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The Enigma of Electability: How Do Voters Predict Who Can Win?

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Abstract

Ideological moderation is often assumed to inform a candidate's electability. This article examines the effects of a voters' perceptions of a candidate's ideology on the voters' belief in the candidate's ability to win the election. Using data from the American National Election Survey from 2008 and 2016, the paper compares the effect of the perceived ideology of a candidate and individuals' predictions about the candidate that will win. Opinions regarding Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Donald Trump are analyzed. The results suggest that for the Democratic candidates, voters who believed them to be more moderate or conservative were more likely to believe they would win than those who thought they were more liberal. However, the results suggested no similar relationship existed for the Republican candidates with no effect of ideological moderation on election outcome predictions.

Keywords

electability, voter behavior, ideology, presidential candidates

Disciplines

American Politics | Models and Methods | Political Science

Comments

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The Enigma of Electability:

How Do Voters Predict Who Can Win?

Emily Dalgleish

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In 2008, Barack Obama beat the conventionally more electable candidate Hillary Clinton in the presidential primaries, and in the general election, he beat a more experienced and electable candidate John McCain (Nagourney 2008). In 2016, the deemed unelectable candidate Donald Trump beat his traditional primary contenders, then beat the perceived more electable Hillary Clinton in the general election (Flegenheimer and Barbaro 2016). Now leading up to 2020 presidential election, the Democratic Party, voters, and the media have persistently focused on each candidate's electability in the Democratic primary (Kilgore 2019).

But what does it mean to be electable? Many pundits discuss electability in terms of how closely a candidate matches the perceptions of the demographic norm in swing states: a white, straight man with a working-class background. Some candidates and voters counter that the demographic view of electability is coded discrimination (Herndon 2019). Alternatively, pundits discuss electability by how ideologically moderate a candidate is (Kilgore 2019). Though demographics and moderation tend to be the most discussed methods to estimate electability, others estimate using a candidate's ability to energize voters with charisma or policy, ability to fundraise, electoral experience and successes, portrayal in the media, or a candidate's ability to debate and defend their policies. Though individual evaluations of electability are subjective, this paper will use the definition of electability as who voters believe will win the general election.

While pundits may speculate about the electability of candidates, it is ultimately the voters' decision. In the primaries, voters may or may not consider electability in their vote. If voters do consider electability, they may each determine differently who is the most electable. In the general election, voters determine who is electable by electing a candidate. This paper will explore how the relationship between perceived ideology of the candidate and perceived electability of the candidate: does the independent variable of a voter's perceived ideology of a

candidate effect the dependent variable of the voter's prediction of if the candidate will be elected?

This paper will first look to research regarding the different criteria voters take into account when choosing a candidate, focusing on ideology and electability. Secondly, the paper will explore research regarding how voters evaluate electability, including perceptions of ideology, race, gender, and exposure to media. Finally, the paper will evaluate studies researching if voters are correct in their perceptions of candidates, in their subsequent votes, and their election predictions. These studies will guide my research in the perception of ideology and its effects on voter predictions for the 2008 and 2016 presidential elections.

Researching voter behavior and perceptions regarding electability is essential now as our country is obsessed with the concept of electability, but voters, candidates, and the media greatly differ in defining and evaluating electability. A better understanding of perceptions of electability can redefine the way that candidates campaign, the media evaluates candidates, and voters vote. Understanding voter perceptions of electability allow us to better predict voter behavior and outcomes in 2020, an election in which Democrats say they will vote more on the ability to win in the general election over any other factor (Kilgore 2019). With that, it is imperative to research how voters perceive electability.

Voter Criteria

When voting in a primary, do voters choose the person that most closely matches their ideology or the person they believe is most likely to win in the general election? Studies have found that voters consider the general election prospects of their party's candidate when voting in primaries (Wattier 2003; Rickerhauser and Aldrich 2007; Abramowitz 1989; Stone and Abramowitz 1986; Adams and Merrill 2013). A common belief has been that because primary

voters are more ideologically extreme than the general election voters, the primary is more likely to produce an ideologically extreme candidate that is less ideologically similar to the general population (Stone and Abramowitz 1986; Abramowitz 1989). Abramowitz in his 1986 research with Stone and in his 1989 research uses voter decision pathways to model voter behavior, displaying that personal opinions of the candidate affect the voter's perception of which candidate is most likely to win the general election. Though voters consider the electability of the candidate, Adams and Merrill (2013) found using election modeling that voting with ideology or voting with electability had an equal effect on election outcomes. Data does not support the bandwagon method of voting, in which voters support a candidate because they believe the candidate will win the primary election, as voters think more about winners of the general election than the primary (Abramowitz 1989). Some studies found electability to be the strongest indicator of voter choice (Wattier 2003; Abramowitz and Stone 1986) while other studies found that voters combined substantive issues as well as electability in their decision (Rickerharuser and Aldrich 2007; Adams and Merrill 2013). Though studies vary in the degree to which voters consider electability, all relevant research has supported that electability is an important indicator for voter primary choice.

Voter Perception of Electability

Voters who vote with a consideration of electability must then use a variety of factors to decide who they perceive to be most likely to win in the general election, including perceived ideology of the candidate (Simas 2016; Cremona and McDonald 2006; Stone and Abramowitz 1986; Abramowitz 1989; Stone and Rapoport 1994; Hall 2015), race and gender of the candidate and voter (Terkildsen 1993; Weaver 2012; Payne 2011; Stout and Danvy 2010; Sanbonmatsu 2006; Smith et al 2018; Miller, Peaker, and Boulton 2010; Atkeson and Krebs

2008), and the media portrayal of the candidate (Simas 2016; Stone and Rapoport 1994; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010; Atkeson and Krebs 2008).

The term “moderation hypothesis” is used to describe the concept that more moderate candidates are more likely to win the general election. Studies have found that voters follow the moderation hypothesis to some extent, with a modest effect of perceived ideology on perceptions of which primary candidate voters think will win the general election (Abramowitz and Stone 1989; Rapoport and Stone 1994). However, the effects are limited with ideologically extreme candidates able to outperform moderate candidates (Simas 2016 and Stone and Rapoport 1994). Cremona and McDonald (2006) found no relationship between centrist party position and electability of the candidate and party using data from left-right two-party systems including the UK, Australia, US, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand. This discrepancy in results may be because the United States is the only system with a non-plurality system, and candidate-centered elections can greatly change the behavior of voters. Contrarily, Hall (2015) found a strong relationship between moderation and election chances, with an average decrease in election success of 9-13% for ideologically extreme candidates. This conclusion may find a strong relationship between moderation and electability compared to those of Simas, Stone and Rapoport, and Abramowitz because Hall used data from House races while the other studies used national presidential election data: individual districts may be more sensitive to ideological extremity than the entire country. Furthermore, voters perceive candidates’ ideologies differently: Republicans perceive Democratic candidates to be more liberal than Democrats perceive Democratic candidates, and Democrats perceive Republican candidates to be more conservative than Republicans perceive Republican candidates (Stone and Rapoport 1994). For that reason, it will be important in this research to control for the party of the voter respondents.

Overall, the ideological extremity does have an effect on voter perceptions of electability, but there are limiting factors to the relationship such as candidate television performances and ideological variations from the voters, and the effects change with the type of election.

However, voters do not perceive ideology alone in their evaluations of electability. The race and gender of candidates can consciously or subconsciously affect voters' perceptions. Studies have found that the candidates who are black receive lower rankings from voters and less likelihood of voter support, decreasing their electability (Terkildsen 1993; Weaver 2012; Payne 2011; Stout and Danvy 2010). In hypothetical comparisons of white and black candidates, white voters would penalize black candidates controlling for policies and parties (Terkildsen 1993; Weaver 2012). In a comparison of real candidates in real elections, there are negative effects among voters for black candidates (Payne 2011; Stout and Danvy 2010). There was a gap between black and white candidates, even when controlling for party, in the 2008 Presidential election with Obama and Clinton (Stout and Danvy 2010) and Tom Bradley's California gubernatorial race (Payne 2011). Additionally, the race, gender, and party of the voter all affect how the voter perceives race in their evaluation of the candidate, with black voters (Weaver 2012; Payne 2011; Stout and Danvy 2010). Studies looking at skin tone found that skin tone also affected voter behavior and thinking (Stout and Danvey 2010; Terkildsen 1993), with Terkildsen finding that voters evaluating candidates with darker skin tones are more likely to be aware of their prejudice. While the personal opinion of a candidate can affect the perception of electability, these studies did not research the effects of race of candidates on the perceptions of their electability.

The gender of the candidate can also affect the perception of voters of the candidate. Women candidates are perceived differently than men in their elections (Sanbonmatsu 2006;

Smith et al 2018; Miller, Peaker, and Boulton 2010; Atkeson and Krebs 2008). Perceptions of electability have had consistent correlations with gender, with sexualized appearance negatively affecting voter perceptions of electability (Smith et al 2018), questions of electability positively correlated with questions of electability in newspapers (Miller, Peaker, and Boulton 2010), and party leaders believing women have worse electoral chances (Sanbonmatsu 2006). When comparing their election outcomes, women generally perform no worse than men, especially among Democratic districts (Sanbonmatsu 2006; Ondercin and Welch 2009).

For moderation, race, and gender, the media's amount of coverage and type of coverage can also affect a candidate's election prospects (Simas 2016; Stone and Rapoport 1994; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010; Atkeson and Krebs 2008). Simas and Stone and Rapoport found media to be an intervening variable and controlled for its effects when testing the effects of ideology on perceived electability. Stone and Rapoport found the television performance of Reagan and John Glenn to exceed past the moderation hypothesis. Gender affects the type of media coverage in a race, which can greatly affect voter perception of candidates (Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). Atkeson and Krebs found in open-seat nonpartisan competitive mayoral races that press coverage was not biased in favor of male candidates but only expanded the issues discussed in campaigns, contrasting with Miller, Peake, and Boulton that concluded that female candidates received more negative coverage and more negative personal coverage than men in looking at the 2008 election with Obama and Clinton. This discrepancy could be due to the different political environments of local elections and national elections, as national elections are often more animus.

Accuracy of Voter Predictions and Perceptions

How accurate are voters in their perceptions of electability in who will win the election, and does their voting choice reflect their values? Voters as an aggregate have been able to successfully predict who will win the presidential election for many election cycles (Lewis-Beck and Tien 1999; Forsythe et al 1992). Though many voters are biased in their decision of who they believe will win the election, there are enough voters limited in their bias that their combined prediction overall can outperform predictions based on voter preference polling (Lewis-Beck and Tien 1999; Forsythe et al 1992). Lewis-Beck and Tien also found that voter predictions could predict election outcomes more accurately a month before the election date than traditional polling. However, even if voters can accurately predict election winners, their vote choice may not reflect their individual values and interests, especially in primaries (Lau 2013). Lau found that in primaries, voters often barely do better than chance in selecting a candidate that represents their values. Voters may be able as a group to predict who can win an election but cannot predict who they best align within primaries. This indicates that despite biases and wishful thinking, voters collectively can determine electability which is important as voters do use electability in their primary decisions.

Causal Explanations and Hypotheses

Voters may perceive that more moderate candidates are more electable based on their thoughts about other voters and what candidates need to do to win an election. Voters think that for a candidate to win an election, the candidate must appeal to a wide array of voters. With that, the candidate cannot appeal only to their party, but to the swing and independent voters that decide the election. Voters see candidates that are more ideologically extreme as less appealing for more moderate voters and the general electorate, so they are less likely to gain their votes and are less likely to win. Voters think that extreme candidates have fewer people that are

ideologically consistent with them, so the candidates will have a far narrower base and the number of voters. Furthermore, voters see that ideologically extreme issue positions are often used as attack points on candidates, so the more extreme the candidate is, it is harder for them to defend their positions and defend themselves against an opposition candidate making them less likely to win.

Voters may believe that there are fewer moderate voters or swing voters than there are extreme voters, so a candidate must be moderate to get the most votes. Alternatively, voters could assume that moderates would not vote for an ideologically extreme candidate, but ideologically extreme voters would vote for a more moderate candidate. That could be because extreme voters are more politically engaged and would rather vote for someone they don't ideologically match with than have the oppositional party win. In this study, I hypothesize that in a comparison of individuals, respondents who perceive a candidate to be more moderate in their party are more likely to believe that candidate will be elected. With that, I hypothesize that in a comparison of individuals, respondents who perceive the Democratic candidate to be more conservative are more likely to believe that that candidate will win than those who believe the candidate is more liberal, and that respondents who perceive the Republican candidate to be more liberal are more likely to believe that that candidate will win than those who perceive the Republican candidate to be conservative.

I will control for the respondent's ideology, race, and gender. I control for party ideology as an individual's ideology can affect how they perceive a candidate's ideology. If an individual is extremely liberal, they may perceive a liberal candidate to be moderate, as the candidate is moderate relative to themselves, and the same follows for conservative individuals. I control for the respondent's gender as in both elections, females may assess electability differently than

males and in 2016, females may perceive Clinton as a female candidate to be more electable than males may perceive her to be. Finally, I control for race as racial issues were central in the 2008 and 2016 election which could affect the way voters of different races predict the outcome of the election.

Research Design Section

Introduction

In order to test the hypotheses, I examined data from the American National Election Surveys 2008 and 2016. The data include a pre and post-election survey with 2,322 respondents for 2008 and 4,270 respondents for 2016. All respondents were US eligible voters. I will be using only data from pre-election survey.

I selected these data because I am researching perceived ideology and electability in American presidential elections. These surveys asked respondents both how they perceived each major candidate's ideology and who they thought would win, or in other words, who is most electable. Furthermore, I selected 2008 and 2016 because I wanted to look at presidential elections in which there is an open seat, as a candidate's incumbency can impact voters' predictions and perceptions of electability. Furthermore, many similar studies that have researched ideologically and electability are from the 1980s, and modern data would be the most relevant. I use only pre-election surveys as I am looking at who voters think will win the election, so the surveys must be from before the election occurs. A constraint of these surveys is that they only survey respondents before and after the general election, and do not include information about candidate perception of ideology or win predictions from the primary elections.

Variable Measurements

In order to operationalize perceived electability of the presidential candidate, I use the win prediction variable. The survey question asked to respondents was, “Who do you think will be elected President in November?” with “Barack Obama,” “John McCain,” and “Other” for 2008 and “Hillary Clinton,” “Donald Trump,” and “Other” for 2016. Those who answered “Other” were removed from the data. The mode for this variable in 2008 was Barack Obama, with 71.94% of respondents predicting Obama. In 2016, the mode was Hillary Clinton, with 64.41% of respondents predicting Hillary Clinton. In Table 1 and Table 2, there is a distribution of respondents who believe each candidate will win by the party of the voter. In Table 1, it is clear that while a majority of respondents overall believed that Obama would be elected, a much higher percentage of Democrats believed so compared to Independents and Republicans. The same pattern follows for Clinton in 2016, as seen in Table 2.

Table 1: 2008 Respondent’s Predictions of Who Will Be Elected by Respondent’s Party				
Who voters believe will be elected	Respondents Self-Identified Party			
	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Total
John McCain	12.51	29.36	61.70	28.06
Barack Obama	87.49	70.64	38.30	71.94
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 2: 2016 Respondent’s Predictions of Who Will Be Elected by Respondent’s Party				
Who voters believe will be elected	Respondents Self-Identified Party			
	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Total
Donald Trump	9.30	36.11	66.18	35.47
Hillary Clinton	90.70	63.89	33.82	64.53
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Respondents’ perceived ideology of the Democratic candidate was surveyed with the question, “Where would you place [Barack Obama/ Hillary Clinton] on this scale?” with the

scale ranging from 1-7. The scale was labeled as follows: “1. Extremely liberal 2. Liberal 3. Slightly liberal 4. Moderate; middle of the road 5. Slightly conservative 6. Conservative 7. Extremely conservative.” The mean of Barack Obama’s perceived ideology is 3.29; the median is 3 for slightly liberal; the mode is 2 for liberal. The mean of Hillary Clinton’s perceived ideology is 2.73; the median is 2 for Liberal; the mode is also 2 for Liberal. Figures 1 and 2 display the percentage of the sample who believe the Democratic candidate will win by the respondents’ perceived ideology of the candidate, for Obama and Clinton respectively.

Figure 1: Percent Who Believe Obama will Win by Perceived Ideology of Obama

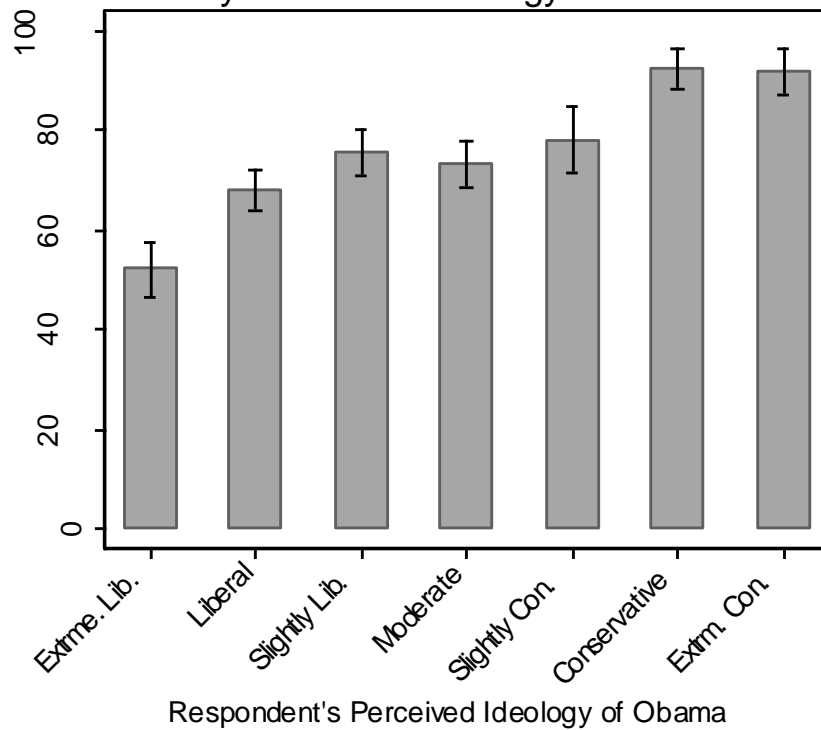
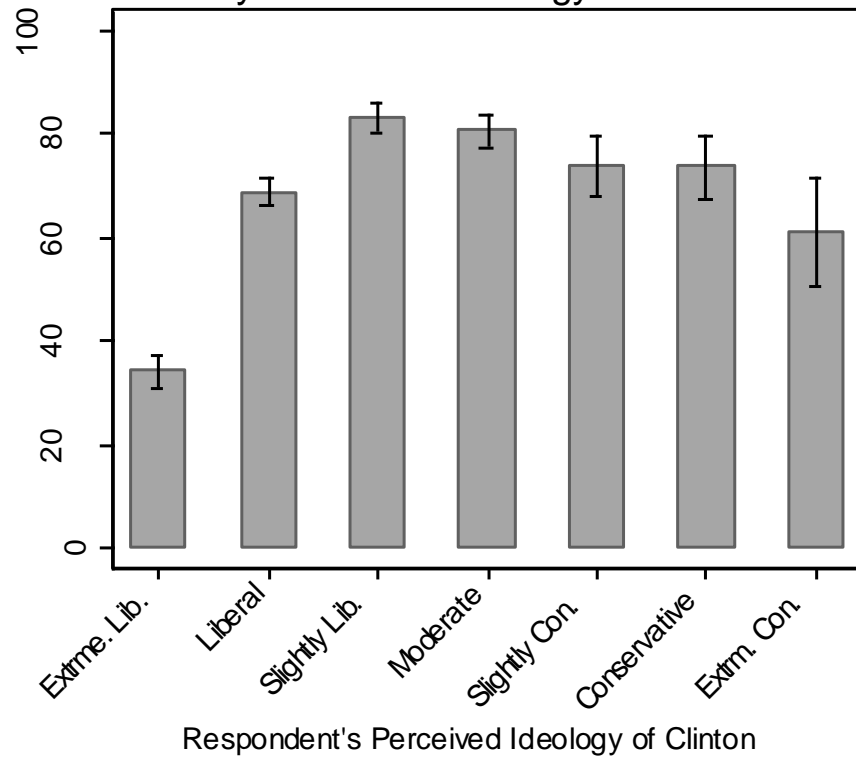


Figure 2: Percent Who Believe Clinton will Win by Perceived Ideology of Clinton



Respondents' perceived ideology of John McCain and Donald Trump was surveyed with the same question replacing the candidates' names and using the same scale. For the perceived ideology of John McCain, the mean is 4.86; the median is 5 for slightly conservative; the mode is 6 for conservative. The mean of Donald Trump's perceived ideology is 4.87; the median is 5 for slightly conservative; the mode is 6 for conservative. Figures 3 and 4 display the percentage of the sample who believe the Republican candidate will win by the respondents' perceived ideology of the candidate, for McCain and Trump respectively.

Figure 3: Percent Who Believe McCain will Win by Perceived Ideology of McCain

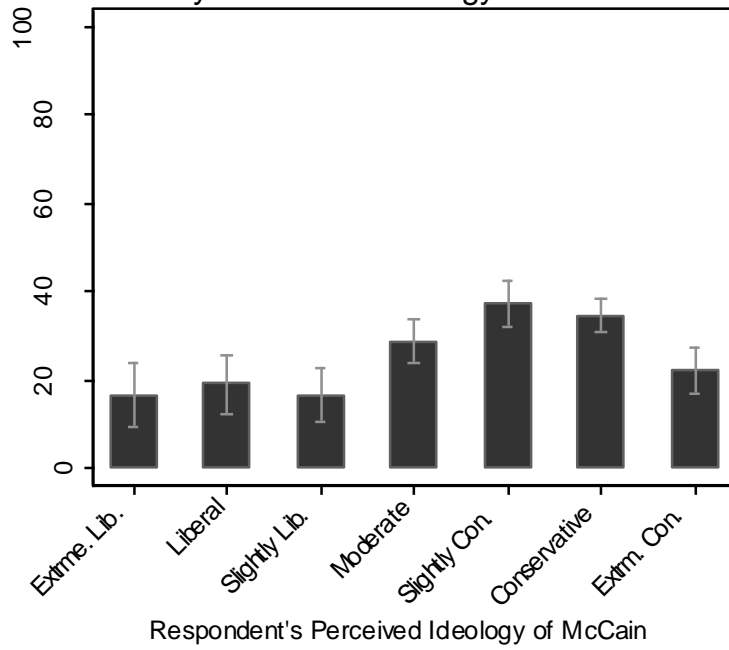
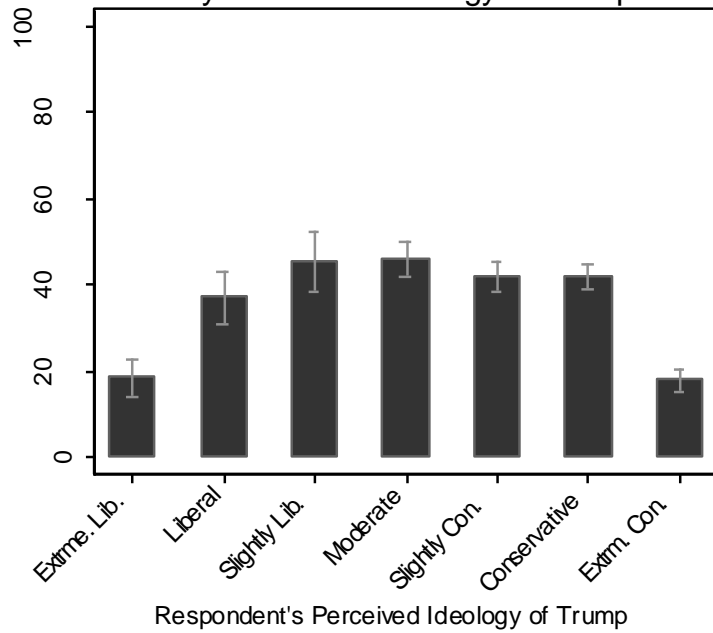


Figure 4: Percent Who Believe Trump will Win by Perceived Ideology of Trump



In the survey, the respondent's gender was recorded by asking "What is your gender?" with the options "Male," "Female," and "Other." The responses are coded with male as the value 1, females as the value 2, and those who responded other removed from the data. The mode of this variable is female, with 57.0% female respondents in 2008 and 52.9% female respondents in 2016.

Race was recorded by asking the question "Please choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be: white, black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander?" If the respondent identified as Hispanic, they were recorded under a Hispanic category, with all other race categories specifically non-Hispanic. If the respondent identified as a race not listed or listed more than one race, they were considered as part of a sixth "Other" category. The mode of the variable is white non-Hispanic for both years, with 62.40% of respondents in 2008 and 71.68% of respondents in 2016.

Model Estimation

The dependent variable, who respondents believed would be elected, is a binary variable, which is why I chose logistic regression to approximate the probability of a voter believing that the Democratic or Republican candidate would win. I ran four logistic regressions, one each for Obama, Clinton, McCain, and Trump, to estimate the probabilities of a voter believing that each candidate would win the election, with the independent variable as what the voter perceived the candidate's ideology to be. In both models, I controlled for the ideology of the voter, race, and gender. The ideology of the voter is interval, so I held the ideology at its mean, which was 4.14 in 2008 and 4.18 in 2016 on the 7-point scale from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Race and gender are nominal variables, so I held each variable at their modes. In 2008 and 2016,

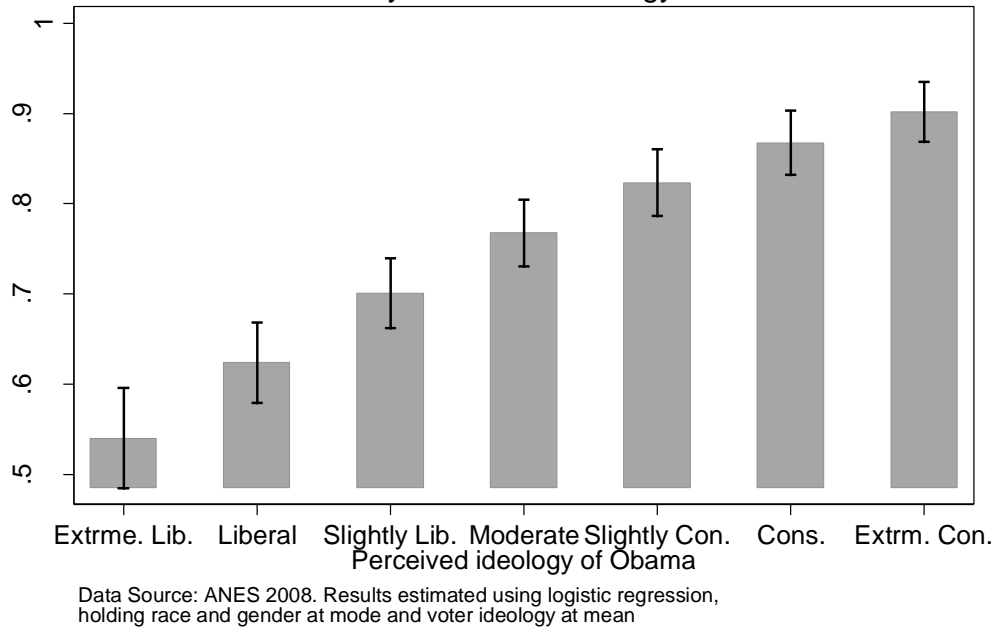
the mode for race was non-Hispanic white people (race6 = 1). For gender, the mode is female (gender = 2) in both years.

Results

Model 1: Probability that Respondent Believes Obama Will Win

Table 3: 2008 Logistic Regression for Probability Voters Believe Obama Will Win	
Variables	winprediction
Perceived Obama ideology	0.346*** (0.0407)
Race	0.133* (0.0701)
Respondent ideology	-0.443*** (0.0428)
Gender	-0.0541 (0.126)
Constant	1.621*** (0.317)
Observations	1,419
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Figure 5: Probability One Believes Obama Will Win by Perceived ideology



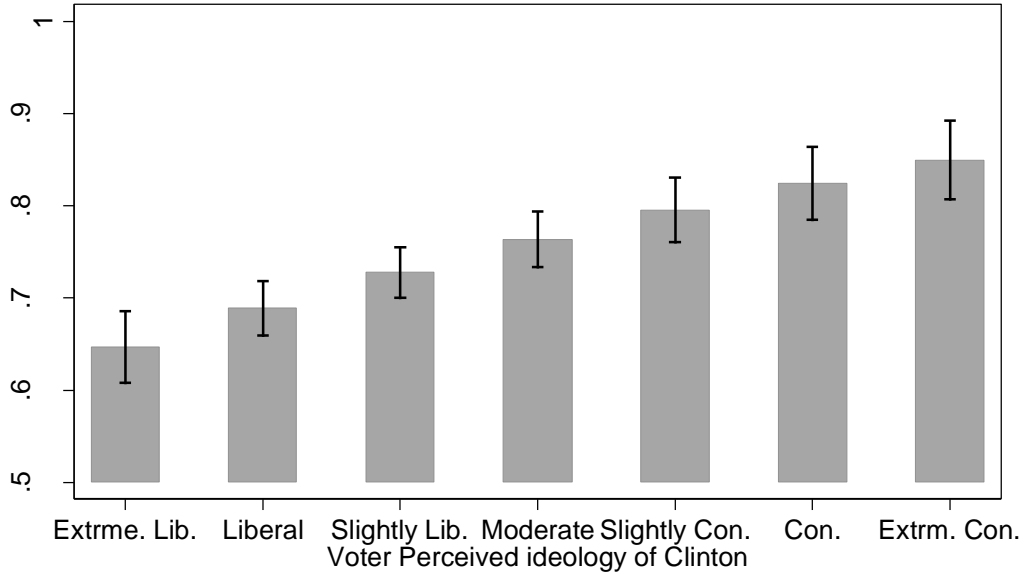
This model supports that the more conservative the respondent to perceive Obama's ideology to be, the more likely the respondent is to predict that Obama will be elected. The p-value is less than 0.01 for the perceived ideology independent variable, meaning that we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis: the more conservative the voter perceives Obama to be, the higher the probability that they believe he will win. The effect of gender was not significant with a p-value above 0.1. Race was significant at the $p < 0.1$ level and respondent ideology is significant with a p-value below 0.01. Respondent ideology has the greatest effect on the respondent's outcome prediction, with a -0.443 coefficient. While the confidence intervals in the graph overlap between extremely liberal and liberal or conservative and slightly conservative, the increase is significant when comparing a wider ideological spread, including from extremely liberal to slightly liberal, and from slightly liberal to slightly conservative. The R-squared value is 0.131: about 13 percent of the variation in the dependent

variable (the win prediction) is explained by the independent variables. The other 87 percent of the variation may be explained by other variables not included in the regression equation. Overall, this model supports the hypothesis that in a comparison of individuals, the more conservative a Democratic candidate is perceived to be, the more likely they are to be predicted to win by voters.

Model 2: Probability that Respondent Believes Clinton Will Win

Table 4: 2016 Logistic Regression for Probability Voters Believe Clinton Will Win	
Variables	winprediction
Perceived Clinton ideology	0.189*** (0.0346)
Race	0.108*** (0.0316)
Respondent ideology	-0.765*** (0.0360)
Gender	0.137 (0.0894)
Constant	3.226*** (0.256)
Observations	3,066
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Figure 6: Probability That One Believes Clinton Will Win by Perceived ideology



Data Source: ANES 2016. Results estimated using logistic regression, holding race and gender at mode and voter ideology at mean

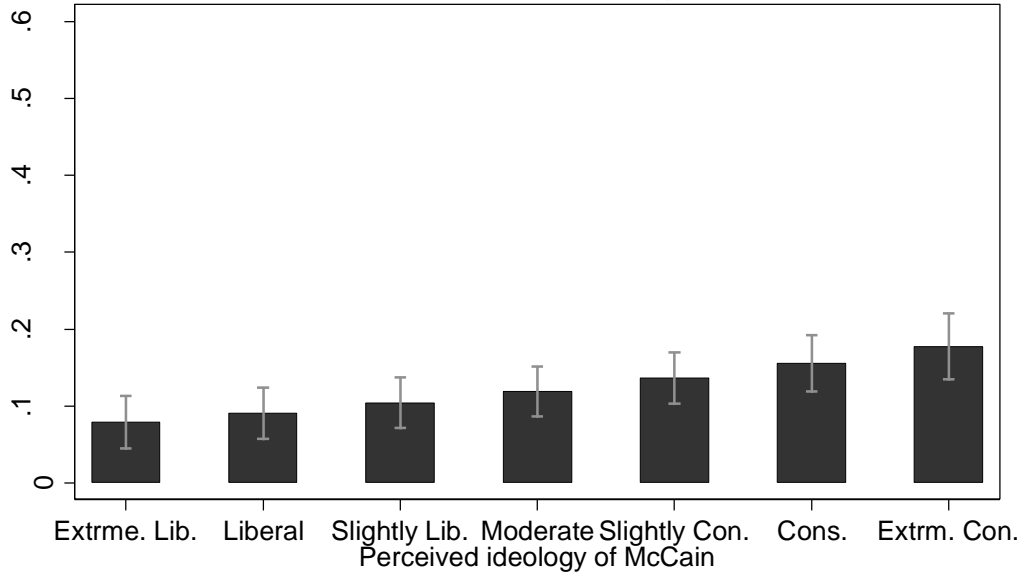
This model supports that the more conservative the respondent to perceive Clinton’s ideology to be, the more likely the respondent is to predict that Clinton will be elected. The p-value is less than 0.01 for the perceived ideology independent variable, meaning that we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis: the more conservative the voter perceives Clinton to be, the higher the probability that they believe she will win. The coefficient for perceived ideology was .189, which is lower than the coefficient for Obama (.346) but is still a meaningful increase on a scale from 0 to 1. The effect of gender on voter prediction was not significant, with a p-value above 0.1. Race and respondent ideology are significant with p-values below 0.01. Respondent ideology has the greatest effect on the respondent’s outcome prediction, with a -0.765 coefficient. Like in the graph for logistic regression for Obama, the confidence intervals in the graph overlap between extremely liberal and liberal or conservative and slightly conservative but is significant when comparing a larger ideological spread: including from

extremely liberal to slightly liberal. The differences are not significant from those who perceive Clinton is slightly conservative to those who perceive Clinton is extremely conservative, partly because the error bars are larger for those who perceive her to be conservative because fewer voters perceive Clinton to be ideologically conservative than those who believe her to be ideologically liberal. The R-squared value is 0.228: about 23 percent of the variation in the dependent variable (prediction that Clinton will win) is explained by the independent variables. The other 77 percent of the variation may be explained by other variables not included in the regression equation. Overall, this model supports the hypothesis that in a comparison of individuals, the more conservative a Democratic candidate is perceived to be, the more likely they are to be predicted to win by voters.

Model 3: Probability that a Respondent Believes that McCain Will Win

Table 9: 2008 Logistic Regression for Probability Voters Believe McCain Will Win	
Variables	winprediction
perceived McCain ideology	0.155*** (0.0419)
Race	-0.256*** (0.0690)
respondent ideology	0.463*** (0.0427)
Gender	0.0203 (0.122)
Constant	-3.220*** (0.390)
Observations	1,419
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Figure 7: 2008 Probability One Believes McCain will Win by Perceived ideology



Data Source: ANES 2008. Results estimated using linear regression, holding gender and party at its mean

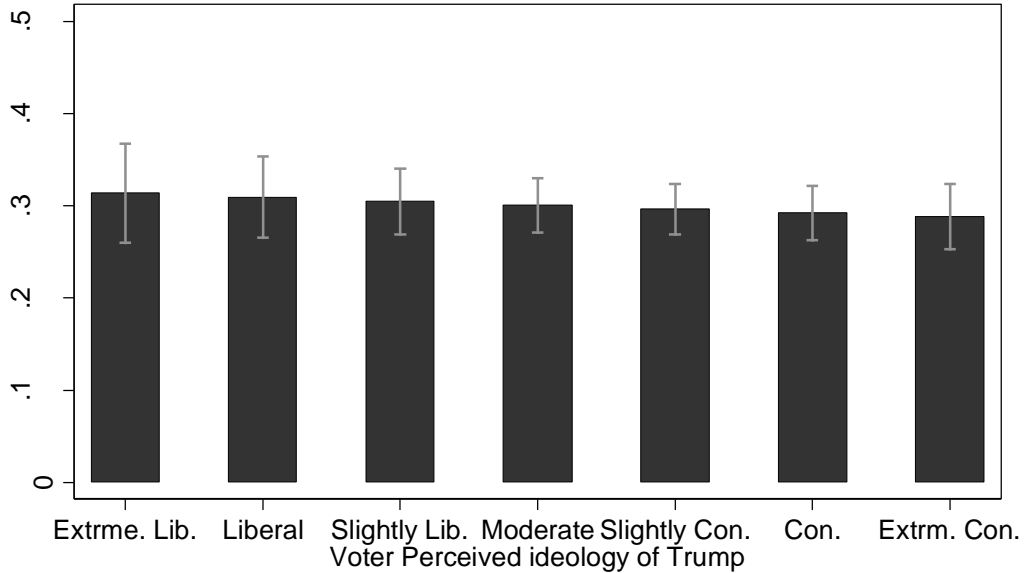
In the model for probability that a respondent believes McCain will win, the respondent's perceived ideology of McCain has an effect, though less sizeable than for Clinton and Obama, with a 0.155 compared to 0.189 and 0.346 respectively. However, in this model, the more conservative McCain is perceived to be, the more respondents predicted he would win this is the opposite of the hypothesis for Republican candidates. I hypothesized that those who perceived him to be more conservative would have a lower probability of believing that he would win with a negative coefficient, but the coefficient is positive, indicating the opposite. Perceived ideology in this model is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. When comparing the confidence intervals in this model, the differences in ideology are only significant when comparing those who perceive McCain to be extremely liberal and extremely conservative. The R-Squared for this model is 0.0925: about 9 percent of the variation in the dependent variable (prediction of if McCain will win) is explained by the independent variables. The other 91 percent of the variation may be

explained by other variables not included in the regression equation. Though this model is significant when looking at the p-value, the effects of perceived ideology on voter prediction are limited when comparing the confidence intervals and the small coefficient.

Model 4: Probability that a Respondent Believes that Trump Will Win

Table 10: Logistic Regression for Probability Voters Believe Trump Will Win	
Variables	(1) winprediction
perceived Trump ideology	-0.0200 (0.0276)
Race	-0.140*** (0.0313)
respondent ideology	0.825*** (0.0348)
Gender	-0.166* (0.0889)
Constant	-3.740*** (0.272)
Observations	3,029
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Figure 8: Probability that One Believes Trump Will Win by Perceived ideology



Data Source: ANES 2016. Results estimated using logistic regression, holding race and gender at mode and voter ideology at its mean

In the model for probability that a respondent believes Trump will win, the respondent's perceived ideology of Trump has a much smaller effect than in the model for Clinton. The coefficient is -0.02, which while still negative, has little effect in the regression, while respondent ideology still has the highest coefficient at 0.825. Additionally, for this Trump model, the perceived ideology of Trump is p-level is 0.467, so we fail to reject the null hypothesis and cannot conclude that the perceived ideology of Trump has an effect on voter belief that he will win. Furthermore, all confidence intervals overlap. However, race, respondent ideology, and gender are statistically significant in this model as well, though gender is only significant at the $p < 0.1$ level. With an R-squared value of 0.219, about 22 percent of the variation in the dependent variable (prediction of if Trump will win) is explained by the independent variables. The other 78 percent of the variation may be explained by other variables not included in the regression

equation. For the Trump model, there is no evidence to support that the more liberal a Republican candidate is perceived to be, the more likely voters will be to believe they will win.

Discussions and Conclusions

Overall, the perception of a candidate's ideology only had a moderate effect on who respondents believed would win for the Democratic candidates, Obama and Clinton: the more conservative the respondent perceived the Democratic candidates to be, the higher probability that the respondent will believe the candidate will win. McCain's results were only significant when comparing the perceived ideological extremes, and the relationship was the opposite of the hypothesis, with probability of believing McCain would win increasing as the perceived conservatism increases. The results for the 2016 Trump model were not significant when comparing confidence intervals nor when evaluating p-value. The data from 2008 and 2016 suggest that the perceived ideology of the presidential candidate affect voter's prediction of who will in for Democratic candidates more than Republican candidates.

My findings for Clinton and Obama are in line with existing literature, specifically with Stone and Abramowitz (1986), who found a correlation between moderation and Stone and Rapoport (1994). However, no study I looked at found a discrepancy between Republican presidential candidates and Democratic presidential candidates. This party disparity could exist because Republican voters are more willing to vote for someone who does not match perfectly ideologically than Democrats are, so voters could think extreme ideology in the Democratic party will have more effect than ideological extremity in the Republican Party. Stone and Rapoport (1994) also found that performance on television could overpower the effects of ideological moderation, which could be another reason that the model for Trump had the least correlation between perceived ideology and predictions of his win, as Donald Trump had a

prominent media presence. To continue this research, I would look at more election years to see if the difference in variable effect for Democrats and Republicans is an ongoing pattern. If it is a consistent pattern, I would research why the difference exists. In addition, I would like to compare candidates of the same party during primaries to see the effects of perceived ideology on perceived electability. In addition, it would be interesting to look at different data from more types of elections, including U.S. House and Senate races, and races for state government as well.

As the Democratic Party still fields 18 presidential candidates with a wide ideological spread, the party and campaigns want to find ways to sell candidates to voters as the most likely to win in the general election. Gaining a deeper understanding of how voters perceive candidates' ideologies and their corresponding electoral chances can be valuable for those trying to win elections and those trying to study elections.

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