

Why Don't People Vote in Primaries? Assessing Theoretical Explanations for Reduced  
Participation in Primary Elections

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## Why Don't People Vote in Primaries? Assessing Theoretical Explanations for Reduced Participation in Primary Elections

### **Abstract**

Primary election participation in the United States is consistently lower than general election turnout. Despite this well-documented voting gap, we know surprisingly little about the individual-level factors that explain why general election voters do or do not show up for primary contests. We provide some of the first insights into this question, using a new novel survey to examine three theoretical perspectives on participation never before applied to primary races. Compared to general elections, we find that for House primary elections sizable segments of the electorate consider the stakes lower and the costs of voting greater, feel less social pressure to turn out and hold exclusionary beliefs about who should participate, and are more willing to defer to those who know and care more about the contests. Multivariate analysis reveals that these attitudes explain validated primary election participation. The implications of these findings point to new directions for future research.

Primary elections are how parties in the United States select the candidates who will represent them in the general election. In fact, in many congressional districts, where the distribution of voters is such that one party is virtually guaranteed to win the general election (i.e., safe districts), the primary serves as the only viable manner in which to affect who will represent the district. Yet despite the crucial nature of these contests, participation rates are often exceedingly low, and turnout falls significantly from general elections. In 2010, for example, 37.8% of the voting age population turned out nationwide, a full 20 points higher than the average in the preceding primary cycle (Gans 2010).

Although the fact that primary participation lags considerably behind general election turnout is well documented, we know relatively little about why this is the case. Scholars have, however, examined the correlates of primary participation across a number of contexts. These include, for example, investigations of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, as well as policy preferences, of primary voters, as well as the extent to which this group is representative of general election participants, nonvoters, or the population as a whole (Bartels 1988; Geer 1988; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Norrander 1986, 1989). Other work evaluates how the structure of the primary (open or closed), the nature of the contest (primary or caucus), and/or the characteristics of the campaign (e.g., competitiveness, spending, or mobilization) affect who participates (Jewitt and Treul 2014; Karpowitz and Pope Forthcoming; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Kenney and Rice 1985; Norrander 1986). What remains unclear, however, is why some voters choose to participate in primary elections, while others skip these races but still vote in other, more high profile contests (such as general elections).

Understanding this question has important policy implications. For example, congressional primaries are often cited as the cause of increasingly polarized candidates and

behavior in Congress (e.g., Ansolabehere et al. 2001; McCarty et al. 2006). In addition, substantial work demonstrates that who votes matters for the types of officials elected and policies implemented (see e.g., Griffin and Newman 2005). While the differences are modest, previous studies suggest that the policy preferences of those who do and do not vote differ in important ways (Ansolabehere et al. 2006; Bennett and Resnick 1990; Citrin et al. 2003; Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Leighley and Nagler 2014). Although scholars disagree about the extent to which the primary electorate is unrepresentative of the general public (Bartels 1988; Geer 1988; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Norrander 1986, 1989), potential differences in preferences between voters and nonvoters mean it is important to understand why and for whom turnout declines in low-salience races.

We leverage a novel new survey to gain insight into the reasons why voters might sit out primary contests. In doing so, we test three distinct theories that have been used to explain turnout in general elections but, to our knowledge, have never been formally evaluated in the context of primary elections: the calculus of voting in these contests, the social norms associated with participation, and the willingness to defer to those who know more or care more about the races. First, we posit that, in comparison to general elections, citizens view the stakes as lower and the participatory costs as higher in House primary elections, which reduces the inclination to turn out. Second, we assert that the social norms associated with voting are weaker in primary contests, meaning it is more socially acceptable to abstain. Additionally, many voters maintain expectations about who should participate in primaries (e.g., only those who strongly associate with the party or who will vote for the party's candidate in the general election, regardless of who it is) that they do not hold for other contests. Third, given the greater informational burdens associated with these contests, a number of voters may be more willing to defer to others who

know or care more about the race, particularly when they expect that these individuals will do as good a job as they would in selecting candidates. Together, these theories may explain at least part of the drop-off in participation from general to primary elections.

Our survey of a nationally representative sample of validated general election voters (i.e., active members of the electorate), some of whom also participate in primary contests, reveals evidence consistent with each of our hypotheses. In asking about House primary, House general, and presidential general elections, we find that voters do in fact appear to evaluate differently the costs and benefits of voting, the social norms associated with this action, and the acceptability of deference in these contests. Furthermore, not only does a sizeable proportion of the population share these beliefs, but these opinions predict validated primary election participation. While the effect sizes are modest, measures for each theoretical perspective exert a statistically significant influence in predicting which general election voters also participate in House primaries. When we control for all of these explanations together, we continue to find supportive evidence for our hypotheses, particularly those related to the costs of voting and social norms of primary engagement. Our observational data do not permit us to draw strong causal conclusions from our analyses, but the results nonetheless provide some of the first evidence of how variation in evaluations across elections impacts the participatory inclination for primary elections. More generally, they speak to the importance of better understanding how these psychological determinations influence the decision to take part in different electoral contests.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we discuss in greater detail the three theories for depressed primary participation (in comparison to general elections) introduced earlier and explicitly link them to turnout in these contests. While each

perspective has been used previously to understand the decision to participate, we know of no studies that use them to understand primary participation. After introducing the unique survey we conducted and discussing how its design allows us to evaluate our hypotheses, we report our results. The final section discusses and concludes.

### **Voting in Primary Elections**

In this section, we present three theoretical accounts to explain the gap between primary and general election turnout. We briefly discuss each in turn and describe how they are consistent with observed participatory patterns. Of note, nearly all of the prior work discussed below focuses on presidential primaries, meaning we know even less about the unique dynamics related to the act of voting in congressional primaries.

#### *Stakes are Low, Voting is Hard*

The first potential explanation for depressed primary participation rates is rooted in the standard calculus of voting model (e.g., Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968), which emphasizes the relative costs and benefits of electoral participation. This model is often formalized as concluding that an individual votes if  $p \cdot b > c$ , where  $p$  is the probability that one's vote is pivotal in deciding the election,  $b$  represents the stakes of the election (what happens if one's preferred candidate wins rather than loses), and  $c$  is the net cost of voting (including becoming informed, turning out at the polls, complying with social norms, etc.). In this account, participation in primaries may be lower because the stakes of primary elections are smaller ( $b$  is small, for example because the candidates are perceived as more ideologically similar) and the choice itself is more difficult because of the limited information available to voters ( $c$  is larger; see, e.g., Neimi 1976), a problem that is exacerbated by the lack of party labels as shortcuts in standard one-party primaries. At the same time, because primary electorates are often smaller

and the field of potentially viable candidates is larger,  $p$ , the chance that one's vote may decide an election, is larger, which may tend to increase the potential returns to voting.

Other research expands upon the standard calculus of voting model to consider how the campaign environment and social norms can be incorporated as variation in the cost of voting. For example, campaigns may reduce the cost of voting by providing information that makes voting easier. Similarly, social norms about participation may impose a cost to not voting that can offset the costs of becoming informed and making it to the polls (i.e., the duty term referenced in Riker and Ordeshook 1968; see also Aldrich 1993; Blais 2000). The influence of both of these factors may differ in primaries relative to general elections. As primary election campaigns are more limited, these events may not target all potential voters equally. Similarly, social norms about participation in primaries may be different than in general elections.

Despite the widespread use of the basic calculus of voting model to explain turnout across elections (see Blais 2000 for a review), however, we know of no work that systematically tests the assumption that voters perceive differences in the relevant theoretical constructs for primary elections relative to other forms of elections. For example, do voters think the costs and benefits of voting are bigger or smaller in primary elections? Are citizens more likely to participate if they perceive the stakes of a primary election that shapes the general election field to be larger than what happens after the candidate field is set? Understanding these questions requires some direct measurement of how citizens perceive primary elections relative to other elections.

It also does not appear that there has been any systematic effort to measure perceptions of the campaign environment or social norms about voting in primary elections. Some studies have examined common factors that explain voting across different election types (e.g., Sigelman et

al. 1985), including specific comparisons of primaries to general elections (Geer 1988; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Norrander 1989; Nownes 1992). Other work has focused on the correlation between demographic characteristics, standard measures of interest and engagement, proxy measures of campaign activity (e.g., spending), and reported campaign contact to explain primary voting (Bartels 1988; Geer 1988; Jewitt and Treul 2014; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Kenney and Rice 1985; Norrander 1986, 1989). None of these studies, however, measure whether these factors are associated with variation in individual-level perceptions of the costs or benefits of voting or include direct measures of perceptions about the theoretically relevant costs and benefits of voting in primary elections.

#### *Social Norms about Participation are Weaker and Exclusionary*

A second possible explanation for low primary turnout relates to the strength and nature of social norms about taking part in these contests. Extensive work in social psychology demonstrates the powerful influence that social norms exert on behavior (see Cialdini and Goldstein 2004 for a review), and prior work shows that threats of social approbation for failing to participate in elections increase participation. In observational analyses, voting is more frequent among those who view this action as a civic duty, individually report greater social pressure to participate, or live in places where the perceived social consequences of not voting are larger (e.g., Blais 2000; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Experimentally, outreach that emphasizes the descriptive norm of voting raises participation rates (Gerber and Rogers 2009). Similarly, increasing the visibility of the decision to participate as well as other efforts that threaten revelation of non-participation are among the most effective messages for increasing participation (e.g., Gerber et al. 2008, 2010; Mann 2010). Despite this rich literature, however,



we know very little about how potential *primary voters* perceive the social consequences of voting in these elections.

Thus, the relatively low rates of participation in primary elections could derive from the fact that the social pressures that might drive participation in general elections are simply much weaker for primary elections. Moreover, in light of the possibility that citizens potentially understand that it is harder to choose among candidates of one party (rather than between the parties), it might also be the case that voters perceive less sanction for not participating because it is understood that it is much harder to know how to vote in primary elections than in most general elections.

In addition to general expectations about primary participation, there is also the possibility that the partisan structure of primaries in many states (setting aside the question of formal rules about who can vote, a topic we take up below in our empirical analysis) creates expectations about appropriate behavior. Partisanship is often a social and psychological orientation as well as an ideological one (Greene 2002). As such, those who vote may do so because they perceive partisan social pressure to participate in their own party's primary. Furthermore, social pressure about appropriate norms of behavior in primaries may shape who feels comfortable voting as well. For example, individuals may believe that they should not vote in a primary if they do not strongly identify with a party or if they might not vote for their party's nominee in the general election. This is consistent with work showing that many primary participants often vote in a strategic manner, with their candidate preference influenced by a candidate's prospects to secure the nomination and their electability in the general contest (Abramowitz 1987, 1989; Abramson et al. 1992; Stone et al. 1992). These sorts of norms may also discourage individuals from crossing party lines, or lead independents to believe that

primaries ought to be reserved for members of the party even when formal rules do not prohibit their voting. To date, however, no studies have empirically examined the potentially unique influence of social norms on primary election participation.

*Citizens Defer in Primaries to those Who Know and Care More*

A final explanation we advance to understand low primary participation relates to the potential for citizens to be more willing to choose not to vote in these contests out of deference, either to those who are better informed or who care a great deal more about the issues at stake. Because of the absence of party cues, citizens may need to acquire substantially more information to make decisions in primary elections than in many general elections. Given these heavy informational burdens, one possibility is that citizens are aware of their lack of information and are therefore willing to defer to their fellow citizens who are better informed about the candidates involved. Such delegation is more likely if citizens believe that those who would act in their place are likely to make decisions with which they would agree.

Previous work is consistent with these contentions and a willingness by some to defer to their more knowledgeable fellow citizens. Supporting the idea that citizens understand they often lack an informational basis for making decisions, Gerber et al. (2011) show that citizens are less likely to punish or reward elected officials for their policy positions when they understand that their own policy views are not well-informed. Similarly, experimental work in laboratory settings suggests that non-participation by less informed citizens may be an equilibrium strategy when citizens know there are more informed individuals available to make decisions on their behalf (Battaglini et al. 2008, 2010; Feddersen and Pesendorfer 1996, 1999). In the often information-poor context of local elections, AUTHOR CITE OMITTED find that citizens who believe those who vote share their interests are less likely to vote in local municipal elections,

even when their preferences in fact diverge from those who do participate. More generally, McMurray (2010, 2013) presents a model of rational abstention in which low information voters are more likely to sit out an election if the pool of expected voters is sufficiently well-informed.

In addition to deferring to those who know more, citizens may also defer to those who appear to care more about what is at stake in an election. There are a variety of reasons such deference might arise. One is that in a primary election, where the goal of the process is to pick a party's nominee, some individuals may believe that they will support their party's nominee no matter who it is, while those who feel strongly about the outcome may be less willing to do so. As such, deferring to those who care more may be a way to ensure that the party's eventual nominee performs better in the general election. Similarly, voters may perceive that those who care more about the primary election are more invested (e.g., better informed) in understanding which of the party's potential candidates is superior. Therefore, those who care more may, like those who know more, be appropriate substitutes for other voters.

Finally, apart from strategic motivations for deference to those who care more, individuals may also be motivated by a simple desire to accommodate those who appear to care a great deal about an outcome that is not a particular concern to the citizen. Indeed, in other more private contexts it is common to defer to an individual who feels strongly about some issue. For example, people regularly defer to a friend who cares a great deal about which movie to attend or where to eat when they have clear, but not deeply felt, preferences of their own. Even in the political environment, the assumption of logrolling models is that on those dimensions where one group feels strongly, other members of a coalition will defer while expecting similar deference in their areas of core concern (e.g., Ferejohn 1974; Riker and Brams 1973; Shepsle and Weingast

1981). In the context of primary elections then, we may witness a similar deference from those less invested in the contest's outcome.

## **Data**

As detailed above, despite the apparent utility of these theories in explaining the drop in turnout between general and primary elections, none have been empirically tested to explain this gap. At least in part, this failure derives from a dearth of adequate data necessary to do so. We need specific information about how citizens understand the costs and benefits and social norms of primary election participation, as well as the extent to which they are likely to defer in these contests. To our knowledge, however, no such information is currently available. To address this limitation, we undertook a novel survey of citizens' attitudes toward participation in primary elections. We asked respondents questions directly pertaining to each of the three theories posited above with regard to three different types of elections: House primaries, House general elections, and presidential general elections. As such, we can determine not only whether citizens possess attitudes consistent with the theories advanced above, as well as whether those attitudes explain voting, but also the extent to which those attitudes vary across election type.

Data for our analysis come from a survey we designed that was fielded by YouGov/Polimetrix from June 27 to July 3, 2014. In keeping with our desire to compare primary versus general election participation, we drew a nationally representative sample of registered voters who voted in either the 2010 or 2012 general elections (as determined by matches to voter registration records). In addition, the sample was stratified to ensure that 25% of the sample consisted of individuals who voted in either (or both of) the 2010 and 2012 congressional primaries (all vote history information was appended to the data). Our sample thus consists of general election voters, some of whom also participate in House primary elections. The final

dataset contains 2,000 completed surveys. Exact wording of all questions appears in the supplemental appendix, and descriptions of the questions used in our analyses are presented below. All analyses presented use analytic weights.<sup>1</sup>

## **Results**

In this section, we discuss our survey results. We first examine the extent to which general election voters have attitudes toward primary elections and primary election participation consistent with each of the three explanations posited above. Although the differences are modest in size, we show that in comparison to general presidential and House contests, a sizable percentage of this population does in fact view primary elections as lower-stake races that involve a more difficult vote choice. Similarly, vis-à-vis general elections, a number of respondents feel weaker social pressure to turn out in primaries, maintain exclusionary viewpoints about participation in these contests, and have attitudes congruent with a greater propensity to defer to more knowledgeable and interested citizens. We use multivariate regression to examine whether these attitudes correlate with the decision to vote in primaries. We find that even after controlling for many common demographic, socioeconomic, and attitudinal covariates strongly correlated with the propensity to vote, many of these perceptions do in fact predict turnout. As such, it is not simply the case that segments of the electorate possess viewpoints consistent with our theories, but also that these viewpoints correlate with whether or not the individual participates in a primary contest.

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<sup>1</sup> According to YouGov, 6,058 individuals were invited to take the survey, 2,723 started it, and 2,334 completed the survey. The AAPOR response rate 1 is 38.5% and response rate 2 is 43.5% (American Association for Public Opinion Research 2011).

### *The Stakes of Primary Voting are Low and Voting is Hard*

Three variables appear in the standard calculus of voting model: a citizen's perceptions of the probability her vote decides an election, the importance of the election, and the costs of voting. How do perceptions of these quantities vary across election types? To address this question, we asked respondents to answer parallel questions measuring each concept for the three types of elections. To measure the likelihood that a voter's ballot was pivotal, we asked respondents how much they agreed that "My vote matters a great deal for who wins."<sup>2</sup> Importance was measured using an item asking whether "The outcome of the election has a big effect on my life." Finally, the cost of voting was proxied using an item that asked whether "It is easy for me to figure out which candidate to vote for."<sup>3</sup>

For each election type, the proportion of respondents who agreed (somewhat or strongly) with each item is displayed in Table 1. Per the first row, it appears that respondents on average perceive that their votes have the smallest effect on who wins presidential elections and the largest on House general elections, with primaries surprisingly somewhere in between. (Ex ante, we expected the effect to be largest for primaries, in which a larger proportion of races are

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<sup>2</sup> Response options were strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Unless otherwise specified, all questions gauging the degree to which a respondent agrees with a statement have the same response options.

<sup>3</sup> We also asked several items designed to assess whether respondents perceived the direct costs of getting to the polls and casting a ballot in a primary election as different from general elections. We did not ask about perceptions of these costs for other elections. Of note, only about 8.5% of respondents disagreed with a statement that they knew where to go to vote in a House primary, while about 20% thought the lines would be longer than in other elections.

decided by a small number of ballots.) In terms of importance to the respondent, the pattern follows conventional assessments about the stakes of each type of election: Respondents perceive presidential elections as personally more important to them than House elections, and both are more important than House primary elections (both  $p < .001$ ). If one thinks of the benefit of voting as roughly the combination of this importance weight and the likelihood one's vote is important for the outcome, a rough measurement of the overall benefit of voting is formed by multiplying the two measures. Focusing on averages, this suggests that House elections have an average benefit score of about .60, presidential elections about .59, and House primary elections come in third at .54. Thus, when focusing on the benefits side, we would expect primary elections to have lower turnout than other types of elections.

[Insert Table 1 about Here]

Turning to the third row of the table, it becomes clear that accounting for perceptions of costs makes voting in primaries even less attractive, while perhaps offsetting the benefits to voting in House general elections. On average, respondents are least likely to agree that it is easy to figure out which candidate to vote for in a primary election (75%), with these percentages five and seven points larger for House general (80%) and presidential elections (82%), respectively (both  $p < .001$ ). Overall then, in considering a simple calculus of voting model, primary elections both offer the least apparent benefit to voting and the greatest perceptions of the costs of doing so.

#### *Social Norms about Participation Are Weaker and Exclusionary for Primary Elections*

We next examine whether the general pattern outlined in the previous section is offset or reinforced by beliefs about the norms associated with participating in primaries. In order to do so empirically, our first analysis simply asks: Do citizens perceive large social consequences for not

staying informed or not voting in primary elections? Furthermore, are those consequences different than for other types of elections?

To measure social norms, we begin with a battery of questions about these social consequences. For each election type, we asked respondents whether they agreed that their friends and family would be disappointed if they either did not vote or did not stay informed. Additionally, we asked them whether they would feel bad if they did not vote. Table 2 displays the proportion of respondents who agreed (strongly or somewhat) with each statement. Beginning with column (1), we see that only about 28% of respondents agree that if they do not vote in a primary election, their friends and family will be disappointed. However, the figures for the House general and presidential elections are 33% and 38%, respectively, which represent proportional increases of 16% and 34% (both  $p < .001$ ). Thus, social sanctions for not voting appear to be larger for House general elections than for primary elections, and even larger still for presidential elections.

[Insert Table 2 about Here]

By contrast, the second row of the table shows that not remaining informed appears to have similar and rather modest effects across all three election types. On average, only about 32% of respondents agree that not being informed would have serious social consequences. We note that because it requires much more information to choose candidates in primaries (within a party) than in general elections (across parties), the similarity of the minimal pressures to remain informed likely depresses primary turnout more than equalizing it across elections.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when we directly asked respondents if they thought not knowing enough about the candidates was an acceptable excuse with their friends and family for not voting in different types of elections, only 26% agreed for a presidential election and 30% agreed for a House



third row shows that overall personal assessments of guilt—a measure of internalized norms—appear to follow the pattern for expected social approbation for staying home. 59% of respondents agree they feel bad if they do not vote in primaries, and the figures are 12% and 25% higher for House general and presidential elections, respectively (both  $p < .001$ ).<sup>5</sup>

The descriptive analysis above considers overall social pressure to participate. It does not take into account that members of parties may perceive partisan-specific social pressure. For this reason, we also examined whether perceptions of the social consequences of not voting are different for individuals of different party orientations, using both the item discussed above about friends and family being disappointed as well as a direct measure that asks whether individuals should feel obligated to participate in their party's primary. In both cases, as strength of partisanship increases, the expressed norms about voting and expectations about the social consequences of not doing so are larger. These effects are also substantial. For example, agreement with internalized norms of voting ("Party members should feel obligated to vote in their party's primary") are about 23% larger for both strong Democrats and Republicans relative to their party's leaners (both  $p < .05$ ; see supplemental appendix Table 2).

There is also evidence that citizens hold surprisingly pervasive views that primaries ought to be restricted to strong adherents of each party. For example, as is shown in Table 3, about a

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general election, compared to 34% for a primary, an increase of 31% and 14% (both  $p < .001$ ; see supplemental appendix Table 1).

<sup>5</sup> We obtain similar results if we simply look at a measure of civic duty about voting in elections. 62% of respondents agree that voting in a primary is a civic duty, compared to 80% for a House general and 89% for a presidential election (both  $p < .001$ ). This analysis is available upon request.

third of respondents agree that only those who (1) will vote for that party's candidate in the general election no matter what, or (2) strongly identify with the party should participate in the primary. 23% agree that Independents should not participate in primaries, and fully 44% agree that partisans should not cross party lines to vote in the other party's primary. These views are held not only by strong partisans who have incentives to exclude less partisan voters, but by those with a weaker (or no) attachment as well (see supplemental appendix Table 3). As expected, across the four measures support for exclusionary norms tends to increase with strength of partisanship. Even about a quarter of pure Independents, however, also believe only people committed to a party's eventual nominee in the general election, or who strongly identify with a party, should vote in its primary.<sup>6</sup>

[Insert Table 3 about Here]

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<sup>6</sup> As one might expect, these exclusionary attitudes are correlated with the primary rules in the respondent's state. Compared to those living in states with no participatory restrictions on unaffiliated registrants for either party primary (i.e., an unaffiliated registrant can vote in either party's primary without having to register with that party), all other respondents are more likely to agree with each of the four statements in Table 3 ( $p < .06$  for all statements but "Only those who strongly identify with a party should vote in its primary";  $p = .16$ ). No similar pattern emerges for the social norms items included in Table 2. We also examined whether these state rules condition the effect of either the social or exclusionary norms measures in predicting the decision to vote in a primary contest and found no evidence that they did, with the exception that the negative turnout effect of agreeing that only those committed to the party's candidate should vote in its primary is larger in states without participatory restrictions ( $p = .07$ ; analysis available upon request).

Cumulatively, these data reveal new insights into the nature of social expectations for participation in primaries. General norms about the importance of voting and staying informed are weaker for primaries than for general elections, which may explain reduced participation. This weaker social pressure to participate in primaries is compounded by the fact that norms about who ought to participate in primaries are somewhat exclusive.

#### *Citizens Defer In Primaries to Those Who Know and Care More*

In addition to general expectations about who ought to vote in primaries, we also examine the possibility that citizens choose not to vote out of deference, either to those who are better informed or care a great deal more about the issues at stake. Our survey includes two general questions asking respondents whether they agree that people who know or care more should vote. On a scale from “Everyone should vote in every election” (1) to “The people who know the most should vote” (7), 25% of respondents provided responses closer to the position that only better informed individuals should vote. A smaller group of about 18% of respondents agreed more with the statement that “The people who care the most should vote” (7) over “Everyone should vote in every election” (1).<sup>7</sup> Out of concern that individuals may be unwilling for reasons of social desirability to state directly that they would forgo voting if others cared more about some outcome than they did, we also asked a separate question about the general issue of whether the respondent would give in to others if they cared more about a decision. On a four-point scale (very likely to not at all likely), 48% of respondents indicated it was very or somewhat likely that they would give in to someone who cares more than they do.

Overall, these questions provide initial evidence that at least some portion of the population would be willing to sit out an election if others knew more or cared more deeply

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<sup>7</sup> These two items are correlated at .7485 (Pearson’s rho,  $p < .01$ ).

about its outcome. Are these conditions more likely to be met in primary elections? We first examine whether individuals are less likely to believe that they have sufficient information to decide whom to vote for in primary contests. Above, we showed that fewer individuals believe it is easy to figure out how to vote in primary elections than in other elections. Here, we show that respondents are also less likely in primary elections to believe they (1) are well qualified to choose which candidate to vote for and (2) know a great deal about each candidate. Specifically, the first two rows of Table 4 show the proportion of respondents who agree (strongly or somewhat) with each statement by election type. Column (1) shows that while a majority of respondents (84%) agree they are qualified to choose candidates in a primary election, 26% disagree that they know a great deal about each candidate. By contrast, citizens are more likely to agree that they are well qualified to pick candidates, and that they know a great deal about them, in congressional and presidential general elections, a pattern similar to the item shown in Table 1 about having an easy time figuring out for which candidate to vote (all  $p < .001$ ).

[Insert Table 4 about Here]

These data show that on average individuals perceive themselves as less informed about, and somewhat less concerned with the outcome of, primary elections than either congressional or presidential general elections. However, knowing and caring less may not lead individuals to stay home if they perceive those who do vote as having different preferences than they do. For this reason, we also asked respondents to assess how well those who do vote in each type of election would do in their place if they did not vote. As the last row of the table shows, respondents are also more likely to agree with the statement, “If I don’t vote, the people who will vote in my place will do a good job of picking the right candidate for me,” for primary elections than for the other two types of elections. About 25% of respondents agree that other voters can

substitute for them in the primary, compared to only 20% in House general elections and 13% in a presidential election (both  $p < .001$ ).<sup>8</sup> Together, these data provide preliminary evidence that people might be more willing to defer to others in primary elections than for other types of elections.

### *Do Individual-Level Perceptions Explain Variation in Primary Voting?*

Up to now, we have presented evidence about individual-level and election-type variation in perceptions of (1) the costs and benefits of voting, (2) social expectations about voting in primaries, and (3) the value of deferring to others. Does variation in these perceptions explain variation in who votes? To assess the relative importance of these different theoretical perspectives, we take advantage of the fact that our survey includes a validated measure of primary participation that identifies those who voted in either the 2010 or 2012 congressional primary. This measure equals 1 if someone voted in either or both primaries and 0 if they did not. 25% of our respondents voted in at least one of these two primary elections. As a reminder, everyone in the entire sample was a registered voter who voted in either the 2010 or 2012 November general elections. Our analysis is therefore useful for understanding what factors are associated with some general election voters also participating in primary elections.

In order to assess the relationship between voting and these survey measures, we estimate OLS regression models that examine how these views predict primary voting. Because these are observational survey data we cannot ascertain whether the observed relationships are causal in nature (that is, we do not independently or randomly manipulate these views), but these analyses

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<sup>8</sup> We also asked respondents to evaluate whether those who vote in each type of election know more or less than they do. About 20% of respondents said they know more than those who vote in primaries, compared to 24% for presidential elections ( $p < .05$ ).

nonetheless provide initial evidence about whether the views are associated with real variation in primary participation. To assess the robustness of each finding, we also estimate models that control for common covariates of primary participation (education, age, gender, race, political interest, strength of partisanship, and income). In each case, the odd numbered columns do not include these covariates, while the even numbered columns do.

Initially, we present models in Table 5 testing the traditional calculus of voting model. (Given our strong priors about the directionality of these relationships, we report one-tailed p-values for our statistical tests of the theories outlined above.) In columns (1) and (2) we include measures of agreement with whether a vote matters to the outcome, that who wins the election is important, and that it is easy to figure out how to vote in the primary election. In our earlier tabular analysis, we displayed the proportion of respondents who agreed with each statement. Here, we utilize the full range of responses to create a scale that ranges from 0 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree) for each statement. Per the standard calculus of voting equation, agreement with each statement is expected to be associated with greater turnout.<sup>9</sup> The results shown in column (1) provide some support for this perspective. Individuals who strongly rather than somewhat agree that their vote matters are 5 percentage points ( $p < .01$ ) more likely to vote, while the same shift in agreement with the ease of figuring out who to vote for is correlated with

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<sup>9</sup> We also estimated models in which we interacted the measure that one's vote matters for the outcome with perceptions of election importance. Per the standard calculus of voting perspective, simultaneously agreeing with both statements should be associated with a greater likelihood of voting. However, the interaction is negatively signed and statistically insignificant. We note that the two measures included in the interaction coefficient are highly correlated: 60% of respondents score the same on both components.

an increase in primary voting of about 6 points ( $p < .01$ ). Believing the primary election is important has a small and statistically insignificant effect on voting (although in a model omitting the other two factors, it is positive and statistically significant). When we include in the column (2) specification a large set of covariates that are correlated both with primary participation and holding these views, the magnitude of the previously significant estimates is reduced by more than 50%. Believing one's vote matters now has a p-value of .10, while agreeing it is easy to figure out for whom to vote is significant at  $p = .05$ .

Next, we assess the importance of norms in columns (3) and (4) using two distinct measures. The first is an additive *Social Norms to Participate in Primary Scale* composed of the three items shown in the first column of Table 2 about whether an individual feels social pressure to participate in the primary.<sup>10</sup> The scale ranges from 0 to 1 with a standard deviation of .28 and includes agreement with the items about whether family and friends care if one (a) votes in the primary and (b) stays informed about the primary, as well as (c) the self-assessment of whether respondents feel guilty if they do not vote.<sup>11</sup> The second norms measure is an additive *Exclusionary Norms About Primary Participation Scale*, which is composed of an additive index of agreement with the 4 items listed in Table 3 ("Only those committed to the party's candidate or who strongly identify with a party should vote in its primary," "Independents should not vote

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<sup>10</sup> For the norms items, we also included a "Don't know" response. Answers to these items were therefore coded as strongly agree (1); agree somewhat (.75); don't know (.5); disagree somewhat (.25); and strongly disagree (0).

<sup>11</sup> The scale reliability coefficient (alpha) is .78, and all three items are correlated with one another at  $p < .01$ .

in party primaries,” and “It is wrong to vote in another party’s primary”).<sup>12</sup> The index ranges from 0 to 1 and has standard deviation of .35. We anticipate that higher scores on the *Social Norms Scale* should be positively associated with voting in primaries, while higher scores on the *Exclusionary Norms Scale* will be correlated with lower participation rates.

Per the results shown in column (4), higher scores on the social norms to participate scale are associated with greater rates of voting ( $p < .01$ ), while higher scores on the exclusionary norms scale are associated with reduced rates of voting ( $p < .01$ ). In terms of magnitudes, these effects are also somewhat substantial. A one standard deviation increase in the social norms to vote measure is associated with a 3 point increase in rates of voting, while a similar one-standard deviation increase in the exclusionary norms measure is associated with a 3 point decrease in the rate of voting.

One notable feature of the items included in the *Exclusionary Norms* scale is that some people who support those views may nonetheless meet their own self-expressed conditions for participation. For example, if one believes that only people who will support a party in the general election should vote in its primary, strong partisans are unlikely to find themselves conflicted between their party’s nominee and the other party’s nominee. By contrast, those who are less tightly tied to their party and believe that they should support their party in the general election if they vote in the primary may feel they cannot commit to doing so. For this reason, in columns (5) and (6) we interact the *Exclusionary Norms* scale with indicators for the different levels of partisan attachment. We expect exclusionary norms to be associated with lower turnout for those with less strong partisan attachments.

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<sup>12</sup> The scale reliability coefficient (alpha) is .75, and all four items are correlated with one another at  $p < .01$ .



The results in columns (5) and (6) somewhat support this expectation. Focusing on the column (6) results with covariates, for all groups (strong partisans, weak partisans, partisan leaners, and pure independents) exclusionary norms are associated with reduced participation, but the point estimates are largest for weak partisans (-.19,  $p < .01$ ) and independents (-.12,  $p = .06$ ). These point estimates are largely statistically indistinguishable from one another (although the .12 difference between the coefficient estimate for strong and weak partisans has a two-sided  $p$ -value of .10), but they nonetheless show that the group that empirically is mostly likely to deviate from a party (weak partisans, compared to strong partisans and partisan leaners who are often very ideological in their voting) has turnout behavior most correlated with holding exclusionary norms.

Finally, we consider whether variation in the willingness to defer to others is associated with differences in primary participation. To measure deference, we use agreement with the statement, "If I don't vote, the people who will vote in my place will do a good job of picking the right candidate for me." In both columns (7) and (8), the point estimate for this measure's impact on primary voting is negatively signed (although it is not significant in the specification with control variables;  $p = .16$ ), indicating that the willingness to defer makes sitting out an election less of a concern. Per the column (7) specification, moving from strongly disagreeing to strongly agreeing that others will do a good job picking a candidate is associated with a 4 point decrease in primary participation.

Overall, the models presented in columns (1) through (8) provide some support for each theoretical perspective: The unique costs and benefits of primary voting, social norms, and ideas about deference. However, we have not assessed how each perspective performs when measures relevant for each are simultaneously included in a regression model. Thus, in the last two

columns of Table 5 we estimate models that include all of the measures relevant for each theoretical perspective. These results are generally encouraging. For example, in column (9), five of the six independent variables are significant at  $p < .05$ . Supporting the basic calculus of voting logic, believing one's vote matters for the outcome and that it is easy to figure out who to vote for are associated with greater turnout. The effects of both norm measures are also substantively large and statistically significant. Finally, the measure of willingness to defer to others is associated with a statistically significant reduction in turnout.

When we include all of the demographic and attitudinal covariates in the column (10) specification, three of the measures remain significant ( $p < .1$ ). These are the measure of the ease of choosing candidates and the two norms measures. Those who strongly rather than somewhat agree that it is easy to figure out which candidate to choose are roughly 3 points more likely to vote in a primary. A one standard deviation increase in the social norms scale raises the propensity to vote by just over 2 points, while an identical movement on the exclusionary norms scales reduces the likelihood of participation by about 3 points. The other variables retain their earlier signs, but perceptions that one's vote matters now has a p-value of .12 and the deference measure has a p-value of .27. Thus, even after controlling for a number of covariates strongly associated with the propensity to participate, there remains support for some of our hypothesized explanations.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the importance of primary elections in shaping who gets elected and, by extension, who is represented, what policies are implemented, and the degree of polarization in Congress, turnout is substantially lower in these than in general elections. This drop-off has long been identified by scholars, pundits, and practitioners alike as a phenomenon with immense

political consequences, yet we know surprisingly little about what explains this participatory gap between the two types of contests. In this article, we provided new insights into this question by advancing three theories previously untested in this context. Using a novel survey of general-election voters, we show that voters view candidate selection as more difficult and their decisions as less meaningful, both of which alter the calculus of voting in a less favorable manner, in primary races as opposed to other types of races. In addition, individuals appear to feel less social pressure to participate in these contests, and often believe that turnout should be limited to those more invested in the party and more committed to voting for it in the general election. Finally, larger percentages of voters express an openness to defer to those who know and care more than them in primary than in general elections. These results provide, to our knowledge, the first direct evidence that these individual-level considerations are relevant when voters decide whether or not to participate in primaries.

These effects are relatively modest and only explain a portion of the difference in turnout across races. In addition, our analyses suffer from some key limitations. The first, and most important, is our inability to draw causal conclusions about these relationships due to the observational nature of our data. Because we do not experimentally manipulate attitudes, we are unable to rule out the possibility that the findings derive from our failure to include some omitted variable(s) that instead explain the observed relationship. Second, to the extent that we can draw firm conclusions, those conclusions are limited to a subset of the electorate; namely, recent general election voters, some of whom participated in at least one of two recent primaries. While we believe that this is the most relevant group for addressing our research question (why general election voters do or do not show up for primary contests), we cannot speak to the prevalence of these beliefs across less participatory inclined segments of the electorate, or the extent to which

any such opinions differentially affect their decisions to turn out in primary and general elections.

These limitations point to fruitful avenues for future work to explore. With regard to the first, scholars should test the theories posited here experimentally, either via surveys or in the field. For example, one could envision exposing individuals to messages that attempt to alter the perceived costs and benefits or social norms of voting in primary elections, measuring whether such a change occurs, and then seeing if this attitudinal change affects reported interest in voting or other participatory indicators. Similar efforts could be undertaken in the field, with outcomes measured using changes in observed political behavior. To address the second limitation, future work could examine different types of voters to determine whether the demonstrated relationships hold for other, less engaged members of the electorate, who likely participate even less in primary contests than the population we study here. Additionally, while we suspect that these attitudinal differences at least partially explain the turnout gap between general elections and other, less salient, contests (e.g., local elections), future work should actually test this contention.

These concerns aside, our work, using new data, appears to be the first to directly link our theories to the decisions made by voters about whether to turn out in primary contests. In doing so, we have provided some of the first empirical evidence about the individual-level beliefs that correlate with the gap in voting between primary and general elections. These findings provide important insight into the efforts to understand the consequences of low turnout in primary elections and the barriers faced in efforts to increase participation and improve the representativeness of the electorate.

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**Table 1. Calculus of Voting Attitudes**

Question	House Primary	House General	Presidential General
My vote matters a great deal for who wins	0.739 [.4392]	0.764 [.4249]	0.706 [.4558]
The outcome of the election has a big effect on my life	0.731 [.4436]	0.785 [.4107]	0.835 [.371]
It is easy to figure out which candidate to vote for	0.754 [.4307]	0.800 [.4002]	0.818 [.3857]
Observations	1981	1981	1981

Note: Proportion of respondents agreeing with statement (strongly or somewhat), using survey weights, with standard deviations in brackets.

**Table 2. Social Norms Attitudes**

Question	House Primary	House General	Presidential General
If I do not vote my friends and family are disappointed in me	0.282 [.4499]	0.327 [.4693]	0.379 [.4852]
If I do not stay informed my friends and family are disappointed in me	0.312 [.4634]	0.328 [.4694]	0.306 [.4610]
I feel bad the next day if for some reason I cannot vote	0.586 [.4927]	0.655 [.4754]	0.730 [.4440]
Observations	1993	1993	1993

Note: Proportion of respondents agreeing with statement (strongly or somewhat), using survey weights, with standard deviations in brackets.

**Table 3. Exclusionary Norms Attitudes**

Question	Proportion Agreeing
Only those committed to the party's candidate should vote in its primary	0.328 [.4694]
Only those who strongly identify with a party should vote in its primary	0.316 [.4652]
Independents should not vote in party primaries	0.225 [.4174]
It would be wrong to vote in the other party's primary	0.437 [.4961]
Observations	1997

Note: Proportion of respondents agreeing with statement (strongly or somewhat), using survey weights, with standard deviations in brackets.

**Table 4. Deference Attitudes**

Question	Congressional Primary	Congressional General	Presidential General
I am well qualified to choose which candidate to vote for	0.839 [.3680]	0.870 [.3362]	0.946 [.2254]
I know a great deal about each candidate	0.736 [.4411]	0.783 [.4122]	0.835 [.3711]
If I don't vote, others will do a good job of picking candidate	0.249 [.4323]	0.202 [.4016]	0.132 [.3387]
Observations	1979	1979	1979

Note: Proportion of respondents agreeing with statement (strongly or somewhat), using survey weights, with standard deviations in brackets.

Table 5. Correlates of Primary Election Participation among General Election Voters

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
My vote matters a great deal	0.144*** [0.054]	0.068* [0.053]							0.130*** [0.053]	0.060 [0.052]
Outcome of election big effect on my life	-0.031 [0.053]			0.015 [0.052]					-0.063 [0.055]	-0.001 [0.054]
Easy to figure out which candidate to vote for	0.167*** [0.044]	0.071** [0.043]							0.160*** [0.045]	0.077** [0.044]
Social Norms Scale			0.205*** [0.041]	0.106*** [0.040]	0.194*** [0.041]	0.108*** [0.040]			0.136*** [0.048]	0.073* [0.045]
Exclusionary Norms Scale			-0.119*** [0.032]	-0.093*** [0.030]					-0.106*** [0.034]	-0.091*** [0.032]
Strong PID * Exclusionary Norms Scale					-0.119** [0.052]	-0.065* [0.048]				
Weak PID * Exclusionary Norms Scale					-0.221*** [0.060]	-0.188*** [0.058]				
Leaner PID * Exclusionary Norms Scale					-0.068 [0.063]	-0.037 [0.058]				
Independent PID * Exclusionary Norms Scale					-0.127* [0.081]	-0.122* [0.077]				
Others will do good job of picking candidate							-0.120*** [0.040]	-0.040 [0.040]	-0.094** [0.042]	-0.025 [0.041]
High School Education (1=yes)		0.075*** [0.026]		0.066** [0.027]		0.066** [0.027]		0.069** [0.027]		0.067** [0.026]
4-Year College Education (1=yes)		0.176*** [0.032]		0.169*** [0.033]		0.168*** [0.033]		0.172*** [0.033]		0.169*** [0.032]
Post-Graduate Education (1=yes)		0.206*** [0.037]		0.195*** [0.037]		0.196*** [0.037]		0.196*** [0.037]		0.199*** [0.037]
Age		0.000 [0.004]		0.001 [0.004]		0.001 [0.004]		0.000 [0.004]		0.000 [0.004]
Age <sup>2</sup>		0.008* [0.004]		0.006 [0.004]		0.006 [0.004]		0.007* [0.004]		0.007* [0.004]
Female (1=yes)		-0.084*** [0.023]		-0.085*** [0.023]		-0.086*** [0.023]		-0.084*** [0.023]		-0.086*** [0.023]
Non-white (1=yes)		0.003 [0.031]		0.012 [0.030]		0.013 [0.030]		0.011 [0.031]		0.005 [0.031]
Political Interest=Some (1=yes)		-0.082*** [0.027]		-0.093*** [0.025]		-0.093*** [0.025]		-0.098*** [0.026]		-0.078*** [0.027]
Political Interest<Some (1=yes)		-0.028 [0.032]		-0.040 [0.031]		-0.038 [0.031]		-0.051 [0.032]		-0.017 [0.033]
PID Weak Partisan (1=yes)		-0.008 [0.029]		-0.022 [0.029]	-0.026 [0.046]	0.019 [0.044]		-0.022 [0.029]		-0.013 [0.029]
PID Leaner (1=yes)		-0.040 [0.030]		-0.054* [0.029]	-0.082* [0.043]	-0.060 [0.040]		-0.054* [0.030]		-0.048 [0.030]
PID Independent (1=yes)		-0.038 [0.032]		-0.064** [0.031]	-0.091* [0.049]	-0.046 [0.045]		-0.061* [0.032]		-0.050 [0.032]
Income Tercile 1 (1=yes)		-0.017 [0.031]		-0.013 [0.031]		-0.013 [0.031]		-0.018 [0.031]		-0.013 [0.031]
Income Tercile 2 (1=yes)		0.047 [0.036]		0.048 [0.036]		0.049 [0.036]		0.047 [0.036]		0.048 [0.036]
Income Tercile 4 (1=yes)		0.001 [0.032]		0.001 [0.032]		0.003 [0.032]		0.002 [0.032]		0.000 [0.032]
Income Tercile 5 (1=yes)		-0.038 [0.048]		-0.033 [0.047]		-0.032 [0.048]		-0.034 [0.048]		-0.042 [0.048]
Income Refused (1=yes)		0.103* [0.054]		0.099* [0.052]		0.099* [0.053]		0.097* [0.054]		0.108** [0.053]
Constant	0.056* [0.031]	-0.061 [0.106]	0.193*** [0.023]	0.014 [0.102]	0.241*** [0.035]	0.000 [0.102]	0.285*** [0.017]	0.057 [0.101]	0.092*** [0.034]	-0.035 [0.106]
Observations	1983	1983	1983	1983	1983	1983	1983	1983	1983	1983
R-squared	0.028	0.145	0.023	0.147	0.032	0.149	0.007	0.140	0.047	0.152

Note: Cell entries are OLS coefficient estimates with robust standard errors in brackets. Dependent variable is an indicator for whether respondent voted in either the 2010 or 2012 primary elections (1=yes). All analyses use survey weights. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1, one-sided tests for costs and benefits of voting, social and exclusionary norms, and deference variables

Supporting Information for:

**Why Don't People Vote in Primaries? Assessing Theoretical Explanations for Reduced Participation in Primary Elections**

This Supporting Information contains the following material:

Supplemental Appendix 1: Question Wording

Supplemental Appendix 2: SA Tables 1-3

SA Table 1. Lack of Candidate Knowledge is Acceptable Excuse for Abstention among Friends and Family

SA Table 2. Social Norms Attitudes, by Party Identification

SA Table 3. Exclusionary Norms Attitudes, by Party Identification

## Supplemental Appendix 1 – Question Wording

There are many elections in the United States, ranging from elections for local office to presidential elections. Additionally, there are primary elections, in which parties select their candidates for the general election, and general elections, in which candidates from the two main parties and certain others compete for office. We'd like to ask you your views about some of these different types of elections. Please tell us how much you agree with each of the following statements.

In a presidential election  
In an election for the US House  
In a primary election for the US House

I am well qualified to choose which candidate to vote for  
My vote matters a great deal to who wins  
The outcome of the election has a big effect on my life  
If I don't vote, the people who will vote in my place will do a good job of picking the right candidate for me  
I know a great deal about each candidate's policy positions, experience, and other qualities  
It is easy for me to figure out which candidate to vote for

Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Somewhat disagree  
Strongly disagree

Primary elections are subject to different rules and procedures from general elections in the United States. Please tell us how much you agree with each of the following statements, or if you simply don't know.

I know where to go to cast my ballot in the congressional primary election  
The line to vote will be longer in a congressional primary than in a typical general election

Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Somewhat disagree  
Strongly disagree  
Don't know

Please tell us how much you agree with each of the following statements:

in a presidential election,  
in a congressional election,  
in a congressional primary election,

If I do not vote my family and friends are disappointed in me...  
If I do not stay informed about what is going on my family and friends are disappointed in me...  
I feel bad the next day if for some reason I cannot vote...

Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Somewhat disagree  
Strongly disagree

Don't know

Suppose you didn't vote in a presidential election. For each of the excuses below, what sort of reaction would you expect from your family and friends?

I didn't know enough about which candidate to vote for, so I stayed home

Suppose you didn't vote in an election for the US House. For each of the excuses below, what sort of reaction would you expect from your family and friends?

I didn't know enough about which candidate to vote for, so I stayed home

Suppose you didn't vote in a Primary Election for the US House. For each of the excuses below, what sort of reaction would you expect from your family and friends?

I didn't know enough about which candidate to vote for, so I stayed home

Very acceptable  
Somewhat acceptable  
Somewhat unacceptable  
Very unacceptable

Setting aside the formal rules and procedures for primary elections, people have ideas about who ought to vote in primary elections. Please tell us how much you agree with each of the following statements, or if you simply don't know.

Only those who are committed to supporting the party's candidate in the general election should vote in that party's primary election.

Only those who strongly identify with a party should participate in its primary.

Independents should not vote in party primaries, even if they are legally eligible to do so.

Party members should feel obligated to vote in their party's primary.

Even if you are allowed to do so, it would be wrong to vote in the other party's primary.

Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Somewhat disagree  
Strongly disagree  
Don't know

Some people think that everyone should vote in every election, while other people think that it is more important to let those who **care** the most about the outcome of an election choose the winning candidate.

On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is everyone should vote in every election and 7 is the people who **care** most should vote, where would you place yourself?

1 – Everyone should vote in every election

7 – The people who **care** the most should vote

Some people think that everyone should vote in every election, while other people think that it is more important to let those who **know** the most about what is at stake choose the winning candidate. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is everyone should vote in every election and 7 is the people who **know** the most should vote, where would you place yourself?

1 – Everyone should vote in every election



7 – The people who **know** the most should vote

Suppose you were deciding on a course of action with someone, and you learned that they cared a great deal more than you did about what to do. How likely would you be to give in to them because they cared more than you did?

Not at all likely

Not very likely

Somewhat likely

Very likely

For each of the following elections, compared to you, how much do you think the people who vote **know** about which candidate ought to win?

Presidential election

House primary election

Know much less

Know somewhat less

Know about the same

Know somewhat more

Know much more

**SA Table 1. Lack of Candidate Knowledge is Acceptable Excuse for Abstention among Friends and Family**

Question	Proportion Agreeing
House Primary - I Didn't Know Enough about Candidates	0.342 [.4745]
House - I Didn't Know Enough about Candidates	0.301 [.4587]
Presidential - I Didn't Know Enough about Candidates	0.262 [.4396]
Observations	1997

Note: Proportion of respondents agreeing with statement (strongly or somewhat), using survey weights, with standard deviations in brackets.

**SA Table 2. Social Norms Attitudes, by Party Identification**

Question	Strong Democrat	Not very strong Democrat	Lean Democrat	Independent	Lean Republican	Not very strong Republican	Strong Republican
House Primary - If I do not vote my friends and family are disappointed in me	0.328	0.246	0.203	0.226	0.307	0.290	0.325
	[.4698]	[.4316]	[.4034]	[.4186]	[.4625]	[.455]	[.4691]
Party members should feel obligated to vote in their party's primary	0.682	0.596	0.565	0.462	0.660	0.672	0.816
	[.4662]	[.4917]	[.4969]	[.4993]	[.4748]	[.4708]	[.3886]
Observations	526	252	220	307	218	190	280

Note: Proportion of respondents agreeing with statement (strongly or somewhat), using survey weights, with standard deviations in brackets.

**SA Table 3. Exclusionary Norms Attitudes, by Party Identification**

Question	Strong Democrat	Not very strong Democrat	Lean Democrat	Independent	Lean Republican	Not very strong Republican	Strong Republican
Only those committed to the party's candidate should vote in its primary	0.350 [.4773]	0.289 [.4541]	0.207 [.4063]	0.260 [.4391]	0.378 [.4860]	0.354 [.4794]	0.425 [.4953]
Only those who strongly identify with a party should vote in its primary	0.349 [.4769]	0.252 [.4351]	0.246 [.4319]	0.246 [.4311]	0.386 [.4878]	0.318 [.4669]	0.388 [.4882]
Independents should not vote in party primaries	0.287 [.4526]	0.213 [.4105]	0.097 [.2969]	0.126 [.3325]	0.195 [.3971]	0.257 [.4379]	0.335 [.4727]
It would be wrong to vote in the other party's primary	0.421 [.4942]	0.367 [.4831]	0.294 [.4566]	0.356 [.4797]	0.535 [.4999]	0.531 [.5004]	0.568 [.4963]
Observations	529	252	220	307	219	190	280

Note: Proportion of respondents agreeing with statement (strongly or somewhat), using survey weights, with standard deviations in brackets.