

# Values as Heuristics: Core Beliefs and Voter Sophistication in the 2000 Republican Nomination Contest

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*ABSTRACT* One of the central questions of political psychology is how relatively uninformed citizens can make electoral decisions in a way that allows them to be meaningfully represented. We examine this question in the context of a presidential nominating election, a decision-making environment complicated by the lack of powerful partisan or ideological cues. We suggest that in such contexts, voters use abstract value priorities as heuristics, without considerable reference to particular issue postures or even general ideological orientations. We further hypothesize that, in contrast to issue-based or ideological voting, the accurate use of value heuristics is often little affected by voter sophistication, enabling even unsophisticated citizens to cast meaningfully representative votes. A study of vote intention during the 2000 Republican nomination contest provides empirical support for our hypotheses.

How citizens make political choices while knowing little of politics is one of the central puzzles of contemporary research in political behavior. The nature of electoral democracy itself is at issue. If substantial political knowledge, especially of the issue positions of candidates, is necessary for a healthy democracy to function, does the generally acknowledged lack of this knowledge within the voting public mean that our democracy is dysfunctional? Or does some other mechanism account for a representative democratic process? Considerable research has shown that voters use party identification to simplify decision-making in general elections. But what about nominating elections, where party identification is constant? We suggest that voters use value priorities to ease the process of candidate evaluation, enabling even relatively unsophisticated voters to cast meaningfully representative votes. Using the 2000 Republican nomination as a case study, we provide an empirical assessment of these hypotheses.

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### Value Priorities

For our purposes, we define values as *core normative predispositions*, or *abstract visions of the “good”*. They are simultaneously more specific and more abstract than political ideology – more specific because a given value can only be one element of the constellation of beliefs and values that form the organizational structure of an ideology, and more abstract because they are about broad normative goals rather than the complex empirical means of obtaining them. Further, values are principled considerations; they do not, by definition, pertain to group interest or self-interest, which may be an important facet of an ideology. Another distinction that is important for our purposes is the central role of *prioritization*. Although many abstract principles enjoy nearly universal support among the American electorate (e.g. individualism, liberty, equality of opportunity), considerable variance exists in the priority that individuals assign to different values (Tetlock, 1986). So our interest lies not in values considered alone, but rather in the way individuals make choices between competing values that may both be viewed favorably. Hence the dynamics of values are conceptually different from the application of a political ideology.

Indeed, a great deal of scholarship has now demonstrated that it is the *prioritization* of some values over others that often drives political decision-making and public opinion (e.g. Lane, 1962; Hochschild, 1981; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985; Feldman, 1988; Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Chong, 1993; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Jacoby, 2006). This appears to be the case even among less sophisticated citizens, whose lack of political knowledge does not seem to hinder their ability to employ values to guide their choice of policy attitudes when they choose to develop them (Goren, 2000, 2001). However, much less attention has been paid to the influence of values as *direct* determinants of vote choice, even among citizens who have not formulated opinions on even the most central issues or gained a rudimentary knowledge of candidates’ stances. Scholars have yet to consider the extent to which value priorities could function as simplifying devices in an inattentive electorate, facilitating democratic representation among less sophisticated voters.

### Heuristic Reasoning in Presidential Nominations

A substantial body of research demonstrates that voters routinely employ cognitive shortcuts, or *heuristics*, to help them navigate a complex and confusing political world (see Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Popkin, 1991; Lupia, 1994).<sup>1</sup> But the central theoretical question underlying studies of heuristic decision-making is whether and under what conditions it actually leads to accurate judgments that result in meaningful democratic representation. When less sophisticated citizens use heuristics, does this produce *more* or *less* accurate judgments about which candidate represents them best? One of the most powerful political heuristics in general elections appears to be party identification (Rahn, 1993; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Political ideology also serves as a powerful cue, but its utility appears to be

restricted to sophisticated voters (Knight, 1985; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). So what guides the choices of unsophisticated voters in a primary election, when partisan cues are absent? Three influential factors appear to be perceptions of candidates' relative viability, electability, and momentum.<sup>2</sup> What these three heuristics have in common is that they extrapolate information from perceptions of *other citizens' political choices*, allowing less sophisticated or attentive voters to ground their decisions in others' knowledge and preferences. What these decision mechanisms do *not* do is attach the voter's own political predispositions directly to their vote choice – what we normally think of as electoral representation. At best, these heuristics produce an indirect form of representation that assumes some degree of congruence between the preferences of the voting public writ large and those of the uninformed voters who follow its lead. At worst, these heuristics facilitate an abnegation of citizens' individual political influence.

Another potentially useful heuristic that voters might employ is their assessment of the personal qualities of the candidates (Geer, 1989; Popkin, 1991; Norrander, 1996), but this is also a flawed route toward representation. There are reasons to suspect that perceptions of the relative competence and character of candidates are, to a large extent, functions of projection and rationalization on the part of voters (e.g. Rahn *et al.*, 1994). To the degree that perceptions of character are driven by political values or policy attitudes (“he seems to agree with me, so he must have integrity”), they are merely proxies for these other constructs (see Barker *et al.*, 2006). And to the degree that character perceptions are a true independent variable, they facilitate a type of voting distinct from representation grounded in a congruence of political belief. Character may be a crucial electoral variable, especially in regard to presidential leadership, but it is not a congruence of goals and beliefs, what is often considered the heart of political representation. We do not dispute that character assessments influence vote choice – the question is what it means that they do.

So is there a mechanism that connects voters' political predispositions to their vote choices in a way that allows for meaningful representation despite citizens' lack of political knowledge and attention? We propose that voters can use limited bits of information to draw inferences about the value priorities of competing candidates. They then (perhaps reflexively) gauge their own value priorities against those of opposing candidates, developing greater affect toward the candidate whose value priorities most closely match their own, *without considerable understanding of their own issue orientations or those of the candidates*.

If voters develop perceptions of candidates' value systems that are relatively accurate and then reliably choose the candidate who is closest to their own predilections, such shortcuts may render our democracy more than functional. Indeed, democracy under this framework is representative in an important sense, as it results in office holders who promote policies that are grounded in the value system that is closest to that of the electorate.<sup>3</sup> As Lau and Redlawsk (1997) point out, the concept of a “correct” vote does not necessarily entail that the vote is highly informed, but simply that it makes the appropriate choice between competing options. Thus, in a nation where the electorate is not very knowledgeable about politics and is largely

“innocent of ideology” (Converse, 1964), the use of value heuristics may produce presidential nominees who genuinely represent the normative interests of the electorate, providing a solution to the well-articulated “democratic dilemma” (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998) as it pertains to presidential nominations.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, our basic position is that in an electoral democracy (especially in the context of a primary election), *individual voters employ values as a heuristic to choose the candidate whose predispositions are closest to their own, regardless of their level of political sophistication*. The four central elements of this perspective are that (1) when faced with a choice between competing values, citizens can express their individual value priorities, (2) voters can perceive accurately (more often than not) the comparative value priorities of competing candidates, (3) citizens’ value priorities shape their voting decisions, even in the absence of much political knowledge, and (4) this provides an important if not optimal form of democratic representation, especially in the context of primary elections. The following sections elaborate this argument, discuss the particular value predispositions that we expect to have the greatest influence, describe our research design and methodology, report our empirical findings, and draw some inferences from this evidence.

### Theory and Hypotheses

If people are truly cognitive misers, then they subconsciously employ mental devices that are not necessarily most accurate, but are most efficient in terms of costs of inputs (time, energy, or “effortful thinking”) and perceived accuracy of outputs (political judgments or decisions) (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Value priorities may be one of the most basic of political heuristics, as they are understood easily and encountered frequently in common discourse. They are by nature comparative, used to judge better or worse, more preferred or less preferred, and can be judged *against each other* in terms of values that are more dear or central and those that are less important.

If individuals employ values as heuristics in the process of candidate choice, then the relationship between values, issue orientations, and electoral choices may be quite different than what is assumed in many models of political cognition. Models of voting often assume that citizens compare their issue positions to those of the competing candidates, and then choose the candidate whose views most closely match their own. Citizens’ issue orientations (a.k.a. “postures”) are themselves thought to be constrained by higher order constructs such as core values (Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985; Zaller, 1992).<sup>5</sup> In this sense, values play an indirect role in shaping vote choice, as illustrated in the issue voting model of Figure 1. However, while attaching values to issue postures (path *a* in Figure 1) may not be hindered by a lack of political sophistication (Goren, 2000, 2001), moving to the next step of discriminating among candidates based on their policy positions requires a broader knowledge of current politics. Employing specific issue positions, or even more general ideological postures that organize issue positions, to judge candidates (path *b*)

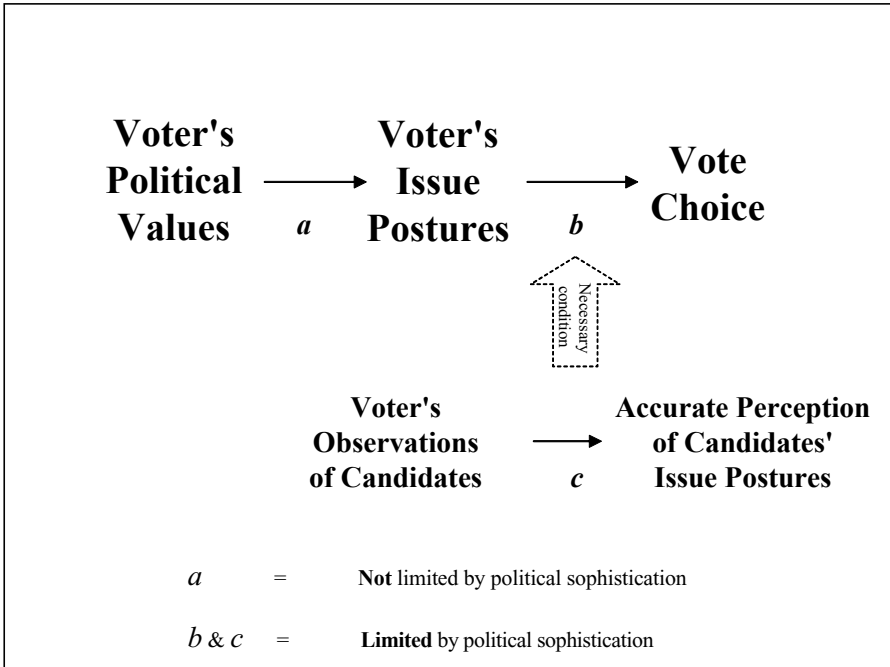


Figure 1. Issue voting model.

seems to be limited to the more politically sophisticated (e.g. Knight, 1985; Goren, 1997). But citizens' value priorities may shape voting preferences through a simpler and more direct process: voters may reflexively develop greater affect for candidates whose values they perceive to be closer to their own. Indeed, this process may occur primarily at the "gut level" (Popkin, 1991), bypassing any direct comparison of issue orientations. As illustrated by the value heuristics model of Figure 2, individuals might not translate their impressions of candidates into perceived issue positions, but rather into perceptions of each candidate's value priorities. Voters can then compare their impressions of the candidates' value priorities to their own, and choose the official to represent them whose priorities most closely match their own, without reference to policy positions or broad ideologies.

In other words, we hypothesize that value priorities not only structure policy preferences, thus influencing vote choice indirectly among some voters, but that values also have *direct* influence over electoral choice. While the mechanisms in Figures 1 and 2 that deal with issue positions (*b* and *c*) are limited by citizens' degree of political sophistication, we argue that the mechanisms that rely on values (*a*, *d* and *e*) are *not* limited by a lack of political knowledge. Given an electorate that displays little ideological understanding or policy knowledge aside from what they gain through partisan cues, the value heuristic mechanism empowers voters to make representative choices, irrespective of their level of sophistication. Compared to the

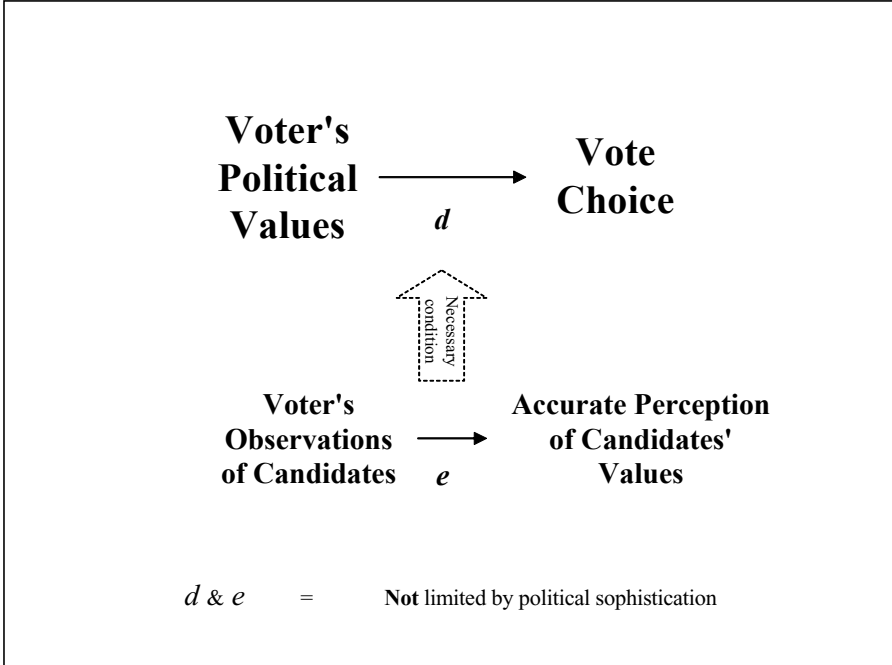


Figure 2. Value heuristics voting model.

now accepted “two-step” process, where issue preferences act as intervening variables connecting value priorities to vote choices, this direct process requires less cognitive gymnastics from the mass public. Therefore, a voter with limited political interests and resources may be likely to employ values as heuristics.

In the sections to come, we describe specific examples of how this process would have occurred during the 2000 Republican nomination campaign, and provide an empirical assessment of our hypotheses. The full range of our empirical hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

- H1: Voters perceive candidates’ relative value priorities accurately more often than not.
- H2: Accurate perceptions of candidates’ value differences are not dependent on political sophistication, unlike perceptions of candidates’ differences on issue postures or broader ideologies.
- H3: Citizens’ value priorities are related to their vote choice in presidential primaries, such that the probability of voting for a candidate increases the greater the congruence in value priorities between voter and candidate.
- H4: The relationship between value priorities and vote choice is not dependent on voter sophistication, unlike the relationship between voting and issue postures/ideology.

## **Influential Core Values and the Hunter Thesis**

We have chosen to examine four different value dimensions that we suspect are core distinctions in contemporary American politics: (1) libertarianism/egalitarianism (Rokeach, 1973; McClosky & Zaller, 1984), (2) individualism/humanitarianism (Feldman, 1988; Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001), (3) isolationism/interventionism (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987), and (4) theism/humanism (Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001). We chose these particular value dimensions as a means of providing some degree of discriminant validity to our design. That is, while we expect value priorities to predict vote choice, we also expect that particular value dimensions will differ in their predictive capacity (especially given the candidates and salient conflicts at the time of a specific campaign). If the electoral influences of prominent values differ in predictable ways, we will have traveled some distance toward establishing that the observed relationships are not mere statistical artifacts or proxies for other variables not included in our models. If, on the other hand, all the value dimensions prove to be strong predictors, we will be less confident that our design is an adequate test of our proposition regarding the role of value priorities as heuristic determinants of nomination vote choice.

To elaborate, we predict that the value prioritization that may have the least influence in a primary context is the choice between libertarianism and egalitarianism. Prioritization between these two values has been a core division in political ideology (see Rokeach, 1973), and a defining element of party attachments for most of the last century, at least to the degree that party identification has centered on the economic realm.<sup>6</sup> As such, there may be little variance along this dimension among candidates vying for the same party's nomination, diminishing this value's utility as a predictor of candidate preference in a presidential primary.

Individualism/humanitarianism reflects the competing prioritization of personal responsibility versus social responsibility. In broadest terms, the distinction involves whether an individual views their primary responsibility to be toward themselves and their family compared to the broader social community. Previous scholarship has revealed that this value dimension is central to many conflicts within domestic policy, sometimes cutting across party attachments (e.g. Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001). Still, individualism is clearly identified with the Republican Party, which is likely to be reflected in Republican voter preferences and the inferences those voters draw about Republican candidates. Hence, while we expect this value dimension to provide nomination voters with some guidance beyond that afforded by libertarianism/egalitarianism, we do not expect it to be the strongest predictor of vote intention among the value dimensions under consideration.

Isolationism/interventionism pertains to an individual's gut-level orientation toward the degree to which the nation should be active and aggressive in the world or should focus on matters at home. Note that this orientation does not include specific opinions regarding foreign policy or, for that matter, even predispositions toward militarism or pacifism. Rather, it taps a general predilection toward looking

“outward” vs. “inward”. While the Republican Party is now clearly more associated with military interventionism abroad, the relation between this value dimension and party affiliation was much more complicated until recent decades. Prior to the 1960s, the Democratic Party had been traditionally at least as aggressive internationally as the Republican Party, but the political fallout of the Vietnam War engendered a new cleavage along a dove–hawk dimension, which has carried through to more recent conflicts in the Middle East. Nonetheless, as of 2000, considerable variation likely remained within each party regarding the degree to which the US military should be used to promote democracy abroad and engage in “nation-building”. Furthermore, given that this particular value dimension is not restricted to militarism/pacifism, but also encompasses international peacekeeping efforts, humanitarian aid, and even orientations regarding free trade, there is reason to believe that candidates sharing the same party attachment could vary considerably on this dimension.

The fourth value dimension, theism versus humanism, deserves particular attention because it undergirds the “culture wars” thesis – a perspective that many have embraced as the source of a major ideological and partisan realignment in contemporary politics, which is often depicted as “red America vs. blue America” (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998; Layman, 2001; Layman & Carsey, 2002; White, 2003). This value refers to whether citizens assess “truth” by looking to religious faith or to scientific evidence and reason. Beginning with James Davison Hunter (1991, 1994), many scholars argue that there is an increasing political divide between citizens who appeal to a transcendent source of authority and those who stress individual judgment grounded in empirical knowledge.<sup>7</sup> In Hunter’s words, “the politically relevant world-historical event ... is now the secular Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and its philosophical aftermath” (Hunter, 1991: 136). The theism–humanism value dimension may play a particularly important role in contemporary Republican primaries because of the divide between the more and less socially conservative wings of the party, the first influenced primarily by Christian fundamentalism and the second by philosophical libertarianism.

However, while the culture wars thesis has been applied to the study of changing party attachments over time (see especially Layman, 1999), the micro-foundations of the theory have not been systematically assessed with measures that capture Hunter’s specific conceptualization applied to vote choice. That is, to our knowledge, existing scholarship has not tested the essence of Hunter’s theory – that contemporary political decisions are guided by individual beliefs regarding whether society should look to faith or to science as the primary source of truth. Our study represents the first attempt to systematically capture the impact of this important value orientation on electoral choice.

### **A Case Study of Value Heuristics in the 2000 Republican Nomination Contest**

We test our hypotheses within the context of a relatively recent competitive nomination contest that gave voters a choice between two viable and distinguishable



candidates – the 2000 Republican race between George W. Bush and John McCain. While we certainly expect that the use of value heuristics in presidential nomination campaigns is a general phenomenon, it is simply not feasible, at this time, to examine this dynamic across electoral contests. First, the particular values that serve as important heuristics are sure to vary according to party, time period, salient events, and candidates. Second, the nature of the modern nominating contest renders the examination of vote choice either meaningless or unduly complicated in several of the elections since 1972 (when the current system was instituted) because they were not sufficiently open contests. That is, for many of these nomination races, the outcome was a forgone conclusion, severely restricting their usefulness as objects of study (see Cohen *et al.*, 2001).<sup>8</sup> Third, and perhaps most relevantly, measures of voters' value priorities and their perceptions of the candidates' value priorities are simply not available in any year other than 2000, and in no other data source than the one we employ here.

But how do we expect voters' value priorities to be related to vote choice in this specific race? In order to determine the degree to which even the most casual observers of the 2000 Republican nomination struggle could have distinguished between Bush and McCain in terms of the four value dimensions we discussed earlier, we consulted daily news coverage of the primary campaign, the political ads of each candidate, and entertainment media (such as the nightly monologues on the *Tonight Show*) between 1 December and 7 March of the campaign season (the day of Titanic Tuesday, when Bush effectively claimed the nomination).<sup>9</sup> From this we concluded that the most readily available information about John McCain was that he (1) was a Vietnam War hero who had been held in a POW camp, (2) had a reputation as a maverick with a short temper, (3) had an adversarial relationship with the "Christian Right", and (4) was popular among some groups of voters (after the New Hampshire Primary). A slightly more astute observer might have also noticed that (5) McCain was advocating campaign finance reform, and that (6) he frequently expressed a desire to "inspire a generation of young people to advance causes greater than their own self-interest". As for Bush, the most reported information included that he (1) was the former President Bush's son, (2) was supported by the Republican establishment, (3) frequently mentioned his religious feelings and was supported by "the Christian Right", (4) had a reputation for being intellectually lazy, and (5) was the popular governor of Texas. Again, voters who paid slightly more attention would have likely noted that Bush was (6) championing something called "compassionate conservatism".

Note that these observations provide little direct information regarding the candidates' policy preferences. Rather, they are the general bits of information about the candidates' backgrounds, personalities, and sources of support that are the easiest for busy voters to absorb from cursory glances at headlines, references on late-night talk shows, and the like. We suggest that voters armed only with these small pieces of knowledge can nonetheless discern candidates' comparative value priorities, such as their predispositions toward theism or humanism. In this particular election, the

typical busy voter could conclude that Bush was more likely than McCain to value faith over scientific evidence as a means of navigating public life. Bush's now famous Iowa debate reference to Jesus as his favorite political philosopher (which was widely reported, even on entertainment programs) would have been enough to provide this impression. This view would have been further cemented by any notice of the Christian Right's strong relationship with Bush and hostile attitude toward McCain.

Considering the isolationism/interventionism dimension, McCain's military record is a powerful cue that was reported extensively. Putting aside the observation that the candidates' public pronouncements during the campaign revealed that McCain appeared to favor a more aggressively interventionist approach than Bush,<sup>10</sup> voters would have only needed to know that McCain was a decorated war hero to suspect that he is a stronger supporter of an active American presence on the world stage.

Comparing the candidates on individualism–humanitarianism grounds is more difficult with this limited information. On the one hand, knowledge of McCain's refusal to abandon his fellow POWs, his support for the reform-minded campaign finance overhaul, and his public statements about causes “greater than one's own self-interest” might have led observers to feel that McCain was the more humanitarian candidate. On the other hand, Bush's “compassionate conservatism” certainly has a humanitarian ring to it. Still, we suspect that these observations may have been lost on the least attentive voters. However, simple heuristics like Bush's support from the conservative establishment, as well as his popularity in Texas compared to McCain's in New England, might have suggested that McCain was more of a “do-gooder” and Bush more of a “rugged individualist”. So, on balance, we tentatively predict that most voters would have perceived McCain to be the more humanitarian of the two candidates (a perception that would have proven accurate if one had carefully compared the candidates' policy pronouncements during the course of the campaign). However, we do not expect this differentiation to be deduced nearly as easily as the previous two value dimensions.

Finally, we considered how these cues may have influenced perceptions of the two candidates regarding the libertarian/egalitarian dimension. This is the most difficult relationship to predict. After much consideration, we could not see how any unambiguous conclusion about the candidates' relative positions could have been picked up by the casual voter. Moreover, given that market freedoms garner such broad support within the Republican party, we suspect that there is simply not enough variance on this value dimension to act as a meaningful cue in this context (though the story might be different in a general election).

In sum, we suggest that voters could draw correct inferences about several of the value priorities of the candidates (H1), even when relying only on the small bits of information available to inattentive voters (H2). As a result, we expect that voters identified more readily with one of the candidates on a “gut level”, based on their own value priorities (H3). Specifically, we expect that in the context of the 2000 Republican nomination:

- H3a: Voter humanism strongly predicts an intended vote for McCain.
- H3b: Voter interventionism clearly predicts an intended vote for McCain.
- H3c: Voter humanitarianism weakly predicts an intended vote for McCain.

### **Data and Measurement of Key Variables**

For our study of the 2000 nomination contest, we obtained a random sample of 287 registered Republican voters in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI).<sup>11</sup> We conducted the surveys between 1 January and 6 March of the 2000 presidential primary season (before the contest was essentially decided on 7 March).<sup>12</sup>

The central variables of interest for this study are (1) vote intention, (2) value priorities, (3) perceptions of the value priorities of the competing candidates, (4) political sophistication, and – to provide a means of comparison – (5) issue-based ideological postures. We measured vote intention by asking survey respondents to indicate the candidate for whom they intended to vote in the upcoming primary election. Their choices were Bush, McCain, Alan Keyes, Steve Forbes, Orrin Hatch, or Gary Bauer. We then deleted preferences for any candidate other than Bush or McCain (which made up less than 10% of the sample), as well as “I don’t know”, leaving us with a working sample size of 218. Of these respondents, 62% preferred Bush, while 38% preferred McCain.

To assess value priorities, for each value pair, we asked respondents (1) to indicate which of two value alternatives – liberty or equality, individualism or humanitarianism, isolationism or interventionism, theism or humanism (phrased in common language terms) – they considered to be “more important for society”, and (2) to speculate about which alternative both Bush and McCain preferred (see the Appendix for the exact wording of each question).<sup>13</sup>

Following conventional wisdom, we conceptualize political sophistication as political knowledge (Luskin, 1987, 1990; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993a, 1993b, 1996). We employ the Delli Carpini and Keeter knowledge measure because of its strong content validity and its demonstrated reliability as a brief index (though with a slight variant due to the political figures in question; see the Appendix for details of the specific questions).

Finally, in order to gauge the efficacy of values as choice determinants, we must compare the role of the value priorities described above with the influence of citizens’ issue postures. As discussed earlier, we define value orientations as the prioritization of particular normative visions of the good over others that naturally fall at the opposite end of a particular moral dimension. Again, what makes our characterization of the role of values unique is that we predict that values influence candidate preferences directly, without the intervening influence of issue postures or ideology (see Figures 1 and 2). So if our perspective is to receive empirical support, value priorities must exhibit predictive power while competing for variance with issue postures.

But it is important to avoid stacking the deck by employing esoteric or complicated policy issues, which unsophisticated voters are extremely unlikely to comprehend.

The more conservative test of our hypotheses is to assess the role of issue voting in regard to the broadest and most easily understood issue “postures” (e.g. Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987), which unsophisticated voters have the greatest chance to perceive and employ accurately. In the economic realm, perhaps the most accessible policy preference is a general attitude toward government spending, which is often represented by the “services and spending” scale that has appeared consistently in the National Election Studies (see the Appendix). This measure avoids any reference to specific targets that can complicate attitudes (such as welfare or military procurements), while gauging a broad policy preference regarding government spending. Indeed, this item has been used many times to gauge the economic issue dimension of liberalism–conservatism. Such an “issue-based ideological posture” is perfect for our purposes; it is broader and more familiar than many specific measures of policy preferences would be, thus providing a conservative test of our hypothesis that value priorities should be more easily accessible to low sophistication voters than issue positions, but it is more specific and “means-based” than our abstract measures of value priorities, thus providing a clear conceptual distinction between it and our value priority measures.

In the realm of social or cultural issues, one of the broader and more accessible orientations pertains to tolerance of new or alternate lifestyles. This attitude can be gauged most easily through another item employed on several National Election Study instruments: respondents’ reaction to “new lifestyles” and their effect on society (see the Appendix for the exact wording). The beauty of this measure is the vagueness of the phrase “new lifestyles”, which could refer to a variety of different things, including divorced or single-parent families, the abandonment of traditional gender roles, an increasingly tolerant attitude toward sexual promiscuity or homosexual relations, and so on. But while “new lifestyles” may mean different things to different people, virtually every conceivable interpretation of a negative response to this question would reflect a traditionalistic orientation toward cultural issues.<sup>14</sup> Like the services/spending item discussed in the preceding paragraph, this measure has been used to capture the issue-oriented aspects of liberalism–conservatism in the United States – in this case, the social/cultural dimension.

Thus, to reiterate, by choosing to compare the predictive power of value priorities to that of these two issue-based ideological postures, we have chosen a conservative test of our hypothesis – if voters are unable to understand and hold positions on such “easy” issues pertaining to government activity in the economy and tolerance, then clearly they would be even more unlikely to successfully make use of more complex policy disputes.

### **The Perception of Candidates’ Value Differences**

The first empirical test of our theoretical perspective must be to determine whether voters, even inattentive ones, can indeed gain a reasonably accurate sense of candidates’ relative value priorities during a nomination contest. As long as individuals are correct more often than not, the aggregation mechanism ensures that the

electorate as a whole will come to an accurate conclusion. This result is grounded in the logic of the Condorcet Theorem – if decision-makers are on average over 50% likely to make an accurate judgment, then as the number of people involved in the decision increases, the probability of accuracy quickly becomes astronomical.<sup>15</sup> But if individual voters' perceptions of candidate value priorities are accurate *less* than 50% of the time, then the electorates' aggregate perception will be faulty.<sup>16</sup> So the baseline standard for employing a value heuristic effectively is surpassing even odds of a reasonably accurate versus inaccurate judgment, a hurdle that our data suggest voters are easily able to cross.

Of course, the central problem in the empirical measurement of accurate or inaccurate perceptions is our understanding of what is "accurate". While it may be difficult to define an accurate perception of a candidate's values, it is easier to see when clear errors have been made regarding candidates' comparative priorities. We considered an inaccurate judgment to be a perception that Bush was *more* humanitarian, humanist, or interventionist than McCain; a reasonably accurate judgment, on the other hand, would consider McCain's value priorities to be equally or more humanitarian, humanist, or interventionist than Bush's.<sup>17</sup> Citizens who could not articulate a judgment regarding one or both candidates could also not be considered to have a reasonably accurate view.

As Table 1 reveals, on average only 37.1% of respondents gave clearly inaccurate responses or could offer no evaluation of the candidates' value priorities. The rate of reasonably accurate responses was 62.9%, substantially above the minimum of 50% needed for an accurate aggregate judgment. However, as we predicted, registered voters had an easier time with some value dimensions than others. Not surprisingly, candidate individualism–humanitarianism was the most difficult to discern (44.2% inaccuracy rate), while isolationism–interventionism had the lowest rate of inaccurate responses (33%). On the whole, perceptions of values compare favorably to citizens' understandings of candidates' ideological postures.<sup>18</sup> The average rate of inaccuracy was 6.1% higher for issues than for values, and the highest rate of inaccuracy was for candidates' positions on government services/spending (48.2%, 11.1% higher than the average inaccuracy of value perceptions). But none of the aggregate perceptions, of either value priorities or ideological postures, are inaccurate at a rate higher than 50%, the crucial cutoff before the entire electorate is led to misjudge the candidates.

Scholars who emphasize the lack of knowledge among the American electorate might find this evidence surprising. If citizens do not know much about contemporary politics, then how could they perceive a candidate's value priorities?<sup>19</sup> We argue that this perspective likely inflates the information necessary to invoke a value. One reason for this is that we are not positing the translation of values into appropriate policy positions, which is the more complex and demanding process. Instead, we are suggesting the reverse – translating very general bits of information learned or inferred about candidates into a sense of their political values. It would seem that the cognitive resources and effort required to make inferences about candidates' values are not excessive.

**Table 1.** Inaccuracy rates of voter perceptions of candidate values/postures

Candidate beliefs	Inaccurate or don't know*	Low sophistication	High sophistication	Difference
<i>Value priorities</i>				
Isolationism–interventionism	33.0%	35.7%	30.0%	5.7%
Theism–humanism	34.0%	37.3%	31.1%	6.2%
Individualism–humanitarianism	44.2%	48.2%	40.7%	7.5%
Average	37.1%	40.4%	33.9%	6.5%
<i>Issue-based ideological postures</i>				
Government spending/services	48.2%	57.1%	40.7%	16.4%
Support for “new lifestyles”	38.1%	48.4%	29.3%	19.1%
Average	43.2%	52.8%	35%	17.8%
<i>Difference in</i>				
Average accuracy of value priorities and issue postures				6.1%
Accuracy of value priorities and economic issue posture				11.1%
Accuracy of value priorities and social issue posture				1.0%
Effect of sophistication on accuracy, between values & issues				11.3%

\*Inaccurate responses are limited to those that can be considered clear errors, placing Bush as *less* theist, isolationist, or individualist than McCain, or less conservative than McCain. All other responses are considered at least reasonably accurate.

Our next question is whether the accuracy of citizens' perceptions is dependent on their degree of political sophistication. The simplest test of this question is to compare the rates of inaccuracy between more and less sophisticated citizens. When we divide the sample in half, there are small but statistically insignificant differences in the two groups' rates of inaccuracy in judging candidates' values. As illustrated in Table 1, the differences in accuracy range between 5 and 7% ( $p = 0.20$ , 0.30 and 0.32, respectively). Much greater differences, however, are apparent when we consider perceptions of candidates' issue positions. Less politically sophisticated citizens are 16% more likely to make an error regarding government spending ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 2.76$ ), and 19% more likely to mistake candidates' comparative positions regarding tolerance of “new lifestyles” ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 3.30$ ). Perhaps even more importantly, the error rate among low sophistication citizens is *above* 50% in regard to government spending, the only condition that breaks the 50% threshold. The propensity of this group of voters to mistake the relative positions of candidates along this dimension will have important ramifications on voting patterns, as we will see below.

To test the role of political sophistication more stringently, we specified probit models of perceptual accuracy (0 = an inaccurate assessment, and 1 = an accurate

one), while controlling for other possible influences, such as demographic variables and the date of the interview. We also used the same model to predict accurate perceptions regarding candidates' relative issue-based ideological postures.

Thus:

$$\text{accuracy of perception} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + Z + \epsilon$$

where  $X_1$  = political sophistication,  $X_2$  = interview date,  $X_3$  = interview date squared,<sup>20</sup> and  $Z$  = control variables.<sup>21</sup>

The results in Table 2 reveal that the ability to recognize differences in candidates' ideological postures is facilitated considerably by political sophistication, but the same cannot be said regarding candidates' relative value priorities. After transforming the probit coefficients into marginal effects (revealing the change in the probability of an accurate perception for a one unit increase in the independent variable, while holding all other variables at their means), we can observe that the most knowledgeable respondents were at least 30% more likely to accurately perceive the candidates' positions regarding government services and spending, and 21% more likely to accurately perceive the candidates' positions regarding "new lifestyles".<sup>22</sup> These findings are consistent with previous research showing that the influences of ideology (Knight, 1985) and issue preferences (Goren, 1997) on vote choice are contingent on voter sophistication. But for none of the three value priorities did sophistication have a significant influence on accurate perceptions. This evidence of the different role played by sophistication in the accuracy of citizens' perceptions of values versus issues is an important link in our theoretical perspective regarding the utility of values as heuristics in presidential nominations. Simply put, voters do not need to be politically sophisticated to grasp the important value differences between candidates. Values rather than issues are the means through which less knowledgeable voters can judge political leaders.

### **Value Heuristics and Vote Intentions**

Convinced that even the busiest voters are able to form reasonably accurate impressions of candidates' relative value priorities more often than not, we then specified our models of principal interest: predicting vote intention as a function of a voter's value system, while controlling for ideological postures and demographic differences.<sup>23</sup>

Thus:

$$\text{vote intention} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + Z + \epsilon$$

where  $X_1$  = value priority regarding libertarianism versus egalitarianism,  $X_2$  = value priority regarding individualism versus humanitarianism,  $X_3$  = value priority regarding isolationism versus interventionism,  $X_4$  = value priority regarding theism versus

**Table 2.** Voter sophistication and correct identification of candidates' values/postures

Independent variables	Perceived candidate value priorities				Perceived candidate issue postures					
	Individualism–humanitarianism		Theism–humanism		Isolationism–interventionism		Government spending/services		Support for “new lifestyles”	
	Marginal effect	<i>p</i> <	Marginal effect	<i>p</i> <	Marginal effect	<i>p</i> <	Marginal effect	<i>p</i> <	Marginal effect	<i>p</i> <
Political knowledge	2%	0.44	16%	0.11	13%	0.19	30%	<b>0.02</b>	21%	0.07
<i>Controls</i>										
Born again	-1%	0.42	-2%	0.36	4%	0.24	-7%	0.31	-4%	0.41
Age	-0.1%	0.30	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>0.03</b>	-0.1%	0.37	<b>-0.5%</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Gender (female)	<b>-13%</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>-14%</b>	<b>0.00</b>	-9%	0.09	<b>-22%</b>	<b>0.00</b>
Income	-3%	0.02	1%	0.25	-0.5%	0.41	1%	0.30	<b>-2%</b>	<b>0.00</b>
Interview date	0.4%	0.38	-1%	0.24	2%	0.18	1%	0.33	1%	0.15
Interview date <sup>2</sup>	0%	0.29	0%	0.16	0%	0.12	0%	0.31	0%	0.10
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.05		0.03		0.05		0.06		0.10	

*Notes:* Probit models; DV = accuracy of perception (0 = inaccurate, 1 = accurate). Statistically significant relationships are in bold (*p* < 0.05; one-tailed). *N* = 276. The political knowledge variable has been recoded to range from 0 to 1.0, so that the reported change in probability is the effect of moving the full range of the variable, from its lowest to highest value.



humanism,  $X_5$  = issue posture regarding government spending,  $X_6$  = issue posture regarding “new lifestyles”, and  $Z$  = control variables.<sup>24</sup>

We did not control for evaluations of candidate traits for two reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, there is inherent endogeneity between voters’ relative evaluations of candidate traits and the vote intention itself. Indeed, relative trait evaluations are so highly correlated with vote intention that they absorb nearly all the variance in vote intention. Second, we expect perceptions of candidate value priorities to stem, in part, from such perceptions. For example, voters who perceive a candidate to be more compassionate than another candidate are also likely to imagine that the candidate is also more humanitarian. We obviously do not want to control away any aspect of the theoretical mechanism we are trying to assess. Accordingly, it would not make sense to include trait evaluations as controls, even absent the statistical problems created by their inclusion.

Table 3 reveals the results of the initial look at the relationships between value priorities and vote choice. As expected, three value dimensions bear strong relationships to vote intention. The value with the greatest influence on vote choice is the distinction between humanism and theism. Interpreted as a marginal effect, the probability of favoring McCain over Bush was 31% greater for those respondents who considered knowledge to be more important for society than religious faith (holding all other variables at their means and using the mean as the baseline probability of voting for McCain).<sup>25</sup> These findings not only support the value heuristics perspective, but they also represent suggestive evidence that perhaps the micro-foundations of the so-called “culture war” may indeed be, at least in part, a function of theism–humanism, as Hunter has argued.

As for isolationism/interventionism, interventionists were roughly 18% more likely to favor McCain than were isolationists. We wonder if this value would be more or less influential in the post 9/11 environment, though we suspect that the answer might be “both”. On the one hand, the increased attention devoted to such matters by politicians and the media has likely made this value more salient to voters. On the other hand, precisely because of its salience, and given that the Iraq War has appeared to cement the distinction between Republicans and Democrats along this dimension, the intra-party contests may no longer reveal enough variance between candidates to make this a useful predictor in a primary election.

The power of the value predispositions contrasts starkly with the impotence of ideological postures as clear determinants of nomination candidate preference. Controlling for value priorities and demographics, respondents’ ideological postures – both economic and cultural – appear to have no clear, significant impact on primary vote choice between McCain and Bush.

### **The Conditioning Role of Political Sophistication**

In order to examine the last piece of our theoretical puzzle – the degree to which less sophisticated voters can make use of value priorities as accurate heuristics – we divided the sample at the mean and re-estimated the model.<sup>26</sup> As

**Table 3.** Value priorities, issue-based ideological postures, and vote choice in the 2000 Republican primary

Independent variables	Coefficients		
	Marginal effect	Probit (robust s.e.)	$p <$
<i>Value priorities</i>			
Libertarianism–egalitarianism	–9%	–0.28 (0.24)	0.13
Individualism–humanitarianism	<b>25%</b>	<b>0.48 (0.20)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
Isolationism–interventionism	<b>18%</b>	<b>0.50 (0.22)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
Theism–humanism	<b>31%</b>	<b>0.73 (0.20)</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<i>Issue-based ideological postures</i>			
Government spending	–3%	–0.20 (0.41)	0.31
Inclusion of “new lifestyles”	–2%	0.02 (0.28)	0.47
<i>Demographics</i>			
Born again	<b>–20%</b>	<b>–0.60 (0.25)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
Age	0%	0.00 (0.01)	0.40
Female	<b>–17%</b>	<b>–0.52 (0.20)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
Education	–25%	–0.34 (0.41)	0.20
Income	–1%	0.00 (0.05)	0.47
Interview date	<b>4%</b>	<b>0.10 (0.05)</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Interview date squared	<b>–1%</b>	<b>–0.001 (0.00)</b>	<b>0.05</b>
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.145		

*Notes:* Probit models; DV = vote choice (0 = Bush, 1 = McCain). Statistically significant relationships are in bold ( $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed).  $N = 218$ . The more conservative side of each value pair is coded 0 and the more progressive side coded 1, such that results represent increased or decreased probabilities of voting for McCain associated with egalitarianism, humanitarianism, interventionism, and humanism. In order to facilitate comparison, the variables representing value priorities and issue-based ideological postures have been recoded to range from 0 to 1.0, so that the reported change in probability for each variable is the effect of moving the full range of the variable, from its lowest to highest value.

Table 4 displays, what immediately stands out from the results is that value priorities are powerful predictors of vote choice even among low sophistication voters. The comparison to higher sophistication voters is instructive: on the whole, values are actually more powerful predictors of vote choice among *less* knowledgeable voters, providing strong support for our hypotheses.<sup>27</sup> Humanism shows a strong and consistent relationship to votes for McCain (even while controlling for self-identification as a born-again Christian and for attitudes toward “new lifestyles”). Again, these findings provide persuasive support for the particular mechanism underpinning the culture war realignment, as originally proposed by Hunter. Moreover, while some have argued that this phenomenon is limited to the beliefs and discourse of elites (see Fiorina, 2005), our

evidence suggests that the much-ballyhooed cleavage between “red” and “blue” America was prominent in the race for the 2000 Republican nomination even among voters of limited political acumen. But the value dimensions employed by less sophisticated citizens are not limited to the cultural realm: isolationism/interventionism was a powerful predictor, as was (somewhat more surprisingly) individualism/humanitarianism.

While the influence of values is not mitigated by the lack of political knowledge, the same cannot be said of ideological postures. Among more sophisticated voters, attitudes regarding economic issues represent the most powerful predictor of candidate preference. That is, those who favor a larger role for the federal government in the economy are much more likely to vote for McCain over Bush. Among less sophisticated voters, however, we see that economic issue attitudes bear a significant relation to vote intention, but in the *opposite* direction. That is, unsophisticated economic liberals are actually more likely to prefer the candidate who agrees with them the least. This finding reflects the anomaly we uncovered earlier – the single time when inaccuracy rates topped 50% was by unsophisticated citizens regarding perceptions of candidates’ views on government spending (see Table 1). In this case the Condorcet Theorem suggests that the aggregate judgment of this sector of the electorate would be exactly wrong, misleading them about the appropriate candidate when considering this policy dimension. Thus it appears that misperceptions regarding the candidates’ economic issue postures (driven, perhaps, by slogans such as Bush’s “compassionate conservatism”) may actually be leading voters astray who are less familiar with politics. Unlike in the realm of political values, where unsophisticated citizens seem to match their priorities to the appropriate candidate, when less sophisticated voters consider the issue of government spending, they employ it inaccurately in candidate choice.

## Conclusion

This research addresses one of the central problems of contemporary political psychology: how does an uninformed public make choices and what does this mean in terms of electoral representation? Here we are concerned not so much with the simple act of voting, but the act of voting by the simple. It would seem that the electoral context within American politics that might provide the biggest challenge would be nomination contests, because of the lack of partisan cues. While we do not want to make too much out of the results of one study of one election campaign, our empirical evidence provides an encouraging explanation of how even relatively uninformed voters can cast meaningful votes. If it is true, as Miller and Stokes once suggested, that there is “not more than a chemical trace” of policy knowledge in the electorate (Miller & Stokes, 1963), then the efficacy of such value-based mechanisms is an encouraging sign.

Our findings, while in need of substantial supporting evidence before any certain conclusions can be drawn, also speak to the way that we understand political values.

**Table 4.** Value priorities, issue-based ideological postures, and vote choice in the 2000 Republican primary – split by political sophistication

Independent variables	Low sophistication		High sophistication		p <
	Marginal effect	Probit (robust s.e.)	Marginal effect	Probit (robust s.e.)	
<i>Value priorities</i>					
Libertarianism–egalitarianism	6%	0.18 (0.22)	-10%	-0.27 (0.22)	0.11
Individualism–humanitarianism	<b>24%</b>	<b>0.74 (0.21)</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>0.59 (0.26)</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Isolationism–interventionism	<b>24%</b>	<b>0.72 (0.17)</b>	11%	0.29 (0.40)	0.24
Theism–humanism	<b>21%</b>	<b>0.63 (27)</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>0.87 (0.21)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
<i>Issue-based ideological postures</i>					
Government spending	<b>-58%</b>	<b>-1.74 (0.34)</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>1.81 (0.67)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
Support for “new lifestyles”	4%	-0.11 (0.38)	4%	0.10 (0.35)	0.39
<i>Demographics</i>					
Born again	-15%	-0.52 (0.39)	<b>-30%</b>	<b>-0.88 (0.33)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
Age	0%	0.00 (0.00)	0%	0.00 (0.00)	0.30
Female	<b>-34%</b>	<b>-1.02 (0.35)</b>	<b>-15%</b>	<b>-0.40 (0.14)</b>	<b>0.01</b>
Education	<b>1%</b>	<b>-1.51 (0.47)</b>	-10%	-0.28 (0.34)	0.21
Income	1%	0.04 (0.04)	-1%	-0.02 (0.09)	0.41
Interview date	<b>7%</b>	<b>0.22 (0.06)</b>	2%	0.04 (0.08)	0.29
Interview date squared	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.002 (0.00)</b>	0%	-0.06 (0.05)	0.41
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.293		0.219		

*Notes:* Probit models; DV = vote choice (0 = Bush, 1 = McCain). Statistically significant relationships are in bold ( $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed).  $N = 97$  and 121, respectively. The more conservative side of each value pair is coded 0 and the more progressive side coded 1, such that results represent increased or decreased probabilities of voting for McCain associated with egalitarianism, humanitarianism, interventionism, and humanism. Variables representing value priorities and issue-based ideological postures have been recoded to range from 0 to 1.0, so that the reported change in probability for each variable is the effect of moving the full range of the variable, from its lowest to highest value.

Peffley and Hurwitz (1985) provide a starting point for our perspective, by demonstrating that value hierarchies allow for a significant degree of vertical constraint in the political beliefs of the mass public. However, we do not conceptualize values in the usual cognitive way, but rather as an almost effortless and or sub-cognitive referent – a heuristic. Thus, our conception of values as heuristics seeks to build upon Sniderman *et al.*'s (1991) argument that citizens will employ the most easily accessible and least complex process that provides the level of accuracy demanded. Political values seem to meet that need, even if they are not readily articulated given the inevitable value conflicts that arise within individuals. In this sense, our findings also dispute the emphasis on value ambivalence as the central feature of the belief systems of American citizens. Voters may hold conflicting views about many core values, but nonetheless their priorities are strong enough to guide their vote choice. Even if citizens cannot discuss their values without finding themselves in frustrating contradictions, when it comes to deciding on candidates to represent them, their value system provides a reliable guide.

Our findings support the argument that values are and in some sense should be the central language of electoral politics. We can bemoan the lack of political sophistication of the American electorate, but nonetheless we are bound by its decisions. This suggests that we are better served by campaigns that focus on the political beliefs that citizens can comprehend. In this sense the frequent calls for greater ideological grounding of candidates and the increased salience of specific policy issues miss the crucial point that many citizens do not understand and think in terms of ideology or issues. Campaigns that focus on basic value questions are more likely to be understood by the electorate, allowing them to make the appropriate choices.

A value dimension that seems especially relevant to contemporary politics is the division between theism and humanism. Our finding that this value is a strong predictor of vote choice, among both more and less sophisticated citizens, provides important empirical support for the culture wars thesis. Whether individuals look first to religious faith or to Enlightenment precepts as guides to understanding seems to be a powerful element of political decision-making for Republican voters. A second value dimension of particular contemporary relevance is isolationism versus interventionism. Contrary to studies from earlier eras of American politics, basic value priorities regarding the conduct of foreign policy have important electoral consequences.

Finally, the value heuristic approach has important ramifications for our interpretation of representative democracy, specifically for the aspects of the public's beliefs that are being represented. We argue that in some senses electoral democracy results more in value transmission than in the communication of policy preference. This is quite a different vision of representation from the one that many advocates of political participation currently share. In a system dominated by representation based on values, elected officials reflect the electorate's core beliefs, even though voters possess little political knowledge or interest in policy questions. This may be a suboptimal but still crucial form of representation, one that has empirical backing as well as normative importance.

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## Notes

1. See especially Sniderman *et al.* (1991: 19), who define heuristics as “judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice”.
2. Viability refers to perceptions of a candidate’s likelihood of winning the nomination contest (see Abramowitz, 1989), while electability refers to the odds of winning the general election to follow (see Abramson *et al.*, 1992). Momentum refers to a candidate’s recent performance or the direction their campaign seems to be going (see Bartels, 1988; Mutz, 1995).
3. An objection to this reasoning is that after being elected, politicians could be swayed by other political pressures to move away from the policies that match their value system. But the same objection applies to representation based on issue positions – candidates often change their positions after the election. The more important point is that while much of the electorate may not have issue positions on which they can be represented, they do have values, which *can* be represented.
4. One could view the model of representation we are describing as something in between the classic “delegate” and “trustee” models described in so much of the literature on representation (e.g. Miller & Stokes, 1963). In this model, voters place their trust in particular candidates to represent them, as in the trustee model, but because this trust is grounded in shared value systems, policy outcomes ultimately resemble those that might occur under the delegate model.
5. Values are fundamentally distinct from policy attitudes, in that political values are trans-situational evaluative predispositions, while attitudes are specific evaluations of particular items such as a given policy option. In this sense values can be expected to be more stable, less easily distorted by priming and framing effects, and can be applied to a wide range of political judgments. See Rohan (2000) for an excellent summary of the distinctions between these constructs.
6. Because freedom and equality are related in some ways (e.g. by promoting equality, a nation increases the freedom enjoyed by the less fortunate), this may hinder citizens from also comprehending the ways in which they are contradictory. They are opposed in the sense that maximizing individual liberty creates disparities in opportunity for all, because a “level playing field” can only be achieved by an outside force (such as the government) reigning in the natural inclinations of the powerful in a free society. Thus, most modern democracies try to strike some balance between the competing democratic visions of liberty and equality. For an excellent treatment of egalitarianism in American society, see Verba and Orren (1985).
7. We should emphasize, as Hunter does, that this value orientation is not a synonym for religious intensity or religiosity, which is often gauged by the frequency of church attendance. It is a matter of a traditionalist worldview, which is not limited to evangelical Protestants; it encompasses anyone who emphasizes faith in a transcendent source of authority, whatever that authority may be. Of course, this does not mean that this value orientation will not be correlated with certain religious affiliations. In our sample, respondents who identified themselves as born-again Christians were more likely to value theism over humanism ( $r = 0.271$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This reveals the importance of including born-again identification in our models to ward off spurious associations. Furthermore, theism–humanism is not a synonym for moral traditionalism, which is often captured in an individual’s opposition to policies designed to promote the civil rights of women and same-sex couples. The culture wars thesis argues that theism *causes* moral traditionalism, not that the two are the same thing.

8. The observation that some nomination contests may be a foregone conclusion limits the applicability of our approach to relatively open races. This does not mean that value heuristics and other mechanisms of representation do not play a role in all primary campaigns, but simply that in some cases the advantage of the front runner or party favorite may be too large to overcome, regardless of the characteristics of a challenger.
9. For full details of this content analysis, see Barker *et al.* (2006).
10. After 9/11 Bush clearly moved toward interventionist policies and abandoned his previous antagonism toward “nation-building”. But the signals projected by the candidates during the campaign clearly indicated that Bush was the more isolationist and McCain the more interventionist candidate.
11. We chose registered voters as the appropriate pool, rather than primary voters or all citizens. Primary voters represent a more politically informed and engaged strata, which would bias our results in favor of our hypotheses by excluding the less sophisticated. A sample of all citizens, on the other hand, would include many who do not engage in voting and therefore would not illuminate patterns of voting behavior. The most appropriate sample is all registered voters, the pool from which electoral decisions are drawn.
12. The sampling and data collection were carried out by the University Center for Social & Urban Research (UCSUR) at the University of Pittsburgh. The completion/response rate was 59%.
13. In terms of question order, respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of the candidates’ values *before* being asked about their own value priorities, in order to attenuate the propensity of respondents to project their own reported preferences onto their preferred candidate. Although our choice to measure value priorities dichotomously provides less information than broader scales would have, we believe that these dichotomies provide more reliable measures of value predispositions, since each respondent is unlikely to make an error large enough to move to the entirely wrong side of the dichotomy. This approach also eliminates the tendency of respondents to choose the middle alternative, forcing them to make a choice and reveal their predisposition, which many voters may have preferred to avoid. While there are drawbacks to this measurement strategy, we consider it better, on balance, than alternatives such as Likert scales. For a good overview of the advantages and disadvantages of various strategies, see Achen (1975), Dryzek (1988), and Zaller and Feldman (1992).
14. Indeed, in different contexts, scholars have treated such postures toward new lifestyles as a value. To be sure, the line between values and issue-based ideological postures might be difficult to draw in some cases. Indeed, the distinction here is less clear-cut than we would have liked, looking at it in retrospect. But we contend that the new lifestyles measure is a better measure of cultural liberalism–conservatism, rather than of the prioritization between two competing goals or values, both of which are typically viewed positively, in the vein of our value priority measures. Thus, we think that the new lifestyles measure is more clearly identified with a familiar aspect of liberalism–conservatism, rather than the somewhat more specific but also more abstract realm of value priorities.
15. The Condorcet Jury Theorem (Condorcet, 1785) states that “if  $n$  jurists [decision-makers] act independently, each with probability  $p > 1/2$  of making the correct decision, then the probability  $h_n(p)$  that the jury (deciding by majority rule) makes the correct decision increases monotonically to 1 as  $n$  increases to infinity” (Boland, 1989: 181). This means that “if on balance each voter is more often right than wrong, then the majority view is *very likely* to identify the decision that *is* objectively best” (Young, 1988: 1232, italics in original). For a review of applications of the Condorcet Theorem to elections see Black (1958).
16. It is important to remember that the Condorcet Theorem works equally powerfully in reverse – if individuals fall below the 50% likelihood of accuracy, then the aggregate result is almost certain to be wrong.
17. While it is not possible to directly observe the value priorities in the heads of candidates, their policy positions and expressed attitudes provide strong insights into their comparative value priorities. We argue that Bush is likely more theist, isolationist, and individualist than McCain, but we also consider perceptions that the two candidates are equal along any of these dimensions to be



reasonable (as noted earlier, the relative positions of Bush and McCain regarding libertarianism–egalitarianism were impossible to easily discern). Hence we think that the most conservative definition of accuracy separates reasonable perceptions from those that are highly likely to be faulty. Hence, the perceptions that we consider inaccurate are those that paint McCain as more theist, isolationist, or individualist than Bush. This approach allows us to distinguish between clearly inaccurate and *reasonably* accurate perceptions.

18. For issue postures we applied the same rule of discerning obvious errors, or instances where Bush was considered to be more liberal than McCain. The scales of the value and issue questions are slightly different, so we made sure that any bias was in the direction of greater numbers of errors in values rather than issues. Instead of dichotomous responses, the social issue question employs a three point scale. Applying the same rule to identify clear errors, this creates two erroneous responses out of the nine possible combinations, or a 22% error rate if respondents answer randomly. This compares favorably to the value queries, which have a one in four or 25% random error rate. The economic issue question employs a five point scale, which we recoded into a three point scale before applying the same procedure. This ensures that we have applied a conservative test of our hypotheses.
19. See Zaller (1992: 24–25): “[C]itizens must still possess some minimal degree of information in order to recognize the relevance of their values for a given issue, and, as I have been arguing, it is quite easy to underestimate how often even minimal political information may be absent for some citizens ... Thus, the impact of people’s value predispositions always depends on whether citizens possess the contextual information needed to translate their values into support for particular policies or candidates, and the possession of such information can, as shown earlier, never be taken for granted.”
20. We include both interview date and interview date squared for two reasons. First, we suspect that the ability of voters to learn from campaign events is not monotonic over time, but in fact grows exponentially as the nominating election in a voter’s state draws nearer and as publicity increases. Second, we suspect that voters may have picked up different types of cues following particular events that occurred at different times, such as McCain’s resounding victory in New Hampshire, Bush’s rebound in South Carolina, which was achieved largely through appeals aimed at mobilizing the Christian Right, and McCain’s direct confrontation with the Christian Right leading up to the Virginia primary.
21. Age, gender (female = 1), born-again Christian identity, and income.
22. It should be noted that the relationship regarding “new lifestyles” is only marginally significant, statistically speaking ( $p < 0.07$ ). Given that the new lifestyles item is admittedly closer to being a value than the services/spending item (though not a value priority, and less clearly a value than the items in our list of value priorities), it is in keeping with our theory that correct identification of candidates’ relative positions on this item would be more influenced by voter knowledge than the value priority items, but less so than the services spending item.
23. An alternative specification would have examined the degree to which congruence between voters’ value predispositions and their *perceptions* of the candidates’ values (perceived value congruence) relates to vote choice. However, such an operationalization would invite Type I errors based on projection bias. Because the direction of causality between vote choice and perceived value congruence could not be sorted out empirically, we chose to subject our theory to a more stringent empirical test. For the record, we did determine perceived value congruence as well and employed it as the independent variable in the same models presented here. The results of those models are essentially similar but demonstrate even stronger relationships.
24. Age, gender (female = 1), education (< 12 years = 1; postgraduate = 7), income, born-again Christianity (born again = 1), political knowledge, date of the interview, and the date of the interview squared (to capture the expected curvilinearity of this relationship, due to the spike in McCain support after the New Hampshire primary and subsequent drop after the South Carolina primary).
25. Relationships captured using probit are not monotonic. That is, predicted probabilities of voting for McCain, as a function of the independent variables, differ somewhat depending on the baseline probability of voting for McCain. Marginal effects capture the effects when the baseline probability



- of voting for McCain is equal to the mean, which provides a nice general indicator of the overall relationship (see Long, 1997).
26. Unfortunately, the relatively small size of our sample prevents us from comparing respondents according to quartiles, rather than the more crude split-sample approach.
  27. While the most straightforward means of testing the moderating role of political sophistication is the comparison between these two groups of high and low sophistication citizens, we explored other possibilities as well. Another test is to incorporate interaction terms into the model, multiplying both values and policy preferences with political sophistication. This allows us to observe how the magnitude of a value's relationship to vote choice is altered as voters reveal more knowledge about politics, across all knowledge levels. As predicted, interacting value priorities with knowledge does not significantly alter the baseline relationships, though this is not the case with the interaction of sophistication with issue positions. In other words, this also reveals that sophistication *does not significantly change the relationship between value priorities and candidate preference*, unlike a reliance on policy preferences. We chose not to report these models because, theoretically speaking, we do not expect the conditional effect of knowledge to be monotonic, but rather in effect when voters hold *requisite* levels of political awareness. Furthermore, statistically, including interaction terms multiplying knowledge by each of the value priority and issue posture variables created substantial multicollinearity and therefore reduced dramatically the amount of unique information that was being used to estimate particular relationships, damaging the efficiency of our estimates. Finally, the models in Table 4 enable us to present results that are much more easily interpretable than are the interaction models.

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## Appendix: Survey Questions

### *Value Priorities*

“Now I am going to ask you to make a series of choices between pairs of principles or values. Even if you like both choices, ask yourself which you consider most important for society. Force yourself to make a choice.” One half of the respondents were randomly queried with options in the reverse order, in order to eliminate bias toward selecting the first option.

- Libertarianism v. egalitarianism: “What would you say is more important for society: freedom (0) or equality (1)?” Mean = 0.20
- Individualism v. humanitarianism: “What would you say is more important for society: self-reliance and personal responsibility (0), or cooperation and helping others (1)?” Mean = 0.43
- Isolationism v. interventionism: “What would you say is more important for society: avoiding international conflict (0), or protecting our interests worldwide (1)?” Mean = 0.29
- Theism v. humanism: “What would you say is more important for society: religious faith (0) or knowledge (1)?” Mean = 0.52

### *Perceptions of Candidates' Value Priorities*

“In the next series of questions, I am going to ask you to think about the presidential candidates for your party’s nomination. For the two candidates, please think about how THEY would choose between these pairs of principles or values. Even if you don’t feel that you know the candidates well, please make your best estimate based on what you have heard about them.”

- Individualism v. humanitarianism: “What would you say Bush [McCain] believes is more important for society: self-reliance and personal responsibility, or cooperation and helping others?” Means = 0.37 (Bush), 0.43 (McCain)
- Isolationism v. interventionism: “What would you say Bush [McCain] believes is more important for society: avoiding international conflict, or protecting our interests worldwide?” Means = 0.73 (Bush), 0.78 (McCain)
- Theism v. humanism: “What would you say Bush [McCain] believes is more important for society: religious faith or knowledge?” Means = 0.56 (Bush), 0.78 (McCain)

### *Issue-Based Ideological Postures*

Government spending/services (economic liberalism–conservatism): “Some people believe that the government should provide many more services to its citizens to ensure a social safety net, even if it means spending more money. Others believe that the government should provide many fewer services, spending less money.

What about you? Would you say that the government should provide many fewer services, fewer services, neither more nor fewer services, more services, or far more services?" Mean = 2.42 (1–5 scale)

Support for new lifestyles (cultural liberalism–conservatism): "Some people believe that new lifestyles are good for society, while others believe that new lifestyles are harmful to society. What about you? Would you say that new lifestyles are bad for society, neither good nor bad for society, or good for society?" Mean = 1.82 (1–3 scale)

### *Perceptions of Candidates' Issue Postures*

"In the next series of questions, I am going to ask you to think about the presidential candidates for your party's nomination. For the two candidates, please think about how THEY would choose regarding these political issues. Even if you don't feel that you know the candidates well, please make your best estimate based on what you have heard about them."

Government spending: "Some people believe that the government should provide many more services to its citizens to ensure a social safety net, even if it means spending more money. Others believe that the government should provide many fewer services, spending less money. What about Bush [McCain]? Would you say that Bush [McCain] believes that the government should provide many fewer services, fewer services, neither more nor fewer services, more services, or far more services?" Means = 2.70 (Bush), 2.81 (McCain)

Support for new lifestyles: "Some people believe that new lifestyles are good for society, while others believe that new lifestyles are harmful to society. What about Bush [McCain]? Would you say that Bush [McCain] believes that new lifestyles are bad for society, neither good nor bad for society, or good for society?" Means = 1.71 (Bush), 1.88 (McCain)

### *Political Knowledge Index*

- 1) Which party now controls the US House of Representatives?
- 2) In general, which party is more conservative, Democrats or Republicans?
- 3) Which job or political office is now held by Madeleine Albright?
- 4) Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not ... is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?
- 5) How much of a majority is required for the US Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
- 6) Who is the Mayor of New York City and probable candidate for the Senate in the upcoming election?

Questions 1–5 are the Recommended Five-Item Knowledge Index found in Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993). An alteration of question number 3 was necessary, as it

is designed to refer to the Vice President. Because he is the focus of other questions in the survey, Madeleine Albright was substituted as another major executive branch figure. Question 6 was added to increase the range of respondents' scores. The percentage of correct responses was 72.7%, 88.0%, 58.8%, 81.6%, 56.6%, 72.7%, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha for the index is 0.71.