Does Choice Bring Loyalty? Electoral Participation and the Development of Party Identification

Elias Dinas   University of Nottingham

Party identification is known to influence almost all aspects of political life. How this attachment develops across the adult life cycle, however, remains unknown. I argue that people reinforce their partisan predispositions by voting for their preferred party. Voting entails a choice over a set of alternatives. This choice is likely to induce rationalization. In so doing, it provides signals of group identity, which in turn strengthens people's partisan ties. Testing this hypothesis is made difficult because it implies a reciprocal relationship between partisanship and vote choice. I address this problem by using vote eligibility as an instrument of vote in a sample of almost equally aged respondents. The results indicate that elections fortify prior partisan orientations. Moreover, they do so not by increasing political information. Rather, it is the act of voting for a party that, itself, bolsters partisan attachment. This act leaves a long-lasting imprint on people's partisan outlooks.

In *Of Time and Partisan Stability*, Converse (1969) sets the foundations for a theory of democratic stability. His model constitutes one of the most eloquent attempts to link individual partisan dynamics with macrolevel party-system characteristics. Repeated exposure to the same political context, Converse argued, fosters enduring partisan sentiments, which are then transmitted to coming generations through political socialization. The partisan equilibrium gradually formed—itself the joint product of continuity at the elite level and mass political learning—forges democratic support and accounts for the endurance of political regimes.

All integral parts of the model have been subjected to empirical scrutiny (Brader and Tucker 2001; Cassel 1993). None, however, has attracted more scholarly attention than the role of aging in creating strong partisan ties. Even though some studies challenged this claim (Abramson 1979; Clarke et al. 2004, chap. 6; Glenn 1972, 508), a voluminous literature, based on both repeated cross-sections and panel data, has identified important gains in the strength, consistency, and stability of partisan predispositions throughout the life cycle (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Carlsson and Karlsson 1970; Converse 1976; Jennings 1989; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009; Markus 1979; Stoker and Jennings 2008).

These findings notwithstanding, the microlevel mechanisms driving the relationship between age and partisanship remain a puzzle. How do enduring partisan ties come into being? Converse himself was quick to emphasize that chronological age does not in itself constitute an explanatory factor. Instead, building on McPhee and Ferguson's (1962) political immunization thesis, he suggested that what matters is the length of one's experience with the political system (Converse 1969, 152). How this experience translates into increased partisan support, however, has been left an open question.

One possibility is that experience brings information about the parties, particularly during election campaigns. The accumulation of partisan political information could lead to the consolidation of partisan loyalties, with an

initial leaning developing into a stronger attachment. The "perceptual screen" provided by a partisan affiliation (Bartels 2002; Campbell et al. 1960), which prompts motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2000), would lead individuals to interpret new information so as to reinforce, rather than to undermine, their prior leaning. However, as Gerber and Green (1998; see also Groenendyk 2012; Lupu 2013) point out, this line of argument founders if the parties' stances and electoral fortunes are, themselves, changing over time. Whatever is causing partisanship to strengthen with age is boosting partisan ties irrespective of shifts in how the parties are differentiated on policy and in the extent of their electoral success.

This article highlights the importance of voters' own participation in the electoral process to the strengthening of their partisan identification. Unlike previous studies that focus on elections as a provider of information about the parties, I posit a dynamic that is not based on information processing. Rather, it focuses on the act of casting a vote and the consequences of postdecision consonance or dissonance on party identification. Party identification is strengthened when individuals convert a partisan identity or leaning into a behavioral choice through the act of voting, and it is weakened when the two are at odds. The fact that consonant votes outnumber dissonant votes leads to the finding that partisanship tends to strengthen with age.

As discussed below, the possibility that the vote one casts influences the party identification one claims subsequently has been studied by political scientists. Almost none of the prior work, however, has situated the question in the context of how party identification (PID) strengthens with age. Moreover, most of the prior work is vulnerable on methodological grounds, specifically, that unmeasured variables are influencing both the vote cast and the PID claimed (the "selection problem"). By contrast, this study considers how votes cast help us understand the perennial finding of age-related gains in strength of partisanship across the life cycle and addresses the selection problem through the use of vote eligibility as an instrument of actual vote. The long-term panel data employed enable an examination of the effects of votes cast at different points in the life cycle and an investigation of possible paths through which elections may matter, i.e., as providers of political information or through the act of voting per se.

The findings suggest that voting for one's preferred party strengthens prior partisan preferences among young voters by half a point on a 0–6 scale. Rather than operating as providers of informational cues, elections matter as a way of signaling group affiliation through the act of voting. The effect holds even after posterior

presidential elections take place. Eventually, however, a ceiling is reached above which further votes cast have no consequences for partisanship.

Given the centrality of party identification on people's political outlooks, understanding how it is developed over the life trajectory constitutes a crucial task for researchers of political socialization. Apart from that, however, the findings from this study shed light on three interrelated lines of research. First, whereas most theories of partisan learning give pride of place to the role of rational updating through information processing (Achen 1992, 2002; Gerber and Green 1998; Grynaviski 2006), the feedback loop from behavioral manifestations of political preferences has not attracted much scholarly attention. In this respect, this study joins recent voices in calling for the need to relax a rigid assumption made in the literature on voting behavior, namely that attitudes lead to behavior but not vice versa (Mullainathan and Washington 2009).

Second, the results bear upon the debate between the two conceptualizations of party identification. In their "spirited defense" of the Michigan approach to party identification, Green and Shickler emphasize the importance of design-based studies in addressing the long-standing controversies in this literature. As they argue, "[t]he extensive non-experimental literature on partisanship has much to contribute to our understanding of partisan change, but returns to this type of research are beginning to diminish. The experimental frontier, by contrast, remains wide open and full of promise" (2009, 198). In an attempt to explore this frontier, this study casts doubt on revisionist interpretations of partisan change. The findings suggest that casting a vote for a party strengthens the sense of partisan identity in a way consistent with the traditional conception of PID as articulated by the Michigan school.

Third, a better understanding of why party identification tends to strengthen with age informs other literatures in political science in which strength of partisanship plays an important role. It is well known, for example, that strong partisans are more likely than weak partisans to turn out to vote. A better understanding of how partisanship grows with age will, in turn, illuminate why vote turnout does as well. I return to these and other implications in the concluding section of the article.

The Puzzle of Strengthening Partisanship with Age

At least since Converse's work on partisanship (1969, 1976), the observation that partisan attachments

strengthen with age has challenged the idea that partisan orientations are simply rooted in early parental socialization (e.g., Beck and Jennings 1991; Converse and Pierce 1992; Dalton and Weldon 2007; Leithner 1997; Sears and Funk 1999; Westholm and Niemi 1992). Since changes in partisanship across the adult life span evidently cannot be the product of parental influence alone, there must be something more that drives partisan development—but what?

Despite some early theoretical attempts to address this question (e.g., Andersen 1979), scholarly attention quickly shifted from understanding the age-related evolution of partisanship to understanding its short-term dynamics. Studies evaluated the meaning (Clarke et al. 2004; Fiorina 1981), measurement properties (Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Weisberg 1980), and short-term stability of party identification (Franklin 1984; Jackson 1975). The fact that partisanship tends to strengthen over the life span has been repeatedly demonstrated (Alwin and Krosnick 1989; Campbell and Valen 1961; Cassel 1993; Claggett 1981; Dalton 1984, 269; Delli Carpini 1989; Jennings and Markus 1984; Markus 1983; Shively 1979; Stoker and Jennings 2008; Tilley 2003), but why that is so remains unclear.

The most common explanation one finds in this literature alludes to the acquisition of political experience. Engaging in the political process, people obtain a better understanding of what parties are and what they stand for (Andersen 1979; Butler and Stokes 1974; McPhee and Ferguson 1962). This accumulation of information increases both the strength and the stability of partisan preferences. As Jennings and Markus put it, "the passage of political time acts to protect one against the lure of competing partisan calls" (1984, 1003). Central to the political experience idea is the repetition of signals that favor one's partisan priors. Achen's (1992, 2002) partisan learning models have been very influential in this respect. Operating as Bayesian updaters, individuals are thought to crystallize their PID by adjusting their priors under the light of new information. To the extent that new information confirms one's priors, partisan predispositions are gradually strengthened. Elections are thought to be integral to this process of political learning, in that campaigns disclose parties' stances, helping individuals to structure their political perceptions (Weber 2012).

One problem with this line of argument is that it assumes that the parties' images remain stable over time (Gerber and Green 1998; Lupu 2013). It does not speak to how partisan strength would develop in a context where the parties' policy positions shift and their electoral fortunes wax and wane. The accumulation of political experience in an environment where the parties are themselves changing would not, necessarily, give rise to age-related gains in strength of partisanship. Yet, even in historical periods in which parties' positions shift dramatically, aging effects in the strength of partisan support are apparent (van der Eijk and Franklin 2009,185–86; Osborne, Sears, and Valentino 2011).[1]

I argue that elections matter but in a different way. Participating in the electoral process means converting a preference into a behavioral choice. The resulting sense of commitment intensifies the link between the individual and the party. If partisanship is a form of identity, it should be formed on the basis of self-categorization (Campbell et al. 1960, 122). Self-categorizations are based on people's beliefs about the reference group and how well they perceive themselves to resemble or fit that prototype (Spencer et al. 1998; Turner et al. 1987), and the prototypical partisan casts a vote for the party's nominee. As Grofman, Wayman, and Barreto (2009, 69) describe it, a partisan identity requires evidence that one's behavior matches the behavior of a typical partisan. Thus, elections may be important because they give the opportunity to individuals to confirm or reaffirm their identity by casting a vote for their preferred party.

This logic rests upon the assumption that what people do influences how they think about and classify themselves. Two leading theories in cognitive psychology—cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) and self-perception (Bem 1972)—have proposed such a link from behavior to identities and attitudes. In each case, the idea is that people will change their identities/attitudes in the direction of greater conformity with their behavior. The two theories differ in whether behavior induces change through a "negative drive state" or whether this process is the result of the individual becoming the external observer of her own behavior. According to cognitive dissonance theory, "if an individual performs an activity that is antithetical to his beliefs, the individual may unconsciously change his beliefs to alleviate the discomfort of having inconsistent attitudes and actions" (Mullainathan and Washington 2009, 86–87). According to Bem's (1972) self-perception theory, intrinsic motivations lead to an overjustification of behavioral choices, which in turn leads to the reinforcement of the attitudes originally driving the observed behavior.

[1] Of course, motivated reasoning may lead strong party identifiers to maintain their PID when the parties shift their positions and vary in their performance, but the attachments of those who begin with weak leanings should be more vulnerable to change (Franklin and Jackson 1983; Jennings and Stoker 2009). Moreover, as Lupu (2013) notes, the idea that individuals ignore information that is contrary to their priors has been questioned even by advocates of the traditional school of PID (Gerber and Green 1998). Groenendyk's (2012) experiment confirms this view.

Although following different paths, both theories arrive at the same conclusion, i.e., the presence of postdecision bias (Brownstein, Read, and Simon 2004; Festinger and Walster 1964; Gerard and White 1983).[2] It is this idea that is of particular interest here. Once people make a choice over a set of alternatives, they become more favorable toward their initially preferred alternative. This logic can be directly applied in the case of elections. Having opted for one of the parties leads voters to think of the party more positively than they had before the election. The PID of those casting a vote in accordance with a prior partisan leaning should strengthen as a result. Moreover, those without a prior leaning should develop one that is consistent with the vote cast, and those who defect from their prior partisan leaning should manifest a weaker PID subsequently. If these processes are operating with equal strength, the tendency for PID to strengthen with age would derive from the fact that those who act in accordance with their prior partisan leaning outnumber those who are vote defectors.

The idea that party identification may be influenced by the vote cast in an election is not new (Dobson and St. Angelo 1975; Howell 1980, 1981; Jennings and Markus 1984; Knoke 1976; Markus and Converse 1979). The theoretical framework within which this relationship has been examined, however, is shaped by the question of short-term partisan volatility. None of these studies addresses the question of why party identification tends to strengthen with age. This lack of a developmental perspective explains why none of the prior research has considered how votes cast affect the strength of PID as distinct from its direction. By the same token, no distinction has been made with regard to the acquisition, reinforcement, or change in PID.

The findings from this literature suggest that voting for either of the two parties' candidates is associated with a shift of party identification in that direction. Selection effects, however, impede a causal interpretation of these findings. Various factors may have influenced both people's PID and their vote choice. Pointing to this problem, Cowden and McDermott (2000) set up an experiment in order to test the effect of vote choice on change in party identification. The aim is to induce defection from one's prior PID and examine whether doing so also qualifies subjects' PID scores. They find no such effects.

Partisan shifts, however, are only one of the possible manifestations of change in PID. Along their political trajectories, individuals may acquire a PID and/or

strengthen their prior partisan ties. Meredith (2009) examines the first possibility and finds that cohorts eligible to vote in 2000 are significantly more likely to register a political affiliation in the state of California than those born only some days later, making them ineligible to vote in that year.[3]

The present study departs from the existing literature in several significant respects. First, I use long-term panel data on a nationwide random sample of young adults, providing a longitudinal perspective on the consequences of early voting experiences. Doing so shows that vote choice is not just a short-term determinant of PID change. Second, I directly evaluate whether age-related gains in partisan strength are driven by the acquisition of political information. Multiple tests suggest that this is not the case. Third, I examine the effect of the act of voting on the acquisition, strength, and direction of party identification. Voting seems to matter most in strengthening prior predispositions or in retaining them against the trend of the times. Fourth, I use an instrumental variables approach that allows the estimation of voting effects net of unobserved heterogeneity. The next section describes the design in more detail.

Data and the Identification Strategy

I employ all four waves of the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965–1973–1982–1997 (Jennings et al. 2004). However, the main part of the analysis focuses on the first two waves of this study, which started in 1965 with a nationwide random sample of high school seniors. Almost all (98%) of the respondents were born between 1946 and 1948, with the great majority (76%) born in 1947. To minimize age differences, I only examine individuals with a maximum of one-year difference: those born from 1 April 1947 to 31 March 1948.[4] All of them were approximately 18 years old when first interviewed in 1965 and 26 years old when reinterviewed in 1973. Two

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[2]Many classic social psychology experiments have found supporting evidence of postdecision bias. See, for example, Brehm (1956) and Knox and Inkster (1968).

[3]Other studies have tested the effects of voting on candidate evaluations or future voting, not PID. Besley and Joslyn (2001) and Mullainathan and Washington (2009) provide evidence that voting for a party prompts people to become more polarized in their evaluations about party leaders. Shachar (2003) models current vote choice as a function of previous voting decisions, finding evidence for path dependence in vote choice, which increases as people accumulate more elections.

[4]Among those born in 1948, 65% were born in January, February, or March. March 1948 is the last month in which more than 10 individuals were born. The month of birth of the remaining respondents (n = 24) follows a uniform distribution. Thus, going beyond March 1948 expands the age gap without adding more than a few (on average 2.6) individuals per month of birth.
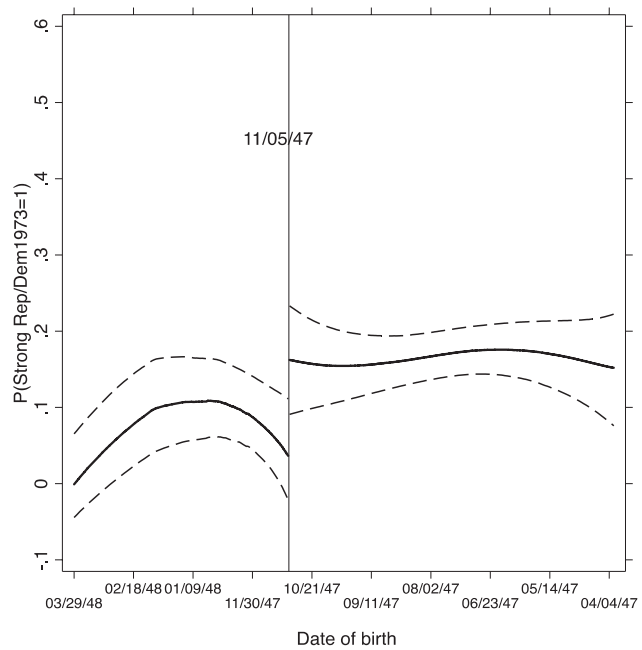
presidential elections took place during the intervening period (in 1968 and 1972).

The 1968 election was the last presidential election in which the voting age was 21. This is exactly the age the respondents had reached or were approaching in 1968. Importantly, not all high school seniors were eligible to vote in 1968. Despite their small (six months on average) age differences, approximately 20% of the respondents had not reached voting age at the time of that election. This variation in eligibility status provides an identification opportunity: we can use the discontinuity offered by the eligibility status to identify the causal effect of voting in 1968 on change in partisan strength from 1965 to 1973. Initially, the counterfactual of interest is this: did those who voted in 1968 develop stronger partisan identities by 1973 than they would have had they not voted in 1968? Instead of comparing the 1973 PID of actual 1968 voters versus nonvoters—a comparison fraught with selection confounds—I compare the 1973 PID of those who were eligible to vote versus those who were ineligible in 1968. Although eligibility directly affects the likelihood of voting (63% of the eligible reported voting in 1968), the fact that it is determined by the happenstance of date of birth means that it should be unrelated to other characteristics that could be driving partisan change.[5]

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of how the design works. It shows the percentage of strong identifiers among noneligibles and eligibles, respectively, sorted according to their date of birth. A local linear regression (loess) curve is fitted separately for the two groups and is shown in bold. The dashed curves present the 95% point-wise confidence intervals. Although PID generally strengthens with age, here the age interval is too short for such age-related differences to emerge (i.e., there is no linear trend with age). The loess curve is bell shaped for

[5]Balance between the two groups approaches the standards of a randomized experiment. Indicatively, the average 1965 PID scores (0–6 scale) are 2.53 and 2.57 for those eligible and those noneligible to vote in 1968, respectively (p = .828). The equivalent figures for the strength of PID scale are 1.76 and 1.78, respectively (p = .755). It is still possible that eligibles would be different from noneligibles even if they have not voted in 1968 because (1) they were marginally older, because (2) they differed in their rate of panel attrition, or because (3) by being eligible, they paid more attention to the 1968 election. A placebo test presented in the next section rules out the first possibility. Analysis rules out the second: when a dummy variable indicating panel status (1 = dropped out, 17% of 1965 sample) is regressed on eligibility status (1 = eligible, 80% of the 1965 sample), the resulting OLS coefficient is practically zero (b = −.008, se = .029). As to the third possibility, a later section of the article shows that eligibles had not become more politicized than noneligibles by 1973. For a more detailed examination of how eligibility performs as an instrument of turnout in 1968, see online supplementary information.

FIGURE 1 Percentage of Strong Identifiers in 1973 According to Their Date of Birth

Note: The solid bold curves present the local average of partisan strength, conditional on date of birth. The dashed lines display the 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals. The vertical line denotes the date of birth cut point that determines eligibility status (November 5, 1947). Individuals are sorted from younger to older.

the noneligibles and flat for the eligibles; the uncertainty is higher for the former due to the relatively small number of respondents in the group (n = 161).

More importantly, Figure 1 reveals a clear discontinuity in strength of PID at the eligibility threshold. On average, eligibles appear to be more likely to register strong partisan views than noneligibles. Whereas 9.5% of noneligibles declared a strong attachment either to the Democrats or the Republicans, the equivalent figure for eligibles is 16.8%. There is a gap of 8 percentage points, with 95% confidence bands ranging from 4 to 12%.

In what follows, I examine the consequences of voting for the development of PID in more detail. I first compare the change in the strength of PID from 1965 to 1973 between those eligible and those not eligible to vote in 1968. Next, I test the hypothesis that partisan change was prompted by the acquisition of political information, looking at the difference between eligibles and noneligibles on a series of available politicization indicators. I then unpack the effect of vote choice on the direction versus the strength of party identification. Finally, I explore the long-term effects of the 1968 vote on people's partisan trajectory.

TABLE 1 **The Effect of Voting in 1968 on Change in Partisan Strength from 1965 to 1973**

	Generalized Ordinal Logit	Generalized Ordinal Logit: Placebo for Age	Wald Estimator	2SLS	LARF
Eligible$_{68}$	.302	−.277			
	(.151)	(.113)			
Strength of PID$_{65}$	.619	.640			
	(.084)	(.070)			
Voted$_{68}$ (Instrumented with Eligible$_{68}$)			.319	.351	.349
			(.173)	(.169)	(.186)
N	782	894	774	774	768

Note: The dependent variable is strength of PID in 1973 (0–3), as described in the text. The first column presents log-odds from a generalized ordinal logit model with eligibility status and strength of PID in 1965 as the two independent variables. When strength of PID in 1965 is fully factorized, *Eligible$_{68}$* becomes .295 (.153). The second column displays the placebo test described in the text. The third column instruments vote in 1968 through 1968 eligibility, and the fourth and fifth columns present the estimates from a 2SLS and a LARF analysis, respectively.

Results

The first column of Table 1 presents the results from a generalized ordinal logit (Williams 2006), where strength of 1973 PID is regressed on eligibility status in 1968 and on strength of 1965 PID. The measure of strength of PID was derived by folding the standard 7-point measure of PID and is coded 0 (independents), 1 (leaning partisans), 2 (weak partisans), and 3 (strong partisans). Generalized ordinal logit allows independent variables to exert heterogeneous effects across the outcome categories, representing those effects with multiple coefficients. As the first column of Table 1 shows, this is not the case with either *StrengthofPID$_{65}$* or *Eligible$_{68}$*, both of which appear to exert a homogenous effect across all levels of partisan attachment. This is why there is only one coefficient to represent these effects. Translating the eligibility coefficient into quantities of interest, holding 1965 partisan strength at its mean value, the difference in the probability of registering a weak and a strong party ID between those eligible to vote in 1968 and those noneligible is 4.1% [95% CI: 0.1–8.3] and 3.3% [95% CI: 0.1–6.3], respectively.

Column 2 of Table 1 serves to examine whether the difference is driven by the age gap between the two groups. It presents a placebo test, whereby the subsample of eligibles is divided in two subgroups. To maintain the same age gap, I include all eligible respondents born in 1947, that is, even those born earlier than April 1947. I distinguish between voters who were born until the end of May 1947 (454) and those born since June of the same year (452).[6] Splitting the eligible into two almost equal groups max-

imizes the statistical power of the test. All respondents in both groups were eligible to vote. The younger group is treated as noneligible to vote in 1968. The coefficient of eligibility is of the wrong sign (negative). Evidently, it cannot be age that accounts for these results.

All previous effects are so-called intent-to-treat effects, since no adjustment has been made for the fact that not all eligible respondents voted in 1968. By taking this one-sided noncompliance into account, the last three columns of Table 1 present the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT), i.e., the effect of voting in 1968 for those who voted in that election. Using eligibility as an instrument of turnout in 1968, column 3 includes no covariates, and thus the two-stage least square (2SLS) estimator reduces to the Wald estimator. According to the results, voting in 1968 increased those voters' partisan attachments by an average of 0.32 points on the 0–3 scale. The results from columns 4 and 5 come from a similar analysis that includes a long list of covariates, measured in 1965, to account for possible baseline imbalances. Apart from demographics (gender, race), parental political interest and party identification are included in this list (see the online appendix for further details). Column 4 presents the 2SLS estimation. If the findings came from a randomized experiment, we would expect the inclusion of these covariates to make no substantive difference in the effect of eligibility, apart from increasing precision. In effect, the effect of eligibility becomes somewhat greater and is more precisely estimated. To relax the assumption of constant treatment effects within strata of X, I also used the semiparametric Local Average Response Function estimator (LARF), proposed by Abadie (2003; see also Kern and Hainmueller 2009), which allows for heterogeneous treatment effects. These results are shown in column 5 and confirm the 2SLS estimation.

[6]The mean age difference between the two groups is five months and 28 days. In the treatment comparison, mean age difference was six months and seven days.

Does Political Learning Explain the Effect of Voting on Strength of Partisanship?

The results we have seen thus far suggest that participating in one's first eligible election induces stronger partisan attachments. As discussed earlier, the effect could be due to how the act of casting a party vote creates or consolidates the sense of party identity or could be due to how election participation prompts political learning. People who are eligible to vote may become more informed about the coming election since they are more easily targeted by the parties, or they pay more attention to the campaign.

To examine this alternative explanation, I look at the mean difference between eligibles and noneligibles in terms of their change from 1965 to 1973 in each of the following attributes: political interest, political knowledge, political activity (outside of voting), internal political efficacy, ideological sophistication (using a "levels of conceptualization" measure based on Converse's 1964 model on mass perceptions about political issues), and attention to politics in the newspapers and on television. I also use two measures of political learning suggested by Stoker (2007). One counts the number of responses people provided when asked to describe how the Democrats and Republicans differ. The second records the number of examples people provided when asked to explain why one party was more conservative than the other. If political learning accounts for the larger gains in strength of partisanship that we have observed among the eligibles, then a gap between the eligibles and ineligibles should be evident on one or more of these variables.

The results appear in Table 2. Our interest lies in the last column, which shows the ordinary least squares (OLS) coefficient attached to eligibility status. In no instance do we find a significant difference between the two groups. The only exceptions point in the opposite direction (political knowledge, political activity).[7] This evidence suggests that the effects found in the previous section cannot be attributed to the role of elections as funnels of political information. They are more likely to stem from the psychological commitment generated by the act of voting.

Unpacking the Effect of Vote Choice

If the act of voting reinforces people's partisan sentiments, we should observe consistency between actual vote choice and the direction toward which people strengthen their partisan predispositions. Therefore, between two otherwise similar individuals, of whom one voted for Nixon in 1968 whereas the other was not eligible to do so, the first should not simply appear a stronger partisan in general but rather a more committed Republican in particular. The aim of this section is to delve into this exact relationship between vote choice and partisan identification.

The problem in addressing this question is that although eligibility is a very good instrument of turnout, it remains agnostic about people's actual party choice. Consequently, we need to derive actual 1968 party choice both for eligibles and noneligibles. To do this, I make use of a hypothetical vote-choice question included in the 1973 wave of the study. All voters were asked what party they voted for in 1968. Those who said they did not vote were asked which party they would have voted for had they voted in that election. Importantly, this question does not take into account eligibility status. It was asked of all respondents who said they did not cast a ballot in 1968. I created a vote-choice variable using reported vote for voters and hypothetical vote choice for nonvoters. The interaction between this variable and eligibility status will indicate whether manifesting a party preference in an actual choice induces higher levels of party affiliation. The identification strategy works in the same way as before, given that we will again be comparing eligibles and noneligibles. An actual vote cast for Nixon in 1968 should induce a pro-Republican shift in PID, whereas a vote for Humphrey should work in favor of a Democrat ID. These shifts should be larger than those found among the ineligibles who preferred Nixon or Humphrey.[8]

To begin, I fit a model interacting eligibility with two vote-choice/preference dummy variables—one distinguishing Humphrey voters and one distinguishing Nixon voters. Wallace voters constitute the baseline category. The following model was estimated:

$$PID_{73} = \alpha + \gamma\, PID_{65} + \beta_1\, Eligible_{68} + \beta_2\, Humphrey_{68}$$
$$+ \beta_3\, Nixon_{68} + \beta_4\, Eligible_{68} \times Humphrey_{68}$$
$$+ \beta_5\, Eligible_{68} \times Nixon_{68} + u_{si} \qquad (1)$$

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[7]There was no difference between the two groups in their ability to identify the Republicans as more conservative than the Democrats in 1973 (.004, p = .88, not shown in the table). I considered the further possibility that, by voting in 1968, people might feel more embedded in the political system. This sense of taking part in a nationwide decision-making process may increase their level of trust in government and, in so doing, strengthen their partisan attachments. There were no differences between the eligibles and ineligibles in their 1965 to 1973 change in trust in government either.

[8]As a robustness check, the online appendix replicates this analysis using a different way of inferring vote choice in 1968. Specifically, I assume that people voted the same party twice, both in 1972 and in 1968, thus inferring 1968 preference through 1972 vote. The results are substantively very similar.

TABLE 2 **Testing the Impact of 1968 Eligibility on Various Indicators of Political Engagement**

$E(\text{PoliticizationMeasure}_{73}|\text{PoliticizationMeasure}_{65},\text{Eligible}_{68}) = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Pol.Meas.}_{65} + \beta_2 \text{Eligible}_{68}$		
Politicization Measure$_{73}$ (Outcomes)	β_1	β_2
Political Knowledge$_{73}$ (0–6)	.660 (.030)	−.254 (.096)
Interest in Political Affairs$_{73}$ (1–3)	.326 (.038)	.042 (.063)
Political Activity$_{73}$	1.06 (.140)	−.452 (.205)
Internal Political Efficacy$_{73}$ (1–5)	.323 (.038)	−.086 (.057)
Ideological Consistency$_{73}$ (1–6)	.353 (.035)	−.235 (.154)
Read about Politics in Newspapers$_{73}$ (1–5)	.259 (.043)	.032 (.131)
Watch Politics on TV$_{73}$ (1–5)	.135 (.038)	−.006 (.113)
Mentions of Party Differences$_{73}$ (0–5)	.162 (.034)	−.072 (.120)
Mentions Explaining Conservatism$_{73}$ (0–5)	.193 (.044)	−.015 (.090)

Note: Entries are OLS coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. All models include a constant that is omitted from the table. All variables are coded so that higher values denote higher levels of the attribute in question. They are all measured in the same way both in 1965 and in 1973 with the exception of political activity, which in 1973 is measured on a 0–9 scale and involves all modes of political participation excluding voting in elections. Since in 1965 the respondents were only 18 years old, anticipated political activity was used as a baseline variable. Categorical choice models produce substantively identical results. Nothing changes when all baseline measures are fully factorized.

PID$_{73}$ is measured with the full 7-point scale, ranging from strong Democrat (0) to strong Republican (6). *Humphrey$_{68}$* and *Nixon$_{68}$* are binary variables, which switch on for people who said they voted or would have voted for the Democrat and the Republican candidate, respectively. The subscript *s* denotes clustering of the errors at the school level. Our interest lies in the comparison between eligibles and noneligibles with the same candidate preference in 1968. In the case of Humphrey supporters, the average effect of eligibility is given by $\beta_1 + \beta_4$. In the case of Nixon supporters, the effect of eligibility is captured by $\beta_1 + \beta_5$. The two quantities summarize the intent-to-treat effect of the act of voting in a way that comes close to the counterfactual in our main research question: what would the PID of a Humphrey or Nixon voter have been if the person had not voted in the past election?

Table 3 presents the full results from equation (1). The first column displays OLS coefficients. The second column sets the reliability of PID$_{65}$ at .90, a conservative figure that likely underestimates the true reliability of the measure (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Column 3 accounts for the ordinal nature of the PID, using an ordinal logistic regression for the estimation of the effects. The bottom two rows of the table report the average eligibility effects.

In the case of Nixon supporters, the two OLS regressions suggest that eligibility shifts PID to a Republican direction by approximately half a point on a 0–6 scale. The ordinal regression estimate points to the same conclusion. Translating the log-odds into predicted probabilities, among respondents who preferred Nixon in 1968,

those eligible to vote in that election were 8.3% [95% CI: 2.4–13.7] more likely to declare themselves as weak Republicans than noneligibles. They were also 4% [95% CI: 1.3–6.5] more likely to be strong Republicans. Although smaller in magnitude, an eligibility effect is also apparent in the case of Humphrey. Columns 1 and 2 indicate a .28 shift of PID toward a Democratic direction. The ordinal regression estimate confirms this pattern.

Figure 2 illustrates the results graphically. This figure makes clear how those who were eligible to cast votes for Humphrey and Nixon ended up with stronger partisan identities than did supporters who were not eligible to vote. Since no adjustment has been made for the fact that only two-thirds of eligibles voted in 1968, the estimated effects represent a lower bound of the true effects of voting in 1968. It is especially notable that the effect of votes cast in 1968 was still evident in 1973 in the wake of the second presidential election (1972) in which everyone could convert their preference into votes.

Variants of Partisan Change

The foregoing analysis showed that voting for Humphrey prompted a more Democratic identification subsequently and that voting for Nixon prompted a more Republican PID. Yet, because the analysis did not consider how the vote that was cast compared to the prior PID of the voter, it did not distinguish between important variants of PID change: strengthening of a prior PID, weakening of a prior PID, acquisition of a PID, or change in a PID. If the act

TABLE 3 The Impact of Vote for Nixon/Humphrey in 1968 on Change in PID between 1965 and 1973

	OLS	Errors-in-Variables	Ordinal Logit
PID_{65}	.298 (.029)	.339 (.031)	.410 (.043)
$Eligible_{68}$	.189 (.220)	.188 (.206)	.292 (.268)
$Humphrey_{68}$	−.367 (.272)	−.322 (.277)	−.258 (.344)
$Nixon_{68}$	.691 (.301)	.648 (.259)	.760 (.360)
$(Humphrey_{68}) \times (Eligible_{68})$	−.468 (.279)	−.471 (.310)	−.876 (.377)
$(Nixon_{68}) \times (Eligible_{68})$	.275 (.311)	.284 (.290)	.407 (.378)
Constant/Threshold: 1	1.58 (.216)	1.47 (.195)	−1.57 (.277)
Threshold: 2			.481 (.272)
Threshold: 3			1.39 (.284)
Threshold: 4			2.47 (.298)
Threshold: 5			3.35 (.310)
Threshold: 6			4.90 (.348)
N (N of schools)	782 (97)	782 (97)	782 (97)
Average Intent-to-Treat Effects			
$Humphrey_{68}$ $(\beta_1 + \beta_4)$:	−.278 (.161)	−.283 (.162)	−.584 (.240)
$Nixon_{68}$ $(\beta_1 + \beta_5)$:	.465 (.219)	.472 (.204)	.699 (.271)

Note: The dependent variable is PID in 1973, coded as 0 = Strong Democrat to 6 = Strong Republican. PID in 1965 is coded in the same way as PID in 1973. Entries are OLS coefficients in the first two columns. The third column reports the log-odds of the ordinal logit. Robust standard errors, clustered at the school level, are in parentheses. Bootstrapped standard errors (1,000 draws taken within each school) are shown in the last two rows.

FIGURE 2 1973 PID among Humphrey and Nixon Supporters, by 1968 Eligibility Status
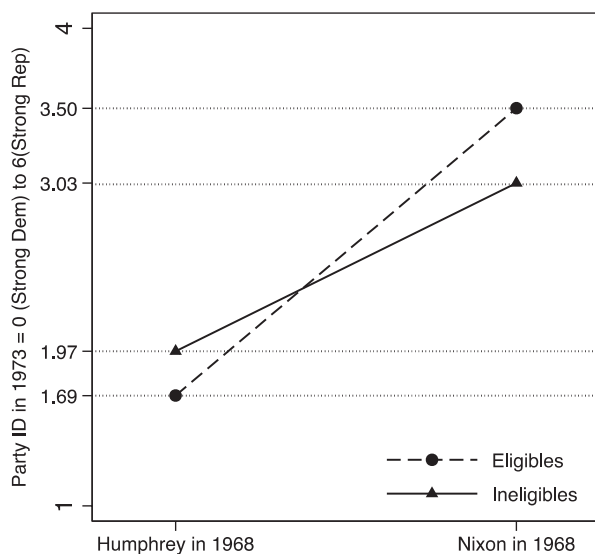
Note: This figure reports predicted values of 1973 using results from column 1 of Table 3. When calculating the predicted values, 1965 PID was set to its mean value (2.49).

should signal a future PID. Distinguishing among these variations would help us assess the extent to which vote choice drives the development of PID as is theorized here, or whether it mainly serves as a source of partisan shifts, as has been suggested in previous literature.

To consider these possible variants of change, the model generating the Table 3 results needs to be elaborated by allowing all two- and three-way interactions between 1965 PID, 1968 vote choice/preference, and eligibility:

$$
\begin{aligned}
PID_{73} = {} & \alpha + \beta_1 Dem_{65} + \beta_2 Rep_{65} + \beta_3 Eligible_{68} \\
& + \beta_4 Humphrey_{68} + \beta_5 Nixon_{68} + \beta_6 Dem_{65} \\
& \times Eligible_{68} + \beta_7 Dem_{65} \times Humphrey_{68} \\
& + \beta_8 Dem_{65} \times Nixon_{68} + \beta_9 Rep_{65} \times Eligible_{68} \\
& + \beta_{10} Rep_{65} \times Humphrey_{68} + \beta_{11} Rep_{65} \\
& + \beta_{12} Eligible_{68} \times Humphrey_{68} + \beta_{13} Eligible_{68} \\
& \times Nixon_{68} + \beta_{14} Dem_{65} \times Eligible_{68} \\
& \times Humphrey_{68} + \beta_{15} Dem_{65} \times Eligible_{68} \\
& \times Nixon_{68} + \beta_{16} Rep_{65} \times Eligible_{68} \\
& \times Humphrey_{68} + \beta_{17} Rep_{65} \\
& \times Eligible_{68} \times Nixon_{68} + u_{si}
\end{aligned}
\tag{2}
$$

of voting is important to the age-related development of PID, a consonant vote should reinforce prior leanings, a dissonant vote should weaken them or even prompt a change in party ID, and the vote of a pure independent

TABLE 4 The Impact of a Humphrey vs. Nixon Vote Depending upon Prior (1965) PID

	1968 Election: Humphrey	1968 Election: Nixon
Reinforcement	$PID_{65} =$ Democrat −.311 (.177)	$PID_{65} =$ Republican .453 (.266)
Weakening	$PID_{65} =$ Republican −.315 (1.02)	$PID_{65} =$ Democrat .329 (.509)
Acquisition	$PID_{65} =$ Independent .016 (.523)	$PID_{65} =$ Independent .355 (.187)
PID Shift	$PID_{65} =$ Republican .204 (.297)	$PID_{65} =$ Democrat −.024 (.132)
N (N of schools)	782 (97)	

Note: All entries are OLS coefficients, indicating the Average Intent-to-Treat Effects of eligibility—i.e., the effect of being eligible versus ineligible to cast a vote for one's preferred candidate, Humphrey or Nixon. For the "Reinforcement" and "Weakening" analyses, the dependent variable is the 7-point PID scale (coded 0–6). For the "Acquisition" and "PID Shift" analyses, the dependent variable is a binary variable that corresponds to people's party choice in 1968: In the first column, it is a dummy variable coded 1 = Democrat and 0 = Republican. In the second column, it is coded 1 = Republican and 0 = Democrat. Bootstrapped standard errors, with independent draws within each high school, shown in parentheses. Further details about the analysis are given in the online appendix.

In this model, pure independents constitute the reference category. *Dem* (*Rep*) denotes leaners, weak, and strong Democrats (Republicans).[9] All independent variables are dummies, switching on for the category denoted by their name. The details concerning this model and full results are shown in the online appendix. The key findings are given in Table 4.

In the first row are the effects of eligibility on 1973 PID for those who expressed a vote/vote preference consistent with their 1965 PID, with 1965 Democrats supporting Humphrey in 1968 on the left, and 1965 Republicans supporting Nixon in 1968 on the right. These indicate the extent to which casting a consonant vote reinforces prior leanings. The second row shows the comparable results among those who defected in 1968 from the PID they expressed in 1965; here, the question is whether casting a dissonant vote weakens prior leanings. In the third row are the results for those who in 1965 claimed to be

[9]To the extent that the findings shown below change when leaners are included in the independent category, they only become more favorable for the effect of the act of voting on change in PID.

pure independents, which shows how the vote cast shapes the acquisition of PID. Finally, the fourth row considers whether casting a dissonant vote ushers in a directional change in PID. Here, the issue is whether Republicans voting for Humphrey end up identifying as Democrats in 1973 and whether 1965 Democrats supporting Nixon end up as Republican identifiers.

The first row of Table 4 confirms the presence of reinforcement effects. On average, among respondents who declared themselves as Democrats in 1965 and revealed a preference for Humphrey in 1968, those who were eligible to vote in that election increased their pro-Democrat PID score by .311 points (on the 7-point PID scale) more than those who were not eligible to vote in that election. The equivalent strengthening effect of eligibility among Republican high school seniors who preferred Nixon in 1968 is .453.

The second row of Table 4 presents ambiguous evidence about whether prior partisan identities are weakened as a result of a dissonant vote. Eligible voters who defected in 1972 seem to have adjusted their PID in the direction of the vote, but these estimates are accompanied by high levels of uncertainty. I return to this point below.

The questions addressed in rows 3 and 4 are more qualitative in nature: did voting in 1968 induce the acquisition of partisanship or a shift from one party to the other? To accommodate this logic, a binary dependent variable is used, which takes the value of 1 if the PID expressed in 1973 matches the party voted for or preferred in 1968. Row 3 shows a mixed picture with respect to the acquisition of a PID. Independents who were eligible to vote for Nixon in 1968 were on average 35% more likely to claim a Republican PID in 1973 than were their noneligible counterparts—a remarkable effect by any standard. Eligibility status, however, did not seem to increase the chances of a Democrat ID among 1965 independents who preferred Humphrey in 1968. Finally, the last row of Table 4 indicates the limits of the act of voting. Previous studies emphasized the role of vote choice in generating partisan shifts. Net of selection effects, however, a dissonant vote does not seem to cause shifts from one party to the other. This is the case irrespective of who was the preferred candidate in 1968.

Table 4 suggests that the act of voting mainly contributes in strengthening prior partisanship and, to a lesser extent, in accelerating the process of partisan acquisition. It does not, however, drive swings from one party to the other. A remaining source of uncertainty relates to the presence of weakening effects. The estimates point to the right direction, but the few number of people who opt for a candidate opposite to their 1965 PID makes them imprecise. Given that the effect of eligibility does

not seem to vary substantially between the two parties either when a dissonant or when a consonant vote is cast, we can increase precision by assuming a constant effect of eligibility for both parties. Doing so lets us simplify equation (2) as follows:

$$PID_{strength73} = \alpha + \beta_1 PID_{strength65} + \beta_2 ConsonantVote_{68}$$
$$+ \beta_3 DissonantVote_{68} + \beta_4 Eligible_{68}$$
$$+ \beta_5 ConsonantVote_{68} \times Eligible_{68}$$
$$+ \beta_6 DissonantVote_{68} \times Eligible_{68} + u_{is}$$

(3)

$ConsonantVote_{68}$ is a dummy variable that scores 1 for 1965 Democrats who preferred Humphrey in 1968 and for 1965 Republicans who preferred Nixon in 1968. $DissonantVote_{68}$ becomes 1 if 1965 Democrats opted for Nixon in 1968 and if 1965 Republicans opted for Humphrey in 1968. To avoid cancelling out the effects of the two types of partisans, the dependent variable used for this exercise is strength of PID (the folded 0–3 measure). The online appendix describes this model in detail. Figure 3 presents the results. Black dots denote the average difference between eligibles and noneligibles, and the gray spikes cover the 95% confidence bounds of these point estimates. When the vote cast agrees with prior PID, it reinforces prior predispositions. When it disagrees with prior PID, it weakens partisan sentiments. Finally, combining the two processes, the last entry of Figure 3 shows that converting a consonant versus a dissonant preference into a vote reinforces PID by one point more (in a 0–3 scale) when compared to simply having consonant versus dissonant preferences.

When taken as a whole, these findings challenge the idea that people simply accommodate their partisanship according to their most recent vote choices (Howell 1980, 1981). Rather than signaling partisan zigzagging as a result of prior votes, the act of voting mainly contributes in the process of partisan reinforcement. Dissonant votes also act to weaken partisan ties but without causing shifts to the opposite party.

The Persistence of Early Vote Choices

Although the previous analyses evaluated the effect of the first vote one casts as an adult on young people's partisan attachments five years after the election in question, they do not consider votes cast in subsequent elections. Bringing information about the 1972 election into the picture would allow us to distinguish between scenarios of continuity and volatility in young adults' early vote choices.

Are the effects of voting for the party's standard-bearer in a presidential election undone by later voting for the other party's nominee? Bringing in vote choice in 1972 also helps to address a potential criticism to the previous strategy of inferring vote choice. Eligibles, it could be argued, may be more likely to vote in 1972 than noneligibles, driving the difference in their partisan profiles. By explicitly conditioning on vote choice in 1972, this alternative explanation is ruled out.

The idea is to examine the change in PID between 1965 and 1973 among those who cast identical votes in 1972 but differed in whether they had been able to vote four years earlier. I test this assumption by employing the model shown in equation (1) and reported in Table 3, conditioning now on vote choice in 1972. Full details about this model are shown in the online appendix. Figure 4 summarizes the results. The graph is divided in two groups. The first presents scenarios of continuity, where a vote in 1972 corresponds to a vote (actual or hypothetical) in 1968. The second denotes instances of discontinuity, when different partisan candidates were chosen in 1968 and in 1972. Figure 4 suggests that vote choice in 1968 affects 1973 PID even when conditioning on 1972 vote choice. It does so, however, only when it is followed by a consonant vote in 1972. When the two disagree, any partisan gap between the two groups after 1968 disappears. This pattern gives support to the developmental pattern of party identification, highlighting the cumulative importance of early voting choices.

A potential criticism of this analysis could be that the 1968 election was particularly salient. Thus, the results might be simply due to the fact that we capitalize on the extraordinary salience of 1968. I examine whether this is the case in the online appendix. To summarize this analysis, I make use of various American National Election Studies (ANES), distinguishing between two two-year cohorts. The older cohort was eligible to vote in the previous presidential election, whereas the younger cohort was not. The results suggest that the former group were stronger supporters of their party than the latter. The design allows a placebo test for the role of age and provides plenty of political sophistication indicators to examine the politicization hypothesis. All of these analyses support the hypothesis that it is the act of voting for one's preferred party that strengthens PID.

When Do the Voting Effects Decay?

If the accumulation of electoral experience brings about stronger partisanship, the difference between eligibles and noneligibles should gradually evaporate as they both add

**FIGURE 3 Consonant vs. Dissonant Votes and Their Effect on
Partisan Strength**
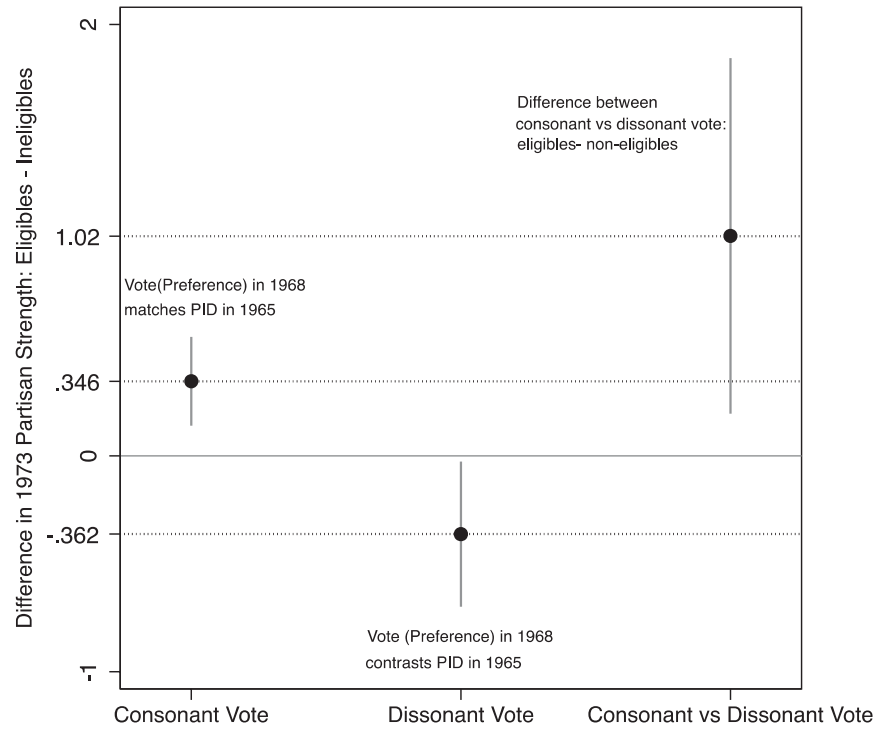
Note: Black dots denote the average difference between eligibles and noneligibles in partisan
strength measured in 1973. Gray spikes denote the 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals.
The numeration of the coefficients follows equation (3). The first entry denotes the average
difference in the strength of PID (0–3 scale) between those who cast a vote that matched
their 1965 PID and those who would have also cast a vote consonant to their 1965 PID but
were not eligible to do so due to their eligibility status. The second entry denotes the average
difference in the strength of PID (0–3 scale) between those who cast a vote that contrasted
their 1965 PID and those who would have also cast a vote dissonant to their 1965 PID but
were not eligible to do so due to their eligibility status. The third entry presents the average
change in partisan strength as a result of a consonant versus dissonant vote compared to
a consonant versus dissonant preference that could not materialize into actual vote due to
eligibility constraints.

more elections in their partisan profiles. By making use
of the last two waves of the panel study (1982 and 1997),
we can trace any intent-to-treat effect of 1968 vote on
partisan strength (folded party ID) along the life cycle
of high school seniors. I estimate the effects by using
a growth curve model (Plutzer 2002; Raudenbush and
Bryk 1992). Drawing on the previous literature (Bartels
2000), I include both a linear and a curvilinear term to
model the development of PID over this political period.
The generic form of the model is shown below:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P_{tis}(PID = c)}{1 - P_{tis}(PID = c)}\right)$$
$$= \gamma_c - \left[\alpha_{0is} + \alpha_{1is}T + a_{2is}T^2 + e_{tis}\right], \quad (4)$$

where $i = 1, \dots, n$ denotes survey respondents, $t = 1, \dots, 4$ indexes the number of observations for each in-

dividual, and α_{ki} denotes the starting level and the growth
curve parameter for i with $k\{0,1,2\}$. I use a logistic link
function and assume a simple error structure. The out-
come category of the t-th measurement of the i-th indi-
vidual is represented by $c = 1 \dots C-1$, and γ represents
the threshold parameters. Observations are nested within
individuals and, in turn, nested within schools. The pa-
rameters are estimated with mixed-effects ordinal logit
(Hedeker 2004).

Full results are provided in Table A.10 of the online
appendix. Figure 5 displays the key findings, showing the
effect of 1968 eligibility on the probability of declaring
oneself a weak or strong partisan. Both in 1973 and in
1982, 1968 eligibles were approximately 15% more likely
than noneligibles to register a partisanship with either of
the two parties. By 1982, the young adults were 35 years

FIGURE 4   **The Impact of 1968 Vote on 1965–73 Change in Party ID, Conditioning on 1972 Vote Choice**
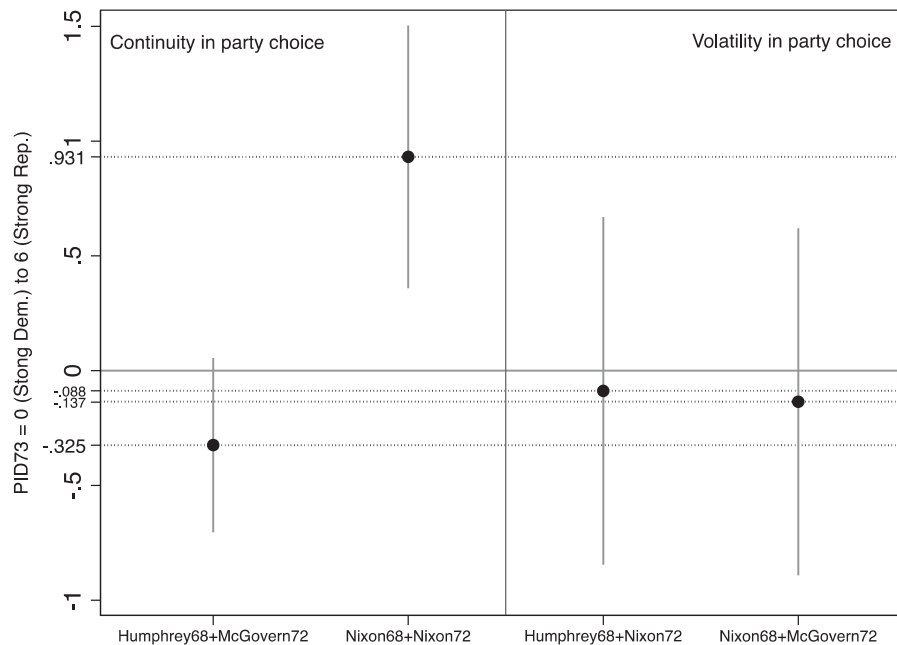
Note: Black dots denote the average difference in PID between eligibles and noneligibles with the same configuration of party preference in 1968 and in 1972. The dependent variable is PID, measured in 1973, and ranging from strong Democrat (0) to strong Republican (6). *Humphrey*[68] and *Nixon*[68] are dummies that switch on for those who either voted for or would have voted for each of these candidates. *McGovern*[72] and *Nixon*[72] switch on only for those who voted for each of the two candidates in that election.

old and the difference between eligibles and noneligibles in their number of presidential elections is still noticeable: three versus four. As partisanship consolidates, however, the imprint of early voting experiences disappears.[10] Partisan anchoring probably necessitates less than eight presidential elections, i.e., the number of elections 1968 eligibles had the opportunity to participate in by 1997.

An interesting implication from this pattern alludes to the importance of early adulthood. The impressionable-years thesis (Delli Carpini 1989) asserts that attitudes regarding the parties are intensified during this period, only to crystallize afterward. A similar pattern is observed here with respect to the act of voting. Repeated confirmations of one's PID have diminishing marginal gains as the stock of prior behavioral manifestations of party preferences grows.

[10]Even if only suggestive, further evidence supporting this argument comes from a comparison of the young cohort with their parents. The parents' average age in 1973 was 50, corresponding to the age of the young cohort in 1997. Among the parents, the change in the predicted probability of registering a PID in 1973 as a result of voting in 1968 is .04 [−.05–.13].

Discussion

In what has been characterized as "a small masterpiece of dyspeptic commentary on the theoretical and empirical difficulties of cohort analysis" (Bartels 2001, 3), Converse (1976) delved into the most crucial part of his party-system stability model, namely the idea that partisanship strengthens across the life span. Although various longitudinal analyses since then have largely confirmed this hypothesis, a still pending question refers to the specification of those factors that relate to the process of aging and whose effects are vaguely attributed to the accumulation of political experience. This article has tried to shed light on this question, making use of established ideas from social psychology and a rare identification opportunity to empirically test its main hypothesis—that the act of voting, itself, plays an important role in the process by which partisan identities develop with age. At least in part, the answer to the question about how young people form firm partisan identities is this: by voting repeatedly for the same party. This finding has important implications that merit some elaboration.

FIGURE 5 **The Difference in the Growth Curve of Partisan Strength between Eligibles and Noneligibles, 1965–97**
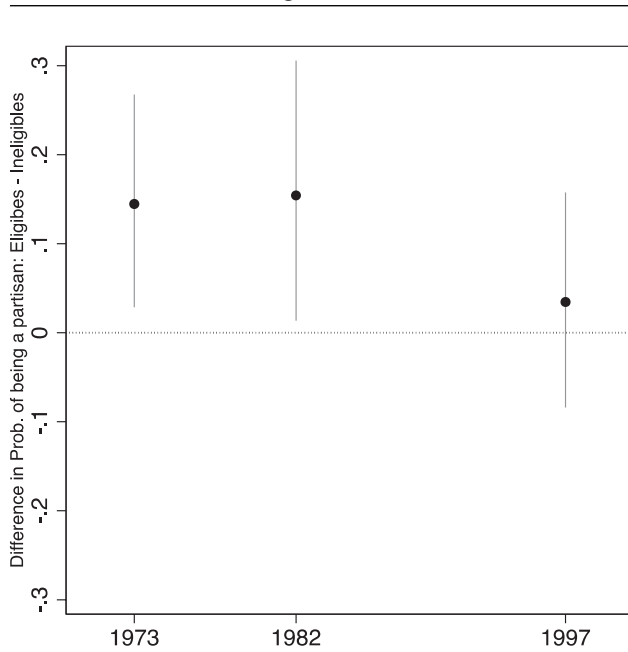
Note: The black dots denote the average gap in the probability of registering a PID between eligibles and noneligibles in 1973, 1982, and 1997. The gray spikes denote the 95% bootstrapped confidence bands of these estimates, taken from equation (4).

The first implication concerns the role of behavioral heuristics in the process of political learning. It is probably safe to argue that one of the least questioned assumptions in the voting behavior literature is that attitudes lead to behavior. Scarce attempts to reverse the causal arrow have remained marginal. This study qualifies this conventional wisdom, suggesting that voting histories exert an important effect on partisan preferences. Previous studies that used vote choices as predictors of PID treated the former as proxies of campaign dynamics. The position argued in this article is that the act of manifesting a preference by casting a vote itself matters to the party ID one develops. Voters seem to follow the pattern identified by psychological theories of behavior-driven attitude change. They consult their own prior behavior as they consider the direction and strength of their partisan identities.

The second implication relates to the long-lasting debate between the two schools of party identification. The driving force of Michigan's conceptualization of partisanship was the idea that partisan preferences are initially developed in childhood. Given children's limited cognitive capacity to form such attachments on information-processing grounds, it was natural to argue that these attachments are developed in an affective manner, long before children developed issue orientations and other

political perceptions (Greenstein [1970] 2009, 58). As evidence of partisan volatility during the adult life accumulated, the idea of a stable, psychological attachment to political objects was questioned, and the so-called revisionist view of party identification was formulated (Fiorina 1981; Franklin 1984; Franklin and Jackson 1983). Achen's (1992, 2002) Bayesian models have been pivotal in this context, because they reconciled the revisionist theory—until then deemed to predict a zero relationship between aging and partisan lability—with two empirical patterns, namely the decay of parental influence and the increase in partisan stability as young people accumulate political experience. If party identification adjusts with political experience as Achen portrays, it is more a summary index of a stock of political information than a psychological sense of attachment stemming from self-identification. Of course, any such either-or formulation may be less apt than one admitting of both types of partisans (Kroh and Selb 2009).

This study enters the fray by showing that changes in partisanship across the early adult years can be integral to the process of identity formation. At least in part, people figure out who they are by considering what they have done. They do not update their party ID only on the basis of new information about the parties. Contrary to the logic driving the revisionist approach and unlike other determinants of short-term partisan volatility such as leadership assessments (Markus and Converse 1979), issue considerations (Jackson 1975), and retrospective evaluations (Fiorina 1981), the act of voting disseminates no information about parties' stances, performance, or candidates. Moreover, the findings suggest that the first vote leaves a quite long footprint on people's partisan profiles. This pattern is hardly compatible with a Bayesian updating logic. It is, however, explained by the dynamics of self-categorization. By voting for a party, people come closer to considering themselves as a prototypical member of the group.

Third, the findings may also prove useful for our understanding of how turnout can become self-reinforcing. Casting a ballot in a given election has been shown to increase the likelihood of also doing so in the next election (Denny and Doyle 2009; Gerber, Green, and Shachar 2003; Meredith 2009). Why the act of voting has this self-reinforcing element has not been examined. Here we found that the act of voting typically creates or strengthens the partisan attachments of young people (though sometimes undermines them). Since strength of partisanship is a key predictor of turnout (e.g., Powell 1986, 30), it is probable that the habit of voting is, itself, mediated by the stronger partisan attachments to which voting gives rise.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Table A.1: Summary statistics for control and treatment group, 1965-1973.

Table A.2: The impact of 1968 eligibility status, conditioning on 1972 vote choice, on change in PID between 1965 and 1973.

Table A.3: Estimating Equation (2): Reinforcement, Weakening, Acquisition and Shifts in PID.

Table A.4: Reinforcement vs. Weakening effects, estimates from equation (3) of the main text.

Table A.5: Examining the intent-to-treat effect of vote choice in 1968 on PID in 1973, conditioning on vote choice in 1972.

Table A.6: The difference in PID between eligibles and non-eligibles in time t-1 among those voting for the Republicans/Democrats in time t, ANES postelection surveys, 1952-2004.

Table A.7: Difference between eligibles and non-eligibles in terms of political interest and knowledge, Presidential election years.

Table A.8: A Placebo test for the role of eligibility: difference between older and younger eligibles in terms of political interest and knowledge.

Table A.9: A test for the role of Presidential elections: difference between eligibles and noneligibles in terms of political interest and knowledge, Congressional election years.

Table A.10: The impact of 1968 eligibility on the growth curve of partisan strength, 1965-1997.