Age and Partisan Stability: how much of the association is explained by continuity in social and personal life?

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Abstract

Stable partisanship in the United States is often attributed to attachments to political parties that become slowly and incrementally stronger with age. Here, I show that switches in partisan identification tend to happen quickly after major life changes even in old age and that this pattern of party-switching explains much of the age-partisan stability association. Using voter registration information over 8 years for more than 20 million voters in California, in combination with American National Election Studies panel surveys, I measure how many individuals switch party affiliation when they move to new homes, switch when separating from a partner, and become less likely to switch after retirement. In both ANES and voter record analyses, accounting for residential mobility alone reduces the association between age and party-switching by 50 percent or more. The combined findings demonstrate that socially crystallized lives help drive steady partisanship in adulthood and suggest that continuity in day-to-day life maintains partisan identity at thirty years old almost as much as it does at sixty.

Partisanship is deservedly one of the best studied areas of American politices. Partisan polarization and resistance to switching partisan affiliation explain many political phenomena in the United States. Exceptions to polarized and unchanging partisanship are less well understood. This paper focuses on one piece of the partisan change puzzle: why older people are less likely to change party. It evaluates whether older people are really less willing to switch party than younger people and, more centrally, whether specific patterns of party switching with age are consistent with the assumptions of prior research and theory.

This age-partisan stability pattern matters because the reliability of the finding makes it a required prediction of any partisanship theory – otherwise, a theory is inconsistent with decades of empirical research. Partisan stability with age was a foundation of restrained (Franklin and Jackson 1983), impressionable (Alwin and Krosnick 1991), and crystallized (Sears and Funk 1999) partisanship. Many of the social, psychological, and informational interpretations of the age-partisan stability relationship imply a slow build up of partisan attachment over time. The age-partisan

change association is even part of the theory that voters gradually develop strong priors about which party will best serve their interests and become resistant to change through rational loyalty (Converse 1969; Achen 1992). The association between age and partisan stability in young and even later adulthood shows up in empirical research even while the directions of ideological change (Glenn 1974) and political motivations (Campbell 2002) with age seem to be closely related to contemporary politics.

Here, since the findings on age and partisan stability are so central to theories of partisanship, I conduct a study of the precise functional form of partisan change with age. I focus on measuring whether there is a smooth decline in willingness to change party with age because most studies assume that this is the right pattern of age and stability that their models should predict. I show that there are good reasons to believe that that smooth, or even stepwise, functional form is wrong, suggesting that many theories of partisanship were built to predict the wrong data.

For clarity, I categorize the theories that may have been built on the wrong functional form as "internalized" partisan attachment theories: where a person, with each action, nugget of experience, and with the psychological effects of biological age, becomes less and less willing to change party over time, and thus becomes increasingly unresponsive to party performance. There are, of course, ways of adjusting these theories to other functional forms, given a good reason. The point instead is that, if they are still right, the correctness was an accident and that they should be updated to account for the better evidence.

In contrast with internalized partisan attachment theories, I will explain the changes with age within the original, classic arguments on the social foundations of partisanship in the American Voter (Campbell et al. 1960) and with mechanisms that are broad and affected by many life changes: social relationships, personal circumstances, and, to a small extent, self-interest. If partisanship, as Campbell et al. argued, is produced by relationships, or in their words the social milieu, and a person's relationships grows more stable with age, then increasingly stable partisanship with age might be due to the smaller and smaller changes in a person's social environment as they grow

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older. This increasing life stability is nearly all-encompassing. The older a person is the less likely they are to move (until around age 70), meet new people and be in unfamiliar social circles, marry and separate, and experience sudden changes in their careers.

Importantly, life changes are discontinuous, occurring over short periods during a person's life, so if they make a person change party more than other influences, then the age-partisan stability association is also punctuated. In the aggregate and over long time-spans, however, the hypothesized relationship between aging and partisan attachment is very similar to the relationship between aging and life changes. Because of this, an age-based partisan attachment explanation is indistinguishable from a social and contextual explanation for partisan stability in most surveys on partisan identification. The crux of this argument and the empirical tests, then, will rely on the precise patterns of these life changes and the accompanying changes in partisanship.

My results show that individuals change partisan affiliations after changing residence, are more likely to change party the farther they move, and change party after separation from a spouse or roommate. The results further show that individuals are *less* likely to change party after retiring, when life becomes more stable. Consistent with a life stability explanation for age and partisan stability associations, and at the expense of certain components of partisan attachment models, partisan switching effects are similar across voters' age range after controlling for sources of life stability. Using only residential stability, I am able to explain half of the relationship between partisan stability and age. That is, the association between partisan stability and age is halved.

Broadly, these results forward evidence in favor of *external* crystallization in partisan identification. Going forward, I argue that we will be able to measure a variety of contemporary and objective indicators from an individual's personal life to assess whether they are likely to reconsider their partisan stances as if they were in their 20s.

Partisan Attachment Explanations for Partisan Stability

The difficulty in identifying large, sudden, and individual-level changes in American partisan affiliation is thought to be a symptom of surprisingly prevalent political hardheadedness. How is it that so few Americans claim strong interest in politics or hold opinions consistently on one side of the aisle or the other, yet so many hold so strongly to their chosen political party?

One argument is that partisans are socialized to associate political parties with a set of long-standing symbols and social cleavages (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). The average citizen does not follow politics or hold an informed set of ideologically consistent opinions, but does care very much about their own social group and perceived interests. A partisan change or vote for the other side is a vote against their social group or class, and a voter who does not feel strongly for their side may just as well not cast a vote as consider other options.

Within this and other socialization frameworks, partisanship not only heavily drives voter choices (which I will not question here), but also conceivably becomes increasingly self-reinforced with age even after young adulthood (Sears 1981). Psychologically attached partisans will interpret political information to confirm their affiliations (Bartels 2002), and weakly attached partisans will more strongly hold affiliations if they are led to affirm them (Gerber, Huber and Washington 2010; Dinas 2014).[1]

This argument is similar to the claim that partisanship becomes more stable over time because individuals make up their mind early in life, and develop loyalties to one party or the other with political experience (Converse 1969; Achen 1992);Fiorina (1981)). As individuals grow older, they accumulate knowledge about the parties. With this accumulated experience, identification becomes more grounded.

Both of these theories of partisanship suggest that people do not change party because they maintain an abstract set of information about the parties and their relationships to them. This

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[1] Although, importantly, Dinas (2014) finds that votes (as affirmations) do not appear to lead to a lower likelihood of changing party. Votes only affect respondents willingness to state "strong" partisanship.

information immunizes partisans to environmental pressures and new political experiences – and the immunization accumulates with time.

Life Stability and External Crystallization

In contrast with the increasing attachment and self-reinforcement explanations for increasing partisan stability in adulthood (and refining the existing explanations for partisan stability overall), I will argue that people become increasingly less likely to change party after 30 because increasingly stable personal lives give them little impetus to change party. As an example of this stability, 37% of Americans have never lived outside of their hometowns (Cohn and Morin 2008). This residential stability has increased in the United States in recent years (Molloy, Smith and Wozniak 2011).

When social and personal circumstances do change, however, people reconsider their partisan identification. Individuals whose lives have changed could 1) have altered political interests, 2) have decreased continuity in the social and personal contexts that informed prior choices and identities, and 3) be exposed to new social influences to introduce, inform, and affirm political choices and identities. This life change argument is similar to the argument that individuals will change their partisanship when the parties themselves change (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002; Lupu 2013). That is, individuals are open to changing partisanship when the parties change or when their lives change.

Many others have argued for a life stability effect on increasing partisan stability over the life-course (see, for example, Sears (1981) and Stoker and Bass (2011))[2], and there is some support for this life stability explanation for the age-partisan stability relationship. Miller and Sears (1986) tested a very similar hypothesis for attitudinal persistence – focusing on conflicting demographic environments as proxies for encountering conflicting norms in adulthood rather than, as I will sug-

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[2]And, somewhat counter to their broader theoretical framework, the authors of *The American Voter* did not rule out "social milieu" effects later in life.

gest here, *any* environment that is both unfamiliar and that introduces new social influences – and argued that persistence in attitudes appears to be at least partially attributable to environmental continuity. Others have argued that stability might be driven by the continuity of political experience, especially in studies of generational change (Niemi and Jennings 1991) and major political events (Converse 1969; Sears and Valentino 1997).

Tests of the life stability explanation for partisan stability have been limited by difficulties in identifying and studying environmental discontinuity in small panel studies. However, the life stability argument is also consistent with several studies of life changes and social contexts on partisanship, as well as the classic, social-psychological take on partisan identification (Campbell et al. 1960). In its support, researchers have found evidence of social conformity after residential moves (Brown 1981, 1988; Glaser and Gilens 1997) and gradual partisan convergence over marriage (Jennings and Stoker 2005; Alford et al. 2011; Sinclair 2012).[3]

Surprisingly, works in this area often find separation between partisan or specific policy opinion change and change in ideological orientation generally.[4] For example, Glaser and Gilens (1997) find that Southerners who move to the North change specific, politicized policy positions on race but do not appear to become more racially tolerant. Doherty et al. (2006) find that lottery winners tend to change political opinions only on issues that affect them directly and materially (like the estate tax).[5] Also, spousal studies find that longer-married spouses are more likely to share partisan affiliations (Alford et al. 2011) and that spouses tend to converge in partisan affiliation over time (Jennings and Stoker 2005). However, they also find that spouses do not appear to strongly converge across issue opinions, that general ideological correspondence may be more based on similarity prior to the relationship, and that specific issue opinions that do converge tend to be

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[3]Other researchers have identified contextual effects not necessarily related to a life change, such as social network induced ambivalence (Huckfeldt, Mendez and Osborn 2004), conflict avoidance (Mutz 2002), and gradual conformity in a neighborhood (Lyons 2011).

[4]Recent priming research (Klar 2013, 2014) is a notable exception.

[5]Although, notably, lottery wins might affect individuals in much more specific ways than major life changes generally (i.e. changing wealth, but not necessarily introducing new friends or a new workplace).

more politicized. Mason (2015) evaluates an partisanship-issue opinion distinction and argues that partisanship is more susceptible to social influences than issue ideology.

Within this framework, then, partisanship seems to be relatively susceptible to new influences compared to latent ideological orientations. Change in politicization can occur even if the partisanship of discussants in a new life stage are the same as the previous one's and even if an individual's ideological disposition does not change. New friends could, for example, more heavily weight a party's stance on government spending than stances abortion or immigration, and, therefore, partisanship in that social context could connote a different social identity. In experimental settings, temporal landmarks and an induced sense of "new beginnings" lead to behavior change (Dai, Milkman and Riis 2015). Similar dynamics could anchor partisan identities, especially if friendships and shared histories restrict individuals' willingness to redefine themselves.

Research Design

The research design of this paper will distinguish life stability from partisan attachment in the aging-stability relationship by testing two major empirical implications of the life stability theory that are inconsistent with partisan attachment. First, if the life stability model is correct, people will be more likely to change party after a life change, and will be unlikely to change party otherwise. Second, controlling for life changes will reduce or eliminate the relationship between age and partisan stability. If partisan attachment entirely accounts for aging-stability, older people will be less likely to change party than younger people, independent of their circumstances.

Figure 1 displays the logic of the research design. Partisan attachment theories suggest an underlying willingness to change that continuously decreases with age (green line in the top-left panel). This individual-level underlying willingness to change manifests as a continuously declining party-switching rate at an aggregated level (black line in the top-left panel). Partisans are not more likely to change party when their lives have changed because partisan attachment is abstract

and buffered from current personal experience (middle-left panel). Because there is no difference in partisan change following life changes, controlling for life changes has no effect on the aging-stability relationship (orange line in the bottom-left panel).

[Figure 1 about here.]

In the life stability theory, individuals are more willing to change party when their lives have changed, and perceive little reason to change party when their lives are stable (green line in the top-right panel). They are then more likely to change party following life changes, and unlikely to do so during more stable periods (middle-left panel). This frequency of *impetus* to change (life changes) declines with age, but the willingness to change following life changes does not decline.

Despite this same willingness to change at all ages, the life stability theory *also* manifests as a continuously declining party-switching rate at the aggregate level (black line in the top-right panel). However, if party-switching is driven by the frequency of periodic life changes rather than continuously increasing partisan attachment, I will be able to identify different levels of partisan change during periods of life stability and instability (middle-right panel). Once I separate these punctuated phases from each other (i.e. impetus to change vs. no impetus to change phases), individuals experiencing life changes (or not) will switch parties at similar rates at all ages (gray and purple lines in the bottom-right panel). The relationship between age and partisan stability will then be reduced or disappear when I control for life changes (orange line in the bottom-right panel).

Life stability vs. partisan attachment: specific tests

The purpose of this analysis is to test the possibility that life stability might explain partisan stability, especially increasing stability with age. Because of this, I will focus on tests that distinguish the life stability explanation from partisan attachment theories. I will further test the effects of
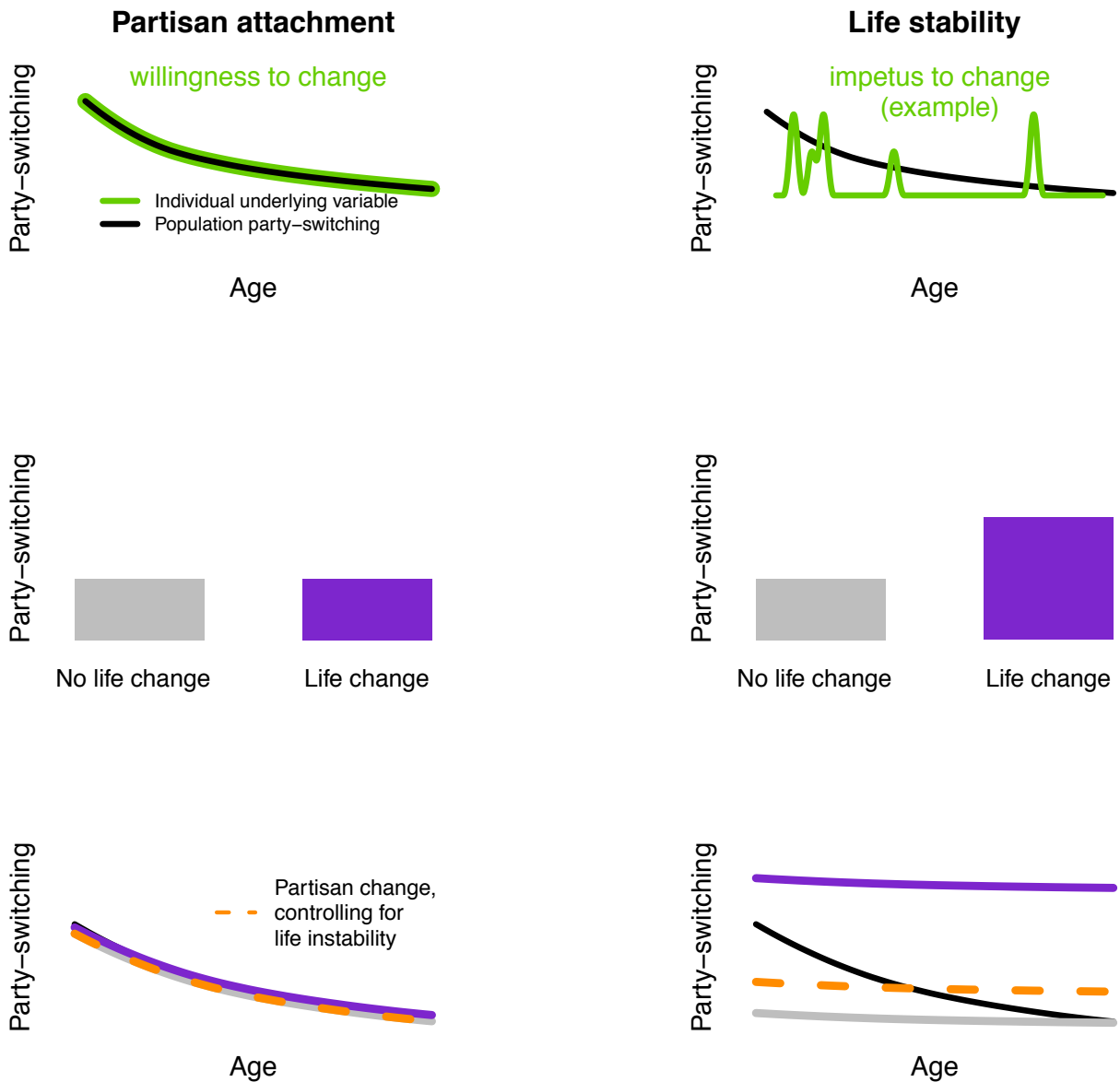
Figure 1: *Partisan attachment theory vs. life stability theory.* Partisan attachment explanations suggest an underlying willingness to change that decreases with age (in some, an underlying willingness that decreases much more greatly at young ages – e.g. the 20s – than at older ages). Here, I argue that periodic life instability, that is more common at young ages, drives the observed relationships (in the aggregate and over long time-spans) between age and party-switching. In the analysis here, I will separate the periods of "low" stability and "high" stability and then show that aging-stability, though perhaps driven in part by "attachments", fixed social identities, and loyalty, is *more* attributable to frequent life changes at young ages. This finding suggests that partisan stability overall would be higher if Americans' lives were less stable – for example, if American society and the structure of the economy created more dynamic lives and correspondingly dynamic social and political interests.

life changes that are likely to correspond to simultaneous changes in political interests, social discontinuities, and changes in social influences, so that this combined influence will provide a more comprehensive estimate for the total effect of increasing life stability on increasing partisan stability with age. I will not, in this paper, attempt to distinguish possible subsets of the life stability explanation from each other (e.g. the effects of economic/job stability vs. continuity in social contexts). This effort is worthwhile once we establish that life stability might in fact better explain partisan stability than partisan attachment.

Table 1 summarizes the analyses I will use here to test whether party affiliation changes might be related to life stability. The first set of tests (top left cell of Table 1) will evaluate whether individuals who change residence are more likely to change party. While friends have similar partisan identities and ideologies, an individual in a new place will need to establish new relationships, and will have somewhat limited influence over those choices (Huckfeldt 1983; Huckfeldt et al. 1995), with the likely exception of romantic partnerships. Further, many moves are driven by new jobs (Clark and Davies Withers 1999)[6] and children (Clark, Deurloo and Dieleman 1984). These interests might inform political choices (e.g. a child's schooling can increase the importance of preferences on local education politics), and a residential move on their basis might be a strong indicator of their emergent and contemporaneous importance in a person's life.

I will first evaluate this in the American National Election Study, then replicate the analysis using the California voter record (bottom left cell). For both of these analyses, I will test whether controlling for residential mobility greatly reduces the relationship between age and partisan stability. I will then test whether people who move farther from their prior residence are more likely to change party than those who move shorter distances (bottom left cell of Table 1). Individuals should not only change party when their lives changes, but should be more likely to change party the more their lives change. This is a test meant to evaluate party change independently of where

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[6]Being laid off might have no effect because many individuals will seek out a comparable job. In this case, the affected individual might not perceive unemployment as a long-term change or a political, societal-level problem. Also, like retirement, losing a job might be socially isolating.

an individual moves, rather than the partisan makeup of a destination. Although there are small zip code and district partisanship effects here, controlling for neighborhood partisanship does not alter the results. In other words, this will be a test of a social life and circumstance shuffling (and corresponding political reorientation) or even "re-socialization".

As a robustness check, I will analyze whether individuals who moved in immediately prior years (2006-2012) change party much less than all movers (who move 2012 to 2014), controlling for frequency and distance of past moves. This test allows me to evaluate whether long-term drift in partisanship that only manifests after a cue to update party affiliation in the voter record affects the estimates.[7] Movers receive the same cues to update their party registration, so this confounder does not affect variation by distance, and repeat movers will have previously received the cues to change party. I note that the repeat mover analyses help rule out the explanation that these tests identify "movers" vs. "stayer" types of people in these analyses, since repeat movers should have higher rates of party-switching.

After this set of residential mobility results, I will then test whether changing political discussion partners alters political affiliations (center-bottom cell of Table 1). Because it is difficult to observe changes in friendships, I will focus on the effects of changes in relationships I can observe: spouses. Changes in martial relationships are not only easy to observe, but relatively likely to affect political decision-making. Spouses and family members are the most cited discussion partners in social surveys for both political discussion (Beck 1991) and discussion generally (Marsden 1987). In addition, changes in martial status tend to lead to residence changes (Speare Jr and Goldscheider

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[7]Voters who transfer their voter registration to a new residence are more likely to change party, but they receive cues to update registration information, including party affiliation, after doing this. *While partisan identification measurement in the American National Election Study is not affected by this consideration*, in the official voter record, movers might update their party affiliation when they move, even though their partisan identification might have changed prior to the move. To ensure that the results here are not strongly driven by inconsistency between *stated* party affiliation in the voter record and partisan identification, I first test whether residence changes predict partisan identification changes in the American National Election panel studies. In these surveys, respondents were simply asked to state their party identification and did so at regular intervals. I then replicate these results, testing in the California voter record whether adjusting for residential mobility reduces the relationship between age and party-switching in official records and also, *given* a move, whether partisans who move farther are more likely to change party.

1987), and separated spouses who move might establish new relationships to displace the influence of their ex-spouse.

In these marital separation tests, I will test whether probable spouses who separate are also likely to quickly diverge in partisanship. I will show estimates for individuals who separated in 2012-2014 to show that there is little change in partisanship prior to separation and a large sudden change at the separation. I will then show estimates for individuals who separated in 2008-2010 to show that there is a jump in partisan divergence immediately after the separation and that this divergence continues at a lower rate thereafter.

Finally, I will show that rates of party switching *suddenly* change slope at retirement (right-bottom cell of Table 1). A sudden change in rate is consistent with a life stability explanation, while smooth declines (i.e. roughly the same slope) through retirement are consistent with a psychological attachment explanation. This is not a residential mobility test and I show in the appendix that changes in slope occur for movers and non-movers alike. As individuals leave the workforce, we might expect them to have more stable day-to-day lives, and to be exposed to fewer social influences on partisanship, since the workplace is a very important source of cross-cutting discourse (Mutz and Mondak 2006). We might also think that retirees could start voting on focused issues, as fixed incomes and health care concerns (and the government's involvement in them) become more important (Campbell 2002, 2003). In this analysis, I will show (in the appendix) that the change in slope at retirement precisely corresponds to age rather than year of birth (e.g. comparing age 65 in 2006 to age 65 in 2012 to a 1941/1947 birth year in 2006 and 2012), strongly suggesting that this an age effect and not a cohort effect.

[Table 1 about here.]

For the age and time from retirement as well as residential mobility tests, the improvement over prior works is primarily the precise test of fit between the expected and observed functional forms of party-switching enabled by a dataset many times larger than in prior analyses. For the spousal

	Residential mobility	**Separation**	**Retirement**
ANES DV: 4 pts on 7 pt scale	Do movers change more than non-movers? Does controlling for life stability reduce the age relationship?	Not enough divorces	Few retirees (imprecise)
Voter record DV: Dem-Rep, Rep-Dem	Do movers change more the farther they move? Does controlling for life stability reduce the aging-stability relationship?	Do separating spouses diverge more than moving spouses?	Do retirees become *less* likely to change party?

Table 1: *Life change effect tests.* This table displays the series of tests for whether life changes lead to new party affiliations, and whether controlling for life changes reduces associations between age and party-switching.

influence tests, the improvement is to study sudden change after separation, since gradually in-
creasing similarity over time might be attributable to difficult-to-measure prior similarity between
spouses (and these base similarities, by definition, cannot not quickly disappear after separation).
Competing (socialization, discussion, self-reinforcement) partisanship theories would suggest that
ex-spouses and roommates should diverge after separation slowly or not at all. Like the retirement
and residential mobility analyses, this separation analysis was not possible in smaller, prior studies.

I note that none of these tests guarantee a change in circumstance or social environment. In this
sense, all estimates here are *intent-to-treat* estimates. While the analyses could leverage the parti-
san composition of a destination, homophily in social ties complicate the interpretation of partisan
composition estimates. Individuals might, for example, maintain more like-minded friendships
when surrounded by ideologically distant people. The focus here, instead, is to estimate the pro-
portion of the age-partisan stability association that can explained by sudden partisan shifts around
common major life changes, rather than a gradually increasing psychological attachment to a po-
litical party. The estimates will combine the probability of new, politically relevant circumstances
or social environments (given life changes) and the effects of new influences. Both of these vari-
ables, exposure and influence, are central to understanding the meaning of stable partisanship in
the American electorate.

California voter record

I use the California statewide voter record to analyze party affiliation changes by age, residence
change, and whether probable spouses have separated. The California voter record is the full list
of registered voters in the state, and includes name, date of birth, and residence, as well as party
affiliation and voting history. Voter registration information, including unique identification, is
maintained at the county level. Because California is a large state and counties are large, moves
are relatively likely to be both within state and within county.

To determine whether a registered voter has moved, I link voters between biennial releases

of the voter record (2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014) by county voter ID[8] and check whether their residence changed between releases. Voters can easily update their voting address when updating their vehicle address in California. This ensures that these residence changes are relatively up-to-date. If a move is within county, voters only need to check a box on the California Department of Motor Vehicles change of address web page (or the paper form) to transfer their voter registration. In contrast, voters cannot transfer their registration after moving to a new county and must re-register to vote (i.e. the California voter record, across county lines, does not record moves of individuals who do not fill out a re-registration form). I will limit my analysis to within county moves because of this.

Partisan affiliation (voter records) vs. partisan identification (ANES)

To further test the validity of party affiliation listed on an official voter record as an indicator of an individual's current partisan preference, I considered whether respondents in the Cooperative Congressional Elections Survey were likely to state party affiliations different from their official registration. Ansolabehere and Hersh (2011) conducted a very similar, descriptive analysis, and I replicated this analysis in California to characterize the prevalence of conflicting identification and registration, specifically testing whether married individuals maintain a partisan affiliation different from their partisan identification. I found that only 2-3% of people reported partisan identification inconsistent with their partisan affiliation, and married people were perhaps slightly more likely to misreport (1-2 percentage points more likely). Ansolabehere and Hersh found a similar number of misidentifiers plus around 3% who reported other party affiliation, but, in nationwide estimates and with extensive controls, did not find a marriage effect.

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[8]Using county voter identification numbers instead of first name, last name, and date of birth prevents me from considering between county moves in the main analyses, but allows me to more easily link individuals who change their last names and to more confidently identify the effect of separation. Using names instead of country voter identification numbers gives larger estimates, but I cannot clearly distinguish artifacts and county-to-county re-registration effects from life change and other social effects.

Spouse/roommate-formatted voter records

My main dependent variable in the spouse/roommate analysis is an individual's change in party affiliation to an affiliation that is different from their spouse. This analysis could theoretically be completed using a panel survey of a large number of individuals with a reasonable probability of divorcing and moving to different residences, given that the survey would be completed at short, one to two year intervals. However, the sample size of that survey, and the difficulty of implementing it at sufficient quality, is prohibitively costly.

The California voter record is a strong replacement for such a panel survey, and substantially stronger than existing surveys in its ability to detect fast-acting and long-term changes. The current residences in the California voter record can be easily used to identify cohabitants and probable spouses. I identify cohabitants and spouses using a formatting algorithm that closely follows the spousal identification rules used in Hobbs et al. (2014).[9] For the longitudinal analysis that covers changes from 2006 through 2014 – intended to confirm that partisan changes are both sudden and long-term – I require that both spouses were present in each voter record.

Though separation and divorce are not rare, they are also not common in any given year. Because of my large sample size, I identified 1.62 million pairs for which at least one individual moved between 2008 and 2012 (22% of partners and roommates identified in the voter record in that period) and 430 thousand in which the pairs might have separated (6% of partners and roommates identified in the voter record in that period). 830 thousand pairs with the same last name

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[9]To identify partners and roommates, I first create a dataset of all households in California by grouping voters with the same listed address, excluding addresses with more than six household members (to exclude group homes). I then link household members whose ages are within fifteen years and who are the only two individuals within their generation in a household. Because I am interested in changes in partisanship, especially between individuals who separate, I require that subjects in the spousal analysis file change residence in a given analysis year. As an example, to be included in an analysis file for the January 2007 (2006 registration) to January 2009 (2008 registration) period, individuals must have either moved from a shared residence in 2007 to a shared residence in 2009 or from a shared residence to separate residence (this includes cases where one of the spouses remains in the previous residence or both spouses move to new residences). I do not require that all spouses move because many individuals keep their marital home after a divorce, and requiring movement limits my sample to a somewhat unusual sample of marriages (where the couples will be younger, less likely to vote, and, arguably, have less investment or social attachments in a community). Requiring that all subjects and spouses either change residence or vote to does not meaningfully alter the overall results, however.

in 2008 (17% of the same last name subset) moved and 190 thousand (4% of the same last name subset) separated. As a reference, the United States yearly divorce rate (percent of married people) is around 0.7% (an approximately 3% four-year rate).[10]

In the American National Election Study panel surveys, only around 2% of respondents who listed "married" in the first series of interviews in 2000 later stated any other marital status. This proportion of newly divorced respondents was too small for statistically well-powered quantitative analysis. Although, the relative effects of life changes on partisan stability are large, the absolute effects are not.

American National Election Study panel survey codings

In the American National Election Study panel survey data, I code respondents as having moved if they stated that they lived in a current residence or community for fewer than 2 years (for the middle panel survey, if asked to continuing panel respondents) or 4 years (for the final survey). I code respondents as having changed party if their 7-point partisan identification changed four points or more (e.g. lean Democrat to strong Republican or weak Republican to weak Democrat). A four point change is the smallest shift on the 7-point scale that is certain to correspond to a switch from one major party to the other.[11]

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[10]The US Census official California divorce rate was 0.43% in 1990 and the United States official divorce rate was 0.48%. These rates are based on the full population, rather than the married population. They do not take into account all partnerships.

[11]The results are nearly identical when coding "changed party" as a four point shift for "strong" partisans and three point shifts for "weak" partisans and leaning independents, when also controlling for stated partisan strength in the first panel (i.e. controlling for whether a four point shift or a three point shift will count as party-switching). The effect sizes are smaller, but in the mediation tests more statistically significant, when counting moves from leaning one party to leaning another party as party-switching. The lean to lean specification is not desirable because respondents do not need to identify with either party to count as party "switchers". In the ANES, leaning partisan respondents describe themselves as independents, and are pressed to affiliate with one party or another.

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Results

Associations between age and length of time holding an affiliation and partisan stability support partisan attachment models in current interpretations. The events that I will consider here are related to both of those. To the extent that I find meaningful effects, the results cast doubt on partisan attachment theories, especially those informed by socialization and increasing attachment models. To highlight this, I will show that controlling for residential mobility greatly weakens relationship between age and party-switching, illustrating the extent of confounded evidence supporting partisan attachment in partisanship. Other tests on marital separation and retirement will add evidence to support the life stability explanation over partisan attachment more generally.

Residential mobility

As shown in Table 1, there are two control groups in the residential mobility analysis. The first is non-movers in the American National Election Study panel surveys. I compare these non-movers to people who move to a new home or community. The second is people who move to new homes close to their prior residence in the California voter record. I compare short movers to people who move farther from their prior residence – in other words, a heterogenous effects test within the treated group rather than a treated vs. non-treated comparison.

Figure 2 shows estimates of the effect of residential mobility on party identification change (corresponding to at least a four point change on the 7 point party identification scale) from a logistic regression combining all panel years in the American National Election Study (1956-1960, 1972-1976, 1992-1997, and 2000-2004), with controls for age and highest education. A residence change roughly doubles (1.7 times) the rate at which respondents change party in a four-year period. The left side of this panel shows that this effect is specific to party-switching (a change of 4 points or more on the 7 point scale, or the smallest point change guaranteed to result in a party

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change).[12] Adding controls for partisan strength and interest in campaign does not meaningfully alter the residential mobility estimate. Table 3 in the appendix shows the same result with these additional controls. In all of the ordinary least squares models shown there, I scale all variables and center them at their median value. This centering allows us to interpret the intercept as the baseline partisan identification change. I display ordinary least squares so that the coefficients are more readily interpretable, and also show logistic regression estimates in the appendix.

[Figure 2 about here.]

Table 2 shows the effect of adding whether an individual has changed residence to a simple model of partisan stability in the American National Election Study panel surveys. Adding the residential mobility roughly halves the coefficient for age effects in partisan stability. Adding additional controls, shown in Table 3 in the appendix, slightly increases the age effect reduction. The reduction in slope on age when adding residential mobility to the model corresponds to a 48% mediated effect (p-value: 0.03 using logistic regression and a bias-corrected bootstrapped standard error as described in Tingley et al. (2014)).

The figure to the right of Table 2 shows the replicated comparison for the California voter record. This analysis is limited to ages 30 through 65 because I observe many what appear to be voter registrations at parents' houses before age 30 (when comparing move rates to rates in the American Community Survey) and rates of party-switching after 65, as I will show, appear to be related to retirement. While there is a relationship between age and partisan stability in the overall data, controlling for residential mobility (re-weighting the data so that movers and non-movers are equally weighted in the averages at all ages) greatly reduces the association. The relationship between logged age and party-switching here is reduced by an average of 73.9%.[13]

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[12]I estimate the effect of moving on partisanship for different partisan shifts using log-link generalized models. Coefficients from log-link generalized linear are risk ratios, while coefficients from logistic regressions are odds ratios and so affected by baseline rates. This is a meaningful distinction here because baseline rates for 2 point shifts are substantially larger than for 4 point shifts.

[13]This mean of four bi-yearly estimates excludes party-switching mediation effects for individuals over 50 in years
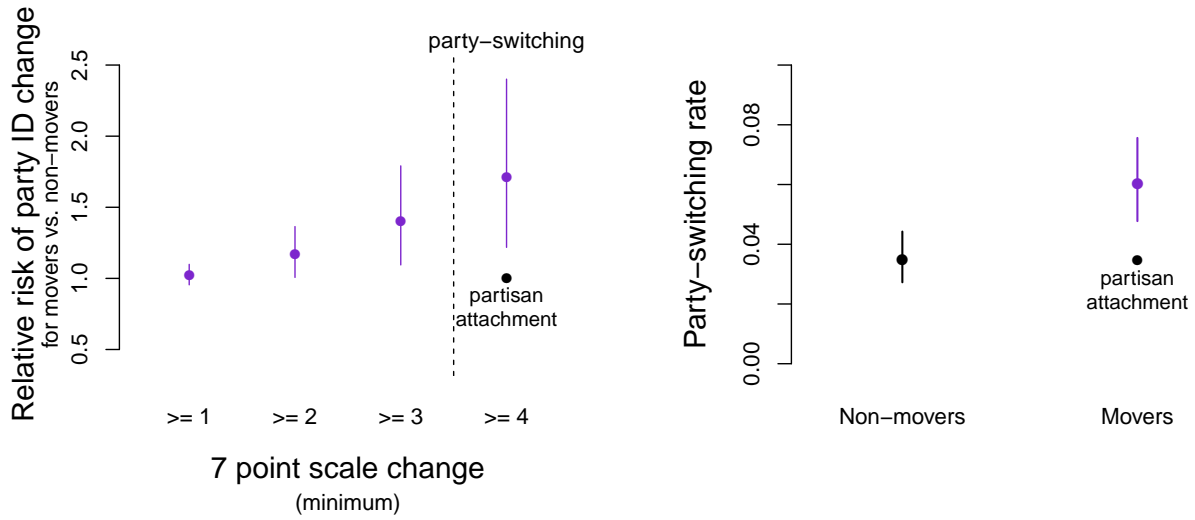
Figure 2: *Effect of residential mobility on party identification change in the American National Election Study panel studies.* The left panel in this figure shows the relative risk of moving on party identification change in pooled American National Election Study panel surveys, by minimum point change on the 7 point partisan identification scale. 4 points on the scale is the smallest point change certain to result in a party affiliation change (e.g. corresponding to a change from "weak Democrat" to "weak Republican" or "strong Republican" to "lean Democrat"). The right panel shows predicted probabilities for movers vs. non-movers from a logistic regression, controlling for age and highest education. Adding further controls does not meaningfully alter the estimates. The 4 point, party-switching models exclude respondents who stated "independent-independent" in the first panel.

[Table 2 about here.]

The life stability argument suggests that individuals not only should change party when their lives change, but should be more likely to change party the *more* their lives change. To test this, I consider whether registered electors are more likely to change party the farther they move from their prior residence.

The right panel of Figure 3 shows rates of party-switching by distance from prior residence. The party-switching rate is dose-dependent: people who move (and who receive the same official cues to change party) are more likely to change party the farther they move. The estimates are for distance quantiles (30 bins with equal numbers of observations), and distances were computed from the residence zip code centroids. These estimates are from linear regressions with dummy variables for each quantile. The x-axis is the logged distance moved and the y-axis is biennial party-switching rate for 2012 through 2014. While I display the 2012-2014 period (which took place after the California switched to an open, top-two primary), the only difference between the open, top-two years and other years in the analysis here is that the earlier years were log-linear (without the slight uptick for moves over 30 miles). An advantage of using the 2012-2014 data is that I am able to compare recent, repeat movers to all movers.

[Figure 3 about here.]

Spouses and roommates

To examine partisan change attributable to social influence, I test for divergence of partisan affiliation between separating spouses. I distinguish party switching (e.g. Democrat to Republican, Republican to Democrat) from party adoption (e.g. no party to Democrat, no party to Republican)

2008-2012 (where older voters were more likely to change party than younger voters) and over 65 in years 2006-2008 and 2012-2014 (where retirement effects drive party-switching). Including over 50 voters in 2008-2012 increases the average mediation effect to 81.4%. I note that the mediation effects tests are insensitive to the magnitude of the relationship between changing residence and party-switching.

ANES PANEL SURVEYS		
	Changed party	
Moved		**0.023**
		(0.008)
		0.003
Age	**−0.008**	**−0.004**
(logged, scaled)	(0.003)	(0.004)
	0.021	*0.269*
Highest education	−0.017	−0.018
(scaled)	(0.004)	(0.004)
	< 0.001	< 0.001
Constant	0.046	0.038
(baseline change)	(0.004)	(0.004)
	< 0.001	< 0.001
Observations	3,424	3,424

CALIFORNIA, 2006 to 2008
(voter record)
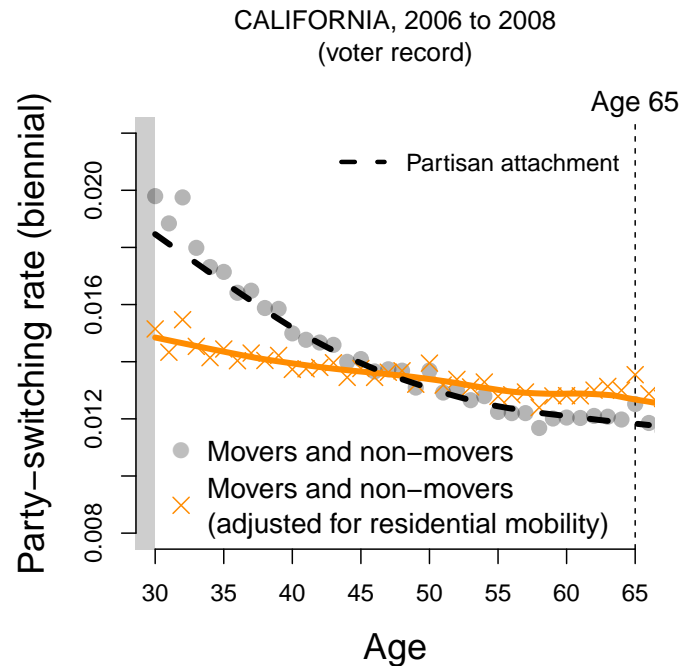
Table 2: *Effects of residential mobility and age on probability of changing partisanship (left: ANES, right: California voter record).* The table (left) displays estimates from a linear regression using pooled ANES panel survey data. It shows that residential mobility substantially increases the probability of changing party (a change of 4 or more points on the 7 point partisan identification scale), and that controlling for residential mobility reduces the relationship between age and the probability of changing party. The reduction in slope on age when adding residential mobility to the model corresponds to a 48% "mediated" effect (p-value: 0.03 using logistic regression and bias-corrected bootstrapped standard errors described in Tingley et al. (2014)). The figure (right) shows that controlling for residential mobility in the California voter record also greatly reduces the relationship between age and party-switching. The relationship between age (logged) and party-switching is on average reduced by 73.9%.

VOTER RECORD			
	Changed party		
	Non-movers		
Never moved	0.0111		
	(0.0001)		
	All movers		
Future movers	0.0142		
	(0.0002)		
Movers in period	0.0579		
	(0.0003)		
Already moved	0.0123		
	(0.0002)		
	Repeat Movers		
First move (mover in period, move 1 of 2)	0.0557 (0.0007)		
Second move (mover in period, move 2 of 2)	0.0626 (0.0007)		

Standard deviations in parentheses.
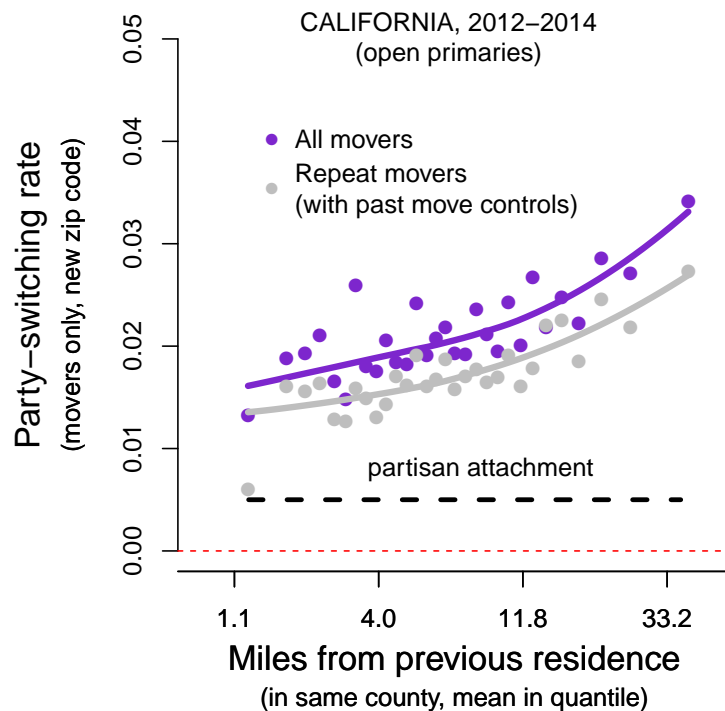
Figure 3: Movers change party in the voter record at rates higher than in the ANES panel surveys (ANES result shown previously, Figure 2), while non-movers change at slightly lower rates than in the ANES (left panel here – showing proportions weighted to match mover age distribution, and for years 2008-2012 so that all movers were observed before and after their moving periods). Mailings sent only to movers (e.g. postcards with registered party affiliation) might drive some of the replicated voter record result. However, I also show that individuals are more likely to change party the farther they move (right panel). Additionally, controlling for distance of past moves, repeat movers were slightly less likely to change party by move distance. The x-axis is the log distance moved from the previous residence (in miles). Distances were computed from zip code centroids, and the distance analysis is limited to individuals who changed zip codes during within county moves. Controls in the repeat mover analysis were centered at their (logged) means.

and abandonment (e.g. Democrat to no party, Republican to no party). For the main results shown here, I run models on a partisan subset of the data, and measure whether a spouse changes major party while the other spouse maintains an opposing party affiliation or changes party while the other spouse switches to independence.[14] In addition, I measure whether the affiliation change effects I observe are long-lasting – that is, whether the spouses maintain party divergence in the three elections after the separation period. In contrast with other tests, I will focus on the relative estimates over absolute estimates (but will show both). The effects are multiplicative and the control groups' baseline rates (divergence between spouses who do not separate) vary from year to year.

I first describe spousal similarity among registered electors. Past works have found that spouses tend to converge in party affiliation, and that this convergence can be substantial (Jennings and Stoker 2005). This correspondence might not directly apply here, however, because this analysis separates party-switching from switches to and from independence. Figure 4 shows the partisan affiliation correspondence between spouses in the California voter record. At all ages, about 80 percent of spouses who both state a party affiliation shared the same affiliation. Younger spouses, however, have less correspondence when independent voters are included in the analysis. Many young individuals decline to state a party affiliation even when their spouse chooses to. This lower correspondence perhaps indicates low political interest or hesitancy in affiliating rather than partisan dissimilarity. Given this relatively constant partisan similarity over time, we should expect the absolute effect sizes of changes from one party affiliation and another to be small, and changes to and from independence to be large.

[Figure 4 about here.]

Given the loss of a spouse's opinion leadership and an impetus to create a life different from the married life a couple shared (here, a new home and neighborhood), we should see individuals

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[14]I show corresponding results measuring whether spouses change to independence or adopt an affiliation in the appendix.
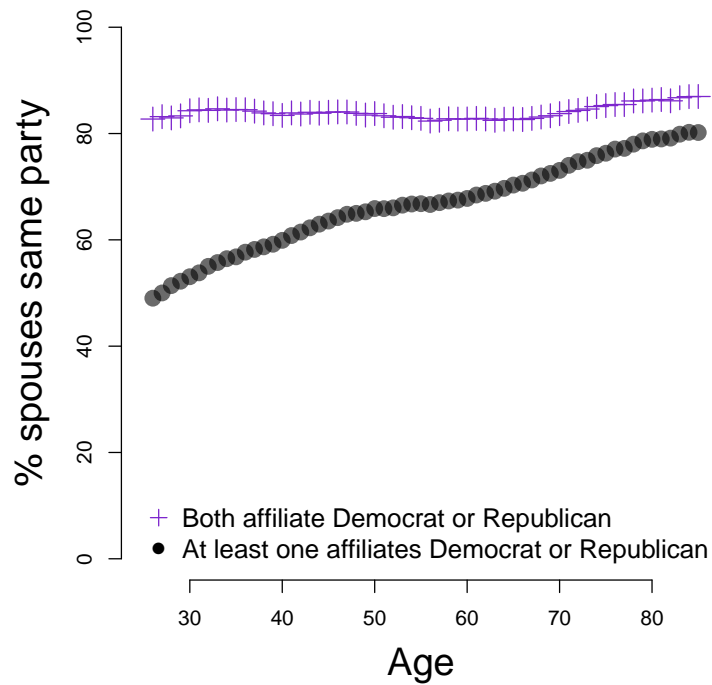
Figure 4: *Proportion of spouses who list the same party affiliation, by age.* This figure shows that slightly over 80 percent of spouses state identical party affiliations when they both state some major party affiliation and that this concordance is constant by age. It further shows that younger couples are more likely to have at least one spouse decline to state a party affiliation or state a third-party affiliation.

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shift party affiliation away from a spouse after residential separation. Figure 5 shows, in the left panel, the estimated divergence between separating spouses and roommates from a linear regression model. In the right panel, I report marginal relative estimates here because the 2008-2010 estimates are for movers only while the other years are not restricted to movers. As a reference from the raw data, 4.6% of couples who stated identical major party affiliations in 2006 then separated and still stated affiliations in 2008 diverge in party affiliation, compared to 1.6% of the still cohabiting couples. Figure 9 in the appendix shows the absolute estimates for the party abandonment and party switching results, as well as overall and party adoption estimates. While the party adoption estimates are substantially larger than party-switching, the relative estimates are not meaningfully different.

[Figure 5 about here.]

It is likely that most of these pairs are spouses; however, some are likely to be roommates. I analyze all pairs in the main results because many of the same underlying processes may drive roommate similarity as well as spousal. The effects are similar to identical for couples/roommates who do not share the same last name.

Age and time from retirement

The previous results show slight increases in life instability lead to increased party-switching. I next consider whether increased stability reduces party-switching rates. To do this, I test whether the rate of party-switching changes at retirement, especially whether the slope by age is suddenly altered once an individual reaches approximately age 65.[15]

Figure 6 shows biennial party-switching rates in California for 2006-2008. I highlight the change in slope, where rates of party-switching are relatively flat until age 65 and then begin to

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[15]I note that there is also an increase in party-switching around retirement (bottom-right of Figure 7 in the appendix), but that this increase varies from year-to-year. I will leave the source of this variation to future research. For now, I note that we might expect many retirees to not be exposed to new social influences, instead spending more time with family members who are not retiring.
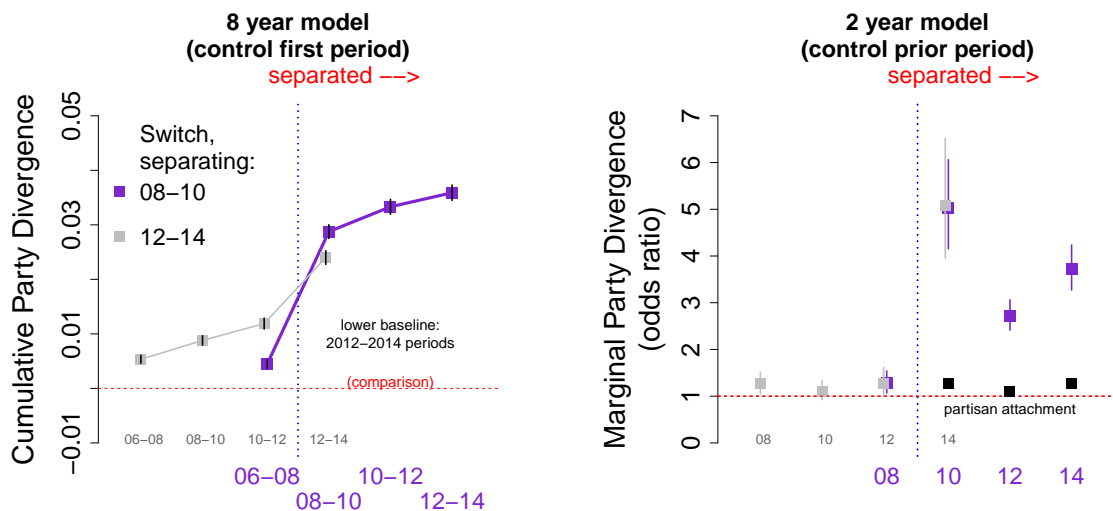
Figure 5: *Change in party affiliation before and after separation (absolute, cumulative and marginal, relative effects).* The absolute, cumulative effects of separation are shown in the left panel (first period controls, confidence intervals shown but very small) and the marginal, relative effects are shown in the right panel (with prior period controls). The x-axis is the time from separation (with a vertical dotted line marking the separation period), and y-axis is the party divergence estimate. Controls are age, identifying with a different party than spouse and fixed effects for party identification in the last voter record. The jump in the separating period corresponds to an absolute effect of 1-3 points for party switching (varying by election year, and greater for electors who vote less). The odds ratios in the right panel are only very slightly larger than risk ratios because the outcome variable, party-switching, is rare. I show the relative, cumulative effects in the top-right panel of Figure 9.

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more sharply decline – consistent with an effect of *increased* life stability on partisan stability. This figure is raw data and not the output of a statistical model. However, an F-test for a linear regression with a younger than 65 vs. 65 or older linear trend interaction compared to a linear regression with a linear trend from 30 through 85 is highly statistically significant (p-value: < 0.01).

[Figure 6 about here.]

Whether voters should adjust before retirement or after being in retirement is not entirely clear. I highlight age 65 as only a rough estimate of when retirement-healthcare priorities might change, and when we might expect exposures to new, competing political discussions to begin to decline.

Discussion

This analysis suggests a social and personal environment stability explanation for why partisanship becomes more stable with age in the United States. The results support an alternative to important components of internalized and abstract partisan attachment theories, as the age-based partisan attachment and life stability explanations were observationally equivalent in previously analyzed data sets. While findings here do not rule out all age-related evidence in favor of partisan attachment theories, they suggest that 50% (ANES estimate), and up to 70% (voter record estimate), of the relationship between age and party-switching is attributable to age differences in residential mobility alone. Other sources of life stability that co-vary with age, including marriage and retirement, further undermine evidence favoring internalized partisan attachment models. Increased partisan stability with age, and perhaps partisan stability generally, appears to be more driven more by limited changes in an individual's social context than by internalization, abstract attachment, or increasingly reinforced party associations.

Catch-all life change variables are appropriate here because the primary endeavor is to highlight evidence against important aspects of partisan attachment models. However, life changes do not
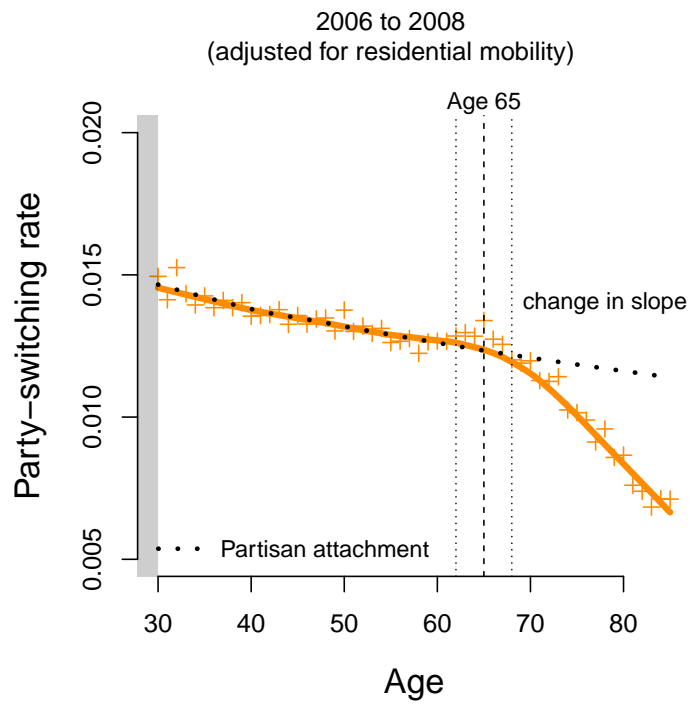
28

Figure 6: *Proportion of registered voters who switch party before and after age 65, controlling for residential mobility.* This figure shows that the relationship between age and party-switching changes slope immediately around age 65 (roughly retirement, entitlement eligibility age).

guarantee politically relevant changes in circumstances and social influences, and I do not estimate the effects that extremely fluid lives or extreme changes in environments have on partisanship. Similar to intent-to-treat estimates, the estimates here might reflect the chances of new, politically relevant influences after ordinary life changes.

There are few experiments that involve major social reassignments. One possible exception is the *Moving to Opportunity* study (see Katz et al (2000) for a description), and the results from that experiment support this emphasis. Like school voucher programs, participants in this study received housing vouchers, not necessarily changing jobs, income, or general opportunity and social status. Perhaps related, the reassignment appears to have caused social isolation among participants assigned to better neighborhoods and, because of social isolation, lower voter turnout (Gay 2012). It is possible that neighborhood changes considered here were limited to approximately within socioeconomic group moves, but that they still happened to correspond to transitions in social circles, personal circumstances, and political environments – and would not have resulted in change were political parties aligned across a uni-dimensional social divide.

It is important to re-emphasize that these results do not raise questions about the stability of partisanship. Partisanship in the United States is undoubtedly very stable, and the rates of change here, though approximately double the baseline rate of change, are not large. The take-away point, instead, is that conventional explanations for increasing stability over time might be incorrect. If lives were less stable, rates of partisan change would be correspondingly larger.

These results also do not necessarily question the stability of latent ideological dispositions. Most works in this area have found that political choices and affiliations can change without changing underlying opinions (on relatively non-politicized issues, especially). Ideological dispositions might even underlie new party choices in unfamiliar social environments, with social relationships and political discussion helping to inform and organize them, connect them to political parties, and affirm the partisan associations. As an example of research that supports this hypothesis (i.e. the inherent stability of ideological disposition), Hatemi et al. (2009), in a twin study of genetic

influences on ideology, find that parents socialize ideological constraint in childhood, but that genetics, along with emergent environmental influences, drive ideological orientations from young adulthood on through later life. Gerber et al. (2010) find that personality, another measure of long-term disposition, predicts ideology. In follow-up work, Gerber et al. (2012) argue that ideology mediates an association between personality and the direction of partisan identification, but that personality affects partisan strength (i.e. willingness to identify with a party) directly.

The distinction between a life stability explanation partisan and attachment explanation for partisan stability should inform how we think about partisanship, evolving political choices, and a periodically and partially informed electorate. The life stability explanation provides potential revisions to both identity (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002) and rational, running tally (*Retrospective voting in American national elections* 1981; Achen 1992) theories of partisanship. To the running tally models, it adds a periodic reconsideration component, where the accomplishments of each party are only considered by individuals when their lives have changed, forcing them to reconsider or reestablish their social relationships and their relationship to society and politics generally. To the identity model, it suggests that symbols and political associations are not especially abstract – that is, they are connected to the immediate environment, and only as stable as the relationships that formed them are.

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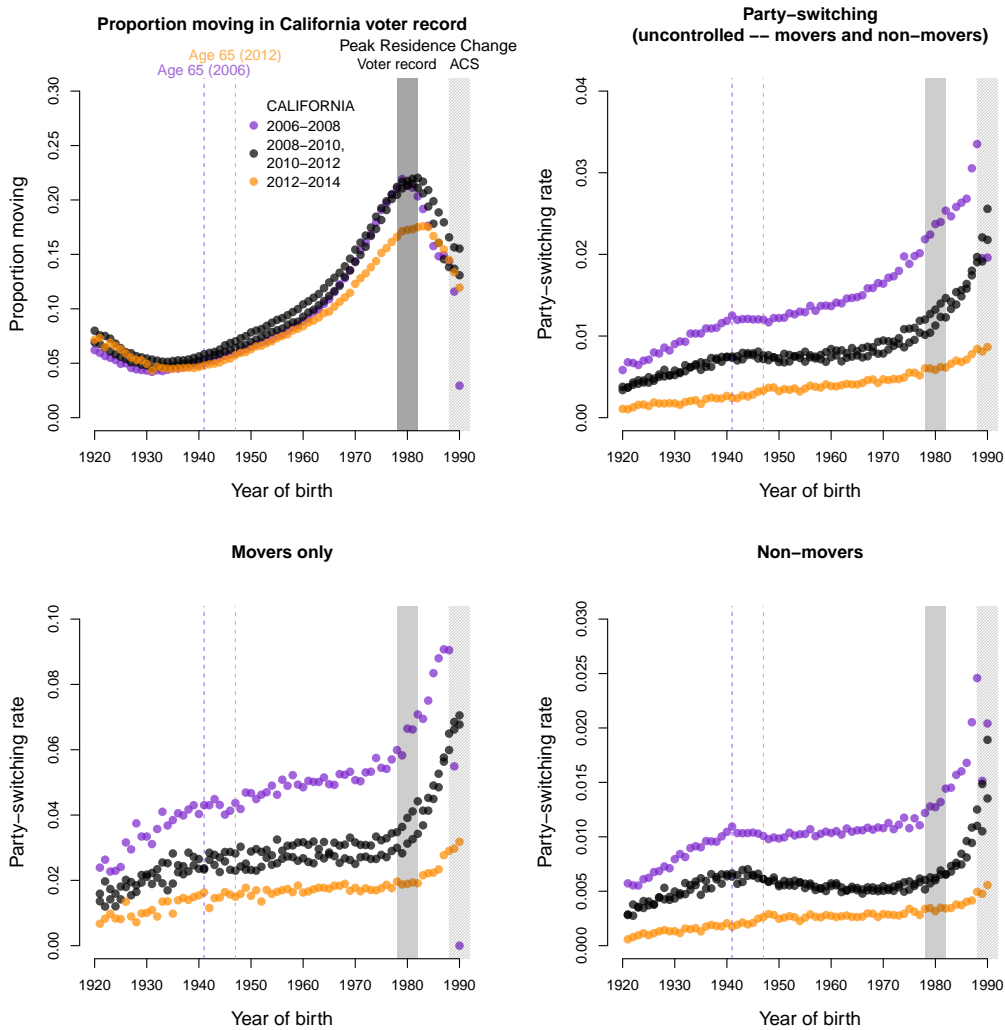
Supporting Information

Figure 7: *Residential mobility and party-switching.* This figure shows relationships between residential mobility and party-switching by age. Note that all y-axes are different. This is raw data and there are no controls for covariates such as separation from partner or roommate. Mobility rates in the United States, according to the Current Population Survey, increase up to the 20-24 age group and decline thereafter. The peak here is older than that, and the increase up to around age 30 is likely to simply represent the greater observability of residential mobility in this data. Because of this, the sudden flattening of party-switching is very likely related to an abiilty to observe an individual's residential moves (rather than their parents'), and is not evidence of an impressionable years effect ending precisely after age 30.

| | | Changed party | | |
	OLS	logistic	OLS	logistic
Moved			0.024	0.571
			(0.008)	(0.186)
			0.002	*0.003*
Age	−0.007	−0.209	−0.003	−0.115
(logged, scaled)	(0.004)	(0.088)	(0.004)	(0.093)
(median in age group for '56)	*0.037*	*0.018*	*0.397*	*0.221*
Interested in campaign	−0.009	−0.219	−0.010	−0.222
(scaled)	(0.004)	(0.091)	(0.004)	(0.092)
	0.011	*0.017*	*0.010*	*0.016*
Highest education	−0.015	−0.457	−0.015	−0.454
(scaled)	(0.004)	(0.111)	(0.004)	(0.111)
	< 0.001	*< 0.001*	*< 0.001*	*< 0.001*
Not Married	−0.003	−0.082	−0.006	−0.153
	(0.007)	(0.193)	(0.008)	(0.195)
	0.700	*0.672*	*0.420*	*0.433*
Partisan 'strength'	0.001	0.031	0.001	0.036
(scaled)	(0.004)	(0.101)	(0.004)	(0.102)
	0.731	*0.761*	*0.706*	*0.722*
Constant	0.049	−3.064	0.041	−3.281
(baseline change)	(0.004)	(0.104)	(0.005)	(0.132)
	< 0.001	*< 0.001*	*< 0.001*	*< 0.001*
Observations	3,414	3,414	3,414	3,414

Table 3: *Pooled ANES panel survey estimates, additional controls.* 'Changed party' is a partisan identification shift of four or more points on the 7 point partisan identification scale. In these models, no significant association between partisan strength and changing party means that respondents who in the first panel report strong partisan identification are not less likely to identify with or lean toward the other party four years later than respondents who lean toward a party are to strongly identify with the other party after four years. Partisan strength does predict a lower likelihood of a four point or more shift when excluding leaners in the first panel (scaled OLS coefficient: -0.01, p-value: 0.04); however, controlling for partisan strength does not affect age estimates (i.e. estimates with and without the residential mobility control). Partisan strength is a substantially better predictor of partisan abandonment and adoption than party-switching. The association between 'interested in campaign' and party-switching varies from panel to panel, and is driven by a strong negative association in the 1956-1960 and 1972-1976 panels.
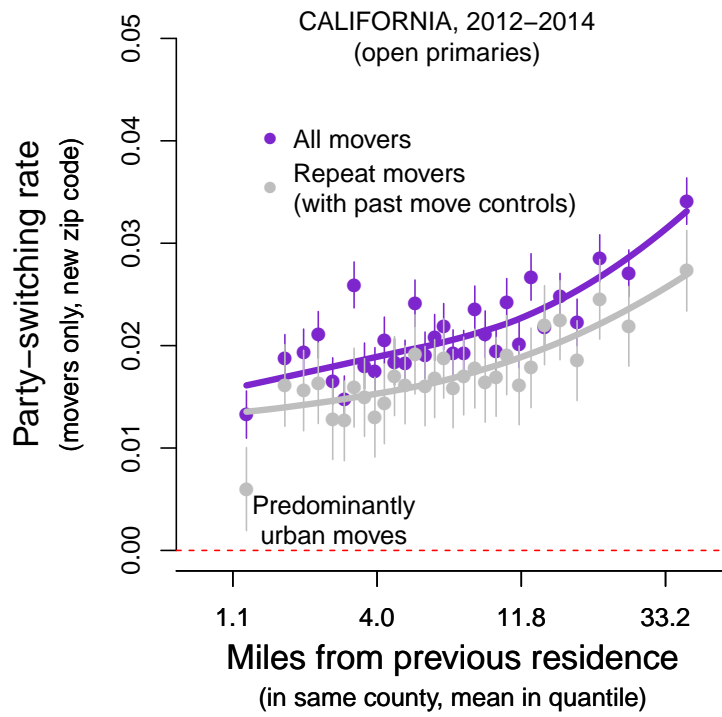
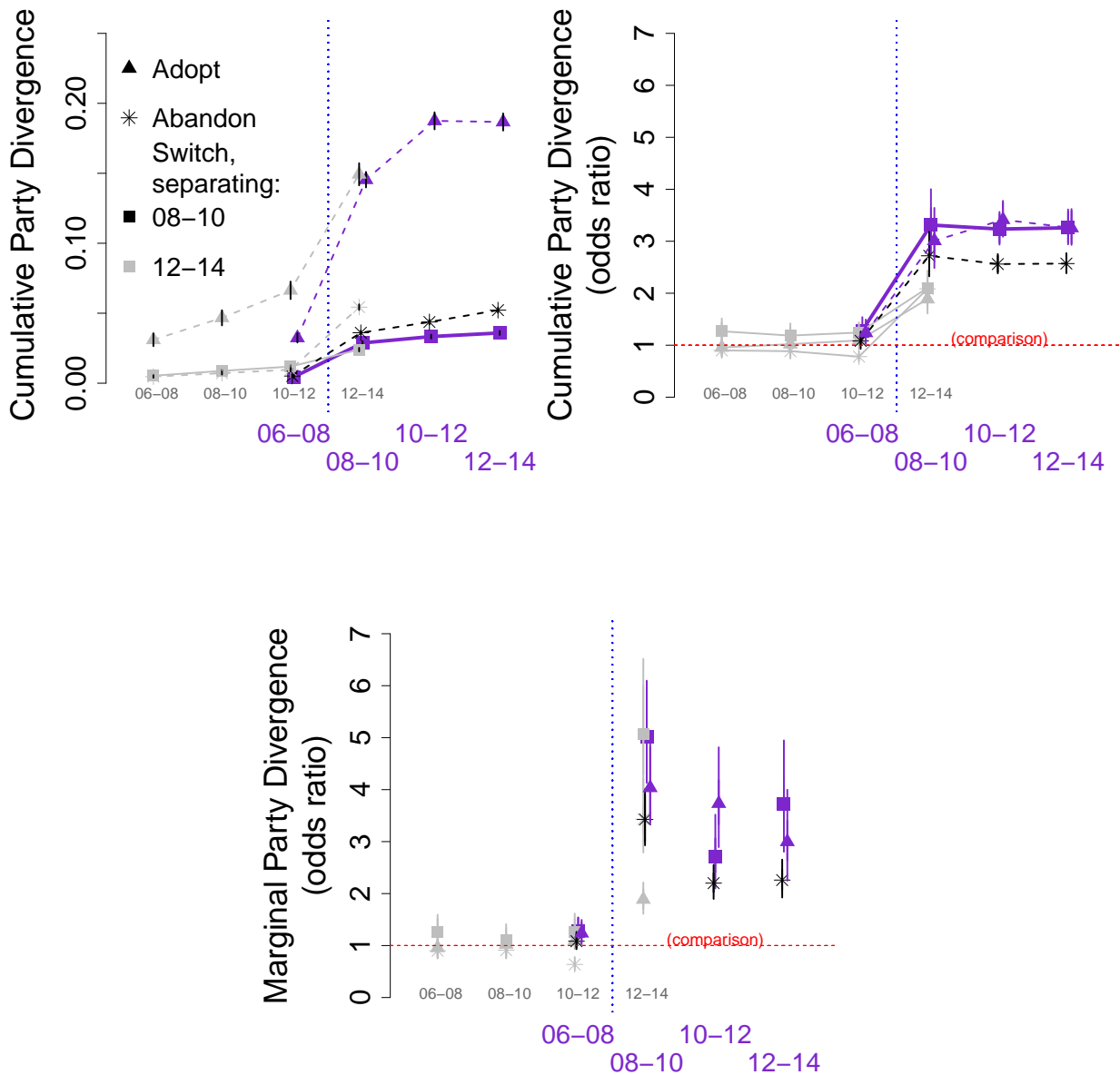Figure 8: *Figure 3 with point confidence intervals.*

Figure 9: *Absolute party change effects following partner/roommate separation.* The top-left figure shows the cumulative, absolute effects of separation on dropping or adopting a party, in addition to the party-switching estimates shown in Figure 5 in the main text. The absolute effects of separation on movements to and from independence are substantially larger than for party-switching. The top-right figure shows the same models for the cumulative, relative effects. While the absolute effects of movements to and from independence are larger than party-switching, the relative effects (for separators vs. non-separators) are comparable in size. All controls in these two sets of models (in the top row of figures) are at the first period (2006 for the purple estimates and 2012 for the gray estimates). The bottom figure shows the marginal, relative estimates for the effect of separation on party-switching and changes to and from independence. The controls in this model are biennial (e.g. spouses' party concordance in the period before the move).
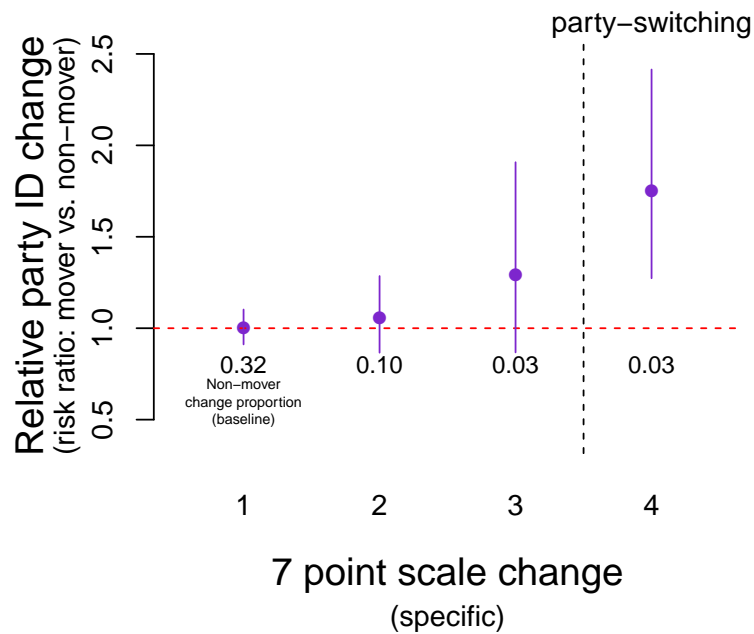
Figure 10: This figure shows the relative risk relationships between moving (compared to non-moving) and specific (instead of minimum) 7 point party identification scores changes in the ANES panel surveys. The effect of residential mobility on partisan identification change is limited to party-switching (and, in the ANES, does not appear to extend to changes to and from independence).