

Changing Patterns of the Presidential Vote Choice, 1980 - 2004: A Structural Equations Analysis

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Abstract

Guided by the theory of *The American Voter*, we specify and test a series of latent variable structural equation models of the vote decision in the American presidential elections from 1980 to 2004. We test nearly identical models in all elections, allowing for comparisons across election years independent of small differences in operationalization, sample variance, and measurement reliability in the various studies. Our findings indicate, in strong confirmation of the original theory by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960), that party identification has by far the greatest impact on the vote choice. Our data show the rise of the gender gap and the growing influence of Christian fundamentalists in the Republican party, but a commensurate *decrease* in the importance of social class for party differences. Indeed, the total effects of demographic background variables and long-term political orientations have a substantial impact on vote choice, a finding that provides ammunition to those who hold that American presidential elections are largely predetermined affairs. Seen in larger context, the structure of the vote choice in 2004 is somewhat of an outlier, as party declines in importance but the impact of ideology increases dramatically. Once we control for ideology we see no evidence whatsoever that “values” had much to do with President Bush’s victory that year.

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Changing Patterns of the Presidential Vote Choice, 1980 - 2004: A Structural Equations Analysis

Fifty years ago this Fall interviewing began for the 1956 American National Election Study, the survey that became the basis for *The American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960). It would be hard to overestimate the effect this book has had on the study of American politics and political behavior more generally. Some of the original findings have been challenged and revised, but the basic structure of the model, with its underlying theory of long- and short-term forces and the “funnel of causality,” remains today.¹ Moreover, this theory guides one of the most extraordinary data collection efforts in all of the social sciences, the American National Election Studies (ANES) – biannual surveys conducted by the survey research center at the University of Michigan around virtually every national U.S. election since 1952. These surveys have proved invaluable to learning most of what we know about American public opinion and voting behavior.

They also make the basic conceit of this paper possible. Guided by the theory of *The American Voter*, we will compare the basic structure of the vote decision in the American presidential elections from 1980 through 2004. There are several reasons to focus on the past two decades, some practical, others theoretical. To begin with, the presidential elections through 1976 have been explored pretty thoroughly already by the original authors and their students (Converse, Campbell, Miller, and Stokes, 1961; Converse, Clausen, and Miller, 1965; Converse, Miller, Rush, and Wolfe, 1969; Miller, Miller, Raine, and Brown, 1976; Markus and Converse, 1979) and the leading revisionists (Fiorina, 1981; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1978; Page and Jones, 1979; Pomper, 1972; Shulman and Pomper, 1975). Second, while the ANES goes to great lengths to repeat a basic “core” of questions in each election year, the measurement of crucial concepts has evolved over time, with the last major change occurring in the 1980 study when the candidate trait items were introduced (Abelson, Kinder, Peters, and Fiske, 1982). Although we will adopt an analytic procedure which separates the vagaries of measuring crucial concepts from their theoretical impact, we will not pretend that our methods can overcome conceptual changes

¹ To briefly mention one of the major challenges, the 1950s in America may have been an unusually quiet, non-contentious period in our country’s history, when politicians were centrists and few issues were publicly debated by opposing elites. Following the implicit lead of elites, few in the general public were much engaged by the political issues of the day. This changed by the mid 1960s. Civil rights, urban riots, the increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam, and the women’s liberation movement brought these much more contentious issues into the homes of the general public via the nightly news. This period also saw some of the most ideologically extreme candidates running for the presidency, including Goldwater and Johnson in 1964, Humphrey and Wallace in 1968, and McGovern and Wallace in 1972. The general public, again following the lead of political elites, were much more involved with political issues in the 60s and 70s, more consistent in their own views, and more likely to base their vote decision on perceived agreement with the candidates. Such is the story told by *The Changing American Voter* (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1976; see also Pomper, 1972; Repass, 1971). At the same time, parties were apparently becoming less important, and the media-dominated period of candidate-centered politics came to the fore (Wattenberg, 1991). Markus and Converse (1979) incorporate (and evaluate) most of these revisions in their updating of the basic Michigan model with data from the 1972 and 1976 presidential elections. Most recently, Miller and Shanks (1996) have specified more precisely several important categories of variables in the funnel of causality. Still, these revisions were more of degree than kind, and do not threaten the basic model laid out by Campbell, et al (1960).

in what is trying to be measured. Because this paper is about theory and not measurement, we will eliminate any major confounds from changes in the latter by restricting analysis to the surveys from 1980 to the present, when the basic concepts being measured (if not always the specific items) remain the same.

But the most interesting reasons to focus on the period after 1980 are the changes in American politics that have occurred since then. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked the completion of any transition between the 5th and 6th party systems in the United States (Aldrich and Niemi, 1995). The New Deal period of Democratic dominance of national politics had ended. Government was no longer the means for solving the country's ills, but instead was identified as the problem itself. The South was not solidly Democratic anymore, and was well on its way to becoming comfortably Republican – a trend begun in the Civil Rights era when the Democratic Party firmly committed itself to the pro-integration side of the issue. The religious right was also beginning to become a powerful force in the Republican party.

So, how did Americans decide how to vote in the presidential elections from 1980 on?

- Did the conventional influences of *The American Voter* still persist over this period? Miller and Shanks (1996), in what is arguably the final revision of the original model, provide a partial answer, but their analyses end with the 1992 election, and their methods and analytic goals are not as strictly comparative as ours.
- How much of the vote can be explained by long-term political orientations?
- What policy issues, if any, were important to the vote choice, and did they change over time?
- How strongly can candidate factors, or evaluations of the President's job performance, influence the vote choice?
- And can we identify any systematic changes in the *structure* or relative importance of these causal factors over time? For example, has the direct, or total, influence of party identification declined over time?
- How about ideology? Does it play a major role in the politics of the past few decades?
- Can we see an increased influence of the Christian right in the Republican Party, or of female, Black, and Hispanic voters in the Democratic Party?

To address these questions, we specify and test a series of structural equation models with latent variables with American National Election Study data from each election year between 1980 and 2004. Continuity in the ANES data allow us to test nearly identical models across these different elections, although the measurement models will vary somewhat from year to year. This will allow for relatively precise comparisons across election years that are independent of small changes in the operationalization of crucial concepts, and differences in

sample variance and measurement reliability across studies.

Figure 1 is a common representation of the original American Voter model, although it was never formally tested as such in the book itself (but see for example Schulman and Pomper, 1975).² Miller and Shanks (1996) update the theory from *The American Voter*, formally incorporating the improved measurement of candidate personalities mentioned above, but also now adding retrospective and prospective evaluations of the candidates and parties. Our own model, displayed in broad outlines in Figure 2, builds from Miller and Shanks. As described more fully below, we flesh out the earlier steps of the model and arrange the predictors into five stages leading up to the vote decision. Our model includes 1) five basic demographic/social location indicators, 2) two long-term political orientations, 3) four distinct policy preferences and perceptions of current economic conditions, 4) retrospective evaluations of the incumbent president's job performance, and 5) ascriptions of personality traits to the competing Democratic and Republican candidates, all leading up to an ultimate determination of candidate preference/vote choice. We do eliminate the penultimate step of Miller and Shanks's (1996) model, however – prospective evaluations of the parties and candidates -- which we fear cannot be measured independent of the vote choice itself. With slight exceptions, this model can be estimated with the survey data from every presidential election between 1980 and 2004, and it will serve as the basis for our overall evaluation of the veracity of the basic theory as it applies to recent U.S. presidential elections, and as the basis for comparisons across election years. Since the original American Voter's model essentially assumed a two-party election, we restricted analyses to respondents who reported voting for either the Democrat or the Republican candidate in those seven presidential elections, although this period includes several elections where third party candidates did reasonably well.

***** Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here *****

Method

Our theory actually involves far more than a straightforward prediction of the vote choice. Our funnel of causality has six distinct stages proceeding to election day. Every variable after the initial (leftmost) stage can itself be a dependent variable in a separate equation, while every variable to the left of it in the diagram is a potential predictor. Thus the five “social and economic characteristics” could (if theory dictates) have direct effects on all of the remaining variables in the model;³ party and liberal-conservative identifications could have direct effects on

² Markus and Converse (1979) elaborate upon this original model in what is to our mind still the best formal test of many of the provisions and suggested revisions and changes to the original model, albeit one which relies on the existence of 4-year panel data and thus cannot be replicated across the series of elections upon which we focus.

³ It would certainly be possible to make further distinctions among these five background variables, as SES is often viewed as a function of gender, race, and ethnicity. We do not include this extra level of complexity in our model because we are not trying to explain social class; for our purposes, all that matters is that SES, along with the other four demographic variables, all *precede* the two long-term political orientations (and the remaining endogenous variables in the model). We are comfortable with this theoretical assumption.

all subsequent (i.e., to the right) variables, but are *not* predictors of any of the social and economic characteristics to their left; and so on. As discussed below, we will not assume that every dependent variable in the model is directly affected by all prior variables, but it is still possible that a prior variable could have some *indirect* influence on a subsequent variable through its direct influence on an intermediate variable in the model. But to estimate both direct and indirect effects of prior variables, we must specify the links among all of the intermediate variables in our model. Hence our complete theory, depicted most fully in Figure 3, involves a structured collection of interrelated equations, and the overall fit of our model cannot be judged by the success of any single equation. The statistical technique for estimating and evaluating such a collection of interrelated equations is “path analysis” or *structural equation modeling* (Bentler, 1980; Duncan, 1975; Joreskog and Goldberger, 1975). When a model is fully *recursive*, as ours is (that is, involves no hypothesized two-way causation between any pair of variables), path analysis allows investigators to estimate the direct, indirect, and total effects (simply the sum of the direct and indirect effects) of every prior variable on every dependent variable in a structural equation (Wright, 1921).

Assuming each of the dependent variables under consideration is a continuous, normally distributed variable (admittedly a difficult assumption to make with the inherently dichotomous vote choice itself), we could estimate the entire model with a series of ordinary least squares regressions. One of the least-recognized assumptions of OLS regression is that all of the variables are measured with perfect reliability (Berry, 1993; Berry and Feldman, 1985). In the social sciences, anything approaching perfect reliability is rarely achieved. It is fairly easy to show the consequences of measurement unreliability in the dependent variable: lower R-squares and higher standard errors across the board. Even worse, measurement unreliability in the independent variables will bias coefficients, and it is almost impossible to predict the direction of the bias (Berry and Feldman, 1985).⁴ This is not a happy situation.

With ordinary methods, what a variable “means” can be no more than how it is measured. Yet we normally think (and theorize) at a more conceptual level that is independent from the specifics of measurement. Structural equations modeling *with latent variables* (SEMLV) is a technique designed to separate the meaning of conceptual variables from their measurement, and to overcome the problem of measurement unreliability (Bentler, 1980; Bentler and Weeks, 1980;

⁴ Assume there are multiple correlated independent variables in a regression model. If all of those independent variables save one were measured with perfect reliability, it is easy to see that the causal impact of that one less-than-perfectly-measured independent variable will be *underestimated* relative to the other variables in the equation, and relative to what the true impact of that variable is in the population as a whole. The next step is to realize that, given correlated independent variables, the estimates of the causal impact of all of the remaining (perfectly measured) variables in the equation could be biased upward (that is, away from zero) in a weaker version of what happens when important variables are omitted from an equation. Of course, usually *all* of the independent variables are imperfectly measured, in which case every coefficient is simultaneously biased downward (toward zero) because of its own unreliability, and upward (away from zero) because of the omission of the true impact of *other* predictors in the equation because of *their* less-than-perfect reliability. A possible fallback position at this point is to argue that measurement unreliability is random, and all of this randomness ought, in the long run, to even out – and hence we can simply ignore it. Unfortunately, all of the random biases will come out in the wash only in the unusual circumstance that every independent variable is measured with the *same* degree of error. If not, there can be systematic biases in the estimates of every coefficient in the regression.

Bollen, 1989). Whenever possible, multiple indicators are used to represent every conceptual (or latent) variable in a theoretical model.⁵ Then the reliability of measurement of crucial theoretical concepts can be *determined* rather than assumed, and differences in measurement reliability can be distinguished and statistically separated from differences in the *causal* impact of conceptual variables. Although in reality these two steps occur simultaneously, it is sometime helpful to imagine that the analysis occurs in two stages, beginning with a *confirmatory* factor analysis where the measurement equations are precisely defined, followed by a structural equations analysis where the causal relations among the latent, conceptual variables (the “factors” defined by the confirmatory factor analysis) are specified and tested.

We have then two distinct tasks that must be described: (1) the selection (or construction) of manifest variables used to *measure* each of the conceptual variables in our theory; and (2) the specification of the hypothesized *causal links* (the structural relations) among the conceptual variables. We discuss each in turn.

Measurement Model

Gender (female), *race* (African American), and *ethnicity* (Hispanic) are all measured by dummy variables. We have only a single indicator of each available, and will treat them as observed variables (rather than latent factors) in our analyses. We must assume they are measured with perfect reliability, just as one must with more traditional methods. With minor exceptions in individual elections (detailed below and in Figure A-1 in the Appendix), all of our remaining concepts are measured by multiple indicators.

*Christian fundamentalism*⁶ is measured by two variables, whether respondents consider themselves to be “born again” Christians, and the frequency of attending religious services.

Social economic status (SES) is measured by three variables: years of education, family income,

⁵ Ideally, every conceptual variable should have three - five manifest indicators. If there are only two indicators of some factor, further assumptions are often required for identification (e.g., that the two manifest variables equally represent the underlying concept). No such additional assumptions are required when there are three or more indicators of an underlying concept, and in theory, the more indicators one has of a latent factor, the better. In practice, however, convergence difficulties tend to multiply as the number of variances and covariances in a model increase, a fact which leads most practitioners to try to limit measurement to three or four indicators of any latent factor.

⁶ This is an awkward and somewhat misleading term, but after some debate we have decided to use it because it seems to capture what political observers mean when they talk about the “religious right” or the Christian Coalition, and because we could think of no better term that was understood by lay readers. Manza and Brooks (1997) might prefer the term “conservative Protestants.” See also Olson and Green (2006) on the political importance of the frequency of attending religious services.

and subjective social class.⁷ This variable is scored with upper SES high.

Party identification is measure in every survey by three variables: the traditional 7-point Strong Democrat - Strong Republican party identification scale, and pre-election feeling thermometer evaluations of Democrats and of Republicans. The resulting conceptual variable or factor is scored such that identification with/liking of the Republican party is high.

Liberal-conservative identification is measure in every survey by three variables: a 7-point Strong Liberal - Strong Conservative self identification, and pre-election feeling thermometer evaluations of liberals and of conservatives. This factor is scored such that identification with/preference for conservatives is high.

Economic/welfare policies are always measured by a 7-point government spending and services scale, and by the 7-point government guaranteed jobs and incomes scale. We typically employed two additional manifest indicators which differed across election years, but the most frequent variables were a 7-point national vs private health insurance scale, and a scale measuring preferences for more or less government spending (created by counting the number of programs where respondents would like to see decreased government spending, and subtracting from it the number of programs where respondents would like to see increased spending). These variables were coded such that preference for more conservative policies were scored high.

Racial policies are always measured by a 7-point scale about whether government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Blacks and other minority groups, and a question about whether civil rights leaders are pushing too fast. No other relevant questions were available in every election study, but we always had a third manifest indicator available, typically either a question about busing or an item about affirmative action. These variables were all coded such that preference for more conservative policies were scored high.

Social issues are always measured by a 7-point question about the proper role for women in society, and a 4-point question about abortion policy. No other questions were available in all of the surveys, but we were always able to measure (in one way or another) attitudes toward gay rights, and frequently attitudes toward prayer in public schools. These variables were again coded such that preference for more conservative policies were scored high.

⁷ The last question was not available in the 1996 survey, but we built an instrument for it from questions about whether respondents felt “close to” different social groups, including poor people, working men and women, middle class people, and business men and women. Similarly the “born again” question was not asked in the 2004 survey, but we built an instrument for it from questions about how much guidance respondents’ receive from religion, how often they read the Bible, whether they believe the Bible is the word of God, and religious denomination.

Questions that could be used to measure *foreign policy preferences* varied the most across surveys. We always included a 7-point scale about whether defense spending should increase or decrease (and in 1996, that was the *only* question available), but beyond that there is little similarity across election years. Additional questions involve cooperation with the Soviet Union/Russia, preferences for maintaining a strong military, questions about diplomatic vs. military solutions to international problems, and so on. These items were scored such that preferences for increased defense spending and military solutions to foreign policy disputes are high.

Current economic conditions are always measured by retrospective evaluations of the nation's economy over the past year. In many (but not all years) we have similar questions about inflation and unemployment. Positive evaluations are scored high whenever the Republican party controls the White House, while negative evaluations are scored high whenever the Democrats are in power (see footnote 8 below).

Approval of the incumbent *president's job performance* is always measured by approval of his handling of the economy. We also always have a question about approval of the president's handling of foreign policy (in 1980, this question was specific to the Iran hostage crisis), and in every year save 1980, an overall evaluation of the president's job performance. Approval is scored high whenever there is a Republican president, while disapproval is scored high whenever there is a Democratic president.⁸

The *candidates' personal qualities* are measured by questions about how strongly various traits describe the two major party candidates. The specific items available differ from survey to survey, but we always tried to measure the four trait dimensions of integrity, empathy, ability, and leadership (Kinder, 1986). *Integrity* is most often measured by "honest" and "moral," *Empathy* is typically measured by "compassionate" and "cares about people like me," *Ability* is usually measured by "knowledgeable" and "intelligent," and *Leadership* is often measured by "inspiring" and "strong leader." In every survey the items describing each personality dimension for the Democratic candidate were averaged together and subtracted from a similar measure of the Republican candidate's personality. Thus these items were always scored such that preference for the Republican candidate's personality

⁸ The Republicans held the White House in 4 of the 7 elections considered here, while a Democrat was the incumbent for the remaining three elections. This fact forces us to choose between keeping the coding of all or our conceptual variables constant, but then remembering that the hypothesized sign of different structural paths is expected to be positive in some years and negative in others; or switching the coding of the conceptual variables themselves, but keeping the predicted signs of structural paths consistent across election years. The choice is arbitrary, and in the end we selected the latter procedure. This coding means that all of the predictors in our final vote choice equation should have positive signs in every election year, and that the long-term political orientations should always have positive effects on all variables they are hypothesized to predict. But the expected sign of the coefficients for the demographic variables in the equation for perceptions of current economic conditions should vary, according to the party of the incumbent president. Consider, for example, the coefficient for Female in this equation: Women always believe the economy is a bit worse now than it was a year ago, although sometimes the sign of that coefficient is negative (whenever there was a Republican president) and sometime the sign is positive (whenever there is a Democratic president).

over the Democrat's is high.⁹

Finally, the *vote choice* is measured in every survey by three items: a 4-point variable indicating *strength* of preference for the Republican over the Democratic candidate, or vice versa, and post election feeling thermometer evaluations of the two major party candidates. This variable is scored such that preference for the Republican candidate is scored high.

All of these manifest indicators were recoded to have a 1-point range. SEMLV requires that the measurement scale of every hypothetical latent factor be determined, typically by fixing a factor loading of one of the manifest indicators representing each factor at some arbitrary value (by convention, at 1.0). As a result of this coding procedure, all of our factors will also have a 1-point range, a point which will make interpreting the structural paths presented below a bit easier.

The Appendix provides more detail on scale construction and the handling of missing data, including the exact items from each survey utilized for each observed measure.

Hypothesized Equations

One of the advantages of structural equation modeling is that the researcher is required to specify every hypothesized link in the structural model – that is, to be much more detailed and specific than the initial depiction of our model in Figure 2. The easiest way to summarize the structural relationships included in a model as complex as ours is with a matrix such as Figure 3. The ten endogenous variables in our structural model each head a column of the matrix, while the possible independent variables each head a different row. Our structural model involves ten equations, with the independent variables in each equation indicated by a plus or a minus sign in the matrix, depending on the direction or sign of the expected relationship. Thus both party identification and liberal-conservative identification are viewed as functions of the five exogenous demographic variables in the model.¹⁰ African Americans, women, and (less strongly) Hispanics, are more likely to be liberal and support the Democratic party; hence those variables should have negative signs in the equations for the two long-term political orientations. Christian fundamentalists and upper class individuals are more likely to be conservative and support Republicans, and thus they should have positive signs in these first two equations (Leege, Wald, Krueger, and Mueller, 2002).

***** Insert Figure 3 about here *****

The four policy views factors should each be strongly (and positively) predicted by a

⁹ In 1980 there were no items available to measure Empathy.

¹⁰ Because they are both long-term political orientations, we expect these first two endogenous variables to be positively related in ways beyond those explicitly represented by paths from the five exogenous variables in our model. This expectation is included in our model in the form of correlated disturbance terms associated with these first two equations. We include similar correlated disturbances between economic/welfare policy views and racial policy views (because they are both so strongly associated with the New Deal), and between economic/welfare policy views and perceptions of current economic conditions (which we could imagine affecting each other).

more general long-term liberal-conservatism. Many, but not all, of the demographic variables are also hypothesized to have direct effects on policy preferences. Women, for example, who tend to be more tolerant of modern alternative lifestyles, particularly gender roles, should have relatively liberal views on social issues. However, we expected gender's influence on the remaining policy attitudes to be chiefly indirect, through its direct effect on liberal-conservatism. We expect both African Americans and Hispanics to hold more liberal views (hence to have negative signs) on economic/welfare policies and racial policies, as members of these groups are disproportionately impacted by these policies. African Americans should also tend to oppose military interventions around the world, we hypothesize, as members of the black community seem to disproportionately pay the price of foreign intervention in terms of military casualties. Controlling on long-term political conservatism, we expect the moral principles of Christian fundamentalists to lead them to more charitable (hence liberal) views on economic/welfare policies, to less militaristic (again, liberal) views on foreign policy, and of course to strongly conservative views on social policies.¹¹ (The *total* effect of fundamentalism on these policy factors may well be positive, however, as we expect it to have a strong positive effect on political conservatism.) Finally, economic interests should lead social class to be positively related to more conservative views on economic policy, while the greater education of those with high SES should lead them to hold more liberal views on racial and social policies. We also expect education to lead to a greater support of more interventionist foreign policies, and hence to have a positive sign.

Although we explicitly refrained from including party identification in any of the policy views equations, as we believe its effect will be only indirect through its relationship with liberal-conservatism, all of the remaining variables in our model are viewed as being direct functions of party identification. This includes perceptions of current economic conditions, which in theory ought to be a more or less objective assessment. However, even controlling for those different life situations,¹² we expect there to be a strong partisan component to the assessment of current economic conditions, with members of each party viewing the economy in more positive light whenever *their* man is in the White House (see Evans and Andersen, 2006).

Perceptions of current economic conditions are hypothesized in turn to positively affect retrospective evaluations of the president's job performance, which should also have a strong partisan component. We also allow the four policy preferences to have direct effects on evaluations of the president's job performance, testing the idea that voters will react more positively toward presidents who pursue policies that citizen agrees with. Of course these paths

¹¹ The relationship of Christian fundamentalism to racial views is harder to predict. On the one hand, morality could again push them toward supporting government programs designed to help the less fortunate in society. On the other hand, Sears and Valentino (2003) have argued that conservative racial views were one of the most important factors contributing to the rapid growth of the Republican party in the South over the past three or four decades.

¹² We generally expect females, African Americans, and Hispanics to have more negative views of current economic conditions, while upper class individuals should have more positive views of the economy. But since the direction of coding of the dependent variable switches according to the party of the president (see footnote 8 above), the predicted sign of demographic variables in the current economic conditions equation also switches – as indicated by the “-/+" sign in Figure 3.

assume that citizens are at least vaguely attentive to what the incumbent has actually been doing the past four years – or that one candidate or the other has successfully conveyed that information during the campaign. We also allow policy preferences, along with partisanship and retrospective evaluations of the president’s job performance, to affect perceptions of the candidate’s personalities. This tests the proposition suggested by Rahn, Aldrich, and Borgida (1994) that citizens in part judge candidate’s personalities by the policy stands they take (e.g., candidates taking liberal views on social welfare policies may be judged as having greater empathy, while candidates taking stronger military stands could be viewed as particularly strong or tough, etc.).

Finally partisanship, policy preferences, perceptions of current economic conditions, retrospective evaluations of the incumbent’s job performance, and assessments of the candidate’s personalities are all hypothesized to have direct effects on the vote choice. All of these variables are hypothesized to have positive signs. Our model does not allow the demographic indicators, nor liberal-conservatism, to have direct effects on the vote choice, but all of these variables could have important indirect effects because of their hypothesized direct relations to other predictors in this last equation.

Results

Various summary fit statistics for our models are shown in Table 1. The comparative fit indices (CFI) from the maximum likelihood solutions are all above .90, indicating an acceptable fit between theory and data. The CFIs for the robust solution (which does not assume multivariate normality) are typically a bit lower. The ratio of Chi-square to degrees of freedom vary around a mean of about 3.0, figures which are pretty normal for models as large as ours (and just as importantly, sample sizes as large as ours). Because our analytic goal is to test as similar a model as possible across election years rather than maximizing the fit within any given year, our models include *no correlated error terms* – a common post hoc means of improving the fit of a model, but one that tends to be very sample specific, and hence does not generalize across election years. Our fit indices would all increase a few points if we employed such procedures, but we would rather be sure we are testing the same model (MacCallum, 1986).

***** Insert Table 1 about here *****

We do not show any of the measurement model results (which are available from the authors upon request), and will just state here that every hypothesized indicator of a conceptual variable had a very significant relationship to that factor, with almost all *t*’s averaging well above 10. Of much greater theoretical interest is the relationships among the conceptual variables. Space precludes a detailed discussion of every result from each of the ten equations across all seven election years in our analysis. We will focus our more limited discussion on changes over time in the magnitude (and whenever they occur, direction) of the effects, and note how our results tend to confirm or challenge current views of American politics. We organize our discussion longitudinally, stage by stage through the funnel of causality, building up to the vote decision itself. Virtually all of the pertinent information is provided in Tables 2 - 7, so that researchers with somewhat different interests than ours will have the basic results necessary to

answer their own questions.

Stage 2: Long-Term Political Orientations

Table 2 reports the equations for the two long-term political orientations in our model, party and liberal-conservative identifications. The tables report the unstandardized regression coefficients. Since all of our variables have a 1-point range, the coefficients can be interpreted as the proportion shift from the lowest to the highest value of the dependent variable (for positive coefficients – from the highest to the lowest value for negative coefficients) that results from a “full dose” of each independent variable, controlling for all of the other variables in the equation.

***** Insert Table 2 about here *****

The data in Table 2 provide no big surprises but do demonstrate some interesting shifts over time. We see the beginning of the gender gap, as gender doubles in importance as a predictor of both of the long-term political orientations between 1980 and 1984, and then stays at the higher (1984) level for the next two decades. Women are about ten percent more likely to be Democratic and liberal than men, and the effect is a bit stronger for liberal-conservatism than it is for party. African Americans are likewise more likely to be Democratic and liberal than whites, and the effect of race is two or three times more important than gender. Race is a noticeably stronger predictor of party than liberal-conservative identification. Hispanics too are generally a bit more Democratic and liberal, although the effect is more sporadic and only reaches statistical significance about half of the time. We thus see no evidence that Republicans have been able to reverse the Democrat’s edge among this increasingly important (and rapidly growing) social group, but nor have the Democrats been able to firm up or increase their small advantage.

Both Christian fundamentalism and socio-economic status are associated with strong Republican and conservative identifications. But while the effect of being a Christian fundamentalist on both party and liberal-conservative identifications has virtually doubled between 1980 and 2004, SES has become less and less important. In 1980 a full dose of socio-economic status moved respondents almost a third of the way along the party ID scale; in 2004, that figure was only ten percent. Beginning in 1992 SES was no longer significantly associated with more conservative identification, and in 2004 it actually had a slightly negative (that is, more liberal) sign. Thus while our results confirm the gender gap and the continued importance of African Americans to the Democratic party, and the growing importance of the religious right to Republicans, this is the first we have seen anyone suggest that social class is diminishing as a factor influencing long-term political orientations. Moreover, this trend has occurred while the income gap between the rich and the poor has been steadily growing (APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, 2004).

Overall, our two equations are only modestly successful in explaining variation in these two long-term political orientations, with R-squares averaging about .26 across the seven replications of the two equations. Had these equations been the focus of our investigation we certainly could have included additional demographic indicators. Furthermore, we make no attempt to model parental influence on these two political orientations, although there clearly is a

strong socialization component to their development (Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Sears, 1975). Hence our model is a little short on predictors of the two important political orientations, but it does include correlated disturbance terms associated with these two political orientations to stand in for variables that have been omitted from our model.¹³

Stage 3: Policy Views and Current Economic Conditions

The third stage of our model includes four distinct sets of policy views, and perceptions of current economic conditions. Tables 3a through 3d report the analysis of voter's views in four distinct policy areas. Because of the explicit causal ordering of our predictors, it is now possible for the demographic variables from the first stage of our model to have both direct effects on the dependent variables of this stage, and also indirect effects through their earlier direct effects on long-term political orientations. Where appropriate, the table lists both the direct and indirect influence of every prior variable in our model. The total effect of any of the predictors, of course, is simply the sum of the direct and indirect effects.

***** Insert Tables 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d about here *****

Across all four policy areas, the strongest predictor, by far, is liberal-conservative identification. Its effect is a bit stronger on economic/welfare policies and foreign policy views, and a bit weaker on racial views and social issues. But even in the latter two cases no other predictor comes close to providing the sort of direct guidance that liberalism-conservatism does. However, even when controlling for liberalism-conservatism many of the demographic variables have statistically significant, and in many cases substantively important, effects as well. And here the distinction between direct and indirect effects is often quite instructive.

Consider the effects of being African American or a Christian fundamentalist on citizen's views on economic/welfare policy. The direct effect of being African American on economic policy views is always significant and of reasonable magnitude: this one variable alone moves respondents about 11 percent of the way (on average) toward the liberal end of the scale. But the indirect effects of this same variable are of roughly the same magnitude, and always in the same direction. Thus the direct and indirect effects *reinforce* each other, and the total effect of being African American is about twice as large as it would appear from the direct effects of this equation alone. Other notable instances where the direct and indirect effects of a variable reinforce each other and thus magnify the total effect of a variable include the effect of SES on economic/welfare policy views; the effect of being African American on racial policy views; and the effect of being female, or a Christian fundamentalist, on social policy views.

On the other hand, consider the effect of being a Christian fundamentalist on views toward economic/welfare policy. The magnitude of this effect is generally weaker than that of being African American, but the four largest coefficients are negative as well, suggesting (somewhat surprisingly) that Christian fundamentalists also tend to hold liberal positions toward

¹³ The average correlation between these two disturbance terms is .38. It varies between a low of .31 in 1980 to a high of .47 in 2004.

economic policies. But in this case the indirect effects of the variable are always larger in magnitude than the direct effects and *opposite* in direction, such that the total effect of Christian fundamentalism is to push citizens in a more conservative direction. In this case the direct and indirect effects tend to counter rather than reinforce each other. Christian fundamentalism has a similar countervailing effect on racial views and foreign policy. Likewise socio-economic status tends to have countervailing effects on policy views in every domain save the economic. In both cases the total effect of the variable is less than a simple examination of the direct effects would have led us to believe.

The remaining variable in stage 3 is perceptions of current economic conditions. The results from the equation predicting it are reported in Table 4. While the four policy preferences were all viewed as a function of liberal-conservatism, the remaining proximal variables in our model are all hypothesized to be functions of long-term party identification. This hypothesis is strongly supported by the data. Party ID always has the most important effect by far on perceptions of current economic conditions. But there are important differences in the magnitude of the effect of long-term partisanship across election years that point to the limits of psychological factors in shaping the perception of reality. Although still highly significant, party ID has its smallest effects in 1980 and 2000, the two years with objectively the weakest and strongest economic conditions in our dataset. In 1980 the economy was doing so badly that even Democrats had a hard time putting a positive spin on it, while the economy was doing so well at the end of the millennium that even Republicans could not deny reality. But when objective reality is somewhere between these two extremes – as is the norm – it is much easier for everyday citizens to bring their perceptions of current economic conditions in line with their long-term partisanship.¹⁴

***** Insert Table 4 about here *****

Stage Four: Retrospective Evaluations of the President's Job Performance

As we move to the fourth stage of our model it is now possible for the two long-term political orientations, along with the five demographic indicators, to have both direct and indirect

¹⁴ Our model included two additional non-causal links between the disturbances associated with several of the equations in this third stage of our model. First, because they are both strongly associated with the New Deal, we allowed the disturbances associated with our economic/welfare policy equation and our racial policies equation to correlate. These correlations were always highly significant ($p < .01$) but relatively small in magnitude, averaging only $r = .08$ across our seven elections. As with the correlated disturbances between the two long-term political orientation, our reasoning here is that there are several common predictors of these two policy preferences that have been omitted from our model. Second, we also included a link between the disturbances associated with economic/welfare policy preferences, and perceptions of current economic conditions. Here we fear was that these two factors might in part influence each other. If a citizen sees the government pursuing a set of economic policies s/he agrees (or disagrees) with, that citizen may be motivated to view the economy as relatively healthy (or unhealthy) as a consequence. From the other direction, if a citizen perceives the economy to be performing well (poorly), they may come to believe that the economic policies pursued by the government have been relatively successful (unsuccessful), and rationally update their policy preferences accordingly. This latter idea had only very weak support in our data, however, as this hypothesized correlation was only statistically significant in three of the seven election years and was never very large, averaging only $r = .02$ across the seven elections.

effects on the remaining variables in the model. Our model holds, however, that we have now moved close enough to the vote choice itself that the (non-political) demographic variables far back in the funnel of causality no longer have any direct effect on the remaining dependent variables in the model, although we can still see their indirect influence through other variables in the model. We still allow the early-learned party identification to have a direct effect on variables in the model because it is focused so clearly on politics.

Our model does an excellent job explaining evaluations of the president's job performance, with an average R-Square across election years of .78. The most interesting data in Table 5, which shows the results of the equation predicting approval of the president's job performance, compare the direct effect of current economic conditions to the total effect of party identification. Both variables should have very strong effects on evaluations of the president's job performance. We have seen above how strongly party identification shapes (distorts?) perceptions of current economic conditions. But now, with both variables in the equation, it is much easier to interpret the effect of perceptions of current economic conditions as reflecting economic reality. If Fiorina (1981) is right and voters judge incumbents primarily on retrospective evaluations of how well they have performed in office, objective reality should really matter. However, if those retrospective evaluations are little more than rationalizations of long-term partisanship, so-called retrospective evaluations would lose much of their theoretical importance.

It is easy to summarize the overall results: both reasonably objective perceptions of current economic conditions, and rationalizations from long-term political orientations, are very important in determining approval of the president's job performance, but on average rationalization is about 65 percent more important than economic conditions. Across the seven elections the coefficient for current economic conditions averages .43, while the total effect of party identification averages .71 (with an average direct effect of .54 and an average indirect effect of .17). Looking at the individual election years, the only major exception is 1980, when there was almost a one-to-one correspondence between perceptions of the economy and evaluations of President Carter's job performance, even with the ongoing Iran hostage crisis. Evaluations of the president's job performance had relatively little to do with partisanship that year. Partisanship was even less important in 2004, but that year liberal-conservatism, the other long-term political orientation, has a huge (.62) indirect effect.

***** Insert Table 5 about here *****

Stage Five: Candidate Personalities

The penultimate stage of our model involves perceptions of the candidate's personalities – more precisely, attributing a more positive personality to the Republican candidate relative to the Democrat. As shown in Table 6, once again our model does an excellent job of explaining this factor, with an average R-square of .84, and once again party identification has the greatest total effect on the dependent variable, averaging .65 across election years. It is worth commenting again on the magnitude of the party identification effect. As one moves from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican on the party ID scale, one moves almost two-thirds of the

way from believing the Democratic candidate’s personality is much better than the Republican’s, to believing just the opposite. Evaluations of the president’s job performance is also consistently an important predictor of candidate personality. In fact the equation for candidate personality looks very much like the vote choice equation, the final and most important dependent variable in our model, to which we turn now.

***** Insert Table 6 about here *****

Stage Six: The Vote Choice/Candidate Preference

Our statistical model assumes that all of our dependent variables are continuous, normally distributed variables, which obviously the vote decision is not. As discussed above, we have three manifest indicators of this last factor, two feeling thermometer evaluations (which are pretty close to normally distributed continuous variables), and a 4-point measure of strength of preference for the Democrat of the Republican (which is more of a stretch to call continuous and normally distributed). However, together these three manifest variables do an excellent job of representing an underlying, more or less continuous linear preference for the Democratic or Republican candidate. Since our analyses are limited to voters, it does not seem unreasonable to refer to it as the vote choice. Clearly the higher these three variables (the way we have scored things), the greater the probability of a Republican vote, and the lower the three variables, the greater the probability of a Democratic vote. Indeed, because all of our variables have a 1-point range, as a rough approximation we can think of each of our coefficients as reflecting a greater or lesser probability of a Republican vote (controlling for all of the other variables in the model) – although again, strictly speaking such an interpretation is not justified. We use the labels “vote choice” and “candidate preference” synonymously in the discussion that follows.

The results for our final equation are shown in Table 7. The model does a great job of explaining differences in candidate preference, with R-Squares varying from .90 to .97. We cannot possibly do justice to the richness of the data in this table, and will only attempt to provide a few guideposts in walking the reader through it. We will focus our attention here on interesting differences across election years, reserving for the final section a discussion of the normative implications of our findings.

Starting at the top of the table (and the back of the funnel of causality), our model dictates that the demographic variables only have indirect influence on candidate preference/vote choice through their direct influence on long-term political orientations, policy views, and perceptions of current economic conditions. When you add together all of these indirect paths, however, the sum total is quite substantial. These results clearly illustrate the establishment of the “gender gap” in the 1984 election and its maintenance thereafter, the steady importance of race to the preference for Democratic over Republican candidates, the growing importance of Christian fundamentalists to the preference for Republicans over Democrats, and the declining importance of SES toward that same preference.

***** Insert Table 7 about here *****

Party identification has by far the most important total effect on the vote choice, nearly doubling the impact of any other variable in the model. Long-term liberal-conservatism is not nearly as important, as its influence is felt primarily through its affect on voter's policy attitudes. This indirect influence is not even significant in 1996 and 2000. This story changes dramatically in 2004, as importance of party as a direct influence on the vote declines noticeably and the importance of liberal-conservatism increases commensurately. George W. Bush's victory in 2004 was due not to rampant partisanship, but rampant ideology – ideology expressed through preference for a strong and active military. Look in particular at the effect of foreign policy views was particularly strong in 2000 and 2004. In both years the *direct* effect of foreign policy views is *negative*: that is, controlling on other variables in the equation (most importantly evaluations of the president's job performance), voters who wanted a strong and active military preferred the Democrat. In 2000 this negative coefficient makes clear sense, as Bush derided the Clinton administration's "nation building" efforts in the Balkans. However, circumstances clearly led President Bush to revise his position on nation building, as the *total* effect of foreign policy views on preference for Bush in 2004 is overwhelmingly positive (due, almost entirely, to the one-to-one correspondence between conservative foreign policy views and approval of the president's job performance in our most recent election).

While foreign policy views often had a significant direct or indirect effect on candidate preference, the same could not be said for most of our other policy views. Economic/welfare views never had a significant total effect on the vote choice in any of our seven elections. Racial views were important in 1980 and 1984 but disappeared thereafter. These are the attitude clusters we associate most strongly with the New Deal, and after President Reagan they have apparently disappeared from the scene. On the other hand, social issues associated with the religious right became an important contributor to preference for Republican candidates in 1992 - 2000, reaching a zenith in the Bush/Gore election of 2000 but then mostly disappearing in 2004. Many commentators on the 2004 election credited George Bush's reelection to conservative "values." We do not see this in our data. Once a complete model of the vote decision is specified, it becomes clear that Bush won in 2004 because the public generally approved of his use of military force against Iraq. "Values," at least as they are reflected in tangible social issues, had very little to do with his victory.

The most proximal variables in our model, evaluations of the president's job performance and perceptions of the candidate's personalities, always have fairly large and statistically significant direct effects on the vote choice, with one prominent exception: the 2000 election. Vice President Gore felt he had to run away from President Clinton due to shortcomings in Clinton's personal life, even though the public was quite positive toward his overall job performance. This choice clearly hurt Gore's prospects for victory, as approval of Clinton's job performance had absolutely no direct effect, and only a small indirect effect, on candidate preference in 2000.

Discussion

We started this paper by posing a number of questions about the structure of the vote decision in U.S. presidential elections between 1980 and 2004. We can unequivocally answer

our primary question in the affirmative: The conventional influences of the *American Voter* (Campbell et al, 1960) do indeed persist over time. Most of our equations had extremely large R-Squares for survey analyses of social phenomena. It is hard to imagine doing much better than this with the prediction of any complex social phenomenon. These results bear witness to the advantages of careful measurement of conceptual variables, and removing measurement unreliability from estimates of causal impact. Let us now try to address some of the normative issues that follow from that conclusion

Figure 4 summarizes the average predictive power of variables within the different stages of our model on the ultimate vote choice. The most important, by far, are the demographic social location indicators that people are born with, and long-term political orientations that develop early in life and change very little thereafter.¹⁵ These forces were in place long before the candidates for any of our seven elections were chosen, and they change only very slowly with time. To the extent such forces predominate in a campaign environment – and it sure looks like they do – elections in America would seem to be largely predetermined affairs in which incumbent office holders’ success and the actions and arguments and promises of the competing candidates generally play a relatively minor role.

***** Insert Figure 4 about here *****

Moreover, when we show that party identification affects perceptions of current economic conditions (controlling on our set of demographic indicators), perceptions of the president’s job performance, and ascription of personality traits to the competing candidates, we demonstrate that party ID serves its euphemistically labeled “coloring” function – that is, it helps *distort reality* to conform to partisan predilections. Lau and Redlawsk (2006) refer to this as *confirmatory* decision making, and while it may be comforting to the decision maker, it has more disturbing consequences for the functioning of democracy.

However, for several reasons we are not drawn to so pessimistic a conclusion. To begin with, these semi-permanent long-term influences are pretty evenly balanced across the two parties, leaving a much bigger role to various short-term factors in determining the outcome of elections. Granted an even starting point, the variables in the latter stages of our model are more than sufficient to sway the outcome of just about any election.

The most immediate influences on the vote choice are perceptions of the candidate’s personalities, and retrospective judgments of the incumbent president’s job performance. Holding everything else in our model constant, either one of these variables by themselves can drive the vote choice almost halfway across its entire scale. In some cases judgments of a candidate’s personality are based in part on that performance in office (Bill Clinton comes

¹⁵ It is important to note that our data *do not* address the so-called “macropartisanship” debate as to the stability of party identification and its responsiveness to economic performance and presidential approval (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 1998; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1989). To do so requires longitudinal data that are not available for every election year under study. All parties in this debate would agree that there is a substantial long-term stable characteristic of party identification, and our model assumes nothing more.

immediately to mind), in which case they are a vehicle for democratic accountability. Even more directly, the impact of retrospective judgments of a president's job performance reflect clear accountability. Quite appropriately, such retrospective evaluations have a relatively weaker effect in 1988 and 2000, the two years in our study when vice presidents (rather than the incumbent president himself) was seeking election, but still they always has some impact. Similarly, incumbents are held accountable for the performance of the economy. We have seen that these perceptions have a strong partisan component, but controlling on party identification, economic perceptions have a significant indirect effect on the vote choice (through their effect on perceptions of the president's job performance) in every year in our study save 2000.

But for democratic theory, the most import route through which the public provides a guide to its leaders is by comparing their own policy preferences to those of the competing candidates. In our data, policy preferences affected the vote choice somewhat differently across election years. Neither economic/welfare policy views nor racial policy views ever had a direct impact on the vote choice in our data, but they each had significant indirect effects in multiple elections. Conservative racial views worked in the Republicans' favor from 1980 through 1992, but were replaced by other concerns, particularly related so social policy, thereafter. The significant *negative* effect of economic/welfare policy views in 1992 and 2004 demonstrate that economic concerns over growing deficits or broken pledges about "no new taxes" may have affected the vote choice of many individuals in those years. And finally foreign policy preferences were a large determinant of vote choice in 2004, as would be expected given the importance of the ongoing Iraq war.¹⁶

Looking somewhat deeper in the causal chain, we also highlight the impact of long-term liberal conservatism on the four policy clusters examined in our study (see Tables 3a to 3d). That liberal-conservatism should guide citizen's more proximal policy preferences is both efficient and rational, a sign that political beliefs can have the ideologically consistent hierarchical structure for which Converse (1964, 1970) searched in vain.

The differential contributions to vote choice of short-term policy preferences indicates that despite the persistent and significant contributions to vote choice made by long-term political orientations and demographic characteristics there is still room in the democratic process for candidates and parties to differentiate themselves from each other. The power of at least some policy beliefs in every one of our elections shows that democracy is still alive in American politics.

¹⁶ The large negative effect of strident pro-military, pro-intervention foreign policy views in 2000 cannot similarly be explained by current world events. It does demonstrate, we believe, a growing desire in the American public for the country to be engaged in world affairs, a view that was fostered by the Clinton-Gore administration but was seemingly antithetical to candidate George Bush and his criticisms of "nation building" in 2000.

Methodological Appendix

Table A-1 lists the manifest variables that were used to represent the latent concepts in the different election years. In 2004 the “born again Christian” item was not asked, but we created a surrogate for it from related items about how important religion is to the respondent, how much guidance it provides for day-to-day living, how often they pray, and whether the Bible is the word of God. Similarly, in 1996 the subjective social class item was not asked, but we created a surrogate for it from items about whether the respondent felt “close to” various social groups, including poor people, working men and women, middle class people, and businessmen and women.

***** Insert Table A-1 about here *****

Thus in every election year our analyses relied upon responses to about 40 individual survey items. Our biggest challenge was dealing with missing values. The simplest solution is to resort to “listwise” deletion of missing values, such that only respondents with no missing data on any of the 40-odd individual survey items are included in the analysis. However, such a procedure greatly reduces the number of cases available for analysis, and much worse, usually badly distorts the representativeness of the resulting reduced sample (King, Honaker, Joseph, and Scheve, 2001). A much better alternative would be to rely upon some full information maximum likelihood procedures to impute missing values from other, nonmissing variables in the dataset. This would maximize the number of cases available for analysis, but also result in some instances where a case that has entirely missing data for some of the crucial conceptual variables is nonetheless included in the analysis – and this seems a bit too lenient to us. We devised a procedure that was somewhere between these two extremes, in which we required every case to have at least one nonmissing value for one of the manifest variables chosen to represent every conceptual variable in the model. Once this criterion was met, we freely imputed any missing values for the remaining indicators or any conceptual variable from nonmissing variables elsewhere in the dataset. Thus every case employed in our analyses provided at least some legitimate response to one of the manifest indicators of every conceptual variable in our model.

One other important decision we made was to limit cases in the 2000 study to respondents who were randomly assigned to be interviewed face-to-face, as this was the procedure used for all respondents in every other survey. The 2000 ANES was a major methodological experiment determining whether the greatly added cost of a face-to-face survey could be justified with substantially higher data quality. Evidently they could, as the results showed important differences in the responses obtained by face-to-face and telephone interviews. To maximize similarity with other election years, we decided to exclude the phone respondents from the 2000 study. This decision cuts the number of potential respondents in half, but still leaves us with a sample size of 596, easily large enough to justify the maximum likelihood methods our SEMLV employed.

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FIGURE 1
The American Voter's Original Model of the Vote Choice

Panel a: Original Model from Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, 1960

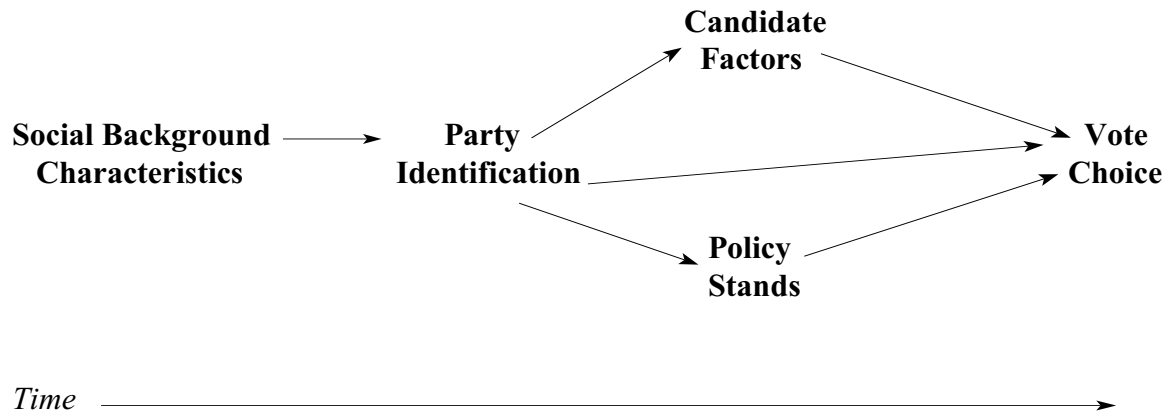


FIGURE 2
Revised American Voter Model to be Tested

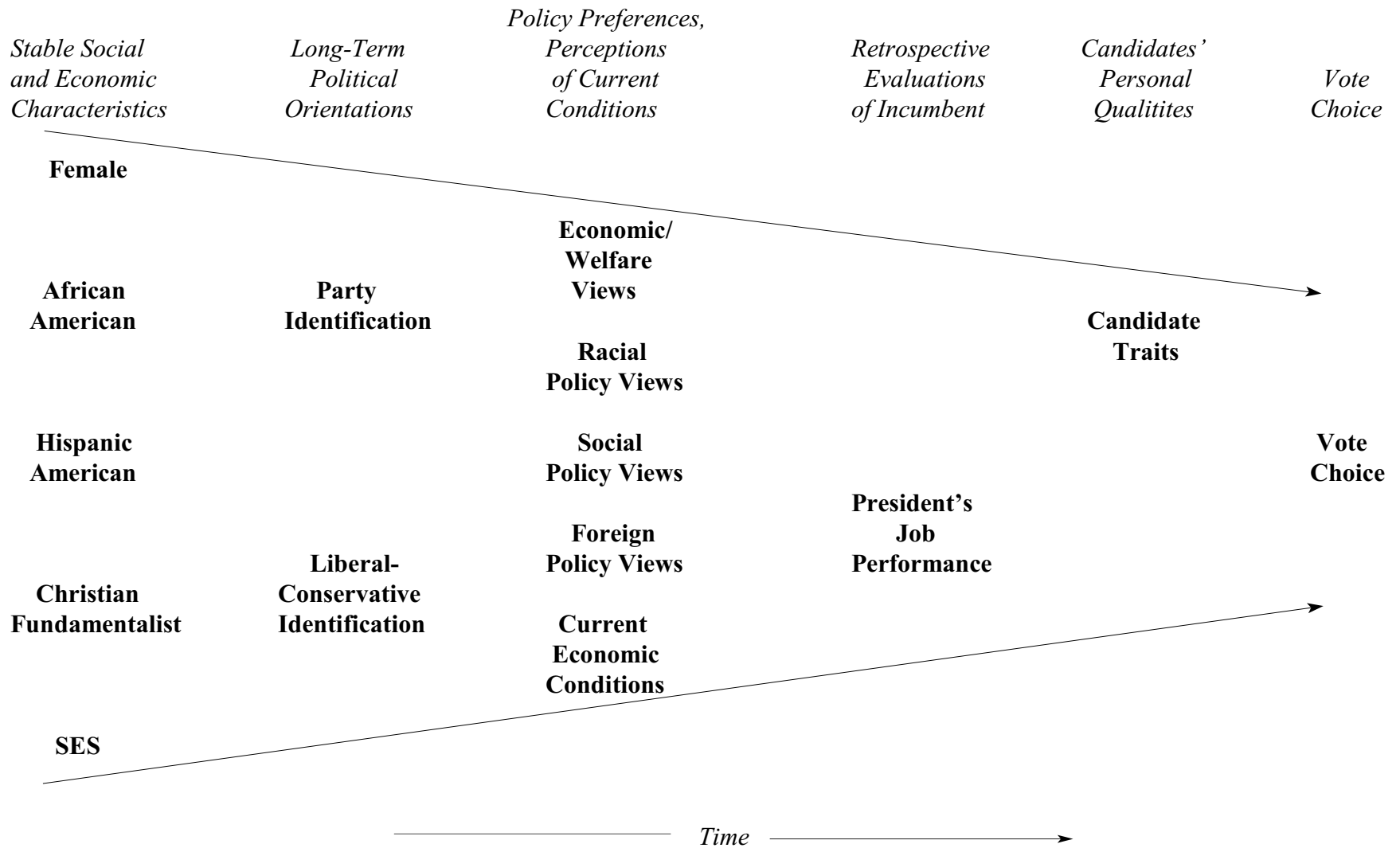
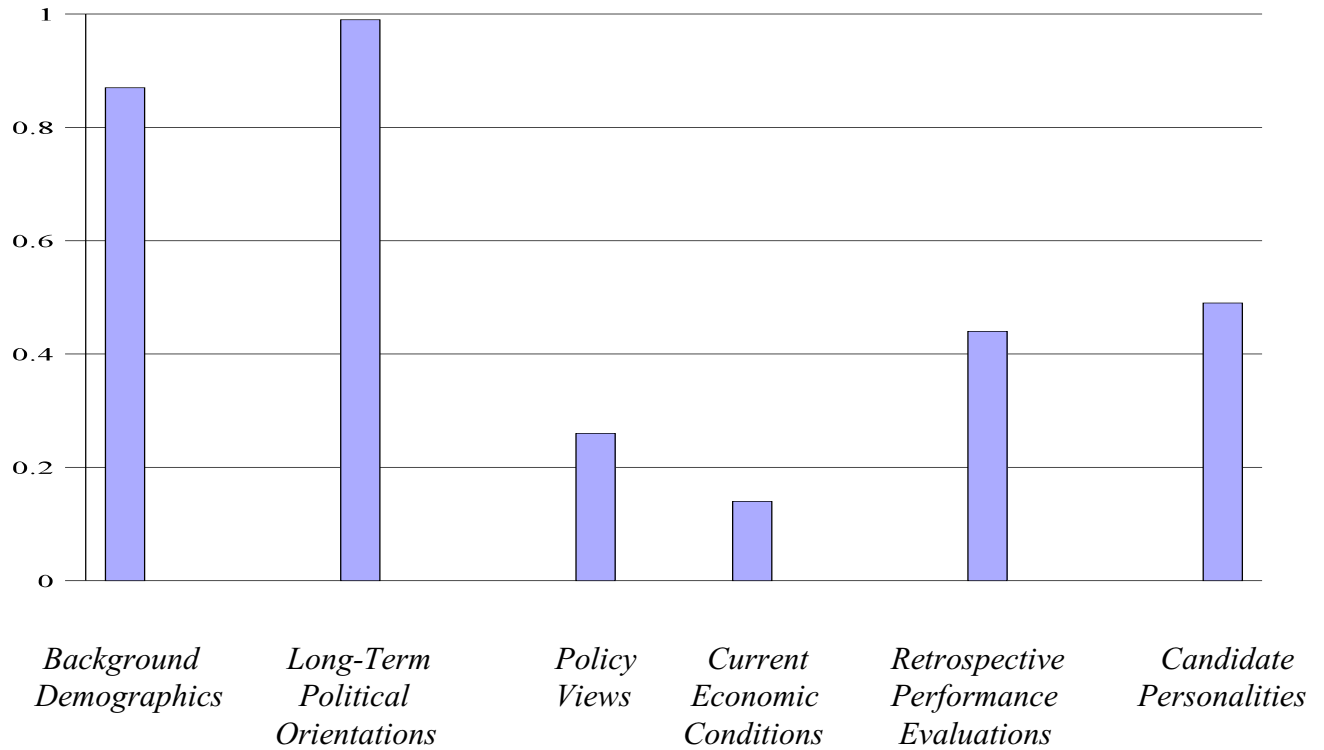


FIGURE 3
Hypothesized Structural Relations

	Party ID ¹	Liberal - Conserv. ¹	Economic/Welfare Policies ^{2,3}	Racial Policies ²	Social Policies	Foreign Policies	Current Econ. Conditions ³	President's Job Perform.	Candidate Personality	Vote Choice
Female	-	-			-		-/+			
African American	-	-	-	-		-	-/+			
Hispanic	-	-	-	-			-/+			
Christian Fundamentalist	+	+	-	-/+	+	-				
SES	+	+	+	-	-	+	-/+			
Party ID							+	+	+	+
Liberal - Conservative ID			+	+	+	+				
Economic/Welfare Views								+	+	+
Racial Policies								+	+	+
Social Policies								+	+	+
Foreign Policies								+	+	+
Current Econ. Conditions								+		+
President's Job Performance									+	+
Candidate Traits										+

Note: Model includes correlated disturbances (i.e., noncausal relationships) between variables sharing similar superscripts.

FIGURE 4
Relative Importance of Predictors of the Vote Choice
U.S. Presidential Elections 1980 - 2004



Note: Figure displays the sum of the absolute value of every structural coefficient within each stage of our model, averaged across the seven election years.

TABLE 1
Model Fit Summary

	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Maximum Likelihood Chi-Square (df)	1652.8 (641)	3066.6 (641)	2466.9 (757)	2777.3 (717)	2020.9 (642)	1416.0 (641)	2058.4 (678)
Comparative Fit Index	.91	.90	.92	.92	.93	.92	.94
Robust Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-Square (df)	1615.4 (641)	1974.3 (641)	2353.5 (757)	2654.4 (717)	1268.8 (642)	1364.0 (641)	1942.2 (678)
Comparative Fit Index	.86	.91	.84	.87	.91	.84	.93
N	877	1192	1195	1355	1026	596	1066

TABLE 2
Direct Effects of Demographics on Long-Term Political Orientations

Party Identification Equation

Predictors	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	-.03	-.08*	-.05	-.06*	-.07*	-.08*	-.12**
<i>African American</i>	-.24**	-.25**	-.28**	-.29**	-.20**	-.32**	-.35**
<i>Hispanic</i>	-.09*	-.04	-.06*	-.02	-.06*	-.02	-.08*
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	.12*	.19**	.11**	.28**	.33**	.32**	.23**
<i>SES</i>	.31**	.16**	.25**	.21**	.37**	.19**	.10*
<i>R-Squared</i>	.27	.17	.23	.26	.37	.26	.19

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note: Identification with/preference for Republicans is scored high.

Liberal-Conservative Identification Equation (Conservative High)

Predictors	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	-.07*	-.14**	-.11**	-.12**	-.11**	-.12**	-.13**
<i>African American</i>	-.14**	-.16**	-.20**	-.21**	-.13**	-.22**	-.19**
<i>Hispanic</i>	-.05*	.02	-.05	-.03	-.05*	.04	-.04
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	.22**	.35**	.29**	.40**	.40**	.37**	.40**
<i>SES</i>	.18**	.11*	.09*	.06	.16**	.07	-.01
<i>R-Squared</i>	.18	.27	.23	.32	.31	.29	.28

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note: Identification with/preference for conservatives is scored high.

TABLE 3a
Direct and Indirect Predictors of Economic/Welfare Policy Views

Predictors	Type of Effect	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	Indirect	-.04*	-.11**	-.06**	-.06**	-.07**	-.07**	-.09**
<i>African American</i>	Direct	-.19**	-.11**	-.10**	-.13**	-.08**	-.09*	-.06*
	Indirect	-.09**	-.12**	-.10**	-.11**	-.09**	-.13**	-.14**
<i>Hispanic</i>	Direct	-.08**	-.04*	-.08**	-.06**	-.02	-.05	-.03
	Indirect	-.03	.01	-.03*	-.01	-.03	.02	-.03
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	Direct	-.05	-.13**	.02	.00	-.04	.01	-.13**
	Indirect	.14**	.26**	.15**	.22**	.26**	.22**	.29**
<i>SES</i>	Direct	.09*	.11**	.15**	.11**	.18**	.20**	.19**
	Indirect	.12**	.08*	.05*	.03	.10**	.04	-.01
<i>Liberal-Conservative Identification</i>	Direct	.64**	.73**	.51**	.54**	.63**	.59**	.72**
<i>R-Squared</i>		.73	.67	.58	.66	.71	.65	.59

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note: Conservative policy views are scored high.

TABLE 3b
Direct and Indirect Predictors of Racial Policy Views

Predictors	Type of Effect	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	Indirect	-.03*	-.07**	-.05**	-.06**	-.07**	-.05**	-.06**
<i>African American</i>	Direct	-.36**	-.30**	-.28**	-.26**	-.20**	-.19**	-.15**
	Indirect	-.06**	-.08**	-.09**	-.10**	-.09**	-.09**	-.09**
<i>Hispanic</i>	Direct	-.08*	-.05*	-.15**	-.11**	-.03	-.10**	-.06*
	Indirect	-.02	.01	-.02*	-.01	-.03	.02	-.02
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	Direct	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.08*	-.13**	-.10*	-.09**
	Indirect	.09**	.18**	.14**	.19**	.26**	.16**	.19**
<i>SES</i>	Direct	-.20**	-.16**	-.10**	-.12**	-.15**	-.12**	-.07*
	Indirect	.08**	.06*	.04*	.03	.10**	.03	-.00
<i>Liberal-Conservative Identification</i>	Direct	.42**	.50**	.47**	.48**	.65**	.43**	.47**
<i>R-Squared</i>		.65	.61	.56	.59	.67	.42	.52

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Note: Conservative policy views are scored high.

TABLE 3c
Direct and Indirect Predictors of Social Policy Views

Predictors	Type of Effect	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	Direct	-.08**	-.04	-.09**	-.08**	-.09**	-.14**	-.05**
	Indirect	-.02*	-.05**	-.04**	-.05**	-.05**	-.06**	-.05**
<i>African American</i>	Indirect	-.05**	-.05**	-.06**	-.09**	-.07**	-.10**	-.07**
<i>Hispanic</i>	Indirect	-.02	.01	-.02*	-.01	-.03	.02	-.02
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	Direct	.37**	.38**	.35**	.27**	.24**	.26**	.19**
	Indirect	.08**	.11**	.09**	.18**	.20**	.18**	.15**
<i>SES</i>	Direct	-.24**	-.20**	-.25**	-.22**	-.18**	-.21**	-.09**
	Indirect	.06**	.04*	.03*	.03	.08**	.03	-.00
<i>Liberal-Conservative Identification</i>	Direct	.34**	.31**	.32**	.44**	.49**	.47**	.37**
<i>R-Squared</i>		.95	.90	.88	.89	.88	.90	.88

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Note: Conservative policy views are scored high.

TABLE 3d
Direct and Indirect Predictors of Foreign Policy Views

Predictors	Type of Effect	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	Indirect	-.04*	-.12**	-.07**	-.06**	-.06**	-.06**	-.09**
<i>African American</i>	Direct	-.02	.02	.04	.02	-.02	.10*	-.04
	Indirect	-.09**	-.13**	-.12**	-.11**	-.07**	-.11**	-.14**
<i>Hispanic</i>	Indirect	-.03	.01	-.03*	-.01	-.03	.02	-.03
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	Direct	-.11*	-.07	.01	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.12**
	Indirect	.14**	.29**	.18**	.21**	.22**	.19**	.30**
<i>SES</i>	Direct	-.12**	-.12**	-.16**	-.12**	-.14**	-.12*	.01
	Indirect	.11**	.09*	.06*	.03	.08*	.04	-.01
<i>Liberal-Conservative Identification</i>	Direct	.63**	.83**	.62**	.53**	.54**	.51**	.74**
<i>R-Squared</i>		.72	.69	.61	.38	.17	.95	.78

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note: Conservative policy views are scored high.

Table 4
Perceptions of Current Economic Conditions Equation*

Predictors	Type of Effect	Worse	Better	Better	Better	Worse	Worse	Better
		1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	Direct	.01	-.06*	-.08**	-.08**	.08**	.00	-.09**
	Indirect	-.01	-.05*	-.02	-.03*	-.03*	-.02	-.07**
<i>African American</i>	Direct	.05*	.00	-.02	-.02	.07*	-.02	-.07*
	Indirect	-.04**	-.17**	-.13**	-.13**	-.09**	-.09**	-.21**
<i>Hispanic</i>	Direct	.02	.06*	-.02	-.01	.05*	-.03	-.04
	Indirect	-.02*	-.03	-.03*	-.01	-.03*	-.00	-.05*
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	Indirect	.08**	.12**	.06**	.13**	.14**	.18**	.14**
<i>SES</i>	Direct	.02	.15**	.12**	.04	-.11**	.03	.16**
	Indirect	.06**	.11**	.12**	.09**	.16**	.05**	.06*
<i>Party Identification</i>	Direct	.17**	.65**	.48**	.45**	.44**	.28**	.62**
<i>R-Squared</i>		.19	.68	.48	.35	.30	.12	.59

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

***Note:** Coding direction of the dependent variable switches according to the party of the incumbent president. Whenever there is a Republican incumbent, perceptions that the economy is better/improving are scored high. Whenever there is a Democratic incumbent, perceptions that the economy is bad and/or getting worse are scored high. (The direction of coding of the dependent variable is noted above the column for each election year.)

TABLE 5
Direct and Indirect Predictors of the President's Job Performance*

Predictors	Type of Effect	Approve		Approve		Disapprove		Approve
		Disapprove	Disapprove	Disapprove	Disapprove	Disapprove	Disapprove	Disapprove
		1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	Indirect	-.00	-.13**	-.08**	-.09**	-.03	-.09*	-.15**
<i>African American</i>	Indirect	-.14**	-.27**	-.25**	-.27**	-.15**	-.24**	-.33**
<i>Hispanic</i>	Indirect	-.04	-.00	-.06*	-.02	-.03	-.01	-.06
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	Indirect	.02	.27**	.13*	.28**	.27**	.30**	.24**
<i>SES</i>	Indirect	.17**	.18**	.17**	.12**	.27**	.10	.06
<i>Party Identification</i>	Direct	.37**	.51**	.60**	.72**	.63**	.62**	.35**
	Indirect	.16**	.35**	.17**	.16**	.18**	.05**	.13**
<i>Liberal-Conservative Identification</i>	Indirect	-.01	.19**	.16**	.05	.04	.13	.62**
<i>Economic/Welfare Policy Views</i>	Direct	-.07	-.04	-.09	-.22*	.05	.02	-.17*
<i>Racial Policy Views</i>	Direct	.19*	.10*	.07	.09	.02	.01	-.03
<i>Social Policy Views</i>	Direct	-.10	.13*	.01	.10*	-.02	.17	-.08
<i>Foreign Policy Views</i>	Direct	-.02	.16*	.28*	.15**	.02	.07	1.06**
<i>Current Economic Conditions</i>	Direct	.98**	.53**	.34**	.35**	.40**	.19**	.22**
<i>R-Squared</i>		.63	.87	.74	.80	.82	.68	.94

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

***Note:** Coding direction of the dependent variable switches according to the party of the incumbent president. Whenever there is a Republican incumbent, approval of the president's job performance is scored high. Whenever there is a Democratic incumbent, disapproval of the incumbent's job performance is scored high. (Again, the direction of coding on the dependent variable is noted above the column for each election year.)

TABLE 6
Direct and Indirect Predictors of Candidate Traits

Predictors	Type of Effect	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
<i>Female</i>	Indirect	-.02	-.09*	-.06**	-.07**	-.03	-.08*	-.13**
<i>African American</i>	Indirect	-.20**	-.24**	-.19**	-.26**	-.13	-.21**	-.32**
<i>Hispanic</i>	Indirect	-.07*	-.02	-.04*	-.03	-.04*	-.01	-.07*
<i>Christian Fundamentalist</i>	Indirect	.07*	.23**	.14**	.23**	.21**	.26**	.25**
<i>SES</i>	Indirect	.18**	.08*	.12**	.09**	.26**	.08*	.03
<i>Party Identification</i>	Direct	.31**	.48**	.47**	.43**	.39**	.49**	.37**
	Indirect	.27**	.25**	.14**	.27**	.30**	.14**	.22**
<i>Liberal-Conservative Identification</i>	Indirect	.11*	.10*	.14**	.10**	-.01	.12*	.42**
<i>Economic/Welfare Policy Views</i>	Direct	.08	-.09*	.02	-.10*	.04	-.03	-.07
	Indirect	-.03	-.01	-.02	-.07*	.02	.00	-.08*
<i>Racial Policy Views</i>	Direct	.06	.17**	-.01	.17**	-.03	.01	.10
	Indirect	.10*	.03*	.02	.03	.01	.00	-.01
<i>Social Policy Views</i>	Direct	.03	.11**	.08	.03	-.06*	.06	.11*
	Indirect	-.05	.04*	.00	.03*	-.01	.03	-.04
<i>Foreign Policy Views</i>	Direct	.05	-.01	.13*	.09**	.00	.15	.13
	Indirect	-.01	.05*	.05**	.05**	.01	.02	.49**
<i>Current Economic Conditions</i>	Indirect	.49**	.15**	.06**	.11**	.16**	.04*	.10**
<i>President's Job Performance</i>	Direct	.50**	.29**	.18**	.31**	.37**	.20**	.46**
<i>R-Squared</i>		.83	.84	.72	.86	.89	.82	.93

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note: Preference for the Republican candidate's traits is scored high.

TABLE 7
Direct and Indirect Effects of Predictors of Candidate Preference/Vote Choice

Predictors	Type of Effect	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Female	Indirect	-.03	-.12**	-.06*	-.09**	-.08*	-.11*	-.14**
African American	Indirect	-.29**	-.29**	-.28**	-.31**	-.19**	-.34**	-.33**
Hispanic	Indirect	-.10**	-.02	-.07*	-.03	-.06*	-.02	-.07*
Christian Fundamentalist	Indirect	.10*	.26**	.16**	.34**	.37**	.37**	.26**
SES	Indirect	.25**	.14**	.20**	.14**	.35**	.16*	.05
<i>Party Identification</i>	Direct	.29**	.33**	.45**	.55**	.37**	.57**	.16**
	Indirect	.49**	.56**	.38**	.38**	.58**	.44**	.48**
Liberal - Conservative ID	Indirect	.19**	.20*	.20**	.10**	.07	-.13	.41**
<i>Economic/Welfare Policy Views</i>	Direct	.08	.01	.13	.03	.03	-.04	.09
	Indirect	.01	-.05	-.02	-.10**	.05	-.02	-.17*
<i>Racial Policy Views</i>	Direct	.08	.05	.02	.01	-.04	.03	.01
	Indirect	.15*	.10*	.02	.08**	-.01	.01	.01
<i>Social Policy Views</i>	Direct	-.01	-.01	-.02	.16**	.16**	.28*	.10
	Indirect	-.04	.10**	.04	.04*	-.05	.06	-.03
<i>Foreign Policy Views</i>	Direct	.06	.07	.05	-.06*	-.00	-.64*	-.37
	Indirect	.02	.08*	.14**	.07**	.01	.12	.97**
<i>Current Economic Conditions</i>	Direct	-.15	-.01	-.10*	-.02	-.06	.02	-.11*
	Indirect	.56**	.28**	.09**	.11**	.18**	.03	.19**
<i>President's Job Performance</i>	Direct	.24*	.43*	.18**	.15*	.21*	-.01	.71**
	Indirect	.33**	.08*	.09**	.11**	.24**	.14*	.16**
<i>Candidate Traits</i>	Direct	.66**	.27**	.48**	.36**	.64**	.70**	.35**
R-Squared		.90	.96	.91	.94	.96	.92	.97

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note: Preference for the Republican candidate is scored high.

TABLE A-1
Variables Used in Measurement Model Across Election Years

Christian Fundamentalist	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Born Again Christian?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X*
Frequency of Attending Religious Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Socio-economic Status	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Years of Education	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Family Income	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Subjective Social Class	X	X	X	X	X*	X	X
Party Identification	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
7-Point Party Identification Scale	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Democrats Feeling Thermometer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Republicans Feeling Thermometer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Liberal - Conservative Identification	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
7-Point Liberal - Conservative Identification Scale	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Democrats Feeling Thermometer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Republicans Feeling Thermometer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Economic/Welfare Policy Views	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
7-Point Government Guaranteed Jobs and Incomes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7-Point Government Services/Spending Tradeoff	X		X	X	X	X	X
7-Point Government Health Insurance Scale		X	X	X	X	X	X
Preferences for More/Less Government Spending on Specific Programs		X	X	X	X	X	X
7-Point Unemployment/Inflation Tradeoff	X						
Support for 30 % Tax Cut?	X						

Racial Policy Views	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
7-Point Minority Aid Scale	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Are Civil Rights Leaders Pushing too Fast?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7-Point Busing Scale	X	X					
Preferential Treatment for Blacks in Hiring and Promotion?			X	X	X		X
Government Insure Equal Treatment on Jobs?						X	
Social Policy Views	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
7-Point Equal Role for Women Scale	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Abortion Attitudes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attitudes toward Gays (mean of available items)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attitudes toward School Prayer	X	X	X	X	X		
Foreign Policy Views	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
7-Point Decrease/Increase Defense Spending	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7-Point Cooperate with Soviet Union/ Russia	X	X	X				
Oppose Communism in Central/South America?		X					
Should U.S. Do All It Can to Oppose the Spread of Communism?			X				
Diplomatic/Military Solutions to World Crises?				X			X
Worry About Getting Into a War?						X	
Iraq War Worth the Cost?							X
Current Economic Conditions	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Retrospective Evaluations of Economy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Retrospective Evaluations of Unemployment	X		X	X		X	X
Retrospective Evaluations of Inflation	X		X	X			X
Retrospective Evaluations of Economy, Post					X		
Prospective Evaluations of Economy		X			X	X	

Presidential Job Performance	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Overall Evaluation of Job Performance		X	X	X		X	X
Handling of the Economy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Handling of Foreign Policy		X	X	X	X	X	X
Handling of Energy Crisis	X						
Handling of Iraq Hostage Crisis	X						
Handling of National Health Care Debate					X		
Candidate Traits	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Ability	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Leadership	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Integrity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Empathy		X	X	X	X	X	X
Vote Choice	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Strength of Vote Preference	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Democratic Candidate Feeling Thermometer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Republican Candidate Feeling Thermometer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X