The Messenger or the Message?
Group Endorsements, Heuristics, and Grassroots Campaigning*

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Abstract

Scholars of political campaigns have focused on traditional mobilization efforts where a political party or interest group targets core supporters and undecided independents. Although these efforts appear to pay off in terms of both persuading those targeted to support the campaign's candidate and turning out to vote, it is less clear that approaching those voters who have typically supported the opposition, but who are believed persuadable, have the same effects. If people are merely responding to the message tailored for them, then nontraditional strategies should be effective despite the fact that it is delivered by an opposition political group. However, there are strong theoretical reasons to expect that people consider the source of a message in addition to the content of the message (e.g., Druckman 2001; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994). If source cues overwhelm the message (cf. Kuklinski and Hurley 1994), then people may reject the message's recommended course of action (e.g., vote for candidate X) when it is delivered by an opposition group *even though they agree with the group's issue position in the message*. We study the competing effects of message and source cues with a field experiment conducted during the 2006 election in two highly competitive Pennsylvania statehouse races where a well-known liberal activist group endorsed Democratic candidates and canvassed both core supporters and Republicans they thought to be persuadable. The group allowed us to randomly assign individuals to either receive contact from the group or not. We then measured the political preferences of subjects in the treatment and control groups by conducting a telephone survey after the election. We found a clear negative effect of this group's canvassing among Republicans who agreed with the group on its core issue. Our work suggests that source cues may indeed overwhelm message cues, and that nontraditional strategies may backfire in low information campaigns.

*Prepared for presentation at the 2006 State Politics and Policy Conference, Austin, TX, February 22-24. We owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Hagen and the Temple University Institute for Public Affairs whose support and generous funding made this project possible. Of course, any errors are ours.

There is mounting evidence that partisan groups are well-served by grassroots mobilization campaigns (e.g., Arceneaux 2007; Vavreck, Spiliotes, and Fowler 2002; Nickerson 2005; Nickerson, Friedrich, and King 2006). By dispatching campaign workers to call on potential supporters, either in person or by phone, political parties can boost support for their candidate at the polls. Over the past few election cycles, partisan organizations have also adopted more risky campaigning strategies wherein they contact voters who typically prefer the opposition but are believed to be open to persuasion (Cornfield 2007). For instance, the campaign may believe particular voters are cross-pressured, like an evangelical Christian Democrat or a pro-choice Republican, and can be swayed to vote for the campaign's desired candidate with the right message

Thus far, scholars have focused their attention on more traditional mobilization campaigns where the partisan group (e.g., a political party or issue advocacy group) targets core supporters, individuals who have supported them in the past, and undecided independents. Although these efforts appear to pay off in terms of both persuading those targeted to support the campaign's candidate and turning out to vote, it is less clear that more risky strategies have the same desired effects. If people are merely responding to the message tailored for them, then nontraditional strategies should be effective despite the fact that it is delivered by an opposition political group. However, there are strong theoretical reasons to expect that people consider the source of a message in addition to the content of the message (e.g., Druckman 2001; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994). If source cues overwhelm the message (cf. Kuklinski and Hurley 1994), then people may reject the message's recommended course of action (e.g., vote for candidate X) when it is delivered by an opposition group *even though they agree with the group's issue position in the message*.

We study the competing effects of message and source cues with a field experiment conducted during the 2006 election in two highly competitive statehouse races in suburban Philadelphia where a well-known liberal activist group endorsed the Democratic candidates and canvassed both core supporters and Republicans they thought to be persuadable. The group allowed us to randomly assign individuals to either receive contact from the group or not. We then measured the political preferences of subjects in the treatment and control groups by conducting a telephone survey after the election. Random assignment furnishes unbiased causal effect estimates of the group's canvassing, because it balances the treatment and control group with respect to both observed and unobserved covariates.[1] Accordingly, if it were not for the experimental intervention, there should be no differences in outcomes between treatment and control groups. If statistically significant differences are discovered it is likely attributable to the effect of canvassing.

Because the experiment was conducted in the course of an on-going campaign among individuals who were unaware that they were subjects in an experiment, our study helps instantiate laboratory experiments aimed at studying the effects of group endorsements (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001). We also add to the growing field experimental literature devoted to studying the persuasive effects of partisan campaigning (Arceneaux 2007; Gerber 2004; Nickerson 2005). While previous work has focused on campaigns orchestrated by a political party or candidate, we extend this research by studying the canvassing operation of an issue advocacy group. These groups are becoming increasingly involved in grassroots mobilization, as aptly illustrated by the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign where issue advocacy groups knocked

[1] Of course, randomization generates balance within sampling variability. Imbalances can occur by chance, but it is possible to calculate the probability that observed effects are due to sampling error with standard frequentist tests of statistical significance.

on just as many doors as the two major parties combined (a total estimated at 17 million) and most likely more (Bergan et al. 2005).

Information Shortcuts and Political Campaigning

The past 50 years of research on voting behavior, beginning with seminal work by scholars at Columbia and Michigan (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960), has certainly dispelled the notion that many voters put much cognitive effort into understanding politics. Americans are thoroughly uninformed on most matters of importance (e.g., Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996) and few hold stable attitudes on political issues, much less organize their political beliefs into one, coherent overarching ideological system (Converse 1964).

Nevertheless, many voters are capable of overcoming their dearth of knowledge about politics by taking advantage of information shortcuts, or *heuristics*. The cognitive capacity of humans is limited. People cannot collect and consider, much less remember, all relevant pieces of information for complex decision tasks such as voting, requiring that they develop cognitive shortcuts to make these decisions with minimal effort (e.g., Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Simon 1957). Consequently, voters rely on a number of easy-to-collect and understand bits of information available during the campaign when making their voting decision (Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001; Popkin 1991). Whether a candidate is affiliated with their political party, shares their cultural background, or has the backing of political groups they trust may communicate just as much about the candidate's issue positions and job qualifications as an in-depth study of all available information.

For the purposes of our study, previous research finds that voting decisions are substantially influenced by the endorsements of political groups (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994). Relying on what Brady and Sniderman (1985) call the *likability heuristic*, individuals

need only know whether they like or dislike the group endorsing a candidate. If people like a political group and see it as aligned with their values and interests, then they can trust that the group would make the same decisions they would under complete information. Conversely, if people dislike a political group and see it in opposition to their values and interests, then they can assume that the group would make the opposite decision than they would. As long as people choose to like groups that align with their values and dislike those that do not, endorsements are an efficient information shortcut, because they lead individuals to make a correct voting decision regardless of whether the cue is from a group they like or one they dislike (Lupia 1994).

Currently, a debate exists over whether heuristics, like endorsements, are useful to all citizens. Some scholars argue that heuristics are most useful among the least politically informed (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991). Because these individuals do not pay much attention to politics, they lack "encyclopedic" knowledge about the candidates and must use information shortcuts to help them make accurate voting decisions. Thus, by using an endorsement as a heuristic for whether the candidate would be a good representative for their interests, politically unaware voters can make decisions as if they possess encyclopedic knowledge of the candidates.

In contrast, other scholars caution that an information shortcut can only be effective and efficient if the user knows that the shortcut exists. If the individual lacks the contextual information necessary to realize the political implications of a group's endorsement, then he or she will be no better off knowing this piece of information than not knowing it (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Zaller 1992). Accordingly, heuristics may actually better serve people who are more aware of politics and, thus, possess a greater store of contextual knowledge (Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Individuals who are aware of the group that has come knocking on their door to endorse a candidate and can place the group in the political landscape should be able to use the

group's endorsement as a useful cue. If they have reason to like the group, they will be more inclined to take its recommendation and less inclined if they dislike the group. In contrast, individuals who do not recognize the political relevance of the group will, at best, only be able to take the message at face value.

Experimental Design

Data

In the fall of 2006, we conducted a field experiment with the help of a well-known liberal issue advocacy group that focuses on women's issues. The group endorsed the Democratic candidates in two competitive statehouse races (Districts 156 and 161) located in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and deployed campaign workers to canvass the districts on behalf of the Democratic candidates. Using both traditional and nontraditional strategies, the group selected 67,076 individuals from 39,595 households from the registered voter file whom it believed could be persuaded to support their preferred candidate. Its traditional target universe consisted of over 24,000 registered Democrats and approximately 11,000 unaffiliated voters, and its nontraditional target universe consisted of nearly 22,000 females who are registered Republicans and 10,000 males (or individuals who did not list their sex) who are registered Republican and infrequent voters. The group surmised that females and infrequent voters who are registered Republican may be more sympathetic to liberal stances on women's issues, such as access to birth control and abortion and, thus, open to supporting Democratic candidates.

We randomly assigned households into one of four experimental conditions. Subjects in the first condition were slated to receive door-to-door canvassing, those in the second group were slated to receive door-to-door canvassing followed by a phone call, those in the third group were to receive only a phone call, and subjects in the fourth group were assigned to receive no contact

(see Table 1). We stratified the randomization by whether the voter file recorded a phone number for the household so that subjects without phone numbers were not assigned to any of the phone call conditions. A randomization test confirmed that the available covariates in the voter file (age, party registration, household size, sex, precinct, and voter history) do not jointly predict experimental assignment (District 156: no phone number listed, $?^2[47] = 43.49$, $p = 0.619$, phone number listed, $?^2[235] = 230.98$, $p = 0.562$; District 161: no phone number listed, $?^2[61] = 55.24$, $p = 0.684$, phone number listed, $?^2[310] = 302.06$, $p = 0.616$).[2]

[Insert Table 1 about here]

After the election, we hired a reputable survey research firm to conduct a survey of a random sample of subjects from all of the experimental conditions in both districts. From each target population we randomly sampled 12,000 households with phone numbers listed in the voter file for the survey, of which 2,000 completed interviews (1,000 in each district). After removing non-eligible phone numbers from the sample (e.g., fax line or business number) the response rate is 30.6 percent, which is in line with the performance of current-day telephone surveys.[3] Because we were unable to survey everyone in our sample, the generalizability of our results is necessarily restricted to the population of individuals who take telephone surveys. Although this is not ideal, analyses of observational survey data are subject to the same limitation in generalizability. The advantage of our study over an observational one is that the incomplete response rate does not aversely affect the internal validity of the study. Randomization checks for the survey data show that available covariates do not jointly predict experimental assignment (District 156: $?^2[230] = 210.78$, $p = 0.814$; District 161: $?^2[295] = 294.37$, $p = 0.499$). Moreover, the response rates do not differ significantly across experimental

[2] We regress treatment assignment on the covariates using multinomial logit in order to obtain these quantities.
[3] The response rate was calculated using AAPOR definition 1, which is the most conservative (AAPOR 2006).

groups, demonstrating (as one would expect with randomly assigned groups) that the same proportion of survey-takers existed in each of the groups (District 156: $?^2[5] = 3.11$, $p = 0.684$; District 161: $?^2[5] = 3.53$, $p = 0.619$).

Background

Pennsylvania Politics: Competitiveness of the 2006 elections

The 2006 elections were competitive on a national scale. However, since Pennsylvania has always been tightly contested, expectations ran high that the Democrats might gain control of one chamber of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the House of Representatives (mostly because only half the Senate was up for reelection). To add to the already pro-Democratic mood in the state (buoyed by the candidacies of Democratic incumbent Governor Ed Rendell and Democratic US Senate candidate Bob Casey, Jr., both favored to win statewide), the legislative elections had the added dimension of a highly public "scandal" – the pay raise lawmakers first approved in the summer of 2005 and later rescinded. The political damage was done, but to members of both parties, since support for the pay raise was bipartisan. This issue attracted a variety of serious primary challenges to incumbents in May 2006, and indeed 15 incumbents were defeated, 11 Republicans and four Democrats (Jacobson 2006). Geography explained more voter outrage than party, as only one of the defeated incumbents was from the southeastern part of the state and only one from the Northeastern portion. This was mostly a central and western Pennsylvania phenomenon. However, it helped set up an anti-incumbent mood that ran strong throughout the 2006 election cycle (Jacobson 2006). Going into this election, Democrats needed to pick up eight seats statewide to control the lower chamber.

Swing Districts in Southeastern Pennsylvania

On primary day in May, a special election was held in Chester County (west of Philadelphia) to fill a vacancy in a state Senate seat caused by the death of the incumbent Republican. The Democratic candidate, County Commissioner Andrew Dinniman defeated Republican Carol Aichele by a 13 point margin in a highly Republican district. Indeed, the seat had been Republican since the Civil War. This victory directed the attention of parties and interest groups to the entire southeastern region for opportunities to expand their ranks (Petersen 2006). This led to intense focus on the 156th (in Chester County and overlapping with the 19th Senate district) and the 161st legislative district (in neighboring Delaware County).

The 156th District. Jeff Price of the Philadelphia Inquirer explains that the district of retiring Republican Representative Elinor Z. Taylor had voter registration of 20,941 Republicans, 12,185 Democrats and 6,236 who cited no affiliation. Price (2006) noted that "even with that GOP registration edge of roughly 7-4, political observers are predicting a close race, given the strength of Democrats at the top of the ticket -- Gov. Rendell and U.S. Senate candidate Bob Casey Jr. -- the current tough national political climate for Republicans, and the upset victory by Democrat Andrew Dinniman in May's State Senate race in Chester County. Dinniman's 19th District overlaps the 156th."

The candidates in this open seat race were Republican Shannon Royer and Democrat Barbara McIlvaine Smith. Royer was a West Chester Borough Councilman and long time legislative staffer, first for Congressman Bob Walker in the 1990s and just before this campaign, served as the regional coordinator for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Smith was also a member of the West Chester Borough Council, as well as an educator and activist in the

area who had previously announced her intention to retire from politics. She was recruited to make this race.

Given the Republicans' registration advantage cited above, one wonders why this race became competitive. Dinniman's special election victory combined with a general anti-incumbent sentiment and strong polling numbers by top of the ticket Democrats Rendell and Casey gave the Democrats hope. However, no one would have predicted precisely how close this race would be. On election night, the results of this particular race were too close to call. It took over a month of recounts before Democrat Smith was declared the winner by 28 votes on December 21, 2006. Even more amazing – the outcome of this race determined that the Democrats would have the majority in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

The 161st District. This district's dynamic was quite different, as Democratic challenger Bryan Lentz took on 28 year Republican incumbent Tom Gannon. This district is in Delaware County, and had proven safe for Rep. Gannon since 1978. Gannon voted for the unpopular pay raise, though he later backed its repeal. Lentz, a former prosecutor and Iraq war veteran, presented himself as a mainstream Democratic alternative. Lentz proved to be a strong candidate from the start and was quick to line up support from a variety of interest groups early on. However, the dynamic shifted clearly toward Lentz in late September in response to an ad run by the House Republican Campaign Committee alleging that Lentz, as a defense attorney, "helped" put a child predator back on the street (Schaeffer 2006). The ad was roundly criticized and the campaign was seen to be extremely close after that. On Election Day, Lentz beat Gannon by 820 votes out of 27,870 cast.

Protocol

The interest group we worked with joined many other interest groups and party organizations in their interest in these two state house races. Because of the extensive attention paid to other up ballot races (Governor, US Senate, US House –both the 6th and 7th districts) in media and television advertising, groups active in the 156th and 161st used direct contact extensively. In the case of our group, this included door-to-door canvassing and phone calls. Because subjects were assigned to these conditions randomly, the effects of television advertising, news coverage, and the efforts of the other groups and candidate campaigns cancel out, allowing us to estimate the *marginal* effect of our group's effort. Subjects in each group were equally likely to receive contact from another group or campaign and read or hear the same news stories. Consequently, random assignment controls for any unobservable factors that influences subjects' voting decisions.

The group paid canvassers and phone callers to work from the same script. Campaign workers first asked treatment group contacts to identify the issue (or issues) they saw as the most important and followed by asking how important they viewed "protecting access to family planning services." The third and final question asked contacts which statehouse candidate they would vote for "if the election were held today." If the contact said that protecting access to family planning was important to them (and they did not overtly express opposition), campaign workers concluded the contact by reading the following endorsement of the Democratic candidates:[4]

[4] All door-to-door canvassers worked from this script. Phone bank callers were randomly assigned to read either this script or one very similar. Preliminary analyses did not find significant differences between the two scripts with respect to vote preference. Consequently, we do not make a distinction between the scripts in the analyses reported here. The alternate script read:

> Okay, thanks for answering those questions. Just to let you know, [GROUP] has endorsed (Bryan Lentz/ McIlvaine Smith) because (he/she) believes the current attacks on birth control and reproductive healthcare must stop. (Bryan Lentz/McIlvaine Smith) will work on behalf of Pennsylvania families to keep

> Okay, thanks for answering those questions. Just to let you know, [GROUP] has endorsed (Bryan Lentz/McIlvaine Smith) because of (his/her) stance on access to birth control, cervical cancer screenings, mammogram services, and his support for reproductive healthcare rights. *(If they say: Does that mean (he/she) supports abortion? Answer: It's my understanding that (he/she) has expressed the right to choose abortion, though that is not (his/her) top priority.*)

Measures

We measured candidate preferences, our dependent variable of interest, in the post-election survey by asking respondents, "In the election for your state house representative the candidates were ([Democrat Barbara McIlvaine Smith and Republican Shannon Royer]/[Democrat Bryan Lentz and Republican Tom Gannon]). Which candidate did you vote for?"[5] We instructed interviewers to rephrase the question as "which candidate did you prefer" if respondents said they did not vote. We coded responses as 1 if they voted for or preferred the Democrat and 0, otherwise.[6] When the updated voter file is released by the state of Pennsylvania, we will be able to combine this measure with validated turn out data.

Placing the hypotheses articulated in the previous section in the context of our study, if people use group endorsements as a heuristic, we expect campaign contact to diminish the support for these candidates among self-identified Republicans but not self-identified Democrats. Moreover, diminished support among Republicans should be observed even if they hold liberal

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> government intrusion out of personal healthcare decisions. *(If they say: Does that mean (he/she) supports abortion? Answer: It's my understanding that (he/she) has expressed the right to choose abortion, though that is not (hi/her)s top priority.*)

[5] We randomly rotated the order in which the candidates were listed.

[6] Note that this coding scheme removes non-responses from the analysis, but because experimental conditions were randomly assigned, we can safely assume that missing data occurs randomly and, thus, excluding these observations from the analysis does not threaten to bias our inferences. Our results do not change if we include these responses and model the ITT effects using multinomial logit.

views on reproductive issues, which stands in contrast to the alternative hypothesis implicit in the nontraditional targeting approach. We test these hypotheses with measures of partisanship and abortion attitudes obtained from the post-election survey. The partisanship item uses the standard SRC question wording, "Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?"[7] The abortion item wording is also common, "Would you like to see the government and the courts make it harder to get an abortion than it is now, make it easier to get an abortion than it is now, or leave the ability to get an abortion the same as it is now?"[8]

Finally, in order to test competing hypotheses about the effects of political awareness, we asked respondents factual questions about politics and constructed a political awareness scale (cf. Price and Zaller 1993). Specifically, we asked respondents identify the position held by Condolezza Rice, Tony Blair, John Roberts, and Harry Reid.[9] Correct answers are coded as 1 and any other response are coded as 0.[10]

Findings

The estimation of causal effects is somewhat complicated with these data, because our group, like all campaigns, was unable to contact everyone targeted. Failure to treat a portion of the treatment groups does not bias inference if it is handled properly. An inappropriate approach would compare those whom the group contacted to those whom they did not. It ignores random assignment and, thus, forfeits the benefits of randomization. Survey respondents who are home and open to talking to campaign workers are likely more politically engaged than those who are

[7] We rotated the order in which Democrat and Republican were listed.
[8] We rotated the order in which "make it easier" and "make it harder" were listed.
[9] The scale reliability coefficient for these four items, alpha = 0.661.
[10] We accepted as correct answers, Secretary of State or any mention of the State Department or National Security Advisor for Rice, British Prime Minister or any mention of leader of England for Tony Blair, Chief Justice of U.S. Supreme Court or any mention of Supreme Court justice for John Roberts, and because of recent change in control of the U.S. Senate, we accepted either majority or minority leader for Harry Reid.

unavailable. Unless we can perfectly account for the selection process that underlies the willingness to speak with campaigns, comparing contacted individuals to uncontacted ones will generate biased causal estimates.[11]

Instead of taking this flawed approach, we compare respondents who were assigned to the treatment group – irrespective of whether they were contacted – to respondents who were assigned to the control group and calculate the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect. Since assignment is random, these experimental groups should not differ significantly in their preferences for the candidates, and if they do we can confidently attribute the difference to the intervention of the campaign. The ITT effect also has an intuitive interpretation, as it quantifies how many individuals a campaign must *attempt* to contact in order to gain (or loose) one supporter. Moreover, once we know the ITT effect, it is a simple matter to calculate that average-treatment-on-treated (ATT) effect, which quantifies how many individuals a campaign must *actually* contact in order to gain (or loose) one supporter. It is this estimand that the flawed approach attempts to estimate but cannot without accounting for the selection process underlying contact. Because we know the selection process underlying assignment (it is random) and assignment is a necessary condition for contact, we are able to estimate the ATT by using random assignment as an instrument for contact (see Arceneaux, Gerber, and Green 2006). (Unfortunately, at the time of writing we have not yet merged the campaign's contact records, so we are unable to report the ATT estimates.)

Table 2 displays the ITT effects with respect to vote preference for all subjects who responded to the vote preference question (n = 1800). Basically, these results show that the

[11] More formally, the problem with this approach is that it requires the assumption that there is no unobserved covariate that is correlated with both contact, c_i, and the dependent variable. If there is, $\text{cov}(c_i, u_i) \neq 0$, where u_i = the disturbance term. This, of course, violates a major assumption underlying all regression approaches, and leads to biased parameter estimates.

group's grassroots campaign backfired. In both the 156th and 161st District, door-to-door canvassing decreased support for the Democratic candidates, and in the 156th, phone calls and canvassing augmented with phone calls also diminished support for the Democratic candidate. Taken together, as the pooled model shows, the group's canvassing effort reduced support by 8.8 percentage points relative to the control group ($p = 0.015$, one-tailed); canvassing augmented with a follow-up phone call reduced support by 4.6 percentage points ($p = 0.103$, one-tailed); and phone calls reduced support by 3.4 percentage points ($p = 0.136$, one-tailed).

[Table 2 about here]

Table 3 displays the effects of grassroots campaigning by partisanship. As we anticipated, the group's endorsement of the Democratic candidates had strong negative effects among Republican respondents. Looking at the pooled analysis, Republicans in the canvassing condition were 14.1 percentage points less likely to support the Democratic candidate than Republicans in the control group ($p = 0.005$, one-tailed), 8.7 percentage points less likely in the canvassing group augmented by a follow-up phone call, and 7.5 percentage points less likely in the phone only group ($p = 0.04$ for both, one-tailed).[12] The group's campaign, on the other hand, had small positive but statistically insignificant effects on Democrats. It appears that Republicans used the group's endorsement of these candidates as a heuristic to support a different candidate *even though the group did not mention the partisan affiliation of the candidates it endorsed*.

[Table 3 about here]

Moreover, we continue to find negative effects on Democratic candidate support among Republicans who express pro-choice views. Table 4 displays the effects of the group's

[12] Intriguingly, the group also had a negative effect on the support of the Democratic candidates among Independents.

grassroots campaign on statehouse candidate preference among respondents who said they wanted access to abortion to remain unchanged or made easier. As the pooled analysis demonstrates, even Republicans who are unopposed to abortion were less likely to support the Democratic candidate after being contacted by the campaign. These findings buttress further the thesis that people use endorsements as a decision heuristic. Republicans, it appears, saw an endorsement by a liberal group as evidence that they would not be well-represented by the endorsed candidate – *even if they agreed with the group on the issue contained in its message*.

[Table 4 about here]

Finally, we consider whether political awareness moderates the use of endorsements as a heuristic by interacting the political awareness scale with indicators for the experimental conditions. The results, which are displayed in Table 5, are consistent with the compensatory thesis (e.g., Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991). As Figure 1 illustrates, Republicans are far more likely to withdraw support from the Democratic candidate in response to the group's contact as their level of political awareness goes down. If we look at the level of support among Republicans in the control group, 25 percent of politically unaware respondents (*political awareness* < 2) supported the Democrat, while only 12.8 percent of politically aware respondents (*political awareness* > 2) supported the Democrat. Simply put, because politically aware subjects largely opposed the Democratic candidate it is unlikely that an additional piece of negative information about the candidate would do much to change their vote preference one way or another. Taken together, these findings suggest that politically unaware subjects benefited more from learning about the group's endorsement than did politically aware subjects.

[Table 5 and Figure 1 about here]

Conclusion

Our analysis demonstrates that the information interest groups provide in elections can have significant unintended effects, especially when voters' familiarity with or opinion of the groups is greater than their familiarity with the candidates in a race. Use of group endorsements as a heuristic provides both positive and negative costs – and in this instance, the negative costs are substantial. Our experiment confirms the importance of the group endorsement as heuristic, but also suggests further avenues for research in state elections. In this election, and in our survey, much emphasis was placed on knowledge and understanding of national political trends. Voters in the entire population were exposed to a wide variety of appeals on television, in direct mail, and in direct contact regarding the Pennsylvania US Senate race, the Pennsylvania Governor's race, and (in the case of television in particular) three competitive US House races. The information available to voters about these two statehouse races was relatively low by contrast. Our group canvassed and phoned exclusively in these two statehouse races in the belief that other candidates farther up the ticket did not need further campaign assistance. By focusing exclusively on the statehouse races, our group may have given persuadable voters one of the few pieces of information available to them about this race, and given the clear negative predisposition of voters to the group, that information provided a negative cue. The argument is further supported by the evidence from the survey that voters who agreed with the position of the group on the issue emphasized in the direct contact still decided against supporting the candidate with the group's endorsement.

Our findings also corroborate the thesis that politically unaware citizens can use heuristics as a way to compensate for their lack of knowledge (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991). However, we do not see these findings as a repudiation of scholars who argue that heuristics may

lead politically unaware citizens astray either (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Rather, our findings may simply demonstrate that politically unaware individuals may use heuristics effectively if they are also given the contextual information necessary to apply the heuristics. In our study, the group's message not only announced their endorsement of the candidate but also explicitly identified their stance on an easy-to-understand issue (abortion) on which even politically unaware individuals likely have crystallized attitudes. Consequently, we believe that future research should focus more on the *conditions* under which heuristics compensate for low levels of political information.

Finally, although nontraditional targeting backfired for our group, these findings do not imply that all nontraditional strategies are doomed to fail. Perhaps a less controversial issue or issue group would have better success, or a more sophisticated targeting model would do a better job identifying persuadable voters. One cannot know without conducting additional studies. Until then, our findings should be interpreted as a cautionary tale that canvassing one's opponents may sometimes do more harm than good.

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Table 1: Experimental Assignment

	District 156		District 161	
Experimental Condition	**Number of Households**	**Number of Individuals**	**Number of Households**	**Number of Individuals**
Canvass Only	4,162	6,272	4,221	7,056
Canvass + Phone Call	8,353	14,169	8,612	15,712
Phone Call Only	2,846	5,055	4,434	5,149
Control	4,150	6,195	2,817	7,468
Total	19,511	31,691	20,084	35,385

Table 2: The Effect of Group Campaigning on Support for Democratic Statehouse Candidates

Variables	156th	161st	Pooled
Canvass Only	-0.101	-0.073	-0.088
	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.040)
Canvass + Phone	-0.096	0.007	-0.046
	(0.049)	(0.053)	(0.036)
Phone Only	-0.059	-0.007	-0.034
	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.031)
Democrat	0.369	0.279	0.322
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.026)
Republican	-0.322	-0.313	-0.319
	(0.033)	(0.037)	(0.025)
Female	-0.015	-0.004	-0.012
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.021)
District 156			0.018
			(0.020)
Constant	0.545	0.496	0.513
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.037)
N	910	890	1800
Adjusted R^2	0.35	0.26	0.31
F	83.924	52.668	114.222

Note: OLS coefficients in cells and standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable = 1 if response preferred the Democratic statehouse candidate, 0 otherwise.

Table 3: The Effect of Group Campaigning on Support for Democratic Statehouse Candidates by Partisanship

	156th			161st			Pooled		
Variables	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**
Canvass Only	-0.177	-0.195	0.102	-0.104	-0.141	0.025	-0.142	-0.164	0.056
	(0.074)	(0.148)	(0.091)	(0.079)	(0.128)	(0.097)	(0.054)	(0.097)	(0.067)
Canvass + Phone	-0.097	-0.11	-0.077	-0.084	0.002	0.098	-0.087	-0.048	0.009
	(0.066)	(0.134)	(0.075)	(0.076)	(0.118)	(0.088)	(0.050)	(0.088)	(0.058)
Phone Only	-0.102	-0.011	-0.029	-0.042	0.025	0.015	-0.075	0.011	-0.007
	(0.056)	(0.117)	(0.067)	(0.062)	(0.103)	(0.074)	(0.042)	(0.077)	(0.050)
Female	-0.011	-0.059	0.009	0.059	-0.065	-0.004	0.023	-0.062	-0.002
	(0.045)	(0.075)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.066)	(0.048)	(0.032)	(0.049)	(0.033)
District 156							-0.02	-0.008	0.08
							(0.027)	(0.047)	(0.032)
Constant	0.254	0.56	0.858	0.175	0.523	0.734	0.226	0.542	0.759
	(0.063)	(0.119)	(0.068)	(0.067)	(0.102)	(0.074)	(0.047)	(0.078)	(0.053)
N	391	230	289	324	235	331	715	465	620
Adjusted R^2	0.01	0.001	0.004	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.004	0.01	0.004
F	1.495	1.066	1.251	0.97	0.971	0.488	1.657	1.549	1.493

Note: OLS coefficients in cells and standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable = 1 if response preferred the Democratic statehouse candidate, 0 otherwise.

Table 4: The Effect of Group Campaigning on Support for Democratic Statehouse Candidates Among Respondents who Possess Pro-Choice Attitudes by Partisanship

	156th			161st			Pooled		
Variables	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**
Canvass Only	-0.21	-0.24	0.056	-0.071	-0.154	-0.038	-0.148	-0.189	0.004
	(0.106)	(0.167)	(0.085)	(0.117)	(0.145)	(0.100)	(0.078)	(0.109)	(0.067)
Canvass + Phone	-0.07	-0.192	-0.079	-0.055	-0.001	0.027	-0.064	-0.094	-0.025
	(0.098)	(0.150)	(0.071)	(0.109)	(0.134)	(0.092)	(0.072)	(0.099)	(0.058)
Phone Only	-0.1	-0.066	-0.027	-0.022	-0.027	-0.039	-0.067	-0.036	-0.035
	(0.082)	(0.134)	(0.064)	(0.090)	(0.115)	(0.078)	(0.060)	(0.087)	(0.051)
Female	-0.022	-0.022	0.038	0.043	-0.097	-0.021	0.01	-0.057	0.002
	(0.066)	(0.082)	(0.042)	(0.064)	(0.074)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.054)	(0.033)
District 156							0.01	-0.001	0.096
							(0.040)	(0.052)	(0.032)
Constant	0.329	0.637	0.883	0.207	0.616	0.815	0.268	0.621	0.805
	(0.089)	(0.133)	(0.064)	(0.095)	(0.111)	(0.079)	(0.068)	(0.087)	(0.054)
N	234	193	255	198	190	293	432	383	548
Adjusted R^2	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.01
F	1.048	1.023	1.075	0.256	0.914	0.353	0.746	1.161	1.97

Note: OLS coefficients in cells and standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable = 1 if response preferred the Democratic statehouse candidate, 0 otherwise.

Table 5: The Effect of Group Campaigning on Support for Democratic Statehouse Candidates by Partisanship and Political Awareness

	156th			161st			Pooled		
Variables	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**	**Republicans**	**Independents**	**Democrats**
Canvass Only	-0.546	-0.57	-0.045	-0.223	0.061	-0.322	-0.348	-0.272	-0.181
	(0.197)	(0.271)	(0.217)	(0.180)	(0.288)	(0.217)	(0.130)	(0.196)	(0.153)
Canvass + Phone	-0.523	-0.452	-0.153	-0.159	-0.03	0.011	-0.302	-0.25	-0.058
	(0.178)	(0.287)	(0.161)	(0.170)	(0.300)	(0.170)	(0.120)	(0.206)	(0.115)
Phone Only	-0.503	-0.217	-0.141	0.028	-0.023	-0.031	-0.204	-0.139	-0.068
	(0.160)	(0.226)	(0.149)	(0.150)	(0.247)	(0.134)	(0.106)	(0.166)	(0.099)
Political Awareness	-0.15	-0.033	0.018	-0.001	0.059	0.069	-0.069	0.008	0.05
	(0.051)	(0.078)	(0.051)	(0.060)	(0.082)	(0.047)	(0.037)	(0.056)	(0.034)
Canvass Only x Awareness	0.131	0.167	0.047	0.061	-0.08	0.107	0.086	0.049	0.074
	(0.071)	(0.101)	(0.074)	(0.078)	(0.103)	(0.077)	(0.051)	(0.071)	(0.053)
Canvass + Phone x Awareness	0.155	0.136	0.038	0.036	0.016	0.032	0.089	0.08	0.031
	(0.063)	(0.105)	(0.062)	(0.072)	(0.108)	(0.067)	(0.046)	(0.074)	(0.046)
Phone Only x Awareness	0.145	0.091	0.048	-0.032	0.04	0.011	0.051	0.071	0.024
	(0.055)	(0.085)	(0.057)	(0.065)	(0.089)	(0.053)	(0.040)	(0.061)	(0.039)
Female	-0.013	-0.071		0.07	-0.056	0.023	0.025	-0.062	0.02
	(0.045)	(0.074)		(0.047)	(0.065)	(0.047)	(0.032)	(0.049)	(0.032)
District 156							-0.014	-0.019	0.081
							(0.028)	(0.047)	(0.032)
Constant	0.67	0.644	0.823	0.168	0.362	0.576	0.39	0.527	0.633
	(0.156)	(0.216)	(0.134)	(0.144)	(0.238)	(0.119)	(0.102)	(0.160)	(0.089)
N	391	230	289	324	235	331	715	465	620
Adjusted R^2	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.001	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.03	0.05
F	1.856	1.738	2.259	1.011	1.744	3.275	1.546	2.564	4.741

Note: OLS coefficients in cells and standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable = 1 if response preferred the Democratic statehouse candidate, 0 otherwise. Political awareness = number of factual questions answered correctly (ranges from 0 to 4).

Figure 1: Treatment Effects among Republicans by Political Awareness, Pooled Analysis

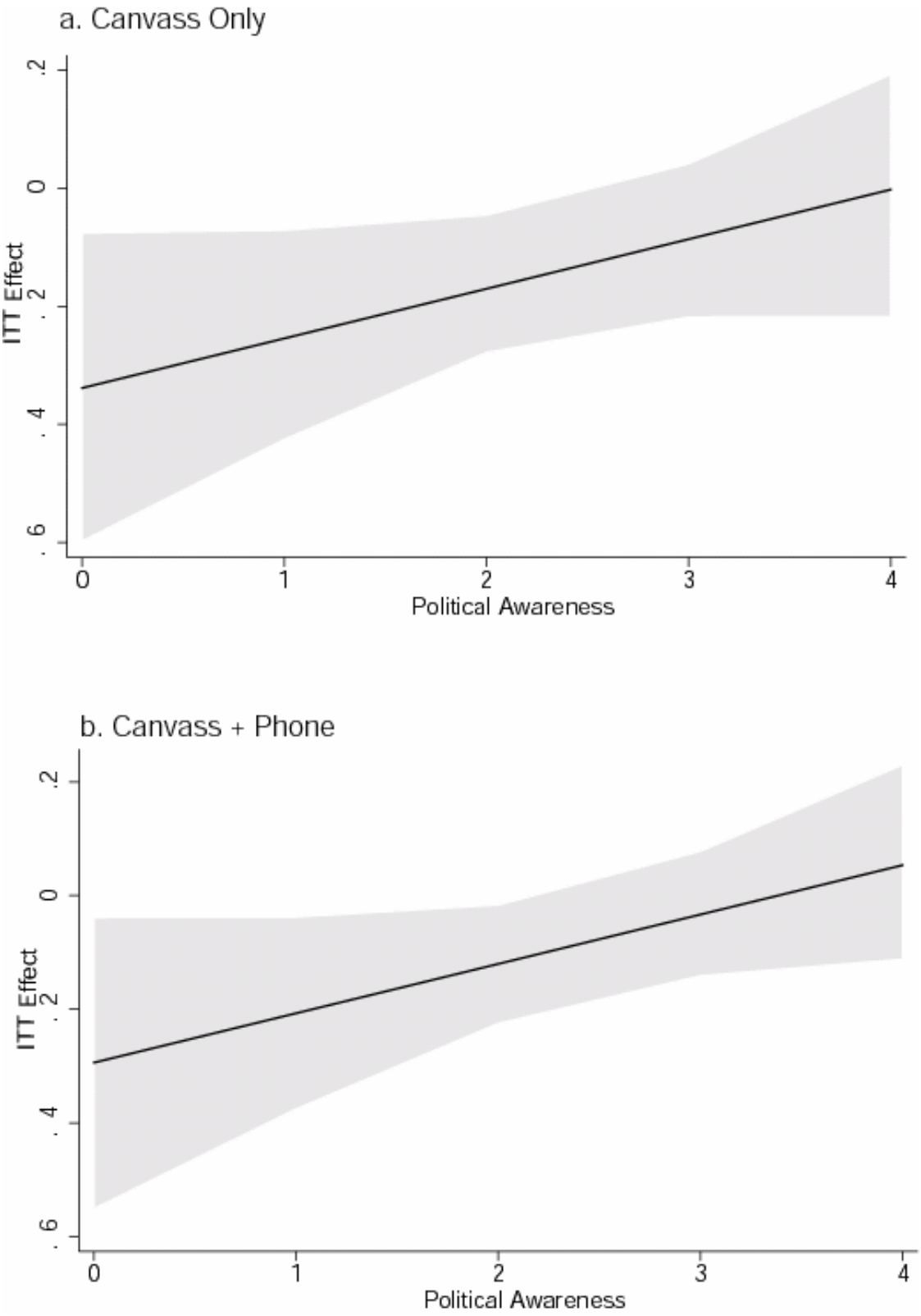
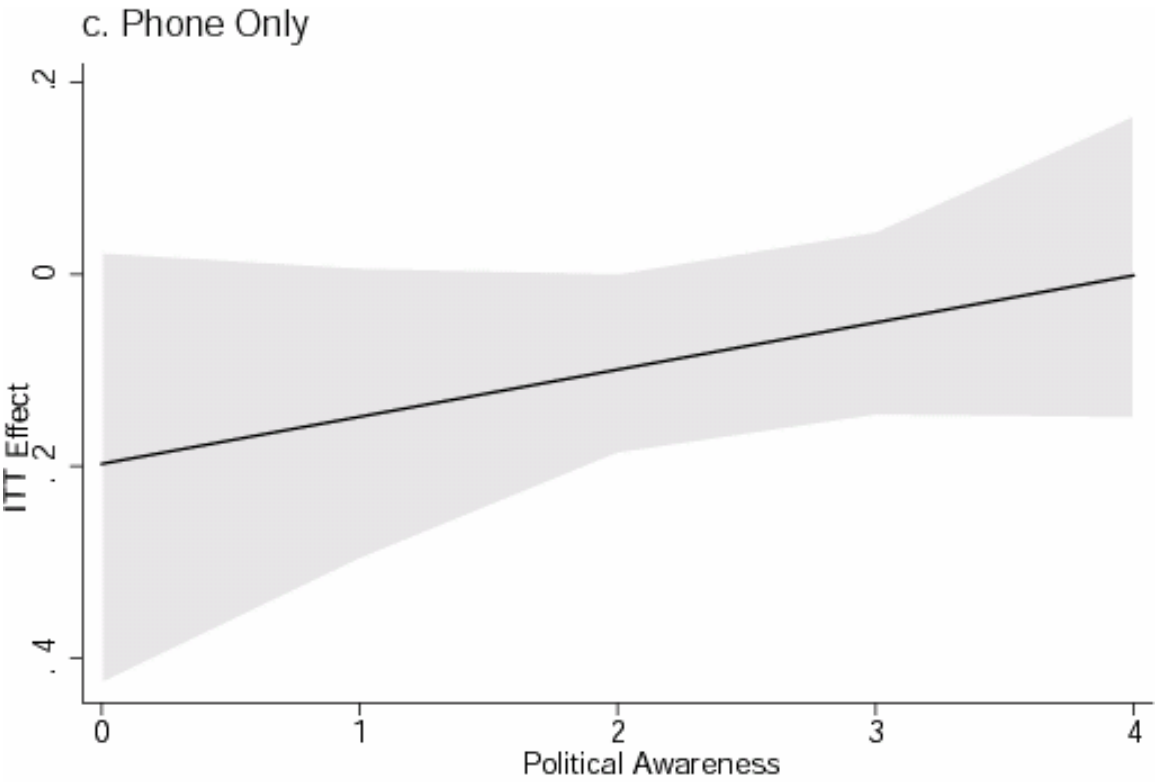


Figure 1 continued



Note: ITT effects estimates calculated from pooled model for Republicans in Table 5. Solid line represents the ITT effect and the shaded area represents the 95-percent confidence interval. Confidence intervals simulated with the *Clarify* program (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).