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Nathaniel Swigger

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What You See Is What You Get: Drawing Inferences From Campaign Imagery

NATHANIEL SWIGGER

Can images in campaign ads change voter perceptions of candidates? I use a series of controlled experiments to demonstrate that viewers make inferences about a candidate based on the types of people depicted in campaign ads. Viewers were more likely to believe that the candidate supported political benefits for certain demographic or professional groups when images of group members were included in campaign ads. They were also more likely to characterize the candidate as liberal or conservative, depending on the ideological reputation of the group pictured.

[Supplementary material is available for this article. Go to the publisher's online edition of Political Communication for the following free supplemental resource(s): Storyboards for campaign ad stimuli]

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Television ads have become a ubiquitous feature of American political campaigns at every level of government, and are one of the most expensive tools of a political campaign (Thurber, Nelson, & Dulio, 2000). The verbal content of these ads usually highlights issues where the candidate can present himself or herself in a positive light, and most political scientists have focused on this aspect of advertisements (Simon, 2002; Kaplan, Park, & Ridout, 2006; Sides, 2006). For many campaign professionals, though, this verbal content is secondary to the visual content of the ad. Campaign consultants tend to conceive of ads as a way to generate an affective bond between the candidate and the electorate by showing viewers that the candidates are “one of them” (Friedenberg, 1997; Kern, 1989; Perloff & Kinsey, 1992; Thurber et al., 2000). In order to create this impression, candidates show images that their constituents can relate to—**images of social groups that remind viewers of themselves and their own lives**. For example, candidates who represent rural areas may include images of farmers and ranchers, whereas candidates from areas with large Latino populations may include images of Latinos in their ads.

While campaign ads are designed with strategy in mind, they also serve as an important link in the democratic process by providing voters with information about candidates. Candidates tend to live up to the verbal issue appeals they use in campaign ads with action

Nathaniel Swigger is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, The Ohio State University.

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Address correspondence to Nathaniel Swigger, Department of Political Science, The Ohio State University, 1179 University Drive, Newark, OH 43055, USA. E-mail: swigger.1@osu.edu

in office (Ringquist & Dasse, 2004; Sulkin, 2009), and the images used in campaign ads can also serve as an important signal of future behavior. As Sulkin and Swigger (2008) show, there are strong correlations between the groups of people a candidate pictured in her or his ads and the candidate's support for those groups in office. Campaign ad imagery may therefore serve an important role in communicating candidate positions to the electorate.

Do voters actually use these images to make substantive inferences about a candidate's positions? In this article, I show that citizens use campaign ad images to draw substantive inferences about candidates as well. I begin by examining the research on information in campaigns and imagery in advertising, and I develop two hypotheses about how voters might be affected by campaign images. Then I present two controlled experiments in which I manipulate the images presented within an ad. These experiments show that individuals use campaign images to make inferences about a candidate's policy positions and political ideology. These findings should encourage political researchers to take into consideration visual information as well as verbal information when evaluating the content of political advertising. Any study that ignores the former and focuses only on the latter is effectively ignoring half the content.

Imagery in Political Advertising

Much of the political research on the effect of images has focused on their ability to elicit emotions like enthusiasm and anxiety (Brader, 2005, 2006), or on the effect of images in building affective connections with the viewer. The enthusiasm/anxiety path focuses on how provocative images can generate an emotional response and motivate learning and political engagement in the viewer. In order to achieve an emotional reaction, the ad usually requires a high degree of emotional imagery, music, and tone.

On the other hand, research on affective connections focuses primarily on immediate reactions and the judgments viewers make and feelings they form upon seeing a candidate. For example, research on facial similarity and appearance has shown that individuals respond more favorably to candidates who look like them (Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, & Yee, 2006; Bailenson, Iyengar, Yee, & Collins, 2008). In a similar vein, Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall (2005) argued that voters would make judgments about a candidate's competence based solely on the appearance of the candidate. In each case, these researchers found voters had instinctive affective reactions to political images. Beyond facial similarity, there is a tendency for individuals to respond favorably to advertisements featuring people who remind them of themselves (Chang, 2002). Racial imagery has proven especially powerful at generating emotional responses, as Whites tend to respond to images of African-Americans depending on their own level of racial resentment or views on African-Americans (Mendelberg, 2001; Terkildsen, 1993; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 1999).

These findings fit with what campaign professionals often try to accomplish. Most campaigns are built on the idea of forging an affective bond between the candidate and the voters (Burton & Shea, 2003; Hernson, 2004; Kern, 1989). In order to create that bond, political campaigns use the voters' social identities and attempt to convince them that the candidate is just like them. Groups like senior citizens are ubiquitous in American political campaigns, but other racial and demographic groups make regular appearances in ads as well, and it is unusual to see a political ad where the candidate appears alone. Over 90% of the congressional and Senate ads run in 2000, 2002, and 2004 pictured members of a politically distinctive and important demographic or occupational group (Sulkin &

Swigger, 2008). Almost one third of the candidates across those three campaign cycles pictured African-Americans in their ads, about 25% used images of blue-collar workers, 15% pictured farmers, and other groups make regular appearances as well.

Though those images may be intended to serve an affective purpose, it is not clear that they only achieve that goal. Images may incite emotional reactions in some instances, but they also constitute information and may serve as a heuristic to voters about a candidate's positions. Research on the *verbal* content of campaign ads demonstrates that voters learn about candidates over the course of campaigns and absorb the information in campaign ads (Craig, 2005; Lodge, Steenbergen, & Brau, 1995), though the learning process is hardly perfect and unbiased (Norpoth & Buchanan, 1992; Rahn, 1993). The partisanship of the candidate and the voter can distort or dampen the informational message in the campaign, but those messages can still have an impact on voters, particularly unengaged voters who might otherwise hear little or nothing about the campaign (Craig, 2005; West, 1993).

If voters use the verbal information in campaign ads, then why wouldn't they also use the visual information? The cliché is that a picture is worth a thousand words. Although an image may not say quite that much, it does constitute a metaphorical claim. Research on persuasive messaging and information processing offers tremendous insight into how individuals might use images to make judgments in a political campaign. Much of this work builds on dual processing models of persuasion such as the elaboration likelihood model and the heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken, 1987; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). In general, this research focuses on persuasive appeals in a commercial advertising context, although the key ideas and concepts in this research have often been adapted for the study of campaign ads.

For the most part, people seem to react to images in a peripheral or heuristic manner (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As a person becomes more interested and involved in an advertisement, he or she is more likely to use central processing to think through its message. However, even an attentive respondent may not use central processing to evaluate all of the content of an ad. Lord, Lee, and Sauer (1995) argue that both central and peripheral processing take place simultaneously. In their lab experiments they demonstrate that these processes happen not only independently but also simultaneously, so that a respondent can be affected by both the explicit content of the ad, which he or she can analyze, and the peripheral content, which leaves an impression without triggering any cognitive evaluation. Simply put, it is difficult for an individual to pay attention to and evaluate all aspects of a persuasive message (verbal content, images, tone, music, etc.). So images not directly related to the verbal content of a persuasive message may be processed reflexively without receiving much thought or attention.

Research in psychology and consumer advertising shows that images in ads act as metaphorical claims (Lord, Lee, & Sauer, 1995; Phillips, 2000). Because of the associations in memory between images and ideas, viewers who see the ad interpret the image as making some claim about the product (or the people using the product) being advertised. This visual content may be used to strengthen a verbal claim, or it may simply transmit a message on its own (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). In the political context, certain groups have strong political reputations (Price, 1989), and because of those reputations and the ideas that surround certain groups in politics, images of those groups can convey a strong substantive message.

A case in point is Tasha Philpot's study (2004) of the 2000 Republican National Convention. Contrary to the party's reputation, the GOP went out of its way to feature

African-American speakers during the convention. Those who watched the convention came away believing that the Republicans were making a strong effort to reach out and appeal to minority voters and moderate their party's stance on racial issues. In picturing particular groups, candidates signal that they care about those groups *and* that they support the groups' political views or causes. Hutchings, Valentino, Philpot, and White (2004) went further in investigating the effect of racial images when they looked at how presidential candidates could boost their standing among women by using racial appeals. The authors argued that women were sympathetic to a vulnerable social group. When shown racial images or given an overt racial appeal, women responded more favorably toward the candidate making an appeal on behalf of African-Americans. Hutchings and Valentino (2010) extended this reasoning and showed that racial cues can be particularly powerful among African-Americans and may help Republican candidates cut into traditional support for Democrats among African-American voters. In each of these studies images had a similar effect: Respondents saw images as a signal about a candidate's substantive policy positions toward a group and used that signal to evaluate the candidate.

Race may be a particularly strong signal, but if picturing one group seems to signal support for that group, then it seems logical to think that this effect may extend to other politically relevant, visually identifiable groups. Further, if a visual signal can constitute support for a group, it may also be used to say something more general about the candidate. Images of groups in a political ad could convey a message about the candidate's ideological position. Many groups in American society are strongly linked with a particular ideology because of a long association between those groups and political parties (Petrocik, 1996). For example, voters associate African-Americans with the Democratic party and liberalism because of the long-standing alliance between the party and Black voters and the perceived liberalism of prominent Black leaders (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino & Sears, 2005; Valentino, Traugott, & Hutchings, 2002).

It seems, then, that there are two main substantive messages conveyed by picturing a particular group in a campaign ad: support for the group and support for the ideology associated with that group. This leads to the two main hypotheses tested in this article:

The Group Support Hypothesis: When a candidate pictures a visually recognizable member of an occupational or demographic group, voters will interpret that image as a message that the candidate favors that group.

The Ideology Hypothesis: Picturing groups widely perceived as conservative will cause voters to view the candidate as more conservative, and picturing groups perceived as liberal will make voters view the candidate as more liberal.

Both hypotheses posit that candidates convey substantive messages when they use images of demographic groups. Voters are not responding simply on the basis of an affective identification but are responding to a substantive impression, support of either an ideology or a group, that the image created. These hypotheses would have important implications for campaign strategists. Explicitly talking about an issue and providing support to a particular group should have a strong impact on viewers' perceptions, but it is also something that candidates try to shy away from at times. Though candidates often talk about issues, they prefer to do so in nonspecific terms (Sulkin, 2009) and, for obvious reasons, rarely wish to address controversial issues in their ads. If they could achieve the same type of effect through a visual appeal without being tied to an explicit verbal or controversial promise, candidates could appeal to a group (or voters sympathetic with that group) in a way that might offer little strategic downside.

Experiment 1: Adult Subjects With Knowledge of the Candidate's Party

For the first experiment, I used the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP)¹ as a platform to collect a sample of adults from a midwestern state. The CCAP consisted of six waves beginning in December 2007, using a sample of registered voters stratified by battleground and non-battleground states. Respondents were chosen from the YouGov/Polimetrix Polling Point Panel with an eye toward creating a sample representative (by gender, age, race, and education) of the national population.

Before constructing campaign ads for the experiment, I first determined what type of images to use. In the March wave of the CCAP, respondents were asked to place nine groups on ideological scales from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). The groups were presented in random order and respondents were asked to make a judgment based on what they knew of the group in general. Table 1 shows how respondents viewed each group. The first column shows the mean placement (with standard deviations in parentheses) of each group; the other columns show the percentage of the sample that placed that group on the liberal or conservative end of the scale, or at the midpoint (4) of the ideological scale.²

The results indicate that these occupational and demographic groups have strong ideological reputations. Respondents saw African-Americans, teachers, Latinos, and labor unions as liberal groups. On the other hand, police officers, soldiers, senior citizens, businessmen, and farmers were all seen as conservative groups. In every case, a majority of respondents placed the group on one side of the ideological spectrum, and in 6 out of 9 cases, more than 60% of respondents identified the group as liberal or conservative. Because these groups have ideological reputations, it would make sense that picturing a member of one of those groups with a candidate should affect a viewer's perception of the ideology of that candidate.

The goal in these experiments was to produce ads in which the candidate made a verbal appeal to a group, made a visual appeal to a group, did both, or, in the control condition, did

Table 1
Ideological placement of groups within the March CCAP

Group	Mean placement	Liberal placement	Conservative placement	Midpoint placement	N
African-Americans	2.39 (1.27)	81.0	5.4	13.6	1,099
Labor unions	2.41 (1.38)	79.1	7.3	13.6	1,097
Teachers	2.72 (1.30)	71.7	7.1	21.6	1,102
Latinos	3.26 (1.37)	53.7	16.7	29.5	1,099
Police officers	4.79 (1.30)	12.6	60.2	27.2	1,096
Farmers	4.83 (1.29)	12.1	62.8	25.1	1,098
Senior citizens	4.77 (1.38)	15.1	57.7	27.2	1,098
Military personnel	5.37 (1.25)	5.7	78.3	16.0	1,101
Businessmen	5.46 (1.52)	10.4	77.6	12.0	1,101

Note. Respondents placed each group on a 7-point scale (1 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely conservative). The first column indicates the mean placement of the group with standard errors in parentheses. The second and third columns show the percentage of respondents who placed the group on the liberal (1, 2, or 3) or conservative (5, 6, or 7) side of the scale. The fourth column indicates the percentage of respondents who simply placed the group in the exact middle (4) of the ideological scale.

neither. To produce a number of campaign ads for the experiment, I used archived campaign commercials from Mark Kennedy's failed 2006 Minnesota senate campaign. Kennedy, a sitting member of Congress at the time, ran many different ads during the campaign, so a considerable amount of video of the candidate was publicly available after the campaign. Kennedy is a White, male Republican who was in his 40s at the time of the campaign, and is not well known outside of Minnesota, meaning that participants had little knowledge of him prior to the experiment. As a first step, I used selected footage from Kennedy's actual ads as well as video footage of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the surrounding area to create a 30-second campaign commercial. I used this commercial as a control ad in the experiment described below. The commercial's basic format was as follows: about 15 seconds of Minnesota scenery intercut with a brief shot of the capital dome and images of Kennedy speaking to the camera or standing next to Caucasians with no obvious ties to any major political or demographic group. The scenes of the Twin Cities and surrounding areas did not have any footage of people, focusing instead on buildings, highways, and rivers. The resulting ad shows Kennedy on screen a good portion of the time alone and interacting with a few people. The scenes of Minnesota are split and appear at roughly the 10- and 20-second marks within the ad.³

For the first experiment, I used images of blue-collar workers and African-Americans. Blue-collar workers were shown working with tools, wearing hard hats, and so on, while African-Americans were pictured in natural home or office settings. I went through the control ad and replaced the footage of Minnesota with footage of a particular group.⁴ Since the control ad also contained images of Caucasians,⁵ these images were left in the treatment ads. In each treatment ad, the group appeared on screen from roughly the 10–15-second and 20–29-second marks within the ads. As a result, the treatment ads still contain footage of Kennedy alone and Kennedy alongside the adults pictured in the control ad as well as footage of the groups I am interested in investigating. The treatments, therefore, effectively mimic real ads while keeping the intent of the experiment hidden. Participants may not have accepted ads for a White political candidate that only pictured African-Americans.⁶ Though this weakens the treatments somewhat, it does preserve the internal validity of the treatment.

Finally, gender can serve as a cue about ideology (Koch, 2003; McDermott, 1997). Because women are usually seen as a more liberal group, the presence of women in the ads could potentially contaminate the experiment. On the other hand, the absence of women might also be noticeable. To control for this factor, the ratio of men to women within the ads was held consistent across conditions. Though not all ads feature the same number of people, the gender balance across conditions should eliminate any potential contamination due to gender stereotypes.

For audio content, I recorded an audio track for each ad with music and an actor supplying the voice of Mark Kennedy. In the control condition Kennedy talks about the importance of change and working for people rather than special interests. His only policy statement concerns the need to balance the federal budget. The visual treatment conditions are split into one condition that would hear the same verbal script as the control condition and one in which the candidate makes a verbal appeal for a particular group instead of discussing the budget. In the verbal treatment conditions, his support for balancing the budget is replaced with an explicit appeal for support for a particular group. For example, in the case of African-Americans, this meant voicing support for affirmative action policies in college admissions.

From a visual perspective, the main comparison here should be between ads that feature images of African-Americans or workers and ads that feature neutral scenery. I also

Table 2
Design of the CCAP experiment

Audio condition	Video condition		
	Generic video	African-American video	Worker video
Generic audio	145	135	151
Pro-minimum wage audio	136	–	144
Pro-affirmative action audio	127	114	–

Note. Cells indicate the number of subjects in each condition.

included a final ad that focused on Kennedy's family and personality, which featured Kennedy and his immediate family and contained no policy information at all. The family merely comments on Kennedy's personality and the ad attempts to humanize the candidate. This biographical ad ran after the treatment ads and served as a brief distraction while also bringing some authenticity to the experiment. Table 2 shows a breakdown of Experiment 1 and the number of subjects in each condition.

The experiment ran in the September 2008 wave of the CCAP for the state of Illinois. Each participant viewed two ads: The first ad contained the experimental treatment, while the second ad was the non-substantive biographical ad. Though the subjects knew that the ads were the focus of the experiment, they were still unaware of the verbal and visual distinctions between conditions, and the actual treatment within each ad amounted to roughly 15 seconds of audio and/or video. Once they had seen the ads, I then asked the subjects to identify the candidate's position on a number of issues (aid to Blacks, affirmative action, the minimum wage, and free trade). I also asked subjects for their perception of the candidate's overall ideology and their overall feeling toward the candidate.

Results

Table 3 summarizes the results from the first experiment, showing the mean placement within each treatment group on perceptions of the candidate with standard errors shown in parentheses. Scales ran from 0–100 and were constructed so that higher values indicate positions more supportive of the group. The liberal-conservative scale also ran from 0–100, with 0 indicating extremely conservative and 100 indicating extremely liberal. As expected, both the visual and verbal content had a strong impact on perceptions of the candidate's positions in the racial conditions, though this effect was not present in the worker conditions. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) confirm significant between-condition differences on the perception of the candidate on affirmative action, $F(3, 459) = 36.76$, $p < .01$; aid to Blacks, $F(3, 465) = 19.00$, $p < .01$; and overall ideology, $F(6, 828) = 23.33$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc contrasts confirm that these differences are driven by the racial treatment conditions. Conditions containing a verbal, visual, or combined verbal and visual stimulus related to African-Americans led subjects to perceive the candidate as more supportive of the Black community and more liberal in general. This gap was both statistically significant and substantively quite large. For example, even when the ad contained no verbal racial content, there was still a 17-point, statistically significant ($p < .01$) difference in mean placements on the issue of aid to Blacks between the control condition and the treatment condition with images of African-Americans.

Table 3
Summary statistics from Experiment 1

Condition	Aid to Blacks	Affirmative action	Minimum wage	Free trade	Ideology
Pictured African-Americans and mentioned affirmative action	58.03* (3.19)	65.35* (3.06)			62.35* (2.20)
Mentioned affirmative action	58.61* (2.60)	65.22* (2.86)			59.86* (2.07)
Pictured African-Americans	52.89* (2.17)	49.90* (1.94)			50.84* (1.74)
Pictured workers and mentioned minimum wage			48.21 (2.25)	44.44 (2.21)	45.54 (1.46)
Mentioned minimum wage			52.20 (2.69)	45.09 (2.39)	43.40 (1.60)
Pictured workers			49.63 (2.22)	49.35 (2.08)	42.51 (1.49)
Control	36.09 (1.94)	34.86 (1.89)	46.23 (2.20)	51.18 (1.83)	41.70 (1.58)

Note. Cell entries represent the mean response in each condition with standard errors in parentheses. On each scale, higher values represent higher support for the group in question. On the ideological scale, higher values are more liberal and lower values are more conservative.

* $p < .05$ (significant difference with control condition).

On the issue of affirmative action, there was an additional difference in mean candidate placement between the racial treatment conditions depending on whether the ad included verbal support for affirmative action. Post-hoc contrasts reveal that subjects who heard the candidate verbally support affirmative action rated the candidate as more liberal on that issue than subjects who saw only images of African-Americans. When the subjects received only the visual message of support for African-Americans, with no verbal message, they placed the candidate at 49.9, or almost precisely at the midpoint. When a verbal message supporting affirmative action was included (either alone or in combination with images), the subjects placed the candidate in a significantly more liberal position. These results suggest that picturing a group is sufficient to deliver a *nonspecific* message of support, and complementing the image with a verbal statement does not seem to increase the power of that message. Although a verbal statement that addresses a specific issue can have a greater impact on viewers' perceptions regarding that issue, it is not necessary in order to express general support for a group.

The results in the worker-related conditions are somewhat less compelling. Understandably, subjects in the treatment conditions seemed reluctant to place a Republican candidate on the liberal side of an issue, even when given explicit information in the ad.⁷ In the condition that included both images of workers and a verbal statement supporting an increase in the minimum wage, the mean placement of the candidate on the minimum wage issue was only 48.21, or almost exactly at the midpoint of the scale. At the same time, the subjects in the control condition—the comparison group—did not place the Republican candidate in a particularly conservative position on worker issues. On the issue of the minimum wage, the mean placement of the candidate in the control condition was 46.2, or slightly to the right of center, on the 0–100 scale. Simply put, the subjects in the control condition placed the candidate at a fairly moderate position on workers' issues even without

any verbal or visual message of support. The differences between conditions in perceptions of the candidate's position on worker-related issues, therefore, were often minimal.

In addition to making inferences about policy positions, subjects also interpreted the images in the experiment as a signal about the candidate's ideology. This is consistent with the Ideology Hypothesis, which suggests that picturing liberal groups like Blacks and workers should leave viewers with the impression that the candidate is more liberal. However, a partisan ceiling effect is also apparent when looking at how the subjects rated the candidate's ideology. Even in conditions with liberal visual and verbal messages, the perception of the candidate's ideology never moved much farther than slightly left-of-center. Figure 1 shows the mean rating of the candidate's ideology for each experimental group. In the control condition, subjects placed the candidate at 41.70 on a 100-point scale. In order to achieve a statistically significant difference, subjects in the treatment groups would have had to place the Republican at a substantially more liberal position. The mean placements of the candidate for all of the treatment groups featuring race-based verbal and/or visual appeals were at a statistically significant distance from the control group's mean placement. By contrast, in the worker-related treatment conditions the mean ideological placements were always more liberal than those in the control group, but the differences in these group means were negligible.

Because the participants in the experiment had little knowledge of the candidate, it is possible that they projected their own positions onto the candidate based on how much

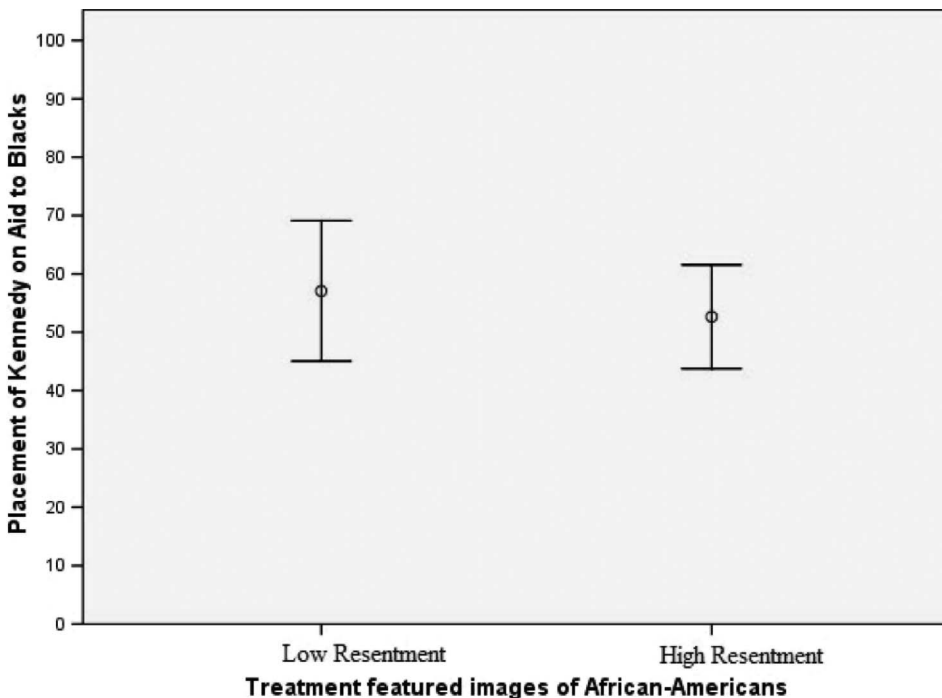


Figure 1. Comparison of placement of candidate between high and low racial resentment participants. The graph shows the mean placement of Kennedy on the issue of aid to Blacks, with 95% confidence intervals indicated. Higher values on the graph indicate increased support for aid to Blacks. Racial resentment was measured on a 1–5 scale. There were 23 participants with low levels (<2) of racial resentment and 47 with high levels (>4) of racial resentment.

they liked him. Several studies have shown that voters tend to project their own views onto candidates they like, regardless of that candidate's actual issue positions (Brady & Sniderman, 1985). In order to verify that the results in Table 2 came about because of the treatment, I estimated an OLS regression model using the issue and ideological placements as the dependent variable. I created indicator variables to show whether or not a respondent viewed a particular image or heard a particular appeal and created an interaction term between the subjects' issue⁸ or ideological position and their feelings toward the candidate in order to control for any halo effect, while also controlling for other factors such as individual partisanship, race, and gender.

The results in Table 4 show that there is in fact a halo effect; respondents who liked the candidate tended to project their own positions onto the candidate. However, even after controlling for this effect, the racial audio and visual treatments are still both statistically significant and in the correct direction. While feelings toward the candidate apparently altered perceptions of the candidate's positions, the individual's predispositions alone did not significantly alter the impact of the treatment. An analysis similar to Table 3 using interactions between the treatments and individual predispositions showed no significant results. For example, images of African-Americans had the same effect on perceptions of the candidate regardless of whether or not the individual participant had high or low levels of racial resentment. Figure 1 shows a comparison on the issue of aid to Blacks within the treatment group that saw ads that pictured African-Americans but did not offer verbal support for African-Americans. Participants with high levels of racial resentment did not

Table 4
Effects of visual and verbal treatments in Experiment 1 with halo effect

	Aid to Blacks	Affirmative action	Minimum wage	Free trade	Ideology
African-American video	8.18** (2.43)	7.49** (2.41)	—	—	4.49* (1.81)
African-American audio	11.93** (2.58)	21.09** (2.57)	—	—	12.18** (1.97)
Worker video	—	—	-.32 (2.49)	-1.77 (2.54)	-.10 (1.48)
Worker audio	—	—	1.97 (2.43)	-5.29* (2.53)	.74 (1.46)
Self-placement	-7.84* (3.70)	-10.17** (3.51)	-13.23** (1.92)	.30 (2.88)	-17.53** (1.78)
Feeling	-.91** (.18)	-.87** (.17)	-.19** (.15)	-.18 (.23)	-.96** (.09)
Halo	.22** (.05)	.21** (.05)	.25 (.03)	-.02 (.04)	.31** (.03)
Party ID	.20 (.65)	-.30 (.66)	-.12 (.71)	.85 (.67)	.69 (.45)
Female	5.66* (2.43)	3.22 (2.39)	4.97* (2.56)	-.48 (2.64)	.15 (1.29)
African-American	-5.41 (4.60)	1.29 (.66)	6.18 (5.76)	-3.02 (6.72)	-3.42 (3.84)
Latino	.26 (5.97)	-6.02 (5.69)	7.80 (8.28)	-1.23 (6.65)	3.18 (3.16)
Constant	1.98 (12.32)	-3.01 (11.77)	-16.08 (8.85)	53.94* (14.28)	-11.98* (5.66)
<i>N</i>	447	447	387	387	656
<i>R</i> ²	.20	.25	.19	.03	.33

Note. Each column represents a separate regression analysis with dependent variables listed at the head of each column. Cells represent regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

significantly differ in their perceptions of the candidates from participants with low levels of racial resentment. Comparisons across all treatment groups among individuals with differing issue positions, partisanship, attitudes, and so on showed that these predispositions did not interact significantly with the treatment.

Overall, then, the results of the CCAP experiment show substantial support for the Group Support and Ideology hypotheses in the case of African-Americans, but little support in the case of workers. The results of the experiment may suggest that racial imagery may simply be more powerful than other visual signals, or it may simply be that images of African-Americans constitute a clearer signal than images of workers.

Experiment 2: Student Subjects With No Knowledge of the Candidate's Party

In order to gain a better understanding of the general effect of group images, I followed up on the results of the CCAP experiment in the fall of 2008 and spring of 2009 with an experiment using student subjects to test the effects of picturing African-Americans and workers as well as senior citizens, farmers, police officers, soldiers, teachers, businesspeople, and Latinos. The subject pool uses undergraduate students recruited from introductory courses in political science.

The number of subjects within each treatment group was much smaller in these experiments (roughly 15–30 subjects per cell), so I strengthened the treatment in the experiment by including two substantive ads instead of one. Subjects saw two 30-second ads featuring visual and/or verbal content supporting a particular group (or neutral images and verbal content in the control condition). In verbal treatment conditions the first ad contained a specific policy statement (e.g., “I want to increase the Medicare prescription drug benefit”), while the second ad contained a more generic message (e.g., “I’ll work to help seniors”). As in the CCAP experiment, the neutral images were of Minnesota scenery and were replaced in treatment ads by images of a particular group. Following the two substantive ads, the subjects viewed the Kennedy biographical ad and then answered questions about the issue positions and ideology of the candidate.⁹ Although the participants knew they were viewing political ads, they were not given the candidate’s partisan identity, nor was Kennedy’s partisanship mentioned in the subsequent ads. Without the party label to provide an anchor for perceptions of the candidate, subjects should be far more likely to be influenced by the ad content (Rahn, 1993).¹⁰

Results

I have used two issue items to measure support for each of the groups. Most of these focus on economic benefits or health benefits for the group. For police and soldiers, I have included measures of where the candidate stands on harsher punishment for criminals and defense spending, respectively, because respondents may draw policy inferences from these images that are not strictly related to benefits for the group. The results from Experiment 2 provide evidence for the Group Support Hypothesis and indicate that verbal and visual messages of support had a similar impact on subjects’ perceptions of the candidate.

To investigate the impact of visual and verbal treatments, I performed an ordered logit analysis similar to the regression analysis shown in Table 4 in order to correct for any individual-level confounds. In each case, the dependent variable was support for a group on a particular issue (scales ranged from 1–7), with higher values indicating increased support for that group. In the case of the subject pool, however, individuals did have to place

Table 5

Summary of effects of visual and verbal treatments in Experiment 2 with halo effect

Group	Verbal treatment	Visual treatment
Teachers		
Senior citizens	Medicare ($\beta = 2.66$, $SE = .85$)	Social Security ($\beta = 1.17$, $SE = .65$)
Latinos	Aid to Latinos ($\beta = 2.43$, $SE = .71$)	
	Immigration ($\beta = 2.00$, $SE = .68$)	
Farmers	Agricultural spending ($\beta = 2.44$, $SE = .73$)	Ethanol subsidies ($\beta = 1.42$, $SE = .63$)
	Ethanol subsidies ($\beta = 3.25$, $SE = .79$)	
Police	Spending on police ($\beta = 2.54$, $SE = .60$)	
Soldiers	Defense spending ($\beta = 1.85$, $SE = .69$)	Aid to veterans ($\beta = 1.54$, $SE = .58$)
	Aid to veterans ($\beta = 1.90$, $SE = .70$)	
African-	Aid to Blacks ($\beta = 2.93$, $SE = .64$)	Aid to Blacks ($\beta = 2.01$, $SE = .53$)
Americans	Affirmative action ($\beta = 2.13$, $SE = .64$)	Affirmative action ($\beta = 1.19$, $SE = .50$)
Workers		Free trade ($\beta = .79$, $SE = .39$)
Businesspeople	Regulations ($\beta = .82$, $SE = .47$)	Regulations ($\beta = .86$, $SE = .45$)

Note. The table summarizes a series of analyses that look at the effect of visual and verbal treatments in Experiment 2 after including a number of controls. (Full results are provided in the appendix.) Dependent variables are placements of the candidate on issues related to each group. In each case the scale was constructed so that higher values indicate more support for the group, so positive coefficients indicate that the treatment made the candidate look more supportive of the group. The cells reflect whether imagery is a significant ($p < .10$) predictor of later voting or activity and, if so, for which party or parties' legislators the effect was found and the magnitude and standard error of the coefficient. Models for voting scores were estimated using ordered logit.

themselves on the same scales that they used to rate Kennedy, which makes for a more direct test of the halo effect. Table 5 presents a summary of the results of these models (full results can be found in the appendix). As was the case in Experiment 1, participants in Experiment 2 tended to project their own views onto the candidate, but even after controlling for this effect the visual and verbal treatments often had a significant impact on perceptions of the candidate.

Looking at the results from Table 5, it is clear that the audio treatments had a more consistent effect across groups, which is hardly unexpected given the low level of knowledge about the candidate and the absence of party labels within the experiment. However, in 6 out of 9 cases (senior citizens, soldiers, farmers, African-Americans, blue-collar workers, and businesspeople) the video treatment also had a significant effect on individuals' perceptions of the candidate on the issues. Unlike the results from Experiment 1, for example, images of workers had a significant impact on how participants viewed the candidate's position on free trade.

The evidence from this experiment also provides support for the Ideology Hypothesis. Participants placed the candidate on a 7-point ideological scale with 1 being extremely

liberal and 7 being extremely conservative. The first column of Table 6 shows an estimated ordered logit model using placement of the candidate on the liberal/conservative scale as the dependent variable and again controlling for individual factors and the possible presence of a halo effect. Even after accounting for a halo effect, there is support for the idea that images can provide an ideological cue. Six of the nine groups had a statistically significant impact on evaluations of the candidate's ideology when respondents were shown an image of that group. In contrast, verbal support for a group had a significant impact for five of the nine groups.

Table 6
Effects of visual and verbal treatments on ideology and gun control
in Experiment 2

	Ideology	Gun control
Video		
Senior citizens	.91* (.53)	.14 (.48)
Teachers	.12 (.42)	.13 (.44)
Farmers	.16 (.42)	.12 (.41)
Blue-collar workers	-.80** (.39)	-.24 (.38)
Businesspeople	.63* (.36)	-.30 (.36)
Soldiers	.51* (.30)	-.26 (.29)
Police officers	.28 (.35)	.41 (.35)
African-Americans	-1.64*** (.43)	-.76* (.39)
Latinos	-1.28** (.47)	-.37 (.43)
Audio		
Senior citizens	-.41 (.51)	.05 (.50)
Teachers	-.69* (.42)	-.86* (.46)
Farmers	.14 (.42)	.02 (.41)
Blue-collar workers	-.72* (.40)	-.78 (.39)
Businesspeople	.59 (.41)	-.24 (.38)
Soldiers	.49* (.30)	.22 (.29)
Police officers	.54 (.38)	-1.22** (.38)
African-Americans	-1.61** (.43)	-.35 (.37)
Latinos	-1.34** (.41)	-.27 (.37)
Individual position	-2.03*** (.25)	-.69*** (.16)
Feeling thermometer	-.13*** (.02)	-.06*** (.01)
Halo effect	.04*** (.00)	.01*** (.00)
<i>N</i>	489	489
Log-likelihood	-725.93	-839.23
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.16	.05

Note. Each column represents a separate ordered logit analysis with dependent variables listed at the head of each column. The liberal/conservative scale ran from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). The gun control scale was designed so that higher values indicate more opposition to gun control. Each analysis also included controls for partisanship, gender, and race, though these have been omitted in the table for space reasons. Cells represent ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

There is also little reason to believe that these effects are spurious artifacts of the experiment. The last column of Table 6 shows another estimated ordered logit using gun control as the dependent variable (also on a 7-point scale, with lower values favoring increased gun control measures). Unlike ideology, there is no particular reason to believe that any of the images used in the experimental ads would have an effect on perceptions of the candidate's position on gun control.¹¹ In fact, an examination of the coefficients in this model shows only three statistically significant effects (images of African-Americans and verbal support for teachers and police officers) for any of the verbal or visual treatments, which demonstrates that images and verbal content in the experiments provided relatively clear cues to the respondents that were limited to the expected issue areas.

Conclusion

In this study, I have presented evidence that suggests voters use campaign images to make inferences about a candidate's issue positions. While not every type of image examined in this article yielded significant results, the overall pattern suggests that images in general can have a strong impact on how voters see the candidate. Voters view images of groups as an implicit message of support for that group, and they take away a substantive impression about the candidate's issue positions and ideology based on the types of people he pictures in his ads. Though previous studies had investigated the importance of racial imagery in political ads, this study has shown that the effects of racial imagery are not unique. Images are information, after all, and can be a cheap, efficient way to communicate campaign messages since many recognizable groups with strong political reputations can be used as cues by the viewers.

The ease of images and the fact that voters of all predispositions could make use of them have important implications for candidate strategy. A 30-second ad offers little time to cover all of the issues that might be important in a political campaign, and, more importantly, candidates may not wish to make verbal statements that could tie them to issue positions. For example, very few candidates offer verbal support for race-based programs like affirmative action, but if they can achieve the same effect through imagery they could appeal to voters supportive of such programs without making an explicit statement. By varying the images appearing in an ad, a candidate could appeal to multiple constituencies simultaneously without ever saying a word. Given the costs involved in going back on explicit verbal campaign promises, candidates may find it much more efficacious to limit their verbal appeals and imply positions through visual appeals instead.

Like any laboratory experiment, the results here may be limited by external factors that intrude in the real world. For one, the candidate in the experiment was unknown to the subjects prior to their participation. Of course, many voters know little of candidates, and in non-presidential campaigns they often use campaign ads as their primary source of information about the candidates (Craig, 2005). Still, it would be reasonable to assume that it would be harder to shape perceptions of a known candidate. Indeed, several experiments on imagery have found that results among knowledgeable or strong partisan voters are often limited (e.g., Bailenson et al., 2008). However, in the experiments presented here treatment effects persisted across individual partisanship and issue predispositions. While these effects may be muted in a real-world environment with a well-known candidate, it should be possible to still see a significant impact from campaign imagery.

With those caveats in mind, the results of this analysis indicate that campaign researchers need to adjust their definition of "information" within a campaign. If voters make inferences about a candidate based on who is pictured in his or her ads, then

campaign images are providing information to voters, and we must account for that information signal. Research on priming, mobilization, persuasion, and so on all assumes that the information in the campaign plays a role, but the unstated assumption is that information must be verbalized. There may in fact be a great deal of learning taking place in the campaign, and voters may be primed or mobilized by the visual messages as well as the verbal content of campaign ads. The public may have grown tired of listening to politicians, but it can still learn a great deal by watching them.

Notes

1. The Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project is a multi-university study conducted by You Gov/Polimetrix under the direction of Simon Jackman of Stanford University and Lynn Vavreck of UCLA. While the surveys contained content common to all respondents, individual institutions were allowed to place their own surveys and experiments within each wave of the study. Full details are available from the author (Vavreck & Rivers, 2008).

2. I am not suggesting that all members of the conservative and liberal groups fall into those categories, or even that a majority of a particular group does. It is just that the public, in general, views the group a certain way. There are, undoubtedly, many politically liberal senior citizens, for example, but the general public perception equates seniors with conservatism.

3. Valentino, Hutchings, and White (1999) used a similar approach in their investigation of racial images. They contrasted campaign ads picturing African-Americans with ads featuring x-rays and hospitals without any people present in the image. In an experiment focused on campaign images, it is not always clear what the control condition should look like. In this case, I used Minnesota scenery in order to ensure that the images in the control ad presented no kind of substantive group cue to the subjects.

4. In the treatment conditions, no individual represented more than one group in order to ensure that the treatment was not contaminated. For example, all of the blue-collar workers pictured were Caucasian rather than African-American, so any difference between the control and treatment conditions must be due to the appearance of an individual as a worker, rather than his or her ethnicity. I did, however, include male and female members of each group.

5. Arguably, the use of Caucasians alone in the control ad may make the candidate appear more conservative. However, in limited pilot tests I used a Democratic candidate and found that subjects paid little notice to the presence of Caucasians with no obvious group affiliation. Subjects who saw ads with images of unaffiliated Caucasians generally evaluated the candidate as a somewhat typical Democrat.

6. In pilot tests subjects took particular notice of ads that featured only African-Americans or Latinos, and often noticed when only one occupational group (e.g., farmers or workers) was pictured. In contrast, when one of these groups was pictured but the ad also pictured Caucasians who did not belong to any particular occupational group, none of the participants questioned the authenticity of the ads.

7. The lack of significant differences between conditions could also be a result of subjects' failure to connect blue-collar images with the issues of the minimum wage and free trade. A post-experiment look at the subjects in the control condition also revealed that they actually identified unions as significantly more conservative than the subjects in the worker treatment conditions did, which explains why those in the control condition may have been predisposed to view a Republican candidate as worker friendly.

8. In Experiment 1 subjects were not asked specifically about their positions on worker and race-related issues. I have used the subject's level of racial resentment (scaled from 1 [high resentment] to 6 [low resentment]) as a proxy for his or her position on aid to Blacks and affirmative action and the subject's position on a government guaranteed standard of living (scaled from 1 [strongly opposed] to 7 [strongly supportive]) as a proxy on free trade and the minimum wage. Subjects' ideologies were measured on a 1–7 scale, with higher values indicating more liberal subjects.

9. The issue and ideological scales in the subject pool ran from 1–7, rather than 0–100 as they did in the CCAP experiment. The experimental software used in the subject pool was unable to easily accommodate a 100-point issue scale.

10. Whether or not the candidate's partisanship should have been mentioned in the ads and whether or not it should have been given to the subjects are still open questions. While some candidates will specifically identify their partisanship in their ad, many do not, and it is not clear which approach increases the external validity of the experiment.

11. An argument could be made that showing or talking about police officers could have an impact, though it is not clear what direction this effect would take.

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Appendix: Effects of Visual and Verbal Treatments in Experiment 2 With Halo Effect

	Teachers				Senior citizens				Latinos				Farmers				Police				Soldiers				African-Americans				Workers				Business people			
	Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue					
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2						
Images of group	-.86	-.89	.40	1.17*	.36	.62	.54	1.42**	-.12	-.35	.59	1.54**	2.01**	1.19**	.25	.79*	.86*	.39																		
	(.62)	(.60)	(.67)	(.65)	(.56)	(.56)	(.63)	(.63)	(.54)	(1.29)	(.56)	(.58)	(.53)	(.50)	(.49)	(.39)	(.45)	(.44)																		
Verbal support	.39	1.44	2.66**	1.94	2.43**	2.00**	2.44**	3.25**	2.54**	-.35	1.85**	1.90**	2.93**	2.13**	.14	.21	.82*	.38																		
	(.69)	(.68)	(.85)	(.76)	(.71)	(.68)	(.73)	(.79)	(.60)	(.49)	(.69)	(.70)	(.64)	(.64)	(.48)	(.48)	(.47)	(.48)																		
Individual position	-2.63**	-.09	-.86	.71	-1.19	-1.72**	-2.98**	-.78	.18	-.35	1.12	-1.79*	-1.07*	-1.12**	-.25	-.01	-.74	.02																		
	(.94)	(1.01)	(1.35)	(1.24)	(.85)	(.63)	(1.12)	(1.00)	(.99)	(.55)	(.85)	(1.05)	(.54)	(.56)	(.65)	(.58)	(.49)	(.54)																		
Feelings toward	-.30**	-.01	-.06	.07	-.14**	.08*	-.28	-.08	-.06	-.09**	.06	-.12*	-.06	-.03	-.05	-.01	-.07**	-.08**																		
	(.09)	(.02)	(.13)	(.09)	(.06)	(.04)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.04)	(.05)	(.07)	(.04)	(.03)	(.05)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)																		
Candidate Feelings x, Position	.06**	.00	.01	-.00	.03**	.03**	.07**	.02	.01	.01	-.01	.03**	-.02**	.02*	-.02*	.00	.02**	.02**																		
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.00)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)																		
Female	1.06*	.63	1.08	.20	-.22	.48	.68	-.45	.73	.35	.23	-.04	-.26	-.02	.27	-.90*	-.18	.22																		
	(.64)	(.62)	(.72)	(.67)	(.65)	(.61)	(.62)	(.65)	(.50)	(.47)	(.58)	(.57)	(.54)	(.53)	(.51)	(.49)	(.45)	(.44)																		

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Teachers		Senior citizens		Latinos		Farmers		Police		Soldiers		African-Americans		Workers		Business people	
	Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue		Issue	
	Issue 1	Issue 2	1	Issue 2	Issue 1	Issue 2	1	2	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 1	Issue 2
Party ID	-.28	-.08	.09	.20	.07	-.09	.20	.18	-.04	-.25*	.04	-.24	-.13	.08	.16	-.34**	.05	-.01
(7-point scale)	(.17)	(.17)	(.17)	(.18)	(.14)	(.16)	(.14)	(.14)	(.15)	(.14)	(.16)	(.17)	(.14)	(.13)	(.12)	(.13)	(.11)	(.11)
African-American	-.21	1.44	1.22	.52	2.04	-.64	1.65	-1.37	-1.48	-2.03	-.15	-.35	-.70	-.07	.50	1.90**	-.05	.29
American	(1.80)	(1.49)	(2.16)	(2.45)	(1.69)	(1.44)	(1.29)	(1.77)	(.98)	(1.05)	(.71)	(.71)	(.83)	(.77)	(.89)	(.81)	(.89)	(.81)
Latino	-.34	-.61	.69	-3.39	-1.17	-.97	-2.02*	1.46	1.18	-.19	1.72*	-.74	-.46	.30	.11	.48	1.45*	-1.57**
	(.97)	(.97)	(1.79)	(1.89)	(1.02)	(1.02)	(1.17)	(1.09)	(.92)	(.78)	(.89)	(.89)	(.82)	(.77)	(1.02)	(.93)	(.75)	(.74)
Log likelihood	-59.41	-54.82	-51.45	-54.58	-65.51	-71.67	-62.45	-60.79	-81.96	-103.03	-85.37	-88.28	-95.48	-99.72	-99.86	-113.35	-119.12	-112.96
Pseudo R ²	.30	.12	.14	.19	.19	.16	.24	.20	.18	.14	.09	.12	.24	.20	.14	.09	.13	.19
N	47	47	36	36	50	50	54	51	54	54	54	54	72	72	68	68	76	76

Note. Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable in each of the models is placement of the candidate on issues related to the group. The main independent variables are whether or not the participant saw an image of the group or heard a verbal appeal on behalf of the group, with other controls shown. Issue 1: teachers—teacher pay; senior citizens—Medicare; Latinos—aid to Latinos; farmers—spending on agriculture; police officers—spending on law enforcement; soldiers—defense spending; African-Americans—aid to Blacks; blue-collar workers—raising the minimum wage; businesspeople—regulations on business. Issue 2: teachers—education spending; senior citizens—Social Security; Latinos—more liberal immigration policy; farmers—ethanol subsidies; police officers—harsher punishments for criminals; soldiers—aid to veterans; African-Americans—affirmative action; blue-collar workers—free trade; businesspeople—free trade (for businesspeople the scale for free trade responses was inverted compared to the scale used in worker conditions). **p < .05; *p < .10.