Electoral Reinforcement and the Dynamics of Partisanship Strength

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The partisanship strength of individuals is investigated as dependent upon the cumulative effect of their electoral decisions. Using data from the 1956-1960 and 1972-1976 American National Election Studies (NES), voters who reinforce their party identification through loyal presidential vote choices over their life-cycle were found to experience gains in partisanship strength to a larger degree than those who vote for different parties or who do not vote. Additionally, short-term forces such as defecting from one's party identification in a single election or casting a split-ticket vote hinder life-cycle gains in partisanship. The totality of the evidence shows that the dynamics of partisanship may be better understood if the absence or presence of electoral reinforcement is accounted for across several presidential elections and across the entire ballot in a single election.

The relationship between modern democracy and political parties has long been observed as indispensable (Schattschneider 1942). But how individuals form their party identification, and whether or not strong and enduring ties facilitate the operation of democracy are topics lacking consensus and direction. It may be helpful to begin an investigation into the dynamics of partisanship with a brief survey of the comparisons researchers employ when confronted with the task of conveying what partisanship "is like": "religious affiliation" (Gerber and Green 1998, 795), "perceptual filter" (McDonald and Howell 1982, 83), "sea anchor" (Franklin and Jackson 1983, 969), "traitlike self-image" (Dennis 1991, 61), and "unifying centripetal force" (Wattenberg 1996, 1). Analogies that stress partisanship as a disposition have been countered with comparisons that stress its endogeneity to other political attitudes. This view is exemplified by the classic example of Harold Hotelling (1929), who analogized the process of choosing a party based upon ideological considerations to patronizing a supermarket based upon geographic proximity. Certainly, these comparisons draw distinct images of how we should think about partisanship. Is party identification akin to one's religion? Or is it more like choosing between a supermarket and the corner grocer?

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Assumptions of whether partisanship is a long-term, relatively enduring phenomenon or whether it is more reliant on short-term influences have manifested in the research designs of partisan dynamics. The prevailing view suggests that short-term issue concerns and government performance considerations are the forces that best account for changes in the strength and direction of partisanship (Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Franklin 1984; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson 1989; Achen 1992). Franklin and Jackson summarized this view with the statement: "the impetus for (partisan) change comes from shifts in people's perceived party proximities relative to their own issue preferences" (1983, 968).

This study breaks from the research cited above on two theoretical fronts. First, electoral decisions, such as the presidential vote, are posited as the proximate cause of partisanship, or a kind of summary measure that captures all political perceptions and attitudes in predicting the dependent variable of interest. Second, the long-term effects of the proximate cause (a.k.a. one's voting behavior over the life-cycle) is hypothesized to provide the fullest accounting for the ebb and flow of partisanship. When viewed as a proximate cause, the act of voting becomes the manifestation of the numerous influences swirling around voters in a political campaign. While factors such as issues and candidate appeal drive vote choice, this study maintains that they account for partisan change through the explanatory power of electoral behavior.

The next section briefly reviews the literature on the determinants of partisan dynamics. The following section reviews two prescriptions that may produce a more valid measure when estimating the vote choice/partisanship strength relationship. Employing these prescriptions, the subsequent analysis section estimates the long and short-term effects of voting behavior on partisanship strength with panel data from the 1956-1960 and 1972-1976 NES panel studies.[1] The article concludes with comments regarding the importance of evaluating voting behavior both across time and across the ballot when estimating the dynamics of partisanship strength.

Underlying Causes of Partisanship Strength

Investigations into the determinants of partisanship strength typically involve estimating the predictive capabilities of some defined influence while controlling for the explanatory power of past partisanship. If the defined influence demonstrates predictive power, in spite of the lagged dependent variable, it can establish the dynamics of partisanship. The influences identified as determinants of partisanship vary considerably, and they extend back to the introduction of the party identification model (Campbell, Converse,

Miller, and Stokes 1960). While the authors of *The American Voter* designated party identification as the most important long-term force in explaining political behavior, they also maintained that the strength of this "catch-all" variable was endogenous to life-cycle effects. In other words, the extent to which individuals identify with a party can be explained as a function of time spent in the electorate. Evidence showed that older citizens in the United States were, on average, stronger partisans and less likely to claim independent identification than their younger counterparts (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1964, 93).

The electoral experience explanation incited a lively debate with differing interpretations, one leaving a marked lack of consensus on the matter. Table 1 provides an overview of three interpretations with the corresponding works that have shown supporting evidence. The rows in Table 1 represent three theoretical demarcation lines separating the competing explanations of partisanship strength.[2] The two columns juxtaposed to the explanation represent an additional cleavage line that exists within the broad explanation.

Much of the literature generated regarding partisan dynamics takes the form of challenges to the argument that electoral experience fosters partisanship strength. The comparative study of electorates with varying degrees of electoral experience by Converse (1969) showed that the positive relationship between age and partisanship strength withered without long and sustained electoral histories.[3] An alternative explanation is that partisanship strength was better explained by period or generational effects (Glenn and Hefner 1972; Crewe 1974; Abramson 1976). These arguments were bolstered by the apparent dealignment pervading the American electorate beginning in the late 1960s. Unlike the steadfast partisanship of the World War II Generation, evidence showed that "Baby Boomers" did not follow suit. In response, Converse (1976) maintained that life-cycle and generational effects were not mutually exclusive. Rather, both short and long-term forces operated simultaneously to determine the ebb and flow of partisanship. Still, Niemi, Powell, Evans and Stanley (1985) refuted the notion that age is simply a proxy for electoral experience, and they showed there is a curvilinear relationship between strength and age in most countries regardless of democratic electoral experience.[4]

Studies that explain party identification from the rational choice perspective diverge from *The American Voter* premise that posits party identification as a long-term, psychological attachment. Rather, one's partisanship merely reflects issue orientations or beliefs about the incumbent party's performance. This made an important theoretical distinction between thinking about partisanship as a manifestation of short-term political currents as opposed to the alternative view that partisanship shades all political

Table 1. Partisanship Strength Determined as a Function of Time, Context, and Rational Evaluations

Time (Life-Cycle)	**Age in Years**: Individuals become stronger partisans as they age—"electoral experience" *is not* a prerequisite for life-cycle gains in partisanship strength (Niemi, Powell, Evans, Stanley 1985; Wong 2000).	**Electoral Experience**: Increases in the amount of time *spent in the electorate* leads to corresponding increases in partisanship strength. In established democracies, age can serve as a proxy indicator (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Converse 1969, 1976; Shively 1979).
Contextual Time Frames	**Period Effects**: Contextual forces affect party identification *across* generations. An entire electorate becomes more or less partisan together (Crewe 1974).	**Generational Replacement or "Cohort" Effects**: Contextual forces affect the partisanship of generations *differently* (Manheim 1953; Glenn and Hefner 1972; Abramson 1976, 1979).
Rational Evaluations	**Issue Proximity**: Partisanship is dependent upon voter perceptions of issue proximity to the parties. These evaluations are updated as an on-going tally (Downs 1957; Jackson 1975; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Franklin 1984; Achen 1992).	**Performance Considerations**: Partisanship is dependent upon evaluations of the incumbent party. Incumbent parties perceived as capable stewards of the economy attract stronger and larger number of partisans (Fiorina 1981).

perceptions. Derived from Downs' spatial modeling (1957), rational choice interpretations maintain that partisan loyalties simply reflect the proximity of an individual's current issue positions (Jackson 1975; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Franklin 1984). Positing performance, rather than policy considerations, as the critical independent variable, Fiorina (1981) found that identification with the incumbent party increased in both strength and numbers during good economic times, while poorly performing parties produced weaker partisans and vote defections. While he found considerable support for his hypothesis, he observed a "pronounced element of continuity" in party identification across time (1981, 96).

The continuity of partisanship provided the theme for some studies in the 1990s, attacking earlier research for neglecting the effects of measurement error (Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green and Schickler 1993).

Green and Palmquist found that "when measurement error is included explicitly in the models of political behavior, the effects of performance evaluation, candidate evaluations, issue proximities, or vote choice on party identification are negligible" (1990, 872).

Achen (1992) showed that partisan beliefs are susceptible to the acquisition and evaluation of new political information, however, these dynamics stall as individuals age. This argument accommodated advocates of both short-term, rational evaluations and the long-term, life-cycle explanation. On methodological grounds, Gerber and Green (1998) challenged Achen on his finding that partisanship dynamics decelerate as electoral experience increases. They found that "current information continues to be important, even when voters have a great deal of experience with the parties" (1998, 798). These findings supported the "lifelong openness" view which holds that basic political attitudes are always susceptible to change (Downs 1957; Key 1966).

Problems and Prescriptions in Estimating the Effect of Vote Choice on Partisanship

While evidence has been brought to bear in support of the underlying causes stated above, the causal relationship between vote choice and the dynamics of partisanship has yet to be established convincingly. This section will review the way past research has estimated this relationship, and it will identify two inherent shortcomings with the approaches taken. Then, subsequent analysis will address these shortcomings and establish vote choice as a proximate cause of partisanship change.

Prescription 1: Including Long-Term Electoral Behavior in Predicting Strength of Partisanship

In the first examination of the vote choice—partisanship relationship in the American setting—Markus and Converse (1979) examined the extent to which partisanship levels in 1976 were determined by the presidential vote in 1972. The model also controlled for partisanship in 1972, and it included an estimate of changes in partisanship among voters and non-voters. The results from their model showed respondents who voted for Nixon in 1972 were likely to shift their partisanship toward stronger Republican identification in 1976, and 1972 McGovern voters were likely to follow suit toward the Democrats, albeit to a lesser degree. For respondents who voted, it was shown that prior partisanship feeds forward more strongly than among non-voters. The authors concluded:

> . . . [W]hen partisanship is not reinforced by consistent electoral behavior, it may weaken. The predicted effect of a deviating vote in a single election is hardly dramatic; indeed, it were, there would be reason to doubt the analysis. Nevertheless, the cumulative effects of a series of votes running counter to an individual's prior party ties might well lead to a conversion of partisan orientations at the individual level (Markus and Converse 1979, 1061).

While the authors made the inference that a series of vote choices could substantially influence an individual's partisanship, the analysis fell short in testing this proposition. Figure 1 provides a preliminary look at how multiple reinforcements in the voting booth may be necessary to build and maintain party identification.

With respondents divided into seven age groups, those who say they always vote for the same party for president increase in partisanship strength by .73 on the four point strength of partisanship scale (2.79 to 3.52) between ages 17 and 64. In contrast, respondents who report voting for different parties or never voting, experience comparatively smaller gains, from 2.41 to 2.66 for those who vote for different parties and from 2.46 to 2.56 for respondents who never voted.[5] Consistent with life-cycle theory, gains in partisanship strength stabilize in later years, closely resembling a log-linear relationship rather than a strict linear pattern. While a statement of causality based upon this histogram must be conveyed with caution due to the simultaneous nature of the vote choice/partisanship relationship, the case for electoral reinforcement certainly appears plausible with this first swath of evidence.

Prescription 2: Controlling for Across-ballot Consistency in a Single Election

Thus far, the arguments regarding the vote choice $\Rightarrow$ partisanship relationship have hinged on the premise that voting for the president is the only vote that matters.[6] This narrow focus overlooks the possible influence of vote choices for other elected offices. Does electoral consistency matter in regard to the voting decisions made across an entire ballot in a single election? This question is particularly important in light of evidence that suggests ticket-splitting is a deliberate act driven by political moderates to divide their government and balance policy outputs (Fiorina 1996). The policy balancing viewpoint suggests that one's electoral decisions are dependent upon one another, thus calling into question the primacy of presidential vote choice as the solitary influence on one's partisanship. Past studies have failed to account for the conjecture that across-ballot consistency may

**Figure 1. Comparison of Partisanship Strengths
Among Different Voting and Age Groups (1952-1980)**
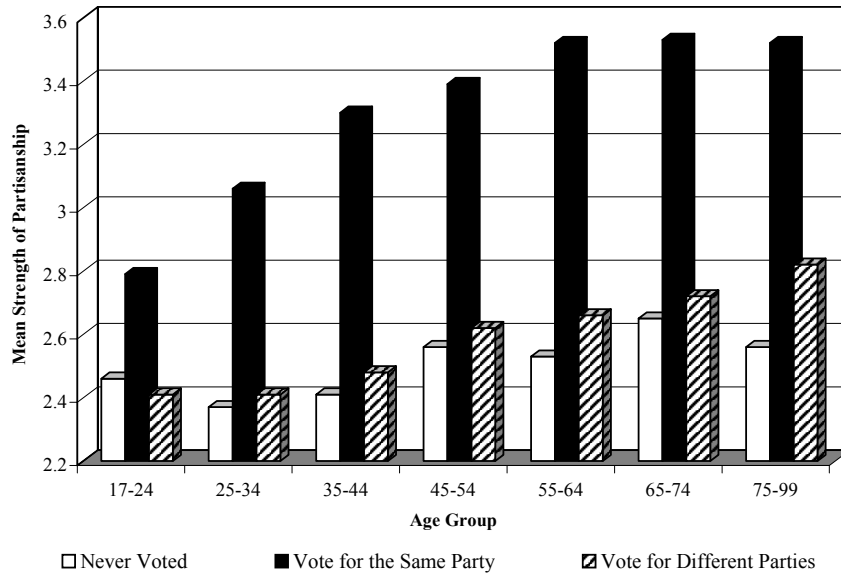
possess explanatory power independent of the influence of presidential voting behavior.

Fortunately, survey questions are available that ascertain whether respondents voted a straight-ticket for state and local offices in addition to the questions that record voting behavior at the federal level. Specifically, one NES question asks, "How about elections for state and local offices—did you vote a straight ticket or did you vote for candidates from different parties?" The answer to this question can be cross-referenced with federal voting behavior in determining straight or split-ticket voting.

**Evaluating Partisanship Strength
as Dependent Upon Electoral Reinforcement**

After Markus and Converse (1979), subsequent analyses estimated the explanatory power of a solitary vote choice on partisanship as part of a larger system, building their models around the "rational evaluations" approaches described in Table 1. These studies produced estimates of the vote that were hardly dramatic relative to the explanatory power of issue
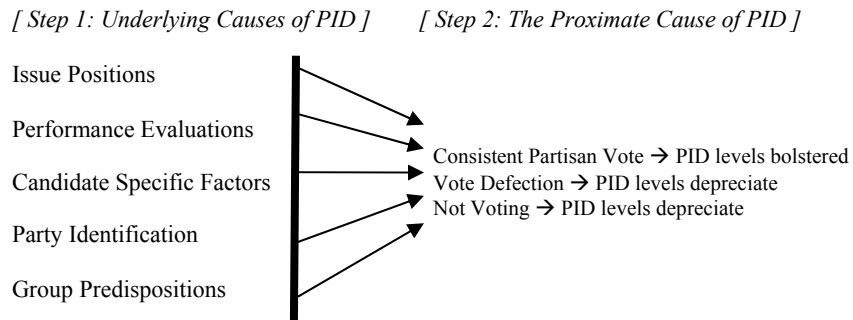
proximity (Jackson 1975; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Franklin 1984). Franklin and Jackson (1983) observed that "the voting decision, by itself and not as a surrogate for other factors, exerts little if any effect on subsequent identifications. We expect the forces that influence the vote and that indirectly influence identifications by this method have already done so" (965-966).

The observation that candidate evaluations, issue positions and other factors may indirectly influence partisanship through the choices made in the voting booth suggest a different causal route than that taken by these studies. Rather than lining up a slate of independent variables, including vote choice, and predicting future partisanship levels, the indirect causal route suggests a two-step process: first predicting the effects of issue positions and other influences on vote choice and then predicting the proximate effects of vote choice on partisanship. Figure 2 demonstrates how this causal process unfolds, where vote choice serves as a summary indicator for all of the underlying factors that influence partisanship. The second step in Figure 2 finds theoretical direction from traditional theories of behavioral reinforcement (see Skinner 1959), where partisan dynamics are driven by positive reinforcement (voting for the same party), negative reinforcement (voting for different parties), and extinction (not voting).

Rather than estimating the vote choice as an independent, underlying cause of partisanship done in as previous studies, the reinforcement model designates vote choice as a proxy for an array of underlying political influences. The reinforcement model, however, demands that voters must actively support same-party candidates in order to build and maintain partisan strength over the life-cycle. This assertion introduces a condition to the electoral experience explanation that only designates *the amount of time* spent in the electorate as a determinant of partisan strength. Simply living in a democracy with the right to vote may serve as a necessary condition for life-cycle gains in partisanship, but it is far from sufficient. It is hypothesized that active support for a party, manifested in loyal voting habits, builds the strong identifier. In sum, the reinforcement model differs from the explanations reviewed in Table 1 which exclusively account for partisanship as function of time, context, or rational evaluations.

> **H1:** *Consistent electoral experience, manifested in continuous support for the same party's presidential nominee, will lead to increases in partisanship strength over the life-cycle. Conversely, not voting or selecting presidential nominees from different parties will stymie life-cycle gains in partisanship strength.*

Figure 2. Causal Flow of Two-Step Partisanship Reinforcement Model

[Step 1: Underlying Causes of PID]   *[Step 2: The Proximate Cause of PID]*

Issue Positions

Performance Evaluations

Candidate Specific Factors   Consistent Partisan Vote → PID levels bolstered
                                    Vote Defection → PID levels depreciate
                                    Not Voting → PID levels depreciate
Party Identification

Group Predispositions

In addition to measuring the influence of electoral consistency across time, it also may be important to factor in the role of "across-ballot" consistency in a given election. Determining whether consistent ballots matter can be addressed in controlling for the effects of straight and split-ticket voting.

> **H2:** *Straight-ticket voting in a given election increases one's party identification in future elections with the party for whom the individual supports in comparison to individuals who do not vote or split their ticket.*

Estimating the Proximate Cause:
The Utility of Consistent Electoral Experience

Evaluating the causal arrow from vote choice to partisanship must consider the simultaneity risk that comes with this estimation. With cross-sectional data, the causal arrow from vote choice to partisanship easily can be flipped, as one's partisan stripes certainly influences one's vote choice. Turning to a non-recursive model such as two-stage-least-squares seems appropriate for overcoming the reciprocal relationship, but this approach also proves problematic. Non-recursive models only can estimate properly if there is an instrumental variable that indirectly affects the dependent variable through the explanatory power of another independent variable. If there is a direct relationship between the exogenous, instrumental variable and the ultimate dependent variable, the simultaneous effects will continue to persist and, as a consequence, typically overestimate the relationship of interest. In the case of ridding partisanship of the confounding simultaneity, "there exists no variable consistent with the requirements of an instrumental

variable" (McDonald and Howell 1982, 83). If all political perceptions flow from partisanship, at least in part, no political variable can exist exogenous to its influence.

Faced with this consideration, this analysis will employ a model similar to the Markus and Converse approach, where past vote choices predict future partisanship levels, while controlling for partisanship at a previous time. The analysis is presented in two-stages: first examining the effects of electoral behavior on strength of partisanship independent of across-ballot consistency and long-term voting consistency (Model A) and then estimating the additional effects of these behaviors in the full model (Model B).

Equation 1: Predicting Partisanship Strength with Both Short- and Long-Term Electoral Behavior

Model A: *Partisanship Strength$_t$ =*
   α + b_1 (Partisanship Strength$_{t-1}$) + b_2 (Age in Years$_{t-1}$)
   + b_3 (Voted in Election$_{t-1}$) + b_4 (Elections R has voted$_{t-1}$)
   + b_5 (Always votes same party for president$_{t-1}$)
Model B (adds the following interaction terms):
   *+ b_6 (Voted in Elections$_{t-1}$ * Consistent "Straight Ticket" Ballot$_{t-1}$)*
   *+ b_7 (Elections R has voted$_{t-1}$ * Always votes same party for*
      president$_{t-1}$) + u_{t-1}

In Model A, the lagged dependent variable (b_1) captures the stability of partisanship strength across panel waves. There is less room for forces of partisanship change with the greater the explanatory value of one's pre-existing partisan pre-dispositions. The coding of the 4-point strength of partisanship variable spans from 0, indicating a self-identified, "non-leaning" independent, to 3, indicating a strong partisan identifier. The age variable indicates the effects of age, independent of one's electoral behavior. Estimate b_3 captures the effect of voting in the election at time-1 on strength of partisanship four years later. Estimate b_4 provides an estimate for the number of presidential elections R has voted. Employing the respondent's age and gender, a count of *potential* presidential votes can be determined.[7] The electoral eligibility count is then interacted with a categorical variable capturing "how often one votes" in presidential elections. The multiplicative effect of the two variables represents the number of times a person has voted in presidential elections. The effect of always voting for the same party for president (b_5) is estimated with the next dichotomous variable. Those who say they always vote the same for president are coded 1 with different-party-voters and the never-voted-group forming the 0 category.[8]

Model B introduces two interaction terms to test the utility of electoral reinforcement forwarded in Hypotheses 1 and 2. Predicting the effects of across-ballot consistency on strength of partisanship is captured with the first interaction term (b_6). In the creation of this variable, the effect of voting in the election at time-1 (b_3) is interacted with those respondents who voted a straight-ticket. Consistent voting is coded 1 for straight-ticket voters (who remain loyal to one's professed party identification) and 0 for partisan "defectors," split-ticket voters, and non-voters.[9] The long-term effects of consistent electoral experience is estimated with the next interaction term (b_7). Multiplying electoral experience (b_4) with the always-vote-same-dummy (b_5) predicts the explanatory power of consistent presidential voting over the life cycle *vis-à-vis* inconsistent voting or not voting.

It must also be pointed out that estimates b_3, b_4, and b_5 take on new meaning with the introduction of the interaction terms in Model B. Because these variables serve as components for the subsequent interaction terms, they estimate the effects of inconsistent electoral behavior, or when the component variables are equal to 0. When interpreting Model B, these variables will predict the effects of defecting or ticket-splitting in a single election (b_3), the effects of voting for different parties in all elections (b_4), and the effects of never voting (b_5).

Estimation of Party Identification Model

If partisanship is largely stable over time, the lagged dependent variable should be close to 1.0 and the effect of the electoral variables should be minimal.[10] However, Table 2 shows substantial influence of the electoral variables, indicating changes in strength of party identification between the two panel waves.

As stated previously, Model A predicts the explanatory effect of electoral behavior on strength of partisanship without the interaction terms capturing across-ballot consistency and life-cycle reinforcement. The results indicate that the act of voting in the election, regardless of vote choice, increases strength of partisanship by .145 on the 4-point scale upon re-interview four years later when estimated with the 1972-1976 panel data. However, the 1956-1960 data do not reflect this shift. The variable capturing the number of elections R has voted is insignificant for the 1956-1960 panel but significant in 1972-1976. The effect of "always voting for the same party for president," regardless of age and previous electoral participation, produces significant effects across both panel studies. Respondents who say they always vote the same increase their strength of partisanship by .291 in 1956-1960 and .293 in 1972-1976. It also should be noted that the

**Table 2. Predicting Partisanship Strength
with Short- and Long-Term Voting Behavior**

T-1 Variable	Model A		Model B	
	1956-60	1972-76	1956-60	1972-76
R's Partisanship Strength	.471**	.467**	.450**	.456**
	(.028)	(.029)	(.028)	(.029)
Age in Years	.005*	.003	.004	.003
	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)
Voted in the Election t-1	.023	.145*	-.003	.146**
	(.065)	(.070)	(.074)	(.072)
Elections R has Voted	.004	.023*	-.031*	.002
	(.013)	(.013)	(.015)	(.014)
Always Votes Same Party	.291**	.293**	.010	.015
	(.052)	(.054)	(.078)	(.089)
Voted in the Election t-1 * Consistent Ballot t-1	—	—	.112*	.122**
			(.057)	(.057)
Elections R has Voted * Always Votes Same Party	—	—	.070**	.051**
			(.015)	(.014)
Constant	.750**	.527**	.906**	.652**
	(.115)	(.123)	(.117)	(.125)
Standard Error	.775	.794	.767	.789
r^2	.324	.355	.341	.367
N	1,076	1,066	1,076	1,066

Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
**significant at .01 level, one-tailed test; *significant at .05 level, one-tailed test
Dependent Variable: Pre-election strength of partisanship in 1960 and 1976, coded 0 (Independent); +3 (Strong Partisan Identifier)

effect of age only shows significant results in the 1956-1960 panel. For both models, the preponderance of evidence regarding the effects of age on strength of partisanship supports the conjecture that life-cycle effects serve only as a surrogate for electoral behavior.

With the introduction of the interaction terms in Model B, Hypotheses 1 and 2 can be tested. First, the multiplicative effect of "always votes same" and electoral experience ("elections R has voted") produces significant results across both panel studies. For same-party-voting-loyalists, each addi-

tional presidential vote increases strength of partisanship by .070 in 1956-1960 and .051 in 1972-1976, compared to -.031 and .002 for non-voters and voters who cast presidential votes for different parties. In other words, consistent voters build their partisanship strength while inconsistent voters experience a depreciation of strength in the 1956-1960 panel and a null effect in the 1972-1976 panel. Substantively, this interaction term shows that the effect of one solitary vote choice on political partisanship does not account for a sizeable change in partisanship strength. However, it can be inferred that the cumulative effect of multiple consistent votes over the life-cycle builds the strong partisan identifier, providing strong support for Hypothesis 1.

The effect of across ballot consistency in a single election is the concern of Hypothesis 2 and "voted in t-1 election" * "consistent ballot" estimates its effect. For voters who cast a straight ticket, consistent with their professed party identification, strength of partisanship increases four years later by .112 between 1956-1960 and .122 between 1972-1976, compared to non-voters, split-ticket voters, and/or partisan defectors. Evaluating the results from Hypotheses 1 and 2 together, the absence or presence of electoral consistency across time and across the ballot provides considerable explanatory value in understanding the absence or presence of life-cycle gains in partisanship strength. Additionally, the introduction of the interaction terms produces a larger R^2 for both panel analyses, indicating better model specification.

Conclusion

The act of voting has recently been evaluated as a political action that can become "habit-forming" with several reinforcements (Green and Gerber 2000). The evidence shown here suggests that the study of voting as self-reinforced behavior can tell us a great deal more than simply predicting turnout. Namely, one's voting decisions offer a reliable indicator of how party identification will change over time. Same-party-voting-loyalists experience increases in strength over the life-cycle while evidence is mixed for the others.[11] This finding establishes the importance of reinforcement as a necessary and sufficient cause in the building and maintenance of party identification. Additionally, the importance of team loyalty becomes apparent when the effects of across-ballot consistency are controlled. Whether or not individuals cast a straight ticket serves as a viable predictor of future partisanship levels.

While the importance of electoral reinforcement is established, it would be remiss to think about elections as a grand Pavlovian experiment. Elections are about candidate appeal and salient issues. These factors, shaded by

partisan predispositions, produce the vote choice that drives the dynamics of partisanship. Neglecting either stage of the causal process undermines our ability to account for partisanship change.

APPENDIX
Question Wording

Self-Identified Partisanship: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" If response was Republican or Democrat: "Would you call yourself a strong Republican [Democrat] or not a very strong Republican [Democrat]?" If response was Independent: "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?"

Coded: Strong (Strong Republican or Strong Democrat 3); Not Very Strong (Weak Republican or Weak Democrat 2); Republican (Independent Leaning Republican 1); Democratic (Independent Leaning Democrat 1); Neither (Independent 0)

How Often Respondent Votes For President: "In the elections for president since you have been old enough to vote, would you say that you have voted in all of them, most of them, some of them, or none of them?"

Coded: Voted in all of them (1.0); Voted in most of them (.67); Voted in some of them (.33); Voted in none of them or not old enough to vote (0). [The electoral experience variable multiplies the values shown in parentheses by the number of elections the respondent has been eligible to vote based upon age and gender.]

Always Vote for the Same Party for President: "Have you always voted for the same party or have you voted for different parties for president?" (If same) "Which Party was that?"

Coded: Always Vote for the Republicans/Democrats (1); Vote for Different parties (0).

Voted in the General Election: "In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people weren't able to vote because they weren't registered, or they were sick or they just didn't have the time. How about you—did you vote in the elections this fall?"

Coded: Yes, did vote (1); No, no, did not vote (0).

Voted a Straight or Split-Ticket: "Who did you vote for in the election for president?"

Coded: Vote choice in 1956/1972 was consistent with self-identified partisanship (1); self-identified Democrat who voted for Eisenhower/Nixon in 1956/1972 (0); self-Identified Republican who voted For Stevenson/McGovern in 1956/1972 (0).

"How about the elections for state and local offices—did you vote a straight ticket or did you vote for candidate from different parties?"

Coded: Voted straight ticket Democratic/Republican (1); voted split ticket between Republican or Democratic parties (0).

[The creation of the ballot consistency variable also controlled for U.S. House and U.S. Senator votes. Voters who did not cast same-party ballots for all federal, state and local offices were coded 0.]

NOTES

[1]All of the data analyzed in this study were collected by the American National Election Studies (NES) project, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, and are publicly available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). My analyses are based on data from the Cumulative Data File issued on the American National Election Studies 1948-1996 CD-ROM (1997), supplemented with data from the 1956-1960 and 1972-1976 panel data files (on the same CD-ROM).

[2]While all three determinants are posited to affect "partisanship strength," only rational choice explanations cover the direction of party identification (the actual party with which the individual identifies). For example, cohort effects do not predict the likelihood that a voter will identify with the Republican Party, rather, they only predict the strength of one's existing identification. Issue proximity models, however, predict both the strength and direction of party identification.

[3]Groups within a democracy that were enfranchised at later stages in life also provided evidence that age is a tenuous estimator of partisanship strength. In his analysis, women in Mexico did not begin to experience life-cycle gains until the right to vote was granted.

[4]See the exchange between Crittenden (1962; 1970) and Cutler (1970) regarding the notion that aging increases conservative beliefs.

[5]The y axis indicates mean strength of partisanship and is coded from 1 (independent) to 4 (strong identifier). See Appendix for coding rules in creating the strength of partisanship scale. These data were formed by combining the answers from 15 biannual NES surveys from 1952 to1980. Unfortunately, NES stopped asking this question in 1980. Due to the nearly 30-year-time-span from which these respondents are drawn, it should be cautioned that cohort or period effects may effect these frequencies.

[6]Anderson and LoTempio (2002) arrive at this conclusion when measuring the effect of electoral choices on trust in government in the American setting. They find that voting for the presidential winner increases trust in government while presidential losers experience a corresponding decline between pre and post election interviews. These changes, however, are not observed for congressional election outcomes.

[7]Women were fully enfranchised in 1920 with the adoption of the 19th Amendment thus setting additional criteria for the coding of this electoral experience variable.

[8]Concern over the validity of this measure (whether the respondents are telling/recalling the truth) warrants validation with different survey questions—specifically, the reported presidential vote provided in the two elections covered by each panel study. For the 1956-1960 panel, 89.3 percent of respondents who said they always vote for the same party for president reported voting for the same party's nominee in the 1956 and 1960 elections. For the 1972-1976 panel, this percentage was 87.1.

[9]The operationalization of loyal-straight-ticket voting (b_6) demands that respondents voted for candidates from the same major party for all federal, state and local offices. Respondents who did not meet this criteria were coded 0.

[10]The following results are estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS). Ordered logit yields similar results.

[11]Only the component variable, "Voted in the Election t-1," is significant in the 1972-1976 panel for Model B. This means that ticket-splitters experience gains in

partisanship strength as well as straight-ticket voters in this panel. All other component variables are either insignificant or significantly negative in Model B, showing that inconsistent electoral behavior does not build partisanship strength.

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