

CONFLICTED VOTERS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

by

ELLIOTT ROGERS REECE

(Under the direction of Paul-Henri Gurian)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the electoral behavior of weak partisans and leaning independents when partisanship and ideology/issue preferences are in conflict. It is hypothesized that the stronger a voter's issue preferences and ideology are in conflict with their partisanship—defined here as “contradictory issue preferences”—the higher the probability that the voter will not vote for their preferred party's candidate in a presidential election. The data come from the American National Election Studies Time Series data for the years 1996, 2000, and 2004. Logistic regressions show that voters, predominantly conflicted Republicans, were likely to defect from their preferred party candidate as a function of their contradictory issue preferences in 1996 and 2000, but not 2004.

INDEX WORDS: Partisanship, Ideology, Issues, Voting behavior, Presidential Elections

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ELLIOTT ROGERS REECE

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ELLIOTT ROGERS REECE

Approved:

Major Professor: Paul-Henri Gurian

Committee: James E. Monogan
Jamie L. Carson

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
The University of Georgia
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Chapter 1

Introduction and Theory

This paper examines weak party identifiers and leaning independents who possess contradictory issue preferences, and to what extent these preferences affect vote choice in presidential elections. Contradictory issue preferences can be defined as preferences that are incongruent with the ideology of a voter's preferred party. A weak or leaning Democrat who favors the privatization of Social Security, for example, possesses a contradictory issue preference, as this is counter to the position of the Democratic Party. These voters are "conflicted" in the sense that their partisanship and issue preferences are at odds with one another. They are effectively being pulled between the parties, with partisanship pointing in one direction and issue preferences pointing in the other.

When a voter's issue positions are conflicting with partisanship, how does the voter reconcile this dilemma? By examining weak and leaning party identifiers with contradictory issue preferences, we can begin to formulate a theory regarding the conflicted voter. We know that strong partisans will almost always vote based solely on their partisan affiliation. These are voters with deep, psychological attachments to their party, and even if they possessed contradictory issue positions on some level, it is doubtful those preferences would often cause

party defections. We also know that pure independents cannot vote on partisanship and must rely on some other criteria, such as issues and ideology, candidate traits, or retrospective evaluations.

But then there is the group of weak partisans and leaning independents where the behavioral pattern may be less predictable. By definition, the attachment these voters have to the parties is weak, and therefore, they may be more susceptible to party defection than strong partisans. By including the concept of contradictory issue preferences, these weak and leaning partisans become even more vulnerable in terms of their partisan loyalty.

This particular group—weak and leaning partisans with contradictory issue preferences—may evince a unique voting behavior due to the combination of weak party loyalty and issue preferences that are incongruent with the party’s ideology. If the partisan attachment of a voter is weak, combined with issue preferences that are pulling the voter away from their preferred party, we can expect that this voter has a higher probability of party defection compared to strong partisans or weak and leaning partisans without contradictory issue preferences.

What exactly is the relationship between partisanship and ideology for these conflicted voters? What is the decision rule that makes weak and leaning partisans with contradictory issue preferences decide to not support their party’s candidate in a presidential election? This paper tests the theory that the *strength* of these contradictory issue preferences is the determinant for party defection. The stronger contradictory issue preferences become among weak and leaning partisans, the less likely the voter will be to vote for the presidential candidate of his or her preferred party.

To eliminate confusion, the relationship between issue preferences, partisanship, and ideology should be clearly delineated. While issues and ideology are not synonymous terms, decades of political science research has relied upon issue position questions in survey research to gauge a latent ideology in the voter. In this paper, the terms are used—not

interchangeably—but as intrinsically related concepts that work in tandem to potentially conflict with partisanship. For example, the more conservative issue preferences a conflicted Democrat possesses, the more his or her comprehensive ideology is conflicting with the ideology of the Democratic Party.

This research is time sensitive because it theoretically relies upon the alignment of partisanship, ideology, and issue preferences in modern American politics. Polarization has created two disparate camps, with liberals aligning with the Democratic Party, and conservatives with the Republican Party (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Jacobson 2008). Rarely is there talk of “liberal Republicans” or “conservative Democrats” as may have been common fifty years ago.

This is an important stipulation, because the theory of this research states that voters will be less likely to vote for the presidential candidate of their preferred party, as contradictory issue preferences become stronger. In other words, as the ideologies of the voter and the preferred party become more incongruent, the conflicted voter is more likely to defect from the preferred party. If the ideology of the party is relatively heterogenous, it becomes problematic to assume that the more liberal/conservative a voter becomes, the more likely they are to vote Democratic/Republican. For example, for much of the twentieth century the Democratic Party had a strong conservative faction. Therefore, it would not be prudent to assume that Democrats in 1952 would be more likely to oppose their party’s presidential candidate due to the strength of their conservative issue preferences.

1.1 A Theory of Party Defection for Conflicted Voters

When partisanship is strong and ideology is congruent with party, there is little reason to believe that party defections will occur at any considerable rate. Likewise, weak party identifiers and leaning partisans who are ideologically congruent with their party may not be

highly susceptible to defection, as partisanship has been shown to be a powerful determinant of vote choice (Campbell et al., 1960; Bartels 2000; Bartels 2002). For voters whose partisanship is weak but their ideology is incongruent with party, the strength of their contradictory issue preferences may be the key determinant in whether or not they support their preferred party's candidate.

The conflicted voter is figuratively straddling a fence between two determinants of vote choice—ideology and partisanship. If the contradictory issue preferences of the voter are not strong, the voter will more than likely side with the candidate of their preferred party. However, the stronger the contradictory issue preferences are in the mind of the conflicted voter—in other words, how strongly the voter is being ideologically pulled away from his or her preferred party—the more likely ideology and issue preferences will be a reliable predictor of vote choice.

Figure 1.1 presents a diagram that illustrates the dynamic of vote choice for conflicted voters. The voter has initially two ways to evaluate presidential candidates, apart from such criteria as national conditions and candidate traits (which will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper). The voter can either employ ideology or partisanship, or a combination of the two. If partisanship is strong, the voter will almost certainly vote along party lines.

Similarly, if ideology is congruent with party, there should not be a high probability of defection from the preferred party. If the voter is a weak partisan or leaning independent who is ideologically conflicted, the choice becomes more complicated. Now, the voter can either follow path A and cast a vote for party, or follow path B and either vote for another party's candidate, or not vote at all.

Paths A and B represent different levels of strength regarding contradictory issue preferences. As an example, consider two voters who are either weak or leaning partisans with contradictory issue preferences. Voter 1 may possess contradictory issue preferences, but these preferences are not strong. Perhaps Voter 1 is a weak or leaning Republican who is

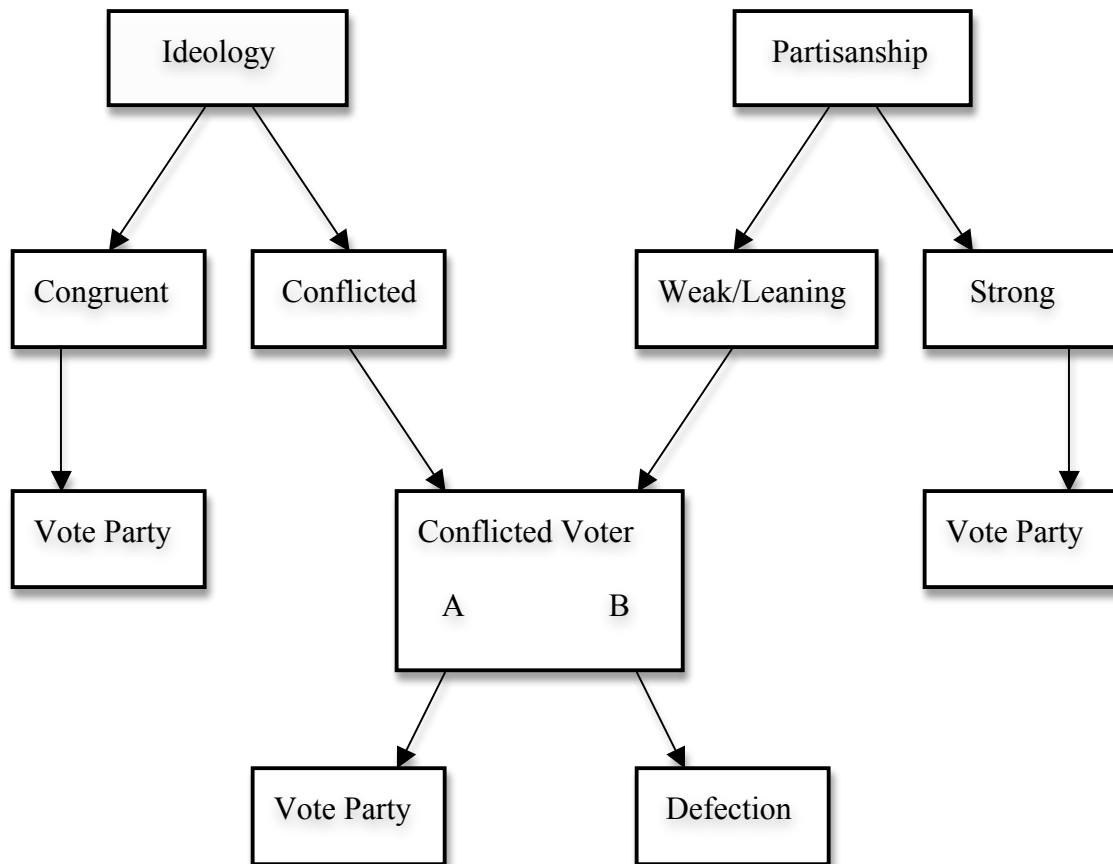


Figure 1.1: Dynamic of Vote Choice for Conflicted Voters

slightly pro-choice on abortion and slightly in favor of civil unions for homosexual couples. Despite these slightly liberal tendencies on two issues, Voter 1 is still a reasonably strong conservative and will more than likely follow path A and cast a vote for party.

Voter 2 is also a weak or leaning Republican, but in contrast to Voter 1, *strongly* favors the legality of abortion and civil unions for homosexual couples. Therefore, the probability of following path B to a vote of defection should be higher for Voter 2 than Voter 1. The probability of defection for conflicted voters should incrementally increase as the strength of contradictory issue preferences increases. To further illustrate, if Voter 3 is a weak or leaning Republican that strongly favors the legality of abortion and civil unions, and *also* strongly favors regulation of businesses and a government medical insurance program, then the probability of defection should be higher for Voter 3 than for Voter 2, and so on.

From this theory we can derive the first testable hypothesis, which can be stated: *As the strength of contradictory issue preferences among weak and leaning partisans increases, the probability of not voting for the candidate of the voter's preferred party also increases.*

There is some reason to think that this theory may be more applicable to Republicans than Democrats. In the last decade there has been an emergence of a Libertarian faction in the Republican Party, most recently evinced by the grassroots popularity of presidential candidate, Ron Paul. Often, voters who identify with the Republican Party will admit to being closer to the ideology of Libertarianism, but vote Republican due to the two-party system. While the archetype of a Democrat who is socially conservative but economically liberal certainly exists, it is far less common than the Republican who is socially liberal and economically conservative.¹

¹Although it will be discussed in more detail later, it should be noted that it is not necessary for the purposes of this research to treat ideology as two separate dimensions: one social, one economic. While ideology is certainly multidimensional, and this is an important theoretical foundation for this research, the only consideration given to issue positions here, is whether or not they conflict with party ideology, not whether they are social or economic in nature. While it may be theoretically interesting to analyze the two separately in future research, it is beyond the scope of the research at hand.

The second testable hypothesis, then, can be stated: *Weak and leaning Republicans with contradictory issue preferences will be more likely to defect from the candidate of the preferred party than weak and leaning Democrats with contradictory issue preferences.*

In sum, this paper expects to find that weak and leaning partisans possessing contradictory issue preferences will vote according to the strength of their contradictory issue preferences. That is to say, the more a voter with weak partisan attachment is being ideologically pulled away from their preferred party, the less likely that voter is to support the presidential candidate for that party.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Multidimensional Preferences

The research on multidimensional preferences is important for understanding the idea of a member of the electorate voting as a function of the strength of their contradictory issue preferences. A person with multidimensional preferences can be defined as having both liberal and conservative preferences regarding certain issues (Tetlock 1986; Conover and Feldman 1981; Trier and Hillygus 2009). The two concepts are very similar. The difference between the terms “multidimensional preferences” and “contradictory issue preferences” is that the former is a description of someone’s cumulative ideology, while the latter is only looking at those preferences which collide with partisan values.

Previous research supports the idea that Republican are more multidimensional in their issue preferences than Democrats. Stimson (2004) showed that people who adopt the ideological label “conservative” were far more likely to display liberal preferences in survey responses than those who adopt the term “liberal” were to display conservative responses. These “conflicted conservatives” made up 22 percent of Stimson’s (2004) sample, while the opposite group—“conflicted liberals”—made up only 2 percent (90). Similarly, Trier and

Hillygus (2009) found that conservatives were more likely than liberals to have preferences that were liberal on one dimension and conservative on another. In other words, the preferences of many conservatives were multidimensional and did not easily fit onto a left/right continuum.

The idea of multidimensional preferences is closely related to a concept called *ambivalence* which has received much attention in political science research. Ambivalence can be defined as the adoption of opposing considerations regarding a political issue or object (Feldman and Zaller 1992). In their study regarding conflicting attitudes towards abortion, Alvarez and Brehm (1995) found that a vast majority of survey respondents expressed seemingly contradictory considerations regarding the issue. Rudolph (2011) defined ambivalence as “the simultaneous attraction toward two opposing candidates,” (568) and found a negative linear relationship between partisanship and ambivalence; as partisanship strengthened, the tendency to display conflict regarding the favorability of candidates declined.

Rudolph’s (2011) finding of “simultaneous attraction” to opposing political objects is important for understanding the nature of the conflicted voter. These are voters who are attracted to two different associations—one partisan, one ideological. Thus, when faced with two presidential candidates who represent a facet of each of these concepts, the conflicted voter experiences a dilemma similar to ambivalence.

The fact that Rudolph (2011) found that weaker partisans were more ambivalent than strong partisans about presidential candidates lends some support to the theoretical foundation of this paper. It stands to reason that weak and leaning partisans who also possess contradictory issue preferences would display even more ambivalence than weak partisans without contradictory issue preferences. Thus, the more ambivalent a conflicted voter becomes, the more likely they will defect to an opposition candidate.

2.2 Ideology, Issue Voting, and Partisanship

To understand whether the theory regarding conflicted voters is applicable, it is first necessary to review whether the majority of voters are capable of ideological thinking and issue voting. When Converse (1964) examined the electorate, he discovered that people were largely uninformed and lacked a coherent belief structure. Voters were largely incapable of thinking ideologically, and their responses to survey questions were highly erratic. Others have corroborated this finding in subsequent decades, such as Jennings (1992), who found that the public generally suffered from a deficit of ideological thinking.

Some researchers contend that Converse's (1964) depiction of the electorate is largely a product of measurement error and conceptual error. As previously discussed, ideology is often not constructed in terms of a left/right continuum as Converse (1964) conceptualized, but rather it often exists in a multidimensional framework. Additionally, when problems in measurement error are addressed, ideological thinking appears more prevalent among the public (Achen 1975). In essence, the responses to issue position questions in surveys appear to have structure and consistency, rather than being the product of randomness.

Still, the question of how often, or to what extent, voters rely on these issue preferences when casting votes in a presidential election is debatable. Some have found that salient issues, such as abortion have influenced vote choice (Abramowitz 1995; Alvarez and Nagler 1992) while others have found that issue voting was only common among those possessing high levels of political knowledge (Jacoby 2010). In their analysis of ambivalence in House elections, Basinger and Lavine (2005) found that only voters possessing high levels of political knowledge relied upon issues and ideology.

Similar to the debate regarding ideology, Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008) found that the scant evidence for issue voting in presidential elections has largely been a product of measurement error. The authors showed that when a large sample of issue preferences are properly scaled, they can be as effective in predicting vote choice as partisanship (Ansolabehere, Snyder, Rodden 2008).

This is strong evidence for the theory at hand. Previously, issue preferences were either believed to play a minor role in vote choice, with only certain salient issues producing strong effects. The work of Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008) shows that analyzing a prodigious sample of issue preferences from survey responses can accurately predict a latent ideology in the respondent, and this ideology is a strong predictor of how they will vote.

Regarding issues and partisanship, Carsey and Layman (2006) test whether issues produce changes in partisanship, or whether partisanship causes a voter to revise their issue preferences. The evidence was somewhat mixed. Largely, people changed their issue preferences in light of partisanship, but for a select group who were knowledgeable of the differences between parties and found certain issues to be salient, issue-based party conversion was common. Since some voters change party affiliation due to issues, it stands to reason that some voters will defect from their party in presidential elections, even if they do not change their party affiliation.

Carsey and Layman (2006) found that the determinant for issue-based party conversion was salience, whereas the argument of this paper is that it is *strength*. These are two similar concepts, but ultimately distinct. Salience refers to the importance placed on a particular issue by the voter, and strength—in this context—refers to the cumulative amount of issue preferences.

The theory of this research does not consider how important a contradictory issue preference is to the voter, only the strength of the preferences. It is one thing to say “I am strongly for affirmative action”; it is quite another to say “affirmative action is an issue that

is very important to me.” Nevertheless, the finding that knowledgeable voters—which will be controlled for in the analysis—change their partisanship in light of issue preferences is promising for the theory that conflicted voters will vote based on the strength of their issue preferences.

The research of Carsey and Layman (2006) speaks to a longstanding debate in political science regarding the nature of partisanship. Understanding this debate and the theories thereof, will give context to the theory of the conflicted voter. The first theory of partisanship was put forth by Campbell et al., (1960) and described partisanship as a deep, psychological attachment in the mind of a voter. Criteria such as issues, campaigns, and retrospective evaluations have diminutive effects on vote choice compared to the power of party identification. Much research has corroborated this theory over the last several decades (Bartels 2002; Green and Palmquist 1994; Conover and Feldman 1981).

The other theory, first proposed by Downs (1957) and bolstered by Fiorina (1981), may be more applicable to weak party identifiers with contradictory issue preferences. This theory suggests that partisanship is not necessarily a deep, psychological attachment, but rather a “running tally” of assessments made by the voter in light of new information.

According to this theory, criteria such as issues, candidate perceptions, and retrospective evaluations can exert considerable influence on partisanship and vote choice. This rational choice perspective was aptly described by Franklin and Jackson (1983) when they wrote that “party identification is not the fixed, exogenous force organizing political behavior that we thought at one time. Party identifications change as individual preferences change” (968).

Carmines, McIver, and Stimson (1987) found that many voters who choose the label “independent” do so because their issue preferences are either more liberal or conservative than their party, evincing that partisanship is subject to retrospective judgments. Additionally, Boyd (1986) found that vote choice in 1980 and 1984 was determined by economic evaluations, issue positions, and candidate traits.

Whether or not the rational choice model or the social psychological is ultimately correct is beyond the scope of this research. What may be offered, though, is that both of these theories could be correct depending on the particular group of voters under examination. For instance, Arceneaux and Wielen (2013) found that the social psychological model better described individuals with a higher need for affect, while the rational choice model fit the individuals with a higher need for cognition.

A similar conclusion could potentially be drawn from this research. Indeed, if it is the case that weak partisan voters possessing contradictory issue preferences are found to employ those preferences when voting, then it would be evidence for the rational choice perspective. Again, this is not to say that the rational choice perspective is ultimately correct, but for this specific segment of the voting population, it may best explain their voting behavior.

A final note on partisanship and voting behavior regards the anticipated criticism of treating leaning independents and weak partisans as essentially the same. While on the surface these two groups may appear different because of their respective labels, research has shown the opposite. Leaning independents, despite the different classification, behave almost identically to weak partisans (Petrocik 2009; Keith 1992). For the purposes of this research it makes theoretical sense to group them together. The theory specifies that anyone with weak partisan attachment will be included in the analysis, and “leaning” is a form of weak attachment. Of course, pure independents as well as strong partisans have been excluded from the analysis.

Chapter 3

Data and Measures

The data for this study come from the American National Election Studies for the years 1996, 2000, and 2004. These three years provide an auspicious timeframe in which to test this theory. Because the theory is contingent upon the notion that the parties represent a certain ideology and set of issue positions, it may be problematic to test the theory during a year where the electorate and political elites were not highly polarized, as previously stated. For example, it makes sense to assume that the more liberal a voter becomes in 2004, the more likely they are to vote for the Democratic Party. This assumption would not hold as well in 1976, or even 1980. Polarization has aligned partisanship and ideology on the same side and the theory firmly rests on this specification.

Aside from polarization, these years provide a good balance of various national conditions. In 1996 and 2004 an incumbent was running for reelection, whereas 2000 election was an open race. This allows for the proposition that voters may behave differently when retrospectively evaluating a returning president, than they would with no incumbent present in the election. Additionally, these years represent different economic conditions, with 1996 exhibiting a strong economy, 2000 a slightly weaker economy, and 2004 an economy in decline.

Perhaps the most important difference between these years is the presence of the Iraq War and the War on Terror in 2004. The effects of September 11th, 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq could potentially have caused voters to abandon ideological voting in favor of matters relating to national security. These three years enable the theory to be tested in peacetime and in wartime.

Three logistic regressions were performed for each year of the analysis; three for all conflicted voters, three for Democrats, and three for Republicans. In each regression, the dependent variable was a dichotomous measure of vote choice, coded 1 if the Democrat (Republican) voted for the Democratic (Republican) candidate, and 0 if there was a defection from the party. In this context, defection is defined as any electoral action other than voting for the preferred party, including voting for the other major party, voting for a third party candidate, or not voting at all.

The independent variable *Contradictory Issue Preferences* was created from a sample of public policy questions in the NES surveys. All public policy questions that had either a social or economic component were chosen for the analysis, and all questions that had a foreign policy connotation were excluded.¹ A considerable amount of research that assesses the effects of issue voting do not include foreign policy questions, as voters do not often rely on foreign policy aspects when choosing between candidates (Alvarez and Nagler 1992; Carsey and Layman 2006; Conover and Feldman 1981; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008; Trier and Hillygus 2009).

Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008) did attempt to include a foreign policy issue scale and omitted it because the results were never significant. However, if the independent variable achieves statistical significance in 2004, I will include a control variable measuring respondents' attitudes towards the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, terrorism, and national

¹A full list of all the variables used can be found in the appendix

security. It may be the case that issue-based voting was compromised in 2004 due to these pressing foreign policy matters.

The NES questions covered a wide spectrum of social and economic issues, including: abortion, social security, welfare programs, affirmative action and aid to blacks, crime, government health care, environmental regulation, taxes, gay marriage, government services, and various spending matters related to the federal budget. While some of these issues are more salient than others—hence, some could arbitrarily be dismissed as irrelevant to vote choice—I followed the precedent set by Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008) by selecting every available question and assuming that each question can be coded in terms of more liberal and more conservative responses.

The reason for selecting every possible question is that the larger the sample of issue preferences, the more accurately you can approximate a respondent’s latent ideology. This is, after all, the crucial element of interest for this research: how strong is the respondent’s ideology pulling them away from their preferred party. Including all available questions from the NES reduces the potential for measurement error, and provides for a more accurate interpretation of the voter’s latent ideology.

Previous research has often separated the social and economic questions into two scales. I chose not to do this for two reasons. First, many of these issues have both a social and economic component. For example, government provided health care can either be framed in terms of a basic human right, or in terms of federal spending. Deciding which issues were definitively social and which were economic is necessarily a haphazard assessment.

Additionally, this paper does not theoretically require that the social and economic issue preferences be separated, as there is no need to examine the individual effects. On the contrary, it is the *combined* effect of social and economic issue preferences that is necessary for this research because their cumulative influence produces a final variable that measures how strong the respondent's contradictory issue preferences, i.e. ideology, is conflicting with their partisanship.

Some of the questions asked respondents whether they were for or against specific issues and how strongly they felt about their position. For example: "Should federal spending on solving the problem of the homeless be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?" with a follow up question of "Do you feel strongly or not strongly about this issue?" If the question was asked in this manner, a variable was constructed on a 1-5 scale, capturing the responses "strongly increase," "somewhat increase," "kept about the same," "somewhat decrease," and "strongly decrease."

Other questions asked the respondent to place themselves on a 1-7 likert scale with "strongly disapprove" at one end and "strongly approve" at the other. Each variable was coded with higher values either meaning more conservative for Democrats or more liberal for Republicans. To get all the variables on the same scale, each issue preference variable was standardized with mean 0 and standard deviation 1, and then summed across all responses. What resulted is a composite score for each respondent measuring the strength of their cumulative contradictory issue preferences.

The summated rating model is essentially a standardized score for each variable and respondent, but for intuitive purposes, I will describe the scale construction if it were created from the raw scores. Consider scales from 1-5 with 5 indicating the most liberal response and 1 indicating the most conservative response. A weak or leaning Republican who answered 4 to one question (a somewhat liberal response) and a 2 to another question (a somewhat conservative response) would produce a raw score of 6. Another respondent who answered

1 to both questions (two very conservative responses) would produce a raw score of 2, while another respondent who answered 5 to both questions (very liberal responses) would produce a raw score of 10. The higher values indicate the strength of the conflicted voter's contradictory issue positions. While this is a very basic approach to issue scaling, it serves the purposes of this research. All tests of Chronbach's α produced coefficients indicating the reliability of the issue scales: .83 for 1996, .80 for 2000, and .72 for 2004.

3.1 Political Knowledge

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of controlling for political knowledge when analyzing vote choice (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Zaller 1992; Palfrey and Poole 1987). The authors of *The American Voter* aptly stated the need to control for political knowledge when they wrote "If someone has little perception of the candidates, of the records of the parties, of public issues or questions of group interest, his attitudes toward these things may play a less important intervening role between party identification and the vote" (Campbell et al., 1960, 136).

While complex methods of gauging political knowledge are available, a simple knowledge test satisfies the theoretical assumptions of this research. Following Carsey and Layman (2006) I incorporate a simple test requiring the respondent to place the Republican presidential candidate to the right of the Democratic presidential candidate on a left/right continuum. If they failed to do this, they were excluded from the analysis. The theory states that conflicted voters will vote as a function of their contradictory issue preferences. To do this, a voter must be able to recognize what the parties and presidential candidates stand for, or at least, be able to identify which is more liberal or conservative. If the respondent cannot do this, then they cannot vote based on ideology and issue preferences.

3.2 Economic Perceptions

The state of the economy plays a central role in every presidential election. In a prosperous economy, incumbent presidents seeking reelection or presidential candidates of the same party as the outgoing president will attempt to claim credit for positive national conditions. In an economic downturn, they will attempt to minimize the rhetoric regarding the economy, while their opponent will capitalize on the issue. Economic conditions can either greatly help or hurt a presidential candidate because of the importance placed on this issue by the American voters. Little political knowledge is required to be aware of one's own personal financial situation, or even the financial shape of the country as a whole.

The literature has shown that there are two economic perspectives a voter may employ: the retrospective model (Fiorina 1981) and the sociotropic model (MacKuen, Erickson, and Stimson 1992; Holbrook 1994). In the retrospective model, the voter relies upon their personal financial situation in order to assess current presidential candidates and the state of the economy. In the sociotropic model, the voter evaluates the nation's economy as a whole.

To account for these two different perspectives, questions from the NES were used to create the variables *Personal Finances* and *National Conditions*. The question regarding personal finances asked whether or not the respondent's personal financial situation was "better," "worse," or "about the same" as compared to one year earlier. Additionally, there was a follow-up question regarding the strength of their situation, asking if the respondent was "much better," or "much worse." The two questions were used to form a 1-5 scale, with 1 indicating the respondent chose "much worse" and 5 representing "much better." The variable measuring national conditions was created in the same fashion, with the NES question referring to the state of the economy as a whole compared to one year earlier.

3.3 Candidate Traits

Another element thought to influence voting behavior in presidential elections is the assessment of character traits. When voters observe presidential candidates—especially during the debates—certain personal qualities of the candidates may lead a voter to perceive them as a “strong leader” or “moral,” for instance. Goren (2007) found that Democratic evaluations of Bush as “empathetic” decreased from 2000 to 2004, while Republicans were critical of Gore and Kerry’s leadership qualities.

These three traits—strong leadership, morality, and empathy—are specified by Hayes (2005) in his theory of trait ownership as being the traits that are “owned” by the two parties.² Democrats own the empathy trait, while Republicans own the traits of strong leadership and morality. The effect these traits can potentially have on vote choice depends on whether or not a presidential candidate can overcome a trait deficit. This means that voters are conditioned to see Democrats as being less moral and weaker on leadership than Republicans, while Republican candidates are perceived to lack empathy. The more a candidate can overcome these “trait stereotypes,” the more likely these candidates will increase their appeal to voters (Hayes 2005, 909).

Adopting the precedent established by Hayes (2005), I used the respondent’s assessment of each candidate’s morality, empathy, and leadership qualities to assess the effect of candidate traits on vote choice. The NES questions asked the respondent how well each trait described the presidential candidate with responses ranging from 1-4; 1 being “not well at all” and 4 being “extremely well.” A variable for each candidate was constructed for each trait.

²Hayes also includes “compassion,” yet only 1996 included a question regarding this character trait.

Once each trait variable was created, the Democratic variable measuring empathy was subtracted from the Republican variable measuring empathy, yielding a final variable which measures the differences between the scores of the two candidates. Positive scores for empathy mean more favorable evaluations for the Republican candidate. For the leadership and morality variables, I subtracted the Republican variables from the Democratic variables, in order to have positive scores reflect more favorable evaluations for the Democratic candidates.

In the final variable *Candidate Traits* I included only the responses from conflicted Democrats that assessed the Republican candidate’s empathy compared to the Democratic candidate, and only the responses from conflicted Republicans that assessed the Democratic candidate’s morality and leadership ability compared to the Republican candidate. What resulted was a control variable that measures how well each weak or leaning partisan evaluates the opposition candidate in terms of overcoming a trait deficit.

Since there were two variables for conflicted Republicans—morality and leadership—I simply took an average of these to equalize scores for both conflicted Democrats and conflicted Republicans. The final variable that can be interpreted as: higher scores indicate that the respondent evaluates the opposition candidate more favorably on a trait that is not owned by their party.

3.4 Other Control Variables

By only examining weak partisans and leaning independents, strength of partisanship has been controlled for. Some might suggest including a standard control for ideology, where the respondents place themselves on a left/right continuum. Considering one of the objectives of this research is to identify a latent ideology in the voter, it is counterintuitive to include an additional variable that measures how the voter *perceives* their ideology.

As stated previously, voters often respond incorrectly, making the left/right continuum a poor predictor of latent ideology. Furthermore, the left/right continuum does not reflect multidimensional preferences, a key theoretical component of this research. Rather than have two variables measuring the same concept—one being a considerably inferior predictor—the decision was made not to include a standard ideology variable.

Standard demographic controls were included in the analysis measuring the effect of a respondent’s ethnicity, gender, education, income, and age. *Ethnicity* was coded 1 for non-white, 0 for white, *Age* was coded in one year increments, *Gender* was coded 1 for female, 0 for male, *Education* was coded on a 1-7 scale, with 1 representing “no high school diploma,” and 7 representing “Doctoral degree,” and *Income* was coded in increments of \$10,000.

The model can be formally written as:

$$\Pr(\text{Vote Choice}_i=1)=f [\beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Contradictory Issue Preferences}) + \beta_2 (\text{National Conditions}) + \beta_3 (\text{Personal Finances}) + \beta_4 (\text{Candidate Traits}) + \beta_5 (\text{Income}) + \beta_6 (\text{Gender}) + \beta_7 (\text{Age}) + \beta_8 (\text{Ethnicity}) + \beta_9 (\text{Education}) + \epsilon_i]$$

Chapter 4

Results

Table 4.1 displays the results of the three logistic regressions for the years 1996, 2000, and 2004. These regressions examined all conflicted voters collectively, compared to the results displayed in Table 4.2, which separated conflicted Democrats from conflicted Republicans. One tailed tests were performed with a chosen significance level of .10.¹ The most notable finding in Table 4.1 is that the main independent variable—*Contradictory Issue Preferences*—is significant two of the three years. Conflicted voters did appear to vote as a function of the strength of their contradictory issue preferences in 1996 and 2000, but not 2004.

In 1996, the coefficient of -.039 (and odds ratio of .962) means that for every one point increase on the contradictory issue preferences scale, there is approximately a four percent decrease in the odds of voting for the preferred party candidate. As contradictory issue preferences grew in strength, conflicted Republicans became more likely to abandon Bob Dole, and conflicted Democrats became more likely to abandon President Clinton.

¹While .10 was the chosen significance level, nearly all of the coefficients achieved significance of .05 or better. One tailed tests were performed due to the directional nature of the hypotheses.

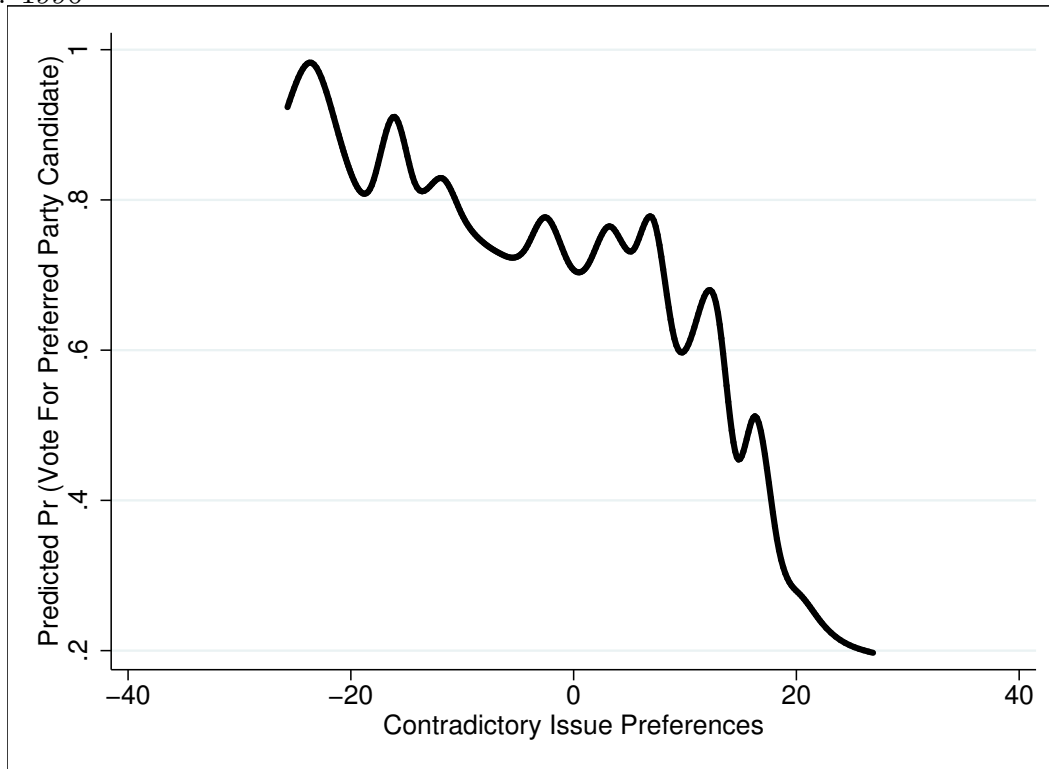
Figure 4.1 graphs the predicted probabilities of voting for the preferred party candidate in 1996 as the strength of contradictory issue preferences increases. There is a visible downward trend, indicating that the more conflicted a voter became, the more likely they were to defect from their preferred party.

When contradictory issue preferences are strongly negative (indicating that a voter is not considerably conflicted) the probability is very close to 1 that the voter will vote for their preferred party candidate. In turn, voters scoring 20 or more (indicating strong conflict) have a probability of less than .4 of voting for their preferred party candidate.

Table 4.1: Probability of Voting for the Preferred Party Candidate (Logit Estimates)

	1996	2000	2004
Issue Preferences	-.039*	-.016*	.010
	(.013)	(.010)	(.018)
National Conditions	.189*	.194*	-.075
	(.114)	(.084)	(.175)
Personal Finances	-.032	.147	.025
	(.090)	(.102)	(.160)
Candidate Traits	-.830*	-.964*	-1.960*
	(.109)	(.114)	(.237)
Income	-.002	-.002	.018
	(.006)	(.003)	(.031)
Gender	-.048	-.108	.579*
	(.183)	(.260)	(.350)
Age	.019*	.020*	.033*
	(.006)	(.006)	(.011)
Ethnicity	.108	-.442*	.308
	(.270)	(.268)	(.373)
Education	.284*	-.034	.254*
	(.061)	(.042)	(.123)
Constant	-2.428*	-1.157*	-2.200*
	(.601)	(.583)	(.895)
N	733	688	478
Log likelihood	-381.720	-369.807	-126.095
Significant at *p<.10			

Figure 4.1: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for Preferred Party Candidate for Conflicted Voters: 1996



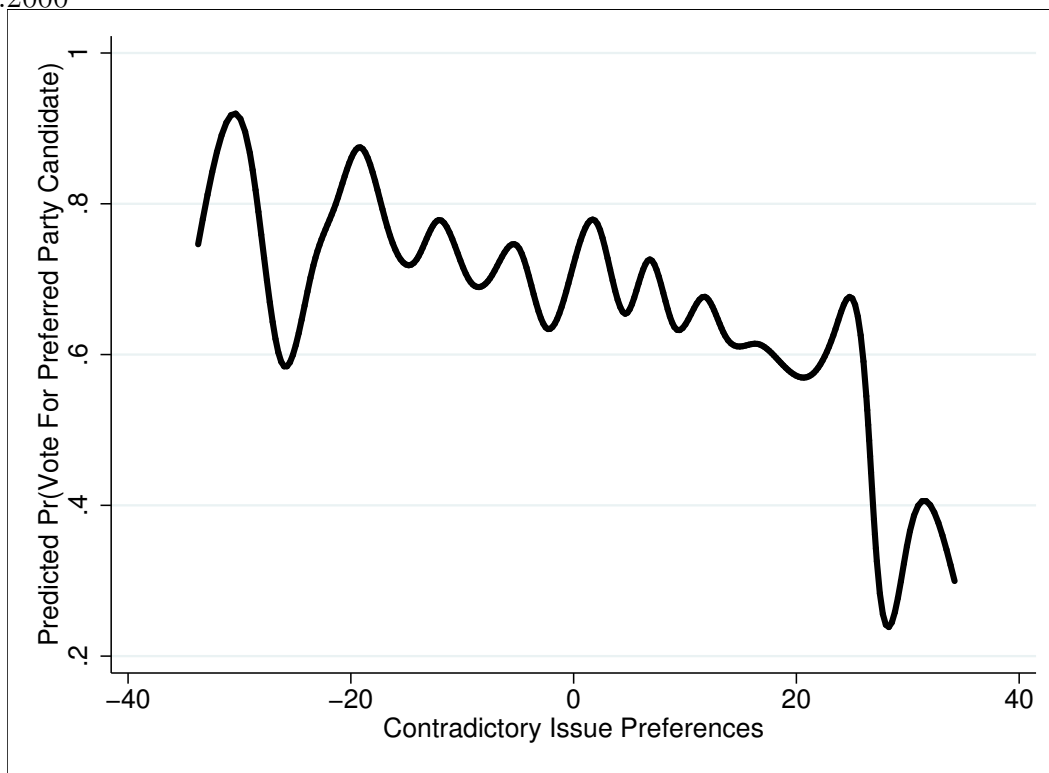
Conflicted voters also seemed to have voted as a function of the strength of their contradictory issue preferences in 2000, indicated by the coefficient of -0.016 which is significant and signed in the expected direction. The value of -0.016 (odds ratio of $.984$) means for every point increase on the contradictory issue preferences scale, the odds of voting for the preferred party candidate decreases by approximately 2 percent.

Figure 4.2 graphs the predicted probabilities of voting for the preferred party candidate in 2000 against the strength of contradictory issue preferences. While there is a visible downward trend, it is not as pronounced as 1996. This is also, of course, reflected by the smaller coefficient value for 2000 compared to 1996. Nevertheless, these two graphs illustrate

that the strength of contradictory issue preferences affected vote choice in 1996 and 2000. However, the results fail to show any evidence for this type of voting behavior in 2004.²

Overall, the results from Table 4.1 offer some support for the first hypothesis. Turning to whether conflicted Republicans are more likely than conflicted Democrats to rely upon the strength of their contradictory issue preferences when voting, Table 4.2 reports the results for when these two groups are analyzed separately. One of the most noticeable results is the lack of evidence for conflicted Democrats voting as a function of their contradictory issue preferences. In none of the years does the main independent variable achieve statistical significance.

Figure 4.2: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for Preferred Party Candidate for Conflicted Voters:2000



²A dichotomous control variable measuring the respondent's attitude towards the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was included for the 2004 regressions, but did not produce any significant changes in the results.

Table 4.2: Probability of Voting for the Preferred Party Candidate: Democrats and Republicans (Logit Estimates)

	Republicans			Democrats		
	1996	2000	2004	1996	2000	2004
Issue Preferences	-.058*	-.030*	-.015	-.006	.006	-.003
	(.019)	(.014)	(.039)	(.024)	(.014)	(.033)
National Conditions	-.712*	.076	1.032*	.831*	.308*	-.598*
	(.218)	(.128)	(.330)	(.243)	(.123)	(.245)
Personal Finances	-.030	.172	-.293	.231	.137	.197
	(.148)	(.164)	(.308)	(.184)	(.146)	(.216)
Candidate Traits	-1.176*	-1.373*	-2.160*	-1.125*	-.788*	-1.896*
	(.206)	(.228)	(.505)	(.235)	(.137)	(.321)
Income	-.004	.001	.079	-.000	-.001	-.016
	(.009)	(.004)	(.056)	(.012)	(.004)	(.046)
Gender	.569*	-.012	1.504*	-.298	-.183	.135
	(.328)	(.291)	(.686)	(.383)	(.269)	(.458)
Age	.019*	.024*	.020	.006	.019*	.039*
	(.010)	(.009)	(.021)	(.012)	(.009)	(.016)
Ethnicity	.722	-.082	-.232	.422	.060	.590
	(.611)	(.467)	(.748)	(.012)	(.307)	(.479)
Education	.156	.031	-.200	-.067	-.096	.413*
	(.102)	(.068)	(.222)	(.123)	(.061)	(.181)
Constant	-.210	-1.900*	-2.226	-1.670	-1.356	-2.150*
	(1.161)	(.877)	(1.718)	(1.332)	(.881)	(1.188)
N	300	312	210	335	344	236
Log likelihood	-132.454	-155.753	-27.632	-101.304	-183.589	-67.230
Significant at *p<.10						

However, the coefficients for 1996 and 2000 were statistically significant and signed in the expected direction for conflicted Republicans. For 1996, the coefficient of -.058 means that for every point increase on the contradictory issue preferences scale, there is approximately a six percentage point decrease in the odds of conflicted Republicans voting for Bob Dole. For 2000, the coefficient of -.030 (odds ratio of .97) translates into approximately a 3 percentage point decrease in the odds of conflicted Republicans voting for George W. Bush.

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 graph the predicted probabilities for conflicted Republicans voting for their party's candidate in 1996 and 2000. Both of these graphs illustrate a clear trend

for conflicted Republicans during these two elections. When contradictory issue preferences are weak, the probability is quite high that these voters will vote along party lines.

The stronger these contradictory issue preferences become among conflicted Republicans, the more likely they are to defect from their party. In both graphs, the largest negative values (indicating low contradictory issue preferences) are associated with probabilities between .8 and 1 of voting for the preferred party candidate. The largest positive values (indicating high contradictory issue preferences) are associated with probabilities of .4 or less of voting for either Dole in 1996 or Bush in 2000.

Figure 4.3: Predicted Probabilities for Conflicted Republicans Voting for the Republican Candidate: 1996

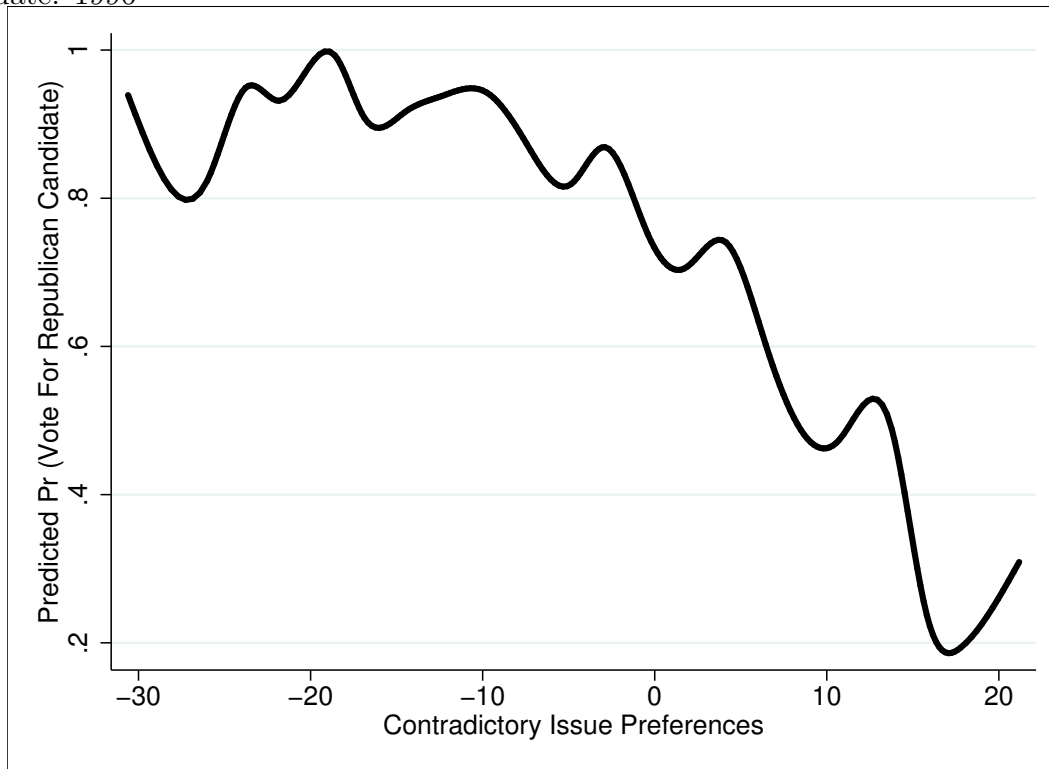
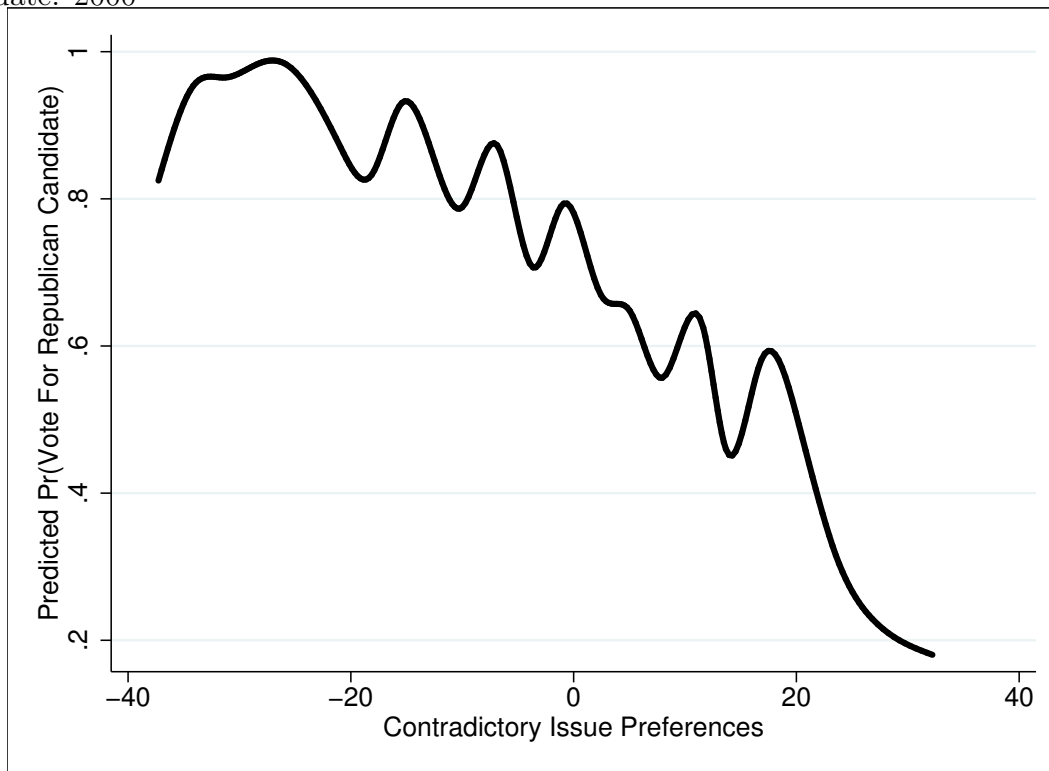


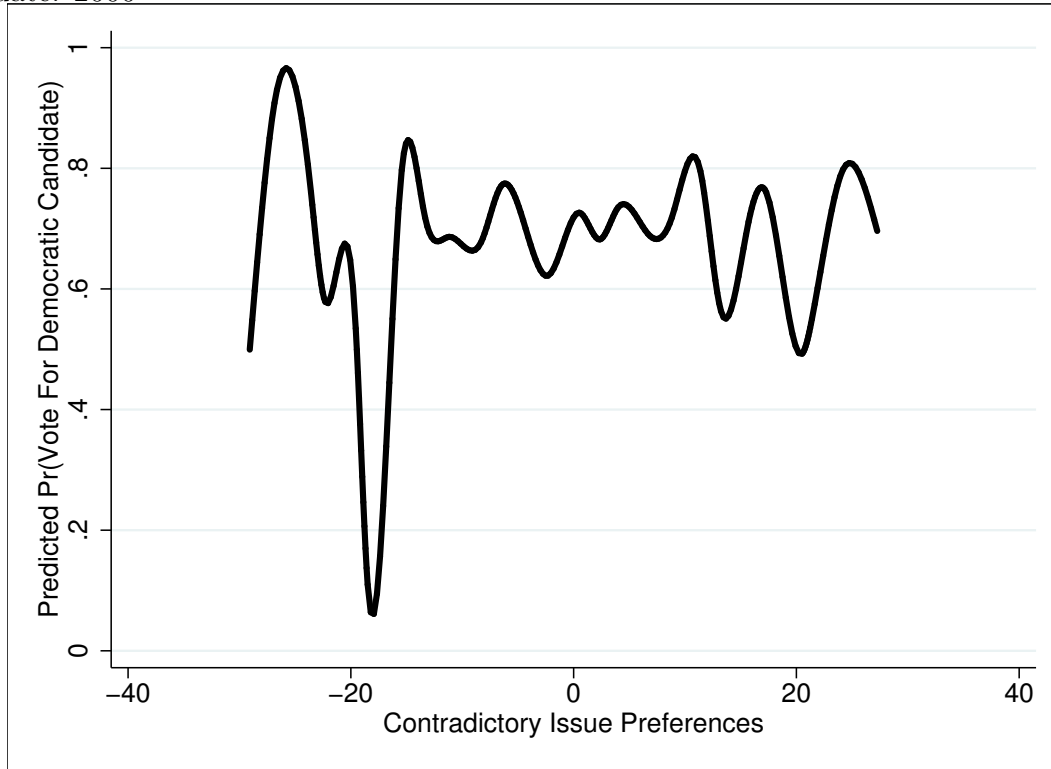
Figure 4.4: Predicted Probabilities for Conflicted Republicans Voting for the Republican Candidate: 2000



To illustrate the difference between the statistically significant results found in 1996 and 2000 for conflicted Republicans, I included a graph of the predicted probabilities of voting for Gore in 2000 among conflicted Democrats. It can easily be seen in Figure 4.5 that there is no discernible downward trend, indicating that conflicted Democrats did not systematically abandon their party's candidate in 2000 due to the strength of their contradictory issue preferences.

Regarding the control variables, national conditions and candidate traits proved to be strong, significant predictors of vote choice. In all years, the candidate trait variables are significant and signed in the expected direction. When conflicted voters perceived the opposing party's candidate of overcoming a trait deficit, this increased the probability of a

Figure 4.5: Predicted Probabilities for Conflicted Democrats Voting for the Democratic Candidate: 2000



defection. With the exception of two years—2004 for all conflicted voters, and 2000 for conflicted Republicans—perceptions of the national economy was also strong predictor of vote choice for conflicted voters in these three elections.

4.1 A Test of Issue Salience

To compare with the results of the main analysis, an additional test was performed measuring the effects of issue salience among conflicted voters. Due to limitations in the availability

Table 4.3: Probability of Voting for the Preferred Party Candidate: Democrats and Republicans (Logit Estimates)

	Republicans		Democrats	
	1996	2000	1996	2000
Issue Salience	.625 (.445)	.743* (.376)	-.539 (.608)	.921* (.404)
National Conditions	-.391 (.331)	-.023 (.187)	.792* (.430)	.440* (.189)
Personal Finances	-.270 (.225)	.220 (.245)	.145 (.299)	.217 (.226)
Candidate Traits	-1.756* (.378)	-1.021* (.331)	-.919* (.408)	-.578* (.219)
Income	-.010 (.013)	.001 (.006)	.014 (.020)	-.001 (.006)
Gender	.385 (.492)	-.365 (.422)	.446 (.615)	-.197 (.402)
Age	.030* (.016)	.002 (.013)	-.002 (.018)	.031* (.015)
Ethnicity	1.750* (.972)	-.410 (.604)	-.521 (1.190)	.052 (.437)
Education	.315* (.184)	-.055 (.106)	.000 (.190)	-.018 (.096)
Constant	-2.285 (1.980)	-.798 (1.409)	-2.310 (2.025)	-3.396 (1.514)
N	137	151	132	151
Log likelihood	-59.225	-72.182	-37.684	-80.466
Significant at *p<.10				

of data, only 1996 and 2000 were used for this analysis. The same model from the main analysis was used, replacing the *Contradictory Issue Preferences* variable with the variable, *Issue Saliency*.

For the years 1996 and 2000, voters were asked what they believed to be the most important issue facing the country, with a follow up question regarding which party would be better to handle this issue. The latter question was used to create the issue saliency variable, with only the voters possessing some level of contradictory issue preferences included. For conflicted Democrats, the variable was coded 1 for the Democrats handling the issue better, 0 if there was no difference between the parties, and -1 if the Republicans would be better suited to handle the issue. The same coding was used for conflicted Republicans in reverse order.

Effectively, what this variable measures is how much issue saliency may take precedence over the strength of contradictory issue preferences. If there is a strong association between voting for the preferred party and the most important issue, it may indicate that conflicted voters rely on issue saliency more than the strength of contradictory issue preferences. For example, a conflicted Democrat may possess some level of contradictory issue preferences, but considers the legality of abortion to be the most important issue. Therefore, the voter may vote for the Democratic candidate despite their conservative leanings on issues of lesser importance, solely due to the saliency of the abortion issue.

Table 3 displays the results of the logit estimates for the model testing issue saliency and the probability of voting for the preferred party candidate. The results are interesting and somewhat inexplicable. Issue saliency appears to be a strong predictor of vote choice for conflicted voters in 2000, but not in 1996. With odds ratios of 2.1 for conflicted Republicans, and 2.5 for conflicted Democrats, both coefficients lead to over 100% increase in the percent change in the odds of voting for the preferred party candidate in 2000.

Exactly why issue salience was a strong predictor of vote choice in 2000, but not 1996 is an interesting puzzle for future research. Perhaps the lack of an incumbent president can somehow create an environment where the importance of certain issues are brought to the forefront in the mind of a conflicted voter. In essence, a “changing of the guard” may cause conflicted voters to rely on the issue that is of the utmost importance.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research design started with a very basic question: Do weak and leaning Democrats and Republicans vote as a function of the strength of their contradictory issue preferences? In other words, when issue preferences and ideology are pulling weak and leaning partisans away from their preferred party, does that affect the manner in which they cast votes in presidential elections? The evidence displayed here provides an interesting answer: at certain times, yet the evidence is much stronger for conflicted Republicans.

Overall, the data lend support to the two hypotheses. With the exception of 2004, conflicted voters in 1996 and 2000 do seem to vote as a function of the strength of their contradictory issue preferences. However, when conflicted voters are separated by partisan attachment, it becomes clear that the relationship is much stronger for conflicted Republicans.

As previously stated, the Republican Party appears to be more diverse regarding multidimensional preferences. It is quite common to meet a socially liberal Republican, where socially conservative Democrats are not quite as common. Indeed, the Democratic Party

tends to be more homogeneous regarding issue preferences. The paradigm of economically liberal and socially liberal best typifies the modern Democrat. It may be the case that conflicted Republicans are no more likely to defect from their party than conflicted Democrats, there are simply more conflicted Republicans in the electorate.

Nevertheless, the regression results of this research indicate that conflicted voters—especially conflicted Republicans—*do* vote as a function of the strength of their contradictory issue preferences. However, this seems to be conditional on what is happening at the country at a particular point in time. In 1996 and 2000, there were very few, if any, pressing issues that would override all other determinants of vote choice. There were few salient foreign policy or economic matters occurring during these two elections.

For conflicted voters, these conditions may have presented the opportunity to allow issues and ideology to be the strongest determinant of vote choice. In essence, when the economy is poor or there is a foreign policy crisis, these conditions may take precedence in the mind of a conflicted voter. When these conditions are absent, issues and ideology may be at the forefront of electoral reasoning.

This is supported by the fact that all conflicted voters did not vote based on the strength of their contradictory issue preferences in 2004. This was a highly polarized election, with Iraq, Afghanistan, and terrorism being a crucial determinant of vote choice (Weisberg and Christenson 2007). As Jacobson (2008) wrote, “fewer voters were undecided, fewer were open to changing their minds, (and) more supported their candidate strongly” (141). When grouping independent leaners with strong and weak partisans, 89 percent of Democrats and 90.6 percent of Republicans voted for their party’s candidate, the “highest level of party-line voting in the fifty-two-year history of the ANES” (Jacobson 2008, 141).

It is not surprising, then, that conflicted Republicans did not defect from their party in 2004 the way they seemed to in 1996 and 2000. Iraq and terrorism were much more salient issues to conflicted Republicans—indeed, all voters—than issues such as abortion or welfare

programs. While pleasant national conditions may allow conflicted voters to ideologically stray, severe conditions may bring them back home.

From the evidence presented here, voters seems to behave according to the sociotropic model in presidential elections. Rather than “pocketbook” voting, where an individual relies on retrospective judgments about their personal finances, voters seem to judge the health of the national economy as a whole. None of the variables measuring respondents’ assessments of their individual personal finances ever reached statistical significance, while the variable measuring a respondent’s perspective of the national economy was significant in 7 of the 9 regressions performed.

Intuitively, the economic results make sense. A popular Democratic president and a healthy economy in 1996 would cause conflicted Republicans who viewed the economy in a positive light to be less likely to support Dole. In turn, conflicted Republicans who viewed the economy positively in 2004 would likely attribute the positive conditions to the incumbent president of their party. Due to the lack of an incumbent in 2000, positive assessments of the economy did not seem to be linked to support for either particular candidate among conflicted Republicans.

In 1996 and 2000, conflicted Democrats who viewed the economy as healthy were more likely to support Clinton and Gore. This is to be expected considering a strong economy was one of the hallmarks of the Clinton/Gore administration. In 2004, positive economic assessments among conflicted Democrats did not predict support for either candidate, which is not surprising given the low popularity of George W. Bush among all Democrats. Even if a conflicted Democrat viewed the economy as strong in 2004, they were still unlikely to reward the unpopular Republican president.

However, perceptions of Bush being empathetic did seem to erode support for John Kerry in 2004, while Kerry benefited from conflicted Republicans who considered him to be moral and strong on leadership. Overall, character traits seem to be strong predictors

of vote choice in the regressions. When a conflicted Democrat or Republican viewed the opposition candidate as successful in overcoming a “trait deficit,” this significantly decreased the probability of a vote for party. The demographic variables were generally not successful in predicting vote choice among conflicted partisans.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This paper tested the theory that weak and leaning partisans vote in accordance with the strength of their contradictory issue preferences. Contradictory issue preferences meaning those which are incongruent with the positions of a voter's preferred party. The results show some support for the theory, but the evidence is stronger for conflicted Republicans. In both 1996 and 2000, there was evidence that conflicted Republicans defected from their party as their liberal issue preferences grew in strength. The theory also appears to be sensitive to national conditions, such as a poor economy or salient foreign policy matters.

The research detailed in this paper could have implications regarding the theoretical interpretations of partisanship. Returning to the two theories,—the rational choice model versus the social psychological model—it is not exactly clear which theory better describes the voters analyzed in this paper. While it may be tempting to say that conflicted Republicans behave in accordance with the rational choice model—as they seem to in 1996 and 2000—the conditions surrounding the 2004 election produced voting behavior that provides evidence for the social psychological model.

However, one could argue that the overwhelming support conflicted Republicans showed for their party's candidate was a rational calculation in response to economic and foreign policy concerns. The failure to find evidence of issue-based voting for conflicted Democrats may suggest that there is a deeper psychological attachment to the partisan label for conflicted Democrats than conflicted Republicans. A more thorough examination of the relationship between conflicted partisans and these two theories should be performed in the future.

Future research should also consider reshaping this theory to apply only to conflicted Republicans, or perhaps to both Republicans and Democrats only when national conditions are relatively stable. The failure to find evidence for conflicted Democrats does not necessarily mean the theory is not applicable to them. A more sophisticated statistical analysis and narrow theory may be able to find evidence that weak and leaning Democrats vote according to the strength of their contradictory issue preferences. Again, this may be contingent upon several factors, most notably the presence of absence of a strong economy and war.

Importance of issue preferences is also a consideration for future research. It may not simply be the "strength" of contradictory issue preferences, necessarily, but strength *combined* with salience. If a weak or leaning partisan strongly favors an issue that is contradictory to their preferred party's platform, and they also consider this issue to be highly important, it stands to reason that this combination would carry more weight than strength or salience alone. The fact that a voter's issue preferences are strongly pointed in one direction does not necessarily mean that those preferences are intrinsically driving their vote choice. Some voters may be single issue voters, while some may vote based on their comprehensive ideology. Incorporating these nuances will generate stronger theoretical foundations for understanding how contradictory issue preferences affect vote choice.

6.1 Appendix

Contradictory Issue Preferences

1996: V960450, V960479, V960483, V960487, V960496, V960497, V960498, V960500,
V960501, V960503, V960519, V960523, V960537, V960543, V960560, V960561, V960562,
V960563, V960564, V960565

2000: V000550, V000614, V000620, V000645, V000674a, V000675, V000676, V000677,
V000679, V000680, V000681, V000682, V000683, V000685, V000687, V000690, V000693,
V000694, V000702, V000705, V000713, V000727, V000731, V000744, V000748

2004: V043136, V043149, V043150, V043152, V043158, V043164, V043165, V043166,
V043167, V043168, V043169, V043170, V043172, V043176, V043177, V043179, V043181,
V043182, V043187, V043189, V043196, V043210

Vote Choice

1996: V960548

2000: V000793

2004: V043203

Economic Variables

1996: V960338, V960386

2000: V001412a, V000491

2004: V043098, V043062

Trait Variables

1996: V960423, V960426, V960427, V960432, V960435, V960436

2000: V000524, V000525, V000527, V000531, V000532, V000534

2004: V043117, V043118, V043119, V043124, V043125, V043126

Income

1996: V960702

2000: V000994

2004: V043294

Education

1996: V960610

2000: V000913

2004: V043254

Age

1996: V960605

2000: V000908

2004: V043250

Gender

1996: V960066

2000: V001029

2004: V043411

Ethnicity

1996: V960067

2000: V001006a, V001006b, V001006c

2004: V043299a

Figure 6.1: Predicted Probabilities for Conflicted Republicans Voting for the Republican Candidate: 1996—Monotonic Graph

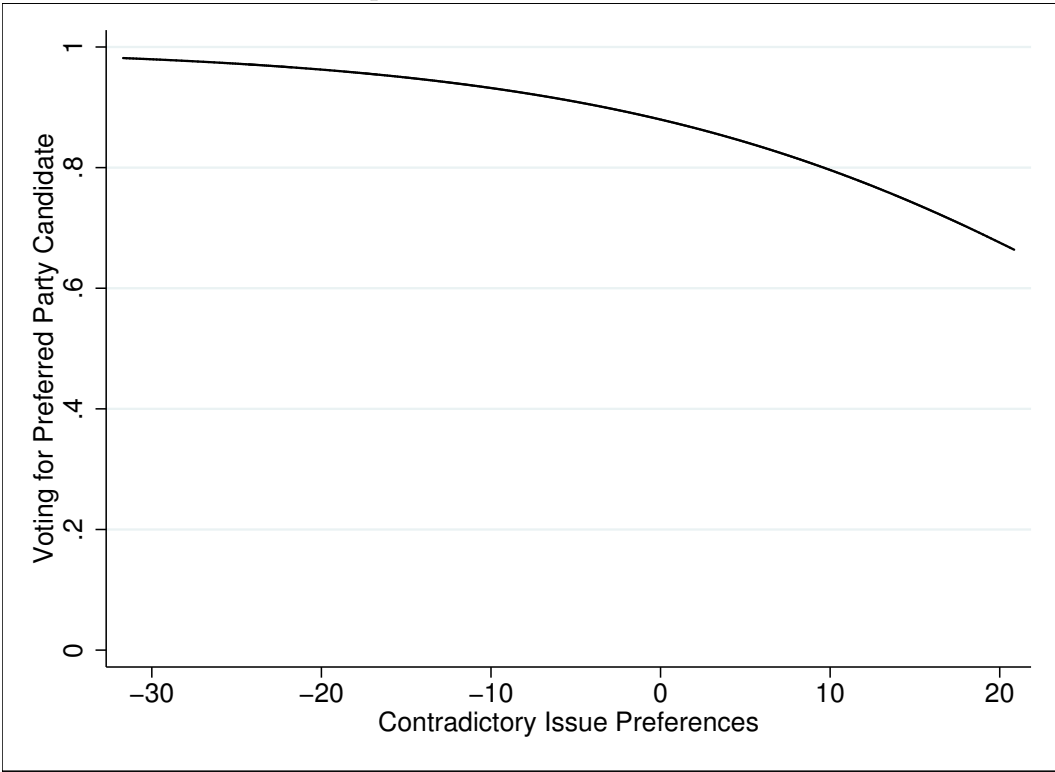


Figure 6.2: Predicted Probabilities for Conflicted Republicans Voting for the Republican Candidate: 2000—Monotonic Graph

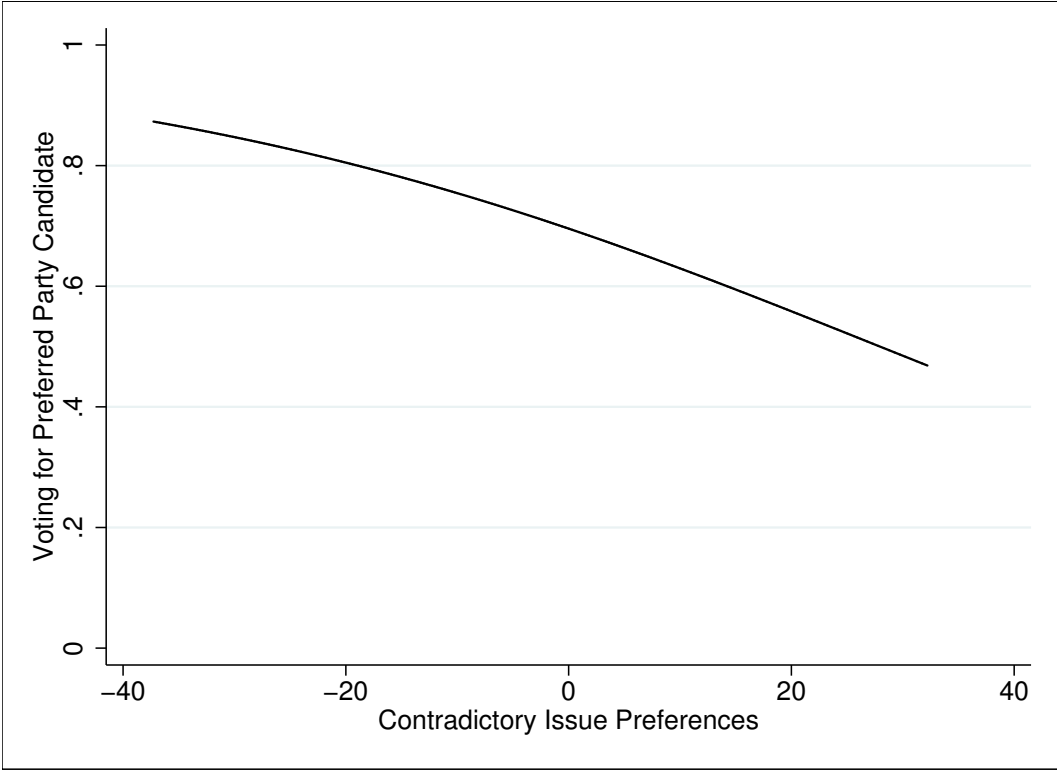


Figure 6.3: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for Preferred Party Candidate for Conflicted Voters: 1996—Monotonic Graph

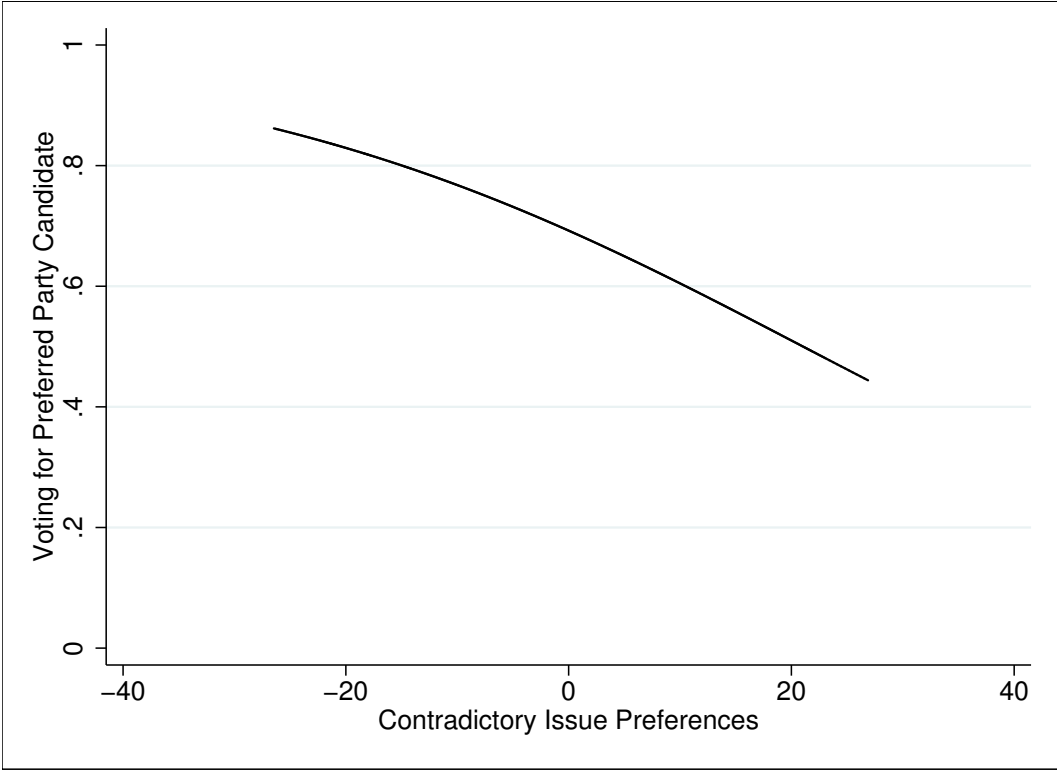
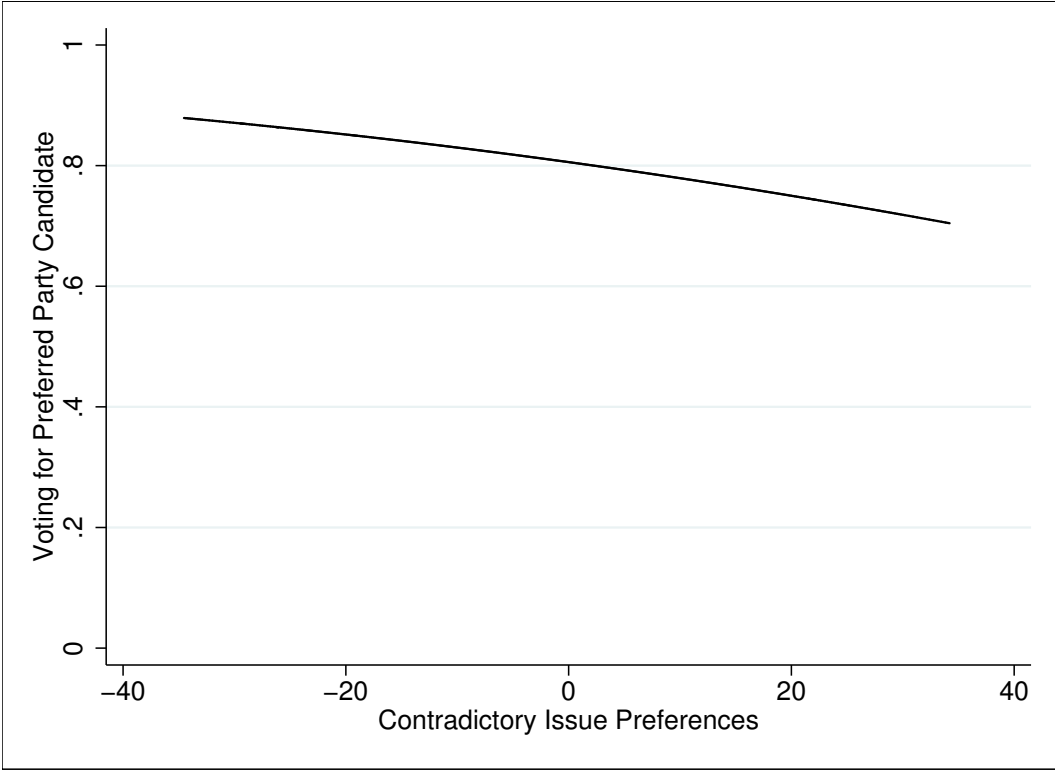


Figure 6.4: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for Preferred Party Candidate for Conflicted Voters: 2000—Monotonic Graph



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