I'm (Not) With Stupid: Do Extreme Candidates Help (or Hurt) Their Parties?[1]

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Recent American presidential elections have featured a number of candidates whose views were perceived by many observers to fall outside of the mainstream of American politics due in part to issue positions considered to be extreme. On the Republican side, such candidates have included Michelle Bachmann, Ted Cruz, and Donald Trump. Democrats given the "extremist" label have included Dennis Kucinich and and Bernie Sanders. While there is substantial ideological variation within American parties, these candidates are often argued to have taken positions far beyond those of most copartisan elites, with Donald Trump's call to "take out [terrorists'] families" and Sanders's identification as a democratic socialist serving as illustrative examples. What impact does the presence of such candidates on the electoral scene have on the public's evaluations of more mainstream candidates?

Much research has focused on how extremism affects a candidate's electoral chances (e.g., Downs, 1957; Hall, 2015; Harbridge and Malhotra, 2011; Cohen et al., 2016). Yet we do not know how such candidates affect perceptions of co-partisans. Pundits have suggested two contradictory hypotheses as to their effects. The first is that candidates far from the center remake the party brand in their image, tarnishing other members of the party by association. *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni (2015), while disagreeing with this view, summarizes it nicely: 'I keep reading that Donald Trump is wrecking the Republican Party. I keep hearing that he's a threat to the fortunes of every other Republican presidential candidate, because he sullies the brand and puts them in an impossible position." Advocates of this position often cite polling data as evidence that candidates far from the mainstream can hurt copartisans; as a CBS News article noted, "Adding to GOP worries, there's evidence to suggest Trump is damaging voters' perceptions of the Republican Party as a whole. ... In Wisconsin, the numbers were even more damning: only 9 percent said Trump improved their outlook on

the GOP, while 59 percent said it made their outlook worse" (Miller, 2016). Furthermore, political practitioners believe that such associations are real and capable of being reinforced; witness the campaign ads attempting to tie relative moderates to unpopular ideologues in prominent positions in their parties.

Yet other commentators take a different view. According to them, candidates who position themselves far from the center can be assets to copartisans by making them appear more moderate than they really are. Columnist Andrew Ireland (2016) writes, "However, Clinton's drawn-out primary race against Sanders has given her the upper hand in November. Of the candidates Democrats fielded in 2016–with maybe the exception of the now all-but-forgotten bid by former Virginia Sen. Jim Webb–she has come out appearing the most moderate of the bunch. . . . Clinton is no moderate, but Sanders sure helps make her look that way." Jonathan Chait (2016), in an article entitled "Being Less Crazy Than Donald Trump Does Not Make Marco Rubio 'Moderate,'" wrote that while Rubio's positions were very conservative, comparisons to Trump and Cruz had "magnified the contrast to the point where Rubios principal ideological identifier is now 'moderate.'" Moving beyond candidate evaluations to perceptions of political positions, another columnist wrote, "[Trump's] grim intervention shifts the terms of acceptable political debate. Anti-Muslim prejudice that is more sophisticated and subtle (which isnt hard) suddenly seems less extreme, and somehow instantly more palatable" (Jones, 2015). And for an absurd application of this line of thinking, consider state legislator Todd Courser of Michigan, who spread a false claim that he had had sex with a male prostitute in the hope that this would make his affair with another state legislator appear "mild by comparison" (Livengood, 2015).

These competing viewpoints on how extreme candidates influence evaluations of others are not merely journalistic puffery; both of these viewpoints have a solid grounding in psychological theory, particularly in the literature on assimilation and contrast effects. An assimilation effect occurs when a prime or stimulus causes evaluations of another object, often known as the target, to move closer to the prime. A contrast effect occurs when evaluations

of the target become more distant from the prime. A variety of factors determine which is more likely, but essentially, if the prime is relevant or close to to the target or representative of the group to which it belongs, assimilation is the expected result; if not, contrast is more likely (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz, 1996). Although some work has examined assimilation and contrast effects in relation to evaluations of elected officials' integrity (Schwarz and Bless, 1992), to our knowledge, no work to date uses the assimilation and contrast framework to examine the effects of ideological extremity among political candidates.

We present results from an experiment motivated broadly by the assimilation and contrast literature, with an eye to understanding how extreme candidates affect evaluations of other candidates, as well as of political parties. The strongest effects are on co-partisan candidates, for which we primarily find evidence of contrast: Respondents evaluate a candidate as as more moderate when they are previously exposed to an extreme candidate of the same party. In keeping with the theories mentioned above, these effects are conditional on perceptions of how typical the extreme candidate is of his party. When the extreme candidate is viewed as atypical, contrast effects are strongest. Furthermore, we find that beyond perceptions of candidates' ideology, exposure to extreme candidates leads to more favorable evaluations of co-partisans on feeling thermometers. While we do not find any direct effect of the manipulation on vote choice, those who view the extreme candidate as atypical become more likely to vote for the target, while those who perceive him to be representative of his party are less likely to do so. This suggests that the extreme candidate does not merely anchor subjective scales, but can also have concrete effects on behavior.

Contrast and Assimilation

The question of how mainstream candidates are evaluated in light of extreme candidates essentially boils down to a question of how context affects candidate evaluations. People do not make judgments in a vacuum; rather, they make evaluations in part through comparisons

with other objects and relative to the background upon which objects are being evaluated. For example, a gray object placed in the foreground against a white or black background will appear darker or lighter, respectively, but colors in a background are perceived as closer to those in the foreground (Suls and Wheeler, 2007). These are familiar examples of what are referred to in much psychology literature as contrast and assimilation effects, respectively.

First, it is critical to define some terms often used in the contrast/assimilation literature. Various terminologies have been used to describe contrast and assimilation effects (e.g. Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski, 2000), but in this paper we use the terms defined in the Inclusion-Exclusion model promoted by Norbert Schwarz and colleagues (Schwarz and Bless, 1992; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz, 1996). Under this framework, a *target* is an object being evaluated, and in this paper the primary targets are political candidates. The *standard* refers to the context surrounding a target upon which the target is evaluated. Standards can include any dimension along which a target might be evaluated, and in this paper the primary standard upon which we expect the target – political candidate – to be evaluated is the political party to which the candidate belongs. Finally, a *prime* is an object that is expected to influence perceptions of the relationship between a target and a standard. In this paper, then, the prime is the extreme candidate, and depending on how people view the prime in relation to the standard (the extreme candidate's party), we might expect evaluations of the target (a mainstream copartisan candidate) to shift. To put it in terms of contemporary politics, if we view Michele Bachmann as having been an extreme Republican candidate, we might have expected the public's views of a more moderate Republican like John Boehner to shift (relative to the party more broadly) in light of her presence on the electoral scene.

Critically, there is no strict distinction or criteria upon which objects are considered targets, primes or standards. Essentially, any subject being directly evaluated may be considered a target, and a standard is any background concept (of which the individual may or may not be aware of) that influences evaluations of the target; and so the standard is a very fluid concept, and can include existing knowledge or information about a target as

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well as objects that are also targets of a previous evaluation. In this paper, political parties, for example, are a target of evaluation but also may act as a standard upon which specific candidates are judged. Michele Bachmann may act as a prime influencing how John Boehner is viewed in relation to the Republican Party, but she may also influence evaluations of the Republican Party itself, thus making the Republican Party a target as well as a standard upon which another target (John Boehner) is evaluated (see Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski, 2000; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz, 1996).

Our expectations for how extreme candidates might influence other candidate evaluations can be explained in terms of contrast and assimilation effects. A contrast effect is when a prime causes evaluations or perceptions of a target to shift away from the prime on the dimension on which the objects are being evaluated. Alternatively, an assimilation effect takes place when the target evaluation shifts toward the prime rather than in the opposite direction(Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski, 2000; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz, 1996). As Suls and Wheeler (2007, 10) write, "Assimilation can be thought of as a kind of magnetic-like attraction toward and contrast as a kind of repulsion from a context or standard."

Schwarz and colleagues have outlined a basic model for when contrast and assimilation effects might be expected. According to the Inclusion-Exclusion framework, a prime is incorporated into evaluations of a target when the prime is seen as prototypical of the standard. In these cases, one should expect an assimilation effect such that the target is evaluated in a manner consistent with the prime. However, when the primed object is seen as irrelevant or unrepresentative of the standard, it is excluded from evaluations of a target, and the result should be a contrast effect. How information is excluded in a contrast effect has important implications. If the prime fails to become fully incorporated into the standard, a subtraction-based contrast effect will result, and only the target immediately following the prime will be affected. However, if the prime is incorporated into the standard, the prime will affect all targets that are reasonably related to the prime (see Schwarz and Bless, 1992; Schwarz,

Münkel, and Hippler, 1990; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz, 1996).[1]

In line with the preceding framework, Schwarz and Bless (1992) showed that respondents who were asked to name politicians involved in a recent scandal evaluated politicians in general as less trustworthy than those who were not asked to name any politicians. The assimilation effect occurred because both the prime and target were perceived as part of the same category "politicians," so the prime was seen as relevant information and thus incorporated into target evaluations. However, when asked to evaluate the trustworthiness of specific politicians not involved in the scandal, those who had been primed rated them as more trustworthy than those who had not been. A contrast effect occurred because the respondents were asked to evaluate specific individuals who were unlikely to be placed in the same category as the scandal-plagued politicians, and were instead compared against them

Some scholars have questioned whether assimilation and contrast truly affect judgments or merely lead to "semantic adjustment" affecting how points on subjective scales are understood (e.g., Stevens, 1958). However, there is substantial evidence that people change evaluations on objective, numerical scales as well; as an example, those previously exposed to a pattern with a large number of dots gave lower estimations for a succeeding pattern (Helson and Kozaki, 1968). Preference orderings that violate independence of irrelevant alternatives can often be understood through the lens of individuals contrasting one of the choices from an added alternative (e.g., Wedell, 1991). Furthermore, while political scientists have rarely explicitly used the terms "assimilation" and "contrast," several areas of political psychology frequently used in the field are deeply grounded in these concepts, and political scientists have found behavioral implications. The literature on priming effects is a clear example, with effects resulting from comparisons to a prime.(Herr, Sherman, and Fazio, 1983) Another example is in the literature on projection effects, in which evaluations can be either assimilated toward or contrasted from the self or the in-group (Spears and Manstead, 1990).

Despite this work on evaluations of politicians in light of contrast and assimilation effects,

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1. While we rely primarily on the Inclusion-Exclusion model, we view most other models of assimilation and contrast as compatible with it.

we know of no work that explicitly uses this literature to examine evaluations of candidate extremity or electability. Although some disagreement exists over the exact psychological processes that lead to these effects, a fairly clear-cut framework from this literature can be applied to understanding evaluations of candidate extremity.

Expectations for the Impact of Extreme Candidates on Copartisan Candidates

We use the Inclusion-Exclusion framework to develop competing hypotheses regarding the main questions of this study by conceptualizing specific political candidates and their parties as targets and extreme candidates as primes. Importantly, political parties are also proposed to be standards upon which specific candidates are evaluated (and so parties are both targets and standards). Importantly, we expect extreme candidate primes to influence perceptions of target candidates' ideological extremity as well as feelings toward the target candidates and the likelihood of voting for target candidates.

On the one hand, it is possible that the ideological extremity associated with the extreme candidate prime will be incorporated into the perceived extremity of the candidate's political party as well as the target candidate, thus manifesting as an assimilation effect on both candidates and parties whereby mainstream candidates and their parties are subsequently viewed as more ideologically extreme (i.e. closer to the ideology of the extreme candidate). This assimilation effect is plausible because there are reasons for the respondent to view the extreme candidate prime as relevant to the target: they are both politicians and members of the same party. Based on these expectations, we would further predict that the average voter will see the mainstream candidate as less favorable and less worthy of their vote (assuming the average voter is relatively moderate and prefers a moderate candidate)[2].

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2. It may reasonably be expected that effects on favorability and willingness to vote will be dependent on the respondent's own ideological extremity. In this study, we do not have the statistical power to conduct such analyses and so do not explore this hypothesis in the current manuscript

On the other hand, despite an assimilation effect for the political party of the extreme candidate, a contrast effect may occur for the copartisan mainstream candidate. Regardless of whether this contrast effect is subtraction-based or comparison-based, the extremity of the prime candidate may act to shift perceptions of the target candidate to being more moderate. In this way, the prime candidate shifts perceptions of the broad category of the party but is nonetheless seen as an exemplar – an extreme anchoring point unrepresentative of the group (i.e., politicians or members of the party) – rather than a representative of the extremity that exists in all party members. As such, a target candidate, which may have previously been seen as somewhat extreme, would be seen as moderate. Favorability and likelihood of voting for the target candidate should then increase for the average voter.

## Branding across the Aisle: Effects on Other-Party Candidates

Although the Inclusion-Exclusion model offers fairly concrete competing expectations regarding evaluations of candidates from the same party as the extreme candidate, it is reasonable and quite important to examine the implications of extreme candidates for evaluations of other-party candidates. Recent research suggests that politicians strategically reinforce the party identification of opposing party candidates when that party is unpopular in order to brand opposing candidates with an unpopular label (e.g., Neiheisel and Niebler, 2013). Thus, the potential negative effects of extreme candidates are not necessarily limited to parties "shooting themselves in the foot" by associating themselves with extreme candidates. Rather, other-party candidates may actively try to tie their opponents to relative extremists of their party. Of course, if the hypothesis that extreme candidates lead to contrast effects (i.e. mainstream co-partisan candidates being viewed as more moderate) is supported, such a strategy would be unwise. Further, it is possible that branding the other party as extreme has substantial ramifications for candidates from both parties. Despite the potential

aisle-crossing ability of the effects of extreme candidates, prior literature on contrast and assimilation is fairly uninformative with regard to whether effects will spread across party lines.

The baseline null hypothesis is that the effects of extreme candidates do not cross the partisan aisle. This would be perfectly consistent with the Inclusion-Exclusion framework because it would suggest the standard upon which the other-party candidate is being evaluated was not influenced by the extreme candidate, which would suggest that respondents did not draw a broader connection between the two candidates or evaluate them in light of some higher-order standard. However, it is reasonable to expect that candidates from opposing parties will indeed be evaluated with regard to a broad standard such as "politicians in general." If this is the case, there are several outstanding possibilities.

First, it is possible that assimilation occurs for all candidates. Specifically, an extreme candidate may simply cause a shift in the respondent's perception of what "moderate" means, thus leading candidates belonging to the other party to be seen as more centrist. Such an effect would suggest the strategy mentioned above of intentionally branding other-party candidates is a useful tactic because it not only makes mainstream other-party candidates appear more extreme, but also makes fellow copartisan candidates seem more moderate. However, it is equally likely that contrast effects will be observed for all candidates, in which case candidates from the party opposite the extreme candidate would be viewed as more extreme and the extreme candidate's copartisans would be viewed as more moderate. Either finding would be critical because it would suggest the contrast effect on the copartisan candidate was comparison-based (rather than subtraction-based), and so the effects of an extreme candidate can go beyond simply influencing the target immediately following the prime. Figure 1 illustrates the basic possibillities for the effects of an extreme candidate on both copartisan candidates and other-party candidates.

Figure 1: Framework for Contrast and Assimilation Effects on Same- and Other-Party Candidates
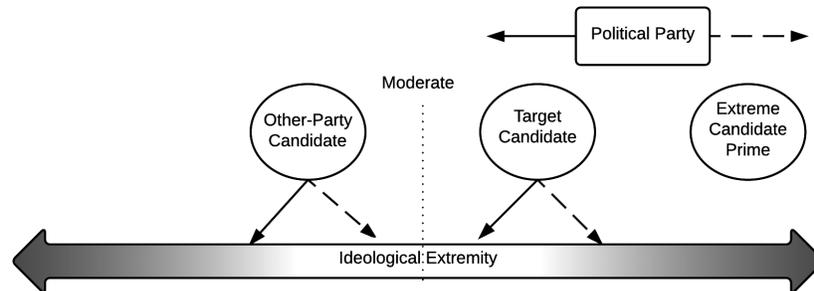
The continuum represents a scale of perceived ideological extremity with moderate in the center. Dashed lines indicate assimilation effects of target evaluations toward the prime (extreme candidate) and solid lines indicate contrast effects of target evaluations away from the prime.

Moderators of Contrast and Assimilation

There are myriad potential moderators for the degree to which contrast or assimilation effects might manifest when individuals are exposed to ideologically extreme candidates, but we examine two potential moderators that we see as critical: the degree to which the respondent sees the extreme candidate as "typical" of their party, and the respondent's own partisan match with the extreme candidate. Our expectation for the role of perceived typicality of the extreme candidate is straightforward and based firmly in the assimilation and contrast literature. Existing work suggests assimilation effects are most likely when the prime is seen as relevant to or representative of the standard, whereas contrast effects are to be expected when the prime is viewed as unrepresentative. Therefore, we argue that contrast effects for copartisan candidates as well as their parties should be most likely when respondents view the extreme candidate as atypical of their party.

It may seem obvious that respondents' party identifications will substantially influence evaluations of candidates. A great deal of research has shown that party affiliation is an extremely powerful (if not the single most dominant) heuristic by which people infer the political stances of candidates and estimate the degree to which those stances match their

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own (Jacoby, 1988; Mondak, 1993; Popkin, 1994). Thus, we expect that besides the effects of the extreme candidate through assimilation or contrast, evaluations of each candidate will also be driven largely (and likely primarily) by participants party identification. However, party identification may also influence perceptions of the extremity of candidates as well as the effects of being primed with an extreme candidate. We expect first of all that individuals will perveive opposite-party candidates as more ideologically extreme than candidates of their own party, because a great deal of research on phenomena such as false consensus has shown that people tend to overestimate the degree to which others share their views (Ross, Greene, and House, 1977). Our expectations for the role of respondents' partisan match with the extreme candidate on the effects of being primed with an extreme candidate are more exploratory. However, it may reasonably be expected that when the extreme candidate is from the opposite party from the respondent, the extreme candidate's more mainstream copartisan will be viewed as more extreme, thus exhibiting an assimilation effect, because the respondent is motivated to see the other party as radical. Further, the other-party candidate (i.e. the candidate from the same party as the participant but the opposite party from the extreme candidate) may be perceived as less extreme due to being primed with the seemingly radical nature of the extreme candidate's party. We would expect these effects to correspond with more negative feelings toward the candidate from the extreme candidate's party and more positive feelings toward the candidate from the party of the participant, as well as shifts in the likelihood of voting for each candidate that exhibit the same pattern. Such a finding would fit with findings that partisanship can act as a social identity (e.g., Huddy, 2001; Huddy and Khatib, 2007), and so individuals are motivated to see their ingroup as favorable relative to an outgroup.

Data, Design, and Measures

Three hundred adults were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) on August 1, 2016 in exchange for $1.75 in compensation. Participants were required to have successfully completed at least 500 MTurk Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs), have been approved for at least 95% of the HITs they completed, and had to reside in the United States. Three participants showed evidence of being duplicates from the same MTurk user, and so two of those cases were removed from the data. This resulted in a sample of 298 adults that were demographically reflective of a typical MTurk sample. Specifically, the sample was 58.4% male, 15.4% nonwhite, 7.4% Hispanic, well-educated (75.2% had at least 2 years of college), and had a median age of 32 years old. Further, the sample was predominantly Democratic (70.8% leaned Democratic) and liberal on a slider scale that ranged from -50 ("Extremely Liberal") to 50 ("Extremely Conservative"), with 0 indicating "Moderate" (M = -14.66, SD = 28.44). Unfortunately, there was some evidence of participants having technical problems with the sliding scales used in the survey. This was evident through emails from some participants, comments left by some participants at the end of the survey, and some participants with extreme negative scores on all sliders (reflecting a problem mentioned by several respondents who were unable to move the sliders rightward). The 18 cases for which slider problems were clearly evident were removed from analyses in which slider scales were used.

The experiment involved reading information about a series of political candidates and answering questions related to those candidates. All candidates were hypothetical, but participants were not told that until the debriefing. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. In the Extreme condition, participants began by being introduced to Mark Stanton, a candidate for Congress from Barnesville, Ohio. Participants were shown a bulleted list of six issue positions held by Stanton, which were in all cases what would reasonably be considered ideologically extreme positions. Stanton was randomly shown to be a Democrat or a Republican, and his ideological stances were always congru-

ent with his party affiliation. If Stanton was a Democrat, participants were told that he, for example, "supports a guaranteed income for all Americans" and "believes that abortion should be legal in all cases, regardless of reason and stage of pregnancy." If Stanton was a Republican, participants were told, among other positions, that he "opposes any minimum wage" and "supports banning abortion regardless of the circumstances" (see Appendix for full descriptions). These issue stances were shown at the top of the screen for each of the survey pages that asked about Stanton. Participants were first asked to describe Stanton in their own words in an open-ended comment. Then, participants placed him on an ideological slider scale that ranged from -50 ("Extremely Liberal") to 50 ("Extremely Conservative"), with 0 indicating "Moderate". They subsequently placed him on the same scale two more times but with regards to economic positions and social positions, specifically. Finally, participants were asked to rate how they felt toward Stanton on a slider scale from -50 ("Extremely negative") to 50 ("Extremely positive"), with 0 indicating "Neither positive nor negative", and how likely they would be to vote for Stanton on a 5-point scale from "Not likely at all" to "Extremely likely". In the Control condition, participants were not shown or asked anything about Mark Stanton.

The next candidate (or the first candidate for those in the Control condition) was Don Ochs, a candidate for Congress from Woodsfield, Ohio. Participants were again shown a bulleted list of six issue positions held by Ochs, but in this case the positions were decidedly more moderate than those of Stanton. Ochs was always of the same party as Stanton in conditions in which Stanton was shown. If Ochs was a Democrat, participants were told that he, for example, "supports a large increase in the minimum wage" and "supports abortion rights except in the third trimester of pregnancy." If he was a Republican, participants were told that he, for example, "opposes raising the minimum wage" and "opposes abortion except in cases of rape or incest." The same exact survey items were then asked regarding Ochs as were asked regarding Stanton.

The final candidate participants were intoduced to was Nicholas Randall, a candidate for

Congress from Caldwell, Ohio. The exact same procedures were followed for Randall as were followed for Ochs, except that Randall was always in the opposite party from Ochs (and thus for those in the Extreme condition, in the opposite party from Stanton as well). The issue positions used for Randall were simply those that would have otherwise been used for Ochs if he were of the opposite party[3]. After being introduced to and asked about all of the candidates, participants were asked who they would vote for between Ochs and Randall (the two "mainstream" candidates)[4].

Participants were then asked how liberal or conservative the Democratic and Republican parties were on a -50 ("Extremely Liberal") to 50 ("Extremely Conservative") slider scale, how they felt toward each party on a -50 ("Extremely negative") to 50 ("Extremely positive") slider scale, and how likely they would be to vote for each party on the same 5-point scale as with the specific candidates. At the end of the survey, participants were asked how similar they perceived each candidate to be to other members of their party on 4-point scales with higher values indicating greater similarity, as well as a series of demographic questions. Stanton was only asked about to those in the Extreme condition. The exact wording for all survey items is available in the Appendix.

To gauge contrast and assimilation effects, we constructed several key variables. Extremity variables were created for both mainstream candidates and their parties. Extremity variables were calculated as the distance between where participants estimated the candidate's/party's ideology to be (on the -50 to 50 scale) and the extreme end of the ideological spectrum *opposite* that which would normally correspond to the candidate's party. In other words, if the candidate was a Republican and the participant marked them at 15, their score on the extremity variable would be 65 because this is 65 points away from -50, which would indicate "Extremely Liberal". Similarly, if the candidate was a Republican and the

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3. Due to a technical error, however, the Republican mainstream candidate, whether Ochs or Randall, was shown with a seventh issue position instead of only six.
4. Participants were first asked with the option of choosing "Don't know" or "Would not vote", but then answered a forced choice question where they had to choose Ochs or Randall. In this manuscript, we combine the two items so that those who chose to abstain at first were forced to choose one of the candidates.

participant marked them at 40, their score on the extremity variable would be 90. The same logic follows for extremity scores for each party. This method of constructing the extremity variable was used instead of simply using the absolute value of the perceived ideology of the candidate to take into account individuals who marked Democrats as conservative or Republicans as liberal (i.e. cases where candidates were placed on the "wrong" side of zero). Such cases were rare, but nonetheless did occur. Therefore, we constructed the variable so that this would be coded as a larger difference than simply placing the candidate or party in the center.

We also constructed a "Stanton typicality" variable to test the hypothesis that viewing Stanton as more similar to and typical of his party will lead to a tendency toward assimilation rather than contrast of the copartisan mainstream candidate (i.e. Ochs). This was constructed from a question asking how similar Stanton was to other candidates of his party (full question wording and coding is available in the Appendix). Those in the Control condition were not exposed to Stanton, and among those in the Extreme condition, only two respondents considered Stanton to be similar to no candidates of his party. Therefore, we constructed a categorical variable whereby participants were split into four categories: the Control condition ("Control"), similar to few or no co-partisan candidates ("Stanton Atypical"), similar to some ("Stanton Somewhat Typical"), and similar to most ("Stanton Very Typical").

Results

We begin with simple bivariate regressions examining whether exposure to the extreme candidate affected evaluations of the extremity of the other two candidates, as well as the two parties. These models are all presented in Table 1.

The first column of Table 1 presents the results for the perceived extremity of the candidate Don Ochs, who again is of the same party as the extreme candidate, Mark Stanton.

Table 1: Effects of condition on evaluations of candidates and their parties

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Extreme Condition	−7.317***	−2.132	1.759	0.556
	(2.083)	(2.009)	(2.177)	(2.104)
Constant	80.878***	81.324***	81.978***	81.827***
	(1.478)	(1.425)	(1.545)	(1.493)
Observations	280	280	280	280
R^2	0.043	0.004	0.002	0.0003
Adjusted R^2	0.039	0.0005	−0.001	−0.003

Ordinary least squares models with standard errors in parentheses. Column 1: Ochs (same-party candidate) extremity; column 2: Randall (opposite-party candidate) extremity; column 3: Ochs's party extremity; Column 4: Randall's party extremity; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Those exposed to Stanton rated Ochs as significantly more moderate than did the control group, a difference of about seven points. Although this seven-point difference is out of 100 possible points, it should be noted that the plausible range for the scale is at most 50 points, as scores less than 50 would indicate rating as Republican as liberal or a Democrat as conservative. This result provides evidence of a contrast effect, rather than an assimilation effect, for the extreme candidate's mainstream copartisan.

We had competing hypotheses for the effects of the treatment on evaluations of the opposite-party candidate, Nicholas Randall. Specifically, it could reasonably be expected that a candidate from the party opposite the extreme candidate would be perceived as more extreme because perceptions of what is "moderate" have shifted, but such a shift may also reasonably lead to the opposite. While the results suggest evaluations of the opposite-party candidate appear to become somewhat more moderate, the effect is fairly small and well short of statistical significance.

Turning to perceptions of the parties more broadly, we expected that exposure to the extreme candidate would lead to more extreme evaluations of the party, i.e. an assimilation effect, consistent with Schwarz and Bless (1992). As shown in Column 3 of Table 1, those

in the treatment group evaluated Stanton's party as more extreme than did those in the control group, but the effect was small and far from statistically significant. We did not have clear expectations for effects on Ochs's party (Column 4), and indeed the treatment effect was small and statistically insignificant.

Table 2 presents results for models in which we interacted condition with partisanship (whether the participant identified with or leaned towards Ochs's or Randall's party) to test whether respondents were more likely to engage in assimilation or contrast with their own party. As seen in Columns 1, 3, and 4, the effects of the manipulation on evaluations of the extremity of the target candidate, his party, or the opposite party are not conditional on partisanship. However, this is not the case for Randall's extremity. As shown in Figure 2, respondents of Ochs's party rate Randall as slightly more extreme when exposed to Ochs, though this effect falls short of conventional levels of significance ($p = .157$). Respondents who identify with or lean toward Randall's party, however, rate him significantly more moderately in the Extreme condition. This interaction suggests that partisans are particularly alert to extremism coming from the other party, and note, perhaps with some pride, that their party's candidate is not such a dangerous radical. This fits in line with the hypothesized role of partisanship acting as a social identity and motivating individuals to see their own candidate as favorable. However, unlike what would subsequently be expected, this process did apply for members of Ochs's party, who were still nonetheless viewed as more moderate in light of the extreme candidate.

Table 2: Interaction between condition and participant's match with Och's party - ideological evaluations

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Extreme Condition	−9.288***	−8.834***	0.647	−2.240
	(2.743)	(2.465)	(2.797)	(2.725)
Member of Ochs's Party	−15.081***	-4.269	−11.155***	3.759
	(2.819)	(2.820)	(2.874)	(2.800)
Extreme Condition ×	4.892	13.292***	1.241	4.197
Member of Ochs's Party	(3.954)	(3.956)	(4.032)	(3.927)
Constant	87.859***	83.634***	88.282***	81.225***
	(1.933)	(1.737)	(1.971)	(1.920)
Observations	272	272	272	272
R^2	0.172	0.051	0.093	0.036
Adjusted R^2	0.040	0.078	0.083	0.026

Ordinary least squares models with standard errors in parentheses. "Ochs's Party" means that the respondent identified with or leaned toward the same party as the prime and target candidates. Column 1: Ochs (same-party candidate) extremity; column 2: Randall (opposite-party candidate) extremity; column 3: Ochs's party extremity; Column 4: Randall's party extremity; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Figure 2: Effects of treatment conditional on respondent's party. Shaded regions indicate 95% confidence intervals.
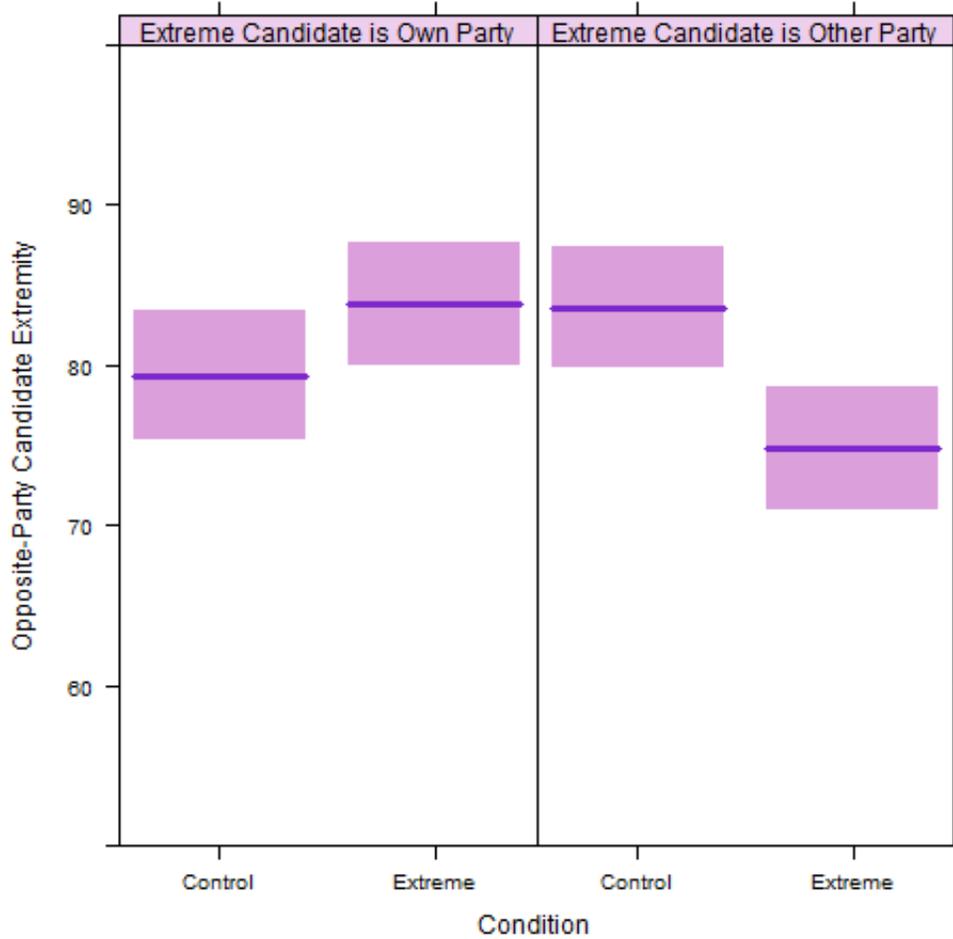
We next examine whether the effect of the manipulation on candidate evaluations is moderated by whether the treatment candidate (Stanton) is viewed by the respondent as typical of his party.[5] Naturally, perceptions of whether the extreme candidate Stanton is representative of his party may be shaped by perceptions of the ideology of the party itself, a factor that might also correlate with evaluations of Ochs. Therefore, in these models, we control for the respondent's perception of the extremity of Ochs's party (which is also

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5. As perceptions of typicality of particular candidates are likely to be largely endogenous to evaluations of the positioning of the parties, we do not present models with the party extremity dependent variables here.

Stanton's party). The results are presented in Table 3, with the control group serving as the omitted category. As shown in column 1, while contrast effects occur for all cases regarding Ochs, they are strongest when Stanton is seen as atypical and weakest when he is seen as very typical; those who consider Stanton atypical rate Ochs 14 points less extreme than do the control group, versus only a five-point effect among those who see him as very typical. Pairwise comparisons show this difference is significant ($b = -9.076$, $p < .05$). The inclusion of the control for perception of party ideology did little to attenuate the effects of typicality, suggesting that these effects come from contrast effects being weakened when the prime is seen as typical, in keeping with prior theory and our hypotheses.

Table 3: Effects of perceived typicality of extreme candidate on evaluations of candidates

	(1)	(2)
Stanton Atypical	-13.871***	3.558
	(3.603)	(3.679)
Stanton Somewhat Typical	-8.425***	-3.835
	(2.391)	(2.442)
Stanton Very Typical	-4.796*	-3.666
	(2.598)	(2.653)
Ochs Party Extremity	0.359***	0.246***
	(0.053)	(0.055)
Constant	51.442***	61.121***
	(4.585)	(4.683)
Observations	280	280
R^2	0.210	0.079
Adjusted R^2	0.199	0.065

Ordinary least squares models with standard errors in parentheses. Control group is omitted category for Stanton typicality variable. Column 1: Ochs (same-party candidate) extremity; column 2: Randall (opposite-party candidate) extremity; *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$.

For the opposite-party candidate, Randall, we see somewhat increased perceptions of extremity among those who see Stanton as atypical, and somewhat decreased extremity

among those who view Stanton as typical, suggesting, as expected, greater contrast away from the extreme candidate when Stanton was seen as atypical. While none of these differences from the control group are statistically significant, those who see Stanton as atypical differ from those who see him as somewhat or very typical by about seven points each, and these differences are statistically significant with one-tailed significance tests (p = .063 and .082, respectively).

We now move from predicting ideological extremity to predicting feelings toward the candidates, as measured by the feeling thermometer sliding scales. These results are presented in Table 4. Just as exposure to the extreme candidate, Stanton, made Ochs appear more moderate, it also made him appear more likable, with a predicted effect of about six points on a −50 to 50 scale. Feelings toward Randall, like perceptions of his extremity, were not significantly affected by the treatment. There was no significant effect on feelings toward the parties; this is consistent with the results for ideological extremism and suggests that evaluations of parties are not moved by exposure to Stanton.

Table 4: Effects of condition on feelings toward candidates and their parties

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Extreme Condition	6.437*	−0.308	1.744	−0.052
	(3.855)	(3.997)	(4.011)	(3.995)
Constant	−9.777***	−0.770	−11.475***	−7.367***
	(2.736)	(2.836)	(2.846)	(2.835)
Observations	280	280	280	280
R^2	0.010	0.00002	0.001	0.00000
Adjusted R^2	0.006	−0.004	−0.003	−0.004

Ordinary least squares models with standard errors in parentheses. Column 1: Feeling thermometer for Ochs (same-party candidate); Column 2: Feeling thermometer for Randall (opposite-party candidate); Column 3: Feeling thermometer for Ochs's party; Column 4: Feeling thermometer for Randall's party; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

The effects on feeling thermometers of perceptions of the extreme candidate's similarity

to co-partisans also echoes the results for extremity, as shown in Table 5. We control for feelings toward Ochs's party, as this is likely to affect both feelings toward Ochs himself and perceptions of Stanton's typicality.[6] Those who believe that Stanton is atypical of his party view the target candidate, Ochs, more favorably than do the control group. The effect is smaller among those who see Ochs as similar only to some candidates of his party, and disappears entirely among those who see him as similar to most co-partisans; indeed, the sign flips, though the difference from the control group falls short of significance. If we assume that increased favorability toward the target candidate is a contrast effect, as extremism can be considered a negative attribute, then these results fit our hypothesis perfectly.

Table 5: Effects of perceived typicality of extreme candidate on feelings toward candidates

	(1)	(2)
Stanton Atypical	18.004***	−16.714***
	(4.637)	(5.965)
Stanton Somewhat Typical	8.406***	1.850
	(3.071)	(3.951)
Stanton Very Typical	−4.208	6.804
	(3.314)	(4.263)
Ochs Party Thermometer	0.692***	−0.569***
	(0.037)	(0.048)
Constant	−1.840	−7.296***
	(1.782)	(2.292)
Observations	280	280
R^2	0.609	0.391
Adjusted R^2	0.603	0.382

Ordinary least squares models with standard errors in parentheses. Control group is omitted category for Stanton typicality variable. Column 1: Feeling thermometer for Ochs (same-party candidate); column 2: Feeling thermometer for Randall (opposite-party candidate); *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

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6. Due to endogeneity concerns, we again do not present models with feelings toward parties as dependent variables.

Meanwhile, those who see Stanton as atypical are less favorably disposed toward the opposite party candidate, Randall. This mirrors the result for extremity, though the differences are stronger here. These results corroborate the narrative that if the extreme candidate is seen as unrepresentative of their party, contrast effects will occur and yield corresponding shifts in favoribility, and can even cross the party aisle.

So far, we have found some evidence for contrast in evaluations; Ochs is viewed more favorably, and as more centrist, when respondents are exposed to the relative extremist Stanton, though this result fades when Stanton is seen as typical. One might ask, however, whether contrast effects merely change ratings on scales, or if they also lead to changes in voting behavior, with the target candidate benefiting from a more moderate image. Our investigation of this question begins with the regressions in Table 6. In these models, in which the dependent variable is the likelihood of voting for a given candidate or party, the answer, generally speaking, appears to be no; in three of the four models, the treatment effect is substantively small and statistically insignificant. The one exception is for the likelihood fo voting for Ochs's party. Here the effect is marginally significant (at the $\alpha = .1$ level), fairly small (a movement of .29 on a five-point scale), and in an unexpected direction: exposure to Stanton leads to a greater likelihood of voting for his (and Ochs's) party.[7] Yet null results are the main story here. Table 7, which presents results from a model of the vote choice between Ochs and Randall, tells us the same story: exposure to Randall has no effect.

These results, however, do not mean that the treatment cannot have any effect on vote choice. Table 8 examines whether the treatment effect is conditional on whether or not Stanton is seen as representative of his party. While neither those who saw Stanton as typical of his party nor those who saw him as atypical are significantly different from the control, those who see him as like almost all members of his party (i.e., "very typical") are significantly less likely to vote for his copartisan Ochs than those who see him as very typical. Again, these results suggest that when Stanton is seen as unrepresentative of the group to

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7. An interaction with ideological distance suggests that this result is strongest among those ideologically closest to extremists of that party.

Table 6: Effects of condition on likelihood of voting for each candidate

Treatment	0.201	−0.085	0.288*	0.070
	(0.164)	(0.170)	(0.173)	(0.172)
Constant	2.163***	2.469***	2.374***	2.592***
	(0.117)	(0.121)	(0.123)	(0.122)
Observations	298	298	298	298
R^2	0.005	0.001	0.009	0.001
Adjusted R^2	0.002	−0.003	0.006	−0.003

Ordinary least squares model with standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is likelihood of voting for a candidate, ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). Column 1: Ochs (same-party candidate); Column 2: Randall (opposite-party candidate); Column 3: Ochs's party; Column 4: Randall's party; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table 7: Effects of condition on vote choice

	Vote Choice
Extreme Condition	−0.024
	(0.232)
Constant	−0.095
	(0.165)
Observations	298
AIC	416.246

Logistic regression model with standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable coded 1 if respondent would vote for Ochs and 0 if respondent would vote for Randall; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

which he belongs, contrast is the result, but when Stanton is seen as typical, assimilation becomes more likely.

Table 8: Effects of perceived typicality of extreme candidate on vote choice

	Vote Choice
Stanton Atypical	1.395
	(0.949)
Stanton Somewhat Typical	0.331
	(0.591)
Stanton Very Typical	−0.747
	(0.648)
Ochs's Party	3.559***
	(0.555)
Ideological Distance from Ochs's Party	−0.036***
	(0.011)
Constant	0.048
	(0.824)
Observations	272
Log Likelihood	−67.460
AIC	146.920

Logistic regression model with standard errors in parentheses. "Ochs's Party" means that the respondent identified with or leaned toward the same party as the prime and target candidates. Dependent variable coded 1 if respondent would vote for Ochs and 0 if respondent would vote for Randall; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

In Table 9, we test the same set of independent variables but use the likelihood of voting for each candidate or party as the dependent variable; we see that only those who see Stanton as atypical are more likely to vote for Ochs compared to the control group. To a lesser extent, those who see Stanton as atypical of his party are less likely to vote for his party and more likely to vote for Randall's.

Table 9: Effects of perceived typicality of extreme candidate on likelihood of voting for each candidate

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Stanton Atypical	0.647***	−0.155	0.419**	0.050
	(0.213)	(0.220)	(0.203)	(0.193)
Stanton Somewhat Typical	0.132	−0.095	0.284**	0.080
	(0.142)	(0.147)	(0.135)	(0.129)
Stanton Very Typical	0.014	0.153	0.019	0.251*
	(0.153)	(0.158)	(0.146)	(0.138)
Ochs's Party	1.263***	−1.192***	1.396***	−1.172***
	(0.193)	(0.199)	(0.184)	(0.175)
Ideological Distance from Ochs's Party	−0.014***	0.017***	−0.017***	0.022***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Constant	2.337***	2.061***	2.693***	1.948***
	(0.262)	(0.270)	(0.249)	(0.237)
Observations	272	272	272	272
R^2	0.579	0.576	0.660	0.685
Adjusted R^2	0.571	0.568	0.654	0.679

Ordinary least squares model with standard errors in parentheses. "Ochs's Party" means that the respondent identified with or leaned toward the same party as the prime and target candidates. Dependent variable is likelihood of voting for a candidate, ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). Column 1: Ochs (same-party candidate); Column 2: Randall (opposite-party candidate); Column 3: Ochs's party; Column 4: Randall's party; *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$.

Conclusion

We find that extreme candidates can affect perceptions of co-partisans. Most of the effects we found were contrast effects, with respondents exposed to an extreme candidate evaluating a co-partisan more moderately and more favorably than those who did not see the extremist. However, this effect is moderated by perceptions of how representative the extreme candidate was of his party. Those who saw him as less typical exhibited stronger contrast effects, in keeping with our expectations. The treatment rarely affected evaluations of the parties themselves suggest that these parties have a relatively stable brand, though one would be unwise to expect a large effect on evaluations of parties from exposure to a single fictional congressional candidate. The lack of an effect on parties may be an artifact of the hypothetical nature of the experiment, but it is also reasonable to expect the priors that come along with the contemporary Democratic and Republican parties may be largely resistant to being influenced by the occasional extreme candidate.

Finally, while we find no direct effects on vote choice, those who consider the extreme candidate as typical of his party become less likely to vote for his co-partisan, while those who see him as unrepresentative are more likely to do so. This results is particularly important because it suggests these findings are not indicative merely of shifts in the subjective evaluations of what points on a scale mean. Rather, it seems that increased salience of extreme candidates on the political landscape may have concrete implications for electoral outcomes in some cases. Specifically, if extreme candidates are able to embed themselves into the electorate's vision of what the party stands for, it may have detrimental consequences for more moderate members of that party.

Yet if contrast indeed predominates when extreme candidates are identified as unrepresentive of their party, it suggests that, far from hurting their party, extreme candidates – as long as they do not win the nomination – can actually improve its chances in a general election, where centrist candidates are advantaged. Regarding the 2016 election, this suggests that Clinton's standing among centrist voters may be better off than it would have without

the strong challenge from her left from Bernie Sanders, and had Rubio been the Republican nominee, efforts to paint him as a right-wing ideologue would have been more difficult because voters might have associated those labels with Cruz or Trump instead. However, it is reasonable to argue that such benefits may fade somewhat by the time the general election concludes, as the extreme adversaries in the primary become a distant memory. Additional research is necessary to examine the durability and longevity of these effects.

That contrast was the dominant effect in these results should not be taken as proof that this is always the primary effect of extreme candidates on evaluations of co-partisans. That those who saw the extreme prime, Stanton, as more typical of the party exhibited weaker contrast effects – and sometimes even assimilation effects – is evidence that assimilation is possible, and changes to a few details of the experiment, or the political environment, might lead assimilation to predominate. For example, a greater emphasis on the shared partisanship of the prime and the relatively-moderate target (Ochs, in this experiment) would most likely promote assimilation, as the prime would then be seen as more relevant to the target. Furthermore, unlike Donald Trump, Stanton was a mere congressional candidate, not the party's standard bearer for the presidential election. Therefore, there is little reason to see him as representing the party, but a more prominent role for Stanton might change this and promote an assimilation effect for both members of his party and for evaluations of the party itself. Finally, we exclusively considered ideology, but traits such as civility, compassion, honesty, and many others can also be subject to assimilation and contrast effects. We plan to explore these and other avenues in future research.

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Appendix

Candidate Descriptions

Mark Stanton, Extreme candidate: Democrat

- He supports a universal, fully government-run healthcare system.

- He supports a guaranteed income for all Americans.

- He supports cutting the military budget in half.

- He supports increasing taxes, including raising taxes on the wealthy to their highest levels in history.

- He believes that only members of the police and military should be allowed to carry guns.

- He believes that abortion should be legal in all cases, regardless of reason and stage of pregnancy.

Mark Stanton, Extreme candidate: Republican

- He supports a fully private healthcare system.

- He opposes any minimum wage.

- He supports doubling military spending.

- He supports cutting taxes, including reducing taxes on the wealthy to their lowest levels in history.

- He opposes all restrictions on gun purchases.

- He supports banning abortion regardless of the circumstances.

Mainstream Democrat (either Don Ochs or Nicholas Randall)

- He supports an expansion of healthcare to provide insurance to all Americans, though he does not support eliminating private health insurance providers.

- He supports a large increase in the minimum wage.

- He supports slightly reducing the military budget.

- He supports moderately raising taxes and increasing the share paid by wealthy indi-

viduals.

- He supports a ban on assault weapons and on convicted felons carrying guns.

- He supports abortion rights except in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Mainstream Republican (either Don Ochs or Nicholas Randall)

- He supports increased privatization of health insurance.

- He support slightly increasing the military budget.

- He supports cutting programs that assist the very poor and disabled.

- He opposes raising the minimum wage.

- He supports tax cuts, including some on the wealthy.

- He generally opposes restrictions on gun purchases but supports preventing those convicted of violent felonies from buying certain guns.

- He opposes abortion except in cases of rape or incest.

Survey Items

Open-ended Candidate Evaluation

First, we would like you to describe [candidate] in your own words. Please briefly write down any words or phrases that come to mind with regard to traits and characteristics that you think [candidate] possesses that have not previously been stated.

Ideological Perceptions

Where would you place [candidate/party] in terms of ideology? Please move the slider below to reflect where you believe him to stand ideologically, with more negative numbers indicating more liberal and more positive numbers indicating more conservative.

Ideological Perceptions - economic issues

Where would you place [candidate/party] in terms of ideology, specifically with regard to economic issues? Please move the slider below to reflect where you believe him to stand ideologically in terms of economic issues, with more negative numbers indicating more liberal and more positive numbers indicating more conservative.

Ideological Perceptions - social issues

Where would you place [candidate/party] in terms of ideology, specifically with regard to social issues? Please move the slider below to reflect where you believe him to stand ideologically in terms of social issues, with more negative numbers indicating more liberal and more positive numbers indicating more conservative.

Feelings toward Candidate

How positively or negatively do you feel toward [candidate/party]? Please move the slider below to reflect how you feel, with more negative numbers indicating more negative feelings and more positive numbers indicating more positive feelings.

Vote Likelihood

How likely would you be to vote for [candidate/party]?

(5-point scale from "Not likely at all" to "Extremely likely")

Vote Choice

In an election between Don Ochs and Nicholas Randall, who would you vote for?

Don Ochs - the candidate described just before Randall

Nicholas Randall - the candidate described most recently

Don't know

Would not vote

If you had to choose between Don Ochs and Nicholas Randall, who would you vote for?

Don Ochs - the candidate described just before Randall

Nicholas Randall - the candidate described most recently

Candidate Typicality

Given the description of [candidate] (the [n^{th}] candidate presented), would you say he was:

Similar to most other candidates of the [party]

Similar to some other candidates of the [party]

Similar to few other candidates of the [party]

Similar to no other candidates of the [party]

*There were very few cases in the "similar to no other candidates" category and so this response option was combined with the "similar to few other candidates" response option in order to comprise the "atypical" category for analyses.