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ISSUE PUBLICS GONE WILD OR THE END OF NARROW INTERESTS?

THESIS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Political Science
The University of Mississippi

by

MICHAEL C. BOWEN

May 2013

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ABSTRACT

Issue public theory holds that individuals are more likely to base political judgments, such as the decision of who to vote for on election day, on issues that are particularly important to them. This subset of issues is presumed to be relatively small in quantity for most individuals, allowing them to specialize in information gathering and attention. There is reason to believe the nature of issue publics has significantly changed in recent years as a result of profound shifts in the information environment. Many of the traditional findings within the literature are reassessed using data primarily from the 2008 Presidential election. Though significant changes are found, they do not, as theorized, represent a strengthening of issue publics within society. If anything, people appear to emphasize a larger array of issues today than ever before and rely no more heavily upon important issues than unimportant ones in their voting decision. Evidence is found, though, for a mediating role of the particular form of media the individual engages in.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends who supported me throughout my education. In particular, I thank my parents for fostering my intellectual curiosity, pushing me further than I wanted to go, and believing in my potential. I thank my wife, Brooke, who puts up with my sleepless nights of data crunching and helps me through the hard times. I thank my son, Ethan, who, though he cannot yet even talk, inspires me to be a better person. And, most of all, I thank God for blessing me with all of these things and many, many more.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On April 15, 2013, brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev planted and exploded two bombs fashioned from pressure cookers near the finish line of the Boston Marathon. Three people died and many more were seriously wounded. Four days later, the entire city of Boston was turned into a ghost town as law enforcement officers swarmed the small suburb of Watertown. One brother had already died in the course of the manhunt and the other was on the run. It made for very compelling television and it seemed that the entire nation was focused on this Boston suburb.

As it turns out, though, not everybody was so enthralled. David Beard, Director of Digital Content for the Washington Post, posted on Twitter at noon that the most-searched story on the news agency's Web site, despite the Boston lockdown, was actually a story about the divorce of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries. Thirty minutes later, this story was replaced as most-searched by an article on a former minister from Michigan sentenced to prison for murder of "his fiancée's 24 year old daughter, allegedly to fulfill a fantasy to have sex with a dead body."¹

Contrast that to what could have occurred prior to the massive proliferation of the Internet and its impact on modern media. Now, more than ever, people have the capacity to choose their news. Their choice is no longer limited by the amount of time in the day that a handful of major networks, or the column inches their newspapers and periodicals, have. Instead, they can seek out the news that interests them by subscribing to email newsletters or

¹ (Levis & Plott, 2013) (Carter & Botelho, 2013) (Gerstein & Samuelsohn, 2013) (dabeard, 2013) (dabeard, 2013) (Associated Press, 2013) (Associated Press, 2013)

following certain individuals on Twitter or the blogosphere that share their peculiar interests. The impact of this change in the information environment must surely be extensive in the political realm which is so profoundly impacted by the flow of information.

The comprehensive impact of the tectonic shifts taking place in society due to these technological advancements is of course far too much to cover in any single study. Indeed, tomes of paper have been written on the subject in various academic journals, scholarly books, and popular works. One potential effect of these shifts, however, that could prove truly monumental to the study of political behavior is how it could dramatically increase the role of interest in politics, issues, and candidates.

Where voters may have once relied almost exclusively on the passive reception of news according to the editorial decisions of executives at ABC, NBC, or the New York Times, the modern voter can actively seek out information pertinent to his interests. One theory of political science for which this holds particular importance is that of issue publics, the idea that many members of the public, while not highly motivated to engage themselves with information and make decisions based on most issues, are very enthusiastic about certain issues salient to them. This modern information environment, which allows for access to more diversified information according to the interests of the recipient, is perfectly suited for such a voter who may have previously been limited in his ability to focus attentions on his unique interests.

The purpose of this paper is to revisit the idea of issue publics in the modern information environment. If context matters as some authors suggest, then this area is in need of an updated examination and analysis. The contribution is to revisit a literature grounded in empirical analysis from 20-30 years ago and see if the theories and findings change in the modern climate.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Democratic theory has long rested on the notion that individuals can and do evaluate candidates and make voting decisions based on public policy preferences. Indeed, it seems paramount to the central doctrine of electoral accountability that voters do in fact make such judgments. Political science, on the other hand, has struggled mightily with the search for attitude-based voting.

Anthony Downs, in *Economic Theory of Democracy*, more formally laid out in mathematical terms that which many hold to be self-evident: that voters make decisions based on the proximity of party or candidate policy positions (Downs, 1957). While the theory satisfies normative desires for democracy, empirical research has had incredible difficulty backing it up. An alternative approach is represented by *The American Voter* and "The Michigan Model," which placed little power in ideology and issues, placing instead pre-eminent importance on affective attachment to groups, namely political parties (Campbell, et al., 1960).

Since then, unwilling to give up on issue voting, scholars have engaged in an on-going struggle to find a role for issues in politics with increasing success. *The Changing American Voter* suggests that *The American Voter*, though likely true at the time of the study, did not account for significant changes to the political system which developed in the 1960s, notably the breakdown of consensual politics and growth of divisive conflict, increasing the role of issues in politics (Nie, et al., 1976). The literature remained highly dubious, though, of the traditional view of the model, enlightened citizen.

One particular avenue of study which attempted to patch up the holes in issue voting theory is the issue publics literature. This school of thought originates with Converse in 1964, who made the following observation about public opinion:

The simple conclusion seems to be that different controversies excite different people to the point of real opinion formation. One man takes an interest in policies bearing on the Negro and is relatively indifferent to or ignorant about controversies in other areas. His neighbor may have few crystallized opinions on the race issue, but he may find the subject of foreign aid very important. Such sharp division of interest are part of what the term 'issue public' is intended to convey (Converse, 1964, p. 246).

Noting the high cost of information,² the issue publics literature holds that "voters are characterized as being concerned with a narrow subset of issues with the content of the subset varying from voter to voter (Davis, et al., 1970)."

Though issue publics have been met with opposition in the academic literature, some substantial evidence has been provided. Perhaps most convincing of all, representatives speak and think in terms of issue publics, assigning great value to the extent to which different groups of their constituents are likely to care about their votes on specific policies (Fenno, 1978) (Fiorina, 1974). One particular issue public that has received much attention in the literature is the group of passionate activists involved in the issue of abortion. Abortion activists on both sides of the issue appear to be very passionately and even obsessively engaged with the issue, almost exclusively driven by the single attitude (Luker, 1984).

Empirically, the most consistently observed characteristics of issue publics were laid out by Krosnick in 1990: citizens think more frequently about important attitudes, perceive

² (Downs, 1957) (Fiske & Taylor, 1991)

candidates as more polarized on important issues, and form candidate preferences on the basis of important attitudes (Krosnick, 1990).³ More recently, Hutchings provided another layer to the issue publics literature by stressing the mediating role of the information environment in activating the prior interests of the voting public. In his view, the public can best be viewed as "sleeping giants" whose potential preferences are powerful enough to shape legislative behavior:

The information environment plays a critical role in facilitating the ability of ordinary citizens to monitor their elected officials. Hence, the Internet represents an important technological innovation that holds enormous promise for the shape of this environment (Hutchings, 2003, p. 138).

Here, this paper takes a step back to examine the role of the information environment in mediating the issue public phenomenon. In fact, one of the most important theoretical consequences of membership in an issue public is its impact on the information sought and comprehended by the individual:

People are probably acutely attuned to information they encounter that is relevant to policy attitudes they consider personally important, whereas information relevant to unimportant attitudes is more likely to be ignored. Among information that is attended to, people are more likely to think deeply about and elaborate upon information relevant to important policy attitudes (Krosnick, 1990, p. 68).

While the simple equation of interest leading directly to information consumption is appealing, the information environment historically experienced by most people severely limits this relationship. Converse famously said in 1990, "The two simplest truths I know about the distribution of political information in modern electorates are that the mean is low and the

³ Also see (Krosnick, et al., 1994)

variance high (Converse, 1990, p. 372)." Indeed, most people know very little about politics and those that do are most significantly differentiated from their counterparts by the resources they have making them able to spend more time and money attaining relevant information.

This is likely due, to a large extent, to the media environment in which citizens have historically lived. The passive nature of television and radio news, and even to a certain extent print media, requires the citizen to wade through extensive amounts of coverage of both news and non-news items in order to find any information particularly relevant to the voter's decision calculus. The predominant view of information gathering in this historical environment, then, is best represented in Popkin's *The Reasoning Voter*. In it, Popkin explains that the typical voter utilizes "low information rationality" with information inadvertently attained as a byproduct of daily life (Popkin, 1991).

In such an environment, extensive media coverage is required for issue attitudes and party ties (and presumably voting decisions) to affect one another (Dancey & Goren, 2010). Such coverage is ultimately governed by majority interests which must compete with news and non-news items that individuals can spend their time consuming. The resulting effect is the "issue attention cycle," characterized by rapid growth in coverage followed by a steady decline as the public grows bored with the subject. This dissolution of interest in a given issue occurs, often before the issue is even handled by the government, as long as a majority do not continue to have some form of intrinsic interest in the story (Downs, 1972).

Television, by its nature, is also predominantly concerned with what is called horse-race coverage rather than substantive policy coverage. "Television, in other words, is not giving people enough to read about the substance of political coalition building because it ignores many important campaign signals (Popkin, 1991, p. 230)." This is because television must provide broad appeal in order to compete for viewers and ratings.

As the predominant form of news media consumed by the mass public, television created a passive, majoritarian information environment in which the voting public merely attained information about the issues and political events chosen to satisfy the interests of the largest possible segment of voters. Issue publics, then, characterized by intense passion for issues which often do not garner such interest from a majority of voters, have little support from such an information environment. The modern information environment, ushered in with the advent and widespread use of the Internet, has turned this environment on its head.

Internet usage has exploded in recent years in the United States from under 2 users per 100 people at the time of the 1992 election to nearly 75 in 2008 (World Bank, 2012). Facebook, the social networking site which had only 1 million active users in 2004, had more than 100 million active users in 2008 (Associated Press, 2012). Political scientists are racing to understand the consequences of this radical change in the information-gathering process.

Prior studies indicate that political knowledge tends to be generalist in nature rather than specialized (Hutchings, 2003) (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). This finding has always been one of the more damaging to the issue public theory. It runs counter to the notion that such individuals seek out information and are more actively engaged on issues that they find important. The findings are made even more curious in light of studies which find evidence that citizens do in fact seek out information on personally relevant issues such as the confirmation vote of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas (Hutchings, 2001). One potential answer for such findings is that these studies are based on data from a time before widespread use of the Internet and the ability to seek specific kinds of information.

Whereas voters may have been more interested in certain subjects, the media system forced a more general attainment of information by not allowing for customized information access. Instead, the voter would watch the nightly news and read the paper. Occasionally, the

voter may uncover a story on a particularly interesting topic, but was provided little by way of means to target the process of information acquisition at such topics. The Internet, on the other hand, allows for highly customized information gathering.

Of course, this is nothing new to the political science literature. Extensive research has been conducted on the subject of selective media exposure (Jones, et al., 2011) (Arceneaux, et al., 2012) (Stroud, 2007) (Stroud, 2008). This literature is predominantly focused, however, on the polarizing nature of selective exposure to broadcast journalism, with the advent of Fox News, MSNBC, and politically charged cable news networks. It remains a step behind the impact of the Internet which takes this to another level, allowing individuals to select not just the political slant of their coverage, but the content of the coverage itself.

This customization, providing unique information for individuals, has far-reaching effects. On the one hand, the optimistic approach holds that increased access to information is a normative good for democracy. Joe Trippi, best known for managing Howard Dean's 2004 Presidential campaign, emphasized the role of the Internet as a medium in the political system. "While TV was a medium that rendered us dumb, disengaged, and disconnected, the Internet makes us smarter, more involved, and better informed (Trippi, 2008, p. 227)."

Others are not so convinced, pointing to a range of consequences which may not be so good for democracy. One such concern is that voters may now more easily than ever avoid political information entirely (turning instead to the latest Kardashian gossip as demonstrated on the day of the manhunt for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev). "As technology continues to evolve, the knowledge gap between the information privileged and the information underclass is likely to grow (Graber, 1996, p. 34)." Of course, uninformed voters have a very negative normative implication for democracy. And, although much of the political science literature holds that the uninformed voters are simply random noise (Erikson, et al., 2002), Bartels indicates that

uninformed voters often very poorly choose their candidates in a way that is biased against challengers and even produces a partisan skew, significantly impacting the results of elections (Bartels, 1996).

On the other end of the spectrum, those with intense passions and interest in particular issue attitudes can avoid opposing viewpoints and potentially important issues entirely. This is a product of cognitive dissonance, the tendency for people to seek out information that is consistent with their own attitudes (Festinger, 1957). Such behavior has been recently found to be more pronounced among strongly held attitudes (Brannon, et al., 2007). The Internet, then, by providing an avenue for people with passionate opinions to seek out information consistent with those opinions results in "echo chambers" that serve to reinforce such preconceptions (Zaller, 1992) (Sunstein, 2007) (Bartels, 2002) (Bartels, 1988). These echo chambers effectively eliminate the natural mechanism by which mass opinion is influenced by elite level conflict, producing conflicting predispositions within the electorate (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002).

Noelle-Neuman wrote about the "spiral of silence" in 1974. Her contribution was that people are more vocal and active in politics when they believe themselves to be in the majority on the issue, or at the very least are reassured of future success on the issue. The Internet provides more and more groups of passionate minorities with the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals, advancing such assurances to a much greater extent than prior information environments would have ever allowed. Whereas certain issues do not play well on national television news, they most certainly may be incredibly important to some small segment of the population. Their ability to access information about the issue and communicate with others with similar attitudes and interests is vital to that segment's political efficacy.

In the past, unless united by some natural geographic proximity, this segment of the population was very limited in its ability to connect with one another. Now, they can connect

and network, elevating their confidence level, growing more vocal, exercising the reverse of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neuman, 1974) (Bennett, 2012). As a result, Bimber forecasts "accelerated pluralism in which the Internet contributes to the on-going fragmentation of the present system of interest-based group politics and a shift toward a more fluid, issue-based group politics with less institutional coherence (Bimber, 1998, p. 133)."

Issue-based politics relies on more than just knowledge of the issues themselves and strong positions on those issues. It relies on knowledge of candidate positions. The modern information environment furthers this, as well, in two ways. First, it allows interested voters to seek out information about the candidate pertaining to their particular interests. Second, it allows candidates to target campaign efforts to particular constituencies based on known interests.

By allowing individuals to more intimately follow and understand candidates themselves, the modern information environment increases the ability of interested voters to learn about the candidates. Studies show that not only the ability of the public to place the candidates on issues but the relative certainty with which they do so is crucial. In fact, risk aversion, or the tendency to vote against candidates about which voters are uncertain of issue positions has been found to be just as important as issue agreement itself (Alvarez, 1997) (Bartels, 1986).

Attitude extremity, either by the communicator or the listener, has been found to increase certainty of perceptions in political communication (Huckfeldt, et al., 2000). Attitude extremity, therefore, intrinsically linked with interest in the issue, promotes both the likelihood an individual takes the time to seek out information on the subject and the likelihood that he knows how to interpret the information, producing certainty. The modern information environment, which minimizes accidental information exposure and increases active, purposeful exposure, then, can serve to increase the importance of interest and attitude extremity in voting behavior.

Further, candidate strategies utilize modern technology to personalize their campaigns. Candidates can now target information from the campaign using what has been termed "dog-whistle politics," sending campaign materials about specific issues and addressing attitudes which are likely to be more important to the voter. These strategies are informed by modern polling, which allows candidates more confidence in position-taking effects, leading to the use of wedge issues to pull cross-pressured partisans in lieu of moderating stances (Hillygus & Shields, 2008).

Therefore, in addition to allowing individuals to actively pursue more targeted information, individuals are likely to be bombarded with information geared towards particularized interests. And, candidates are free to take stronger positions rather than equivocate due to lower risk. Candidates are further encouraged to take strong issue positions to raise the money to engage in the targeted politics involved in persuading uninformed voters (Baron, 1994). The resulting candidate contrast will serve to only further increase issue voting, especially among the well informed and motivated voters (Highton, 2004) (Highton, 2010).

It is no wonder, then, that we see a polarized political climate. This polarization is discussed in both academic and popular sources. This is not to say that the modern information environment is exclusively responsible for the polarization witnessed in modern America. It is, however, one important possible explanation that must be explored.

The modern information environment has served to unleash the natural tendency among people, long hypothesized and empirically sought among political scientists, to make political decisions based on particularly important attitudes. Further, the diversity of these interests, characterized as issue publics by Converse, is no longer suppressed by a one-size-fits-all media environment. The Internet has, in effect, freed people to engage, or disengage, themselves with as many, or as few, political issues as they desire.

The modern information environment, then, fosters issue publics at a never before seen level in the following ways. It increases the capacity for members of issue publics to selectively pursue information pertinent to their passion, allowing for more information specialization. It increases capacity for communication within issue publics, reinforcing passion with confidence and reassurance. It increases candidate capacity to target information to issue publics and reduces the risks associated with position-taking, further facilitating issue voting. It is reasonable, then, to expect to see changes in the extent to which issue publics manifest themselves in the electorate. The findings of the traditional issue publics literature, which have not seen much advancement in the past decade, should be reassessed in this entirely new context.

III. HYPOTHESES AND THEORY

The crux of my theory lies in the role of the information environment in mediating the relationships between resources, interest, and information consumption and, as a result, political behavior. These relationships are modeled below in Figure 1. Resources refer to everything from an individual's education, wealth, and free time which make the individual more capable of

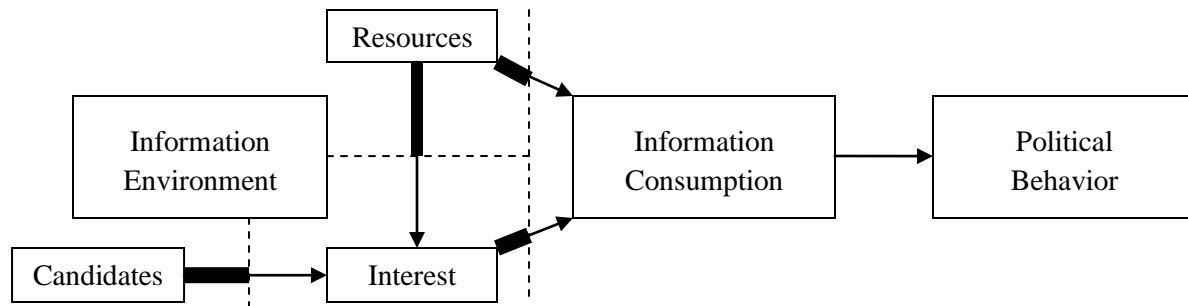


Figure 1

bearing the costs of attaining and comprehending information. In essence, it is the supply side of the equation that determines the likelihood that an individual will engage in the process of consuming information. Following this comparison, interest represents the demand side. It is the extent to which an individual is willing to pursue information despite its cost.

Together, the resources available to and the interests within an individual help to determine the extent to which he consumes information. The type and quality of information consumed then profoundly impacts the political behavior of the individual. The issue publics literature adds additional relationships to this dynamic. It posits that many individuals specialize in their interests rather than attempting to grasp the full spectrum of political issues. This specialization, though largely a product of values and internal characteristics of the individual, can also be at least partially attributed to resources and candidate behavior. Resources limit the

ability of an individual to suffer the costs of attaining information about a large range of issues. Candidates also substantially impact interests by staking positions (or not doing so) in such a way that increases the perceived relevance of an issue and demands attention.

My proposition is that the information environment substantially impacts the nature of all of these relationships. Specifically, the information environment constrains the impact of both resources and interest on information consumption as well as the impact of resources and candidates on the scope of individual interests. The modern information environment is characterized by the following:

1. Information costs have decreased.
2. More information is available about any given issue.
3. Information is available about more issues.
4. Communication is no longer limited by geography.
5. Information can be targeted at specific audiences.
6. More information about voters is available to candidates.

These six characteristics of the modern information environment are the basic assumptions of my theory. From these assumptions, and certain concepts borrowed from the issue publics literature, I will develop a series of hypotheses.

The first assumption, that information costs have decreased, is a product of two basic trends in our society. The first is increased access to technology, including the widespread proliferation of computers and Internet access. The second is the increasing convenience of such technology to access information seamlessly throughout the day. The combined effect is that more people have access to information that is easier to attain.

It follows that we should see a significant decrease in the role of resources in access to information. Specifically, as it relates to issue publics, the lowered costs of information mean

that it is easier for someone to engage themselves with a wider spectrum of issues. Additionally, as the sixth assumption points out, candidates have more information available to them about voters. This encourages strategic position taking rather than equivocation on issues, increasing the likelihood that contentious issues will be highlighted by campaigns and further facilitating interest in various issues. We should, then, see a diversification of interests among the population.

H₁: In the modern information environment, individual voters should be more interested in a larger array of issues.

The second assumption, that more information is available about any given issue, and the third assumption, that information is available about more issues, are products of the diversification of information sources created by modern technology. Where individuals may have once had access to three major television networks and a local newspaper, they can now access any newspaper story, library archives, or independent research and opinion as narrow as a newsletter from a national pro-life organization or as broad as news bulletins from the Associated Press. They can learn everything there is to know about maritime trade agreements at the click of a button. Their information is not limited to the issues which are interesting to the majority of the public nor is their information limited by time and space.

The fourth assumption, that communication is no longer limited by geography, expands upon this by noting that people do not just have access to information from media outlets, but they are actually now able to network and communicate with other citizens from across the globe about the issues for which they are passionate. While this increased capacity for communication could allow for greater interaction between opposing cultures and perspectives, social-psychological studies have long noted people's natural tendencies to seek

out self-reinforcing information via cognitive dissonance. The result is access to large social groups of like-minded individuals to reinforce preconceptions.

It could be argued that this is even more important for issue publics than access to information itself, particularly when the passion is driven by deep convictions, personal values, and experiences. In such cases, new information may be irrelevant to someone who so strongly holds a belief based on the present information. The confidence of having company in that conviction, on the other hand, can make the difference between a passionate activist, and a disillusioned non-participant.

Taken together, these assumptions allow an increased role for particular interests to impact political behavior by relieving the constricting effect of the information environment on the role of interest. Where individuals may have always had a desire to seek out more information about certain issues and like-minded individuals on those issues, past information environments severely limited their capacity to do those things. In the modern information environment, many barriers are removed.

As such, we should expect to see a much more profound role for issue interest to play in political behavior. First, an individual with particular issue interests is likely to be polarized on the issue more frequently due to greater information access and ability to find community support.

H₂: People who are interested in an issue hold more extreme positions on that issue than others.

Second, an individual with particular issue interests should be more likely than ever before to base his political behavior on those issue attitudes due to both higher efficacy and greater understanding of the issue.

H₃: People who are interested in an issue are more likely to vote for the candidate they agree with on that issue than are others who also agree on that issue.

Corollary - This effect should be most profound among information seekers, those who more regularly consume media, especially among those who use the Internet.

The fifth assumption, that information can be targeted at specific audiences, and the sixth assumption, that more information about voters is available to candidates, are a product of campaign use of modern technology. Campaigns have at their disposal massive databases of voter information allowing them to target particular constituencies based on their interests. Additionally, modern polling allows candidates to better understand the opinion of the electorate. These two factors allow campaigns to utilize issues in ways that they have never been able to in the past, when information about voters was sketchy at best and position taking on contentious issues was incredibly risky.

Now, candidates emphasize particular issues strategically to certain groups of the electorate in order to maximize electoral output. Voters, then, are more likely to receive information relevant to their interests about candidates' positions and candidates are more likely to broadcast clear positions in the first place. This should allow voters to more readily perceive the positions of the candidates, which are more polarized, especially on the issues that matter to them.

H₄: Members of an issue public perceive candidates as more polarized on that issue than do others.

Corollary - Members of an issue public are more certain of their perceived placement of the candidates on that issue than are others.

IV. DATA AND METHODS

Five datasets were utilized to test the four hypotheses and explore the accuracy of the theory presented in this paper: the American National Election Study (ANES) 2000 and 2008 Pre- and Post-Election Surveys, a 1993 Times Mirror survey, and 2004 and 2012 Pew Research surveys. The primary focus of the analysis rests on data provided by the 2008 ANES data; however, the other polls were chosen to specifically address questions which the 2008 data could not on its own.⁴

In order to test the first hypothesis, updated data comparable with that used by Krosnick to assess the distribution of the number of highest importance groups was needed. Krosnick used 1980 and 1984 ANES surveys because they included questions which required the respondent to rate the importance of a series of issues.⁵ In an attempt to reassess the nature of this distribution across time, the 2008 ANES survey was used. While the question of importance was asked on a number of issues, responses from nine issues were selected for the purpose of this study⁶ because they include questions pertaining to the respondent's position on the issue, the importance of the issue, and their perceptions of candidate positions on the issue. All of these data were necessary to test the full range of hypotheses in this paper and the data was hence limited to the issues on which all such questions were asked.

⁴ A complete summary of descriptive statistics of variables included in this study is available in Table 1 of the Appendix.

⁵ The Krosnick analysis referenced here is on page 77-78 and Table 10 of "Government Policy and Citizen Passion (Krosnick, 1990)."

⁶ These issues include the government spending/services tradeoff, defense spending, government health insurance, a government guaranteed job/income, a path to citizenship, aid to blacks, the environment, women's role in society, and abortion.

Limiting the number of issues in this way actually helps with the comparability as the 1980 and 1984 surveys used by Krosnick only asked respondents to place themselves on seven and four issues, respectively. Following Krosnick's model, respondents were coded as members of a highest importance group for a given issue if they rated the issue at the highest level of importance given as a possible response.⁷ The percentage of respondents who fell into different numbers of highest importance groups was then charted similarly to Krosnick.

To add more depth to this analysis, the Roper Center's iPoll service was used to query polls outside of the ANES study which asked questions pertaining to issue importance over the years since Krosnick's analysis. Three such polls were selected⁸ due to the breadth of issues addressed and the consistency of their structure, each giving four different possible levels of importance for a number of issues.⁹ These data were treated in the same manner as the ANES data and added to a Table to mimic Krosnick's 1990 analysis. The results are provided in Table 3 and visually demonstrated in Table 4 in Appendix D.

The 2008 ANES data allowed for a little bit more analysis of the trend, specifically by looking at potential variables which could influence the number of issues a respondent finds very important. Two variables were selected to represent the information environment's influence:

⁷ Respondents were given four possible levels of importance on all issues. On some questions, the responses included not important at all, not too important, somewhat important, and very important. On other questions, the responses replaced the two middle responses with slightly important and moderately important. Using Krosnick's method of creating a binary importance variable should equate these two sets of responses.

⁸ These were a Times Mirror Poll conducted May 18-24, 1993, using a sample of 1,507 adults, a Pew/Princeton Survey Research Associates International Survey conducted October 15-19, 2004, using a sample of 1,568 adults, and a Pew Research Center 2012 Values Survey conducted April 4-15, 2012, using a sample of 3,008 Adults.

⁹ The 1993 Times Mirror Poll used options Critical, Very Important, Somewhat Important, and Don't Know. The two Pew polls in 2004 and 2012 used options Very Important, Somewhat Important, Not Too Important, Not At All Important. The Pew polls also allowed respondents to choose an option that they did not know or refused to answer the question. Although the lack of continuity in language is regrettable, especially considering the highest importance group in the Pew polls is the second highest importance language used in the Times Mirror Poll, it should not harm the validity of the comparison.

newspaper usage and Internet usage.¹⁰ To test their impact on the number of issues a respondent finds very important, a linear regression was chosen. The dependent variable was not simply the number of highest importance groups an individual was a member of because not all respondents were presented with the same number of issues to rate. To make up for this, a new variable was created which represented the percentage of issues which were rated of highest importance among those the respondent was asked to give an opinion. The dependent variable has 23 distinct values between 0 and 1 the distance between which is meaningful. Thus, a linear regression is appropriate. The independent variables, in addition to newspaper and Internet usage, included a more general interest in campaigns as well as control variables for identification with either party, partisan strength, education, age, race and income. The results are presented in Table 5 in Appendix E.

In order to test the impact of issue importance (henceforth characterized as membership in an issue public) on respondent polarization, ordinal regression was chosen. Respondent polarization was operationalized by generating a variable equal to the absolute value of the difference between the value associated with the respondent's self-identified position¹¹ on the issue and the middle position.¹² In effect, this created a set of dependent variables (one for each issue) which measures a respondent's distance from the center. These dependent variables were ordinal in nature, with no set definition for the gap between each value and only taking a maximum of three values, making an ordinal regression appropriate. Independent variables used

¹⁰ Both newspaper and Internet usage represent the number of days in a typical week the respondent reads the newspaper or uses the Internet to read about news in a typical week. Select respondents were also chosen for an alternative question wording that asked about the number of days in the previous week. Given that there is no reason to suspect the previous week to be atypical, there should be no significant disadvantage to treating the two groups of respondents the same.

¹¹ Respondents were given options for all issues which fell along an ordered scale from one to seven (see Footnote 12 for lone exception.)

¹² Such a moderate position was provided as a response for all issues except for abortion which, unfortunately, had an even number (4) of positions to choose from. For the issue of abortion, the middle position was 2.5, the median of the values represented by choices given to the respondent (1, 2, 3, and 4).

included membership in the issue public, identification as a Democrat or Republican, partisan strength, and control variables for age, education, income, race, and gender. A separate regression was run for each issue. The results are provided in Table 6 in Appendix F.

A further analysis of the role of the modern information environment in facilitating the polarizing effect of membership in an issue public was conducted using the issue of defense spending. Defense spending was chosen because it was one of two issues which demonstrated significant effects from membership in the issue public, partisan identification, and partisan strength. To test the role of the modern information environment, the same ordinal regression was repeated four times for different sets of respondents.

The first regression was run on only those respondents who said that they did not read a newspaper in a typical week. The second regression was run on only those respondents who said that they did read a newspaper in a typical week. The third regression was run on only those respondents who said they did not use the Internet to get news in a typical week. The fourth regression was run on only those respondents who said they did use the Internet to get news in a typical week. The results of these four regressions can be found in Table 7 in Appendix G.

In order to test the power of issue public membership in determining vote behavior, logistic regressions were run using vote choice as the dependent variable. Vote choice was operationalized into two separate binary variables. One variable was coded 1 with a vote for Barack Obama and 0 with a vote for anybody else. The other variable was coded 1 with a vote for John McCain and 0 with a vote for anybody else. With a binary dependent variable, logistic regression is appropriate for this analysis.

Issue agreement, issue public membership, and sharing the same party with the candidate, as well as control variables for age, education, income, race, and gender, were chosen as independent variables. Additionally, an interaction term was included for issue agreement and

issue public membership. Issue agreement was operationalized by creating a dummy variable and setting it equal to 1 if the respondent's self-identified position was equal to the respondent's placement of the candidate and 0 if not.¹³ Logistic models were run separately for each issue and each candidate. The results can be seen in Table 8 in Appendix H. For easier interpretation, Gary King's Clarify program was used to produce predicted probabilities for voting for either candidate according to the model (King, et al., 2000). All independent variables were set to their mean except for membership in the issue public, issue agreement, and their interaction term. These variables were set to specific values to examine interesting cases the results of which are presented in Table 9 in Appendix I

To further analyze the role of the media environment in these effects, the abortion issue public's role in affecting votes for John McCain was looked at more carefully using the same technique as was demonstrated previously with defense spending. The logistic regression from the previous analysis was repeated four times among newspaper readers, non-newspaper readers, Internet users, and non-Internet users. The results are presented in Table 10 in Appendix J.

Turning to perception of candidates, ordinal logistic regressions were run for each issue using perceived candidate polarization as the dependent variable. This variable was operationalized as the absolute value of the distance between the respondent's placement of the two candidates on each issue. The created variable is ordinal for similar reasons as respondent polarization was. Independent variables were chosen to be membership in the issue public, respondent polarization on the issue, identification with either party, and partisan strength.

¹³ The weakness of this binary approach, obviously, is that it does not consider issue proximity. Someone who places himself as a 7 on a scale from 1 to 7 and places the candidate as a 6 is coded the same if he had placed the candidate as a 1. The binary approach lacks such nuance, but also avoids the assumption that the distance between points on the scale are equal in the mind of the respondent.

Additionally, an interactive term was added for respondent polarization and issue public membership. The results are presented in Table 11 in Appendix K.

Finally, the analysis of certainty of candidate placement required the use of 2000 ANES data. The 2008 data did not include questions concerning the certainty of the respondent's placement of the candidates; however, the 2000 data did. Using the 2000 data, ordinal logistic regressions were conducted on the dependent variable of certainty as reported by respondents on the issues of abortion, gun control, and the environment for candidates Al Gore and George W. Bush. Membership in the issue public, identification with the same party, partisan strength, and education were used as independent variables. The results are presented in Table 12 in Appendix L.

V. ANALYSIS

First, it is interesting to note the relative sizes of the issue publics studied in the 2008 data. As Table 2 demonstrates, the largest issue public at the time of the survey was the government health insurance issue, with 44% of those asked identifying the issue as Very Important. This should not be surprising considering the extent to which the 2008 campaign focused on the issue. At the opposite end, aid to blacks was only rated so highly by 27% of respondents when asked. The sizes of these groups are likely in a very good range for analysis because they are just large enough to present a substantial sample size and yet not so large as to diminish the distinct nature of the issue public. Indeed, there is likely a substantial variation of caring even within these groups, but this binary distinction serves to ease the empirical analysis.

Both Table 2 and Table 3 demonstrate very effectively that the typical voter appears to have taken up interest in a much broader array of issues since the data was collected in 1980 and 1984 for Krosnick's 1990 study. While Krosnick found that greater than 50% of respondents rated no issues at all as Very Important, the 2008 ANES only saw 13% of respondents do so. The shift is even more apparent among the Times Mirror and Pew Research polls. The mode of the distribution has clearly shifted away from the left side of the graphs in Table 4, representing fewer issues. This is the case even though the graphs have been standardized in their width so as to account for the varying numbers of issues queried in the various polls.

The first hypothesis, then, has been very powerfully affirmed. People seem to care about more issues now than they used to. As to why that is the case, we must now turn to Table 5. While the theory presented for why the first hypothesis should be expected was based on

increased usage of the Internet and easier access to information, the regression model does not back that up. In fact, the frequency with which someone uses the Internet is actually correlated with a decrease in the percentage of issues they find important. This could be the product of their ability to avoid more general news sources such as television and print media. More general interests in the campaign and the strength of partisan attachment, though, appear to provide the key support for diversification of interests. Another interesting finding, though, is that Democrats appear to have been interested in significantly fewer issues than Independents and Republicans in 2008. A curious finding, this deserves more research. Alas, it lies beyond the scope of this study.

As for the second hypothesis, that members of issue publics should hold more extreme positions on the issue than others, the results are very supportive. In fact, membership in the issue public has a significant and positive effect for seven of the nine issues. Curiously, one of the issues for which there was no such effect was the issue of abortion. There are two reasons for which this could be expected. First, it could be argued that abortion is such a polarizing issue that even those who do not care passionately about it must choose one side or the other, thus diminishing the ability for members of the issue public to differentiate themselves. The second reason deals with the methodology of the survey. Abortion, unlike the rest of the issues, only consisted of four alternatives rather than seven. This means that there are only two possible values for respondent polarization on abortion rather than four as is the case with the other issues. This dramatic decrease in variation on the dependent variable could deflate the significance of the model.

It is also interesting to note that there are a few partisan effects in these results as well. Republicans appear to hold less extreme positions on the government spending/services tradeoff, defense spending, and abortion. Republicans appear to have more extreme positions, on the

other hand, on the issue of aid to blacks.¹⁴ Additionally, strength of partisanship, as might be expected, does seem to have some kind of polarizing effect; however, the effect is only significant on four issues and does not generally seem to have as much effect as membership in the issue public.

Table 7 indicates that the polarizing effect of issue publics only takes place among those who seek news through newspapers. This supports the theory of this paper in that it indicates that the information environment mediates the effect of issue publics, though the relationship is backwards from that expected. The theory held that the Internet, through access to echo chambers, would produce polarization. It appears, though, that issue publics have a greater polarizing effect among those who do not use the Internet than those that do. The opposite is true of newspapers.

Perhaps the most interesting findings can be found in Table 8. First of all, partisan alignment is clearly very important for vote behavior. Second, issue agreement was fairly predictive as well. In fact, on all but the issue of a path to citizenship for John McCain, agreeing on the issue with the candidate made a respondent more likely to vote for the candidate.

Things get really interesting, though, when you look at the various effects of issue publics in voting behavior. First of all, members of issue public appear to be biased toward one candidate on three issues: path to citizenship, aid to blacks, and abortion. Those who find a path to citizenship or abortion to be Very Important were significantly more likely to vote for John McCain. Those who found aid to blacks to be Very Important were significantly more likely to vote for Barack Obama.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the way that the models were conducted, with dummy variables for Democrats and Republicans, the results should be interpreted as compared to Independents which are the baseline category.

The expected interactive effect between issue agreement and issue public membership, however, is not found. In fact, the interaction term only appears to have any significance with three issues and, based on the predicted probabilities of voting for either candidate demonstrated in Table 9, the relationship is not consistently in the predicted direction. For example, on the issue of aid to blacks, given that an individual agrees with John McCain, 39% would vote for him if they do not find the issue important. Theoretically, a higher percentage of those who agree and also find the issue important should vote for McCain. The findings indicate, though, that only 23% of those who agree and find the issue important would be expected to vote for McCain.

Table 10 dives more deeply into these effects on the issue of abortion and finds that the media environment is once again important, though not in the manner expected. In fact, the use of newspapers and the use of the Internet seem to behave similarly with regard to mediating the role of the abortion issue public in affecting the vote for John McCain. That role seems to be that issue publics have less of an impact among those who read newspapers or use the Internet. Issue publics, on the other hand, play a rather large role among those who do not do either. This could be evidence that issue publics actually do serve to fill in the gaps when more information is either unavailable or the voter does not have the resources to attain it. Instead of assessing candidates more generally which greater information would allow them to do, issue publics allow for heuristic use of simple, key issues for those who have little access to or desire for broader political information.

Perhaps no portion of the theory presented in this paper can be so resoundingly rejected, though, than that which holds that members of issue publics will perceive candidates as more polarized than others, better able to pick up on subtle distinctions in the positions of the two candidates. In fact, members of issue publics were not significantly different from others on a

single issue in their perceived candidate polarization. Instead, this seems to be driven by respondent polarization and partisan strength, both of which increase the perceived polarization of the candidates.

On the other hand, members of issue publics do appear to be significantly more certain of their candidate placements. This effect does appear to be mediated in some way by something about the candidates, though. On the issue of gun control, members of the issue public were significantly more certain of Al Gore's position than they were of George W. Bush's position. This could be a product of Bush's complex public position on the issue confounding even those who have the most interest in that position.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this paper warrant one grand conclusion: it is time to reassess the role of issue publics. Fundamental shifts have taken place since the most famous and powerful studies on the subject were conducted. Specifically, people are paying attention to more issues. Where the distribution of respondents used to consist of a massive number of people who appeared to care very little about any issues and a relatively few who cared about more than just one or two, the modern landscape appears to be more of a bell curve with very few falling on either extreme.

This finding, if corroborated by further study, could indicate a normatively profound event for democracy. The literature that spawned the theory of issue publics was built as a reaction to those who scoffed at the idea that the mass public could rationally guide its government using sound reasoning based on issue positions. It was built from the idea that people do not have to understand and act upon a vast array of issues, but only those which are important to the them.

Now, in the modern information environment, it appears that people are learning about and becoming fascinated with more issues than ever before. This does not, as the theory in this paper had suggested, appear to be a product of Internet usage. Further study should examine whether this is a product of campaign effects which, due to the modern information environment, are likely to involve increased position taking and strategic priming of specific issues. This could explain why Democrats and not Republicans, subject to different campaign strategies, placed greater importance on different numbers of issues. Or, it could be some other cause.

Either way, the unmistakable trend that people care about more issues now than they used to must be reconciled through the literature.

The findings, on the other hand, raise serious doubts about the traditional assumptions about the behavior of issue publics. Members of issue publics do appear to have more extreme positions than others and are more certain of their placement of candidates than other. They do not, however, seem to be more likely to use agreement on the issue in determining their vote choice. Very few effects were demonstrated consistently across issues and candidates. Very little effort has been made in the literature to explain this variation.

Why did the findings of this paper not reflect the expectations based upon traditional issue public theory? There are a series of potential explanations. The first explanation is theoretical. It could be that the role of issue publics has been mischaracterized in this paper. This paper has predominantly viewed issue publics in the classical model of Converse and Krosnick which view them as self-motivated individuals. Hutchings, on the other hand, viewed issue publics as sleeping giants who had to be activated by information sources. Perhaps those signals, in this modern information environment, are more easily avoided, thus reducing the importance of the issue public in voting behavior.

Another explanation is methodological. The variables used to capture media consumption, for one, do not discriminate based on the manner in which the media is used. For example, someone who simply logs in to the online site for their preferred cable news network is likely to be exposed to the same type of information as a conventional media user. The active form of Internet usage, on the other hand, seeking out information on blogs and more unique Web sites would be coded the same in this data.

And, finally, this paper does not address the potential for issue position transference. For example, a member of an issue public is expected to be more likely to vote based on agreement

with the candidates on that issue. This paper tests this by looking at whether or not people more frequently vote for candidates they agree with on the issues they find important. This method could provide a false negative if individuals do in fact choose candidates based on issues that are more important to them, but then either adopt the position of their chosen candidate or project onto that candidate their position on other issues. This would produce an inflated level of issue agreement on non-important issues.

Still, none of these explanations would seem to rationalize the finding that, on some issues for some candidates, the interactive effect of agreement and importance is negative. Overall, the findings must be viewed as conflicting with issue public theory.

I have demonstrated in this paper, though, that one potentially fruitful avenue of study lies with the analysis of the mediating role of the information environment in issue publics. Issue publics are a product of their environment. That environment has fundamentally changed. The analysis in this paper has presented two instances in which variation of information sources has produced significant changes to the effect of issue public membership.

One such finding is that those who read the newspaper are generally more polarized by issue publics than those that use the Internet which runs counter to the echo chamber hypothesis. The other finding is that the gathering of more information seems to decrease the role of issue publics in determining vote behavior.

Taken together, the findings of this paper indicate that our understanding of issue publics and their role in American democracy is at best incomplete. How important issues are is important, but not in the same way at all times. Future research must determine the nuances of these relationships in a changing environment and recognize that what was true in 1980 is not necessarily true today.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: VARIABLE SUMMARY

Table 1

| Variable Summary | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------|-------|-----------|-----|-----|----------------------------|------|--------|-----------|-----|-----|
| Spending/Services | Obs | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max | 1993 Importance Variables | Obs | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
| Issue Public | 2306 | 0.378 | 0.485 | 0 | 1 | Economy | 1507 | 1.560 | 0.682 | 1 | 4 |
| Respondent Polarization | 2090 | 1.477 | 1.201 | 0 | 3 | Education | 1507 | 1.569 | 0.650 | 1 | 4 |
| Respondent Position | 2090 | 3.905 | 1.901 | 1 | 7 | Jobs | 1507 | 1.574 | 0.642 | 1 | 4 |
| Agree with Obama | 2133 | 0.305 | 0.461 | 0 | 1 | Russia | 1507 | 2.578 | 0.798 | 1 | 4 |
| Agree with McCain | 2132 | 0.220 | 0.415 | 0 | 1 | Environment | 1507 | 1.861 | 0.748 | 1 | 4 |
| Candidate Polarization | 2079 | 2.420 | 1.753 | 0 | 6 | Health Care | 1507 | 1.764 | 0.787 | 1 | 4 |
| Defense Spending | | | | | | Deficit | 1507 | 1.643 | 0.746 | 1 | 4 |
| Issue Public | 2309 | 0.387 | 0.487 | 0 | 1 | Crime | 1507 | 1.535 | 0.618 | 1 | 4 |
| Respondent Polarization | 2130 | 1.494 | 1.963 | 0 | 13 | Homeless | 1507 | 1.956 | 0.785 | 1 | 4 |
| Respondent Position | 2130 | 4.242 | 2.455 | 1 | 17 | Bosnia | 1507 | 2.542 | 0.869 | 1 | 4 |
| Agree with Obama | 2167 | 0.310 | 0.463 | 0 | 1 | Abortion | 1507 | 2.402 | 0.939 | 1 | 4 |
| Agree with McCain | 2167 | 0.263 | 0.440 | 0 | 1 | Gay Marriage | 1507 | 2.808 | 0.809 | 1 | 4 |
| Candidate Polarization | 2222 | 2.526 | 2.364 | 0 | 15 | Values | 1507 | 1.839 | 0.807 | 1 | 4 |
| Government Health Insurance | | | | | | Highest Importance Groups | 1507 | 4.594 | 2.996 | 0 | 13 |
| Issue Public | 2314 | 0.437 | 0.496 | 0 | 1 | Percent Highest Importance | 1507 | 0.353 | 0.230 | 0 | 1 |
| Respondent Polarization | 2189 | 2.005 | 1.118 | 0 | 3 | 2000 Variables | | | | | |
| Respondent Position | 2189 | 3.362 | 2.205 | 1 | 7 | Abortion Issue Public | 1547 | 0.195 | 0.396 | 0 | 1 |
| Agree with Obama | 2228 | 0.290 | 0.454 | 0 | 1 | Gun Control Issue Public | 1801 | 0.249 | 0.432 | 0 | 1 |
| Agree with McCain | 2226 | 0.173 | 0.378 | 0 | 1 | Environment Issue Public | 1782 | 0.123 | 0.328 | 0 | 1 |
| Candidate Polarization | 1939 | 3.043 | 2.099 | 0 | 6 | Vote for Gore | 1162 | 0.508 | 0.500 | 0 | 1 |
| Guaranteed Job Income | | | | | | Vote for Bush | 1162 | 0.456 | 0.498 | 0 | 1 |
| Issue Public | 1146 | 0.434 | 0.496 | 0 | 1 | 2004 Variables | | | | | |
| Respondent Polarization | 1024 | 1.604 | 1.101 | 0 | 3 | Economy | 1307 | 1.298 | 0.713 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Position | 1024 | 3.962 | 1.946 | 1 | 7 | Iraq | 1307 | 1.389 | 1.008 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with Obama | 2230 | 0.662 | 0.473 | 0 | 1 | Terrorism | 1307 | 1.344 | 0.875 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with McCain | 2232 | 0.622 | 0.485 | 0 | 1 | Gay Marriage | 1307 | 2.585 | 1.656 | 1 | 9 |
| Candidate Polarization | 1025 | 2.549 | 1.944 | 0 | 6 | Values | 1307 | 1.679 | 1.256 | 1 | 9 |
| Path to Citizenship | | | | | | Abortion | 1307 | 2.120 | 1.593 | 1 | 9 |
| Issue Public | 1159 | 0.286 | 0.452 | 0 | 1 | Deficit | 633 | 1.619 | 1.012 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Polarization | 1140 | 2.034 | 1.085 | 0 | 3 | Energy | 633 | 1.607 | 0.924 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Position | 1140 | 3.562 | 2.264 | 1 | 7 | Health Care | 674 | 1.389 | 0.811 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with Obama | 2318 | 0.618 | 0.486 | 0 | 1 | Education | 674 | 1.343 | 0.725 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with McCain | 2317 | 0.587 | 0.492 | 0 | 1 | Environment | 674 | 1.717 | 1.095 | 1 | 9 |
| Candidate Polarization | 748 | 2.008 | 1.968 | 0 | 6 | Stem Cell Research | 1307 | 2.130 | 1.663 | 1 | 9 |
| Aid to Blacks | | | | | | Taxes | 633 | 1.589 | 0.972 | 1 | 9 |
| Issue Public | 2302 | 0.272 | 0.445 | 0 | 1 | Jobs | 674 | 1.364 | 0.757 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Polarization | 1923 | 1.655 | 1.187 | 0 | 3 | Social Security | 633 | 1.494 | 0.861 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Position | 1923 | 4.510 | 1.972 | 1 | 7 | Gun Control | 674 | 2.025 | 1.341 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with Obama | 2012 | 0.303 | 0.460 | 0 | 1 | Highest Importance Groups | 1568 | 5.669 | 3.602 | 0 | 12 |
| Agree with McCain | 2028 | 0.259 | 0.438 | 0 | 1 | Missing Importance | 1568 | 6.401 | 4.315 | 4 | 16 |
| Candidate Polarization | 1959 | 2.433 | 1.891 | 0 | 6 | Percent Highest Importance | 1307 | 0.590 | 0.240 | 0 | 1 |
| Environment | | | | | | 2012 Variables | | | | | |
| Issue Public | 2298 | 0.321 | 0.467 | 0 | 1 | Economy | 1164 | 1.213 | 0.808 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Polarization | 2056 | 1.754 | 1.160 | 0 | 3 | Immigration | 1164 | 1.944 | 1.261 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Position | 2056 | 3.311 | 1.987 | 1 | 7 | Health Care | 1164 | 1.352 | 0.835 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with Obama | 2157 | 0.328 | 0.470 | 0 | 1 | Abortion | 1164 | 2.383 | 1.752 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with McCain | 2159 | 0.224 | 0.417 | 0 | 1 | Jobs | 1209 | 1.211 | 0.600 | 1 | 9 |
| Candidate Polarization | 1708 | 1.748 | 1.849 | 0 | 6 | Deficit | 1209 | 1.385 | 0.909 | 1 | 9 |
| Women's Role | | | | | | Medicare | 1209 | 1.438 | 0.837 | 1 | 9 |
| Issue Public | 1151 | 0.366 | 0.482 | 0 | 1 | Gay Marriage | 1209 | 2.726 | 1.623 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Polarization | 1116 | 2.444 | 0.933 | 0 | 3 | Gun Control | 1209 | 2.065 | 1.364 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Position | 1116 | 1.833 | 1.467 | 1 | 7 | Education | 622 | 1.431 | 0.870 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with Obama | 2295 | 0.705 | 0.456 | 0 | 1 | Foreign Policy | 622 | 1.640 | 1.161 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with McCain | 2295 | 0.637 | 0.481 | 0 | 1 | Birth Control | 622 | 2.571 | 1.712 | 1 | 9 |
| Candidate Polarization | 982 | 1.507 | 1.803 | 0 | 6 | Afghanistan | 592 | 1.973 | 1.465 | 1 | 9 |
| Abortion | | | | | | Environment | 592 | 1.865 | 1.227 | 1 | 9 |
| Issue Public | 1042 | 0.350 | 0.477 | 0 | 1 | Taxes | 542 | 1.585 | 1.077 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Polarization | 1031 | 1.058 | 0.497 | 0.5 | 1.5 | Terrorism | 542 | 1.712 | 1.269 | 1 | 9 |
| Respondent Position | 1031 | 2.805 | 1.129 | 1 | 4 | Energy | 617 | 1.498 | 0.935 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with Obama | 2318 | 0.737 | 0.440 | 0 | 1 | Iran | 617 | 1.898 | 1.396 | 1 | 9 |
| Agree with McCain | 2317 | 0.639 | 0.480 | 0 | 1 | Highest Importance Groups | 3008 | 3.098 | 2.189 | 0 | 7 |
| Candidate Polarization | 822 | 1.460 | 0.971 | 0 | 3 | Missing Importance | 3008 | 12.658 | 2.789 | 11 | 18 |
| Vote for Obama | | | | | | Percent Highest Importance | 2373 | 0.581 | 0.248 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote for McCain | 2322 | 0.283 | 0.451 | 0 | 1 | Control Variables | | | | | |
| Newspaper Usage | 2321 | 2.457 | 2.703 | 0 | 7 | Democrat | 4098 | 0.455 | 0.498 | 0 | 1 |
| Internet Usage | 2322 | 1.627 | 2.529 | 0 | 7 | Republican | 4098 | 0.272 | 0.445 | 0 | 1 |
| Campaign Interest | 2205 | 2.541 | 1.143 | 0 | 4 | PartisanStrength | 4098 | 1.858 | 1.044 | 0 | 4 |
| Highest Importance Groups | 2322 | 2.479 | 1.774 | 0 | 8 | Age | 4075 | 47.297 | 17.195 | 18 | 97 |
| Missing Importance | 2322 | 2.098 | 1.033 | 1 | 9 | Education | 4111 | 4.089 | 1.598 | 0 | 7 |
| Percent Highest Importance | 2320 | 0.356 | 0.247 | 0 | 1 | Income | 3734 | 9.959 | 6.755 | 1 | 25 |
| | | | | | | White | 4088 | 0.630 | 0.483 | 0 | 1 |
| | | | | | | Male | 4113 | 0.433 | 0.495 | 0 | 1 |

APPENDIX B: SIZE OF HIGHEST IMPORTANCE GROUPS

Table 2

| Size of Highest Importance Groups | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------|
| Issue | Percent Respondents | N |
| Government Health Insurance | 44% | 2314 |
| Guaranteed Job/Income | 43% | 1146 |
| Defense Spending | 39% | 2309 |
| Spending/ Services | 38% | 2306 |
| Women's Role | 37% | 1151 |
| Abortion | 35% | 1042 |
| Environment | 32% | 2298 |
| Path to Citizenship | 29% | 1159 |
| Aid to Blacks | 27% | 2302 |

APPENDIX C: NUMBER OF HIGHEST IMPORTANCE GROUPS

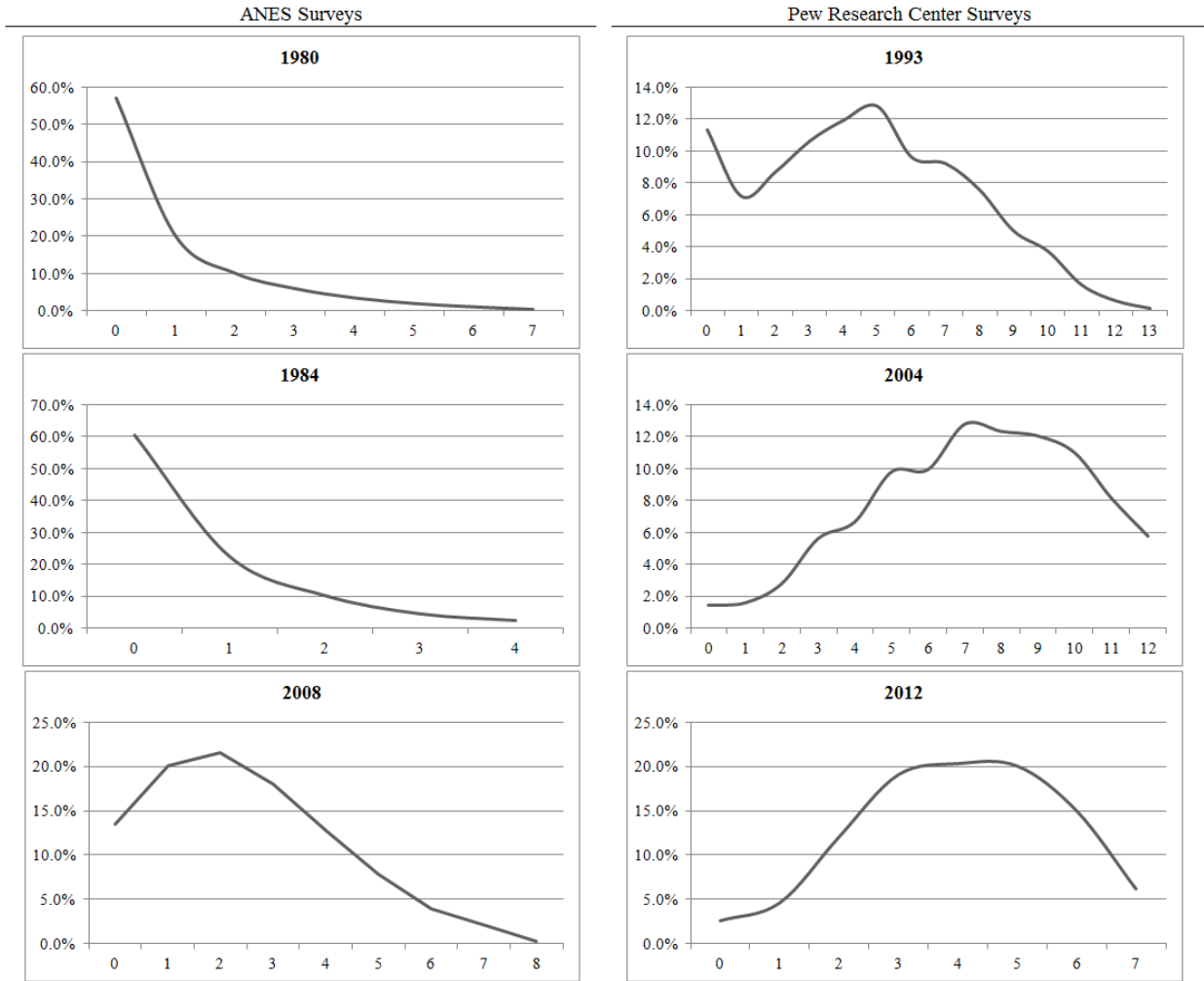
Table 3

| Number of Highest Importance Groups | Percent of Respondents | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | 1980 ANES | 1984 ANES | 1993 Pew | 2004 Pew | 2008 ANES | 2012 Pew |
| 0 | 57.0% | 60.5% | 11.4% | 1.5% | 13.4% | 2.6% |
| 1 | 20.0% | 22.4% | 7.2% | 1.6% | 20.1% | 4.6% |
| 2 | 10.1% | 10.2% | 8.7% | 2.8% | 21.5% | 12.1% |
| 3 | 6.0% | 4.5% | 10.6% | 5.6% | 18.0% | 19.1% |
| 4 | 3.5% | 2.4% | 11.9% | 6.7% | 12.8% | 20.4% |
| 5 | 2.0% | | 12.8% | 9.8% | 7.9% | 20.1% |
| 6 | 1.1% | | 9.6% | 9.9% | 3.9% | 15.0% |
| 7 | 0.4% | | 9.2% | 12.8% | 2.1% | 6.2% |
| 8 | . | | 7.6% | 12.3% | 0.3% | |
| 9 | | | 5.0% | 12.0% | | |
| 10 | | | 3.7% | 11.0% | | |
| 11 | | | 1.6% | 8.2% | | |
| 12 | | | 0.6% | 5.8% | | |
| 13 | | | 0.1% | | | |
| | (N=3587) | (N=2127) | (N=1507) | (N=674) | (N = 2322) | (N=1831) |

APPENDIX D: NUMBER OF HIGHEST IMPORTANCE GROUPS BY YEAR AND SURVEY

Table 4

Number of Highest Importance Groups by Year and Survey



APPENDIX E: LINEAR REGRESSION MODEL OF INTEREST DIVERSIFICATION

Table 5

Linear Regression Model of Interest Diversification
Based on Data from the 2008 ANES Time Series Study

| | Percent of Issues Highest Importance | |
|-------------------|---|---|
| | Coef. | P |
| Newspaper Usage* | 0.001 (0.790) | |
| Internet Usage* | -0.005 (0.042) | |
| Campaign Interest | 0.030 (0.000) | |
| Democrat | -0.049 (0.019) | |
| Republican | -0.009 (0.687) | |
| PartisanStrength | 0.026 (0.007) | |
| Education | 0.002 (0.694) | |
| Income | 0.000 (0.880) | |
| N | 1989 | |
| Adj R-squared | 0.061 | |

* Newspaper and Internet usage is measured in days used in a typical week and (or in the previous week for some respondents) and ranges from 1 to 7.

Control variables not shown include age, race, and gender.

APPENDIX F: ORDERED LOGISTIC MODELS OF RESPONDENT POLARIZATION

Table 6

Ordered Logistic Models of Respondent Polarization
Based on Data from the 2008 ANES Time Series Study

| Respondent Polarization | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Spending/ Services | | Defense Spending | | Government Health Insurance | |
| | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| | Issue Public | 0.269 (0.002) | | 0.213 (0.012) | | 0.259 (0.002) |
| Democrat | -0.228 (0.168) | | -0.199 (0.209) | | -0.018 (0.915) | |
| Republican | -0.458 (0.010) | | -0.444 (0.010) | | 0.088 (0.616) | |
| Partisan Strength | 0.223 (0.004) | | 0.252 (0.001) | | 0.155 (0.040) | |
| N | 1892 | | 1928 | | 1987 | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.010 | | 0.008 | | 0.008 | |
| | Guaranteed Job/Income | | Path to Citizenship | | Aid to Blacks | |
| | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| | Issue Public | 0.056 (0.641) | 2.181 (0.000) | 0.506 (0.000) | | |
| Democrat | -0.312 (0.218) | -0.185 (0.460) | -0.165 (0.354) | | | |
| Republican | 0.277 (0.300) | 0.327 (0.226) | 0.509 (0.007) | | | |
| Partisan Strength | 0.304 (0.010) | 0.141 (0.219) | 0.035 (0.664) | | | |
| N | 932 | | 1032 | | 1743 | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.020 | | 0.097 | | 0.018 | |
| | Environment | | Women's Role | | Abortion | |
| | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| | Issue Public | 0.685 (0.000) | 0.512 (0.000) | 0.037 (0.795) | | |
| Democrat | 0.079 (0.643) | -0.090 (0.745) | -0.118 (0.657) | | | |
| Republican | -0.116 (0.518) | -0.316 (0.280) | -0.605 (0.034) | | | |
| Partisan Strength | 0.072 (0.354) | 0.107 (0.392) | 0.103 (0.386) | | | |
| N | 1869 | | 1012 | | 936 | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.020 | | 0.024 | | 0.019 | |

Control variables not shown include age, education, income, race, and gender.

APPENDIX G: ORDERED LOGISTIC MODELS OF THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN
FACILITATING THE DEFENSE SPENDING ISSUE PUBLIC

Table 7

Ordered Logistic Models of The Role of Information in Facilitating the Defense Spending Issue Public
Based on Data from the 2008 ANES Time Series Study

| | Respondent Polarization | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---|------------------------|---|------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| | No Newspaper | | Newspaper | | No Internet | | Internet | |
| | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| Issue Public | 0.187 (0.259) | | 0.231 (0.030) | | 0.206 (0.059) | | 0.204 (0.135) | |
| Democrat | -0.693 (0.015) | | 0.131 (0.522) | | -0.232 (0.275) | | -0.156 (0.516) | |
| Republican | -0.868 (0.003) | | -0.126 (0.576) | | -0.078 (0.737) | | -0.908 (0.001) | |
| Partisan Strength | 0.324 (0.011) | | 0.189 (0.045) | | 0.237 (0.014) | | 0.260 (0.022) | |
| N | 722 | | 1206 | | 1150 | | 778 | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.011 | | 0.010 | | 0.007 | | 0.020 | |

Control variables not shown include age, education, income, race, and gender.

APPENDIX H: LOGISTIC MODELS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR

Table 8

Logistic Models of Voting Behavior
Based on Data from the 2008 ANES Time Series Study

| Vote for Barack Obama | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Government Health | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Guaranteed | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spending/ Services | | | Defense Spending | | | Insurance | | | Job/Income | | | Path to Citizenship | | | |
| | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P |
| Issue Agreement | 0.735 | 2.086 | (0.000) | 0.940 | 2.559 | (0.000) | 1.005 | 2.732 | (0.000) | 0.705 | 2.024 | (0.002) | 0.880 | 2.411 | (0.000) |
| Issue Public | 0.032 | 1.033 | (0.860) | -0.015 | 0.985 | (0.918) | -0.025 | 0.975 | (0.901) | 0.063 | 1.065 | (0.813) | -1.008 | 0.369 | (0.099) |
| Agree x Issue Public | -0.013 | 0.987 | (0.881) | 0.058 | 1.059 | (0.332) | -0.010 | 0.990 | (0.901) | -0.133 | 0.876 | (0.282) | 0.192 | 1.212 | (0.376) |
| Same Party | 2.528 | 12.530 | (0.000) | 2.498 | 12.163 | (0.000) | 2.465 | 11.766 | (0.000) | 2.334 | 10.319 | (0.000) | 2.707 | 14.991 | (0.000) |
| N | 1892 | | | 1928 | | | 1987 | | | 932 | | | 1032 | | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.309 | | | 0.311 | | | 0.309 | | | 0.327 | | | 0.304 | | |
| Vote for John McCain | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Government Health | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Guaranteed | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spending/ Services | | | Defense Spending | | | Insurance | | | Job/Income | | | Path to Citizenship | | | |
| | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P |
| Issue Agreement | 0.934 | 2.544 | (0.000) | 0.824 | 2.278 | (0.000) | 0.562 | 1.755 | (0.002) | 0.957 | 2.604 | (0.000) | 0.118 | 1.125 | (0.630) |
| Issue Public | 0.507 | 1.660 | (0.058) | -0.004 | 0.996 | (0.985) | -0.243 | 0.784 | (0.630) | -0.820 | 0.441 | (0.031) | 0.648 | 1.912 | (0.299) |
| Agree x Issue Public | -0.366 | 0.694 | (0.001) | -0.005 | 0.995 | (0.958) | 0.104 | 1.109 | (0.569) | 0.795 | 2.213 | (0.011) | -0.056 | 0.945 | (0.801) |
| Same Party | 2.603 | 13.510 | (0.000) | 2.524 | 12.485 | (0.000) | 2.451 | 11.598 | (0.000) | 2.507 | 12.268 | (0.000) | 3.296 | 27.002 | (0.000) |
| N | 1743 | | | 1869 | | | 1012 | | | 936 | | | 1032 | | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.341 | | | 0.301 | | | 0.322 | | | 0.363 | | | 0.353 | | |
| Aid to Blacks | | | Environment | | | Women's Role | | | Abortion | | | | | | |
| | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P |
| Issue Agreement | 0.539 | 1.714 | (0.001) | 0.570 | 1.768 | (0.001) | 1.011 | 2.750 | (0.000) | 1.132 | 3.103 | (0.000) | 0.118 | 1.125 | (0.630) |
| Issue Public | -0.809 | 0.445 | (0.015) | -0.044 | 0.957 | (0.860) | 0.447 | 1.564 | (0.474) | 0.934 | 2.544 | (0.023) | 0.648 | 1.912 | (0.299) |
| Agree x Issue Public | 0.313 | 1.368 | (0.021) | -0.020 | 0.980 | (0.847) | -0.220 | 0.802 | (0.329) | -0.674 | 0.510 | (0.046) | -0.056 | 0.945 | (0.801) |
| Same Party | 3.378 | 29.312 | (0.000) | 3.253 | 25.864 | (0.000) | 3.212 | 24.839 | (0.000) | 3.082 | 21.805 | (0.000) | 3.296 | 27.002 | (0.000) |
| N | 1743 | | | 1869 | | | 1012 | | | 936 | | | 1032 | | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.394 | | | 0.364 | | | 0.407 | | | 0.410 | | | 0.353 | | |

Control variables not shown include age, education, income, race, and gender.

APPENDIX I: PREDICTED PROBABILITIES OF VOTING FOR CANDIDATE

Table 9

Predicted Probabilities of Voting for Candidate
Based on Data from the 2008 ANES Time Series Study

| | Abortion | | Aid to Blacks | |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | McCain | Obama | McCain | Obama |
| Agree, Not Important | 39% | 83% | 35% | 85% |
| Agree, Important | 37% | 88% | 25% | 87% |
| | -1% | +5% | -10% | +2% |
| Disagree, Not Important | 17% | 66% | 24% | 70% |
| Disagree, Important | 27% | 56% | 13% | 79% |
| | +10% | -10% | -11% | +9% |

APPENDIX J: LOGISTIC MODELS OF THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN FACILITATING
THE ABORTION ISSUE PUBLIC

Table 10

Logistic Models of The Role of Information in Facilitating the Abortion Issue Public
Based on Data from the 2008 ANES Time Series Study

| Vote for John McCain | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------------|---|--------------|-------------------------|---|
| | No Newspaper | | | Newspaper | | |
| | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P |
| Issue Agreement | 1.236 | 3.440 (0.002) | | 1.012 | 2.751 (0.001) | |
| Issue Public | 1.632 | 5.115 (0.011) | | 0.518 | 1.678 (0.342) | |
| Agree x Issue Public | -1.103 | 0.332 (0.034) | | -0.428 | 0.652 (0.349) | |
| Same Party | 3.060 | 21.326 (0.000) | | 3.152 | 23.383 (0.000) | |
| Income | 0.048 | 1.050 (0.108) | | 0.034 | 1.034 (0.152) | |
| N | | 372 | | | 564 | |
| Pseudo R2 | | 0.423 | | | 0.412 | |
| No Internet | | | | | | |
| | No Internet | | | Internet | | |
| | Coef. | OR | P | Coef. | OR | P |
| Issue Agreement | 0.939 | 2.558 (0.001) | | 1.643 | 5.170 (0.002) | |
| Issue Public | 0.924 | 2.519 (0.042) | | 1.147 | 3.147 (0.273) | |
| Agree x Issue Public | -0.699 | 0.497 (0.071) | | -0.836 | 0.434 (0.288) | |
| Same Party | 2.760 | 15.807 (0.000) | | 4.519 | 91.736 (0.000) | |
| Income | 0.040 | 1.040 (0.053) | | 0.017 | 1.017 (0.693) | |
| N | | 686 | | | 250 | |
| Pseudo R2 | | 0.377 | | | 0.530 | |

Control variables not shown include age, education, race, and gender.

APPENDIX K: ORDERED LOGISTIC MODELS OF PERCEIVED CANDIDATE
POLARIZATION

Table 11

Ordered Logistic Models of Perceived Candidate Polarization
Based on Data from the 2008 ANES Time Series Study

| Perceived Candidate Polarization | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| | | Spending/ Services | | Defense Spending | | Government Health Insurance | |
| | | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| Issue Public | | 0.220 | (0.103) | 0.078 | (0.448) | -0.021 | (0.898) |
| Respondent Polarization | | 0.298 | (0.000) | 0.073 | (0.015) | 0.242 | (0.000) |
| Issue Public x Respondent Polarization | | -0.063 | (0.378) | 0.028 | (0.569) | 0.001 | (0.989) |
| Democrat | | -0.083 | (0.615) | -0.046 | (0.765) | -0.327 | (0.051) |
| Republican | | -0.019 | (0.911) | 0.364 | (0.026) | -0.380 | (0.034) |
| Partisan Strength | | 0.399 | (0.000) | 0.227 | (0.001) | 0.513 | (0.000) |
| N | | 1893 | | 2064 | | 1846 | |
| Pseudo R2 | | 0.023 | | 0.010 | | 0.019 | |
| Perceived Candidate Polarization | | | | | | | |
| | | Guaranteed Job/Income | | Path to Citizenship | | Aid to Blacks | |
| | | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| Issue Public | | 0.115 | (0.571) | 0.393 | (0.451) | -0.083 | (0.626) |
| Respondent Polarization | | 0.367 | (0.000) | 0.220 | (0.003) | 0.254 | (0.000) |
| Issue Public x Respondent Polarization | | -0.173 | (0.113) | -0.193 | (0.315) | 0.069 | (0.402) |
| Democrat | | -0.431 | (0.068) | -0.399 | (0.127) | 0.055 | (0.753) |
| Republican | | -0.650 | (0.009) | -0.649 | (0.020) | -0.128 | (0.486) |
| Partisan Strength | | 0.686 | (0.000) | 0.367 | (0.002) | 0.294 | (0.000) |
| N | | 936 | | 744 | | 1669 | |
| Pseudo R2 | | 0.032 | | 0.009 | | 0.017 | |
| Perceived Candidate Polarization | | | | | | | |
| | | Environment | | Women's Role | | Abortion | |
| | | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| Issue Public | | 0.155 | (0.387) | 0.195 | (0.601) | 0.072 | (0.814) |
| Respondent Polarization | | 0.224 | (0.000) | 0.109 | (0.162) | 0.622 | (0.000) |
| Issue Public x Respondent Polarization | | -0.076 | (0.366) | -0.043 | (0.759) | -0.111 | (0.677) |
| Democrat | | -0.248 | (0.191) | -0.450 | (0.051) | 0.211 | (0.372) |
| Republican | | -0.595 | (0.003) | -1.058 | (0.000) | 0.435 | (0.093) |
| Partisan Strength | | 0.448 | (0.000) | 0.559 | (0.000) | 0.024 | (0.827) |
| N | | 1549 | | 954 | | 818 | |
| Pseudo R2 | | 0.016 | | 0.017 | | 0.013 | |

APPENDIX L: ORDERED LOGISTIC MODELS OF PLACEMENT CERTAINTY

Table 12

Ordered Logistic Models of Placement Certainty
Based on Data from the 2000 ANES Time Series Study

| Certainty of Candidate Placement | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Placement of Al Gore | | | | | | |
| | Abortion | | Gun Control | | Environment | |
| | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| Issue Public | 0.635 | (0.000) | 0.441 | (0.001) | 0.656 | (0.000) |
| Same Party | -0.382 | (0.001) | -0.324 | (0.005) | -0.161 | (0.132) |
| Partisan Strength | 0.229 | (0.000) | 0.215 | (0.000) | 0.195 | (0.000) |
| Education | 0.166 | (0.000) | -0.003 | (0.933) | 0.105 | (0.001) |
| N | 1149 | | 1140 | | 1309 | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.028 | | 0.012 | | 0.016 | |
| Placement of George W. Bush | | | | | | |
| | Abortion | | Gun Control | | Environment | |
| | Coef. | P | Coef. | P | Coef. | P |
| Issue Public | 0.394 | (0.005) | 0.220 | (0.179) | 0.795 | (0.000) |
| Same Party | 0.444 | (0.000) | -0.164 | (0.291) | 0.091 | (0.406) |
| Partisan Strength | 0.041 | (0.464) | 0.154 | (0.034) | 0.107 | (0.051) |
| Education | 0.055 | (0.120) | 0.040 | (0.390) | 0.092 | (0.006) |
| N | 1119 | | 677 | | 1245 | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.012 | | 0.006 | | 0.015 | |

VITA

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EDUCATION

B.A., Political Science, 2010, University of Mississippi, University, MS

HONORS AND AWARDS

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Graduate Assistantship, 2010

I gathered precinct-level data pertaining to local elections in Mississippi for research conducted by Dr. Jonathan Winburn.

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I researched and summarized the academic literature pertaining to minority office-seekers for research conducted by Dr. Jonathan Winburn and Dr. Marvin King.

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I gathered data pertaining to the Gulf oil spill for research conducted jointly by the University of Mississippi Political Science and Economics Departments under the direction of Dr. Richard Forgette.