The effect of core values on support for electoral reform: Evidence from two survey experiments

[invited revise and resubmit at AJPS]

Abstract

A central tenet in the electoral systems subfield is that parties seek desired outcomes via the strategic adoption of electoral rules. Such partisan self-interest, however, is merely one explanation for reform: a second is that an actor may attempt to maximize her *core values*, which constitute her perception of the 'common good.' Although the extant literature has demonstrated the motivational power of core values, their effect on electoral rule choice has not been tested. Using a factorial experimental design that manipulates the partisan- and values-implications of a fictitious reform proposal, I find evidence in favor of core values: not only do they have an effect net of partisan concerns, but they also attenuate the effect of partisan self-interest when the two predispositions countervail. The results provide evidence that partisan self-interest offers an incomplete picture: actors hold—and pursue through electoral reform—objectives that are not immediately partisan in nature.

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1 Introduction

If elections are the foundation of democracy, then the rules that structure the electoral game are the bricks and mortar. By stipulating how an election is to run, these rules structure and constrain the behavior of parties and candidates, voters and officials (North, 1990). As such, they can affect who wins and who loses election to office. Indeed, Rae (1967) candidly assesses the importance of electoral rules as follows: "Electoral laws are of special importance for every group and individual in a society, because they help to decide who writes the other laws"—that is, the actual domestic and foreign policy outputs about which citizens care. In other words, the downstream effects of electoral rules may be felt throughout the polity.

A central tenet in the electoral systems subfield is that, because the rules can affect who wins, parties and their members recognize, and pursue, opportunities to advance partisan objectives via the strategic adoption of electoral rules (Benoit, 2004, 2007; Boix, 1999; Renwick, 2010; Colomer, 2005). Put concretely, when given the choice between a rule that helps and a rule that hurts her party, a partisan (acting rationally) should pick the former—defending it from attack if it is the status quo or leading the charge for reform if it is the alternative.

It is certainly no wonder that scholars return again and again to "goal-seeking" parties as the "conscious and purposive" engines that power institutional change (Benoit, 2007, 370–72). After all, modern representative democracy organizes around the party unit: partisan teams run candidates in the electoral arena and, once in office, their members populate the deliberative bodies and administrative agencies tasked with making, updating, and enforcing the rules that govern electoral conduct (Cain, 2014; Kimball and Kropf, 2006; Hicks et al., 2015).

Additionally, turning to public opinion, partisan identification is a stable and visceral, group-based predisposition that individuals learn early in life (Campbell et al., 1960;

Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2004; Bartels, 2002; Achen and Bartels, 2017) and regularly deploy as an informational shortcut in decision-making, across issues (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). On the topic of electoral reform, recent survey and experimental studies have found that both elites and the mass public (the latter tends to take its lead from the former) often reason about electoral institutions in partisan terms, actively searching for—or at least passively open to—opportunities for gain (Biggers, 2019; Bowler and Donovan, 2013; Alvarez et al., 2011; Wilson and Brewer, 2013; McCarthy, 2019).

Having positioned partisan self-interest as *the* key determinant of electoral rule choice, the extant literature has only intermittently attended to the import of other motivations (cf. Renwick, 2010; Bowler and Donovan, 2013). As Leyenaar and Hazan (2011, 440–43) have argued, one of the next lines of inquiry for the reform subfield is to move beyond the "dominant" partisan self-interest approach by seeking a "synthesis of determinants" for reform. The present study joins this corrective enterprise as the first to empirically test one such neglected explanation for reform: predispositional *core values*, defined as a set of normative-based, abstract beliefs "about desirable modes of conduct or desirable end-states of existence" that guide citizens in their evaluations of policy and people (Rokeach, 1973; McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Feldman, 1988; Schwartz, 1994; McCann, 1997; Goren, 2001, 2005; Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; McClosky, 1958). These values— of which egalitarianism, moral tolerance, self-reliance, and economic individualism are prominent examples—constitute one's understanding of 'right and wrong' and, as such, of how a 'good person' ought to behave and of how a 'good society' ought to operate.

Core values should be germane to electoral rule choice because they engage notions of fairness, representativeness, equality, self-worth, order and security, etc.—that is, the very building blocks of how an ideal election ought to be structured, the individuals it ought to include, and the collective outcomes it ought to produce. Do individuals deploy their core values when taking a decision on electoral reform? If so, in what way do their values *interact* with their partisan goals on the same issue? If, for example, a political

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actor is confronted with a reform predicted to advance her conception of the common good but to harm her party, what does she do: does she sacrifice the value for the partisan gain, sacrifice the partisan gain for the value, or become paralyzed by indecision?

To answer these questions, I utilize a factorial experimental design that manipulates the partisan- and values-implications of a fictitious reform proposal on absentee voting; this design allows me to control the number of factors to which a respondent is exposed: 1) partisan self-interest only; 2) a value-based frame only; or, 3) various combinations of the two. Across two samples, I find consistent evidence of a role—net of partisan concerns—for values. Furthermore, for situations in which the focal value and partisan self-interest pull in opposite directions, I find that the former can attenuate the effect of the latter: individuals express support for rule changes that *disadvantage* their preferred party, provided their core value is advanced. As such, I demonstrate that the relationship between partisan self-interest and electoral reform is indeed nuanced: other motivations shape the process, too.

Although the issue on which I focus is electoral reform, my findings have broad implications for *extra*-partisan position-taking across issues. This study therefore joins existing work—by Goren and his coauthors especially (Goren, 2001, 2005; Goren, Federico and Kittilson, 2009)—in exploring the complex relationship between these two bedrock predispositions: values and partisan self-interest.[1] Nevertheless, relative to existing observational work on the topic, this paper's design provides for a notable gain in causal identification. First, although we cannot randomly assign a partisan identity or a value position to an individual, we can nonetheless randomly prime which of these two predispositions is at the top of her mind. The factorial design thus gives us greater confidence

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[1] My work compliments a second intellectual tradition, as well: *procedural justice*, which argues that "people care strongly about the way authoritative decisions are made," i.e., they desire that elites "[use] just procedures when exercising their authority" (Esaiasson et al., 2019; Doherty and Wolak, 2012; Tyler, 1994; Skitka, Winquist and Hutchinson, 2003). For a recent application of procedural justice to electoral rule choice, see Bowler and Donovan (2013).

that, when answering a question on her support for a given reform proposal, we know about what the focal respondent is thinking. Second, unlike in observational studies, the design allows the researcher to pull the levers of partisan self-interest and core values against each other—and, due to the nature of the reform issue, in a way that is quite believable. To my knowledge, this paper is the first to pit core values and partisan self-interest head-to-head in countervailing situations.

In Section 2, I outline a theory of core values and electoral reform; I also introduce hypotheses. Section 3 details the experimental design, including my data sources, coding scheme, and empirical strategy. Section 4 presents results and Section 5 concludes.

2   A theory of core values and elections

The potential of electoral rules to affect—mechanically and psychologically—who wins and loses (Duverger, 1959; Rae, 1967; Blais and Carty, 1991; Lijphart, 1994; Cox, 1997) makes them a prime target for political actors in search of advantage. Although previous studies have identified a range of potential reformers, from colonial powers to international organizations to academics and experts (Benoit, 2007), typically scholars of electoral reform focus on the role of political parties. More than any other group, parties are *well-invested* (their members run for office under these rules) and *well-positioned* (they control the legislative and administrative offices in charge of making and enforcing the rules) to act as reformers (Boix, 1999; Colomer, 2005; Pilet, 2007).

The quintessence of this approach is the Benoit (2004) model, which positions parties as the key agents of reform and predicts rule change will occur if and only if: first, a party possesses the "fiat power" (e.g., a majority of seats in the assembly) necessary to pass the legislation; and second, the same party is "motivated" to pursue an alternative to the status quo, believing the former will improve its subsequent electoral performance (but see Andrews and Jackman, 2005; Shvetsova, 2003, on the way in which imperfect

information makes parties haphazard reformers).

Similarly, turning to public opinion, scholars of electoral rule choice have found that the positioning of partisans in the mass public tends to align with that of co-partisan elites (Hicks et al., 2015; Biggers and Hanmer, 2017; Wilson and Brewer, 2013). In an recent treatment of the topic, Biggers (2019) distinguishes between two competing mechanistic explanations for such congruence: 1) the average citizen takes cues from a trusted, politically sophisticated co-partisan (Zaller, 1992; Lenz, 2013), a "specialization of labor" that allows the *opinion leader's* calculated preference to become her own; and, 2) the average citizen *herself* independently calculates whether a policy is in her self-interest, rather than merely adopting her co-partisan elite's preference. This distinction notwithstanding, we thus should expect the canonical partisan approach to understanding electoral rule choice to operate at the citizen level, as well (see also McCarthy, 2019, on voters' particular desire to pursue a self-interest that hurts the partisan out-group).

2.1 Core values and position-taking

The dominance of the partisan-self interest approach, however, has masked a key problem: the extant literature largely has neglected to examine other potential determinants of electoral reform, as well as to investigate the way in which such motivations may interact with partisan-self interest on the issue (Leyenaar and Hazan, 2011). Such neglect is of two kinds. First, the reform literature has tended toward conceptual underdevelopment when discussing *extra*-partisan considerations—even sympathetic scholars will note the role of 'values' using vague language and blurred definitions. While such shoutouts are useful for theory-building, they eschew measurement and systematic hypothesis testing.

Second, as Renwick notes, many electoral reform scholars dismiss 'values' as being of little consequence to rule choice relative to partisan concerns (cf. Bowler and Donovan, 2013; Renwick, 2010; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006):[2]

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[2] An important exception is Bowler and Donovan (2013), who surveyed U.K. voters during the 2011

> For some authors, it seems that these [partisan self-interest] are the only considerations that matter. Riker (1984, 103) contends that 'most actual choices [of electoral systems] have been made with the intention of promoting partisan advantage rather than with the goal of incorporating sound constitutional principles into governmental structure.' Kellner (1995, 23) observes aphoristically that, 'In politics, when principle collides with self-interest, principle tends to retreat with a bloody nose.' (Renwick, 2010, 37)

Benoit (2007), similarly, concedes that extra-partisan concerns, such as ensuring fair outcomes, ease of use, enhanced efficacy, etc., "tend to figure more in the rhetoric of electoral reform than in actual decision making." That is, an actor's invocation of values is likely to be "strategic [rather than]...genuine," a way to appeal to the mass public in light of the fact that overt appeals to partisan self-interest tend not to fare particularly well (Bowler and Donovan, 2013, 54–55).[3] The problem, however, is that qualitative case studies, anecdote, and intuition alone—rather than systematic empirical testing—form the foundation of this conclusion.

Both forms of neglect are in contrast to rich behavioral literatures that, in their own way, argue individuals' issue positions are a function not only of their partisan self-interest but also of *extra*-partisan considerations. I focus on one such literature, *core values*, which constitute an individual's "deeply held...enduring" (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002, 18), "bedrock" (Goren, 2005, 881) beliefs about "desirable modes of conduct or

Alternative Vote referendum. They find that views on procedural fairness, majoritarianism, and voter influence over officials indeed affected citizen position-taking on the reform: "The attitudes mute and even overwhelm the independent effect of partisanship," they write. "...partisan self-interest was the dominant force in voter reasoning about electoral rules—but [is] only... *part of the picture*. People's views of what elections *should do* clearly matter as well" (39; emphasis added).

[3] Where the extant literature *does* credit values, however, is during times of crisis. Renwick (2010, 50) has attended to the relationship between values and electoral reform, but in his story, values primarily matter to rule choice when systemic, institutional failure "seriously threatens" the polity and its way of life. In this exceptional circumstance, elites and the public rally around reform as a means to re-secure the values that undergird their society (Shugart, 2001). Thus, during periods of 'normal politics,' partisans will resume their search for advantage, pushing values aside.

desirable end-states of existence" (Rokeach, 1973, 7).

By their nature values are: 1) *normative* (they provide an ideal standard against which to judge items); 2) *abstract* and "transsituational" (these standards are applicable to many items and settings); 3) *enduring* (an individual develops these standards early in her life through socialization to, and reinforcement by, the dominant ethos); and, 4) *economical* (to judge an item, an individual need not collect detailed information; rather, she need only assess the extent to which it is consistent with her ideal standards) (Schwartz, 1994, 21; Converse, 1964, 211; Feldman, 1988, 2003; McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; cf. McCann, 1997; Goren, 2005, on the influence of partisan ID on the updating of values; cf. Zaller, 1991; Kam, 2005, on the way in which political sophistication and awareness affect the ability of citizens to deploy their values).

As such, core values can provide a powerful, emotionally-intense, *extra*-partisan way by which an individual can evaluate most policy proposals—support the policy if it advances her concept of the common good, oppose it if it does not. Indeed, scholars have found core values influence people's positions on an array of issues (Feldman, 1988; McCann, 1997; Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Craig et al., 2005; Kam, 2005). This said, existing scholarship has not yet applied core values to the issue of electoral design.

Social psychologists have posited a number of values (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994), a handful of which political scientists have taken up and operationalized. In the present study, I consider four values:

- *Egalitarianism*: The belief that all people—sharing a "common humanity" and "possess[ing] inherent worth and dignity"—should have an equal opportunity to get ahead in life (McClosky and Zaller, 1984, 62–73)

- *Moral tolerance*: A willingness to accept, or at least abide, individuals whose lifestyles are different from the societal norm; this value is thus related to the "libertarian creed" of the American ethos (36–55)

- *Self-reliance*: The belief that, to get ahead in life, one should rely not on others but on herself—that is, the "self-made" man should "move ahead" on his own; this value is related to the "cultural foundations of capitalism" in American society (91, 111–13)

Core value	Battery
Egalitarianism	1. Our society should make sure that everyone has an equal chance to get ahead in life.
	2. Our country would be better off if people were truly treated equally.
	3. Our society should do what is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.
Moral tolerance	1. The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes.
	2. We should be tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are different from our own.
	3. Our society does not need to be accepting of individuals whose values or behaviors are different from most. (*rev.*)
Self-reliance	1. In order to get ahead in life, individuals should depend on themselves rather than on others.
	2. Our country is best off when we emphasize reliance on others, rather than self-reliance. (*rev.*)
	3. Our society would benefit greatly if people were truly self-sufficient.
Economic individualism	1. Most people who don't get ahead should not blame the system—they have only themselves to blame.
	2. Any person who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.
	3. Even if people try hard, they often cannot reach their goals. (*rev.*)

Note: The survey randomized the order of the batteries, as well as the order of the items within each battery. Economic individualism only appears in Study 2.

Table 1: Question wordings for each core value

○ *Economic individualism*: The belief that "personal exertions" and ambition, rather than "laziness," will lead to individual success; this value traces back to the Weberian Protestant work ethic (103–13)

These four values should be germane to the issue of electoral rule choice because they speak to notions of fairness, inclusion, representativeness, equality, and self-worth—that is, the very ideals that would-be democratic architects must translate into institutional design (Dahl, 1989). With core values an individual easily can assess electoral rules, whether a status quo or an alternative, relative to her ideal standards (of how an election ought to look, the individuals it ought to include, and the collective outcomes it ought to produce) and then promote or stymie change, accordingly.

2.2 Mapping core values onto the access/integrity trade-off

One way in which core values should manifest in electoral design is the trade-off between increased *access* (of voters to the electoral process) and increased *integrity* (of the state over the process)—the former occurs when the government passes a law that makes it easier to vote or that protects the right of its citizens to vote, whereas the latter makes it easier for election officials to detect, prevent, and punish fraudulent voting (thereby making it much harder to vote legally, as well).[4] Importantly, each side believes that the election *ought* to be more legitimate, but has a very different idea of how to "protect the value of the vote." Access advocates worry that burdensome or discriminatory rules will exclude qualified voters from the electoral process; therefore, they desire to 'open things up.' Integrity advocates, conversely, worry that lax rules (and enforcement) will lead to the inclusion of disqualified persons in the electorate; they thus hope to 'zip things up'

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[4] Certainly, there are other questions of design to which core values could be applicable, including: 1) majoritarian-induced stability versus proportional-induced descriptive representation (Lijphart, 1994); equality of vote weight versus geographic over-representation (Virgin, 2017); technology-induced ease of voting versus concerns over security (Alvarez and Hall, 2010); populist versus pluralist reform traditions (Cain, 2014), etc. These provide an opportunity for future research.

Core value	Reform = Increased access	Reform = Increased integrity
Egalitarianism	(i) All humans are of equal worth	(i) All humans are of equal worth
	(ii) Reform lessens systematic biases	(ii) Reform worsens systematic biases
	(iii) To advance equal opportunity, we should support the reform	(iii) To advance equal opportunity, we should oppose the reform
Moral tolerance	(i) People are free to live as they like	(i) People are free to live as they like
	(ii) Reform compliments a wider range of life styles	(ii) Reform undermines a wider range of life styles
	(iii) To advance tolerance, we should support the reform	(iii) To advance tolerance, we should oppose the reform
Self-reliance	(i) People should resist help in reaching their goals	(i) People should resist help in reaching their goals
	(ii) Reform offers governmental help	(ii) Reform curtails governmental help
	(iii) To encourage self-reliance, we should oppose the reform	(iii) To encourage self-reliance, we should support the reform
Economic individualism	(i) People must show effort to reach their goals	(i) People must show effort to reach their goals
	(ii) Reform makes expending effort less necessary	(ii) Reform makes expending effort more necessary
	(iii) To avoid encouraging laziness, we should oppose the reform	(iii) To avoid encouraging laziness, we should support the reform

Table 2: Mapping the logic of each core value onto access/integrity

(Ansolabehere, 2007; Biggers and Hanmer, 2017).

Table 2 maps each value onto the access/integrity trade-off, with (i) representing the normative objective of the value, (ii) the logical assessment of the reform, and (iii) the logical position one should take on it. In short, for egalitarianism and moral tolerance, positive identifiers should support increased access over increased integrity, because each

places the onus on *society* to ensure that electoral institutions are properly inclusive, reducing problematic barriers where necessary. If overly-burdensome rules and high costs of voting generate inequalities in the opportunity to participate (make it hard for certain voices, however distasteful, to be heard), then the egalitarian (tolerant person) wants these barriers reduced.

Conversely, positive identifiers on economic individualism and self-reliance should support increased integrity over increased access. This is because each places the onus on the *individual* to ensure that they are included in society's institutions, rising above adversity when required. If overly-burdensome rules are preventing people from participating, then the individualist (self-reliance adherent) responds 'too bad'—effort and planning will get a person to the polls if they want to vote (a person shouldn't need help to do something that they can do on their own).[5]

2.3 Hypotheses

Based on the above discussion, I develop the following interrelated, preregistered[6] hypotheses about the relationship between political predispositions and support for electoral reform. H1 tests the canonical partisan self-interest motivation, whereas H2 assesses the core values alternative. H3 refers to situations in which an individual receives information pertinent to both of her predispositions, but with them set in opposition:

- H1: If an electoral reform advances an individual's partisan goals, then she will be more likely to support the proposal. (*partisan congruence*)

- H2.a: If an electoral reform advances an individual's value identification (manifested via the access/integrity trade-off), then she will be more likely to support the proposal. (*value congruent*)

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[5] In a pilot study on MTurk, I asked 100 workers their position on egalitarianism, moral tolerance, and self-reliance, as well as their degree of support for increasing voter access and for increasing electoral integrity. I report the correlations in Appendix B, p.8. They are as expected.

[6] Preregistered content is available at [REDACTED].

○ H2.b: If an electoral reform undermines an individual's value identification (manifested via the access/integrity trade-off), then she will be less likely to support the proposal. (*value incongruent*)

○ H3: If an electoral reform advances *one* of an individual's predispositional goals *but* undermines the other, then she will be ambivalent; yet, partisan self-interest may determine the effect's sign.

2.4   Selecting an electoral rule

An experiment on electoral reform needs a *rule* to reform. Certainly, there is no shortage of rules to which the access/integrity trade-off applies: absentee voting, voter ID, in-person early voting, automatic voter registration, same-day registration, etc. For my purposes, however, some of the most obvious candidates are not appropriate due to their high-salience and/or (perceived) non-neutrality. The problem with a rule that features in partisan warfare is that it increases the odds of a survey respondent importing foreign knowledge (and passion) into the survey and bringing this information to bear on her answers on the dependent variable—that is, contaminating the design by making a given treatment less (or, perhaps, more) believable.

For example, voter ID laws—the epitome of a partisan-biased, highly-salient electoral rule—likely would imperil the manipulation because popular discussion of this issue is ubiquitous and fervid. A low-salience, neutral rule provides for a more auspicious test. After assessing neutrality via a pilot survey,[7] I determined that absentee voting—that is, provisions that permit a voter to cast a ballot by mail if she is unable or, in some states, unwilling to vote in-person at her polling place[8]—possesses the necessary qualities.

[7] See Appendix C, p.11. For a similar strategy, see Kam (2005, 169), who focuses on the low-salience issue of food irradiation when assessing the extent to which individuals deploy the value of 'trust in scientific innovation.' The selection of a perceived neutral rule adds to this project a scope condition that may affect the generalizability of the finding to conditions that feature a non-neutral rule.

[8] See http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx; I do not make use of the distinction between 'excuse-only' and 'no-excuse' absentee voting.

3 Experimental design

The objectives of this study are: 1) to isolate the effect of core values, as manifested via the access/integrity trade-off, on support for electoral reform; and, 2) to observe what happens when partisan self-interest and core values combine to countervail each other.[9] I therefore am interested in both the independent and interactive effects of values on citizens' support for reform. To evaluate these relationships, I have developed and preregistered an experimental design that manipulates the manner in which a given electoral reform is framed, holding all else constant.

3.1 Factors and vignettes

I employ a two-factor, between-subjects factorial design that randomly assigns respondents into one of eight treatment conditions; importantly, treatment assignment does *not* depend upon the subject's predispositional profile: *any treatment is available to any subject* (see Tables 4 and 5). The instrument is a vignette—presented as a news story but written by the investigator[10]—that manipulates the framing of a reform proposal on absentee voting. A factor has two available frames, each of which is bi-directional (molar): 1) for partisan self-interest, as either helping (hurting) Democrats/hurting (helping) Republicans; and, 2) for core values, as either increasing (decreasing) access/decreasing (increasing) integrity.[11]

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[9] I also isolate the effect of partisan self-interest on support for electoral reform. These results, fully consistent with the canonical approach, are in Appendix D, p.13.

[10] I searched Nexis Uni for news stories on absentee voting. Those I modeled ran in local or national newspapers between 2000–12. The stories also provide proof-of-concept with respect to the permissibility of molar treatments and the incredibility of a control group.

[11] I use bi-directional, or 'molar,' treatments for two reasons. First, a two-party system is zero-sum; thus, a party advantage frame invariably implies a disadvantage for the other. Second, with respect to access/integrity, journalists typically discuss an electoral reform proposal using the language of one in tandem with the other. The limitation of bi-directionality is an attendant inability to tell which piece

		Partisan self-interest frames		
		(1) None	(2) Helps Dems.	(3) Helps Reps.
Values frames	(A) None		Dems.	Reps.
	(B) Pro-voter access	Access	Dems. + Access	Reps. + Access
	(C) Pro-electoral integrity	Integrity	Dems. + Integrity	Reps. + Integrity

Notes: Cell A1 is blank because the experimental design omits a pure control group.

Table 3: Treatment groups in terms of partisan-self interest and core values

The factorial design allows me to control the number of factors to which a respondent is exposed (Shadish, Cook and Campbell, 2002, 263). In the first two conditions (cells A2 and A3 in Table 3) the subject receives a news story that discusses the reform proposal *only* in terms of its partisan effects (partisan single-factor conditions), thus priming her partisan self-interest. The helps-Democrats (Republicans) version of the story reads:

> . . . If implemented, the proposal is—on balance—expected to advantage the Democratic (Republican) Party. Democrats (Republicans), as a result, are on board: they see an opportunity to achieve electoral gains. "This proposal would help us to advance our overall agenda," says Democratic (Republican) strategist Todd Bennett. "Changing absentee voting means more Democratic (Republican) officeholders, which means the ability to advance progressive (conservative) causes across the country." . . .

In the second two conditions (B1 and C1) the subject receives a news story that discusses the reform *only* in terms of its implications for access/integrity (values single-factor conditions), thus priming her core values. The pro-access (pro-integrity) version of the news story reads:

> . . . If implemented, the proposal is—on balance—expected to make it easier to vote absentee (guard against voter fraud). As such, voter access (electoral

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of the dual-sided frame drives the effect on the dependent variable (Cook and Campbell, 1979, 32–33).

integrity) advocates are lining up behind the proposal: they have long believed the current system makes it too hard (easy) for well (ill)-intentioned individuals to exercise their right to vote (cast an unlawful vote). "This proposal would open (zip) up the electoral process," says John Lange, a proponent of expanded access (electoral integrity). "Legitimizing our elections by making voting more convenient (encouraging in-person voting) is consistent with America's larger commitment to equality (honesty) and inclusion (security)." ...

In the remaining four conditions the subject receives a news story that uses both factors (B2–3, C2–3)—that is, unique combinations of the single-factor options. These conditions thus prime both of her predispositions. (See Appendix A, p.1, for the full survey.)

After much thought, I decided to omit a pure control ('none/none,' A1), because it would have needed to eschew content about the partisan and core values implications of the reform proposal. This would have introduced two problems. First, it is not obvious how subjects in the control group would have been able to evaluate a policy *absent* information on its predicted effects. One possibility is that these respondents would have read-in a 'foreign' partisan self-interest, thereby contaminating the analysis. Second, a control version of the news story would not have been externally valid given the implausibility of real-world journalists stripping their stories of partisan/values-based content. Instead, I manufacture 'as-if' controls in the subsequent analysis by allowing one factor *only* to vary in each model; the design holds constant the other factor.

3.2   Two-step coding of respondents

The theory, however, is not about which vignette a subject receives, but rather how that treatment relates to her partisan and core values predispositions. To obtain information on each subject's predispositional profile, I ask a series of questions, pre-stimulus. For partisan self-interest I use the standard two-question partisan ID battery. Each partisan group includes strong identifiers, weak identifiers, and leaners (subjects who, though selecting 'independent' or 'other' on the first question, subsequently state that they are close to a major party on the second). True independents are those who answer 'neither

| | | Single-factor treatment vignettes | | | |
		Helps Dems	Helps Reps.	Pro-access	Pro-integrity
Respondent's predispositions	Egalitarian Dem.	Partisan congruent	Partisan incongruent	Value congruent	Value incongruent
	Egalitarian Rep.	Partisan incongruent	Partisan congruent	Value congruent	Value incongruent
	Inegalitarian Dem.	Partisan congruent	Partisan incongruent	Value incongruent	Value congruent
	Inegalitarian Rep.	Partisan incongruent	Partisan congruent	Value incongruent	Value congruent

Notes: The table uses egalitarianism as an example; any of the other core values may substitute in.

Table 4: Predispositional routes to each single-factor code

party' to the follow-up.

For each core value, I use a three-item battery that I have taken, in modified form, from Goren (2001, 2005) and Goren, Federico and Kittilson (2009).[12] Table 1 contains the text of all 12 questions; each item presented respondents with five options from which to choose, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' The objective of each battery is to ascertain whether a respondent is a positive identifier on its value (supports equal opportunity, moral tolerance, self-reliance, or economic individualism), a negative identifier (opposes that respective quality), or is a non-identifier (ambivalent on the value). Relative to partisan ID, a disciplinary standard for slicing the data is less established. I opt for an appropriate middle-ground between being too exclusive

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[12] It is possible that the experimental design may have primed respondents, when answering the DV, to think in terms of core values more so than they otherwise would have. While this is a concern, the alternative of placing the values batteries *post*-stimulus would have positioned the vignettes to affect respondents' answers to the values batteries. I sought to minimize any possible *pre*-stimulus contaminant by eschewing the key phrases of each value's battery when writing the vignettes.

and too inclusive in terms of value identification. With each battery consisting of three five-choice items, the lowest score possible is 0, whereas the highest is 12. As cut points, I code respondents with a score of 8–12 (0–4) as positive (negative) identifiers, while non-identifiers are those with a score of 5–7.[13]

Next, I code each respondent according to whether her randomized treatment assignment was congruent with her predisposition(s), incongruent, or mixed. The building blocks of this scheme are:

- *Partisan congruent* (P+): the reform was framed as helping the subject's party

- *Partisan incongruent* (P–): the reform was framed as helping the opposing party

- *Value congruent* (V+): the reform was framed as advancing the side of the access/integrity trade-off that is, according to theory, consistent with the subject's value identification

- *Value incongruent* (V–): the reform was framed as undermining the side of the access/integrity trade-off that is, according to theory, consistent with the subject's value identification

For subjects in the single-factor treatment groups, the above codes are jointly exhaustive. As seen in Table 4, any coding can result from any predispositional profile. For example, on the core value of egalitarianism, a *value congruent* (shaded gray) coding can result from an egalitarian respondent receiving the pro-access version of the news story *or* from an inegalitarian receiving the pro-integrity vignette. For the double-factor conditions, the above building blocks must be combined, since each subject is exposed to both factors:

- *Combined congruent* (V+/P+): the reform was framed as helping the subject's party and as advancing her value identification (a 'double positive')

- *Combined incongruent* (V–/P–): the reform was framed as hurting the subject's party and as undermining her value identification (a 'double negative')

- *Value-led countervailed* (V+/P–): the reform was framed as advancing the subject's value identification but also as hurting her party

- *Partisan-led countervailed* (V–/P+): the reform was framed as helping the subject's party but also as undermining her value identification

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[13] As robustness checks, I try other slicings as well. The results hold. Please see Appendix E, p.14.

	Double-factor treatment vignettes			
Respondent's predispositions	Helps Dems. + Pro-access	Helps Reps. + Pro-access	Helps Dems. + Pro-integrity	Helps Reps. + Pro-integrity
Tolerant Dem.	Combined congruent	Value-led countervailed	Partisan-led countervailed	Combined incongruent
Tolerant Rep.	Value-led countervailed	Combined congruent	Combined incongruent	Partisan-led countervailed
Intolerant Dem.	Partisan-led countervailed	Combined incongruent	Combined congruent	Value-led countervailed
Intolerant Rep.	Combined incongruent	Partisan-led countervailed	Value-led countervailed	Combined congruent

Notes: The table uses moral tolerance as an example; any of the other core values may substitute in.

Table 5: Predispositional routes to each double-factor code

As seen in Table 5, any of the four above codings can result from any predispositional profile (I have shaded gray the four routes to the *combined congruent* coding). Due to orthogonality between treatment assignment and predispositional profile, the experimental design does *not* require the existence, in the survey sample, of respondents with 'mismatched' or 'off-diagonal' profiles (e.g., tolerant Republicans, intolerant Democrats)—in order to countervail subjects. 'Matched' or 'on-diagonal' profiles can easily result in a countervailing coding (a tolerant Democrat in the *Helps Reps. + Pro-access* vignette).

3.3 Analytical strategy

I estimate a series of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests, a method that allows a researcher to assess the extent to which the means of three or more groups differ from each other on a single, shared dependent variable. The null hypothesis is that the group means are statistically indistinguishable from each other, whereas the alternative hypothesis is that (at least two of) the groups are different. Below, each model includes

Value	Study	Score distribution			Percent identifiers		
		Median	Mean	Range	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Egalitarianism	MTurk	10	9.16	0–12	74.55	13.10	12.35
	SSI_{total}	10	9.69	0–12	80.05	16.06	3.89
	$\text{SSI}_{compliers}$	10	9.74	0–12	81.12	14.57	4.31
Moral tolerance	MTurk	9	8.34	0–12	66.45	18.38	15.17
	SSI_{total}	8	7.62	0–12	53.91	34.60	11.48
	$\text{SSI}_{compliers}$	8	7.79	0–12	57.72	28.14	14.14
Self-reliance	MTurk	5	4.56	0–12	49.01	37.89	13.10
Economic individualism	SSI_{total}	5	4.98	0–12	43.40	42.55	14.05
	$\text{SSI}_{compliers}$	5	5.18	0–12	42.64	38.55	18.81

Notes: The full scale for each value is 0 to 12 points. I have colored gray those identifiers expected, according to theory, to favor increased access.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for the four core values, by study

three groups and uses the Bonferroni method to obtain post-hoc, pairwise comparisons. Moreover, all models exclude respondents who are non-identifiers on either partisan ID or the focal core value.[14] The dependent variable is support for the reform proposal, measured post-stimulus via a five-point Likert scale, recoded such that -2 is 'strongly oppose,' 0 is 'neither support nor oppose,' and 2 is 'strongly support.'

Each ANOVA holds constant a unique single-factor coding across its three groups, which makes possible inferences about the effect of the *other*, varying predisposition. Indeed, the single-factor in each trio is best thought of as a make-shift control group against which the corresponding double-factor may be compared. The constituent pieces of each ANOVA, as well as a brief explanation for its construction, are as follows:

1. *Value congruent* (V+), *combined congruent* (V+/P+), and *value-led countervailed*

[14] It is possible for a respondent to be an identifier on one core value but a non-identifier on a second. In this case, she would be included in the analysis of the former, but dropped from analysis of the latter.

(V+/P–). This ANOVA holds constant the reception of a congruent value frame, allowing partisan-self interest to vary

2. *Value incongruent* (V–), *combined incongruent* (V–/P–), and *partisan-led counter-vailed* (V–/P+). This ANOVA holds constant the reception of an incongruent value frame, allowing partisan-self interest to vary

3. *Partisan congruent* (P+), *combined congruent* (V+/P+), and *partisan-led counter-vailed* (V–/P+). This ANOVA holds constant the reception of a congruent partisan frame, allowing the core value to vary

4. *Partisan incongruent* (P–), *combined incongruent* (V–/P–), and *value-led counter-vailed* (V+/P–). This ANOVA holds constant the reception of an incongruent partisan frame, allowing the core value to vary

The first two tests isolate the net effect of partisan self-interest (H1), by holding constant the directionality of the focal value. The last two tests isolate the net effect of the focal core value (H2) by holding constant the directionality of partisan self-interest. Finally, because each ANOVA contains a countervailed factor, all four can be used to assess H3.

4 Findings

I utilize this design for two studies, each of which required respondents to answer every item and prohibited advancing the vignette until at least 30 seconds had elapsed.

4.1 Study 1 – Recruitment and data

For Study 1, fielded on 2 July and on 1 August 2018, I recruited 1061 subjects from Amazon's Mechanical Turk internet-based crowd-sourcing platform. Workers selected voluntarily into the study after viewing an advertisement; they had a maximum of one hour to complete the task and were compensated $1.60. The survey screened out subjects younger than 18-years old and subjects located outside the U.S.[15] A convenience sample, the MTurk draw is not nationally-representative. In this case, it skews Democratic

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[15] The survey set worker qualifications to ensure high performance: approval HIT rate $\geq 90\%$ and number of HITS approved ≥ 100.

(53.82%), young (48.63% between 18–30-years old), educated (60.32% with a Bachelor's degree or higher), and male (61.92%).[16] With respect to the values positions of respondents, Table 6 displays descriptive statistics—both the raw scores on the battery of each, as well as the subsequent coding of subjects. (*Note*: Economic individualism does not appear in Study 1.)[17]

4.2   Results

The primacy of partisan self-interest on the issue of electoral rule choice is so firmly established in the literature that it is no exaggeration to call it canon, and indeed, failure to recover this expected relationship could indicate poor instrument design. However, I consistently find that partisan self-interest has a statistically and substantively significant effect on support for the proposal: whether we hold constant the reception of a congruent value frame (V+, via the six iterations of ANOVA.1) or of an incongruent one (V–, via ANOVA.2), subjects who are told that the reform will help their preferred party (P+) are *more* likely than the baseline to support the change; similarly, subjects who read that their party will be hurt (P–) are *less* likely to support. Importantly, this pattern is robust across both the MTurk and SSI samples, regardless of which of the four values stands in for 'V.' (Due to space constraints, the figures for ANOVAs 1 and 2 are reserved

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[16] For a discussion of MTurk's strengths and weaknesses, see Berinsky, Huber and Lenz (2012).

[17] It might seem odd that people subscribe simultaneously to values that, on the one hand, lead them to favor increased access and, on the other hand, those that lead them to favor increased integrity. But as Feldman (2003, 481) notes, "[Because] values refer to a...desirable end-state, it is likely that an individual will positively evaluate a sizable number of values, perhaps giving no value an unambiguously negative assessment." As such, it is more accurate to speak in terms of "value *priorities*: the relative endorsement of values with respect to each other." Deploying one's values on a given issue, then, may involve a degree of conflict resolution, in which case external stimuli (e.g., framing effects, elite source cues) could take on an out-sized role. Such recommends an analysis that controls for an individual's non-focal core values sentiments, which I execute as a regression-based robustness check in Appendix F, p.18. The main results obtain.
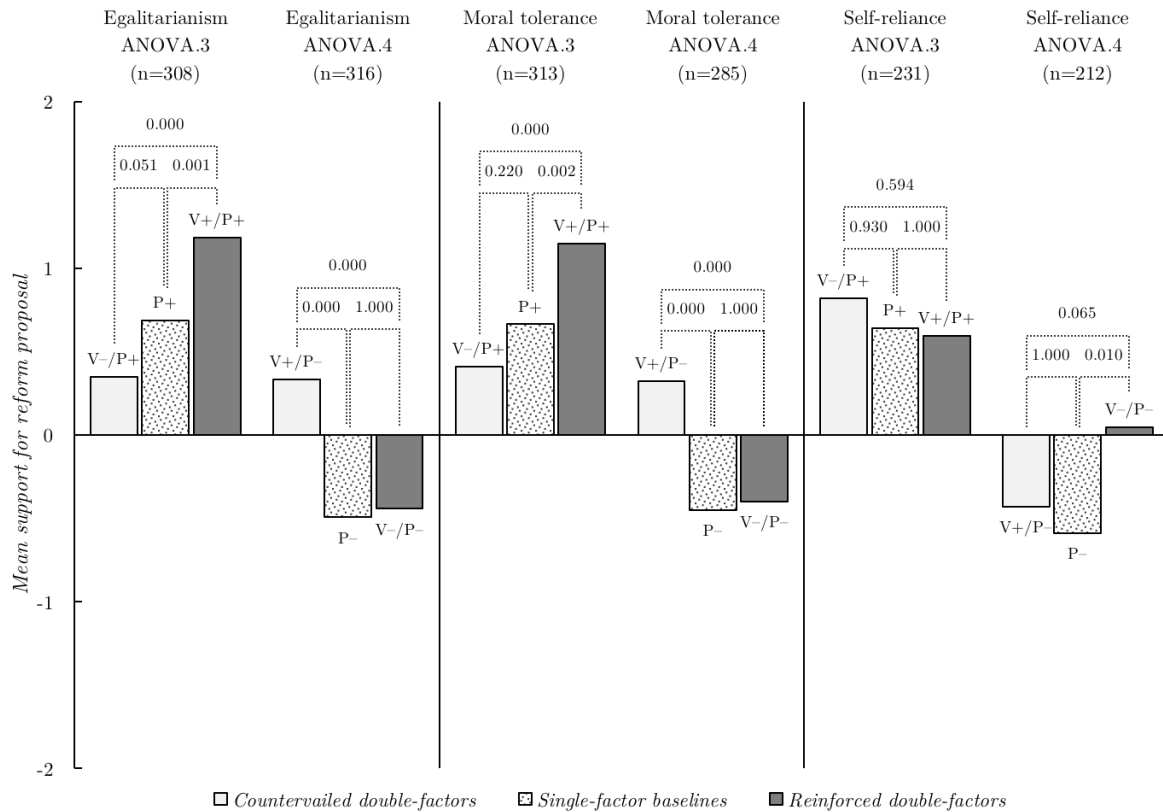
Notes: ANOVA.3 holds constant the reception of a congruent partisan self-interest factor (P+), allowing the focal core value factor to vary between incongruent (V−), none, and congruent (V+). Similarly, ANOVA.4 holds constant the reception of an incongruent partisan self-interest factor (P−), again allowing the focal value to vary.

Figure 1: The effects of core values for Study 1, MTurk sample

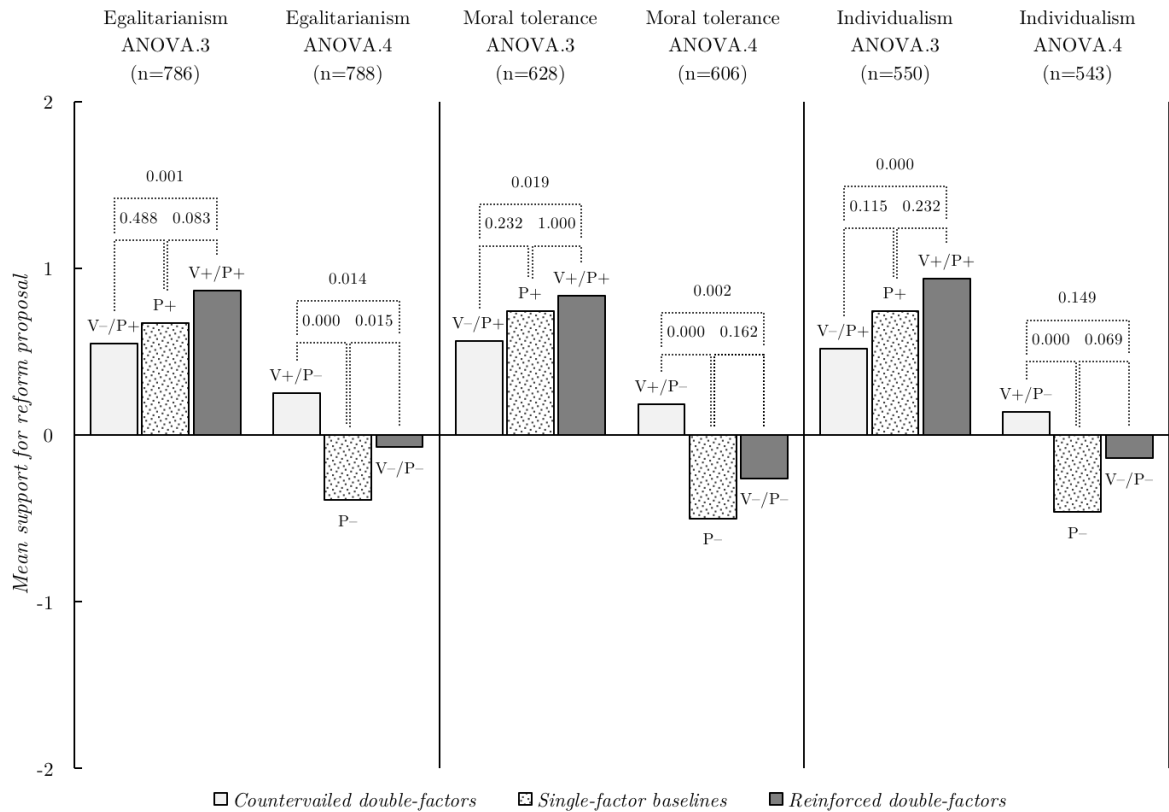for Appendix D, p.13.) The data thus support H1.

At issue, however, is that the validation of partisan self-interest is where existing scholarship on electoral reform stops. By contrast, the present paper provides core values a rebuttal, isolating their net effects and pitting them head-to-head against partisan concerns. Figure 1 graphically displays the results for the three values utilized in Study 1. As noted in the previous section, ANOVA 3 (4) holds constant the reception of a congruent (incongruent) partisan self-interest frame, allowing the focal value to vary between incongruent (V−), none, and congruent (V+); *p*-values (two-tailed) for each pairwise comparison appear above the dotted lines.

Looking first at egalitarianism and moral tolerance, we find strong substantive and

statistically significant support for H2.a: the reception of a congruent values frame (V+) makes the respondents *more* likely to support the reform. This occurs irrespective of whether the subject has been told the reform will help her party (combined congruent, V+/P+), in which case she becomes even more likely to favor the proposal relative to the single-factor baseline (P+); or that the reform will hurt her party (values-led countervailed, V+/P−), in which case she abandons her single-factor baseline opposition and becomes neutral-to-supportive. This latter point shows the ability of egalitarianism and tolerance to overwhelm, and thus reverse, the opposing pull of partisan self-interest (as H3 predicts).

The results on H2.b, however, are mixed: the reception of an incongruent values frame (V−) on egalitarianism and moral tolerance sometimes follows theory, and at other times it does not. First, a respondent who is told the reform will both hurt her party and undermine her value identification (combined incongruent, V−/P−) *never* emerges as more likely, relative to the single-factor baseline (P−), to oppose the reform; thus, a 'double negative' has no effect. However, in support of H3, a respondent who is told that the proposal will help her party but undermine her value identification is, in fact, less likely to support the reform, although this time the sign of the effect is (as theorized) determined by the congruent partisan factor. Nevertheless, the fact that people become more ambivalent reflects, again, the motivational power of core values— they have attenuated the effect of partisan concerns. In total, across H3 (regardless of whether we use V+ or V−) for egalitarianism and moral tolerance, the countervailing situations represent the strongest evidence to date that partisan concerns are but a partial explanation for electoral reform—people pursue values-based objectives, too.

Thus far, I have omitted self-reliance from the discussion. This is because nothing about the results is as theoretically expected. On the one hand, this could be evidence that, although the survey instrument worked, individualist-based core values such as self-reliance merely are not pertinent to position-taking on the issue of electoral rule choice

Egalitarianism ANOVA.3 (n=786)　Egalitarianism ANOVA.4 (n=788)　Moral tolerance ANOVA.3 (n=628)　Moral tolerance ANOVA.4 (n=606)　Individualism ANOVA.3 (n=550)　Individualism ANOVA.4 (n=543)

□ *Countervailed double-factors*　⊡ *Single-factor baselines*　■ *Reinforced double-factors*

Notes: ANOVA.3 and ANOVA.4 each allow the focal core value to vary, but hold constant the reception of congruent (P+) and incongruent (P–) partisan self-interest factors, respectively.

Figure 2: The effects of core values for Study 2, total sample

(as manifested via the access/integrity trade-off). On the other hand, it could be that the instrument was faulty and that, if the quality of the self-reliance items was improved, we might yet detect an effect. I tend toward the latter explanation and utilize Study 2 to improve the operationalization of this underlying value concept.

4.3　Study 2 – Recruitment and data

The results of Study 1 provide initial evidence that individuals indeed utilize their core values when taking a position on electoral reforms. That said, Study 1 has two limitations. First, the sample is unrepresentative of the U.S. adult population, and therefore, the findings may not be externally valid. Second, the self-reliance battery (the lone 'individualist' value in Study 1) did not perform as expected, perhaps indicating an issue with

the instrument. To address these problems, I opted to field a second study, replicating the design from Study 1 with minor changes—most notably the addition of the economic individualism battery (see Table 1) as a substitute for self-reliance.

For Study 2, piloted between 23 July–1 August 2018, and further fielded between 2–19 August, I recruited 2491 subjects from Survey Sampling International's internet-based, pre-contracted panel of respondents; panelists selected voluntarily into the study after seeing the task as an option in their personal SSI portfolio. In addition to retaining the three in-survey screeners used in Study 1, I added a fourth screener to terminate pure independents, since non-identifiers are not germane to the theory (and were 'wasted' in Study 1).[18] Because SSI manages which of its panelists view the survey, the resulting sample for Study 2 is much more nationally-representative: 25.09% between 18–30-years old; 39.06% with a Bachelor's degree or higher; and, 45.85% male. In terms of partisan ID, 51.30% of respondents are Democrats and 48.70% are Republicans. Of particular note, however, is that the sample—and despite SSI's efforts at course correction in-field—suffered from a high rate of non-compliance, assessed via a two-item manipulation check:[19] 27.10% of respondents failed one item, whereas another 16.98% failed both. As such, for the analysis that follows, I run all models on the total sample ($n = 2491$), as well as the subset of respondents who passed the manipulation check ($n = 1393$, with demographics: 52.84% Democratic and 47.16% Republican; 15.79% between 18-30-years old; 38.05% with a Bachelor's degree or higher; and, 40.49% male).[20] As before, value

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[18] Similarly screening out core values non-identifiers was not possible because a subject could be a non-identifier on one value but an identifier others.

[19] The first item assessed respondents' ability to recall the vignette's focal policy, absentee voting. The second item asked respondents if the vignette had portrayed the reform as being partisan in its effect; for this item, the correct answer depended on treatment assignment.

[20] Unlike MTurk, SSI did not provide the option of using worker qualifications to screen out individuals with histories of poor performance. When the first wave resulted in a 51.13% non-compliance rate, SSI sought to boost respondent quality by terminating users using a mobile phone; this action was successful.

identification statistics—for the total sample and for compliers only—appear in Table 6.

4.4 Results

As with Study 1, the results for partisan self-interest are strong, thereby providing additional support for H1. (Again, due to space constraints, these figures appear in the Appendix.) Figures 2 and 3 display the results of the total sample and of SSI compliers only, respectively. With respect to egalitarianism and moral tolerance, in general, Study 2 reproduces the results of Study 1, especially when subsetting on compliers; the analysis of the total sample softens many of the patterns, although they still emerge as, more or less, consistent with the MTurk sample. As such, I do not detail them further, save for a brief remark that H2.a and H3 are supported, whereas again a test of H2.b has a weak-to-no effect as a double negative.

The results for economic individualism, however, display the applicability of individualist values to the issue domain of electoral reform. Regardless of whether we look at the total sample or just compliers, the reception of a congruent value frame (V+) always pulls a respondent's level of support upwards relative to the single-factor baseline (P+). The evidence for H3 is again strong: values-led countervailed (V+/P−) individuals follow their instincts on individualism, moving toward neutral when they are told the reform will advance their value identification, irrespective of whether their party is aided or harmed. As for H2.b, again, the reception of an incongruent values frame does not have the expected effect. Yet, with respect to H3, in partisan-led countervailed situations it does at least move respondents toward neutral relative to the single-factor baseline (P+); while indicative of the theorized effect, it is not statistically significant.
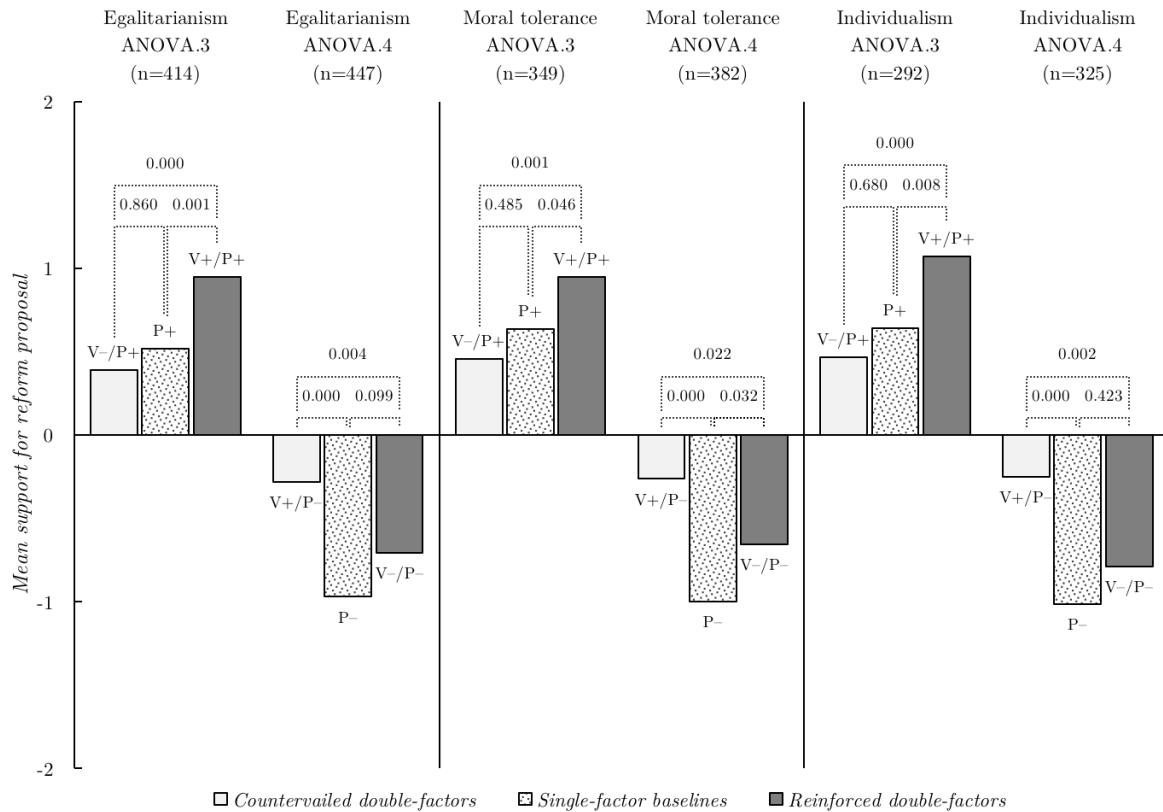
Notes: ANOVA.3 and ANOVA.4 each allow the focal core value to vary, but hold constant the reception of congruent (P+) and incongruent (P−) partisan self-interest factors, respectively.

Figure 3: The effects of core values for Study 2, SSI compliers only

5   Discussion and conclusion

The potential of electoral rules to affect who wins and who loses—especially when combined with the zero-sum nature of U.S. elections—means that political parties, as the key combatants in the electoral arena, face a strategic incentive to change the rules of the game. As such, when a party takes power, we expect to find a willingness among its members (whether elites or identifiers in the mass public) to adopt reforms they believe will help them in subsequent elections. Such is the story that the canonical, partisan self-interest approach to electoral reform tells.

The differential partisan implications of an electoral reform are indeed important, even "dominant." My argument is not that partisan self-interest is inconsequential or

even secondary in importance, but rather that it is neither solely determinative nor exhaustive, and often may have to either work in concert with, or labor to counteract, other sources of motivation for electoral reform. In this paper, I have examined the effects of one such motivation, predispositional core values (egalitarianism, moral tolerance, self-reliance, and economic individualism). Furthermore, I have forced them to compete with partisan self-interest. Each of these contributions fills existing gaps in the literature.

To do so, I developed an original experimental design that simultaneously manipulates the partisan- and values-implications of a fictitious reform proposal on absentee voting. I fielded survey experiments via Amazon's Mechanical Turk and Survey Sampling International, collecting information on each respondent's partisan and core values identifications and then recoding each subject according to whether her treatment was congruent or incongruent with her predispositional profile. A difference of means analysis reveals evidence of a role for core values: not only do they have an important effect *net* of partisan concerns, but also, they attenuate the effect of partisan self-interest in instances for which the two predispositions have been made to countervail. The results, then, not only demonstrate that partisan self-interest provides a partial picture of reform, but also displays the underappreciated, general power of core values to wash out partisan effects when the two predispositions are placed in opposition to each other.

The current project, then, provides numerous opportunities for future research. Perhaps most obviously, I have not manipulated as a third factor the topic of the reform proposal, choosing instead to use absentee voting as the focal rule across all treatments. Left unresolved, then, is the extent to which my findings would transfer to decision-making on other types of electoral rules, especially those that, and unlike absentee voting, are: 1) highly-salient and perceptually non-neutral (e.g., voter ID laws; see Biggers, 2019); or, 2) "major," structural formulae that influence the translation of vote shares into seats and offices (Katz, 2005; Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011; Leyenaar and Hazan, 2011). It is possible that, for the first type of rules, partisan concerns would overwhelm the motivational pull

of values, because the relationship between the proposed change and (expected) differential partisan turnout dominates news coverage. On the other hand, proposed dramatic, structural changes may provide an opportunity for core values to trump partisan machinations, because the very identity of a country—and its people—could be at stake. While the present study offers a necessary first step, future scholarship must force core values to battle partisan-self interest on the least and most auspicious turfs imaginable, in order to establish the lower and upper-bounds on their influence.

A second extension of the current project is to move the level of analysis from the mass public to that of state or federal lawmakers. After all, political elites (rather than survey respondents) tend to control the reform process—what Renwick (2010, 10–16) has termed "elite-majority imposition." While elites occasionally lose control of the reform process to ordinary citizens via initiatives or referenda, public outrage, scandal, etc., they tend not to, and so it is therefore important to establish whether the *key* decision-makers of representative democracy, too, utilize core values when taking action on this issue. While observational approaches are a natural avenue for such an exploration, political science lacks good measures of lawmakers' core value identifications; as such, survey experiment or text-analysis methods may prove more fruitful. This said, the citizen-level analysis of the present study offers the proof-of-concept upon which to construct a sampling of elites' predispositions—for if the public uses core values to decide on electoral reform, then so too should the elites who work within, as well as shape and prime, the value identifications of voters (Goren, 2001, 2005; Renwick, 2010, 18)

Finally, and irrespective of the level of analysis, the four core values I have explored are those that previous survey research in political science has established and refined (Feldman, 1988; Goren, 2001, 2005)—but this list is far from exhaustive (Feldman, 2003, 479–80). In social psychology, for instance, both Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz (1994) conceptualize and measure many additional values, some of which, too, could be germane to issues of electoral design, operation, and participation ('value families,' or "motiva-

tional types," such as security, conformity, and self-direction come to mind; see Schwartz, 1994, 22–25). While I suspect that other values also are pertinent to electoral rule choice, caution is necessary before generalizing the present study's results to them: their effects may be much weaker than those observed for egalitarianism, moral tolerance, and individualism, each of which, after all, I selected, in part, because a persuasive case could be made for its applicability to the electoral domain. In short, scholars of electoral reform would do well to put additional core values to the test.

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