Linguistic Complexity and Public Acceptance of Supreme Court Decisions

Thomas G. Hansford
Associate Professor of Political Science
UC Merced
thansford@ucmerced.edu
http://faculty.ucmerced.edu/thansford/

Chelsea Coe
Ph.D. Student in Political Science
UC Merced
ccoe@ucmerced.edu

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Scholars suggest that judges have an incentive to use complex language to increase support for their decisions and decrease the likelihood of adverse responses from other actors. It is unknown, however, how people actually respond to complex legal language. Using a survey experiment, we manipulate the complexity of the language conveying two recent Court decisions, the institutional source of these decisions, and the presence of party cues. For one of these two decisions we find evidence that linguistic complexity decreases acceptance of the decision while legalistic language increases acceptance. We also find limited evidence that our language manipulations affect perceptions of whether the decision was political. Our results reveal that complex decision language does not, however, make party cues more relevant. The general take-away is that neither linguistic complexity nor legalistic language can consistently generate much in the way of support for a decision or otherwise change how people view it.
One of the hallmarks of law is its complexity. The decisions and legal opinions rendered by courts are no exception. There are many different ways in which a judicial opinion or body of case law can be complicated, though studies of judicial behavior typically conceptualize the complexity of a court case as a function of the number of legal issues or legal provisions at stake (e.g., Hansford and Spriggs 2006; Hettinger, Lindquist, and Martinek 2006; Westerland et al. 2010). The most proximate source of complexity, however, is the very language used by judges in their opinions.1

An emerging line of research quantifies the linguistic complexity of court opinions and then models the determinants of variation in opinion complexity (Nelson 2013; Owens, and Wedeking 2011; Owens, Wedeking, and Wohlfarth 2013). These studies contend that different institutional contexts motivate judges to manipulate the complexity of the language they use, though Posner (2008) implies that there is a relatively constant incentive to make judicial language complicated and opaque. It is not at all clear, however, how people actually respond to complex legal language. We seek to answer the following question – How does variation in the linguistic complexity of Supreme Court decisions, or at least their descriptions, affect both public acceptance of these decisions and how people perceive the determinants of these decisions?

Public responses to Supreme Court decisions are consequential, given the Court’s inability to directly implement its decisions and its reliance on other actors to do so. For this reason, numerous studies examine the factors that might influence how the public views Court decisions (e.g., Bass and Thomas 1984; Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2005; Hoekstra 1995; Mondak 1994; Nicholson and Hansford 2014; Salamone 2014). Much of this research examines how attributes of Court decisions influence acceptance (e.g., Zink, Spriggs, and Scott 2009), but

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1 On average, judicial opinions are approximately as difficult to read as political science articles (Cann, Goelzhauser, and Johnson 2014).
has not yet considered the possibility that the complexity of the language used to convey a decision might be a particularly important attribute.

Independent of the acceptance of a decision, public perceptions of how the Court reaches a decision are also viewed as important since they may in turn drive diffuse support for the Court as an institution (Baird 2001; Ramirez 2008) and beliefs about how justices ought to be selected (Bartels and Johnson N.d.). Again, decision characteristics should play a role in determining whether people perceive a decision as resulting from legal considerations or from the justices’ policy preferences, and the complexity of a decision may be a key characteristic. Indeed, Posner (2008) implies that opinion complexity is intended to increase perceptions of legality and decrease perceptions of political decision making.

We examine whether linguistic complexity serves as a cue for people evaluating a Court decision. Complex language usually leads to negative evaluations, implying a generic distaste for it (e.g., Brochet, Naranjo, and Yu 2012). Yet with court decisions, complex language is expected and may operate similarly to positive judicial symbols (see Gibson, Lodge, and Woodson 2014). It reminds the public of the legal expertise of judges. At the same time, however, linguistic complexity may also amplify the importance of other basic cues, such as the partisan leanings of the justices in the majority (see Nicholson and Hansford 2014). We thus expect linguistic complexity to increase acceptance of a decision but also increase the effect of party cues on acceptance. We also hypothesize that linguistic complexity will decrease the extent to which a decision is perceived as political.

We employ a survey experiment to test our hypotheses with a national sample obtained through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. In this experiment, we manipulate the complexity of the language conveying two recent Court decisions, the institutional source of these decisions, and

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2 Opinion content might also directly affect diffuse support (Faganis 2012).
the presence of party cues. For one of the two decisions we consider, we find evidence that linguistic complexity decreases acceptance of the decision while legalistic language increases acceptance. We also find limited evidence that our language manipulations affect perceptions of whether the decision was political. Our results reveal that complex decision language does not, however, make party cues more relevant. The general take-away is that neither linguistic complexity nor legalistic language can consistently generate much in the way of support for a decision or otherwise change how people view it.

Complexity in Legal Language

It is cognitively taxing to read text consisting of complex language. Generally speaking, linguistic complexity can lead to negative assessments of both the content and the communicator. Complex language reduces processing fluency for the reader, which then can make the reader less likely to believe or trust the content (Unkelbach 2007). There are several known practical consequences of this negative relationship between complex language and evaluations of this language or the source of the language. For example, linguistic complexity leads to negative responses from investors (e.g., Brochet, Naranjo, and Yu 2012; Rennekamp 2012) and adverse outcomes in healthcare (e.g., Friedman and Goetz 2007; Taylor and Bramley 2012).

While simplicity is expected and favored in most situations, perceptions and consequences of linguistic complexity can be context-dependent. This is in part due to a reader’s processing fluency adjusting based on expectations of complexity. For example, an experiment conducted by Galak and Nelson (2010) demonstrates that while clearly written books may be easier to read, when complexity is expected (e.g. textbooks) these texts can be less persuasive due to their simplicity.

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3 Processing fluency refers to the ease with which information is processed. While there are different types of information that can be processed (e.g. perceptual, memory-based), in our context processing fluency is the ease by which the text is read and processed.
The language of the law is, in comparison to many other types of text, quite complex. Judicial opinions can be notoriously impenetrable to those without specialized training, as was vividly illustrated by reporters’ efforts to quickly decipher the Supreme Court’s decision in *Bush v. Gore* (2000). Solan (1993) contends that the language of judicial opinions inevitably suffers from three largely unavoidable forces: the need to speak authoritatively, the requirement that decisions appear neutral and grounded in the law, and a desire to make language as precise as possible. Other scholars offer a more strategic view of the complexity of judicial language. Posner (2008, 3), for instance, suggests that judges cultivate “professional mystification” in an effort to convince others that “they use esoteric materials and techniques to build an edifice of doctrines unmarred by willfulness, politics, or ignorance.” Owens, Wedeking, and Wohlfarth (2013) point out that the justices have an incentive to use complex language in their opinions when they seek to avoid a negative response from Congress.5

Interestingly, these strategic explanations for relatively high levels of linguistic complexity in judicial opinions imply that the consequences of complexity for this particular type of text are positive in nature, at least from the perspective of judges. In other words, these explanations assume that judicial decisions and opinions represent the type of context in which linguistic complexity can lead to favorable evaluations, or at least diffuse the possibility of negative evaluations.

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4 We refer here to the linguistic complexity of the law and judicial opinions, not linguistic certainty (see Corley and Wedeking 2014) or doctrinal coherence.

5 Corley and Wedeking (2014), however, find that lower court judges appear to prefer Supreme Court decisions with language expressing certainty. It should be noted, though, that certainty and complexity are not necessarily related attributes, either conceptually or in terms of how they have been measured.
Cues, Complex Language, and Evaluations of Court Decisions

How do people evaluate Court decisions? People generally have little information about the policies established by governmental actors, and decisions made by the Supreme Court are no exception. Given the lack of detailed information about governmental policies, people tend to use heuristics, i.e., information shortcuts, to make judgments about such policies. Cues are the bits of information required for the operation of a heuristic and scholars find that the public often relies on credible source cues when making political judgments (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). That is, when evaluating a policy the public often considers the identity of the source of the policy.

Some argue that the Supreme Court operates as a particularly strong, positive source cue, meaning that decisions attributed to the Supreme Court will be evaluated more favorably than decisions attributed to other sources. For many, the U.S. Supreme Court’s image is that of a relatively legalistic and nonpartisan institution. The justices emphasize the legal aspects of their decision making and media coverage of the Court also largely focuses on legal factors and procedural fairness (Gibson, Caldeira and Spence 2003). Perhaps as a result, the public generally perceives the Court’s decision making processes to be driven by legal considerations (Baird 2001; Scheb and Lyons 2000) and procedural fairness (Gibson 1989; Mondak 1993). Both survey (Hanley, Salamone, and Wright 2012; Stoutenborough, Haider-Markel, and Allen 2006) and experimental data (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2005; Hoekstra 1995; Mondak 1994) provide evidence that decisions attributed to the Court enjoy greater support than they otherwise would, though other studies find little in the way of a Court-specific positive source cue effect (Bass and Thomas 1984; Franklin and Kosaki 1989; Nicholson and Hansford 2014).
As noted above, there are indications that judges might intentionally use difficult or complicated language in their opinions in order to generate additional support for a decision, or perhaps head off any meaningful opposition. More generally, it is believed that public acceptance of Court decisions increases when the Court claims to base these decisions on legal considerations (e.g., Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2005; Zink, Spriggs, and Scott 2009) or when the content of a decision is paired with judicial symbols (Gibson, Lodge, and Woodson 2014). Complicated, legalistic language may serve as a cue for legalism, at least when a court is the source of the language. That is, just as the Supreme Court and political parties can serve as source cues that shape public responses to policy decisions, the complexity of the language used to express the decision may serve as a positive cue that increases support for the decision.

It is important to remember, though, that linguistic complexity generally leads to negative evaluations of the content of the language. Complex language is only viewed favorably in the right type of context. Supreme Court decision making is exactly the type of context in which complex language is expected and can serve as a cue that leads to more positive assessments of a decision. Thus, the first two hypotheses we seek to test are:

*H1: Complex decision language will increase acceptance of a decision attributed to the Supreme Court.*

*H2: Complex decision language will decrease acceptance of a decision attributed elsewhere.*

Scholars generally argue that the Supreme Court’s legal image, or least less-than-fully-political image, leads to the possibility that a decision attributed to the Court will be more accepted than a decision attributed to any other policy making institution. The potential for a positive source cue effect owing to the Court’s legalistic image should not be overstated, though, as the public often views the Court in political or even partisan terms. As Bybee (2010, 4) puts
it, the public holds a “half-politics-half-law” understanding of courts. In fact, a pair of recent studies suggests that when the justices behind a decision are identified as Democratic or Republican appointees people use this information to evaluate both specific decisions (Nicholson and Hansford 2014) and the Court itself (Clark and Kastellec 2013). If a decision is attributed to Democratic appointees, for example, then Democrats are more likely to accept the decision while Republicans are more likely to challenge the decision. In other words, while it is possible that the Court acts as a positive source cue, party cues can work in the context of the Court just as they work in American politics generally (Arceneaux 2008; Kam 2005; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Rahn 1993).

As with any type of cue, party cues will be particularly informative when it is difficult to otherwise evaluate a policy. Variation in the complexity of the language communicating a policy decision should directly affect how easy it is to evaluate the policy, and it could thus be the case that increases in complexity, while they may increase overall acceptance of a decision, will also cause people to rely more heavily on party cues if they are present. Party cues should increase the degree to which Democrats and Republicans differ in their acceptance of a decision, and this cue-induced polarization should be greatest when the decision is conveyed with complex language. Here there is no reason to expect that the Court is particularly unique, and we thus forward the following hypothesis without reference to institutional source. Our experimental design, however, will allow for the possibility that this type of complexity effect will vary by whether the Court is the attributed source of the decision.

H3: Complex decision language will increase the effect of party cues on the acceptance of decisions.
In addition to influencing the acceptance of decisions, the complexity of the language conveying a Court decision should affect perceptions of how the decision was made. People expect the Court to be legalistic (Scheb and Lyons 2001) though their perceptions of “procedural fairness” at the Court can be somewhat malleable. For example, Baird and Gangl (2006) find that if media coverage of a Court decision emphasizes the political dimension, then people report diminished perceptions of procedural fairness. These perceptions have important implications. For example, Bartels and Johnson (N.d.) find that perceptions of politicized Court predict support for a politicized judicial appointment process. Baird (2001) and Ramirez (2008) find that perceptions of politicization affect diffuse support for courts, and Nicholson and Howard (2003) find that political or partisan frames decrease specific support for the current Court.

To the extent that people are of “two minds” about the Court (Bybee 2010) and that complex language signals legalism, decisions described with complicated language should bring the legal image of the Court to the forefront and cause people to perceive the decision in legal terms, as opposed to political.

H4: Complex decision language should decrease perceptions that a Court decision is political.

Note that H3 and H4 thus present what may initially appear paradoxical – linguistic complexity may simultaneously increase the use of party cues and cause people to view the decision as less political. However, these are not competing hypotheses. It is entirely possible for complex language to increase the reliance on party cues while also leading people to perceive the decisions as more a function of law than politics.

Experimental Design

To test the direct and conditioning effects of complex decision language on evaluations of Court decisions, we conducted an online survey experiment in July 2014. Each of our
subjects was asked to evaluate two Supreme Court decisions: *Graham v. Florida* (2010) and *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010). *Graham* held that juveniles cannot be sentenced to life without parole for any crime other than murder while in *Citizens United* the Court ruled that independent campaign expenditures cannot be limited. There are several reasons we choose to use these two decisions. While both can be viewed as ideological and decided by clear partisan majorities (*Graham* is liberal, primarily decided by Democratic appointees; *Citizens United* is conservative, decided by Republican appointees), these decisions involve issue areas that are not as immediately polarizing as others, such as abortion or prayer in school. Thus, there should be some potential for cueing effects.

Our sample consists of 1,616 subjects recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. While not representative of the American public in the same way as a national probability sample, Mechanical Turk samples are superior to typical convenience samples and are increasingly being used for social science research (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). Each subject was first randomly assigned to receive a description of either the *Graham* decision or *Citizens United* decision, though they were not informed of the names of these decisions or, for half the subjects, even the fact that these are Court decisions. Then, each subject was randomly assigned to one of 16 experimental conditions, resulting from a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ design. All of the manipulations involve the text of the description of the decision in question.

The first two factors involve our manipulation of the complexity of the language in the

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6 1,630 subjects completed the survey, but we do not include the responses of 14 of our subjects due to the speed with which they completed the survey (less than five minutes). Each subject who completed the survey was paid $1.00. Each subject could earn an extra $1.00 for correctly answering two factual questions about the Court decisions. All subjects are U.S. residents.

7 Our sample skews somewhat young and Democratic, but there is meaningful variation in all of the demographic and political variables we recorded. For example, 25% of the sample are 40 years old or older, 24% identify as Republican (as compared to the 59% identifying as Democrats), 45% are women, 22% are non-white, and 49% do not have a college degree.
description of the policy decision (i.e. Court decision). As discussed in more detail below, we seek to separate pure linguistic complexity from legalistic language. Thus, the first factor manipulates whether the subject receives the linguistically complex description of the decision. The second factor involves whether the subject receives a description of the decision that contains legalistic language (which we will refer to as “legalese” from this point forward). The third factor consists of manipulating the source of the decision. Subjects are either told that the “Supreme Court” or “Government officials” made the decision in question. The fourth factor varies whether the partisanship of those who made the decision is revealed (Democrats for Graham, Republicans for Citizens).

For example, a subject might be given a linguistically simple and legalese-free description of the Graham decision in which the decision is attributed to “Democratic appointees on the Supreme Court.” Or, a subject might be given a linguistically simple but legalese-containing description of the Citizens United decision in which the decision is attributed to “Government officials,” and so on. Importantly, the fundamental content of the description of a given decision remains consistent across manipulations. Table 1 presents the manipulated sources of the two decisions in our experiment, while below we discuss the nature of the linguistic and legalese manipulations.

*** Table 1 Here ***

After reading the manipulated description of the decision, each subject is then asked a series of questions about the decision. Subjects are then presented with the second decision, again being assigned randomly to one of 16 possible permutations of the text describing the decision. If a subject received the Graham decision first then the second decision they receive is Citizens United, and vice-versa. After answering a series of questions about the second decision,
the survey concludes with a block of questions assessing the subject’s partisanship and other potentially relevant attitudinal variables.

To ensure that the subjects actually read the descriptions of each of the policy decisions, each block of post-decision questions included a relatively basic, factual question about the decision. If the subject correctly answered the question, s/he received an extra $0.50 payment, allowing for the possibility of earning a total of an extra $1.00. Subjects were informed of this “bonus” opportunity at the very beginning of the survey. As noted below, manipulation checks clearly suggest that subjects received the “treatments” to which they had been assigned.

**Manipulating Complexity**

We are interested in examining the effect of variation in the complexity of decision language on reactions to the decision. The judicial context, however, introduces a potential complication. We want to assess whether complex language acts as a cue for legalism, but there may be an important distinction between language that is complex and language that is legalistic. To probe this issue, we manipulate decision language in two ways. We manipulate the linguistic complexity of the language and we manipulate the extent to which the language contains legal jargon or terminology. This allows us to isolate whether it is linguistic complexity, per se, that affects responses to decisions or whether it is legalistic language that drives any relationship.

How do we manipulate the linguistic complexity of the text describing the decision? We are guided by the relevant cognitive linguistics literature, which indicates that both word length and sentence length contribute to the complexity of a text. The length of a word corresponds with its information content, lack of predictability, and thus complexity (Piantadosi, Tilly, and Gibson 2011). The results of eye-tracking studies imply that longer words impose a greater cognitive cost (e.g., McDonald 2006). Researchers also find that processing fluency decreases as
sentences lengthen (Jaeger 2010). In line with these results, commonly employed readability measures use word length and sentence length to determine how easy or difficult it is to read a given selection of text. To both guide and measure the complexity of the decision text we present to our subjects, we employ the Coleman-Liau Index (CLI), which has been used to measure the complexity of Supreme Court decisions (Owens, Wedeking and Wohlfarth 2013). The higher the CLI value, the more complex the text is.

Our starting point for the text that presents and explains one of our Court decisions is the official syllabus for the decision, which gives a relatively detailed summary of the decision. We trim this text down, while preserving the original language as much as possible. For both decisions, we add two sentences to the beginning which summarize the overall nature of the decision and allow for our manipulations regarding the source of the decision. The rest of the text describing and explaining the decision uses the text of the syllabus.

To achieve the combination of conditions in which the text is both linguistically complex and contains legalese, we simply leave the original text of the syllabus for the decision largely unaltered, as it is very complex and loaded with legalistic words. The CLI for this text for both *Graham* and *Citizens United* ranges from 17.1 to 17.5, which reveals that the text is quite complex. To make these texts linguistically complex but not full of legalese (another combination of conditions that a subject could receive), we simply take the same text from the above condition but remove particularly legalistic language and use less legalistic (though still wordy) synonyms instead. In doing so, we are very mindful not to change the fundamental information content of the text.

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8 The formula for the Coleman-Liau Readability Index (CLI) is:

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\text{CLI} = 5.88 \left(\frac{\text{number of letters}}{\text{number of words}}\right) - 29.9 \left(\frac{\text{number of sentences}}{\text{number of words}}\right) - 15.8
\]
To construct the linguistically simple (relatively speaking) text about a decision, we start with the text used for the linguistically complex conditions and then, where possible without damaging the information content, replace lengthy words with shorter synonyms and parse lengthy sentences into multiple shorter sentences. The legalese manipulation is achieved with these simpler texts in the same manner as described above. The CLI scores for linguistically simple and legalese-free decision descriptions range from 12.1 to 13.1, revealing that these descriptions are substantially more readable than the linguistically complicated descriptions with legalese. Note that the length of the decision texts (measured by number of characters) remains similar across all manipulations.9

Table 2 presents examples of how we manipulate linguistic complexity and legalese for the *Citizens United* decision. Note that the linguistically complicated excerpts (Linguistic Complexity = 1) consist of 25 to 27 words per sentence and use words that average six to seven characters in length. The sentences in the simpler excerpts (Linguistic Complexity = 0) consist of an average of 12 words and these words have an average length of five characters. The excerpts from the legalese conditions (Legalese = 1) include legalistic terminology such as “strict scrutiny,” “compelling interest,” and “precedent.” They also specifically refer to the precedent of *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*. The excerpts from the less legalistic treatment conditions (Legalese = 0) omits these terms. Appendices A and B present the full text of these and other versions of the manipulated descriptions of the *Graham* and *Citizens United* decisions.

*** Table 2 Here ***

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9 The mean number of characters for the 16 variations of the *Graham* and *Citizens United* decision descriptions are 1,752 (with a range of 1,707 to 1,822) and 1,707 (with a range of 1,607 to 1,774), respectively.
Dependent Variables

Our hypotheses lead to two dependent variables, the first of which is the extent to which a subject accepts the decision. To measure acceptance, we use the standard acceptance question; “Do you accept the decision? That is, do you think that the decision ought to be accepted and considered to be the final word on the matter or that there ought to be an effort to challenge the decision and get it changed?” (see Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2005). Responses to this question fall on a four-point scale ranging from “strongly not accept” to “strongly accept.”

The second dependent variable is the degree to which the subject perceives the decision to be a function of political considerations, as opposed to legal. We asked subjects whether they agree or disagree (on a five-point scale) with three statements about the decision. The first statement is that the decision was based on the law and the Constitution while the second and third asserts that the decision was based on political views and partisanship, respectively (see Gibson and Caldeira 2011). We then use factor analysis to collapse these three responses to a single measure tapping the subject’s perception that the decision was motivated by political considerations.10

Results

Before testing our hypotheses, it is first important to assess whether the language manipulations “worked” in the sense that the subjects perceive the complexity of the language. After reading a decision, each subject was asked how difficult or easy it was to read the decision (on a five-point scale). Subjects receiving the linguistically complex decisions with legalese rated the decisions significantly more difficult to read than those receiving the simpler language.

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10 It is clear that these questions load on a single factor (with an Eigenvalue of 1.27). Agreement with the statement that the decision was based on the law loads negatively on the factor while agreement with the statements regarding the role of political views and partisanship load positively on the factor. This is an interesting result, as it implies that legal influences and political influences are viewed as fundamentally incompatible.
without legalese. Subjects were also asked whether the decision was simple or complicated (on a five-point scale) and again the subjects assigned to the complex version of the decision rated it to be more complicated. We also asked factual questions about the decisions in order to assess the subjects’ comprehension of what they had read and find that complexity decreases the number of correctly answered questions.\textsuperscript{11} In sum, subjects assigned to the combination of linguistic complexity with legalese clearly received the treatment as revealed by both subjective and objective indicators. Table 3 provides the formal results of these manipulation checks.\textsuperscript{12}

*** Table 3 Here ***

Acceptance

The first hypotheses we seek to test are that complex decision language will increase acceptance of decisions attributed to the Supreme Court and decrease acceptance of decisions attributed elsewhere (i.e., “government officials”). Before parsing out the different effects of the two components of complex language in our context, linguistic complexity and legalese, we first examine the difference in acceptance for language with maximum complexity as compared to minimum complexity. Complexity equals one if the subject received both the Linguistic

\textsuperscript{11} We also test the separate effects of Linguistic Complexity and Legalese by estimating regression models in which the perceptions of how hard the decision was to read, how complicated was the decision, and the number of correctly answered factual questions are the dependent variables. In all three models, Linguistic Complexity exerts the expected effect and is statistically significant. The coefficient for Legalese is in the same direction as that for Linguistic Complexity in all three models, but is only significant in the first two. Moreover, the estimate for Legalese is significantly smaller in all three models. Thus, Linguistic Complexity leads to stronger perceptions of complexity than Legalese does.

\textsuperscript{12} The other experimental manipulation that could be questioned is the source of the decision. It is possible that subjects assigned to the “government officials” treatment were thinking that the Supreme Court was the actual source of the decision. To test this possibility, we asked subjects assigned to this condition what type of governmental official probably made the decision. We provide five options to choose from, including “Supreme Court justices” and the option of selecting “Cannot make an educated guess.” For both Graham and Citizens, fewer than half the subjects selected “Supreme Court justices,” suggesting that most subjects had other types of policymakers in mind when assessing the policy decision under the “government officials” condition. Our null results for the Supreme Court condition persist if we exclude observations for which the subject was assigned the “government officials condition” but reported that s/he believed the Court made the decision.
Complexity and Legalese treatments. Complexity equals zero if the subject received neither of these treatments. Subjects given a mix of the two are excluded from this first analysis.

We then estimate a regression model in which acceptance of the decision is the dependent variable. Complexity is included as a constituent term and is also interacted with Supreme Court, which equals one if the subject is informed that the Court is the source of the decision. Hypotheses 1 and 2 imply that the estimates for Complexity and Complexity × Supreme Court should be negative and positive, respectively. We also include Party Cue (equals one if party cue is present) and the subject’s Party ID in these models.\(^\text{13}\) The results for both the juvenile sentencing (\textit{Graham}) and campaign finance (\textit{Citizens United}) decisions are reported in Table 4.

*** Table 4 Here ***

These results provide no support for the claim that the complexity of the language used to relay a decision will affect the degree to which someone accepts the decision. Neither the estimate for Complexity nor its interaction term are statistically significant in either model, through the majority of them are in the expected direction. In contrast, the partisanship of the subject influences their acceptance of these two decisions. Republicans are less accepting of the decision prohibiting life without parole sentences for juveniles convicted for crimes other than murder and are more accepting of the striking down of restrictions on independent campaign expenditures. The opposite pattern holds for Democrats. The attribution of the decisions to the Supreme Court has no effect on the acceptance of these decisions, which is consistent with the findings of Nicholson and Hansford (2014).

This first pair of models suggests that the language used to present and justify a decision has no effect on how people respond to the decision. It is possible, though, that linguistic

\(^\text{13}\) Party ID is measured on the traditional seven-point scale centered on zero with higher values indicating a Republican subject.
complexity and legalistic language have different effects on these responses. It may be the case that linguistic complexity exerts its usual negative effect on evaluations of text while legalistic language signals legalism and thus increases acceptance. To examine these possibilities, we estimate a model of acceptance in which the Linguistic Complexity and Legalese treatments are included as separate explanatory variables. In doing so, we now also include the subjects who received a mix of these conditions (e.g., a linguistically-complex but legalese-free version of the decision language). Table 5 presents the results of these models for our two decisions.

*** Table 5 Here***

The estimates for Linguistic Complexity and Legalese in the juvenile sentencing model conform to the logic outlined above. Subjects are less accepting of decisions that are portrayed with complex language, but are more accepting when the text in question contains legalistic language. Neither of these effects are conditioned by the institutional source of the decision, meaning, for example, that Legalese increases acceptance regardless of whether the decision is attributed to the Court. For the campaign finance decision, the estimates for Linguistic Complexity and Legalese are not statistically significant. Why the difference between the two decisions? The effect of Party ID is more than three times larger in the campaign finance model, which may imply that our subjects have a more hardened position in the area of campaign finance and are less influenced by secondary considerations such as the complexity of the language accompanying the presentation of a decision.

In sum, there is little evidence on behalf of our first two hypotheses. Legalistic language and complicated language have diverging effects for one of the two decisions in our experiment, but these effects are not attached to the Supreme Court being the source. Our third hypothesis is that complexity will make party cues particularly important in evaluations of policy decisions.
We test this expectation by estimating separate models for Democratic and Republican subjects while including two interaction terms: Linguistic Complexity × Party Cue and Legalese × Party Cue. For Democrats evaluating the juvenile sentencing decision, the estimate for Party Cue should be positive, as should the estimates for the interaction terms. This would indicate that the Party Cue (which is Democratic in this case) increases acceptance by Democrats and that this effect is larger in the face of complex or legalistic depictions of the decision. The opposite pattern of results would be expected for Republican subjects. For the campaign finance decision, Republican subjects should have positive estimates for Party Cue (which is Republican for this decision) and its interactions. Democrats should have negative estimates. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 6.

*** Table 6 Here ***

These results send a clear message – party cues are not influencing evaluations of these decisions, regardless of whether subjects were assigned to one of the complex decision language conditions. In fact, with the partisanship of the subjects already taken into account by the splitting of the data, these models do a very poor job of explaining acceptance of these two decisions. In contrast, Nicholson and Hansford (2014) find that party cues amplify the effect of partisan identification on evaluations of these particular Court decisions. Why the different results here? It may be the case that, at least for the Citizens United decision, people’s attitudes towards campaign finance in particular have polarized and hardened over the past few years, making party cues less necessary or useful. Alternatively, it is possible that the substantially

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14 We exclude independents from this set of analyses, as party cues are not expected to “work” with this subset of our subjects.
lengthier descriptions of the decisions employed here distract from the party cue, rather than cause the subject to rely more heavily on it.15

**Perceptions of Politicization**

The final hypothesis we test is that complex decision language should lead people to perceive that decisions are less political in nature. As described above, the dependent variable for this analysis is a factor score based on responses to three questions regarding the degree to which law or political considerations influenced the decision. Larger values of this dependent variable correspond with perceptions that the decision is political, not legal. Again, we include Linguistic Complexity and Legalese as our main independent variables of interest and interact these two variables with Supreme Court. Table 7 displays the results for these models.

*** Table 7 Here ***

The estimates for Linguistic Complexity are positive in both models, and significant for the campaign finance decision. The estimates for Legalese are negative in both models, and close to significant for the juvenile sentencing decision (p = .08, two-tailed test). None of the estimates for the interaction terms are significant. This pattern of results suggests that linguistically complex depictions of decisions may actually increase perceptions of politicized decision making. Legalistic language, however, could cause people to perceive decisions as being less about politics and more about law. These effects are not conditioned by whether the Court is identified as the source of the decisions. The attribution of a decision to the Court does have a “main effect,” however, for the juvenile sentencing decision. If the Court is identified as the source of the decision, a subject views the decision as less political.

15 Nicholson and Hansford (2014) use single sentence descriptions of Court decisions in their survey experiment. We should note, though, that in our longer descriptions of the decisions the party cues are inserted twice to ensure that they are noticed by the subject.
The presence of a party cue increases perceptions that the decision was political and the partisanship of the subject influences perceptions of whether *Citizens United* is a decision based on law or politics. Republican subjects lean towards the former while Democrats lean towards the latter. The presence of a party cue does not significantly amplify this partisan response, though.

**Conclusion**

Through the use of a survey experiment, we examine the idea that judges can use complex language to induce acceptance of their decisions and influence perceptions regarding the foundations of these decisions. Taken together, our results suggest that linguistic complexity, if anything, may actually lead to negative evaluations of Court decisions. The evidence on this point is mixed, but some of our analyses show that complex language decreases acceptance of decisions and actually increases perceptions of politicization. Importantly, complexity has these effects even though the fundamental policy content remains the same. Though linguistic complexity is typically associated with negative evaluations (Brochet, Naranjo, and Yu 2012; Friedman and Goetz 2007; Rennekamp 2012; Taylor and Bramley 2012), there is some evidence that context matters and that complexity can lead to favorable evaluations when complexity is expected (Galak and Nelson 2010). Our results reveal that Court decisions are apparently not one of the contexts in which this form of complexity leads to positive responses. In this sense, the mass public may respond to Supreme Court decisions in the same way that lower court judges do. Uncertainty or complexity originating from the language of an opinion may devalue the content of the opinion (see Corley and Wedeking 2014).

On the other hand, the use of legalistic language does increase acceptance of one of the decisions we study and, if anything, is negatively associated with perceptions of political
decision making. Thus, if judges, or others who portray court decisions, want to maximize acceptance of decisions and perceptions that decisions are legalistic, then they should freely use legalese while keeping the text otherwise simple. In other words, legalistic language may signal legalism or serve as reminder of the unique positions or attributes of courts, but complex language does not. There is no profit to just making decision language more complicated, a point further emphasized by the possibility that decision complexity may undercut the assistance of the public in deterring noncompliance with a court decision (Carrubba and Zorn 2010; Vanberg 2005).
References


Appendix A: Selected Descriptions of Graham Decision from Survey Experiment

Below we present four of the 16 versions of the Graham decision that our subjects received. For simplicity, all four of these include the Supreme Court treatment and do not include the Party Cue treatment.

Legal Complexity =1, Legalese = 1

“The Supreme Court recently decided that the Eighth Amendment’s Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause does not permit juvenile offenders to be sentenced to life in prison without parole for nonhomicide crimes.

In reaching this decision, the justices argued that embodied in the cruel and unusual punishments ban is the idea that punishment for crime should be graduated and proportioned to the offense. Under the proportionality standard, the first consideration is whether objective indicia of society’s standards, as expressed in legislative enactments and state practice indicate a national consensus against the sentencing practice at issue. It appears that only 12 jurisdictions nationwide in fact impose life without parole sentences on juvenile nonhomicide offenders, while 26 States and the District of Columbia do not impose them despite apparent statutory authorization. The fact that many jurisdictions do not expressly prohibit the sentencing practice at issue is not dispositive because it does not necessarily follow that the legislatures in those jurisdictions have deliberately concluded that such sentences would be appropriate.

Second, looking to the standards elaborated by controlling precedents and the understanding and interpretation of the Eighth Amendment’s text, history, meaning, and purpose, it is apparent that the punishment in question violates the Constitution. The inadequacy of penological theory to justify life without parole sentences for juvenile nonhomicide offenders, the limited culpability of such offenders, and the severity of these sentences all lead to the conclusion that the sentencing practice at issue is cruel and unusual. None of the legitimate goals of penal sanctions—retribution, deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation—is adequate to justify life without parole for juvenile nonhomicide offenders. Because age 18 is the point where society draws the line for many purposes between childhood and adulthood it is the age below which a defendant may not be sentenced to life without parole for a nonhomicide crime.”
Appendix A: Selected Descriptions of *Graham* Decision from Survey Experiment, Contd.

Legal Complexity =1, Legalese = 0

“The Supreme Court recently decided that the Constitution’s prohibition of cruel and unusual punishments does not permit juveniles to be sentenced to life in prison without parole for crimes other than murder.

In reaching this decision, the justices argued that embodied in the cruel and unusual punishments ban is the idea that punishment for crime should be graduated and proportioned to the offense. Under this theory, the first consideration is whether objective indicia of society’s standards, as expressed in state legislation and practice indicate a national consensus against the sentencing practice at issue. It appears that only 12 States nationwide in fact impose life without parole sentences on juvenile offenders convicted of something other than murder, while 26 States and the District of Columbia do not impose them even though they are legally allowed to do so. The fact that many States do not expressly prohibit the sentencing practice at issue is not important because it does not necessarily follow that the legislatures in those States have deliberately concluded that such punishment would be appropriate.

Second, looking to the guidelines elaborated by prior decisions and the understanding and interpretation of the Eighth Amendment’s text, history, meaning, and purpose, it is apparent that the punishment in question violates the Constitution. The inadequacy of theory to justify life without parole for juvenile offenders, the limited responsibility of juveniles, and the severity of these sentences all lead to the conclusion that the sentencing practice at issue is cruel and unusual. None of the legitimate goals of punishment—retribution, deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation—is adequate to justify life without parole for juveniles who have not committed murder. Because age 18 is the point where society draws the line for many purposes between childhood and adulthood it is the age below which someone may not be sentenced to life without parole for a crime other than murder.”
“The Supreme Court recently decided that juvenile offenders cannot to be sentenced to life in prison without parole for nonhomicide crimes. This decision is based on the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

In making this decision, the justices argued that the ban on cruel and unusual punishment means that the punishment should fit the crime. Under the proportionality standard, the first thing to think about is whether this type of prison sentence meets society’s standards. This means looking at the legislative enactments of the States to see who allows this type of punishment. It turns out that only 12 jurisdictions use life without parole sentences for juvenile nonhomicide offenders. 26 States and the District of Columbia do not use these sentences even though they have statutory authorization to do so. The fact that many jurisdictions do not clearly prohibit these sentences is not dispositive. After all, it is not clear that the legislatures in these jurisdictions believe that this type of punishment is a good idea.

Second, it is important to look at the standards found in relevant precedents as well as the history and purpose of the Eighth Amendment. This will help reveal the meaning of this Amendment. It is clear that sentencing juveniles to life without parole for nonhomicide crimes violates this part of the Constitution. Penological theory does not justify life without parole in these situations. Juveniles are not culpable for their actions in the same way that adults are. Life in prison without parole is a very harsh punishment. The usual goals of penal sanctions include justice, deterrence, public safety, and improving the behavior of the convict. None of these goals justify life without parole for juvenile nonhomicide offenders. This type of sentence is thus cruel and unusual. The age of 18 is the point where society draws the line between being a child and being an adult. If a defendant is younger than 18 then they cannot be sentenced to life without parole. The only exception is if the juvenile is guilty of murder.”
Appendix A: Selected Descriptions of *Graham* Decision from Survey Experiment, Contd.

Legal Complexity =0, Legalese = 0

“The Supreme Court recently decided that juveniles cannot to be sentenced to life in prison without parole for crimes other than murder. This decision is based on the Constitution’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

In making this decision, the justices argued that the ban on cruel and unusual punishment means that the punishment should fit the crime. Under this idea, the first thing to think about is whether society seems to approve of this type of prison sentence. This means looking at how many States allow this type of punishment. This information should help show what the nation thinks about these sentences. It turns out that only 12 States use life without parole sentences for juvenile offenders convicted of something other than murder. 26 States and the District of Columbia do not use these sentences even though their laws allow them to. The fact that many States do not clearly prohibit these sentences does not matter. After all, it is not clear that the legislatures in these States believe that this type of punishment is a good idea.

Second, it is important to look at the history and purpose of the Eighth Amendment. This will help reveal the meaning of this Amendment. It is clear that sentencing juveniles to life without parole for crimes other than murder violates this part of the Constitution. Theories of crime and punishment do not to justify life without parole in these situations. Juveniles are not responsible for their actions in the same way that adults are. Life in prison without parole is a very harsh punishment. The usual goals of punishment include justice, deterrence, public safety, and improving the behavior of the convict. None of these goals justify life without parole for juveniles who have not committed murder. This type of sentence is thus cruel and unusual. The age of 18 is the point where society draws the line between being a child and being an adult. If someone is younger than 18 then they cannot be sentenced to life without parole. The only exception is if the juvenile is guilty of murder.”
Appendix B: Selected Descriptions of *Citizens United* Decision from Survey Experiment

Below we present four of the 16 versions of the *Citizens United* decision that our subjects received. For simplicity, all four of these do not include the Supreme Court treatment and do include the Party Cue treatment.

**Legal Complexity =1, Legalese = 1**

“Republican officials recently decided that the First Amendment’s Freedom of Speech Clause prohibits attempts to limit independent election-related expenditures by corporations or unions.

In reaching this decision, the Republican officials argued that any prohibition on corporate independent expenditures is an outright ban on speech, especially if it is backed by criminal sanctions. Because speech is an essential mechanism of democracy--it is the means to hold officials accountable to the people--political speech must prevail against laws that would suppress it by design or inadvertence. Laws burdening such speech are subject to the legal doctrine of strict scrutiny, which requires the Government to prove that the restriction "furthers a compelling interest and is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest." This language provides a sufficient framework for protecting the interests in this case and the application of the strict scrutiny test leads to the conclusion that independent election expenditures by corporations cannot be restricted.

Premised on mistrust of governmental power, the First Amendment stands against attempts to disfavor certain subjects or viewpoints or to distinguish among different speakers, which may be a means to control content. The Government may also commit a constitutional wrong when by law it identifies certain preferred speakers. There is no basis for the proposition that, in the political speech context, the Government may impose restrictions on certain disfavored speakers such as corporations. It has been recognized that the First Amendment applies to corporations and that this protection is extended to the context of political speech.

This decision follows the principle established in the precedent-setting case of *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti* that the Government may not suppress political speech based on the speaker's corporate identity. No sufficient governmental interest justifies limits on the political speech of nonprofit or for-profit corporations.”
Appendix B: Selected Descriptions of *Citizens United* Decision, Continued.

Legal Complexity =1, Legalese = 0

“Republican officials recently decided that the First Amendment’s guarantee of the freedom of speech prohibits attempts to limit independent election-related expenditures by corporations or unions.

In reaching this decision, the Republican officials argued that any prohibition on corporate independent expenditures is an outright ban on speech, especially if it is backed by criminal sanctions. Because speech is an essential mechanism of democracy--it is the means to hold officials accountable to the people--political speech must prevail against laws that would suppress it by design or inadvertence. Laws burdening political speech are subject to an examination which requires the Government to prove that the restriction promotes a particularly important and legitimate governmental objective, and is also limiting speech in a focused, minimal way. This language provides a sufficient framework for protecting the interests in this case and the application of this examination leads to the conclusion that independent election expenditures by corporations cannot be restricted.

Premised on mistrust of governmental power, the First Amendment stands against attempts to disfavor certain subjects or viewpoints or to distinguish among different speakers, which may be a means to control content. The Government may also commit a constitutional wrong when by law it identifies certain preferred speakers. There is no basis for the proposition that, in the political speech context, the Government may impose restrictions on certain disfavored speakers such as corporations. It has been recognized that the First Amendment applies to corporations and that this protection is extended to the context of political speech.

This decision follows the principle established in a previous legal case that the Government may not suppress political speech based on the speaker's corporate identity. No sufficient governmental interest justifies limits on the political speech of nonprofit or for-profit corporations.”
Appendix B: Selected Descriptions of *Citizens United* Decision, Continued.

Legal Complexity =0, Legalese = 1

“Republican officials recently decided that there cannot be any limits on how much corporations or unions spend on elections. This is due to the First Amendment’s Freedom of Speech Clause.

In reaching this decision, the Republican officials argued that stopping corporations from spending money on elections is the same thing as stopping them from speaking about politics. Speech is a key part of democracy. Free speech means that public officials have to answer to the people. Political speech is more important than laws that try to limit this speech. Thus is true even for laws that limit speech in an unintentional way. Laws limiting political speech are subject to the legal doctrine of strict scrutiny. This doctrine requires the Government to prove two things. First, does the restriction “further a compelling interest?” Second, is it “narrowly tailored to achieve that interest?” This test protects both the interests of the Government and the freedom of speech. But, the result of the strict scrutiny test is that election spending by corporations cannot be limited by the Government.

The First Amendment exists because the Government cannot always be trusted. This Amendment guards against attempts to favor some ideas or points of view. It also guards against efforts to treat different kinds of speakers unequally. Both types of protections make sure that the Government does not control speech. A law is in the wrong if it says that that only some people can speak about a topic. There is no basis for the argument that it is okay for the Government to restrict just some speakers, like corporations. Corporations are recognized as having First Amendment rights. One of these rights is the freedom to speak about politics.

This decision follows the logic of the precedent-setting case of *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*. The Government may not stop political speech just because it comes from a corporation. This is true for both nonprofit and for-profit corporations. There is no valid reason for this kind of limit on political speech.”
Appendix B: Selected Descriptions of *Citizens United* Decision, Continued.

Legal Complexity =0, Legalese = 0

“Republican officials recently decided that there cannot be any limits on how much corporations or unions spend on elections. This is due to the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of speech.

In reaching this decision, the Republican officials argued that stopping corporations from spending money on elections is the same thing as stopping them from speaking about politics. Speech is a key part of democracy. Free speech means that public officials have to answer to the people. Political speech is more important than laws that try to limit this speech. Thus is true even for laws that limit speech in an unintentional way. Laws limiting political speech are judged by whether the Government can prove two things. First, is there a really important reason for the law? Second, is the limitation on speech as small as possible? This test protects both the interests of the Government and the freedom of speech. But, the result of this test is that election spending by corporations cannot be limited by the Government.

The First Amendment exists because the Government cannot always be trusted. This Amendment guards against attempts to favor some ideas or points of view. It also guards against efforts to treat different kinds of speakers unequally. Both types of protections make sure that the Government does not control speech. A law is in the wrong if it says that that only some people can speak about a topic. There is no basis for the argument that it is okay for the Government to restrict just some speakers, like corporations. Corporations are recognized as having constitutional rights. One of these rights is the freedom to speak about politics.

This decision is similar to prior decisions about free speech. The Government may not stop political speech just because it comes from a corporation. This is true for both nonprofit and for-profit corporations. There is no valid reason for this kind of limit on political speech.”
Table 1. Examples of source manipulation for the *Citizens United* decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment type</th>
<th>Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court = 1, Party Cue = 1</td>
<td>A Republican-appointed majority on the Supreme Court recently decided that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court = 1, Party Cue = 0</td>
<td>The Supreme Court recently decided that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court = 0, Party Cue = 1</td>
<td>Republican officials recently decided that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court = 0, Party Cue = 0</td>
<td>Government officials recently decided that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment type</td>
<td>Excerpts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Linguistic complexity = 1  
Legalese = 1 | Laws burdening such speech are subject to the legal doctrine of strict scrutiny, which requires the Government to prove that the restriction "furthers a compelling interest and is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest."  
This decision follows the principle established in the precedent-setting case of *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti* that the Government may not suppress political speech based on the speaker's corporate identity. No sufficient governmental interest justifies limits on the political speech of nonprofit or for-profit corporations. |
| Linguistic complexity = 1  
Legalese = 0 | Laws burdening political speech are subject to an examination which requires the Government to prove that the restriction promotes a particularly important and legitimate governmental objective, and is also limiting speech in a focused, minimal way.  
This decision follows the principle established in a previous legal case that the Government may not suppress political speech based on the speaker's corporate identity. No sufficient governmental interest justifies limits on the political speech of nonprofit or for-profit corporations. |
| Linguistic complexity = 0  
Legalese = 1 | Laws limiting political speech are subject to the legal doctrine of strict scrutiny. This doctrine requires the Government to prove two things. First, does the restriction “furthemore a compelling interest?” Second, is it “narrowly tailored to achieve that interest?”  
This decision follows the logic of the precedent-setting case of *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*. The Government may not stop political speech just because it comes from a corporation. This is true for both nonprofit and for-profit corporations. There is no valid reason for this kind of limit on political speech. |
| Linguistic complexity = 0  
Legalese = 0 | Laws limiting political speech are judged by whether the Government can prove two things. First, is there a really important reason for the law? Second, is the limitation on speech as small as possible?  
This decision is similar to a prior decision about free speech. The Government may not stop political speech just because it comes from a corporation. This is true for both nonprofit and for-profit corporations. There is no valid reason for this kind of limit on political speech. |
Table 3. Assessing the complex language manipulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Complex</th>
<th>~Complex</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graham</strong> (n = 843)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to read (5-pt. scale)</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.99*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated decision (5-pt. scale)</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Correct answers (3-pt. scale)</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>-0.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citizens United</strong> (n = 785)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to read (5-pt. scale)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated decision (5-pt. scale)</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.64*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Correct answers (4-pt. scale)</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>-0.34*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p ≤ .05 (two-tailed test). Here, “Complex” means that the subject was assigned both the Linguistic Complexity and Legalese conditions while “~Complex” means they were assigned neither.
Table 4. Testing the effect of complex language on acceptance of decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Juvenile Sentencing</th>
<th>Campaign Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.005 (.075)</td>
<td>.064 (.098)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court</td>
<td>.092 (.075)</td>
<td>.015 (.099)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity × Supreme Court</td>
<td>-.057 (.107)</td>
<td>.188 (.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Cue</td>
<td>-.052 (.053)</td>
<td>-.059 (.069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.065* (.015)</td>
<td>.214* (.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.08* (.062)</td>
<td>2.41* (.079)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| F-test                       | 4.5*                | 28.2*             |
| R²                           | .03                 | .15               |
| N                            | 843                 | 785               |

* p ≤ .05 (two-tailed test). Cell entries are OLS estimates (and standard errors).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Juvenile Sentencing</th>
<th>Campaign Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Complexity</td>
<td>-.129*</td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.053)</td>
<td>(.066)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalese</td>
<td>.123*</td>
<td>-.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.053)</td>
<td>(.082)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>-.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.065)</td>
<td>(.082)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Complexity × Supreme Court</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.076)</td>
<td>(.093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalese × Supreme Court</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.076)</td>
<td>(.093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Cue</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>-.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.038)</td>
<td>(.047)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.062*</td>
<td>.196*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.010)</td>
<td>(.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.11*</td>
<td>2.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.051)</td>
<td>(.064)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| F-test                                     | 7.6*                | 34.6*            |
| R²                                         | .03                 | .13              |
| N                                          | 1,616               | 1,616            |

* p ≤ .05 (two-tailed test). Cell entries are OLS estimates (and standard errors).
Table 6. Linguistic complexity and legalese do not amplify the effect of party cues on acceptance of decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Juvenile Sentencing</th>
<th>Campaign Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dems</td>
<td>Reps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Complexity</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>-.169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.070)</td>
<td>(.114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalese</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.070)</td>
<td>(.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Cue</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>-.251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.080)</td>
<td>(.150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Complexity × Party Cue</td>
<td>-.133</td>
<td>.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.096)</td>
<td>(.170)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalese × Party Cue</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>-.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.097)</td>
<td>(.170)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.25*</td>
<td>3.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.059)</td>
<td>(.098)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F-test | 2.7* | 2.0 | 0.9 | 1.6 |
R²     | .01  | .03 | .01 | .02 |
N      | 957  | 387 | 957 | 387 |

* p ≤ .05 (two-tailed test). Cell entries are OLS estimates (and standard errors).
Table 7. Effects of linguistic complexity and legalese on perceptions the decision is political

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Juvenile Sentencing</th>
<th>Campaign Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Complexity</td>
<td>.077 (.048)</td>
<td>.115* (.057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalese</td>
<td>-.083 (.048)</td>
<td>-.024 (.057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court</td>
<td>-.142* (.058)</td>
<td>-.098 (.071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Complexity × Supreme Court</td>
<td>.130 (.069)</td>
<td>-.051 (.080)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalese × Supreme Court</td>
<td>.022 (.069)</td>
<td>.003 (.080)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Cue</td>
<td>.223* (.037)</td>
<td>.278* (.043)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>.011 (.013)</td>
<td>-.090* (.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Cue × Party ID</td>
<td>.011 (.019)</td>
<td>-.037 (.022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.308* (.046)</td>
<td>.027 (.055)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F-test</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.6*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.2*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1,616</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p ≤ .05 (two-tailed test). Cell entries are OLS estimates (and standard errors). The dependent variable is based on a factor analysis of three questions regarding the basis of the decision and higher values correspond with the decision being based on politics as opposed to law.