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# Ideology and candidate evaluation*

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**Abstract.** How does the expressed political ideology of voters influence their evaluation of presidential candidates? The classic answer to this question is provided by the spatial theory of electoral choice in which utility for a candidate is a function of the proximity between the voter and candidate positions on the liberal-conservative continuum. We have argued elsewhere that spatial theory, while intellectually appealing, is inadequate as an empirical model of mass behavior. We have developed a directional theory of issue voting that we believe provides a more realistic accounting of how specific policy issues influence utility for a candidate. Directional theory is based on the view that for most voters issues are understood as a dichotomous choice between two alternative positions. While ideology is widely understood as a continuum of positions, the directional model can be applied to the relationship between ideology and candidate evaluation. In this paper we compare the two theories using National Election Study data from 1972 to 1988. The results tend to favor the directional model over the traditional proximity model. We conclude by briefly tracing out the implications of this finding.

A host of factors influence how voters evaluate candidates for the American presidency. Candidates compete in terms of their ability to deliver economic good times, personality, partisanship, and specific issues, to mention a few. Yet when elections are interpreted, particularly by the mass media, the keynote of the interpretation is usually liberal-conservative ideology. Because ideology is so rich in content, it provides a natural shorthand for understanding the broad consequences of election outcomes.

Here we consider the relationship between ideology and candidate evaluation. But we do so through a particular lens. Recently, a directional theory of issue voting has been proposed as an alternative to the traditional proximity-based spatial model. In this paper we will compare the two models as explanations for how ideology relates to candidate evaluation. First we will introduce the directional model; then we will investigate the evaluations of candidates for president of the United States from 1972 through 1988.

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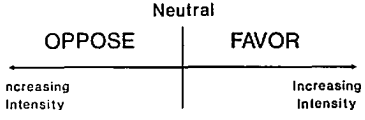


*Figure 1.* A Directional Continuum

## 1. Introduction to directional theory

Directional theory rests on the assumption that individuals in the mass public usually perceive issues as two-sided rather than continuous. Position on one side or the other of an issue continuum reflects intensity for the favored side rather than preference for a particular policy option. For example, if we think of the issue of government-provided health insurance, voters would tend to be *for* or *against* or *neutral*. Unless the debate were unusually specific, individuals in the mass public would not be concerned about the particular mix of government versus private insurance; they would simply favor or oppose some form of national health insurance. On each side of the issue, individuals would vary in terms of how much they cared.

Figure 1 shows a directional continuum. Notice that there is a neutral point at which voters simply do not care about an issue. On the right side of the neutral point, voters favor national health insurance; on the left side, they are opposed. Moving away from the center, voters become more intense. This is a very different continuum from the traditional policy continuum on which each position represents a preference for a particular policy alternative. With regard to health insurance, a traditional policy continuum might associate each position with a different mix of government versus private insurance.

In directional theory, candidates or parties also differ in terms of which side of the issue they are on and the intensity with which they advocate their position. Intensity can be viewed as a function of the candidate's actual extremeness on the issue, the degree of stress placed on the issue, and the candidate's past history with regard to the issue. But candidate intensity is constrained. According to the theory, a candidate or party will be penalized if it is so intense as to be perceived as irresponsible.

In directional theory, the utility of voter i for candidate j is a monotone function of the scalar product between the voter and candidate positions less a potential penalty.[1] Thus, utility is a monotone function of $A_{ij}$, where

$$A_{ij} = \Sigma_k \, I_{ik} \, I_{jk} - P_{ij} \qquad (1)$$

where

$I_{ik}$ is negative if voter i is on the left side of issue k and positive if voter i is on the right side, and $|I_{ik}|$ represents the intensity of voter i with regard to issue k

$I_{jk}$ is defined similarly for candidate j with regard to issue k

and

$P_{ij} = 0$ when $\Sigma_k I_{jk}^2 < r^2$ and
$P_{ij} > 0$ when $\Sigma_k I_{jk}^2 > r^2$

where r defines the maximum intensity level of a candidate before being penalized. Notice that the penalty function defines a hypersphere (circle) of radius r around the neutral center of the directional space.

It is useful to contrast the utility function of the directional model with that of the traditional proximity model. In the traditional model, utility is a negative monotone function of Euclidean distance (or, equivalently, distance squared). Thus, utility is a monotone function of $B_{ii}$, where

$$B_{ij} = - \Sigma_k (\theta_{ik} - \theta_{jk})^2 \qquad (2)$$

where

$\theta_{ik}$ is the position of voter i on issue k
$\theta_{jk}$ is the position of candidate j on issue k

Conceptually the theories are quite different. Traditional proximity theory argues that utility for a candidate is based on positional congruence and that voters prefer the candidate whose policy bundle is closest to their own (Davis, Hinich, and Ordeshook, 1970; Enelow and Hinich, 1984). Directional theory assumes that most people do not have specific policy preferences; they have only a general sense of which direction they prefer in a policy debate. In directional theory, voters prefer candidates who are on their side of issues and intense. Voters only constrain candidates by insisting they be responsible.

The theories also lead to very different views about what constitutes effective political strategy. In traditional spatial theory there is a strong incentive for candidates to be centrist (e.g., Calvert, 1985; Cox, 1990; Enelow and Hinich, 1984). In directional theory there is a strong incentive for candidates to be *non*-centrist when they are on the popular side of an issue (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). From a representational perspective, proximity theory views the representative as an instructed delegate pursuing the policy most preferred by the voter. In directional theory the specifics of policy are dele-

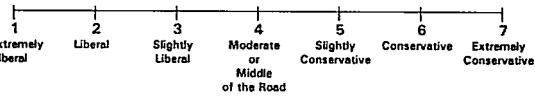


*Figure 2.* Liberal-Conservative Scale

gated. Representatives are only bound to follow the general thrust they advocate in the campaign.

The interpretation of issue position is fundamentally different in the two theories. Therefore, we were careful to use different symbols to represent voter and candidate position in each case. When we turn to empirical testing, however, we will rely on exactly the same information to establish the position of the voters and candidates in both models. In the analysis to follow we will rely on position on the liberal-conservative continuum.

Since 1972 the National Election Studies (NES) have included a question asking respondents to place themselves and the major presidential candidates on a liberal-conservative continuum. The exact wording of the question is "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?" The scale that is presented to respondents appears in Figure 2. The natural neutral point for the scale is the middle category which is labeled "moderate or middle of the road." The designation of a neutral point is critical to directional theory. It is the interaction of direction (are the voter and candidate on the same or opposite sides of the neutral point) and intensity (how far are the voter and candidate from the neutral point) that determines utility in directional theory. Since the neutral point is of no special consequence to proximity theory, there is no loss in establishing it anywhere on the scale. In the analysis to follow, the scale will run from $-3$ for extremely liberal to $+3$ for extremely conservative.

While the theories are conceptually distinct, once they are put in an operational context they can be directly compared. To get a better sense of their formal properties, it is helpful to use a common symbol for issue position in the utility functions. We can use the symbol x to replace the I and the $\theta$ in equations (1) and (2) above. Recall that the symbol $B_{ij}$ represents the proximity-based utility of voter i for candidate j and the symbol $A_{ij}$ represents the directional utility.

$$
\begin{aligned}
B_{ij} &= -(\Sigma_k(x_{ik} - x_{jk})^2) \\
&= -(\Sigma_k x_{ik}^2 + \Sigma_k x_{jk}^2 - 2\,\Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{jk}) \\
&= 2\,\Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{jk} - (\Sigma_k x_{ik}^2 + \Sigma_k x_{jk}^2) \\
A_{ij} &= \Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{jk} - P_{ij}
\end{aligned}
$$

Notice that in both functions the scalar product ($\Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{jk}$) is critical. The difference between the functions is that in directional theory $P_{ij}$ must be zero if the candidate is not too intense ($\Sigma_k x_{jk}^2 < r^2$) and the term ($\Sigma_k x_{ik}^2$) does not appear in the $A_{ij}$ function.

Because of the similarity of the formulas, we can compare the theories empirically by estimating a model in which the scalar product term [$2\ (\Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{jk})$] and the negative length term [$-\ (\Sigma_k x_{ik}^2 + \Sigma_k x_{jk}^2)$] are estimated with separate coefficients.[2] According to proximity theory, the ratio between the estimated regression coefficient for the scalar product term divided by the coefficient of the length term should produce a ratio of one. In directional theory, the coefficient associated with the scalar product term should be substantially higher than that for the length term.

The similarity of the directional and proximity formulas leads to a further observation. Suppose there are two candidates, h and j, and we compare voter i's utility for each using the proximity model. We would have the following:

$$B_{ij} = 2\ \Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{jk} - (\Sigma_k x_{ik}^2 + \Sigma_k x_{jk}^2)$$

$$B_{ih} = 2\ \Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{hk} - (\Sigma_k x_{ik}^2 + \Sigma_k x_{hk}^2)$$

When we subtract the two utilities, we would get

$$B_{ij} - B_{ih} = 2\ (\Sigma_k x_{ik}x_{jk} - \Sigma_k x_{jk}x_{hk}) - (\Sigma_k x_{jk}^2 - \Sigma_k x_{hk}^2) \qquad (3)$$

Notice that the first part of this formula is simply a difference of scalar products. The second part is the difference between the squared lengths of the candidates' policy vectors. Once the candidates have adopted positions, the difference in lengths of the policy vectors is a constant. Because the length term has no variance, it will be absorbed in the intercept of any standard statistical model. In directional theory, the difference in evaluation is strictly a difference in the scalar products unless one of the candidates is outside the region of acceptability.

The implication of this observation is that in analyzing vote in a standard statistical model, the two theories are indistinguishable. Thus, virtually every effort to estimate vote as a function of spatial position in the political science literature has been equivalent to estimating vote as a function of directional position.[3] To distinguish the models, it is more natural to compare them as predictors of candidate evaluation. Here the theories make quite different predictions that are not sensitive to the intercept. In directional theory support for a candidate should peak at the extremes of the scale, while in proximity theory support should peak at the candidate's position.

Directional theory and proximity theory have been compared based on issues

in the United States and Norway (Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz, 1991; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). In both countries directional theory has proved to be a more powerful predictor of candidate and party evaluation. Here we consider whether and to what extent this is true of ideology. Ideology is conceptually quite different from a specific issue. Most issue debate in society tends to be two-sided with very little detail provided to the mass public. Even the most concerned voters are often left to simply consider whether they generally approve or disapprove of one side or the other. Ideology, however, has the potential for more subtle differentiation.

It was not accidental that Downs (1957), and before him Hotelling (1929) and Smithies (1941), constructed the traditional spatial model based on the idea of a single unidimensional liberal-conservative continuum. People are widely viewed as having different ideological positions which reflect their general orientation toward public policy. This is distinct from the directional view where position would reflect a preference for one side or the other.[4] Table 1 shows the distribution of the 1988 NES respondents on the liberal-conservative question and the health care question. Notice the dense clustering in the center on the liberal-conservative scale and the rather nice shape of the distribution with monotone declines as one moves from the mode towards the extremes. This contrasts with the health care question where the distribution is trimodal with clustering at the ends and in the middle. Aldrich (1975) has described such distributions as "circus tents." The circus tent effect is consistent with the directional view that people are distributed into favor, neutral, and opposed camps. The shape of the ideological distribution, however, suggests a more positional perspective might underlie placements on the liberal-conservative continuum.

## 2. Empirical findings

What then is the relationship between ideology and the evaluation of candidates by voters? Information on perceived candidate position and individual position on a liberal-conservative continuum has been collected in National Election Study surveys since 1972. During this time, 11 candidates have drawn five percent or more of the presidential vote: Nixon and McGovern in 1972; Ford and Carter in 1976; Reagan, Carter, and Anderson in 1980; Reagan and Mondale in 1984; and Bush and Dukakis in 1988. We will look separately at the relationship for each of these candidates. We will also analyze a pooled data set to establish some generic patterns, and then finally we will look at the relationship in its raw form to get a sense of the values that underlie the other analyses.

We will estimate two regression models for each candidate. The models are

*Table 1.* Distribution of 1988 sample on ideology and health insurance questions

| Scale value | Ideology[a] | Health insurance[b] |
|---|---|---|
| −3 | 2.5% | 19.6% |
| −2 | 7.9% | 10.7% |
| −1 | 13.1% | 12.1% |
| 0 | 31.3% | 19.0% |
| 1 | 21.7% | 14.4% |
| 2 | 19.5% | 10.9% |
| 3 | 4.1% | 13.4% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Number of cases | 1425 | 1707 |

[a]The wording for the ideology question appears in the text.

[b]The wording for the health insurance question is as follows: "There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan that would cover all medical and hospital costs for everyone. Others feel that all medical expenses should be paid by individuals and through private insurance plans like Blue Cross or other company paid plans." The respondent is then shown a seven-point scale with the endpoints labeled Government Insurance Plan and Private Insurance Plan, and asked "Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"

$$\text{Model 1: Evaluation} = b_0 + b_1 (2 \times \text{Scalar Product}) + b_2(-\text{Length}) + b_3\,\text{Black} + b_4\text{Southern White}$$

$$\text{Model 2: Evaluation} = b_0 + b_1 (2 \times \text{Scalar Product}) + b_2 (-\text{Length}) + b_3\,\text{Black} + b_4\,\text{Southern White} + b_5\,\text{Party Identification}$$

where

Evaluation is response to a 100-point feeling thermometer question[5]
Scalar Product and Length are defined above
Black is a dummy variable coded 1 = black, 0 = all others
Southern White is a dummy variable coded 1 = southern white, 0 = all others
Party Identification is based on the standard NES question recoded from −3 to +3 so that positive values are consistent with the partisanship of the candidate[6]

The models are straightforward. Both models estimate evaluation as a function of ideology, allowing for a directional or proximity effect. The closer the ratio between $b_1$ and $b_2$ is to one, the more the result will support the traditional proximity theory; the higher the ratio between $b_1$ and $b_2$, the more the result will support the directional theory.[7] The first model controls for race and

region, while the second model incorporates an additional control for party identification. Empirical political research has generally found partisanship to be the single most important factor in explaining attitudes towards candidates.

In calculating the scalar product and the length values, it is necessary to know both the respondent and candidate placement on the ideology scale. Respondent position is determined directly from the response to the ideology question. Candidate location is estimated as the mean candidate placement across all voters. Both directional and proximity theory require that a candidate have a single position; hence the need for a single estimate of candidate location. The mean is the most natural estimate and has been widely used (see, for example, Holm and Robinson, 1978; Markus and Converse, 1979). However, recent work by Powell (1989) suggests that there might be a bias toward the center in the use of the mean. We will address that concern later in the paper.

The results of the eleven analyses appear in Table 2. Clearly the results are not favorable to the traditional proximity model. All of the ratios are substantially over one, with the median ratio in the first model 6.14 (for Anderson in 1980) and in the second model 2.60 (for Ford in 1976). In many cases the length component is not statistically significant. Yet, in some instances there is a significant length component, and that would not be predicted by directional theory.

Aside from the general weakness of the proximity model, the most striking feature of the table is the systematic change in the ratios when the control for partisanship is added. The impact of the control is to diminish the scalar product effect while the length effect remains about the same. The shape of the relationship between ideology and candidate evaluation is thus altered when party identification is held constant. The exact interpretation of this result depends upon the causal priority of ideology versus partisanship, an area of controversy in political behavior.[8] But generally the implication is that when partisanship is controlled, ideology has a somewhat more proximity-like influence.

The election of 1980 offers a special opportunity to go beyond statistical control. Because Anderson ran as an independent, his candidacy provides a sort of natural experiment in which partisanship is removed from consideration in evaluating the candidate. Thus, we can see what the relationship between ideology and candidate evaluation would be like in the absence of partisanship. In the table, the Anderson results look quite similar to those of the other candidates in the first analysis. In fact, the ratio for Anderson is the median value. This suggests that whatever role partisanship plays, it does not account for the general shape of the ideology effect. In the absence of partisan cues from the candidate, the influence of ideology on evaluation is clearly directional.

*Table 2.* Summary of ideology effects in regressions of candidate evaluation on ideology and controls

| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Ideology, race, and region | | | Model 1 plus partisanship | | |
| | Scalar product | Length | Ratio | Scalar product | Length | Ratio |
| 1972 | | | | | | |
| Nixon | 4.20 | 1.41 | 2.98 | 2.85 | 1.43 | 1.99 |
| McGovern | 2.63 | 0.08[a] | – | 1.89 | 0.00[a] | – |
| 1976 | | | | | | |
| Ford | 2.71 | 0.46[a] | – | 1.38 | 0.53 | 2.60 |
| Carter | 3.69 | 0.94 | 3.93 | 2.02 | 0.82 | 2.46 |
| 1980 | | | | | | |
| Reagan | 3.01 | 0.85 | 3.54 | 1.93 | 0.90 | 2.14 |
| Carter | 7.80 | 0.38[a] | – | 1.76[a] | 0.35[a] | – |
| Anderson | 4.05 | 0.66 | 6.14 | 4.02 | 0.61 | 6.59 |
| 1984 | | | | | | |
| Reagan | 4.68 | 0.49[a] | – | 2.37 | 0.78 | 3.04 |
| Mondale | 5.71 | 1.23 | 4.64 | 2.28 | 0.86 | 2.65 |
| 1988 | | | | | | |
| Bush | 3.29 | 0.50[a] | – | 1.51 | 0.78 | 1.94 |
| Dukakis | 3.94 | 1.14 | 3.46 | 1.68 | 0.92 | 1.83 |

*Note.* When the length coefficient is not significant, the associated ratio is not computed. In each case in which the scalar product is significant at the .05 level, it is significantly larger than the length coefficient at the .05 level.

[a] Not significant at the .05 level.

### *2.1 Pooled analysis*

Over the time span of 1972 to 1988 there appears to be no systematic change in the magnitude of the coefficients for either the ideology or partisanship variables. Analytically, then, it will be useful to estimate a single general model across the election studies.[9] We have two motivations for such an analysis. First, we will be able to establish a general relationship between ideology and candidate evaluation. Second, we will be able to build up a large sample of individuals whom we would expect to conform more closely to the proximity model. For this purpose we will consider a subset of the population based on education and political interest. We will select only those respondents who have completed four years of college and who express the highest interest in the current campaign. This dual filter on education and interest selects less than ten percent of the original sample in each of the election studies.

*Table 3.* Mean perceived ideological location of candidates

| | Full sample | Sophisticated subsample |
|---|---|---|
| 1972 | | |
| Nixon | 0.87 | 1.03 |
| McGovern | −1.55 | −2.03 |
| 1976 | | |
| Ford | 0.90 | 1.24 |
| Carter | −0.77 | −1.21 |
| 1980 | | |
| Reagan | 1.21 | 1.82 |
| Carter | −0.26 | −0.61 |
| Anderson | −0.43 | −0.71 |
| 1984 | | |
| Reagan | 0.96 | 1.69 |
| Mondale | −0.55 | −1.28 |
| 1988 | | |
| Bush | 1.11 | 1.56 |
| Dukakis | −0.76 | −1.36 |
| Mean absolute length | 0.85 | 1.32 |

We show in Table 3 the mean perceived position of each of the candidates on the ideological dimension for both the full sample and the high-education high-interest subset. We also show the mean length (distance from the center position on the ideology scale) across the entire set of candidates. As Powell (1989) predicts, the perceived candidate positions for the sophisticated group are distinctly more extreme than those of the general sample. She argues that this is likely to be a more correct positioning of candidates because random responses by the less informed tend to bias the general sample mean toward the center position.

In the pooled analysis we anticipate a decline in the scalar-product-to-length ratio for the sophisticated subset because they are more politically aware and more likely to act as proximity voters. But we also recognize that there will be a decline in the ratio due to the shift in the location of the candidates for the sophisticated subgroup. This will occur for purely technical reasons. The scalar product effect is equal to the three-way product of the regression coefficient, the location of the voter on the centered ideology scale, and the location of the candidate on the centered scale. Thus, an increase in the absolute value of the candidate component will produce a proportional reduction in the regression coefficient for the scalar product term. The coefficient for the length term will not be affected in this way because the length term is the sum (rather than the product) of the voter and candidate lengths.[10] Thus, in order to present a meaningful comparison between the full and sophisticated samples, we will

perform the pooled analyses with both sets of candidate locations.

In Table 4 we show the results from three regression models. The first model includes only the scalar product and the length component for political ideology. The second model adds candidate dummies and demographic controls for race and region. The third model also includes partisanship.[11] Each regression model is run four times: twice for the full sample and twice for the sophisticated subset. The first column in the table shows the results based on the full sample with the candidates located at the full sample mean. The second column shows the results for the full sample when the candidates are located at the sophisticated mean. The third and fourth columns replicate the analysis for the sophisticated set of respondents.

The general pattern we observe across the various regressions is consistent with our prior expectations. The most proximity-like behavior is exhibited by the high-education high-interest subset, using their placement of candidates and including the partisanship control. While the pattern is as anticipated, the differences across groups are modest. This is surprising because it means that the behavior of the sophisticated subset is scarcely more proximity-like than the behavior of the full sample. The only striking difference between the subgroup and the general sample is that the ideological effects are stronger for the subgroup. Thus, there is a real difference across the groups in the *extent* to which they evaluate candidates based on ideology, but the *manner* in which ideology influences evaluation is remarkably similar.

To give a better sense of the relationship between ideology and evaluation, we have drawn two curves, one for the full sample and one for the sophisticated subset. Each curve is drawn to represent voter evaluation of a typical candidate. To establish the location of a typical candidate on the liberal-conservative scale, we used the average distance from the center over the set of eleven candidates and arbitrarily placed the candidate on the conservative side of the scale. The candidate location based on the full sample is .85, while the location based on the high-education high-interest subset is 1.32. The parameters used to draw the curves are taken from Model III in Table 4. These models show the most proximity-like results we have obtained. The curves appear in Figure 3.[12]

The main observable difference in the curves is the steeper slope of the curve for the sophisticated subset in comparison to the full sample. Both curves reach their apex at virtually the same point and at about the same level of evaluation. The apex in each instance is between the next to the most extreme and the most extreme ideological category with virtually no drop-off from the apex to the end of the ideological continuum. These curves are very close to being monotone and that is the prediction of directional theory.

*Table 4.* Summary of pooled regressions of candidate evaluation on ideology

| | Full Sample | | Sophisticated Subsample | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Full sample candidate location | Sophisticated candidate location | Full sample candidate location | Sophisticated candidate location |
| **Model I. Includes only ideology** | | | | |
| Scalar product | 3.94 | 2.64 | 5.54 | 3.76 |
| Length | 0.95 | 0.96 | 1.42 | 1.35 |
| *Ratio* | *4.15* | *2.75* | *3.90* | *2.79* |
| **Model II. Includes ideology, candidate dummies, race, and region[a]** | | | | |
| Scalar product | 3.49 | 2.35 | 5.37 | 3.65 |
| Length | 0.80 | 0.76 | 1.24 | 1.22 |
| *Ratio* | *4.36* | *3.09* | *4.33* | *2.99* |
| Nixon | 5.17 | 4.53 | 3.10 | 1.40 |
| McGovern | −10.43 | −10.41 | −7.57 | −6.86 |
| Ford | 1.15 | 0.78 | 4.36 | 3.76 |
| Carter (76) | −1.08 | −1.35 | −1.14 | −1.57 |
| Reagan (80) | −4.27 | −4.00 | −2.37 | −1.88 |
| Carter (80) | −8.34 | −8.84 | −9.90 | −11.10 |
| Anderson | −5.27 | −5.98 | −0.61 | −1.89 |
| Reagan (84) | 2.14 | 2.29 | −0.50 | 0.33 |
| Mondale | −5.05 | −4.61 | −0.53 | −0.91 |
| Bush | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Dukakis | −3.57 | −3.26 | 2.23 | 2.77 |

*Table 4.* Cont.

| | Full Sample | | Sophisticated Subsample | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Full sample candidate location | Sophisticated candidate location | Full sample candidate location | Sophisticated candidate location |
| **Model III. Includes ideology, candidate dummies, race, region, and partisanship[b]** | | | | |
| Scalar product | 1.97 | 1.31 | 2.88 | 1.99 |
| Length | 0.75 | 0.73 | 1.19 | 1.19 |
| *Ratio* | *2.63* | *1.79* | *2.42* | *1.67* |
| Nixon | 5.57 | 4.91 | −0.47 | −1.77 |
| McGovern | −11.21 | −11.08 | −4.50 | −3.97 |
| Ford | 1.93 | 1.55 | 3.18 | 2.63 |
| Carter (76) | −1.74 | −2.02 | −0.74 | −1.19 |
| Reagan (80) | −2.59 | −2.27 | −2.32 | −1.75 |
| Carter (80) | −9.44 | −10.01 | −10.71 | −11.83 |
| Anderson | −3.00 | −3.70 | −2.55 | −3.87 |
| Reagan (84) | 2.25 | 2.53 | −0.52 | 0.29 |
| Mondale | −4.85 | −4.59 | −1.72 | −1.84 |
| Bush | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Dukakis | −3.12 | −2.97 | 1.80 | 2.10 |
| Partisanship | 5.77 | 5.73 | 6.02 | 5.81 |

*Note.* In all cases the scalar product coefficient is significantly larger than the length coefficient at the .05 level.

[a] The candidate dummies are referenced against Bush. The coefficients for the twenty-two race and region controls are omitted and are available from the authors on request.

[b] See note a. In addition, the special partisanship coefficient for Anderson is omitted.

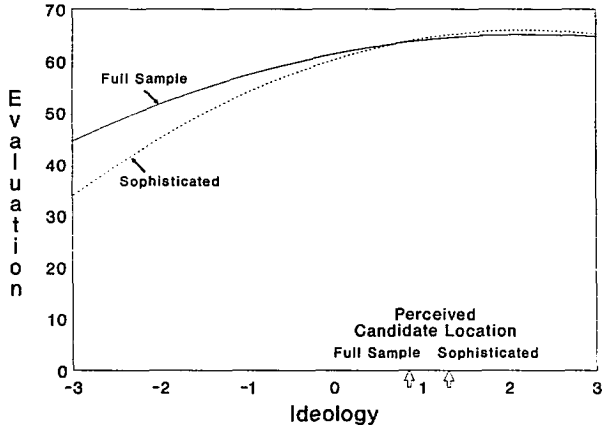


*Figure 3.* Plot of Evaluation of Typical Candidate

## 2.2 *Support by ideological groups*

The curves show the general pattern of support for a typical candidate, but we can also look at support for each of the actual candidates by ideological groups. The purpose of this final analysis is to investigate the relationship between ideology and evaluation without imposing a model on the relationship. By "letting the data speak" we will be in a good position to address a few basic questions. In particular, do relatively centrist candidates draw their strongest support from voters in the center? And, do voters who are moderate give higher evaluations to more moderate candidates?

To observe the evaluations of each of the ideological groups, we have broken out the seven categories of political ideology and entered them into the analysis as dummy variables. Table 5 presents the results for two sets of regressions. For each candidate in each year, the upper set of values shows the coefficients for the ideology categories when race and region are controlled; the lower set of values shows the coefficients when partisanship is also controlled. The last line of the table shows the overall percentage of cases in each of the ideology categories.

Looking at Nixon, the first candidate in the table, we see that his mean placement by the full sample was at .87 and by the sophisticated sample at 1.03. The average evaluation of Nixon by nonblack, nonsouthern voters of moderate ideology was 68.0 on the 100-point feeling thermometer. This base evaluation was decreased by 28.1 to give an average rating of 39.9 by respondents who called themselves extremely liberal. Liberals deducted 23.8 points and slight

*Table 5.* Mean evaluation by moderates and specific ideological category effects from regressions of candidate evaluation on ideological self-placement

| | Full sample candidate location | Sophisticated candidate location | Mean evaluation by moderates (intercept) | Extremely liberal | Liberal | Slightly liberal | Moderate | Slightly conserv. | Conserv. | Extremely conserv. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nixon | +0.87 | +1.03 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship[a] | | | 68.0 | −28.1 | −23.8 | −9.4 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 8.0 | 9.3 |
| Partisanship[b] | | | 68.8 | −25.7 | −18.4 | −7.9 | 0.0 | 1.4 | 2.2 | 7.4 |
| McGovern | −1.55 | −2.03 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisansip | | | 47.6 | 18.2 | 18.0 | 10.3 | 0.0 | −8.2 | −15.6 | −23.3 |
| Partisanship | | | 46.7 | 15.9 | 12.9 | 8.8 | 0.0 | −4.5 | −10.0 | −18.9 |
| Ford | +0.90 | +1.24 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 61.9 | −10.4 | −13.4 | −5.1 | 0.0 | 5.9 | 9.5 | 6.1 |
| Partisanship | | | 63.3 | −5.5 | −9.8 | −2.7 | 0.0 | 1.6 | 3.8 | −0.5 |
| Carter (76) | −0.77 | −1.21 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 62.0 | 7.4 | 6.3 | 2.1 | 0.0 | −9.8 | −16.3 | −25.0 |
| Partisanship | | | 60.6 | 2.3 | 2.5 | −0.4 | 0.0 | −5.4 | −10.1 | −17.7 |
| Reagan (80) | +1.21 | +1.82 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 57.3 | −24.4 | −20.8 | −8.2 | 0.0 | 4.8 | 13.0 | 8.3 |
| Partisanship | | | 59.9 | −20.5 | −16.1 | −7.1 | 0.0 | −0.1 | 5.6 | 3.1 |
| Carter (80) | −0.26 | −0.61 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 54.5 | 4.8 | 7.5 | 0.4 | 0.0 | −4.4 | −13.7 | −8.6 |
| Partisanship | | | 51.5 | −0.3 | 1.8 | −1.1 | 0.0 | 1.3 | −5.3 | −2.2 |
| Anderson | −0.43 | −0.71 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 54.8 | 2.0 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 0.0 | −2.1 | −7.7 | −15.5 |
| Partisanship | | | 57.3 | 2.1 | 7.1 | 6.8 | 0.0 | −2.2 | −7.4 | −15.0 |
| Reagan (84) | +0.96 | +1.69 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 62.1 | −30.8 | −18.7 | −10.8 | 0.0 | 9.8 | 16.6 | 19.4 |
| Partisanship | | | 64.0 | −22.9 | −11.9 | −7.7 | 0.0 | 2.5 | 4.9 | 7.9 |

*Table 5.* Cont.

| | Full sample candidate location | Sophisticated candidate location | Mean evaluation by moderates (intercept) | Extremely liberal | Liberal | Slightly liberal | Moderate | Slightly conserv. | Conserv. | Extremely conserv. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mondale | −0.55 | −1.28 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 58.8 | 2.7 | 8.0 | 4.4 | 0.0 | −9.5 | −19.1 | −24.1 |
| Partisanship | | | 57.3 | −1.5 | 2.1 | 1.6 | 0.0 | −3.2 | −8.9 | −13.7 |
| Bush | +1.11 | +1.56 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 60.4 | −19.7 | −18.8 | −8.2 | 0.0 | 7.6 | 14.1 | 13.0 |
| Partisanship | | | 61.5 | −14.8 | −11.9 | −4.4 | 0.0 | 1.9 | 3.3 | 2.4 |
| Dukakis | −0.76 | −1.36 | | | | | | | | |
| No partisanship | | | 58.8 | 2.7 | 9.1 | 5.8 | 0.0 | −6.9 | −18.0 | −23.7 |
| Partisanship | | | 56.2 | −2.0 | 3.1 | 2.3 | 0.0 | −2.1 | −8.9 | −14.3 |
| Overall % in ideology category | | | | 2.3% | 9.5% | 13.0% | 34.0% | 20.8% | 17.8% | 2.9% |

[a] The intercept value is the mean candidate evaluation by nonblack, nonsouthern moderates.

[b] The intercept value is the mean candidate evaluation by nonblack, nonsouthern, independent moderates.

liberals 9.4. Slight conservatives increased the rating 5.0 points, conservatives 8.0, and extreme conservatives 9.3.

Two aspects of the overall results are striking. First, with the single exception of McGovern, there is no apparent relationship between the ideological centrality of the candidate and the mean evaluation by moderate voters. Recall that directional theory states that a candidate who is perceived as irresponsible will be penalized by the electorate. McGovern was perceived as far more extreme than any other candidate we analyzed. Thus, if any candidate fits the description of lying outside the region of acceptability, it is McGovern. For the rest of the candidates there is simply no meaningful relationship between centrality and positive evaluation. Indeed, if we correlate relative centrality with mean thermometer rating for the ten other candidates, we find that the correlation is slightly negative.[13]

Second, observe that the number of people who identify themselves as extremely liberal or extremely conservative is quite small. The behavior of these groups is erratic and not closely tied to the centrality of candidates. For example, Nixon's strongest support came from extreme conservatives. On the other hand, Reagan in 1980 was the most extremely perceived conservative candidate, yet his strongest support came from conservatives rather than extreme conservatives. If we focus on the five categories with numerous cases, we see that the strongest support and the strongest opposition always come from either the liberal category or the conservative category. This is quite consistent with directional theory.[14]

## 3. Discussion

In many ways ideology is an unnatural terrain for directional theory. The theory was developed around the concept of a complex, multi-issue space and the view that most policy-related debate at the mass level tends to be two-sided. That the ideological behavior of voters should be better explained by directional theory than proximity theory is thus somewhat surprising. It suggests that in the current U.S. context ideology is perceived more as a choice between a liberal and a conservative side than as a differentiated continuum.

But does it really matter whether one theory or the other better describes the relationship between ideology and candidate evaluation? From a public choice perspective, it does matter. The key argument that comes from the proximity-based model is that candidates should seek the center in order to maximize electoral support. In directional theory, in contrast, candidates should provide issue intensity. If a plurality of the electorate favors government health insurance, a candidate maximizes support by taking a strong stand in favor of national health insurance. If there are more conservatives than liberals, a con-

servative candidate would do well to emphasize her conservatism. Attempts to hug the center will draw fairly uniform ratings across groups rather than high ratings from the center.

In directional theory, campaigning on the basis of issues and ideology is a game in which candidates attempt to define the relevant agenda by making "their" issues – the issues on which a significant plurality favors their side – the issues on which the campaign turns.[15] The behavior of Republican candidates since the late 1960s has generally been consistent with this strategy. The Democrats have been less effective in articulating an aggressive issue agenda. Because many factors other than issues influence electoral outcomes, it is not clear that the Democrats would have done better had they followed a different strategy. Only the loss of Dukakis to Bush stands out as an election that likely turned on the conduct of the campaign.

In the 1991 Senate election in Pennsylvania, Democrat Harris Wofford followed a clear directional strategy emphasizing national health insurance and was remarkably successful. Either because of the Wofford success or because many practical politicians have attributed the failure of Dukakis to the lack of an agenda, the Democrats in 1992 are likely to pursue a more directional strategy than they have in recent presidential elections. Such a strategy would not rely on ideology on which the Democrats are disadvantaged, but on issues such as health insurance and education where they are likely to have plurality support.

The '92 election may have a third presidential candidate in Ross Perot, a wealthy populist from Texas. If Perot does, in fact, run, he will have to decide how to frame his campaign in terms of issues, ideology, and other qualities. To the extent that he wishes to generate support based on issues, he will need to take some strong – but not necessarily detailed – stands. To the extent that he wishes to define his candidacy strictly in terms of leadership ability, he would do well to eschew issues. It can be difficult, however, to appear effective as a leader and yet have no policy agenda.

In any event, having the two parties playing the same fairly aggressive game with regard to issues should make future elections more interesting. Based on these and other results we have reported, it appears to be the game to play.

## Notes

1. Throughout the text we present the more complex, multi-issue model for both theories to preserve some generality. In the case of ideology, the summation sign can be dropped and the values are simply the positions on the centered ideology scale.
2. This estimation strategy was originally suggested by Howard Rosenthal.
3. If the intercept is eliminated, comparison of the theories is possible. However, the resulting statistical model is likely to be seriously misspecified. Empirical models of the vote commonly

include an intercept because of the myriad factors that influence electoral choice. Some recent work by Merrill (1992a, 1992b) attempts to model vote strictly as a function of ideological position and finds evidence in favor of the "mixed model" (see Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989, and Note 7).

4. The directional view would be consistent with the symbolic interpretation of ideology of Conover and Feldman (1981) and the "us against them" interpretation of Hinich and Munger (1992).
5. The question wording is as follows: "I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I will use something we call the feeling thermometer and here is how it works: I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person."
6. Party identification is measured by the following question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?" Those who respond Republican or Democrat are asked, "Would you call yourself a strong ____ or a not very strong ____?" Those who respond Independent are asked, "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?" The seven categories of the party identification variable are Strong Democrat, Democrat, Independent leaning Democrat, Independent, Independent leaning Republican, Republican, and Strong Republican.
7. The set of models in which utility is a monotone function of

$$k_1 (2 \times \text{Scalar Product}) + k_2 (- \text{Length}) \text{ with } k_1 \text{ and } k_2 > 0$$

is called the set of mixed models. Depending on the ratio between $k_1$ and $k_2$, these models are more or less directional or proximity-like in character. The classic proximity model is a mixed model in which $k_1 = k_2$. The directional model is not a member of this set because of the penalty function. For a discussion of some of the implications of mixed models, see Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989).

8. Party identification should be controlled if it precedes ideological identification and might confound the relationship between ideology and candidate evaluation. However, the more recent literature has stressed the predominant role of ideology in changing partisanship (see Niemi and Jennings, 1991). Under this assumption party identification plays a mediating role in translating ideology into candidate evaluation. This leads to the rather provocative finding that the general effect of ideology is directional, but when ideology is not mediated by partisanship, it works in a more proximity-like manner.
9. From a rigorous statistical perspective there is enough variability in the scalar product and length coefficients across candidates so that pooling is not strictly appropriate. However, the violations are modest. We do include a separate partisanship effect for Anderson in the pooled model we report in the text, because theoretically we would expect partisanship to be different for Anderson than for the other candidates.
10. Changing the candidate length will influence the intercept instead of the regression coefficient for the length term.
11. The demographic controls are candidate specific. Hence, the regressions include two ideology variables (scalar product and length), ten candidate dummies (Bush is the omitted candidate), twenty-two demographic controls (black and southern white for each of the eleven candidates), and sometimes partisanship.
12. We began by plotting all four equations in Model III, but the two curves for the full sample overlay each other so that they were virtually indistinguishable, as did the two curves for the highly sophisticated group.

13. There are actually four correlations because there are two sets of distances from the center and two sets of intercepts (full sample and sophisticated subset). All four correlations are negative, and one reaches statistical significance. Directional theory predicts no correlation between closeness to the center and candidate evaluation, while proximity theory predicts that the correlation should be strong and positive.
14. Including the extreme categories of ideology, there is evidence supporting a mixed model (see Note 7).
15. The idea of salience campaigning is not new, though the strategy is a natural implication of directional theory. A nice statement of this idea is in Budge and Farlie (1983). Starting from the premise of the proximity model, they move to a perspective more consistent with directional theory after examining voting behavior in a large number of democracies.

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