

Trait Ownership and Trait Effects in U.S. Senate Elections

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Abstract: The effect of candidate traits on voting behavior in U.S. congressional elections is uncertain, because little research has sought to extend existing theory beyond presidential contests. In this paper, I use unique survey data from the 2006 midterm campaigns to test the theory of “trait ownership” in U.S. Senate elections. I find that voters stereotype candidates’ personal attributes based on party reputations and reward candidates who “trespass” on their opponents’ trait territory, as in presidential campaigns. In contrast to presidential contests, however, incumbency gives sitting Senators strong advantages on the trait of leadership, which is particularly influential in congressional voting behavior. The findings provide evidence for the portability of trait theories from presidential to congressional contests, but show that scholars must pay special attention to the role of incumbency in conditioning their effects.

What role do U.S. voters' assessments of candidates' personal attributes play in shaping their choices at the ballot box? In the last four decades, scholars have devoted considerable effort to answering this question at the presidential level (Bartels 2002a; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Stokes 1966). Those studies provide evidence that some voters may be moved to support a candidate because of his personal qualities, such as a strong set of leadership skills. But in congressional elections, there is surprisingly sparse evidence that the same dynamic is at work, and some reason to suspect that the influence of candidate personality is different than in presidential contests. As a result, we know relatively little about how important ingredients candidate traits are in vote choice in legislative contests.

There are two reasons for this uncertainty. First, the applicability of existing theory to sub-presidential elections has not been established. The magnitude and nature of personality effects in presidential contests is at least partially the product of their unique electoral circumstances: a highly saturated information environment, non-stop television exposure to candidates, and nominees who, by virtue of an intense primary process, typically possess most of the attributes that voters care about. These conditions do not characterize most congressional campaigns. And other factors—including the power of incumbency—may attenuate or alter the effects of trait perceptions on voting behavior in House and Senate elections. Second, few national surveys of congressional voters have included appropriate measures of trait perceptions, inhibiting scholars' ability to empirically examine the role of personality assessments in legislative contests. The studies often cited as providing evidence for trait effects in House and Senate elections are based on experiments or survey measures that have been widely challenged in the voting literature.

This paper focuses on U.S. Senate campaigns to attempt to improve our understanding of this element of congressional elections. I test whether the theory of “trait ownership” (Hayes 2005)—which posits that candidate party affiliation strongly affects how voters in presidential elections view their personal attributes—illuminates the role candidate personality plays in shaping voting in Senate contests. To do so, I analyze survey data from the Congressional Cooperative Election Study in 30 U.S. Senate races during the 2006 midterm elections. The survey includes measures of trait perceptions that are rarely included on congressional election surveys, overcoming the data limitations of previous studies.

The findings show that candidate traits play a similarly influential role in Senate as in presidential campaigns—but with some important differences. I find support for “trait ownership,” as Senate candidates, like their presidential counterparts, are stereotyped according to their party label; Democrats tend to be perceived as significantly more compassionate and empathetic than Republican politicians. Consequently, candidates in Senate contests gain electoral advantages by “trespassing” on their opponent’s trait territory. At the same time, incumbency gives sitting Senators’ trait advantages that incumbent presidents do not receive, which makes leadership a particularly important attribute in Senate contests. In general, the findings provide evidence for the portability of trait theories from presidential to congressional contests, but show that scholars must pay special attention to the role of incumbency in conditioning their effects.

Trait Effects and Trait Ownership

Stokes’ (1966) seminal work on the presidential campaigns of 1952-1964 saw a candidate’s personal attributes as a dynamic element of the political environment, a potential source of electoral change. Whereas party identification and group attachments shifted glacially (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell, et al. 1960), the electorate’s

reactions to the candidates themselves were quite variable. Stokes (1966, 23) argued that the public's response to a "candidate's smile, the timbre of his voice, his smoothness in dealing with the teleprompter, his willingness to suffer fools gladly" helped explain Eisenhower's success in the 1950s and the Democrats' in the following decade. Perceptions of candidate attributes, he concluded, can be central to voters' choices.

Subsequent research has validated Stokes' argument. Drawing on psychological research on person perception, a substantial literature has demonstrated how voters' assessments of presidential candidate traits vary across and within campaigns, and that these perceptions influence candidate evaluation and vote choice (e.g., Hayes 2005; Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004; Kinder et al. 1980; Prysby 2008; Sullivan et al. 1990; see Bartels 2002a for a review). While reasonable scepticism persists about the magnitude of the effects of candidate personality (Bartels 2002a; Kilburn 2005), the consensus is that it plays a role.

Recent work has sought to clarify the origins of voters' perceptions of candidate traits, and to better understand the way those evaluations can affect vote choice. Building on Petrocik's (1996) theory of "issue ownership, Hayes (2005) posits that political parties come to "own" personality traits associated with particular issues.¹ Drawing on psychological studies of trait perception, the theory suggests that voters make inferences about candidate character based on their party label and behavior on the campaign trail (Cantor and Mischel 1979; Rapoport, Metcalf, and Hartman 1989). Since Republican candidates typically emphasize themes of national security, law and order, and traditional values, voters associate GOP politicians with the traits of leadership and morality. At the same time, because Democratic candidates focus their attention on promoting the interests of the less fortunate,

¹ For other work on issue ownership and related concepts, see, among others, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994); Budge and Farlie (1983); Holian (2004); Petrocik, Benoit, Hansen (2003-04); Egan (2009); Sides (2006, 2007).

voters tend to view them as compassionate and empathetic. Over time, the parties have developed ownership of these attributes, a phenomenon that may also stem from differences in the traits prioritized by Democratic and Republican primary voters (Barker, Lawrence, and Tavits 2006).

The partisan stereotypes at the core of “trait ownership” theory have electoral consequences. Data from the 1980-2004 presidential campaigns show that candidates benefit most by “trespassing” (Norpoth and Buchanan 1992) on traits their party does not own, eroding an opponent’s party-based advantage (Hayes 2005, 917-20). This dynamic emerges from an “expectations gap” theory of information processing (Aronson and Linder 1965; Kimball and Patterson 1997): Because citizens expect the two parties to be particularly representative of certain traits, they disproportionately reward candidates who “over-perform” by positively defying those expectations. For example, Republicans make gains by being perceived as caring, while Democrats benefit most by being seen as strong leaders. Candidates also win votes by holding advantages on owned traits, but the effects are larger when they successfully “trespass” on an opponent’s trait territory.

Why Traits Might Matter Less—or Differently—in Senate Campaigns

It is not clear, however, whether trait ownership theory applies to Senate campaigns, in part because the context in which congressional elections typically occur is very different from a race for the White House.² For one, Senate candidates may be less likely to be stereotyped on the basis of national party images than presidential nominees. State-wide candidates are somewhat more removed from the national party than presidential candidates, which may mean voters are less inclined to infer candidate attributes from party images. This

² We also do not know whether the theory applies to other non-presidential contests. But I emphasize Senate campaigns here, since that is the focus of this study.

notion receives support from studies showing that candidates in low-information elections can be stereotyped on the basis of gender or occupation, which may weaken the influence of party cues (McDermott 1997, 2005). Thus, party reputations may be rendered less consequential in shaping perceptions of Senate candidate traits.

Other features of Senate campaigns could attenuate the effects of candidate personality on vote choice. If the influence of candidate personality is amplified by televised exposure to candidates (Druckman 2003; Hart 1999; Keeter 1987), then the lower levels of television exposure in Senate campaigns may make candidate personality matter less. A common argument is that presidential elections have become “personalized” as a result of voters’ exposure to candidates in television advertising, televised debates events, and news stories that probe presidential candidates’ personal strengths and foibles (see Hayes 2009 for a review), non-stop cable coverage of campaign. While some Senate campaigns see presidential-like levels of television exposure, such cases are rare (Kahn and Kenney 1999). Moreover, Kahn and Kenney (1999, p.56, 125) show that both Senate advertising and news coverage emphasize traits at a much lower rate than issues. Both of these factors may serve to make candidates’ personal attributes less salient as a criterion for judgment.

Perhaps most importantly, the formidable power of incumbency may attenuate the effect of party stereotyping on voters’ opinions of candidate traits and alter the effect of those traits on vote choice (Jacobson 2004). Members of Congress see their personal image as central to their re-election prospects, and go to great lengths to keep it burnished. Thus, incumbents may hold trait advantages over non-incumbents that override the effects of party stereotyping, a pattern that is not consistent in presidential campaigns (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Fenno 1978, 2007). And because personal attributes are so central to incumbents’ connections with their constituents, candidate personality may matter

considerably more in incumbent re-election contests than in open seat races. This suggests a conditional effects hypothesis—traits may play a larger role in vote choice when an incumbent is running for re-election.³

Finally, a difference in the role of traits in presidential and Senate campaigns may stem from the traits voters see as salient. It may be that because members of legislative bodies are not unitary actors, voters are less concerned with their leadership abilities than in the case of a president or mayor, whose office requires a good deal of symbolic and political strength. Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b) find in a laboratory experiment that perceptions of a candidate's leadership abilities were a stronger predictor of vote choice in executive than legislative contests, but that conclusion has not been subjected to a test in an actual campaign. Similarly, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) suggest that one of the chief attributes that citizens want in their political representatives is that they are “empathetic,” perhaps making that attribute especially powerful in legislative contests.⁴ Studies of presidential campaigns find leadership to be a central component of candidate evaluation, but it bears exploration whether the same is true for Senate contests. Miller (1990), looking at evaluations of House and Senate candidates, suggests that matters of integrity and competence (as well as issues) are particularly important in Senate campaigns, whereas in House campaigns more superficial criteria, such as candidate charisma, are more likely to matter. Though this paper is not focused on differences across House and Senate races, the existing literature suggests that the traits that matter in Senate campaigns may be different than those are most important matter in presidential contests.

³ The existing research on this point is not clear. Miller (1990) finds voters are more likely to mention personal characteristics as reasons to support or oppose incumbents than their challengers. The same was not true, however, in Jacobson and Wolfinger's (1989) study of the 1980 and 1986 U.S. Senate elections in California.

⁴ This contention is part of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's (2002) argument that citizens want their representatives to be “ENSIDs”: empathetic, non-self interested decision makers.

Why Traits Might Matter Similarly in Senate Campaigns

At the same time, however, there are reasons to suspect that trait attribution and trait influence may look similar in Senate and presidential campaigns. First, with respect to the patterns of trait attribution predicted by “trait ownership,” the power of the party cue may be quite robust in Senate elections. Voters routinely make inferences about politicians’ attributes, ideology, and issue positions based on their party affiliation (Feldman and Conover 1983; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Rahn 1993). Party affiliation’s influence has been shown to be pronounced in elections at all levels, not just presidential contests (e.g., Koch 2002; Squire and Smith 1988).

Second, the relatively low-information contexts of Senate campaigns may make the party heuristic even more powerful as a cue. To the extent that party identification is the most accessible piece of information about candidates at voters’ disposal, trait evaluations should reflect partisan stereotypes (Huckfeldt et al. 1999; Taylor and Fiske 1978). Third, in an era of increasing elite partisan polarization and a reinvigoration of mass partisanship, candidates should have a harder time distancing themselves from the national party image (Bartels 2000; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2002). Moreover, because of the divergence of the parties, Senate candidate nominees have an incentive to take orthodox party positions on most issues, which should reinforce the reputations that Hayes (2005) theorizes are the source of trait assessments. When a Democratic Senate candidate talks about raising the minimum wage or expanding Social Security benefits, this reinforces the perception of the Democratic Party as the more empathetic one. Thus, trait ownership should obtain in Senate elections.

There are also reasons to suspect that trait assessments will affect voting behavior in a similar fashion as in presidential contests. First, because voters are efficient consumers and

users of political information, perceptions of candidates' personal attributes are particularly attractive pieces of data. Trait inferences are nearly automatic in person perception and people are quite willing to make judgments about candidates' attributes (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Fridkin and Kenney 2007; Fiske and Taylor 1991; McGraw 2003). As a result, evaluations of candidate personality are "cheap," easily acquired and easily interpreted (Popkin 1994). This is especially true compared with a candidate's ideological orientation or policy positions. Voters may have a hard time discerning the fiscal wisdom of a candidate's tax proposal, but they are quite comfortable judging whether he is trustworthy or inspiring. The relatively little research that has directly tested the effects candidate trait perceptions on vote choice has found significant effects (Druckman 2004; Jacobson and Wolfinger 1989; Miller 1990).

In addition, legislative representation in the U.S. is in fact "personalized" by incumbents who make special effort to make their constituents comfortable with them as people (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987). Fenno (1978) argues based on his observation of members of Congress that "presentation of self" to their constituents is critical. Their interactions with voters are not issueless—that is, devoid of policy content—but much of their engagement with constituents, both between and during campaigns, is designed to develop a personal connection. The hope is that on election day, these positive feelings translate into a vote for re-election. "The expression [a member of Congress] tries to give off in all his person-to-person dealings is that he knows them, that they know him as a person, that they are all part of the same community, and that his constituents, therefore, have every reason to make favorable inferences about him," Fenno (1978, 65) writes. Jacobson (2004, 94) notes that members of Congress often gain and maintain office by "eliciting trust and

regard as individuals,” underscoring the point made by Fenno’s campaign trail observations. Thus, personality may be as relevant as it is in presidential contests.

These conflicting theoretical expectations have not been resolved by the literature. The extant research falls into three categories. First, scholars have focused on the levels of trait content in candidate communications and news coverage finding non-trivial but not saturation levels of personal information about candidates (Druckman and Parkin 2005; Kahn and Kenney 1999; Kahn and Gordon 1997). Second, as a way of probing voters’ perceptions of candidate personality and their effects on vote choice in congressional contests, scholars have turned to the laboratory experiment (Funk 1997; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Iyengar et al. 1997; Todorov et al. 2005). Valuably, these studies have identified cognitive processes that illuminate voter decision-making. But they do not provide evidence of the influence of candidate traits in an actual election, amid the cacophony of a real-world campaign.⁵

Finally, a handful of studies have examined the effect of trait perceptions on candidate evaluation and voting in actual elections, but each is limited in important ways. Miller (1990) and Jacobson and Wolfinger (1989) find that trait perceptions influenced voting in House and Senate contests, based on analyses of citizens’ responses to open-ended likes/dislikes questions. Those findings are subject to question, however, given the questions that have been raised about the amount of amount of rationalization in the likes/dislikes responses (Rahn, Krosnick, and Breuning 1994; Smith 1989). Scholars have argued that the questions do not measure the actual criteria by which voters choose; instead they reflect “top of the head” considerations that are merely rationalizations of a pre-existing choice.

Druckman’s (2004; Druckman and Parkin 2005) work on the 2000 Minnesota Senate

⁵ Similar findings have emerged in experimental work on legislative elections outside of the United States (*e.g.*, Johns and Shephard 2008).

campaign employs better trait measures, but its conclusions, based on a study of a single race, are necessarily limited.⁶ Thus, a comprehensive examination of candidate trait effects using appropriate measures is necessary to determine whether the same theories that apply at the presidential level are applicable to lower-level contests. An empirical test would also serve to test whether “trait ownership” as a theory is limited to presidential elections, or whether it is generalizable as an explanation for how traits can matter across campaign contexts.

The following analyses test these hypotheses using data from a nationally representative survey of voters in Senate campaigns during the 2006 campaign. The new data set overcomes the limitations of earlier studies by using closed-ended measures of trait perceptions—identical to those used to tap voters’ assessments of presidential candidate traits in the National Elections Studies—rather than likes/dislikes batteries, collecting data from more than one race, and directly testing the effects of trait evaluations in actual elections, while controlling for other factors known to shape candidate evaluations. The results should shed light on the role candidate personality plays in U.S. Senate contests and yield a sense of whether presidential trait theories are portable to lower-level elections.

Data

The data for this study come from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a collaborative enterprise of more than three dozen academic institutions that organized a survey of Americans during the 2006 midterm elections. The survey was conducted by Polimetrix, Inc. Each university was given the opportunity to design a

⁶ Grose and Globetti (2007) find that traits influenced vote choice in the 2006 midterm Senate contests, but some of the respondents in their study were purposely exposed to candidate ads that “primed” trait considerations. McCurley and Mondak (1995) conduct an interesting study in which they find that candidates’ integrity and competence are closely related to their electoral success. But these traits are assigned by the authors based on candidate background and biographies, not voter perception.

questionnaire administered to 1,000 randomly sampled Americans, who also filled out a longer survey of “common content” questions. The key measures in this paper were included in the [institution name] module in the CCES.⁷ The survey included a host of measures typical in congressional election studies: demographic questions, positions on issues, ideological views, candidate evaluation, and vote choice.

The [institution name] module also included questions about the personality traits of the Republican and Democratic senate candidates in the respondent’s state. As noted, such questions are rare in congressional surveys.

Because of survey time constraints, roughly half of the 1,000-person sample was asked the trait battery. In all, the trait measures were asked of about 500 respondents from 30 states with Senate elections in 2006.⁸ Though the sample does not constitute a random draw within each state, the large number of elections allow for an examination of trait perceptions and their effects across a range of races with differing characteristics.

Aggregating survey respondents from multiple states is a common approach in U.S. Senate election research (Kahn and Kenney 1999; Lau and Pomper 2001). Table A-1 displays the candidates, their incumbency status, and the states included in the study.

Respondents were asked to assess the candidates on four traits: “provides strong leadership,” “moral,” “compassionate,” and “really cares about people like me.”⁹ Following

⁷ More information about CCES and Polimetrix, Inc., the firm that conducted the Internet-based survey, is available at <http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/index.html>. One post-survey analysis (Hill et al. 2007) shows that the CCES sample was slightly better informed, slightly younger, and slightly more educated than respondents in the 2004 National Election Studies, but that these differences are not large.

⁸ This paper does not include data from three states with unusual circumstances in their 2006 Senate races. In Indiana, Republican Richard Lugar faced no Democratic opposition. In Connecticut, Democrat Joe Lieberman won re-election as an independent, beating out a Republican and Democratic opponent. And in Vermont, independent Bernie Sanders won election in a contest without an official Democratic candidate.

⁹ It would be ideal to have a larger battery of trait questions. But because of limitations on the number of questions that could be included in the survey, the measures were restricted to the characteristics central to the trait ownership argument. Even though the battery is smaller than the group of traits included on, for example, the ANES, it does account for three of the four key dimensions of personal attribute evaluation. Previous work has identified leadership, integrity, empathy, and competence as critical trait dimensions (see Funk 1997;

the standard wording of the National Election Studies trait batteries, respondents were asked a question in this format: “Think about Rick Santorum, the Republican candidate for U.S. senator. In your opinion, does the phrase ‘provides strong leadership’ describe Rick Santorum extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?” Respondents were asked to rate both Republican and Democratic candidates on each trait. The responses were initially coded so that “extremely well” received a score of 3, “quite well” a score of 2, “not too well” a score of 1, and “not well at all” a score of 0. Following Bartels (2002a), I transformed these values into a 0-100 rating to ease the interpretation of the descriptive data.¹⁰

Party Stereotyping and Incumbency: How Do Voters See Senate Candidate Traits?

The responses to these measures allow for a test of the trait ownership hypothesis and the incumbency hypothesis. If partisan stereotyping affects perceptions of Senate candidates, then the patterns of trait ownership apparent at the presidential level should be present in these data. Republican candidates should be perceived more favorably than Democrats on the leadership and morality measures, while Democrats should hold an advantage on compassion and really cares about people like me, the latter of which is a proxy for empathy. The incumbency hypothesis predicts that incumbents will be perceived more favorably than challengers or open-seat candidates.

Kinder 1986). Leadership is tapped by the “provides strong leadership” measure. Empathy is tapped by the “really cares...” and “compassionate” questions. Integrity is tapped by the “moral” measure. The most important weakness of the battery is the absence of the competence measures. While this is a shortcoming, the omission of a single trait dimension is unlikely to produce substantively different results than if it was included. Ultimately, the traits used here represent a salient range of qualities that tap key components of candidate evaluation.

¹⁰ Specifically, a score of 0 remained 0, 1 was converted to 33.3, 2 was converted to 66.7, and 3 was converted to 100. The results are substantively no different if the original coding is employed.

Figure 1 presents the results of the testing of the trait ownership hypothesis. The darker bars represent the average rating on the four traits for Republican Senate candidates; the lighter bars represent the average rating for Democrats.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The hypothesis finds mixed support. The comparisons for leadership and morality show little evidence of Republican ownership. While GOP candidates received slightly higher morality ratings than Democrats—52.4 to 51.7—the difference is not statistically significant ($p=.79$). Moreover, Democrats received higher leadership ratings than Republicans, at 50.8 to 48.9. The difference falls short statistical significance ($p=.42$), but the important point is that the expected Republican advantage does not emerge.

On the other hand, as predicted by the trait ownership hypothesis, Democrats held large advantages on their party's traits. Democratic candidates on average received a rating of 55.4 on compassion, compared to 44.8 for Republicans, a statistically significant difference of more than 10 points ($p<.05$). Likewise, survey respondents saw Democratic candidates as significantly more empathetic than Republicans, giving them a nearly 8-point advantage on “really cares about people like me,” 45.9 to 38.2 ($p<.05$). Notably, the empathy ratings for both parties are the lowest among the four measures, revealing the public view that politicians, regardless of party, may not have citizens' best interests at heart (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). Given the prevailing mood during the 2006 midterms—61% of registered voters in mid-October thought the country was on the “wrong track”¹¹—it is not surprising that Senate candidates were perceived fairly unfavorably on this dimension.¹²

¹¹ NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll taken October 13-16, 2006. Results retrieved from www.pollingreport.com.

¹² Figures 1 and 2 exclude respondents who did not rate one of the candidates on the particular trait. In other words, the comparisons reflect only the responses of individuals who were willing to rate both the Republican and Democratic candidates on the specific trait. Depending on the trait, this eliminates roughly 90 of the 558 respondents, but the results are not substantively different when the responses of these individuals are

The evidence in Figure 1 suggests the anti-Republican sentiment in the country at the time of the 2006 midterms substantially affected voters' ratings of the GOP candidates' traits. It seems likely that the overall displeasure with the Republican Congress, George W. Bush, and the war in Iraq permeated citizens' judgments about all aspects of the party's candidates, including their personality traits (Jacobson 2007). This may have led to lower than normal ratings on the leadership and moral measures. Given the very low baseline of Republican support, the fact that the GOP did not "lose" these trait comparisons to the Democrats, even in the face of such public discontent, suggests the power of partisan stereotypes. The default Republican advantage allowed them to at least "tie" the Democrats on these dimensions, even scoring slightly higher morality ratings, despite the scandal involving Florida Republican Congressman Mark Foley's communications with congressional pages. Whether this is evidence for "ownership" of GOP traits is debatable, but it seems to point to the relevance of partisan stereotyping in the process of trait attribution.

Just as the evidence for trait ownership is mixed, so is the evidence for the incumbency hypothesis. Figure 2 presents comparisons between incumbents and challengers/open seat candidates.¹³ The top panel presents data for Republican candidates, and the bottom panel analyzes Democrats. I separate the presentation as a way of "controlling" for the partisan differences evident in Figure 1 and simplifying the examination of the incumbency hypothesis.¹⁴

included. In those analyses, there are no significant differences on leadership and morality, and significant Democratic advantages on compassion and really cares about people like me.

¹³ The results in Figure 2 are no different if the comparisons are restricted only to incumbents and challengers.

¹⁴ I also examined whether there is an "interactive" relationship between incumbency and party affiliation. When Republican and Democratic incumbents are compared to one another, the patterns of trait attribution look the same as in Figure 1. The same is true when non-incumbents of both parties are compared. In other words, there is no interaction between incumbency and party affiliation—the role of party stereotyping is similar within both groups. These results are available from the author.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Looking first at the Republicans, incumbents' traits were generally viewed more favorably than non-incumbents', as expected. All of the differences except for the empathy measure are statistically significant. On that trait, incumbents held a negligible 38.4 to 38.0 advantage. The picture for the Democrats is less clear. Democratic incumbents were perceived as stronger leaders than non-incumbents (55.5 to 46.0, $p < .05$) and marginally more moral (53.7 to 49.7, $p < .10$). But incumbents held no advantage over their fellow partisans on the Democratic traits of compassion and empathy. In neither case are the differences statistically significant.

Figure 2 suggests the trait advantage that accrues to incumbents may be limited to the attributes associated with experience in office. Among the four traits, the only one to find significant differences in both parties is leadership. The result dovetails with Fridkin and Kenney's (2007) finding that the largest differences between incumbents and challengers emerge on the traits of leadership and experience.¹⁵ Voters may see their experienced incumbents as having accrued leadership skills during their time in Congress, but may not be any more likely to ascribe to them traits associated with caring. There is nothing about having held office previously that necessarily makes a politician seem more compassionate or empathetic, which may explain the smaller or non-existent differences on those traits.

The results show that party affiliation and incumbency influence trait perceptions, but the way this occurs is somewhat complicated. Party stereotypes clearly shape the way Senate voters see the traits of Republican and Democratic candidates, though the effect in 2006 was more pronounced on the Democratic than Republican traits. And while

¹⁵ Fridkin and Kenney (2007) find large and significant differences between incumbents and challengers on both traits. In competitive contests, incumbents hold an advantage only on experience, though this may be a reflection of the "quality challenger" effect in competitive contests (see Jacobson 2004).

incumbents did not hold large and consistent advantages across the four specific traits, both parties' incumbents were perceived as substantially stronger leaders than challengers and open-seat candidates. Since leadership has in presidential elections been strongly related to vote choice, this advantage may prove especially important in the way voters choose between candidates.

The next questions address whether and how these perceptions influence voters' attitudes when they vote. Specifically, does the influence of traits vary depending on whether a candidate is an incumbent? Do the same traits influence Senate campaign voting behavior as influence presidential voting behavior? And do candidates benefit from "trespassing" on the opposing party's traits.

Trait Effects in U.S. Senate Elections

The basic hypothesis is that, controlling for other factors known to shape candidate evaluation, individuals' perceptions of their Senate candidates' traits will influence their vote choice. Testing this hypothesis requires a model explaining a respondent's vote. The dependent variable is the respondent's self-reported vote choice from the CCES post-election survey. The variable is coded 1 for a vote for the GOP candidate, 0 for the Democrat.

The key independent variable is a comparative trait index. The index measures the influence of trait perceptions on candidate evaluation. I created the variable by first summing a respondent's rating of the Republican candidate on each trait, which ranged from 0 ("not well at all") to 3 ("extremely well"). Thus, the Republican candidate could receive a rating from 0 ("not well at all" on all four traits) to +12 ("extremely well" on all four traits). I then did the same for the Democratic candidate, and subtracted the Democratic rating from the Republican rating to create the comparative measure. The trait index thus ranges from -12

(the most pro-Democratic rating) to +12 (the most pro-Republican rating). I use this comparative trait measure instead of separate variables for each candidate in light of the evidence that voters do not evaluate candidates separately, but rather in reference to the alternative (Rahn et al. 1990). If trait perceptions affect vote choice, then this variable will be positive and significant—increases in the Republican trait advantage will increase the probability of a Republican vote. A host of controls account for individual-level and contextual factors known to influence vote choice.¹⁶

Because the model includes measures at different levels of aggregation—the individual level and state level—it is estimated using robust (Huber-White) standard errors to account for the clustering of observations by state. This inflates the standard errors, biasing the model in favor of null results, but represents a more accurate estimation. It also provides a more conservative test of the trait effects hypothesis. This is the case for all the models presented in the paper.

The results of the logit model are presented in the second column of Table 1. Trait perceptions clearly influence candidate evaluation in Senate contests. Even controlling for a host of other variables, including party identification, ideology, and views of the Iraq war, evaluations of the candidates' personal attributes help explain vote choice.

The magnitude of the effect is substantial. Figure 3 shows the effect of shifting trait perceptions on the probability of voting for the Republican candidate in three types of elections—a Republican incumbent contest, a Democratic incumbent contest, and an open

¹⁶ The control variables are the 7-point party identification scale, the respondent's self-placement on a 5-point ideology scale, whether the respondent viewed the Iraq war as a mistake (a variable that is necessary because of the centrality of the issue to the 2006 midterms), gender, race, education, the difference in campaign spending between the candidates, and dummies for races with Republican and Democratic incumbents (with open seats as the omitted category). Coding is described in the appendix.

seat race.¹⁷ On the far left, the figure shows that when a voter views the Democratic candidate as holding a large trait advantage (-4 on the comparative trait index), the likelihood of a GOP vote is very low. But as the trait gap narrows, and eventually becomes an advantage for the Republican, the probability increases significantly. For example, a voter in an open seat race who gave the Democratic candidate a one-unit advantage (i.e., -1 on the trait index) has a 0.28 probability of voting for the Republican. But if the same voter viewed the Republican candidate with a slight trait advantage (+1 on the trait index), the probability of a GOP vote doubles, to 0.56. The height of the lines illustrates the challenges facing Republican candidates in 2006. Even when GOP candidates “broke even” on traits, they still were unlikely to win voters’ support, given the political climate. Nonetheless, a fairly small shift on the trait variable has a substantial effect on vote choice.¹⁸

[Insert Table 1 here]

Do traits matter more or less for incumbents than non-incumbents? The third column of Table 1 explores the possibility that voters may weigh the importance of personal characteristics differently when an incumbent is running for re-election. The model is the

¹⁷ All simulations in this paper are produced using CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003). The effects are based on a moderate, independent, white, female voter with an average level of education and who was unsure about whether the Iraq war was a mistake. The Republican spending advantage was set at its sample mean value. I also do not present the predicted probabilities across the entire range of the trait index (-12 to +12). The vast majority of respondents had scores on the variable between -4 and +4, which is why I use the truncated scale in the figure.

¹⁸ A prominent concern in the literature on candidate traits is that assessments of personal characteristics may stem from projection. When voters engage in projection, they “reason backwards,” assigning positive attributes to the candidate they already prefer, instead of first evaluating the candidates’ attributes and then using those evaluations to form a candidate preference. If trait assessments represent mere projection, they can tell us little about stereotyping, candidate evaluation, or voting behavior. But though there is evidence that this sort of motivated reasoning does occur, it is not clear empirically that trait assessments represent nothing more than projection. In the CCES sample, for example, 37% of respondents rated their Senate candidates equally on one of four traits, which should not occur if trait perceptions are simply reflections of a pre-existing candidate preference. Another 16% of voters rated the candidate they did *not* vote for more favorably on at least one trait dimensions. That number is not trivial, and it is even higher in presidential contests. Thus, while some amount of projection no doubt occurs, other elements of the campaign, or the candidates themselves, are contributing to voters’ attitudes. For discussions of projection and motivated reasoning, see Bartels (2002b) and Taber and Lodge (2006). For evidence that trait perceptions may originate from other sources, see Hayes (2005) and Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson (2004).

same as the first, with the addition of interactive terms between the Republican and Democratic incumbent dummies and the comparative trait index. If trait evaluations matter more when an incumbent is running for re-election, these variables should be positive and significant. If trait evaluations matter less in incumbent contests than open seat races, the coefficients should be negative and significant.

As shown by the large standard errors on the coefficients, there is no evidence that incumbent traits matter more or less than challengers or open seat candidates' personal attributes. It appears that voters care about the traits of candidates, but that their status as office-holders does not affect the weight that voters give personal evaluations. Challengers' and open seat candidates' personal attributes matter just as much as sitting Senators' do.

With the basic hypothesis about the influence of traits confirmed, two questions remain. Do different traits matter more than others? And do different traits matter more for Republican and Democratic candidates?

To examine the first question—do different traits matter differentially?—I ran a second regression similar to the first. The dependent variable is again vote choice. But instead of the trait index, the key covariates are the comparative ratings on each personality trait. For each characteristic, the rating could range from -3 to +3, with the higher values indicating a Republican advantage. The results of the model are presented in the third column of Table 1.

Similar to presidential elections, leadership and empathy are clearly at the top of voters' priority lists in Senate elections. The coefficients for moral and compassionate,

however, are not significant, indicating that those attributes play a comparatively smaller role in legislative contests.¹⁹

The strength of the leadership effect is at odds with Huddy and Terkildsen's (1993b) finding that traits associated with leadership and competence are less important in legislative than executive races. In most studies of presidential trait effects, leadership typically matters as much, if not more than candidate empathy ratings (e.g., Hayes 2005). It appears that voters want the people who they put into higher office—whether for president or Senator—to possess leadership skills. They do not deprioritize leadership qualities because legislative representatives have less autonomy than executive office-holders. Voters also want their legislators to be caring, as evidenced by the significant effects on the empathy measure. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's (2002) argument that the public is concerned that government officials be empathetic finds support in these results.

Figure 4 plots the effect on vote choice of voters' evaluations of candidates' leadership abilities and empathy levels. As shown by the steeper slope of the “strong leadership” line, leadership matters more than empathy. But both traits meaningfully influence voters' willingness to support a candidate.²⁰ These results suggest that voters may have universal preferences for the personal attributes of their political leaders—leadership and empathy are central to the evaluation of not only presidential candidates, but also congressional candidates.

¹⁹ One potential explanation for the absence of a “compassion effect” is that the variable essentially measures the same attitude as the empathy question. Thus, its insignificance is not necessarily evidence that voters do not care about how compassionate U.S. Senators are. Instead, it could be that voters' responses to the empathy question account for that single attitude. Given that this paper is not properly equipped to resolve that issue, I leave it aside for now.

²⁰ The effects are based on an open seat race and a moderate, independent voter, with the other variables set at the same values as in Figure 3.

The Benefits of Trait “Trespassing”

To isolate the potential effects of “trait trespassing,” I focus on the circumstances in which the candidates are rated equally on various traits. This allows me to examine whether Republican and Democratic candidates are disproportionately rewarded when they neutralize the ownership advantages of the opposition party, compared to the support they gain when they “break even” on owned traits.

To determine whether trespassing yields benefits, I isolate those survey respondents who saw the candidates as equally representative of particular traits. The logic is that if trait trespassing is at work in Senate elections, voters who saw Democratic candidates as “tied” with Republican candidates on the qualities of leadership and morality will be more likely to vote for the Democrat than if they see the candidate as equally empathetic and compassionate. In the latter case, the Republican candidate would be rewarded for having overcome the partisan reputational disadvantage. If the data reveal that support for candidates is higher when they “break even” on traits they do not own, this would provide support for the trait trespassing argument.

The second column (“All”) of Table 2 presents the percentage of all voters casting Republican and Democratic ballots after evaluating the candidates equally on a specific trait. Here, there is evidence for the importance of trait trespassing. Republicans were handsomely rewarded for neutralizing Democratic trait advantages on compassion and empathy. Voters who saw the two candidates “tied” on those traits voted for the GOP candidate in 65% and 56% of the cases, respectively. Despite the relatively small sample on which these comparisons are made, the differences are statistically significant ($p < .10$). In contrast, when Republicans were seen as equally strong leaders and as moral as their opponents, voters cast ballots in their favor just 48% and 43% of the time. The converse of this finding is that

Democrats won the votes of 52% and 57% of voters who saw the candidates as equally strong leaders and moral, illustrating the advantage of the party's candidates of eroding the traditional GOP advantage. The only difference that is not statistically significant is on leadership, though it is nearly so ($p=.17$).

[Insert Table 2 here]

These results are confirmed by predicted probabilities calculated from the logit model in the final column of Table 1. I focus on leadership and empathy, since these are the traits that are most strongly related to vote choice. Holding the other trait variables at their means, and assigning a “tie” score to the candidates on the trait of leadership, the probability of Republican vote is 0.57. But when the same analysis is run with the candidates tied on empathy instead of leadership, the probability of a Republican vote is 0.61. The effect is modest, but result is almost exactly the same magnitude as what Hayes (2005, 917) finds in presidential elections. In close contests, these differences could play an important role.

The final three columns of Table 2 break down the data by the respondent's party identification. These data demonstrate the possible mechanism by which trait trespassing may yield benefits, though they should be interpreted cautiously, given that the sample sizes are very small. The data for Democratic identifiers, in the final column, are especially compelling. When the candidates were seen as equally representative of Republican traits—leadership and morality—Democrats were very unlikely to defect and support them. Just 6% and 7% of Democrats defected when the candidates were tied on those traits. But when GOP candidates were seen as equally compassionate and empathetic, more than one in five of those Democrats defected. Similarly, 58% of independents supported the Republican candidate when they were seen as equally compassionate, but just 45% did when they saw the candidates tied on the Republican traits (as well as the Democratic trait of empathy).

Among Republicans, 82% who saw the two candidates as equally strong leaders supported the GOP candidate. The figure is 81% for ties on moral. On compassion, the ostensibly Democratic trait, 85% of identifiers supported their candidate. Of course, the evidence is not unequivocal; the loyalty rate was 80% when the candidates tied on “really cares...” And the difference is not particularly large. But collectively, these results indicate that candidates have an incentive to “trait trespass,” attempting to overcome their party’s inherent disadvantages on particular attributes. It is traits they do not own that matter most.

To be sure, the effects of candidates’ personal attributes are not enormous, and nor should they be. Trait perceptions are just one of many influences on vote choice. Voters are anchored by PID, retrospective assessments of an incumbent’s performance in office, and salient issues. But these data suggest that perceptions of a candidate’s personality are an important ingredient of voters’ choices in Senate campaigns. The effects are modest, but meaningful.

Conclusion

In typical American political campaigns, campaign strategists tirelessly attempt to burnish their candidate’s image, using sophisticated television advertising and closely managed public appearances to create a picture in voters’ minds of their candidate as a man or woman of superb character. In presidential elections, the scholarly consensus is that these strategies pay dividends from time to time, as voters’ evaluations of candidate traits are related to political decision making. But because of important differences between the information environment and political context of presidential and congressional campaigns, the role of candidate personality in sub-presidential contests has been less than clear. This study has helped demonstrate that in addition to voting behavior’s usual suspects—party

identification, ideology, and issue positions—perceptions of Senate candidate traits are important ingredients in citizens’ judgments.

The ways these perceptions matter share similarities with presidential elections, but also some important differences. Consistent with the theory of “trait ownership,” party reputations influence assessments of Senate candidate traits, despite the fact that those politicians are further removed from the national party than presidential nominees. Just as they do in presidential contests, Democrats “own” the traits of compassion and empathy. Republicans did not hold the expected advantages on leadership and morality, but it is difficult to determine whether this reflects the absence of GOP ownership or a short-term loss of these advantages as a consequence of an abysmal political climate. What is clear is that trait ownership, at least for Democrats, is not limited to high-profile presidential contests.

These trait perceptions are influential. As they do with presidential candidates, voters’ care about the personal qualities of their Senate candidates, and their assessments affect vote choice. The traits that appear to matter most, as in presidential contests, are leadership and empathy, suggesting some qualities that Americans see as universally desirable for politicians at all levels of government. And the effects of trait assessments are not more important for incumbents than challengers and open-seat candidates. Voters care about the qualities their representatives embody, regardless of whether they are current office-holders.

Several differences stemming from the outsized role of incumbency in congressional campaigns should inform the way scholars incorporate trait assessments into their study of voting behavior in congressional contests. Voters saw more favorably the traits of incumbents than non-incumbents, an advantage that was most pronounced on leadership assessments. Given that leadership had the strongest effects on vote choice, this is likely

another source of the advantages that incumbents bring to their re-election bids: Voters care most about the trait dimension that incumbents hold the largest edge. This is not, of course, a coincidence; incumbents often emphasize experience and leadership capabilities in their campaign communications. Presumably, the extent to which leadership is prioritized by voters will vary with the campaign context, as incumbents should reap the largest benefits of their trait advantage when questions of leadership are central to campaign discourse.

The findings here provide a point of departure for future work on trait effects in sub-presidential contests. One dynamic this study ignores is that the importance of traits should vary across contexts, depending on how much candidate personality is emphasized during a campaign. In an analysis of newspaper coverage of the Senate campaigns—a project that involved about 1,300 news stories in the 30 Senate states—I found no effects of trait-related discourse. In states with high levels trait-focused campaign discourse, the effects of trait perceptions were no larger than in states characterized by relatively little news attention to the candidates' personal attributes.²¹ This somewhat surprising null finding suggests that more comprehensive measures of campaign dialogue—including analyses of campaign advertising—may be necessary to fully understanding the role of campaign context in promoting or suppressing the importance of personality judgments in Senate campaigns. More work on how campaign discourse can shape voter perceptions of candidate traits and their salience would be valuable, similar to work that has been conducted at the presidential level (e.g., Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004). And it bears investigation how far down the electoral ladder the effects of partisan stereotyping go—whether trait ownership extends to U.S. House, statewide, and local elections. It seems likely that as the ties between a candidate and the image of the national party loosen, the patterns of trait ownership would

²¹ The results of the study and analysis are described in [citation omitted]. Details are available from the author on request.

start to recede, and partisan trait stereotyping might begin to lose its effects. Gubernatorial aspirants, for example, might have less of an incentive to trait trespass than federal candidates, since public opinion would be less likely to conform to the stereotypes of the national parties. Because they affect candidate strategy and election outcomes, these matters are worth exploring.

More broadly, one contribution of this paper is to demonstrate that while Senate contests often appear to be less overtly “personal” than presidential campaigns, the electorate is intensely interested in the character traits of their congressional hopefuls. There is no doubt that partisanship, ideology, and incumbency occupy the most central role in congressional voting. But in explaining election outcomes, scholars must also account for the part played by the public’s views of the candidates’ traits. It is certainly too sweeping to assert, as journalists sometimes do (e.g., Zengerle 2002), that personality is the most important component of congressional elections. But we have evidence that it matters substantially.

Appendix

Coding of Control Variables in Table 1

Party ID: 7-point partisanship scale, ranging from Strong Democrat (lo) to Strong Republican (hi)

Ideology: 5-point ideology scale, ranging from very liberal (lo) to very conservative (hi). (A variable that measures the ideological distance between the respondent and the candidate reveals substantively identical results. But because about 70 respondents failed to place both candidates on the ideological scale, in the models I use self-reported ideology.)

Iraq mistake: Respondent's view of whether the 2003 invasion of Iraq was a mistake. An answer of "no" was coded as 1, "yes" coded -1, and "not sure" coded as 0. (The results of the models are the same if the "not sure" responses are omitted. But because I lose about 90 cases, the trichotomized measure is preferable.)

Female: Coded 1 for female respondents, 0 for males.

White: Coded 1 for white respondents, 0 for all others.

Education: 6-category scale, ranging from no high school degree (lo) to post-graduate degree (hi).

Republican spending advantage: Difference in campaign spending between the two candidates, scaled so that a Republican spending advantage takes on positive values. The measure is scaled by \$10,000. Spending data were collected from the *New York Times* 2006 Election Guide.

Republican and Democratic incumbent: Dummies for races with Republican and Democratic candidates running. Incumbents are designated by an asterisk in Table A-1.

Table A-1. Summary U.S. Senate Candidates, 2006 CCES

State	Republican Candidate	Democratic Candidate
Arizona	Jon Kyl*	Jim Pederson
California	Richard Mountjoy	Dianne Feinstein*
Delaware	Jan Ting	Thomas Carper*
Florida	Katherine Harris	Bill Nelson*
Hawaii	Jerry Coffee	Daniel Akaka*
Massachusetts	Ken Chase	Edward Kennedy*
Maryland	Michael Steele	Ben Cardin
Maine	Olympia J. Snowe*	Jean Hay Bright
Michigan	Mike Bouchard	Debbie Stabenow*
Minnesota	Mark Kennedy	Amy Klobuchar
Missouri	James Talent*	Claire McCaskill
Mississippi	Trent Lott*	Erik R. Fleming
Montana	Conrad Burns*	Jon Tester
North Dakota	Dwight Grotberg	Kent Conrad*
Nebraska	J. Peter Ricketts	Benjamin Nelson*
New Jersey	Thomas Kean Jr.	Robert Menendez*
New Mexico	Allen W. McCulloch	Jeff Bingaman*
Nevada	John Ensign*	Jack Carter
New York	John Spencer	Hillary Clinton*
Ohio	Mike Dewine*	Sherrod Brown
Pennsylvania	Rick Santorum*	Robert Casey
Rhode Island	Lincoln Chafee*	Sheldon Whitehouse
Tennessee	Bob Corker	Harold Ford
Texas	Kay Bailey Hutchison*	Barbara Ann Radnofsky
Utah	Orrin Hatch*	Pete Ashdown
Virginia	George Allen*	James Webb
Washington	Mike McGavik	Maria Cantwell*
Wisconsin	Robert Gerald Lorge	Herb Kohl*
West Virginia	John Raese	Robert C. Byrd*
Wyoming	Craig Thomas*	Dale Grountage

*Incumbent

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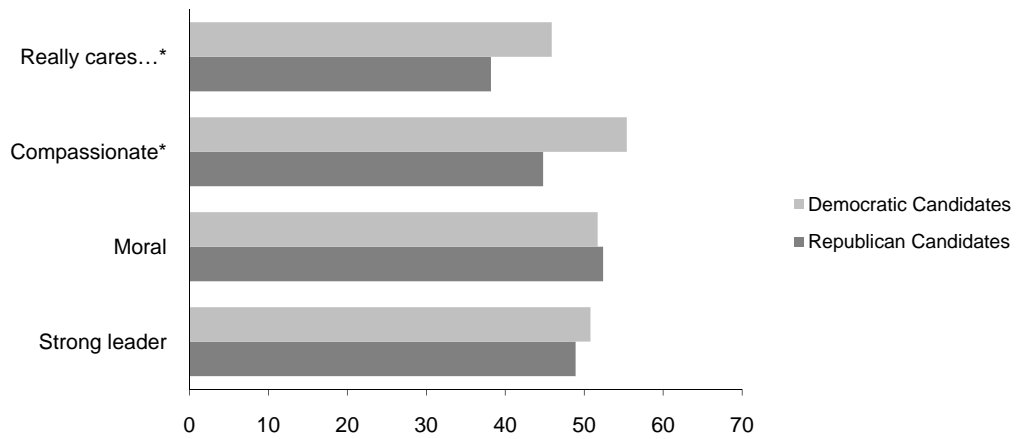
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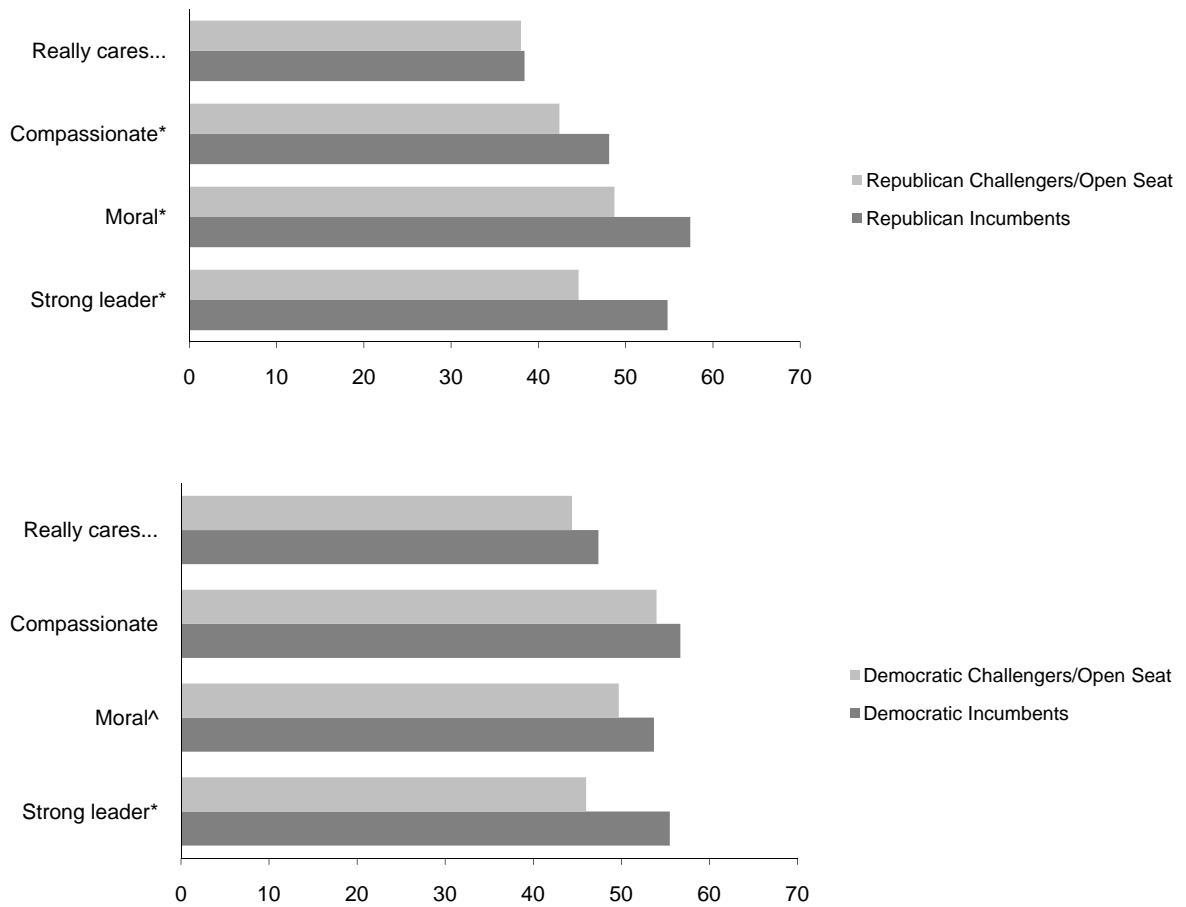
Figure 1. Mean Trait Ratings for U.S. Senate Candidates, by Party, 2006 CCES



* Difference between Republican and Democratic candidates is significant at $p < .05$.

Note: Responses to the trait questions are recoded onto a 0 to 100 scale. Figure includes only respondents who rated both candidates in their state on the particular trait. The number of respondents represented in each comparison ranges from 463 to 466. Data are from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

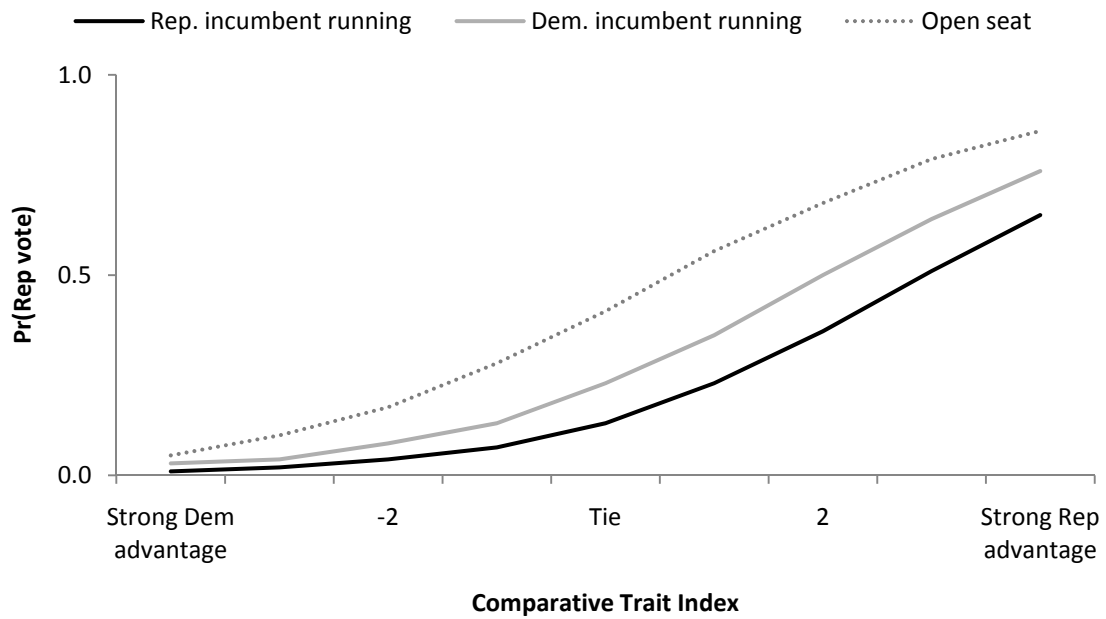
**Figure 2. Mean Trait Ratings for U.S. Senate Candidates, by Incumbency, 2006
CCES**



* Difference between incumbent and non-incumbent candidates is significant at $p < .05$; ^ $p < .10$.

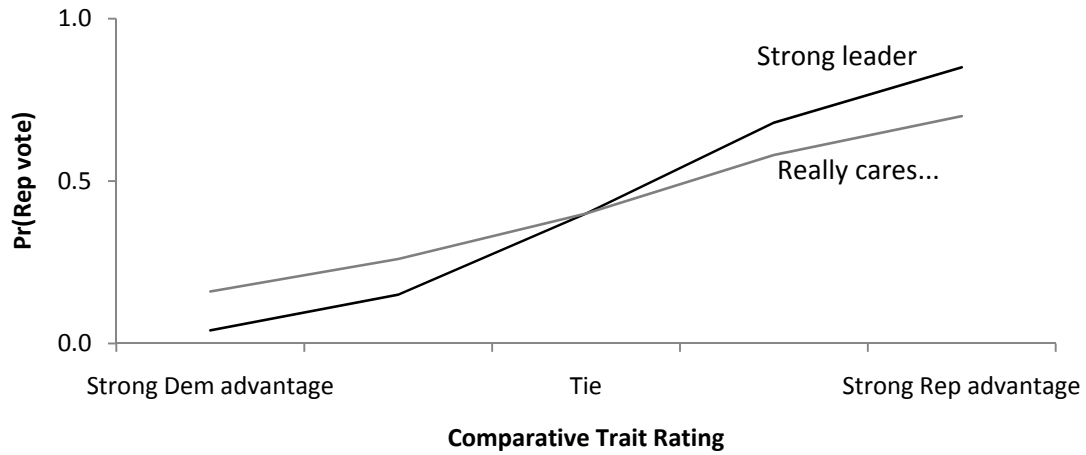
Note: Responses to the trait questions are recoded onto a 0 to 100 scale. Figure includes only respondents who rated both candidates in their state on the particular trait. The number of respondents represented in each comparison ranges from 463 to 466. Data are from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Figure 3. The Effects of Trait Evaluations on the Probability of Republican Voting, 2006 U.S. Senate Elections



Note: Predicted probabilities are based on a moderate, independent, white, female voter with a mean level of education and who was unsure about whether the Iraq war was a mistake. The Republican spending advantage was set at its sample mean value. The simulations are based on the model in the “Trait Index Model” column of Table 1. Data are from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Figure 4. The Effects of Leadership and Empathy Ratings on the Probability of Republican Voting, 2006 U.S. Senate Elections



Note: Predicted probabilities are based on an open seat race and a moderate, independent, white, female voter with a mean level of education and who was unsure about whether the Iraq war was a mistake. The Republican spending advantage was set at its sample mean value, and the remaining trait variables were set at their means. The simulations are based on the model in the “Individual Trait Model” column of Table 1. Data are from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Table 1. Effect of Trait Perceptions of Vote Choice, 2006 U.S. Senate Elections

	Trait index model	Incumbent interaction model	Individual trait model
Comparative trait index	0.66* (0.15)	1.01* (0.38)	--
Republican incumbent x trait index	--	-0.40 (0.43)	--
Democratic incumbent x trait index	--	-0.24 (0.44)	--
Comparative strong leader	--	--	1.38* (0.48)
Comparative moral	--	--	0.51 (0.34)
Comparative compassionate	--	--	0.05 (0.31)
Comparative really cares...	--	--	0.87^ (0.49)
Party identification	0.24* (0.11)	0.26* (0.12)	0.23^ (0.14)
Ideology	0.27 (0.35)	0.16 (0.46)	0.33 (0.35)
Iraq mistake	1.14* (0.32)	1.39* (0.35)	1.07* (0.34)
Female	1.14* (0.51)	0.99* (0.47)	1.27* (0.58)
White	-0.46 (0.63)	-0.45 (0.64)	-0.53 (0.57)
Education	-0.14 (0.16)	-0.07 (0.14)	-0.10 (0.16)
Republican spending advantage (in \$10,000s)	0.01 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Republican incumbent	-1.34 (0.90)	-1.77 (0.99)	-1.41 (1.08)
Democratic incumbent	-1.06 (0.87)	-1.16 (0.86)	-1.01 (0.97)
Constant	-0.02 (1.34)	-2.15 (1.58)	-0.45 (1.45)
N	375.00	375.00	375.00
Pseudo R ²	0.82	0.82	0.83
Log Likelihood	-259.86	-259.86	-259.86
χ^2	73.81	201.62	93.37

* $p < .05$; ^ $p < .10$

Note: Dependent variable is vote choice (1=Republican, 0=Democrat). Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Data are from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents Voting Republican Who Gave Both Candidates the Same Trait Rating, 2006 U.S. Senate Elections

	All	Respondent's Party ID		
		Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Strong leader (n=86)	48	82	45	6
Moral (n=101)	43*	81	45	7
Compassionate (n=94)	65*	85	58	22
Really cares... (n=57)	56*	80	45	21

* $p < .10$, difference of proportions test between percentage voting for Republican and percentage voting for Democrat

Note: Cell entries represent the percentage of respondents voting for the Republican candidate who gave both candidates the same rating on the particular trait. Data are from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.