Political Sophistication and the Use of Candidate Traits in Candidate Evaluation
Author(s): Patrick A. Pierce
Source: *Political Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Mar., 1993), pp. 21-35
Published by: International Society of Political Psychology
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3791391
Accessed: 22-08-2019 16:56 UTC

REFERENCES

Political Psychology, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1993

Political Sophistication and the Use of Candidate Traits in Candidate Evaluation

Patrick A. Pierce
Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame

Most research on voting behavior has attempted to explain how individuals, in general, determine their candidate preference. Recently, however, some scholars have concluded that we must recognize that different individuals make these evaluations differently. Knight (1985) found that political sophistication affected the extent to which individuals rely on issues and ideology when evaluating presidential candidates. This paper finds that political sophistication has little systematic impact on the relative use of candidate's personal traits in evaluating the candidates. The results provide some evidence that the extent to which voters engage in rationalization involving candidate personal traits and issue positions is related to political sophistication.

KEY WORDS: political sophistication, candidate personal traits, candidate evaluation.

Most research on voting behavior has attempted to explain how individuals, in general, determine their candidate preference. Recently, however, Rivers (1988) has concluded that we must recognize that different individuals make these evaluations *differently*. A potentially useful variable for exploring such differences is political sophistication. Knight (1985) has conducted such an exploration by examining the role of political sophistication in affecting the extent to which individuals use party, ideological identification, and issue positions to develop their candidate preferences (see also, Jacoby, 1986; Stimson, 1975). The present study will contribute to further understanding the role of political sophistication in structuring the bases of the voting decision, beyond the results in Knight. I will examine the differences in the nature of candidate evaluation between individuals with different levels of political sophistication, focusing on the effects of political sophistication on individuals' use of candidates' personal characteristics in determining their candidate preference.

0162-895X/93/X900-0XXX$06.50/1
Published by Blackwell Publishers, 238 Main Street, Cambridge, MA 02142, USA, and 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF, UK.

Rivers correctly notes that traditional studies of electoral choice are suitable for understanding election outcomes (voting in general) but flawed for understanding the political psychology of the voting decision (Rivers, 1988). Generalizations based on homogeneous models of candidate choice are clearly inappropriate if issues, party identification, or other considerations carry different levels of salience for different kinds of voters (Jacoby, 1986). Rivers' solution is to use a sophisticated statistical technique for uncovering the existence of heterogeneity in models of electoral choice. This solution is essentially atheoretical, however, and begs the question of the basis of such heterogeneity. Once heterogeneity is discovered, its basis must still be determined.

Political sophistication is a theoretically promising concept for exploring the basis of heterogeneity in the dynamics of candidate choice. Luskin (1987) defines an individual's political sophistication as "the extent to which his or her PBS (political belief system) is large, wide-ranging, and highly constrained" (p. 860). As such, political sophistication should influence information-gathering strategies relevant to candidate choice, his or her ability to encode, store, and retrieve information and the individual's use of information which is discordant with his or her current beliefs (Fiske, Kinder, & Larter, 1983; Hagner & Pierce, 1982; Barton & Parsons, 1977). On a macropolitical level, political sophistication should affect the extent to which the collective voting decision communicates issue content, a referendum on economic performance, party voting, etc. (Knight, 1985). As such, exploring differences in models of candidate preference based on political sophistication sheds light on several normative issues in democratic theory (Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985).

Rivers observes that the measure of levels of political conceptualization, introduced by *The American Voter*, has the potential for illuminating the nature of such heterogeneity of candidate choice but "has been ignored in almost all subsequent analyses of issue voting" (Rivers, 1988, p. 746; see also, Luskin, 1987). The paucity of such research is striking because Hagner and Pierce (1982) and Cassell (1984) have demonstrated the construct validity of the levels of conceptualization measure (cf. Smith, 1980). Furthermore, Knight (1985) finds that the measure possesses a degree of predictive validity in affecting the nature of candidate choice.

The levels-of-conceptualization measure was designed to indicate *generally* the level of political sophistication of the individual (Campbell, et al., 1960). The measure makes qualitative and ordinal distinctions between aggregated responses to the open-ended questions concerning likes and dislikes about the political parties and the presidential candidates. Higher levels of conceptualization indicate higher levels of abstractions which are applied to politics. These abstractions make it possible for the individual to possess the "large, wide-ranging, and highly constrained" political belief system which Luskin identifies with political sophistication. Abstractions allow the individual to organize his or

her political beliefs in a more efficient fashion than if a "piecemeal" approach is used. Thus, his or her political belief system could include more beliefs, they could be better integrated, and thus could range over a wider area of political phenomena (see Luskin, 1987).

The levels-of-conceptualization measure has four categories. Ideologues are those individuals able to respond to these questions in terms of abstract concepts and principles (such as the liberalism-conservatism spectrum). At a lower level of sophistication, Group Benefits individuals are those who evaluate the parties and candidates in terms of the delivery of benefits to certain groups. At the next lower level of sophistication, Nature of the Times individuals respond largely in terms of praising or blaming the party and candidate in power for current circumstances. Finally, No Content individuals are unable to respond to these questions in a way which would indicate any analytical abilities; indeed, Knight (1985) notes that in 1980, 64% of those in this category said nothing.

As noted above, Knight (1985) found political sophistication (as measured by the levels of conceptualization) to affect the nature of candidate choice. Knight's use of party identification, ideological identification, and issue positions in her model was understandable given her concern with the various ways in which scholars have used the term "ideology" and the exploratory nature of the candidate-trait items in the 1980 ANES. However, we can profitably extend our understanding of the role of political sophistication in structuring candidate preference by including candidate traits in our model. Numerous studies have affirmed the increasing importance of candidate characteristics in affecting candidate choice (Pomper, 1975, 1977, 1981, 1985; RePass, 1976; Converse, 1975; Markus & Converse, 1979; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). If we wish to understand more accurately the role of political sophistication in structuring the individual's voting decision, exploring differences in the use of candidate traits is an important endeavor.

Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) have studied educational differences in the use of candidate characteristics and argue that

> Candidates should be very salient features of [the campaign] environment, perhaps even more so than issues or parties, because they are less abstract; thus, it is easier to store and retrieve information about them from memory (Miller et al. 1986, p. 525).

Therefore, none of the candidate traits is sufficiently complex to substantially challenge voters. Even unsophisticated voters should be *able* to use candidate traits and,

> Contrary to the common assumption by those who view personality as irrational, schema theories suggest that more politically informed voters will be the most likely to make comments about the candidates' inner dispositions and behaviors (Miller et al., 1986, p. 524).

Although the authors refer only to "making comments," they clearly expect similar differences in the use of candidate traits in evaluating candidates. As

political sophistication increases, the impact of candidate traits on candidate preference should increase.

Glass (1985) presents a different argument which leads to the same prediction. Glass notes that sophisticated citizens "know" that candidates can change their issue stances once elected. "One might surmise that only the better educated would realize the ephemeral nature of the issue positions taken by the candidate and accordingly given more weight to the personal attributes of the candidates" (Glass, 1985, p. 519). However, he finds few differences in the reliance on candidate traits by individuals with differing levels of education (which he uses as a measure of sophistication).

Contrary to these studies, my expectation is that more politically sophisticated individuals should be *less* likely to rely on candidate traits in forming their candidate preferences. This expectation does not imply that candidate traits are foolish criteria for voters. Political sophistication entails the ability to link specific issues to each other and to organize those issues through broader, more abstract concepts (Converse, 1964; Luskin, 1987; Conover & Feldman, 1984; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985; Stimson, 1975; Marcus, Tabb, & Sullivan, 1974). As such, political sophistication composes a relatively enduring system which can assist the voter in evaluating candidates once the candidate's party, ideology, and issue positions have been identified.[1] Sophisticated individuals are therefore more likely than less sophisticated ones to use party, ideology, and issues in evaluating the candidates (Knight, 1985).

However, on what basis should less sophisticated individuals make their candidate choice? These individuals should rely more heavily on cognitively simpler (less abstract) and more accessible cues. Less sophisticated individuals should choose candidates on the basis of party (directly, rather than incorporating issue positions) and candidate traits. Candidate traits, in general, are not integral to the kind of political cognitive network which has been found among more politically sophisticated individuals. Personal traits are not necessarily linked to the political parties, ideologies, and issues in the same way that these three latter sets of factors are interrelated. Candidate traits need not be related to politics, whereas parties, ideologies, and issues are inherently political; thus, candidate traits require less sophistication to understand and incorporate into the voting decision. Furthermore, candidate traits are very accessible to voters. Patterson (1980) and others (Brady & Hagen, 1986; Brady & Johnston, 1987) have found that the media focus on the horse-race aspect of the campaign and on candidate traits rather than on issues.

This discussion does not imply that sophisticated voters *do not* use candi-

[1]These evaluations of candidates are not necessarily accurate. Indeed, one of the functions of political sophistication is to "fill in" missing information by making reasonable (but perhaps incorrect) inferences on the basis of other information which is known.

date traits in forming their candidate preference. Since these characteristics receive so much attention from the media, it is likely that *all* voters—regardless of sophistication—use them. However, more sophisticated voters should also use more sophisticated cues, thus minimizing the *relative* impact of candidate traits.

The second area of investigation examines the *kinds* of candidate traits that are used by individuals within each level of political sophistication. On this heading, little theoretical or empirical guidance exists. Our efforts in this regard will be frankly exploratory. Nonetheless, the existence of four dimensions of candidate characteristics argues for separate examination of the impact of political sophistication on the use of each of the candidate traits.

The specific measures of candidate traits used in this study were obtained in the 1980 and 1984 American National Elections Studies by asking respondents to evaluate the presidential candidates in terms of a variety of personal characteristics. In the 1984 study, twelve of these characteristics form four dimensions or traits (Kinder, 1986; Brady & Johnston, 1987):[2]

1) Leadership—composed of a) Commands respect b) Inspiring c) Strong leadership

2) Competence—composed of a) Hard-working b) Intelligent c) Knowledgeable

3) Integrity—composed of a) Decent b) Moral c) Good example

4) Empathy—composed of a) Compassionate b) Kind c) Cares about people like me

The discussion of candidate traits will be centered on these four dimensions.

SPECIFICATION

The data to be used in the study are from the American National Election Study of 1984. The first two models were estimated for each level of conceptualization: Ideologues, Group Benefits, Nature of the Times, and No Content. Only those respondents voting for one of the two major party candidates for president are included in the analysis (Knight, 1985).

The first model is comparable to that used by Knight (1985). The results from this model can be compared to those of her study and facilitate comparative analysis between the 1980 and 1984 elections. More importantly, these results can be compared to a model which includes candidate traits. The equation is presented below.

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6 + b_7X_7 + b_8X_8 + b_9X_9 + e \quad (1)$$

[2]The 1980 study did not use the same candidate trait items as the 1984 study, eliminating the possibility of performing a comparative analysis between the two years.

Where

Y = Score on candidate preference (Difference between thermometer items for Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale)
X_1 = Party ID (7-pt scale [V318])
X_2 = Liberal/Conservative (7-pt, nonbranching scale [V369])
X_3 = Defense spending (7-pt, self-placement scale [V395])
X_4 = Government services spending (7-pt, self-placement scale [V375])
X_5 = U.S. involvement in Central America (7-pt, self-placement scale [V388])
X_6 = Minority aid (7-pt, self-placement scale [V382])
X_7 = "Detente" (7-pt, self-placement scale [V408])
X_8 = Government assistance to women (7-pt, self-placement scale [V401])
X_9 = Guaranteed job (7-pt, self-placement scale [V414])
b_1 are the appropriate regression coefficients
a is the constant, and e is the error term.[3]

Next, a model incorporating party, ideology, issues, and candidate traits was tested. This model allows us to evaluate the impact of candidate traits on candidate preference, and also note the reductions in the explanatory power of issues and ideology (for each level of political sophistication) as candidate traits are allowed to enter the equation. This model could, of course, be more fully specified. For example, group evaluations have an impact on candidate preference and these evaluations are probably more important among Group Benefits voters. However, the purpose of this study is to provide an initial investigation of differences in the impact of candidate traits on candidate preference and hence focuses on the traditionally used predictors (party and issues) in addition to candidate traits. Thus, the equation for model 2 simply adds the four candidate traits to the right side of equation 1. The score on each candidate trait index was obtained by averaging scores on the items for each trait (see above for the items associated with each trait). If one item was missing, the average was computed for the two available items. Respondents missing two or three of the items were removed from the analysis. The final score was obtained by computing the difference between the trait indexes for the two candidates.

These two equations were estimated for the sake of providing fairly direct comparisons with the results in Knight (1985). However, the use of these equations presents a pair of related problems. First, a more realistic model of candi-

[3]The issue items are identical to those used by Knight with the exception of X_5 and X_8. In 1984, the Central American question replaced the 1980 question on Inflation/Unemployment. Also, the question wording on the position of women was changed between the two surveys. Proximity measures are not initially used in order to provide faithful comparisons with Knight's results. Also, Knight's study did not reveal substantial differences in results when proximity measures were used. Model 3, below, introduces proximity measures.

date choice would use issue proximity measures rather than simply the respondent's issue positions. Furthermore, issue proximity should be measured with respect to the candidates' "true" positions (the sample's average perception of the candidates' positions) (Markus & Converse, 1979; Krosnick, 1988). Second, the issue positions (and proximity measures) should be highly collinear. Hence, the issue measures will be "competing" for virtually the same variance, limiting regression coefficients for all the issues. To remedy these two problems, the third model uses a single issue proximity measure which sums up the relative distances from the candidates on all seven issues. One reviewer suggested using policy domains to define subsets of issues (see Kritzer, 1978). Factor analysis, however, revealed that the issues did not form more than one distinct factor. Only two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were uncovered and the eigenvalue for the second factor was minimally significant. More importantly, the only issue with a factor loading greater than .5 on the second factor was U.S. involvement in Central America. The liberal-conservative measure, which is highly collinear with the issues, is dropped from the equation (Judd & Krosnick, 1982; Judd & Milburn, 1980). A third problem concerns the use of separate equations for each level of political sophistication. Producing separate equations for each level of sophistication provides a measure of clarity in examining the nature of electoral choice within each level. However, a single equation provides certain advantages. This equation includes three dummy variables (for Ideologues, Group Benefits, and Nature of the Times), party identification, issue proximity, candidate traits, and multiplicative terms involving the dummy variables and the party, candidate trait, and issue variables. (See Wittink, 1988, p. 113, for a discussion of the advantages of using a single equation.) The estimates of the standard errors of the coefficients will be superior in the single equation, and the t-ratios for the coefficients of the multiplicative terms allow us to determine more directly whether the differences in the reliance on issues, candidate traits, and party identification are statistically significant.[4]

FINDINGS

The first model to be estimated is similar to the full model used by Knight (1985). The results are displayed below in Table I. The relationships revealed in Table I closely resemble those found in the 1980 election by Knight. Issues and

[4]For example, the coefficient for the interactive term IDEO*Party ID estimates the difference in impact of party identification on candidate preference for those who are ideologues compared to those in the reference category (i.e. No Content voters). I should note that the results using the single equation do not differ substantially from those using four equations. The R^2 for the single equation is a weighted average of the R^2s in the four equations. The only difference is that the standard errors of the coefficients are greater (necessarily) in the single equation.

Table I. Bases of Candidate Preference (Knight Model) by Level of Political Sophistication Regression Coefficients (T-ratio)

Item	Ideologues	Group	Nat. of Times	No Content
Party ID	10.989	15.669	8.599	10.193
	(10.042)	(10.967)	(8.494)	(4.909)
L/C	6.114	1.067	5.912	3.014
	(3.823)	(0.550)	(3.624)	(0.846)
Defense $	2.379	3.697	2.956	1.644
	(1.506)	(2.102)	(2.040)	(0.503)
Services $	−1.071	−3.950	−4.300	2.617
	(−0.714)	(−1.898)	(−2.955)	(0.848)
Central America	−3.740	−0.665	−0.375	0.299
	(−3.191)	(−0.426)	(−0.327)	(0.099)
Minority aid	3.228	1.710	2.590	−1.123
	(2.380)	(0.942)	(1.612)	(−0.376)
"Detente"	2.361	2.841	2.094	−0.168
	(2.055)	(1.970)	(1.441)	(−0.067)
Govt assist women	−0.139	2.747	2.094	4.241
	(−0.101)	(1.588)	(1.441)	(1.335)
Job guarantee	4.444	2.112	1.106	6.214
	(2.811)	(1.153)	(0.815)	(1.876)
CONSTANT	−82.275	−78.148	−70.167	−92.099
	(−5.640)	(−4.383)	(−4.923)	(−2.524)
R^2	0.765	0.600	0.571	0.332
(N)	(277)	(233)	(229)	(60)

ideology are meaningful (statistically) primarily for Ideologues. For Ideologues, the issues of Central America, Minority Aid, "Detente," and Guaranteed Job have a significant impact on candidate preference. For Group Benefits and Nature of the Times voters, only the issues of Defense Spending and Government Services Spending were more important in affecting candidate preference. The most important difference between 1980 and 1984 is the impact of ideology on candidate preference among Nature of the Times voters. In 1980, ideology did not have a significant impact on candidate preference for these voters; in 1984, the impact of ideology on candidate preference among Nature of the Times voters was similar to that exhibited among Ideologues.

In terms of the explanatory power of Knight's model, the R^2's do decline as political sophistication decreases. Politically more sophisticated individuals do rely more on ideology and issues in determining their candidate preferences than do less sophisticated individuals.

The second model adds the four candidate trait items to Knight's model. This model enables us to examine the extent to which the impact of ideology and issues (Table I) is artificially inflated as the result of using a less specified model.

The candidate trait variables, collectively, constitute a significant improvement in the model. Partial F-tests (within each level of sophistication) between the Full Model and the Knight Model are significant at $p \leq .05$. By level, the

Table II. Bases of Candidate Preference (Full Model) by Level of Political Sophistication Regression Coefficients (T-ratio)

Item	Ideologues	Group	Nat. of Times	No Content
Party ID	6.075	6.218	3.972	2.139
	(5.712)	(4.836)	(5.228)	(0.689)
L/C	3.722	1.501	1.307	1.525
	(2.561)	(1.030)	(1.115)	(0.329)
Defense $	2.075	1.474	0.451	−3.912
	(1.530)	(1.101)	(0.438)	(−0.933)
Services $	−1.276	−1.111	−3.414	7.342
	(−0.962)	(−0.687)	(−3.413)	(1.842)
Central America	−3.014	−1.381	−0.114	5.069
	(−2.906)	(−1.175)	(−0.139)	(1.112)
Minority aid	1.801	−0.273	−0.330	−0.517
	(1.522)	(−0.191)	(−0.286)	(−0.115)
"Detente"	−0.057	−0.904	2.093	6.377
	(−0.056)	(−0.804)	(2.548)	(2.144)
Govt assist women	−0.453	1.067	0.628	4.414
	(−0.364)	(0.774)	(0.618)	(1.089)
Job guarantee	1.685	0.493	1.101	3.655
	(1.222)	(0.359)	(1.135)	(1.034)
Leadership	−7.701	−9.979	−11.309	−16.805
	(−4.017)	(−4.537)	(−5.534)	(−1.892)
Competence	−4.702	−3.017	−1.379	2.397
	(−1.951)	(−1.059)	(−0.597)	(0.191)
Integrity	−4.499	−8.336	−10.812	−6.180
	(−1.444)	(−2.535)	(−3.243)	(−0.310)
Empathy	−9.990	−15.353	−9.688	−18.889
	(−3.987)	(−4.095)	(−3.679)	(−1.405)
CONSTANT	−31.495	−17.816	−15.690	−111.589
	(−2.192)	(−1.226)	(−1.481)	(−3.082)
R^2	0.859	0.831	0.817	0.701
(N)	(234)	(188)	(197)	(38)

F-ratios are—Ideologues: 32.733; Group Benefits: 55.459; Nature of the Times: 62:509; and No Content: 5.569.

Once candidate traits are included in the model, few issues have a significant impact on candidate preference, even among politically sophisticated voters. Among ideologues, only U.S. involvement in Central America and Defense spending are significantly related to candidate choice. The individual's positions on "Detente" and Government Services Spending are significantly related to candidate choice for Nature of the Times voters, but for Group Benefits individuals, none of the issues has a significant impact on candidate preference.

Party identification is significantly related to candidate preference for the top three levels of political sophistication. However, ideological self-placement is an important predictor of candidate choice only among ideologues. These findings conform to those of Knight (1985).

Making comparisons across levels of political sophistication reveals few

differences in the reliance on specific candidate traits, none of which is statistically significant ($p \leq .05$).[5] As political sophistication increases from Nature of the Times to Group Benefits, the use of Competence becomes significantly related to candidate preference. Conversely, Integrity is significantly related to candidate preference among Nature of the Times voters, but declines as political sophistication increases.

The final model substitutes an issue proximity measure for the 7 separate self-placement measures and uses a single equation. The results are presented below.[6]

The use of an issue proximity index boosts the statistical importance of issues above that indicated in Table II. Ideologues rely more heavily on issues than do individuals at any other level of political sophistication ($p \leq .05$). However, the relationship between political sophistication and the reliance on issues is not monotonic. Whereas Group Benefits voters did not significantly rely on issues in affecting their candidate preference, Nature of the Times voters did.

The results concerning candidate traits are not changed dramatically from the above model (Table II). Competence is slightly more likely to be used by individuals with higher levels of political sophistication, and Integrity is somewhat more likely to be used by individuals with lower levels of political sophistication. Leadership and Empathy are, however, of importance to individuals regardless of their level of sophistication.

DISCUSSION

The present study clarifies the findings of Knight (1985). Adding candidate traits to her model results in sharply diminished issue coefficients. Two issues are significantly related to candidate preference among ideologues (Defense spending and Central America) and Nature of the Times voters (Government service spending and Detente). Interestingly, Group Benefits voters—presumably more sophisticated than Nature of the Times voters—did not rely significantly on any issue. Creating an issue proximity index bolsters the impact of issues on candidate preference, but again provides the anomaly of Nature of the Times voters emphasizing issues to a significantly greater extent than "more sophisticated" Group Benefits voters.

More broadly, the present study extends our understanding of the role of

[5]Comparisons of the impact of individual items (e.g., Competence) between levels of political sophistication will only involve the top three levels—Ideologues, Group Benefits, and Nature of the Times. The drastic reduction in sample size among No Content voters (missing values) makes reliable comparisons with this group difficult. As a potential solution to this problem, I recalculated the equations for all the models using mean substitution for missing values. This exercise produced some baffling results which made no sense, particularly in the higher levels of sophistication.

[6]The partial F-test for the hypothesis that the candidate trait items do not significantly increase the explained variance from the more limited model is significant at $p \leq .05$ ($F = 72.685$).

Table III. Bases of Candidate Preference Single Equation with Issue Proximity Index

Item	Coefficient	T-ratio
Party ID	3.697	2.226
IDEO * Party ID	2.273	1.200
GBEN * Party ID	2.502	1.299
NTIME * Party ID	0.228	0.126
Issues	5.423	1.522
IDEO * Issues	6.608	1.613
GBEN * Issues	−3.586	−0.870
NTIME * Issues	2.824	0.707
Leadership	−8.874	−2.072
IDEO * Leadership	0.280	0.061
GBEN * Leadership	−1.585	−0.343
NTIME * Leadership	−2.091	−0.446
Competence	8.191	1.242
IDEO * Competence	−15.726	−2.269
GBEN * Competence	−14.397	−2.063
NTIME * Competence	−10.855	−1.560
Integrity	−16.303	−1.926
IDEO * Integrity	11.107	1.245
GBEN * Integrity	10.670	1.203
NTIME * Integrity	5.808	0.647
Empathy	−13.748	−2.130
IDEO * Empathy	3.864	0.566
GBEN * Empathy	−1.449	−0.211
NTIME * Empathy	2.538	0.370
CONSTANT	−7.001	−1.283
Adjusted R^2 = .832 (N) 931		

Note: None of the coefficients for main effects of the level of conceptualization dummy variables were significant. Excluding these dummy variables from the equation did not substantially alter the results.

political sophistication in structuring the bases of the voting decision beyond the results in Knight (1985). Political sophistication does seem to affect individuals' ability and preference to use ideology in evaluating the candidates, as Knight found. However, political sophistication clearly does not affect how individuals will use candidate traits in their estimation of the candidates. This finding is consistent with Rahn, et al. (1990) which finds no consistent differences in the use of candidate traits, using slightly different measures than those employed in this study. Furthermore, once candidate traits are added to a model of electoral choice, the use of issues is not consistently related to political sophistication. Confirming the results of other studies (e.g., Jacoby, 1986), sophistication does not behave as an ordinal variable in this regard.

Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) use different measures to test

some of the same propositions related to the use of candidate traits. Their measure of sophistication is the respondent's level of education and they use the open-ended questions on likes/dislikes about the candidates to indicate candidate traits. (Furthermore, they arrive at five candidate traits—Competence, Integrity, Reliability, Charisma, and Personal.) As noted above, their hypotheses run counter to our expectations. A careful examination of the findings in Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) and the present study indicates, however, that the use of candidate traits does *not* differ systematically between levels of political sophistication. Whether indicated by education or the levels of political conceptualization measure, sophisticated voters do not seem to differ (in theoretically reasonable ways) from unsophisticated voters in their use of candidate traits (again, using either indicator of candidate traits).

Therefore, we should consider context more fully when considering how individuals perceive candidates. The emphasis on political sophistication directs our attention to how individuals process information which is somewhat complex or not very accessible. Even Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) hypothesize that some kind of schema is needed to effectively store, retrieve, and use candidate trait information. The findings from this study concerning the importance of candidate traits indicate that we should remember that some information—which is cognitively facile—is quite available during the course of the campaign and that even unsophisticated individuals can use such information. The widespread reliance on such information says more about the campaign environment than about differences in information processing between individuals with varying levels of political sophistication, perhaps regardless of the operationalization of political sophistication.

One might argue, however, that more sophisticated voters use that simple information in more sophisticated ways than do less sophisticated voters (see Fiske et al., 1983). Adding candidate traits to Knight's model significantly increases the variance explained for all levels of sophistication. However, among those with lower levels of political sophistication, candidate traits seem to make a greater independent contribution to the variance explained in candidate preference. The increases in R^2 accomplished by adding candidate traits to Knight's model are: Ideologues: .094; Group Benefits: .231; Nature of the Times: .246; No Content: .369. This result is consistent with McGraw, Lodge, and Stroh's (1990) finding that

> sophisticated citizens are characterized by more efficient on-line processing of political information, whereas nonsophisticated citizens are more likely to be characterized by memory-based processing (p. 51).

Memory-based processing would treat issues and candidate traits as morsels of information to be recalled when the individual is asked to evaluate the candidate; on-line processing uses this information in an ongoing fashion to form and

update an impression of the candidate. Therefore, we should expect issues and candidate traits to make independent contributions to candidate preference among less sophisticated voters; among more sophisticated voters, issues and candidate traits are more closely related (see Rahn et al., 1990) and less likely to have independent impacts on candidate preference (see also Krosnick, 1988; Shaffer, 1981).

Perhaps more interestingly, we might consider the measure of political sophistication itself. The levels of political conceptualization measure is clearly intended as a global indicator of political sophistication. Schema development or domain-specific expertise are narrower measures of sophistication. McGraw and Pinney (1990) have investigated the relationships between global and more specific measures of sophistication and their impact on political judgments. Their study suggests that global measures of political sophistication will affect differences in on-line processing of information, whereas domain-specific measures will affect differences in memory. Importantly, global measures of sophistication, such as the levels-of-Political Sophistication, Candidate Traits, and Candidate Evaluation political conceptualization measure, may be weakly related to such topic-specific measures of political sophistication (for theoretical discussions, see Lau, 1986; Hamill and Lodge, 1986; Luskin, 1987; for a slightly different empirical examination, see Fiske, Lau, and Smith, 1990). Hence, the appropriate measure for political sophistication should be used in examining differences in the relationships between issues, candidate traits, and candidate preference. The present study suggests that global measures, at least the levels of conceptualization, are not appropriate in understanding differences in the use of candidate traits in affecting candidate preference. That is, candidate traits may affect candidate preferences through memory-based processing. (Note that Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh (1989) use candidate traits as part of their measure of candidate evaluation. Hence, the process by which candidate traits affect candidate evaluation cannot be examined.) Perhaps the use of schema development or narrower measures of political sophistication would reveal greater differences in the use of candidate traits.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1989 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta. The data for this research were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan, which bears no responsibility for the analyses and interpretation. I would like to thank Warren Miller, Gerald Pomper, Don Miller, Michael Delli-Carpini, Rick Lau, and Art Goldberger for their

helpful and useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. All remaining errors are, of course, my own.

REFERENCES

Barton, A. H. and R. W. Parsons. (1977). Measuring belief system structure. *Public Opinion Quarterly 41*: 159–180.

Brady, H. E. and Hagen, M. G. (1986). The 'horse-race' or the issues? What do voters learn from Presidential primaries? Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C.

Brady, H. E. and R. Johnston. (1987). What's the primary message: Horse race or issue journalism. In G. R. Orren and N. W. Polsby (Eds.). *Media and Momentum: The New Hampshire Primary and Nomination Politics*, Chatham, N. J.

Campbell, A., P. Converse, W. Miller, and D. Stokes. (1960). *The American Voter*, Wiley, New York.

Cassel, C. A. (1984). Issues in measurement: The "levels of conceptualization" index of ideological sophistication. *American Journal of Political Science 28*: 417–429.

Conover, P. J. and S. Feldman. (1984). How people organize the political world: A schematic model. *American Journal of Political Science 28*: 95–126.

Converse, P. E. (1964). The nature of belief systems in mass publics. In D. Apter (Ed.)., *Ideology and Discontent*, Free Press of Glencoe, N. Y.

Converse, P. E. (1975). Public opinion and voting behavior. In F. I. Greenstein and N. W. Polsby (Eds.). *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 4*, Addison-Wesley, MA.

Fiske, S. T., D. R. Kinder, and W. M. Larter. (1983). The novice and the expert: Knowledge-based strategies in political cognition. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 19*: 381–400.

Fiske, S. T., R. R. Lau, and R. A. Smith. (1990). On the varieties and utilities of political expertise. *Social Cognition 8*: 31–48.

Glass, D. P. (1985). Evaluating Presidential candidates: Who focuses on their personal attributes? *Public Opinion Quarterly 49*: 517–534.

Hagner, P. R. and J. C. Pierce. (1982). Correlative characteristics of levels of conceptualization in the American public: 1956–1976. *Journal of Politics 44*: 779–807.

Hamill, R. and M. Lodge. (1986). Cognitive consequences of political sophistication. In Lau, R. R. and D. O. Sears (Eds.)., *Political Cognition*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, N. J.

Jacoby, W. G. (1986). Levels of conceptualization and reliance on the liberal-conservative continuum. *Journal of Politics 48*: 423–432.

Judd, C. M. and J. A. Krosnick. (1982). Attitude centrality, organization, and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 42*: 436–447.

Judd, C. M. and M. A. Milburn. (1980). The structure of attitude systems in the general public. *American Sociological Review 45*: 627–643.

Kinder, D. R. (1986). Presidential character revisited. In Lau, R. R. and D. O. Sears (Eds.)., *Political Cognition*, Lawrence Erlbaum, N. J.

Knight, K. (1985). Ideology in the 1980 election: Ideological sophistication does matter. *Journal of Politics 47*: 828–853.

Kritzer, H. M. (1978). Ideology and American political elites. *Public Opinion Quarterly 42*: 484–502.

Krosnick, J. A. (1988). The role of attitude importance in social evaluation: A study of policy preferences, presidential candidate evaluations, and voting behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 55*: 196–210.

Lau, R. R. (1986). Political schemata, candidate evaluations, and voting behavior. In Lau, R. R. and D. O. Sears (Eds.)., *Political Cognition*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, N. J.

Lodge, M., K. M. McGraw, and P. Stroh. (1989). An impression-driven model of candidate evaluation. *American Political Science Review 83*: 399–419.

Luskin, R. (1987). Measuring political sophistication. *American Journal of Political Science 31*: 856–899.
Marcus, G., D. Tabb, and J. P. Sullivan. (1974). The application of individual differences scaling analysis to the measurement of ideology. *American Journal of Political Science 18*: 405–420.
Markus, G. B. and P. E. Converse. (1979). A dynamic simultaneous equation model of electoral choice. *American Political Science Review 73*: 1055–1070.
McGraw, K. M., M. Lodge, and P. Stroh. (1990). On-line processing in candidate evaluation: The effects of issue order, issue importance, and sophistication. *Political Behavior 12*: 41–58.
McGraw, K. M. and N. Pinney. (1990). The effects of general and domain-specific expertise on political memory and judgment. *Social Cognition 8*: 9–30.
Miller, A. H., M. P. Wattenberg, and O. Malanchuk. (1986). Schematic assessments of Presidential candidates. *American Political Science Review 80*: 521–540.
Patterson, T. E. (1980). *The Mass Media Election*, Praeger, N. Y.
Peffley, M. A. and Jon Hurwitz. (1985). A hierarchical model of attitude constraint. *American Journal of Political Science 29*: 871–890.
Pomper, G. M. (1975). *Voter's Choice*, Harper & Row, N. Y.
Pomper, G. M. (1977). *The Election of 1976*, David McKay, N. Y.
Pomper, G. M. (1981). *The Election of 1980*, Chatham House, Chatham, N. J.
Pomper, G. M. (1985). *The Election of 1984*, Chatham House, Chatham, N. J.
Rahn, W., et al. (1990). A social-cognitive model of candidate appraisal. In Ferejohn, J. A. and J. H. Kuklinski, (Eds.), *Information and Democratic Processes*, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana and Chicago.
RePass, D. (1976). Comment: Political methodologies in disarray: Some alternative interpretations of the 1972 election. *American Political Science Review 70*: 814–831.
Rivers, D. (1988). Heterogeneity in models of electoral choice. *American Journal of Political Science 32*: 737–757.
Shaffer, S. D. (1981). Balance theory and political cognitions. *American Politics Quarterly 9*: 291–320.
Smith, E. R. A. N. (1980). The levels of conceptualization: false measure of ideological sophistication. *American Political Science Review 74*: 685–696.
Stimson, J. (1975). Belief systems: Constraint, complexity, and the 1972 election. *American Journal of Political Science 19*: 398–418.
Wittink, D. R. (1988). *The Application of Regression Analysis*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.