Having Their Cake and Eating It, Too:
Why Local Party Leaders Don't
Support Nominating Centrists

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Abstract

Some theories hypothesize that U.S. political parties' formal leaders support nominating centrist candidates in hopes of winning general elections; and, therefore, that increasing their influence in primaries could decrease polarization. We theorized that *local* party leaders—especially Republicans—would perceive limited electoral incentives to nominate centrists and therefore rarely support nominating them. We evaluated this argument with an original survey of 1,118 county party leaders. In experiments, we find both parties' local leaders prefer nominating extremists to centrists, with Republicans doing so by 10 to 1. Republicans also spontaneously mention conservatism as desirable in nominees six times more often than centrism. This appears to be because Republicans alone expect extremists to be more likely to *win* general elections. Additional data is consistent with the mechanism we hypothesized: Republican leaders overestimate the electorate's conservatism by double digits. Our findings suggest caution about empowering local party leaders and highlight a new potential cause of asymmetric polarization.

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Over the last fifty years, political parties at the national, state, and local levels in the U.S. have increasingly nominated ideologically extreme candidates.[1] During the same period, formal party leaders'[2] influence over party nominations has declined; outside groups now dominate many primaries (e.g., Masket 2009). Many scholars have suspected that these two trends are related, with parties' and formal party leaders' declining influence in primaries contributing to the declining number of party nominations going to centrist candidates (e.g., Persily 2015).

Scholars expect party leaders to support centrists because parties are "the sole political organizations whose primary goal is to win [general] elections" (La Raja and Schaffner 2015, see also Hassell (2017, 2018)) and evidence suggests that parties are more likely to win general elections when they nominate centrists (e.g., Hall 2015).[3] This line of reasoning suggests a policy remedy that could decrease elite polarization: "enhancing the role of parties" and their leaders in primary elections through a variety of reforms (McCarty 2015, p. 143).

However, evaluating the potential effectiveness of this remedy requires understanding the way parties influence candidate emergence and primaries at all levels of government—not just at the state or national level where existing work about party leaders' preferences largely focuses, but also in local parties, where many activists and officials begin their careers. In this paper, we advance a theoretical argument about *local* party leaders' preferences in primaries. These leaders are worthy of study for two main reasons. First, local party leaders are already influential in recruiting, screening, and supporting primary candidates for local, state legislative, and even national office in many areas (Crowder-Meyer 2010, 2011). For example, in a survey of candidates for state legislative office, we found over 57% of candidates indicated that their local party organization was important in encouraging them to run for office (citation removed for review). Likewise, in the survey of local party leaders we present below, 46% said they "played a very important role in

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[1]For evidence of polarization in policymaking at all these levels, see Barber (2016); de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2016, 2018); Fiorina and Abrams (2009); Lee (2009); Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013, 2014); Thomsen (2017).

[2]For concision, throughout "party leaders" refers to the formal leaders of political party organizations, such as party chairs. Other work demonstrates informal leaders in parties are also significant, but they are outside what we mean by the term "party leaders" here.

[3]Hassell (2018) finds support for a different mechanism, that party leaders may tend to personally support moderate candidates (see also May 1973).

recruiting or supporting primary election candidates" for state legislature or U.S. House.[4] Second, even in contexts where local party leaders do not play a significant role today, many reforms intended to empower national and state party leaders to play a larger role in primaries may empower local leaders to play a larger role in them, too.[5] However, local party leaders may have different preferences than their national and state counterparts, meaning that how they act today—and which candidates they would support if further empowered—may not be the same. Yet, local party leaders' preferences in primaries remain largely unstudied.

Our theoretical argument is that local party leaders may not see the general electorate as preferring centrists (as state and national party leaders appear to) because of forces that particularly bias their perceptions of the general electorate. Most importantly, compared to state and national party leaders, we expect local party leaders to be less insulated from grassroots forces encouraging polarization and have less access to the sources of information like detailed polling that would allow them to form more accurate perceptions of the general electorate. Additionally, grassroots activists should find local parties especially easy to capture by installing themselves and their allies as party leaders. Conditions appear ripe for such dynamics to take hold among local party leaders in the United States. Local elites in both parties—and especially Republicans—have been surrounded by ideological activists who have sought to alter their perceptions of the public (e.g., Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Layman et al. 2010; Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016). Further, these activists have also often installed themselves as local party leaders (Skocpol and Williamson 2011); Persily (2014) thus notes reason to "fear...capture [of parties] by the extremes" (see also La Raja and Schaffner 2015, p. 22). Consequently, we hypothesized that local party leaders in this environment might not perceive strong electoral incentives to nominate centrists, which would in turn dampen their desire to nominate centrists or even lead them to prefer nominating extremists.

Using a methodologically diverse set of original experimental and descriptive studies, we find

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[4]Moreover, even the chairs who solely recruit for local offices play an important role in "building the bench" of candidates who will be in a good position to run for higher office; evidence indicates that the supply of candidates plays an important role in generating elite polarization (Thomsen 2017).

[5]For example, reforms to campaign finance laws that advantage parties and disadvantage outside groups in primaries could empower parties at all levels, including the local level.

evidence consistent with the implications of our theoretical argument. These studies draw on an original survey of county party leaders, which offers a rare window into how local party leaders navigate the strategic calculus of who to back for their party's nomination. This data reveals that local party leaders usually *do not* prefer centrist candidates. Moreover, in accordance with our theoretical argument, we show this appears to be because local party leaders do not see centrists as likely to perform better in general elections than other candidates. Republican party leaders even say extremist candidates are *more* likely than centrists to *win* general elections. Furthermore, as a methodologically distinct test of our overall theory, we show that local party leaders also overestimate support for conservative issue positions among the public — those composing the general electorate their nominated candidates would face. Thus, consistent with our theoretical argument, local party leaders' perceptions of the general electorate undermine the key mechanism that should lead them to favor nominating centrists.

In particular, in our first study, we presented local party leaders with conjoint experiments (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014; Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018) that showed them potential candidates for their party's nomination whose traits, including ideology, we experimentally varied. We asked party leaders which candidates they would encourage to run for their party's nomination, which would be more likely to win if nominated, and which would be more likely to remain loyal to the party if elected. Local leaders in both parties were least likely to prefer candidates from the ideological centers of their parties, and overwhelmingly preferred extremists to centrists. Intriguingly, and consistent with our argument, local party leaders appear to favor nominating extremists because they do not believe their party will face an electoral penalty for nominating an extremist and do not perceive incentives to nominate centrists.

This first study also uncovered a stark partisan difference: Republican local party leaders preferred extremist nominees over centrists particularly overwhelmingly. Indeed, when faced with a choice between a candidate more extreme than their party or more centrist, Republicans preferred the extremist by 10 to 1. Consistent with our proposed mechanism, we show that this preference may arise because Republican leaders believe that extremists are actually *more* likely to win gen-

eral elections than centrists. Republicans thus believe they "can have their cake and eat it, too": nominating extremists, they believe, provides both ideological and electoral rewards. This is especially ironic because evidence suggests that Republicans actually face especially high penalties for nominating extreme candidates (Hall 2015, Table A.4).

Our second study explores the underpinnings of this mechanism, eliciting party leaders' beliefs about the general electorate. We pair data from a large public opinion survey with data we gathered on party leaders' perceptions of public opinion on individual issues. Consistent with our broader theory, we find that local Republican party leaders perceive public opinion in their counties and states to be significantly more conservative than surveys indicate that it is, by between 10 and 50 percentage points.

To further corroborate our findings, our third study examines what party leaders spontaneously say about the traits they look for in candidates for their party's nomination. We find that party leaders rarely mention centrism or moderation but often spontaneously say that they prefer ideological loyalists. For example, Republican leaders mention conservatism as an ideal nominee trait over six times more often than they mention centrism.

Throughout, we show that our results are robust and generalize across partisan contexts: to counties that are evenly divided by party, to counties where each party is favored, and to counties that party chairs subjectively perceive as competitive. Weighting all our results by county size also does not affect our conclusions.

Our findings have two particularly important implications. First, to the extent potential reforms further empower local party leaders, they may empower individuals who do not perceive a trade-off between candidates' extremity and electability. Reforms may therefore benefit from a more surgical approach, empowering national and state leaders who appear more supportive of centrists (Hassell 2018; La Raja and Schaffner 2015) while avoiding empowering local party leaders. Second, they raise the possibility that local party leaders' preference for nominating extremists may already play a role in contributing to the asymmetric polarization of politicians and policy at the local, state, and national levels.

Theoretical Argument and Existing Evidence

Many political observers argue that party leaders' declining influence in primaries might have contributed to the growing elite polarization that has been observed at all levels of government in the U.S.[6] The formal leaders of party organizations can potentially influence primary elections in many ways: using their information and connections, they can recruit new candidates they like, direct financial and human resources to nominees they favor, and boost the fortunes of nominees they endorse (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Lawless 2012; Masket 2016). However, over the last several decades, changes to nomination processes and campaign finance laws have reduced party leaders' influence in primaries and increased the influence of interest groups and activists (e.g., Masket 2009; Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016). Many of the interest groups and ideological activists who have gained influence over the last several decades are thought to support extremists in primaries. In contrast, party leaders oversee "the sole political organizations whose primary goal is to win [general] elections" (La Raja and Schaffner 2015). As a result, party leaders are expected to be especially likely to support nominating centrists, as conventional wisdom in political science is that centrists perform better than extremists in general elections (e.g., Hall 2015).

This line of reasoning has important policy implications: it suggests that increasing party leaders' influence in primaries would lead more moderate politicians to be elected at many levels of government, decreasing elite polarization. Empowered party leaders, it has been argued, might use their influence to "clamp down on candidates and incumbents outside the mainstream" and throw their support behind more centrist candidates (Persily 2015, p. 132), "exercis[ing] a moderating effect" in primaries (La Raja and Schaffner 2015, see also Barber and McCarty (2015); Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018)).

Most existing work in this literature has considered the role of national and state party leaders, but has not paid as much attention to local party leaders. However, local party leaders are important for two reasons. First, local party leaders already play a significant role in many primaries for

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[6]For evidence of polarization at many levels of government, see, among others, Caughey, Xu and Warshaw (2017); de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2016, 2018); Thomsen (2014, 2017).

offices at all levels of government. In a survey of candidates for state legislative office, for instance, we found 57% of candidates indicated that their local party organization was important in encouraging them to run for office (citation removed for review). Likewise, in the survey of local party leaders we present below, 46% said they "play[ed] a very important role in recruiting or supporting primary election candidates" for state legislature or U.S. House. Second, even in contexts where local party leaders do not play a significant role today, many reforms intended to empower national and state party leaders to play a larger role in primaries may empower local leaders to play a larger role in them, too.

We argue that local party leaders may tend to have different preferences in primaries than their national and state counterparts, meaning that how they act today—and which candidates they would support if further empowered—may not be the same as their national and state counterparts. In particular, our theoretical argument is that local party leaders will be exposed to more forces that bias their perceptions of the general electorate, leading them to believe that the general electorate is more open to ideologically extreme candidates.[7]

There are several reasons why we theorized that local party leaders may not always perceive strong incentives to nominate centrists. First, we suspect that the same grassroots ideological activists who polarize the candidate pool also influence how local party leaders view the electorate. For example, in the contemporary U.S. today, sophisticated activist networks barrage local elites with expressions of support for extreme policies, via direct communication, at town halls, with protests, through partisan media, and more (Goss 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2005; Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016; Skocpol and Williamson 2011). A principal aim of these tactics is to alter elites' perceptions of public opinion and of the electoral viability of polarized candidates. As leaders reflect on what kind of nominees voters prefer, they may think of the most vocal activists (Miler 2009). Where these efforts succeed, local party leaders will tend to think voters are more

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[7]Our theoretical argument is agnostic with respect to the level of government at which local party leaders are influencing primaries. Consistent with this agnosticism, we explicitly varied the level of government in Study 1 below and did not find evidence that the results meaningfully differed. Our argument also has implications for all levels of government: in many areas, local party leaders recruit candidates for all levels of government, and reforms that empower parties in general may empower the local party leaders who are not currently involved in primaries for a given level of government.

ideologically extreme, and therefore that ideologically extreme nominees are more viable.

Second, local party leaders may also be uniquely vulnerable to false consensus effects and availability heuristics–they may be more likely to overgeneralize from their own opinions and the opinions of copartisans in their social networks. Selection could also play a role: people who believe their polarized ideologies are favored in general elections (versus those who do not) might be more likely to agree to serve as party chairs in the first place (Thomsen 2017). And unlike national and state party leaders, local party leaders seldom have the kinds of organizational resources that might counteract these biases, such as detailed polling, extensive data on a large number of candidates, and so on. Just as researchers with strong priors and small samples are more likely to reach extreme conclusions, local party leaders with fewer information resources may be more likely to conclude that their voters are ideologically extreme.

In the context of contemporary U.S. politics, we expect these kinds of patterns to be especially pronounced among Republican local party officials. At the local level, left-leaning organizations have atrophied in recent decades, while their conservative counterparts are experiencing something of a renaissance (in part thanks to strategic investments by conservative donors and organizations and a rich network of conservative media outlets that include television, internet, and radio (Blee and Creasap 2010; Skocpol and Williamson 2011)). Recent studies suggest that Republican elected officials over-estimate public support for conservative positions, but Democratic elected officials do not over-estimate public support for liberal positions (Broockman and Skovron 2018) and that Republican elites think differently about how to succeed in general elections, believing that nominating extremists allows them to 'fire up the base' (Buchler 2015). In light of these differences, we expect Republican local party leaders to be especially likely to think that ideologically extreme candidates can win elections.

Of course, our argument about local party leaders represents a significant departure from much of the recent work in political science on national and state-level party leaders. State and national party leaders tend to prefer moderates, not extremists (La Raja and Schaffner 2015; Hassell 2018). They have access to more sophisticated organizational and informational resources, and they focus

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on a broader set of election outcomes. However, even the scholars who have studied national and state party leaders have recently wondered whether their findings extend to local party leaders and expressed concern about the possibility that local parties "nurture . . . ideological activists" (La Raja and Schaffner 2015, p. 22; see also Persily (2014)).[8] Our original studies bear out these concerns and provide evidence for the novel theoretical mechanism we hypothesized—local political party leaders appear to prefer nominating extremists to centrists because they do not perceive nominating centrists as electorally advantageous.

Data

To test our arguments, we fielded a national survey of the chairs of the county-level (or equivalent)[9] branches of both parties in 2013.[10] We chose to study county leaders for several reasons. First, they are often the most active local party organizations in primary elections for state and federal office (Crowder-Meyer 2011; Lawless 2012); over 78% of the party chairs in our sample indicated that people in their county party organization have helped support a candidate in a primary for an open seat. Counties also provide a well-defined sampling frame that allow us to assess the representativeness of our respondents.

To administer the survey, we first manually compiled contact information for 6,219 county party chairs. We gathered this information by searching the internet for the name of every county in the US together with the name of each of the two major parties. In November 2013, we sent each chair a pre-notification and then a survey invitation at his or her email and/or postal addresses. (If both were available, we attempted contact at both.) We received responses from 1,118 chairs (18%), a response rate comparable to recent surveys of politicians (e.g., citation removed for re-

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[8]There is also some evidence that national party leaders' preference for moderate candidates diminishes ahead of competitive general elections (Hassell 2018), inconsistent with elites even at this level necessarily believing moderates are more electable.

[9]Some states do not have county parties but instead have parties at the parish (LA), borough (AK), district (ND), city (CT), multi-county (MN), or sub-city (MA Democrats) level. For simplicity we nevertheless refer to all respondents as "county chairs" throughout.

[10]Nine states were excluded because neither party provided contact information for county officials: GA, IN, IA, KY, MI, NH, NM, OK, and WI. These states do not appear to meaningfully differ in terms of their political composition; Obama's two-party vote share in 2012 was just 1.4 percentage points higher on average in the states we surveyed versus the states we did not.

view) and double that of many mass public surveys.

Representativeness

We conducted extensive checks of the representativeness of our respondents. As we face space constraints, we review them briefly here and present them in full in Online Appendix B. Response rates were nearly identical by region; for Republican (18.0%) and Democratic chairs (17.9%); and for chairs identified as men (18.2%) and women (18.5%). One potential concern is that only party chairs in un-competitive areas would respond. However, Figure OA5 shows that the underlying partisan composition of the areas where our respondents are from is fairly representative in both parties. Another possibility is that only chairs from very small counties would respond. Figure OA6 shows that we received a similar response rate in counties of all sizes, and if anything very slightly more responses from larger counties. Last, another potential concern is that the most ideologically polarized party leaders would select into our survey. This does not appear to be the case: we compare our survey to a previous survey that secured a very high response rate (45.5%) and found a very similar distribution of reported personal ideology within both parties (Figure OA9).

Study 1: Candidate Choice Conjoint Experiment

Our first study consists of a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014; Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018). Conjoint experiments force respondents to make trade-offs between two possible choices that differ along several dimensions. Providing respondents with a forced choice allows for a statistical estimation of their revealed preferences over each dimension. Providing multiple dimensions enhances the naturalism of respondents' choices.

In our experiment, we asked county party chairs to pick which of two possible candidates they would prefer to run in their party's primary for an open seat. Our experiments began, "Suppose there is a primary for an open [county board / state legislative / US House][11] seat in your county

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[11]The level of government was randomized to assess the robustness of the results. The results do not meaningfully differ based on the level of government displayed.

and the two individuals below are considering running." The survey then described "Candidate A" and "Candidate B" by displaying two side-by-side lists of the candidates' personal attributes. After the local party leaders viewed the candidates, we asked "Which of the above candidates would you be more likely to encourage to run for office?" Online Appendix D gives the full language for each condition and shows how the survey appeared to respondents.

Each aspect of each candidate's biography was independently generated at random: the survey supplied each candidate's gender (signaled by first name), age, occupation, experience in the party, life circumstances, personal characteristics, and political ideology. For political ideology, we described some candidates as more moderate than the typical voter in their party (for Democrats, more conservative; for Republicans, more liberal); we described other candidates as similar in ideology to typical party members; still others we described as more extreme than typical party members (for Democrats, more liberal; for Republicans, more conservative).[12] Providing several traits for each candidate beyond ideology was intended to enhance naturalism and to assess the relative importance of ideology to chairs' judgments compared to other potentially relevant traits. All traits (ideology, gender, etc.) were independently randomized, allowing us to compare how party leaders reacted to candidates with each trait to estimate the effects of each trait, as each trait is uncorrelated with the others by design. Each party leader was shown only one conjoint matchup (because the survey was also administered on paper, making multiple matchups impractical).
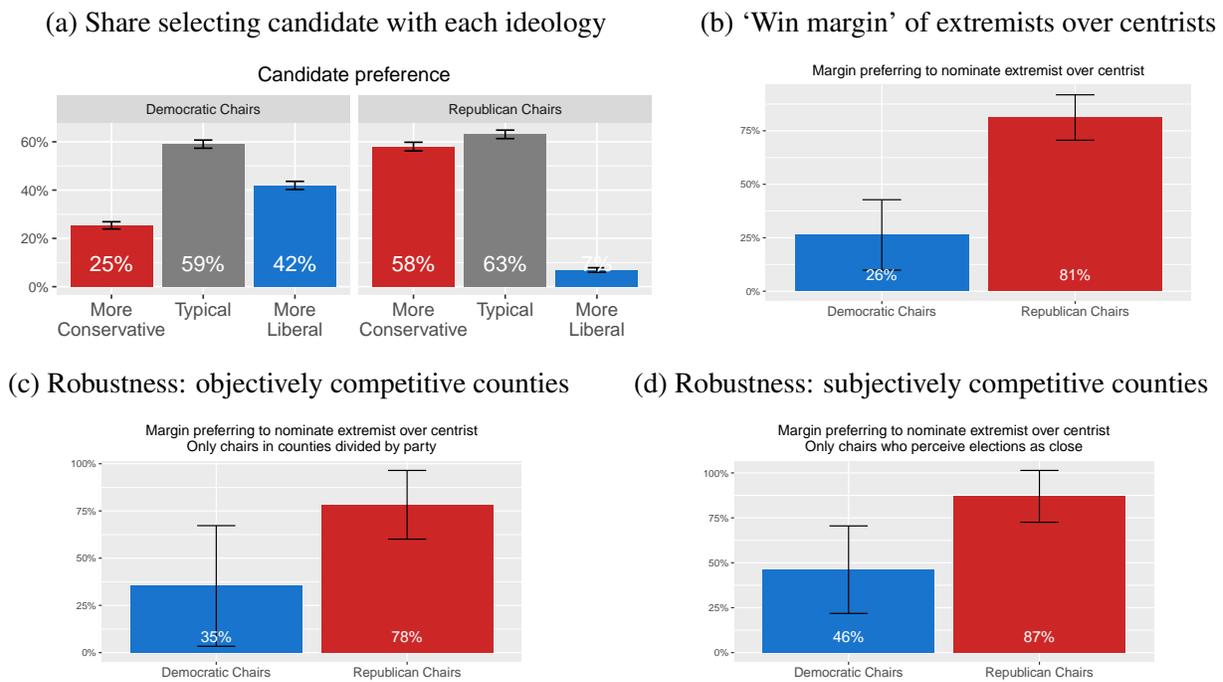
Results: Who Party Leaders Prefer To Run

Figure 1a shows the share of party leaders who selected each candidate type conditional on being shown that type, with 95% confidence intervals overlaid.[13] (Recall that other candidate

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[12]We chose this operationalization of candidate ideology because we thought it would be the easiest for chairs to understand. We also did not want to introduce social desirability bias by using elected officials as a reference point, because this would mean our survey implicitly asked chairs to describe whether they thought the existing officeholders in their area were sufficiently liberal or sufficiently conservative, which we thought they might regard as too politically sensitive. Finally, in conceptualizing the influence of party elites in primaries, the kinds of candidates that would otherwise prevail if median primary voter ideology were well-represented represents a theoretically-motivated baseline scenario. With this said, our results do not depend on chairs accurately perceiving the cardinal location of their primary voters or the hypothetical candidates, merely the left-right order of the hypothetical candidates; we are always conducting experimental comparisons between how a given chair chooses between two candidates, one of which is always clearly more conservative or more liberal than the other.

[13]Full results for all the conjoint dimensions are shown in Online Appendix E.

attributes were also shown, but that these other traits are uncorrelated with the ideological types by design.) The results are not encouraging for the null hypothesis we seek to disprove: that local party leaders prefer to nominate centrists. In fact, party leaders in both parties are the *least* likely to prefer nominating centrist candidates: Democrats are the least likely to select a candidate more conservative than their typical party member and Republicans are the least likely to select a candidate more liberal ($p < 0.01$ for both comparisons). For example, Republicans selected a candidate more centrist (i.e., more liberal) than their party in only 7% of the match-ups in which such candidates were shown.

Figure 1: Party Leaders' Preferences In Primaries

(a) Share selecting candidate with each ideology

(b) 'Win margin' of extremists over centrists

(c) Robustness: objectively competitive counties

(d) Robustness: subjectively competitive counties

Note: error bars display 95% confidence intervals. Panel (a) shows the probability that a chair selected a candidate of each type conditional on being shown a candidate of that type. The remaining panels calculate the differences between more extreme and more moderate candidates conditional on chairs being shown candidates of those two types.

To communicate the magnitude of these differences, we next consider the cases where party leaders were presented with a choice where one candidate was more centrist than their party and

where one was more extreme.[14] In these cases, party leaders preferred that the more extreme candidate run 76% of the time, or by a more than 3-to-1 margin ($p < 0.01$). Disaggregating the data by party reveals that this is largely driven by Republican party chairs. Democratic party chairs preferred extremists to centrists 63% of the time ($p < 0.01$), but Republicans preferred extremists to centrists 91% of the time, or by about 10 to 1 ($p < 0.01$). To illustrate the size of these differences, Figure 1b shows the 'win margin' of the extremist candidate in these extremist-versus-centrist match-ups, subtracting the share of party leaders who preferred the centrist nominee from the share who supported the extremist nominee. The error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Figures 1c and 1d demonstrate the robustness and generalizability of this finding. We first examine whether our results persist in competitive counties for two reasons. First, our results may be the most relevant to the parties in divided counties where more money might flow to parties in a reformed campaign finance system. Relatedly, one potential concern with these results is that many county party leaders work in areas where their party is guaranteed to win or lose elections, potentially reducing their incentive to nominate centrist candidates. Figure 1c therefore shows the results just for the subset of county party chairs in *objectively* competitive counties, where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012;[15] and Figure 1d shows the subset of county party chairs who *subjectively* perceive general elections in their area as competitive.[16] As Figures 1c and 1d illustrate, the results are robust when we examine these especially relevant subgroups. Indeed, if anything, party chairs who perceive elections in their area as more likely to be up for grabs are *more* likely to prefer extremist nominees, with Republican party chairs in such areas preferring extremists by 15 to 1.

In Online Appendix Figure OA1,[17] we also show that the results remain unchanged within both Republican-leaning and Democratic-leaning counties. For example, even in Democratic-leaning

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[14] Due to the random assignment, other candidate traits remain uncorrelated with candidate ideology, and the chairs who received these matchups are statistically identical to the broader sample.

[15] 34% of respondents' counties satisfied this criteria.

[16] We asked party leaders what share of offices their county party reliably won and include in this category those who indicated their party won between 26-50% or 51-75% of the time. 35% of respondents' counties satisfied this criteria.

[17] Figure OA1 also shows Figure 1a within objectively and subjectively competitive counties.

counties, Republican chairs are the least likely to select centrist candidates. These results are also essentially unchanged when we weight by county population; they do not reflect that party chairs over-represent small counties that may tend to be conservative.[18]

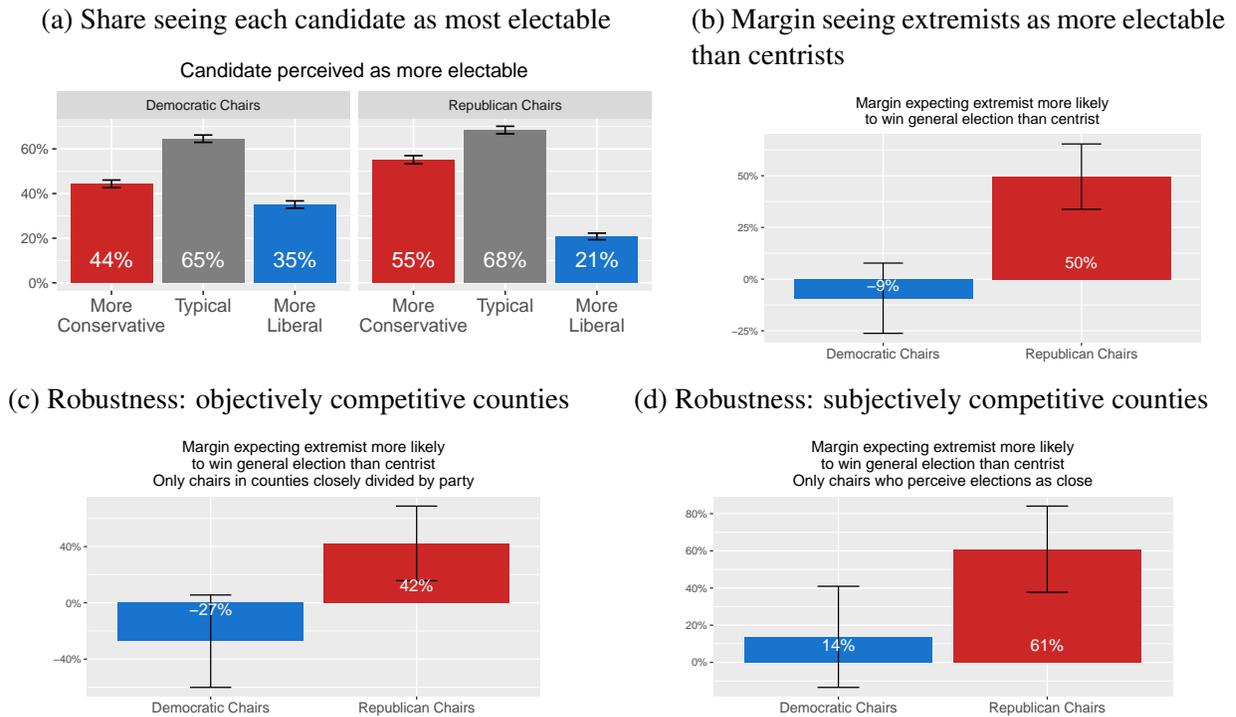## Mechanisms: 'Having Their Cake And Eating It, Too'

After party leaders selected which primary candidate they preferred, we also asked them about which of the two candidates they thought would be more likely to win the general election and which of the two candidates would be more likely to stay loyal to the party if elected. Unsurprisingly, party leaders were significantly more likely to initially select candidates who they perceived as having these qualities, by about a 4 to 1 margin for each. And, as expected, Figure OA2 shows that both sides recognize that extremists are very likely to toe the party line.

More surprising are party leaders' perceptions of electability—and the partisan differences in these perceptions. Figure 2a shows that both Democratic and Republican chairs saw more liberal candidates as the least electable ($p < 0.01$). This means that Republican chairs were most skeptical about the electoral appeal of moderate Republicans, whereas Democrats were most skeptical of liberal Democrats' electoral appeals.

To better illustrate this pattern, Figure 2b again focuses on cases when party leaders faced a choice between an extremist and a centrist. Democratic chairs are slightly more likely to see centrist candidates as more electable than extremists, although this difference is not statistically significant in match-ups between the two. The picture is quite different for Republican party chairs. Republican chairs see extremist candidates as *more* likely to win general elections. 75% of Republican party chairs indicated they thought the extremist candidate they saw in the conjoint would be more likely to win the general election than the centrist candidate they saw, a margin of 50% for the extremist candidates ($p < 0.01$). This difference persists for Republican chairs who work in closely divided counties and is even larger for Republican chairs who subjectively perceive elections in their areas as close.

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[18]We also found no significant interaction between candidate ideology and candidate gender. However, candidate gender and ideology do correlate in the population of potential candidates (Thomsen 2015), meaning that local party chairs' preference for extreme candidates still has consequences for gender representation.

Figure 2: Party Leaders' Perceptions of Candidate Electability

(a) Share seeing each candidate as most electable

(b) Margin seeing extremists as more electable than centrists

(c) Robustness: objectively competitive counties

(d) Robustness: subjectively competitive counties

Note: error bars display 95% confidence intervals. Panel (a) shows the probability that a chair selected a candidate of each type conditional on being shown a candidate of that type. The remaining panels calculate the differences between more extreme and more moderate candidates conditional on chairs being shown candidates of those two types.

In Online Appendix Figure OA3,[19] we also show that the results remain unchanged within both Republican-leaning and Democratic-leaning counties; even in Democratic-leaning counties, Republican chairs see centrist candidates as the least electable. In Republican-leaning counties, Democratic chairs do begin to see centrists as more electable than extremists; however Figure OA1b shows that they still do not prefer nominating them there. These results are also unchanged when we weight by county population; they do not reflect that party chairs over-represent small counties that may tend to be conservative.

Together, these results suggest an intriguing explanation for why Republican party chairs prefer extreme candidates for their party's nomination over centrists: unlike Democrats, Republican party chairs across contexts appear to believe they can 'have their cake and eat it, too' by nominating

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[19]Figure also OA3 also shows Figure 2a within objectively and subjectively competitive counties.

extremists, reaping both electoral and ideological rewards. Ironically, political science evidence suggests the exact opposite: Hall (2015) finds that the penalty for nominating extreme candidates in general elections is especially *large* for Republicans (see Table A.4). The theoretical mechanism that Republican party chairs appear to see extremists as more electable appears to help explain our main findings that Republican chairs prefer nominating extremists to centrists, but what mechanism explains why Republican party chairs see extremists as more electable in the first place? We return to this question in the next study and in the discussion, but one secondary finding from Study 1 supports our expectations about the role of Republican activists in Republican chairs' thinking: We also asked party chairs which candidate they thought would be most likely to recruit enough volunteers and raise enough money. Figure OA4 shows the results. Consistent with the general electability findings, Republicans think extreme candidates are the most likely to do both.

Of course, this study has several important limitations. First, it assumes party leaders can understand or are prone to think in terms of ideological labels. Second, it relies on party chairs' perceptions of their party as a benchmark against which to compare potential candidates. And, third, this study does not directly tap party leaders' views about voters themselves. If it is really the case that Republican leaders at the local level think that extremists fare well in elections, we might expect them to not just think extreme candidates are more electable, but for them to do so because they perceive voters as more conservative than they really are.

Study 2: Party Leaders' Perceptions of Public Opinion

With party leaders at the national and state level seen as savvy advocates for centrist candidates, could it really be the case that local Republican party chairs would perceive the general electorate in their area as desiring much more conservative candidates? As a methodologically and operationally distinct test of our overall theoretical argument, we also queried party leaders' beliefs about public opinion in their counties and their states — those composing two of the general electorates their nominated candidates might face. Our theory held that Republican party chairs in particular might expect extremist nominees to perform better than centrists in part because they overestimate the

conservatism of the general electorate in their area. When operationalizing conservatism in terms of issues (this study) instead of ideology (Study 1), we find further support for our theory.

Data

To ascertain party leaders' perceptions of public opinion, we asked them to estimate public opinion in their county and in their state on several issues. Specifically, we asked them "What percent of people living in your state would agree with the following statements?" and "What percent of people living in your county would agree with the following statements?" followed by a series of statements taken verbatim from a public opinion survey (described below). Each party chair made estimates of public opinion for their state and their county on three randomly selected issues. We asked them to estimate public opinion in both their state and in their county. We expected these boundaries to be well-known to county party chairs, especially as the chairs indicated that they are active in primaries for countywide and statewide office.

To compare party leaders' perceptions to reasonably precise estimates of reality, we asked party chairs to estimate county and state opinion on issues that had been asked in the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a large sample survey (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2013). We were therefore constrained in the kinds of issues we could ask about, as the CCES only asked its full sample about their opinions on a limited set of issues. Fortunately, the policy domains the CCES questions covered were almost all salient at all levels of government in the U.S.[20] For example, the issue of immigration was not only a federal matter; states, counties, and cities had salient debates over issues such as whether to act as "sanctuaries" for unauthorized immigrants and whether to grant them drivers licenses. These policy domains were thus almost all relevant to the

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[20]Policy issues pending in state legislatures around this time provide an instructive example. As mentioned above, many county party chairs are actively involved in recruitment for state legislative offices, and the CCES issues we asked about have frequently been the subject of state laws enacted since 2012. For example, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) indicates that more than 100 immigration-related laws were enacted by the states *every year* from 2012-2017, with the exception of 2016 (National Conference of State Legislatures 2017). Likewise, the NCSL also found that states enacted 344 abortion restrictions between 2011 and July 2016 (National Conference of State Legislatures 2016). On the issue of guns, more than 600 state laws concerning guns have been enacted since the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Vasilogambros 2018). Same-sex marriage had not yet been nationally legalized in 2013, meaning this remained an active issue in state politics; non-discrimination protections for gays and lesbians were also actively debated in local politics during this time.

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politics of all levels of government, meaning these questions are relevant to ask local party leaders regardless of the levels of government at which they were most active in supporting candidates for office.[21]

Table 1 reports the text of the issue items in the 2012 CCES that were available, as well as the ideological direction of the "Yes" side and whether the policy represented a status quo change in 2013. We also report weighted national mean support for each issue in the CCES.[22]

Table 1: Issue questions available in the 2012 CCES presented to party leaders.

CCES Issue Item Wording	National Mean Support in CCES	"Yes" direction	Status quo change?
"Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry."	53%	Liberal	Some states
"Grant legal status to all illegal immigrants who have held jobs and paid taxes for at least 3 years, and not been convicted of any felony crimes."	48%	Liberal	Yes
"Laws governing the sale of firearms should be made less strict than they are."	13%	Conservative	Yes
"Let employers and insurers refuse to cover birth control and other health services that violate their religious beliefs."	37%	Conservative	Yes
"By law, abortion should never be permitted."	12%	Conservative	Yes
"Always allow a woman to obtain an abortion as a matter of choice."	49%	Liberal	Yes

Empirical Strategy 1: Raw Data

Because each state and county has a relatively small number of CCES respondents, special care is required to compare party leaders' estimates of public opinion with the CCES' estimates of true public opinion. We use two approaches that both yield similar results.

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[21]The issues cover a broad array of different issues and vary in terms of whether they represent liberal and conservative proposals, but most are social issues. Unfortunately this was a constraint imposed by the 2012 CCES' item selection. However, our theory is corroborated by the other two studies in this paper, and other research on politicians' perceptions of public opinion has not found differences between economic and social issues (Broockman and Skovron 2018), which suggests that our findings here would not differ if we were able to study economic issues.

[22]Recent high-profile errors of national and state polls provide some caution about these results, but we will show that the magnitude of the differences between CCES-measured opinion and party leaders' perceptions are much larger than these errors.

Our first approach simply compares the average party leader's perceptions to the average CCES estimate of average county-level public opinion (across the counties where party chairs responded to our survey). Our estimation strategy is as follows, following Broockman and Skovron (2018). Let C represent the set of all CCES respondents who live in counties where a party leader responded to the survey, with respondents indexed by c and issues by i. Denote opinions expressed on issue i by CCES respondent c as $o_{c,i}$. All the CCES questions we use are binary choice, such that $o_{c,i} \in \{0,1\}$. Let $p_{c,i}$ represent the perception of the party leader in c's county of average support for issue i; that is, $p_{c,i}$ is a party leader's estimate of $E(o_{c,i})$ for their county. The average of $p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}$ within each county thus captures an estimate of party leaders' average overestimation of support for policy i. For example, suppose a party leader perceives support for a policy in their county at 80% but true support is only 60%. In this example, $E(p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}) = 0.8 - E(o_{c,i}) = 0.8 - 0.6 = 0.2$. Although the estimate for any given chair and county will be imprecise, we can estimate party leaders' *average* overestimation of support for i, by estimating the mean of $p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}$ across all the CCES respondents.[23] To incorporate the CCES weights, we take the weighted mean of this quantity, multiplying by the CCES survey weights w_c, which have mean 1. In addition, because the CCES has many more respondents from larger counties than smaller counties, we weight these estimates inversely to county size so that party leaders from large counties and small counties matter equally. In particular, we weight each CCES observation by $\frac{\bar{s}_c}{s_c}$, where s_c is the size of each CCES respondents' county in 2013 according to the US Census. This makes party leaders the effective unit of analysis and counts party leaders from small and large counties equally. Our results are similar when we weight to mass survey respondents instead of to counties, however.

We seek to estimate y_i, party leaders' average overestimation of county support for issue i. We therefore estimate y_i with:

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[23]We acknowledge Doug Rivers for this suggestion.

$$\widehat{y}_i = \frac{\sum\limits_{c \in C} \left[(p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}) w_c * \frac{\bar{s}_c}{s_c} \right]}{n(C)}, \tag{1}$$

where $n(C)$ is the number of CCES respondents.

We can also estimate public opinion in the average county—what party leaders' average perceptions would be if their perceptions were perfectly accurate—using:

$$\widehat{o_{c,i}} = \frac{\sum\limits_{c \in C} \left[o_{c,i} w_c * \frac{\bar{s}_c}{s_c} \right]}{n(C)}. \tag{2}$$

This quantity can be interpreted as 'the expectation of county opinion for a party chair respondent chosen at random.'

Likewise, party leaders' mean perception can be estimated with:

$$\widehat{p}_i = \frac{\sum\limits_{c \in C} \left[p_{c,i} w_c * \frac{\bar{s}_c}{s_c} \right]}{n(C)} \approx \bar{p}_i. \tag{3}$$

Our analysis at the state level is identical, except with s_c corresponding to the size of each CCES respondents' state. We cluster the standard errors at the county level for our county analysis and at the state level for our state analysis. Note that the county analysis excludes the states where parties are not organized at the county level because the levels at which these parties are organized (parish, etc.) are not available in the CCES data: LA, AK, ND, CT, and MA.

Results: Republican Party Leaders Overestimate The Public's Conservatism

Consistent with our argument, the data from Study 2 indicates that Republican county party leaders perceive the public in their counties and states as more conservative than the CCES sug-

gests that it is. Figure 3a shows our estimates for party leaders' perceptions of public opinion in their counties and our estimates from the CCES of what their average perceptions should have been were they perfectly accurate. Table 2 shows point estimates as well as the sample size of CCES respondents. Because thousands of CCES respondents form each point estimate, these point estimates are relatively precise.

On average, Republican leaders appear to underestimate public support for the liberal policies on the CCES by about 10 percentage points and to overestimate public support for the conservative policies on the CCES by almost 40 percentage points. For example, only 13% of CCES respondents believe that "Laws governing the sale of firearms should be made less strict than they are," but Republican county party leaders perceive their counties as 67% supportive. On the other hand, the CCES evidence indicates that about 37% of people in the typical county supported same-sex marriage in 2013,[24] but the typical Republican county party leader perceived county support at 27%. Democrats do not consistently overestimate voter liberalism, and indeed if anything appear to overestimate voter conservatism as well.

Figure 3b and Table 3 report the results for party leaders' estimates of state opinion. The results are similar: Republicans overestimate state support for conservative policies and underestimate state support for liberal policies.

These results are robust when we limit the estimates of true public opinion to opinion among voters only; voter mean opinion is typically within 1 percentage point of overall mean opinion reported in Table 1, with the largest difference being a 3 percentage point difference on the religious exemption issue. This difference is nearly an order of magnitude smaller than the magnitude of their average misperceptions; our results are *not* a result of elites thinking only about voters and not all residents.

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[24]Because smaller counties are more conservative but we weight all counties equally, the mean county opinion is more conservative than mean national opinion reported in Table 1. Again, the results are essentially unchanged when we weight mass public respondents equally instead of counties equally.

Figure 3: Party leaders' perception of public opinion

(a) County opinion

Liberal Issues

Conservative Issues

(b) State opinion

Liberal Issues

Conservative Issues
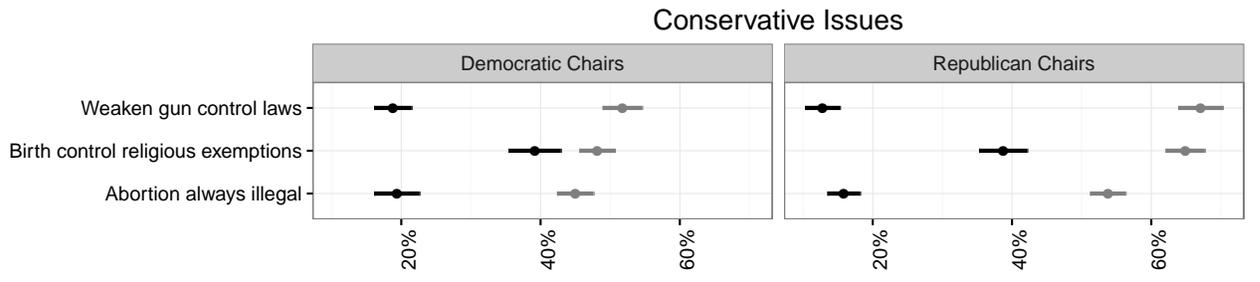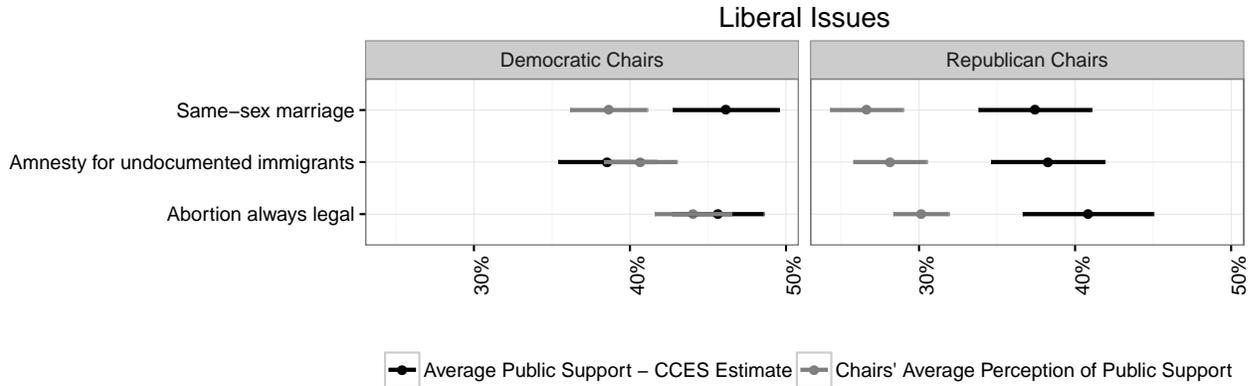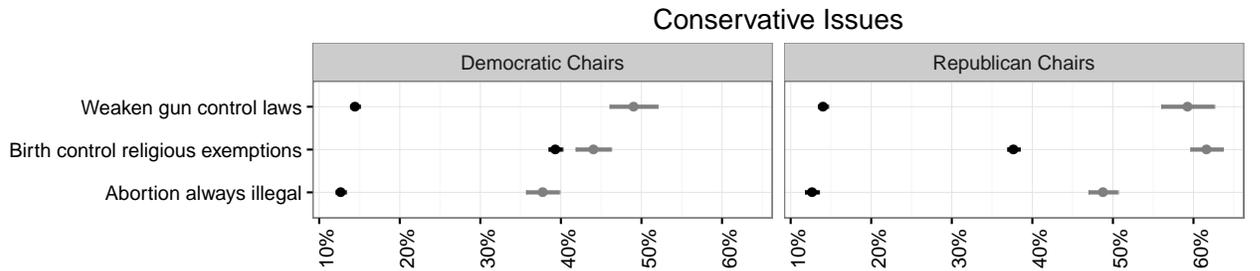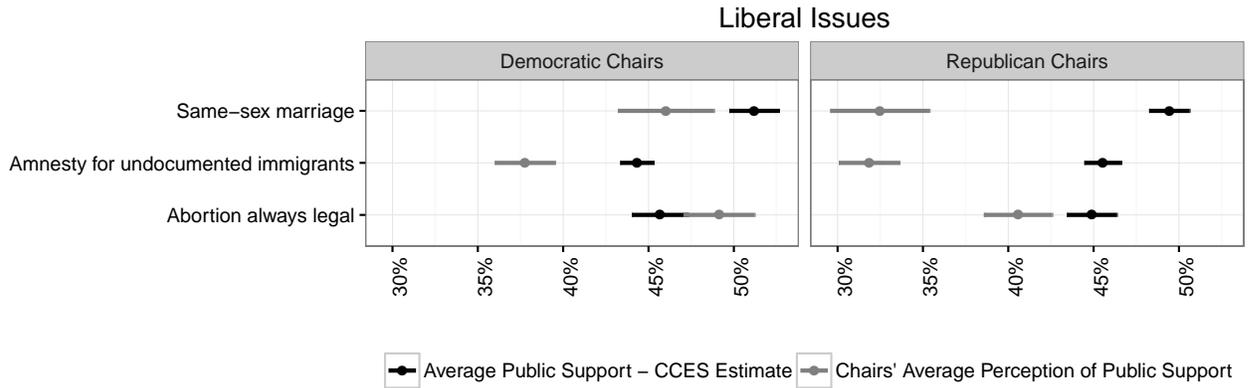
Table 2: Party leaders' perceptions of county public opinion and actual opinion

Issue (see Table 1 for item wording)	Democratic Chairs				Republican Chairs			
	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	Average Misperception	N CCES Respondents	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	Average Misperception	N CCES Respondents
Liberal Policies								
Abortion always legal	44.1	45.6	-1.60	2,620	30.1	40.8	-10.70*	1,906
	(2.449)	(2.914)	(3.388)		(1.780)	(4.189)	(4.377)	
Amnesty for undocumented immigrants	40.7	38.5	2.13	2,418	28.2	38.3	-10.11**	1,624
	(2.340)	(3.136)	(4.208)		(2.357)	(3.633)	(3.507)	
Same-sex marriage	38.6	46.2	-7.52*	2,382	26.6	37.4	-10.78*	2,544
	(2.470)	(3.398)	(3.314)		(2.335)	(3.611)	(4.183)	
Conservative Policies								
Abortion always illegal	45.0	19.4	25.63***	2,567	53.8	15.8	37.93***	2,737
	(2.622)	(3.256)	(4.249)		(2.552)	(2.350)	(3.571)	
Birth control religious exemptions	48.1	39.2	8.96*	2,193	64.9	38.7	26.14***	2,790
	(2.551)	(3.746)	(3.965)		(2.815)	(3.460)	(5.245)	
Weaken gun control laws	51.8	18.8	32.97***	2,987	67.1	12.8	54.29***	1,749
	(2.846)	(2.692)	(3.810)		(3.201)	(2.504)	(3.775)	

*** = $p < 0.001$. ** = $p < 0.01$. * = $p < 0.05$. *Standard errors are clustered at the county level.*

Table 3: Party leaders' perceptions of statewide public opinion and actual opinion

Issue (see Table 1 for item wording)	Democratic Chairs				Republican Chairs			
	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	Average Misperception	N CCES Respondents	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	Average Misperception	N CCES Respondents
Liberal Policies								
Abortion always legal	49.1	45.7	3.47*	14,508	40.6	44.9	-4.32**	17,692
	(2.080)	(1.643)	(1.668)		(2.005)	(1.459)	(1.318)	
Amnesty for undocumented immigrants	37.8	44.3	-6.56**	13,414	31.9	45.5	-13.69***	13,916
	(1.764)	(0.977)	(2.239)		(1.775)	(1.082)	(1.889)	
Same-sex marriage	46.0	51.2	-5.17**	15,476	32.5	49.4	-16.96***	13,058
	(2.820)	(1.454)	(1.834)		(2.909)	(1.185)	(2.346)	
Conservative Policies								
Abortion always illegal	37.8	12.7	25.07***	16,167	48.8	12.7	36.13***	14,015
	(2.074)	(0.626)	(2.019)		(1.827)	(0.859)	(2.015)	
Birth control religious exemptions	44.0	39.3	4.70*	14,567	61.6	37.7	23.97***	14,949
	(2.198)	(0.856)	(2.072)		(2.015)	(0.768)	(1.674)	
Weaken gun control laws	49.0	14.4	34.57***	13,654	59.3	14.0	45.25***	13,130
	(2.978)	(0.602)	(2.992)		(3.287)	(0.611)	(3.036)	

*** = $p < 0.001$. ** = $p < 0.01$. * = $p < 0.05$. *Standard errors are clustered at the state level.*
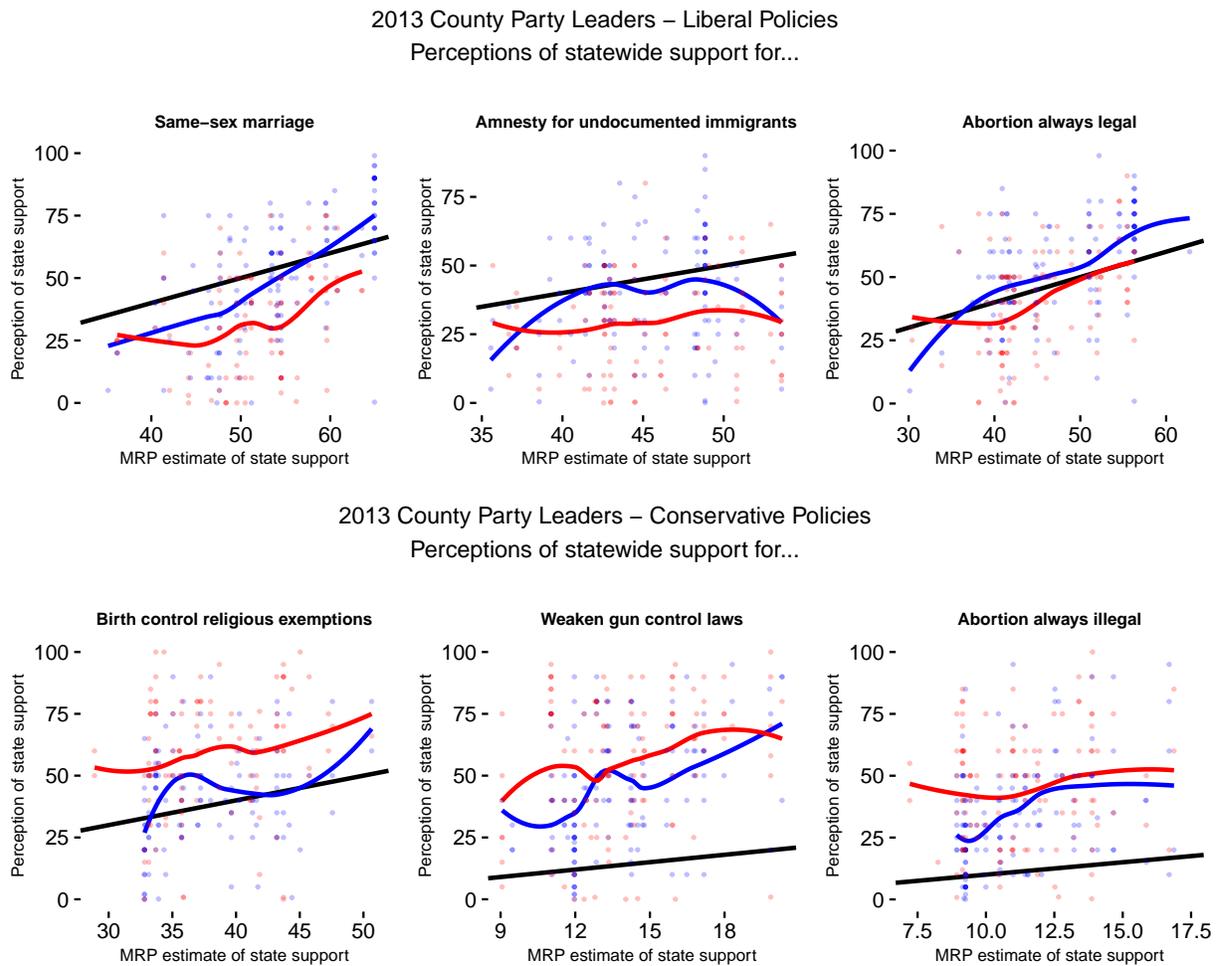
Perceptions of state-level opinion: MRP

As a robustness check and to gain a better appreciation of the nature and magnitude of these misperceptions, we also used multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP) to estimate true public opinion in each state and compared these state-level MRP estimates to party leaders' perceptions their state.[25] MRP uses individual-level survey data and demographic information about the districts from the US Census to construct state-level estimates of support for each issue (Lax and Phillips 2009*b*; Warshaw and Rodden 2012; Park, Gelman and Bafumi 2004). Our MRP procedure first fits multilevel models to the responses to each issue question from the 2012 CCES. Each model fit returns estimated effects for demographic and geographic predictors. We then use the estimates from the multilevel model to estimate support for various demographic cells, identified by age, race, education, gender and state. Finally, using data from the US Census' American Community Survey, we weight those cells by their frequency in each state. The result is an estimate of the percent of each state supporting each issue. We then dyadically compare these estimates to party leaders' perceptions. For states with sufficiently large samples, MRP is designed so that the results approach rely very little on MRP's demographic weighting. Online Appendix C provides further details.

We present the MRP results graphically in Figure 4, with a loess smoother for each party. The x-axis on each graph shows the MRP estimate of state support and the y-axis shows party leaders' estimate of state support. If party leaders were perfectly accurate, we would expect their responses to follow the black line, which shows the line $y = x$. However, the results from the MRP estimates match what we saw in the weighted but unmodeled raw data: it appears that Republican party leaders consistently overestimate support for conservative policy positions, whereas Democrats do not do the same with liberal policy positions.

The MRP results also help alleviate three other possible concerns about the findings from the weighted raw data. First, one possible concern with the raw data is that innumeracy leads party

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[25]MRP estimates at the county level would be more imprecise, so we focus on the state level where our estimates are most defensible.

Figure 4: Party chairs' perceptions of state opinion compared to MRP estimates of state opinion.

2013 County Party Leaders – Liberal Policies
Perceptions of statewide support for...

2013 County Party Leaders – Conservative Policies
Perceptions of statewide support for...

Notes: Democratic chairs' estimates are in blue; Republican chairs' estimates are in red. Each dot represents one chair's estimates. The lines show loess smoothed local averages.

leaders to simply answer by default near 50% or some other threshold. However, Figure 4 shows that most party chairs do not answer at any particular threshold, and that there is a clear correlation between the truth and their answers—albeit offset by a large intercept shift in the case of Republicans, due to their overestimation of state conservatism. Second, one might worry that party chairs are simply loathe to admit their party's "side" is not favored by a majority. However, it is clear from Figure 4 that Republican party chairs still overestimate conservatism even when their side is favored; for example, in states where same-sex marriage does not receive majority support in the public, Republican party chairs still estimate its support to be even lower than it already is. Finally,

one might worry that the results are driven by Republicans in one particular kind of state, such as the majority of states that lean rightward. However, Figure 4 makes clear that the misperceptions are consistent across state types.

Discussion of Study 2

The results of our second study represent methodologically distinct evidence for the same finding as Study 1: whereas Democratic county party chairs perceive a general public that looks relatively similar to what political science evidence suggests—not rewarding extremism—Republican county party chairs perceive a much more conservative general public. These are exactly the perceptions conservative grassroots organizations have worked to give Republican leaders (Skocpol and Williamson 2011). Importantly, these differing perceptions suggest that on many issues where political scientists would expect extremely conservative candidates to take positions out-of-step with public opinion, Republican leaders appear more likely to expect such candidates would be in-step. These differing perceptions may help explain why Republican local party leaders expect very conservative candidates to perform better in general elections than political science conventional wisdom predicts.[26]

Of course, both of our first two studies relied on explicitly prompting party chairs for their beliefs about the electorate's ideological composition. Our next study asks whether local party chairs might nevertheless spontaneously think of centrism or moderation as a desirable quantity when ideology and issues are not explicitly primed.

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[26]Our analysis does not assume that median voter opinion represents the position politicians are most incentives to take; for example, on the issue of gun control, it is possible that differences in intensity on each side of the issue mean that siding with the minority of those opposed to gun control is more politically advantageous. Clearly, public opinion as measured in polls may not be the only form of public opinion that party leaders are thinking about when they gauge what candidates the public is likely to favor. However, intensity-weighted opinion is difficult to measure objectively, and our other two studies are better suited to capture chairs' summary judgments about the public's behavior in elections. Our question wording therefore specifically asked what percentage of people living in their state or county agree with the survey questions that appeared on the CCES, as this baseline was objectively estimable.

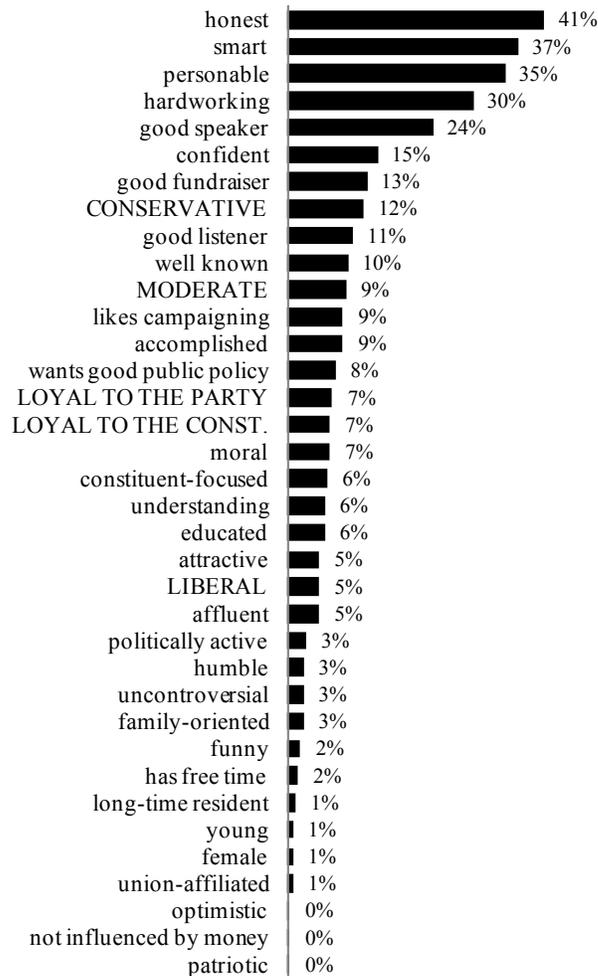# Study 3: In Describing Ideal Candidates, Chairs Rarely Mention Centrism or Moderation

If local party leaders truly prefer centrist candidates (such as due to concerns about winning general elections), moderation might be a "top of mind" consideration for party leaders when they think about potential candidates. To test this possibility, we asked party leaders an open-ended question (on the paper version of the survey only): "In an ideal world, what personal qualities would you like all of your party's political candidates to have? Please list as many as you would like." 84% of the 234 party leaders who answered the question listed at least one characteristic. (Respondents to this question were again broadly representative of the sampling frame; see Online Appendix B.2.)[27]

After research assistants blind to the hypotheses of the study grouped these responses into 36 categories, the data revealed two patterns consistent with our argument. First, local party leaders of both parties rarely mention centrism or moderation. This is not because they rarely mention policy: indeed, they often say they seek out ideological orthodoxy when thinking about potential nominees. Figure 5 plots the frequency of each type of response across both parties. Characteristics clearly related to ideological loyalty—conservative, liberal, loyal to the party, and loyal to the Constitution—were mentioned by 28% of the sample, more than three times the number who mentioned ideological moderation or centrism (difference in proportions $p < 0.001$).

Second, Republican elites mentioned ideological loyalty far more than Democratic elites. Figure 6 plots the percentage of leaders in each party who mentioned each of the five most common traits as well as the percentage who mentioned any of the ideological responses we identified. Republican party chairs were twice as likely as Democrats to mention ideology ($p < 0.001$)— the largest inter-party difference by far. Table OA1 shows that this difference remains the same

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[27]This question appeared on the survey directly after the conjoint experiment from Study 1. This placement means Study 1's results should not be contaminated by chairs wanting to fill out Study 1's conjoint with their answers to this open-ended question in mind, as it appeared afterwards. Moreover, as Study 1 presented hypothetical candidates with many traits beyond ideology, the presence of Study 1 before this open-ended question should not have primed ideology.

Figure 5: Share of Chairs' Responses Mentioning Each Quality

Quality	Percentage
honest	41%
smart	37%
personable	35%
hardworking	30%
good speaker	24%
confident	15%
good fundraiser	13%
CONSERVATIVE	12%
good listener	11%
well known	10%
MODERATE	9%
likes campaigning	9%
accomplished	9%
wants good public policy	8%
LOYAL TO THE PARTY	7%
LOYAL TO THE CONST.	7%
moral	7%
constituent-focused	6%
understanding	6%
educated	6%
attractive	5%
LIBERAL	5%
affluent	5%
politically active	3%
humble	3%
uncontroversial	3%
family-oriented	3%
funny	2%
has free time	2%
long-time resident	1%
young	1%
female	1%
union-affiliated	1%
optimistic	0%
not influenced by money	0%
patriotic	0%

Notes: Qualities in capitals indicate partisan/ideological qualities.

size when controlling for 2012 Obama vote share; the results are not driven by the presence of Republicans in disproportionately conservative counties.

These findings mirror other findings that Republican elites place a special premium on ideological loyalty (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016)—but are at odds with any hopes that local Republican local party leaders might seek out centrist candidates in order to win elections. Indeed, while chairs of both parties were more likely to spontaneously mention ideological orthodoxy as a desirable quality than moderation or centrism, this differed by party—Democrats were twice as likely to

spontaneously mention liberalism than centrism or moderation as desirable, but Republicans were nearly six times as likely to mention conservatism than centrism or moderation.

Figure 6: Share of Republican and Democratic Chairs' Responses Mentioning Each Quality
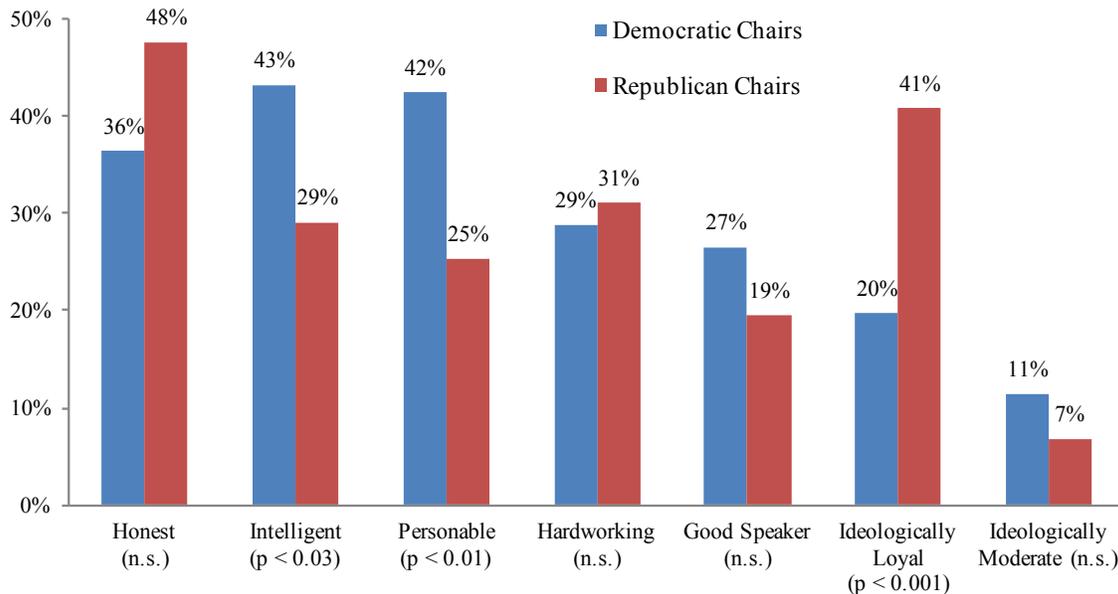
Notes: Percentage values correspond to the share of open-ended responses that mentioned each quality. p-values correspond to difference of means tests between how often chairs of each party mention the quality.

In summary, our results again point away from the null hypothesis we seek to disprove, namely, that local party chairs would seek out centrist candidates. Centrism and moderation rarely appear to come to the top of party leaders' minds when they think about ideal candidates.

Discussion: Having Their Cake And Eating It, Too

As elite polarization has continued to grow at all levels of government in the United States, activists and political scientists have begun to ask what reforms might reduce it. Recently, scholars have considered one intriguing possibility: that reforms empowering formal political party leaders might actually reduce polarization, as party leaders might be more likely to favor nominating centrists in hopes their parties will perform better in general elections. Evidence has accumulated about the typically moderate candidate preferences of national and state party leaders in primaries

(e.g., La Raja and Schaffner 2015; Hassell 2018; Persily 2015). However, many potential reforms to empower national and state party leaders would also further increase the power of *local* party leaders—a group already influential in many primary elections at all levels of government yet about whom we know little.

In this paper, we advanced a theoretical argument about the circumstances under which party leaders would prefer nominating centrists, arguing that local party leaders might be especially likely to not see strong incentives to do so. We considered several reasons why they may not. For example, they may be especially likely to be surrounded by like-minded and polarized individuals, such as the bevy of grassroots organizations—especially on the political right—that have attempted to use well-organized and high-visibility events to press their demands on political leaders(e.g., Skocpol and Williamson 2011). Many local party leaders and their organizations do not have the same resources, professionalization, and breadth of experience that their state and national counterparts have, making them more susceptible to the kinds of inferential mistakes politicians can make when passionate activists are screaming at them.

In a series of original studies, we collected considerable evidence consistent with these expectations. Our results suggested that Republican local party leaders are especially unlikely to favor nominating centrists. This appears to be because Republican county party leaders actually see extreme conservatives as more electable than centrists. In this way, Republican party leaders act as if nominating extremists allows them to 'have their cake and eat it, too'—winning more votes in general elections by offering voters the opportunity to select party loyalists. Their Democratic counterparts see centrists as only slightly more electable than extremists and so still do not favor nominating them on balance. It may well be the case that the formal leaders of local parties are less enthusiastic about extremists than other local party activists like donors and interest group leaders. But our evidence shows many local party leaders remain enthusiastic about extremists still—appearing not to believe nominating centrists will help their parties win. Even if local party leaders face a trade-off between nominating electable centrists and less-electable loyalists in reality, many of them do not perceive one.

Of course, our studies have several limitations, and we would welcome future research that addressed them. First, our studies use survey data, not data on how local party leaders actually behave. Although this allowed us to conduct experiments with a high degree of internal validity and better capture key theoretical mechanisms, observational data on how local party leaders actually recruit candidates would clearly complement our approach.[28]

A second area where future research could build on our own is to better understand why party leaders appear to underestimate the electoral rewards of nominating centrists. We established a new empirical finding about local party leaders (their preferences in primaries) and a likely mechanism (their (mis)perceptions of the electorate), but the mechanism for this mechanism is less clear—although we had several reasons to expect Republican party leaders to overestimate the electorate's conservatism, more research is needed to understand how important each of these are. For example, it could be instructive to understand how party chairs' misperceptions of public opinion vary according to their experiences both prior to becoming chair and once in office.[29] Consistent with one reason we expected Republicans to maintain such beliefs, however, we did find that Republicans thought that extreme candidates would be more likely to secure support from activists, being better able to recruit volunteers and raise money than centrists.

Finally, our evidence comes from only one point in time, and future research could help understand whether our findings are time-bound. For example, our theory would predict that if liberal grassroots groups became as active and organized in pressuring local party organizations as conservative grassroots groups have been, party chairs' perceptions of their incentives might shift. It is too soon to tell whether groups like Indivisible that have sprung up in reaction to Donald Trump's election will succeed to the extent conservative groups have, but future studies that track this activity and measure party chair's perceptions again could prove informative about mechanisms. Our

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[28]That said, it is unlikely that simple social desirability bias is responsible for our findings, as it is unclear why this would produce the partisan difference we found. Furthermore, our conjoint experiment (Study 1) was designed to randomly give party leaders so many characteristics of candidates it seems unlikely leaders would systematically offer a socially desirable response regarding one particular characteristic. It is also unclear why party leaders seeking to give socially desirable answers would spontaneously mention centrism or moderation so rarely (in Study 3).

[29]We attempted to ask about party chairs' experience prior to attaining their chairships with an open ended question on our survey, but unfortunately chairs' responses proved too vague to yield any useful categorization.

work can serve as a point of comparison for any such future research that will allow it to uncover any such changes over time.

Our findings also suggest two intriguing possibilities with regard to the literature on asymmetric polarization (e.g., Mann and Ornstein 2013). First, our findings that Democratic party leaders seem less sanguine about extremists' electoral prospects than Republicans suggest a new mechanism that may underpin asymmetric polarization at the local, state, and national levels. Since Republican local party leaders believe they can 'have their cake and eat it, too' when considering potential nominees, they appear to advocate nominating extremists—which may contribute to the rightward movement of Republican nominees. In addition, our data also suggest an intriguing potential strategy for reducing polarization: consistent with recent field experiments (Butler and Nickerson 2011), supplying local party leaders with more reliable information about public opinion and their incentives might change their perceptions and reduce their support for extremists. If local party leaders came to believe they were undermining their party's electoral prospects, they might be less likely to favor nominating extremists than they appear today. This hypothesis is ripe for future research. Most broadly, our results underscore the importance of not taking the incentives political actors perceive for granted; just as scholars of public opinion theorize about and study how voters subjectively perceive the political world, scholars of elite decisionmaking should seek to carefully understand not just the strategic realities political elites face, but also how they perceive them (e.g., Bowler, Donovan and Karp 2006; Broockman and Skovron 2018; Miler 2009).

References

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Online Appendix

A Figures and Tables

Due to space constraints, we place several Figures and Tables referenced in the manuscript in the Online Appendix.

Figure OA1: Party Leaders' Preferences In Primaries: Generalizability across partisan contexts
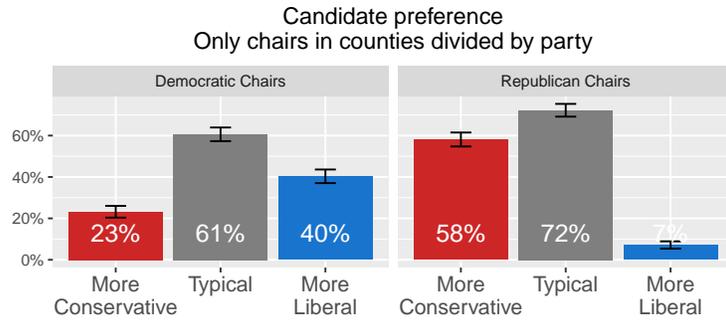
(a) Objectively competitive counties

Candidate preference
Only chairs in counties divided by party

(b) Republican-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share < 40%)

Candidate preference
Only chairs in Republican–leaning counties

(c) Democratic-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share > 60%)

Candidate preference
Only chairs in Democratic–leaning counties

(d) Subjectively competitive counties

Candidate preference
Only chairs who perceive elections as close
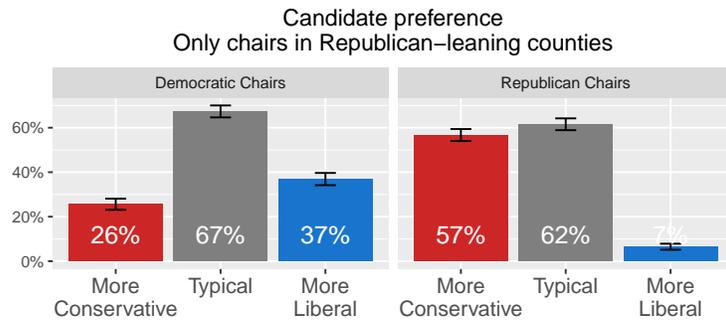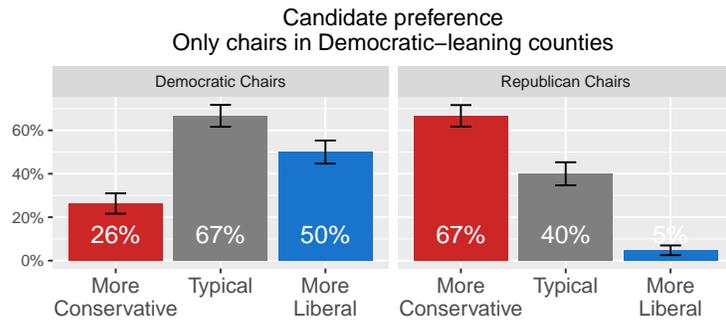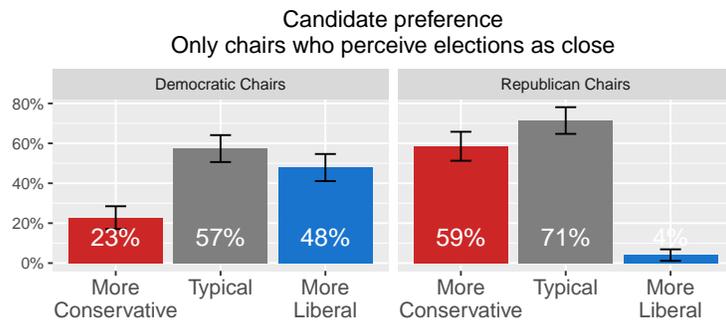
Figure OA2: Party leaders expect extremists to toe the party line

(a) Objectively competitive counties

Candidate perceived as more loyal

(b) Subjectively competitive counties

Margin expecting extremist to stay more loyal than centrist
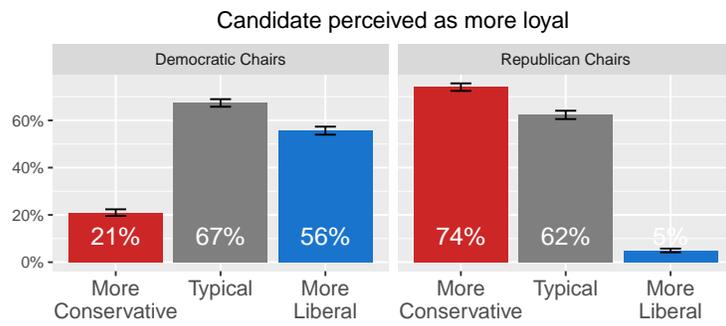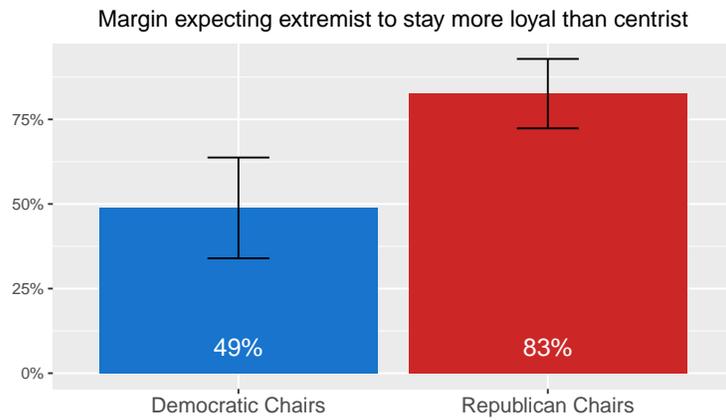
Figure OA3: Party Leaders' Expectations About Electability: Generalizability across partisan contexts
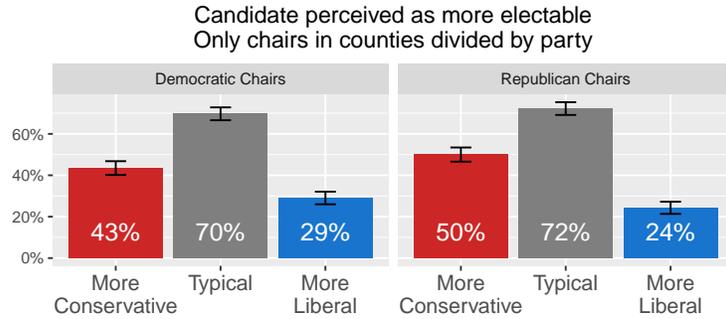
(a) Objectively competitive counties

Candidate perceived as more electable
Only chairs in counties divided by party

(b) Republican-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share < 40%)

Candidate perceived as more electable
Only chairs in Republican–leaning counties

(c) Democratic-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share > 60%)

Candidate perceived as more electable
Only chairs in Democratic–leaning counties

(d) Subjectively competitive counties

Candidate perceived as more electable
Only chairs who perceive elections as close
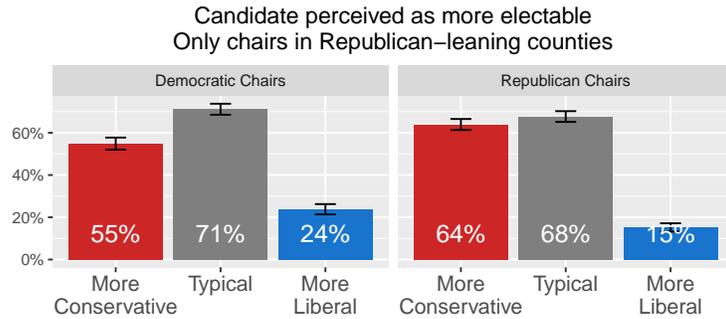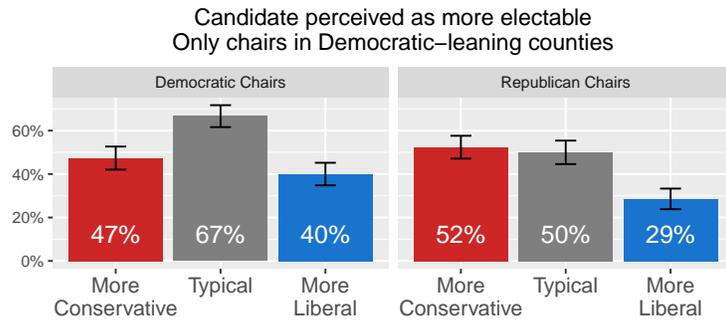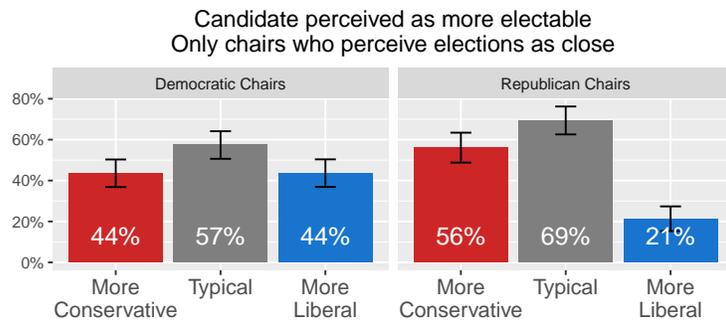
Figure OA4: Party leaders expect extremists to be more successful raising money and recruiting volunteers

(a)

**Candidate perceived as more
likely to raise enough money**

Democratic Chairs			Republican Chairs		
45%	52%	41%	54%	48%	31%
More Conservative	Typical	More Liberal	More Conservative	Typical	More Liberal

(b)

**Candidate perceived as more
likely to recruit enough volunteers**

Democratic Chairs			Republican Chairs		
33%	59%	48%	55%	51%	30%
More Conservative	Typical	More Liberal	More Conservative	Typical	More Liberal

Table OA1: Robustness of Partisan Difference in Study 3 to Control for 2012 Obama Vote Share

	DV = Mentioned Ideological Loyalty
Republican Chair	0.256***
	(0.068)
2012 Obama Vote Share	-0.028
	(0.223)
Constant	0.168*
	(0.099)
Observations	175
R-squared	0.076

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

B   Representativeness

This section provides information on how representative NSPL respondents are of the broader population of county party chairs using data from the sampling frame and from another survey of county party chairs.

B.1   Representativeness of Survey Respondents to Sampling Frame

As described in the main text, Figures OA5 and OA6 show the distribution of Obama's 2012 vote share and county population, respectively, among survey respondents and non-respondents. Note that these statistics are not available for the 20% of party chairs in our sampling frame from states whose parties are organized at a level other than county (see Footnote 9 in the main text).

Figure OA5: Obama 2012 County Vote Share Among Survey Respondents and Non-Respondents
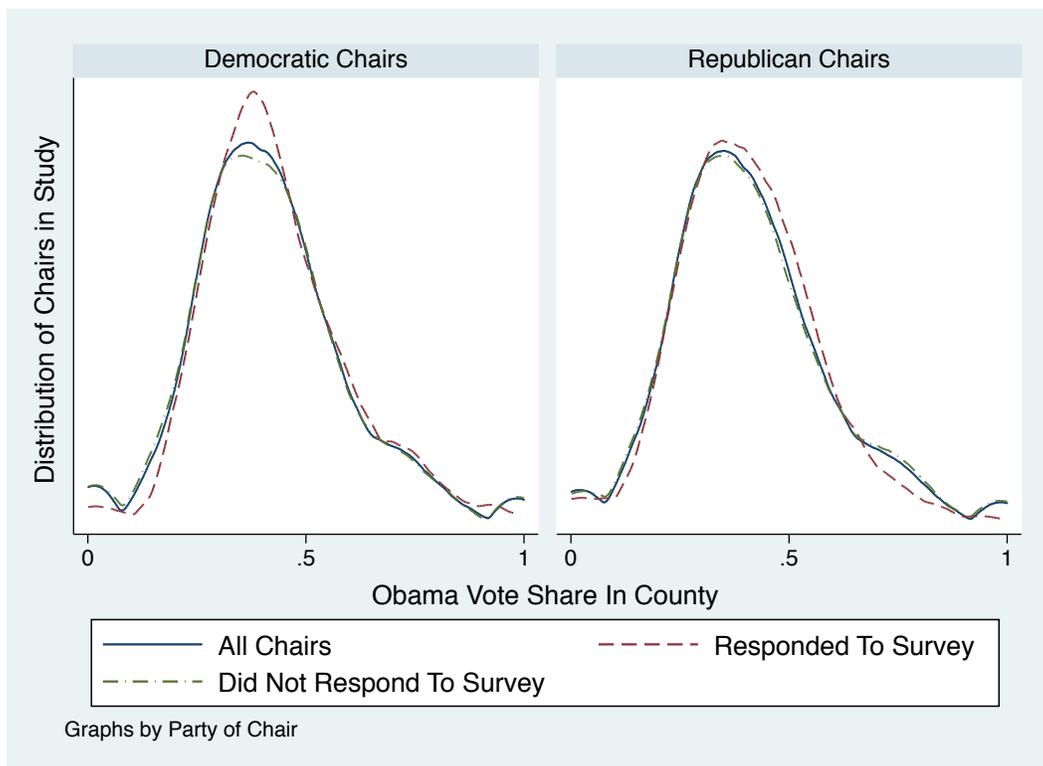
Figure OA6: County Population Among Respondents and Non-Respondents
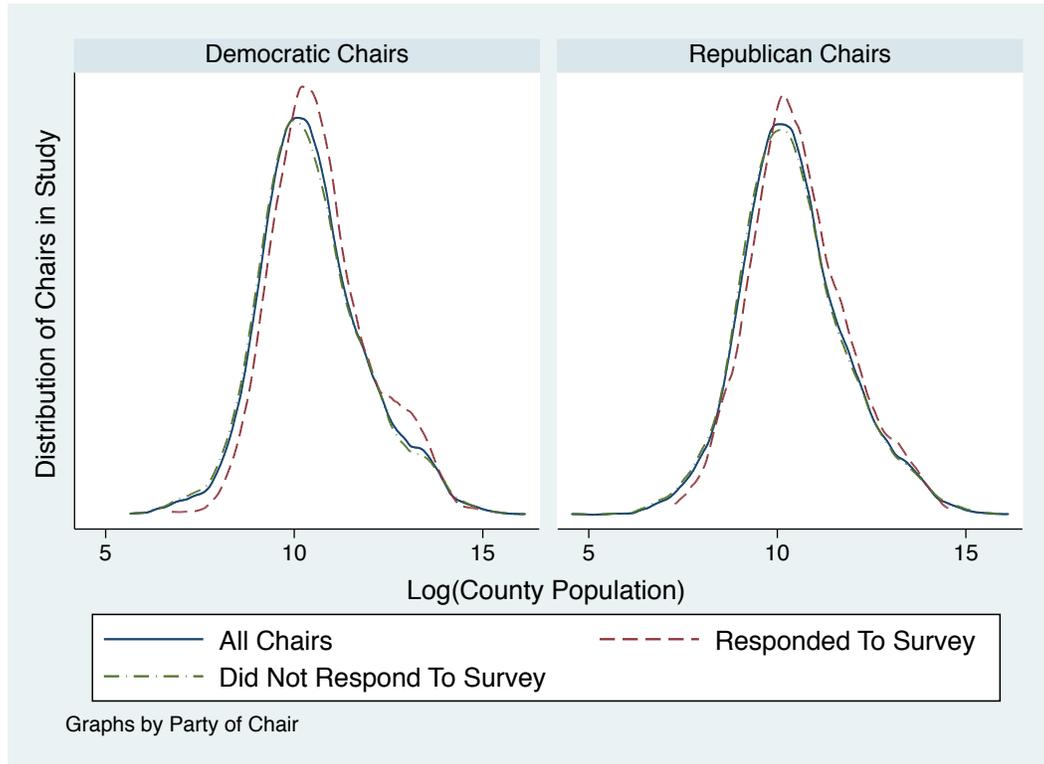
Table OA2 reports linear regression models predicting whether party leaders responded to the survey as a function of covariates. The only significant coefficient is the finding that party leaders in larger counties were slightly more likely to respond. The first model in Table OA2 shows the results for all parties organized at the county level. As described in Footnote 9 in the main text, in 20% of cases, local political parties are not organized at the county level but instead at levels (e.g., townships, etc.) for which data on Obama vote share and population is not readily available. These parties are therefore missing from the first regression as there is missing data for those two covariates. The second regression contains all the local parties from whom we solicited a response.

We attempted to determine chair gender from first name, although in 20% of cases we were unable to do so conclusively. The omitted category for gender in the regression is this unknown category. The remaining 80% of chairs in the sampling frame were 33% female and 67% male. Chairs with known genders were slightly more likely to respond (by about 2 percentage points, although this is not statistically significant), but there was no difference between the response rates

of male and female chairs.

Table OA2: Predictors of NSPL Survey Response

	Counties	All Parties
Female Chair	0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Male Chair	0.02	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Republican Chair	0.06	−0.00
	(0.08)	(0.01)
2012 Obama Vote Share	0.00	
	(0.04)	
log(county population)	0.02*	
	(0.01)	
2012 Obama Vote Share X	−0.07	
Republican Chair	(0.06)	
log(county population) X	−0.00	
Republican Chair	(0.01)	
(Intercept)	−0.04	0.17*
	(0.06)	(0.01)
N	4933	6217
R^2	0.01	0.00

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

B.2 Representativeness of Respondents to Open Ended Question to Sampling Frame

Respondents to the open-ended item used in Study 3 were similarly representative to non-respondents.

Figure OA7: Obama 2012 Two-Party Vote Share Among Open End Respondents and Non-Respondents

Graphs by Party of Chair
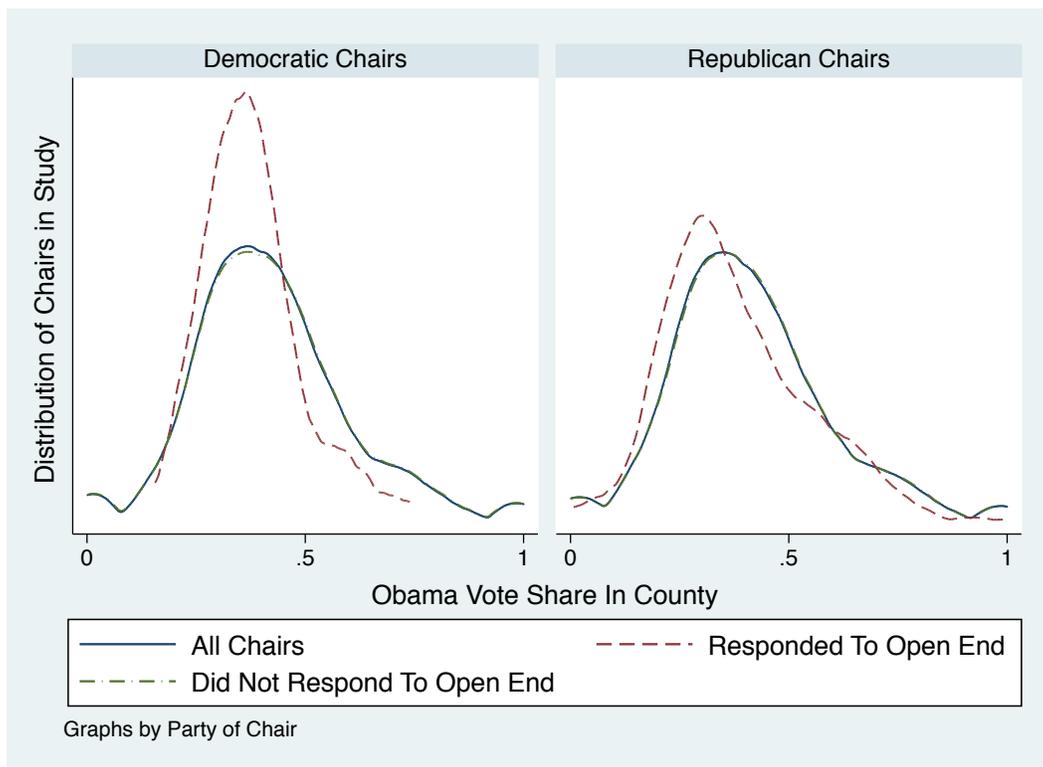
Figure OA8: County Population Among Open End Respondents and Non-Respondents

Graphs by Party of Chair
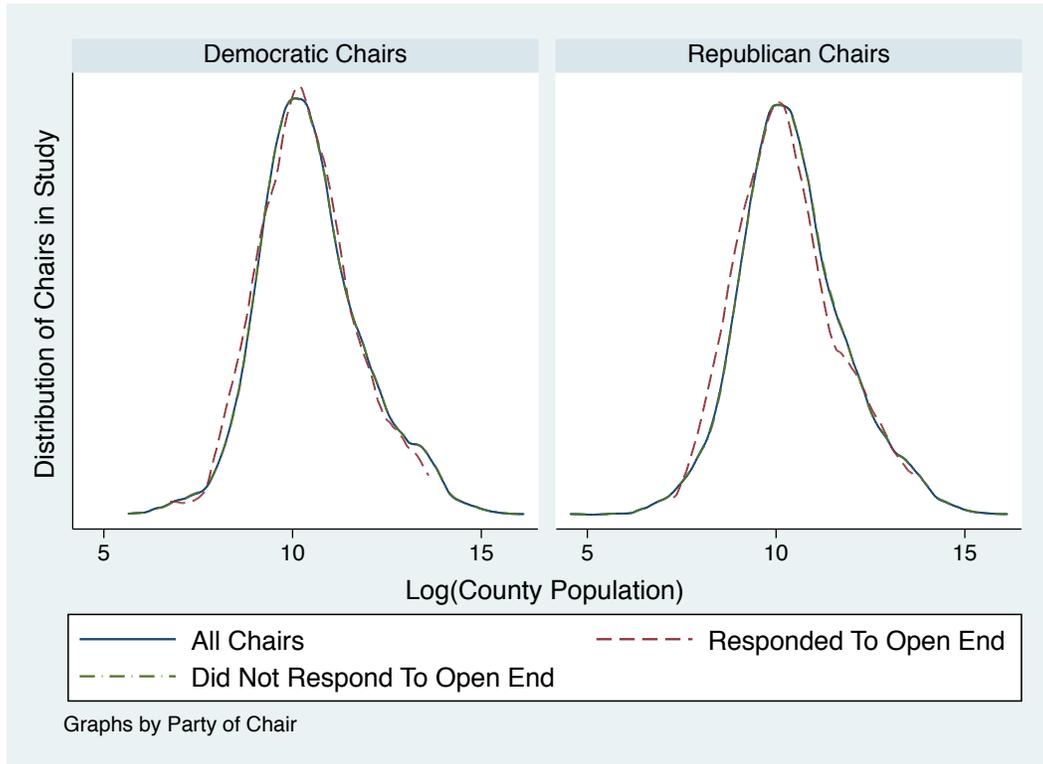
B.3 Comparison to 2008 party leaders survey

As another point of comparison, we compare our 2013 survey data to a 2008 survey conducted by Crowder-Meyer (2010) that achieved a high response rate of 45.5%. For this survey, Crowder-Meyer conducted intensive individual follow-up contact with party chairs to encourage more responses. Although our survey response rate was relatively high, this very high response rate survey should be less subject to any potential selection issues and therefore serves as a useful point of comparison.

Figure OA9 plot the distributions of self-reported ideology for Democratic and Republican chairs in the two surveys. Reassuringly, the two samples have almost identical distributions of ideological identification. This suggests that, despite having a lower response rate, the respondents to our 2013 survey are unlikely to be biased in terms of their ideology compared to the population of party chairs. The only notable difference is that slightly more Democratic chairs placed themselves

at the "liberal" position than the "somewhat liberal" or "moderate" in 2013 than in 2008, but as our main result about Democrats is that they do not behave as extremely as Republicans, this should bias against our findings.

Figure OA9: Comparison of sample ideology in 2008 (black) and 2013 (grey) party leaders surveys. Higher values indicate more conservative ideology.
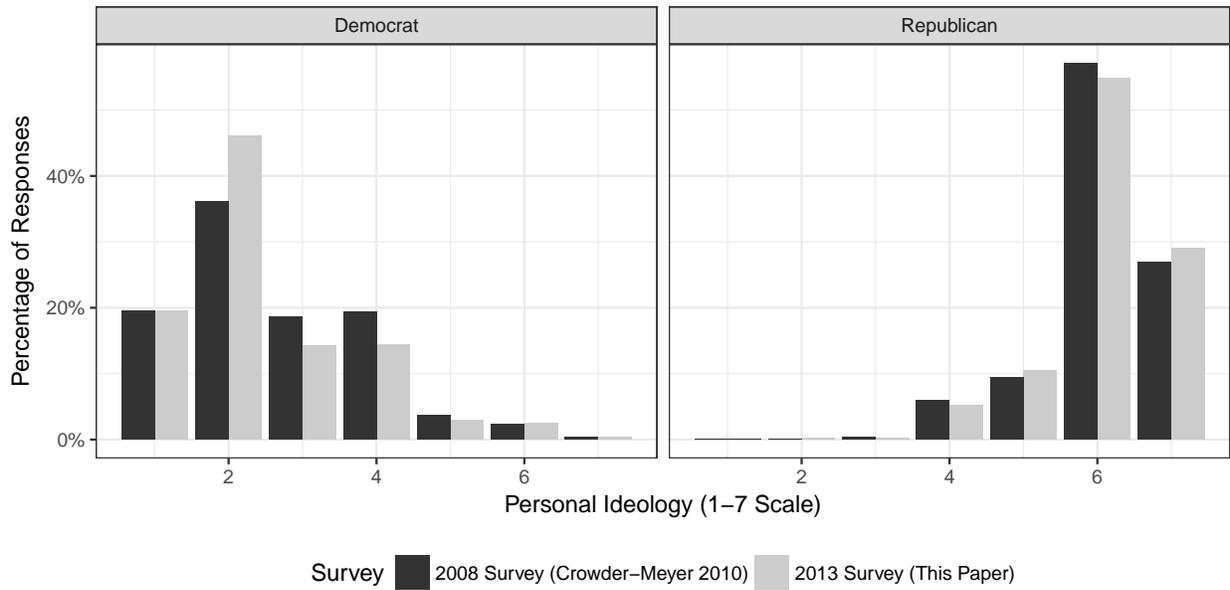
C   Details of MRP Estimation Procedure

Estimation of an MRP model proceeds in two stages. First, a hierarchical logistic choice model is estimated for the opinion item being studied. Our models include predictors at two different levels. At the individual level, we include random effects for the respondent's education, gender, and race/ethnicity. At the state level, we include individual state random effects and fixed effects for Obama's share of the 2012 Presidential vote in the state (see Lax and Phillips (2009*a*)). State random effects are centered around regional random effects.[30]

C.1   Hierarchical Model

The general form of the model is a varying intercept, varying slope model:

$$\theta_j = logit^{-1}(X_j\beta + \sum_s \alpha_{S(j)}^S) \tag{4}$$

where j indexes cells, each of which is identified by the unique combination of race, gender, education, and state, and S represents subsets of the grouping variables. β represents the fixed effects and is modeled with a uniform prior distribution. α^S are random effects, modeled with hierarchical Gaussian priors.

The response model is specified as:

$$Pr(y=1) = logit^{-1}(\beta_0 + \alpha_{j[c]}^{gender} + \alpha_{k[c]}^{race} + \alpha_{l[c]}^{edu} + \alpha_{m[c]}^{gender \times race} + \alpha_{s[c]}^{state} + \alpha_{r[c]}^{region}) \tag{5}$$

The individual-level random effects are modeled as:

$$\alpha_j^{gender} \sim N(0, \sigma_{gender}^2) \text{ for } j = 1,2 \tag{6}$$

---

[30]The models are estimated using the `glmer()` function in `R`.

$$\alpha_k^{race} \sim N(0, \sigma_{race}^2) \text{ for } k = 1, 2, 3 \tag{7}$$

$$\alpha_l^{age} \sim N(0, \sigma_{age}^2) \text{ for } l = 1...4 \tag{8}$$

$$\alpha_m^{edu} \sim N(0, \sigma_{edu}^2) \text{ for } m = 1...4 \tag{9}$$

The state and region effects are modeled:

$$\alpha_s^{state} \sim N(\alpha_{[r]}^{region} + \beta presvote, \sigma_{state}^2) \text{ for } s = 1...50 \tag{10}$$

$$\alpha_r^{region} \sim N(0, \sigma_{region}^2) \text{ for } r = 1...4 \tag{11}$$

This model yields predictions for the share of individuals in any given state who support same-sex marriage or universal health care in all possible combinations of race, gender, and education. Because of the CCES' large sample size, the state-level random effects dominate the estimation, meaning MRP makes only slight adjustments to the disaggregated data from the CCES.

C.2 Poststratification

The final step in constructing state-level estimates is poststratification. We first use data from the US Census American Community Survey 2013 5-Year file to calculate the share of individuals in each state that fall into each 'cell': for example, of all the individuals living in California, what share of them are college-educated white women? These official US Census estimates are exceptionally accurate.

We then merge these cell-level state proportion estimates from the Census with our cell-level opinion estimates from the multilevel regression model to construct the state-level opinion estimates. This poststratification process is a straightforward aggregation process by which estimates

for each cell θ_j in each state are summed in proportion to the share of the state that they represent. Note that the cells in each state are exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

$$\theta_{state} = \frac{\sum_{j \in J_{state}} N_j \theta_j}{\sum_{j \in J_{state}} N_j} \tag{12}$$

The result of this poststratification process are estimates of state support for each issue for each of the nation's states.

D Details of conjoint experiment survey instrument

Table OA3 lists the attributes that the hypothetical candidates could have. Attributes were fully randomized, with the exception of age, which was constant, with the first profile always being 43 years old and the second profile always being 47 years old. Two different sents of first names were used for the two profiles in order to ensure that no pair of candidates had the same name. Figure OA10 shows how a respondent on the online survey would have seen the experiment.

Figure OA10: Survey Instrument Example

Suppose there is a primary for an open county board seat in your local party area and the two individuals below are considering running for the seat. We'd like you to consider the following two potential candidates for this office.

	Potential Candidate A	Potential Candidate B
Name	Lauren	Alexander
Age	47	43
Occupation	Small business owner	Factory worker
Experience in party	None	None
Life circumstances	Is independently wealthy	Military veteran
Talents	Well known in community	Physically attractive
Positions and ideology	Somewhat more liberal than the typical voter from your party in your county	Somewhat more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county

Which one of the above candidates would you be more likely to encourage to run for office?

○ Candidate A
○ Candidate B

Table OA3: Treatments in Conjoint Experiment

Attribute	Values
Name (gender)	Male names: Donald, Laurence, Nathan, Nicholas, Samuel, Alexander, Andrew, Christopher, Charles, Daniel. Female names: Donna, Lauren, Natalie, Nicole, Samantha, Alexandra, Andrea, Charlotte, Christina, Danielle. (No pair of candidates had the same name.)
Age	43, 47
Occupation	Attorney, business executive, investor, lawyer, nurse, small business owner, social worker, teacher, receptionist, restaurant server, factory worker
Experience in party	Active and well known in county party organization, active and well known in group important to the party, frequent campaign volunteer for the last four election cycles, frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle, none
Life circumstances	Has a great deal of free time, has two young children, has flexible work hours, is independently wealthy, military veteran
Talents	Assertive, experienced fundraiser for local charities, hard worker, physically attractive, talented public speaker, well known in community
Positions and ideology	Much more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county, somewhat more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county, similar views to the typical voter from your party in your county, somewhat more liberal than the typical voter from your party in your county, much more liberal than the typical voter than the typical voter from your party in your county

E Conjoint experiment: Robustness and additional outcome variables

This section shows the full results of the conjoint experiments for all dependent variables, for all the treatment variables in the conjoint, and among all the subsamples we mention in the paper. For the full sample, we report the results as both figures and tables; for other subsamples, we present only the figures for space (tables available upon request from the authors). In the party-ideology interactions, the letter "D" or "R" indicates the chair's party, and the ideology label reflects the potential candidate's ideology relative to the median party member. Democratic chairs evaluating a candidate whose ideology is average for the party are the omitted category. Thus, "D.Very conservative" reflects a Democratic chair evaluating a very *moderate* candidate— as a Democratic candidate much more conservative than the party would be more centrist—while "R.Very conservative" reflects a Republican chair evaluating a very *extreme* candidate.

E.1 All conjoint experiment outcomes: full sample

Figure OA11: Conjoint results: Full Sample
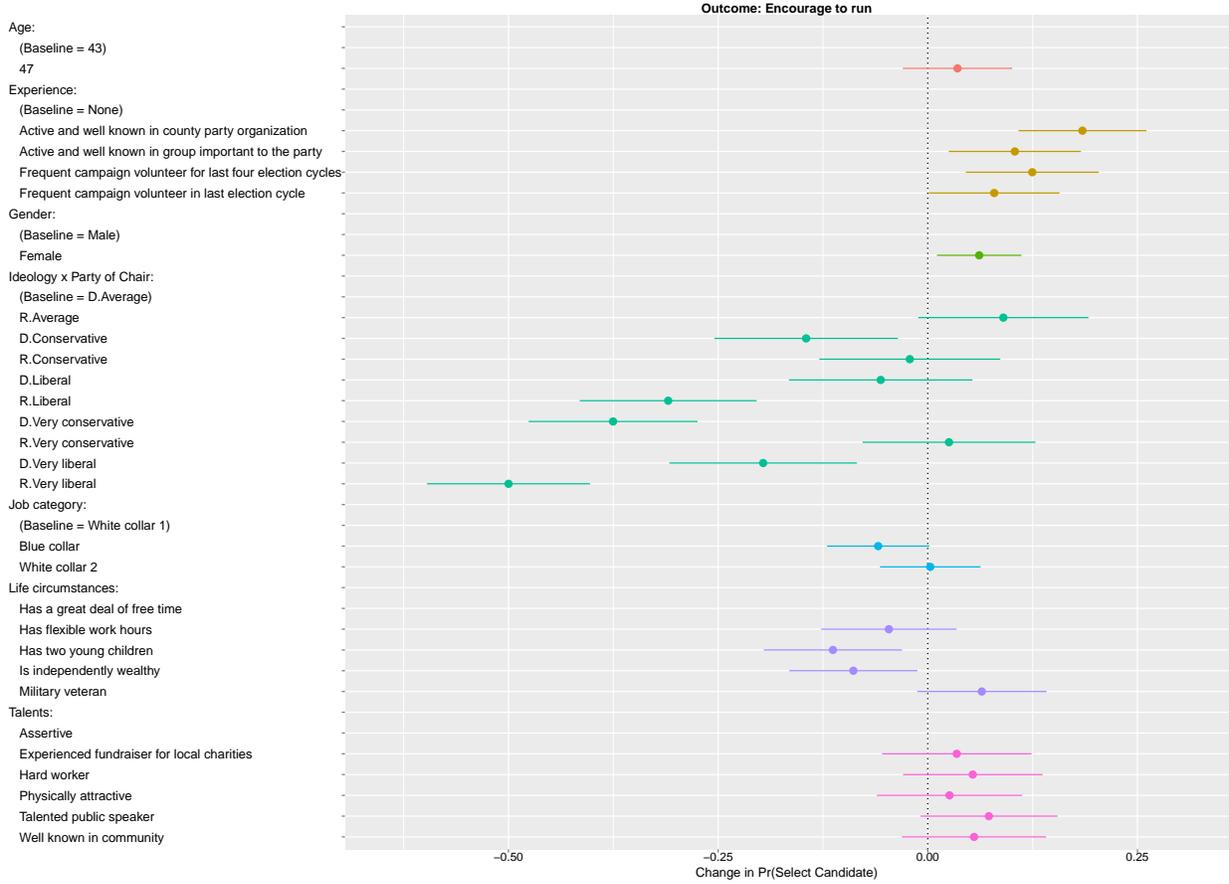
Figure OA12: Conjoint results: Full Sample

Outcome: Win the general

Age:
- (Baseline = 43)
- 47

Experience:
- (Baseline = None)
- Active and well known in county party organization
- Active and well known in group important to the party
- Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles
- Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle

Gender:
- (Baseline = Male)
- Female

Ideology x Party of Chair:
- (Baseline = D.Average)
- R.Average
- D.Conservative
- R.Conservative
- D.Liberal
- R.Liberal
- D.Very conservative
- R.Very conservative
- D.Very liberal
- R.Very liberal

Job category:
- (Baseline = White collar 1)
- Blue collar
- White collar 2

Life circumstances:
- Has a great deal of free time
- Has flexible work hours
- Has two young children
- Is independently wealthy
- Military veteran

Talents:
- Assertive
- Experienced fundraiser for local charities
- Hard worker
- Physically attractive
- Talented public speaker
- Well known in community

Change in Pr(Select Candidate)

−0.50   −0.25   0.00   0.25

Figure OA13: Conjoint results: Full Sample
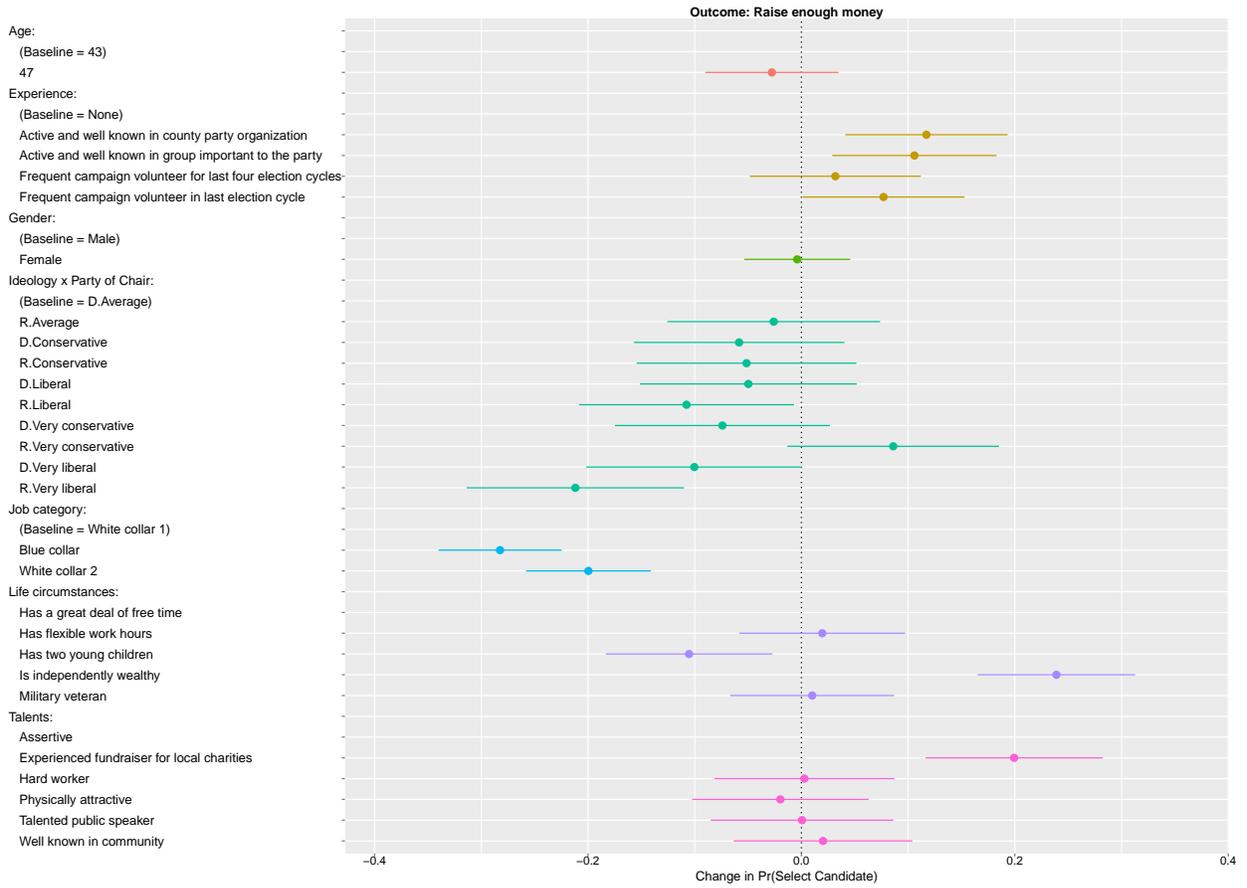
Figure OA14: Conjoint results: Full Sample

Outcome: Recruit enough volunteers
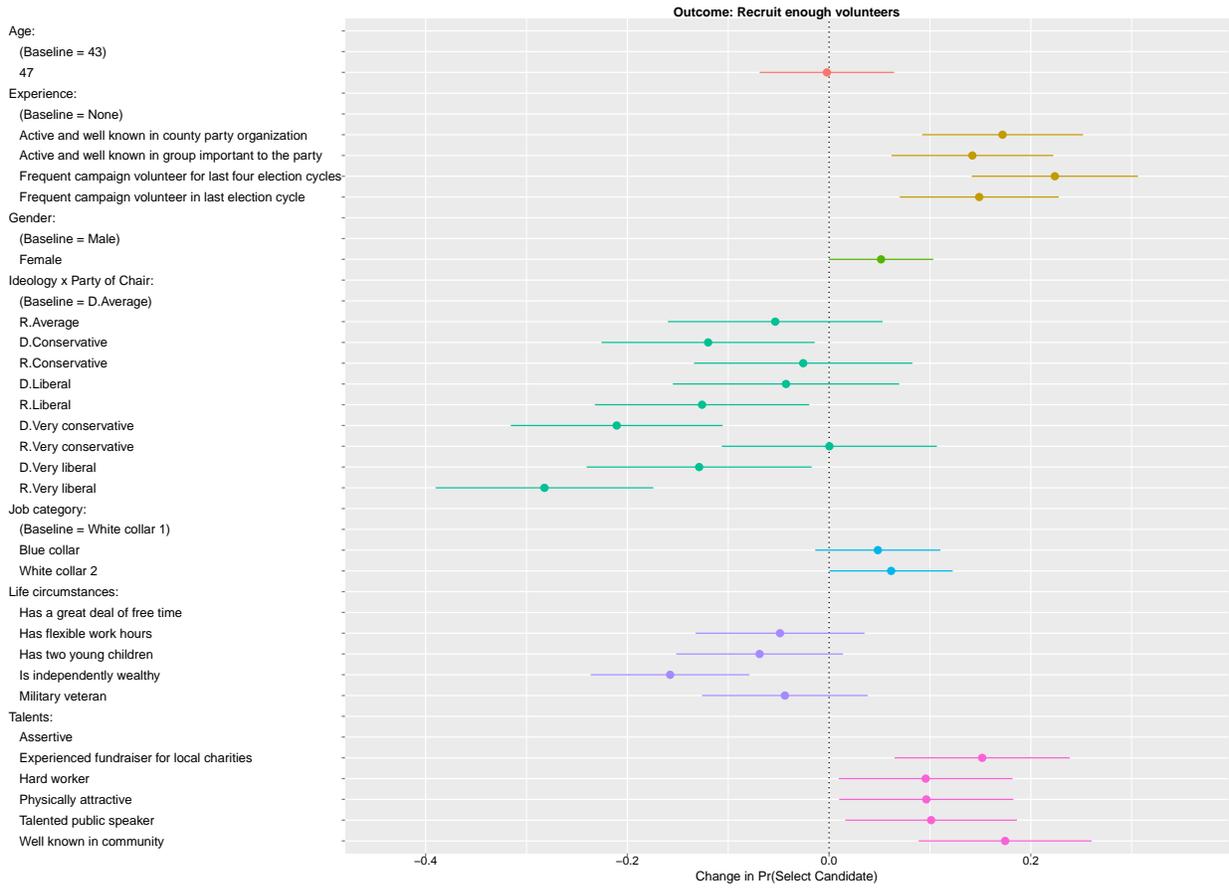
Figure OA15: Conjoint results: Full Sample
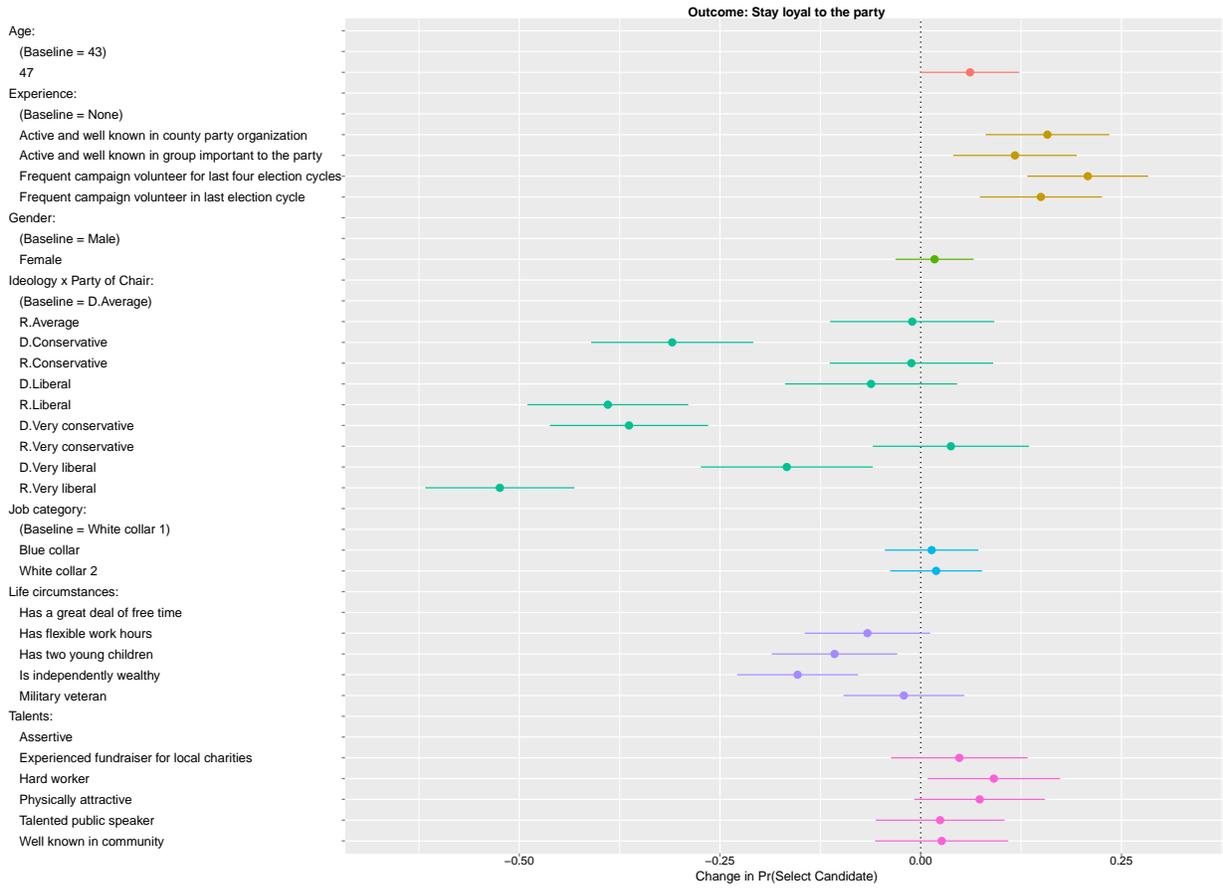
E.2 All conjoint experiment outcomes: weighted to county population

The figures in this section report the estimated AMCEs from the conjoint experiment after weighting by log(county population).

	Dependent variable:
	Encourage to run
Age 47	0.035 (0.025)
Female	0.061** (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.059* (0.031)
White collar 2	0.003 (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.184*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.104** (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.125*** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.079** (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	−0.046 (0.041)
Has two young children	−0.113*** (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.089** (0.040)
Military veteran	0.064 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.035 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.054 (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.026 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.073* (0.044)
Well known in community	0.055 (0.044)
R.Average	0.090 (0.059)
D.Conservative	−0.145*** (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.021 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.056 (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.310*** (0.059)
D.Very conservative	−0.375*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	0.025 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.196*** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.500*** (0.059)
Constant	0.514*** (0.067)
Observations	1,345
R^2	0.163
Adjusted R^2	0.147
Residual Std. Error	0.462 (df = 1318)

Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
	Full sample.

Table OA5

	Dependent variable:
	Win the general
Age 47	0.031 (0.025)
Female	0.014 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.189*** (0.031)
White collar 2	−0.108*** (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.149*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.080** (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.093** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.116*** (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	−0.081** (0.040)
Has two young children	−0.095** (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.072* (0.040)
Military veteran	0.040 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.041 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.064 (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.034 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.086** (0.044)
Well known in community	0.062 (0.044)
R.Average	0.081 (0.058)
D.Conservative	−0.080 (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.110* (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.150*** (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.225*** (0.059)
D.Very conservative	−0.216*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	−0.047 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.214*** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.371*** (0.059)
Constant	0.601*** (0.067)
Observations	1,437
R^2	0.107
Adjusted R^2	0.091
Residual Std. Error	0.477 (df = 1410)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample.

	Dependent variable:
	Raise enough money
Age 47	−0.028 (0.025)
Female	−0.004 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.282*** (0.030)
White collar 2	−0.200*** (0.030)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.117*** (0.039)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.106*** (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.032 (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.077** (0.039)
Has flexible work hours	0.020 (0.039)
Has two young children	−0.105*** (0.039)
Is independently wealthy	0.239*** (0.039)
Military veteran	0.010 (0.039)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.199*** (0.043)
Hard worker	0.003 (0.043)
Physically attractive	−0.020 (0.043)
Talented public speaker	0.001 (0.043)
Well known in community	0.020 (0.043)
R.Average	−0.026 (0.057)
D.Conservative	−0.058 (0.053)
R.Conservative	−0.051 (0.057)
D.Liberal	−0.050 (0.053)
R.Liberal	−0.108* (0.058)
D.Very conservative	−0.074 (0.053)
R.Very conservative	0.086 (0.057)
D.Very liberal	−0.100* (0.055)
R.Very liberal	−0.212*** (0.058)
Constant	0.572*** (0.065)
Observations	1,425
R^2	0.160
Adjusted R^2	0.144
Residual Std. Error	0.463 (df = 1398)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample.

Table OA7

	Dependent variable:
	Recruit enough volunteers
Age 47	−0.002 (0.026)
Female	0.052** (0.026)
Blue collar	0.048 (0.031)
White collar 2	0.062** (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.172*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.142*** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.224*** (0.042)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.149*** (0.041)
Has flexible work hours	−0.049 (0.041)
Has two young children	−0.069* (0.041)
Is independently wealthy	−0.158*** (0.041)
Military veteran	−0.044 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.152*** (0.045)
Hard worker	0.096** (0.045)
Physically attractive	0.096** (0.045)
Talented public speaker	0.101** (0.044)
Well known in community	0.175*** (0.045)
R.Average	−0.053 (0.059)
D.Conservative	−0.120** (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.026 (0.059)
D.Liberal	−0.043 (0.056)
R.Liberal	−0.126** (0.060)
D.Very conservative	−0.211*** (0.055)
R.Very conservative	0.0003 (0.059)
D.Very liberal	−0.129** (0.057)
R.Very liberal	−0.282*** (0.060)
Constant	0.364*** (0.068)
Observations	1,419
R^2	0.081
Adjusted R^2	0.064
Residual Std. Error	0.484 (df = 1392)

Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
	Full sample.

Table OA8

	Dependent variable:
	Stay loyal to the party
Age 47	0.061** (0.024)
Female	0.017 (0.024)
Blue collar	0.014 (0.030)
White collar 2	0.019 (0.030)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.158*** (0.038)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.117*** (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.208*** (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.150*** (0.038)
Has flexible work hours	−0.066* (0.039)
Has two young children	−0.107*** (0.039)
Is independently wealthy	−0.153*** (0.039)
Military veteran	−0.021 (0.039)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.048 (0.043)
Hard worker	0.091** (0.042)
Physically attractive	0.073* (0.042)
Talented public speaker	0.024 (0.042)
Well known in community	0.026 (0.042)
R.Average	−0.011 (0.057)
D.Conservative	−0.309*** (0.053)
R.Conservative	−0.012 (0.056)
D.Liberal	−0.062 (0.053)
R.Liberal	−0.390*** (0.057)
D.Very conservative	−0.363*** (0.052)
R.Very conservative	0.038 (0.056)
D.Very liberal	−0.167*** (0.054)
R.Very liberal	−0.524*** (0.057)
Constant	0.531*** (0.065)
Observations	1,423
R^2	0.175
Adjusted R^2	0.159
Residual Std. Error	0.459 (df = 1396)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample.

	Dependent variable:
	Be an effective legislator
Age 47	0.068*** (0.025)
Female	0.023 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.055* (0.030)
White collar 2	−0.021 (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.126*** (0.039)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.096** (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.123*** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.095** (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	0.010 (0.040)
Has two young children	−0.039 (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.057 (0.040)
Military veteran	0.061 (0.040)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	−0.006 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.073* (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.012 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.046 (0.043)
Well known in community	0.017 (0.044)
R.Average	0.066 (0.058)
D.Conservative	−0.146*** (0.054)
R.Conservative	−0.029 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.062 (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.338*** (0.060)
D.Very conservative	−0.374*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	0.006 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.174*** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.495*** (0.059)
Constant	0.527*** (0.066)
Observations	1,389
R^2	0.143
Adjusted R^2	0.127
Residual Std. Error	0.467 (df = 1362)

Note: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

Full sample.

Figure OA16: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population

Outcome: Encourage to run

Age:
(Baseline = 43)
47
Experience:
(Baseline = None)
Active and well known in county party organization
Active and well known in group important to the party
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle
Gender:
(Baseline = Male)
Female
Ideology x Party of Chair:
(Baseline = D.Average)
R.Average
D.Conservative
R.Conservative
D.Liberal
R.Liberal
D.Very conservative
R.Very conservative
D.Very liberal
R.Very liberal
Job category:
(Baseline = White collar 1)
Blue collar
White collar 2
Life circumstances:
Has a great deal of free time
Has flexible work hours
Has two young children
Is independently wealthy
Military veteran
Talents:
Assertive
Experienced fundraiser for local charities
Hard worker
Physically attractive
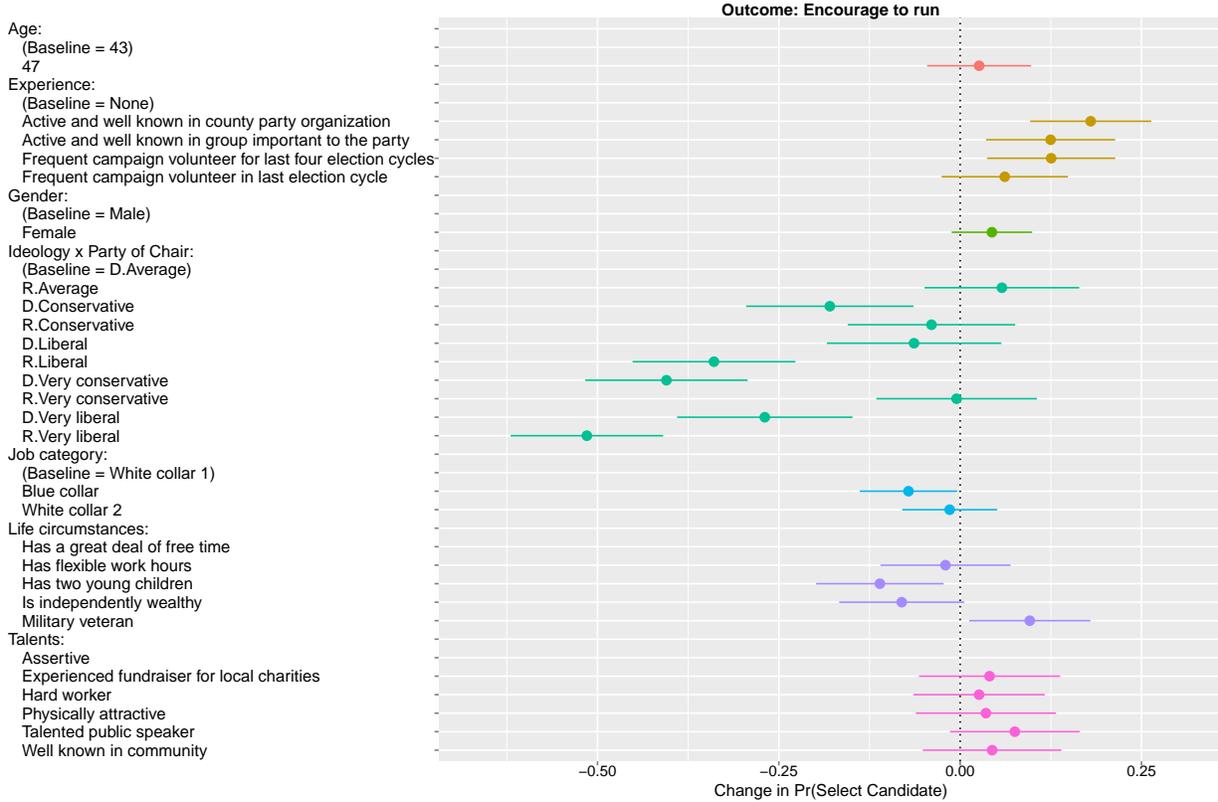Talented public speaker
Well known in community
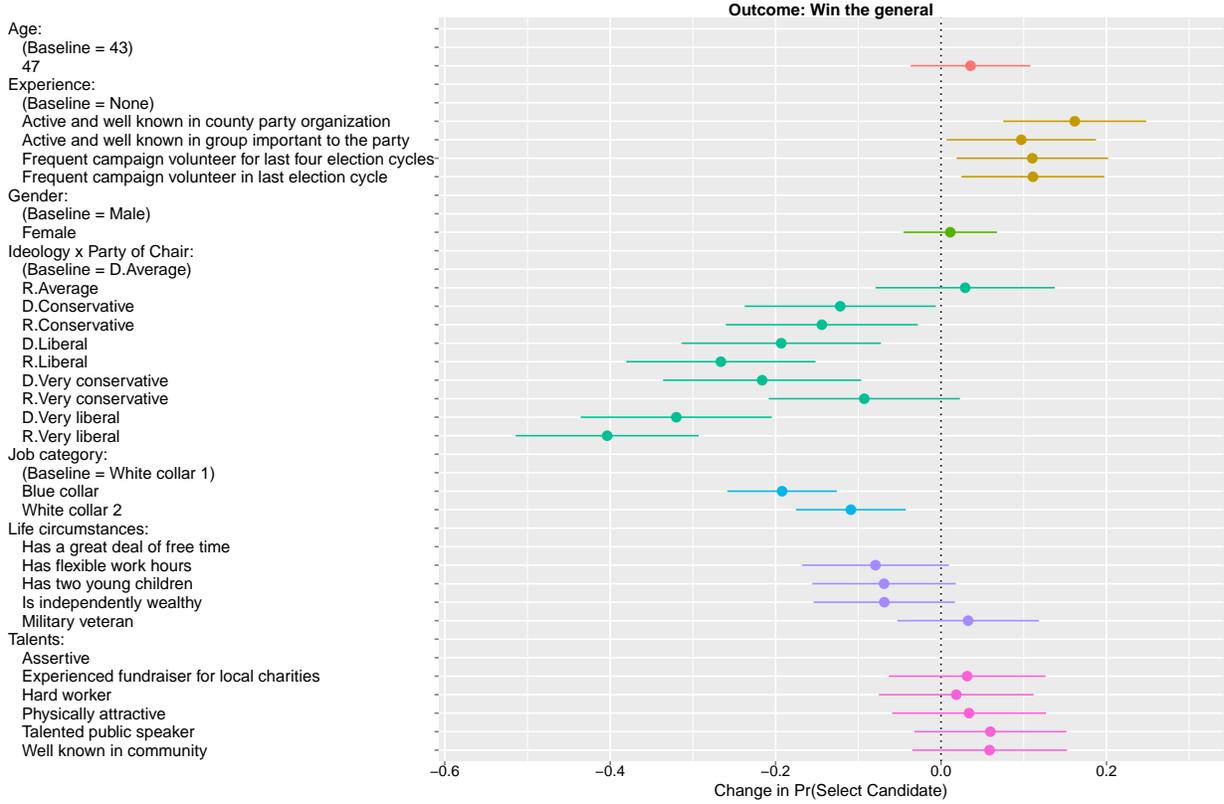
Change in Pr(Select Candidate)

Figure OA17: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population

Figure OA18: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population

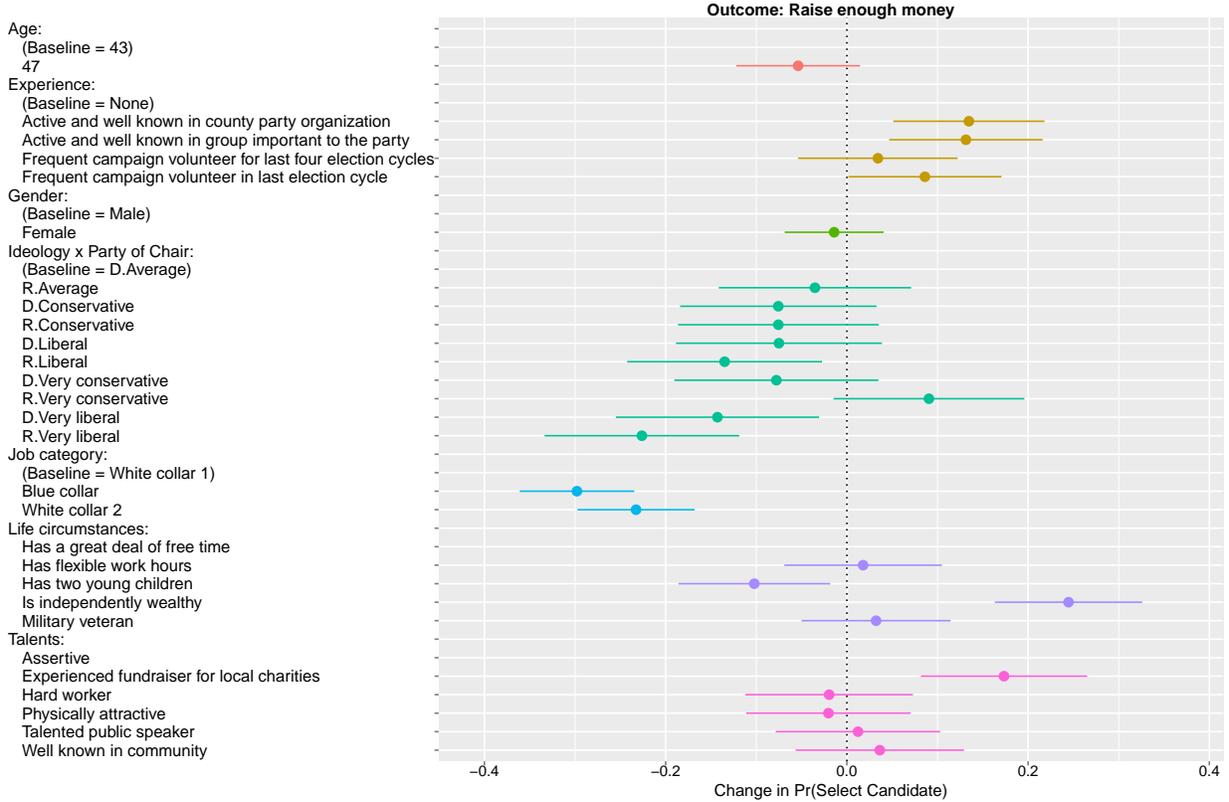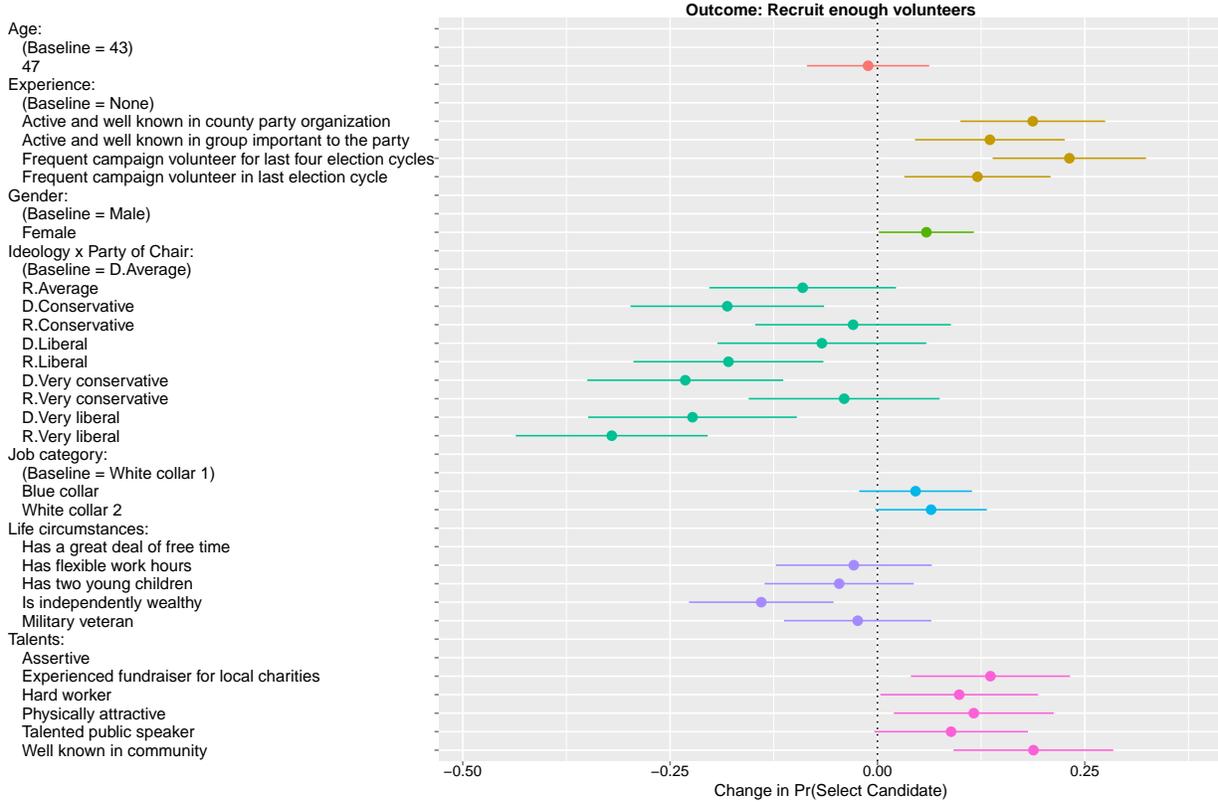**Outcome: Raise enough money**

Age:
(Baseline = 43)
47
Experience:
(Baseline = None)
Active and well known in county party organization
Active and well known in group important to the party
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle
Gender:
(Baseline = Male)
Female
Ideology x Party of Chair:
(Baseline = D.Average)
R.Average
D.Conservative
R.Conservative
D.Liberal
R.Liberal
D.Very conservative
R.Very conservative
D.Very liberal
R.Very liberal
Job category:
(Baseline = White collar 1)
Blue collar
White collar 2
Life circumstances:
Has a great deal of free time
Has flexible work hours
Has two young children
Is independently wealthy
Military veteran
Talents:
Assertive
Experienced fundraiser for local charities
Hard worker
Physically attractive
Talented public speaker
Well known in community

Change in Pr(Select Candidate)

Figure OA19: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population

Outcome: Recruit enough volunteers

Age:
(Baseline = 43)
47
Experience:
(Baseline = None)
Active and well known in county party organization
Active and well known in group important to the party
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle
Gender:
(Baseline = Male)
Female
Ideology x Party of Chair:
(Baseline = D.Average)
R.Average
D.Conservative
R.Conservative
D.Liberal
R.Liberal
D.Very conservative
R.Very conservative
D.Very liberal
R.Very liberal
Job category:
(Baseline = White collar 1)
Blue collar
White collar 2
Life circumstances:
Has a great deal of free time
Has flexible work hours
Has two young children
Is independently wealthy
Military veteran
Talents:
Assertive
Experienced fundraiser for local charities
Hard worker
Physically attractive
Talented public speaker
Well known in community

Change in Pr(Select Candidate)

Figure OA20: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population

Outcome: Stay loyal to the party

Age:
(Baseline = 43)
47
Experience:
(Baseline = None)
Active and well known in county party organization
Active and well known in group important to the party
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle
Gender:
(Baseline = Male)
Female
Ideology x Party of Chair:
(Baseline = D.Average)
R.Average
D.Conservative
R.Conservative
D.Liberal
R.Liberal
D.Very conservative
R.Very conservative
D.Very liberal
R.Very liberal
Job category:
(Baseline = White collar 1)
Blue collar
White collar 2
Life circumstances:
Has a great deal of free time
Has flexible work hours
Has two young children
Is independently wealthy
Military veteran
Talents:
Assertive
Experienced fundraiser for local charities
Hard worker
Physically attractive
Talented public speaker
Well known in community

Change in Pr(Select Candidate)

E.3 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012

322 respondents were from these counties.

Figure OA21: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties

Figure OA22: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties
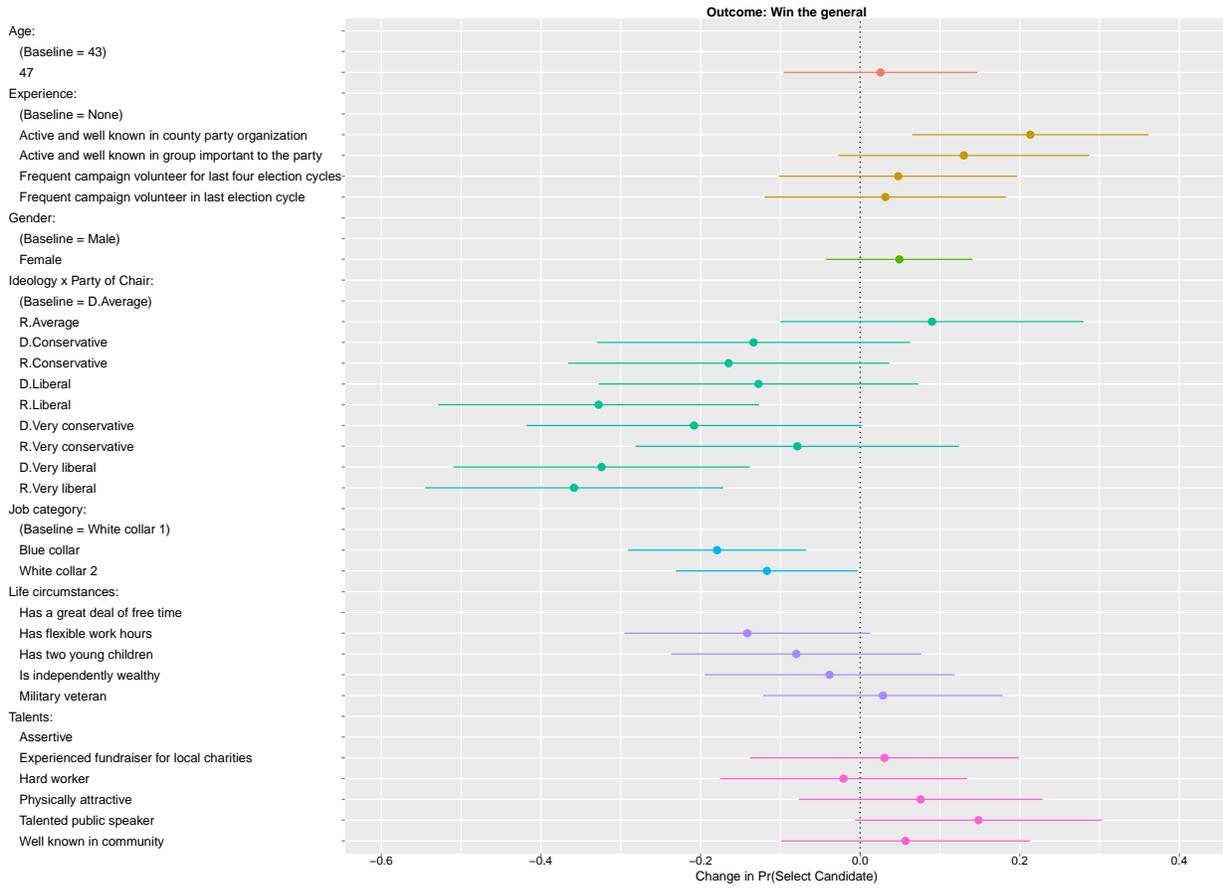
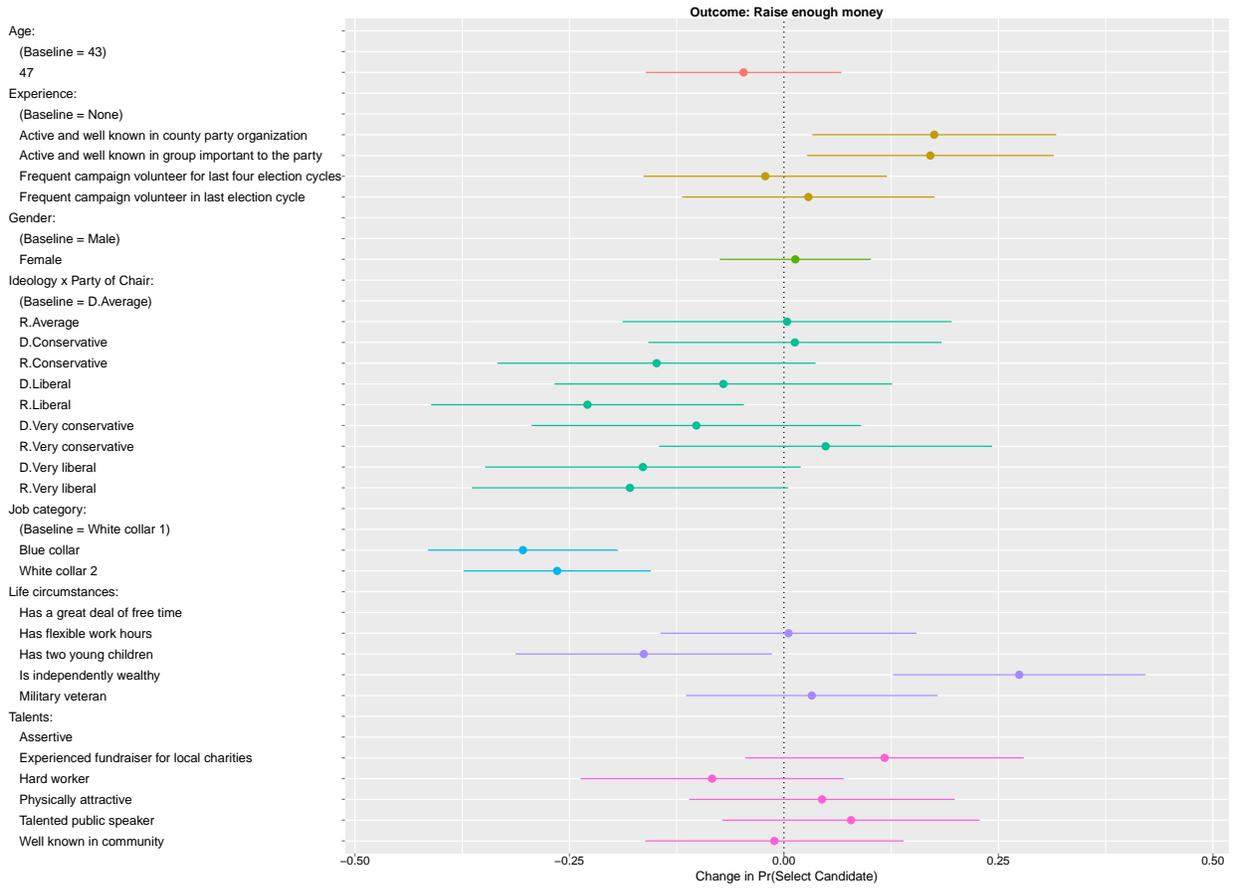# Figure OA23: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties

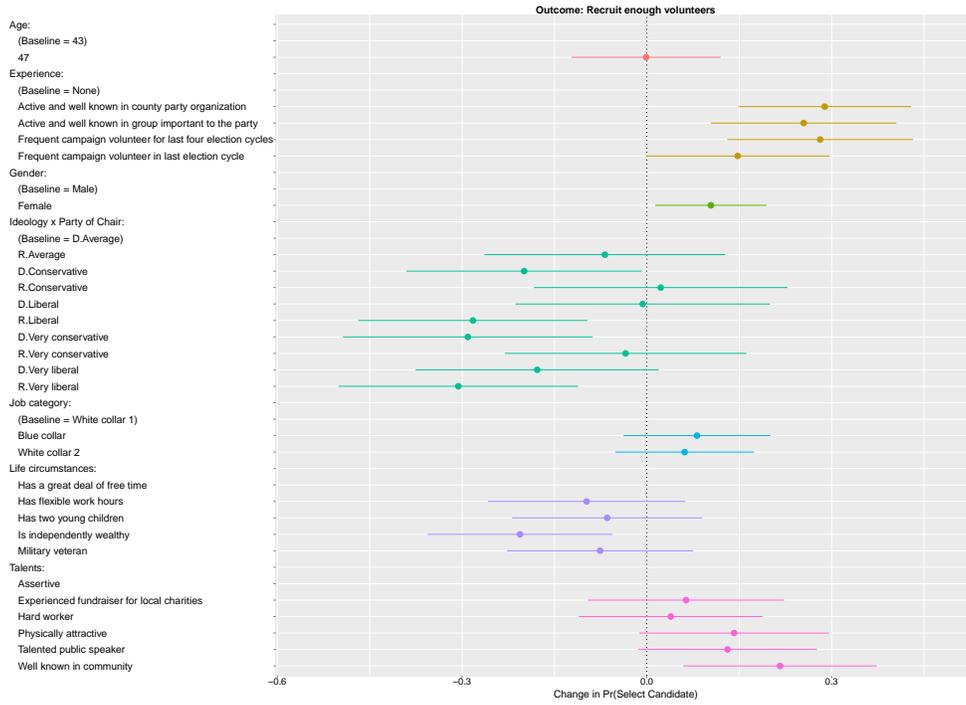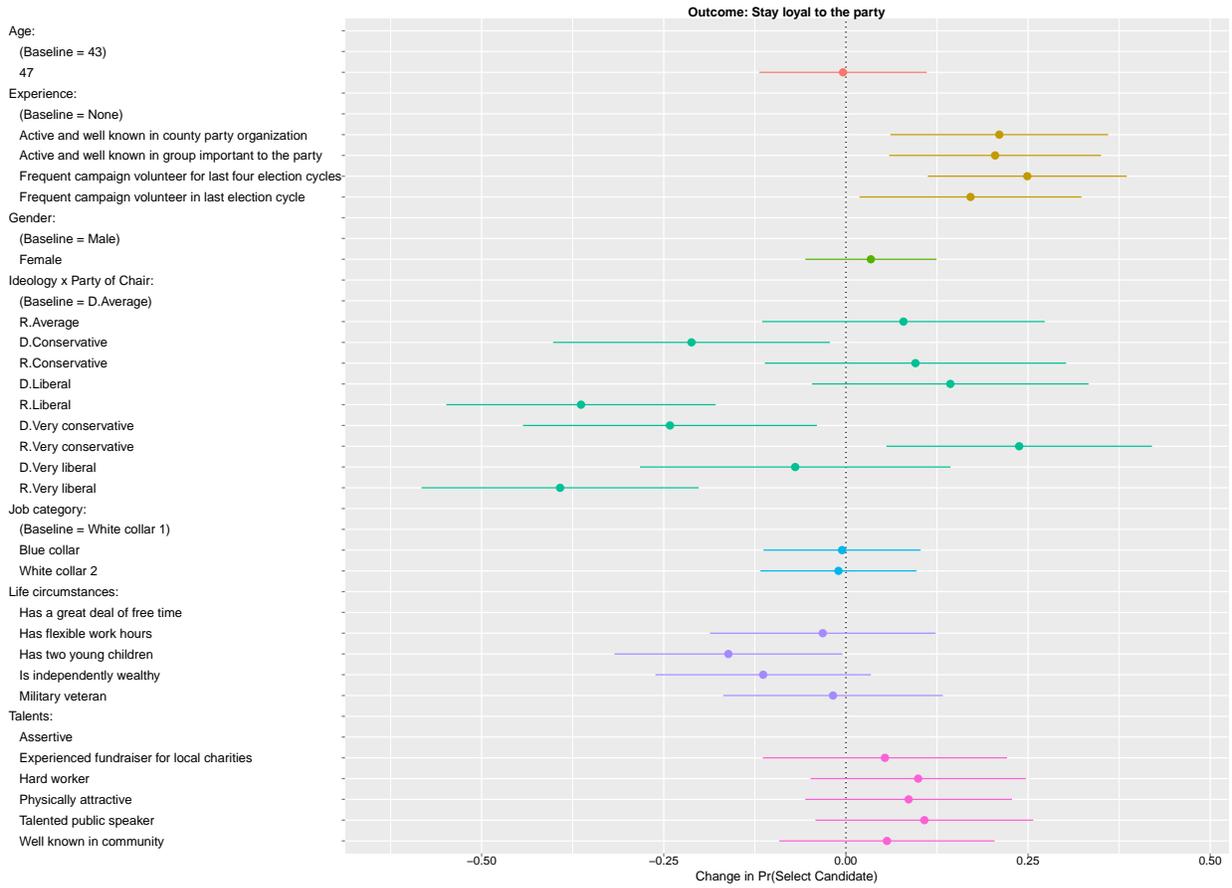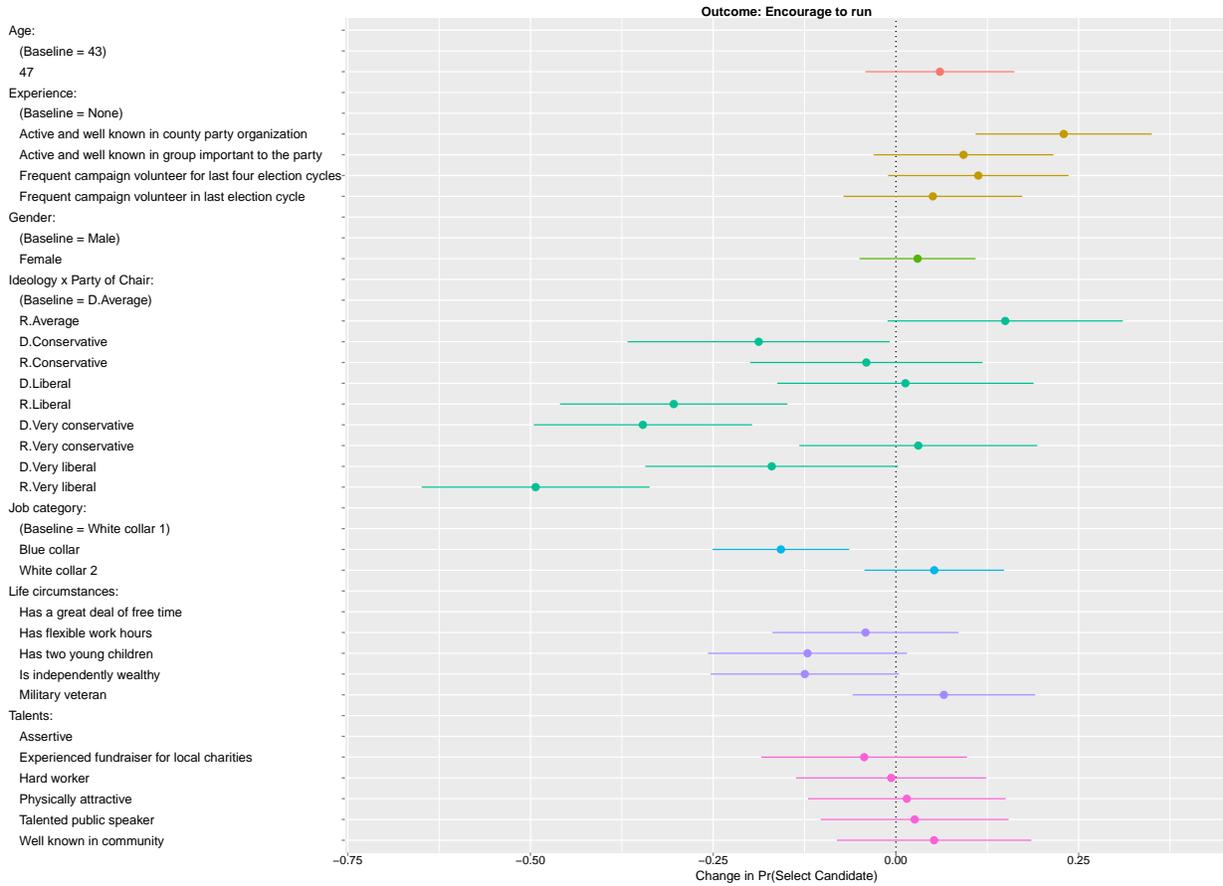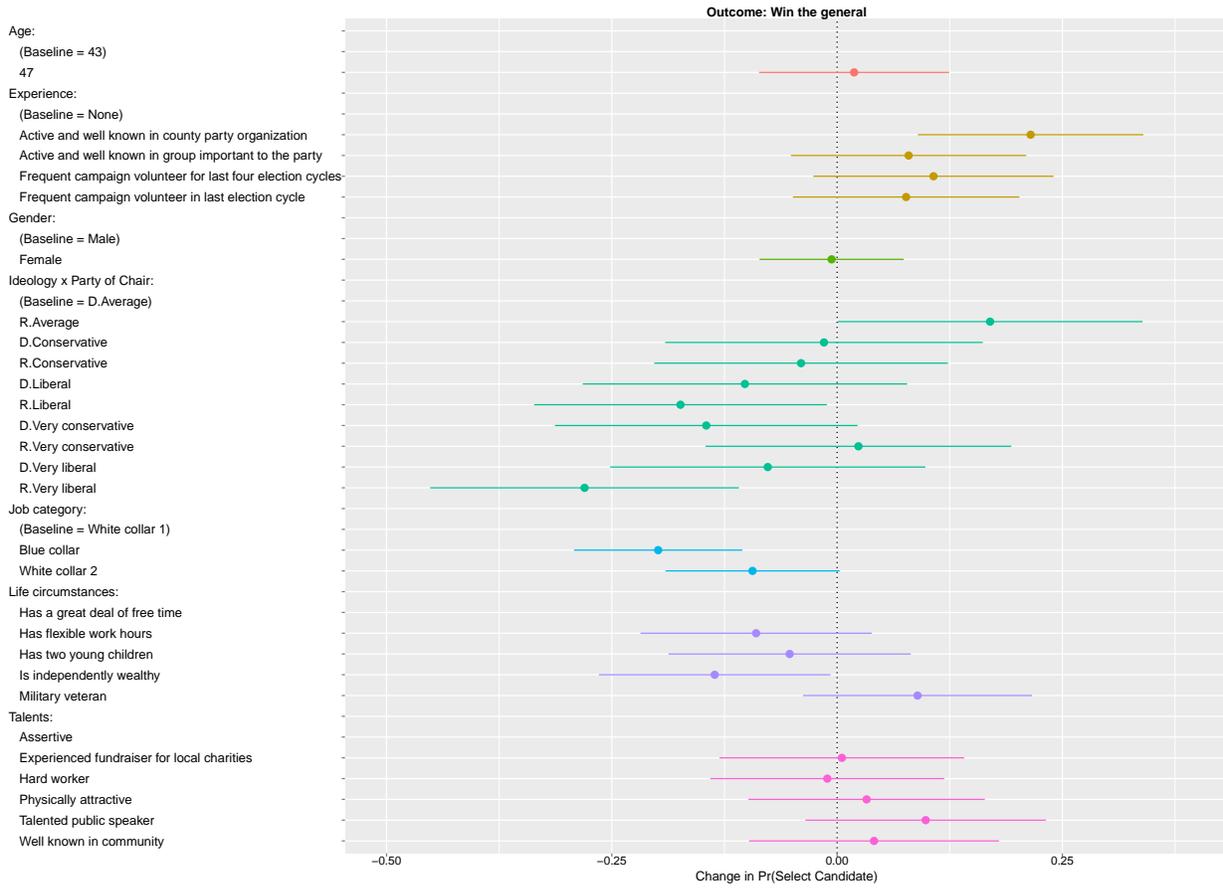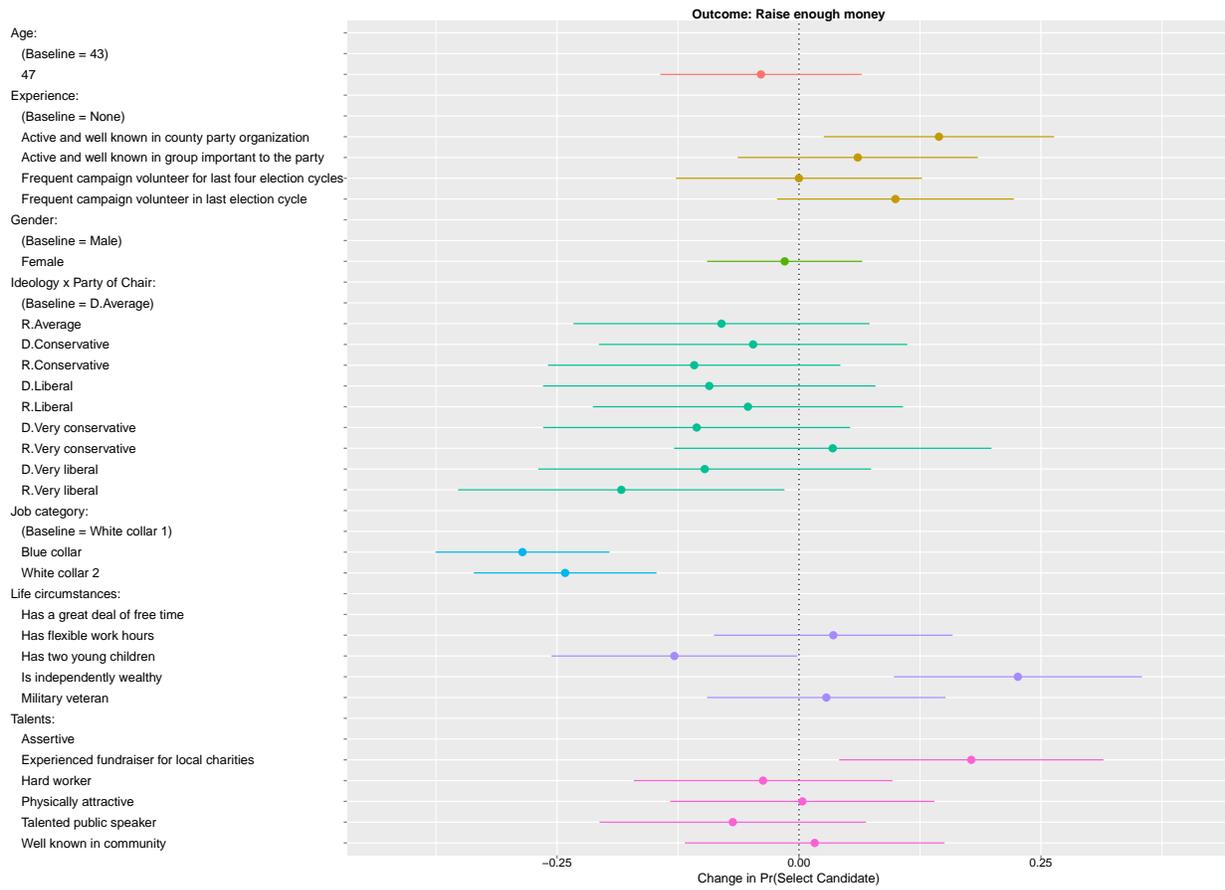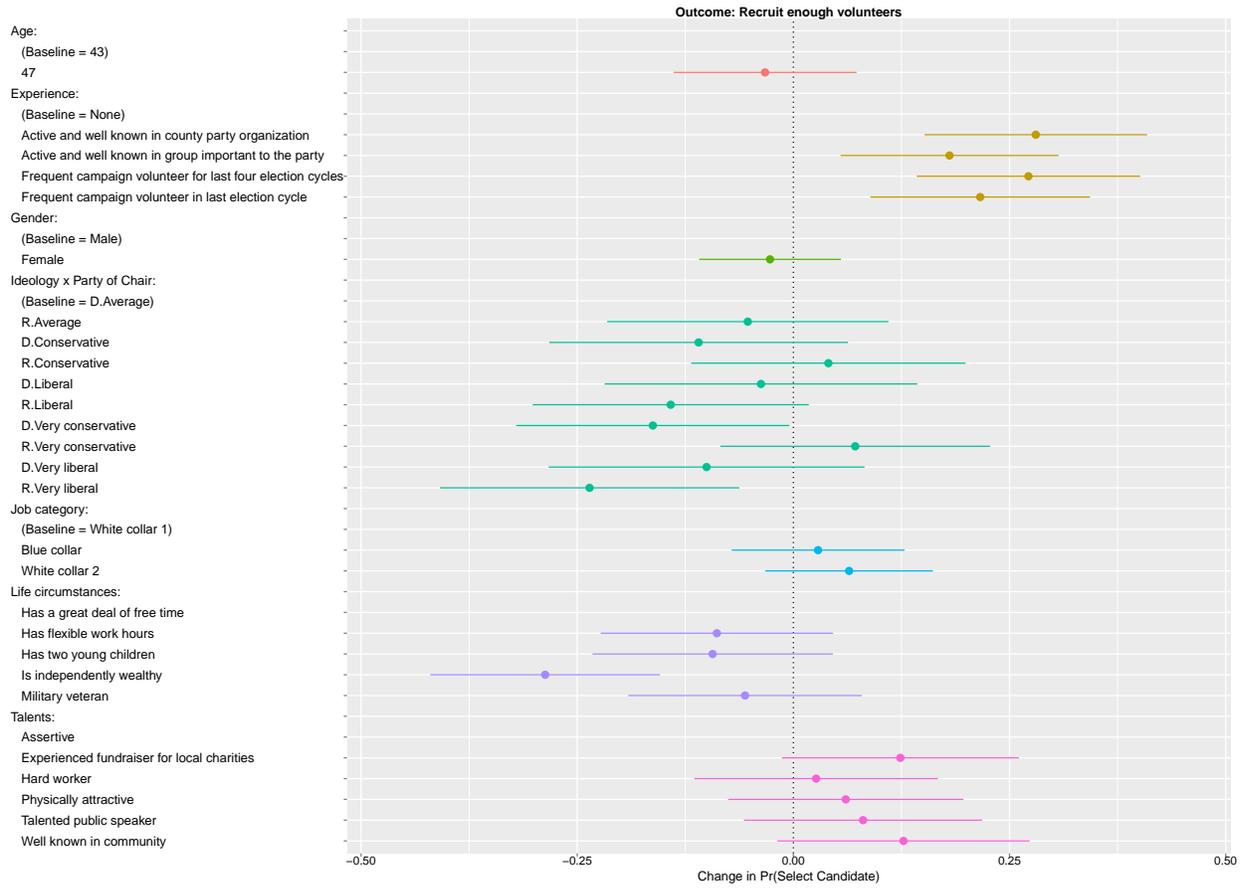## Figure OA24: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties

Figure OA25: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties

Outcome: Stay loyal to the party

Age:
  (Baseline = 43)
  47
Experience:
  (Baseline = None)
  Active and well known in county party organization
  Active and well known in group important to the party
  Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles
  Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle
Gender:
  (Baseline = Male)
  Female
Ideology x Party of Chair:
  (Baseline = D.Average)
  R.Average
  D.Conservative
  R.Conservative
  D.Liberal
  R.Liberal
  D.Very conservative
  R.Very conservative
  D.Very liberal
  R.Very liberal
Job category:
  (Baseline = White collar 1)
  Blue collar
  White collar 2
Life circumstances:
  Has a great deal of free time
  Has flexible work hours
  Has two young children
  Is independently wealthy
  Military veteran
Talents:
  Assertive
  Experienced fundraiser for local charities
  Hard worker
  Physically attractive
  Talented public speaker
  Well known in community

Change in Pr(Select Candidate)

E.4 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where the chair perceives between 26% and 75% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates

389 respondents were from these counties.

Figure OA26: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties

Figure OA27: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties

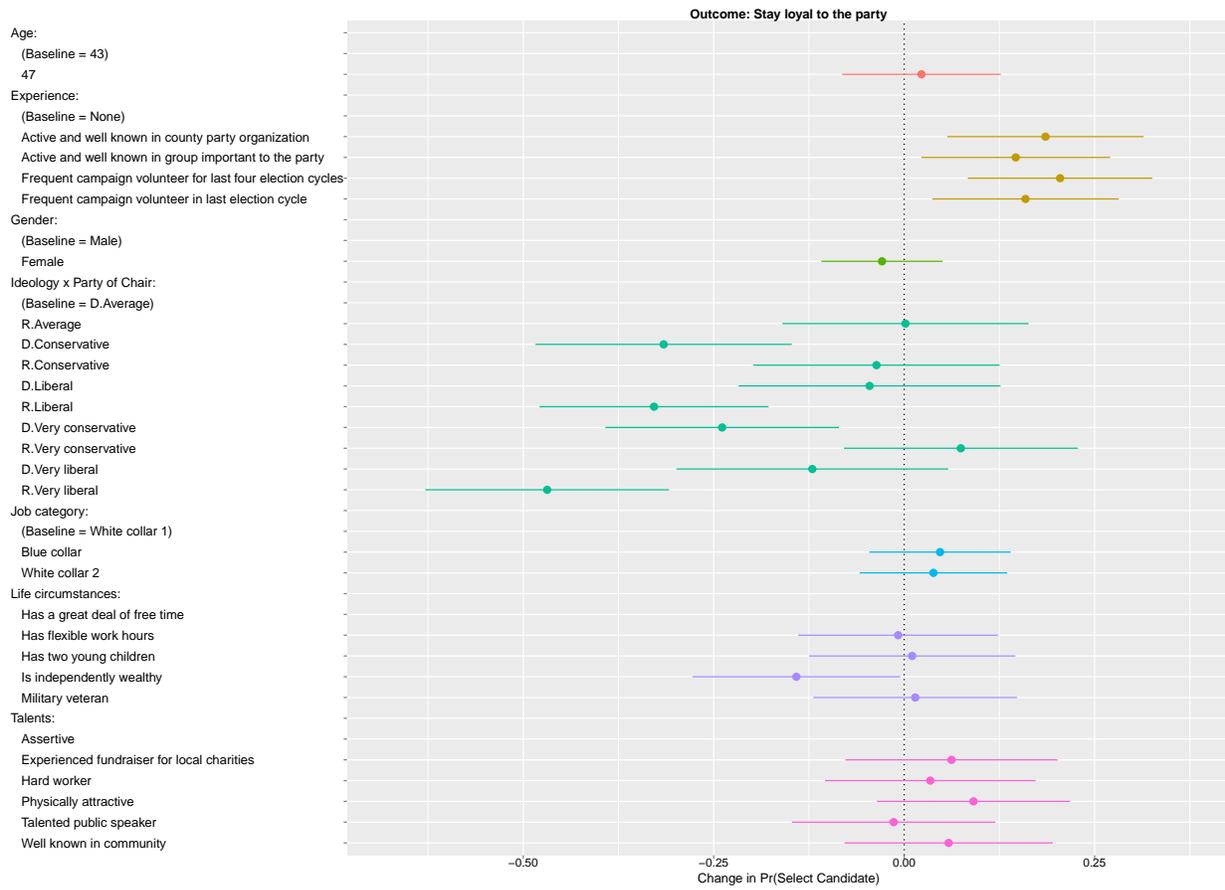## Figure OA28: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties

Figure OA29: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties

Outcome: Recruit enough volunteers

Age:
  (Baseline = 43)
  47
Experience:
  (Baseline = None)
  Active and well known in county party organization
  Active and well known in group important to the party
  Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles
  Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle
Gender:
  (Baseline = Male)
  Female
Ideology x Party of Chair:
  (Baseline = D.Average)
  R.Average
  D.Conservative
  R.Conservative
  D.Liberal
  R.Liberal
  D.Very conservative
  R.Very conservative
  D.Very liberal
  R.Very liberal
Job category:
  (Baseline = White collar 1)
  Blue collar
  White collar 2
Life circumstances:
  Has a great deal of free time
  Has flexible work hours
  Has two young children
  Is independently wealthy
  Military veteran
Talents:
  Assertive
  Experienced fundraiser for local charities
  Hard worker
  Physically attractive
  Talented public speaker
  Well known in community

Change in Pr(Select Candidate)

Figure OA30: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties

E.5 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where the chair perceives between 76% and 100% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates

255 respondents are in this category.

Figure OA31: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.
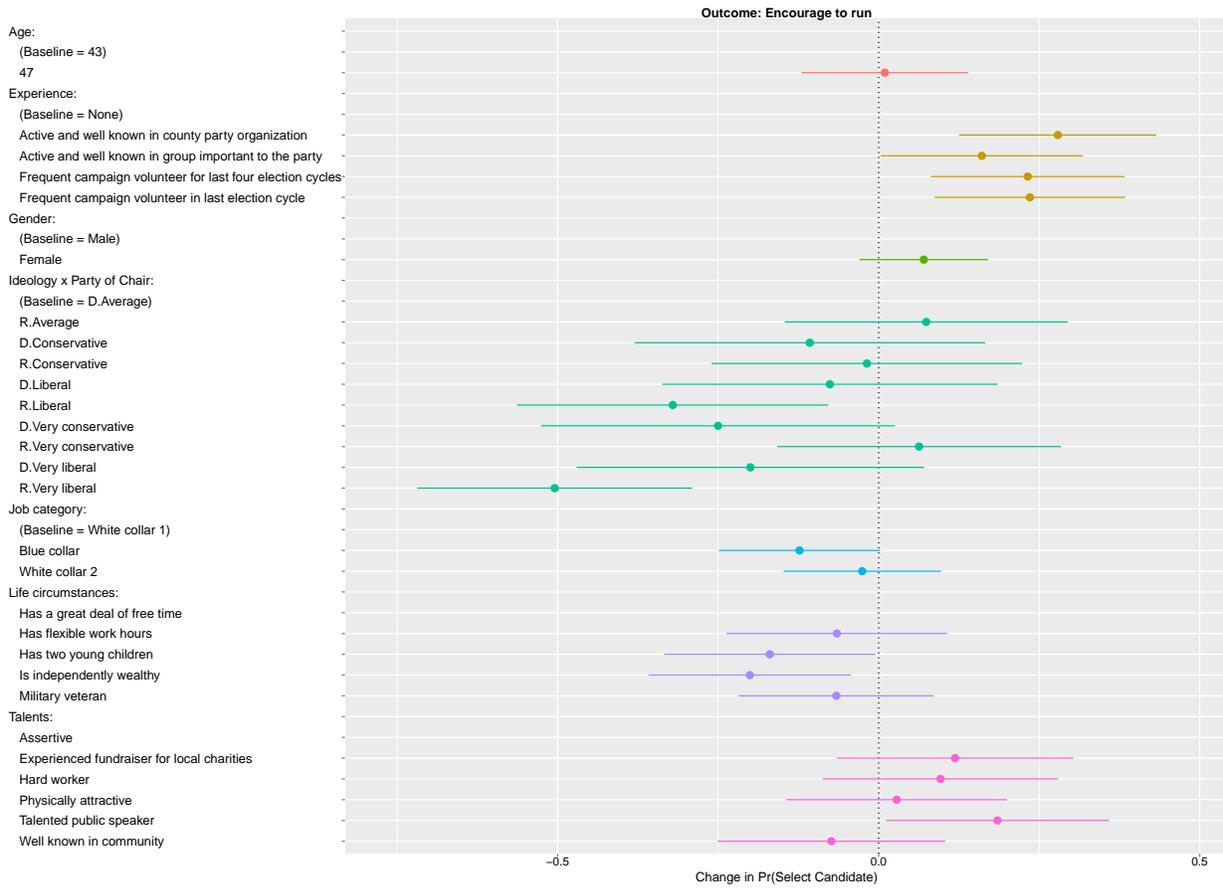
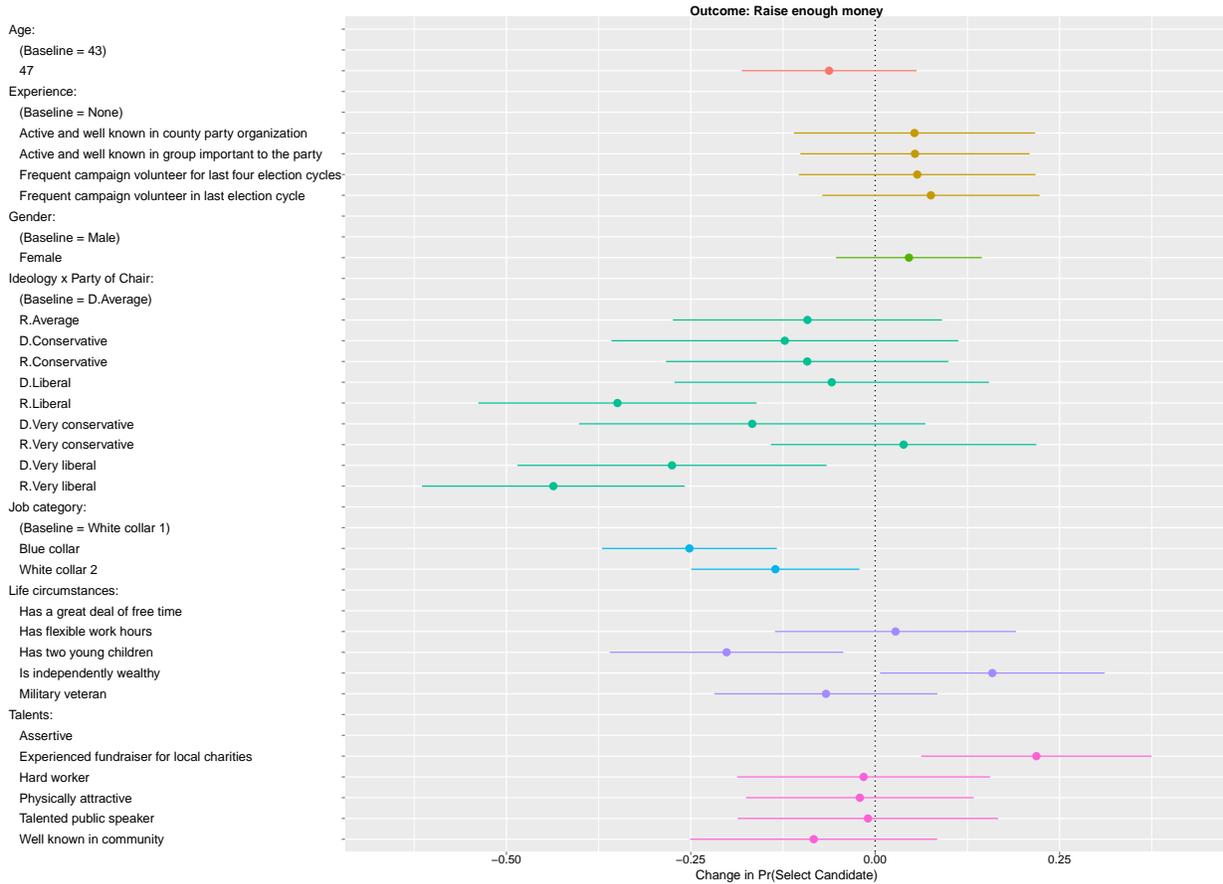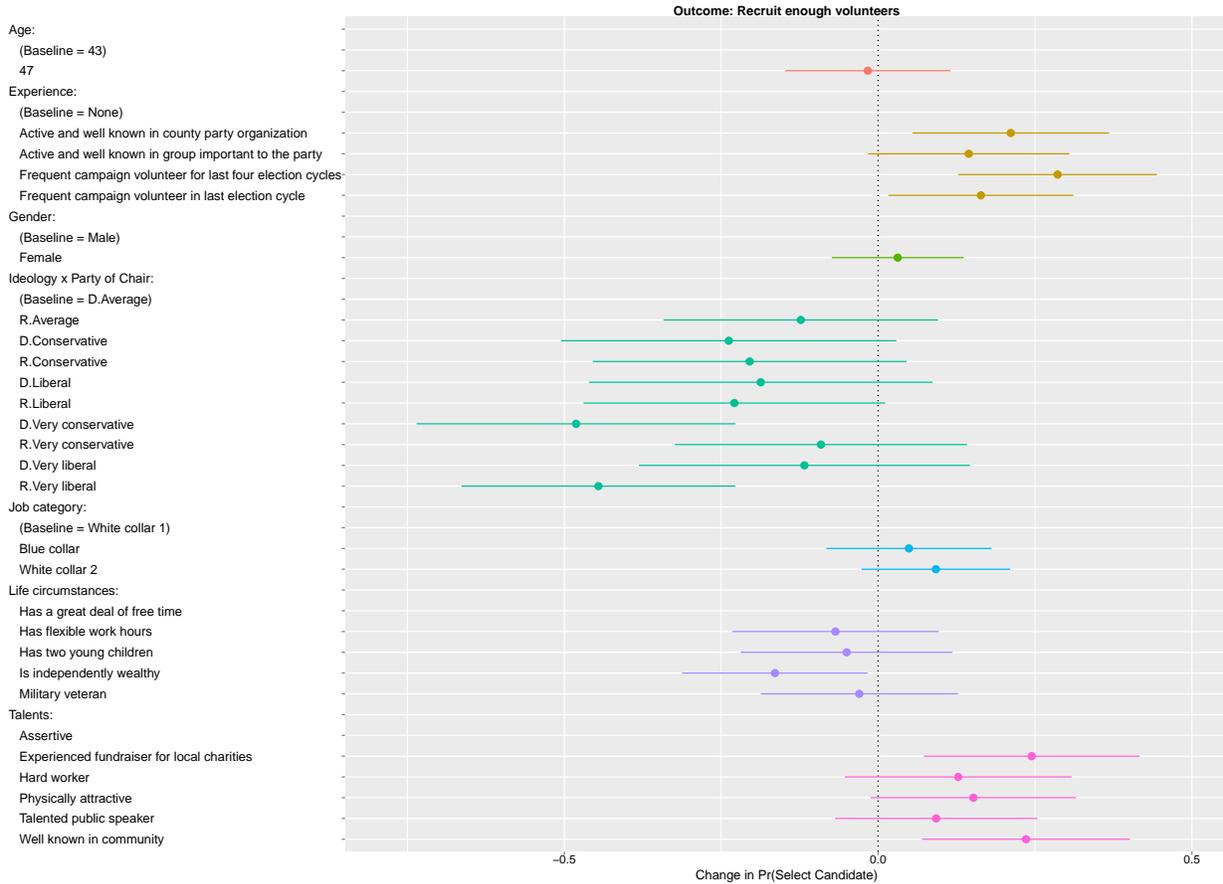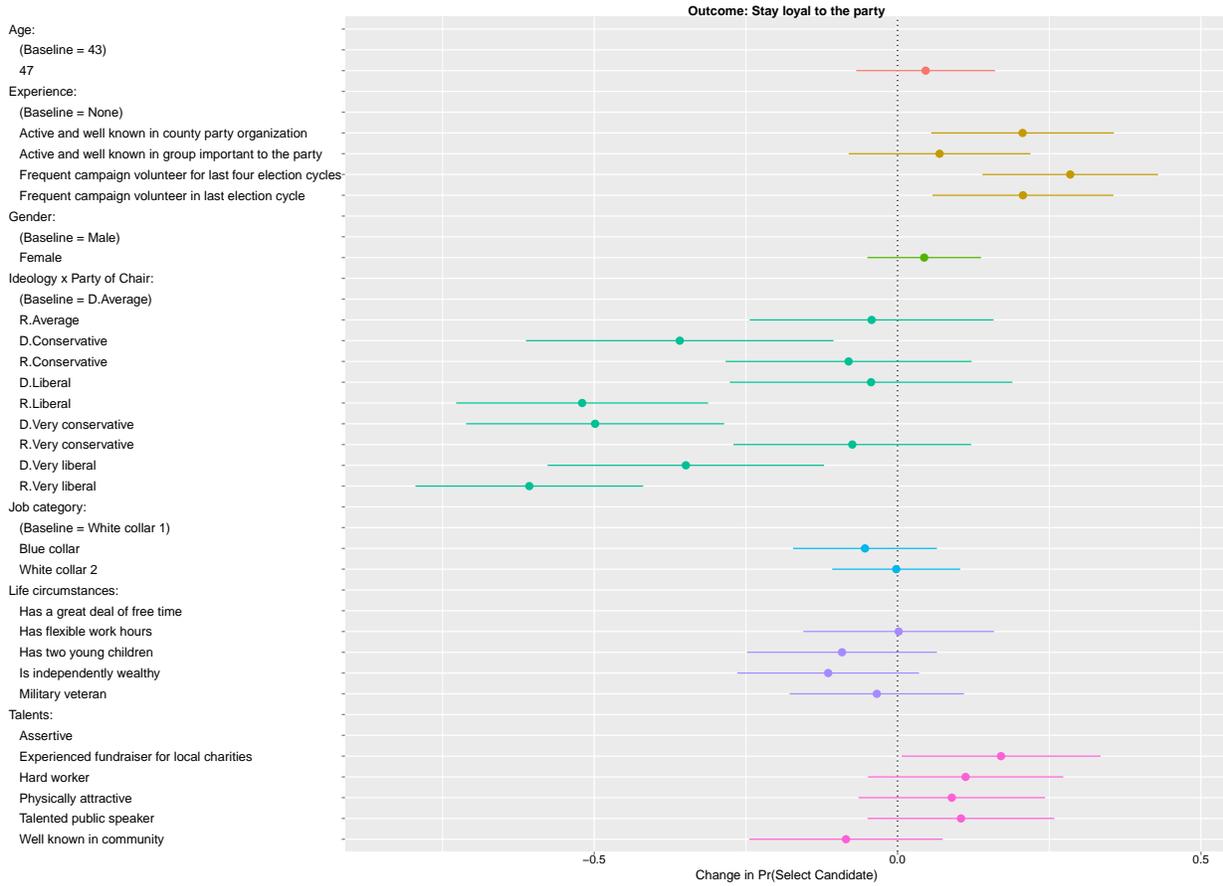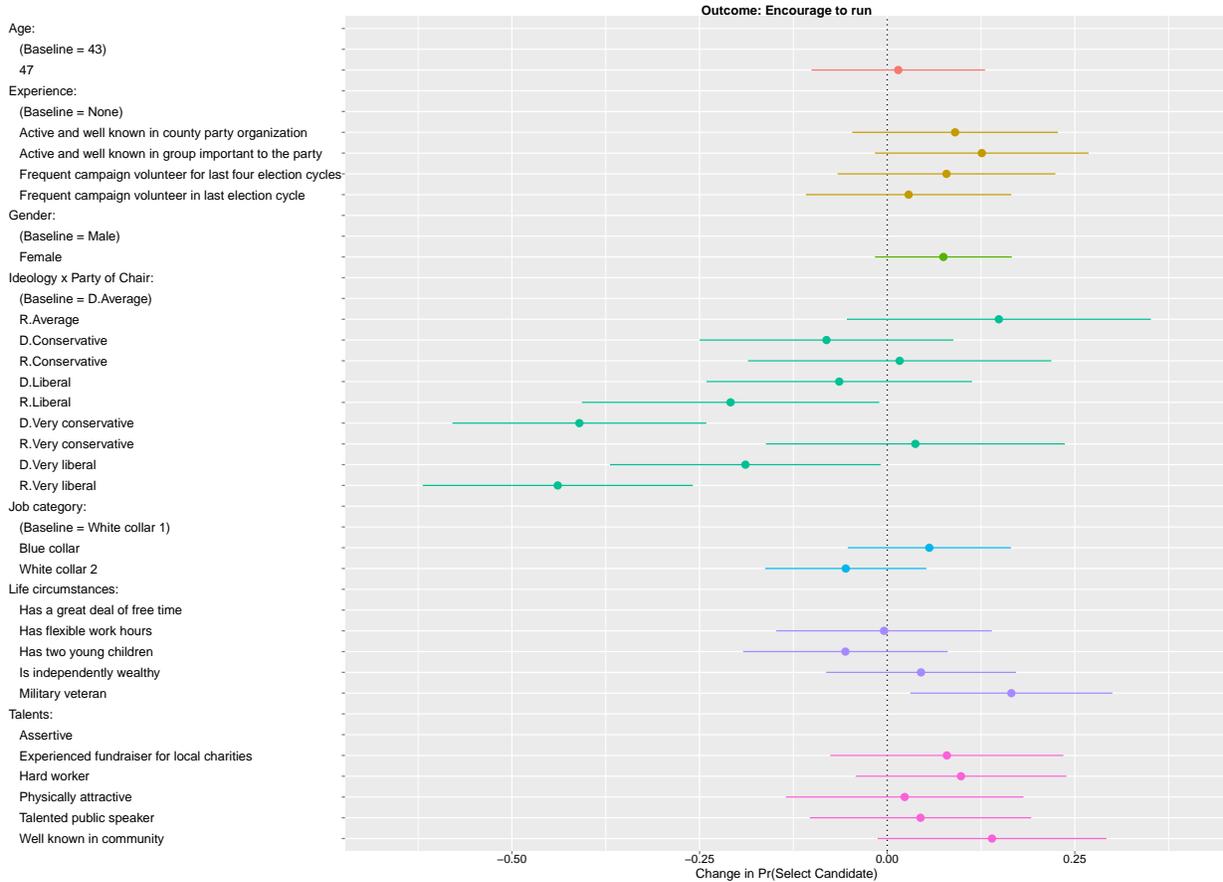Figure OA32: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.
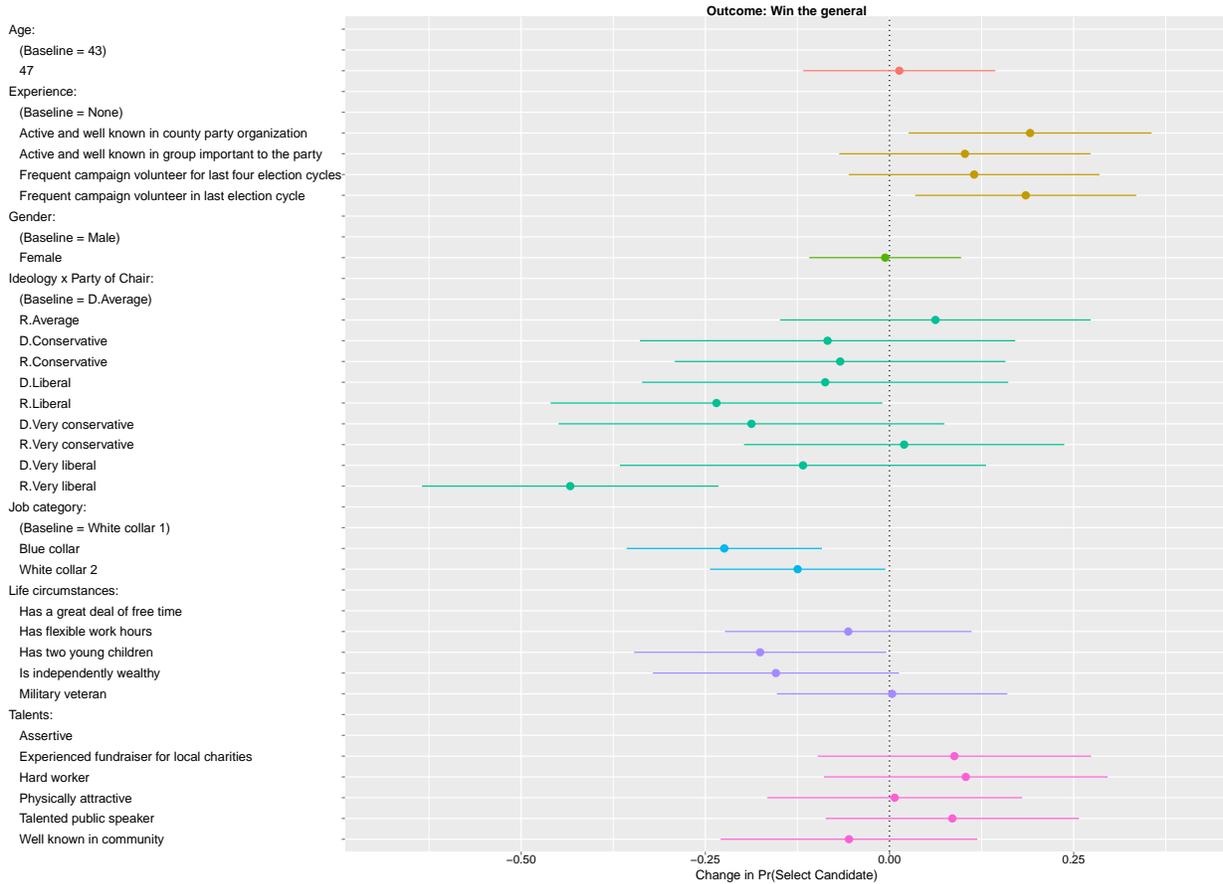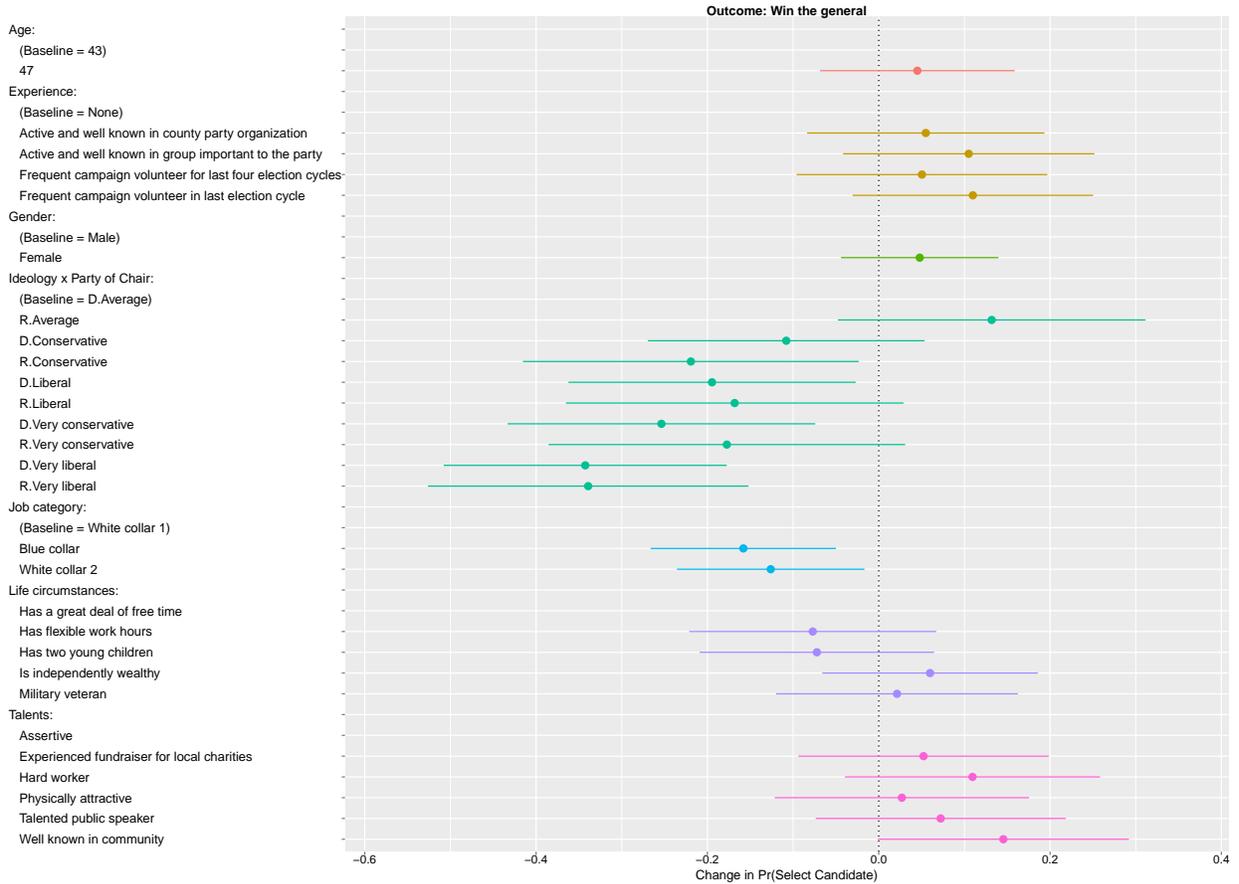
Figure OA33: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.

Figure OA34: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.

Figure OA35: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.

E.6 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where the chair perceives between 0% and 25% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates

343 respondents are in this category.

Figure OA36: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.

Figure OA37: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.

Figure OA38: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.
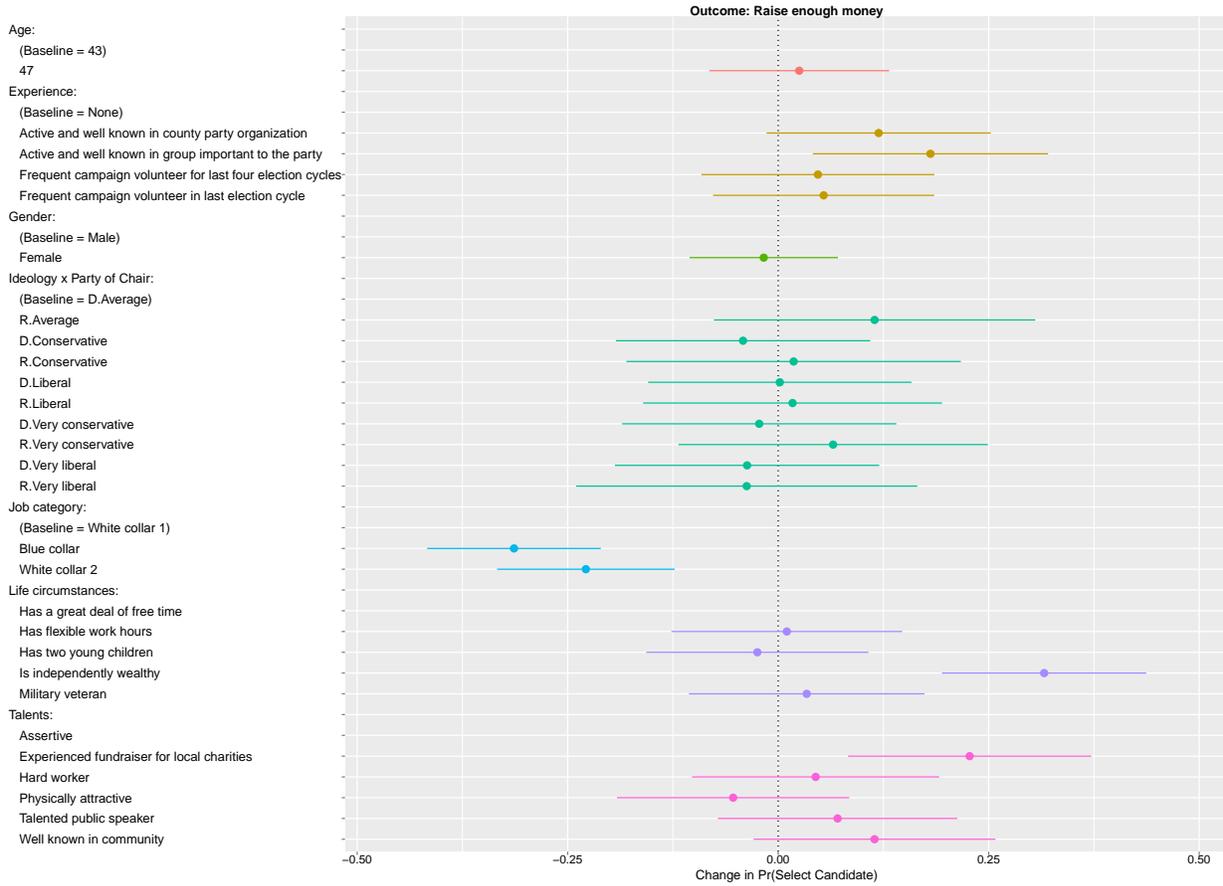
Figure OA39: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.
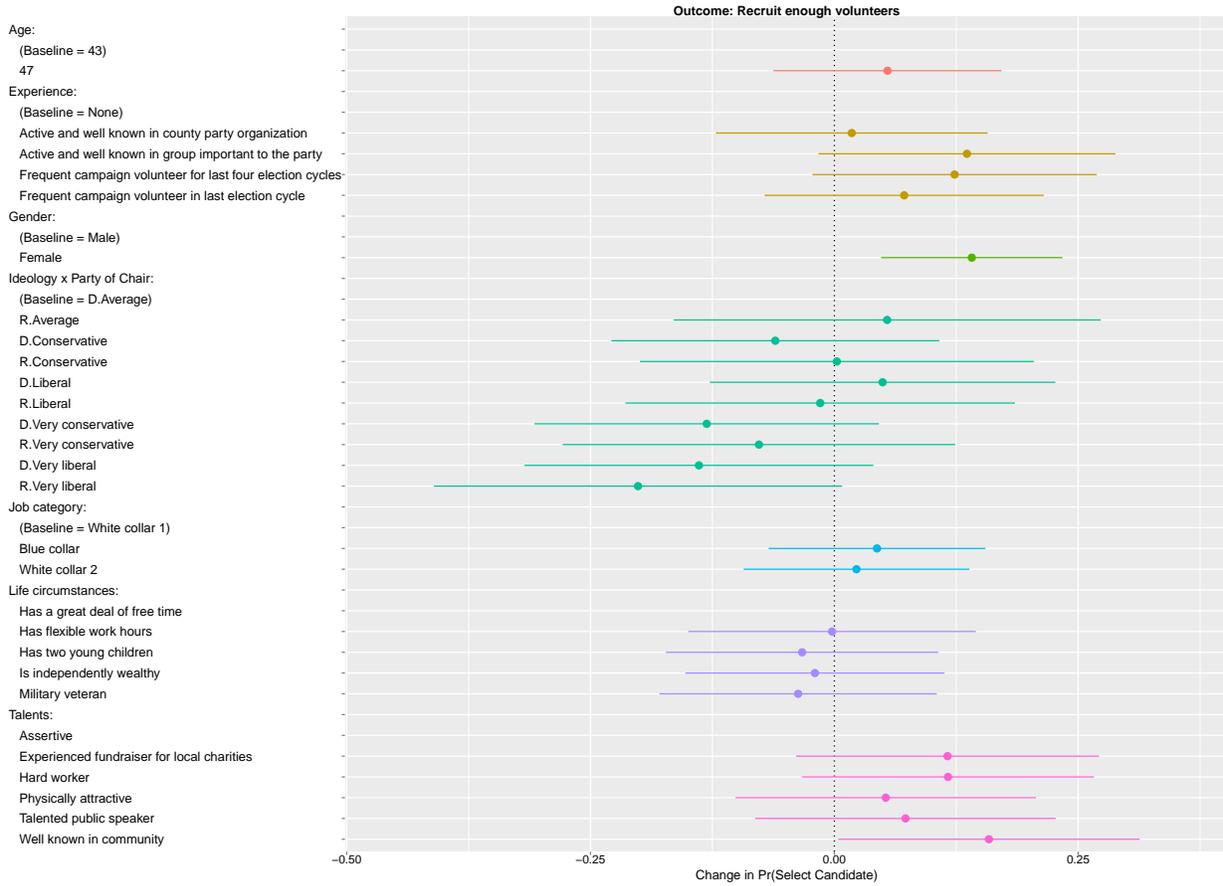
Figure OA40: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.