

How Do Information and Cues Affect Citizens' Election Forecasts?

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Do these factors affect other outcomes of interest to political behavior researchers?

■ Background

■ Empirics

■ Study 1

■ Study 2

■ Conclusion

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Election Forecasts

- Election forecasts are a hobby for many political scientists, journalists, and others
- They matter for a variety of reasons:
 - Can shape campaigning strategies
 - Influence journalistic narratives about elections
 - Shape individual attitudes, behavior, and social interactions

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 - Polling firms sample individuals from the population
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 - Polling firms sample individuals from the population
 - Respondents report their vote intention
 - Those data are aggregated and modelled to generate a forecast
- Yet such efforts do not necessarily capture all information that citizens might have about an election

Election Forecasts

- What might citizen know?
 - Information about *other citizens'* views
 - How certain or uncertain their own views are
 - Expectations about forthcoming events in a campaign
 - Their or others' turnout propensities

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- Traditional forecasts thus miss some information, therefore:
 - Betting markets
 - Citizen forecasting

Citizen Forecasts I

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 - Ask citizens what they expect others to do
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 - What percentage of citizens will vote for Britain to Leave the EU?
 - Do you expect Britain will vote to leave the EU or vote to remain in the EU?

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 - What percentage of citizens will vote for Britain to Leave the EU?
 - Do you expect Britain will vote to leave the EU or vote to remain in the EU?
- These expectations are aggregated to produce a forecast

Beyond “Atomic” Models

- Most research assumes “atomic” citizens
- Exceptions to this:
 - Network studies (Huckfeldt and Sprague; Mutz)
 - Deliberation experiments (Karpowitz and Mendelberg)
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- But citizens are necessarily embedded in a social context that seems likely to shape their beliefs
- We are interested in how citizens understand those social contexts

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- Focus on citizen forecasts as an outcome
- Attempt to understand how information and cues affect those forecasts
 - *Information*: a message or argument received by a citizen
 - *Cues*: information about position-taking by elites or others
- Provide a descriptive analysis of the factors related to these forecasts and the *accuracy* thereof

Aside: Social cues as “attitudinal norms”

- *Attitudinal norms*
 - “widespread viewpoints held by members of a social group”
 - A form of “impersonal influence”
 - Cues about group rather than elite attitudes
- Driven by inherent needs for belongingness (Baumeister and Leary 1995)

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 - A form of “impersonal influence”
 - Cues about group rather than elite attitudes
- Driven by inherent needs for belongingness (Baumeister and Leary 1995)
- Very little research on downstream consequences of this form of impersonal influence (until Sara and I started working on it)

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 Study 1

 Study 2

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This Project

- Case study: 2016 referendum on Britain's membership of the EU
- Panel survey (BES)
 - Assess the accuracy (prediction error) of citizen forecasts
 - Descriptively characterize the factors that shape forecasts and the accuracy thereof
- Experiment
 - Attempt to measure the size of effects of information and cues

Outcome Measures I

- Overall forecast for election outcome
 - Rescaled 0 to 1
 - Higher values = Remain
- Error in that forecast:

$$Error_i = (Forecast_i - 0.48)^2$$

- In-party forecast (how your party will vote)
- In-party forecast error

Outcome Measures II

- We know overall results from official election records
- Party-specific results have to be estimated from data

Party	BES (w)	BES (uw)	YouGov
Conservative	0.36	0.34	0.29
Labour	0.63	0.66	0.65
LibDem	0.73	0.75	0.68
SNP	0.59	0.65	n/a

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Study 2

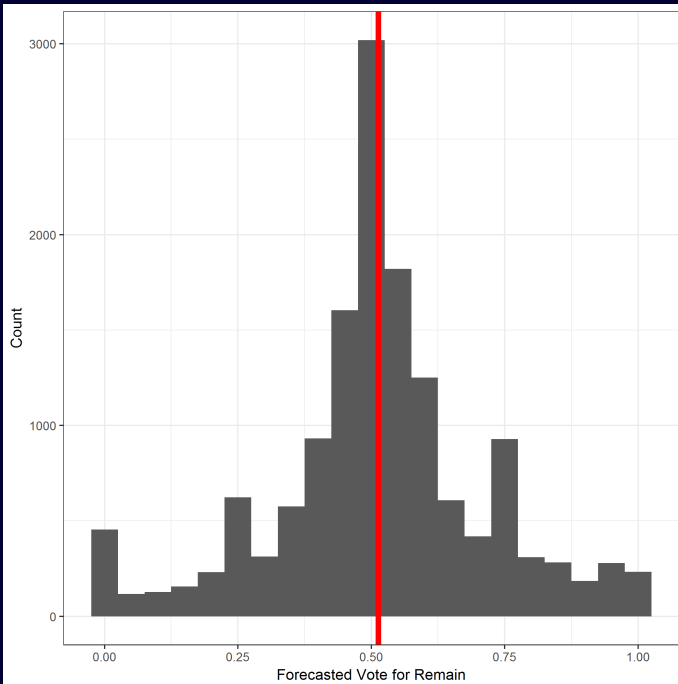
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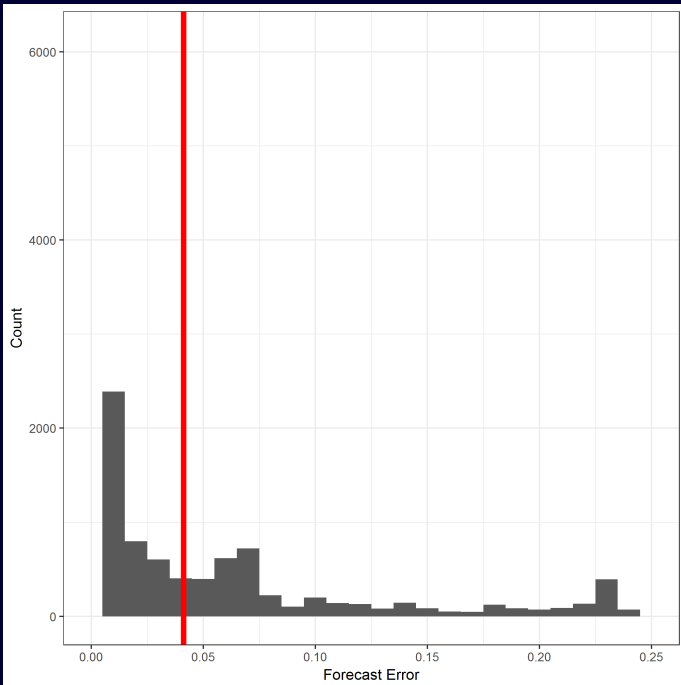
Study 1: BES Analysis

- Goal is to understand the factors that influence citizen forecasts
- Data from BES
 - Wave 7 (pre-referendum) and Wave 8 (rolling cross section)
 - Fielded by YouGov, weighted to be nationally representative
 - $n = 16,503$

Outcome Measures

- How likely do you think it is that the UK will vote to leave the EU?
 - Continuous measure 0 – 100
 - 0: UK will definitely vote to remain in the EU
 - 100: UK will definitely vote to leave the EU
 - Rescaled 0–1 (higher = Remain)



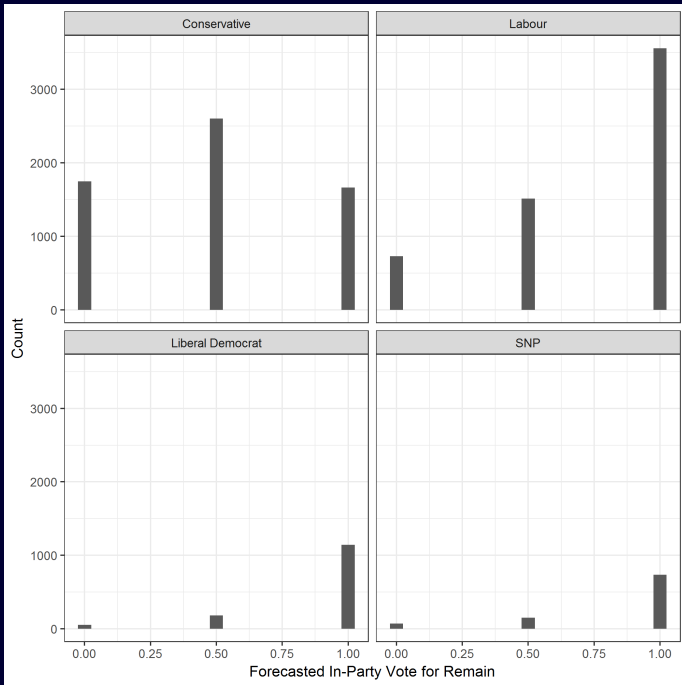


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- Do you think that other people who are close to <PARTY> mainly want to remain in the EU or leave the EU?
 - Mainly leave
 - Mainly remain
 - Fairly evenly split



Results: Explaining forecasts

- Forecasts cluster around true result, slight pro-Remain bias
 - Wisdom of crowds?
 - 50/50 guessing?
- Largest effects:
 - Left-wing more likely to forecast Remain
 - Educated more likely to forecast Remain
 - Conservatives more likely to forecast Remain
- False consensus dynamic!

Results: Explaining Accuracy

- Citizens are on average quite accurate
- Smaller errors for:
 - Leave voters
 - Political right-wing
 - Conservatives and LibDems
 - Older people
 - Higher education
 - Other than White English

Results: Explaining In-Party Forecast

- The descriptive results suggest citizens get the gist of where their co-partisans stand
- Unfortunately BES question is kind of crap
 - Three-category discrete measure (leave/remain/split)
- Trying to decide how to analyze this

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- Various demographic factors explain forecasts and accuracy thereof
 - Also a “false consensus effect”
- Next step: Leverage the panel design to try to pick up causal effects
 - Exposure to government leaflet
 - Exposure to interpersonal discussion
 - Exposure to Leave and Remain campaigns
 - Awareness of in-party MPs positions

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Study 2

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Study 2: Survey Experiment

- Goal is to assess the degree to which information and cues affect forecasts and forecast error
- Basic design:
 - Supply a mass cue or elite cue
 - Supply pro-leave or pro-remain arguments
 - Measure overall forecast and in-party forecast
- Fielded w/ YouGov Omnibus
05/30 – 02/06/2016

Experimental Design

	Elite Cue	Mass Cue
None	n=299	320
Remain Argument	321	352
Leave Argument	288	320

- Also “pure” control group (n=151)
- Also cue ambiguity factor (ignored here)
- Arguments pilot tested through Prolific

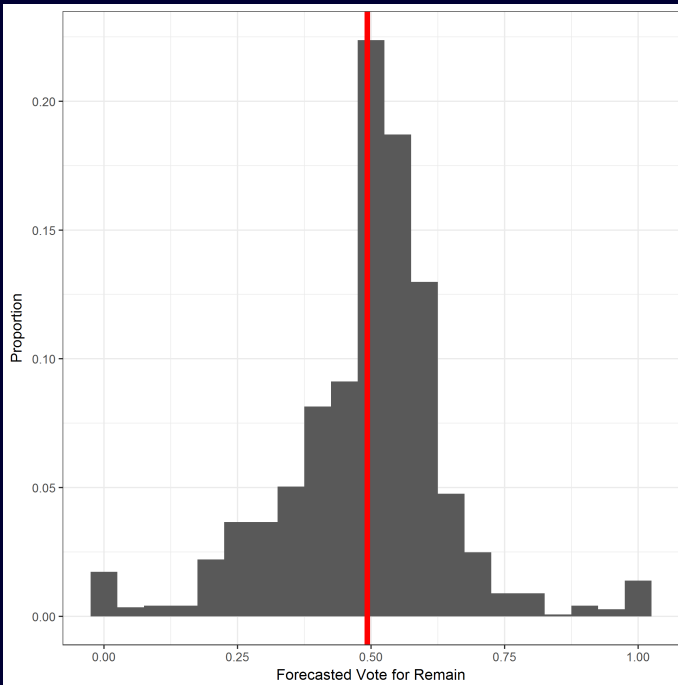
Partisan Composition of Sample

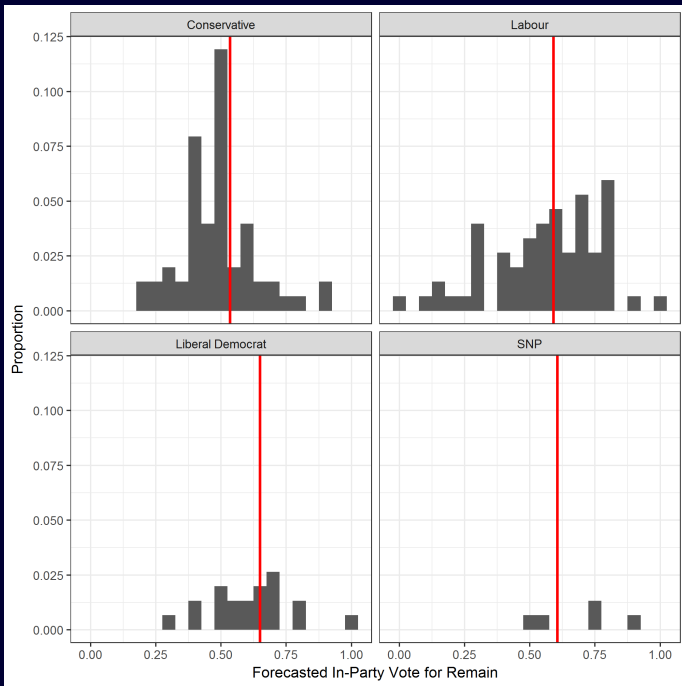
- Experimental data only for supporters of pro-Remain parties
- Party identification drawn from YouGov profile data

Conservative	901 (43.2%)
Labour	856 (41.0%)
LibDem	249 (11.9%)
SNP	82 (3.9%)

We would now like to know what you expect the results of the referendum will be, expressed as a percent. A percent can be thought of as the number of votes out of 100. For example, a number like 5 percent means 5 out of every 100 votes will be for "leave", 50 percent means 50 out of every 100 votes will be for "leave," and 95 percent means 95 out of everyone 100 votes will be for "leave."

- Regardless of how you yourself intend to vote, what percent of voters do you anticipate will vote for Britain to leave the European Union? (Please enter a number between 0 and 100.)
- What about <PARTY> voters? What percent of <PARTY> voters do you anticipate will vote for Britain to leave the European Union? (Please enter a number between 0 and 100.)





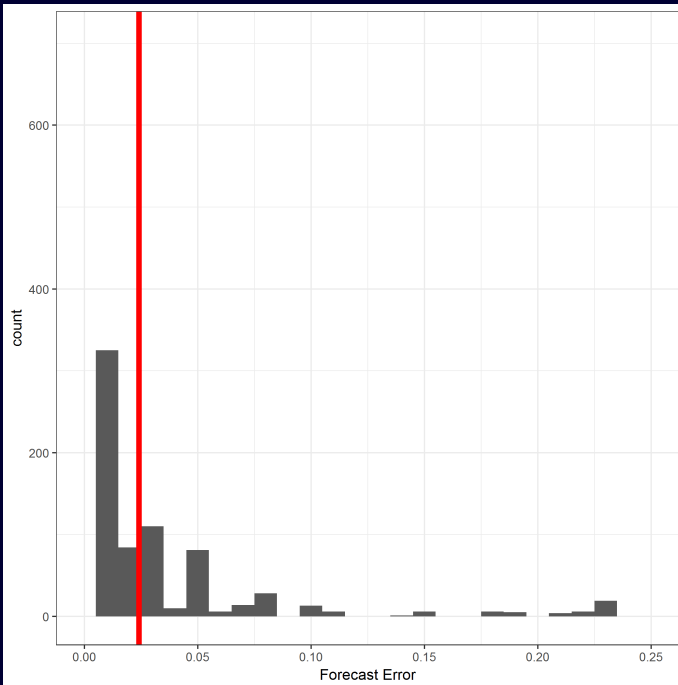
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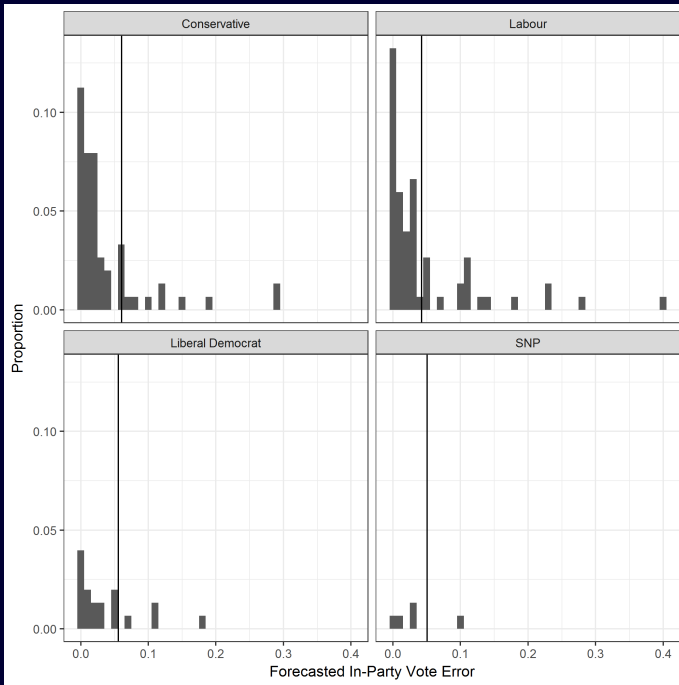
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Study 2

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Treatment: Elite Cue Only

When deciding how to vote in the upcoming referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, many voters want to know where their preferred party stands. A clear majority of < PARTY > politicians favour Britain remaining in the EU.

Treatment: Mass Cue Only

When deciding how to vote in the upcoming referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, many voters want to know where their fellow citizens stand. Polls show a clear majority of < PARTY > voters favour Britain remaining in the EU.

Treatment: Cue + Remain Argument

One argument being made in the debate is that the EU safeguards British jobs because it provides access to a market of 500 million consumers and because EU membership attracts foreign firms keen to be part of that market. The attractiveness of Britain as a place to invest is clearly underpinned by its membership of the EU. It is estimated that over three million jobs in Britain are linked, directly or indirectly, to its exports to the European Union. Walking away from Europe's single market would be catastrophic for people's jobs, and would leave households £4,300 worse off, according to estimates. A vote to Remain would safeguard the economic benefits of the EU single market.

Treatment: Cue + Remain Argument

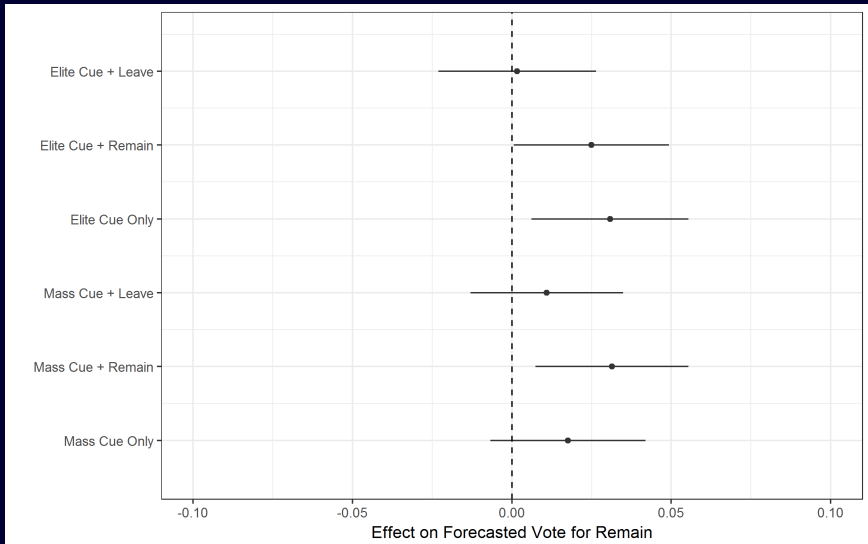
One argument being made in the debate is that in the EU, Britain's borders lay open to criminals and terrorists trying to enter the UK from the continent. This makes the whole of the UK vulnerable to terrorist attacks and crimes committed by those from abroad. At present, more than 100 EU migrants per day are convicted of crimes ranging from theft to rape and murder. These rates have risen as the EU has expanded further into Eastern Europe. Outside the EU, the Westminster parliament will regain its sovereignty and the ability to secure the country's borders and towns. Failure to leave now significantly decreases public safety and endangers the British people.

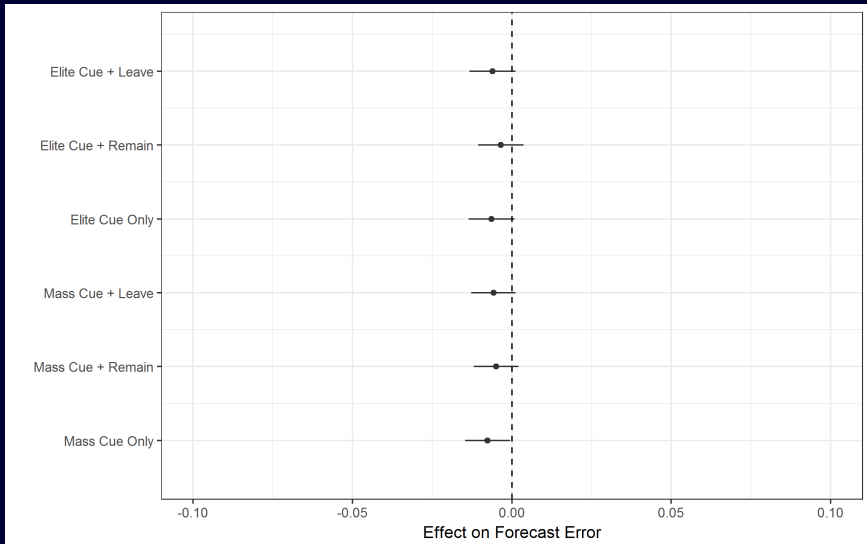
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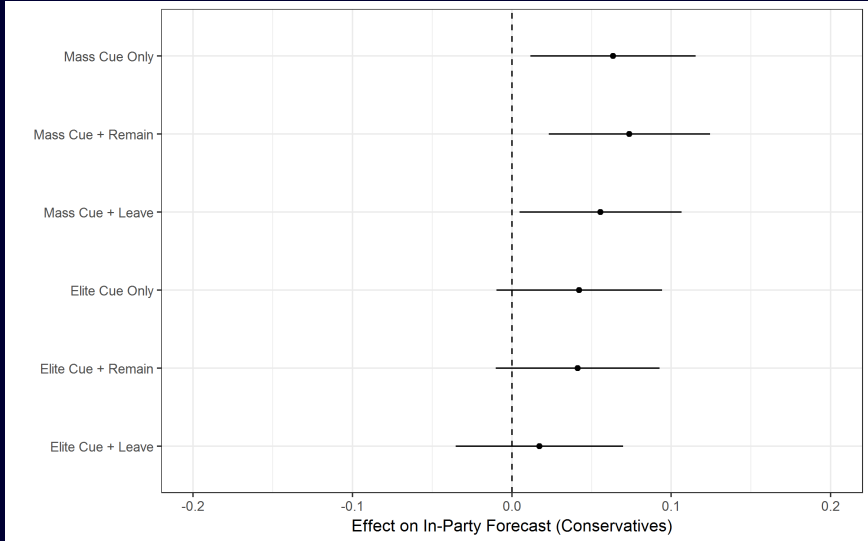


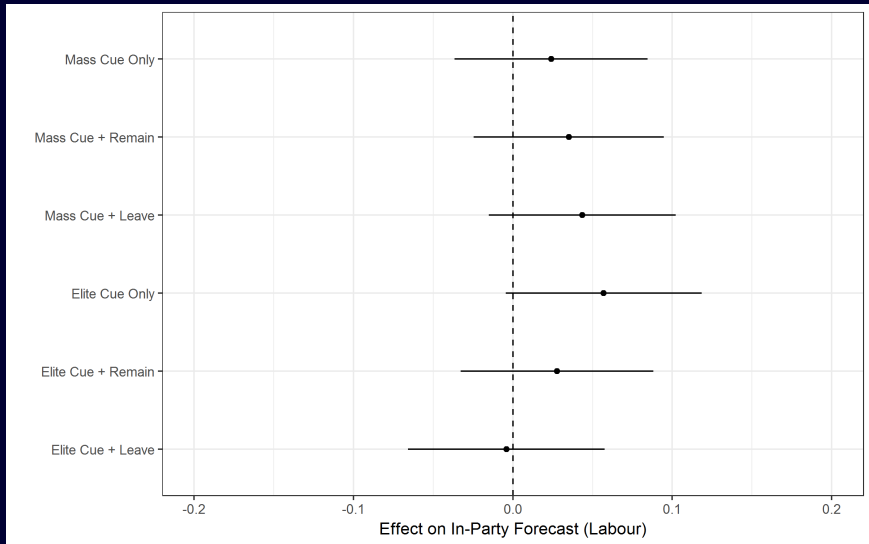
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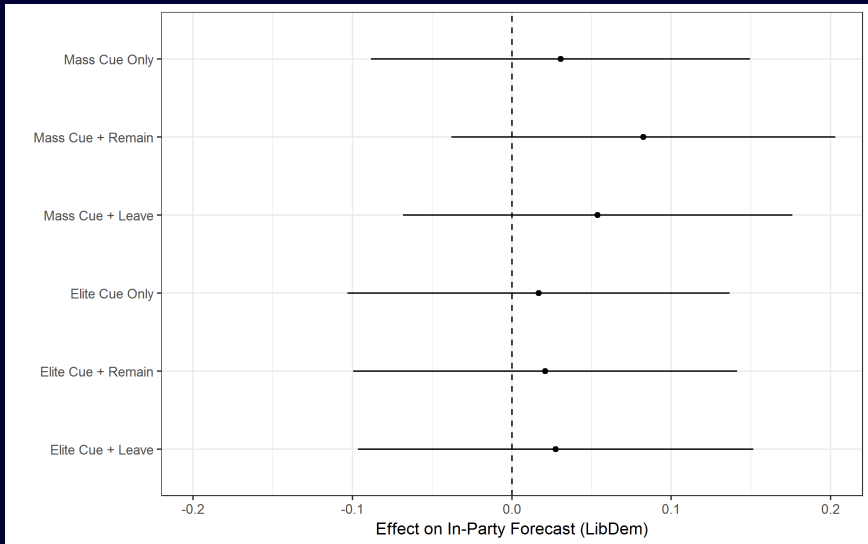
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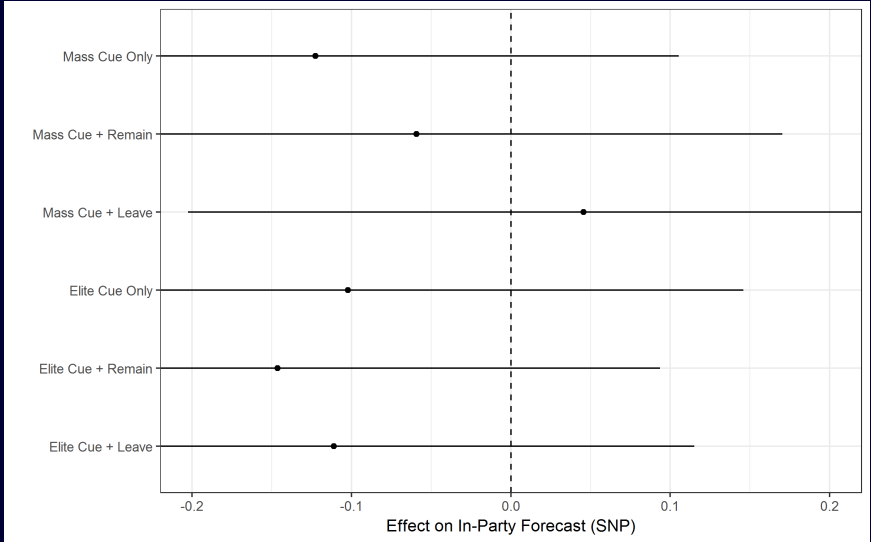
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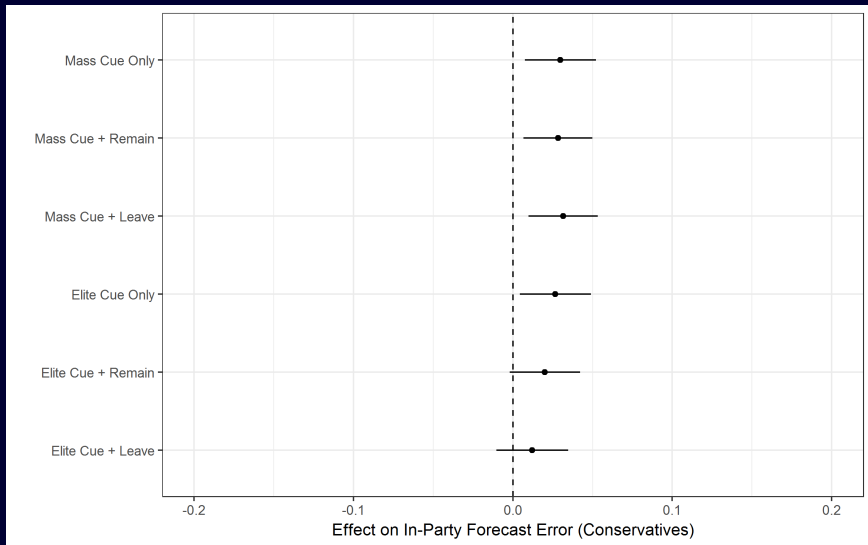


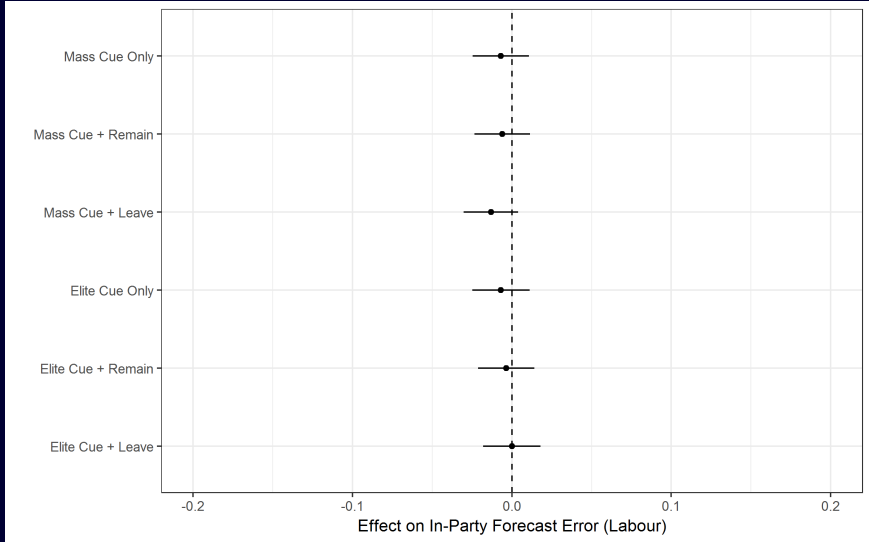
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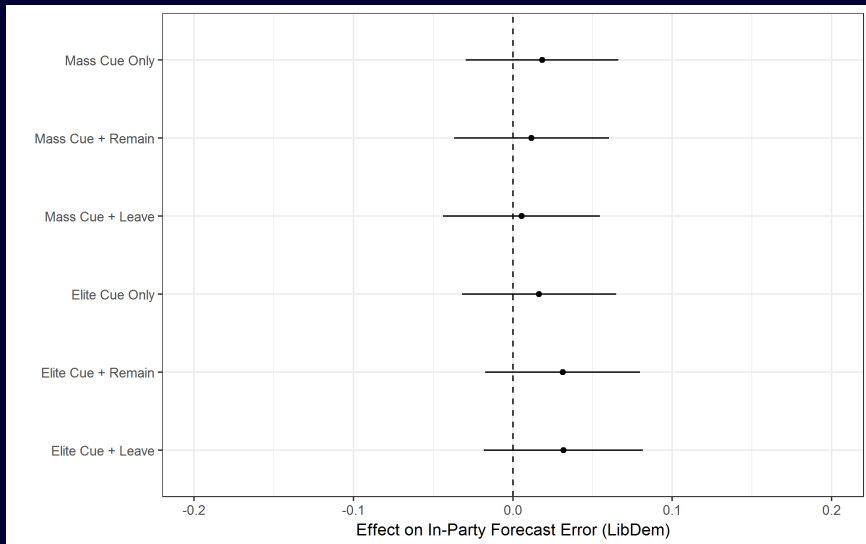
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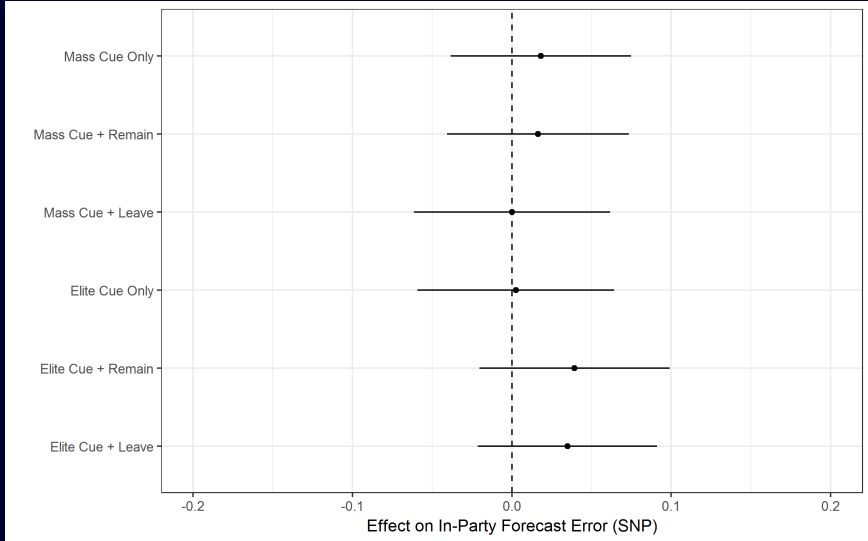
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- Cues and pro-Remain information increases expected Remain vote share
- All treatments seem to reduce forecast error
- Party-specific results are noisy (obviously)
 - Effects on forecast error mirror these









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- This isn't necessarily a good thing because that movement doesn't necessarily improve the accuracy of these forecasts
- Any wisdom in crowds?
 - Size of one-off impersonal influence is small
 - Citizen forecasts don't seem to just parrot elite communications

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Conclusion

- Citizen forecasts are reflect a false consensus dynamic
- Citizen forecasts are somewhat sensitive to elite cues and information but the effects are small
- Some citizens have social information about their groups and society as a whole
- Limitations to an atomic model in political behavior research

