

# **Policy, Personality, and Presidential Performance\***

by

John H. Aldrich, Professor of Political Science, [aldrich@duke.edu](mailto:aldrich@duke.edu)  
Paul Gronke, Assistant Professor of Political Science, [gronke@duke.edu](mailto:gronke@duke.edu)  
and  
Jeffrey D. Grynaviski, Graduate Student, [jeffrey.grynaviski@duke.edu](mailto:jeffrey.grynaviski@duke.edu)

Box 90204, 214 Perkins Library  
Department of Political Science  
Duke University  
Durham, NC 27708-0204  
(919)-660-4300

Please refer all correspondence to John Aldrich

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## **Abstract**

# **Policy, Personality, and Presidential Performance**

John H. Aldrich, Paul Gronke, and Jeffrey D. Gynaviski

The importance of personality and performance assessments for candidate evaluations and choice has been well established, most prominently in the work on presidential prototypes by Kinder, et al., and the social cognitive model of vote choice by Rahn, et al. However, most of the experimental and survey data were collected in a relatively brief period, particularly between 1980 and 1984. Among the unique aspects of the 1980s was the distinctive personality of Ronald Reagan, sometimes called the “teflon president.” Because the public admired him as an individual, regardless of political events, his persona might have uniquely influenced the times and thus the models and results.

This paper reexamines the social cognitive model. We do so primarily by extending, refining, and updating previous research, using NES surveys from 1984 through 1996. We produce a set of candidate evaluation scales that reflect, though are not identical to, the Rahn, et al., scales, yet which can be employed in a far wider variety of presidential election context. Our analysis demonstrates the lasting value of the social cognitive approach for understanding voter decision making in the candidate-centered era.

## Introduction

The emergence of candidate-centered elections led, as we might well have expected, to a reconsideration of how voters assess political figures and how they reach voting decisions. In most general terms, Abelson, Fiske, and Kinder brought recent advances in social, cognitive psychology to bear on the evaluation of political candidates (e.g., Kinder, 1978; Kinder, 1986; Kinder, Peter, Abelson, and Fiske, 1980; Abelson, Kinder, Peters, and Fiske, 1982; Fiske, 1993). Kinder and others in that team of scholars also devised methods of measuring person-perception ideas in the context of presidents and presidential candidates. They also saw those measures incorporated into National Election Study (NES) surveys.<sup>1</sup>

In 1984, Aldrich, Borgida, and Sullivan conducted their own national survey, borrowing and modifying from the work of Kinder, et al., and the NES. In collaboration with Rahn, they used these data to develop and test a complete model of voter choice in presidential elections (see especially Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, and Sullivan, 1990; see also Sullivan, Aldrich, Borgida, and Rahn, 1990 and Rahn, Aldrich, and Borgida, 1994). Their model highlighted the importance of candidate comparisons along different dimensions of choice. With only a few exceptions (e.g., Wattenberg, 1991), scholars since then have talked extensively about the candidate-centered nature of presidential elections. Surprisingly, there has been relatively little new empirical work on the subject. Just as Rahn, et al., took the next step from Kinder, et al., we seek here to extend the

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<sup>1</sup> While developed for the 1979 pilot and first implemented in the 1980 surveys, those questions were most fully administered in the 1984 NES survey (Kinder, Abelson, and Fiske, 1979; Kinder and Abelson, 1981; Kinder, 1983).

application of the social cognitive theory of presidential elections to a wider set of years and a more varied set of candidates.

The number of articles spawned by this research agenda speaks, at least in part, to its power in allowing us to understand presidential evaluations. The convergence in results of the Kinder and Aldrich teams, employing different data sets and different methods, is good evidence in favor of the social-cognitive approach.<sup>2</sup> These scholars demonstrated the importance of a politician's personal characteristics in candidate evaluation. So, given the success of this earlier work, the reader might ask, why are we returning to these questions today? For two reasons: Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.

Reagan was able to base much of his sustained support on high approval of him as an individual – his personality and leadership qualities. The “teflon President” weathered many political difficulties in this way. Clinton appears to be nearly the opposite. His sustained support derives more directly from assessments rooted in political judgments, such as satisfaction with economic conditions. Continued high approval ratings came directly in the face of widespread disenchantment with his personal qualities (Moore 1999; Schneider 1998; Berke 1998). Perhaps, then, the public's assessment of the president varies in ways that are currently only dimly reflected in our scholarly considerations of the candidate evaluation process.

There are at least two distinct explanations for the apparent shift in candidate appraisal. First, the public, in the face of continued flows of information about (and

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<sup>2</sup> These different data and methods include an exploratory factor analysis of open ended candidate likes and dislikes items, using three decades of NES surveys; another using new trait and affect measures, added to the 1979 pilot and 1980 regular National Election Study; and a third using specially written items included in a Gallup poll in a multi-equation statistical estimation model.

media assessments of) politicians' personal lives, may have learned to discount the personal, "private" failings of their political leaders. Therefore, the way in which the public assesses political figures may have changed since the Reagan campaigns of 1980 and 1984. Second, the relative importance of personality and performance may be contingent on a particular array of candidates or historical circumstances. It seems reasonable to doubt the generalizability of the 1984 election, held at the height of Reagan's popularity, and including a challenger who proclaimed himself to be uncomfortable in the use of that singularly most important tool of the candidate-centered election, television.

The current literature does not easily help sort out among these competing hypotheses. The flurry of research that followed Abelson, Kinder, and Fiske's initial introduction of social-cognitive psychology research on person perception into the study of candidate appraisal was virtually unsustainable (see Lodge and McGraw 1995 for a review), with a few exceptions such as Funk's (1999) replication of study. Virtually all of the Kinder, Rahn, and their colleagues' empirical research examined only one election year and, therefore, only one pair of candidates. Simply put, alternative hypotheses require variation in both candidates and the times to be able even to try to test between changing standards and changing candidate match-ups.

In this article we revisit the question of the structure of cognitive assessments of presidential candidates' traits, and the influence of those traits on the vote decision. We develop and test alternative measurement models of the assessment procedure for major party candidates using data from the NES presidential surveys for 1984 through 1996. Our conclusions provide strong support for Kinder's (1986) dimensional analysis across

time, and in the process, identifies a richer and more complex structure than reported in the Rahn et al study. With measures of candidate traits in place, we investigate factors that seem to underlie those appraisals, finding convincing evidence that the process of candidate assessment varies across levels of political sophistication. Finally, we study vote choice, following as closely to the Rahn, et al., model as possible with NES data. The replication strongly supports many elements of the social cognitive approach. The evidence verifies claims about the importance of candidate assessment in shaping individual vote choices and Sullivan et al's (1990) claims about the variability in the role of various traits over time. But, Rahn et al made strong claims about the similarity of candidate assessment across different levels of political sophistication that our analysis does not verify. Overall, the evidence still argues in favor of the social cognitive model of vote choice as the best way to understand citizen learning and vote choice in a candidate-centered era.

## **Personality and Performance in Candidate Assessment**

After a relatively fallow period, there was a great burst of intellectual energy in political psychology beginning in the late 1970s, especially in the field of public opinion and voting behavior. Substantively, the emergence of increasingly candidate centered electoral politics prepared the way for importing new advances in social, cognitive psychology. The key to specification of candidate assessments is in thinking about the translation of person perception to political judgment. One of the most attractive features of applying person perception to politics is that individuals have substantial experience in evaluating people outside of politics. Indeed, experimental research has shown that

character and personality assessments are a foundation of interpersonal relations (e.g. Lodge and McGraw 1995). These assessments are not cognitively demanding to make, in part because routines have been developed and practiced repeatedly. These routines can therefore be rapidly mobilized, and they often turn out to be accurate, reinforcing their use.

Abelson, Kinder, and Fiske applied scholarship on person perception to the study of politics by arguing that citizens have *meta-theories* (Kinder and Abelson 1981) or *prototypes* about what constitutes leadership:

*(p)rototypes are categories people hold about the nature of the world. An ideal presidential prototype in particular consists of the features that citizens believe define an exemplary president* (Kinder, Peters, Abelson, and Fiske 1980).

Prototypes are evaluative rulers against which presidential candidates and presidents are measured. Prior to widespread acquisition of information about a candidate – for example, Gary Hart in the weeks following his second place finish in the 1984 Iowa caucuses and subsequent victory in New Hampshire – the prototype dominates. In Hart’s case, the prototype was “the rising challenger.” Only later does “reality,” that is, new observational evidence, intrude (Bartels 1988), fleshing out the prototype with more variegated substantive content. Kinder, Abelson, and Fiske (1979) proposed that prototypes may include *traits* (personality characteristics ascribed to leaders), *affective reactions* (patterns of emotional responses elicited by leaders), *behavioral expectations* (understandings of what actions presidents take), and *ideal types* (beliefs about what the president *should* be and do). This account of prototypes shaped the measures Kinder, et al., developed and tested for use in the NES survey.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The 1979 Pilot Study of the National Election Study included the most elaborate set of candidate characteristics and

Rahn and colleagues take a different approach, asking what aspects of candidate assessment are unique to presidential campaign politics (not just to political person perception writ large). Two differences are salient here. First, unlike Kinder and his colleagues, Rahn, et al., employ an explicitly *comparative* approach. Candidates are advantaged to the degree by which they exceed the other candidate on one or another dimension of evaluation, whether or not they are evaluated absolutely high or low. We agree with this specification, since the electoral context is one in which the conclusion of the evaluation process is to reach a voting *choice*, a choice made between or among competing options.<sup>4</sup> Since we are studying both appraisal and choice in presidential elections, we adopt the comparative approach in this paper.

Second, while employing the language of a “prototype,” Sullivan et al. (1990) rejected a single, prototypical standard. Instead, they argued that citizens might employ different rules to different candidates. Their empirical evidence was that the incumbent in 1984, Ronald Reagan, was held to a different standard, one they called “everyman” (an “intuitive profile of human nature”), while Walter Mondale, an ex-vice president but also out of the political eye for four years, was held to the standard they called “superman.” The latter referred to an ideal standard against which this real candidate could be compared. It made sense that Reagan would be evaluated on this fuller, performance-centered, informational base, while Mondale would be held to the prototypic notions the citizens hold in general about their “ideal president.” Citizens hold less information

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evaluative scales. The list was substantially cut down for the 1980 study, extended in 1984, and was included in limited form from 1988-1996. It should also be noted that these categories of prototypes are not settled scholarship. Sullivan, Aldrich, Borgida, and Rahn (1990) and Miller, Wattenberg, and Malunchuk (1986) use two other categorizations.

<sup>4</sup> It may be, in other contexts, such as assessing the president on the way to forming a presidential approval rating, citizens, especially younger adults, may draw from their experience with only one president, so that there is no comparative basis upon which to anchor their views of presidential performance.

about the challenger than about the incumbent. They also have direct observation of actual performance by the incumbent but not the challenger.

As reasonable as such arguments may be, equally reasonable arguments could be made about special features of Reagan, the “great communicator,” Mondale, awkward in front of television cameras, and so on. Because Sullivan and colleagues tested these ideas using their own, one-time electoral study, they could not judge whether these different standards were employed because of differences between Reagan and Mondale, differences between incumbents and challengers, or for some other reason. Thus, while we agree with Sullivan, et al., that different campaigns and different candidate arrays surely result in different sets of relevant standards for each election, this is still just a working hypothesis. Only a comparison across elections, which we provide here, can confirm or deny Sullivan’s claims.

The final difference between the work of Rahn, et al., and Kinder, Abelson, and Fiske is the population of relevant considerations that are allowed into the choice process, primarily the relative ordering of opinions on policy, candidate assessments, affective evaluations, and choice. Building upon a common theme in the social cognitive literature that the nature of the cognitive task affects information processing and judgment (Rahn, Aldrich, and Borgida 1994), Rahn, et al., argued for the existence of a particular structure of social cognitive assessments when evaluating political candidates. They used two cognitive categories for assessing political figures: personal attributes and what we call “performance” (or what they called “competence”) characteristics. They further claim that these two cognitive assessments shape affective judgments about the candidates.

Again, the Rahn, et al., approach fits with our understanding of presidential contests. Most importantly, evaluations of parties and political candidates are both theoretically (Downs, 1957) and empirically (Fiorina, 1981) based on actual *performance* as a politician. Performance serves, that is, as a second, parallel evaluative system, based on observation of actual conduct in office or on policy information that voters receive during a campaign. Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, and Sullivan's specification identified a set of adjective pairs, analogous to the "personality" items, which individuals use to ascribe professional capabilities. This approach is therefore an extension of person perception theory to include performance attributes.<sup>5</sup> In the models that follow, we try, as much as is feasible using a different set of surveys, to mirror this partitioning of presidential candidate perception into competence or performance and personal categories.

## **A Strategy for Replication and Extension**

The first task, then, is to see if we can produce scales that define the dimensions of candidate assessments in 1984 and that are reproducible in subsequent election studies. It is, of course, quite possible that no stable or even roughly comparable assessment structure can be found, whether due to changes in the political landscape, the arrays of candidates being assessed, or even the design of the NES survey. The results, however, are crucial, because they serve as the foundation for the subsequent analysis of candidate assessments and choice.

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<sup>5</sup> The analogy is to a hiring situation in which the employer applies person perception based routines in the evaluation of employment relevant attributes.

The second step involves a comparison of incumbent and challenger evaluations across the four elections. The social cognitive literature rests on the presumption that information processing is resource-intensive (for an overview, see Fiske 1993). Therefore, we would anticipate a difference between those, such as incumbents, for whom many respondents will have relatively high levels of information and those, such as challengers, for whom most hold relatively little information. The extant literature also points to differences between candidates. As we noted earlier, Sullivan, et al., found that Mondale was held to a different standard than Reagan. The actual occupant of the office may substantially influence conceptions of the “ideal president” (Kinder, et al., 1979).

Once the structure of candidate appraisal is determined, we then turn to the impact of information and the complexity of already established cognitive routines used by the individual in political assessments. Most of what is by now a substantial body of evidence accumulated over the past decade would lead us to anticipate important differences between these two groups (e.g., Luskin, 1987; Zaller, 1992). Both Kinder, et al. (1979), and Rahn, et al. (1990), examine this role of political sophistication in the process of candidate evaluation, but they come to different conclusions. Kinder and colleagues suggest that well-educated voters consider competence (i.e., assessments of political attributes) more in their prototypical expectations, while the less well educated are more likely to rely on likeability and morality (that is, judgements of the candidates as persons). The well educated are looking for an “exemplary *manager*” while the less well-educated are looking for an “exemplary *person*” (Kinder et al, 1979 [italics in original]; see also Kinder and Abelson 1981). Rahn and colleagues, in contrast, stress the

*stability* of their regression coefficients across sophisticated and unsophisticated voters. All voters rely on both the “personal qualities” and “competence” ratings of presidential candidates, regardless of their level of political interest, in spite of the fact that there may be systematic difference in the amount of information held about the candidates. A reexamination of the 1984 data, along with the extension of the analysis to multiple surveys, adjudicates between these competing views. Our task, therefore, is to examine whether the structural relationships in assessments and choice are consistent in comparing the relatively more with the relatively less political sophisticated citizens.

The preceding empirical tasks study the assessment process, per se. Our final set of analyses puts the assessments to use. That is, we will approximate the Rahn, et al., model of the 1984 presidential contest as closely as possible using the 1984 NES survey. Assuming that task is successfully accomplished, we will then ask whether that model is sustained using subsequent NES surveys. Essentially, Rahn, et al., use the basic ingredients conventionally included in vote choice models, i.e., candidates, issues, parties, and the like. They modify it in light of their social cognitive based exploration of candidate perception, constructing a model that is particularly appropriate in an era of candidate-centered elections. According to their model, issues, ideology, and partisan identification affect the cognitive assessments of candidates.<sup>6</sup> Next, drawing on schema-triggered affect theory, personal and competency assessments in turn shape candidate affect. Finally, comparative candidate affect measures (constructed from the candidate likes and dislikes items) and partisan identification are directly related to vote choice.

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<sup>6</sup> In their case, personal and competency dimensions.

In most respects, we follow closely the Rahn specification. A few important differences, however, should be highlighted. First, we substitute what we believe are superior versions of the candidate evaluation scales, reported later in this paper. Second, in place of their candidate affect measure, we employ the traditional NES candidate thermometers. We believe these scales measure more than strictly affective evaluations. Therefore, we follow common practice (e.g., Page and Jones, 1979) in using thermometer scores as nearly continuous measures of global summary evaluations. Finally unlike Rahn, et al., we compare respondents with different levels of political sophistication both at the stage of candidate assessment as well as at the stage of vote choice.

### **Candidate Evaluation: Personality, Performance, Plus ...?**

Our initial task is to extend the Rahn, et al., scales of candidate assessments to the additional years. We begin with a replication effort, using the 1984 NES survey.<sup>7</sup> In the Rahn study, respondents were given a set of adjective pairs, trustworthy-untrustworthy, selfish-unselfish, and cool and aloof-warm and friendly – which reflect the “personal qualities” of the candidates, or as we refer to it, “personality.” We call the second standard “performance.” This time, respondents were asked to evaluate the candidate on three adjective pairs: ineffective-effective, incompetent-competent, and strong-weak. These are components of personality assessment that, according to Rahn, et al., have a “clear professional component.”

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<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the data set used by Rahn et al., which was specially designed by the investigators, we are limited to the measures that the NES chose to include. Fortunately, the close intellectual relationship between their work and that of Kinder and colleagues meant that an at least related set of items were included in the 1984 study, and in each NES election study since then.

Are these personality and performance distinctions evident using the trait items available in the 1984 NES survey? The wording of these items, with some slight variation across phrases, is as follows:

*In your opinion does the phrase “Hard-Working” describe Reagan?  
1) Extremely well; 2) Quite well; 3) Not too well; 4) Not well at all?*

Other phrases posed to respondents included “intelligent,” “hard working,” “provides strong leadership,” and “really cares about people like you” (see Table One). In 1984, sixteen items were asked about each candidate. In 1988 and 1992, only nine were asked about each candidate, and by 1996, nine questions were asked of the incumbent, but only seven about the other candidates. There were other slight variations in the items available across years.

(INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE)

We then determined which items, in our view, were most comparable to the personality and performance components. These items were constrained to load only on their respective scales in a confirmatory factor analysis.<sup>8</sup> What we believed to be performance-related items included such phrases as “provides strong leadership,” “intelligent,” and “knowledgeable.” Personality items included measures such as “compassionate,” “moral,” and “honest.” “Inspiring” and “sets a good example” were

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<sup>8</sup> Estimation was performed in the CALIS procedure of SAS. In the results reported here, the error variances were assumed to be a single, estimated parameter across manifest variables. A similar assumption was made regarding the error variances of latent constructs. The error covariances for the manifest variables were assumed to be identically zero, while the covariances for the latent constructs were estimated as a single parameter. Attempts to estimate models with more relaxed assumptions typically experienced identification problems. For example, we attempted to model response bias by assuming that the error covariances for the manifest variable equations differed between candidates, but were identical within candidates. Though this model improved the fit of the data in 1984, in later years with a reduced number of manifest variables, response bias models were not identified. To maintain consistency across years, we therefore chose the more restrictive set of assumptions.

two items that we initially chose to be unconstrained and therefore could load on both latent dimensions.

A two-dimensional model consistent with the intuition behind the original Rahn, et al., study, simply could not be replicated using the 1984 data (more detailed results are available on request).<sup>9</sup> The fit between the variance-covariance matrix of observed variables with the variance-covariance matrix implied by the latent constructs of “personality” and “performance” was poor. We report both the ratio of the chi-square statistic to degrees of freedom<sup>10</sup> ( $\chi^2/\text{df}$ ) and the adjusted goodness of fit index<sup>11</sup> (AGFI) as measures of fit quality. The two-factor model developed to reproduce the Rahn categories had an unacceptable  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  of 9.4 ( $\chi^2/\text{df}=4169/442$ ). Moreover, its AGFI score was only .7866, well below the fit demanded of an adequate model. Minor permutations of the factor structure to determine whether our somewhat arbitrary judgements about the assignment of manifest variables to latent constructs were also attempted, without success. Whether it was a poor fit between the measures available in the NES and those used in the original Rahn study, or some other difference, strict devotion to the Rahn categories proved unproductive.

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<sup>9</sup> We began our analyses with 1984 both because that was the election that Rahn, et al., studied (hence holding constant both candidates and context) and because the NES had the largest number of trait items from which to select that year.

<sup>10</sup> This imprecise substitute for traditional hypothesis tests based on the chi-square statistic is required because, with large sample sizes (typically  $n > 500$ ), the chi-square is biased upwards. This is because: “...even minute differences tend to be detectable as being more than mere sample fluctuations and hence significant” (Hayduk 1987). Ratios of two or three to one are typically considered a reasonable target; though, Hayduk reports some scholars accept ratios as high as five to one. Note that for models of this sort, the degrees of freedom are determined by the model’s covariance structure, not the number of observations.

<sup>11</sup> AGFI assesses the fit of the predicted covariance matrix relative to the sample matrix, adjusted for the degrees of freedom. The AGFI ranges in value from zero to one, with *good* fits falling in the range of about 0.90 or 0.95 and one.

Following our failure to replicate the Rahn categories, we developed, tested, and generally rejected a number of alternative models using the 1984 data. Via likelihood ratio tests within nested models, we were able to compare the fit of these alternative models, finally concluding with a four-factor solution.<sup>12</sup> We labeled the four latent dimensions of candidate assessment “character,” “competence,” “empathy,” and “strong leader.” Our dimensional analysis corresponds almost exactly with that identified by Kinder (1986) in his analysis of the same data, less the “negativity” dimension. This fifth negativity dimension simply does not seem to have a very intuitive foundation in the social cognitive framework and is therefore excluded from our study. The reader can refer to the specific measures that were allowed to load on each latent dimension, shown in Figure One, and also on the first page of Table Two.

(INSERT TABLE TWO AND FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE)

“*Character*” represents what various authors, cited above, describe as personal aspects of the candidate’s personality. Can they be trusted, are they compassionate, are

“*Strong leader*” represents the performance aspect of candidate assessments – what aspects of personality evaluation relate more directly to activities in office. Does the candidate project an image of strong leadership, does he merit our respect, and are we

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<sup>12</sup> We began by investigating a number of very restrictive models with few categories of assessment, eventually building up to the more general models used in this analysis. First, we considered the most restrictive specification, with one latent variable underlying all of the manifest measures, as might be the case if voters had reached a judgement about their vote choice, and answered questions to justify that choice. Second, we tried a pair of models with only two factors, a “common candidate” model (a single evaluative dimension for each candidate) and a “common characteristic” model (one evaluative dimension for character and one for performance, with loadings for the manifest indicators constrained to be equal across candidates). In addition to these simpler specifications, we also tried a three-factor model that included, what we refer to as the empathy dimension, in addition to the personality and performance categories.

inspired? A third factor is an elaboration on character, but this time representing those standards of evaluation that indicate that the candidate understands or empathizes with the position of the respondent. This we labeled “*empathy*.” The final dimension is a second facet to performance, assuming that some parts of performance speak more to a candidate’s ability to perform a job well, without necessarily projecting a strong or vigorous image. Is the candidate knowledgeable, intelligent, hard working? We labeled this final dimension of evaluation “*competence*.” In sum, the character and strong leader dimensions seemed the most clearly “personality” and “performance” measures, respectively. Empathy reflects a set of personal traits that seem especially relevant for campaigning for the presidency, while competence incorporates personal traits of managing the presidential office.

A likelihood ratio test between our version of Rahn, et al.’s two-factor model and the four-factor model we develop demonstrated the strength of the less restrictive model. With a difference in chi-squares of 2576 (4169-1593) on 26 (442-416) d.f., the new model provided a strongly statistically significant improvement in fit. Additionally, model diagnostics indicate that the four-factor solution has a reasonable goodness of fit overall. It has a respectable  $\chi^2/df$  of 3.8 (1593/416) and the model’s AGFI value of .92 was appreciably better than the two-factor solution. Finally, we note that the relationship between the latent constructs and the manifest variables were in the correct direction, or were found to be statistically insignificant, and therefore not particularly worrisome.

This set of four characteristics did not just provide the most satisfactory fit of the data to the model in 1984, but more importantly, also performed well, relative to all

alternatives that we tested, in the 1988, 1992, and 1996 surveys.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the NES trait battery had fewer items after 1984. Thus, our measurement models for later years are based on a sparser set of manifest variables (see the factor loadings for 1988 through 1996 in Tables Two). As with 1984, there are no real surprises elsewhere in the table. With few exceptions, latent constructs are related in the appropriate direction to manifest variables. The exceptions are, however, worth noting. We found an inexplicable negative loading for the question about whether the candidate is “decent” on the empathy dimension for both Bush and Dukakis in 1988 (implying that the higher value on the unobserved latent measure or “empathy,” the less well “decent” described the candidate). Negative relationships were also found in 1992 between “competence” and “gets things done” for George Bush and between “compassionate” and “character” for Bill Clinton. This findings for 1992 are more intriguing because of the media emphasis during the election and may merit attention in future research. George Bush heavily emphasized his “competence,” especially in foreign policy, while Bill Clinton advanced his own “compassion,” claiming that “I feel your pain.” Meanwhile, the candidates respectively attempted to focus attention on their opponents’ short-comings: Bush was unable to boost the economy out of recession, raising questions about whether he could “gets things done,” while questions about Clinton’s character plagued his campaign. Despite these minor blemishes, a comparison of our factor structure with the smaller dimensional structure employed by Rahn allows us to conclude that in all years, the four-factor solution significantly outperformed the two-factor model. Even with the reduced set of indicators, we feel

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<sup>13</sup> Funk’s (1999) replication of Kinder’s work also suggests a four-factor solution, but because of concerns about intercorrelations among the trait factors she drops the competence factor. However, given the crucial role of competence in the social cognitive vote model, we take our chances with correlated independent variables and biased standard errors in our vote models and report all four factors.

confident with the measurement model over time.

Our first result, therefore, is that we cannot replicate a two-dimensional basis to candidate appraisal using the NES data that would be similar to the personal and competence scales of Rahn and colleagues. The four dimensional model has clear attractions, however. The variables that compose each dimension have a coherency and consistency that satisfy face validity. Further, they reveal two personality- and two performance-based assessments, consistent with the theoretical foundations of the social cognitive approach. They read collectively, in other words, just as we might expect candidate assessments to be made in a candidate-centered era for selecting the sole occupant of the nation's highest office. And, perhaps most importantly, this appraisal structure is replicable over repeated elections with differing mixes of candidates.

Left unanswered, however, is how people assess a non-partisan candidate who lacks political experience but has, nonetheless, attracted a good deal of media attention. Despite our best efforts, we have been unable to determine the "social cognitive" content of Perot evaluations in either 1992 or 1996. Unfortunately, the NES did not include questions asking about assessments of Perot in 1992. Attempts to estimate the model using what data were available about Perot in 1996 were not satisfactory. Theory-driven models that mirrored the factor structure of the major party candidates did not converge, thereby preventing us from determining unique estimates for the structural coefficients. Perhaps a factor structure built from a more complete set of questions, such as 1984, or even 1988 and 1992, would have led to better results. However, given the sparseness of available data from 1996, what results we were able to produce lend credence to our suspicion that Perot was evaluated differently from major-party affiliated (and

nominated) presidential candidates. If so, we erred in trying to force the same measurement model onto the data. To the extent that Rahn, et al., are correct in their view that evaluations of candidate traits are determined by issues, party identification, and ideology, it seems likely that individuals either did not have sufficient information to evaluate Perot, or they did not have cognitive routines for assessing unaffiliated candidates.

## **Predicting Evaluative Standards**

Our first step establishes the basis by which respondents appraised candidates. We next attempt to uncover the impact of information acquisition on candidate assessment. Following Kinder's (1986) piece, we initially estimate the influence of socioeconomic, demographic, and long-term attitudes explain respondents' assessment scores.<sup>14</sup> Unlike Kinder, the focus of the study is on identifying differences in the ability of voters to formulate clear appraisals of the different candidates across time. Our expectation is that there will be less unexplained variability in incumbents' scores for "character," "competence," "empathy," and "strong leader" than for challengers. The source of the additional *noise* in challenger evaluations would be the lack of exposure to information about an individual who did not hold national office immediately prior to the election. Figure 2 reports the R<sup>2</sup>s of the regression of the various candidate assessment

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<sup>14</sup> The long-term attitudes are party identification and the NES, seven-point ideology scale. At least in theory, these attitudes, but not necessarily short-term attitudes, should precede and therefore help structure respondents' assessments of the candidates. Later, we report the full, recursive vote choice model, replicating Rahn, et al., which includes issue indices (see Tables Four through Seven).

measures on respondent characteristics (party identification, ideology, education, income, gender, race, and region).<sup>15</sup>

Three points are quite striking in this figure. The first is that in 1984, 1988, and 1996, our ability to predict assessments of the incumbent president (or vice president in 1988) is substantially higher than our ability to explain citizens' assessments of the challenger. Such a result is remarkably clear, but not surprising. After all, the social cognitive account (like most theories of voter choice) is centrally concerned about the consequences of low and differential information acquisition and utilization. The second point to glean from the figure is that the incumbent is especially advantaged on the two performance measures, as this account would anticipate. The incumbent's privileged position in the public eye as an elected official certainly makes it easier for the public to form opinions about his professional abilities than of a challenger, who in the years prior to the election holds a lesser, typically state-level office, or may not hold elective office at all. Third, in 1992 the pattern of knowledge about the different candidates appears quite different. While the overall fit for Clinton, the challenger, differs little from those for other challengers (especially Dole), the fit for Bush is much lower than for the other two incumbents. In fact, the explained variance for Bush tends to be about the same as that for Clinton. However, it appears that there was not necessarily something unique about 1992, but instead about George Bush, since there was little difference in the fit of the incumbent model between 1988 or 1992 (note that Bush is treated as the incumbent in 1988). Moreover, it does not appear to be a transformation in how the public formed impressions of candidates: 1996 returns, in most respects, to the patterns seen in 1984

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<sup>15</sup> All explanatory variables are scaled from zero to one.

between incumbent and challenger. In 1992, Bush's public image seemed to be particularly unclear, or alternatively, the typical incumbent advantage over a challenger was reduced due to Clinton's candidacy. We are unable to adjudicate definitively among these alternatives.

(INSERT FIGURE TWO AND TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE)

Given the importance of processing ability in the literature, we report, in Figure Three, the predictive power of this set of explanatory variables across three levels of political sophistication.<sup>16</sup> The Figure yields a number of important conclusions. First, in almost every year and across all variables, the distinction between incumbent and challenger is maintained across all levels of sophistication. Second, it is also clear, if unsurprising, that the attitudes of the politically sophisticated are typically more predictable than those of less sophisticated voters. Third, differences in the explained variance between the most and least sophisticated were consistently greater for incumbents than challengers. This indicates that sophisticates do not simply perform better with a given amount of information than less sophisticated voters, but that sophisticates apparently process more information at a faster rate than the lower group. We thus provide additional evidence for the keen role of information processing and acquisition in social cognition.

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<sup>16</sup> We constructed a scale of political sophistication by principle components analysis (using a single factor) to determine the weights of an additive index. Variables included were the interviewer's assessment of respondent's political knowledge, level of education, and a pair of dummy variables that equaled one if the respondent was able to identify the Republican as more conservative and more likely to support decreased government spending on social services than the Democrat.

(INSERT FIGURE THREE ABOUT HERE)

In this section, we have provided an alternative set of dimensions of candidate evaluation, a set that we think stands up theoretically, and performs admirably across different electoral contexts. In addition, we have unearthed interesting patterns in the predictability of these dimensions, comparing both incumbents and challengers, different incumbents from 1984 through 1996, and across levels of political sophistication. Most patterns fit nicely with our understanding of the advantages that a sitting president has when running for office, and conventional wisdom regarding the relative information processing abilities of well informed and less well informed respondents. Our next step is to move beyond candidate evaluations to comparative candidate assessment and vote choice. We turn to this in the next section.

### **Candidate Appraisals and Voter Choice**

The final task of this paper is to incorporate the measures of candidate traits into the social cognitive model of voting. For each presidential elections from 1984 to 1996 we proceed in three stages correspond to the three steps in the Rahn et al model. First, we estimate the political determinants for the comparative assessment of candidates on the four latent candidate traits identified in the measurement model developed in previous sections of the paper. Second, we study the impact of these comparative assessments and other political variables on individuals' relative affect towards the two candidates. Third, we model the joint impact of affect and partisan identification on vote choice. The results of this analysis are reported in Tables Four through Seven where each table corresponds

to a different year. Estimates are reported for the full sample and for the sample partitioned into thirds by level of political engagement.

The original Rahn, et al. voting model fared well in all elections when using the full sample, except for 1992 (again, the Bush-Clinton contest appears to be an outlier. Most importantly, the overall fit of the models is reasonably similar to that reported by Rahn, et al., – and the fit is very high. This is especially true for the final two stages of the model, one with the comparative candidate thermometer rankings, and the other with vote choice as dependent variables. Direct comparisons with the Rahn results are, of course, impossible, because we have four dimensions of cognitive appraisal to their two (and good evidence that their two category approach fails with the NES measures). In addition, there are differing patterns to the effect of the various variables among the elections (i.e., we can reject the hypothesis that the coefficients are the same in each election). Still, the most important point is that the overall shape of the model estimates is largely similar across the four NES data sets.

Most striking of all in the full-sample model are the effects on the four dimensions of cognitive assessments. All variables are significant in all cases but one, and the relative magnitudes of coefficients are similar across the four years. The issue index has a substantial effect, one of the same order of magnitude as party identification.<sup>17</sup> Ideology generally is significant with a reasonable magnitude of effect, but provides a lone exception by being small and insignificant in each case in 1996. We

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<sup>17</sup> The issue index was constructed by summing over the seven-point issue scales reported in the NES the absolute value of the difference between the respondents self-placement from the mean for the Republican candidate less the absolute value of the difference between the respondents self-placement from the mean for the Democratic candidate. Values for questions that were not answered by the respondent were scored a zero in the summation. The value given by the summation was divided by the number of questions answered by the respondent, multiplied by six.

therefore find that stable political values and identities are significant factors in candidate assessment, thus confirming a central premise of the social cognitive model.

(INSERT TABLES FOUR THROUGH SEVEN ABOUT HERE)

The effect of candidate appraisals on comparative candidate thermometer scores in the second stage of the social cognitive model is substantial for most cases for the full-sample regressions. One interesting exception is the competence dimension. It is insignificant in three elections and significant but very small in 1992. Recall that in 1992 competence was one of only a very few cases of unexpected relationships between latent and manifest constructs—clearly some element of the campaign primed the public to conceive competence as an unusually important evaluative tool in the campaign. Additionally, the strong leader dimension is insignificant in 1996, and small but significant and incorrectly signed in 1992. Thus, it appears that the most clearly personal attribute assessment dimensions are more consistently consequential.

Perhaps the least convincing aspect of the Rahn, et al, study, given the results in Table Seven, is their conclusion regarding political sophistication and information processing in the social cognitive model. Rahn, et al., found little difference in the relative influence of competence and personality evaluations between the less politically engaged and the more involved. They stressed stability rather than variability. Our analyses stand in stark contrast. We demonstrate a number of important differences across elections among voters with varied levels of sophistication. These differences

across groups are most striking in the regressions on the comparisons between relative candidate location on the factor scores and the feeling thermometers.

We first note that consistent with our analysis of the impact of durable political characteristics (e.g. ideology, party identification) and demographic information (e.g. income, education, etc.) on candidate appraisal, we found fairly consistent differences across sophistication in each election. In addition to the relatively low  $R^2$ 's for lower sophisticates, we also found that, except for 1988, the coefficients for political ideology were small and insignificant among the least sophisticated voters. For the medium and high sophisticates, ideology was significant for all traits and all years (except 1996 for the middle group). The coefficient estimates for the political issues index were also small and insignificant for every year except 1984 for the least sophisticated voters. Meanwhile, issues were found to be consistently statistically significant across years for the upper two-thirds of our sample. Though we can largely reject the hypothesis that voters of different levels of sophistication relied on identical information in evaluating candidates, we conclude that durable characteristics played a key role in candidate assessment over time.

Turning to the regressions sorted by sophistication on the candidate feeling thermometers, a distinct set of tendencies emerges for each group. "Character" and "competence" are never significant determinants of vote choice for the least sophisticated; however, "empathy" was found to be significant in all elections except 1992 (surprising given the importance of "empathy" to the Clinton campaign), and strong leader was significant in 1984 and 1992. In terms of purely political evaluations, party identification was significant across elections for this group while issues were not. The

middle third also apparently placed a strong emphasis on empathy and less consistent importance on strength, with statistically significant coefficients in all elections except 1988 for the former, and only 1984 and 1988 for the latter. Character and competence again appear to have been unimportant determinants of comparative feeling thermometer placement across years, while party identification was the only consistently significant, purely political, variable. Finally, the most sophisticated group of respondents drew upon a greater array of available information. They tended to have statistically significant coefficients for all purely political evaluations. Meanwhile every dimension of candidate appraisal was significant in at least two of the four elections under investigation. We therefore conclude that different classes of voters used different bundles of information when comparing candidates. Furthermore, differences in the significance of variables across elections suggests that the prototypical standards voters employed depended on some characteristics of the candidates or historical circumstance.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper, we examined the effect of cognitive appraisals of presidential candidates. The measures included in the 1984-1996 NES surveys support a four-dimensional structure to such appraisals. Roughly speaking, two focus on the individual personalities of the candidates and two are centered more on the performance of the political tasks of the presidency expected or already observed in the candidate. The over-time continuity in this set of factors is a major argument in behalf not just of the

dimensions themselves but of the social cognitive theory of candidate appraisal underlying them.

Another major conclusion flows from the reasonable replicability of the social cognitive model of vote choice developed by Rahn, et al. These estimates imply that, even though based on four rather than two cognitive dimensions, there is strong support for an information processing based account that puts candidate appraisal in the center of political choice in this candidate-centered electoral era. We do challenge their finding that the least and most well informed citizens process political information in a mostly similar fashion. It is possible, however, that our findings are a product of having four dimensions of evaluation rather than two, or of some other difference between the Gallup and the NES surveys. Our conclusions fit far better into the conventional wisdom regarding political information and vote choice. That is, the more politically sophisticated not only hold more information, but appear to use it more effectively.

There are significant tasks remaining in this field of study. First, reasonable arguments and evidence have now been amassed in support of different numbers and types of factors of cognitive appraisal of presidential candidates. Both theoretical and empirical work is sorely needed to adjudicate among the known (and conceivably many other) alternatives. We thus believe the four-fold solution stands as a hypothesis rather than as an accepted conclusion.

Serious attention is also needed for further understanding how candidate appraisals are used in decision making. Neither our work, nor Rahn, et al. tests the voting model against alternatives, and neither tests for specific causal claims. Indeed, as the

work of others in the same area (e.g., Goldberg, 1966; Marcus and Converse, 1979; and Page and Jones, 1979) indicates, the purely recursive nature of Rahn, et al.'s model and our replication of it is unlikely to withstand scrutiny. Second, our estimates indicate that the relative impact of the various dimensions of candidate appraisal vary from election to election. Social cognitive theory is not, however, sufficiently developed in the discipline to propose hypotheses to explain such variation.

These recommendations are primarily theoretical – indeed, very difficult theoretical work. We close with one more substantive observation. We believe we have learned a great deal from the effort to replicate studies of candidate appraisal on different data and in different political circumstances. We also were motivated by the empirical puzzles of how Clinton could maintain support in spite of public perception of personal failings and how very different forces seemed necessary to explain Reagan's high level of popular support. Noteworthy in the comparison of the Reagan and Clinton results is the consistent importance of empathy. Perhaps this is indicative of the electoral necessity of appearing to care about your constituents in the age of modern mass media. Surprisingly, the much ballyhooed character dimension was not found to be significant across levels of sophistication during the Reagan and Clinton reelection campaigns. Instead, we found that the apparent difference between the two races was the significance of the strong leader dimension in the Reagan-Mondale campaign among all classes of voters, while during the Clinton-Dole campaign, that dimension was insignificant for all groups. The apparent importance of Reagan's integrity or character, may in fact, have been a product of the public's perceptions of Reagan as a Cold Warrior (e.g. Aldrich, et al., 1989)—a trait no longer demanded of president's at the close of the twentieth century. We trust

that we have brought the relative dimensions of character evaluation more clearly into relief, paving the way for future scholarship on the importance of context in priming the nature of candidate evaluation.

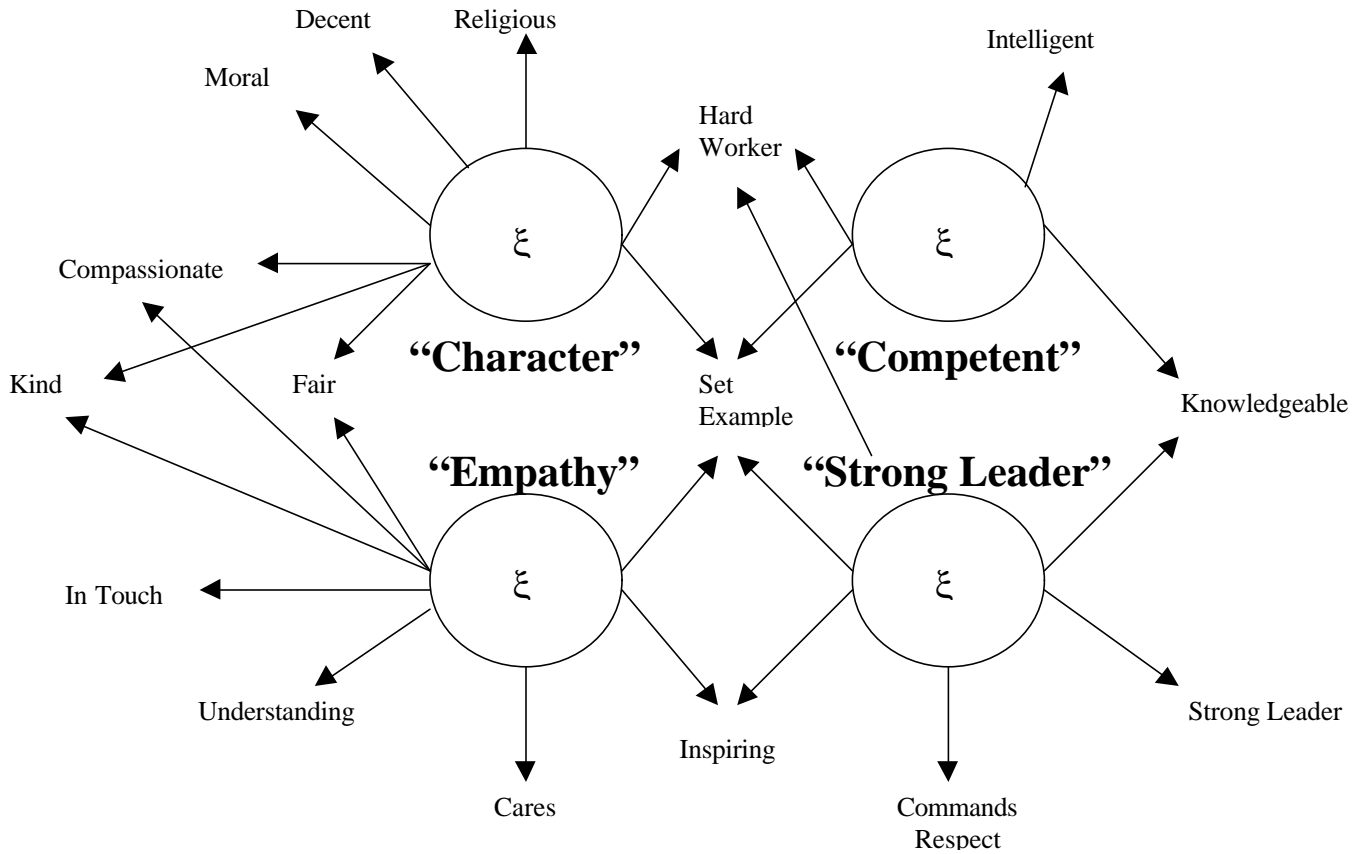
**Table 1: Candidate Characteristics, 1984 – 1996**

**HOW WELL DOES R FEEL THE WORD "(word or phrase)" DESCRIBES (Candidate)?**

<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>1984</b>	<b>1988</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1996</b>
HARD-WORKING	X			
DECENT	X	X		
COMPASSIONATE	X	X	X	X*
COMMANDS RESPECT	X			
INTELLIGENT	X	X	X	X*
MORAL	X	X	X	X
KIND	X			
INSPIRING	X	X	X	X
KNOWLEDGEABLE	X	X	X	X
SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE	X			
REALLY CARES ABOUT PEOPLE LIKE YOU	X	X	X	X
PROVIDES STRONG LEADERSHIP	X	X	X	X
UNDERSTANDS PEOPLE LIKE YOU	X			
FAIR	X			
IN TOUCH WITH ORDINARY PEOPLE	X			
RELIGIOUS	X			
HONEST		X	X	X
GETS THINGS DONE			X	X

\* Questions were asked only of Clinton, so were excluded from measurement models to increase likelihood of compatible factor scores across candidates.

**Figure One: Measurement Model of Candidate Evaluation, 1984**



**Table 2: Personality and Performance, Latent Variable Equations, 1984 (Reagan, Mondale)**

Manifest Variable	Character				Empathy			
	Reagan		Mondale		Reagan		Mondale	
Religious	1.0000	<i>0.6070</i>	1.0000	<i>0.6274</i>				
In Touch					1.0000	<i>0.8211</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8005</i>
Fair	0.4385	<i>0.2662</i>	0.5593	<i>0.3509</i>	0.7660	<i>0.6289</i>	0.6366	<i>0.5096</i>
Understands people like me					1.1027	<i>0.9055</i>	1.1170	<i>0.8941</i>
Sets a good example	0.4334	<i>0.2631</i>	0.4894	<i>0.3071</i>	0.2327	<i>0.1911</i>	0.2068	<i>0.1655</i>
Compassionate	0.7188	<i>0.4363</i>	0.9975	<i>0.6259</i>	0.5051	<i>0.4147</i>	0.2461	<i>0.1970</i>
Knowledgable								
Decent	1.2943	<i>0.7856</i>	1.2243	<i>0.7682</i>				
Hard Worker	0.4048	<i>0.2457</i>	0.6579	<i>0.4128</i>				
Intelligent								
Commands respect								
Moral	1.2379	<i>0.7696</i>	1.2373	<i>0.7764</i>				
Really cares about people					1.1221	<i>0.9213</i>	1.1112	<i>0.8894</i>
Kind	0.9961	<i>0.6046</i>	1.1283	<i>0.7080</i>	0.2741	<i>0.2250</i>	0.1118	<i>0.0895</i>
Inspiring					0.2563	<i>0.2104</i>	-0.0081	<i>-0.0065</i>
Provides strong leadership								
Manifest Variable	Leadership				Competence			
	Reagan		Mondale		Reagan		Mondale	
Religious								
In Touch								
Fair								
Understands people like me								
Sets a good example	0.4671	<i>0.3951</i>	0.5106	<i>0.4359</i>	0.0459	<i>0.0386</i>	-0.0208	<i>-0.0176</i>
Compassionate								
Knowledgable	-0.0096	<i>-0.0081</i>	0.2427	<i>0.2071</i>	1.0168	<i>0.8561</i>	0.7336	<i>0.6212</i>
Decent								
Hard Worker	0.4795	<i>0.4056</i>	-0.0677	<i>-0.0578</i>	0.1868	<i>0.1573</i>	0.3348	<i>0.2835</i>
Intelligent					1.0000	<i>0.842</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8468</i>
Commands respect	0.8147	<i>0.6891</i>	0.8574	<i>0.7319</i>				
Moral								
Really cares about people								
Kind								
Inspiring	0.7108	<i>0.6012</i>	0.9715	<i>0.8292</i>				
Provides strong leadership	1.0000	<i>0.8459</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8536</i>				
Adjusted Goodness of Fit	0.9204	Chi-square	1593.29		Null Model	34726.96		
		(degrees of freedom)	416		(d.f.)	496		

Notes: Data Source = 1984 NES. Cell entries are confirmatory factor analysis coefficients (from manifest variable equations). Standardized coefficients are italicized. Estimated with Proc CALIS (SAS)

**Table 2 (cont.): Personality and Performance, Latent Variable Equations, 1988  
(Bush and Dukakis)**

Manifest Variable	Character				Empathy			
	Bush		Dukakis		Bush		Dukakis	
Compassionate	0.5654	<i>0.4344</i>	0.4270	<i>0.3162</i>	0.4052	<i>0.3523</i>	0.4467	<i>0.3958</i>
Knowledgable								
Decent	1.1663	<i>0.8960</i>	1.2156	<i>0.9002</i>	-0.1701	<i>-0.1479</i>	-0.1437	<i>-0.1273</i>
Intelligent								
Moral	1.0000	<i>0.7683</i>	1.0000	<i>0.7406</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8695</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8861</i>
Really cares about people								
Honest	1.0708	<i>0.8227</i>	1.1034	<i>0.8171</i>				
Inspiring					0.2760	<i>0.2399</i>	0.1282	<i>0.1136</i>
Provides strong leadership								

Manifest Variable	Leadership				Competence			
	Bush		Dukakis		Bush		Dukakis	
Compassionate								
Knowledgable	<b>0.0881</b>	<i>0.0778</i>	0.2893	<i>0.2456</i>	0.8660	<i>0.6943</i>	0.6611	<i>0.5091</i>
Decent								
Intelligent					1.0000	<i>0.8017</i>	1.0000	<i>0.7701</i>
Moral								
Really cares about people								
Honest								
Inspiring	0.5986	<i>0.5285</i>	0.7625	<i>0.6474</i>				
Provides strong leadership	1.0000	<i>0.883</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8490</i>				

Adjusted Goodness of Fit	0.9533	Chi-square	432.00	Null Model	15591.06
		(degrees of freedom)	99	(d.f.)	153

Notes: Data Source = 1988 NES. Cell entries are confirmatory factor analysis coefficients (from manifest variable equations). Insignificant variables in bold. Standardized coefficients are italicized. Estimated with Proc CALIS (SAS)

**Table 2 (con't): Personality and Performance, Latent Variable Equations, 1992 (Bush and Clinton)**

Manifest Variable	Character				Empathy			
	Bush		Clinton		Bush		Clinton	
	Compassionate	0.6162	<i>0.4509</i>	-2.3828	<i>-1.7255</i>	0.4156	<i>0.3629</i>	3.0287
Knowledgable								
Gets things done								
Intelligent								
Moral	1.0000	<i>0.7316</i>	1.0000	<i>0.7241</i>				
Really cares about people					1.0000	<i>0.8733</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8000</i>
Honest	1.0687	<i>0.7819</i>	1.1020	<i>0.7980</i>				
Inspiring					0.2138	<i>0.1867</i>	0.3927	<i>0.3142</i>
Provides strong leadership								
Manifest Variable	Leadership				Competence			
	Bush		Clinton		Bush		Clinton	
	Compassionate							
Knowledgable	0.2136	<i>0.5735</i>	0.4382	<i>0.3682</i>	0.7216	<i>0.1731</i>	0.4673	<i>0.4152</i>
Gets things done	1.0021	<i>0.812</i>	0.8803	<i>0.7397</i>	-0.1226	<i>-0.0974</i>	0.0821	<i>0.073</i>
Intelligent					1.0000	<i>0.7948</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8886</i>
Moral								
Really cares about people								
Honest								
Inspiring	0.7459	<i>0.6044</i>	0.5737	<i>0.4821</i>				
Provides strong leadership	1.0000	<i>0.8103</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8403</i>				
Adjusted Goodness of Fit	0.9473	Chi-square	543.56		Null Model	18435.15		
		(degrees of freedom)	99		(d.f.)	153		

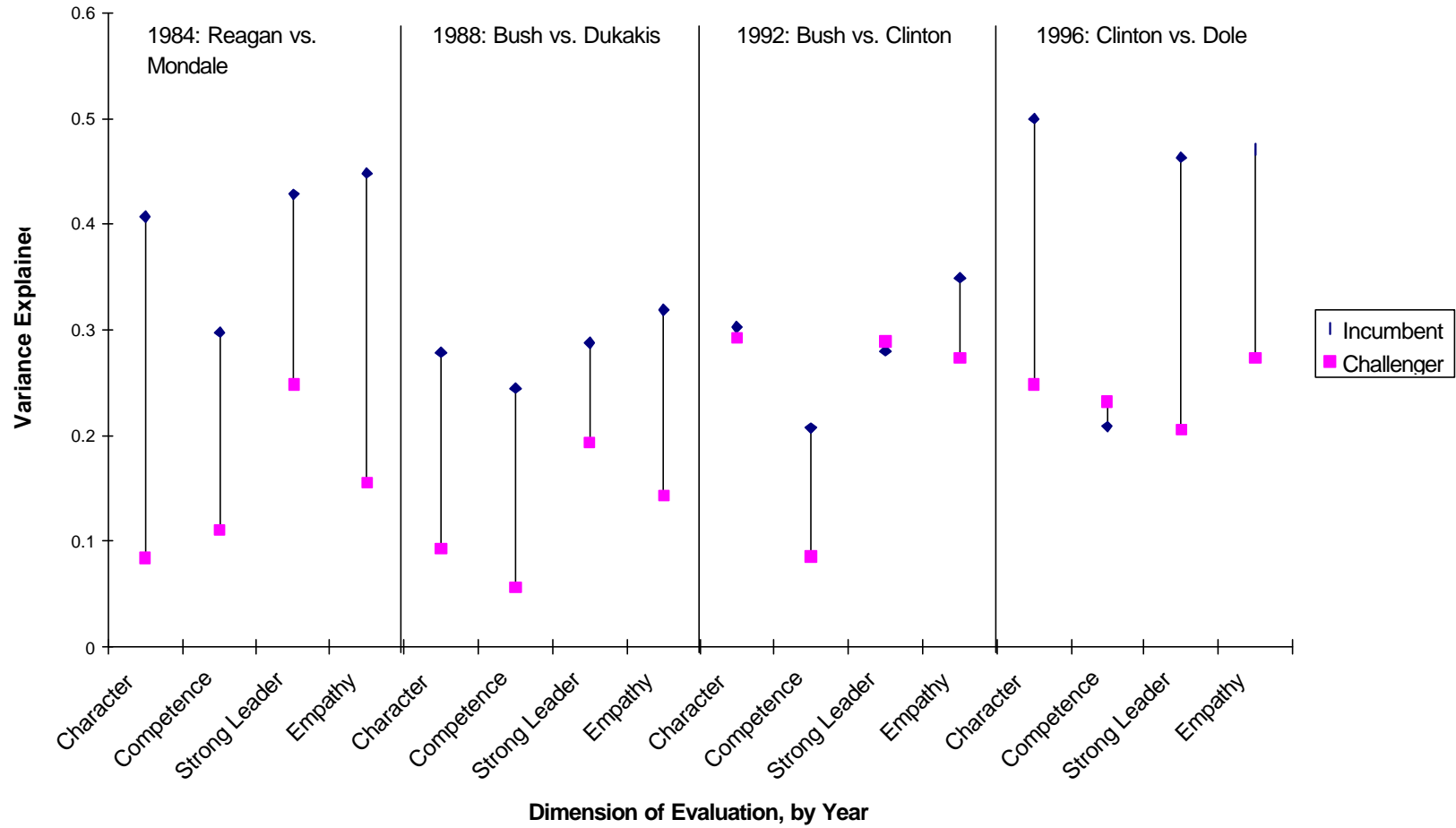
Notes: Data Source = 1992 NES. Cell entries are confirmatory factor analysis coefficients (from manifest variable equations). Standardized coefficients are italicized. Estimated with Proc CALIS (SAS)

**Table 2 (con't): Personality and Performance, Latent Variable Equations, 1996 (Clinton and Dole)**

Manifest Variable	Character				Empathy			
	Clinton		Dole		Clinton		Dole	
Knowledgable								
Gets things done								
Moral	1.0000	<i>0.8306</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8106</i>				
Really cares about people					1.0000	<i>0.8532</i>	1.0000	<i>0.9890</i>
Honest	1.0817	<i>0.8984</i>	1.0451	<i>0.8471</i>				
Inspiring					0.4455	<i>0.3801</i>	0.3039	<i>0.4840</i>
Provides strong leadership								
	Leadership				Competence			
	Clinton		Dole		Clinton		Dole	
Knowledgable					1.0000	<i>0.7082</i>	1.0000	<i>0.7222</i>
Gets things done	0.8238	<i>0.7131</i>	0.5245	<i>0.4446</i>	0.0781	<i>0.0553</i>	0.4497	<i>0.3248</i>
Moral								
Really cares about people								
Honest								
Inspiring	0.4810	<i>0.4164</i>	0.5709	<i>0.3006</i>				
Provides strong leadership	1.0000	<i>0.8656</i>	1.0000	<i>0.8477</i>				
Adjusted Goodness of Fit	0.9725	Chi-square		135.10	Null Model		12294.68	
		(degrees of freedom)		45	(d.f.)		91	

Notes: Data Source = 1996 NES. Cell entries are confirmatory factor analysis coefficients (from manifest variable equations). Standardized coefficients are italicized. Estimated with Proc CALIS (SAS)

**Figure 2: Relative Explained Variance in Evaluative Dimensions, Incumbent vs. Challenger**



**Table 3: Relative Explanatory Power of Evaluative Dimensions**

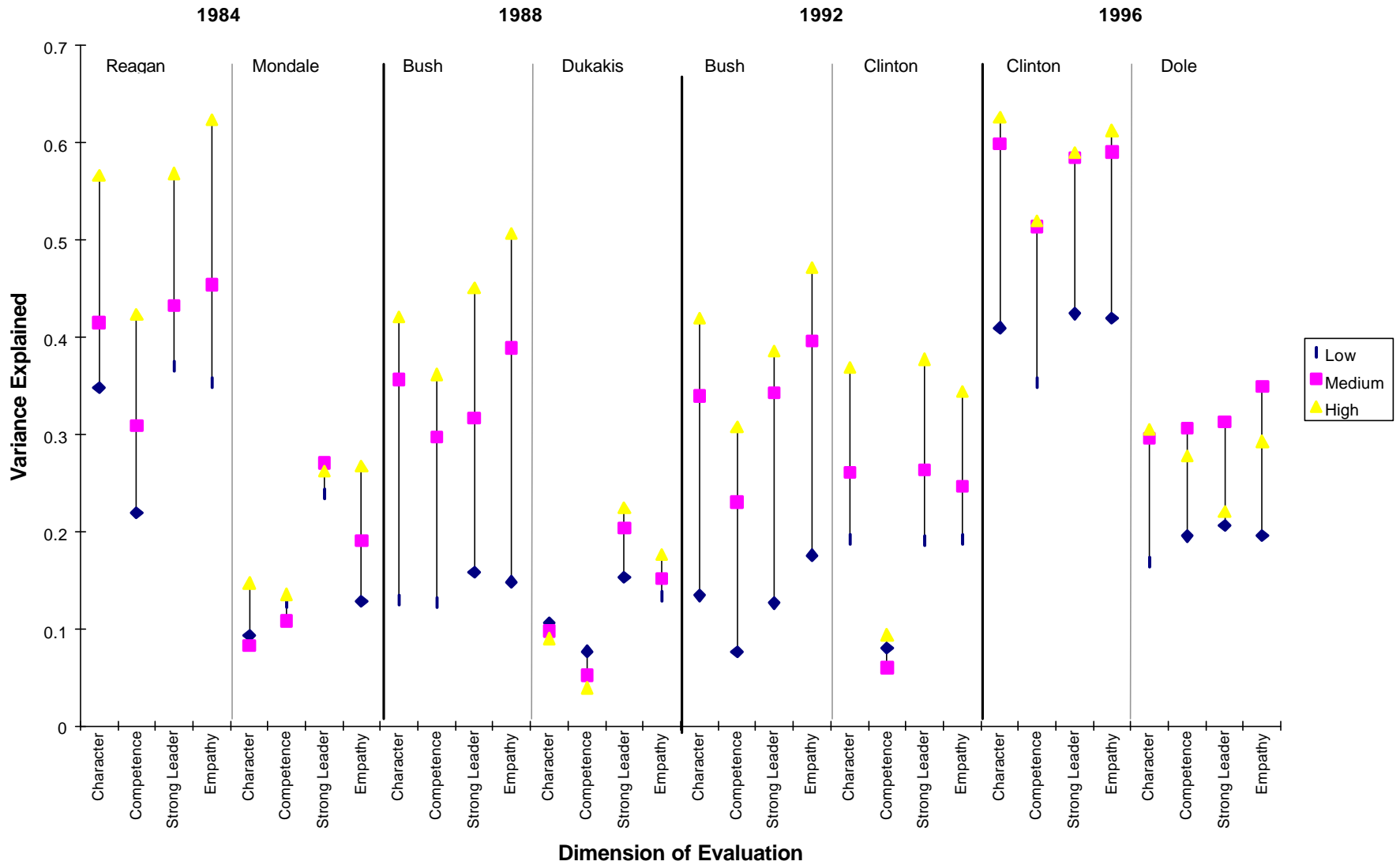
1984	Reagan				Mondale			
	Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy	Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy
Party ID	.638 ***	.797 ***	1.050 ***	1.104 ***	-.273 ***	-.401 ***	-.651 ***	-.550 ***
Ideology	.555 ***	.744 ***	.805 ***	.783 ***	-.126	-.051	-.246 *	-.234 *
Education	-.016	-.410 ***	.037	-.032	.057	-.067	-.333 **	.020
Income	.032	.003	.080	.056	-.036	-.120	-.272 **	-.191 *
Female	.085 ***	.113 **	.031	.064	.016	.042	.044	-.020
Black	-.241 ***	.033	-.167 *	-.245 **	.025	.126 *	.284 ***	.116
South	.066 *	.114 **	.112 *	.135 **	-.012	-.006	-.021	-.102 *
Adj. R2	.420	.309	.447	.462	.092	.117	.265	.171
N	861							
1988	Bush				Dukakis			
	Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy	Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy
Party ID	.751 ***	.667 ***	.913 ***	.974 ***	-.372 ***	-.279 ***	-.643 ***	-.618 ***
Ideology	.038 ***	.032 **	.045 **	.047 ***	-.007	-.002	-.005	-.011
Education	-.068	-.137 *	-.301 **	-.212 *	.230 **	.130 *	.061	.187 *
Income	.081	.140 *	.080	.123	-.153 *	-.085	-.232 **	-.174 *
Female	.059 *	.033	.057	.081 *	-.036	-.032	.033	.001
Black	-.121 *	-.009	.090	-.094	.020	.026	.116 *	.076
South	.111 **	.149 ***	.204 ***	.128 **	.001	.031	.026	-.009
Adj. R2	.296	.252	.294	.335	.095	.057	.199	.148
N	1129							

Notes: Data are drawn from the 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996 National Election Studies. As a rough indicator of statistical significance, \* = the estimated regression coefficient is more than two times its standard error. \*\* = more than three times. \*\*\* = more than four times. Intercepts have been excluded for ease of presentation.

**Table 3: Relative Explanatory Power (con't)**

<b>Table 3: Relative Explanatory Power (con't)</b>									
<b>1992</b>	<b>Bush</b>				<b>Clinton</b>				
	Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy		Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy
Party ID	.659 ***	.573 ***	.797 ***	.942 ***		-.658 ***	-.426 ***	-.786 ***	-.707 ***
Ideology	.055 ***	.037 **	.047 ***	.073 ***		-.025 *	-.001	-.023 *	-.027 *
Education	-.147 *	-.023	-.239 **	-.244 **		-.199 **	.128 *	-.095	-.067 *
Income	.189 **	.145 *	.059	.178 *		-.180 **	-.014	-.190 **	-.160 *
Female	.061 *	.012	.016	.064 *		.019	.000	.024	.019
Black	-.230 **	-.093 *	-.085	-.218 ***		.124 **	.074	.119 *	.136 *
South	.086 **	.060 *	.108 **	.120 **		.027	.007	.017	.037
Adj. R2	.299	.203	.276	.346		.288	.079	.284	.270
N	1321								
<b>1996</b>	<b>Dole</b>				<b>Clinton</b>				
	Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy		Character	Competence	Strong Leader	Empathy
Party ID	.481 ***	.424 ***	.535 ***	.829 ***		-1.081 ***	.768 ***	-1.101 ***	-1.118 ***
Ideology	.055 ***	.047 ***	.064 ***	.089 ***		-.077 ***	-.048 ***	-.067 ***	-.075 ***
Education	.190 *	.127 *	.055	.140		-.278 **	-.064	-.214 *	-.188 *
Income	.163 *	.116	.061	.047		-.263 **	-.059	-.163 *	-.203 *
Female	-.014	-.022	-.015	.043		.030	-.005	.013	.025
Black	-.280 ***	-.217 ***	-.204 **	-.174 *		.257 ***	.170 **	.293 ***	.268 ***
South	.026	.032	.073 *	.046		-.020	-.033	-.031	-.026
Adj. R2	.285	.285	.259	.293		.576	.469	.558	.562
N	864								
Notes: Data are drawn from the 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996 National Election Studies. Cell entries are a rough indicator of statistical significance. * = the estimated regression coefficient is more than two times its standard error. ** = more than three									

**Figure 3: Relative Explained Variance, by Candidate and Levels of Political Sophistication**



**Table 4: Full Comparative Model of Vote Choice, 1984**

Character	Full Sample		Political Sophistication		
	Estimate	Std. Error	Low	Medium	High
Intercept	<b>-0.324</b>	0.031	<b>-0.290</b>	<b>-0.299</b>	<b>-0.383</b>
Party ID	<b>0.886</b>	0.052	<b>0.892</b>	<b>0.882</b>	<b>0.822</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.980</b>	0.175	<b>0.831</b>	0.549	1.006
Political Ideology	<b>0.487</b>	0.084	0.035	<b>0.616</b>	<b>0.857</b>
Adj. R-square	0.441		0.340	0.439	0.556
N	861		289	292	278

<b>Competence</b>					
	Estimate	Std. Error	Low	Medium	High
Intercept	<b>-0.437</b>	0.042	<b>-0.384</b>	<b>-0.385</b>	<b>-0.551</b>
Party ID	<b>1.082</b>	0.071	<b>1.127</b>	<b>1.063</b>	<b>0.969</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.498</b>	0.237	<b>1.469</b>	<b>0.868</b>	<b>1.218</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.586</b>	0.114	-0.092	<b>0.843</b>	<b>1.201</b>
Adj. R-square	0.408		0.341	0.404	0.517

<b>Strong Leader</b>					
	Estimate	Std. Error	Low	Medium	High
Intercept	<b>-0.496</b>	0.055	<b>-0.659</b>	<b>-0.524</b>	-0.119
Party ID	<b>1.659</b>	0.091	<b>1.704</b>	<b>1.744</b>	<b>1.127</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.881</b>	0.307	<b>1.983</b>	<b>1.666</b>	<b>1.810</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.870</b>	0.148	0.178	<b>0.890</b>	<b>1.821</b>
Adj. R-square	0.472		0.394	0.483	0.549

<b>Empathy</b>					
	Estimate	Std. Error	Low	Medium	High
Intercept	<b>-0.965</b>	0.051	<b>-0.903</b>	<b>-1.010</b>	<b>-0.944</b>
Party ID	<b>1.574</b>	0.084	<b>1.491</b>	<b>1.700</b>	<b>1.342</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.763</b>	0.283	<b>1.521</b>	<b>1.179</b>	<b>1.605</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.796</b>	0.137	-0.064	<b>0.923</b>	<b>1.639</b>
Adj. R-square	0.483		0.343	0.509	0.604

Feeling Thermometer	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Intercept	<b>-0.083</b>	0.018	<b>-0.100</b>	-0.033	<b>-0.089</b>
Party ID	<b>0.263</b>	0.028	<b>0.241</b>	<b>0.207</b>	<b>0.311</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.251</b>	0.081	0.071	<b>0.356</b>	<b>0.294</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.151</b>	0.039	0.020	0.121	<b>0.303</b>
Character	<b>0.126</b>	0.038	0.122	0.093	<b>0.136</b>
Competence	-0.001	0.022	-0.035	0.007	0.021
Strong Leader	<b>0.142</b>	0.015	<b>0.172</b>	<b>0.158</b>	<b>0.096</b>
Empathy	<b>0.138</b>	0.019	<b>0.136</b>	<b>0.136</b>	<b>0.134</b>
Adj. R-square	0.828		0.789	0.819	0.874

Vote Equation	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Affect	<b>4.480</b>	0.356	<b>6.330</b>	<b>3.799</b>	<b>4.678</b>
Party ID	<b>1.195</b>	0.295	<b>1.582</b>	0.746	<b>1.973</b>
Adj. R-square	0.731		0.749	0.658	0.824
N	862		290	293	279

**Table 5: Full Comparative Model of Vote Choice, 1988**

Character	Full Sample		Political Sophistication		
	Estimate	Std. Error	Low	Medium	High
Intercept	<b>-0.658</b>	0.030	<b>-0.562</b>	<b>-0.649</b>	<b>-0.638</b>
Party ID	<b>1.094</b>	0.053	<b>1.075</b>	<b>1.110</b>	<b>0.835</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.038</b>	0.162	0.261	<b>1.278</b>	<b>2.003</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.217</b>	0.066	<b>-0.221</b>	<b>0.484</b>	<b>0.415</b>
Adj. R-square	0.378		0.275	0.404	0.536
N	1129		363	412	352

**Competence**

Intercept	<b>-0.464</b>	0.027	<b>-0.396</b>	<b>-0.447</b>	<b>-0.436</b>
Party ID	<b>0.912</b>	0.049	<b>0.917</b>	<b>0.904</b>	<b>0.676</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.593</b>	0.149	0.018	<b>0.765</b>	<b>1.293</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.178</b>	0.060	<b>-0.211</b>	<b>0.416</b>	<b>0.395</b>
Adj. R-square	0.318		0.235	0.356	0.434

**Strong Leader**

Intercept	<b>-0.966</b>	0.040	<b>-0.824</b>	<b>-0.983</b>	<b>-0.898</b>
Party ID	<b>1.501</b>	0.070	<b>1.400</b>	<b>1.561</b>	<b>1.138</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.936</b>	0.215	0.222	<b>0.930</b>	<b>2.022</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.260</b>	0.087	<b>-0.337</b>	<b>0.531</b>	<b>0.676</b>
Adj. R-square	0.374		0.263	0.392	0.529

**Empathy**

Intercept	<b>-0.908</b>	0.040	<b>-0.753</b>	<b>-0.911</b>	<b>-0.892</b>
Party ID	<b>1.551</b>	0.070	<b>1.495</b>	<b>1.574</b>	<b>1.236</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.396</b>	0.215	0.406	<b>1.681</b>	<b>2.586</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.281</b>	0.087	<b>-0.334</b>	<b>0.639</b>	<b>0.563</b>
Adj. R-square	0.406		0.292	0.438	0.560

**Feeling Thermometer**

	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Intercept	<b>-0.057</b>	0.016	<b>-0.066</b>	<b>-0.058</b>	-0.017
Party ID	<b>0.309</b>	0.025	<b>0.232</b>	<b>0.320</b>	<b>0.278</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.211</b>	0.065	0.189	0.139	<b>0.285</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.118</b>	0.026	0.007	<b>0.137</b>	<b>0.225</b>
Character	<b>0.099</b>	0.050	0.007	0.122	0.117
Competence	0.098	0.041	0.054	0.016	<b>-0.127</b>
Strong Leader	<b>0.170</b>	0.031	0.083	<b>0.149</b>	<b>0.235</b>
Empathy	<b>0.094</b>	0.014	<b>0.195</b>	0.057	0.084
Adj. R-square	0.755		0.628	0.768	0.849

**Vote Equation**

	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Affect	<b>1.592</b>	0.249	<b>1.524</b>	<b>1.556</b>	<b>1.856</b>
Party ID	<b>4.835</b>	0.371	<b>3.761</b>	<b>6.815</b>	<b>4.997</b>
Adj. R-square	0.740		0.929	0.813	0.840
N	1037		327	382	328

Notes: Data source, 1988 National Election Study. Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Sample size is entered for the first equation only, but is fixed across all estimates. As a rough indicator of statistical significance, bold coefficients indicate that the coefficient is more than two times its standard error. Bold and italicized coefficients indicate that the coefficient is more than three times its standard error.

**Table 6: Full Comparative Model of Vote Choice, 1992**

Character	Full Sample		Political Sophistication		
	Estimate	Std. Error	Low	Medium	High
Intercept	<b>-0.682</b>	0.032	<b>-0.723</b>	<b>-0.576</b>	<b>-0.467</b>
Party ID	<b>1.422</b>	0.060	<b>1.245</b>	<b>1.379</b>	<b>1.088</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.346</b>	0.079	0.026	<b>0.317</b>	<b>0.740</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.757</b>	0.123	-0.105	<b>1.179</b>	<b>1.866</b>
Adj. R-square	0.406		0.246	0.420	0.554
N	1321		435	446	438

**Competence**

Intercept	<b>-0.412</b>	0.028	<b>-0.385</b>	<b>-0.370</b>	<b>-0.362</b>
Party ID	<b>1.016</b>	0.051	<b>0.969</b>	<b>1.037</b>	<b>0.826</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.186</b>	0.067	-0.006	0.046	<b>0.461</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.437</b>	0.104	-0.025	<b>0.695</b>	<b>1.002</b>
Adj. R-square	0.310		0.196	0.322	0.435

**Strong Leader**

Intercept	<b>-0.979</b>	0.036	<b>-0.955</b>	<b>-0.912</b>	<b>-0.846</b>
Party ID	<b>1.613</b>	0.067	<b>1.519</b>	<b>1.611</b>	<b>1.294</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.333</b>	0.088	-0.058	<b>0.312</b>	<b>0.744</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.678</b>	0.136	-0.060	<b>1.144</b>	<b>1.485</b>
Adj. R-square	0.402		0.265	0.427	0.527

**Empathy**

Intercept	<b>-0.983</b>	0.038	<b>-0.986</b>	<b>-0.887</b>	<b>-0.791</b>
Party ID	<b>1.726</b>	0.070	<b>1.636</b>	<b>1.685</b>	<b>1.330</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.451</b>	0.092	-0.014	<b>0.502</b>	<b>0.922</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.890</b>	0.142	-0.007	<b>1.492</b>	<b>1.853</b>
Adj. R-square	0.431		0.290	0.452	0.560

**Feeling Thermometer**

	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Intercept	<b>0.013</b>	0.001	<b>0.011</b>	<b>0.015</b>	<b>0.012</b>
Party ID	<b>0.015</b>	0.002	<b>-0.008</b>	<b>-0.017</b>	<b>-0.011</b>
Political Issues Index	0.003	0.003	0.007	-0.005	<b>-0.017</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.012</b>	0.004	<b>-0.013</b>	0.002	<b>-0.020</b>
Character	<b>-0.007</b>	0.003	-0.002	-0.003	<b>-0.013</b>
Competence	<b>0.007</b>	0.002	0.007	0.004	<b>0.010</b>
Strong Leader	<b>-0.009</b>	0.002	<b>-0.012</b>	-0.002	<b>-0.012</b>
Empathy	<b>-0.007</b>	0.003	-0.008	<b>-0.014</b>	0.002
Adj. R-square	0.471		0.375	0.464	0.554

**Vote Equation**

	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Affect	<b>-32.881</b>	2.590	<b>-26.322</b>	<b>-40.498</b>	<b>-33.156</b>
Party ID	<b>3.083</b>	0.217	<b>2.556</b>	<b>3.060</b>	<b>3.952</b>
Adj. R-square	0.657		0.511	0.675	0.743
N	967		267	326	374

**Table 7: Full Comparative Model of Vote Choice, 1996**

Character	Full Sample		Political Sophistication		
	Estimate	Std. Error	Low	Medium	High
Intercept	<b>-0.397</b>	0.050	<b>-0.643</b>	<b>-0.246</b>	-0.003
Party ID	<b>1.793</b>	0.095	<b>1.660</b>	<b>1.623</b>	<b>1.452</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.169</b>	0.273	0.860	<b>1.785</b>	<b>1.135</b>
Political Ideology	0.210	0.132	0.445	0.313	<b>0.466</b>
Adj. R-square	0.523		0.368	0.579	0.606
N	864		287	299	276

**Competence**

Intercept	<b>-0.550</b>	0.035	<b>-0.689</b>	<b>-0.509</b>	<b>-0.258</b>
Party ID	<b>1.307</b>	0.067	<b>1.341</b>	<b>1.276</b>	<b>0.925</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.873</b>	0.194	0.590	<b>1.194</b>	<b>1.132</b>
Political Ideology	0.176	0.094	0.295	0.202	<b>0.376</b>
Adj. R-square	0.540		0.413	0.584	0.604

**Strong Leader**

Intercept	<b>-0.669</b>	0.049	<b>-0.856</b>	<b>-0.619</b>	<b>-0.270</b>
Party ID	<b>1.784</b>	0.094	<b>1.812</b>	<b>1.756</b>	<b>1.271</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.214</b>	0.271	0.958	<b>1.598</b>	<b>1.518</b>
Political Ideology	0.236	0.131	0.405	0.313	<b>0.468</b>
Adj. R-square	0.528		0.404	0.578	0.579

**Empathy**

Intercept	<b>-1.115</b>	0.056	<b>-1.260</b>	<b>-1.077</b>	<b>-0.769</b>
Party ID	<b>2.058</b>	0.108	<b>2.094</b>	<b>1.974</b>	<b>1.646</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>1.396</b>	0.310	0.719	<b>2.234</b>	<b>1.461</b>
Political Ideology	<b>0.406</b>	0.150	0.444	0.464	<b>0.689</b>
Adj. R-square	0.546		0.420	0.585	0.595

**Feeling Thermometer**

	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Intercept	<b>-0.190</b>	0.018	<b>-0.176</b>	<b>-0.185</b>	<b>-0.253</b>
Party ID	<b>0.252</b>	0.031	<b>0.276</b>	<b>0.198</b>	<b>0.293</b>
Political Issues Index	<b>0.324</b>	0.073	0.159	<b>0.494</b>	0.181
Political Ideology	<b>0.176</b>	0.035	<b>0.132</b>	<b>0.117</b>	<b>0.223</b>
Character	<b>0.043</b>	0.018	0.049	<b>0.068</b>	0.060
Competence	0.142	0.090	0.197	0.109	-0.016
Strong Leader	0.040	0.056	-0.008	0.068	0.154
Empathy	<b>0.094</b>	0.014	<b>0.089</b>	<b>0.086</b>	<b>0.089</b>
Adj. R-square	0.829		0.764	0.857	0.850

**Vote Equation**

	Full Model		Low	Medium	High
	Estimate	Std. Error			
Affect	<b>8.272</b>	0.907	<b>21.223</b>	<b>6.813</b>	<b>7.247</b>
Party ID	<b>2.506</b>	0.438	<b>2.847</b>	<b>2.450</b>	<b>3.958</b>
Adj. R-square	0.886		0.929	0.882	0.889
N	865		288	300	277

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