

## Should Campaigns Respond to Electability Arguments?

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### *Abstract:*

Should candidates respond when they are described as unelectable? Though strategic arguments about the viability and electability of candidates were commonplace in the 2016 election, we know little about whether campaigns can effectively rebut these arguments. Assessments of a candidate's chances in a general election are often complicated by partisanship and candidate-specific factors, and it is difficult to disentangle viability from electability. Our studies are situated in an electoral context without partisan primaries, which complicates judgments by pitting partisan goals against ideological and electability objectives. In our experiments, a Democratic candidate is described as viable in the first round of voting but unelectable in the second round, and Democratic voters are encouraged to strategically vote for a more acceptable Republican to advance. Subjects were then randomly selected to see a press release from the Democratic candidate responding to that description by asserting their electability. We find that when respondents see a campaign respond to the strategic voting argument by asserting their electability, it significantly improves perceptions of that candidate's electability but does not change voters' preferences. Candidates should push back when their electability is challenged.

Before a primary election, voters are bombarded with arguments about candidates' relative standing in the polls and their electability in the general election. Primary voters may be encouraged to vote strategically by prioritizing electability over their personal preferences (Abramowitz 1989; Stone and Abramowitz 1983). Candidates and pundits often discuss strategic considerations about viability and electability, and many voters incorporate this information into their expectations and voting decisions (McKee and Hood 2013). Do voters engage in this sort of thinking, however, in elections without party primaries?

*Viability*, defined as voters' perceptions of a candidate's chances of advancing to the general election, and *electability*, defined as voters' perceptions of a candidate's chances to win the general election, are often in conflict (Abramowitz 1989). In party primaries, this conflict means that the candidate most popular with an extreme partisan base is competitive in a primary but less likely to win a general election, as in the cases of Nevada's Sharron Angle or Delaware's Christine O'Donnell in Republican Senate primaries in 2010. In elections without party primaries, the mix of candidates may lead voters to adjust their preference that an acceptable option proceeds to the general election (viability) with a chance to win (electability), even if that candidate is not from their party. In these situations, is there anything campaigns can do to overcome voters' inclinations to vote strategically?

In this article, we experimentally test the impact of candidate responses to negative claims regarding their electability. We expose subjects to an argument against a candidate's electability, and then randomly assign some subjects to see one candidate's rebuttal to that argument. We situate this experiment in an election without partisan primaries, in which voters consider viability and electability simultaneously while deciding between partisan representation and ideological acceptability of an eventual winner. This electoral context sets our study apart

from previous studies of strategic voting, which were largely situated in presidential primaries or involve independent candidates (McKee and Hood 2013). In two separate experiments, we find that candidates can mitigate losses by responding to arguments against their electability: voters who read a response from the campaign were significantly more likely to believe that candidate won the election. We also find no campaign response effect on co-partisans' preferences, indicating that strategic voting considerations may not be able to overcome the pull of partisanship towards "sincere voting" for their most preferred candidate, consistent with other findings (McKee and Hood 2013). Given that approximately one-eighth of Americans now live in states with elections without party primaries, it is important to understand the dynamics of viability and electability in these electoral systems.

### **Strategic Voting and Electability**

The motivations behind vote choice, and the decision to vote at all, are central to the study of political behavior and political psychology. The paradox of voting, described most prominently by Downs (1957) and Riker and Ordeshook (1968), posits that the costs of voting—such as finding one's polling place, acquiring information, and taking the time to cast a ballot (Brady and McNulty 2011)—will almost always exceed the expected return on the individual act of voting, since the chances of casting a deciding ballot are miniscule. Voters consider more than economic costs and benefits, however, and account for their own personal satisfaction (fulfilling civic duty, affirming partisanship, reinforcing political efficacy, etc.) in deciding whether and how to vote (Riker and Ordeshook 1968).

The equation explaining the individual vote decision from Riker and Ordeshook (1968),  $R = B * P - C + D$  (in which  $R$  = the rewards of the act of voting;  $B$  = the differential benefit of

one's preferred candidate winning;  $P$  = the probability that a person's vote will cause the benefit;  $C$  = the costs to the individual of the act of voting; and  $D$  = the personal satisfaction from voting, (described above), largely describes the voting decision in the context of  $C$  and  $D$ , the costs of voting and the personal utility gained. The values of these terms depend upon the available candidates, however, and the institutional structure of many elections encourages voters to decide between imperfect options when calculating their expected utility from the result (Abramowitz 1989).

Not all candidates have an equal chance of winning, and voters are often encouraged to weigh the preferences of the aggregate electorate against their preferences for a specific candidate. Information about the state of the race has the power either raise or lower voters' intention to cast a vote at all (Matsuzaka 1995). The "horse-race" focus of media coverage on polls, in addition to the recent turn towards probabilistic forecasting from websites such as *FiveThirtyEight*, can change the calculus of potential voters by altering their perception of the  $P$  term in the Riker and Ordeshook (1968) equation (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Delli Carpini 1984; Mutz 1998; Searles, Ginn, and Nickens 2016; Westwood, Messing, and Lelkes 2018).

In the context of primary (or first-round) elections, in which voters decide which candidates will advance to a general election, the weight applied to a candidate's chances of eventual victory can be even more consequential. Perceived electability, or the chance that a candidate will win in a general election, is a substantial concern for primary voters, often exceeding the influence of ideological proximity (Stone and Abramowitz 1983). Voters want to send a candidate from the primary into the general election who has a chance of winning, rather than "throwing their vote away" on a candidate who is less electable, since their calculations must account for general election performance (Abramowitz 1989). In Abramowitz' "expected

utility model” of primary voting, preferences are most accurately modeled as an interaction between candidate evaluations and electability: voters are unlikely to choose an extremely ideologically distant candidate, but are also unlikely to choose an unelectable one whose ideological preferences match theirs.

Electability is different from viability, which assesses the chances that a candidate will advance through a primary to the general (Bartels 1987). Viability, which can be increased through even small amounts of information such as name recognition (Kam and Zechmeister 2013), influences perceptions of electability since viable candidates are seen as more likely to advance to the general election. Viability is an effective heuristic for voters who are assessing how much effort they should expend while learning about an election, influencing information-seeking, evaluations of candidates, and vote choice (Kam and Utych 2014). Much of the scholarship on viability and electability is situated in the context of presidential primaries, where a large field of candidates is narrowed by early contests that indicate viability (Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, and Rohde 1992; Bartels 1985, 1987; Mutz 1997). Electability, however, is ultimately the more important influence on vote choice, particularly later in the primary season when voters are choosing between fewer candidates (Abramowitz 1989; Guarrant and Gurian 1996; Norrander 1986). In single-stage primaries, it stands to reason that electability would weigh more heavily on voters, who cannot rely upon information from earlier primary contests to inform their votes.

Electability is often portrayed as a consideration of voters, but rarely as a subject of contention between the candidates or other political elites. Candidates want to appear electable but may struggle against polling disparities or an assumed disadvantage in the general election. As such, a less-considered form of information may be available to voters in primaries:

candidates' own arguments for their electability or suitability for the general elections. Candidates should not simply be expected to accept judgments about their general election prospects, particularly given the demonstrated influence of elites' advocacy of strategic voting (Alvarez and Nagler 2000; Cox 1994; Duch and Palmer 2002; Merolla 2009).<sup>1</sup> To our knowledge, no study has tested whether candidates are better off responding to arguments against their electability or if they are better off ignoring them. In the case of negative campaigning from an opponent, counterattacks may help negate the initial argument or may be counterproductive (Freedman, Wood, and Lawton 1989). Most of the literature on the effectiveness of campaign response deals with negative campaigning, and in that context, it is generally considered better for candidates to respond to negative attacks (Craig and Hill 2011; Craig, Grayson, and Rippere 2010, 2014; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991).

We expect that the same logic will hold in the case of attacks on a candidate's electability. Though a candidate may be tempted to ignore the attack for fear of bringing attention to it, we expect that responding to electability arguments will help that candidate seem more electable and boost voters' confidence in their chances. In the language of Riker and Ordeshook (1968), campaign response should mitigate the perceived reduction in the B term (benefits from voting for a candidate) and give voters permission to fulfill the partisan goals quantified in the D term (personal and partisan satisfaction gained from the act of voting).

*H1. When a candidate responds to an argument against their electability, they will be seen as more electable than if they do not.*

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<sup>1</sup> We will note, as do McKee and Hood (2013, footnote 12), that the existence of strategic voting is not in dispute, and we do not seek to "prove" it here. We make two specific contributions in the American context: examining strategic voting in elections without partisan primaries, and whether or not campaigns can influence strategic voting perceptions by responding to them directly.

### **Party vs. Electability Without Party Primaries**

Most studies of viability and electability study partisan primaries in order to control for partisan identification, the most powerful influence on vote choice (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). Within a party, voters may prize electability over ideological closeness (Stone and Abramowitz 1989), but may not be willing to break with their party to do so in different electoral systems. Studying only partisan primaries makes it difficult to determine whether primary voters are trying to achieve partisan or ideological goals: in different electoral contexts, voters face competing considerations between party and ideology, enabling us to disentangle those motivations more effectively.

Some systems of primary voting force voters into strategic thinking that can conflict with their partisan preferences. One of these, in the state of Louisiana, provided the inspiration for this article: candidates from all parties compete together in the general election, and if any candidate reaches over 50 percent they are declared the winner. If no candidate reaches 50 percent, there is a runoff between the top two candidates. Other states, such as Washington and California, hold a so-called “jungle primary” with all parties and candidates, and the top two vote-getters (regardless of whether they exceed 50 percent) move on to the general election. Though the strategic imperatives are different in Louisiana and California’s electoral systems,<sup>2</sup> each forces

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<sup>2</sup> In Louisiana, if partisans believe their candidate has a chance to exceed 50 percent in the general election, they should vote for that candidate. If a party’s candidate is unlikely to reach 50 percent, the strategic considerations of voting for viable and “least-worst” alternatives may take over. In California and Washington, by contrast, viability may be more of a concern in the primary round, since there is guaranteed to be a general election. The 50 percent threshold is not mentioned in the experimental treatments in this study, so respondents are only presented with an election without partisan primaries. As such, for the purposes of this experiment, these systems are not distinguishable. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging the authors to distinguish between these systems.

voters to choose over a set of candidates from both parties and weigh viability and electability simultaneously.

More than one in eight Americans now vote in a system without party primaries in state-level elections. If a general election always features a Republican and a Democrat, as in traditional party primaries (the subject of most research on the dynamics of electability), choosing the most electable member of one's party makes sense. If a Republican-Democrat general election is not guaranteed, voters' considerations change. A viable candidate from one party may be unelectable in the general (or runoff) election, while a more moderate member of the opposite party might be more electable if paired against a more extreme member of the opposite party in the general election. In other words, the partisan goal of electing a member of one's own party may be in conflict with the ideological goal of electing the candidate closest to one's preferences.

An electoral context without party primaries allows us to test whether voters choose to prioritize their party or a combination of ideology and electability. In the 2015 Louisiana gubernatorial election, for example, State Representative John Bel Edwards was the only prominent Democrat, while Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne, former Lieutenant Governor Scott Angelle, and Senator David Vitter were all competing for the support of Republicans. Though reelected to the Senate in 2010, Vitter was not popular in the state, and was involved in multiple prostitution scandals throughout his political career and during this gubernatorial election (Cillizza 2015). Prominent commentators in the state argued that Democrats were better off voting for an acceptable Republican in the primary, since Edwards was presumably unelectable in the general election (Mann 2015). Democrats did not follow this advice, however, and sent Edwards to the runoff election where he defeated Vitter in an upset.



If people are exposed to a strategic voting argument that encourages them to choose ideology and electability over party, will they stay loyal to their party or choose to vote strategically? We define strategic voting in the same manner as Fisher (2004) and McKee and Hood (2013): “vot[ing] for a party [the voter] believe[s] is more likely to win than their preferred party, to best influence who wins in their constituency” (Fisher 2004, p. 157). We utilize an example of strategic voting in an electoral context without party primaries to disentangle partisan and ideological-strategic motivations and expect that partisanship will overwhelm the temptation to engage in strategic ideological voting. Party is a much stronger determinant of behavior than ideology, despite the predictions of Downs’ median voter theorem (1957). In order to be successful, a strategic voting argument in this context must convince voters to abandon their party and believe that others will do the same, a sort of “prisoners’ dilemma” that should result in partisan voters sticking with their “team.” In the language of Riker and Ordeshook (1968), voters’ partisan satisfaction (D) should be more powerful than the argument’s proposed relative increase in benefits (B) and probability of a strategic vote deciding an election (P).

*H2. Partisan voters will not strategically place ideological goals over partisan goals in the first stage of an election without party primaries.*

### **Experimental Design and Analysis**

Our experiment employed a between-subjects design in which participants were randomly presented with arguments for strategic voting from an online edition of a newspaper or a personal blog, using the Qualtrics platform. Though the inspiration for the study came from Louisiana, the state named in the treatment was changed to Minnesota, and the Louisiana candidates—one Democrat and three Republicans—were replaced with Minnesota gubernatorial

candidates from the 2014 election (Mark Dayton (D), Jeff Johnson (R), Marty Seifert (R), and Kurt Zellers (R)), so as not to bias respondents familiar with Vitter's controversies. Dayton stood in for Edwards, while Johnson represented Vitter, the Republican most unacceptable to Democrats. Strategic voting may depend in part on the extent to which a voter dislikes their least preferred choice, making the inclusion of a least-preferred candidate important (Blais and Nadeau 1996) The treatments presented an argument from the blog of a political commentator making the case for Democrats to vote for a moderate Republican rather than the only Democrat. One Republican in the election is a former Democrat, and is portrayed as more acceptable to Democrats than the presumed Republican front-runner (Dardenne and Vitter, respectively, in the Louisiana example; Mann, 2015). One treatment was presented as a personal blog post, while the other was presented as an editorial in a local newspaper (the *St. Cloud Times*).<sup>3</sup>

The strategic voting article was adapted from real articles written by Robert Mann, a political columnist for the New Orleans Times-Picayune and NOLA.com (Mann 2015).<sup>4</sup> The use of real strategic voting arguments increases the external validity of our treatments and approximates the complexity of these arguments as encountered by voters. In the article, Mann (whose first name was changed to John in the treatments) argues that the smart move for Democrats in the election is to vote against their party. In the treatments, Mann states that in consultation with a dozen political observers, not one believed that Dayton could win a general election against Johnson, and that Democrats should exercise their power by supporting moderate Republicans rather than sending doomed Democrats to the runoff (Mann 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> There were not significant differences in the credibility or interpretation of the blog and newspaper source. Our focus is on the dynamics of campaign response, and the following analyses include the source treatments only as control variables.

<sup>4</sup> The blog and newspaper articles used appear in the Supplemental Appendix as Figures A1 and A2.

After reading the article, respondents were randomly assigned to see a campaign argument against strategic voting or no additional treatment. The response, titled “Dayton: Voters Won’t Be Fooled in the Battle to Save Minnesota,” lays out Dayton’s biography in the context of giving voters reasons to support him.<sup>5</sup> This response is adapted from the actual response of gubernatorial candidate John Bel Edwards to Mann’s editorial about the Louisiana race (Edwards 2015). Dayton argues that voters will be open to him due to his conservative positions on abortion and gun rights, and his experience opposing the previous administration. The Democratic candidate concludes by stating, “I’d also like to thank God that Minnesota’s future is not determined by the opinion of political pundits, it’s determined by the people. And I firmly believe that the people of Minnesota see more than just a letter behind the candidate’s name.” Those subjects who were randomly exposed to the response treatment received a forceful rebuttal to the strategic voting argument, combined with a detailed justification for the candidate’s electability in his own words.

We conducted this experiment across two separate survey populations, with only minor formatting differences between the studies. Study 1 utilized a student sample from the undergraduate and graduate student population at a large public university in the southern United States ( $N = 187$ ). 42 percent of our sample identified as Democrats, 28 percent as Republican, 26 percent as Independent, and 5 percent “did not know” their party. Students were provided course credit upon completion of the study. Participants were randomly assigned to see the strategic voting argument followed by campaign response ( $N = 70$ ) or without a campaign response ( $N = 69$ ). In Study 2, we replicated the scenario and treatments using a larger, non-student sample. As such, Study 2 uses a survey instrument substantially similar to Study 1. Using Amazon’s

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<sup>5</sup> The campaign response treatment appears in the Supplemental Appendix as Figure A3.

Mechanical Turk (MTurk), we recruited 650 respondents from across the United States. 45 percent of this sample identified as Democrats, 20 percent as Republican, 33 percent as Independent, and 2 percent “did not know” their party. Upon completion of the survey, participants were compensated. Participants were randomly assigned to see the strategic voting argument followed by campaign response ( $N = 308$ ) or without a campaign response ( $N = 338$ ).

The dependent variable captures voter perceptions of each candidates’ electability through a rank-ordered assessment of which candidate they believe won the election. Respondents were shown a prompt stating, “If you had to guess, who do you think won the election described earlier? Please drag and drop the candidate names to rank your predictions from most votes to least votes.” Each candidate was listed, along with their party as a letter in parentheses next to their name. Voter preferences were assessed using a rank-ordering, following the prompt, “Which candidate would you have voted for in this race? Please drag and drop the candidate names to rank your preferences.”

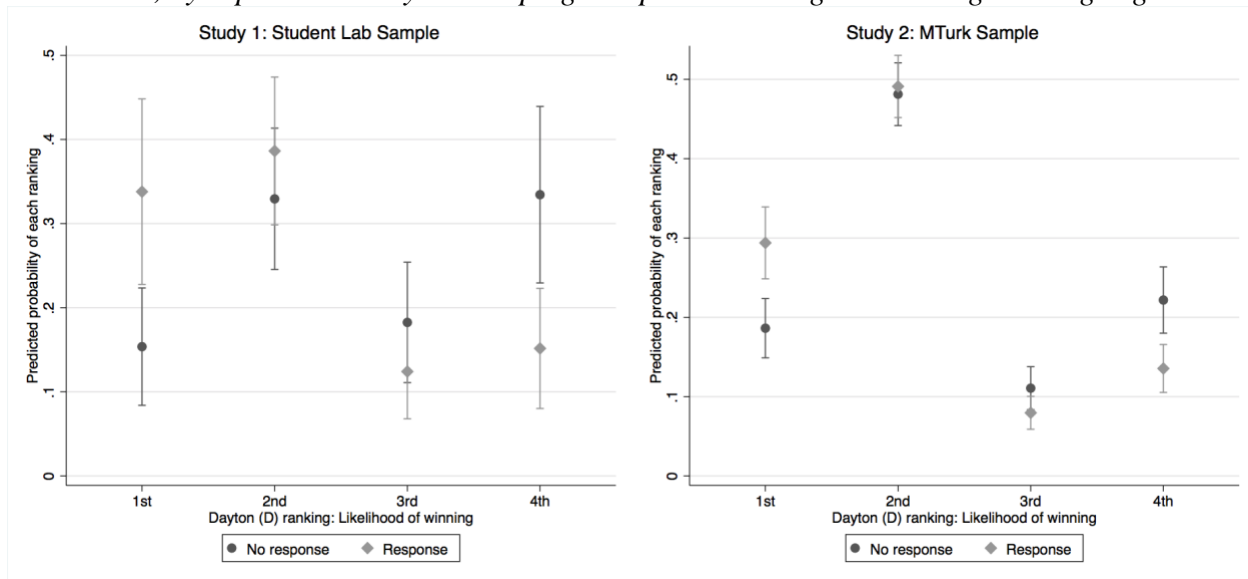
Using ranked dependent variables in our win-assessment and preference analyses suggests that ordered logistic regression is the most proper method for estimating our experimental effects. Logistic regression reports coefficients in log-odds units, which are difficult to interpret substantively: accordingly, the results below will be presented as predicted probabilities generated using the “margins” and “marginsplot” commands in Stata, with full ordered logistic regression tables relegated to an online appendix.

## **Results**

Does responding to a negative strategic voting argument help campaigns appear more electable in the eyes of voters? Figure 1 presents predicted probabilities of respondents’

perceptions of the rank-ordered finish of Democrat Mark Dayton, differentiated by whether or not respondents were exposed to a response from the Dayton campaign asserting his electability.

**Figure 1.** Predicted marginal probabilities of ranking Mark Dayton (D) as the likely winner of the election, by exposure to Dayton campaign response to a negative strategic voting argument.



*Note.* Results from ordered logit regression. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Full ordered logistic regression results appear in Tables A1 (Study 1) and A2 (Study 2) of the Supplemental Appendix.

Subjects who were exposed to the Dayton campaign's response were significantly more likely to believe that Dayton came in first in the election, in both the student laboratory sample (Study 1) and the larger Mechanical Turk sample (Study 2). In Study 1, 33.8 percent of those who saw the campaign response thought Dayton came in first, compared to 15.4 percent of those who did not see the campaign response. In Study 2, 29.4 percent of those who saw the Dayton campaign's response thought he came in first, compared to 18.6 percent of those who did not see the campaign response. There were also significant differences across conditions regarding whether Dayton was believed to finish fourth (last) in the election. Those who saw the Dayton campaign

response were significantly less likely to believe that Dayton came in last than those who did not (Study 1: 15.2 percent vs. 33.4 percent; Study 2: 13.6 percent vs. 22.2 percent;  $p < 0.05$ ).

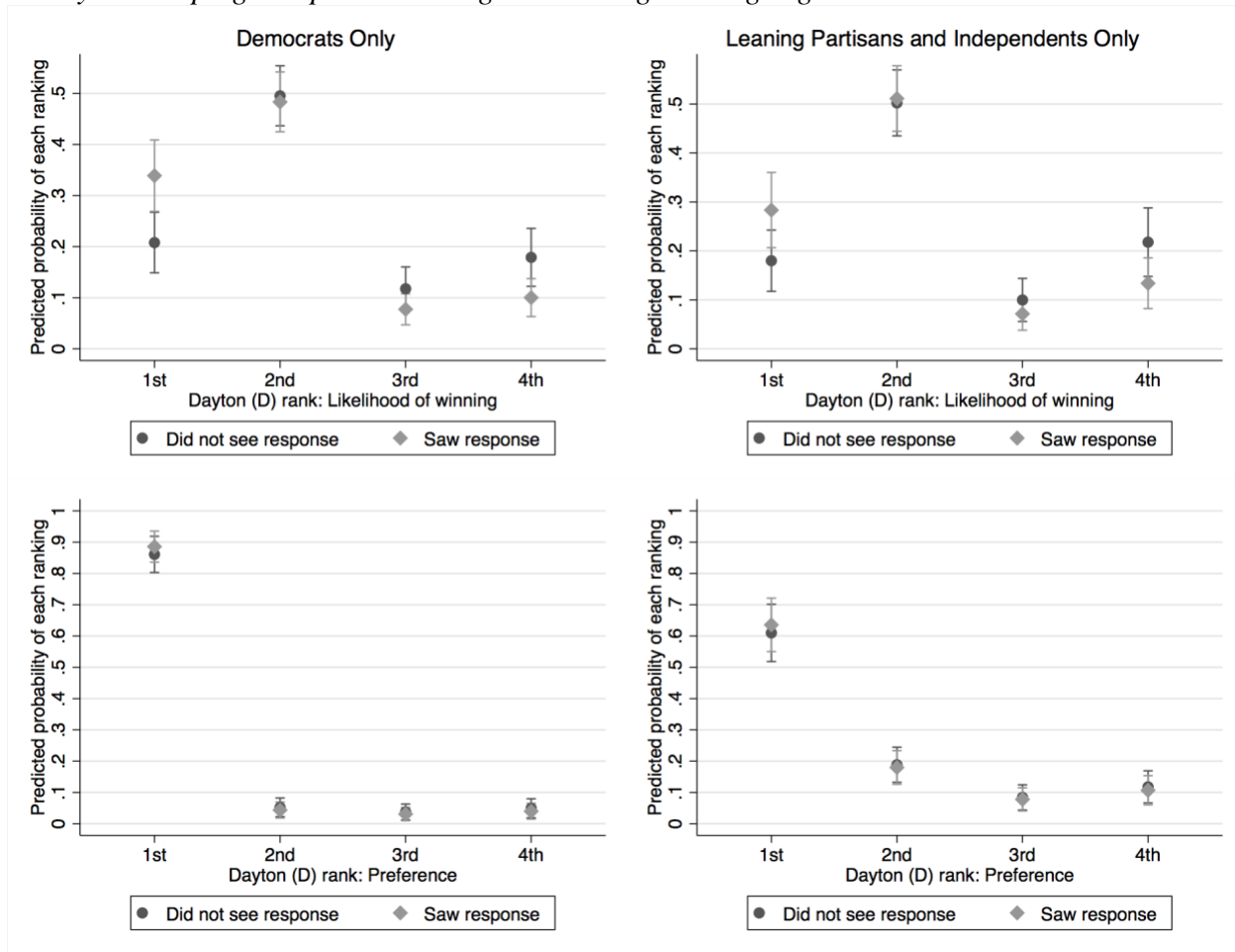
Across these studies, subjects were clearly more likely to believe that Dayton was electable when Dayton responded to criticisms of his electability. Those who saw the Dayton campaign's response were significantly more likely to predict he came in first, and significantly less likely to predict he came in last, than those who did not see a campaign response. Though it is not possible to disentangle the exact mechanism—the criticism of the strategic voting argument or Dayton's justification for his electability—respondents who saw the candidate response believed it and were more likely to think that Dayton could win the election. Though an argument could be made that campaigns are better off ignoring arguments against their electability so as not to draw attention to it, these results suggest that campaigns may be imperiled by that strategy and are better off making their electability case to voters.

Next, we examine the potential moderating role of partisanship. Did Democrats believe the argument that their party's candidate could not win, or did they stick with Dayton (McKee and Hood 2013)—and did Dayton's response influence their behavior? Were partisan leaners and independents particularly susceptible to the strategic voting argument or the Dayton campaign's response to it? Given that the argument was aimed at influencing the behavior and perceptions of Democrats specifically, we restrict the sample in Study 2 to Democrats only (those who identify as “Strong Democrat” and “Democrat” on the 7-point party identification scale) and to partisan leaners and independents only (those who identify as “Lean Democrat,” “Independent,” and “Lean Republican”), with results presented as predicted probabilities in Figure 2.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There were insufficient respondents in Study 1 to achieve statistically significant results after restricting the sample to Democrats.

**Figure 2.** *Restricted sample: Democrats only. Predicted marginal probabilities of ranking Mark Dayton (D) as the likely winner of the election and preference for voting for Dayton, by exposure to Dayton campaign response to a negative strategic voting argument.*



*Note.* Results from ordered logit regression. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Full ordered logistic regression results appear in Table A3 of the Supplemental Appendix.

The first column of Figure 2 shows that Democrats responded similarly to the strategic voting argument against Dayton's electability and to his campaign's response as did the broader sample. Those who saw the campaign's response were significantly more likely to believe that Dayton came in first compared to those who did not (33.9 percent versus 20.8 percent;  $p < 0.05$ ). The Dayton campaign's response was effective at increasing electability perceptions among the segment of the electorate, Democrats, that was targeted by the strategic voting appeal. Mann's argument, that a moderate Republican represented the best hope for Democrats to avoid their

most disliked candidate, did not change Democrats' preferences, regardless of whether or not they saw Dayton's response. Democrats in both conditions strongly prefer Dayton to any of the Republicans, with over 85 percent ranking him as their most preferred candidate. The encouragement to vote strategically to achieve ideological goals was not strong enough to overcome subjects' preference for the politician from their party.

The second column of Figure 2 shows that the strategic voting argument and response had similar, if weaker, effects on the perceptions of partisan leaners and independents. Those leaners and independents who saw the Dayton campaign response were 10.3 percent more likely to believe that Dayton won the election (28.3 percent vs. 18.0 percent), though this difference is not statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. As with Democrats, there is no significant difference in candidate preference between conditions. Though there is a weaker effect among partisan leaners and independents, these findings do not alter our broader conclusion: campaigns are better served by issuing a statement rebutting an electability attack than by ignoring it.

### **Discussion**

A strategic voting argument that voters should sacrifice partisan satisfaction for a combination of ideology and electability did not influence partisan preferences in the way it intended, and was effectively rebutted by a forceful candidate statement. Candidates are not helpless in the face of strategic voting arguments against their electability, which have been shown to influence voters (Cox 1994; McKee and Hood 2013). Elite mediation of the strategic voting process can lead voters to act strategically or sincerely. These arguments should be forcefully rebuffed. Voters seem primarily interested in pursuing partisan goals, and candidates



can exploit that. Similar to negative attacks from opponents (Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2014), campaigns should not endure criticisms of their electability without pushing back.

Partisanship is simply too strong for voters to prioritize electability and ideological acceptability outside the context of partisan primaries (McKee and Hood 2013), particularly when voters' preferred candidate directly rebuts the strategic voting argument. Given the increasing prevalence of elections without party primaries in the United States, we should broaden our theories of electability and strategic vote choice to include non-sequential, non-partisan primaries. Though the presidential case is valuable, it is easily the one where the most information is available. Media coverage of candidates and horserace polling, sequential elections, and paid advertisements give voters ample information on candidate positions, ideology, viability, and electability. State-level primaries receive less attention (Hirano, Lenz, Pinkovskiy, and Snyder 2014), but are nonetheless more numerous and highly consequential. If voters from the disadvantaged party (i.e. Democrats in Louisiana and Republicans in California) choose party over ideology, an election without party primaries should be expected to result in worse ideological outcomes for the disadvantaged party most of the time. Given the substantial number of Americans voting in elections without party primaries, political scientists should continue to reexamine the dynamics of campaign strategy, strategic voting, and the push and pull of ideology and partisanship within that context. Our results demonstrate that in complex strategic voting situations, voters will lean on partisanship to decide rather than vote for the most electable and ideologically palatable option.

We leave many directions for future research, and our experiments are not a comprehensive treatment of the subject. It is possible that respondents were confused or unfamiliar with the electoral system described, and that simpler treatments could have provided

more necessary information while, we argue, sacrificing external validity. We also did not have a condition where voters did not see the commentator's argument but did see the campaign response, and so cannot assess whether the campaign response is helpful or detrimental if viewed outside the context of the original argument. Replication of these experiments in other contexts, with more possible conditions and easier to understand treatments, would be a valuable step towards greater understanding of these dynamics.

Candidates can mitigate the impact of arguments against their electability by directly rebutting them, but voter preferences are unaffected by a campaign response. We believe that this research represents an important step towards understanding the impact of strategic voting arguments on campaign strategy and its impact on voter perceptions. Outside the context of partisan primaries, voter considerations change in meaningful ways—and the strategies of campaigns and interested outsiders should change as well. By emphasizing party and forcefully responding to strategic voting arguments, campaigns can give themselves a better chance to advance and possibly pull off an upset like Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards did in 2015.

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