Accounting for Candidate Obfuscation and Electoral Context when Modeling Issue Voting under Uncertainty

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Introduction

Spatial theories of voting argue that voters compare their policy preferences to the issue positions of the candidates and then choose the candidate who best represents their preferred policies (Enelow and Hinich 1984). Voters, however, are expected to have only imperfect information about where the candidates stand on issues. This uncertainty can have multiple sources, including candidate obfuscation (Downs 1957, Page 1978) as well as the differential costs of acquiring information (Alvarez and Franklin 1994), and is often considered to be a ubiquitous part of the political environment. Uncertainty also has important consequences for how voters choose among candidates during an election, operating as a "cost" that reduces the likelihood that a voter will support a given candidate (Bartels 1986, Alvarez 1997).

Our paper seeks to expand upon the empirical evidence that uncertainty operates as a cost to voters when choosing between candidates. We use an estimation strategy applied by Bartels (1985) in which predicted probabilities of nonresponse to candidate placement questions (constructed from a first-stage analysis) serve as measures of uncertainty in a (second-stage) regression of proximity voting. We expand upon Bartels's approach in two ways. We first seek to empirically distinguish between the effects of external sources of uncertainty attributable to candidate ambiguity and the internal sources of uncertainty due to voter attention to campaigns. Examining differences in levels of uncertainty across different presidential campaigns provides leverage over the question of candidate ambiguity. The internal sources of uncertainty are assessed by the effects of information, media coverage, political interest, strength of party identification, education, and other demographic characteristics on uncertainty, which are expected to be constant across election cycles. Differences across candidates and issues capture, to a large extent, the effects of candidate ambiguity. Second, we investigate whether the

electoral effect of uncertainty varies by source, allowing candidate ambiguity to have an effect that differs from that of uncertainty due to the voter's internal characteristics.

Uncertainty about Candidate Issue Positions

The classic literature has defined uncertainty in terms of the level of information citizens have about some aspect of the political world (e.g., Page 1978, Shepsle 1972, Enelow and Hinich 1984). Downs (1957), for instance, described uncertainty as, "any lack of sure knowledge about the course of past, present, future, or hypothetical events," (p. 77). Particular interest among the early studies was given to the incentives that candidates have to present ambiguous policy positions to voters. The incentive to gain votes, Downs wrote, "encourages parties in a two-party system to be as equivocal as possible about their stands on each controversial issue," and to, "becloud their policies in a fog of ambiguity," (p. 136). Page (1978) provides one of the most comprehensive studies of candidate ambiguity, detailing the lack of specificity in the policy statements made by presidential candidates. "Even the most diligent and successful seeker after information," he noted, "is frustrated by the fact that stands on policy, once found, turn out to be quite unspecific," (p. 162). This lack of specificity stems from the tendency of candidates to talk about issues in vague terms, failing to articulate the intentions, timing, direction, and magnitude of the policies they promote (pp. 163-164). At the congressional level, Senate candidates can affect how clearly voters perceive their positions by altering how much their campaigns choose to emphasize certain issues, as well as how many issues they discuss (Franklin 1991). Moreover, even when candidates attempt to communicate clear positions, they are often frustrated by poor media coverage and scarce campaign resources (Page 1978).

Uncertainty is considered a ubiquitous part of the political world that has multiple sources and consequences on political behavior (Burden 2003). Despite being a fundamental part of politics, there have been few empirical studies on the uncertainty that citizens have about candidate issue positions. Bartels (1986) was the first to develop an empirical method for estimating the cost of uncertainty within the spatial model of voting by using the probability that a respondent will place a candidate on an issue scale as a measure for individual uncertainty. Respondents are assumed to place a candidate on an issue scale if they are sufficiently certain about where the candidate stands on the issue, and will refuse to place the candidate if their level of uncertainty is greater than some unknown threshold.[1] While the individual's level of uncertainty and the threshold value are unobserved, Bartels assumes that this uncertainty is related to observable characteristics such as the individual's level of political involvement and demographic characteristics (p. 713). Among the variables used by Bartels to estimate the individual's level of uncertainty are media exposure, political interest, party identification, and group memberships.

The predicted probability of nonresponse, N_{ijk}, then enters a second-stage vote choice model as a cost of voting for a candidate:

$$-\lambda_{jk}[(M_{ijk} - X_{ik})^2 + \zeta(N_{ijk})] \qquad (1)$$

…where $(M_{ijk} - X_{ik})^2$ is the familiar proximity term representing the squared distance between the candidate's position on an issue (M_{ijk}) and the voter's own preferred position (X_{ik}), λ_{jk} is the issue-specific weight, and ζ is a scale factor that scales the probability of nonresponse to the

[1] Uncertainty is represented as a variance of perceived candidate position on a particular issue, V_{ijk}. Bartels' basic assumption is that the respondent places the candidate if:

$$V_{ijk} \leq T$$

…where T is the unobserved threshold.

same metric as the 7-point issue scales used to calculate the proximity terms. The variance of a candidate's position, as perceived by the voter, is therefore represented as $\zeta * N_{ijk}$.

Bartels noted in footnote 2 that this variance, "represents the *uncertainty in the mind of voter* i about candidate j's position," (p. 710, emphasis from original). Voters differ in how precisely they perceive a candidate's position but have similar mathematical expectations about where that candidate stands on the issue, and hence there are no systematic differences across candidates in the amount of variation. This variability in perceived candidate positions is attributed to factors "internal" to voters, such as their strength of partisanship and attentiveness to politics. In contrast, variability in candidate placement attributable to the candidate's characteristics and behavior are "external" to the voters and manifest as systematic differences across candidates. In other words, voters who do not differ in terms of how precisely they perceive a candidate's position can have divergent expectations about the location of that position, and hence systematic differences exist across candidates in the amount of variation.

Bartels therefore left open the possibility that candidate behavior and characteristics can influence uncertainty, as measured by $\zeta * N_{ijk}$. As noted above, nonresponse to candidate placement is modeled as a function of individual characteristics:

$$N_{ijk} = \beta_{0jk} + \sum_{c} [\beta_{cjk} (Characteristic_{ci})] \qquad (2)$$

As Bartels wrote, "variations in uncertainty due to characteristics and behavior of the candidates will appear as differences in these parameter values from one candidate to another" (p. 713, footnote 6). Internal sources of candidate placement are expected to have the same effect across electoral contexts while candidate differences in the effects of these internal sources represent variability in candidate placement attributable to the candidate.

An important theoretical distinction, though, must be made between strategic candidate ambiguity and voter uncertainty due to candidate behavior and characteristics. Strategic candidate ambiguity might not be captured by differences in the parameter values across candidates in the first-stage nonresponse model. Bartels defines candidate ambiguity as variation in expectations about the location of a candidate's position among voters who do not differ in terms of how precisely they perceive that position (based on their personal characteristics). Yet, voters as a group could be more uncertain about the location of an ambiguous candidate's position, which would be realized by greater variation in the placement location, but no less willing on an individual basis to place that candidate than a less ambiguous one. The ideal situation for the strategic, vote-maximizing candidate is for each voter to perceive the candidate's policy positions as close to their own without realizing that other voters with divergent positions share the same perception of the candidate. To the extent that the candidate can act strategically in taking ambiguous positions, this external variability might not manifest as an increase in the probability of nonresponse. Obviously, the candidate's political opponents have incentives to undermine and counter efforts to develop an "everything to everyone" image through strategic ambiguity on policy issues. They will seek to make voters aware of inconsistencies in the candidate's positions and thereby ensure that variation (across voters) in expectations about the location of the candidate's position translate into greater voter uncertainty about where the candidate stands. In sum, candidate ambiguity can result in either an increase in the variation of perceived candidate locations with no change in the probability of placement nonresponse or an increase in voter uncertainty as represented by an increase in the probability of nonresponse. Our (first-stage) analysis below considers this question by investigating the

extent of candidate-specific differences in the baseline level of and the effect of political sophistication on nonresponse to candidate placement questions.

To the extent that candidate ambiguity influences the probability of nonresponse, the effect of candidate ambiguity should have the clearest effect on the constant and the effect of political sophistication. First, the attributes of a candidate can affect how much information citizens have about that candidate. Incumbents, for instance, have a track record in office that citizens can rely on when assessing their issue positions. While politicians often make policy promises that they are unable or unwilling to enact, citizens can use an incumbent's past performance as a reliable source of information about which policies the candidate is likely to enact if reelected. Thus, the base level of uncertainty is expected to be lower for incumbents than for challengers or candidates running in an open election. In addition, the Republican and Democratic parties each have a core set of issues that they "own" or emphasize more than the other party (Petrocik 1996). This theoretical perspective suggests that voters will be more certain about where Democrats stand on domestic spending and social issues and where Republicans stand on foreign policy and tax cuts. The implication is that we should observe lower predicted probabilities of nonresponse on issues that are "owned" by each of the political parties. These issue-ownership effects should be represented as differences in the baseline level of predicted nonresponse.

In addition to candidate attributes, strategic behavior by candidates is expected to influence the uncertainty that citizens have about candidate's issue positions. Benjamin Page (1978) views ambiguity as a result of emphasis allocation and the limited resources available with which to communicate to voters. Candidates' ability to communicate clear policy positions to the electorate depends on the amount of time and money they have at their disposal, as well as

the priority they give to communicating policy versus personal information to voters. When a candidate works to make his or her position on an issue obvious to the public, then the baseline level of nonresponse should decline as the public becomes more aware of the candidate's position.

Yet this effect is expected to vary according to the individual's level of political sophistication. Voters with a more complete and independent understanding of the candidate's issue position are unlikely to be as affected by candidate ambiguity than voters who are less politically aware. Candidate ambiguity is therefore expected to increase nonresponse among the less informed, who already have higher levels of uncertainty about candidate placement, than the highly informed. Consequently, information differences are expected to be greater for more ambiguous candidates as reflected by larger information coefficients in the first-stage nonresponse model.

In addition to resource allocation, candidates are also likely to obfuscate on issues that represent an electoral liability, such as when they are viewed as outside the mainstream on an issue.[2] Campaigns will try to emphasize other issues or attempt to moderate the candidate's position to make it more appealing to the mass public. The information effect will be larger as candidates obfuscate on these issues, resulting in larger information coefficients when the issue distance between the mass public and the candidate is largest.

Additionally, candidate affect might have an effect in the first-stage nonresponse model. Shepsle (1972) views the cost of uncertainty as a function of risk-averse behavior; the incentive for candidate ambiguity would rise if most citizens were risk acceptant. Citizens may be more risk-acceptant as their affect toward a candidate increases. Bartels (1988) found that perceived

[2] This argument assumes that voters are risk acceptant – give the candidate the benefit of the doubt – when uncertain about the candidate's policy position. Bartels (1986) analysis, however, adopts the perspective that voters are risk averse and therefore "punish" candidates for uncertainty about their positions.

issue distances declined among individuals who held more favorable evaluations of candidates during presidential primary elections. Candidates with a favorable public image can remain ambiguous on the issues and allow citizens to assume that the candidate shares their policy preferences, even if the actual issue distances are larger than the voters perceive. Citizens who like a candidate are gambling that the candidate shares their policy preferences, thus accepting the risk that the candidate will enact policies they do not favor.

This could reduce the level of uncertainty among citizens who have a more favorable image of a candidate, increasing the willingness of respondents to place a candidate on an issue scale. If candidate affect only captures non-issue considerations then it should not have an impact on the probability that an individual will place the candidate. Moreover, if the influence of candidate affect on candidate placement is limited to projection, then it will produce greater variation in candidate placement but no difference in the likelihood of nonresponse. Viewing a candidate more favorably will only lower nonresponse to the extent that candidate ambiguity influences voter uncertainty about where the candidate stands.

The distinction between the two manifestations of candidate ambiguity also has implications for its effect on vote choice. While candidates rarely engage in outright contradictions, candidates may sometimes attempt to selectively and independent present different images to different groups of voters. Page (1976), for instance, argues that, "candidates drop a number of vaguely conflicting hints about what they stand for," and, "from different indications given to different audiences at different times, the average citizen might infer…a candidate's stand," (p. 744). Candidates who are successful at this strategy will gain electoral benefits when different groups of voters perceive the candidate as being closer to them while having no greater uncertainty about where the candidate stands. This form of candidate

ambiguity, in other words, manifests itself as an increase in the variation of perceived candidate locations yet with no change in the probability of nonresponse. Conversely, the second manifestation of candidate ambiguity—an increase in the probability of nonresponse—could occur by increasing voters' risk aversion about where the candidate stands and thereby creating a greater electoral cost for more ambiguous candidates. Voters are likely to punish candidates that are perceived to have "waffled" on an important issue. This appeared to be the case during the 2004 presidential election when John Kerry was widely attacked as "flip-flopping" on funding for the Iraq War (Balz 2004).[3]

Distinguishing between the internal and external sources of uncertainty therefore allows us to examine whether differences exist in the magnitude of their electoral costs. As noted above, internal sources of uncertainty are represented in the first-stage nonresponse model by the effects of individual characteristics (e.g., sophistication) while external sources such as candidate ambiguity are reflected in differences in the effect of these individual characteristics across candidates. Separating the two distinctive components of voter uncertainty allows us to examine whether and to what degree the cost of uncertainty differs according to its source. Specifically, separating candidate-specific effects from the predicted probability of nonresponse (N_{ijk}), thus creating both an internal component (I_{ijk}) and an external component (E_{ijk}), would allow the "cost" of uncertainty to vary in the second-stage vote choice model with each component having a separate scale parameter. Returning to the model proposed by Bartels:

$$-\lambda_{jk}[(M_{ijk} - X_{ik})^2 + \zeta(I_{ijk}) + \eta(E_{ijk})] \qquad (2)$$

[3] Senator Kerry had originally voted in favor of an $87 billion funding bill for the Iraq War and later voted against a separate funding bill. In an unfortunately worded attempt to explain the inconsistency, Kerry explained that, "I actually did vote for the $87 billion before I voted against it," (Balz 2004).

The cost of uncertainty that is due to individual motivation and attentiveness to politics would appears as ζ while the cost of uncertainty attributed to candidate characteristics and behavior would be captured by η. Each component is therefore allowed to have a different effect on the voting decision, with candidate ambiguity (measured in part by E_{ijk}) not constrained to have the same cost associated with the vote choice as internal sources of uncertainty (measured by I_{ijk}).

A final motivation for our study is considering whether the cost of uncertainty revealed by Bartels (1986) holds across presidential election contexts. It is possible that the 1980 presidential race was a unique election year in terms of the influence of uncertainty on vote choice. The Republicans nominated an ideologically-oriented candidate in Ronald Reagan to run against Jimmy Carter, a Democratic incumbent who had changed his policy approach several times during his term in office. Most citizens at the time blamed Carter for the economic downturn and a weak foreign policy, and generally viewed him as having enacted ineffective policies. In this setting, uncertainty might have been a more relevant consideration for voters than during other election years. A full test of Enelow and Hinich's model of issue voting under uncertainty requires expanding the scope of analysis to confirm that uncertainty influences vote choice in other presidential election years.

Methods and Results

In order to examine the different sources of voter uncertainty as well as differences in the cost associated with this uncertainty, we examined data from the National Election Studies Cumulative File. While Bartels's original study examined the 1980 election, we expanded the

analysis to include all presidential years between 1980 and 2004.[4] Many of the issue scales included in the 1980 election study were not asked during later presidential election years. We consequently only consider three 7-point issue scales—Aid to Minorities, Guaranteed Jobs, and Defense Spending—but also include the 7-point ideology scale in the first-stage analysis.[5] Responses were pooled across these years to analyze differences in the sources and costs of uncertainty across candidates.

Bartels (1986) used nonlinear least squares to estimate the two-stage regression model and interpreted the ζ *N_{ijk} term in the second-stage as the variance of perceived candidate placement. Considering that variances cannot be negative, the predicted nonresponse (N_{ijk}) would need to be positive. This makes the use of a linear probability model problematic because the linear model allows the respondent's predicted nonresponse (N_{ijk}) to take negative values, which will translate into negative variance estimates in the second-stage model. While the first-stage predicted nonresponse values could be truncated, the use of probit to estimate the first-stage probabilities of nonresponse is more theoretically appropriate considering that the probit model produces non-negative predictions of the nonresponse probability.[6]

For the first-stage models, respondents were coded 1 if they failed to place a candidate on one of the four issue scales and 0 if they chose to place the candidate on that issue, which serve as the dependent variables for the probit models. In general, our specification of the first-stage models follows the approach adopted by Bartels. The explanatory variables include the

[4] Candidate placement questions for one of the issue scales, Aid to Minorities, were not asked during the 1992 election study. Respondents to the 1992 study are included in the first-stage analysis but are then excluded from some of the second-stage models.

[5] Ideology represents a "package" or "bundle" of related issue positions, and is could therefore capture some of the variation attributed to individual issue positions in the second-stage model, reducing the estimated effect of these individual issue position on vote choice.

[6] Bartels (1986) notes this complication, writing that, "unfortunately, two-stage probit procedures are unwieldy—particularly in this instance, where the second stage requires estimation of the unknown scale factor from the first step together with the separate issue effects," (p. 715).

interviewer rating of the respondent's level of political information and the respondent's education level, media exposure, political interest, age, race (non-white), gender, extremity of self-placement on the particular issue, and party identification (measured with a set of dummy variables, leaving pure independents as the baseline for comparison). We constructed the media exposure and political interest scales from survey questions asking about the respondents' interest in the campaign and how much they cared about the outcome (for political interest) as well as questions about their exposure to campaign messages through four different types of media outlets (for media exposure).[7] Consistent with Bartels, both the media exposure and political interest scales were recoded to range from zero to one.

In addition to these individual demographic and political characteristics, we added separate dummy variables for each year, leaving 2004 as the baseline, to the model in order to capture baseline differences in predicted nonresponse across candidates and election years. These year dummies were then interacted with political information, again leaving 2004 as the baseline year for comparison. Finally, we added a candidate affect variable measuring the number of likes minus the number of dislikes each respondent had toward the candidate. The candidate affect variable ranges from negative five (maximum dislike) to positive five (maximum like).

Table 1 presents the results for these first-stage models for nonresponse to Republican and Democratic candidates for the ideology and guaranteed jobs scales while Table 2 presents the results for the aid to minorities and defense spending scales. Generally, the demographic and political variables had a strong and statistically significant impact on the probability of

[7] Unfortunately, respondents were not asked about exposure to the campaigns through television in the 1988 survey, and were not asked about exposure to magazine material in 2000. Although the media exposure scale was reconstructed for these years, the results of the first-stage models were not affected by the use of these reconstructed scales.

nonresponse across all eight models.[8] In addition, the information coefficients were strong, negative, and statistically significant across all of the models. Turning to the interaction terms, there was considerable variability in the information effect across election years. Political information, for example, had the smallest effect on ideological placement of the candidates in the 1980 election (indicated by the strong positive interaction terms), followed by Republican and Democratic candidates in 1992, and had the largest effect on ideological placement of the candidates during the 2004 election.[9] These differences are roughly consistent with journalistic and anecdotal characterizations of these elections to the extent that there was greater media consensus (and more consistent elite messages) about the ideological positions of Reagan and Carter in 1980 than about those of Bush and Kerry in 2004.

For guaranteed jobs, information had the strongest effects during the 1988 and 2004 elections, and the smallest effect during the 1992 election (regardless of party). Information differences were generally larger among Democrats for aid to minorities, with the largest differences seen in the 1980 through 1988 elections (indicated by the negative and significant interaction terms for these years). Likewise, information had a larger effect among Republicans on defense spending with the strongest information effects found during the 1984 and 1988 elections. The partisan differences across issues seem somewhat counter-intuitive if one expects issue ownership to be associated with a general sense among voters about where the party's presidential candidates stand on its "owned" issues, e.g., lower informational differences in uncertainty about where Democratic candidates stand on aid to minorities and where Republican

[8] In addition to these pooled models, we replicated Bartels' original 1980 analysis which included both the standard NES survey as well as responses for a year-long panel study. For this replication, we used the linear probability model employed by Bartels and only included verified voters. We also included the full range of issue scales included in the 1980 survey. With few exceptions, the coefficients for these replicated models were identical to those reported by Bartels. The slight differences in the size of the coefficients are likely due to the use of STATA and LIMDEP to estimate the models as opposed to SAS, which was used by Bartels.

[9] All of the information interaction terms for ideology were positive, indicating that the information effect was larger for these election years than for the baseline year (2004).

candidates stand on defense spending. Table 3 summarizes the estimated information effect for each candidate per year.

There was also considerable variability in the baseline probability of nonresponse across election years. These results are summarized in Table 4, which presents the estimated average probability of nonresponse for each candidate per year. Comparisons of the probabilities in Table 4 across issues and candidates suggest some systematic patterns associated with incumbency and perhaps issue ownership.

To more systematically analyze the effect of candidate characteristics on the baseline probability of nonresponse, these average estimated probabilities were regressed on the party of the candidate (using a dummy variable for Republican), whether the candidate was an incumbent, separate dummy variables for each issue and interactions with the party (to examine the effects of "issue ownership"), average proximity scores, and a time trend.[10] As the results in Table 5 show, the baseline level of nonresponse is about 2.5 percentage points lower for an incumbent than a non-incumbent ($p > .014$). Additionally, nonresponse rates are about 3 percentage points lower for Republican candidates than Democratic ones, although the results just barely fail to reach statistical significance at the .10 level ($p > .109$). Not surprisingly, nonresponse rates were highest for ideology (indicated by negative coefficients for the issue dummies). Nonresponse rates were generally lower for defense spending than for other issues, but voters were no less likely to place Republican candidates on defense spending than they were Democrats. Additionally, there has been a general decline in nonresponse rates of about 4 percentage points over the past 24 years. Finally, greater issue distance between voters and

[10] The model was estimated using OLS regression. The estimated baseline level of nonresponse was included for all seven election years, all four issue scales, and candidates for both political parties (e.g., N = 56). However, the aid to minorities scale as not included in the 1992 election study, resulting in an overall N of 54.

candidates actually reduces the probability of nonresponse by about 2.5 percentage points for candidates perceived to be one unit farther away, on average, from the voters on the issue scale.

Finally, candidate affect had a negative effect on placement nonresponse in all but two of the models, but failed to reach statistical significance in all but one of them (Democratic placement on ideology). Although many of the coefficients for these "external" factors failed to reach statistical significant greater than the .10 level, the likelihood-ratio (LR) tests reported at the bottom of Table 1 and Table 2 indicate that these external factors appeared to have a collective impact on the probability of nonresponse. The first set of tests drops candidate affect and the interaction terms for political information, leaving the year dummies in the model, and tests the joint probability that all of these coefficients are zero.[11] The chi-squared statistic was not statistically significant for ideology ($p > .20$ for both models) but was significant at the .10 level for all but one of the other models.[12] The second set of likelihood-ratio tests also drops the year dummies and tests the joint probability that all of the "external" coefficients are zero. The chi-squared statistic was highly significant ($p > .001$) for all eight of the models, indicating that external factors (captured primarily by the year dummies) help explain voter uncertainty.

The second-stage analysis uses predicted probabilities of nonresponse constructed from the estimated models in Tables 1 and 2 as measures of voter uncertainty in probit models of presidential vote choice. The dependent variable in these probit models is a dichotomous indicator of vote choice, coded 1 for the Republican candidate and 0 for the Democratic candidate. Nonvoters and third party voters are excluded from the analysis. Following Bartels, squared issue distances are used to capture proximity effects and the models include controls for

[11] This set of tests is labeled "LR test (year dummies)".
[12] The chi-squared statistic barely failed to reach statistical significant at the .10 level for Republicans in the aid to minorities model ($p > .116$).

perceived leadership and party identification (measured with a set of dummy variables, leaving pure independents as the baseline for comparison). Year dummies are also included to account for election-specific differences.

Table 6 presents two probit models of the presidential vote choice estimated with respondents pooled across the 1980-2004 surveys.[13] These models differ in terms of how they specify the effect of uncertainty about the candidates' issue positions. The first model does not distinguish between the internal and external sources of uncertainty – implicitly estimating a common effect – while the second model allows the electoral cost of uncertainty to differ depending upon the source. Due to the limited set of candidate placement questions in 1992, proximity on the aid to minorities scale is excluded from these models.

Table 6 demonstrates that the electoral cost of uncertainty revealed by Bartels is not unique to the 1980 election and applies more generally to presidential voting from 1980-2004. The positive uncertainty scale factors indicate that voters are less likely to support a candidate as their uncertainty about that candidate's issue positions increases. Moreover, the second model suggests that this electoral cost is slightly greater for uncertainty due to sources internal to the voter rather than to those attributable to the candidate, even though this difference is not statistically significant (as reflected in the similar log-likelihood values for the two models).

The severity of the electoral cost of voter uncertainty is more difficult to assess since the magnitude of the estimated coefficient largely reflects the difference in the scales of the squared issue distances and the predicted probabilities of nonresponse, which reflect the true variances of the perceived candidate positions by an unknown factor. A rough benchmark, however, is the

[13] The probit models in Tables 6 and 7 were estimated with the self-defined maximum likelihood command in LIMDEP, which allows for nonlinear specifications of the continuous (utility) dimension underlying the dichotomous vote choice. The estimates are conditional maximum likelihood since the uncertainty measures were constructed from first-stage probit models. In future research, we intend to generate full-information maximum likelihood estimates by simultaneously estimating the placement nonresponse and presidential vote equations.

ratio of the standard deviation of the squared distance and the probability of nonresponse for each issue since it estimates the magnitude difference between the scales of the two measures. Values above (below) this benchmark suggest that voters punish candidates more (less) for a one-standard-deviation increase in uncertainty than they reward them for a one-standard-deviation decrease in issue distance or increase in proximity. This benchmark ratio ranges from 40.56 for Democratic candidates on defense spending to 52.05 for Democratic candidates on aid to minorities (the second highest ratio is 48.35 for Republican candidates on defense spending). Based on this benchmark, Table 6 suggests that uncertainty strongly conditions issue voting, with average differences in uncertainty more than fully offsetting average differences in proximity. In other words, the results imply that candidates are slightly better off having their positions perceived with better than average precision than as more proximate than average (everything else being equal).

Table 7 reinforces the findings in Table 6, presenting probit models of presidential vote choice estimated with respondents pooled across all survey except 1992. While these models only include issue measures for the guaranteed jobs and defense spending scales, they produce similar evidence supporting the general conclusion that candidates bear a significant electoral cost for voter uncertainty about their issue positions regardless of the source. Moreover, Table 7 provides stronger evidence that uncertainty due to internal sources is more costly than uncertainty attributable to candidate behavior and characteristics (the LR statistic testing the null hypothesis of no difference is 7.59 with one degree of freedom, which is significant at the .01 level). This finding is consistent with the interpretation that some voters (some of the time) are risk acceptant about or willing to give the benefit of the doubt to candidates whose issues positions are ambiguous. This finding begs the question of whether this internal-external

difference is general or "hides" systematic heterogeneity across electoral contexts and candidates. Addressing this question, though, is beyond the scope of this paper and a subject for future research.

When interpreting the results in Tables 6 and 7, it should be noted that the specification of the uncertainty cost assumes that the scale factor is constant across issues. Imposition of this restriction can be justified by model convergence concerns associated with multicolinearity among the predicted probabilities of nonresponse across issues. Yet, one could argue that cross-party restrictions on the magnitudes of the proximity coefficients would be more justified on theoretical grounds. Moreover, exclusion of the aid to minorities scale from the analysis presented in Table 7 might account for the difference in the strength of evidence for an internal-external difference in the magnitude of the electoral cost of uncertainty. In particular, ambiguity about a candidate's position on racial policy might have smaller costs (or even benefits) relative to ambiguity about their position on defense spending. This could be a consequence of issue differences in the risk acceptance of voters, e.g., voters being more willing to give candidates the benefit of the doubt (or to view them as trustees) on racial issues than on national defense. Similarly, it might be more difficult for a candidate's opponents to characterize policy ambiguity as "waffling" on racial issues than it is on defense spending, thereby producing issue differences in the translation of candidate ambiguity into voter uncertainty.

Table 8 summarizes the results of an initial investigation of this proposition. The analyses presented in Tables 6 and 7 were replicated using an alternative specification of the proximity and uncertainty effects. The uncertainty scale factors were allowed to vary across issues while the issue distance coefficients were constrained to have the same magnitude for Democratic and Republican candidates. For the purpose of brevity, Table 8 only presents the

issue distance and uncertainty coefficients even though the probit models also included the full set of control variables employed by the analyses reported in Tables 6 and 7.

The alternative specifications in Table 8 reveal some interesting issue differences in the electoral costs of uncertainty. The most striking difference is the negative (statistically significant) scale factors for the aid to minorities issue. These negative coefficients indicate that candidates *benefit* electorally from uncertainty about their position on the aid to minorities policy dimension. Moreover, the specification differentiating between the internal and external source of uncertainty suggests that this electoral benefit is associated with voter uncertainty attributable to candidate ambiguity rather than characteristics internal to the voter.

In contrast, the scale factors for defense spending in Table 8 are positive and strongly significant both substantively and statistically. They indicate that the electoral cost of uncertainty about the candidate's position on defense spending is greater than that for the guaranteed jobs policy dimension. Additionally, the results suggest that the cost of uncertainty associated with placement on defense spending stems more from internal sources than from the candidate's behavior and characteristics. This contrasts with the lower cost of uncertainty associated with the guaranteed jobs scale which appears to be entirely attributable to candidate ambiguity. In sum, Table 8 implies that candidates have electoral incentives to be ambiguous about their positions on racial policy but explicit about those associated with the guaranteed jobs dimension, and that candidate differences in how precisely the voters perceive the candidates' positions on defense spending are more important than the relative proximity of those positions to the median voter.

Table 1. Nonresponse to Candidate Placement for Ideology and Guaranteed Jobs

	Ideology		Guaranteed Jobs	
	Democrat	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Republican*
Information	-0.419***	-0.400***	-0.217***	-0.226***
	(0.080)	(0.081)	(0.060)	(0.067)
*Information*1980*	0.263**	0.232**	-0.079	-0.041
	(0.103)	(0.105)	(0.089)	(0.090)
*Information*1984*	0.093	0.052	-0.127	-0.141
	(0.096)	(0.098)	(0.078)	(0.086)
*Information*1988*	0.074	0.059	-0.139*	-0.123
	(0.095)	(0.097)	(0.075)	(0.081)
*Information*1992*	0.143	0.174*	0.134*	0.109
	(0.096)	(0.097)	(0.076)	(0.083)
*Information*1996*	0.131	0.083	0.027	-0.018
	(0.104)	(0.107)	(0.086)	(0.088)
*Information*2000*	0.084	0.111	-0.080	-0.029
	(0.116)	(0.117)	(0.093)	(0.097)
Education	-0.263***	-0.273***	-0.171***	-0.160***
	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Media Exposure	-0.569***	-0.561***	-0.478***	-0.456***
	(0.084)	(0.086)	(0.079)	(0.080)
Political Interest	-0.375***	-0.367***	-0.334***	-0.312***
	(0.073)	(0.075)	(0.070)	(0.070)
Age	0.008***	0.007***	0.013***	0.012***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Non-white	0.346***	0.332***	-0.065	-0.049
	(0.052)	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.052)
Woman	0.151***	0.172***	0.302***	0.290***
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.041)	(0.042)
Issue Extremity	-1.016***	-1.116***	-0.425***	-0.415***
	(0.033)	(0.037)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Strong Democrat	-0.098	0.041	-0.378***	-0.290***
	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.083)	(0.083)
Weak Democrat	-0.151*	-0.078	-0.364***	-0.301***
	(0.082)	(0.083)	(0.081)	(0.081)
Leaning Democrat	-0.337***	-0.258***	-0.415***	-0.334***
	(0.092)	(0.093)	(0.090)	(0.091)
Leaning Republican	-0.215**	-0.175*	-0.299***	-0.332***
	(0.091)	(0.094)	(0.090)	(0.091)
Weak Republican	-0.199**	-0.196**	-0.136	-0.217**
	(0.086)	(0.089)	(0.083)	(0.085)
Strong Republican	-0.104	-0.171*	-0.131	-0.347***
	(0.096)	(0.102)	(0.088)	(0.092)
Affect (Likes-Dislikes)	-0.022**	-0.006	-0.007	-0.002
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.010)
1980	-0.255	-0.117	-0.053	0.364*
	(0.239)	(0.242)	(0.214)	(0.219)
1984	-0.085	0.003	0.045	0.110

	(0.227)	(0.230)	(0.197)	(0.210)
1988	0.036	-0.008	0.261	0.436**
	(0.223)	(0.227)	(0.192)	(0.202)
1992	-0.235	-0.326	-0.449**	-0.331*
	(0.214)	(0.217)	(0.185)	(0.199)
1996	-0.403*	-0.252	-0.683***	-0.130
	(0.242)	(0.246)	(0.214)	(0.219)
2000	-0.078	-0.144	0.038	0.208
	(0.273)	(0.277)	(0.232)	(0.239)
Constant	1.293***	1.227***	0.522***	0.246
	(0.215)	(0.218)	(0.187)	(0.198)
N	7149	7149	7114	7114
Log-likelihood	-2438.52	-2326.46	-2711.43	-2604.72
PRE	34.85	35.61	13.86	13.81
LR test (year dummies)	0.208	0.262	0.001	0.029
LR test (internal only)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Note: Dependent variable is dichotomous indicator of nonresponse to candidate placement question, equal to 1 for "don't know" and 0 otherwise. Nonvoters and third party voters are excluded from the analysis. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10

Table 2. Nonresponse to Candidate Placement for Aid to Minorities and Defense Spending

	Aid to Minorities		Defense Spending	
	Democrat	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Republican*
Information	-0.222***	-0.278***	-0.241***	-0.164**
	(0.055)	(0.059)	(0.067)	(0.075)
*Information*1980*	-0.178**	-0.097	-0.014	-0.132
	(0.089)	(0.086)	(0.097)	(0.101)
*Information*1984*	-0.157**	-0.123	-0.160*	-0.406***
	(0.074)	(0.080)	(0.086)	(0.103)
*Information*1988*	-0.145**	-0.088	-0.173**	-0.342***
	(0.071)	(0.074)	(0.084)	(0.095)
*Information*1992*			0.103	-0.061
			(0.082)	(0.099)
*Information*1996*	-0.062	-0.021	0.008	-0.044
	(0.079)	(0.080)	(0.089)	(0.094)
*Information*2000*	0.029	0.111	-0.054	-0.088
	(0.087)	(0.088)	(0.099)	(0.105)
Education	-0.155***	-0.165***	-0.145***	-0.166***
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.029)
Media Exposure	-0.493***	-0.407***	-0.552***	-0.631***
	(0.084)	(0.084)	(0.082)	(0.090)
Political Interest	-0.352***	-0.335***	-0.477***	-0.455***
	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.072)	(0.078)
Age	0.008***	0.009***	0.008***	0.007***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Non-white	-0.305***	-0.262***	0.161***	0.254***
	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.052)	(0.055)
Woman	0.299***	0.313***	0.574***	0.540***
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.048)
Issue Extremity	-0.344***	-0.334***	-0.449***	-0.576***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.026)
Strong Democrat	-0.408***	-0.293***	-0.188**	-0.131
	(0.091)	(0.091)	(0.085)	(0.091)
Weak Democrat	-0.399***	-0.277***	-0.266***	-0.232***
	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.084)	(0.090)
Leaning Democrat	-0.393***	-0.277***	-0.379***	-0.323***
	(0.097)	(0.098)	(0.095)	(0.102)
Leaning Republican	-0.337***	-0.367***	-0.287***	-0.351***
	(0.096)	(0.097)	(0.094)	(0.103)
Weak Republican	-0.249***	-0.218**	-0.257***	-0.325***
	(0.089)	(0.090)	(0.088)	(0.096)
Strong Republican	-0.232**	-0.269***	-0.183**	-0.297***
	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.093)	(0.103)
Affect (Likes-Dislikes)	-0.012	0.008	0.011	-0.018
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
1980	-0.355*	-0.033	-0.000	0.826***
	(0.212)	(0.208)	(0.229)	(0.241)
1984	-0.280	-0.394**	0.270	0.612**

	(0.189)	(0.197)	(0.209)	(0.238)
1988	0.016	0.012	0.288	0.661***
	(0.184)	(0.188)	(0.205)	(0.227)
1992			-0.190	-0.054
			(0.195)	(0.223)
1996	-0.538***	-0.284	-0.294	0.306
	(0.201)	(0.201)	(0.219)	(0.233)
2000	-0.420*	-0.368	0.319	0.665***
	(0.222)	(0.224)	(0.241)	(0.257)
Constant	1.016***	0.814***	0.296	0.039
	(0.186)	(0.190)	(0.200)	(0.222)
N	5807	5807	7118	7118
Log-likelihood	-2300.37	-2294.43	-2499.80	-2096.85
PRE	11.41	10.84	15.80	18.31
LR test (year dummies)	0.068	0.116	0.002	0.000
LR test (internal only)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Note: Dependent variable is dichotomous indicator of nonresponse to candidate placement question, equal to 1 for "don't know" and 0 otherwise. Nonvoters and third party voters are excluded from the analysis. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10

Table 3. Predicted Information Effects Across Election Years

	1980		*1984*		*1988*		*1992*	
	Reagan	*Carter*	*Reagan*	*Mondale*	*Bush*	*Dukakis*	*Bush*	*Clinton*
Information								
Ideology	-0.191	-0.185	-0.297	-0.305	-0.313	-0.380	-0.163	-0.231
Aid to Minorities	-0.413	-0.361	-0.313	-0.357	-0.425	-0.458		
Guaranteed Jobs	-0.340	-0.277	-0.287	-0.331	-0.395	-0.429	-0.093	-0.081
Defense Spending	-0.260	-0.170	-0.297	-0.336	-0.369	-0.405	-0.118	-0.136

	1996		*2000*		*2004*	
	Dole	*Clinton*	*Bush*	*Gore*	*Bush*	*Kerry*
Information						
Ideology	-0.175	-0.176	-0.188	-0.256	-0.246	-0.288
Aid to Minorities	-0.281	-0.217	-0.180	-0.196	-0.322	-0.285
Guaranteed Jobs	-0.182	-0.106	-0.251	-0.285	-0.180	-0.228
Defense Spending	-0.173	-0.162	-0.250	-0.318	-0.080	-0.201

Note: Cell entries are the differences between the probability of nonresponse for the least informed minus the probability of nonresponse for the most informed.

Table 4. Predicted Baseline Probability of Nonresponse Across Election Years

	1980		*1984*		*1988*		*1992*	
	Reagan	*Carter*	*Reagan*	*Mondale*	*Bush*	*Dukakis*	*Bush*	*Clinton*
Uncertainty								
Ideology	0.331	0.326	0.246	0.253	0.270	0.294	0.246	0.290
Aid to Blacks	0.236	0.165	0.134	0.174	0.239	0.258	0.291	0.334
Guaranteed Jobs	0.254	0.200	0.145	0.190	0.240	0.257	0.165	0.204
Defense Spending	0.207	0.257	0.107	0.170	0.160	0.202	0.129	0.215

	1996		*2000*		*2004*	
	Dole	*Clinton*	*Bush*	*Gore*	*Bush*	*Kerry*
Uncertainty						
Ideology	0.188	0.181	0.200	0.206	0.179	0.184
Aid to Blacks	0.170	0.137	0.208	0.192	0.207	0.258
Guaranteed Jobs	0.142	0.109	0.186	0.179	0.136	0.191
Defense Spending	0.179	0.138	0.217	0.219	0.108	0.147

Note: Cell entries are the predicted overall probability of nonresponse for each presidential election year by candidate

Table 5. Effect of Candidate Characteristics on Baseline Level of Nonresponse

	Baseline Nonresponse
Republican	-0.030
	(0.018)
Incumbent	-0.026**
	(0.010)
Aid to Minorities	-0.034*
	(0.019)
Aid to Minorities*Republican	0.000
	(0.026)
Defense Spending	-0.084***
	(0.018)
Defense Spending*Republican	0.011
	(0.025)
Guaranteed Jobs	-0.040**
	(0.018)
Guaranteed Jobs*Republican	-0.010
	(0.025)
Time Trend	-0.002***
	(0.001)
Average Proximity	-0.026***
	(0.005)
Constant	0.410***
	(0.029)
N =	54
Adj. R-squared	0.595

Table 6. Probit Models of Republican Presidential Vote, 1980-2004

	Common Uncertainty Effect	Source-Specific Uncertainty Effects
Squared Issue Distances (0-36):		
Guaranteed Jobs – Republican	-.0341 (.0036)***	-.0355 (.0038)***
Defense Spending – Republican	-.0416 (.0035)***	-.0418 (.0035)***
Guaranteed Jobs – Democrat	.0444 (.0037)***	.0434 (.0037)***
Defense Spending – Democrat	.0303 (.0037)***	.0305 (.0036)***
Uncertainty Scale Factor	57.55 (10.60)***	
Uncertainty Scale Factor – Internal Sources		66.04 (14.82)***
Uncertainty Scale Factor – External Sources		54.25 (12.62)***
Party Identification		
Strong Democrat	-1.281 (.095)***	-1.270 (.096)***
Weak Democrat	-.757 (.084)***	-.751 (.084)***
Leaning Democrat	-.884 (.093)***	-.878 (.094)***
Leaning Republican	.499 (.095)***	.490 (.096)***
Weak Republican	.539 (.092)***	.522 (.095)***
Strong Republican	.861 (.118)***	.835 (.124)***
Leadership – Democrat (0-1)	-1.892 (.100)***	-1.896 (.101)***
Leadership – Republican (0-1)	1.700 (.097)***	1.699 (.097)***
1980	.546 (.131)***	.515 (.148)***
1984	.296 (.094)**	.285 (.095)**
1988	.311 (.097)**	.306 (.098)**
1992	-.173 (.098)*	-.183 (.099)
1996	.026 (.125)	-.013 (.143)
2000	.100 (.120)	.080 (.127)
Constant	-.034 (.136)	-.025 (.137)
N	7136	7136
Log Likelihood	-1783.9	-1783.7
Chi-Squared LR Test for Model (20,21)	3567.8	3567.3

Note: Dependent variable is dichotomous indicator of presidential vote equal to 1 for Republican candidates and 0 for Democratic candidates. Nonvoters and third party voters are excluded from the analysis. Models were estimated with the self-defined maximum likelihood estimation routine in LIMDEP. Variance terms were generated with first-stage probit models. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10

Table 7. Probit Models of Republican Presidential Vote, 1980-2004 (1992 Excluded)

	Common Uncertainty Effect	Source-Specific Uncertainty Effects
Squared Issue Distances (0-36):		
Guaranteed Jobs – Republican	-.0259 (.0042)***	-.0302 (.0040)***
Aid to Minorities – Republican	-.0230 (.0052)***	-.0213 (.0050)***
Defense Spending – Republican	-.0393 (.0039)***	-.0393 (.0038)***
Guaranteed Jobs – Democrat	.0334 (.0043)***	.0282 (.0039)***
Aid to Minorities – Democrat	.0296 (.0049)***	.0316 (.0048)***
Defense Spending – Democrat	.0244 (.0042)***	.0245 (.0039)***
Uncertainty Scale Factor	56.85 (11.54)***	
Uncertainty Scale Factor – Internal Sources		98.26 (18.98)***
Uncertainty Scale Factor – External Sources		45.55 (13.92)**
Party Identification		
Strong Democrat	-1.247 (.109)***	-1.121 (.117)***
Weak Democrat	-.726 (.097)***	-.632 (.101)***
Leaning Democrat	-.868 (.107)***	-.789 (.111)***
Leaning Republican	.359 (.109)**	.341 (.111)**
Weak Republican	.524 (.103)***	.481 (.106)***
Strong Republican	.780 (.134)***	.698 (.143)***
Leadership – Democrat (0-1)	-1.806 (.113)***	-1.813 (.113)***
Leadership – Republican (0-1)	1.691 (.108)***	1.705 (.110)***
1980	.670 (.159)***	.529 (.193)**
1984	.370 (.100)***	.337 (.101)***
1988	.366 (.102)***	.334 (.105)**
1996	.099 (.143)	-.048 (.168)
2000	.176 (.130)	.085 (.145)
Constant	-.155 (.167)	-.296 (.176)
N	5827	5827
Log Likelihood	-1444.2	-1440.4
Chi-Squared LR Test for Model (21,22)	2888.4	2880.8

Note: Dependent variable is dichotomous indicator of presidential vote equal to 1 for Republican candidates and 0 for Democratic candidates. Nonvoters and third party voters are excluded from the analysis. Models were estimated with the self-defined maximum likelihood estimation routine in LIMDEP. Variance terms were generated with first-stage probit models. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05

Table 8. Issue Differences in the Effects of Uncertainty, 1980-2004

	Common Uncertainty Effect	Source-Specific Uncertainty Effects
Squared Issue Distances (Republican-Democrat):		
Guaranteed Jobs	-.0402 (.0031)***	-.0402 (.0031)***
Defense Spending	-.0374 (.0031)***	-.0373 (.0031)***
Uncertainty Scale Factor		
Guaranteed Jobs	24.13 (29.64)	
Defense Spending	85.96 (26.38)**	
Guaranteed Jobs – Internal Sources		18.10 (33.38)
Defense Spending – Internal Sources		97.28 (31.29)**
Guaranteed Jobs – External Sources		28.84 (31.40)
Defense Spending – External Sources		80.64 (27.37)**
Log Likelihood	-1787.9	-1787.6

	Common Uncertainty Effect	Source-Specific Uncertainty Effects
Squared Issue Distances (Republican-Democrat):		
Guaranteed Jobs	-.0302 (.0035)***	-.0281 (.0037)***
Aid to Minorities	-.0301 (.0043)***	-.0287 (.0043)***
Defense Spending	-.0333 (.0034)***	-.0345 (.0035)***
Uncertainty Scale Factor		
Guaranteed Jobs	78.02 (56.49)	
Aid to Minorities	-184.33 (74.53)*	
Defense Spending	130.99 (36.84)***	
Guaranteed Jobs – Internal Sources		12.63 (65.90)
Aid to Minorities – Internal Sources		-43.46 (83.17)
Defense Spending – Internal Sources		193.42 (46.23)***
Guaranteed Jobs – External Sources		201.42 (76.65)**
Aid to Minorities – External Sources		-353.94 (102.81)***
Defense Spending – External Sources		105.86 (36.33)**
Log Likelihood	-1439.8	-1429.3

Note: Coefficients are from probit models estimated with the self-defined maximum likelihood estimation routine in LIMDEP. See Tables 6 and 7 for further details on the estimation and for the specification of the control variables whose coefficients are not reported. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05

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