

# What Comes to Mind: Did Voters Remember Policy Promises during the 2016 Campaign?

NYU Politics & SMaPP lab

Jan Zilinsky, Jonathan Nagler, Joshua Tucker

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# Information environment: the 2016 campaign

We asked if people could name a policy Trump and Clinton proposed that would make them better off

## Questions

- Do traditional media outlets play a role in educating the public?
- Are voters who consume news via social media more likely to remember candidates' promises?

# Hypotheses

1. Education → Ability to name a policy
2. Exposure to news (Newspapers, TV, News organizations on Twitter, Political information shared by friends on Facebook) → Ability to name a policy
3. More conservative news diet → more likely to name a Trump policy
4. More conservative news diet → less likely to name a Clinton policy
5. More liberal news diet → more likely to name a Clinton policy
6. More liberal news diet → less likely to name a Trump policy

# Results

1. Education → Ability to name a policy.
  - **YES: 6-12% effect**
  - But no effect on ability to name a Trump policy
2. Exposure to news → Ability to name a policy. **YES**
3. More conservative diet → more likely to name a Trump policy
  - **20% effect** of watching Fox News (comparable to PID)
  - **12% effect** of right-leaning online sources
4. More conservative diet → less likely to name a Clinton policy
  - **YES** both offline and online
5. More liberal diet → more likely to name a Clinton policy
  - **15% effect of TV** (MSNBC)
  - **10% effect** of left-leaning online sources
6. More liberal diet → less likely to name a Trump policy
  - **No effect**

# Data

Open-ended questions in 2016 SMaPP Panel survey (wave 3)

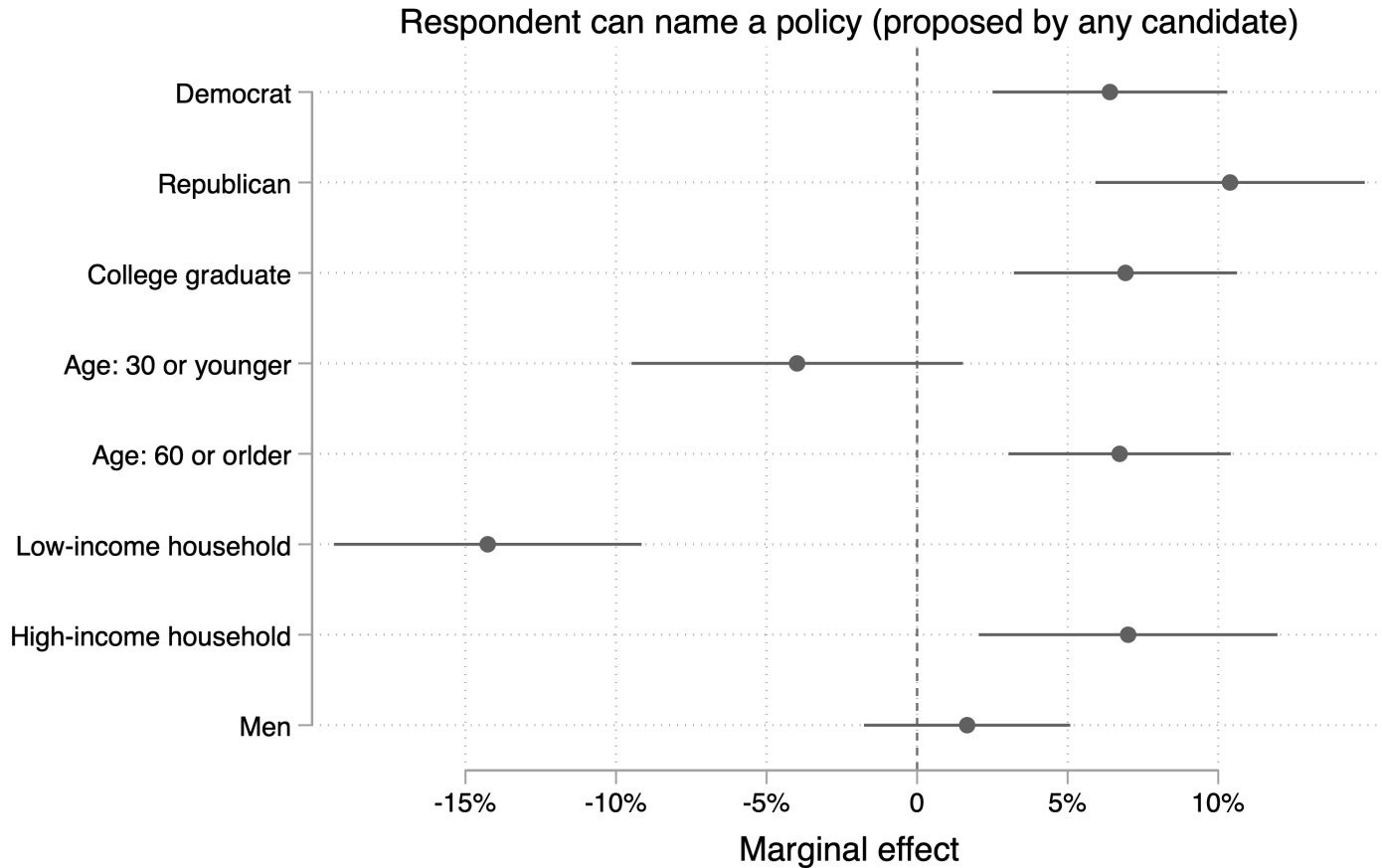
- 76.4% can name a policy proposed by **at least one candidate**
  - 72.7% Democrats and 9.7% Republicans can name a Clinton policy
  - 80% Republicans and 20.3% Democrats can name a Trump policy

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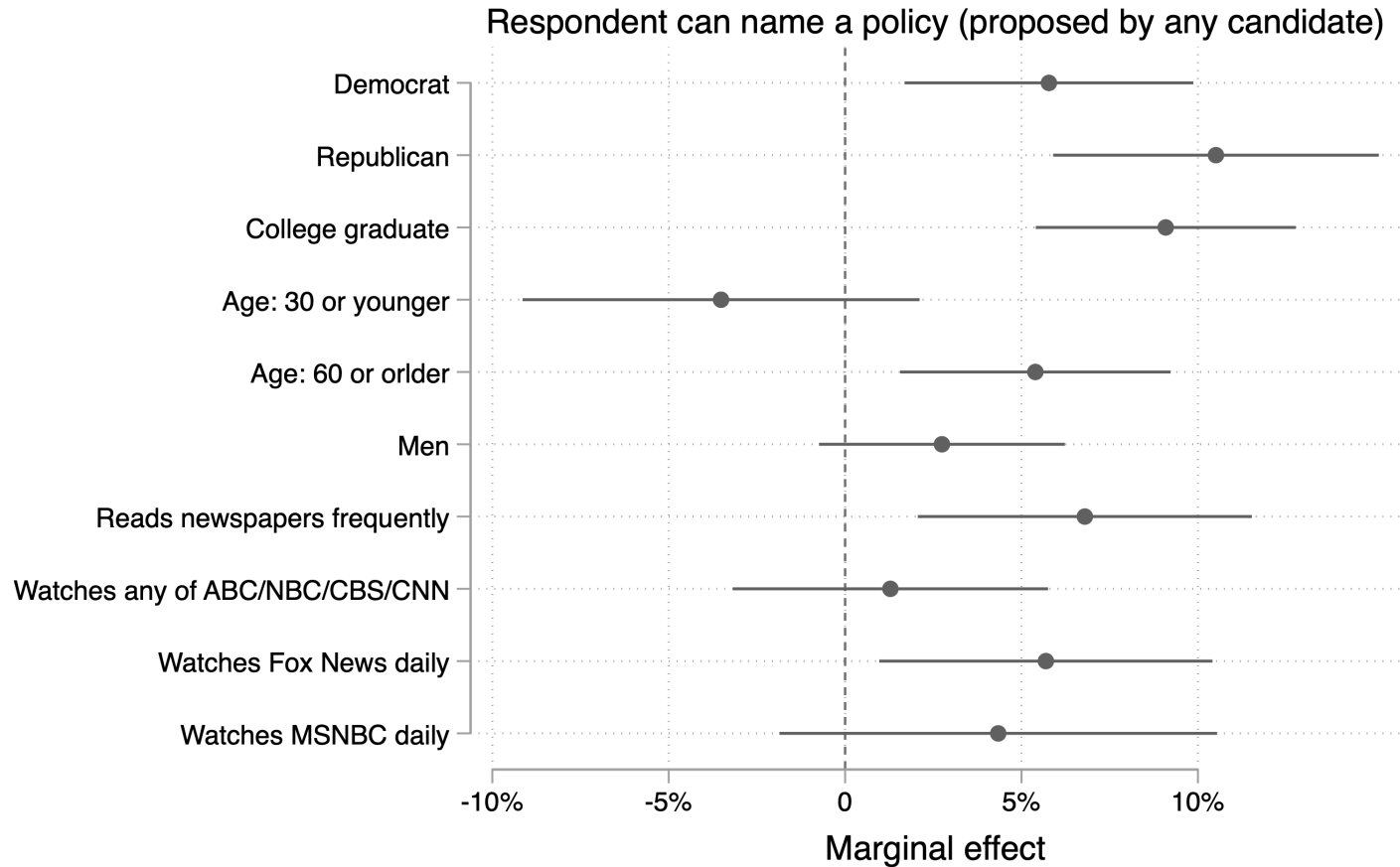
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  - 72.7% Democrats and 9.7% Republicans can name a Clinton policy
  - 80% Republicans and 20.3% Democrats can name a Trump policy
- 11.4% of all respondents could name desirable policies from the platforms of **both candidates**
  - Example (from a single respondent): "[Trump will lower] taxes on people in my income bracket"; "[Clinton will make] sure all americans have health insurance"
  - Example (from a single respondent): "Building the wall will create jobs ... we need more infrastructure projects - even pointless ones"; "expanding the ACA"

# Policy from any candidate (baseline)



Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=2354

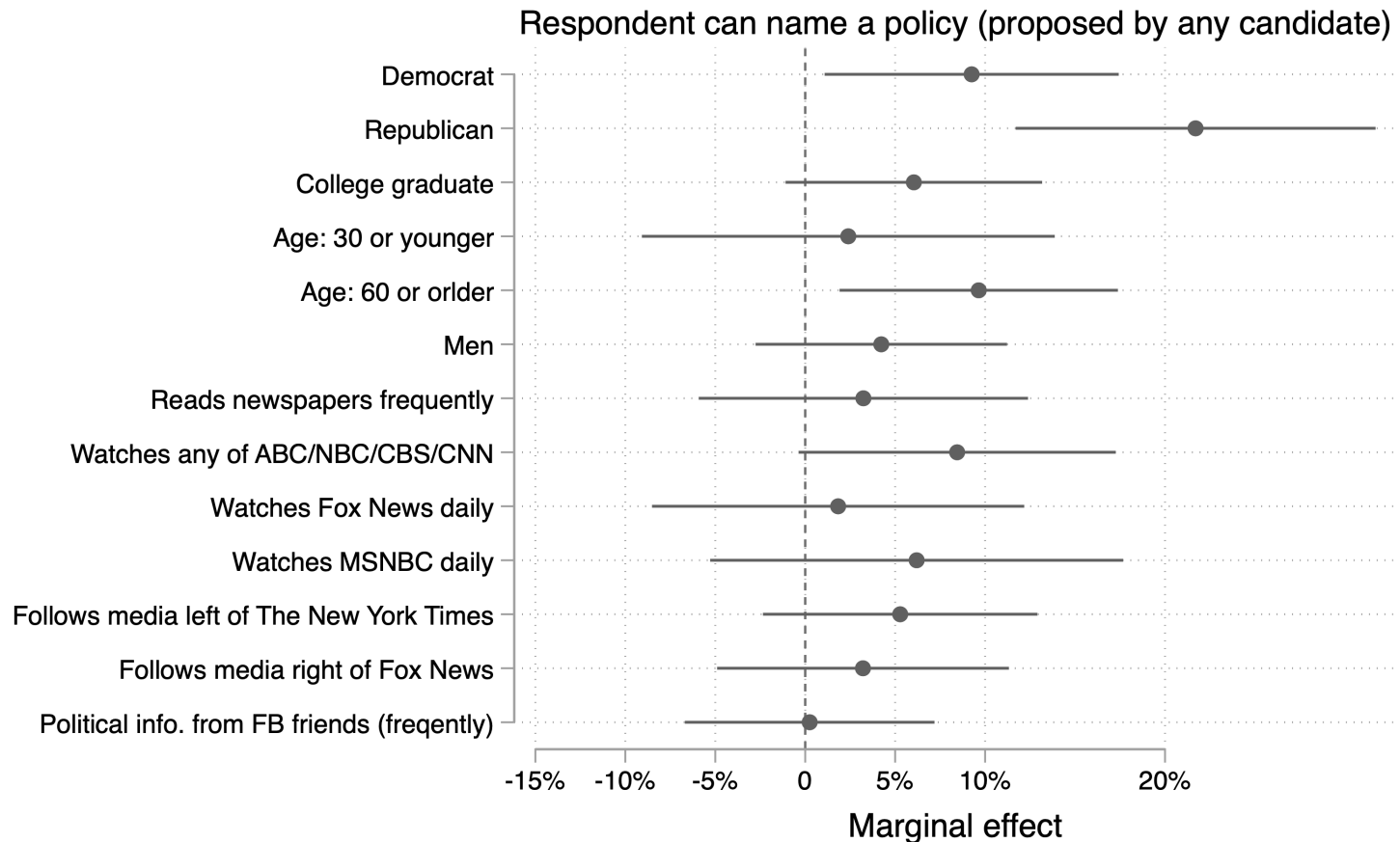
# Policy from any candidate (demographics & media consumption)



Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=2296

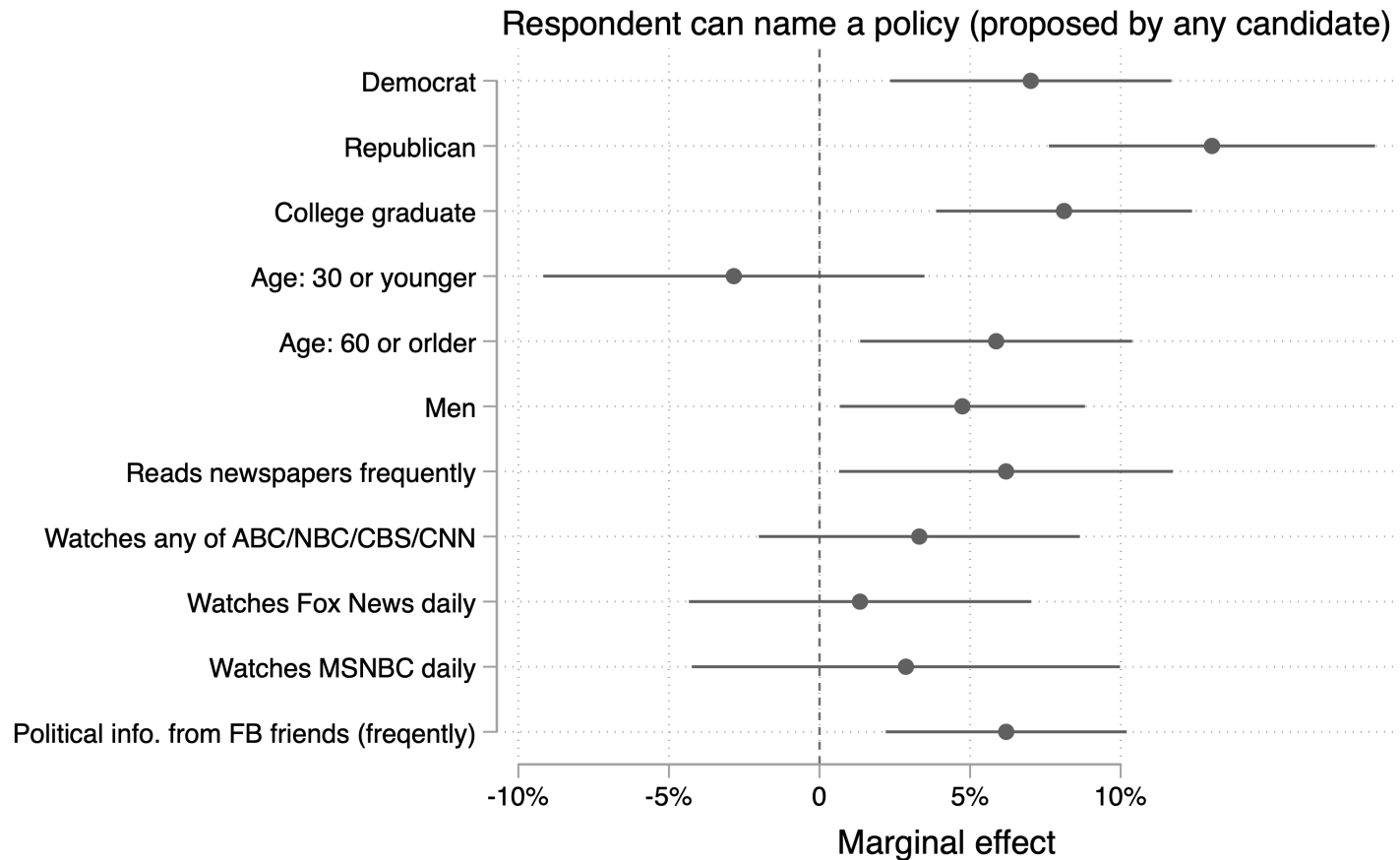


# Policy from any candidate (demographics & online/offline media consumption)



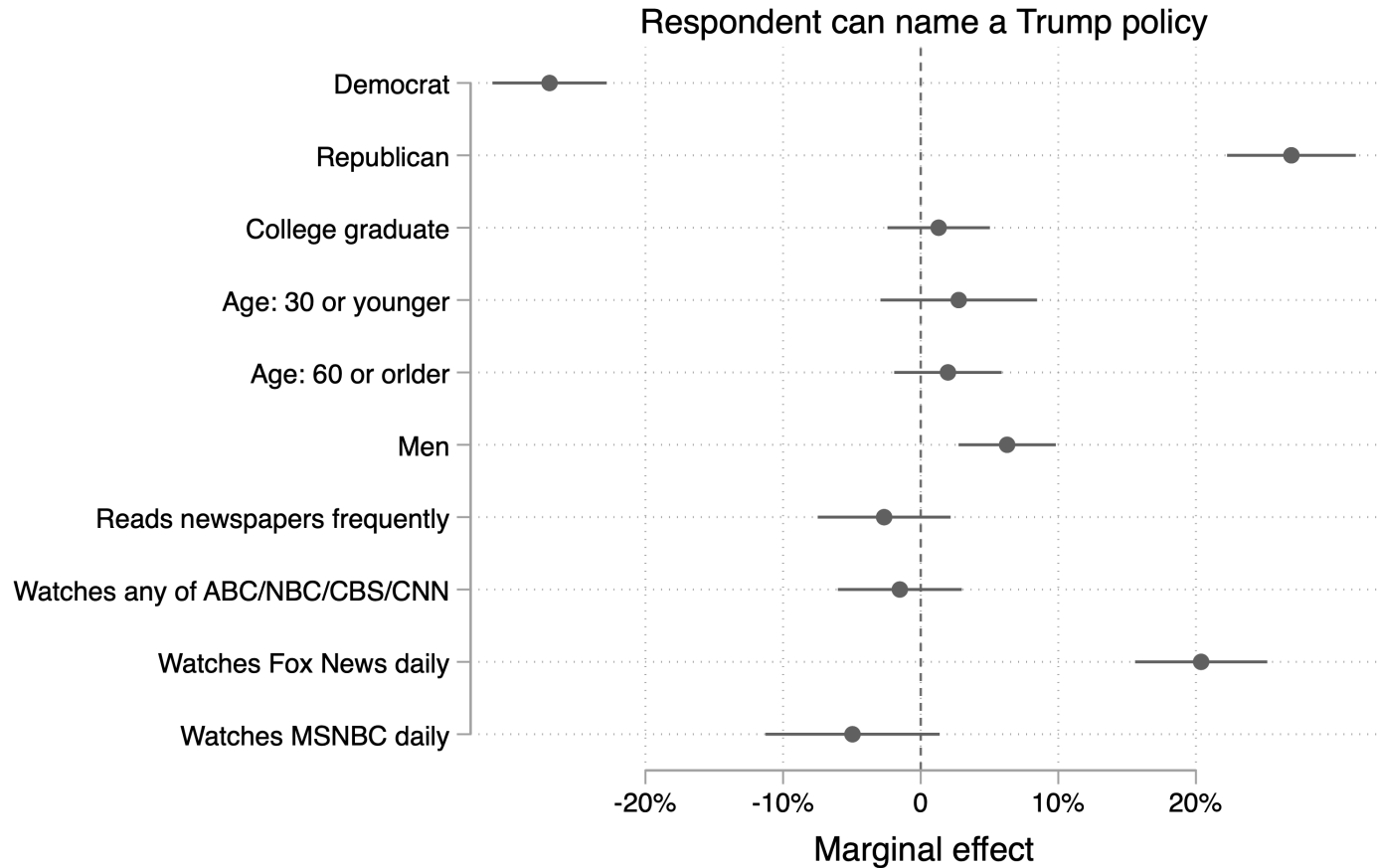
Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=525

# Policy from any candidate (demographics & media consumption & Facebook)



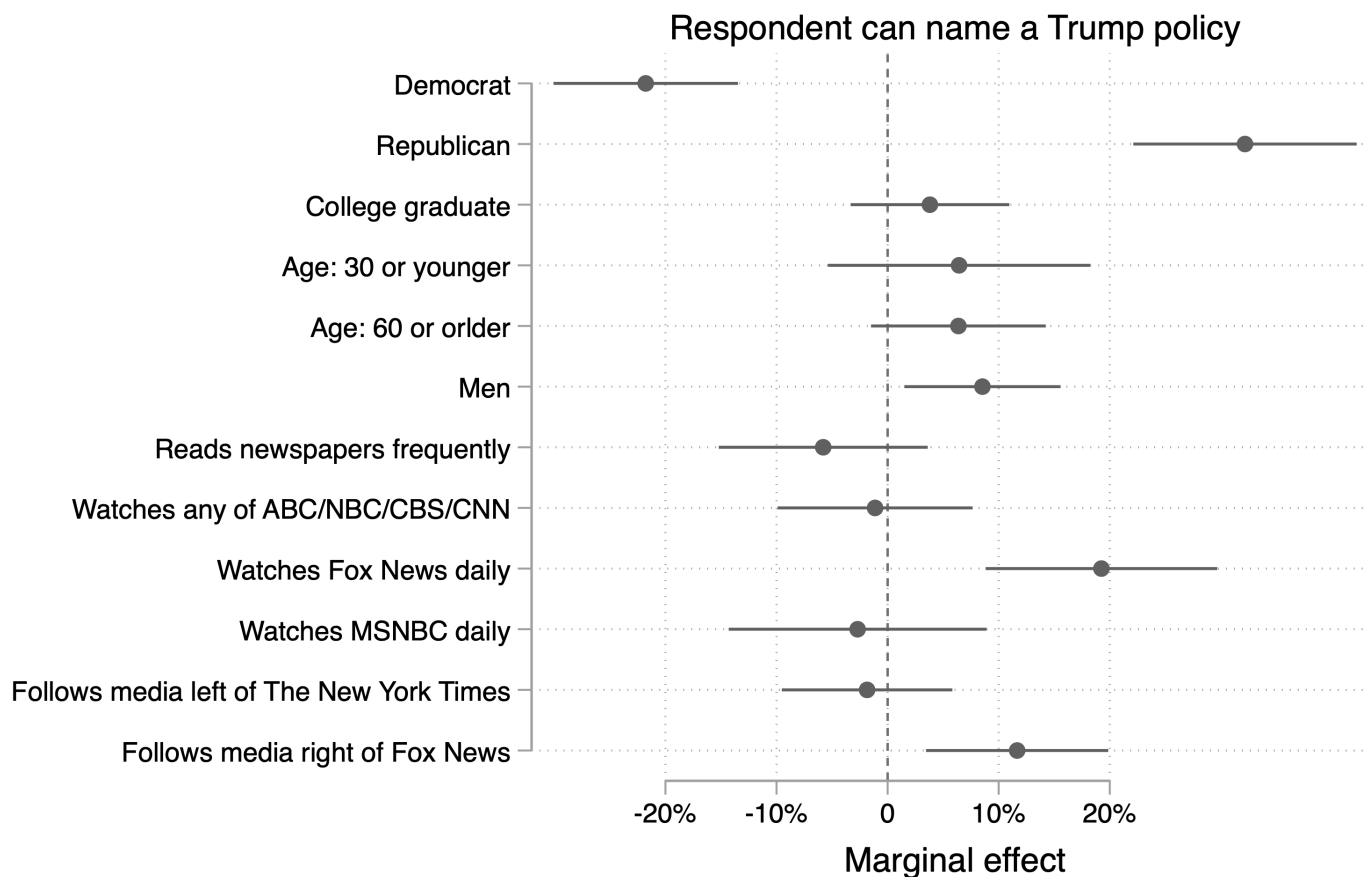
Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=1706

# Remembering a desirable Trump policy (traditional media)



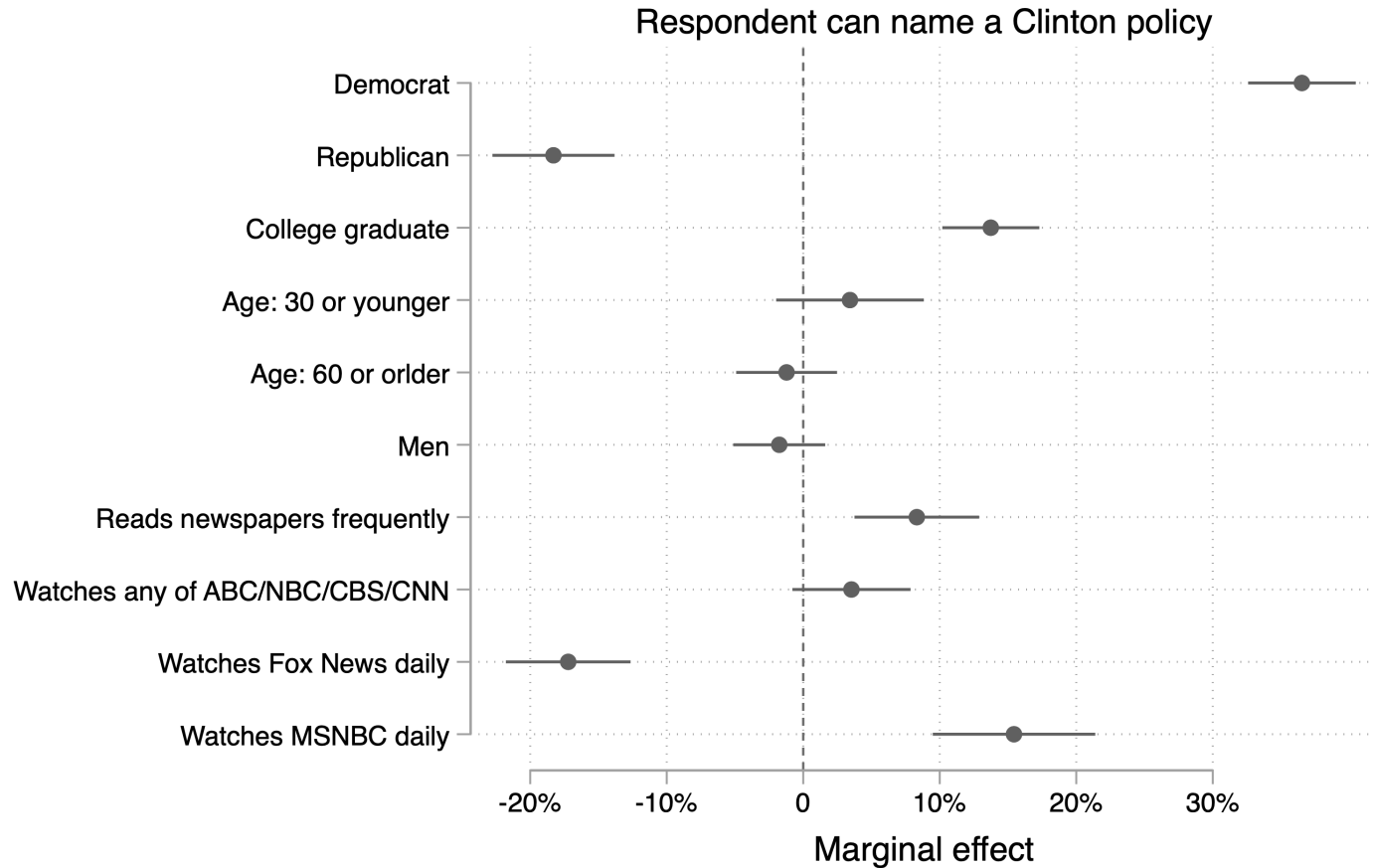
Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=2365

# Remembering a desirable Trump policy (traditional & online media)



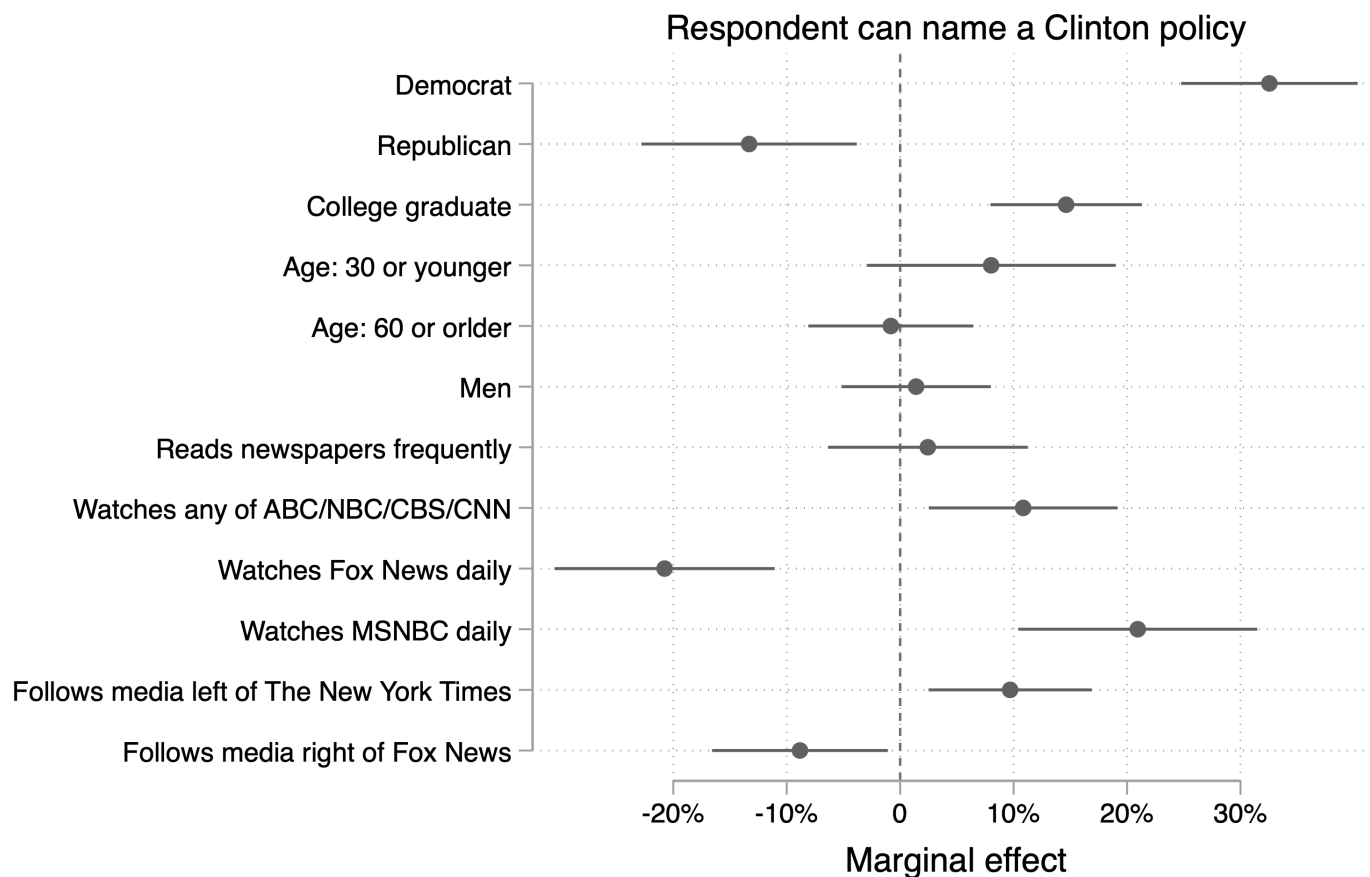
Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=585

# Remembering a desirable Clinton policy (traditional media)



Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=2349

# Remembering a desirable Clinton policy (traditional & online media)



Data: 2016 SMaPP Survey. N=591

# Take-away

## What we show

- Most voters could name at least one policy. The campaign was not (solely) about negativity ("crooked Hillary") or identity.
- Education, PID, and media consumption are correlated with knowledge of candidates' policies.
- Liberal TV (MSNBC) does not seem to convince viewers that Trump has no desirable policies.
- (Suggestive evidence Fox News may reduce appeal of Clinton's policy proposals, holding partisanship fixed.)

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## Debate: Do voters have enough knowledge to cast an informed vote?

- **Optimists:** Parties have an incentive to reach citizens and pitch their case. Exposure to news is almost unavoidable -- and it is correlated with knowledge.
- **Pessimists:** Voting is a low-stakes activity & earlier surveys suggest surveillance knowledge is limited