

Presidential Campaigns and the Fundamentals Reconsidered

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The contrast between the predictability of presidential elections and the variability of early polls has come to be viewed as evidence that campaigns provide crucial information to voters. We argue that unmotivated survey respondents offering minimally acceptable answers (i.e., satisficing) offers an additional explanation for the classic conundrum of why the polls vary when the election outcome is predictable. The analysis relies on data from the National Annenberg Election Survey, a natural experiment that results from California's election laws, and the 2000 ANES survey mode experiment. The results support the claim that respondents' motivation to engage the survey question, not the information provided by the campaign, is the most important determinant of whether vote intentions reflect the "correctly" weighted fundamentals. We conclude by discussing the implications of this finding for both survey-based and experimental studies of campaign effects.

If you want to know who is most likely to win the next United States presidential election, do not look at which candidate is ahead in the early horse race polls.¹ The variability of these early polls has become a fact of presidential campaigns (Andersen, Tilley, and Heath 2005; Crespi 1988; Gelman and King 1993; Stimson 2004; Wlezien and Erikson 2002). To forecast the winner, scholars point to factors such as the economy and approval of the president (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992; Wlezien and Erikson 2004). Although additional information can improve the precision of the estimate, basic information about the economy and presidential approval ratings from June of the election year would be sufficient to predict the popular vote winner of every presidential election since 1968. In contrast, relying on vote intentions from public opinion polls of the same period would yield a correct prediction for only five of these eleven elections.²

The contrast between the predictability of presidential elections and the variability of the early polls has

come to be viewed as evidence that campaigns provide crucial information to voters. This information enables voters to select the candidate that best corresponds with their "fundamentals" (Campbell 2008; Gelman and King 1993; Kaplan, Park, and Gelman 2012; Peterson 2009; Wlezien and Erikson 2002, 987). As Gelman and King explain, "The function of the campaign, then, is to inform voters about the fundamental variables and their appropriate weights... voters... gather and use increasing amounts of information over the course of the campaign, with the largest increase occurring just before election day" (1993, 433–34). People must become "enlightened." This theory of campaign enlightenment is impressive in that it accounts for the variability of early polls as well as the predictability of election outcomes. Campaign learning is also consistent with the fact that many Americans are politically uninformed (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and with evidence that longer campaigns lead to increased reliance on the

¹Peter Enns acknowledges generous support from Princeton University's Center for the Study of Democratic Politics and Cornell University's Institute for the Social Sciences theme project on Judgment, Decision Making, and Social Behavior. An online appendix with supplementary materials for this article is available at www.journals.cambridge.org/jop. All data and materials necessary to reproduce the numerical results are available at <http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/Enns>.

²The nearly even split of the popular vote in 1968 and 2000 suggests these outcomes were close to random. Thus, a model's ability to predict these two cases is not informative. The key point, however, is that this forecast model predicts the winning candidate about twice as often and predicts the popular vote percentage more closely than vote intentions from the same period. See supplementary Appendix 1 for the complete results and details of this forecasting comparison.

fundamentals (Arceneaux 2005; Stevenson and Vavreck 2000).

Although Gelman and King (1993) speak of learning during the campaign, scholars have identified several additional mechanisms by which campaigns may help voters base their vote choice on the fundamentals. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944, 74) emphasized the “activation” of latent predispositions (see also, Finkel 1993; Kaplan, Park, and Gelman 2012). Erikson and Wlezien (2012) refer to the “crystallization of voter preferences.” They show how the salience of certain fundamentals, such as party identification, tends to increase as the campaign unfolds. Campaigns can also reduce uncertainty about candidates (Alvarez 1997; Glasgow and Alvarez 2000; Peterson 2004, 2009). As campaigns emphasize the candidates’ characteristics, such as where they stand on the issues, voters are better able to identify the candidate that best aligns with their preferences. Another perspective suggests that campaigns influence what considerations voters rely on through priming—that is, by emphasizing some considerations and ignoring others (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). As the campaign “primes” certain considerations, voters are more likely to base their vote choice on these factors. Vavreck (2009) shows that voters not only learn about which fundamentals matter, but which factors candidates emphasize are, themselves, a function of the most important fundamental—the economy. Lenz (2009) offers a contrasting perspective, arguing that what has typically been considered evidence of priming actually reflects the fact that voters are updating their issue preferences to match their preferred candidate. Although Lenz’s (2009) argument reverses the causal arrow, campaign information still serves to increase the relationship between the fundamentals and vote choice. Indeed, despite their differences, each of these perspectives focuses on information provided by the campaign. As Peterson explains, “Each theory shares the same basic function of the campaign. It provides information to the electorate, which leads voters to change how they weigh determinants of vote choice” (2009, 446).

We propose an additional explanation for why survey respondents increasingly rely on the fundamentals as the campaign progresses. Our argument builds on Krosnick’s (1991) theory of survey satisficing. We contend that for many potential voters, as the election nears, the prospect of facing a vote creates an incentive to consider the election and its consequences. The increased salience of the election, in turn, increases respondents’ motivation to take the vote-intention

question more seriously. Thus, for many survey respondents, the increased reliance on the fundamentals does not imply the use of campaign information to reach a vote choice. Instead, the reliance on the fundamentals reflects a shift from satisficing (offering a minimally acceptable response) to optimizing (offering a response that integrates relevant information into a summary judgement). In short, we hypothesize that shifts in survey respondents’ motivation to answer the vote-intention question can also account for the fact that as the election approaches, voter intentions appear to “crystallize” or become “enlightened.”

This argument carries important implications. First, if most voters do not need the campaign to rely on the fundamentals, much of the electorate may be more informed than the current literature acknowledges. Of course, knowing the fundamentals does not imply high levels of political information. It does, however, suggest that the know-nothing caricature that appears in the popular press (e.g., Shenkman 2008) as well as some academic writing is not accurate. Second, if a primary effect of campaigns is *not* to inform voters about the fundamentals, we should look elsewhere to understand campaign effects. In other words, our argument does not necessarily imply minimal campaign influence. In fact, the assumption that voters need a campaign to rely on the fundamentals may have made scholars less likely to theorize other important effects. Thus, we believe our argument and results support research that examines additional ways that campaigns influence voters, such as through persuasion (Hillygus and Shields 2008; Huber and Arceneaux 2007) or emotional appeals (Brader 2006). Finally, as we discuss in the conclusion, our argument holds implications for both experimental and observational studies of campaign effects. In particular, we show how satisficing can lead analysts to overestimate both campaign learning and persuasion.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section explains why we should not expect most individuals to depend on the campaign to learn how to attach the fundamentals to their vote choice. We then develop the implications of respondent motivation and survey satisficing for the probability of connecting the fundamentals to vote intentions. The analysis relies on data from the National Annenberg Election Survey, a natural experiment that results from California’s election laws, and a survey mode experiment in the 2000 American National Election Study. The results support the claim that respondents’

motivation to engage the survey question, not the information provided by the campaign, is the most important determinant of reliance on the fundamentals. The concluding section discusses the implications of the findings for the study of presidential campaigns.

How Much Do Voters Know?

Regardless of the mechanism (learning, priming, etc.), the notion that it takes months of campaigning and hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign expenditures for members of the electorate to connect fundamentals, such as the economy, race, or partisanship, to their vote choice matches the image of Campbell et al.'s *The American Voter*. The pioneering work of these scholars introduced us to the California woman who provided typical "no issue content" responses. When asked about the candidates, she responded, "I really don't care which man is best or otherwise. I don't know about either one of the men enough to give an opinion" (1960, 248–49). The man from Iowa, who Campbell et al. classified as someone who votes according to "group benefit" also seemed only vaguely aware of the upcoming presidential election. When asked if there was anything he liked about Stevenson, the response was, "I don't know much about the man. Our radio's tore up and I ain't heard any news lately" (243). For half a century, this image of the *The American Voter* has remained largely intact (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Converse's (1964) evidence of survey response instability and overwhelming evidence of the public's low levels of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) have reinforced the view that without a high-profile campaign, many voters will be unable to sort out the presidential candidates. Perhaps not surprisingly, Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson describe campaign enlightenment as the "dominant position in the political science literature" (2004, 12).

We accept that for some individuals this is the case. For many (perhaps most) potential voters, however, we believe that campaign information is *not* necessary to explain the increasing reliance on the fundamentals throughout the campaign. This observation hinges on the fact that the dominant fundamentals are easy issues (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 1989). Consider partisanship. Given the overwhelming evidence of the use of partisan cues (e.g., Downs 1957; Popkin 1991; Shaffner and Streb 2002) it would be surprising if voters needed months of campaigning to connect their party identi-

fication to their vote choice.³ Retrospective evaluations of the incumbent offer another easy cue. Even midterm Congressional elections reflect presidential approval ratings (Abramowitz 1985; Cover 1986). If voters connect their evaluations of the president to their Congressional vote in midterm elections, drawing the connection between presidential approval and presidential vote choice should be an easy task. The same logic applies to race. According to exit poll data, since 1996 the percentage of African Americans voting for the Democratic presidential candidate has ranged from 84 to 95%.⁴ Considering these values and the prominence and symbolic nature of race in U.S. politics (Carmines and Stimson 1989), it is hard to imagine that every four years voters need to be reminded how to connect race to their vote choice.

Even for fundamentals that are thought to be more difficult, making the connection to a binary vote choice (Democratic or Republican candidate) is likely to be a relatively easy task. Economic evaluations, for example, can be considered a complicated issue (e.g., Anderson 2007). Yet, Enns and Kellstedt (2008) show that even the least informed individuals regularly update their policy preferences in response to objective economic indicators. If the least politically aware can connect economic conditions to their policy attitudes without an election, it seems reasonable to assume that they can connect economic conditions to their presidential vote. Recent research also shows that the political ideology and issue positions of the least politically aware are stronger and more coherent than previously thought (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008; Goren 2004; Levendusky 2011) and that even with minimal effort, voters appear to be astute evaluators of candidate traits (Benjamin and Shapiro 2009). This research suggests that many voters do not need an entire campaign to decide whether the Democratic or Republican candidate more closely matches their fundamentals.

The point is not that potential voters can learn nothing from the campaign about the relationship between the candidates and the fundamentals. Candidates

³The fact that fundamentals, such as partisanship, are easy does not imply that individuals automatically connect them with their surveyed vote intentions. Although Gelman and King (1993) found a relatively stable relationship between partisanship and vote intentions during the 1988 presidential campaign, Erikson, Panagopoulos, and Wlezien (2010) show that this relationship can increase as the campaign unfolds. As we explain below, particularly early in the campaign, survey satisficing may lead to vote intentions that do not correspond with fundamentals, even as basic as partisanship.

⁴See, e.g., <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/elections/natl.exit.poll/index1.html>.

may emphasize certain fundamentals (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Vavreck 2009), new information about the fundamentals may become available during the campaign (Erikson and Wlezien 2012; Wlezien and Erikson 2002), and uncertainty about the candidates may diminish (Alvarez 1997; Peterson 2009). But given the ease of the fundamentals and the evidence that even the least informed update their political attitudes systematically (Enns 2006; Enns and Kellstedt 2008), it would be surprising if campaign learning offered the sole explanation for the increased reliance on the fundamentals during the campaign.

Motivation, Satisficing, and the Fundamentals

Simon (1957) proposed that when faced with a cognitively demanding decision, many people will satisfice—that is, instead of investing the effort to make an optimal decision, they only expend the effort necessary to make a satisfactory or acceptable decision. Focusing on surveys, Krosnick (1991) extended this idea to a theory of survey satisficing. Krosnick begins with the observation that, “survey respondents are often asked to expend a great deal of cognitive effort for little or no apparent reward” (1991, 214). Even if particular survey questions are *not* especially demanding, respondents often become fatigued, disinterested, impatient, and distracted (214). As a result, respondents may *satisfice*, (i.e., offer a minimally acceptable response), instead of *optimize* (i.e., offer a response that, following careful consideration of the question, integrates all relevant information into a summary judgement). Krosnick’s (1991) theory of survey satisficing helps explain a range of well-known survey phenomena, such as response order effects, respondents’ tendency to agree with interviewer assertions (acquiescence bias), selecting the “don’t know” response, and responding randomly. We propose that survey satisficing also holds important implications for how we understand presidential campaigns and reliance on the fundamentals.

Krosnick (1991) identifies three factors that influence the prevalence of satisficing: task difficulty, respondent ability, and respondent motivation. Our focus is on respondent motivation. We posit that respondents’ increasing reliance on the fundamentals, which has traditionally been interpreted as evidence of campaign effects, is, in part, a result of fewer respondents satisficing as the election nears. Some respondents, especially early in the campaign, are uninterested in the upcoming election. Although these individuals

know a campaign is underway, the election seems distant and of little importance. For these individuals, when asked how they intend to vote, the question is almost hypothetical. We expect that these respondents will not be motivated to carefully consider the question and the relevant considerations. Other respondents are at the opposite end of the continuum. For these individuals the election is an important and salient event. They care about the outcome and anticipate casting a vote. Thus, when taking the survey, the vote-intention question reflects a real vote choice that they plan to make. We expect these individuals are motivated to answer the question and will thus optimize. That is, they will answer the vote-intention question based on the fundamentals, as they would when making their actual vote-decision. Of course, some respondents are in between these ends of the continuum. The key point is that the more important the election is to the survey respondent, the more likely the respondent is to be motivated to treat the survey question like the actual vote choice.

This is a basic proposition. The link between the perceived importance of a topic and motivation to expend cognitive effort is well-established (Chaiken 1980; Krosnick 1999; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Yet, this argument holds important implications for how we understand the influence of presidential campaigns. On average, we expect that as the election nears its perceived importance grows. Indeed, behaviors that likely reflect how much importance individuals place on the election, such as the proportion of individuals who report donating to a campaign, displaying a campaign sign, or intending to participate in the campaign, increases as the campaign unfolds.⁵ Thus, in contrast to the traditional emphasis on campaign information and voter learning, we emphasize an additional mechanism to explain survey respondents’ growing reliance on the fundamentals throughout the campaign. As election day approaches and the perceived importance of the outcome grows, survey respondents become increasingly motivated to offer an optimal response to the vote-intention question.

As noted above, satisficing depends on two other parameters, task difficulty and respondent ability. Because we rely on the same vote-intention question throughout the campaign, task difficulty is a constant. Respondent ability, however, is an important consideration. The campaign-enlightenment hypothesis predicts that respondents’ ability to answer the vote choice question will improve throughout the

⁵These questions were asked in the 2004 NAES.

campaign. Furthermore, for some individuals, learning about the campaign may explain why the perceived importance of the election increases. Thus, the subsequent analyses employ a battery of strategies and robustness checks in order to test the hypothesis that increased reliance on the fundamentals is, in part, a result of motivation to engage with the survey question (as opposed to receiving campaign information). Of course, given our earlier contention that the fundamentals are easy issues, we expect that most respondents have the ability to respond to the vote-intention question in an optimal way. One might then ask, if the fundamentals are easy issues, can respondent motivation (or lack thereof) influence the probability of satisficing? Krosnick, Narayan, and Smith answer yes. They explain, “the presence of any *one* of those conditions [high task difficulty, low ability, or low motivation] may be sufficient to induce satisficing” (1996, 33, italics in original). Thus, we predict that, holding exposure to campaign information constant, greater respondent motivation will increase the probability of expressing a vote intention based on the fundamentals. As the election approaches and becomes more salient in the public’s mind, we expect that respondents are increasingly motivated to connect the intended vote choice question to their actual vote, taking stock of the fundamentals as they answer. The analyses below offer three distinct tests of this prediction.

Vote Intentions During the 2000 Presidential Campaign

We have argued that holding the effect of campaign information constant, respondents’ motivation to offer an optimal response should increase individuals’ reliance on the fundamentals. The first part of the analysis uses data from the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) to test this hypothesis. We utilize both the rolling cross-section and the panel component of the data. We focus on the 2000 NAES because the fundamentals were relatively difficult in this election. Despite the economic growth during much of the Clinton years, by 2000 economic conditions were much more ambiguous. In fact, between 1948 and 2008, the leading economic indicators had been worse in eight election years and better in six election years.⁶ Additionally, neither candidate was an incumbent. Because these fundamentals were more

difficult than during other recent elections, the 2000 election offers a most likely case for voters needing the campaign to connect the fundamentals to their vote choice. This part of the analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we identify which respondents expressed an intended vote choice that aligns with their fundamentals. We then test our hypothesis that vote intentions which do not correspond with the fundamentals often reflect a lack of respondent motivation, not unenlightened respondents.

To identify whose vote intentions correspond with their fundamentals, we build on the strategy of Gelman and King (1993). First, we need to identify the “correct” fundamental weights. To do this, we regress vote intentions from the final week of the campaign on the fundamentals. We rely on NAES data from the last week of the campaign because, as Gelman and King explain, “the final estimated coefficients are largely based on enlightened preferences and are therefore more closely related to the actual reasons people will vote” (1993, 447; see also, Bartels 2006, 86). Indeed, intended vote support from these data are within one percentage point of the actual two-party vote.

Our model includes 12 potential fundamentals.⁷ Gelman and King’s (1993) analysis of the fundamentals included party identification, ideology, race, region, sex, income, and education.⁸ We add one demographic variable to this list, age. We also include presidential approval and economic evaluations because of the prominence of these variables in forecast models (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992; Wlezien and Erikson 2004). Finally, we add two measures of policy preferences. Past research suggests that the most informed are more likely to connect their policy preferences to their presidential vote choice (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). Thus, policy preferences could be viewed as the fundamental most likely to be influenced by campaign information. We focus on domestic policy preferences because Vavreck (2009, 60) shows that domestic policy was the dominant theme of campaign advertisements and speeches

⁶We consider the leading economic indicators, because Erikson and Wlezien (2008) show that this measure performs better than other economic measures for early election forecasts.

⁷We also replicated subsequent results with a fundamentals model that included just presidential approval and partisanship. Given the parsimony of forecast models and the importance of partisanship for vote choice, not surprisingly, the model with just two predictors fit the data almost as well as the full fundamentals model. While we believe this result supports our assertion that the most important fundamentals are easy issues, here we report results based on the model with all fundamentals because this model offers a best case scenario for uncovering evidence of campaign learning and thus a more difficult test of our hypothesis.

⁸See the supplementary appendix for complete question wording.

in 2000. The first measure of policy preferences is Stimson's (1999) policy mood. Policy mood measures the public's support for more or less government and has been shown to be an important predictor of presidential election outcomes (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). To generate this measure, we use 10 questions that ask whether the federal government should spend more or less on areas such as social security, education, and health care. The second measure of policy preferences captures attitudes toward cultural and religious issues, which have played an increasingly important role in U.S. politics (Ellis and Ura 2011; Layman 2001). To measure policy preferences on these issues, we follow Ellis and Ura (2011) and generate an index based on four questions about opposition to discrimination against homosexuals and support for access to abortion. We call this measure moral mood. Because our dependent variable is binary (1 = Gore vote intention, 0 = Bush vote intention), we use logistic regression to estimate the relationship between the fundamentals and vote intention. The estimated relationship between the fundamental variables and vote intentions from the final week of the campaign reflect our estimates of the "correctly" weighted fundamentals. We report these estimates in supplementary Appendix 2.

Our next task is to evaluate whether respondents' vote intentions reflect these weights. For each respondent throughout the entire NAES survey, we use these coefficients to generate predicted vote intentions. These predicted values represent how each respondent would vote if he or she relied on "enlightened" fundamental weights (Gelman and King 1993). We then compare this predicted vote based on the "enlightened" fundamentals with the vote intention actually expressed by the respondent. If the predicted and intended vote match, we code a 1 to indicate that the respondent's vote intention corresponds with his or her fundamentals. If the predicted and actual vote intention differ, we code a 0 to indicate the mismatch. The result is a binary indicator of whether or not each respondent's vote intention reflects the properly weighted fundamentals.⁹

We also need to identify whether respondents were motivated to provide an optimal response to the vote-intention question. By optimal, we mean basing the vote intention on the same considerations that the respondent would rely on when making the actual

vote choice. Experimental studies have shown that it is possible to eliminate the difference between hypothetical votes (i.e., vote intentions) and actual votes by providing subjects with a set of instructions that includes an entreaty "to vote just exactly as you would vote if you were really going to face the consequences of your vote" (Ajzen, Brown, and Carvajal 2004; Cummings and Taylor 1999). This entreaty is similar to Krosnick's (2000) recommendation that surveyors maximize respondent motivation by obtaining a commitment from respondents to think carefully about the questions and their responses. These experiments and Krosnick's recommendation inform our measurement strategy. Suppose we conducted an experiment and some subjects were instructed to vote as if "you were really going to face the consequences of your vote." By focusing on the consequences of their vote, subjects in this treatment group should be more likely to offer an optimal response (Krosnick 2000). To verify that subjects followed these instructions (and as a result, optimized), at the end of the experiment we might conduct a manipulation check (Mutz 2011) and ask how much subjects cared about the election outcome. Presumably, those who indicated that they cared about the election outcome followed the treatment's entreaty and treated the question as an actual choice with real consequences. In the language of satisficing theory, these respondents were motivated to optimize. Of course, there was no experiment in the NAES asking respondents to answer the vote-intention question as if they were going to face the consequences of their vote. But the survey did ask the question we would have used as a manipulation check: "Do you care a good deal which party wins the 2000 presidential election?" This question allows us to identify which respondents were more likely to optimize when expressing their vote intention and which were more likely to satisfice. We expect those who responded that they care a good deal which party wins the election were more likely to be motivated to respond to the vote-intention question as if it was an actual vote choice. Alternatively, we expect those who responded that they did not care about the outcome were more likely to satisfice and offer a minimally acceptable response. This measurement strategy is also consistent with research that shows those who care more about an issue are more likely to be motivated to expend cognitive effort (e.g., Chaiken 1980; Krosnick 1999; Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

To evaluate the validity of this measure, we examine how it relates to "don't know" responses to other survey questions. "Don't know" responses offer an important indication of survey satisficing (Krosnick 1991, 1999). Thus, if knowing whether respondents

⁹We exclude respondents who voted early because these responses reflect actual votes, not vote intentions. We also follow previous research (Gelman and King 1993) and only analyze respondents who expressed vote support for the Democratic or Republican candidate.

cares about the election outcome offers a valid measure of whether or not they were motivated to optimize when answering the vote-intention question, responses to this question should correlate with “don’t know” responses to other questions. We calculate the proportion of “don’t know” responses that each respondent offered to all demographic questions (except for education level, income level, employment status, and citizenship status, which we omit because a “don’t know” response might reflect a social desirability bias).¹⁰ We focus on demographic questions because they are *not* made easier by political information. In other words, if those who report caring about the election also answer more demographic questions, this association is most likely due to optimizing—not to higher levels of campaign information. Consistent with expectations, the relationship between caring about the election outcome and responding “don’t know” is statistically significant and substantively important. A shift from zero to three “don’t know” responses corresponds with an expected 0.23 decrease in the probability of caring about the election. A shift from the minimum to the maximum “don’t know” responses reflects an expected 0.43 decrease.¹¹

Theoretically and empirically, we have reason to believe that respondents who report they care a good deal about the election outcome are more likely to be motivated to optimize when they report their vote intention. If this is the case, our argument suggests that we should observe two over-time patterns in responses to the care-about-the-election question. First, as the election approaches, the proportion of respondents who report that they care a good deal which party wins the election should increase. This prediction stems from our claim that motivation to respond optimally to the vote-intention question increases as the election nears. Second, we expect that throughout the election the proportion of respondents who express a vote intention in line with the “correctly” weighted fundamentals will be greater for those who report caring a good deal about the election. This pattern is particularly important for our argument. Although we expect the proportion of those who care about the election to increase as the election approaches, among those who do care about the election, we predict

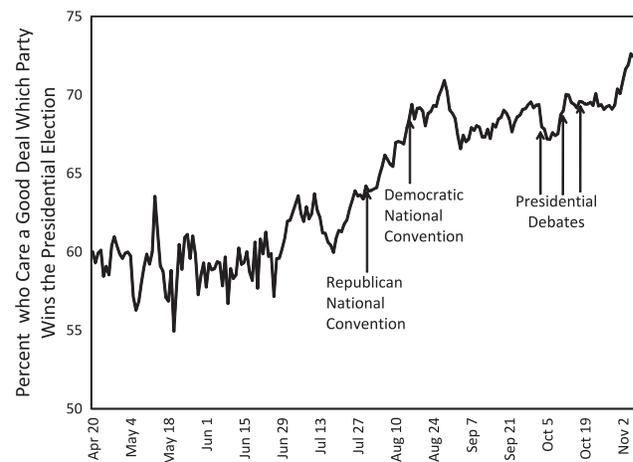
¹⁰To ensure that we only include the same respondents as our subsequent analyses, we omit demographic questions for which listwise deletion was used for “don’t know” responses in the fundamentals regression.

¹¹The maximum number of “don’t know” responses was 13 (out of 18 demographic questions). Full results are presented in supplementary Appendix 5.2.

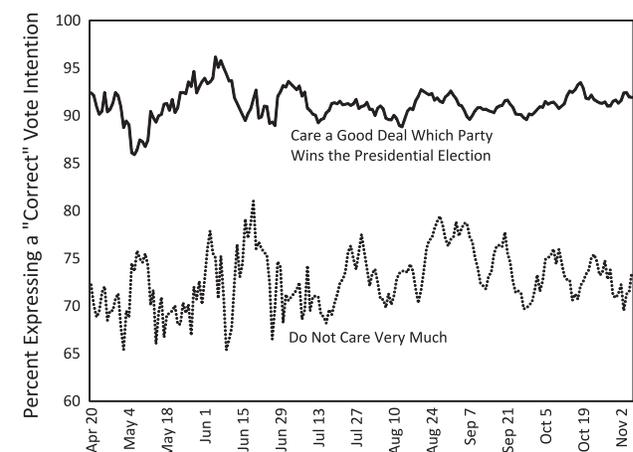
a relatively constant (and high) proportion of “correct” vote intentions. If the fundamentals are easy issues, even early in the campaign when information is limited, we should observe vote intentions based on the fundamentals among those who are motivated to optimize.

Figure 1 uses survey responses from the last 200 days of the 2000 campaign (smoothed with a seven-day-prior moving average) to examine these predictions. Panel (a) reports the percent of respondents who report that they care a good deal which party wins the election. Consistent with expectations, as the campaign unfolds, a higher proportion of respondents indicate they care a good deal. This increase starts slowly in June and accelerates around the conventions. After a postconvention decline, the percent who care a good deal begins to increase with the steepest increase the final week of the campaign. Panel (b) shows those who

FIGURE 1 The Relationship between Caring about the Election Outcome and “Correct” Vote Intentions during the 2000 Presidential Campaign



(a) Percent who report they care a good deal about the election



(b) Percent who express a vote intention that reflects the “correctly” weighted fundamentals

care about the election are much more likely to express vote intentions in line with the “correctly” weighted fundamentals. The average difference is about 18 percentage points, and, as expected, this difference is roughly constant throughout the entire pre-election period.

Although these patterns are consistent with our argument, they do not rule out alternate explanations. For example, if campaign information leads individuals to care about the election and to express vote intentions in line with the fundamentals, we would observe similar patterns. To address these concerns, the subsequent analysis controls for the information provided by the campaign with four measures of campaign information. First, we create a summary measure of campaign knowledge based on 17 factual questions about the presidential candidates and the interviewer’s rating of the respondent’s overall level of political knowledge.¹² We also control for the respondent’s education level because the more educated tend to be more politically informed (Althaus 2003; Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen 2006). Following Hillygus (2005), the third measure relies on self-reported exposure to the campaign. We generate a summary measure of the amount of campaign exposure with six questions about how much exposure respondents had to various television news, newspaper, talk radio, and the internet sources during the previous week and four questions about how much attention respondents paid to *campaign* information through these media sources.¹³ Finally, we generate a measure of exposure to presidential campaign advertisements. This measure follows the recommendations of Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein (2004) and Ridout et al. (2004) and generates an individual-level measure of ad exposure based on the number of ads broadcast on each program in each media market and program-specific television viewing habits for each respondent.¹⁴

Individually, each of the measures faces limitations. Combined, we believe these four measures offer an impressive amount of information about respondents’

¹²The factual candidate questions varied throughout the campaign. Thus, no respondent answered all 17 questions. This does not pose a problem for our analysis because we match respondents by date to ensure that we only compare respondents who received the same survey.

¹³Although the questions are not as detailed as those offered in the 2008 NAES, this format approximates the program list technique validated by Dilliplane, Goldman, and Mutz (2012). We also use multiple survey items because focusing on a single question can inflate viewership estimates (Prior 2009).

¹⁴The ad data come from the Wisconsin Advertising Project (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002). Full details of our measurement strategy and evidence to support the validity of this measure appear in supplementary Appendix 6.

knowledge of and exposure to the campaign.¹⁵ If the campaign helps voters connect the fundamentals to their vote choice, higher values on these variables should correspond with higher rates of “correct” voting.¹⁶ At this point, we could regress our measure of whether or not each respondent’s vote intention matched the fundamentals on our campaign information and care about the election variables. We take one additional step, however, and use Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) to preprocess the data (Iacus, King, and Porro 2011). We match “treated” and “untreated” respondents (i.e., those who care a good deal and those who do not care a good deal about the election outcome) on our measures of campaign knowledge, education level, campaign exposure, presidential ad exposure, and week of the campaign.¹⁷ Because balance is not perfect after matching, we follow the recommendation of Iacus, King, and Porro (2011) and control for the four campaign information variables in the subsequent analysis. Including these covariates also allows us to estimate the relationship between campaign information and the probability of expressing a vote intention in line with the fundamentals.¹⁸ Figure 2(a) presents the coefficients and 95% confidence intervals (based on a logistic regression) for our measure of motivation to optimize and the four measures of campaign information.¹⁹ The dependent variable indicates whether or not the respondent expressed a vote intention in line with the correctly weighted fundamentals. The predictors, which are labeled on the vertical axis, have been standardized to a common variance, so the coefficients can be compared.²⁰ Although the

¹⁵We also estimated all analyses controlling for whether or not a respondent lived in a battleground state, a safe state, or a leaning state (Shaw 2006). The battleground variables did not alter any findings in subsequent analyses.

¹⁶The four measures of campaign learning/exposure and “care about the winner” are weakly correlated (the highest correlation is $r = 0.22$). Among the campaign information variables, the strongest correlation is between the campaign knowledge and self-reported campaign exposure ($r = 0.40$).

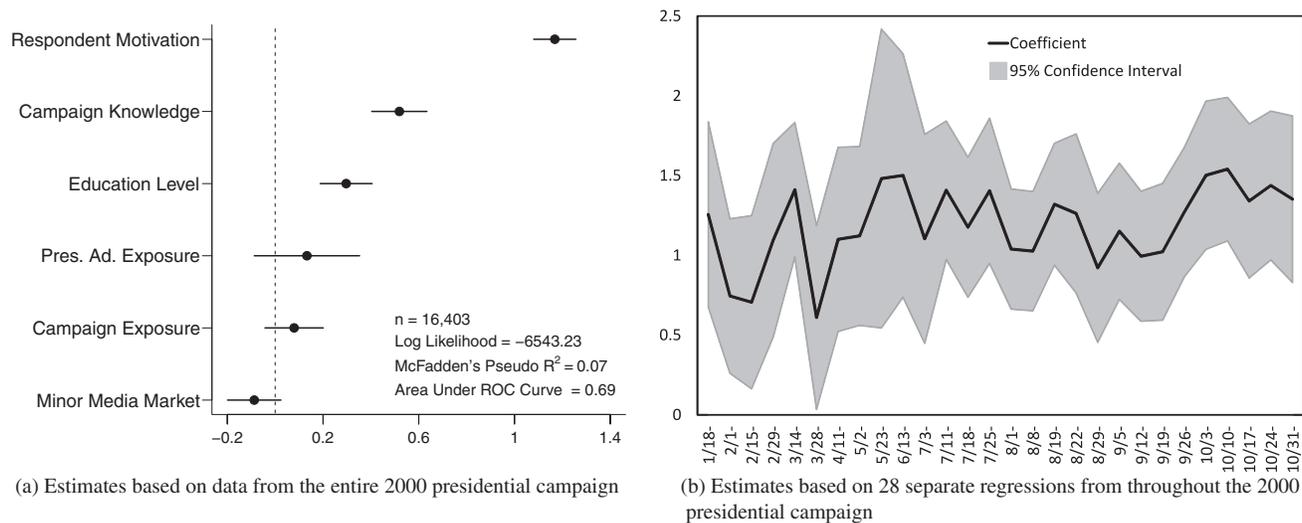
¹⁷See supplementary Appendix 7 for a discussion of our matching strategy and additional results which show the findings are not sensitive to the decision to match. Because we balance the data on our measures of campaign information, we do not employ survey weights in the analysis.

¹⁸Perfect balance implies that the control variables are uncorrelated with the treatment variable but it does not imply that the covariates are uncorrelated with the outcome of interest.

¹⁹Because we do not have presidential ad information for minor media markets, we also include a dichotomous indicator for these areas.

²⁰We standardize the continuous predictors to a standard deviation of 0.5, which matches the standard deviation of an evenly distributed binary variable (Gelman 2008).

FIGURE 2 The Relationship between Respondent Motivation and Vote Intentions that Correspond with the “Correctly” Weighted Fundamentals during the 2000 Presidential Campaign



Note: Data are from the 2000 NAES and have been preprocessed with Coarsened Exact Matching. To facilitate the comparison of coefficients, nonbinary variables have been standardized to a standard deviation of 0.5.

analysis is not meant to identify the unique effects of the campaign (i.e., whether the campaign affects individuals through priming, learning, etc.), consistent with past research, we see evidence that campaign information matters. The relationships for campaign knowledge and education level are statistically significant and the coefficients for the exposure measures are in the expected direction. Equally important, we see that our measure of motivation to optimize (whether respondents care about the election outcome) corresponds with the largest substantive effect. In fact, the expected increase in the probability of offering a vote intention in line with the correctly weighted fundamentals for a respondent who switches from not caring to caring about the election outcome (0.15) is roughly equivalent to the expected shift from simultaneously moving all other predictors from the 20th percentile to the 80th percentile (0.16).²¹

If, as we have argued, motivation to optimize is driving the above results, the significant relationship between caring about the election and relying on the correctly weighted fundamentals should persist throughout the entire campaign. That is, even when the campaign is in its infancy and minimal campaign information is available, respondents who care about the election should be more likely to con-

sider the fundamentals. To test this prediction, we estimate 28 different logistic regressions across the 10 months of NAES data.²² Like the above analysis, we match on the four measures of campaign information. The expected influence of respondent motivation appears in Figure 2(b). Throughout the entire campaign, we observe a statistically significant relationship. Almost an entire year before the election—controlling for campaign learning, education, campaign exposure, and exposure to presidential ads—knowing whether someone cares about the outcome of the election is an important predictor of whether vote intentions align with the “correctly” weighted fundamentals. Although not shown to save space, none of the campaign information variables are significant for every time period. Additionally, consistent with the results in Figure 2(a), the size of these relationships are consistently less than the expected effect of caring about the election.

These results suggest that when respondents care about the election outcome, and presumably

²¹We used Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003) to generate these estimates.

²²Although, the 2000 NAES began on December 14, 1999, the analysis begins in January 2000 when campaign ad data are first available. The results for December (without ad data) look virtually identical to the other periods. About 110 days before the election, the NAES increased the weekly sample to more than 2,000 respondents. For this period, we analyze each week separately. Prior to this period, we group either two or three weeks together to obtain sample sizes of about 1,000.

take the vote-intention question more seriously (i.e., optimize instead of satisfice), the probability of expressing a vote intention in line with the “correctly” weighted fundamentals increases substantially. Yet, despite controlling for all available measures of campaign exposure, the results are not dispositive. In particular, two scenarios could cast doubt on our conclusions. First, if any unmeasured campaign effects are correlated with caring about the election, we will have overestimated the influence of respondent motivation. We believe the first estimate in Figure 2(b) suggests that this scenario is unlikely. Even before the Iowa Caucus, caring about the election outcome corresponds with an increased probability of relying on the correctly weighted fundamentals. Although consistent with our expectations based on respondent motivation, this result is well before standard accounts of campaign learning posit an effect. Nevertheless, we examine this concern more closely below. Second, our inferences could be wrong if those who care about the election are systematically different from those who do not care about the election, and this difference correlates with vote intentions. For example, if those who care about the election are more partisan than those who do not care, these individuals might have an easier time relating their partisanship to their vote intentions, regardless of their motivation to optimize.

To evaluate these concerns, we rely on the panel component of the 2000 NAES. By including respondent fixed effects in our analysis, these data allow us to examine *within* person shifts in caring about the election outcome. Thus, between-person differences that correlate with caring about the election are held constant. We also use the panel structure of the data to guard against the possibility that unmeasured sources of campaign information correlate with caring more about the election. Our chief concern is that an increase in caring about the election outcome may reflect the reception of campaign information. For this reason, we exclude observations when a respondent’s concern for the election outcome increased. Variation comes entirely from respondents who reported caring *less* about the election outcome in a subsequent interview. Although we know from Figure 1 that the overall proportion of respondents who cared a good deal about the election increased as the campaign unfolded, the current focus on respondents whose concern remained the same or decreased ensures that our results do not reflect a correlation between increased campaign information and caring more about the election. We assume that respondents who report less concern for the election than in a previous interview were less motivated (i.e., more likely to satisfice) when

expressing their vote intention.²³ The findings unequivocally support our expectations. (To save space, we report the results of the panel data analysis in Table A-2 of the supplementary appendix.) Across all specifications, when a respondent’s reported concern about the election declines, the respondent is less likely to report a vote intention that corresponds with the correctly weighted fundamentals.²⁴

The California Voter Guide as a Treatment Effect

Another implication of our argument is that if an election suddenly became salient in the public’s mind, survey respondents would be more likely to provide an optimal survey response. These respondents should be more motivated to treat the vote-intention question like an actual vote choice and, as a result, even if they received no additional information about the candidates, we should observe an increased reliance on the fundamentals. A unique feature of California’s election law allows us to test this prediction. Between 40 and 21 days prior to the election, California law requires that the state mail a Voter Information Guide to every registered voter (CAL. ELEC. CODE §9094). This information guide has several important characteristics. First, it is noticeable. In 2000, the guide was printed on 8.5 by 11 inch paper and contained 84 pages. Additionally, the front and back cover included graphics and large capital letters that read “GENERAL ELECTION 2000” and “OFFICIAL VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE.” In addition to offering a powerful reminder that the election is upcoming, the guide also reminds the individual that he or she is registered to vote and includes details of the election, such as a sample ballot. We propose that receiving the Voter Information Guide makes the upcoming election and corresponding vote choice more salient, which should increase respondents’ motivation to offer an optimal response, treating the vote-intention question more like the actual vote choice.

For our purposes, another important feature of the voter guide is that it contains almost no

²³Given the increasing amounts of information through the campaign, there is no reason to expect that individuals with relevant information about how to link the fundamentals to vote choice would lose this information. Nevertheless, we scrutinize this possibility in supplementary Appendix 3.

²⁴As an additional robustness check, supplementary Appendix 5 shows that the results are robust to using the proportion of “don’t know” responses to demographic questions as an instrument for our measure of motivation to optimize.

information about the presidential candidates (most of the material focuses on the state's ballot initiatives). In 2000, the guide only mentioned Al Gore's name once (on p. 49) in a general statement from the Democratic Party. The Republican party statement did not even mention George W. Bush. The only place Bush's name appeared was in a discussion of Proposition 32, which was a bond to support California Veterans. Thus, the voter guide makes the election salient without providing additional information about how the fundamentals relate to the presidential candidates. Finally, the information guide is advantageous because among the most populous states (which we analyze below), California is the only state that legislates this type of mailing during such a narrow time period. These characteristics combine to offer many of the desirable properties of a natural experiment (Robinson, McNulty, and Krasno 2009). During a two-and-a-half week period, all registered voters in California received an 84-page booklet reminding them about the upcoming presidential election.²⁵ Clearly, individuals are not randomly distributed across the states. Yet, among registered voters, this "treatment" is exogenous to attention to the campaign.²⁶ If the "treatment" works as hypothesized, during the 19-day period that Californians registered to vote received the mailing, we should observe an increased reliance on the fundamentals relative to registered voters in other states.²⁷

For this part of the analysis, we rely on 2000 NAES data from 100 days before the election. This period allows us to analyze an extended period of the campaign while maintaining large and consistent sample sizes each week.²⁸ We divide the data into five periods, 100 to 81 days, 80 to 61 days, 60 to 41 days, 40 to 21 days, and 20 to 1 day before the election. Notice that the second to last period matches the period when all registered voters in California received the Voter

²⁵If more than one person in a household was registered, only one booklet was mailed to that household.

²⁶Attention to the guide could be endogenous to political interest, but because the guide does not contain information about the candidates, the treatment effect is not correlated with learning.

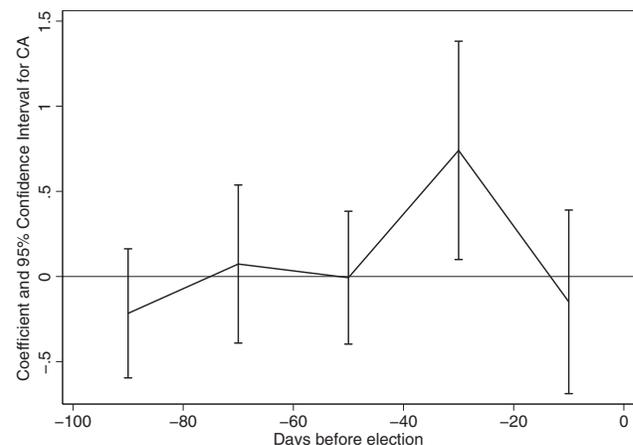
²⁷In theory, we could compare registered voters in California to nonregistered California voters. This, however, is not as clean a comparison. If a household has a registered voter and a non-registered voter, both individuals would be exposed to the treatment. Additionally, comparing registered Californians with non-registered Californians would result in much smaller matched sample sizes.

²⁸During this period, the weekly sample size ranged from 2,057 to 2,228.

Information Guide. If our hypothesis is correct, during this period, the vote intentions of registered voters in California should align more closely with their fundamentals than registered voters in other states. To control for the possibility that receiving the voter guide leads people to seek out additional information about the presidential candidates, similar to the previous analysis, within each of our five periods, we match registered voters in California with registered voters in the other states on campaign knowledge, education level, campaign exposure, and presidential ad exposure. This helps ensure that any difference between California and other states does not result because of different levels of campaign knowledge or exposure.

For each period, we then regress our dependent variable, whether or not respondents' vote intentions matched the properly weighted fundamentals, on a dummy variable for California and the four campaign information variables. Figure 3 reports the coefficient and 95% confidence interval for the California variable for each time period. The first three time periods show no significant differences in reliance on the fundamentals between registered voters in California and registered voters in other states. Given the fact that coverage of the campaign reaches across all states and our decision to balance on and control for

FIGURE 3 The Estimated Effect of *The California Voter Guide* (period -40 to -20) on Expressing a Vote Intention that reflects the "Correctly" Weighted Fundamentals



Note: The figure reports the estimated relationship (and 95% confidence interval) between being a registered voter in California (relative to being a registered voter in another state) and expressing a vote intention that corresponds with the "correctly" weighted fundamentals. The period -40 to -20 corresponds with the dates that California mails the Voter Information Guide.

campaign information variables, the lack of difference is not surprising. We are most interested, however, in the 40 to 21 days prior to the election. During this period, exactly as expected, registered voters in California are more likely to connect their vote-intention to the fundamentals. This result is consistent with the prediction that receiving the Voter Information Guide increased respondents' motivation to answer the vote-intention question. Although we cannot completely rule out the possibility that receiving the Information Guide led California voters to seek out additional campaign information, our controls for factual knowledge of the candidates, self-reported campaign exposure, exposure to presidential ads, and education make this explanation less likely. By the end of the campaign, we can no longer conclude that registered voters in California differ from registered voters in other states. This result is not surprising, because in the final weeks of the campaign we would expect the proximity of the election to lead registered voters in other states to increase their reliance on the fundamentals when expressing their vote intentions.

Although the results in Figure 3 confirm expectations, to get a further sense of these findings, we ask how often would we obtain these results if we chose another state (Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller 2010). To answer this question we repeated the above analysis, each time replacing the California dummy variable with another state. We did this for each of the 21 states with a sample size of more than 1,000.²⁹ In total, we estimated 105 placebo regressions (21 placebo states at five different periods of the election). We would expect five significant coefficients due to chance. As we report in supplementary Appendix 8, we observe seven. The placebo analysis reinforces our conclusions about the California voter guide.

ANES Survey Mode Experiment

A survey mode experiment in the 2000 American National Election Study (ANES) offers a final test of our predictions (Burns et al. 2000). This survey compared face-to-face interviews (selected by probability area sampling) with telephone interviews (selected by random digit dialing). The use of two survey modes provides a unique opportunity to test the relationship

²⁹The states were, NY, FL, PA, OH, IL, MI, NC, VA, GA, NJ, TN, WI, MA, IN, WA, MO, MN, MD, AZ, AL, and TX. To avoid confounding the treatment and control, in these placebo regressions, we omitted California (the treatment variable) from the matched control group.

between motivation to optimize and reliance on the fundamentals. In their extensive study of survey mode effects, Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick conclude, "respondents interviewed by telephone appear to have been more suspicious and less cooperative and less interested in the survey, suggesting they may have had less motivation to generate optimal answers" (2003, 109–10). If our argument is correct, the diminished "motivation to generate optimal answers" among those interviewed by telephone should lead to a decreased reliance on the fundamentals when expressing their vote intentions.

To test this prediction, we follow the strategy of our earlier analyses. First, we generate a measure of whether or not respondents' vote intentions correspond with the "correctly" weighted fundamentals.³⁰ Next, we control for potentially confounding factors. Although the two groups (telephone and face-to-face interviews) were selected randomly and by a national area probability sample, certain demographic groups may not be equally represented in the two types of surveys (Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick 2003). Indeed, Table A-8 in the supplementary appendix confirms that numerous demographic variables are correlated with the probability of being in the telephone or face-to-face survey. Because demographic characteristics are sometimes related to the probability of satisficing, unlike our previous analyses, in order to isolate the effect of survey mode we must control for these factors (Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick 2003).³¹ Thus, to help ensure that the respondents in the face-to-face survey are as similar as possible to respondents in the telephone survey, we use CEM to match on relevant demographic characteristics. We also matched on the date of survey, political knowledge, campaign exposure, and education level to further ensure that differences across survey mode are not a function of confounding factors.³²

³⁰We used the ANES post-election survey to generate estimates of the "correctly" weighted fundamentals. Supplementary Appendix 9 discusses this measurement strategy in full.

³¹The first analysis used panel data to ensure that unmeasured individual characteristics did not affect our conclusions. The within-state focus of the second analysis made it unnecessary to control for demographic variables. In the present analysis, in order to identify the unique effect of survey mode, we must control for demographic factors that might influence the probability of participating in a particular type of survey and that might also influence the probability of satisficing.

³²All question wording and relevant balance statistics are reported in supplementary Appendix 9. Table A-10 in the supplementary appendix shows that the results are robust to a variety of different approaches to balancing the data as well as to not matching.

We conducted two tests of the effect of survey mode on vote intentions.³³ First, we estimated the relationship between survey mode and expressing a vote intention based on the “correctly” weighted fundamentals. This analysis controls for political knowledge, campaign exposure, education level, age, and the day of the interview, because we were not able to perform exact matching on these variables (Iacus, King, and Porro 2011). As with the previous analysis, nonbinary variables have been standardized to a standard deviation of 0.5, so coefficients are comparable. Consistent with Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2003), significance tests of directional predictions are one-tailed (Blalock 1979).

Table 1 (row one, column 1) shows that those in the face-to-face interview were significantly more likely to express vote intentions that corresponded with the correctly weighted fundamentals than those in the telephone interview. Given Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick’s (2003) findings that respondents in face-to-face interviews are more motivated to offer optimal responses (as opposed to satisficing), this result offers strong support for the prediction that, independent of learning about the campaign, higher levels of respondent motivation increase the probability of relying on the fundamentals.³⁴ The expected effect of survey mode is smaller than that of political knowledge and education, but the magnitude of the survey mode effect is still important. Participating in the face-to-face interview instead of the telephone interview corresponds with an expected increase of 0.05 in the probability of relying on the fundamentals. Of those interviewed by phone more than 50 days prior to the election, about 76% expressed a vote intention in line with the correctly weighted fundamentals. Thus, the expected increase of 0.05 represents about one-fifth of the total potential increase in reliance on the fundamentals. Of course, this estimate

³³For these analyses, we omit observations from the final days of the campaign. We predict that satisficing declines as the election approaches, thus differences in survey mode should also disappear. Table A-10 in the supplementary appendix shows that the results are not sensitive to this decision.

³⁴The increased reliance on the fundamentals could also reflect increased motivation to offer optimal responses in the face-to-face survey to questions that measure fundamentals. This possibility reinforces our argument about the importance of respondent motivation for understanding vote intentions.

TABLE 1 The Relationship between Survey Mode and Vote Intentions Based on the “Correctly” Weighted Fundamentals and “Don’t Know” Responses to the Vote-Intention Question

	Rely on Fundamentals	“Don’t Know”
Face to face	0.88* (0.40)	-1.11* (0.60)
Political knowledge	1.05* (0.62)	-0.29 (0.77)
Campaign exposure	-0.40 (0.57)	0.24 (0.70)
Education	1.29* (0.59)	0.15 (0.69)
Days before election	2.09* (0.64)	0.91 (0.71)
Age	-3.63 (2.54)	3.13 (2.75)
Age ²	3.17* (1.53)	-1.32 (1.24)
Constant	2.51* (1.01)	-3.93* (1.44)
Log-likelihood	-85.45	-58.04
Pseudo R ²	0.24	0.06
N	267	316

Note: Data are from the 2000 ANES and have been pre-processed with Coarsened Exact Matching. * $p < 0.05$, one-tailed tests for directional hypotheses; standard errors in parentheses.

only reflects the effect of satisficing due to survey mode. As suggested by the earlier analyses, the total effect of satisficing on vote intentions is likely to be much greater.

The second column of Table 1 reports the estimated relationship between survey mode and responding “don’t know” to the vote-intention question. Strong satisficing, where respondents do not search their memory for relevant information and do not attempt to integrate information into a summary judgment, increases the probability of “don’t know” responses (Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick 2003; Krosnick 2000). Thus, if respondents in the telephone interview engage in strong satisficing on the vote-intention question, the probability of offering a “don’t know” response should decrease for face-to-face respondents. Because the previous analysis did not include “don’t know” responses, this offers a distinct test of the satisficing hypothesis. Consistent with expectations, the coefficient for face-to-face interviews is negative and significant. Furthermore, survey mode is the only significant variable in the

model, representing an expected shift of 0.04 in the probability of responding “don’t know.” It appears that the “motivation to generate optimal answers” (Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick 2003, 110) induced by face-to-face interviews holds important implications for the probability of expressing a vote intention that relies on the fundamentals.

Conclusions and Implications

Gelman and King conclude their classic study by noting, “The most important role [of the campaign], from this perspective, is to enlighten voters – to give them sufficient information in a timely fashion so they can make up their minds relatively easily” (1993, 449). In the words of Erikson and Wlezien, “Over the campaign, voter preferences crystallize” (2012, 148). We have argued that Krosnick’s (1991) theory of survey satisficing can also account for the fact that as the election approaches, voter intentions appear to “crystallize” or become “enlightened.” Thus, some of what has been attributed to campaign effects is actually a function of whether or not respondents are motivated to answer the question. Indeed, three different analytical approaches offer strong support for our argument. However, just like Gelman and King (1993) could not directly measure campaign enlightenment, we cannot directly measure respondent motivation. Thus, as they did (Gelman and King 1993, 448), we would like to acknowledge that our conclusions are tentative. Yet, even if tentative, we believe the argument and findings warrant some discussion.

Respondent motivation and satisficing carry important implications for how we study campaign effects. First, consider the experimental framework. Scholars are increasingly using experiments to test how various manipulations influence subjects’ vote choice. These studies are advantageous because they permit precise estimation of specific causal mechanisms. Unfortunately, satisficing may be especially pronounced in experiments. Experimental subjects, after all, face a hypothetical election where motivation to optimize is likely low. As a result, subjects may be especially sensitive to treatment effects because they are relying less on fundamental considerations, such as their partisanship, than they would if the vote choice was real. To alleviate this concern, researchers could follow the experimental economics literature and include an entreaty that asks subjects to vote as if they will face the consequences of their decision (e.g., Ajzen, Brown, and Carvajal 2004). This parallels Krosnick’s (2000)

suggestions to ask respondents to commit to thinking carefully about the question of interest. Additionally, recent work by Huber, Hill, and Lenz (2012) may offer an effective approach. Their experimental subjects participated in multiple elections, where the vote choice in each election held real (monetary) consequences in subsequent periods and elections. Although their experimental election clearly differs from a presidential election, we believe this format is likely to increase motivation to optimize and thus increase the likelihood that subjects rely on the fundamentals as if casting a real vote.

A similar caution applies to how we interpret vote intentions in survey data. Scholars typically treat these vote intentions as sincere (even if uninformed) representations of voter preferences and therefore shifts in vote intentions are often viewed as evidence of persuasion. Satisficing among unmotivated respondents, however, suggests that this interpretation may be problematic. A common result of “weak” satisficing, where respondents engage in an incomplete or biased mental search and summary judgment, is opting for either the first response (the primacy effect) or selecting the last response (the recency effect) (Krosnick 1991). When considering a choice between the Democratic or Republican candidate, recency of the response options is unlikely to matter. However, the recency of salient considerations may matter. It would not be surprising if respondents who satisfice are more likely to utilize “top of the head” considerations (e.g., Taylor and Fiske 1978; Zaller 1992), made salient by the campaign. Stimson (2004, 113) evokes this idea when he writes that those who do not care about a campaign might simply select the name that is more familiar when answering the vote-intention question. This possibility does not mean the changes in vote intentions are not real or systematic. Box-Steffensmeier, Darmofal, and Farrell (2009) have shown that these changes respond to relevant information and have a meaningful influence on candidates and media. The point is simply that instead of offering evidence of persuasion, these changes may reflect shifts in the available top of the head considerations among unmotivated respondents who are satisficing. This conclusion is consistent with evidence that shifts in vote intentions early in the campaign do not endure until election day (Wlezien and Erikson 2002). Of course, as the election nears, and respondent motivation increases, we would expect respondents who previously satisficed to optimize and thus rely on the fundamentals when expressing their vote intention. As a result, later in the campaign, aggregate shifts in vote intentions should persist until election day.

Again, this is precisely what Wlezien and Erikson (2002) find.³⁵

Of course, survey satisficing is not the only source of measurement error that may vary during the campaign. Burden (2000) shows that survey nonresponse (i.e., individuals are selected but not successfully interviewed) has important consequences for how we measure voting behaviors, such as turnout. Since lack of motivation can produce survey nonresponse (Fricker and Tourangeau 2010), survey nonresponse rates (and the associated survey error) may also vary throughout the campaign. Prior (2012) identifies another source of error that varies during the campaign. He shows that after a presidential debate, error associated with self-reported debate viewing varies significantly as time goes on. Although our focus has been on respondent motivation to offer an optimal response to the vote-intention question, the broader point is that scholars studying the effects of campaigns must not only be aware of survey error but also how this error varies during the campaign.

Finally, we wish to reiterate that our argument does not imply minimal campaign effects. While we have argued that the campaign is not as important as previously thought for voting in line with the fundamentals, this does not mean that learning has no effect on voting with the fundamentals. In fact, we found evidence that campaign information predicts reliance on the fundamentals. Furthermore, the campaign can influence voters, and the election outcome, in other ways. Shaw (2006), for example, shows that Gore's advertising strategy in 2000 may have cost him his home state of Tennessee. We should also note that even if the fundamentals are easy issues that many voters can rely on without a presidential campaign, in some electoral contexts actual vote decisions incorporate irrelevant considerations (Bartels 2008; Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010). Thus, it is our hope that as scholars consider the possibility that the fundamentals are easy issues that are within the grasp of many potential voters (even before the campaign begins), campaign studies will shed new light on how campaigns (and irrelevant events) get voters to *deviate* from the fundamentals.

³⁵The often discussed convention bump is also consistent with our argument. Just like the California Voter Guide appears to have increased the salience of the campaign, leading registered voters in California to be more likely to rely on the fundamentals when expressing their vote intention, the national conventions could also increase the salience of the election and the likelihood of optimizing when expressing a vote intention.

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