

UC Berkeley

The Charles H. Percy Undergraduate Grant for Public Affairs Research Papers

Title

Occupational Hazard: Ballot occupation as a proxy for party in low-information elections

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9fq06172>

Author

White, Joshua

Publication Date

2013-07-15

Undergraduate

Occupational Hazard: Ballot occupation as a proxy for party in low-information elections.

Joshua White

University of California, Berkeley

Author Note

This research was funded by the Charles H. Percy Undergraduate Grant for Public Affairs Research, generously awarded by the Center for the Study of Representation at the University of California, Berkeley's Institute for Governmental Studies. The author studies political science as an undergraduate, and is indebted to Professors Gabriel Lenz and Terri Bimes, graduate student Stephen Goggin, and numerous others for their assistance on this project. Correspondence may be directed to joshua.white@berkeley.edu.

Abstract

Researchers have long viewed ballot cues as key factors in vote choice unrelated to a pure evaluation of a candidate's merits. In this study, I investigate the role of ballot occupation—that is, the title often included with a candidate's name on a ballot. Ballot occupation is more malleable by candidates than other cues, like ethnicity or ballot order, and could be manipulated to produce an electoral benefit. I evaluated a difference in occupation preference between respondents of the two major United States political parties. I conducted an Internet-based survey of 610 individuals, varying the cues presented—occupation, party, or both. The results suggest that listing occupations historically and logically associated with one of the political parties has an effect similar to, but weaker than, the effect of listing the corresponding party. Further, when both a party and an occupation inconsistent with that party are listed (e.g., a “Republican college professor”), the results most clearly reflect those of the party-only group (but are somewhat weaker). This suggests that ballot occupation can act as a proxy for the candidate's political party when no party information is provided, but that occupation has nearly no effect when a party is listed.

Keywords: ballot cues, ballot occupation, heuristics, political behavior, low-information voting, voting

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
The Conventional Wisdom on Ballot Occupation	5
Analyzing the Conventional Wisdom	8
Methodology	8
Findings	9
Overview of Following Sections	9
2. Approaches to Analyzing the Role of Ballot Occupation	11
General Research	11
Qualification Advantage?	13
Prestige/Reputation Advantage?	14
A Cue for Party/Ideology?	16
The State of the Existing Literature	17
3. A Model of Ballot Occupation as a Proxy for Party	18
4. Designing an Experiment to Maximize Real-World Applicability	20
Variables	20
Collecting Data with an Internet Survey Experiment	21
Designing the Survey	22
Assessment of the Research Design	24
5. Significant Results, Uncertain Real-World Impact	25
Cues Provided to Respondents	25
Analytical Methods: Measuring the Aggregate Ballot	26
Measuring the Aggregate Ballot: Results	27
Analytical Methods: Office-by-Office Differences	30
Office-by-Office Differences: Democratic Respondents	30
Office-by-Office Differences: Republican Respondents	32
Office-by-Office Differences: Independent Respondents	33
G2 Group: Comparing Democratic, Independent, and Republican Respondents	35
Assessment of Results	36
6. Discussion	39
Summary of Results	39

BALLOT OCCUPATION AS A PROXY FOR PARTY	4
Methodological Limitations	39
Areas for Future Research	41
Societal Implications	42
Final Thoughts	43
7. References	45
8. Appendix A: Survey Text	48

Introduction

Political science research has long attempted to answer a deceptively simple question: why do people vote how they do? The ideal answer would find that voters have perfect knowledge of each candidate for office and choose the candidates that would be the best for society, but we know that to be far from the case. Many voters, particularly in down-ballot races, have little knowledge of the candidates and issues, and yet they vote anyway. Some consider this a problem—that because voters often make voting decisions with limited information, they cannot be making the choices best aligned with their true preferences. However, researchers have honed in on “information shortcuts” as a way for low-information voters to make voting choices mirroring those of similarly positioned high-information voters. The most studied and most powerful shortcut is party identification. One reason for party identification’s value to voters is its availability: in partisan contests, each candidate’s party identification is listed next to his or her name on the ballot. As a result, every voter is exposed to the information while voting.

Non-partisan elections, like those for municipal and county offices, lack that crucial shortcut. This may be beneficial in some ways: because of the greater media attention given to national politics, voters tend to associate the political parties with their national priorities. National priorities may have little or no relationship to the priorities of local candidates who happen to be of the same party. However, in some regions, ballots do include a potentially important cue: occupation.

The Conventional Wisdom on Ballot Occupation

Candidates for elected office and their campaign consultants pay considerable attention to their ballot occupation. Every election cycle, there are disputes over whether an occupation fairly represents the candidate’s actual experience—candidates often choose a dubious occupation, ostensibly to appeal to a particular constituency or suggest a particular

type of experience. Democratic consultant Paul Mitchell called ballot occupation “valuable real estate in a campaign,” (Sanders 2012). Dan Schnur, a former communications director for Republicans Pete Wilson and John McCain, noted that, “for every voter who sees a TV commercial, there’s a lot whose only exposure to the campaign is going to be what they see on the ballot” (Sanders 2010). Tab Berg, a Republican campaign consultant who worked for now-Congressman Paul Cook, said, “When we won the court case [allowing our first-choice ballot occupation], I knew we were going to win the race” (Miller 2012). While both major political parties agree that ballot occupation matters, their approach to choosing an occupation differs.

Democrats and Ballot Occupation

Democratic consultants and strategists, consider some variant of “teacher” or “educator” as the optimal occupation for a Democratic candidate hoping to appeal to a Democratic constituency (Miller 2012). Democratic strategist Paul Mitchell noted the value of listing “teacher” as a candidate’s occupation: “If it’s a teacher vs. a tax collector vs. an incumbent Assembly member, a lot of people are just going to say, ‘I believe in teachers’” (Sanders 2012b). While there could be various factors at work in Mitchell’s analysis, the fact that a Democratic consultant chose “teacher” as an example is telling. Darrel Woo, who won the Sacramento County Democratic Party’s endorsement in his school board campaign, chose to call himself a “classroom teacher,” even though he was actually an attorney and had taught only a legal reasoning class as an adjunct law professor (Gutierrez 2010).

Republicans and Ballot Occupation

Among Republican consultants, it is an article of faith that some variant of “business owner” is the optimal title to target Republican voters. Allen Hoffenblum, who analyzes congressional and legislative races in California, said that, “On the Republican side, the best

ballot designation you can have is ‘businessman’ or ‘businesswoman’ or ‘small business owner’” (Sanders 2012b). Disputes over ballot occupations seem particularly common, with candidates often dubiously claiming a business-related occupation. San Bernardino County Supervisor Neil Derry—an incumbent—sought to list himself as a “Supervisor/Businessman” even though most of his time and income was spent working as a county supervisor. His opponent sued, and Derry was forced to remove “businessman” from his ballot occupation (Ghori 2012). In a parallel case, California State Assemblyman Kevin Jeffries described himself as a “small business owner” in his campaign for Riverside County Supervisor. Jeffries was similarly sued, but the judge in that case allowed his ballot occupation to stand (Horseman 2012).

Explaining the phenomenon

While political practitioners agree that ballot occupation matters, and that there may be differences between Democrats and Republicans, they are less clear on why it matters. Practitioners typically point out that ballot occupation most strongly affects low-information voters. In some cases, consultants and candidates seem to be trying to produce a qualification advantage. For instance, California Attorney General candidate John Eastman, a constitutional law professor, attempted to list “Assistant Attorney General,” since he had spent a few weeks assisting the South Dakota Attorney General with a specific case (Sanders 2010). Darrel Woo’s use of “classroom teacher” in his school board candidacy also fits this explanation. However, the qualification advantage explanation does not fit with the recent aversion toward listing politically-oriented occupations—for instance, choosing not to list “state senator” while running for Congress. It does not fully explain why Republicans would seek business-related titles in so many cases, even when the office being sought was not business-related. Most notably, it also fails to account for the difference between Democratic and Republican candidates identified by Allan Hoffenblum (Miller 2012).

Analyzing the Conventional Wisdom

Viewed together, the comments from political practitioners lead to one main conclusion: that there is an ideological component to occupation. While qualification may play a role in some races, it seems clear that in many cases candidates choose ballot occupations as a signal for a particular constituency: “I’m one of you.” That there are often key differences between the preferred occupations of Democrats and Republicans suggests that voters of each party may prefer particular occupations—and, further, that some ballot occupations may function as a proxy for party in low-information, non-partisan elections.

However, relatively little existing research, either observational or experimental, has explored a difference in how low-information voters of the two parties choose between candidates with different ballot occupations, assuming everything else to be equal. This is the question I address: whether ballot occupation serves as a proxy for party in low-information, non-partisan elections.

Methodology

I conducted an Internet-based survey of 610 individuals, with subjects recruited with Amazon’s Mechanical Turk service. Respondents were presented with a simulated ballot listing artificial candidates for six nondescript local offices. Respondents were placed into one of four treatment groups, which varied the cues provided: name only; name and occupation; name and party; or name, party, and occupation (with this group providing inconsistent cues). The occupations chosen were either socially-oriented or business-oriented, with one of each per vote choice, and were based on existing ballot occupation research conducted in Europe by Sajons (2011) and Chatraborty (2012), research into ideological associations with occupation conducted by Goggin (2012), and on the comments of political practitioners discussed previously.

Findings

In analyzing the data, I first created a measure of the “aggregate ballot”—that is, the percentage of the ballot given to the candidate with a socially-oriented occupation. This measure suggests that, among both Democratic and Republican respondents, adding occupational information to a ballot composed of otherwise-unknown candidates produces a swing of approximately 20% away from the name only group. Importantly, respondents of the two parties moved in opposite directions: Democrats toward the socially-oriented occupation, and Republicans away from it (and toward the business-oriented occupation). That is, Democrats awarded about 20 percentage points more of their votes to candidates with socially-oriented occupations, while Republicans awarded about 20 percentage points more to candidates with business-oriented occupations. These results are significant at the 0.01 level. There was some variance in the office-by-office results (i.e., in the non-aggregated results), but nearly all are consistent with the aggregate ballot results. Further, the direction-of-change for respondents of each of the political parties was consistent with the direction-of-change seen when adding party identification information (without occupation information). In other words, adding an occupation without a party label has an effect similar to, but weaker than, the effect of adding the corresponding party.

Overview of Following Sections

Next, I will describe the existing political science literature on ballot occupation. The existing literature largely focuses on a qualification advantage, while some very recent research in European elections has considered a possible ideological component. I will then present a formal model and hypothesis for the effect I expect to see. The following section expands on the details of my research’s design, including the logic behind the cues selected and the manner in which they are presented. In the Analysis and Assessment section, I detail the results of my experiment. Finally, my conclusion will sum up my findings, discuss

limitations to my methodology, suggest areas for further research, and describe the larger impact of ballot occupation acting as a proxy for party in local elections.

Approaches to Analyzing the Role of Ballot Occupation

The existing literature has addressed areas related to, but different from, the present question. Fundamentally, the literature views a candidate's party identification as a highly significant factor in vote choice. Scholars disagree about whether party identification is stable (e.g., Campbell, et al, 1960) or wavering (e.g., Popkin, 1994) and about what factors lead to a voter's adoption of a particular party identity, but both groups tend to agree that a voter's party identification at the moment when he votes affects that choice. In short, a candidate's party matters.

Researchers have also considered the role of secondary or tertiary factors that could affect vote choice. For instance, researchers have explored the effect of a candidate's demographic characteristics (Matson and Fine, 2006), name recognition (Baum, 1987), position on the ballot (e.g., Brockington, 2004; Koppell and Steen, 2004; Miller and Krosnick, 1998) and ballot occupation (which will be the focus of much of this review). These "ballot cues"—which are either directly a part of, or easily discerned from, information provided on the ballot itself—primarily impact lower-information voting (as Brockington [2004] suggests). Since considerable voting, especially in down-ballot races, is relatively low-information (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini, 2005; Popkin, 1994), these factors may play a role in a significant number of elections. My research attempts to address whether voters in United States elections who identify as members of each of the two major parties prefer candidates of differing occupations. While this specific question has not yet been directly addressed in the literature, previous research has explored the role of ballot occupation.

General Research

Byrne and Pueschel (1974) conducted some of the earliest and most general research into the potential impact of ballot occupation on vote choice. The authors used election results from Democratic and Republican county political party central committee elections

(which are typically very low-information) to evaluate the impact of various factors, including ballot position, ethnic origin of the surname, sex, and occupation. The authors found that candidates with specific occupations receive a significantly different share of the total vote, with “professor” and “incumbent” providing the greatest advantage, and “real estate broker” and not listing any occupation providing the greatest disadvantage. However, they used a very limited methodology. Even though they conducted observational research, Byrne and Pueschel disregarded a range of potential confounding variables and simply look at each of the potential ballot cues in a vacuum. They thereby ignore a range of possibilities. For instance, a college professor or current officeholder might have a higher level of name identification than other occupations—in other words, perhaps voters are choosing the candidate with the name they recognize, rather than glean information from the occupation.

“Businessman” and “teacher”—which would seem to have some ideological implications—are found to have no effect, but that could be because an advantage among one political party is cancelled out by a disadvantage among the other political party. The authors group all votes together, regardless of party. Their research note does not address these issues, and similar ones persist among the other cues examined. Its conclusions are therefore very limited. That said, Byrne and Pueschel’s use of Democratic and Republican central committee election results did minimize some notable issues—namely, the effects of campaign expenditures. Central committee election data may be the best means of observationally establishing whether voters perceive an ideological component inherent within certain occupations, because the sole purpose of serving on a central committee is the promotion of a particular ideology. Any preference for particular occupations shown in observational central committee election data would directly suggest an ideological cue in that occupation.

Qualification Advantage?

Researchers have also considered whether certain occupations can produce a “qualification advantage” for certain offices. This theory holds that a relationship between a candidate’s ballot occupation and the nature of the office being sought provides an advantage to that candidate. In other words, this literature theorizes that a candidate for school board who lists “teacher” will have an advantage, while a candidate for state treasurer who lists “accountant” will have an advantage. Both papers in this category did find a qualification advantage. Muller (1970) evaluated the first election for the Los Angeles Junior College Board of Trustees, which involved little campaign spending, no partisan labels on the ballot, and no incumbents. Mueller regressed the number of votes each candidate received on five independent variables: ballot position, endorsements, occupation, surname ethnicity, and name identification. This is a much more robust methodology than that utilized by Byrne and Pueschel, with Mueller’s regression producing an R^2 of 0.87. He finds that ballot position has the strongest effect (aside from name identification: Edmund G. Brown, Jr., who then had strong name identification because of his father’s service as governor, by far won the most votes). Mueller notes that an education-related occupation tended to increase a candidate’s number of votes, while the most popular occupation, attorney, provided a modest (though not significant) disadvantage. Omitting an occupation also provided a small disadvantage. While not addressing a relationship between occupation and party, these results are still important: they show that occupation did affect vote choice in a real world low-information election, in opposition to the possibility that voters simply ignore occupation information and focus on other cues.

More recently, McDermott (2005) used results from a 1994 Los Angeles Times poll specifically to consider a qualification advantage. She views the information listed on the ballot as a short résumé, noting that Knouse (1994) found that employers reviewing

applicants respond favorably to a connection between previous jobs held and the position sought. McDermott reaches two conclusions: first, that providing occupation information decreases abstention, and second, that a connection between the occupation given for a candidate and the office being sought adds to the candidate's level of support. McDermott's is one of the more rigorous examinations of the topic, and is aided by robust data from a reputable organization. That said, McDermott's work did have some limitations. For one, while she used "no occupation information" as a sort of control, she was unable to independently manipulate the candidates' occupations—this would have provided a superior confirmation of her results. Additionally, while she did control for party preference among voters, she did not consider whether voters of each of the major parties would prefer candidates of different occupations, all else made equal. This is less an omission or oversight than a difference of focus: McDermott was looking for a qualification advantage, which she found. Additionally, the way in which polls are conducted may question the applicability of McDermott's finding to real elections. If a candidate's occupation is given orally in a telephone poll, it may have more of an impact than if given in writing near a candidate's name on a ballot.

Prestige/Reputation Advantage?

Another potential explanation for the impact of ballot occupation on vote choice stems from an occupation's prestige or reputation. Mechtel (2011) uses observational data from local elections in Germany and finds that the occupations of candidates with the best electoral performance are generally correlated with the occupations with the best reputations in public opinion polls. His work exhibits some odd outlying data, though, which are caused by the jurisdiction's election process and by the sample size of several occupations. The election is for seats in a local parliament, and each voter receives a number of votes equal to the number of seats. The voter can then award all votes to a particular party's list, or can

award additional votes to specific candidates—even candidates of multiple parties. Therefore, voters can both affect which party wins a majority, as well as the final order of each party's list of candidates. Mechtel's model regresses the change in ballot position for candidates of a specific occupation on several independent variables. These variables include gender, whether the candidate possesses a doctoral degree, aspects of the candidate's name, the candidate's initial position on the ballot, and the candidate's occupation. The trouble presents at the fringes. The greatest benefit attributable to occupation is found among candidates who list "unemployed." This is a particularly unexpected result, and is likely a direct result of the very few observations of "unemployed"—just seven. It seems possible that the "unemployed" candidates may have been former officeholders or others with strong name identification, who happened to be unemployed at the time of the election. That said, the data as a whole does find a correlation between higher occupational prestige and a higher share of the vote—while also acknowledging that the occupation listed on the ballot is not the only factor considered by voters.

Sajons (2011) uses experimental data modeled after Spanish local elections to consider potential prestige/reputation benefits and abstention effects, and is in many ways an experimental approach to Mechtel's research. The Spanish elections use an open list voting system, like that of the German elections evaluated by Mechtel, which allows voters to directly affect both the number of seats allotted to each party as well as the specific candidates elected to those seats. Sajons first concludes that including ballot occupation information increases the satisfaction of respondents—that is, they feel like they had a more meaningful choice to make, and were therefore more satisfied by the election system. This would presumably lead to a decreasing rate of abstention among qualified voters, which corresponds with McDermott's findings. Second, he finds that respondents tend to choose candidates who list high-skill occupations. This is somewhat different from the qualification advantage

McDermott identifies. She focuses on occupations that provide qualification for a specific office, while Sajons instead focuses on high-skill professions generally. The difference between the methodologies of McDermott and Sajons stems from the different voting systems in use. McDermott had two realistic candidates for each position, making it easier for a distinctly qualified candidate to stand out. Sajons, on the other hand, had far more candidates, and the office being sought by his hypothetical candidates did not have a close non-elected analog (in the way that finance based occupations related to state treasurer or state controller, in McDermott's work).

A Cue for Party/Ideology?

Mechtel makes a noteworthy observation as an aside (not all variants of his paper include the section): “candidates with occupations fitting to the historical and or ideological background [of a political party]...gain” (12). In other words, certain occupations receive a benefit among parties only on one end of the political spectrum—and at the same time, notes that certain occupations can also have a negative impact. This was apparently the first time any connection between ballot occupation and voter perception of party or ideology was described in the literature. Interestingly, similarly focused research followed closely after Mechtel's paper.

Sajons, the experimental counterpart to Mechtel, also notes that respondents of different political ideologies prefer candidates with different occupations. He finds that respondents preferred either candidates that share their occupation, or candidates that have occupations that could “signal ideological proximity” to the voter. He observes that respondents from left-wing parties tend to be more supportive of candidates with “‘socially oriented’ [occupations], like teacher, physician, and kindergarten [teacher]¹,” while

¹ “Teacher” and “kindergarten teacher” were considered separate occupations in Sajons's research. He considered the role of candidate gender; “teacher” is a gender-neutral occupation in Spain, while “kindergarten teacher” is female-dominated.

respondents from right-wing parties tend to be more supportive of “business oriented” occupations such as manager, lawyer, and salesperson” (29).

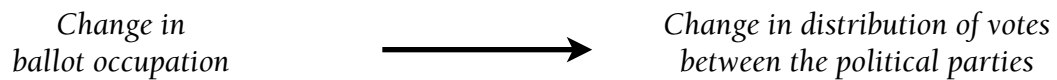
Chakraborty (2012) uses observational election data from Sweden to evaluate occupation as one of several ballot cues in local elections. He finds that incumbency and occupations that suggest political experience provide the greatest advantage, across party lines. Interestingly, Chakraborty does not identify any occupations as being advantageous for candidates of particular political parties, but does note that certain occupations are disadvantageous. For instance, he identifies “businessman,” “student,” and “retired” as being harmful for a candidate’s chances among left-wing voters, and “graduate,” “self-employed,” and “lawyer” as being harmful among right-wing voters. This tends to match with Sajons’s findings, and points to a potential problem in researching this subject: how do we identify whether a vote is *for* a specific occupation, or *against* a specific occupation?

The State of the Existing Literature

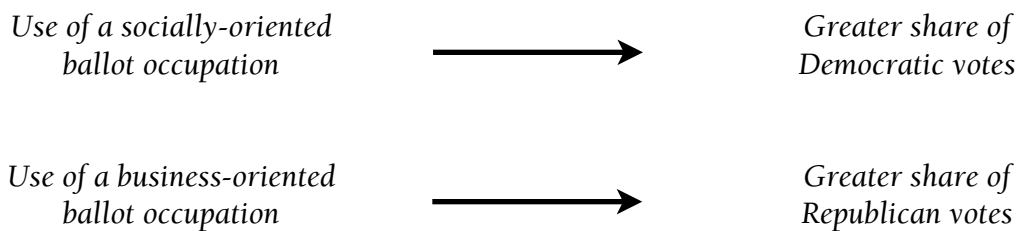
The existing literature on the effects of ballot information, and particularly the effects of ballot occupation, shows that it does play a role, particularly in low-information elections. While a qualification advantage has been explored in American elections, the more important (in light of the well-accepted importance of a candidate’s political party) question is whether voters use occupation as a means of discerning the candidate’s party or ideology. The recent research in Europe suggests that in party-centered parliamentary elections, different occupations are preferred or opposed by voters of different political parties. Whether occupation and ideology interact in a similar way in American elections with American political identifications has yet to be shown. While such a finding would be logical, the candidate-centered nature of American elections does present an obstacle to immediately drawing a similar conclusion.

A Model of Ballot Occupation as a Proxy for Party

The research described previously explored a link between a candidate’s occupation and a higher share of the vote, with proposed explanations typically emphasizing some sort of qualification or reputation advantage. The most recent research in Europe points to ideological effects—that voters of different political beliefs prefer candidates of different occupations. Sajons notes in his work on European parliamentary elections that socially-oriented professions are preferred by left-leaning parties, and business-oriented professions are preferred by right-leaning parties. I hypothesize that U.S. voters will behave similarly: if a candidate lists a “liberal” or “conservative” occupation, then that candidate will receive more support from voters subscribing to that ideology. The model could be diagrammed most simply like this:



For clarity, it is helpful to split the model into two expressions:



The left side of the expression refers to what is effectively a dichotomous variable, though it will be varied somewhat. For instance, “socially-oriented” occupations might include education, labor organizer or health care. “Business-oriented” occupations might include businessman, financial advisor, or chief executive officer. I excluded political and

public service-related occupations because of the clear potential for a qualification advantage effect, where a “city councilman” might be viewed as most qualified to serve as mayor, confounding an ideological preference. Such an occupation could also work against the candidate in times of widespread anti-incumbent sentiment. Further, elected offices (like “councilmember” or “state senator”) have less of an ideological association than occupations that are distinctly business- or socially-oriented.

Designing an Experiment to Maximize Real-World Applicability

While some research into ballot occupation involved U.S. elections, and other research considered occupation as a cue for ideology or party, no existing research has considered both together. My research intends to consider that specific question, but among American voters, modes of election, and political parties. It is unlikely that ballot occupation serves as a cue for the candidate's ideology when a political party is listed, and it is also unlikely to play a role in high-information elections. However, there are thousands of down-ballot elections each year, many of which do not include a party identification. In these races, particularly since they are covered less by the media and expend fewer campaign resources, ballot cues (like occupation) may play a significant role. My research attempts to examine all of these issues. My hypothesis is that in nonpartisan elections, low-information voters use ballot occupations historically associated with political parties as a proxy to determine the candidate's party, playing a similar role to that of party identification.

In this section, I will outline the decisions I made in researching a relationship between ballot occupation and a voter's party preference. I will define and explain the operationalization of my variables and explain how I collected the data necessary to address my question.

Variables

My model holds that different ballot occupations will result in different levels of support from respondents of the two major political parties. My independent variables, then, are the cues listed next to the candidate's name and the political party identification of voters.

For occupation, I used six permutations of the two categories of occupations, based on the existing work of Sajons (2011), Chatrabortky (2012) and Goggin (2012), as well as the informal comments of political consultants in the news media. I did not use any distinctly political or public service-oriented occupations (like "incumbent," "councilmember," or

“attorney”), because those could produce a qualification advantage or anti-incumbent disadvantage. Further, they have less of an association with a particular political party.

For voter party, I asked which party the individual most identifies with. If the respondent responds “other” or “independent,” I then asked which of the two main political parties the respondent is closer to. This limited the number of “faux independents”—the voters who claim to be independent, but are essentially “closet Democrats and Republicans” (Keith, et al, 1992, pp. 4).

There are numerous other potential variables and I attempted to limit them wherever possible. I collected basic biographical information (including gender and age) of respondents and conducted a brief political knowledge test. I kept other aspects of the simulated ballot both realistic from the respondent’s perspective, and fair from a scientific perspective. The survey’s design was modeled after real-world ballots. The names used were all relatively common, male, typically Caucasian, the same length in total characters, and of the same formality (“William” and “Daniel” rather than “Bill” and “Dan”)².

Collecting Data with an Internet Survey Experiment

Because of the high number of confounding variables in any observational data set, I conducted an original experiment to produce the data needed to address my question. I used Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk service as a low-cost way of obtaining a sample of sufficient size and quality to produce meaningful results—610 total respondents. While the use of this service (“MTurk,” in shorthand) is relatively new, research by Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz found that “relative to other convenience samples often used in experimental research in political science, MTurk subjects are often more representative of the general population,” and further, they “appear to respond to experimental stimuli in a manner consistent with

² The names could have just as easily been female and typically Latino, or any other combination, so long as they were consistent. I selected names that were male and typically Caucasian, rather than some other combination, because most candidates for the United States Congress are male Caucasians: 73% in 2010 (Fraade 2010).

prior research.” They do note some concerns, though: MTurk subjects tend to be “younger and more ideologically liberal than the public” (2012, pp. 16).

Using MTurk to conduct an Internet-based experiment provided several advantages, in addition to the lower cost and corresponding larger sample size when compared with other methods of subject recruitment. First, it allowed for a simulated ballot to be presented visually, rather than audibly. This is in contrast to the data used by McDermott (2005), which was collected by telephone. It is conceivable that an orally-given occupation, or a lack of one, would have a greater impact than one placed next to a candidate’s name on a simulated ballot. Second, that MTurk pays each subject a small sum to take the survey provides a motivation to take the survey that is disconnected from the subject of the survey. For instance, if a web-based survey recruited subjects using search engine ads, the users most likely to click on the survey are those with an interest in the survey’s subject. When dealing with political science research, these would likely be higher-information voters, who are most likely to draw a connection between occupation and ideology. Providing a small fee to participate in a survey provides an alternative motivation to participate, which could produce a higher-quality sample.

Designing the Survey

I started with an existing survey provided by Gabriel Lenz as a foundation, customizing it to my needs. My survey began with two introductory pages explaining how to take the survey, and then presents one of four sets of questions (described below). It ends by collecting background information on subjects, including gender, year of birth and party identification (including several follow-up questions targeted at independents).

ID	Description
G1	Name Only (<i>control</i>)
G2	Name + Occupation
G3	Name + Party
G4	Name + Occupation + Party (<i>inconsistent cues</i>)

Note that names designated as Republicans in G3 received business-oriented occupations in G2, and that names designated as Democrats in G3 received socially-oriented occupations in G2. My hypothesis is that G2 and G3 should show a swing in the same direction (e.g., toward the occupation or party best aligned with the respondent’s party identification) when compared with the control group (G1). G4 provides respondents with an inconsistent set of cues. For instance, G4 respondents were asked to choose between a “Democratic Chief Executive Officer” and a “Republican College Professor.” The “mismatch” could have conceivably caused the cues to cancel out (i.e., G4 would mirror the control group). Alternatively, one of the cues could have overwhelmed the other (i.e., G4 looks more like either G2 or G3). A table of the entire set of cues is provided in the Analysis and Assessment section.

My simulated ballot (included with the text of the survey, in Appendix A) included two candidates each for six different elected offices: county supervisor, county clerk, county public administrator, city mayor, city council and city clerk. All of these are typically nonpartisan and low-information. However, it does not include any information about the simulated candidates other than their names and the cues described above (if any). This is intentional: the goal of my research is to speak to the actions of the lowest of low-information voters, the people who enter the polling place intending to do their civic duty and with some sense of their own political identity, and perhaps knowledge of “headlining” candidates (president, governor, and senate), but no knowledge of down-ballot races.

Assessment of the Research Design

My research has specific and well-defined applications: nonpartisan, low-information elections. As a result, I do not explore other potentially fruitful areas—including, for instance, whether an ideological association of ballot occupation can play a role among voters with a knowledge of both candidates. However, it will specifically address the commonly-held belief of political practitioners—that all else made equal, Republicans prefer business-oriented occupations and Democrats prefer socially-oriented occupations.

Significant Results, Uncertain Real-World Impact

I posted the survey to Amazon’s Mechanical Turk on January 26, 2013, and collected responses until February 10, 2013. I paid \$0.30–\$0.40 per response and collected a total of 610 valid responses. Of those, 444 were identified as Democrats, 100 identified as Republicans, and 66 were identified as “true independents.” I administered the survey with the Qualtrics service, which randomly assigned respondents to one of the four groups. The groups had no statistically significant differences in age or gender.

Cues Provided to Respondents

To understand my methodology, it is useful to see the cues provided to respondents. Each respondent was asked to choose a candidate for six offices, with two options per office. The names assigned socially-oriented occupations in the G2 group were listed as Democrats in the G3 group, while names assigned business-oriented occupations in the G2 group were listed as Republicans in the G3 group. I also added a G4 group, where the names assigned socially-oriented occupations were listed as Republicans, and the names assigned business-oriented occupations were listed as Democrats. This was the “inconsistent” group, intended as a test of the relative strength of the two other cues in relation to each other. All respondents were provided names, with the other cues provided differing by group. The table below shows the cues provided to each group:

Cues Provided to Respondents, by Group and Office

		G1: Name Only	G2: Name and Occupation	G3: Name and Party	G4: Name, Occupation and Party
Board of Supervisors	0	William Long	Chief Executive Officer	Republican	Republican College Professor
	1	Daniel Perry	College Professor	Democrat	Democrat Chief Executive Officer
County Clerk	0	James Morgan	Financial Advisor	Republican	Republican Social Worker
	1	Thomas Kelly	Social Worker	Democrat	Democrat Financial Advisor
Public Admin.	0	Richard Cook	Real Estate Agent	Republican	Democrat Real Estate Agent
	1	John Reynold	Counselor	Democrat	Republican Counselor
Mayor	0	Charles Bell	Businessman	Republican	Republican Nonprofit Manager
	1	Robert Scott	Nonprofit Manager	Democrat	Democrat Businessman
City Council	0	Andrew Smith	Business Consultant	Republican	Republican Labor Union Organizer
	1	Michael Gray	Labor Union Organizer	Democrat	Democrat Business Consultant
City Clerk	0	Paul Fischer	Small Business Owner	Republican	Republican Educator
	1	George Clark	Educator	Democrat	Democrat Small Business Owner

Analytical Methods: Measuring the Aggregate Ballot

In analyzing the results, I first compiled an aggregate measure of each respondent's ballot. Votes for the Daniel Perry, Thomas Kelly, John Reynold, Robert Scott, Michael Gray, and George Clark were coded as "1." In other words, the name that in G2 was listed with a socially-oriented occupation, in G3 was listed as a Democrat, and in G4 was listed with a socially-oriented occupation and as a Republican, were all coded as "1." Votes for the other candidates were coded as "0." For clarity, the table below shows my coding methodology:

Coding Criteria, by Cues

Value	G1: Name Only	G2: Name and Occupation	G3: Name and Party	G4: Name, Occupation and Party
0	–	Business-Oriented	Republican	Socially-Oriented Republican
1	–	Socially-Oriented	Democrat	Business-Oriented Democrat

To find the aggregate vote of each respondent's ballot, I computed the sum of each vote, and then divided by the total number of vote choices (six). For instance, a respondent

in G2 who voted for five candidates with socially-oriented occupations and one candidate with business-oriented occupations would have a score of 0.834.

My hypothesis holds that in G1, candidates would effectively be chosen at random, with roughly 50% of the vote going to each candidate. In G2, I hypothesized that Democratic voters should be more likely to vote for candidates with socially-oriented occupations, Republican voters should be more likely to vote for candidates with business-oriented occupations, and Independents should show no significant difference. In G3, I hypothesized that the direction of change from the control group (G1) should be the same as seen as in G2, but exaggerated (and there would still be little difference for Independents). In G4, I hypothesized that the party cue would overwhelm the occupation cue, producing a result mirroring, but somewhat weaker than, that of G3.

To make figures simpler to grasp, I will state them as percentages. Further, while I explain the results in terms of the “vote for the candidate identified as socially-oriented in G2,” it is important to remember that the cues provided vary between groups, and that respondents were given a choice only between a socially-oriented occupation and a business-oriented occupation.

Measuring the Aggregate Ballot: Results

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the results of a comparison between the aggregate ballots of respondents, by group and party. As expected, Democrats, Independents, and Republicans all voted nearly-randomly in G1. In G2, both Democrats and Republicans showed a massive swing away from the control value in G1—in the opposite direction.

Democrats

Among Democratic respondents, candidates listing a socially-oriented occupation received, on average, an extra 19% of the vote from Democratic respondents. A comparison between G1 and G3 serves as a check on this: if occupation, in the absence of a listed party,

cues for a party (with socially-oriented occupations cueing that the candidate is a Democrat), then G3 should show a similar move to that seen in G2, only exaggerated. Indeed, identifying candidates as Democrats gives them an extra 43% of the vote from Democratic respondents. Again, the G3 candidates identified as Democrats used the same names as the G2 candidates assigned socially-oriented occupations. A comparison between G1 and G4 indicates that the party cue overwhelms an occupation cue inconsistent with that party. G4 also suggests that Democrats are less-firm supporters of Democratic candidates with business-oriented occupations than when no occupation is given.

Republicans

Republican respondents showed a similar pattern. Candidates listing a business-oriented occupation received, on average, 19% more of the vote from Republican respondents. As with the Democratic respondents, that move was magnified in G3, with an extra 38% of Republican respondents choosing the candidate listed as a Republican. As with Democratic respondents, a comparison between G1 and G4 indicates that the party cue overwhelms an occupation cue inconsistent with that party.

Independents

Respondents identified as “true Independents” had no statistically-significant differences between the control and any of the three treatment groups.

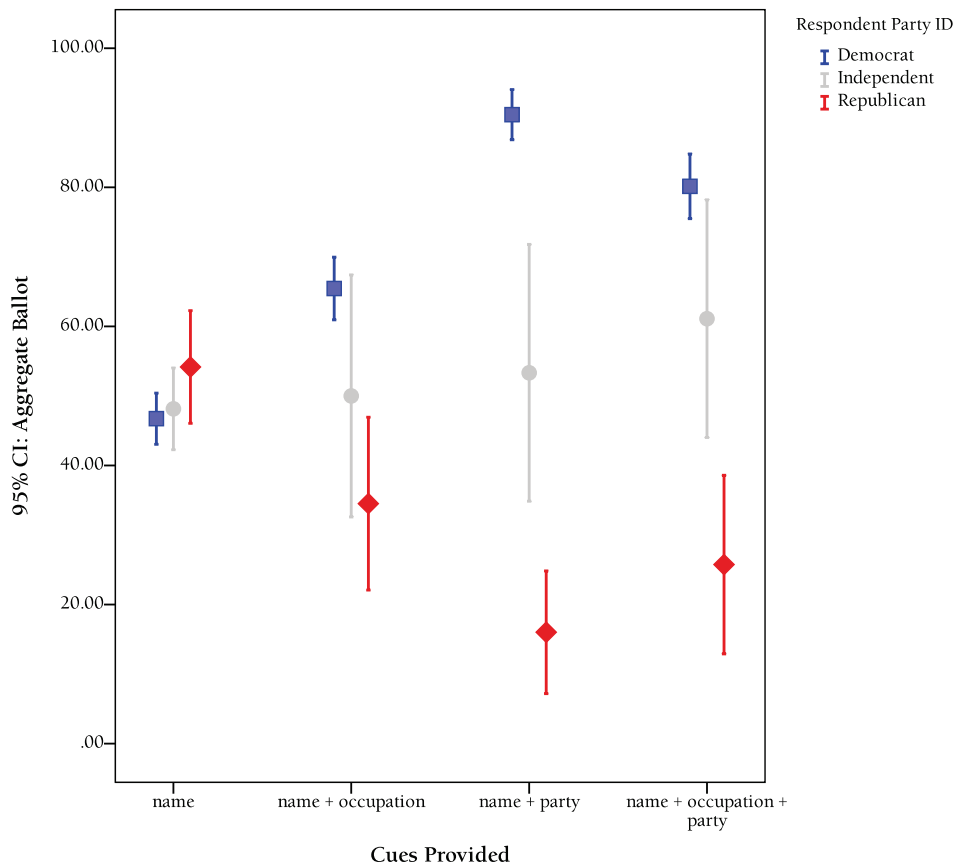
Table 1
Vote for Candidate with Socially-Oriented Occupation, by Group and Party

	Democratic Respondents		Independent Respondents		Republican Respondents	
		N		N		N
G1: Name Only (control)	47%	102	48%	27	54%	24
G2: Name and Occupation	65%**	110	50%	17	34%*	28
G3: Name and Party	90%**	117	53%	10	16%**	26
G4: Name, Occupation and Party (inconsistent)*	80%**	115	61%	12	25%**	22

Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1
Vote for Candidate with Socially-Oriented Occupation*, by Group and Party



*Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.

Analytical Methods: Office-by-Office Differences

While the aggregate ballot measure discussed above shows that, as a whole, socially-oriented occupations perform better than business-oriented occupations among Democrats, with the opposite true among Republicans, it is also worth comparing the results of each of the six choices respondents made. Tables 2–4 show those results for Democratic respondents, Republican respondents, and Independent respondents. These tables are best considered along with the cues table, provided near the beginning of this section.

Office-by-Office Differences: Democratic Respondents

The office-by-office results for Democratic respondents are shown in Table and Figure 2. Interestingly, Democratic respondents in G2 seemed to have no preference between a “Financial Advisor” and “Social Worker” (in the county clerk election).

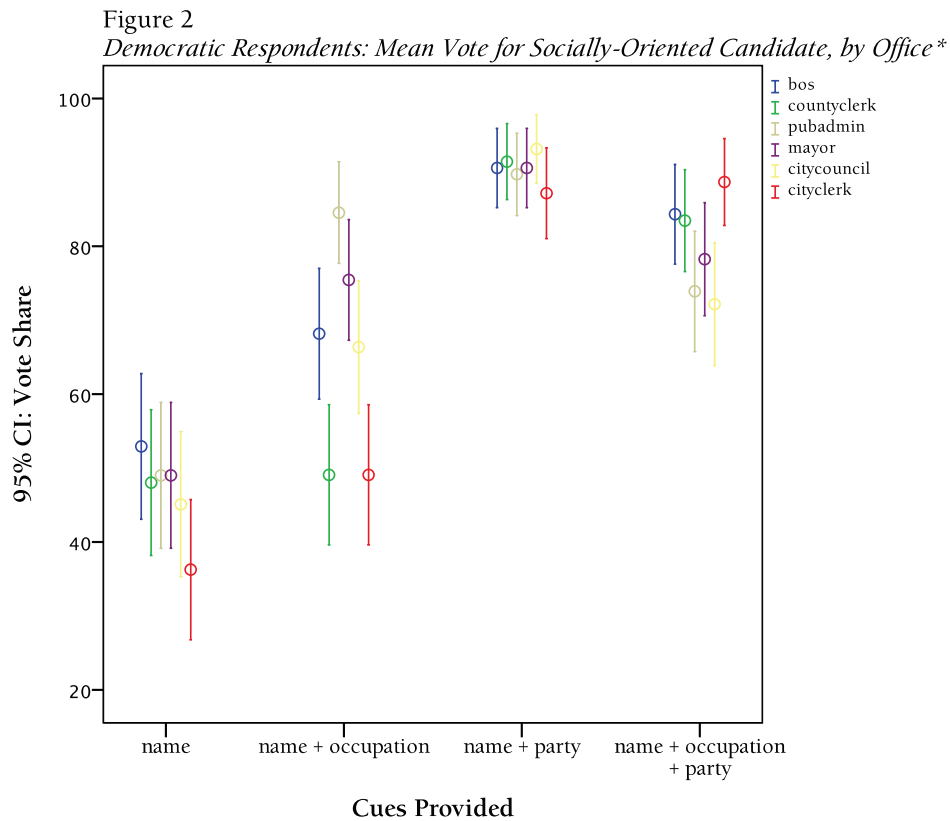
The remaining five choices showed significant (or very nearly significant, as in the city clerk choice) differences when occupation information was provided. No surprising results appear in G3 or G4: Democrats typically award about 90% of their votes to candidates listed as Democrats with no occupation, and 80% of their votes to candidates listed as Democrats with business-oriented occupations.

Table 2
Democratic Respondents: Mean Vote for Socially-Oriented Candidate, by Office

	Board of Sup.	County Clerk	Public Admin.	Mayor	City Council	City Clerk
	P	P	P	P	P	P
G1: Name Only (control); N=102	53%	48%	49%	49%	45%	36%
G2: Name and Occupation; N=110	68% 0.023	49% 0.879	85% 0.000	75% 0.000	66% 0.002	49% 0.060
G3: Name and Party; N=117	91% 0.000	91% 0.000	90% 0.000	91% 0.000	93% 0.000	87% 0.000
G4: Name, Occupation and Party*; N=115	84% 0.000	83% 0.000	74% 0.015	78% 0.000	72% 0.008	89% 0.000

Values are the percent of votes for the candidate with a socially-oriented occupation. P-values are in comparison to control group (G1).

*Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.



*Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.

Office-by-Office Differences: Republican Respondents

Table and Figure 3 provide an office-by-office comparison for Republican respondents. Republicans showed significant results in the County Clerk and City Clerk races. It seems likely that the other offices could show similar results if the Republican sample size (less than 1/4 that of the Democratic sample) was sufficiently increased. It is worth noting that, across all choices, Republicans always shifted toward the business-oriented occupation (and away from the socially-oriented occupation) with at least a 9% difference between the G1 and G2 groups.

Republicans follow the same patterns as Democrats in G3 and G4. Republican respondents overwhelmingly preferring candidates identified as Republicans, regardless of whether a socially-oriented occupation is also listed for a particular candidate (as in G4).

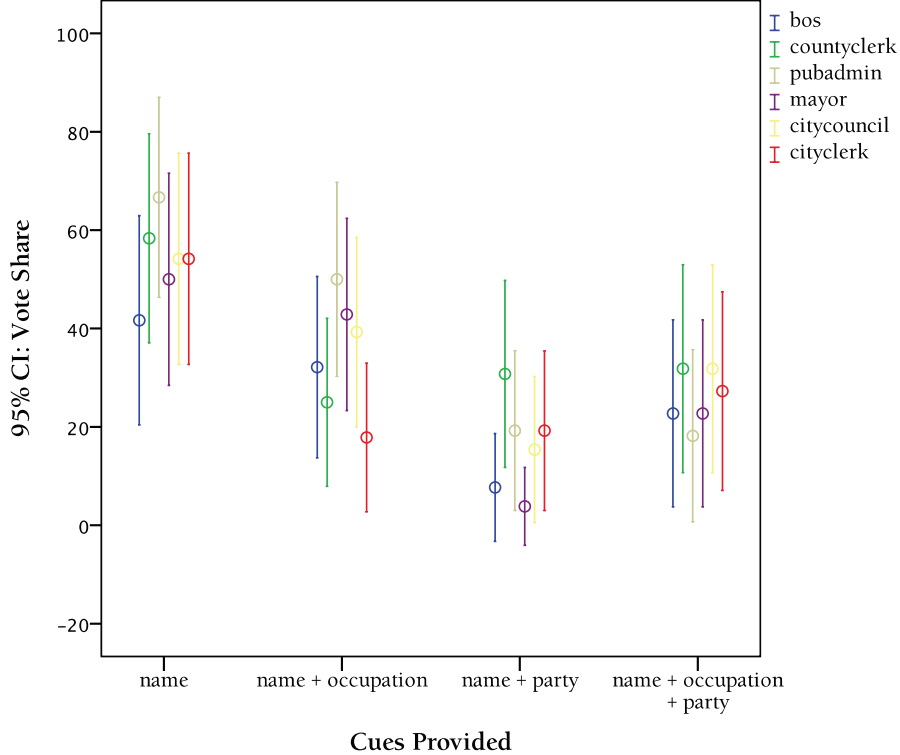
Table 3
Republican Respondents: Mean Vote for Socially-Oriented Candidate, by Office

	Board of Sup.		County Clerk		Public Admin.		Mayor		City Council		City Clerk	
	P		P		P		P		P		P	
G1: Name Only (control); N=24	42%		58%		67%		50%		54%		54%	
G2: Name and Occupation; N=28	32%	0.487	25%	0.014	50%	0.233	43%	0.615	39%	0.292	18%	0.005
G3: Name and Party; N=26	8%	0.004	31%	0.051	19%	0.000	4%	0.000	15%	0.003	19%	0.009
G4: Name, Occupation and Party*; N=22	23%	0.014	32%	0.500	18%	0.252	23%	0.057	32%	0.342	27%	0.201

Values are the percent of votes for the candidate with a socially-oriented occupation. P-values are in comparison to control group (G1).

**Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.*

Figure 3
*Republican Respondents: Mean Vote for Socially-Oriented Candidate, by Office**



*Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.

Office-by-Office Differences: Independent Respondents

Table and Figure 4 show results for “true Independent” respondents. As in the aggregate ballot data, there is no significant difference between any of the three treatment groups and the control group, in any of the individual vote choices.

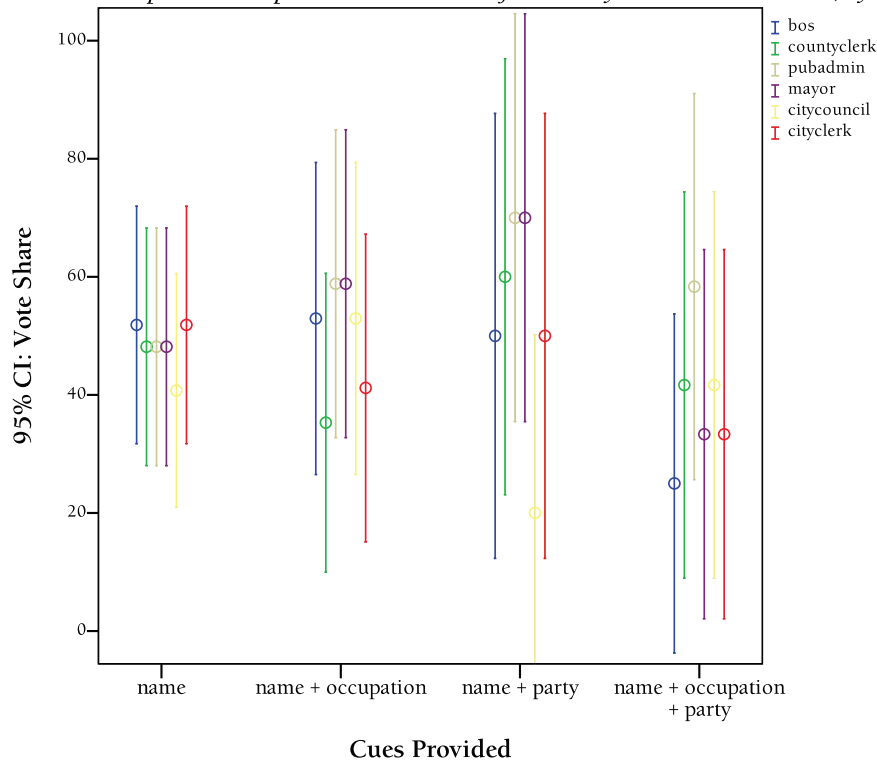
Table 4
Independent Respondents: Mean Vote for Socially-Oriented Candidate, by Office

	Board of Sup.	County Clerk	Public Admin.	Mayor	City Council	City Clerk
	P	P	P	P	P	P
G1: Name Only (control); N=27	52%	48%	48%	48%	41%	52%
G2: Name and Occupation; N=17	53% 0.945	35% 0.414	59% 0.501	59% 0.501	53% 0.440	41% 0.501
G3: Name and Party; N=10	50% 0.923	60% 0.535	70% 0.248	70% 0.248	20% 0.253	50% 0.923
G4: Name, Occupation and Party*; N=12	25% 0.125	42% 0.717	58% 0.569	33% 0.403	42% 0.958	33% 0.297

Values are the percent of votes for the candidate with a socially-oriented occupation.
 P-values are in comparison to control group (G1).

*Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.

Figure 4
*Independent Respondents: Mean Vote for Socially-Oriented Candidate, by Office **



*Because G4 has an “inconsistent” set of cues—e.g., a “Democrat Chief Executive Officer” or a “Republican College Professor”—values in G4 are the vote for Democratic candidates.

G2 Group: Comparing Democratic, Independent, and Republican Respondents

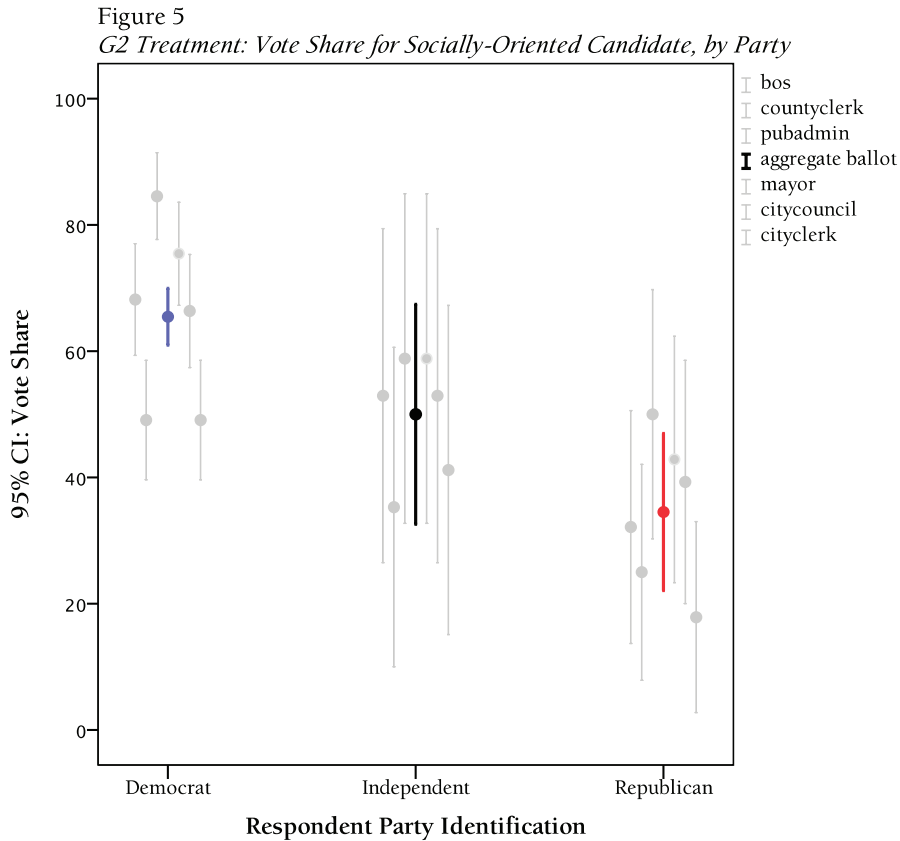
Analyzing the differing behavior of Democratic and Republican respondents in the G2 group, without regard to the control group, provides a valuable insight. If occupations were merely providing a qualification or prestige advantage, we would expect respondents of the two parties to prefer the same candidate—whichever was perceived as having the more prestigious occupation or as being the most qualified. However, in every vote choice, respondents of the two political parties made significantly different choices. Some of these results (particularly county clerk and public administrator³) suggest that certain occupation match-ups may result in an advantage among voters of one party, while providing no advantage or disadvantage among voters of the other party.

Table 5
G2 Treatment: Vote Share for Socially-Oriented Candidate, by Party

	Board of Sup.		County Clerk		Public Admin.		Mayor		City Council		City Clerk	
	P		P		P		P		P		P	
Democratic Respondents	68%		49%		85%		75%		66%		49%	
Republican Respondents	32%	0.000	25%	0.022	50%	0.000	43%	0.001	39%	0.009	18%	0.003

Values are the percent of votes for the candidate with a socially-oriented occupation.

³ City Clerk in Table 5 appears to show a similar pattern to County Clerk and Public Administrator, with the match-up changing the behavior of one party’s respondents but not the other party’s respondents. However, Table 2 does show a nearly-significant result for City Clerk among Democratic respondents. This suggests that there may have been a bias against the name used for the socially-oriented candidate for City Clerk, causing the G1 group’s vote for that candidate to be artificially deflated.



Assessment of Results

The aggregate ballot data indicates that providing cues along with a name changes how votes are allocated between candidates. Democratic respondents were more likely to support candidates with socially-oriented occupations, and were much more likely to support Democratic candidates (regardless of occupation). Republican respondents did the opposite: they were more likely to support candidates with business-oriented occupations, and much more likely to support Republican candidates (regardless of occupation). However, the office-by-office comparison shows that there is significant variance in the performance of the twelve occupations tested. Comparing the selections of Democratic and Republican respondents within the G2 group ideology is at work, and not a qualification or prestige benefit. However, the specific match-up of occupations does seem to be a factor.

Further, it is difficult to know precisely why respondents made a particular choice. Was a Democrat voting *for* a college professor, or *against* a chief executive officer? Still, these findings do suggest that ballot occupation affects vote choice, and that the ideological nature of an occupation plays a role in that. That said, we should be wary of drawing larger conclusions about what might be seen in the real world. These results only speak to voters with extremely limited information on the vote choice. While this experiment produced average swings of roughly 20% when occupation cues are provided compared to the name-only group, this experiment used fictional candidates. The key element in analyzing the real-world impact of these findings is to know how many voters enter the polling place with no knowledge of the candidates and with no recognition of any candidate's name. I was unable to find any existing literature that directly addresses this issue. However, several findings taken together indirectly address it.

First, scholars agree that voters' political knowledge of national issues is quite low. Delli Carpini reviews the literature on the subject, and calls the average citizen "woefully uninformed" (28). While scholars disagree on whether voters can hold meaningful opinions in light of the low level of political knowledge, they typically agree that knowledge of facts (like being able to identify national leaders, their parties, and so on) is very low. Considering how much media attention is given to national issues, compared to local issues, it is unlikely that the average voter has a higher level of knowledge of local candidates and issues. This suggests that a large number of the people voting in local elections have little knowledge of local candidates and issues.

At the same time, research into "roll off" (that is, the number of people who cast a vote for the headline candidate—governor, senator, or president—and then abstain on down-ballot races) shows that most people vote in all elections. Pothier found that congressional races received an average of 91.3% of the number of votes received by presidential elections

in the same districts (142). That said, nonpartisan local elections are lower-profile than congressional elections, which could produce a different level of roll off. As a test, I examined the results of the 2010 primary election in Los Angeles County, California. Though anecdotal, 89.61% of voters who chose a candidate in the Gubernatorial primary also voted for a nonpartisan countywide elected official⁴. This suggests that county results can be consistent with the better-established roll off rates on congressional elections.

Taken together, these two findings—low knowledge of civics, and high rates of participation on down-ballot races—suggest that the population of voters choosing to vote for candidates they know nothing about may be quite high.

⁴ Countywide offices up for election included Assessor, Auditor-Controller, County Clerk-Recorder, District Attorney, Public Administrator, Sheriff, and Treasurer-Tax Collector.

Discussion

My experiment produced several fairly strong results, but we must be cautious when attempting to apply them to real-world situations. That said, consultants and candidates have been anecdotally aware of what my research shows for some time, and acting in a manner consistent with it. It is also worth discussing the societal implications of ballot occupation acting as a cue for party in local elections.

Summary of Results

My results clearly show that, in at least some circumstances, ballot occupation does affect vote choice, and that respondents of the two political parties respond differently to certain occupational cues. My controlled experiment produced swings of approximately 20% when occupational cues were provided, compared to the name-only control group. Further, respondents of the parties shifted their votes in opposite directions, away from the control group. Democrats and Republicans apparently respond to occupational cues differently, which suggests that an ideological factor may be at work (as opposed to a qualification or prestige advantage). True independent respondents did not have any significant response to any cues.

Methodological Limitations

My methodology has several limitations. First, all occupations used were either socially-oriented or business-oriented and all choices had two candidates, with one for each type of occupation. While Democrats and Republicans do respond to occupational cues, we cannot know what causes the response. Are Republicans voting against the socially-oriented candidate, or for the business-oriented candidate? Are Democrats voting for the socially-oriented candidate, or against the business-oriented candidate? This is a common issue with surveys that might be addressed with follow-up questions for each pairing, asking the

respondent if his choice is “for” the candidate selected, or “against” the opposing candidate. However, this would add complexity to the experiment and reduce its realism.

Another limitation is my use of just six permutations each of socially-oriented and business-oriented occupations. While I attempted to pair occupations roughly equal in stature, qualification, and prestige, there was still some individual discretion involved. For the County Clerk office, for instance, I paired “financial advisor” and “social worker.” Democratic respondents had absolutely no preference between the two, while Republicans strongly preferred the “financial advisor” (or, perhaps, rejected the “social worker”). It could be that certain occupations are prejudicial, separate from their function as a cue for party. “Social worker” might be an example of this among Republicans. This issue is one that cannot be entirely avoided. There are an infinite number of potential occupations a candidate might list, making it impossible to test them all. I attempted to mitigate this by using a range of occupations in the two broad categories, but this issue is still subject to debate.

The biggest limitation is the applicability of these findings to real-world elections. The findings suggest that, in a two candidate election, with one candidate having a business-oriented occupation and the other having a socially-oriented occupation, Republican respondents will give about 20% more of their vote to the business-oriented candidate than they would if no occupation were listed, while Democrats will give about 20% more of their vote to the socially-oriented candidate than if no occupation were listed. What if both candidates are in the same category? What if one candidate is either distinctly socially- or business-oriented, but the other is something generic? And what of primary elections, where both candidates are known to be of the voter’s party—will Democrats view a Democratic college professor as a better choice than a Democratic chief executive officer?

More importantly, my findings only apply to voters with zero information on the candidates, and absolutely no recognition of either name. How many voters enter the polling

place meeting those conditions? If it is a high number, then ballot occupation choice could swing an election. However, if one candidate has a familiar-sounding name, that could potentially outweigh any ballot occupation advantage. While some existing research into national political knowledge and the level of roll off suggests that the number of people voting in local elections they know little may be relatively high, it is still difficult to quantify.

That said, we can surmise that ballot occupation is likely to have a larger effect in high-turnout elections (like presidential general elections) as lower-information voters turnout in support of a headlining candidate, and then continue down the ballot choosing minor candidates. The people who vote in off-year elections tend to be better-informed about the seats up for election, likely reducing the role of ballot occupation in vote choice.

Areas for Future Research

Ballot occupation is an area primed for future research. It is particularly important because of its manipulability and its range of possibilities, when compared with ethnicity, gender, and other ballot cues. First, Byrne and Pueschel's use of County central committee election data may provide the best means of conducting observational analysis. Central committee elections are typically low-information and are single-party, allowing for analysis of the differing preferences of Democrats and Republicans. This would allow a large data set to be generated, since central committee elections are plentiful, and would also allow for a wide range of occupations to be analyzed. However, coding such wide a range of occupations would prove difficult.

Experimentally, future research might explore whether occupation still cues for party when all candidates are known to be of a single party, as in a primary election. It seems likely that a "small business owner" Republican would be chosen over a "educator" Republican by Republican respondents (with the opposite for Democrats), but it is also plausible that once a "party litmus test" is satisfied, respondents choose candidates randomly.

Experimental research might also explore the impact of ballot occupation when separate biographical information on each candidate is provided. Respondents might be asked to read a paragraph explaining the issue positions of each candidate, and then to choose one of them. Whether the paragraph was provided, and whether occupational and party cues are presented, would be manipulated to analyze the effects of the cues. While this experiment would have questionable real-world applicability for the same reason my findings do (i.e., we do not know the distribution of knowledge among the electorate for each election), it could produce results that point to potential reforms.

Societal Implications

These findings present some concerns over the inclusion of occupational information for candidates in local elections. My results suggest that ballot occupation, in elections without party information, can act as a proxy for party. However, there are at least two possible reasons for this. The first possibility is that, upon seeing an occupation without a party, voters tend to immediately interpret that occupation as meaning that the candidate is a member of a particular political party. Voters then associate that candidate with the party's national platform, agenda, and history. For instance, seeing "small business owner" next to a school board candidate's name might lead a voter to think "probably a Republican," leading the voter to associate that candidate with "war in Iraq, pro-life." If this is the cognitive process that occurs then including occupational information on local ballots is almost certainly not achieving the goal of omitting party information, because it would not separate local priorities from national ones.

However, it seems more likely that a voter seeing "small business owner" thinks something like, "focus on making money, favors individual responsibility." A voter seeing "educator" probably thinks something like, "likes children, works for the good of society as a whole." A choice between those two occupations, then, gets to a voter's key priorities—the

very priorities that made them Republicans or Democrats in the first place. While this possibility is likely better for our election system than the first one, it may still fail to achieve the goal of providing occupational information. Is the goal of listing an occupation to identify candidates with the same priorities and core beliefs, or is it to identify highly-qualified candidates? If the goal of providing occupation information is to help identify highly-qualified candidates—for example, if the idea is to produce technocratic local officials—then that goal is probably not achieved, at least in the sort of vote choices studied in my research.

Finally, that ballot occupations are chosen by candidates themselves is concerning. While having a third-party somehow analyze a candidate's work experience and choose an appropriate occupation would be very impractical, allowing candidates to choose their own ballot occupations is still dubious. Further, the cases where candidates actually do have “inconsistent” traits—e.g., a Republican college professor—is cause for concern. If Democratic voters support a Republican “college professor” (with no party cue listed) thinking the candidate is a Democrat, then providing occupation information actually works against the interest of voters.

Perhaps ballot occupation should be replaced with other cues that are more objective—the candidate's highest level of education, yearly income, and the number of years lived in the district are all possibilities. These cues, if included on the ballot, would likely provide a better sense of the candidate than does ballot occupation while being more easily verifiable by elections officials. That said, under the current system, candidates should choose their occupations carefully. There is now some evidence, however limited, that American voters of different parties tend to prefer different occupations.

Final Thoughts

My research has, for the first time, shown that Republicans and Democrats respond differently to occupational cues, with Democrats typically choosing candidates with socially-

oriented occupations, and Republicans typically choosing candidates with business-oriented occupations. While my findings have significant caveats, they show this to be an area deserving of greater attention, especially considering how easily manipulable the cue is by candidates and consultants.

References

- Baum, L. (1987). Explaining the Vote in Judicial Elections: The 1984 Ohio Supreme Court Elections. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 40(2), 361–371. doi:10.2307/448318
- Berinsky, A. J., Huber, G. A., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Evaluating Online Labor Markets for Experimental Research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*. doi:10.1093/pan/mpr057
- Bernstein, D. (2012, March 27). Thumbs up for no fingerprints! *Press-Enterprise, The*. Riverside, CA. Retrieved from <http://www.pe.com/local-news/columns/dan-bernstein-headlines/20120327-region-thumbs-up-for-no-fingerprints.ece>
- Brockington, D. (2003). A Low Information Theory of Ballot Position Effect. *Political Behavior*, 25(1), 1–27. doi:10.1023/A:1022946710610
- Byrne, G. C., & Pueschel, J. K. (1974). But Who Should I Vote for County Coroner? *The Journal of Politics*, 36(3), 778–784. doi:10.2307/2129255
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1980). *The American Voter*. University Of Chicago Press.
- Chakraborty, L. (2012). Electoral Success in Swedish Municipal Councils: The Role of Occupation and Politicians' Characteristics. Uppsala University, Department of Economics.
- Converse, P. E. (2006). The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics (1964). *Critical Review*, 18(1-3), 1–74. doi:10.1080/08913810608443650
- Delli Carpini, M. X. (2005). An Overview of the State of Citizens' Knowledge About Politics. In M. S. McKinney (Ed.), *Communicating politics: engaging the public in democratic life* (pp. 27–40). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

- Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.
- Fraade, J. (2010, August 13). A Demographic Analysis of the Major 2010 Election Candidates. Retrieved from <http://ndn.org/sites/default/files/paper/CandidateDemographicReport.pdf>
- Ghori, I. (2012, March 28). Derry denied “businessman” ID. *Press-Enterprise, The*, p. A1. Riverside, CA.
- Goggin, S. (2012, December 3). E-mail Correspondence.
- Gutierrez, M. (2010, October 9). Is candidate a “classroom teacher”? *Sacramento Bee, The* (CA), p. B1.
- Horseman, J., & Daniel Danelski. (2012, April 10). “Businessman” approved for ballot. *Press-Enterprise, The*. Riverside, CA.
- Keith, B. E., Magleby, D. B., Nelson, C. J., Orr, E., & Westlye, M. C. (1992). *The Myth of the Independent Voter*. University of California Press.
- Knouse, S. B. (1994). Impressions of the Resume: The Effects of Applicant Education, Experience, and Impression Management. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 9(1), 33–45.
- Koppell, J. G., & Steen, J. A. (2004). The Effects of Ballot Position on Election Outcomes. *Journal of Politics*, 66(1), 267–281. doi:10.1046/j.1468-2508.2004.00151.x
- Matson, M., & Fine, T. S. (2006). Gender, Ethnicity, and Ballot Information: Ballot Cues in Low-Information Elections. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 6(1), 49–72. doi: 10.1177/153244000600600103
- McDermott, M. L. (2005). Candidate Occupations and Voter Information Shortcuts. *The Journal of Politics*, 67(1), 201–219.

- Mechtel, M. (2011). It's the Occupation, Stupid! Explaining Candidates' Success in Low-Information Local Elections. Retrieved from <http://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/48682>
- Miller, J. (2012, March 26). Candidate ballot designations big deal. *Press-Enterprise, The*, p. A1. Riverside, CA.
- Miller, J. M., & Jon A. Krosnick. (1998). The Impact of Candidate Name Order on Election Outcomes. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62(3), 291–330.
- Mueller, J. E. (1970). Choosing Among 133 Candidates. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 34(3), 395–402.
- Popkin, S. L. (1994). *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. University of Chicago Press.
- Pothier, J. T. (1987). Drop-Off, the Vanishing Voters in On-Year Elections, and the Incumbency Advantage. *American Politics Research*, 15(1), 123–146.
- Sajons, C. (2012). Is Bob the Banker more electable than Bob the Builder? The effect of candidate profession on voter satisfaction and behavior in open-list elections. Retrieved from <http://www.econ.upf.edu/eng/graduates/gpem/jm/pdf/paper/JMP%20Sajons.pdf>
- Sanders, J. (2012a, March 20). Candidates tune up their legal titles. *Sacramento Bee, The* (CA), p. A3.
- Sanders, J. (2012b, April 2). What's in a ballot name? *Sacramento Bee, The* (CA), p. A1.
- Van Oot, T. (2011, February 14). "Business" can start a ballot fight. *Sacramento Bee, The* (CA), p. A3.

Appendix A: Survey Text

The entire text of the survey follows this page. Note that each respondent received only one set of ballots. The group identifier (e.g., “Name Only”) was not shown to respondents.

Introduction

For this research project, it is critical that you understand the questions. We therefore check responses in order to make sure that people have responded carefully.

We will only accept participants who demonstrate that they have paid careful attention to the survey and answered appropriately.

- I understand
- I do not understand

Instructions

You will be presented with a simulated election ballot. Some candidates may be familiar, while others may be new.

Please act as you would if presented with this ballot in a real-world polling place.

Name Only

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Vote for One

- Mitt Romney
- Barack Obama

COUNTY

MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Vote for One

- William Long
- Daniel Perry

COUNTY CLERKVote for One

- Thomas Kelly
- James Morgan

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORVote for One

- Richard Cook
- John Reynold

CITY**MAYOR**Vote for One

- Robert Scott
- Charles Bell

MEMBER, CITY COUNCILVote for One

- Michael Gray
- Andrew Smith

CITY CLERKVote for One

- Paul Fischer
- George Clark

Name + Occupation

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATESVote for One

- Barack Obama
President of the United States
- Mitt Romney
Former Governor of Massachusetts

COUNTY**MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**Vote for One

- Daniel Perry
College Professor
- William Long
Chief Executive Officer

COUNTY CLERKVote for One

- Thomas Kelly
Social Worker
- James Morgan
Financial Advisor

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORVote for One

- Richard Cook
Real Estate Agent
- John Reynold
Counselor

CITY

MAYORVote for One

- Robert Scott
Nonprofit Manager
- Charles Bell
Businessman

MEMBER, CITY COUNCILVote for One

- Andrew Smith
Business Consultant
- Michael Gray
Labor Union Organizer

CITY CLERKVote for One

- George Clark
Educator
- Paul Fischer
Small Business Owner

Name + Party**PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**Vote for One

- Mitt Romney
Republican
- Barack Obama
Democrat

COUNTY**MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

Vote for One

-
- Daniel Perry
Democrat
 - William Long
Republican

COUNTY CLERKVote for One

- James Morgan
Republican
- Thomas Kelly
Democrat

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORVote for One

- Richard Cook
Republican
- John Reynold
Democrat

CITY**MAYOR**Vote for One

- Charles Bell
Republican
- Robert Scott
Democrat

MEMBER, CITY COUNCILVote for One

- Andrew Smith
Republican

- Michael Gray
Democrat

CITY CLERK
Vote for One

- Paul Fischer
Republican
- George Clark
Democrat

Name + Occupation + Party

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
Vote for One

- Mitt Romney
Republican | Former Governor of Massachusetts
- Barack Obama
Democrat | President of the United States


COUNTY

MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Vote for One

- Daniel Perry
Republican | College Professor
- William Long
Democrat | Chief Executive Officer

COUNTY CLERK
Vote for One

- James Morgan
Democrat | Financial Advisor
-

 Thomas Kelly
Republican | Social Worker

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR
Vote for One

- Richard Cook
Democrat | Real Estate Agent
- John Reynold
Republican | Counselor

CITY

MAYOR
Vote for One

- Charles Bell
Democrat | Businessman
- Robert Scott
Republican | Nonprofit Manager

MEMBER, CITY COUNCIL
Vote for One

- Michael Gray
Republican | Labor Union Organizer
- Andrew Smith
Democrat | Business Consultant

CITY CLERK
Vote for One

- Paul Fischer
Democrat | Small Business Owner
- George Clark
Republican | Educator

Background

You have now completed the simulated ballot.

We would now like to ask you a few background questions.

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What year were you born?

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or something else?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Something else

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

- Strong Democrat
- Not very strong Democrat

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?



- Strong Republican
- Not very strong Republican

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- Closer to the Republican Party
- Closer to the Democratic Party
- Neither

Did you vote in the November 2012 election?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

Did you vote in the November 2010 election?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

How do you typically vote?

- By mail/absentee
- In a polling place
- I'm not sure/other

We have a few questions about the federal government. Many people don't know the answers to these questions. If you don't know, just say so.

Do you happen to remember what job John Boehner holds?

- Vice President of the United States
- Speaker of the US House of Representatives
- Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court
- Governor of Texas
- Prime Minister of Canada
- I'm not sure

Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the US House of Representatives right now?

- Republicans
- Neither
- Democrats
- I'm not sure

Do you happen to remember what political party President Franklin Roosevelt was a member of?

- Whig Party
- Republican Party
- Democratic Party
- Some other party
- I'm not sure

Do you happen to remember what industry the Dodd-Frank Act regulates?

- Healthcare
- Insurance
- Finance
-

Oil and Natural gas

I'm not sure

Recent research on decision making shows that choices are affected by context. Differences in how people feel, their previous knowledge and experience, and their environment can affect choices. To help us understand how people make decisions, we are interested in information about you. Specifically, we are interested in whether you actually take the time to read the questions before answering; if not, some results may not tell us very much about decision making in the real world. To show that you have answered this survey attentively, please choose both the "Happy" and "Unhappy" options below, and no others. Thank you very much.

Interested

Strong

Enthusiastic

Distressed

Guilty

Proud

Excited

Scared

Unhappy

Happy

Hostile

None of the above.

Thanks for contributing to our research!

Any comments? (optional)
