

# Priming Gender: Campaign Messages and the Dynamics of the Gender Gap\*

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## Abstract

Can presidential campaigns influence the gender gap in vote choice? The gender gap may grow (or shrink) during presidential campaigns if male and female voters respond differently to issue primes contained within political advertisements. This project uses two data sets to analyze the gender gap throughout campaigns. The 2000 Annenberg rolling cross-sectional survey is used to measure intended vote choice. The Wisconsin Ad Project is the source of the campaigns' messages. The influence of campaign priming is examined across five issues: social welfare, international relations, law and order, the economy, and women's issues. The findings demonstrate that overwhelmingly men and women react in similar ways to issue primes from campaign advertising. However, there are a few instances when men and women respond differently to issue primes.

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The gender gap in the 1992 presidential election was only four percent.<sup>1</sup> The 1996 presidential election saw an 11 percent gender gap. These elections, while only four years apart, represent one of the largest gender gaps and one of the smallest gender gaps observed in presidential elections. Existing research on the gender gap in vote choice largely explains variation in the gender gap across elections by focusing on the votes cast on Election Day. These studies suggest that the gender gap is determined by a few salient issues and features of a particular electorate (Kaufmann & Petrocik 1999, Manza & Brooks 1998, Chaney, Alvarez & Nagler 1998). However, we do not know how campaigns shape the gender gap by influencing male and female voters over the course of an election cycle. This paper analyzes the role that campaigns play in the formation of the gender gap by examining how male and female voters respond to issue primes contained in political advertising. If men and women respond in a similar fashion then campaigns may play an extremely limited role in the formation of the gender gap in vote choice. However, if male and female voters respond differently to issue primes, then campaigns can influence the size of the gender gap by changing their messages.

Without the gender gap, no Democratic candidate would have won the White House since 1992 (CAWP 2012).<sup>2</sup> Women's higher rate of turnout means small shifts in the gender gap can substantially influence election outcomes (Diekman & Schneider 2010). Despite the importance of the gender gap in determining election outcomes, we know very little about how campaigns try to shape the gap and when campaigns are successful at influencing the gap.<sup>3</sup> This project is a first step in filling these significant gaps in the existing research on

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<sup>1</sup>The gender gap is a term used to refer to a wide variety of differences in men's and women's behavior (Diekman & Schneider 2010). In this project it is primarily used to describe the difference in voting behavior between men and women. Many scholars have noted the difference between sex and gender (Beckwith 2005). Technically the topic of study in this project is sex differences. However, I use the term gender gap to maintain consistency with how these differences are discussed in the extant literature.

<sup>2</sup>The influence of the gender gap is not limited to presidential elections, but also influences the electoral outcomes of races in the U.S. Senate, House of Representatives, Governors, and state legislatures (Carroll 2006, Schaffner 2005, Ondercin & Bernstein 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Schaffner (2005) tells us the little we do know about the gender gap in campaigns. This research informs

the gender gap and the influence of political campaigns.

The manuscript proceeds as follows. First, I review the existing research on how differences in issue positions and long-run factors serve as the primary explanations of the gender gap in vote choice. Second, I develop an argument for why campaigns should care about the gender gap and how campaigns should try to influence the gender gap. I argue that campaigns will make calculated appeals based on sex differences in public opinion and issue ownership. Male and female voters will respond to the strategic messages of political campaigns. As a result, the gender gap in intended vote choice will vary systematically in response to changes in the messages from campaigns and key events in political campaigns. Third, I review how I use both the rolling cross-sections and panel data from the National Annenberg Election Studies Studies in 2000. Fourth, I examine how men and women react when campaigns prime the issues of social welfare, international relations, law and order, the economy, and women's issues. Men and women tend to respond to issue primes in a very similar manner, implying that campaigns play a limited role in creating the gender gap. However, there are a few instances where men and women respond differently, causing the gap to grow and shrink based on the messages from the campaign. I conclude by offering some observations about the implications of my findings for research on the gender gap and campaigns.

## Understanding the Gender Gap

The gender gap in vote choice has become an accepted feature of presidential, senate, house, and state-wide elections. First capturing the media's and scholars' attention in the aftermath of the 1980 presidential election, the gender gap in vote choices existed in presidential elections dating back to the 1960s. Explanations for the gender gap in vote choice largely

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us that candidates and campaigns should act strategically to capitalize on the gap, but the ability to do so is constrained.

focus on a mixture of election-specific factors and long-term structural changes.

Issues have played a central role in explaining variation the gender gap between elections (Clark & Clark 1999). Initial media accounts and research on the gender gap after the 1980 presidential election attributed the gap to the newly emerged differences between the political parties on two issues: the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion (Abzug 1984, Smeal 1984). More detailed analysis of the 1980 election demonstrated that the gender gap had little to do with these two issues, largely because men and women held similar opinions on these particular issues (Shapiro & Mahajan 1986, Mansbridge 1985). Scholars then shifted to explaining the gender gap in vote choices based on issues where men and women hold different opinions or issues that vary in their importance to men and women.

Men and women hold different opinions on a host of issues that are key to shaping their respective voting behaviors. Public opinion research consistently demonstrates differences concerning the use of force domestically and abroad, compassion and cost bearing issues, the environment, and more generally the size and scope of government (Shapiro & Mahajan 1986, Fite, Genest & Wilcox 1990, Iversen & Rosenbluth 2011). Differences between men and women have also been found when it comes to economic voting, with women more likely to vote socio-tropically and men more likely to rely on their own pocketbook (Chaney, Alvarez & Nagler 1998, Welch & Hibbing 1992). While the effects of the issues vary depending on their salience in the electoral context, these issues play an important role in shaping the voting behavior of men and women. In presidential elections between 1980 and 1992 about three-quarters of the gender gap in vote choice could be attributed to the difference in men's and women's opinion on national and personal financial situations, foreign affairs, use for force, ideology, and social programs (Chaney, Alvarez & Nagler 1998). In addition to issue positions, the salience of the issues also appear to matter. For example, while simple differences on social welfare appear to explain the gender gap in 1992, it is the salience of social welfare to male voters that matters in 1996 (Kaufmann & Petrocik 1999).

Sex differences in issue positions and salience not only lead to the gender gap in vote choice, but are also linked to the gender gap in other political orientations, specifically the gender gap in partisanship (Manza & Brooks 1998, Wirls 1986). As discussed above women tend to favor issue positions generally championed by the Democratic Party, while men tend to hold issue positions closer to those of the Republican Party. Thus, while issues contribute to the gender gap in vote choice in a given election, the influence of issues tends to be largely channeled through gender differences in partisan attachments.

Issues are helpful in explaining variation across different electoral settings, but the gender gap has grown considerably over time (CAWP 2012, Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef & Lin 2004). The growth in the gender gap has largely been attributed to long-run structural changes that have shifted men's and women's relationships with the political parties. Central to this research is women's increased workforce participation (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef & Lin 2004, Manza & Brooks 1998). Women's workforce participation is theorized to lead to increased economic and psychological independence from men, resulting in different political preferences (Carroll 1988). Issues are not completely absent from this explanation; rather, women's new economic position shapes their preferences for more compassionate and cost-sharing policies (Iversen & Rosenbluth 2011, Erie & Rein 1988). At the same time, men would prefer policies that maintain the status quo, allowing them to keep more of their paychecks (Iversen & Rosenbluth 2011). In analyzing presidential elections between 1952-1992, women's workforce participation accounted for gender differences in vote choice during this period. Women's experience at work shapes their attitudes on social service spending and feminist consciousness, which in turn shapes their vote choice (Manza & Brooks 1998, Plutzer 1991).

The existing literature points to many factors that influence the gender gap in vote choice registered on Election Day. However, we are given little insight into how the context of the campaign interacts with these factors to produce this gender gap in vote choice. To better understand this process we need to identify how campaigns influence voters and why

campaigns may cause changes in the gender gap.

## Campaigns and the Gender Gap

I argue that candidates should use the sex differences in issue positions to their advantage to influence the gender gap. Campaigns select specific messages to prime voters and shift the criteria voters use to evaluate candidates (Druckman 2004, Druckman, Jacobs & Ostermeier 2004, Iyengar & Simon 2000, McGraw & Ling 2003). Most commonly, campaigns focus on priming issues and candidate images (Druckman 2004, Druckman, Jacobs & Ostermeier 2004); however, they can also prime group identities (Valentino 2001, Schaffner 2010, Schaffner 2005). Candidates engage in priming as a way to gain a strategic advantage over their opponents. As a result, candidates are likely to prime voters when the public already views the candidates as competent on a particular policy or has a strong record on a particular issue (Druckman 2004, Miller & Krosnick 2000, Petrocik 1996, Schaffner 2005). Candidates are also likely to engage in priming when they hold the same position as the public on a given issue (Druckman 2004, Mendelsohn 1996, Riker 1996). In addition to being selective about which issues to prime, candidates also strategically target audiences that are most receptive to their messages in order to maximize their campaigns' influence (Schaffner 2005, Hillygus & Shields 2009). Sex differences in issue positions and issue salience provide an opportunity for campaigns to target male and female voters. Sex differences in public opinion align with traditional issue cleavages associated with the political parties. Thus, campaigns are likely to focus on these issues to gain an electoral advantage (Petrocik 1996, Petrocik, Benoit & Hansen 2003, Schaffner 2005).

In addition to priming voters, campaigns can serve a very important but subtle role in reinforcing predispositions, mainly partisanship and group identity (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet 1944, Berelson et al. 1954, Finkel 1993, Iyengar & Simon 2000, Erikson & Wlezien

2012). This activation will lead voters to base their decisions on fundamentals such as partisanship and sex. The main way that campaigns activate predispositions is through the information they supply voters. Zaller (1992, 1996) explains that messages consistent with a voter's predispositions are accepted, reinforcing existing information about candidates. Messages counter to the voter's predispositions are rejected and have little influence on voters' decisions. Campaigns provide voters with a reason to vote on their predispositions (Finkel 1993). While these effects are subtle, it is important to note that the variation in pre-election surveys results from real events in the campaigns, as voters respond systematically to new information about the candidates from both anticipated and unanticipated events (Gelman & King 1993, Erikson & Wlezien 2012).

As discussed above, sex differences in vote choice have been a fundamental feature of electoral politics for decades. We would then expect that one of the fundamentals campaigns serve to activate would be the group identities of men and women based on their sex. Additionally, partisanship serves as the primary fundamental that campaigns reinforce. The gender gap in partisanship suggests that campaigns would target men and women in an attempt to reinforce these preferences. Starting in the 1960s a small but unstable partisan gender gap emerged, with women showing a slight preference for the Democratic Party compared to men. The difference in partisan attachments continued to grow over the next several decades and by the mid-1980s a sizable and stable gap emerged (Ondercin N.d., Norrander 2008, Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef & Lin 2004). Kaufmann & Petrocik (1999) find that the gender gap in partisanship explains a large portion of the gender gap in vote choice. However, when the gender gap in vote choice emerged in the 1960s, sex differences in partisanship explained very little of the gap. Over time, though, sex differences in partisanship have become increasingly important for explaining the gender gap in vote choice. When campaigns reinforce fundamentals, they should activate an individual's gendered political identity and partisanship.

## Research Design and Data

Sex differences in intended vote in the general election are examined across the 2000 presidential campaigns. In the 2000 election, the Democratic candidate was the incumbent Vice-President Albert Gore, who ended up losing to former Texas governor George W. Bush. Similar to the 1996 presidential election, in 2000 the media discussed candidates' attempts to court "soccer moms," highlighting the importance of the gender gap in shaping presidential election outcomes (Carroll 2008). Moreover, both campaigns in the 2000 election considered the past gender gap when shaping their messages (Schaffner 2010).

The National Annenberg Elections Surveys (NAES) for the 2000 election and the 2000 Wisconsin Ad project provide the data for this project. The National Annenberg Election Surveys conducted a national rolling-cross sectional research design. This design has many advantages over surveys that only take a single snap shot of the electorate and affords us important variation in issue priming. Each day through the primary and general election cycles the Annenberg surveys interviewed somewhere between 50-300 individuals, with an average of 921 interviews each week. Overall, there are approximately 33,000 individuals used in my analysis. When matched with the the advertisement data the rolling cross-section design provides considerable variation in the campaigns' messages over the course of the campaign and across the country. Thus, my research design provides substantial variation in the key independent variable over time and space.

The central dependent variable of interest is a respondent's intended vote in the general election. Details about the questions used to measure intended vote can be found in the Appendix. The surveys include a series of questions with different potential match-ups during the primary election before a single candidate gains enough delegates to be considered their party's nominee. The surveys also included variation in question wording after the primary to reflect the vice-presidential candidates, third party candidates, and independent



candidates. Only questions that contained the two major party candidates in the general election were used to create the vote intent variable. The vote intent variable was used to create a dummy variable, with 1 indicating that the respondent voted for the Al Gore, the Democratic candidate, and 0 indicating they did not vote of Al Gore. Examining the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate matches with the tendency to discuss the gender gap in terms of Democratic vote share.

The Wisconsin Ad Project in 2000 collected information on both the content and frequency of political advertisements in the top 75 media markets (). The Wisconsin Ad project coded the ads for four key features: 1) when the ad was aired; 2) in what media market the ad appeared; 3) whether the ad favored the Democratic or Republican presidential candidate; and 4) the first four themes mentioned in the advertisements. I recoded these themes into 5 categories: social welfare, international relations, law and order, the economy, and women's issues. These 5 categories reflect major cleavages between the parties and issues that play an important role in the formation of the gender gap. The social welfare categories includes the themes of poverty, education, lottery for education, child care, other child-related issues, environment, health care, social security, medicare, and welfare. Many of the issues in the social welfare category represent issues that are associated with women as caregivers. They also represent issues where women tend to be more supportive of more funding or government playing a larger role than men. The international relations category includes the themes of defense, missile defense/Star wars, veterans, foreign policy, Bosnia, China, and other defense/foreign policy issues. This category represents many of the war and peace issues that form the largest gap between men and women. The category domestic law and order includes the themes of gun control, crime, drugs, death penalty, and other reference to law and order. The economy category includes advertisements with themes of minimum wage, employment/jobs, trade/NAFTA, and other economic references. The final category, women's issues, includes advertisements with themes of sexual harassment/Paula Jones and

abortion. Unfortunately, the issue of sexual harassment was not coded independently of references to Paula Jones, which would prime the Clinton sex scandals.

Individuals in the Annenberg surveys were then matched with data on the advertisements that were aired in their media market the week before their interview took place. I use a series of dummy variables to indicate whether an individual was exposed to an advertisement the week before he or she was surveyed by Annenberg. The dummy variable not only reflects the issue content but which political party was favored by the advertisement. Thus, there is an indicator for advertisements favoring the Democratic candidate on social welfare issues and an indicator for advertisements favoring the Republican candidate on social welfare issues. There are three limitations to this measure. First, the dummy variable is a rather blunt instrument to measure potential exposure to the different issue primes. In some media markets this means that respondents had the potential to see a single ad featuring the issue prime. In other media markets individuals had the potential to see hundreds of ads featuring the issue prime. Second, the dummy variable approach does not contain information about other ad exposure. The single ad featuring the issue prime could have been the only political advertisements run during that week in the media market or it could have been 1 of 100 different ads featuring other issue primes run during that week. These two issues will be addressed in future analyses using alternative measures of media exposure. Third, there is no way for us to be sure that an individual was exposed to a particular advertisement, thus the measure reflects potential exposure of these themes. This issue is more complicated to address, but future analyses will use indicators such as campaign interest and attention to the media to try to isolate the theoretical relationship.

Two other independent variables are included in the analysis. First, respondent sex is measured with a dummy variable coded 1 for women and 0 for men. Second, party identification is measured with a set of dummy variables indicating whether the respondent is a Democrat or Republican, with independents serving as the omitted category. Because

party identification is such an important factor in structuring an individual's vote choice, this needs to be controlled for when modeling the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate.

The models of vote choice include the key explanatory variables of respondent sex, democratic issue prime, republican issue prime, dummy variables for measuring partisanship, and a series of interaction terms to model the conditional relationships among these variables. Only these variables were included in the model for parsimony. Additionally, many other variables traditionally included in vote choice models such as education and income are correlated with sex. Controlling for these other factors would distort the full effect of sex in the analysis. Because the purpose of this analysis is to understand the difference between men and women, not the difference controlling for several other factors, I omit these variables from the analysis.

The interaction terms included in the analysis allows us to test three different relationships. First, the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate based on an individual's sex, partisanship, and exposure to the issue prime. These probabilities will give us a general idea of how vote choice is structured by sex and partisanship. However, raw probabilities are not the most informative for determining whether exposure to primes influences the likelihood of voting for the Democratic candidate and whether primes have a differential effect on men and women. Assessing these relationships requires that we calculate two additional quantities. The first difference between two of the probabilities can tell us if ad exposure significantly increased or decreased the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate, conditional on sex and partisanship. This is equivalent to the unit or marginal effect for ad exposure. The difference between those first differences (or the difference-in-difference) assesses whether men and women responded in a similar or different manner to the issue prime, conditional on partisan identification. The predicted probabilities, first differences, and difference-in-difference calculations are calculated using post-estimation simulations. Us-

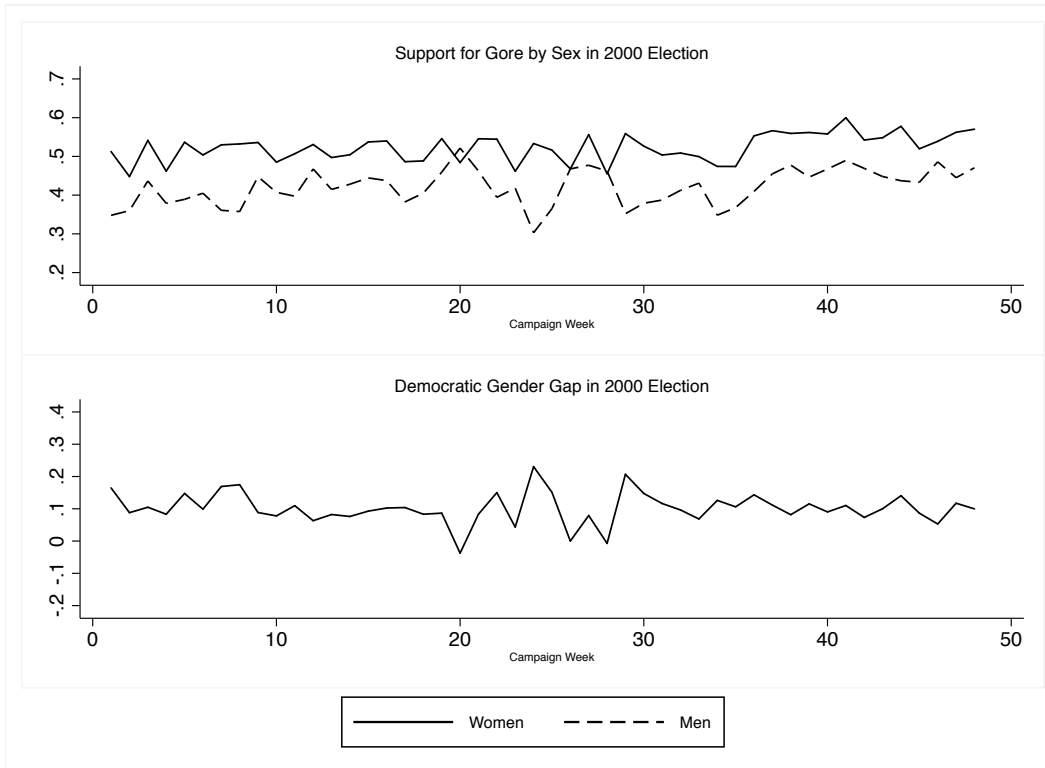


Figure 1: Men’s and Women’s Support for the Democratic Candidate and the Gender Gap, 2000

ing simulations allows us to calculate the uncertainty associated with these quantities and perform appropriate statistical tests.

## Variation in the Gender Gap and Campaign Message

Figure 1 presents the variation in men’s and women’s vote choice (top panel) and the gender gap (bottom panel) over the course of the 2000 presidential election. Both men’s and women’s support for Al Gore appears to move around a stable mean, with perhaps a slightly increasing trend towards the end of the election. On average about 52% of women supported Gore over the course of the campaign, while, on average, only about 42% of men intended to vote for Gore during the campaign. The gender gap also appears to fluctuate around a mean of 10% over the course of the campaign. While there appears to be a fairly stable mean for men,

women, and the gap, this does not mean these series are without changes. Men's intended vote choice experienced relatively larger changes over the course of the campaign, with an average standard deviation of 4.7 points. Women's intend vote for Gore, in contrast, exhibits only a 3.6 point standard deviation. The gap has a standard deviation of 5 points.

The mean gap across the campaign was close to the gap observed on Election Day. Specifically, the average 10% gap during the 2000 campaign matches the gender gap recorded by exit polls (CAWP 2012). Thus, it appears the magnitude of the gap is a function of factors occurring before the campaign that creates the overall electoral context (i.e. the economy, macro-levels of partisanship). However, over the course of the campaign we observe variation in the gender gap, suggesting that campaigns influence the gender gap that exists on Election Day. As we would expect, most of the variation in these series occur early in the campaign (Gelman & King 1993). This is consistent with the idea that campaigns provide information to the electorate, which helps voters connect their political predisposition to their intended vote.

The variation in men's and women's intended vote is not constant over the 2000 presidential campaign. Some of the variation observed in the gender gap and men's and women's intended vote is likely to be a function of sampling error. However, while the sample sizes change from week to week, there is nothing systematic about this change. This is, sample sizes are not systematically larger during the middle of the campaign compared to the weeks before the election. Accordingly, at least some of the variation in intended vote choice during the election cycle is likely a function of the campaigns' behavior.

Figure 2 looks at the variation in exposure to different issue primes from the campaigns. Social welfare issue primes were the most common, with 67% of the survey respondents exposed to at least one ad from the Democratic Party featuring the theme of social welfare. There was no difference between the issue primes from the Republican Party on the issue of social welfare, as 68% of the survey respondents had the potential to see an advertisement

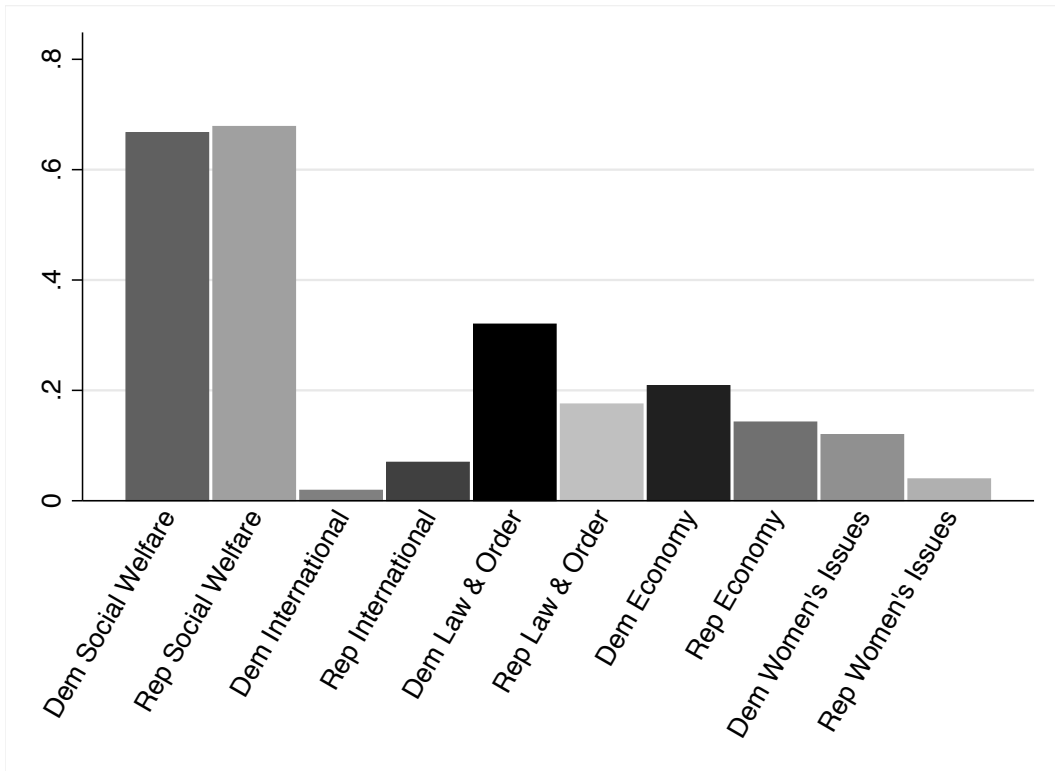


Figure 2: Exposure to Campaign Primes by Issue and Party Sponsoring Advertisements

containing the social welfare prime that favored the Republican candidate. International relations were barely talked about by either candidate during the 2000 election: only about 2% of respondents were exposed to an international relations issue prime from the Democrats while only 7% were exposed to an international relations issue prime that favored the Republicans. The fact that the campaigns were more likely to run ads favoring domestic politics such as social welfare compared to international relations is not surprising given that domestic politics dominated the political agenda throughout the 1990s.

Democrats were considerably more likely to prime voters regarding issues of law & order. Thirty-one percent of respondents were exposed to issue primes concerning law and order from the Democratic Party. In contrast, only 18% of respondents were exposed to law & order primes from the Republican Party. The Democratic Party was slightly more likely to prime individuals about the economy than Republicans. Specifically, 21% of respondents were exposed to economic issue primes from the Democratic Party but only 14% of respondents were exposed to economic issue primes from the Republican Party. Finally, Democrats were twice as likely to prime voters on women's issues than Republicans: 12% of the respondents were in media markets where the Democratic Party ran ads on women's issues compared to only 4% of voters that resided in media markets that ran ads containing women's issues favoring the Republican Party.

## **Vote Choice and Campaign Message**

The figures presented above demonstrate that the content of the messages voters were exposed to and the intended vote choices of men and women varied during the 2000 campaign. But does the variation in message content explain the variation in vote choice? I ran a series of logit models to determine the influence of campaign primes on men's and women's intended vote in the 2000 election. Separate models were run for each of the five issue

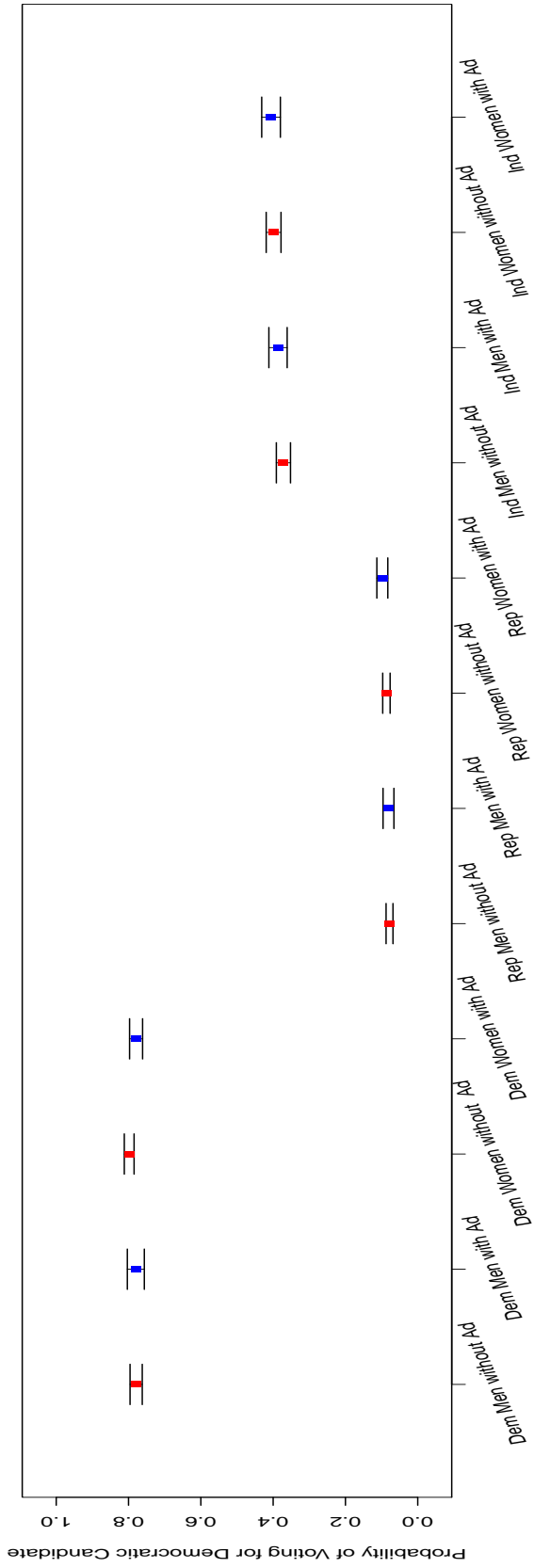
primes. Each model used measures of sex, partisanship, issue exposure, and the interactions among these three variables to model the conditional relationship. Tables 3 and 4 report the coefficients for these models and can be found in the Appendix. These tables tell us very little about the relationships we are interested in for two reasons. First, because they are logit models the coefficients need to be transformed into some meaningful quantity, such as a predicted probability, to understand their substantive effects. Second, the inclusion of the interaction terms makes assessing the statistical significance from the tables impossible using the information reported in standard results tables (). More relevant for my purpose are the predicted probabilities of Democratic vote, the unit effect of issue priming for men and women, and the difference in the unit effect of issue priming between men and women. I now turn to a discussion of these quantities.

Figures 3 through 7 show the predicted probability of voting for the Democratic candidate across sex, partisanship, and exposure to advertisement. Panel A in each figure presents the results given exposure to ads favoring the Democratic candidate while Panel B reports exposure to a message in advertisements favoring the Republican Party. There are some general patterns across all of the figures that we would expect. Men and women who identify as Democrats are more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate than independent identifiers or Republican identifiers and men and women who identify as independents are more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate than Republicans. While not always clear in the figures, among party identifiers women are more likely than men to vote for the Democratic candidate. For example, female Republicans are more likely than male Republicans to vote for the Democratic candidate. All of these results fit with our understanding of how vote choice is structured by partisanship and sex.

These figures give us a first look at the influence of issue priming on vote choice for men and women. Overall, it does not appear that issue priming has a substantial influence on the voting intentions of men or women. This result reflects the difficulty campaigns often have



Panel A: Democratic Ad



Panel B: Republican Ad

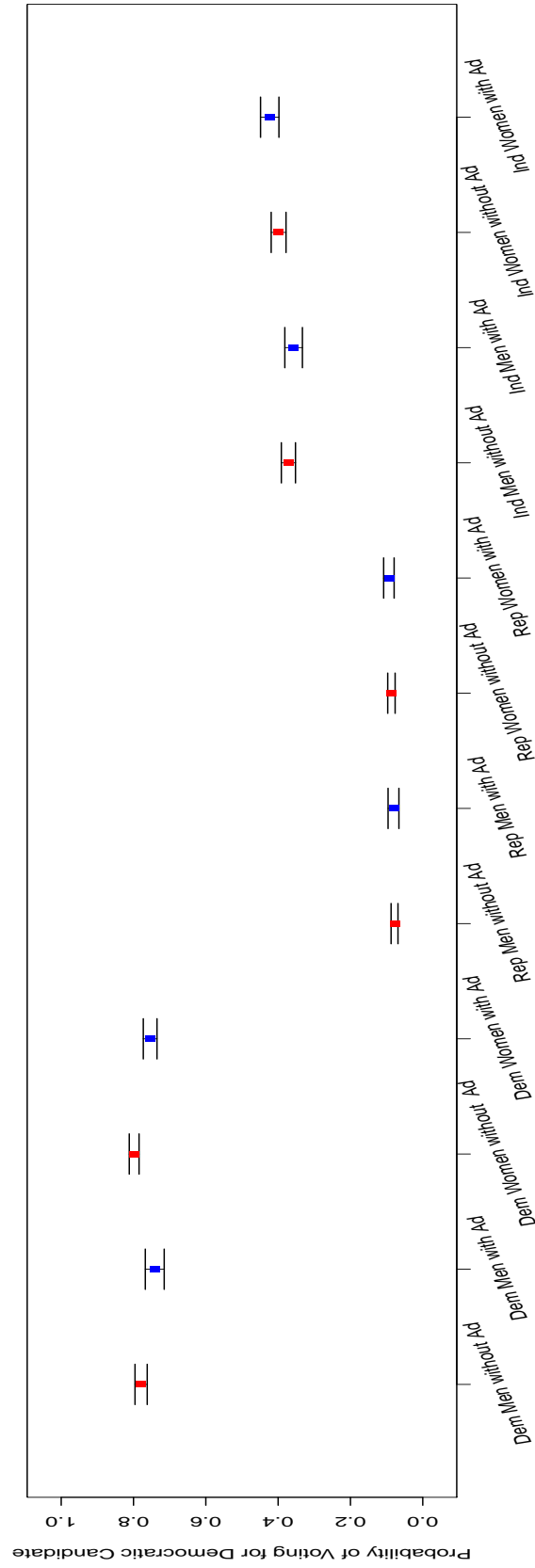
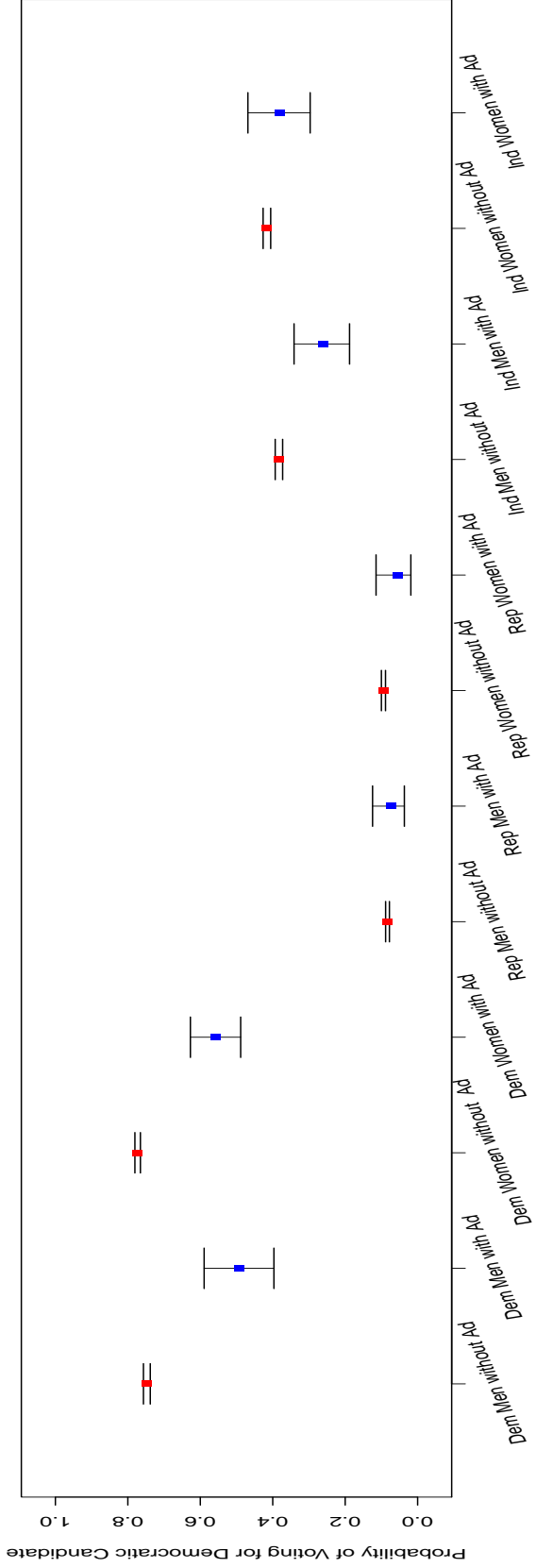


Figure 3: Probability of Voting Democrat with Social Welfare Prime by Sex and Party Identification

Panel A: Democratic Ad



Panel B: Republican Ad

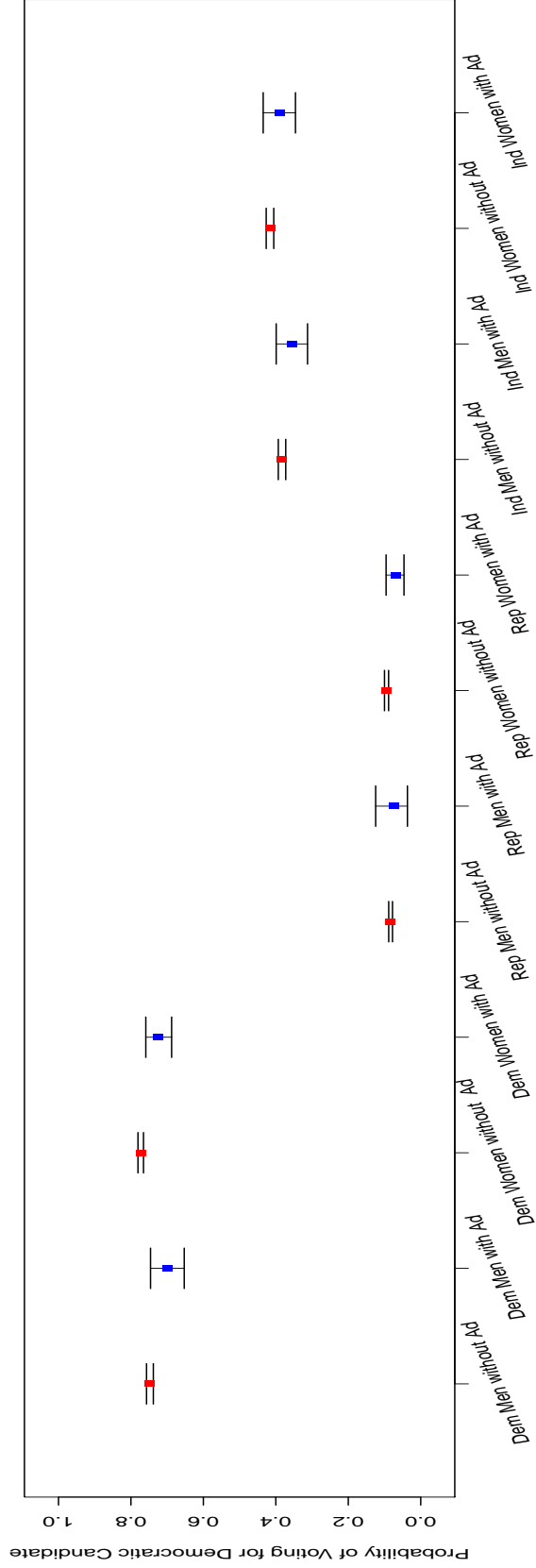
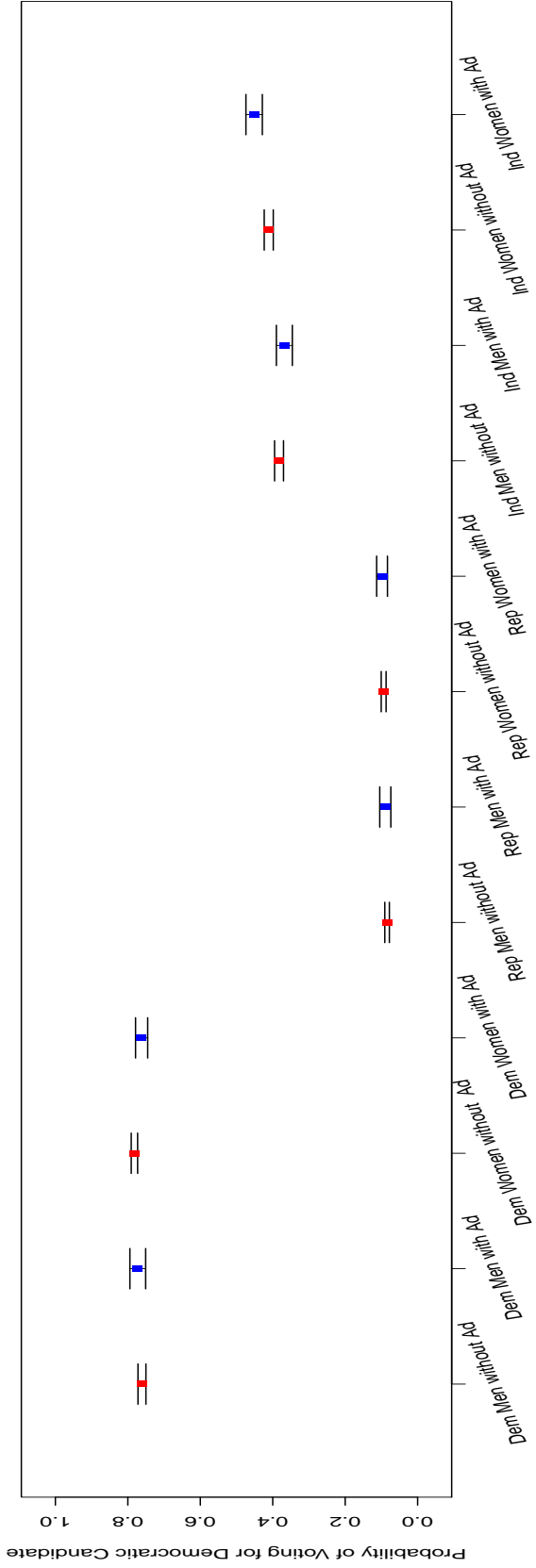


Figure 4: Probability of Voting Democrat with International Relations Prime by Sex and Party Identification

Panel A: Democratic Ad



Panel B: Republican Ad

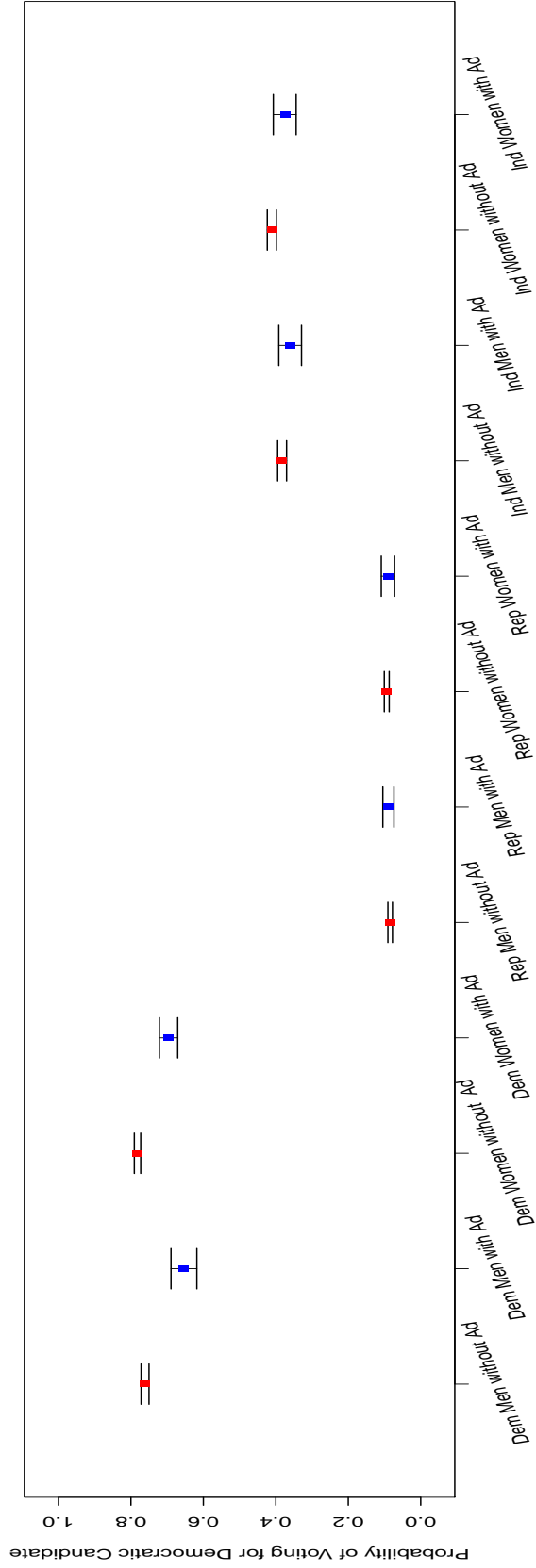
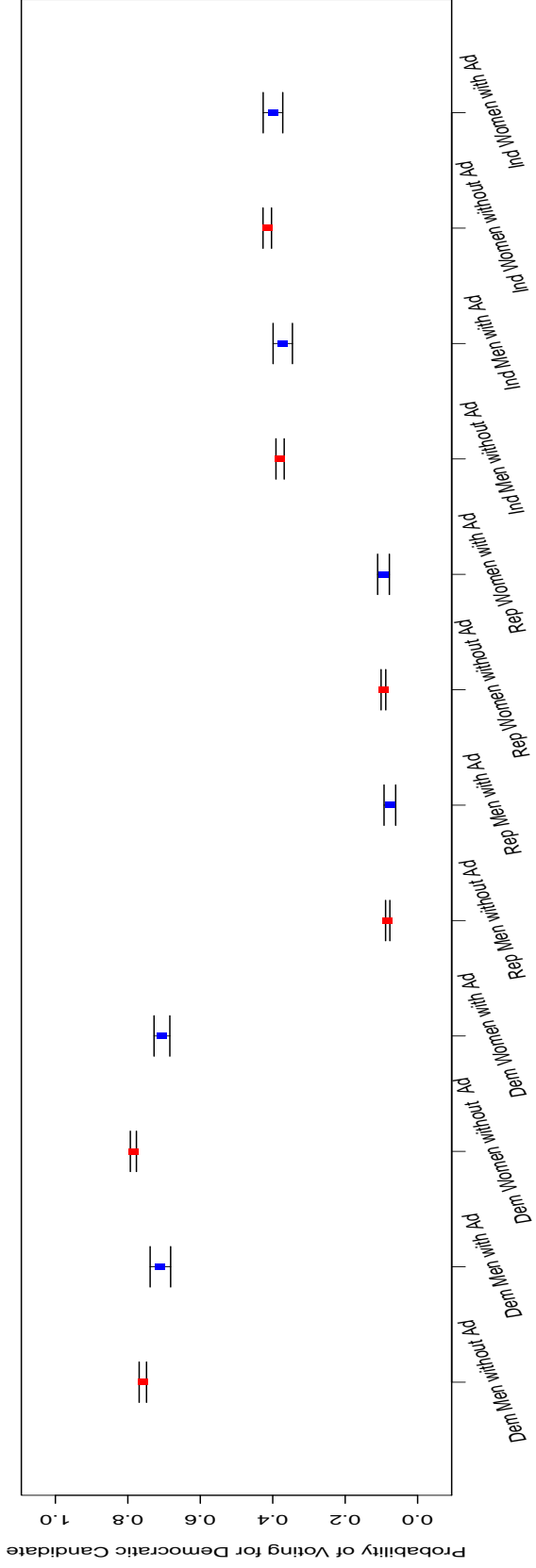


Figure 5: Probability of Voting Democrat with Law & Order Prime by Sex and Party Identification

Panel A: Democratic Ad



Panel B: Republican Ad

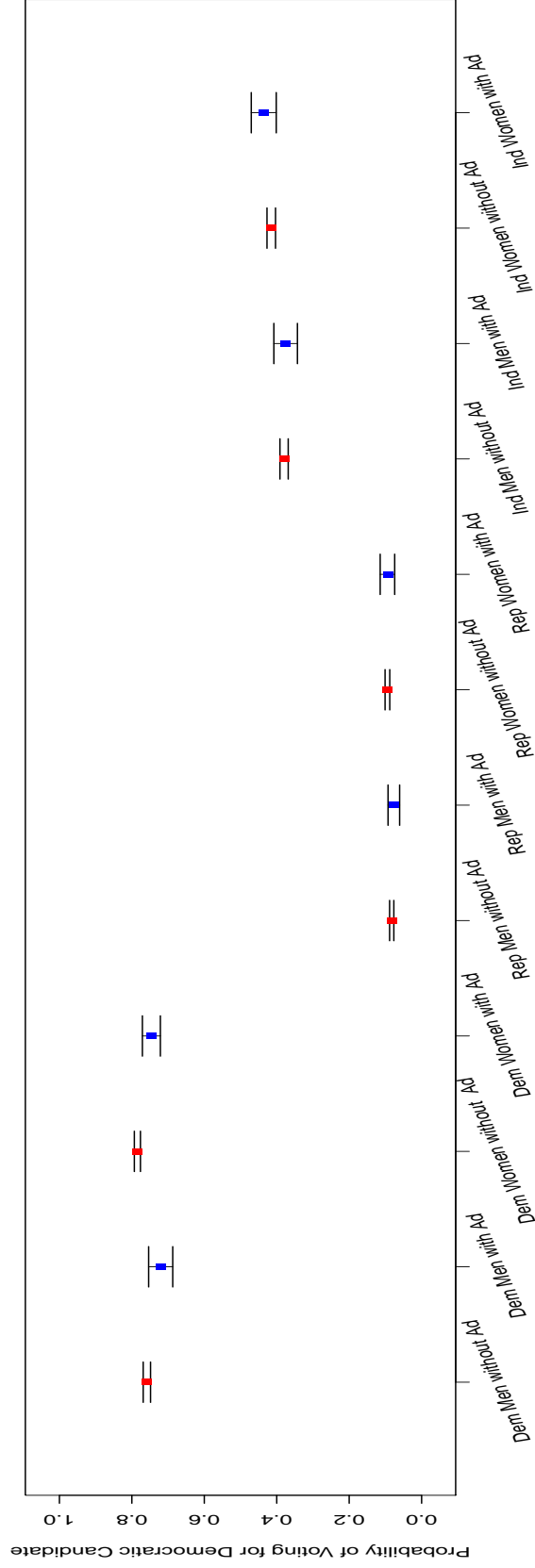
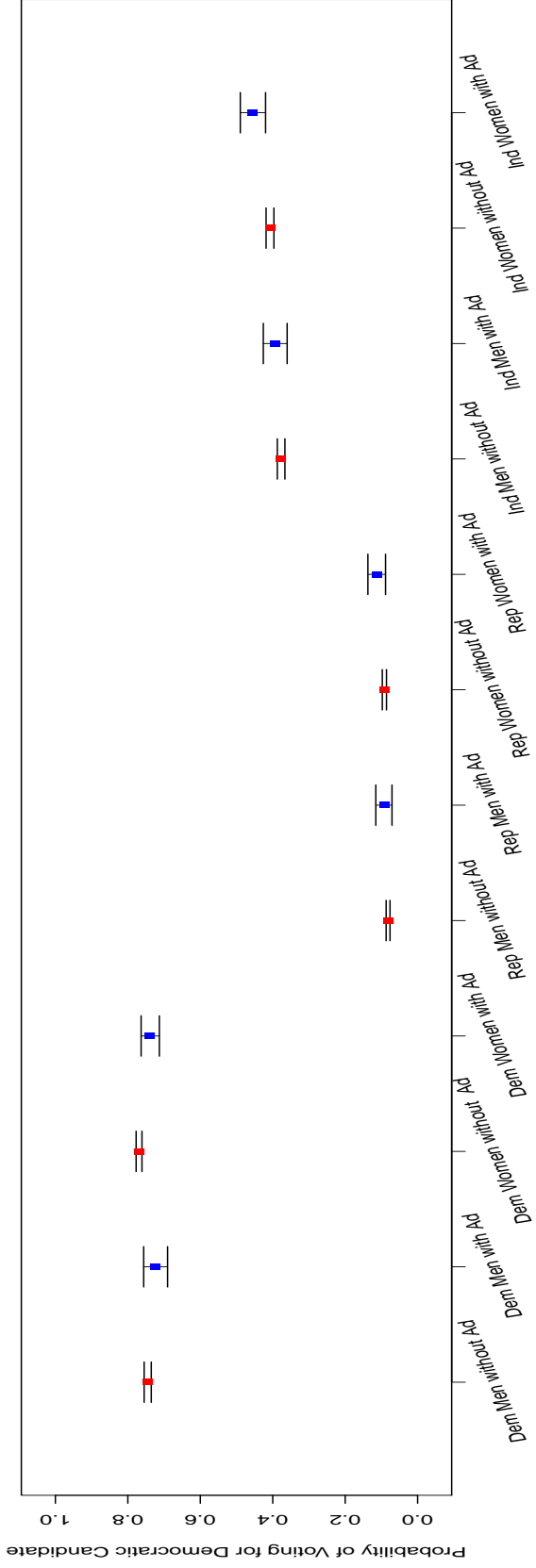


Figure 6: Probability of Voting Democrat with Economy Prime by Sex and Party Identification

Panel A: Democratic Ad



Panel B: Republican Ad

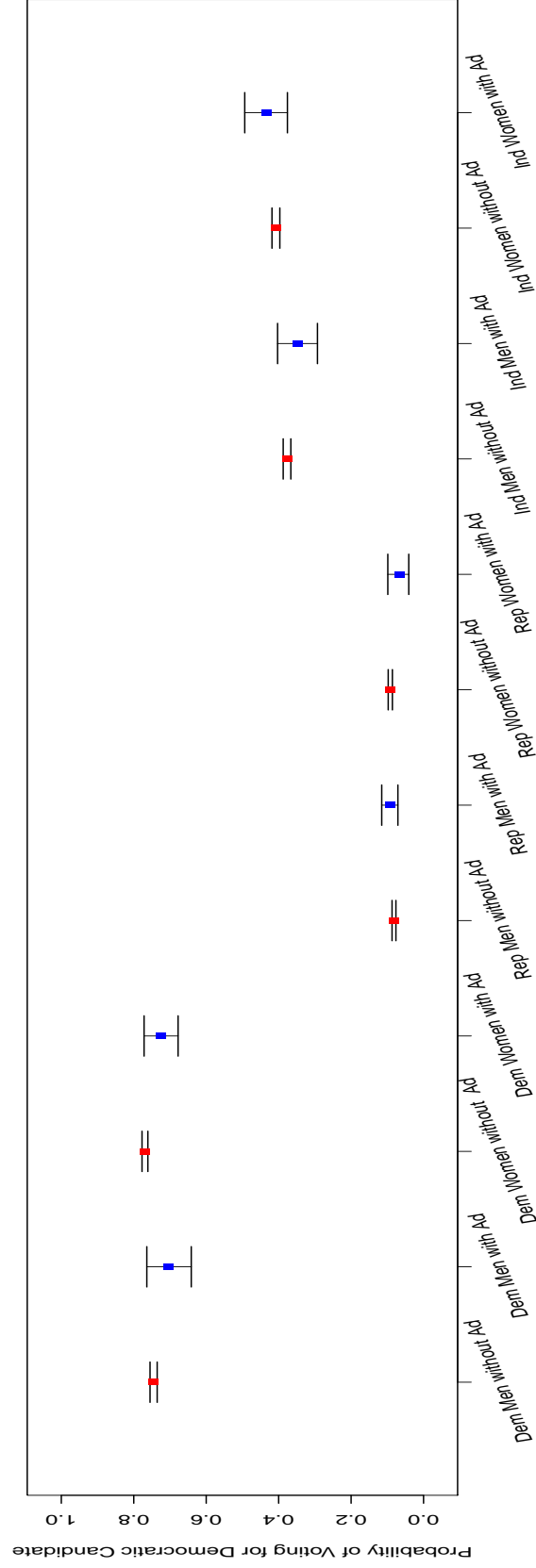


Figure 7: Probability of Voting Democrat with Women's Issue Prime by Sex and Party Identification

in persuading voters to shift their preferences. However, there are a few places where we see changes in the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate based on issue exposure. In Figure 4, we see a change in the probability of Democratic men and women and independent men and women voting for Al Gore when they are exposed to an ad priming international relations. For Democratic men exposure to an ad favoring the Democratic Party and priming the theme of international relations decreases their likelihood of voting for the Democratic candidate from 0.75 to 0.49, for Democratic women exposure to the same message from 0.77 to 0.56. Smaller changes were observed for independent-identifying men and women. When exposed to an ad favoring the Democrats and containing an international relations prime, the probability of voting Democrat shifts from 0.38 to 0.26 for an independent man and from 0.42 to 0.38 for an independent woman.

Figure 5 suggests that exposure to the law & order issue prime in advertisements favoring the Republican candidate reduces the likelihood of voting for the Democratic candidate. When Democratic men are exposed to law & order messages favoring the Republican candidate their probability of voting for the Democrat drops from 0.76 to 0.65. When Democratic women are exposed to the law & order issue prime from the Republicans, their probability of voting for the Democrat drops from 0.78 to 0.70. Smaller movement is observed for Independent men and women exposed to ads that prime law & order by the Republicans. Independent men decrease their probability of voting Democrat from 0.39 to 0.36 when exposed to the issue prime. Independent women's probability of voting Democrat is reduced from 0.41 to 0.37 when exposed to Republican ads on law & order. Figure 7 suggests voters react to campaigns' messages about women's issues. In particular, independent women increase their probability of voting Democratic from 0.41 to 0.45 when exposed to a Republican ad with a women's issue prime.

These figures reveal some interesting patterns, but they do not allow us to assess whether the changes in intended vote associated with exposure to campaign ads are statistically signif-

Table 1: Marginal Effects of Ad Exposed Conditional on Sex and Partisanship and Difference-In-Difference Tests

|                              | Social Welfare | International Relations | Law & Order   |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Exposure to Democratic Ad    |                |                         |               |
| Male Democrat                | 0.001          | <b>-0.25*</b>           | 0.01          |
| Female Democrat              | <b>-0.02*</b>  | <b>-0.21*</b>           | -0.02         |
| <i>Female Dem - Male Dem</i> | -0.02          | 0.04                    | <b>-0.03*</b> |
| Male Republican              | .002           | -0.01                   | 0.004         |
| Female Republican            | 0.01           | -0.04                   | 0.004         |
| <i>Female Rep - Male Rep</i> | 0.01           | -0.03                   | -0.0002       |
| Male Independent             | 0.01           | <b>-0.12*</b>           | -0.01         |
| Female Independent           | 0.01           | -0.04                   | 0.04          |
| <i>Female Ind - Male Ind</i> | -0.01          | 0.09                    | <b>0.06*</b>  |
| Exposure to Republican Ad    |                |                         |               |
| Male Democrat                | <b>-0.04*</b>  | <b>-0.05*</b>           | <b>-0.11*</b> |
| Female Democrat              | <b>-0.04*</b>  | <b>-0.05*</b>           | <b>-0.09*</b> |
| <i>Female Dem - Male Dem</i> | -0.01          | -.001                   | 0.02          |
| Male Republican              | 0.002          | -0.01                   | 0.004         |
| Female Republican            | 0.006          | -0.03                   | -0.005        |
| <i>Female Rep - Male Rep</i> | 0.004          | -0.02                   | -0.01         |
| Male Independent             | -0.01          | -0.03                   | -0.02         |
| Female Independent           | 0.02           | -0.03                   | -0.04         |
| <i>Female Ind - Male Ind</i> | <b>0.04*</b>   | 0.001                   | -0.01         |
|                              | Economy        | Women's Issues          |               |
| Exposure to Democratic Ad    |                |                         |               |
| Male Democrat                | <b>-0.04*</b>  | -0.02                   |               |
| Female Democrat              | <b>-0.08*</b>  | <b>-0.03*</b>           |               |
| <i>Female Dem - Male Dem</i> | -0.03          | -0.01                   |               |
| Male Republican              | -0.01          | 0.01                    |               |
| Female Republican            | -0.001         | 0.02                    |               |
| <i>Female Rep - Male Rep</i> | 0.01           | 0.01                    |               |
| Male Independent             | -0.01          | 0.02                    |               |
| Female Independent           | -0.02          | <b>0.05*</b>            |               |
| <i>Female Ind - Male Ind</i> | -0.01          | 0.03                    |               |
| Exposure to Republican Ad    |                |                         |               |
| Male Democrat                | -0.04          | -0.04                   |               |
| Female Democrat              | -0.04          | -0.04                   |               |
| <i>Female Dem - Male Dem</i> | -0.0005        | -0.003                  |               |
| Male Republican              | -0.01          | 0.01                    |               |
| Female Republican            | -0.001         | -0.03                   |               |
| <i>Female Rep - Male Rep</i> | 0.01           | -0.04                   |               |
| Male Independent             | -0.005         | -0.08                   |               |
| Female Independent           | 0.02           | 0.03                    |               |
| <i>Female Ind - Male Ind</i> | 0.02           | 0.06                    |               |

\*: statistically significant with 90% confidence intervals.

icant. Table 1 directly tests if ad exposure significantly changed individuals' voting intentions and if those differences were significantly different for men and women. The marginal effects of exposure to an advertisement are reported on lines with straight text while the differences in the marginal effects of exposure across sex are reported on lines with italicized text. The marginal effects represent the probability of an individual voting Democratic when he or she has not been exposed to an issue prime minus the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate when he or she has been exposed to the issue prime. Additionally, the marginal effects are reported conditional on a respondent's sex and partisanship. This allows us to determine, for example, whether exposure to an issue prime influences the voting intentions of Democratic men.

For the vast majority of the cases the marginal effect for ad exposure conditional on sex and partisanship is not statistically significant. The issue messages from campaigns then have a limited potential to influence the gender gap in vote choice because the issue content of campaigns appear to have little impact on the vote. However, there are several instances where messages from campaigns significantly shift the preferences of voters. When Democratic women are exposed to social welfare, law & order, and women's issues themes in advertisements favoring the Democratic candidate their probability of voting Democratic is significantly reduced. Both male and female Democrats and female independents experience a significant reduction in their probability to vote for the Democratic candidate when exposed to Democratic ads with the theme of international relations. Additionally, male and female Democrats are less likely to vote for the Democratic candidate when the message from the Democrats focuses on the economy. Democratic men and women who are exposed to issue primes from the Republican Party concerning social welfare, international relations, and law & order have a significantly lower probability of voting for the Democratic candidate.

The difference between men's and women's reactions to the campaign messages reported in Table ?? provide direct tests of whether campaigns' shape the gender gap in vote choice.



Positive differences between women's and men's marginal effects indicate an increase in the gender gap and negative differences in marginal effects indicate a shrinking gender gap. There are two ways that the gap could be manipulated by campaigns. First, men and women could react in a similar manner to the advertisement, both increasing or decreasing their probability of voting for the Democratic candidate, but the magnitude of the reaction is different. Second, men and women could respond in opposite directions to the message from the campaign, one increasing their probability of voting Democrat and the other decreasing their probability of voting Democrat. There are two cases where men and women respond to cues from campaigns in opposite directions that reach statistical significance. Male independents exhibit a slight decrease of 0.01 in their probability of voting Democratic when exposed to an ad on law & order that favors the Democratic candidate, while female independents move in the opposite direction and increase their probability of voting Democratic by 0.04. These contrasting effects result in a statistically significant 0.06 point difference in the marginal effect of law & order advertisements on independent men and women's intended vote. Men and women also respond in opposite directions when primed on the issue of social welfare by the Republican party. Men reduce their probability of voting Democratic by 0.01, while women increase their probability of voting Democratic by 0.02 when exposed to an a social welfare ad by the Republican Party. This creates a 0.04 difference in the marginal effect of being exposed to a Republican prime of social welfare for independent men and independent women.

## **Conclusion**

For several decades the gender gap in vote choice has played a significant role in shaping the outcome of presidential elections. Despite the importance of these sex differences, we know relatively little about how campaigns can influence the size of the gender gap. In this

manuscript I examine how campaigns use advertising to prime issues to influence voters. Examining the gender gap over the course of the election we see that it fluctuates around a stable mean. Importantly, those fluctuations do not appear to be random. Rather, there appears to be something systematically shaping the gender gap over the course of the campaign. Moreover, we see that the Democratic and Republican Parties focus on different issues in the 2000 elections. Individual level analysis demonstrates that overwhelmingly men and women respond in a similar fashion to issue primes from campaigns. However, there are instances where men and women respond in opposite directions to those primes demonstrating that campaigns can play some role in shaping the gender gap in vote choice.

This analysis provides us interesting insights into the tradeoffs campaigns might engage in when trying to manipulate the gender gap. In the 2000 election priming different issues did not always help candidates among their base. When the Democratic Party primed the law & order issue it reduced the probability of Democratic women voting for the Democratic candidate. This action would reduce the size of the gender gap. However, the same prime caused the gender gap to grow based on the reaction of women and men who identified as independents. Thus parties walk a fine line, risking losing support among their base to gain support among independents.

Examining a single election provides us with only limited insight into how campaigns shape the gender gap. Every campaign takes place in a larger political context, making some issues more central than others. The 2000 election is often times considered a continuation of the trend in the 2000 where politics was dominated by domestic issues. Clearly, both campaigns tried to capitalize on this issue given that it was the most primed issue area. However, in retrospect, it appears the best strategy for the Gore campaign in the 2000 election might have been to not do anything. Priming voters on issue areas that are viewed as favoring the Democratic Party, such as social welfare, hurt Gore among both supporters and failed to attract independents. Further analysis needs to be done to understand how

campaigns might manipulate the gender gap when other issues are dominate. For example, analysis of the 2004 campaign would provide insight into a time period when security issues and international relations dominate the campaign messages. The 2008 campaign would shed light on when the economy returned to the center stage as the most pressing issue of the campaign.

In addition to exploring this process across different electoral context, future research needs to move beyond simply looking at a single yes or no indicator of the issue prime from campaigns. Considerable variation exists in the amount of advertisements in a given media market in a single week. This creates variation in the number of times a respondent is potentially exposed to an issue prime and the number of different issue primes a respondent could be exposed to in the week before their interview. This variation needs to be incorporated into the analysis to understand how much priming is necessary to shift voting preferences.

Finally, it is not surprising that large effects of issue priming causing the gender gap were not discovered in this study. First, this analysis reported the average effect of exposure to a prime conditional on sex and partisanship based on a sample of survey respondents. The average survey respondent is likely to differ from the average voter in an election. Moreover, political campaigns serve to reinforce preferences, rather than persuade voters. Thus, the larger effects of issue priming in campaigns could be their ability to motivate individuals to turnout in elections, rather than changing their vote choice. To more completely understand the influence issue priming on the gender gap, further analysis needs to be conducted to connect individual vote choice predictions to aggregate electoral returns.

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## Variable Information

The dependent variable represents intended vote in the presidential election. The variable ids, question wording, and dates the question were asked can be found in the tables below. The National Annenberg Elections Survey does change question wording over the course of the campaigns to reflect the choices offered to the voters at the time of the survey. Additionally, the surveys include a series of questions with different potential match-ups during the primary election before a single candidate gains enough deflates to be considered their party’s nominee. In this project only questions that paired the two major party candidates in the general election were used to create the vote intent dependent variables. For example, in 2000 only questions that had George Bush as the Republican candidate and Al Gore as the Democratic candidate were used. This coding exclude any third party and indecent candidates referenced in the various questions.



Table 2: Dependent Variable Information

| Year | Variable id | Question Wording   | Dates Asked                    |
|------|-------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 2000 | cr23        | Thinking about the general election in November, if you voted today in the general election for president and the candidates were George W. Bush, the Republican, and Al Gore, the Democrat, who would you vote for?   | Dec 14, 1999 - Nov 6, 2000     |
| 2000 | cr27        | Thinking about the general election in November, if you voted today in the general election for president and the candidates were George W. Bush, the Republican; Al Gore, the Democrat; Pat Buchanan of the Reform Party; and Ralph Nader of the Green Party, who would you vote for? | July 18, 2000 - Nov 6, 2000    |
| 2004 | crc07       | Thinking about the general election for president in November 2004, if that election were held today, and the candidates were George W. Bush, the Republican, and John Kerry, the Democrat, for whom would you vote?   | Jan 28, 2004 - April 29, 2004  |
| 2004 | crc10       | Thinking about the general election for president in November 2004, if that election were held today, and the candidates were George W. Bush, the Republican; John Kerry, the Democrat; and Ralph Nader, the Independent; for whom would you vote?                                     | March 5, 2004 - April 29, 2004 |

## A Logit Results

Table 3: Predicting Likelihood to Vote Democrat Conditional on Sex, Partisanship, and Ad Exposure: Social Welfare, International Relations, and Law&Order

|                        | Social Welfare                | International Relations       | Law & Order                  |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sex                    | 0.11 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.05)   | 0.14<br>(0.03)                | 0.12<br>(0.04)               |
| Respondent Democrat    | 1.79 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.06)   | 1.56 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.03)   | 1.64 <sup>c</sup><br>(.04)   |
| Respondent Republican  | -1.95 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.09)  | -1.92 <sup>c</sup><br>( 0.04) | -1.91 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.05) |
| Democratic Ad          | 0.06 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.07)   | -0.58 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.24)  | -0.06 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.06) |
| Republican Ad          | -0.06 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.06)  | -0.12 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.12)  | -.10 <sup>c</sup><br>(.08)   |
| Sex*Dem Ad             | -0.03 <sup>c</sup><br>( 0.09) | 0.42 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.34)   | 0.23 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.09)  |
| Sex*Rep Ad             | 0.16 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.09)   | .01 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.16)    | -.05 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.11)  |
| Democrat* Dem Ad       | -.06 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.11)   | -.53 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.34)   | 0.13 <sup>c</sup><br>(.10)   |
| Republican* Dem Ad     | -0.03 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.14)  | 0.38 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.47)   | 0.11 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.14)  |
| Democrat*Rep Ad        | -0.14 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.11)  | -0.11 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.18)  | -0.42 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.12) |
| Republican* Rep Ad     | 0.03 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.13)   | 0.31 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.23)   | -0.18 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.18) |
| Sex*Democrat* Dem Ad   | -0.09 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.13)  | -0.30 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.44)  | -0.41 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.12) |
| Sex*Republican* Dem Ad | 0.13 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.18)   | -0.97 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.79)  | -0.23 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.17) |
| Sex*Democrat*Rep Ad    | -0.21 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.12)  | -0.02 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.24)  | 0.13 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.16)  |
| Sex*Republican* Rep Ad | -0.05 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.17)  | -0.56 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.35)  | 0.27 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.23)  |
| Constant               | -0.53<br>(0.05)               | -0.48<br>(0.03)               | -0.48<br>(0.03)              |
| N                      | 29186                         | 29186                         | 29186                        |
| loglikelihood          | -14996.7                      | -14979.4                      | -14976.7                     |

<sup>c</sup> Conditional Relationship  
Standard Errors in parentheses.

Table 4: Predicting Likelihood to Vote Democrat Conditional on Sex, Partisanship, and Ad Exposure: Economy and Women's Issues

|                        | Economy                      | Women's Issues               |
|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sex                    | 0.15<br>(0.03)               | 0.12<br>(0.03)               |
| Respondent Democrat    | 1.64 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.04)  | 1.58 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.03)  |
| Respondent Republican  | -1.92 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.05) | -1.92 <sup>c</sup><br>(.005) |
| Democratic Ad          | -0.03 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.07) | 0.07 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.09)  |
| Republican Ad          | -0.02 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.09) | -0.13 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.15) |
| Sex*Dem Ad             | -0.03 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.10) | 0.12 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.12)  |
| Sex*Rep Ad             | 0.10 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.12)  | 0.24 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.20)  |
| Democrat* Dem Ad       | -0.21 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.11) | -0.18 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.13) |
| Republican* Dem Ad     | -0.06 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.16) | 0.04 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.19)  |
| Democrat*Rep Ad        | -0.17 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.13) | -0.06 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.23) |
| Republican* Rep Ad     | 0.09 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.18)  | 0.40 <sup>c</sup><br>(.30)   |
| Sex*Democrat* Dem Ad   | -0.14 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.14) | -0.18 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.18) |
| Sex*Republican* Dem Ad | 0.11 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.21)  | -0.03 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.25) |
| Sex*Democrat*Rep Ad    | -0.12 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.17) | -0.27 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.31) |
| Sex*Republican* Rep Ad | -0.19 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.24) | -0.89 <sup>c</sup><br>(0.44) |
| Constant               | -0.49<br>(0.03)              | -0.50<br>(0.02)              |

<sup>c</sup> Conditional Relationship  
Standard Errors in parentheses.