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# Vote Intent and Beliefs about Democracy in the United States

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**ABSTRACT:** Democracy is an abstract and murky concept. This is particularly apparent in the wide variety of beliefs about democracy held by publics around the globe. Within democracies, political parties often define and name themselves by reference to a particular understanding of democracy. This paper focuses on this partisan division in understanding democracy. We suggest that parties will attract those who share similar beliefs about democracy. Specifically, we look at whether differences in beliefs about democracy predict party support in the United States. Examining the responses of U.S. participants to the fifth wave of the World Values Survey, we find that differences on a number of “essential” aspects of democracy among individuals predict vote intent (and party identification). Those more likely to understand democracy as a form of government that promotes civil liberties and the redistribution of wealth to protect the vulnerable are more likely to vote Democrat. Those who report stronger associations between democracy and both religious interpretation of laws and severe punishment of criminals are more likely to vote Republican. This research reinforces the idea that policy differences between the two main parties in the United States may derive from different understandings of the role of government in society.

**KEYWORDS:** democracy beliefs; political ideology; vote intent; U.S. politics

Kris Dunn is a Lecturer in Comparative Politics and Political Psychology in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. His research focuses on representation, ideology, culture, and authoritarianism and seeks to increase our understanding of how individual (pre)dispositions and social and political environments interact to influence individual political attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and identities.

Judd Thornton is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Georgia State University. His primary focus is on mass political behavior. In particular, his interests include partisanship, beliefs systems and ideology, the interplay between elite and mass opinion, and issues of measurement.

In the late 1980's, Fukuyama (1989) argued that we may be witnessing "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." This observation was somewhat prophetic as democracy, at least rhetorically, is now the dominant ideology and preferred form of government around the world (Norris 1999b); even countries that are by no means democratic often make some claim to be. Contrary to Bell (1960), the "exhaustion of political ideas" writ large does not necessarily coincide with those writ small; though the ideological war between democratic and non-democratic ideologies may be winding down, there is certainly no consensus on the preferred form of sub-democratic ideology.

Political parties in democracies emphasize diverse democratic ideologies, and though under less proportional electoral systems, such as the single member plurality system used in national elections in the United States, these ideologies appear to agree on many issues, there are still ideological incongruences between them (Castles and Mair 1984, Huber and Inglehart 1995, Budge 2001, Grofman 2004, Klingemann, et al. 2006). Even parties that operate under the democratic ideological umbrella express such substantially divergent policy preferences that to call all democracy-oriented parties ideologically equivalent is to paint with strokes so broad as to obscure politically-relevant ideological diversity.

Recent literature provides a particularly important impetus for not just the acknowledgement of, but also the active investigation of the diversity of democracy-ideologies. Variation in democracy-ideologies is not simply an artifact of cross-country disagreement, but also of within-country disagreement (Kornberg and Clarke 1994, Miller, et al. 1997, Bratton and Mattes 2001, Dalton, et al. 2007, Schedler and Sarsfield 2007, Lagos 2008, Bratton and Mattes 2011, Canache 2012, Seo and Kinsey 2012). There is frequently disagreement over what democracy

actually references even among those who specifically study the concept (e.g., Collier and Levitsky 1997, Whitehead 1997, Collier and Adcock 1999, Bell and Staeheli 2001, Markoff 2011). Even discussions which predominantly focus on the best way to measure democracy almost invariably revert to a debate over how to conceptualize democracy (e.g., Elkins 2000, Cheibub, et al. 2010, Møller and Skaaning 2010, Alexander, et al. 2012). Importantly, variation in how we understand democracy, expressed in various democracy-ideologies, is important as it potentially influences what we consider acceptable policy. Evidence suggests that these beliefs affect how we understand human rights (Dryzek 2016), how democratic institutions are designed and implemented (cf., Powell 2000, Powell and Vanberg 2000), and the legitimacy and trust we afford such institutions *ex post* (Kornberg and Clarke 1994).

This paper undertakes a case study of the United States to specifically examine whether beliefs about democracy are related to party support. We hypothesize that a party, which expresses a given democracy-ideology, attracts electoral support from individuals who perceive the party to hold similar beliefs about democracy. Employing data from the fifth wave of the World Values Survey, we find that beliefs about democracy are related to party support.

Evidence that those who support different parties hold different beliefs about democracy may help us understand why the most ardent party supporters are so hostile to the alternative party's political agenda: if you believe the other party is violating the rules of the game—i.e., acting outside of the parameters of democratic governance—your opposition to their policy is not simply a matter of disagreement, but one intended to prevent the other side from violating regime principles. We discuss this further in the conclusion.

## **Ideology and Party Preference**

Our primary theoretical position in this paper is that groups of individuals share similar collections of political attitudes and beliefs and behave in ways largely consistent with those attitudes and beliefs. In other words, we expect that individuals behave in accordance with general ideologies that structure their political attitudes, beliefs, and behavior; an expectation built on accumulated evidence (e.g., Miller, et al. 1976, Miller and Levitin 1976, Knight 1985, Alvarez and Nagler 1995, Miller and Shanks 1996, Alvarez and Nagler 1998, MacKuen, et al. 2003, Jost 2006, Jost, et al. 2009, Treier and Hillygus 2009, Feldman and Johnston 2014, Carmines and D'Amico 2015).

Analyses of both attitude and value structures (McClosky and Zaller 1984, Wildavsky 1987, Swedlow and Wyckoff 2009, Treier and Hillygus 2009, Feldman and Johnston 2014, Lupton, et al. 2015) indicate that U.S. political space is comprised of at least two dimensions, often referenced in terms of an economic dimension, consisting of issues related to the welfare state and government regulation of business, and a social or cultural dimension, consisting of issues related to traditional values, civil liberties, and law and order. As a result of multidimensional political space constrained by a two-party system, the Democratic and Republican parties are composed of coalitions of distinct, yet overlapping, ideologies (cf., Bawn, et al. 2012). The Republican party is argued to consist of two different ‘wings’: the first both economically and socially conservative (e.g., the various Christian-right and Tea Party groups) and the second economically conservative and socially moderate or liberal (Schofield and Miller 2007, Miller and Schofield 2008). The Democrats are similarly composed of two groups: those who are both economically and socially liberal and those who are economically moderate or conservative and socially liberal (Schofield and Miller 2007, Miller and Schofield 2008). Of the four quadrants suggested by a two-dimensional model of political space, the two political parties are predominantly composed of three of the four, overlapping among those who fall into the economically conservative and

socially liberal quadrant; only those who are economically liberal and socially conservative—the quadrant often identified with the working class (e.g., Lipset 1959, 1960, Napier and Jost 2008)—are left unrepresented. Each party, then, is composed of a coalition of two distinct yet overlapping ideologies: Democrats overlap on the social dimension; Republicans overlap on the economic dimension.

## **Hypotheses**

As most citizens in most of the world's countries view democracy as the ideal form of government (Klingemann 1999, Inglehart 2003), most ideologies, including those in the U.S., are democratically inclined. However, this does not necessitate a single democracy-ideology, as the variations in policies held by Conservative, Christian Democratic, and Social Democratic (etcetera) parties makes abundantly clear. Both expert judgments (Castles and Mair 1984, Hunt and Laver 1992, Huber and Inglehart 1995, Laver and Garry 2000) and quantitative measurement of policy programs (Budge 2001, Klingemann, et al. 2006) support not only the assertion that party ideologies differ, but also that the ideologies of supporters also differ, and to a substantial degree.

As we focus on an advanced democracy where support for democratic governance is quite high, we do not expect the degree of variation in beliefs about democracy that one might expect from a country with less support for democratic governance, such as the Russian Federation (cf., Klingemann 1999, 2014). We expect those beliefs which emphasize democratic participation in politics and the social equality of individuals will strongly associate with democracy while beliefs emphasizing non-democratic intervention in politics will not. Similarly, we expect that most individuals will believe that democracy involves at least minimal economic intervention as industry regulation and the welfare state have become, to some degree, bound to the idea of democratic governance. Our first three hypotheses, then, focus on our sample as a whole:

Hypothesis 1: Characteristics which emphasize political participation and social equality will be widely believed to be essential to democracy.

Hypothesis 2: Characteristics emphasizing non-democratic political interventions will be widely believed to be non-essential to democracy.

Hypothesis 3: Characteristics emphasizing economic intervention will be believed to be at least moderately essential to democracy.

Although we expect convergence around the above characteristics, we also expect a meaningful degree of variation within the public and we expect party support to be systematically related to such. Given the coalitional structure of the dominant U.S. parties, we base our expectations around the apparent shared social liberalism of Democratic supporters and the economic conservatism of Republican supporters.

Hypothesis 4: Those who believe that characteristics reflecting social equality are more essential to democracy will be more likely to support the Democratic Party than the Republican Party.

Hypothesis 5: Those who believe that characteristics reflecting economic intervention are less essential to democracy will be more likely to support the Republican Party than the Democratic Party.

## **Data and Measurement**

Measuring beliefs about democracy is a complicated project. As democracy can mean various things to various people, anything short of an open-ended question could be considered restrictive and likely to play to the expectations of the researcher. However, even an open-ended inquiry is problematic. The limited motivation of respondents to provide more than an answer or two as well as various other reasons (e.g., interview pressures, interviewer effects, accessibility issues

associated with question order) may cause a respondent to overlook a potential aspect of democracy that would be quite pertinent under other circumstances. Both preselected lists and open-ended questions, then, have their drawbacks, but either can be useful for a given research question.

For our purposes, a pre-fabricated list allows comparison of a larger variety of characteristics (that individuals may or may not believe are necessary for democracy) than are normally coded in open-ended inquiries. Limited responses coded from open-ended questions may allow us to compare the primacy of attribution of a characteristic to democracy across individuals of differing party preference, but will not allow us to say anything about whether individuals of differing party preference believe democracy entails different characteristics, as the absence of a response does not equate to the absence of an association. The advantage of the data used here is its capacity to reveal whether Republican Party supporters hold relatively different beliefs about what democracy entails than do Democratic Party supporters.

Wave 5 of the World Values Survey (WVS<sub>5</sub>) provides a unique battery of ten items which inquire into individuals' beliefs about democracy, as well as vote intent and relevant control variables. Samples in each country include individuals over the age of 18, with a minimum sample size of 1000 individuals. Nationally representative samples are obtained via stratified sampling. Data from the U.S. were collected between September 19<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> 2006 by Knowledge Networks using personal interviews. 1,201 respondents (of a total sample of 1,710) responded to and completed the survey; a completion rate of 70.2%. Missing pertinent data reduces the sample to 1,107 observations.

For those 1,107 individuals, when asked, "If there were a national election tomorrow, for which party on this list would you vote?", 362 (32.7%) chose "Republican", 472 (42.6%) chose

“Democrat”, and 200 (18.1%) chose “Independent”.<sup>1</sup> The remainder of the sample chose “Other” or did not answer the question. As our primary focus in this article is examining the different beliefs about democracy between Republican Party and Democratic Party supporters, we retain only those individuals for analysis whom responded “Republican” or “Democrat”. We exclude independents as there is no political manifesto or elite rhetoric which might serve to guide or unite the rank-and-file of this group and therefore little reason to assume that independents are a relatively coherent group.<sup>2</sup> This reduces our sample to 834 observations.

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<sup>1</sup> The WVS<sub>5</sub> also includes a partisanship question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent or don’t you have any strong party loyalty.” However, as our theory speaks more to the psychologically weaker concept of party support rather than on the psychologically stronger concept of party identity, we choose to focus our analyses on the broader vote intent question. Nevertheless, given the obvious relevance of the question, we test the robustness of our findings by also analyzing the partisanship question. The results (presented in the appendix) are very similar to the results reported in Table 2.

<sup>2</sup> Independents could hypothetically fall anywhere in ideological space and could therefore express various non-overlapping ideologies. Independents could be, among other things, closet partisans, minor party supporters of the left or right, or people who are disengaged from politics (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). In terms of our theory, there are no party-based ideological appeals to attract the support of this group and therefore no reason to hypothesize that they hold similar beliefs about democracy. Nevertheless, we do expect party supporters to differ from independents: if party appeals to specific democracy-beliefs attract those with similar democracy-beliefs, then those who do not support either of the main parties should hold distinct democracy-beliefs, even if such are

Individuals' beliefs about democracy are determined via reference to a set of 10 questions.

These are prefaced with the following:

Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy.

Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means "not at all an essential characteristic of democracy" and 10 means it definitely is "an essential characteristic of democracy".

Table 1 presents the ten statements that follow this question along with the variable names used to reference those items in the remainder of this paper. In terms of the categorical terminology used in our hypotheses above, we consider: free elections and referendums as synonymous with political participation; civil rights and women's rights as synonymous with social equality and social liberalism; religious interpretation and military intervention as synonymous with non-democratic political intervention; and redistribution and unemployment security as synonymous with economic intervention and economic liberalism. While criminal punishment is not directly related to social equality, its indirect connection via economic and racial considerations (e.g., King and

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not coherent within the group of independents. So, while this is certainly relevant to our theory, it is not directly relevant to the main focus of the paper. We therefore include an analysis of independents alongside party supporters in the appendix. As expected, independents are statistically different from both Democrats and Republicans on certain democracy-beliefs. Further, as a robustness check to our primary analyses, in the appendix we also include the output of a multinomial regression model including independents, using Republicans as the base category. The results of the comparison between those who intend to vote Republican and those who intend to vote Democrat are substantively identical to those reported in Table 2.

Wheelock 2007, Wakefield and Uggen 2010, Western and Pettit 2010) makes it relevant to the social liberalism category and therefore subject to our fourth hypothesis, though it will be negatively related to such; i.e., a weaker belief in this characteristic is indicative of social liberalism. This leaves economic prosperity uncategorized and for which we remain agnostic in terms of any expectations.

<<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>>

Previous analyses of vote intent suggest a number of additional concepts that may influence vote intent (cf., Campbell, et al. 1960, Lewis-Beck, et al. 2008). Further, the very nature of some of the beliefs about democracy questions suggest a particular need to account for certain influences: e.g., the relationship between the belief that civil rights are essential to democracy and vote intent may result from one's status as a racial minority. The regression analysis below therefore controls for a select set of variables that are either known to effect vote intent, may influence beliefs about democracy, or both: age, authoritarianism, education, gender, income level, Left-Right identification, race, and religiosity.

Age is a self-reported measure of the respondent's age at the time of the interview and ranges from 18 to 91. Authoritarianism is a formative scale (cf., Singh and Dunn 2013) that follows comparative authoritarianism scholars (Stenner 2005, Dunn and Singh 2011, Brandt and Henry 2012, Dunn and Singh 2014, Roccato, et al. 2014, Dunn 2015) who utilize specific child-rearing values questions from the European and/or World Values Surveys to measure an individual's level of authoritarianism. This scale is an additive index composed of four questions gauging the respondent's view of desirable qualities to instill in children: independence, imagination, respect/tolerance for others, and obedience. Each of the first three items is coded 1 if rejected and 0 if accepted. The fourth item, obedience, is coded 1 if accepted and 0 if rejected. The items are

then summed to form a scale ranging from 0 to 4 with a higher value indicating a higher degree of authoritarianism. Gender is a report of the respondent's gender with males coded as 1 and females coded as 2. Education is a 9-point measure of the level of education the respondent has achieved with a higher value indicating a higher level of education; in the U.S. sample, this variable ranges from 3 to 9. Income is a measure of the respondent's income ranging from 1 to 10 with a higher value indicating a higher level of income. Left-Right identification is obtained from the following inquiry: "In political matters, people talk of 'the left' and 'the right.' How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?" This variable ranges from 1 to 10 with 1 corresponding to the furthest "left" and 10 corresponding to the furthest "right." Race (determined by the interviewer) is initially coded into 5 categories (white, non-Hispanic; black, non-Hispanic; other, non-Hispanic; Hispanic; more than one race, non-Hispanic). We recode this so that white, non-Hispanic is coded as 1 and all others are coded 0.<sup>3</sup> Religiosity is composed of four standardized items (due to differing scale ranges) inquiring into a respondent's religious attitudes ("For each of the following, indicate how important it is in your life: Religion", "Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are: A religious person, Not a religious person, A convinced atheist?", "How important is God in your life?") and behavior ("Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?"). This scale generates a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.842 with an average inter-item correlation of 0.571. The scale ranges from -2.637 to 0.820; a higher value indicates a higher level of religiosity.

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<sup>3</sup> We find substantively identical results if we include dummy variables for white, for black, and for Hispanic Americans (with "other" as the omitted reference category).

## Analyses

We first examine the distributions of responses to the ten democracy-beliefs items. Figure 1 presents histograms for each of the democracy-belief items. In Figure 2, we plot the mean rating for each of these items. Consistent with our expectations regarding the distribution of beliefs in society, those items that one would expect to be strongly endorsed in an established liberal-democracy – free elections, referendums, civil rights, and women’s rights – are. Those illiberal items we would expect to receive minimal support – religious interpretation and military intervention – do so. The items that reference economic issues and criminal punishment score in between the illiberal and liberal items.

<<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>>

<<INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>>

Examining a few items in detail helps illustrate these general characterizations. Consider religious interpretation, an item we expect to receive little support: here we see that the mean is 3.025 and about 42% give a score of zero and more than 90% give a score of five or less, indicating very little support for the idea that religious authorities should interpret the laws in democratic countries. For civil rights, an item we expect to receive high support, we see that the mean response is 8.10 and more than 80% offer a score of six or greater. Other items show more variation in levels of support: for example, while the most common response is ten for the criminal punishment item, nearly a third of respondents offer a response of five or lower. Likewise, we also observe substantial variation in the public’s belief that redistribution is essential to democracy: the modal response is five, but 17% offer a response of one and about 10% offer a response of nine or ten; about 45% of respondents offer a six or greater while about 55% offer a five or lower for this item. In other words, while there is considerable agreement for some of the items, the data do not indicate that there is a consensus in the public about what is essential for democracy.

Examining the relationship between the individual belief items and party support, we estimate a model where vote intent is the dependent variable. Table 2 provides the output of a logistic regression model regressing vote intent on beliefs about democracy (reporting both coefficients and odds ratios), controlling for other relevant variables. The model output indicates that a stronger belief that redistribution, unemployment security, and civil rights are essential to democracy predicts a higher likelihood of a Democratic vote intent, while a stronger belief that religious interpretation and criminal punishment is essential to democracy predicts a lower likelihood of reporting a Democratic vote intent.

<<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>>

We further examine the impact of these items by calculating the change in the probability of reporting a vote intent for the Democratic Party over the Republican Party. Figure 3 displays the impact of the five items with statistically significant coefficients on the probability of reporting a Democratic vote intent with 95% confidence intervals. As is clear from the figure, these items have a substantively meaningful relationship with vote intent. When the redistribution variable is set to its minimum value, the probability of supporting the Democratic Party is 0.505; this increases to 0.638 when the variable is at its maximum value. A change in the unemployment security variable from the minimum value of 1 to the maximum value of 10 increases the probability of reporting a Democratic vote intent from 0.405, favoring the Republican Party, to 0.689, strongly favoring the Democratic Party. This relationship is echoed for civil rights: an increase from a probability of 0.413 to 0.609. On the other hand, a shift from the minimum to the maximum on the religious interpretation variable decreases the probability of reporting a Democratic vote intent from 0.597 to 0.460. This relationship is echoed for criminal punishment, where we observe a decrease in probability from 0.648 to 0.521.

<<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>>

Over all, our analyses largely support our hypotheses. Our first three hypotheses consider the sample as a whole. We expect that on average the belief that democracy requires: 1) free elections, referendums, civil rights, and women's rights will be quite high; 2) religious interpretation and military intervention will be quite low; 3) redistribution and economic security will be moderate. The descriptive analyses of the data support these hypotheses.

Our fourth hypothesis posits that those who have stronger beliefs that civil rights and women's rights are essential for democracy and a lesser belief that criminal punishment is essential for democracy will be more likely to intend to vote Democratic. Our analyses demonstrate that the probability of reporting a Democratic vote intent is much higher among those who hold a stronger belief that civil rights are essential to democracy. However, this is not the case with women's rights; one's belief that women's rights are essential for democracy appears uncorrelated with vote intent. Criminal punishment is related to vote intent in the expected direction: those with a weaker belief that the severe punishment of criminals is essential for democracy are more likely to report a Democratic vote intent. Our fourth hypothesis, then, is predominantly, though not entirely, supported.

Our fifth hypothesis posits that those who have weaker beliefs that economic redistribution is essential for democracy will be more likely to report a Republican vote intent. This is born out in both items that relate to this issue: redistribution and unemployment security. Weaker support for both items correlate with an increased probability of reporting a Republican vote intent.

Finally, outside of our vote intent-related hypotheses and somewhat surprisingly, we find that those who hold a stronger belief that religious interpretation is essential for democracy are

more likely to report a Republican vote intent; above and beyond the influence of religiosity on this belief.

## **Conclusion**

For generations, parties in the U.S. have embraced different beliefs about what democracy entails, occasionally expressing such as explicit components of their platforms. One of the initial struggles in the U.S. related to how ‘democratic’ the new political system should be (Cohen, et al. 2009). Soon after, disagreements arose over federalism and its role in the burgeoning republic (cf., Channing 1917, Aldrich 1995). During the period of Jacksonian Democracy, Jackson and his fellow partisans extended the suffrage to nearly all adult white males (McCormick 1960, Aldrich 1995), appealing to populist democratic ideals over the more elitist republican ideals of the past. Currently, both the Democratic and Republican parties explicitly tie their economic agenda to specific values and principles associated with ‘American democracy’ in order to legitimize their policy preferences. That only some of these appeals overlap indicates a divergence in beliefs about what American democracy actually entails.

The Republicans and the Democrats embody differing democracy-ideologies. Yet as mainstream parties in an established democracy, these ideologies and those of their supporters tend to be fairly liberal-democratic in nature and at least minimally supportive of economic redistribution. On average, one may expect respondents to report strong beliefs that liberal and participatory characteristics are essential to democracy and a moderate belief that redistribution is essential to democracy. However, given the partially distinct ideologies expressed by the two parties, we expect that those with divergent vote intents will vary in the strength of their belief in certain of these characteristics. We hold two broad expectations: first, individuals will largely hold liberal and participatory beliefs about democracy that are also at least somewhat supportive of

redistribution; second, individual's beliefs about democracy's essential characteristics will be reflected in their vote intent. Our analyses support these expectations.

In general, individuals strongly believe that free elections, civil rights, referendums, and women's rights are essential characteristics of democracy; while religious interpretation and military intervention are only weakly associated with democracy. Individuals only moderately believe that democracy requires redistribution of wealth and unemployment security. The belief that democracy requires criminals to be severely punished is fairly strong, as is the more politically neutral belief that democracy requires economic prosperity.

Five of the ten proposed characteristics of democracy are significantly correlated with vote intent. A stronger belief that redistribution, unemployment security, and civil rights are essential for democracy is associated with a greater probability of a Democratic vote intent. A stronger belief that democracy requires a religious interpretation of laws and the severe punishment of criminals predicts a lower probability of a Democratic vote intent. As expected given the stereotypical attribution of party policy preferences, central to the Democratic ideological coalition is a stronger belief that democracy ensures civil rights and economic security while the Republican ideological coalition more strongly believes that democracy requires religiously-guided and punitive governance. Importantly, however, supporters of both parties believe that liberal characteristics are essential to democracy while mostly dismissing illiberal characteristics.

As with most cross-sectional survey research, our analyses leave a number of unresolved issues. Critically, we cannot confirm our proposed direction of causality. We cannot discern whether beliefs about democracy precede vote intent or follow from it or whether both result from concepts such as partisan identity or value structures. Without relevant long-term panel data, causal attribution will remain theoretical speculation. However, according to the expectancy-value model

of attitudes and the theory of planned behavior, individuals' attitudes tend to follow spontaneously from accessible beliefs which then guide behavior (cf., Fishbein 1966, Ajzen and Fishbein 2000). Our suggestion that people's beliefs about democracy, likely in conjunction with none-regime-based beliefs, determine their policy attitudes and their subsequent vote preference is grounded in a good deal of previously accumulated evidence.

In this article, we diverge from previous research on democracy-related mental constructs (e.g., McClosky and Zaller 1984) by focusing on questions that invite the expression of beliefs about democracy rather than attitudes regarding policy preferences. However, we cannot be sure that people are indeed separating their beliefs from their attitudes when answering this set of questions; it is reasonable to suspect that those who have given little consideration to what democracy does or does not entail may, for example, simply substitute their attitude toward civil liberties for their belief about whether democracy requires such.

It is also important to emphasize that we do not wish to suggest that political space in the U.S. is unidimensional. By focusing on interparty differences in a two-party system we may give the impression of a unidimensional political space. However, consideration of multidimensional space is critical in understanding how coalitions affect our analyses. We expect that Republican Party supporters will vary more widely on issues of social equality than issues of economic intervention while Democratic Party supporters will vary more widely on issues of economic intervention than social equality. If this is the case, a proposition we do not test in this paper, this would mean that those individuals who fall in the overlapping quadrant are shifting the average score of the social-oriented beliefs for the Republican Party supporters and the economic-oriented beliefs for the Democratic Party supporters closer to that of the opposing party's supporters, thereby moderating the differences between the parties. Further, it is possible that those who fall

into this overlapping quadrant hold distinct beliefs about democracy from their fellow supporters. These are certainly good reasons to take greater account of intraparty differences; and we view this as an important line of inquiry to be taken forward in future research.

Herein, we have focused on support for the two major parties in U.S. national politics. However, a sizeable portion of the electorate abstains from reporting a preferred party, either in terms of vote intent or party identification. For our purposes here, we chose to exclude such respondents as there is no hypothetical reason to expect that independents share a coherent ideology that would predict, as a group, their beliefs about democracy. Those who choose “independent” for their vote intent or party identification may be, among other things, closet partisans, minor party supporters of the left or right, or people who are disengaged from politics (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). Future research may seek to examine whether such individuals differ from traditional party supporters in terms of their democracy-beliefs and the impact of such on their (lack of) party support.

End-of-ideology theses suggest that we largely agree on both the means and ends of society and governance. While there is widespread agreement that democracy is the ideal form of regime (Norris 1999b), there remains a fair amount of diversity in belief regarding what democracy itself requires. For those who intend to vote for one of the two dominant American political parties, there appear to be relatively distinct beliefs about what democracy is. Though some of these beliefs overlap, they also diverge to a substantial degree. Previous research provides evidence that distrust in or dissatisfaction with democratic political institutions is higher among those individuals who did not vote for or do not agree with the policy outputs of those currently in power (Miller 1974, Miller and Borrelli 1991, Hetherington 1998, Norris 1999a, Anderson and LoTempio 2002, Banducci and Karp 2003, Singh, et al. 2012, Singh 2013). The analyses herein suggest that such

distrust may originate from a matter-of-degree, rather than a fundamental, disagreement over the nature and purpose of democratic governance and may thus be a tractable problem. However, just because party supporters do not report extreme associations with the above suggested characteristics of democracy, does not mean they do not perceive themselves as radically divergent from the opposition (cf., Mackie and Cooper 1984, Mackie 1986, Van Boven, et al. 2012).

Difference in democracy-beliefs may contribute to perceptions of culture wars in the U.S. Numerous scholars have added to the debate on how polarized the U.S. has become in recent decades (e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, Hetherington 2001, Fiorina, et al. 2006, Layman, et al. 2006, Abramowitz and Saunders 2008, Baldassarri and Gelman 2008, Fiorina, et al. 2008, Hetherington 2009, Hetherington and Weiler 2009, Iyengar, et al. 2012, Van Boven, et al. 2012, Prior 2013, Jacoby 2014, Westfall, et al. 2015, Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). Regardless of whether we are talking about elites or rank-and-file party supporters, beliefs about democracy are likely to inform how one views those on the other side of the aisle. Those whose beliefs about democracy are expansive and policy prescriptive are likely to more strongly oppose the other side if the other side's policies violate perceptions of what is democratically acceptable. For example, if a Democrat strongly believes that democracy requires civil liberties, any suggested infringement of civil liberties on the part of Republicans (or even fellow Democrats) is liable to be met with strong opposition. Repeated violations of a group's beliefs by the opposition may create a permanently aggravated relationship and the belief that the opposition is trying to undermine democratic institutions. This is exemplified in current political rhetoric as groups often reference policies of the party they disagree with as fascist, communist, socialist, or totalitarian; and while such rhetoric often makes little sense, especially where distinct ideologies are used by the same person to describe the same policy or party, the underlying message appears to be that the target

policy or party is undemocratic. Such perspective makes any compromise, or support for any compromise, highly unlikely as to do so would condone violating the perceived rules of the game.

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**Table 1: Conceptions of democracy items**

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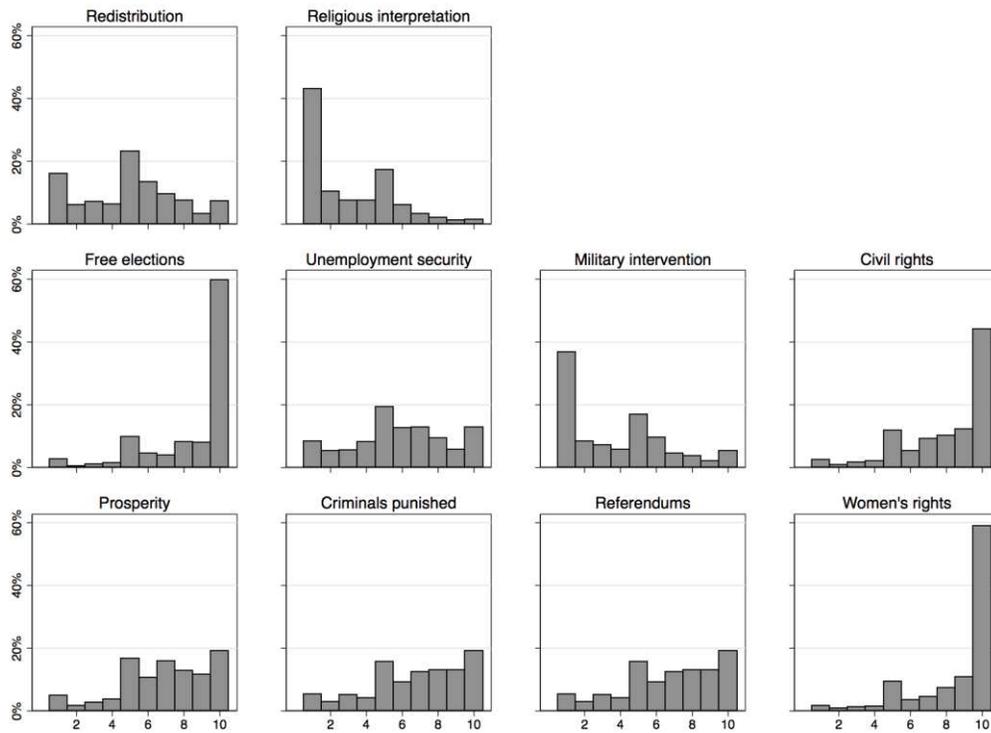
survey question	variable name
Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor.	redistribution
Religious authorities interpret the laws.	religious interpretation
People choose their leaders in free elections.	free elections
People receive state aid for unemployment.	unemployment security
The army takes over when government is incompetent.	military intervention
Civil rights protect people's liberty against oppression.	civil rights
The economy is prospering.	economic prosperity
Criminals are severely punished.	criminal punishment
People can change the laws in referendums.	referendums
Women have the same rights as men.	women's rights

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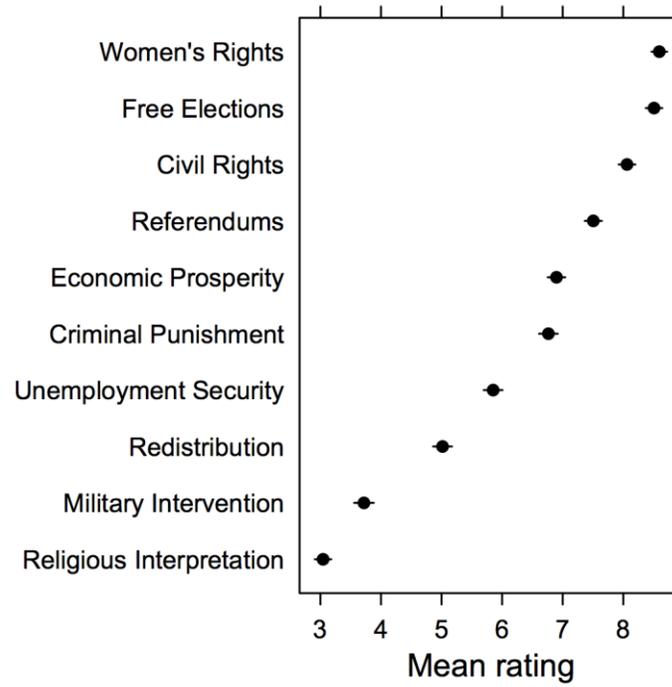
**Table 2: Logit Model of Vote Intent (Democrat = 1)**

	$\beta$	s.e.	O.R.
Redistribution	<b>0.099</b>	0.039	<b>1.104</b>
Religious Interpretation	<b>-0.101</b>	0.049	<b>0.904</b>
Free Elections	-0.093	0.052	0.911
Unemployment Security	<b>0.210</b>	0.043	<b>1.234</b>
Military Intervention	-0.044	0.037	0.957
Civil Rights	<b>0.145</b>	0.051	<b>1.156</b>
Economic Prosperity	-0.087	0.050	0.916
Criminal Punishment	<b>-0.097</b>	0.046	<b>0.908</b>
Referendums	-0.017	0.050	0.983
Women's Rights	-0.035	0.060	0.965
Age	<b>0.014</b>	0.006	<b>1.014</b>
Authoritarianism	-0.135	0.095	0.874
Education	-0.050	0.077	0.951
Gender (female)	<b>0.480</b>	0.186	<b>1.616</b>
Income	-0.034	0.052	0.967
Left-Right identification	<b>-0.650</b>	0.062	<b>0.522</b>
Religiosity	<b>-0.266</b>	0.132	<b>0.767</b>
Race (white, non-Hispanic)	<b>-1.644</b>	0.238	<b>0.193</b>
constant	<b>4.806</b>	0.892	--
observations	834		
pseudo-r <sup>2</sup>	0.341		

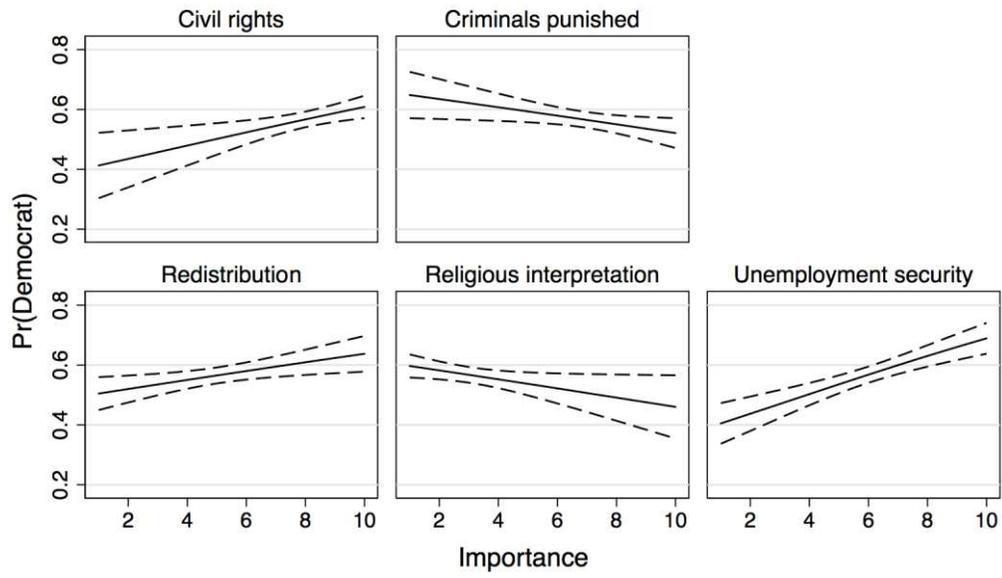
Note: **bolded** coefficients are significant at  $p \leq 0.05$  (one-tailed).



**Figure 1:** Distributions for the ten beliefs about democracy items. Higher values indicate the item is considered more essential.



**Figure 2:** Average rating of each of the ten items with 95% confidence intervals.



**Figure 3:** The impact of the five significant democracy items on  $\text{Pr}(\text{Democrat})$  with 95% confidence intervals.

## Appendix

Table A1 presents coefficient estimates and standard errors from a multinomial logistic regression where Independents are the base category. These results support our theory in that independents appear to possess a distinct ideological profile from both Democrats and Republicans. Independents significantly differ from Democrats in that Democrats more strongly believe redistribution is essential democracy and less strongly believe that religious interpretation is essential to democracy. Independents differ from Republicans in that Republicans less strongly believe that unemployment security is essential to democracy and more strongly believe that criminal punishment is essential to democracy.

In order to more directly compare the results from this model to those in Table 3, we present coefficient estimates and standard errors from a multinomial logistic regression where Republicans are the base category in Table A2. This table serves as a robustness check on Table 3, accounting for independents alongside of party supporters. The results are substantively identical to those in Table 3.

<<INSERT TABLE A1 HERE>>

<<INSERT TABLE A2 HERE>>

Table A3 displays a logistic regression analysis of the party identification question. We note that fewer respondents answer the identity question ( $n = 677$ ) than the vote intent question ( $n = 834$ ). This variable is strongly correlated with the vote intention variable:  $\chi^2 = 578.313$  ( $p < 0.001$ ),  $\phi = 0.953$ . It is therefore unsurprising that we see similar results to those reported in Table 3. The primary difference is that the coefficient for criminal punishment is no longer statistically significant.

<<INSERT TABLE A3 HERE>>

**Table A1: Multinomial Logit Model of Vote Intent**

	Democrat		Republican	
	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.
Redistribution	<b>0.079</b>	0.039	-0.020	0.044
Religious Interpretation	<b>-0.149</b>	0.050	-0.054	0.053
Free Elections	-0.035	0.052	0.054	0.057
Unemployment Security	0.081	0.042	<b>-0.106</b>	0.045
Military Intervention	0.002	0.038	0.059	0.041
Civil Rights	0.101	0.053	-0.019	0.054
Economic Prosperity	0.005	0.046	0.075	0.051
Criminal Punishment	0.019	0.042	<b>0.106</b>	0.048
Referendums	-0.011	0.047	-0.001	0.053
Women's Rights	-0.099	0.060	-0.086	0.065
age	0.005	0.006	-0.009	0.006
authoritarianism	0.010	0.096	0.173	0.105
education	0.019	0.074	0.064	0.083
gender (female)	<b>0.555</b>	0.184	0.094	0.205
income	<b>0.145</b>	0.052	<b>0.198</b>	0.057
Left-Right identification	<b>-0.241</b>	0.061	<b>0.454</b>	0.066
religiosity	<b>0.382</b>	0.113	<b>0.649</b>	0.132
race (white, non-Hispanic)	<b>-0.742</b>	0.217	<b>0.925</b>	0.270
constant	0.601	0.862	<b>-4.502</b>	0.970
observations	1034			
pseudo-r <sup>2</sup>	0.223			

note: **bolded** coefficients are significant at  $p \leq 0.05$  (one-tailed); base category is Independent

**Table A2: Multinomial Logit Model of Vote Intent**

	Democrat		Independent	
	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.
Redistribution	<b>0.099</b>	0.038	0.020	0.044
Religious Interpretation	<b>-0.095</b>	0.048	0.054	0.053
Free Elections	-0.088	0.051	-0.054	0.057
Unemployment Security	<b>0.187</b>	0.040	<b>0.106</b>	0.045
Military Intervention	-0.057	0.036	-0.059	0.041
Civil Rights	<b>0.120</b>	0.049	0.019	0.054
Economic Prosperity	-0.070	0.047	-0.075	0.051
Criminal Punishment	<b>-0.087</b>	0.043	<b>-0.106</b>	0.048
Referendums	-0.010	0.048	0.001	0.053
Women's Rights	-0.013	0.058	0.086	0.065
age	<b>0.014</b>	0.005	0.009	0.006
authoritarianism	-0.163	0.093	-0.173	0.105
education	-0.045	0.074	-0.064	0.083
gender (female)	<b>0.461</b>	0.180	-0.094	0.205
income	-0.052	0.050	<b>-0.198</b>	0.057
Left-Right identification	<b>-0.695</b>	0.062	<b>-0.454</b>	0.066
religiosity	<b>-0.267</b>	0.125	<b>-0.649</b>	0.132
race (white, non-Hispanic)	<b>-1.667</b>	0.235	<b>-0.925</b>	0.270
constant	<b>5.103</b>	0.868	<b>4.502</b>	0.970
observations	1034			
pseudo-r <sup>2</sup>	0.223			

note: **bolded** coefficients are significant at  $p \leq 0.05$  (one-tailed); base category is Republican

**Table A3: Logit Model of Party Identity (Democrat = 1)**

	$\beta$	s.e.	O.R.
Redistribution	<b>0.157</b>	0.043	<b>1.170</b>
Religious Interpretation	<b>-0.100</b>	0.054	<b>0.904</b>
Free Elections	-0.091	0.055	0.913
Unemployment Security	<b>0.148</b>	0.045	<b>1.160</b>
Military Intervention	-0.071	0.04	0.931
Civil Rights	<b>0.165</b>	0.056	<b>1.180</b>
Economic Prosperity	-0.042	0.057	0.958
Criminal Punishment	-0.028	0.051	0.973
Referendums	-0.008	0.055	0.992
Women's Rights	-0.051	0.064	0.950
Age	<b>0.016</b>	0.006	<b>1.016</b>
Authoritarianism	-0.053	0.106	0.949
Education	-0.103	0.085	0.902
Gender (female)	<b>0.521</b>	0.204	<b>1.684</b>
Income	-0.062	0.054	0.940
Left-Right identification	<b>-0.561</b>	0.063	<b>0.571</b>
Religiosity	<b>-0.435</b>	0.153	<b>0.648</b>
Race (white, non-Hispanic)	<b>-1.753</b>	0.252	<b>0.173</b>
constant	<b>3.610</b>	0.943	
observations	667		
pseudo-r <sup>2</sup>	0.329		

Note: **bolded** coefficients are significant at  $p \leq 0.05$  (one-tailed).