

Battleground Voters:

Issues, Race, and Retrospective Evaluations in Florida 2008

Michael D. Martinez

Department of Political Science
University of Florida
234 Anderson Hall
P.O. Box 117325
Gainesville, FL 32611-7325

martinez@ufl.edu

Prepared for presentation at the Annual Meetings of the Southern Political Science Association (New Orleans, January 8-10, 2009).

“If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our Founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.”

President-elect Barack Obama,
November 4, 2008

In our admittedly brief hindsight, 2008 marked a number of electoral milestones. Hillary Clinton was the first female frontrunner for a major-party presidential nomination, only to lose an unexpectedly long and arduous Democratic contest to Barack Obama, whose record fundraising paved the way to his becoming the first African-American presidential nominee of a major political party. John McCain’s path to the Republican nomination was more conventional, after Rudy Giuliani showed why skipping the early primary and caucus states is likely to remain a wholly unconventional strategy. McCain chose Governor Sarah Palin as the first female Republican vice-presidential nominee, and she and Senator Joe Biden were the first pair of vice-presidential candidates from states with three electoral votes each in modern memory. In the general election, Obama eschewed public financing, ostensibly to enable a “shock and awe” response to any potential “swift boat” attacks by independent groups, and to pursue a 50 state strategy in an effort to try to change the electoral map.

Barack Obama's victory was wide in a geographic sense -- he won ten states scattered throughout all regions of the country that George Bush had carried in either 2000 or 2004, including three states of the former Confederacy¹ -- and across important demographic groups. Exit polls showed that Obama was favored over McCain by both women and men (barely), people in all education categories, as well as those with annual incomes less than \$50,000 *and* those with incomes more than \$200,000. Obama won a large majority of the youngest third of the electorate, he essentially tied McCain among the middle third, and he lost among the eldest third of the electorate by a slim margin. In many respects, the breadth of Obama’s electoral support in 2008 was impressive.

In spite of the historic campaign events and election result, 2008 followed some more or less usual patterns. The Obama campaign did contract McCain’s geographic base, but in the end, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida remained the three key battleground states through which McCain would unsuccessfully try to mount one last comeback. Voters in these battleground states saw the presidential and vice-presidential principals and their surrogates repeatedly in the weeks between the conventions and the general election, and as we shall see, voters in one of those states mostly relied on two of the simplest and most time-tested cues in deciding this historic contest. In this paper, we will assess how partisanship, political trust, retrospective evaluations of President Bush and the economy, issues, and race shaped one battleground state’s voters’ choices.

Data

¹ Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida. The others were New Hampshire, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, New Mexico, Colorado, and Nevada.

We analyze data from three surveys of Florida residents conducted in the fall of 2008 to examine the effects of party, retrospective evaluations, issues, and race on voter preferences. An October pre-election survey of 504 adult residents of households in Florida was conducted throughout October 2008 by the University of Florida Survey Research Center, in conjunction with its monthly consumer confidence survey. In addition to standard questions about consumer confidence and demographics, respondents were asked thirteen questions about campaign interest, vote intention, and issues. UF's SRC also conducted a post-election survey in conjunction with its November 2008 consumer confidence survey in which 449 adult respondents were asked about their current perceptions of the economy, political issues, and demographics, as well as turnout and vote choice in the presidential election. Our analyses of October data here are limited to self-identified registered voters, and our analysis of November data are limited to 338 respondents who said that "I'm sure that I voted" in response to our turnout question (see Duff, Hanmer, Park, and White 2007). Our race effects analysis was supplemented by a telephone survey of 839 registered voters in the state, conducted by Cherry Communications (a private commercial firm) between September 28 and October 5, 2008. Each respondent in the latter survey was asked 53 questions, including questions about evaluations of President Bush, Governor Crist, and the political parties; vote intention; which candidate would perform better on several policy areas; retrospective evaluations of the economy; and basic demographic information.

No state is a perfect microcosm of the national electorate, but our focus on Florida provides some important analytical leverage. First, as it was in 2000 and 2004 (Shaw 2006), Florida was a battleground state in 2008. Both campaigns spent considerable resources on television advertising in the state, and both presidential candidates (and their spouses and running mates) made numerous visits to the state between the conventions and the day before Election Day. With no other statewide offices up for election in 2008, the presidential candidates had the political stage largely to themselves in most of the state, so Floridians had even more of an opportunity than most Americans to encounter and weigh arguments both for and against both candidates. Second, Florida is a southern state, where we might expect to see stronger vestiges of "old racism" among white residents (Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997), which is relevant for our analysis of race effects.

Party

With only a few exceptions in the last half-century, the pull of partisanship on voter choice in presidential elections has been slightly stronger for Republicans than for Democrats. Democrats were very loyal both to Al Gore in 2000 and to John Kerry in 2004, but Republicans' even stronger loyalty to George W. Bush helped to offset the Democrats' slight numerical advantages in those elections. (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2002; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2006) The beginning of our story of the 2008 election is that the pull of partisanship was strong (Bartels 2000), and Democrats were about as loyal in their support for Obama as Republicans were for McCain. In our October pre-election survey, 92% of Democratic identifiers either preferred Obama or leaned toward voting for him, while 88% of Republican identifiers preferred or leaned toward McCain. The November post-election survey showed the more usual pattern of slightly stronger Republican partisanship in the voting booth: 92% of Republican voters cast ballots for McCain, while Obama retained the support of 89% of Democratic voters in

our sample. That's not much of a difference, especially considering that the Democratic loyalty to Obama followed a tough and grueling nomination struggle (in which all major Democratic candidates bypassed Florida's controversial January primary) that resulted in the first-major party candidacy of an African-American. But as we shall see, partisanship is only the beginning of the story.

Retrospective Evaluations and the Economy

It is likely that George W. Bush will leave office as the most unpopular retiring president since Harry S Truman in 1953. Seeking to capitalize on increasing dissatisfaction with the fragile state of the economy and progress in the war(s) on terror, Obama claimed the "change" mantra early in the campaign, and he successfully defended ownership of that message from attempted usurpation by both Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries and John McCain in the general election campaign. Our October pre-election data shows the strategy behind that message. McCain was preferred by 88% of Florida's registered voters who either strongly or somewhat approved of Bush's job as president, which would have been impressive but for the fact that figure represented less than 30% of the state's registered voters. 84% of our respondents believed the country was on the "wrong track", 57% *strongly disapproved* of President Bush's job performance, and 58% said that, in retrospect, the United States had made the wrong decision to use military force against Iraq. Among the majority of Floridians who *strongly disapproved* of Bush's job performance, 82% preferred Obama in the October pre-election survey. Figure 1, which presents the predicted probabilities from a logit model estimating preference for Obama, shows that both partisanship and retrospective evaluation of the incumbent administration strongly influenced voters' pre-election preference, an early indication that 2008 might be "salvation" for the retrospective voting model. (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2003) The distances between the lines show the strong effects of partisanship, controlling for Bush evaluation, while the steep slopes show the powerful effects of Bush evaluation: Democrats' and Republicans' support for Obama was about 35 points higher among those who strongly disapproved of Bush than among those who approved, while the gap between Independent approvers and Independent strong disapprovers was 62 points. This first glance at the data shows that Obama benefited from both a strong partisan pull among Democrats and an equally strong reaction against the incumbent Bush administration.

Figure 1 about here

Not surprisingly, Floridians' evaluations of economic conditions were also bleak, as shown in Table 1. Overall, our respondents in both October and November generally had negative assessments of their current family financial situation compared to a year ago, opinions about whether now was a good time to buy major household items, and the prospects for business conditions in the country as a whole over the next twelve months. Not surprisingly, those with the most negative assessments about their own pocketbooks were generally more inclined to prefer Obama. However, our data suggest that economic assessments were somewhat mediated by partisanship. (Evans and Andersen 2006; Ladner and Wlezien 2007) As Figure 2 shows, the effects of retrospective pocketbook evaluations in explaining voter choice in our November sample were largely limited to Independents, as self-identified Republicans were virtually oblivious to the economy as a factor in their voting decision. Moreover, the outcome of

the election seemed to bring voters' economic crystal balls into a partisan focus. In the pre-election October survey, the few optimists about the nation's economic future tended to support McCain, while in the post-election November survey, roughly the same percentage of economic optimists tended to disproportionately report voting *for* Obama.

Table 1 about here
Figure 2 about here

More evidence of the endogeneity of economic evaluations comes from questions in the November survey about emotional reactions to the economic news of the day. After the dramatic economic shocks in September and October 2008, much of the public commentary warned of the direst economic consequences if the credit markets remained frozen and more financial institutions collapsed, and underscoring the seriousness of the crisis, several public officials and journalists warned that the current financial crisis could be as bad as the Great Depression of the 1930s. We tried to gauge the degree to which the economic news of the day affected people emotionally (see Conover and Feldman 1986) with two new questions in the November survey:

People have different concerns about the future of the nation's economy. Would you say that you are extremely fearful, somewhat fearful, not very fearful, or not at all fearful about the nation's economic future?

How about for your own family's financial future? Would you say that you are extremely fearful, somewhat fearful, not very fearful, or not at all fearful about your family's financial future?

In the aggregate, the lower half of Table 1 shows plenty of sociotropic *and* pocketbook anxiety, though more respondents reported fear about the nation's economic future than about their own family's prospects. A significant proportion of our respondents was *extremely* fearful about the country's economic future (18.5%), and *three-fourths* of the state's consumers were at least *somewhat* fearful about the nation's economy. "Pocketbook" fear was only slightly less widespread; 12.7% were extremely fearful for their own family's financial future, while 58% were at least somewhat fearful. One might suspect that such widespread fear would work to the benefit of the "change" candidate, but in our November post-election survey, those who were most fearful about the future of the national economy were actually slightly *less* likely to support Obama. The effect of sociotropic fear on vote choice is insignificant when party identification is controlled (table not shown), which further suggests that the outcome of the election had more effect on fear than *vice versa*. Economic anxiety was widespread in late 2008, but Obama's election apparently intensified that anxiety among Republicans and relieved some of it among Democrats. In short, our data suggest that the election result provided a prism through which our respondents projected the economic future.

Taken together, our evidence suggests that Floridians' presidential preferences were largely shaped by long-term partisan dispositions and short-term reflections on the performance of the Bush administration. While voters' gloomy economic reflections no doubt affected overall evaluations of Bush's job performance, economic judgments did not appear to play an especially strong direct role in shaping voters' preferences.

Trust in Government

To the extent that political trust reflects public opinion about governmental authorities, as distinct from the political regime, we might expect that it would also shape voter choice. In previous presidential elections, the most disaffected voters were less likely to vote for the incumbent party's candidate, and more likely to support prominent third-party candidates in multi-party elections (Wallace in 1968, Anderson in 1980, Perot in 1992 and 1996) and candidates from the nonincumbent major party when third-party challenges were absent. (Hetherington 1999) However, that research is based on standard measures of political trust that have been recently criticized for conflating lack of trust with active cynicism. (Cook and Gronke 2005) In short, traditional measures of political trust might be good at identifying the relatively few Americans who still believe that government can be counted on to do what is right, but the majority of people at the low end of the traditional scale includes both skeptics, who believe government *might be* wrong some of the time, as well as cynics, who believe that government *probably is* wrong most of the time. In our surveys, we included the following measure of "active trust", modeled on the idea proposed by Cook and Gronke.

People have different views about how well government works. Using any number from "0-10" where "0" means that government can almost always be counted on to do the wrong thing, "10" means that government can almost always be counted on to do the right thing, and "5" means that government is right about half of the time and wrong the other half. What number would you use?

Table 2 shows that the modal response in both surveys is "5", which reinforces Cook and Gronke's conclusion that the median voter is more of a "show me" skeptic than a deeply disaffected cynic. Support for the proposition that political trust (as measured here) helps to shape voter choice is limited, however. There is weak positive relationship between our measure of political trust and preference for McCain in our October survey, but the direction of the relationship changes in our November post-election survey. As with economic projections, political trust was partially shaped by one's view of the election outcome.

Table 2 about here

Issues

Both major party candidates argued that the 2008 election represented the clearest choice in a generation. Obama and McCain agreed that they differed on the approach that government should take in providing services, protecting the environment, reconciling the demand for energy with environmental protection, and regulating abortion. Our estimates show that a few issues contributed a little to voters' preferences between Obama and McCain, but not nearly as much as the campaign rhetoric would have suggested. In this section, we show the effects of three issues – abortion, government spending, and support for offshore drilling – based on separate logit analyses of October preferences controlling for partisanship and retrospective evaluations of President Bush. Each figure displays the effects of retrospective evaluations and an issue for

Independents, theoretically maximizing the short-term forces' effects by minimizing the long-term partisan effects.

Abortion is now regarded as a new exemplar of an easy issue which can have powerful effects on voter choice. (Abramowitz 1995; Carmines and Stimson 1980; Highton 2004) When we asked our October respondents the standard ANES abortion question, a majority selected the most pro-choice alternative that we offered ("By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice"), and 65.6% of those respondents preferred Obama. While McCain received majority support from respondents who preferred any restriction at all on a woman's right to choose, evidence of issue voting based on opinion about abortion is significantly weakened in a multivariate model controlling for party and Bush approval. In Figure 3, which shows the expected probabilities derived from that model for Independents, the effect of abortion opinion is represented by the slopes of the lines, while the effect of Bush job approval is represented by the distance between those lines. The minority of absolutist abolitionists was significantly less supportive of Obama than all others, but the slopes representing the effect of the issue taper off, while the effect of Bush (dis)approval looms large among other Independent respondents. In short, it appears that abortion mattered a little (on average) in shaping voter choice in 2008, but not nearly as much as Bush approval.

Figure 3 about here

In spite of the emergence of "new" moralist issues such as abortion, opinions about government spending and the extent to which government should provide services continue to play an important role in defining political cleavages. In our October survey, a slim majority of respondents (55%) indicated that they preferred that government "provide more services, even if it meant an increase in spending", and three-fourths of them preferred Obama. Among the large minority of respondents who preferred fewer services and less spending, nearly three-fourths preferred McCain. Figure 4 displays the estimated probabilities of supporting Obama among Independents, and it shows that the effect of this issue remains pronounced among Independents. The large distances between the issue support lines illustrate the importance of Bush approval, while the steep slopes show the strong effect of this most traditional New Deal issue in shaping candidate support in 2008.

Figure 4 about here

As American consumers were stunned by \$4 per gallon summer gas prices, chants of "drill, baby, drill" echoed out of the Republican convention in Minneapolis. Floridians (both in the mass public and those who were elected to represent them) had long opposed offshore drilling, fearing possible damage to the environmentally sensitive and tourist-friendly pristine Gulf and Atlantic beaches. But during the fall campaign, Governor Charlie Crist (who was supposedly on McCain's vice-presidential short list) voiced support for leasing large offshore tracts to expand domestic production of oil and gas. Many Floridians apparently agreed, as fifty-seven percent of October respondents agreed more with "Oil companies should be allowed to drill off Florida's shores in order to increase oil production" than with "We need to protect Florida's coasts from the environmental dangers of drilling offshore." Figure 5 shows the estimated probabilities of support of Independents for Obama, and illustrates the significant

effect of this issue on vote preference. For Independents, moving from strong support for drilling to strong support for protecting the coasts corresponds to about a 35% increase in the probability of preferring Obama, net of Bush approval. Retrospective evaluations of the incumbent again have a strong effect, independent of one's position on offshore drilling. Indeed, we estimate that an Independent "driller" who strongly disapproved of Bush's job performance had a higher probability of voting for Obama than a "coast hugger" who only somewhat disapproved of Bush's performance.

Figure 5 about here

All in all, we read our data as suggesting that a few issues did matter in shaping Floridians' vote preferences. Obama benefited modestly from the balance of opinion favoring more government services, but lost some support as Florida's leaders and voters shifted toward greater support for offshore drilling. But, in the aggregate, neither of these issues, nor abortion or any other issue we asked about, outweighed the importance of retrospective evaluation of the incumbent president in shaping voter preference. Despite McCain's late protestations that "I'm not President Bush", for all intents and purposes, Floridians voted almost as if he was.

Race

Despite the strong Democratic winds provided by the unpopular Bush presidency and the rapidly deteriorating economy, the other 800 pound gorilla in the election was race. The general election result seemingly provides a definitive answer to the question of whether America is ready for an African-American president. Yet, a quick glance at exit poll data also shows that America remains far from a "post-racial" society. Race has been a powerful political cleavage in the United States for decades (Stanley and Niemi 2006), and it remained so in 2008. Ninety-five percent of African-American voters chose Obama, as did two-thirds of Latinos, but McCain won a majority (55%) of whites' votes. Differences in how black, brown, and white Americans viewed the state of the economy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the role of the federal government in providing a social safety net no doubt explain much of the racial cleavage, but previous research also suggests the real possibility that simple racial antipathy on the part of many whites (and racial pride on the part of many Blacks) may have exacerbated the racial divide in this election. In this section, we explore the degree to which white voters in a southern state were upset by, and inspired by, the candidacy of the first African-American to win a major party's presidential nomination.

Measurement Strategy

Measuring racial attitudes in surveys can be tricky, and might be especially vulnerable to the threat of social desirability if contemporary white racism is masked behind references to a secularized Protestant work-ethic (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981). A few bigots who remain out in the open may freely admit to having negative affect and overt biases toward African-Americans, but some whites might be tempted to conceal anti-Black attitudes behind what they know to be more socially acceptable answers to direct questions about race. A solution is to ask about racial attitudes and motivations *indirectly*, providing some cover for individual respondents to express attitudes about sensitive topics, while maintaining the analyst's

ability to assess the aggregate magnitude of those beliefs. The “list experiment” technique accomplishes those goals by randomly assigning respondents to control and treatment conditions. In the commercial survey conducted in late September and early October, respondents in the control condition were told

I'm now going to read you four things that sometimes make people angry or upset. After I read all four statements, just tell me how many of them upset you. I don't want to know which ones, just how many.

- One: The way gasoline prices keep going up;
- Two: Professional athletes getting million-dollar-plus salaries;
- Three: Requiring seat belts be used when driving; and
- Four: Large corporations polluting the environment.

Respondents randomly assigned to the treatment condition were provided a fifth stimulus that might be upsetting:

Five: A black candidate running for president.

The logic behind the list experiment is that the difference in the average number of upsetting stimuli in each group reflects the proportion in the overall sample which is upset by “a black candidate running for president.” If, for example, we assume for a moment that everyone in both groups is upset by gas prices and pollution, and that no one in either group is upset by millionaire-athletes or seat-belt laws, the mean number of upsetting items in the control group would be exactly 2. If thirty percent of respondents were also upset by a black candidate running for president, the mean number of upsetting items in the treatment group would be 2.3. Generally, then, our estimate of the number of people upset by the black candidate is the difference in means between the two groups, multiplied by 100. This technique was developed by Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens (1997), who showed that both the prospect of a Black family moving in next door and affirmative action policies elicited more anger among white Southerners in the early 1990s than among white non-Southerners. (See also Kuklinski, Sniderman, Knight, Piazza, Tetlock, Lawrence, and Mellers 1997.) Applications of this technique have also demonstrated substantial anger over the prospect of a female president (Streb, Burrell, Frederick, and Genovese 2008) and surprisingly little negative affect directed to a Jewish vice-presidential candidate (Kane, Craig, and Wald 2004).

“Upset” effects

The first row of Table 3 shows the results from the late September – early October commercial survey of registered Florida voters, with the analysis here limited to self-identified non-Hispanic whites. Our basic, and perhaps most striking, finding is that the main effect is essentially zero. The mean number of upsetting stimuli in the treatment group (who heard the list including “A Black candidate running for president”) was 2.27, which was exactly the same as in the baseline group. We should note that four respondents (1.3%) in the treatment group indicated that they were upset by all five stimuli, including the treatment stimulus, but this does not change

our conclusion that very few white respondents in the sample were upset by the Black candidate running for president.

Table 3 about here

These findings are largely confirmed by the October consumer confidence survey, reported in the second row of Table 3. Again, our analysis is limited to self-identified non-Hispanic whites. In this study, roughly one-third of respondents were assigned to the control group, and one-third were assigned to the upset treatment group. (The treatment of the remaining third will be discussed shortly.) In this study, the mean number of upsetting responses is actually *lower* in the treatment group (2.32, $n = 152$) than in the baseline group (2.37, $n = 153$). While that difference is more than likely attributable to random assignment, it again underscores the trivial number of whites in Florida who evidenced upset by a Black candidate running for president.

Given the overall similarity of the findings in these two surveys, we combine the data from them for our analysis of subgroups. Neither Obama supporters nor McCain supporters showed any discernible degree of upset in the aggregate, though it appears that white Democrats were more upset about a Black candidate than were either white Independents or Republicans. In short, in our pre-election surveys, it appears that racially-conservative Democrats who were upset (roughly 14% of white Democrats) had already “defected” by expressing a preference for McCain, partially explaining the lack of any “Bradley effect” in the pre-election polls. Among white women, the estimated effect of the treatment was negative, while among men, it was positive but trivially small (2.3). The level of upset appears larger among the middle-education group and among the middle-aged group, but neither effect reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. Thus, while there are some suggestive patterns, our overall impression is one of somewhat surprisingly null effects in our samples of white Floridians.

It is conceivable a Black *president-elect* might evoke much more anxiety among white southerners than a Black candidate would, but our evidence from the November post-election consumer-confidence survey does not show it. In this survey, we changed the treatment stimulus to read

Five: A black man being elected president.²

Again to our surprise, the mean number of upsetting stimuli for non-Hispanic white respondents in the treatment group was lower (2.14, $n = 126$) than in the baseline group (2.30, $n = 137$). Subsets of this sample based on party identification, vote choice, gender, age, and educational attainment are all somewhat small and analyses based on them should be viewed with caution. However, mean “upset scores” were unexpectedly *higher* in the baseline condition than in the treatment condition for eight of eleven subgroups. The difference in means was in the expected direction but statistically trivial for Republicans (difference = 1.5, $p = .95$, $n = 99$), McCain voters (difference = 7.1, $p = .73$, $n = 114$), and people with low education (difference =

² The dramatic and unexpected drop in gasoline prices in fall 2008 also prompted us to change one of the baseline stimuli from “One: The way gasoline prices keep going up” to “One: High gasoline prices”.

0.4, $p = .98$, $n = 165$). In short, the list experiment is designed to detect what might be seen as socially undesirable racially sensitive responses, but did not reveal any significant degree of upset among white Floridians about a black candidate or a black president-elect.

“Proud” effects

In the October consumer confidence survey, we introduced a variant of the list experiment by asking respondents in our control group a second question.

I'm now going to read you four things that sometimes make people feel proud or inspired. After I read all four statements, just tell me how many of them make you feel proud or inspired. I don't want to know which ones, just how many.

One: American athletes participating in the Olympics;

Two: The overall system of government in this country;

Three: The performance of our military in Iraq and other trouble spots around the world;

Four: The opportunities for people who work hard to get ahead in life.

The remaining third of our respondents were asked about a fifth stimulus

Five: The fact that a black candidate is able to win his party's nomination for president.

To be clear, respondents in our control group were asked both the “upset” and “proud” baseline questions without any reference to “a Black candidate”, one treatment group was asked about the “upsetting” stimuli with reference to “a Black candidate”, and a separate treatment group was asked about the “proud” stimuli, including “a Black candidate”. As we did in our analysis of “upsetting” responses, we can calculate the estimated proportion of respondents who were “proud or inspired” by a black candidate’s nomination by subtracting the control group mean from the treatment mean, and multiplying by 100. Table 4 presents the results of this analysis of self-identified whites in this survey.

Table 4 about here

The most striking finding in Table 4 is the very high proportion of whites who claim some pride or inspiration from a black presidential candidacy. The mean number of “proud or inspiring” stimuli in the treatment group is 3.49 ($n = 115$), as compared to 2.85 ($n = 153$) in the control group, resulting in our estimate that 64% of white Floridians had some positive emotional response to Obama’s candidacy. Not surprisingly, that sentiment was almost universal (90%) among those who preferred Obama, but 44% of those who preferred McCain in the pre-election survey had a similar sentiment. Analogous to our “upset” findings, Democrats in the aggregate had a *less* positive emotional reaction than did Independents or Republicans, suggesting again that racially-conservative Democrats had already aligned themselves with McCain in the pre-election survey.

White women in our survey were somewhat less proud or inspired than were white men, perhaps reflecting some level of greater disappointment in Hillary Clinton's failure to break the glass ceiling. Not surprisingly, "proud" effects were correlated in the aggregate with education. Whites with less than a college education showed significant effects (44.8), but substantially less than whites with 16 years of education (91%).

We replicated the "proud" list experiment in the post-election November consumer-confidence survey, again changing the fifth treatment stimulus to read

Five: A black man being elected president.

Again, many white Floridians seem to have shared a positive emotional response to the historic election of a black candidate. The mean in the treatment group (3.45, $n = 111$) was significantly higher than in the baseline group (2.76, $n = 139$), resulting in an overall estimate that 69.5% of our white respondents were proud or inspired by Obama's election. Again, small sample sizes necessitate caution in interpreting subgroup analyses of a single survey, but the differences between the treatment and baseline groups were positive and significant among McCain voters as well as Obama voters, Republicans and Democrats, men and women, those without and those with a college education, and older voters. Differences were in the expected direction but not statistically significant among Independents (2.68 vs. 3.04, $n = 53$, $t = 1.26$, $p = .21$), just above the conventional bounds of significance among respondents younger than 60 years of age (2.87 vs. 3.23, $n = 131$, $t = 1.98$, $p = .0503$).

Conclusion

While 2008 may go down in history as a watershed election that returned Democrats to unified control of the White House and both Houses of Congress, elevated the son of an African to the presidency, and cracked the glass ceiling for women politicians of both parties, ultimately most Florida voters' decisions in this election reflected the simplest of heuristics: partisanship and retrospective evaluation of the incumbent. The fact that retrospective voting on George W. Bush figured so powerfully in our analysis of the vote is itself significant politically, in that McCain's attempts to silence the incumbent president during the general election campaign and show some distance from him were overwhelmed by Obama's twin mantras of "change" and "no third term." But it is also significant theoretically, as it shows the renewed strength of the retrospective model itself, after "failures" in 2000, when peace and prosperity did not elect Al Gore, and in 2004, when war and the first signs of economic travails did not unseat Bush. (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2003) Partisanship remained strong as well, and traditional issues (such as government spending and abortion) and "new" issues (such as offshore drilling) also mattered to a few voters.

Most striking in our data, however, was the dog that did not bark. In the last throes of her primary campaign, Senator Clinton appealed to Democratic superdelegates' political instincts with an overt message that Senator Obama could not win, and an unspoken argument that white working class voters throughout the country (but especially in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and the South) would not vote for an African-

American. Pundits also wondered aloud about the potential for a “Bradley effect” that might evaporate Obama’s lead in the late October polls. Using a method that previously revealed base racism among “New South” whites, our surveys revealed that few white were distressed about an African-American’s candidacy (or election), and most appeared to take some pride or inspiration in being a part of history with him. We do not conclude from these findings that white racism in Florida is finally gone; rather, future research will determine whether the differences between the findings we report here and those of Kuklinski and his colleagues from the early 1990s represents a delayed transformation of the “new South,” the peculiar place of Florida in the “old south”, or differences between the “process” stimulus of the election of a black president and the policy stimulus of “affirmative action” (Kuklinski et al. 1997) and the more personal stimulus of a “black family moving in next door.” (Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997)

Table 1: Evaluations of the Economy and Voter Choice

	October		November	
	Percent of Sample	Percent Prefer Obama	Percent of Sample	Percent Vote for Obama
Current Family Financial Situation compared to one year ago				
Better off	10.5	34.1	9.8	14.7
Same	31.9	41.1	34.7	35.7
Worse off	57.6	61.3	55.6	55.7
Good time to buy big household items?				
Good time	26.3	37.1	31.0	38.6
Uncertain	19.2	46.7	18.8	48.3
Bad time	54.6	62.4	50.1	46.3
Business Conditions Next 12 months				
Good	16.8	42.4	15.7	63.0
Uncertain	38.2	52.6	34.7	46.8
Bad	45.0	55.8	49.6	38.9
Fearful about the nations' economic future?				
Extremely	--	--	18.5	39.3
Somewhat	--	--	56.6	45.4
Not very	--	--	14.8	51.0
Not at all	--	--	10.1	51.4
Fearful about family's economic future?				
Extremely	--	--	12.7	40.9
Somewhat	--	--	45.6	53.6
Not very	--	--	24.9	43.7
Not at all	--	--	16.7	31.0

Source: Data from statewide October (pre-election) and November (post-election) consumer confidence surveys.

Table 2: Trust in Government and Voter Choice

	October		November	
	Percent of Registered	Percent Prefer Obama	Percent of Voters	Percent Vote for Obama
People have different views about how well government works. Using any number from "0-10" where "0" means that government can almost always be counted on to do the wrong thing, "10" means that government can almost always be counted on to do the right thing, and "5" means that government is right about half of the time and wrong the other half. What number would you use?				
Less than half (0-4)	31.1	55.6	32.6	41.1
Half (5)	43.7	56.5	50.3	44.8
More than half (6-10)	25.2	40.2	17.1	50.0
N	405		328	

Source: Data from statewide October (pre-election) and November (post-election) consumer confidence surveys.

Table 3: “Upset” effects in list experiments

	baseline		treatment		effect	t	df	p(t)
	mean	n	mean	n				
Registered voter survey	2.27	317	2.27	306	-0.33	-0.04	614.66	0.97
October consumer confidence survey	2.37	153	2.32	152	-5.02	-0.45	302.49	0.65
Combined data	2.30	470	2.29	458	-1.82	-0.27	922.96	0.79
<i>Presidential preference</i>								
Obama	2.41	185	2.38	189	-3.51	-0.35	370.40	0.72
McCain	2.18	230	2.16	202	-2.42	-0.23	422.45	0.82
<i>Party identification</i>								
Democrats	2.34	137	2.48	150	13.69	1.24	284.91	0.22
Republicans	2.26	190	2.18	154	-8.13	-0.71	327.32	0.48
Independents	2.33	131	2.22	143	-11.15	-0.88	265.15	0.38
<i>Sex</i>								
Men	2.16	227	2.19	220	2.34	0.22	444.51	0.82
Women	2.44	243	2.38	238	-5.81	-0.68	473.93	0.50
<i>Education</i>								
12 years or less	2.57	128	2.51	105	-5.60	-0.42	229.18	0.67
13 – 15 years	2.27	128	2.42	123	14.93	1.13	241.24	0.26
16 or more years	2.16	213	2.11	226	-5.34	-0.56	436.92	0.57
<i>Age</i>								
Less than 45	2.27	66	2.20	69	-6.98	-0.44	132.98	0.66
45-59	2.29	114	2.38	130	8.74	0.70	235.46	0.48
Greater than 59	2.33	279	2.27	243	-5.87	-0.62	501.65	0.53

Source: Data from statewide commercial survey of registered voters (September 28 through October 5) and October consumer confidence survey.

“Mean” entries represent the mean number of upsetting stimuli in the baseline group (presented with four stimuli) and the treatment group (presented with five stimuli).

Table 4: “Proud or inspired” effects in list experiment

	Baseline		Treatment		effect	t	df	p(t)
	mean	n	mean	n				
October consumer confidence survey	2.85	153	3.49	115	63.73	4.80	232.49	0.00
<i>Presidential preference</i>								
Obama voters	2.54	59	3.45	38	90.50	4.02	75.39	0.00
McCain voters	3.22	63	3.67	51	44.44	2.56	100.13	0.01
<i>Party identification</i>								
Democrats	2.85	48	3.33	36	47.92	2.19	70.17	0.03
Republicans	3.21	52	3.85	40	63.85	3.12	81.04	0.00
Independents	2.44	39	3.38	29	94.34	3.49	54.32	0.00
<i>Sex</i>								
Men	2.88	78	3.72	61	83.67	4.65	129.37	0.00
Women	2.81	75	3.22	54	40.89	2.12	103.35	0.04
<i>Education</i>								
Less than 16 years	2.83	89	3.28	68	44.80	2.55	126.61	0.01
16 years or more	2.88	64	3.78	46	90.76	4.58	103.94	0.00
<i>Age</i>								
Less than 60	2.75	76	3.43	58	68.10	3.34	114.18	0.00
60 and over	2.95	77	3.54	57	59.58	3.49	116.75	0.00

Source: Data from statewide October consumer confidence survey.

“Mean” entries represent the mean number of proud or inspiring stimuli in the baseline group (presented with four stimuli) and the treatment group (presented with five stimuli).

Figure 1: Effects of Partisanship and Evaluation of Bush on Vote Preference

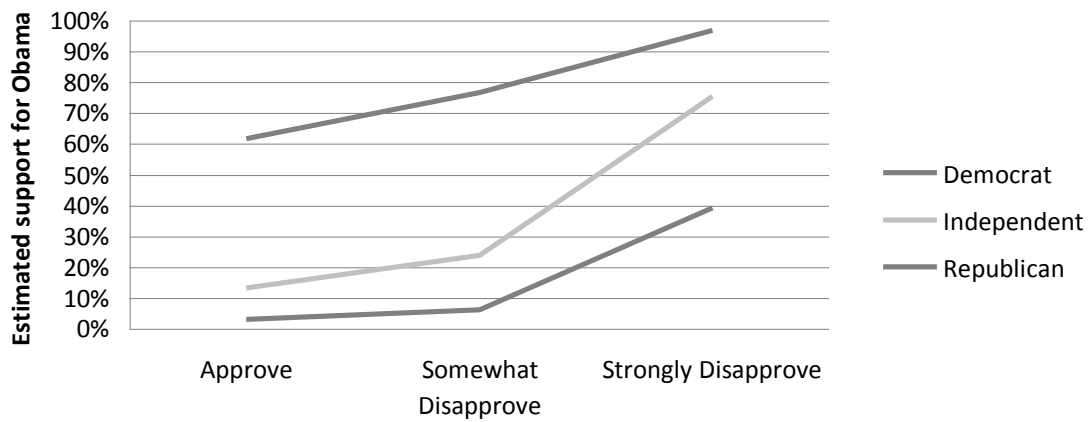


Figure 2: Effects of Partisanship and Family Financial Condition on Vote Choice

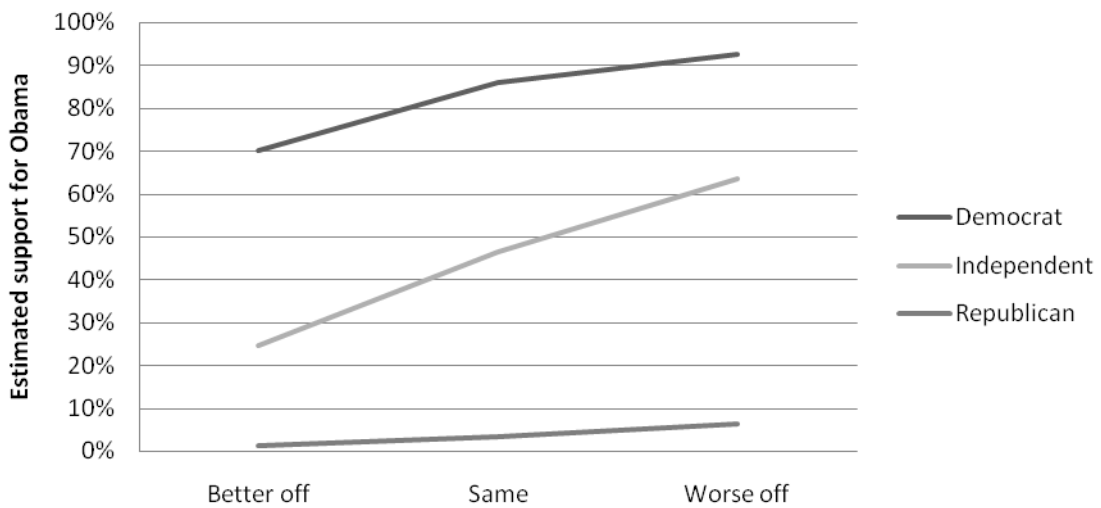


Figure 3: Effects of Bush Job Approval and Abortion Opinion on Vote Choice (Independents)

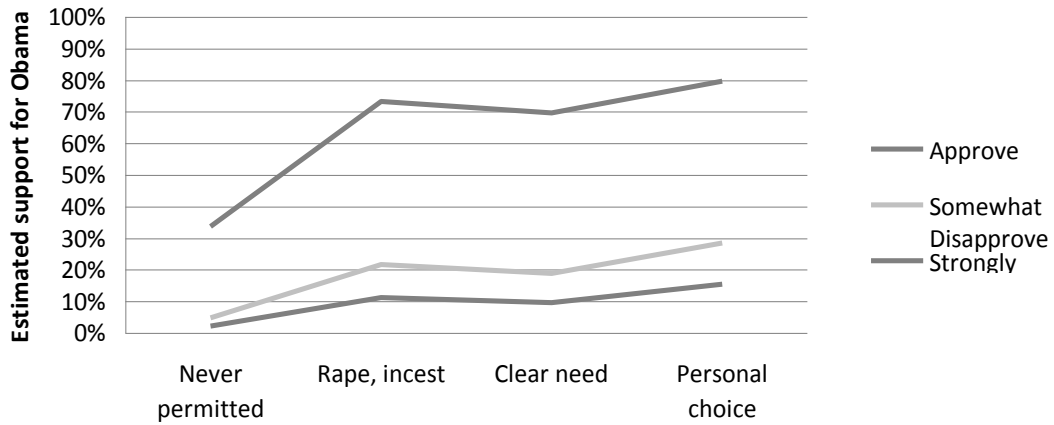
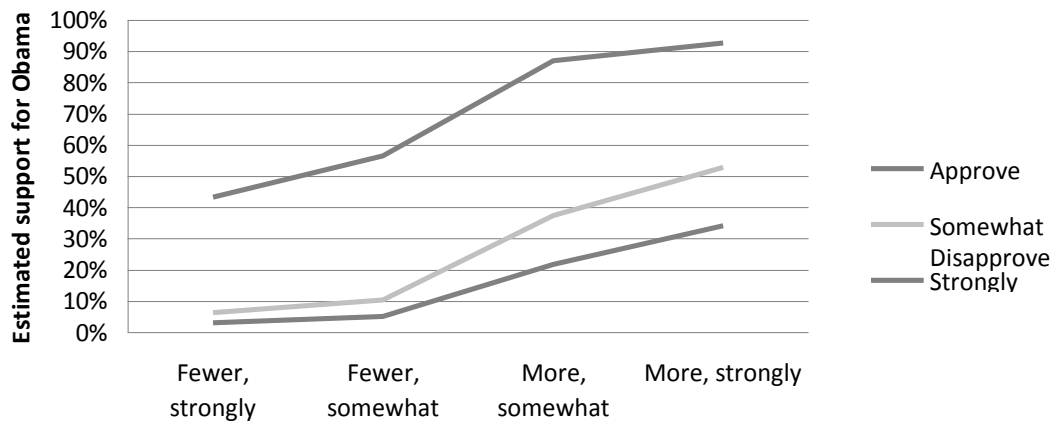
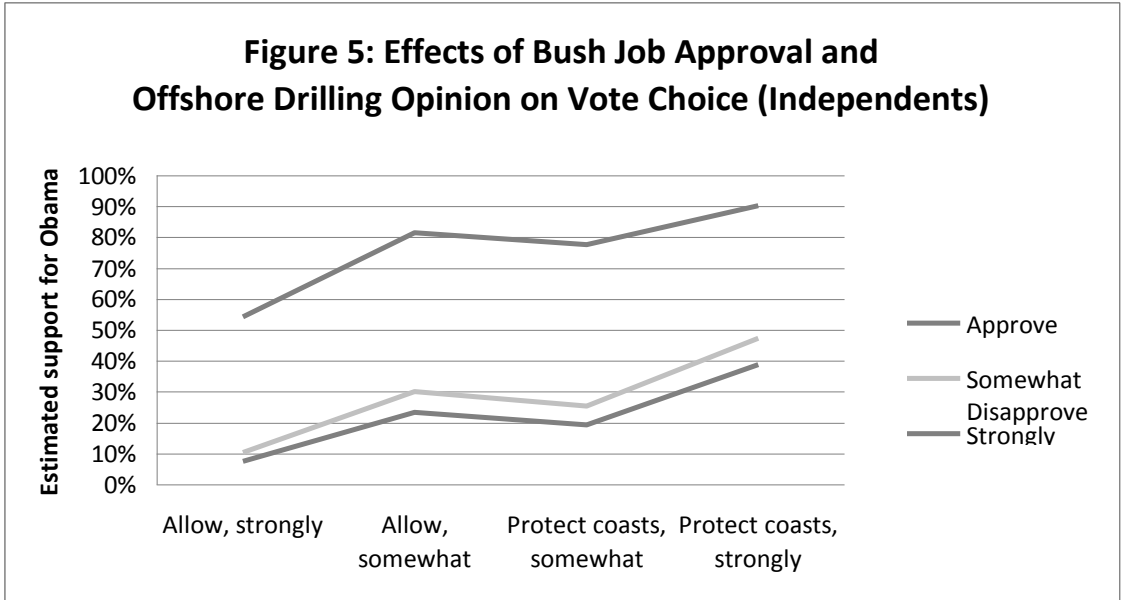


Figure 4: Effects of Bush Job Approval and Services Opinion on Vote Choice (Independents)





Acknowledgements

My colleague, Steve Craig, was a collaborator in developing many of the survey questions used here, though he is not (yet) implicated in the analysis. We appreciate the UF Survey Research Center’s inclusion of our questions in its October and November 2008 Florida Consumer Confidence Surveys, with special thanks to Scott Richards and Armando Padilla. Jim Kane provided access to the data from the commercial survey.

References

- Abramowitz, Alan I. 1995. "It's Abortion Stupid: Policy Voting in the 1992 Presidential Election." *Journal of Politics* 57:176-186.
- Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde. 2002. *Change and Continuity in the 2000 Elections*. Washington: CQ Press.
- . 2006. *Change and Continuity in the 2004 Elections*. Washington: CQ Press.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2000. "Partisanship and voting behavior, 1952-1996." *American Journal of Political Science* 44:35-50.
- Carmines, Edward G. and James A. Stimson. 1980. "The Two Faces of Issue Voting." *American Political Science Review* 74:78-91.
- Conover, Pamela Johnston and Stanley Feldman. 1986. "Emotional Reactions to the Economy: I'm Mad As Hell and I'm Not Going to Take It Anymore." *American Journal of Political Science* 30:50-78.
- Cook, Timothy E. and Paul Gronke. 2005. "The skeptical American: Revisiting the meanings of trust in government and confidence in institutions." *Journal of Politics* 67:784-803.
- Duff, Brian, Michael J. Hanmer, Won-ho Park, and Ismael K. White. 2007. "Good excuses: Understanding who votes with an improved turnout question." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71:67-90.
- Evans, Geoffrey and Robert Andersen. 2006. "The political conditioning of economic perceptions." *Journal of Politics* 68:194-207.
- Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope. 2003. "The 2000 US Presidential Election: Can Retrospective Voting Be Saved?" *British Journal of Political Science* 33:163-187.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 1999. "The effect of political trust on the presidential vote, 1968-96." *American Political Science Review* 93:311-326.
- Highton, Benjamin. 2004. "Policy voting in senate elections: The case of abortion." *Political Behavior* 26:181-200.
- Kane, James G., Stephen C. Craig, and Kenneth D. Wald. 2004. "Religion and Presidential Politics in Florida: A List Experiment." *Social Science Quarterly* 85:281-293.
- Kinder, Donald R. and Lynn M. Sanders. 1996. *Divided By Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kinder, Donald R. and David O. Sears. 1981. "Prejudice and Politics: Symbolic Racism Versus Racial Threats to the Good Life." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40:414-431.
- Kuklinski, James H., Michael D. Cobb, and Martin Gilens. 1997. "Racial attitudes and the "New South"." *Journal of Politics* 59:323-349.
- Kuklinski, James H., Paul M. Sniderman, Kathleen Knight, Thomas Piazza, Philip E. Tetlock, Gordon R. Lawrence, and Barbara Mellers. 1997. "Racial Prejudice and Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 41:402-419.
- Ladner, Matthew and Christopher Wlezien. 2007. "Partisan preferences, electoral prospects, and economic expectations." *Comparative Political Studies* 40:571-596.
- Shaw, Daron R. 2006. *The race to 270: the Electoral College and the campaign strategies of 2000 and 2004*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stanley, Harold W. and Richard G. Niemi. 2006. "Partisanship, Party Coalitions, and Group Support, 1952-2004." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36:172-188.

Streb, Matthew J., Barbara Burrell, Brian Frederick, and Michael A. Genovese. 2008. "Social Desirability Effects and Support for a Female American President." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72:76-89.