

PARTISANSHIP AND ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY: EVIDENCE FROM THE UK EXPENSES SCANDAL

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Why do voters support corrupt politicians? One reason is that voters care about both corruption and partisan control of government; the more voters care about which party wins, the less they can deter individual wrongdoing. I highlight this tradeoff in the 2009 UK expenses scandal, showing that individualized electoral accountability was less effective in constituencies where the partisan stakes of the local contest were higher: not only did corrupt MPs in these constituencies suffer smaller punishments, but these MPs were also more likely to be implicated in the scandal in the first place. The findings point to an under-appreciated consequence of partisanship (and underlying causes such as strong party systems and polarization at the elite or mass level) for the electoral control of politicians.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Electoral competition is thought to provide an important check to political corruption (Rose-Ackerman 1999), and indeed cross-country regressions indicate that durable democracy is associated with lower corruption levels (Treisman 2000, Montinola & Jackman 2002). Still, corruption persists to some extent in all democracies and is even viewed as endemic in a few such as Italy, India, and the United States in the Gilded Age. Why do corrupt practices like bribe-taking and outright theft of public resources, which benefit the politician but typically hurt almost every citizen, persist in a democratic system where the people rule?

One answer formalized by political agency models (e.g. Ferejohn 1986, Fearon 1999, Besley 2006) is that corruption persists because it is hard to detect, but informational problems can only go so far in explaining the persistence of corruption in democracies. Politicians who are widely believed to have engaged in corrupt behavior have been shown in numerous studies to suffer very modest electoral penalties (e.g. Reed 1999, Chang et al. 2010, Peters & Welch 1980, Welch & Hibbing 1997). The question is why voters – all of whom would presumably prefer to be governed by non-corrupt politicians – would fail to remove incumbents who are known to be corrupt.

The explanation I emphasize in this paper is that even when voters unanimously prefer non-corrupt politicians, they disagree about other aspects of politics, such as which party should be in power; in many situations, their ability to deter corruption is undermined by their determination to achieve other political goals. My focus is on the way in which partisanship, which I define as the strength of voters' party preferences, undermines electoral accountability. In the case of corruption, this means that voters' partisan attachments make them less responsive to corruption scandals implicating incumbent politicians, and this in turn makes incumbents more likely to be implicated in corruption scandals. More broadly, the idea is that partisanship makes voters less responsive to politicians' performance (e.g. their management of the economy (Powell & Whitten 1993, Anderson 2000, Hellwig & Samuels 2008)), and this in turn makes politicians less likely to exert effort

toward performing well.

As an empirical test of this idea, I focus on the 2009 UK parliamentary expenses scandal, in which dozens of MPs were revealed to have improperly used public money and, a year later, stood for reelection before voters who (according to survey data) remained angry at the reported abuses. To capture variation in the degree of partisanship across electoral constituencies, I take advantage of the fact that three major parties compete for seats in UK elections, with the locally relevant parties varying across constituencies. I argue based on survey evidence that, in the 2010 election on which I focus, strategic voters viewed the partisan stakes of the local constituency race as substantially higher in two-way Labour-vs-Conservative contests than in two-way contests in which a Liberal Democrat faced either a Labour or Conservative opponent. Consistent with this and with the idea that partisanship undermines electoral accountability, I show that incumbents who were implicated in the expenses scandal were punished less heavily in the subsequent election in Labour-vs-Conservative contests than in less partisan two-way contests, and (perhaps more significantly) incumbents in Labour-vs-Conservative constituencies were more likely to be implicated in the expenses scandal in the first place; this suggests that incumbents who expected to face more partisan re-election contests were more willing to risk being publicly criticized for abusing their expensing privileges. I thus provide evidence of an inverse relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability not just in the aggregate behavior of voters but also in the behavior of incumbent politicians. The results are robust to the inclusion of incumbent and constituency controls, the use of alternate measures of MP implication in the expenses scandal, and subset analysis focusing on relatively homogeneous constituencies.

In highlighting the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability, I build on political agency models such as Persson & Tabellini (2000, chapter 4), Besley (2006, chapter 3), and Ashworth & Bueno de Mesquita (2009) in which the electoral control of politicians is undermined by voters' partisan preferences. The idea that partisanship undermines electoral accountability appears in several areas of empirical research as well.

Scholars of comparative politics have highlighted the tradeoff between holding parties accountable and holding individuals accountable (Carey 2003), although much of this work approaches this tradeoff from the opposite perspective: Reed (1994), Samuels (2002), and Golden (2003), for example, emphasize that an excessive focus on individual performance undermines party accountability. Scholars of voting behavior in a variety of contexts implicitly or explicitly make the related point that voters who cast ballots based on ethnicity are less responsive to politicians' performance or policy proposals (e.g. Kaufmann 2004, Lindberg & Morrison 2008, Wantchekon 2003). I contribute to these formal and empirical lines of research by analyzing a situation in which the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability appears in especially stark relief. Although previous studies have provided cross-national regression results consistent with the idea that partisanship undermines electoral accountability (e.g. Treisman 2003, Persson et al. 2003, Gawande et al. 2009), this paper examines a single episode of legislative corruption in one political system, studying how electoral accountability varies with the local political context. My approach sacrifices geographical scope compared to these cross-national studies, but it allows for more precise measures of both partisanship and individual politician corruption and allows less scope for omitted variable bias. Bolstered by an array of robustness tests and sensitivity tests, my results leave less doubt than previous studies that partisanship explains variation in electoral accountability in the setting I examine.

It should be noted that my findings, although consistent with standard political agency models, are somewhat surprising in the context on which I focus. The conventional view of British politics is that voters are almost wholly unresponsive to the attributes or performance of individual candidates, casting votes on a partisan basis instead (e.g. Cain et al. 1984, Cox 1987, Gaines 1998). Along with Curtice et al. (2010), Johnston & Pattie (2012), and Vivyan et al. (2012), I challenge that view by showing that British voters took account of incumbents' actions in the expenses scandal and responded accordingly.¹ I also go be-

¹My findings thus relate to work by Cain et al. (1984), Norton & Wood (1990), Norris et al. (1992), Gaines (1998) who study the relevance of candidate characteristics in British parliamentary elections. According to my findings, this should vary by constituency type, which is not considered in any of these studies.

yond other analyses of the expenses scandal both by providing an electoral explanation of which MPs were implicated in the scandal but also by showing how voters' response to the scandal varied by constituency type; in doing so, I provide evidence that, consistent with speculation by Cain et al. (1984), Norton & Wood (1990), Green (2007), and Vivyan & Wagner (2012), ideological convergence among British parties makes voters more attentive to the individual performance of MPs and party leaders.

II. VARIATION IN PARTISANSHIP ACROSS ENGLISH CONSTITUENCY CONTESTS

The three main parties in British politics are the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrat Party, and the Conservative Party.² Ideologically, Labour has generally been viewed as left-of-center and the Conservatives right-of-center, with the Liberal Democrats somewhere between them (Russell & Fieldhouse 2005, Schofield & Sened 2006, Quinn & Clements 2010).³ Consistent with this ordering,⁴ voters appear to have on average stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between the Liberal Democrats and either Labour or the Conservatives. The left-most column of Table 1 reports, for the 2010 pre-campaign British Election Study survey, the proportion of respondents who were basically indifferent between a given pair of parties (top three rows) as well as the difference in reported feelings toward a given pair of parties (bottom three rows). About half of respondents reported being basically indifferent between the Liberal Democrats and either Labour and the Conservatives, compared to about 3/10 for the comparison of Labour and the Conservatives; the average difference in feelings (on a 0-10 scale) was at least 50% higher for the Labour-Conservative comparison than for the other two party pairs.

²Other parties compete, but in the English constituencies on which I focus no other party is viewed as having a serious chance of winning. I exclude Brighton Pavilion, where the Green Party won its first parliamentary seat in 2010.

³Some commentators adopt a two-dimensional view of British politics in which the Liberal Democrats are in the center of economic issues but liberal on social issues. See, however, Benoit & Laver (2006), who place the Liberal Democrats to the left of Labour on both economic and social issues.

⁴In a spatial model with three parties spread along a single ideological dimension, voters with Euclidean policy preferences will on average have stronger preferences between the two most extreme parties than between other possible pairs as long as voter ideal points are not concentrated near the centrist platform. See Appendix B (Supplementary Information) for a more formal treatment of the relationship between platform polarization and the strength of voters' party preferences.

Table 1: Attitudes toward the major parties, by constituency type

Party pair	Constituency type			
	All	Lab-Con	Lab-Lib Dem	Lib Dem-Con
<i>Proportion of respondents expressing indifference</i>				
Lab & Con	0.30	0.30	0.33	0.28
Lab & Lib Dem	0.51	0.51	0.49	0.45
Lib Dem & Con	0.47	0.47	0.43	0.44
<i>Average gap in reported feeling about party pair</i>				
Lab & Con	4.47	4.53	4.24	4.60
Lab & Lib Dem	2.86	2.82	2.89	3.12
Lib Dem & Con	3.12	3.11	3.36	3.35
Respondents	12,271	3,484	499	1,385

Note: BES respondents are asked to evaluate each of the major parties on a scale from 0-10, where 0 is “strongly dislike” and 10 is “strongly like.” In the top three rows of this table, I present the proportion of respondents (by constituency type) who place a given pair of parties within 2 points of each other. In the bottom three rows of the table, I present the average difference between respondents’ evaluation of a given pair of parties (again, by constituency type). The bold numbers report attitudes of respondents toward the locally competitive parties in their own constituency.

Suppose it were possible to experimentally vary which pairs of parties compete in a given constituency. Given a set of Labour incumbent MPs, for example, we could randomly vary whether the MP faces a Liberal Democrat or Conservative challenger. In light of the party preferences reported in the left column of Table 1, we would expect voters to have stronger partisan preferences between the candidates in constituencies where the Labour incumbent faced a Conservative challenger than in constituencies where the Labour incumbent faced a Liberal Democrat challenger; in light of theories linking partisanship to electoral accountability described in the previous section, we would also expect voters in constituencies where the challenger was a Conservative to be less responsive to the incumbent’s performance and, as a consequence, incumbents in those constituencies should exert less effort to deliver good performance.

For obvious reasons, the ideal experiment is impossible. We can, however, make use of observed variation in party match-ups across constituencies to try to approximate the experiment with observed data. Although the three major parties compete in all English

constituencies, many constituency races are effectively two-way contests, in the sense that only two of the three parties have a serious chance of winning. Studies of British politics often classify constituencies based on which two parties are locally competitive, with e.g. “Lab-Con” referring to constituencies where observers expect either the Labour candidate or the Conservative candidate to win (e.g. Norris & Wlezien 2005, Pattie & Johnston 2010). To the extent that (some) voters in constituencies with two-way contests vote as if there were only two parties on the ballot, and to the extent that voters in all constituency types have stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between the Liberal Democrats and either of the other two parties, we have variation in the strength of party preferences across constituencies that resembles that described in the experiment above. Of course, the fact that constituency types are not randomly assigned is a major disadvantage compared to the ideal experiment, but by being attentive to possible confounding factors we may still be able to draw inferences about the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability in this context.

To implement this research design, I first identify Lab-Con, Lab-Lib Dem, and Lib Dem-Con constituencies from the set of English constituencies.⁵ Using the results of the previous general election (2005), I focus on constituencies where exactly two parties had a reasonable chance of winning; this means excluding constituencies where all three parties were competitive as well as constituencies where one party won easily.⁶ This leaves 225 constituencies in England with two-way contests (out of 484 without substantial boundary changes between 2005 and 2010), in 202 of which the incumbent had not announced retirement before the expenses scandal hit.⁷ Of these, 133 are Lab-Con constituencies, 20 are Lab-Lib Dem, and 49 Lib Dem-Con.

The right-most three columns of Table 1 report measures of party preferences broken

⁵I focus on England because regional parties complicate analysis in the rest of the UK.

⁶In particular, I exclude constituencies where (in three-party vote share) the first and second party were separated by more than .2 or the second and third party were separated by less than .1. In Table 4 of the Appendix I show that the results depend on focusing on competitive contests but are robust to variation in the particular cutoffs employed; in Table 6 I include uncompetitive constituencies for comparison.

⁷I exclude constituencies in which the MP had announced retirement before the scandal because MPs in these constituencies would likely not be affected by the electoral prospects in their constituency.

down by constituency type. The numbers indicate that, in constituencies with two-way contests as in the whole of England, voters have stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between the Liberal Democrats and either of the other two parties. In fact, voters' preferences over the three major parties appear to be remarkably similar across constituency types; for example, about 30% of voters express indifference between Labour and the Conservatives in each constituency type. Importantly for my research design, voters in Lab-Con constituencies have stronger preferences between the locally-competitive parties than do voters in Lab-Lib Dem constituencies or Lib Dem-Con constituencies. It is this variation in the strength of voters' preferences over the locally-competitive parties that produces the variation in partisanship on which I base my subsequent analysis.

To be clear, any difference in partisanship between Lab-Con contests and others depends not just on voters having stronger preferences between the locally-competitive parties but also on voters *conditioning their vote choices* on which parties are locally competitive. In other words, at least some voters must be strategic or tactical (e.g. Alvarez & Nagler 2000, Myatt 2007, Kawai & Watanabe 2012). If all voters are sincere, meaning that they vote for their favorite candidate regardless of how their vote might affect the outcome, then the partisan stakes do not vary by constituency type and therefore the degree to which corrupt MPs are punished would also not vary by constituency type. Strategic voters, on the other hand, would respond to a corruption scandal implicating the local incumbent in different ways in different constituency types. Because strategic voters recognize that the effect of unseating an implicated incumbent depends on which party would gain the seat, and because (based on Table 1) voters appear to perceive larger stakes of replacing the incumbent in Lab-Con constituencies, we can expect strategic voters' reaction to the expenses scandal to be smaller in these constituencies.⁸ Implicitly, then, the subsequent analysis in this paper depends not just on party preferences following the pattern described in Table 1 and voters being less responsive to corruption when their party preferences are

⁸The relationships among partisanship, platform polarization, and strategic voting are handled formally in Appendix B (Supplementary Information).

stronger but also on there being a sufficient proportion of strategic voters who condition their vote choice on the local electoral context.

III. THE EXPENSES SCANDAL AND THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 2010

The UK parliamentary expenses scandal, which broke in May of 2009, provides an advantageous setting in which to test predictions about the role of partisanship in undermining the electoral control of politicians. In this section I introduce the scandal and explain how I measure MPs' implication in it.

A. BACKGROUND ON THE EXPENSES SCANDAL

Since the 1970s, British MPs have been permitted to collect an allowance (known as the “Additional Costs Allowance,” or ACA) to help them maintain a residence in London in addition to their home in their constituency. It was the perceived abuse of this allowance that most directly provoked the parliamentary expenses scandal that is the focus of this paper. The total allowances received by each MP had been made public for the first time in 2004, provoking some public outcry and one academic study (Besley & Larcinese 2011), but until the *Daily Telegraph* obtained a leaked copy of detailed records from the House of Commons Fees Office and began reporting on the information in May of 2009, the public did not know the substance of the specific items for which MPs had received reimbursement. The *Telegraph* disclosed cases of MPs being reimbursed for expensive garden improvements, MPs bending the rules to claim second-home allowances on two homes, and even MPs fraudulently submitting claims for mortgage interest payments after the mortgage had been paid. The broader British media immediately seized on the story as a major political scandal; it quickly became practically the only topic of political discussion (Renwick et al. 2011, Johnston & Pattie 2012).

As an indication that voters viewed the expenses scandal as a serious matter, monthly surveys conducted between May of 2009 and April of 2010 consistently indicated that around 90% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement that the MPs expenses scandal made them “very angry”; only about 8% replied that the expenses scandal

was “not that important.” Perhaps more telling for electoral accountability, immediately after the scandal broke as many as 52% of surveyed voters said they would vote against the candidate from their preferred party if that candidate were found to be implicated in the scandal.⁹

What angered voters about MPs’ expenses abuses? Based on media coverage of the scandal, it appears that many voters believed that MPs who would request reimbursement for extravagant or fraudulent expenses would also be likely to take advantage of the public in other respects. As noted in a letter to the editor published in the weeks after the scandal broke, “Those who are cynically dishonest about expenses may carry the same attitude into politics,” said one in the *Financial Times*; “As in the financial world, public life at the moment needs more morality, not less.”¹⁰ George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, made a widely-discussed statement in which he said that “what’s most worrying about this sad, sordid and scandalous affair is that it reveals an ambiguity amongst our politicians in their attitudes to public service.”¹¹ In short, voters appear to have taken the view that the scandal revealed important information about a politician’s quality or type; removing corrupt MPs from office could prevent them from further taking advantage of citizens. This view is consistent with political agency models (e.g. Fearon 1999, Besley 2006) in which politicians care about a politician’s past offenses because those actions provide information about his type.¹²

⁹Ipsos MORI poll conducted in May of 2009. By March of 2010 the proportion was down to 38%. “Impact of the expenses scandal recedes,” available at <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2578/Impact-of-the-expenses-scandal-recedes.aspx>, accessed 21 September, 2011.

¹⁰*Financial Times*, June 8, 2009, pg. 10.

¹¹Simon Walters, “The Speaker’s scapegoat: Official who signed off MPs’ expenses didn’t even have accountancy qualification,” *The Mail Online*, May 10, 2009.

¹²Intriguingly, voter sentiment also appears to have reflected the idea in Caselli & Morelli (2004), who present a model in which corrupt politicians tend to decrease the legitimate rewards of government service and thus encourage other corrupt politicians to enter politics. For example, a letter to the editor published in the *Times of London* on May 13, 2009 stated, “If politics was not seen as a self-serving career in which the accumulation of power and, duly, money were seen as natural then maybe it would attract a more altruistic type of person.” *Times of London*, May 13, 1999, pg. 27.

B. VARIATION IN INCUMBENTS' IMPLICATION IN THE EXPENSES SCANDAL

A crucial feature of the expenses scandal is that, while there was substantial criticism of the expensing system in general, most of the attention was focused on the abuses of particular individuals. The expenses scandal was a product of investigative journalism and sensational news reports, and the media were the channel through which voters learned about MPs' abuses. The approach I use to identify which MPs were implicated in the scandal thus relies on a measure of how much media attention was devoted to an MP's expenses. While media attention is not a perfect measure of either public perceptions of MP wrongdoing or actual MP wrongdoing, I maintain that it reflects both better than available alternatives.

Specifically, the measure employed here (also used in Eggers & Fisher (2011) and based on the one developed in Fisher (2011)) is constructed from a tally of two types of news stories appearing on Google News between May of 2009 and the general election in May of 2010.¹³ The first tally counts stories that mention the MP's name and the MP's constituency; this provides a rough measure of total media attention to the MP in that period.¹⁴ The second tally counts stories that mention the MP's name and constituency as well as the word "expenses," which restricts the results to those stories that mention the MP and also somehow mention the expenses scandal.¹⁵ The second tally divided by the first roughly captures the proportion of an MP's media attention that focused on his or her role in the expenses scandal, which I argue is a reasonable way to capture the importance of an MP's expenses revelations in the minds of voters compared to other aspects of the MP or his or her record, such as ministerial service or prominent public statements on unrelated issues.¹⁶

¹³The exact period used was May 1, 2009, to May 5, 2010. A "story" on Google News is a collection of articles appearing in various publications at approximately the same time that are determined by a proprietary clustering algorithm to be on the same topic. The coding is essentially the same if the number of articles is used instead.

¹⁴The MP's constituency is included mainly in order to ensure that the stories are about the MP and not about another person with the same name. Including the MP's constituency in the search also reduces the chances that a high-profile MP (such as a party leader or minister) will be marked as implicated merely because he or she comments on the expenses scandal; this is because e.g. ministers are usually not identified by constituency when they are being discussed in their ministerial role.

¹⁵In spot checks, I confirmed that the results of this second search almost invariably focused on the MP's role in the expenses scandal. The fact that the word "expenses" is rarely used in other contexts (unlike "expense") helps in this regard.

¹⁶The Google News archive at the time of searching (July 2011) covered not just national media but also

Specifically, the implication score for MP i is

$$\text{Implication}_i = \frac{\#\text{expenses stories}_i}{\#\text{stories}_i + n_0}. \quad (1)$$

The factor n_0 is included in order to reflect the fact that MPs with very few expenses stories are unlikely to have been seriously implicated in the scandal; without such a factor, an MP who is mentioned in only one news story, which happens to mention the scandal in a general sense, would be marked as more implicated than an MP with 30 total stories, 25 of which mention his expense abuses.¹⁷

In order to calibrate and confirm the validity of our measure, MPs' implication scores were compared against a hand-coded set of 57 MPs who were singled out by leading newspapers as particularly guilty or innocent of expenses abuses. Using this list and plausibility checks of the highest- and lowest-scoring MPs, I chose a value of 10 for n_0 . (Sensitivity tests reported in Table 3 of the Appendix indicate that the results of this paper depend on using $n_0 > 0$ but are not sensitive to the particular choice of n_0 ; they also indicate that the results are essentially the same when I do away with the denominator entirely and simply use the total number of expenses stories.) As an indication that the measure in fact captures important variation in implication, the implication score very neatly separates the "saints" from the "sinners" in the hand-coded dataset: 94% (17/18) of the most notoriously implicated MPs had scores above .25, compared to only 7.7% (3/39) of the unimplicated MPs. A list of the ten MPs with the highest implication scores, which appears in Table 2, contains several names that anyone familiar with the scandal would expect to be marked as implicated: the top six are Margaret Moran, David Chaytor, Andrew MacKay, Julie Kirkbride, Peter Viggers, and Douglas Hogg, all of whom played leading roles. (For example, David Chaytor was imprisoned for fraudulent mortgage payment claims; Peter Viggers expensed the infamous duck house; and Douglass Hogg claimed reimbursement for hundreds of sacks of manure for his garden.) Several other notoriously implicated MPs

local news outlets in the UK, such that for many MPs the search results included local news items where, for example, the MP voiced an opinion on the condition of local roads.

¹⁷Technically, the implication score can be viewed as the posterior mean of the probability parameter in a binomial model with a beta conjugate prior; the prior here involves quasi-data of zero successes and n_0 failures (Gelman et al. 2004, at pp. 35–49).

Table 2: Validation of media measure of implication: Most-implicated MPs

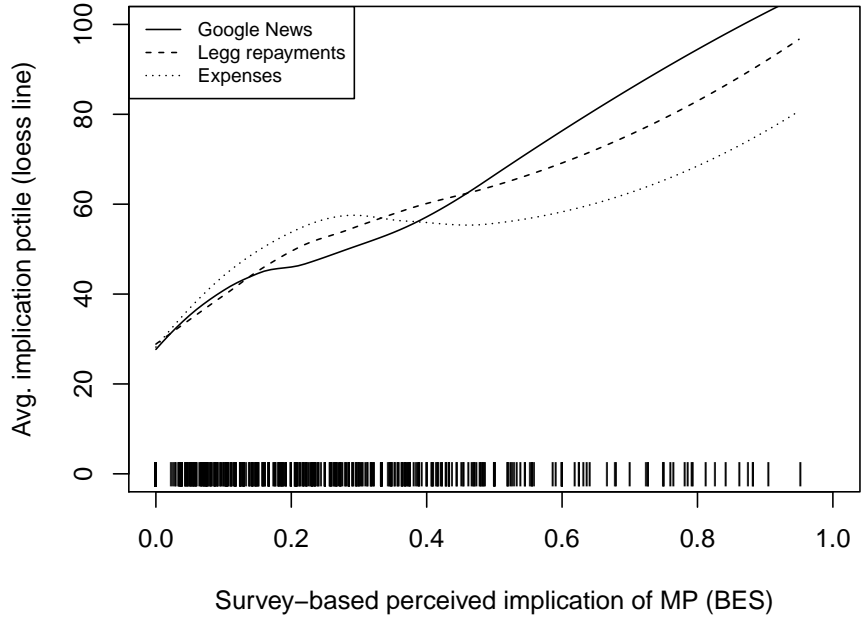
MP	Total stories	Expenses stories	Score
Margaret Moran	158	140	0.83
David Chaytor	109	93	0.78
Andrew MacKay	111	89	0.74
Julie Kirkbride	198	147	0.71
Peter Viggers	92	72	0.71
Douglas Hogg	42	36	0.69
Anthony Steen	152	111	0.69
Derek Conway	23	21	0.64
Harry Cohen	48	36	0.62
Sir Alan Haselhurst	37	29	0.62

Note: “Total stories” counts the stories returned by a Google News search of the MP’s name and constituency; “Expenses stories” counts the stories returned by a search with these terms plus the word “expenses.” The list includes MPs who did not stand for re-election.

narrowly missed the top ten, including Eliot Morley (.62), Barbara Follett (.49), Jacqui Smith (.53), and Hazel Blears (.53).

Figure 1 provides a further indication that the implication measure I employ captures relevant variation in MPs’ perceived wrongdoing. In 2010, the British Election Study asked respondents whether their own MP had “claimed expense money to which they were not entitled.” The solid line in Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the proportion of BES respondents who responded “yes” about their MP and my Google News-based implication score for that MP (converted into a percentile); it confirms that MPs who most respondents said had abused the expenses system have relatively high implication scores by my measure. The figure also shows that my measure performs better than other alternatives one might consider. One option is to measure implication by the sheer amount of money that the MP claimed in second-home expenses; another is to measure implication by the amount of money that the MP was required to repay by Sir Thomas Legg’s review of expenses claims. Figure 1 shows that these two alternate measures (dotted line and dashed line, respectively) are less closely related to survey respondents’ perceptions than mine is. The fact that the media measure correlates more highly with survey responses makes sense both because

Figure 1: Comparison of three possible measures of MP implication with survey-based perceived implication



Note: BES respondents were asked whether their MP “claimed expense money to which they are not entitled.” This figure shows the relationship (locally fit loess regression) between the proportion of respondents in a constituency who responded in the affirmative (x-axis) and the MP’s implication percentile based on three alternative ways of measuring implication (y-axis). The solid line corresponds to the measure I use; it agrees more closely than the others with what BES respondents perceived.

the media was ultimately the source of voters’ information about the scandal and because media attention captures better than total expenses or even total repayments what voters found objectionable about an MP’s behavior, which was often the willingness of the MP to submit expenses that, while modest in overall cost compared to the legitimate claims of other MPs, were viewed as petty, needlessly lavish, or otherwise morally inappropriate.¹⁸

In the subsequent analysis I reduce the continuous 0-1 implication score to a binary indicator of implication. This is mainly for ease of interpretation, but an additional reason is that it arguably better measures voters’ perceptions of MPs’ behavior. Most of the

¹⁸A prominent example of an MP criticized for modest expenses was wealthy Liberal Democrat MP Chris Huhne, who submitted expenses claims for cookies, teabags, and bus tickets (Gordon Rayner, “Chris Huhne, a millionaire but you buy his chocolate HobNobs: MPs’ expenses”, *The Telegraph*, May 13 2009).

media’s attention to the scandal focused on several dozen clearly implicated MPs. For the majority of MPs who were not implicated, variation in the implication score is essentially noise arising from, for example, stories in which the MP’s expenses are mentioned but not in a way that voters found incriminating; including this noise in the analysis is likely to lead to attenuation and possibly bias in the results. Creating a binary implication variable requires choosing a cutoff value of the implication score above which an MP is marked as “implicated”; I choose a cutoff of .25 because it yields the same proportion of implicated MPs (just under one quarter) as were identified for these constituencies by Curtice et al. (2010) using a different approach; sensitivity analysis in Table 2 of the Appendix indicates that any cutoff of .25 or higher would produce roughly the same findings; lower cutoff values that mark larger and larger proportions of MPs as implicated produce attenuated results.

IV. RESULTS

If we accept that voters hold stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between either party and the Liberal Democrats, and if some voters condition their votes on their constituency type (i.e. if they vote strategically), then we should expect to see less effective electoral accountability in Lab-Con constituencies than elsewhere: a higher proportion of MPs being implicated in the scandal and a lower electoral punishment experienced by those MPs. I now turn to testing these predictions.

A. PARTISANSHIP AND ELECTORAL PUNISHMENT

I begin by assessing whether voters indeed punished corrupt incumbents less harshly in Lab-Con constituencies. To start, I carry out an analysis to measure the baseline level of punishment suffered by incumbents who were implicated in the expenses scandal. For the analysis of electoral punishment in this section, I restrict attention to constituencies in which the incumbent ran for re-election, and thus the incumbent’s implication in the expenses scandal would be particularly relevant to voters.¹⁹

¹⁹Implicated MPs who stood down tended to be those whose abuses had been most egregious; because those who remain were relatively mildly implicated, the electoral punishments I detect are probably smaller than they would be without retirements. Crucially, in separate analysis I do not find that implicated

The baseline results are reported in Table 3. The dependent variable here is the (three-party) vote share received by the incumbent in 2010; on the right-hand side is an indicator for whether the incumbent was implicated in the expenses scandal, along with controls for incumbent’s vote share and margin of victory in 2005, an indicator for Lab-Con constituency, and dummy variables for the incumbent’s party. In addition, in columns 2-4 the regression controls for additional constituency variables: the region of England in which the constituency is located (column 2), interactions between region and incumbent’s party (column 3), and a set of characteristics describing the incumbent (years of experience in the House of Commons, age (broken into four categories), and position in the cabinet or shadow cabinet) (column 4). According to Table 3, implication in the expenses scandal in these constituencies cost the average incumbent about 2.5 percentage points in the 2010 election. The point estimate is quite stable across different specifications. Based on the coefficient estimates on “Lab-Con” there is no evidence that incumbents did systematically better or worse on average in constituencies where partisanship was higher.

I next test whether the punishment received by corrupt incumbents was smaller in the Lab-Con constituencies where voters would on average have stronger partisan preferences about the local contest. The regressions (reported in Table 4, columns 1-4) are the same as those reported in Table 3, except that here I include an interaction between implication and the “Lab-Con” dummy in order to test whether implication in the expenses scandal was less costly to the incumbent when that incumbent expected to face a more partisan election contest. The results are highly consistent with the idea that voters were more forgiving of corrupt behavior when they perceived greater partisan stakes. With the interaction included, the “Implicated” coefficient now measures the electoral penalty paid by incumbents in constituencies with relatively low partisanship – those in which a Liberal Democrat is either the incumbent or the main challenger. Across models, the estimated effect of implication in these constituencies is around 6 percentage points, which is over

incumbents in Lab-Con constituencies retired at a higher rate, which addresses the possible concern that voters were less harsh on implicated MPs in those constituencies because the ones who remained were less heavily implicated.

Table 3: Incumbent vote share as a function of implication in expenses scandal and controls

Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Implicated	-.024** (.009)	-.025** (.008)	-.026** (.008)	-.026** (.009)
Lab-Con	-.011 (.009)	-.013 (.009)	-.012 (.010)	-.011 (.010)
Vote share, 2005	.662*** (.156)	.627*** (.149)	.625*** (.137)	.518*** (.153)
Margin, 2005	.164 (.102)	.163 [†] (.098)	.158 [†] (.084)	.257** (.095)
Labour incumbent	-.117*** (.006)	-.122*** (.007)	-.114*** (.019)	-.114*** (.019)
Lib Dem incumbent	-.035** (.012)	-.033** (.011)	.006 (.013)	.007 (.013)
Constant	.216** (.066)	.222*** (.064)	.204*** (.059)	.253*** (.065)
Region dummies:		✓	✓	✓
Region-party interactions:			✓	✓
Incumbent characteristics:				✓
N	171	171	171	171
Adj R^2	.732	.737	.759	.763

Note: The dependent variable for each OLS model is the vote share of the incumbent party in the 2010 general election. Analysis is limited to English constituencies in which the incumbent stood for reelection and there had been a two-way contest in 2005, as defined in the text. The omitted group is a constituency in South West England represented by a Conservative incumbent whose closest challenger in 2005 was a Liberal Democrat. White's heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Guide to significance codes: *** indicates $p < .001$; ** indicates $.001 < p < .01$; * indicates $.01 < p < .05$; and [†] indicates $.05 < p < .1$.

Table 4: Incumbent vote share as a function of constituency type, implication and controls

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sample:	All English constituencies				South	Ex. LD
Implicated	-.060*** (.012)	-.058*** (.014)	-.061*** (.013)	-.061*** (.016)	-.055** (.018)	-.050** (.018)
Lab-Con	-.015 [†] (.009)	-.016 [†] (.009)	-.016 (.010)	-.016 (.010)	-.035 (.022)	-.016 (.011)
Interaction	.046** (.016)	.042* (.017)	.044** (.016)	.046* (.019)	.043* (.021)	.035 (.021)
Vote share, 2005	.672*** (.154)	.633*** (.147)	.627*** (.135)	.517*** (.149)	-.061 (.240)	.383* (.163)
Margin, 2005	.164 (.102)	.165 [†] (.098)	.162 [†] (.084)	.266** (.095)	.367* (.160)	.302** (.101)
Labour incumbent	-.116*** (.006)	-.122*** (.007)	-.116*** (.019)	-.117*** (.019)	-.098*** (.023)	-.106*** (.018)
Lib Dem incumbent	-.037** (.011)	-.035** (.011)	.005 (.012)	.006 (.013)	.010 (.013)	
Constant	.214** (.065)	.223*** (.063)	.207*** (.058)	.256*** (.063)	.478*** (.095)	.291*** (.066)
Region dummies:		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region-party interactions:			✓	✓	✓	✓
Incumbent characteristics:				✓	✓	✓
N	171	171	171	171	52	143
Adj R^2	.736	.74	.763	.767	.796	.745

Note: The dependent variable for each OLS model is the vote share of the incumbent party in the 2010 general election. Analysis is limited to English constituencies in which an incumbent stood for re-election and there had been a two-way contest in 2005 (as defined in the text). Analysis in column (5) restricts attention to constituencies in the South or South West region of England, and analysis in column (6) restricts attention to constituencies in which the incumbent MP in 2010 was not a Liberal Democrat. The omitted group in each column is a constituency in South West England represented by a Conservative incumbent whose closest challenger in 2005 was a Liberal Democrat. White's heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Guide to significance codes: *** indicates $p < .001$; ** indicates $.001 < p < .01$; * indicates $.01 < p < .05$; and [†] indicates $.05 < p < .1$.

twice as large as the average effect for the whole sample. The interaction term, which measures the difference in the penalty suffered by corrupt incumbents in partisan contests as compared to less-partisan contests, is statistically significant at the .05 level in models 1-4 and at the .01 level in models 1 and 3.

B. PARTISANSHIP AND IMPLICATION

I now turn to the question of whether incumbent politicians in more partisan environments take advantage of voters' relatively low responsiveness to corruption. Were incumbents who anticipated more partisan competition more likely to become implicated in the expenses scandal?

As above, the analysis here focuses on constituencies with two-way contests in 2005. Here I include constituencies in which the incumbent did not run but exclude those in which the incumbent had announced retirement before the scandal hit, because MPs who had been planning to retire would be less likely to consider the local electoral situation in deciding whether to engage in corruption.

Table 5 reports the coefficient estimates for a linear probability model in which the dependent variable is 1 if the incumbent was implicated in the expenses scandal and 0 otherwise. As in the previous tables, columns 1-4 report coefficient estimates with a progressively larger set of control variables included. The analysis provides suggestive evidence that incumbents were in fact more likely to be implicated in the expenses scandal when they expected to face a more partisan contest in 2010. As more covariates are added to the model across columns 1 to 4, the size of the point estimate increases, and in the full model with all interactions included (column 4) the point estimate is significant at the .05 level. Substantively, the results suggest that the probability of being implicated in the scandal was as much as twice as high in the more partisan constituencies. (The proportion of implicated MPs in the 202 constituencies analyzed in these models is 33/202 or about 15%.)

Note that this result could be interpreted in two ways. One way is to place the emphasis on the candidate's own strategic behavior: knowing that they would face an electorate that would be less responsive to their behavior, incumbents in Lab-Con constituencies were more inclined to risk scandal by filing aggressive expense claims. Another approach is to focus on the strategic behavior of the parties. If the parties could identify which MPs were inclined to abuse their parliamentary privileges or otherwise misbehave, they may

Table 5: Implication in expenses scandal as a function of constituency type and controls

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sample:	All English constituencies				South	Ex. LD
Lab-Con	.089 (.064)	.096 (.063)	.111 [†] (.065)	.156* (.071)	.079 (.165)	.154* (.072)
Margin, 2005	.221 (.410)	.407 (.395)	.387 (.407)	-.420 (.441)	.027 (.849)	-.647 (.561)
Labour incumbent	-.051 (.061)	-.029 (.062)	-.127 (.206)	-.108 (.159)	-.035 (.224)	-.104 (.156)
Lib Dem incumbent	-.115 (.070)	-.092 (.071)	-.095 (.157)	-.013 (.120)	-.001 (.123)	
Constant	.128 [†] (.070)	.133 (.093)	.153 (.140)	.020 (.086)	-.055 (.116)	.028 (.089)
Region dummies:		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region-party interactions:			✓	✓	✓	✓
Incumbent characteristics:				✓	✓	✓
N	202	202	202	202	60	172
Adj R^2	.013	.036	-.022	.109	.080	.125

Note: The dependent variable for each OLS model is 1 if the incumbent MP is implicated in the expenses scandal, based on the media measure described in the text. Analysis is limited to English constituencies in which there was a two-way contest in 2005, as defined in the text. Analysis in column (5) restricts attention to constituencies in the South or South West region of England, and analysis in column (6) restricts attention to constituencies in which the incumbent MP in 2010 was not a Liberal Democrat. The omitted group in each column is a constituency in South West England represented by a Conservative incumbent whose closest challenger in 2005 was a Liberal Democrat. White's heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Guide to significance codes: *** indicates $p < .001$; ** indicates $.001 < p < .01$; * indicates $.01 < p < .05$; and [†] indicates $.05 < p < .1$.

have chosen to place those MPs in constituencies where misbehavior would be less heavily punished. Given that MPs' overall expense totals had been released in 2004 and the media had been clamoring for more disclosure since then, it is reasonable to think that both MPs and party leadership were aware of the risk involved in filing objectionable expense claims.

C. PARTISANSHIP AND COMPETITIVENESS

To this point I have excluded uncompetitive constituencies in order to focus on the role of partisanship. To reiterate the logic behind that exclusion: I expect little difference in average partisanship between e.g. a Labour stronghold where a Liberal Democrat finishes a distant second and one in which a Conservative finishes a distant second, because in both cases the prospect of a Labour defeat is so remote that strategic voters would not condition their vote choice on which party is more likely to replace the incumbent. Comparing competitive and uncompetitive constituencies may provide useful corroboration for our main findings on partisanship, however. In particular, if MPs engaged in more expenses abuses when they expected to face a more partisan electoral environment, it would be surprising if they did not also engage in more expenses abuses when they expected to face a less competitive electoral environment. Similarly, if voters in Lab-Lib Dem and Lib Dem-Con constituencies were more willing to punish implicated MPs because the partisan stakes were lower, it would be surprising if voters in uncompetitive constituencies (where the partisan stakes are presumably even lower) were not also relatively willing to punish implicated MPs.

Table 6 indicates that these expectations are more or less met. The table summarizes regressions that include all constituencies in England and interact constituency type with an indicator for competitiveness (where a constituency is “competitive” if the incumbent and the first challenger were separated by less than .2 in three-party vote share in 2005). The left two columns summarize the results of a regression with the binary implication indicator as the dependent variable; the right two columns summarize a regression with incumbent vote share as the dependent variable. The left columns of Table 6 indicate that, as expected, the implication rate is somewhat higher in uncompetitive constituencies than in either

Table 6: Implication rate and punishment by constituency type and competitiveness

	Implication rate (%)		Punishment (% pts.)	
	Lab-Con	Other	Lab-Con	Other
Competitive	16.3	6.4	-0.7	-4.1
Uncompetitive	23.4	20.9	-2.2	-0.3

Note: This table compares the implication rate and degree of electoral punishment for implication across four types of constituencies: 1) competitive Lab-Con, 2) competitive Lab-Lib Dem or Lib Dem-Con, 3) uncompetitive Lab-Con, and 4) uncompetitive Lab-Lib Dem or Lib Dem-Con. The figures report point estimates from regressions like those in Tables 5 and 4 that include uncompetitive constituencies and interact “Lab-Con” with an indicator for competitiveness (based on the winner and runner-up being within .2 in three-party vote share in 2005).

type of competitive constituency; the fact that, among uncompetitive constituencies, the implication rate is not substantially higher in Lab-Con contests is consistent with the idea that partisanship does not depend on which party finishes second when even the second-place party is very unlikely to win.

The right columns of Table 6 suggest that the average degree of electoral punishment is somewhat higher in uncompetitive constituencies than in competitive Lab-Con constituencies; the fact that punishment appears to be higher in competitive non-Lab-Con constituencies than in either type of uncompetitive constituency raises the possibility that voters were more attentive to individual MP wrongdoing when the local contest was competitive (perhaps because challengers’ campaigns highlighted expenses abuses).

As another confirmatory analysis, I find in a separate regression that the rate of implication tended to be higher among older MPs, who (conditional on competitiveness and constituency type) would likely perceive fewer future benefits from continuing their parliamentary career than younger MPs with a longer career ahead of them.²⁰ In a standard political agency model (e.g. Besley 2006, section 3.4.1), lower competitiveness and smaller expected benefits from office would both tend to make politicians more likely to engage in corruption. The fact that we recover both of these comparative statics in the expenses scandal provides evidence that MPs did in fact weigh the costs and benefits of abusing their expenses privileges, which bolsters our confidence in the main finding relating MPs’ implication in the scandal to the partisan stakes of their constituency contests.

²⁰Detailed results available on request.

D. ROBUSTNESS

I have presented evidence that electoral accountability was less effective in Lab-Con constituencies than in other constituency types, and I have interpreted this as evidence of the idea that partisanship undermines the electoral control of politicians. Of course, there may be other differences between Lab-Con and other constituency types that could explain the findings; after all, neither the party of the incumbent nor the party of the relevant challenger is randomly assigned. The most important alternative explanation would be that the differences we see in voters' responses to the expenses scandal and incumbents' implication rates are due not to differences in effective partisanship but to different attitudes (among voters and MPs) to corruption itself: if voters and MPs in Lab-Con constituencies for some reason cared less about corruption in an absolute sense (not just relative to party), then it would be difficult to attribute my findings to the role of partisanship. To the extent that I can conduct robustness tests that dismiss explanations based on voters' and MPs' attitudes toward corruption, my findings may be taken as stronger evidence that partisanship undermines electoral accountability in this setting.

One such alternative explanation for my findings is that Liberal Democrat incumbents may be on average more honest than politicians from other parties, perhaps because of differences in candidate selection procedures or party culture. If that were the case, we may find a lower rate of implication in the less partisan contests simply because Liberal Democrat incumbents are only found in these constituencies. We may also find that voters punish a corrupt incumbent more harshly in these constituencies because, given voters' high prior estimation of Liberal Democrats' probity, implicated Liberal Democrat incumbents may have suffered a larger loss of reputation than similarly-implicated Labour and Conservative incumbents.²¹ Consistent with these alternative explanations, survey data indicates that the average voter held a higher opinion of the honesty of the Liberal Democrat party as a whole. A *Times*/Populus poll in September of 2009 asked respondents whether

²¹Another alternative explanation for the higher electoral penalty in Lab-Lib Dem and Lib Dem-Con constituencies is that incumbents of any centrist party stand to lose the support of a larger number of sincere voters, given that a drop in their reputation leads to defections among these voters to both left and right.

they viewed each of the main parties as “honest and principled;” the Liberal Democrats scored the highest by far, with 57% of voters agreeing that the label applied to that party (compared to 41% for the Conservatives and 28% for Labour).²²

To address the possibility that electoral accountability appears to be higher in Lab-Lib Dem and Lib Dem-Con constituencies simply because Liberal Democrat incumbents are found in these constituencies, I replicate the analysis of the previous section, now focusing only on constituencies without a Liberal Democrat incumbent. The results appear in column 6 of Tables 4 and 5 under the heading “Ex. LD.” The interaction term in Table 4 is smaller than in the full sample and borderline significant at the .1 level (p-val = .1),²³ while the coefficient on high party salience in Table 5 is just as large and significant as in the full sample. The fact that the findings hold up in the sample without Liberal Democrat incumbents suggests that differences between Liberal Democrats and other incumbents do not explain the patterns I find in the full sample.

Another possibility is that voters who are inclined to support the Liberal Democrats simply care more about corruption than other kinds of voters do, perhaps because the party attracts voters who are exasperated by scandals in previous governments. This could explain the fact that implicated incumbents suffer a larger penalty in constituencies where the Liberal Democrats are among the top two parties, and this greater sensitivity to corruption among voters could also explain why incumbents in these constituencies are less likely to be implicated.

I address this possibility in two ways. First, I again reproduce the analysis on a subset of constituencies – this time focusing only on constituencies in the South of England, where the Liberal Democrats are strongest. To the extent that inter-regional differences among voters may explain both the success of Liberal Democrat candidates and the sensitivity

²²Equally striking, respondents who claimed to have voted Conservative in 2005 saw the Liberal Democrats as almost as “honest and principled” as their own party (61% vs. 68%) and Labour voters saw them as *more* honest and principled than their own party (62% vs. 43%). Full results available at http://www.populus.co.uk/uploads/download_pdf-130909-The-Times-The-Times-Poll---September.pdf, accessed April 2012.

²³The interaction term is significant at the .05 level for models 1-3 in the sample without Liberal Democrat incumbents.

of voters to corruption, restricting analysis to an area in which these differences are less pronounced should reduce this source of bias. The results appear in column 5 of Tables 4 and 5 under the heading “South.” The interaction term in Table 4 remains large and is significant at the .05 level, suggesting that even within the South of England implicated incumbents were punished less severely in Lab-Con constituencies. The coefficient on “Lab-Con” is no longer a significant predictor of implication when we focus on the South in Table 5, but with only 60 data points and large standard errors this may not be very surprising. Still, the fact that the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability in Table 4 holds up when focusing only on the South of England suggests that it is not inter-regional differences between voters in Liberal Democrat strongholds and voters elsewhere that drive the broader results.

As a second way of addressing the possibility that differences among voters might explain the patterns I find, I next look at survey evidence. Before the 2010 election, the BES asked its internet panel a set of questions intended to measure respondents’ attitudes about the expenses scandal. If differences in voters’ attitudes toward corruption in general explain the relationships among partisanship, implication, and electoral outcomes that I have reported, then we may expect to find key differences in survey responses to questions about the expenses scandal. One difference would be that Liberal Democrat supporters may be expected to be more outraged by the scandal. Similarly, we might expect respondents in Lab-Con constituencies to report being more upset about the expenses scandal. Either pattern would indicate that voters in places where Liberal Democrats have a strong electoral presence had different views about corruption, which would constitute an alternative explanation for my finding that voters punished corruption less in Lab-Con contests.

The results of my analysis of BES survey results (presented in Table 7) suggest otherwise. The dependent variable in the regression is 1 if the survey respondent chose “agree” or “strongly agree” to the statement, “MPs who have abused their expense claims should be required to resign immediately.” I do not find that respondents in Lab-Con constituencies were less upset about the scandal; the coefficient on “Lab-Con” is positive in each case

(suggesting that if anything those who voted in more partisan contests were more upset), although none of the coefficients is significant. The interaction between implication and Lab-Con is also not statistically significant for any sample. Finally, when I include the respondent's party in the regression (in column 3), I find no evidence that Liberal Democrat respondents were generally more upset about the scandal than other respondents (conditional on the same RHS variables that appear in the main regressions). To the contrary, I find that Liberal Democrat respondents were significantly less likely to support the resignation of implicated MPs than were Conservative respondents (the omitted group in the regression) although not as permissive as Labour respondents.²⁴

In short, my analysis of survey responses about the expenses scandal provides no evidence to support the alternative explanation that Liberal Democrat supporters, or respondents in places where Liberal Democrats were stronger, were generally less tolerant of corruption. In fact, if anything it suggests the opposite. Together with the analysis above focusing on subsets of English constituencies, these robustness tests tend to strengthen my claim that partisanship *per se* explains why voters in Labour-Conservative constituencies were less likely to punish corrupt MPs, and MPs representing these constituencies were in turn more likely to be implicated in the scandal.

V. PARTISANSHIP AND PARTY REPUTATIONS

As noted above, voters in 2010 viewed the Liberal Democrats as more honest. Above I addressed the possibility that a higher average level of honesty among Liberal Democrat incumbents may explain the pattern of more effective electoral accountability in constituencies where the Liberal Democrats are competitive. The role of challengers should be considered as well. To this point I have focused on voters' evaluations of incumbents, reasoning that a corruption scandal affecting the incumbent would lead more voters to change their votes when they view the incumbent's and leading challenger's parties as more substitutable. Implicitly I have assumed that voters view challengers as interchangeable in terms of probity. It may be, however, that what differs between Labour-Conservative constituen-

²⁴The difference between the two interaction terms is not significant at the .05 level.

Table 7: Survey respondents' belief that implicated MPs should resign, as a function of constituency type and controls

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lab-Con	.02 (.018)	.018 (.019)	.018 (.018)	.015 (.019)
Implicated	.009 (.037)	.012 (.037)	.006 (.036)	.008 (.036)
Interaction	-.037 (.041)	-.044 (.041)	-.034 (.04)	-.041 (.04)
Incumbent vote share, 2005	.695* (.315)	.741* (.333)	.596 [†] (.313)	.629 [†] (.33)
Incumbent vote margin, 2005	-.224 (.198)	-.252 (.21)	-.171 (.197)	-.189 (.208)
Labour incumbent	-.012 (.015)	-.011 (.048)	-.007 (.015)	-.002 (.047)
Lib Dem incumbent	.001 (.022)	.021 (.036)	.002 (.022)	.025 (.036)
Labour			-.091*** (.015)	-.092*** (.015)
Lib Dem			-.058** (.019)	-.058** (.019)
None/don't know			-.091*** (.016)	-.091*** (.016)
Other			.053** (.019)	.053** (.019)
Constant	.44** (.137)	.414** (.145)	.526*** (.137)	.503*** (.144)
Region dummies:	✓	✓	✓	✓
Incumbent party (IP) dummies:	✓	✓	✓	✓
IP-Region interactions:		✓		✓
N	5,716	5,716	5,716	5,716
Adj R^2	.003	.002	.015	.014

Note: Dependent variable is 1 if British Election Survey (pre-election CIPS) respondent indicated “Strongly agree” or “Agree” to the statement, “MPs who have abused their expense claims should be required to resign immediately,” and 0 otherwise. Analysis in all models is limited to respondents living in English constituencies that had two-way contests in 2005, as defined in the text. The omitted group is a (Conservative, in model 3) BES respondent in a South West England constituency represented by a Conservative incumbent whose closest challenger in 2005 was a Liberal Democrat. White’s heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Guide to significance codes: *** indicates $p < .001$; ** indicates $.001 < p < .01$; * indicates $.01 < p < .05$; and [†] indicates $.05 < p < .1$.

cies and others is not only the degree to which voters care about the partisan implications of electing the incumbent versus the leading challenger, but also the amount of corruption they expect from the leading challenger. If voters viewed Liberal Democrat challengers as less likely to be corrupt, then the electoral punishment in constituencies where the leading challenger is a Liberal Democrat may have been greater simply because in the other constituencies voters expected the challenger to be less of an improvement.

Because “Lab-Con” coincides perfectly with the absence of a competitive Liberal Democrat challenger in my research design, I cannot completely rule out this alternative explanation. It is worth pointing out, however, that the fact that Liberal Democrats have a stronger reputation for honesty can be viewed as a result of the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability on which this paper focuses. Models of partisanship and political agency predict that candidates in less partisan environments are less likely to engage in corruption because the penalties for doing so are larger. The same calculus should apply at the level of the party. Given that the average Liberal Democrat competes in less partisan contests than is the case for Labour or the Conservatives, it is more worthwhile for the party to cultivate a reputation for honesty – by more assiduously screening its candidates, for example, or by committing to a higher level of organizational transparency. The reputational advantage enjoyed by Liberal Democrats may therefore be viewed as an implication of the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability rather than simply a competing explanation for my findings.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has empirically tested an intuitive and theoretically well-founded idea connecting partisanship and corruption: partisanship tends to make voters less responsive to corruption and other aspects of politicians performance, which undermines the effectiveness of elections as a means to control politicians. The analysis focuses on a recent episode in which British voters punished dozens of MPs who were found to have improperly received public funds. I show that the extent of the punishment was larger in constituencies where voters were more indifferent between the main parties in competition; I argue that in these

contests, strategic voters responded more to corruption because the partisan stakes were lower. I also show that MPs were less likely to be implicated in the scandal in these less-partisan contests, which suggests that politicians filing expenses claims (or parties placing politicians in constituencies) took calculated risks based partly on the electoral punishment they were likely to suffer if improper behavior were brought to light.

One implication of the findings in this paper is that electoral accountability should be most effective in party primaries, where partisanship *per se* disappears and ideological differences among candidates are at a minimum. Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the most popular demands for electoral reform in the wake of the expenses scandal was for the introduction of primary elections to choose candidates for constituency races (Renwick et al. 2011).²⁵ It should be noted, however, that by pitting incumbents against copartisans at the primary stage, the introduction of primaries may have subtle and conflicting indirect effects in light of the findings of this paper. On one hand, to the extent that primaries cause incumbents to more actively differentiate themselves from their party, the introduction of primaries may make voters more responsive to incumbents' individual performance and thus strengthen electoral accountability. On the other hand, to the extent that the primary electorate is more ideologically extreme or less far-sighted than the party elites who currently select candidates, the introduction of primaries may have a polarizing effect on the parties (as has been hypothesized in the U.S.²⁶), which would tend to increase partisanship and thus undermine the disciplining effect of primaries.

²⁵See Hirano & Snyder Jr (2012) for evidence of the effectiveness of primaries in removing corrupt incumbents in the U.S.

²⁶See Carey & Polga-Hecimovich (2006) and Hirano et al. (2010) for references and a critical view.

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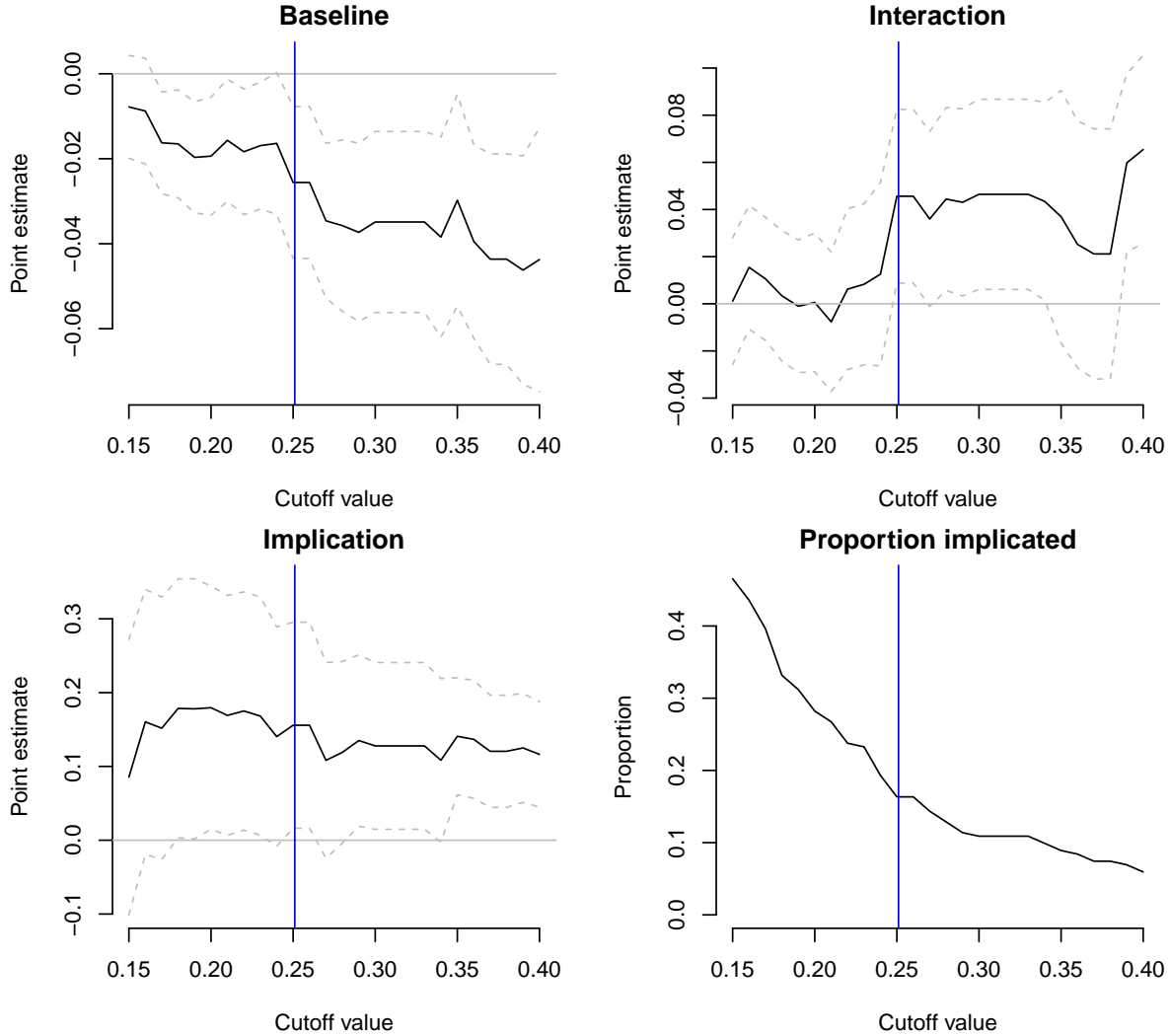
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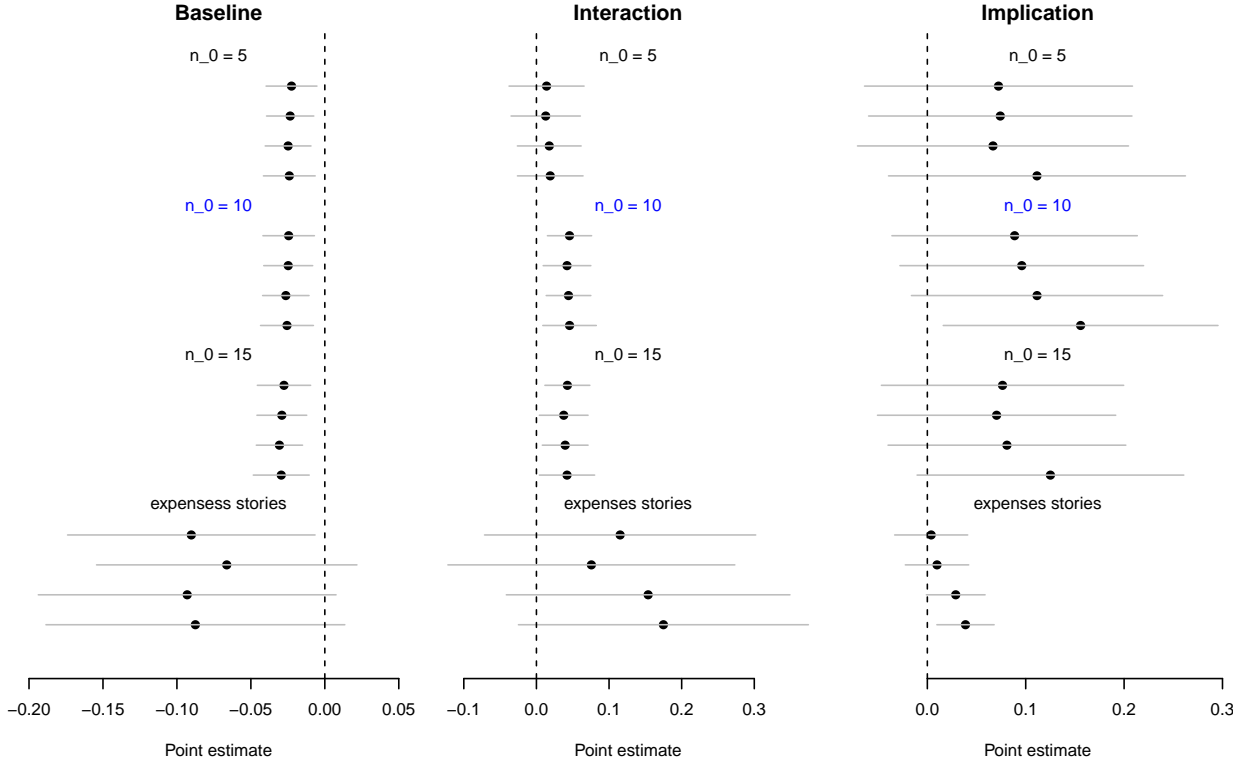
APPENDIX: SENSITIVITY ANALYSES

Figure 2: Sensitivity of results to choice of cutoff in implication score



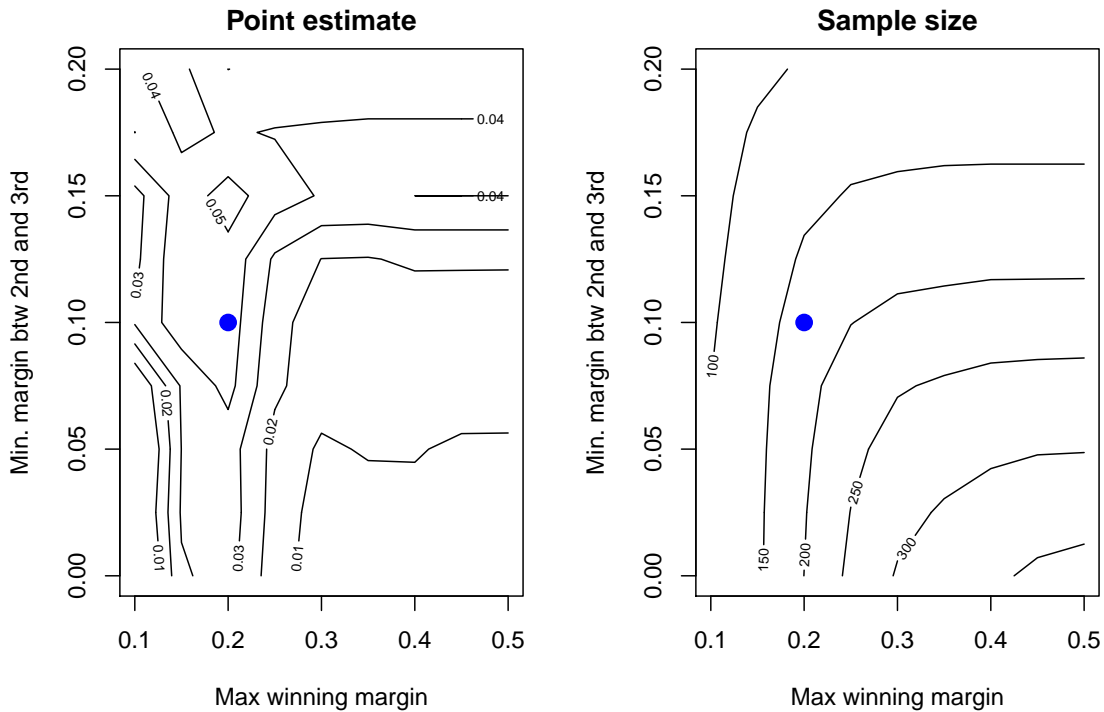
Note: This figure shows how the main results in Tables 3, 4 and 5 depend on the cutoff employed to identify implicated MPs from the implication score given in Equation 1. The first three panels show the point estimate on the main coefficient of interest in Tables 3 (top left), 4 (top right), and 5 (bottom left) depends on the choice of cutoff used to construct the binary implication variable. (In each case, results from the model in column (4) is depicted; the dashed gray lines depict the point-wise 95% confidence interval.) The bottom right panel shows the proportion of MPs in the estimation sample that are marked as “implicated” at a given cutoff value.

Figure 3: Sensitivity of results to measurement of implication



Note: The left, center, and right panels of this figure show how the main results in Tables 3, 4 and 5 (respectively) depend on the way in which the implication variable is defined. Each black dot and gray line shows the point estimate and 95% confidence interval corresponding to the main coefficient of interest in one of the columns of a Table reported in the paper; the top left dot, for example, reports the coefficient on “high polarization” in column (1) of Table 3 if n_0 were set to 5. The results reported in the paper (where $n_0 = 10$) are presented for comparison. The bottom measure, “expenses stories,” is simply the number of stories mentioning the MP, her constituency, and “expenses,” rescaled to lie between 0 and 1. The similarity of these findings to the main findings suggests that the results do not depend heavily on the value of n_0 in the denominator of the implication measure (or indeed the inclusion of the denominator at all), nor do they depend on creating a binary implication variable.

Figure 4: Sensitivity of Table 4 result to choice of cutoffs defining estimation sample



Note: This figure shows how the main result in Table 4 depends on the way in which the estimation sample is defined. The contour plot on the left reports the point estimate on the interaction term in the regression in column (4) of Table 4 (i.e. the interaction between implication and constituency polarization in a regression of incumbent vote share in 2010) under different cutoffs restricting the sample. (The blue dot indicates the cutoffs used in the paper’s main regressions.) Moving left to right on the x-axis, the sample includes less and less competitive constituencies (i.e. those in which the margin of victory was larger); moving top to bottom on the y-axis, the sample includes constituencies in which the “relevant challenger” is less clear (i.e. those in which the margin between the second- and third-place party was smaller in 2005). The left panel shows that the results are sensitive to the choice of cutoffs, as we would expect if voters are strategic. The right panel shows the size of the estimation sample at each pair of cutoffs.

APPENDIX B (SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION)

In this section I provide a simple formal framework to clarify what I mean by partisanship, how it relates to electoral accountability, and how it could vary across political contexts for strategic voters. At the end of the section I summarize the main points in non-technical terms.

A. PARTY PREFERENCES AND ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

An election takes place between a candidate l who belongs to party L and candidate r who belongs to party R . Voters care about both the quality of the politician who wins the seat and the party to which that politician belongs. In particular, each voter i has a party preference η_i , where $\eta_i > 0$ indicates that he prefers party R , and all voters perceive a quality difference of \mathcal{Q} between l and r , where $\mathcal{Q} > 0$ indicates that l has higher quality than r . A representative voter i votes for r if

$$\eta_i > \mathcal{Q}. \tag{A.1}$$

Starting from an initial quality differential $\mathcal{Q} = 0$, consider the effect of a drop of size q in l 's perceived quality. If η is distributed according to density $f(\eta)$, with corresponding cdf $F(\eta)$, the change in vote share experienced by l can be written

$$\Delta = F(0) - F(-q). \tag{A.2}$$

The drop in vote share experienced by l thus depends on the proportion of voters with values of η_i between 0 and $-q$, i.e. the proportion of voters whose preference in favor of party L was small enough to be outweighed by a drop of q in l 's quality.

Suppose for example that η_i is distributed uniformly on $[-\frac{\phi}{2}, \frac{\phi}{2}]$, such that larger ϕ indicates stronger partisan preferences among voters. When l 's quality drops by $q < \frac{\phi}{2}$, l 's vote share drops by

$$\Delta = \frac{q}{\phi}. \tag{A.3}$$

Stronger partisan preferences thus make electoral outcomes less responsive to candidate quality.

If politicians face opportunities to take actions that are privately rewarding but risk affecting voters' perception of their quality, then the distribution of partisan preferences will affect politicians' optimal actions. For example, if a vote-maximizing politician can steal money from the public at some risk of being detected (in which case his perceived quality will drop by a fixed amount), he is more likely to steal if voters have stronger partisan preferences.²⁷

B. POLARIZATION AS A SOURCE OF VARIATION IN PARTISANSHIP

So far we have taken the distribution of voters' partisan preferences as given exogenously. In general, the strength of partisan preferences could vary across political contexts for a variety of reasons: for example, because of the importance of clientelistic patronage networks, because of the degree to which the partisan control of government affects policy outcomes, or because of the extent to which party and ethnicity are linked in the minds of voters. In this section I highlight the role of voter preferences and party platforms

²⁷For a more complete account of how a more partisan electorate leads politicians to act more corruptly, see the political agency model in section 3.4.1 of Besley (2006), in which "bad" politicians are more likely to take dissonant actions in the first period when voters have stronger partisan preferences, and chapter 4 of Persson & Tabellini (2000), in which competing politicians propose positive amounts of rent when the electorate is partisan.

in a simple spatial model of politics, which will help to further clarify concepts and explain the approach I will take to identifying the effect of partisanship in the empirical analysis that follows.

In this simple spatial model, politics is characterized by a single dimension. Each voter i derives utility $-(x_i - x_p)^2$ from party p 's exogenously given platform x_p , where x_i is i 's ideal point. I assume that voter ideal points x_i are distributed uniformly on $[-\alpha/4, \alpha/4]$.

I highlight three types of polarization that could lead to voters in this model having stronger partisan preferences. If there are two parties L and R associated with symmetric platforms x_L and x_R (with $x_L < x_R$), it follows that the party preference of a voter with ideal point x_i is $\eta_i = 2x_i(x_R - x_L)$ and thus that the η_i are distributed according to

$$\eta_i \sim \text{Unif}\left[-\frac{\alpha}{2}(x_R - x_L), \frac{\alpha}{2}(x_R - x_L)\right]. \quad (\text{A.4})$$

Combining Equation A.4 with Equation A.3 above, the size of the electoral effect of a change of q in the perceived quality of party L 's candidate would be

$$\Delta = \frac{q}{\alpha(x_R - x_L)}. \quad (\text{A.5})$$

Equations A.4 and A.5 make clear how two kinds of polarization can strengthen party preferences (and thus undermine electoral accountability). First, *preference polarization*: for larger α , the η_i are distributed more widely and the electoral punishment associated with a quality shock is smaller. Second, *platform polarization*: for a fixed distribution of voter preferences, a larger divergence between x_R and x_L similarly strengthens voters' partisan preference and reduces the electoral effects of a quality shock.

The third type of polarization to which I draw attention, which I call *effective platform polarization*, is more subtle. Suppose now that three candidates (l , c , and r) compete for office with exogenously given party platforms x_L , x_C , and x_R at $-D$, 0 , and D (respectively). A fraction $1 - \beta$ of voters vote sincerely for the party whose platform is closest to their own ideal point; the remaining voters are tactical (i.e. strategic), in the sense that they correctly anticipate which of the three parties will finish third and cast a vote for their favorite of the remaining two parties. The electoral effect of a drop in quality of one of the candidates then depends on which candidate is affected, whether the voter is sincere or tactical, and (for tactical voters) which parties are relevant:

- Among sincere voters, the proportion who change their vote in response to a drop of q in the perceived quality of l or r is

$$\Delta_{\{l,r\}}^{(s)} = \frac{q}{\alpha D} \quad (\text{A.6})$$

while the proportion who change their vote in response to a drop of q in the perceived quality of c is

$$\Delta_c^{(s)} = \frac{2q}{\alpha D}. \quad (\text{A.7})$$

The drop is larger when the center-party candidate loses perceived quality because he loses votes to both l and r .

- Among tactical voters, when competition is between party L and party R (with C being viewed as irrelevant), a drop of q in the perceived quality of one of the relevant candidates leads to a change in vote share of

$$\Delta_{\{l,r\}}^{(t)} \Big|_{\text{Pr}(C)=0} = \frac{q}{2\alpha D}. \quad (\text{A.8})$$

When competition is between party C and party L or party C and party R , on the other hand, a drop of q in the perceived quality of one of the relevant candidates leads to a change in vote share

among tactical voters of

$$\Delta_{\{l,c\}}^{(t)} \Big|_{\Pr(R)=0} = \Delta_{\{r,c\}}^{(t)} \Big|_{\Pr(L)=0} = \frac{q}{\alpha D}. \quad (\text{A.9})$$

(A drop in quality of one of the irrelevant candidates always has no effect on tactical voters' vote choice.)

Combining these expressions, we can see that the largest electoral response occurs when a quality shock occurs to a (relevant) center-party candidate; the next largest occurs when a quality shock occurs to a (relevant) left- or right-party candidate in competition with a center-party candidate; and the smallest electoral shock takes place when a quality shock hits a left-party candidate competing with a right-party candidate or a right-party candidate competing with a left-party candidate (i.e. when the center-party candidate is irrelevant).²⁸

C. SUMMARY OF FORMAL SECTION

If voters have partisan preferences and care about the quality of individual candidates, then the extent to which voters respond to a given change in perceived candidate quality depends on the strength of their partisan preferences. In general, if voters have stronger partisan preferences, fewer voters will be swayed by a given change in perceived candidate quality. If voters' partisan preferences are uniformly-distributed, for example, the change in vote share associated with a given change in a candidate's perceived quality will be inversely related to the spread of those preferences. If politicians' payoffs depend on receiving a higher vote share, they will be more likely to take actions that risk reducing their perceived quality when voters have stronger partisan preferences.

In the context of a spatial model of politics, three types of polarization can be shown to affect the degree to which quality shocks affect electoral outcomes: preference polarization (the spread of voters' ideal points), platform polarization (the spread of the parties' policy platforms), and effective platform polarization (the spread of the *relevant* parties' policy platforms). With three parties competing (only two of which are relevant to tactical voters), the electoral effects of a quality shock will be larger when one of the two relevant parties is the centrist party and thus the two relevant parties are more proximate.

²⁸The size of the vote share changes associated with each of these events is $\frac{q(2-\beta)}{\alpha D} > \frac{q}{\alpha D} > \frac{q(2-\beta)}{2\alpha D}$. The strict ordering assumes $0 < \beta < 1$.