The Power of Partisanship in Brazil: Evidence from Survey Experiments *

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This version: May 30, 2013

Abstract

To what extent do party labels influence individuals’ policy positions? Much research has examined this question in the US, where party identification can generate both in-group and out-group pressures to conform to a party’s position. However, relatively little research has considered the question’s comparative generalizability. We explore the impact of party labels on attitudes in Brazil, a relatively new democracy with a fragmented party system. In such an environment, do parties function as in-groups, out-groups—or neither? We answer this question through two survey experiments, one conducted on a nationally-representative sample and another on a convenience sample recruited via Facebook. We find that both in- and out-group cues shape the opinions of identifiers of Brazil’s two main parties, but that cues have no effect on non-partisans. Results suggest that party identification can structure attitudes and behavior even in “party-averse” electoral environments.

*Supplemental results, data, and R code for replication of results are available on the AJPS Dataverse (http://hdl.handle.net/1902.1/21485). Previous versions of this paper were presented at the Inter-American Development Bank in May 2011, at the September 2011 APSA Meeting in Seattle, and at Oxford University in January 2012. Thanks to Taylor Boas, Chris Federico, Paul Goren, Kathy Hochstetler, Rick Lau, Howard Lavine, Joanne Miller, as well as to the anonymous reviewers and editors at AJPS for comments and suggestions. Thanks to Ted Brader for sharing ideas and experiences with partisan cueing experiments. The online surveys were approved by the IRBs of the University of Minnesota (#1110S05602) and Rutgers University (#E12-231). Thanks to Andy Sell in the University of Minnesota’s College of Liberal Arts Office of Information Technology for helping implement and manage the online survey.
Partisanship is a core heuristic individuals use to make sense of politics. It shapes voters’ opinions on a range of issues, motivates engagement in politics, and impacts vote choice. Most of what we know about the nature and impact of party ID comes from the United States, where the same two parties have competed for over 150 years, and where scholars have found ample support for the idea that source cues can shape public opinion (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991; Greene, Palmquist and Schickler, 2002; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006; Goren, Federico and Kittilson, 2009).

Over the last 30 years new democracies have emerged in nearly every corner of the globe. Scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the study of voting behavior in these countries. However, relatively little experimental research has considered whether the core concept of mass partisanship can travel into such different political contexts, particularly where political parties are new and numerous (For an exception see Brader and Tucker, Forthcoming 2012).

New democracies offer a useful proving ground for testing the generalizability of the concept of partisanship, because free and fair elections are a relatively new phenomenon and as such, partisanship has had less time to develop as predicted—as a function of consistent information parties provide to voters (Fiorina, 1981). Moreover, although individuals in established democracies partly inherit their partisan disposition from their parents (Converse, 1969; Jennings, Stoker and Bowers, 2009), in new democracies neither older nor younger citizens have had many opportunities to vote—and in any case the political context may have changed dramatically and rapidly in recent years. Parental socialization also cannot explain the strength of partisanship in new democracies.

Brazil constitutes a useful case for testing the portability of the idea that party ID can shape attitudes and behavior, because in many ways it is a least-likely case. As with other ‘Third Wave’ democracies, Brazil’s party system is relatively young—free and fair elections only began, after a long dictatorship, in the 1980s. Yet in contrast to many other new democracies, neither political party that has led the government or the opposition since since that time existed under either the prior democratic (1945–64) or military regime (1964–1980s), eliminating the possibility that parental socialization shaped partisan attitudes today.

Brazil’s party system also exhibits some of the highest degree of fragmentation in the world
The proliferation of parties not only makes it hard for voters to understand which, if any, party stands for what they believe in, but also to identify parties that stand for positions that differ from their own. Adding to this confusion, Brazil’s main parties have converged on the political center and grown less ideologically distinct in recent years (Power and Zucco, 2009; Lucas and Samuels, 2010), and all have entered a confusing array of electoral and governing coalitions. Parties that deliberately dilute their own image or message might gain voters, but scholars do not expect them to cultivate deep affective attachments to voters.

Scholars have also long supposed that mass partisanship is unlikely to take root in Brazil because of the shallowness of socio-cultural cleavages. While scholars of both American and comparative politics suggest party attachments are an extension of a person’s social or cultural group membership (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, 1960; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) cleavages such as class, ethnicity, religion, or region have historically never provided the basis for party competition in Brazil (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995).

Finally, Brazil’s political institutions work against the emergence of individual-level partisan identity (e.g. Mainwaring, 1999; Ames, 2001; Samuels, 2003). For example, its proportional electoral rules not only foster high party-system fragmentation but also make it difficult for voters to understand where parties stand on the issues. Its open-list system for legislative elections also fosters intra-party competition, attenuating the importance of party labels and enhancing the importance of individual candidates’ reputations.

Given this political, cultural, and institutional environment, Brazil is an unlikely case in which to expect party identification to shape voter attitudes and behavior. To the extent that party cues do shape voters’ attitudes in Brazil, we gain confidence that the concept of party identification rests on firm theoretical foundations for broad comparative use—in both established and newer democracies.

To explore the causal import of partisanship in Brazil we implemented two survey experiments, one using an online convenience sample and the other using a national probability sample. We find that exposure to party cues strongly shapes voter opinion. Both in- and out-group biases
shape the attitudes of partisans of Brazil’s two most important parties—but not those of partisans of other parties. These findings have important implications for the comparative study of parties and partisanship, given the supposed shallowness of partisan roots in Brazilian society—and the alleged shallowness of partisan roots in many other new democracies.

The next section discusses theoretical sources of partisanship. We then derive hypotheses about the power of partisan labels to shape Brazilian voter attitudes, drawing on observational evidence and recent research in American politics (e.g. Nicholson, 2012) which assumes that individuals interpret partisan cues in a framework of in-groups and out-groups. We proceed to describe our experiments, and then present our results. The conclusion considers the implications of our findings.

The Sources of Partisanship

Greene, Palmquist and Schickler (2002) suggest that partisan identification is a form of social identity. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT) (e.g. Huddy, 2001; Brewer, 2007), individuals classify themselves and others whom they perceive as similar as belonging to an “in-group,” and classify those whom they perceive as different as belonging to an “out-group.” People evince positive attitudes toward members of their group, and negative biases against members of out-groups. When individuals perceive group membership as important, they are more likely to agree with the prevailing opinion within their group—a form of in-group bias—and disagree with opinions of members of the other group—a form of out-group bias.

If partisanship operates in new democracies just as it does in the US, then we have good reason to expect in-group party cues to increase support for policy issues among partisans. For example, someone who identifies with Party A shown a cue from Party A will be more likely to agree with that party’s position than a partisan of Party A not shown that cue.

Similarly, out-group biases can also provide a basis for partisanship. Out-group bias may promote partisanship if someone who identifies with Party A shown a cue from Party B grows more likely to agree with Party A’s position than a supporter of Party A not shown a cue from Party B.
Both in-group and out-group biases are rooted in universal human desires to delineate and maintain group membership boundaries: individuals have incentives to accentuate intergroup differences by highlighting both in-group similarities and out-group differences (Brewer, 1991; Hogg, 2005).

Some suggest that in-group biases are relatively more important than out-group biases (e.g. Zaller, 1992; Brewer, 2007). Because social groups serve as a key source of personal values (Conover and Feldman, 1984), individuals assume that other members of their group share their goals and interpret the world similarly, at least with respect to issues that are important to their group’s identity. In-group biases can powerfully shape individual attitudes when group membership reinforces a positive social identity (Brewer, 1991).

However, Goren, Federico and Kittilson (2009) and Nicholson (2012) suggest that out-group cues can sometimes overwhelm in-group biases. Nicholson hypothesizes that in-group biases will matter most in uncompetitive, low-stakes contexts. In contrast, in a competitive environment individuals not only have incentives to agree with their own group but also face social incentives to disagree with an opposing group. In such situations, an opposing party’s endorsement of a particular policy could reinforce attitudes even more than an in-party’s endorsement.

In short, the salience of group membership and the levels inter-group competition determine the extent to which cues shape attitudes as well as the predominance of either in- or out-group cues. In the US, scholars assume that partisanship exists, in the sense that it reinforces a positive social identity for Democrats and Republicans. The competitiveness of the US political system is also self-evident, with only the two major parties standing a chance of winning major offices. However, in comparative perspective, particularly in new democracies and in multiparty systems, the salience of partisanship is often lower and way that inter-party competition impacts perceptions of each individual party is harder to interpret. Given this, we lack clear guidance regarding whether in- or out-group cues should matter more. In the next section we develop expectations about the

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1The standard definition of partisanship includes two components: the strength of its effects, which we focus on in this paper, and its stability over time. Using panel data and following the approach in Zuckerman, Dasovic and Fitzgerald (2007), in other work Samuels and Zucco (2010) confirm that for Brazil’s Workers’ Party (PT) at least, party ID is as consistent over time as in other new democracies, and nearly as consistent as in established democracies. Party ID is less consistent over time for the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB).
Partisanship in Brazil

Brazil is now a stable democracy and two parties have dominated presidential elections since 1994. However, its party system—the number and competitive dynamic between existing political parties—differs markedly from what we observe in the US.

To illustrate, consider two decades worth of survey-based observational evidence. Using polls from Datafolha (a large polling firm) since 1989, Figure 1 provides the proportion of Brazilian voters who identify with any party at all as well as the share who identify with the three largest parties: the Workers’ Party (PT, Partido dos Trabalhadores), the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB, Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira), and the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB, Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro).

The figure reveals why scholars perceive mass partisanship as relatively weak in Brazil. The aggregate level in the electorate—about 40-45% in recent surveys—is below average in comparative perspective (Huber, Kernell and Leoni, 2005; Kitschelt et al., 2010). The three parties shown—PSDB, PT, and PMDB—are the only ones to have obtained more than 5% of partisan preferences on average over this time-period.

The PMDB has steadily lost ground since the 1990s. This may be explained by the fact that it is a loosely-organized federation of state and local leaders who lead clientelistic electoral machines (Hagopian, 1996). Because of its decline and because it has never led the government since redemocratization, we concentrate on the other two large parties.

The PSDB—which held the presidency from 1995–2002 and has served as the main opposition party since—has never attracted more than a small slice of the electorate. It emerged as a breakaway faction from the PMDB in 1988, and has always been a resource-rich party, dominated by experienced politicians from the state of São Paulo, Brazil’s largest and wealthiest (Roma, 2002).

The Datafolha question was always phrased the same, as an open-ended question: “What is your preferred party?” [“Qual é o seu partido político de preferência?”]
Figure 1: Party Identification in Brazil (1989-2010)

Figure shows a moving average of levels of party identification, as computed by Datafolha. White vertical lines indicate presidential elections.

Today, despite winning two presidential elections, it remains largely a loosely-organized federation of regional leaders, and relies on these leaders’ personal popularity and demonstrated technocratic effectiveness in government rather than on a coherent political vision. The party’s appeal is concentrated among relatively educated and wealthy Brazilians, who tend to regard the PT as a party of inexperienced upstarts.

Only one party—the PT—can claim a sizable proportion of the electorate as partisan supporters. Since its founding in the early 1980s it has professed to be the party of “activist citizens,” engaging average Brazilians who want to change society, promoting greater participation in government, and greater socio-economic equality. It has consistently sought to develop and consolidate this partisan image, coupling a branding effort with an organizational development strategy that seeks to highlight the party’s connection to individuals in civil society at the local level. The PT’s deliberate efforts to cultivate an image have paid off. The party initially established itself as the main opposition party, then gradually increased its presence around the country, and has held
the presidency since 2003. As Figure 1 reveals, since 1989, the proportion of Brazilians who call themselves *petistas* has grown from about 5% to about 25%.

In a country where scholars do not expect mass partisanship to take root in the first place, one party’s growth from zero in 1980 to 25% a generation later is remarkable. However, such growth does not necessarily confirm that partisanship—for the PT or for any other party—has the same causal force that it does elsewhere. The Datafolha question, for example, might not be capturing the psychological phenomenon of “partisanship.” And if that were true, Figure 1 might both overestimate the strength of partisanship in Brazil as well as be comparing Brazilian oranges to American and/or West European apples. Perhaps, as skeptics imply (e.g. Mainwaring, 1999), partisan sympathies in Brazil—even for the PT—are not as strong as they are in longstanding democracies. Can we determine whether party labels shape Brazilians’ attitudes and behavior? Given what we know about Brazil’s parties, and based in recent research on source cues, let us now articulate our hypotheses.

**Hypotheses**

We expect to find that the labels of the PT and the PSDB convey reference-group information to partisans of these parties. That is, respondents who identify with either the PT and the PSDB and receive information about these parties’ positions (“party cues”) should agree more with their respective party’s positions when compared to partisans who do not receive such information (H1).

The PT is the most likely candidate among Brazilian parties to have cultivated partisanship similar to what is found in longstanding democracies. It has a history seeking to develop and consolidate its party label across the country (Samuels, 1999; Hunter, 2010) and of cultivating the party’s connection to individuals in civil society at the local level. As Figure 1 suggests, *petismo* appears, at least at first glance, to provide a powerful form of social identity.

The case for the PSDB partisanship is less clear, but still present. On the one hand, the party has long highlighted its technocratic efficiency in government, and has been popular among Brazil’s
better-off citizens (Samuels, 2006). On the other hand, it has a decentralized organizational structure (Roma, 2006), and partly for this reason has never deliberately sought to cultivate a coherent collective public image beyond technocratic effectiveness. Although this image does represent a specific style of government, the PSDB’s own leaders have acknowledged that has failed to foster widespread affective ties to voters (Cardoso, 2011). Still, many Brazilians fondly remember PSDB leaders’ successful state administrations, and especially President Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s presidency (1995–2002), whose policies ended runaway inflation and brought Brazil’s debt crisis under control, laying the foundations for subsequent economic growth.

Building on recent research in the U.S., we can also generate more specific predictions, about the distinction between in- and out-group cueing dynamics. The simplest and most likely mechanism behind any cueing effects in the Brazilian context is in-group cueing. For in-group cueing to exist, it is only necessary that voters’s attachment to their preferred party be a substantively meaningful form of social identity; their feelings about other parties are irrelevant. We investigate whether in-group cueing exists by examining whether PT and PSDB partisans’ opinions are impacted when they receive information only about the position of their own party (H2).

Out-group cueing, on the other hand, is a priori less likely in the Brazilian context because the fragmented multiparty system renders the notion of an “out-group” unclear. In contrast to the U.S., for instance, it is not obvious which of Brazil’s many parties—currently, 19 have at least one seat in the legislature—partisans might consider an “out-group.”

The key to assessing out-group cueing effects—in Brazil or elsewhere—is not just the degree of fragmentation but the context in which the parties compete. Although many parties participate and win in local, state, and national legislative elections, only the PT and PSDB have effectively competed for the presidency since 1994, and they have served as the main government and opposition parties since then. This dynamic could provide partisans of these two parties with a concrete track-record that would mark the “other” party as their main competition.

Thus if political competition drives the emergence of out-group biases, and if partisans of the PT and PSDB see the other party as their main competitor for control of government, then partisans
of those two parties should react not only to their own party’s cue, but also to the “other” party’s cue (H3).

To be clear, if we find in-group but not out-group cueing effects, we would conclude that PT and PSDB partisans do not understand competition between their two parties to be as clearly defined as we have suggested just above. In short, while H2 examines whether partisanship is a meaningful form of social identity, H3 indicates whether the structure of political competition is well defined enough to generate out-group biases. H2 and H3 represent two distinct causal pathways for cues to shape opinions.

Finally, our depiction of Brazilian politics also has implications for non-partisans, who comprise a majority of the electorate. Non-partisans by definition cannot be subject to in-group dynamics. However, examining non-partisans can help us better assess whether party cueing effects work as scholars have supposed. The context of political competition in Brazil may, as H3 suggests, have created the conditions for out-group cues to matter for partisans of the PT and/or the PSDB. However, we expect information about either party (or even about both parties) to have no effect on individuals who affirm no partisan identity (H4).

Though trivial at a first glance, this hypothesis, if true, rules out plausible and theoretically relevant alternatives. If we were to find, for instance, that non-partisans react to (any) party cues, then our claim that partisan identity is a real and substantively important phenomenon would be jeopardized, as it would imply that no behavioral difference exists between non-partisans and partisans. We might also, for example, discover that non-partisans react negatively to information about the PT but not to information about the PSDB; this would suggest that perhaps a particular group’s distinctive identity drives cueing effects and that out-groups do not operate by strengthening one’s own in-group biases, as psychological theories suggest (Nicholson, 2012).

In any case, observational evidence provides preliminary support for our hypotheses. For example, statistical analysis of the micro-data of the surveys used in Figure 1 reveals that since 1989, evaluation of the president’s job performance is substantially higher among those who identify with the president’s party than for those who identify with the main opposition party, with identifiers
of other parties and non-identifiers in between. Identifiers are also much more likely than others
to vote for their own party’s presidential candidate. These differences suggest that partisanship
shapes voters’ attitudes and actions just as one might expect. However, such findings cannot be
taken as direct evidence of the causal import of partisan identification. Cross-sections of observa-
tional data do not permit direct identification of causal relationships, because they cannot account
for potential endogeneity between partisanship and the behavior we observe, or for potential re-
porting biases that might lead respondents to project consistency in answers to survey questions.
Due to these limitations, we adopt an experimental approach to the question, allowing us to draw
stronger causal inferences.

The Survey Experiments

To assess the power of party labels to shape attitudes in Brazil, we undertook two survey experi-
ments where we employ party cues to manipulate information respondents have about the positions
of the PT and the PSDB. One experiment was embedded in a national probability sample survey
that employed face-to-face interviewing, and the other performed on a convenience sample recruited
through and conducted on the internet.

Design of the Studies

Each experimental item presented two polar positions on a given political issue, and asked respon-
dents to state which position they agreed with the most. Respondents in the control group were
told simply that “some” politicians supported one position, while “others” supported the opposing
view. Respondents assigned to the treatment condition saw the two main party labels (PT and
PSDB) attached to each position. This basic design, which we refer as the “double-cue” treat-
ment, emulates research in American politics (Cohen, 2003; Levendusky, 2010; Lavine, Johnston
and Steenbergen, 2013; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, Forthcoming), and allows us to test

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3See supplemental materials for details.
whether information about the position of the two main parties shapes opinions of partisans of either the PT or the PSDB, partisans of other parties, and non-partisans.

In order to test whether in-group and out-group cueing effects differ, we introduced two additional treatment conditions. Respondents in these conditions were provided with only one party cue associated with one of the two positions, while the remaining position was attribute to “some” or “other” politicians, depending on the order in which the options were presented. As noted, in an extremely fragmented party system like Brazil’s, it is not obvious who “others” might be. Combined with the double-cue treatment, this “single-cue” treatment allows us to investigate whether in-group or out-group cueing effects predominate, and to explore whether cues from either of Brazil’s major parties impact the opinions of non-partisans.

In the face-to-face survey we were able to field only a single experimental question, and only in the double-cue format. In the Internet sample we fielded five items each with all four conditions. Table 1 shows the numbers of respondents in each condition in each survey. Note that in the empirical section that follows, we also occasionally pool all respondents who receive a treatment into a “some treatment” category.

In both surveys respondents were randomly assigned to different conditions. In the online version of the experiment we randomized treatment assignment by respondent (to prevent respondents from learning about the different treatment conditions) and also randomized the order in which the experimental items were presented and whether they were presented before or after the party ID question.

The Experimental Items

The questions, which are translated in full in Table 2, covered the following issues: the appropriate level of Brazil’s minimum wage; the signing of investment protection treaties for direct foreign investment; regulation of exploration of offshore (“pre-salt”) oil fields; the acceptance of Venezuela into Mercosul, a free trading agreement; and government financing of private companies. This last question was the only one asked (in almost identical wording) in both the online and traditional
Table 1: Sample Sizes by Treatment Conditions

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<th>Control</th>
<th>Treatment Conditions</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Double-Cue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-partisan</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSDB</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-partisan</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSDB</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>67</td>
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versions of the survey.

We did not use deception in any item; the policy positions attributed to each party correspond to that party’s actual positions. The main reason for employing deception is to circumvent the limitations imposed by too high ex-ante agreement between partisans and parties (i.e. to avoid ceiling effects) (Mondak, 1993). Yet because four of our items addressed obscure issues, we were able to observe varying, and sometimes low, levels of agreement between partisans and their parties in the control group, even without the use of deception (see below).

The obscurity of the topics also afforded us the opportunity to examine cueing in the absence of deeply-held convictions. However, Goren, Federico and Kittilson (2009) found that party cues can move voters’ core beliefs in the US, highlighting the potentially powerful causal import of partisan identity even where voters have strong priors on the issue. Therefore, we introduced one question with relatively high public salience—the minimum wage question. We chose this policy because the parties’ positions on this question ran against what one might expect: the center-left PT (which controlled the government) favored a lower value of the minimum wage, contradicting its historical position, while the center-right PSDB, for tactical reasons, favored the higher value. Conveniently, this avoids conflating high baseline support (which would impose ceilings on possible effects) with strong convictions.
Table 2: Wording of Experimental Items

Minimum Wage
Politicians from different parties supported different positions in the last February’s debates about the minimum wage bill. [Some][Members of the PT] supported the option to increase the minimum wage to R$ 545. [Others][Members of the PSDB] supported the option to increase the minimum wage to R$ 600. With which of these positions do you agree more?

Investment Protection
Politicians from different parties defend different positions about international treaties protecting Direct Foreign Investment in Brazil. [Some][Members of the PSDB] think that Brazil should sign these treaties to generate incentives for foreign investment and create new jobs. [Others][Members of the PT] think that Brazil should not sign treaties like these, to preserve national sovereignty. With which of these positions do you agree more?

Offshore Oil (“Pre-salt”) Exploration
Politicians from different parties defend different positions about the way Brazil should use the revenue from any pre-salt offshore oil discoveries. [Some][Members of the PSDB] defend the “concession” model, under which the corporations that extract the oil own the product but pay royalties and taxes to the government. [Others][Members of the PT] defend a “production sharing” model under which the government owns a portion of the oil that different corporations extract. Which model do you prefer?

Venezuela in Mercosur
Politicians from different parties defend different positions about the integration of Brazil with other countries in Latin America. [Some][Members of the PT] think that Venezuela should be accepted in Mercosur, to preserve business opportunities for Brazilian corporations. [Others][Members of the PSDB] think that Venezuela should not be accepted in Mercosur because they consider its government to be non-democratic. With which of these positions do you agree more?

Gvt. Financing of Pvt. Companies (Online)
Politicians from different parties defend different positions about the way the government should stimulate the economy. [Some][Members of the PT] think that the government should finance Brazilian private-sector companies. [Others][Members of the PSDB] think that private-sector banks should finance these companies, and that the government should use its resources in other areas, such as health and education. With which of these positions do you agree with more?

Gvt. Financing of Pvt. Companies (Traditional)
During the campaign this year, the principal candidates presented different proposals about government financing of private-sector companies. [Some/The PT] think that the government should finance Brazilian companies at low interest rates to stimulate the economy and create jobs. [Others/The PSDB] think that private-sector banks and not the government should finance these companies, and that the government should use its resources in other areas, such as health and education. With which of these options do you agree more?

For each question respondents could choose either statement, or “don’t know.”
The Samples

Our subjects in the face-to-face survey were the 1,221 respondents to the last wave of the Brazil Election Panel Survey (BEPS), fielded in December 2010. Each wave involved interviews in respondents’ homes, and respondents were chosen via a national probability sample. The survey contained a range of questions about parties, politics and public policies, as well as the usual demographic questions. In the third wave of the survey, we presented a single experimental item to respondents, after they were asked about party identification. As this was a pen-and-paper survey, respondents were randomly assigned to treatments a priori, within census tracts.

Our second set of respondents come from an internet-based survey. We recruited subjects for this survey by broadcasting advertisements on Facebook in Brazil between November 27 and December 25, 2011. Facebook had approximately 37 million users in Brazil at this time; advertisers can target Facebook ads at specific demographic groups, which in our case included all Brazilians 18 years or older.

Basic ads on Facebook are simple: advertisers are given approximately 140 characters of text and can also include a small .jpg image. Following recommended best practices, we broadcast several very similar ads that used different figures and explored minor variations of the following text: “Win an iPad2! University researchers want your opinion. Fill out a ten-minute questionnaire and you’re eligible to win an iPad2 (1 in 3000 chance).” The ad would appear temporarily on the right-hand side of a Facebook user’s screen. Approximately 4.6 million Brazilians saw our ad, each an average of 9.5 times, and approximately 1 in 5,000 people who saw the ad clicked on it (for more information see (Zucco Jr. and Samuels, 2013).)

A person who clicked on the ad would be taken to a new web page, where they would be asked to read a consent form. If they agreed, they would then start the survey, which took approximately seven minutes and contained demographic questions, questions on political participation and activism, a party identification question, and five experimental questions. We obtained a total of 3286 valid entries, after eliminating multiple entries by the same respondent (identified by either
repeat Internet Protocol or personal email address) anyone younger than 18 (as determined by their response to an age question), and anyone who did not answer the party ID question or at least one of the five experimental questions. The prize was delivered to the lottery winner in February of 2012. The sample included respondents from every Brazilian state, from all age groups, and from varying socio-economic backgrounds. The sample was younger, richer, and more male than the overall Brazilian population, but drew from all relevant demographic groups.

The Strength of Party Labels: Experimental Evidence

Figure 2 provides initial evidence to evaluate the hypothesis that party cues shift partisans’ policy choices (H1). The figure shows the proportion of respondents in the control group who agreed with their own party on the issues (baseline agreement), and the comparable proportions of those who received the double-cue treatment, as well as of those who received some cue (i.e. pooling respondents in the double-cue treatment and single-cue treatments). The double-cue group and the pooled some-cue group are alternative operationalizations of the treatment that are both consistent with H1.

For the PT, partisans who received cues were always more likely to agree with their party. Out of the six items, this difference was significant at the 0.05 level in four, and at the 0.1 level in one. For the PSDB, though partisans who received cues were more likely to agree with their party on four of the six questions, this difference was only statistically significant in three questions, and in one of these it was significant only for the some-cue pooled condition.

The item fielded in the BEPS only allows for the comparison of the control group with that of the group receiving the double-cue, as the question design in that survey did not include the

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4 For a few days we also broadcast ads on Google AdWords, but Facebook proved more cost-effective. In the end less than 3% of our sample was recruited via Google.

5 The experiment yielded good balance between treatment and control groups, so not surprisingly, simple differences in proportions are almost identical to marginal effects estimated with controls for income, gender, age, an index of political activism, and (in the BEPS only) an index of political knowledge. We checked for balance in several ways. The Hansen and Bowers (2008) omnibus test, which provides a single statistic for assessing balance, produced results that suggest that treatment and control groups are statistically indistinguishable. Details are provided in the supplemental materials.
single-cue treatments. Effects for PT sympathizers are very similar on this question across the face-to-face and internet surveys, but we found much larger effects in the BEPS for sympathizers of the PSDB than we found online. We attribute this result to the small number of PSDB sympathizers in the BEPS survey.

The apparently relatively weaker cueing effects overall for the PSDB hinge on two features of our data. First, as reported in Table 1, statistical power in the case of the PSDB is limited by the smaller number of identifiers in both surveys. More importantly, the baseline level of agreement with the parties in the control condition varied considerably across questions, and was very high in some cases. This was particularly true for the PSDB, for which baseline agreement with the party was in the vicinity of 0.80 in two questions. Given that cueing effects tend to disappear when agreement between partisans and their party is already high (e.g. Mondak, 1993) it is striking that we obtain results as robust as those reported here.

To make this point readily visible, the items in Figure 2 are ranked in descending order by the baseline level of support for each party’s position. If we consider, for instance, only questions for which the baseline agreement with a party was below 0.6, we find that treatment effects were statistically significant in four out of five items for the PT and three out of four for the PSDB. Considering only the low-agreement questions, the average double-cue treatment effect across all questions is actually smaller for petistas (0.16) than for PSDB supporters (0.22). However, if we exclude the BEPS results, the average effects become almost identical — 0.16 for supporters of the PT and 0.17 for those of the PSDB. This leads us to conclude that for similar levels of baseline agreement, it is likely that the effects of the PSDB label on sympathizers of the PSDB are similar to that of the PT label on its own sympathizers.

The minimum wage item is particularly revealing. The PT had historically defended a higher minimum wage, but once in government it was constrained by fiscal issues to back a smaller increase. The PSDB, as the main opposition, pushed for a larger increase to shame the government, but its stance reversed the position it held when in office. Surprisingly, for us, approximately 85% of partisans of both parties in the control group supported the higher value. While this left us
no room to investigate cueing effects for the PSDB on this question, it created a very interesting scenario to evaluate the cueing effects on PT partisans. Even on an issue that should be close to the heart of most petistas, party cues in the “unexpected” direction are strong enough to change respondents’ minds.

In general terms, our results thus far echo findings from American politics that use the double-cue design—that is, party labels have the predicted effects, shifting the opinions of self-identified partisans. What is novel here is that we have uncovered such effects in a ‘3rd Wave’ democracy with an extremely fragmented multiparty system, where a priori expectations for the existence of cueing effects are lower.

**In- and Out-Group Effects:** The double-cue treatment indicates that on questions where partisans tend to disagree with their party’s position, seeing information on how the parties line up on the issue tends to move partisans toward “their” party’s position. We cannot, from this
result, conclude whether these effects are the product of in- or out-group cueing, but the fact that the pooled “some-cue” group exhibits very similar results to the double-cue group is preliminary evidence that the three different cueing treatments produce similar effects.

Our research design does, however, allow us to make additional inferences about the nature and effects of partisanship in Brazil, including whether the driving force behind this result is solely in-group cueing, or whether out-group biases also play a role. The former is the more likely simpler mechanism, in that it requires only an attachment to one’s party. The latter is a more complex phenomenon, as it requires respondents identify the other party as a competitor to their own.

To this point, Figure 3 reports the effects of single-party cues on partisans of the two main parties. As expected, the results suggest that in-group cueing exists, for both parties (H2), and that their effects increases, as in Figure 2, as baseline level of agreement with the party’s position declines.

More interestingly, however, results also show some evidence in support of the presence of out-group cueing effects (H3). The out-group cues (darker bars) generally produce effects in the expected direction (to agree with one’s own party more than the control group), and when baseline agreement with the party is low enough, the effects are also statistically significant.

The figure also reveals visually that in- and out-group cues tend to generate similar effects for both the PT and the PSDB. That is, the null hypothesis that the in- and out-group cues produces similar effects can never be rejected at conventional levels of statistical significance. The absolute difference in the effects of PT and PSDB cues reported in both panels in Figure 3 is never larger than 0.13, the mean absolute difference is much smaller (0.05), and p-values for these differences computed using bootstrapped standard errors are are always greater than 0.50. In short, within each sub-population and within each question, the effects of the three treatment conditions are statistically indistinguishable from each other.

Out-group cueing effects are particularly important because they can emerge only if respec-

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6 Results for out-group cues are statistically significant for the PT on two items (both at the 0.05 level) and for the PSDB on two items, one of which only at the 0.1 level.
Figure 3: Comparing Effects of In- and Out- Group Cues

Figures shows levels of agreement between partisans and their own party, as well as effects of cues, for partisans of the the PT and the PSDB. Items are ordered by baseline level of agreement with each party, so the ordering differs across panels. 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for a one-tailed t-test between the PT/PSDB conditions and the no-cue condition are also shown.

dents make sense of the structure of political competition. Our results thus suggest that partisan identification in Brazil is not only strong enough to generate in-group bias for partisans of the two main parties, but also that partisan competition between the PT and PSDB is sufficiently well-structured so that knowing the position of the other party provides useful information to partisans of both parties, generating out-group bias. Our design, however, does not allow us to identify precisely what determines the relative sizes of effects of in- and out-group cues, a task we leave for future research.

Effects on Non-Partisans: To the extent that partisanship is a real form of social identity in Brazil, we should expect party cues to have no effect on the attitudes of non-partisans. If, however, non-partisans are moved by PT or PSDB cues, it would imply that declaring sympathy for a party does not have a distinct effect on political behavior.

Our hypothesis concerning non-partisans (H4) is confirmed by the data. Figure 4 demonstrates
Figure 4: Effects of Party Cues on Non-Partisans

Figure shows effects of receiving a single- or double-cue on the agreement of non-partisans with the position of the two main parties (PT on the left, and PSDB on the right panel). Items are ordered by baseline level of agreement with each party, so the ordering differs across panels. 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for a one-tailed t-test relative to the control group are also shown.

It is logically possible, though statistically implausible, that some non-partisans (or partisans of other parties) are systematically moved in one direction while others are systematically moved in the other, and the null average effects we report in that figure are a product of aggregation of these conflicting significant effects. There are infinite ways in which one could disaggregate the data to examine potential heterogeneity of effects in different sub-populations. Yet without a compelling theoretical reason, it is unclear which disaggregations, if any, should be examined.

In any case, the results in Figure 4 provide a fairly strong null result, because treatment effects on non-partisans are estimated with much higher precision than on partisans due to much larger sample sizes. We interpret these findings as suggesting that non-partisans, in sharp contrast with partisans, simply do not receive much useful information from the labels of Brazil’s two main parties.
Overall, our experiments provide strong support for our hypotheses. In the absence of information about their parties’ positions, many partisans do not naturally agree with their party on a range of policies. Yet when told about either their own or the main rival party’s position—or both—Brazilians who identify with the PT or PSDB tend to line up behind their party (H1). Because the PT and PSDB are real social groups of like-minded citizens, and because the two parties have competed for and alternated in power for almost 20 years, party cues lead to both in-group (H2) and out-group attitude change (H3). However, because non-partisans are neither attached to, nor in direct competition with PT or PSDB, those two parties’ labels do not generally shape their opinions (H4). In short, the PT and PSDB labels convey information to sympathizers about the issues, and generate group cohesion at the mass level.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper is part of a relatively new effort to bolster scholarly understanding of the origins and impact of party identification by using evidence derived from experimental methods in relatively newer democracies. Our results confirm that the concept of partisan identification can travel to disparate political contexts, suggest that scholars should continue to explore the different sources of partisan biases, and deepen our understanding of the Brazilian case. Finally, this paper also provides proof of concept of a novel and low-cost way to conduct survey-experiments in comparative perspective.

First, given that limits on our ability to derive causal inferences about partisanship from observational data are well-known, applying experimental methods beyond the US and European cases offers tremendous opportunities to put the concept of mass partisanship on surer conceptual footing. Results in this paper clearly establish that learning information about parties’ positions affects partisans’ attitudes in Brazil, but such information has no effect on non-partisans. Identifying with a party, in short, is meaningful enough to induce partisans to seek to reduce cognitive dissonance (Brewer, 1991). This implies that partisan identification in a relatively young democ-
racy with a highly fragmented party system is fundamentally the same phenomenon as in more mature democracies.

Second, our study also begins to unpack the way that partisan identification operates in different political contexts by presenting evidence that both in- and out-group cues can provide partisans with meaningful information. Our results strongly suggest that when group membership matters, in-group biases push individuals to adopt their group’s position out of a desire to conform. They also suggest that out-group biases can shape individuals’ attitudes, when the inter-group dynamic is sufficiently competitive. For the most part, it appears that PT and PSDB partisans are just as able to map the policy space after receiving information about their party’s opponent as they are after receiving information about their own party’s position. This is an important finding, because in the contemporary US context, out-group cues may be stronger than in-group cues (Nicholson, 2012). However, in multiparty democracies it is not always obvious who the main competitors are. Our results suggest that even a modicum of structure in the landscape of political competition can help partisans make sense of the policy space. In short, our findings support predictions from social psychology that if group membership is a salient form of political identity, members will seek to accentuate intergroup differences.

Third, the paper contributes to debates about Brazilian politics by showing that although the aggregate level of mass partisanship in the electorate is comparatively low, partisanship can still be meaningful. The PT and PSDB have very different historical trajectories, so our findings suggest that there is more than one way to cultivate partisan attachments in a complicated partisan electoral context such as Brazil’s. We do not, however, wish to make too much of the finding that the PSDB cue has the predicted effect. It is one thing to note that the PSDB label can shape voter opinion just like the PT label can, but for all practical purposes the importance of the PSDB label pales in comparison to the PT label simply because it has meaning for only a tiny slice of the Brazilian electorate.

Finally, these conclusions were obtained by the first—to our knowledge—survey-experiment to have used an online social network (Facebook) as a source of subject recruitment. This approach
should help popularize experimental research in comparative politics, because of its low cost and because it facilitates rapid data collection. This implies, of course, that most of our results are drawn from an unrepresentative sample. However, the online sample more closely resembles the overall population than commonly used samples of college students, and results from the BEPS—drawn from a nationally-representative sample—are compatible with, if not identical to, the results from the online experiment. The relative consistency of our results across two distinct political contexts (an election campaign versus a “normal” year) and two distinct testing environments lends credence to the view that we have captured a real and substantively important phenomenon and also that social networks are a promising medium in which to conduct social-scientific research.

Conventional wisdom expects partisanship to be weakly-sedimented in newer democracies in general and in Brazil in particular. Yet despite the absence of social cleavages and an institutional environment that privileges political individualism and discriminates against cohesive parties—and even though Brazil’s two main parties have converged on the political center, agree on many of the issues and have allied with a confusing array of parties, party labels for the PT and PSDB have the same effects scholars find for parties in older democracies (e.g. Brader and Tucker, Forthcoming 2012). Our results suggest that in multiparty systems, the intensity and pattern of inter-party competition particularly matter for the strength of party labels (e.g. Nicholson, 2012). Future research should explore the relative strength of in- and out-group partisan biases in greater detail.

By establishing the existence of cueing effects in a least-likely case, our study places the generalizability of the concept of partisan identification on more solid theoretical foundations. Even when adversaries are weakly-defined, a modicum of structured political competition can lead to the emergence of in- and out-group biases in which voters use party labels to structure their political attitudes and behavior. Many questions remain to be asked and answered, and the agenda for experimental research on partisanship in comparative perspective remains wide open.
References

URL: http://books.google.com/books?id=5xlTLuEACAAJ


