

The Persuadable Voter: Strategic Candidates and Wedge Issues in Political Campaigns

Introduction and excerpts from Chapter 2 and 3

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In this manuscript, we examine the link between the campaign strategies of political candidates and the decision making processes of voters. We argue that wedge politics are the key to understanding the behavior of both candidates and voters during political campaigns. Among the voters most likely to be responsive to campaign information are those with conflicting predispositions—partisans who disagree with their party on a policy issue. For these cross-pressured partisans, campaign messages from the opposition can be persuasive if they are focused on the incongruent issue. Politicians look for wedge issues to emphasize in the campaign so that they can exploit the very tensions that create the opportunity for campaigns to “matter”. We argue that recent changes in the amount and type of information available about the mass public has increased the use of wedge politics and contributed to more fragmented and polarized issue agendas as candidates now micro-target different issue messages to different groups of voters in an effort to win over cross-pressured swing voters.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston, Massachusetts, the topic of stem cell research received top billing in a prime-time speech by the son of former president Ronald Reagan.

“A few of you may be surprised to see someone with my last name showing up to speak at a Democratic convention. Let me assure you, I am not here to make a political speech...I am here tonight to talk about the issue of research into what may be the greatest medical breakthrough in our or in any lifetime: the use of embryonic stem cells.”

Network news coverage of the nominating conventions was at an all-time low, dropping from 26 hours of coverage in 1976 to just 3 hours of coverage in 2004, so Ronald Prescott Reagan’s speech came during an especially coveted and carefully-scripted time slot. In an election year in which the United States was embroiled in a controversial war and the economy was faltering, why would the Democrats focus on stem cell research? For the vast majority of Americans, stem cell research was hardly considered one of the most pressing issues facing the nation.

The Democrats took a very public stance on the issue of stem cell research during the convention and later in campaign stump speeches and campaign communications because they viewed it as a potential wedge issue that offered them an advantage among swing voters. Polls showed that a majority of Democrats and Independents were supportive of embryonic stem cell research and moderate Republicans were evenly split on the issue. Democratic pollster Peter Hart explained that the issue of stem cell research had the potential to “attract support from disease sufferers and families who otherwise agree with Bush on public policy but feel ‘alienated’ by his decision to restrict federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.”¹ Republican pollster Robert Moran offered a similar assessment, “this is not an issue you can run and hide from...If this is going to negatively impact President Bush, it will likely be in places like the Philadelphia suburbs, where you have moderate swing-voting economic conservatives.”² Ron Reagan’s highly touted speech was an appeal to those cross-pressured voters.

The Bush administration policy on stem cell research could also be linked to a campaign appeal, although one that most Americans did not realize that Bush had made in the 2000 presidential contest. Certainly, stem cell research was not a prominent issue in the 2000 campaign, which had focused primarily on the issues of education, tax cuts, and social security. Bush had not mentioned stem cell research in his television advertising or his nominating speech, the issue was not raised in the presidential debates, and his position was not available on his campaign website. A July 2001 CNN/USA Today poll found that 56% “didn’t know enough to say” when asked their opinion on the issue and only 9% of respondents were “very closely” following the stem cell research debate.

Yet, in his first televised speech to the nation as president in August 2001, George W. Bush announced an executive order that banned federal funding for research on new embryonic stem cell lines but allowed funding for the approximately 60 existing stem cell lines “where the decision on life and death has already been made.” The policy offered a narrow escape in which he was able to defuse building bipartisan pressure to fund stem cell research while still upholding a campaign promise. During the 2000 campaign, Bush had sent a letter to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and other anti-abortion groups in which he affirmed his position that “taxpayer funds should not underwrite research that involves the destruction of live human embryos.”

The Bush campaign was trying to make inroads in the Catholic vote, a traditionally Democratic constituency that often disagreed with the national party on moral issues. Opposition to abortion and stem cell research offered Bush common ground with religious voters of different denominations and across

¹ Ceci Connolly, “Kerry Takes On Issue of Embryo Research; Campaign Broadens Challenge to Include President’s Commitment to Science” *The Washington Post*, 8 August 2004, Final Edition, A05.

² Ceci Connolly, “Stem Cell Proponents Enter Campaign Fray,” *The Washington Post*, 26 July 2004, Final Edition, A11.

party affiliations. In 2000, stem cell research was a relatively obscure scientific question, allowing Bush to microtarget a campaign message on the issue without concern that it was an electoral risk.³ By 2004, the issue was prominent enough that Democrats viewed it as an advantageous issue to emphasize, and so it joined a long list of divisive issues that became the subject of campaign “ground war” communications all the while that television advertising and news coverage remained primarily focused on the economy, Iraq, and terrorism.

The use of wedge issues has become standard playbook fare in contemporary presidential campaigns, but the strategy challenges political science expectations that candidates should be ambiguous or moderate on policy issues to appeal to swing voters.⁴ In this manuscript, we examine the incentives that encourage political candidates to use a wedge campaign strategy. Our basic argument is that the persuadable voters in the electorate—those most likely to be receptive to a candidate’s campaign appeals—are often cross-pressured between their partisan loyalties and policy preferences. And information and communication technologies have made it more efficient for candidates to narrowly target these persuadable voters on the specific issues they care about than to win over individuals committed to the opposition or to mobilize voters unlikely to vote.

This manuscript explores the interaction between voters and candidates that occurs during a presidential campaign. We argue that voter behavior cannot be fully understood without taking into account the behavior of the candidates, and the behavior of candidates rests fundamentally on perceptions about what the voters care about and how they make up their minds in a campaign. Taking into account this reciprocal relationship between candidates and voters offers a more comprehensive understanding of the role of campaigns in American democracy, and this broader perspective leads to new insights regarding the influence of political campaigns.

The Reciprocal Campaign

Political campaigns play an intermediary role between the governed and the governors in U.S. democracy, a role that fundamentally hinges on information about both the candidates and the voters. Candidates develop their issue agendas and campaign strategies on the basis of information about the voting public. The voters, in turn, select a preferred presidential candidate based on information learned during the campaign. The translation of information between candidates and voters is neither flawless nor complete, but it is the key mechanism by which elections are thought to serve a democratic function. We aim to address two interrelated research questions: Who in the electorate can be persuaded by campaign information? What strategies do candidates use to appeal to these persuadable voters?

We argue that campaign information can influence voter decision making when the factors underlying an individual’s vote decision are in conflict. In other words, the most persuadable voters in the electorate are those individuals with predispositions pulling them in different directions. A Pew Survey conducted late in the 2004 campaign, for instance, found that 76% of likely voters who had not yet made up their minds

³ Even by 2001, Bush appeared somewhat concerned about taking a hard stance against stem cell research. In coming up with the compromise policy, one White House aide explained that “he made it clear that he was up in the air,” telling advisors that he was “looking for a solution somewhere between a total ban and the kind of green light that might encourage the spread of virtual embryo factories.” As a *Time* magazine report notes, “By allowing funds for research on the small number of already existing stem-cell lines but denying money for any work with stem cells derived from embryos destroyed in the future, he positioned himself in the narrow political space that allowed him to claim he had not stood in the way of promising medical investigations....The White House is hoping that the Bush compromise will deflate moves in Congress to push through legislation that would override his decision...It helped that Bush timed his announcement for the summer recess, when members of Congress are scattered, making it harder for Democrats to offer a speedy, unified alternative.” Richard Lacavo. “How Bush got there” *Time Magazine*, 20 August 2001.

⁴ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, NY: Harper and Bros., 1957).

said they agreed with Bush on some important issues and with Kerry on others.⁵ This group of persuadable voters includes self-identified independents who are closer to the Republican candidate on some issues and the Democratic candidate on other issues, but it also includes partisans who disagree with their party on a salient policy issue, such as an environmentalist Republican or pro-life Democrat.

Voters with a foot in each camp have a more difficult time deciding between the candidates so they turn to campaign information to help decide between competing considerations. Campaigns are able to shape the vote decision of individuals cross-pressured between issue preferences and partisan loyalties *if the campaign focuses on the incongruent issue*. By defining the issues and contrasting the candidates in a particular way, the campaign helps voters to sort through and give weight to the various factors influencing their vote. In other words, issue priming is the mechanism by which a campaign can persuade a swing voter to support one candidate or the other.

Our theory of the persuadable voter offers new insights into the influence of campaigns on voter behavior, but it also provides a framework for understanding candidate campaign strategy. As VO Key long ago recognized, “the perceptions of behavior of the electorate...condition, if they do not fix, the types of appeals politicians employ as they seek popular support.”⁶ Identifying who is persuadable and who is not helps to explain why candidates behave the way they do. Despite the common perspective in the popular media that politicians today only appeal to their base, presidential candidates cannot win with their base alone. Electoral success requires winning over persuadable voters.

One implication of this theory is that strategic candidates should emphasize the issues that cross-pressure the persuadable voters. Candidates have an incentive to exploit the tensions that make campaigns matter. The optimal campaign strategy will use wedge politics, taking advantage of cleavages in the opponent’s potential winning coalition. By emphasizing the issues that are the source of cross-pressures, candidates have a chance to attract (or at least disaffect) the persuadable voters in the electorate.

Campaign Effects and the Persuadable Voter

Political science research once characterized campaigns as “sound and fury signifying nothing,” but a renaissance of recent research has offered compelling evidence that campaigns can shape voter behavior and election outcomes.⁷ Our analysis contributes to this growing body of literature in several ways. First, we examine not ‘if’ campaigns matter, but rather, for whom and under what conditions campaigns influence voter behavior and attitudes. Research that only evaluates the influence of campaign at the aggregate level (e.g., state or national vote totals) masks potential variation in individual-level campaign effects.⁸ Our theory recognizes that the campaign will have little influence on some in the electorate, but for others the campaign provides critical information for selecting between two candidates, neither of whom are a perfect match to their preferences. Whereas political commentators and scholars often talk about the electoral importance of “swing voters” in the election—and will variously define these voters as political independents, the “undecideds” in political polls, those who switch parties between elections, or

⁵ “Swing Voters Slow to Decide, Still Cross-pressured” Pew Research Center, 27 October, 2004. <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=231>

⁶ V.O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 7.

⁷ For an extensive discussion of the minimal effects debate see Richard Johnston, Michael G. Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The 2000 Presidential Election and the Foundations of Party Politics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Thomas M. Holbrook, *Do Campaigns Matter?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1996); Daron Shaw, *The Race to 270: The Electoral College and the Campaign Strategies of 2000 and 2004* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

⁸ For instance, Shaw, Daron R. 1999. "The Effect of TV Ads and Candidate Appearances on Statewide Presidential Votes, 1988-1996." *American Political Science Review* 93: 345-361; Johnston, Richard, André Blais, Henry E. Brady, and Jean Crête (1992) *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993).

the politically unsophisticated “floating voters”—our theory offers a theoretically-based explanation of who in the electorate can be persuaded and how candidates attempt to sway them.

Second, our analysis examines the impact of the campaign not only on final vote choice, but also on the process by which voters make up their mind. Classic political science research offers extensive theories about the correlates of the final vote decision, but we know much less about any dynamics in the process by which voters come to that decision. Even if we are able to accurately predict an individual’s final vote choice with long-term demographic and political characteristics, knowing if it was a bumpy ride to that decision helps us to evaluate the persuasiveness of campaign communication. Focusing on final vote alone overlooks the noteworthy differences, for instance, between the partisans who remain committed loyalists through the entire campaign and those who switch back and forth between candidates or remain undecided until “coming home” on Election Day. As Thomas Holbrook observes, “A political campaign must be understood to be a process that generates a product, the election outcome, and like any other process, one cannot expect to understand the process by analyzing only the product.”⁹

Finally, our analysis suggests that the particular issues emphasized in a campaign shape who votes how and why. Much of the recent research on campaign effects has evaluated the effect of campaign volume—the number of television ads or candidate visits, the amount of media coverage, or the intensity of campaign efforts.¹⁰ Much less is known about the nature and influence of campaign *content*. Is it consequential, for instance, not only that Bush ran more ads than Kerry in Ohio in 2004, but also that those ads focused primarily on issues of national security instead of other issues? Many scholars have concluded that campaign effects are predictable from one campaign to the next; partisans are *always* activated during a campaign, for instance.¹¹ The implication is that the specific content of campaign appeals is largely inconsequential. We argue that the particular issue appeals made by the candidates shape the vote dynamics observed during a campaign. Depending on the issues emphasized in the campaign, cross-pressures may rest peacefully unnoticed in one election but be the basis for defecting in the next. While previous research on priming has recognized that the campaign can change the basis on which an individual votes, we evaluate how campaign priming might differentially influence cross-pressured voters.¹² The campaign helps determine how these swing voters actually swing in a given election. For instance, an environmentalist Republican might not fret over the candidates’ positions on the environment if she does not think environmental policy is at stake in the election. If, however, she is bombarded with messages about the Republican candidate’s heinous record on the environment and the Democratic candidate’s stellar record, she must confront the cross-pressure.

In some respects, it is obvious that it should be easier to change the minds of voters who are closer to indifferent between the candidates, by virtue of the fact that it takes less to move them from one side to the other. For example, the individual with a 45% probability of voting Republican should be easier to persuade than the one with just a 15% probability of doing so. If we assume the Republican candidate makes a new policy promise, say an across-the-board tax cut, that increases every voter’s probability of voting Republican by 10% points, then the candidate has won over the first voter but not the second.

⁹ Thomas M. Holbrook, *Do Campaigns Matter?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1996), 153.

¹⁰ For instance, Daron Shaw, *The Race to 270: The Electoral College and the Campaign Strategies of 2000 and 2004* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

¹¹ Andrew Gelman and Gary King, “Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes Are so Predictable?” *British Journal of Political Science* 23.4 (Oct., 1993): 409-451; Larry M. Bartels, “Priming and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns” in *Capturing Campaign Effects*, ed. Henry E. Brady and Richard G. C. Johnston (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 78-112.

¹² For background on campaign priming, see Johnston, Richard, André Blais, Henry E. Brady, and Jean Crête (1992) *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election* Montreal, (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Hutchings, Vincent L. 2003. *Public Opinion and Democratic Accountability: How Citizens Learn About Politics*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); Druckman, James N. 2004. “Priming the Vote: Campaign Effects in a U.S. Senate Election,” *Political Psychology*, 25 (4): 577-94.

But cross-pressured partisans are also more responsive to campaign appeals because the incongruent issue creates an opportunity for messages from the opposition to be influential. In contrast to our example, political psychology research suggests that a policy promise from a candidate will not in fact increase every voter's level of support equally. Rather, some voters will be more resistant to the campaign message than others.

Research on political persuasion has long recognized that how individuals respond to new information depends on existing predispositions. As John Zaller so aptly observed, "every opinion is a marriage of information and predisposition."¹³ When individuals encounter new information, it is anchored against predispositions, with congruent evidence being uncritically assimilated and inconsistent evidence being vigorously counterargued.¹⁴ In a recent experimental study looking at how respondents evaluate arguments about affirmative action and gun control, Charles Taber and Milton Lodge find that respondents seek out supportive evidence and dismiss evidence that challenges prior attitudes. Other studies have found that partisan predispositions, in particular, filter out countervailing political information.¹⁵ When a consistent partisan encounters campaign information that conflicts with their predispositions, they will counterargue it. In contrast, when an individual disagrees with her party on an issue, she is more likely to be receptive of information from the opposition party on that incongruent issue. In the 2004 presidential campaign, when John Kerry revealed that he was personally opposed to gay marriage, many true liberal Democrats rationalized his position—they explained he wasn't *really* opposed to gay marriage, he simply had to pander to social conservatives for the election. For cross-pressured partisans, however, new information about an incongruent issue will exacerbate and reinforce tensions with party loyalties rather than being rationalized. Following President Bush's announcement that he would support a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, the Log Cabin Republicans (a national group of gay Republicans) issued an immediate press release rebuking the position, and they ultimately decided to withhold endorsing Bush, the first time the group had refused to endorse the Republican nominee.

Early Cross-Pressure Theories

We are by no means the first to recognize that cross-pressures can influence the vote decision.¹⁶ The earliest research on voting behavior, the classic Columbia studies of the 1940 and 1948 presidential campaigns, were the first to offer a theory of cross-pressures, although their focus was on conflicting "social pressures." They find that individuals in cross-cutting social groups took a longer time to make a vote decision and were more likely to shift between candidates during the campaign.¹⁷ The thesis of this early work rests on the assumption that "social interaction is the primary mechanism linking social group

¹³ John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

¹⁴ Charles S. Taber, and Milton Lodge, "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science*. 50:755-69 (2006); Lord, C., M. Ross, and M. Lepper. "Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27:2098-109 (1979).

¹⁵ Bartels, Larry M. "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions." *Political Behavior* 24:117-50. (2002); Zaller 1992.

¹⁶ There is an extensive literature on consistency theory in political psychology, coined cognitive dissonance theory, balance theory, or symmetry theory.

¹⁷ The focus of subsequent work tended to focus on the impact of conflicting social-networks on political participation. See, for instance, Diana Mutz (2002) 'The Consequences of Cross-Cutting Networks for Political Participation' *American Journal of Political Science* 46(4): 838-855; Lazarsfeld, Paul, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet (1948) *The People's Choice*, New York: Columbia University Press; Ithiel Pool, Robert Abelson, and Samuel Popkin, *Issues and Strategies*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965); Peter Sperlich, *Conflict and Harmony in Human Affairs*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971.

membership and individual political behavior.”¹⁸ The vote decision becomes more difficult “when the political complexion of friends and co-workers is divided.”¹⁹ In other words, it is assumed that social group considerations, rather than policy preferences, underlie the vote decision. Although social network cross-pressures may influence voting behavior, we assume that partisan identification and policy preferences are the factors most fundamental to the vote decision.²⁰ Whereas the person in conflicting social networks can simply avoid discussing politics, voters have a much more difficult time avoiding the tensions between issue preferences and party affiliation if the campaign is focused on the incongruent issue. Electoral campaigns, especially presidential contests, are structured around partisan competition for office and the policy alternatives offered by the opposing candidates.²¹ In selecting a preferred candidate, a voter’s wide variety of policy opinions must be resolved into a dichotomous choice between a Republican candidate and a Democratic one. And the campaign, by focusing attention on some issues more than others, helps voters to decide the trade-off between partisan predispositions and an incongruent policy if it appears to be at stake in the election.²²

This does not mean that political campaigns, even presidential ones, are purely policy-based events. There is a blurry line between policy and pageantry in political campaigns. Candidates attempt to reinforce their issue messages with affective appeals, visual symbols, and expressive language. And voters’ assessments of character traits and candidate personality are very much intertwined with policy considerations.²³ In 2004, for instance, voters’ evaluations of Bush’s leadership skills were strongly related to their opinions on the Iraq War, while Bush’s campaign communications about his “stay the course” policy in Iraq drew on images and references to September 11, patriotism, and the American flag. Similarly, the direct mail advertising that identified Bush’s opposition to gay marriage discussed his support of traditional family values and included visual images of churches, a bible, and an all-American family. In fact, some scholars and journalists argue that candidates deliberately send coded messages on controversial issues so that potential supporters receive the message but others may not be aware of the policy position being advocated.²⁴ Even with these often implicit and vague policy references, voters are

¹⁸ Patrick Horan, “Social Positions and Political Cross-pressures: a re-examination” (1971, 650) *American Sociological Review* 36(4): 650-660.

¹⁹ Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee. 1954. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 98).

²⁰ This assumption is consistent with decades of political science research. E.g., Andrew Gelman and Gary King, “Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes Are so Predictable?” *British Journal of Political Science* 23.4 (Oct., 1993): 409-451; Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist and Eric Schickler (2002) *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004)

²¹ Sigelman, Lee and Emmett Buell. 2004. “Avoidance or Engagement? Issue Convergence in Presidential Campaigns.” *American Journal of Political Science* 48(4):650-661.

²² In *The Changing American Voter*, Norman Nie, Sidney Verba, and John Petrocik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), point out that cross-pressured partisans were more likely to defect in elections in which the candidates positions on the issues were more clearly delineated.

²³ Wendy M Rahn, “The Role of Partisan Stereotypes in Information Processing about Political Candidates.” *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1993):472-496.

²⁴ E.g., Edward Glaeser, Giacomo Ponzetto, Jesse Shapiro, “Strategic Extremism: Why Republicans and Democrats Divide on Religious Values,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120(4): 1283-1330; Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality*, Princeton University Press, 2001. Called *Dog Whistle Politics* by some, the classic example comes from the 2001 Australian federal election campaign in which Prime Minister John Howard famously said ‘[w]e don’t want those sorts of people here,’ referring to asylum seekers coming on unauthorized boats. The same Australian campaign strategist came up with the Tories 2005 British general election campaign slogan, “Are you thinking what we’re thinking?” The slogan was said to appeal to those who opposed Labour’s stance on immigration without appearing racist.

generally aware by the end of the campaign of the policy differences between the candidates, especially on the issues that they consider personally important.²⁵

Influence of Voter Behavior on Candidates

In an effort to win over persuadable voters, strategic candidates attempt to exploit the tensions that make campaigns matter. They look for political issues that offer them an advantage among the cross-pressured swing voters, and will attempt to prime those particular issues. In other words, candidates use a “wedge strategy” to exploit cleavages in the opposition’s potential winning coalition. Perhaps surprisingly, political scientists have not previously explored the nature or influence of such wedge strategies,²⁶ although journalists and pundits often talk about the use of “wedge issues” in political campaigns. At one time or another, nearly every political issue has been labeled a wedge issue in the media: gun control, abortion, global warming, immigration, affirmative action, school prayer, free trade, gay marriage, stem cell research, welfare reform, education, and internet taxation to name a few.²⁷ One political commentator astutely observed that “wedge issues are — now let me get this straight — things people disagree about.”²⁸ Any political issues on which there is disagreement within a party coalition has the potential to be used as a wedge issue. The use of the term refers to the tactical motivation for raising the issue. Candidates focus on these divisive issues not because they believe them to be the most pressing or important issues facing the nation, but because they believe them to be an effective strategy for appealing to some portion of an opponent’s potential supporters.

Candidates try to build issue agendas that will capitalize on cleavages within the opposition coalition. The Republican’s famed Southern Strategy is perhaps the most obvious example of a wedge strategy. In the 1984 presidential election, Republican strategist Lee Atwater articulated the optimal campaign strategy for Reagan: “to drive a wedge between the liberal (national) Democrats and traditional Southern Democrats....we must assemble coalitions in every Southern state largely based on the country clubbers and the populists.”²⁹ Whether or not a wedge strategy actually succeeds in dividing a candidate’s traditional supporters depends on a number of other factors, including the distribution of preferences in the electorate and the other issues discussed during the campaign.

²⁵ Michael R. Alvarez. *Information and Elections*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Popkin, Samuel L. 1991. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993)

²⁶ Exceptions include Shaun Wilson and Nick Turnbull, “Wedge Politics and Welfare Reform in Australia,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 47.3 (September 2001): 384-404; Thad Kousser and Mathew McCubbins, “Social Choice, Crypto-Initiatives, and Policy Making by Direct Democracy,” *Southern California Law Review* 78 (2005): 949-984.

²⁷ David E. Rosenbaum, “Narrow Issues May Sway Voting,” *The New York Times*, 27 October 1980, A1; William Safire, “The Double Wedge,” *The New York Times*, 23 February 1995, A23; Matthew L. Wald, “The 2000 Campaign: The Environment; From Social Security to Environment, the Candidates’ Positions,” *The New York Times*, 5 November 2000, 1.44; Frank Rich, “The War in the Wings,” *The New York Times*, 9 October 1996, A21; William Safire, “On Language: Wedges and Bounces,” 20 September 1992, 6.22; Robin Toner, “The 2004 Campaign: Political Memo; G.O.P. Revives Line of Attack Against Kerry,” 5 February 2004, A1; Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Eyes on November, Parties Zero in on Issues to Drive Voter Turnout,” 24 April 2006, A12; Gerald F. Seib, “Welfare Reform: Hot-Button Issue of New Order,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 November 1994, A30; John Harwood, “Democrats, Courting Swing Voters, Embrace ‘Hot-Button’ Politics,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 October 1998, A1; John Simons, “Bush Faces Wedge Issue as GOP Rivals Focus on Question of Taxing Internet,” 6 December 1999, A36.

²⁸ “Art, Wedge Issues, and the Virgin Mary” *National Review Online*. Goldberg Forum, 28 September 1999.

<http://www.nationalreview.com/goldberg/goldberg092899.html>

²⁹ John Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1997), 120, 117-118.

Nonetheless, it is important simply to recognize the wedge strategy as an explanation for why candidates emphasize the issues that they do during a campaign. According to Anthony Downs' median voter theorem, rational candidates should converge on a centrist campaign agenda in order to appeal to moderate swing voters. As it turns out, the swing voters are not moderate across issues, they are cross-pressured. Rather than assuming voters can be arranged along a single left-right dimension, our theory acknowledges that voters vary in the policy issues they care about. Instead of moving to the middle, candidates today try to build a winning coalition between their base supporters and subgroups of swing voters attracted to specific issue appeals and policy promises.

To win the White House, candidates must build a winning coalition of voters with diverse backgrounds, interests, and concerns. Candidates try to develop an issue agenda that will bridge their base supporters and the persuadable voters, including those cross-pressured partisans from the opposition party. Sometimes the policy cleavages within the traditional coalitions are readily apparent—like the racial policy fractures in the Democratic Party in the 20th century—but often times they may be less evident. Thus, information about the policy preferences of the voters is critical to a candidate's campaign strategy. Before the campaign begins, political candidates assess the electoral landscape using polls, focus groups, historical voting patterns, and increasingly, consumer data. Using this information, they divide the voting public into those who are “for them,” “against them,” and “still available,” and look for issues that will bridge their base supporters and the persuadable voters.³⁰ In describing the growing importance of polling in presidential campaigns, Stephen and Barbara Salmore hint at the link between information about voters and a wedge campaign strategy: “The Eisenhower landslides in the 1950s demonstrated that an appealing presidential candidate could attract large numbers of voters from the opposition party. Campaign organizations needed to know from which groups wavering voters might come, what concerned them, and how they would respond to various candidates and issues.”³¹

Not surprisingly, candidates adamantly deny that they base their issue agendas on public opinion, and certainly not the opinions of only a subset of the population. Politicians maintain that their campaign messages reflect simply what they believe is right and the facts warrant. In a campaign speech on behalf of a candidate for California governor in 2002, President Bush offered a direct contradiction to our expectations “[the job of governor is] not to pit one group of people against another. It's not to take into account of who is for you and who is against you, and therefore make decisions based upon that. You need a governor who makes decisions based upon principle, not polls; a governor who...doesn't need a poll or a focus group to tell him what to think.”³² We suggest nearly the opposite—a candidate's issue agenda directly reflects the perceived policy preferences of strategically important subsets of the population. While candidates might not use polls to figure out where they stand on the issue, they do use polls to figure out whether to emphasize or deemphasize that position in the campaign.

Political consultants more readily acknowledge that information about the electorate directly shapes campaign strategy and issue agendas. Political consultants view their job as to “identify the most salient issues in the election, as well as issues of potential salience, and...uncover the effects of the various ways that those issues could be framed.”³³ As one Republican consultant explained, the job of a pollster is to translate “[poll] numbers into strategic recommendations that identify who your voter should be, what is of the greatest concern to those who should be voting for you, and how you can best influence those groups.”³⁴

³⁰ Republican consultant Robert Carpenter, conference at Northeastern University on June 10, 2006.

³¹ Barbara G. Salmore and Stephen A. Salmore, *Candidates, Parties and Campaigns: Electoral Politics in America* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), 40.

³² White house press release, August 24, 2002 for candidate Bill Simon.

³³ Stephen Medvic, *Political Consultants in US Congressional Elections* (Ohio University Press 2001), 51.

³⁴ Quoted in Barbara G. Salmore and Stephen A. Salmore, *Candidates, Parties and Campaigns: Electoral Politics in America* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), 119.

Rational choice theorists have long assumed that candidates will base their issue agendas on the preferences of the voting public, but few studies have attempted to explicitly evaluate the link.³⁵ The few studies on the topic have found an empirical relationship between political polling and a politician's willingness to talk about a political issue. One study finds that Richard Nixon was more likely to take a stance on an issue when he had poll numbers about the issue.³⁶ Another finds John F. Kennedy also responded to public opinion, concluding that "the issues that were raised in Louis Harris's polls were persistently mentioned by Kennedy in his subsequent public statements."³⁷ We suggest that the public opinion to which the candidates are most attentive are from those voters who are crucial to a winning coalition.

There are of course forces outside the control of the candidates that will influence the campaign agenda. There may be national-level conditions, such as sagging economy or foreign conflict, that will need to be addressed, scandals or missteps that reshape the focus of attention, or emerging issues on which candidates will be pressed to take a stance. In addition to the broader political environment, candidates might also consider the strengths and weaknesses of their opposition, as well as their own voting record, experiences, or reputational advantages. In Tom Carsey's study of gubernatorial campaigns, one campaign staff member explains, "The campaign must talk about those issues that matter to people, but you can't stray from what the candidate has a background on. You must meld together the voters' concerns and the candidate's qualities. You need to be credible on the issues you discuss" (55). Political commentator Jeff Greenfield puts it more bluntly with the advice, "*do not offend reality*."³⁸ But within these constraints, candidates will attempt to highlight issues that offer them a strategic advantage among the voters they view as necessary to win.³⁹

Instead of targeting the moderate middle, candidates today have found it more efficient to try to build a winning coalition between their base supporters and subgroups of swing voters who might respond to specific issue promises. Political consultant Frank Luntz explains that, "As campaign costs continue to spiral upwards, the necessity to target voters accurately and send them the right message at the lowest possible cost has become crucial. As a result, there is a trend in political campaigning toward dividing and subdividing the electorate into smaller, more narrowly defined subsections."⁴⁰ Rather than assuming voters can be arranged along a single left-right dimension with the pivotal voters being moderate, this strategy recognizes that voters vary in the policy issues they care about and they may be liberal on some issues at the same time they are conservative on other issues.⁴¹ A recent study finds for instance that the majority of individuals who call themselves ideological moderates are actually cross-pressured between their social and economic issue positions.⁴²

The growing body of research on "issue publics" documents this variability in issue importance. Unfortunately, the term "issue public" conjures an image of an issue activist, a single issue voter or a

³⁵ David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, NY: Harper and Bros., 1957).

³⁶ James N. Druckman, Lawrence R. Jacobs, and Eric Ostermeier, "Candidate Strategies to Prime Issues and Image," *The Journal of Politics* 66.4 (November 2004) 1180-1202.

³⁷ Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Issues, Candidate Image, and Priming: The Use of Private Polls in Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign" *The American Political Science Review* 88.3 (Sep., 1994), 532.

³⁸ Jeff Greenfield, *Playing to Win: An Insider's Guide to Politics* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 191.

³⁹ One study finds that candidates are more likely to "ride the wave" of public opinion than to follow a pure issue ownership strategy, for instance (John Sides, "The Origins of Campaign Agendas" *British Journal of Political Science* 36 (2006), 407-436.)

⁴⁰ Frank I. Luntz, *Candidates, Consultants and Campaigns: The Style and Substance of American Electioneering* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 200.

⁴¹ Rational choice theorists have long recognized that the median voter theorem does not hold in a multiple dimension issue space. See, for instance, Duncan Black (1948) "On the Rationale of Group Decision-making," *Journal of Political Economy*, 56: 23-34.

⁴² Shawn Treier and D. Sunshine Hillygus. "The Contours of Policy Attitudes in the Mass Public," Working Paper.

member of an issue interest group. Yet, an individual need not champion an issue in order for it to be relevant to her decision making process.⁴³ Moreover, voters might consider several different issues to be important or the concern might remain dormant until activated during the campaign. In the 2004 election, for instance, citizens who reported that stem cell research was an important issue may have never even considered the topic before it was raised during the campaign, but the issue resonated with them for one reason or another. A Republican respondent in our 2004 election survey explained why she disagreed with Bush's opposition to stem cell research: "Having had my father suffer from Alzheimer's disease, I feel very strongly that [embryonic stem cell] research should be done."

While the decision making process of voters creates incentives for candidates to use wedge issues in the campaign, a candidate's decision to emphasize a divisive issue will depend on the extent to which the benefits of doing so outweigh the risks. In taking a position, a candidate will inevitably lose some swing voters and gain others. In 1996, Republican Bob Dole repeatedly emphasized the issue of school prayer because it was clear that the public was overwhelmingly supportive. The more information candidates have about the preferences of the public, the better able they are to assess the tradeoffs associated with emphasizing a particular issue. Since the turn of the 21st century, candidates have had more information about the electorate than ever before. By combining computerized voter registration lists and voting history with consumer databases and political polling information, candidates are better able to predict who will turnout and how they will vote. One journalist explains, "If you're a registered voter, chances are the candidates know not just your name, address, and voting history but also your age and the age of your children, whether you smoke cigars, where you shop, where you attend church, what kind of car you drive, how old it is, whether you're on a diet, and what type of pet you have."⁴⁴ Critically, the information that candidates have about voters is no longer simply demographic, it is also psychographic—i.e., information about the voter's preferences and beliefs.

Another aspect of the information environment that has the potential to shape the use of wedge issues, is the ability of candidates today to microtarget campaign appeals. By narrowly targeting a message to the voters who care about, the candidates are able to reduce the likelihood that they will be punished by voters on the opposing side of the issue. The microtargeting of wedge issues is sometimes called *dog whistle politics* because candidates try to send a targeted message that can be heard only by those it is intended to reach, like the high-pitched dog whistle that can be heard by dogs but is not audible to the human ear. Although candidates today will not typically take clearly contradictory issue positions to different audiences, candidates emphasize different issue priorities. The goal of microtargeting is to prime different voters on different issues. For instance, in direct mail to union members in 2004, Democrat John Kerry emphasized issues like minimum wage and job creation, while campaign mailings to senior citizens focused on issues of social security and health care.

We argue that the evolution of information and communication technologies in recent years has changed candidate strategies, campaign promises, and policy priorities in presidential campaigns. Candidates should be more ambiguous on issues if they have less information about the electorate or if they are communicating to a broader audience. Candidates were more centrist in the 1950s and 1960s than today in part because of differences in the information environment. Candidates had reason to avoid taking a stand on divisive issues when they had only crude information about the preferences of swing voters and when they communicated their issue agendas primarily through broadcast media.

In the past, the information available to candidates and parties was typically limited to geographic or demographic characteristics that only loosely suggested issue preferences. Even with the growth of polling, candidates simply did not have the sample size to do anything more than rough demographic

⁴³ Vincent L. Hutchings, *Public Opinion and Democratic Accountability: How Citizens Learn About Politics*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ Dana Milbank, "Candidates' consultants create the customized campaign," *The New Republic*, 5 July 1999, 22-27.

breakdowns of preferences.⁴⁵ Today, candidates have information about nearly *every* voter. Candidates can pinpoint a single swing voter in a neighborhood of die-hard partisans. Computing and statistical power now allow candidates to target an individual rather than a demographic, creating incentives for candidates to cherry-pick specific voters on different wedge issues. A recent Los Angeles Times article describes a suburban African American woman in Ohio, who although she tends to vote Democratic, was deluged with calls, e-mail messages and other forms of communication by Republicans who knew that she was a mother with children in private schools, an active church attendee, an abortion opponent and a golfer.⁴⁶

New communication technologies have clearly contributed to the candidates' ability to microtarget. By using direct mail, emails, personal canvassing, and phone calls, swing voters in swing states can be told that the issues he or she cares about are the issues that are a priority to the candidate. In 2004, the Republican campaign identified 30 different target groups, each who were told that their priorities were at stake in the election.⁴⁷ In contrast, television advertising, with its broad audience, continues to focus on more general issue appeals. Television advertising by the 2004 presidential candidates contained almost no references to divisive issues like gay marriage or abortion, while much of the direct mail communication was focused on these issues.

The effectiveness of ground war communication remains an open question. These campaign communications remain just one of many sources of information for the voters, in addition to television advertisements, political news, and the like. There is always the possibility that the media will pick up on the microtargeted message and bring it to a wider audience. And given the nature of the media environment, candidates will be pressed to take positions on issues they otherwise might not want to focus. Microtargeting is nonetheless consequential because it shapes the issue agendas of the candidates. Information and communication technology has contributed to changes in the policy alternatives offered to the voters, with candidates today having an incentive to take positions on more issues and more divisive issues than in the past.⁴⁸

The fragmentation of candidates' issue agendas has consequences for democratic governance and accountability. The efficiency of candidate targeting strategies has heightened political inequality by improving the ability of candidates to ignore large portions of the public—nonvoters, those committed to the opposition, and for presidential candidates, those living in uncompetitive states. Critically, the preferences of these individuals are not unknown, rather they are deliberately ignored. Candidates consider it a waste to spend resources (financial or political) on individuals with a low expected probability of voting for them.

Trends in self-reported campaign contact overtime offer some evidence of the relationship between information and campaign strategy. Figure 1.1 plots the percentage of respondents reporting being contacted by the parties by voter registration. By the late 1990s, corresponding with the computerization of voter registration files following the Motor Voter Act, the gap in party contact between those registered to vote and those not registered dramatically increased. In the last presidential election, roughly half of registered voters were contacted by a political party, compared to less than 15% of those not registered. Among registered voters in competitive states, nearly two-thirds reported contact by one or both of the political parties. Candidates have used the more detailed information about the electorate to more

⁴⁵ By the 1980s, some candidates were able to merge information on voter history with census tract characteristics, leading to geodemographic targeting, in which candidates would concentrate resources on neighborhoods that might be expected to have a concentration of particularly favorable or persuadable voters.

⁴⁶ Peter Wallsten and Tom Hamburger, "The GOP Knows You Don't Like Anchovies" *The Los Angeles Times*, 25 June 2006, M1.

⁴⁷ Author interview with Sara Taylor, November 21, 2005.

⁴⁸ Just in sentence length alone, the 2004 Democratic platform is more than 3 times the length of the 1948 platform and the 2004 Republican platform is more than 12 times the length.

efficiently target campaign efforts. Political consultant David Hill explained, “There is a practical reason that we don’t focus on those unlikely to vote...[it] comes down to a budgeting issue.” As the cost of the media has increased through the years, the impact of a single media source has decreased so that “the cost per impression” is now grown dramatically. Those not registered to vote are even less likely to ever be asked to participate in the political process.

The potential implications of this new campaign strategy extend beyond the political campaign. Elections have always been a blunt instrument for expressing the policy preferences of the public, but the fragmentation of campaign messages makes it even more difficult to evaluate if elected representatives are following the will of the people. How does a winning candidate interpret the policy directive of the electorate if different individuals intended their vote to send different policy messages? Can politicians claim a policy mandate if citizens were voting on the basis of different policy promises? We return to these questions in the conclusion. But in the case of government policy on stem cell research, the electoral process has not yet brought policy closer in step in public opinion on the issue. In July of this year, Bush issued the first veto of his administration to reject Congress’s effort to expand federal funding of embryonic stem cell research.

Figure 1.1: The growing gap in campaign contact by voter registration, 1956-2004



Plan of the Book

We cover a lot of ground in this book: voter decision making, candidate strategy, and the campaign spectacle that connects the two. We evaluate our expectations about the dynamics of presidential campaigns using a variety of different data sources—longitudinal and panel surveys, collections of campaign communications, historical data, and personal interviews. And we lean on a number of different theoretical perspectives, including work on information processing, attitudinal ambivalence, political persuasion, campaign strategy, and campaign effects.

To examine the influence of campaign efforts on voter behavior we rely on the longitudinal National Election Study, as well as two unique surveys: 1) The 2000 Knowledge Networks election panel, a 28,000 respondent panel survey that allows us to track individual-level changes in vote choice over the course of the campaign and 2) The 2004 Blair Center Election Survey, a post-election survey specifically designed

to gauge respondents' policy disagreements with their affiliated party.⁴⁹ In evaluating candidate tactics, we adopt a mixed quantitative and qualitative research design that includes interviews with campaign consultants, historical analyses, and evidence from a first-of-its-kind data collection of candidate communication material from the 2004 elections. The 2004 Campaign Communications Survey (CCS) commissioned by the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (CSED) at Brigham Young University collected data on the phone calls, personal contacts, and the actual direct mail and email pieces received by a sample of registered voters in the last three weeks of the 2004 campaign.⁵⁰ This study offers a picture of the specific issue appeals candidates were making and to whom they were being made. Each of these research methodologies has its own set of benefits and limitations; together, we hope they offer an initial evaluation of our thesis.

In the next chapter, we further develop our theory that the most persuadable voters in a campaign include individuals cross-pressured between partisan loyalties and policy preferences. This chapter considers alternate definitions of persuadable voters and discusses the difficulties of measuring persuadability. We make a case for the measure that will be used in the book and then explore the nature and origins of cross-pressures among partisans today using the 2004 Blair Center Election Survey and the American National Election Study. We find that partisans are especially like to disagree with their party's stance on moral issues, such as abortion, stem cell research, and gay marriage. We examine the robustness of our measure of cross-pressures, demonstrating that significant tensions exist whether we look at only the most politically sophisticated partisans, only issues deemed "personally important" by the respondent, or only issues volunteered in response to open-ended survey questions. This overview identifies the contemporary policy fractures between and within the contemporary parties-in-the-electorate, offering a new perspective on the debate over the extent of partisan and ideological polarization in the public and the so called 'culture wars.'

In chapter three we move beyond examining the basic measurement of partisan and policy incongruities and begin to examine how cross-pressured shape responsiveness to campaign information. In this chapter, we evaluate the responsiveness of persuadable voters to campaign information in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. More broadly, this chapter addresses the question: when and how do campaigns shape voter decision making? The analysis demonstrates that cross-pressured partisans are more likely to defect, more likely to be undecided early in the campaign and more likely to change their mind in response to campaign information. Using a variety of different measures of campaign exposure, we find

⁴⁹ Both surveys were conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN). The Knowledge Networks sample consists of a national sample of households recruited by random-digit dialing, who either have been provided Internet access through their own computer or are given a WebTV console. Thus, although surveys are conducted over the Internet, respondents are a probability sample of the United States population. By using a methodology that produces a representative sample of the U.S. population, KN overcomes the most common shortfall of most web-based surveys.

⁵⁰ The fieldwork for this multi-mode national survey of registered voters was conducted by the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC) at Washington State University. The sample was obtained from the "Datamart" national database of registered voters maintained by the Democratic National Committee. Because the survey design required some telephone contact, the population was defined as registered voters living in households with telephones. The sample design was intended to maximize the participation of respondents most likely to receive campaign communications so was stratified by past turnout behavior and by likely competitive US Senate states with oversamples in the competitive presidential states of Ohio and Florida. The 1606 respondents returned a total of 19297 pieces of political mail, logged 9627 political phone calls and 399 in-person visits. A more comprehensive coding of the federal mail pieces was conducted by the CSED. For more information about the study see *Dancing without Partners: How Candidates, Parties, and Interest Groups Interact in the Presidential Campaign* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) Edited by David B. Magleby, J. Quin Monson, and Kelly Patterson; Magleby, David B., J. Quin Monson, and Kelly D. Patterson 2006. "Mail Communications in Political Campaigns: The 2004 Campaign Communications Survey" Presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.; Magleby, David B and Kelly D. Patterson, "Stepping Out of the Shadows? Ground War Activity in 2004" in *The Election After Reform* edited by Michael Malbin. Lanham, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

that cross-pressured partisans who are highly exposed to campaign information are more likely to defect than cross-pressured partisans who are less exposed, suggesting that campaign exposure can prime incongruent issues at the expense of partisanship. Variation in campaign responsiveness is also apparent in individual-level reactions to the presidential debates and nominating conventions and in aggregate overtime trends that show an increase in the relationship between incongruent issues and vote choice over the course of the campaign.

To offer a more detailed look at the relationships between voter preferences, wedge campaign strategies, and voter decision making, we conduct an in depth analysis of the Republican ‘Southern strategy’ in Chapter 4. In campaign appeals during the 1960s and 1970s, Republican presidential candidates attempted to exploit racial cleavages in the Democratic Party. We examine the origins of this wedge campaign strategy and trace its evolution and influence as it changed from a focus on racial issues in the 1970s to a focus on moral issues by the turn of the century. We contrast the strategic decisions behind Richard Nixon’s campaign agenda in 1960, when he fought to include a civil rights plank to the Republican Party platform, compared to his campaign agenda in 1972, when he explicitly campaigned in opposition to civil rights. Using data from the cumulative National Election Study, we evaluate the effect of the Republican wedge strategy on voter decision making among persuadable voters in presidential elections from 1960-1996. This analysis demonstrates that candidates make strategic decisions about their issue agendas on the basis of policy cleavages in the opposition coalition and that these issue agendas shape which cross-pressured partisans will remain loyal in a given election and which ones will defect to the opposition.

In chapter 5, we trace the relationship between campaign strategy and the changing information environment. Candidates have always had an incentive to use wedge issues, but to effectively use a wedge strategy requires being able to identify and target swing voters. The less information candidates have about the preferences of the voters, the more ambiguous their campaign appeals. Likewise, the broader the audience to whom they are communicating, the more moderate the appeal. We discuss how new technologies have shaped developments in campaign strategy through the 20th and 21st centuries, from whistle stop tours to today’s hypermedia campaign. In the contemporary information environment, candidates have more information about the voters than ever before, and new communication technologies enable candidates to narrowly target swing voters with personalized issue messages. This change in candidate strategy has implications not only for how candidates communicate with voters, but also for the policy promises they are willing to make in those communications. For instance, candidates are willing to take positions on many more issues and on more divisive issues in targeted “ground war” communications than in their broadcast advertising. In this chapter, we compare the nature of issue appeals found in targeted communication relative to that found in broadcast advertising. Together with interviews of campaign consultants and political strategists, we evaluate the link between a candidate’s issue agenda and the hypermedia communication environment. We then consider the implications of the new campaign strategy for political representation and inequality.

In the final chapter, we conclude by considering the implications of our analysis for democratic governance. The fragmentation of candidates’ issue agendas and the microtargeting of wedge issues have potentially troubling consequences for electoral accountability. Elections have always been a blunt instrument for expressing the policy preferences of the public, but the fragmentation of campaign messages makes it even more difficult to evaluate if elected representatives are following the will of the people. How does a winning candidate interpret the policy directive of the electorate if different individuals intended their vote to send different policy messages? The winning candidate simply cannot credibly claim a mandate to implement any policy in particular if individuals in the electorate are voting on the basis of different policy promises. We address the potential for the new campaign strategy to contribute to a crisis in governance as targeted constituencies find the winning candidate unable or unwilling to fulfill the variety of policy promises made during the campaign.

CHAPTER 2: THE PERSUADABLE VOTER (excerpt)

American political parties are “creatures of compromise, coalitions of interest.... It would be hard to imagine a political association more motley than the Democratic Party of the United States. The Republicans, for all their apparently sterner commitment to principle and respectability, are not much less of an army with a hundred different banners. They, like the Democrats, are a vast enterprise in ‘group diplomacy’”⁵¹

Scholars and journalists often talk about the electoral importance of “swing” voters, but there has not been a comprehensive theory of who in the electorate can be persuaded or how they can be swayed. In this manuscript, we argue that among the most persuadable voters are partisans who disagree with their party on a salient policy issue. In an attempt to attract these cross-pressured voters, candidates look for issue cleavages within the opposition’s potential coalition that can be emphasized in the campaign. In this chapter, we offer a more careful look at our theory of the persuadable voter, comparing with alternative definitions and considering the challenges of measurement. We then examine the policy contours of Democrats and Republicans in the electorate, exploring the nature and origins of policy cross-pressures among partisans today.

The very notion of cross-pressured voters and a wedge campaign strategy presupposes that there are meaningful issue cleavages within the party coalitions in the electorate. Yet, the prevailing conventional wisdom is of a polarized and divided American public. Certainly, polarization is apparent among partisan elites.⁵² But many have interpreted the 2004 presidential election map as evidence of a political and cultural divide in the electorate as well. The red-blue state map is frequently interpreted as a depiction not only of the presidential election outcomes but also of the opinions and attitudes of the American public. Commentator George Will concluded that the 2004 presidential election “continues—and very nearly completes—the process of producing a perfect overlap of America’s ideological and party parameters.”⁵³

If the American public is deeply divided along ideological and partisan lines, it seems difficult to reconcile our thesis that cross-pressured partisans play a prominent role in presidential campaigns. For a candidate to drive a wedge in the opposition requires that the party coalitions contain meaningful policy fractures. A wedge issue can be consequential only if the “parties in the electorate” have heterogeneous policy preferences. In this chapter, we offer a descriptive overview of the policy preferences of the party coalitions in the American public, allowing us to evaluate the extent of policy cleavages among Democratic and Republican identifiers even in today’s polarized environment. This descriptive landscape will be critical to identifying who in the electorate might be susceptible to campaign appeals on so-called wedge issues.

⁵¹ Clinton Rossiter, *Parties and Politics in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960) 11-12.

⁵² ⁵² See for instance, Gary C. Jacobson, “Party Polarization in National Politics: The Electoral Connection,” in *Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era*, ed. Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000) 9-30; Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, “Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate” *The Journal of Politics* 60.3 (Aug., 1998): 634-652; Marc J. Hetherington, “Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization” *American Political Science Review* 95 (2001): 619-631; Nolan M. McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Ronald B. Rapoport, Walter J. Stone, and Alan I. Abramowitz, “Sex and the Caucus Participant: The Gender Gap and Presidential Nominations” *American Journal of Political Science* 34.3 (Aug., 1990): 725-740; Thomas M. Carsey and Geoffrey C. Layman, “[Party Polarization and ‘Conflict Extension’ in the American Electorate](#)” *American Journal of Political Science* 46.4 (Oct., 2002): 786-802; Geoffrey C. Layman “‘Culture Wars’ in the American Party System” *American Politics Research* 27.1 (1999): 89-121; Samuel J. Abrams, Morris P. Fiorina, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York, NY: Pearson Education, 2005).

⁵³ George F. Will, “America’s Shifting Reality,” *The Washington Post*, 4 November 2004, Final Edition, A25.

Using a variety of different surveys, election years, and policy questions, we find that there is considerable heterogeneity in issue priorities and preferences within the parties-in-the-electorate. Partisans are cross-pressured across a wide variety of different policy domains, but especially on social or cultural issues. We find similar rates of disagreement among the most sophisticated partisans, the most educated partisans, the strongest partisan identifiers, and the most politically interested. It is clear that the aggregate red-blue state comparisons so frequently interpreted as evidence of mass polarization have overlooked the extent to which contemporary party alliances remain diverse coalitions. As such, the pool of persuadable voters in the electorate is much larger than often assumed.

The Persuadable Voter

We argue that the most persuadable voters are those for whom neither candidate offers a perfect policy match. These voters are closer to the Republican candidate on some issues and the Democratic candidate on others.

It should come as no surprise that those with a foot in each camp should be the most likely to switch back and forth between them. Perhaps less clear is that existing notions of “swing voters” do not adequately or completely capture our conception of the persuadable voter. In media and scholarly accounts, swing voters have been variously operationalized as political independents, the “undecideds” in political polls, those who switch parties between elections, and the politically unsophisticated “floating voters.” While each of these groups might be more persuadable than other subsets of the electorate, they incompletely capture persuadability in one way or another. Our conception of the persuadable voter—individuals cross-pressured between partisan loyalties and a salient policy issue—offers a more theoretically-grounded and empirically-testable measure of responsiveness to campaign information, and one that is consistent with the campaign behavior of the candidates who attempt to do the persuading.

It seems intuitive that individuals who call themselves political independents will be more persuadable than partisan identifiers. And by our expectations, independents will undoubtedly be persuadable since they are more likely to be cross-pressured across policy domains. But using political independence alone as a gauge of persuadability misses the many partisan identifiers who actively disagree with some aspect of their party’s platform. We focus our attention on this group of persuadable voters, not only because they have been so often overlooked in previous research but also because they offer the clearest evidence of the tradeoff voters must make when the predispositions underlying their vote decision are in conflict. Political independents are also substantially less likely to vote. According to the 2004 National Election Study, just 46% of pure independents (59% including leaners) voted, compared to 70% of self-identified Democrats and 83% of self-identified Republicans. As we argued in the introduction, candidates base their campaign appeals on strategic segments of the *voting* public. We expect that self-identified independents will be responsive to campaign information, but they are not alone in their susceptibility to campaign effects.⁵⁴

Pollsters typically label as persuadable those individuals who reveal they are “undecided” when surveyed about their candidate choice.⁵⁵ Cross-pressured partisans might be more likely to be uncommitted to a candidate, but the “undecided” survey response is not itself a theoretically useful measure of persuadability. For one, the definition of an undecided voter depends on the timing of the poll in the

⁵⁴ The self-identified independent measure is also problematic in that respondents might call themselves independent, all the while that their policy views (as well as their voting behavior) are indistinguishable from hard-line partisans. Decades of research have shown that “partisan leaners,” the self-identified independents who say they are closer to one party or the other, are often as partisan in their behavior as weak identifiers. Roughly 13% independents would be classified as unpersuadable by the policy measures used later in the analysis.

⁵⁵ Similar to the undecided measure is William Mayer’s definition of swing voters as those rating both candidates within 15 degrees of each other on a thermometer rating in a political survey. William Mayer, “The swing voter in American presidential elections: an initial inquiry”, working paper.

campaign, the wording of the question, and the extent of follow-up probes. Pollsters vary widely in how they ask about candidate preference, with many asking how respondents “lean” in an effort to classify as many individuals as possible into one camp or the other. Not surprisingly, polls from early in the campaign will have more undecided voters than polls later in the campaign. Practically speaking, then, the undecided classification faces some concerns about its reliability as a measure.

More importantly, being undecided about candidate preference is a behavioral consequence, rather than a determinant, of persuadability. The undecided measure offers no theoretical guidance as to who in the electorate will be persuadable outside the context of the poll. To understand campaign dynamics, we need to be able to identify the persuadable voters *before the campaign begins*. Candidates, after all, develop their campaign strategies on the basis of who they expect will be persuadable long before most surveys ask the public if they have made a decision. Relying on a measure that can only be captured during the campaign fails to recognize that the content of the campaign helps to determine if these persuadable voters remain undecided or if they are able to settle on a preferred candidate. The undecided measure also misses individuals who change their candidate choice over the course of the campaign. Although a relatively small proportion of the electorate, these voters can offer the clearest evidence of the direct persuasive effects of campaign information.

Political scientists have also used past voting history as a measure of swing voting.⁵⁶ Individuals who voted for the Democrat in one election and the Republican in another are thought to be more open to persuasion. This measure comes closer to the measure actually used by political candidates, although it too lacks a theoretical explanation as to why these individuals should be persuadable. The measure has the advantage of being exogenous to the current electoral context, but the prediction of who is persuadable and who is not is dependent on the past electoral context. For instance, given Ronald Reagan’s high level of support among Republicans, this measure would lead us to predict that few Republicans were persuadable in 1992, when in fact George HW Bush won a smaller percentage of Republicans than Reagan did in either 1984 or 1988. This measure also misses individuals with no voting history—the young or newly mobilized—who may very well be among the most persuadable. Practically speaking, this measure is difficult to use since there are few cross-election panel studies available and vote recall questions are notoriously flawed, typically finding many more individuals remembering they voted for the winner than was actually the case.

Other scholars have offered a more general theory of persuasion that predicts variation in campaign effects. Most notably, scholars have argued that the individuals most receptive to new information are those with the lowest levels of political knowledge or sophistication.⁵⁷ As argued in *The People’s Choice*, “the notion that the people who switch parties during the campaign are mainly the reasoned, thoughtful, conscientious people who were convinced by the issues of the election is just plain wrong. Actually they were mainly just the opposition.”⁵⁸ It was concluded that the least sophisticated voters were the most susceptible to the ebbs and flows of the campaign and the whims of manipulative candidate efforts. Ben Harper perhaps best sums up the perspective, “You change your mind so many times, I wonder if you have a mind at all.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See for instance, Daron Shaw, “Swing Voting and U.S. Presidential Elections”, working paper. VO Key, in *The Responsible Electorate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) also considered “vote switchers” from one election to the next to be those individuals who disagreed with their party on a policy issue, but he explicitly suggested this occurred independent of the campaign.

⁵⁷ John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 241; H. Daudt, *Floating Voters and the Floating Voter*, (Leiden, Holland: H.E. Stenfert Kroese N.V.; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, McPhee, 1948); Phil Converse, “Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes,” (1962). Cite?

⁵⁸ Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudent, *The People’s Choice*, (1948) Pg 69. Citation?

⁵⁹ Ben Harper, *Show Me a Little Shame*, Burn to Shine, Virgin Records (1999)

The notion that the politically unknowledgeable are the most persuadable voters rests on the assumption that politically knowledgeable respondents are better able to resist information that is inconsistent with their existing predispositions. John Zaller argues the case most explicitly with regard to partisan predispositions, concluding “given reception of a range of campaign messages, people tend to accept what is congenial to their partisan values and to reject what is not.”⁶⁰ Yet, this research does not take into the account how the relationship *between* relevant predispositions might shape campaign responsiveness. Whereas Zaller suggests that party identification acts as a perceptual screen that leads partisans to resist information from the opposing party, we suggest that cross-pressures create a specific condition under which partisans will be receptive to messages from the opposition. Nonetheless, throughout our analysis, we carefully consider this alternative hypothesis. We demonstrate that the most politically knowledgeable and sophisticated respondents also embrace substantial levels of disagreement with their affiliated party.

Why party and policy cross-pressures?

An individual’s vote decision requires weighing and balancing various considerations—policy preferences, partisan loyalties, affection for a particular candidate, group attachments, and the like. If the key factors that underlie the vote decision are in conflict, individuals are more likely to turn to new information to help make up their minds.⁶¹ Although there are a number of different individual-level factors or predispositions that might be relevant to voter decision making, the two most fundamental to the vote decision are partisan predispositions and policy predispositions.⁶²

Policy predispositions are critical to the vote decision because individuals want to support the candidate who will best represent their policy interests. In other words, we expect voters to behave rationally and sincerely. The assumption that voters select the candidate closest to their own policy preferences is the foundation of rational choice models of voting behavior, but the assumption has been challenged by empirical work finding voters lacked the necessary political knowledge to make policy-based vote decisions. Scholars have concluded that voters are nonetheless able to make rational, policy-based vote decisions by using various heuristics or information shortcuts to compensate for low levels of political knowledge.⁶³ William Mayer sums up the current prevailing perspective, “Public thinking about issues and ideology may not conform to a civics-book model of an ideal democratic citizenry, but the voters are capable, on the whole, of recognizing the broad differences between the presidential candidates and casting their ballots accordingly.”⁶⁴

Certainly, it is easier today for voters to cast their ballots on the basis of policy issues because the candidates are taking more distinct positions across a range of policy areas. The electorate is able to vote on the basis of policy alternatives only if they are presented with clear policy choices between the candidates. In recent elections, scholars have found a very clear relationship between voters’ policy preferences and their vote choice. In the 2004 presidential election, for instance, we can accurately

⁶⁰ John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 241.

⁶¹ See, for instance, Duane T. Wegener and Donal E. Carlston “Chapter 12, Cognitive Processes in Attitude Formation and Change” in Dolores Albarracín, Blair T. Johnson, and Mark P. Zanna (eds), *Handbook of Attitudes* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2005).

⁶² E.g., Andrew Gelman and Gary King, “Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes Are so Predictable?” *British Journal of Political Science* 23.4 (Oct., 1993): 409-451.

⁶³ Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁶⁴ William G. Mayer, *Divided Democrats: Ideological Unity, Party Reform and Presidential Elections* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) 7.

predict 88% of votes using just the top 3 issues discussed during the campaign: evaluations of the Iraq War, evaluations of the economy, and attitudes towards government-funded health care.⁶⁵

Partisan loyalties are the other predispositions fundamental to voter decision making. Party labels are important because they structure the candidate choice set presented to the electorate. Voters are not asked to select their preferred candidate from among all eligible citizens in the United States, but rather they must choose between a Democratic and Republican nominee. A partisan predisposition offers an initial expectation of support for one candidate over the other. A stable and long-term identification with a political party offers “an information shortcut or default value, a substitute for more complete information about parties and candidates.”⁶⁶ The relationship between party identification and vote choice remains one of the most robust and enduring findings in political science.⁶⁷ In 2004, more than 90% of self-identified partisans voted for their party’s candidate. When asked if she disagreed with her party on any policy issues, one 75 year old Democratic respondent to the 2004 Blair Center survey commented, “Right or wrong I stand by my party!...never in my life have I ever considered being a Republican!!”

While there is little doubt that partisan identity is a stable and powerful determinant of an individual’s overall political identity, there remains debate regarding the source of these partisan attachments. Scholars have argued that party identification may be rooted in ideological preferences, family socialization, social networks and group attachments, or generational experiences.⁶⁸ And no doubt the reality is that each of these factors helps to shape an individual’s partisan affiliation in some way. Whatever the origins, our key point is simply that party identification, while closely connected to attitudes on most policy issues, remains a conceptually distinct consideration in the minds of the voters. Even if voters are affiliated with the party that best matches most of their policy preferences, there remains room for consequential policy disagreements. Voters can and do identify with a political party while nonetheless actively disagreeing with some of the policy tenets of that party. In accepting the Republican nomination in 1996, presidential candidate Robert Dole recognized this point, proclaiming the Republican Party to be “broad and inclusive. It represents many streams of opinion and many points of view.” Former House Speaker Jim Wright similarly described the Democratic Party as “a mixture, an amalgam, a mosaic. Call it a fruitcake.”⁶⁹

This basic point is often overlooked in voting behavior research, which has typically assumed voters will be (or should be) completely congruent between policy preferences and party identification. The focus of recent debate has been on the direction of the causal arrow between issues and party identification. On one side, the Michigan tradition assumes issue positions will reflect the partisan paradigm that dominates an individual’s political thinking. According to this perspective, partisans should fall lockstep in line with their party on most policy issues. In contrast, the rational choice perspective suggests that issue positions

⁶⁵ Estimated using a logit model of support for Bush over Kerry (nonvoters and minor party supporters omitted) among 2076 voters in the Blair Center 2004 Presidential Election Survey.

⁶⁶ Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) 13.

⁶⁷ Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*, (1960; rpt. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Larry M. Bartels “Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996” *American Journal of Political Science* 44.1 (2000): 35-50.

⁶⁸ See for example, Charles H. Franklin and John E. Jackson “The Dynamics of Party Identification,” *American Political Science Review* 77.4 (Dec., 1983): 957-973; Alan Gerber and Donald P. Green, “Rational Learning and Partisan Attitudes” *American Journal of Political Science* 42 (1998): 794-818. Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). As Bartels summarizes “In the simplest caricature of what has come to be called “the Michigan model,” partisan loyalties are formed early in life, remain perfectly stable throughout adulthood, and serve as the unmoved movers of more specific political attitudes and behavior.” Larry Bartels, “Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions,” *Political Behavior* 24 (2002): 117.

⁶⁹ Quoted in William G. Mayer, *Divided Democrats: Ideological Unity, Party Reform and Presidential Elections* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) 1.

and party identification will be congruent because individuals will align themselves with the party that most closely approximates their ideological viewpoints.⁷⁰ In his classic work on retrospective voting, Morris Fiorina argues that “controversies about issue voting versus party identification miss the point: the ‘issues’ are *in* party identification” (italics in original).⁷¹ The reality of the “chicken and egg” debate is that the causal arrow undoubtedly runs both ways.⁷² More importantly, both perspectives overlook the extent to which partisans might disagree with their political party on an issue without it leading to a change in either their partisanship or policy attitude. As Don Green, Brad Palmquist, and Eric Schickler observe, “ideological proclivities and partisanship overlap somewhat but less than is often supposed, and each contributes to the predictive accuracy of the [vote choice] model.”⁷³ Our analysis is focused on understanding how voters deal with tensions between their party loyalties and issue preferences in coming to a vote decision. Even if we find evidence of ideological or partisan realignment over time, we demonstrate that in any given election, many voters confront conflicts between party and policy. We suggest the campaign helps determine which of these considerations win out.

The prevailing assumption in political science of congruence between party identification and issue preferences was reinforced by early psychological research on cognitive dissonance, which concluded that when related cognitions conflict, one will be changed to restore consistency.⁷⁴ Although this literature is critical in recognizing the extent to which conflicting cognitions exist, the early research assumed that individuals would change their underlying attitude or belief (in this case, party identification or the issue preference) in order to reduce the dissonance. More recent research now recognizes that, even when both cognitions are central to important decisions, individuals will often keep the inconsistent cognitions but simply change the importance of the cognition for the decision or will develop a rhetorical strategy to explain the inconsistency.⁷⁵ Given the variety of cognitions that can influence any life decision, researchers now recognize that it is unrealistic to assume that individuals can make them all congruent.

Recent political psychology research on attitudinal ambivalence recognizes that individuals will simultaneously hold inconsistent political values or beliefs.⁷⁶ For instance, citizens often have ambivalent attitudes toward taxes because they simultaneously hold competing values between a desire for lower taxes as well as a desire for better government services.⁷⁷ This literature has identified a variety

⁷⁰ In fact, it is not uncommon for empirical models rooted in the rational choice tradition to simply omit party identification from their analysis altogether (Enelow and Hinich 1982).

⁷¹ Morris Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting* (1981).

⁷² See for instance, Carsey, Thomas M., and Geoffrey C. Layman. Forthcoming. “Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate.” *American Journal of Political Science*, April 2006.

⁷³ Don Green, Brad Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004) 214.

⁷⁴ Festinger, L. and Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). “Cognitive consequences of forced compliance”. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58, 203-211.

⁷⁵ Michael Billig, *Arguing and Thinking*, Second Edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Neuman, Yair, and Iris Tabak,. (2003). “Inconsistency as an interactional problem: A lesson from political rhetoric” *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 32, 251- 267.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Stanley Feldman and John Zaller, ‘A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions Versus Revealing Preferences’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 36 (1992), 579–616; R. Michael Alvarez and John Brehm, *Hard Choices, Easy Answers: Values, Information, and American Public Opinion* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Jennifer Hochschild, *What’s Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁷⁷ R. Michael Alvarez and John Brehm. ‘Speaking in Two Voices: American Equivocation about the Internal Revenue Service’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 42 (1998), 418-452; See Scott Basinger and Howard Levine. 2005. “Ambivalence, Information, and Electoral Choice.” *American Political Science Review* 99:169–184; Stephen Craig and Michael D. Martinez. *Ambivalence and the Structure of Political Opinion*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

of different attitudinal consequences to such ambivalence, such as greater overtime attitude inconsistency and higher nonresponse in response to survey questions. Our analysis focuses on the behavioral consequences for voter decision making, which we expect to differ from the attitudinal consequences previously identified. Attitudes require no action beyond a mental evaluation, while a decision forces individuals to make a choice between the competing considerations. In selecting between alternatives (i.e., when making a decision), competing considerations are explicitly brought to the foreground. When making a judgment, competing considerations may be easier to ignore (or to avoid by offering a “no opinion” or neutral response). In the case of making a decision between candidates, voters cannot help but confront any tensions between the key political issues discussed during a campaign and party affiliation since the choice set in elections is structured around party labels and campaign information is focused in political issues (however broadly presented). Whereas individuals might be able to avoid talking politics with people in their social networks if they disagree, voters have a much more difficult time avoiding the trade-offs between their partisan identity and policy issues if exposed to campaign information.

How do cross-pressured partisans respond to campaign information focused on an incongruent issue? They might choose to rationalize why one consideration is more important than another, or they might decide that other issues are more important than the ones that conflict, or they might ultimately decide that voting against their national party in a single election does not make them any less of a partisan. The key point is that voting requires making a choice between these competing considerations, and we argue that the campaign context helps to determine how voters make that choice.⁷⁸ By focusing attention on the incongruent issue, cross-pressured voters should be more likely to vote on the basis of that issue. In the absence of a campaign attention to the issue, the cross-pressured voter should revert to partisan predispositions or the broad performance components of the election (economy, war, etc) which everyone considers important. There is an extensive literature demonstrating that campaigns and media coverage can increase the weight given to various considerations; our analysis suggests priming is the mechanism by which cross-pressured voters are persuaded to vote for one candidate or the other.⁷⁹ In other words, among cross-pressured partisans, the effect of the campaign can be issue activation at the expense of partisan activation.

Measurement of cross-pressures

Unfortunately, it is not entirely straightforward to measure the extent of cross-pressures between party loyalties and issue preferences. The exercise requires comparing the policy positions taken by partisans in the electorate with the positions taken by presidential candidates—yet the measurement of each of these can be difficult. Among candidates, for instance, there will be some issues on which they stake clear and opposing positions, but others on which they are deliberately vague. As Benjamin Page once commented, presidential candidates are “skilled at appearing to say much while actually saying very little.”⁸⁰ We restrict our estimate of cross-pressures to only those issues for which the candidates take opposing positions, as gauged by party platforms and campaign rhetoric.⁸¹

⁷⁸ These cross-pressures might also lead incongruent partisans to avoid voting altogether (Berelson et al. 1954), although our panel data find that pre-campaign turnout intentions are highly correlated with actual self-reported turnout on Election Day.

⁷⁹ Druckman, James N, “Priming the Vote: Campaign Effects in a U.S. Senate Election,” *Political Psychology*, 25 (4, 2004): 577-94.; Johnston, Richard, André Blais, Henry E. Brady, and Jean Crête, *Dynamics of a Canadian Election* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992).

⁸⁰ Page, Benjamin I, *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 153.

⁸¹ We first contrasted the party platforms to identify the set of issues on which the parties held divergent positions. We also checked with the coverage of the issues in the New York Times to confirm that the issue was salient in the campaign. Lee

Measuring the policy preferences of the public is also difficult. Scholars have found that responses to issue questions are sensitive to question wording, response categories, and the like. Very minor differences in the wording of survey questions can have systematic effects on the responses given by individuals. For example, the public reports much greater support for federal spending on ‘assistance for the poor’ than on ‘welfare.’⁸²

There are ways to improve the measurement of policy preferences in the mass public. Responses to issue questions are more valid, for instance, when respondents are presented with both sides of a debate. In such cases, expressed preferences more accurately reflect true policy preferences. In a recent work, Paul Sniderman and Sean Theriault find that “when citizens are exposed to a complete rather than to an edited version of political debate, they do not succumb to ambivalence or fall into confusion. On the contrary, even though as part of the process of debate they are exposed to an argument at odds with their general orientation, they tend ‘to go home,’ to pick out the side of the issue that fits their deeper-lying political principles.”⁸³

In the electoral context, there are policy issues that are presented as the polar perspectives of the two major political parties. Yet, too often survey questions about policy issues do not reflect the structure of the current issue debate. For the sake of continuity over time or comparability with existing studies, surveys continue to ask issue questions on which there is actually little disagreement between the contemporary political parties. For instance, the National Election Studies have consistently included questions like: “should federal spending on public schools be increased, decreased or kept about the same?” Although party distinctions on education policy certainly exist, this question does not reflect these differences. Democrats may endorse increased spending for teacher pay or improving urban school districts while Republicans may prefer increased spending on testing and providing financial incentives for merit or performance. Similar problems exist for questions regarding spending on crime, spending on foreign aid, and the death penalty among others. While these are important policy domains, the questions that are often included in leading national surveys are inadequate for measuring the extent to which someone might disagree with their party (and agree with the opposing party) on the issue; from these survey questions, it is not clear that the national parties differ, or in what ways they differ, on the issues referenced in such questions.

In the 2004 Blair Center presidential election study, we deliberately structured questions to reflect the current debate on salient political issues.⁸⁴ We asked, for example, about opinions on a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, rather than attitudes toward civil unions, because the extant debate about gay rights was focused specifically on this policy disagreement between the parties. In this way, we present respondents with policy alternatives that more closely represent the actual political environment and therefore should more accurately measure the extent to which respondents might disagree with the position of their party candidate. Ultimately, our analysis still rests on the assumption

Sigelman and Emmet Buell generously shared updated data from their work, “Avoidance or Engagement? Issue Convergence in Presidential Campaigns,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 48.4 (2004): 650-661. We checked reliability by comparing the distribution of issue preferences on the survey questions. Any issues for which the majority of both Democrats and Republicans *shared* an issue position were excluded. In 2000, for instance, the issues omitted by these criteria include the death penalty, spending on education, and spending on overseas aid. We also omitted valence issues, such as economy and Iraq, on the belief that they are likely endogenous to candidate support.

⁸²E.g., T. W. Smith “That Which We Call Welfare by Any Other Name Would Smell Sweeter: An Analysis of the Impact of Question Wording on Response Patterns” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51 (1987): 75-83.

⁸³Paul M. Sniderman and Sean M. Theriault, *The Dynamics of Political Argument and The Logic of Issue Framing* in *Studies in Public Opinion: Gauging Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error and Change*, by Willem E. Saris and Paul M. Sniderman (eds.). (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2004).

⁸⁴Question wording for the 10 issues used in subsequent analysis are in the appendix. The survey was fielded by Knowledge Networks between November 5-16, 2004. The overall survey completion rate was 68.1%. The sample plan consisted of 2800 interviews from three strata: 1) 1,150 from Southern states, 1,150 from other states, 500 general adult population.

required of survey research that responses reflect real preferences. We take a number of steps to explicitly test this assumption, but it remains an assumption of the analysis.

Our coding proceeds in a conservative manner. First, in our measure of cross-pressures between partisan loyalties and issue preferences we include only those respondents who identify with a major party. Partisan leaners, self-identified independents who indicate that they are closer to one party or other, are excluded. Not surprisingly, these leaners have somewhat higher levels of partisan incongruities, no doubt related to their decision to call themselves independents in the first place.⁸⁵ This decision means that much of our analysis is generalizable only to the 2/3rds of the electorate who report a party identification (although we try to include analysis of self-identified independents throughout). In real campaigns, candidates do not typically use self-identified party identification; rather they infer partisanship on the basis of party registration, voting history, demographics, and the like. We use this subset because it offers the most rigorous test of our expectations.

Second, if the question response format included a middle, neutral, or don't know category, individuals selecting these categories were coded as being congruent with their political party, even if, they might consider their moderate position to be incongruent with their party's more extreme position. So, to be coded as cross-pressured the respondent must not only disagree with the position taken by her own party but also agree with that of the opposition party. Finally, in much of the analysis we will limit the analysis to only those cross-pressures on issues that respondents report are important to them personally. In the next section, we use these criteria to estimate the extent of policy-party cross-pressures in the mass public in 2004.

Partisan Cross-pressures

Even though the 2004 election was regarded one of the most polarizing elections of recent history, we nonetheless find that partisans disagreed with their affiliated party across a variety of policy issues. Shown in Table 2.1 is the distribution of issue preferences, ordered from the least incongruent to the most incongruent. In the Blair Center survey, we tried to select issues that had the potential to be divisive in 2004, both ones that had just recently entered the public domain (as in the case of stem cell research) or ones that represented a historical division between the two major parties (as in the case of support for labor unions). We generally find that the majority of partisans hold positions congruent with those taken by their affiliated political party, but the margins are far from overwhelming. Across the various issues, we find an average of 26% of partisans hold positions incongruent with their party, 20% hold neutral or ambivalent positions, and a bare majority (54%) agree with the stance of their party's nominee.

In scanning the issues by their level of incongruence, we notice that social or cultural issues more than other issues are at the top of the list. In contrast, the issues of the Iraq War and the economy found the highest levels of inter-party agreement. On evaluations of the Iraq War, seventy five percent of partisans share the position of their party candidate while 65% of partisans were congruent on evaluations of the economy. This is consistent with scholarly evaluations of the prominent issues of the 2004 campaign, but it also no doubt reflects the fact that evaluative issues are more likely than other issues to reflect candidate support rather than deep-seated ideological predispositions.⁸⁶

Of course, simply disagreeing with your party on an issue does not necessarily translate to discomfort or dissonance about the cross-pressure. An individual might be closer to the opposition party on an issue, but not really care about the issue. As a way to gauge the importance of a cross-pressure, we included in the survey a question about issue importance for many of the political issues above. Issue importance

⁸⁵ Edward Carmines and Michael Ensley *Strengthening and Weakening Mass Partisanship: Issue Preferences and Partisan Attitudes in an Increasingly Polarized Party System* (Midwest Political Science Association, 2004).

⁸⁶ Geoffrey Evans and Robert Andersen, "The Political Conditioning of Economic Perceptions," *The Journal of Politics* 68.1 (2006): 194.

measures “the extent to which attitudes manifest the qualities of durability and impactfulness.”⁸⁷ Research has found that issues deemed important by respondents are more likely to be stable, resistant to change, and more likely to influence behavior.⁸⁸ There is also substantial evidence that if an individual considers an issue important, they are more likely to become informed about that issue.⁸⁹ Thus, a measure of issue importance helps to ensure that we are distinguishing “real” cross-pressures from “top of the head” survey responses.⁹⁰

Table 2.1: Issue Preferences among Partisans in 2004

	Incongruent	Neutral	Congruent
Faith-based Initiatives	36%	24%	40%
School Prayer	36%	21%	43%
Abortion	35%		65%
School Vouchers	35%	17%	48%
Partial Birth Abortion	35%		65%
Drug Imports	34%	17%	49%
NCLB Education policy	30%	28%	42%
Tort Reform	29%	21%	50%
Gay Marriage	29%	16%	56%
Gun Control	27%	10%	62%
Environment vs Oil	27%	20%	53%
Stem Cell	26%	23%	51%
Business Regulation	25%	31%	44%
Health Care	25%	23%	52%
Union Support	23%	26%	51%
Social Security Privatization	22%	28%	50%
Government Aid to Poor	22%	27%	51%
Affirmative Action	21%	27%	52%
Tax Cuts vs. Minimum Wage	20%	20%	61%
Multilateralism	15%	30%	55%
Use of Force/Terrorism	14%	27%	59%
Iraq War Evaluation	13%	12%	75%
Economy Evaluation	11%	24%	65%
Average All Issues	26%	20%	54%

Note: numbers calculated using post-stratification/nonresponse weights provided by KN.

Limiting our analysis to positional issues (rather than evaluative issues) on which the candidates took publicly opposing positions, issues on which partisans are not in consensus (e.g., support for prescription drugs), and issues for which we have a measure of personal importance, we are left with 10 potential “wedge” issues from the 2004 presidential election: abortion, gay marriage, stem cell research, gun control, affirmative action, environment, health care, minimum wage, social security privatization, and

⁸⁷ Jon A. Krosnick and Richard E. Petty (eds.), *Attitude Strength: Antecedents and Consequences* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1995), 3.

⁸⁸ Converse, Philip E. *The Nature of Mass Belief Systems in Mass Publics*. (New York: Free Press, 1964) 245.

⁸⁹ Amy Gershkoff, “How Issue Interest Can Rescue the American Public,” presented at the 2006 American Association of Public Opinion Research, Montreal.

⁹⁰ Because we have a post-election measure of issue importance we cannot distinguish whether attitude strength is a function of the campaign or an individual’s inherent interest in the topic (issue public). For the analysis here, we are simply using the importance measure as an indicator that we are measuring a true policy preference.

aid to the poor. For each self-identified partisan we determined if she disagreed with her own party, agreed with the opposing party position, *and* considered the issue to be personally important. As reported in the first column of Table 2, we find that 67% of partisans disagreed with their political party on at least one issue that they considered personally important in 2004, and 40% disagreed with their party on more than one issue. Thus, despite the ideological polarization of party elites in the United States today, most partisans in the electorate experience some degree of tension between their party affiliation and policies they care about. One respondent to the Blair Center survey offered the following perspective regarding his policy disagreements with his party, “No party is going to fulfill every citizen’s expectations and you have to learn to give and take with the party that benefits as a whole your own needs, the people around you or the area where you live and work.”

Indeed, we find that the majority of respondents are aligned with the political party that is closer to their preferences on *most* political issues. Just 4% of partisans disagree with their political party on more than half of the ten issues. Generally, then, partisans are correctly sorting themselves into the correct partisan camp on the basis of their policy preferences, just as rational choice theorists would predict. The belief systems of the American public are often complex—with respondents liberal on some issues but conservative on others—but they are nonetheless able to figure out which of the two major political parties provides the better *average* fit. Although not shown, we similarly find that those with one foot in each camp are more likely to call themselves political independents and ideological moderates.⁹¹

Who are these 4% of partisans who are highly incongruent? Perhaps surprisingly, the political knowledge levels of these individuals are not that different from those with fewer cross-pressures.⁹² Instead, the most highly cross-pressured partisans appear to be individuals for whom party identification is a closer reflection of socialization than ideological preference. These highly incongruent individuals tend to be older, more likely to share the party identification of their parents, are less likely to have ever affiliated with the other party, and are more likely to be Southern Democrats. One highly-cross-pressured 80 year-old Republican respondent explained why he disagreed with his party on so many issues, “I was voting Republican when young George was an unfertilized egg. The party has changed...They once believed that the less government intruded into private affairs, the better. These new [Republicans] want Uncle Sam and the 50 states to poke their collective noses into the reproductive organs of the American female.”

As a further test of the robustness of our measure, we examine levels of partisan incongruities among the most politically sophisticated portions of the electorate, reported in Table 2.2. According to early research, only a small subset of the population is capable and motivated to think in ideological terms, with very few characterized by political belief systems that are “large, wide-ranging, and highly constrained.”⁹³ The early Columbia school studies believed that cross-pressures reflected a lack of political knowledge or interest—“simply from not caring much one way or the other about the election.”⁹⁴ The work of Phil Converse and John Zaller might also generate skepticism that our observed cross-pressures are reflective of true policy tensions rather than reflections “ideological innocence” or a lack of political awareness. Yet, we find that even among that the most politically sophisticated respondents there is considerable cross-pressures. Whether we look only at those who are self-identified “strong” partisans, college graduates, the politically attentive, or the most politically aware or knowledgeable, we always find that less than half agree with their party on all 10 of the issues considered here. Clearly, there remains substantial policy heterogeneity in issue preferences among the party-in-the electorate.

⁹¹ Edward Carmines and Michael Ensley “Strengthening and Weakening Mass Partisanship: Issue Preferences and Partisan Attitudes in an Increasingly Polarized Party System” (Midwest Political Science Association, 2004).

⁹² The political knowledge levels of those with at least 50% of issues cross-pressured are not statistically different from those with less than 50% cross-pressured ($p=.23$).

⁹³ Robert Luskin, “Measuring Political Sophistication,” *American Journal of Political Science* 31.4 (1987): 860.

⁹⁴ Bernard Berelson, Hazel Gaudet, and Paul Lazarsfeld, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up his Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1944) 19-20.

Table 2.2: Summary Measure of Cross-Pressures in 2004

	All Partisans	Strong Partisans	Politically Attentive	College Graduates	Politically Aware	Democrats	Republicans
Completely Congruent	33%	35%	38%	43%	42%	33%	33%
Incongruent on at least 1 issue	67%	65%	62%	57%	58%	67%	67%
Incongruent on more than 1 issue	40%	36%	35%	30%	31%	39%	31%
1/2 of issues or more	4%	3%	5%	3%	3%	4%	4%
Mean	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.38	1.5
Sample size	1872	1113	684	450	620	1057	815

Although not shown in great detail in this excerpt, we conducted a number of other robustness checks to evaluate the extent of policy cross-pressures in the electorate. For instance, the Blair Center survey included an open-ended question that asked partisans if they could think of any political issues about which they disagreed with their party. An open-ended question allows respondents to tell us in their own words about any issue on which they felt tension with their political party. These responses are reported in Table 2.3. With the open-ended responses, we find slightly fewer partisans who disagree with their affiliated party on a policy issue than with the closed ended items, but still 46% were able and willing to volunteer an answer. Republicans were more likely than Democrats to offer a policy disagreement (59% versus 46%), perhaps reflecting the fact that an incumbent president presents a clearer policy reference point.⁹⁵ Categorizing the issue responses, we find that partisans were particularly likely to mention that they disagreed with their party on cultural issues more than economic or foreign policy issues. Some 18% of all Democrats and 26% of all Republicans volunteered that they disagreed with their party on a social issue. Republicans were also considerably more likely than Democrats to say they disagreed with an economic policy issue or a foreign policy issue, accounting for the higher overall levels of partisan incongruities among Republicans.

Although the issue questions from the National Election Studies are less than ideal for measuring policy preferences, they too show that partisans often disagree with their party on a policy issue.⁹⁶ Looking at policy disagreements over time—whether looking at only the four issues with the longest time trend or with a measure of the proportion of issue disagreements in each year—we find that a majority of partisans disagree with their political party on at least one policy issue. Perhaps surprisingly, there is only the slightest hint of a decline in the extent of policy cross-pressures since 1972, offering some challenge to recent research suggesting the public has undergone an ideological realignment.

Estimates of the absolute level of partisan incongruities in the American electorate will of course depend to on the particular data sets employed and the particular issues examined and the wording of the questions asked. The measures used here for gauging the extent of incongruities in the electorate are far from perfect. Nonetheless, the basic point we wish to make is that whatever the extent of ideological and partisan realignment that is occurring over time, *within a given election*, we can expect that many partisans will face policy disagreements with their party's nominee.⁹⁷ Simply, the party-in-the-electorate remains a diverse coalition on both sides of partisan aisle. And with diversity comes susceptibility to wedge issues.

⁹⁵ Reassuringly, we find a strong relationship between the open-ended responses and our coding of the closed-ended questions. The correlation between those who are identified as cross-pressured by the open-ended question and those who are cross-pressured by the closed-ended question is statistically significant at $p < .01$.

⁹⁶ The issues include gun control, government services, tax cuts, abortion, social security, health care/government insurance, aid to blacks, the environment, and gay marriage. Where available, we limit to "important" cross-pressures, available for gun control, government services, abortion, care/government insurance, and aid to blacks.

⁹⁷ E.g., Abramowitz and Saunders (1998); Layman and Carsey (2002).

Using our 10 issue important cross-pressures measure, we can calculate a rough estimate of the proportion of the electorate who might be susceptible to wedge appeals, reported in Table 2.3.⁹⁸ Whether looking at the general public or the voting public, we find that roughly half of the electorate is entirely congruent with one of the two parties, while about half have at least a toe in each camp. We should emphasize that simply being more susceptible to campaign influence does not necessarily mean that these individuals will vote one way or the other. Their final vote will depend on how the voters weigh different considerations in their final vote, which we argue is dependent on the campaign environment, a hypothesis we explore in the next chapter.

Table 2.3: Percentage of potentially persuadable voters in 2004 electorate

	Percent of Citizenry	Percent of Electorate	Percent of Electorate (open-ended)
Persuadable Partisans	25%	26%	24%
Congruent Partisans	41%	44%	46%
Persuadable Independents	30%	25%	25%
Congruent Independents	4%	5%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%

This analysis in this chapter illustrates the coalitional nature of the political parties. Scholars and journalists have long recognized this characteristic of the Democratic Party. Through its historical development, the Democratic Party has brought together very different demographic and social groups with different policy interests and priorities under a single tent. In response to accusations that he divided the Democrats, Eugene McCarthy replied, “Have you ever tried to split sawdust.” And a half a century earlier, Journalist Finley Peter Dunne’s Mr. Dooley observed, “Th’ dimmycratic party ain’t on speakin’ terms with itself.”⁹⁹ In the book, *The Divided Democrats*, William Mayer shows that the fractures in the Democratic Party are fundamentally rooted in policy differences rather than created or exacerbated by divisive primary contests or the nomination process.¹⁰⁰

But our analysis highlights contemporary cleavages within the Republican Party as well. With electoral success, the Republican Party has grown more diverse. If we consider the sheer number of different policies on which elected officials must today stake a position, it should be of no surprise that partisans often encounter a policy disagreement with their national party, even in today’s more polarized environment. Political elites may have become increasingly ideological during the previous few election cycles, but the structure of American politics guarantees that the parties-in-the-electorate will remain heterogeneous coalitions.

Finally, despite the media attention on the “the culture wars,” our analysis suggests that partisans in the electorate are more likely to disagree with their national party’s position on cultural or social issues than on economic issues. Since social issues create cleavages *within* party coalitions, candidates have an incentive to emphasize these social issues in their targeted campaign appeals even as economic issues remain the primary division *across* party coalitions. Thus, the focus on cultural issues in contemporary political campaigns is not so much a reflection of the policy priorities or preferences of the public, but a consequence of the strategic decision of the candidates.

⁹⁸ Persuadable partisans are limited to those individuals who are not only cross-pressured on at least one issue but also knowledgeable about the positions of the candidates on these issues.

⁹⁹ Both quotes are cited in William Mayer, *The Divided Democrats*, (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1996) 1.

¹⁰⁰ William G. Mayer, *Divided Democrats: Ideological Unity, Party Reform and Presidential Elections* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 8.

Chapter 3: Cross-pressures and Campaign Effects (excerpt)

Macomb County, Michigan, a suburban county just north of Detroit, was the most Democratic suburban county in the nation in 1960, voting 63 percent for John F. Kennedy. In 1984, the county gave 67% of its votes to Ronald Reagan. Following yet another presidential loss for the Democrats, pollster Stanley Greenberg conducted a study of Macomb County in an attempt to figure out why so many traditional Democrats cast their ballots for a Republican presidential candidate.

What Greenberg found was wide-spread sentiment among white blue-collar men that they were “getting a raw deal” from the Democratic Party, which they viewed as beholden to minority interests and caught up in the civil rights movement. Most of the disaffected Democrats Greenberg spoke to were unionized auto workers, who were conservative on issues like busing and welfare and hawkish on foreign policy. Reagan appealed to these working class Democrats by emphasizing patriotism, anti-communism, religion and family values, as in his 1984 campaign commercial that scrolls through images of rolling farms, steel mills, coal miners, and churches to the tune of Lee Greenwood’s, “I’m Proud to Be an American.”

It is generally recognized that partisans who are ideologically conflicted with their party are more likely to defect, as the legendary Reagan Democrats of Macomb County illustrate. Less understood is the way in which cross-pressures between partisan loyalties and policy preferences interact with the campaign environment. In this chapter, we examine how cross-pressures shape susceptibility to campaign effects. Using survey data from the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, we evaluate the influence of campaign information on voter decision making. We find that increases in campaign information are associated with higher levels of vote instability and party defection among cross-pressured partisans. Likewise, as learning increases over the course of the campaign, we find corresponding increases in the effect of incongruent issues on vote choice at the expense of partisan loyalties.

Cross Pressures and Voter Decision Making

Almost every decision in life involves difficulty and conflict. Whether selecting a restaurant for dinner, choosing a college, or selecting a preferred political candidate, making a decision requires weighing the trade-offs between various considerations. Do you choose the restaurant with the spectacular food at exorbitant prices or the one with mediocre food at reasonable prices? Similarly, the voter who agrees with the Republican candidate on some issues and Democratic candidate on other issues must ultimately choose between competing considerations. We argue new information is more likely to influence an individual’s decision making when the factors underlying her decision are in conflict.¹⁰¹

In the context of presidential elections, voters cross-pressured between competing considerations should be more susceptible to campaign persuasion. Such tensions are most evident among partisans who disagree with their party on a salient policy issue, such as a Republican who supports universal health care or the Democrat who opposes stem cell research. Likewise, political independents are also likely to be cross-pressured, no doubt reflecting their decision to identify as an independent in the first place. The campaign is critical in determining whether the conflict is exacerbated or assuaged, altering the weight given to an incongruent issue relative to partisan loyalties.¹⁰² If campaign discussion is focused on the incongruent issue, the cross-pressured partisan should be more likely to abandon her party; whereas in a campaign fought on other issues the conflict might rest peacefully unnoticed.¹⁰³ As a textbook on

¹⁰¹ A similar story is appropriate in the restaurant decision. How many of us, when undecided between two dining options, simply ask our significant other to decide?

¹⁰² One mechanism of priming might also be simple learning of issue positions—voters cannot evaluate a candidate on the basis of an issue if they don’t know about that issue. See Gabriel S. Lenz. 2005 “Learning, Not Priming: Reconsidering the Evidence for the Priming Hypothesis.” Unpublished manuscript. Princeton University.

¹⁰³ Back to the dining analogy, the tension between quality and price “rests peacefully unnoticed” in my decision making when Harvard is picking up the tab.

persuasion explained, “By regulating the degree of conflict experienced, the persuader can make it more likely that the persuadee will choose the option desired by the persuader.”¹⁰⁴

Some cross-pressured partisans might know from the start that their party’s nominee will not perfectly match their policy preferences, but others will only come to learn of their issue disagreements as the campaign progresses. Thus, we expect these cross-pressured partisans will not only be more likely to defect, but also more likely to be undecided early in the campaign and more likely to change their mind in response to campaign information. In contrast, congruent partisans—those who share the policy positions of their party—should quickly converge to support their party’s candidate. For these individuals, a presidential vote choice is a straightforward decision and campaign information will do little more than reinforce or activate candidate support. Congruent partisans are able to “vote correctly” even before the campaign gets underway and new information will do little beyond reinforcing that decision. As they encounter any campaign information that might undermine their decision, these consistent partisans are more likely to counterargue new information. Thus, we expect that these individuals will make up their minds earlier, are less likely to change their minds during the campaign, and are generally unlikely to be persuaded by new information learned during the campaign.

A simple descriptive analysis of vote choice responses from a 2000 panel survey offers initial support for our hypothesis that independents and cross-pressured partisans are more receptive to campaign information. In Table 3.1, we compare the vote choice dynamics of congruent partisans, incongruent partisans, and political independents. We see that independents and incongruent partisans are much more likely to be undecided early in the electoral season and are much more likely to change their candidate selection during the campaign than are congruent partisans. It also takes longer for independents and incongruent partisans to reach a final vote decision. Two-thirds of congruent partisans report selecting a candidate before their party has even officially nominated a candidate. In contrast, only 43% of independents and just over half of cross-pressured partisans report making up their mind that early in the campaign. Looking at their final vote choice, cross-pressured partisans are three times as likely as congruent partisans to defect from their party’s candidate on Election Day. Also striking is the simple extent of volatility in vote choice observed over the course of the campaign. Some 45% of the electorate changed their vote choice (including moving from undecided to a decision) at some point during the campaign. Although this number may be higher in 2000 because it was an open seat election, it is a markedly higher percentage than the minimal effects perspective might suggest.

Table 3.1: Vote Choice Dynamics in the 2000 Presidential Election.

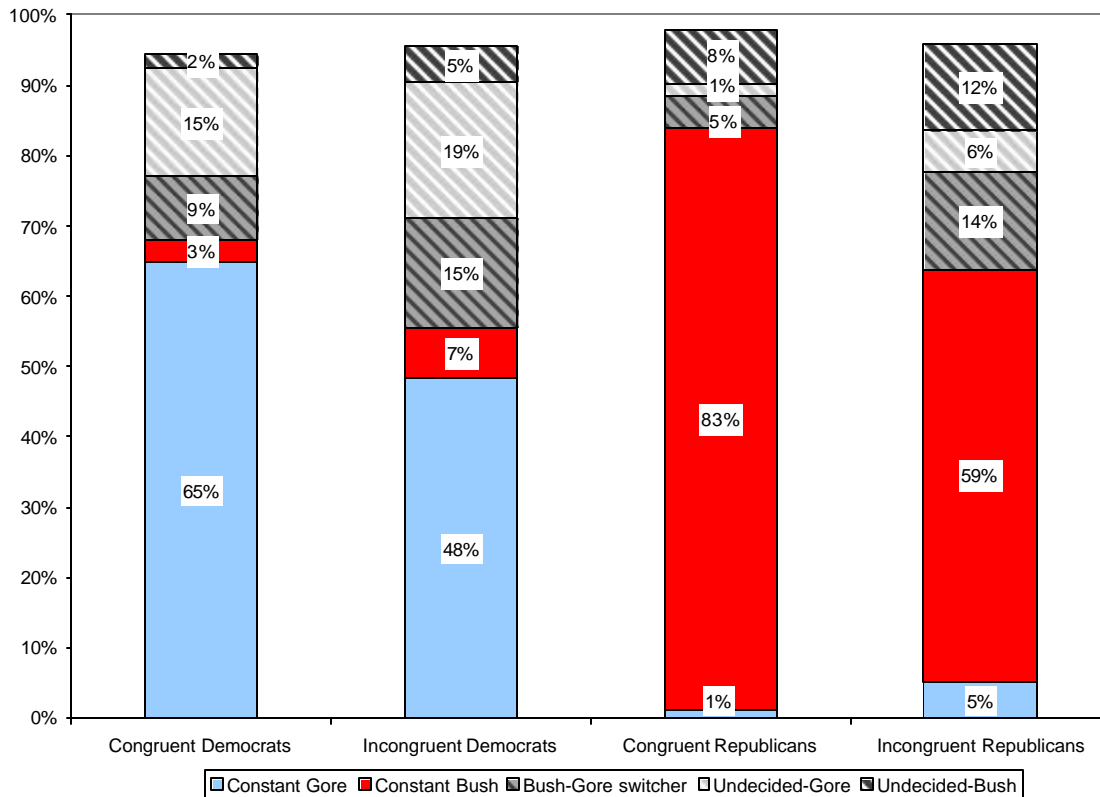
	Undecided in 1st Interview	Changed Mind During Campaign	Final Vote Decision <i>after</i> Conventions	Election Day Defection
Congruent Partisans	12%	24%	33%	6.0%
Incongruent Partisans	20%	40%	43%	18.0%
Independents	40%	57%	57%	
All Respondents	29%	45%	42%	

To offer greater detail of these dynamics, we report the vote choice responses of Democrats and Republicans separately. In Figure 3.1, we summarize the multiple interviews of congruent and incongruent partisans from a panel survey from the 2000 presidential election. Among congruent Democrats, for instance, 65% said they supported Gore every time they were interviewed during the 2000 campaign, compared to only 48% of incongruent Democrats. Likewise, among congruent Republicans, an overwhelming 83% supported Bush throughout the campaign, compared to 59% of cross-pressured

¹⁰⁴ Okeefe, *Persuasion*, p. 81.

Republicans. Incongruent partisans of both stripes were more likely than congruent partisans to consistently support the opposing party candidate and were more likely than congruent partisans to have changed their candidate support during the campaign. Some 15% of cross-pressured Democrats and 14% of cross-pressured Republicans switched support between the two major party candidates, compared to just 9% and 5% respectively among congruent Democrats and Republicans. Much of the movement is from being undecided to making a vote decision, and again cross-pressured partisans were more likely to make such a transition.

Figure 3.1: Summary of Panel Interviews in 2000 Presidential Election



Note: Values do not sum to 100% because of omitted vote combinations (e.g., Buchanan-Bush, Nader-Gore)

Although these dynamics are not explicitly linked to campaign activities, they certainly highlight which voters had the potential to be influenced by the campaign. Those holding the same vote choice every time they were interviewed through the race were unlikely to have been influenced much by the information encountered during the campaign. We should emphasize that these incongruent partisans are more susceptible to influence by the campaign, but it’s still entirely possible that incongruent partisans will ultimately cast a ballot for their party’s candidate on Election Day. In other words, issue incongruence is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for campaigns to have a persuasive effect on partisans.

Measuring Campaign Receptivity

Unfortunately, empirically linking presidential campaigns to voter behavior can be difficult. Much of the recent research on campaign effects has been focused on questions of measurement, operationalization and methodological approach, with one scholar concluding that “measurement problems have contributed to the persistence of the ‘minimal effects’ hypothesis, since without precise measures of the information

made available by the media and the campaign, demonstrating the correlation between this information and changes in voter perceptions is extremely difficult.”¹⁰⁵ The first hurdle to conducting campaign effects research is simply defining the campaign.

Is the campaign the advertisements that candidates air on television? This is not completely adequate if candidates use different substantive appeals with television than with other mediums. In the 2004 presidential election, for instance, the television advertisements sponsored by Kerry and Bush made no mention of gay marriage or abortion, yet these issues were prominent topics in direct mail, phone calls, and personal canvassing by the candidate organizations, political parties, and 527 organizations. Even if we are able to capture the full array of messages used during the campaign, we would still overlook the fact that most voters are exposed to them only indirectly through the media. Yet, the fragmentation of the media today means that media coverage varies enormously across television, newspapers, and the Internet, as well as within each of these different mediums. We also cannot forget the influence of information attained from interpersonal political discussions within social networks, with friends and family, or over the water cooler. In effect, presidential campaigns are ubiquitous.

With all of the hoopla surrounding presidential elections it seems hard to imagine that campaigns do not matter, but the broad-scale nature of the campaign is what makes it a difficult task to show how and when campaigns are important. With the exception of perhaps a major scandal, it is nearly impossible to isolate the effect of a single advertisement or a particular news story.

Only an experiment would allow us to perfectly match a given stimuli with a voter's reaction. Experimental studies are able to overcome difficulties assigning causal responsibility by creating a more clearly delineated “campaign treatment,” but experiments have their own set of limitations. Although experiments allow researchers to isolate the influence of a specific treatment, they generally have poor external validity because they take place under artificial conditions. For instance, experimental research has also found political advertisements to have a considerable influence on turnout and candidate support,¹⁰⁶ but critics argue these effects may be exaggerated because respondents are unnaturally attentive to the ads within the laboratory context (respondents are unable to change the channel or make a run to the refrigerator during commercial breaks). Because experiments often use a nonrandom sample or geographically concentrated samples (e.g., students at a college), the experimental findings cannot be generalized and may be difficult to replicate.¹⁰⁷ Even the gold-standard field experiment “shares the laboratory’s limitation: it identifies a potential rather than an actual effect.”¹⁰⁸

Once we decide how to define the campaign, we must still decide how to measure voters’ exposure to it. Self-reported measures of campaign exposure, in particular, have come under considerable scrutiny because of high levels of measurement error.¹⁰⁹ Simply asking respondents to estimate the number of advertisements they saw in the past week, month, or during the entire campaign, is an imprecise measure of campaign exposure. Perhaps most problematic with this blunt and error-prone measure is that people who best recall watching political advertisements are those who were already planning to vote.

Our approach is to measure the campaign in as many different ways as possible. Thus, we consider differences in the campaign environment that might result from living in a state where the campaign is intensely fought compared to a less competitive state. Battleground states not only have more television

¹⁰⁵ Michael Alvarez, *Information and Elections* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 22.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ Steven E. Finkel and John Geer, ‘A Spot Check: Casting Doubt on the Demobilizing Effects of Negative Campaign Ads’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 43 (1998), 1189-1208.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Brady, Richard Johnston, and John Sides, “The Study of Political Campaigns,” *Capturing Campaign Effects*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Vincent Price and John Zaller 1993. ‘Who Gets the News? Alternative Measures of News Reception and their Implications for Research’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57 (1993), 133-164.

advertising they also have more personal canvassing, higher levels of political discussion, and more coverage of the campaign in the media.¹¹⁰ We also consider differences in candidate exposure resulting from a candidate visiting a state—whether the travel is motivated by campaigning or fundraising.¹¹¹ But we must also recognize that the presidential campaign is a national event that generates interest and attention across the nation. Those in uncompetitive states can still tune in to the campaign through national newspapers, television, or the Internet. Voters might require a bit more self-motivation to follow the campaign closely in an uncompetitive state, but there are nonetheless millions who still do so. Thus, we also measure campaign exposure with individual-level measures capturing attention to the campaign and political awareness, considered the best measure of campaign exposure according to some scholars.¹¹² Finally, we consider reactions to specific campaign events and overtime trends in the campaign. With each of these measures, our assumption is that the most exposed to the campaign receive more information about the policy priorities of the candidates than those least exposed. Given the difficulty of defining and measuring the campaign, we hope the triangulation of analyses helps offer a more complete picture of when, how, and for whom campaigns matter.

The analysis in this chapter relies on the 2004 Blair Center Survey described in Chapter 2 and the 2000 Knowledge Networks Election Panel Study. The 2000 data is a panel design, with repeated measures of the same individuals over the course of the campaign.¹¹³ This design allows us to explore the individual-level dynamics of the vote decision, in much the same way as the original studies by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues. Unfortunately, the cross-pressures measure is less than ideal—some individuals were asked more issue questions than others and we have no way to capture the personal salience of the issue.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, we find quite similar results across two different surveys and different electoral contexts.

Campaign Effects and Partisan Incongruities

We begin by looking at final vote choice in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. In Figure 3.2, we graph defection rates by our measures of policy incongruence. For comparability across elections and across individuals, our policy incongruence measure is calculated as the percentage of issues for which the respondent disagreed with their party (and agreed with the position of the opposing party). Not surprisingly, we see that defection rates increase markedly as the levels of policy cross-pressures increase.¹¹⁵ Among partisans with the lowest levels of cross-pressures (i.e., no policy disagreements with their political party) less than 5% defected to the opposition candidate. At the other extreme, more than one-third of the partisans defected among the small percentage of respondents who disagreed with their party on at least 60% of the issues surveyed.

¹¹⁰ For review, see Thomas Holbrook, *Do Campaigns Matter?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1996).

¹¹¹ Daron Shaw generously shared data on candidate visits from the 2000 presidential campaign.

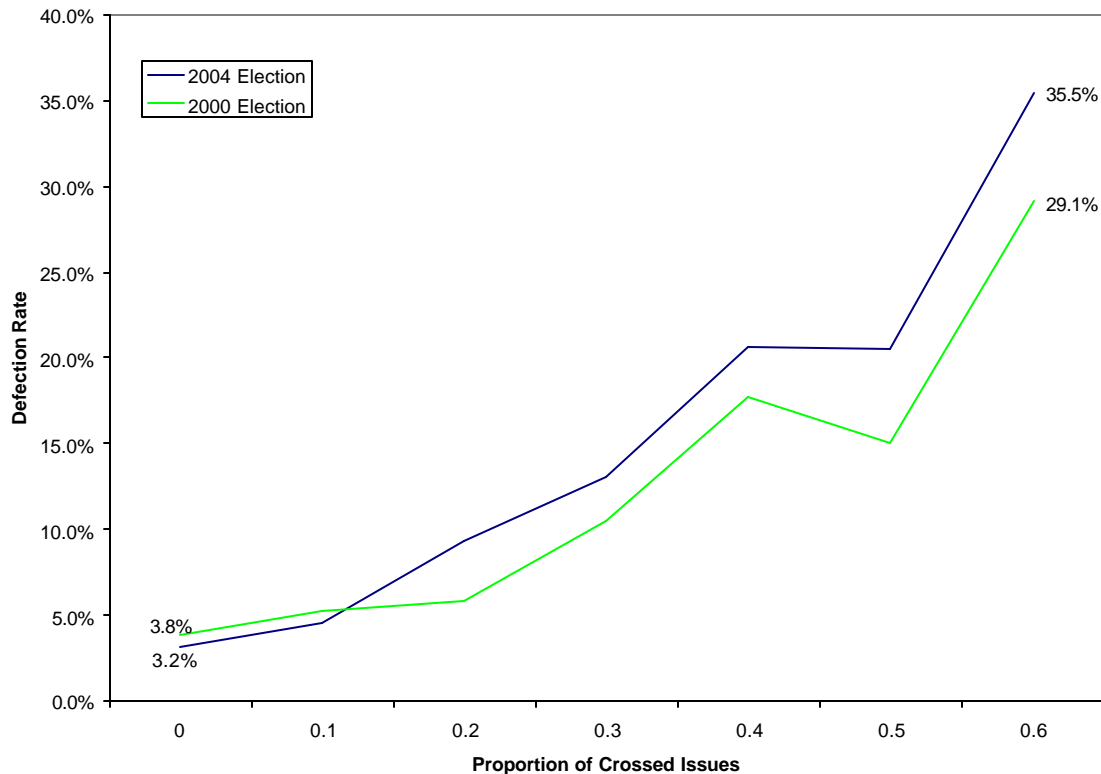
¹¹² Vincent Price and John Zaller. “Who Gets the News? Alternative Measures of News Reception and Their Implications for Research,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57 (1993), 133-164.

¹¹³ The data were collected by Knowledge Networks. The panel includes 29,000 respondents, with interviews beginning in May 2000. The modal number of interviews per respondent is three, and average number is five. The data were collected as part or all of approximately seventy-five randomly assigned surveys (with widely varying sample sizes) sampled from the Knowledge Networks panel. Unfortunately, only a few of these surveys included issue questions, limiting the sample size available to explore the questions at hand.

¹¹⁴ The issues include abortion, defense spending, environment, gun control, affirmative action, school prayer, social security, tax cuts, support for school vouchers. Because of the structure of the data, the number of issue questions asked of each respondent varied: of the partisans in the post-election sample, more than one-third were previously asked no issue questions, and 50% were asked three or more issue questions that could be used in the analysis.

¹¹⁵ The 2004 relationship is likely slightly stronger because the measure is restricted to personally salient issues, while we were not able to make such a distinction with the 2000 data.

Figure 3.2: Party Defection by Policy Incongruity



Most partisans, however, fall somewhere in the middle. They disagree with their political party on one or two policies, but on the whole, they are affiliated with the party that best represents *most* of their policy preferences. But what happens if they received campaign information about those on or two issues that are in conflict with their party identification? We expect that the campaign can activate these issue cross-pressures and thereby influence voter decision making.

This is an increasingly likely possibility given that campaigns today are focusing on more issues and more divisive issues than ever before. The introduction of new information and communication technologies has increased the ability of candidates to individualize campaign messages to cross-pressured voters on the issues of incongruence. In 2004, for instance, Republicans were much more likely to send campaign mail about Bush's abortion policy to Democrats who were affiliated with right-to-life organizations.

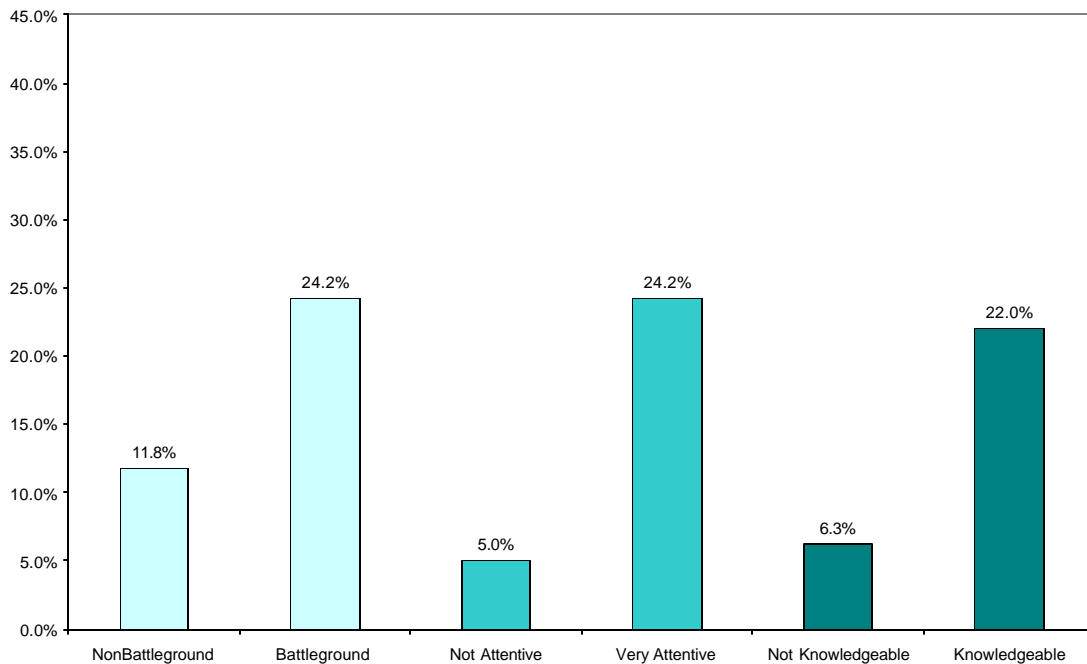
Voters are not fools—they recognize that they embrace some policy positions that are at odds with their preferred political party. Typically, however, these incongruities remain dormant—unnoticed and inconsequential if a campaign is dominated by debate on other issues. If a campaign is able to focus messages on the incongruent issue, the cross-pressured partisans must face the conflicting forces pulling them in different directions. When attention is drawn to conflicting issues, we argue that cross-pressured partisans will be more likely to consider supporting the candidate with a similar position, even if that means voting against their party's nominee. Scholars have long shown that campaigns can prime an issue, and we suggest that this can come at the expense of party loyalties. If an issue is ignored during a campaign, it is easier for a cross-pressured partisan to avoid the issue incongruence.

In order to assess the link between the campaign and the activation of issue cross-pressures in the 2000 and 2004 elections, we estimate a series of logit models using a variety of campaign exposure measures. For ease of presentation, our measure of issue cross-pressures is an indicator variable capturing if the

partisan was cross-pressured on at least one of the salient issues of the campaign.¹¹⁶ We expect the effect of the cross-pressure on vote choice to be greater among those most exposed to the campaign. The campaign is able to activate the incongruent issue only to the extent that an individual receives the campaign message. In each of these models, we include controls for demographics characteristics and general political knowledge. For the ease of presentation, we present the key effects in the text and report the full models in the Appendix.

Illustrated in Figure 3.3 are the results from the logit model predicting defection in the 2004 presidential election. We find that cross-pressured partisans are always more likely than congruent partisans to defect from their party's candidate on Election Day. More notably, however, is that this difference in predicted defection is significantly larger among the most exposed compared to the least exposed—even controlling for political knowledge, strength of partisanship, and demographic characteristics.¹¹⁷ Incongruent partisans living in non-battleground states were about 12% points more likely than congruent partisans to vote for the opposing party candidate. In comparison, incongruent partisans living in battleground states were 24% points more likely to defect. In other words, the incongruent issue was given greater weight in the vote decision among respondents most highly exposed to the campaign. Although living in a battleground state is a blunt measure of campaign activity, there is little doubt that campaign activity levels were substantially higher in these states. As we discuss later in the manuscript, one of the most striking differences between battleground and non-battleground states during the 2004 presidential election was the extent of issue appeals that were microtargeted through direct mail, phone calls, and personal visits.

Figure 3.3: Incongruent Partisans, the 2004 Presidential Campaign and Party Defection



Note: Model controls for political knowledge, strength of partisanship, race, gender, income, education. For all three measures, the 95% confidence interval around the change in probability for high exposure does not overlap the low exposure estimate.

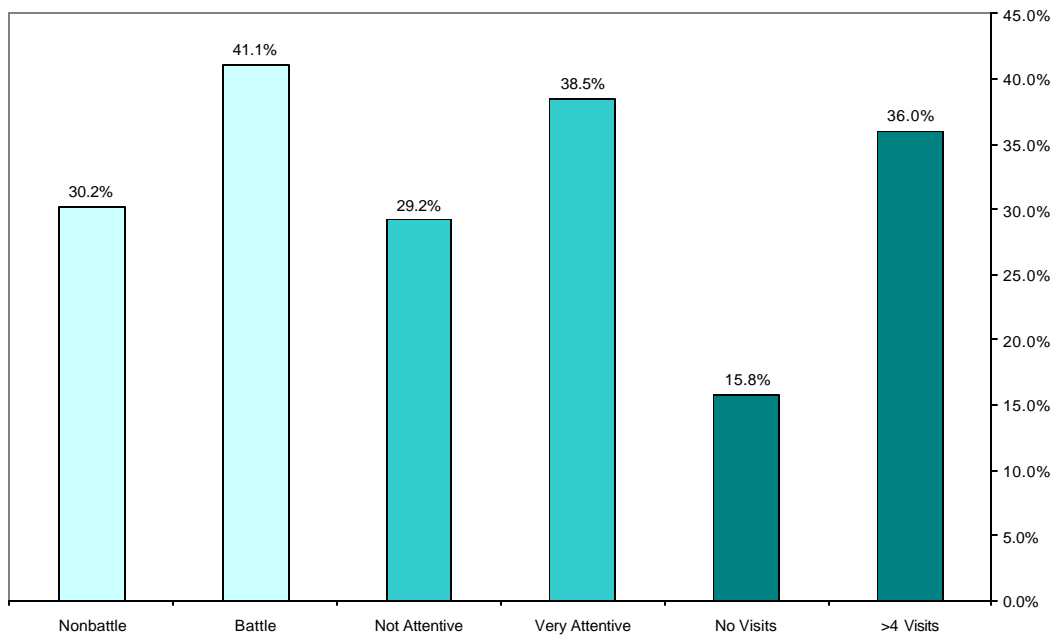
¹¹⁶ We have replicated with the continuous measure with similar results—not surprisingly, there is a much stronger relationship for those at higher levels of cross-pressures. Given the difference in measures across years and in order to simplify presentation, we used a simply dichotomous measure for the remainder of the analysis.

¹¹⁷ For all three measures, the 95% confidence interval for the high exposure estimate does not overlap the low exposure estimate. These effects also hold if we include in the model a control for evaluations of Iraq.

We find similar effects with our individual-level measures of campaign exposure. Among voters reporting lower levels of attention to the presidential campaign, incongruent partisans were just 5% points more likely than congruent partisans to defect, while the difference was 24% points among the most attentive. Using a measure of political awareness, we find a similar pattern. The least aware incongruent partisans were just 6% points more likely to defect than the least aware congruent partisans, while the most aware incongruent partisans were 22% points more likely to defect compared to the most aware congruent partisans.

We replicate this model using data from the 2000 presidential election to ensure that the results are not confined to a single election. The 2000 presidential contest is notable in that it was an open seat race. We might expect that voters have less information about candidates compared to a race including a sitting president, contributing to higher levels of vote instability and perhaps greater reliance on the campaign to make a decision. Indeed, our results are much stronger across the board. In Figure 3.4 we see that incongruent partisans were always more likely than congruent partisans to defect, but the differences are again larger among those most exposed to the campaign. In non-battleground states, incongruent partisans were 30% points more likely than congruent partisans to defect on Election Day, while incongruent partisans living in battleground states were 41% more likely to defect. Using an alternate measure of state-level campaign activity, we find that incongruent partisans in states that were never visited by the candidates were just 16% points more likely than congruent partisans to defect. In contrast, in those states with a greater than average number of presidential visits (4 visits), incongruent partisans were 36% percentage points more likely to defect. Using our individual-level indicator of campaign exposure, we find that among the least attentive, incongruent partisans were 29% points more likely than congruent partisans to defect. Among the most attentive voters, incongruent partisans were 39% points more likely to vote for the opposition candidate than were congruent partisans. Again, these findings suggest that the probability of defection is related not only to the level of ambivalence a respondent feels toward their party candidate, but also the information environment. The finding that incongruent partisans were likely to jump ship, particularly when they were highly exposed to the campaign, suggests that the campaign activates these incongruent issues at the expense of partisanship.

Figure 3.4: Incongruent Partisans, the 2000 Presidential Campaign and Party Defection



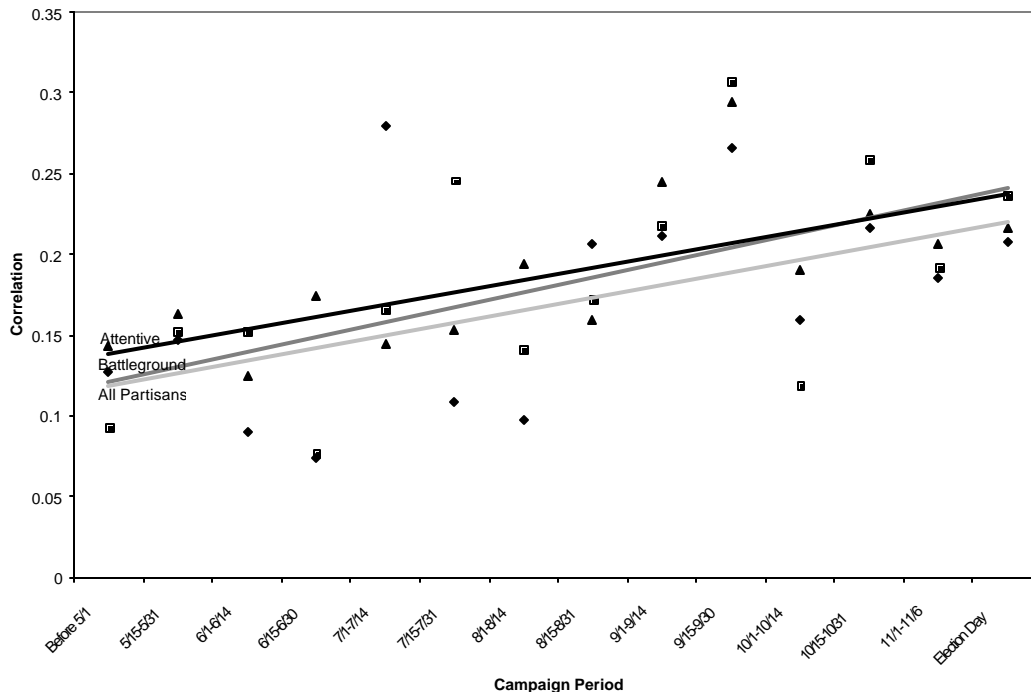
Notes: Model controls for political knowledge, education, strength of partisanship, race, gender, income. For all three measures, the 95% confidence interval around the change in probability for high exposure does not overlap the low exposure estimate.

Temporal Dynamics

In the final section of this chapter, we examine the overtime dynamics of decision making. We consider changes in the relationship between predispositions over the course of the campaign and then we explore reactions to specific campaign events. We argue that the campaign activates issues, thereby leading some incongruent partisans to defect to the opposing party candidate. By the turn of the 21st century, the scope and extent of issues debated during presidential campaigns had dramatically increased relative to earlier decades. In thinking about the temporal dynamics of the campaign, we might expect that incongruent partisans are increasingly likely to face tensions between their issue preferences and party loyalties as the issue positions of the candidates are clarified over the course of the campaign. In other words, we should find that the relationship between issues and vote choice should increase as we get closer to Election Day.¹¹⁸ In Figure 3.5, we find that the correlation between cross-pressures and support for the opposing party increases over the course of the campaign, doubling from .12 in the early campaign to .21 by Election Day. The relationship is even slightly stronger in battleground states (and heavily visited states, not shown) and among the most attentive voters.

This analysis offers additional evidence that the campaign increases the relationship between policy preferences and vote choice, even when it serves to decrease support for one’s own party candidate. This also counters suggestions that the only effect of the campaign is to activate partisans or induce partisans to adopt the positions of their party candidates (often termed “projection”).¹¹⁹ Early campaign research was concerned that campaigns might induce voters to act against their preferences, a concern that appeared unfounded if campaigns only served to “bring home” partisans. Our analysis shows that campaigns do have a direct persuasive effect, but are able to persuade because of the complexity of voter preferences not because the campaign is able to manipulate preferences.

Figure 3.5: Partisan Incongruities and Defection during 2000 Presidential Campaign



¹¹⁸ This is the same logic underlying Gelman and King, 1993. Our theory in fact accounts for flat relationship observed by Gelman and King (1993) and our analysis. We also replicated for strength of partisanship and found almost no change in the relationship over the campaign (increases from .24 to .26).

¹¹⁹ See Gabriel Lenz (2004) for a review of this perspective.

Campaign Events

As a final evaluation of the temporal dynamics of campaign effects, we turn to an analysis of voter reactions to specific campaign events. Conventions and debates are the most high profile and high information events of the presidential campaign. Thomas Holbrook reports that except for the final week of the campaign, the spike in newspaper coverage about the candidates is higher during the conventions than at any other point in the campaign.¹²⁰ Presidential debates also create a spike in information about the candidates, but the information level is somewhat less distinguishable because overall media coverage is already so intense during this time period. Nevertheless, we expect that conventions and debates are high enough profile events that we should be able trace some of the patterns of campaign effects we identified above in reactions to these events. Again, we expect that incongruent partisans and independents will be the most likely to change their vote choice in response to information learned from these high profile events.

We measure the effect of conventions and debates on voter decision making by comparing candidate preference before and after each of these events.¹²¹ In other words, we treat them as intervening events, allowing us to study individual-level movements in vote preferences in response. Because we do not have a controlled experiment, we cannot rule out the possibility that the observed movements in vote preferences are caused by something other than the conventions and debates. For instance, the respondents may have been exposed to other stimuli such as television advertising, political discussions, or news coverage. These other sources of information may have caused voters to change their vote choice during this same time period. Yet, many of these alternate sources of information reflect the events themselves (e.g., media coverage of events). Moreover, individual survey questions gauging reactions to the conventions and debates also find responsiveness to the events. Following the Republican Convention, 46% of interviewed respondents reported that the convention had an effect on their vote. And in response to the individual debates, 13-15% gave an affirmative response to the question, “Has anything you have leaned from, or about, the debates made you change your mind about whom to vote for?” Finally, transitions in vote choice are much higher during these event periods than at other points during the campaign, suggesting movements may be attributable to the events.¹²²

In Table 3.2, we offer a descriptive comparison of vote choice responses before and after each event. We find that congruent partisans were less likely to be undecided prior to the convention than were cross-pressured partisans or independents, with just 11.7% undecided in their last interview before the conventions compared to 22.1% of incongruent partisans and 36.7% of independents. Incongruent partisans and independents were also much more likely to change their candidate preference between the interview just before and just after the event—29.3% of incongruent partisans changed their vote choice as did 34.4% of independents but only 14.4% of congruent partisans (including the move from being undecided to selecting a preferred candidate). Finally, among incongruent partisans, we find that 12% moved from supporting their own party candidate to supporting the opposition candidate following the convention compared to just 4% of congruent partisans doing the same. We find similar trends with the debates, although with overall less instability as we might expect given how late they occur in the campaign.

¹²⁰ Holbrook 1996.

¹²¹ For each event, we compare the last interview prior to the event and the first vote preference interview following the event (no more than ten days after). This cutoff date is consistent with the campaign effects research, which has found in the aggregate that campaign effects may be strongest three to ten days after an event. Daron Shaw, “A Study of Presidential Campaign Event Effects from 1952-1992,” *Journal of Politics* 61(1999): 387-422.

¹²² See Sunshine Hillygus and Simon Jackman, “Voter Decision Making in Election 2000: Campaign Effects, Partisan Activation, and the Clinton Legacy,” *American Journal of Political Science* 47(2003):583-596. To ensure that the changes in vote choice were not simply picking up sophistication levels, we have also replicated results for only the most politically attentive respondents with almost identical results.

Table 3.2: Vote Choice and the 2000 Conventions and Debates

	Undecided Before Event	Changed Vote Choice After Event	Percent Defecting*
Conventions			
Congruent Partisans	11.7%	14.4%	3.9%
Incongruent Partisans	22.1%	29.3%	12.0%
Independents	36.7%	34.4%	NA
Debates			
Congruent Partisans	8.0%	5.8%	5.2%
Incongruent Partisans	10.0%	14.0%	15.2%
Independents	23.0%	24.0%	NA

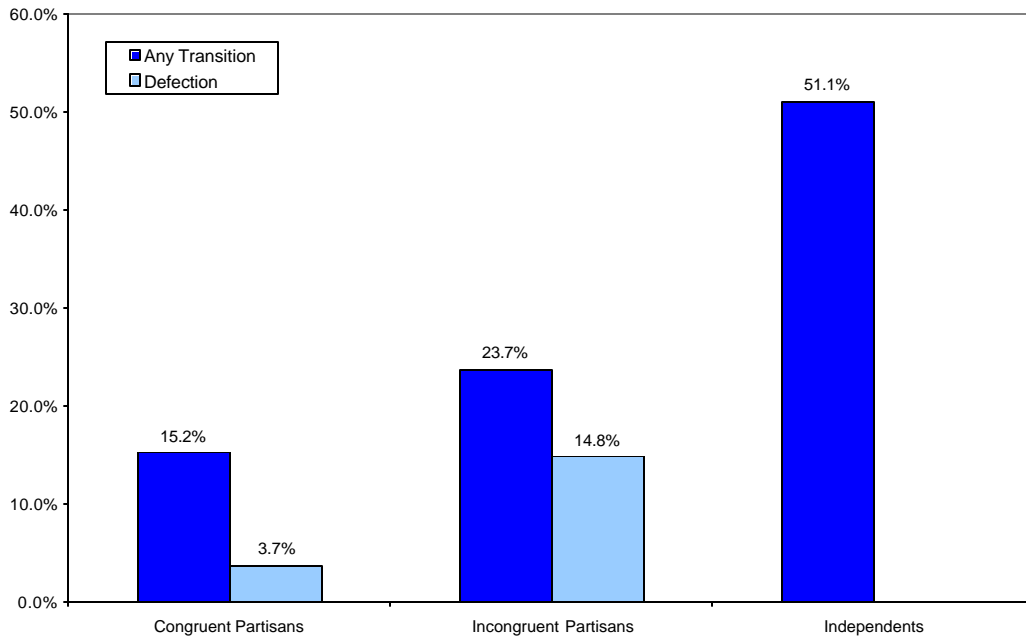
Note: Defections reflect only those who *change* from supporting their party candidate before the event to supporting the opposing party candidate after the event.

While the descriptive findings suggest these events have a comparably larger influence among independent and incongruent partisans, in the next section we predict transitions while also taking into account other factors that might contribute to vote transitions, including political knowledge, demographics, and previous instability in vote choice.¹²³ The full results from the logit models are reported in the Appendix. Using the estimates from these models, we calculate the predicted probability that independents, incongruent partisans, and congruent partisans change their vote choice (in any way) following these events as well as the predicted probability that partisans defect to the opposition party candidate after these events (but did not support the opposition candidate before the event). As shown in Figure 3.6, the predicted likelihood that congruent partisans change their vote choice is just 14.7% (95 CI: 13.5%, 16.1%), compared to a 24.1% (20.6%, 27.6%) probability among incongruent partisans, and a whopping 51.8% (46.2%, 57.4%) predicted probability that independents will change their vote choice following the conventions compared to just before the conventions (including going from undecided to making a candidate selection). We find a similar trend in the defection model, with just 3.7% of congruent partisans predicted to defect to the opposing party candidate in response to the nominating conventions in contrast to 14.8% of incongruent partisans.

As reported in Figure 3.7, the effects of the debates are smaller yet quite similar. Once we control for political knowledge and previous vote choice instability, we find that incongruent partisans have an estimated 12.7% (10.8%, 14.6%) likelihood of transitioning and 6.7% likelihood of defecting in response to the presidential debates. Similarly, independents have a 25.8% (23.0%, 28.6%) chance of transitioning. In contrast, congruent partisans have a 9.2% chance (8.5%, 9.9%) of making any changes to their vote choice and only a 3.0% chance to defecting in response to the debates.

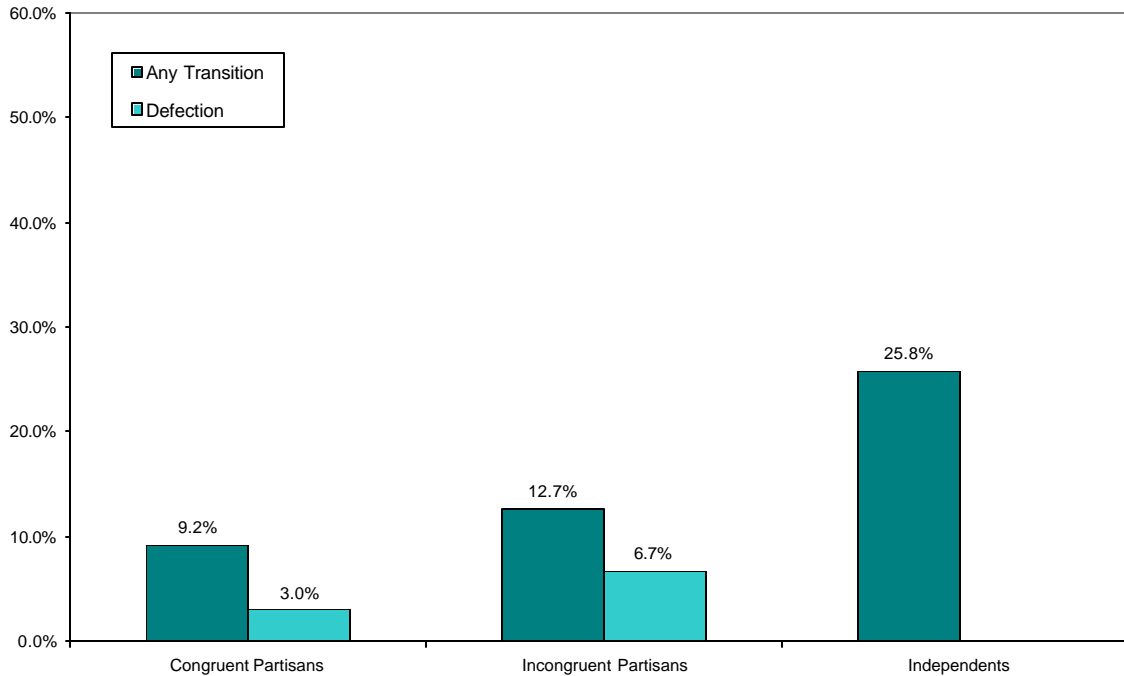
¹²³ We have also replicated the analysis only for the most politically knowledgeable respondents (i.e., estimating the slope change among the most knowledgeable rather than just the intercept shift that comes with including as a control) with identical results. Replicating the debate model for just the politically sophisticated, we find the most sophisticated congruent partisans had a predicted likelihood of defecting of 8.2% (compared to 9.2% among all congruent partisans) and the most sophisticated incongruent partisans had a likelihood of defecting of 12.3% (compared to 12.7% among all incongruent partisans), and sophisticated independents were predicted to 25.2% likelihood (compared to 25.8% likelihood among all independents). The previous changes measure is included only in the debate model because so few respondents had multiple interviews before the conventions.

Figure 3.6: Predicted Probability of Transitioning Following Conventions



Note: Model controls for political knowledge, education, strength of partisanship, gender, race, age, and region. Defection dependent variable omits individuals who supported the opposing party candidate *before* the campaign event.

Figure 3.7: Predicted Probability of Transitioning Following Presidential Debates



Note: Model controls for political knowledge, education, strength of partisanship, gender, race, age, region, and a vote volatility measure capturing the number of times a respondent change their vote choice earlier in campaign. Defection dependent variable omits individuals who supported the opposing party candidate before the campaign event.

These findings suggest that the patterns identified in overtime and final vote dynamics are also observed in reactions to high profile events. The nominating conventions and presidential debates have previously been identified as the campaign events most clearly linked to voter learning. The large number of individuals who transition from being undecided to being able to make a candidate selection following these events offers additional evidence of such learning effects. But our analysis shows that cross-pressured partisans were receptive to messages from the opposition, in contrast to the conventional wisdom that Democrats and Republicans view the debates through a purely partisan lens. These events were able to activate issue preferences, at the expense of partisan activation. More generally, these results confirm the hypothesized variation in campaign effects based on the strength and consistency of predispositions. The individuals most likely to respond to campaign information are the individuals most in need of additional information—political independents and partisans who are imperfectly matched to their party's nominee.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter reveals the influence of campaign information on voter decision making in presidential elections. We have identified variation in campaign effects based on the strength and consistency of the predispositions voters bring to the campaign context. Political independents and cross-pressured partisans were significantly more likely than congruent partisans to change their vote choice when highly exposed to the campaign and in reaction to campaign events. The campaign helps to narrow the agenda to a particular set of issues on which the voters can base their decision. If those issues are in conflict with party loyalties, the campaign complicates decision making and leads to partisan defections at the ballot box. These findings contribute to research on attitude change by identifying conditions in which partisans will be receptive to information that conflicts with their partisan predispositions. The analysis also contributes to research on campaign effects by identifying cross-pressured voters as among the most susceptible to campaign information.

Our expectations about campaign effects follow directly from the strategic behavior of the candidates. The candidates' choice of particular issue messages is consequential to determining who votes how, and candidates attempt to exploit the very tensions that create the opportunity for campaigns to matter. Campaigns are not, however, able to manipulate the electorate to vote against their preferences, as once feared by campaign researchers. Candidates try to maximize the strategic advantage of their issue agenda (termed "deliberate priming" by some), but the voters still base their choice on their predispositions—our analysis simply recognizes the complexity of those predispositions. Since candidates rely on information about voters to develop their issue agendas, some might be inclined to view campaigns as a successful mechanism for electoral accountability. Later in the manuscript, we argue that the threat to democratic accountability comes not from the influence of the campaigns on the voters, but on the implications of changing campaign strategies on the policies pursued by political candidates. In the next chapter, we turn to a closer look at the relationship between candidate strategy, cross-pressures, and voter decision making with a more detailed look at the Republican Southern strategy.

Appendix A: Question Wording

- Some people have proposed allowing individuals to invest portions of their Social Security taxes in the stock market, which might allow them to make more money for their retirement, but would involve greater risk than the current government-run system. Do you favor or oppose allowing individuals to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in the stock market?
- Do you favor or oppose the federal government in Washington trying to reduce the income differences between the richest and poorest Americans?
- Which of the following do you think should be emphasized more in an economic recovery plan: An increase in minimum wage? Or tax cuts for businesses? Where would you place yourself on the scale below? (7 point scale)
- In thinking about health care reform, which of the following do you think should be emphasized more in a reform plan: Expanding coverage for low income adults through federal and state health care programs? Or aiding small businesses in offering health care to their employees? Where would you place yourself on the scale below?
- Would you favor or oppose an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman, thus barring marriages between gay or lesbian couples?
- On the whole, do you favor or oppose the use of stem cells taken from human embryos in medical research?
- Do you favor or oppose the registration and licensing of all new handguns sold in America?
- Some people say that affirmative action programs are still needed to counteract the effects of discrimination against minorities, and are a good idea as long as there are no rigid quotas. Other people say that affirmative action programs have gone too far in favoring minorities, and should be ended because they unfairly discriminate against whites. Still others have opinions somewhere in between these two. Where would you place yourself on the scale below?
- Do you favor or oppose relaxing some environmental standards to increase oil and gas production in the United States?
- Which of the following opinions comes closer to your view about abortion? It should never be permitted; It should only be permitted when the woman's life is in danger; It should only be permitted if the woman's health or life is in danger; By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice (note: only Democrats who selected health only coded as neutral)

Appendix B: Model Results

Table A1: Logit Results Predicting Partisan Defection (2004)

	Non Battleground		Battleground		Non Attentive		Attentive		Low Awareness		High Awareness	
	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err
Partisanship												
Strength	-5.64	0.78	-6.96	1.53	-4.33	1.54	-6.24	1.19	-3.79	1.22	-7.44	1.08
Age	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.11	-0.04	0.12	0.05	0.12	-0.05	0.11	0.16	0.09
Black	-0.27	0.36	-0.58	1.10	-0.20	0.65	-0.47	0.67	-0.98	0.76	0.42	0.46
Income	0.02	0.55	0.37	1.06	1.20	1.02	0.18	0.98	0.33	0.97	0.73	0.77
Female	0.04	0.22	-0.73	0.40	-0.19	0.38	-0.59	0.39	0.26	0.37	-0.07	0.27
Education	0.01	0.12	0.46	0.21	-0.05	0.20	0.22	0.20	0.18	0.19	0.10	0.15
Political												
Knowledge	-0.10	0.11	0.05	0.21	0.19	0.20	-0.38	0.20	0.11	0.19	-0.10	0.18
South	-0.09	0.22	-0.32	0.38	0.27	0.38	-0.74	0.39	-0.25	0.36	-0.32	0.28
Incongruent	0.95	0.22	2.24	0.48	0.47	0.38	2.48	0.50	0.59	0.35	1.81	0.30
Constant	1.47	0.75	0.31	1.48	0.21	1.42	1.29	1.38	-0.18	1.19	1.30	1.08
Pseudo R2	0.138		0.282		0.078		0.301		0.087		0.262	
N	1405		490		381		758		444		1108	

Table A2: Logit Results Predicting Partisan Defection (2000)

	Non Visited		Visited		Non Battleground		Battleground		Non Attentive		Attentive	
	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err
Partisanship												
Strength	-2.44	0.77	-2.11	0.46	-1.80	0.20	-1.96	0.24	-1.66	0.37	-1.86	0.27
Age	0.04	0.15	0.07	0.11	0.01	0.05	-0.01	0.06	0.09	0.07	-0.15	0.08
Black	-0.74	1.10			-1.07	0.44			-1.36	0.75	-1.08	0.75
Income	0.02	0.08	-0.07	0.05	-0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.004	0.04	0.02	0.04
Female	0.02	0.50	-0.02	0.39	0.17	0.16	-0.12	0.18	-0.07	0.23	0.44	0.26
Education	-0.23	0.18	-0.11	0.13	-0.10	0.06	-0.11	0.06	-0.12	0.08	0.01	0.08
Political												
Knowledge	0.0002	0.01	0.01	0.005	-0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	-0.002	0.003	-0.001	0.003
South	0.33	0.49	0.23	0.46	-0.22	0.19	0.10	0.19	-0.06	0.27	-0.03	0.27
Incongruent	0.31	0.49	1.36	0.38	1.09	0.16	1.12	0.18	0.80	0.23	1.51	0.26
Constant	3.54	2.01	3.13	1.37	2.05	0.61	2.24	0.71	1.68	0.98	1.66	0.93
Pseudo R2	0.151		0.197		0.155		0.155		0.099		0.193	
N	274		420		1940		1464		694		1154	

Table A3: Logit Results Predicting Campaign Event Transitions (2000)

	Convention Models				Debate Models			
	Any Transition		Defection		Any Transition		Defection	
	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err
Partisanship								
Strength	-0.74	0.10	-2.14	0.67	-0.55	0.08	-0.76	0.43
Age	-0.02	0.06	0.05	0.17	-0.08	0.04	-0.14	0.12
Black	-0.55	0.46			0.47	0.37	-0.16	1.06
Female	0.42	0.18	1.28	0.58	0.16	0.15	0.39	0.42
Education	-0.11	0.06	-0.27	0.19	0.02	0.06	-0.08	0.16
Political								
Knowledge	-0.37	0.19	-0.70	0.55	-0.40	0.17	-0.74	0.51
South	-0.34	0.22	-1.44	0.82	-0.28	0.17	-0.21	0.49
Previous Vote								
Changes					1.39	0.26	2.96	0.67
Incongruent	0.63	0.23	1.62	0.54	0.39	0.20	0.85	0.41
Constant	0.36	0.43	2.18	1.90	-0.99	0.31	-0.90	1.33
Pseudo R2	0.10		0.28		0.08		0.14	
N	904		391		2096		777	