Partisan Cues and Vote Choice in New Multiparty Systems

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Abstract

There are numerous studies of the effects of partisan cues in developed democracies, but almost none on how they affect voting in new multiparty systems. This lacuna might stem from untested assumptions that partisan cues are un-influential where parties lack longstanding records as governors, ideological cores, and psychological bonds with citizens. Alternatively, we theorize that even in new multiparty systems, voters use partisan cues to assess candidates’ potential performance, resource distribution, democratic credentials, and electoral viability. We test this theory through an experiment in which we varied inclusion of party identifiers on ballots in Uganda, where the multiparty system was only five years old. We find that partisan cues increased selection of major-party candidates over independents, straight-ticket ballots, and votes for copartisans. Our results challenge the common assumption that partisan affiliation is irrelevant to voters in new party systems. Partisan cues can influence political decision-making, even when party-systems are young.
Cues play important roles in individuals’ decisions about politics, affecting how they vote, form attitudes on issues, and respond to new information. These cues can take a range of forms, including partisan and ideological labels, referent endorsements, and candidate demographics. Partisan cues have received a great deal of attention in research on developed democracies with stable party systems, such as the United States (Downs 1957; Huckfeldt, et al. 1999; Kam 2005; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Rahn 1993).

However, few scholars have examined the effects of partisan cues outside of established democracies, particularly in new multiparty systems (Bullock 2011; Samuels and Zucco 2014). In such settings, parties are thought to be too young to provide voters with useful heuristics about policy or performance, and too evanescent to be the objects of voters’ psychological attachments. As such, voters there are presumed to focus more heavily on other attributes, such as distributional practices (Keefer 2007; Keefer and Vlaicu 2008); ethnicity or other ascriptive identities (Birnir 2007; Chandra 2004; Ferree 2011; Posner 2005); or endorsements from key societal figures, such as local elites (Baldwin 2013; Koter 2013). In other words, partisan cues are assumed to be uninformative and unimportant to voters in new multiparty settings.

The assumption that partisan cues are inconsequential for voting behavior in such settings is largely untested, however. Our paper therefore marks the first of which we are aware to study these effects.¹ We present a theory that, even in systems in which major parties are young, voters may use partisan cues to form assessments about candidates on a range of topics, such as

¹ Several experimental studies on partisan cues outside of developed democracies vary the presence of cues, but examine their effects on policy attitudes (Brader and Tucker 2012; Brader, et al. 2013; Merolla, et al. 2007; Samuels and Zucco 2014). Examining the effect of partisan cues on vote choice, and not just policy preferences, is important because vote outcomes can have direct political implications. Furthermore, an additional set of factors comes into play when individuals are voting, as opposed to when they are evaluating policies. Another experiment examines candidate-based versus party-based voting outcomes, but only varies the prominence of candidate names and search functions, and not the presence of partisan cues (Calvo, et al. 2009; Katz et al. 2011).
their past and potential performance, preferences and abilities regarding distribution, democratic credentials, and electoral viability. Notably, partisan labels can serve these functions even when parties’ youth means it is unlikely that voters have established psychological attachments to them, and when parties’ platforms are vague. In short, partisan cues could be meaningful to voters, even in systems in which the major parties are still in their infancy.

We seek to fill this gap by examining the effects of partisan cues on vote choice in a context where such effects are especially unlikely: Uganda’s 2011 general election. Three factors make this a particularly hard case for the identification of partisan cue effects. First, our outcome of interest is vote choice for real candidates, rather than support for unfamiliar policies or fictitious candidates. In most studies of partisan cues, subjects have limited knowledge and weak attitudes about the object of the inquiry, and party label is often the only heuristic available. In our study, subjects were asked to make a meaningful choice between familiar candidates in an environment where there were numerous alternate decision-making cues.

Second, the precise timing of our study—after a months-long election campaign and just days before the actual election—biased against the finding of significant partisan cue effects because many subjects had already decided on their favored candidates. Partisan cues are likely to have real-world implications if they can affect vote choice at the end of a campaign. And finally, the current multiparty system in Uganda was introduced in 2006, making the 2011 elections only the second time candidates had run under party the major parties’ banners. To our knowledge, no study of cue effects has focused on a multiparty system as young as Uganda’s.²

² Of these studies on partisan cue effects outside of developed democracies, the party system and major parties in Uganda are newer than those in Mexico (Merolla, et al. 2007), Brazil (Samuels and Zucco 2014), Argentina (Calvo, et al. 2009; Katz et al. 2011), and former Communist systems of Russia and Poland (Brader and Tucker 2012; Brader, et al. 2013).
If partisan cue effects are identifiable under these conditions, then such heuristics are probably meaningful to voters in a much broader range of contexts than has been previously considered.

In order to study the effects of partisan cues in Uganda, we conducted an experiment in which we varied subjects’ exposure to partisan cues via an important, yet overlooked medium for the transmittal of cues: electoral ballots. Subjects were randomly assigned to treatment conditions where they were given mock ballots that included or excluded party identifiers, and then asked to mark their preferred candidates in presidential, parliamentary, and local contests on these ballots. This experimental design enhances external validity, in that it used real candidates, was conducted in close proximity to an actual election, and administered treatments using a medium that often transmits partisan cues (i.e., ballots).

Our findings indicate that partisan cues did affect vote choice in Uganda. Subjects whose ballots contained partisan cues were more likely to vote for major parties, less likely to support independent candidates, more likely to cast straight-ticket votes, and more likely to match their votes with their self-reported partisan identity. These effects were substantively as well a statistically significant; for example, the probability of straight-ticket voting increases by 16% for those subjects who saw partisan cues compared to those who did not. These strong effects challenge the conventional view that partisan cues are less consequential in nascent party systems than in longstanding ones (Brader, *et al.* 2013; Bullock 2011; Merolla, *et al.* 2007).

The article proceeds as follows. We first review the literature on partisan cues and develop hypotheses on cues’ effects on voting in young multiparty systems. Second, we discuss our research methodology, including the use of mock ballots to administer treatments, case selection, experimental design, and subject recruitment strategies. The third section describes measurement and analysis strategies, while the fourth presents findings. Finally, we discuss potential mechanisms for our findings, before concluding with an overview of implications.
A Theory on the Utility of Partisan Cues for Voting in New Multiparty Settings

Research on the effects of partisan cues has focused, almost exclusively, on well-established party systems. Numerous scholars of the U.S., in particular, have examined the effect of partisan cues on vote choice, opinion formation, information processing, and affective responses (Chaiken 1980; Goren 2005; Goren, et al. 2009; Kam 2005; Lau, et al. 2008; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Rahn 1993). In these contexts, well-established parties are more likely to have stable reputations and programmatic cores from which their elites do not deviate significantly (Snyder and Ting 2002), while voters themselves are socialized to internalize identification with parties (Campbell, et al. 1960; Converse 1969; Downs 1957; Fowler and Kam 2007; Gerber and Green 1998; Green, et al. 2002; Jennings, et al. 2009). Party labels are deemed influential because they act as useful information shortcuts or because they prime long-standing and deep psychological attachments.

In contrast, studies of newer party systems have generally avoided examining the importance of partisan cues. Given that individuals often use heuristics when information is scarce or costly (Tversky and Kahneman 1974), we might expect that cues of various types would be especially influential in newer party systems, where paucity of political information, shifting alliances, and non-habituated political behavior make political landscapes harder to navigate for voters. However, scholars of such settings have focused on other types of heuristics—such as ascriptive identity (Birmir 2007; Chandra 2004; Conroy-Krutz 2013; Ferree 2011; Posner 2005) or clientelistic distribution (Keefer 2007; Keefer and Vlaicu 2008)—and eschewed the study of partisan cues. Partisan cues are presumed to hold limited utility where party leaders change allegiances too often to invest in the development of partisan brands.

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3 For a discussion, see Samuels and Zucco (2014).
(Conroy-Krutz and Lewis 2011; Desposato 2006; Rose and Munro 2003; Young 2014), avoid taking policy positions (Bleck and van de Walle 2011), and have yet to establish reputations based on previous terms in office (Brader, et al. 2013; Greene 2011).

In short, scholars assume that citizens do not know or care about parties in such cases, and thus partisan cues will have minimal or no effects.

We theorize that there are reasons that partisan cues could affect voters’ decision making in new party systems. First, most citizens are aware of which is the incumbent party, and theories of retrospective voting should apply even if incumbents have only been in power (or in existence) for a short period of time. Research on economic voting in established democracies suggests that citizens focus primarily on election-year performance, suggesting that they do not need (or want) long periods of time to develop assessments about the incumbent's economic competence (Achen and Bartels 2004; Alesina, et al. 1993; Fair 1978; Healy and Lenz forthcoming; Kiewiet 1983; Kramer 1971). If rewarding or punishing incumbents for economic performance is a consideration for many voters, then a key piece of information is who is in the government now and who is not, which partisan cues provide.

Second, partisan cues can affect citizens’ expectations about patronage distribution. Party leaders’ regional or ascriptive identities might signal the distributional preferences of the party as a whole (Chandra 2004). Furthermore, the delivery of largess in campaigns, during which party symbols and colors are often on display, might be interpreted as an indication of the party’s future commitment to recipients. The party affiliation of candidates may also signal their connections to powerful individuals who determine access to resources and influence.

Third, in the case of systems emerging from periods of authoritarianism, even new parties may indicate different democratic credentials based on events before, during, and after the

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4 For a review of these arguments, see Lupu and Stokes (2010).
transition. Parties often develop reputations as advocates for democracy and human rights, perpetrators of authoritarian abuses, or harbingers of (dis)order during the period immediately preceding or following the establishment of new regimes, when systems are still in flux.

Finally, major-party candidates may be deemed more viable than minor-party candidates or independents. Major-party candidates have already demonstrated that they are popular, well-resourced, or influential by winning primaries or gaining the assent of party elites (Ichino and Nathan 2013). Further, voters might assume that other partisan-minded voters will be attracted by the party label. Thus, party affiliation might signal the top contenders and deter sincere voting for candidates who have little chance of winning (McKelvey and Ordeshook 1972).

These factors suggest that party labels may influence voting soon after the establishment of new party systems. Importantly, our theory about how party labels can affect vote choice does not depend on citizens’ development of partisan psychological attachments, or on parties having clear and distinct platforms. Our theory also predicts that party cues can influence vote choice under such conditions, even if psychological attachments might be necessary for party cues to affect citizens’ policy preferences (Samuels and Zucco 2014).

If party labels carry meaning for citizens, then partisan cues could alter citizen choices by providing new information about the party affiliation of candidates, which could in turn help voters assess candidates’ competence and preferences. Further, partisan cues could prime party-based considerations, such that citizens consider party affiliations to be more important than individual attributes. In theory, either mechanism could increase party-based voting. Thus, we hypothesize that partisan cues can impact voting behavior, even new party systems.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of empirical evidence about how parties affect political behavior new party systems. As noted by Samuels and Zucco (2014), "relatively little experimental research has considered whether the core concept of mass partisanship can travel
into such different political contexts, particularly when political parties are new and numerous."
Certainly there are many studies about the development of party systems and party strategies and actions (for a review, see Ferree, et al. 2014), but little about whether partisan affiliation is meaningful to voters. We know of only a few studies specifically on the effects of partisan cues in newer party systems, most of which examine how cues affect policy preference, rather than vote choice (Brader and Tucker 2012; Brader, et al. 2013; Merolla, et al. 2007; Samuels and Zucco 2014). We are aware of only one study that examines the effects of cues on party-based voting: an experiment testing varying electronic voting designs in Argentina (Calvo, et al. 2009; Katz et al. 2011). In this study, however, party names and logos were equally apparent across all treatment conditions, while the prominence and accessibility of candidate names, among other things, varied across treatments. In other words, the study evaluates whether the presence of candidate cues, rather than partisan cues, affects party-based voting.\footnote{The complexity of the treatments also makes it difficult to isolate the potential effects of cues on decision-making processes from mechanical effects of different vote technologies on ballot marking. The treatments varied considerably in the logistical challenges that subjects faced when trying to locate their favored candidate from amongst over 70 candidates and 24 parties.} We know of no research specifically on how partisan cues affect citizen vote choice in new party systems.

**Research Design**

In order to adjudicate between the conventional expectation of no effect and our hypothesis that partisan cues increase party-based voting, we conduct an experiment testing the effects of partisan cues on vote choice in a party system that was, at the time of our study, only five years old: Uganda. The experiment was conducted using mock electoral ballots and held just days before Uganda’s 2011 general election. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of five ballot types; these ballots contained varying combinations of visual and textual elements, such as
party names, party symbols, and candidate photographs. According to our general hypothesis, we expect that those subjects in treatment groups that received ballots containing partisan cues (i.e., party names or party symbols) would be more likely to vote based on candidate partisan affiliation than their counterparts who received ballots including no such cues.

In this section, we discuss our use of mock electoral ballots for administration of treatments, the selection of the Ugandan case, the experimental design, and subject recruitment.

**Ballots and Partisan Cues**

Ballots are an important—and understudied—potential source of cues that affect voters’ decision-making. Policy makers often suggest that ballots include myriad textual and visual elements, in order to facilitate informed and autonomous voting. These elements can include information about candidates, such as their photographs or occupations, or about parties, such as their names or symbols. Visual elements, such as photographs and symbols, are especially recommended for countries where voters have less education, information, and voting experience (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network 2011; Reynolds and Steenburgen 2006; Smith, et al. 2009).

Despite widespread use of such identifiers on ballots, we currently lack systematic evidence about their effects on voting, particularly in developing countries (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network 2007; Katz, et al. 2011; Reynolds and Steenburgen 2006). While proponents of the inclusion of textual and visual elements argue that doing so will affect electoral outcomes by encouraging participation and reducing voter error, such recommendations fail to consider that such elements could themselves affect voter preferences. Candidate

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6 For examples of observational analyses of partisan cues on ballots in established democracies, see Meredith and Grissom (2010); Schaffner and Streb (2002); Schaffner, et al. (2007); and Welch and Bledsoe (1986). For examples of experimental studies, see Buckley, et al. (2007); Klein and Baum (2001); and Reynolds and Steenbergen (2006).
photographs could, for example, shift support in favor of more attractive contenders, or to those who appear to be coethnics of the voter ([Working paper by authors]). And, as we suggest in this article, partisan cues could affect voter preferences, even in countries with relatively short experiences of multiparty competition. Ballots provide the last stimuli that might affect voters’ decision-making processes and could therefore have sizeable effects on vote outcomes, even though cue effects are often ephemeral. In the experiment described below, we randomly assign subjects to mock ballots containing different textual and visual elements, and thus measure the effects that such elements—and, more specifically, partisan cues—have on subjects’ electoral choices.

**Case Selection: Uganda**

Two considerations guided our selection of Uganda as the experimental site: its status as a country with a new multiparty system, and its recent history of including variable textual and visual elements on ballots. On the first count, the 2011 general election marked only the second under Uganda’s current multiparty regime. Parties had been prohibited from electioneering under so-called “no-party democracy,” which President Yoweri Museveni established upon seizing power in 1986, and candidates did not appear with party affiliations on ballots. Multiparty electoral competition was not restored until 2006, following the public’s approval in a referendum the previous year. The main parties competing in that election, as well as in the 2011 election, were Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) and the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), which had been founded in 2004 as a breakaway from the NRM. Together these two main parties won 94.4% of the presidential vote in 2011. Therefore,

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7 Two parties that field candidates pre-date the current multiparty era—the Democratic Party (DP), founded in the mid-1950s, and the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC), founded in 1960—
Ugandans have had limited time to develop psychological attachments to parties, and elites’ party allegiances are still in flux. Finally, parties in Uganda are not simply coterminous with ethnic identities. The respective leaders of the NRM and FDC in recent elections, Museveni and Dr. Kizza Besigye, are both from closely related ethnic groups in the Western Region, and both parties draw significant electoral support from all regions of the country. In short, Ugandans might not have strong attachments to new party labels, as they might if parties were simple proxies for ethnicity.

Second, Uganda has a tradition of varying ballot design. Candidates’ photographs, for example, appeared on ballots in the 1994 Constituent Assembly elections. Party names and symbols were included beginning in 2006, while photographs remained fixtures. This means that ballots with and without partisan information would be plausible conditions for most Ugandan voters, thus increasing the experiment’s external validity. In sum, Uganda represented an ideal research site, because of its particularly young multiparty system and varying ballots.

**Experimental Design**

Subjects in the experiment were randomly assigned to one of five treatments, which varied according to the inclusion or exclusion of partisan cues, as well as a cross-cutting candidate photograph treatment. All five conditions include candidates’ names. Treatment 1 (the control) included no other information. Treatment 2 included party names, while Treatment

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but neither enjoys significant support. In 2011, these parties won a combined 3.4% of the presidential vote, and 22 parliamentary seats (out of 350 directly elected).

8 The exception is the Western Region, where support for the NRM is overwhelming.

9 We designed the experiment to examine the effects of candidate photos on voting in addition to testing the effects of partisan cues (see: [Working paper by authors]). For the regression analyses in this paper, we control for the cross-cutting picture treatment.
3 included party names and symbols. Treatment 4 included candidate photographs, and Treatment 5 included all elements: party names and symbols, and candidate names and photographs. Table 1 shows the conditions analyzed in this paper by ballot features. For each treatment the information provided accurately portrays the actual candidates. Treatment 5 most closely mimics real Ugandan ballots. Images of mock ballots are available in Figure 1.

[Table 1 goes around here]  
[Figure 1 goes around here]

Subjects were asked to take part in a survey about candidates, parties, and other political opinions and behaviors. After some initial demographic data were collected, subjects were asked to mark one mock ballot for each of four separate, real-world contests: president, Member of Parliament, district women’s Member of Parliament, and district chairperson. Each race was contested by candidates from each of the two major parties, at least one candidate from a minor party, and several independents. Each subject received the same type of ballot for each contest.

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10 The Electoral Commission (EC) requires that independent candidates select an object from a pre-designated list, on a first-come, first-served basis. Independent presidential candidates can design their own symbols, subject to the EC’s approval. The object appears on the ballot in the same location as would a party symbol. We include (or exclude) the object (e.g., soccer ball, chair, etc.) in the same way that we include (or exclude) party symbols.

11 In the interest of clarity and brevity, we exclude analysis of treatment 2 in this article. Results comparing treatment 2 with the control or treatment 3 are consistent with our conclusions in this paper, and they suggest that party symbols may be more influential that party names for many outcomes. For results and discussion of these analyses, see ([Working paper by authors]).

12 The experimental ballots were similar in size, shape, and design to official ballots, although they were also clearly marked as samples and lacked the EC logo that appears on official ballots. In addition, subjects were reminded before the ballot exercise and at the end of the survey that the ballots they had “cast” were not official, and those wishing to vote would have to go to the appropriate polling station on designated election days.

13 Uganda is divided into 112 districts, each of which elects one woman MP.

14 Each district elects a chairperson, which is the highest position within local government.

15 The minimum number of candidates in a contest was six (district chair) and the maximum was nine (MP). See Online Appendix 1 for a full list of candidates from each contest, including their current and former partisan affiliation, ethnicity, and percent of support amongst subjects in the control.
In other words, an individual assigned to Treatment 1 would be asked to complete the control ballot for each of the four contests. Subjects were asked to mark their ballots in private, without assistance from research staff or others, and place their ballots in an envelope. Following this task, subjects were asked a series of additional questions.

**Subject Recruitment**

The experiment was conducted in one parliamentary constituency—Soroti County, which is a rural area located in the country’s northeast. Soroti County was selected for logistical reasons—one of the co-authors was already conducting data collection in the area—and because its demographics and ethnically diverse candidate pools facilitated study of the effects of ballot design on ethnic voting, as well (as reported in [working paper by co-authors]). Enumeration Areas (EAs), as delineated by the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics, were first randomly selected, with EAs’ likelihood of selection proportionate to their population as of the last census (2002). Enumerators then selected households via a random-walk pattern, and individuals within selected households were recruited using a kish grid. Subjects had to be at least eighteen years of age, citizens of Uganda, and able to understand and respond to questioning in at least one of the three

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16 These envelopes contained no identifying information about the subject, but were marked with a serial number that allowed later matching to the subject’s completed questionnaire.

17 Questionnaire numbers were used to select subjects based on kish grid requirements, as well as to assign treatment conditions. An unanticipated interaction occurred, whereby some positions on the kish grid did not have equal probabilities of being assigned to each treatment. For all analyses in this article, we include only subjects from positions on the kish grid that had an equal probability of being assigned to comparison conditions. This maintains the experimental design, but does cost us considerable statistical power, in that it reduces the number of observations in the analysis by about 50%. It also limits external validity, in that the analysis population is not representative of the population at the within-household level. Kish grid placement is determined by the number of individuals, and age rankings, within a household, so some demographics were more likely to be included than others. For example, subjects in single-person households are more prevalent in our analysis than in the total subject population, and subjects are about 4 years older on average. The gender composition of the population included in our analysis is not significantly different than that of the total subject population.
survey languages (English, Iteso, and Kumam); they did not have to be registered to vote in the upcoming election, nor did they have to be literate.

**External Validity**

Our case selection and research design increase external validity in four respects. First, as previously discussed, most Ugandans have cast ballots with and without partisan identifiers; this means that ballots of any type would be within the realm of our subjects’ real-world experiences. Second, our ballots included real-world candidates currently campaigning for office. Studies utilizing hypothetical candidates might be biased towards finding larger cue effects, given that subjects will have very little information about the candidates other than the available cues. Third, we conducted the experiment just days prior to the actual elections. Presidential and parliamentary elections were held on 18 February, while local elections were held five days later. Our experiment was conducted between 10 and 17 February. Again, conducting the study earlier in, or even prior to, the campaign would likely bias effects upward, since subjects would have had less information about candidates at such times and would have to rely more extensively on ballot-provided cues. The number of undecided voters, who are more easily swayed, is also likely higher early in a campaign. Any study of the effects of partisan cues on vote outcomes, then, should ideally be held as close to the election as possible. Finally, our subjects filled out their mock ballots in secret and used separate papers for each of the electoral contests studied, a procedure similar to the one that Ugandans actually face at polling stations. This design represents a particularly hard test of the hypothesis that partisan cues can affect vote choice in new multiparty systems, given that we are evaluating support for real-world candidates at the end of a campaign in a party system that was then only five years old.
Measurement

To test the effect of partisan cues on voting, we compare the votes recorded on our mock ballots for those treatments that contain party name and symbol (treatments 3 and 5) against those treatments that do not contain any information about parties (treatments 1 and 4). We cannot directly observe whether voters considered party affiliation when marking ballots, so we look for observable implications of decision-making criteria. We operationalize party-based voting in three ways: 1) increased voting for major-party candidates and decreased voting for minor-party candidates and independents; 2) straight-ticket voting; and 3) voting in accordance with party identification.18 For each, we code the dependent variables to indicate the dimensions of vote choice we wish to test based on the attributes of the candidates selected by each subject.19

We first posit that major-party candidates benefit from decision-making that weights party considerations more heavily, while minor-party candidates and independents lose votes. Major parties have more supporters, so they gain support when voters consider party. Furthermore, when party is emphasized, strategic voters are more wary of wasting votes on minor-party candidates and independents. Schaffner, et al. (2007), working in the two-party U.S. system, find that the majority party benefits from partisan elections, and Katz, et al. (2011), working in Argentina, find that minor parties benefited from candidate-centric displays. In sum, we expect that partisan cues increase voting for major-party candidates and decrease voting for minor-party candidates and independents. This first operationalization requires three measures:

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18 The descriptive statistics, coding rules, and question wording for the outcome measures described in this section can be found in Online Appendix 2.
19 Alternate approaches, such as use of interaction terms, would be unwieldy given that there are thirty-one candidates across the four races; seven parties, plus independent candidates; and multiple outcome measures of interest. The primary models presented here include all four races, and code all unmarked ballot contests as zero.
Major Parties, Minor Parties and Independents measure the total number of votes for major-party, minor-party, and independent candidates, respectively. All range from 0 to 4.

Our second expectation is that party-based decision making manifests in higher rates of straight-ticket voting (Kimball 2003). Cues about party affiliation should generate greater consistency, such that more voters choose candidates from the same party for all contests. Voters may choose candidates from a previously favored party for all contests, or the party affiliation of a single favored candidate in a salient contest may anchor decisions for less salient ones. Straight-Ticket is a binary variable coded one if a subject voted for candidates from the same party in all four contests, and zero otherwise.

Third, we expect that voter partisan identification exerts a stronger influence on vote choice when partisan considerations are more emphasized. Partisan cues might provoke partisans to “come home,” therefore increasing the match between the partisan identification of voters and the partisanship of the candidates they select. Party-ID Match measures the total votes for candidates from a subject’s preferred party. Our main formulation of this measure includes only those subjects who identified a party to which they “feel close.” The measure sums across the four contests and ranges from 0 to 4.

Collectively, these three measurement approaches provide a methodologically and theoretically sound basis for evaluating whether partisan cues increase party-based voting. The third operationalization is the most common conception of party-based voting, while the first two are strongest with respect to causal inference. The first two are based solely on how subjects marked the experimental ballots, and we can feel confident that differences between groups

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20 The two major parties—the FDC and NRM—received 61.1% and 34.6%, respectively, of the 2011 presidential vote in Soroti County. Minor parties included the DP, UPC, People’s Development Party, People’s Progressive Party, and Uganda Federal Alliance. The most popular of the minor parties in 2011, the UPC, received just 1.3% of the presidential vote in Soroti.
reflect differences in voting behavior. The third has advantages with respect to construct validity, but it requires a post-treatment measure of partisan identification, which makes interpretation of causal effects more difficult. Consistent results across the three approaches strengthen our conclusions about the causal effects of partisan cues on party-based voting.

**Analysis and Results**

Across all three dimensions, the results indicate that partisan cues affect vote choice. Table 2 displays the results of regression analyses controlling for the cross-cutting treatment (candidate photos). We use logistical analysis for the binary measure of straight-ticket voting and ordered logistical analysis for others, where outcomes range from 0 to 4. Figure 2 graphs the means and 95% confidence intervals for subjects who were and were not exposed to partisan cues. The estimated effects of partisan cues on voting are strong and consistent.

[Table 2 goes around here]  
[Figure 2 goes around here]

First, partisan cues significantly increased votes for major-party candidates and significantly decreased votes for independent candidates, as expected. The substantive size of the effects is notable, especially for a new party system (Bullock 2011). The estimates indicate that subjects exposed to partisan cues were 13% more likely to vote for major-party candidates in all contests as compared to those not exposed to partisan cues. We do not see the expected decline in support for minor parties, probably because of a floor effect. There were no viable

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21 A closer match between vote choice and party ID in partisan cue conditions could be because cues caused partisans to vote according to their partisan preferences, or because cues caused subjects to report feeling close to the party of their favored candidates. Theoretically, the former is more likely, but we cannot rule out the latter. We opted for a post-treatment measure of party ID because a pre-test mentioning parties may have biased how subjects marked their ballots.
minor-party candidates in the down-ballot contests,\textsuperscript{22} so there was little room for loss of votes due to the inclusion of party identifiers. Instead, the evidence suggests that the inclusion of partisan cues discouraged subjects from voting for independent candidates. Partisan cues decreased the probability of voting for any number of independent candidates by 18%. Partisan cues seem to have induced subjects to vote for major-party candidates instead of independents.

Second, considerably more voters expressed consistent party preferences when partisan identifiers were on the ballot. Subjects who saw partisan cues were 16% more likely to vote straight-ticket than those who did not.

Third, self-identified partisans were significantly more likely to vote for copartisan candidates in the presence of partisan cues. The probability that a subject voted for all the candidates from his/her preferred party was 11% higher when partisan cues were included on the ballot than when they were not. These results suggest that party attachments exert greater influence on vote choice when partisan cues are present.

In sum, there is considerable evidence that partisan cues affect voting, even in a party system as young as Uganda’s. Furthermore, these results are robust to different coding decisions and alternate specifications of the model. Online Appendix 3 displays the results of our robustness checks.\textsuperscript{23} Our results are not due to a selection bias based on who chose to vote. The treatment has no effect on subjects’ willingness to mark the ballot, nor on the total number of contests marked. Additionally, our coding rule for missing votes does not affect our conclusions. The foregoing analyses include all possible responses from all subjects, with missing ballot choices coded as zero, but the results do not change notably if we drop subjects who failed to

\textsuperscript{22} Amongst subjects assigned to the control, only 5.5% of votes in the women MP race, 11.1% the MP race, and 3.2% in the chairperson race were for minor-party candidates.

\textsuperscript{23} The descriptive statistics, coding rules, and question wording for the robustness checks can be found in Online Appendix 4.
mark their ballots at all, or if we drop subjects who failed to mark one or more contests on the ballot.

Our results are also robust to alternate formulations of the outcome variables. For major-party voting, the key results remain significant if we include only the most popular party in Soroti, the FDC, instead of the two most popular parties. For straight-ticket voting, the results hold if we create a more nuanced measure. We summed the total number of down-ballot vote choices with the same partisan affiliation as the presidential vote choice.\(^{24}\) Partisan cues significantly predict the degree of party matching between presidential and down-ballot votes. Furthermore, the results for straight-ticket voting are the same if we include only those subjects who could vote straight ticket based on their presidential pick. Only the FDC, NRM and UPC fielded candidates in all four contests. Among only those subjects who voted for the FDC, NRM, or UPC presidential candidates, partisan cues significantly increased straight-ticket voting. The results also hold for party-ID voting if we restrict our sample to those who could vote for copartisans in all four contests (i.e., FDC, NRM, or UPC partisans). In addition, we get similar results if we expand our measure of party-ID voting to include non-partisans, such that non-partisans voting for independent candidates are coded as voting according to their party ID. Finally, disaggregating our analyses to evaluate the presidential, MP, women MP, and chairperson contests separately shows that our results are not driven by just one contest.\(^{25}\)

\(^{24}\) An individual coded as 3 would have voted for candidates from the same party in all races. One coded as 2 would have voted for a candidate for one down-ballot race whose partisanship did not match his or her presidential pick, etc.

\(^{25}\) Interestingly, we find that the partisan cues have no effect on the presidential race and that cue effects are stronger if we consider only the three down-ballot contests. This between-race variation is consistent with literature suggesting that cues are less influential in salient contests (Nicholson 2012), but with only four races we are unable to test effects of contest-level characteristics such as salience.
In sum, we find strong and robust evidence that the inclusion of partisan cues on election ballots increased party-based voting. The strong effects of partisan cues on vote choice are striking given the newness of the party system in Uganda.

**Discussion**

In this section we provide suggestive evidence about the nature of the change in voting behavior and the possible mechanism motivating the increase in partisan-minded voting. Our goal here is to use available evidence to probe the nature of the processes that might be generating the effects on vote choice that we observed.26

The results of additional analyses, shown in Table 3, suggest that partisan cues led subjects to switch votes in predictable ways: namely, they privileged 1) their party’s current favored candidates over independents who were formerly copartisans, and 2) copartisan ties over coethnic bonds. First, as noted above, partisan cues resulted in significantly higher support for major-party candidates, and lower support for independents. The types of independents most often abandoned by subjects in the presence of partisan cues were those who were formerly copartisans of the subject. Nearly all independent candidates in Soroti were previously affiliated with a major party, and subjects in the control were more likely to support former copartisan independents than former non copartisan independents.27 Results from an ordered logit model, shown in Column 1 of Table 3, indicate that partisan cues significantly decreased the number of former copartisan independents supported (b=-.84, SE=.25, p=.00). In other words, partisan

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26 The descriptive statistics, coding rules and question wording for these analyses can be found in Online Appendix 5.
27 The mean number of copartisan independents supported was .36, while the mean number of non copartisan independents supported was .27 (T-test for difference in means significant at p=.10). We exclude the presidential race from these analyses, because the only independent candidate in that race—Samuel Lubega—was a former member of the DP, with which less than 1% of our subjects identified.
cues increased subjects’ likelihood of voting for the current flag-bearer of their favored party over former affiliates of their favored party.

**[Table 3 goes around here]**

Second, partisan cues also seem to affect ethnic voting. Soroti County is an ethnically divided constituency, with 69.1% of the population identifying as Iteso and 29.1% as Kumam (2002 census). If partisan cues increase party-based voting, we should expect the presence of such cues to increase willingness to support candidates from other ethnic groups in instances in which copartisanship and coethnicity cross-cut. The district chairperson contest provides an excellent opportunity to test this expectation, given that the two major-party candidates came from different ethnic groups. In that contest, George Michael Egunyuu, a Kumam, was the NRM candidate, while Daniel Ediau of the Iteso group stood for the FDC. Logistic regression analyses indicate that partisan cues increased voting for non coethnic candidates when including our entire subject population (b=.47, SE=.20, p=.02), as well as when the analysis is limited to voters who were cross-pressured, such that they could either vote for a copartisan or a coethnic major-party candidate, but not both (b=.64, SE=.32, p=.04). These results are displayed in Columns 2 and 3 of Table 3. Though we cannot be certain that these changes in ethnic voting are due to vote switching between major-party candidates, the results suggest that subjects were more likely to consider party, and less likely to consider other possible heuristics, when partisan cues were present.

What causal process might be responsible for the strong effects of partisan cues? Much of the literature, especially on new party systems, suggests that cues are influential because they provide voters with novel information about candidates (Birnir 2007; Chandra 2004; Conroy-

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28 In the MP race, both major-party candidates were Kumam, while all candidates in the district women’s MP race were Iteso. None of our subjects had coethnic presidential candidates.
Krutz 2013; Ferree 2011; Posner 2005). However, our evidence suggests that information is not the causal mechanism generating the partisan cue effects we find.\(^{29}\)

In order to evaluate whether certain ballot cues increased subjects’ knowledge of candidate partisanship, thus affecting their vote choices, we asked subjects to identify the partisanship of all twenty-three candidates running for MP, women MP, and district chair positions. After marking their ballot and putting it in an envelope, subjects were shown unmarked ballots of the type matching their treatment condition and asked about the partisanship of the candidates. The variable *Know Partisanship All* totals the number of candidates whose party affiliation was correctly identified. Because subjects might ignore information about candidates who are not of interest, we also evaluate a less-demanding criterion for learning. *Know Partisanship Voted* totals the number of correctly identified party affiliations only for the three candidates that the subject marked on the ballots. The results of regression analyses of partisan cues’ effects on knowledge of candidate partisanship were not significant, regardless of whether we use *Know Partisanship All* (\(b=-.29, \ SE=.59, p=0.62\)) or *Know Partisanship Voted* (\(b=-.09, \ SE=.18, p=0.62\)).\(^{30}\) Columns 4 and 5 of Table 3 show the full results of these analyses.

We suspect that partisan cues did not improve knowledge of partisanship because subjects were already knowledgeable about major-party candidates and ill-equipped to make sense of cues for independent and minor-party ones. In other words, at the end of a campaign, they could not make sense of what they did not already know. On average, subjects in the

\(^{29}\) Evaluating causal mechanisms is a difficult task with respect to causal inference (Green, *et al*. 2010). We provide suggestive evidence by examining whether our experimental treatments are associated with the hypothesized mechanism.

\(^{30}\) These findings are not sensitive to the coding of non-responses.
control identified the affiliation of 4.4 out of 6 (73%) major-party candidates, suggesting a ceiling effect. However, subjects in the control knew far less about independents’ and minor-party candidates’ affiliation, identifying only 6.3 out of 17 (37%). Perhaps subjects were unable to make sense of the symbols and labels for independent and minor-party candidates, especially given that most symbols were selected just prior to official campaigning. Subjects may also have been uncertain about the meaning of the “independent” label or lesser-known minor parties’ names. Rather than changing their understanding of the affiliation of independent or minor-party candidates, partisan cues may have caused subjects to focus on the (already known) partisanship of major-party candidates, thereby changing votes. In short, the available evidence suggests that partisan cues did not create more informed voters, but did seem to create more partisan-minded ones.

If party-cue effects are not the result of learning, than what alternate process might be at work? Priming is the most likely alternate causal mechanism to learning (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Lenz 2009). Exposure to the party symbol may have increased the salience of partisanship so that partisanship was a more important consideration for subjects in the down-ballot contests.

There are several possible scenarios that would explain a priming effect. Partisan cues might increase the salience of: 1) party characteristics over candidate characteristics; 2) national issues over local ones; 3) prospective party affiliation over retrospective party affiliations; and 4) candidate viability over candidate capability. First, the presence of partisan cues might shift voter focus from candidate traits to party traits. For example, subjects might care about access to patronage when voting for officials, but not consider the party-based patronage system as the most salient dimension affecting resource access until partisanship is highlighted. Second, it may be that parties have meaningful reputations for national-level issues (such as democracy, security, and economic performance), but not for local-level issues (such as service delivery,
identity representation, and resource distribution). Subjects might be more likely to consider how the outcomes of down-ballot contests might affect the relative power distributions at the national level when partisan cues appear next to down-ballot candidates. In a third possible scenario, when current party affiliations are accentuated, subjects may decide that previous performance is not a good indicator of future performance for candidates who lost their party’s support in the interim. Finally, partisan cues might highlight that some candidates are more viable than others, and thus push voters from sincere voting for preferred candidates to strategic voting for candidates with better chances of winning.

The evidence and discussion in this section have important implications. We do not intend to argue based on the Ugandan case that learning is never a cause of partisan cue effects. Instead we hope to encourage scholars to reconsider their assumptions about causal mechanisms underlying cue effects. Scholars of the developing world in particular have too often assumed that cue effects are due to information acquisition without considering information-processing theories. Direct empirical tests of learning, priming, or alternate mechanisms underlying cue effects are extremely rare (Lenz 2009). Our results suggest scholars should be attentive to a broader range of mechanisms through which partisan cues alter attitudes and behaviors, and should seek to empirically evaluate theorized processes.

Importantly, the policy and normative implications are quite different if the behavioral changes from partisan cues are the result of what people learn as opposed to how they decide (Lenz 2009). Practitioners recommend including ballot information (especially visual images like party symbols and candidate photos) under the assumption that this helps voters overcome knowledge deficits and select preferred candidates (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network 2011; Reynolds and Steenburgen 2006; Smith, et al. 2009). We find no evidence that partisan cues altered voting by facilitating informed choice. Instead, cues may themselves shape preferences
through priming. Given the proximity of exposure to ballots and vote choice, subtle cues on ballots can have large effects on vote outcomes, even if their influence on attitudes is ephemeral.

**Conclusion**

Numerous studies indicate that voters in developed democracies rely on partisan cues to streamline their electoral decision-making processes. However, only a handful of scholars have examined the effects of partisan cues elsewhere (Brader and Tucker 2012; Brader, et al. 2012; Calvo, et al. 2009; Katz, et al. 2011; Merolla, et al. 2007; Samuels and Zucco 2014), and none have studied vote choice outcomes in a system where all major parties have little electoral experience. The paucity of scholarship on partisan cues in such settings is likely attributable to researchers’ expectation that partisan cues are of limited utility in new party systems, where parties have not had much time to establish records as governors, coherent ideological cores, and psychological bonds with citizens. Voters are assumed to utilize other cues that ostensibly carry more meaning, such as candidates’ distributional behavior, ascriptive identity, or regional ties.

We theorize that partisan cues might influence voters, even in new party systems without historical legacies. Partisan cues identify incumbents, whom voters might want to punish or reward for recent performance. Additionally, parties can quickly establish reputations for favoring certain groups, based on campaign tactics and candidate choice. Voters might conclude that certain parties will support or limit democratic freedoms, based on events immediately before, during, and after recent liberalization processes. Finally, partisan cues might signal candidate viability. Party labels can therefore affect vote preferences even when parties are too young to establish psychological ties with voters and party platforms are hard to distinguish. In sum, parties might become meaningful to voters, and partisan cues could affect political decision-making, very soon after the establishment of new party systems.
We test the effects of partisan cues on voting in Uganda, where multiparty political competition is still in its infancy, and partisan cue effects are especially unlikely. Subjects were asked to indicate their support for real-world national- and local-level candidates on mock ballots that included (or excluded) party identifiers. The experiment was conducted just days prior to the actual election using procedures similar to those used at actual polling stations, thus enhancing the external validity of the study. The study provides an extremely rigorous test of the partisan cue thesis given that we examine the influence of a subtle cue on vote choice for real candidates at the end of a campaign in a multiparty system that had been in existence for only five years.

Our experiment demonstrates that voters in new party systems do, in fact, use partisan cues in their electoral decision-making; the presence of partisan identifiers increased party-based voting. Subjects who received ballots with party identifiers were more likely to 1) vote for major parties; 2) avoid voting for independents; 3) cast straight-ticket ballots; and 4) vote for copartisans. Furthermore, the presence of partisan cues did not help subjects accurately identify the partisanship of candidates, which suggests that effects are not due to learning.

Our results challenge the common assumption that partisan affiliation is irrelevant to voters in new party systems. Although the multiparty system in Uganda was only five years old at the time of the experiment, partisan labels significantly impacted vote choice. Use of such heuristics is not limited to older party systems or established democracies, as is commonly believed. Partisan cues can influence political decision-making, even when party systems are in their infancy.
References


Table 1: Treatment Conditions by Ballot Elements

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Note: Partisan identifiers include both party name and party symbol.
Table 2: Effects of Partisan Cues on Voting

<table>
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Notes: Cell entries represent coefficient estimates followed by standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, based on two-tailed tests. Outcome variables are: total votes for major-party, minor-party, and independent candidates; straight-ticket voting, and total votes for candidates from favored party. The outcomes include votes in the presidential, MP, women MP, and chair contests. Models 1 and 2 include all subjects. Model 3 includes only partisans.
Table 3: Nature of Vote Choice, and Knowledge as a Possible Mechanism

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Cross-pressed subjects</th>
<th>(4) Know partisan affiliation of all candidates</th>
<th>(5) Know partisan affiliation of vote choices</th>
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<td>(1)</td>
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<td>(3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vote for independents who had been copartisans</td>
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<td>0.47*</td>
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<td>(0.20)</td>
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<td>Vote for non-coethnic in chairperson contest</td>
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Notes: Cell entries represent coefficient estimates followed by standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, based on two-tailed tests. Outcome variables are: (1) total votes for independent candidates who previously were members of the subject’s favored party in the MP, women MP, and chair contests; (2 and 3) vote for a non-coethnic candidate in the chairperson contest; (4) total number of candidates whose partisan affiliation the subject correctly identified from all 23 candidates in the MP, women MP, and chair contests; and (5) total number of candidates whose partisan affiliation the subject correctly identified from only those candidates for whom the subject voted in the MP, women MP, and chair contests. Model 1 includes only partisans. Model 2 includes all Iteso and Kumam subjects. Model 3 includes only subjects who could vote for either a coethnic or a copartisan candidate in the chairperson contest, but not both. Models 4 and 5 include all subjects.
Figure 1: Images of Treatment Features for MP Contest

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- **SAMPLE BALLOT 1**

- **SAMPLE BALLOT 3**

- **SAMPLE BALLOT 4**

- **SAMPLE BALLOT 5**

- Sample Ballot 1: Images of Treatment Features for MP Contest
- Sample Ballot 3: Images of Treatment Features for MP Contest
- Sample Ballot 4: Images of Treatment Features for MP Contest
- Sample Ballot 5: Images of Treatment Features for MP Contest
Figure 2: Means and 95% Confidence Intervals for Vote Outcomes by Exposure to Party Cues

Notes: Dots represent mean number of votes, or proportion of votes, by ballot types. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The outcomes include votes in the presidential, MP, women MP, and chair contests. Major party, minor party, and independents are the sums of votes for each type of candidate, and the measures range from zero to four. Straight-ticket vote is a binary outcome coded 1 if subject voted for candidates from the same party and 0 otherwise. Party ID match is the mean number of votes for candidates from a subject’s preferred party, and the measure ranges from zero to four.