

BEYOND THE RUNNING TALLY: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions

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I examine the impact of long-term partisan loyalties on perceptions of specific political figures and events. In contrast to the notion of partisanship as a simple “running tally” of political assessments, I show that party identification is a pervasive dynamic force shaping citizens’ perceptions of, and reactions to, the political world. My analysis employs panel data to isolate the impact of partisan bias in the context of a Bayesian model of opinion change; I also present more straightforward evidence of contrasts in Democrats’ and Republicans’ perceptions of “objective” politically relevant events. I conclude that partisan bias in political perceptions plays a crucial role in perpetuating and reinforcing sharp differences in opinion between Democrats and Republicans. This conclusion handsomely validates the emphasis placed by the authors of *The American Voter* on “the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects.”

Key words: party identification; Bayesian learning; perceptual bias.

The authors of *The American Voter* built their account of electoral behavior in significant part on “the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects” (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960, p. 135). In the simplest caricature of what has come to be called “the Michigan model,” partisan loyalties are formed early in life, remain perfectly stable throughout adulthood, and serve as the unmoved movers of more specific political attitudes and behavior. Thus, evidence of reciprocal effects of specific political attitudes on party identification (Franklin and Jackson 1983; Jackson, 1975) and evidence of significant shifts in the aggregate distribution of party identification (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1989) have sometimes been interpreted as empirical challenges to the Michigan framework. Would-be revisionists have frequently overlooked the fact that Campbell and

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his colleagues themselves warned against “too simple an idea of the connection between party identification and attitudes,” carefully qualifying their judgment that “in the period of our studies the influence of party identification on attitudes toward the perceived elements of politics has been far more important than the influence of these attitudes on party identification itself” (Campbell, pp. 133, 135).¹

Scholarly dissatisfaction with the Michigan model was fueled in part by the turmoil of American politics in the 1960s and 1970s, and in part by changes in the theoretical preconceptions of political scientists. The growing prominence of “rational choice” theories, most notably Downs’ (1957) “economic” model of electoral competition, made the psychological processes emphasized in the Michigan model seem increasingly anomalous: *The American Voter*’s American voter was, as Wattenberg (1996) nicely put it, “more of a *rationalizing* voter than a rational one” (p. 13).² The construction of “a political theory of party identification” (Fiorina, 1977) within the rational choice framework became a high priority for scholars of electoral politics.

In the first instance, the new theoretical project required a change in focus from “the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects” to the role of political attitudes as “potential agents of change in the individual’s basic partisan orientation” (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 135). Fiorina (1977, 1981), drawing on the rational choice perspective of Downs (1957) as well as the “revisionist” empirical research of Key (1966) and others, described party identification as “a running tally of retrospective evaluations of party promises and performance” (Fiorina 1981, p. 84). While making due allowance for the “careful, cautious tone of the discussion” contained in *The American Voter*, Fiorina (1981) argued that the available data (almost all of it gathered by the Michigan team and their successors) raised “fundamental questions about the prevailing conception of party ID” (p. 86).

Fiorina’s alternative conception of partisanship as a summary of retrospective evaluations was formalized in a Bayesian model of political learning proposed by Zechman (1979) and Achen (1989, 1992) and elaborated by Gerber and Green (1998). In Achen’s version of the model, party identification represents the difference in future benefits a given citizen expects to derive from Republican and Democratic administrations.³ Given some continuity in the parties’ platforms and performance over time, a rational citizen will base her expectation of future benefits on past political experience. Thus, the citizen’s “running tally” of retrospective evaluations serves as a basis for rational prospective voting behavior.

The conception of party identification as a running tally of political experiences and perceptions provides a very appealing framework for analyzing partisan change. But if party identification is merely a running tally, without inde-

pendent causal significance in shaping the more specific political attitudes that make it up, then *The American Voter's* emphasis on party identification as an *explanatory* variable—that is, on “the influence of party identification on attitudes” (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 135)—is clearly misplaced. The running tally may be a convenient accounting device, but it is not a moving force in politics.

Until recently, most theoretical and empirical work in the revisionist tradition has attempted to highlight the impact of evaluations on partisanship but without seeming to doubt that partisanship also strongly shapes more specific political attitudes. For example, Fiorina (1981, p. 110) found that party identification “exerts an important influence on evaluations of government economic performance,” but argued that those evaluations “are far more than reflections of preexisting partisanship,” and that “the positive evaluation produced by a perceived improvement in business conditions virtually offsets the negative evaluation stemming from a prior strong Democratic party affiliation.” Here, partisan bias is taken for granted, and the fact that reality (as measured by perceptions of actual business conditions) virtually offsets the impact of enduring partisan commitments in shaping specific political attitudes is interpreted as good news from the revisionist perspective.

In a recent essay, Gerber and Green (1999) mounted a much more direct challenge to the traditional view that party identification “raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation” (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 133). While acknowledging decades of influential arguments to that effect—from Lazarsfeld and his colleagues’ analysis of “the spiraling effect of political reinforcement” (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954, p. 223) and Stokes’ (1966, p. 127) emphasis on the “capacity of party identification to color perceptions” to Zaller’s (1992, p. 241) claim that “people tend to accept what is congenial to their partisan values and to reject what is not”—they argued that “most of the studies purporting to demonstrate biased learning are either theoretically indeterminate or consistent with a Bayesian model” of rational information processing (Gerber and Green 1999, p. 192).

In support of this striking claim, Gerber and Green (1999) provided a brief survey of experimental evidence on “biased assimilation” in social psychology, concluding that “The phenomenon of biased learning in the form of selective perception has less empirical support than is often supposed” (p. 192). They also appealed to aggregate trends in political opinion among different partisan groups, noting that those trends tend to move in parallel. For example, they argued that

only the faintest traces of selective perception are evident from partisan trends in presidential approval. All three partisan groups move together—sometimes mark-

edly—as party fortunes change. These data are inconsistent with the claim that partisanship “dampens” the effects of new information. . . . Beliefs and evaluations do change, and they change to approximately the same degree among those with different political allegiances. (p. 205)

They went on to note that this finding

accords with Gerber & Green’s (1997) analysis of panel survey data, in which Democrats, Republicans, and Independents moved together in their evaluations of which party was best able to handle the nation’s economy. It accords also with Page and Shapiro’s (1992) extensive evidence that the opinions of opposing ideological, social, and economic groups seldom polarize over time. (pp. 206–207)

Somewhat surprisingly, Gerber and Green’s survey of relevant evidence paid little or no attention to studies focusing more directly on the issue of partisan bias, including detailed analyses of individual-level opinion change ranging from the classic work of Berelson et al. (1954) to more recent analyses by Markus (Markus and Converse, 1979; 1982), and Finkel (1993), all of which asserted an important causal role for partisan predispositions. Nor did they consider work by political psychologists on partisan cues in information processing (for example, Conover and Feldman, 1989; Jacoby, 1988; Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Rahn, 1993; see also Fischle, 2000), or related work by psychologists on impression formation and “motivated reasoning.” Whether these studies are supposed to be “theoretically indeterminate” or somehow consistent with the notion of unbiased political learning is simply unclear.

My aim here is to reassess the evidence for partisan bias in the light of Gerber and Green’s critique. First, I review the Bayesian model of rational learning that provides the theoretical framework for their analysis, arguing that cases in which “Democrats, Republicans, and Independents moved together in their evaluations” are, in fact, quite difficult to explain in terms of unbiased Bayesian learning. Second, I report several dozen direct tests of partisan bias in political learning using individual-level data from panel surveys rather than aggregate opinion trends. Third, in order to rule out the possibility that apparent biases in political learning simply reflect partisan differences in political values, I compare responses of Republicans and Democrats to purely factual political questions such as whether inflation increased or decreased over a specified period of time. Taken as a whole, my analysis provides strong evidence of “the influence of party identification on attitudes toward the perceived elements of politics” (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 135). Far from being a mere summary of more specific political opinions, partisanship is a powerful and pervasive influence on perceptions of political events.

BAYESIAN LEARNING: CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

I concur with Gerber and Green (1999, p. 190) that perceptual bias can only be assessed relative to some clear baseline model of unbiased information processing, and that the most compelling such baseline model is one in which people “update their prior beliefs in accordance with Bayes’ rule.” Thus, I begin by reviewing the implications of a Bayesian learning model in which people with different political views (say, Democrats and Republicans) are exposed to new information relevant to those views.⁴

According to Gerber and Green (1999) Bayesian learning implies “that new information moves people with different partisan affinities (but similar levels of prior information) in the same direction and to approximately the same extent” (p. 192).⁵ If that was true, empirical evidence of parallel opinion shifts among different partisan groups would, as Gerber and Green suggested, count in support of the hypothesis that information processing is largely unaffected by partisan biases. In fact, however, it is quite difficult to produce parallel opinion shifts in a Bayesian framework—*unless* partisan bias is built into different groups’ selection or interpretation of politically relevant information. Thus, I argue that empirical evidence of parallel opinion shifts should be counted *against*, not in support of, the hypothesis of unbiased information processing.

Consider a simple Bayesian model describing learning about an unknown parameter μ on the basis of some evidence x_t . If we assume that our prior belief (before observing x_t) can be represented by a Normal distribution with mean μ_{t-1} and variance $1/\pi_{t-1}$, and that x_t is drawn from a Normal distribution with mean μ and known variance σ_t^2 , then our posterior belief (after observing x_t) can be represented by a Normal distribution with mean μ_t and variance $1/\pi_t$, where

$$\mu_t = \mu_{t-1} \pi_{t-1} / (\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2) + x_t (1/\sigma_t^2) / (\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2) \quad (1)$$

and

$$\pi_t = \pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2. \quad (2)$$

The posterior belief μ_t is a weighted average of the prior belief μ_{t-1} and the evidence x_t , each weighted by its precision;⁶ the posterior precision π_t is the sum of the prior precision π_{t-1} and the precision of the evidence, $1/\sigma_t^2$.

One important implication of this simple model is that evidence reduces uncertainty: the posterior variance $1/\pi_t$ is smaller than the prior variance $1/\pi_{t-1}$ for any $\sigma_t^2 < \infty$.⁷ An even more important implication, for my purposes here, is that accumulating evidence will tend to produce consensus even

among observers with very different prior beliefs—as long as they agree on the implications of the evidence. For example, imagine two otherwise similar observers with distinct, equally precise prior beliefs centered at $\mu_{D,t-1}$ and $\mu_{R,t-1}$ who observe the same evidence x_t . Equation 1 implies that their respective updated beliefs will be

$$\begin{aligned}\mu_{D,t} &= \mu_{D,t-1} \pi_{t-1}/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2) + x_t(1/\sigma_t^2)/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2) \\ &= \mu_{D,t-1} + (x_t - \mu_{D,t-1}) (1/\sigma_t^2)/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2)\end{aligned}\quad (3a)$$

and

$$\begin{aligned}\mu_{R,t} &= \mu_{R,t-1} \pi_{t-1}/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2) + x_t(1/\sigma_t^2)/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2) \\ &= \mu_{R,t-1} + (x_t - \mu_{R,t-1}) (1/\sigma_t^2)/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2)\end{aligned}\quad (3b)$$

Since both observers will be pulled in the direction of the evidence x_t , their posterior beliefs will be more similar than their prior beliefs. This is easiest to see when $\mu_{D,t-1} < x_t < \mu_{R,t-1}$, since in that case the two prior beliefs will clearly be pulled in opposite directions— $\mu_{D,t-1}$ “up” toward x_t and $\mu_{R,t-1}$ “down” toward x_t . But even when the evidence is outside the range of prior beliefs, the posterior beliefs will be more similar than the prior beliefs. Indeed, in the simple model considered here, the degree of convergence depends solely on the *weight* of the evidence relative to the prior beliefs and not at all on the *direction* of the evidence:

$$\mu_{R,t} - \mu_{D,t} = (\mu_{R,t-1} - \mu_{D,t-1})\pi_{t-1}/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2). \quad (4)$$

Since the ratio $\pi_{t-1}/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2)$ is clearly less than 1 (for any $\sigma_t^2 < \infty$), the posterior difference $(\mu_{R,t} - \mu_{D,t})$ is smaller in magnitude than the prior difference $(\mu_{R,t-1} - \mu_{D,t-1})$. The more powerful the evidence (that is, the smaller its variance σ_t^2 relative to the prior variance $1/\pi_{t-1}$) the more powerful this convergence of beliefs will be.

The implication of Equation 4 for Gerber and Green’s argument should be clear. The fact that political evaluations “rise and fall among all partisan groups to a similar extent” (Gerber and Green 1999, p. 206) should not be interpreted as evidence of unbiased Bayesian learning, except (and even then only approximately) in cases where the new information is very extreme by comparison with the relevant range of prior beliefs.⁸ In general, the characteristic pattern of opinion change suggested by the simple Bayesian model is one of converging opinion among people with different prior views; the strength of that convergence depends on the weight of new information assimilated between suc-

cessive opinion readings. It is *failure* to converge that requires explanation within the Bayesian framework.

The same reasoning applies to other models of opinion change insofar as they seek to interpret or account for shifts in opinion among partisan or other political groups with distinct preexisting opinions. For example, Zaller's (1992) model of attitude change implies that receipt and acceptance of a liberal message will produce a larger change in opinion among conservatives than among equally well-informed liberals.⁹ Thus, parallel shifts in opinion among conservatives and liberals in this case must reflect substantial "partisan resistance" among the former, not uncritical acceptance of a "mainstream message" by both groups.¹⁰

DETECTING EVIDENCE OF PARTISAN BIAS IN SURVEY DATA

Gerber and Green (1999) noted that "a thorough empirical analysis of Bayesian learning (and departures therefrom) requires greater attention to the measurement of prior beliefs" (p. 207) than is common in the literature on political opinion change. In order to facilitate such attention, I focus here on situations in which the availability of panel data makes it possible to analyze the relationship between prior beliefs and posterior beliefs at the individual level. Following the strategy of Bartels (1993), I approximate the Bayesian learning model in Equation 1 with a linear regression model in which posterior beliefs are regressed on prior beliefs and prior partisanship:

$$Evaluation_{it} = \alpha + \beta Partisanship_{i,t-1} + \lambda Evaluation_{i,t-1} + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (5)$$

where ϵ_{it} is a stochastic disturbance term and α , β , and λ are constant parameters to be estimated. The $Evaluation_{i,t-1}$ and $Evaluation_{it}$ terms in Equation 5 represent responses to survey questions; they are interpreted here as reports (albeit with some measurement error) of the corresponding prior and posterior beliefs μ_{t-1} and μ_t in Equation 1.¹¹

The regression parameter λ in Equation 5 corresponds to the weight $\pi_{t-1}/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2)$ associated with the prior belief μ_{t-1} in Equation 1. This correspondence suggests that the estimated value of λ in the regression model should fall between 0 and 1, with higher values reflecting (relatively) strong prior beliefs and lower values reflecting (relatively) strong new information in the period between survey readings. The remaining terms ($\alpha + \beta Partisanship_{i,t-1} + \epsilon_{it}$) in the regression model capture the impact of new information represented by the term $x_t(1/\sigma_t^2)/(\pi_{t-1} + 1/\sigma_t^2)$ in the Bayesian learning model.¹²

If political learning is based on shared assessments of common political experience, there is no reason to expect the new information represented in

the Bayesian learning model by $x_i(1/\sigma_i^2)/(\pi_{i-1} + 1/\sigma_i^2)$ and in the regression model by $(\alpha + \beta \textit{Partisanship}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{it})$ to vary with respondents' prior partisan loyalties. In that case, the regression parameter β would be 0. To the extent that β diverges from 0 it implies that Republicans and Democrats interpret the "evidence" of political experience between the two surveys in systematically different ways. Perhaps they rely on different sources of political information with distinctive partisan colorations. Perhaps they attach more salience to perceptions consistent with their partisan predispositions than to discordant perceptions. Whatever the mechanism (or mechanisms) may be, the result is that perceptions of political events are colored by pre-existing partisan loyalties.

Gerber and Green (1999) suggest two alternative interpretations of the impact of partisanship on political learning. First, they suggest that contrasting assessments of political experience may simply reflect distinctive political preferences and values. If a Republican president's economic policies are, in some objective sense, consistent with Republican values and inconsistent with Democratic values, then no "bias" would be necessary for Republicans and Democrats to notice that fact and respond accordingly. As Gerber and Green put it, "If, in a college dormitory, half the students like Mexican cuisine and the other half do not, we would not cite mixed reviews of the lunch menu when tacos are served as evidence of perceptual bias" (p. 206).

In any particular instance of potential partisan bias, it may be very difficult to rule out the possibility that Republicans simply like tacos better than do Democrats. However, the plausibility of this interpretation may be significantly eroded by patterns of partisan evaluation across a range of political objects and issues, especially insofar as political events do not correspond neatly with partisan stereotypes. Of the dozens of instances of apparent partisan bias presented below, some seem fairly easy to account for on the basis of intrinsic differences in the values of Republicans and Democrats, while others seem much harder to interpret in that light. For example, one would be hard-pressed to argue that George Bush's handling of the crisis in the Persian Gulf in the 18 months following the end of the Gulf War, or Jimmy Carter's handling of the Iranian hostage crisis during the spring of 1980, was tailored to appeal to the distinctive policy preferences of the president's own partisans. (The t statistics for the corresponding partisan bias estimates are 3.4 and 3.2, respectively.) In these cases, among others, partisan differences in political learning clearly seem to reflect something more than partisan differences in political values.

The case for partisan bias becomes even stronger when the perceptions at issue are perceptions of objective facts rather than essentially subjective political opinions. For example, while differences in the ideological values of Democrats and Republicans might well account for markedly different general

evaluations of a president's economic performance, they cannot plausibly account for markedly different beliefs about whether unemployment or inflation is rising or falling. This logic provided the basis for Fiorina's (1981, p. 80) distinction between (endogenous) "mediated" retrospective evaluations and (presumably exogenous) "simple" retrospective evaluations.¹³ Unfortunately for the distinction, significant partisan biases sometimes appear even in responses to exceedingly straightforward factual questions. In these cases, the "differing values" interpretation seems clearly incapable of accounting for stark partisan differences in political perceptions.

Alternatively, Gerber and Green (1999) suggest that partisan differences in political learning may be attributable to differing assessments of the credibility of political information. The Bayesian framework, they wrote, does not

rule out the possibility that Democrats find evidence of a Democratic scandal less credible than do Republicans. The prediction that distinguishes Bayesian models from biased learning models has to do with whether Democrats and Republicans who possess equivalent levels of prior uncertainty and assign a given information source equal credibility *ex ante* are equally affected by the new information. (p. 193)

At another point they argued that

Although widespread consensus exists about the capacity of preexisting beliefs to structure the assimilation of new information, the implications for "biased" judgment remain unclear. In one sense, judgment may be said to be biased when observers with different preconceptions interpret the same piece of evidence in ways that conform to their initial views. . . . On the other hand, one could argue that the process of evaluating new information in light of what is previously believed is consistent with rational information processing. (p. 197)

These claims seem to me to reflect a straightforward but unfortunate conflation of the concepts "Bayesian," "unbiased," and "rational." It is certainly true that, in a world of extremely complex and often ambiguous political events, it may be rational for observers to interpret what they see in light of what they already believe—for Democrats to find evidence of a Democratic scandal less credible than do Republicans. As Gerber and Green suggest, this is a straightforward implication of Bayes' theorem in situations where beliefs and evidence are both uncertain. But the appropriate conclusion to draw from this fact is not that perceptual biases do not exist but that perceptual biases may sometimes be rational. Moreover, at some point—for example, in the case of Cantril's (1958, pp. 200–202) committed communists viewing the Hungarian revolt through the lens of party orthodoxy—it seems very hard to think of Bayesian consistency as a sufficient condition for rationality in the

sense of plain reasonableness. Opinion change in accordance with Bayes' rule may often be biased, and in extreme cases it may approach delusion, as long as it does not manifest internal contradictions. The more interesting issue, from the perspective of politics, is whether and how "observers with different preconceptions interpret the same piece of evidence in ways that conform to their initial views" (Gerber and Green, 1999, p. 197).

PARTISAN BIAS IN PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS: AN EXAMPLE

The implications of my argument to this point may be illustrated by considering a specific (but fairly typical) example: the partisan pattern of opinion change regarding the elder George Bush's handling of economic policy in the 2 years preceding his 1992 reelection bid. The left panel of Figure 1 shows average evaluations of Bush's economic policy among strong Republicans and strong Democrats, respectively, in the three waves of a panel survey conducted by the American National Election Studies (NES) in the fall of 1990, the summer of 1991, and the fall of 1992.¹⁴ The evaluations are coded to range from +1 (for strong approval) to -1 (for strong disapproval).¹⁵

The survey data show a slight improvement in evaluations of Bush's eco-

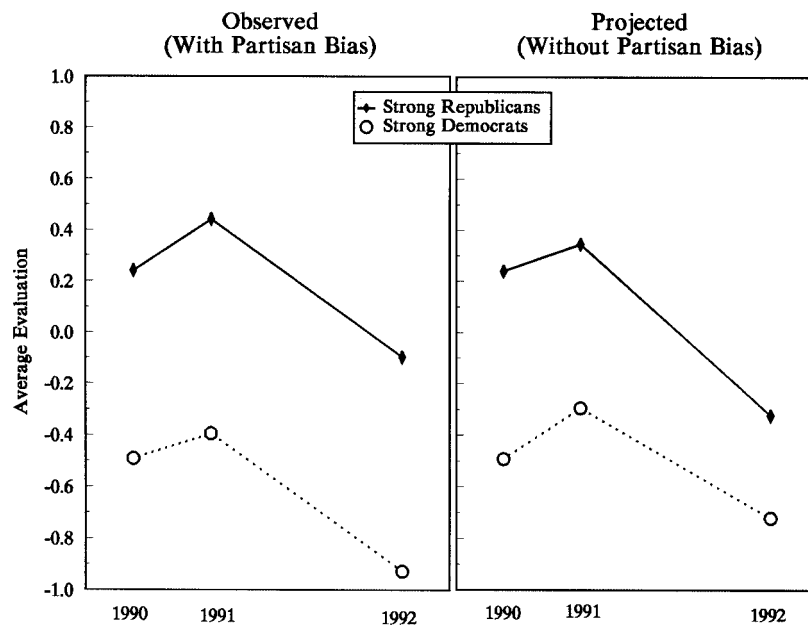


FIG. 1. Evaluations of George Bush's economic performance, 1990–1992.

nomic performance among both Republicans and Democrats between the fall of 1990 and the summer of 1991, followed by a marked decline in evaluations among both groups by the time of the 1992 election. The difference in average views between strong Republicans and strong Democrats was essentially constant over the three waves of the survey: .73 in 1990, .84 in 1991, and .83 in 1992 (on the -1 to +1 scale). Thus, these evaluations clearly reflect the pattern of parallel opinion change cited by Gerber and Green (1999) as evidence of unbiased information processing.

The first row of Table 1 reports the parameter estimates produced by applying the model of opinion change in Equation 5 to the data from 1991 and 1992 on Bush's handling of the economy.¹⁶ The estimated values of the parameters λ , α , and β for this regression model are .622 (with a standard error of .064), -.538 (.017), and .155 (.044), respectively.¹⁷ The first of these parameter

TABLE 1. Changing Public Evaluations of George Bush's Performance, 1991-1992 (parameter estimates from errors-in-variables regression analyses, with standard errors in parentheses)

	1991 Evaluation	1991 Partisanship	Opinion Shift (Intercept)	
<i>Economic Policy</i>	.622	.155	-.538	std err of reg = .540;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.064)	(.044)	(.017)	$R^2 = .34$; $N = 1057$
High Information	.651	.133	-.473	std err of reg = .515;
	(.074)	(.055)	(.024)	$R^2 = .42$; $N = 531$
Low Information	.605	.156	-.599	std err of reg = .564;
	(.117)	(.075)	(.029)	$R^2 = .26$; $N = 526$
<i>Foreign Policy</i>	.793	.166	-.145	std err of reg = .660;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.073)	(.046)	(.041)	$R^2 = .32$; $N = 1058$
High Information	.671	.157	.054	std err of reg = .609;
	(.078)	(.053)	(.045)	$R^2 = .34$; $N = 532$
Low Information	.782	.219	-.280	std err of reg = .695;
	(.109)	(.074)	(.062)	$R^2 = .28$; $N = 526$
<i>Gulf War</i>	.902	.126	-.205	std err of reg = .604;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.054)	(.037)	(.039)	$R^2 = .40$; $N = 1058$
High Information	.918	.131	-.178	std err of reg = .574;
	(.068)	(.045)	(.048)	$R^2 = .46$; $N = 531$
Low Information	.857	.116	-.213	std err of reg = .637;
	(.085)	(.065)	(.064)	$R^2 = .33$; $N = 527$
<i>Overall</i>	.781	.187	-.546	std err of reg = .592;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.062)	(.045)	(.036)	$R^2 = .40$; $N = 1057$
High Information	.670	.236	-.484	std err of reg = .576;
	(.070)	(.056)	(.038)	$R^2 = .44$; $N = 530$
Low Information	.934	.139	-.650	std err of reg = .610;
	(.121)	(.075)	(.075)	$R = .34$; $N = 527$

estimates suggests that about 62 percent of a typical respondent's 1991 evaluations persisted until 1992; this estimate suggests an unusual degree of fluidity in assessments of Bush's economic performance over a 15-month period, by comparison with the average stability coefficient for a variety of other Bush performance evaluations (.81) or for a varied set of 60 other evaluations summarized in Table 2 (.84). The strongly negative estimate of α (a little more than half a point on the -1 to $+1$ scale) reflects the sharp overall decline in perceptions of Bush's economic performance between 1991 and 1992; as Gerber and Green (1999) put it, "the public does seem to update its perceptions in the wake of events. When unemployment rises, the public's assessment of economic conditions sours, and when economic optimism fades, the public's evaluation of presidential performance deteriorates" (p. 189). Finally, the positive estimate of β suggests that the overall decline in evaluations was significantly mitigated among strong Republicans and significantly exaggerated among strong Democrats (in each case by almost 30 percent) due to partisan bias in perceptions of economic experience in the 16 months leading up to the 1992 election.¹⁸

These parameter estimates (and the corresponding parameter estimates representing opinion change from 1990 to 1991) can be used to simulate how the average views of the two partisan groups would have evolved between 1990 and 1992 in the absence of any partisan bias in perceptions of Bush's economic performance. That simulation is presented in the right-hand panel of Figure 1. In contrast to the observed evaluations in the left-hand panel, the projected evaluations in the right-hand panel show a marked tendency for the views of Republicans and Democrats to converge in response to events. By 1992, the projected difference in evaluations in the absence of partisan bias is .40—less than half the observed difference of .83 in the left panel of Figure 1. Thus, more than half of the observed difference in views between strong Republicans and strong Democrats would have evaporated if the two partisan groups had agreed in their perceptions of events over this 2-year period.

It is worth noting that the simulated evaluations in the absence of partisan bias in the right panel of Figure 1 converge significantly between 1991 and 1992 despite the fact that the new information absorbed by survey respondents during that period was quite extreme by comparison with their previous evaluations. The estimated intercept of $-.538$ in Table 1 corresponds to an x_t value of -1.42 in the framework of Equation 1: evidence that, if taken alone, would prompt every respondent in the survey to "strongly disapprove" of Bush's economic performance.¹⁹ That evidence would have represented a significant negative shock even for strong Democrats, who were already modestly negative about Bush's economic performance in 1991, but a much *bigger* negative shock for strong Republicans, who were modestly positive about Bush's economic performance in 1991. Thus, Republicans' evaluations would have

declined much further than Democrats' did—that is, the opinions of the two partisan groups would have converged significantly—if not for the compensating effect of partisan bias. In this case, parallel opinion shifts turn out to be produced by marked Bayesian convergence in combination with considerable offsetting divergence attributable to partisan bias in political perceptions.²⁰

THE UBIQUITY OF PARTISAN BIAS

The example presented in the preceding section, and illustrated in Figure 1, shows that partisan bias in political perceptions may significantly inhibit the gradual convergence in political opinions across partisan groups that would otherwise occur in response to shared political experience. But how typical is this example? Table 1 presents parameter estimates for three further examples from the 1990–91–92 NES panel study. The dependent variables in these analyses include evaluations of President Bush's handling of foreign policy and of the Gulf War and assessments of his overall performance as president. In each case, I take the relevant evaluations in the fall of 1992 as my dependent variable and prior evaluations and partisanship (both measured in the summer of 1991) as explanatory variables.

For each of these analyses, the results presented in Table 1 provide significant evidence of partisan bias in the evolution of political evaluations. Even with preexisting evaluations accounted for in the regressions, the parameter estimates representing partisan bias range from .126 (with a *t* statistic of 3.4) for evaluations of Bush's handling of the Gulf War to .187 (with a *t* statistic of 4.2) for evaluations of his overall job performance; the results for economic job approval presented in Figure 1 turn out to be quite typical.

In addition to this evidence from regression analyses employing all of the respondents in the 1990–91–92 NES panel, Table 1 presents parallel evidence from separate regression analyses of opinion change among relatively well-informed and less-informed respondents in the NES sample.²¹ If the partisan biases in perceptions of Bush's performance documented in Table 1 reflect the use of a cognitive shortcut by respondents too disengaged from politics to have monitored Bush's actual performance, we might expect those biases to be considerably stronger among less-informed respondents than among those with more ready access to "objective" political information. On the other hand, Zaller's (1992) discussion of "partisan resistance" suggests that less-informed respondents should be unable to recognize and resist persuasive messages inconsistent with their political predispositions, so that substantial partisan biases should only appear among better informed respondents. As it turns out, there is little support in Table 1 for either of those hypotheses; the magnitudes of the estimated partisan bias effects are substantial, and relatively similar, among relatively well-informed and less-informed respondents. These

results suggest that partisan bias is widespread and that its effects are not significantly mitigated or enhanced by access to objective political information.

Table 2 provides a much broader array of evidence regarding the pervasiveness of partisan bias in political perceptions and evaluations. The table summarizes the results of 92 distinct analyses of opinion change using data from the 1990–91–92 NES panel survey and from an election-year panel survey conducted by NES in 1980.²² (The detailed results are presented in Table 1 and in Tables A1 through A6 in the appendix.) The perceptions and evaluations included in these analyses range from assessments of economic conditions (including the state of the national economy and the respondent's own financial situation) to evaluations of presidential performance in a variety of policy domains to perceptions of candidates' personal traits. In each case, the analysis takes the same form as in Table 1, with perceptions or evaluations at

TABLE 2. Summary of Parameter Estimates (entries are average parameter estimates, with average standard errors in parentheses, from 92 pairs of errors-in-variables regression analyses)

	Determinants of Evaluations		Determinants of Partisanship	
	Lagged Evaluations	Lagged Partisanship	Lagged Partisanship	Lagged Evaluations
<i>Bush Performance</i> (8 Evaluations)	.786 (.057)	.102 (.040)	.969 (.021)	.012 (.030)
High Information	.720 (.065)	.147 (.048)	.937 (.024)	.060 (.032)
Low Information	.836 (.096)	.055 (.068)	1.005 (.038)	-.052 (.054)
<i>Bush Economic Conditions</i> (4 Evaluations)	.702 (.056)	.065 (.023)	.973 (.016)	.002 (.040)
High Information	.868 (.104)	.054 (.030)	.956 (.021)	.068 (.075)
Low Information	.551 (.060)	.052 (.040)	.985 (.029)	-.030 (.043)
<i>Carter Performance</i> (14 Evaluations)	.914 (.062)	.076 (.033)	1.011 (.017)	-.007 (.035)
<i>Carter Traits</i> (18 Evaluations)	.828 (.054)	.053 (.028)	1.009 (.018)	.017 (.034)
<i>Reagan Traits</i> (18 Evaluations)	.818 (.067)	.090 (.029)	1.013 (.017)	.001 (.042)
<i>Thermometer Ratings</i> (6 Evaluations)	.864 (.043)	4.17 (1.23)	.998 (.019)	.00015 (.00062)

a given point in time regressed on lagged perceptions or evaluations, lagged partisanship, and a constant term.²³

The left half of Table 2 presents the average estimated effects (with average standard errors) of prior evaluations and prior partisanship on current evaluations within each of six broad categories. (For the analyses based on data from the 1990–92 NES panel survey, the table also includes separate calculations for High Information and Low Information respondents.) All of these average estimated effects—and 83 of the 92 separate estimates on which they are based—are consistent with the hypothesis of partisan bias.²⁴ Whether they were assessing the state of their own personal finances, Jimmy Carter’s handling of unemployment, or Ronald Reagan’s hunger for power, Democrats and Republicans tended to interpret political events in ways that reflected “the influence of party identification on attitudes” (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 135).

Of course, many of the examples summarized in Table 2 are subject, in varying degrees, to the criticism that they may reflect systematic differences in the political values or experiences of Democrats and Republicans rather than biases in perceptions of political events. For example, the specific nature of George Bush’s economic policies could be responsible for partisan differences in assessments of his performance, and even for partisan differences in respondents’ assessments of their own financial situations.²⁵ However, as I have already tried to suggest, explanations along these lines seem much less helpful in accounting for differences that do not reflect any obvious partisan differences in values or experiences, such as assessments of Carter’s handling of the Iranian hostage crisis or perceptions of Reagan as “power-hungry.”²⁶

Perhaps the most striking instances of the latter sort are the evaluations in the 1980 NES panel study of the competing presidential candidates, Carter and Reagan, as “knowledgeable.” The estimated partisan effects for these evaluations in Tables A4 and A5 are .057 for Carter between January and June, .093 for Carter between June and September, .037 for Reagan between January and June, and .086 for Reagan between June and September. (The *t* statistics for these coefficients range from 1.3 to 3.3.) If we are to interpret these partisan differences as reflecting differing values rather than partisan bias, we must suppose that Democrats and Republicans had markedly different views about what it means to be knowledgeable, *and* that each of the presidential candidates just happened to embody his own partisans’ distinctive epistemological values, *and* that he did so increasingly as Election Day approached. None of that is logically impossible; but it certainly seems simpler and more plausible to attribute the observed differences between Democrats and Republicans to the “capacity of party identification to color perceptions” of specific candidates and political events (Stokes, 1966, p. 127).

The effect of this coloring of perceptions is graphically represented in Fig-

ure 2, which compares strong Democrats' and strong Republicans' observed ratings of Carter as knowledgeable over the course of the 1980 campaign (in the left panel) with projected ratings purged of the effects of partisan bias (in the right panel). The general pattern is quite similar to the pattern in Figure 1: the observed ratings by Democrats and Republicans move in near-parallel, while the projected ratings purged of partisan bias show a marked convergence of views over the course of the campaign. In fact, the results suggest that more than half of the observed partisan difference in ratings of Carter as knowledgeable would have evaporated over the brief span of 8 months separating the first and third waves of the 1980 NES panel survey, if not for the tendency of Democrats and Republicans to perceive campaign events in accordance with their own partisan views.

The range of results represented in Table 2 also sheds some light on the further assertion of Campbell and his colleagues that "the influence of party identification on attitudes toward the perceived elements of politics has been far more important than the influence of these attitudes on party identification itself" (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 135). The two rightmost columns of Table 2 summarize the results of regression analyses paralleling those in the first two columns, but with the respective roles of specific perceptions and partisanship

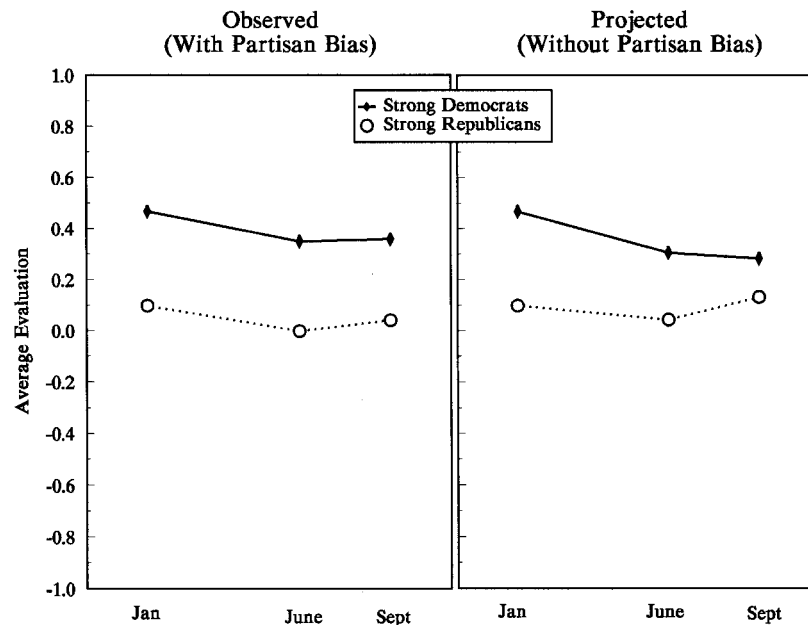


FIG. 2. Evaluations of Jimmy Carter as "knowledgeable," 1980.

reversed.²⁷ If party identification plays a distinctive role in shaping responses to specific political events, the significant effects of lagged partisanship on current evaluations in the second column of Table 2 should not be paralleled by similar effects of lagged evaluations on current partisanship in the right-most column. Instead, partisanship should be approximately stable over time, with coefficients on lagged partisanship close to 1.0 and coefficients on lagged evaluations close to 0.

The expectations derived from the Michigan model of party identification are handsomely supported by the results of the parallel data analyses presented in Table 2. The effect of lagged partisanship on current partisanship, averaged over the dozens of separate regression analyses represented in the table, is 1.003, while the average effect of lagged evaluations on current partisanship is .006—less than one-tenth as large as the corresponding average effect of lagged partisanship on current evaluations.²⁸ Party identification is generally quite stable, and relatively immune to short-term forces of the sort represented by the lagged evaluations in Table 2.²⁹ Of course, this is not to suggest that specific political attitudes and perceptions cannot produce significant changes in broader partisan loyalties; but the preponderance of effects is clearly in the opposite direction, just as the authors of *The American Voter* asserted (on the basis of the much less systematic evidence available to them) more than 40 years ago. Thus, the results presented in Table 2 provide strong evidence of the distinctive role of partisanship in shaping more specific perceptions of the political world.

PARTISAN BIAS IN PERCEPTIONS OF “OBJECTIVE” CONDITIONS

Public opinion surveys generally devote much more attention to respondents’ *evaluations* of political figures and events than to straightforward *perceptions* of political, economic, or social conditions. Thus, the data available for documenting partisan biases in perceptions are much less extensive than the data available for documenting partisan biases in evaluations. However, some relevant data do exist—and they are, in my view, even more devastating to the hypothesis of unbiased information processing than the data considered thus far.

The 1988 NES survey included a battery of items intended to measure respondents’ perceptions of how national conditions and government policy had changed during the 8 years of the Reagan administration. The battery was introduced by the statement that

Ronald Reagan was elected president in November 1980 and took office in January 1981. He will soon be leaving office after eight years as president. During these

eight years, some federal programs have increased, some have decreased, and others have remained about the same.

This introduction was followed by a series of questions with similar formats asking whether “federal efforts to improve and protect the environment,” “Social Security benefits,” “government spending on defense,” “federal spending on assistance to the poor,” and “federal spending on public schools” had been “increased, decreased, or stayed about the same as they were in 1980.” Although respondents’ attention had already been called to the fact that Reagan assumed office in 1981, none of these questions referred directly to the president or to the Reagan administration.

Several minutes later, these questions about perceived changes in government policy were followed by two even simpler questions about changes in objective economic conditions over the preceding 8 years. One asked, “Would you say that compared to 1980, the level of unemployment in the country has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?” The other asked, “Would you say that compared to 1980, inflation has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?” (In each case, respondents who said better or worse were asked a follow-up question distinguishing between much better or worse and somewhat better or worse.) Again, neither of these questions mentioned President Reagan or the Reagan administration.³⁰

The correct answers to the questions about unemployment and inflation were somewhat better and much better, respectively: unemployment in the civilian labor force fell from 7.1 percent in 1980 to 5.5 percent in 1988; the inflation rate in consumer prices fell from 13.5 percent to 4.1 percent. However, the subjective perceptions of respondents in the 1988 NES survey only weakly reflected these economic realities. In particular, Democrats were strikingly impervious to the good economic news. For example, more than 50 percent of “strong” Democrats claimed that inflation had gotten somewhat worse or much worse over the preceding 8 years, despite the fact that the actual inflation rate had declined by more than two-thirds. Fewer than 8 percent said it had gotten much better. (The corresponding percentages for “strong” Republicans were 13 percent and 47 percent, respectively.)

Figure 3 provides a graphical summary of partisan biases in perceptions of unemployment (in the left panel of the figure) and inflation (in the right panel of the figure) in the 1988 NES survey. In the absence of bias, we would expect some individual variability in these economic perceptions but no aggregate differences across partisan groups. The result would be a series of flat lines dividing the various response categories. Obviously, the observed response patterns are dramatically inconsistent with such an expectation. Partisan predispositions exerted a powerful impact on perceptions of “objective” economic events, not only in the extreme categories of “strong” Democrats and Republicans but over the whole range of the party identification scale.

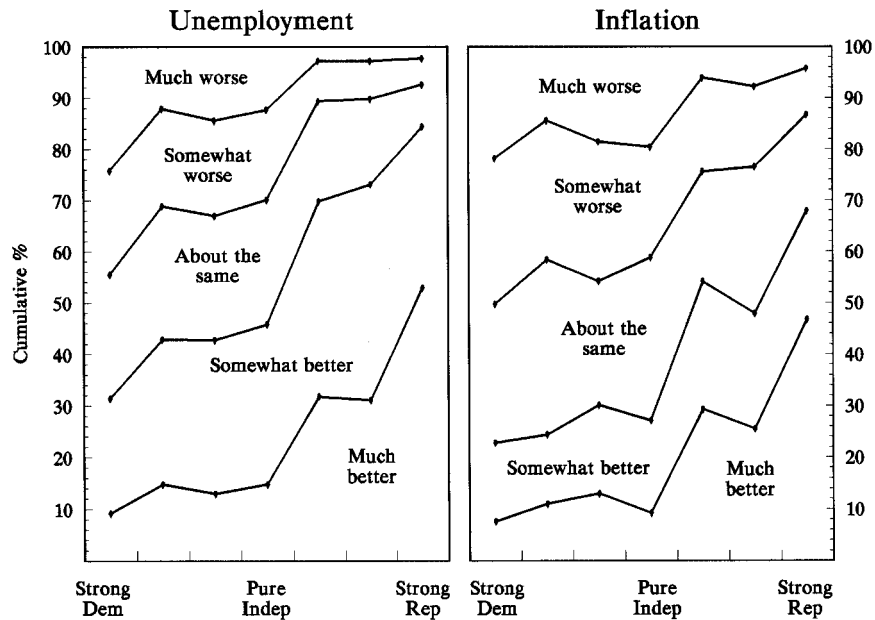


FIG. 3. Partisan bias in perceived economic conditions, 1980–1988.

Table 3 provides a more general statistical summary of partisan biases in these and other factual questions included in the 1988 NES survey. Each row of the table presents the results of a simple regression analysis in which respondents' partisan loyalties are used to account for their perceptions of change in a variety of political and economic conditions over the 8 years of the Reagan administration. Each of the dependent variables is coded to range from -1 (for "much worse") to $+1$ (for "much better"). The regression analyses utilize the 7-point party identification scale as an explanatory variable; the table reports the conditional mean perceptions corresponding to the two endpoints of that scale (for Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans, respectively) as well as the difference between those conditional mean perceptions.³¹

For example, in the case of unemployment the predicted value of $-.116$ (partway between "stayed about the same" and "somewhat worse") for Strong Democrats is .715 points lower (on the -1 to $+1$ scale) than the predicted value of .600 (partway between somewhat "better" and "much better") for Strong Republicans. The t statistic for this partisan difference is 18.3. The corresponding partisan difference in perceptions of inflation is almost as large, .643, with a t statistic of 15.3. Absent some complicated just-so story involving stark differences in the meaning of "unemployment" and "inflation" (or "better" and "worse," or compared to 1980) among Democrats and Republicans,

TABLE 3. Partisan Biases in Perceived Changes in Conditions and Policies, 1988 (parameter estimates from OLS regression analyses of perceived changes in conditions and policies on party identification, with standard errors in parentheses)

	Strong Democrats	Strong Republicans	Difference	
Unemployment	-.116 (.023)	.600 (.025)	.715 (.039)	std err of reg = .584; adj. R^2 = .15; N = 1830
Inflation	-.253 (.024)	.390 (.026)	.643 (.042)	std err of reg = .617; adj. R^2 = .11; N = 1841
Assistance to the Poor	-.274 (.027)	.136 (.030)	.411 (.047)	std err of reg = .697; adj. R^2 = .04; N = 1850
Protect Environment	-.158 (.026)	.247 (.028)	.406 (.044)	std err of reg = .661; adj. R^2 = .04; N = 1883
Honesty in Government	-.358 (.017)	.029 (.018)	.387 (.028)	std err of reg = .409; adj. R^2 = .10; N = 1759
Spending on Public Schools	-.106 (.027)	.150 (.029)	.256 (.046)	std err of reg = .682; adj. R^2 = .02; N = 1843
Social Security Benefits	.152 (.028)	.401 (.031)	.249 (.048)	std err of reg = .721; adj. R^2 = .01; N = 1862
Discrimination Efforts	.119 (.019)	.188 (.021)	.070 (.033)	std err of reg = .482; adj. R^2 = .00; N = 1761
Defense Spending	.680 (.021)	.707 (.022)	.027 (.035)	std err of reg = .532; adj. R^2 = .00; N = 1889
Budget Deficit	-.645 (.020)	-.621 (.021)	.025 (.033)	std err of reg = .483; adj. R^2 = .00; N = 1764

these large differences can only be interpreted as evidence of substantial partisan biases in perceptions of how the country fared during the Reagan years.

The other rows of Table 3 present parallel estimates of partisan biases in a variety of other perceived policies and conditions in 1988 by comparison with 1980. In addition to the items already mentioned, these include questions asking whether “compared to 1980 the federal government budget deficit has gotten smaller, stayed about the same or gotten larger?” whether “the people running the federal government now” are “*more* honest or *less* honest than those who were running the government in 1980, or hasn’t this changed much?” and whether “federal efforts to protect blacks from racial discrimination increased, decreased, or stayed about the same as they were in 1980?” None of these questions mentioned Ronald Reagan or the Reagan administration (although the general introduction to the whole battery of questions did), and none asked respondents to evaluate perceived changes in conditions or policies.³² (Thus, two respondents might agree that efforts to protect blacks from racial discrimination had decreased, but disagree about whether that was a good thing or a bad thing.)

In all, 7 of the 10 perceived conditions and policy changes included in Table 3 present very strong evidence of partisan bias, with estimated differences between Democrats and Republicans ranging from .249 to .715 on the -1 to +1 scales and *t* statistics ranging from 5.2 to 18.3. In six of these seven instances, Republicans and Democrats could not even agree on the *direction* of change between 1980 and 1988. The three exceptions to the general pattern of strong partisan bias are the questions about what had happened to the budget deficit, defense spending, and discrimination efforts—not coincidentally, the only three cases in which there was substantial disagreement about appropriate policy.³³

The 2000 NES survey included a similar battery of questions inviting respondents to assess changes in conditions and policies over the eight years of the Clinton administration. The specific substantive focus and wording of the questions varied, but the general format of these “Clinton legacy” questions paralleled the format of the “Reagan legacy” questions asked in 1988. As in 1988, some of these questions clearly invited evaluations of the president and his policies (for example, “Have you personally been helped or have you been hurt economically by the Clinton Administration, or hasn’t it affected you one way or the other?”), while others were essentially objective in nature (for example, “Would you say that compared to 1992, the federal budget deficit is now smaller, larger, or about the same?”).

Table 4 provides an analysis of the impact of partisan attachments on responses to each of the six questions in the 2000 Clinton legacy battery that

TABLE 4. Partisan Biases in Perceived Changes in Conditions and Policies, 2000 (parameter estimates from OLS regression analyses of perceived changes in conditions and policies on party identification, with standard errors in parentheses)

	Strong Republicans	Strong Democrats	Difference	
Moral Climate	-.651 (.031)	-.090 (.028)	.561 (.048)	std err of reg = .496; adj. R^2 = .13; N = 870
National Security	-.275 (.032)	.152 (.030)	.427 (.051)	std err of reg = .521; adj. R^2 = .08; N = 854
National Economy	.350 (.031)	.680 (.028)	.330 (.048)	std err of reg = .494; adj. R^2 = .05; N = 877
Budget Deficit	.214 (.037)	.457 (.033)	.242 (.057)	std err of r = .569; adj. R^2 = .02; N = 813
Crime Rate	-.104 (.038)	.083 (.034)	.187 (.059)	std err of reg = .602; adj. R^2 = .01; N = 862
Assistance to Poor	.102 (.034)	.171 (.031)	.069 (.054)	std err of reg = .518; adj. R^2 = .00; N = 767

tapped respondents' perceptions of national policies and conditions rather than evaluations of the Clinton administration.³⁴ As with the "Reagan legacy" questions in 1988, most of these items display strong, statistically significant partisan biases in perceptions. That is not to say that reality had no impact on perceptions—even most Strong Republicans thought the nation's economy had improved under Clinton, and even most Strong Democrats thought the nation's moral climate had declined. Nevertheless, the differences in views between the partisan camps were quite marked, even with respect to such apparently straightforward (and certainly nonpartisan) questions as whether the federal budget deficit had gotten smaller or larger.

BEYOND THE RUNNING TALLY

The evidence presented here suggests that partisan loyalties have pervasive effects on perceptions of the political world. In some cases, partisan bias produces actual divergence in the views of Republicans and Democrats over time; more often, it significantly inhibits what would otherwise be a strong tendency toward convergence in political views in response to shared political experience.

I conclude that partisanship is not merely a running tally of political assessments, but a pervasive dynamic force shaping citizens' perceptions of, and reactions to, the political world. Partisan bias in political perceptions plays a crucial role in perpetuating and reinforcing sharp differences in opinion between Democrats and Republicans. This conclusion handsomely validates the emphasis placed by the authors of *The American Voter* on "the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects." (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 135)

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APPENDIX

This appendix presents the parameter estimates summarized (along with those in Table 1) in Table 2 in the text. All of the parameter estimates are from errors-in-variables regression analyses paralleling those in Table 1, with current opinions regressed on lagged opinions, lagged partisanship, and a constant term.

Table A1 presents parameter estimates for evaluations of President Bush's job performance in 1991. Table A2 presents parameter estimates for evaluations of the national economy and of the respondents' own financial circumstances. Table A3 presents parameter estimates for evaluations of President Carter's job performance in 1980. Tables A4 and A5 present parameter estimates for evaluations of Carter's and Reagan's character in 1980, respectively. Table A6 presents parameter estimates for ratings on the NES "feeling thermometer" of Bush in 1991 and 1992 and Carter and Reagan in 1980. All of the data pertaining to Bush are from the NES 1990-91-92 panel; all of the data pertaining to Carter and Reagan are from the NES 1980 Major Panel.

TABLE A1. Changing Public Evaluations of George Bush's Performance, 1990-1991 (parameter estimates from errors-in-variables regression analyses, with standard errors in parentheses)

	1990 Evaluation	1990 Partisanship	Opinion Shift (Intercept)	
<i>Economic Policy</i>	.874	.124	.136	std err of reg = .580;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.064)	(.043)	(.020)	$R^2 = .43$; $N = 1054$
High Information	.738	.230	.031	std err of reg = .548;
	(.067)	(.048)	(.026)	$R^2 = .49$; $N = 528$
Low Information	1.002	.022	.231	std err of reg = .597;
	(.120)	(.075)	(.030)	$R^2 = .37$; $N = 526$
<i>Foreign Policy</i>	.830	.021	.297	std err of reg = .542;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.052)	(.037)	(.022)	$R^2 = .43$; $N = 1056$
High Information	.626	.164	.285	std err of reg = .572;
	(.061)	(.044)	(.033)	$R^2 = .37$; $N = 529$
Low Information	.964	-.134	.349	std err of reg = .517;
	(.076)	(.061)	(.027)	$R^2 = .49$; $N = 527$
<i>Gulf War</i>	.559	.081	.529	std err of reg = .549;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.040)	(.033)	(.019)	$R^2 = .31$; $N = 1060$
High Information	.585	.079	.461	std err of reg = .551;
	(.055)	(.042)	(.029)	$R^2 = .34$; $N = 532$
Low Information	.531	.091	.596	std err of reg = .546;
	(.055)	(.053)	(.027)	$R^2 = .29$; $N = 528$
<i>Overall</i>	.930	-.041	.302	std err of reg = .451;
<i>Job Approval</i>	(.044)	(.034)	(.018)	$R^2 = .57$; $N = 1058$
High Information	.900	.043	.242	std err of reg = .429;
	(.047)	(.038)	(.022)	$R^2 = .65$; $N = 532$
Low Information	1.009	-.171	.343	std err of reg = .449;
	(.084)	(.062)	(.029)	$R^2 = .51$; $N = 526$

TABLE A2. Changing Public Evaluations of Economic Conditions, 1990–1992
 (parameter estimates from errors-in-variables regression analyses,
 with standard errors in parentheses)

	Lagged Evaluation	Lagged Partisanship	Opinion Shift (Intercept)	
<i>National Economy, 1991</i>	.820 (.068)	.100 (.020)	.025 (.036)	std err of reg = .375; $R^2 = .28$; $N = 1060$
High Information	.996 (.135)	.082 (.026)	.114 (.074)	std err of reg = .344; $R^2 = .32$; $N = 532$
Low Information	.572 (.065)	.101 (.037)	-.088 (.037)	std err of reg = .415; $R^2 = .19$; $N = 528$
<i>National Economy, 1992</i>	.599 (.070)	.072 (.024)	-.285 (.030)	std err of reg = .399; $R^2 = .19$; $N = 1060$
High Information	.993 (.155)	.051 (.037)	-.083 (.069)	std err of reg = .372; $R^2 = .31$; $N = 532$
Low Information	.348 (.059)	.026 (.038)	-.414 (.028)	std err of reg = .417; $R^2 = .10$; $N = 528$
<i>Personal Finances, 1991</i>	.903 (.037)	.027 (.021)	-.003 (.012)	std err of reg = .394; $R^2 = .49$; $N = 1057$
High Information	.930 (.055)	.032 (.025)	-.010 (.017)	std err of reg = .376; $R^2 = .51$; $N = 531$
Low Information	.861 (.051)	.019 (.037)	.002 (.019)	std err of reg = .416; $R^2 = .46$; $N = 526$
<i>Personal Finances, 1992</i>	.488 (.047)	.060 (.027)	-.059 (.015)	std err of reg = .484; $R^2 = .16$; $N = 1060$
High Information	.555 (.069)	.053 (.032)	-.039 (.020)	std err of reg = .455; $R^2 = .20$; $N = 532$
Low Information	.422 (.063)	.062 (.046)	-.080 (.023)	std err of reg = .512; $R^2 = .13$; $N = 528$

TABLE A3. Changing Public Evaluations of Jimmy Carter's Performance, 1980
 (parameter estimates from errors-in-variables regression analyses,
 with standard errors in parentheses)

	Lagged Evaluation	Lagged Partisanship	Opinion Shift (Intercept)	
<i>National Economy</i>	.634	.028	-.323	std err of reg = .338;
Jan-June	(.089)	(.022)	(.055)	$R^2 = .17$; $N = 758$
<i>National Economy</i>	1.398	.034	.402	std err of reg = .285;
June-Sept	(.078)	(.019)	(.056)	$R^2 = .56$; $N = 759$
<i>Inflation</i>	.953	-.042	-.170	std err of reg = .471;
Jan-June	(.056)	(.036)	(.027)	$R^2 = .49$; $N = 756$
<i>Inflation</i>	1.078	.141	.151	std err of reg = .413;
June-Sept	(.051)	(.030)	(.030)	$R^2 = .64$; $N = 740$
<i>Unemployment</i>	.629	.056	-.376	std err of reg = .563;
Jan-June	(.056)	(.037)	(.021)	$R^2 = .25$; $N = 758$
<i>Unemployment</i>	.961	.212	.054	std err of reg = .460;
June-Sept	(.048)	(.029)	(.026)	$R^2 = .54$; $N = 740$
<i>Energy Policy</i>	.918	-.009	-.175	std err of reg = .528;
Jan-June	(.072)	(.040)	(.032)	$R^2 = .40$; $N = 757$
<i>Energy Policy</i>	1.184	.077	.329	std err of reg = .469;
June-Sept	(.069)	(.035)	(.038)	$R^2 = .57$; $N = 739$
<i>Iranian Crisis</i>	.611	.139	-.432	std err of reg = .679;
Jan-June	(.051)	(.044)	(.026)	$R^2 = .27$; $N = 757$
<i>Iranian Crisis</i>	.945	.149	.003	std err of reg = .493;
June-Sept	(.040)	(.032)	(.023)	$R^2 = .60$; $N = 758$
<i>Afghan Invasion</i>	.909	-.021	-.133	std err of reg = .491;
Jan-June	(.095)	(.035)	(.036)	$R^2 = .26$; $N = 757$
<i>Afghan Invasion</i>	.917	.027	-.006	std err of reg = .453;
June-Sept	(.076)	(.030)	(.036)	$R^2 = .35$; $N = 754$
<i>Overall Approval</i>	.730	.124	-.354	std err of reg = .536;
Jan-June	(.045)	(.039)	(.020)	$R^2 = .43$; $N = 757$
<i>Overall Approval</i>	.931	.152	.010	std err of reg = .443;
June-Sept	(.039)	(.032)	(.020)	$R^2 = .64$; $N = 755$

TABLE A4. Changing Public Evaluations of Jimmy Carter's Character Traits, 1980 (parameter estimates from errors-in-variables regression analyses, with standard errors in parentheses)

	Lagged Evaluation	Lagged Partisanship	Opinion Shift (Intercept)	
<i>Moral</i>	.872	.045	-.007	std err of reg = .378;
Jan-June	(.054)	(.025)	(.029)	$R^2 = .40$; $N = 745$
<i>Moral</i>	.865	.014	.068	std err of reg = .374;
June-Sept	(.052)	(.025)	(.026)	$R^2 = .42$; $N = 718$
(-) <i>Dishonest</i>	.654	.056	.132	std err of reg = .432;
Jan-June	(.070)	(.028)	(.050)	$R^2 = .21$; $N = 745$
(-) <i>Dishonest</i>	.726	.022	.097	std err of reg = .394;
June-Sept	(.064)	(.026)	(.039)	$R^2 = .29$; $N = 717$
<i>Inspiring</i>	.798	.087	-.175	std err of reg = .385;
Jan-June	(.048)	(.028)	(.015)	$R^2 = .48$; $N = 745$
<i>Inspiring</i>	.959	.047	.027	std err of reg = .359;
June-Sept	(.054)	(.028)	(.019)	$R^2 = .54$; $N = 717$
(-) <i>Weak</i>	.794	.091	-.156	std err of reg = .467;
Jan-June	(.057)	(.034)	(.020)	$R^2 = .40$; $N = 745$
(-) <i>Weak</i>	.874	-.001	.096	std err of reg = .396;
June-Sept	(.054)	(.031)	(.015)	$R^2 = .48$; $N = 718$
<i>Strong Leader</i>	.745	.081	-.233	std err of reg = .411;
Jan-June	(.046)	(.030)	(.016)	$R^2 = .43$; $N = 745$
<i>Strong Leader</i>	.936	.083	.036	std err of reg = .338;
June-Sept	(.040)	(.025)	(.017)	$R^2 = .63$; $N = 718$
(-) <i>Power-Hungry</i>	.763	-.015	-.068	std err of reg = .510;
Jan-June	(.057)	(.034)	(.027)	$R^2 = .31$; $N = 745$
(-) <i>Power-Hungry</i>	.852	.102	-.083	std err of reg = .447;
June-Sept	(.048)	(.029)	(.019)	$R^2 = .46$; $N = 718$
<i>Knowledgeable</i>	.708	.057	-.026	std err of reg = .439;
Jan-June	(.053)	(.031)	(.022)	$R^2 = .32$; $N = 745$
<i>Knowledgeable</i>	.574	.093	.107	std err of reg = .405;
June-Sept	(.047)	(.027)	(.018)	$R^2 = .30$; $N = 716$
<i>Solve Economy</i>	.818	.050	-.207	std err of reg = .342;
Jan-June	(.052)	(.026)	(.018)	$R^2 = .46$; $N = 745$
<i>Solve Economy</i>	1.006	.095	.032	std err of reg = .315;
June-Sept	(.055)	(.024)	(.025)	$R^2 = .58$; $N = 718$
<i>Good Relations</i>	.968	-.004	-.224	std err of reg = .409;
Jan-June	(.064)	(.031)	(.016)	$R^2 = .44$; $N = 745$
<i>Good Relations</i>	.983	.056	.088	std err of reg = .403;
June-Sept	(.066)	(.031)	(.018)	$R^2 = .48$; $N = 718$

TABLE A5. Changing Public Evaluations of Ronald Reagan's Character Traits, 1980 (parameter estimates from errors-in-variables regression analyses, with standard errors in parentheses)

	Lagged Evaluation	Lagged Partisanship	Opinion Shift (Intercept)	
<i>Moral</i>	.844	.022	.070	std err of reg = .345;
Jan-June	(.056)	(.024)	(.020)	$R^2 = .40$; $N = 705$
<i>Moral</i>	.923	.105	.001	std err of reg = .339;
June-Sept	(.059)	(.024)	(.022)	$R^2 = .47$; $N = 698$
(-) <i>Dishonest</i>	.692	.005	.175	std err of reg = .390;
Jan-June	(.067)	(.027)	(.036)	$R^2 = .26$; $N = 702$
(-) <i>Dishonest</i>	.949	.080	.065	std err of reg = .361;
June-Sept	(.065)	(.025)	(.035)	$R^2 = .43$; $N = 698$
<i>Inspiring</i>	.680	.127	.026	std err of reg = .419;
Jan-June	(.042)	(.029)	(.016)	$R^2 = .39$; $N = 702$
<i>Inspiring</i>	.784	.111	-.055	std err of reg = .423;
June-Sept	(.045)	(.029)	(.016)	$R^2 = .44$; $N = 697$
(-) <i>Weak</i>	.879	.024	.115	std err of reg = .374;
Jan-June	(.117)	(.028)	(.049)	$R^2 = .26$; $N = 702$
(-) <i>Weak</i>	.995	.059	.025	std err of reg = .430;
June-Sept	(.156)	(.035)	(.072)	$R^2 = .24$; $N = 698$
<i>Strong Leader</i>	.722	.139	.091	std err of reg = .405;
Jan-June	(.056)	(.029)	(.016)	$R^2 = .37$; $N = 702$
<i>Strong Leader</i>	.951	.082	-.050	std err of reg = .401;
June-Sept	(.060)	(.031)	(.017)	$R^2 = .48$; $N = 698$
(-) <i>Power-Hungry</i>	.837	.065	.005	std err of reg = .449;
Jan-June	(.057)	(.032)	(.017)	$R^2 = .41$; $N = 702$
(-) <i>Power-Hungry</i>	.942	.086	.024	std err of reg = .421;
June-Sept	(.060)	(.028)	(.020)	$R^2 = .37$; $N = 698$
<i>Knowledgeable</i>	.626	.037	.060	std err of reg = .418;
Jan-June	(.061)	(.029)	(.022)	$R^2 = .22$; $N = 702$
<i>Knowledgeable</i>	.859	.086	.024	std err of reg = .421;
June-Sept	(.060)	(.028)	(.020)	$R^2 = .37$; $N = 698$
<i>Solve Economy</i>	.629	.136	.050	std err of reg = .384;
Jan-June	(.054)	(.028)	(.015)	$R^2 = .33$; $N = 702$
<i>Solve Economy</i>	.794	.134	-.093	std err of reg = .366;
June-Sept	(.057)	(.028)	(.014)	$R^2 = .45$; $N = 698$
<i>Good Relations</i>	.786	.114	.054	std err of reg = .363;
Jan-June	(.056)	(.026)	(.014)	$R^2 = .42$; $N = 702$
<i>Good Relations</i>	.835	.139	-.081	std err of reg = .416;
June-Sept	(.074)	(.033)	(.016)	$R^2 = .39$; $N = 698$

TABLE A6. Changing Thermometer ratings of Political Figures, 1990–1992 and 1980 (parameter estimates from errors-in-variables regression analyses, with standard errors in parentheses)

	Lagged Evaluation	Lagged Partisanship	Opinion Shift (Intercept)	
<i>George Bush,</i> 1991–92	.820 (.068)	.100 (.020)	.025 (.036)	std err of reg = .375; $R^2 = .28$; $N = 1060$
High Information	.996 (.135)	.082 (.026)	.114 (.074)	std err of reg = .344; $R^2 = .32$; $N = 532$
Low Information	.572 (.065)	.101 (.037)	-.088 (.037)	std err of reg = .415; $R^2 = .19$; $N = 528$
<i>George Bush,</i> 1990–91	.599 (.070)	.072 (.024)	-.285 (.030)	std err of reg = .399; $R^2 = .19$; $N = 1060$
High Information	.993 (.155)	.051 (.037)	-.083 (.069)	std err of reg = .372; $R^2 = .31$; $N = 532$
Low Information	.348 (.059)	.026 (.038)	-.414 (.028)	std err of reg = .417; $R^2 = .10$; $N = 528$
<i>Jimmy Carter</i> Jan–June 1980	.810 (.038)	5.45 (1.32)	-8.31 (2.41)	std err of reg = 18.18; $R^2 = .54$; $N = 744$
<i>Jimmy Carter</i> June–Sept 1980	.883 (.030)	4.18 (1.12)	3.04 (1.64)	std err of reg = 14.72; $R^2 = .70$; $N = 714$
<i>Ronald Reagan</i> Jan–June 1980	.704 (.040)	7.41 (1.26)	7.89 (2.25)	std err of reg = 17.22; $R^2 = .49$; $N = 703$
<i>Ronald Reagan</i> June–Sept 1980	.907 (.043)	3.47 (1.30)	-0.59 (2.69)	std err of reg = 16.29; $R^2 = .59$; $N = 690$

NOTES

1. This “judgment” of “importance” was clearly not intended to apply to every political context, much less to every prospective voter. Campbell and his colleagues (1960, pp. 134–135) allowed for both individual and historical exceptions to the predominant pattern: “If the individual has developed attitudes *not* consistent with his party allegiance, that allegiance presumably will work to undo the contrary opinions. But they in turn must exert some pressure on the individual’s basic partisan commitment. If this pressure is intense enough, a stable partisan identification may actually be changed. When such a change occurs in a considerable part of the electorate, as it has at rare moments of our political history, the great realignments occur that change the course of electoral politics for years to come.”
2. Wattenberg’s (1991, 17–20) citation count suggests that Downs’s *An Economic Theory of Democracy* equaled *The American Voter* in scholarly impact by the late 1970s and greatly surpassed it in the 1980s.
3. Gerber and Green (1998, pp. 815–816) argued for the importance of a theoretical distinction between *party identification* and *party evaluations*, but simply interpreted their model in terms of the latter and noted in passing that an “appropriate model” for the former would be “quite a bit more complex.” Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002) provided a more extensive consideration of party identification as a social identity.

4. This Bayesian model is essentially identical to those considered by Achen (1989, 1992) and Gerber and Green (1999, pp. 193–194). Gerber and Green's (p. 194) Equations 1 and 2 correspond to my Equations 1 and 2, respectively, with some algebraic rearrangement.
5. Two pages later, Gerber and Green (1999, 194) noted that "The degree to which the voter adjusts her beliefs in response to new information is a function of how much the new information deviates from her prior best guess, the precision of the new information, and the voter's confidence in her original guess." But they failed to note that the first of these considerations—"how much the new information deviates from her prior best guess"—will be different, and sometimes substantially different, for Democrats and Republicans. Thus, in interpreting their subsequent empirical results they harked back to the simpler (and incorrect) claim that patterns of opinion change in which Democrats and Republicans "move together—sometimes markedly—as party fortunes change" are "inconsistent with the claim that partisanship 'dampens' the effects of new information" (Gerber and Green, p. 205).
6. "Precision" refers to the reciprocal of the variance of a distribution—the larger the variance, the smaller the precision, and vice versa.
7. This feature of the simple Bayesian model with Normal prior beliefs and Normal data does not hold more generally. For example, a model with unknown mean μ and unknown variance σ_i^2 (and Normal-Gamma prior beliefs) can produce situations in which very surprising evidence casts doubt on previous data as well as prior beliefs, producing a net reduction in posterior precision. Leamer (1978, chap. 2) provides a useful introduction to this and other aspects of Bayesian inference.
8. If the new information is sufficiently extreme (that is, if $[x_t - (\mu_{R,t-1} + \mu_{D,t-1})/2]$ is large in magnitude relative to $[\mu_{R,t-1} - \mu_{D,t-1}]$), the opinion shifts represented in Equations 3a and 3b will be large in magnitude by comparison with the convergence represented in Equation 4. However, even in that case the *absolute* extent of opinion convergence may be substantial.
9. In the notation of Zaller's (1992, p. 120) Equation 7.1, the change in response probability attributable to a single "dominant message" is $C_i/(C_1 + D_1)(C_1 + D_1 + 1)$, where C_1 and D_1 are the number of "countervailing" and "dominant" considerations previously internalized, respectively. Thus, a conservative who has previously internalized one liberal consideration and four conservative considerations ought to be affected by an additional liberal message four times as strongly as a liberal who has previously internalized four liberal considerations and one conservative consideration.
10. Zaller's empirical analyses were based almost entirely on cross-sectional rather than panel data, so their implications for opinion change are rather unclear. His most detailed analysis of aggregate-level opinion shifts suggests that support for the Vietnam War declined equally among doves, centrists, and hawks in the lower half of the distribution of political awareness between 1968 and 1970 (Zaller 1992, p. 208). Zaller interpreted these shifts as reflecting uncritical acceptance of elite arguments by all three groups, albeit a mixture of pro-war and anti-war arguments rather than a single "mainstream message." "Moderately aware hawks and doves," he wrote (pp. 204–205), "behave fairly similarly: They fail to support the war in its initial stage because they have not been sufficiently propagandized; as the prowar message heats up, they become more supportive of the war, but then just as quickly begin to abandon the war when the antiwar message becomes loud enough to reach them." This interpretation takes no account of the fact that moderately aware hawks were much more supportive of the war in 1968 than moderately aware doves were and so, in the absence of partisan resistance, ought to have responded much more strongly to the preponderance of antiwar messages between 1968 and 1970.
11. More precisely, I interpret a survey response as a somewhat noisy report of the mean of a distribution of belief. Measurement error may arise because the actual response is sampled from the distribution in some stochastic fashion or because ambiguities of language, ordinal

response categories, and other sources of error obscure the respondent's "true" attitude. Relevant discussions of the relationship between attitudes and survey responses include Achen (1975), Bartels (1986), and Zaller and Feldman (1992).

12. As in the analysis of Bartels (1993), the regression model in Equation 5 imposes an important simplification by treating the ratio of prior precision to posterior precision as a constant parameter rather than a variable. The data analysis reported in Table 1 relaxes that simplifying assumption somewhat by allowing the parameter λ to vary with levels of political information.
13. According to Fiorina (1981, pp. 80–81, 106), *simple* retrospective evaluations "reflect citizens' more or less direct experiences or impressions of political events and conditions," and are tapped by survey questions that do not refer to the parties, the president, or the government; the prototypical example is a question asking whether the respondent's personal financial situation has improved or deteriorated. *Mediated* retrospective evaluations, on the other hand, "contain a reference to job performance or an aspect thereof and a reference to a political entity—President Ford, former president Nixon, or the 'government.'" The key operational distinction in Fiorina's analysis is that simple retrospective evaluations are treated as exogenous while mediated retrospective evaluations may be affected by prior party identification, either because Democrats and Republicans rely on different sources of political information or because "ambiguous information is likely to receive a partisan benefit of doubt."
14. The 1990 interviews were conducted in the 6 weeks following the midterm election in early November; the 1991 interviews were conducted in June and early July, shortly after the conclusion of the Gulf War; the 1992 interviews were conducted between Labor Day in early September and Election Day in early November. My analysis is based on data from 1,060 respondents interviewed in all three waves. The data are from the 1990–91–92 Full Panel data file on the 1948–1997 NES CD-ROM issued October 1998. All of the data analyzed in this report are also publicly available from the NES website, <http://www.umich.edu/~nes>.
15. The question asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling the economy? Do you approve [disapprove] *strongly* or *not strongly*?"
16. The corresponding parameter estimates for 1990–1991 are presented in Table A1 in the appendix.
17. Since partisanship and (especially) prior evaluations are measured with substantial error, the parameter estimates reported here and throughout this report are derived from an errors-in-variables regression analysis in which the reliability of each observed indicator is estimated using a Wiley-Wiley (1970) measurement error model.
18. My measure of partisanship is the NES 7-point party identification scale, recoded to range from –1 for strong Democrats to +1 for strong Republicans. Thus, the opinion shifts implied by the parameter estimates in Table 1 are $(-.538 + .155) = -.383$ for strong Republicans, $-.538$ for "pure" Independents, and $(-.538 - .155) = -.693$ for strong Democrats.
19. The value of –1.42 is obtained by dividing the estimated intercept, $-.538$, by the complement of the estimated weight attached to prior evaluations $(1 - .622 = .378)$. The corresponding estimates of x_i for the "High Information" and "Low Information" regressions in Table 1 are –1.36 and –1.52, respectively, and the resulting patterns of simulated opinion change in both cases are quite similar to the pattern displayed in Figure 1.
20. The parameter estimate for partisan bias in Table 1 implies shocks of –1.01 and –1.83, respectively, for strong Republicans and strong Democrats, by comparison with the estimated shock of –1.42 in the absence of partisan bias (that is, for pure Independents).
21. The High Information respondents are those scoring in the upper half of the sample on a political information scale derived from responses to factual questions in the NES survey; the Low Information respondents are those scoring in the lower half of the sample.
22. The three waves of the 1980 NES panel survey were conducted in January and February, June, and September and October. My analysis is based on data from 759 respondents interviewed in all three waves.

23. Partisanship is coded relative to that of the candidate or incumbent president in each instance, so the expected direction of the partisan bias is always positive.
24. Seven of the nine negative parameter estimates for partisanship have *t* statistics ranging from -0.03 to -1.2 . The two exceptions are for evaluations of Bush's foreign policy ($t = 2.2$) and overall job performance ($t = 2.8$) by Low Information respondents in 1991. These anomalous estimates appear to be attributable to ceiling effects in the simple linear regression models for poorly informed respondents in the immediate wake of the Gulf War. For example, Bush's average job performance rating among poorly informed strong Republicans (on the -1 to $+1$ scale) increased from $+0.56$ in 1990 to $+0.80$ in 1991 (with almost 80 percent strongly approving of Bush's performance in 1991); the corresponding change among poorly informed strong Democrats was from -0.23 to $+0.30$ (with more than 40 percent strongly approving of Bush's performance in 1991, as compared with only about 15 percent of better informed strong Democrats).
25. According to government figures, real after-tax incomes in the poorest two-fifths of U.S. households declined by about 3 percent between 1990 and 1992, while those in the richest two-fifths declined by less than 1 percent.
26. Nor can they account for partisan differences in cases where experience actually contradicts partisan expectations or values. Thus, the relative assessments of the economy and presidential performance by Democrats and Republicans reversed between 1992 and 1996, despite the fact that Bill Clinton presided over robust economic growth for the rich as well as the poor.
27. The detailed results for the individual regressions of partisanship on lagged partisanship and lagged evaluations summarized in Table 2 are not reported in the appendix, but are available from the author.
28. These averages are based on the 68 distinct regression analyses summarized in Table 2, not including the separate analyses of High Information and Low Information respondents for Bush Performance and Bush Economic Conditions. In the case of Thermometer Ratings, the coefficients for lagged evaluations reported in Table 2 are multiplied by 50 to reflect the coding of the thermometer variables.
29. For much more extensive empirical investigations arriving at the same conclusion, see Green and Palmquist, (1990) and Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002).
30. Unfortunately, these two questions were immediately preceded in the NES survey by a battery of items tapping respondents' personal assessments of and emotional reactions to Reagan. Thus, respondents were indirectly primed to respond to the questions about unemployment and inflation in a more partisan way than they otherwise would have. However, this complication does little or nothing to revive the hypothesis of unbiased information processing, since there is no reason why a rational, unbiased information processor should have had any difficulty setting aside anger or pride while answering simple factual questions about unemployment or inflation.
31. The patterns of responses in Figure 3 suggest that it might be possible to improve upon the assumption embodied in the regression analyses reported in Table 3 of linear effects across the party identification scale. However, the strength of the partisan biases demonstrated even by this simplest version of the regression model seems sufficient to obviate the need for more elaborate analysis.
32. The table does not include questions tapping what Fiorina (1981) referred to as *mediated* retrospective evaluations, including items asking whether "the economic policies of the Reagan administration have made the nation's economy better," whether the respondent had "personally been helped or . . . hurt by the Reagan administration's economic program," and whether "the policies of the Reagan administration" had "made the United States more secure or less secure from its foreign enemies." Not surprisingly, responses to these items also display strong partisan biases.

33. Substantial majorities in the NES and other surveys typically support increases in spending for assistance to the poor, environmental protection, public schools, and social security. Honesty in government presumably also enjoys widespread support. Thus, the directions of the partisan differences on all of these items are consistent with the notion that Republicans viewed political events of the 1980s much more favorably than Democrats did—even in the cases of environmental protection and social security, where a straightforward application of partisan stereotypes would hardly tempt one to imagine that a conservative Republican president would have pursued a more activist policy than his Democratic predecessor.
34. “As you know, Bill Clinton was first elected President in November 1992. He will soon be leaving office after 8 years as President. The next several questions ask whether you think things have changed since Clinton came into office. First, would you say that *compared to 1992*, the federal budget deficit is now smaller, larger, or about the same?” “Has federal spending on assistance to the poor been increased, decreased, or has it stayed about the same *as in 1992*?” “Would you say that *compared to 1992*, the nation’s economy is better, worse, or about the same?” “Would you say that *compared to 1992*, the United States is more secure from its foreign enemies, less secure, or hasn’t this changed very much?” “Would you say that *compared to 1992* the nation’s crime rate has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?” “Would you say that *compared to 1992*, the nation’s moral climate has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?” All of these questions included follow-ups distinguishing between “much” better or worse and “somewhat” better or worse. The questions on the economy, security, crime, and moral climate also included follow-ups asking whether “President Clinton” or “the Clinton administration” had made things better or worse; those questions are excluded from my analysis.

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