Obama and the Public Mood

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This file includes only the model specification, tables, and the supporting appendix, most of which were not included in the published version of the chapter

The 2008 Comparative Congressional Election Study

I examine Obama's victory through an analysis of the 2008 Comparative Congressional Election Study.[1] The internet-based CCES survey combines a very large sample of 32,000 respondents with a two-wave, pre- and post-election interview design.[2]

The vote decision model is adapted from the Michigan School's "funnel of causality," (Campbell et al. 1960) as subsequently refined by Miller and Shanks (Miller and Shanks 1996). This is a non-recursive model, without feedback loops or two-way causation. Socio-economic characteristics and political orientations such as partisan self-identification are presumed to influence the formation of contemporary policy-relevant political views, which in turn influence voter's judgments of the current administration and the contending candidates. Figure 1 displays the model.

The model estimates the influence of all of the independent variables on the vote decision for Obama or McCain. Because the dependent variable is a dichotomy, I use multiple logistic regression to estimate the parameters. The variables are entered by the stages depicted in the model. For example, at Stage 1, I enter the social and economic characteristics of voters, but not the variables introduced at subsequent stages. At Stage 2, the independent variables include all of the variables in Stages 1 and 2. And so on. For ease of interpretation, I convert the logistic regression coefficients to measures of the effect of each variable on the probability of voting for Obama. The model assumes that the variables in each stage can affect the vote decision directly or indirectly through their influence on variables that follow in the causal sequence. Thus, the Obama vote probabilities are total estimates of the direct and indirect effects of the variables at each stage on the presidential vote. Miller and Shanks employ this analytic strategy as well,

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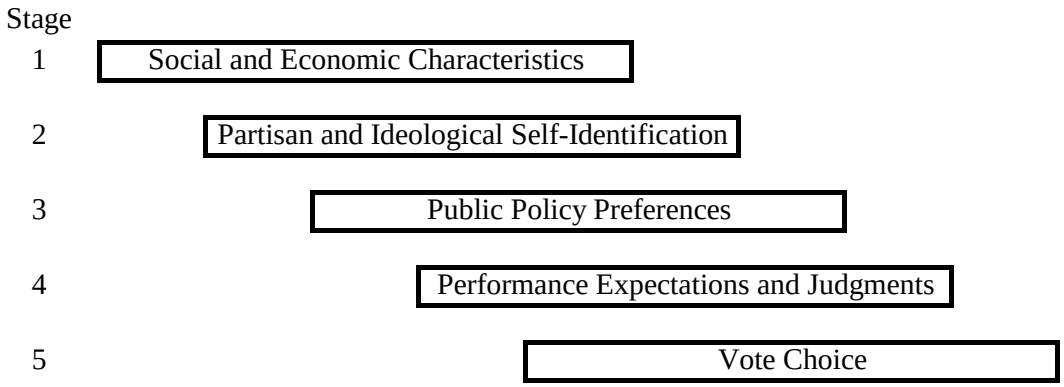
[1] I am indebted to Professors James Thurber of the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University and Brian Schaffner of the University of Massachusetts for providing access to the common content of the 2008 election study and to Stephen Ansolabehere of Harvard University for assistance with the final codebook.

[2] A full description of the project is available at http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/index.html. Ansolabehere, Stephen, COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 2008: COMMON CONTENT. [Computer File] Release 1: February 2, 2009. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. [producer]. Quoting from the codebook, "The 2008 CCES involved 30 teams, yielding a Common Content sample of 32,800 cases. The subjects for this study were recruited during the fall of 2008. Each research team purchased a 1,000 person national sample survey, conducted in October and November of 2008 by YouGov/Polimetrix of Palo Alto, CA. Each survey has approximately 120 questions. For each survey of 1,000 persons, half of the questionnaire was developed and controlled entirely by each the individual research team, and half of the questionnaire is devoted to Common Content. The Common Content consists of the questions common to all team modules and has a sample size equal to the total sample size of all team modules combined. Most of the 30 teams purchased 1,000 person surveys, though the Harvard/MIT team purchased additional cases to increase their sample size and the size of the Common Content. All cases were selected through the Internet and YouGov/Polimetrix constructed matched random samples for this study. Interviews for the 2008 survey were conducted in two waves. The Pre-Election wave was conducted during October, 2008, and gauged issue preferences, knowledge of the candidates, and some demographics, and vote intentions. The Post-Election wave was conducted the two weeks following Election Day (November 4, 2008)."

although they estimate the total effects with multiple regression coefficients. This vote model fits the data quite well. It correctly predicts the vote decision of 94% of the respondents, with a pseudo multiple R square of .88. The appendix presents the full model. Here I elaborate on the most interesting of the findings.

Figure 1: Model of Vote Choice



Stage 1: Social and Economic Characteristics

Sex. Sixty percent of women voted for Obama, compared to only 48% of men.[3] This gender gap first emerged in the Reagan victories, when the Republican Party platform embraced its pro-life position and withdrew support for the Equal Rights Amendment. This gap persists even when the differing incomes and marital states of women are taken into account.

[3] This is a verbal shorthand. What this really means is the probability of women voting for Obama is .60, controlled for all of the other socioeconomic variables in Stage 1. This formulation should not be confused with the actual bivariate vote of men and women for Obama. In the simple bivariate cross-tabulation of gender and vote, 58% of women in the 2008 CCES survey voted for Obama, compared to 50% of men. I will use this verbal shorthand throughout this discussion unless I refer specifically to a bivariate relationship of a variable to the vote. The vote probabilities for Stage 2 variables are likewise controlled for all variables entered in both Stage 1 and Stage 2, and the vote probabilities in Stage 3 are controlled for all variables entered in Stages 1, 2, and 3. And so on through Stages 4.

Figure 2: Race Ethnicity and the Obama Vote

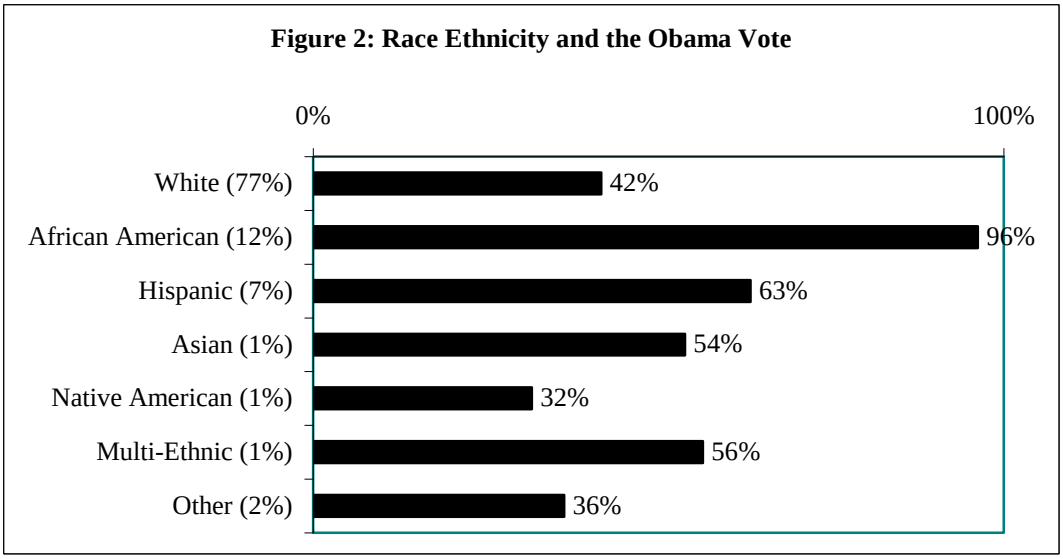
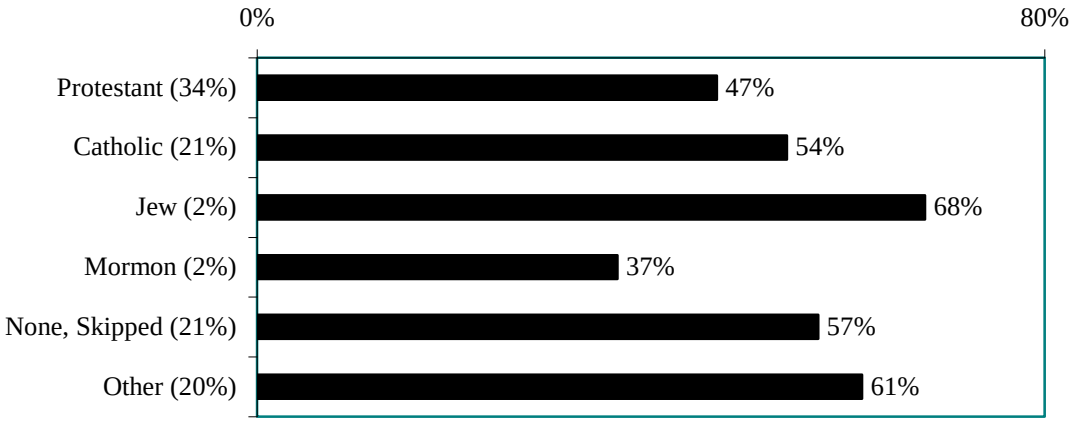


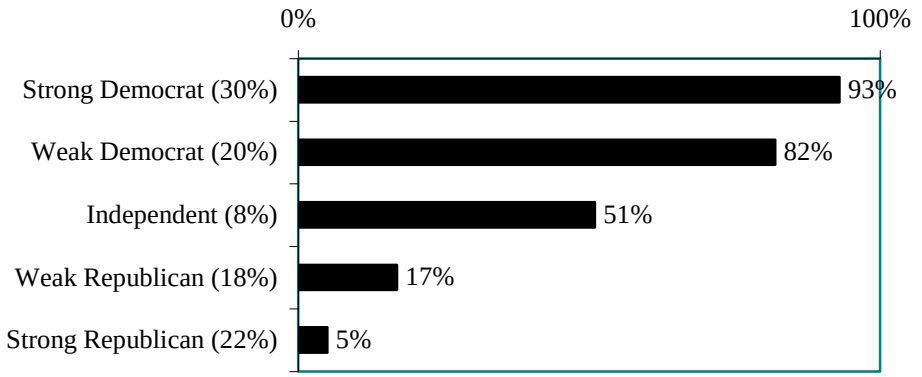
Figure 3: Religion and the Obama Vote



Stage 2: Partisan and Ideological Identification

Together, the social and economic variables in Stage 1 correctly predict the votes of 74% of the 2008 CCES sample, with a pseudo R square of .38. When we add the direct and indirect Stage 2 effects of partisan and ideological self-identification, the model correctly predicts 91% of the votes, with a pseudo R square of .80. As Figures 4 and 5 show, partisan identification is slightly more important than ideological identification, but both are powerful predictors, even when the effects of all of the Stage 1 variables are controlled.

Figure 4: Party Identification and the Obama Vote



Stage 3: Political and Moral Policy Preferences

The 2008 CCES common content survey includes many questionnaire items measuring people's policy preferences. I have reduced these items to a set of four underlying policy dimensions: views on the proper federal role in social welfare, moral traditionalism, preferences on means of reducing budget deficits, and conditions justifying the deployment of U.S. troops abroad.

Figure 5: Ideological Identification and the Obama Vote

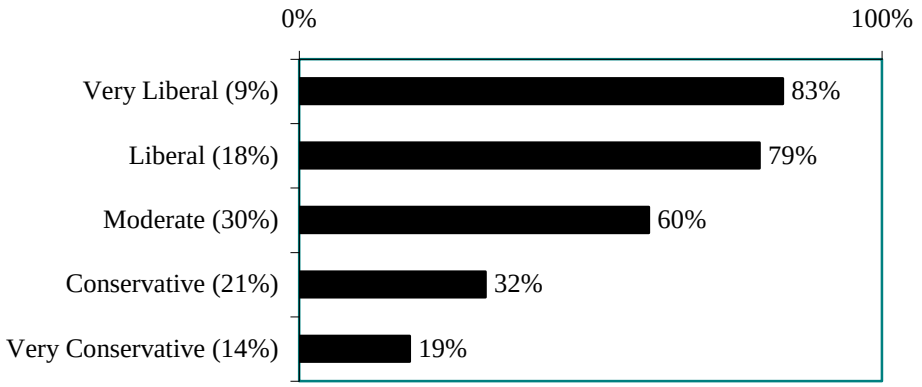
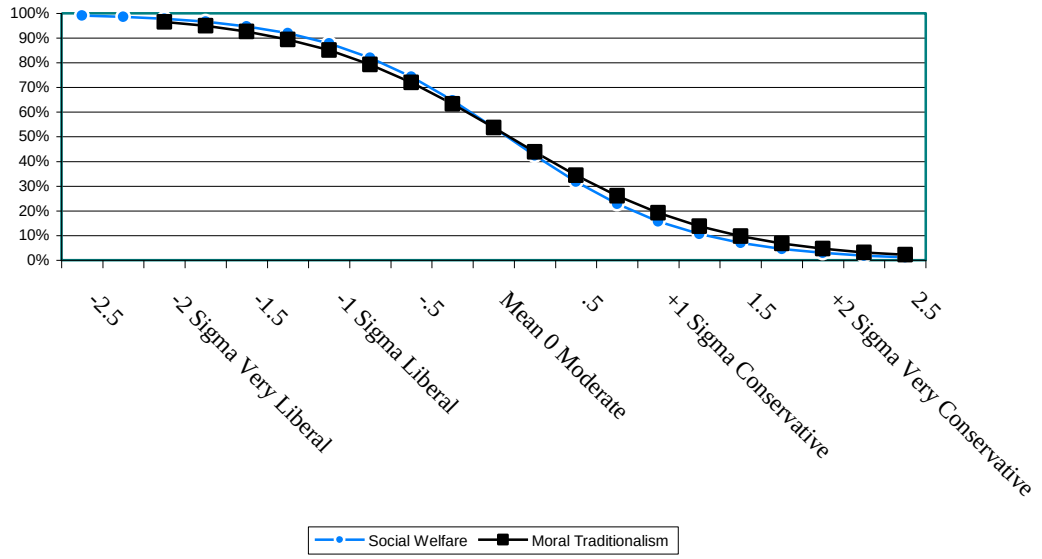


Figure 6: Social Welfare and Moral Traditionalism and the Obama Vote



Stage 4: Performance Judgments and Economic Expectations The Economy, the Iraq War, and the Bank Bailout

Discussion

Adequacy of the Model. The model, based on the "funnel of causality" in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960) fits the data well in several important respects. Overall, the logistic regression correctly predicts the vote decisions of 94% of the respondents in the 2008 CCES. The pseudo R square is .88. This result is not a consequence of people deciding first on a vote decision and then rationalizing their way to retrospective criticisms of the Bush Administration justifying those prior vote decisions. The policy preferences introduced in Stage 3 were even more substantively important to the vote than the retrospective performance judgments of Stage 4.

The parameter estimates behave as they should when the variables in successive stages are introduced. If the model is properly conceived as a non-recursive causal chain, then the substantive importance of variables in the early stages should sharply diminish as the new variables they are presumed to cause are introduced in subsequent stages. For example, the model posits that peoples' habits of religious observance develop in conjunction with religious identity, and both subsequently influence their values on moral issues such as abortion and gay rights. If so, when the intervening policy dimension, moral traditionalism, is introduced in Stage 3, the indirect effect of religious observance

through the intervening variable, moral traditionalism, on the vote should disappear, leaving only a possible direct effect of religious observance on the vote. This, indeed, is what happens. Religious Observance, so important when introduced in Stage 1, is statistically insignificant after Stage 3.

Ideological self-identification in Stage 2 provides another supporting example for the model's assumption of a causal chain. When the policy preferences in Stage 3 are introduced, the Stage 2 measure of ideological identification ceases to be statistically significant. Overall, few of the social and economic characteristics in Stage 1 have any substantive relationship to the vote once variables later in the causal chain are included. This non-recursive model appears to fit the data quite adequately.

Figure 7: James Stimson's Cycle of Policy Moods, 1952-2009

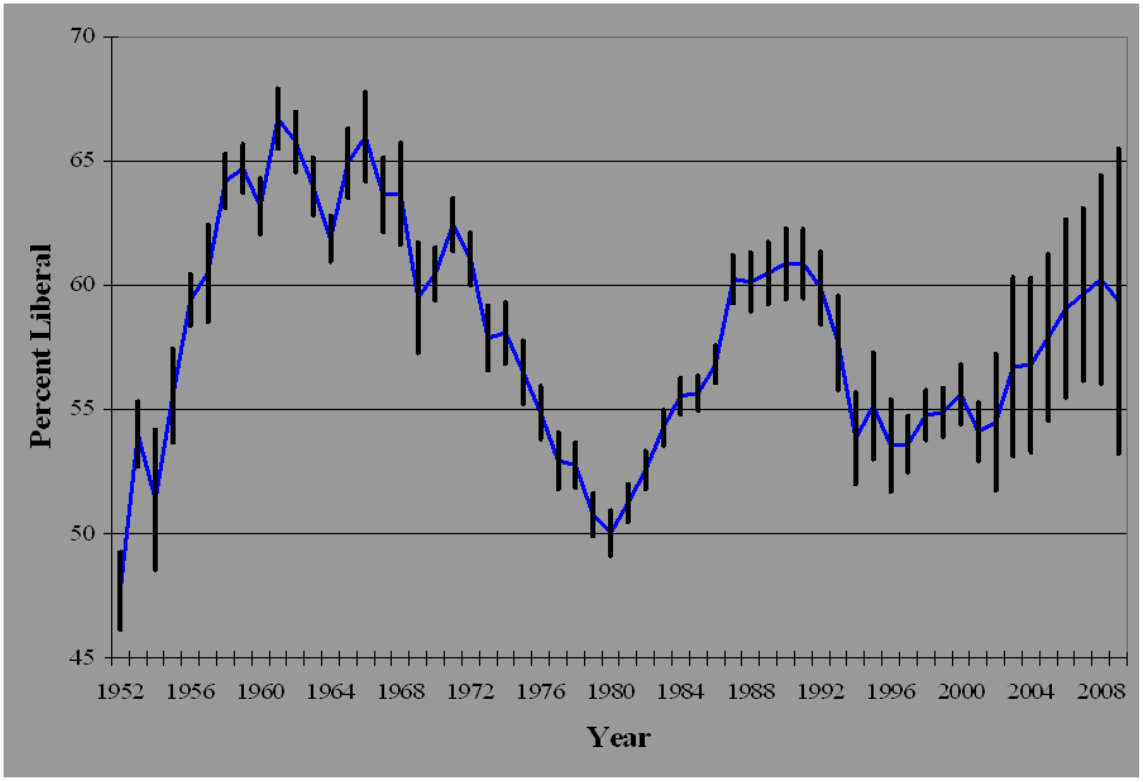


Figure 8: Federal Role on Social Welfare Policy by Party Identification

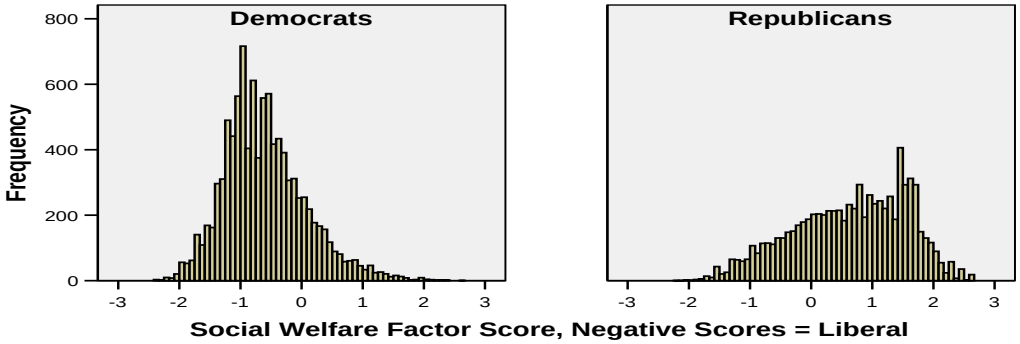


Figure 9: Moral Traditionalism by Party Identification

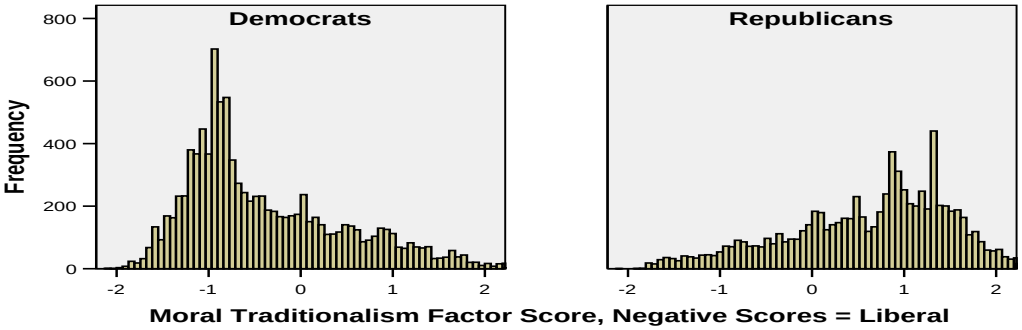


Figure 10: Independents' Views on Federal Role on Social Welfare

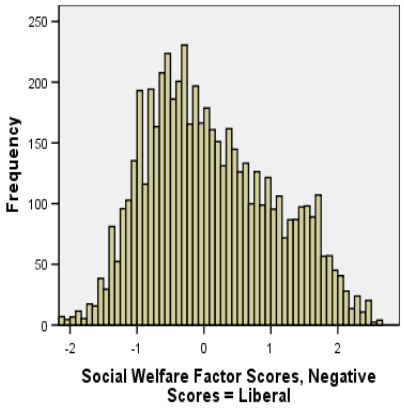


Figure 11: Independents' Views on Moral Traditionalism

Table 1: Budget Balancing Preferences by Party Identification				
Budget Policy Preferences	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Totals
Liberal Preferences	40%	25	3	24
Mixed Preferences	34	24	10	24
Conservative Preferences	26	51	87	52
Totals	100% (N=9905)	100% (N=5570)	100 (N=7719)	100% (N=23,194)

Appendix

Stage 1: Social and Economic Variables. All Obama vote estimates are controlled for all other variables in Stage 1. The estimates include the direct effects of these variables on the vote as well as the indirect effects these variables have on intervening variables in the causal model. All of the categoric variables have a comparison group marked with a "c" to which the other categories are statistically compared. The comparison group is typically the group expected to support McCain most strongly. The groups that are statistically significantly different from the comparison group are denoted by an asterisk. The sample size of voters is 24,708 for all tables. Cases Correctly Predicted = 74%. Nagelkerke R Sq = 38%	**Obama's Share of the Two Party Vote**
Sex:	
Male (51%) (Percentage of Voters in Each Category)	48% c
Female (49%)	60% *
Region:	
Southeast (25%)	48% c
Northeast (21%)	57% *
Midwest (23%)	59% *
Southwest (11%)	49%
Far West (19%)	54% *
Ethnicity:	
Non-Hispanic Whites (77%)	45% c
Non-Hispanic Blacks (12%)	97% *
Hispanic Americans (7%)	64% *
Asian Americans (1%)	54% *
Native Americans (1%)	32% *
Multiple Ethnicities (1%)	56% *
Other (1%)	36% *
Education:	
No High School Degree (8%)	49%
High School Graduate (28%)	48% c
Some College (26%)	51% *
Two Year College Degree (7%)	51% *
Four Year College Degree (20%)	59% *
Postgraduate Degree (11%)	71% *
Religion:	
Protestant (34%)	47% c
Catholic (21%)	54% *
Jew (2%)	68% *
Mormon (2%)	37% *
None, Skipped (21%)	61% *
Other (20%)	57% *
Family Income:	
First Quintile (18%)	60% *
Second Quintile (20%)	55% *
Third Quintile (21%)	54% *
Fourth Quintile (17%)	51%
Fifth Quintile (17%)	50% c
Skipped (7%)	46% *

Age Group:		
Under 30	(13%)	55%
30's	(14%)	52%
40's	(20%)	52%
50's	(19%)	54%
60's	(17%)	56% *
70 and Higher	(9%)	52% c
Employment Status:		
Full or Partly Employed	(56%)	52%
Unemployed or Laid Off	(6%)	61% *
Retired	(19%)	54% c
Other, Skipped	(20%)	55%
Marital Status:		
Married	(58%)	50% c
Divorced	(9%)	55% *
Separated	(1%)	60% *
Domestic Partnership	(4%)	73% *
Single	(23%)	59% *
Widowed	(4%)	50%
Union Membership:		
Neither Respondent nor Family Member in a Union	(74%)	51% c
Family Member in a Union, But not Respondent	(11%)	58% *
Respondent in a Union, But not another Family Member	(10%)	60% *
Both Respondent and another Family Member in a Union	(4%)	66% *
Missing Data on Union Membership	(1%)	62% *
Residence:		
Own Home or Apartment	(64%)	51% c
Rent Home or Apartment	(25%)	60% *
Live with Someone or Family	(8%)	55% *
Institutional Residence	(2%)	60% *
Missing Data	(<1%)	30% *
Frequency of Religious Observance:		
Statistically Significant Factor Score		
Example Values:		
-1 Standard Deviation, More Observant		37%
0 Mean		54%
+1 Standard Deviation, Less Observant		70%
Stage 2: Partisan and Ideological Self Identification.		**Obama's Share of the Two Party Vote**
Direct and Indirect Effects.		
Cases Correctly Predicted = 91%.	Nagelkerke R Sq = .80%	
Party Identification:		
Strong Democrats	(30%)	93% *
Not Strong and Leaning Democrats	(20%)	82% *
Independents	(8%)	51% *
Not Strong and Leaning Republicans	(18%)	17% *
Strong Republicans	(22%)	3% c
Missing Data	(2%)	50% *

Ideological Identification:		
Very Liberal	(9%)	83% *
Liberal	(18%)	79% *
Moderate	(31%)	60% *
Conservative	(21%)	32% *
Very Conservative	(14%)	19% c
Missing Data	(9%)	54% *
Stage 3: Political and Moral Policy Preferences. Direct and Indirect Effects. Cases Correctly Predicted = 93%. Nagelkerke R Sq = .87%		**Obama's Share of the Two Party Vote**
Federal Role in Social Welfare: Statistically Significant Standardized Factor Score Example Values:		
-2 Standard Deviations, Very Liberal		98%
-1 Standard Deviations, Liberal		88%
0 Mean, Moderate		54%
+1 Standard Deviations, Conservative		16%
+2 Standard Deviations, Very Conservative		3%
Moral Traditionalism: Statistically Significant Standardized Factor Score Example Values:		
-2 Standard Deviations, Very Liberal		97%
-1 Standard Deviations, Liberal		85%
0 Mean, Moderate		54%
+1 Standard Deviations, Conservative		19%
+2 Standard Deviations, Very Conservative		5%
Conditions Justifying Use of U.S. Troops Abroad: Statistically Significant Standardized Factor Score Example Values:		
-2 Standard Deviations, Very Supportive		37%
-1 Standard Deviations, Supportive		45%
0 Mean		54%
+1 Standard Deviations, Opposed		62%
+2 Standard Deviations, Very Opposed		69%
Means to A Balanced Budget: Cutting Defense, Cutting Domestic Spending, or Raising Taxes		
Conservative Policy Preferences	(52%)	38% c
Mixed Balanced Budget Preferences	(24%)	62% *
Liberal Policy Preferences	(24%)	77% *
Missing Data	(1%)	42%

Stage 4: Performance Judgments and Economic Expectations: Direct and Indirect Effects. Cases Correctly Predicted = 94%. Nagelkerke R Sq = .88%		**Obama's Share of the Two Party Vote**
Consumer Confidence in Current Economy: Standardized Factor Score. Neither substantively important nor statistically significant. Example values not shown.		
Consumer Confidence in the Economy's Near Future: Statistically Significant Standardized Factor Score on business conditions, general employment, and personal income in the next six months		
-2 Standard Deviations, Very High Confidence		(42%)
-1 Standard Deviations, High Confidence		(48%)
0 Mean		(54%)
+1 Standard Deviations, Low Confidence		(59%)
+2 Standard Deviations, Very Low Confidence		(65%)
Opinion on U.S. Decisions on Iraq War:		
Right Thing, No Mistakes	(7%)	(26%) c
Right Thing, Worth It Despite Mistakes	(23%)	(25%)
Right Thing, But Mistakes Made War Too Costly	(15%)	(48%) *
War a Mistake, But Worth the Cost Even So	(11%)	(44%) *
War a Mistake from the Beginning	(43%)	(77%) *
Missing Data	(1%)	(54%) *
Opinion on Bank Bailout:		
Support the Bailout	(21%)	(54%) c
Not Sure or Missing Data	(26%)	(58%)
Oppose the Bailout	(53%)	(51%)