WHEN IS THE PARTY OVER? EXAMINING THE SUCCESS OF LIBERAL BALLOT MEASURES IN CONSERVATIVE STATES

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WHEN IS THE PARTY OVER? EXAMINING THE SUCCESS OF LIBERAL BALLOT MEASURES IN CONSERVATIVE STATES

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Abstract: Party ID continues to be a dominant force in American politics and generally is one of the most reliable predictors of voter behavior up and down the ballot. Some recent electoral results have challenged this narrative, namely the success of liberal ballot measures such as Medicaid expansion and minimum wage increases in conservative states. Why are conservative voters breaking from the party on some ballot measures? To answer this question, this paper will utilize a logistic regression model to investigate the success of liberal ballot measures in conservative states. I argue that self-interest, namely in the form of economic self-interest, causes some Republican voters to indicate support for policies that are not in line with their party's position. I find support for this hypothesis, demonstrating a positive effect between self-interest and Republicans support for Medicaid expansion and raising the minimum wage. This paper makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the limitations of party ID and with the insights gained , will hopefully inform strategies to overcome polarization in other instances in order to craft more representative policy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In June of 2020, voters in Oklahoma went to the polls with a controversial question on the ballot. Oklahoma State Question 802 was a ballot measure asking the voters of Oklahoma if they wanted to expand access to Medicaid to individuals whose income did not exceed 133% of the federal poverty level (sos.ok.gov). The Supreme court had ruled in 2012 that the federal government could not force state governments to expand Medicaid eligibility in accordance with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) (Haselswerdt 2021). In conservative states like Oklahoma, the state legislature had no interest in adopting any provision of "Obamacare" leading proponents of Medicaid expansion to go directly to the voters. The result should have been easy to predict, especially in light of the increasingly polarized nature of American partisanship. More and more, conservatives and liberals have separated into distinct parties that have an increasing distain for each other (Levendusky 2009; Mason 2018). "Obamacare" as it was dubbed demonstrated this strong polarization well, with the Republican leaders of Oklahoma voicing their opposition to Oklahoma's SQ 802 and any provision of the ACA (Haselswerdt 2021). But rather than take their cues from the party and strike down SQ 802, voters in Oklahoma actually went against them. Republicans continued their dominance in partisan elections across the state but in a ballot measure concerning one of

the biggest issues used to differentiate conservatives from liberals, voters in Oklahoma passed SQ 802 and expanded Medicaid. This is not an isolated incident, as Medicaid expansion has also passed via ballot initiative in Nebraska, Utah, Idaho, and Missouri (Haselswerdt 2021). Raising the minimum wage is another example of a policy position that tends to find success where we would not expect it. In 2020, 51.2% and 60.8% of Florida voters picked Donald Trump for President and to raise their state's minimum wage respectively (Vestal et al. 2020). These results in Oklahoma and Florida indicate that in direct democracy elections, partisanship cannot predict everything and at times significant chunks of Republican voters are willing to break with their conservative ideological preferences and back a liberal ballot initiative.

What causes a conservative Republican to vote for a liberal ballot measure is an important question with implications for the American politics literature and potentially for the strategies of political operatives. Party ID has cemented itself as a dominant force in American politics and it often is the only thing we need to know to predict behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Mason 2018; Smith and Tolbert 2001). While scholars have noticed individual variation that party ID cannot always explain, deep red states ignoring the cues of their party leaders on a ballot measure flies in the face of what we would expect (Burnett and McCubbins 2014; Campbell et al. 1960). The phenomena at question is a direct challenge to much of the voter behavior literature and has the potential to better help us understand the nuances of party ID and vote choice while also contributing to the work on voter behavior in non-partisan and direct democracy elections. This question also has important real-world implications. The rise of affective polarization has led to an extreme politics in which compromise between legislators is rare (Mason 2018).

Democrats in Oklahoma would have never come anywhere near passing Medicaid expansion through the Oklahoma legislature, but the ballot initiative process proved to be a fruitful alternative for advocates to pursue. As state legislatures across the country solidify themselves as partisan institutions, the ballot initiative process may become a very common way for major policy change to happen in spite of affective polarization. Understanding why some ballot initiatives compel a significant chunk of voters to "switch teams" may help us overcome our partisanship and produce representative policy through legislative means. Additionally, understanding why some ballot initiatives are successful where they should not be can help inform the practices and strategies of both candidates and advocates working in and around the political process.

To address this puzzling situation, I will propose and test a hypothesis regarding the behavior of Republican voters in direct democracy elections. Using data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) and Cooperative Election Studies (CCES), I will investigate a possible link between financial self-interest and deviation from the conservative position among Republican partisans voting on these liberal ballot measures. I expect to find that less affluent Republicans are more likely to step out of line with the party in these elections than their more affluent counterparts. Before diving into the details of my expectations and methods, I will first review the literature on voting behavior and direct democracy.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent results from direct democracy elections in red states such as Utah, Idaho, and Florida are puzzling because in these cases, party identification appears to be a wholly inadequate predictor of voter behavior. Party ID has long been understood as a driving force on voter behavior in American politics. The authors of *The American Voter* took some of the initial steps to demonstrate the importance of party ID in explaining vote choice by measuring the direction and intensity of party ID with their seven-point scale (Campbell et al. 1960). In their investigation of the 1952 and 1956 presidential election, Campbell et al. (1960) found no construct more useful in predicting presidential vote choice than party ID. The impact of party ID can also be seen down ballot, with split-ticket voting becoming increasingly rare and reaching a new low in 2020 (Levan and Greene 2021). There is also evidence to suggest that in some cases party ID is a powerful component in understanding vote choice in ballot initiatives. Smith and Tolbert's (2001) analysis of ballot initiatives in California between 1994 and 1998 found a statistically significant relationship between partisanship and vote choice in 11 of 13 initiatives. Smith and Tolbert (2001) add that political parties have become increasingly involved in the initiative process, using wedge issues down ballot to drive up voter turnout among their base and improve the chances of the party's candidates, further

cementing the importance of party ID in all types of vote choices.

Our understanding of Party ID has moved beyond simple vote choice and into areas that suggest that partisanship may be more powerful and dangerous than once thought. Campbell et al. (1960) were ahead in their time in noticing the psychological ties that partisans have to their preferred party and the consequences that accompany such an attachment. These attachments to party have become even deeper since voters have not only sorted into the "correct" party according to their self-perceived ideology, but they have also become increasingly socially sorted (Levendusky 2010; Mason 2018). As a result, voters will have a more difficult time fairly reasoning with ideas that come from outside their political orientation, if they ever hear them at all. In her book *Uncivil Agreement,* Lilliana Mason examines how our political parties have become increasingly homogenous. Mason (2018) notes that the composition of the Democratic and Republican parties has changed vastly over the last 50 years, with racial and religious divides being especially apparent. More and more, partisans are isolated in social circles of diminishing diversity in which biased attitudes are reinforced rather than challenged (Mason 2018). As a consequence, affective polarization, in which partisans harbor ill will towards members of the opposing party has been on the rise in the United States (Mason 2018). Many Americans even go as far to say that they do not wish to spend any time with members of the other party or would prefer that their neighbors be of the same political party, let alone vote for something a member of the other party would support (Mason 2018).

Social sorting is also important for its effect on cross-pressured voters. Cross-pressures occur when some of the various identities that an individual may take on do not

all align politically. Scholars have long considered the importance of cross-pressures, noting that voters who experienced cross-pressures took longer to make decisions for their presidential vote choice and were less enthusiastic about the election (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). This means that the diminishing cross-pressures observed by Mason (2018) leads to more voters who are sure of their vote choices and less likely to hear out differing opinions. Social sorting has also led to a decrease in warm feelings towards members of the opposite political party and the proliferation of outgroup bias among American partisans (Mason 2018). This all means that as many Americans go to vote, they do so having had their mind made up for a long time, having heard little information outside their partisan echo chamber, and as enthusiastic members of a team ready to defeat their rival in competition (Green et al. 2002; Mason 2018).

With voters being so sure in their support for their party, and perhaps more importantly their distain for the other party, it would be reasonable to expect that the parties have opposite policy agendas. The truth however, is that policy preferences often do not explain the extend of partisan animosity. There are cases in which partisans seemingly agree on policy, as the success of ballot initiatives like Florida's Amendment 2 would suggest. Some voters also have a difficult time knowing which policies they support, even though they are comfortable calling themselves a liberal or a conservative (Claassen et al. 2014). Scholars of voter behavior have uncovered that some voters symbolic party ID, or the party they self-identify with, does not always align with their concreate policy positions, or their operational party ID (Claassen et al. 2014). The term "conflicted conservative" is used in the literature to describe an individual who has a symbolic conservative identity but is an operational liberal when asked about their policy

preferences (Claassen et al. 2014). Contradictions between policy and ideology can occur across the political spectrum, but “conflicted conservatives” are more common than “conflicted liberals” which may be relevant when investigating the success of liberal leaning ballot initiatives in what we generally describe as conservative states (Claassen et al. 2014). “Conflicted conservatives” also serve to further highlight the importance of party ID to one’s sense of their social identity. In explaining the mismatch between symbolic and operational identity, Claassen et al. (2014) notes the importance of apolitical sources of labeling. For some, being a conservative did not say much about their position of Medicare or Social Security, but it did mean that they were hardworking church goers who support the community (Claassen et al. 2014).

“Conflicted conservatives” are an unsurprising subclass of voters if we consider the ways in which partisanship alters our perceptions. As Campbell et al. (1960) put it and was again emphasized by Bartels (2002), partisanship can apply a “perceptual screen” that causes us to view reality through a lens that is favorable to our partisanship. Examples of this lens are plentiful. Mason (2018) notes the change in partisans’ opinions on National Security Agency (NSA) spying practices that corresponded with the change of the presidency from George W. Bush to Barack Obama. Achen and Bartels (2016) show that partisanship influences perceptions and misperceptions of reality, with hardcore partisans claiming ownership of their own facts. Even objective metrics, such as the yearly deficit, are subject to partisan interpretation that can cause voters to give factually incorrect answers to questions regarding the deficit under different administrations (Achen and Bartels 2016). Partisanship also influences the way in which we perceive the parties’ issue positions. This may cause use to view the other party as

more extreme than they actually are or alternatively, cause us to ascribed positions to our party to avoid incongruence between our own stance and the stance of our party (Achen and Bartels 2016; Campbell et al. 1960; Mason 2018). When there is a conflict between policy preference and party ID, the ladder generally works to align the former rather than the other way around (Achen and Bartels 2016; Campbell et al. 1960; Carsey and Layman 2006).

This information helps us to understand the thoughts of the aforementioned "conflicted conservatives". When symbolic conservatives are presented with a policy question that may trigger cognitive dissonance, their attachment to their party ID will work to resolve the incongruence. This may mean that they assign their preferred position onto the party they identify with regardless of what that party's actual position is or it may mean that conflicted voters decide traditional labels are not appropriate for a particular issue such as Medicare or Social Security (Achen and Bartels 2016; Claassen et al. 2014). When voters are genuinely confused about their position on an issue, they are likely to turn to their party for the answers. This can often be the case in direct democracy elections in which voters are not able to simply find the candidate of their party. In these situations, voters will often turn to cue givers to learn how they ought to feel about an issue, and political parties are very powerful cue givers that can sway how a voter will decide to vote on a ballot initiative (Burnett and McCubbins 2013). Between giving voters their new opinions and changing their existing ones, party ID is a powerful force in American politics with psychological and social attachments being essential to its importance. One's party ID has increasingly become essential to their identity and has shown the potential to influence our understanding of reality and make us vindictive

voters who long more so for our rivals defeat than for the best policy outcomes (Achen and Bartels 2016; Campbell et al. 1960; Mason 2016).

Thus far, we have painted a promising picture for party ID as a predictor of voter behavior. Yet we have also foreshadowed the limitations of party ID in explaining electoral outcomes. The success of Medicaid expansion via ballot initiatives in red states would appear to contradict much of what scholars of voter behavior would expect, but there has long been reason for caution when using party ID to predict outcomes (Achen and Bartels 2016; Burnett and McCubbins 2013; Mason 2018). Campbell et al. (1960) noted that while party ID could provide strong aggregate data on voters, the variation observed among individuals was something that could not be accounted for. Additionally, the "conflicted" voters help to illustrate the confusion that many voters have with ideology and party. Although most Republicans will call themselves conservative, not all of them will demonstrate a proper allocation of ideology when asked their opinion on specific issues (Claassen et al. 2014). While it may be desirable for citizens to understand which position on an issue is the liberal and conservative one, it is certainly not necessary for voters to be loyal partisan soldiers (Achen and Bartels 2016; Mason 2018).

Although political scientists may view the passage of some ballot initiatives in conservative states as evidence of voters behaving erratically, the voters themselves may have a different conception of the outcome. It is very possible that voters do not see any contradiction in their vote choices up and down the ballot. Not only do many voters struggle to understand what a liberal or conservative position looks like, that amount of engagement between one's ideology and their issue position may never happen (Achen and Bartels 2016; Claassen et al. 2014). This line of thinking makes sense for some ballot

initiatives. Carmines and Stimson (1980) and Dyck and Pearson-Merkowitz (2021) illustrate two issue types: hard and easy. An easy issue is one in which voters already know where they stand in part because the issue is of great political relevance and signals from the parties are easy to understand (Dyck and Pearson-Merkowitz 2021). Hard issues are generally of a less controversial nature and may deal with procedures of governance or local taxes, meaning that voters do not generally have a preexisting opinion and may not have an easy place to obtain one (Dyck and Merkowitz 2021). We would expect easy issues to be more predictable, as voters already know where they ought to stand and are less susceptible to information campaigns that may attempt to portray themselves as non-partisan (Dyck and Merkowitz 2021; Middleton and Rogers 2015). The ballot initiatives that are the subject of this certainly fall under the category of easy issues. It would be impossible to deny that the Medicaid expansion provision of the Affordable Care Act was supported along partisan lines. Voters in Oklahoma should have known where their party stood and how a conservative ought to have voted in Oklahoma's state question 802. yet in spite of the particularly tribal nature of contemporary partisanship, Medicaid expansion passed in Oklahoma and other conservative states. It could be that these voters are performing an impressive case of willful misunderstanding, but perhaps a deeper investigation of how sub-groups impact politics will provide a more plausible explanation.

Being a Republican or a Democrat is a large part of one's political identity, but there may be a myriad of identities that make up an individual. Achen and Bartels (2016) in particular note the importance of sub-groups in contemporary American politics. There is the large group of Republicans, but within that group are smaller sections like poor

Republicans and African-American Republicans and so on. Having various identities, especially ones that do not generally exist simultaneously, produces cross-pressures that can impact vote choice and perhaps explain unexpected electoral outcomes (Mason 2018). Some evidence for the importance of cross pressures can be found in studies of ballot initiatives decriminalizing marijuana. Marijuana has been a popular subject in direct democracy, with 32 cannabis legalization initiatives between 2004 and 2016, a sample size that has allowed for scholars to investigate the determinants of vote choice in these elections (Orenstein and Glantz 2020). A Survey of voters before a 2012 marijuana ballot initiative in Washington state provided results to echo many of the sediments addressed above. Partisanship was once again reliable predictors of attitudes on recreational marijuana legalization with the 73 percent of Democrats who supported legalization being joined by only 31 percent of Republicans (Collingwood et al. 2018). Sub-groups also proved to be important in evaluating support as frequent church goers had a higher opposition to recreational marijuana (Collingwood et al. 2018). A unique sub-group of interest in this case was people who had themselves or knew someone with an experience in the criminal justice system. Those in this category were more likely to support marijuana legalization, suggesting that groups that can be directly impacted by a policy change may have the potential to act as a separate voting block from the larger group they belong to (Collingwood et al. 2018).

CHAPTER III

THEORY

The core of my argument is that voters will vote in a way that coincides with their perceived self-interest. In most cases in contemporary American politics, this will simply mean voting in accordance with their partisan identity to help their team reach victory in electoral contests (Mason 2018). When we expand our consideration of identity beyond party ID and outside of strictly partisan elections, the calculations that a voter conducts to vote in their best interest becomes more complicated. My argument is that poor Republicans will break from the more affluent members of their party in their vote choice in direct democracy elections that contain a class element. Liberal leaning ballot initiatives often involve a proposed policy that is intended to improve the quality of life for poorer Americans. The debate over the minimum wage may consider broad economic consequences, but the policy most directly impacts those working minimum wage jobs. Expanding Medicare is also a policy question that has a targeted benefit to less affluent populations, which could make it a difficult opportunity to pass up for poor Republicans. Franko and Witko (2022) provides evidence that class status can help us predict social and economic attitudes. Generally, being of a lower economic class indicates liberal economic attitudes and conservative social attitudes with the inverse being true of more

more affluent people (Franko and Witko 2022).

Although there has been some debate among political scientists regarding the ability of voters to accurately advocate for their self-interest with their vote choice, ballot initiatives have provided some evidence to suggest voters know how to make the selfish choice. Using surveys, researchers analyzed support for Washington state's Proposition 1098 which would have created a tax on the wealthy. Partisanship once again is among the best predictors of support for the measure with 74% of Democrats being joined by only 18% of Republicans in voting for the measure (Franko et al. 2013). Making less than $40,000 a year was a significant indicator of support but this significance faded when income reached between $60,000 and $100,000 per year (Franko et al. 2013). Here we see voters regardless of class status may vote in accordance with their self-interest. The tax on the wealthy would act as a redistributive policy. From the perspective of those voters making less than $40,000, the wealth tax would generate more revenue for the state government to provide better services at no costs to them. From the perspective of the more affluent voter, the wealth tax either directly depleted their income or presented the possibility that if they were to get a raise, some of that money would go to the state. Here we see voters making what we may call the selfish choice, deciding that the best vote to make was the one that benefited them and the group they identify with. This leads me to *H1: Self-interested Republicans are more likely to support liberal ballot initiatives than non-self-interested Republicans.*

CHAPTER VI

METHODS

In order to test my first hypothesis, I will need to be able to measure relevant attitudes among Republican voters of varying income levels. Fortunately, existing datasets like the ANES and the CCES allow me to examine the attitudes Republican voters hold in conservative states that passed a liberal ballot initiative. These datasets can be reduced to the state level and will give me measures of Republican attitudes that existed the same year they voted on a ballot measure. I will be focusing on Oklahoma, which passed Medicaid expansion via ballot initiative, and Florida, which passed a state minimum wage of $15/hr. via ballot initiative. I choose these states above other instances of a liberal ballot measure succeeding in a conservative state for a few reasons. First because of the two policy issues in question, Medicaid expansion and the minimum wage. They are clear examples of a "liberal" ballot initiative as the positions of the parities are very clear. They are easy issues as some scholars have put it and thus more puzzling to see some Republican voters break party ranks. Second, both of the ballot initiatives occurred in 2020, providing us with pertinent examples that occurred at the same time as record low levels of split-ticket voting (Leven and Greene 2021). Finally, because these examples are particularly impressive in terms of the number of Republican voters that may have voter for a liberal position. Medicaid expansion passed in Oklahoma, a state in which Donald Trump would go on to win every county during the

during the 2020 election (Vestal et al. 2020). And support for the minimum wage outpaced Joe Biden's support in Florida by 12.9% (Vestal et al. 2020)

I will use various logit regressions models to test my hypothesis. The outcome variable, support for either Medicaid expansion or raising the minimum wage, is derived from questions about policy attitudes from the ANES and CCES. The possible responses to these questions led me to create a dichotomous outcome variable of only supporting the liberal policy position or not supporting it, meaning that a logit regression is the appropriate choice. Although I will be focusing on Republican voters in Oklahoma and Florida to test my theory of self-interest, I want to know if my findings are representative of the national population of Republican voters and how they can be compared to Democratic voters. As such, I will be running four different models to test the effects of party ID and self-interest as well as the interaction of them both. I will begin with an analysis of Oklahoma Republican voters who were asked to vote on Medicaid expansion and a separate analysis of Florida Republicans who voted on a minimum wage increase. I will then assess if the findings from these models have the potential to reflect broader trends by running the logit regression on statewide and national samples that include all voters in the dataset, not just Republicans. This will allow me to compare Republican voters to Democrats with the added benefit of giving me more observations to include in the regression and bolster the confidence we can place in the generalizability of the results.

It is my argument that Republican voters will be more likely to vote for a liberal ballot measure if they perceive it to be in their self-interest. Thus, the independent variables that will interact in my multi-variate model will be partisan strength and self-

interest. Partisan strength will be measured based on responses to questions within the ANES and CCES. Both databases include questions that allow respondents to place themselves on the familiar seven-point scale for party ID which I will use to measure partisan strength. I have made the decision to utilize partisan strength as an independent variable rather than a voter's self-assessment of their ideology for two reasons. First, scholars have demonstrated the confusion that American voters have regarding ideological assessments of policy positions. In regards to the policies under examination in this paper, voters who label themselves conservative and indicate support for Medicaid expansion would likely apply the conservative label to that position to resolve any dissonance (Claassen et al. 2014). Voters confusion over correct ideological assessment of policies may be part of the success story for the ballot initiatives in question, but it is not the primary phenomena I wish to investigate. The second reason I focus on partisan strength is the importance of partisan cues in voting in direct democracy (Burnett and McCubbins 2014). The argument that voters derive their ideology and vote choices from party cues is well supported in the literature. Thus, I am most interested in why voters are not taking party cues to heart in the ballot initiatives in question rather than how voters square their self-assessed ideology with the policies from these initiatives. Nonetheless, I will be running my logistic regression models with a seven-point ideology scale and report the results in the appendix. Focusing on partisan strength also allows me to compare the attitudes of not very strong Republicans to that of very strong Republicans, which I will be doing in my logit regression models that only include Republican voters. Recall that the seven-point scale I am using to measure partisan strength goes from strong Democrat at 1 to strong Republican at 7, meaning that we would expect to see a negative

sign in front of the correlation coefficient if Republican voters are not supporting Medicaid expansion or raising the minimum wage. Furthermore, the respondents are geocoded which allows me to pull out partisans who voted on Medicaid expansion in Oklahoma and increasing the minimum wage in Florida separately.

The measurement of self-interest is based on the nature of the outcome variable. In the case of Medicaid expansion and the minimum wage, class will be heavily tied to self-interest. Fortunately, the phrasing of questions contained in the ANES and CCES allow me to create a measure of self-interest directly related to the ballot initiatives in question. To measure self-interest in the Oklahoma case, I will look to the 2020 CCES question, “Do you currently have health insurance?” Those who responded “no” or those who indicated they purchase private insurance but became eligible for Medicaid after it expanded, which I can know via the CCES regarding the voter’s annual household income, would be the voters I theorize relied on self-interest. Although I cannot see the how the actual vote of these respondents on the Medicaid ballot measure, I can see how they answered the CCES prompt that asked for support or opposition for the proposal to “Expand Medicare to a single comprehensive public health care coverage program that would cover all Americans.” To find support for H1, I would need to see that Republican voters who would stand to personally benefit from Medicaid expansion were more likely to indicate support for the expansion of state health care services than Republicans who did not stand to personally benefit. It should be noted that the 2020 CCES began administering their survey in September of 2020 and the special election on Medicaid expansion in Oklahoma occurred in June. The timing of a June special election makes pre-election data gathering more difficult, but I feel that the attitudes measure in the

CCES surveys are an adequate measure of attitudes held by Oklahomans during their vote on Medicaid expansion. I do not find the difference between the CCES question text and the Oklahoma ballot initiative, Medicare vs. Medicaid expansion, to be a significant issue as both programs refer to state subsidize health care services and should not invoke different partisan reactions.

I will then run the same model again, but with the outcome variable being support for raising the minimum wage among Florida voters. This time I will be looking to the ANES which asks respondents to place themselves on the seven-point party ID scale and their family's total income over the last year. Since this ballot measure deals directly with wages, the income of the voter's family will be used to measure self-interest. I chose a household income of less than $20,000/yr. as a benchmark for self-interested motivation because the ballot measure in question first raises the minimum wage to $10/hr. or around $20,800 annually for a full-time worker, before eventually climbing to $15/hr. (Torres 2020). This means that workers making less than $20,000/yr. stand to get the most immediate personal benefit from the ballot measure as well as the most to gain from the eventually $15/hr. minimum wage set to take effect in 2026 (Torres 2020). The ANES has a great question to measure the outcome variable of support for the liberal ballot measure, "Should the federal minimum wage be raised, kept the same, lowered but not eliminated, or eliminated all together?" To find support for hypothesis 1, I would see that Republican voters with household incomes below $20,000/yr. were more likely to say the minimum wage ought to be raised than voters you make more than $20,000/yr. The above processes will be repeated, once with the outcome variable being support for the relevant polices among all voters statewide and once more with the full national

sample. The existing literature has provided me with some control variables to be included in each model. These controls will be age, (Burnett and McCubbins 2013; Franko et al. 2013; Orenstein and Glantz 2020) education, (Burnett and McCubbins 2013; Franko et al. 2013) gender, (Franko et al. 2013) and race (Collingwood et al. 2018; Smith and Tolbert 2001).

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Table 1 contains the logistic regression result for Oklahoma Republicans. Model 1 includes my independent variable of self-interest along with the controls of age, education, sex, and race. Model 2 adds the partisan strength variable and Model 3 adds the interactive term of partisan strength and self-interest. Starting with my analysis of support for Medicaid expansion, there is support for H1 found in both the sample that includes only Oklahoma Republicans and in the national CCES sample. Table 1 presents the logit regression results among Oklahoma Republicans. Self-interest, meaning that the respondent lacked health insurance or would be newly eligible for Medicaid after passing State Question 802, had a positive and significant relationship with support for expanding Medicaid in models 1 and 2 with logistic regression coefficients of 0.687 and 0.942 respectively. These results held when the sample was expanded to every respondent, both Democrats and Republicans, in the CCES sample. The results for the national sample are presented in table 2 and show self-interest maintaining a positive and significant relationship with support for Medicaid expansion in models 1 and 2. To better interpret the real-world impact of self-interest on support for Medicaid expansion, I then converted the coefficients into probabilities that predict the likelihood that a respondent will indicate support for expanding Medicaid when they are self-interested compared to when

they are not, or the effect of a one unit change in the dependent variable on the outcome variable. For the sample of only Oklahoma Republicans, being self-interested resulted in an increase in the probability of a respondent supporting Medicaid expansion of 16% in model 1 and 21% in model 2. Model 3 is important for its inclusion of the interactive term of partisan strength and self-interest. The interaction of partisan strength and self-interest did not reach significance among Oklahoma Republicans but did at the national level. Figure 1 demonstrates the effect of self-interest across party lines. Here, we see self-interest having a significant impact on Republican voters' attitudes on Medicaid expansion, supporting H1.[1] Moving on to the issue of raising the minimum wage and tables 3 and 4, which presents the logistic regression results for only Florida Republicans and for all voters nationally. Self-interest in this case refers to those in the sample who indicated their household income was at or less than $30,000 per year, meaning that the eventual increase to the minimum wage to $15/hr. would constitute a raise. Generally, there is less support for H1 in my analysis of self-interest and minimum wage attitudes. Self-interest failed to reach significance across all models in the logit regression that contained only Florida Republicans as presented in Table 3. The national sample that includes all respondents to the ANES shows more promise for H1 with the results presented in Table 4. Although self-interest fails to maintain significance in model 2 whenever partisan strength is introduced into the logit regression, the interactive term of partisan strength and self-interest lends

[1] Statewide regression results available in the appendix.

Table 1

	(1) For Expansion	(2) For Expansion	(3) For Expansion
For Expansion Self Interest	0.687*	0.942*	1.661
	(0.338)	(0.391)	(0.218)
age	-0.0382***	-0.0362***	-0.0362***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)
education	-0.554***	-0.520***	-0.524***
	(0.125)	(0.138)	(0.139)
sex	0.233	0.196	0.199
	(0.303)	(0.340)	(0.340)
race	0.0386	-0.0122	-0.0216
	(0.356)	(0.416)	(0.418)
Partisan Strength		-0.265	-0.242
		(0.198)	(0.218)
Partisan Strength W/Self Interest			-0.116
			(0.475)
_cons	2.412**	3.764**	3.637*
	(0.794)	(1.380)	(1.474)
N	279	239	239
BIC	337.5	285.8	291.2

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 2

	(1) For Expansion	(2) For Expansion	(3) For Expansion
For Expansion Self Interest	0.155***	0.378***	-0.0000454
	(0.033)	(0.039)	(0.100)
age	-0.0294***	-0.0334***	-0.0334***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
education	0.0152*	-0.124***	-0.125***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
sex	0.329***	0.182***	0.181***
	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.021)
race	-0.622***	-0.154***	-0.157***
	(0.021)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Party ID		-0.600***	-0.606***
		(0.005)	(0.006)
Party ID W/Self Interest			0.0805***
			(0.020)
_cons	2.022***	4.950***	4.983***
	(0.051)	(0.069)	(0.070)
N	60901	58542	58542
BIC	73842.6	55383.3	55378.3

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

more support to H1. Figure 2 illustrates the impact of self-interest on minimum wage attitudes across the seven-point party ID scale. As with Medicaid expansion, self-interest had a significant and positive effect on Republican minimum wage attitudes. In the case of the minimum wage, this effect increased along with the intensity of partisanship. Although self-interest does not achieve significance across all sample sizes and models, H1 does find a noteworthy share of support. A perhaps puzzling result in Figures 1 and 2

is the impact of self-interest on Independents. We may expect that in the absence of strong partisan attachments, then self-interest would have a much stronger effect on vote choice. Yet my findings show self-interest to have an effect on Independents that is stronger than the effect on Democrats but weaker than the effect on Republicans. This may be the result of less attention and/or knowledge of partisan cues among independent voters, which may be causing these voters in this category to express both support and opposition to Medicaid expansion and raising the minimum wage at roughly equal levels. Still, Figures 1 and 2 visualize the effects of self-interest quite convincingly and suggest that H1 has strong potential and that self-interest may cause some Republican voters to support liberal ballot measures.

Figure 1

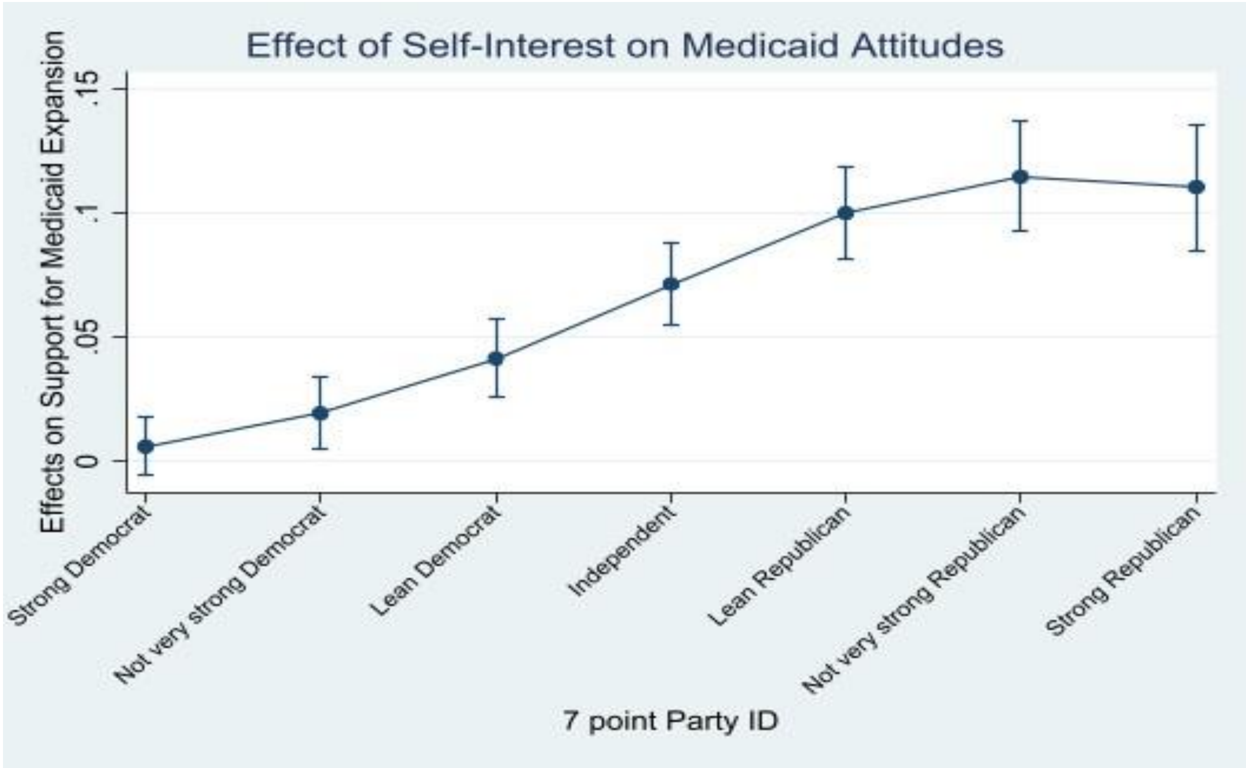


Table 3

	(1) For Raise	(2) For Raise	(3) For Raise
For Raise			
Self Interest	0.240	0.0650	-2.135
	(0.472)	(0.490)	(3.641)
age	0.0288**	0.0331**	0.0328**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
education	-0.303*	-0.284	-0.277
	(0.153)	(0.155)	(0.155)
sex	0.0783	0.182	0.190
	(0.327)	(0.341)	(0.342)
race	0.705	0.726	0.732
	(0.463)	(0.469)	(0.470)
Partisan Strength		-0.283	-0.329
		(0.198)	(0.211)
Partisan Strength W/Self Interest			0.349
			(0.568)
_cons	-2.372*	-1.069	-0.795
	(1.018)	(1.485)	(1.545)
N	213	212	212
BIC	269.7	270.4	275.3

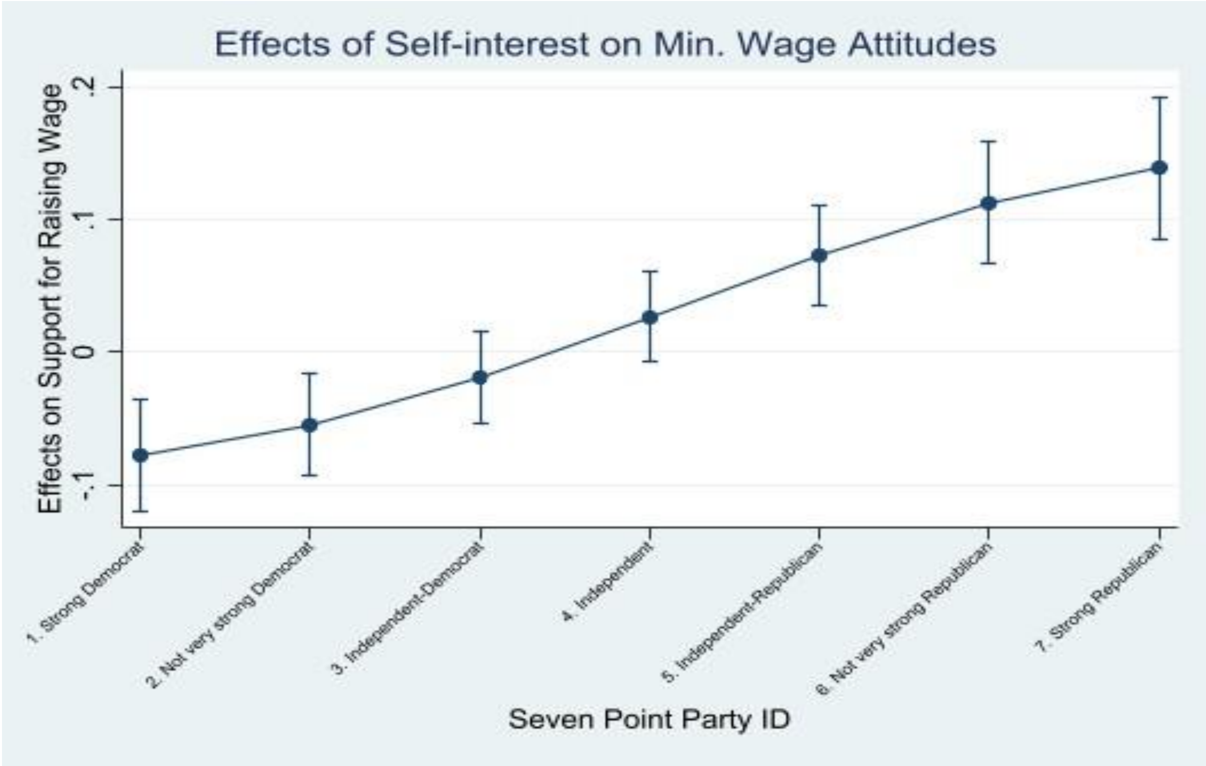
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

Table 4

	(1) For Raise	(2) For Raise	(3) For Raise
For Raise			
Self Interest	0.164*	0.0932	-0.646***
	(0.067)	(0.073)	(0.144)
age	0.00252	0.00483**	0.00501***
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
education	0.121***	0.0114	0.00155
	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.024)
sex	0.315***	0.176***	0.174***
	(0.046)	(0.051)	(0.051)
race	-0.386***	0.0919	0.0715
	(0.053)	(0.060)	(0.060)
Partisan Strength		-0.425***	-0.453***
		(0.012)	(0.013)
Partisan Strength			0.188***
W/Self Interest			(0.032)
_cons	-0.581***	1.226***	1.384***
	(0.128)	(0.149)	(0.152)
N	7805	7792	7792
BIC	10673.0	9275.0	9251.1

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Figure 2



CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Concerns over the polarization both within the electorate and among legislators has garnered much attention from scholars of American politics. The electoral success of these ballot initiatives in spite of partisan sorting and polarization presents a unique opportunity for researchers to deepen our understanding of partisan dynamics among individual voters. I hypothesized in this paper that self-interest may be a contributing factor in voter's decision making in direct democracy elections, which may in turn lead to the success of ballot initiatives that are ideologically incongruent with the population voting on them. My findings indicated solid though not complete support for this hypothesis. There exists a myriad of implications if indeed self-interested voters are willing to break party lines and vote for ballot initiatives that defy the policy preferences of state governors and legislatures. It may prompt an increase in activists turning to direct democracy instead of applying their resources to the legislative process. The success of ballot initiative concerning liberal causes such as the minimum wage, Medicaid expansion, and decriminalized marijuana is sure to be noticed by political actors who may now feel a greater sense of efficacy in direct democracy than they do in the more traditional process. Such actors may also turn to the initiative process as a response to decisions made by legislatures or by courts.

The importance of self-interested partisans as potential swing voters in direct democracy hopefully will fuel greater efforts to engage with voters who may otherwise

be ignored by traditional campaigns. Often times, self-interest as it pertains to direct democracy will take the form of class and race. Members of marginalized communities are generally not targeted by voter outreach campaigns and may face structural barriers and a lack of political efficacy (Dalton 2017). These factors contribute to a participation gap in political activities that could potentially be addressed with direct democracy. Direct democratic campaigns will be far more incentivized to speak with voters of all kinds if self-interest can truly galvanize marginalized people to engage with the political process. A poor Republican in Oklahoma can go from an taken for granted partisan in a deep red state, to a crucial swing voter in a direct democracy campaign if my hypothesis is true. In this view, not only does direct democracy achieve the original intention of checking the power of legislatures, but it may also prove to be a powerful tool to close the participation gap in political activities.

Still, the results I have presented in this paper do not suggest that self-interest is always an important explanatory variable. Unlike in the Oklahoma sample, self-interest failed to reach significance in any of my models that contained Florida Republicans. This is an intriguing finding as one may have expected self-interest to be less compelling in Oklahoma's vote on Medicaid expansion than it would be in Florida's decision to raise the minimum wage considering the role that "Obamacare" discourse has played in contemporary American politics and partisanship. Explaining these different outcomes in my findings could be a fruitful avenue for further research. Before concluding, I would like to posit one such avenue for future scholars to pursue.

Perhaps differing results in direct democracy elections across states can be partially attributed to partisan salience. By this I mean how intensely an issue acts as a

litmus test to distinguish a conservative from a liberal. These issues are generally defined by elites as they communicate the defining issues of an election cycle and what the "correct" position on that issue is for their fellow partisans. Opposition or support for the ACA was one issue that had an intense degree of partisan salience due to its dominance in political discourse. Of course, when one issue dominates the national conversation, other issues slip to the wayside. Without elite attention to a policy issue, voters may be less able to identity the position that best fits their ideological preferences. Carsey and Layman (2006) lay out this argument and find evidence that the degree to which voters are aware of a conflict between partisanship and an issue stance will dictate whether or not a voter corrects a contradiction between an issue stance and their ideology. Those who do not know that an issue position they have contradicts the position of their party because no elite has told them so may be less likely to correct these incongruencies, especially if other factors like self-interest are at play. Strong and not so strong Democrats

There were considerations to include a hypothesis from this logic and a test within the current paper, but the timing and logistics were difficult obstacles to overcome. Combing through sources of elite messaging such as social media feeds or newspaper clippings can be at times a lengthy and costly task. Additionally, the ballot initiatives I have investigated in this paper occurred in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic which had an obvious effect on messaging from elites of both parties. Although the pandemic did create an environment in which issues like Medicaid expansion and the minimum wage were not the subject of elite cues, it would be quite difficult to test a general hypothesis pertaining to elite messaging in a window that includes such a shock to the

system. Still, there are various other examples of liberal ballot initiatives succeeding and failing in conservative states under otherwise “normal” conditions. Monitoring the messaging from elites nationally and within particular states during a direct democracy vote could allow for a test of the impact of partisan salience in the future.

COVID-19 itself may have had an impact on these electoral outcomes in Oklahoma and Florida outside of taking attention off of the issues on the ballot. If voters do make choices in direct democracy based on a calculation of self-interested pay offs versus partisan loyalty, then the pandemic could have reasonably affected this calculation. The consequences COVID-19 had on the economy could make the prospect of Medicaid expansion and a wage raise very attractive. Those who experienced job loss or the fear of job insecurity may have been tempted to vote for Medicaid expansion in Oklahoma for fear that they could not rely on employer provided insurance. Additionally, the pandemics ability to evoke hospitalization and the threats of long-term COVID-19 infection have the potential to generate anxiety regarding health care costs. This would be especially true for those in my sample of Oklahoma Republicans that I deemed self-interested due to their income. The pandemic may also have shifted attitudes about the minimum wage for both those who I deemed self-interested and those who were not. Working during a pandemic is a dangerous proposition in which workers take on an increased risk of exposure for both themselves and their loved ones, which may make those workers feel more deserving of a wage increase. The thanks offered to “essential workers” alluded to these inherent risks and perhaps engendered more favorable feelings towards workers of sub $15/hr. jobs like fast food service.

A final consideration regarding the substantive depth of these implications is whether self-interest has the potential to moderate the partisan voting habits of Democrats as I have found that it may in Republicans. While there are certainly examples of what some would call conservative ballot measures succeeding in liberal states such as California's proposition 8 which defined marriage as between one man and one woman in the state constitution, these cases emerge from a time in which the partisan atmosphere may have been different and a casual mechanism of self-interest may be less evident (Ballotpedia). As was the case in my examination of attitudes on Medicaid expansion and the minimum wage, economic self-interests will generally not clash with the partisan cues of Democratic voters. This expectation is borne out within my findings seeing as less affluent Democratic voters were not more likely to support Medicaid expansion and within the broader literature that has found "conflicted conservatives" to outnumber "conflicted liberals" (Claassen et al. 2014). Yet scholars have noted the presence of at least some conflicted liberals and my findings on national minimum wage attitudes suggest that Democrats partisan attitudes can be impacted by outside conditions. Figure 2 shows that strong and not very strong Democrats appear to demonstrate a *negative* though not substantively large relationship between self-interest and support for increasing the minimum wage. Explaining this result is not the goal of this paper, but further examination of Democratic attitudes and self-interest would broaden the significance of the theory I have presented here. Perhaps looking to the minimum wage positions of Democratic business owners could test if self-interest can cause Democratic voters to break with partisan cues. Results from such tests would help to clarify if the scope of the findings presented here demonstrate policy liberalization among the general

American electorate or if self-interested motivations can truly curb partisan attitudes across the board.

There exists a plethora of examples of liberal ballot initiatives succeeding in conservative states. Here, I examined only two recent examples and found support for my hypothesis that self-interested Republicans would be more likely to support liberal ballot initiatives than Republicans that were not self-interested. Further research will be needed to further validate or invalidate my hypothesis, but a better understanding of why voters may not always tow the party line can add great utility to the American political system. The perils of increased polarization have already been articulated by scholars of American politics, but direct democracy shows us that this does not have to be our reality. Perhaps knowing what causes us to break out of our polarized views can aid us in fostering a healthier political discourse, be more empathetic and open to opposite partisans, and above all else, create more representative public policy both in the realm of direct democracy and in the formal legislative process.

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APPENDICES

Table 5

OK Statewide Regression Table

	(1) For Expansion	(2) For Expansion	(3) For Expansion
For Expansion Self Interest	0.669**	0.943**	0.536
	(0.254)	(0.319)	(0.979)
age	-0.0334***	-0.0304***	-0.0306***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
education	-0.0505	-0.250**	-0.250**
	(0.066)	(0.085)	(0.085)
sex	0.221	0.126	0.117
	(0.192)	(0.241)	(0.242)
race	-0.387	-0.124	-0.123
	(0.218)	(0.279)	(0.279)
Party ID		-0.693***	-0.704***
		(0.065)	(0.070)
Party ID W/Self Interest			0.0780
			(0.180)
_cons	2.153***	5.667***	5.740***
	(0.521)	(0.748)	(0.770)
N	567	527	527
BIC	720.3	511.1	517.2

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 6

FL Statewide Regression Results

	(1) For Raise	(2) For Raise	(3) For Raise
For Raise Self Interest	0.240	0.0650	-2.135
	(0.472)	(0.490)	(3.641)
age	0.0288**	0.0331**	0.0328**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
education	-0.303*	-0.284	-0.277
	(0.153)	(0.155)	(0.155)
sex	0.0783	0.182	0.190
	(0.327)	(0.341)	(0.342)
race	0.705	0.726	0.732
	(0.463)	(0.469)	(0.470)
Party ID		-0.283	-0.329
		(0.198)	(0.211)
Party ID W/Self Interest			0.349
			(0.568)
_cons	-2.372*	-1.069	-0.795
	(1.018)	(1.485)	(1.545)
N	213	212	212
BIC	269.7	270.4	275.3

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 7

OK GOP results W/Ideology

	(1) For Expansion	(2) For Expansion	(3) For Expansion
Self-interest	0.966*	0.918*	1.638
	(0.391)	(0.400)	(1.880)
age	-0.0395***	-0.0305**	-0.0301**
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
education	-0.501***	-0.494***	-0.499***
	(0.137)	(0.139)	(0.140)
sex	0.123	0.0849	0.0881
	(0.334)	(0.341)	(0.341)
race	-0.0391	0.00709	0.0166
	(0.412)	(0.425)	(0.428)
ideology		-0.378**	-0.357*
		(0.130)	(0.140)
Ideology W/Self-interest			-0.134
			(0.341)
_cons	2.357**	4.006***	3.874***
	(0.882)	(1.078)	(1.126)
N	239	239	239
BIC	282.1	279.0	284.3

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 8

OK Statewide Results W/Ideology

	(1) For Expansion	(2) For Expansion	(3) For Expansion
self-interest	0.669**	0.791**	-0.839
	(0.254)	(0.296)	(0.930)
age	-0.0334***	-0.0175*	-0.0184**
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
education	-0.0505	-0.226**	-0.228**
	(0.066)	(0.081)	(0.081)
sex	0.221	0.147	0.122
	(0.192)	(0.234)	(0.236)
race	-0.387	-0.196	-0.201
	(0.218)	(0.264)	(0.265)
ideology		-0.849***	-0.909***
		(0.078)	(0.088)
ideology and Self-interest			0.335
			(0.186)
_cons	2.153***	5.702***	6.072***
	(0.521)	(0.729)	(0.774)
N	567	567	567
BIC	720.3	546.1	549.5

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 9

National Medicaid Expansion Results W/Ideology

	(1) For Expansion	(2) For Expansion	(3) For Expansion
Self-interest	0.155***	0.280***	-0.389**
	(0.033)	(0.038)	(0.120)
age	-0.0294***	-0.0226***	-0.0226***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
education	0.0152*	-0.150***	-0.151***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
sex	0.329***	0.216***	0.216***
	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.021)
race	-0.622***	-0.524***	-0.526***
	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.025)
ideology		-0.818***	-0.831***
		(0.007)	(0.008)
Ideology W/Self-interest			0.145***
			(0.025)
_cons	2.022***	5.786***	5.851***
	(0.051)	(0.072)	(0.073)
N	60901	60880	60880
BIC	73842.6	55572.5	55551.5

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 10

FL GOP Results W/Ideology

	(1) For Raise	(2) For Raise	(3) For Raise
Self-Interest	0.123	0.0486	0.218
	(0.486)	(0.496)	(0.827)
age	0.0318**	0.0317**	0.0318**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
education	-0.269	-0.275	-0.275
	(0.154)	(0.156)	(0.156)
sex	0.0638	0.0566	0.0603
	(0.328)	(0.330)	(0.330)
race	0.665	0.654	0.660
	(0.463)	(0.463)	(0.464)
ideology		0.154	0.170
		(0.119)	(0.136)
Ideology and Self-interest			-0.0712
			(0.281)
_cons	-2.616*	-2.873**	-2.925**
	(1.039)	(1.065)	(1.086)
N	212	212	212
BIC	267.1	270.8	276.1

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 11

FL Statewide Results W/Ideology

	(1) For Raise	(2) For Raise	(3) For Raise
Self-interest	0.194 (0.286)	0.0823 (0.298)	1.193* (0.571)
age	0.00927 (0.006)	0.0102 (0.006)	0.0112 (0.006)
education	-0.00417 (0.093)	0.0220 (0.095)	0.0158 (0.096)
sex	0.293 (0.196)	0.294 (0.201)	0.313 (0.203)
race	-0.402 (0.211)	-0.253 (0.219)	-0.286 (0.221)
ideology		0.346*** (0.077)	0.439*** (0.089)
Ideology and Self-interest			-0.396* (0.171)
_cons	-0.570 (0.574)	-1.691** (0.640)	-1.961** (0.658)
N	447	447	447
BIC	645.7	630.0	631.0

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 12

National Minimum Wage Results W/Ideology

	(1) For Raise	(2) For Raise	(3) For Raise
Self-interest	0.164*	0.0521	0.741***
	(0.067)	(0.069)	(0.143)
age	0.00252	0.00364**	0.00367**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
education	0.121***	0.145***	0.141***
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)
sex	0.315***	0.285***	0.286***
	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.047)
race	-0.386***	-0.227***	-0.230***
	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.056)
ideology		0.347***	0.397***
		(0.018)	(0.020)
ideology and self-interest			-0.231***
			(0.042)
_cons	-0.581***	-1.729***	-1.846***
	(0.128)	(0.145)	(0.147)
N	7805	7805	7805
BIC	10673.0	10269.5	10248.9

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

VITA

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