Does Polarization Imply Poor Representation? A New Perspective on the “Disconnect” Between Politicians and Voters*

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Abstract

Many argue that elite polarization implies a “disconnect” between politicians and citizens that the election of politicians with moderate positions would resolve. We critique two common versions of this claim—a first concerning ideology, and a second concerning issues—showing that they rely on the faulty assumption that citizens’ policy preferences are ideologically rooted. First, with unique revealed preference experiments, we show that citizens care more that politicians represent their personal pattern of issue views than that they hold an ideologically mixed, ‘less polarized’ set of positions. As a result, despite not being ‘polarized’ themselves, citizens often see ‘polarized’ representatives as superior to ‘not polarized’ alternatives. Second, some assert that citizens’ lack of polarization implies that their views on individual issues are more moderate than politicians’. With original issue questions more capable of assessing support for moderate policies, we show most citizens have immoderate views on many issues. These findings suggest a different “disconnect” between citizens and politicians than a simple undersupply of moderate politicians: the range of policy alternatives elites debate often appears systematically to the left or right of the range of policies popular among the public.

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Elite political polarization is one of the most significant developments in contemporary American politics (Lee 2009; Noel 2014). Almost universally, scholars argue that it holds dour consequences for representation. Perhaps the most lamented consequence of elite polarization is the chasm it is said to imply between the policy positions of American political elites, often described as extreme, and the policy preferences of American voters, often characterized as reliably moderate. Fiorina and Levendusky (2006) ably define the perceived “disconnect” that results: “The political class is increasingly polarized” but “the majority of Americans remain largely centrist...The result is a disconnect between the American people and those who purport to represent them.”

This perspective on the consequences of polarization holds that voters would overwhelmingly feel better represented if politicians were to take more moderate positions. This notion that now permeates contemporary American politics research (e.g., Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2006). For example, Bafumi and Herron’s (2010) influential analysis suggests that over 90% of voters would like their Members of Congress to take more moderate positions. Consistent with this view, many scholars operationalize “responsiveness to constituents” as the degree to which legislators’ positions are moderate (e.g., Hall 2014; Snyder and Strømberg 2010). Likewise, a cottage industry has evaluated the merits of political reforms on the basis of whether they encourage politicians to take more moderate positions, taking for granted that this would improve representation in voters’ eyes (e.g., Ahler, Citrin and Lenz 2015; Brownstein 2007; Bullock and Clinton 2011; Gerber and Morton 1998; Mann and Ornstein 2013).

Claims that voters would feel better represented if politicians were to take moderate positions commonly appear in two forms. In this paper, we show how both rely on assumptions about the ideological content of citizens’ policy preferences that data do not support. We first illustrate these assumptions with care theoretically, then raise questions about whether they hold empirically.

First, many characterize citizens as disconnected from polarized elites on an ideological basis and suggest citizens would welcome the election of ideologically moderate politicians. These arguments characterize citizens as ideological moderates because they tend to lack ideological
consistency in their expressed preferences; citizens tend to express support for a mix of liberal and conservative policies. By contrast, the essence of elite polarization is that few Members of Congress take an ideologically mixed pattern of positions; nearly all politicians consistently support liberal or conservative policies across nearly every policy area (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006). The lack of ideologically “mixed” politicians who support each ideological side at least some of the time, as most citizens tend to do, is the first main component of the “disconnect” between politicians and voters that scholars have noted (e.g., Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2006; Bafumi and Herron 2010; Fowler and Hall 2013).

We demonstrate how this influential line of reasoning connecting elite ideological polarization to a disconnect with voters relies on an assumption that citizens assess representation on this ideological basis. The importance of this assumption is not widely acknowledged, but we will argue it is crucial. Moreover, we will cast doubt on it, arguing that citizens are better conceptualized as having personal patterns of issue views that they want represented; citizens want to see politicians represent their personal mix of policy preferences, not just a mix. This distinction has important implications for understanding polarization’s ills: because the American public is internally divided on many issues, politicians cannot simply take a “less polarized” or “ideologically moderate” set of issue stances and automatically please voters.

This leads us to our critique of the second common articulation of the “disconnect” that supposedly stems from elite polarization. Citizens’ views on individual issues are often characterized as reliably moderate. Elites, by contrast, are thought to have comparatively extreme positions on individual issues (e.g., Fiorina and Abrams 2009). The implication of this alleged contrast is that most citizens would feel best represented by politicians who support policies somewhere between the two parties’ positions on each of many individual policies. For example, if Democrats in Congress support raising taxes by 5% and Republicans support lowering them by 5%, this view would predict that nearly all citizens support a tax rate somewhere in the middle of these extremes.

Surprisingly little data exists on the centrism or extremity of citizens’ views on individual poli-
cies; most existing research simply assumes that Americans are more moderate than politicians on individual issues because they are not as polarized as politicians, not being consistent supporters of any particular ideology across many issues. We show analytically that citizens’ degree of polarization implies surprisingly little about the moderation or extremity of their views on individual issues. Moreover, when we empirically investigate citizens’ policy views in a more nuanced manner, we find that they are often not moderate. For example, many citizens’ ideal Social Security policy appears to the left of most Democratic politicians’ positions, while many citizens’ ideal immigration policy appears to the right of most Republican politicians’. We show that such immoderate views are widespread among citizens and guide their choices.

The evidence for both these critiques is drawn from a novel series of survey items and experiments we delivered to voters in a two-wave panel. For reasons that we elaborate in greater detail below, many of our studies allow us to evade the potential for measurement error to bias findings in our favor that has bedeviled previous work.

These results suggest two potential correctives to influential trends in research on polarization. First, our findings suggest a more nuanced “disconnect” between politicians and voters than a simple undersupply of moderates: on many issues, the entire range of policy alternatives on the elite agenda is systematically to the left or right of the range of policies popular among the public. Simply electing more moderates will not clearly resolve this disconnect, and could in fact exacerbate it. Second, the main effect of polarization may not be an easily-ameliorated disconnect in dyadic representation, but rather the many other ills polarization may exacerbate, such as gridlock, incivility, and more (e.g., Callander and Krehbiel 2014; Krehbiel 1998; Lee 2009).

**Does Elite Ideological Polarization Imply Poor Representation?**

“Pick a dozen issues. If you agree with me on eight out of twelve, you should vote for me. If you agree with me on twelve out of twelve, you should see a psychiatrist.”

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The essence of elite polarization is the increasing ideological orthodoxy of contemporary American politicians: Republican politicians nearly always vote on the conservative side of roll call votes, while Democratic politicians nearly always vote on the liberal side. American voters' answers to survey questions look quite different. Most Americans are ideologically mixed, claiming to support a mix of liberal and conservative policies (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Broockman 2015). For example, as Figure 1 shows, correlations between 2012 American National Election Study respondents’ reported preferences on abortion, environmentalism, and social spending are quite weak; most citizens express conservative views on some issues and liberal views on others.

Many argue that this contrast between polarized elites and “ideologically mixed” voters implies voters are poorly represented and would be better represented by politicians who are less polarized and more “mixed” (e.g., Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2006; Bafumi and Herron 2010; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Fiorina and Abrams 2009). However, making inferences about policy representation based on this contrast in polarization is not as straightforward as it may seem. Rather, this reasoning depends on the extent to which voters’ mixed positions on individual issues should be thought to reflect a moderate ideology they want politicians to embody or as sincere commitments specific to individual issues. An extended example will illustrate why.

A Tale of Two Legislators: How Unresolved Debates About Public Opinion Affect Interpretations of Elite Polarization

Consider the hypothetical voter in Table 1. This voter has completed a survey about four issues that will come up for a vote in Congress this session, on which she claims to have liberal views on two and conservative views on the other two. Similar to many citizens, this voter claims to support a mix of liberal and conservative policies and thus qualifies as “not polarized,” or as an ideological moderate.
Now consider two potential legislators who might represent this voter. Most existing Legislators look like Legislator B: consistently loyal to one side, “polarized,” and thus “disconnected” from the voter (e.g., [Fiorina and Levendusky 2006]). But would encouraging a representative who was less polarized than Legislator B to represent this voter necessarily improve representation in her eyes? Legislator A satisfies this criteria. However, Legislator A has positions that sit at odds with the voter’s survey responses on every issue.
Table 1: Which Legislator is a Better Representative of this Voter?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Liberal Survey Response?</th>
<th>Legislator A Liberal Vote?</th>
<th>Legislator B Liberal Vote?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Ideology” on 0-1 scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Not Polarized”</td>
<td>“Not Polarized”</td>
<td>“Polarized”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 0 denotes a conservative survey response or position, and 1 denotes a liberal survey response or position.

Which legislator would this voter prefer to represent her? For reasons we elaborate on below, existing theories offer surprisingly conflicting answers, a disagreement that touches on an unresolved debate concerning the nature of public opinion and how it should be measured. The relevance of this debate for understanding the consequences of polarization are not widely appreciated, but we will argue that it is central.

The Argument for Legislator A: Citizens’ Policy Views Are Mere Windows Into Ideology, and Political Surveys Are Like Math Tests

The underlying premise animating the idea that Legislator A is a superior representative for this voter is the notion that citizens’ issue preferences are ideologically rooted. For those who do not share this perspective, a metaphor may help communicate it.

The methods used to model elites’ and voters’ ideologies are usually drawn from the literature on educational testing (Bafumi and Herron 2010; Barber 2014; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014). Consider the application of such an approach in its original context, on the example mathematics test shown in Table 2a. In this example, Students 1 and 2 each correctly answered half the questions correctly, but the questions they answered correctly and incorrectly were exactly opposite each other. Nevertheless, we still might characterize these students as having similar mathemat-
ical ability; the individual items are merely windows into these students’ overall mathematical abilities, with random error determining which questions are answered correctly and incorrectly. Importantly, in this application, few would disagree that Students 1 and 2 are almost certainly more similar to each other than either one is to a students who answered all questions correctly (“whiz”) or all questions incorrectly (“dunce”).

Table 2: Are Political Surveys Like Math Tests?

(a) Math Test: Average Score Taps Underlying Ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct Answer?</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Whiz</th>
<th>Dunce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Score</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Political Survey: Does Average Score Tap Underlying Ideology?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal Position?</th>
<th>Voter A</th>
<th>Voter B</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower Taxes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrict Immigration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrict Abortion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrink Medicare</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Not Polarized”</td>
<td>“Not Polarized”</td>
<td>“Polarized”</td>
<td>“Polarized”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholars increasingly conceptualize voters’ responses to issue questions in exactly the same manner: citizens’ responses to issue questions are thought of as merely windows into their underlying ideology, not reflecting significant patterns specific to those issues (Clinton 2006; Jessee 2009; Shor 2013). For example, in their prominent study of representation, Bafumi and Herron (2010) write that “if we conceptualize legislators as having ideal points that drive their roll call voting choices, then we should think similarly about voters” and their views on issues (p. 521).

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1One might imagine, for instance, that Students 1 and 2 have a 0.5 chance of committing an arithmetic error on any question.
The upshot of this conceptualization of citizens’ responses to issue questions is similar to the upshot of scoring math tests: it allows us to calculate one-dimensional summary statistics for individuals that “can be compared in a proximate sense” with ease (Bafumi and Herron 2010). Just like calculating an overall score allows us to capture the clear commonalities between Students 1 and 2 on the math test in Table 2a, so too is it thought that an ideological “ideal point” can capture commonality between the political views of Voters A and B in Table 2b. Under this view, Voters A and B can thus be considered quite similar, as their ideal points are as “proximate” as can be, and certainly are more alike to each other than to Democrats or Republicans.

Returning to Table 1, the argument for Legislator A is now clear: when we compute ideal points for all these actors and “compare them in a proximate sense,” the voter and Legislator A look similar, just like the two students in Table 2a and the two voters in Table 2b. Their claimed differences on individual issues are immaterial, just like the two students’ different answers to the math questions in Table 2a.

The Argument for Legislator B: Ideological Innocence

We suspect many scholars will have a visceral negative reaction to the perspective articulated above, echoing Kinder (1983): “Enough already about ideology!” This second perspective would see the conception of political surveys like educational tests – primarily a way to measure an underlying continuum with many items – as gravely mistaken.

This alternative perspective conceives many citizens as having genuine views particular to individual policies that are not rooted in any overall ideology (Lupton, Myers and Thornton 2015). Rather, citizens evaluate distinct policies along distinct dimensions (Kinder and Sears 1985; Layman and Carsey 2002; Tesler 2014), and citizens are best understood as cross-pressured—genuine supporters of a series of particular liberal and conservative policies across different issue areas—rather than ideologically moderate per se (Treier and Hillygus 2009).

This idea that citizens are “ideologically innocent” is, no doubt, an old one (e.g., Converse
But despite the rich intellectual history of this perspective, its importance for understanding the implications of polarization is underappreciated: as Table 2b showed, if it is correct, implied ideological similarities and differences may say little about citizens’ and politicians’ similarities and differences on actual issues. For example, under this view, the Voters 1 and 2 in Table 2b would see each other as quite different from each other, and the voter in Table 1 would see little to like about Legislator A. Moreover, the two “moderate” citizens in Table 2b may both view the “polarized” Democratic and Republican politicians as better representatives of their views than each other! The last thing these two citizens would want is for the “less polarized” among them to be their representatives.

Assuming that electing ideological moderates will automatically improve representation in voters’ eyes thus assumes that voters look to their underlying moderate ideological orientations as they evaluate issues and politicians, just as students’ answers to math tests are primarily a function of their underlying ability. Many scholars implicitly and explicitly hold this view. But, if citizens instead seek representation on the basis of individual issues, ideologically moderate politicians may not be superior representatives to ostensibly ideologically extreme representatives, even if citizens are not themselves polarized. To understand whether resolving elite ideological polarization would improve representation in and of itself, it is thus important to understand to what extent citizens evaluate politicians through an ideological lens.

**Observational Equivalence in Existing Data**

Do citizens relate to politics through the lens of a general ideology or through many distinct commitments? Many scholars find the answer to this question obvious; the problem is that they find different answers to it to be obvious. Unfortunately, existing empirical evidence has important ambiguities that also leave this question difficult to resolve.

On the one hand, the strongest support for the idea that citizens are ideologically innocent and driven by individual issue commitments is the empirical finding that citizens’ views on different
issues do not tend to correlate strongly. If citizens tended to evaluate the political world in ide-
ological terms, we should see strong correlations between their issue views, as under this theory
these views are all reflections of the same underlying ideology. However, we do not observe such
correlations empirically (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Broockman 2015; Converse 1964; Kinder
and Sears 1985). This evidence is not dispositive, however. Those who conceive of public opinion
in ideological terms often argue that these correlations are artificially attenuated because of the
tremendous measurement error in survey responses (e.g., Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2008;
Jessee 2009). The classic evidence for ideological innocence thus has not managed to convince the
many scholars who treat citizens as evaluating political stimuli through an ideological lens.

On the other hand, proponents of the ideological conception of public opinion have shown
that citizens whose scores on an ideological index are more similar to a candidate’s are more
likely to vote for that candidate (Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2008; Enelow and Hinich
1984; Jessee 2009; Joesten and Stone 2014; Shor and Rogowski 2013). This evidence seems to
support the view that citizens evaluate the representation politicians provide them on an ideological
basis (“ideological proximity”) (e.g., Boudreau, Elmendorf and McKenzie 2013; Stone and Simas
2010), validating the idea that ideological scales allow us to compare citizens and politicians “in a
proximate sense.”

Existing evidence in favor of the ideological view is more limited than it seems at first glance,
too. The “ideological innocence perspective” would also predict that many citizens who appear
closer to politicians on an ideological scale would be more likely to vote for them. When polar-
ized politicians sit at the extreme of ideological scales, where an ideologically innocent citizen
scores on the scale may reflect the share of policies on which they agree with each party and not an
ideological position per se. We would expect both “more liberal” citizens and “citizens who sup-
port a greater number of liberal policies than conservative policies” to be more likely to vote for
Democrats. Both perspectives predict that citizens who answer more questions on a policy battery
in a liberal manner will be more likely to prefer to be represented by Democratic politicians.
These observational equivalencies in existing research reflect the fact that, in a polarized era, we rarely get to observe voters making choices between politicians like Legislator B and Legislator A. Nearly all politicians consistently support liberal or conservative policies, and so we learn little about whether voters would prefer ideological or issue representation; few Legislators of type A exist. Significantly, this lack of data is not guaranteed to hold if reformers succeed in electing more ideological moderates to office, as politicians like Legislator A may well be elected. Examining to what extent citizens would indeed prefer Legislator A’s ideologically moderate representation thus has immediate practical relevance. Our first set of studies is inspired by this exact possibility. The extent to which citizens would prefer Legislator A also has broader implications for how we should interpret the fact that most citizens are similarly ideologically mixed as Legislator A.

Study 1: Do Citizens Prioritize Issue Representation or Ideological Representation?

In Study 1 we give citizens a choice between two potential legislators with four issue positions. We drew these issue items from prominent works that have used issue items to calculate an ideological index for the purpose of studying representation and polarization. Unlike in these studies, which tend to compare citizens’ scaled positions to the scaled positions of real politicians, we constructed artificial politicians that do not take a consistent set of liberal and conservative responses across questions—the kind of politicians the ideological perspective suggests citizens would prefer as representatives. The presence of these ideologically diverse candidates that provide different degrees of issue and ideological representation allows us to drive a wedge between the observationally equivalent real-world predictions of the ideological and ideological innocence perspectives.

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2 We are not principally concerned with explaining electoral choice per se or in simulating an election accurately; we simply thought a forced choice would be a naturalistic way to capture citizens’ demand for ideological or issue representation, as it most closely approximates a common choice environment for citizens. (An alternative would have been to have citizens rate how well one politician represents them on a feeling thermometer, for example, but one might worry that results from such a comparison would reflect measurement idiosyncrasies. As such, we preferred a revealed preference approach.)
and appraise to what extent citizens might indeed welcome ‘ideological proximity’ in and of itself.

Table 3 shows an example of how ideological and issue similarity can diverge in the context of our studies. A voter provides responses to a variety of issue questions in a first survey, shown in the first column. Then, in a second survey months later, we ask a voter to choose between two politicians with the positions shown in the remaining columns.

Table 3: A Hypothetical Matchup Between Two Politicians to Gauge how Citizens Evaluate Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Voter Survey Response in Baseline Survey</th>
<th>Positions Shown in Second Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Politician A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>L</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>L</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>L</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implied Ideology</th>
<th>75% Liberal</th>
<th>75% Liberal</th>
<th>0% Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Ideological Distance from Voter | 0 (Perfect) | 0.75 (Divergent) |
| Issue Agreement with Voter     | 0/4 (Divergent) | 4/4 (Perfect) |

Politician B Ideological Distance Advantage: -.75
Politician B Issue Agreement Advantage: 4

Note: Voters were not shown a table like this; an example of what they were shown is presented in Figure 2.

Which politician would this voter see as a better representative? As a reminder, this voter might see Politician A as a better fit if the ideological perspective is correct because, according to the ideological perspective, there is nothing special about the particular issues on the baseline survey on which the voter claims to have had liberal and conservative views, just like there is
nothing special about the questions students get right and wrong on math tests. What matters and persists is a voter's latent ideological disposition, as responses to individual survey items merely provide a window into their underlying ideological preferences.

On the other hand, if voters have meaningful views particular to individual issues that arise independently of their ideology, we would expect the voter to select Politician B. From the ideological perspective such a choice would be surprising, as this mostly-liberal voter would be selecting a polarized conservative. But if ideological distance does not imply poor representation, the voter may see Politician B as a good fit.

Data

Most of our studies rely on a two-wave panel survey conducted in January and March of 2014. In the first wave, we recruited 1,240 survey respondents from the United States through Survey Sampling International, which recruits samples that compare favorably to Census benchmarks. The sample matches the population reasonably well on key demographic variables, although African-Americans were intentionally oversampled for another project (see subsection A.1 of the Online Appendix [OA]). We use survey weights to account for this oversampling and to improve the correspondence between the sample and the population on observable covariates more generally.

In the first survey wave, we asked respondents 27 binary choice issue questions to which they indicated agreement or disagreement with the statement given (e.g., “Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry”; see the appendix for all 27 issue questions). Consistent with research in the recent ideological tradition, we estimated a latent ideology variable by scaling respondents’ answers to the binary issue questions using a unidimensional item-response theory (IRT) model.3

We then conducted a follow-up wave in March 2014 with 515 of the Wave 1 respondents. Wave 2 contained our four main studies, in which we examined the relationship between choices respon-

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3We use the MCMCpack R package to generate 10,000 draws from a posterior distribution of each respondent’s estimated ideal point.
dents made in Wave 2 and the issue opinions they offered in Wave 1. The two months between the two waves was intended to preclude bias in favor of the ideological innocence perspective: given how much time passed, respondents should not feel significant pressure to prefer politicians who share the individual issue positions they reported in Wave 1.

**Study 1A: Probing the Demand for Ideological Representation with Random Positions**

In our first study, we created match-ups like those shown in the second and third columns of Table 3 by picking candidates’ positions completely at random: we picked four issues at random for each candidate and then picked four positions at random. The stimulus as presented to voters is shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: An Example Matchup from Study 1, As Shown to Respondents](image)

Our main independent variables are the implied ideological and issue similarity between the voter and each politician in their particular matchup, generated by the experimental variation:

4

To measure the degree of congruence between these hypothetical politicians and respondents on issues, we calculated the proportion of positions for which the citizen’s Wave 1 responses agreed with each of the fictive politicians we
example of these independent variables for the hypothetical matchup we described earlier is shown at the bottom of Table 3. Our dependent variable is which politician the respondent chooses for their particular matchup.

How do citizens choose? At first glance, ideological proximity seems to affect citizens’ choices. Consistent with past studies of ideologically-driven choice (e.g., Boudreau, Elmendorf and MacKenzie 2013; Jessee 2009), the first column of Table 4 shows a significant bivariate association between citizens’ ideological proximity to Politician B and a preference for Politician B (estimated via OLS). Figure 3 shows this graphically, with the x-axis depicting the probability that Candidate B is ideologically superior to Candidate A, and the y-axis showing the share of respondents who chose Candidate B.

However, as we noted, ideological proximity tends to correlate with issue agreement, making it unclear whether citizens who vote in a way the ideological perspective would predict are actually evaluating political figures on the basis of ideological proximity. An alternative is also possible: when evaluating politicians on the basis of issues, citizens also tend to select politicians that appear like an ideological match.

Indeed, the evidence suggests that the association between ideological proximity and choice that many have noted may be a byproduct of its correlation with issue agreement. Figure 4 shows this phenomenon graphically, reproducing Figure 3 at each level of issue agreement. Each of randomly generated. Citizen i’s agreement score with Politician A is specified as Agreement_iA = Σ_j=1^n (j_i = j_A) / n, with j indexing the randomly chosen issues and n referring to the set of those issues for which the respondent expressed a Wave 1 opinion (n = 4 for all respondents). Our main measure of issue congruence in this test is Politician B’s issue agreement advantage, Agreement_iB - Agreement_iA.

To measure ideological congruence, we estimated latent ideology for all possible politicians (combinations of four issue positions) with a unidimensional IRT model. Again using the MCMCpack R package, we generated 10,000 draws from a posterior distribution of each politician’s estimated ideal point. We calculated Politician B’s ideological proximity advantage—the probability that Politician B’s ideal point (ψ_B) is ideologically closer than Politician A’s (ψ_A) to citizen i’s (θ_i)—as follows:

Pr(Politician B is more proximate) = Σ_d=1^10,000 |θ_id - ψ_Bd| < |θ_id - ψ_Ad| / 10,000,

where d indexes draws from the posterior distributions. We use this measure of Politician B’s ideological advantage and the measure of Politician B’s issue agreement advantage detailed above to assess the extent to which issues and ideological proximity affect respondents’ tendency to prefer the representation provided by Politician B.
Table 4: The Effect of Ideological Proximity on Political Choice Flows Through Issue Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DV: Preference for Politician B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. B ideological proximity advantage</td>
<td>0.48** (0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. B issue agreement advantage</td>
<td>0.51*** (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.23** (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. * = \( p < 0.10 \), ** = \( p < 0.05 \), *** = \( p < 0.01 \).

Figure 3: Ideological Proximity Does Predict Voter Choice

The subplots shows the relationship between Candidate B’s proximity advantage and candidate choice at a particular level of issue agreement advantage. For example, in the right-most plot, the “Candidate B” respondents saw agreed with them on 2 more issues than the “Candidate A” they saw; respondents in the center plot plot agreed with their “Candidate A” and “Candidate B” on the same number of issues. The horizontal axis in each graph depicts the probability that Candidate B is ideologically superior, and the vertical axis shows the probability that voters chose Candidate B.

To the extent the ideological perspective has merit, we should see the same upward sloping
Figure 4: Conditional on Issue Agreement, Ideological Proximity Does Not Predict Voter Choice

Pattern from Figure 3 in Figure 4, with ideological proximity predicting choice. We do not. Instead, we observe a pattern more consistent with citizens evaluating candidates on the basis of individual issues. Respondents in the subplots to the left saw matchups where Candidate A was superior to Candidate B on issues, and tend to select Candidate A; respondents in the subplots to the right saw matchups where Candidate B was superior on issues and tend to select Candidate B. Across subplots, however, we fail to find any systematic influence of Candidate B’s ideological advantage on respondents’ choices, conditional on issue agreement.

Column 2 of Table 4 summarizes this with regression. When introducing Politician B’s issue agreement advantage into the regression of candidate choice on ideological proximity advantage (Column 1), the apparent effect of ideological proximity on politician preference plummets to near zero. Moreover, we find that when we pit ideological advantage and issue agreement advantage against each other in this model, only issue agreement strongly predict citizens’ preferences. Ceteris paribus, we would expect a respondent to be 26 percentage points more likely to support a politician who agrees with her on three of the four issues than one who agrees with her on just

---

5Collinearity in a linear regression does not bias estimates (Achen 1982), although it does favor concepts that are more precisely measured. In this case, our measure of ideological agreement is drawn from the literature, but our measure of issue agreement is coarse and does not reflect that citizens might see some issues are more important than others. Nevertheless, we see the coarse measure of issue agreement significantly outperforming the sensitive ideological measure.
one issue. In other words, what has been seen as strong evidence that citizens evaluate politicians based on ideological proximity may reflect significant omitted variable bias because agreement on issues is not usually included in these statistical models.

The data from our first study thus suggests that citizens appear to be fairly indifferent to ideological match in itself. However, this preference for issue agreement can be mistaken as ideologically-driven if issues are not explicitly considered. By contrast, citizens strongly prefer politicians who represent their claimed positions on individual issues. This provides our first hint that citizens would not necessarily be much more satisfied with representation if politicians only matched them in a general ideological sense.

**Study 1B: Testing The Demand for Ideological Representation with Tailored Politicians**

Study 1A suggested that citizens evaluate political representation on the basis of issue agreement much more than they do on the basis of ideological proximity, to the extent citizens appear to prioritize ideological representation at all. To put the question of citizens’ preference for ideological representation vis-à-vis issue representation to a starker test, in Study 1B we presented citizens with a stark choice between the two. We again used the “Politician A vs. Politician B” format from Study 1A but tailored the politicians so that their issue positions and underlying ideologies were not randomly determined but instead intentionally forced the respondent into a stark tradeoff between issue and ideological representation.

An example of this stark tradeoff was shown in Table 3, with Politician A being ideologically proximate yet disagreeing on issues and Politician B being ideologically distant yet agreeing on issues. If citizens tend to pick a politician with congruent issue positions that sit at odds with their general ideology, this would represent evidence in favor of the ideological approach; on the other hand, if voters tend to prefer politicians with a mix of positions similar to theirs, even though the individual positions sit at odds, it would show the clearly deleterious effects of polarization on representation.
We constructed politicians that presented this kind of stark trade-off for all respondents as follows. To construct the “ideologically correct” politicians for our respondents, we considered every possible hypothetical politician who took four positions and disagreed with a particular respondent’s prior positions on all four, scaled them one-by-one with all Wave 1 respondents using IRT, and selected the politician who was closest to the respondent on latent ideology as indicated by IRT. Figure 5 shows this process graphically.

We then constructed an “ideologically incorrect” politician who took positions in concordance with each of the respondent’s previously stated issue preferences but who was the most likely to be ideologically inferior to the “ideologically correct” politician of all such politicians, with ideological proximity again being assessed by IRT. Figure 6 shows this process graphically.

As in Study 1A, we asked citizens to imagine choosing between these two candidates in an

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6 Specifically, we first created a list of every possible politician who took four positions, all of which disagree with the respondent’s Wave 1 responses to the binary choice issue questions. We then scaled each of these politicians together with all of the Wave 1 survey respondents, one by one, using a unidimensional IRT model and calculated the mean squared distance between the politician and the citizen to whom we were attempting to pair a politician. Among the politicians who disagreed with the respondent’s previously stated preferences on all four issues, we then found the politician who nevertheless was likeliest to share the citizen’s ideological position, as measured by minimum mean squared distance. By the ideological perspective, the citizen should be quite satisfied with this politician despite having taken issue positions entirely at odds in the previous wave. In pseudo-code, the procedure for finding the ‘ideology-only agreement’ candidate is as follows:

```python
for voter in all.voters:
    for candidate in all.possible.candidates:
        if issue.agreement.proportion(voter, candidate) == 0:
            ideal.points <- scale([all.voters, candidate])
        else:
            pass
    candidate.shown[voter] <- which(min(ideological.distance))
```

---

7 To construct the “ideologically incorrect” politicians, we took a similar approach to the one described in Footnote 6. In pseudo-code, the procedure for finding these “issue-only agreement” candidates is as follows:

```python
for voter in all.voters:
    for candidate in all.possible.candidates:
        if issue.agreement.proportion(voter, candidate) == 1:
            ideal.points <- scale([all.voters, candidate])
        else:
            pass
    candidate.shown[voter] <- which(max(ideological.distance))
```
election. We randomly assigned the “ideologically correct” and “ideologically incorrect” candidate to occupy the positions of “Politician A” and “Politician B” to avoid order effects.

When presented with the stark choice between a politician who mirrors their implied ideology
and thus similarly tends not to be polarized (yet disagrees with their previously stated positions) or a politician who takes their previously stated positions on individual issues (yet takes a consistent set of liberal or conservative positions), which do citizens choose? We find that they overwhelmingly prefer the politician who agrees with their previously stated issue positions despite being more polarized and inferior from an ideological perspective by more than 2-to-1. 69.9% of the 513 respondents in Study 1B selected the “ideologically incorrect” politician, while just 31.1% selected the “ideologically correct” politician ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI: [24.9%, 37.3%]). A clear minority of respondents behaved in accordance with the predictions of the ideological perspective while a clear majority appear to have evaluated the politicians according to their distinct positions on individual issues.

Before exploring the implications of these results in greater detail, we explore their robustness in Study 2.

**Study 2: Citizens Are Indifferent to Ideology in the Presence of Issue Information**

A potential alternative explanation for the results from Study 1 is that citizens would have preferred an ideologically proximate politician but did not understand how ideology tends to relate to the issues we selected, “what goes with what” (e.g., Converse 1964). For example, the Voter in Table 1 may mistakenly believe that Politician A’s pattern of positions is actually more indicative of his own underlying ideology and, thus, that selecting Politician A is ideologically correct. Further complicating matters, citizens usually evaluate potential representatives in an information-rich environment, i.e., when campaigns are actively providing ideological cues.

To assess these possibilities and the robustness of citizens’ indifference to ideology, we introduced a series of ideological primes and information before voters chose in Study 1B. We varied the extent of ideological information and priming with three treatments of differing impact and
directness.

Our first two treatments were relatively indirect. First, before allowing them to choose between the politicians, we randomly asked 122 respondents whether they thought Politician A (randomly assigned to be either the “ideologically correct” or “ideologically incorrect” politician) would agree or disagree with 5 other issue statements (randomly chosen from the 22 binary response issue questions not displayed as part of Politician A’s platform). This task was meant to lead respondents to think about how issues fit together and thus the politicians’ implied ideologies. Second, we randomly asked 132 respondents where they thought the two politicians stood on a 7-point ideological scale, directly asking them to consider politicians’ ideology before voting.

Finally, to put the external validity of Study 1B to an even tougher test, our final and most direct treatment actually showed 127 respondents the ideal point estimates for the two politicians, a more direct ideological treatment than even election campaigns typically deliver. In addition to the four positions for each politician, we showed respondents an image featuring an ideological dimension bounded by “liberal” on the left, “conservative” on the right, and arrows indicating the estimated ideal points for Politicians A and B. (See Figure [7] for an example.) We told respondents that, “based on these positions, scholars believe these two candidates are at about the positions shown on a liberal-conservative spectrum” before asking them to choose between the two. This treatment should leave no doubt about the ideological aspect of the choice respondents faced. Indeed, studies that adopt the ideological perspective increasingly capture citizens’ views by asking them to place themselves and politicians on scales like this (e.g., Ahler, Citrin and Lenz 2015; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014); thus, we suspected that citizens might be able to make sense of these candidates with this aid.

None of these interventions led citizens to evaluate potential representatives ideologically. As Figure [8] shows, compared to the baseline condition, respondents were no more likely to choose the “ideologically correct” politician when primed to think about where one politician likely

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8To avoid demand effects, we did not include respondents’ estimated latent ideal points on these figures.
Figure 7: Example of “Ideology Shown” Condition

Based on these positions, scholars believe these two candidates are at about the positions shown below on a liberal-conservative spectrum:

In this example, Candidate B is the respondent’s “ideologically correct” candidate who nevertheless disagrees with the respondent on all four issues, while Candidate A is the respondent’s “ideologically incorrect” candidate who agrees with the respondent on all four issues.

Figure 8: Priming Ideology and Providing Ideological Information Fail to Increase Demand for Ideological Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>% Voting for Ideologically-Correct Candidate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Issues Primed</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology Primed</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology Shown</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals

stands on other issues. Nor were they more likely to choose the “ideologically correct” politician when asked about the politicians’ likely ideological predispositions. Across all three of these
conditions—priming issue packages, priming ideology, and the baseline—a clear minority of respondents choose the ideologically correct candidate over the ideologically distant candidate who agrees with them on all four issues.

Citizens’ total disregard of the ideological information we provided in Study 2 and prioritization of issue information makes little sense from the point of view that citizens lack meaningful attachments to individual issues separate from their underlying ideology. However, it is fully compatible with our claim that citizens are issue-driven first and foremost in ways that ideological summaries cannot capture.

Summary of Studies 1 and 2

Citizens tend to have a mix of liberal and conservative positions across issues, and a large literature argues that they would see representation as superior if politicians were to have such a mix also. Our findings suggest that citizens do not place much value on the extent to which politicians are similarly “not polarized” as they are in this sense. Citizens do not seem to care whether politicians have a mix of issue views, but instead whether politicians share their own personal mix. Not only do citizens decline to evaluate politicians in the ideological terms, but their views on individual issues—increasingly written off as mere error-laden reflections of their underlying ideology—powerfully dictate their choices.

The same issues recur at the aggregate level. In Table 5, each voter is liberal on 3 of 5 issues. A legislator seeking to represent this district faithfully may also note that, on every issue, 3 of 5 voters have liberal views. Such a legislator might vote like Legislator A, taking the liberal stance on every issue. However, note that this pattern of voting puts Legislator A ‘out of step’ with the district on an ideological basis. By contrast, Legislator B looks in step with the district ideologically, but can only achieve this distinction by voting against majority will. In this way, ideological agreement and issue agreement are not only separate concepts, they are not guaranteed to correlate positively.

This underscores how, if citizens evaluate representation on the basis of individual issues in-
Table 5: Which legislator is a better representative in the aggregate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter 1</th>
<th>Voter 2</th>
<th>Voter 3</th>
<th>Voter 4</th>
<th>Voter 5</th>
<th>Legislator A</th>
<th>Legislator B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Ideology’</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 0 denotes a conservative survey response or position, and 1 denotes a liberal survey response or position.

Instead of ideology, we may need to re-examine whether electing ideological moderates would improve representation in their eyes. Since citizens tend to identify themselves as moderates on ideological scales (Fiorina and Abrams, 2009) and appear ideologically moderate when we scale their responses to individual policy questions (Bafumi and Herron, 2010), scholars of representation in the ideological tradition argue that moderation by parties and candidates would remedy the “disconnect” citizens feel. But if citizens evaluate the representation they receive not according to ideological fit but instead according to whether politicians advocate for the individual policy positions they favor, reducing elite polarization may not improve representation in many citizens’ eyes, despite citizens’ own lack of polarization—just as Legislator A would not represent Table 1’s voter well.

Do Citizens Reliably Support Moderate Policies on Individual Issues?

“Within the range of alternatives permitted by the mass public, elites in the district further constrain the congressman by not tolerating some alternatives that were tolerated by the mass.”

– (Kingdon, 1989, p., 291)

25
A second way elite polarization has been said to degrade representation is by encouraging politicians to take positions within issue areas that are extreme relative to voters’ (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005; Fiorina and Abrams 2009). For example, if Democrats in Congress support raising taxes by 5% and Republicans support lowering them by 5%, this view would lead us to expect that nearly all citizens would like their representatives to support a tax rate somewhere in the middle of these extremes. Consistent with this idea scholars like Ellis and Stimson (2012) speak of a large group of centrist voters who tend to see the policies advanced by leftist parties as “more leftist than it prefers” and the policies advanced by rightist parties as too rightist (p. 47-8).

But the existence of elite polarization has more ambiguous implications than many realize for the relative moderation of elites’ and voters’ preferences on individual issues. Table 6 illustrates why. Suppose policy options on four issues can be arrayed from left to right on a 7-point scale, with Democrats and Republicans consistently supporting policies at 3 and 5, respectively. Table 6’s voters hold no moderate positions and agree with each other on nothing yet, when their views are boiled down to one dimension, appear monolithically moderate. However, observing voters’ ideal policies within each area may reveal that politicians are much closer to the center of public opinion on each issue than at first glance.

**Table 6: Elite Polarization Does Not Imply Politicians’ Ideal Policies Are More Extreme Than Voters’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voter 1</th>
<th>Voter 2</th>
<th>Voter 3</th>
<th>Voter 4</th>
<th>Ideal Policy on 1 to 7 Scale</th>
<th>Democratic Legislator</th>
<th>Republican Legislator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ideology”</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remarkably little existing data speaks to the extent of voters’ support for moderate policies within policy areas; scholars typically infer that citizens have moderate views on issues because they have moderate scores on ideological scales. But, as we have shown, there is far more heterogeneity among “moderate” citizens than this inference requires (see also Baldassarri and Gelman 2009).
And, if we cannot impute citizens’ policy preferences from their ideological scores, issue-specific measures are necessary to understand how moderate or extreme citizens’ preferences are within issue areas.

Data

To explore the extent of politicians and citizens’ support for moderate policies, we asked respondents for their positions on 13 issues. These 13 issue questions were notably different from those on most surveys. Most issue questions on national surveys are like those we used in Studies 1 and 2: they are binary-choice and ask whether citizens prefer the typical Republican or Democratic position. It is difficult to know from such questions how many citizens would prefer more moderate or more extreme courses of actions than those offered by either party. For example, if a citizen opposes President Barack Obama’s health care plan, does this mean the citizen would prefer a policy somewhere between the Democratic and Republican positions, would be satisfied with the Republicans’ proposals, or perhaps desires a policy even more conservative than this? We cannot tell, and thus it is difficult to assess how well Democrats, Republicans, or alternatives would represent this person on this issue on the basis of their response to this binary-choice question alone.

In order to capture citizens’ issue preferences with greater nuance, our 13 issue questions thus provided seven response options ranging from very liberal statements to very conservative statements (see the appendix for all 7-point scales, as well as all binary-choice issue questions from Studies 1 and 2). To craft these scales, a team of research assistants catalogued the positions of all senators from the 113th Congress on these 13 issues. We measured elite positions in the interest of making scale points “3” and “5” correspond with mainstream Democratic and Republican elite positions. We then composed a point “4” occupying centrist ground for each of the 13 issues.

Coding of senators’ positions took place in three stages. First, we coded positions for roughly a quarter of the Senate according to an early version of the 7-point scales shown in the appendix. RAs (two per senator) independently researched the senators’ public statements (through press releases, website content, and local media coverage) on each of the 13 issues and recorded the scale point closest to each senator’s apparent position on each issue with available information. We then adjusted the scales so that they captured the major facets of elite discourse and debate on each issue. [9]
In Study 3, we rely on survey data using these scales to explore whether citizens would reliably prefer policies more moderate than either party, or whether they tend to support either party’s positions or even prefer policies that are more extreme. We find that a sizable proportion of individuals support policies less moderate than either party’s typical position.

**Study 3: The Centrist Public? The Prevalence of Immoderate Policy Preferences**

We first explore citizens’ demand for politicians with moderate policy positions by exploring demand for moderate policies via responses to the 7-point policy questions. These responses are shown in Figure 9.

We observe widespread support for the policies championed by the parties-in-government on many issues, as well as for policies less moderate; only a small share of the responses center around the moderate option. For example, the Democratic Party appears to represent citizens’ preferences on issues of social welfare and economic fairness: on Medicare, Social Security, and taxes, a majority of respondents placed themselves at scale points 2 or 3, implying that the party’s delegation to Congress represents citizens well on these issues. By contrast, the Republican Party appears to represent the views of at least a clear plurality of citizens on other issues, namely abortion and the policies regulating labor unions.

These patterns also suggest an intriguing pattern we will return to in a moment: on some issues both parties are too far to the left or too far to the right for most Americans’ tastes. Most citizens would be pleased if the range of policies that political elites debated moved to the left on issues like taxes, marijuana, Social Security, and Medicare, while on immigration and abortion citizens tend to think the entire range of elite policy debate is too far to the left. This pattern hints at a different...
disconnect than existing literature suggests: rather than the Democratic party reliably being to the left of most voters and the Republican party to the right of most voters, sometimes both parties’ positions are to the left or right of a substantial number of Americans’.

Stability of Immoderate Positions

Should we believe citizens’ claims that they have these immoderate views on many issues? There is no doubt some measurement error in citizens’ responses to policy questions; but is there enough that we should disregard their answers to these questions entirely? The panel data we collected allows us to explore whether these views reflect mistaken measurement, as we can examine whether citizens take the same position again two months later. At the end of Wave 2, we asked respondents a random subset of the 7-point policy questions from Wave 1. Reassuringly, we find that
these preferences on individual issues are relatively stable over time. As Figure 10 shows, citizens who express views outside the elite mainstream on an issue also tend to do so again two months later. Within issues, respondents are far more likely to select their Wave 1 response as their preference than any other option in Wave 2, and deviations tend to be proximate to that prior response. Further, immoderate opinions are at least as stable as more moderate opinions, if not more so. We thus find it difficult to chalk immoderate attitudes up to measurement error. (Study 4 considers this possibility in more detail.)

Figure 10: Intertemporal Stability Within Issues

Moreover, as Figure 11 shows, the correlations between Wave 1 and Wave 2 responses are considerably stronger within issue domains than across issue domains. If citizens merely answer survey questions by attempting to apply their overall ideology, we should not see this pattern. Instead, we find evidence that these policy preferences are both genuine and unique to their issue domains, and thus not mere reflections of citizens’ ideologies; there are clearly attitudes respondents rely on specific to each issue.

In summary, Study 3 suggests that characterizing citizens as moderate overstates the mass
Figure 11: Intertemporal Stability Within Issues but not Across Issues

Notes: Each subgraph depicts responses on a first issue during the first survey wave on the x-axis and responses on a second issue a month later on the y-axis. Raw data is plotted with jitter given the categorical nature of the variables. Red lines depict the loess smoothed relationship between the responses. Polychoric correlations are shown above each graph. Issue names for the x- and y-axes of each graph are shown, respectively, along the top and left of the figure.
public’s desire for representatives with moderate issue positions. Citizens who appear moderate overall when their issue positions are boiled down into an ideological index often espouse positions on many individual issues that are consistent with typical party positions or even less moderate (e.g., [Broockman 2015]). These positions are also relatively stable over time.

**Study 4: A Revealed Preference for a Mix of Immoderate Policies**

“The definition of alternatives is the supreme instrument of power.” – Schattschneider (1960)

Our studies so far suggest an alternative to the standard view of the “disconnect” in American politics. Figure 12 summarizes the traditional view of this disconnect and this alternative. In the traditional view, the parties misrepresent citizens because they reliably take positions that are too polarized across issues and too extreme on issues. However, Figure 9 implied a different disconnect, one between the range of policy options that characterize elite conflict and the range of policy options popular among citizens: on some issues both parties are too far to the left or too far to the right for most Americans’ tastes. Moreover, this revised view sees little role for ideological representation, as citizens themselves do not reliably line up in the same order across all issue areas and cannot be summarized in an ideological manner.

Our last study, Study 4, directly pits the traditional view against our revised view. In this study, we give voters a choice between two candidates, one who represents our view of voters’ ideals, and one who represents the traditional view of voters’ ideal.

We designed these candidates as follows. First, we designed our “alternative” candidate to be as different from the traditional view as possible. Our candidate is a tailored politician taking the three least moderate positions each voter previously reported on the 7-point items in Wave 1. This politician is immoderate, albeit in an idiosyncratic way consistent with the respondent. Under the view that citizens do not have immoderate views, these are the survey responses that the traditional view would suggest are the likeliest to represent “mistakes.” The other politician in these matchup,
Figure 12: The Traditional “Disconnect” Versus a Revised “Disconnect”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1</th>
<th>Traditional &quot;Disconnect&quot;</th>
<th>Revised &quot;Disconnect&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D — A — B — C — R</td>
<td>D — A — R — B — C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 2</td>
<td>D — A — B — C — R</td>
<td>B — A — D — C — R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 3</td>
<td>D — A — B — C — R</td>
<td>C — D — R — A — B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 4</td>
<td>D — A — B — C — R</td>
<td>B — C — A — D — R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Politicians shown as ‘D’ and ‘R,’ and voters shown as the remaining letters.

representing the traditional view of what most citizens would broadly like, consistently takes the centrist (“4”) option on those same issues, and thus is moderate on issues and ideologically.

Table 7 shows an example. If a citizen gave the series of issue positions shown in Table 7a, she would be shown the candidate match-up in Table 7b. (Figure 13 shows how this match-up appeared to respondents.)

There are at least two reasons why, when presented with a match-up like this, citizens might tend to choose the consistently moderate politician. First, consistent with the ideological perspective, citizens might recognize that a consistent moderate is likeliest to embody a moderate ideology. Second, if the ostensibly immoderate issue stances citizens claimed to posses in the first wave were simply artifacts of measurement error, then we have selected the positions for the immoderate candidate that are, by virtue of being the most immoderate stances each citizens took, the most likely to reflect error. Under the measurement error view that describes citizens as moderate despite their prior answers, we are thus presenting citizens with a clean slate in which they can choose to pick their erroneous responses again or, potentially, recognize the moderate options that better reflect
Table 7: Example: Study 4 stimulus

(a) Example Wave 1 Issue Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Issue 7</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Issue 8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Issue 9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Issue 10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Issue 11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Issue 12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Example Wave 2 Match-Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate 1</th>
<th>Candidate 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue 1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Stimulus Shown to Respondents in Study 4

Now, imagine choosing between these two candidates for US Congress described below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate A</th>
<th>Candidate B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Social security benefits should be tied to the Chained Consumer Price Index, meaning that benefits would rise slower with time than they currently do.</td>
<td>• Social security benefits should be increased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Immigration of highly skilled individuals should greatly increase, and immigration among those without such skills should be limited in time and/or magnitude, e.g., through a guest worker program.</td>
<td>• Further immigration to the United States should be banned until the border is fully secured, and all illegal immigrants currently in the US should be deported immediately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintain current levels of federal spending and federal income taxes on the rich, middle class, and poor.</td>
<td>• Move to a completely flat income tax system where all individuals pay the same percentage of their income in taxes, accomplished by decreasing government services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please take a moment to review the candidates’ positions and think about the degree to which each candidate reflects your views.

If you had to choose, which candidate would you vote for?

- [ ] Candidate A
- [ ] Candidate B
their views.

The results of this study are the most decisive yet. When presented with a choice between a politician who espouses their own least moderate positions and a politician who is centrist on those same issues, 74.6% of respondents ($n = 513$) select the politician who mirrors their previously reported immoderate issue views ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI: [68.6%, 80.7%]).

This result is consistent with our suggestion that citizens do not reliably clamor for moderates on every issue. Rather, consistent with findings from the previous studies, citizens appear to desire politicians who represent their own unique bundle of genuinely held positions, including many that are not moderate. The discussion takes up the broader implications of this finding.

(OA subsection A presents an additional study showing that, when faced with a politician with moderate positions or positions taken by the two parties, only a minority of voters select the consistent moderate.)

Discussion: A New Perspective on the Representational “Disconnection”

The essence of polarization is the lack of elected officials who have a mix of liberal and conservative positions. Most voters do, and a popular perspective laments this contrast as a clear failure of representation (e.g., Bafumi and Herron, 2010; Fiorina and Abrams, 2009). This paper raised new questions about two common forms of this lament.

First, according to a common perspective, this contrast implies that the distribution of polarized politicians’ ideological positions fails to mirror the public’s generally moderate ideological positions. Some empirical work finds that citizens tend to prefer moderate candidates in elections (e.g., Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan, 2002; Hall, 2015), but this work is by no means alone (e.g., Adams et al., 2013; Hopkins, 2014; Stone and Simas, 2010). For example, Hopkins (2014) finds that “moderates are in fact less electorally secure than their more ideologically extreme congressional colleagues, and their rate of reelection has declined over time.”

The ideological implications of the “immoderate” politician appears not to influence respondents’ choices; we find no difference in respondents’ willingness to support the extreme politician across the extremity of this politician. See OA subsection D.1.
preferences in a way that the public would like to see resolved. However, we found that the public appears largely indifferent to ideological representation and does not seem to have a strong desire for ideologically moderate politicians per se. Citizens do appear moderate on ideological scales that attempt to boil down their preferences on many issues into a single score, yet do not seem to place any premium on whether politicians appear this way as well. Specifically, in Study 1 we found that citizens tend to prefer politicians who represent their distinct issue positions rather than their ideological predispositions. In Study 2 we found that this pattern holds even when we encourage citizens to think ideologically in a number of ways—including directly showing citizens politicians’ ideological locations. These studies suggest that increasing politicians’ congruence with citizens’ implied ideological orientations will do little to improve representation in citizens’ eyes in and of itself. Rather, citizens appear to evaluate representation on the basis of individual issues.

It is on individual issues where a second group of scholars see elite polarization as implying a disconnect between extreme politicians and moderate voters (Ellis and Stimson 2012; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005; Fiorina and Abrams 2009). However, surprisingly little data has evaluated the extent of citizens’ support for more moderate policies within areas, rather than assuming that these positions can be inferred from citizens’ ideologies. In Study 3, we found that citizens’ opinions on the issues do not seem reliably more moderate than the parties. Study 4 also indicated that citizens’ demand for politicians who represent these immoderate issue views appears greater than their desire for politicians with centrist positions.

Our findings do not imply the absence of a representational disconnect but rather prompt us to revisit its nature, pointing towards two additional disconnects previous literature does not fully acknowledge.

First, because each citizen prefers a different mix of policies and wants politicians to represent their own personal mix, not just a mix, there is no one mix a politician could adopt that would broadly satisfy all citizens. This suggests inherent difficulties in achieving the robust collective
representation American political thought has long valued. John Adams hoped American legislators would look like “in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large.” If nearly all Americans wanted politicians to take a clear set of moderate positions on issues or to position themselves as moderates in an ideological sense, this ideal would be relatively straightforward to achieve. But we have suggested a different portrait of the “disconnect” between elites and citizens in American politics than scholars and observers typically paint. Contrary to the conventional wisdom rooted in the ideological perspective, most citizens do not seem to wish the Senate were composed of 100 Olympia Snowes and Max Baucuses, the noted Senate moderates. But this does not mean that Americans are satisfied with the politicians who represent them either. Unfortunately, because each citizen’s pattern of views across issues appears unique, each citizen is likely to be “disconnected” from the positions their representatives take in his or her own way, a situation which the election of more moderates—or more of any other one particular kind of politician—could not easily resolve (Plott 1967).

Our studies also point towards a second, aggregate disconnect between politicians and voters on issues that politicians could resolve. However, it is not the straightforward portrait of the disconnect that places Democratic politicians to the far left of the public and Republicans to the far right of the public on all issues. Instead, many citizens support policies that seem to fall outside of the range of policy options considered in elite discourse. However, despite outside-the-mainstream positions comprising modal preferences on some issues—such as the legalization of cannabis or the implementation of more draconian immigration policies—these opinions are often characterized as illegitimate and unworthy of representation, at least at the national level. The normative implications of such a disconnect lie beyond our aims here, but the frustrations of citizens who ardently espouse positions outside of elite debate are easily appreciated. And, importantly, they present a stark contrast to the traditional notion of the disconnect engendered by traditional interpretations of polarization: that citizens yearn for politicians taking moderate positions on every issue.
There are certainly many other political ills that polarization may cause or exacerbate. Decreasing agreement between parties may create gridlock (Krehbiel 1998) and incentives to tarnish the other party’s reputation may make it even more difficult for new laws to be passed (Lee 2009). Our data says little about these potential consequences. However, it does underscore that the implications of polarization for representation are not always as obvious as they may seem. The precise ways in which polarization degrades representation—not only its antecedents—appear to deserve more careful scrutiny than many realize.
References


Appendix

Issue Questions and Policy Scales

Binary-Choice Issue Questions

We asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the following items in Wave 1. (We did this across many screens, with different tasks in between screens, to prevent respondent fatigue.) In Wave 2, we presented either these statements (or crafted versions, for purposes of making sense as politician statements) or their negations to make the politician profiles.

- I support free trade and oppose special taxes on the import of non-American-made goods.
- There should be strong restrictions on the purchase and possession of guns.
- Implement a universal healthcare program to guarantee coverage to all Americans, regardless of income.
- Laws covering the sale of firearms should be made less strict than they are.
- The US should immediately act to destroy Iran’s nuclear weapons development facilities.
- Grant legal status to all illegal immigrants who have held jobs and paid taxes for at least 3 years, and not been convicted of any felony crimes.
- Increase taxes for those making over $250,000 per year.
- Regulate greenhouse gas emissions by instituting a carbon tax or cap and trade system.
- Allow doctors to prescribe marijuana to patients.
- Require minors to obtain parental consent to receive an abortion.
- The government should provide parents with vouchers to send their children to any school they choose, be it private, public, or religious.
- Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry.
- Legalize the purchase and possession of small amounts of marijuana.
- The US should contribute more funding and troops to UN peacekeeping missions.
- The government should not provide any funding to the arts.
- Allow illegal immigrants brought to the US as children to apply for citizenship.
- Give preference to racial minorities in employment and college admissions in order to correct for past discrimination.
• Let employers and insurers refuse to cover birth control and other health services that violate their religious beliefs.

• Allow more offshore oil drilling.

• By law, abortion should never be permitted.

• I support the death penalty in my state.

• Government spending can stimulate economic growth.

• The federal government should subsidize student loans for low income students.

• The minimum wage employers must pay their workers should be increased.

• The federal government should try to reduce the income differences between rich and poor Americans.

• This country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world.

• The federal government should do more about protecting the environment and natural resources.

7-Point Policy Scales

We presented respondents with these scales in Wave 1. Respondents randomly saw the scales ordered either as shown below (1 is most liberal, 7 is most conservative) or in the reverse order to minimize order effects while preserving ordinal scale.

• Marijuana

1. The federal government should legalize marijuana for all uses.

2. The federal government should allow states to individually determine whether to legalize marijuana for both medical and recreational uses.

3. The federal government should allow states to individually determine whether to legalize marijuana for medical uses, but prohibit recreational use of marijuana.

4. The federal government should keep marijuana illegal for all purposes, but decriminalize its use (decrease the severity of punishments).

5. The federal government should keep marijuana illegal for all purposes and/or keep punishments at their current levels.

6. The federal government should impose harsher penalties on those who produce, use or distribute marijuana with measures including lengthy prison terms and mandatory minimum sentences.
7. The federal government should put people in jail for life if they are convicted of using or distributing marijuana.

• Energy/Environment

1. The government should institute a carbon tax or cap and trade system that would significantly decrease US carbon emissions over the next several decades.

2. The government should institute a carbon tax or cap and trade system that would keep US carbon emissions at or just below their current levels.

3. The government should discourage the use of energy sources that contribute most heavily to global warming (e.g., coal) and subsidize the use and development of solar, wind, and nuclear energy. However, there should be no general cap on or market for carbon emissions overall.

4. The government should enact regulations encouraging energy efficiency and subsidize the use and development of solar, wind, and nuclear energy.

5. The government should encourage energy efficiency but not subsidize the development of ‘green’ energy.

6. The government should allow for further oil drilling offshore and/or on federal lands, prioritizing American energy independence and low prices over environmental concerns.

7. The government should both allow AND subsidize increased domestic production of fossil fuels (i.e., coal, oil, and gas).

• Social Security

1. The government should increase social security benefits AND provide new, direct non-cash benefits to seniors such as food aid and in-home care.

2. Social security benefits should be increased.

3. Social security benefits should remain at their current levels.

4. Social security benefits should be tied to the Chained Consumer Price Index, meaning that benefits would rise slower with time than they currently do.

5. Federal spending on social security should decrease, either by raising the retirement age or decreasing cash benefits.

6. Social security should be mostly or wholly privatized, allowing taxpayers to invest their social security savings as they see fit.

7. Social security should be abolished entirely or made semi-voluntary, with the government potentially providing incentives for retirement saving but not managing individuals’ retirement funds.

• Gun Control
1. Sales of firearms of any kind should be completely banned in the United States.

2. Weapons with high-capacity magazines of all kinds should be banned in addition to fully automatic weapons, and those wishing to buy other kinds of guns should always have to pass a background check. Ammunition should be heavily regulated, with certain types (e.g., armor-piercing bullets) banned outright. Additionally, it should be illegal for civilians to carry concealed guns in public.

3. Weapons with high-capacity magazines of all kinds should be banned in addition to fully automatic weapons, and those wishing to buy other kinds of guns should always have to pass a background check. Ammunition should also be heavily regulated, with certain types (e.g., armor-piercing bullets) banned outright.

4. Fully automatic guns like high-powered machine guns should be extremely difficult or illegal for civilians to purchase. Those wishing to buy other kinds of guns should always have to pass a background check, except when buying guns from friends and family.

5. Fully automatic guns like high-powered machine guns should be extremely difficult for civilians to purchase. Other firearms should be free to be bought and sold at gun shows and in other private transactions without restrictions.

6. All Americans should be allowed to buy any kind of gun they want, including automatic guns. No background checks or licenses should be required.

7. Certain Americans who are not in law enforcement (e.g., teachers and school staff) should be REQUIRED to own a gun to protect public safety.

• Health Care

1. The United States should move to a system like Great Britain’s, where the government employs doctors instead of private companies and all Americans are entitled to visit government doctors in government hospitals free of charge.

2. The government should expand Medicare to cover all Americans, directly providing insurance coverage for all Americans free of charge.

3. The government should guarantee full private health insurance coverage to all Americans, regardless of their age or income.

4. The government should help pay for all health care for vulnerable populations like the elderly, children, and those with low incomes. Other Americans should only receive assistance in paying for catastrophic illnesses.

5. The government should help pay for some health coverage for vulnerable populations like the elderly and those with very low incomes, including prescription drugs. However, other individuals should not receive government assistance. The government should primarily pursue market reforms (e.g., tort reform, increasing tax deductions, allowing citizens to buy across state lines) to make insurance more affordable.
6. The government should only help pay for emergency medical care among the elderly and those with very low incomes. Other individuals and any routine care should not be covered. Instead, the government should pursue market reforms to make insurance more affordable.

7. The government should spend no money on health care for individuals. Those who cannot afford health care should turn to their families and private charity for help.

• Immigration

1. The United States should have open borders and allow further immigration on an unlimited basis.

2. Legal immigration to the United States should greatly increase among all immigrant groups, regardless of their skills. Immigrants already in the United States should be put on the path to citizenship.

3. Immigration of highly skilled individuals should greatly increase. Immigration by those without such skills should continue at its current pace, although this immigration should be legalized.

4. Immigration of highly skilled individuals should greatly increase, and immigration among those without such skills should be limited in time and/or magnitude, e.g., through a guest worker program.

5. The United States should admit more highly skilled immigrants and secure the border with increased physical barriers to stem the flow of other immigrants.

6. Only a small number of highly skilled immigrants should be allowed into the United States until the border is fully secured, and all illegal immigrants currently in the US should be deported.

7. Further immigration to the United States should be banned until the border is fully secured, and all illegal immigrants currently in the US should be deported immediately.

• Federal Taxes

1. Establish a maximum annual income, with all income over $1,000,000 per year taxed at a rate of 100%. Decrease federal taxes on the poor and provide more services benefiting the middle class and poor.

2. Increase federal income taxes on those making over $250,000 per year to pre-1990s levels (over 5% above current rates). Use the savings to significantly lower taxes and provide more services to those making less and to invest in infrastructure projects.

3. Increase federal income taxes on those making over $250,000 per year to 1990s rates (5% above current rates). Use the savings to lower taxes and provide more services to those making less while also paying down the national debt.

4. Maintain current levels of federal spending and federal income taxes on the rich, middle class, and poor.
5. Decrease all individuals’ income tax rates, especially high earners who pay the most in taxes now, accomplished by decreasing government services.

6. Move to a completely flat income tax system where all individuals pay the same percentage of their income in taxes, accomplished by decreasing government services.

7. Move to a flat consumption tax where all individuals pay the same percentage of their purchases in taxes, banning the income tax, even if this means the poor pay more in taxes than the rich. Significantly decrease government services in the process.

- Abortion

1. Abortions should always be legal, and the government should pay for all abortions.

2. Abortions should always be legal, and the government should help women pay for abortions when they cannot afford them.

3. Abortions should be legal in the first two trimesters at least, and the government should require private insurers to cover abortions.

4. Abortions should be legal in the first two trimesters, though the government should not play any role in financially supporting abortions.

5. Abortion should only be legal if the life of the mother is in danger or in cases of rape and incest.

6. Abortion should only be legal if the life of the mother is in danger.

7. Abortion should always be illegal.

- Medicare

1. Replace Medicare with government-run hospitals and clinics for the elderly that directly employ doctors, nurses, and surgeons.

2. Increase spending on Medicare, allowing the program to provide even more benefits than it does today, although retain its current structure.

3. Maintain the current annual growth in Medicare spending and all other aspects of the program in their current form.

4. Reduce the rate of growth in Medicare funding over time, though continue to leave the program as structured.

5. Reduce the rate of growth in Medicare funding over time and transition towards a voucher system that helps seniors to buy private insurance instead of directly covering health costs.

6. Significantly reduce funding for Medicare so that it helps seniors only with catastrophic health costs like expensive surgeries, leaving other costs to be paid for by their savings, their families, and private charities.

7. The government should not assist the elderly in paying for any health expenses.
• Gay Rights

1. Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry and adopt children; the government should prosecute companies for firing individuals because they are lesbian or gay; the government should require corporations to offer the same benefits to partners of gay and lesbian employees as they do to straight employees’ partners; and, government should require that all schools teach children about gay and lesbian relationships.

2. Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry and adopt children; the government should prosecute companies for firing individuals because they are lesbian or gay; and, the government should require corporations to offer the same benefits to partners of gay and lesbian employees as they do to straight employees’ partners.

3. Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry and adopt children; and, the government should prosecute companies for firing individuals because they are lesbian or gay.

4. Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry each other and adopt children.

5. Same-sex marriage should not be legal, although the government should not regulate homosexual conduct or ban gays and lesbians from adopting children.

6. Gay sex should be permitted, but same-sex marriage should be illegal and known gays and lesbians should not be allowed to adopt children.

7. Gay sex should be illegal and punishable by imprisonment, similar to the penalties for committing incest and bestiality.

• Unions

1. The government should periodically administer union elections in all workplaces where a union has not been formed.

2. The government should automatically recognize unions in instances when over 50% of a workplace’s employees indicate interest in forming a union.

3. Workers should be allowed to attempt to form unions that charge mandatory dues, by secret ballot. If a companys workers form a union, new employees may be compelled to join.

4. Workers should be allowed to attempt to form unions with voluntary dues and membership. Unions should only be formed through secret ballots. Corporations should not be allowed to fire workers for starting them.

5. Workers should be allowed to attempt to form unions with voluntary dues and membership. Unions should only be formed through secret ballots, and unionized workplaces must hold recertification elections regularly. Corporations should not be allowed to fire workers for starting them.

6. Workers should be allowed to attempt to form unions with voluntary dues, but corporations should have the right to fire workers for attempting to start such unions and/or the power of the National Labor Relations Board to issue directives to unionized companies should be significantly curtailed.
7. Workers should not be allowed to form unions, just as corporations are not allowed to form cartels.

• Birth Control

1. The government should help pay for birth control pills for all women AND other forms of contraceptives for women who cannot afford them.

2. The sale of birth control pills should be allowed. Pharmacists should be required to sell them and the government should cover their cost.

3. The sale of birth control pills should be allowed. Pharmacists should be required to sell them and insurance companies should be forced to cover their cost.

4. The sale of birth control pills should be allowed and pharmacists should not be allowed to refuse selling birth control pills. However, employers and insurance companies may decline to cover birth control.

5. The sale of birth control pills should be allowed to people of all ages. However, insurance companies, pharmacists, and employers should be allowed to refuse selling or covering birth control.

6. The sale of birth control pills should be allowed, but only to women over 18 years of age. Insurance companies, pharmacists, and employers should be allowed to refuse selling or covering birth control.

7. Birth control pills should be banned.

• Public Funding for Private Education

1. All children should attend public schools. Private schools perpetuate economic inequality and should be banned.

2. Private schools should be legal but the government should play no role in funding private education – for example, private schools should not be exempt from taxes.

3. Private schools should be legal and retain tax exempt status, but government should play no active role in funding private education.

4. The government should create private school voucher programs in school districts where regular public schools are failing so all families in such areas can send their children to a private school if they wish.

5. The government should create a voucher program in all school districts, paying private school tuition for families so that they always have the choice to send their children to private schools.

6. The education system should be fully privatized, although the government should still provide support for private school tuition.

7. The education system should be fully privatized, with government playing no role in paying for families’ education expenses. However, private school tuition should be tax deductible.
Online Appendix

Study OA1: Would Citizens Prefer Moderates to Contemporary Party Politicians?

We have argued that the “disconnect” between citizens and representatives does not reflect a wholesale failure of politicians to take moderate positions on issues, as citizens want to see their issue views represented and appear to have many immoderate views on issues. Study 3A was consistent with this notion, as citizens explicitly register such preferences. Here we test another implication of our perspective—that even if candidates with moderate positions were on offer in American politics, most voters would still prefer their copartisan representatives.

In Study OA1, we showed respondents three hypothetical candidates for US House, a “pure Republican,” a “pure moderate,” and a “pure Democrat.” These candidates took positions on three distinct issues. We randomly selected which issues these were, but not the positions themselves: the “pure Democratic” politician consistently took the Democratic party-line position on all issues, the “3” statement on the corresponding 7-point policy scale. The “pure Republican” politician consistently took the Republican party-line position on all issues, or the “5” statement. Finally, the “pure moderate” politician consistently took the centrist position between the two parties, or the “4” on statement. To avoid party effects, we labeled all three candidates with the respondent’s self-professed party label from the previous wave. Table 8 shows an example of how these positions were assigned, and Figure 14 shows how the choice appeared to respondents.

Table 8: Example Matchup Shown to Respondents in Study OA1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Candidate 1</th>
<th>Candidate 2</th>
<th>Candidate 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue 3</td>
<td>Same as Respondent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Same as Respondent</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Same as Respondent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would citizens reliably prefer politicians who take moderate positions over politicians who take the positions contemporary Democrats and Republicans take? These results of Study OA1 imply that the public’s demand for centrists is weaker than many suggest. Just 32.5% of all respondents (n = 513) voted for the consistently centrist candidate. By contrast, the candidate who consistently took Democratic party-line positions won the most votes with 40.3%. The consistently Republican party-line candidate took 27.2%. (As expected, respondents tended to gravitate towards politicians with positions similar to their parties: a majority (50.7%) of Democratic and Democratic-leaning respondents selected the consistently liberal candidate, and a plurality (38.2%) of Republican and Republican-leaning respondents selected the consistently conservative candidate.)

The results of Studies 3 and OA1 challenge the notion that an overwhelming majority of Americans would favor a representative with moderate positions over one with the issue positions typically taken by their party. To be clear, these results are consistent with the view that moderate politicians may perform better in elections under certain electoral rules. Some Americans also

\[12\] We randomly assigned non-leaning independents to see either all Democrats or all Republicans.
Figure 14: Study OA1 as Shown to Respondents

Now, imagine choosing between these three candidates for US Congress described below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Affiliation</th>
<th>Candidate A</th>
<th>Candidate B</th>
<th>Candidate C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1: Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate C</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 2: Abortion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate C</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 3: Unions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate C</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please take a few moments to review the candidates’ positions and think about the degree to which each candidate reflects your views.

If you had to choose, which candidate would you vote for?

- [ ] Candidate A
- [ ] Candidate B
- [ ] Candidate C

seem to prefer the positions moderate politicians take on the whole. But, the demand for representatives with moderate positions on issues is nowhere near a majority preference, much less universal.

.1 Introduction and Study 1

.1.1 Sample Demographics

Table SI-1 compares the demographics of the SSI sample used in this study to a probability sample of U.S. citizens (the 2012 American National Election Study [ANES]) as well as to Census data.
Figure 15: Citizens do not Overwhelmingly Choose the Centrist Candidate in Study OA1

Democrats and Democratic-Leaners

Republicans and Republican-Leaners

Independents

Full Sample

95% confidence intervals
Table 9: Raw and Unweighted SSI Sample Compared to ANES and Census Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White/Caucasian</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/PI</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than HS degree</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school/GED</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college/2-year degree</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year college degree</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/professional degree</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Identification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic (inc. leaners)</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican (inc. leaners)</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No party preference/Other</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal (inc. leaners)</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative (inc. leaners)</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
.2 Study 2

.2.1 Study 2A: No Order Effects for Vote Choice and Spatial Perception Items

In Study 2A we find that participants’ ideological perceptions of the hypothetical politicians correlate positively and significantly with the actual estimated ideal points for these hypothetical politicians. We further find that this trend holds when we fold both measures, implying that citizens do have some sense of how positions fit together in terms of elite ideology. However, we asked some participants for their ideological perceptions of these politicians before they voted while we asked others to do so after. Here, we show that there are no significant differences in the groups’ predictive abilities based on whether they voted first or reported perceptions first.

In particular, if there was an order effect, we would expect to see a significant coefficient associated with the interaction between question order and estimated ideal point when we regress ideological perceptions on these two variables plus their interaction. As the table below shows, we fail to observe such a coefficient, either in the analysis of perceived ideology or implied perceived extremity (folded perceptions).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DV: Perceived Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated politician ideology</td>
<td>0.92***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order: Vote First</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order x Estimated Ideology</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SER</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent-politician Pairs</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors, clustered at the respondent level, reported in parentheses. * = p < 0.10, ** = p < 0.05, *** = p < 0.01.

Note that the apparent positive correlation between perceived extremity and estimated extremity falls out of conventional ranges of statistical significance, but also that this is because the standard error rises (compared to Table 3 in the paper) because we are effectively cutting the data in half by estimating the correlation separately for the two groups (those who voted first and those who reported perceptions first). The strength of the correlation is largely unchanged.
.2.2 Study 2A: Ideological Perceptions of “Spatially Correct” and “Spatially Incorrect” politicians

To further demonstrate that the apparent correlation between respondents’ ideological perceptions of the hypothetical politicians and those politicians’ estimated ideal points is robust, we show that the correlation appears for both “spatially correct” and “spatially incorrect” politicians separately.

Table 11: Can Citizens Infer Ideology from Issue Positions? (“Spatially Correct” Politicians Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DV: Perceived Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated politician ideology</td>
<td>0.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SER</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. * = $p < 0.10$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$.

Table 12: Can Citizens Infer Ideology from Issue Positions? (“Spatially Incorrect” Politicians Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DV: Perceived Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated politician ideology</td>
<td>0.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.83***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SER</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. * = $p < 0.10$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$. 
.3 Study 3

.3.1 Study 3: Distribution of Opinion Across All 7-Point Policy Scales

See the appendix in the paper for the corresponding policy positions.

**Table 13:** Opinion is Dispersed and Not Always Moderate in Central Tendency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy/Environment</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Control</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>17.22%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>26.22%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Rights</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraception</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
.4 Study 4

.4.1 Study 4A: Extremity of the Extreme Politician Fails to Affect Choices

In Study 4A, we asked respondents to choose between two tailored politicians: one who took the four most immoderate positions they expressed in Wave 1, and one who took the moderate positions on those issues. As the figure below shows, the ideological implications of the “immoderate” politician appears not to influence respondents’ choices. Since just 6.8% of respondents took four or more outside-the-mainstream positions and roughly 30% took none at all, we observe variation in the overall extremity of the “extreme” politician. However, we find no difference in respondents’ willingness to support the extreme politician across the extremity of this politician.

Figure 16: Choice of Extreme Politician, by Extremity of Extreme Politician