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No Republican, No Vote: Undervoting and Consequences of the Top-Two Primary System

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Abstract

Washington and California adopted the Top-Two Primary in 2008 and 2012, respectively. Under this new system, all candidates regardless of party affiliation run against each other, narrowing the field down to the top two for the general election. In some jurisdictions, the general election features two candidates from the same party. Ten percent of California voters chose not to vote in the 2016 U.S. Senate election which featured two Democrats. Using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (2012–2016), I find that among those who vote in the national November elections, *orphans*, or voters without a copartisan candidate on the ballot are more likely to undervote, opting out of voting in their congressional race. Levels of undervoting are nearly 20 percentage points higher for orphaned voters compared to non-orphaned voters. Additionally, voters who abstain perceive more ideological distance between themselves and the candidates compared to voters who cast a vote. These findings support a multi-step framework for vote decisions in same-party matchups: voters are more likely to undervote if they are unable to vote for a candidate from their party (partisan model), but all voters are more likely to vote for a candidate when they perceive ideological proximity (ideological model).

Keywords

ideology, partisanship, voting behavior, political behavior, electoral systems, elections, top-two primary

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Introduction

In 2016, Californians chose Kamala Harris as their next U.S. senator, making Harris the second African-American woman ever elected to the United States Senate. Yet, Harris' victory matters for American politics beyond its immediate, symbolic implications. It marked the first time in 103 years of popular elections of U.S. senators that a Republican candidate did not qualify for a general-election race in California.[1] For Republicans uneasy with Harris, her only challenger was also a Democrat: former Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez. In other words, before a single vote was cast in the general election, Republicans knew that a Democratic candidate would prevail. This result was made possible by a reform of California's primary system. Californians approved ballot Proposition 14 in 2010, which mandated that direct primaries for most major offices would advance the "top-two vote-getters" (California Constitution, article II, section V). Washington is the only other state with this primary system.[2] While one intention for the system was to help elect more moderate candidates, an additional consequence has been to exclude one party from a substantial number of general elections. In the 2012, 2014, and 2016 November elections, a total of 17% of the general election races in California featured same-party candidates. To a lesser extent this matchup type occurs in Washington, mostly for state legislative office but a few times at the congressional level. *Same-party matchups* in both states—a total of 26 congressional races between 2012 and 2016—are under observation in this study.

Partisanship is often the most important factor in vote choice, so the consequences of this new system have brought light to an intriguing new area of partisan politics: How do voters choose between out-party candidates? One way of examining the effects of same-party contests is through undervoting rates. Undervoting is not a measurement of turnout, but rather measures if a voter fails to make a selection in a particular contest. Previous work on voter roll-off has found that voters skip races on the ballot when they lack enough information to make a choice (Wattenberg, McAllister, and Salvanto 2000). Similar to same-party matchups, nonpartisan races depress turnout because people are unable to rely on party labels as a heuristic (Hall 2007; Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001).[3] Unlike nonpartisan races, in same-party contests only one party's supporters are *orphaned*–the term used to describe partisans without a candidate on the ballot. In most elections across the United States, voters are not orphaned, giving most voters a candidate who shares their partisanship. In 2016, 10% of California voters undervoted in the Senate race, compared to less than 3% in previous Senate elections featuring candidates from both parties. Party labels make it so candidates appear as distinct choices to the voters. The victorious party in same-party contests is known a priori, and orphaned voters are most likely unhappy, regardless of the outcome. However, these matchups allow researchers to observe the influence of ideological preferences, which are often hidden by partisan considerations. There are fewer incentives for anyone to cast a vote in a race if the perceived candidate difference is small or the expected outcome is undesirable. Same-party matchups yield intriguing observations for voting behavior.

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The following analysis challenges existing knowledge of vote choice by examining voting behavior in same-party matchups. First, I explain the consequences of two voting frameworks on electoral participation: ideological and partisan models. Second, I examine undervoting in congressional races using voter-validated data to show how levels of undervoting for same-party contests are different than other races and that orphaned voters are more likely to undervote. Finally, I show that all voters, but specifically orphaned voters are more likely to undervote in same-party matchups when they perceive the candidates to be ideologically distant from themselves. These results indicate two distinct models of voting: voters are more likely to undervote when they cannot support a copartisan candidate, but less likely to undervote if they perceive a candidate is ideologically proximate.

Models of Voting

Most models of voter participation describe a citizen who supports the candidate that best represents their preferences. In the traditional rational choice framework, this is imagined as a spatial model where people place themselves and the candidates on a liberal-conservative ideological spectrum (Downs 1957). The candidate closer in ideology to the voter would be the candidate that best represents the voter's interests. Under the spatial model, a conservative Republican in a district with two Democrats facing off in the general election should choose the more moderate Democratic candidate. Although this model is straightforward in its understanding of voters' preferences and is still referenced in theories of voting behavior, many scholars dispute the applicability of the spatial model of voting. Stokes (1963) famously remarks that voters do not think along a single ideological dimension. He suggests that models of voting should account for the weighting of different issues on different dimensions.

One significant challenge to the spatial model argues the direction of candidates' preferences is more important than proximity (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Westholm 1997). In this model, voters prefer candidates with preferences in the same ideological direction, regardless of strength. Due to high levels of elite partisan sorting in the last few decades, voters can assume candidates from the two parties occupy opposite sides of the spectrum. While voters are able to effectively place incumbent candidates on the ideological spectrum, they use the ideological positions of the parties to infer the positions of challengers (Peskowitz 2017). This means voters are better at placing incumbents, giving challengers a slight disadvantage. Nevertheless, elite sorting makes it so voters are capable of perceiving candidate ideology. According to the spatial model, the voter chooses the ideologically closer candidate, regardless of ideological orientation. Under the directional model, a voter only chooses to cast a vote if at least one candidate is on their side of the spectrum. Separately, scholars have attempted to create robust theories of issue voting using proximity, directional, or unified theories (Merrill and Grofman 1999). Despite many theories on the importance of ideological preferences, voters often think in non-ideological terms where candidate evaluations are an amalgam of various assessments. Much of what we know about voter preferences can be boiled down to partisan identification.

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In *The American Voter*, Campbell et al. (1960) popularized a partisan model of voting, arguing that voter behavior can best be characterized by partisanship. Party identification is persistent and rarely changes over time, owing to early childhood socialization. They likened partisanship to a religious identity. More recent work has shown that partisanship can be thought of as an emotional and psychological attachment grounded in social identities (Green and Palmquist 1994; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Issue preferences and party evaluations may change slightly over time, but party identification remains. Partisan *identities* hold a stronger meaning to individuals, beyond an assortment of issue positions. In short, partisanship is very important to the American voter. Judgments of the political system and subsequent political behaviors are in large part determined by the strength of our partisan identities. Many factors influence electoral behavior, but partisanship is one of the best predictors of vote choice (Bartels 2000).

As the differences between parties have increased, political evaluations have become more noticeably colored by partisan judgments. Even the most sophisticated voters engage in motivated reasoning and use their existing partisan views to interpret objective facts in a party-reaffirming way (Bartels 2002; Gaines et al. 2007; Taber and Lodge 2006). Partisans are good at taking cues from elites and applying them to reinforce favorable in-party evaluations and unfavorable out-party evaluations (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Nicholson 2012). Candidates are finding the task of rising above their party label to court out-party voters to be daunting. Arceneaux (2008) shows that for a candidate to move beyond their party label, issues must be salient and voters must be aware. Nevertheless, party labels are critical because they give uninformed voters an informational shortcut at the ballot box (Garlick 2015; Kam 2005). In a same-party matchup, voters still evaluate candidates using party labels, although this shortcut is not useful for differentiation. For orphaned voters, the lack of a copartisan candidate may result in abstention.

Over the last few decades, political polarization has strengthened the significance of partisan voting. Polarization, the growing ideological gap between liberals and conservatives, has penetrated politics at the elite level and in the mass electorate. At the elite level, there is strong evidence of issue polarization (Jacobson 2000; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Poole and Rosenthal 2011). Today, almost every member of Congress can be labeled a liberal Democrat or conservative Republican. Moderates were pushed out of the system. At the state level, we see polarization to a great extent with variations across state lines (Shor and McCarty 2011). There is no doubt that the political parties and elites have polarized, meaning the difference between an average Republican and average Democrat in any particular race is stark. The two choices left for voters are distinct, to say the least.

While there is debate over the extent to which the mass electorate has polarized (see Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Fiorina and Abrams 2008), most evidence supports the claim that the electorate has polarized. Voters presented with two choices from opposing parties most likely have to choose between candidates who are not ideologically proximate. Scholars have also identified growing levels of affective polarization, or partisan animosity, as a potential problem for democratic discourse and

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compromise (Iyengar et al. 2019).[4] In the context of same-party matchups, orphaned voters may be unwilling to cast a vote because their strong partisan animus does not recommend either candidate. Being a strongly identified partisan and holding negative feelings toward the opposing party may overwhelm a voter's ability to select a candidate.

Same Party, Different Candidates?

The situation of one party's voters being orphaned is not an entirely new phenomenon. For decades, Republicans were quasi-orphaned due to the dominance of the Democratic Party in the Jim Crow South. More than 70% of the Southern electorate identified as Democrats (Hayes and McKee 2008). Several states adopted a primary runoff if no candidate reached a majority, which in effect eliminated any legitimate opposition from the Republicans (Glaser 2006; Key 1996). This is one of the many factors that led Mickey (2015) to characterize much of this period as Southern authoritarianism, which prevented any significant electoral competition. The contexts of one-party dominant states and same-party matchups are quite different, but the mechanisms for vote choice are probably quite similar.

Top-two primaries that result in general elections between same-party candidates provide a good test for the effects of party identification and ideology on voting behavior. There is evidence that open primaries create more moderate electorates and representatives more open to compromise (Alvarez and Sinclair 2012; Kaufmann, Gimpel, and Hoffman 2003). However, this has so far not been the case in the top-two primary. Other effects of the new system have interested scholars in political science. Ahler, Citrin, and Lenz (2016) find that congressional races with viable moderate candidates did not end up electing moderates. The main reason is that voters are unaware of candidates' ideology. Sinclair (2015) focuses on one state assembly race and finds that between two Republicans, Democrats were more likely to support the candidate that was ideologically closer (more moderate). The victor may have been able to make their moderation apparent enough to attract Democratic voters. To the extent that moderation has increased following the reform, at least part of the cause is simultaneous electoral changes, such as redistricting and term limits (McGhee and Shor 2017).

Little research has examined undervoting rates among orphaned voters. Nagler (2015) examines voting behavior in the primary and general election of state assembly races. Specifically he looks at roll-off rates, when voters skip over down-ballot races, finding significant rates of abstention for orphaned voters. In this study, the author used a sample of voters for state assembly races. The analysis is relatively limited since it only looks at state legislative races and the sample of orphaned voters is relatively small. Second, the effect of abstention in these districts could be attributed to non-competitiveness, which is difficult to ascertain without a measure for district-level competition. Overall, the consensus opinion is that same-party matchups decrease turnout (Masket 2016b; McGhee 2014). According to the aforementioned research, most of this decline is attributed to orphaned voters who perceive a lack of choice.

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When a top-two primary results in two candidates from the same party in the general election, orphaned voters must vote for an "evil," or abstain from that particular contest. Voters without prior information about the candidates' preferences or ideological leanings have a difficult choice. This is especially true for orphaned voters. How do they decide which candidate better represents their interests? If there are no clear ideological markers, partisan labels or other heuristics to make the decision easier, all voters should be unable to make a choice. Orphaned voters should have a more difficult time in choosing between out-party candidates. Even if orphaned voters are able to differentiate between the two candidates, they may be unwilling to look past party labels in order to cast a vote. Comparing levels of undervoting across different types of matchups and between orphans and non-orphans provides a better assessment of the influence of these matchups on voting behavior. Detailed below are my expectations and their proposed implications:

Hypothesis 1: In same-party matchups, orphaned voters exhibit higher levels of undervoting compared to voters with a copartisan candidate.
Hypothesis 2: Voters who perceive one candidate to be substantially closer to their own ideology will be less likely to undervote.

Despite voters being able to place candidates on ideology, differences between the two candidates and proximity to the voter are most likely difficult to discern in a same-party matchup. An orphaned voter needs a heuristic or prior information to compare the two candidates. Otherwise, the voter may presume both candidates hold similar (ideologically distant) positions and will be less likely to vote for either of the two. My theory is that same-party matchups drive undervoting among orphaned voters, due to the lack of a candidate from their party. Non-orphaned voters vote because they are able to support a candidate from their party, potentially having voted for one of the candidates in the primary. All voters are more likely to undervote when the candidates are ideologically distant—on the far, opposite side of the ideological spectrum.

Orphaned voters are less likely to be ideologically proximate to a candidate, preventing them from supporting an out-partisan. Undervoting is not expected to be linked to levels of partisan attachment. Having a strong attachment to one party does not overcome the significance of ideological considerations in driving the decision to undervote. When presented with two candidates from the same political party, a combination of partisanship and ideological reasoning leads to undervoting. The expectation is that the lack of a party label heuristic turns away some voters. Nevertheless, if voters are ideologically proximate to a candidate, they are less likely to undervote. Research on elections often downplays the influence of ideology behind partisan voting. The purpose of my analysis is to test existing theories of voting in a unique context, where all voters choose between two similar candidates. Among orphaned voters, these two choices are most likely undesirable. In the following analysis, I determine the extent to which undervoting occurs in same-party matchups and which factors drive that abstention.

Data and Methods

In order to analyze the effects of same-party races on undervoting, I employ data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES).[5] The CCES is run in national elections every two years. The data that I use are voter validated, meaning individuals' self-reported turnout is verified with their actual voter file. Top-two primaries are used for all state legislative, state executive, and congressional offices in California and Washington. However, for the purposes of this article, I am looking at congressional elections due to data availability. The first congressional election to be a same-party matchup in either Washington or California took place in 2012; therefore, I am using data from the 2012, 2014, and 2016 national elections. Between 2012 and 2016, the top-two primary system resulted in 25 House and one Senate general election races featuring two candidates from the same party—20 Democratic and 6 Republican races. Only respondents who voted in the November election are included, since undervoting is a measurement of a voter's propensity to abstain from a particular race.[6] Using undervoting instead of overall turnout yields a better estimate of partisans' likelihood to vote for a candidate from the other party. For the years included in this analysis, most voters' ballots included top-of-the-ticket races featuring candidates from both major parties. The large sample in the CCES yields over 3,000 respondents in jurisdictions with same-party matchups. Voter partisan composition of some of these congressional districts heavily favors one party; therefore, these voters may look slightly different than those in more competitive jurisdictions.

To best understand the effect of same-party matchups on undervoting, comparisons across district race types are necessary. The first part of the analysis is between orphaned voters and non-orphaned voters in House matchups in all fifty states. Individuals who lean toward one party are coded as partisans.[7] Respondents who said they selected a write-in candidate or marked unsure for their choice were coded as voting. This coding scheme provides a strict test of undervoting. Table 1 shows four possible matchups in congressional races, named in reference to the party of opposition candidate(s) and written in order by expected levels of undervoting (lowest to highest): *Traditional, Minor Only, Same-party, and Unopposed*.

Undervoting should occur least under traditional matchups, because partisans can vote for a copartisan candidate. Variation of competitiveness by districts will also affect undervoting in traditional districts, but most likely to a small extent. Levels of undervoting should be higher under minor only and same-party matchups, since one major party's voters are unable to vote for a copartisan. In minor only races, a minor party candidate typically arises that is similar in ideology to the traditional party that is absent; therefore, I expect levels of undervoting to be lower in minor only districts. Most undervoting in same-party districts should be attributed to orphaned voters, but voters with two copartisan candidates may show higher rates of undervoting than in a traditional matchup. Finally, undervoting should be most common in unopposed races because there is no choice. The top-two primary allows candidates who qualify to run in the primary to run under any party affiliation. Greater openness under this system has tended to create an influx of primary candidates in most races; therefore, there is

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Table 1. House of Representatives District Matchup Types.

District type	Definition	Number of house races in CA or WA (2012–2016)
Traditional	one Republican and one Democrat (and other minor party candidates).	154
Minor Only	one traditional party candidate (R or D) and one or more minor party candidates, including candidates without political affiliations.	10
Same-party	candidates from the same party, either Republican-Republican or Democrat-Democrat.	25
Unopposed	one candidate runs unopposed.	0

an extremely small probability of an uncontested general election.[8] Every congressional House race in California or Washington since the adoption of the top-two system has resulted in two candidates, just like most races prior to the reform.

The first part of the analysis examines undervoting specifically across district types. First, what are the levels of undervoting among orphaned and non-orphaned voters in these districts? This allows a test of *hypothesis 1* that orphaned voters exhibit higher levels of undervoting. Using difference-in-proportions tests is the best method for determining differences in levels of undervoting. Second, what is the best predictor of undervoting in same-party races? I test *hypothesis 2* by determining if voters are less likely to undervote if they are ideologically proximate to a candidate. To understand the best predictor(s) of undervoting in these races, I run logistic regression models predicting respondent behavior. The main predictors are being an orphaned voter, perceived ideological proximity to the closest candidate, perception of a directional ideological cue, perceived ideological difference between the candidates, and partisanship strength. Perceptions of ideology are more useful than candidate ideal points for understanding individual-level behavior. If respondents fail to acknowledge ideological proximity, then it cannot be driving their voting decisions. Since the CCES does not have partisan feeling thermometers, I use a measure of partisanship strength derived from the party identification measure. Strong partisans are more likely to indicate partisan prejudice (Mason 2018). Altogether, these variables provide adequate measures for determining the relevance of partisan and/or ideological voting in same-party matchups. These methods provide the necessary evidence to test both hypotheses.

Analysis and Results

At the beginning of this article, I discussed the 2016 California U.S. Senate election between two Democrats: Kamala Harris and Loretta Sanchez. Prior Senate elections in California had not been very competitive, but at least one Republican had appeared on the ballot. This election is a good preliminary test to demonstrate the increase in

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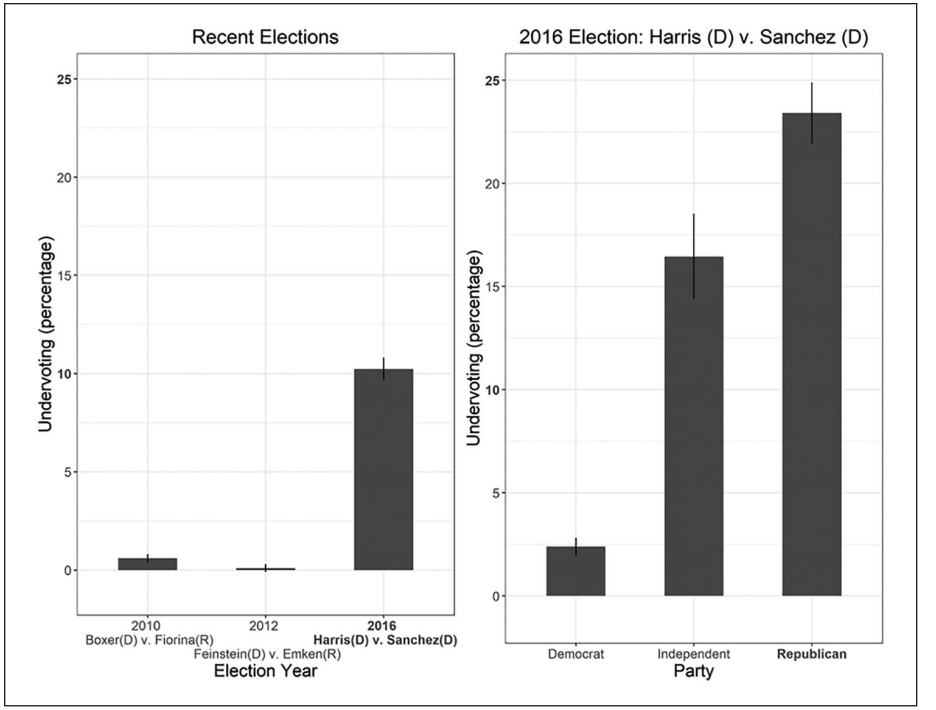

Figure 1. Undervoting in California U.S. Senate elections.
Note. Voter validated data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Bars represent weighted means and 95% confidence intervals, Left side: $N = 11{,}439$; right side: $N = 4{,}174$.

undervoting related to same-party matchups. The left side of Figure 1 indicates that undervoting is relatively low in U.S. Senate elections.[9] In the 2016 November election, nine percentage points fewer voters reported casting a vote in the California U.S. Senate race, compared to the previous two elections. The right side shows levels of undervoting by party identification. While undervoting was non-zero among Democrats, only 78% of Republicans cast a vote for either Harris or Sanchez. More than 20% of orphaned Republican voters chose to abstain rather than vote for a Democrat. U.S. Senate races are typically salient and near the top of a voter's ballot; yet, the 2016 election in California saw a large amount of undervoting, mostly from Republican voters.

The 2016 Senate race provides an initial demonstration of the effects of same-party races, supporting *hypothesis 1*. Next, consider the results comparing November election voters across all district types. The left side of Figure 2 depicts undervoting for non-orphaned voters in congressional races, while the right side shows undervoting for voters with at least one copartisan candidate on the ballot. Democratic respondents are in black, while Republican respondents are in gray. There are no observations for orphaned voters in traditional races, since all Republican and Democratic identifiers

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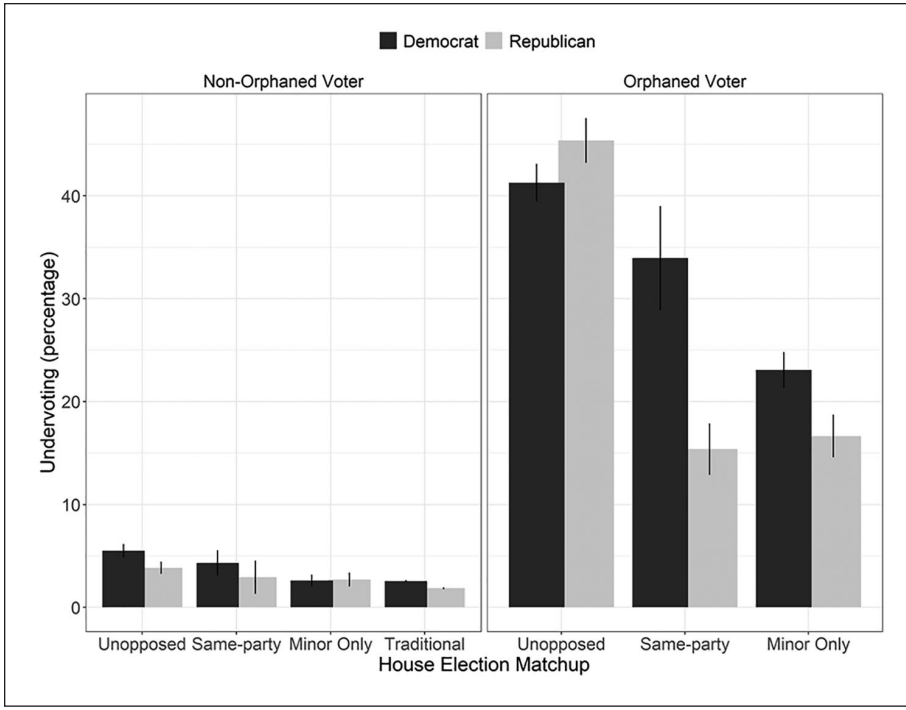

Figure 2. Undervoting in U.S. House elections from 2012 to 2016.
Note. Bars represent weighted means and 95% confidence intervals; $N = 102{,}117$. Figure includes estimates for all 50 states.

share partisan affiliation with at least one candidate. Congressional races are typically salient, so undervoting should be relatively small. The results indicate that levels of undervoting depend on whether the voter is orphaned.

As expected, undervoting is highest for orphaned voters in unopposed races, with more than 40% abstention. Some states have statutes that allow unopposed candidates to be automatically elected, without appearing on the ballot. All voters in these districts are unable to vote for a candidate, so technically everyone undervotes. The eight cases of unopposed House races in these states are excluded from the analysis.[10] Unopposed races present no choice for the voters, but undervoting is still minimal for voters who share partisanship with the lone candidate. The next highest rate of undervoting for orphaned voters is same-party contests, followed closely by minor only races. Rates of undervoting in minor only races are expected to be high according to my theory, because one major party's voters are unable to use partisanship as a voting heuristic. All cases of same-party matchups are from California and Washington. On average, undervoting in same-party House races is about 20 percentage points higher for orphaned voters than non-orphaned voters. The main partisan difference in undervoting between Republicans and Democrats is in same-party races. Orphaned Democrats

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are about 18 percentage points more likely to undervote compared to orphaned Republicans. This finding may be explained by California Democrats, conditioned by past elections to expect Democratic candidates in every race. Undervoting is lowest in districts with traditional matchups. Fewer than 3% of voters report undervoting in their congressional race if it features candidates from both parties. For reference, undervoting in traditional matchups in the two states under study is also less than 3%.[11]

Although congressional districts with same-party contests tend to have moderate to strong partisan majorities, initial results indicate voters from the represented party had more influence on the outcome of the general election. Orphaned voters deciding not to vote in same-party races makes it difficult for moderates to get elected if non-orphaned partisans choose the more extreme candidate. Still, around 75% of orphaned voters cast a vote. Based on the population of districts in this study, most undervoting comes from Republicans who abstain from a race featuring two Democrats. So far, the evidence supports *hypothesis 1* that orphaned voters exhibit higher levels of undervoting than non-orphaned voters in same-party contests. For all district types, undervoting is minimal for voters with a copartisan candidate on the ballot. When able to vote for a copartisan, voters almost never abstain. Independents are not included in this analysis, but their rates of undervoting across the various matchup types do not differ as much as they do for orphaned and non-orphaned voters. On average, independent voters are six percentage points more likely to undervote in same-party matchups, compared to traditional races. Based on these results, it is evident that orphaned voters undervote at higher rates.

The rest of my analysis attempts to answer the question: which factors influence orphaned voters to undervote in same-party elections? Is there a difference between voters who cast a vote and voters who do not, in terms of how strongly they identify with their political party or the way they perceive the candidates ideologically? In order to better understand behavior in same-party contests, I predict the decision to undervote using logistic regression models. Prior to modeling for predictions of undervoting, it is useful to obtain a better descriptive picture of the voters in the sample. On ideological strength (three-point scale, 0 = middle of the road, 3 = very liberal or conservative), respondents are on average 1.55. They are slightly less likely to call themselves strong partisans, with a minority of 47%. Most of the respondents see at least a 3- to 4-point ideological difference between the two parties on a 7-point scale. Finally, 54% of the sample reported being highly interested in politics, saying they follow what's going on in politics, "most of the time." In summary, the average respondent is only slightly ideological and highly interested in politics.

The CCES common content asks respondents about their positions on issues, perceptions of political figures and parties, measures for their political knowledge, and political interest. My dependent variable is binary—undervoting in the House or Senate race. The regression models include the following explanatory variables: proximity to the closest candidate, difference in the candidates' ideologies (six-point scales, 0 = no difference, 6 = greatest difference), ideological directional cue (binary, 1 = at least one candidate in same ideological direction as respondent), and strong partisan (binary). Ideological proximity is measured by taking the differences of the perceived

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ideology of each respondent and the two candidates. The score for proximity is the absolute difference in ideology between the respondent and the closest candidate. I include control variables for education (continuous, 1 = no high school degree, 6 = post-graduate degree) and district-level competitiveness (continuous, 0 = equally competitive, <0 favors one party). Binary control variables are also included for presidential year, Senate race, Democrat, and California. Alternative specifications for partisanship strength are tested in Table 3 of the online appendix. These variables allow me to adequately predict the probability of orphaned and non-orphaned voters casting a vote.[12] Other models (not included here) test the effects of political knowledge, political interest, ideological strength, and perceptions of the parties' ideologies—all unrelated to undervoting in same-party contests.

In my analysis, I conduct several logistic regression tests, starting with a basic model only including the five relevant explanatory variables: *orphaned voter, proximity, directional cue, ideology difference*, and *strong partisan*.[13] The results from the baseline model for all voters in same-party races show that being an orphaned voter and proximity are statistically significant. These results remain in a model with controls. Education is also related to undervoting—respondents with higher levels of education are less likely to undervote. Among just orphaned voters in a separate model, proximity remains as a significant predictor. Ideological differences between the two candidates and being a strong partisan are not significant predictors under any model specification. The remaining models in Table 2 examine undervoting, treating House and Senate races separately. Some controls do not appear in the Senate models due to the lack of variance. In the House model, proximity and being an orphaned voter are the only statistically significant variables, besides being a Democrat. As addressed earlier, the unique nature of California Democrats may explain this result. In the Senate model, respondents who perceive a directional cue are less likely to undervote. Altogether, after accounting for orphaned voters ideological proximity predicts undervoting. Perhaps one of the most surprising results is that there are few differences between orphaned and non-orphaned voters concerning which factors predict undervoting. Although orphaned voters are more likely to undervote, both types of voters engage in ideological considerations. Additional models (not presented here) test interactions between the main predictors and being an orphaned voter, finding no substantive differences compared to the models presented in Table 2. Overall, ideological considerations are important factors in determining the propensity to undervote for both orphaned and non-orphaned voters.

These models indicate that perception of ideological differences between the candidates is not very important. Voters do not make their decision to undervote based on being able to differentiate between the two candidates. Rather, sharing ideological closeness with at least one candidate is far more important. In terms of ideology, spatial proximity to one of the candidates is a better predictor of undervoting than ideological difference or a directional cue. Being an orphaned voter appears to be a strong predictor of undervoting in same-party matchups; the strength of a voter's party attachment does not matter. In order to determine which variable has the greatest effect on undervoting, it is necessary to test their average marginal effects. To accomplish

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Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting Undervoting.

	Undervoting in congressional race (house or senate)						
	Full (no controls)	Full (controls)	Full (orphaned)	House	House (orphaned)	Senate	Senate (orphaned)
Orphaned	1.825**	2.523**		2.984**		1.685**	
	(0.297)	(0.843)		(0.744)		(.324)	
Proximity	0.324**	0.341**	0.357**	0.394*	0.469*	0.332**	0.350**
	(0.064)	(0.062)	(0.073)	(0.172)	(0.184)	(0.066)	(0.079)
Directional	–0.793	–0.727	–1.151	0.786	–1.144	–1.071*	–1.140
	(0.413)	(0.410)	(0.693)	(0.506)	(1.193)	(0.531)	(0.782)
Ideology difference	–0.063	–0.015	0.047	–0.437	–0.418	0.072	0.142
	(0.116)	(0.118)	(0.144)	(0.268)	(0.338)	(0.126)	(0.155)
Strong partisan	0.021	–0.046	–0.043	0.521	0.707	–0.116	–0.132
	(0.165)	(0.161)	(0.168)	(0.406)	(0.467)	(0.177)	(0.181)
Presidential year		0.164	0.464	0.196	0.574		
		(0.494)	(0.492)	(0.516)	(0.525)		
California		–0.063	0.299	0.041	0.497		
		(0.541)	(0.586)	(0.533)	(0.616)		
Competition		0.006	–0.040	0.009	–0.050		
		(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.036)		
Education		–0.125*	–0.153*	0.056	0.018	–0.162**	–0.185**
		(0.056)	(0.063)	(0.137)	(0.158)	(0.060)	(0.067)
Democrat		0.803	1.910*	0.914	2.176**		
		(0.808)	(0.742)	(0.717)	(0.794)		
Senate race		0.369	0.138				
		(0.343)	(0.343)				
Constant	–4.191**	–4.772*	–4.063**	–6.421**	–5.848**	–3.472**	–1.795**
	(0.299)	(2.100)	(1.257)	(2.034)	(1.581)	(0.404)	(0.461)
Observations	3,719	3,719	1,341	669	232	3,050	1,109

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. Estimates are weighted.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

this task, I use the *margins* package equivalent for R (Leeper and Arnold 2017). The function calculates predicted probabilities for undervoting for each explanatory variable with all other variables held at their mean values.

Figure 3 shows the average marginal effects of the explanatory variables on undervoting, holding all other variables constant. According to this test, being an orphaned voter increases the probability of undervoting by .18. The probability of undervoting increases as voters perceive at least one of the candidates to be ideologically more distant. For a one unit increase in proximity—the candidate moving spatially farther away from the voter–the probability of undervoting increases by .024, holding all other variables constant. For example, the difference in probability of undervoting for a voter who perceives the closest candidate to share the same ideology (0 ideological points away) and a voter who perceives the closest candidate to be 6 ideological points away is .14, on average. Respondents with higher levels of education are less likely to undervote, although the total effect is substantively smaller than other variables.

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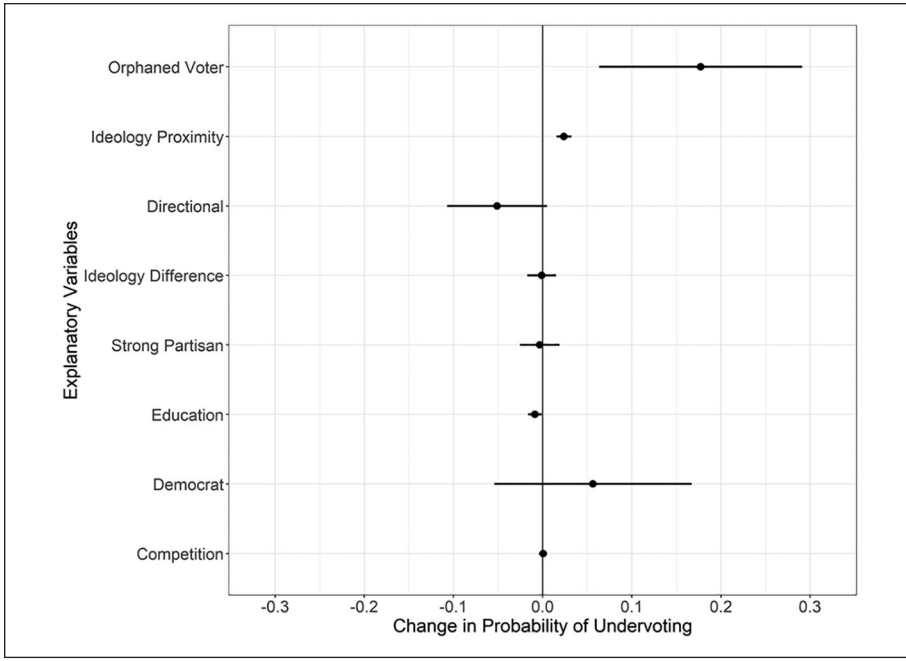

Figure 3. Marginal effects on undervoting for orphaned voters.

Directional cues decrease the probability of undervoting by .05, but the effect is not significant. Assuming that a directional cue matters, proximity has a stronger total effect. These results provide support for my theory that the spatial model drives vote choice, at least in same-party matchups. Overall, results presented here demonstrate that the best predictors for voters failing to cast a vote in a same-party matchup are being an orphaned voter and ideological proximity to the candidates.

The average marginal effects from the logistic regression predicting undervoting support *hypothesis 2*. Orphaned voters are more likely to undervote. However, ideological proximity between voters and the candidates also influences their propensity to undervote. There may be a concern that ideological perceptions are being driven by partisan attachments or some other factor related to the campaigns. This claim is credible; however, ideological questions precede vote choice questions on the survey. All respondents are asked ideological questions on the CCES pre-election wave, while nearly everyone is asked vote choice on the post-election wave. Second, I compare respondents' perceptions of ideology to the candidates' ideal points. The use of either subjective or objective ideology measures yield the same conclusions.[14] The robustness of this conclusion is tested further by examining the effects of proximity voting for orphaned voters, compared to non-orphaned voters. Although both types of voters are shown to engage in ideological considerations, the total effect may be larger for one group.

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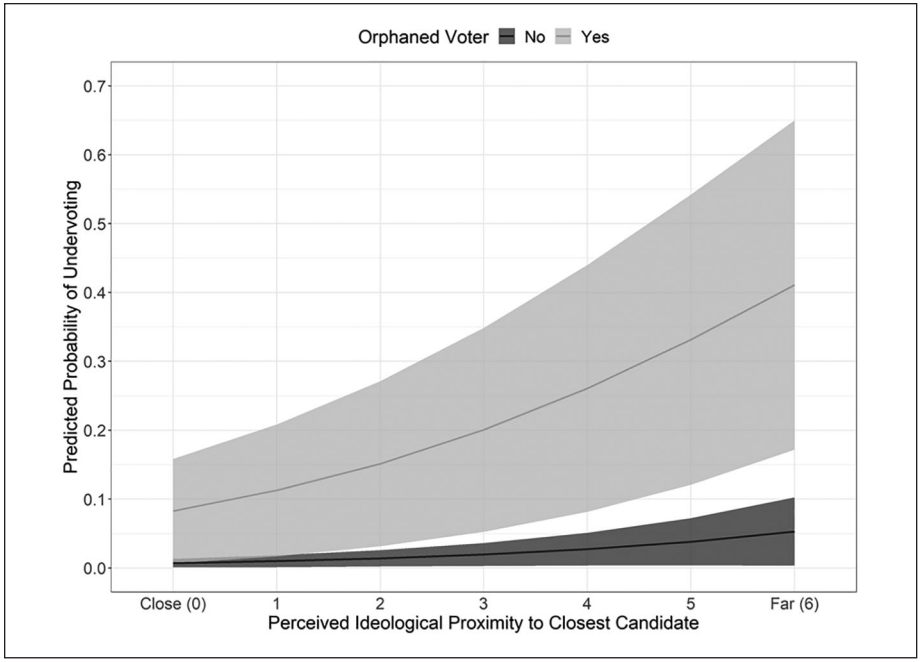

Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of undervoting based on ideological proximity.

Figure 4 shows predicted probabilities for undervoting, after varying spatial proximity (0–6 on the ideological scale) for orphaned and non-orphaned voters. Voters who share partisanship with the two candidates are consistently less likely to undervote. Even when a voter perceives both candidates (who share their party identification) to be as ideologically distant as possible, they have only a .05 predicted probability of undervoting. The story for orphaned voters is more dramatic. Ideological proximity makes a big difference in predicting undervoting for orphaned voters. An orphaned voter who believes they share ideological space with at least one of the out-party candidates has a .08 predicted probability of undervoting, comparable to levels of undervoting for non-orphaned voters. The difference is stark for orphaned voters who are ideologically extreme and believe both out-party candidates are on the opposite end point of the spectrum. When ideological distance is greatest, orphaned voters have a .41 predicted probability of undervoting. Although the size of the confidence interval increases as proximity increases, this effect unequivocally signals the importance of ideological proximity for orphaned voters. In all, these analyses demonstrate that undervoting is more than orphaned voters simply skipping over same-party matchups. Voters are making ideological considerations when trying to figure out whether they should vote.

On the surface, the best predictor of undervoting in same-party matchups is partisanship. Voters who share partisanship with the candidates are less likely to undervote than orphaned voters, who share partisanship with zero candidates on the ballot. After

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digging deeper into the data, I find evidence of ideological voting, especially among orphaned voters who are unable to use partisanship as a heuristic. Individuals are less likely to undervote if they perceive the candidates to be ideologically proximate to themselves. Most of this effect is driven by orphaned voters. Altogether, the findings support a theory for the use of multiple voting frameworks in predicting undervoting.

Discussion

Despite beliefs that the top-two primary would help elect moderate candidates, most research has shown that this goal has fallen short. Although some politicians such as former governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger (R-CA) thought the adoption of the new system meant finally holding elected officials accountable, party organizations figured out how to work around the institutional design by endorsing candidates early in the primary phase, ensuring that parties have power (Masket 2016a). In some one-sided partisan districts, the general election now pits two candidates from the same party against each other, with the potential to undercut voters' power. Instead of voting for a candidate from their own party, orphaned voters must choose between the "lesser of two evils," or choose not to cast a vote at all.

My analysis looked at same-party contests. I theorized that undervoting is higher in these races because individuals are less likely to vote when they cannot use partisanship as a heuristic. Within this story of partisan voting is an ideological component. Voters are more likely to vote for an out-party candidate when they perceive ideological proximity to a candidate. If the candidates are ideologically distant, then voters are more likely to undervote. First, I demonstrated that undervoting is higher in same-party contests compared to traditional contests (between one Republican and one Democrat), specifically among political orphans. Second, I performed logistic regression tests to predict the source of undervoting. Besides being an orphaned voter, the other strong predictor of undervoting is ideological proximity to the candidates. Neither a directional cue nor a large ideological difference between the candidates predicts undervoting. To the extent that ideology matters in vote choice, being able to support a candidate who is ideologically proximate is most significant.

There is room to expand and improve this analysis in future research. I do not account for primary voters, since obtaining measures of candidate support is not possible with CCES data. Future work should examine and compare rates of undervoting for primary voters and non-primary voters. One limitation of this analysis is that I rely on self-reported voting for congressional races. Each respondent is voter validated for having voted in the November election, but I have no way of verifying if they cast a vote in their House race. Although it is difficult to get an accurate measure of undervoting from state election returns, an alternative test is to take the difference in the number of votes cast in the 2016 presidential race and the number of votes cast in the 2016 California U.S. Senate race. There is an expectation that nearly every voter who casts a ballot in a presidential election year voted in the presidential race (Alvarez et al. 2001). The difference between the number of votes cast in these two races according to California state election returns is 13.7%. When independents are included, the

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undervoting rate according to CCES data is approximately 13.2%. This leads me to infer that levels of self-reported undervoting are relatively accurate.

Another restriction to the present work is that the measure for partisan strength is not necessarily the best measure for party attachment and prejudice. Although strong partisans are more likely to indicate partisan bias (see Mason 2015, 2018), recent work has shown that even political leaners are close to partisans in their partisan intensity (Theodoridis 2017). Independents can even have strong partisan attachments, yet try to appear as independent to their friends, family, and even pollsters (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). Alternative ways of looking at partisanship strength are to treat the values on an ordinal scale or separate the categories altogether. I test these alternative specifications of partisanship strength, but the substantive conclusions do not change. Although the evidence presented here does not show use of affective considerations, this may change as affective polarization increases. Write-in responses on the CCES indicate partisan affect may be part of the mechanism at work. Some political orphans say they refused to vote specifically because there was not a candidate from their party. A final limitation is that most of the cases for same-party matchups come from California and most of these contests feature Democrats. California is a heavily Democratic state, so California Republicans might behave differently than Republicans in more competitive states. If this is true, I would expect orphaned Republicans in California to undervote at lower rates than orphaned Republicans in other states. Their considerations for undervoting may also be different. Overall, I argue that my results yield strong evidence in support of a multi-step framework for understanding vote choice in same-party matchups and elections, more generally.

The effects of same-party contests hold strong implications for research on political participation. Some voters identifying with an unrepresented party are potentially unwilling to cast a vote for an out-partisan. For political science, same-party matchups provide a unique window to compare the relevance of different voting frameworks. Trying to understand the effects of various electoral considerations is difficult because party identification is a strong predictor of vote choice. On its face, the partisan model seems to be the strongest explanation for undervoting. Same-party contests are likely to result in undervoting, particularly for orphaned voters. In traditional contests, the influence of ideology is less clear, influenced by and hiding behind clearer partisan factors. However, within the partisan voting framework is an ideological framework. Voters who perceive more ideological distance between themselves and the closest candidate are more likely to undervote. Alternatively, those who can identify a candidate as ideologically closer are less likely to undervote. Proximity matters in deciding whether to cast a vote. If these findings were applied to campaigns, they help illustrate that candidates in same-party matchups can appeal to out-party voters by making themselves appear ideologically moderate. General theories of vote choice evolve as the parties and voters' feelings and perceptions of the parties change. Electoral system reforms have the capacity to reveal more information about voters' preferences and considerations at the polls. Same-party contests reveal that voters, specifically individuals unable to support a copartisan candidate, use ideological considerations.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. In the 1946 election, incumbent Republican Governor Earl Warren was nominated by both parties.
2. Eleven other states have introduced at least one bill intending to adopt the top-two primary system according to LegiScan (2018) and other bill trackers. Louisiana has a similar system with a "jungle primary," which allows for a run-off election in December if no candidate gets a simple majority in the November general election. These races have notoriously low turnout and are treated basically like special elections. For these reasons, Louisiana same-party matchups are not included in the analysis.
3. Other research on undervoting deals with the failure of voting methods like punch cards (see Ash and Lamperti 2008; Bullock and Hood 2002).
4. Partisans tend to have positive feelings toward their in-party and increasingly negative feelings toward the opposition party (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015).
5. "The CCES is a 50,000+ person national stratified sample survey administered by YouGov/Polimetrix. The survey consists of two waves in election years. In the pre-election phase, respondents answer two-thirds of the questionnaire. Spacing of interviews across these intervals allows researchers to gauge the effects of campaign information and events on the state and district electorates. In the post-election phase, respondents answer the other third of the questionnaire, mostly consisting of items related to the election that just occurred. The post-election phase is administered in November." (Dataverse)
6. Undervoting is similar to roll-off in that both concepts refer to the incompleteness of voters' ballots Roll-off is more specific, because it refers to a voter who fails to vote for down-ballot offices.
7. Independents are excluded from the main analyses. For more information on independents, see Figure 7 in the online appendix.
8. There are instances of uncontested state legislative races in both California and Washington.
9. The estimate for the 2012 election is not statistically different from zero.
10. Thirty-six states have statutes that allow candidates running unopposed to be "declared elected," without the race appearing on the ballot (Lindell 2017). Although most of these statutes apply to primary or special elections, four states (Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, and Oklahoma) automatically elect unopposed candidates in general and federal elections.

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11. For a more detailed analysis of undervoting in California and Washington, please see Figures 5 and 6 in the online appendix.
12. For summary statistics, please see Table 5 in the online appendix.
13. Respondents who did not answer at least one ideology question were excluded. Respondents included in the model undervoted at 10.4%, while those excluded undervoted at 11.9%. Orphaned voters in the model undervoted at 27.6%, while those not in the model undervoted at 25.4%.
14. The main regression analysis was respecified using candidate ideal points for the ideology measures (see Bonica 2017), and the results are substantively similar. Refer to Table 4 and Figure 8 in the online appendix.

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