How do independents make up their minds?

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Our argument

- Independents have been characterized as:
  1. "Innocent of ideology" or "know-nothings" Converse (1964); Bennett (1988)
  2. "Undercover" or "closet" partisans Keith et al (1992); Petrocik (2009); Klar & Krupnikov (2016)
- Instead, independents are engaged voters who face stark electoral choices

Today's presentation

How do independents and partisans vary in the information they use when choosing between political candidates?

Data

- Online survey of non-institutionalized adults living in U.S. households
- May-June 2024 (first of 3-wave panel)
- $N = 3,474$
- 30% identify as independent (including "leaners")

Information use

- "Process-tracing" design Lau & Redlawsk (2006); Ditonto et al (2014)
- Forced-choice tasks in which respondents vote for one of two political candidates
- Respondents know candidates take positions on multiple issues but can choose number of attributes they see

Our experimental design

	Candidate A	**Candidate B**
Minimum Wage	Higher	Stay the same

Please indicate which of the two candidates you would vote for, or if you would need more information

Candidate A	Candidate B	More information
○	○	◉

Our experimental design

	Candidate A	**Candidate B**
Minimum Wage	Higher	Stay the same
Gun control	Supports	Against

Please indicate which of the two candidates you would vote for, or if you would need more information

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Our experimental design

	Candidate A	**Candidate B**
Minimum Wage	Higher	Stay the same
Gun Control	Supports	Against
Abortion	Pro-Choice	Pro-Life

Please indicate which of the two candidates you would vote for, or if you would need more information

Candidate A	Candidate B	More information
○	◉	○

Pre-registered hypotheses

H1 Independents need more candidate information than their partisan counterparts

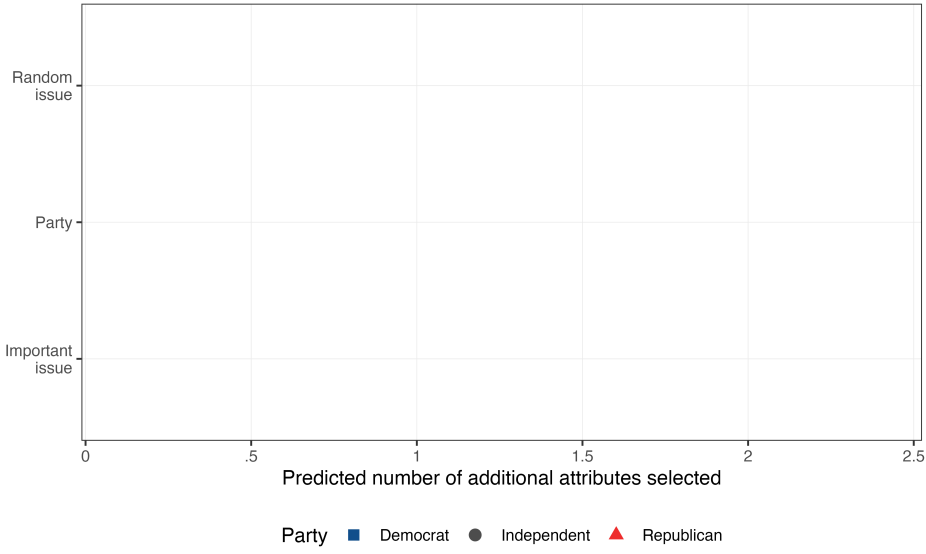
H2 Candidate party is less informative for independents than for partisans

H3 Independents are more likely to be single-issue voters than their partisan counterparts

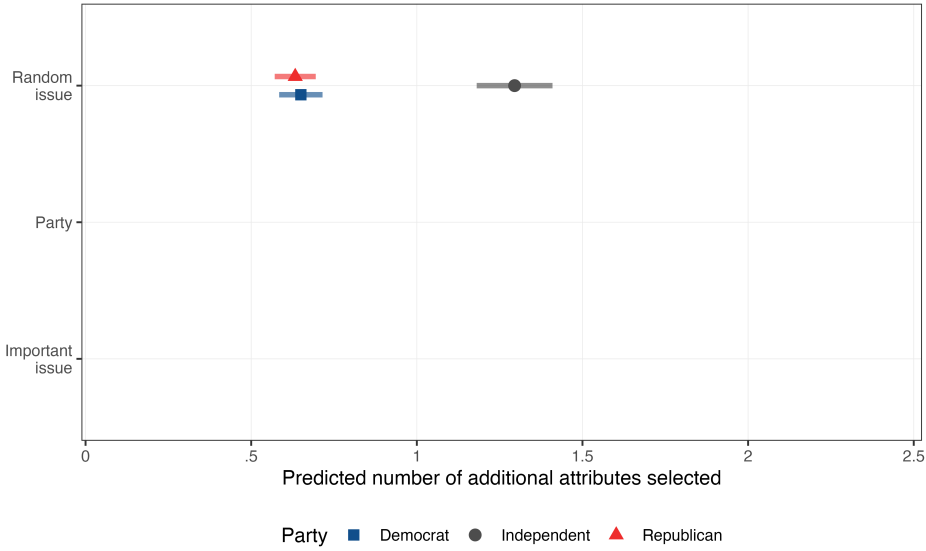
Rounds and hypotheses

Round	Initial attribute	Example	Hypothesis
1	Random issue	<table><tr><th></th><th>Candidate A</th><th>Candidate B</th></tr><tr><td>Gun Control</td><td>Against</td><td>Neutral</td></tr></table>	H1
2	Party	<table><tr><th></th><th>Candidate A</th><th>Candidate B</th></tr><tr><td>Party</td><td>Republican</td><td>Democrat</td></tr></table>	H2
3	Random issue	<table><tr><th></th><th>Candidate A</th><th>Candidate B</th></tr><tr><td>Tax Level</td><td>Stay the same</td><td>Lower</td></tr></table>	H1
4	Important issue	<table><tr><th></th><th>Candidate A</th><th>Candidate B</th></tr><tr><td>Abortion Position</td><td>Pro-choice</td><td>Neutral</td></tr></table>	H3
5	Random issue	<table><tr><th></th><th>Candidate A</th><th>Candidate B</th></tr><tr><td>Gay Marriage</td><td>Supports</td><td>Neutral</td></tr></table>	H1

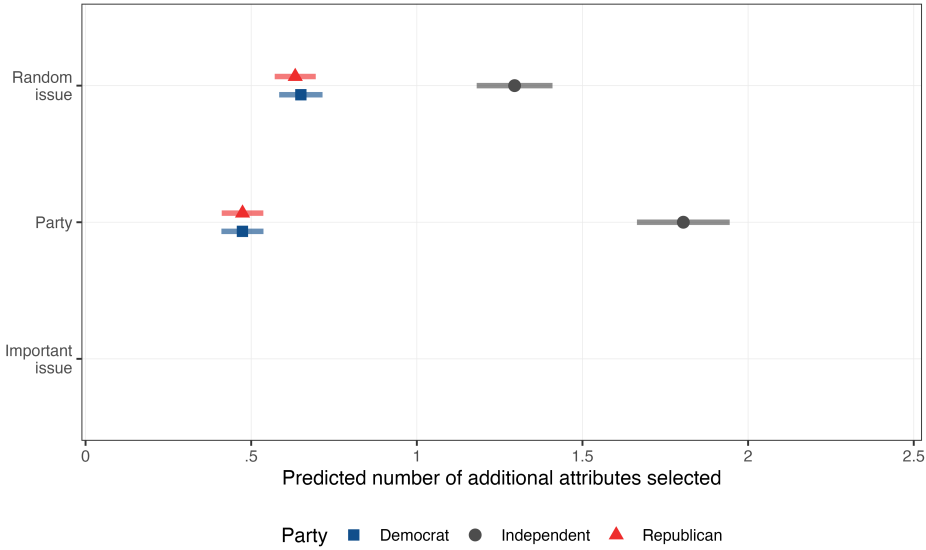
How does information use vary by partisanship?



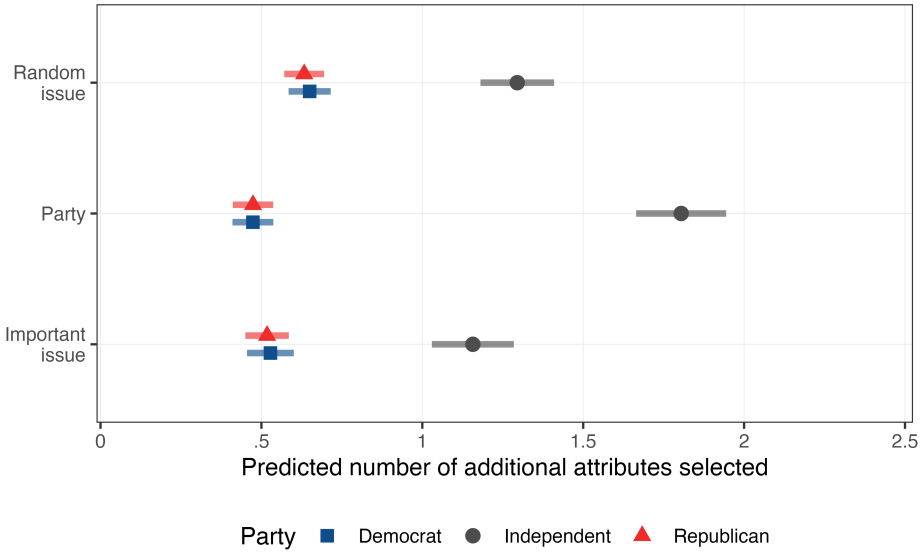
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Conclusions

- Independents are neither disengaged nor do they behave like partisans
- Need to understand heterogeneity among voters and growing number of non-partisans
- Misalignment with party system produces cognitive hardships that may contribute to political inequality

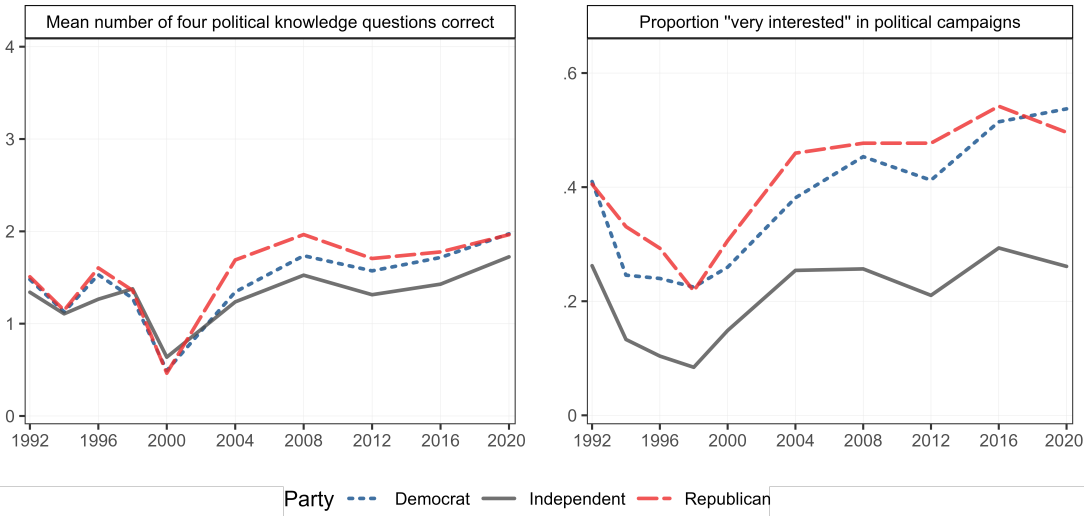
Thank you!

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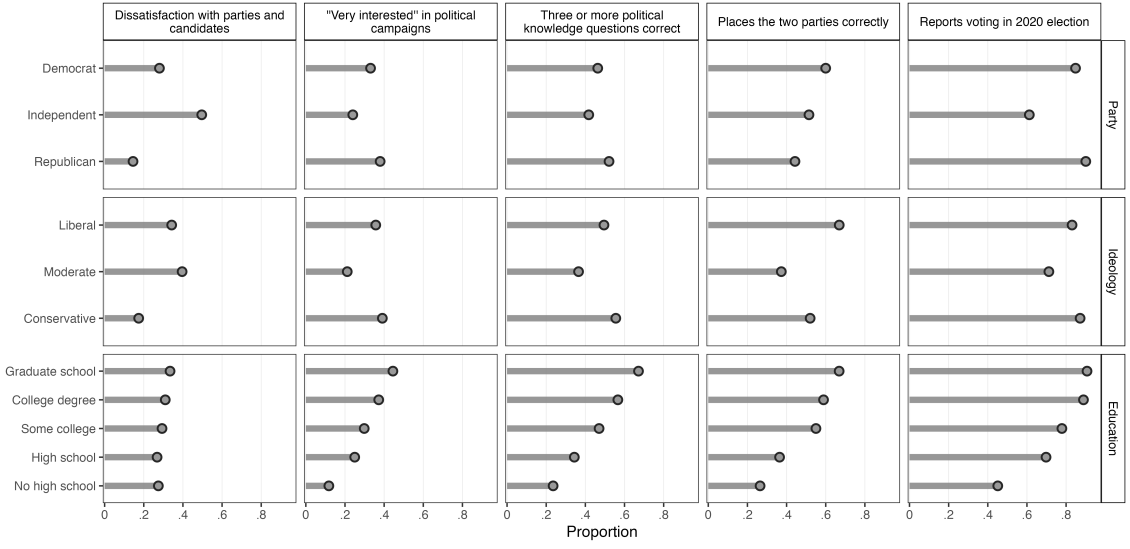
Additional Slides

1. Misfits and political beliefs
2. Party perceptions
3. Models with controls
4. Models for seven-category partisanship

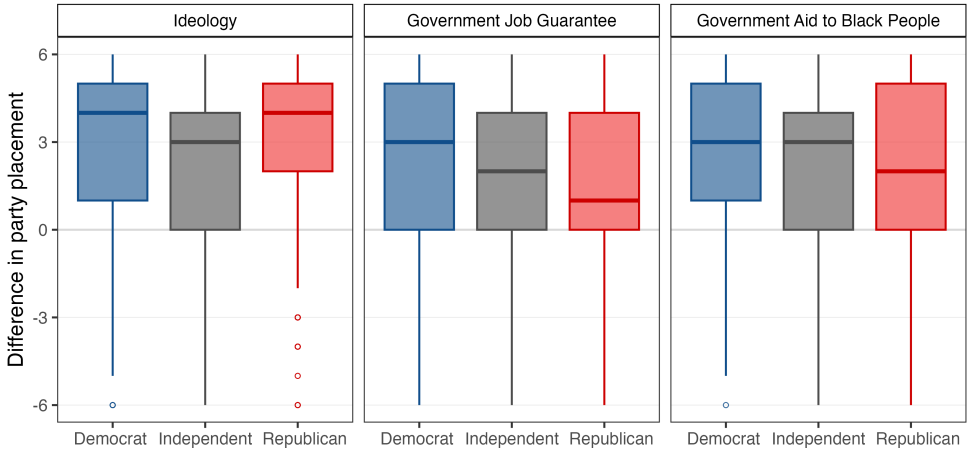
Trends in knowledge versus interest (ANES)



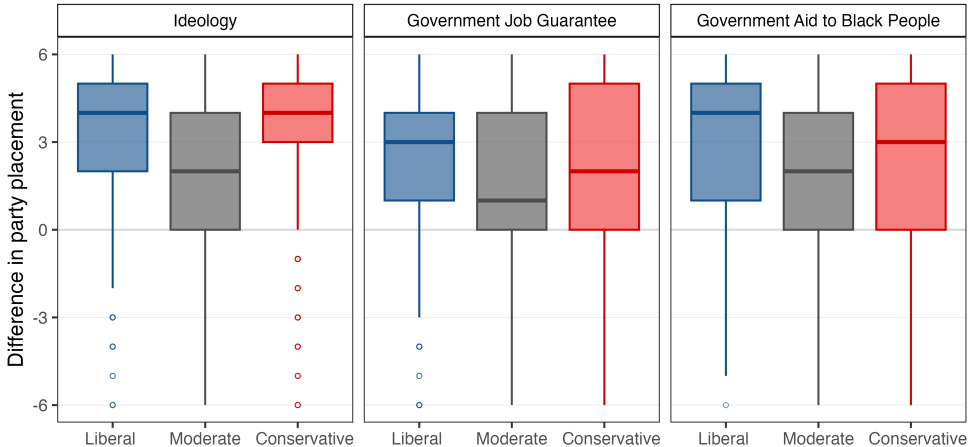
Misfits, political beliefs, and participation



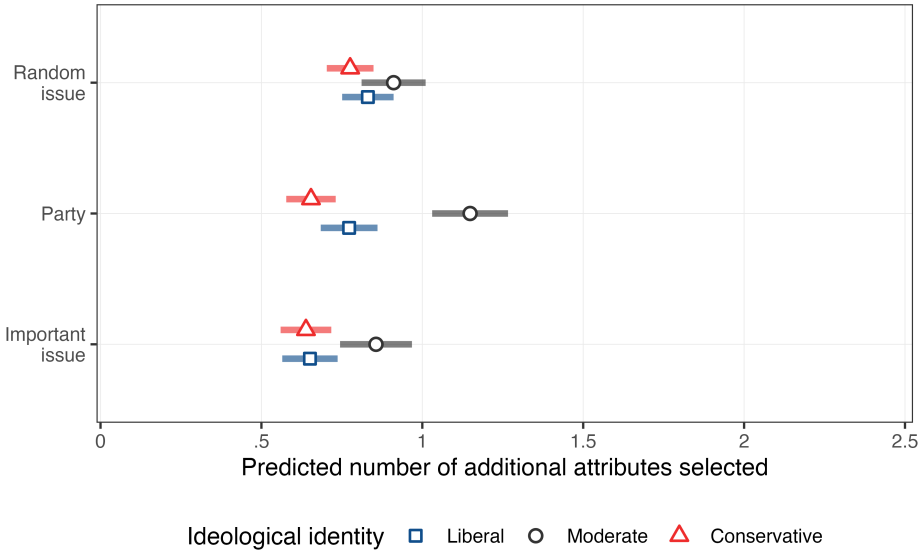
Partisanship and party perceptions



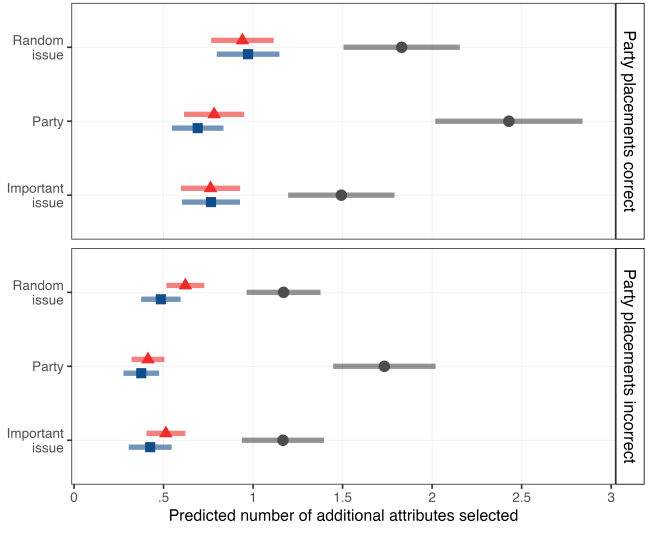
Ideology and party perceptions



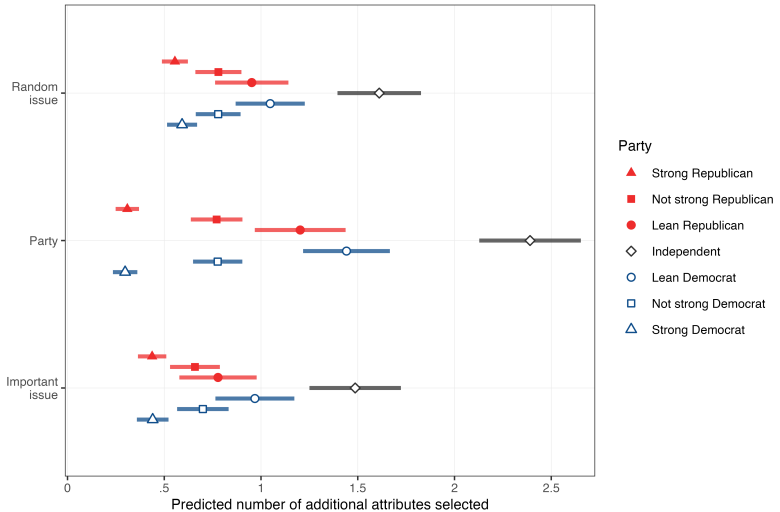
How does information use vary by ideology?



Information seeking and partisanship with controls



Information seeking and detailed partisanship



Information seeking and detailed partisanship with controls

