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Issues in the 2008 presidential election: Perceptions of the candidates and their links to vote

Justin T. Cross

Eastern Illinois University

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Issues in the 2008 Presidential Election:

Perceptions of the Candidates and their Links to Vote

(TITLE)

BY

Justin T. Cross

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Arts in Political Science

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2011

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For Ashley and Ivy
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Abstract

Can the electorate’s beliefs on issues be used as a predictor of vote? More importantly, do voter’s perceptions of a candidate’s position overshadow the party identification model? Arthur H. Miller and Thomas F. Klobucar (2003) studied this subject by analyzing the 2000 American Presidential Election. The aim of this paper is advance their study, by creating a more robust test of their model. The 2008 election is analyzed using data from the American Nation Election Time Series Survey. This election was chosen because it identifies the economy, as the most important issue (CNN exit poll). If issues could have more predictive power than party identification, the 2008 election would show it. Likert scale responses were transformed into proximity scales to create new variables exemplifying how close the electorate felt to Barack Obama and John McCain on a range of issues. A binary logistic regression with actual vote serving as the dependent variable was used to identify which issues were had the most impact. The findings show that, while party identification has the highest influence on the vote, issues measured also had an impact. Defense spending remained significant throughout the test suggesting that electorate voted for the candidate that mirrored their beliefs on that issue. This research shows that the electorate is sophisticated enough to decide which candidate to support, without only reverting to partisan identification.
Acknowledgements

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I would also like to show my gratitude to my Mother, Father, and Stepfather, who has helped finance a major portion of my excursion into higher education. I appreciate everything you have done for me and look forward to being able to repay you...someday.

Finally, I need to say thanks to my future wife Ashley Stickels whose encouragement brought me back to school in the first place. Without her love and support, I would have never completed this project. She has been my champion and friend when times were tough and I am forever indebted to her.

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Justin Cross
Chapter 1: Introduction

How important are issues in an election? How do issues influence the electorate? Some scholars (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960) have postulated that because many election issues are short-lived entities, they do not have the impact that candidates think they do. Others (Miller and Klobucar 2003; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Fiorina 1981) believe that election issues are important for informing the voter who the candidates are, and why they should vote for them. Miller and Klobucar (2003) performed a study analyzing these questions in the 2000 Presidential Election. They used the American National Election Survey (ANES) to create proximity scales measuring how voters felt about the candidates. They found that Al Gore and George Bush were each advantaged by distinct issues, some of which had large impacts on voting. In 2000, there was no major issue that dominated the minds of the electorate as the economy did in 2008. Did voters in 2008 vote for the candidate whose perceived stance on important issues was closest to their own? Or, was the desire for a change in party control so strong that the issues fell to the wayside? To answer these questions, a binary regression measuring the impact that the voter’s perceived proximity to the candidates had on the election outcome will be performed. In addition, controls are added to create results that are more robust than those of Miller and Klobucar (2003).

Every election is studied by political scientists for years following the results. This is especially true for presidential elections for obvious reasons. The election results are believed to contain a large amount of data that is ripe for picking to those who are
so inclined. This creates a couple of consequences for this work. First, there is a large amount of background literature. Actually, there is an almost endless amount of literature dealing with the importance of issues, elections, and partisanship. Because of this, a researcher at my level would be foolish to make the claim that the following literature review encompasses all theories or views on the matters at hand. However, every attempt has been made to locate the most current and salient work. It will also include brief historical reviews, to provide a context for the following study. Second, because this study is happening so close to the 2008 election, there will be some sources of information that will not be available yet. In the two years since the election, there has been a large amount of data released to the public; however, there are some instances where this is not the case. The 2008 American National Election Survey is one such example. This will be the chief source of data for this research for reasons that will be more fully explained in the methodology section. While most of the survey information has become available, the data set has not been finalized and it is not expected to be until late next year. This put increased pressure on this researcher to find data that can reliably create inferences based on the election results. A third consequence of the large amount of data that is created by presidential elections is that an abundance of caution should be taken when making claims of causation. There are many nuances present in this type of study. One should always be mindful that a correlation does not imply causation. Just because a number of variables are found to have a correlation with the dependant variable, we should not assume that they are
mutually exclusive occurrences. In other words, the dependant variable could have occurred regardless of the occurrence of the independent variable(s).
Chapter 2: The 2008 Election

During the run-up to the 2008 Presidential election, it was common to hear that the vote would be a referendum on the Bush presidency. This was no surprise to many presidential scholars who have studied the US elections and found that this is typically the case when there is no incumbent running (Crotty 2009; Jacobson 2009). The major issues of the election were all influenced by the actions that were taken by the outgoing Bush administration. Domestic and international concerns were included in the campaign on both sides of the aisle; however, the economy became the leading issue in time for the general election (Crotty 2009; CNN). The increasingly negative feeling towards President Bush and his party made it apparent to some that the Republican nominee would be facing an uphill battle.

Survey results showed record low approval ratings for the President and the Congress as the election came near. Trust and confidence in the government had dropped from a high of around 70% during Bush’s second term to the mid 40’s (Crotty 2009, 300). Presidential approval ratings were in a steady decline for both Republicans and Democrats. Democrats and independents had the lowest ratings of the president, both being below 40% by the time of the election (Crotty 2009, 298). The Republicans’ ratings held above 60% for the vast majority of the administration’s reign, however it was clear that support was declining (Crotty 2009, 298). To be fair, the Democratic controlled Congress’s approval rating had been experiencing a near parallel approval-rating drop. The number one reason for the precipitous drop in approval rating for the president was the failing economy (Crotty 2009). In addition, as it became clear that the
worst was yet to come, the prospects for a successful Republican candidacy seemed to be slim; “the mystery is not Barack Obama’s victory but John McCain’s ability to remain competitive” (Jacobson 2009, 10). The low approval rating of the Republican Party also contributed to a lack of identity for the voters. Some wanted a return of a more conservative leader, while others felt that McCain’s maverick style was what Washington needed to break out of gridlock. The lack of party identity also likely increased the concentration on McCain’s personal image and stance on issues. “The less well developed the party image, the more sensitive voters are to the candidate” (Popkin 1994; 69).

During the 2006 mid-term election, the issue that dominated the scene was the Iraq War, and by many accounts, this was expected to continue until the presidential election two years later (Jacobson 2009). However, poor performance of the economy became too large for voters to ignore around the time of the first bailouts (Jacobson 2009, 4). In 2006, negative feelings toward President Bush began to emerge, they took hold, and by 2008, those feelings had become stronger (Jacobson 2009, 2). The bailout’s perceived failure to provide relief only solidified this feeling as Obama began to link McCain with the performance of the previous administration. Both McCain and Obama had been taking positions on the opposite ends of the political scale, and, as the economy began to undermine the Republicans, Obama was able to capitalize and receive increased support among Democrats and independents (Jacobson 2009, 7-9). The interesting fact was that both McCain and Obama took positions that have been found to be at the extremes of the political spectrum (Jesse 2010, 206). “More than two
thirds of the voters,” were estimated to hold positions that were in between the two (Jesse 2010, 206). This illustrates the high level of conflict that was taking place between the two parties. The 2008 election has gone down as one of the most politicized elections in recent American history.

Table 1: CNN Exit Poll: Most Important Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2004 CNN Exit Poll: Most important issues</th>
<th>2008 CNN Exit Poll: Most Important Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Values</td>
<td>Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy/ Jobs</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Health Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>Energy Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
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Notes: 2004 CNN Exit Poll taken on November 2, 2004, total number of respondents = 13,660. The 2008 Exit Poll was taken on November 4, 2008, total respondents = 17,836.

The 2008 election was the obvious choice for this study for a couple of reasons.

The Democrats retaking the White House was done at a time where the public was highly energized. Voting rates, among eligible voters were up by over 10% from 1996, reaching 62% (McDonald 2010). Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin provided an impetus for more women to become involved. In addition, the nomination of a young African American presidential candidate increased minority voting as well as the youth vote.

The high voting rate also implied that the numbers of those paying attention to the election were elevated as well. Table 1, compares the issues that were cited as being the most important in 2004 and 2008. The most striking change over the four years is the rise in the number of respondents claiming the economy as being the most important issue. This illustrates the extent to which the public was feeling the
downturn. The best time to look for proof of issue voting would be when there is an issue upon which everyone agrees.

In addition to the economy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were issues that show up in both polls (Table 1). The popularity of both was at all time low levels and still falling at the time of the 2008 election. The war in Iraq had switched from an approval of near 75% to a 60% disapproval rating (Crotty 2009, 300). This trend from approval to disapproval can be directly correlated with the number of casualties suffered in theatre. Had the economy not crashed when it did, it is conceivable that both wars would have become the major issue in the election. A change in direction was desired by the public for every issue. Confidence in institutions, trust in government, and satisfaction with the country’s direction were all at eight-year lows (Crotty 2009, 303-05). Spending on war, in a time of domestic difficulty, with casualties being the only measurable result gave the Republican candidate a tough hill to climb.

At the end of the election, it was clear that the election was a referendum on the Bush handling of the economy (Crotty 2009, 306). It must also be noted that the Obama campaign was run well and they have set high precedence for money raising and effectiveness. Obama received 53% of the popular vote and won 365 Electoral College votes to McCain’s 173 (Crotty 2009, 307). The numbers also show that Obama received large levels of support from women (57%), Hispanics (86%), and Blacks (99%) (Crotty 2009, 309). Young voters also favored Obama over McCain by a significant portion. Another striking figure was the level of the partisan divide that was present in the election. The role of partisanship in the US should not be overlooked when analyzing
the election results. The level of polarization that was present in the 2008 election was high. This coupled with the relatively high turnout among young, Democrat voters proved to be the death nail in the McCain campaign. The breakdown shows that the 93% of Democrats voted for Obama, a rate that was on par with the Democratic vote in the two previous presidential elections. The number that made the partisan divide significant was the high numbers of young voters of which 61% voted Democrat (Jacobson 2009, 308).
Chapter 3: Literature Review

The place to begin the literature review is with *The American Voter* (Campbell et. al. 1960). The authors’ work gives a view of how the voter makes a choice at the ballot box. Most importantly, it clearly displays evidence that weakens the assumption that votes can be determined by examining the partisan makeup of the electorate (Campbell et. al. 1960, 529). The fact that remains is that there are a number of influences on the decision to vote, so much that the results can lead to the election of an individual that would not have been predicted by using partisan makeup as the sole prediction variable (Campbell et. al. 1960, 529). The question that remains is, if party identification is not an accurate predictor of elections, then what other forces direct a vote one way or the other?

Campbell et. al. (1960) make the argument that an individual sums the feelings they have on a variety of issues in order to arrive at the candidate that best fits their opinions (524). Each issue is given a rank of importance in the mind of the voter; this is typically a subconscious act, and then will be assessed as to how well the candidate’s position on the issue agrees with the voters. The number of issues that play a role in the decision making process depends greatly on the individual. For some it can be as simple as a single issue, for others it can become incredibly complicated with an inclusion of a wide variety of unrelated issues (Flanigan and Zingale 1991, 123).

**Issues and elections**

The role that issues play in the mind of the voters can be manipulated in order for a candidate to change their chances at being elected. The candidates can, and
frequently do, change their positions on popular issues. This is typically done in order to
differentiate them from the rest of the competition; however, there are many other reasons why this is done. A position is one of the things in an election that is relatively flexible for change. The area around a particular issue is frequently nuanced enough that a candidate can change their stance on the minutia of the issue and alter his perception among the electorate (Flanigan and Zingale 1991, 122). For candidates, a position on an issue can adjust the way that he or she is viewed by the people, and this can be beneficial because, not every identifying feature is controllable in this way. Party Identification is one example of a characteristic that is not nearly as changeable as an issue stance is. Sure, there are cases where a candidate has changed their party identification with some success. However, the chances of changing partisan affiliation without alienating the voters who elected you are very slim. The flexibility of candidates' issue stances has been studied many times before (Kaufmann 2004; Fournier 2003). The purpose of this paper is not to further that area of study, but instead to find what roles the issues played in the 2008 Presidential Election. The ability and willingness of a candidate to adjust their position on an issue is a testament to the perceived importance that these positions have on the election outcome.

The positions taken by candidates receive constant attention from the public today. The attention is increased when candidates change their stance ("flip-flop"). Despite this, there are numerous studies that have found that the electorate, in general, is woefully uninformed on the issues that are facing the country during an election (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, and Wiesberg 2008, 164). In
addition, of those who do have a slight grasp on what the major issues are voters have trouble identifying which candidate supports a particular side of an issue (Campbell et. al. 1960; RePass 1971, 389). This finding has led some political scientists to conclude that it is very difficult for a single-issue to have a major impact on the voter's decision to support one candidate over another (Lewis-Beck, et. al. 2008, 162). It is more likely that the amalgamation of multiple issues of varying degrees of importance is what results in a vote.

The role of issues in an election can be viewed from two different viewpoints. The first is how a candidate’s issue stance affects a voter’s decision-making process. This view has been studied at length, by Campbell, Stokes, V.O. Key and many other contributors. It is designed to enable further understanding of an electorate with the goal of increasing our ability to predict outcomes and influences in an election. The second view is what this paper is going to be chiefly concerned. That is, how issues are correlated with the results of the election. It is more descriptive in nature. This type of study has been placed under increased scrutiny since the 2000 election. The models that used economic factors predicted that Al Gore would win the 2000 Presidential Election. These were disproved with the election of George W. Bush, who won due to the effect of short-term campaign issues that some scholars believed to be inept at influencing election results (Campbell 1996; Lewis-Beck and Rice 2008; Miller and Klobucar 2003, 102). This view is more concerned with a description of what happened in the election and offers the opportunity to paint a more complete picture.
Each issue has its own level of importance. The level of importance will change depending upon two criteria, the individual and the particularities of that election. The more important an issue is perceived, the more likely it is to have an effect on an individual’s vote (Fournier, Blais Nadeau, Gidengil, and Nevitte 2003, 52). In a study on the Canadian electorate Fournier et. al. (2003) found a link between individual’s feelings about an issue and their ability/willingness to evaluate the candidate on that issue. This shows that the role that issues play in an election that is full of salient issues, as some have suggested the 2008 election was, can have a relative increase in importance. When a significant section of the public feels emotionally tied to a large number of issues, they will be more likely to examine the candidates based on how they feel they would treat that issue. If the voter feels that the candidate would take action on the issue in a manner that they feel is appropriate then they are more likely to vote for that candidate. This supports the claim that issues play an important role in elections. If people judge candidates more stringently on the issues that they find to be important, then they are less likely to judge the candidate on the issues considered to be unimportant (Fournier et. al. 2003, 63). Therefore, if one is able to find what the major issues are in an election, and how the candidates are being judged on those issues then, they have the potential to predict which candidate will be successful. The importance of this finding is that it shows how issues have an effect on the outcome of an election. By looking at the issues that were important after the election there will be the potential to extrapolate how the candidates’ positions on the issues resonated with the electorate.
Issues have also been shown to have a link to partisanship. John Petrocik (1980) developed a theory based on the idea that each party (and/or individual), owns a particular issue (Issue Ownership). He then goes on to conclude that it is in each candidate’s best interest to stay within his or her area of ownership. The reason that this theory is valuable in this analysis is that it suggests that each party in a presidential election would benefit to keep their focus on the issues that are owned. The Republicans and the Democrats are both known to be champions of certain causes. If the later identified “major issues” of the 2008 election are “owned” by one party more than the other, then we will be able to assume that that particular party had an advantage from the beginning. It should be noted that this method will not be given too much weight in analysis. The issues in a presidential election are wide ranging, and one cannot forget that the previous administrations actions will likely weigh heavily on the public’s perception of the parties ability to handle negative issues. Because of this, and the large amount of bad news that was being created during the election buildup, it would seem obvious that the Republicans, as the incumbent party, were at a distinct disadvantage in 2008.

It has also been suggested that although each party has distinct issues, the candidates are not always forced to stay within those boundaries (Kaufmann 2004). Kaufmann’s (2004) study of Senate elections finds that a candidate with a record of accomplishment can overcome “party orthodoxy” (299). This she says shows that a candidate with a well-rounded record could break free of the typical constraints that partisan politics can create (Kaufmann 2004, 299). Therefore, while we can assume a
certain degree of advantage for the non-incumbent party on the issues, that advantage should not be considered automatic.

**Issues and Voting**

What drives a member of the electorate to vote for one candidate and against another? This theme has driven many scholars' entire professional lives, and we have not found a definitive answer yet. One of the most influential contributors to this topic is Morris Fiorina’s, 1981 book *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. In this book, Fiorina (1981) develops his retrospective voting model to answer some of the important questions regarding voter behavior. The idea of retrospective voting claims that as voters we decide our vote based on perceptions of past actions then, infer which candidate is most likely to either stick to the desirable status quo; or make a desirable change (Fiorina 1981). “Good past performance... creates favorable future expectations” (Fiorina 1981; 198).

Fiorina (1981) claims that the items a voter is most likely to use for retrospective evaluation are political issues. In fact, he says these can be the most powerful influences on vote and partisan identification (Fiorina 1981). The major issues of an outgoing administration factor in to the preceding election by encouraging voters to identify with a party based on past performance. For example, it could be inferred that because of the negative perception of President G. W. Bush’s handling of the economy, voters would not trust another Republican to do any better. Fiorina (1981) is careful to say that the electorate reacts to perceived outcomes rather than actual outcomes of policies. This distinction has made his model more resilient to findings that the
electorate is much less educated about the issues than is required to allow for an
“informed vote.”

It has been known for some time that the electorate can be ambivalent to the actual results of public policy. This encouraged people to claim that issues could not play a large role in election results. How can an unknown variable affect an outcome? Fiorina’s (1981) model found that despite the low levels of knowledge held by the electorate, the issues “consistently show important effects...and suggests that the mass public does react to policy outcomes, social conditions, and economic circumstances even when unaware of government activities that contribute to those end states” (195). Since Fiorina published his work, there has been debate over whether a voter can make these decisions while maintaining low levels of fact based knowledge. Lupia and McCubbins (1998) argue convincingly that it is not necessary for the voter to be completely informed to make a “reasoned choice.” The voter can actually use a very limited amount of personal knowledge and mix it with other informal sources of information (news, trusted opinion, or politician) in order to make a choice (vote) that is based on what is most beneficial to the individual.

Fiorina’s (1981) work on retrospective voting has been continued by countless political scientists. This aspect of voting studies has proven to be a hard one to capture fully. While Fiorina (1981) has given ample reason to believe in his theory, a problem remains. When testing for this type of interaction it is difficult to measure retrospective voting because controls (party and demographics) have a tendency to explain a large majority of the variance (Lanoue 1994, 203). The effects of the controls are hard to
ignore, however there continues to be ample evidence of the effects of retrospective voting as well (Lanoue 1994). One factor that has weakened the argument for retrospective voting is that not all voters will engage in it. With the size and complexity of the electorate, it is difficult to measure accurately how many actually do. However, the difficulty in testing retrospective voting should not be reason to throw the model out. Fiorina (1981) points out that because “retrospective judgments have direct impacts on the formation of future expectations and on party identification...controversies over issue voting versus party identification miss the point: issues are in party identification” (2001). Issues are one of the key elements in the running tally idea suggested by some scholars. Party identification is the conclusion that is drawn from a voters feeling on a variety of issues, the one party that represents the voters feelings the closest is selected (Popkin 1994).

Another issue is that retrospective voting may be employed more frequently in certain elections due to their characteristics. The presence of an incumbent as well as the state of the economy will both have effects on the level of retrospective voting. In all probability, in the 2008 election the levels of retrospective voting would be higher than average because of the relatively extreme nature of the economic difficulties that the US was facing at the time. There was also the frequently discussed notion that the 2008 election being a referendum on the Bush administration, “and the failed policies of George W. Bush” (CQ Transcriptions 2008). It would be no surprise to find that a sizable

1 Emphasis is Fiorina’s not my own
portion of the electorate agreed with Obama’s statements on the Bush failures, and this portion would have risen as the economic situation worsened.

Page and Shapiro (2001) write on the subject of rational public opinion and come to some interesting conclusions. They find that the public’s opinions regarding many political issues are stable. The public requires some dramatic impetus to create a measurable change among a population survey. It is the typical finding that the public is rather unengaged in the political process. This is seen when people have difficulty answering even the most cursory of questions regarding simple concepts taught early on in education (Lupia 2008). This has led to other researchers to look into phenomena of citizens giving their preference on policies that do not exist (Prior and Lupia 2008). People obviously have opinions about what legislation is important to them and their vote is one of the ways that they show this preference (Niemi and Weisberg 2001).

Partisanship has always been a major factor in a person’s decision on who to vote for (Niemi and Weisberg 2001; Weisberg 2002). However, there are also other factors that can play major roles as well. There is the position of economic retrospective voting, which has been studied by numerous scholars according to Richard Nadeau and Michel S. Lewis-Beck (2001). They conclude that the economic variables are very salient, but not all the time, or in all elections. However, some researchers (Godbout and Belanger 2007) have found evidence to doubt the assertion that the economy plays such a significant role in the outcome of presidential elections. This was found to be especially true in the case of open seat elections, as the 2008 Presidential election was. In open seat elections, the results of their study suggested that when there was not
incumbent, there was a corresponding drop in their measure of economic voting (Godbout and Belanger 2007, 552).

Despite their findings (Godbout and Belanger 2007, 552), they show that there is a lot of room for further explanation in regards to issue voting. In 2004, the economy was doing relatively well, especially when viewed with the benefit of hindsight. Despite this, the economy was one of the leading issues in the exit polls for voters (CNN, 2004). However, President Bush had begun to see a drop in his approval rating regarding his handling of the economy according to the ANES, which found that the economy was only behind terrorism and Iraq in the minds of Americans (Abramson, Aldrich, Rickershauser, and Rohde 2007). The placement of terrorism and Iraq at the top of the list of important issues helped Bush gain an edge over Kerry, who was attacked for being antiwar and weak on terrorism.

Abramson, et al. (2007) used a theory that placed the importance of vote receiving, primarily on party identification, and where voters stand on the issues. They showed it is of key importance that the voter successfully identifies the issue with the candidate. People need to identify the issue with the candidate in order for their true preferences to be represented by their vote and, this is not always easy. Bishop, Tuchfarber, and Oldendick (1986) find that citizens will frequently give opinions about fictitious policies just because of the pressure to give an answer. It is not hard to imagine that when faced with conflicting news reports, and the large amount of information that becomes available during an election, people will easily identify issue positions with the incorrect candidate. The importance of having an informed
electorate is noted in a study that focused on the knowledge of a particular portion of the electorate. “Without an adequate understanding of politics, citizens are less capable of voting in a way that furthers political representation” (Nicholson, Pantoja, and Segura 2006, 259).

Many of the scholars that have attempted to measure the ability of the public to assign accurately a candidate’s position on issues have been dismayed to find that the public is woefully uneducated (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Nicholson, et. al. 2006; Verba, Brady, and Schlozman 1995). The importance of having an informed voting public is stressed in nearly every publication on the matter. The ultimate goal of an individual voting is to achieve a level of representation for his beliefs in how government should be run. If the individual is not knowledgeable enough about the candidates’ views on issues then they will be ill prepared to make an informed vote. When being unknowledgeable about candidates becomes the norm, then an election’s ability to create a representative government will be severely reduced. Another important aspect of having an informed public is that the level of accountability will rise (Nicholson, et. 2006). However, Lupia and McCubbins (1998) are not alarmed by these findings. They find that even with low levels of information, there is still the potential for an informed vote, should certain criteria be reached. The individual can reach out for other sources of knowledge to supplement his own and reach a conclusion, which allows accurate representation to be possible.

The descriptions of issue voting and the public’s lack of knowledge regarding electoral politics are important for this review because they provide context for the
main concerns of this paper. However, the problems that many have found with studying issue voting are not believed to be a hurdle that will need to be overcome. Scholars have said that, “political knowledge is a critical prerequisite for issue voting,” which is not opposed in this paper (Nicholson, et. al. 2006). The studies discussed above describe issue voting in elections with the ultimate goal of relating voter behavior. This paper does not attempt a similar feat. This author wishes to illustrate how the major issues of the 2008 election can be correlated with the results. By doing this the stage will be set for future research to focus on the levels of political knowledge held by the public at that time. Finding these correlations will do more to further our knowledge on how the major issues of an election are translated into votes. It is of less interest to this paper to find whether the views that the public had about the candidate were accurate. Regardless of the accuracy, there were certain issues that dominated the discourse in the run-up to the election, the goal here is to find what those issues were in the minds of the voters and test their associations with the election results.

Model Study

The principal idea for this work comes from Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) research on issues and the Presidential Election of 2000. In this work, the authors make the distinction that some scholars of presidential elections have suggested that issues play only a minor role in election outcomes (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992; Campbell 1996; Miller and Klobucar 2003, 102). Because of the fleeting nature of the election, issues do not have enough time or weight to create a strong effect on the outcome. Fiorina et. al. (2003), found that the result of the election in 2000 was so far from what the
predictions were calling for that one of the only remaining solutions was to allow for the
effect of issues in the prediction models. So much time and effort is spent in an election
on the issues and the positions that the candidates take on them, one would think that
there must be a reason. The issues that come up in an election are shown to be a
snapshot of the major issues that are facing the country at that specific time. This is not
to suggest that each of the issues that are brought up in an election is items that must
be dealt with by the incoming president. However, each of the candidates become
known by their positions on the issues and therefore they stand to gain and lose votes
based on them (Miller and Klobucar 2003). This process can be unfair to the candidates
because as previously discussed, a portion of the electorate will have false impressions
of the candidate’s positions (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997). The fact remains that the
issues must play a role in the election outcomes.

The 2008 election was similar to the election in 2000 in a number of ways. Most
of which will be discussed later, but a key similarity was that after each the party’s
nominations were secured, the race was between two candidates. Because the issues
are what enable the voters to find differences among the candidates, there is pressure
for them to take opposing positions. This is what McCain and Obama were found to
have done in the previously cited research (Jesse 2010, 206). The larger the ideological
difference between the two candidates the increased likelihood that the public will be
able to identify accurately which nominee mirrors their values. Miller and Klobucar
(2003) write that the study of issues during an election helps us understand which issues
are “worthy of public debate” (102). Their study identifies what these issues were in the 2000 Presidential Election and how they compared to previous elections.

Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) study utilized the 2000 ANES study for their data. They discover which issues were most salient in the minds of the voters. Then they breakdown the totals to identify which portions of the population were most concerned about which issue. For example, they show that in the 2000 election 21% of Democrats claimed education was the most important issue for them, which compared to 14% and 12% for independents and Republicans respectively (Miller and Klobucar 2003, 105). This enabled them to draw conclusions about which of the issues would be more beneficial to which candidate. In addition, Pearson r measures were used to show links between specific policies and the vote. This added evidence to their claims of how a single issue may have brought more benefit to one candidate at the expense of another.

The most interesting section of the article is Table 7, which identifies the public perceptions of both candidates in the 2000 election (they excluded Ralph Nader) for ten of the major election issues (Miller and Klobucar 2003, 116). When Miller and Klobucar (2003) include the self-placements of respondents in the same table, they are able to use a simple equation to suggest which issues were more beneficial for each candidate. Their equation creates a proximity scale to measure the average perceived distance between a voter and the candidate. By finding the difference between a self-placement variable and the perception of a candidate, they create a new variable gauging which issues would benefit a candidate. They base their conclusions on the idea that if a
candidate is perceived to mirror the respondent’s self-placement then that candidate holds an advantage (Miller and Klobucar 2003, 117).

The final portion of the study employs the use of a both Logit and OLS regression analysis. This allows the authors to solidify their results without relying only on the self-placement scale to indentify a candidate advantage. The dependent variable they use is whether the respondent voted for Gore or Bush in the election. By running this against the issue variables, the authors are able to show definitively which issues resulted in votes for a candidate. The results were also used to suggest which campaigns were the most effective at getting their position to translate into votes (Miller and Klobucar 2003, 118). Overall, the results of both analyses show that on many of the issues there was a small measure of difference between the candidates. This was reflected in the election results in 2000 as we all remember. The end result of the work, according to the authors, is that on certain issues Bush was more successful at translating his positions into votes. Their results do give Gore credit for holding an advantage on a few of the issues that were measured, however, he was not as successful as converting these feelings into votes.

One major criticism of the model Miller and Klobucar use is that they do not include control variables in their regressions. The failure to do so undermines their results. The goal of this paper will be to extend this work to the 2008 election to illustrate which issues McCain’s team was able to translate into votes. By including a similar model for study this research will extend Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) on to the 2008 election. However, by addressing the lack of control variables in the previous
study, the results in this study will be more persuasive. The more exciting prospect for this study will be to find an answer to the question asked earlier on, how McCain managed to stay in the race as long as he did.
Chapter 4: Methodology

This study is based on previously published work by Miller and Klobucar (2003). They used the ANES and data manipulation to produce a convincing argument for the role of issues in the 2000 Presidential race. They used regression analysis to demonstrate that a range of issues played a significant role in the election outcome. This paper will attempt to create a similar argument for the 2008 election. This addition is useful for a couple of reasons. In 2000, no single overarching issue dominated the minds of the country as in 2008. The economy in 2008 would continue to slide further as the election progressed making the issue more salient for every voter. Studying how the issues are affecting the voter can have a lasting impact on the attention that these last minute issues receive.

Miller and Klobucar (2003) used a number of strategies in their work to study what was happening during the election. This paper attempts to replicate some of their strategies. However, every effort has been made to create an original piece of work that has added new methods of measurement, different perspectives, and introduces a more reliable technique for claiming issue importance in the election. While Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) work is the inspiration, it was important to improve on the study by creating a more reliable outcome.

The first step was to identify which issues were likely to have an impact on the vote in 2008. This was done by finding reliable polling information from the CNN News website. The information gathered is in the form of an exit poll. It should be understood that this information should be used with some caution because of the
unreliability of this type of poll. However, this poll adds to the description of what was on the mind of the voter, as well as, places the election in context with earlier elections. The poll clearly shows how the nation went from one election with no single issue of major importance, to one were the economy had a near monopoly on the minds of voters.

The 2008 ANES study was used for the remainder of this analysis. The original questions used in the research are included in the appendix. The 2008 ANES Time Series Study interviewed over 2000 individuals in a pre- and post- election survey. All of the variables used in this paper were taken from the pre-election interviews with the exception of the abortion variable, which is asked in the post interview, as well as the dependant variable “actual vote.” It is not clear why the abortion questions are asked in the post-election interview. They were included in Table 2 and 3 because it gives the reader the ability to compare the issues to a more familiar topic. The dependant variable “actual vote” will be discussed later in more detail, but it is asked in the post-election survey to increase the reliability of the measure. If the question were included in the pre-election interview, there would be the chance that the respondent could change their mind and therefore reduce the usefulness of the measure.

The issues used in the earlier portions of the paper were used because they met certain selection criteria. The responses could not be open ended, for the purposes of creating a consistent measurement; the Likert style response was preferred. In the 2008, ANES every issue question that is included in the initial portions of this study was based on a seven-point scale, with the abortion issue being the only exception. This
type of scale enabled the creation of proximity scales, which are a key feature to the
later analysis. Another important criterion was that each variable used included similar
questions regarding the perceived positions of the candidates on that issue. For
example, if the respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale regarding gun
control, they also were also asked to place Barack Obama and John McCain on the same
scale. After this initial selection process there were nine issue questions selected.
Below there is the title for each of the selected variables as well as a brief description of
how the question was worded. For the full description, please see Appendix 2.

Some of the questions were asked to identify a policy direction: Equality for
Women-should men and a woman have equal roles or is the woman’s role in the home?
Environment/Jobs-should the government create jobs at the expense of the
environment, or protect the environment at the expense of jobs? Government
Healthcare-should the government provide health insurance to the public or should the
government stay out of healthcare? Government Guarantee Jobs- should the
government ensure jobs for all or leave each person to get jobs on their own? And,
Government Aid to Blacks-should the government help blacks or leave them to help
themselves?

All of the above variables were asked in a way that did not mention an increase
in spending. This is why I have labeled them as policy related questions. Two of the
variables that were selected are classified as spending issues because they directly ask
whether the respondent believes there should be an increase or decrease in
government spending. The two spending measures were overall government spending
(Government Spending) and spending on defense (Defense Spending). These two variables are regarded as two of the more significant due to the economic downturn and because a majority of Americans (63%) said, it was the most important issue for them in the election (CNN, 2004).

The abortion issue was included in the post-election survey and was based on a four-point scale. This type of scale does not allow for the respondent to take a moderate position. They must choose, at varying degrees, whether the wish to allow or disallow abortions. This variable was included in the early portions of the analysis because of its nature as a ubiquitous issue for all recent elections. This variable can also provide additional context about the position of the electorate at the time of the election, as well as to provide the reader with additional evidence regarding which candidate had an advantage (Table 3).

The final variable is included because of its importance to the analysis. However, its status as an “issue” is somewhat questionable. It is liberal or conservative self-placement. Granted this may not be considered an issue in the same manner that the earlier discussed variables are, but this variable is important to this study because of the broad nature of the question. When respondents were asked to place themselves and the candidates on a seven-point liberal or conservative scale, they are revealing what types of policies and spending habits with which they might agree. Because the survey can be relatively vague and limited in its scope, this type of variable can be relied upon to give valuable insight into the mind of the electorate.
The following chapter will include three sections of analysis. (The first is a partisan breakdown of responses to each of the variables previously discussed.) It is organized so that the reader can choose which issue they are interested in and find which position the majority in a single party takes on that issue. When creating the data for this table each of the seven point scale responses were transformed into a trichotomized version. This technique was also used in Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) analysis of the 2000 election (114). By dividing the responses into three categories, we get a simplified table that allows for a clearer presentation of information. It is true that some information is lost with this strategy; however, the purpose of this table is to show who favors which position. The abortion issue was coded differently because of its four-point scale. In its case, the middle two responses were coded as being “moderate” and the two outliers were placed at the appropriate side. This was done first for continuity in the table. As well as because the desire was to display a rough measurement of where the public is on all the issues and because not including a moderate position there would be little reason to include the variable at all.

The public perceptions of the candidates are in the second section of the analysis and are also inspired by the Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) piece (115). Following the discussion of the electorate’s positions on the issues the goal was to establish which candidate was advantaged by each issue. This is done by using a means score of the self-placement as well as the placements of each of the candidates. The variables included are the same as the previous table. Instead of using the trichotomized version of the data, the real numbers were used. By doing this, the information loss that was
present in the issue breakdown does not continue to be a concern. To calculate the values found in the table first a mean was calculated for each issue. This was done for the self-placement, as well as the placements of John McCain and Barack Obama. As earlier discussed all the variables were based on a seven-point scale with abortion being the only exception.

Once the means were calculated, the absolute difference was found between both candidates and the self-placements. This number is representative of the distance perceived between each survey respondent and the candidates. The higher the number, the further the respondent feels they are from that candidate. If an individual places John McCain a greater distance from their self-placement than Barack Obama, then it is assumed that they are more likely to agree with Obama than McCain. Once all of these issues are compiled for all survey respondents, the candidate to whom they feel the closest is the one who is more likely to receive their vote.

The difference found between the respondent and Obama and the respondent and McCain, are also captured for each issue. The Obama difference was always subtracted from the McCain difference. A positive number always indicates that, more respondents placed themselves closer John McCain than Barack Obama while, a negative number indicates an Obama advantage. By manipulating the numbers in this way, it becomes possible to see which issues are more beneficial to either candidate. This analysis, coupled with the information in the exit polls can be used as a predictor for who would become the next president. The issues that were cited as being the most important by the electorate are also the most likely issues to support a vote decision. If
an individual feels that economic issues are the most important and says that Obama’s economic platform is closest to their own, then they are most likely to vote for Obama. Conversely, a voter who felt that they agreed with most of Obama’s issues but believed that abortion was the most important issue may not give Obama their vote.

The final portion of the analysis is done with a Logit regression, this method of analysis was chosen for a couple of reasons. First, the inspiration for this study used a similar method to analyze the 2000 Election (Miller and Klobucar 2003). However, because of this paper is using a different data set where some of the variables have changed there are some glaring differences between them. Miller and Klobucar (2003), only briefly described the coding that was used in their study. As a result, most of the coding procedures were developed just for this paper. Because, the ultimate goal to explain whether voters positions on issues are a useful predictor of vote is the same as Miller and Klobucar’s (2003), there are similar, but not identical procedures used.

Logit regression was also selected because of the dichotomous nature of the dependant variable. This was coded as 0 for an Obama vote and 1 for a McCain vote. The results of the regression are available in Table 4. An OLS regression was also run because of its similarities to Logit, as well as its readable results. While the analysis will be done using the Logit results, the OLS table will be included in the first section of the appendix. Miller and Klobucar (2003), use both regressions as well, however, they only refer to the OLS regression in the discussion and, place the Logit regression in the appendix without including analysis. This weakened their discussion because, the OLS regression results were not ideal for their dichotomous dependant variable.
Miller and Klobucar's (2003) use fifteen independent variables from the 2000 ANES data set. This was also the original goal for this research as well. Unfortunately, in the 2008 ANES the designers decided to test a new style of questioning. When performing a Logit regression any respondent that failed to give a useable response to every variable included was discarded. The result being that the sample number for many of the variables being used were cut in half from their original sample size (<1000). Once the independent variables were all included in the regression equation, the \( n \) had become so small (<300) that there could be little confidence placed in the results. In order to combat these problems only five variables were included in the regression equations. Luckily, the remaining variables were some of the more salient issues for the study. The resulting table is easier to comprehend, regains a high \( n \) (≈700), and still represents the original intent of the study.

The 2008 ANES asked "new" and "old" versions of the same questions. The "old" versions, named so because they have been used in previous ANES studies. The first two tables described relied only on the "old" questions. Each set of questioning was divided in such a way that each could stand alone as a representative sample for the US. The "new" questions were, in some cases, asked the same (or a similar) question as the "old". However, the possible response was changed from a seven-point scale to a three-point scale. The possible responses were favor, oppose, or neither favor or oppose.

There were five questions where the "old" and "new" versions were nearly identical. These variables were liberal/conservative, government spending, defense
spending, government aid to blacks, and government healthcare. The decision was made to recode the “new” and “old” variables for these questions, creating a variable that was a combination of the two. The steps taken to create the combination variable were performed with the utmost attention to detail to ensure that no loss or mixture of data would occur.

For the “old” versions, which were in the seven-point scale, the only option was to recode so they were three-point variables. All responses that were not within the seven-point scale (e.g. refusals or inappropriate responses) were recoded as missing variables. This was done to ensure that their presence would not contaminate the valid data with meaningless values. Any feeling for an issue outside of the moderate position would be recoded as a one or a three (e.g. if 1,2,3=1 then 5,6,7=3). This allowed for the moderate position to be placed in the center of the order. For example in the seven-point version, a four have would become a two.

The new versions did not require as much work. There were two main considerations when recoding the new variables. First, the values that coincided with a conservative position would need to be similarly coded across all variables. Second, in order to retain continuity with the data, the favor, oppose and neither responses would have to be placed in the same order as the recoded old variables. Therefore, the recoding commands typically appeared as 1=1, 2=3, and 3=2. Again, this was done to create a variable that was based on a three-point ordinal scale, with the middle value always being the moderate position. Following these recoding procedures, the two recoded variables were combined in a way that the typical sample size increased from
≈900 with the old variables to ≈1800 combined. This ensured that the regression equations would have enough valid data to remain significant.

Each of the variable transformations was completed for the self-placement question, as well as the placements of Barack Obama and John McCain. The next step was to create a new variable that would serve as a proximity scale for the two candidates and the issues. This same method was used in Miller and Klobucar’s research; however, there is no description available for the exact processes used in its creation.

To create the proximity scale, the absolute values were taken for the difference between the self-placement (S) and Obama placement (O), as well as between self-placement (S) and the McCain placement (M). This was done for each issue to be included in the regression. Following this, the Obama difference (Od) was subtracted from the McCain difference (Md) and equaled X. For both the Od and Md the larger the value, signifies a greater distance between the individual and the candidate. The values are also going to be inversely related, meaning if one value is high, the opposing value will be low. Therefore, when the difference (X) is found between the Od and the Md a positive X will indicate that McCain held a advantage for that particular issue, and a negative X will signify a Obama advantage. The equation is included as Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Proximity Scale Equation**

$$|S - O| = Od \quad and \quad |S - M| = Md \quad then$$

$$Od - Md = X$$
In order to isolate the effects of the control variables three Logit regressions will be included. The first will only comprise of the five issue variables. This will serve as a base for the rest of the analysis. If the data is not found to be significant at this step then there will be little chance for it to become significant after the inclusion of the control variables. In the second equation, a party identification variable will be added. The party identification variable is coded as negative one for Democrats, zero for independents, and one for Republicans. This is done to enable a test of whether the significance of the issue variables remains after controlling. The party id coding was done to give a logical order to the three possible party responses, as well as to allow for an easier interpretation of the regression results. A third equation will include additional controls to further test the resilience of the issue variables.

There are five additional controls included in the final equation. Gender- coded as zero for male and one for female. White/ non-white- a control for race coded as zero for a white respondent and one for a non-white respondent. Education- coded on a five-point scale zero equaling no degree and four equaling a terminal degree. Marital status coded on a three-point scale one being married, two separated or divorced and three as never married. In addition, age was broken into five age groups one being the youngest, and five being the oldest respondents. These control questions were asked for the entire survey field and had an almost 100% response rate for those participating.
Chapter 5: Hypotheses

The intent of this paper is to discover the role of issues in the 2008 election.

When studying voting behavior, demographic variables typically explain a large amount of the variance (Verba, Brady, and Schlozman 1995; Levernier and Barilla 2006).

Previous scholars (Campbell et al. 1960) have fought hard to support their claim that party identification can explain a majority of the vote. Running a regression that does not include demographic variables, instead only including the issue measurements will show a degree of prediction as can be seen in Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) article. If the issue measurements remain significant after the inclusion of variables such as party id, race, and education then, it can be argued, with a higher degree of certainty that the issues played a role in the voting decision. (hyp. 1) It is expected that the issue variables will be a significant predictor of vote in the 2008 presidential race. Because in politics issue positions play a major role during election, it is also expected that once the equation is controlled using the demographic variables the issues will remain significant.

Discovering what role the issues played in the 2008 election will provide evidence how candidates should proceed in the future. There is the possibility that voters only side with the party of their choice and, vary only slightly in their behavior at the booth. This type of explanation leaves out the possibility for national issues to influence the decision. While it is agreed that partisan identification has a role to play in the election results, a desire to prove the importance for the nagging talking points is still present. Without such proof, one may begin to wonder why the national attention is captivated by the endless barrage of policy promises. This is why the following
hypothesis is based on what other items act as stimuli for the voter. (hyp. 2) Voters will vote for the candidate whose perceived stance on important issues is closest to their own. This hypothesis is based on previous literature regarding how voters behave at the poles (Campbell et. al. 1960; Fiorina 1981; Kaufmann 2004; Miller and Klobucar 2003).

The exit polls discussed in Table 1 show the economy was the chief concern among voters. Studies in the literature discuss the important role economic voting plays in elections (Godbout and Belanger 2007). Therefore, it is expected that the issues that are related to the economy will be the strongest predictors of the vote after the inclusion of the controls. The government spending variable is expected to show the highest correlation with vote (hyp. 3). Both the “new” and “old” version of the question provides a response of more or less government services. The introduction to the survey section makes it clear that the government services being discussed are directly related to spending. Each party has its own methods of correcting an economic downturn. This would show up in the survey responses. The Democrats would ask for more spending/services and the Republicans would ask for reduced spending/services. Because the issue variables have been transformed into proximity scales this will not affect the results. The variable created from the respondent’s placement of candidates and themselves does not report whether or not respondents asked for a change in government spending but instead, reports on how close the candidates and their own opinions were.
Defense spending is also expected to show a similar result as the government spending variable. Regardless of whether one is asked about spending in general or spending in relation to defense, the individual’s desire for more spending is tested. Respondents certainly will be swayed by their opinions of the efficacy of military spending, but if the desire to increase spending in general is not present then it will be unlikely to be there for defense. The significance should remain because of the links that this type of issue has to the economy. However, the correlation will likely be somewhat weaker for defense spending. The suspected drop in correlation would be the result of the current War on Terrorism, and its influence on the electorate (Abramson et. al. 2007). The war may have acted to moderate some voters views on the matter. Because Obama and McCain were in a head-to-head battle, they chose positions that were on opposite sides of the issue. Respondents may have strongly opposed an increase in defense spending, as Obama did. However, due to a desire to give financial support to the troops, respondents may have moderated their position. This placed them closer to the center than they may have otherwise been. Simply put, the War in Iraq may have moderated the public’s opinion on defense spending, while the nature of the election may have moved the candidates to extremes, which would cause a drop in correlation.

The effect of attitudes toward government aid to blacks is harder to predict. It was not mentioned in the exit poll as being an important issue. Any discussion of a change in the level of services available to a population would include a similar change in the amount of spending in aid to blacks. In addition, as the economy continued to
decline, the demand for services increased. Therefore, portions of the matter were being discussed in the public. This issue potentially covers portions of all the listed important issues in the election. An increase in government spending, or a change in the healthcare policy would have an effect on the levels of government aid to blacks. There was a surge in black voters in 2008 when compared to previous elections (Roberts 2009). Black voters became more involved in politics, mainly as a result of the Barack Obama candidacy. Consequently, it is assumed that issues, which directly affect black voters, would have also had increased significance. It is believed that (hyp. 5) a significant correlation will be found between the aid to blacks issue and voting for Obama. Individuals that perceive an issue as having a direct impact on them are more likely to classify the issue as important. Fournier et. al (2003) show that important issues are the most likely to have impact on vote choice among the electorate.

The political argument over healthcare began during the 2008 election and continued on through the first year of the Obama Presidency. The exit poll showed that 9% believed in its importance as a national issue (CNN). Following the election the issue became the central theme of President Obama’s first year in office. A poll done by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard School of Public Health (2009) finds that 61% of American’s agreed that despite the bad economy, reforming healthcare was “as important as ever”. The poll also shows that a majority of Democrats agreed that healthcare reform could be instrumental to helping the economy recover. It is believed that (hyp. 6) the healthcare variable will maintain its significance despite the controls.
The liberal/conservative variable will have a significant correlation with the vote. Table 2 shows that 79% of Republicans identify as being conservative and, 47% of Democrats say they are liberal. Because of the high proportion of those that vote with their party (hyp. 7) the likelihood of this variable maintaining its significance is high as well. If the hypothesis is proved in this instance, it will show that those who claim allegiance to liberalism or conservatism are also likely to side with their associated parties. Moreover, it would be considered evidence for the importance of political movements and their power to affect election outcomes. The voters who identify as being a part of a liberal or conservative movement are predictable for the policies they will champion. A significant finding would show that candidates should pay attention to the popular movements during elections and perhaps adjust their platforms accordingly.

Similar to Miller and Klobucar's (2003) study, Logit analysis will be used to test the hypotheses. The hope is that the data will indicate issue voting in the 2008 election. The more variables that are found to maintain their significance, the easier it will be to claim an issue/voting link. Furthering the scope of this study, a confirmation of hypothesis 2 will show that not only do issues matter, but, also that the population’s feelings on issues may be used as a vote predictor. The importance of economic issues in the election causes the expectations of a significant finding for government spending on services to be the greatest. Defense spending, healthcare, and government aid to blacks are all expected be significant, however, because these variables have a less direct link to the economy the expectation is lower. Hypothesis 7 is expected to have
the highest probability of showing a vote prediction capability as well as displaying significance in its correlation to vote.
Chapter 6: Analysis

The electorate was heading in an opposite direction than they were in the previous two elections (Miller and Klobucar 2003, 113). In the 2000 election, the trend was for the electorate to favor the conservative side of many issues. However, with the economic downturn that had begun towards the end of the Bush Presidency a much different trend began to emerge. This slide to the left is seen in the results of the National Election Survey. Table 2 shows this change in the electorate’s feelings on a few issues. The table breaks down the electorate’s beliefs on issues according to which party they belong. For each column and issue, the highest percentage is marked in bold.

The data comes from the pre-election survey of the 2008 ANES. The issues in the table were all chosen because they were asked in a similar manner. A brief summary was given for most issues then, the respondent was asked to place himself or herself on a seven point Likert scale. In order to create a more readable table the responses were trichotomized so that any leaning out of the neutral position is clearly shown.

The totals at the bottom of Table 2 are not the total number of responses for each issue. The numbers represent the total number of Democrats, Republicans, and independents that were included in the study. All of the issue variables were divided in order to ask “new” versions of the questions, this fact made the regression more difficult to achieve a sample size large enough to be considered representative. Each of the variables also gave the opportunity for the respondent to opt out of the question. This also reduced the valid cases for each of the variables. The totals at the bottom are simply the largest number of possible responses for each variable.
The first thing to notice in Table 2 is that in every single category except women's roles Republicans and Democrats are at odds. Those that claim to be independents exhibit the expected equal distribution on nearly every issue. Liberal or conservative identifiers are only separated by 9% with conservatives possessing the majority. There are a few points of this table that prove to be rather unremarkable. For example, the split between Republicans and Democrats on defense spending was to be expected. As well as, the fact that in a time of war, those that wish for an increase in defense spending are in the plurality. The lack of a majority on this issue is indicative of the decreasing popularity of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

CNN's exit polling (Table 1) showed that the respective top issues were the economy, Iraq, and a tie between terrorism and healthcare. Therefore, these issues, as they are represented in Table 2 should be given more scrutiny. Republicans and Democrats were nearly identical in their preference (or lack of) for government provided health insurance. The debate that would ensue following the election made no mistake about that. With the inclusion of the independents in the total, those in favor of government provided insurance were in the majority.

The economic variable in Table 2 is where there is a hint why the election resulted in a Democratic victory. The economy was by far the most important issue for voters. This suggests that those who were looking for reasons to vote with one candidate or the other would be inclined to do so if their position matched that of the candidate. Three of the issues in Table 2 that are economically related were
### Table 2: Partisan Distribution of Issue Preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal/Conservative</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>39</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Reduce</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gov. Guarantee</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov. Stay Out</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>41</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gov. Aid to Blacks</th>
<th>Gov. Increase Help</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Leave Blacks Alone</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gov. Increase Help</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave Blacks Alone</td>
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<td>51</td>
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<table>
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<th>Should be Equal</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Women Stay Home</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Should be Equal</td>
<td>87</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women Stay Home</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Environment/Jobs?</th>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Ins.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Ins.</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>Abortion</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Prochoice</th>
<th>N=</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prochoice</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N=                    | 977   | 714      | 432       | 2123 |

Notes: All data used from 2008 ANES. Issues were trichotomized versions of seven-point scales. Due to the effects of rounding, percentage totals are 100 +/- 1%. Highest percentage in the category is marked in bold
government spending, government guarantee jobs, and environment versus jobs.

Government spending was split by a high margin among Republicans and Democrats. However, once totaled the liberal position of increasing spending had the clear advantage. This is important because the two positions are representative of two opposite strategies for approaching an economic downturn. The campaign rhetoric made clear that the side who won the election would claim a mandate for their recovery strategy.

The results in the environment versus jobs issue are some of the most interesting. The question asks the respondent to say which is more important, to protect the environment even at the expense of jobs or, to protect jobs at the expense of the environment. It would be expected that in time of increasing unemployment that many would be more favorable to the creation of jobs. The partisan breakdown of the issue was close, but still exhibited the expected Republican and Democratic tendencies. It is assumed that the economic downturn was at least partially to blame for resulting in a tie on the two extreme positions. It is also noteworthy to point out that the moderate position is the second highest percentage of all the issues. The abortion issue is the only to achieve a higher moderate percentage. A moderate position in the environment versus jobs question suggests that the respondent was not particularly attached to either side of the issue.

Table 2 suggests that there was a sizable split between the two parties before the 2008 election. When the issues are viewed from the Republican/Democrat perspective, there was a dichotomy in issue preferences. This would be rather
unremarkable to many who would have expected this type of result. However, once the totals are figured the public was evenly divided. This begins to explain the highly charged partisan nature of the 2008 election, as well as the important role the moderates played in the final tallies. Each side was encouraged to hold on to their base while reaching out to the middle. Table 3 will take this type of analysis a step further and provide a more complete picture as to which candidate had the advantage based on issue preference and candidate placements.

The independents are shown to favor a variety of positions on Table 2. On the liberal/conservative measurement, they are placed in the moderate category. This is one instance where they respond in a predictable way. On the remainder of the issues included, the independent agrees with one of the parties. This is interesting considering the purported rise in voters who claim to be independent. Efforts to capture the independent vote consume a sizable portion of both campaigns time. On government spending, the independents agree with Democrats in calling for an increase in the amount of spending for public services. They also agree with Democrats on the environment versus jobs issue, as well as the government healthcare issue. However, on the environment versus jobs issue there is only a three percent difference between the second highest rated response (the neutral response). The aid to blacks issue shows the independents siding with Republicans by a sizable margin. When asked whether government should guarantee jobs or whether there should be an increase in defense spending, the independents agreed with the Republicans, however, neither argument achieved a plurality. Not surprisingly, the abortion issue places the independents at the
center of the debate. Moreover, the women’s roles issue again saw agreement among all three categories.

The average independent respondent agrees with economic liberals and social conservatives, according to the table. The majority wishes for more services, government healthcare, and places the environment over the creation of jobs. While asking that the government stay out of job creation, leave blacks alone, and increase the amount of support going to the defense department. The U.S. involvement in war is thought to create more support among independent respondents than would otherwise be present. It would be interesting to see whether the independents would respond the same way to the defense issue had the U.S. not been fighting two wars.

**Voter’s Issue Perspectives**

The public’s perception of distance between each of the candidates was present in every issue included in Table 3. For every variable, the survey respondents placed each candidate on the ideologically correct side. Initially this would suggest that the public is knowledgeable enough to correctly identify a democratic stance and place the appropriate candidate in relation to that stance. This result contradicts the findings of Bishop, Tuchfarber, Oldendick (1986), by exhibiting the public’s knowledge of basic political tenets and their ability to apply them to the current election.

With 39% of respondents claiming to be conservative, it is no surprise to find that McCain held the advantage in the liberal/conservative category. Because more people identified as having conservative views, more placed themselves closer to John
Table 3: Public Perceptions: Obama and McCain Issue Stances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>议题</th>
<th>自我定位</th>
<th>奥巴马</th>
<th>麦凯恩</th>
<th>差异</th>
<th>麦凯恩优势</th>
<th>奥巴马优势</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>政府保证就业？</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>麦凯恩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>政府增加公共服务支出？</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>奥巴马</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>政府增加国防支出？</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>麦凯恩</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>政府对黑人的援助？</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>奥巴马</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>平等对女性？</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>奥巴马</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>环境或就业更重要？</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>麦凯恩</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>政府或私人健康保险？</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>奥巴马</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>流行病</td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>麦凯恩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>麦凯恩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>奥巴马</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>自我定位</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>奥巴马</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

注：所有数据均来自2008年的ANES。负数表明更多响应者支持奥巴马。
McCain. This advantage is very small, only the abortion variable has a smaller margin. Another possible inference from the Table 3 is when respondents claim to be conservative they are not asked to state whether they are social or fiscal conservatives. This difference could explain why McCain was able to achieve the slight advantage while Obama would go on to be elected. As you look down Table 3 it becomes clear that Obama won on all of the economic variables while McCain took the social policy variables. The only exception to this was the abortion variable. Obama’s position is recognized as being closer to the public’s. However, the difference between McCain and Obama on this issue is the smallest margin on the table.

The majority of the public was concerned with the economy, as it was clearly the number one issue for the 2008 election. The economic variables were the ones where a candidate would find the most votes. Having the public identify more close with his position on how to handle government spending would be crucial to winning the election. For government spending on services, Obama had the advantage by .39. For defense spending that number rose to .74. If these variables were found to be significant predictors of the vote, Obama would have gained the most votes.

Another group of variables that would be important to capture an advantage in a time of economic hardship would be those that dealt with jobs. According to Table 3 more respondents placed themselves closer to Obama than they did McCain on the questions regarding government guaranteeing jobs and the environment versus jobs issues. The importance of these two variables is not that they provide proof of a policy mandate, but that the public agreed more with Obama than McCain. Obama actually
found the advantage in every category dealing with jobs or the economy. This was likely a result of voters becoming tired of the Republicans being in power and, their desire to allow the Democrats a chance at solving the country’s problems.

For the most part, the respondents place their own opinion on the issue in the middle of the two candidates. This is evidence that agrees with the Downsian model on how each candidate takes particular sides on an issue, opposite his opponent, then later converges on the median voter. This finding is the same as in Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) study (115). It seems that instead of both candidates converging on the median voter, they chose to stay polarized. Because the data is pulled from a single frame, there is no evidence of convergence. However, the finding that the candidates were narrowly to the left or right of the voter suggests that Obama was center left and McCain stayed center right. The idea being that the candidates are typically not as extreme as the electoral process encourages them to be. Rather, out of a desire to stand out as being different from the opposing candidate, one is encouraged to take steps toward an extreme in an attempt to clarify the differences. If the candidate steps too close to the extreme, they face the prospect of alienating their moderate support.

The equality for women variable is the exception to the rule on Table 3. All other categories place the voter between the two candidates. On the question asking whether women should be equal in the workplace or should they remain in the home, respondents placed both candidates as believing the role of women should be equal to men in business, industry, etc. However, the self-placement for respondents shows that, on average, they sided closer to the argument that the role for a woman is to be at
home. McCain was shown to have the advantage on this issue. Obama ranked 2.51 and McCain 3.26 on a seven-point scale, while self-placement of respondents was on the opposite side of the issue at 4.28. This suggests that among survey takers the feeling was that both candidates would work for more equality than was actually desired. Had this been a major topic in the election, the issue potentially could have caused damage to both candidates.

Table 3 shows that voters placed themselves closer to Obama in six out of nine categories. Regardless of what the issues were, Obama had an advantage going into election. The CNN exit poll results strengthen that assumption by showing that the cases where Obama had the advantage were also the issues listed as important. If the hypothesis is true that voters will vote according to their issue preferences, then Table 3 shows that Obama would have the advantage.

The results so far have all shown that while the electorate was split in its feeling on many issues, there were some commonalities present that would benefit Obama. Table 2 showed that the electorate had a conservative view on many of the issues included on the table, except, for those issues that were deemed as important. The economy and jobs, as well as people’s opinions on healthcare all sided with the liberal side, or were very close. The fact that the economy had gone sour following the two-term presidency of George W. Bush likely served to encourage those voters who were on the fence to vote Democratic in order to get some fresh ideas in the White House. Obama held the advantage on the majority of the issues included in Table 3. The split on nearly every issue shows that there was a perceived difference between the
candidates. If there was no visible difference between the candidates then it would be
difficult to claim that the people voting on the issues had any effect on the election
outcome. The idea is that a voter must perceive a difference between the two, then
choose which candidate they prefer based on those differences. The voter in nearly
every case felt as though they were in between the two candidates, but in the end, felt
that Obama's beliefs were closer to their own.

Regression Analysis

All of the previous tables have put the election into context. They also create
predictions about which candidate would benefit from an issue, assuming that voters
use issues in deciding their vote. While it is nearly impossible to say conclusively that
voters do use issues in their decisions, it is possible to look for evidence that would
suggest they do. This is what the Logistic regression table is designed to do. A finding of
significance for any of the voter issues included in the analysis would suggest that a
voter employs issue positions (their own and the candidates) when determining their
vote. The inclusion of controls will only strengthen the finding by removing the
possibility that the significance could be attributed to unmeasured factors.

Because the dependant variable is dichotomous, the preferred method of analysis is
Logit. This type of regression is designed for dichotomous variables and provides the
best vehicle for testing. The drawback of this type of test is that the results are more
difficult to interpret. Because of this, I have included an OLS regression Appendix 1. The
findings are very similar and, the results include standardized coefficients with have the
benefit of making comparisons possible between the independent variables. The
Table 4: LOGIT Analysis Predicting Votes from Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equation 1</th>
<th>Equation 2</th>
<th>Equation 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
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<td>.12***</td>
</tr>
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<td>.50</td>
<td>.12***</td>
</tr>
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<td>Defense Spending</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.13***</td>
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<td>.13***</td>
</tr>
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<td>.22***</td>
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<td>Nagelkerke R²</td>
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<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Notes: All data from the 2008 ANES. Dependant variable was coded 0=vote for Obama, 1= vote for McCain. For a description of independent variables see methodology section. Correct prediction rates for the respective equations were as follows: 1=89.5%, 2=91.9%, 3=91.9.

$p < .1$, $^*$p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

The following analysis will concentrate on the Logit table. However, the OLS test will occasionally be referred to.

In Table 4, the Logit analysis is split into three separate equations. Equation 1 performs as was expected. All of the issue variables are significant. Taken alone, these results should be used with some caution. Because many of the responses to the policy and spending questions are going to be predicted by partisan support, one cannot
definitely say that issues were a great predictor of the vote. Equation 1 has a high Nagelkerke $R^2$ value (.75), which estimates the ability of the equation to explain variance within the variables. Another good sign in Equation 1’s results is that the prediction ability is also high, correctly predicting 89.5% of the cases. Equation 1 provides a good start for this analysis with all independent variables being significant to the highest degree. The real test is to see whether the levels of significance can be maintained despite the inclusion of controls.

Each variable in Equation 1 has a positive sign associated with it. A Logit analysis predicts the highest valued dependent variable. The coding for all three equations is Obama = 0 and McCain = 1. All of the independent variables were coded so that a conservative position possesses a higher value than the liberal position. By coding all of the variables in this manner, we gain the ability to interpret the B terms. Because McCain is the highest coded dependent variable, when the B term has a positive sign it signifies that a conservative feeling on that issue was more likely to provide a vote for McCain. This would be as expected on every variable in Equation 1.

The odds ratio allows us to see the relative strength of each variable. Table 4, Equation 1 shows that for every unit increase in the liberal/conservative variable, the chance of voting for McCain goes up by a factor of 2.4. This is the largest odds ratio in Equation 1. A person who had strong conservative feelings would be the most likely to vote for McCain, while those with the strongest feelings for liberals would vote for Obama. Also as expected, those that agree with conservative positions on the remaining four issues were also predicted to vote for McCain. Those who ask for private
health insurance, less government spending on services, more support for the Defense Department, and those who feel that blacks should not receive any special assistance from the government. This finding is also reversible, because conservatives are successfully predicted to vote for McCain. Those who have liberal opinions on these issues are predicted to vote for Obama.

Voters who support conservative causes can also be expected to back conservative policies. All of the issues in Equation 1 are significant and have the expected positive sign. The significance findings are a step in the right direction for proving hypothesis 2, voters vote for the candidates whose beliefs on the issue are most similar to their own. The positive sign for the B terms is the most important finding in Equation 1. The positive finding shows that in 2008, the voter whose position on the political scale was distinct could be counted on to vote for the candidates who shared their own beliefs. Therefore, personal feelings on the issues can predict vote with a degree of certainty.

For Equation 2, the same test is provided, however, there is the inclusion of the party identification variable. As expected, the party variable assumes a large portion of the descriptive power. This is most easily seen in the OLS regression in Appendix 1. The standardized coefficient for party identification is .366, which causes a drop in the remaining variable coefficients when compared to Equation 1, in every case, roughly by one third. This explanatory power of the new variable is also shown in the odds ratios in Table 4. Party identification has the highest odds at 4.9. Meaning that, the odds for a McCain vote go up by a unit of 4.9 for every unit increase in the party id variable. The
issue variable odds ratios all remain in the 1.4 to 2.0 range. Defense spending maintains its position as the second highest issue variable with an odds ratio of 1.9. The more an individual believed that the Defense Department should receive an increase in government support (money) they were 1.9 units more likely to vote for McCain. The dichotomous dependant variable creates the situation where we can say those that believed there should be less spending on defense was more likely to vote for Obama.

In Table 4, Equation 2, despite the high value that the partisan identification receives, the issues are still found to be significant. The significance reading for the partisan identification variable is at .988, compared to 100% in Equation 1. This is evidence of the government spending variable weakening. This counters hypothesis 3, and diminishes the chance of proving that because the economy was the most important issue in the election, the variables closely tied to the economy would remain significant. The Nagelkerke $R^2$ is increased slightly, to .809, as was expected. The increase seen across Equations 1 and 2 is largely due to the high correlation between party identification and vote.

The healthcare and aid to black’s variables also show signs of weakening in the odds ratio column. For the aid to black’s variable, this was as expected because the issue was not listed as being of national importance. The variable shows significance and it is positively correlated with the vote variable. Perhaps the national importance of the issue is not a prerequisite for vote predictability. The healthcare issue was listed as having national importance (Table 1), but was being overshadowed by the economy. Attempts were made by the candidates to tie the two issues together, however, the
success of such efforts are not known and are suspected to be low at this particular point in the election. Hypotheses 5 and 6 called for the continued significance for the healthcare and aid to blacks issues. The failure of these two issues to remain significant while retaining the positive correlation in Equation 2 suggests that voters did not heavily rely on these issues when selecting a candidate. They did choose the candidate who matched their own beliefs on the matter (hyp. 2).

Equation 3 includes all issues, party identification, as well as the demographic controls. This was designed to be the most stringent test for the hypothesis. There a small increase in the Nagelkerke $R^2$, which reaches .82, which again is as to be expected with the introduction of the controls. All of the correlations for the issues retain their signs (hyp. 2), as some of the B terms have become much weaker. Party identification claims the highest odds ratios in Equation 3’s results, and is significant. The most important feature of Table 4, Equation 3 is that the significance levels for liberal/conservative and defense spending remain significant. These variables are shown to be the only two issues that remained significant throughout the entire test, showing that these two issues are the greatest predictor of vote (of those included in the analysis). In addition, the significance of these two measures confirms hypotheses 4 and 7. The liberal/conservative variable (hyp. 7) significance shows that those who identify strongly with a side can be relied upon to vote for candidates who reflect those feelings. Support for the defense hypothesis (hyp. 4) can be explained because of its links to the economy, as well the difficulty some have with arguing for less defense
support during a time of war. Both facets of the defense-spending variable likely aided in its ability to stay significant, despite the controls.

Government spending has moved further from significance at .08 again possibly due to the drop in number of respondents. The $n$ has dropped one-third from the level it was in Equation 1. This is due to the number of respondents that did not provide answers to all of the questions included in the regression. If the $n$ stayed closer to the level that it was in Equation 1 it is suspected that the results would have shown a higher significance for many of the variables. Government spending can be regarded as having only marginal significance. The result is that hypothesis 3 cannot confidently be proved true. This is a surprising result considering the importance of the economy in the 2008 election. Support for hypothesis 2 still remains, as those who wished for less government, spending on services sided with McCain who was perceived as having the same wish in Table 3.

When looking at the odds ratios across the three equations it is interesting to note that while the liberal/conservative and defense spending variables stay almost static in their power, the other three variables show a drop. This suggests that liberal/conservative and defense opinions are more consistent than those that are related to the remaining variables. For example, those that wish for more spending on defense were more reliable in their support for McCain. Those that wish for private healthcare were more wavering in their support for McCain. The drop across the three equations could signify issues where voters supported a conservative opinion while voting for Obama.
Interpreting the relative impact of the issue variables allows for further insight into which issues were relied upon the heaviest when determining vote. It came as no surprise to find that party identification has the highest impact when compared with the issues. The fact remains that partisanship is a great predictor of vote. The findings in this paper also show that opinions on issues can also provide insight into election results. Defense spending had the highest impact among the issue variables. This shows that those who aligned strongly with a particular candidate on this issue were most likely to vote for that candidate. Voter ideology proved to have the second highest relative impact. Those that placed the candidate they voted for nearest to their own ideology exhibited a propensity to provide that candidate with a vote. Government spending and aid to blacks were tied on the lower end of the relative impact on vote. Because aid to blacks was not thought to have been a major issue in the election this was not a surprise. However, the placement of government spending was alarming. It was thought that because the economy was, by far, the most important issue in the election government spending would have one of the highest impacts on vote. The finding that it did not, suggests that perhaps voters do not perceive a link between the amount of spending and the status of the economy. Healthcare had the lowest relative impact. Again, this was somewhat surprising considering Obama had promised that it was an issue that would be addressed in his presidency. This finding implies that, in general, neither candidate’s position on healthcare resulted in a gain of votes.

Collinearity diagnostics were performed to ensure that the interpretations of the individual variables are accurate. The finding was that the highest condition index is at
shows that multicollinearity is not a problem within the equations. Multicollinearity was a suspected issue with the variables because they measured similar opinions. For example, the government and defense spending variables could have been correlated in a way that reduced the reliability of the Logit results. The Pearson Correlations were also found to be within the acceptable range, with an r-value being ±.5 or less. This also shows that, despite similar variables being included in the equations, the individual interpretations are possible and valid.

The control variables performed the desired task of creating a rigorous test for the issues. While race was the only significant control in the group, the B terms can be used to create an identity of the McCain voter. Race was coded zero for white and one for non-white respondents. Because the B term has a negative sign, the equation predicts that white individuals were more likely to vote for McCain. Because of the significance, the odds ratio can also be confidently interpreted as meaning a unit increase in the racial identifier resulted in a .21 decrease in the chance for a McCain vote. This confirms what has been stated earlier that the non-white vote was a factor in Obama’s election victory.

Because of the lack of significance, by a wide margin in most cases, an interpretation of the remaining controls should be met with a level of skepticism. The negative sign with education variable suggests that the McCain voter was less educated than the Obama voter was. The marital status variable had those who reported being married coded lowest. Therefore, a negative B term signifies that the McCain voter was married. The gender variable is one of the most difficult controls to interpret, however,
because females were coded higher than males a positive correlation suggests females were more likely to vote for McCain. In reality, Obama received the majority of the women votes. The age variable shows a positive sign which suggests that older the voter was the more likely they were to vote for McCain. With the exception of the gender variable, the controls preformed as expected. The predictions based on the demographic variables should be considered with extreme caution due to their lack of significance. In fact, it was a disappointment to find that all the demographic variables remained insignificant throughout the regressions. An attempt was made to find other demographic variables that could overcome this obstacle. Unfortunately, these attempts were unsuccessful.

It is also worthy of note to say that if the OLS Regression (Appendix 1) had been relied upon for the analysis as they were in Miller and Klobucar’s (2003) paper, hypothesis 3 would not have been rejected. It is not clear why Miller and Klobucar placed their Logit regression in their appendix and interpreted the OLS results, because the dependant variable is clearly better analyzed using Logit. The decision to use the Logit in the analysis of this paper is believed to improve upon the methods that are employed by the inspiration article. It must be noted that in the OLS results the government spending and healthcare variables remained significant thru the three equations (they did not in the Logit). This suggests that perhaps with a more focused data set the related hypotheses may not have been rejected.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

The issues in the 2008 election certainly did play a role in the election of President Barack Obama. The national economy became the most important issue in the election and this study has found that the voters stuck with the candidate that most represented their beliefs on how to fix it. The highly contentious nature of the election forced the candidates to choose opposing solutions to nearly every problem the country faced. This resulted in an electorate that was similarly split. Because of the bad taste left by the outgoing Republican president, it seemed unlikely that McCain could have pulled out a victory. However, his candidacy seemed to stay in the fight much longer than would have been predicted. This study suggests that one possible reason for this was there were more respondents who identified as conservative (Table 2) than not. The electorate also felt closer to McCain ideologically than they did to Obama on a few issues (Table 3). However, when the issues are examined more closely, it becomes clear that opinions on policy direction were favoring Democrats more than Republicans.

The failure of all the issues to remain significant (hyp. 1) in the Logit regression was a disappointing finding. Had all the issues remained significant, it would have allowed a broader claim that the issues were pivotal in the election outcome. The marginal impact of the government-spending variable (hyp. 3) was another disappointing finding because of its relation to the most important issue cited in the election of 2008. The failure of the aid to blacks and healthcare variables suggest that perhaps they were not completely on the radar of the electorate at the time of the election. While both variables have spending ramifications, they had not reached the
status that the economy had at the point that the surveys were taken. The combined patriotic and economic aspects of the defense-spending variable (hyp. 4) contributed to its ability to remain a significant predictor of the vote. This result was not altogether surprising due to the impact of the War in Iraq and Afghanistan. The electorate saw that both of these conflicts were continuing to require material and public support. The significance of the liberal/conservative variable supports hypothesis 7. This result shows that while not all issues can be shown to affect voting choice, people who identify as liberal or conservative can be relied upon to support the candidate that is perceived as the same.

All of the variables show the expected sign, which supports the statement that voters will vote for the candidate whose perceived stance on important issues is closest to their own (hyp 2). The lack of significance across all variables in Equation 3 weakens this argument to an extent. However, it does not refute it completely. If any number of voters had supported the candidate that was further away from their personal feelings the results would have shown a negative correlation with the McCain vote. This finding reinforces Millner and Klobuchar’s (2003) work by showing that the voter’s perception of candidates issue positions is linked to vote. President Bush’s final years in office turned public opinion away from the position’s that McCain would be perceived to have. This gave Obama the advantage on a large portion of issues to be considered important in 2008. The Obama advantage proved to be too large for McCain to overcome and this was reflected in the election results.
The results of the analysis provide a piece of evidence supporting the view of those who believe that party identification cannot fully explain voting behavior. Importance must also be placed on where the electorate perceives the candidates to be on certain issues. In addition, attention should be paid to how the candidate perceived position relates to the voting public. The result is a more complex, even sophisticated, view of the voter than some have attempted to prove is not possible (Prior and Lupia 2008). The evidence suggests that the voter is able to employ a calculus when determining which candidate to support. If the voters were not able to analyze their feelings on the short-term election year issues then, the issue variables in this study would not have shown the predicted significant correlation. This results in a voter that is ideological, but not to the point of being blind to the issues. The opinion that election issues do not play role in vote selection because of the emphasis placed partisanship seem to be just plain wrong, at least regarding the election in 2008. This is clearly shown in Equation 2 of Table 4.

This finding should encourage scholars of voting behavior to look beyond the partisan makeup of the electorate. A politician’s ability to comprehend where the electorate is on important issues and, adapt to them is a skill that should not be overlooked. The 2008 election results were not surprising given the feelings towards Republicans following the Bush presidency. To claim that the Obama victory was due to the unwillingness to place another Republican in office is not accurate. Voters supported the candidate they agreed with the most on a variety of issues. This is supported by the Logistic regression. Issues remained significant following the inclusion
of the party identification. This was found to be true on every issue included in the equation. Admittedly, the issues included in this study are limited in scope. It would be desirable to include a more expansive set of issues to test whether these findings would hold. The insignificance of the demographic variables suggests (but does not prove) that the electorate was not as split along lines of age, education, and gender as they have been in the past. The regression shows that the public’s attitudes on national issues explain more of the vote results than any of the demographic identifiers. Therefore, it is clear that those that have attempted to make claims that the 2008 Election results can be attributed solely to the political makeup of the U.S. at the time are wrong.

Candidates should begin to recognize that in order to pull undecided voters to their side they should be prepared to adapt their platform to match the largest segment of the population. This type of campaigning is risky due to the possibility of being a populist or flip-flopper, both of which carry negative connotations. Small adjustments can be made. However, the value of a candidate that possesses the attributes at the beginning should not be understated. Those who are considering a run for the presidency should spend time analyzing the opinions of the electorate, and predicting where they will be at the time of the election. The economic downturn that occurred late in the Bush presidency pushed voters further away from Republican ideals. McCain would have done better in the election had he predicted these feelings and found ways to decrease his distance from them. Obama was able to capture the advantage on most of the issues measured by centering his position on issues. This was where McCain lost
the election. He spent too much time trying gain votes from the right while the center was where he had the most to gain.
References


Lupia, Arthur. 2008. Questioning our Competence: Improving the Practical Relevance of Political Knowledge Measures. presented at the American Political Science Association 2008 meeting


## Appendix 1

**Multiple Regression, Predicting Vote choice from Issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Equation 1</th>
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<th>Equation 2</th>
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<td>.03 .08**</td>
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Notes: All data from the 2008 ANES. Dependant variable was coded 0=vote for Obama, 1= vote for McCain. For a description of independent variables, see methodology section.

*p≤.1, *p≤.05. **p≤.01. ***p≤.001.
Appendix 2
Issue Variable Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Title</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal/Conservative</td>
<td>Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? Where would you place BARACK OBAMA on this scale? Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN on this scale? 1. Extremely liberal 2. Liberal 3. Slightly liberal 4. Moderate; middle of the road 5. Slightly conservative 6. Conservative 7. Extremely conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov Guarantee Jobs?</td>
<td>Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this? Where would you place BARACK OBAMA on this issue? Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN on this issue? 1. Govt should see to jobs and standard of living 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Govt should let each person get ahead on own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Spending OLD</td>
<td>Some people think the government should provide fewer services even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending. Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this? Where would you place BARACK OBAMA on this issue? Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN on this issue? 1. Govt should provide many fewer services 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Govt should provide many more services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Title</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Government Spending</strong></td>
<td>Do you think the government should provide MORE services than it does now, FEWER services than it does now, or ABOUT THE SAME NUMBER of services as it does now? What about BARACK OBAMA? (Does Barack Obama think the government should provide MORE services than it does now, FEWER services than it does now, or ABOUT THE SAME NUMBER of services as it does now?) What about JOHN MCCAIN? (Does John McCain think the government should provide MORE services than it does now, FEWER services than it does now, or ABOUT THE SAME NUMBER of services as it does now?)</td>
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<td><strong>Defense Spending OLD</strong></td>
<td>Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? Where would you place BARACK OBAMA on this issue? Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN on this issue?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Defense Spending NEW</strong></td>
<td>Do you think that the government should spend MORE on national defense, LESS on national defense, or ABOUT THE SAME on national defense as it does now? What about BARACK OBAMA? (Does Barack Obama think the government should spend MORE on national defense, LESS on national defense, or ABOUT THE SAME on national defense?) What about JOHN MCCAIN? (Does John McCain think the government should spend MORE on national defense, LESS on national defense, or ABOUT THE SAME on national defense?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. More
2.
3. Less
4.
5. About the same
6.
7. Govt should increase defense spending
**Environment/Jobs?**

*OLD*

**Question**

Some people think it is important to protect the environment even if it costs some jobs or otherwise reduces our standard of living. Other people think that protecting the environment is not as important as maintaining jobs and our standard of living. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?

Where would you place BARACK OBAMA (on this issue)?

Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN (on this issue)?

1. Protect environment, even if it costs jobs & standard of living
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. Jenkins: Jobs & standard of living more important than environment

---

**Healthcare**

*OLD*

**Question**

There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone. Others feel that all medical expenses should be paid by individuals through private insurance plans like Blue Cross or other company paid plans.

Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?

Where would you place BARACK OBAMA on this issue?

Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN on this issue?

1. Govt insurance plan
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. Private insurance plan

---

**NEW**

**Question**

Do you FAVOR, OPPOSE, or NEITHER FAVOR NOR OPPOSE the U.S. government paying for all necessary medical care for all Americans?

What about BARACK OBAMA?

(Does Barack Obama FAVOR, OPPOSE, or NEITHER FAVOR NOR OPPOSE the U.S. government paying for all necessary medical care for all Americans?)

What about JOHN MCCAIN?

(Does John McCain FAVOR, OPPOSE, or NEITHER FAVOR NOR OPPOSE the U.S. government paying for all necessary medical care for all Americans?)

1. Favor
2. Oppose
3. Neither favor nor oppose
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Title</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment/Jobs?</td>
<td>Some people think it is important to protect the environment even if it costs some jobs or otherwise reduces our standard of living. Other people think that protecting the environment is not as important as maintaining jobs and our standard of living. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this? Where would you place BARACK OBAMA (on this issue)? Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN (on this issue)? 1. Protect environment, even if it costs jobs &amp; standard of living 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Jobs &amp; standard of living more important than environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid to Blacks</td>
<td>Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this? Where would you place BARACK OBAMA on this issue? Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN on this issue? 1. Govt should help blacks 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Blacks should help themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Roles</td>
<td>Recently there has been a lot of talk about women’s rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. Others feel that a woman’s place is in the home. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this? Where would you place BARACK OBAMA Where would you place JOHN MCCAIN 1. Women and men should have equal roles 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. A woman’s place is in the home</td>
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