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Author(s): Jeffrey W. Koch

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WHEN PARTIES AND CANDIDATES COLLIDE

CITIZEN PERCEPTION OF HOUSE CANDIDATES' POSITIONS ON ABORTION

JEFFREY W. KOCH

Abstract When candidates assume issue positions opposite those of their sponsoring political party do citizens recognize these positions? Relatedly, what role do candidates' actual issue positions play in citizens' perceptions of their issue positions? Examining citizens' perceptions of 1996 and 1998 House candidates' position on abortion, this research finds that citizens' perceptions are shaped largely by partisan and, to a lesser extent, gender stereotypes. However, candidates' individuating positions on abortion influence perceptions of the candidates' position, but the effects are considerably stronger for perceptions of Republican candidates. Democratic candidates are likely to adopt anti-abortion positions in districts characterized by lower than average levels of political awareness and education, reducing the likelihood their party-contradicting position is accurately perceived. In contrast, Republican candidates adopt a pro-choice position in districts characterized by high education and political awareness, increasing the likelihood their position is accurately perceived.

Do citizens recognize the unique policy position of candidates who assume issue positions contrary to those of the party sponsoring them for election? Or, to consider the research question from a slightly different perspective, what role do candidates' actual issue positions play in citizens' perceptions of their issue positions? Utilizing objective measures of 1996 and 1998 House candidates' positions on abortion and concentrating on instances in which candidates adopted an issue position opposite that generally ascribed to their sponsoring party—an electoral strategy referred to as issue trespassing (Nor-

JEFFREY W. KOCH is Associate Professor of Political Science at the State University of New York at Geneseo. The author wishes to acknowledge helpful comments received from anonymous reviewers. Direct correspondence to Jeffrey W. Koch, Department of Political Science, One College Circle, State University of New York at Geneseo, Geneseo, New York, 14454. E-mail: koch@geneseo.edu.

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poth and Buchanan 1992)—this research examines how characteristics of citizens and candidates shape perception of candidates' issue positions.

The electoral incentives for candidates to abandon the issue positions of the party whose label they wear can sometimes be strong, and research stresses the freedom granted by congressional leaders and parties to candidates to tailor their issue positions to fit their district's political preferences (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1974; Huntington 1950; MacRae 1952; Mayhew 1974; Miller 1970).¹ The loosely structured, ideologically nebulous, undisciplined American parties confer this freedom on their candidates because they believe it enhances the likelihood they will win election. Political parties tolerate these deviations because, presumably, constituents do not. Unexplored across a variety of elections is how characteristics of the candidates (their actual issue position, party label, gender), in addition to characteristics of citizens, influence perception of candidates' issue positions. Citizens' perceptions of candidates' positions on abortion is a suitable test of the electoral benefits of an issue-trespassing campaign strategy because candidates commonly take positions contrary to those of their political party, and one can determine candidates' true positions.

Heavy citizen reliance on stereotypes, instead of candidates' individuating policy positions, weakens the case for the occurrence of candidate-centered issue voting in congressional elections. To the extent citizens categorize candidates as holding the same position of their sponsoring party on an issue, there is little evidence of an electorate that distinguishes among candidates with regard to their unique positions, punishing or rewarding them accordingly. Such a result would underscore the importance of political parties for the public's understanding of the American political process, suggesting that parties, not individual candidates, are punished or rewarded for their issue positions. Moreover, it would require reconsideration of the electoral benefit of the freedom granted candidates by congressional leaders and political parties to hold party-contradicting issue positions. Alternatively, evidence indicating a public discriminating among officeholders according to their actual positions would emphasize an individualistic conception of politics by the American public, indicating that candidates can derive electoral benefit from the freedom granted to them by congressional leaders and political parties. Such a result would furnish evidence of citizens as flexible information processors, capable of recognizing candidates' individuating policy positions.

The empirical analyses presented here reveal that partisan and, to a slightly lesser extent, gender stereotypes exert strong effects on citizens' perceptions of candidates' positions on abortion. However, candidates' individuating information—that is, their actual policy position—also shapes citizens' percep-

1. Of course, there are other reasons candidates may assume an issue position contrary to that of their sponsoring political party; candidates may assume positions contrary to their sponsoring party if they follow their own political beliefs or those of financial contributors, for example.

tions of candidates' position on abortion. The effects are stronger for perception of Republican candidates than for that of Democratic candidates. This partisan differential in the importance of the candidates' actual position for structuring perceptions of candidates' positions results from the characteristics of the districts that lead candidates to abandon their party's position on abortion in the first place. Republican candidates who assume a pro-choice position on abortion do so in districts composed of citizens with higher than average levels of education and political awareness. Similarly, Democratic House candidates who espouse an anti-abortion position generally do so in districts characterized by lower levels of educational attainment and political awareness. Consequently, Democratic candidates who engage in issue trespassing on abortion are unlikely to have their party-contradicting position correctly perceived by constituents. In contrast, Republican candidate issue trespassing on abortion is almost as likely to be accurately perceived as party-consistent position taking.

Category-Based and Individuating Processes of Impression Formation

For candidates to reap electoral benefit from issue trespassing, citizens must perceive them as holding positions distinct from their party. However, most empirical research on citizens' perceptions of candidates' issue positions emphasizes the power of stereotypes rather than the individuating issue information candidates provide. Unwilling to devote precious resources to decipher the ambiguities of the political world, citizens rely on heuristics to identify the issue positions of candidates (Conover and Feldman 1985, 1989; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Kahn 1994; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993; Wright and Niemi 1983).

There are reasons to believe that a category-based process (also labeled a theory-driven strategy of information attainment or, more commonly, stereotyping) as opposed to an individuating (or data-driven) process of impression formation dominates political perception. Utilization of a category-based process of impression formation requires the individual to examine the target to determine if it fits into a category useful for assigning relevant attributes (Fiske and Neuberg 1990). If the target fits with a relevant category, then the individual assigns the attribute to the candidate. With respect to abortion, respondents may infer that a Democratic candidate holds a pro-choice position and a Republican an anti-abortion position, or, similarly, that a male candidate is anti-abortion and a female candidate is pro-choice. A category-based process of impression formation imposes minimal demands on citizens; it is more likely to be employed when individuals lack the motivation or expertise necessary for ascertaining more individuating information.

A data-driven or individuating process of impression formation stands in

sharp contrast to a category-based process. A data-driven process requires the citizen to examine the unique or individuating characteristics of the candidate to determine whether she possesses the relevant attribute; it is more accurate than a category-based process but considerably more costly as well, requiring a greater expenditure of time and effort. Although category-based and individuating processes can be conceived of as representing opposite ends of a continuum of impression formation, scholars maintain that individuals can employ them simultaneously, sifting through category-based and individuating information to arrive at a final judgment for whether the candidate possesses the relevant attribute (Fiske and Neuberg 1990). In light of the fact that most voting behavior and public opinion research depicts a public devoting minimal attention to politics, many scholars emphasize a category-based process of impression formation (Conover and Feldman 1989; Norpoth and Buchanan 1992; Rahn 1993; Wright and Niemi 1983).

Several factors are theorized to enhance the application of individuating information for impression formation. Individuals who are highly motivated to learn whether a candidate possesses a particular attribute or who are high in expertise for the relevant domain are more likely to employ an individuating strategy of impression formation. These individuals are more willing and more able, respectively, to pay the accompanying costs of an individuating impression formation strategy.

Experimental research designs provide some of the strongest evidence for the application of stereotypes in impression formation (Lodge and Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993). After reviewing contrived candidate presentations in which candidates enunciated some issue positions consistent with their partisan label and others inconsistent, subjects demonstrated greater success at recalling party-consistent positions than party-contradicting positions. In fact, subjects often believed the candidates' positions were consistent with their party label when in fact they were not. In experimental research on the application of gender stereotypes respondents assigned issue positions, issue competencies, character traits, and ideological orientations to candidates on the basis of their gender (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b; Kahn 1994; Sapiro 1982). However, Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau's (1995) and Rahn's experimental work suggests candidates' individuating campaign messages are noted by respondents, implying that an issue-trespassing strategy may prove fruitful. Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau's (1995) experimental study finds that candidates' individuating policy positions—even when it is party contradicting—rivals the effect of partisanship in forming an evaluation of political candidates.

Conover and Feldman (1982, 1985, and 1989) and Wright and Niemi (1983), after analyzing citizens' perceptions of presidential candidates, maintain that citizens employ partisan stereotypes to deduce candidates' issue position. Unlike experimental designs, however, their models of political perception do not include measures of the candidate's actual issue positions, a requisite for a fair competition between the category-based and individuating methods of

impression formation. It is not clear whether individuals are responding on the basis of the ascribed category or on the basis of the category-consistent individuating information (i.e., the candidate's position); both yield identical predictions. Absent a measure of a candidate's true issue position, one cannot determine whether stereotypes or substantive information shaped perceptions of the candidates.

Some analysis of survey data, however, supplies evidence for the application of individuating processes of impression formation, indicating that issue trespassing can provide electoral benefits. Franklin (1991) found that both partisan stereotypes and candidates' actual ideological orientations, measured by American Conservative Union roll-call scores, shaped citizens' perceptions of incumbent senators' ideological orientations. Moreover, the effects of senators' true ideological orientations on citizens' perceptions are larger for candidates up for reelection, suggesting that campaigns partially fulfill the goal of informing voters about the candidates' true positions. Contemporary political campaigns occur over several months, providing citizens with an extended opportunity to learn candidates' unique issue positions. While experimental designs are able to isolate the effects of stereotypes by controlling for the candidate's own position they may fail to replicate the true nature of modern American elections. Oddly, no scholarly analysis of citizens' perception or knowledge of candidates' positions on a long-standing political issue takes account of candidates' actual positions.²

Political Parties and Candidate Position-Taking on Abortion

If ever there ever was an issue appropriate for the study of the effect of issue trespassing on perception of candidates' issue positions it is abortion. Many Americans possess relatively stable and strongly held positions on abortion (Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Carmines and Stimson 1980; Converse and Markus 1979). Moreover, abortion is a political issue on which the major parties take distinct and clearly defined positions (Abramowitz 1995; Adams 1997). Beginning in 1976, the Democratic party platform, as well as each of its presidential candidates, supported the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Beginning in 1980, every Republican presidential nominee called for the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, and the GOP's party platform echoed this position. Unlike some long-standing political issues, abortion is a difficult issue for candidates to fudge. Most make clear that they either oppose abortion completely, permit it only in cases of a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest or when the life of the mother is in danger, or fully support *Roe v. Wade*. If

2. Some research analyzes citizens' knowledge of their representative's vote on a specific roll-call vote (Alvarez and Gronke 1996).

willing to expend the effort, one can determine with a relatively high degree of accuracy a candidate's true position on abortion. Finally, abortion is an issue on which candidates frequently assume positions opposite those of the party whose label they wear.

Data

This research analyzes data from the 1996 and 1998 American National Election Studies (ANES) to determine the importance of candidates' policy positions on citizens' perceptions of candidates' positions on abortion. The 1996 and 1998 ANES include measures of the respondent's position on abortion and the respondent's perception of the position of the major political parties and each party's congressional candidate on abortion.³ Importantly, these surveys contain measures of variables necessary for constructing and testing multivariate models of citizen perception of candidates' positions on abortion.

To determine a candidate's true position on abortion I rely on data gathered by Project Vote Smart, *Congressional Quarterly*, Voters for Choice (VFC), *Congressional Quarterly's Politics in America*, and on-line searches of newspaper articles. After compiling a list of all major party candidates for the House of Representatives included in the 1996 and 1998 ANES sampling frames, data from Project Vote Smart were consulted to establish each candidate's position on abortion. Project Vote Smart sent all 1996 and 1998 House candidates a questionnaire to ascertain their position on a wide variety of issues, including abortion.⁴ From these data I was able to determine whether

3. The ANES measured respondents' positions on abortion with the following question: "There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can just tell me the number of the opinion you choose. 1. By law, abortion should never be permitted. 2. The law should permit abortion ONLY in case of rape, incest or when the woman's life is in danger. 3. The law should permit abortion for reasons OTHER THAN rape, incest or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established. 4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice. 7. Other (Volunteers)." Respondents were asked to place the major political parties and the candidates for the House of Representatives in their district on the same scale. Only those respondents who claimed a position on abortion themselves (99 percent of the respondents) and recognized the candidates' name when asked to provide a feeling thermometer score for the candidate were asked to identify the candidate's position. Consequently, in 1996 60 percent of the respondents were asked to place the Democratic House candidate, 65 percent the Republican House candidate. The corresponding figures for the 1998 ANES are 67 percent and 70 percent.

4. The 1996 Project Vote Smart questionnaire asked the candidate to check all statements with respect to abortion policy with which they agreed. The options listed were the following: "a) Abortions should always be legally available. b) Abortions should be legal in all circumstances as long as the procedure is completed within the first trimester of pregnancy. c) Abortions should be legal only when the pregnancy resulted from incest or rape or when the life of the woman is endangered. d) Abortions should be legal only when the life of the woman is endangered. e) Abortions should be limited by waiting periods and notification requirements as decided by each state government. f) Abortions should always be illegal. g) Other." The 1998 survey included two additional options: one for whether the candidate supported partial birth abortions, another for whether the candidate supported funding for agencies that advocate or perform abortions.

a candidate supported *Roe v. Wade*; believed abortion should be allowed only in cases of rape, incest, and when the life of the woman was endangered; or opposed abortion in all circumstances for 57 percent of the 1996 and 1998 major party congressional candidates. For the remaining candidates I consulted the October 1996 or 1998 election issue of *Congressional Quarterly*, and from their coverage I was able to identify the position of 15 candidates. To identify the positions of the remaining candidates I relied on information gathered by VFC. Voters for Choice recorded the roll-call votes of all incumbent candidates on issues related to abortion during the 104th and 105th Congresses. Additionally, all 1996 and 1998 nonincumbent candidates were sent a questionnaire to ascertain how they would have voted on each of these roll-call votes. If a questionnaire was not returned, VFC sent a second questionnaire. If a candidate or staff member still failed to supply the requested information VFC contacted the candidate by phone until the relevant information was attained.⁵ Next, if the candidate was successful in his or her 1996 or 1998 election, I consulted the *Congressional Quarterly's Politics in America*; this resource allowed for identification of the position of an additional four candidates. For the candidates whose positions I was unable to determine I conducted an on-line search of newspapers whose circulation included the candidates' congressional district. This method allowed for identification of the position of 13 candidates. Utilization of data from these five sources allows for identification of the position on abortion of 683 of the 703 candidates (97 percent) who ran in congressional races included in the 1996 and 1998 ANES sampling frames. Some candidates, 106 incumbents, ran in districts included in both the 1996 and 1998 ANES sampling frame. Taking this into account reduces the total number of candidates to 577.

The variety of data sources used to identify citizens' positions and perceptions of the parties' and candidates' positions on abortion, as well as the candidates' actual positions, necessitated creation of a simple two-category

Any candidate who indicated a belief in either never permitting abortion (*f*) or only in cases of a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest (*c*), or when the life of the mother was in danger (*d*) was considered anti-abortion. Those who indicated a woman should be free to seek an abortion in all circumstances (*a*) or in the first trimester of a pregnancy (*b*) were categorized as pro-choice. Project Vote Smart's data are located on the World Wide Web (<http://www.vote-smart.org/ce/>).

5. Candidates who took what VFC considered a pro-choice position on all bills were defined as pro-choice; those who opposed the VFC position on all bills were defined as anti-abortion. Although some incorrect classifications are possible, I believe the amount of error is likely to be very small. In order to minimize my requests to the staff of VFC, I only asked for their data for 1996 candidates for whom I could not acquire the information from Project Vote Smart. I am most grateful to Katie McCarthy of VFC for searching through their records. Voters for Choice's 1998 data are located on the World Wide Web (<http://voters4choice.org/docs/record.html>). For 115 candidates included in the 1998 ANES sampling frame I had both VFC and Project Vote Smart data. In only two instances did these two sources differ in their categorization of a candidate. (To resolve these discrepancies I used the Vote Smart coding as it is more detailed.)

variable to measure abortion positions.⁶ Measures of the respondent's position, perceptions of a political parties' and candidates' positions, or the candidates' actual position are coded zero for an anti-abortion position, one for a pro-choice position. For the ANES survey data, codes 1 and 2 indicate an anti-abortion position, codes 3 and 4 a pro-choice position. Of those candidates included in the 1996 and 1998 ANES sampling frames, 85 percent of the Democratic House candidates favored continuation of abortion rights, while 15 percent took an anti-abortion position. Seventy-seven percent of their Republican counterparts supported either the complete elimination of abortion or allowances only in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the mother was endangered; 13 percent supported *Roe v. Wade*. Relatedly, 77 percent of the 1996 and 1998 ANES respondents identified the Democratic party as pro-choice; 70 percent considered the Republican party to be anti-abortion.⁷

Citizens' Perceptions of Candidates' Positions on Abortion

To determine the importance of category-based versus individuating information attainment strategies for citizens' perceptions of House candidates' positions on abortion, maximum likelihood probit analysis is employed. The dependent variable is dichotomous, scored zero if the respondent perceived the candidate as holding an anti-abortion position, one for a pro-choice position. The measure of individuating information on perception of the candidate's position is the candidate's actual position. Two variables are included to measure the effect of stereotypes on perception of the candidate's position. It is expected that after controlling for the effects of the candidate's own position on abortion, citizens will be more likely to assign a pro-choice position to a female candidate and an anti-abortion position to a male candidate (one indicates the candidate was female, zero male). Huddy and Terkildsen (1993a) demonstrate a tendency for citizens to assign liberal positions to female candidates; it thus seems likely that citizens infer female candidates are pro-choice and male candidates anti-abortion. The effect of partisan stereotypes on perception of a candidate's position is measured with a survey question that asked respondents their perceptions of the positions of each political party on abortion. Prior research establishes that individuals often infer that others hold positions similar to their own (Conover and Feldman 1989). Thus, a variable measuring the respondent's position on abortion is included in the

6. It is impossible to construct a more finely grained measure of abortion position—one that captures the extremity of candidates' and respondents' views—without losing approximately half the cases.

7. The bivariate relationship between a candidate's position on abortion and citizens' perception of the candidate's political party's position on abortion is very weak: .002 for the Republican candidate and party, .02 for the Democratic candidate and party.

model. The impact of the respondent's position on perception of the candidate's position is augmented as affect for the candidate increases (Conover and Feldman 1982; Krosnick 1990; Markus and Converse 1979).⁸ To capture projection effects, an interaction term is included in the model that matches the respondent's position with affect for the candidate as measured on the ANES feeling thermometer.⁹ To ensure proper model specification, the candidate feeling thermometer score variable and a dummy variable for year of the survey (one = 1998) are also included. Separate analyses are performed on perception of Republican and Democratic candidates; the results are presented in table 1.¹⁰

The empirical analysis provides strong evidence of category-based processes of information attainment. Women candidates were assumed to hold a pro-choice position, and citizens' beliefs about the position of the candidate's party exerted strong effects. The effects of candidate gender are larger for perception of the Democratic candidate than for perception of the Republican candidate. The weaker effect of candidate gender for Republican candidates may result from citizens receiving conflicting category-based cues. While being female may lead a citizen to infer a candidate is pro-choice, the partisan cue suggests opposition to abortion. For Democratic candidates, the complimentary nature of the cues may serve to reinforce their effects. Additionally, the relative power of these stereotypes on perception is reflected in women candidates' actual position on abortion. Of the 50 Democratic female candidates in the analysis, 47 (94 percent) held a pro-choice position; of the 29 female Republican candidates, 18 (62 percent) held a pro-choice position. To give substantive meaning to the estimates of candidate gender on perception of the candidate's position, I make calculations for a hypothetical citizen attempting to construct an impression of a 1996 Democratic candidate. This citizen is anti-abortion, perceives the Democratic party as pro-choice, and is modestly favorable toward the candidate (25 on the feeling thermometer that ranges from -50 to 50). For this hypothetical citizen, the presence of a female candidate changes by 19 percent the likelihood the candidate is perceived as pro-choice. For a hypothetical 1996 anti-abortion citizen who believes the Republican party is anti-abortion, and is faced with an anti-abortion Republican and with the same level of affect for the Republican candidate, the

8. Analysis was also run with the ANES 7-point measure of partisanship included in the model to estimate differences in perception resulting from respondent partisanship; this variable never reached conventional levels of statistical significance in any analysis.

9. The 100-point feeling thermometer was rescaled so that its lowest value was -50, its midpoint 0, and its highest value 50.

10. The analyses in table 1, and all subsequent analyses of individual-level data, were also conducted with a selection bias model. Gender, frequency of newspaper reading, education, incumbency, candidate campaign spending, the competitiveness of the race, and interest in the congressional race served as predictors for whether or not the respondent offered a perception of the candidate's position on abortion. In no instance did the results from the selection bias model differ substantively from the results presented here.

Table 1. Respondent Perception of Candidate's Position on Abortion

Independent Variables	Republican Candidate	Democratic Candidate
Candidate's position	.44*** (2.99)	-.13 (.783)
Perception of party position	1.05*** (10.11)	1.20*** (9.92)
Woman candidate	.27* (1.81)	.49*** (3.20)
Respondent's position	.22** (1.97)	.26** (2.13)
Candidate feeling thermometer	-.04*** (4.84)	-.06*** (7.23)
Candidate feeling thermometer × respondent's position	.02*** (5.44)	.03*** (7.16)
1998	-.29*** (2.95)	-.24** (2.20)
N	845	782
Model chi-square (df = 7)	206.16***	300.77***
Log-likelihood	-447.19155	-345.50146
Pseudo R ²	.19	.30

NOTE.—Entries are maximum likelihood probit coefficients; *t*-statistics are given in parentheses. The dependent variable is perception of the candidate's position on abortion, coded one for a pro-choice position, zero for an anti-abortion position.

* Significant at the .10 level (two-tail tests).

** Significant at the .05 level (two-tail tests).

*** Significant at the .01 level (two-tail tests).

presence of a female candidate increases by approximately 6 percent the likelihood the candidate is perceived as pro-choice.

Democratic candidates' positions on abortion failed to register statistically significant effects on perception of their position; for Republican candidates, however, candidate position influenced perceptions. While the effect of the candidate's own position is sizable for Republican candidates, it is considerably smaller than the combined effect of gender and partisan stereotypes.

Why does the candidate's actual position on abortion influence perception of Republican House candidates' position but not that of Democratic candidates? Theoretical works on impression formation posit that the application of individuating information is moderated by the expertise and motivation of the respondent. Citizens with high political awareness continually follow the political process; they are more politically sophisticated and, consequently, more adept at processing information about politics (Zaller 1992). Those of greater political awareness should be more able to bear the necessary costs for learning the candidates' actual position.

The distinctive effects of the candidate's position for each party may be attributable to differences in the characteristics of the populations that offered perceptions of the candidate's position. Due to the effect of incumbency on the likelihood of offering a perception of a candidate's position and the relationship of education to partisan orientations, the population of citizens offering a perception of Republican candidates is more well-educated and politically aware than the population articulating a perception of Democratic candidates.¹¹ As measured on the ANES summary 7-point scale of educational attainment and a 7-point scale of political awareness (each ranges from 0 to 6), respondents who offered perceptions of Republican candidates had scores of 3.41 and 3.91, respectively.¹² The equivalent scores for respondents who offered a perception of the Democratic candidate were 3.29 and 3.75. To the extent these variables enhance the impact of individuating information on political perception, the actual position of Republican candidates should play a larger role in political perception.

An additional, and politically more interesting, explanation emphasizes that educational attainment and political awareness are related to the likelihood of a candidate adopting a party-contradicting position on abortion and the probability that the candidate's individuating position will be used to form an impression. Well-educated citizens are prone to adopt a pro-choice position, and less-well-educated citizens an anti-abortion position ($r = .21$ in the combined 1996 and 1998 ANES). Unsurprisingly, in 1996 and 1998 House candidates' adoption of a party-contradicting position on abortion was related to citizens' position on abortion, and this was related to the level of educational attainment and political awareness in the district. Republican candidates who held a pro-choice position did so in districts where 75 percent of the respondents held a similar position; the mean levels of educational attainment

11. The relationship between Democratic incumbency status and offering a perception is .13; the equivalent correlation for Republican incumbency is .10.

12. Political awareness is measured by the respondent's ability to correctly identify several prominent political figures, a few constitutional provisions, and partisan control of each chamber of the U.S. Congress. The 7-point scale of education was constructed in the following manner: 0 = 8 grades or less; 1 = 9–11 grades; 2 = high school diploma or equivalency test; 3 = more than 12 years of schooling; 4 = junior or community college level degree; 5 = B.A.-level degree; 6 = advanced degree.

and political awareness of these citizens were 3.64 and 4.02, respectively. For Republican candidates who proclaimed a party-consistent position on abortion, 56 percent of the citizens in the district that they ran in held a pro-choice position; the mean scores for educational attainment and political awareness were 3.05 and 3.51, respectively (t -statistics are 5.65, 6.48, and 9.50, respectively). Democratic candidates who adopted a party-contradicting position on abortion ran in districts where 47 percent shared their position; in congressional districts where the Democratic candidate held a pro-choice position, 60 percent of the constituents reported a pro-choice position (t -statistic = 2.69). The mean levels of educational attainment and political awareness in districts where an anti-abortion Democratic candidate ran were 2.88 and 3.51, respectively. The equivalent means for districts with party-consistent Democratic candidates were 3.20 and 3.61 (t -statistics = 3.70 and .967, respectively). To the extent that the impact of candidates' individuating position is moderated by political awareness, the effect is to increase the likelihood citizens recognize the position of the issue-trespassing Republican candidate and fail to accurately perceive the position of the issue-trespassing Democratic candidate. The appendix contains results of a district-level multivariate model of candidate issue trespassing that reveals a relationship between a district's level of educational attainment and a candidate's position on abortion.

Political Awareness and Issue Importance as Moderators of Individuating and Category-Based Information Processing

In this section I examine whether political awareness and considering abortion an important issue moderate the impact of the candidate's individuating position and category-based information on citizen perception of the candidate's position. Theories of impression formation posit that those with greater cognitive resources and motivation make more use of individuating information than less politically sophisticated and motivated citizens and, relatedly, rely less on category-based information. Interaction terms were created that match political awareness and considering abortion an important issue with the candidate's position on abortion, candidate gender, and perception of the sponsoring party's position on abortion. The interaction terms for the combination of political awareness or considering abortion an important issue with the individuating information should be positive; the interaction of political awareness and considering abortion an important issue with the category-based measures should be negative. To ensure proper model specification, political awareness and the variable measuring importance attached to abortion by the

respondent are also included in the model.¹³ Unfortunately, ANES did not include a measure of the importance of abortion to the respondent in the 1998 survey, limiting analysis of its effects to the 1996 data. Table 2 contains the results of a model of perception of the candidate's abortion position with political awareness interactions. Presented in table 3 are results from a model with interactions for the importance the respondent attaches to the abortion issue.

Of the two variables hypothesized to moderate the impact of individuating information on perception, effects consistent with the hypotheses are present only for political awareness. As expected, higher levels of political awareness result in greater utilization of the candidates' actual position to form an impression. The coefficient for the interaction between the candidate's actual position and considering abortion an important issue reaches statistical significance for perception of the Republican candidate, but the coefficient is incorrectly signed, suggesting that this combination reduces the impact of the candidate's actual position on perception. The interactions between the category-based cues and either political awareness or considering abortion an important issue do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Note, however, that the interaction between candidate gender and political awareness for perception of the Republican candidate's position barely misses the .10 cutoff (two-tail test). Interestingly, the coefficient is positively signed, suggesting that the more politically aware make greater use of gender stereotypes to infer a Republican candidate's position. While this result is suggestive rather than conclusive, it does imply that category-based information may be considered another piece of information available to citizens, and one more likely to be employed by the politically aware.

One striking and counterintuitive result is that the baseline coefficient in the model for perception of the Democratic candidate's position is negative as well as statistically significant; low political awareness appears to result in citizens perceiving the candidate's position as opposite of what it actually is. Closer examination of the data revealed that a negative and statistically significant bivariate relationship ($-.38$) between the candidate's position and perception of her position occurs only among the least politically aware, that is, among those citizens unable to correctly answer any of the six political knowledge questions posed by the ANES interviewer. Given that there are only 41 cases in this category, it seems imprudent to make too much of this counterintuitive result. If the least politically aware are excluded from the model, the baseline coefficient is no longer close to statistical significance, and the other coefficients are essentially the same.

The theory of motivated reasoning offers one possible explanation for the

13. The importance of abortion to the respondent was measured with the following question: "How important is this issue to you? (0) NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL, (1) NOT TOO IMPORTANT, (2) SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, (3) VERY IMPORTANT, or (4) EXTREMELY IMPORTANT?"

Table 2. Respondent Perception of Candidate's Position on Abortion, with Interactions for Political Awareness

Independent Variables	Republican Candidates	Democratic Candidates
Candidate's position	-.46 (.966)	-1.46*** (2.95)
Candidate position × political awareness	.21** (1.96)	.35*** (2.97)
Political awareness	-.18*** (4.09)	-.25** (1.99)
Perception of party position	.84*** (2.86)	1.16*** (3.84)
Perception of party position × political awareness	.05 (.803)	.03 (.426)
Woman candidate	-.42 (.940)	.27 (.652)
Woman candidate × political awareness	.17 (1.61)	.06 (.591)
Respondent's position	.35*** (2.96)	.22* (1.65)
Candidate feeling thermometer	-.03*** (4.11)	-.06*** (6.51)
Respondent position × candidate feeling thermometer	.02*** (4.66)	.03*** (6.30)
1998	-.35*** (3.49)	-.24** (2.02)
<i>N</i>	798	725
Model chi-square (<i>df</i> = 11)	216.29***	312.50***
Log-likelihood	-414.26	-304.758
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.21	.34

NOTE.—Entries are maximum likelihood probit coefficients; *t*-statistics are given in parentheses. The dependent variable is perception of the candidate's position on abortion, coded one for a pro-choice position, zero for an anti-abortion position.

* Significant at the .10 level (two-tail tests).

** Significant at the .05 level (two-tail tests).

*** Significant at the .01 level (two-tail tests).

Table 3. Perception of Candidate's Position on Abortion, with Interactions for Importance of Abortion

Independent Variables	Republican	Republican	Democrat	Democrat
Candidate's position	2.93*** (2.74)	3.01*** (2.80)	-1.08 (1.49)	-1.03 (1.44)
Candidate position × importance of abortion	-.65** (1.97)	-.68** (2.04)	.35 (1.55)	.34 (1.47)
Importance of abortion	.74** (2.06)	.94** (1.99)	-.53 (1.24)	-.93* (1.76)
Perception of party position	1.72*** (3.57)	1.74*** (3.60)	1.57*** (2.79)	1.92*** (3.24)
Perception of party position × importance of abortion	-.22 (1.40)	-.23 (1.47)	-.21 (1.20)	-.33* (1.73)
Importance of abortion × candidate feeling thermometer		-.01 (.796)		-.003 (.256)
Importance of abortion × respondent's position on abortion		-.10 (.550)		.31 (1.52)
Importance of abortion × respondent's position on abortion × candidate feeling thermometer		.007 (.919)		.002 (.300)
Woman candidate	-.05 (.048)	-.003 (.003)	.29 (.360)	.24 (.314)
Woman candidate × importance of abortion	.11 (.357)	.10 (.312)	.10 (.389)	.11 (.436)
Respondent's position	.14 (.833)	.45 (.774)	.14 (.780)	-.82 (1.24)
Candidate feeling thermometer	-.06*** (4.71)	-.04 (.585)	-.07*** (6.05)	-.06 (1.21)

Table 3. (*Continued*)

Independent Variables	Republican	Republican	Democrat	Democrat
Respondent position × candidate feeling thermometer	.04*** (4.88)	.01 (.539)	.04*** (6.11)	.03 (1.27)
N	430	430	437	437
Model chi-square	140.86***	141.88	157.34***	161.17***
Log-likelihood =	-216.818	-216.304	-191.50	-189.58
Pseudo R ²	.25	.25	.29	.30

NOTE.—Entries are maximum likelihood probit coefficients; *t*-statistics are given in parentheses. The dependent variable is perception of the candidate's position on abortion, coded one for a pro-choice position, zero for an anti-abortion position.

* Significant at the .10 level (two-tail tests).

** Significant at the .05 level (two-tail tests).

*** Significant at the .01 level (two-tail tests).

relationship between considering abortion an important issue and making less use of candidates' individuating information to form an impression (Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2000; Lodge, Taber, and Galonsky 1999). The theory of motivated reasoning holds that those who feel the strongest about an issue experience the greatest difficulty in handling objective information, thereby enhancing perceptual bias. A citizen for whom abortion is an important issue and is favorably predisposed toward the candidate should undergo the greatest amount of perceptual bias. The counterintuitive result of considering abortion an important issue reducing reliance on the candidate's actual position to form an impression may reflect this type of bias. To estimate this effect, a three-way interaction term matching considering abortion an important issue with affect for the candidate and one's own position on abortion was included in the model. The results of these analyses are presented in the third and fourth columns of table 3. In no instance did any of the three-way interaction terms come close to reaching conventional levels of statistical significance, failing to provide support for the theory of motivated reasoning. Additionally, the coefficient for the interaction between considering abortion an important issue and the candidate's actual position is approximately the same size with essentially the same standard error. At this point, the anomalous empirical finding defies theoretical explanation.

After taking account of the role of political awareness for moderating the impact of the candidate's position, the models for perception of the Democratic and Republican candidates are similar to each other. To give substantive meaning to the estimates, I calculate the effect of a one standard deviation (1.5 units) increase in political awareness for a hypothetical respondent in 1996

attempting to discern the position of a male pro-choice Republican and a male anti-abortion Democratic candidate. I assume the respondent is pro-choice, holds the mean level of affect for the candidate, and correctly perceives the sponsoring party's position on abortion. For this hypothetical voter, a one standard deviation increase in political awareness increases by 20 percent the likelihood of perceiving the Democratic candidate as anti-abortion and by 12 percent the probability of perceiving the Republican candidate as pro-choice.

The moderating effect of political awareness accounts for the partisan differences in the impact of the candidate's own position. The types of districts where 1996 and 1998 Republican House candidates abandoned their party's position on abortion were the demographic opposite of those where Democratic House candidates held anti-abortion positions. Fortunately for Republican candidates, those demographic characteristics that lead citizens in their district to hold a pro-choice position on abortion are also associated with high levels of political awareness, increasing the likelihood their party-contradicting position will be accurately perceived. Democratic candidates are prone to abandon their party's position on abortion when they run in districts composed of voters with lower levels of educational attainment because these voters are more likely to hold an anti-abortion position. Unfortunately for these Democratic candidates, the lower level of educational attainment and, consequently, political awareness characteristic of these citizens reduces the likelihood they accurately perceive the candidate's position on abortion.

As previously noted, 75 percent of the citizens in districts where Republican candidates held a pro-choice position shared that view. Thus, it would be to the electoral advantage of the Republican candidate to emphasize his or her agreement with these citizens on abortion. Democratic candidates who espoused a party-contradicting position on abortion faced a sharply divided electorate on that issue: 47 percent agreed with their position, 53 percent disagreed. Electoral prudence may discourage them from focusing attention on their position on this issue. Moreover, the higher level of political awareness of citizens in districts where Republicans issue trespassed should increase the likelihood that communication of their position is recognized. The opposite is true for anti-abortion Democrats.¹⁴

Issue trespassing only modestly decreases the accuracy of citizens' perceptions of Republican candidates' stand on abortion; citizens are almost as likely to correctly perceive a Republican candidate who espouses a pro-choice position as one who holds an anti-abortion position. For Democratic House candidates, issue trespassing on abortion reduces the accuracy of perceptions considerably. Only 35 percent of the respondents correctly identified the position of an anti-choice Democratic House candidate, while 66 percent ac-

14. I have searched far and wide for information on the importance of abortion in the campaigns and elections of the 683 candidates included in this study. Thus far I have been unsuccessful in locating data on the extent to which each candidate emphasized his or her position on abortion and the amount of media coverage of each candidate's position on abortion.

curately perceived the position of a pro-choice Democrat. The gap in accurate perception of the issue-trespassing House candidate on abortion and the party-consistent candidate for Republicans is much smaller: 55 percent versus 68 percent, respectively.

Conclusion

The analyses presented here highlight several important issues in the perception of candidates' issue positions. Much additional research is required to determine the robustness of the findings for other political issues and settings. Are similar patterns of perception present in gubernatorial, senatorial, and presidential elections that receive greater media and public attention? Do similar effects for the candidates' actual position, partisan stereotypes, and candidate gender characterize citizens' perception of candidates' positions on the death penalty, welfare, or defense spending? At a minimum, however, the research presented here suggests that to more fully understand the determinants of citizen perception of candidates' issue positions we need to pay close attention to candidates' actual issue positions.

In the presence of strong party stereotypes, candidates who hold issue positions contradicting those of their sponsoring party are unlikely to have their position recognized by many citizens. In these circumstances, extra effort by the candidate is necessary for perception of the candidate's position. Current writings emphasize the entrepreneurial, candidate-centered nature of House elections (King 1997). For citizen perceptions of House candidates' issue positions, partisan stereotypes powerfully shape perceptions, thereby limiting the potential electoral benefits of candidates' choice in their issue positions. One might contend that when candidates issue trespass on abortion they do so not to appeal to all citizens but to those who care most intensely about that issue. However, recall that respondents who cared greatly about abortion were not more likely to utilize the candidate's individuating information to form an impression of the candidate's position on abortion.

One other finding from this research deserves special note. A number of recent studies employing experimental research designs demonstrate the power of gender stereotypes to shape perceptions of political candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b; Kahn 1994; Sapiro 1982). Thus far, scholars have not located evidence for the application of gender stereotypes for candidate perception in actual elections. A contribution of this research is to fill this void: candidate gender influences citizens' perceptions of candidates' position on abortion.

Appendix

Modeling Candidate Issue Trespassing on Abortion

To identify the incentives for candidate issue trespassing on abortion, I constructed the following model for those candidates included in the ANES sampling frame. I assume that as the strength of the opposing party in a congressional district increases, the incentive for a candidate to abandon the sponsoring party's position on abortion also increases. To measure the opposing party's strength in the candidate's congressional district, I take the average of that party's 1992 and 1996 presidential votes. Data for educational attainment in the district were ascertained from the 1990 census.¹⁵ High educational attainment is measured as the proportion of residents who are at least 25 years of age with a college degree or higher; low educational attainment is measured as the proportion of residents who are at least 25 years of age and lack a high school diploma. Educational attainment, due to its relationship to preferences on abortion, should influence the likelihood that the candidate adopts a party-contradicting position. The dependent variable is dichotomous, coded one if the candidate adopted a pro-choice position on abortion, zero for an anti-abortion position.¹⁶ The relatively strong relationship between the two education variables ($r = .75$) introduces a worrisome level of multicollinearity. Therefore, I present models with both education variables included and one with only the education variable expected to lead to an issue-trespassing candidacy. Some congressional districts were included in both the 1996 and 1998 ANES sampling frame. It makes no sense to count each candidate twice; thus, the analysis includes 293 Democratic candidates and 284 Republican candidates. The results are presented in table A1.

As expected, the greater the electoral strength of the opposing party, the greater the likelihood the candidate holds that party's position on abortion. For Republican and Democratic candidates, the higher the proportion of respondents with a college degree in their district, the more likely it is that the candidate espouses a pro-choice position on abortion. In the model of Democratic candidates that contains both education variables, low education fails to reach statistical significance, while it does at the .10 level when only the variable measuring the proportion of low education individuals in the district is included. In sum, high education exhibits more robust effects than low education. This difference may reflect the greater frequency of voting and participatory activities for the higher educated, prompting more responsiveness by can-

15. Specifically, these data were taken from CD90-1D-3D-105, issued by the Bureau of the Census of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

16. Other variables related to abortion position are not included in the census data. For example, legal statute prevents the Census Bureau from asking about religious orientations or degree of religiosity. The proportion of respondents residing in rural areas and median family income were also included in the model of candidate issue trespassing, but neither came close to reaching statistical significance and were thus dropped from the model. The explanatory power of the models (R^2) can be increased by pooling the data and using party as a predictor variable. Doing so does not change the substantive value of the other coefficients. I present the data this way because my purpose is to highlight the factors that lead to issue trespassing on abortion for candidates of each party.

didates to their preferences. The data confirm theoretical expectations: high education encourages adopting of a pro-choice position, and low education an anti-abortion position.

Table A1. Model of Candidate Position on Abortion

Independent Variables	Democrat	Democrat	Republican	Republican
Opposing party's electoral strength	-.03*** (2.92)	-.03** (2.57)	.04*** (5.80)	.04*** (5.54)
Residents with less than a high school diploma	-.02* (1.89)	.02 (.802)		-.03 (1.60)
Proportion of residents with a college degree or more		.05** (2.47)	.05*** (4.81)	.03* (1.67)
N	293	293	284	284
Pseudo R ²	.04	.07	.18	.19
Model chi-square	10.06***	16.62***	55.87***	58.54***
Log-likelihood	-117.16	-113.88	-124.83	-123.494

NOTE.—Entries are maximum likelihood probit coefficients; *t*-statistics are given in parentheses. The dependent variable is perception of the candidate's position on abortion, coded one for a pro-choice position, zero for an anti-abortion position.

* Significant at the .10 level (two-tail tests).

** Significant at the .05 level (two-tail tests).

*** Significant at the .01 level (two-tail tests).

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