

**Partisan Hearts, Minds, and Souls:
Candidate Religion and the Activation of Partisan Voting**

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DRAFT: NOT FOR QUOTATION . . . YET

The vast literature on vote choice and evaluations of political candidates identifies a myriad of factors—policy attitudes, evaluations of candidates’ personal traits, and assessments of the candidate’s or party’s past performance in office, to name just a few—that shape voters’ judgments (e.g. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Page and Jones 1979; Fiorina 1981; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2007). However, far and away the most consistent and, typically, most substantial impact on candidate evaluations and voting decisions is exerted by party identification (Campbell et al. 1960; Markus and Converse 1979; Miller and Shanks 1996). In nearly all elections, the vast majority of Democratic identifiers votes for the Democratic party’s candidate and the vast majority of Republican identifiers votes for the candidate of the GOP (e.g. Bartels 2000). That, however, does not mean that the electoral influence of partisanship is constant. The degree of partisan voting varies across levels of elections (Jacobson 2004; Bartels 2000), electoral contexts (Weisberg 2002; Miller 1978), electoral rules (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001), and over time (Bartels 2000).

One factor that may shape the importance of party identification on evaluations of political candidates is the socio-demographic profile of particular candidates. A large body of research shows that candidate characteristics such as race (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993; Carsey 1995), gender (McDermott 1997; Dolan 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Streb et al. 2008), and religion—or, specifically a candidate’s Catholicism (Converse et al. 1966; McDermott 2007; Wilson 2007)—affect citizens’ voting decisions. In addition to their independent effects on voters’ judgments, these candidate characteristics may shape the degree of partisan voting.

They may do so because citizens generally have clear images of the types of groups that are associated with the two parties (Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991; Bastedo and Lodge

1980), and these groups, in turn, trigger partisan reactions from citizens (Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991; McDermott 2007). In fact, party identification is, according to some scholars, based largely in such group-based party stereotypes (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). These images of the parties thus may become so deeply ingrained in the public's mind that when citizens see or hear about a candidate with a particular socio-demographic profile, they naturally think "Republican" or "Democrat" and base their support for him or her accordingly on their party loyalties. More specifically, if candidates' personal characteristics tap into the group-based stereotypes that voters have of the parties, then they may serve to enhance the relationship between party identification and candidate support for the candidate.

To assess the possibility of candidates' group profiles shaping the extent of partisan voting, we turn to a socio-demographic trait that is increasingly associated with the social group images of the parties: namely religion. The role of religion in American politics has been the focus of ever-increasing attention by scholars, journalists, and political commentators, but the overwhelming focus has been on how voters' religious orientations affect their political attitudes and behavior. With the exception of a handful of articles on voters' reactions to Catholic candidates (Converse et al. 1961; McDermott 2007; Wilson 2007), there has been virtually no attention given to how candidates' religious orientations shape voters' evaluations of them.

Here, we gauge just that, but from the standpoint of how partisan identifiers react to candidate religion. Recent decades have witnessed substantial changes in the relationship between religion and the two parties: White evangelical Protestants have realigned their party ties from Democratic to Republican (Layman and Hussey 2007) and a broader "God gap" has emerged between the two parties, with the Republicans growing more religious and the Democratic coalition becoming more non-religious (Green 2007). These developments, we

argue, should have been reflected in the electorate's images of the parties, with citizens coming to associate the GOP with evangelicals and religious people and the Democrats with non-religious people. That, in turn, should have consequences for how partisans react to candidate religion. The simple fact of a candidate being evangelical or even just being religious should increase the relationship between partisanship and evaluations of that candidate, with Republicans growing more positive and Democrats more negative. Of course, such activation of party identification should occur only for those individuals whose images of the parties' group coalitions have incorporated the division of the parties along the lines of traditional religiosity.

We test these expectations with survey data gathered from national samples of citizens in the fall of 2006 and the summer of 2007. At the heart of our data are a unique set of experimental survey questions in which we present voters with a hypothetical candidate and randomly vary the information available about that candidate's religious background. Our experimental manipulations allow us to isolate the effect of a candidate's religious orientations on voters assessments of him and thus to gauge the degree to which those orientations activate partisan evaluations. Our results clearly show that the religious profiles of candidates shape the degree to which partisanship structures citizens' support for them.

Party Stereotypes, Social Groups, and Candidate Traits

A number of studies have shown that the stereotypes, or preconceived images, citizens hold of the Republican and Democratic parties (e.g. of their policy positions, values, or effectiveness in managing government) are widespread and stable, and help individuals to evaluate the parties and their candidates in complex information environments (Bastedo and

Lodge 1980; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Sanders 1988; Conover and Feldman 1989; Rahn 1993).

Of the party stereotypes voters hold, the most pervasive and powerful may be those regarding the groups to which each party is connected. Citizens consistently and clearly associate certain groups with each party, and these perceived party-group connections influence evaluations of the parties and candidates, assessments of their policy positions, and, ultimately, voting decisions (Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991; Bolce and DeMaio 1999a ; Bolce and DeMaio 1999b; McDermott 2007).

In fact, a recent and influential perspective on party identification suggests that such group-based party stereotypes may lie at the very heart of partisanship itself. Drawing on and extending earlier work identifying the close connection between social group memberships and partisan ties (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960), this work contends that an individual's party identification is rooted in his or her perceptions of the social groups that comprise each party's coalition of supporters (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991). Thus, one identifies with a party because of an affinity to the racial, ethnic, class, religious, or other social groups perceived to be within it as well as antipathy toward the social groups associated with the other party. As Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002, p. 8) note,

As people reflect on whether they are Democrats or Republicans (or neither), they call to mind some mental image, or stereotype, of what these sorts of people are like and square these images with their own self-conceptions. In effect, people ask themselves two questions: What kinds of social groups come to mind as I think about Democrats, Republicans, and Independents? Which assemblage of groups (if any) best describes me?¹

¹ In a related, but distinct, line of work, Greene (1999, 2002) also offers a social identity perspective on party identification. However, rather than the connection between partisanship and identification with social groups outside of politics, Greene focuses on the parties themselves as groups and argues that identification with a party is much like identification with any other salient social group.

If, as this group-attachment perspective on partisanship contends, party identification is closely connected to and even based in social group membership, identity, and affect, then the socio-demographic group characteristics of political candidates should be consequential for the degree to which partisanship structures support for them. Party identification's impact on candidate evaluations and vote choice may be amplified when the candidates in an election possess socio-demographic profiles consistent with commonly-held stereotypes about the groups associated with each party. However, if the social group characteristics of candidates are inconsistent with prevailing party stereotypes, then levels of partisan voting may be diminished.

There also may be interactions between popular images of the parties' group associations and other party stereotypes. For example, we might expect higher levels of partisan voting when the parties' candidates take policy stands that are consistent with the public's prevailing views about the types of issue positions generally held by the parties (e.g. Sanders 1988). If the candidates' demographic profiles also conform to citizens' stereotypes about the parties' group coalitions, then the impact of party identification on voter judgments may be especially large. On the other hand, we might expect inconsistency between candidates' issue positions and existing party stereotypes to diminish, or perhaps even reverse, the connection between partisanship and vote choice.² However, if the candidates' social characteristics match citizens' group-based images of the parties, then party identification's influence may not be reduced as much. In fact, if, as Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002) and others argue, party identification is based more in group identification and membership than in policy attitudes, then

² While this seems logical, Rahn (1993) finds that inconsistency between the issue positions of hypothetical candidates and citizens' expectations about party policy positions does not diminish the influence of party identification on support for those candidates.

the case of social consistency but policy inconsistency may see the impact of partisanship still taking shape in reliable ways.³

Candidate Religion and Party Stereotypes

Many partisan stereotypes—for example, the identification of the upper class with the Republicans and the working class with the Democrats (Campbell et al. 1960)—are based on longstanding group associations. Such enduring partisan stereotypes leave a deep imprint on the electorate, as the images have been continuously reinforced over decades. Religious affiliation has long been part of these partisan stereotypes. As one notable case, in the mid-twentieth century Catholics were closely associated with the Democratic party, and mainline Protestants with the Republicans (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954).

In recent decades, however, the relationship between religion and the political parties has been fundamentally altered. One of the main changes has been a wholesale shift in the party loyalties of white evangelical Protestants. Strongly Democratic through at least the 1950s, evangelicals have become the most loyal component of the Republican electoral coalition (Layman and Hussey 2007; Green 2007). An even more fundamental shift has been the emergence of a broader and growing “God gap” between the two parties, with the most committed members of a wide range of faith traditions growing more attached to the GOP and the Democratic electoral base becoming more secular (Layman 2001; Green 2007).

From the perspective of our argument about candidate characteristics and the activation of partisanship, these developments should have important consequences for the relationship

³ This, of course, should not be true if, as some scholars (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981; Abramowitz and Saunders 2006) contend, party identification is based less in group attachments and more in summary evaluations of the parties’ ideological and policy positions.

between candidates' religious orientations and partisan voting. The presence of an evangelical candidate or even simply a religious candidate in an electoral contest may—even without identifiers of the candidate's party affiliation—trigger images of the GOP in the minds of voters and thus elicit distinctly partisan reactions. Republican identifiers should react more favorably toward the candidate, while Democratic partisans grow less supportive.

While partisan divisions based on traditional religiosity are of relatively recent vintage, we still expect that the association of the GOP with evangelicals and religious people (and of the Democratic party with non-religious people) has penetrated into the party stereotypes held by many citizens. Other research shows that aggregate images of the parties' coalitions change predictably as the group composition of the parties changes (Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991; McDermott 1997) and, more specifically, that evangelical and fundamentalist Christians have been associated with the Republican party in Americans' minds since the 1980s and 1990s (Bolce and DeMaio 1999a Bolce and DeMaio 1999b). Even more relevant for this paper is the finding by McDermott (2007) that the impact of party identification on non-Catholics' support for Catholic candidates has shifted as the party ties of Catholics as a group have shifted in a Republican direction. Thus, the electorate as a whole does seem to recognize shifts in the parties' group coalitions and to reconnect their party affiliations to evaluations of candidates with particular socio-demographic profiles accordingly.

However, given the generally low levels of political attentiveness of the American public, there may well be many citizens whose images of the parties do not yet reflect the division of the party coalitions along the lines of religious traditionalism. This should create important individual-level variation in the degree to which candidates' religious characteristics condition the impact of party identification on judgments about them. Among individuals who recognize

that groups such as evangelical Christians and religious people tend to be Republicans, Republicans should respond more favorably and Democrats less so to candidates who come from those groups. However, for individuals who do not recognize such group-party associations, candidates' religious traits should not affect the partisan tenor of their voting decisions.

Data

Our analysis employs data collected in the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), and then in a follow-up survey which replicated the methodology of the first. Both surveys were conducted on-line by Polimetrix (Ansolabehere 2006).⁴ The Polimetrix panel is best thought of as a representative survey of voters, rather than the general population, and so is likely to be more politically knowledgeable and perhaps more opinionated than a sample of the population as a whole. Since the crux of our analysis employs experiments embedded in surveys, the advantages of economically assembling a large sample is worth the small sacrifice in representativeness, especially since the sample is far more representative than subjects recruited to a lab (e.g. college sophomores).

Partisan Stereotypes

A test of partisan stereotypes requires that voters associate specific social groups with the parties—that there are actually stereotypes widely held within the general population. Furthermore, as described by Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, there should be bipartisan consensus on which groups are associated with which party (2002, 10). As we use the term, a partisan stereotype is shared by both Republicans and Democrats, and therefore is not simply a negative association that supporters of one party have of partisans on the other side.

⁴ See Rivers (2006) for more details on the Polimetrix methodology.

We tested the prevalence of partisan stereotypes with the following question, which enabled us to test an array of group images, both religious and not.⁵

For each of the following groups, please let us know whether you think that the members of this group are mainly Democrats, mainly Republicans or a pretty even mix of both.

Respondents were then given a list of groups which included conservatives, liberals, people in business, members of labor unions, blacks, Hispanics, Catholics, Jews, evangelicals, religious people, and non-religious people. Table 1 displays the results. Clearly, there are widespread partisan stereotypes which largely reflect the actual composition of the two parties' supporters. Conservatives are overwhelmingly identified as Republicans (79.58% say they are mainly Republicans), while pretty well the same percentage perceive liberals to be Democrats (79.11% report they are mainly Democrats). Union members and blacks are also overwhelmingly perceived to be Democrats (71.44% and 75.98%), while a majority believe Hispanics are likely to be Democrats (56.26%). Fifty-nine percent see "people in business" as mainly Republicans. In short, these partisan stereotypes seem a reasonable reflection of reality: public opinion data reveal that Democrats really are far more likely than Republicans to be liberal, union members, and black, while they have a smaller, but still substantial, advantage among Hispanics.

As evidence that Catholics are no longer widely identified as Democrats, note that over half (52.45%) of our respondents say that Catholics are an even mix of Republicans and Democrats. The percentage who identify Catholics as Republicans actually exceeds those who see Catholics as Democrats (24.73% versus 20.08%). This is a reasonable inference, as within the general population Catholics are split between Republican and Democratic identifiers (Leege et al. 2002; Mockabee 2007).

⁵ This question was only posed in the second round of our data collection, not on the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

A strong, and accurate, perception among voters is that evangelicals are predominantly Republican. Only slightly fewer respondents indicated that evangelicals are mainly Republicans (73.67%) than said the same about conservatives. And what of the Republicans' general brand label as the "party of religion"? We tested the Republicans' religious brand label by asking respondents about how they perceive the partisanship of "religious people" and, conversely, "non-religious people." Just under half of respondents said that religious people are an even mix of both parties (45.24%), while an almost identical percentage (45.83%) said that they are mainly Republicans. Very few (5.34%) reported that religious people are mainly Democrats. The results for non-religious people are almost precisely the mirror image.

Recall that partisan stereotypes are defined as groups which both Republicans and Democrats agree are associated with each party. Figure 1 demonstrates that both Republican and Democratic identifiers share essentially the same stereotypes for four religious groups: religious people, evangelicals, Catholics, and Jews. Only for religious people do we see differences by party, but they are modest. While 56% of Republican identifiers say that religious people are mostly Republicans, 43% of Democratic identifiers do; 39% of Republicans say religious people are an even mix, compared to 48% of Democrats who say the same. These differences are presumably owing to the fact that in a highly religious nation like the United States, to be religious is widely considered a positive attribute and so partisans are slightly more likely to say that religious people are found within their party. Indeed, given the positive impression of religion within the American population, it is striking that more party identifiers do not report that their party is the natural home of religious Americans. Instead, we see that the image of Republicans as the party of religion is a widespread, although not universal, stereotype.

This evidence strongly supports our expectation that the division of the parties' coalitions along the lines of traditional religiosity has penetrated the party stereotypes held by the electorate. Nearly all Americans associate evangelicals with the GOP and citizens are far more likely to place religious people in the Republican camp (and non-religious people with the Democrats) than they are to do the reverse. This suggests that certain types of religious orientations should elicit an explicitly partisan response from voters, conditioning the impact of partisanship on vote choice. Because citizens clearly think of religious people and especially evangelicals as Republicans, candidates who are evangelicals or even simply people of faith should attract more support from Republican identifiers and less support from Democrats. At the same time, the evidence in table 1 also suggests that some religious orientations, including those which traditionally have been closely associated with one of the parties, may have little effect on the degree to which party identification is linked to candidate support. The clearest example here is the case of Catholics. Long connected to the Democratic party in the minds of Americans (McDermott 2007), Catholics now are not generally identified with either party. Thus, identifying a candidate as Catholic should not trigger a partisan reaction.

Experiments

These partisan stereotypes enable us to see which groups are associated with which party, and how widely that association is made within the population. If these stereotypes trigger a partisan response from voters in the absence of a candidate's party label, we should expect voters to react systematically when a candidate is described as belonging to a group which is associated with a partisan stereotype. Second, we should see that reaction occurring on both sides of the partisan spectrum—when Republicans are more supportive, Democrats should be less so. Third,

the partisan reaction should occur regardless of the issues which are emphasized by the candidate.

We test for a partisan response to religious cues with a series of experiments in which respondents read the description of a hypothetical Congressional candidate, and then indicate their likelihood of supporting that candidate if they lived in his district. Respondents are randomly assigned different candidate descriptions—some learn that he is Catholic, others that he is an evangelical, and so on.

The experiments contain two basic candidate descriptions, one which makes our hypothetical candidate sound like a conservative and another that has a more liberal cast. The descriptions emphasize valence issues like “keeping our people safe” and a “clean environment,” but which are more likely to be emphasized by either conservatives or liberals. Note, though, that these descriptions do not include any overtly partisan language, so that the conservative candidate could conceivably be a Democrat, while the liberal candidate could be a Republican.

Here is the baseline description of the conservative candidate:

Now we would like to get your opinion about a candidate running for Congress outside of your state. Please read his description, and then tell us what you think about him.

John Robinson owns a local pharmacy. He is forty-one years old, married, and has three children. As one of the most prominent citizens in his community, he has long been active in local politics. In a recent newspaper article, this is what he said when he was asked why he has entered the congressional race:

“I am running for Congress because I want to see our values protected, our borders secure, our people safe, our economy strong, and our troops supported.”

If you lived in this candidate’s congressional district, how likely would you be to vote for him? [Very Likely, Somewhat Likely, Not Very Likely, Not At All Likely]

The liberal candidate has an identical biography, but is said to offer a different rationale for his candidacy:

“I am running for Congress because I want to see good wages, a clean environment, effective healthcare, quality schools, and honest government.”

We succeeded in our intention to have candidates that respondents perceived as conservative and liberal, and who therefore differed in their support from Republicans and Democrats. In the baseline condition (no religion, no party cues), 94% of Republicans indicated that they are “somewhat” or “very” likely to vote for the conservative candidate, compared to only 65% of Republicans who supported the liberal candidate. Among Democrats, support for the conservative was 48%, contrasted with 93% who said that they would vote for the liberal.

To provide a religious or partisan cue, the baseline description is modified slightly. The description below highlights one example of additional information in bold face.

*John Robinson owns a local pharmacy. He is forty-one years old, married, and has three children. As one of the most prominent **evangelical Christians** in his community, he has long been active in both **his church** and local politics. In a recent newspaper article, this is what he said when he was asked why he has entered the congressional race:*

*“As a **man of faith**, I am running for Congress because . . .*

Other treatments included identifying the candidate as Catholic and a prominent member of his local church without specifying an affiliation.

Analyses

To examine the degree to which candidates’ religious orientations condition the impact of party identification on voters’ judgments about them, we estimate a series of straightforward models that have the following form:

$$Candidate\ Support_i = b_0 + b_1 Party\ Identification_i + b_2 Treatment_i + b_3 (Party\ ID_i \times Treatment_i)$$

Because the candidate support variable is a four-category ordinal scale, we estimate all of the models with ordered logit. Party identification is the traditional seven-point scale, recoded to range from zero for strong Democrats to one for strong Republicans. The treatment variable is a dummy variable on which a score of one indicates the respondents who received the treatment (the description of the candidate as an evangelical, a Catholic, or a general person of faith), and zero indicates respondents who received the baseline condition (no identification of the candidate's religion). The coefficients in the model, then, have a very straightforward interpretation. The coefficient on party identification, b_1 , represents its effect on candidate support for those in the baseline group (zero on the treatment variable). The coefficient on the treatment variable, b_2 , signifies the difference between the support of strong Democrats (zero on party identification) for the candidate under the baseline condition and under the particular religious treatment. The coefficient on the interaction term, b_3 , indicates the difference between the impact of party identification on candidate support under the treatment condition and under the baseline condition. This represents the degree to which the particular religious characteristic in the treatment influences the impact of party identification on the likelihood of voting for the candidate. Because the treatments were assigned randomly, there is no need for demographic controls.⁶

We begin in table 2 by examining whether the connection between party identification and candidate support is affected by identifying a conservative candidate as Catholic. (The

⁶ In other analyses, we have also added to all the models we report other interactions of the treatments with a measure of religiosity (an index of religious attendance, religious importance, and frequency of prayer), to ensure that our results were not simply driven by differences in religiosity between Republicans and Democrats. In no case does adding this interaction affect the substantive interpretation of our conclusions. We have also interacted the respondents' religious affiliation with the treatment (i.e. Evangelical X Evangelical Cue, Catholic X Catholic Cue) and, again, our findings hold. (Results available upon request).

Catholic cue was added only to our description of the conservative candidate.) As we expected, the Catholic cue elicits no partisan response. Party identification has a positive and highly significant effect on candidate support for those in the baseline condition. Given that we included the Catholic cue only in the description of the conservative candidate, finding that support for the candidate increases with attachment to the Republican party makes perfect sense. However, the connection between partisanship and evaluations of the candidate is not enhanced by his Catholicism. The approximately-zero coefficient for the Catholic cue indicates that strong Democrats who know that the candidate is Catholic do not evaluate him any more positively or negatively than those (in the baseline group) who do not. The statistically-insignificant coefficient on the interaction term means that the influence of party identification is no different when the candidate is identified as Catholic than when no information about his religion is provided. Figure 2 displays the results of the model graphically, where we see support for both the baseline and Catholic candidate is nearly indistinguishable (the slight difference is not statistically significant).

In table 3, we examine the impact of the evangelical cue, and the results stand in stark contrast to those for the Catholic cue. The first column of the table shows the results when the candidate has a conservative policy agenda. The first half of figure 3 illustrates their implications, by showing the effect of party identification on the probability of voting for the candidate under the baseline condition and when the candidate is identified as an evangelical.⁷ Party identification, as expected for a conservative candidate, has a positive and highly significant influence on candidate support even under the baseline condition. However,

⁷ Our ordered logit analyses actually produce probabilities of occupying each of the four categories of our ordinal candidate support variable. To simplify the presentation of predicted probabilities, we assume that respondents who said that they would be “very likely” to vote for the candidate would actually vote for him and, accordingly, report the percentage of respondents who chose that option.

identifying the candidate as an evangelical clearly augments the effect of partisanship. Both the positive and significant coefficient on the interaction term and the steeper slope of partisanship's effect for the evangelical candidate (shown in the figure) indicate that the impact of party identification grows noticeably stronger when voters are informed of a candidate's status as an evangelical Christian. The reason, it turns out, is not that Republican identifiers are much more supportive of evangelical candidates, but that Democrats are clearly less supportive. The negative and highly significant coefficient on the evangelical cue signifies that strong Democrats are markedly less likely to vote for an evangelical candidate than for a candidate whose religious orientations are not known, and that is shown clearly in the figure.

Column 2 then repeats the same analysis for the liberal candidate, again comparing the baseline with the description of the candidate as an evangelical, and the solid and dashed lines in the bottom half of figure 2 illustrate the substantive implications of the results. The negative and significant effect for party identification indicates that, not surprisingly for a candidate pursuing typically liberal policy goals, stronger attachment to the GOP produces lower levels of candidate support. However, when the candidate is identified as an evangelical Christian, the impact of partisanship becomes much different. The negative coefficient on the evangelical treatment variable means that just as strong Democratic support for the conservative candidate was noticeably reduced under the evangelical condition, *strong Democrats even abandon a liberal candidate in droves when he is identified as an evangelical*. Meanwhile, the figure indicates that strong Republicans, somewhat wary of this liberal candidate under the baseline condition, feel noticeably more positive about him when told of his evangelical status.

In fact, despite the liberalism of his policy agenda, there is actually a positive and statistically significant effect of Republican party ties on support for this candidate when his

evangelicalism is revealed.⁸ Although we do not claim that this is a direct test of the social identity perspective on party identification against the view that party identification is a shortcut for individuals' issue positions and ideologies, it is suggestive. If party identification was based in policy attitudes and ideology, then we would expect it, as coded, to continue to have a negative relationship to support for a liberal candidate even if the candidate's social group characteristics lined up with those typically associated with the Republican party. The fact that the impact of partisanship on support for a liberal candidate not only is no longer negative when the candidate is identified as an evangelical, but actually becomes positive suggests that party identification's connection to group attachments and identifications may be stronger than its connection to policy and ideological orientations.

A further test of religious cues and partisan stereotypes comes when the candidate is identified as *both* an evangelical and a Republican. At the extreme, the strongest possible association between a group and a party would mean that adding a party label in addition to a group cue engenders no additional partisan reaction. If this were the case, once voters hear that a candidate is an evangelical, adding that he is a Republican would add no additional information—they already inferred his party affiliation from his religious affiliation. The results when our liberal candidate is described as both an evangelical and a Republican are displayed in column 3 of table 3, and their substantive implications are illustrated by the dotted line in the bottom half of figure 3.

⁸ The results in column 2 of table 3 do not provide a direct indication of whether the positive effect of party identification on candidate support is statistically significant under the evangelical condition, just that it is significantly *more positive* under the evangelical condition than under the baseline condition. In order to gauge whether the positive effect shown in figure 3 is statistically significant, we reversed the coding of the treatment variable to be zero for the evangelical condition and one for the baseline condition, interacted the reversed variable with party identification and re-estimated the model. In this model, the coefficient on party identification becomes its effect on candidate support when the evangelical cue is given. That coefficient is 1.13 with a standard error of .38 (p=.003).

They indicate that the impact of partisanship on candidate support does become significantly more positive when the candidate is identified as an evangelical and a Republican than when neither the candidate's religion nor his partisanship is revealed. However, the figure shows that the effect of party identification under this condition is not much different at all than it is when only information about the candidate's evangelicalism and not his Republican affiliation is provided. In results not shown, we directly tested whether the impact of party identification is different under the evangelical and Republican condition than it is under the evangelical (only) condition. We do so by making the comparison group for the evangelical and Republican treatment variable not the baseline condition, but the evangelical (only) condition. The interaction term is statistically insignificant, which indicates that the impact of party identification on candidate support is not at all greater when we tell respondents that the candidate is an evangelical Republican than it is when we simply tell them that he is an evangelical. This is considerable evidence for the strong association among evangelicals and the GOP, particularly among Republicans—once Republicans know a candidate is an evangelical, adding that he is a Republican neither adds to nor subtracts from his support.

A further test of party versus religion is provided in column 4 of table 3, where we model the reaction to a liberal candidate who is described as both an evangelical and a Democrat. In this case, we see that the two cues cancel each other out—the interaction between the evangelical/party cue and party identification is nowhere close to statistical significance. In other words, party identification does not lead Republicans to be more or less supportive of this overtly *Democratic* candidate when he is also described as an evangelical. While an evangelical identity does not outweigh the importance of a party label, it does neutralize it.

Among religious cues, “Catholic” and “evangelical” lie at opposite ends of the spectrum, and so our expectations for triggering a partisan response were clear. Evangelicals have a distinctive partisan profile, Catholics do not; evangelicals elicited a partisan response, Catholics did not. Our expectations are less clear for a candidate who is described as simply being religious, without being associated with a specific religious affiliation. If it is true that the Republican party has successfully fostered a brand label as America’s “religion party,” then we should observe a partisan response when a candidate is described as religious (in generic terms). Yet remember that the data on partisan stereotypes suggests that the Republicans’ brand label as the religion party is far from universal. Forty-six percent of respondents said that they associate “religious people” with the Republicans, while forty-five percent did not associate them with either party. Given this nearly even split on the partisan stereotype associated with religious people, do we observe a partisan response when a candidate is described as a religious person?

To find out, we described both the conservative and liberal candidates as religious without specifying their specific religious affiliation, which we refer to as the generic religion cue.

*John Robinson owns a local pharmacy. He is forty-one years old, married, and has three children. As **one of the most prominent members of the local church in his community**, he has long been active in both **his church** and local politics.*

In a recent newspaper article, this is what he said when he was asked why he has entered the congressional race.

“As a man of faith, I am running for Congress because . . . ”

We test the impact of the generic religion cue on partisan voting just as we did that of the evangelical and Catholic Cues. And, as displayed in table 4 and figure 4, the results are much the same. For the conservative candidate, the identification of the candidate as religious produces a

significant increase in the impact of partisanship. Again, that is largely because of the negative reactions that Democrats, especially strong Democrats, have to religious candidates. For the liberal candidate, the effect of party identification is negative and highly significant under the baseline condition, but grows significantly less negative when the candidate is described as a person of faith. In short, just as an evangelical candidate triggers images of the Republican party in citizens' minds, the association of religion with the GOP (and of non-religion with the Democratic party) appears to have grown strong enough that simply describing a candidate as religious in a generic way triggers negative reactions from Democratic identifiers and positive responses from Republicans.

However, it is worth noting that the impact of the generic religion cue is not as powerful as that of the evangelical cue. Whereas the evangelical cue turned the negative relationship between Republican party identification and support for the liberal candidate into a positive one, in this case the relationship is still negative—though significantly less so—when the candidate is described simply as religious. Moreover, while revealing the candidate's Republican ties in addition to his religion did not provide any further boost to partisanship's impact on vote choice in the case of the evangelical cue, it clearly does in the case of the generic religion cue. As the figure indicates, the effect of party identification on support for the liberal candidate is clearly more positive when we tell respondents that he is a Republican and a religious person than it is when we simply tell them that he is religious.⁹

This, of course, is not terribly surprising. Because the connection between evangelicals and the Republican party is much more universally recognized by citizens than the ties between

⁹ To determine whether the difference in the effect of party identification between the respondents in the religious and Republican group and the (only) religious group is statistically significant, we undertook the same analysis as we did in column four of table 3 in the case of the evangelical cue. In this case, the results indicated that the effect of party identification on candidate support was significantly ($p < .001$) more positive when the candidate is described as religious and Republican than it is when the candidate is simply described as religious.

the GOP and religious people in general are, we would expect identification of a candidate as an evangelical to have a much more powerful impact than statements of a candidate's general religious faith on levels of partisan voting. In terms of the whole electorate, Americans have more or less come to *know* that evangelical means Republican, but they may just *think* that religious might mean Republican.

If partisan stereotypes explain how voters respond to religious cues, a logical implication follows. Only those voters who hold the relevant stereotype should react to the cue in question. In this case, those respondents who do not make a mental connection between “religious people” and the Republican party should not, in turn, perceive a generically religious candidate to be a Republican. In contrast, respondents who hold the partisan stereotype that religious people are “mainly Republicans” should have a partisan reaction to a candidate described in generically religious terms. Recall that our respondents were split nearly 50/50 over whether religious people should be associated with the Republican party. Such an even division permits us to compare those who hold the religion-Republican stereotype with those who do not. We make that comparison by splitting the sample and running two models—one for respondents who do identify religious people as Republicans and one for respondents who do not make a religion-Republican connection. Our test is performed by modeling respondents' reactions to our hypothetical candidate when he is profiled as a liberal.¹⁰

Table 5 reports the results, which support our expectations. We observe that a partisan response is indeed conditional on whether respondents associate religion with the Republicans. Column 1 contains the results for those respondents who do not link religion and the GOP—here we see that the interaction between party identification and the religious cue is far from statistical

¹⁰ We only conduct this test using the liberal candidate, because that was the experiment in which we asked about partisan stereotypes.

significance. But when voters associate religion with the Republican party, hearing a candidate described as religious triggers a partisan response. In column 2—those respondents who do identify religious people as Republicans—there is a highly significant interaction between a respondent’s partisanship and the description of the candidate as religious. Figure 5 displays the results graphically. The difference between those respondents who are and are not aware of the religion-Republican link is striking. For those who are aware, there is an upward sloping line—the more Republican, the more support the candidate receives. For those who are not aware, there is a slight (and statistically insignificant) drop in support. As a result, Republicans are far more likely to support the candidate when he is described in religious terms than when he is not. For example, among strong Republicans, the gain in support means an increased probability of being “very likely” to vote for a religious candidate of 0.2—which translates into a 20 percentage point advantage.

In other words, for those who make the connection between religion and the GOP, hearing that a candidate is religious leads to the inference that he is a Republican. Among those voters who do not make that connection, learning a candidate is religious imparts no partisan-relevant information. This intuitive finding thus lends further support to our interpretation of the mechanism underpinning partisan response to religious cues, namely that it rests on voters’ party stereotypes.

Conclusion

Our experimental results provide the mirror image of models which correlate religion and vote choice in observational surveys, confirming the significance of religion as a significant cleavage in contemporary American politics. But where previous research has revealed the

impact of voters' religion, we have shown when a candidate's religion matters (or not). Evangelicals vote heavily Republican; Republicans are more likely to vote for a candidate who identifies as an evangelical. As a group, Catholics do not favor one party over another; all else equal, neither Republicans nor Democrats are more likely to favor a Catholic candidate. Most notably, a generic religion cue is enough to trigger a partisan response from voters. Whereas previous analyses have shown that religious voters are more likely to vote Republican, ours shows that religious candidates receive greater support from Republicans and less support from Democrats. This is true even for a liberal candidate. And it is not simply that highly religious voters of either party respond positively to religious candidates, and that Republicans just happen to be more religious. Rather, a religious cue triggers a *partisan* response that operates over and above a voter's own level of religiosity. The "religion brand label," however, is only effective among those voters who consciously connect religion and the Republicans. For those who do not make such a connection, a religion cue triggers no partisan reaction. In short, the Republicans have successfully stamped their party with a brand label as the party of religion, at least with roughly half of the electorate.

These results underscore that religion and partisanship have become closely bound in contemporary American politics. For many voters, religion has been absorbed into the Republicans' party image. And while, historically, partisan stereotypes have often included religion, this is something new. In the past, the parties have been associated with particular religious denominations. Now, the Republicans are associated with religion more generally.

As we consider the future of religion and partisan politics, the fact that half the electorate associates religiosity with the parties is like the proverbial question of whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. On the one hand, partisan stereotypes are self-reinforcing. The more voters

perceive the Republicans as the party of religion, the more religiously devout voters will identify as Republicans, which will likely reinforce the perception of the Republicans as the religion party. While, today, just under half of voters make a religion-Republican association, that percentage will grow if Republican candidates continue to embrace religion. Consequently, the religious divide between the parties would persist and perhaps even widen.

On the other hand, party images can—and do—change. The Republicans have not always been perceived as the party of religion, nor of evangelicals. Democrats were once the party of Catholics, but are no longer. And, outside of religion, the change in the racial groups associated with America’s two major parties has been well documented. As one indication that a change in religious stereotypes could be coming, some within Democratic ranks have called for the party to more openly embrace religion. Accordingly, recent years have seen more Democratic candidates employ religious rhetoric and symbolism on the stump. Should Democrats continue to “get religion,” perhaps we are at the high point of the religion-Republican connection. If so, the Republicans’ religion brand will fade away and cease to have such resonance within the electorate. Yet since party images are hard to shake, any such change will not happen overnight. Only time will tell if it ever happens at all.

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Table 1: Party Images of Religious Groups, Political Groups, and Other Socio-Demographic Groups

| | Party Image of Group (<i>Members of this group are:</i>) | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|------------------|
| | Mainly Republicans | Pretty Even Mix of Both | Mainly Democrats |
| Catholics | 24.73 | 52.45 | 20.08 |
| Evangelical Christians | 73.67 | 18.85 | 4.23 |
| Religious People | 45.83 | 45.24 | 5.34 |
| Non-religious People | 2.92 | 45.37 | 47.67 |
| Conservatives | 79.58 | 12.30 | 5.08 |
| Liberals | 4.68 | 12.85 | 79.11 |
| People in Business | 59.33 | 31.30 | 6.25 |
| Members of Labor Unions | 5.09 | 20.10 | 71.44 |
| Blacks | 2.18 | 18.36 | 75.98 |
| Hispanics | 7.40 | 32.74 | 56.26 |

Note: Entries are row percentages. Percentages do not equal 100 because those who skipped the question are not included.

Table 2: The Conditional Effect of Identifying the Candidate as Catholic on the Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support (*Conservative Profile Only*)

| Independent Variables | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Party Identification ^a | 2.62*** (.24) |
| Catholic Cue ^b | .15 (.25) |
| Party Identification × Catholic Cue | -.43 (.42) |
| Pseudo R ² | .09 |
| χ^2 (df=3) | 176.86 |
| (N) | (834) |

Note: Entries are ordered logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All independent variables are coded to range from 0 to 1. The dependent variable ranges from being “not at all likely” to support the candidate (1) to being “very likely” to support the candidate (4).

^a Ranges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

^b Comparison category includes respondents in the baseline condition.

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; *p<.05

Table 3: The Conditional Effect of Identifying the Candidate as Evangelical on the Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support

| Independent Variables | Ideological Profile and Religion or Religion & Party Identifier | | | |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| | (1) <i>Conservative Profile: Evangelical Cue</i> | (2) <i>Liberal Profile: Evangelical Cue</i> | (3) <i>Liberal Profile: Evangelical & Republican Cue</i> | (4) <i>Liberal Profile: Evangelical & Democratic Cue</i> |
| Party Identification ^a | 2.50*** (.23) | -2.56*** (.43) | -2.63*** (.44) | -2.48*** (.44) |
| Evangelical Cue ^b | -1.23*** (.26) | -2.54*** (.35) | — | — |
| Evangelical/Party Cue ^b | — | — | -3.09*** (.37) | -.97** (.37) |
| Party Identification × Evangelical Cue | 1.74*** (.45) | 3.84*** (.59) | — | — |
| Party Identification × Evangelical/Party Cue | — | — | 4.37*** (.60) | .40 (.55) |
| Pseudo R ² | .11 | .07 | .09 | .08 |
| χ^2 (df=3) | 240.85 | 59.99 | 79.73 | 81.87 |
| (N) | (822) | (390) | (377) | (400) |

Note: Entries are ordered logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All independent variables are coded to range from 0 to 1. The dependent variable ranges from being “not at all likely” to support the candidate (1) to being “very likely” to support the candidate (4).

^a Ranges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

^b Comparison category includes respondents in the baseline condition.

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; *p < .05

Table 4: The Conditional Effect of Identifying the Candidate as Generically Religious on the Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support

| Independent Variables | Ideological Profile and Religion or Religion & Party Identifier | | | |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| | (1) <i>Conservative Profile: Religious Cue</i> | (2) <i>Liberal Profile: Religious Cue</i> | (3) <i>Liberal Profile: Religious & Republican Cue</i> | (4) <i>Liberal Profile: Religious & Democratic Cue</i> |
| Party Identification ^a | 2.52*** (.22) | -2.66*** (.45) | -2.80*** (.45) | -2.95*** (.48) |
| Religious Cue ^b | -.79*** (.20) | -1.48*** (.35) | — | — |
| Religious/Party Cue ^b | — | — | -3.14** (.38) | .04 (.34) |
| Party Identification × Religious Cue | 1.09** (.35) | 2.28*** (.57) | — | — |
| Party Identification × Religious/Party Cue | — | — | 4.94*** (.63) | -1.08 (.58) |
| Pseudo R ² | .11 | .05 | .09 | .16 |
| χ^2 (df=3) | 286.61 | 42.74 | 80.62 | 140.42 |
| (N) | (995) | (375) | (361) | (369) |

Note: Entries are ordered logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All independent variables are coded to range from 0 to 1. The dependent variable ranges from being “not at all likely” to support the candidate (1) to being “very likely” to support the candidate (4).

^a Ranges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

^b Comparison category includes respondents in the baseline condition.

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; *p < .05

Table 5: How Partisan Stereotypes Shape the Conditional Effect of Candidate Religious Characteristics on the Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support (*Liberal Profile Only*)

| Generic Religion Cue | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Independent Variables | (1) Do not identify “religious people” as “mainly Republicans” | (2) Identify “religious people” as being “mainly Republicans” |
| Party Identification ^a | -1.33* (.62) | -4.15*** (.67) |
| Religious Cue ^b | -.53 (.46) | -2.61*** (.52) |
| Party Identification × Religious Cue | -.08 (.81) | 4.73*** (.85) |
| Pseudo R ² | .03 | .11 |
| χ^2 (df=4) | 14.56 | 46.54 |
| (N) | (194) | (181) |

Note: Entries are ordered logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All independent variables are coded to range from 0 to 1. The dependent variable ranges from being “not at all likely” to support the candidate (1) to being “very likely” to support the candidate (4).

^a Ranges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

^b The comparison group includes respondents in the baseline condition.

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; *p<.05

Figure 1. Partisan Stereotypes Held by Republican and Democratic Identifiers

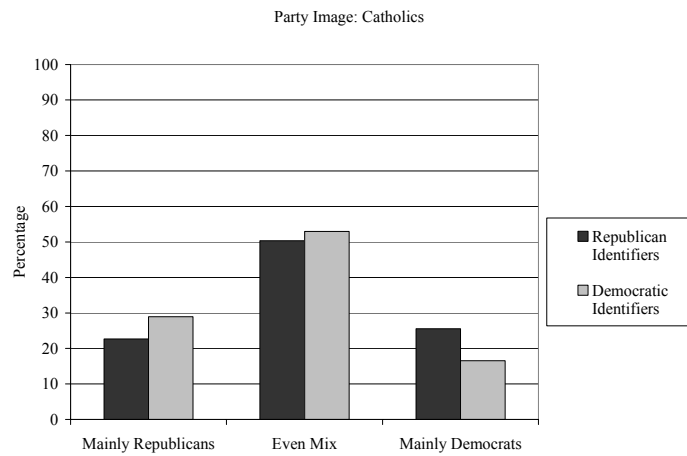
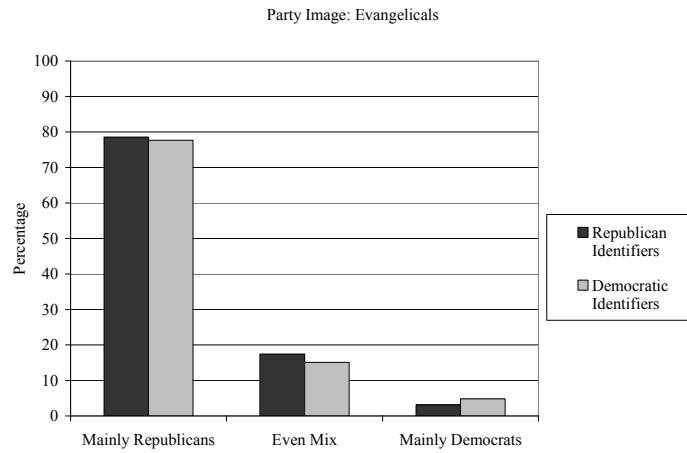
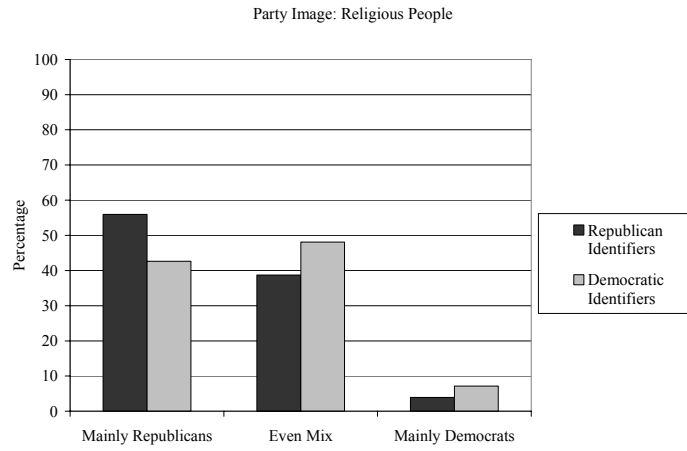


Figure 2: The Influence of the Catholic Candidate Identifier on the Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support (Conservative Profile Only)

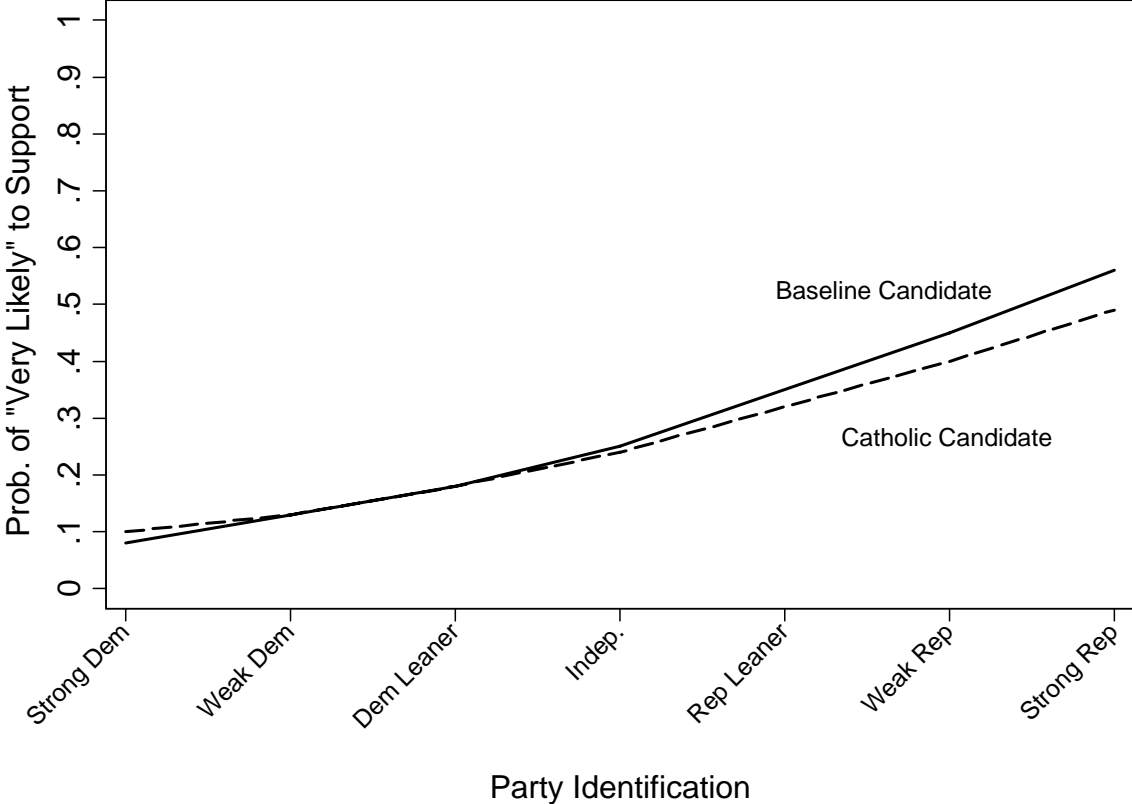
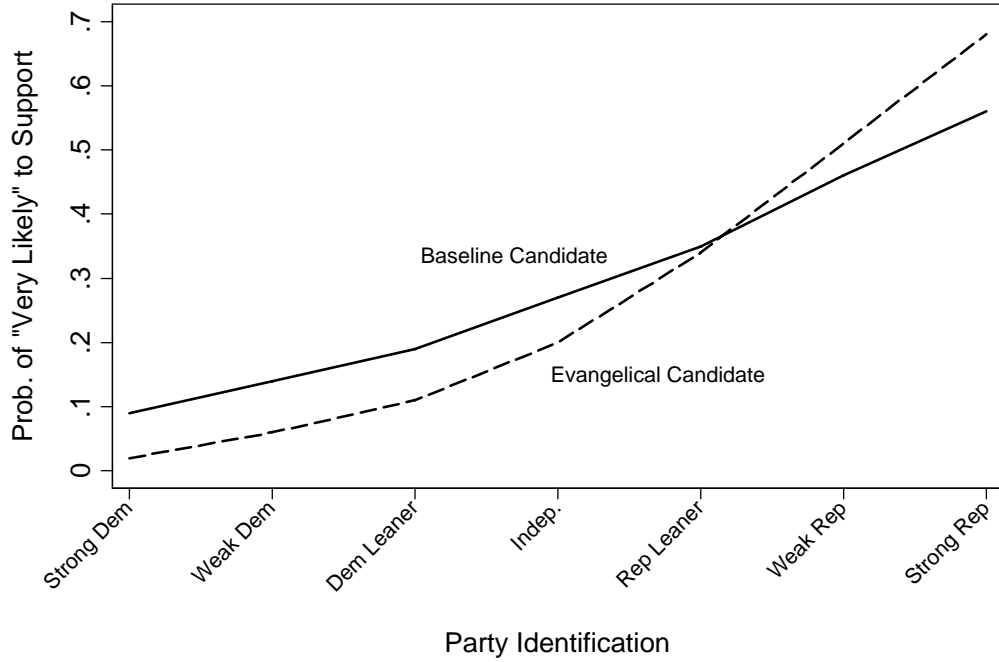


Figure 3: The Influence of the Evangelical Candidate Identifier on the Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support

Conservative Profile



Liberal Profile

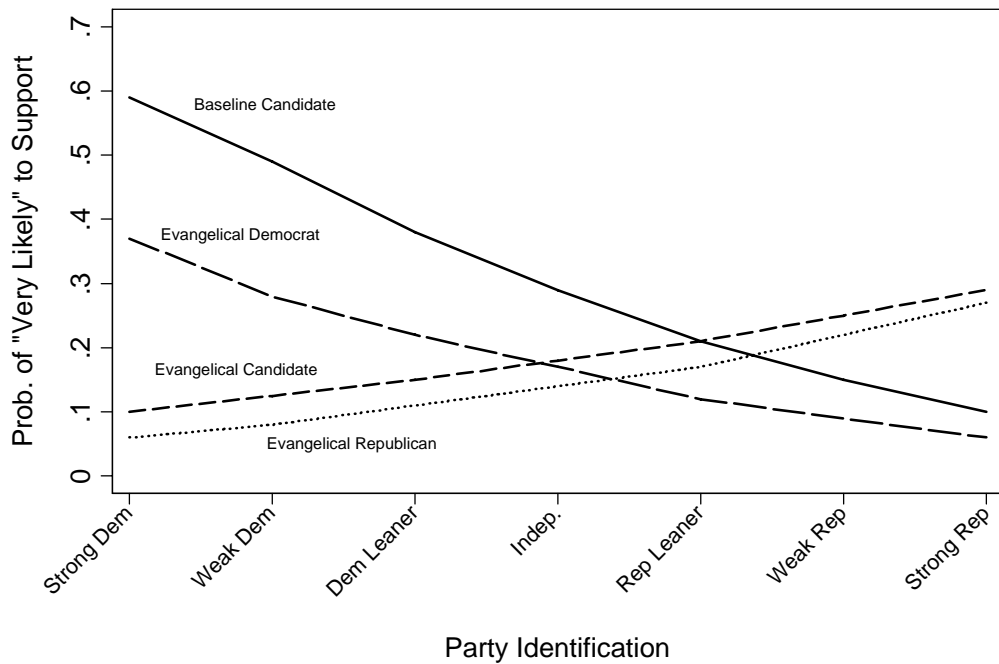


Figure 4: The Influence of the Generically Religious Candidate Identifier on the Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support

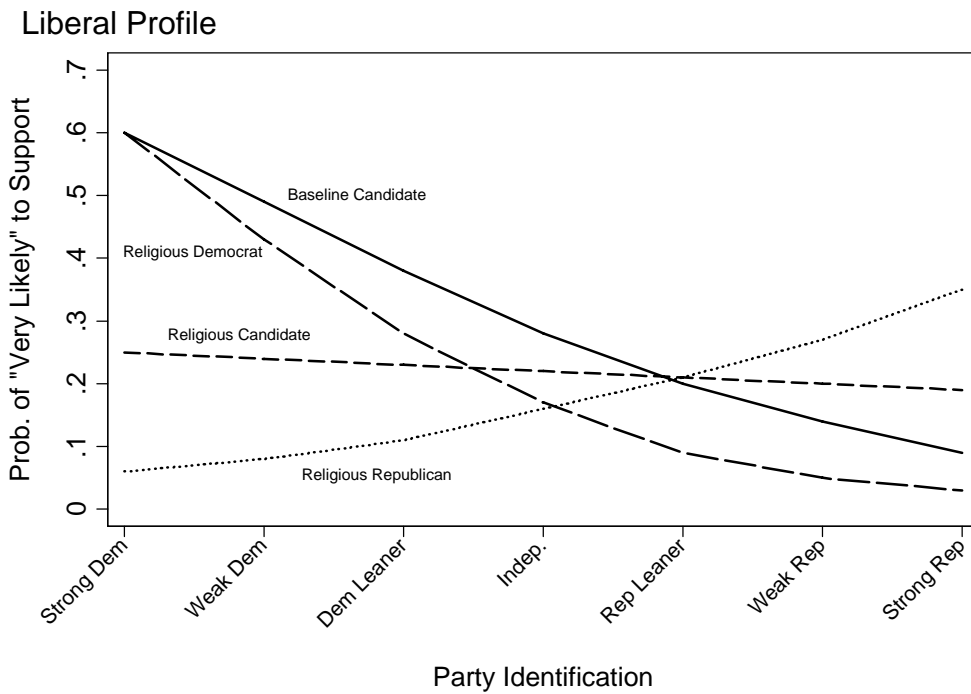
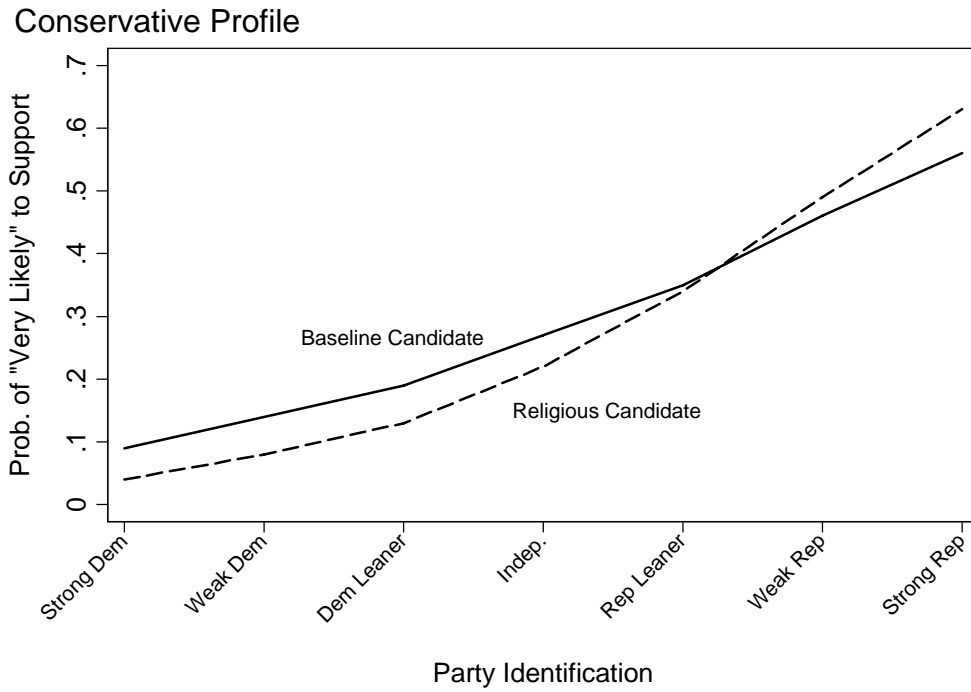


Figure 5: The Impact of the Religious Candidate Identifier on Partisan Voting by Awareness that Religious People are “Mainly Republicans” (Liberal Profile Only)

