Accentuating the Personal:
Media Exposure, Political Sophistication, and Evaluations of Presidential Candidate Traits

by Danny Hayes

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POLITICAL SCIENTISTS have long recognized the importance of candidates' personalities in American presidential elections.[1] While voting behavior research has uncovered a wide range of factors related to the way voters pick their favorite candidates—including policy positions,[2] economic conditions,[3] and party identification[4]—the candidates' personal attributes are an enduring and relevant feature of presidential electoral politics. Accordingly, Dwight Eisenhower's reassuring image, Ronald Reagan's personability, and John F. Kennedy's youthful vigor contributed to each candidate's electoral success.

Not surprisingly, scholars have devoted considerable effort to investigating which voters are most likely to focus on presidential candidates' personal attributes. These studies have shown that differing levels of political sophistication and media consumption are closely related to how much a voter cares about personality on the campaign trail. This line of inquiry has provided researchers with an understanding of why certain voters might, for example, weigh traits more heavily than issue positions[5] and which personal characteristics are most important to different groups of voters.[6]

Little, however, has been done to determine whether a voter's level of political sophistication or media exposure has an influence on how positively or negatively that voter views a presidential candidate's character traits. While the existing literature has found that political sophistication and media consumption affect the *salience* of candidate traits, vis-à-vis issue positions, the question in this article is whether those same factors have an impact on the *perception* of candidates' personal attributes.

The rise of candidate-centered politics[7] and an industry of political image-making makes this an important question. If presidential candidates are making image- and character-based appeals to voters, scholars should have something to say about whether individuals are likely to be won over by such campaigning. And with media

coverage playing an increasingly important role in presidential campaigns, it is critical that researchers understand the ways in which exposure to political journalism influences the way voters view candidates for the highest office in the land. While political scientists have done considerable work on the differential salience of personal traits, no general analysis has attempted to determine if the valence of candidate assessments can be systematically explained by voter characteristics such as political sophistication or media consumption.

This article, divided into four sections, seeks to fill that gap. The first section provides a brief overview of the relevant literature on the importance of candidate traits in presidential elections. The second section lays out hypotheses derived from what previous studies have found about the circumstances under which candidate traits matter. The third section presents descriptive statistics on trait perceptions of presidential candidates from the 1988 National Election Studies and employs three extended beta-binomial regression models to test my hypotheses. The article concludes with a discussion of the results of the empirical testing.

THE RELEVANCE OF CANDIDATE CHARACTER TRAITS

In recent decades, the decline in influence of political parties has seen a commensurate rise in candidate-centered campaigning.[8] Presidential candidates rely less on partisan appeals in their campaigns, often trying to hide, rather than exploit, their party affiliation.[9] To the extent that candidates subvert the relevance of party affiliation, that cue may lose some of its utility as a predictor of how voters evaluate them. At the presidential level, candidates have shown the ability to launch campaigns and win primaries without the party's blessing. This has afforded candidates the opportunity to shape their own images separate from their party labels. In 2000, for example, the media frequently referred to Republican candidate John McCain as a "maverick," a message that implied to citizens that he was not closely aligned with the party elites. In this way, the image an "outsider" candidate creates for himself could be quite distinct from the way people view the party in general.

At the heart of this type of appeal are a candidate's personal attributes, or traits. Even as candidates have taken up more and more of the electoral spotlight, not all voters are likely to focus on the same aspects of a candidacy. Besides partisanship,

which is a robust predictor of the way citizens evaluate candidates, previous research has explored the influence of education, political sophistication, and media consumption on the importance of traits to vote choice. More educated voters are likely to recall candidate traits with more frequency than the less well-educated, but the impact of traits on the vote is either equal across the groups or slightly more important for the less well-educated.[10]

Differences also appear in the traits political novices and political experts—groups differentiated by how interested and attentive to politics they are—care about. Funk found that experts place greater emphasis on a candidate's competence than novices do, while novices give more weight to a candidate's sociability—or "warmth"—than experts.[11] Experts, having a better understanding of the President's responsibilities, are more likely to care about traits they believe to be connected to his ability to perform those tasks. For example, well-informed voters may look at a candidate's competence in a political office he has held previously, because they are likely to believe that past performance will be a good predictor of his ability to function in the challenging role of President.[12] With a less developed understanding of government and presidential responsibility, novices might not make the same connections, leading them to focus on different personal attributes, such as charisma or compassion.

Media consumption has also been found to alter the weight that voters assign to candidate traits. Voters dependent on television for most of their political news have since the 1960s been more focused on candidate traits than those who take their news from newspapers.[13] One explanation is that television, with its inherent promotion of image, emphasizes presidential candidates' personalities more than their policy positions. Television, in Keeter's words, provides the "illusion of intimacy" with candidates.[14] Newspapers, however, are less dependent on image, which could lead to policy and issue priming, a process that can alter the criteria by which people evaluate Presidents.15

EXPECTATIONS FOR POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION AND MEDIA EXPOSURE

Much of the existing research shares a focus on the differential weighting of traits vis-à-vis issues, party affiliation, or other variables. Little has been done, however, to determine whether the factors that have been found to affect the salience of traits—political sophistication or media consumption—have any

systematic influence on the willingness of voters to attribute positive personal characteristics to the candidates. In other words, it is unclear whether political sophistication or media consumption makes a voter more or less willing to attribute positive traits to candidates.

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION

Turning first to political sophistication, people with less knowledge about politics might be more susceptible to image-based appeals. With a less-than-thorough understanding of the political process and little information about specific policy issues, political novices might be inclined to choose candidates based solely on personality and a winning smile. Indeed, previous research has found that political experts are better able to differentiate pieces of information and integrate information with ideological concepts.[16] If image is more important for less politically sophisticated voters, political candidates have an incentive to eschew substance for personality-based campaigns.

With media coverage playing an increasingly important role in presidential campaigns, it is critical that researchers understand the ways in which exposure to political journalism influences the way voters view candidates for the highest office in the land.

On the other hand, since experts are more likely in surveys to mention traits as reasons for liking or disliking presidential candidates,[17] it is possible that the politically sophisticated are more susceptible to personal appeals. In the end, this might make them more likely to attribute positive characteristics to the candidates. As noted, the previous literature has left this question open. This article will provide a test of whether differing levels of political sophistication influence the likelihood that voters will view the candidates' personalities favorably.

The results of this test have important normative implications. Delli Carpini and Keeter argue that an informed citizenry makes for a stronger democracy, suggesting that a more politically knowledgeable electorate will yield better collective choices.[18] To be sure, this is not a dominant view in political science. In recent years, scholars have argued that citizens, regardless of the amount of political information they have, can make efficient individual and collective decisions using strategies of low-information rationality.[19] Identifying the effects of political sophistication on perceptions of presidential candidate personalities will provide some insight into

the nature of the differences and similarities in the decision-making processes of novices and experts.

THE IMPACT OF MEDIA EXPOSURE

Focusing on the willingness of voters to attribute positive traits to presidential candidates also allows for a test of a common criticism of media coverage of political campaigns. Since 1960, news coverage has increasingly focused on candidate images and the campaign "horse race" at the expense of policy issues.[20] At the same time, coverage has become more negative.[21] These two factors suggest that, all else being equal, more media exposure should produce negative assessments of presidential candidates and decrease the likelihood of a voter attributing positive traits to the candidates.

But all media are not created equal. More criticism has been lobbed at television than at newspapers, magazines, or radio. Scholars have argued that the rising dependence on television has helped create an atomized society of individuals who have less interest in civic participation[22] and are cynical about politics, politicians, and the government.[23] But if television does create false intimacy with politicians,[24] exposure to political news through television should make it more likely that a voter will view a candidate's personality in a favorable way, regardless of the tone of news coverage. Candidates work hard to portray themselves as strong leaders, compassionate, empathetic, and trustworthy. To the extent that television, with a heavy emphasis on visuals and photo opportunities, encourages trait-based evaluations of candidates, television viewers might be more likely to attribute positive traits to the candidates.

Other media, however, might contribute to negative personal assessments of a candidate. The rise in negative reporting has not been limited to television, as newspapers, magazines, and radio programming have also gotten into the act.[25] But because those media do not provide the same personal connection with candidates as television does, readers and listeners might be less likely to view their personalities favorably and more apt to offer negative personal assessments of the candidates in public opinion surveys.

The following regression analyses are designed to test three hypotheses about the effects of political sophistication and media exposure on candidate evaluations. First, this article examines the possibility that political novices are more likely to offer positive personal assessments of presidential candidates than are more knowledgeable voters. The article then turns to the questions of media exposure, testing first the hypothesis that because of the negative tone of political news coverage, higher levels of media exposure should lead to more negative evaluations of presidential candidate traits. Finally, the paper tests the hypothesis that exposure to television has a different impact on voters' perceptions of candidate traits than do other media, such as newspapers, magazines, and radio.

DATA AND DESIGN

The analysis in this paper relies on data collected as part of the National Election Studies (NES) during the 1988 presidential campaign.[26] The campaign is appropriate for this analysis for three reasons. First, image was especially important in the contest.[27] The election is best remembered for the Willie Horton advertisement, which told the story of a Massachusetts convict who turned violent during a weekend furlough while Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis was the state's governor. Although Dukakis had not initiated the program, Horton's crimes had been committed under his watch, and the Republican ads helped George H.W. Bush's campaign create an image of Dukakis as a misguided policymaker and weak leader who could not be trusted with the presidency.[28] Another of the campaign's more memorable moments involved Dukakis' riding in a tank in an effort to show that he was qualified to handle the nation's military and defense.[29] The image of Dukakis' helmeted head popping out of the top of the tank as it rolled along the road has become symbolic of the campaign. Bush used the image in an ad to portray Dukakis as lacking credibility on military and defense. Character traits, which provide the foundation for a candidate's image, were clearly important, making the campaign an excellent forum in which to test for differences among individual trait-based evaluations.

Second, the election pitted two nonincumbents against each other. When an incumbent is running for reelection, he has a well-documented record of leadership to burnish his image. This may skew perceptions of leadership and other traits in favor of the incumbent. Although Bush was Vice President in 1988, the vice presidency is a much less prominent office than the presidency. Vice Presidents do not command a central position in the national consciousness in the way that Presidents do, and their lower profile means that citizens have relatively little information about their personal attributes. Voters were likely to come to the 1988 campaign with relatively undeveloped perceptions of the personal attributes of both Bush and Dukakis, which makes the election an attractive venue in which to examine influences on voter perceptions of the candidates' traits.

Finally, the NES in 1988 included a healthy battery of eight questions on the traits of the candidates, making the data set well-suited for the purpose of this article. In many years, the survey contains only four questions related to the personal attributes of the candidates, and the questions are not consistent across elections.[30] In the end, the 1988 campaign's focus on image, the candidates involved, and the data available make it the best forum for the investigation at hand.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR TRAIT ATTRIBUTIONS
This article utilizes closed-ended questions from the

Table 1
Distribution of the Dependent Variable
(Number of Traits Each Respondent
Attributed to Bush and Dukakis)

N of Trait Attributions	N of Respondents	% of Sample
0	11	<1
1	2	<1
2	7	<1
3	12	<1
4	10	<1
5	12	<1
6	35	2.4
7	54	3.8
8	133	9.3
9	113	7.9
10	152	10.6
11	193	13.5
12	216	15.1
13	174	12.1
14	133	9.3
15	79	5.5
16	97	6.8
Total N	**1,433**	**100**
Mean N of Trait Attributions	**11.11**	—
Standard Deviation	**3.03**	—
Median	**10**	—

Source: 1988 National Election Studies.

NES pre-election survey, similar to the approach taken in previous research on the same topic.[31] Each respondent was asked how well each of eight attributes described Bush and Dukakis. The survey items were strong leader, moral, compassionate, cares about people like me, intelligent, decent, inspiring, and knowledgeable. The respondents had four options: extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all.[32] Following the method of Sullivan, Aldrich, Borgida, and Rahn,[33] each answer of "extremely well" or "quite well" was categorized as an indication that the respondent attributed that trait to the candidate. A response of "not too well" or "not well at all" was recorded as indicating that the trait did not describe the candidate. In other words, for each of eight trait questions, the responses were dichotomized into "yes" or "no" answers.

Since this article is concerned with the variation in the number of positive character traits that different individuals attribute to presidential candidates, the appropriate dependent variable in the statistical models is a count of the number of traits each respondent said described the two candidates. With eight possible traits, the trait count for each respondent could range from 0, meaning the respondent believed none of the traits described Bush or Dukakis well, to 16, indicating that all of the traits described both candidates well.

Tables 1 and 2 present descriptive statistics on the distribution of trait attributions among respondents in the 1988 NES sample. Table 1 illustrates how the distribution is skewed toward the upper end of the trait count, with the typical respondent, as reflected in the median, attributing 10 out of a possible 16 traits to George Bush and Michael Dukakis.

Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents in the sample that said the listed traits described the two candidates. It is remarkable how positive the assessments of the candidates were. On every trait except for "inspiring," more than half of the respondents reported that the candidates fit the description "extremely well" or "quite well." Barely half the sample believed the candidates were strong leaders, but in general the assessments were quite positive. The data in table 2 fit with previous research that suggests the American electorate holds its presidential candidates, as human beings, in rather high regard.[34]

THE QUANTITATIVE MODEL

Besides revealing the overall positive nature of the assessments, tables 1 and 2 reveal that the data in this analysis are more suited for a maximum-like-

Table 2
Percentage of Respondents Reporting That Various Traits Describe Bush and Dukakis "Quite Well" or "Extremely Well"

Trait	Bush	Dukakis
Provides Strong Leadership	54	57
Moral	78	80
Compassionate	61	73
Cares about People Like Me	50	65
Intelligent	78	88
Decent	88	87
Inspiring	39	49
Knowledgeable	83	82

Source: 1988 National Election Studies.

lihood technique than a traditional ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model. Political scientists often employ OLS regression analysis when the dependent variable is a scale like the one here. But that technique assumes a continuous dependent variable that runs from $-\infty$ to $+\infty$ and a linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables, assumptions that do not hold when the dependent variable is a count of events or responses. Because a count begins at zero and has an upper limit, using OLS in such cases will generate inefficient results. Instead, a discrete regression model is needed to study the phenomenon at hand, since the dependent variable is the sum of random binary variables.[35] One might also use a binomial distribution, but that assumes an individual's response about whether Michael Dukakis is compassionate or not, for example, is independent of the same respondent's belief about Dukakis' level of empathy. This assumption is implausible, as it is more than likely that a respondent who believes a candidate represents one positive trait is likely to believe he is representative of the next trait, and vice-versa. For these reasons, the analysis in this article relies on the extended beta-binomial distribution,[36] which does not assume linearity and allows for dependence among the binary variables and heterogeneity in π across variables—meaning that the probability of each event occurring is not the same.[37]

To test the hypotheses about the effects of political sophistication and media exposure on voters' assessments of candidate character traits, this article specifies three separate models. The first model tests the effect of political sophistication on trait evaluations while controlling for a series of standard variables. The second model adds media exposure to the equation in an attempt to

discern how media consumption influences voters' perceptions of the candidates. Finally, the third model is designed to capture the effects of different kinds of media exposure—television, newspaper, magazine, and radio—on evaluations of the candidates' traits.

Results

Effects of Political Sophistication

As previously noted, the literature on trait evaluations in presidential elections has left unanswered the question of whether political sophistication affects the likelihood that an individual will view a candidate's personal attributes favorably. Table 3 presents a model designed to test for the effects of political sophistication. The political sophistication variable is an index of knowledge about political

Table 3
The Impact of Political Sophistication on the Number of Characteristics Respondents Attributed to Bush and Dukakis

Variable	Coefficient
Political Sophistication	.014 (.014)
Candidate Evaluation	.009*** (.000)
Partisanship	-.014 (.031)
Education	-.001 (.011)
Age	.004*** (.001)
Income	.000 (.002)
Constant	-.846*** (.090)
N	804
Log Likelihood	-1890.1661

***p-value < .001

Note: Cell entries are coefficients from an extended-beta binomial regression. Standard errors are in parentheses.

matters,[38] as measured by a series of questions taken from the NES post-election survey.[39]

Because an individual's assessment of the candidates' traits is likely to be influenced by how much she likes the candidates in general, the model includes a control for candidate evaluation.[40] Also included are controls for partisanship (coded "1" if the respondent identifies with a party or leans toward a party, and "0" if she considers herself an independent), education, age, and income. The dependent variable in all the models in this article is a count of the number of traits an individual attributed to the candidates.

As shown in table 3, political sophistication had no significant impact on an individual's evaluation of the candidates' personal characteristics.[41] Controlling for other factors, the coefficient for political sophistication is positive but does not approach statistical significance. Candidate evaluation and age, however, are significantly related to the number of traits a respondent attributed to Bush and Dukakis. Predictably, the more a voter liked the candidates in general, the more likely she was to offer positive assessments of their traits, and older respondents were more likely to positively evaluate the candidate's personal attributes. The results suggest that political sophistication is relatively unimportant. No matter whether a voter is a political novice or expert, she is no more or less likely to be persuaded by a candidate's image appeals. The finding contradicts the assertion that political novices are more easily drawn in by personal appeals than experts.[42]

Effects of Media Exposure

If political sophistication has no effect on trait evaluations, perhaps more can be explained by how much political news a voter takes from the media. As previously noted, news coverage in recent elections has grown increasingly negative.[43] By focusing differentially on certain topics and by framing events in a way that casts political actors in a negative light, news coverage can encourage audiences to think about politics in those same terms.[44] If that is the case, and if news coverage has indeed become more negative, the more media an individual is exposed to, the fewer positive character traits she should be expected to attribute to the candidates.

The results in table 4 confirm the hypothesis. Controlling for other factors, the more media a voter was exposed to, the fewer positive traits she attributed to the presidential candidates. As in the previous model, political sophistication is not significant, but increases in the measures for

Table 4
The Impact of Media Exposure on the Number of Characteristics Respondents Attributed to Bush and Dukakis

Variable	Coefficient
Political Sophistication	.029 (.017)
Candidate Evaluation	.008*** (.000)
Partisanship	-.002 (.033)
Education	.005 (.033)
Age	.004*** (.001)
Income	-.000 (.003)
Constant	-.732*** (.105)
N	593
Log Likelihood	-1352.1741

***p-value < .001, *p-value < .05

Note: Cell entries are coefficients from an extended-beta binomial regression. Standard errors are in parentheses.

candidate evaluation and age boost the number of traits a respondent attributed to Bush and Dukakis. Media exposure, then, appears to be a much better predictor of trait attributions than political sophistication. Political knowledge itself is not critical, but how much political news an individual takes from the media is of the utmost importance. The results suggest that media negativity has an effect on the way voters evaluate candidate traits.

EFFECTS OF PRINT AND BROADCAST MEDIA EXPOSURE
Because the term "media" encompasses television, newspapers, magazines, and radio, it is important to draw distinctions among the outlets from which a voter gets her political news. Table 5 presents a model with dummy variables for each media outlet. The variables were coded "1" if the respondent said she had taken political news during the campaign from the particular media outlet, and "0" if not.

The results show that watching television for political news increased the number of traits a respondent was willing to attribute to the candidates, consistent with the argument that television brings the candidates into voters' living rooms and creates a positive attachment between the voter and the politician.[45] On the other hand exposure to newspapers and magazines significantly decreased the number of trait attributions. These effects suggest that perhaps because print media are less depen-

Table 5
The Impact of Various Types of Media Exposure on the Number of Characteristics Respondents Attributed to Bush and Dukakis

Variable	Coefficient
Television Exposure	.256* (.118)
Newspaper Exposure	-.084* (.039)
Magazine Exposure	-.063* (.030)
Radio Exposure	-.007 (.033)
Political Sophistication	.031 (.017)
Candidate Evaluation	.007*** (.001)
Partisanship	-.001 (.033)
Education	.006 (.012)
Age	.004*** (.001)
Income	-.000 (.003)
Constant	-1.01*** (.168)
N	593
Log Likelihood	-1348.3399

***p-value < .001, *p-value < .05

Note: Cell entries are coefficients from an extended-beta binomial regression. Standard errors are in parentheses.

dent on pictures and images, the kinds of coverage that appear in newspapers and magazines are less useful for trait-based appeals by the candidates. Radio exposure was the only insignificant media variable. As in the previous two models, controls for candidate evaluation and age are significant.

One plausible explanation for the different effects of television and print exposure centers on distinctions in coverage across those outlets. Television journalists in recent elections have spent more time than print reporters detailing the campaign "horse race," which tends to focus on the candidates rather than their policies. For example, in the last two presidential election cycles *The New York Times* devoted more than half of its campaign coverage to substantive topics, while the major television networks used between just 36 and 42 percent of their campaign news to focus on substantive issues.[46] Print coverage could be priming voters to consider policy over personality and indirectly could promote less positive personal assessments of the candidates than television does.

> *It is plausible to think that in the era of candidate-centered campaigning, television might help voters make connections with a candidate's personality that aren't produced by reading newspapers or magazines.*

Conclusion

In the last decade, political scientists have suggested that citizens often use information shortcuts to make political decisions.[47] Rather than collecting every piece of information about a candidate or policy proposal, voters use symbols and cues to help them make decisions. Party labels, campaign events, and media appearances are all sources of cues for voters. These bits of data allow people to make inferences and arrive at judgments about candidates without memorizing their entire biographies and political resumes. This process is especially likely to occur with respect to candidate traits, since most voters rely exclusively on media coverage of campaigns and televised images of a candidate to make judgments about his character, trustworthiness, leadership abilities, and so on.[48]

This scholarly focus has gained purchase because it comports with the way people process information in their daily lives.[49] If this type of information processing is as common as Popkin[50] and others suggest, it should be no surprise that political sophistication had no impact on voters' assessments

of George Bush and Michael Dukakis' personalities, as this analysis has shown. Experts and novices are likely to make the same kind of trait inferences, because both deal with limited information about the candidates' personalities. While experts might know more about a candidate's position on crime, defense, or the environment, there is no theoretical reason to expect that the politically sophisticated should view candidate's traits in systematically different ways than their less aware counterparts. Indeed, some recent research has found that differences in levels of political sophistication might become important only when information is presented in cognitively demanding ways.[51] With this low-information rationality perspective, the absence of significant political sophistication effects should not be surprising. It should hearten democratic theorists to see that less sophisticated voters might not necessarily be taken for a ride by candidates with slick image campaigns.

Likewise, the body of research on media agenda-setting and priming sheds light on the significance of media exposure in this analysis. The news media have a considerable impact on how people think about political problems and political actors.[52] Since presidential candidates' images are shaped by news coverage, and since people take cues from what they see of candidates in the news, it stands to reason that media coverage should influence how people evaluate the candidates personally.

This article has also shown that television exposure produces more favorable assessments than does print media exposure. While the result is intuitively appealing, the findings must be taken with a grain of salt. Nearly every respondent in the analysis reported seeing news about the 1988 campaign on television, and so there is minimal variance in that variable. Still, it is plausible to think that in the era of candidate-centered campaigning, television might help voters make connections with a candidate's personality that aren't produced by reading newspapers or magazines. Newspaper and magazine consumption were found to produce more negative assessments of the candidates. Print media certainly provide fewer chances for personality priming, and might, unlike television, diminish the likelihood of a positive trait-based assessment of a candidate.

Up to this point, the literature on presidential candidate trait evaluations has been rather quiet about whether political information or media exposure makes individuals more or less likely to view presidential candidates as representative of personal attributes, a critical omission given the importance of character in presidential politics.[53] In summary, the findings in this article attempt to fill that gap. The analysis presented here converges with findings in the previous trait literature about the importance of media exposure. At the same time, the statistically insignificant findings regarding political sophistication contribute to the growing literature that focuses on voters' use of information shortcuts to cope with a complex political world.

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NOTES

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5. David P. Glass, "Evaluating Presidential Candidates: Who Focuses on Their Personal Attributes?," *Public Opinion Quarterly,* vol. 49 (1985), pp. 517-534; Scott Keeter, "The Illusion of Intimacy: Television and the Role of Candidate Personal Qualities in Voter Choice," *Public Opinion Quarterly,* vol. 51 (1987), pp. 344-358.

6. Carolyn L. Funk, "Implications of Political Expertise in Candidate Trait Evaluations," *Political Research Quarterly,* vol. 50 (1997), pp. 675-697.

7. Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

8. Ibid., Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

9. Darrell M. West, *Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952-1992* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1993).

10. Glass, "Evaluating Presidential Candidates"; Miller et al., "Schematic Assessments of Presidential Candidates."

11. Funk, "Implications of Political Expertise in Candidate Trait Evaluations."

12. Because the median presidential candidate in American politics is a man, this paper refers to presidential candidates with the masculine pronoun throughout this paper to avoid the more awkward "he or she" construction. Likewise, because the median voter is a woman, this paper refers to individual voters with the feminine pronoun "she."

13. Keeter, "The Illusion of Intimacy."

14. Ibid.

15. Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Jon A. Krosnick and Donald R. Kinder, "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President through Priming," *American Political Science Review,* vol. 84 (1990), pp. 497-512.

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24. Roderick P. Hart, *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Voter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

25. Farnsworth and Lichter, *The Nightly News Nightmare;* Patterson, *Out of Order*.

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27. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Packaging the Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

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30. Danny Hayes, "Candidate Qualities through a Partisan Lens: A Theory of Trait Ownership" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwestern Political Science Association, San Antonio, Texas, April 2003).

31. David Barker and Adam Lawrence, "When and How Candidates Matter: The 'Primary' Role of Candidate Traits in Presidential Nominations" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwestern Political Science Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 2002); John L. Sullivan, John Aldrich, Eugene Borgida, and Wendy Rahn, "Candidate Appraisal and Human Nature: Man and Superman in the 1984 Election," *Political Psychology,* vol. 11 (1990), pp. 459-484. Scholars have also relied on open-ended questions in similar studies, including Glass, "Evaluating Presidential Candidates"; Keeter, "The Illusion of Intimacy"; and Miller et al., "Schematic Assessments of Presidential Candidates."

32. Responses to the questions were solicited in the following way: "I am going to read you a list of words and phrases people may use to describe political figures. For each, tell me whether the word or phrase describes the candidate I name. Think about (candidate's name). In your opinion does the phrase 'he is (trait)' describe (candidate's name) extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?"

33. Sullivan et al., "Candidate Appraisal and Human Nature."

34. Ibid.

35. Gary King, *Unifying Political Methodology: The Likelihood Theory of Statistical Inference* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

36. R. L. Prentice, "Binary Regression Using an Extended Beta-Binomial Distribution, with Discussion of Correlation Induced by Covariate Measurement Errors," *Journal of the American Statistical Association,* vol. 81 (1986), pp. 321-327.

37. King, *Unifying Political Methodology*.

38. Robert C. Luskin, "Measuring Political Sophistication," *American Journal of Political Science,* vol. 31 (1987), pp. 856-899.

39. Five questions were used to create the index: party control of the House of Representatives; party control of the Senate; which party was more liberal; the office held by William Rhenquist; and the office held by Tom Foley. Correct answers were scored as a 1, and the level of political knowledge for each individual was the sum of correct answers, which could range from 0 to 5. The median score was 3. (Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics*.)

40. Since the dependent variable is the sum of the number of traits attributed to both candidates, the variable was created by adding together Bush and Dukakis' ratings on the standard NES feeling thermometers.

41. Unfortunately, there is no straightforward way to assess the goodness of fit of the extended beta-binomial regression model. Measures such as the R^2, which are used in a typical regression model, are not substantively useful in a maximum likelihood technique such as the one here. Still, the log likelihood statistics, presented at the bottom of each table, provide some sense of the fit of the three models. The addition of the media exposure variables in tables 4 and 5 brings the log likelihood closer to zero than it is in table 3, an indication that the models' fit improved as these variables were added. While this is not an overall goodness of fit measure, it does suggest that the key variables improved the explanatory power of the models. In any event, since the point of the analyses is to determine if political sophistication and media exposure affect the likelihood of attributing traits to the candidates—not to provide a perfect prediction of the number of traits an individual attributed to the candidates—the absence of a goodness of fit measure is not a major drawback. The fit of the models is less important than the statistical significance or insignificance of the key independent variables.

42. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and David S. Birdsell, *Presidential Debates: The Challenge of Creating an Informed Electorate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

43. Farnsworth and Lichter, *The Nightly News Nightmare*.

44. Iyengar and Kinder, *News That Matters;* Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly,* vol. 36 (1972), pp. 176-187; Thomas E. Nelson, Rosalee A. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley, "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance," *American Political Science Review,* vol. 91 (1997), pp. 567-583.

45. Keeter, "The Illusion of Intimacy."

46. Farnsworth and Lichter, *The Nightly News Nightmare.*

47. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter;* Matthew A. Baum, "Sex, Lies, and War: How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public," *American Political Science Review,* vol. 96 (2002), pp. 91-110; Arthur Lupia, "Shortcuts vs. Encyclopedias: Information and Voting

Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections," *American Political Science Review,* vol. 88 (1994), pp. 63-76.

48. Unless, of course, one is a primary voter in New Hampshire or Iowa, in which case the opportunities to meet a candidate are plentiful.

49. Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition,* 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

50. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*.

51. Wendy Rahn, John Aldrich, and Eugene Borgida, "Individual and Contextual Variations in Political Candidate Appraisal," *American Political Science Review,* vol. 88 (1994), pp. 193-199.

52. Iyengar and Kinder, *News That Matters;* Krosnick and Kinder, "Altering the Foundations of Support"; Jon A. Krosnick and Laura A. Brannon, "The Impact of the Gulf War on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Multidimensional Effects of Political Involvement," *American Political Science Review,* vol. 87 (1993), pp. 963-975.

53. James David Barber, *The Presidential Character,* 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Prentice Hall, 1992); Bruce Buchanan, *The Citizen's Presidency: Standards of Choice and Judgment* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1987).

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