Supplemental Appendix for "Do Political Elites Have Accurate Perceptions of Social Conditions?"

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1 Measuring Social Conditions Using SHED Data

This section describes how *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* were measured using the SHED data. For *Financial Insecurity*, the original item in the SHED survey asks: "Suppose that you have an emergency expense that costs $400. Based on your current financial situation how would you pay for this expense?" Respondents then selected one of the following options, or a combination of options if the money would come from multiple places:

(A) "Using money from a bank loan or line of credit"

(B) "By borrowing money from a friend or family member"

(C) "Using a payday loan, deposit advance, or overdraft"

(D) "By selling something"

(E) "I wouldn't be able to pay for the expense right now"

(F) "Put it on my credit card and pay it off over time"

(G) "Put it on my credit card and pay it off in full at the next statement"

(H) "With the money currently in my checking/savings account or with cash"

(I) "Other"

Following the method employed by the Federal Reserve, I identified respondents as experiencing *Financial Insecurity* if they indicated that using some combination of options A, B, C, D, E, and F would be necessary for them to pay off the $400 emergency expense. Such respondents either have no way of paying for the emergency expense, or could only pay for it if they borrowed money or sold something they owned.

For *Unaffordable Healthcare*, the original item in the SHED survey asks: "During the past 12 months, was there a time when you needed any of the following, but didn't get it because you couldn't afford it?" Respondents then selected any of the following options that applied to them:

(A) "Prescription medicine (including taking less medication than prescribed)"

(B) "To see a doctor"

(C) "Mental health care or counseling"

(D) "Dental care (including skipping check-ups or routine cleaning)"

(E) "To see a specialist (such as an OB/GYN, dermatologist, orthopedic surgeon, etc.)"

(F) "Follow-up care"

Following the method employed by the Federal Reserve, I identified respondents as experiencing *Unaffordable Healthcare* if they reported skipping any of the above forms of healthcare.

2 List of Flagship Universities

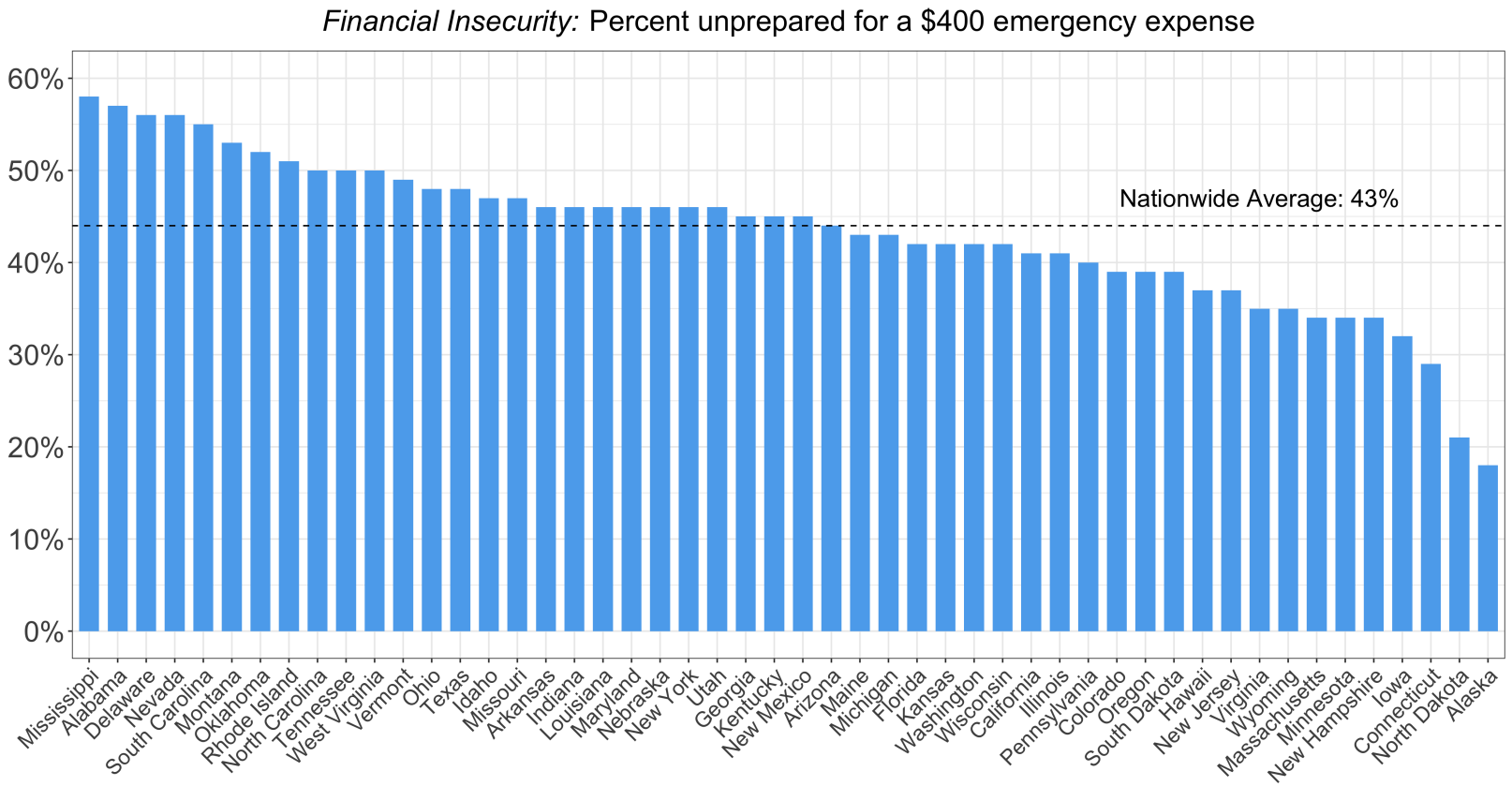
Tables S1 below shows the list of flagship universities that were used in the analysis of the *College Debt* issue. These universities have been identified as state flagships in prior research (e.g., Gerald and Haycock 2006) and by organizations like the College Board.

Table S1: List of flagship universities

State	**Flagship University**	**State**	**Flagship University**
Alabama	University of Alabama	Montana	University of Montana
Alaska	University of Alaska-Fairbanks	Nebraska	University of Nebraska
Arizona	University of Arizona	Nevada	University of Nevada-Reno
Arkansas	University of Arkansas	New Hampshire	University of New Hampshire
California	University of California-Berkeley	New Jersey	Rutgers University
Colorado	University of Colorado at Boulder	New Mexico	University of New Mexico
Connecticut	University of Connecticut	New York	State University of New York at Buffalo
Delaware	University of Delaware	North Carolina	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Florida	University of Florida	North Dakota	University of North Dakota
Georgia	University of Georgia	Ohio	The Ohio State University at Columbus
Hawaii	University of Hawaii at Monoa	Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma
Idaho	University of Idaho	Oregon	University of Oregon
Illinois	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania State University-University Park
Indiana	Indiana University-Bloomington	Rhode Island	University of Rhode Island
Iowa	University of Iowa	South Carolina	University of South Carolina
Kansas	University of Kansas	South Dakota	University of South Dakota
Kentucky	University of Kentucky	Tennessee	University of Tennessee-Knoxville
Louisiana	Louisiana State University	Texas	University of Texas as Austin
Maine	University of Maine	Utah	University of Utah
Maryland	University of Maryland-College Park	Vermont	University of Vermont
Massachusetts	University of Massachusetts-Amherst	Virginia	University of Virginia
Michigan	University of Michigan	Washington	University of Washington
Minnesota	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	West Virginia	West Virgina University
Mississippi	University of Mississippi	Wisconsin	University of Wisconsin-Madison
Missouri	University of Missouri-Columbia	Wyoming	University of Wyoming

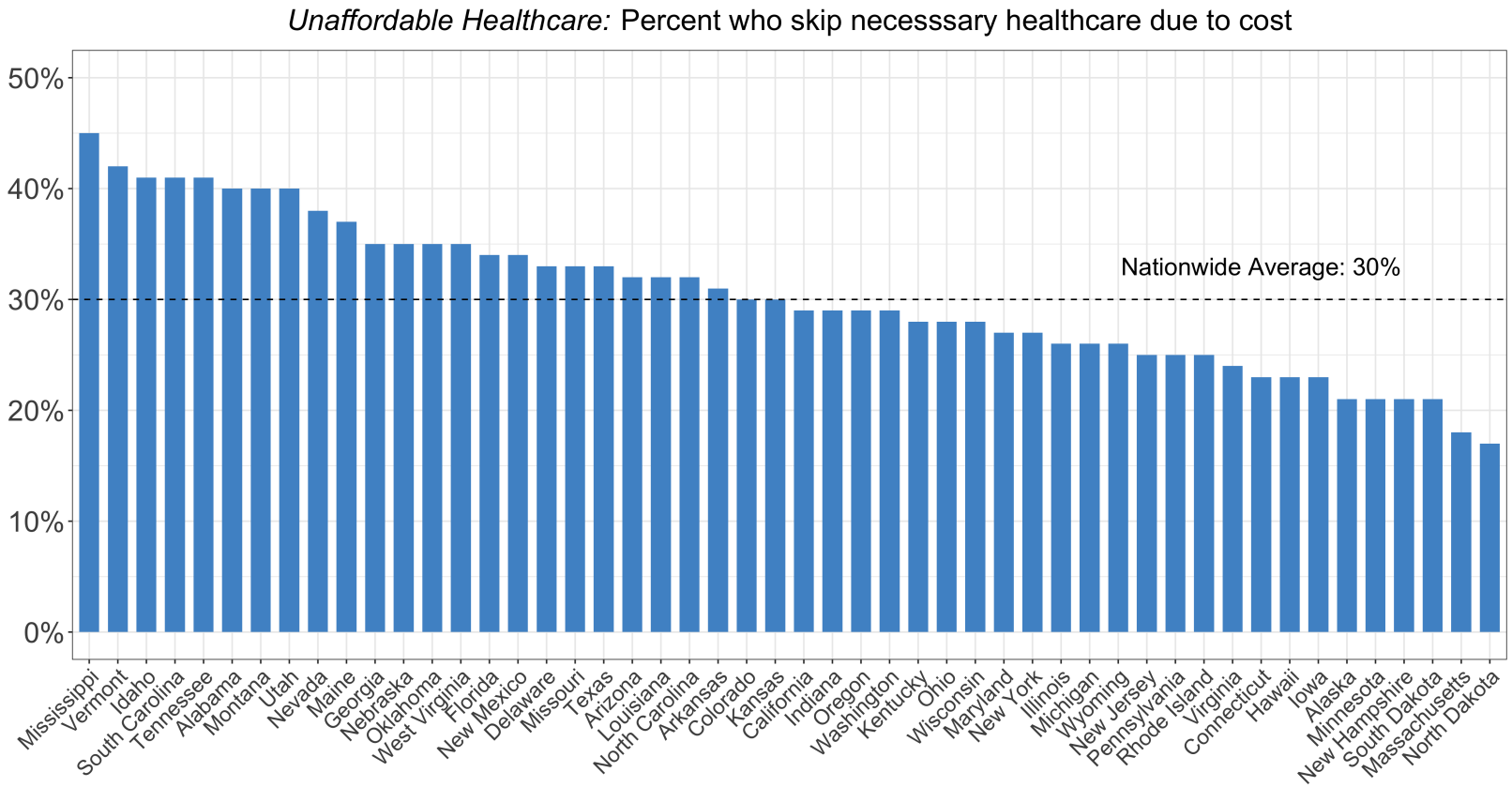
3 Correct Answers for Each State

Figure S1: Prevalence of *Financial Insecurity* across the 50 states



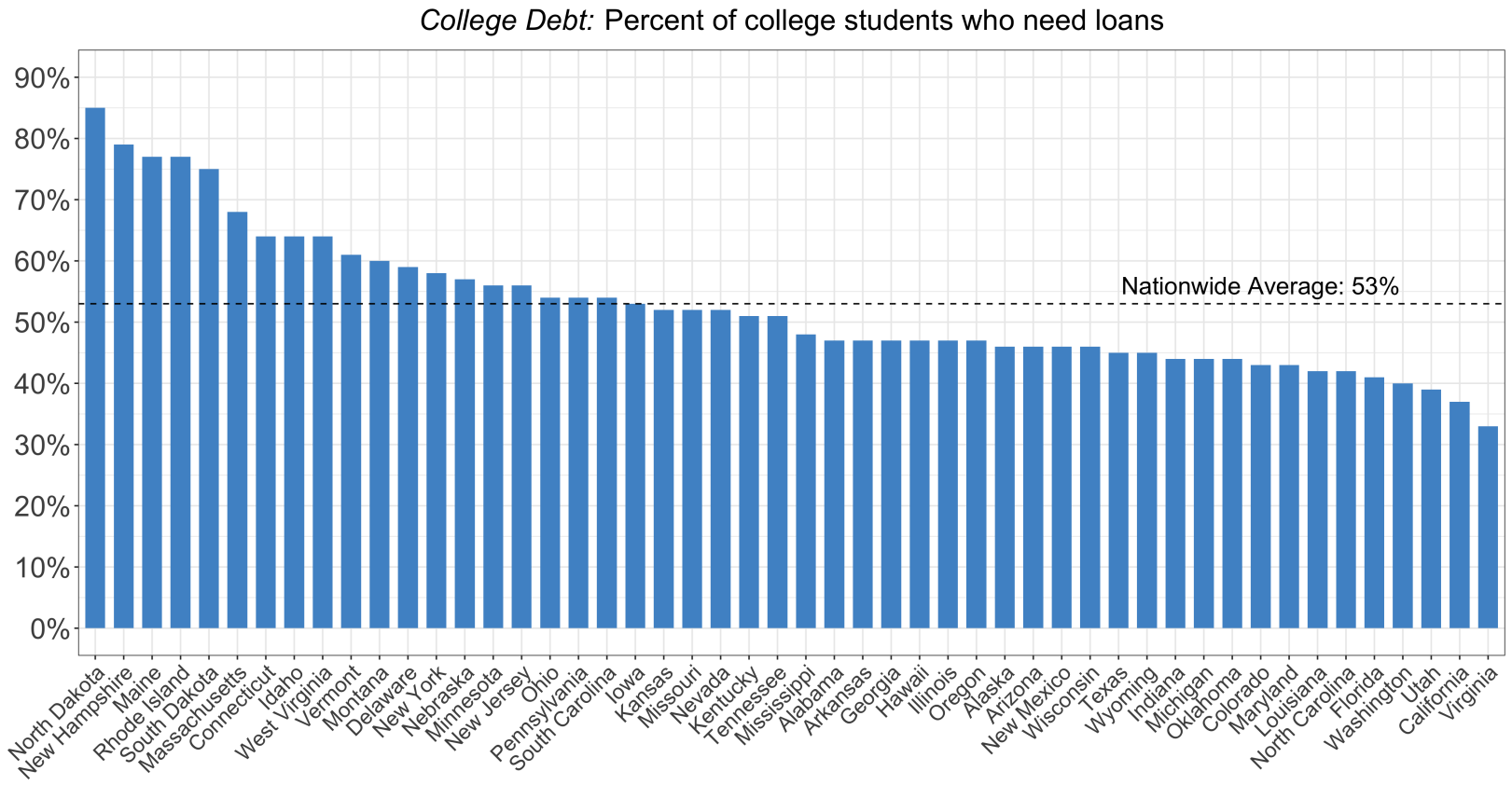
Note: Percent of state residents who would not be able to afford a $400 emergency expense unless they borrowed money or sold something they owned. Source is the Federal Reserve's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking.

Figure S2: Prevalence of *Unaffordable Healthcare* across the 50 states



Note: Percent of state residents who have skipped necessary medical care because they were unable to afford it. Source is the Federal Reserve's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking.

Figure S3: Prevalence of *College Debt* across the 50 states



Note: Percent of students at the state's flagship public university who require loans in order to graduate. The institutional data used here was originally collected by Peterson's, a private firm that collects financial aid data directly from colleges and universities (Petersons 2018).

4 Survey Invitation

Below I show the text of the e-mail invitation sent to the candidates. Identifying information has been redacted.

Dear [Candidate's Name],

You are invited to participate in the **2018 State Legislative Candidate Study**, a non-partisan and academic survey of candidates running for state legislative office in 2018. The study is being conducted by a team of researchers at [University 1], and includes collaborators from [University 2], [University 3], and [University 4].

The goal of this study is to better understand the experiences of candidates seeking election to statehouses across the United States. By participating in the survey, your responses can help to ensure that the insights from our study represent the experiences of candidates for state legislative office in [Candidate's State]. Our results will provide new knowledge about state legislatures, where decisions are made that affect the lives of millions of Americans.

Your responses to the survey will be confidential and anonymous. Your privacy is important to us. No information that could identify a candidate will ever be made public. Only aggregate results will ever be made public.

The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. You can participate on your computer or smartphone by visiting the link below:

Take the Survey

The survey is available now. We would appreciate if you were to respond by [Date].

If you have trouble accessing the survey or if you have any questions, please email the lead investigators [Redacted]. You may also visit the study website to learn more about the study.

Sincerely,

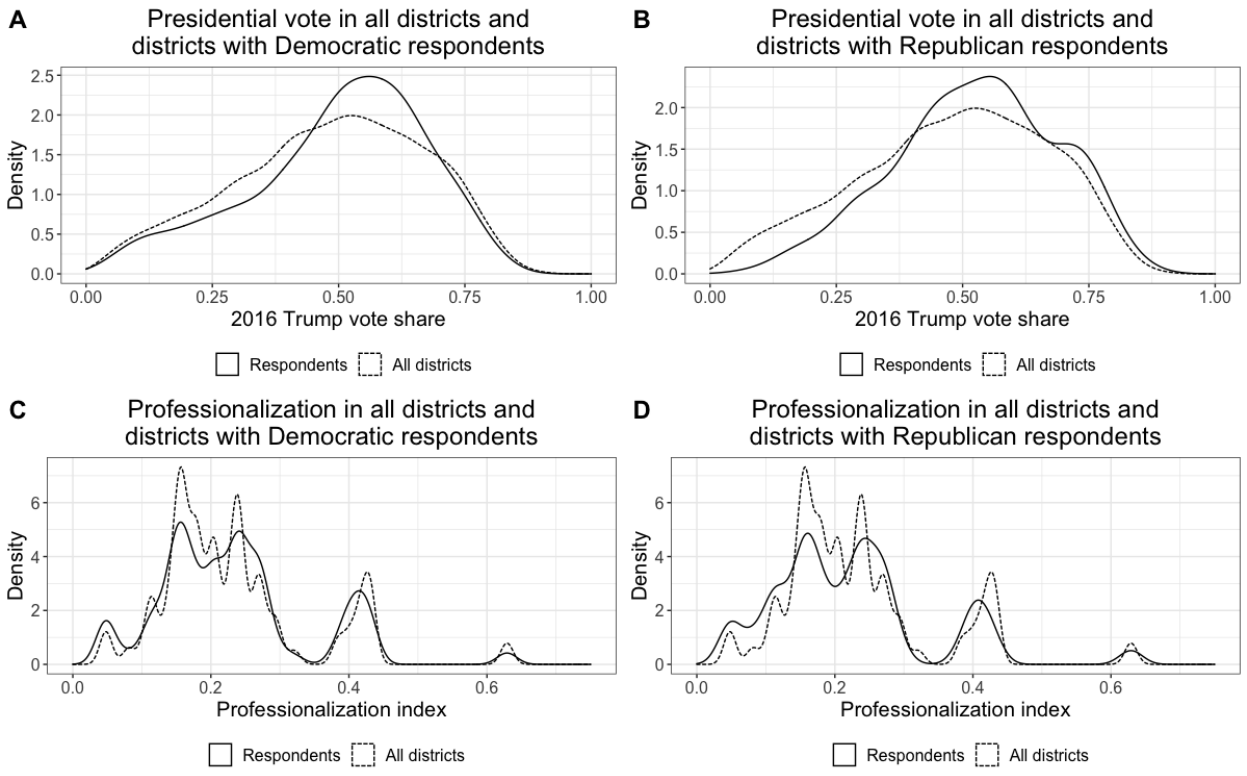
[Redacted]

5 Representativeness

Here I present evidence that the politicians who responded to the survey are similar to the overall population of primary election candidates for state legislature. Following Broockman and Skovron (2018, 546), I focus on two factors: district ideology and the professionalism of the state legislature. Figure S4 compares all state legislative districts against the subset of state legislative districts where at least one candidate responded to the survey. I make this comparison according to (1) the proportion of voters in the district who voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election and (2) the professionalism of the legislature as measured by the Squire Index (Squire 2017).[21] The left column compares the distribution of all districts against the subset of districts with a Democratic respondent (panels A and C), while the right column compares the distribution of all districts against the subset of districts with a Republican respondent (panels B and D). Overall the distributions are very similar. These results provide evidence that the survey respondents from both parties are representative of the broader population of state legislative districts.

As discussed in the main paper, an additional concern is that a substantial proportion of respondents may be inexperienced candidates. I address this concern in the following section.

Figure S4: Representativeness of politicians who responded, by party, presidential vote share in the district, and state legislative professionalization



[21] This is a measure of the extent to which state legislatures are part-time, citizen-based groups or professionalized into bureaucratic occupations.

6 Results for Elected Officials Only

Given that a primary purpose of this study is to learn about the origins of policy decisions, it would be problematic if the results were driven by inexperienced politicians with little hope of attaining elected office. To evaluate this concern I analyze the results of the information-provision experiment for two groups: (1) experienced politicians who already held elected office at the time of the survey[22] and (2) the remainder of respondents who did not hold elected office at the time of the survey.

Tables S2, S3, and S4 show the results for the *Financial Insecurity*, *Unaffordable Healthcare*, and *College Debt* outcomes respectively. For *Financial Insecurity*, the treatment produces a statistically significant increases in elected office holders' support for increasing government spending on cash assistance ($p < .01$), support for raising the minimum wage ($p < .05$), and agreement that it is the government's responsibility to provide financial security for all state residents ($p < .05$). For *Unaffordable Healthcare*, the treatment produces a statistically significant increase in elected officeholders' support for increasing government spending on Medicaid ($p < .05$). For *College Debt*, there are no statistically significant effects on any of the outcomes. Across all three issues, the effect sizes observed for elected office holders tend to be stronger than those observed for all other respondents. This set of analyses suggests that the treatment effects I observe in the main analysis cannot be attributed to the presence of novice candidates in the sample who have little chance of influencing policy decisions. Instead, the results appear to be strongest for experienced politicians who already hold elected office.

[22]This category includes all respondents who indicated that they are "currently an elected official" in the survey.

Table S2: Effects of the information-provision experiment among elected office holders and others for *Financial Insecurity* outcomes

Policy	Elected Office Holders			All Other Respondents		
	Control	Treatment	Effect	Control	Treatment	Effect
Increase government spending on cash assistance	0.57	0.68	0.11**	0.67	0.68	0.01
Raise state-level minimum wage	0.55	0.65	0.10*	0.70	0.69	-0.01
Eliminate asset limit for welfare recipients	0.50	0.53	0.03	0.54	0.53	-0.01
Asset limit on welfare recipients is too low	0.72	0.70	-0.02	0.76	0.79	0.03
Financial security for all is government responsibility	0.40	0.49	0.09*	0.48	0.46	-0.02

Note: The control and treatment cells show the average level of support for each policy. The effect cells show the difference between the control and treatment. Significant effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

Table S3: Effects of the information-provision experiment among elected office holders and others for *Unaffordable Healthcare* outcomes

Policy	Elected Office Holders			All Other Respondents		
	Control	Treatment	Effect	Control	Treatment	Effect
Increase government spending on Medicaid	0.61	0.69	0.08*	0.73	0.74	0.01
Limit hospital charges for low-income patients	0.62	0.65	0.03	0.73	0.71	-0.02
Require hospital pay plans for those unable to pay	0.85	0.82	−0.03	0.87	0.85	-0.02
ACA premium is too high	0.79	0.85	0.06	0.91	0.90	-0.01
Affordable healthcare for all is government responsibility	0.68	0.74	0.06	0.77	0.75	-0.02

Note: The control and treatment cells show the average level of support for each policy. The effect cells show the difference between the control and treatment. Significant effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

Table S4: Effects of the information-provision experiment among elected office holders and others for *College Debt* outcomes

Policy	Elected Office Holders			All Other Respondents		
	Control	Treatment	Effect	Control	Treatment	Effect
Increase government spending on financial aid	0.71	0.76	0.05	0.77	0.75	-0.02
Oppose spending cuts to public universities	0.67	0.74	0.07	0.72	0.73	0.01
Limit tuition increases at public universities	0.68	0.68	0.00	0.74	0.73	-0.01
Tuition at flagship public university is too high	0.76	0.76	0.00	0.81	0.80	-0.01
Affordable college for all is government responsibility	0.62	0.68	0.06	0.71	0.70	-0.01

Note: The control and treatment cells show the average level of support for each policy. The effect cells show the difference between the control and treatment. Significant effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

7 Evaluating Strategies for Measuring Financial Hardship

This section considers how the analysis of politicians' misperceptions of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* may have been shaped by differences in how politicians were asked about their perceptions of financial hardship in the survey of state legislative candidates and how respondents were asked about their experiences of financial hardship in the SHED survey.

There are some differences between how *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* were assessed across these two surveys.[23] For example, politicians' perceptions of *Financial Insecurity* are measured using the following item:

> "To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of [STATE NAME] residents would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense?"

However, respondents in the SHED survey were not directly asked whether they would need to "borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense." Rather, respondents to the SHED survey were asked the following:

> "Suppose that you have an emergency expense that costs $400. Based on your current financial situation how would you pay for this expense?"

I then coded respondents as needing to "borrow money or sell something they own" if they say that they would need to (A) "use money from a bank loan or line of credit", (B) borrow "money from a friend or family member", (C) use a "payday loan, deposit advance, or overdraft", (D) "sell something", (E) "wouldn't be able to pay for the expense right now", or (F) "Put it on my credit card and pay it off over time" (see section one above for full details).

The decisions I made about question wording and coding were informed by how the Federal Reserve analyzes the SHED data. For example, the Federal Reserve also describes respondents as needing to "borrow or sell something" to afford a $400 emergency expense if they need to make use of one of the options listed above instead of paying with "cash, savings, or a credit card paid off at the next statement" (Federal Reserve 2019, 2). However, it is still important to consider how these decisions may have shaped the results.

To assess the impact of the decisions I made about question wording and coding, I ran a supplemental survey of N = 500 respondents on Amazon Mechanical Turk in November of 2019. All respondents are U.S. citizens above 18 years of age. This survey compared the measures of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* derived from the SHED data to alternative measures with wording that more directly matches how politicians were asked about *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* in the survey of elites.

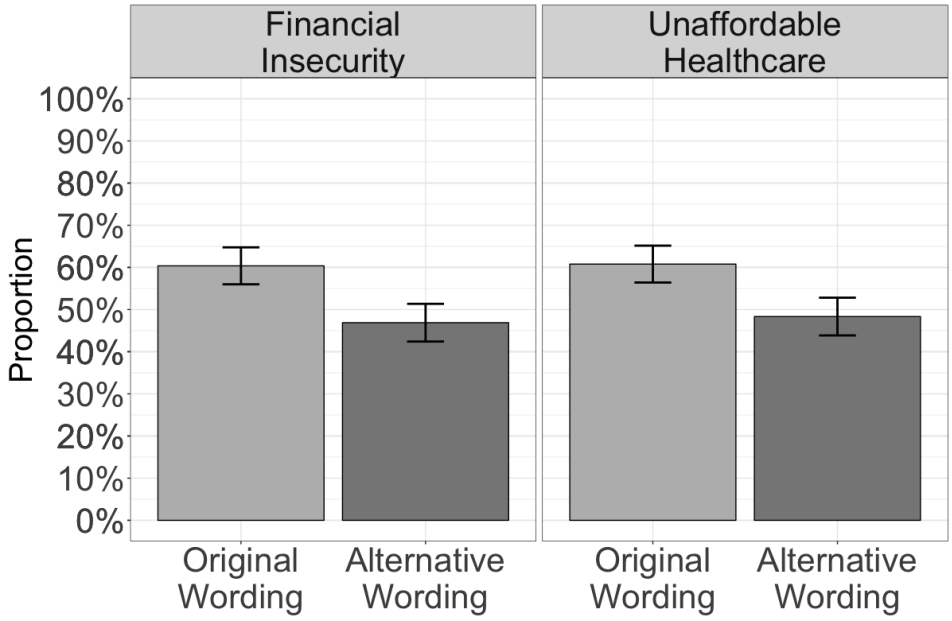
The four survey items shown in Table S5 on page 12 below were included in the Mechanical Turk survey. Those in the second column marked "Original Wording" replicate

[23] These same issues do not apply to the analysis of *College Debt* as the actual level of *College Debt* was measured using institution-level data rather than survey data.

the exact question wording that appeared in the SHED survey. Those in the third column marked "Alternative Wording" are alternatively worded questions that I designed to be as similar as possible to how politicians are asked about *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* in the survey of elites. The order in which respondents to the Mechanical Turk survey answered these four questions was fully randomized.

Figure S5 compares the proportion of respondents in the Mechanical Turk survey who experience *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* based on the questions with the original wording and the alternative wording. The left panel shows the results for *Financial Insecurity*. The question with the original wording estimates that 60% of the Mechanical Turk sample experiences *Financial Insecurity*, while the question with the alternative wording estimates that 47% of the Mechanical Turk sample experiences *Financial Insecurity*. The right panel shows the results for *Unaffordable Healthcare*. The question with the original wording estimates that 61% of the Mechanical Turk sample experiences *Unaffordable Healthcare*, while the question with the alternative wording estimates that 48% of the Mechanical Turk sample experiences *Unaffordable Healthcare*. While the questions with the original and alternative question wordings both estimate high levels of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare*, the level is higher with the original wording included in the SHED survey.

Figure S5: Mean levels of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* estimated using the supplemental Mechanical Turk survey



Note: Mean levels of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* estimated using the original wording that appeared in the SHED survey (see Column 2 of Table S5 below) and the alternative wording that more closely matches how politicians were asked about *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* (see Column 3 of Table S5 below).

Table S5: Questions included in supplemental Mechanical Turk survey with original and alternative wording

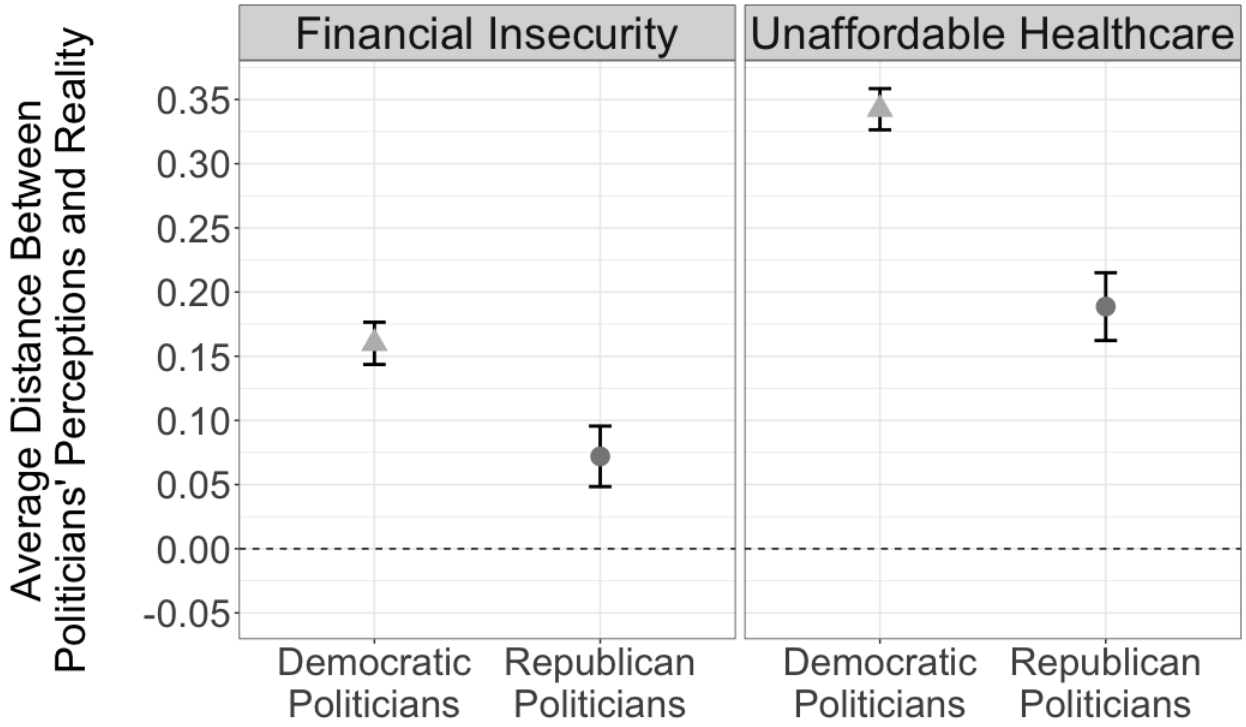
Problem	Original Wording	Alternative Wording
Financial Insecurity	Suppose that you have an emergency expense that costs $400. Based on your current financial situation how would you pay for this expense? If you would use more than one method to cover this expense, please select all that apply. [*Respondents are identified as experiencing Financial Insecurity if they indicate that they would use some combination of options A,B,C,D,E, or F to pay for the expense*] (A) Using money from a bank loan or line of credit (B) By borrowing money from a friend or family member (C) Using a payday loan, deposit advance, or overdraft (D) By selling something (E) I wouldn't be able to pay for the expense right now (F) Put it on my credit card and pay it off over time (G) Put it on my credit card and pay it off in full at the next statement (H) With the money currently in my checking/savings account or with cash (I) Other	Would you need to borrow money or sell something you own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense? [*Respondents are identified as experiencing Financial Insecurity if they answered "Yes"*] (A) Yes (B) No
Unaffordable Healthcare	During the past 12 months, was there a time when you needed any of the following, but didn't get it because you couldn't afford it? [*Respondents are identified as experiencing Unaffordable Healthcare if they selected any of the options below*] (A) Prescription medicine (including taking less medication than prescribed) (B) To see a doctor (C) Mental health care or counseling (D) Dental care (including skipping check-ups or routine cleaning) (E) To see a specialist (such as an OB/GYN, dermatologist, orthopedic surgeon, etc.) (F) Follow-up care	Have you skipped necessary medical care because you were unable to afford it? [*Respondents are identified as experiencing Unaffordable Healthcare if they answered "Yes"*] (A) Yes (B) No

These results can help us think about how the findings might have been different if the questions asked in the survey of politicians and the SHED survey were more similarly worded. Based on the results of the Mechanical Turk analysis, we might assume that – if I were to rerun the SHED survey using the alternative wording – the state-level estimates of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* would be approximately 13 percentage points lower than the estimates produced using the original question wording (which are shown on pages 3 to 4 above). This is based on the observation in Figure S5 that the levels of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* estimated using the alternative wording are 13 percentage points lower than the levels estimated using the original wording.

Based on this assumption, Figure S6 on the following page presents an alternative version of Figure 1 in the main paper where the state-level estimates have been adjusted to be 13 percentage points lower than those produced using the SHED data. When the state-level estimates are adjusted downward by 13 points, we see that politicians are even more likely to overestimate financial hardship. In this analysis, Democrats overestimate *Financial Insecurity* by 16 percentage points and *Unaffordable Healthcare* by 34 percentage points, while Republicans overestimate *Financial Insecurity* by 7 percentage points and *Unaffordable Healthcare* by 19 percentage points.

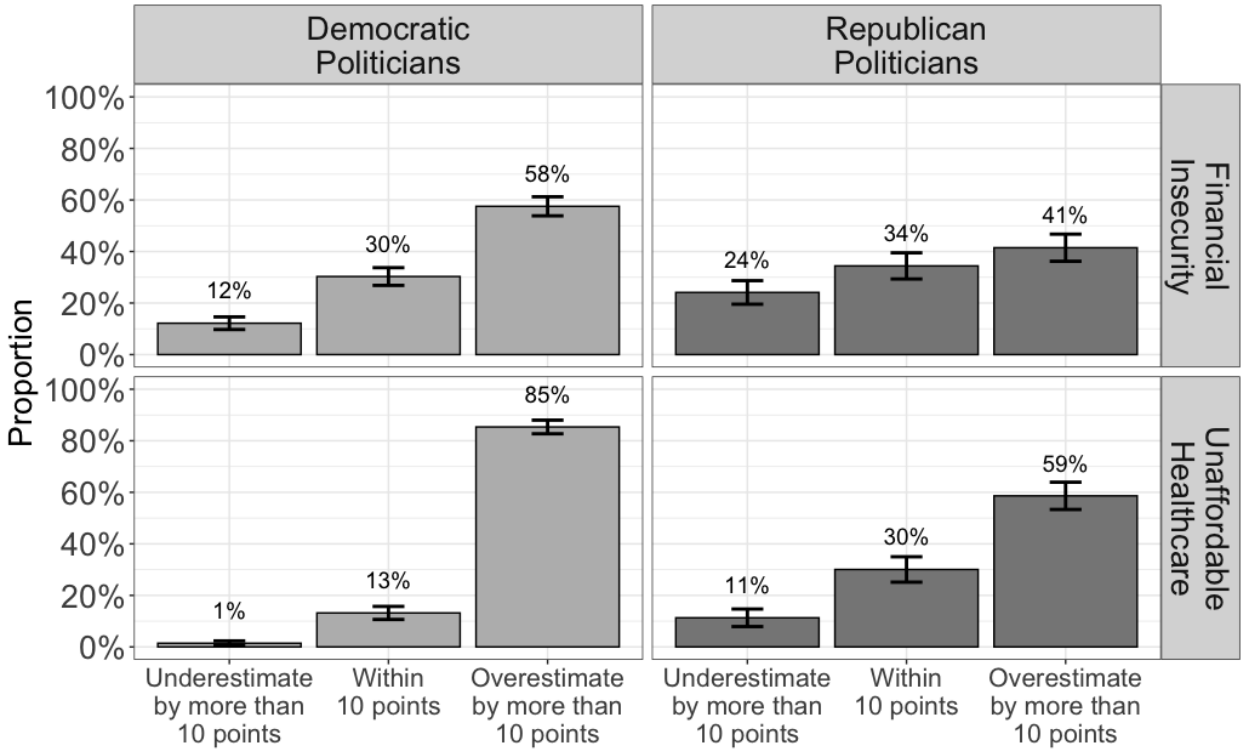
In addition, Figure S7 on page 15 below shows an alternative version of Figure 2 in the main paper where the state level estimates have been adjusted to be 13 percentage points lower than those produced using the SHED data. Here we continue to see evidence that politicians are more likely to overestimate *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* after adjusting for differences in question wording. As a whole, these results suggest that politicians would be even more likely to overestimate financial hardship in this analysis if the questions asked in the survey of politicians and the SHED survey were more closely aligned.

Figure S6: Average distance between politicians' perceptions and reality based on adjusted state-level estimates



Note: This figure presents an alternative analysis of politicians' misperceptions in which the state-level estimates of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* have been adjusted downward by 13 points to account for the results observed in Figure S5. The points show the average distance between politicians' perceptions and reality. Bars are 95% confidence intervals. Positive scores indicate that politicians are overestimating an issue, while negative scores indicate that politicians are underestimating an issue.

Figure S7: Categorical measure of politicians' misperceptions based on adjusted state-level estimates



Note: This figure presents an alternative analysis of politicians' misperceptions in which the state-level estimates of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* have been adjusted downward by 13 points to account for the results observed in Figure S5. Bars show the proportion of politicians in each party who underestimate each issue by more than 10 percentage points, have accurate perceptions that come within 10 percentage points of reality, and overestimate each issue by more than 10 percentage points. Shown with 95% confidence intervals.

8 Additional Analyses of Misperceptions

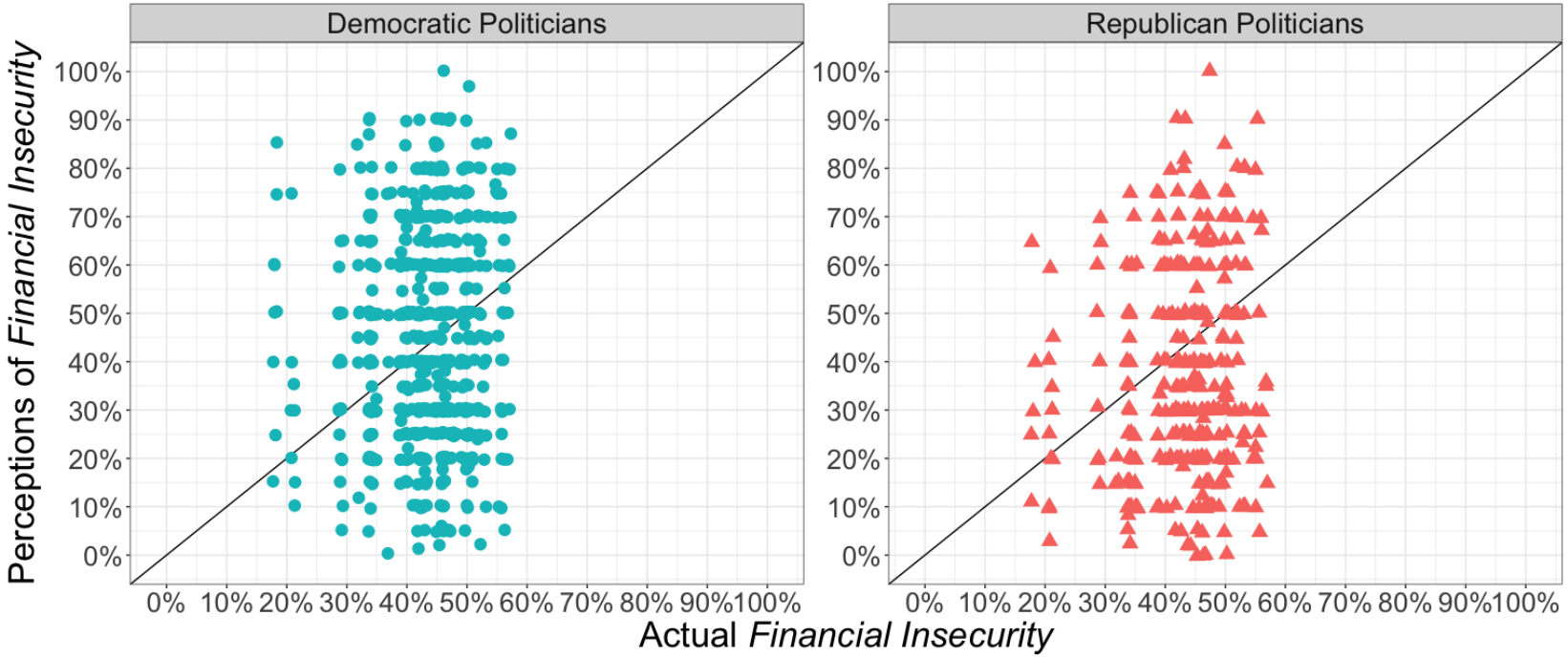
Figure 1 in the main paper plots the average distance between politicians' perceptions of the different forms of financial hardship and reality, while Figure 2 shows the proportion of Democratic and Republican politicians who overestimate the different forms of financial hardship and reality by more than 10 percentage points, underestimate the different forms of financial hardship by more than 10 percentage points, or come within ten percentage points of reality. Here I extend these analyses with additional ways of measuring politicians' misperceptions.

Table S6 shows the proportion of politicians from each party who underestimate or overestimate each issue. In addition, Figures S8, S9, and S10 below provide scatter plots of the relationship between politicians' perceptions (plotted on the y-axis) and reality as measured using the SHED data (plotted on the x-axis). In both cases we continue to see evidence of politicians' tendency to overestimate financial hardship in most instances. In addition, we continue to see evidence of Republican politicians' tendency to underestimate *Financial Insecurity*.

Table S6: Percent who underestimate and overestimate each form of financial hardship

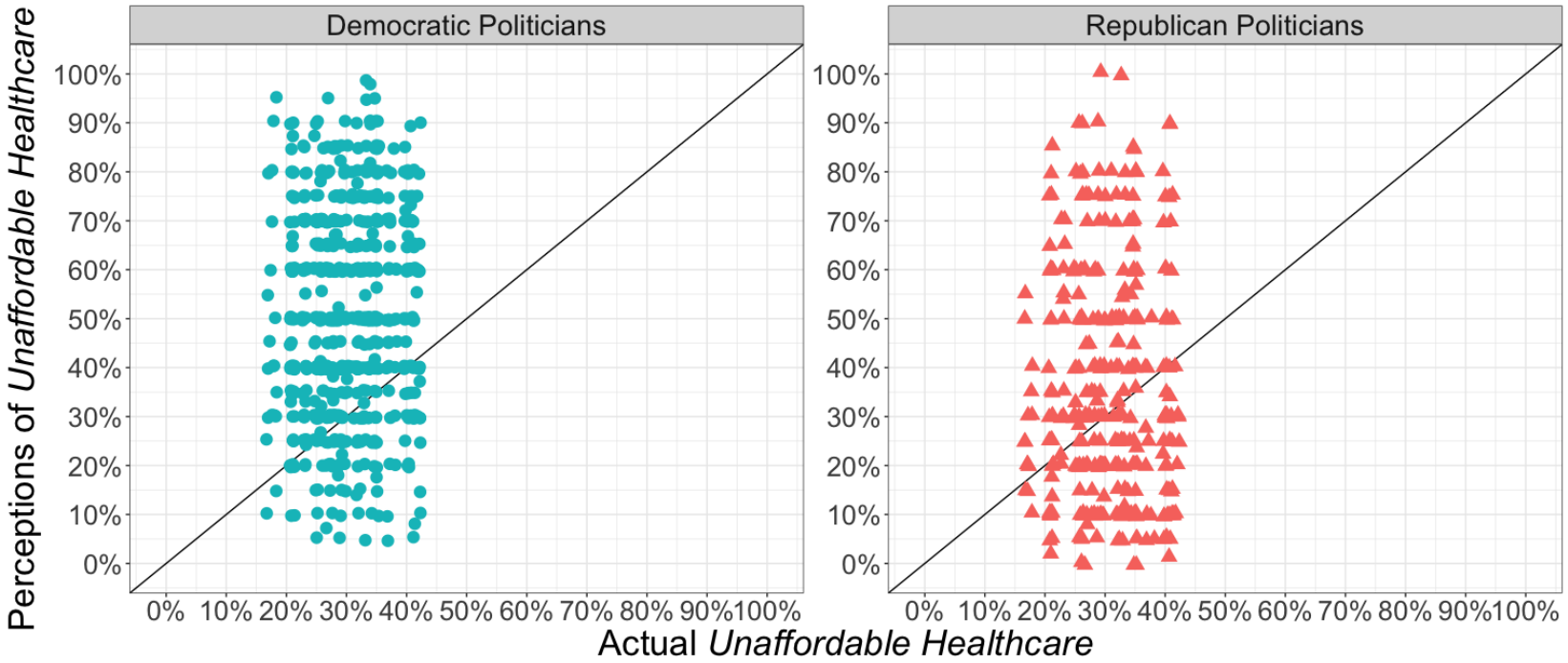
Problem	Democratic Politicians		Republican Politicians	
	Underestimate	Overestimate	Underestimate	Overestimate
Financial Insecurity	46%	53%	62%	37%
Unaffordable Healthcare	18%	81%	46%	54%
College Debt	15%	84%	24%	75%

Figure S8: Scatter plot showing relationship between politicians' perceptions of *Financial Insecurity* and reality



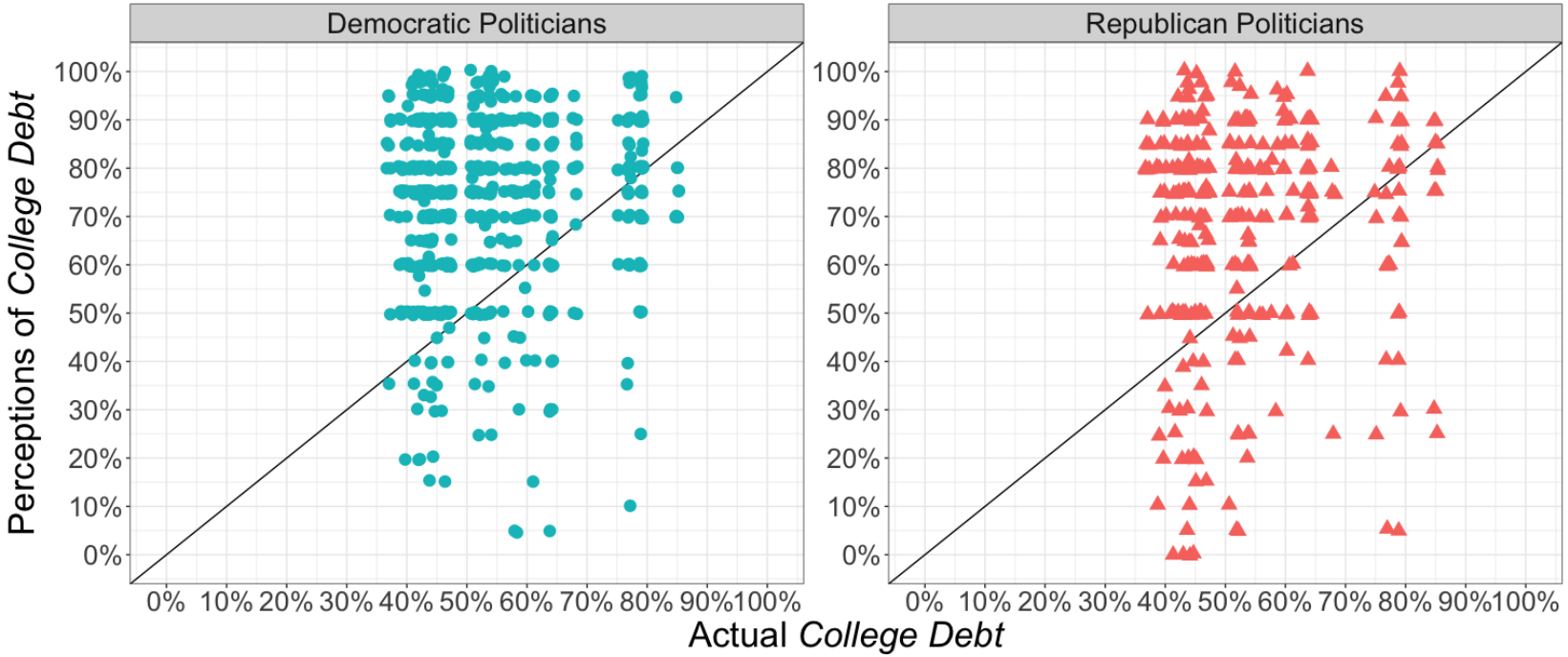
Note: The y axis represents the politician's perceptions of *Financial Insecurity* in the state where they are running for office, while the x axis represents the actual level of these problems in the politician's state. The diagonal line shows the point at which politicians' perceptions perfectly align with reality.

Figure S9: Scatter plot showing relationship between politicians' perceptions of *Unaffordable Healthcare* and reality



Note: The y axis represents the politician's perceptions of *Unaffordable Healthcare* in the state where they are running for office, while the x axis represents the actual level of these problems in the politician's state. The diagonal line shows the point at which politicians' perceptions perfectly align with reality.

Figure S10: Scatter plot showing relationship between politicians' perceptions of *College Debt* and reality



Note: The y axis represents the politician's perceptions of *College Debt* in the state where they are running for office, while the x axis represents the actual level of these problems in the politician's state. The diagonal line shows the point at which politicians' perceptions perfectly align with reality.

9 Results for All Policy Outcomes

Tables S7, S8, and S9 below show the mean level of support for each outcome for Democratic and Republican politicians in the treatment and control conditions of the information-provision experiment. As described on pages 21 to 23 of the main paper these outcomes are coded from 0 to 1 such that 0 indicates the lowest level of support for government action meant to benefit low-income Americans and 1 indicates the highest level of support for government action meant to benefit low-income Americans. The statistical significance of treatment effects is evaluated using OLS regressions in which the policy outcome is regressed on an indicator variable coded 1 for respondents assigned to the treatment group and 0 for respondents assigned to the control group.[24]

[24]I run additional OLS regression analyses where the indicator variable for being in the treatment group is interacted with an indicator variable for being a Republican politician. This allows me to test whether there is a significant difference between the effects on Democratic and Republican politicians. In every instance where there is a statistically significant effect on Republican politicians in Tables S7 and S8, there is also a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference between the effect on Republican politicians and the effect on Democratic politicians.

Table S7: Information-Provision Experiment Results – Financial Insecurity

Outcome	Democratic Politicians			Republican Politicians		
	Control	Treatment	Effect	Control	Treatment	Effect
Support for increasing spending on cash assistance	0.80	0.80	0.00	0.39	0.45	**.06***
Support for raising the minimum wage	0.91	0.93	0.02	0.21	0.21	-0.01
Support for eliminating welfare asset limit	0.63	0.61	-0.02	0.34	0.38	0.05
Agreement that asset limit is too low	0.81	0.80	-0.01	0.61	0.69	**.08***
Agreement that financial security is government responsibility	0.64	0.62	-0.02	0.16	0.16	0.00

Note: Details on how outcomes are coded are on pages 21 to 23 of the main paper. Cell entries are rounded to two decimal digits. Control and treatment cells show the average response for each outcome. Effect cells show the difference between the control and treatment. Significant effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

Table S8: Information-Provision Experiment Results – Unaffordable Healthcare

Outcome	Democratic Politicians			Republican Politicians		
	Control	Treatment	Effect	Control	Treatment	Effect
Support for increasing spending on Medicaid	0.88	0.88	0.00	0.37	0.46	**.09****
Support for limiting hospital charges	0.83	0.83	0.00	0.44	0.43	-0.01
Support for requiring hospital pay plans	0.94	0.93	-0.01	0.72	0.71	-0.01
Agreement that ACA premium is too high	0.92	0.92	0.00	0.82	0.82	0.01
Agreement that affordable healthcare is government responsibility	0.96	0.95	0.00	0.37	0.36	-0.01

Note: Details on how outcomes are coded are on pages 21 to 23 of the main paper. Cell entries are rounded to two decimal digits. Control and treatment cells show the average response for each outcome. Effect cells show the difference between the control and treatment. Significant effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

Table S9: Information-Provision Experiment Results – College Debt

Outcome	Democratic Politicians			Republican Politicians		
	Control	Treatment	Effect	Control	Treatment	Effect
Support for increasing spending on financial aid	0.90	0.90	0.00	0.49	0.51	0.02
Oppose spending cuts to public universities	0.84	0.85	0.01	0.49	0.51	0.02
Support for limiting tuition increases	0.76	0.77	0.01	0.66	0.62	-0.03
Agreement that tuition is too high	0.83	0.82	-0.01	0.72	0.70	-0.02
Agreement that affordable college is government responsibility	0.86	0.88	0.02	0.36	0.37	0.01

Note: Details on how outcomes are coded are on pages 21 to 23 of the main paper. Cell entries are rounded to two decimal digits. Control and treatment cells show the average response for each outcome. Effect cells show the difference between the control and treatment. Significant effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

10 Results With Respondents From Wyoming Included

Due to a coding error, respondents running for office in Wyoming were shown estimates of *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* in the information-provision experiment that were based on SHED survey data from 2015 through 2016 (respondents from all other states in the treatment condition were shown estimates based on SHED survey data from 2013 through 2016). This issue only affects the 15 respondents from Wyoming in the treatment condition, which is about 1% of the sample. To account for this issue I remove respondents from Wyoming from the analyses of the *Financial Insecurity* and *Unaffordable Healthcare* outcomes in Figures 3 and 4 of the main paper. Tables S10 and S11 compare the results when these respondents are included and excluded. The results are substantively the same whether or not these respondents are included in the analysis.

Table S10: *Financial Insecurity* results with and without respondents from Wyoming

Outcome	Treatment Effect on Democratic Politicians		Treatment Effect on Republican Politicians	
	Wyoming Included	Wyoming Excluded	Wyoming Included	Wyoming Excluded
Increase government spending on cash assistance	.01	.00	.06*	.06*
Raise state-level minimum wage	.02	.02	-.01	-.01
Eliminate asset limit on welfare recipients	-.02	-.02	.05	.05
Asset limit on welfare recipients is too low	-.01	-.01	.08*	.08*
Financial security for all is government responsibility	-.02	-.02	.01	.00

Note: Cells show the difference between control and treatment. Significant treatment effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

Table S11: *Unaffordable Healthcare* results with and without respondents from Wyoming

Outcome	Treatment Effect on Democratic Politicians		Treatment Effect on Republican Politicians	
	Wyoming Included	Wyoming Excluded	Wyoming Included	Wyoming Excluded
Increase government spending on Medicaid	.00	.00	.08**	.09**
Limit hospital charges for low-income patients	.00	.00	-.01	-.01
Require hospital pay plans for those unable to pay	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
ACA premium is too high	.00	.00	.01	.01
Affordable healthcare for all is government responsibility	.00	.00	-.02	-.01

Note: Cells show the difference between control and treatment. Significant treatment effects are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

11 Evaluating Social Desirability Bias

In this section I evaluate the possibility that the results of the information-provision experiment may be driven in part by social desirability bias. As a test of this concern, I ask whether the results are stronger among politicians who are running in Democratic-leaning districts. If social desirability bias is driving the results, than the effects of the information-provision experiment should be strongest in Democratic-leaning districts where politicians should be more likely to perceive support for social welfare as a socially desirable response. I measure *District Partisanship* using an item in the survey that asks politicians to evaluate the partisan composition of their district. This survey item asks respondents the following, with response options coded from 0 to 1 such that higher scores indicate a more Democratic-leaning district: "In your view, the district in which you're running is:" "A safe Republican district" (0), "A competitive district, where Republicans have an advantage over Democrats" (.25), "A competitive district, where neither Democrats nor Republicans have an advantage" (.5), "A competitive district, where Democrats have an advantage over Republicans" (.75), "A safe Democratic district" (1).[25] This variable was measured pre-treatment in the survey. Tables S12, S13, and S14 below show the results of OLS models that interact this variable with an indicator variable labeled *Treatment* that is coded 1 for respondents assigned to the treatment condition in the information-provision experiment and 0 for respondents assigned to the control condition. These models are run for the sample as a whole.[26] I do not observe any statistically significant positive interaction effects, indicating that politicians are not more responsive to the treatment in the information-provision experiment in liberal districts. While this test is imperfect, it provides evidence suggesting that social desirability bias is not driving the results.

[25] I note that the results are substantively the same when I measure district partisanship as the proportion of voters in the district who voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016.

[26] I also do not find any statistically significant interactions when Democrats and Republicans are analyzed separately.

Table S12: District Partisanship Interaction Models For *Financial Insecurity*

	Increase Spending on Cash Assistance	Increase Minimum Wage	Eliminate Welfare Asset Limit	Welfare Asset Limit Too Low	Financial Security is Government Responsibility
Intercept	0.66***	0.67***	0.52***	0.74***	0.45***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Treatment	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.02	−0.00
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
District Partisanship	−0.04	−0.02	0.01	0.02	0.03
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Treatment X District Partisanship	0.03	−0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Num. obs.	1140	1144	1031	1028	1142

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Note: Results from OLS models predicting support for policy outcomes.

Table S13: District Partisanship Interaction Models For *Unaffordable Healthcare*

	Increase Spending on Medicaid	Limit Hospital Charges	Support Hospital Pay Plans	ACA Premium Too High	Affordable Healthcare is Government Responsibility
Intercept	0.73***	0.69***	0.86***	0.89***	0.76***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Treatment	0.03	0.02	−0.01	−0.00	−0.00
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
District Partisanship	−0.06†	0.02	0.03	−0.03	−0.04
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Treatment X District Partisanship	0.01	−0.05	−0.01	0.04	0.02
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Num. obs.	1106	1102	1102	1091	1108

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Note: Results from OLS models predicting support for policy outcomes.

Table S14: District Partisanship Interaction Models For *College Debt*

	Increase Spending on Financial Aid	Oppose Spending Cuts	Limit Tuition	Tuition is Too High	Affordable College is Government Responsibility
Intercept	0.76***	0.74***	0.73***	0.81***	0.67***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Treatment	−0.01	0.02	−0.02	−0.01	0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
District Partisanship	−0.03	−0.07†	−0.02	−0.05	0.03
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Treatment X District Partisanship	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	−0.02
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Num. obs.	1107	1099	1097	1095	1106

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Note: Results from OLS models predicting support for policy outcomes.

12 Evaluating Demand Effects

Demand effects offer a potential alternative explanation for the results observed in the information-provision experiment. Demand effects occur when a study's participants infer the hypothesis behind a study and respond in a way that seeks to help confirm that hypothesis. Perhaps Republican politicians intuited my hypothesis, leading them to become more supportive of policies benefiting low-income Americans when provided with accurate information.

In a similar information-provision experiment, Kuziemko et al. (2015) conduct an indirect test for demand effects by examining gender differences in the treatment effect. This test is based on evidence that demand effects tend to be stronger among female respondents (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008; de Quidt, Haushofer, and Roth 2018).

I run this test in tables S15, S16, and S17 below. In these models I interact an indicator variable for being in the *Treatment* condition (coded 1 for respondents in the treatment and 0 for respondents in the control) with an indicator variable for being a *Female* respondent (coded 1 for female respondents and 0 for male respondents).

If demand effects were driving the results in my experiment, I might expect the findings to be stronger among female respondents. However, I do not find any evidence that this is the case. There are no statistically significant interaction effects, indicating that the treatment did not have a stronger effect on female respondents. I continue to find no evidence that the results are stronger for female respondents when I run these models separately for Democratic and Republican politicians.

Table S15: Gender Interaction Models For *Financial Insecurity*

	Increase Spending on Cash Assistance	Increase Minimum Wage	Eliminate Welfare Asset Limit	Welfare Asset Limit Too Low	Financial Security is Government Responsibility
Intercept	0.61***	0.84***	0.66***	0.75***	0.41***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Treatment	0.03	−0.02	0.00	0.03	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Female	0.10***	0.08***	0.13***	0.00	0.16***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Treatment X Female	0.01	−0.01	−0.01	−0.03	−0.08
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Num. obs.	1161	1121	1121	1045	1163

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Note: Results from OLS models predicting support for policy outcomes.

Table S16: Gender Interaction Models For *Unaffordable Healthcare*

	Increase Spending on Medicaid	Limit Hospital Charges	Support Hospital Pay Plans	ACA Premium Too High	Affordable Healthcare is Government Responsibility
Intercept	0.65***	0.66***	0.84***	0.86***	0.69***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Treatment	0.05*	0.00	−0.02	0.02	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Female	0.14***	0.13***	0.08***	0.05*	0.17***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Treatment X Female	−0.04	−0.01	−0.01	−0.02	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Num. obs.	1125	1121	1121	1110	1127

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Note: Results from OLS models predicting support for policy outcomes.

Table S17: Gender Interaction Models For *College Debt*

	Increase Spending on Financial Aid	Oppose Spending Cuts	Limit Tuition	Tuition is Too High	Affordable College is Government Responsibility
Intercept	0.70***	0.67***	0.70***	0.79***	0.64***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Treatment	0.01	0.02	−0.01	−0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Female	0.13***	0.11***	0.07**	0.00	0.12***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Treatment X Female	−0.01	−0.00	−0.00	0.02	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Num. obs.	1126	1116	1114	1112	1125

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

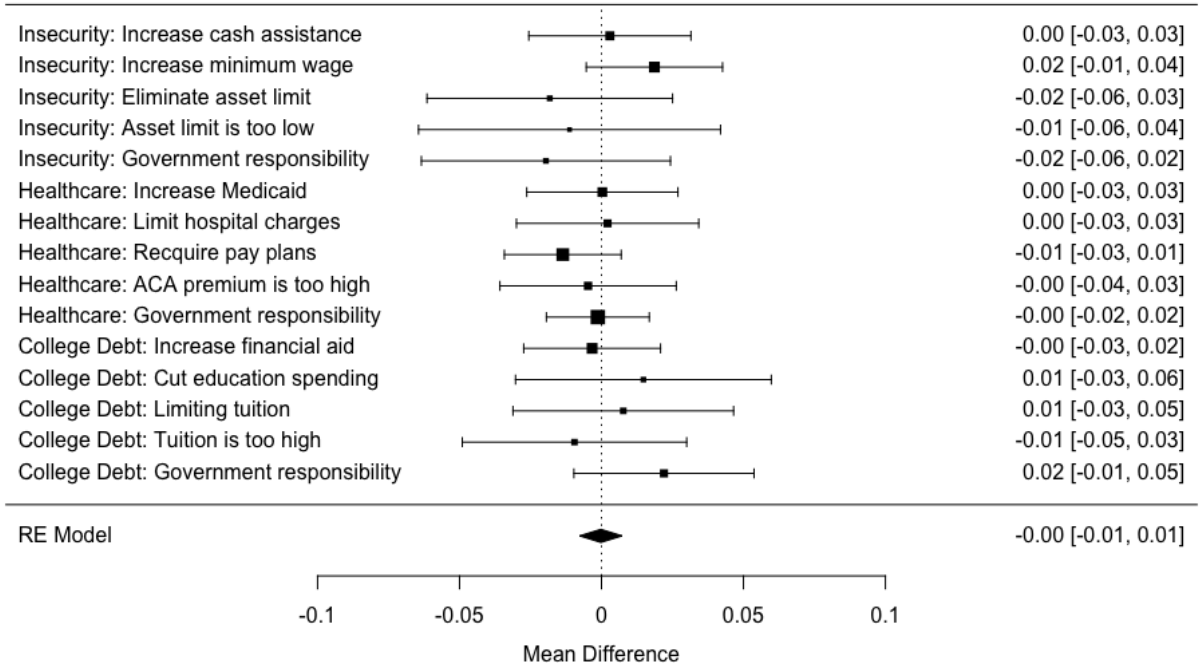
Note: Results from OLS models predicting support for policy outcomes.

13 Precision-Weighted Treatment Effects

The information-provision experiment has 15 total policy outcomes. While I analyze these outcomes individually in the main text, they tend to be strongly correlated with each other. An index combining all 15 outcomes has a Cronbach's α of .90, showing a high degree of internal consistency. Given this high degree of internal consistency, I also analyze the outcomes together by measuring precision-weighted treatment effects using the `metafor` package in `R`. In this analysis, more precise estimates are given more weight in determining the overall treatment effect than less precise estimates. The results are shown in Figure S11 for Democratic politicians and S12 for Republican politicians. Among Democrats, the precision-weighted treatment effect is zero ($p > .10$), indicating a lack of an effect across the outcomes. Among Republicans, the precision-weighted treatment effect is .02, indicating a two percentage point increase in Republicans' support across the outcomes. This effect falls just short of statistical significance, with a p-value of .06.[27]. While this effect is not statistically significant at the standard .05 threshold, it does suggest the treatment may have produced a small increase in Republicans' support for policies benefiting low-income Americans.

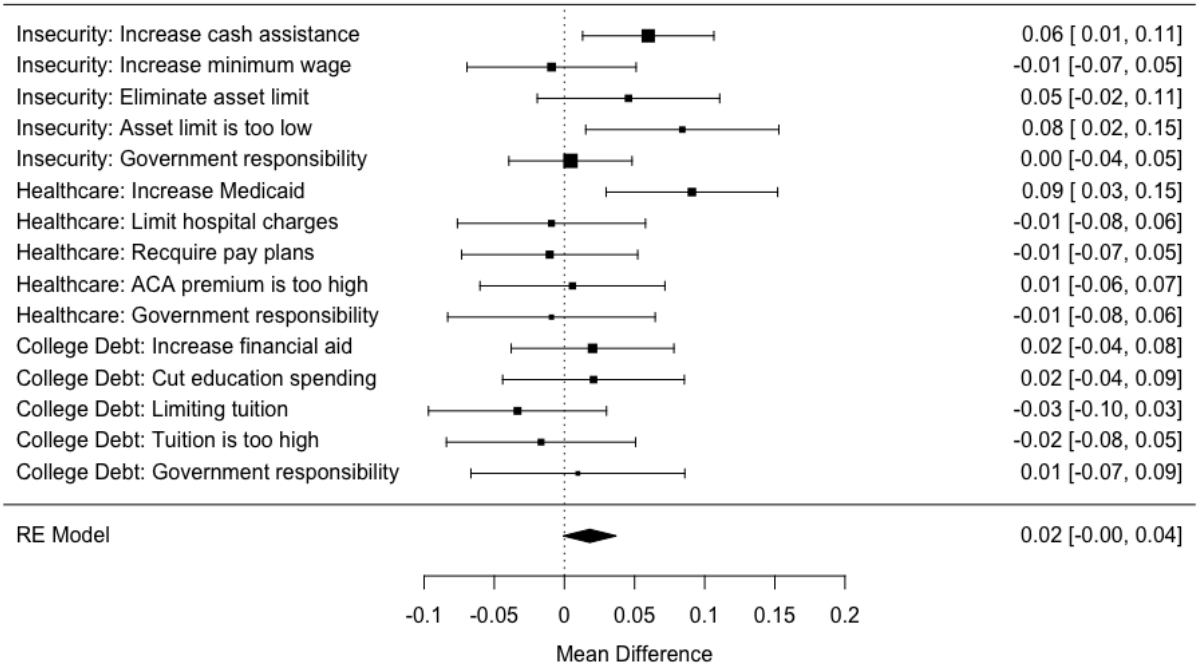
[27]I use a random-effects model rather than a fixed-effects model as the random-effects model does not require the strong assumption that the underlying true effect is homogeneous across the outcomes (Harrer et al. 2022). With a fixed-effects model the results are stronger for Republican politicians. Specifically, I find a precision-weighted treatment effect of .02 for Republican politicians that is statistically significant ($p = .02$). The results are the same for Democratic politicians whether a random or fixed effects model is used.

Figure S11: Precision-weighted treatment effect for Democratic politicians



Note: Treatment effect for each outcome among Democratic politicians and the overall inverse variance weighted average computed with a random effects model. Bars represent the 95% confidence interval.

Figure S12: Precision-weighted treatment effect for Republican politicians



Note: Treatment effect for each outcome among Republican politicians and the overall inverse variance weighted average computed with a random effects model. Bars represent the 95% confidence interval.

14 Analysis of Potential Mechanisms

In the main paper I find evidence that a substantial share of politicians misperceive how many of those they seek to govern are struggling financially. In this section I conduct an exploratory analysis of some of the factors that may be related to these misperceptions. This analysis has two parts. First, I conduct an observational analysis of a range of potential mechanisms that may be related to politicians' misperceptions. These potential mechanisms include the economic composition of politicians' districts, the level of financial hardship in politicians' social networks, politicians' own socioeconomic status, and politicians' ideology. Second, I conduct an experiment to further analyze one particularly promising mechanism, which is the level of financial hardship in politicians' social networks.[28]

Before proceeding, I note that there are several important limitations to this analysis. First, due to data limitations I am not able to consider all of the potential mechanisms that may be related to politicians' misperceptions. Second, I am unable to conclusively say whether any particular mechanism is actually causing politicians to hold misperceptions. Future work can extend this exploratory analysis by considering a broader range of potential mechanisms and more conclusively identifying which of these mechanisms play a role in causing politicians' misperceptions.

14.1 Observational Analysis

Measures and Methods

I begin by conducting an observational analysis of factors that may be related to politicians' misperceptions. The first potential mechanism I consider is the level of financial hardship in politicians' social networks. This accounts for the possibility that politicians' misperceptions may be related to the amount of financial hardship they see in their social networks. I measure politicians' *Self-Reported Network Exposure* to each issue using items that ask politicians to self-report how many of their personal acquaintances experience the issue. For example, for *Financial Insecurity* politicians were asked "To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the people you are personally acquainted with would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense?"[29] Full details on question wording and coding for all variables in this analysis are provided on pages 39 to 42 below.

The second potential mechanism I consider is politicians' district context. This accounts for the possibility that politicians' misperceptions may be related to the prevalence of economic hardship among their broader constituency. While I am unable to measure the level of *Financial Insecurity*, *Unaffordable Healthcare*, and *College Debt* in politicians' districts directly, I am able to measure the median household income in their district (*District Median*

[28] These analyses were not included in my pre-analysis plan.

[29] As shown on pages 43 to 44 below, politicians' answers to these questions are highly correlated with the actual level of affluence in their zip codes as measured by census data. This provides evidence that politicians are accurately reporting what is going on in their social networks.

Income) using data from the 2018 American Community Survey.[30] The median household income in politicians' districts is likely to be correlated with the amount of financial hardship their constituents experience. In particular, districts with higher median incomes are likely to have lower levels of financial hardship on average.

The third potential mechanism I consider is politicians' own socioeconomic status. This accounts for the possibility that politicians' misperceptions may be related to their own risk of experiencing financial hardship. I measure politicians' socioeconomic status with variables for their *Household Income* and their level of *Education*. Both of these factors were measured in the State Legislative Candidate Study. I assess both income and education to account for the multifaceted nature of socioeconomic status, which is impacted both by one's level of economic resources and one's level of educational attainment.

The final potential mechanism I consider is politicians' *Ideology*. This accounts for the possibility that politicians may be engaged in expressive responding when reporting their perceptions of economic hardship. In particular, it may be the case that Republicans are reporting a low level of financial hardship because that supports their conservative beliefs, while Democrats are reporting a high level of financial hardship because that supports their liberal beliefs. I measure politicians' ideology with an item in the survey that asks politicians the following: "Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe your own political point of view?" Politicians then rate their ideology on a scale ranging from "Extremely conservative" to "Extremely liberal." This variable is coded such that more liberal politicians score higher and more conservative politicians score lower (see page 42 for full details on coding).[31]

In examining the relationship between these factors and politicians' misperceptions I also control for a range of demographic variables. I account for politicians' gender with a variable measuring whether they are *Female*, politicians' race and ethnicity with a variable measuring whether they are *White*, and politicians' *Age*.

I measure the relationship between these variables and politicians' misperceptions with logit models that predict underestimating and overestimating *Financial Insecurity*, *Unaffordable Healthcare*, and *College Debt*. In models that predict underestimating the outcome is coded 1 if a politician underestimates an issue by more than 10 percentage points, and 0 if they do not. In models that predict overestimating the outcome is coded 1 if a politician overestimates an issue by more than 10 percentage points, and 0 if they do not.[32] These models are run separately for Democratic and Republican politicians. All continuous predictors are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

[30] In additional models I account for the racial and partisan composition of politicians' districts with variables measuring the percent of their district that is white and the percent of their district that voted for Donald Trump in 2016. I do not observe evidence that these variables are consistently related to politicians' misperceptions.

[31] One potential concern with this variable is that it captures politicians' overall ideology rather than their views of economic issues in particular. In an additional analysis on pages 51 to 54 I replace the measure of politicians' overall *Ideology* with an index measuring their views towards economic policies. I find that the results are substantively the same.

[32] The results are consistent when other thresholds are used, such as the proportion who underestimate or overestimate by more than 20 percentage points.

Results

The results are shown in Figures S13, S14, and S15 below. These figures show average marginal effects based on the logit model results shown on pages 45 to 47 below (e.g., Leeper 2021).[33] For the main variables of interest, which include *Self-Reported Network Exposure*, *District Median Income*, *Household Income*, *Education*, and *Ideology*, these figures show the average marginal effect of a 1 standard deviation increase in the level of the variable on the probability of overestimating or underestimating each issue. The average marginal effects are shown with 95% confidence intervals. When these confidence intervals do not overlap with zero it is indicative of a statistically significant effect at $p < .05$.

I find that *Self-Reported Network Exposure* is the most consistent predictor of underestimating or overestimating financial hardship. This variable measures politicians' perceptions of how many people in their networks experience each issue. I find that politicians who self-report higher levels of exposure to an issue in their network are more likely to overestimate the issue in their state, while politicians who self-report lower levels of exposure to an issue in their network are more likely to underestimate the issue in their state. This finding holds for both parties on all three issues. By contrast, there is less evidence that the other potential mechanisms, including politicians' district context, socioeconomic status, and ideology, are consistently related to politicians' misperceptions.

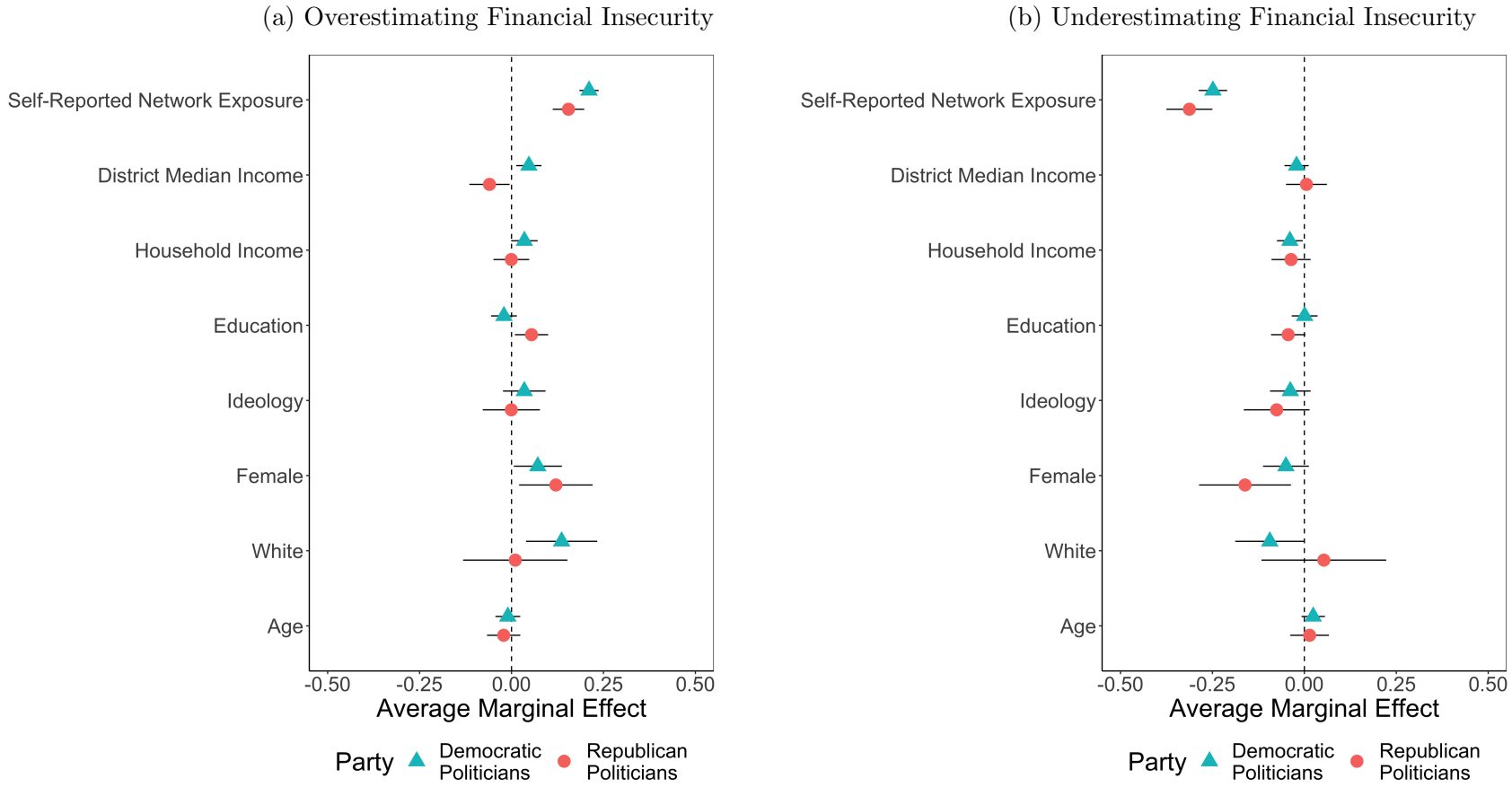
It is particularly noteworthy that *Self-Reported Network Exposure* is more strongly related to politicians' misperceptions than politicians' *Ideology*. As discussed in the main text, one concern with the analysis is that politicians' misperceptions may be driven by expressive responding. Expressive responding occurs when respondents intentionally report an incorrect answer to express their ideological beliefs. If politicians' misperceptions were merely an expression of their ideology, I would expect the variable measuring politicians' *Ideology* to be among the most powerful predictors of whether they misperceive these issues. While *Ideology* is correlated with holding misperceptions in some instances, *Self-Reported Network Exposure* is more consistently correlated with whether politicians hold misperceptions.[34] This suggests that politicians' misperceptions are not merely an expression of their ideological beliefs.

In summary, this analysis provides evidence to suggest that politicians' misperceptions may be related to what they observe in their social networks. One potential concern about these results is that they are based on a self-reported measure of politicians' network conditions. On pages 55 to 58 below I conduct a similar analysis using a more objective measure consisting of the actual level of affluence in politicians' zipcodes as measured by census data. In contrast to the results obtained using the self-reported measure, I do not find evidence that the actual level of affluence in politicians' zip codes is related to their misperceptions. While this casts some doubt on how much politicians' social networks really matter, it is important to keep in mind that the conditions in politicians' zip codes are an imperfect proxy for what is happening in their social networks. In the next section I use an experiment to further analyze the possibility that politicians' misperceptions are related to conditions in their social networks.

[33]Other modeling approaches such as OLS produce results that are substantively indistinguishable.

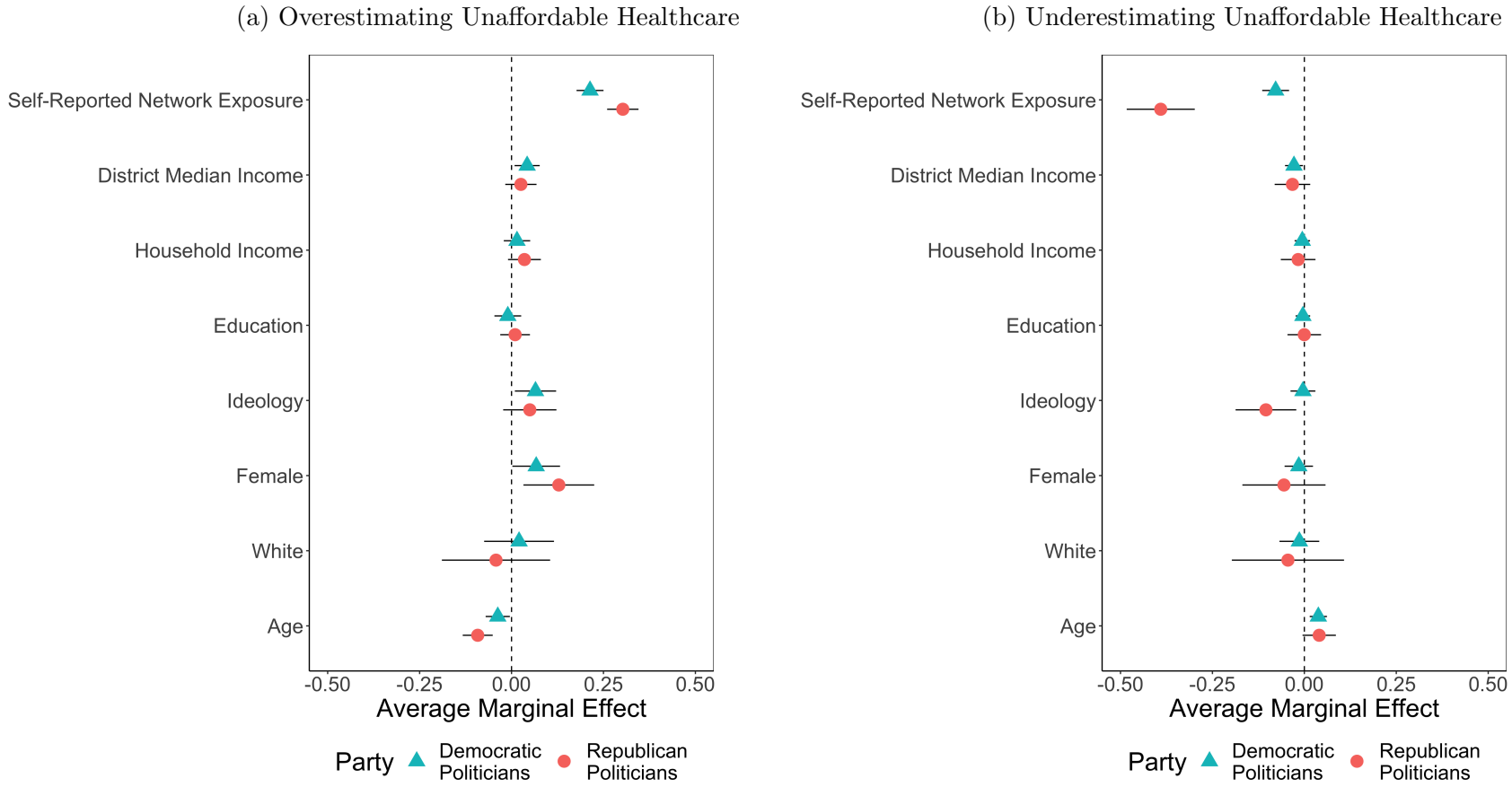
[34]This finding holds in alternative analyses, including when I examine the results in a single model containing the full sample (see pages 48 to 50 below) and when I replace the variable measuring politicians' *Ideology* with an index measuring their ideology on economic issues in particular (see pages 51 to 54 below).

Figure S13: Results from models predicting overestimating and underestimating *Financial Insecurity*



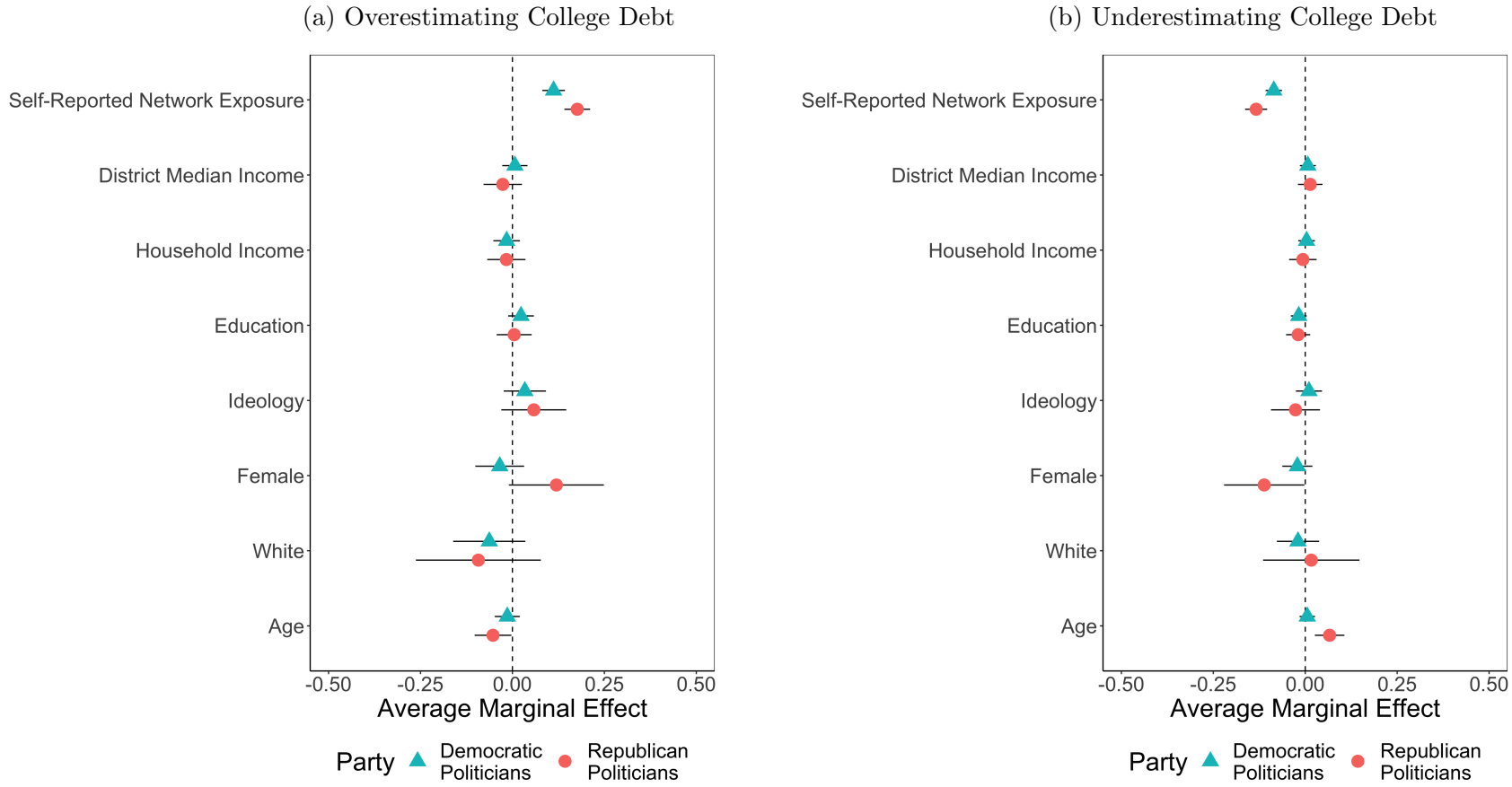
Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Financial Insecurity*. See full model results on page 45 below.

Figure S14: Results from models predicting overestimating and underestimating *Unaffordable Healtcare*



Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Unaffordable Healthcare* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Unaffordable Healthcare*. See full model results on page 46 below.

Figure S15: Results from models predicting overestimating and underestimating *College Debt*



Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *College Debt* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *College Debt*. See full model results on page 47 below.

14.2 Experimental Analysis

In the prior section I find observational evidence of a relationship between politicians' misperceptions and conditions in their social networks. In this section I provide an experimental test of this relationship. I refer to this test below as the *Network Experiment*.

Measures and Methods

In the *Network Experiment* I randomly assigned half of the politicians to think about how well their friends are doing financially. I accomplished this by randomizing the order in which respondents are asked the questions about their state and social networks. These questions are shown in Table S18 below. Those randomly assigned to the treatment condition answered the network questions shown in the third row before answering the state questions shown in the second row. Those randomly assigned to the control condition answered the state questions before the network questions. This design allows me to test whether thinking about conditions in their social network can cause politicians to misperceive conditions in their state. If this is the case, than I would expect respondents in the treatment condition (who answered the network questions first) to hold more extreme misperceptions than respondents in the control condition (who answered the state questions first). This experimental design clearly falls well short of the ideal experiment, which would entail randomly assigning the actual composition of politicians' social networks. However, the *Network Experiment* can still provide a useful complement to the observational analysis presented above.

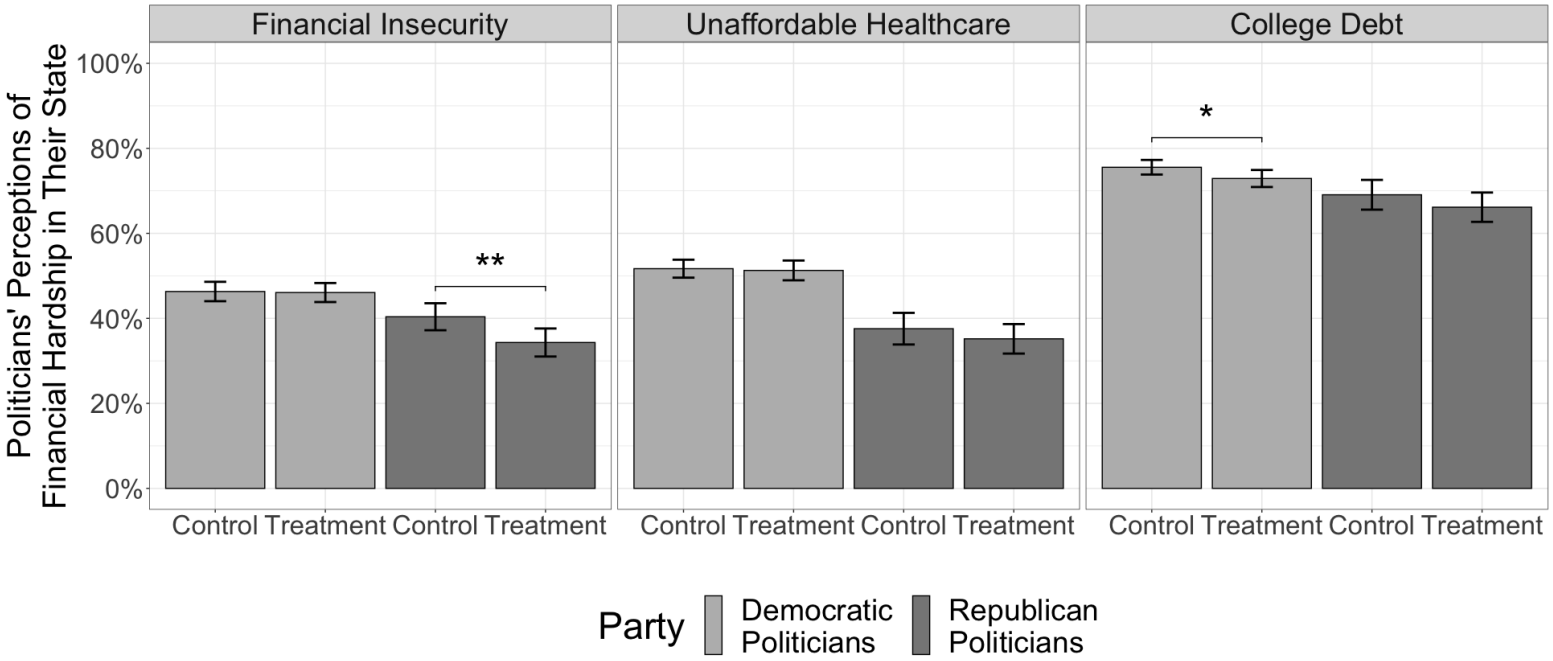
Table S18: State and Network Questions

Question Type	*Financial Insecurity*	*Unaffordable Healthcare*	*College Debt*
State Questions	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of [STATE NAME] residents would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense?"	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of [STATE NAME] residents have skipped necessary medical care because they were unable to afford it?"	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of students needs to take out student loans in order to graduate from [NAME OF STATE FLAGSHIP PUBLIC UNIVERSITY]?"
Network Questions	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the people you are personally acquainted with would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense?"	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the people you are personally acquainted with have skipped necessary medical care because they were unable to afford it?"	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the people you are personally acquainted with could not afford to send one of their children to [NAME OF STATE FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITY] unless their child took out student loans?"

Results

Figure S16 shows the results. The bars show politicians' average perception of how many people experience *Financial Insecurity* (panel 1), *Unaffordable Healthcare* (panel 2), and *College Debt* (panel 3) in their state across the treatment (where respondents saw the network questions first) and control (where respondents saw the state questions first). For the most part, the treatment fails to have an effect. However, there are two instances in which the treatment causes politicians to perceive lower levels of financial hardship in their state. First, the treatment causes a statistically significant six point reduction in Republican politicians' perception of the level of *Financial Insecurity* in their state (panel 1). Second, the treatment causes a statistically significant three point reduction in Democratic politicians' perception of the level of *College Debt* in their state (panel 3). As a consequence of these shifts politicians become more likely to underestimate these issues. Republicans in the treatment condition are 17 points more likely to underestimate *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 percentage points relative to Republicans in the control condition, while Democrats in the treatment condition are 6 points more likely to underestimate *College Debt* by more than 10 percentage points relative to Democrats in the control condition.

Figure S16: The effects of the *Network Experiment* on politicians' perceptions of the level of financial hardship in their state



Note: Respondents in the treatment are shown the network questions before the state questions, while respondents in the control are shown the state questions before the network questions. The y-axis shows politicians' average perception of how many people in their state experience each form of financial hardship. Bars are 95% confidence intervals. Significant differences between the control and treatment are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$.

This relatively large increase in Republicans' tendency to underestimate *Financial Insecurity* may reflect the fact that they are highly isolated from this issue. While the average Republican is running in a state where 43% of people experience *Financial Insecurity* as measured by the SHED data, the average Republican is in a social network where (according to their perceptions) only 22% of people experience *Financial Insecurity*. This means that the level of *Financial Insecurity* Republican politicians see around them in their social networks is approximately half the level that exists in their state as a whole (see page 59 below for further details on politicians' level of isolation from each issue). This could help to explain why thinking about their social networks causes Republican politicians to become more likely to underestimate *Financial Insecurity* in their state.

It is also useful to consider the mechanism behind these results. One potential mechanism has to due with extrapolation. This perspective suggests that politicians in the treatment group are extrapolating from conditions in their social network to form perceptions of state-level conditions. However, an alternative mechanism has to due with anchoring, which occurs when individuals rely too heavily on an initial piece of information when making subsequent judgments. This perspective suggests that politicians in the treatment group are using what they observe in their networks to inform their state-level judgements simply because they were asked the network questions first. I arbitrate between these competing explanations with with a placebo test described on pages 60 to 61 below. The results suggest that the results of the *Network Experiment* are driven by extrapolation rather than anchoring.

Building off the observational results in the prior section, the results of the *Network Experiment* provide further evidence that network conditions may be related to politicians' misperceptions. As noted above, these observational and experimental analyses fall well short of demonstrating that conditions in politicians' social networks play a role in causing their misperceptions. However, this evidence does point to politicians' social networks as one factor that may matter and is worthy of further study. Future research could build off the findings presented here by studying the effects of politicians' social networks with experimental treatments that more closely approximate the actual experience of interacting with people of high or low socioeconomic status.

15 Supplemental Materials for Mechanism Analysis

15.1 Details On Question Wording and Coding

Table S19: Descriptive statistics

Category	Variable	Question Text	Coding	Sample Mean
Dependent Variables	Overestimate *Financial Insecurity*	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of [STATE NAME] residents would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense?"	1 if respondent overestimates *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 points; 0 if not	Mean = .35
	Overestimate *Unaffordable Healthcare*	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of [STATE NAME] residents have skipped necessary medical care because they were unable to afford it?"	1 if respondent overestimates *Unaffordable Healthcare* by more than 10 points; 0 if not	Mean = .14
	Overestimate *College Debt*	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of students need to take out student loans in order to graduate from [NAME OF STATE FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITY]?"	1 if respondent overestimates *College Debt* by more than 10 points; 0 if not	Mean = .11

Continued on next page.

Table S20: Descriptive statistics (continued from previous page)

Category	Variable	Question Text	Coding	Sample Mean
Independent Variables	Network Exposure to *Financial Insecurity*	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the people you are personally acquainted with would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense?"	Continuous	Mean = 29%
	Network Exposure to *Unafford-able Healthcare*	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the people you are personally acquainted with have skipped necessary medical care because they were unable to afford it?"	Continuous	Mean = 32%
	Network Exposure to *College Debt*	"To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the people you are personally acquainted with could not afford to send one of their children to [NAME OF STATE FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITY] unless their child took out student loans?"	Continuous	Mean = 65%
	District Median Income	Median income in politicians' district as measured by American Community Survey	Continuous	Mean = $64,955

Continued on next page.

Table S21: Descriptive statistics (continued from previous page)

Category	Variable	Question Text	Coding	Sample Mean
Independent Variables	Household Income	"Below is a list of income categories. Please select which category best describes the total income of all members of your family living in your house in 2017 before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income." ($30,000 or less; More than $30,000 and less than $60,000; More than $60,000 and less than $90,000; More than $90,000 and less than $120,000; More than $120,000 and less than $150,000; More than $150,000 and less than $175,000; More than $175,000 and less than $200,000; More than $200,000; Prefer not to say)	$30,000 or less = 1; More than $30,000 and less than $60,000 = 2; More than $60,000 and less than $90,000 = 3; More than $90,000 and less than $120,000 = 4; More than $120,000 and less than $150,000 = 5; More than $150,000 and less than $175,000 = 6; More than $175,000 and less than $200,000 = 7; More than $200,000 = 8; Prefer not to say = NA	Mean = 4.0
	Education	"What is the highest level of education you've completed?" (Less than high school; High school degree or equivalent; Some college; 2-year college degree (e.g., Associate's degree); 4-year college degree (e.g., Bachelor's degree); Post-graduate degree (e.g., Master's degree, Ph.D., J.D., LLM))	Less than high school = 1; High school degree or equivalent = 2; Some college = 3; 2-year college degree (e.g., Associate's degree) = 4; 4-year college degree (e.g., Bachelor's degree) = 5; Post-graduate degree (e.g., Master's degree, Ph.D., J.D., LLM) = 6	Mean = 5.1

Continued on next page.

Table S22: Descriptive statistics (continued from previous page)

Category	Variable	Question Text	Coding	Sample Mean
Independent Variables	Ideology	"Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe your own political point of view?" (Extremely liberal; Liberal; Slightly liberal; Moderate or middle of the road; Slightly conservative; Conservative; Extremely conservative)	Extremely liberal = 7; Liberal = 6; Slightly liberal = 5; Moderate or middle of the road = 4; Slightly conservative = 3; Conservative = 2; Extremely conservative = 1	Mean = 4.5
	Female	"What is your gender" (Female; Male; Other [text box])	1 if Female is selected, 0 if not	Mean = .36
	White	"Which of the following do you identify with? Mark all that apply" (White; Black or African American; Latino, Hispanic, or Spanish; Asian; Native Hawaiian; Pacific Islander; Middle Eastern; North African; American Indian or Alaska Native; Some other race [text box])	1 if white is selected, 0 if not	Mean = .85
	Age	"In what year were you born?"	Continuous	Mean = 52

15.2 Validating Elites' Perceptions of Their Social Networks

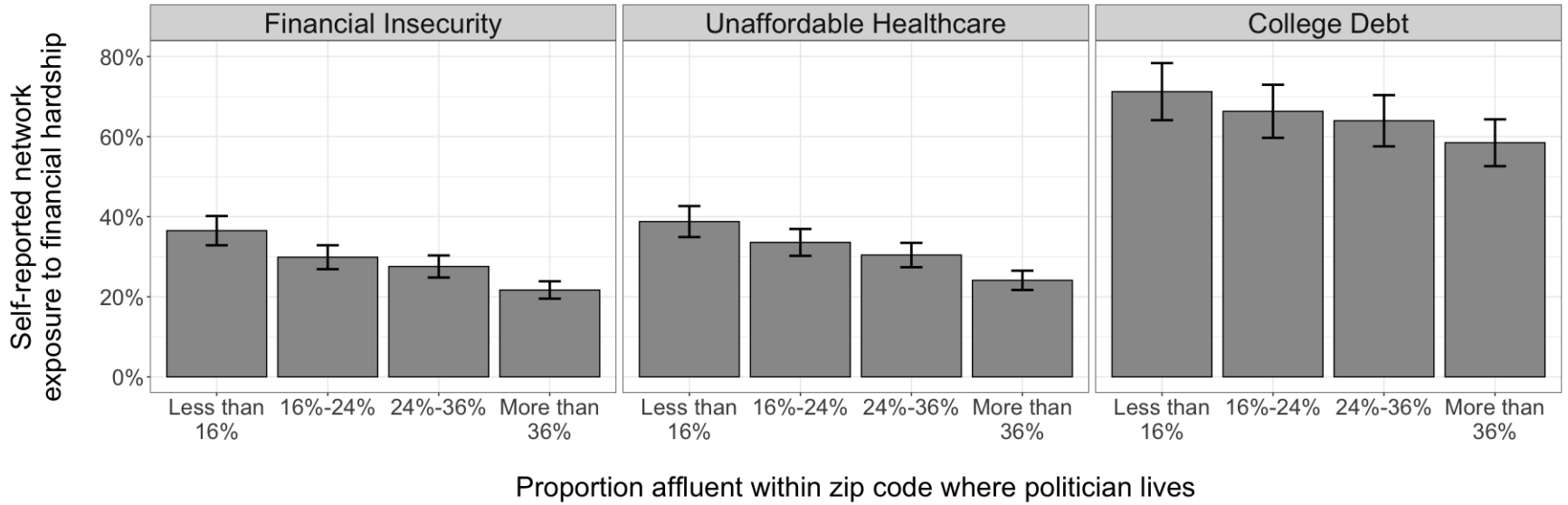
One concern with the measures of network perceptions is that politicians may feel pressure to inflate their own exposure to those experiencing financial hardship in order to avoid appearing out-of-touch. To assess this concern, I look at the relationship between politicians' self-reported exposure to those experiencing financial hardship and politicians' actual level of isolation among the affluent.

Politicians' actual level of isolation among the affluent is measured based on each politician's home zip code, which I asked them to self-report as part of the survey. Using the 2017 American Community Survey, I measure the proportion of households in each of these zip codes that earns more than $100,000 a year. This measure is similar to those used in previous studies of income segregation (Massey 1996; Massey and Rugh 2020). As this measure rises, it indicates that politicians are becoming increasingly isolated among the affluent in the neighborhoods where they live.

To the extent that politicians are accurately reporting their perceived exposure to financial hardship, I would expect their self-reported level of exposure to decline as the proportion of their neighbors who are affluent increases. As Figure S17 shows, this is clearly the case. Here I break the politicians into four categories based on the proportion of households in their zip code that are affluent. These categories correspond to the quartiles of the distribution of zip code affluence among politicians: Less than 16 percent affluent, 16 to 24 percent affluent, 24 to 36 percent affluent, and more than 36 percent affluent. Figure S17 looks at the average level of self-reported exposure to *Financial Insecurity*, *Unaffordable Healthcare*, and *College Debt* across these categories. As expected, I observe that politicians who live in zip codes with few affluent households report significantly more exposure to those experiencing these issues than politicians who live in zip codes with many affluent households. Specifically, for each issue there is a statistically significant decline between the level of financial hardship reported in zip codes that are less than 16% affluent and zip codes that are more than 36% affluent.

While it is not possible to entirely rule out that some respondents are misreporting their perceptions of their social networks, the results provided here suggest that, on average, politicians' self-reports of their network composition are firmly grounded in what they actually experience as they go about their daily lives.

Figure S17: The relationship between objective isolation and self-reported exposure to financial hardship



Note: Relationship between the proportion of a politician's zip code that is affluent (based on census data) and their self-report of the proportion of people in their social network who experience *Financial Insecurity* (left), *Unaffordable Healthcare* (center), and *College Debt* (right).

15.3 Regression Models

Table S23: Models predicting overestimating and underestimating *Financial Insecurity*

	Overestimate - Democrats	Overestimate - Republicans	Underestimate - Democrats	Underestimate - Republicans
Intercept	-1.65^{***}	-1.42^{*}	-0.35	-1.24^{*}
	(0.28)	(0.63)	(0.29)	(0.56)
Self-Reported Network Exposure	1.18^{***}	1.11^{***}	-1.55^{***}	-1.73^{***}
	(0.11)	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.26)
District Median Income	0.26^{**}	-0.43^{*}	-0.13	0.03
	(0.10)	(0.20)	(0.11)	(0.16)
Household Income	0.20	-0.00	-0.25^{*}	-0.20
	(0.10)	(0.18)	(0.11)	(0.15)
Education	-0.12	0.39^{*}	0.01	-0.24
	(0.10)	(0.17)	(0.11)	(0.13)
Ideology	0.19	-0.00	-0.24	-0.42
	(0.17)	(0.28)	(0.18)	(0.26)
Female	0.40^{*}	0.86^{*}	-0.31	-0.89^{*}
	(0.19)	(0.37)	(0.20)	(0.37)
White	0.76^{**}	0.07	-0.59	0.29
	(0.28)	(0.52)	(0.30)	(0.48)
Age	-0.06	-0.15	0.15	0.08
	(0.10)	(0.17)	(0.10)	(0.15)
Log Likelihood	-349.26	-130.30	-312.82	-159.20
Num. obs.	653	297	653	297

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Note: Logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 points (columns 2 and 4) and underestimate *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 points (columns 3 and 5). *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Financial Insecurity*. Average marginal effects are shown on page 33 above.

Table S24: Models predicting overestimating and underestimating *Unaffordable Healthcare*

	Overestimate - Democrats	Overestimate - Republicans	Underestimate - Democrats	Underestimate - Republicans
Intercept	0.31	0.91	-2.90^{***}	-3.21^{***}
	(0.27)	(0.71)	(0.49)	(0.74)
Self-Reported Network Exposure	1.24^{***}	2.45^{***}	-1.36^{***}	-2.68^{***}
	(0.14)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.44)
District Median Income	0.25^{*}	0.21	-0.49^{*}	-0.22
	(0.10)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.17)
Household Income	0.09	0.28	-0.10	-0.12
	(0.11)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.17)
Education	-0.06	0.08	-0.07	-0.00
	(0.11)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.16)
Ideology	0.38^{*}	0.40	-0.07	-0.72^{*}
	(0.17)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Female	0.39^{*}	1.04^{*}	-0.26	-0.38
	(0.19)	(0.41)	(0.34)	(0.40)
White	0.12	-0.34	-0.24	-0.31
	(0.28)	(0.61)	(0.48)	(0.54)
Age	-0.22^{*}	-0.74^{***}	0.66^{**}	0.28
	(0.10)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.16)
Log Likelihood	-332.78	-116.31	-133.38	-129.46
Num. obs.	651	298	651	298

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Note: Logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate *Unaffordable Healthcare* by more than 10 points (columns 2 and 4) and underestimate *Unaffordable Healthcare* by more than 10 points (columns 3 and 5). *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Unaffordable Healthcare*. Average marginal effects are shown on page 34 above.

Table S25: Models predicting overestimating and underestimating *College Debt*

	Overestimate - Democrats	Overestimate - Republicans	Underestimate - Democrats	Underestimate - Republicans
Intercept	1.30^{***}	1.73^{**}	0.11^{***}	-3.31^{***}
	(0.28)	(0.58)	(0.03)	(0.84)
Self-Reported Network Exposure	0.63^{***}	1.02^{***}	-0.09^{***}	-1.44^{***}
	(0.10)	(0.15)	(0.01)	(0.23)
District Median Income	0.04	−0.15	0.01	0.15
	(0.10)	(0.15)	(0.01)	(0.18)
Household Income	−0.09	−0.10	0.00	−0.07
	(0.10)	(0.15)	(0.01)	(0.21)
Education	0.13	0.03	−0.02	−0.21
	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.01)	(0.18)
Ideology	0.19	0.33	0.01	−0.29
	(0.17)	(0.26)	(0.02)	(0.37)
Female	−0.19	0.69	−0.02	−1.20
	(0.19)	(0.39)	(0.02)	(0.62)
White	−0.35	−0.53	−0.02	0.18
	(0.28)	(0.50)	(0.03)	(0.72)
Age	−0.08	-0.30^{*}	0.01	0.71^{**}
	(0.10)	(0.15)	(0.01)	(0.23)
Log Likelihood	−347.93	−157.26	−41.57	−90.46
Num. obs.	648	301	648	301

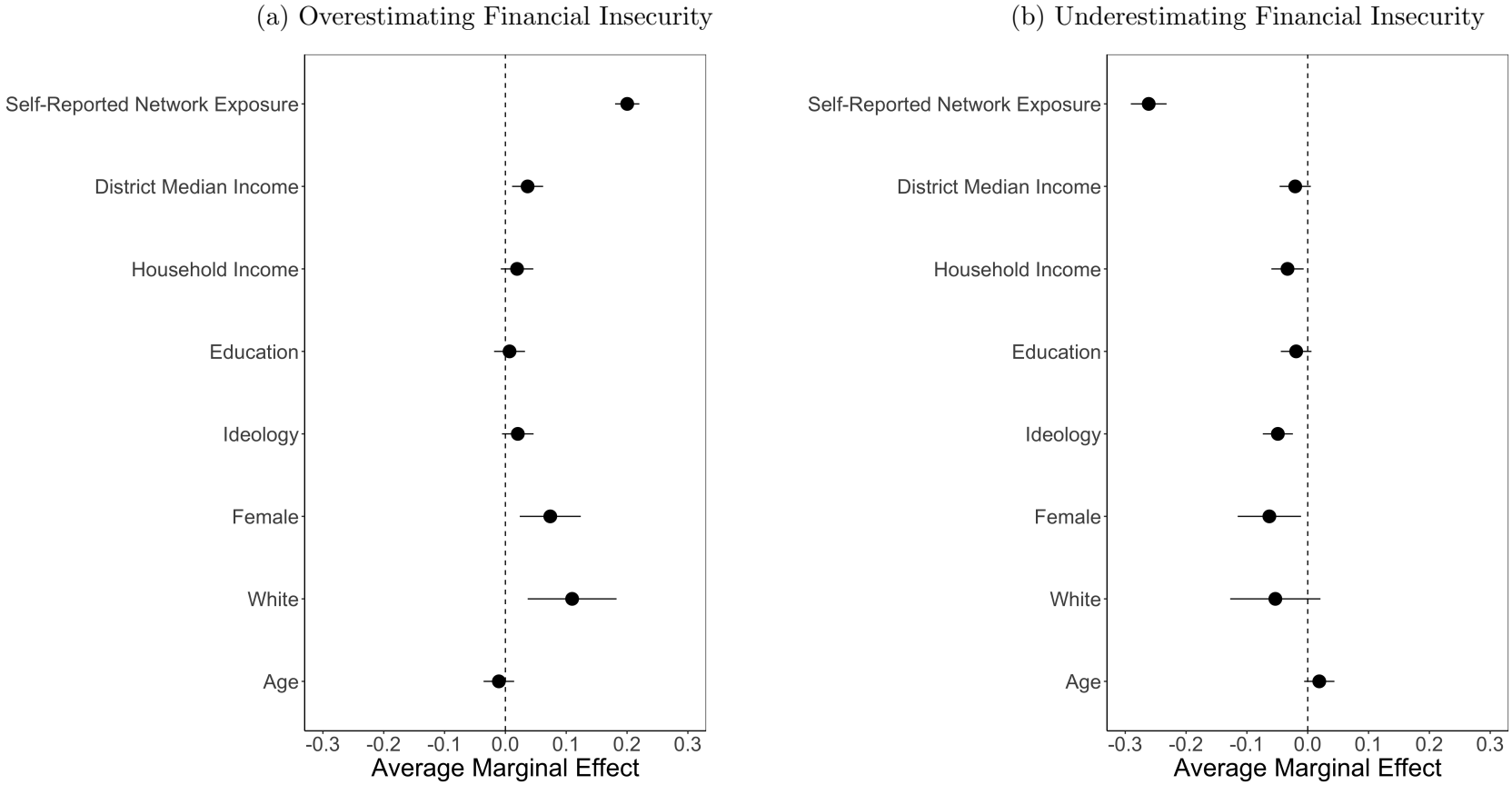
$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Note: Logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate *College Debt* by more than 10 points (columns 2 and 4) and underestimate *College debt* by more than 10 points (columns 3 and 5). *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *College Debt*. Average marginal effects are shown on page 35 above.

15.4 Full Sample Model Results

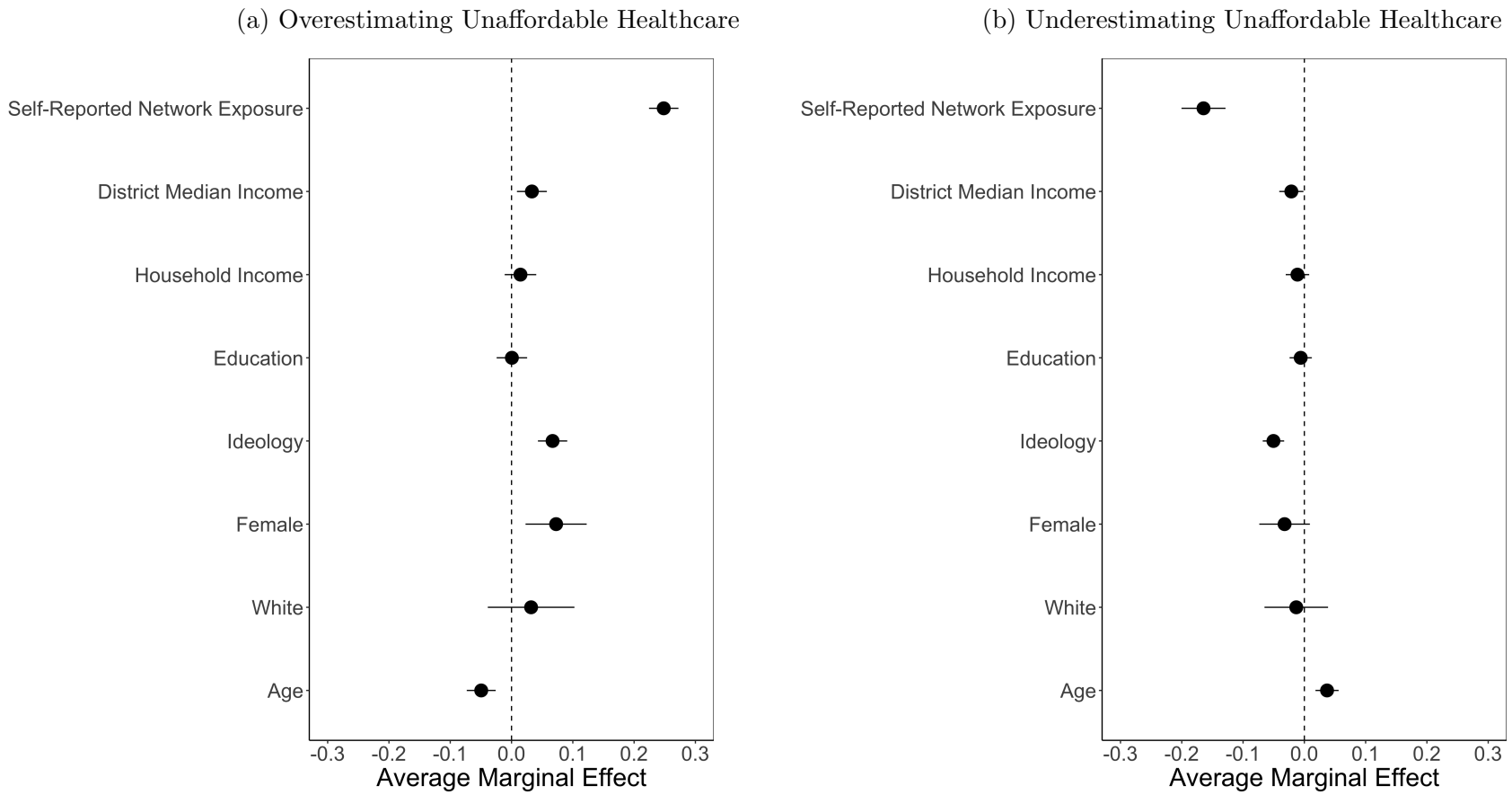
Figures S18, S19, and S20 show the results when the models predicting politicians' misperceptions are rerun using the full sample including Democrats, Republicans, and independents. While these models include a variable measuring *Ideology*, the results are substantively similar when I include a variable measuring partisanship instead.

Figure S18: *Financial Insecurity* results for full sample



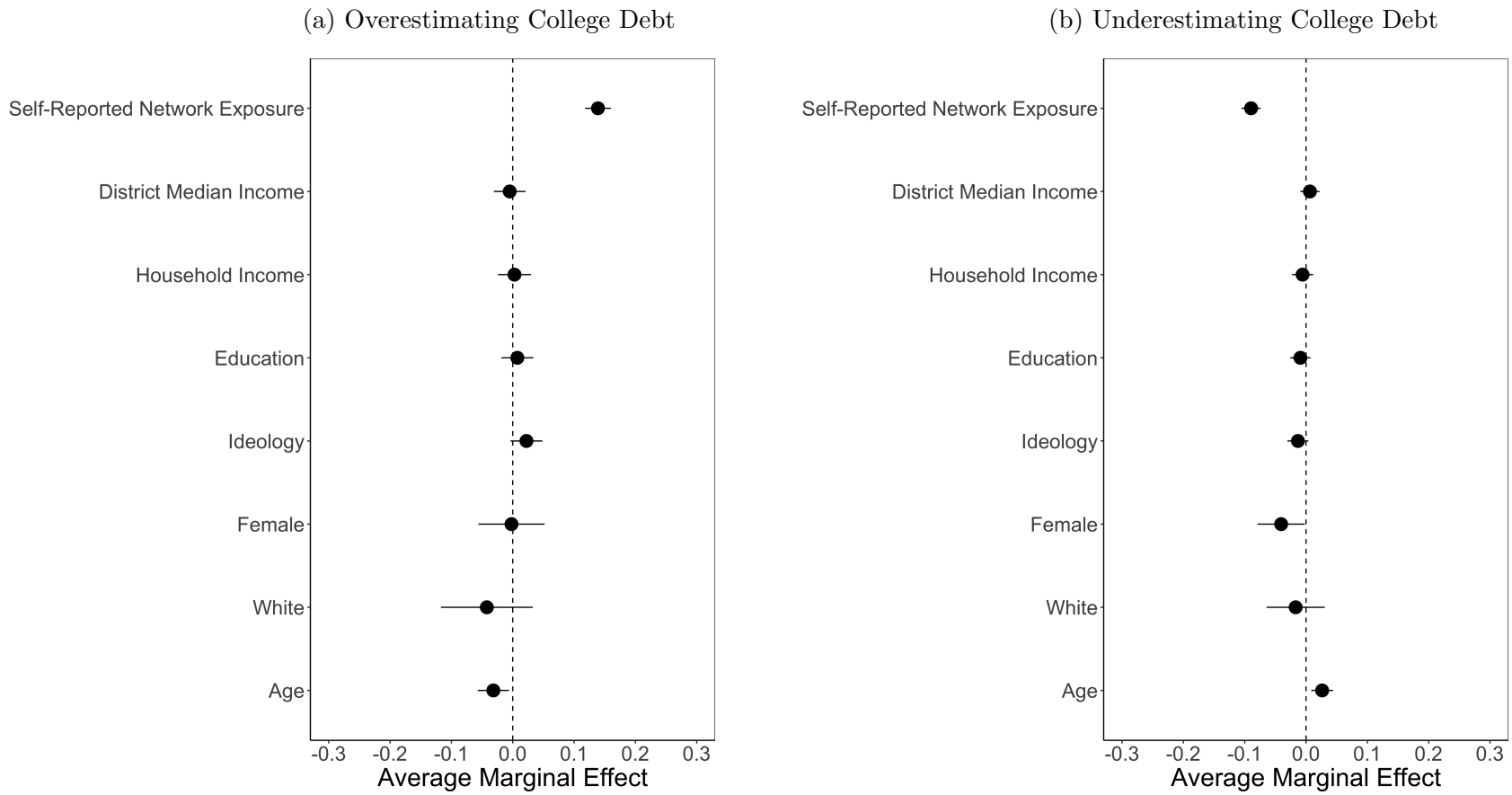
Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Financial Insecurity*.

Figure S19: *Unaffordable Healthcare* results for full sample



Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Unaffordable Healthcare* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Unaffordable Healthcare*.

Figure S20: *College Debt* results for full sample



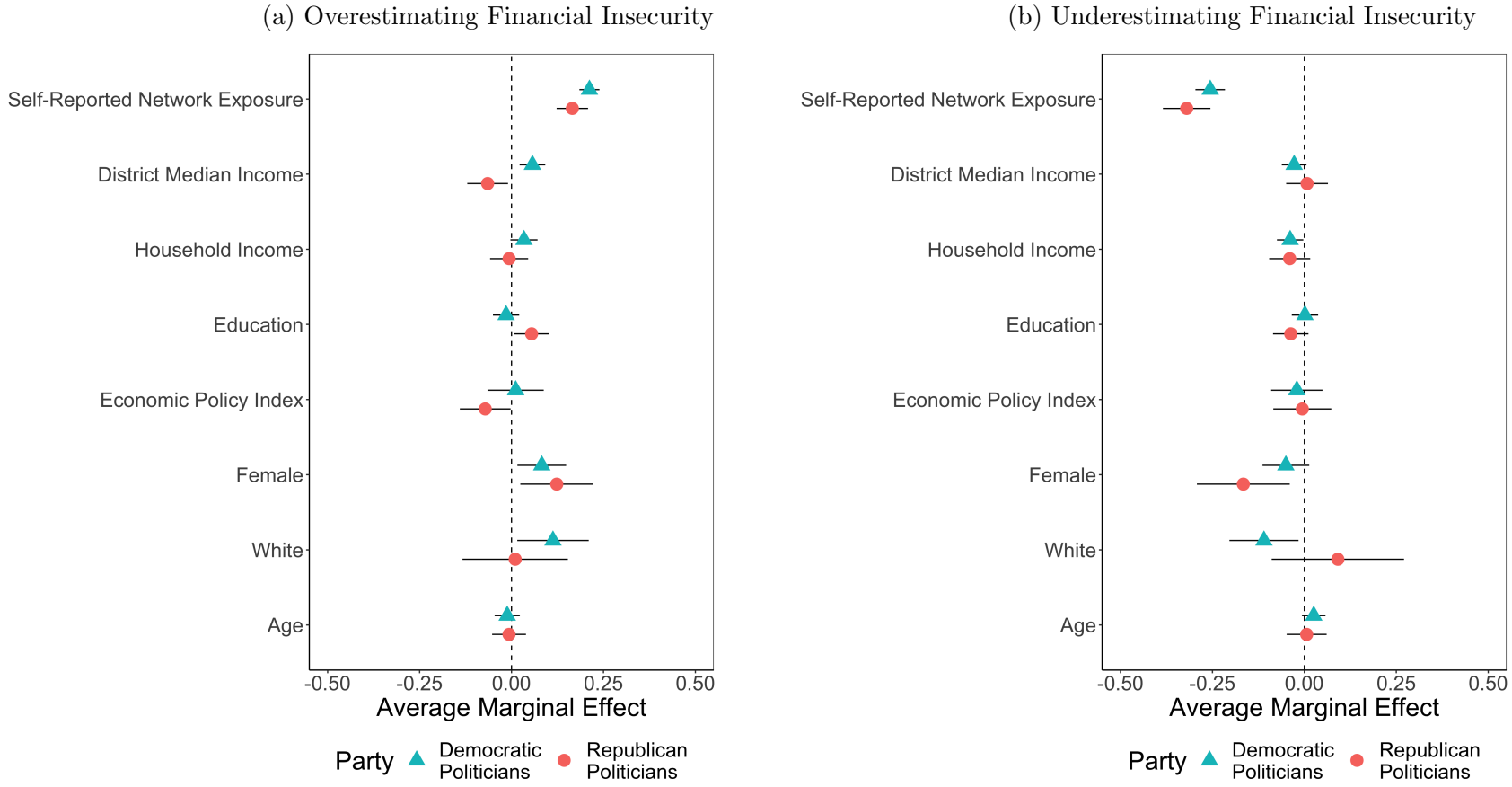
Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *College Debt* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *College Debt*.

15.5 Results With Economic Policy Index

The main observational analysis above controls for politicians' *Ideology*, which is not consistently related to their misperceptions. In these models *Ideology* is measured using an item that asks politicians to rate their overall ideology. One potential concern is that this measure may not adequately capture their ideology on economic issues in particular. In this analysis I replace the *Ideology* measure with an *Economic Policy Index* that averages together politicians' views towards all 15 economic policies I asked about in the information-provision experiment including those related to *Financial Insecurity*, *Unaffordable Healthcare*, and *College Debt*. These outcomes are described on pages 21 to 23 of the main paper. The resulting *Economic Policy Index* has a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). This index provides a way to measure politicians' ideological perspective on economic issues in particular. It takes on higher values as politicians' support for anti-poverty policies grows.

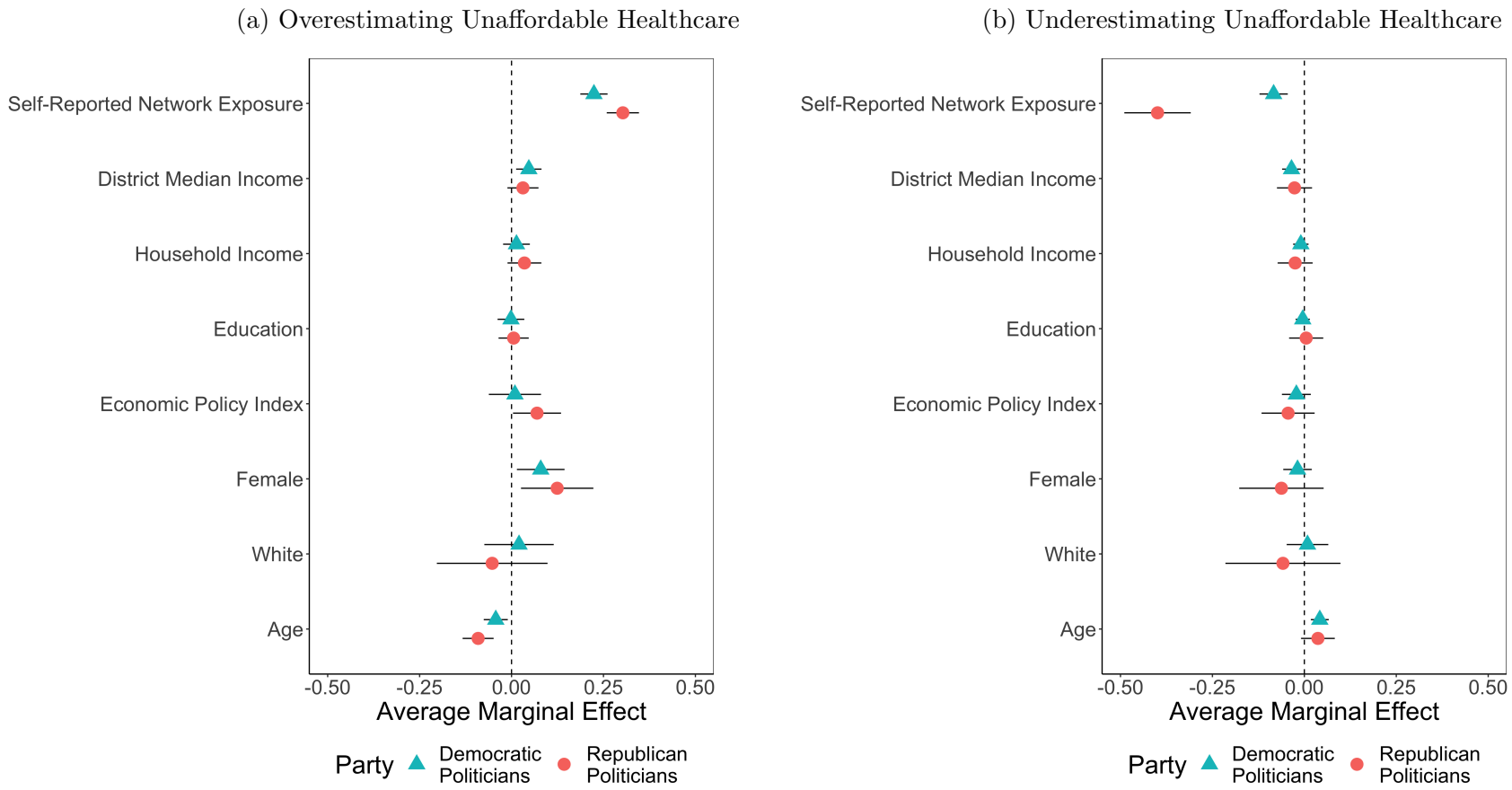
Figures S21, S22, and S23 below show the results when this measure is used. The results are consistent with those seen in the main observational analysis in Figures S13 through S15 above: Politicians' *Self-Reported Network Exposure* remains a much stronger and more consistent predictor of their misperceptions than their ideology as measured by the *Economic Policy Index*.

Figure S21: *Financial Insecurity* results using economic policy index



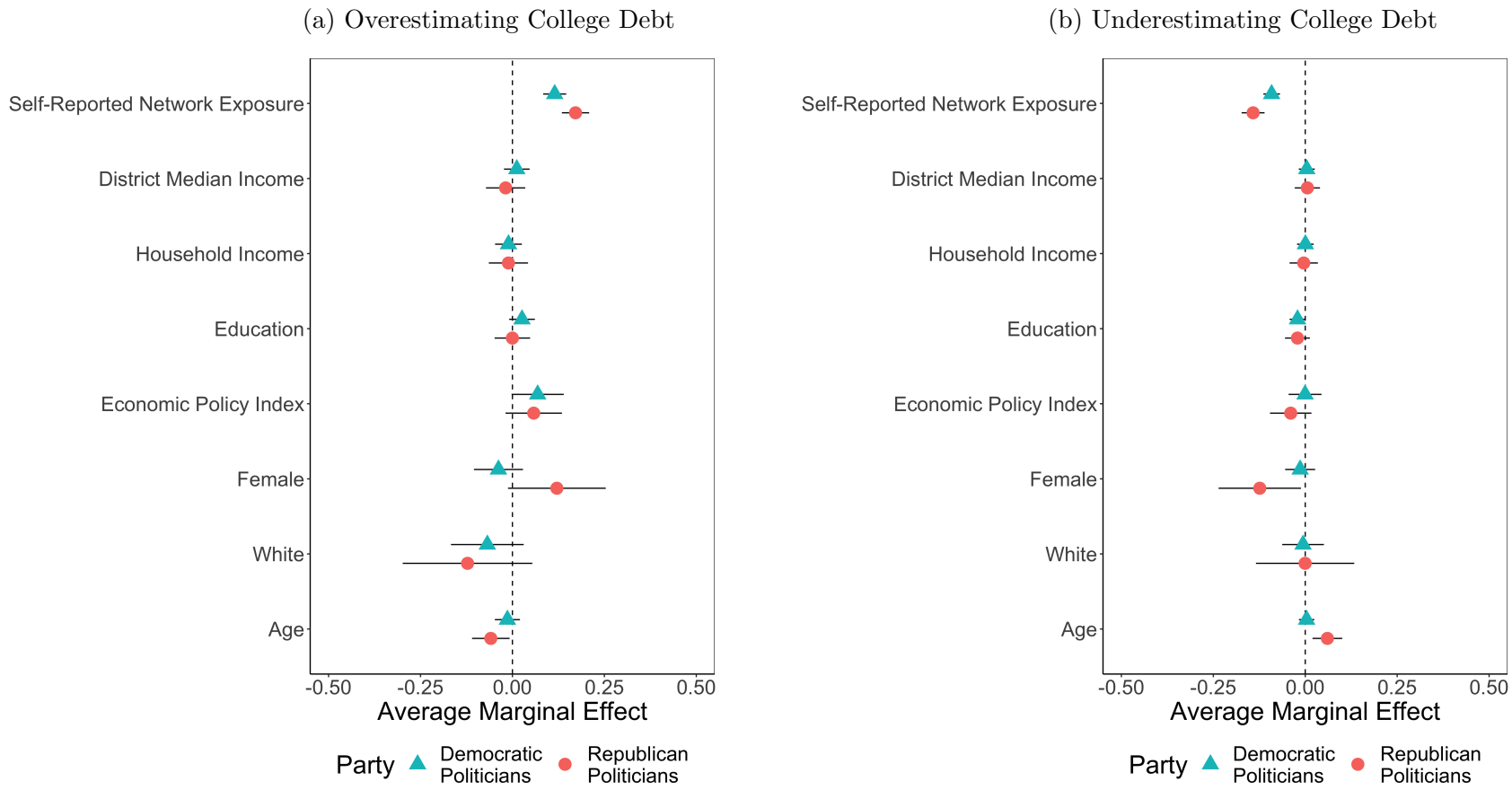
Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Financial Insecurity*.

Figure S22: *Unaffordable Healthcare* results using economic policy index



Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Unaffordable Healthcare* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *Unaffordable Healthcare*.

Figure S23: *College Debt* results using economic policy index

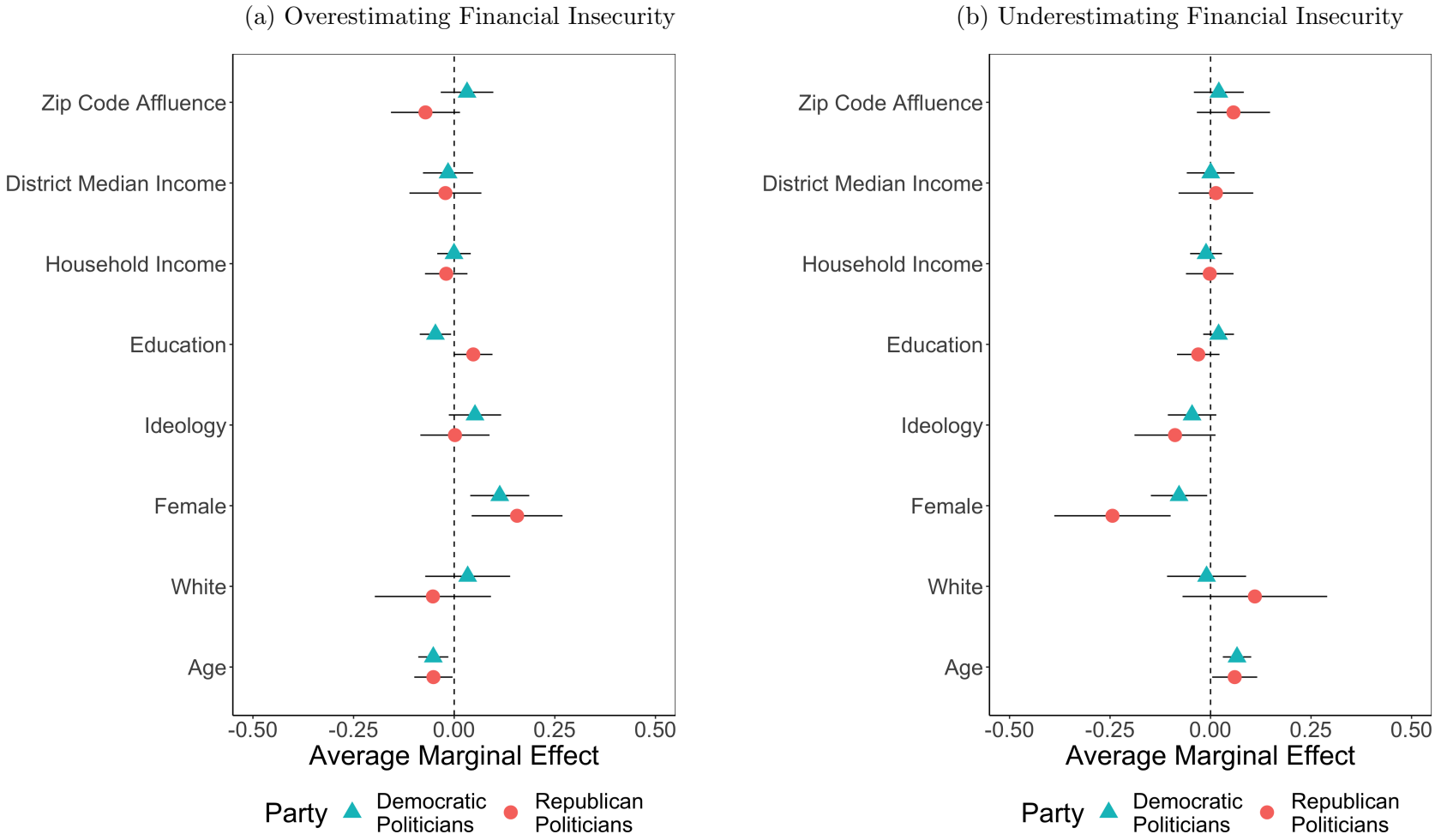


Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *College Debt* by more than 10 percentage points. *Self-Reported Network Exposure* measures self-reported exposure to *College Debt*.

15.6 Zip Code Affluence Robustness Check

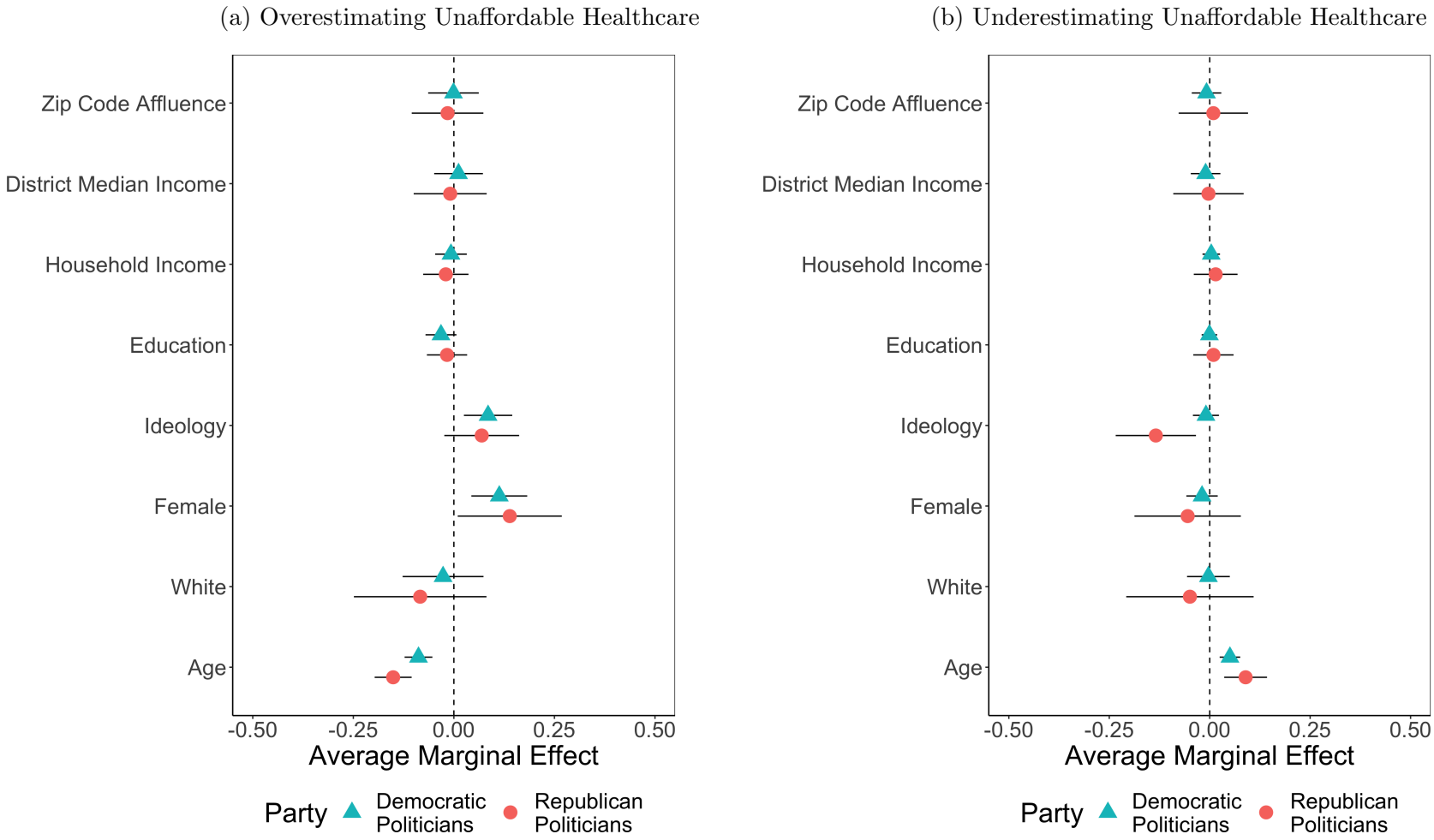
In this section I consider whether the actual level of affluence in politicians' zipcodes is related to their misperceptions. Figures S24, S25 and S26 rerun the analyses above replacing the measure of politicians' *Self-Reported Network Exposure* with a variable measuring the percentage of residents in a politician's zip code who have incomes of over $100,000 based on census data (*Zip Code Affluence*). This can provide a more objective indicator of what politicians are seeing around them as they go about their daily lives. In the results shown below I do not find evidence that this variable is consistently related to politicians' misperceptions. This casts some doubt on whether the composition of politicians' social networks can help explain their misperceptions. However, it is important to keep in mind that the conditions in politicians' zip codes are an imperfect proxy for what is happening in their social networks.

Figure S24: Zip code affluence robustness check: Overestimating and underestimating *Financial Insecurity*



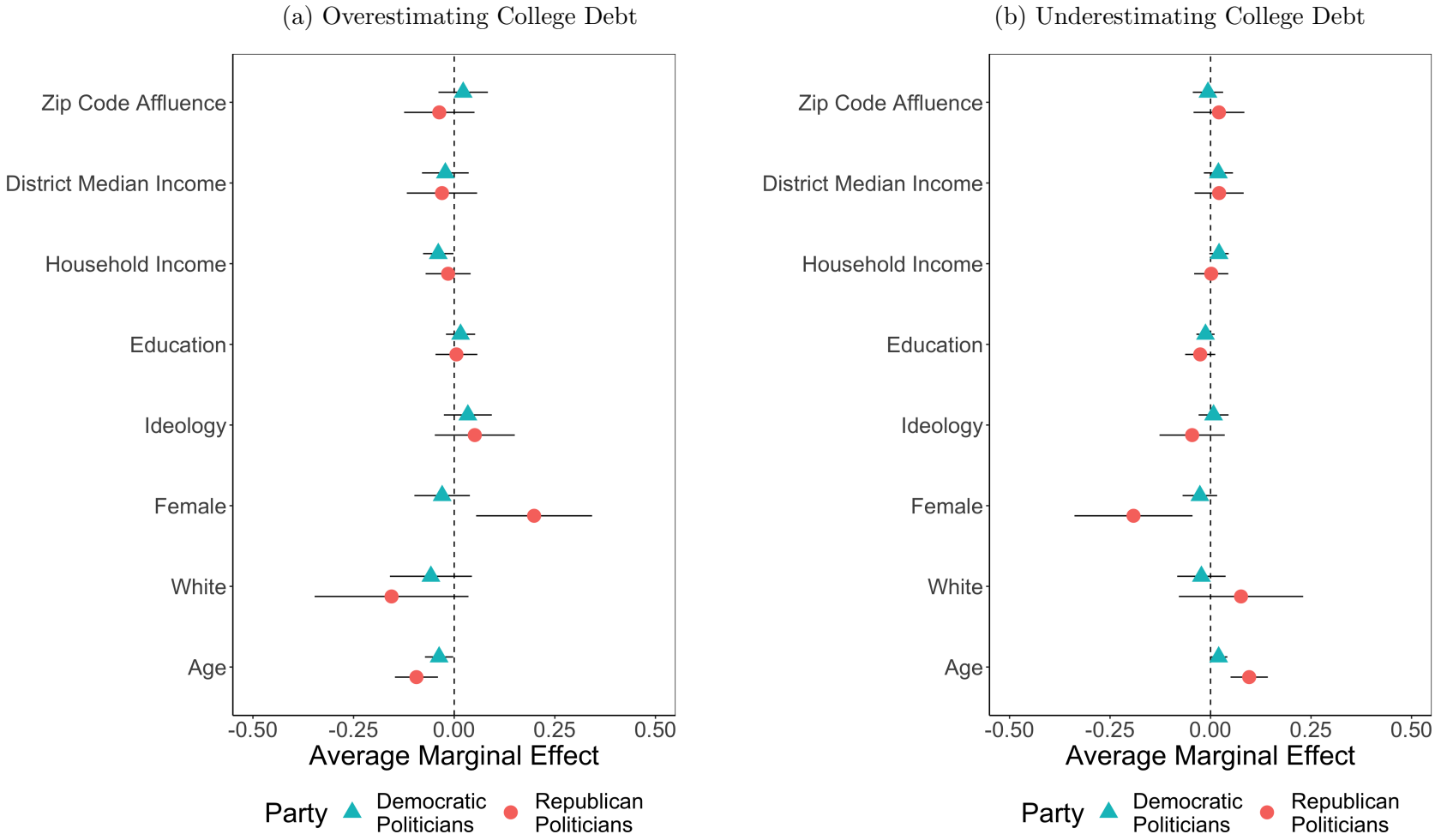
Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Financial Insecurity* by more than 10 percentage points.

Figure S25: Zip code affluence robustness check: Overestimating and underestimating *Unaffordable Healtcare*



Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *Unaffordable Healthcare* by more than 10 percentage points.

Figure S26: Zip code affluence robustness check: Overestimating and underestimating *College Debt*



Note: Average marginal effects from logit models predicting whether politicians overestimate (panel a) or underestimate (panel b) *College Debt* by more than 10 percentage points.

15.7 Descriptive Statistics on Politicians' Exposure to Financial Hardship

Table S26 below shows the average self-reported level of exposure to each form of financial hardship for Democratic and Republican politicians. For comparison, I also show how severe each issue is in politicians' states on average. Democratic politicians report higher levels of exposure to all three issues than Republican politicians. This could potentially help to explain why Democratic politicians also generally perceive all three issues to be more severe than Republican politicians (see Figure 1 in the main paper).

There are also some notable discrepancies between what politicians see in their social networks and the larger reality in their state. For example, the average Republican politician is running in a state where 43% of people actually experience *Financial Insecurity*. This is almost twice as high as the level of *Financial Insecurity* that Republican politicians report seeing in their social networks (22%). This could potentially help to explain Republican politicians' tendency to underestimate this issue.

Table S26: Politicians' self-reported exposure to financial hardship

Issues	Democratic Politicians		Republican Politicians	
	Actual Level in State	Perceived Level in Social Network	Actual Level in State	Perceived Level in Social Network
Financial Insecurity	43%	31%	43%	22%
Unaffordable Healthcare	30%	35%	30%	23%
College Debt	54%	68%	54%	58%

Notably, using more objective data on isolation yields a different conclusion about partisan differences. In this alternative analysis I use census data to measure the proportion of residents in politicians' zip codes with incomes of more than $100,000. When I run this analysis I find that both Democratic and Republican politicians inhabit zip codes that are more affluent than the average zip code in their state. The average Democratic politician inhabits a zip code where 27 percent of people are affluent, but is running for office in a state where 22 percent of people in the average zip code are affluent. The average Republican politician inhabits a zip code where 27 percent of people are affluent, but is running for office in a state where 21 percent of people in the average zip code are affluent. In both cases these differences are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

In contrast to the analysis of self-reported network isolation, this analysis finds that Democratic and Republican politicians are similarly isolated among the affluent. Notably, it may be the case that Republican politicians' social networks are more affluent even if Republican and Democratic politicians inhabit similarly affluent zip codes. At the same time, the discrepancy between these results suggests the need to be cautious in drawing inferences about partisan differences in economic segregation from self-reported perceptions.

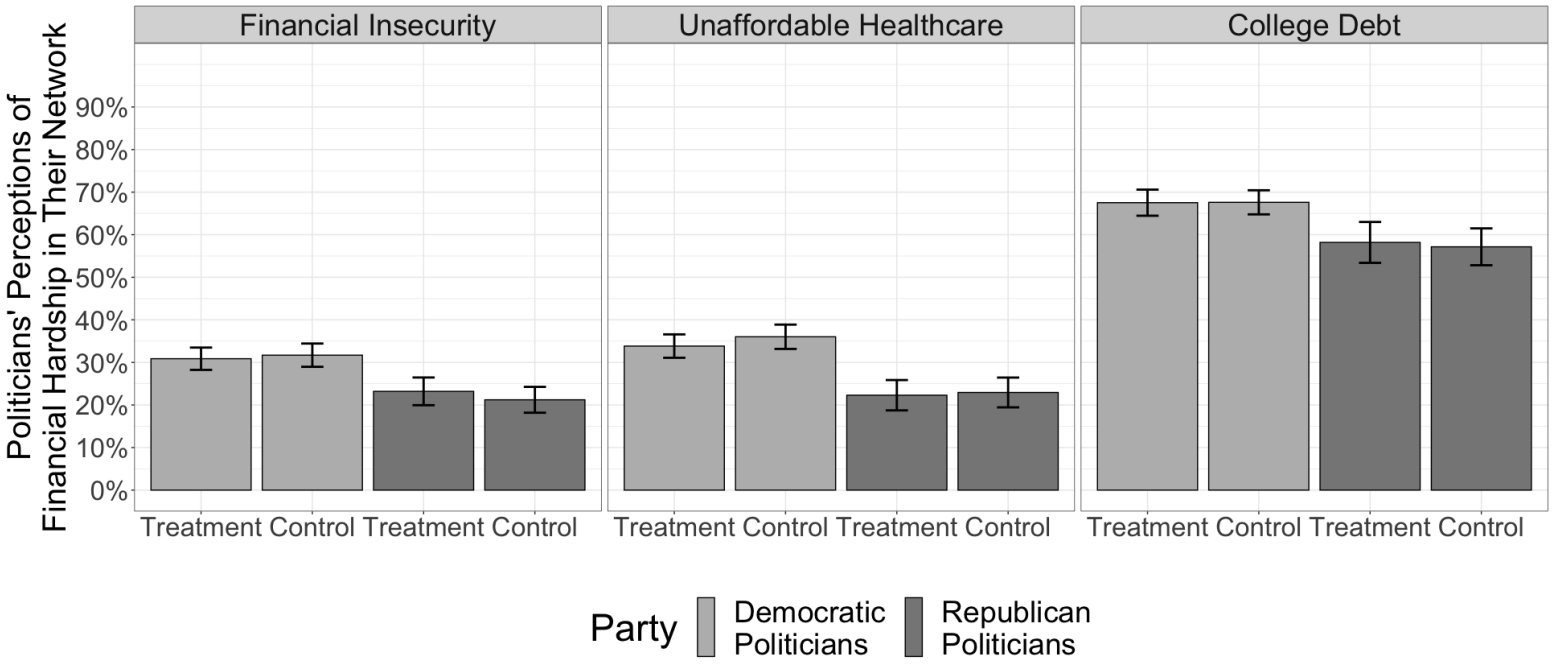
15.8 Network Experiment Placebo Test

In this section I consider some of the potential mechanisms driving the effects of the *Network Experiment*. One potential mechanism has to do with extrapolation. This perspective suggests that politicians in the treatment group are extrapolating from conditions in their social network to form perceptions of state-level conditions. For example, Republican politicians may extrapolate from the low level of *Financial Insecurity* they observe in their social networks and come to the conclusion that relatively few people in their state experience *Financial Insecurity*. However, an alternative mechanism has to do with anchoring, which occurs when individuals rely too heavily on an initial piece of information when making subsequent judgments. This perspective suggests that politicians in the treatment group are using what they observe in their networks to inform their state-level judgements simply because they were asked the network questions first.

As in most experiments, it is difficult to conclusively identify the mechanism at work. However, it is possible to test for the observable implications of these two possible mechanisms. I do so by asking whether the *Network Experiment* works in reverse, i.e. whether being randomly assigned to think of conditions in one's state influences subsequent judgements of conditions in one's social network. To the extent that the effects of the *Network Experiment* occur due to extrapolation, the experiment should not work in reverse as we would not expect individuals to extrapolate from conditions in their state to form perceptions of conditions in their network. By contrast, to the extent that the effects of the *Network Experiment* occur due to anchoring, the experiment should work in reverse we would expect whatever question is asked first to affect responses to whatever question is asked second.

Figure S27 shows the extent to which politicians' perceptions of the level of financial hardship in their network varies based on whether they are asked the state question first or second. Here we see that the experiment does not work in reverse. Answering the state question first has no statistically significant effects on politicians' perceptions of how many people in their network experience financial hardship. While this test is imperfect, it provides some evidence to suggest that the results of the *Network Experiment* are driven by extrapolation rather than anchoring.

Figure S27: Placebo test: The effects of the *Network Experiment* on politicians' perceptions of the level of financial hardship in their network



Note: Respondents in the treatment are shown the network questions before the state questions, while respondents in the control are shown the state questions before the network questions. The y-axis shows politicians' average perception of how many people in their network experience each form of financial hardship. Bars are 95% confidence intervals. Significant differences between the control and treatment are indicated as follows: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$.

16 Pre-Analysis Plan

[Below I present the pre-analysis plan and registry form for the information-provision experiment. I note that the decision to combine the findings from the information-provision experiment and the Network Experiment into the same paper was made after the pre-analysis plan was completed.]

This document describes a pre-analysis plan for a survey experimental test of how political elites' misperceptions of social problems affect their policy decisions. The study uses an information-provision experiment in the context of a survey of primary candidates in the 2018 midterm elections.

Overview

Most citizens – 79% according to a recent Gallup poll – feel that lawmakers are "out of touch with average Americans." This dissatisfaction is driven in part by the perception that legislators are unaware of how difficult life has become for many Americans in an era of stagnant wage growth, limited opportunity, and rising inequality. If political elites are indeed unaware of the economic hardships that Americans experience, than that may limit their willingness to support policies designed to reduce those hardships. Yet there is little research on whether or not this is actually occurring. To fill this gap, I am conducting a survey of primary candidates in the 2018 midterm elections. In the survey, I am measuring candidates' perceptions of the level of financial hardship experienced by Americans, and conducting an experiment in which I measure the effects of correcting their misperceptions.

Subjects

The subjects in the experiment are candidates for state legislative office during the 2018 midterm elections. Respondents are being recruited from all states in which there are primary elections for state legislative office in 2018. The data collection is being conducted in waves, with recruitment emails sent to candidates approximately four weeks before their primary date. The data collection began on May 8, 2018 and will conclude after the final primary is completed on September 6, 2018. The survey is a collaboration between myself and several other researchers at [Redacted]. We aim to survey as many candidates as possible.

Design

The study has two different components, the first of which is descriptive and the second of which is experimental. In the descriptive component, respondents are asked to gauge the severity of three social problems in the state in which they are running for office: financial insecurity, inability to access healthcare, and difficulty affording higher education (see state perception measures below). In the experimental component, which occurs after the descriptive component, respondents are randomly assigned to one of two conditions: a treatment condition in which I inform them about the actual prevalence of the three social problems in their state and a control condition in which they receive no additional information. Re-

spondents are assigned to the conditions with equal probability.[35] The text of the treatment is provided below. After receiving the correct information (in the treatment condition) or no information (in the control condition) respondents proceed to answer a number of policy questions related to the social problem. The text of these policy questions is provided below, along with hypotheses about the effects the treatment will have on how respondents answer these policy questions.

Measures and Manipulations

Perceptions

1. To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of [STATE NAME] residents would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense?

2. To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of [STATE NAME] residents have skipped necessary medical care because they were unable to afford it?

3. To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of students needs to take out student loans in order to graduate from [NAME OF STATE FLAGSHIP PUBLIC UNIVERSITY]?

Manipulations and Outcomes

Financial Security

4. **Respondents randomly assigned to treatment only:** You answered that [ANSWER TO QUESTION #1]% of [STATE NAME] residents would need to borrow money or sell something they own in order to pay for a $400 emergency expense. Based on the best available data, the actual answer is [CORRECT ANSWER TO QUESTION #1]%.

5. Would you like to see [STATE NAME] increase or decrease the amount spent on providing cash assistance to low-income families? [Increase a lot; Increase a little; Neither increase nor decrease; Decrease a little; Decrease a lot. Prediction: More support for spending]

6. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is the responsibility of the [STATE NAME] government to make sure that all [STATE NAME] residents are financially secure? [Agree strongly; Agree somewhat; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree somewhat; Disagree strongly. Prediction: More agreement]

[35] Data for measuring the actual prevalence of financial security and the inaccessibility of healthcare come from the Federal Reserve's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking. Data for measuring the actual prevalence of difficulty financing college is provided by the *Princeton Review*, a private firm that collects and publicizes data from colleges and universities.

7. If elected, would you favor or oppose a proposal to raise the minimum wage in [STATE]? [Strongly favor; Somewhat favor; Neither favor nor oppose; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose. Prediction: More in favor]

8. Welfare recipients in [STATE NAME] must have less than [STATE WELFARE ASSET LIMIT] in assets. While this limit is intended to make sure that public resources do not go to asset-rich individuals, it may also discourage welfare recipients from saving money. Do you think the current limit is too high, too low, or about right? [Too high; About right; Too low. Prediction: More likely to view as too low]

9. If elected, would you favor or oppose a proposal to eliminate the asset limit for welfare recipients in [STATE]? [Strongly favor; Somewhat favor; Neither favor nor oppose; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose. Prediction: More in favor]

Healthcare

10. **Respondents randomly assigned to treatment only:** You answered that [ANSWER TO QUESTION #2]% of [STATE NAME] residents have skipped necessary medical care because they were unable to afford it. Based on the best available data, the actual answer is [CORRECT ANSWER TO QUESTION #2]%.

11. Would you like to see [STATE NAME] increase or decrease the amount spent on Medicaid? [Increase a lot; Increase a little; Neither increase nor decrease; Decrease a little; Decrease a lot. Prediction: More support for spending]

12. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is the responsibility of the [STATE NAME] government to make sure that all [STATE NAME] residents have access to affordable healthcare? [Agree strongly; Agree somewhat; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree somewhat; Disagree strongly. Prediction: More agreement]

13. If elected, would you favor or oppose a proposal to limit how much hospitals in [STATE] can charge low-income patients for necessary medical care? [Strongly favor; Somewhat favor; Neither favor nor oppose; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose. Prediction: More in favor]

14. If elected, would you favor or oppose a proposal to require hospitals in [STATE] to provide reasonable payment plans for patients who are unable to immediately pay for necessary medical care? [Strongly favor; Somewhat favor; Neither favor nor oppose; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose. Prediction: More in favor]

15. In [STATE NAME] a typical healthcare plan available through the Affordable Care Act has a monthly premium of [MONTHLY PREMIUM IN STATE]. Do you think the current premium is too high, too low, or about right? [Too high; About right; Too low. Prediction: More likely to view as too high]

Higher Education

16. **Respondents randomly assigned to treatment only:** You answered that [ANSWER TO QUESTION #3]% of students have to take out student loans in order to graduate from [NAME OF STATE FLAGSHIP PUBLIC UNIVERSITY]. Based on the best available data, the actual answer is [CORRECT ANSWER TO QUESTION #3]%.

17. Would you like to see [STATE NAME] increase or decrease the amount spent on providing financial aid for low-income students from [STATE NAME] to attend college? [Increase a lot; Increase a little; Neither increase nor decrease; Decrease a little; Decrease a lot. Prediction: More support for spending]

18. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is the responsibility of the [STATE NAME] government to make sure that a college degree is affordable for all young people in [STATE]? [Agree strongly; Agree somewhat; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree somewhat; Disagree strongly. Prediction: More agreement]

19. State governments sometimes cut funding to public universities in order to decrease government spending. When their funding is cut, state universities often have to raise tuition for in-state students. If elected, would you favor or oppose a proposal to decrease the amount of state funding that goes to public universities in [STATE NAME]? [Strongly favor; Somewhat favor; Neither favor nor oppose; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose. Prediction: More opposed]

20. If elected, would you favor or oppose a proposal to limit tuition increases in [STATE]? [Strongly favor; Somewhat favor; Neither favor nor oppose; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose. Prediction: More in favor]

21. The current yearly in-state tuition at [NAME OF STATE FLAGSHIP PUBLIC UNIVERSITY] is [TUITION AT STATE FLAGSHIP PUBLIC UNIVERSITY]. Do you think the current tuition is too high, too low, or about right? [Too high; About right; Too low. Prediction: More likely to view as too high]

Moderating Variables

Partisanship: I will examine how the treatment effects vary by partisanship. I expect Republican political elites to be more likely than Democratic political elites to underestimate the severity of social problems. If this is the case, than Republican political elites may show larger treatment effects than Democratic political elites.

Analysis

The descriptive component of the analysis will provide descriptive statistics for elites' perceptions of the three social problems, and gauge how far they are from reality. I will provide these descriptive statistics in a number of ways, modeled off of Nair's (2018) research on Americans' perceptions of global inequality. These methods will include analyses that

treat elites' perceptions of social problems as a continuous variable and look at their mean and median, as well as analyses that treat elites' perceptions of social problems as a categorical variable. Following Nair (2018), the categorical approach will break elites' perceptions into three categories: "overestimators" who overestimate the severity of the social problem by more than 10 percentage points, "accurate" estimators who estimate the severity of the social problem within 10 percentage points of the actual level, and "underestimators" who underestimate the severity of the social problem by more than 10 percentage points. All of these analysis will be conducted on the sample as a whole, as well as on subsets of Democratic and Republican elites to make comparisons across partisan lines.

The experimental component of the analysis will measure the effects of the information treatment on the policy outcomes. I will do so by comparing differences in means across the treatment and control conditions, as well as with OLS regression.[36] The moderating effect of partisanship will be tested by analyzing Democrats and Republicans separately, as well as by interacting an indicator for being in the treatment condition with an indicator for being a Republican in an OLS regression. Regression analyses will be conducted with and without adjustment for standard demographic and political covariates.

Exploratory Analysis

I will likely engage in further exploratory analyses of the data in addition to the pre-registered analyses specified above. This will entail analyses for which I do not have strong a priori expectations on the basis of either theory or prior observational evidence. In writing up the results I will clearly specify if a particular analysis was exploratory in nature and not included in the pre-registered set of analyses specified above.

[36] Other standard approaches, such as randomization inference, may also be implemented.

[Redcacted] Registry Form Schema

B1 Title of Study – *short text*

Are Political Elites Out-of-Touch? Experimental Evidence From the 2018 Midterm Elections

B2 Authors – *if you haven't registered a study with [Redacted] before, please provide name, title, institution, and email address for each author*

[Redacted]

B3 Acknowledgements – *short text*

B4 Is one of the study authors a university faculty member? – *multiple choice*

N/A
Yes
No
Other (if selected, short text field appears)

B5 Is this Registration Prospective or Retrospective? – *multiple choice*

N/A
Registration prior to any research activities
Registration prior to assignment of treatment
Registration prior to realization of outcomes
Registration prior to researcher access to outcome data
Registration prior to researcher analysis of outcome data
Registration after researcher analysis of outcome data
Other (if selected, short text field appears)

This registration is prior to the completion of data collection, which will not occur until September 2018. However, I note that I have had access to the data collected thus far, and have performed preliminary analysis to ensure that the survey is functioning properly.

B6 Is this an experimental study? – *multiple choice*

N/A
No
Yes

B7 Date of start of study – *date (MM/DD/YYYY format)*

05/08/2018

B8 Gate date – *date (MM/DD/YYYY format), ideally limited to no more than 18 months in the future*

05/08/2019

B9 Was this design presented at an [Redcated] meeting? – *multiple choice*

N/A
No
Yes

B10 Is there a pre-analysis plan associated with this registration? – *multiple choice*

N/A
No
Yes

C1 Background and explanation of rationale – *long answer*

The purpose of this study is to establish: (1) Whether political elites have accurate perceptions of social conditions in the United States and (2) Whether political elites' misperceptions of social conditions cause them to oppose redistributive social policies.

C2 What are the hypotheses to be tested/quantities of interest to be estimated? – *long answer*

The primary hypothesis is that correcting elites' misperceptions of social conditions will lead them to become more supportive of redistributive social policies.

C3 How will these hypotheses be tested? – *long answer*

This hypothesis will be tested with a survey experiment conducted on candidates in the 2018 primary elections. Respondents randomly assigned to a treatment condition will be provided with accurate information about social problem, while respondents randomly assigned to a control condition will receive no such information. Afterword, the two groups' views on relevant social policies will be compared. I will make these comparisons both for the respondents as a group, and for Democratic and Republic respondents' separately.

C4 Country – *short answer*

United States

C5 Sample Size (# of Units) – *short answer*

The survey aims to recruit as many candidates in the 2018 midterm elections as possible. Based on current response rates, the final response rate will likely be larger than N = 1,000.

C6 Was a power analysis conducted prior to data collection? – *multiple choice*

- Yes
- No
- N/A
- Other (fill in the blank)

C7 Has this research received Insitutional Review Board (IRB) or ethics committee approval? – *multiple choice*

- Yes
- No
- N/A
- Other (fill in the blank)

C8 IRB Number – *short answer*

[Redcated]

C9 Date of IRB Approval – *short answer*

April 16, 2018

C10 Will the intervention be implemented by the researcher or a third party? If a third party, please provide the name. – *multiple choice*

- Researchers
- Other (fill in the blank)

C11 Did any of the research team receive remuneration from the implementing agency for taking part in this research? – *multiple choice*

- Yes
- No

N/A
Other (fill in the blank)

C12 If relevant, is there an advance agreement with the implementation group that all results can be published? – *multiple choice*

Yes
No
N/A
Other (fill in the blank)

C13 JEL classification(s) – *short answer; please provide alphanumeric code(s)*

Methodology – *select all that apply*

Experimental Design
Field Experiments
Lab Experiments
Mixed Method
Statistics
Survey Methodology

Policy – *select all that apply*

Conflict and Violence
Corruption
Development
Elections
Ethnic Politics
Gender
Governance

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