

CHARACTER MATTERS:  
THE EFFECTS OF CANDIDATE TRAIT-ISSUE COMBINATIONS

by

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**ABSTRACT**

This project focuses on political candidates' image and issue information, informed by the fields of communication, political science, and psychology. Recognizing the field's heavy use of cross-sectional data, I conducted an experiment to test the effects of manipulated trait-issue combinations on overall candidate evaluation. Stimuli were presented in the form of political campaign tweets to maximize external validity. Results indicate that pairing a trait from one party and an issue from the other party may be more effective than simply engaging in trait or issue ownership. They also find that appeals to qualification-based traits may require evidence to be effective, while appeals to personality-based traits may be enough on their own. By utilizing a novel approach to test effects of character and issue information, this study illuminated limitations of this approach as well as several directions forward for future research.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Presidential candidates face limited opportunity to provide firsthand messages to the public; social media, however, provides one such avenue. In addition to campaign communication, such as advertisements, email, and social networking messages, candidates must rely on journalists to report on their campaign events and issue platforms. Even after being elected, the president depends on the media to disseminate information to the public (Cook, 2005). Thus, reporters serve a vital role as gatekeepers. Not only do journalists choose which information to publish, they control how such information is conveyed. In reporting on politicians and their actions, journalists include valuable information on candidate character and issues.

Media coverage influences the standards people use to evaluate candidates through priming (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). Media consumers can be primed to prioritize either issue or image information when evaluating candidates. Additionally, media consumers can also be primed to weight certain criteria with issue or image information more heavily, such as a candidate's position on government debt or the candidate's amount of compassion. The media not only provide voters information about candidate character, the media influence which aspects of character voters find important.

A presidential candidate's character is a vital aspect of a campaign and is a major focus of campaign news coverage because perceptions of character are consequential. Specific trait evaluations can influence global evaluations of candidates (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Funk, 1996), and trait perceptions can directly affect vote choice (Prysbey, 2008). The effects of candidate image on vote choice are significant even when taking issue stance into account (Bishin et al., 2006; Pierce, 1993). Trait information is valuable to voters because it gives them

clues as to how the candidate might behave while in office (Barber, 1992; Hardy, 2014; Miller et al., 1986; Popkin, 1991). While the issues facing the nation might change during a president's tenure, one's character is thought to be enduring and implies how the politician will approach future issues. Character, in other words, is a trait, not a temporary state of being. How a candidate is viewed by the public plays a major role in each campaign and election. Therefore, candidates count on their campaigns to strategically build their image. Media publications can both help and hinder this process, depending on the nature of their coverage.

Considering the significance of candidate image evaluations, I proposed an experiment to test the effects of candidate character and issue information. The experiment was conducted to test the effects of certain trait-issue combinations on trait evaluations and overall candidate evaluations. Candidate traits are often paired with issues; however, previous research compares individual trait evaluations. To better understand the effects of candidate character, researchers must study combinations of character traits and issues. By manipulating such combinations in tweets in an experiment, I was able to examine how certain attribute pairings influence candidate evaluations. I also tested the immediate effects of a tweet on political opinions. These findings add to the literature on candidate character, public opinion, political campaigns, and mass communication and are a step toward uniting the often disparate fields of candidate character and campaign issues. The experiment also offers a novel way of conducting political communication research.

The research is presented as follows. Chapter 2 discusses the candidate character literature, with emphases on news construction and coverage of the candidates, priming and information processing, and lenses to understand trait use. Chapter 2 also proposes hypotheses and research questions based on previous findings. Chapter 3 describes the experimental

methods proposed to be used in the current project. Chapter 4 describes the results of the experiment presented here. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the current study and its limitations. This project's ambition is to expand our understanding of candidate character by identifying (1) effects of combining a trait with an issue on voter evaluations and (2) the relationships between certain traits and issues. It also (3) employs a novel approach to conducting candidate character research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The current project is grounded in the communication, journalism, and political science literature. Although the field lacks a theory of political campaigns, the construction of news, candidate character, priming, and the dual-processing perspective of candidate character formation guide this project and are described in this chapter.

### **The Construction of News**

Media influence public opinion by shaping what Lippmann (1922) referred to as the “pictures inside our head.” Average people do not have much direct contact with political leaders; instead, they depend on media to provide information about politicians, current events, and issues facing the nation. In so doing, the media provide a powerful connection between the world outside and the pictures in our heads.

Agenda building and journalistic norms offer two valuable lenses through which to understand the development of political news content. Also called “media agenda setting” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 24; Weaver & Choi, 2014), agenda building refers to the construction of the media agenda—in other words, which issues appear in the news (and which do not) (Weaver & Choi, 2014). In addition, norms influence not only what journalists and editors decide to cover, but how they frame issues and events. Though outside sources influence the media agenda, the reporters and journalists are able to affect how the agenda is presented to the public (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The building of the news agenda is influenced by news sources, such as presidents and campaigns; other media (as in intermedia agenda setting); unexpected events (e.g., natural disasters, terrorist attacks); and the media audience (Weaver & Choi, 2014). Agenda building is influenced by journalistic norms and traditions as well (Weaver & Choi, 2014).

Among the more common and consequential of these (journalistic) norms are the presumption of objectivity or neutrality, including the expectation that journalists will remove themselves from the story by relying on sources to present both sides of a given story; the tendency to favor sources that are deemed authoritative, especially those in positions of power; an emphasis on dramatic stories or the most dramatic elements within a given story, including crisis, conflict, or scandal; and the desire to find exclusive stories or “scoops” that will differentiate a story, journalist, or news organization from competitors. (Coe, 2011, p. 1112)

Objectivity in news refers to the presentation of facts, conflicting possibilities (or alternative viewpoints) and supporting evidence; the use of quotation marks; and the structuring of content in an appropriate way (i.e., the inverted pyramid) (Tuchman, 1972). In adopting these techniques, the journalist separates herself from the content of the story; for example, by using quotation marks, she is placing an opinion in someone else’s voice. Tuchman (1972) argues that these practices, and objectivity as a whole, are used to protect a journalist from the risks inherent in reporting news. For instance, by introducing multiple perspectives in one article and supporting each with evidence, the journalist can defend herself from charges of bias toward one of the perspectives.

Some have argued that presenting certain viewpoints as similarly veracious or supported by evidence can lead to false equivalence. For instance, from 1988 to 2002, the majority of climate change news coverage presented the debate over anthropogenic contributions to global warming as balanced despite “a remarkably high level of scientific consensus” and reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that human actions have influenced global warming (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004, p. 125). During the 2016 presidential campaign, both the

Democratic and Republican presidential nominees were viewed as largely unfavorable (RealClear Politics, 2016a, 2016b), and both were faced with scandals, such as Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server while Secretary of State (FBI National Press Office, 2016) and allegations of Donald Trump sexually assaulting multiple women (Desjardins, 2016). Yet, some argue that reporters were guilty of false equivalence in painting the two candidates as similarly flawed (Buchanan, 2016; Schweitzer, 2016; Stoehr, 2016).

This argument of false equivalence between the two nominees was also picked up by political commentators such as Bill Maher (Real Time with Bill Maher, 2016) and late night television hosts such as Seth Meyers (Late Night with Seth Meyers, 2016). Meyers summed up the argument of false equivalency:

I mean, do you pick someone who's under federal investigation for using a private email server; or do you pick someone who called Mexicans rapists, claimed the president was born in Kenya, proposed banning an entire religion from entering the U.S., mocked a disabled reporter, said John McCain wasn't a war hero because he was captured, attacked the parents of a fallen soldier, bragged about committing sexual assault, was accused by 12 women of committing sexual assault, said some of those women weren't attractive enough for him to sexually assault, said more countries should get nukes, said he would force the military to commit war crimes, said a judge was biased because his parents were Mexicans, said women should be punished for having abortions, incited violence at his rallies, called global warming a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese, called for his opponent to be jailed, declared bankruptcy six times, bragged about not paying income taxes, stiffed his contractors and employees, lost a billion dollars in one year, scammed customers with his fake university, bought a 6-foot tall painting of himself with money

from his fake foundation, has a trial for fraud coming up in November, insulted an opponent's looks, insulted an opponent's wife's looks, and, bragged about grabbing women by the pu\*\*y. How do you choose? It's so...it's so even. It's so even. (Late Night with Seth Meyers, 2016).

Patterson (2016) argues that false equivalencies are due to a negative news bias. In discussing findings suggesting that Clinton's and Trump's general election news coverage were similarly negative, Patterson (2016) echoes Bennett's (2003) concerns of a burglar alarm press. In response to Zaller's (2003) conception of a press that would "provide information in the manner of attention-catching 'burglar alarms' about acute problems, rather than 'police patrols' over vast areas that pose no immediate problems" (p. 110), Bennett (2003) argues that the press already operates by the burglar alarm standard. The problem, according to Bennett (2003), is that the news media continually sound the alarm.

A constantly sounding burglar alarm is aligned with the news norm of prioritizing dramatic stories or the most dramatic elements of stories. This practice might also be considered a kind of bias, as journalists "favor dramatic and personalized aspects of events over more complex underlying political realities" (Bennett, 2009, p. 37). While scholars lack agreement on the origin of structural biases (Lichter, 2014), a bias toward the dramatic might stem from economic pressures, as media consumers are more attracted to dramatic news content than mundane content.

In addition to journalistic norms and the public relations efforts of potential sources, economic forces can impact the construction of news (Coe, 2011). Corporate ownership can influence how journalists cover legal and financial issues that would directly affect the companies by whom they are employed (Gilens & Hertzman, 2000).

Certain sources are considered more authoritative than others, and journalists tend to predominantly rely on those who are viewed as authoritative. This may occur because some sources, such as government officials, are more “newsworthy” than outsiders or challengers to the status quo (Althaus, 2003, p. 383). This also might be a matter of convenience, wherein reporters come to rely on the same sources over time (because those sources are considered acceptable and are available when the reporter needs to interview them).

**Coverage of the candidates.** News media are one of the most important sources of political information during a presidential campaign. Coverage includes content on the candidate’s personality, issue positions, and strategy, as well as the overall election process (Just et al., 1999). News organizations cover campaigns in detail, sometimes adopting campaign attack themes in their own coverage (Johnston et al., 2004) or legitimizing campaign messaging by airing campaign ads during the news (Jamieson, 1992; Kaid et al., 1993). Despite increases in online campaigning and social networking, news publications remain a key source of information for potential voters (Gottfried et al., 2016).

The media and presidential campaigns likely have a cyclical relationship, with media reporting on campaign activities and campaigns shaping their actions based partially on press coverage. The very nature of their relationship, with the media covering presidential candidates in detail and campaigns shaped (not determined) by press coverage, affords the candidates with the upper hand. Indeed, the political advertising agenda has been found to influence the news agenda (Roberts & McCombs, 1994), and campaigns are considered to be one of the most influential news sources (Weaver & Choi, 2014).

The agenda-setting process, commonly measured as the transfer of issue salience from one agenda to another (Dearing & Rogers, 1996), has been broadly supported in research on the

media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda (McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). In their famous study of the 1968 presidential campaign, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found a 0.967 correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda and wrote that “the media may set the ‘agenda’ of the campaign” (p. 176).

Although inter-media agenda setting might occur between campaign media and news coverage of the campaigns, there are distinct differences in the ways the two describe political candidates. For instance, in the 1996 Republican presidential primary, news about candidate Malcolm “Steve” Forbes Jr. discussed experience and leadership much more often than Forbes’ campaign press releases (Miller et al., 1998). In the same primary, Bob Dole’s press releases mentioned experience and leadership more often than news coverage on Dole (Miller et al., 1998). News coverage of the candidate might pick up candidate traits from the campaigns’ press releases, but news coverage is also likely driven by outside events, other candidates, and journalistic norms.

One type of event that can influence news coverage is the presidential nominating conventions. During the 2000 Republican National Convention, positive online news coverage on Republican candidate George W. Bush’s character was more prevalent than online news coverage on the Bush campaign (either neutral or positive) or negative online news coverage on Bush’s character (Kern, 2001). During the 2000 Democratic National Convention, negative online news coverage on Democratic candidate Al Gore’s character appeared more frequently than positive online news coverage on Gore’s character or any type of online news coverage on the Gore campaign (Kern, 2001). During both conventions, “events” coverage on “campaign actions and activities that were related to the conventions” was the most frequently appearing type of online news story (Kern, 2001, p. 2128). By coding events coverage separate from horse

race coverage, results depicted events coverage the most frequent, followed by candidate coverage (Kern, 2001). If horse race had included events coverage, horse race coverage would have been twice as frequent as candidate coverage (Kern, 2011).

Across elections, horse race coverage detailing campaign strategy and polling results is often assumed to be the most prevalent type of campaign news coverage. Even when horse race coverage is the most common type of coverage, reporters spend sizable amount of space and time on candidate character. Content on character was more prevalent than content on policy in *New York Times* coverage of the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates during general election campaigns from 1952 through 2000 (Benoit et al., 2005). This is in opposition to campaign acceptance addresses, TV spots, debates, and direct mail, which each focused on policy more often than character (the most dramatic difference being campaign direct mail, with 76% of messages focused on policy and 24% on character) (Benoit et al., 2005).

Additionally, an analysis of print and broadcast news from Labor Day to Election Day in 1988 found that approximately 19% of the coverage focused on candidate qualifications (Buchanan, 1991). Reporters covered both George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis' character and competence, though Bush received a greater proportion of stories on character (143 on character, 121 on competence) than Dukakis (67 on character, 70 on competence) (Buchanan, 1991). Thirty-six stories focused on both candidates' character, while 59 stories focused on both candidates' competence (Buchanan, 1991). Over half the stories coded as pertaining to candidate qualifications also devoted attention to candidate issue positions (Buchanan, 1991).

Evidence suggests that the news coverage trend is toward more character information and less policy information (Gilens et al., 2007). Additionally, newspaper coverage provides a greater proportion of content on candidate image than local or network televised news (Just et

al., 1999). Despite these patterns, people remain informed on candidates' issue positions, which researchers attribute to policy content in presidential ads (Gilens et al., 2007). According to an analysis of data from 1952 to 2004, increased televised content has not increased the propensity with which voters cite candidate character as a determinant of vote choice (Hayes, 2009).

Though these results might be considered evidence against the power of the media to shape perceptions of candidate image, the findings might also be interpreted as an indication of the enduring importance of candidate trait information over time. Furthermore, voters might be unaware of media effects and thus unlikely to cite newspapers or televised political advertisements as having influenced their vote choice. This explanation is supported by the third-person effect, which predicts that people consider others to be more affected by media content than themselves (Davison, 1983) and has been found in viewers of political advertisements (Golan, Banning, & Lundy, 2008).

### **Priming**

News coverage of the candidates can prime people to change the standards by which they evaluate presidential candidates. Priming refers to the activation of stored knowledge (Higgins, 1996). Network models of memory assume that an individual's memory is a collection of networks, consisting of nodes (thoughts, feelings) connected by pathways. For example, a Hillary Clinton node might be connected to other nodes representing Bill Clinton, NY Senator, Benghazi, email scandal, granddaughter Charlotte, Secretary of State, 2016 presidential campaign, female politicians, and so on. The strength between these pathways varies. The pathway between Clinton and 2016 presidential campaign might be much stronger than the pathway between Clinton and granddaughter Charlotte in an individual's mind, as they have

likely been exposed to many more messages associating Clinton with the 2016 presidential campaign than messages associating Clinton with her granddaughter.

When an individual is exposed to a message, that message activates semantically related thoughts (Berkowitz, 1984). In other words, a spread of activation occurs, increasing the accessibility of those related thoughts (Higgins, 1996). Following the same example, a news story on Hillary Clinton's authenticity would activate Hillary Clinton and perhaps spread to thoughts on her character as a politician. Priming depends on the availability of stored knowledge (Berkowitz, 1984; Higgins, 1996). That is, if thoughts are not stored, they cannot be activated. The news story on Clinton's authenticity might spread to thoughts in a researcher's mind about candidate character, how candidate image has been measured in scholarly research, and empirical evidence regarding the importance of image in presidential campaigns. If an average voter saw the same news story, different thoughts would be activated. Clinton's authenticity in his or her mind might spread to thoughts on Benghazi, emails, and investigations into her conduct as Secretary of State.

After activation, a thought's activation threshold is lowered, making subsequent activation easier. Priming effects depend on accessibility and applicability (Higgins, 1996). In other words, the knowledge must be readily accessible (easy to pull from memory) and fit the stimulus in order for the knowledge to be used. For instance, if the average voter mentioned above is asked his or her opinion about Clinton, after seeing a news story on her authenticity, they might answer with respect to Benghazi or her emails. But, if the same voter is asked for his or her opinion about public education, they would not pull those thoughts on Clinton, as they are not applicable (or semantically related).

By virtue of focusing on some aspects of the candidates more than others, news coverage primes voters to consider those aspects more heavily in their candidate evaluations (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). For example, in an experimental setting, readers of newspaper articles on euthanasia or abortion (social-moral issues) focus more on candidate integrity than readers of newspaper articles on health care ethics (Domke et al., 1998). Ultimately, media coverage has the power to influence presidential evaluations by priming the audience to alter the standards they use in forming such evaluations (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Iyengar et al., 1984; Kenski et al., 2010; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). News coverage of the candidates can also influence voters' evaluations of candidate character traits. Mere exposure to information is meaningful, as exposure can lower uncertainty, and uncertainty regarding whether a candidate possesses a given trait has been shown to reduce one's overall evaluation of the candidate (Glasgow & Alvarez, 2000). Further, an experiment manipulating news coverage found that participants' evaluations of fictitious candidates as corrupt or honest matched the content of the news articles they had read (Kioussis et al., 1999). Here, political campaign tweets serve as the medium through which the audience may be primed to evaluate the candidate.

Other studies employed open-ended survey questions to determine if certain attributes or traits were accessible in respondents' minds. An examination of the 2006 Israeli elections found that heavy newspaper readers were more likely than light newspaper readers to have been primed to connect several attributes with candidates, specifically, credibility, morality, intelligence, and leadership (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010). A study of the 2002 Texas gubernatorial and U.S. senatorial elections found similar results and yielded evidence that attributes primed by media coverage factor into attitudinal evaluations of the candidates (Kim & McCombs, 2007). The

news attribute agenda can influence the public attribute agenda, in that readers are primed to consider candidates in terms of certain traits.

Campaigns do not occur in a vacuum, making it difficult for researchers to track the influence of news coverage or campaign messaging outside controlled lab settings. Still, evidence indicates that character evaluations shift over the course of a campaign (Buchanan, 1991; Johnston et al., 2004; Kenski et al., 2010; Nimmo & Savage, 1976; West, 2005), indicating that character perceptions are not immune to campaign news coverage and campaign messaging. The experiment presented in this project employs a controlled setting to examine the influence of trait-issue combinations on candidate evaluations.

### **Information Processing**

To understand how political information is received and used to make decisions, political scientists often utilize the memory-based model or the on-line model. The memory-based model describes voters as using a set of considerations, specifically those that are salient at that moment in time, to make a decision (Zaller, 1992). The on-line model describes voters as “bounded rationalists,” who keep a running evaluative tally of their impressions (Lodge, 1995; Lodge et al., 1995). For example, if an individual encountered a political advertisement, they would take their evaluation of it and integrate that into their summary evaluation of the candidate. When later asked about the candidate, the individual would use the running tally to provide a response rather than memories of specific messages (Lodge et al., 1995).

There are instances in which either type of processing is more likely; for instance, online processing is more likely for evaluative tasks (e.g., determining the likeability of a candidate) while memory-based processing is more likely when individuals are asked to justify their decision (Lodge, 1995). Indeed, some argue that models interpreting both perspectives are more

plausible, as individuals most both remember at least some information and evaluate some messages as they are received (Taber, 2003).

Additionally, individuals often use heuristics or shortcuts in making political decisions (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Common heuristics include party affiliation, ideology, endorsements, poll results, and candidate appearance (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). For example, an individual might make a vote choice in a low-information election on the basis of party identification, simply voting for the candidate who belongs to the same party as them (Schaffner & Streb, 2002). While this is less likely in a presidential election, as voters have been bombarded by political information for months, they may use heuristics in other ways within the context of a presidential campaign.

### **Candidate Character**

The influence of news coverage on candidate evaluations matters because such evaluations affect political participation (Bishin et al., 2006; Hayes, 2010; Pierce, 1993; Prysby, 2008). Candidate trait perceptions influence overall candidate evaluations/candidate favorability (Cwalina & Falkowski, 2016; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Funk, 1996) as well as vote choice (Abe, 2018; Hayes, 2010; Johnston et al., 2004; Prysby, 2008; Vitriol et al., 2018). Though some might argue issue positions should be studied more closely than candidate image, both contribute to candidate evaluations. Most voters will never interact with the president, but trait information can give them clues as to who the candidate is and how they might behave while in office (Barber, 1992; Hardy, 2014; Miller et al., 1986; Popkin, 1991). Further, trait information allows voters to evaluate politicians as people, similar to how individuals evaluate each other on a daily basis. As Barber (1992) put it:

To understand what actual Presidents do and what potential Presidents might do, the first need is to know the whole person—not as some abstract embodiment of civic virtue, some scorecard of issue stands, or some reflection of a faction, but as a human being like the rest of us, a person trying to cope with a difficult environment. (pp. 1-2)

Not only is candidate character information useful for voters, evidence indicates that candidate trait ratings influence vote choice regardless of the candidate's issue evaluations (Bishin et al., 2006; Pierce, 1993). For instance, taking into account perceptions of leadership, competence, integrity, and empathy dropped the effect of certain issues on candidate preference in an analysis of data from the 1984 American National Election Study (Pierce, 1993). Voters have also reported that candidates' personal attributes were more important to vote choice than issue positions (Williams et al., 1976) and more often mentioned character attributes as something a candidate must possess "in order to be a good president" than issue positions (Buchanan, 1991, p. 83).

Instead of evaluating candidate image or personality, I focus here on candidate character traits. Character traits "are attributes reflecting the reactive nature of an individual that define his or her constitutional nature" (Hardy, 2014, p. 2). Here, candidate character is considered to consist of a candidate's possessed traits. Scholars have also used the term "image" to describe the personal qualities of a candidate. Hacker (2004) describes candidate images as "clusters of voter perceptions of candidates" but notes "substantial confusion (in the literature) over terms like 'image,' 'political image,' 'candidate image,' and 'imagery'" (p. 4). In Hacker's (2004) *Presidential Candidate Images*, Kaid and Chanslor define candidate image "as a combination of appearance dimensions and candidate characteristics relevant to job performance (honesty, ability, qualified, and so on)" (p. 134). As this dissertation concerns candidate characteristics but

not candidate appearance, I use “trait” to refer to a single characteristic and “character” to refer to a combination of candidate characteristics or traits.

Traits can be broadly grouped into two categories or clusters. One of these overarching categories is “performance-based traits” (Druckman et al., 2004), competence (Cwalina & Falkowski, 2016; Funk, 1996; Johnston et al., 1992; Johnston et al., 2004; Rahn et al., 1990), or qualification (Conway et al., 2014). Performance-based traits include leadership, competence, effectiveness, and knowledge. The other category consists of “interpersonal characteristics” (Druckman et al., 2004), “personal qualities” (Rahn et al., 1990), warmth (Funk, 1996), morality (Cwalina & Falkowski, 2016), or character (Conway et al., 2014; Johnston et al., 1992; Johnston et al., 2004). Interpersonal traits include caring, compassion, warmth, morality, and trustworthiness.

While similar traits can be organized in clusters, greater understanding of candidate character can be attained by examining traits in isolation (rather than as a subcomponent of an overarching category). For example, caring and morality are both considered interpersonal characteristics. Yet, in 2000, voters evaluated George W. Bush and Al Gore differently on these two traits (Bartels, 2002). Gore was seen as more caring than Bush (receiving an average score of 54.2 on a scale of 0 to 100, versus Bush’s 46.5) (Bartels, 2002). Neither candidate had an edge on morality (Bush averaging a 64.1, Gore a 64.3) (Bartels, 2002). These differences in trait evaluations would be masked by researchers combining all “interpersonal characteristics” into one variable.

There is also evidence that both performance-based and interpersonal traits matter to voters when evaluating political candidates. Evidence indicates that leadership (Bartels, 2002; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011), caring or compassion (Bartels 2002; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011;

Laustsen & Bor, 2017; Prysby, 2008; Trent et al., 2010), honesty (Doherty & Gimpel, 1997; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Trent et al., 2010), and competence (Hoegg & Lewis, 2011; Johnston et al., 2004; Kinder, 1986; Markus, 1982) are more influential on voter perception than other traits. Indeed, these four traits are those identified as “key demands” of “the President’s personal qualities” by Kinder in 1986 (pp. 236-237) and all four are positive significant predictors of candidate evaluations (Laustsen & Bor, 2017). Candidate character trait evaluations are dynamic—electoral context, such as the candidates themselves, media coverage, and campaign events can shape the extent to which certain traits matter (Hardy, 2014; Kenski et al., 2002; Kenski et al., 2010). At the same time, “evaluations of the importance of candidate characteristics tend not to shift dramatically across campaigns” (Trent et al., 2005, p. 138).

When citizens were asked an open-ended question about what must “the winner of the (1988 presidential) election have within himself, and bring to the job, in order to be a good president,” many cited character aspects (Buchanan, 1991, p. 83). Most often mentioned were honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness (coded as one category) (Buchanan, 1991). The second most common response was “concern for needs of all people,” which Buchanan (1991, p. 83) sorted under “issue position,” but others might argue constitutes character. Third was good/strong leadership (Buchanan, 1991). It is clear that both traits pertaining to qualification, and traits pertaining to character, are important to potential voters.

**Candidate traits and partisanship.** Candidate trait ratings cannot be entirely explained by partisanship (Johnston et al., 2004). Yet, voter partisanship influences candidate trait evaluations in several ways. First, Republicans rate even a general, “average Republican candidate” more positively than the “average Democrat candidate,” while Democrats rate the “average Democrat candidate” more positively than the “average Republican candidate” (Filer et

al., 2016). Second, Republicans and Democrats differentially use candidate traits in voting decisions (Prysby, 2008). Third, Republicans and Democrats differ in the importance they assign to various traits (Trent et al., 2010).

The expectation that partisan candidates possess character traits owned by their respective parties is predicated on partisan stereotypes. Republican candidates are associated with strong leadership and morality while Democratic candidates are associated with compassion and empathy (Filer et al., 2016; Hayes, 2005). Evidence suggests that citizens rely on partisan stereotypes to a greater extent than policy information in evaluating candidates and making inferences about their ideology (Rahn, 1993). Further, party stereotypes can outweigh gender stereotypes (Hayes, 2011).

Republicans and Democrats differ in the extent to which they rely on certain traits in voting decisions. For instance, Republicans' vote choices in the 2004 presidential election were related to ratings on leadership and morality, while Democrats' vote choices were more related to competence and empathy (Prysby, 2008). Despite being provided with candidates' messages on policy in addition to party stereotypes, voters depend on Republican and Democrat stereotypes to evaluate candidates (Rahn, 1993).

Citizen party affiliation influences the importance one assigns various traits and personal qualities. Compassion is more important to Democrats than to independents or Republicans (Trent et al., 2010). Democrats also rate electing a woman president or vice president, and electing a person of color president or vice president, as more important than independents or Republicans rate both qualities (Trent et al., 2010). Possessing military experience and speaking about personal religious beliefs are more important to Republicans than to independents or Democrats (Trent et al., 2010).

Ideology has symbolic meaning for many people. Indeed, the strongest predictors of individuals' evaluations of liberals and conservatives are symbolic, such as feelings toward the radical left and feelings toward capitalism (Conover & Feldman, 1981). Thus, some party-trait associations may be due to party values or party images. Many researchers have used the Center for Political Studies' (CPS) open-ended items on party likes and dislikes to describe party images (Baumer & Gold, 1995). That this sort of analysis is possible suggests that individuals have conceptualizations of both parties, and that these conceptualizations are similar across the American electorate.

The Republican party is thought to be "the party of the rich and big business," which could extend to perceptions of Republican candidates as strong leaders (as they value those who rise above others) (Baumer & Gold, 2007, p. 469). Republicans have also been associated with competence (Baumer & Gold, 1995), which could be a result of their focus on efficient government. The Democratic party is thought to be the party of the "common man/working people," which could extend to perceptions of Democratic candidates as compassionate (as they care about everyone, not just the rich) (Baumer & Gold, 2007, p. 469).

Research suggests that intelligence is associated with the Democratic party and competence is associated with the Republican party (Hoegg & Lewis, 2011). Other research found individuals to rate "the average" Democratic candidate higher than the Republican candidate on cares about people like me, fair, honest, inspiring, respectful, sincere, indecisive, and ineffective (Filer et al., 2016). The average Republican candidate was rated more highly than the Democratic candidate on experience, productive, stands up for what s/he believes in, abrasive, aggressive, authoritarian, corrupt, hypocritical, immoral, power hungry, rude, uncivil, and unkind (Filer et al., 2016).

Further, while certain traits (particularly leadership, caring or compassion, honesty, and competence) have been found to be more influential on voter perception than other traits (Bartels, 2002; Doherty & Gimpel, 1997; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Kinder, 1986; Marcus, 1982; Prysby, 2008; Trent et al., 2010), traits besides these four can be especially important in a given campaign. Evidence suggests that was the case in 2012: Of character, intelligence, leadership, benevolence, homophily, and charm, only homophily (“an understanding of the voter’s values and concerns”) and character (i.e., morality) were associated with vote intention for both Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and Democratic candidate Barack Obama (Warner & Banwart, 2016, p. 265).

Partisanship and its connection to political character information may also relate to gender. Winter (2010) has connected party image to gender, finding that individuals use more masculine words when describing the Republican party (both likes and dislikes) and more feminine words when describing the Democratic party (both likes and dislikes). The link between gender and party image is likely related to party values and the issues each party is thought to own.

**The theory of trait ownership.** The theory of trait ownership, developed by Hayes (2005), explains that party issue ownership extends to candidate trait ownership. That is, each side is considered to be more able to effectively handle certain issues (Petrocik, 1996), which leads the public to consider candidates on each side to possess certain traits (Hayes, 2005). For example, the public usually perceives Republican government officials as better than Democratic officials at handling defense issues while perceiving Democratic officials as better at dealing with unemployment issues (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994). If Petrocik’s (1996) theory of issue ownership extends to trait ownership, the public would perceive Republicans as stronger leaders

(as they are adept at confronting defense issues) and Democrats as more empathetic (as they are concerned with unemployment). Hayes (2005) upholds these findings, with evidence that Republicans own “strong leader” and “moral” and Democrats own “compassionate” and “empathetic.”

Sometimes, campaigns appeal to traits not owned by their candidate. This can be a ploy to adopt the other side’s traits or a response to the campaign context. Referred to as trait trespassing, appealing to character traits traditionally owned by the other party was more advantageous than was trait ownership in the 2006 senatorial and congressional elections (Hayes, 2011). Voters do not expect Republicans to be compassionate or Democrats to be stronger leaders. If either candidate can sell herself as possessing the other candidate’s owned traits, she is both strengthening her own stock as a candidate and weakening the opposition’s. Other deviations from trait ownership can be context-dependent. Candidates can appeal to specific traits to reinforce a policy position, respond to an attack, or make themselves seem well-equipped to handle current issues. The extent to which journalists focus on candidate-owned traits or question whether candidates possess traits traditionally owned by the opposition is unknown.

A message focusing on certain aspects of a candidate primes the audience to consider those aspects more heavily in their candidate evaluations (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010), and the theory of trait ownership explains how issue ownership can extend to trait perceptions (Hayes, 2005). As such, we might presume message recipients to draw a connection between certain traits and particular issues when the trait is closely related to the issue. These connections should strengthen effects of the stimulus. For instance, if one considers individuals well-equipped at handling issues of national security to be strong leaders, information that a candidate is a strong

leader and well-equipped at handling issues of national security is likely to resonate more than an unexpected trait-issue pairing might. I predict:

H1: The effects of trait-issue on overall candidate evaluation are stronger when traits and issues are closely related (strong leadership-war, caring-health care) than when the traits and issues are not as closely related (strong leadership-education, caring-economy).

**Moral exemplification theory.** Moral exemplification theory was also developed to explain candidate trait evaluations, particularly in terms of moral beliefs (Clifford, 2014). Moral exemplification theory draws on moral foundations theory, which identifies five moral beliefs or foundations: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Graham et al., 2011).

In evaluating whether “something is right or wrong,” liberals care most about harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, while conservatives rate all five moral foundations as similarly “relevant to (their) thinking” (Haidt & Graham, 2007, p. 108). Liberals find harm/care and fairness/reciprocity more relevant to their evaluations of right or wrong than do conservatives (Haidt & Graham, 2007, p. 108). Haidt and Graham (2007) explain liberalism as:

A morality in which the individual is the locus of moral value. In such a moral world, moral regulation revolves around protecting individuals from harm or unfair treatment by other individuals or by the social system. In contrast, conservatives—at least, the social conservatives of the religious right—try to create more tightly ordered communities in which (for example) proper relationships between parent and child, man and woman, and human and God are part of the aim or moral regulation. In such a moral world; the building block of society is thought to be the family, and a much greater emphasis is

placed on virtues and institutions that bind people into roles, duties, and moral obligations. (Graham et al., 2011, p. 368).

Thus, building on moral exemplification theory, we might expect to find Democrats rate compassion, caring, and fairness as more important in candidate evaluations than do Republicans because Democrats' own moral motivations are more often based on care and fairness than are Republicans' moral foundations. Alternatively, we should expect Republicans to care more about leadership, integrity, honesty, and morality than Democrats because Republicans use authority/respect and purity/sanctity to determine the difference between right and wrong to a greater extent than do Democrats. Indeed, Clifford (2014) found associations between traits individuals desire in a politician and individuals' own moral foundations. Moral exemplification theory might also provide an explanation for trait ownership (Clifford, 2014).

One study testing moral foundations theory found that care and fairness are strong predictors of candidate favorability among Democrats; competence also is a significant predictor albeit with a weaker effect on favorability (Clifford, 2018). Fairness is the strongest predictor of candidate favorability among Republicans, followed by authority, sanctity, competence, and patriotism (Clifford, 2018). Fairness, competence, and care ratings predict how well the candidate is seen as able to handle Democratic-owned issues (environment, poverty, health care, and Social Security, in this study), while fairness, competence, authority, patriotism, sanctity, and care have significant effects on how well the candidate is perceived to be able to handle the Republican-owned issues of national security, terrorism, and crime (Clifford, 2018). Data analyzed in that study come from undergraduate students who each rated two of the following: Clinton, Trump, Bernie Sanders, and Ted Cruz (Clifford, 2018). While the results are compelling, further research is required to explore how traits, issues, and party may be related.

### **A Dual-Processing Perspective of Candidate Character Formation: Issues and Traits**

Within the context of a political campaign, character traits and issues are “interconnected” (Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994, p. 527). Thus, campaign efforts to prime issues and efforts to prime character traits are “inherently linked” (Druckman et al., 2004, p. 1181). Indeed, there is considerable overlap in character and issue information in both campaign messaging (Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kenski & Kenski, 2004) and news coverage (Buchanan, 1991). Kenski et al. (2002) likened the two concepts (issues and character) to “overlapping concentric circles” (p. 226). Thus, the dual-processing perspective of candidate image formation (Hacker, 2004), which combines character and issues, is an appropriate lens with which to interpret candidate character evaluations.

The dual-processing perspective holds that candidate “personae” impressions and candidate issue impressions influence candidate evaluation (Hacker, 2004). Additionally, candidate issue impressions can influence candidate character impressions, and candidate character impressions can influence candidate issue impressions (Hacker, 2004).

Indeed, evidence indicates that issue information can influence trait perceptions (Peterson, 2005). Though voters frequently make inferences of the opposite sort, from trait information to issue information, experimental and survey data support that voters are consistently more likely to make issue-to-trait inferences (Rapoport et al., 1989). As Glass (1985) noted:

Even when the focus of a campaign appears to switch from personalities to issues, it is often what the issue reveals about “the man” rather than the issue itself which is in the spotlight. Thus, in 1976 when Gerald Ford blundered by saying Poland was free of Soviet domination, interest was aroused less because Ford’s statement implied a new reality or

shift in policy than for what the statement was thought to imply about Ford's intelligence. Similarly, Jimmy Carter's defense of his proposed amnesty for draft dodgers before the Veterans of Foreign Wars was a clear attempt to demonstrate firmness and courage. (p. 517-518)

Further, candidate traits influence vote choice, regardless of issue position (Bishin et al., 2006; Pierce, 1993).

Jacobs and Shapiro (1994) argued that candidates utilize issues to prime voters to consider candidates in terms of particular candidate traits, presenting evidence of John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign using issues to elevate his character above that of Richard Nixon. This priming process can plausibly occur from traits to issues as well (Druckman et al., 2004). For instance, if a candidate is perceived as a particularly strong leader, voters might (positively) evaluate the candidate in terms of issues of national security.

Both candidate traits (Hayes, 2010; Johnston et al., 2004; Prysby, 2008) and issues (Ansolabehere et al., 2008; Dalton, 2013; Petrocik, 1996) can influence vote choice. The dual-processing perspective of candidate character formation explains that both candidate "personae" impressions and candidate issue perceptions influence overall candidate evaluation (Hacker, 2004). The model also depicts candidate character impressions as possible influences on candidate issue impression, and candidate issue perceptions as possible influences on candidate character evaluations (Hacker, 2004). To test this model, I ask:

RQ1a: Do candidate strong leadership ratings and candidate issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations?

RQ1b: Do candidate honesty ratings and candidate issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations?

RQ1c: Do candidate caring ratings and candidate issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations?

RQ1d: Do candidate competence ratings and candidate issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations?

While the literature contains evidence that image and issue information affect candidate evaluations, there is no evidence to suggest how the two might interact. It may be that the “rich get richer”—that is, if a candidate is seen as well-performing on both a trait and an issue, the effect on candidate evaluation may be stronger than if they are well-performing on just one of those (either the trait or the issue). Or, those who are weak on the trait (or issue) may benefit more from being seen as well-performing on the issue (or trait) than those who are well-performing on both the trait and the issue. Previous research does not indicate which of these may be the case; however, it does suggest that candidates with lower trait and issue ratings will not have higher overall evaluations than candidates with higher trait and issue ratings (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Funk, 1997).

I also ask whether a trait’s effects differ based on the issue with which it is paired, such that the effects of a positive trait rating on candidate evaluation are higher or lower for a given issue. As the dual-perspective outlines, traits and issues can interact to change their effects on overall candidate impression (Hacker, 2004).

RQ2: How do the effects of strong leadership on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue leadership is paired with?

RQ3: How do the effects of honesty on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue honesty is paired with?

RQ4: How do the effects of caring on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue caring is paired with?

RQ5: How do the effects of competence on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue competence is paired with?

**Issues in a campaign.** Nevertheless, the importance of issues in a campaign should be not discounted. Campaign issue emphases (Abbe et al., 2003; Petrocik, 1996), perceptions of candidates' "issue handling competence" (Graefe, 2013, p. 648), and voters' perceptions of policy issues influence vote choice (Ansolabehere et al., 2008; Dalton, 2013; Petrocik, 1996). Additionally, issues can influence the vote in congressional and state-level elections (Konisky & Richardson, 2012). Research findings that issues have a small or indiscernible effect on voting might have been plagued by measurement error, as issue preferences have a much larger effect on vote choice when they are combined into indices of related items (Ansolabehere et al., 2008). In short, issues matter.

Which issues are perceived as most important by the public differs based on campaign propaganda, media coverage, and current events. For example, attitudes toward the Iraq War positively influenced the Obama vote in the 2008 presidential election, as the war continued from 2003 through 2008 (Flanagin & Zingale, 2010). Other issues endure as fairly important from election to election. The economy in particular influences voting across elections. Individuals might engage in retrospective voting, considering whether their financial situations are better off than they were in the past few years (Fiorina, 1978, 1981; Holbrook et al., 2012). Voters are influenced by both the state of the economy (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000) and how the media portray the state of the economy (Shah et al., 1997).

Some evidence suggests that qualification, competence, or performance-based traits are the most important for voter perceptions (Hoegg & Lewis, 2011; Johnston et al., 2004; Kinder, 1986; Markus, 1982). Other evidence indicates that character, personal qualities, or interpersonal characteristics are the most influential on voter evaluations (Doherty & Gimpel, 1997; Prysby, 2008; Trent et al., 2010). Overall, the body of literature provides evidence that both qualification and character matter in political campaigns (Bartels, 2002; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). As such, I expect that both types of traits will be influential; however, to my knowledge, character trait-issue combinations have yet to be empirically tested. In other words, there is no evidence suggesting that a certain trait-issue combination is the most, or the least, consequential of all possible combinations. To explore this, I ask:

RQ6: Which trait-issue combination is the most influential on overall candidate evaluation?

RQ7: Which trait-issue combination is the least influential on overall candidate evaluation?

One study found that Democrats consider compassion to be more important than do Republicans (Trent et al., 2010). Other evidence indicates that Democrats and Republicans use candidate traits differently in voting decisions—in other words, certain traits were more related to the Democratic vote, while other traits were more related to the Republican vote (Prysby, 2008). It seems that partisanship can influence trait evaluations, but only scant evidence suggests that compassion might be more important to Democrats (Prysby, 2008; Trent et al., 2010) and leadership might be more important to Republicans (Prysby, 2008), and some of these findings might pertain more to the candidate who was representing each party at the time than the

partisanship of the voters. Thus, I suspect there might be differences in trait importance between Republicans and Democrats, but am unsure as to how these might manifest, and ask:

RQ8a: Which trait-issue combination is the most influential on Republicans' overall candidate evaluation?

RQ8b: Which trait-issue combination is the least influential on Republicans' overall candidate evaluation?

RQ9a: Which trait-issue combination is the most influential on Democrats' overall candidate evaluation?

RQ9b: Which trait-issue combination is the least influential on Democrats' overall candidate evaluation?

**Gender.** Some issues fall under the umbrella of “women’s interests” and are purported to be “women’s issues.” Some classify women’s issues as those issues that are inherently more relevant to women than men, while others rely on observed differences in policy priorities between women and men (Klotz & Broome, 1998). Women’s issues include early childhood care, education, affirmative action, gender pay disparity, rape, sexual harassment, abortion, women’s health, and health care (Klotz & Broome, 1998; Schaffner, 2005; Swers, 2016).

Candidate gender can also influence trait evaluations, especially those pertaining to qualification. The importance of a presidential candidate being male has fallen over the past few decades (Trent et al., 2010); however, many still feel more comfortable with a male president than a female one (Streb et al., 2008). In a 2006 list experiment designed to eliminate social desirability in respondents’ answers, 26% of respondents indicated that they would feel “angry or upset” about “a woman serving as president” (Streb et al., 2008, p. 80). When evaluating politicians, a good president, member of Congress, mayor, and local council member were each

evaluated as possessing more masculine traits than more feminine traits (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Yet, the good president was seen as having the most masculine and most feminine traits of the bunch (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993), suggesting that the ideal president character is comprised of both masculine and feminine traits.

In the aforementioned study, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) considered active, aggressive, assertive, coarse, masculine, rational, self-confident, stern, and tough to be masculine traits, and cautious, emotional, feminine, gentle, sensitive, talkative, and warm to be feminine traits. In general, male-associated words tend to refer to action and power, while female-associated words refer to timidity and emotion. For instance, arrogant, bossy, capable, conceited, determined, lazy, reckless, and rigid are male-associated words (Williams & Best, 1990). Masculine traits include experienced, strong, decisive, aggressive, inspiring, leadership, charismatic, moral, “doesn’t listen to/understand the needs and wants of the people/the majority of the people,” “doesn’t know how to handle people (at the personal level),” power hungry, unsafe/unstable, and cold (Winter, 2010, p. 612). Charming, emotional, foolish, kind, patient, unambitious, unintelligent, and unstable are female-associated words (Williams & Best, 1990). Feminine traits include “knows how to handle people (at personal level),” kind, warm, caring, friendly, “for equality” (fair), compassionate, inexperienced, weak, indecisive, uninspiring, “not a leader,” lacks charisma, and lacks vision (Winter, 2010, p. 612).

Evidence suggests that voters do not automatically employ gender stereotypes with regard to female political candidates (Dolan, 2014); rather, gender stereotypes are used after they have been cued by campaign messaging (Bauer, 2015). In particular, the traits compassionate and nurturing activate feminine stereotypes (Bauer, 2015). Indeed, gender and feminine stereotype interact such that a female candidate is rated as less qualified for Senate or president

when a feminine stereotype has been activated by the words, “compassionate and sensitive” and “nurturing approach to politics” (Bauer, 2015, p. 708).

The dual-processing perspective of candidate image formation suggests that candidate trait impressions can influence candidate issue impressions (Hacker, 2004). I predict that these effects are strongest when a trait and issue are both perceived to be either masculine or feminine. Strong leadership is a masculine trait (Winter, 2010); thus, I predict that candidates rated high on strong leadership will have greater issue competency with respect to foreign policy than candidates rated low on strong leadership.

H2: Candidates rated highly on strong leadership are rated higher on foreign policy competency than candidates rated low on strong leadership.

Caring is a feminine trait (Winter 2010) and education and health care are considered to be women’s issues (Klotz & Broome, 1998; Schaffner, 2005; Swers, 2016). Therefore, I expect:

H3a: Candidates rated high on caring are rated higher on education than candidates rated low on caring.

H3b: Candidates rated high on caring are rated higher on health care than candidates rated low on caring.

In this chapter, the construction of news, priming, information processing, candidate character, the theory of trait ownership and moral exemplification theory, and the dual-processing perspective of candidate character were described. Hypotheses and research questions were proposed based on previous candidate character research, with an emphasis on the effects of trait-issue combinations on voter evaluations and the relationships between traits and issues. In Chapter 3, experimental methods are described.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The effects of trait-issue combinations on voter evaluations and the relationships between traits and issues were explored here in an experiment testing their influence on candidate trait evaluations, candidate issue ratings, and overall candidate evaluations. Following the description of these methods, analytical procedures are proposed to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions presented in Chapter 2. The pilot study is also described.

Limited research has shown that manipulating news coverage can alter participants' evaluation of fictitious candidates' honesty (Kioussis et al., 1999). The experiment in this dissertation tested the effects of combinations of traits and issues on participants' candidate perceptions and vote intentions. The experimental design is a 4x4 between subjects, manipulating four traits (leadership, honesty, caring, and competence) and four issues (the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education). In order to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions, a questionnaire was given on Qualtrics. Specific trait perceptions, issue handling competencies, and overall candidate evaluations were measured following exposure to trait-issue combinations embedded in tweets. This combining of traits and issues is often done in practice, but its effects had yet to be empirically studied.

The stimuli in this study consist of tweets. Twitter was "the candidate's main online information channel" in the 2016 presidential election (Enli, 2017, p. 50). The platform offers political candidates an avenue through which to communicate with voters sans news gatekeepers, and even to influence the news media agenda (Conway-Silva et al., 2018). Messages sent via Twitter have also been found to be as believable as similar messages coming from traditional news media (Morris, 2018). It is unrealistic to expect respondents to encounter and read

newspaper articles on a political candidate in their everyday lives, but it is plausible that they may ordinarily take the time to read a few tweets.

A priori power analyses were conducted to ensure adequate sample size. Alpha was set to .05 and power, to .95, for all power analyses. The first analysis, for H1, was based on an independent samples t-test and assumed a large effect size of  $d = .8$ ; thus, a sample size of 35 was needed for each group. For the linear multiple regression (RQ1), with one tested predictor (the interaction term) and nine predictor variables in total, and an anticipated small effect size of  $f^2 = .1$ , a sample size of 133 was needed. Sample size of 112 was sought (but not quite obtained) for RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5, which were to be tested with ANOVAs, assuming an effect size  $f = .4$  and including four groups in analysis. Power analyses for H2, H3a, and H3b were based on independent samples t-tests, assumed a large effect size of  $d = .8$ , and estimated an allocation ratio  $N2/N1$  of 3, indicating an overall sample size of 112.

Prior to data collection on Qualtrics, a pilot study was conducted to perform a manipulation check and assess variance in dependent variable measures. That study is further discussed at the end of this chapter.

**Sample.** Following the pilot study, data were collected in June and early July 2017.

Experimental participants ( $N = 370$ ) were recruited via Qualtrics. The number of participants assigned to each cell of the experiment is displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Number of Participants Per Condition*

Condition	Pilot Study	Main Study
Caring net	71	89
Caring and economy	20	20
Caring and education	16	20
Caring and health care	26	28

Caring and war	9	21
Competent net	66	88
Competent and economy	14	24
Competent and education	14	20
Competent and health care	25	20
Competent and war	13	24
Honest net	68	97
Honest and economy	21	24
Honest and education	15	21
Honest and health care	20	27
Honest and war	12	25
Strong leader net	69	96
Strong leader and economy	18	23
Strong leader and education	13	21
Strong leader and health care	16	21
Strong leader and war	22	31

In the main study, quotas were utilized by Qualtrics to approximate a nationally representative sample. Those quotas were: 52% women and 48% men; 12% between the ages of 18-24, 18% 25-34, 17% 35-44, 18% 45-54, 17% 55-64, and 18% 65 and older; 65% white, 17% Hispanic, 13% black, and 5% Asian; 37% from the South, 24% from the West, 21% from the Midwest, and 18% from the Northeast; and 33% Republican, 33% Democrat, and 33% other/politically independent.

**Procedure.** Participants in both the pilot and main study first read and signed Institutional Review Board-approved consent forms regarding the questionnaire. After consenting to participate, the respondent saw an attention check item, designed to prompt respondents to carefully read survey content. If they answered the item correctly (i.e., as instructed), they were directed to a screen notifying the respondent that the question just answered was an attention check question, they answered it correctly, but there will be no warning on subsequent attention check items. If they answered the item incorrectly, they were directed to a screen telling the respondent that:

The question that you just completed is called an attention check measure. It lets us know whether or not study participants are reading the questions before they answer them. You did not follow the directions on the question, which lets us know that you need to slow down and read the questions before answering them. Other attention check questions may be given during this survey. This is a warning; a warning will not be given on future attention check questions. Participants receive credit for their participation in exchange for honestly and diligently answering the questions.

Immediately, the respondent was given a second attention check item. It was intended that those who neglected to follow the directions a second time were exited from the survey and notified why, but a programming error with Qualtrics kept them in the study (for the main study. Those in the pilot study who answered both these items incorrectly had their survey experience terminated and received an explanation as to why. Pilot study participants who were exited from the study due to these attention check items were able to restart the survey). Participants' data were retained if they successfully answered at least one of the three subsequent attention checks. Three cases were removed from analysis in the pilot study, as each of those respondents failed all three attention checks following the training attention check item. All cases in the main study were retained for analysis.

After the initial attention check item, respondents saw, "Next, you will be given brief information about a political candidate. Please do your best with the information provided to you to come to conclusions about the candidate." followed by the stimulus. A series of tweets appeared on their survey page, much as tweets might appear on twitter.com or in the Twitter app. Respondents then clicked ahead to the next page, where they received the first question about the

tweets, as well as this prompt: “If you would like to see the tweets again, use the back button at the bottom of the page.”

During the experiment, participants saw one trait-issue combination among several so-called innocuous tweets. The innocuous tweets were designed to be apolitical so as not to confound the results of the trait-issue tweets. After exposure to the tweets, the participant rated the candidate on a series of traits and issues (i.e., how equipped the candidate is to handle the given issue), as well as provided an overall evaluation of the candidate.

**Stimuli.** The experiment paired traits with issues, with one trait appearing with one issue per candidate. Both trait perceptions and candidate-voter issue agreement factor into vote choice, thus, the two should be studied in conjunction more often. Initial evidence indicates that issue agreement influences candidate trait evaluations; “Overall, for voters who are certain about where the candidate stands, policy distance matters nearly as much as party identification in determining trait perceptions” (Peterson, 2005, p. 15).

Leadership, honesty, caring, and competence were the traits of focus. The issues included were the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. Attribute combinations in this study include: strong leader-economy, strong leader-foreign policy, strong leader-health care, strong leader-education, honesty-economy, honesty-foreign policy, honesty-health care, honesty-education, caring-economy, caring-foreign policy, caring-health care, caring-education, competence-economy, competence-foreign policy, competence-health care, and competence-education (such that each trait is paired with each issue).

Respondents read a series of four tweets that included the trait-issue combination of interest, as well as two innocuous tweets. A series was shown rather than a single tweet to mimic the formatting of Twitter, in which users see a feed of multiple tweets. In all conditions, the first

tweet consisted of the trait manipulation, for example, “Jordan Hughes is caring.” The third tweet (again, in all conditions), was the issue manipulation, such as, “Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle health care.” All respondents saw the same name, Jordan Hughes, so as not to have potential gendered or racial connotations with respect to a name influence results.

Respondents also received the same innocuous tweets, “Vote Jordan for a brighter future.” (second) and “Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!” (fourth). All of the Twitter avatars were comprised of the same generic campaign logo, selected due to its use of both red and blue (and thus its unlikeliness to cue either political party in the minds of viewers). A full list of the tweets is available in Appendix A.

**Measures.** All experimental survey measures are listed in Appendix B. Key measures are described below.

***Independent variables.*** Trait-issue combinations are the independent variables whose effects were tested on voter perceptions. The stimuli are in Appendix A. The independent variable is considered the trait-issue stem (e.g., caring-education).

***Dependent variables.*** Overall candidate evaluation is the main dependent variable of interest. This was measured by a feeling thermometer, worded as:

“Please rate the candidate on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees. Rating above 50 means that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorable and cool toward the person. If you don’t feel particularly warm or cold toward a person you would rate him/her at 50 degrees.”

The wording for the feeling thermometer comes from both the National Annenberg Election Survey and the American National Election Studies (ANES, 2011; NAES08, 2008). Specifically, the first three sentences are from the NAES while the fourth sentence is from the ANES.

The candidate was evaluated on leadership, honesty, caring, and competence using semantic differentials. Participants were instructed to, “Please place the candidate, described in the statement on the previous page, on the following scales.” Each trait was matched with its antonym, for example, authentic and inauthentic, has integrity and lacks integrity, and fair and unfair. Half of the semantic differential pairs had the negative trait on the left side (e.g., untrustworthy) while the other half had the positive trait on the right side (e.g., trustworthy).

Candidate issue competency was assessed to determine whether trait ratings influence candidate issue ratings and to test the dual-processing perspective of candidate character formation. Participants rated “the extent to which (they) agree or disagree that the candidate is well-equipped to handle the following issues,” above a matrix with a list of issues. They rated issue competency on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The order in which issues appear was randomized; issues include: abortion, national debt, environment and climate change, gay rights, gun control, health care, immigration, poverty, income inequality, unemployment, economic growth, military strength, morality and religion in society, racism, social security, taxes, women’s rights, crime, foreign policy, education, and terrorism and homeland security.

**Controls.** Individuals were asked to place the candidate on an ideological scale, using wording from the NAES08 Online Survey (see Appendix B). They were able to select “don’t know” if they did not think they knew enough to rate the person. They were also asked about their assumption of Jordan Hughes’ gender.

Toward the end of the survey, participants provided demographic information. Age, gender, sexuality, race, education, income, state of origin, and state of residence were measured. The exact wording of these items can be referred to in Appendix B.

### **Analytical Procedures**

H1 predicts that the effects of trait-issue on overall candidate evaluation are stronger when traits and issues are closely related (strong leadership-war, caring-health care) than when the traits and issues are not as closely related (strong leadership-education, caring-economy). To answer this question, an independent samples t-test was conducted comparing the first group to the second group.

RQ1 asks whether candidate trait ratings and candidate issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations. A hierarchical linear regression was conducted for each condition, predicting overall candidate evaluation with relevant trait rating, relevant issue rating, relevant trait rating\*relevant issue rating, and demographic variables. The first step (Model 1) includes the independent variables used as controls: age, gender, race, education, and party identification. The next step (Model 2) adds the trait rating and issue rating. The third step (Model 3) adds the interaction term of the trait rating\*issue rating. The trait rating, issue rating, and trait rating\*issue rating variables were mean-centered to facilitate these analyses.

Strong leadership was paired with four issues: the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether strong leadership ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations (RQ1a), four hierarchical regressions were conducted. To test whether strong leadership ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership, candidate issue rating on the economy, candidate leadership rating\*candidate economy rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification. To test whether strong leadership ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting

overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership, candidate issue rating on foreign policy, candidate leadership rating\*candidate foreign policy rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification. To test whether strong leadership ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership, candidate issue rating on health care, candidate leadership rating\*candidate health care rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification used as independent variables. To test whether strong leadership ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership, candidate issue rating on education, candidate leadership rating\*candidate education, age, gender, race, education, and party identification.

Honesty was also paired with the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether honesty ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations (RQ1b), four hierarchical regressions were conducted. To test whether honesty ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on honesty, candidate issue rating on the economy, candidate honesty rating\*candidate economy rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification. To test whether honesty ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on honesty, candidate issue rating on foreign policy, candidate honesty rating\*candidate foreign policy rating, age, gender, race,

education, and party identification. To test whether honesty ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with participants' candidate trait rating on honesty, candidate issue rating on health care, candidate honesty rating\*candidate health care rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification used as independent variables. To test whether candidate honesty ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on honesty, candidate issue rating on education, candidate honesty rating\*candidate education, age, gender, race, education, and party identification.

Caring was paired with four issues: the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether candidate caring ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations (RQ1c), four hierarchical regressions were conducted. To test whether caring ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on caring, candidate issue rating on the economy, candidate caring rating\*candidate economy rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification. To test whether caring ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on caring, candidate issue rating on foreign policy, candidate caring rating\*candidate foreign policy rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification. To test whether caring ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with participants' candidate trait rating on caring, candidate issue rating on

health care, candidate caring rating\*candidate health care rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification used as independent variables. To test whether caring ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on caring, candidate issue rating on education, candidate caring rating\*candidate education, age, gender, race, education, and party identification.

Competence was paired with four issues: the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether competence ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations (RQ1d), four hierarchical regressions were conducted. To test whether competence ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on competence, candidate issue rating on the economy, candidate competence rating\*candidate economy rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification. To test whether competence ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on competence, candidate issue rating on foreign policy, candidate competence rating\*candidate foreign policy rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification. To test whether competence ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with participants' candidate trait rating on competence, candidate issue rating on health care, candidate competence rating\*candidate health care rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification used as independent variables. To test whether competence ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate

evaluations, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on competence, candidate issue rating on education, candidate competence rating\*candidate education, age, gender, race, education, and party identification.

RQ2 asks how the effects of strong leadership on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue leadership is paired with. To answer this question, an ANOVA was conducted comparing strong leadership-foreign policy, strong leadership-health care, strong leadership-education, and strong leadership-economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations. A post-hoc test was conducted to explore the difference indicated by the ANOVA.

RQ3 asks how the effects of honesty on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue honesty is paired with. To answer this question, an ANOVA was conducted comparing honesty-foreign policy, honesty-health care, honesty-education, and honesty-economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations.

RQ4 asks how the effects of caring on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue caring is paired with. To answer this question, an ANOVA was conducted comparing caring-foreign policy, caring-health care, caring-education, and caring-economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations.

RQ5 asks how the effects of competence on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue competence is paired with. To answer this question, an ANOVA was conducted comparing competence-foreign policy, competence-health care, competence-education, and competence-economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations.

RQ6 asks which trait-issue combination is the most influential on overall candidate evaluation; RQ7 asks which trait-issue combination is the least influential on overall candidate

evaluation. To answer these questions, candidate evaluation was averaged within condition. The highest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the most influential trait-issue combination (RQ6); the lowest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the least influential trait-issue combination (RQ7).

RQ8a asks which trait-issue combination is the most influential on overall candidate evaluation among Republican participants; RQ8b asks which trait-issue combination is the least influential on overall candidate evaluation among Republican participants. RQ9a asks which trait-issue combination is the most influential on overall candidate evaluation among Democratic participants; RQ9b asks which trait-issue combination is the least influential on overall candidate evaluation among Democratic participants. These questions were answered similarly as RQ6 and RQ7. First, a subset of the data was created including only Republican participant data. Then, a baseline overall candidate evaluation was calculated by averaging overall candidate evaluations across conditions using said subset of the data (i.e., only Republican participants). The highest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the most influential trait-issue combination (RQ8a); the lowest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the least influential trait-issue combination (RQ8b).

Next, a subset of the data was created including only Democratic participant data. A baseline overall candidate evaluation was calculated by averaging overall candidate evaluations across conditions using said subset of the data (i.e., only Democratic participants). The highest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the most influential trait-issue combination (RQ9a); the lowest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the least influential trait-issue combination (RQ9b).

H2 and H3 pertain to gendered traits and issues. In H2, I predict that candidates rated highly on strong leadership will have higher foreign policy ratings than candidates rated low on strong leadership. A t-test was conducted to test differences on foreign policy ratings between candidates rated above the midpoint on strong leadership and candidates rated below the midpoint on strong leadership.

H3a predicted that candidates rated highly on caring are rated higher on education competency than candidates rated low on caring. A t-test was conducted to test differences on education ratings between candidates rated above the midpoint on caring and candidates rated below the midpoint on caring. H3b predicted that candidates rated highly on caring will have higher health care competency ratings than candidates rated low on caring. A t-test was conducted to test differences on health care ratings between candidates rated above the midpoint on caring and candidates rated below the midpoint on caring.

### **Pilot**

Pilot study participants were undergraduate students recruited through the University of Arizona Department of Communication's research subject pool in March 2017. 61% are female; 39% are male. Age ranges from 18 to 41 years old, with a mean of 20 years. 92% of the sample is between the ages of 18 and 22 years old. The sample is 63% white, 7% black, 21% Hispanic, and 9% other race. The entire sample resides in the West Census region. 38% describe their political views as conservative, 27% describe them as moderate, and 35% describe them as liberal. 38% are Republicans and 36% are Democrats. Two participants who terminated the study prior to reaching the demographic items are not included in these percentages; their data was used for any items they answered before leaving the study.

Following pilot study data collection, results were analyzed to assess differences based on randomly assigned conditions. It was important that the tweets were designed in such a way as to be externally valid, as well as attention-grabbing (as study participants must read the tweets in order to be affected by them). I also inspected the dependent variables for variance. Based on the pilot study, a few changes were made to the stimuli or measures.

First, the hypotheses were tested to assess the manipulation. H1 predicted that the effects of trait-issue on overall candidate evaluation are stronger when traits and issues are closely related (strong leadership-war, caring-health care) than when traits and issues are not as closely related (strong leadership-education, caring-economy). An independent samples t-test was conducted to test this hypothesis. The t-test indicated no significant difference between the two groups, group 1 ( $M = 51.92$ ,  $SD = 15.85$ ) and group 2 ( $M = 50.18$ ,  $SD = 17.47$ ),  $t(79) = -0.46$ ,  $p = .644$ .

H2 predicted that candidates rated highly on strong leadership will have higher foreign policy ratings than candidates rated low on strong leadership. A t-test was conducted to assess this hypothesis. Candidates with high strong leadership had significantly higher ratings on foreign policy ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) than candidates rated low on leadership ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = .83$ ),  $t(200) = -5.42$ ,  $p = .000$ , Hedges'  $g = 1.04$ .

H3a predicted that candidates highly on caring are rated higher on education competency than candidates rated low on caring, while H3b predicted that candidates rated highly on caring are rated higher on health care competency than candidates rated low on caring. Each of these was tested using a t-test. Candidates with high ratings on caring had significantly higher ratings on education ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ) than candidates with low ratings on caring ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ),  $t(216) = -2.13$ ,  $p = .035$ , Hedges'  $g = 0.42$ . Candidates rated highly on caring averaged

3.37 ( $SD = 0.86$ ) on the 5-point health care handling scale, compared with 2.83 ( $SD = 1.02$ ) for those rated lower on caring,  $t(216) = -3.061$ ,  $p = .002$ , *Hedges' g* = 0.60.

While most of the research questions were not explored by use of the pilot data, I did examine the data with respect to RQ6 and RQ7. These questions asked about the highest and lowest candidate evaluation scores. The highest overall candidate evaluation score was among those in the caring-foreign policy condition ( $M = 64.67$ ,  $SD = 25.06$ ), while the lowest was in the strong leader-education condition ( $M = 43.38$ ,  $SD = 23.34$ )

Pilot participants saw tweets from Avery Hughes. Toward the end of the survey (after key variables of interest but before demographics), they were asked to assess the gender of 16 names chosen on the basis of their potentially being seen as gender-neutral (Flowers, 2015). Those names were: Avery, Pat, Kerry, Casey, Tracy, Jaime, Robbie, Morgan, Riley, Jessie, Jackie, Sam, Kris, Harley, Jordan, and Peyton. Sam was most apt to be seen as a gender-neutral name, with 76% deeming it “neutral;” however, the remaining 24% overwhelmingly found Sam to be a male name (80% of that 24% interpreted Sam to be a male name). Jordan was next most likely to be seen as a gender-neutral name, with 68% deeming it “neutral,” and the remaining 32% split a bit more evenly. (Of the 32% that didn’t see Jordan as neutral, 62% considered Jordan to be a male name and 38% considered it to be a female name.) Thus, Avery in the stimuli was replaced with Jordan. (Forty-nine percent said the name Avery is female; just 35% thought it was gender-neutral.)

Pilot participants also saw tweets that referred to “foreign policy/war.” Prior to the main study, this was changed to “foreign policy.” Not only does this modification avoid double-barreling the issue, it is a closer approximation to how the discourse prior to the study seemed to be focused. In the candidate rating question, “Cares about you/Does not care about you” was

changed to “Caring/Not caring,” as respondents should be able to evaluate the candidate on how caring they seem but may not feel like a fictional candidate (they had never heard of) cares about them in particular. “Honest/Dishonest” was changed to “Dishonest/Honest” so that the four key traits would be balanced, with two of their positively valenced terms on the left and two on the right. In the issue handling question, “Economic growth” was changed to “The economy” for clarity and to better match the literature.

Other changes to the questionnaire were unrelated to the stimuli or key variables of interest. For instance, the political efficacy scale was cut to lower cognitive burden (without affecting the ability to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions presented in this dissertation). Additionally, the format of the age question was changed from date of birth to age in years (in so doing, age was still collected, but in a way that allowed greater privacy for participants).

In this chapter, the methodological procedures for this project were described. Next, I describe the study’s results.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The goal of this study was to test the effects of combining trait and issue information in a campaign context, and to examine the relationships between certain traits and issues. Hypotheses were proposed based on the literature. Research questions were posed to further explore the relationships between traits and issues on candidate evaluation.

The sample has 52% females and 47% males. Age ranges from 18 to 85 years old, with a mean of 46 years. 22% of respondents have a high school diploma or less, 36% have an associate degree or some college background, 30% have a Bachelor's degree, and 12% report a post-graduate degree. The sample is 64% white, 12% black, 17% Hispanic, and 7% other race. Based on Census regions, 18% live in the Northeast, 22% in the Midwest, 36% in the South, and 24% in the West. 30% of respondents consider their political views to be conservative; 36%, moderate; and 35%, liberal. 33% are Republicans while 34% are Democrats.

H1 predicts that the effects of trait-issue on overall candidate evaluation are stronger when traits and issues are closely related (strong leadership-war, caring-health care) than when the traits and issues are not as closely related (strong leadership-education, caring-economy). To answer this question, an independent samples t-test was conducted comparing the two groups: one comprised of those who were in the strong leadership-war or caring-health care conditions (group 1), and one comprised of those who were in the strong leadership-education or caring-economy conditions (group 2). The t-test does not fulfill the conventional criteria for significance, group 1 ( $M = 59.25, SD = 19.17$ ) and group 2 ( $M = 65.80, SD = 19.61$ ),  $t(98) = 1.67, p = 0.099, Hedges' g = 0.34$ .

RQ1 asked whether candidate trait ratings and candidate issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations. A hierarchical linear regression was conducted for each

condition, predicting overall candidate evaluation with relevant trait rating, relevant issue rating, relevant trait rating\*relevant issue rating, and demographic variables. Model 1 (the first step) included age, gender, race, education, and party identification. Model 2 (the next step) included those control demographic variables, as well as the trait rating and issue rating. Model 3 (the final model) included those demographic variables, the trait rating, the issue rating, and the trait rating\*issue rating variable. In order to run these analyses, the trait rating, issue rating, and trait rating\*issue rating variables were mean-centered.

Strong leadership was paired with four issues: the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether strong leadership ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation (RQ1a), four regressions were conducted.

To test whether strong leadership ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with first the control variables (age, gender, race, education, and party identification), then with the participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership and the candidate issue rating on the economy, and finally adding candidate leadership rating\*candidate economy rating. The results of that regression are reported in Table 2. When strong leader and the economy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of strong leader\*economy rating was not a significant predictor of the overall candidate evaluation. Both the trait (strong leader) and the issue (economy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 2

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Strong Leader by Economy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Model 1				

Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
Model 2				
Age	0.046	0.054	.039	.398
Female	1.719	1.764	.044	.331
Not white	0.637	1.956	.016	.745
Education	0.680	0.900	.033	.451
Republican	3.385	2.107	.081	.109
Democrat	1.735	2.163	.042	.423
Strong leader rating	2.639	0.635	.205	.000
Economy rating	10.495	1.148	.449	.000
Model 3				
Age	0.046	0.054	.039	.399
Female	1.759	1.765	.045	.320
Not white	0.739	1.960	.018	.707
Education	0.641	0.902	.031	.478
Republican	3.369	2.108	.081	.111
Democrat	1.853	2.167	.045	.393
Strong leader rating	2.626	0.635	.204	.000
Economy rating	10.497	1.148	.449	.000
Strong leader by economy rating	-0.581	0.633	-.040	.359

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Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .32$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .32$

To test whether strong leadership ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with control variables in model 1 (age, gender, race, education, and party identification), participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership and candidate issue rating on foreign policy in model 2, and candidate leadership rating\*candidate foreign policy rating in model 3. The results of that regression are reported in Table 3. When strong leader and foreign policy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of strong leader\*foreign policy rating was not a significant predictor of the

overall candidate evaluation. Both the trait (strong leader) and the issue (foreign policy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate. Here, Republican also was a positive significant predictor of candidate evaluation.

Table 3

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Strong Leader by Foreign Policy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.022	0.057	-.018	.704
Female	1.532	1.898	.039	.420
Not white	1.277	2.095	.031	.543
Education	0.681	0.965	.033	.481
Republican	4.980	2.246	.119	.027
Democrat	2.054	2.318	.049	.376
Strong leader rating	4.277	0.637	.332	.000
Foreign policy rating	5.918	1.157	.250	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.018	0.057	-.015	.750
Female	1.478	1.895	.038	.436
Not white	1.771	2.120	.043	.404
Education	0.658	0.964	.032	.495
Republican	5.189	2.248	.124	.022
Democrat	2.173	2.316	.052	.349
Strong leader rating	4.219	0.637	.328	.000
Foreign policy rating	6.102	1.162	.257	.000
Strong leader by foreign policy rating	-0.990	0.689	-.068	.152

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .22$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .23$

To test whether strong leadership ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall

candidate evaluation with the control variables (age, gender, race, education, and party identification), followed by participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership and candidate issue rating on health care, and finally including candidate leadership rating\* candidate health care rating. The results of that regression are reported in Table 4. When strong leader and health care are paired, the trait and issue interact to influence overall candidate evaluation in the main sample, as the interaction term of strong leader\*health care rating was a significant predictor of overall candidate evaluation, even when controlling for the main effects of strong leader and health care rating. Both the trait (strong leader) and the issue (health care) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 4

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Strong Leader by Health Care Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.005	0.055	-.004	.934
Female	0.335	1.788	.009	.852
Not white	-0.338	2.005	-.008	.866
Education	0.273	0.918	.013	.766
Republican	4.388	2.134	.105	.041
Democrat	2.371	2.199	.057	.282
Strong leader rating	3.592	0.609	.279	.000
Health care rating	8.619	1.042	.388	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.003	0.054	-.002	.959
Female	0.460	1.775	.012	.796
Not white	-0.030	1.992	-.001	.988
Education	0.210	0.911	.010	.818

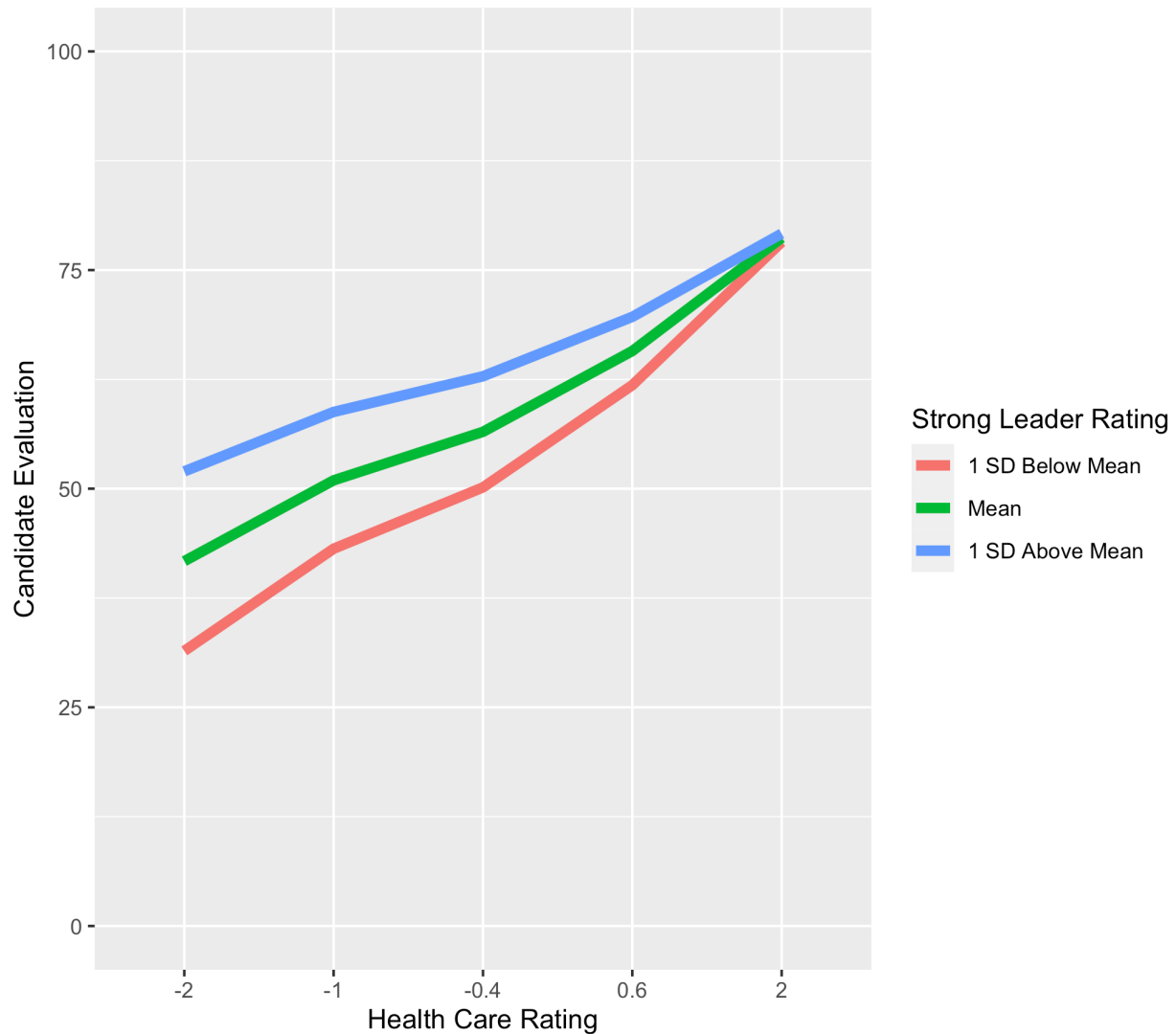
Republican	4.119	2.120	.099	.053
Democrat	2.511	2.182	.060	.251
Strong leader rating	3.482	0.606	.271	.000
Health care rating	9.098	1.050	.410	.000
Strong leader by health care rating	-1.547	0.597	-.115	.010

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Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .30$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .31$

The interaction of strong leader by health care was plotted for further analysis. As noted, both variables were mean-centered prior to their inclusion in the regression. Figure 1 depicts this interaction. Those with the lowest strong leader ratings benefited more from better health care ratings (on overall candidate evaluation) than those with higher strong leader ratings.

Figure 1: Candidate Evaluation with Strong Leader by Health Care Rating



To test whether strong leadership ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of age, gender, race, education, and party identification in the first model, adding participants' candidate trait rating on strong leadership and candidate issue rating on education in the second model, and adding candidate leadership rating\*candidate education in the third model. The results of that regression are reported in Table 5. When strong leader and education are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of strong leader\*education rating was not a

significant predictor of the overall candidate evaluation. Both the trait (strong leader) and the issue (education) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate. Here, Republican also was a positive significant predictor of candidate evaluation.

Table 5

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Strong Leader by Education Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	0.039	0.051	.033	.451
Female	-0.439	1.669	-.011	.793
Not white	-1.490	1.875	-.036	.427
Education	0.783	0.854	.038	.360
Republican	4.214	1.989	.101	.035
Democrat	0.908	2.056	.022	.659
Strong leader rating	2.768	0.578	.215	.000
Education rating	12.110	1.051	.521	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	0.038	0.051	.032	.461
Female	-0.452	1.672	-.012	.787
Not white	-1.542	1.888	-.038	.415
Education	0.792	0.856	.038	.356
Republican	4.201	1.992	.101	.036
Democrat	0.879	2.061	.021	.670
Strong leader rating	2.776	0.580	.216	.000
Education rating	12.097	1.054	.521	.000
Strong leader by education rating	0.151	0.572	.011	.792

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .39$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .39$

To recap RQ1a results: only health care ratings interacted with strong leader ratings to influence overall candidate evaluation in the main sample. In all four pairings, the main effects

of trait rating and issue rating were significant. In the cases of foreign policy and education, self-identification as a Republican was a significant predictor of candidate evaluation as well.

Honesty was also paired with the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether honesty ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations (RQ1b), four regressions were conducted.

To test whether honesty ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of age, gender, race, education, and party identification in model 1; participants' candidate trait rating on honesty and candidate issue rating on the economy added in model 2; and candidate honesty rating\*candidate economy rating added in model 3. The results of the regression for the pilot study are reported in Table 6. When honesty and the economy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of honest\*economy rating was not a significant predictor of overall candidate evaluation. Both the trait (honest) and the issue (economy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 6

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Honest by Economy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Model 1				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
Model 2				
Age	0.006	0.052	.005	.903
Female	1.343	1.686	.034	.426

Not white	-1.295	1.882	-.032	.492
Education	0.912	0.864	.044	.292
Republican	1.981	2.030	.047	.330
Democrat	1.654	2.076	.040	.426
Honest rating	4.849	0.689	.337	.000
Economy rating	9.089	1.104	.389	.000
Model 3				
Age	0.007	0.052	.006	.891
Female	1.348	1.688	.034	.425
Not white	-1.244	1.892	-.030	.511
Education	0.924	0.866	.045	.287
Republican	2.020	2.036	.048	.322
Democrat	1.708	2.086	.041	.414
Honest rating	4.850	0.690	.337	.000
Economy rating	9.089	1.105	.388	.000
Honest by economy rating	-0.210	0.699	-.013	.764

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .38$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .38$

To test whether honesty ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the control variables first (age, gender, race, education, and party identification), followed by adding the independent variables of participants' candidate trait rating on honesty and candidate issue rating on foreign policy, and finally also including candidate honesty rating\*candidate foreign policy rating. Those results are reported in Table 7. When honesty and the foreign policy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of honest\*foreign policy rating was not a significant predictor. Both the trait (honest) and the issue (foreign policy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 7

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Honest by Foreign Policy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
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Model 1				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
Model 2				
Age	-0.059	0.055	-.050	.286
Female	1.250	1.801	.032	.488
Not white	-1.471	2.001	-.036	.463
Education	0.901	0.919	.044	.327
Republican	2.913	2.153	.700	.177
Democrat	1.899	2.207	.046	.390
Honest rating	6.450	0.692	.448	.000
Foreign policy rating	4.787	1.113	.202	.000
Model 3				
Age	-0.059	0.055	-.050	.289
Female	1.251	1.803	.032	.488
Not white	-1.458	2.020	-.036	.471
Education	0.900	0.921	.044	.329
Republican	2.915	2.157	.070	.177
Democrat	1.901	2.211	.046	.390
Honest rating	6.447	0.696	.448	.000
Foreign policy rating	4.795	1.126	.202	.000
Honest by foreign policy rating	-0.038	0.762	-.002	.960

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .30$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .29$

To test whether honesty ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with participants' candidate trait rating on honesty, candidate issue rating on health care, candidate honesty rating\*candidate health care rating, age, gender, race, education, and party identification used as independent variables. The demographic variables were the only independent variables included in model 1; model 2 added the trait and issue rating; and model 3 added the interaction term. Results of this analysis are reported in Table 8. The interaction term of honest\*caring rating was not a significant predictor of overall candidate

evaluation. Both the trait (honest) and the issue (caring) independently predicted candidate evaluation.

Table 8

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Honest by Health Care Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.038	0.053	-.032	.472
Female	0.316	1.721	.008	.854
Not white	-2.427	1.932	-.059	.210
Education	0.513	0.886	.025	.563
Republican	2.734	2.073	.065	.188
Democrat	2.187	2.123	.053	.304
Honest rating	5.480	0.688	.381	.000
Health care rating	7.243	1.041	.326	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.041	0.053	-.034	.444
Female	0.325	1.721	.008	.851
Not white	-2.490	1.934	-.061	.199
Education	0.538	0.887	.026	.545
Republican	2.820	2.075	.067	.175
Democrat	2.161	2.124	.052	.309
Honest rating	5.592	0.698	.388	.000
Health care rating	7.086	1.054	.319	.000
Honest by health care rating	0.619	0.645	.041	.338

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .35$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .35$

To test whether candidate honesty ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the control variables (age, gender, race, education, and party

identification), followed by participants' candidate trait rating on honest and candidate issue rating on education, and adding candidate honesty rating\*education in the third model. Those results are reported in Table 9. When honesty and education are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence the overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of honest\*education rating was not a significant predictor of overall candidate evaluation. Both the trait (honest) and the issue (education) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 9

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Honest by Education Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	0.005	0.050	.004	.920
Female	-0.463	1.607	-.012	.773
Not white	-3.164	1.804	-.077	.080
Education	0.958	0.825	.046	.246
Republican	2.770	1.932	.066	.153
Democrat	0.896	1.984	.022	.652
Honest rating	4.595	0.644	.319	.000
Education rating	10.868	1.037	.468	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	0.005	0.050	.004	.927
Female	-0.448	1.610	-.011	.781
Not white	-3.195	1.810	-.078	.078
Education	0.967	0.826	.047	.243
Republican	2.763	1.935	.066	.154
Democrat	0.861	1.991	.021	.666
Honest rating	4.607	0.647	.320	.000
Education rating	10.867	1.039	.468	.000
Honest by education rating	0.174	0.643	.011	.787

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Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .43$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .43$

Overall RQ1b results: no issue ratings interacted with honest trait evaluations to influence overall opinions on the candidate. In all four pairings, the main effects of trait rating and issue rating were significant.

Caring was paired with four issues: the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether candidate caring ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations (RQ1c), four regressions were conducted.

To test whether caring ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of age, gender, race, education, and party identification in model 1; participants' candidate trait rating on caring and candidate issue rating on the economy in model 2; and candidate caring rating\*candidate economy rating in model 3. That regression's results are presented in Table 10. When caring and the economy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence the overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of caring\*economy rating was not a significant predictor of overall candidate evaluation. Both the trait (caring) and the issue (economy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 10

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Caring by Economy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Model 1				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803

Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
Model 2				
Age	0.028	0.054	.023	.607
Female	2.038	1.729	.052	.239
Not white	0.336	1.929	.008	.862
Education	0.757	0.890	.037	.395
Republican	3.550	2.083	.085	.089
Democrat	1.451	2.137	.035	.497
Caring rating	3.143	0.611	.243	.000
Economy rating	10.384	1.102	.444	.000
Model 3				
Age	0.028	0.054	.024	.604
Female	2.089	1.736	.053	.229
Not white	0.329	1.931	.008	.865
Education	0.750	0.891	.036	.401
Republican	3.522	2.086	.084	.092
Democrat	1.490	2.142	.036	.487
Caring rating	3.134	0.612	.242	.000
Economy rating	10.413	1.106	.445	.000
Caring by economy rating	-0.255	0.620	-.018	.681

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .34$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .34$

To test whether caring ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with demographic variables (age, gender, race, education, and party identification) in model 1, adding participants' candidate trait rating on caring and candidate issue rating on foreign policy in model 2, and adding candidate caring rating\*candidate foreign policy rating in model 3. Results are listed in Table 11. When caring and foreign policy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of caring\*foreign policy rating was not a significant predictor. Both the trait (caring) and the issue (foreign policy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate. Being a Republican was a significant predictor as well.

Table 11

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Caring by Foreign Policy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.043	0.057	-.036	.456
Female	2.188	1.875	.056	.244
Not white	0.769	2.082	.019	.712
Education	0.696	0.960	.034	.469
Republican	5.278	2.236	.126	.019
Democrat	1.655	2.307	.040	.474
Caring rating	4.458	0.637	.344	.000
Foreign policy rating	5.774	1.154	.244	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.042	0.057	-.036	.460
Female	2.318	1.878	.059	.218
Not white	0.945	2.088	.023	.651
Education	0.692	0.960	.034	.471
Republican	5.329	2.236	.128	.018
Democrat	1.800	2.311	.043	.437
Caring rating	4.382	0.641	.338	.000
Foreign policy rating	5.930	1.163	.250	.000
Caring by foreign policy rating	-0.726	0.686	-.049	.291

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .23$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .23$

To test whether caring ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the control variables (age, gender, race, education, and party identification), followed by participants' candidate trait rating on caring and candidate issue rating on health care, and finally including candidate caring rating\*candidate health care rating.

Results are presented in Table 12. When caring and health care are paired, the trait and issue interact to influence the overall candidate evaluation, supporting the hypothesis in this instance. The trait (caring) and the issue (health care) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate, as did being a Republican.

Table 12

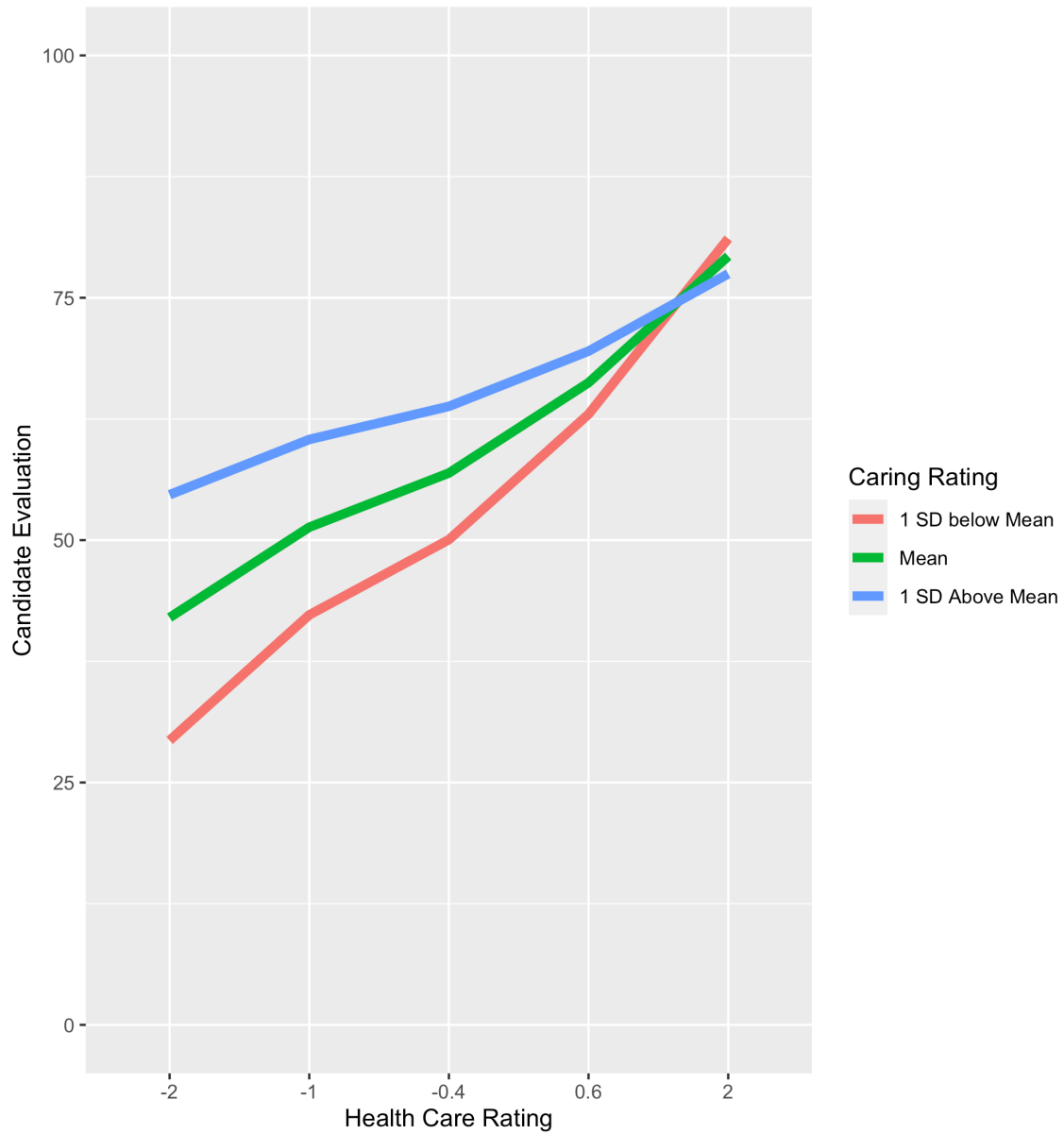
*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Caring by Health Care Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.021	0.055	-.018	.699
Female	0.947	1.779	.024	.595
Not white	-0.722	2.001	-.018	.718
Education	0.274	0.918	.013	.766
Republican	4.673	2.135	.112	.029
Democrat	2.041	2.200	.049	.354
Caring rating	3.641	0.620	.281	.000
Health care rating	8.381	1.057	.377	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.021	0.054	-.018	.695
Female	1.470	1.749	.037	.401
Not white	-0.944	1.962	-.023	.631
Education	0.205	0.900	.010	.820
Republican	4.264	2.096	.102	.043
Democrat	2.525	2.161	.061	.243
Caring rating	3.546	0.609	.274	.000
Health care rating	9.202	1.057	.414	.000
Caring by health care rating	-2.389	0.606	-.174	.000

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .30$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .33$

The interaction of caring by health care on overall candidate evaluation was plotted; see Figure 2. Those with the lowest caring scores benefited more (on overall candidate evaluation) from having a higher health care rating.

Figure 2: Candidate Evaluation with Caring by Health Care Rating



To test whether caring ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of age, gender, race, education, and party identification in model 1; adding participants' candidate trait rating on caring and candidate issue rating on education in model 2; and adding candidate caring rating\*candidate education in model 3. Results of that regression are in Table 13. When caring and education are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence the overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of caring\*education rating was not a significant predictor of overall candidate evaluation. Both the trait (caring) and the issue (education) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate. Being a Republican also was a significant predictor.

Table 13

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Caring by Education Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	0.024	0.051	.021	.634
Female	0.021	1.658	.001	.990
Not white	-1.792	1.866	-.044	.338
Education	0.788	0.853	.038	.356
Republican	4.415	1.985	.106	.027
Democrat	0.661	2.051	.016	.747
Caring rating	2.877	0.582	.222	.000
Education rating	11.969	1.056	.515	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	0.025	0.051	.021	.629
Female	0.060	1.662	.002	.971

Not white	-1.752	1.870	-.043	.350
Education	0.758	0.856	.037	.377
Republican	4.473	1.992	.107	.025
Democrat	0.770	2.069	.019	.710
Caring rating	2.867	0.584	.221	.000
Education rating	11.974	1.057	.516	.000
Caring by education rating	-0.246	0.573	-.018	.668

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Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .39$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .39$

Overall RQ1c results: health care ratings interacted with caring trait ratings to influence overall candidate evaluations. Issue ratings did not interact with caring trait ratings in the other models to influence candidate evaluations. In all four pairings, the main effects of trait rating and issue rating were significant. Republican was a significant positive predictor in the caring\*foreign policy, caring\*health care, and caring\*education models.

Competence was paired with four issues: the economy, foreign policy, health care, and education. To test whether competence ratings and issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations (RQ1d), four regressions were conducted.

To test whether competence ratings and economy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the control variables (age, gender, race, education, and party identification), followed by participants' candidate trait rating on competence and candidate issue rating on the economy, and finally including candidate competence rating\*candidate economy rating. Results are listed in Table 14. When competence and the economy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence the overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of competence\*economy rating was not a significant predictor. Both the trait (competence) and the issue (the economy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 14

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*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Competent by Economy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.007	0.052	-.006	.894
Female	1.548	1.669	.039	.354
Not white	-0.820	1.862	-.020	.660
Education	0.742	0.855	.036	.386
Republican	2.315	2.010	.055	.250
Democrat	1.107	2.061	.027	.591
Competent rating	4.567	0.611	.333	.000
Economy rating	10.050	1.033	.430	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.006	0.052	-.005	.907
Female	1.555	1.671	.040	.353
Not white	-0.778	1.873	-.019	.678
Education	0.747	0.857	.036	.384
Republican	2.338	2.015	.056	.247
Democrat	1.113	2.064	.027	.590
Competent rating	4.564	0.612	.333	.000
Economy rating	10.066	1.036	.430	.000
Competent by economy rating	-0.141	0.604	-.010	.815

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .39$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .39$

To test whether competence ratings and foreign policy ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the independent variables of age, gender, race, education, and party identification in the first model; participants' candidate trait rating on competence and candidate issue rating on foreign policy added in the second model; and candidate competence rating\*candidate foreign policy rating added in the third model. Results of that regression are in Table 15. When competence and

foreign policy are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of competence\*foreign policy rating was not a significant predictor. Both the trait (competence) and the issue (foreign policy) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 15

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Competent by Foreign Policy Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.075	0.056	-.064	.183
Female	1.677	1.832	.043	.361
Not white	-0.642	2.034	-.016	.753
Education	0.567	0.934	.027	.544
Republican	3.808	2.187	.091	.083
Democrat	1.315	2.252	.032	.560
Competent rating	5.570	0.666	.407	.000
Foreign policy rating	5.193	1.131	.219	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.074	0.056	-.063	.187
Female	1.693	1.828	.043	.355
Not white	-1.157	2.053	-.028	.573
Education	0.410	0.937	.020	.662
Republican	3.450	2.193	.083	.117
Democrat	1.112	2.250	.027	.621
Competent rating	5.680	0.668	.415	.000
Foreign policy rating	4.929	1.140	.208	.000
Competent by foreign policy rating	1.147	0.695	.076	.100

Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .27$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .27$

To test whether competence ratings and health care ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the control variables at first (age, gender, race, education, and party identification), then adding participants' candidate trait rating on competence and candidate issue rating on health care, and finally adding candidate competence rating\*health care rating. Results are presented in Table 16. When competence and health care are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of competence\*health care rating was not a significant predictor. Both the trait (competence) and the issue (health care) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 16

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Competent by Health Care Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.053	0.054	-.045	.324
Female	0.541	1.730	.014	.755
Not white	-1.897	1.942	-.046	.329
Education	0.223	0.889	.011	.802
Republican	3.367	2.080	.081	.106
Democrat	1.686	2.139	.041	.431
Competent rating	4.846	0.636	.354	.000
Health care rating	7.997	1.016	.360	.000
<b>Model 3</b>				
Age	-0.053	0.054	-.045	.323
Female	0.684	1.730	.017	.693
Not white	-2.060	1.941	-.050	.289
Education	0.281	0.888	.014	.752

Republican	3.374	2.076	.081	.105
Democrat	1.582	2.136	.038	.460
Competent rating	4.884	0.636	.357	.000
Health care rating	7.914	1.016	.356	.000
Competent by health care rating	0.842	0.566	.063	.138

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Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .34$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .34$

To test whether competence ratings and education ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted predicting overall candidate evaluation with the control variables (age, gender, race, education, and party identification) in model 1, participants' candidate trait rating on competence and candidate issue rating on education added in model 2, and candidate competence rating\*candidate education rating added in model 3. Results are presented in Table 17. When competence and education are paired, the trait and issue do not interact to influence overall candidate evaluation, as the interaction term of competence\*education rating was not a significant predictor. Both the trait (competence) and the issue (education) independently predicted how respondents rated the candidate.

Table 17

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Candidate Evaluation with Competent by Education Rating (N = 370)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
Age	0.016	0.065	.013	.810
Female	2.515	2.114	.064	.235
Not white	1.165	2.365	.029	.623
Education	-0.271	1.085	-.013	.803
Republican	6.571	2.535	.157	.010
Democrat	2.600	2.622	.063	.322
<b>Model 2</b>				
Age	-0.001	0.051	-.001	.979
Female	-0.197	1.635	-.005	.904
Not white	-2.599	1.835	-.064	.158

Education	0.702	0.838	.034	.403
Republican	3.466	1.961	.083	.078
Democrat	0.481	2.021	.012	.812
Competent rating	3.733	0.623	.273	.000
Education rating	11.296	1.059	.486	.000
Model 3				
Age	-0.004	0.051	-.003	.945
Female	-0.125	1.635	-.003	.939
Not white	-2.913	1.853	-.071	.117
Education	0.782	0.840	.038	.352
Republican	3.487	1.960	.083	.076
Democrat	0.540	2.021	.013	.789
Competent rating	3.839	0.629	.280	.000
Education rating	11.275	1.058	.486	.000
Competent by education rating	0.673	0.564	.049	.233

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Model 1, adjusted  $R^2 = .01$ ; Model 2, adjusted  $R^2 = .41$ ; Model 3, adjusted  $R^2 = .41$

Overall RQ1d results: no issue ratings interacted with competent trait ratings to influence overall candidate evaluations. In all four pairings, the main effects of trait rating and issue rating were significant.

To further explore the main effects detected in all regression models, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted examining differences in trait rating by trait condition. The four conditions with the same trait were netted and compared to the other conditions on that trait rating.

Seeing a candidate's claim to be a strong leader was not associated with significantly higher ratings on candidate leadership. The mean strong leader rating for the candidate in the strong leader conditions averaged 5.16 ( $SD = 1.63$ ), compared with 5.09 ( $SD = 1.49$ ) among those in the other conditions,  $t(368) = 0.36, p = .720$ .

Those in the honest conditions rated the candidate better on honesty than those in the other trait conditions. Participants in the conditions with the candidate described as honest rated

the candidate as slightly more honest ( $M = 5.52, SD = 1.35$ ) than those in the other conditions ( $M = 5.21, SD = 1.37$ ),  $t(368) = 1.88, p = .060, Hedges' g = 0.22$ .

Seeing a candidate's claim to be caring was associated with higher ratings on caring. Those in the caring conditions had significantly higher ratings on caring ( $M = 5.45, SD = 1.54$ ) than those in the other trait conditions ( $M = 5.01, SD = 1.50$ ),  $t(368) = -2.39, p = .017, Hedges' g = 0.29$ .

There was not a significant difference on the candidate's competence; those in the competent conditions did not rate the candidate significantly better on being competent ( $M = 5.47, SD = 1.52$ ) than those in the other conditions ( $M = 5.28, SD = 1.41$ ),  $t(368) = 1.08, p = .281$ .

RQ2 asks how the effects of strong leadership on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue leadership is paired with. To answer this question, an analysis of variance was conducted comparing strong leadership-foreign policy, strong leadership-health care, strong leadership-education, and strong leadership-economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations. The ANOVA suggested a significant difference,  $F(3, 92) = 2.72, p = .049, \eta^2 = .08$ . Post hoc analyses using Tukey's b for significance showed that the mean for candidate evaluation in the strong leader-health care condition ( $M = 65.14, SD = 19.70$ ) was significantly higher than those in the strong leader-education condition ( $M = 49.43, SD = 21.55$ ). The other means did not differ.

RQ3 asks how the effects of honesty on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue honesty is paired with. To answer this question, an ANOVA was conducted comparing honesty-foreign policy, honesty-health care, honesty-education, and honesty-

economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations. The ANOVA indicated no significant differences,  $F(3, 93) = 1.08, p = .362$ .

RQ4 asks how the effects of caring on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue caring is paired with. To answer this question, an ANOVA was conducted comparing caring-foreign policy, caring-health care, caring-education, and caring-economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations. The ANOVA indicated no significant differences,  $F(3, 85) = 1.28, p = .285$ .

RQ5 asks how the effects of competence on overall candidate evaluation differ based on which issue competence is paired with. To answer this question, an ANOVA was conducted comparing competence-foreign policy, competence-health care, competence-education, and competence-economy with respect to overall candidate evaluations. The ANOVA indicated no significant differences  $F(3, 84) = 1.26, p = .292$ .

RQ6 asks which trait-issue combination is the most influential on overall candidate evaluation; RQ7 asks which trait-issue combination is the least influential on overall candidate evaluation. To answer these questions, overall candidate evaluations were averaged within condition. The highest overall candidate evaluation mean was among those in the caring-economy condition ( $M = 66.50, SD = 22.01$ ) while the lowest was in the strong leader-health care condition ( $M = 49.43, SD = 21.55$ ).

RQ8a asks which trait-issue combination is the most influential on overall candidate evaluation among Republican participants; RQ8b asks which trait-issue combination is the least influential on overall candidate evaluation among Republican participants. RQ9a asks which trait-issue combination is the most influential on overall candidate evaluation among Democratic participants; RQ9b asks which trait-issue combination is the least influential on overall candidate

evaluation among Democratic participants. The highest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the most influential trait-issue combination (RQ8a and RQ9a); the lowest overall candidate evaluation corresponds to the least influential trait-issue combination (RQ8b and RQ9b).

Please note that these results are purely descriptive in nature, as small sample sizes do not allow statistical comparison of the 16 conditions among only Republican respondents. The most influential trait-issue combination among Republicans was caring-health care, with a mean candidate evaluation of 73.46, and the least influential combination was strong leader-health care, with a candidate evaluation of 52.13. Among Democrats, the most influential trait-issue combination was competent-health care, with a mean candidate evaluation of 79.71, and the least trait-issue combination was competent-foreign policy, with an average candidate evaluation of 48.89.

Subsequent analyses were conducted to explore RQ8 and RQ9, specifically, netting across the trait conditions and across the issue conditions to look at each individually: the traits of possible influence, and the issues of possible influence. Then, ANOVAs were conducted among just the Republican respondents, followed by ANOVAs on the data from Democrat respondents.

An analysis of variance was conducted to assess differences between the trait stimuli among Republicans. That ANOVA indicated no significant differences by trait,  $F(3, 118) = 1.76$ ,  $p = .159$ . Similarly, an ANOVA was conducted to assess differences by issue among Republicans. That ANOVA indicated no significant differences,  $F(3, 118) = 0.35$ ,  $p = .793$ .

An analysis of variance was conducted to assess differences between the trait stimuli among Democrats but indicated no significant differences,  $F(3, 121) = 0.25$ ,  $p = .861$ . An

ANOVA comparing the issue conditions among Democrats did not yield significant differences either,  $F(3, 121) = 0.15, p = .932$ .

H2 and H3 pertain to gendered traits and issues. In H2, I predicted that candidates rated highly on strong leadership will have higher foreign policy ratings than candidates rated low on strong leadership. An independent samples t-test was conducted to test differences on foreign policy ratings between candidates rated above the midpoint on strong leadership and candidates rated below the midpoint on strong leadership. Candidates with higher leadership scores averaged 3.36 ( $SD = 0.88$ ) on the 5-point foreign policy handling scale, compared with 2.88 ( $SD = 0.83$ ) for those rated poorly on leadership,  $t(268) = -3.30, p = .001, Hedges' g = 0.55$ .

H3a predicted that candidates rated highly on caring are rated higher on education competency than candidates rated low on caring. An independent samples t-test was conducted to test differences on education ratings between candidates rated above the midpoint on caring and candidates rated below the midpoint on caring. Those with high ratings on caring averaged 3.67 ( $SD = 0.84$ ) on the 5-point education handling scale, compared with 3.19 ( $SD = 1.07$ ) among those with lower ratings on caring,  $t(263) = -3.26, p = .001, Hedges' g = 0.54$ .

H3b predicted that candidates rated highly on caring will have higher health care competency ratings than candidates rated low on caring. An independent samples t-test was conducted to test differences on health care ratings between candidates rated above the midpoint on caring and candidates rated below the midpoint on caring. Candidates with high ratings on caring had significantly higher ratings on handling health care ( $M = 3.58, SD = 0.94$ ) than candidates with low ratings on caring ( $M = 3.14, SD = 0.97$ ),  $t(263) = -2.77, p = .006, Hedges' g = 0.46$ .

Table 18, below, summarizes the major findings presented in this chapter. They are further discussed in the next chapter.

Table 18

*Summary Table of Findings*

Hypothesis or Research Question	Finding
H1: Trait-issue effects are stronger when traits and issues are closely related than when they're less closely related.	T-test does not fulfill conventional criteria for significance but suggests that pairing a trait from one party and an issue from the other party is more effective than matching.
RQ1: Candidate trait ratings and candidate issue ratings interact to influence overall candidate evaluations.	Main effects for all traits and issues are significant. Two interactions are significant, both of which include health care ratings.
RQ1 post hoc analyses exploring main effects	Claims to be caring were associated with higher ratings on caring. Claims to be honest were associated higher ratings on honesty. Neither claims to be a strong leader nor claims to be competent were associated with higher ratings on strong leadership or competence, respectively.
RQ6 and RQ7: Which trait-issue combination is the most and least influential on overall candidate evaluation?	Highest candidate evaluations were among those in the caring-foreign policy (pilot) and caring-economy (main) conditions. Lowest candidate evaluations were among those in the strong leader-education condition (pilot) and strong leader-health care (main) conditions.
H2: Candidates rating highly on strong leadership will have higher foreign policy ratings than those rated low on leadership.	In both the pilot and the main study, candidates with high strong leadership scores had significantly higher ratings on foreign policy handling than those rated lower on leadership.
H3: Candidates rating highly on caring will be rated higher on education competency and health care competency than those rating low on caring.	In both the pilot and the main study, candidates with high caring scores had significantly higher ratings on education and health care handling than those rated lower on caring.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project is to expand our understanding of candidate character by revealing (1) effects of combining a trait with an issue on voter evaluations and (2) the relationship between certain traits and issues. This project also (3) used a novel approach to test effects of character and issue information on overall candidate evaluation. As such, this project holds implications for political campaigns, as well as related research, which are discussed in this chapter. Additionally, some limitations of this study are described.

### **Implications**

These results lead to new knowledge across disciplines, as the effects of candidate character traits on voter perceptions and how such research is conducted is relevant to the fields of communication, political science, and psychology. The experimental results contribute to a better understanding of the effects of candidate character and inform directions for future research. Traits are typically studied in isolation while one is in actuality seen as possessing multiple traits related to various issue competencies.

**Effects of traits and issues in conjunction.** The results of trait-issue combinations in this project lend insight into how these combinations can influence voters when appearing in news articles, campaign advertising, and candidates' social media posts.

Whichever combination is most influential has implications for political campaigns. To maximize their persuasive efforts, candidates should employ whichever tactic can have the greatest effects on voters' overall evaluations of candidate character. Even so, normatively, the future president should be someone who can get the job done while caring about people. The risk with an all-qualification candidate is electing an automaton who only focuses on what they can accomplish, to the expense of not understanding how policies influence the people or not having

the people's best interests in mind. The risk with an all-character candidate is electing an airhead who loves constituents but has no idea what they are doing and/or lacks the ability to get the job done. The "leaders of destiny"—by most arguments, the greatest presidents America has seen—possessed both qualification and character (Merry, 2012). Thus, while the most influential combinations in the experiment proposed here might yield support for advertising qualification more so than character, or character more so than qualification, candidates should still strategize how to best display both kinds of traits.

Overall, results of this experiment indicate that all four traits and all four issues tested influence candidate evaluation. Not one of the traits was insignificant in regressions, despite controlling for an issue rating. These results suggest that both character (honest, caring) and qualification (strong leader, competent) traits matter in a candidate's overall evaluation. This resonates with the literature, as these four traits are considered to be the "key demands" in a president (Kinder, 1986, pp. 236-237). Each of the four individual traits has been shown to predict overall candidate evaluation and vote choice (Laustsen & Bor, 2017). Distinctions between individual traits are drawn in the next section of this chapter.

Experimental results also provide insight into how traits and issues work in conjunction with each other. While many have noted that the two appear in tandem (Buchanan, 1991; Druckman et. al, 2004; Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994; Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kenski & Kenski, 2004), little is known about how they work together. Results of the trait-issue combinations have implications for how candidates prime character and issues, as well as our understanding of how voters evaluate candidate character and candidate issue competency. The potential relationship between traits and issues is a difficult, but worthy, one to begin to parse.

The combination of caring and the economy was associated with the highest candidate evaluation in the main study, while the combination of caring and foreign policy was associated with the highest candidate evaluation in the pilot study (RQ6). These combinations may be more effective because they combine a stereotypically feminine trait (Winter, 2010) owned by Democrats (Hayes, 2005; Meeks, 2016) with a more masculine issue, owned by Republicans (Hayes, 2005; Meeks, 2016). The trait-issue combinations associated with the weakest overall candidate evaluations were strong leader and health care, in the main study, and strong leader and education, in the pilot study (RQ7). Both these combinations pair a Republican-owned trait (Hayes, 2005; Meeks, 2016) with a Democrat-owned issue (Meeks, 2016). Additional research may explore whether this pattern is due to the combination of Democrat-owned traits and Republican-owned issues being particularly effective, or if claims to be caring do not require evidence while claims to be a strong leader may need demonstration of past behavior to be effective.

It was also expected that the effects of trait-issue combinations on overall candidate evaluation would be stronger when traits and issues are closely related (strong leadership-war, caring-health care) than when they are not as closely related (strong leadership-education, caring-economy) (H1). While the results of the t-test analyzing this hypothesis did not meet the conventional criteria for statistical significance, it is noteworthy that candidate evaluation was higher for group 2—that is, the group with unmatched traits and issues. This further suggests that pairing a Republican-owned trait (strong leadership) and Democrat-owned issue (education), or a Democrat-owned trait (caring) and a Republican-owned issue (the economy) may be more effective than matching one's traits and issues by party. Trait-issue combinations seem to be best

when they utilize party-owned traits and issues in such a way; future research should seek to examine this further.

Results presented here indicate that when it comes to traits and issues, main effects reign king. Of sixteen regressions testing main effects of traits and issues as well as interaction effects on candidate evaluations, only two yielded significant interaction effects—higher health care ratings in those models especially benefited those with lower trait ratings (with respect to overall candidate evaluation). The trait and issue, however, were significant in each and every regression. This is not to say that trait-issue combinations are ineffective—this is one study, with one stimulus; it is possible that such combinations are effective over time, not in a single exposure. It is also possible that combinations are effective on those who already have a perception of the candidate in question (and so the current study was limited in testing a manufactured candidate that respondents had not heard of previously).

**Relationships between traits and issues.** Further research is needed to identify the character traits of most relevance and power in political campaigns, as well as their relationship to political issues.

Supplemental analyses in this dissertation explored whether exposure to trait information led to increased ratings of the candidate on that trait. Appeals to being caring were the most effective; participants were more apt to rate the candidate highly on caring after seeing a tweet in which the candidate claimed to be caring. This is important given that recent research on candidate evaluations from 1984 through 2008 found that warmth (as measured in each election by “cares about people like you” and also with “compassion” in 1984, 1988, and 1992) is a stronger predictor than competence, leadership, or integrity on overall candidate evaluations

(Laustsen & Bor, 2017). Candidates may be able to appeal to this trait without needing to provide evidence as to why potential voters should believe that the candidate cares about them.

Appeals to being honest resulted in slightly higher ratings on the candidate being honest. This finding was marginally significant. Strong leader and competent appeals were not associated with higher ratings on candidate leadership or competence, respectively—leadership and competence, both qualification traits, may be traits that need to be displayed rather than claimed.

Other results showed that those rated highly on strong leadership have better foreign policy ratings than those rating poorly on strong leadership, and those rated highly on caring have better education and health care ratings than those rated poorly on caring. These predicted relationships were based on the dual-processing perspective of candidate image formation, which suggests that candidate trait impressions can influence candidate issue impressions (Hacker 2004), as well as the idea that traits and issues can be perceived as either masculine or feminine.

**Candidate character research design.** The literature on political candidate character has predominantly focused on cross-sectional data. Often, these surveys ask respondents' opinions on real candidates and model whether traits significantly influence vote choice (e.g., Abe, 2018; Graefe, 2013; Hayes, 2010; Holian & Prysby, 2020). While compelling additions to our knowledge of candidate character and issues, such studies are constrained by the circumstances of each campaign and election cycle (even if they aggregate across presidential races). One advantage of experiments featuring fictional candidates is that everything except the variable of interest is held constant. Such experiments, however, are limited in that they typically rely on just one exposure to the stimulus and presume that effects are possible even when the respondent does not already have an affiliation with the candidate. Character and issue effects may be

strongest for candidates with whom the audience is already familiar, and in situations in which the audience is exposed to multiple messages.

Previously, experimental research in which candidate character was studied used written descriptions of hypothetical politicians. Two such studies provided one “paragraph of political background information and three additional paragraphs of warmth and competence-related information” in a format resembling a newspaper column (Funk, 1996, p. 10; Funk, 1997, p. 684). In addition to pre-exposure instructions “stress(ing) the importance of forming an overall impression,” participants received post-exposure instructions to list “five things which came to mind when thinking about that congressman” (Funk, 1997, p. 684). After this step, participants rated the politician on competence, warmth, and trustworthiness (Funk, 1997).

While appropriate when used in research conducted in the 1990s, stimuli in the form of news articles would be unrealistic in 2017—asking respondents to engage in an activity in which many do not regularly, if ever, partake. According to Pew Research Center, visits to the top U.S. newspapers by circulation in the fourth quarter of 2016 averaged 2.45 minutes (Pew Research Center, 2019). Americans increasingly expect and consume their news information in bite-sized bits, such as tweets. In turn, political campaigns have learned to utilize social media, especially to market themselves (Enli, 2017). Indeed, Twitter has been referred to as “the candidate’s main online information channel” (Enli, 2017, p. 50) and social media, “an indispensable part of modern political campaigning” (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018, p. 333). Limited evidence also suggests that campaign messages in the form of tweets are seen as believable as similar messages coming from traditional news media (Morris, 2018). Stimuli in the form of candidate tweets are realistic and appropriate for a 2017 audience.

The challenge of unmasking the nuances of the relationship between candidate image and issues is a tough one. Survey research may very well incorporate candidate trait evaluations and candidate issue-handling perceptions into a model predicting candidate favorability or vote choice in 2020. While such results will be valuable to researchers, campaigns, the news media, and the public, they may also be dependent on or related to who the candidates are in that setting. For instance, such a model may find that evaluations of the presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden as caring interact with evaluations of his ability to handle health care, such that the effects of each item on overall favorability are greater if the potential voter sees him highly on both items. This may, however, stem from Biden's personal history relating to health care (namely, the car accident that killed his first wife and daughter, and one of his sons dying of cancer in 2015 [Glueck, 2019])—rather than Democrats tending to own caring as a trait and health care as an issue. Disentangling the extent to which findings are related to the campaign, candidate, their opposition, and/or current events at the time is exceedingly difficult when analyzing survey results.

One study, conducted prior to the Danish municipal elections in November 2017, found evidence that image and issue information do indeed interact (Pedersen et al., 2019). A candidate with a working-class occupation (warehouse assistant) scored higher on warmth and similarly on competence as one who was a lawyer; however, when the candidate was said to hold a left-leaning policy position, the warehouse assistant no longer did better on warmth and was seen as less competent than the lawyer (Pedersen et al., 2019). Further research should continue to disentangle the relationship between image and issue information.

Rather than examine individual traits' influence (as based on their perceived gender or party ownership), recent research has utilized indices combining trait information (e.g.,

Browning & Sweetser, 2020; Holian & Prysby, 2020; Pedersen et al., 2019; Vitriol et al., 2018).

These indices differ in the traits included, as well as whether one or two indices are used to represent candidate image in analysis.

One study relied on the idea that there are four dimensions of character: leadership, competence, empathy, and integrity, and thus used the following items from the 2016 American National Election Study survey in their candidate character trait index: “would provide strong leadership,” “is knowledgeable,” “cares about people like you,” and “is honest” (Holian & Prysby, 2020, p. 6).

Other research has further distilled these two dimensions into competence and warmth (Pedersen et al., 2019; Vitriol et al., 2018). Competence has been measured with intelligent, competent, credible, and knowledgeable in one study (Pedersen et al., 2019). Another used efficient, intelligent, confident, and capable for competence and disorganized, stupid, insecure, and unqualified for incompetence (Vitriol et al., 2018). Warmth has been measured using likeable, conscientious, friendly, and caring (Pedersen et al., 2019), as well as with friendly, well-intentioned, good-natured, and sincere; coldness, with hostile, manipulative, deceptive, and mean-spirited (Vitriol et al., 2018).

A confirmatory factor analysis of items assessing Clinton and Trump in October and November 2016 led to researchers retaining six measures of candidate character in their analyses: qualified, sophisticated, honest, successful, friendly, and sincere (Browning & Sweetser, 2020). In that study, character (comprised of those six traits) and authenticity (comprised of another six measures) made up a “candidate traits factor” (Browning & Sweetser, 2020, p. 5). Items excluded from their candidate character index were believable, attractive, calm, aggressive, strong, and active (Browning & Sweetser, 2020).

All these indices are robust measures and the studies that utilize them, fine contributions to the literature; however, such measures mask the possible effects of distinct character traits. They also make it more difficult to uncover specific relationships between types of image and issue information. Future research should consider drawing distinctions between traits and issues, as well as manipulating them in a controlled setting to separate findings from the many nuances of a real political campaign.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this experiment is that respondents were only shown the tweets once. It is possible that repeated exposures of trait and issue information in combination is the most impactful on individuals' perceptions of political candidates. As Althaus and Kim (2006) explain, "the greater the cumulative exposure to relevant stimuli, the greater the likelihood that 'mere mention' of relevant stimuli triggered priming of applicable attitudes" (p. 973). Much of the previous research on candidate character and issues focused on real political candidates; their campaigns and the media repeatedly discussed their traits and issues over the course of weeks, if not months. Future work should explore whether seeing the same content multiple times (perhaps in different forms, such as a tweet, a news article, and a political campaign advertisement) has greater effects on candidate character perceptions than seeing the content once. Whether such political messaging effects build over time, or rely on multiple exposures to occur at all, should be explored.

Relatedly, it seems the effect size of the manipulation was overestimated. Participants were only shown one tweet containing the manipulation and the tweet was authored by a fictional political candidate. Those who saw the tweet did not have a vested interest in the election of the fictional candidate and did not begin the experiment with a pre-developed

affiliation with the candidate. All these factors likely limited the effect of the manipulation in this experiment. Future research might employ tweets authored by actual candidates or campaigns, as well as utilize repeat exposure. The drawback of such an approach is that such results may be rooted in time and influenced by aspects of the candidate and/or campaign outside the researcher's control. The experimental stimuli here were purposely designed to be general and not related to certain candidates or campaigns, to lessen the extent to which findings are time-specific and candidate-specific. Still, it is possible this choice lessened the power of the manipulation, and that relationships between traits and issues are more easily detected when the messaging centers on a candidate with whom the audience is already familiar.

It should be noted that, although the stimulus was created to be as gender-neutral as possible—to test trait-issue effects, rather than trait-issue effects on candidates of a particular gender—it was not perceived as such. The pilot study led me to utilize the name Jordan Hughes. However, 85% of the respondents in this study who selected a sex for the candidate, assumed that Jordan was male. Overall, 21% said that they didn't know, and 8% said that they assumed Jordan Hughes was gender-neutral; however, that still leaves 67% who said Jordan was a man. As such, these results might not extend to female candidates, as only 4% overall perceived Jordan to be female.

Voters evaluate qualification differently by gender (Bauer, 2020). Experimental research suggests that voters think female candidates need to possess more legislative skills than male candidates in order to be effective (Bauer, 2020). But in evaluating hypothetical candidates, the male candidate was assumed to have fewer such skills than the female candidate (Bauer, 2020). Further research may consider manipulating gender as well as candidate trait-issue combinations.

The political ideology of the fictional candidate, Jordan Hughes, was assessed to check whether a perceived ideology from the stimulus might influence results in this study. Overall, 46% of the sample said that they didn't know enough to rate Jordan's political ideology. 24% perceived Jordan to be moderate or middle of the road. An additional 8% saw Jordan as slightly liberal, and another 8% as slightly conservative. That is, few perceived Jordan to be either extremely liberal (2%) or extremely conservative (1%). This lends confidence to interpreting the results as potentially applicable to both liberal and conservative political candidates— ideology was held steady (or was considered by respondents as not applicable), while the traits and issues were manipulated.

At the same time, it's plausible that results may differ if political ideology was a variable in the study, as it may very well interact with information about candidate character and their issue expertise. This especially is true of the evidence suggesting that pairing a candidate trait from one political party and an issue owned by the other party is more effective than matching one's traits and issues by party. Were the candidate to sell themselves, for example, as a member of the Democrat party, they may be better served by matching their traits and issues as those owned by their own party (e.g., caring and health care), rather than combining trait ownership and trait trespassing. Future research might explore how perceived partisanship of the candidate influences which trait-issue combinations are most effective.

One other limitation pertains to the nature of the stimulus. In this study, the candidate trait and issue information was conveyed to respondents via a series of tweets. This was designed to be as realistic as possible. Nevertheless, political candidate tweets might suffer from a lack of credibility, trust, or downright likability. Twitter was frequently used by the presidential candidates and their surrogates in the 2016 presidential election and has continued to be used by

the current president. Around the time that this study fielded, an ABC News/Washington Post poll asked a random national sample how they felt about Trump's tweets. Two-thirds disapproved of his use of Twitter overall and 68% found his tweets "inappropriate;" 65%, insulting, and 52%, dangerous (Langer, 2017). If these perceptions are true of political tweets in general (or even just of tweets from political candidates in general), their audience might be inclined to attempt not to absorb the persuasive information contained within them.

There are some methodological limitations inherent to this project. Online experiments are limited in control. Participants may be watching television, talking on the phone, or otherwise distracted while taking the survey. In order to exclude participants who did not actually read the text prior to answering questions, there were several attention check items mixed in with the key variables. Care was taken to design realistic stimuli; still, respondents may have interpreted the tweets as artificial.

Despite these limitations, this study holds promise of expanding our understanding of candidate character. Results lead to new knowledge of the effects of trait-issue combinations on voter evaluations of candidate traits, candidate issues, and overall candidate favorability. They indicate that pairing a trait from one party and an issue from the other party may be more effective than matching one's traits and issues, that appeals to qualification-based traits may need evidence to be effective (whereas appeals to personality-based traits may be taken on face value), and that performing well on a trait is associated with higher ratings on a related issue competency.

**APPENDIX A – EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI**

**Strong leader-economy**

- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Jordan Hughes is a strong leader.







- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Vote Jordan for a brighter future.







- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle the economy.







- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!








**Strong leader-foreign policy**

- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Jordan Hughes is a strong leader.







- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Vote Jordan for a brighter future.







- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle foreign policy.







- 

**Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes

Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!








**Strong leader-health care**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is a strong leader.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle health care.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Strong leader-education**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is a strong leader.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle education.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Honest-economy**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is honest.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle the economy.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Honest-foreign policy**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is honest.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle foreign policy.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Honest-health care**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is honest.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle health care.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Honest-education**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is honest.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle education.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Caring-economy**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is caring.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle the economy.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Caring-foreign policy**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is caring.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle foreign policy.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Caring-health care**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is caring.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle health care.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Caring-education**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is caring.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle education.  
   
-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Competent-economy**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is competent.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle the economy.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Competent-foreign policy**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is competent.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle foreign policy.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Competent-health care**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is competent.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle health care.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**Competent-education**

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is competent.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Vote Jordan for a brighter future.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is well-equipped to handle education.  
   

---

-  **Jordan Hughes** @JordanHughes ▼  
Jordan Hughes is the candidate for you!  
   

**APPENDIX B – SURVEY MEASURES***Intro (Q0)*

Thank you for your interest in this study. Please begin this survey when you have AT LEAST 20 MINUTES to complete it.

NOTE: Do NOT take this survey more than once. You must take the survey in one sitting at a computer.

*Informed Consent (Consent)***The University of Arizona Consent to Participate in Research**

**Study Title:** Candidate Perceptions Study

**Principal Investigator:** Christine Filer

**Sponsor:** The University of Arizona Social & Behavioral Sciences Research Institute, Department of Communication, and Graduate & Professional Student Council

**This is a consent form for research participation.** It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

**Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this study is to gather information to help understand how adults evaluate politicians. This study involves research.

**What will happen if I take part in this study?**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to read some statements, provide assessments of politicians, and complete a questionnaire about your attitudes and opinions on various topics. These procedures are for research only.

**How long will I be in the study?**

The study will be conducted online and the entire process will take about 20 minutes to complete.

**How many people will take part in this study?**

Approximately 340 people will participate in this study.

**Can I stop being in the study?**

**Your participation is voluntary.** You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you. If you do not fully complete the survey, you will be given a small consolatory incentive as previously arranged when you joined the panel.

**What risks or benefits can I expect from being in the study?**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for participating. You will be compensated

through the survey panel that you belong to after completing this survey. If you fail attention or speeding checks, you will not receive your incentive. Questions about your incentive should be directed through your panel membership where you have an account as a panelist.

**Will my study-related information be kept confidential?**

People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator research study personnel.

*Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups:*

*The University of Arizona Institutional Review Board*

*Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies*

*The sponsor supporting the study, their agents or study monitors*

**Who can answer my questions about the study?**

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Christine Filer at [cfiler@email.arizona.edu](mailto:cfiler@email.arizona.edu).

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at 520-626-6721 or online at <http://rgw.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program>.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Christine Filer at [cfiler@email.arizona.edu](mailto:cfiler@email.arizona.edu). If you suffer an injury from participating in this study, you should seek treatment. The University of Arizona has no funds set aside for the payment of treatment expenses for this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

**Signing the consent form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form. (If you wish to save a copy of the form, please save it to your hard drive at this time. You may also contact Christine Filer at [cfiler@email.arizona.edu](mailto:cfiler@email.arizona.edu) for a copy of the form.)

**CONSENT:**

**I agree to participate in this research study.**

Do you consent to participating in this study?

Yes

No [If selected, end survey]

*Date (Date)*

Please enter the date below. Today is [insert date]

*Time (Time)*

Please enter the time below. It is now [insert time]

*Attention Check 0 (AttnC0a)*

The most popular ice cream flavor in America is chocolate. Regardless of your favorite flavor, we would like you to choose pistachio to show that you are reading carefully. What is your favorite ice cream flavor?

Black raspberry (1)

Butter pecan (2)

Chocolate (3)

Chocolate peanut butter (4)

Coffee (5)

Cookie dough (6)

Cookies & cream (7)

Mint chocolate chip (8)

Neopolitan (9)

Other (10)

Pistachio (11)

Rocky road (12)

Strawberry (13)

Vanilla (14)

*Display if AttnC0a = Pistachio (12)*

*Attention 0 Correct (AttnC0aR)*

The question that you just completed is called an attention check measure. It lets us know whether or not study participants are reading the questions before they answer them.

You followed the directions on the question, which lets us know that you read the question before answering it.

Other attention check questions may be given during this survey. This is a warning; a warning will not be given on future attention check questions. Respondents receive credit for their participation in exchange for honestly and diligently answering the questions.

[If AttnC0aR is displayed, skip to Intro]

*Display if AttnC0a: Pistachio (12) is Not Selected*

*Attention 0 Incorrect (AttnC0aW)*

The question that you just completed is called an attention check measure. It lets us know whether or not study participants are reading the questions before they answer them.

**You did not follow the directions on the question, which lets us know that you need to slow down and read the questions before answering them.**

Other attention check questions may be given during this survey. This is a warning; a warning will not be given on future attention check questions. Participants receive credit for their participation in exchange for honestly and diligently answering the questions.

*Display if AttnC0aW was Displayed*

*Attention Check 01b (AttnC0b)*

The most popular ice cream flavor in America is chocolate. Regardless of your favorite flavor, we would like you to choose butter pecan to show that you are reading carefully. What is your favorite ice cream flavor?

Black raspberry (1)

Butter pecan (2)

Chocolate (3)

Chocolate peanut butter (4)

Coffee (5)

Cookie dough (6)

Cookies & cream (7)

Mint chocolate chip (8)

Neopolitan (9)

Other (10)

Pistachio (11)

Rocky road (12)

Strawberry (13)

Vanilla (14)

*Display if AttnC0b: Butter pecan (6) was Not Selected*

*Attention Check 0b Incorrect (AttnC0W)*

The question that you just completed for a second time is called an attention check measure. It lets us know whether or not study participants are reading the questions before they answer them.

You did not follow the directions on the question again, which lets us know that you are not reading the questions before answering them.

Because you are not reading the questions, you have not completed your tasks for this study.

*Stimulus (Intro)*

Next, you will be given brief information about a political candidate. Please do your best with the information provided to you to come to conclusions about the candidate.

[Stimulus – see Appendix A for a list of the stimuli]

*Candidate Traits – Semantic Differentials (CanSem)*

Please place the candidate, described in the statement on the previous page, on the following scales. If you would like to see the tweets again, use the back button at the bottom of the page.

*Statements randomized*

Caring (7) - - - - - (1) Not caring  
 Uncompassionate (1) - - - - - (7) Compassionate  
 Kind (7) - - - - - (1) Unkind  
 Cold (1) - - - - - (7) Warm  
 Effective (7) - - - - - (1) Ineffective  
 Incompetent (1) - - - - - (7) Competent  
 Intelligent (7) - - - - - (1) Unintelligent  
 Unknowledgeable (1) - - - - - (7) Knowledgeable  
 Strong leader (7) - - - - - (1) Weak leader  
 Lazy (1) - - - - - (7) Hardworking  
 Courageous (7) - - - - - (1) Cowardly  
 Indecisive (1) - - - - - (7) Decisive  
 Experienced (7) - - - - - (1) Inexperienced  
 Immoral (1) - - - - - (7) Moral  
 Dishonest (1) - - - - - (7) Honest  
 Inauthentic (1) - - - - - (7) Authentic  
 Has integrity (7) - - - - - (1) Lacks integrity  
 Untrustworthy (1) - - - - - (7) Trustworthy  
 Fair (1) - - - - - (7) Unfair

*Candidate Traits – Matrix (CanMat)*

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree that the candidate described in the tweets you read is:

*Scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)*

*Statements randomized*

Charismatic  
 Ambitious  
 Empathetic  
 Inspiring  
 In touch with ordinary people  
 Sincere  
 Respectful  
 Shares the public's values  
 Stands up for what s/he believes  
 Understands the issues  
 Aggressive  
 Authoritarian  
 Hypocritical  
 Lacks vision  
 Narcissistic  
 Power hungry  
 Prejudiced  
 Reckless  
 Uncivil

## Uncooperative

*Candidate Liking (CanLike)*

Please rate the extent to which you like or dislike the candidate.

Strongly dislike (1)

Dislike (2)

Neither dislike nor like (3)

Like (4)

Strongly like (5)

*Feeling Thermometer (CanFT)*

*Thermometer ranging from 0 to 100*

Please rate the candidate on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees.

Rating above 50 means that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorable and cool toward the person. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward a person you would rate him/her at 50 degrees.

*Washington Status (Wash)*

Do you think the candidate most sounds like a Washington insider, or a Washington outsider?

*Response options randomized*

Washington insider (1)

Washington outsider (2)

Impossible to tell (3)

*Candidate Issue Competency (CanIss)*

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the candidate is well-equipped to handle the following issues:

*Scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)*

*Statements randomized*

Abortion

National debt

Environment & climate change

Gay rights

Gun control

Health care

Immigration

Poverty

Income inequality

Unemployment

The economy

Military strength

Morality & religion in society

Racism

Social Security

Taxes  
Women's rights  
Crime  
Foreign policy  
Education  
Terrorism & homeland security  
Select agree for this line

*Candidate Ideology (CanIdeo)*

Using this scale that ranges from extremely liberal to extremely conservative, where would you place the candidate? Just click "don't know" if you don't know enough to rate the person.

Extremely liberal (1)  
Liberal (2)  
Slightly liberal (3)  
Moderate, middle of the road (4)  
Slightly conservative (5)  
Conservative (6)  
Extremely conservative (7)  
Don't know (10)

*Attention Check 2 (AttnC2)*

Public opinion polling suggests American approval of Congress is at an historic low. Nevertheless, we would like you to choose prefer not to respond to this question to show that you are reading carefully. What is your opinion of Congress?

Highly unfavorable (1)  
Unfavorable (2)  
Prefer not to respond (3)  
Favorable (4)  
Highly favorable (5)

*Avatar & Name Check*

*Avatar (Av1)*

As you might recall, the profile picture you saw was as follows:  
(insert logo)

*Rotate and show only one of PartyAva1 and PartyAva2*

*Avatar Party (PartyAva1)*

What do you assume is the partisanship of the political candidate using that avatar (based only on the logo, not any of the text you read)?

Republican (1)  
Democrat (2)  
Independent (3)  
Neutral (4)  
Don't Know (5)

*Avatar Party (PartyAva2)*

What do you assume is the partisanship of the political candidate using that avatar (based only on the logo, not any of the text you read)?

- Democrat (2)
- Republican (1)
- Independent (3)
- Neutral (4)
- Don't Know (5)

*Candidate Gender (GenTwee)*

What do you assume is the gender of a political candidate named Jordan?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Don't Know (5)

*Tweet Check (TraitCheck)*

Please think back to the messages you saw from @JordanHughes.

Within the tweets you saw, the candidate was described as:

- Caring (1)
- Competent (2)
- Honest (3)
- A strong leader (4)
- None of the above (5)
- Don't know (6)

*Tweet Check (IssueCheck)*

Within the tweets you saw, the candidate was described as being well-equipped to handle:

- The economy (1)
- Education (2)
- Foreign policy/war (3)
- Health care (4)
- None of the above (6)
- Don't know (7)

*Attention Check 3 (AttnC3)*

Some argue that the many media options available today (such as cable and the internet) allow people to avoid news and political information. Regardless of how often you personally seek out political news, please select multiple times a day as your response to this question. How often do you seek out political news?

- Multiple times a day (6)
- Daily (5)
- A few times a week (4)
- Weekly (3)

Once or twice a month (2)  
 Hardly ever (1)

*Need for Cognition (NC)*

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement:

*Scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)*

*Statements randomized*

I would prefer complex to simple problems.

I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.

Thinking is not my idea of fun.

I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities.

I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is likely a chance I will have to think in depth about something.

I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.

I only think as hard as I have to.

I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones.

I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.

The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me.

I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.

Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.

I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me.

I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.

I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that required a lot of mental effort.

It's enough for me that something gets the job done. I don't care how or why it works.

I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.

*Big 5 (Big5)*

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree that each statement is true for you.

I see myself as someone who:

*Scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)*

*Statements randomized*

Is talkative

Is outgoing, sociable

Generates a lot of enthusiasm

Is full of energy

Has an assertive personality

Tends to be quiet

Is sometimes shy, inhibited

Is reserved

Is considerate and kind to almost everyone  
 Has a forgiving nature  
 Is helpful and unselfish with others  
 Likes to cooperate with others  
 Is generally trusting  
 Is sometimes rude to others  
 Starts quarrels with others  
 Can be cold and aloof  
 Tends to find fault with others  
 Does a thorough job  
 Does things efficiently  
 Perseveres until the task is finished  
 Is a reliable worker  
 Makes plans and follows through with them  
 Tends to be lazy  
 Tends to be disorganized  
 Can be somewhat careless  
 Is easily distracted  
 Worries a lot  
 Gets nervous easily  
 Can be tense  
 Can be moody  
 Is depressed, blue  
 Is relaxed, handles stress well  
 Is emotionally stable, not easily upset  
 Remains calm in tense situations  
 Is inventive  
 Has an active imagination  
 Is original, comes up with new ideas  
 Likes to reflect, play with ideas  
 Values artistic, aesthetic experiences  
 Is ingenious, a deep thinker  
 Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature  
 Is curious about many different things  
 Has few artistic interests  
 Prefers work that is routine

*Trait Importance (TraitImp)*

Which of the following traits are the most important to you in terms of choosing which political candidate you will support? Please rate each trait's importance.

*Scale: Extremely Important (1), Very Important (2), Somewhat Important (3), Not So Important (3), Not Important at All (5)*

*Statements randomized*

Caring

Honest

Strong leader

Competent  
 Intelligent  
 Inspiring  
 Trustworthy  
 Authentic  
 Cares about people like you  
 Experienced  
 Washington outsider  
 Understands the issues  
 Aggressive  
 Speaks his/her mind

*Issue Importance (IssImp)*

Which of the following issues are the most important to you in terms of choosing which political candidate you will support? Please rate each issue's importance.

*Scale: Extremely Important (5), Very Important (4), Somewhat Important (3), Not So Important (2), Not Important at All (1)*

*Statements randomized*

Health care  
 Poverty  
 Income inequality  
 Unemployment  
 Economic growth  
 Military strength  
 Foreign policy  
 Education  
 Terrorism & homeland security  
 Abortion  
 Please select very important

*Role of Government (RoleGov)*

Do you feel that government plays a very important role in your life, somewhat what important role, or a not very important role at all?

Very important role (3)

Somewhat important role (2)

Not very important role (1)

*Follow Government (FolGov)*

Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?

Most of the time (4)

Some of the time (3)

Only now and then (2)

Not at all (1)

*Campaign Interest (CampInt)*

How interested are you in political campaigns?

Very interested (3)  
 Somewhat interested (2)  
 Not very interested at all (1)

*Rotate and show only one of IdeoC and IdeoL*

*Ideology (IdeoC)*

Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very conservative, somewhat conservative, moderate, somewhat liberal, or very liberal?

Very conservative (1)  
 Somewhat conservative (2)  
 Moderate (3)  
 Somewhat liberal (4)  
 Very liberal (5)

*Ideology (IdeoL)*

Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, or very conservative?

Very liberal (5)  
 Somewhat liberal (4)  
 Moderate (3)  
 Somewhat liberal (2)  
 Very liberal (1)

*Party ID (pid1a)*

Do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?

*Response options 1 and 2 randomized*

Democrat (2)  
 Republican (1)  
 Independent (3)  
 Other. Explain: (4) \_\_\_\_\_

*Party ID Strength (pid2) – Display if 1 or 2 selected for pid1a*

Do you consider yourself a strong or not so strong party member?

Strong (1)  
 Not so strong (2)

*Independent Lean (ind.pid) – Display if 3 or 4 selected for pid1a*

If you had to choose, which major party would you say that you lean toward?

*Response options randomized*

Democrats (2)  
 Republicans (1)

*Demographics – Age (Age)*

Please enter your age in years

*(Text box)*

*Demographics – Gender (Gender)*

I think of myself as:

Male

Female

Other (*text box*)

*Demographics – Sexual Orientation (SexOrient)*

I think of myself as:

Heterosexual

Gay

Lesbian

Bisexual

Other (*text box*)

*Demographics – Race/Ethnicity (Race)*

Select all that apply. I think of myself as:

(*Multiple answers allowed*)

White/Caucasian/European

Black/African

Hispanic/Latino

Native American/American Indian

East Asian e.g., Chinese, Japanese, South-East Asian

Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or any other Asian

Pacific Islander

Arabian, Egyptian, or Maghreb

Australian Aboriginal

Other (*text box*)

*Demographics – Education (Education)*

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

High school, no diploma (1)

High school graduate (2)

Some college but no degree (3)

Associate's degree (4)

Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, AB, BS) (5)

Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA) (6)

Professional school degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) (7)

Doctorate degree (e.g., PhD, EdD) (8)

*Demographics – Income (Income)*

In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year (2016) before taxes?

Total income includes interest or dividends, rent, Social Security, other pensions, alimony or child support, unemployment compensation, public aid (welfare), armed forces or veteran's allotment.

Under \$5,000 (1)

\$5,000 to \$9,999 (2)

\$10,000 to \$14,999 (3)

\$15,000 to \$19,999 (4)

\$20,000 to \$22,499 (5)

\$22,500 to \$24,999 (6)

\$25,000 to \$29,999 (7)

\$30,000 to \$34,999 (8)

\$35,000 to \$39,999 (9)

\$40,000 to \$49,999 (10)

\$50,000 to \$59,999 (11)

\$60,000 to \$74,999 (12)

\$75,000 to \$89,999 (13)

\$90,000 to \$109,999 (14)

\$110,000 to \$129,999 (15)

\$130,000 to \$149,999 (16)

\$150,000 or over (17)

*Demographics – State of Origin (StateO)*

Which state are you from?

*(Dropdown)*

Alabama (1)

Alaska (2)

Arizona (3)

Arkansas (4)

California (5)

Colorado (6)

Connecticut (7)

Delaware (8)

District of Columbia (9)

Florida (10)

Georgia (11)

Hawaii (12)

Idaho (13)

Illinois (14)

Indiana (15)

Iowa (16)

Kansas (17)

Kentucky (18)

Louisiana (19)

Maine (20)

Maryland (21)

Massachusetts (22)

Michigan (23)  
Minnesota (24)  
Mississippi (25)  
Missouri (26)  
Montana (27)  
Nebraska (28)  
Nevada (29)  
New Hampshire (30)  
New Jersey (31)  
New Mexico (32)  
New York (33)  
North Carolina (34)  
North Dakota (35)  
Ohio (36)  
Oklahoma (37)  
Oregon (38)  
Pennsylvania (39)  
Puerto Rico (40)  
Rhode Island (41)  
South Carolina (42)  
South Dakota (43)  
Tennessee (44)  
Texas (45)  
Utah (46)  
Vermont (47)  
Virginia (48)  
Washington (49)  
West Virginia (50)  
Wisconsin (51)  
Wyoming (52)  
I am not from a particular state (53)

*Demographic – State of Residence (StateR)*

Which state do you currently live in?

*(Dropdown)*

Alabama (1)  
Alaska (2)  
Arizona (3)  
Arkansas (4)  
California (5)  
Colorado (6)  
Connecticut (7)  
Delaware (8)  
District of Columbia (9)  
Florida (10)  
Georgia (11)

Hawaii (12)  
Idaho (13)  
Illinois (14)  
Indiana (15)  
Iowa (16)  
Kansas (17)  
Kentucky (18)  
Louisiana (19)  
Maine (20)  
Maryland (21)  
Massachusetts (22)  
Michigan (23)  
Minnesota (24)  
Mississippi (25)  
Missouri (26)  
Montana (27)  
Nebraska (28)  
Nevada (29)  
New Hampshire (30)  
New Jersey (31)  
New Mexico (32)  
New York (33)  
North Carolina (34)  
North Dakota (35)  
Ohio (36)  
Oklahoma (37)  
Oregon (38)  
Pennsylvania (39)  
Puerto Rico (40)  
Rhode Island (41)  
South Carolina (42)  
South Dakota (43)  
Tennessee (44)  
Texas (45)  
Utah (46)  
Vermont (47)  
Virginia (48)  
Washington (49)  
West Virginia (50)  
Wisconsin (51)  
Wyoming (52)  
I do not reside in the United States (53)

*Last Thoughts – Device (Q102)*

For recording purposes, on what sort of device did you take this survey?

Desktop Computer

Laptop  
2-in-one laptop/tablet  
Tablet  
Smartphone

*Last Thoughts – Open End (LT)*

We value your time and your input on this study. Please provide us any reactions you had about your experience with this questionnaire. Please also provide any opinions you have on candidate character or personality that may not have been expressed already in response to the questions asked.

*(Text box)*

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