

# Who Cares about Election Reform?

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\*Paper Draft\*

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## Abstract

In an effort to understand the public's opinions of election policy this paper examines support for three proposed election reforms captured in the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. The primary hypothesis of this study is that partisans in the mass public will reflect their party's position on election policy because it is partisanship, rather than ideology, that defines elite opinions of election reform. Additionally, the effect of partisanship on an individual's policy positions will be conditional on the individual's level of interest in politics. Those who are more interested in politics will better reflect the positions of partisan elites than individuals who are not interested in politics. The analysis predicts an individual's support for each election policy and indicates strong support for the hypotheses. Strong partisans who are interested in politics are more likely to express the same policy positions as their political party elites than those strong partisans who do not have high levels of political interest. This demonstrates that parties are able to use "conflict extension" to polarize public opinion in new issue-dimensions.

In 2008, residents in 12 U.S. states voted directly on policies reforming voting rights, election districting, and campaigning. Voters in Maryland decided that they wanted to allow absentee voting up to two weeks before Election Day and Nevadans decided not to remove the state's six-month residency requirement for voters. Participants in Connecticut's election lowered the voting age to 17 for primary elections and voters in Alaska rejected a public campaign funding proposal<sup>1</sup>. The public is actively involved in reforming the laws that structure their ability to participate in the electoral process and what that process should look like. However, political scientists know very little about public opinion on issues of election policy. Furthermore, in 2008 the National Conference of State Legislatures counted 171 pieces of legislation enacted in the state legislatures that reformed election laws<sup>2</sup>. State legislatures are using their scarce time and resources to change election policy but we do not know if the public is aware of this activity or if they even have an opinion about election reforms made by their state governments.

Election reform is a particularly complicated policy to study since the reforms have occurred at all levels of government but most of these policies are implemented by the states and localities. The U.S. Constitution gives the power over election law to the individual states but Congress retains the right to regulate elections involving a federal office<sup>3</sup>. The federal government has used this power to make major reforms to elections during the last 60 years through both Constitutional amendments and federal legislation. Much of this federal legislation gives discretion to the state governments so they can implement the spirit of the reform (such as easing the burden of voter registration through the National Voter Registration Act in 1993)

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<sup>1</sup> Ballot issue data were collected from the Initiative & Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California, Gould School of Law.

<sup>2</sup> NCLS election law database is available at <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=16588>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Constitution Article 1 Section 4.1

while still choosing the means of implementation that is best for their state. This study examines public opinion of three election reforms all of which have been considered at the federal level and two have been implemented in some of the states. These policies are: establishing Election Day voter registration (EDR), automatically registering adults to vote, and requiring voters to show photo identification in order to cast a ballot.

There are many goals of election law reforms, some of which are: increasing voter turnout, increasing political participation among traditional low-participation groups, preventing election fraud, maximizing the efficiency of elections, and lowering the costs of election administration. Beyond a few notable exceptions<sup>4</sup>, political scientists' research has focused almost entirely on a single outcome of elections reform – how the reform impacts voter turnout. It is essential for research about election policies to go beyond the study of this one outcome and focus on the motivation and partisan calculations behind the adoption of election reforms. Hanmer (2009) demonstrates that the context in which an election policy is adopted has important implications for how the policy will impact turnout. By extension, I believe that the motivation for adopting an election reform and the public support for that policy will impact the success of any of the goals that the policy might be trying to achieve.

### *How does the Public Form Opinions about Election Reform?*

This paper examines public opinion of election policies by building on the assumption that the average American develops his or her opinions on public policy by listening to the opinions of political elites with whom they agree and responding to their cues (Zaller 1992). In

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<sup>4</sup> Keyssar (2000) presents a historical perspective of the development of American election policy. Piven and Cloward (2000) tell the policy story of the 1993 VRA and Hanmer (2009) illustrates the state implementation context of this policy. Palazzolo and Ceasar (2005) also provide state implementation context for the Help American Vote Act of 2002.

Zaller's account, members of the public with higher levels of political awareness and stronger identification with one of the political parties were more likely to reflect the policy positions of the political elites from their party than individuals with lower political awareness or weaker partisanship. However, in order to apply Zaller's theory to research on election laws it is necessary to assume that partisan elites have strong positions on election policy and that informed members of the public would be able to observe these partisan differences and adopt the position of their party.

Why would election reform be a partisan issue? As Lee (2009) notes in her study of partisanship in the U.S. Senate, election reform, like most good government policies is a "valence issue". These are policies where there should not be a logical partisan divide because there is no driving ideological wedge that would separate liberals and conservatives on the issue. Nonetheless, election reform has divided the Senate so that Democrats frame their positions on election policy around the desire to increase political participation and access to voting while the Republicans support policies that will ensure that individuals are qualified to vote and protect elections from fraud (Ansolabehere 2007).

These positions were made very clear in the party platforms during the 2008 election. The Democrats framed the issue of voting rights as a civil rights concern:

"We will fully fund the Help America Vote Act and work to fulfill the promise of election reform, including fighting to end long lines at voting booths and ensuring that all registration materials, voting materials, polling places, and voting machines are truly accessible to seniors, Americans with disabilities, and citizens with limited English proficiency... We will vigorously enforce our voting rights laws instead of making them tools of partisan political agendas; we oppose laws that require identification in order to vote or register to vote, which create discriminatory barriers to the right to vote and disenfranchise many eligible voters; and we oppose tactics which purge eligible voters from voter rolls" (The 2008 Democratic National Platform: Renewing America's Promise).

While the Republicans emphasized the problems of election fraud and ballot insecurity:

“We support the right of states to require an official government-issued photo identification for voting and call upon the Department of Justice to deploy its resources to prevent ballot tampering in the November elections. We support efforts by state and local election officials to ensure integrity in the voting process and to prevent voter fraud and abuse, particularly as it relates to voter registration and absentee ballots” (2008 Republican Platform).

As the two major political parties have become more ideological over time and the party leaders have become increasingly polarized on policy issues, the partisan members of the public have followed their party leaders toward more polarized positions. Layman and Carsey (2002) illustrate that strong partisans have become polarized on more than one issue-dimension which they call “conflict extension”. Party elites are no longer divided by cross-cutting issue agendas and are becoming increasingly polarized on racial, social welfare, and cultural issues. Their study demonstrated that as the elites grow more polarized, parties are becoming more successful at connecting unrelated issues so they can expand partisan conflict beyond a single issue-dimension to other policies that may not be ideologically similar. Our old policy cleavages are not being *replaced* by new ones, they are being *connected* to the new issues so that the old conflicts extend to cover a broader policy agenda. This indicates that we could see the elite conflict over election reform, demonstrated by the Senate (Lee 2009) and illustrated in the party platforms, extending to partisans in the mass electorate.

Public opinion of election reform should be considered within Carmines and Stimson’s framework of “easy” and “hard” issues (Carmines and Stimson 1980). They define “easy” issues as those public policies for which most people have a gut reaction. Most election laws probably do not fit that definition because they are not an aspect of daily life and few people spend much time thinking about them. The election policies in this study should be exceptions to this

assumption because of their publicized controversy and subsequent framing by the political parties during election years.

Registration reforms were prominent in the debate over the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 with the Democrats actively working to reduce the burden of registration and the Republicans arguing that the policy would only benefit Democrats by expanding their registrant pool (Piven and Cloward 2000). The Republican Party continues to publicize their concern that Democrats are abusing the voter registration system. This was evident during the 2008 presidential election when they accused Democrats of registration fraud and demanded information about newly registered voters in all 88 of Ohio's election districts (Candisky 2008). The Republican Party has also spent a great deal of effort tying voter identification laws to the public's fears of in-person voter fraud, especially illegal voting by non-citizens (Davidson 2009). The Democratic Party responded by trying to tie strict voter ID laws to civil rights claims of discrimination against minorities but their position has not caught on with most individuals who associate photo identification with daily activities such as boarding an airplane or cashing a check (Vercellotti and Anderson 2009).

This public controversy and partisan framing may result in certain election reforms becoming "easy" issues that produce a gut response from individuals who associate easier voter registration with less secure elections and voter ID laws with greater security from fraud. Because voter fraud was a relatively salient issue during the 2008 campaign when the Cooperative Congressional Election Study was conducted, it may have elicited a gut response from individuals who were worried about election security. While many election reforms are true valence issues, the partisan activity surrounding registration reforms and the voter ID controversy may increase partisan polarization on these issues.

### *What is Election Fraud and What Does the Public Think of it?*

Because the public's concern over election fraud is prominent and easily manipulated during election years we need to consider that the public's opinions of all election reforms may be linked to their preferences for secure, honest elections. The federal government has laws regarding four types of election fraud: vote buying, voter intimidation, illegal voting and ballot box stuffing, and voter registration fraud, all of which may involve candidates, elected officials, political parties, and the voters themselves (Donsanto 2008). However, the political parties tend to dramatize and simplify all forms of possible election reform into outright manipulation of the vote totals in order to point fingers at their opponents.

In a 2004 survey by the International Social Survey Program, the United States had the highest proportion of respondents from all countries in the study (including countries with rocky democratic traditions such as Mexico, Venezuela, and Russia) who said that their national elections were "very dishonest" in counting and reporting the vote. The proportion was close to 23 percent of Americans in the survey (Tolbert, Donovan, and Cain 2008). Nor does the public trust the current system of election administration in which most states oversee their elections with a single, appointed, partisan election official. This system has caused public outrage in recent elections in which partisan state election officials, such as Ken Blackwell of Ohio (2004) and Katherine Harris of Florida (2000), enacted election procedures that were seen as benefiting their partisans. In a 2005 survey, an overwhelming majority of respondents supported reforms that would create an elected board of nonpartisan officials to run elections in the state (Alvarez and Hall 2005). Clearly Americans are distrustful of the current system of election administration which should make concerns about election fraud a salient factor in public opinion of election policy.

Recognizing that we know little about the connection between the opinions of elites and those of the public regarding election fraud, Alvarez and Hall (2008) conducted a risk assessment survey to identify areas of election administration that elites (academics, election administrators, policy makers, and advocates) saw as especially vulnerable to disruption and fraud. Elites perceived that voter registration fraud was far and away the most expected disruption to the election process. They also expressed concerns about the possibility of fraud in absentee voting and precinct voting. Elites recognized that tampering with voting machines, vote tabulating, and other election technology had the potential for significant disruption of elections and would be particularly difficult to mitigate. However, they felt that this type of fraud was very unlikely to actually occur.

In a similar survey administered to the general public, Alvarez and Hall found that while average Americans are concerned about fraud, they do not have well-formed opinions about the types of fraud that occur. When asked what they believed was the greatest threat to the electoral system 33.8 percent did not give an answer and 36 percent selected “some other problem” rather than one of the five types of common election fraud on the list. Of those who did give an answer, Democrats were more concerned with intentional election fraud than either Republicans or Independents. Republicans were more concerned with the possibility of voter registration fraud than were Democrats (Alvarez and Hall 2008).

Election machine malfunctions and inaccuracies gained notoriety after the 2000 election when “pregnant chads” and “hanging chads” became a part of the public lexicon. The Help America Vote Act made punch card and lever voting systems illegal and encouraged states to move toward more sophisticated electronic voting machines (Palazzolo and Ceaser 2005). Now that most states have transitioned to these voting machines, public concerns over the potential for

hacking or tampering with election machines has been reflected in recent calls for voter verified paper trails on electronic voting machines.

Though election administrators assert that voting machines are kept under lock and key and a number of techniques are used to verify that they operate and tabulate votes correctly, advocacy groups are calling for paper audit trails on the machines. A large-scale election technology study tested voter confidence of electronic voting machines and vote verification systems. The researchers found that vote verification systems might reduce the likelihood of election fraud through machine tampering but it would likely do so at a cost of greater complication for the voter in the time and assistance many would need to cast a ballot and would provide little increase in voter confidence (Herrnson et al. 2008).

In another study, election machine usability was just one of several polling-place variables that affected public trust in American elections. This research found that the public's assessment of their satisfaction with election administration and confidence that their vote had been counted correctly was highly contingent on local factors such as the competence of their poll workers, the competitiveness of local elections, and the history of election corruption in their locality. It also was affected by the type of election reforms the individual had available in their locality (such as early voting and voter registration available at the polling place) and which ones they chose to utilize. The authors found that election machine usability and the helpfulness of poll workers were key to instilling confidence in the voters regarding their experience (Atkeson and Saunders 2007).

#### *Increased Turnout vs. Protection from Fraud*

When political scientists study election reforms they tend to focus on measuring the effect the reforms have on the size of voter turnout and the equality of voter turnout across racial

groups and income levels (see Hanmer 2009; Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2007; Stein and Vonnahme 2008; Lijphart 2007; Berinsky 2005; Piven and Cloward 2000; Stein 1998; Teixeira 1992 for the effects of various election reforms on turnout). For most of these researchers, election reforms are considered “good” if they increase voter turnout or increase the turnout of traditionally unengaged groups. However, the public may not be as enthusiastic as the political scientists about increasing voter turnout and we know that the political elites are more or less supportive of increasing turnout through election reforms based on their partisan electoral goals.

Following the 2008 election, University of Missouri researchers released a report illustrating that while nearly two-thirds of respondents felt that their state government should do more to increase voter turnout, 60 percent of the sample felt that the goal of protecting elections from voter fraud was more important than the goal of maximizing voter turnout. Respondents were also asked a series of questions about the likelihood of four types of election reform leading to more turnout, more fraud, and more benefit for Democratic candidates over Republicans. Far more of the public were willing to express an opinion regarding the likelihood of the election reform increasing turnout or voter fraud than knew whether the reform would have partisan consequences (Konisky and Powell 2009). This is an important difference from the positions of political elites who take distinct positions on these reforms with the Democrats seeking to increase turnout (supporting Election Day voter registration, vote by mail, and early voting) while Republicans support measures to decrease fraud such as strict voter ID laws (Ansolabehere 2007). In each of these cases the public was less likely to support the reform if they thought it would lead to greater fraud. They felt that Election Day registration and voting by mail were more likely to increase fraud than early voting.

## *Hypotheses*

This paper seeks to explain the role of partisanship and political interest, as well as other demographic and attitudinal features, on individual's opinions of election reforms. I test two primary hypotheses. The first is based on the evidence presented by Ansolabehere (2007) and Lee (2009) that the political parties have clear divisions in their goals for election policy which is evident through the way they frame the debate over election law. Democrats favor expanding access to voting while Republicans favor protecting elections from fraud by strictly ensuring that all voters are qualified. Thus, my first hypothesis expects that as an individual's partisanship becomes more Republican (on a 7-point partisanship scale), their support for election policies that add qualifications for voters will increase and their support for policies that expand access to voting will decrease.

The second hypothesis is that the effect of partisanship on policy positions is conditional on an individual's level of interest in politics. Those partisans who are most interested in politics and current events will be more likely to reflect the policy positions of partisan political elites than the partisan members of the public who do not express an interest in politics and current events<sup>5</sup>.

## *Research Design*

To test these hypotheses I will use data from the common content of the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. This survey was conducted on-line and the questions

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<sup>5</sup> This differs from prior measures of political awareness. Zaller (1992) used an index with several measures of political awareness and sophistication. Layman and Carsey (2002) decided that the best way to identify awareness on policies was to measure whether the respondents could properly identify the Democrat and Republican positions on that policy. The 2008 common content of the CCES does not provide either of those options so self-reported interest in politics and current events was chosen as substitute.

about election reform were asked in the weeks following the 2008 general election. The CCES is limited because it is meant to be a better representation of the U.S. electorate than the general public of the country. Thus, there is a sophistication bias among the population taking the survey. However, there is enough variation across the independent variables that the hypotheses can be tested.

In this study, respondents were asked whether they support, oppose, or aren't sure about establishing Election Day voter registration, automatically registering adults to vote, and requiring photo identification in order to vote<sup>6</sup>. Of these policies, Election Day registration and automatic adult registration would expand access to voting and are favored by elected officials and elites in the Democratic Party. Requiring photo identification prioritizes election security over expanded access and is advocated by the Republican Party. Table one presents correlations between support for each of the policies and demonstrates that there is a positive correlation between the policies that expand access to voting. Support for the expansive policies is negatively correlated with support for photo identification requirements.

[Table 1 about here.]

To test the relationship between partisanship and opinions of election reforms I will use a probit regression model. The dependent variable is binary, indicating whether the individual supports or opposes each policy. The primary independent variables are a dichotomous variable for an individual's interest in politics and current events, which is used as a measure of political awareness, and a seven category measure of partisanship<sup>7</sup>. These variables are multiplied together to form an interaction term that will test the conditional relationship of partisanship and political awareness on election policy positions. The coefficients in probit models are not

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<sup>6</sup> Respondents answering "not sure" were recoded as missing.

<sup>7</sup> As the values of partisanship increase from 0 to 6, party changes from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

intuitively useful for interpreting the size of relationships and they become even more difficult to interpret when an interaction term is included in the model (Ai and Norton 2003). Table two provides simple bivariate crosstabs to examine the relationships between support for each of the elections reforms and partisanship as well as political interest.

[Table 2 about here.]

The bivariate relationships between the primary independent variables and public opinion on each election reform are informative. Partisanship exhibits the expected relationship toward support for each of the election reforms. Democrats are more likely to support the reforms that ease the burden of voter registration than are Republicans and Republicans are more likely to support voter identification laws than are Democrats. Individuals who identified themselves as having a high level of interest in politics and current events are less likely to support *any* reform to election policy than those who were not very interested in politics. This makes some intuitive sense because those who are very interested in politics are also likely to participate and vote and so they will be used to the system as it is and less likely to see a need for change. In this study, the real value of looking at an individual's political interest is to examine its conditional effect on partisanship and not necessarily its independent impact on support for election reforms.

The probit model testing support for each of the election reforms includes several independent variables in addition to partisanship, political interest, and the interaction of these two. It includes a dichotomous variable for respondents with a college degree<sup>8</sup> and another for those who voted in 2008. I also include a dichotomous variable for non-metropolitan, rural residents. Rural Americans have very high levels of in-person voter turnout which is not contingent on the cost of traveling to distant polling locations, as it is for suburban and urban

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<sup>8</sup> Alternative models used a categorical variable for education which did not produce different results. The dichotomous variable is appropriate since my theory indicates that earning a college degree is the aspect of education that substantially changes an individual's policy positions.

voters (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003). People in rural areas tend to be very trusting of their local government and their neighbors. For this reason we would expect that individuals in rural areas would be less worried about election fraud when forming opinions about election policy. A continuous variable for the respondent's age is important since election reforms will likely have more salience for those who are old enough to remember the conflict over minority voting rights in the 1960's. Likewise, a dichotomous variable for non-whites is included to capture the effect of race and the likelihood that minorities will respond to election reforms differently than whites because of the history of racial discrimination surrounding registration and voting laws in the United States.

[Table 3 about here.]

### *Results and Analysis*

Each column in table 3 represents a separate probit equation with a different dependent variable. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between individuals with a college degree and support for Election Day registration<sup>9</sup>. Those individuals who voted in 2008 had a negative relationship toward support for all of the election reforms in the study. This resembles the bivariate relationship between political interest and supporting election reforms and can be understood with the same logic. Those who are already voters are more likely than nonvoters to understand the system and be used to participating. They are less likely to see any difficulty in current registration and voting laws and thus, will not see the need for reform.

Non-whites were more likely than whites to support automatic voter registration and requiring photo identification at the polls. The relationship between being non-white and supporting the voter ID policy is especially interesting since much of the debate over this policy

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<sup>9</sup> Statistical significance was determined using a two-tailed test. Significant p-values were less than .01 (except for the relationship of non-white support for absentee voting by internet which was significant at  $p < .05$ ). Relationships that were not statistically significant are reported in table 3 but are not discussed in the text.

has focused on how it might hurt racial minorities. Either non-whites have not been exposed to this policy debate or they disagree that their political participation would be limited by the photo id requirement.

Respondents from non-metropolitan, rural areas had a negative relationship toward supporting photo identification laws. This is to be expected because we know that rural residents are likely to know and trust their neighbors and thus, they are less motivated by fears of voter fraud to support of photo id laws. Older individuals are also less likely to support photo identification laws. As age increases, respondents were less likely to support photo id, automatic voter registration and Election Day registration. Much like the effect of greater political interest and recent voting experience, older voters are more likely to be familiar with the current election system and unsupportive of new changes.

It is necessary to compute predicted probabilities of supporting the reforms in order to understand the conditional effect of party identification and interest in politics. The predicted probabilities in this project are calculated using the actual values of each independent variable and then taking the average predicted probability of supporting each policy across all values (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2008 for a description of this method). This method is especially appropriate because the model includes so many dichotomous independent variables. If predicted probabilities were calculated by first taking the average value of each independent variable then many of the values would be nonsensical since each individual was assigned a 1 or a 0 indicating the presence or absence of that quality<sup>10</sup>.

[Figures 1-3 about here.]

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, the average value of the variable measuring whether an individual voted in the 2008 election is .89 yet this would not be an appropriate value to use in producing predicted probabilities since each person in the sample either voted or they did not vote. No one could cast 89 percent of a vote, or claim to have “almost voted” in the last election.

The conditional relationships between partisanship and opinions on election reform are illustrated in three graphical figures. They demonstrate support for both hypotheses. The basic partisanship hypothesis is supported because, holding all of the independent variables in the probit model constant, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to support voter identification laws which favor the security of the election over the accessibility of voting and less likely to support registration reforms which would increase the ease of voting.

The more interesting result is the conditional relationship between partisanship and political interest on public opinions. Figure one illustrates the relationship between partisanship and support for allowing voter registration on Election Day. Election Day registration is a controversial issue that gained prominence during the debates on the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (Hanmer 2009). As expected, there is a dramatic decrease in support for the policy when moving up the partisanship scale from strong Democrat to strong Republican. There is a statistically significant difference in support for Election Day registration between high interest and low interest Democrats as well as high interest and low interest Republicans. High interest strong Democrats were 7 percentage points more likely to support this policy than strong Democrats without much interest in politics. Politically interested strong Republicans were 24 percentage points less likely to support the policy than low-interest strong Republicans. The difference in support between partisans with high interest and those without is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ <sup>11</sup>.

[Table 4 about here.]

Automatic voter registration for all eligible adults has been debated as an alternative to Election Day registration. This would put the burden of voter registration on the government

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<sup>11</sup> Statistical significance was determined using 95 percent confidence intervals. These confidence intervals are reported for each value of the partisanship variable in table 4.

instead of the individual registrants. Figure two shows that this policy garnered greater support from Democrats than Republicans. There is also a statistically significant difference between interested and uninterested partisans at both ends of the spectrum. Politically interested strong Democrats were 7 percentage points more likely to support the policy than strong Democrats with low political interest. Strong Republicans were 17 percentage points less likely to support this policy than were less politically interested Republicans.

The controversy over photo identification laws gained prominence during the debate over the Help America Vote Act of 2002 as well as many bills proposed and enacted in the states over the past 10 years. Republicans support these policies as a way to prevent voter fraud while Democrats believe that they will disenfranchise voters who do not possess traditional forms of identification. Overall, the public supports these policies because they associate photo ID with daily tasks like renting movies and going to the bank. This pattern is evident in the graph of the interaction of partisanship and political interest. Among partisans with low interest in politics, the slope of the line is almost flat but the slope of the line indicating support from individuals expressing high interest in politics illustrates a much bigger difference between the preferences of strong partisans. Politically interested strong Democrats were 23 percentage points less likely to support the policy than strong Democrats with less political interest. There was only a six percentage point difference between the preferences of strong Republicans with high interest in politics and the preferences of strong Republicans with less interest.

All three of the figures illustrate an interesting, and unexpected trend. Political interest has a larger effect on policy support for members of the party that is opposed to the policy than for members of the party that supports the policy. For both voter registration reforms, which are favored by Democrats, the difference between high and low interest strong Democrats was less

than seven percentage points but the difference between high and low interest Republicans was much larger (23 percentage point difference for election day registration and 17 for automatic registration). The same pattern is observed in figure 3 illustrating the support for photo ID laws. These laws are favored by the Republican Party and strong Republicans were very likely to support the policy whether or not they expressed a high interest in politics. For strong Democrats there was a 23 percentage point difference in the likelihood of supporting photo ID laws between low interest and high interest partisans. This asymmetrical interaction affect may say something about the way partisans consume information about policies they support versus policies they oppose. Perhaps most partisans are aware of the issues on their party's agenda but only the very interested partisans are paying attention to their issues that their party opposes from the other party's agenda. This finding deserves further attention in future research.

#### *Toward a Better Understanding of Election Reform Attitudes*

As noted in the introduction, it is important to understand the public's opinions on election reform because the public is being called on to make these decisions, either through direct democracy in the form of ballot initiatives, or indirectly by expressing their preferences to elected representatives in the state and federal legislatures. The good news for proponents of direct democracy is that most individuals have an opinion about election reforms. Even when given the opportunity to answer "not sure", over 80 percent of respondents either supported or opposed each of the election reforms in the survey.

When it comes to deciding whether to support or oppose an election reform, the issue that has been most successfully tied to election fraud, voter identification, garnered the highest percent of support from respondents. This provides further evidence of the public's fear of

illegal voting (Alvarez and Hall 2008, Davidson 2009) but it may also be in reaction to the fact that the majority of the public regularly uses government issued photo identification for daily tasks so they do not see it as an undue burden on voting (Vercellotti and Anderson 2009). The correlations between supporting each of the election reform proposals mirrors the theory of ballot access vs. ballot security (Ansolebehere 2007). Individuals who support policies designed to increase access to voting by easing the burden of voter registration are also unlikely to support the policy that focuses on increasing ballot security by requiring photo identification at the polls.

The findings from the probit regression analysis provide overwhelming support for both of the hypotheses tested in this study. Democrats and Republicans within the electorate follow the same trends in support for election reform as the partisan political elites. Partisans with high levels of political awareness, measured by their level of interest in politics, are more likely to reflect elite positioning on election policies than partisans with less political awareness. This provides further evidence for the theory of “conflict extension” into the electorate. This demonstrates that Lee’s (2009) findings regarding polarization of Senate votes on valence issues like election reform can be extended into the mass partisan public. Regardless of the ideological content of the policies, knowledgeable partisans are able to adopt the policy conflicts of the partisan elites. This will ensure that issue-framing by political parties will continue to play an important part in the adoption of election reforms even when these are being selected by the mass electorate through the direct democratic process.

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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1. Correlation between Supporting Election Reform Policies**

	Election Day Registration	Automatic Voter Registration	Require Photo ID to Vote
Election Day Registration	1.00		
Automatic Voter Registration	0.43	1.00	
Require Photo ID to Vote	-0.24	-0.17	1.00

Source: CCES 2008 Common Content

**Table 2. Crosstabs of Support for Election Reform Policies - Key Independent Variables**

Variable	Election Day Register	Auto Register	Require Photo ID
<b>7 pt. Party Identification Scale</b>			
Strong Democrat	64.8%	70.3%	60.5%
Not Very Strong Democrat	54.7%	58.0%	78.3%
Lean Democrat	62.8%	65.7%	66.7%
Independent	45.7%	44.1%	83.1%
Lean Republican	17.7%	23.8%	93.2%
Not Very Strong Republican	27.8%	33.5%	90.7%
Strong Republican	14.2%	19.8%	93.8%
<i>change: Strong Dem to Strong Rep</i>	50.6%	50.5%	-33.3%
<b>Interest in Politics and Current Events</b>			
Very Interested	38.0%	43.2%	76.6%
Not Very Interested	52.2%	54.3%	85.2%
<i>change: Very Interested to Not Interested</i>	-14.3%	-11.1%	-8.6%

source: 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, Common Content

**Table 3. Support for Election Reform Policies**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Election Day Register</b>	<b>Auto Register</b>	<b>Require Photo ID</b>
<b>Very Interested in Politics</b>	0.277	0.207	-0.644
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000
standard error	0.031	0.032	0.034
<b>College Graduate</b>	0.056	-0.014	-0.197
p-value	0.003	0.471	0.000
standard error	0.019	0.019	0.021
<b>Voted in 2008 General</b>	-0.655	-0.171	-0.059
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.113
standard error	0.032	0.031	0.037
<b>Party Identification</b>	-0.134	-0.134	0.092
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000
standard error	0.008	0.008	0.009
<b>Non-White</b>	-0.021	0.174	0.088
p-value	0.355	0.000	0.000
standard error	0.023	0.225	0.024
<b>Remote Rural Resident</b>	0.069	-0.047	-0.156
p-value	0.170	0.343	0.004
standard error	0.050	0.050	0.054
<b>Age</b>	-0.017	-0.012	-0.008
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000
standard error	0.001	0.001	0.001
<b>Party ID * Interest in Politics</b>	-0.154	-0.122	0.177
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000
standard error	0.009	0.009	0.011

source: 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, Common Content

Coefficients are the product of probit regression. All Independent variables are dichotomous except Party ID (7-point scale) age (18-100) and the interaction of party ID and political interest.

**Table 4. Predicted Probabilities and Confidence Intervals for the Relationship Between Partisanship and Public Opinion Conditional on Political Interest**

	High Interest	Low Interest	Change	Confidence Intervals	
				2.5%	97.5%
<b>Election Day Registration</b>					
Strong Dem	0.867	0.801	0.066	0.077	0.122
Not Strong Dem	0.808	0.774	0.034	0.026	0.062
Leans Dem	0.726	0.736	-0.010	-0.028	0.003
Independent	0.626	0.693	-0.066	-0.083	-0.054
Leans Rep	0.484	0.614	-0.131	-0.130	-0.099
Not Strong Rep	0.387	0.576	-0.190	-0.170	-0.134
Strong Rep	0.264	0.500	-0.236	-0.178	-0.140
<b>Automatic Registration</b>					
Strong Dem	0.769	0.703	0.066	0.049	0.094
Not Strong Dem	0.696	0.666	0.030	0.012	0.050
Leans Dem	0.592	0.606	-0.014	-0.031	0.002
Independent	0.503	0.565	-0.062	-0.077	-0.046
Leans Rep	0.372	0.480	-0.107	-0.119	-0.087
Not Strong Rep	0.288	0.434	-0.146	-0.156	-0.118
Strong Rep	0.195	0.365	-0.170	-0.174	-0.132
<b>Photo Identification</b>					
Strong Dem	0.529	0.757	-0.228	-0.251	-0.208
Not Strong Dem	0.652	0.801	-0.149	-0.166	-0.132
Leans Dem	0.721	0.807	-0.086	-0.097	-0.071
Independent	0.820	0.847	-0.027	-0.038	-0.016
Leans Rep	0.866	0.851	0.014	0.002	0.026
Not Strong Rep	0.918	0.876	0.042	0.029	0.054
Strong Rep	0.948	0.888	0.060	0.045	0.072

Predicted probabilities and confidence intervals were computed using the probit models from table 3.

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Support for Election Day Registration

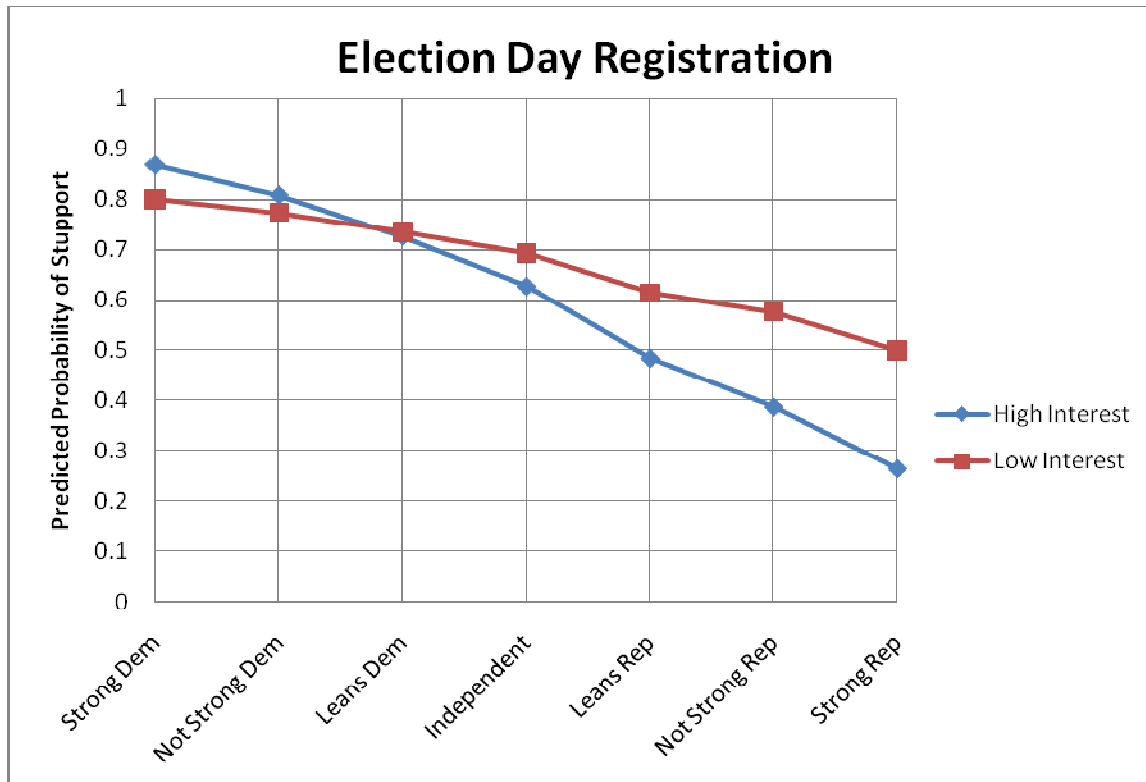


Figure 2. Predicted Probability of Support for Automatic Voter Registration

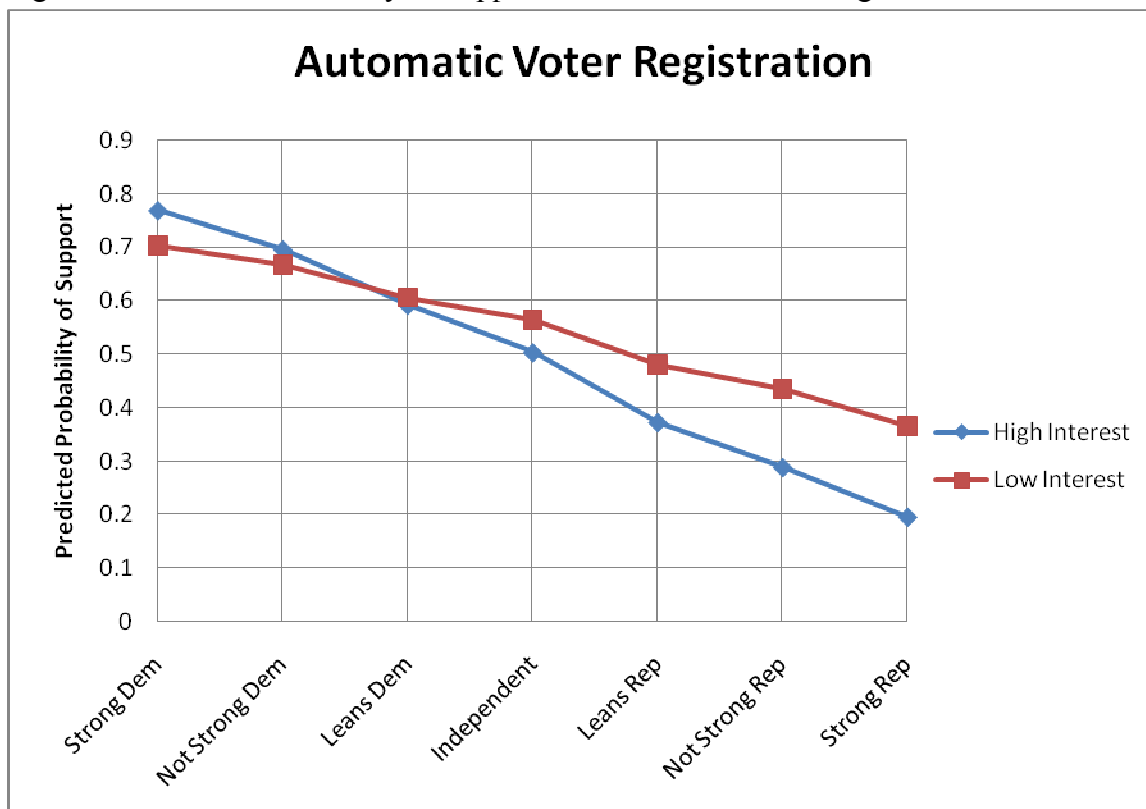
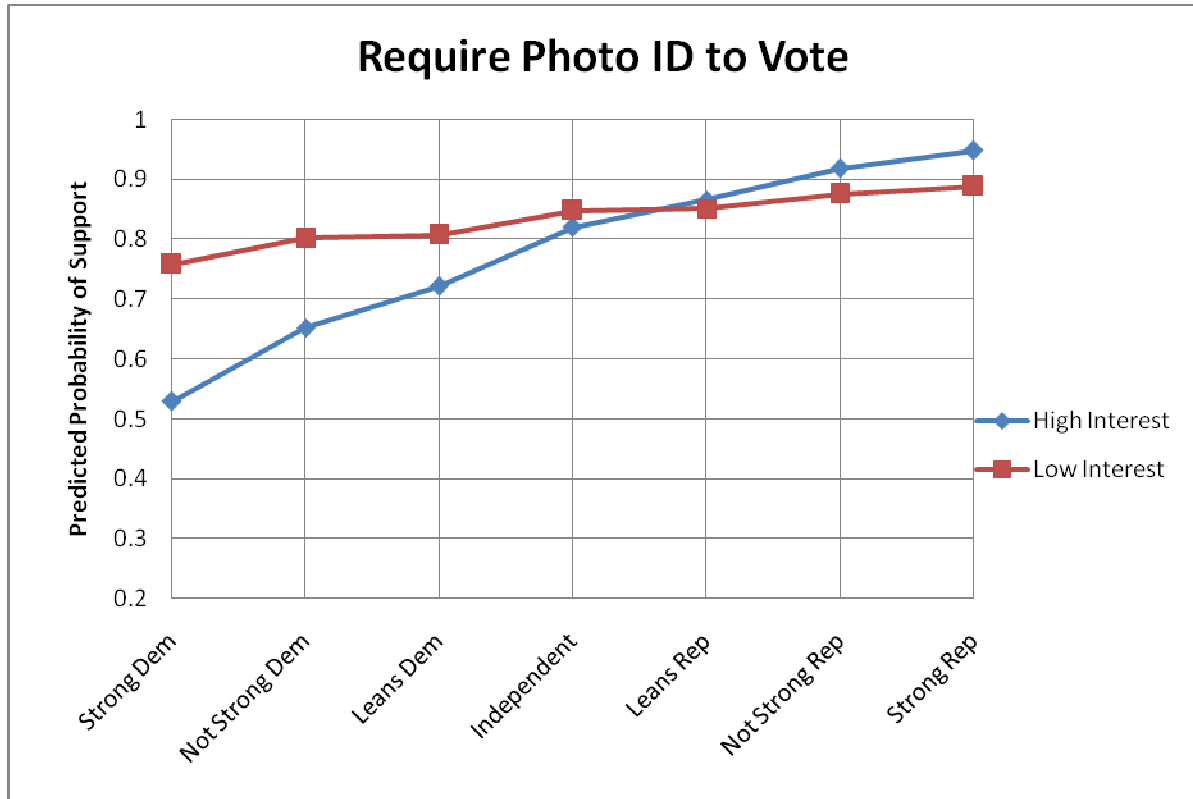


Figure 3. Predicted Probability of Support for Requiring Photo Identification to Vote



## Appendices

### Variables and code from the 2008 CCEs

#### *Dependent Variables*

##### Election Reform:

“States have tried many new ways to run elections in recent years. Do you support or oppose any of the following ways of voting or conducting elections in your state?”

(Answer choices: Support, Oppose, Not Sure)

- CC419\_2 Allow people to register on Election Day at the polls
- CC419\_5 Automatically register all citizens over 18 years old
- CC419\_6 Require that all people show government issued photo identification when they vote

Answers of “not sure” were coded as missing for this study.

#### *Independent Variables*

Party Identification – CC307 7 Point Party ID: Continuous responses from strong Democrat to strong Republican with “not sure” coded as independent.

Remote Rural Resident – Coded 1 if the respondent’s county fips code was in a non-metropolitan area and contained fewer than 25,000 residents.

Very interested in politics – V245 Level of interest in politics/current events: very much interested, somewhat interested, not much interested, not sure. Coded 1 if the respondent answered “very much interested” and 0 for all other responses.

College graduate – v213 Education: no high school, high school graduate, some college, 2-year, 4-year, post grad. Coded 1 if the respondent had a 2-year, 4-year, or post-grad degree and 0 if they did not.

Voted in 2008 General – CC403 Which of the following statements best describes you? I did not vote in the election this November, I thought about voting this time – but didn’t, I usually vote but didn’t this time, I attempted to vote but did not or could not, I definitely voted in the November General Election. Coded 1 if they definitely voted and 0 for all other responses.

Non-white – v211 Race: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Mixed, Other, Middle Eastern. Coded 0 if they are white and 1 for all other responses.

Age – v207 Birth year subtracted from 2008: range from 18 to 100

Party ID \* Interest in Politics: interaction of 7-point party identification variable and dichotomous variable for interest in politics

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>					
<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>sample size</b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>st. deviation</b>	<b>min</b>	<b>max</b>
Very Interested in Politics	32754	0.65	0.48	0	1
College Graduate	32800	0.37	0.48	0	1
Voted in 2008 General	26323	0.89	0.32	0	1
Partisanship	32745	2.78	2.25	0	6
Non-White	32800	0.24	0.43	0	1
Remote Rural Resident	32111	0.03	0.18	0	1
Age	32800	49.57	14.98	18	100
Partisan * Interest in Politics	32699	1.87	2.34	0	6
<b>Dependent Variables</b>	-	-	-	-	-
Support Election Day Register	23587	0.43	0.49	0	1
Support Auto Register	22672	0.47	0.50	0	1
Support Require Photo ID	23348	0.79	0.40	0	1