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**Gender Stereotypes and Congressional Campaign Strategies**

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An abstract of  
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James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Political Science  
2011

## **Abstract**

### **Gender Stereotypes and Congressional Campaign Strategies**

By Jessica Harrell

How do gender stereotypes (gender-based expectations about candidates' legislative interests and expertise) shape gender differences in congressional campaign strategies? Specifically, when and why might women and men emphasize different issues and/or traits? And why might some candidates be more likely than others to promote women's issues and traits in their campaigns, regardless of their gender and/or party? I argue that candidates' decisions to discuss or ignore an issue is a strategic best-reply to the likely campaign behavior of their opponents, given the particular issue preferences and priorities of voters and the candidates' own areas of issue expertise. From this perspective, gender stereotypes are not the central concern of candidates, but instead, are one of several factors that women and men must consider when creating their campaigns' issue emphasis. Using this strategic framework, I first develop a general model of candidate decision-making to generate and test expectations about the conditions under which a candidate will be more or less likely to discuss an issue. I then use the implications of this model to make predictions about the conditions under which gender differences in campaign issues are most likely to occur. In general, my model predicts few systematic differences between women and men. Despite sharing similar perceived issue competencies from gender stereotypes, all women (and all men) do not campaign in similar environments. They each face unique pressures and incentives from opponents and voters to discuss or ignore particular issues and these pressures can mitigate the effects of gender stereotypes in certain conditions.

I test my hypotheses quantitatively, using an original dataset of all major party, competitive U.S. House candidates in 2002, 2004, and 2006 that includes information about the issues and traits the candidates discussed in their television advertisements and websites; the candidates' party and gender-based issue and trait competencies; candidates' positions and district congruence on a set of twenty issues; and the saliency of the issues the candidates discussed in their campaigns.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In a 2007 Washington Post article about the role of gender in elections, staff writer Libby Copeland asked, “Is a woman candidate primarily a woman or a candidate? Can’t separate the two? Right! Advance to the next question” The article, which goes on to reiterate conventional wisdom about how women should campaign (e.g. be tough, but not too tough; manage your clothes; manage your husband), illustrates the popular perception that “woman” and “candidate” are inseparable. That is, gender has a pervasive influence on campaigns and elections and women’s candidacies cannot be understood apart from this influence.

Although there is little evidence of systematic, direct biases against women candidates (e.g. Burrell 1994; Seltzer et al. 1997; but see Sanbonmatsu 2002, 2006), anecdotal evidence from campaign consultants and women candidates themselves lends credibility to the idea that women’s campaigns are different from men’s campaigns and that women face unique challenges on the campaign trail (Witt et al 1994, Fox 1997). For example, observers point out that media coverage of women’s campaigns often focuses, not on substantive policy issues, but rather, on their appearance (e.g. hairstyles, physical attractiveness, clothes) or their families (e.g. marital status, children) (see, for example, Bystrom 2009; Witt et al. 1994). This was particularly apparent in the 2008 presidential primaries, as mainstream media outlets such as The Washington Post, The New York Times, MSNBC, and CNN (among many others) scrutinized nearly every aspect of

Hillary Clinton's appearance, ranging from her pantsuits to her laugh (Carroll 2009). For instance, a Media Matters report found that, “From 9am to 5pm ET on July 30, MSNBC devoted a total of 23 minutes and 42 seconds to segments discussing Senator Hillary Clinton's 'cleavage'” (Media Matters 2007).

Research on perceptions of women’s political skill and expertise reinforces this emphasis on the unique challenges that women face, as numerous studies demonstrate that women candidates continue to be evaluated differently than men. First, both Democratic and Republican women are perceived as more liberal than their male counterparts (Koch 2000; McDermott 1997, 1998). Second, female candidates are perceived to be better skilled than men in dealing with “compassion” issues such as welfare, education, and health care, but less capable of handling issues such as business, the economy, and the military (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981; Leeper 1991). Finally, women are perceived as more sensitive, gentle, dependent, and emotional while men are perceived as more tough, assertive, and independent—traits that are usually associated with effective leadership (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b).

Women’s campaign strategies and decisions are often perceived and interpreted in light of these gender stereotypes. For example, presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s “hawkish” position on the Iraq war was commonly viewed, at least by scholars, as a counter to popular perceptions that women are not strong and decisive in foreign policy and “crisis decision-making”, rather than as a reflection of the genuine policy preferences of either her constituents or of Clinton herself (e.g. Copeland 2007; Carroll 2009). More recently, articles in *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* implicitly referenced gender stereotypes to critique the campaigns of several 2010 Republican women

candidates (Decker 2010; Hernandez 2010). Based on polling data that found that Senate candidates Linda McMahon (Connecticut) and Carly Fiorina (California) and gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman (California) did not have strong support from female voters in their respective states, the articles suggested that these women made strategic miscalculations in their appeals to women voters by overemphasizing their (masculine) business experience and leadership qualities at the expense of their (feminine) “softer”, caring side (Never mind that women voters' lack of support could be explained by simple partisan preferences; see, for example, Dolan 2008a).

More generally, women’s campaign strategies are characterized as a careful balancing act between appearing both sufficiently (but not overly) feminine and sufficiently (but not overly) masculine. Dolan (2008b: 117-18) describes the dilemma this way:

Generally, the major consideration is whether to embrace public stereotypes about women or to work to challenge them by presenting an image that counters these stereotypes. This can take the form of campaigning ‘as a woman’ and making women’s issues a centerpiece in the campaign, or it can mean consciously choosing to burnish more ‘masculine’ credentials by emphasizing male issues and a masculine leadership style.

There has been no shortage of opinions and advice about how best to manage these gender stereotypes, both from academic (e.g. Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003;

Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b) as well as more practical perspectives (e.g. Sharon Rodine's 1990 article, "How to Beat Bubba" in *Campaigns and Elections*). However, there is little agreement as to the best course of action. So, how do women candidates typically respond to gender stereotypes and balance between these opposing choices? What kinds of issues and traits do women tend to discuss in their campaigns? Do they choose to emphasize similar or different issues and traits than men? Existing investigations of women's campaigns provide few definitive answers to these questions, as the studies have reached conflicting conclusions. Some studies find that women do, in fact, campaign on different issues and traits than men, while others find few or no differences at all between women and men (Dabelko and Herrnson 1997; Fox 1997; Kahn 1993, 1996; Williams 1994; Dolan 2005).

One reason why these studies have inconsistent results may be their very specific (and sometimes exclusive) focus on gender stereotypes as the primary factor behind women's campaign decisions. By placing gender stereotypes at the center of analysis, these studies make an (often unstated) assumption that gender stereotypes dominate or "trump" the influence of other factors that might also impact women's campaign behavior, including variations in the expertise and experience of women candidates; in the types of districts or states that women compete in; in the types of opponents that women face; or even in the different "moods" and circumstances of election cycles. The implication of this assumption is that gender stereotypes are expected to have a universal importance and effect on women's campaign behavior and that women will respond to these stereotypes in similar ways in their campaigns.

This project takes a different approach in addressing these questions about gender differences in the issue emphasis of women and men and the role of gender stereotypes in shaping campaign strategies. Rather than viewing women who run for electoral office as primarily *women* candidates, I view them first as *strategic* candidates who, like their male counterparts, are motivated primarily by winning elections. That is, a woman's decision to discuss or ignore certain kinds of issues in her campaign is not simply a response to gender stereotypes, but rather, is a calculated best-reply to the likely campaign behavior of her opponent, given her own areas of expertise and the particular issue preferences and priorities of voters. From this perspective, gender stereotypes are not the central concern of women candidates, but instead, are one of several factors that women (and men) must consider when creating their campaign's issue emphasis.

This approach has several benefits. First, considering women's campaign behavior from a broader, strategic perspective allows for an exploration of campaign contexts and the ways that gender stereotypes intersect with other characteristics and electoral variables beyond gender, such as partisanship, district preferences, and opponent type. Furthermore, this inclusion of context avoids the potential problem of assuming uniformity among all women candidates. Without dismissing or denying potential similarities in behavior among women on the basis of shared gender stereotypes, women may still make different choices about which issues to discuss in their campaigns because different electoral circumstances provide different incentives to discuss particular issues.

Finally, although gender stereotypes are usually considered a unique problem for women candidates, voters also hold gender-based expectations about men's likely interest

and expertise in issues and men must also take these stereotypes into consideration, particularly when they compete against women candidates. Treating both women and men as strategic candidates and considering gender stereotypes as one factor among many that all candidates must consider when constructing their campaign messages removes the emphasis on *women's* response to gender stereotypes and allows for a more inclusive analysis of the ways that both women and men respond to gender stereotypes. In general, the aim of this strategic approach to understanding gender stereotypes and campaign strategies is not to downplay or ignore the impact of gender stereotypes on candidate behavior, but rather, to specify the conditions in which gender stereotypes might (or might not) matter.

Of course, in order to specify the conditions in which gender stereotypes have a significant impact on candidates' behavior, it is necessary to first have a model of candidate behavior and decision-making. The general literature on campaigns and campaign behavior provides a useful, but incomplete starting point. The most noticeable difficulty with existing models of candidate strategy and behavior is the omission of gender—if the literature on women candidates rarely considers women as strategic, then the literature on strategic candidates rarely considers candidates as women. Some authors do suggest, in passing, that gender may have a significant impact on candidates' campaign strategies (e.g. Petrocik 1996). However, the campaign behavior literature focuses mostly on the effects of partisanship or incumbency rather than candidate characteristics like gender.

Even beyond overlooking the potential importance of gender though, the campaign literature in general lacks a comprehensive, strategic model of candidate

behavior. Extant work on candidates' campaign behavior has identified several plausible motivations for candidate strategy and behavior, most of which have at least some empirical support (e.g. Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1994; Holian 2004; Petrocik 1996). However, as following chapters will demonstrate, none of these theories by themselves provide an adequate account of candidate behavior. Furthermore, even though some of these extant theories acknowledge that opponents have a role in shaping candidates' campaign decisions, (for example, Simon 2002) they are still not particularly strategic in that they do not consider how an opponent's likely campaign behavior might influence candidates' decisions to discuss or ignore an issue.

This project, then, proceeds in two parts. In the first part, I construct and test a new model of candidate behavior that explains what conditions make candidates more or less likely to discuss an issue. This new model draws upon previous theories of candidate behavior, but improves these theories by specifying the strategic and conditional behavior of candidates. In the second part, I use this model to explain and predict when and why gender differences in campaign strategies are most likely to occur. The application of the model demonstrates that gender differences in issue emphasis between women and men are likely to occur in only a few specific conditions. Because of this, gender differences in issue emphasis are difficult to detect without considering the specific electoral contexts that women and men face.

I begin by first reviewing the existing literature on both gender stereotypes and women's campaigns and on campaign strategy and behavior. Although these two sets of literature share several commonalities, they have developed mostly independently of each other, with little dialogue between the two. Next, in Chapter 3 I outline my own theory of

candidate behavior and present a set of hypotheses about the conditions in which candidates are most likely to discuss an issue. In some cases, these hypotheses are similar to extant theories, but they provide more nuanced and specific expectations about candidate behavior. In Chapters 4 and 5, I describe my data collection and measures and then test my hypotheses about candidate behavior quantitatively, using content analysis of the television ads and websites of U.S. House candidates from the 2002, 2004, and 2006 elections. The results demonstrate that candidates' campaign decisions are best understood as a strategic best-reply to the likely behavior of their opponents, given the party and gender of the candidates and their opponents and the issue preferences and priorities of voters. The remaining chapters build upon this finding.

In Chapter 6, I use the model to specify the conditions in which gender differences in issue emphasis are most likely to occur. In Chapter 7, I apply the model to gender differences in trait discussion. As I will demonstrate, this extension of the model to traits yields similar results to the analyses in Chapters 5 and 6. Finally, in Chapter 8 I take a closer look at candidates' behavior in a few, specific races from 2004 and 2006 to highlight the basic findings of these quantitative tests. I conclude by summarizing the results of my analysis and outlining the contributions this project makes towards understanding candidate campaign behavior and the role of gender stereotypes in candidate decision-making.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Despite sharing similar research questions and agendas, the literatures on women's campaign behavior and on campaign behavior in general have developed largely independent of each other. The women's campaign literature rarely references general theories of campaign behavior, such as issue ownership or trespassing, when describing or hypothesizing about women's campaign decisions. Likewise, the general campaign literature rarely draws upon insights from research on gender stereotypes and women's campaigns when developing and testing theories of candidate behavior. In this chapter, I introduce and briefly trace the development of both of these literatures, highlighting the commonalities between them and assessing both the contributions as well as the oversights that each makes. In doing so, I establish a background and context for my own model of candidate behavior, presented in Chapter 3. I begin by describing the research on women candidates and campaigns and then move on to the more general literature on campaign strategy and behavior.

#### **2.1 Women's Campaigns**

The literature on women and campaigns has developed around the question of why there are so few women in office. Initial studies identified three possible explanations: voter and party biases against women; the lack of experience and professionalization in women's campaigns; and structural obstacles such as incumbency

and single-member districts. In general, these popular explanations contend that women are less electable because they are disadvantaged, deficient or otherwise different from typical (i.e. male) candidates (Carroll 1994).

However, subsequent research has demonstrated that, despite the persistence of these common perceptions, women are not disadvantaged in their campaigns. First, not only has voter bias declined over time, but several scholars even argue that there is a growing bias in women's favor (Burrell 1994: 18; Sanbonmatsu 2002). Furthermore, once status is controlled (incumbent, challenger, open seat), the evidence indicates that women's campaigns are just as professional as men's campaigns and that women raise similar amounts of money and receive just as many votes as men (Burrell 1994; Carroll 1994; Darcy et al 1987; Seltzer et al 1997). Based on these findings, most scholars agree that the reason more women have not been elected to office is due in part to the overwhelming advantage of incumbency and in part to the low numbers of women who choose to or are encouraged to run for office (Burrell 1994; Carroll 1994; Darcy et al 1987; Seltzer et al 1997; Lawless and Fox 2005).

### **2.1.1 Expectations about Gender Differences in Campaigns**

Nevertheless, even though there is no evidence of direct biases (from either voters or party leaders) against women candidates, it does not necessarily follow that gender has no discernable or predictable impact on campaigns.<sup>1</sup> In fact, there is a common perception that while women may not conduct inferior or disadvantaged campaigns, they do conduct their campaigns differently (e.g. Witt et al 1994; Fox 1997). This difference is

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<sup>1</sup> Although Sanbonmatsu (2006) reports that, at least at the state legislative level, some party leaders continue to express doubts about women's abilities as candidates and legislators.

attributed to both the characteristics of women candidates themselves as well as the responses of women candidates to voter stereotypes (Fox 1997).

First, based on the findings of both women's voting behavior and legislative behavior, many argue that women will conduct distinctive campaigns because they have different policy preferences and priorities as well as different political experiences (Dabelko and Herrnson 1997). Although the levels of education and political experience of women candidates have grown more similar to men over time, women continue to be more likely to enter politics through education and social work backgrounds (Ondercin and Welch 2005). Like women in the general population, women officeholders tend to be more liberal than their male counterparts (Burrell 1994; Barrett 1995; Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Clark 1998; Epstein et al. 2005; Evans 2005). Furthermore, several studies confirm that women in Congress and state legislatures are usually more supportive of feminist issues such as family leave, sexual harassment, and reproductive rights and of social welfare issues such as health care, education, and welfare. (Burrell 1994; Barrett 1995; Dolan 1997; Swers 2002; Epstein et al. 2005). Given these documented differences in the political background and legislative behavior of women, it seems to follow that women will likely differ in their behavior on the campaign trail as well.

Second, while voter reluctance to support female candidates has, for the most part, become a relic of the past, political scientists have found that voters do possess more subtle biases and stereotypes about women's ideology, character traits, and policy expertise.<sup>2</sup> Both Democratic and Republican women candidates are perceived as more

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<sup>2</sup> However, Sanbonmatsu (2002) argues that reluctance to support women candidates still exists--some voters may have a baseline preference or disposition to support male candidates over female candidates. Of

liberal than their male counterparts (Koch 2000; McDermott 1997, 1998). Numerous studies have demonstrated that female candidates are perceived to be better skilled in dealing with “compassion” issues such as welfare, education, and healthcare, but less capable of handling issues such as business, the economy, and the military (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981; Leeper 1991). Furthermore, women are perceived as more sensitive, gentle, dependent, and emotional while men are perceived as more tough, assertive, and independent—traits that are usually associated with effective leadership (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b).

These stereotypes are assumed to have an important and universal impact on the campaigns of all women candidates, although scholars disagree over how women should respond to them and balance their perceived advantages and disadvantages. For example, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b) argue that unless women are able to convince voters that they possess typical masculine traits such as assertiveness and toughness, they will be at a disadvantage in comparison to their male counterparts. Anecdotal evidence and interviews with female candidates support this view, demonstrating that the presentation of professionalism and competence, typically considered male traits, is an important priority in women’s campaign strategies (Fox 1997; Witt et al. 1994). Women feel compelled to compensate for their perceived lack of competence and assertiveness by presenting themselves in formal, professional tones. In fact, Fox (1997) reports that the female candidates he interviewed felt that voters often scrutinized their professionalism.

However, there may be times when Huddy and Terkildsen’s assertion is less accurate. Particularly in the 1992 election, many female candidates believed that their

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course this baseline preference can work in favor of women as well, with some voters having a baseline preference to support female candidates over male candidates.

image as political “outsiders” and as compassionate, caring and honest gave them an advantage over male candidates (Witt et al 1994). In fact, Matland and King (2002:138) maintain that “the assertion of female advantage in congressional races...is now conventional wisdom on the campaign trail”, and Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes (2003) argue that female candidates improve their electoral success rates by capitalizing on gender stereotypes and running “as women” (see also Iyengar et al. 1997). Regardless of which of these views is more accurate though, scholars seem to agree that the presence of gender stereotypes presents a unique challenge to women candidates. Women must be cognizant of voters’ stereotypes and thus, are expected to adjust their campaign strategies accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.1.2 Empirical Evidence of Gender Differences**

Despite the expectation that women’s campaigns will (or perhaps must) be distinctive from men’s campaigns, empirical evidence of such differences is decidedly mixed. Several scholars report that female candidates place a greater emphasis on “women’s issues” (healthcare, education, welfare, etc.) than do male candidates (Dabelko & Herrnson 1997; Fox 1997; Kahn 1993, 1996; Kahn and Gordon 1997). However, this conclusion is challenged by other findings. For example, Williams (1994) and Dolan (2005) find few differences between male and female candidates’ issue focus and Bystrom and Kaid (2002) find that men emphasized feminine issues, such as healthcare, with increasing frequency in the 1990s, eroding female candidates’ dominance on such issues (see also Shames 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> Even though research has demonstrated that voters hold stereotypes about men’s character and expertise as well, few scholars have considered the ways that male candidates may be affected by gender stereotypes.

Similar conflicts are found with regard to the personal characteristics emphasized by men and women. Fox (1997), Kahn (1993, 1996), and Kahn and Gordon (1997) conclude that men and women alike emphasize their competence and professionalism rather than more feminine traits like honesty and compassion. Williams (1994) also finds relatively few differences between men and women, except in his study, both men and women emphasized the more feminine trait of empathy rather than traditional male traits. Similar to their findings regarding issue emphasis, Bystrom and Kaid (2002) report that men have focused increasingly on feminine traits like honesty, sensitivity and trustworthiness.

The contrary findings that Bystrom and Kaid (2002) and Williams (1994) report may be due to the fact that they both fail to take the party label and the status (incumbent or challenger) of the candidates into account. Their findings may also be influenced by the political climate of the 1990s, where it is generally assumed that the salience of domestic issues made a focus on women's issues and traits a less risky and even a more attractive strategy for both male and female candidates (see, for example, Herrnson et al 2003; Matland and King 2002; Shames 2003). The exact reasons for their different findings are not clear, but their conflicting conclusions do suggest several ways that research on women's campaign behavior could be improved.

First, as highlighted above, many of these studies overlook other characteristics of candidates besides gender, such as partisanship and status. Campaign scholars though have demonstrated that there are noticeable differences in candidates' strategies based on status and partisanship and without taking these factors into account, it is difficult to tell if observed differences between women and men are really attributable to gender

stereotypes (Herrnson 2000; Petrocik 1996; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Kahn and Kenney 1999). In fact, because women candidates have been more likely to be from the Democratic party, Dolan (2005) even suggests that many observed gender differences are really due to partisan differences.

However, other factors beyond candidate characteristics should be considered as well. As Dolan (2005) points out, candidates may adjust their campaign strategies in response to the political environment in which they find themselves. The sex of a candidate's opponent may be particularly significant. Women may be more wary of being cast as "too soft" when running against a male candidate and may try to counter this stereotype by emphasizing masculine traits (Witt et al. 1994). Similarly, there is some evidence that men alter their campaign strategies when running against women—they are less likely to use negative attacks (for fear of appearing to "bully" their female opponent) and they try to target women voters more often (Fox 1997). Unfortunately, systematic evidence of such behavior is limited. And although Dolan (2005) does find some (limited) evidence that candidates adjust their campaigns in response to their opponent's sex, her focus is rather narrow, as she considers only the top five issues that candidates raised on their websites.

District and state characteristics can also be important influences on campaign strategies. However, even though studies of women candidates frequently acknowledge the influence of the national political environment on congressional campaigns, very little attention (if any) is given to the influence of local conditions. This oversight is particularly problematic, because there is evidence that district and state level factors can have a significant impact on the content of the campaigns themselves. For example,

Schaffner (2005) finds that Senate candidates significantly altered the issue content of their campaigns when gender gaps were influential in past electoral outcomes and gender issues were particularly important to voters in the state.<sup>4</sup> There were significant party differences in the way that the candidates responded to these influences though. When women's issues were a priority among voters and the gender gap was decisive in previous elections, Democrats were more likely to make women's issues a significant part of their issue focus. In contrast, Republicans were more likely to avoid women's issues and to give more attention to crime and taxes (Schaffner 2005).<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the existing literature has not given full consideration to the ways that context may mediate the effects of gender stereotypes on candidate behavior. Instead, extant research tends to search for gender differences only between aggregate groups of women and men. Without accounting for the possible differences among women or among men, these studies assume that all women (or all men) will respond to gender stereotypes in the same way, and overlook potential variations in the effects of gender stereotypes on campaign behavior.

Perhaps even more importantly though, comparisons of women and men's campaigns lack a theoretical framework to explain and predict gendered behavior in campaign strategies. Surprisingly, none of these studies reference existing theories of candidate behavior even though such theories could provide valuable insight into the campaign behavior of women and men. Instead, research on gender stereotypes and

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<sup>4</sup> Schaffner measures the importance of women's issues using survey results from the Annenberg National Election Survey; he measures the percentage of respondents in each state who cited one of three women's issues (education, childcare, healthcare) when asked about the most important problem facing the country.

<sup>5</sup> Schaffner also suggests that there may be gender differences in these responses as well, although he is unable to provide a conclusive test for these differences because there are not enough women candidates in his sample.



women's campaigns has placed a greater emphasis on documenting the presence (or absence) of gender differences rather than developing a theory of candidate behavior to explain when and why gender differences in campaign strategies might exist. Although existing theories of candidate behavior have not been used to address questions about the effects of gender stereotypes on campaign strategies, they do at least provide a starting point for generating expectations about differences in women and men's campaign strategies.

## **2.2 Theories of Campaign Strategy**

The most well-known theory of campaign strategy is the median voter theory, as outlined by Downs (1957). In its simplest form, two candidates, motivated solely or primarily by winning, compete for votes over a single ideological dimension, where voters' preferences are unimodal. In attempting to maximize their vote share, both candidates converge towards the issue position of the median voter. Thus, the theory predicts that there will be little differentiation between the two candidates.

Despite its popularity, there are a number of problems with this model, both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, many scholars have questioned and/or altered some of the basic assumptions of the model. To begin, the assumption of a single-dimensional issue space has been particularly problematic. In an early critique of spatial models, Stokes (1963: 370) argues that "such an assumption clearly is false to the realities of two-party systems". Scholars have also taken issue with the assumption that candidates are motivated solely by winning elections (e.g. Cox 1984; Calvert 1985; Wittman 1990). For example, Wittman (1990) argues that candidates have their own

policy preferences and use elections as a means to enact their preferred policies, rather than using policies as a means to win elections. Furthermore, reputational concerns further restrain candidates from adopting the position of the median voter; candidates who drastically alter their issue positions may lose credibility among voters (e.g. Burden 2004).

Overall, many adjustments and alterations have been made to the spatial model of campaign behavior to make it more realistic, with scholars incorporating factors such as multi-dimensional issue space, candidate reputations, the influence of party activists, incomplete information about voter preferences, valence issues, etc. (e.g. Wittman 1985; Aldrich 1983; Morton 1993; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1998).<sup>6</sup> Empirically, the basic model has been criticized for failing to match observations of actual campaigns. In fact, scholars routinely find that, contrary to the model's prediction of candidate convergence, political candidates take divergent positions across issues (e.g. Ansolabehere, et al. 2001; Burden 2004; Erikson & Wright 2001).

An alternative approach to studying campaign strategies focuses on agenda setting rather than issue positions. According to agenda setting theories, candidates maximize their votes by altering the issue dimensions of the election rather than by altering their issue positions. Strategy therefore, is not a matter of choosing the right issue positions, but of choosing advantageous issue dimensions (Riker 1983, 1990). Hammond and Hume (1993) develop this idea using the logic of spatial models. They argue that candidates do not adopt the issue positions of the median voter, but instead, campaign on

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<sup>6</sup> These attempts to make the model more realistic have, in turn, altered the predictions of the model—in many cases, the revised models predict that candidate issue positions will diverge rather than converge to the median.

the issues on which they are closer to the median voter. Thus, unlike the median voter theory, where candidates' issue positions are the dynamic to explain, Hammond and Hume (1993) argue that the issue dimensions themselves are the dynamic to explain.

A similar emphasis on issue dimensions is made by Petrocik (1996) in his theory of issue ownership, although credibility and competence in handling issues rather than having an issue position close to the median voter provide candidates with an advantage. According to issue ownership theory, voters believe that one of the parties (and its candidates) is more willing and better able to handle certain issues (Petrocik 1996: 826). For example, Democrats are perceived as better able to handle issues related to healthcare, social security, welfare, education, unemployment, and civil rights while Republicans are perceived as more capable of handling issues related to taxes, crime, foreign policy, the military and economic growth (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Petrocik 1996). Recent work by Hayes (2005) also demonstrates that voters attribute different traits to parties and their candidates as well, with Republicans seen as more moral and as stronger leaders and Democrats seen as more compassionate and empathetic.

Given these perceptions, strategic candidates try to manipulate the discourse of campaigns to reflect their perceived strengths through agenda setting and priming (Petrocik 1996). More specifically, candidates emphasize issues and traits in which they have a perceived advantage, while deemphasizing or avoiding issues and traits in which they have a perceived disadvantage. The underlying logic of issue ownership is that it is easier to prime voters (change the criteria used by voters to evaluate the candidate) than to persuade voters (change voters' opinions of the candidate's expertise, commitment,

and position on issues) (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Unlike the prediction of the median voter theory, both Hammond and Hume (1993) and Petrocik (1996) predict that candidates will differ significantly—each candidate will have different advantages and thus will choose to campaign on different issues. Not only does this prediction match empirical observations (e.g. Petrocik 1996; Simon 2002; Brasher 2003), but research also suggests that candidates are more successful when they focus their campaigns on issues that they “own” (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Simon 2002).

Despite the above evidence though, other scholars have argued that candidates have incentives to focus on similar issues. One alternative theory to issue ownership, “riding the wave”, argues that candidates should emphasize issues that are salient in the media and/or are considered important priorities by the public in order to appear “concerned, responsive, and informed” (e.g. Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1994; see also Schaffner 2005: 807). Accordingly, candidates’ campaign strategies should converge, with each candidate discussing similar issues in their campaigns. While Brasher (2003) finds that issue ownership does exert an influence on the issue selection of candidates, she argues that the salience of issues has a larger effect on the likelihood that candidates incorporate the issue into their campaign. Sides (2006) also finds that candidates’ issue focus was similar across party lines, with candidates more likely to emphasize issues that were highly salient to the public.

A second alternative to issue ownership is trespassing. Like “riding the wave”, issue trespassing predicts that candidates’ issue emphasis will overlap. However, in this case, candidates do not choose issues because they are salient. Instead, candidates deliberately choose issues on which they are thought to be disadvantaged in an effort to

neutralize their opponent's advantage or to "inoculate" themselves against their own weaknesses (e.g. Simon 2002: 80). The literature though is not clear about the conditions under which candidates should be more or less likely to pursue this strategy. Petrocik (1996) only says that candidates may trespass on issues that are "unavoidable," although he does not explain what makes an issue unavoidable. Koch (2001) suggests (in passing) that the political preferences of their district, the preferences of financial contributors or even the candidates' own political preferences may influence the decision to trespass. However, scholars seem to agree that if candidates trespass, they will try to reframe the issue to their advantage (Petrocik 1996; Holian 2004; Sides 2006).

Of course, few argue that trespassing is an optimal strategy; in fact, Simon (2002) argues that candidates should never trespass. Other evidence suggests that this strategy is likely to be successful only under limited circumstances (Norpoth and Buchanan 1992; Holian 2004).<sup>7</sup> Despite this low probability of success though, women candidates in particular are frequently advised to emphasize issues on which they are not advantaged or do not "own" (for example, crime) in order to counter stereotypes that they are not "tough" or "competent" enough to hold office (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Kahn 1996).

These agenda setting theories—ownership, "riding the wave", and trespassing—provide three alternative motivations for candidates' campaign behavior. However, there are still important omissions from these theories. First, none of these theories explain when or why one strategy should be chosen over another. Implicitly, this suggests that

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<sup>7</sup> Holian (2004) argues that issue trespassing can be successful when three conditions are met: public opinion shifts from favoring one party to at least parity between the two parties in their ability to handle the issue; the "trespassing" candidate attempts to reframe the issue; the candidate's new rhetoric is transmitted by the media to the public

strategy is an either/or choice—a candidate either chooses ownership or “riding the wave” or trespassing. However, there is no theoretical reason to expect that candidates will choose only one strategy and empirically, evidence demonstrates that candidates do pursue a combination of strategies (e.g. Brasher 2003).

Second, few of these theories explicitly describe candidates’ strategies as a reaction to or anticipation of their opponent’s behavior. An exception is Hammond and Hume (1993) who suggest that candidates’ strategies are interdependent, although they are unable to find an equilibrium strategy for both candidates. Empirical evidence from Fox (1997) regarding the campaign behavior of male candidates faced with a female opponent lends support to the idea that candidates adapt their campaign strategies in reaction to their opponent. Many of the men in Fox’s study who faced a female opponent altered their campaign strategies in order to appeal to women voters both by demonstrating their sensitivity to women’s issues and by altering the issue content of their campaigns (see also Dolan 2005). Extensive consideration of such interaction in agenda-setting theories is lacking though.

Finally, none of these theories explore the potential impact of gender. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that these agenda setting theories can easily accommodate considerations of gender, particularly since candidate behavior is conditioned by the advantages and disadvantages conferred by party stereotypes (at least according to ownership and trespassing hypotheses). Gender stereotypes may have similar effects, as voters also hold expectations about the issue strengths and weaknesses of women and men (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981; Leeper 1991; McDermott 1997, 1998). Of course many gender stereotypes, particularly those about issue competence, overlap

party stereotypes—issues that women are perceived as more capable of handling are similar to the issues that Democratic candidates are perceived as more capable of handling (Koch 2000). Nevertheless, gender stereotypes influence expectations about a candidate's issue competence regardless of the candidate's party or ideology (Leeper 1991).

In the next chapter, I introduce a strategic theory of candidate behavior that addresses these oversights in both the gender literature and the campaign literature. By acknowledging the unique electoral contexts that each candidate faces, this theory allows for individual differences in the propensity of discussing certain issues and generates more nuanced expectations about candidate behavior. While acknowledging the influence of gender stereotypes, party ownership, issue saliency, and opponent advantages, this theory highlights the conditional effects these factors have on candidate behavior.

## Chapter 3

### Theory

As the previous chapter's literature review has shown, existing work on candidate behavior suggests several plausible motivations for candidate behavior, but there is no singular or comprehensive theory to explain candidates' campaign decisions. These theories are presented and tested individually, as mutually exclusive predictions about how candidates choose campaign issues, with little attention given to integrating these different predictions into a single model. Furthermore, while the importance of opponent characteristics is acknowledged (at least most explicitly in the trespassing theory), none of these theories consider candidates' behavior as an assessment and response to their opponent's likely behavior.

In fact, existing theories of candidate behavior that explain candidates' campaign decisions in terms of gender stereotypes, party ownership, etc. can be described more formally as decision-theoretic processes. Issue ownership, in particular, reflects a myopic decision-theoretic process, where candidates base their decisions on their own strengths and weaknesses, without considering their opponent's characteristics or behavior. Although issue ownership theories do not necessarily preclude the possibility that other factors may influence candidates' behavior, they place primary emphasis on the role of gender and party stereotypes; thus candidates' decisions to discuss or ignore issues are motivated mostly by the advantages and disadvantages conferred by their gender and/or party.



Trespassing suggests a more sophisticated decision-theoretic process, as candidates consider not just their own strengths and weaknesses when deciding which issues to discuss, but the strengths and weaknesses of their opponent as well. Here, candidates' campaign behavior is motivated by their own party and gender as well as the party and gender of their opponent. However, although trespassing introduces the importance of the opponent in shaping candidates' campaign decisions, it is still not particularly strategic.

In my own theory of candidate behavior, I describe candidates as strategic actors who base their decision to discuss an issue on their anticipation of their opponent's behavior. Although I do recognize the importance of both candidates' and opponents' party and gender, I argue that candidates' decisions to discuss or ignore an issue is based on a strategic "best-reply" to the likely behavior of their opponent, rather than a tally or comparison of issue advantages and disadvantages. Considering candidate behavior in this way allows me to integrate existing theories into a single, more comprehensive theory of candidate behavior while also taking into account contextual factors such as issue saliency and district preferences.

While some elements of my theory are similar to or consistent with existing theories about gender and issue ownership, trespassing, and riding the wave (issue saliency), I extend existing work in three ways. First, rather than evaluating each theory separately, I outline the conditions under which a candidate can be expected to pursue a particular campaign strategy. Second, I demonstrate how candidates' choices are strategic and conditioned by the candidates' opponents. Finally, I expand the basic concept of issue ownership to include not just party stereotypes, but gender stereotypes as well.

In the remainder of this chapter, I present my strategic theory of candidate behavior, along with two decision-theoretic alternatives based, in part, on issue ownership and trespassing. I first outline the scope of the theory by explaining some basic assumptions about campaigns and candidate behavior. Then I outline the predictions about candidate behavior generated by each of the three candidate decision-making processes: myopic decision-theoretic, sophisticated decision-theoretic, and strategic.

### **3.1 Assumptions**

To begin, I assume that candidates are rational actors motivated primarily by winning elections. Candidates maximize the probability of winning by using their campaigns to manipulate the issue agenda of the election to their favor. Candidates' advantage on an issue is based on two components: congruence and perceived competence. Congruence, based on Hammond and Hume's (1993) model, is the similarity between the candidate's position and the median voter's position; the closer the candidate is to the median voters' position, the more congruence the candidate has on an issue.<sup>8</sup> Perceived competence is voters' belief that the candidate is credible, interested and capable of handling the issue. This component of advantage is based on Petrocik's (1996) theory of issue ownership, but I include gender stereotypes as well as the relevant experience of the candidate in addition to party stereotypes. The more competence attributed to the candidate through party, gender, and personal experience, the more

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<sup>8</sup> I assume that candidates do not change their issue positions during the campaign because of reputational costs; candidates who alter their issue positions during the campaign may lose credibility among voters.

credible the candidate is on an issue. Both perceived competence and congruence vary across candidates.<sup>9</sup>

Voters have imperfect information about candidates' advantages on issues. However, voters' beliefs about candidates' perceived competence are more certain than their beliefs about candidates' congruence because their beliefs about perceived competency are based on candidates' observable characteristics such as party and gender. These characteristics provide easily accessible, low information cues about candidates' likely interest and skill in handling certain issues (Popkin 1993; Petrocik 1996; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981; Leeper 1991; McDermott 1997, 1998). Congruence, on the other hand, requires voters to have more specific knowledge of the candidates' issue positions and ideological preferences. This information is less accessible to voters because it requires more time and effort for voters to acquire. Therefore, it requires more investment of resources to credibly convince voters of one's congruence, making congruence more costly to advertise than perceived competence.

Theoretically, there is an infinite number (or at least a very large number) of issue dimensions that candidates can discuss. Candidates thus face the choice of whether to discuss or ignore an issue in their campaign. By discussing an issue in their campaign, candidates make that issue more salient, priming voters to weigh that issue more heavily when making their vote choice. Voters, in turn, select the candidate they believe is the most competent and congruent on issues that are or have become salient.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As I will explain below, perceived competence and congruence can be absolute or relative advantages, depending on the type of strategy a candidate uses.

<sup>10</sup> While some voters are highly attentive to and knowledgeable about politics, most voters do not possess a great deal of knowledge of or interest in politics (e.g. Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960; Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Therefore, while it is theoretically possible that voters will strategically anticipate candidates' manipulation of the issue agenda, it is unlikely that they will actually do so.

### 3.2 Myopic Decision-Theoretic Model

Suppose that candidates only consider their own advantages and do not consider their opponent's advantages or try to anticipate their opponent's strategy. In this case, perceived competence and congruence are absolute advantages. All else equal, an advantage in either perceived competence or congruence will increase the likelihood that a candidate will discuss an issue. When candidates have an advantage on an issue, they are more certain that a majority of voters will be attracted to their message without having to expend valuable resources trying to persuade voters that they are competent or congruent. Of course, given voters' asymmetric information about competence and congruence, perceived competence may have a larger impact on candidate behavior than congruence. Competence is a more visible cue and therefore candidates do not have to expend as many resources to signal their competence as they do to signal their congruence.

***Hypothesis 1:** Perceived competence and congruence give a candidate an advantage on an issue and thus increase the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

There are factors or pressures that can compel candidates to discuss an issue on which they have no clear advantage. Although candidates use their campaigns to influence the saliency of issues, they do not have complete control over which issues are salient. There are some issues that are particularly important to voters, independent of candidates' campaigns (e.g. the Iraq war in 2006). Candidates who ignore these highly salient issues run the risk of being perceived as out of touch and unresponsive to voters.

Anticipating these potential disadvantages, candidates will adjust their strategies accordingly. Thus, consistent with the expectations of “riding the wave,” issue saliency induces a shift in candidates’ issue emphasis, with candidates, overall, more likely to discuss issues that are salient, regardless of their own advantages.

***Hypothesis 2:** A candidate’s perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the candidate’s decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*

### **3.3 Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic Model**

Now suppose that candidates take their opponent’s strengths and weaknesses into account when assessing their own advantages. In this case, perceived competence and congruence are relative, with a candidate’s advantage dependent on her opponent’s mix of perceived competence and congruence. If a candidate has more perceived competencies on an issue and/or is more congruent than her opponent, then the candidate has a relative advantage over her opponent and should be more likely to discuss the issue (A relative advantage in perceived competence may still have a stronger impact on candidate behavior than a relative advantage in congruence due to voters’ asymmetric information and the higher costs of advertising congruence.) This expectation is similar to Hypothesis 1 in the myopic decision-theoretic model. However, if an opponent has more perceived competence or congruence on an issue, the candidate no longer has a relative advantage and thus, should be less likely to discuss the issue, all else equal.

***Hypothesis 3:** A relative advantage (disadvantage) in perceived competence or congruence increases (decreases) the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

As outlined above, some issues are more important to voters, independent of candidates' campaigns. When issues are highly salient to voters, I expect the impact of relative perceived competence and congruence to be minimal, as all candidates should be more likely to discuss salient issues. This expectation is similar to Hypothesis 2.

### **3.4 Strategic Interaction Model**

Finally, suppose that rather than simply considering their own relative advantages or disadvantages on an issue, candidates anticipate their opponent's strategy and base their decision to discuss or ignore an issue on how they expect their opponent to behave. Thus far, I have not considered candidates' decisions as a reaction to or anticipation of their opponent's behavior. But it is important to recognize that campaigns are inherently strategic. Just as a candidate attempts to manipulate the issue agenda to her favor, the candidate's opponent is also trying to influence the issue agenda of the election.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, candidates should also consider the likely campaign emphasis of their opponent in deciding whether to discuss or ignore an issue.

There are two conditions a candidate must consider: when an issue has low salience and when an issue has high salience. I begin by assuming that an issue is not particularly salient to voters. First, if a candidate anticipates that her opponent has no relative advantage in either perceived competence or congruence, the candidate can expect that her opponent will not want to discuss the issue. Therefore, the candidate can simply fall back on her decision-theoretic calculation. If the candidate has a relative advantage in perceived competence or congruence, the candidate should be more likely to

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<sup>11</sup> I assume that candidates have equal resources and thus equal opportunity to influence the issue agenda and prime voters.

discuss the issue (voters' asymmetric information about competence and congruence still may lead to a larger effect for perceived competence). This expectation is the same as Hypothesis 3.

Next, if a candidate anticipates that her opponent has a relative advantage in perceived competence, the candidate can expect that her opponent will want to discuss the issue. By discussing the issue and advertising her greater competency, the opponent is able to increase the saliency of that issue to voters and increase her share of the expected vote. The impact of the opponent's behavior on the candidate in this case varies. If the candidate chooses to ignore the issue, she will not incur any costs from advertising the issue, but will lose expected votes to the opponent. In some circumstances though, the best choice for the candidate is to accept this loss of votes and advertise a different issue. For example, when the candidate has no relative advantage from congruence, the candidate has nothing to counter the opponent's strengths; so if the candidate also chose to advertise on this issue, not only would she incur costs for advertising, but she would magnify her own weakness (and the corresponding strength of the opponent) on that issue. The best response in this case is to ignore the issue and expend resources on advertising some other issue that the candidate is advantaged in.

On the other hand, if the candidate has a relative advantage in congruence, the candidate should be more likely to discuss the issue. Although the candidate will incur a higher cost than her opponent by advertising her congruence, doing so will reduce the loss of expected votes that she would otherwise incur if she ignored the issue. And the larger the candidate's perceived competence deficit, the larger the reduction in expected

vote loss will be.<sup>12</sup> In general then, advertising the candidate's closer proximity to district preferences on the issue gives the candidate a boost on an issue that she would otherwise lose, while also reducing the advantage in expected votes that her opponent would receive if the candidate ignored the issue.

**Hypothesis 4:** *A relative disadvantage in perceived competence will increase the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue only when the candidate has a relative advantage in congruence.*

Finally, the effect of an opponent's relative advantage in congruence should be minimal for all candidates, regardless of their own advantages. First, if the candidate has no relative advantage in perceived competence, the opponent's congruence advantage should have little impact. As explained above, when the candidate has nothing to counter her opponent's advantage, she is better off ignoring the issue and accepting the loss of expected votes. An opponent's congruence advantage will also have a minimal impact on the decisions of candidates who have an advantage in perceived competence. Candidates with a relative advantage in perceived competence already have a strong incentive to discuss the issue; by advertising that the candidate is more competent on the issue than the opponent, the candidate is able to increase the saliency of that issue to voters and

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<sup>12</sup> Although this is not a formally-derived equilibrium model, these intuitions about candidate behavior can be demonstrated more formally with the following function that estimates the marginal benefit in expected votes gained from advertising an issue:

$$EV = \sum_{i=1}^n [I_a (S_i pc (C_{pc} - O_{pc}) + S_i c (C_c - O_c))^2 - K_{pc} S_i^c, pc - K_c S_i^c, c]$$

where  $i$  is the issue,  $I_a$  indicates whether the candidate has an overall relative advantage on the issue,  $S_i pc$  is the issue saliency gained from advertising perceived competence,  $C_{pc}$  is the candidate's perceived competence,  $O_{pc}$  is the opponent's perceived competence,  $S_i c$  is the issue saliency gained from advertising congruence,  $C_c$  is the candidate's congruence,  $O_c$  is the opponent's congruence, and  $K_{pc} S_i^c, pc$  is the cost of advertising perceived competence,  $K_c S_i^c, c$  is the cost of advertising congruence, with  $K_c S_i^c, c > K_{pc} S_i^c, pc$ .



increase her expected vote. Even if the opponent chooses to advertise her congruence on the issue and cuts into the gain in the candidate's expected votes, the candidate will still gain more from advertising the issue than the opponent because the costs of advertising perceived competence are lower than the costs of advertising congruence. Thus, facing an opponent with a congruence advantage should only reinforce the candidate's decision to discuss the issue. Overall, then, an opponent's relative advantage in congruence has little impact on candidate behavior.

***Hypothesis 5:*** *A relative disadvantage in congruence will have little impact on the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

Candidates' relative strengths and weaknesses are less important when an issue is highly salient. Regardless of who has an advantage in perceived competence or congruence, candidates are always more likely to discuss highly salient issues because they do not want to risk being seen as unresponsive to voters' concerns. This expectation is similar to Hypotheses 2.

***Hypothesis 6:*** *A relative advantage in perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*

By taking into account the opponent's likely behavior, these strategic hypotheses provide more nuanced expectations of candidate behavior. Like the decision-theoretic hypotheses, a relative advantage in perceived competence and congruence increases candidates' probability of discussing an issue. However, a disadvantage in competence and congruence does not have a uniform, negative effect in the strategic model. Instead, there are conditions where a candidate's best response is to discuss the issue, even when

their opponent is more competent or congruent on the issue. This difference is most pronounced when a candidate with a relative congruence advantage faces an opponent with a relative perceived competence advantage. While the decision-theoretic model predicts that the opponent's perceived competence advantage will decrease the likelihood that the candidate will discuss the issue, the strategic model predicts that the opponent's perceived competence advantage will increase the likelihood that the candidate will discuss the issue. In the following chapters, I will test this more nuanced set of expectations against the expectations of the decision-theoretic models to determine which model better predicts candidate behavior.

## Chapter 4

### Research Design and Measures

To evaluate the myopic decision-theoretic, sophisticated decision-theoretic and strategic hypotheses outlined in the previous chapter, I used an original large-N dataset of major party, competitive U.S. House candidates in 2002, 2004, and 2006. This dataset contains a more comprehensive set of variables than the datasets typically used for similar research. It includes data about the issues and traits the candidates discussed in their television advertisements and websites; the candidates' party and gender-based issue and trait competencies; candidates' positions and district congruence on a set of twenty issues; and the saliency (both district specific and nationwide) of the issues the candidates discussed in their campaigns.. This chapter explains how the data were collected and how the dependent and independent variables were constructed.

I use content analysis to examine the issues and traits mentioned on the websites and television ads of all competitive, major party US House candidates running in the 2002, 2004, and 2006 general elections.<sup>13</sup> I use websites and television ads because each is controlled exclusively by the candidate and/or the candidate's campaign.<sup>14</sup> Of course, issues other than those raised on candidate websites and in television ads may be mentioned in other sources (e.g. newspapers), but these issues may not necessarily reflect the preferred issue emphasis of the candidates.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Website data, in particular, is generally unavailable before 2002.

<sup>14</sup> I exclude television ads aired by political parties, "527 groups" or other third parties on behalf of candidates. I also exclude ads that occurred before the state's primaries.

<sup>15</sup> Media sources may be particularly problematic sources of data on female candidates' issue emphasis, as Kahn (1996) reports that the news media is less responsive to the issue agendas of female candidates.

I include only competitive races because candidates involved in non-competitive races are less likely to engage in strategic behavior in their campaigns (Herrnson 2000). Incumbents who are certain to be re-elected have no incentive to campaign aggressively; challengers in such races will not only lack the resources to run a professional campaign, but may also have motivations other than winning/maximizing votes (e.g. gaining political experience, expressing a particular ideological agenda, etc.) (Jacobson 1983; Herrnson 2000). Because my hypotheses are built on the assumption that candidates are strategic, it is necessary to focus my analysis on competitive races.

I define competitive races as races identified by the Cook Political Report as “toss-ups” or “leaning”. The Cook Political Report is a well-known newsletter that provides independent and non-partisan election and campaign analysis. The Report considers “toss-up races” as races where either party has a good chance of winning and “leaning races” as races that are competitive, but one party has an advantage. The unit of analysis is candidate *i* on issue *j*.

#### **4.1 Dependent Variables**

I coded each issue and trait mentioned by candidates in their websites and television ads to create a dichotomous variable indicating whether the candidate mentioned the issue in their campaign. Data for 2002 and 2004 television ads are from the Wisconsin Advertising Project.<sup>16</sup> I collected the 2006 television ads myself through

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<sup>16</sup> The data were obtained from a project of the University of Wisconsin Advertising Project and includes media tracking data from TNSMI/Campaign Media Analysis Group in Washington, D.C. The University of Wisconsin Advertising Project was sponsored by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Wisconsin Advertising Project or The Pew Charitable Trusts.

various online sources including candidates' websites, the Washington Post's Political Ads Database, and the National Journal's Ad Spotlight. I only coded ads that were sponsored by the candidate. Television ads were unavailable for 22 candidates, or about 8 % of competitive candidates.<sup>17</sup> The 2002 and 2004 ads were already coded for issue content by the Wisconsin Advertising Project. I followed the same coding rules to code the issue content for the 2006 ads.

Although the Wisconsin Advertising Project's codebook includes as many as 72 different issues, I am examining only 20 issues in my analysis: social security, healthcare, abortion, education, environment, welfare, civil rights, stem cell research, agriculture, foreign policy and defense, homeland security, Iraq, civil liberties, gun control, crime, economy, taxes, fiscal policy, immigration, and family and children. These issues are mentioned frequently in the gender stereotype and party ownership literature and include a mix of women's, men's and gender-neutral issues, Democratic/Republican issues and party neutral issues. The issues are also varied with respect to saliency, as some of these issues have been particularly important in recent elections, while others have not. I adjusted the Wisconsin codes to fit these 20 categories. In many cases, the Wisconsin codes included codes for issues that were not related to the 20 issues in my analysis. These issue codes were dropped.<sup>18</sup> For other issues, I collapsed the more detailed Wisconsin codes into my broader categories to be consistent with the extant stereotype literature. For example, employment/jobs, trade/globalization/NAFTA, and business were

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<sup>17</sup> There were no data from the Wisconsin Advertising Project for eighteen candidates (10 in 2002 and 8 in 2004); Most of these candidates were excluded probably because their districts did not fall into the advertising markets that the Wisconsin Project included. It is unclear why the four remaining candidates (1 in 2004 and 3 in 2006) had no ads available.

<sup>18</sup> I dropped the following codes: background, political record, attendance record, special interests, constituent service/casework, Clinton, Ken Starr, Whitewater, impeachment, Bush, Supreme Court/Florida/ballot reform, Karl Rove/Bush staff, campaign finance reform, local issues, term limits, corporate fraud/Enron

combined into one category—economy. Although each of these codes could, arguably, be considered a separate issue, the stereotype and ownership literatures do not consistently make such fine-grained distinctions between issues.

Candidate websites for 2002 and 2004 were accessed through the Library of Congress’s MINERVA Web Archiving Project and the Internet Archive ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)). I accessed and archived 2006 candidate websites myself. All of the websites were coded for issue content using the same coding scheme as the television ads. Most candidates had a specific page devoted to a discussion of issues, although some candidates discussed their issue priorities on the front page or in a “biography” or “about” section. I did not include incidental mentions of issues and/or issue discussions that were filtered through the media (e.g. links to newspaper articles and headlines). I was unable to access a website for seven candidates.<sup>19</sup>

After taking the missing website and advertising data into account, my sample includes a total of 123 races, with 246 major party candidates: 45 races and 90 candidates in 2006; 39 races and 78 candidates in 2004; and 39 races and 78 candidates in 2002. Unsurprisingly, there are fewer women (57) than men (189). Although there are usually more Democratic female candidates than Republican female candidates, women’s partisanship is divided more evenly in my sample of candidates in competitive races. Overall, 47% of the women in my sample were Democrats and 53% were Republicans. In comparison, in all House races in 2002, 2004, and 2006, 64% of the female candidates were Democrats while only 36% were Republicans (CAWP 2008).

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<sup>19</sup> It is not clear whether the websites were unavailable because the candidates did not have a website or if they are unavailable because they were not archived in either MINERVA or Internet Archive.

## 4.2 Independent Variables

### 4.2.1 Congruence

In my model, congruence is defined as the similarity between the candidate's position and the median voter's position on issue  $j$ ; thus, measures of both candidates' and voters' preferences across a range of specific issue areas are necessary for an adequate test of my hypotheses. To my knowledge, there is no existing source of House candidates' issues positions that is both issue specific and that includes incumbents and challengers, much less one that expressly measures the degree to which House candidates' positions on specific issues match the views of voters in their respective districts.

One (seemingly) obvious data source—candidates' campaigns—cannot be used; the issues raised in campaigns are dependent variables and thus not an appropriate source to measure an independent variable. Roll call votes are also problematic. They are available only for incumbents and are not always an accurate reflection of officials' issue preferences (e.g. Van Doren 1990). I tried to pursue an alternative source of information about candidate congruence by soliciting the opinions of knowledgeable experts. I contacted 689 state party leaders (party officers, executive directors, district chairs) and 350 political scientists who study and/or teach American politics, especially campaigns and elections.<sup>20</sup> I asked them to first rate the general ideological tendencies of the candidates and districts; then I asked them to rate the specific issue positions of the candidates and districts relative to the general ideological rating. I also asked

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<sup>20</sup> When possible, I asked the party members and political scientists about the candidates in the district in which they resided. It was not always possible to match respondents to districts though, and in that case, I asked the respondents about candidates and districts in their state.

demographic questions about their sex, party identification, amount of time spent following congressional elections in their state, and length of residence in their state.<sup>21</sup> I sent a second wave of surveys to the party leaders to try to boost participation. Unfortunately, the response rate (approximately 15%) was not large enough to provide information about every candidate and district. Given this low response rate, I considered adding journalists as an additional group of experts. However, preliminary surveys of journalists also yielded low response rates and several journalists declined to participate because they said it would violate journalistic ethics for them to comment on the degree to which candidates' issue positions matched their constituents' preferences.

Among the surveys that were returned, many were unusable. Some responses, notably from state party leaders, were clearly biased. Several state party operatives used the surveys to express their frustration with the candidates in their districts. For example, one respondent claimed that a candidate was neither liberal nor conservative but was, instead, "a liar". Another respondent quipped that a candidate was "as far to the right as she can be without falling into the ocean." Other respondents did not fill out the survey correctly or left large parts of the survey unanswered. In the end, I have 94 "good" surveys, with no obvious problems (although several of these surveys are incomplete). All of these problems limit the usefulness of these surveys as a primary measure of congruence.

I have relied instead on information from the National Political Awareness Test (NPAT, distributed by Project Vote Smart), the *Almanac of American Politics*, and Congressional Quarterly's *Politics in America*. I used the *Almanac of American Politics* and Congressional Quarterly's *Politics in America* as the primary source of information

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<sup>21</sup> A copy of the survey is included in the Appendix.



about both the candidates and the districts. The NPAT asks candidates to state their positions across a wide variety of specific issues and is an ideal source of information, particularly since it includes both incumbents and challengers. However, many candidates do not answer the survey and the number of respondents has declined in recent years (<http://votesmart.org/2006pr.htm>), so I cannot rely exclusively on these candidate surveys to measure congruence. Of the 246 candidates included in my study, the NPAT is available for only 28 (16 incumbents, 12 challengers or open seat candidates).

To create a measure of congruence, I first established baseline scores using partisanship as a proxy for specific issue positions for both candidates and districts. I used the National Journal's Partisan Voting Index (from the *Almanac of American Politics*) as a baseline partisanship measure for districts. This index indicates how many percentage points above or below the national average the district's presidential vote was. The Almanac uses the 2000 presidential results to create the indexes for 2002 and 2004. The average of the 2000 and 2004 presidential results is used for the 2006 index. The index scores ranged from 18 points below the national average to 25 points above the national average. Using a 5-point ideology scale (ranging from 1-very liberal to 5-very conservative), I coded the districts' general ideological preferences. If the district's presidential vote was the same as or within four percentage points of the national average, I coded the district as moderate (score of 3). If the district's vote was within five to nine percentage points of the national average, I coded the district as either liberal (score of 2) or conservative (score of 4) (if below, liberal; if above, conservative). If the district percentage was 10 or more percentage points above or below the national average, I coded the district as very liberal (score of 1) or very conservative (score of 5)

(if below, very liberal; if above, very conservative). Overall, 58 districts were coded as moderate, 43 were coded as liberal or conservative, and 22 were coded as very liberal or very conservative.

Next, I read the district profiles in the *Almanacs* and *Politics in America* to find specific issue preferences or deviations from this baseline. For example, both *Politics in America* and the *Almanac of American Politics* indicate that Alabama's third district is noticeably conservative on social issues; I adjusted the score on these issues from the baseline of moderate (score of 3) to a new score of conservative (score of 4). *Politics in America* noted that residents in Arizona's first district tend to be environmentally conscious; I adjusted the environment score from the baseline of moderate (score of 3) to liberal (score of 2) (both districts' presidential vote was within 3 points of the national average). I updated the partisanship scores accordingly for each issue and/or issue domain mentioned. Both the *Almanac* and *Politics in America* sometimes made references to broad issue domains rather than specific issues, as illustrated in the example of Alabama's 3<sup>rd</sup> district. In these cases, I grouped together the specific issues that could be included within the domain. Social/cultural issues included abortion, gun control, stem cell research, civil rights, stem cell research, and civil liberties; economic issues included economy, taxes, and fiscal; social welfare issues included education, welfare, social security, and health care; defense/military issues included foreign policy and defense, homeland security and the Iraq war. I did not group agriculture, the environment, crime, or immigration with any other issue. Of course, not all districts had distinctive preferences; these districts retained their baseline score for all issues.

I followed a similar procedure for candidates. Candidates were assigned a baseline score on a 5-point ideological scale based on their partisanship (Democrat, liberal score of 2; Republican, conservative score of 4). I then read candidate profiles in the *Almanac* and *Politics in America* to find specific or distinctive issue positions and/or issue positions that deviated from the candidate's party identification. Both sources were more likely to discuss incumbents' issue positions because unlike challengers, incumbents had a record to discuss. However, these sources did mention challengers' positions if the challengers had a distinctive record in the state legislature and/or the challengers had extreme or well-known positions. For example, Randy Graff (AZ-8) was well known for his conservative position on immigration issues. I supplemented this information with scores from NPAT scores when available. If neither the *Almanac* nor *Politics in America* specified any particular issues and there were no NPAT scores for the candidate, the candidate retained her baseline partisan score.

I checked these candidate issue scores against interest group ratings compiled by Project Vote Smart. Although ratings were not available for all candidates across all issues, 98 of the 246 candidates in my sample had some ratings. On average, my issue position scores matched the interest group ratings 78% of the time. A good deal of this variation is with moderate and liberal/conservative mismatches. If I count only instances where my scores were completely opposite of the interest group scores (i.e. one score is liberal, the other is conservative), then the scores match 96% of the time.

I also compared my issue scores with the 94 usable surveys. The results with the candidate ratings are quite similar to the comparisons with interest group ratings. My scores match the survey ratings 75% of the time if I count all mismatches; that percentage

goes up to 98% if I only count instances where the scores were opposite. The agreement between district scores—57%--is lower. But like the other comparisons, a good deal of the variation in scores is due to moderate and liberal/conservative mismatches. The scores match 98% of the time if I only consider cases where my scores are opposite of the survey scores.

There is no pattern to the deviations between my scores and the interest group scores. My scores do tend to be more liberal than the expert surveys for both candidates and districts. However, given the relatively low number of survey responses, the frequency of incomplete responses even among useable surveys, and the unequal response rate of Democrats and Republicans (58% of respondents identify as Democratic, 38% as Republican), it is likely that there are validity problems with these survey results.<sup>22</sup> Even though problems with survey results limit their usefulness, the high level of agreement between my scores and interest group ratings suggests that my measures of candidates' issue positions are reliable and valid.

Using these scores, I created two scales of congruence. For the myopic models, congruence is a dummy variable that indicates whether the candidate's issue position matches the district's position (i.e. the candidate's score is the same as the district's score). For the sophisticated decision-theoretic and strategic models, I created dummy variables to indicate whether the candidate or opponent was more congruent on a

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<sup>22</sup> Although there are more Democratic respondents (58%) than Republican respondents (38%), Democratic respondents were more likely than Republican respondents to rate their own candidate as moderate. Republican respondents rated their own candidates as more conservative than moderate: 81% rated the Republican candidate as conservative while only 14% rated the Republican candidate as moderate. In contrast, only 53% of Democratic respondents rated the Democratic candidate as liberal while 36% rated them as moderate. Unsurprisingly, all of the respondents rated candidates of the opposing party as more ideologically extreme. Among Republican respondents, 94% rated the Democratic candidate as liberal; among Democratic respondents, 98% rated the Republican candidate as conservative.

particular issue. For each issue, the candidate with the issue score closest to the district's score was coded as more congruent. If the candidate's and opponent's scores were equally distant, neither was coded as more congruent.

Overall, 75% of candidates' issue scores are within at least one point of their district's score on the 5-point ideological scale. Congruence does vary somewhat by year. Fewer candidates are within at least one point of their district's issue score across all issues in 2004 while a higher percentage of candidate scores in 2006 matched or were within one point of the district score. The differences in congruence scores across years could be related to the partisanship of the districts in each year. In 2004, where congruence scores are lowest, only 12 of the 39 districts (31%) were moderate while 10 (26%) were solidly partisan—9 very conservative and 1 very liberal. These more partisan, conservative districts make it less likely that Democratic candidates, in particular, will have congruent issue scores. In contrast, 25 of the 45 districts (56%) were moderate in 2006 and only 3 (7%) were very conservative (none were very liberal). The type of candidates running may also affect congruence scores. In 2006 many of the Democratic candidates were less liberal and more moderate than in previous years.<sup>23</sup> These shifts in candidate ideology and in the distribution of district partisanship are both consistent with the changes in congruence scores.

Republican men, on average, are more congruent than Republican women and their Democratic counterparts. Republican men's issue scores match their district's scores 31% of the time and are within at least one point of the district's score 86% of the time. Republican women, on the other hand, match their district's issue score 26% of the time

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<sup>23</sup> Dewan, Shaila and Anne E. Kornblut. 2006. "In Key Races, Democrats Run to the Right." *New York Times*, October 30. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/30/us/politics/30dems.html> (accessed 20 November 2008).

and are at least within one point of their district 69% of the time. A much lower percentage of Democratic candidates matched their district's issue scores (16% of Democratic men and 18% of Democratic women), although 65% of all Democratic men and 75% of all Democratic women's issue scores were within at least one point of their district's scores. The higher congruence scores of Republican men appear to be, in part, a function of the types of districts in the sample, as 48 of the 123 districts (39%) were conservative/Republican (districts where the presidential vote was in favor of Bush by 5 points or more). Furthermore, of these 48 Republican districts, 20 were very conservative (had presidential votes 10 points or more above the national average). In contrast, only 17 of the 123 districts (14%) were liberal/Democratic and of these, only two were very liberal. In Democratic districts (districts where the presidential vote was in favor of the Gore/Kerry by 5 points or more), Republican men's overall issue scores were within at least one point of their district's score 62% of the time; in Republican districts, that number jumps to 96%. Republican women were within at least one point of their district's score 93% of the time in Republican districts and only 7% of the time in Democratic districts. The percentage of scores within at least one point of the district's score for Democratic women is 98% in Democratic districts and around 29% in Republican districts. Among Democratic men, issue scores are within at least one point of the district 97% of the time in Democratic districts and 29% in Republican districts.

#### **4.2.2 Perceived Competence**

Perceived competence is a function of the candidate's party, gender, and relevant experience. Although party competence is a relatively stable stereotype, it can vary

across years (Petrocik 1996; Sides 2006). For example, Sides (2006) reports that Republican advantage on the issue of crime had declined in 1998, with both parties perceived as equally matched on the issue. I searched the Roper Center's public opinion archives from 2002, 2004, and 2006 to see if there were any recent shifts in issue ownership. The poll questions ask respondents which party they believe could better handle a particular issue. I followed Sides' (2007) procedure and relied on the poll closest to September of the election year. I subtracted the percentage of respondents naming Republicans from the percentage of respondents naming Democrats. Thus, a positive number indicates that more respondents believed that the Democratic party owned an issue, while a negative number indicates that more respondents believed that the Republican party owned an issue. Although past studies do not specify a cut-off point for distinguishing significant from non-significant differences, I counted an issue as owned only if the difference between the parties was greater than or equal to five percentage points.

The results are mostly similar to previous studies and show that there are significant short-term fluctuations in party advantage. Democrats owned social security, health care, abortion, environment, fiscal issues and the economy in 2002. In 2004, Democrats gained an edge in education and immigration. And in 2006, Democrats held an advantage on all of these issues plus stem cell research, foreign policy and defense, the Iraq war, and taxes. Republicans owned foreign policy, homeland security, the Iraq war, crime and immigration in 2002. They held similar advantages in 2004, except they lost immigration and crime and gained an advantage on taxes. In 2006 Republicans lost their edge on all of these issues except homeland security. (No polling information was

available for the other seven issues in my analysis; neither Democrats nor Republicans are coded as competent on these issues.)

I relied on extant research on gender stereotypes to identify gender-owned issues (e.g. Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981; Leeper 1991). Gender-owned issues are issues that voters believe either women or men are more capable of handling. The bulk of the research, conducted mostly in the 1980s and 1990s, finds that women are viewed as better at handling social security, healthcare, abortion, education, welfare, and family and children's issues while men are viewed as better at handling agriculture, foreign policy and defense, crime, economy, taxes and fiscal issues. It is not clear if gender stereotypes fluctuate in the same way that party ownership does because there are few recent studies and/or surveys that examine gender stereotypes. However, the few studies that do exist reinforce (for the most part) the conclusions of older studies (Dolan 2008c). The one exception appears to be a Knowledge Networks survey conducted in 2007 that finds that women and men are viewed as equally matched on economic issues (Dolan 2008c). Based on these studies, I coded social security, healthcare, abortion, education, welfare, and family and children's issues as women's issues while agriculture, foreign policy and defense, Iraq, homeland security, and crime are coded as men's issues. Consistent with the newer Knowledge Networks study, I did not code men or women as having an advantage on economic issues. Although the environment and civil rights are sometimes included as "women's issues" this classification is not consistent throughout studies on gender stereotypes. The remaining issues (stem cell research, civil liberties, gun control, immigration) are not typically mentioned in the literature. For all of these issues, neither men nor women were coded as having an advantage.



Following Sellers (1998) and Sides (2006), I coded data on relevant experience from the candidate biographies and descriptions of campaign races available from the *Almanac of American Politics*. Candidates could have experience on an issue based either on previous professions or, in the case of office-holders, on policy expertise. For example, military veterans were coded as competent on Iraq and military issues; Congresswoman Nancy Johnson had competence on healthcare because of her extensive involvement on healthcare issues during her tenure in Congress.

There is no strong theoretical guidance as to which, if any, component of perceived competence—party, gender, or experience—is more important. In the absence of such guidance, I use an additive measure of perceived competence that assumes equal weight between the three components. Candidates receive one point for each type of presumed competence—party, gender, and experience; this measure ranges from 0 (no perceived competence) to 3 (party and gender competence, plus experience on the issue).

#### **4.2.3 Other Variables**

Issue saliency, or voters' pre-existing concern with an issue (independent of the candidates' campaigns), is measured at both the national level and the district level. At the national level, I used Lexus-Nexus to find public opinion polls that asked respondents to name the most important issues facing the country. I took all available survey results from January through July of each election year and averaged the percentage of respondents naming the issue as important. I did not include results past July to minimize the possibility that campaign effects were influencing survey results (see also Sides 2007). There were a large number of issues mentioned, many of which overlapped with

my issue categories. I collapsed some of the relevant responses to fit my issue categories. For example, if 21% of respondents cited “the economy in general” as the most important issue and 8% cited “unemployment and jobs,” I combined those responses into one issue category: economy. There was a wide range of variance in the percentage of respondents naming an issue as important, with some issues being cited by less than 1% of respondents and some cited by as many as 35%. Most of the issues were cited by a low percentage of respondents though (the average is 6%). Given the lack of guidance in the literature regarding the cut-off point for distinguishing salient from non-salient issues and the wide variance in responses, I considered any issue that was mentioned by at least 10% of respondents to be salient. This includes the economy and homeland security in 2002; the economy, homeland security, Iraq, and health care in 2004; and the economy, homeland security, Iraq, and immigration in 2006.

District characteristics may influence the salience of certain issues as well. For example, foreign policy and defense issues may be particularly important to constituents in districts with military bases. Immigration may be more important to constituents in districts with a large immigrant population. Using the *Almanac of American Politics* and Congressional Quarterly’s *Politics in America*, I read congressional district descriptions to find relevant characteristics. I coded the following characteristics: military bases and/or a high percentage of military personnel, active or retired (foreign policy & defense, Iraq war); large immigrant population and/or border district (immigration); growth and water issues, natural resource development, other environmental concerns (environment); agriculture/farming communities (agriculture); large elderly population (social security); recent loss of jobs, industry (economy). If these characteristics were

mentioned in either the *Almanac* or *Politics in America*, I coded the relevant issue as salient for that district. There were some issues that were mentioned explicitly as highly salient to the district's constituency in the district description (e.g. access to health care in TX-1). In these cases, I coded these issues as salient as well.

Finally, I combined nationally salient issues with salient issues at the district level. The resulting measure is a dichotomous variable, where an issue is coded as one if it is salient at either the national or district level and zero if it is salient for neither.

In the next chapter, I use the measures described here to test the expectations about candidate behavior generated by the decision-theoretic and strategic models.

## Chapter 5

### Model Tests

The preceding chapters have shown that although there are several extant theories of candidate behavior, these theories provide an incomplete account of candidates' campaign behavior. In Chapter 3, I introduced a new strategic model of candidate behavior to address the omissions and shortfalls of these existing theories. In this chapter, I test this model's predictions against the predictions of alternative models of candidate behavior to demonstrate that the strategic model is the best predictor of candidate behavior.

At their most basic, extant theories of candidate behavior suggest that candidates base their decisions to discuss issues primarily on party, gender, and/or issue salience. If these theories are correct, there should be clear patterns in the types of issues discussed by the candidates. But a brief look at the actual issues that competitive U.S. House candidates discussed in 2002, 2004, and 2006 shows that this is not necessarily the case.

First, if party ownership is the primary factor in candidate decision making, then Democrats should be more likely than Republicans to discuss Democratically-owned issues. Thus in 2002, Democrats should be more likely to discuss social security, health care, abortion, the environment, fiscal issues, and the economy. In 2004 Democrats should be more likely to discuss social security, health care, abortion, the environment, fiscal issues, the economy, education, and immigration. And in 2006, Democrats should be more likely than Republicans to discuss social security, health care, abortion, the

**Table 5.1: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Issue in Campaign, By Party**

	All years		2002		2004		2006	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
	N=107	N=110	N=32	N=32	N=33	N=34	N=42	N=44
Social Security	61%	70%	72%	91% <sup>#</sup>	61%	59%	52%	64%
Health care	70%	91% <sup>***</sup>	65%	97% <sup>**</sup>	73%	94% <sup>*</sup>	71%	84%
Abortion	37%	34%	34%	25%	42%	32%	36%	41%
Education	76%	84%	91%	88%	76%	85%	64%	80%
Environment	38%	50% <sup>#</sup>	41%	44%	39%	59%	36%	48%
Welfare	5%	5%	9%	6%	3%	3%	2%	5%
Civil rights	21% <sup>**</sup>	7%	6%	3%	27% <sup>*</sup>	9%	26% <sup>*</sup>	9%
Stem cell research	9%	15%	0	0	3%	0	21%	36%
Agriculture	25% <sup>*</sup>	12%	28% <sup>**</sup>	3%	21%	21%	26% <sup>#</sup>	11%
Foreign policy & defense	50% <sup>#</sup>	38%	53% <sup>***</sup>	9%	67%	56%	33%	45%
Homeland Security	60%	53%	56% <sup>*</sup>	31%	48%	47%	71%	73%
Iraq	21%	39% <sup>**</sup>	3%	3%	12%	26%	40%	75% <sup>**</sup>
Civil liberties	14%	8%	6%	6%	15% <sup>#</sup>	3%	19%	14%
Gun Control	29%	22%	28%	28%	42% <sup>*</sup>	18%	19%	20%
Crime	30%	24%	38%	22%	21%	18%	31%	30%
Economy	80%	81%	78%	72%	88%	94%	76%	77%
Taxes	91% <sup>***</sup>	68%	91% <sup>**</sup>	63%	94%	82%	88% <sup>**</sup>	61%
Fiscal	33%	49% <sup>*</sup>	28%	28%	24%	59% <sup>**</sup>	43%	57%
Immigration	37% <sup>#</sup>	25%	3%	0	24% <sup>*</sup>	6%	74%	59%
Family & children	21%	18%	19%	19%	24%	12%	21%	23%

\*p≤ .05; \*\*p≤ .01; \*\*\*p≤ .001, two-tailed test; #p≤ .05, one-tailed test

environment, fiscal issues, the economy, education, immigration, stem cell research, foreign policy, the Iraq war, and taxes. Republicans, on the other hand, should be more likely than Democrats to discuss foreign policy, homeland security, the Iraq war, crime, and immigration in 2002. In 2004, they should be more likely to discuss foreign policy, homeland security, the Iraq war, and taxes. And in 2006, Republicans should be more likely than Democrats to discuss homeland security.

Table 5.1 shows the percentage of Democrats and Republicans that discussed an issue, with shaded cells indicating issues in which one would expect to see a higher percentage of mentions among the candidates, based on party ownership. As the table indicates, there are some significant differences between the parties. However, these differences do not always follow the expectations from party ownership theory. In 2002, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to discuss foreign policy and homeland security, as expected. However, they were also more likely to discuss agriculture and taxes, two issues that they did not own in 2002. Democrats were more likely to discuss social security and health care, but did not discuss abortion, the environment, fiscal issues, or the economy significantly more than Republicans even though polling data indicates that Democrats owned those issues. In 2004, Republicans were not significantly more likely to discuss any of the issues they owned (foreign policy, homeland security, Iraq, and taxes), while Democrats were significantly more likely to discuss only health care and fiscal issues. Finally, in 2006, Democrats were more likely to discuss the Iraq war, but there were no other significant differences between the parties in owned issues. Republicans, in fact, were more likely than Democrats to discuss taxes, even though Democrats owned that issue in 2006.

**Table 5.2: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Issue in Campaign, By Gender**

	All years		2002		2004		2006	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	N=167	N=50	N=50	N=14	N=53	N=14	N=64	N=22
Social Security	65%	68%	82%	79%	55%	79%	59%	55%
Health care	78%	88%	80%	86%	81%	93%	75%	86%
Abortion	37%	32%	34%	14%	36%	43%	39%	36%
Education	80%	78%	92%	79%	81%	79%	70%	77%
Environment	42%	52%	38%	57%	49%	50%	39%	50%
Welfare	5%	4%	8%	7%	2%	7%	5%	0
Civil rights	14%	14%	4%	7%	17%	21%	19%	14%
Stem cell research	10%	18%	0	0	2%	0	25%	41%
Agriculture	20%	12%	16%	14%	25%	7%	20%	14%
Foreign policy & defense	44%	44%	26%	50% <sup>#</sup>	66%	43%	39%	41%
Homeland Security	55%	60%	46%	36%	45%	57%	70%	77%
Iraq	29%	34%	4%	0	21%	14%	55%	68%
Civil liberties	13% <sup>#</sup>	4%	8%	0	11%	0	19%	9%
Gun Control	28%	18%	32%	14%	32%	21%	20%	18%
Crime	28%	22%	32%	21%	19%	21%	33%	23%
Economy	79%	86%	72%	86%	89%	100%	77%	77%
Taxes	78%	84%	78%	71%	87%	93%	70%	86%
Fiscal	41%	42%	28%	29%	40%	50%	52%	45%
Immigration	32%	28%	0	7% <sup>#</sup>	19% <sup>#</sup>	0	69%	59%
Family & children	16%	34% <sup>**</sup>	12%	43%	13%	36% <sup>#</sup>	20%	27%

\*p≤ .05; \*\*p≤ .01; \*\*\*p≤ .001, two-tailed test; #p≤ .05, one-tailed test

Next, if gender ownership is the primary factor that influences candidates' decisions to discuss particular issues, then women should be more likely than men to discuss social security, health care, abortion, education, welfare, and family and children issues. Men should be more likely than women to discuss agriculture, foreign policy and defense, the Iraq war, homeland security and crime. However, gender ownership receives even less support than party ownership. As Table 5.2 shows, there are few significant differences in the issues discussed by women and men (shaded cells indicate issues in which one would expect to see a higher percentage of mentions among the candidates, based on gender stereotypes). In 2002 and 2004 women were more likely than men to discuss family and children's issues, but this is the only difference that fits the expectations of gender ownership. In 2002, women were actually more likely than men to discuss foreign policy and defense.

Finally, if candidates use issue saliency as the primary factor in determining which issues to discuss, then all candidates should be most likely to discuss the economy and homeland security in 2002; the economy, homeland security, the Iraq war, and health care in 2004; and the economy, homeland security, the Iraq war, and immigration in 2006. Table 5.3 shows mixed support for the issue saliency theory though (shaded cells indicate issues in which one would expect to see a higher percentage of mentions among the candidates, based on issue saliency). In 2002, the economy and homeland security should be the top issues discussed. But, while 75% of candidates did discuss the economy, less than half (44%) discussed homeland security. Instead, candidates focused on education (89%), social security (81%) and health care (81%). As expected, most candidates discussed health care and the economy in 2004, but less than half of the



**Table 5.3: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Issue in Campaign**

	All years	2002	2004	2006
Social Security	65% (142)	81% (52)	60% (40)	58% (50)
Health care	81% (175)	81% (52)	84% (56)	78% (67)
Abortion	35% (77)	30% (19)	37% (25)	38% (33)
Education	80% (173)	89% (57)	81% (54)	72% (62)
Environment	44% (96)	42% (27)	49% (33)	42% (36)
Welfare	5% (10)	8% (5)	3% (2)	3% (3)
Civil rights	14% (30)	5% (3)	18% (12)	17% (15)
Stem cell research	12% (26)	0	1% (1)	29% (25)
Agriculture	18% (40)	16% (10)	21% (14)	19% (16)
Foreign policy & defense	44% (95)	31% (20)	61% (41)	40% (34)
Homeland Security	56% (122)	44% (28)	48% (32)	72% (62)
Iraq	30% (65)	3% (2)	19% (13)	58% (50)
Civil liberties	11% (24)	6% (4)	9% (6)	16% (14)
Gun Control	25% (55)	28% (18)	30% (20)	20% (17)
Crime	27% (58)	30% (19)	19% (13)	30% (26)
Economy	81% (175)	75% (48)	91% (61)	77% (66)
Taxes	79% (172)	77% (49)	88% (59)	74% (64)
Fiscal	41% (89)	28% (18)	42% (28)	50% (43)
Immigration	31% (68)	2% (1)	15% (10)	66% (57)
Family & children	20% (43)	19% (12)	18% (12)	22% (19)

candidates discussed homeland security (48%) and only 19% discussed the Iraq war. There was a noticeable increase in the percentage of candidates discussing the salient issues of homeland security, the Iraq war, and immigration in 2006. Nevertheless, less than three-fourths of candidates discussed these issues. In each year, rather than focusing only on salient issues, candidates campaigned on a mix of salient and non-salient issues.

Although all of these tables do show some differences between the candidates based on sex, issue saliency, and especially party, these differences or distinctions are not as large or as consistent as one might expect from the stereotype or ownership literature. In fact, comparing the top five issues discussed by all of the candidates shows that, regardless of sex, party or issue saliency, candidates discussed a similar set of issues across all years: health care, education, social security, taxes and the economy. While these similarities are consistent with the findings of recent research (e.g. Dolan 2005; Sides 2006), they are at odds with the predictions of party and gender ownership theories as well as issue saliency theories.

As these findings suggest, although candidates may share party and/or gender, they have different combinations of advantages and disadvantages and they face opponents with varying advantages and disadvantages in districts with varying preferences and priorities. Blanket predictions of behavior based only on gender or party or issue saliency do not account for these unique circumstances and do not recognize the different incentives (and disincentives) that candidates might have to discuss particular issues, despite shared party and/or gender.

The strategic theory of candidate behavior outlined in Chapter 3 does acknowledge these different incentives though, and in the following sections, I test the

hypotheses about candidate strategy generated by this theory as well as the hypotheses generated by the two decision-theoretic alternatives. I begin by testing the myopic decision-theoretic hypotheses and then move on to test the sophisticated decision-theoretic and strategic hypotheses.

### 5.1 Myopic Decision-Theoretic Model

The myopic decision-theoretic model generates two expectations. First, a candidate's perceived competence and congruence should increase the probability that the candidate discusses an issue. Second, these factors should have less impact on the decision to discuss a salient issue, as all candidates should be more likely to discuss salient issues. If this model is correct, then for non-salient issues, perceived competence should have a positive and significant impact on the probability of discussing the issue. The effect of congruence should also be positive, although it may be weaker than the effect of perceived competence (due to voters' asymmetric information about competence and congruence). For salient issues, both perceived competence and congruence should have little or no impact on the likelihood that a candidate will discuss an issue.

I estimate the following model, where PC measures the candidate's perceived competence and C measures the candidate's congruence:

$$P(\text{discuss}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PC) + \beta_2(C)$$

In this model, perceived competence is additive and ranges from 0 (no party or gender competence or issue experience) to 3 (party and gender competence plus issue experience). Congruence is a dummy variable that indicates whether the candidate is congruent with district preferences (i.e. the candidate's issue score is the same as the

district's issue score). Table 5.4 reports logit regression results for non-salient issues in the left column and for salient issues in the right column. The standard errors for both are clustered by state-district-year to account for possible correlations in the standard errors within House districts in each election year.

**Table 5.4: Logit Regression Results (Myopic Decision-Theoretic Model)**

	<b>Non-Salient Issues</b>	<b>Salient Issues</b>
	Coefficient	Coefficient
Candidate perceived competence	.580** (.058)	-.250** (.096)
Candidate Congruence	.154# (.092)	-.155 (.159)
Constant	-.968** (.061)	.743** (.133)
N	3513	827
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.025**	.007*

\*\*p<.01; \*p<.05; #p<.10

For non-salient issues, perceived competence has the impact predicted by Hypothesis 1, as its coefficient is both positive and statistically significant; perceived competence significantly increases the likelihood that a candidate will discuss a non-salient issue. Congruence is also positive and is significant with a one-tailed test. This is consistent with the expectation that congruence will have less impact than perceived competence.

As expected, congruence has no significant impact on candidates' likelihood of discussing salient issues. However, perceived competence significantly decreases the likelihood of discussing salient issues, an effect not predicted by Hypothesis 2. Nevertheless, candidates do have a higher overall probability of discussing a salient issue

(.678, variables set at the median) than a non-salient issue (.275, variables set at the median) as predicted.

These results are largely consistent with the hypotheses generated from the myopic decision-theoretic model (at least for non-salient issues). For non-salient issues, perceived competence and congruence give candidates an advantage and thus increase the probability that a candidate will discuss the issue. Furthermore, all candidates are more likely to discuss salient issues, as the model predicts. This model though only considers the candidates' own advantages, without taking into account the potential impact of opponent characteristics and strategy on candidates' behavior.

## **5.2 Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic Model & Strategic Model**

Unlike the myopic decision-theoretic model, the sophisticated model incorporates the opponent's perceived competence and congruence in determining issue advantages. In this model, advantages and disadvantages in competence and congruence are relative rather than absolute. The sophisticated decision-theoretic model predicts that a relative advantage in perceived competence and congruence will increase the likelihood that the candidate will discuss an issue. The sophisticated model also predicts that a relative disadvantage in perceived competence and congruence will decrease the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue. Like the myopic model, this model also predicts that all candidates will be more likely to discuss salient issues, regardless of their own relative advantages or disadvantages in perceived competence and congruence.

The strategic model also makes predictions about the impact of relative advantages and disadvantages in perceived competence and congruence, but rather than

the uniform effects that the strategic decision-theoretic model predicts, the strategic model predicts that the effects of some of these relative advantages and disadvantages are conditional. First, like the other models, the strategic model predicts that relative advantages in perceived competence and congruence will increase the probability that a candidate will discuss a non-salient issue. Second, unlike other models, the strategic model predicts that a relative disadvantage in perceived competence will significantly increase the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue, but only when the candidate has a relative advantage in congruence. Candidates who advertise their closer proximity to district preferences in this case will gain a boost on an issue that they would otherwise lose, while also reducing the advantage in expected votes that their opponent would receive if the candidates ignored the issue.

This expectation of a conditional, positive effect is opposite of the prediction made by the sophisticated decision-theoretic model, which predicts a consistent, negative impact across all cases. The strategic model, like the other models, also predicts that all candidates will be more likely to discuss salient issues; therefore, relative advantages and disadvantages in perceived competence and congruence will have less impact on the likelihood of discussing a salient issue.

I estimate the following model, where  $PC_{cand}$  is an additive scale (from 0 to 3) that measures the candidate's perceived competence,  $C_{cand}$  is a dummy variable that indicates that the candidate is more congruent on the issue than the opponent,  $PC_{opp}$  is an additive scale (from 0 to 3) that measures the opponent's perceived competence, and  $C_{opp}$  is a dummy that indicates that the opponent is more congruent on the issue:

$$P(\text{Discuss}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PC_{cand}) + \beta_2(C_{cand}) + \beta_3(PC_{cand} * C_{cand}) + \beta_4(PC_{opp}) + \beta_5(C_{opp}) + \beta_6(PC_{opp} * C_{cand}) + \beta_7(C_{opp} * PC_{cand}) + \beta_8(PC_{opp} * C_{opp})$$

Measuring congruence as two separate dummy variables results in a zero-sum measure of congruence, which is consistent with my model's hypotheses.<sup>24</sup> Ideally, perceived competence would be measured this way as well. However, there is not enough information (either theoretical or empirical) about the impact of each individual component of perceived competence (party, gender, experience) to determine with much confidence which candidate is more competent. It could be the case that these individual components do not have an equal weight or importance. One solution to this problem is to include each perceived competence component as a separate measure. However, this would increase the number of necessary interaction terms, making the estimation and interpretation of the regression equation unwieldy. As a compromise, I measure perceived competence separately for the candidate and opponent in the regression equation and estimate the impact of the relative difference between the two measures in the subsequent analysis. This solution keeps the regression equation and the number of interaction terms manageable, while helping to minimize the potential problems with scaling perceived competence. I leave the more complicated questions about the individual effects of each perceived competence component to future research.

The equation itself includes several interaction terms beyond the specified interactions in the strategic model (specifically Hypothesis 3). These interactions capture

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<sup>24</sup> It is possible to measure congruence as a continuous variable rather than a dummy variable. However, the existing data is not this specific or fine-grained and using a continuous measure would introduce a level of precision that the data does not warrant.

**Table 5.5: Summary of Equation Interaction Terms**

<b>Interaction Terms</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic Expectation</b>	<b>Strategic Expectation</b>
$\beta_1(PC_{cand})$	Candidate perceived competence when neither candidate nor opponent has a congruence advantage	Positive (Hypothesis 3)	Positive (Hypothesis 3)
$\beta_1(PC_{cand}) + \beta_3(PC_{cand} * C_{cand})$	Candidate perceived competence when the candidate is advantaged in congruence	Positive (Hypothesis 3)	Positive (Hypothesis 3)
$\beta_1(PC_{cand}) + \beta_7(PC_{cand} * C_{opp})$	Candidate perceived competence when the candidate is disadvantaged in congruence	Positive (Hypothesis 3)	Positive (Hypothesis 3)
$\beta_2(C_{cand})$	Candidate congruence advantage when neither candidate nor opponent has any perceived competencies	Positive (Hypothesis 3)	Positive (Hypothesis 3)
$\beta_2(C_{cand}) + \beta_3(PC_{cand} * C_{cand})$	Candidate congruence advantage when candidate has perceived competence	Positive (Hypothesis 3)	Positive (Hypothesis 3)
$\beta_2(C_{cand}) + \beta_6(PC_{opp} * C_{cand})$	Candidate congruence advantage when opponent has perceived competence	Positive (Hypothesis 3)	Positive (Hypothesis 3)
$\beta_4(PC_{opp})$	Opponent perceived competence when neither candidate nor opponent has a congruence advantage	Negative (Hypothesis 3)	No Effect (Hypothesis 4)
$\beta_4(PC_{opp}) + \beta_6(PC_{opp} * C_{cand})$	Opponent perceived competence when the candidate is advantaged in congruence	Negative (Hypothesis 3)	Positive (Hypothesis 4)
$\beta_4(PC_{opp}) + \beta_8(PC_{opp} * C_{opp})$	Opponent perceived competence when the candidate is disadvantaged in congruence	Negative (Hypothesis 3)	No Effect (Hypothesis 4)
$\beta_5(C_{opp})$	Candidate congruence disadvantage when neither candidate nor opponent has any perceived competencies	Negative (Hypothesis 3)	No effect (Hypothesis 5)
$\beta_5(C_{opp}) + \beta_7(C_{opp} * PC_{cand})$	Candidate congruence disadvantage when candidate has perceived competence	Negative (Hypothesis 3)	No effect (Hypothesis 5)
$\beta_5(C_{opp}) + \beta_8(PC_{opp} * C_{opp})$	Candidate congruence disadvantage when opponent has perceived competence	Negative (Hypothesis 3)	No effect (Hypothesis 5)



all possible conditions and combinations of perceived competence and congruence that a candidate might face. I include all of these interactions to test not just the specified conditional effects predicted by my strategic model, but the null hypotheses of no conditional effects as well. These interaction terms and the conditions they represent are summarized in Table 5.5, along with the predictions of the sophisticated decision-theoretic and strategic models. Table 5.6 reports logit regression results for non-salient and salient issues, with standard errors clustered by state-district-year.

The marginal effects of a change in perceived competence advantage and disadvantage are reported in Table 5.7 for non-salient issues. First, an advantage in perceived competence (left column) significantly increases the probability of discussing a non-salient issue, regardless of whether the candidate or her opponent has a congruence advantage. This constant, positive effect is consistent with the expectations of both the sophisticated decision-theoretic model and the strategic model (Hypothesis 3). A candidate with a perceived competence advantage has a strong incentive to discuss the issue and the candidate or her opponent having a congruence advantage does not diminish this incentive.

Second, in contrast to the sophisticated decision-theoretic hypotheses, a disadvantage in perceived competence (right column) has conditional, positive effects rather than constant, negative effects. A disadvantage in perceived competence significantly increases the probability that a candidate will discuss the issue when the candidate has a congruence advantage, but not when the candidate and opponent are equally matched in congruence. This effect is consistent with the strategic model (Hypothesis 4), but not with the sophisticated decision-theoretic model (Hypothesis 3).

**Table 5.6: Logit Regression Results (Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic & Strategic Models)**

	Non-Salient Issues	Salient Issues
	Coefficient	Coefficient
Candidate perceived competence	.558** (.092)	-.279 (.168)
Candidate congruence	.174 (.151)	-.032 (.469)
Candidate perceived competence*candidate congruence	.029 (.148)	-.130 (.264)
Opponent perceived competence	.095 (.095)	-.547* (.157)
Opponent congruence	.069 (.152)	-.126 (.452)
Opponent perceived competence*Candidate congruence	.132 (.148)	.145 (.261)
Opponent Congruence*Candidate perceived competence	.008 (.151)	.053 (.281)
Opponent perceived competence*Opponent congruence	.195 (.158)	.242 (.246)
Constant	-1.100** (.113)	1.221** (.326)
N	3513	827
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.029**	.026*

\*\*p<.01; \*p<.05

**Table 5.7: Marginal Effect of Perceived Competence for Non-Salient Issues<sup>25</sup>**

	Perceived Competence Advantage	Perceived Competence Disadvantage
Opponent has congruence advantage	.123* (.026)	.059* (.029)
Neither has congruence advantage	.118* (.018)	.018 (.019)
Candidate has congruence advantage	.131* (.027)	.048* (.024)

\*p<.05, one-tailed test

### **Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic Predictions:**

*Hypothesis 3: A relative advantage...in perceived competence...increases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

*Hypothesis 3: A relative disadvantage...in perceived competence...decreases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

### **Strategic Predictions:**

*Hypothesis 3: A relative advantage...in perceived competence...increases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

*Hypothesis 4: A relative disadvantage in perceived competence will increase the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue only when the candidate has a relative advantage in congruence.*

<sup>25</sup> The left column shows the estimate of a one-unit increase in perceived competence advantage, where candidate perceived competence changes from 0 to 1 and opponent perceived competence is set at 0. The right column shows the estimate of a one-unit increase in perceived competence disadvantage, where opponent perceived competence changes from 0 to 1 and candidate perceived competence is set at 0.

However, the significant and positive effect of a perceived competence disadvantage when the opponent has a congruence advantage is not consistent with any of the hypotheses. Neither the decision-theoretic model, which predicts a negative effect, nor the strategic model, which predicts no effect, anticipates this result and it is not immediately clear what is driving it.

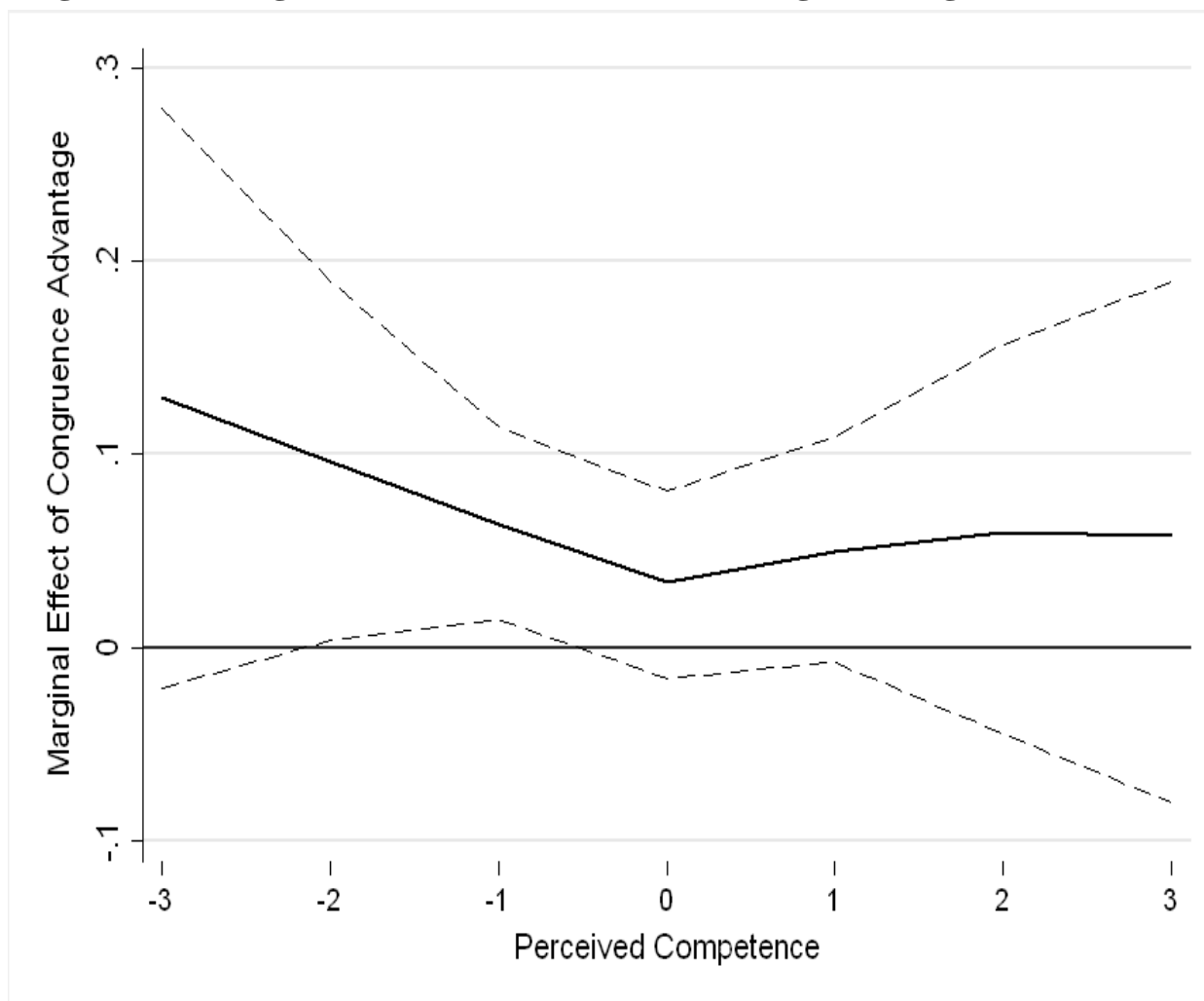
The marginal effects of congruence are shown in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. An advantage in congruence (Figure 5.1) has a significant effect when the opponent has an advantage in perceived competence, but not when the candidate holds an advantage in perceived competence.<sup>26</sup> Because congruence is more costly to advertise than perceived competence, candidates have less incentive to advertise their congruence, absent other pressures. However, a candidate has a greater incentive to highlight her congruence when she anticipates that her opponent has an advantage in perceived competence and will likely discuss the issue. This finding compliments the predictions of Hypothesis 3, that candidates who are disadvantaged in perceived competence are more likely to discuss an issue when they have congruence.

A disadvantage in congruence (Figure 5.2) has no significant impact, regardless of whether the candidate or opponent has an advantage in perceived competence (although it does come close to statistical significance when perceived competence is negative). These effects are also consistent with Hypothesis 5 of the strategic model, rather than the Hypothesis 3 of the sophisticated decision-theoretic model. In both cases,

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<sup>26</sup> Although the effect is not significant when the opponent's margin of perceived competence advantage is 3, this is likely due to the low number of cases (6 observations where the opponent's margin of advantage is 3).

**Figure 5.1: Marginal Effect of a Relative Advantage in Congruence (Non-Salient Issues)**



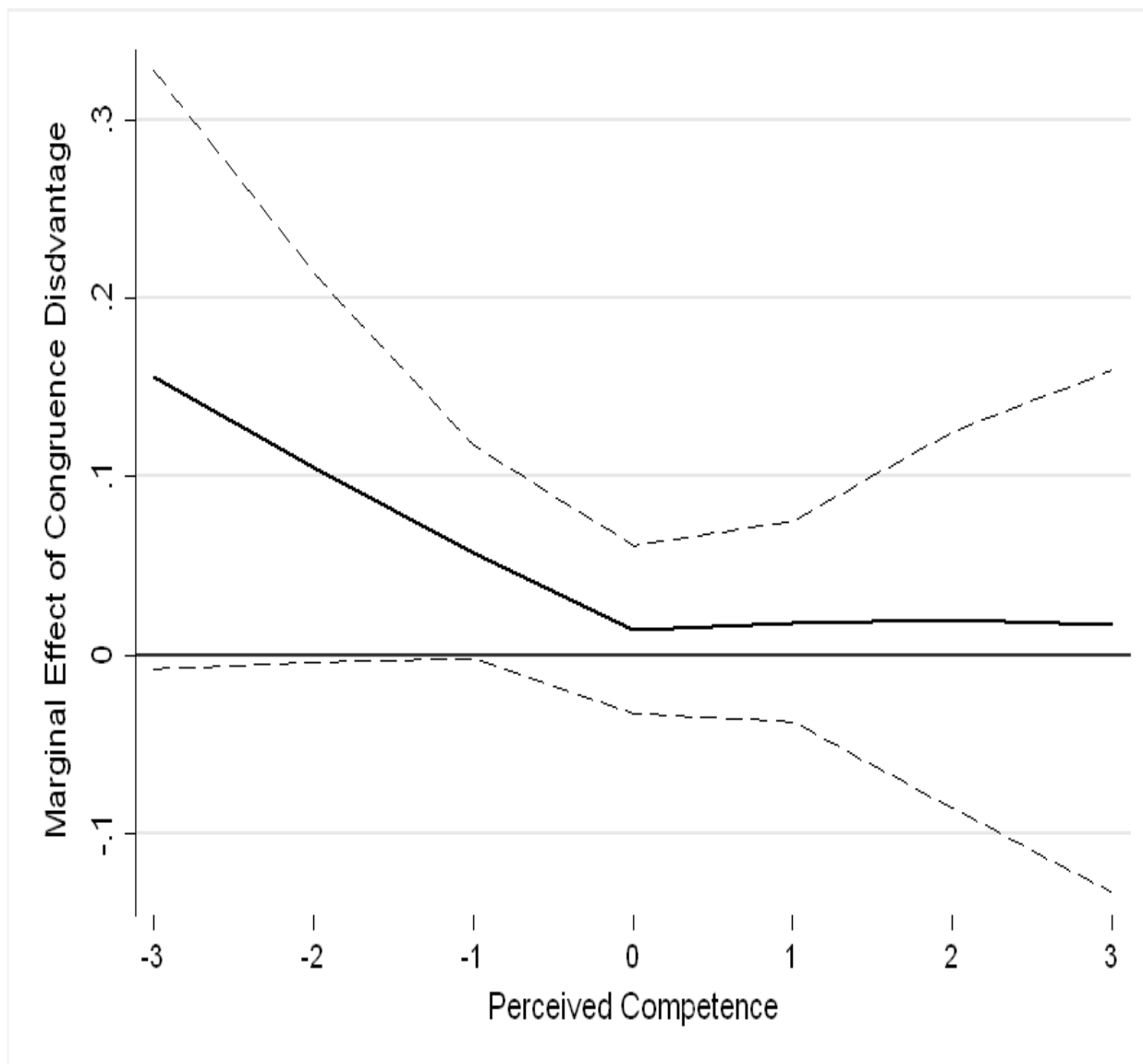
**Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic:**

*Hypothesis 3: A relative advantage in congruence increases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

**Strategic:**

*Hypothesis 3: A relative advantage in congruence increases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

**Figure 5.2: Marginal Effect of a Relative Disadvantage in Congruence (Non-Salient Issues)**



**Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic**

*Hypothesis 3: A relative disadvantage in congruence decreases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.*

**Strategic:**

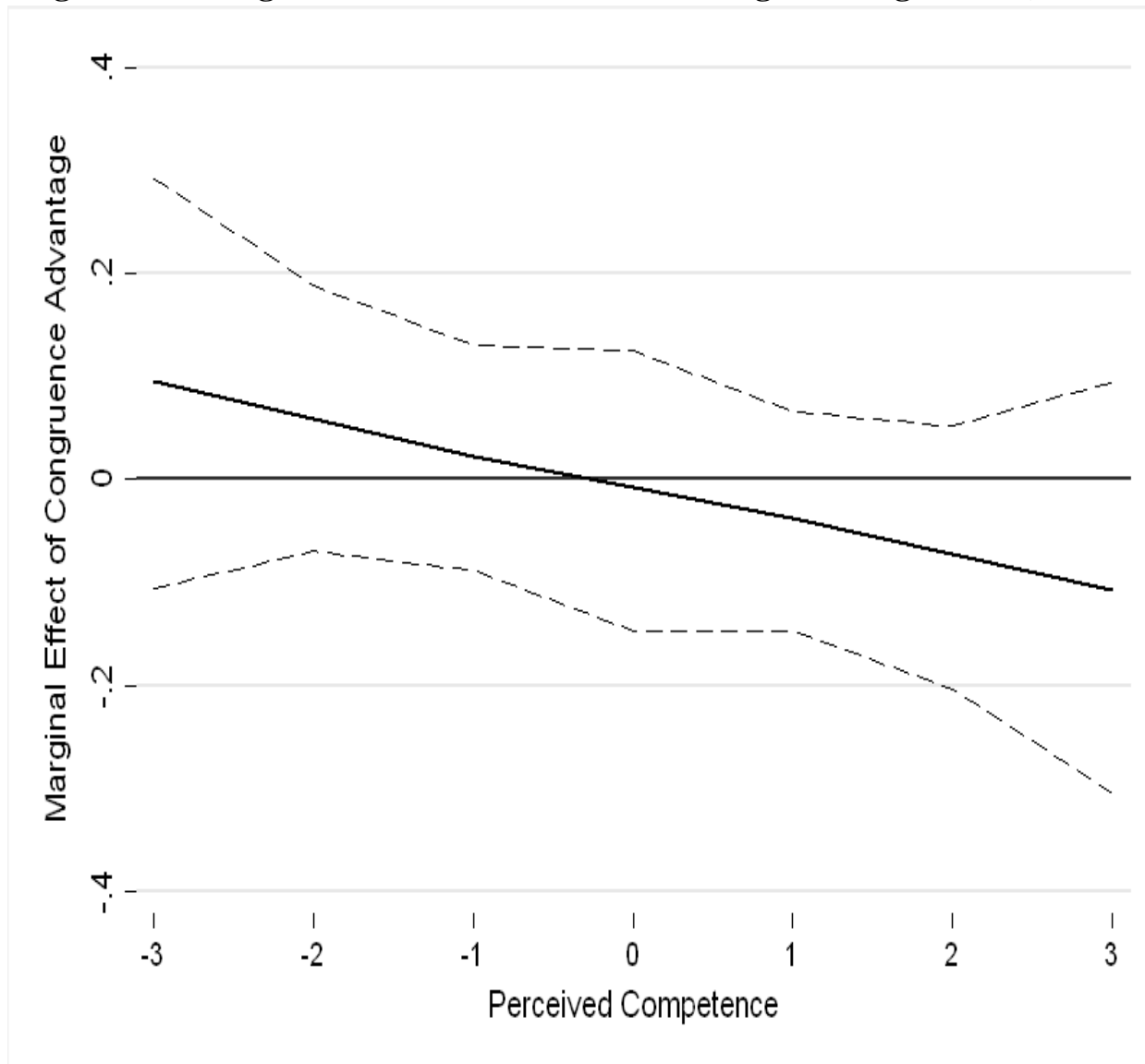
*Hypothesis 5: A relative disadvantage in congruence will have little impact on the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue*

opponent congruence does not significantly alter the incentives for a candidate to discuss an issue. When a candidate has no perceived competence advantage and thus nothing to counter the opponent's congruence advantage, the candidate is better off ignoring the issue; discussing the issue will only highlight the opponent's advantage. A candidate who does have a perceived competence advantage already has a strong incentive to discuss the issue and facing an opponent with a congruence advantage does not lower this incentive.

The logit regression results for salient issues are reported in the right column of Table 5.6. Both the sophisticated decision-theoretic and strategic models predict that advantages or disadvantages in perceived competence and congruence will have little impact on candidate behavior when an issue is salient; instead, all candidates should be more likely to discuss a salient issue, regardless of perceived competence or congruence advantage. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show that, as expected, an advantage or disadvantage in congruence has no significant impact on the likelihood of discussing a non-salient issue.

The effects of perceived competence do not consistently match expectations though. The marginal effects of a perceived competence advantage and disadvantage are shown in Table 5.8. An advantage in perceived competence significantly decreases the likelihood of discussing a salient issue when the candidate is also advantaged in congruence, but the magnitude of the effect is weaker (as predicted) than the effect on non-salient issues. However, a disadvantage in perceived competence also significantly decreases the likelihood of discussing a salient issue when the candidate and opponent are equally matched in congruence and when the candidate holds an advantage in congruence. And, counter to expectations, these effects are larger than the effects for non-salient issues. These results are not predicted by the sophisticated decision-theoretic

**Figure 5.3: Marginal Effect of a Relative Advantage in Congruence (Salient Issues)**



**Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic:**

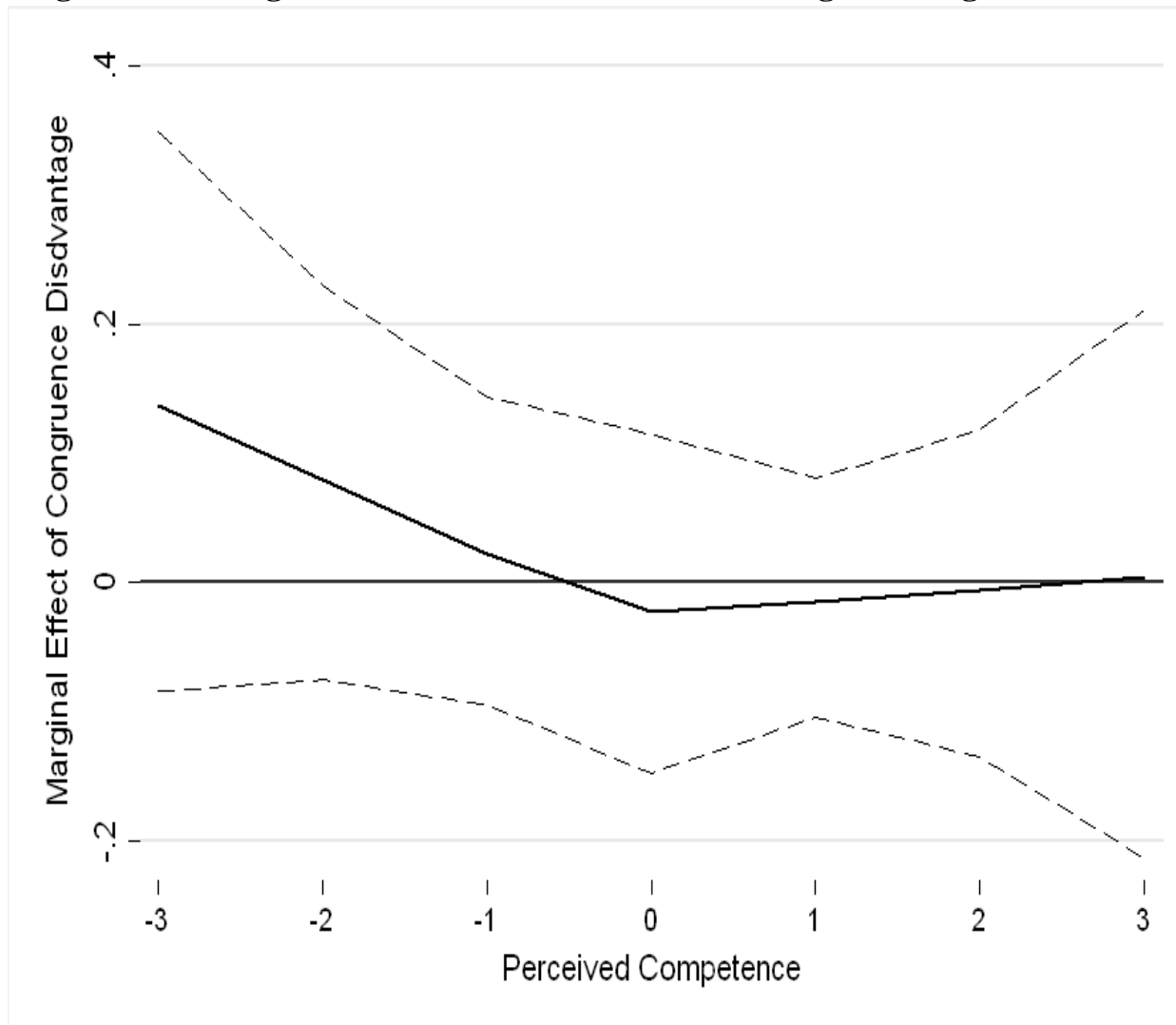
*Hypothesis 2: A candidate's perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the candidate's decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*

**Strategic:**

*Hypothesis 6: A relative advantage in perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*



**Figure 5.4: Marginal Effect of a Relative Disadvantage in Congruence (Salient Issues)**



**Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic:**

*Hypothesis 2: A candidate's perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the candidate's decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*

**Strategic:**

*Hypothesis 6: A relative advantage in perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*

**Table 5.8: Marginal Effect of Perceived Competence for Salient Issues**

	<b>Perceived Competence Advantage<sup>27</sup></b>	<b>Perceived Competence Disadvantage<sup>28</sup></b>
Opponent has congruence advantage	-.043 (.040)	-.060 (.038)
Neither has congruence advantage	-.050 (.027)	-.107* (.025)
Candidate has congruence advantage	-.077* (.033)	-.078* (.035)

\*significant, two-tailed test

### **Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic Predictions:**

*Hypothesis 2: A candidate's perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the candidate's decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*

### **Strategic Predictions:**

*Hypothesis 6: A relative advantage in perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public.*

<sup>27</sup> Estimate of a one-unit increase in perceived competence advantage. Candidate perceived competence changes from 0 to 1; Opponent perceived competence set at 0

<sup>28</sup> Estimate of a one-unit increase in perceived competence disadvantage. Opponent perceived competence changes from 0 to 1; Candidate perceived competence set at 0

model or the strategic model and is it not clear what is driving these results. Nevertheless, candidates are more likely, overall, to discuss a salient issue ( $p=.597$ , all variables set at median) than a non-salient issue ( $p=.250$ , all variables set at median).

### 5.3 Summary

Although none of these results are perfectly consistent with one model, they do lend more support to the strategic model than to either of the decision-theoretic models. Table 5.9 summarizes the results and compares them to the predictions of the decision-theoretic models and the strategic model. Consistent with all models, an advantage in perceived competence always increases the likelihood of discussing a non-salient issue.

However, other results are consistent with only the strategic model. The significant, positive effect of a relative disadvantage in perceived competence, in particular, distinguishes the strategic model from the two decision-theoretic models. First, this effect demonstrates that the myopic model is inadequate, as this model does not account at all for the influence of opponent characteristics and strategy in candidate decision-making.

The sophisticated decision-theoretic model is also inadequate; this model predicts that any disadvantage in either perceived competence or congruence will decrease the likelihood of discussing a non-salient issue. But instead, a disadvantage in perceived competence increases the likelihood of discussing a non-salient issue under certain conditions and this result is more consistent with the conditional expectations of the strategic model. The effects of congruence reinforce this finding. A congruence advantage is significant only when the candidate faces an opponent who has a perceived

**Table 5.9: Summary of Results**

<b>Myopic Decision-Theoretic Hypotheses</b>	<b>Sophisticated Decision-Theoretic Hypotheses</b>	<b>Strategic Hypotheses</b>	<b>Results</b>
H1: Perceived competence and congruence give a candidate an advantage on an issue and thus increase the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue	H3: A relative advantage in perceived competence or congruence increases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue	H3: A relative advantage in perceived competence or congruence increases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue	Consistent with all models
No predictions	H3: A relative disadvantage in perceived competence decreases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue	H4: A relative disadvantage in perceived competence will increase the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue only when the candidate has a relative advantage in congruence	Mixed results, but more consistent with Strategic model
No predictions	H3: A relative disadvantage in congruence decreases the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue	H5: A relative disadvantage in congruence will have little impact on the probability that a candidate will discuss an issue.	Consistent with Strategic model
H2: A candidate's perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the candidate's decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public	H6: A relative advantage in perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public	H6: A relative advantage in perceived competence and/or congruence has less impact on the decision to discuss an issue the more salient it is to the public	Mixed results for all models

competence advantage; and just as the strategic model predicts, a congruence disadvantage has no impact on the likelihood of discussing a non-salient issue.

A few findings are not supported by either theory. The effects of a perceived competence advantage and disadvantage for salient issues are at odds with all expectations. However, even with these unexpected results, all candidates are still more likely to discuss salient issues.

In general, these results provide evidence that candidates' campaign behavior is a strategic calculation, rather than just a tallying of advantages and disadvantages and neither of the decision-theoretic models is able to predict all of the behaviors that the strategic model anticipates. In the next chapter, I use this model to generate and test expectations about gender differences in issue emphasis.

## Chapter 6

### Predicting Gender Differences

Both issue ownership and the extant gender stereotype literature base their expectations of candidate behavior on party and gender-based issue competencies (although neither considers party and gender competencies simultaneously). These perceived competencies suggest that all women (or all Democrats) will discuss Democratic/women's issues such as health care, while men (or Republicans) will never discuss such issues. In turn, all men (or all Republicans) will discuss Republican/men's issues such as foreign policy, while women (or Democrats) will ignore such issues. However, as the strategic model explains, such blanket generalizations cannot be made, as candidate behavior is conditioned by issue saliency, opponent characteristics, and district preferences on the issues in addition to the candidates' own perceived party and gender competence. This alternative view of candidate behavior presents gender stereotypes as neither universal nor irrelevant in candidate decision-making. Instead, these stereotypes are one of several factors that strategic candidates weigh when deciding which issues to discuss. Consequently, gender differences in campaign behavior will not be consistent across all candidates, all elections, or all issues. Once issue saliency, perceived competence, and congruence are taken into account, the model predicts that gender differences are most likely to occur only under a very few predictable conditions.

Because gender differences are apparent only under a few specific combinations of issue salience, perceived competence, and congruence, aggregate comparisons of women and men will usually reveal few, if any, significant gender differences in

candidates' issue emphasis. This expectation is illustrated in Table 6.1, which shows the aggregate percentage of women and men who discussed the twenty issues in my analysis, both overall and with the issues broken down into issues that were both party and gender-owned (Democratic/women's issues include social security, health care, abortion, and education; Republican/men's issues include foreign policy and defense, Iraq, homeland security and crime). This table does not take into account any of the model's three components of saliency, perceived competence, and congruence, and as expected, reveals no significant differences in the issue discussion of women and men. Once these factors are considered though, gender differences will exist under certain conditions.

**Table 6.1: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Issues**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b><i>Difference</i></b>
<b>All Issues</b>	41% (1000)	40% (3340)	<b><i>1%</i></b>
<b>Democratic/Women's Issues</b>	67% (200)	65% (668)	<b><i>2%</i></b>
<b>Republican/Men's Issues</b>	40% (120)	40% (423)	<b><i>0%</i></b>

## **6.1 Gender Differences on Salient Issues**

The strategic model presents three conditions in which candidates have a high incentive to discuss an issue. First, regardless of their own or their opponent's competence and congruence, all candidates are more likely to discuss salient issues. This means that there should be few (if any) gender differences on issues that are highly salient to voters. Both women and men are likely to discuss these issues in their campaigns, regardless of their relative perceived competence and/or congruence advantages and disadvantages.

This expectation can be demonstrated by looking at patterns within the observed data. Table 6.2 shows the percentage of candidates who discussed salient issues by gender. Overall, there were five nationally salient issues—health care (salient in 2004), homeland security (salient in all years), Iraq (salient in 2004, 2006), the economy (salient in all years), and immigration (salient in 2006). Several more issues were salient at the district level, including agriculture, education, the environment, foreign policy, health care, immigration, Iraq, and social security. As the columns in Table 6.2 show, at least 60% of both women and men discussed these salient issues in their campaigns, percentages that are significantly higher than the percentages of candidates who discussed non-salient issues.

**Table 6.2: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Salient Issues**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b><i>Difference</i></b>
<b>All Issues</b>	65% (191)	60% (636)	<b>5%</b>
<b>Democratic/Women's Issues</b>	89% (19)	83% (58)	<b>6%</b>
<b>Republican/Men's Issues</b>	48% (70)	46% (232)	<b>2%</b>

The second and third rows divide these salient issues into Democratic/women's issues and Republican/men's issues. There are three issues that were both salient (either nationally or at district-level) and Democratic/women's issues—health care, education, and social security. There were also three issues that were both salient (nationally or district-level) and Republican/men's issues—homeland security, Iraq, and foreign policy. Over 80% of both women and men discussed salient Democratic/women's issues, which is significantly higher than the percentages who discussed these issues when they were not salient. Just under 50% of women and men discussed salient Republican/men's



issues. Although these percentages are noticeably lower than the percentages of candidates who discussed salient Democratic/women's issues, they are still significantly higher than the percentage of candidates who discussed non-salient Republican/men's issues (see Table 6.3 below).

All of these results are consistent with expectations that candidates are more likely to discuss salient issues, regardless of competence or congruence. More importantly though, across all salient issues, regardless of whether the salient issues were Democratic/women's issues or Republican/men's issues, there are no significant differences between women and men. Similar percentages of both women and men discussed these salient issues in their campaigns.

## 6.2 Gender Differences on Non-Salient Issues

If gender differences do exist then, the model predicts that they should be more apparent on non-salient issues. Even on non-salient issues though, candidate behavior is still conditioned by perceived competence and congruence. And if these two factors are ignored, it is still difficult to detect gender differences, even on non-salient issues (see Table 6.3). Therefore, the predicted size of gender differences on non-salient issues depends on which candidate has a perceived competence and/or congruence advantage.

**Table 6.3: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Non-Salient Issues**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>All Issues</b>	35% (809)	34% (2704)	<b>1%</b>
<b>Democratic/Women's Issues</b>	64% (181)	63% (610)	<b>1%</b>
<b>Republican/Men's Issues</b>	28% (50)	32% (191)	<b>4%</b>

There are two conditions in which a candidate has a high incentive to discuss a non-salient issue—when the candidate has a perceived competence advantage over her opponent and when the candidate has a congruence advantage and is faced with an opponent who is advantaged in perceived competence.

### **6.2.1 Effects of Perceived Competence**

In all cases (i.e. regardless of congruence), candidates who have more perceived competence than their opponent are likely to discuss non-salient issues. A perceived competence advantage provides a large incentive for candidates to discuss an issue because their advantage over their opponents is based, primarily, on easily accessible cues such as party and gender. Candidates are able to capitalize on voters' beliefs that they are generally more competent and more interested in the particular issue and can advertise this advantage at a relatively low cost.

With respect to women's issues, female candidates will always have a perceived competence advantage from gender stereotypes over their male opponents. Likewise, men will have a competence advantage over their female opponents in men's issues. Therefore, based only on gender competence, one might expect women candidates to discuss women's issues such as health care, education, and welfare in their campaigns more frequently than their male opponents do. Likewise, one would expect men to discuss men's issues such as foreign policy and crime more frequently than their female opponents do. However, there is a large amount of overlap between gender and party competencies. The issues that are associated with women also tend to be associated with the Democratic party and issues associated with men tend to be associated with

Republicans. Because of this overlap, women (and men) do not have the same incentives to discuss gender-owned issues.

Democratic women will usually have a perceived competence advantage over their opponents on Democratic/women's issues. Even without considering experience, Democratic women will always have competency from both party and gender, which is more than either a male or a female Republican opponent will have, all else being equal. On the other hand, even though social security, health care, abortion, and education are women's issues, Republican women are rarely in a position to have a perceived competence advantage over their opponents on these issues. Because those same women's issues are also Democratic issues, any female opponent a Republican woman faces will already have more competencies from both gender and party. And Republican women will likely be equally matched in the number of perceived competencies against any male opponent (the Republican woman with gender competency, the Democratic male opponent with party competence).<sup>29</sup>

In fact, Democratic men benefit more from the association of social security, health care, abortion, education, etc. with the Democratic party than Republican women benefit from these issues being associated with women. Although Democratic men are equal to Republican women in perceived competencies (holding experience constant), they have more competencies than Republican men on these issues. And given the fewer number of women that run for office, Democratic men are more likely to face a male opponent. Not surprisingly, Republican men, who lack both party and gender competence

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<sup>29</sup> All of these expectations are based on the assumption that gender competence and party competence have equivalent effects and that candidates and their opponents have equal amounts of experiential competence.

on Democratic/women's issues, are the most likely to be disadvantaged in perceived competence on these issues, regardless of their opponent.

A similar pattern emerges with Republican/men's issues. Republican men will usually have more perceived competence than any opponent and this advantage will be particularly pronounced against Democratic women. Republican men will always have at least two competencies from party and gender and this is more than any Democratic opponent will have (holding experience constant). Democratic men will have at least one competency from gender on these issues, but they will rarely have more competencies than their opponent. Republican male opponents will have more competencies from both party and gender, while Republican female opponents will be equally matched in competencies (with perceived competence from party), all else equal.

While Republican women will likely be equally matched in perceived competence with Democratic men, they will be advantaged over Democratic women who have no competencies from either party or gender. However, given the low number of women who run for office, Republican women are more likely to face a Democratic man. Democratic women, lacking both party and gender competence will not be advantaged in perceived competence on Republican/men's issues, regardless of opponent, all else being equal.

Based only on these differences in perceived competencies, we might expect to find that the largest gender differences in the likelihood of discussing Democratic/women's issues or Republican/men's issues occur in races where a Democratic woman is running against a Republican man. Democratic women will be more competent on Democratic/women's issues than Republican men, and thus more

likely to discuss them, while Republican men will be more competent and thus more likely to discuss Republican/men's issues. On the other hand, fewer gender differences should occur when a Republican woman is running against a Democratic man. Both Republican women and Democratic men will likely be equally matched on perceived competence, with neither having an advantage over the other in either Democratic/women's issues or Republican/men's issues. However, there is one additional factor to consider.

### **6.2.2 Effects of Congruence**

The strategic model predicts that an advantage in congruence also increases the likelihood that a candidate will discuss a non-salient issue, particularly when the candidate does not have a perceived competence advantage. This means that there are conditions when, for example, Republican men will have an incentive to discuss Democratic/women's issues despite their lack of perceived competence advantages. Conversely, there are conditions where Democratic women will have an incentive to discuss Republican/men's issues.

Even though, in terms of perceived competence, Republican men are the most disadvantaged and the least likely to discuss Democratic/women's issues, they will be more likely to discuss Democratic/women's issues when they have a congruence advantage over their opponent. Thus, although one would expect a large gap in the discussion of Democratic/women's issues between Democratic women and Republican men, this gap will be narrower when Republican men are more congruent on these issues than their Democratic female opponent. Likewise, Democratic women will be more

likely to discuss Republican/men's issues when they have a congruence advantage over Republican male opponents, resulting in fewer differences than otherwise expected between Democratic women and Republican men in Republican/men's issues.

For example, Table 6.4 shows the observed percentage of candidates, restricted to races between Republican men and Democratic women, who discussed non-salient Republican/men's issues in their campaigns.

**Table 6.4: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Non-Salient Republican/Men's Issues**

Type of Race	Republican Men	Democratic Women	Difference (Rep♂-Dem♀)
<b>Democrat Woman: Congruence Advantage</b>	29% (7)	14% (7)	<b>15%</b>
<b>Democratic Woman: Congruence Disadvantage</b>	33% (6)	0% (5)	<b>33%</b>

The first row shows the percentage of candidates who discussed these issues in races where Democratic women had a congruence advantage and the second row shows the percentage of candidates who discussed these issues in races where Democratic women had a congruence disadvantage.<sup>30</sup>

In both types of races, Republican men have a large perceived competence advantage over Democratic women and should be more likely to discuss these issues than their Democratic female opponents. However, the gap between the candidates should be smaller when Democratic women (the candidates with a perceived competence disadvantage) have a congruence advantage. As the table shows, Republican men did

<sup>30</sup> It is possible, of course, that the candidates could be equally matched in congruence, with neither candidate having an advantage or disadvantage in congruence. However, the model does not make explicit predictions about candidate behavior in this particular condition.

discuss these non-salient Republican/men's issues more frequently than Democratic women did, but the size of this difference varies, depending on whether Democratic women held a congruence advantage. The gap between Republican men and Democratic women is smaller when Democratic women have a congruence advantage, but larger when they have a congruence disadvantage.

**Table 6.5: Predicting Gender Differences**

<b>MOST LIKELY</b>	<b>LEAST LIKELY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Non-Salient Issues</li> <li>•Democratic women v. Republican men               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Republican man has a congruence disadvantage on Democratic/women's issues</li> <li>•Democratic woman has a congruence disadvantage on Republican/men's issues</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Salient Issues</li> <li>•Republican women v. Democratic men</li> </ul>

In sum, differences in the issue emphasis of women and men are most likely to occur on non-salient issues, where one candidate is more competent on the issue than the opponent and the opponent also has a congruence disadvantage. More specifically, gender differences in the discussion of Democratic/women's issues are *most* likely to occur on non-salient issues, in campaigns between Democratic women and Republican men when Republican men have a disadvantage in congruence. Differences in the discussion of Republican/men's issues are *most* likely to occur on non-salient issues, in contests between Republican men and Democratic women when Democratic women

have a disadvantage in congruence. Gender differences in the discussion of both Democratic/women's issues and Republican/men's issues are *least* likely to occur in campaigns between Republican women and Democratic men and/or when these issues are salient. These expectations are summarized in Table 6.5.

All of these expectations about gender differences can be modeled by using my strategic theory of candidate behavior. First, Table 6.6 shows the model's predicted gender differences in the discussion of salient issues. The first column separates out particular races by perceived competence advantages. The first half of the table shows races between Democratic women and Republican men, where perceived competence advantages/disadvantages are expected to be largest. The second half of the table shows races between Republican women and Democratic men, where candidates are expected to be more equally matched in perceived competence. The second column further distinguishes these sets of races by congruence.

**Table 6.6: Predicted Gender Gaps for Salient Issues**

TYPE OF RACE		PREDICTED GENDER GAP IN ISSUE DISCUSSION	
		DEM/Women's Issues	REP/Men's Issues
DEM ♀ v. REP ♂	REP ♂ with congruence	2%	
	REP ♂ without congruence	6%	
DEM ♀ v. REP ♂	DEM ♀ with congruence		2%
	DEM ♀ without congruence		6%
REP ♀ v. DEM ♂	REP ♀ with congruence	5%	
	REP ♀ without congruence	5%	
REP ♀ v. DEM ♂	DEM ♂ with congruence		5%
	DEM ♂ without congruence		5%



Across all of these races, even with different combinations of perceived competence and congruence, the model predicts minimal and statistically insignificant gender differences between the candidates in the discussion of salient issues. And this prediction holds, regardless of whether the salient issues are Republican/men's issues or Democratic/women's issues.

**Table 6.7: Predicted Gender Gaps for Non-Salient Issues**

TYPE OF RACE		PREDICTED GENDER GAP IN ISSUE DISCUSSION	
		DEM/Women's Issues	REP/Men's Issues
DEM ♀ v. REP ♂	REP ♂ with congruence	14%*	
	REP ♂ without congruence	17%*	
DEM ♀ v. REP ♂	DEM ♀ with congruence		14%*
	DEM ♀ without congruence		17%*
REP ♀ V. DEM ♂	REP ♀ with congruence	2%	
	REP ♀ without congruence	2%	
REP ♀ V. DEM ♂	DEM ♂ with congruence		2%
	DEM ♂ without congruence		2%

\*Gender gap significantly different from 0,  $p < .05$

Of course, even on non-salient issues, the model does not predict consistently large gender differences across all types of races. Table 6.7 shows the model's predicted gender differences in the discussion of non-salient issues, using the same combinations of perceived competence and congruence from the previous table. The first half of the table shows the predicted gender differences in races between Democratic women and Republican men. The predicted gender differences in these types of races are all statistically significant. On Democratic/women's issues, the predicted difference between Democratic women and Republican men is 14% when Republican men have a

congruence advantage. And the gap is predicted to be a bit larger (but still significantly larger) at 17% when Republican men are congruence disadvantaged. The same pattern also holds on Republican/men's issues.

On the other hand, the model does not predict any significant gender differences in races between Republican women and Democratic men, even with different combinations of congruence advantages. Across all types of party and gender-owned issues, the model predicts that Republican women and Democratic men will discuss non-salient issues at approximately the same rate.

By taking into account contextual factors like opponent characteristics, issue saliency, and issue congruence, this analysis demonstrates that gender does influence candidates' behavior. However, these results also demonstrate that gender stereotypes are just one factor out of many that candidates weigh when they decide which issues to discuss in their campaigns, and these stereotypes do not have a uniform or universal impact on women and men's behavior. Despite sharing similar perceived gender competencies, all women (and all men) do not make the same decisions about which issues to discuss in their campaigns because different electoral circumstances provide different incentives to discuss particular issues. Thus, gender differences in issue emphasis are apparent only under certain conditions. When these specific conditions and contexts are not specified though, and when women and men's behavior is examined in the aggregate, such differences are difficult to detect (illustrated previously by Table 6.1). In fact, based only on an analysis of aggregate behavior, we would conclude (erroneously) that gender and gender stereotypes do not affect candidates' campaign behavior at all. Considering women and men's campaign behavior from a strategic

perspective avoids this problem of assuming uniformity among candidates on the basis of gender stereotypes, while still highlighting the ways that gender stereotypes intersect with other electoral factors.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Gender Differences in Trait Discussion**

The previous analyses have focused exclusively on the issues that women and men discuss in their campaigns. However, voters hold stereotypes about male and female candidates' traits in addition to their issue expertise. Although congruence is not relevant to traits, the strategic model can be adapted to explain and predict not just the issues, but the traits that candidates discuss in their campaigns as well. In the following analysis, I adapt the strategic model and test its predictions about candidates' trait discussion against the predictions of decision-theoretic models. I then illustrate the gender implications of the strategic model's predictions about candidate behavior.

#### **7.1 Theory Refinements**

Even though candidates' congruence is not relevant to trait discussion, voters still hold expectations about candidates' traits based on party and gender stereotypes. Republicans are seen as more moral and as stronger leaders while Democrats are seen as more compassionate and empathetic (Hayes 2005). In terms of gender, women are seen as more honest, trustworthy, compassionate and moral. Men, on the other hand, are seen as more tough, competent, knowledgeable, and experienced (e.g. Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Lawless 2004). Without congruence as a factor, candidate behavior is conditioned only by these expectations about perceived competence on traits.

In myopic decision-theoretic calculations, candidates simply consider their own stereotypical or perceived strengths and weaknesses, without consideration of their opponents' strengths or weaknesses or likely behavior. Here, perceived competence on a trait is an absolute advantage. Candidates with perceived competence on a trait have an absolute advantage and are more likely to discuss that trait than candidates without perceived competence, all else equal.

***Hypothesis 1:*** *Perceived competence gives a candidate an advantage on a trait and thus increases the probability that a candidate will discuss a trait.*

In sophisticated decision-theoretic calculations, a perceived competence advantage is relative to the opponent. Candidates who have more perceived competence on a trait than their opponent have a relative advantage in perceived competence over their opponents and are more likely to discuss that trait. On the other hand, if the opponent has more perceived competence on a trait, the candidate no longer has a relative advantage and should be less likely to discuss the issue, all else equal.

***Hypothesis 2:*** *A relative advantage (disadvantage) in perceived competence increases (decreases) the probability that a candidate will discuss a trait.*

In both of these decision-theoretic models, perceived competence, either relative or absolute, has less impact on the candidates' decisions to discuss traits when a trait is highly salient or important to voters. Instead, all candidates are likely to discuss a salient trait because they do not want to appear out of touch or unresponsive to constituents' concerns. This is similar to expectations about salient issues.

***Hypothesis 3:*** *A candidate's perceived competence (either relative or absolute) has less impact on the candidate's decision to discuss a trait the more salient it is to the public.*

Like the predictions about candidates' issue discussion, both of these decision-theoretic models' predictions about candidates' trait discussion are based only on the candidates' and/or their opponents' characteristics. In the strategic model though, candidates' decisions are conditioned not just on characteristics, but on their expectations of their opponent's likely behavior and the importance of traits to voters. First, if a trait is not particularly salient to voters and a candidate anticipates that her opponent has no perceived competence on the trait, the candidate can expect that her opponent will not want to discuss the trait. Thus, like the calculations for issue discussion, candidates will follow decision-theoretic ownership strategies and will be more likely to discuss those traits on which they have a perceived competence advantage.

***Hypothesis 4:** If a candidate has a perceived competence advantage on a trait, the candidate will be more likely to discuss that trait.*

Next, if a candidate anticipates that her opponent does have a perceived competence advantage on a trait, the candidate can expect that the opponent will discuss the trait in her campaign. In this case, candidates should be more likely to trespass and discuss the trait. This expectation is less constrained by the candidates' own strengths and weaknesses because traits are easier to claim than issues; while candidates' claims of expertise on issues can be compared to their policy priorities and relevant experiences, it is more difficult to objectively assess whether a candidate is really "tough" or "compassionate". Of course, this may not be true in all cases. For example, it would be difficult for a candidate to claim honesty if she had been accused of bribery. Therefore, if a candidate has any prominent personal experiences that strongly suggest that the candidate lacks such traits, this expectation may not hold. With this caveat:

***Hypothesis 5:** When a candidate anticipates that her opponent has a perceived competence advantage and will want to discuss the trait, candidates will be more likely to discuss the trait.*

Finally, some traits may be particularly salient to voters; for example, honesty may be more important when political scandals occur. Perceived competence on traits, either the candidates' or the opponents', is less important when a trait is highly salient. All candidates should be more likely to discuss highly salient traits. This expectation is similar to Hypothesis 3.

## **7.2 Data and Measures**

Like the previous analysis on issues, I used content analysis of candidates' television advertisements and campaign websites to identify the traits that candidates discussed in their campaigns. Some candidates discussed traits in the context of a biography or narrative. This approach was used most often in websites. For example, in the "About" section of her website, Lois Murphy highlighted the trait of leadership by mentioning in the opening paragraph that she has held leadership roles in several women's organizations, while Martha Rainville had a section labeled "Community Leadership" in her website biography. Other candidates used traits as a kind of slogan. For example, Deborah Pryce ended an ad about stem cell research by showing the words "Independent", "Experienced", and "Effective" on screen while the narrator said "Congresswoman Deborah Pryce: Independent. Experienced. Effective." Heather Wilson combined both of these approaches by having "independent", "honest", and "effective" displayed at the top of her campaign website and by describing herself as an independent, honest, and effective leader in her biography.

I coded thirteen traits that reflect a mixture of party-owned, gender-owned, and neutral traits in my analysis. Television ads from 2002 and 2004 were already coded for the traits mentioned by the Wisconsin Advertising Project. The Wisconsin Project coded a trait only if the trait or a minor variation of the trait was mentioned directly in reference to the candidate. I followed the same coding rules to code the traits mentioned in the 2006 television ads and candidate websites in order to maintain consistency. Similar to the coding procedure for issues, I did collapse some of the Wisconsin codes into a single trait to match the traits in my analysis. For example, “bipartisan” was counted as “consensus-builder.”

Based on gender stereotype research, gender-owned traits include honest, trustworthy, compassionate/caring, and moral as women’s traits and tough, competent/effective, knowledgeable, and experienced as male traits (e.g. Dolan 2008c; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a).

While the connections between gender stereotypes and trait ownership are well-established within the gender stereotype literature, there is considerably less research on the degree to which traits are party-owned. Nevertheless, recent research suggests that Democrats and Republicans are associated with and own different traits (Hayes 2010, 2005). These party-owned traits include empathy and compassion (owned by Democrats) and leader and moral (owned by Republicans) (Hayes 2005).

The remaining traits—assertive, consensus-builder, ambitious—have been associated as masculine (e.g. assertive, ambitious) or feminine (consensus-builder) in other, previous research (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1996). However, more recent surveys have demonstrated that these traits are not



strongly associated as either masculine or feminine (Dolan 2008c). Dolan found that either a plurality or a majority of the respondents in her survey did not believe that either women or men were more likely to possess these traits. Therefore, assertive, consensus-builder, and ambitious were coded as neither party nor gender-owned.

Like issue salience, I measured trait salience with national public opinion polls that asked respondents to name the most important issues/problems facing the country and district characteristics. None of these thirteen traits were mentioned frequently enough (by at least 10% of respondents) in public opinion polls to be considered nationally salient.<sup>31</sup> At the local level, there were some districts where scandals and corruption charges occurred, making traits like honest, trustworthy, and moral salient. However, there were only three district-years in my sample where this occurred.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, I am unable to test the hypothesis about salient traits using a large-N, quantitative analysis. The following analysis is applicable only to non-salient traits.

To test these hypotheses about the likelihood of discussing non-salient traits, I estimated the following logit model:

$$P(\text{discuss}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PC_{cand} + \beta_2 PC_{opp} + \text{incumbent}$$

The dependent variable is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether the candidate discussed a trait either in a television advertisement or on his/her campaign website.

$PC_{cand}$  is an additive measure of a candidate's perceived competence on a trait. This

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<sup>31</sup> Moral was the most frequently mentioned trait, with 7% of national respondents mentioning this trait as important in 2002. Other traits mentioned include honest, trustworthy (corruption, abuse of power) and consensus-building (partisanship, unifying the country).

<sup>32</sup> In the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Pennsylvania, Curt Weldon (R) was under investigation for influence peddling. In Pennsylvania's 10<sup>th</sup> district, Don Sherwood (R) was caught up in a sex scandal after reports of an extramarital affair and assault were made public. In Ohio's 18<sup>th</sup> district, Republicans scrambled to find a replacement candidate for incumbent Bill Ney when he resigned from office and withdrew from the race after being convicted on corruption charges. The Republican party in Ohio faced other problems as well, as scandals within the state government involving influence peddling, corruption, and campaign finance law violations surfaced. All of these scandals affected campaigns in 2006.

measure adds together perceived competence from party stereotypes, gender stereotypes and/or personal experience, and in theory, ranges from 0 to 3.  $PC_{opp}$  is a similar measure for opponents' perceived competence. Finally, *incumbent* is a dummy variable that indicates whether the candidate was an incumbent. Controlling for incumbency is important for two reasons. First, research suggests that incumbents, overall, may be more likely to discuss traits than other types of candidates (Kahn and Kenney 1999). Second, incumbents may hold an advantage on traits like leadership and experience, beyond any perceived competence candidates gain from their party, gender, and/or personal experience and characteristics (Kahn and Kenney 1999; Fridkin and Kenney 2007; Hayes 2010).

As in the previous analysis of issue discussion, there is not enough information (either theoretical or empirical) about the impact of each individual component of perceived competence (party, gender, experience) to determine with much confidence which candidate is more competent on traits. It could be the case that these individual components do not have an equal weight or importance. Consistent with the previous model estimated for issues, I address this problem by including these separate measures of perceived competence for the candidate and opponent in the regression and estimating the impact of the relative difference between the two measures in the subsequent analysis.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Unlike the hypotheses about issue discussion, none of the hypotheses about candidates' trait discussion is conditional. Therefore, the regression model for trait discussion does not include interaction terms.

### 7.3 Results

Table 7.1 shows the logit regression (with clustered standard errors) results. The coefficients for the candidate's perceived competence, as well as the coefficient for the opponent's perceived competence are both positive and statistically significant, indicating that they both increase the likelihood that a candidate will discuss a trait in their campaign. However, the coefficients by themselves do not estimate the effects of a relative advantage or disadvantage in perceived competence.

**Table 7.1: Logit Regression Results**

	<b>Coefficient</b>
Candidate perceived competence	.584** (.091)
Opponent perceived competence	.401** (.077)
Incumbent	.195# (.113)
Constant	-2.015** (.110)
N	2808
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.025**

#p<.10; \*\*p<.01

Table 7.2 provides a more accurate test of the hypotheses by showing the estimated change in probability that a candidate will discuss a trait when he or she has a relative advantage or disadvantage in perceived competence.

**Table 7.2: Marginal Effect of Perceived Competence<sup>34</sup>**

	<b>Change in Probability of Discussing Trait</b>
Relative Advantage in Perceived Competence	.075* (.012)
Relative Disadvantage in Perceived Competence	.048* (.009)

\*p&lt;.05

As expected, having a relative advantage in perceived competence significantly increases the likelihood that a candidate will discuss a trait in her campaign. Similarly, a relative disadvantage in perceived competence also significantly increases the likelihood that a candidate will discuss a trait, although this effect is slightly smaller (but not significantly smaller) than the effects of a relative advantage.

Both of these results are more consistent with the strategic model of candidate behavior, rather than the decision-theoretic models. The positive, significant effects of opponent perceived competence, in particular, is counter to the predictions of both the myopic decision-theoretic model, which does not factor in opponents' characteristics or behavior at all, and the sophisticated decision-theoretic model, which predicts that any opponent advantage should decrease a candidates' likelihood of discussing an issue. Like the previous analysis of candidates' issue discussion, these results show that the strategic model is a better predictor of candidates' trait discussion as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Estimate of the effect of a one-unit increase in perceived competence advantage/disadvantage. For relative advantage, candidate perceived competence changes from 0 to 1 and opponent perceived competence set at 0; for relative disadvantage, candidate perceived competence set at 0 and opponent perceived competence changes from 0 to 1.

## 7.4 Gender Implications

As Chapter 5 demonstrated, women and men often discuss the same types of issues in their campaigns, with gender differences likely to occur only under a few, specific conditions. This lack of difference is due, in part, to the overlap between perceived party competence and perceived gender competence. In comparison, there is not a great deal of overlap between perceived party and gender competence on traits. Compassionate and moral are traits that are both gender and party owned, with Democrats and women owning compassionate and Republicans and women owning moral. But there is no overlap between party and gender ownership on any other trait. Nevertheless, the model still predicts little variation between women and men in the discussion of traits. Although there are distinctive sets of gender-owned traits that women and men are predicted to emphasize in their campaigns, the expected impact of an opponent's perceived competence limits the conditions under which large gender differences in trait discussion between women and men should occur.

Because gender differences in trait discussion are likely only under certain conditions, aggregate comparisons of women and men's behavior will likely yield few discernable gender differences. Table 7.3 shows the actual, aggregate percentage of women and men who discussed the thirteen traits in my analysis. Like similar comparisons of women and men's issue discussion, Table 7.3 demonstrates that in an aggregate analysis, there are few differences between women and men in trait discussion. Similar percentages of women and men discussed both women's traits and men's traits. However, women and men do display distinctive behaviors, depending on the type of opponent they face.

**Table 7.3: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Traits**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<i><b>Difference</b></i>
<b>All Traits</b>	22% (686)	18% (2172)	<b>4%</b>
<b>Women's Traits</b>	21% (209)	17% (660)	<b>4%</b>
<b>Men's Traits</b>	30% (212)	26% (672)	<b>4%</b>

In races where women and men run against one another, both candidates have incentives to discuss women's as well as men's traits in their campaigns. Women have perceived competence on the traits of honest, trustworthy, compassionate, and moral, and consistent with the expectations of Hypothesis 4, should be likely to discuss these traits in their campaigns, regardless of their opponent. There may be some variations in the discussion of these traits given party ownership; Republican women may be particularly likely to emphasize the trait of moral, while Democratic women may be particularly likely to emphasize compassion. Nevertheless, the model predicts that all women will be likely to emphasize these feminine, gender-owned traits in their campaigns.

However, Hypothesis 5 predicts that women should also be likely to discuss masculine traits like tough, competent, knowledgeable, and experienced when they are running against male candidates. And given the low numbers of women who run for office, women will usually face a male opponent. The result is that women, in nearly all cases, will be likely to discuss masculine traits, in addition to more traditional women's traits, in their campaigns.

Likewise, men have perceived competence on the traits of tough, competent, knowledgeable, and experienced and should be likely to emphasize these traits in their campaigns, given Hypothesis 4. However, men should also be likely to emphasize women-owned traits like honest, trustworthy, compassionate, and moral when they are running against a female candidate, given Hypothesis 5. The implication of these two hypotheses is that there should be very little variation in the discussion of either women's traits or men's traits between women and men, when women and men are running against each other.

Of course, this is not to say that there will never be any differences in women and men's behavior. While women and men are expected to behave similarly when competing against each other, there should be differences in behavior when women and men running in same-sex races are compared. For example, while men are more likely to discuss women's traits when they run against women, men running against other male candidates have little incentive to discuss women's traits in their campaigns. They do not have perceived competence on women's traits themselves and they do not face an opponent with perceived competence on these traits either. Conversely, while women running against men will be likely to discuss male traits to counter their opponent's perceived competence advantage on those traits, women running against other women have little incentive to focus on men's traits in their campaigns. Therefore, there should be a larger gender gap in the discussion of women and men's traits if we compare the behavior of women who run against other women to the behavior of men who run against other men.

These expectations are illustrated in Table 7.4. The first column in the table shows the absolute value of the actual gender gap in the discussion of gender-owned traits between the women who ran against a male candidate and the men who ran against a female candidate.

**Table 7.4: Gender Gap in Trait Discussion**

	<b>MIXED SEX RACES (♀ v. ♂)</b>	<b>SAME SEX RACES (♀ v. ♀/ ♂ v. ♂)</b>
<b>Women's Traits</b>	2%	8%
<b>Men's Traits</b>	2%	14%

As the table shows, when women and men compete against each other, they tend to discuss both women and men's traits at equal rates. There was only a two percent gap between the percentage of women and the percentage of men who discussed either women's traits or men's traits. However, the gender gap in the discussion of both women and men's traits increases when we compare the behavior of women who ran against a female candidate to the behavior of men who ran against a male candidate (second column). There is an eight percent gap in the percentage of women and men who discussed women's traits and a fourteen percent gap in the percentage who discussed men's traits.<sup>35</sup>

All of these expectations can be modeled with the strategic theory of candidate behavior. First, Table 7.5 shows the model's predicted gender gaps in trait discussion in races between female and male candidates. The table distinguishes between women and

<sup>35</sup> These differences between women and men seem to be driven primarily by changes in women's behavior. Women discuss both women's and men's traits more frequently when they are running against another woman. Although it is not clear exactly what is causing this result, it could simply be a result of the low number of races where women ran against women (only five total races in this sample).



men's traits and breaks women's traits into party-neutral and party-owned women's traits, to account for possible party ownership effects. The first row in the table shows the absolute value of the predicted gender gap in trait discussion in races between Democratic women and Republican men, while the second row shows the absolute value of the predicted gender gap in races between Republican women and Democratic men.

For both types of races, the predicted gaps range from 0% to 7%, with the largest predicted differences occurring on party-owned women's traits. However, none of these

**Table 7.5: Predicted Gender Gap for Non-Salient Traits**

TYPE OF RACE	PREDICTED GENDER GAP IN TRAIT DISCUSSION			Men's Traits
	Women's Traits			
	<i>Not Party Owned</i>	<i>Democratic Owned</i>	<i>Republican Owned</i>	
DEM ♀ v. REP ♂	<b>3%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>3%</b>
REP ♀ v. DEM ♂	<b>3%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>3%</b>

predicted gender gaps are statistically significant. As expected, women and men are predicted to emphasize women and men's traits in their campaigns at equal rates when they are competing against each other.

Table 7.6 shows how the predicted probability that candidates will discuss a gender- and/or party-owned trait changes, depending on the type of opponent they face. For each candidate, the table first shows the predicted probability that the candidate will discuss a particular type of trait, for each type of opponent that a candidate could face. The final row for each candidate ("*Difference*") shows how much the candidates' predicted behavior changes across the different opponents.

Table 7.6: Predicted Differences in Discussion of Non-Salient Traits

TYPE OF RACE	PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF TRAIT DISCUSSION			Men's Traits
	Women's Traits			
	<i>Not Party Owned</i>	<i>Democratic Owned</i>	<i>Republican Owned</i>	
<b>Democratic Men...</b>				
v. REP ♀	17%	26%	23%	19%
v. REP ♂	12%	19%	17%	26%
<i>Difference</i>	<b>5%*</b>	<b>7%*</b>	<b>6%*</b>	<b>7%*</b>
<b>Republican Men...</b>				
v. DEM ♀	17%	23%	26%	19%
v. DEM ♂	12%	17%	19%	26%
<i>Difference</i>	<b>5%*</b>	<b>6%*</b>	<b>7%*</b>	<b>7%*</b>
<b>Democratic Women...</b>				
v. REP ♀	26%	39%	35%	12%
v. REP ♂	19%	30%	26%	17%
<i>Difference</i>	<b>7%*</b>	<b>9%*</b>	<b>9%*</b>	<b>5%*</b>
<b>Republican Women...</b>				
v. DEM ♀	26%	35%	39%	12%
v. DEM ♂	19%	26%	30%	17%
<i>Difference</i>	<b>7%*</b>	<b>9%*</b>	<b>9%*</b>	<b>5%*</b>

The table demonstrates that candidates are expected to adjust their trait discussion in response to the type of opponent they face. The strategic model predicts that both Democratic men and Republican men will discuss women's traits more frequently in their campaigns when they face a female opponent than when they face a male opponent. Conversely, the model predicts that Democratic and Republican men will discuss men's

traits more frequently when they run against male candidates, rather than female candidates.

Women candidates are expected to follow a similar pattern. Both Democratic and Republican women are expected to discuss women's traits more frequently when they face a female opponent than when they face a male opponent. And both types of women are expected to discuss men's traits more frequently when they face a male opponent, rather than a female opponent. All of these predicted changes in trait emphasis are statistically significant.

In conclusion, these results reinforce the findings from the previous chapters. First, the strategic model is a better predictor of candidate behavior than other decision-theoretic models, not just for issues but for traits as well. Candidates make strategic decisions about which traits they discuss in their campaigns, based on a combination of party and gender stereotypes and opponent characteristics. Second, like gender differences in the issues that women and men discuss, women and men differ in the traits that they discuss only under a few, specific conditions. Without taking these specific conditions into account, the effects of gender stereotypes on candidates' behavior are obscured.

## Chapter 8

### Case Studies

The aggregate, quantitative analyses of the previous chapters (mostly) confirm the hypotheses of the strategic model. Candidates' behavior is conditioned not just by party or gender stereotypes, but by issue salience, issue congruence, and opponents' characteristics and behavior. These aggregate tests though only demonstrate the general effects of perceived competence, congruence, and issue salience on candidates' campaign strategies. A closer look at candidates' behavior in a few, specific races will help to illustrate the ways that perceived competence, congruence, and issue salience work together to shape candidates' campaign strategies and to influence which issues and traits candidates emphasize in their campaigns.

The chapter begins by comparing candidates' gender-owned issue emphasis in two competitive races from 2006: one race between a Republican woman and a Democratic man and one race between a Democratic woman and a Republican man. Then the individual campaigns of a Democratic man and a Republican woman are compared across two different elections (2004 and 2006) to reveal how the candidates' gender-owned trait emphasis varied, depending on the type of opponent that the candidates faced. Finally, the chapter concludes by demonstrating that my strategic theory provides a better explanation of candidates' behavior in all of these cases than party ownership, gender stereotypes, or issue salience alone.

## 8.1 Issues

National influences were quite prominent in the congressional elections of 2006. Although the Republican victories of 2004, with Bush being reelected and Republicans maintaining their majorities in both the House and the Senate, seemed to signal continued approval of Republican policies, by 2006 the political fortunes of the GOP had changed. Not only were Bush's approval ratings at historic lows (31% in May 2006, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll), but approval ratings of the Republican-controlled Congress were also low, at 23% (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 2007). At the top of the public's agenda was the Iraq war. Voters still believed that Republicans were better able than Democrats to handle terrorism and national security, but voters were increasingly opposed to Bush and the Republicans' handling of the war (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 2007). According to an October 2006 Gallop Poll cited by Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode, 55% of respondents stated that the war in Iraq was "out of control" (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 2007: 273). Of course, war and national security were not the only salient issues in 2006; the economy and immigration were also cited frequently by voters as important issues. Finally, a rash of corruption and sex scandals, many involving Republicans and other officials with ties to the White House, received attention not just locally at the district level, but nationally as well.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For example, the Jack Abramoff scandal received national attention, while a number of individual House members, including Randy Cunningham, Tom Delay, Bob Ney, and Curt Weldon were also under investigation and/or facing corruption charges. Also, while the Mark Foley scandal received a great deal of national attention in late September-early October of 2006, another Republican, Don Sherwood of Pennsylvania, was already involved in a sex scandal of his own. (He was accused of physically abusing a woman with whom he was having an affair.)

### **8.1.1 Republican woman v. Democratic man**

It was against this backdrop that the race between Republican woman Nancy Johnson and Democratic man Chris Murphy in Connecticut's fifth district played out. The fifth district was redrawn after the 2000 census and the new district contained parts of the old fifth and sixth districts. This new district was almost balanced between Republicans and Democrats, with wealthy, white and traditionally Republican areas as well as more diverse, middle and working class areas of Democratic support (Almanac of American Politics 2008). The race was one of three competitive House races in Connecticut in 2006, and with a competitive Senate race as well, the New York Times described the state as “the epicenter of national election-year politics.” The Johnson-Murphy race also was noted for its particularly negative tone, due in part to “robo calls” from political advocacy groups and to the political ads from the candidates themselves (New York Times 2006; Almanac of American Politics 2008).

Nancy Johnson was a moderate Republican and an eleven-term incumbent. The National Journal rated her near the ideological midpoint of all House members and she was a member of moderate groups such as the Republican Main Street Partnership and The Wish List (a fund raising network for pro-choice Republican women candidates). During her tenure in the House, Johnson developed a reputation for her work on health care legislation. She co-sponsored legislation for both the State Children's Health Insurance Program and the Medicare prescription drug program (Almanac of American Politics 2006). Johnson's opponent, Chris Murphy, had previously served in both the Connecticut State House and State Senate. As Senate chair of the Public Health Committee, Murphy also developed a reputation as a leader on health care issues. For

example, Murphy helped pass legislation to ban workplace smoking and to reform hospital collection practices against uninsured patients and he sponsored legislation in support of stem cell research (Almanac of American Politics 2008).

As a Republican woman and a Democratic man, respectively, Nancy Johnson and Chris Murphy had similar incentives, from party and gender stereotypes (and on health care, from their legislative backgrounds), to discuss gender-owned issues. Given such relative parity in perceived competence, the model predicts few differences in issue emphasis between the two candidates. For the most part, Nancy Johnson and Chris Murphy followed these expectations and discussed women's and men's issues at roughly equal rates. These issues are summarized in Table 8.1.

**Table 8.1 Gender-Owned Issues Discussed by the Candidates**

	<b>Women's Issues</b>	<b>Men's Issues</b>
<b>Nancy Johnson (R)</b>	Social security (website only) Health care (website & television) Education (website only) Family & children (television)	Foreign policy (website & television) <b>Homeland security (website &amp; television)</b> Crime (website & television)
<b>Chris Murphy (D)</b>	Social security (website only) Health care (website & television) Education (website only)	Foreign policy (website only) <b>Homeland security (website &amp; television)</b> <b>Iraq (website &amp; television)</b>

*Note: Issues in bold indicate salient issues*

Nancy Johnson discussed four women's issues: social security, health care, education, and family and children's issues. Her primary emphasis though was on health

care and family and children's issues, as she discussed these issues in television ads and, with the exception of family and children's issues, on her website; social security and education were mentioned only on her website. The majority of Johnson's ads did not focus on one particular issue. Instead, they combined a number of different issues into a single ad, usually to highlight her experience, leadership, and/or partisan independence. For example, in one ad, Johnson claims to be an “independent leader who stands up for us” and lists diverse issues such as minimum wage levels, environmental policy, stem cell research, Medicare, and the protection of children from sex predators as issues on which she challenged the president and the Republicans' position.

Johnson ran five ads that discussed health care and four that included family and children's issues. In each ad, she highlighted her experience and legislative accomplishments, including the Medicare prescription drug program and the implementation of a children's health insurance program in Connecticut. She also played up/reinforced her perceived gender competence in several of the ads. For example, in a rare ad that focused solely on the issue of health care, a retired nurse explains how, thanks to Nancy Johnson, Medicare now pays for prescription drugs. The nurse concludes that “Nancy Johnson really cares.” In another ad about health care and children's issues, Johnson is shown interacting with a group of children and says, “As a mother and grandmother, I know how important it is to keep our children healthy and safe.” She goes on to recount how she wrote legislation to establish a children's health insurance program and to track sex predators on the internet.

Although health care and family and children's issues were the main women's issues that Johnson focused on in her campaign, she also included social security and



education on her website. On the “Key Issues” section of her website, she linked to pages that detailed her experience and commitment to these women's issues (among other issues). Often, the opening paragraph on the page summarized her major legislative work on the issue. Following this summary, Johnson provided a bullet-point list of specific legislative actions and votes that she had taken, with references to both dates and bill numbers.

Chris Murphy emphasized a similar set of women's issues. Like Johnson, he placed a heavier emphasis on health care, as he mentioned this issue in his television ads and on his website. Murphy also discussed social security and education, but again, like Johnson, he limited his discussion of these issues to his website. The only women's issue that Nancy Johnson discussed that Chris Murphy ignored was family and children's issues. Notably, this issue was the only women's issue in 2006 not tied to Democratic party ownership.

Unlike Nancy Johnson's ads, Chris Murphy's ads usually had a single issue focus and his ads often criticized or attacked Nancy Johnson's record on the issues. On health care, Murphy's ads attacked the perceived competence advantages that Nancy Johnson held on that issue. In one ad, Murphy sharply criticizes the Medicare prescription drug program that Johnson helped create. As Murphy stands with an older man, a list of insurance and pharmaceutical industry campaign contributions to Nancy Johnson scrolls down beside them, reinforcing Murphy's assertion that the prescription drug program was designed to benefit the drug and insurance companies rather than senior citizens. In another ad, Murphy presents the story of a child born with a cleft lip and palate. The ad says that while Nancy Johnson did not respond to the family's request for help, Murphy

immediately helped the family and within six months, passed legislation requiring insurance coverage for reconstructive facial surgery.<sup>37</sup>

In both ads, Murphy questions the perceived competence of Nancy Johnson, suggesting that she is not the proficient health care advocate that she claims to be. Instead, the ads portray her as inept and heartless; she is willing to help wealthy and powerful insurance and drug companies, but is uninterested in creating legislation to help constituents who lack such power and wealth. The implication is that Johnson is neither caring nor particularly interested and adept in handling health care policy. Instead, she is motivated by money and power.

Like Johnson, Chris Murphy used his website to elaborate on his expertise on women's issues, including health care, social security, and education, although he presented this information in a more conversational tone, using more paragraphs rather than lists or bullet-points. Under his "On the Issues" section, Murphy detailed his legislative work and other first hand experience with the issues, explained why he believed many of the current policies (created or endorsed by Nancy Johnson and Republicans) were wrong, and suggested (in varying detail) ways to improve these policies. Despite his criticism of Nancy Johnson in his ads on health care, he does not mention Johnson at all in his discussion of health care. However, he does mention Johnson (and her ties to Bush's policies) under both the social security and education sections of his website.

Both Johnson and Murphy discussed three traditional men's issues in their campaigns, although they did not discuss the same three men's issues. Nancy Johnson

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<sup>37</sup> Murphy was criticized for this ad, with the New York Times characterizing it as a "distortion of truth" and "bare knuckles mischief." (The New York Times, "It's Voter-Fooling Time in America." October 20, 2006).

focused on homeland security, foreign policy and military issues, and crime. Homeland security, in particular, was not only highly salient, but it was also one of the few issues on which Republicans still held an edge over Democrats in 2006. Of course, foreign policy/military and crime were also traditional Republican issues, although crime was not a Republican-owned issue in 2006. However, Johnson did hold a congruence advantage on crime issues over Chris Murphy and this could explain why she chose to discuss this particular men's issue in her campaign.<sup>38</sup>

Johnson placed a heavy emphasis on the salient issue of homeland security, discussing the issue both on her website and in an attention-grabbing television ad. Johnson's first security ad, one of the few ads that focused on a single issue, portrays Chris Murphy as weak and out of touch on terrorism and security issues. The ad begins with a narrator asking: "A call is placed from New York to a known terrorist in Pakistan. A terrorist plot may be unfolding. Should the government intercept that call or wait until the paperwork is filed?" The ad goes on to say that while Johnson favors immediate action, Murphy believes that court orders must be used, "even if valuable time is lost." The ad generated press coverage and was listed as one of the best ads of the 2006 election (Cillizza 2006).<sup>39</sup> Johnson also aired an additional ad on security and terrorism, although it did not generate as much fan-fare. The ad focuses on personal narrative rather than policy and features a woman praising Nancy Johnson for attending the memorial service of her son, who was killed in the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. The ad both reminds voters of the terrorist attacks and emphasizes (once again) that "Nancy Johnson cares."

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<sup>38</sup> This was the only gender owned issue in which she had a congruence advantage, but no perceived competence advantage.

<sup>39</sup> Although the ad was praised, at least one observer noted that Johnson's poll numbers went down after the ad aired (Cillizza 2006). The reasons for the decline are not apparent though.

Crime was another men's issue that Johnson discussed frequently. Her discussion of the issue was framed mostly in the context of protecting children. In her television ads, she makes multiple references to legislation she wrote to protect children from internet sex predators. In one particular ad, she spoofs one of Chris Murphy's ads that show him walking door to door to introduce himself to voters. In Johnson's ad, the voters whom the Murphy look-alike encounters tell him to "Keep walking!," as they accuse Murphy of being weak on crime by supporting the reduction of penalties for drug dealers and allowing sex offenders to live in public housing.

Johnson also raised foreign policy and military issues in her ads, especially in regard to funding and support of the military. However, she did not devote entire ads to these issues. Instead, they were mentioned, briefly, in combination with other issues.

All three of these issues were included on Johnson's website. Similar to her discussion of women's issues, Johnson highlights her legislative record on these issues by providing more specific details about her legislative work on each issue. Each issue page provides a list of relevant legislation that Johnson authored or supported during her tenure in office, with references to specific dates and bill numbers.

Although these men's issues played a large role in Johnson's campaign, she approached these issues somewhat differently than she did with women's issues like health care. While she focused on her own legislative accomplishments, both on her website and in television ads, when she discussed health care, Johnson's ads on men's issues are often highly critical of Chris Murphy. In fact, she devotes two ads entirely to attacking Chris Murphy (one on security and one on crime). By characterizing Murphy as "weak" on both security and crime issues, Johnson undermines Murphy's perceived

gender competence on these traditional men's issues. Of course, Johnson does not entirely abandon her emphasis on her legislative record. And, she continues to highlight her own perceived gender competence, particularly in the way that she links crime to family and children's issues. Finally, despite raising homeland security and military issues in her campaign, discussions of the Iraq war were conspicuously absent from both Johnson's television ads and her website. Although the issue was salient, Johnson may have decided to sidestep the issue because of the voter discontent towards Bush's (and Republican's) handling of the war. Her support of the war, in particular, was unpopular among district voters.

Chris Murphy also included three men's issues in this campaign, but he chose to discuss foreign policy/military issues, homeland security, and the Iraq war. Murphy placed the greatest emphasis on the Iraq war, as he brought this issue up in two of his television ads. In both ads, he ties Nancy Johnson to President Bush, referring to Johnson's support of "Bush's war in Iraq." The ads reinforce this linkage by showing images of Johnson and Bush together. In one of the ads, Murphy also responds to Johnson's accusations that he is weak on security by referring to an intelligence report and saying that "Johnson's support of President Bush's war in Iraq has increased the threat of terrorism and made us less secure here at home." These ads directly challenge Johnson's perceived party competence on the issue of terrorism and security by describing her party's policies as failures. Furthermore, the ads seek to capitalize on the low approval ratings of Bush and district voters' disapproval of the Iraq war by reminding voters of Johnson's incongruent position on the war issue.

Murphy continues his linkage of Nancy Johnson with Bush on his website. Under “Foreign Policy and the War in Iraq” Murphy provides a long discussion of his views on the Iraq war and other foreign policy topics such as Israel and North Korea. However, the bulk of the section is devoted to the Iraq war. In the opening paragraph on Iraq, Murphy states “The American people were deeply misled about the severity of the threat posed by Iraq and Saddam Hussein, and were coerced into supporting a war that has been mismanaged at every step.” He goes on to say, “And the refusal of Nancy Johnson and her colleagues in leadership of the Congress to demand answers meant that the American people were denied any voice in the process.” Notably, Murphy’s discussion of national security, a Republican owned issue in 2006, is much shorter and does not refer to Nancy Johnson or Bush at all. Instead, Murphy describes his legislative work on security issues in the Connecticut legislature and discusses the policies that he will support in Washington. This is consistent with the expectation that candidates will be more likely to discuss salient issues, regardless of their own relative advantages and disadvantages on the issue. Nevertheless, given the Republican ownership of national security, it is not surprising that Murphy did not discuss this issue as much as he discussed the Iraq war (where he had both perceived competence and congruence).

Overall, Nancy Johnson and Chris Murphy discussed similar gender-owned issues in their campaigns, in part because party and gender stereotypes gave them both similar levels of perceived competence on most of these issues. Of course, their campaigns were not exactly the same and they sometimes placed a different emphasis on the issues, as evidenced above. However, the variations in their behavior can be attributed to issue salience and differences in the candidates’ congruence on the issues.

### **8.1.2 Democratic woman v. Republican man**

In contrast, there was greater variation in the number of gender-owned issues that Democratic woman Darcy Burner and Republican man Dave Reichert discussed in their campaigns in Washington's eighth district. The district was one of the wealthiest districts in Washington and tended to be somewhat conservative (Almanac of American Politics 2008). However, the rapid growth in the district's suburbs and dislike of President Bush's policies suggested that a more general liberal political shift was on the horizon (Kantor 2006; Ritter 2006). The race drew national attention, both because of its competitiveness and because of the prominence of national, rather than local, issues.

Democratic challenger Darcy Burner was a Harvard graduate and a former program manager at Microsoft, but she was a political novice. She had never held any public office prior to her decision to challenge incumbent Dave Reichert. Reichert, on the other hand, was a moderate, Republican incumbent, first elected to the House in 2004 after winning a competitive open seat race against Democrat Dave Ross. Reichert was also the former sheriff of King County, Washington. Gender and party stereotypes, as well as the backgrounds of Burner and Reichert, gave them each different incentives to discuss women's and men's issues. The overlap of women's issue ownership and Democratic issue ownership gave Burner an advantage in perceived competence over Dave Reichert on these issues, but did not provide any perceived competence for her on Republican/men's issues. Likewise, the overlap of men's issue ownership and Republican issue ownership gave Reichert a perceived competence advantage over Darcy Burner on these issues, but did not provide any perceived competence on Democratic/women's issues. Given these different levels of perceived competence, the model predicts that

there should be noticeable differences in the kinds of issues that Burner and Reichert discussed. All else equal, Burner should discuss Democratic/women's issues more frequently than Reichert, while Reichert should emphasize Republican/men's issues more frequently. Of course, as the discussion below will demonstrate, both Burner and Reichert's behavior was not based on perceived competence alone. Instead, considerations of issue salience and congruence mediated the importance of their perceived party and gender competence. The gender-owned issues that they discussed in their campaigns are summarized in Table 8.2.

**Table 8.2: Gender-owned Issues Discussed by the Candidates**

	<b>Women's Issues</b>	<b>Men's Issues</b>
<b>Darcy Burner (D)</b>	Social security (website & television) Health care (website & television) Abortion (website only) Education (website & television)	<b>Homeland security (website only)</b> <b>Iraq (website &amp; television)</b>
<b>Dave Reichert (R)</b>	Social security (website only) Health care (website only) Education (website only) Family & children (website & television)	Foreign policy (website only) <b>Homeland security (website only)</b> <b>Iraq (website only)</b> Crime (website only)

*Note: Issues in bold indicate salient issues*

As a Democratic woman, Darcy Burner focused much of her campaign on typical Democratic/women's issues, including social security, health care, abortion, and education. With the exception of abortion (which was only discussed on her website),



Burner mentioned these issues in both her television ads and on her website, with education and health care mentioned in two ads and social security mentioned in three ads.

Burner's television ads rarely focused on a single issue. Instead, the ads mentioned several different issues together. For example, one ad began by providing a brief biography of Burner and then went on to list Burner's legislative priorities, including "improving education to create opportunity," "making health care affordable," and "protecting social security and pensions." One common theme throughout all of Burner's ads is the pairing of Dave Reichert with President Bush. In two of the ads that mention social security, Reichert is pictured waving with Bush, while a narrator says that both Reichert and Bush support the privatization of social security. One of these ads even ends with the words "He's Just Like George Bush" on the screen.

Burner includes social security, education, and health care, along with abortion, in her discussion of issues on her campaign website. The issues section on her website has two parts. The first part provides brief descriptions of Burner's general policy positions, with headings such as "Darcy will fight to make healthcare more affordable" and "Darcy will fight to improve our education system." These brief summaries occasionally include personal anecdotes, but there are few specific policy plans or references to legislation. However, in the second section, labeled "Darcy Burner v. Dave Reichert," Burner repeats her general position on the issue and provides a short list of relevant bills that Reichert voted for or against, with the implication that Burner would have or will vote differently if she is elected to Congress. The issues in this second section are similar to the issues listed in the first section, but there are three additional issues mentioned, including the

women's issue of abortion (the other issues are homeland security, a men's issue and the minimum wage, a gender-neutral issue).

Burner's emphasis on social security, education, abortion, and health care is not surprising, given the perceived competence advantages she had on those issues from party and gender stereotypes. And her strategy of tying Reichert to Bush and unpopular policies (i.e. privatization of social security) only reinforces these advantages. However, Burner also discussed issues on which she had no perceived competence advantage: homeland security and Iraq. Both of these issues were highly salient to voters in 2006 and Burner used her campaign to respond to voters' concerns. These were the only men's issues though that Burner discussed in her campaign. Perhaps recognizing her partisan strengths and weaknesses on these issues, Burner placed a greater emphasis on the Iraq war than she did on homeland security (which remained a Republican owned issue in 2006). In addition to discussing Iraq on her website, Burner ran two television ads that mentioned the Iraq war, with both tying Reichert to Bush's policies. In one ad devoted solely to Iraq, a picture of Dave Reichert waving with George Bush is shown as a narrator says, "[Reichert] supports Bush nearly 90% of the time. He supported Bush's plan to invade Iraq" and "Reichert says we need to trust the president and stay the course." Another ad shows pictures of Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, along with the picture of Reichert and Bush waving as a narrator says, "Dave Reichert's friends in Washington have trouble with the truth. They didn't tell the truth when we went to war [and] they won't tell the truth about how badly it's going."

Burner also discussed homeland security, but she devoted less attention to this issue, discussing it only briefly on her website. Under the "Darcy Burner v. Dave

Reichert” section of her site, she says that she supports “delivering real homeland security by fully implementing the bipartisan 9/11 Commission recommendations” and criticizes Reichert for chairing “a critical subcommittee on Homeland Security, but [failing] to pass important bills that address 9/11 Commission recommendations.” The different emphasis that Burner placed on homeland security and the Iraq war may be a reflection of her different perceived competence and congruence advantages. Burner’s greater emphasis on the Iraq war (and Reichert’s ties with Bush) over the equally salient issue of homeland security capitalizes on voters’ discontent with Bush and the war in Iraq. On the other hand, Republicans still held an ownership advantage on homeland security and Burner’s discussion of it was noticeably more limited.

Although Burner only discussed two men’s issues in her campaign, her opponent, Dave Reichert, discussed several men's issues, including not just the salient issues of homeland security and Iraq, but also foreign policy issues and crime. All of these issues are typical Republican/men's issues, which gave Reichert a large advantage in perceived competence relative to Burner. However, Reichert balanced his campaign with discussions of Democratic/women’s issues as well, including social security, health care, education, and family and children’s issues. Reichert did not focus all of his attention on these party and gender-owned issues though. In fact, Reichert focused mostly on gender neutral issues like taxes, the environment, and stem cell research in his television ads and used his website to address gender-owned issues.

For all of the gender-owned issues mentioned on his website, Reichert provides a brief opening paragraph that states the importance of the issue and Reichert’s general position, and then lists his professional experience and the legislative actions that he has

taken on the issue. For example, on education, the website lists Reichert's legislative activities in four areas related to education: "Increasing College Access and Affordability," "Increasing Available Student Loan Funds," "Strengthening Math and Science Education," and "The Washington Math Initiative." Most of this information on the issues is presented somewhat formally and in the third person. For example, on homeland security, the text on the website begins with, "Congressman Reichert has worked to increase the safety and security of his community every single day of his thirty-five years in public service..." However, Reichert uses a more personal, informal approach on the issues of social security and the Iraq war. For example, under social security, the website says, "I believe we must ensure the solvency of social security into the future. However, I do not support any solution that includes the following..." And on Iraq, the website starts with, "I believe that Iraq is one of the preeminent issues we face as a nation." Both of these issues (social security and Iraq) are issues that appeared prominently in several of Darcy Burner's television ads.

Finally, although Reichert's television ads focused mostly on gender-neutral issues like taxes, he does mention, among other issues, children's health care and domestic violence in one particular ad designed to highlight his independence from President Bush and the Republican party line. In the ad, Reichert says, "It's not difficult to be independent when you do the right thing. That's why I...helped write new law against domestic violence...and opposed the president on cuts to Children's Hospital."

By balancing his discussion of gender neutral and Republican/men's issues with the inclusion of Democratic/women's issues, it is likely that Reichert was responding not just to Darcy Burner's perceived party competence, but her gender competence as well. In

2004, when Reichert was in a similarly competitive race against a Democratic man (who had party competence, but no gender competence on women's issues), Reichert did not mention one single women's issue in his campaign, either in television ads or on his website. Instead, his campaign focused exclusively on men's issues and gender neutral economic issues. This stands in contrast to Reichert's decision in 2006 to discuss the four women's issues of social security, health care, education, and family and children's issues.

Of course, perceived competence was not the only factor influencing Reichert's decision to discuss these issues. Congruence also mediated his behavior. Reichert had less perceived competence from gender and party on these four issues than Darcy Burner.<sup>40</sup> However, with one exception, his positions on these issues were congruent with the district median voter preference and his behavior was consistent with the model's expectations about the role of congruence in candidates' campaign decisions.<sup>41</sup> Facing an opponent with a large advantage in perceived competence on these Democratic/women's issues, it is likely that Reichert countered Burner's perceived gender and party competence by highlighting his congruence on these issues.

In sum, gender and party stereotypes, as well as the candidates' previous experiences and backgrounds, gave Darcy Burner and Dave Reichert different issue advantages and thus, different incentives to discuss gender-owned issues. Unlike Nancy Johnson and Chris Murphy's campaigns, Burner and Reichert did not discuss women's and men's issues at equal rates. Instead, Darcy Burner emphasized more women's issues

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<sup>40</sup> Reichert's discussion of family and children's issues was in the context of domestic violence and fits in with Reichert's experiences as a law enforcement officer. So, it's possible that Reichert had, if not an equal footing in perceived competence, at least less of a perceived competence deficit on family and children's issues than his party or gender would otherwise suggest.

<sup>41</sup> The exception occurred on family and children's issues; on this particular issue, Darcy Burner was more congruent on the issue.

while Dave Reichert emphasized more men's issues. However, their campaigns were not completely different, as neither candidate ignored their opponent's gender-owned issues. Both issue salience and congruence mediated the divergent effects of perceived party and gender competence.

## 8.2 Traits

Because there is less overlap between party and gender stereotypes on traits, the effects of perceived competence on gender differences in trait discussion is different than its effects on gender differences in issue discussion. Furthermore, these perceived competence effects are not mediated by issue congruence, as congruence is not relevant to traits. So, rather than gender differences occurring more frequently in races between women and men (albeit under certain conditions and combinations of party and gender), gender differences in trait discussion are most likely to occur between women and men running in same-sex races (i.e. women running against other women v. men running against other men). A look at the behavior of two candidates, Chet Edwards and Heather Wilson, who were both involved in competitive campaigns in 2004 and in 2006, helps to illustrate the different effects of perceived competence on candidates' decisions to discuss gender-owned traits. In 2004, both Edwards and Wilson ran in mixed races; Edwards faced a female opponent and Wilson faced a male opponent. In 2006 though, both candidates ran in same-sex races, with Edwards running against a man and Wilson running against a woman. Table 8.3 summarizes the traits that each candidate highlighted in their 2004 and 2006 campaigns. Traits were not a central focus in either of the candidates' campaigns, as issues played a more prominent role in their television ads.

However, both did occasionally incorporate specific traits into their ads and these traits were often used as part of the candidates' website slogans.

**Table 8.3: Gender-owned Traits Discussed by the Candidates**

	2004: Mixed Races		2006: Single Sex Races	
	Women's Traits	Men's Traits	Women's Traits	Men's Traits
<b>Chet Edwards (D)</b>	Moral	Competent	<i>None</i>	Competent
		Experienced		Experienced
<b>Heather Wilson (R)</b>	Honest	Tough	Honest	Competent
		Experienced		

Chet Edwards, an incumbent Democratic representative in Texas, was first elected to the House in 1990, after serving in the Texas State Senate for seven years. Edwards was able to conduct successful reelection campaigns, even as his constituents became more conservative and Republican over time.<sup>42</sup> In both 2004 and 2006, Edwards included mentions of traits in his television ads and website. However, his choice of traits varied, according to whether he faced a male or female opponent. His opponent in 2004 was Republican woman Arlene Wohlgemuth, a conservative member of the Texas House of Representatives noted for her support of “family values” organizations such as Texans United for Life and the American Family Association. In this campaign, Edwards chose to highlight three gender-owned traits. He focused on the two male traits of competence and experience most often. In two of his television ads, after recounting examples of his legislative actions (e.g. keeping the Waco VA Hospital open, cleaning up Lake Waco,

<sup>42</sup> By 2004, redistricting had moved Edwards to Texas's 17<sup>th</sup> district. This district was more conservative than his previous district, as the new 17<sup>th</sup> district included the areas of College Station and west Fort Worth, both heavily Republican.

etc.), the ads end with an announcer saying, “The independence to do what’s right. The experience to get things done,” as the same words appear on screen. This same slogan is repeated at the top of Edwards’ website as part of the site’s main title/heading. Edwards also ran a television ad that highlighted the female owned trait of moral. The ad is a personal endorsement by former Baylor University president, Herb Reynolds, where Reynolds describes Edwards as “a deeply religious man.”

However, in his 2006 campaign, Edwards dropped mentions of this female trait. Instead, while running against Iraq war veteran Van Taylor, Edwards only discussed the male-owned traits of competence and experience. One ad repeated his 2004 slogan of “The independence to do what’s right. The experience to get things done.” Edwards also introduced a new slogan in 2006: “Independent. Effective. For Us.” This slogan was used in television ads and also appeared as part of the main title/heading of Edwards’ 2006 website. While these ads and slogans were similar to the ones he used in 2004 when running against a female opponent, Edwards did not produce similar ads to highlight the trait of moral. Instead, when faced with a male opponent, he dropped references to female traits altogether.

Republican Representative Heather Wilson of New Mexico also moderated her behavior across the two elections in 2004 and 2006. Like Chet Edwards, Heather Wilson was an incumbent representative running in a district that leaned more towards the opposition party than her own. And like Chet Edwards, Wilson adjusted the gender-owned traits that she discussed in her campaigns, according to whether her opponent was a man or a woman. In 2004 when Wilson faced Democratic man Richard Romero, Wilson discussed the stereotypical women's trait of honesty, along with the stereotypical



male traits of tough and experienced in her television ads.<sup>43</sup> In many of her ads, Wilson emphasized her honesty/integrity and experience. One ad showed supporters saying, “I like [Heather Wilson’s] integrity,” while another supporter added, “Heather Wilson is not about politics in my eyes at all. She is about the people.” In another ad that criticized Romero for making a joke about Heather Wilson and Osama Bin Laden during a radio interview, a supporter says, “I’m glad we have Heather Wilson’s experience working for us, not some inexperienced jokester like Richard Romero.” Several of Wilson’s ads also highlighted that she was “tough” and/or “a fighter.” In an ad about job creation and the economy, an announcer says that Wilson, “fought to protect Kirtland Air Force Base,” while another ad about education funding emphasized that she “even fought her own party leadership” to support increased funding.

Although Wilson continued to emphasize some of the same traits (i.e. honesty) in her 2006 campaign against female challenger Patricia Madrid, the emphasis on being tough and a fighter is noticeably absent in her 2006 ads. Instead, she balanced her trait emphasis between the women's issue of honesty and the men's trait of competence. For example, in an ad on stem cell research, Wilson tried to distance herself from Bush and the Republican party line, as she did in 2004 on education funding. But rather than claiming that she “fought her own party leadership,” Wilson instead appeared on camera and explained, “The president vetoed the stem cell bill and I voted to override his veto because it was the right thing to do.” An announcer then said, “Heather Wilson. Independent. Honest. Effective,” as the same text scrolls across the bottom of the screen. This same slogan emphasizing Wilson’s honesty and competence (or effectiveness)

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<sup>43</sup> Wilson did not mention any traits on her website in 2004.

appears on Wilson's website as well, directly under the heading of "Heather Wilson Congress 2006."

The patterns of trait emphasis that Edwards and Wilson displayed across these different election years and different opponents highlight the importance of an opponent's perceived competence in trait discussion. Both candidates placed a greater emphasis on opposing gender-owned traits when they faced an opponent of the opposite sex. Anticipating their opponents' advantages in perceived competence, Chet Edwards discussed more women's traits when he ran against a woman and Heather Wilson discussed more men's traits when she ran against a man. But when they ran in same-sex races, Edwards and Wilson shifted their focus away from these kinds of traits. Instead, Edwards eliminated any discussion of women's traits in his campaign when he ran against a man, while Wilson reduced the number of men's traits that she discussed in her campaign when she ran against a woman. In these same-sex races, Edwards and Wilson had less incentive to discuss women's traits and men's traits, respectively. Edwards could anticipate that his 2006 male opponent, Van Taylor, would be less likely to discuss women's traits than his previous female opponent, Arlene Wohlgemuth. Similarly, Wilson could anticipate that Patricia Madrid, her female opponent in 2006 would be less likely to discuss male traits than her 2004 male opponent, Richard Romero.

### **8.3 Conclusions**

Across all of these cases, my strategic theory of candidate behavior provides a better explanation of these candidates' campaign decisions than party ownership, gender stereotypes, or issue salience alone. First, the variations in these candidates' campaigns

shows that their decisions to discuss particular issues and/or traits is not based just on issue salience. Although most of these candidates did discuss salient issues like homeland security and the Iraq war, salient issues were not the only issues that they discussed in their campaigns.<sup>44</sup>

Second, the candidates' behavior was not simply a response to party ownership or stereotypes. If this were the case, then Democratic candidates Darcy Burner and Chris Murphy should have emphasized the same set of issues. But despite sharing the same perceived party competence, the two Democratic candidates emphasized different types of issues in their campaigns. Burner placed a greater emphasis on women's issues, while only discussing men's issues that were salient to the public. Chris Murphy's campaign though was more balanced between women's and men's issues.

Nancy Johnson and Dave Reicherts' campaigns are more similar, but they are still not identical. Although they discussed similar men's issues (except for the Iraq war which Johnson completely ignored), they differed in the emphasis they placed on women's issues. Nancy Johnson emphasized health care and family and children's issues heavily in her campaign, while Dave Reichert kept most of his discussions of women's issues on his website. Family and children's issues was the only women's issue that Reichert discussed in his television ads.

The candidates' behavior did not follow typical gender stereotypes either. The two men, Chris Murphy and Dave Reichert, did not discuss gender-owned issues at the same rate in their campaigns. In terms of the number of issues, Dave Reichert actually discussed more gender-owned issues than Chris Murphy. And while they both placed heavy emphasis on only one women's issues in their campaigns, Chris Murphy

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<sup>44</sup> There were no salient traits in either 2004 or 2006.

emphasized men's issues more heavily than Reichert. There were also noticeable differences in the campaigns of Nancy Johnson and Darcy Burner. Both discussed a similar number of women's issues, but Burner made women's issues a larger focus of her campaign than Johnson. Nancy Johnson placed a much greater emphasis on men's issues instead.

Finally, Heather Wilson and Chet Edwards shared neither party ownership nor gender ownership, yet they discussed the same number of women's and men's traits in their 2004 campaigns. Their behavior helps to underscore the importance of context in estimating gender differences in campaigns. Because Chet Edwards and Heather Wilson adapted their campaigns in response to the kind of opponent they faced, we would reach different conclusions about the gender-owned traits that Edwards and Wilson emphasized in their campaigns, depending on which election year or race that we compared. If we only compared their behavior in 2004, when they each faced an opponent of the opposite sex, we would find that they emphasized a similar number of women's and men's traits; each discussed one woman's trait and two men's traits in their campaigns. In contrast, if we only compared their behavior in 2006, where they each faced an opponent of the same sex, we would find that, rather than being equal, they tended to emphasize their own gender-owned traits more frequently.

In general, party ownership, gender stereotypes, and issue salience are not the sole motivators of candidate behavior. Instead, all of these factors interact with the particular idiosyncrasies of each election to shape candidates' campaign strategies.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

Women's campaign strategies are often framed as a dichotomous choice between embracing stereotypes about women's expertise by focusing on traditional women's issues and traits or countering these stereotypes by focusing more on traditional men's issues and traits (Dolan 2008b). The underlying assumption of this perspective is that "woman" is the defining characteristic of all women candidates, outweighing the impact of all other attributes, such as partisanship, or electoral considerations, such as voters' issue preferences and priorities. As a result, the empirical research on women's campaigns has focused more on documenting the presence (or absence) of fixed, universal differences in issue emphasis among aggregate groups of women and men, rather than exploring the potential context-dependent effects of gender stereotypes on candidate decision-making and the ways that these stereotypes intersect with other campaign variables.

This project has examined gender stereotypes and campaign behavior from a different perspective by starting with the assumption that the women (and men) who run for office are first and foremost strategic candidates whose primary goal is to win election. From this perspective, gender stereotypes are not the primary motivation behind women (and men's) campaign behavior. Instead, a candidate's decision to discuss or ignore certain types of issues in her campaigns is a calculated best-reply to the likely campaign behavior of her opponent, given the particular issue preferences and priorities of voters. The challenge of crafting a successful campaign strategy is not only a matter of

deciding whether to embrace or challenge gender stereotypes about candidates' perceived expertise and competence on issues. Candidates must also take into account how their party affiliation and experience will affect voters' perceptions about their issue expertise; how important particular issues are to voters; and how their opponents' likely issue agenda might influence voters' issue priorities and evaluations of the candidates.

Therefore, the aim of this work is not simply to confirm or refute the importance of gender stereotypes on campaign strategies, but to place these stereotypes within a broader decision-making process and to specify when and why they might (or might not) lead to differences in behavior between women and men.

Beginning with this assumption that women and men are first and foremost strategic candidates, I developed and tested a set of hypotheses about candidate decision-making to explain why, in general, candidates might choose to discuss a particular issue in their campaigns. These hypotheses illustrate two important features of candidate decision-making in competitive races. First, competitive candidates make strategic decisions about which issues to discuss in their campaigns and these decisions are influenced by the intersection of several context-specific factors, including the candidate's position on an issue (relative to the median district preference), the candidate's perceived competence on an issue, the salience or importance of the issue to voters, and the opponent's perceived competence and position on the issue. There are three conditions, in particular, in which candidates are more likely to discuss an issue. Candidates with a perceived competence advantage over their opponent on an issue are more likely to discuss that issue in their campaign than candidates without such an advantage. However, when candidates do have a perceived competence *disadvantage*,

they are more likely to “trespass” and discuss the issue when they have a congruence advantage over their opponent on that issue. And all candidates are more likely to discuss an issue that is highly salient to voters than an issue that is not particularly salient, regardless of their own advantages or disadvantages on that issue.

The second important feature of candidate decision-making is that because of the influence of contextual factors in shaping candidates’ campaign decisions, all candidates do not have similar incentives to discuss particular issues, even when they share certain characteristics like partisanship or gender. For example, it is advantageous for some women to “run as woman” and emphasize typical women’s issues like social security and health care in their campaigns. However, differences in perceived competence (due to party and/or experience), congruence, and/or issue saliency can make men's issues like crime or foreign policy more advantageous to emphasize for other women candidates. In short, candidates' campaign decisions are both strategic and context-dependent.

Based on these findings, I generated a set of specific expectations about when and why significant differences in the issue emphasis of women and men are most likely to occur. While gender stereotypes do have an impact on candidates’ strategies by affecting candidates’ perceived competence on issues, significant differences in the types of issues that women and men discuss in their campaigns are likely to occur only under a few, specific conditions. As the model demonstrates, gender differences in issue emphasis are most likely to occur on non-salient issues and in races between Democratic women and Republican men, especially when either Democratic women or Republican men hold both a perceived competence advantage and a congruence advantage on an issue. Gender

differences are less likely to occur when issues are highly salient to voters and in races between Republican women and Democratic men.

The different expectations about races between Democratic women and Republican men and races between Republican women and Democratic men are due, mostly, to differences in the relative perceived competence advantages of the candidates. All else equal, a Democratic woman is likely to have a perceived competence advantage over a Republican man on women's issues such as health care, education, abortion, etc. Similarly, a Republican man is likely, all else equal, to have a perceived competence advantage over a Democratic woman on men's issues like foreign policy, crime, etc. In contrast, Republican women and Democratic men are more likely to be equally matched in perceived competence because of the overlap in partisan and gender stereotypes. Issues that are associated with women tend to also be associated with Democrats. So, for example, a Republican woman would have perceived competence on health care issues from gender stereotypes while a Democratic man would have perceived competence on those issues from party stereotypes. Of course, variations in the candidates' congruence on issues and in the salience of particular issues to voters can mediate the effect of these perceived competence advantages and alter the magnitude of observed gender differences.

Without taking these specific conditions into account though, gender differences are likely to be obscured. As I showed in Chapter 6, aggregate comparisons of women and men revealed few significant differences in issue emphasis. It was only when comparing women and men in the specific contexts mentioned above that significant differences in issue emphasis became apparent.



## **9.1 Contributions**

Although research on women's campaigns and on general campaign behavior has developed mostly independently of each other, the model of candidate behavior and subsequent expectations about gender differences in issue emphasis developed in this project have drawn on insights from both sets of literature. For that reason, this project improves not just our understanding of the ways that gender stereotypes influences campaign behavior, but our understanding of campaign behavior in general.

### **9.1.1 A Better Model of Candidate Behavior**

The model of candidate behavior presented here builds on and expands existing work in several ways. First, although the motivations identified by extant candidate behavior theories (party/gender ownership, opponent advantages, issue congruence, and issue saliency) all have an important impact on candidates' campaign decisions, none of these factors by themselves provides a complete account of candidate behavior. For example, as I demonstrated in the beginning of Chapter 5, there are no clear patterns in the types of issues that competitive House candidates discussed in 2002, 2004, or 2006 on the basis of party ownership, gender stereotypes, or issue saliency alone.

For the most part though, there has been little attempt to use these individual theories to construct a more comprehensive and accurate model. Instead, research on candidate behavior has taken one of two forms. Some work focuses on testing one particular motivation or strategy (for example, candidate party ownership), without considering how that strategy might fit into a broader framework of candidate campaign behavior (Petrocik 1996). Other research does consider multiple strategies, but treats the

strategies more as competing explanations of behavior rather than as complimentary or conditional explanations. For example, Sides (2006) tests whether issue ownership or issue saliency best describes the aggregate issue emphasis of congressional candidates.

Rather than treating ownership, trespassing, congruence, and saliency as mutually exclusive or competing strategies, the model of candidate behavior described in Chapter 3 combines insights from all of these existing theories and outlines the conditions under which a candidate is likely to pursue these different strategies. The purpose of the model is not to establish the dominance of any one particular strategy or motivation over another, but to highlight instead the conditional nature of these existing strategies and to demonstrate how these strategies might fit together in a more comprehensive theory of candidate behavior.

Second, while candidate behavior is often presented, at least implicitly, as a decision-theoretic calculation, decision-theoretic based theories are not able to predict all of the behaviors that a more comprehensive, strategic model anticipates. Issue ownership and trespassing theories, in particular, focus on characteristics of candidates and/or opponents rather than their likely or anticipated behavior. As a result, expectations of candidate behavior are based on a tally or comparison of issue advantages and disadvantages. Treating candidate behavior as a strategic best-reply to an opponent's likely behavior, rather than an assessment of issue advantages and disadvantages, produces a more nuanced set of expectations about candidate decision-making.

For example, while a decision-theoretic account of candidate behavior would predict that a candidate with any disadvantage on an issue should avoid discussing that issue in their campaign, a strategic account predicts that in some circumstances

(specifically, when a candidate lacks an advantage in perceived competence on an issue but holds a position on that issue that is closer to voter preferences), it is more advantageous for a candidate to discuss that issue than to ignore it. From this perspective, a Democratic woman's decision to discuss homeland security or a Republican man's decision to discuss education policies is not a campaign misstep, an anomaly to ignore, or evidence that party ownership and gender stereotypes are irrelevant to candidate decision-making. Instead, these decisions can be understood as a strategic response to their opponent's anticipated issue emphasis and their particular electoral environment (i.e. the issue priorities and preferences of their district's likely voters).

Finally, the ownership and trespassing theories in the general campaign literature have focused almost exclusively on issue ownership conferred by party stereotypes, even though other research, particularly the gender stereotype literature, has established that voters often assign different issue competencies to candidates on the basis of factors besides party. Likewise, while the “run as a woman” or “balance” dichotomy that defines much of the literature on women’s campaigns is nearly identical to the concepts of ownership and trespassing, this literature does not make any explicit references to these theories. The model of candidate behavior presented here though links these two areas of research to create a more inclusive model of behavior. Expanding the concept of issue ownership in the general campaign literature to include other characteristics besides party provides a more accurate account of the perceived issue competencies and strategic calculations of candidates. Although this study has focused on the addition of gender stereotypes, the concept of perceived competence presented in the model is broad enough

to be adapted in future research to include other stereotypes that voters may hold about candidates' issue competence (for example, racial stereotypes).

### **9.1.2 More Nuanced Expectations about Differences in Behavior Among Candidates**

This expanded model of candidate behavior has important implications for the way that we understand differences not just in the campaigns of women and men, but in candidates' campaigns in general. Because candidates' decisions to discuss particular issues are influenced not just by party or gender stereotypes, but by issue congruence, issue saliency, and the kind of opponent they face, it is difficult to make generalizations about candidate behavior only on the basis of one factor such as partisanship or gender. However, existing research on candidate behavior tends to do just that—empirical analyses focus on comparisons of aggregate groups of candidates, distinguished by (usually) a single shared characteristic. As this project has demonstrated though, these aggregate comparisons can obscure real patterns of difference.

Although the primary emphasis of this project has been on explaining and predicting campaign differences between women and men, the conclusions drawn here are applicable to candidate comparisons based on other characteristics. All Republicans, for example, do not have the same incentives to discuss particular issues in their campaigns, and consequently, should not be expected to emphasize the same issues in their campaigns. Not only would a Republican woman have different perceived competencies and thus different incentives to discuss women's issues such as welfare, education, or health care than a Republican man, but that same Republican woman may even have different incentives to discuss women's issues than other Republican women

candidates, depending on the district she was running in and the type of opponent she faced. These differences even among candidates of the same party might be obscured though if we based our expectations about their behavior only on party stereotypes without taking into account the other contextual factors in the campaign.

This is not to suggest, however, that there are no commonalities between candidates based on characteristics like partisanship or gender. Rather, the strategic model presented here provides a way of organizing these different characteristics and electoral contexts in order to find patterns in candidates' behavior and to explain and predict the differences and similarities in the kinds of issues that candidates discuss in their campaigns.

## **9.2 Future Research**

The work presented here provides an alternative framework for studying campaign strategy and gender stereotypes, but it is still just a first step in improving our understanding of candidates' campaign behavior and the ways that gender stereotypes affect candidate decision-making. In the remainder of this chapter, I briefly discuss some areas for further exploration and refinement.

This project has used a deductive approach to study candidate behavior, starting with a set of assumptions about campaigns and candidates' motivations and then deriving a set of expectations about candidate behavior from them. Although the empirical tests I conducted are (mostly) consistent with these expectations, this approach does not provide details on the actual decision-making process that candidate used when choosing their campaigns' issue emphasis and thus cannot speak to the causal mechanisms behind the

candidates' behavior. One way to gain greater insight into this process is through interviews with the candidates and/or their campaign managers. This more qualitative approach would compliment the findings presented here by not only providing richer detail about the candidates' campaigns, but by allowing for an examination of the process of decision-making rather than just the outcomes of decision-making.

The use of interviews might also help to shed light on some issues that have not been fully explored in this project. First, given that there is no extant theoretical or empirical reason to expect otherwise, I have assumed that party and gender stereotypes have an equal importance on candidate behavior. However, it may be the case that one is more important or that their impact is conditional. Interviews are one way to investigate this possibility in more detail, without encountering some of the methodological obstacles present in this study (see Chapter 5). Second, while the regression results reported in Chapter 5 are more consistent with the strategic expectations than the decision-theoretic expectations, there are still some unexpected and unexplained results that neither model predicts. It is not clear why a perceived competence disadvantage and a congruence disadvantage together *increase* the likelihood that a candidate will discuss an issue. Nor is it clear why perceived competence has varying effects on the likelihood of discussing salient issues. Interviews with candidates and campaign managers could provide important details about candidates' campaign decisions that would clarify some of these results.

The scope of this project has thus far been limited to competitive, U.S. House general elections. However, there are three ways that this project can be expanded. First, for this initial investigation, I focused on U.S. House races only, in part because there are

more women candidates in House races and in part because research on women's campaigns tends to overlook House races in favor of Senate races. The inclusion of Senate races in future work though would provide additional data to analyze.

Second, given the assumptions about candidate motivations described at the beginning of Chapter 3 (i.e. that candidates are strategic and motivated primarily by winning), the conclusions drawn here about candidate behavior and issue emphasis are necessarily limited to candidates running in *competitive* elections. It could be the case though that candidate decision-making and the subsequent effects of gender stereotypes differ among candidates in non-competitive elections. Candidates in such races may not have the experience or resources to run strategic campaigns or they may be motivated by goals other than winning the election, all of which might alter the costs and benefits that candidates derive from discussing particular issues. Furthermore, extant research suggests that there are different dynamics at play in competitive and non-competitive races. For example, Kahn and Kenney (1999) report that candidates in non-competitive races place less emphasis on issues and position-taking in their campaigns compared to candidates in competitive races. Given the relatively low number of competitive races in any given election year (e.g. 45 out of 435 total House races in 2006), most women and men who run for office will be in non-competitive races and it is important to understand how gender stereotypes might influence their behavior in these races.

In addition, this project, like much of the existing research on both campaign behavior in general and women's campaign behavior specifically, has examined decision-making only in general elections rather than primaries. However, we know considerably less about candidates' decision-making in primaries. This gap in knowledge may be

particularly important for understanding the effects of gender stereotypes, as the impact of candidate characteristics like gender may vary in importance in primary elections where partisan cues are absent.

Ultimately, understanding the gender dynamics of campaign strategies will shed light on both the practical concerns of political actors involved in campaigns as well as broader theoretical questions regarding representation. On the more practical side, understanding the gender dynamics of campaigns may help future candidates, especially women, identify potential campaign challenges and craft more successful campaigns. From a more theoretical perspective, understanding the ways in which women and men respond to and even manipulate gender stereotypes in their campaigns will help to establish links between the candidates' behavior on the campaign trail with their subsequent behavior in public office. As research demonstrates, the way that candidates present themselves to voters in their campaigns will likely influence their legislative priorities and representational style in office (e.g. Canon 1999). Thus, understanding the gender dynamics in elections will enhance our understanding of the gender dynamics in congressional representation and policymaking.



## Appendix

### Congruence Survey

Generally speaking, where would you rate [Candidate A] on the following ideological scale, where 1 is Very liberal and 5 is Very conservative?

1        2        3        4        5  
 Very liberal                                      Very conservative

Next I'd like to know whether any of [Candidate A's] positions on specific issues deviated significantly from his general ideological tendency, which you've just identified. On each of the following issues, please indicate whether [Candidate A's] position was more liberal than usual, more conservative than usual, or about the same as usual.

	<i>More liberal than usual</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>More conservative than usual</i>	<i>Don't know/ NA</i>
Social Security				
Healthcare				
Abortion				
Education				
Environment				
Welfare				
Civil Rights				
Stem Cell Research				
Agriculture				
Foreign Policy & Defense				
Homeland Security				
Iraq War				
Civil Liberties				
Gun Control				
Crime				
Economy (jobs, unemployment)				
Taxes				
Fiscal (deficit, budget)				
Immigration				
Family & Children Issues (child care, parental leave)				

Are there any (other) issues you know of where [Candidate A] differed significantly from his usual ideological position? If so, please list these issues and indicate, for each additional issue, whether [Candidate A] was more liberal or conservative than usual.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>More liberal than usual</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>More conservative than usual</i>	<i>Don't know/ NA</i>

Generally speaking, where would you rate [Candidate B] on the following ideological scale, where 1 is Very liberal and 5 is Very conservative?

1     2     3     4     5  
 Very liberal    Very conservative

Next I'd like to know whether any of [Candidate B's] positions on specific issues deviated significantly from his general ideological tendency, which you've just identified. On each of the following issues, please indicate whether [Candidate B's] position was more liberal than usual, more conservative than usual, or about the same as usual.

	<i>More liberal than usual</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>More conservative than usual</i>	<i>Don't know/ NA</i>
Social Security				
Healthcare				
Abortion				
Education				
Environment				
Welfare				
Civil Rights				
Stem Cell Research				
Agriculture				
Foreign Policy & Defense				
Homeland Security				
Iraq War				
Civil Liberties				
Gun Control				
Crime				
Economy (jobs, unemployment)				
Taxes				
Fiscal (deficit, budget)				
Immigration				
Family & Children Issues (child care, parental leave)				

Are there any (other) issues you know of where [Candidate B] differed significantly from his usual ideological position? If so, please list these issues and indicate, for each additional issue, whether [Candidate B] was more liberal or conservative than usual.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>More liberal than usual</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>More conservative than usual</i>	<i>Don't know/ NA</i>

*Generally speaking*, where would you rate voters in [District X] on the following ideological scale, where 1 is Very liberal and 5 is Very conservative?

1     2     3     4     5  
 Very liberal    Very conservative

Next I'd like to know whether any of the voters' positions in [District X] on specific issues deviated significantly from their general ideological tendency, which you've just identified. On each of the following issues, please indicate whether voters' positions were more liberal than usual, more conservative than usual, or about the same as usual.

	<i>More liberal than usual</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>More conservative than usual</i>	<i>Don't know/ NA</i>
Social Security				
Healthcare				
Abortion				
Education				
Environment				
Welfare				
Civil Rights				
Stem Cell Research				
Agriculture				
Foreign Policy & Defense				
Homeland Security				
Iraq War				
Civil Liberties				
Gun Control				
Crime				
Economy (jobs, unemployment)				
Taxes				
Fiscal (deficit, budget)				
Immigration				
Family & Children Issues (child care, parental leave)				

Are there any (other) issues you know of where voters in [District X] differed significantly from their usual ideological position? If so, please list these issues and indicate, for each additional issue, whether voters in [District X] were more liberal or conservative than usual.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>More liberal than usual</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>More conservative than usual</i>	<i>Don't know/ NA</i>

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Democrat                      Republican                      Independent                      Other

(If Democrat or Republican): Would you call yourself a strong partisan or a weak partisan?

Strong                      Weak

How closely do you follow congressional elections in your state?

Very closely                      Fairly Closely                      Not much at all

How long have you lived in your state?

Less than 1 year                      1-2 years                      3-5 years                      More than 5 years

Are you a (circle one):

State party leader                      APSA member

What is your gender?

Male                      Female

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