

# The Impact of Media Endorsements in Legislative Elections

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Abstract: We investigate how political endorsements influence election outcomes. Through two novel survey-based experiments, we establish that an endorsement's impact depends on the level of ideological congruence between the voter and the source of the endorsement. This finding has implications for the burgeoning literatures on elite cues, voting behavior and representation. Voters reward Congressional candidates when they perceive that an endorsing newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences but punish endorsed candidates when they perceive that the source is ideologically distal. Our findings suggest that candidates should seek to obtain endorsements from newspaper that are ideologically similar to the median voter in their district. In contrast, it is not in the best interest of candidates to receive an endorsement from a newspaper that is ideologically distinct from the median voter.

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Scholars have long debated whether political endorsements affect voters' decisions at the ballot box. Previous research finds that voting decisions are substantially influenced by the endorsements of candidates by political groups (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Lupia, 1994) and media outlets (Chiang and Knight, 2011; DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Ladd and Lenz, 2009). Scholars have argued that these endorsements affect voting behavior because Americans have low levels of information about politics and public affairs. Voters use endorsements as an informational shortcut, or heuristic, to learn about candidates and to make more informed voting decisions. As a result, voters are more likely to support a candidate that receives an endorsement from a like-minded group, while political endorsements from groups individuals dislike makes them less likely to support a candidate (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Druckman, 2001; Lupia, 1994, but see Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994).

In this paper, we provide experimental evidence that media endorsements can have a modest, but significant, effect in legislative elections. Moreover, we establish that voters reward or punish endorsed candidates based on the relative spatial locations of media outlets, candidates and voters. These findings have implications for the burgeoning literatures on political communication, Congressional elections and representation.

We conduct two novel survey experiments that test the impact of newspaper endorsements in legislative elections.<sup>3</sup> In the first study, we show respondents two hypothetical, ideolog-

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<sup>3</sup>Newspapers present a unique case in the study of political endorsements because they have broad and loyal readerships and they commonly endorse candidates across both political parties in both general and primary elections. For instance, *the Austin American-Statesman* endorsed six candidates from both parties in the 2012 congressional primary elections <http://www.statesman.com/opinion/endorsements-in-todays-primary-elections-2379631.html> and *the Detroit News* endorsed 13 candidates from both parties in 10 congressional districts. <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20120807/OPINION01/208070311>

ically distinct general election candidates. We randomize whether respondents received an endorsement from the largest newspaper in their Congressional district, thus leveraging the natural variation in the ideology of newspapers across the country and enhancing the study's external validity. The second study utilizes a conjoint survey design to further identify the causal mechanisms that explain the heterogeneous impact of newspaper endorsements (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2012). We show survey respondents in the Washington DC metropolitan area a series of hypothetical legislative candidates with different characteristics. Importantly, we randomize which candidate receives a newspaper endorsement from a liberal newspaper (*Washington Post*) and conservative newspaper (*Washington Times*). We focus our study on the Washington, D.C. media market since there are clearly differentiated liberal and conservative newspapers in this market (Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan, 2009).

Across both experiments, we find strong evidence that citizens use their perception of the media outlet's ideological stance as a heuristic: citizens are more likely to support endorsed candidates when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences, and less likely to support the endorsed candidate when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically distinct from their preferences. These results indicate that newspaper endorsements function as credible source cues that citizens can use as an efficient information shortcut to evaluate the spatial position and valence of a candidate.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we discuss previous work on the impact of newspaper endorsements. Next, we discuss our theory, hypotheses and previous empirical work. Third, we discuss our research design. Then, we discuss our findings. Finally, we briefly conclude.

## The Impact of Media Endorsements

Previous research has found that exposure to newspaper endorsements influences voters' decisions. These endorsements have buoyed candidate support between two to five points for candidates in city council races (Robinson, 1974), U.S. Senate contests (Druckman and Parkin, 2005; Kahn and Kenney, 2002), gubernatorial races (Hollander, 1979), presidential elections (Chiang and Knight, 2011; Erikson, 1976; Krebs, 1998) and parliamentary elections (Ladd and Lenz, 2009). Cumulatively, these studies lead to the following hypothesis:

H1: *Newspaper endorsements increase the average level of support for candidates.*

Scholars have argued, however, that the impact of endorsements is heterogeneous across different individuals. Partisan bias, for one, shapes the way individuals translate information into their political attitudes and opinions (Bartels, 2002; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Gaines et al., 2007, but see Gerber and Green, 1999) and serves as “perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation” (Campbell et al., 1980, p. 133). Similarly, previous scholars have focused on the relationship between the ideology of the endorser and individuals. They argue that political endorsements function as a key information shortcut for voters. If people see a political group as aligned with their values, they can trust that the group would make the same decisions they would have made with complete information. Conversely, if people see it in opposition to their values and interests, then they can assume that the group would make the opposite decision than they would (Brady and Sniderman, 1985). As a result, voters are more likely to support a candidate that receives an endorsement from a like-minded group, while political endorsements from groups individuals dislike makes them less likely to support a candidate. Thus, endorsements

function as credible source cues that citizens can use as an efficient information shortcut. These cues help individuals to make correct voting decision (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Druckman, 2001; Lupia, 1994, but see Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994)

No previous study has examined whether newspaper endorsements function as credible source cues that citizens can use as an efficient information shortcut to support or oppose candidates. But several recent studies have examined whether other types of endorsements are used as a heuristic by voters. Arceneaux and Kolodny (2009) find that Republicans that were contacted by a liberal political group in a Pennsylvania state house election were less likely to support a Democratic candidate. They argue that Republicans used the endorsement as a negative voting cue, which helped some Republicans compensate for their lack of political awareness. Similarly, Hopkins and Ladd (2012) examine the impact of Fox News Channel's national expansion on candidate preferences for 22,592 respondents to the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey. This can be seen as a study on endorsements since Fox News Channel clearly supported George W. Bush rather than Al Gore. While they find an average treatment effect indistinguishable from zero, Hopkins and Ladd (2012) find a sizable effect of Fox News access on the vote intentions of Republicans and pure independents. Thus, it appears that the Fox News endorsements act as a cue for like-minded voters.

Finally, many media sources have clear ideological associations, and voters perceive these ideological orientations. In a 2009 survey conducted by Pew, 47% of Americans said they think of Fox News as "mostly conservative", while only 14% said they think of it as "mostly liberal." On the other hand, 36% of Americans said think of MSNBC as "mostly liberal", while 11% said it was "mostly conservative." Therefore, endorsements from media sources might provide voters with a signal of the candidate's ideological preferences.

H2: *Newspaper endorsements increase the average level of support for candidates when individuals perceive that the ideology of the newspaper is congruent with their own ideology, and decrease the average level of support for candidates when individuals perceive that the ideology of the newspaper is incongruent with their own ideology.*

## **Research Design**

Our experimental strategy is designed to increase our ability to causally identify the effects of newspaper endorsements. The causal identification of media endorsement effects in the observational literature has been generally weak for a number of reasons. First, voters may choose to read newspapers with like-minded ideology and, therefore, will be predisposed to support the same candidate as the newspaper. Second, newspapers could choose to support high-quality candidates that are likely to win with or without an endorsement, thereby creating the false impression that media endorsements affect candidate support.<sup>4</sup> We sidestep these problems by administering a large, nationally representative survey-based experiment and a separate choice-based conjoint design to causally identify the effect of newspaper endorsements on citizens' votes in hypothetical legislative elections.

## **Experiment 1: National Sample**

We conducted a randomized survey experiments with a nationally representative sample of 5,500 adult Americans during the summer of 2012.<sup>5</sup> The experiments simulated an open

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<sup>4</sup>For instance, the New York Times endorsed three Democrats and two Republicans in general elections for State Senate races, an indication that they have supported candidates out of line with their editorial board's liberal ideological orientation. Therefore, candidate quality or strength drives the endorsement, not the other way around.

<sup>5</sup>The interviews in our database are a sample matched on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest to be representative of the general population, as determined by the 2007

election contest between two hypothetical challengers in a general election context.<sup>6</sup>

Respondents were shown separate vignettes describing two candidates running in a Congressional general election. This experiment was designed to examine whether newspaper endorsements influence respondents' support for two ideologically distinct candidates in a general election.<sup>7</sup> The experiment randomly assigned participants to one of three groups. The control group (n=1,858) viewed a brief vignette describing two candidates (one liberal, one conservative) running for a Congressional general election and then respondents expressed support for a candidate.

The two candidates were described as follows:

Candidate A is a lawyer with 10 years of experience on a city council who supports proposals to allow same-sex marriage, increase taxes on wealthy Americans, and provide subsidies for wind and solar energy.

Candidate B is a doctor with 10 years of experience on a local school board who supports proposals to ban same-sex marriage, extend the Bush tax cuts, and increase domestic oil production by allowing oil companies to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

Are you more likely to support Candidate A or Candidate B?

In two treatment groups ( $N_1=1,853$  and  $N_2=1,877$ ), we randomized whether candidate A or B received an endorsement from the largest newspaper in the respondent's congressional district.<sup>8</sup> This gauges the impact of an endorsement from a local source with which nearly all respondents should be familiar, enhances the external validity of the survey experiment and

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American Community Survey. YouGov administered the survey by Internet.

<sup>6</sup>We used hypothetical Congressional candidates rather than real politicians because many newspapers endorse candidates a few days prior to an election. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult to administer a controlled experiment with real politicians. By using hypothetical candidates, we are able to control the ideological distance between candidates across respondents. In future studies, we may vary the amount of ideological distance between candidates or simulate a low information contest by varying the amount of information provided for each candidate.

<sup>7</sup>The candidates exhibited clear ideological distinctions across the three policy issues.

<sup>8</sup>We obtained the newspaper circulation data from the Audit Bureau of Circulations. <http://www.accessabc.com/products/newsgeo.htm> The candidates' backgrounds as a lawyer or doctor were randomized.

introduces important variation to respondents’ evaluations of the source’s credibility. For instance, if candidate A received an endorsement and the respondent lived in San Francisco, the description of candidate A would be: “Candidate A is a lawyer with 10 years of experience on a city council who supports proposals to allow same-sex marriage, increase taxes on wealthy Americans, and provide subsidies for wind and solar energy. Candidate A has been endorsed by the San Francisco Chronicle.”

Finally, respondents answer a simple vote choice question: “Are you more likely to support Candidate A or Candidate B?”

## Regression Models

We estimate a series of logistic regressions where the main dependent variable is support for either Candidate A or Candidate B. We use a binary variable where support for Candidate A is 0 and support for candidate B is 1. We examine whether the treatment assignment, respondents’ personal political views or perceptions of the newspaper’s quality, reliability or partisanship impact the overall endorsement effect:

$$(1) \text{Support}_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Group}_i + \beta_2 * \text{Controls}_i + u_i$$

where  $\text{Support}_i$  is the dichotomous candidate support dependent variable (B=1, A=0),  $\text{Group}_i$  is the treatment group assignment (No Endorsement, Endorse A, Endorse B),  $\text{Controls}_i$  are a series of background variables such as age, educational attainment and political party, and  $u_i$  is error unexplained by the model.  $\beta_1$  gauges the main effect of a local newspaper endorsement for each treatment group.<sup>9</sup>

We estimate interaction models that capture the interaction between treatment group

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<sup>9</sup>For example, a negative value of  $\beta_1$  for the Endorse A condition indicates that, relative to the control group, local newspaper endorsements increase support for Candidate A.



assignment and the level of ideological congruence between newspapers and respondents:

$$(2) \text{Support}_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Group}_i + \beta_2 * \text{ideoCong}_i + \beta_3 * (\text{Group}_i * \text{ideoCong}_i) + \beta_4 * \text{Controls}_i + u_i$$

where the additional term  $\text{ideoCong}_i$  is the ideological congruence between voters and newspapers.  $\beta_3$  gauges the effect of the newspaper endorsement contingent on the relative ideological distance between the newspaper and a respondent, where low values mean that there is ideological congruence. A negative value on  $\beta_3$  for the Endorse B condition indicates that an endorsement reduces Candidate B's support as the ideological distance between the newspaper and the respondent increases.

We construct a measure of ideological congruence first by asking individuals to evaluate their own political ideology<sup>10</sup> and the ideology of the largest newspaper in their district.<sup>11</sup> Then, we place these metrics on a common scale between 0 and 1 and take the absolute value of the difference between the individual's ideology and their perceived ideology of the newspaper.<sup>12</sup>

This approach is similar to the one in Bartels and Johnston (2013), which constructed a

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<sup>10</sup>We ask this question on a five-point scale. Response options were very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative and very conservative.

<sup>11</sup>We ask this question on a seven-point scale. Response options were very liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, and very conservative.

<sup>12</sup>This variable ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 is complete ideological congruence and 1 is complete ideological dissonance. Republicans' mean score on this measure was .52, compared with .32 for Democrats. It is also worth noting that we asked respondents to rate the ideology of their local newspaper after the endorsement modules. Therefore, it is possible that the experiment impacted responses to the newspaper ideology items. However, the data does not support these claims: Twenty-nine percent of respondents in the control condition in the general election experiment say their newspaper is very or somewhat liberal, compared to 30 percent in Condition A, where the liberal candidate is endorsed, and 28 percent in Condition B, where the conservative candidate is endorsed. Fifty-two percent of Republicans who saw no newspaper endorsements said their local newspaper was very liberal or liberal, compared with 49 percent of Republicans who saw their newspaper endorse conservative candidates in both elections. Twenty-four percent of Democrats who saw no newspaper endorsements said their local paper was very conservative or conservative, compared with 20 percent of Democrats who their newspaper endorse conservative candidates in both elections. This difference is not statistically significant. Finally, 19 percent of pure independents who saw a newspaper endorse a conservative candidate in the general election say their local newspaper is very conservative or conservative, compared with 13 percent of independents who saw no endorsement and 11 percent of independents who saw an endorsement for a liberal candidate.

measure of “Subjective Ideological Disagreement” with the Supreme Court of the United States.<sup>13</sup> Yet, our ideological congruence measure potentially suffers from a number of methodological limitations. First, we scale individuals’ ideology using a self-reported measure of ideology rather than individual responses to ideological policy questions or newspaper editorials. Second, there is the potential issue of reverse causality, where preexisting support for a newspaper may serve as a heuristic for assessing a newspaper’s ideology.

### **Experiment 1 Results**

Table 1 on Page 25 displays the main results across the three treatment groups in the general election experiment. The average treatment effect of newspaper endorsements is quite small. Forty-nine percent of respondents support Candidate B, the conservative alternative, in the baseline condition. This declines to 46 percent when the newspaper endorses the liberal candidate and stays roughly the same when the newspaper endorses the conservative candidate. The three-point shift in candidate preference when the newspaper endorses the liberal candidate is small but statistically significant. On the other hand, local newspaper endorsements for the conservative candidate have no overall effect on candidate support.

There are several potential explanations for the mixed findings on Hypothesis 1. First, we provided a great deal of information about the candidates’ ideological positions and backgrounds. In addition, the candidates took ideologically distinct positions. As a result, most voters do not need the endorsement to help them determine which candidate shares their ideological views. Second, local newspapers may provide a weaker ideological signal than

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<sup>13</sup>They ask for respondents’ ideological preferences along with their perception of the Supreme Court’s ideological tenor (e.g., liberal, conservative, moderate). The authors create a four item measure with “strong agreement”, “tacit agreement”, “moderate disagreement” and “strong disagreement” rather than using a distance metric.

prominent national media outlets.<sup>14</sup> Finally, we did not provide any substantive information with the endorsement about the candidates' positions.

Next, we examine whether the perceived ideology of a newspaper affects the impact of endorsements. We regress candidate support on ideological congruence, the dependent variable is 1 if the respondent supports Candidate B and 0 if he/she supports Candidate A and the coefficients are shown with respect to a respondent in the control group.

First, we examine the average treatment effects. Column 1 in Table 2 shows the average treatment effects for the general election experiment. The results suggest that newspaper endorsements do influence candidate support in the expected directions in a general election. An endorsement for candidate A increases support for candidate A, while an endorsement for candidate B increases support for candidate B. But the results are not statistically significant.

Next, we examine whether the perceived ideological distance between the newspaper and respondent affects the influence of the endorsement. The base effects capture the impact of a newspaper endorsement when citizens are ideologically similar to the newspaper. The interactive effects examine whether the level of spatial distance between the newspaper and voter affects the impact of the endorsement.

The right-hand side of Table 2 shows that an endorsement for candidate B increases support for this candidate when the voter is ideologically similar to the newspaper. However, the endorsement decreases support for candidate B when the newspaper is ideologically distal from the voter. The results for candidate A are similar, although below the conventional level of statistical significance.

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<sup>14</sup>Respondents placed a total of 468 local newspapers on a scale from 1 (very liberal) to 7 (very conservative). The average deviation from the midpoint of 4 was only 0.74 across all respondents, suggesting that many respondents view their local newspapers as relatively moderate.

The results from Table 2 are plotted in Figure 1. While the level of statistical significance varies across models, the models have nearly identical substantive results: respondents that are ideologically congruent with a newspaper are more likely to support candidates that receive an endorsement, while respondents that are ideologically distant from the newspaper are less likely to support candidates that receive an endorsement. Endorsements from newspapers that are ideologically similar to the voter increases support for the candidate by approximately 5 points. In contrast, an endorsement from newspapers that are ideologically distant from the voter slightly decreases candidate support.

## **Experiment 2: Washington DC**

The second study, conducted in Spring 2013, utilizes a conjoint survey design to further identify the causal mechanisms that explain the heterogeneous impact of newspaper endorsements. Conjoint analyses have been widely used in marketing research (Gustafsson, Herrmann, and Huber, 2010). And they have recently been applied to political science by Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2012) and Hainmueller and Hopkins (2012).

Our experimental design puts respondents in the position of a voter making decisions in a hypothetical Congressional election. We sample Washington, D.C. metropolitan area residents because there are clearly differentiated liberal and conservative newspapers in this market. In the design, we require a choice between each pair of candidates to simplify the decision task given the limits of short-term memory (Krosnick, 1999). The introduction to the survey reads:

”For the next few minutes, we are going to ask you to act as if you were about to cast a vote for the candidate that will represent you in the U.S. Congress. We will describe to you several pairs of candidates running for election to Congress.

For each pair of people, please indicate your attitudes towards the two candidates and which one you would prefer to represent you. Even if you aren't entirely sure, please indicate which of the two you prefer.”

We then show respondents a screen with profiles of two candidates as displayed in Figure 2. Each respondent successively evaluates five binary comparisons, with each comparison displayed on a new screen. We vary the profiles of the two candidates on six different attributes.<sup>15</sup> The attributes include each candidate's race/ethnicity, party identification, issue positions on an assault weapons ban and abortion,<sup>16</sup> and whether they received an endorsement from the *Washington Times* or *Washington Post*.<sup>17</sup> For each respondent, we randomly assign the order of the attributes to rule out primacy and recency effects.<sup>18</sup> Individuals view a total of five binary comparisons.

To measure outcomes, we ask respondents to report a preference for one of the two profiles. Our analyses use the binary responses as the primary outcome variable with a 1 indicating the selected candidate profile. This design has the advantage that it forces respondents to make tradeoffs between candidates.<sup>19</sup>

Our conjoint experimental design has several advantages over prior observational and

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<sup>15</sup>Marketing scholars are highly concerned with the potential for information overload in conjoint analysis studies (Acito, 1979). Various scholars have recommended using at most 5, 6 or 10 attributes in conjoint studies (Green and Srinivasan, 1978; Malhotra, 1982)

<sup>16</sup>We chose these issues since they are each salient policy areas, but it is plausible that members of each party could take a liberal or conservative position on a given issue.

<sup>17</sup>Here is the full list of traits for each attribute: Race/Ethnicity - White, Black, Hispanic, Asian-American; Party Identification - Republican, Democrat, Independent; Position on Abortion - Pro-Choice, Pro-Life; Position on Assault Weapons Ban - Supports Ban, Opposes Ban; Newspaper Endorsements - Washington Post, Washington Times, None; Occupation - Business Owner, Car Dealer, Carpenter, Doctor, High School Teacher, Lawyer, Member of Congress, Military Veteran

<sup>18</sup>However, the order of the attributes does not change for each respondent across the five binary comparisons to reduce the task's complexity. Moreover, we restrict the randomization of the attribute order such that the issue positions always appear together in a block in a randomized order (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2012).

<sup>19</sup>As a robustness check, we also use a continuous variable, Support Candidate, which is generated from a seven-point scale assessing each candidate separately. This outcome has the advantage that it allows us to investigate how certain attributes affect absolute levels of support for a particular candidate.

experimental approaches to understanding citizens' vote choices. The fully randomized design allows us to causally identify the effect of each candidate attribute on the probability of being preferred (e.g. how much does the probability of supporting a candidate increase when the candidate in question is pro-choice on abortion?). Moreover, since we randomize all the attributes and measure their effects on the same scale, the design allows us to examine the relative importance of each attribute. For instance, we can compare the effect of issue positions directly with the effect of receiving a newspaper endorsement.

## Data

We utilized Survey Sampling International (SSI) to recruit a total of 550 Washington DC metropolitan area residents to an online survey that we implemented using Qualtrics.<sup>20</sup> SSI samples are not as representative as the best national probability samples but significantly outperform convenience samples.<sup>21</sup> The results reported here are unweighted. But the results are unchanged with or without using these weights.<sup>22</sup>

## Regression Models

We study whether an endorsement from a local newspaper influences candidate support using a series of OLS regressions where the main dependent variable is support for either Candidate A or Candidate B.<sup>23</sup> This design provides unbiased estimates of the average effect of each

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<sup>20</sup>We restricted our sample to include only adult citizens who resided within 35 miles of Washington, DC. Slightly modifying the distance metric does not change the substantive findings.

<sup>21</sup>Many political scientists have used SSI samples for their survey research projects.

<sup>22</sup>The weighted analyses use post-stratification weights to adjust the final respondent data for common sources of survey error (non-response, coverage error, etc. The weights adjust the sample to the demographic and geographic distributions from the Washington DC metropolitan area in the March Supplement of the 2010 Current Population Survey (CPS).

<sup>23</sup>We have run OLS and logistic regressions when the main dependent variable is a binary support measure, along with OLS and proportional odds logistic regressions when the main dependent variable is the 7-point

candidate attribute, including newspaper endorsements, since the values of all attributes for both profiles are randomly assigned and, therefore, orthogonal to one another (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2012). Rather than estimating the effect of each unique profile (which would exhaust our degrees of freedom), we exploit the randomization and resulting orthogonality to estimate the effect of each attribute value. When we compare the probability of being preferred across two different conditions, the comparison yields an unbiased estimate of the effect of that difference in candidate attributes.<sup>24</sup> We first summarize the results across the full sample of respondents, and then discuss subgroup effects.

We examine whether newspaper endorsements have heterogeneous impacts across subgroups by examining the effect of *Washington Post* and *Washington Times* endorsements separately for partisan and ideological subgroups. We measured respondents' ideological positions with eight binary questions on policy issues such as abortion and the minimum wage<sup>25</sup> and measured respondents' party affiliation on a 7-point scale.<sup>26</sup>

We selected Washington, D.C. because the market contains newspapers with differentiated ideological perspectives. We characterize the *Washington Post* as a "liberal" newspaper, while the *Washington Times* is a "conservative" newspaper, and the individual-level survey

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support measure for individual candidates. In all cases, the results are qualitatively similar for both the linear and nonlinear models. We use the OLS models for ease of interpretation. When making any predictions, we will use coefficients from the logistic or ordered logistics models.

<sup>24</sup>The standard errors are clustered by respondent to account for the fact that the choices made by a single respondent may not be independent across the five comparisons. (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2012).

<sup>25</sup>We asked about the following issues: raising the minimum wage, allowing same-sex marriage, providing universal health care, eliminating the estate tax, reinstating the assault weapons ban, limiting greenhouse gas emissions and abortion. We use this definition of ideology in the foregoing results section rather than the standard 7-point self-reported political ideology question. We believe that responses to this eight question battery better capture an individual's ideological position than a single question. Nevertheless, figures and tables using this standard political ideology question as an independent variable produce similar results.

<sup>26</sup>We asked respondents to state their party affiliation. If they identified as a Republican or Democrat, we asked about the strength of their partisanship. If they identified as an Independent or something else, we asked them if they leaned toward the Democratic Party, the Republican Party or neither party.

data and the newspapers' past endorsements validate our characterization. For instance, the *Washington Post* endorsed the Democratic candidate for President in the past three elections, whereas the *Washington Times* endorsed the Republican contender. The vast majority of the people in our sample perceived the "correct" ideological placement of these newspapers. Fifty-eight percent of our respondents indicate that the *Washington Post* is liberal on a 7-point scale, while 56 percent indicate that the *Washington Times* is conservative on a 7-point scale.<sup>27</sup> In fact, fewer than one in 10 respondents "incorrectly" place the *Washington Post* to the right of the *Washington Times* on the 7-point ideological scale.<sup>28</sup>

Hypothesis 2 predicts that an endorsement from a liberal newspaper (*Washington Post*) should increase candidate support among Democrats and liberals, and decrease candidate support among Republicans and conservatives. Likewise, it predicts that an endorsement from a conservative newspaper (*Washington Times*) should decrease candidate support among Democrats and liberals, and increase candidate support among Republicans and conservatives.

## Experiment 2 Results

Figure 3 displays the average treatment effects across our entire sample. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the results indicate that *Washington Post* and *Washington Times* endorsements have a small, positive effect on candidate support. Both endorsements increase candidate support between 2-5 points compared to no endorsement and both are borderline statistically

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<sup>27</sup>The average ideological placement of the *Washington Post* is 3.1 and the average placement of the *Washington Times* is 4.9.

<sup>28</sup>In a separate question, eight times as many respondents say the *Washington Post* has a "liberal, pro-Democratic bias" than a "conservative, pro-Republican bias", whereas three times as many respondents say the *Washington Times* has a "conservative, pro-Republican bias" as say the paper has a "liberal, pro-Democratic bias."



significant.<sup>29</sup> The magnitude of these effects is slightly smaller than the impact of candidates' Party ID or issue positions. Democratic candidates receive about 2 points less support than Independent candidates, while Republican candidates receive about 9 points less support than Independent candidates. Pro-choice candidates receive about 7 points more support than pro-life candidates. Candidates that favor an assault weapons ban receive about 10 points more support than candidates that oppose it. While a candidate's race does not affect voters' decisions overall, respondents exhibit a noted aversion toward candidates with certain occupational backgrounds. They are 15 to 20 points more likely to support a candidate whose previous occupation is a doctor or military veteran compared with a carpenter or car dealer.

Next, we examine whether the impact of *Post* and *Times* endorsements varies based on the level of ideological congruence between the newspaper and survey respondents. Figure 5 shows the impact of newspaper endorsements by ideological subgroup. Conservatives are 4 percentage points more likely to support a candidate endorsed by the *Washington Times* (although this difference falls below conventional levels of statistical significance) and 14 percentage points less likely to support candidates endorsed by the *Washington Post*. Among liberals, a *Washington Times* endorsement has no effect. However, a *Washington Post* endorsement increases the probability that a liberal will support a candidate by 10 percentage points.

Thus far, we have demonstrated that media endorsements boost candidate support in the aggregate and media effects vary considerably by respondents' ideology. Next, we exam-

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<sup>29</sup>The *Post* endorsement is significant at  $p < .1$  level and the *Times* endorsement is significant at the  $p < .2$  level

ine whether media endorsements matter because they influence perceptions of candidates' policy positions, perceptions of candidates' overall qualifications, or both. A large literature in political science has demonstrated that candidates' positions on the issues, along with non-spatial characteristics such as honesty, leadership abilities and constituent service, are fundamental variables that voters use to evaluate candidates.

We asked individuals to evaluate each candidates' qualifications and ideological position on 7-point scales immediately after viewing the candidate profiles.<sup>30</sup> We find that newspaper endorsements have a large impact on perceptions of candidate ideology, as shown in Figure 4. Individuals who see the *Times* endorsement are view candidates as more conservative and respondents who see a *Post* endorsement view candidates as more liberal.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the circumstances when political endorsements influence candidate selection and election outcomes. We study this question using messages from newspapers, which have broad, loyal readerships and commonly endorse candidates in both general and primary elections.

Overall, we find that newspapers increase the average level of support for candidates and that endorsements have heterogeneous impacts across groups. Most importantly, we find that the level of ideological congruence between citizens and newspapers affects the impact of the endorsement. Citizens are more likely to support candidates that receive an endorsement when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences.

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<sup>30</sup>The ideology questions is as follows: "Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe the political viewpoint of the following candidates?" with a standard 7-point liberal to conservative scale. The qualifications question is as follows: "How well qualified to hold public office is." where 1 is "not at all qualified" and 7 is "extremely qualified" .

However, they are less likely to support the candidate that receives an endorsement when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically distinct from their preferences. This suggests that newspaper endorsements can function as credible source cues that citizens use as an efficient information shortcut to evaluate the spatial position and valence of a candidate.

It also suggests that newspapers' practice of endorsing both Democratic and Republican candidates in primary and general elections could reduce candidate support. In elections where voters have a low degree of ideological congruence with newspapers, such as Republican primaries in a media market with a left-leaning newspaper, we demonstrate that an endorsement can actually reduce candidate support. For instance, the *New York Times's* endorsement may diminish candidate support in Republican primary contests or in a general election contest in a Republican district such as New Jersey's 7th Congressional District.<sup>31</sup>

In January 2012, for instance, the left-leaning *Boston Globe* endorsed former Governor Jon Huntsman in the New Hampshire presidential primary. Many argued that this endorsement would actually hurt Huntsman among conservatives in New Hampshire. The Romney campaign specifically cited the ideological orientation of the newspaper in its reaction: “The *Globe* has a liberal editorial page, and it’s not surprising they would endorse Jon Huntsman. Mitt Romney was pleased to get the endorsement of the more conservative *Boston Herald*”.<sup>32</sup>

This study advances our understanding of the impact of local newspaper endorsements. But our results also have implications for strategic candidates and interest groups. Our findings suggest that candidates should seek to obtain endorsements from newspaper that

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<sup>31</sup>According to a 2003 survey by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis, 16% of respondents said the New York Times's coverage is biased toward a liberal point of view, 10% said it was conservative, 27% said it was evenly balanced and 47% did not know or refused.

<sup>32</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/06/mitt-romney-boston-globe-boston-herald\\_n\\_1189123.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/06/mitt-romney-boston-globe-boston-herald_n_1189123.html)

are ideologically similar to the median voter in their district. In contrast, it is not in the best interest of candidates to receive an endorsement from a newspaper that is ideologically distinct from the median voter.

At a broader level, our findings also have implications for the burgeoning literatures on political communication, Congressional elections and representation. Most importantly, our findings show that media endorsements can have a large affect on the type of congressional candidates that are elected to Congress.

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Table 1: Experiment 1 - Average Treatment Effects

	Control Group	Endorse A (Liberal)	Endorse B (Conservative)
Percent Supporting	48.7	45.7	47.9
Conservative Candidate	[46.4,50.9]	[43.4,48]	[45.6,50.2]

\*95% Confidence Intervals in brackets

Table 2: Experiment 1 - Logistic Regressions of Candidate Support on Ideological Distance

	(1)	(2)
Newspaper Endorses Candidate A	-0.114 (0.088)	-0.188 (0.139)
Newspaper Endorses Candidate B	0.117 (0.088)	0.316 * (0.136)
Ideological Distance		.998 * (0.254)
Newspaper Endorses Candidate A * Ideological Distance		0.249 (0.346)
Newspaper Endorses Candidate B * Ideological Distance		-0.580* (0.340)
Constant	-2.091 * (0.218)	-2.347 * (0.236)
<i>N</i>	5572	5240
AIC	5282.6	5039
log <i>L</i>	-2399.263	-2278.642

The dependent variable is 1 if the respondent supports Candidate B and 0 if he/she supports Candidate A. The coefficients are shown with respect to a respondent in the control group. The model includes controls for 7-point party identification, age, gender, education and race.

\*denotes that a coefficient is significant at the .1 level

All models were computed using survey weights.

Figure 1: Relationship between Individuals' Ideological Congruence and the Impact of Newspaper Endorsement

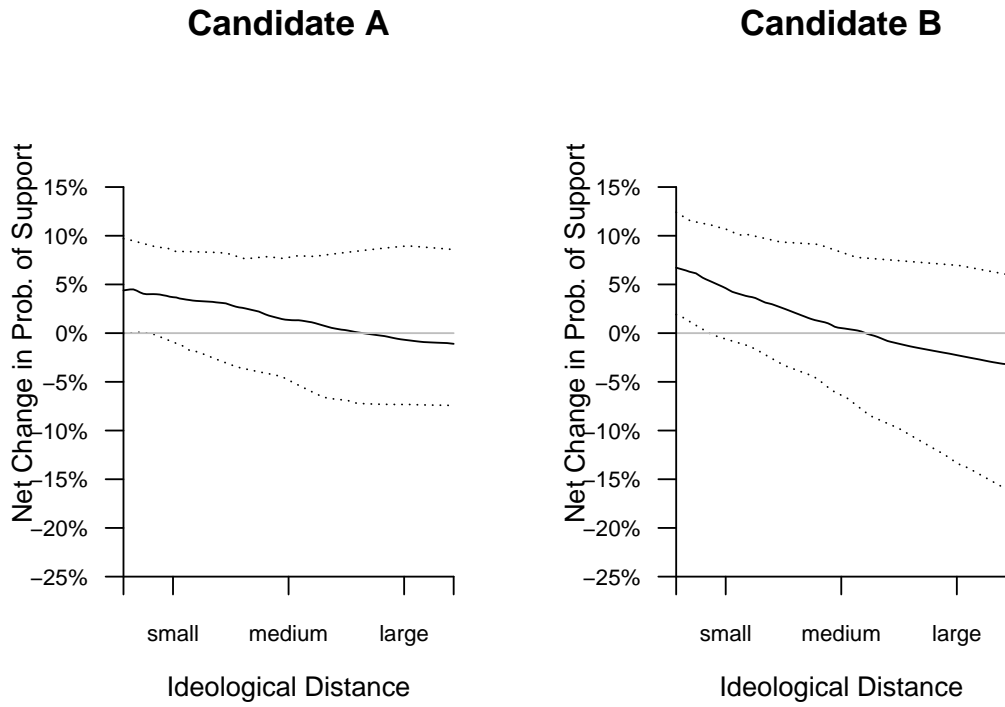
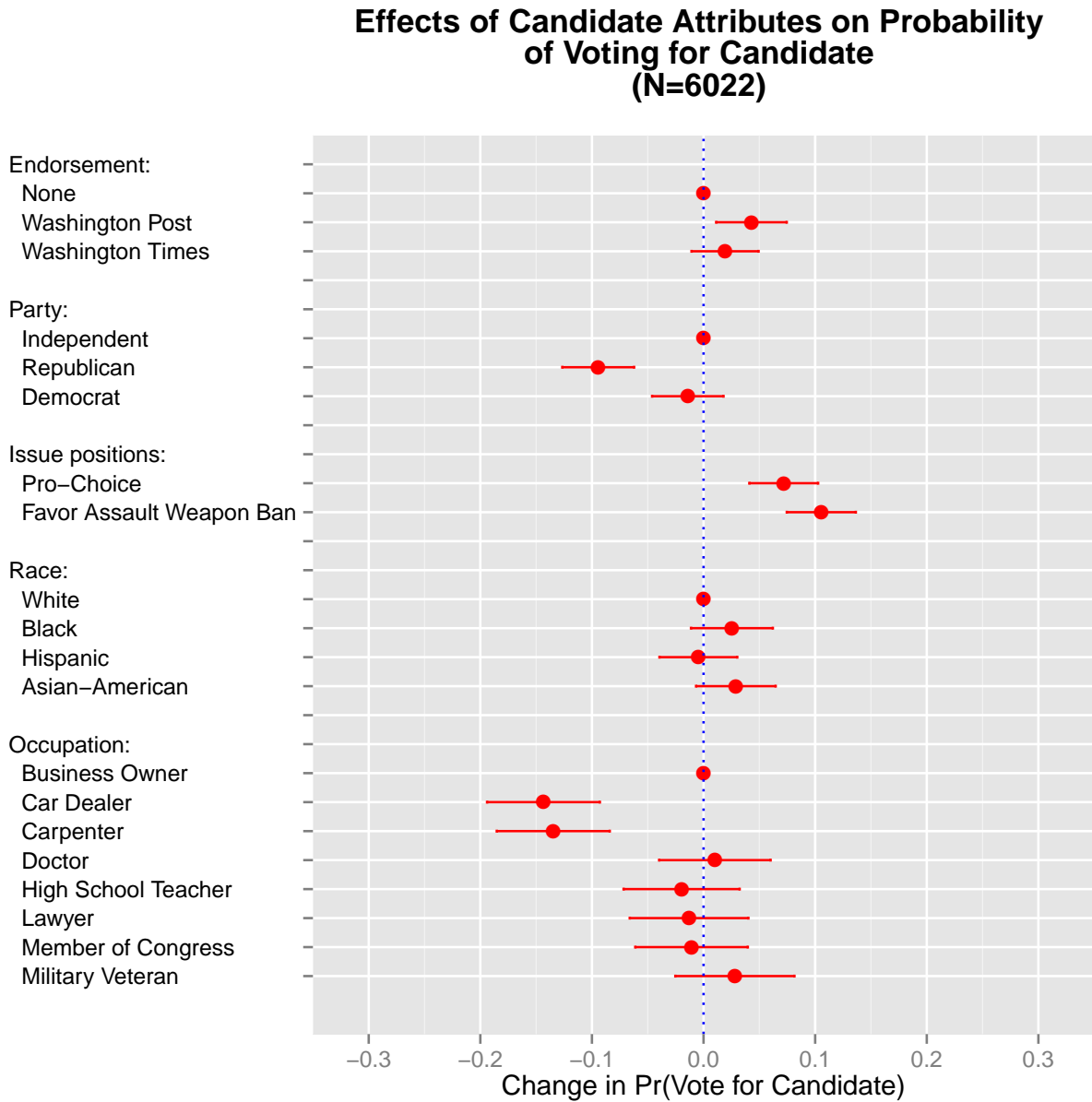


Figure 2: This graph shows an example of the conjoint table with various candidate attributes. Each attribute was fully randomized in our experiment.

Scenario 1 out of 5

	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
<b>Position on Abortion</b>	<b>Pro-choice</b>	<b>Pro-choice</b>
<b>Position on Assault Weapons Ban</b>	<b>Opposes Ban</b>	<b>Opposes Ban</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Lawyer</b>	<b>High school teacher</b>
<b>Party Identification</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Republican</b>
<b>Newspaper Endorsements</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Washington Post</b>

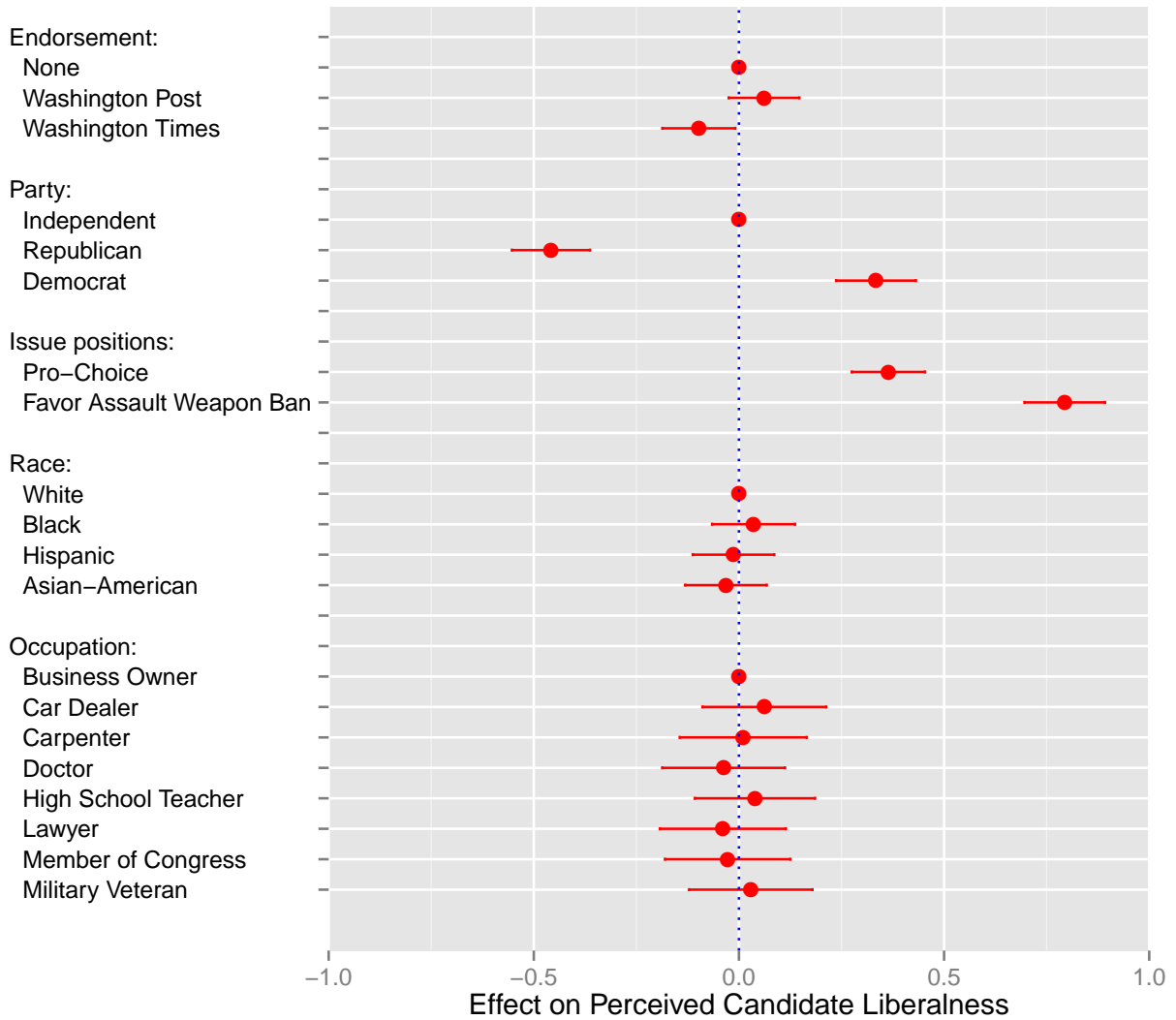
Figure 3: Experiment 2 - Effect of Newspaper Endorsements on Preferred Candidate



These plots show estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attributes on the probability of being preferred by respondents. Estimates are based on an OLS model with clustered standard errors estimated by respondent; bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

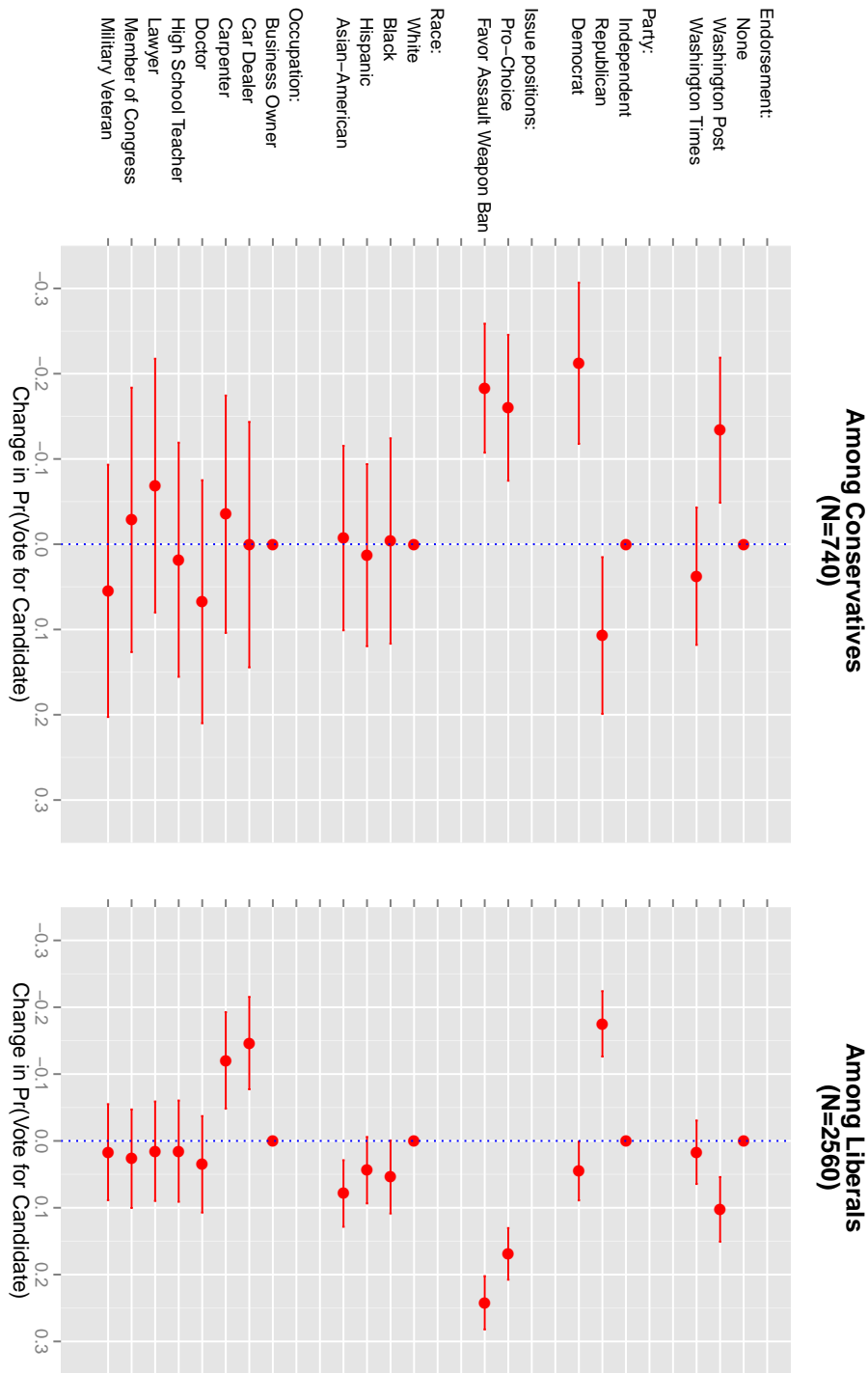
Figure 4: Experiment 2 - Effect of Newspaper Endorsements on Perceived Candidate Ideology

### Effects of Candidate Attributes on Perceived Liberalness (N=5970)



These plots show estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attributes on perceived candidate ideology. Estimates are based on an OLS model with clustered standard errors estimated by respondent; bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 5: Experiment 2 - Effect of Newspaper Endorsements on Preferred Candidate by Ideology



These plots show estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attributes on the probability of being preferred by respondents. Estimates are based on an OLS model with clustered standard errors estimated by respondent; bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.