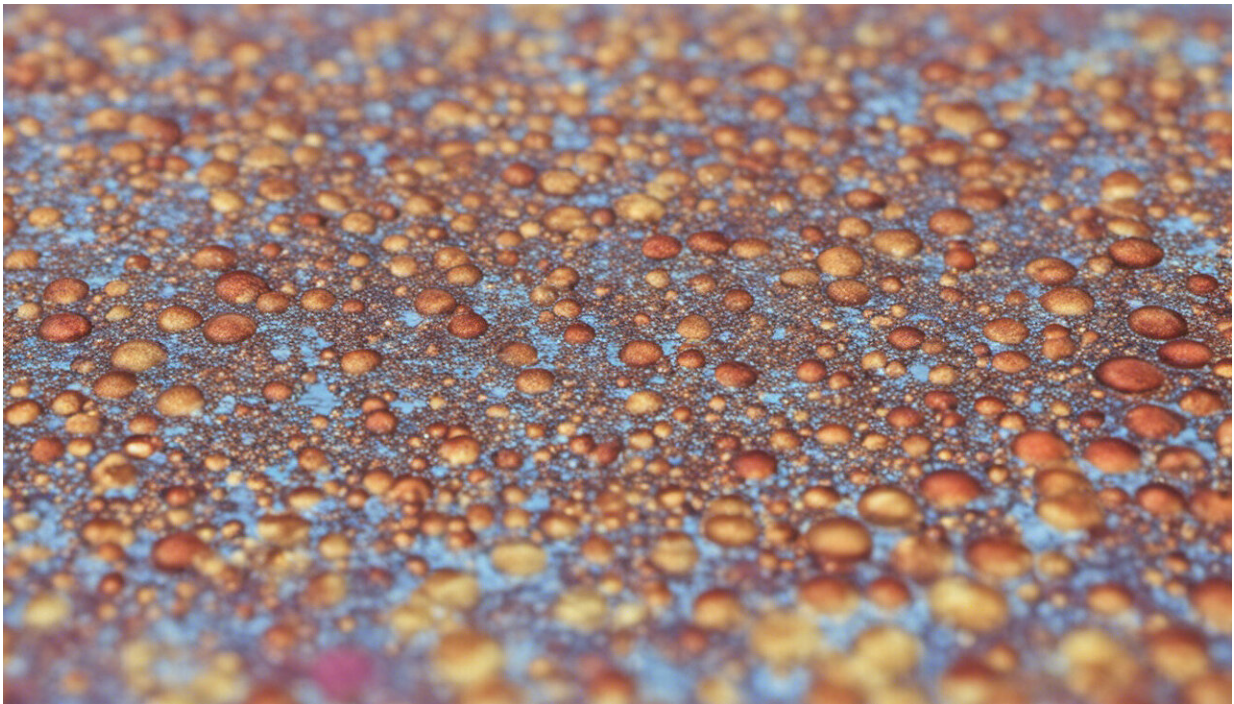


People don't automatically follow political party cues on every issue, study finds

October 18 2018, by George Diepenbrock



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

It's easy to find videos on YouTube exposing people's seemingly unwavering support for the actions of their political party. A 2016 [video](#) on Jimmy Kimmel's show includes Hillary Clinton supporters agreeing with her purported quotes about policies, though the actual quotes were taken from Donald Trump.

"These examples suggest that political parties and elected officials have considerable latitude to sway the attitudes of the masses," said Kevin Mullinix, a University of Kansas assistant professor of political science.

Past research, however, may have overstated the generality of this type of partisan behavior, according to a new study published recently in *American Politics Research* by Mullinix and co-author Dennis Chong of the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

"Our study suggests that people don't automatically follow their party on every issue," Mullinix said. "Some public policies are complex—for example, a proposal that some states have debated is to simultaneously cut income taxes while raising sales taxes. People have a difficult time discerning whether such a proposal is conservative or liberal."

The researchers found that on such ambiguous issues people do indeed look to their preferred political party for guidance.

"They find the issue confusing so they look to a trusted source," Mullinix said. "On these issues, we find that people will often toe the party line even when their party deviates from traditional party positions. If, for example, Democratic officials endorse a conservative [policy](#) position, their partisan base may nonetheless follow."

However, there are other policies that are more easily identified along liberal or conservative lines—such as those pertaining to abortion or [unemployment benefits](#)—on which people don't need as much guidance from political parties to decide where they stand.

In their study, the researchers presented survey respondents with liberal and conservative policy alternatives pertaining to taxes, preschool funding and unemployment benefits to test under what conditions respondents would favor policies endorsed by their party.

Respondents had the greatest difficulty identifying the ideology of competing sides of the tax policy, while changing unemployment benefits was viewed as the most ideologically transparent. Consequently, party cues had a stronger influence on the former policy than on the latter.

An important finding in the study is that the latitude enjoyed by parties to adopt a range of positions on a policy and still retain the support of their followers diminished as more policy information was provided to respondents.

"When we shine a light on a policy's consequences, especially the values that are furthered by the policy and the groups that benefit from it, people pay as much or more attention to policy details as they do to party cues," Mullinix said.

The study could have implications for how the media covers policy debates, for example, he said, because journalists could increase democratic accountability by focusing more on the potential effects of policy choices instead of simply pointing to partisan differences on the issues.

"Our results lead me to be a little more optimistic about the mass public in a democracy," Mullinix said. "They are not just blindly following politicians and their [political parties](#). Providing certain types of policy information will increase the likelihood that voters will hold politicians responsible for their actions."

More information: Dennis Chong et al. Information and Issue Constraints on Party Cues, *American Politics Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/1532673X18803887](https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18803887)

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: People don't automatically follow political party cues on every issue, study finds (2018, October 18) retrieved 27 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-10-people-dont-automatically-political-party.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.