Searching for politically relevant information

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Introduction

A substantial amount of research explores the ways in which people evaluate candidates for political office and the information they use to make voting decisions[1]. However, existing research remains limited to explaining these processes as they relate to information that is explicitly political and doesn't address the role of party cues. **This study investigated how voters prioritize different political and nonpolitical categories of information and how their information-search strategies change in response to party cues.**

[1]Lau, R. R., & Redlawsk, D. P. (2006). *How voters decide: Information processing in election campaigns*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Methods

A timed information board task was used to test these differences across two hypothetical elections (illustrated below). Participants were presented with, and instructed to choose from, these various categories of political and nonpolitical information for two minutes before selecting which candidate they would vote for.

Condition A – No party ID			
Candidate 1		Candidate 2	
Appearance	Demographics	Appearance	Demographics
Economic Issues	Experience	Economic Issues	Experience
Personality	Religion	Personality	Religion
Scandal	Social Issues	Scandal	Social Issues
Viability		Viability	

Condition B – Party Known			
Candidate 3 - Republican		Candidate 4 - Democrat	
Appearance	Demographics	Appearance	Demographics
Economic Issues	Experience	Economic Issues	Experience
Personality	Religion	Personality	Religion
Scandal	Social Issues	Scandal	Social Issues
Viability		Viability	

Results

In the absence of party cues, participants did not prioritize categories of information from which candidates' political party affiliations could be inferred. Instead, they differentially prioritized four categories of information: demographics, personality, experience and religion.
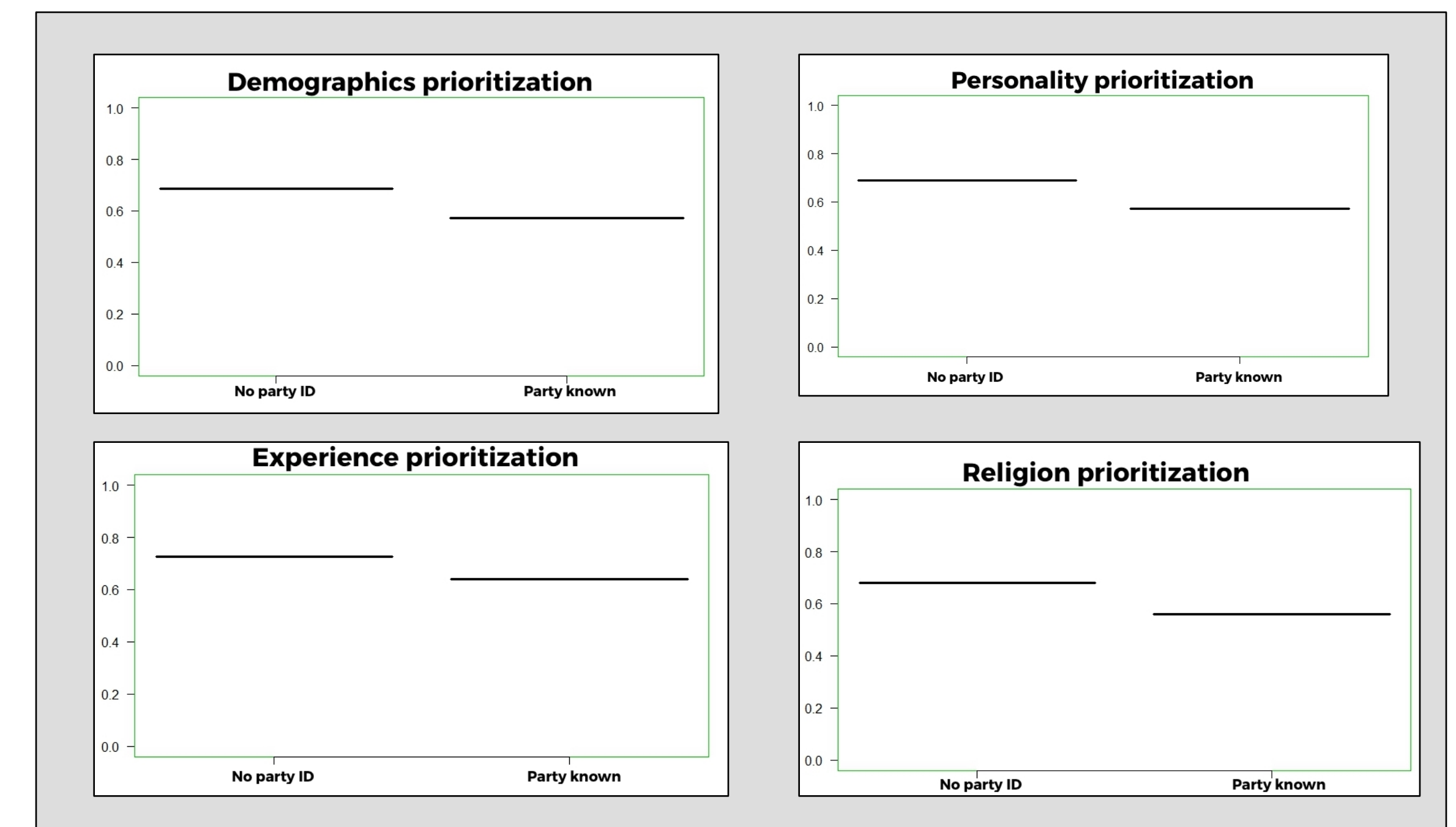
Conclusion

When candidates' political party affiliation was unknown, participants did not differentially prioritize politically relevant information categories. Instead, they more highly prioritized the nonpolitical categories of information, suggesting that party cues may not be conveying politically relevant information to voters.