

VALUES AND THE VOTE: LINKING ISSUE INTERPRETATIONS TO THE PROCESS OF CANDIDATE CHOICE

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This study explores how "moral" issues interact with individuals' core values to influence the mental processes involved in choosing among candidates. Drawing upon three major domains of research – (1) construct activation and framing; (2) values and the self; and (3) decision making – we examine how individuals interpret electoral issues and the influence of these evaluations on the process of electoral choice. The same research design was used with three subpopulations – military reservists, ROTC student members, and undergraduate students – expected to be differentially involved with two issues in the study, abortion and gays in the military. Subjects were presented simulated newspaper articles about an election contest and asked to make a candidate choice. Findings indicate that an individual's interpretation of issues – as either ethical or material in nature – is strongly related to differences in the type of decision-making strategy used, even after accounting for a variety of demographic, orientational, and issue importance variables.



While many have speculated about the role of "moral" issues – for example, abortion, school prayer, and gay rights – in electoral contests, few scholars have adequately considered how such issues interact with individuals' core values to influence the mental processes involved in choosing among candidates.¹ As Price and Tewksbury argue, "particularly important, but rarely examined, is the prospect that people have chronically accessible goals, values, and motivations that help structure their thinking and inform their evaluations across numerous topical domains and situations."² In this article we explore how the *process* of candidate selection is influenced by individuals' appraisals of a political information environment – that is, we examine how cognitive and motivational factors work together to shape individuals' evaluations of political issues and, in turn, how these evaluations foster particular patterns of electoral decision making.

These relationships particularly need examination due to the development of "public journalism" projects, which often provide "issue-oriented" electoral coverage.³ A central expectation of these efforts is that a citizenry informed by media focus on issues will be more likely to make voting decisions based on campaign positions.⁴ If so, research on the linkages among media coverage of issues, individuals' evaluations of issues, and voters' decision-making strategies becomes more important. In this research, we argue that individuals who interpret an issue in ethical terms focus

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attention centrally on this issue, due to the issue's close relation to their core values. As a result, they are motivated to achieve a match between their own position and the candidates' stated positions on that issue, leading to a decision-making strategy in which the ethically interpreted issue serves as the over-riding criterion of choice. To test this theory, we systematically altered a single issue – which varied in the ethical dimensions emphasized in media coverage – across two otherwise constant political information environments to create parallel examinations of how voters process, interpret, and use issue information in choosing among candidates. In addition, to increase confidence in the study of individuals' cognitive activities, we used two different measures to examine voters' decision-making processes.

For this study, three differing subpopulations were used – military reservists, ROTC student members, and university undergraduate students. These groups were selected for three reasons: (1) they were expected to vary in the degree of involvement with two key issues included in this study's design, abortion and gays in the military; (2) they were expected to differ in their ideological orientation towards these issues; (3) when pooled, they increased variation on several potentially confounding factors suggested by previous research in political communication. Using the same research design with these three populations, then, provides a thorough examination of the linkages between individual evaluations of issues and the process of decision making as subjects "vote" for candidates in a simulated election.

Literature Review

During the past three decades, political communication research has undergone a "cognitive revolution" as scholars increasingly examine how people perceive, store, process, recall, and use political information.⁵ Much of this research reflects a grounding in schema theory, which posits that based on experience, people organize their perceptions of the environment into cognitive knowledge structures – that is, mental compartments of information. Once activated, schemata facilitate and shape the processing of information, thereby providing the raw materials upon which individuals form evaluations and come to understand their social environments.⁶

Drawing from this perspective, insight into the relations between cognition, motivation, and voters' evaluations of issues and decision making may be gained from three domains of research: (a) scholarship on construct activation and framing; (b) social psychological research on the role of values and the self in evaluation and judgment; and (c) research on choice processes.

Construct Activation and Framing. Research suggests a number of factors influence which schema is used to guide information processing and decision making – frequency and recency of schema use, information processing objectives, and prior knowledge and expectations.⁷ According to this perspective, individuals do not draw upon all applicable cognitive constructs to guide information processing; rather, people tend to over-sample "accessible" schema. For familiar objects, the relevant schema are highly, sometimes even chronically, accessible. When objects are more ambiguous, however, no schema are readily activated, forcing a search for relevant cognitions.⁸ In such instances, context may help identify relevant cognitive structures to guide information processing and judgment.⁹ Using somewhat different terminology, Zaller and Feldman argue that textual cues may activate certain "considerations," which interact with a person's political predispositions to guide the construction of attitudes.¹⁰

Similarly, scholars concerned with the sociology of news construction assert that media framing – by organizing and ordering audience perceptions through inclusion and exclusion of certain messages – is crucial to establishing the range of criteria for understanding, debating, and resolving social issues.¹¹ For example, in research on “value-choice” frames, Ball-Rokeach and colleagues assert that emphasis on particular values in media coverage shapes policy debates about social issues as political groups attempt “to legitimate to themselves and to communicate to others why their choice is more moral or competent than their opponents’.”¹² Media constructions, in turn, serve as a heuristic for members of the broader public, who often understand issues in terms of the values presented. Together, these psychological and sociological perspectives suggest that media messages are often constructed in ways that may activate particular cognitive structures and associated values, which then become more likely to serve as the basis for processing and evaluating encountered information.

Neuman, Just, and Crigler contend, however, that individuals “do not slavishly follow the framing of issues presented in the mass media”; rather, people “actively filter, sort, and reorganize information in personally meaningful ways in constructing an understanding of public issues.”¹³ This perspective is supported by scholars examining the relationship between framing and individual cognitions within the context of decision making.¹⁴ For example, Shah, Domke, and Wackman, working from a motivational perspective, examined linkages between media messages and voting behavior; they conclude that the influence of frames is mediated by which aspect of an individual’s self-concept is activated during information processing.¹⁵

These perspectives, then, suggest that values and the self-concept should receive greater consideration when examining the linkages between media coverage of political issues, individual cognitions, and decision-making processes.

Values and the Self. Recently, some political communication scholars have called for a re-emphasis on functional or motivational perspectives, which posit that certain cognitions “allow individuals to successfully execute specific plans and achieve particular goals.”¹⁶ In recognizing the re-emergence of motivational approaches, Fiske and Taylor describe individuals as “motivated tacticians” with “multiple cognitive strategies available”; that is, an individual may choose strategies in the interests of accuracy, speed, social adaptability, ego defense, or value expression.¹⁷

Particularly relevant may be perspectives exploring psychological phenomena that function to demonstrate, maintain, and express individuals’ underlying morals, ethics, and values. Research suggests that individuals’ understanding of political issues is formed by the values they are trying to express with regard to particular policies.¹⁸ For example, a number of scholars contend that issues viewed in “moral” terms, such as abortion, have symbolic importance for individuals who wish to declare their values to the broader community.¹⁹ Similarly, Domke and Shah contend that voters form different psychological linkages with issues based upon their core values; in turn, these “issue interpretations” influence how much, as well as what, information is processed in reaching a decision.²⁰

These insights, then, suggest that the expression of values in voting may be a means for individuals to verify and affirm their self-conception.²¹ As Tetlock argues, “people find it dissonant and threatening to their self-esteem to acknowledge that they are capable of cold-blooded trade-off decisions that require compromising basic values.”²² Little research, how-

ever, examines these issues in political contexts, particularly the impact of core values, ethics, and morals in shaping the *process* by which voters make decisions.

Choice Processes. A great deal of research examines the process of decision making from a cognitive perspective.²³ Researchers concerned with choice processes commonly assume that decisions are based upon the willingness to "trade off more of one valued attribute against less of another valued attribute" to determine which alternative has the greatest overall worth.²⁴ In this *compensatory* model, positive and negative evaluations on multiple criteria can balance or offset one another. With its weighting and summing of attributes, the compensatory model shares some theoretical commonality with the spatial theory of voting, a central model of electoral choice for the past four decades.²⁵

Both the compensatory model and spatial theory have been criticized, in part because of their assumptions of highly calculative decision makers.²⁶ Hence, *noncompensatory* strategies, in which a positive evaluation on one attribute cannot offset a negative evaluation on another, have also been theorized.²⁷ In a noncompensatory strategy, "trade-offs may not be made explicitly in many cases" because a single over-riding criterion may serve as the basis for choice.²⁸ In sum, a number of decision-making strategies have been identified, most of which fall under the broad rubrics of either compensatory or noncompensatory processing.²⁹

Research Hypothesis

This research explores the relationship between individuals' issue interpretations and the process of decision making. Several scholars, including Ball-Rokeach et al. and Zaller, suggest that voters' decision making may be influenced by which values are activated by the issues present in media coverage.³⁰ In turn, activated values seem likely to influence individual interpretations, since values function as a heuristic device for a wide variety of individuals – from the politically unsophisticated to the politically knowledgeable.

Based upon conceptual distinctions developed by Shah, Domke, and Wackman, we contend that voters may have distinct *interpretations* of issues based on the activation of particular cognitions. Individuals who assign an *ethical interpretation* to an issue form an understanding of the issue that is grounded in concerns for human rights, civil rights, religious morals, or personal principles. Individuals who assign a *material interpretation* to an issue form an understanding of the issue that is grounded in economics, expedience, practicality, or personal self-interest.³¹ As theorized by Snyder and DeBono and Monroe, cognitive structures related to moral or ethical values are likely to be closely related to one's self-conception and thus be both highly accessible and particularly functional.³²

We posit that individuals with an ethical interpretation of an issue will place that issue in the center of their evaluation of a political environment because their sense of ethics or morals is critical to maintaining their self-conception. In evaluating a set of candidates, then, individuals with an ethical interpretation of an issue will first consider each candidate's position on that issue. As a result, these individuals are motivated to focus on an over-riding attribute, shaping the manner in which information is processed while they arrive at a candidate decision. Therefore, voters with an ethical interpretation of at least one issue seem likely to use a noncompensatory decision-

making process: i.e., candidates who do not share a voter's ethical position may be eliminated or, in a more simplified approach, the vote may be determined solely on that issue. As suggested by Swann and Tetlock, this type of process seems particularly likely when individuals face a choice that has implications for whether they perceive themselves as moral and principled, or, conversely, as compromising basic values.³³

On the other hand, we posit that individuals with a material interpretation of an issue probably do not link the issue to their sense of self with the same intensity as issues tied to ethics or morals, even though the issue may have personal consequences. As a result, when candidates are evaluated on the basis of issues interpreted in material terms, individuals are likely to allow candidates' stands on various issues to balance or offset one another because these voters are not strongly motivated to achieve a match between their position on any single issue and the candidates' stands. Therefore, in the absence of an issue interpreted in ethical terms, individuals will be more likely to use multiple criteria, resulting in more even and extensive – i.e., compensatory – decision making.

Voters' decision-making styles may be explained, however, by several variables suggested by research in political behavior.³⁴ These variables, primarily studied in relation to voting *outcomes*, may influence the *process* of decision making as well. Specifically, variables that need to be examined include features of individuals such as age, gender, and education, and personal orientations such as political party affiliation, public affairs media use, issue involvement, and religiosity. The theoretical relationship also may be attenuated by the importance attached to issues, including the number of issues considered important. Further, scholars also have suggested that individuals who are more ideologically conservative may use less cognitively complex strategies when evaluating and integrating information.³⁵ While these factors may influence voters' decision making, we argue that individuals on both sides of the political continuum will use a noncompensatory decision-making approach if they form an ethical interpretation of a political issue. Therefore, we posit that the *relationship* between individuals' interpretations of issues and their decision-making processes will remain robust even after controlling for such variables. Accordingly, we now state the research hypothesis:

RH: Individuals with an *ethical* interpretation of a political environment will be highly likely to use a *noncompensatory* decision-making strategy, and individuals with a *material* interpretation of a political environment will be highly likely to use a *compensatory* decision-making strategy, even after controlling for demographic variables, orientational characteristics, and importance of the issues.

Method

This study, part of a broader research program, attempts to identify underlying issue interpretations and decision-making strategies by examining how voters in distinctly different populations evaluate political issues. In this study the same research design was used with three subpopulations expected to differ on several relevant variables. Specifically, we collected data from 191 active-duty and reserve naval military personnel in a large midwestern city, 65 student members of an ROTC unit at a large university in the same city, and 156 undergraduate students at the same institution.³⁶ Of

the military reservists, 85% were men; ages ranged relatively evenly between 18 and 54; and 85% of subjects had attended at least some college. Of the ROTC members, 87% were men and 92% were between the ages of 18 and 25. Of the undergraduate students, 41% were men and 90% were between the ages of 18 and 25.

Research Design. The core of this research strategy is the controlled presentation of political information environments. Each environment in this study contained the contrasting views of three candidates on four issues, presented as newspaper articles in a format consistent with recent "issue-oriented" electoral media coverage.³⁷ The study's design allowed for concurrent testing of the research hypothesis across two environments. Each environment contained an issue with ethical dimensions: one environment contained an article on the issue of abortion, the other contained an article on the issue of gays in the military. Both environments also contained articles on the issues of economy, education, and health care. Thus, each political environment, by containing an issue that was expected to be interpreted in ethical terms by some subjects, allowed for replication of tests of the hypothesis within the study.

We expected individuals would ascribe ethical interpretations to abortion and gays in the military because both have been publicly debated as issues of rights and morals and were framed in a similar manner in this study. Abortion was expected to be a particularly powerful social-moral issue, for two reasons: (1) its duration as an important issue in American politics for more than twenty years; (2) the divisiveness of its value conflict, since abortion is generally viewed as a clash between the sanctity of life and personal liberty, in this case the freedom of individuals to control their bodies and to make self-relevant decisions. For this study, we purposefully selected a second issue, gays in the military, that differed from abortion on these two important dimensions: (1) it is a more recent social-moral issue, having emerged in American politics only within the past few years; (2) it provides a fundamentally different and potentially less-powerful value conflict, with a clash between viewing homosexuality as an objectionable and deviant lifestyle and viewing homosexuals as a social group deserving of equality and freedom from discrimination. That these two issues differ substantially regarding their duration in American politics and the ethical dimensions in conflict provides a broader test of the potential generalizability of our theory.

A particular advantage of selecting abortion and gays in the military is that the subpopulations in the sample were expected to be differentially involved with these issues. Specifically, military personnel, who were directly affected by the change in government policy, were expected to be the most highly involved with the issue of gays in the military, while students, due to the higher proportion of women and the sexual activity associated with a college setting, were expected to be the most highly involved with the issue of abortion. ROTC members, as primarily male students not yet serving as military personnel, were expected to be moderately involved with both issues. Despite these differences, however, individuals' evaluations of both abortion and gays in the military were expected to have considerable impact on their processing of information. Each of the three remaining issues, economy, education, and health care, were expected to receive a material interpretation because they have been publicly discussed in primarily economic or pragmatic terms and were framed in a similar manner in this study.

A former professional journalist wrote articles for the political campaign. In the articles, a number of possible confounding variables (e.g.,

candidates' political party affiliation, gender, age, educational and occupational background, and subject familiarity with candidates) were controlled and steps were taken to ensure that no candidate or issue received greater prominence.³⁸ Thus, this research design carefully controlled a variety of variables that may influence voters' issue interpretations and decision making, thereby maximizing internal validity in considering the theorized relationship.

Subjects in each subpopulation were randomly assigned to one of the two political environments. Each subject read the newspaper articles, then filled out the questionnaire described below. Most subjects took thirty-five to fifty minutes to complete the materials.

Questionnaire. After reading the articles, subjects completed a questionnaire about their "voting" process. Measures were developed to identify subjects' use of compensatory or noncompensatory decision-making strategies. A compensatory process is a multiple-criteria approach in which individuals weigh candidates' stands on each relevant issue to calculate which candidate, overall, is the best choice. A noncompensatory process is an over-riding criterion approach in which individuals initially focus on one or two issues, which are used either to make the voting choice or to narrow the field of candidates.

Two very different approaches were used to measure the decision-making strategy used. The first measure was a series of open-ended questions asking subjects to describe their decision-making process in choosing a candidate:

- Please describe, as completely as possible, how you arrived at this candidate choice. For example, what comparisons, if any, did you make?
- Please explain why you did not choose the other two candidates.
- How did you use the information you were provided? What information was particularly relevant to you, and what information did you ignore?

Research suggests that questions about cognitive activities can effectively elicit a "memory dump" if asked immediately after a given task has been carried out.³⁹ Guided by previous research on compensatory and noncompensatory strategies, responses were content analyzed.⁴⁰ Fifty-three percent of all subjects receiving the issue of abortion were coded as compensatory, compared to 64% of subjects receiving the issue of gays in the military.

To illustrate the coding for this measure, we have included excerpts from some subjects that suggested use of either a compensatory or noncompensatory decision-making strategy:

- *Compensatory:* "I agreed with Garrett on three of the four arguments. I disagreed with his economic plan but it is a plan I could live with. Even though I believe the economic aspects of the government are important, I found Garrett's overall stance on issues the most appealing."

• *Compensatory*: "I used the information to get an overall feeling for the candidates' problem solving strategies. All information was equally important and none was ignored, although possibly some issues were more pivotal in my decision. I mostly contrasted the opinions of all three against my own."

• *Noncompensatory*: "Chose Garrett because of his views of gays in the military. . . . I wonder: have either of these [other] 'gentlemen' served on a submarine that goes out for 6 months at a time? . . . Once I saw the issue of gays in the military, everything else did not exist!"

• *Noncompensatory*: "I can't support any candidate who believes he can support a law depriving a woman of her right to religious belief (which to many covers [the right to an] abortion) . . . The information I didn't really care as much about was the economy and taxes. Those two situations will always be dissatisfactory to someone."

The next part of the questionnaire contained nine statements corresponding to compensatory (four items) or noncompensatory (five items) aspects of decision making and information processing. Subjects rated their agreement with the statements using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Following data collection, factor analysis was performed on these statements for each subpopulation. A confirmatory forced one-factor solution was computed because the results of previous research suggested a conceptualization of compensatory and noncompensatory strategies along a one-dimensional continuum; the statements reflected the extremes of this continuum, so this approach seemed justified.⁴¹ If so, compensatory and noncompensatory statements should have inverse loadings (see Table 1).

As expected, in each population the four compensatory items loaded strongly negatively and the five noncompensatory items loaded strongly positively, supporting the conceptualization of decision-making strategies as one-dimensional. Across all subjects, loadings fell in the range between .48 and .81. This solution accounted for 36.9% of variance in the items among undergraduate students, 44.5% among ROTC members, and 44.6% among military personnel.

The responses to the compensatory items were then reverse-coded and used to build an additive decision-making strategy index.⁴² Among subjects receiving the issue of abortion, the index correlated .51 with the open-ended decision-making measure; for individuals receiving the issue of gays in the military, this correlation was .40.⁴³ The strength of these correlations increased confidence that the two dependent measures tapped a similar construct; conversely, that the correlations were not stronger also suggests that the dependent measures, in part, tapped different aspects of the construct.

The next measures in the questionnaire asked subjects to rate the importance in their voting decision of each issue: abortion or gays in the military, economy, education, and health care. For each issue, a 7-point scale was used, ranging from "not at all important" to "extremely important."

TABLE 1
*Factor Analyses of Nine Statements Corresponding to Compensatory or
 Noncompensatory Decision-Making Strategies*

	FACTOR LOADINGS		
	Undergrad students	ROTC members	Military personnel
(1) How the candidates stood overall on the issues was more important to me than how they stood on a particular issue. (compensatory)	-.609	-.659	-.692
(2) I compared candidates only on the issues that were important to me. (noncompensatory)	.535	.725	.688
(3) I eliminated a candidate because we disagreed on an issue that was important to me. (noncompensatory)	.542	.634	.634
(4) I used all the information provided to make my choice, looking at each candidate's stand on each issue. (compensatory)	-.543	-.675	-.673
(5) I eliminated a candidate who did not meet certain set standards on an issue that was important to me. (noncompensatory)	.511	.626	.586
(6) I looked for a candidate who agreed with me on the issue I thought was most important. The candidate who was closest to my position on that issue is the one I voted for. (noncompensatory)	.609	.690	.688
(7) Using all the information, I weighed each candidate's stand on each issue before making my final choice. The candidate who seemed the best overall is the one I voted for. (compensatory)	-.675	-.811	-.739
(8) All the issues played a role in my decision amongst the candidates; while some issues were given less consideration than others, all the issues affected my candidate choice. (compensatory)	-.677	-.482	-.592
(9) Not all the issues factored into my candidate choice; the decision was based on one or two key issues. (noncompensatory)	.729	.657	.705

These issue-importance scales also were used to construct an index of the *number of issues* considered important. The index was built in three steps. First, frequencies were run to examine the importance ascribed by subjects to each issue. Next, as suggested by these frequencies, subjects reporting an issue as at least a "6" in importance were assigned a coding of 1; subjects reporting an issue as less than a "6" in importance were assigned a coding of 0.⁴⁴ These codings were then added together for each subject, producing a possible range of 0 to 4 important issues.

Interpretations of the political environments were measured by a pair of open-ended questions asking subjects to explain which issues were important and why they were of concern:

- For the issue(s) you regarded as most personally important, please explain how the issue(s) impact your life.
- For the issue(s) you regarded as most important to society, please explain how the issue(s) would impact society.

These measures engaged subjects in a thought-listing procedure that attempted to tap how the issues related to their personal sense of ethics, their more broadly construed concerns about society, and their personal life-situations. Responses were coded as having (a) an ethical interpretation if the individual explicitly discussed the issue(s) within the framework of human rights, civil rights, religious morals or personal principles, or (b) a material interpretation if the individual discussed the issue(s) in terms of economics, expedience, practicality, or personal self-interest.⁴⁵ Notably, individuals could receive a coding of either ethical or material regardless of whether they discussed the issues in personal terms or in relation to the broader society; what determined the coding was which concerns – ethical or material – they emphasized. As guided by our theory, if individuals indicated that they interpreted the issue(s) on both ethical and material concerns, they were coded as having an ethical interpretation of the political environment.

To illustrate the coding for this measure, we have included excerpts from some subjects that suggest either an ethical or material interpretation of issues in the environment:

- *Ethical*: "I consider this important to me. I have seven children and take abortion as a direct disobedience to the teaching of God. . . . *It is murder.*"

- *Ethical*: "The right to choose what you do with your life/body is one of the most important parts of the American way of life. . . . It is a fundamental right . . . if they take that right what will stop them from taking others?"

- *Ethical*: "Gays/military: in my opinion this is a civil rights issue. The main sense of our country/constitution is 'liberty and freedom for all.' That doesn't mean only if I agree with you, like what I like, etc. If we don't speak up for all when in need – who will be there for me when I'm in need?"

- *Material*: "I am totally against having gays in the military. It would work against the morale and cohesiveness of a unit. . . . The military has not even worked out all the problems with women yet. How can they deal with this new issue?"

- *Material*: "Unwanted pregnancies affect the personal life economically and . . . mentally; in turn, affects taxpayers with higher welfare costs."

TABLE 2
Interpretations of the Abortion and Gays in the Military Environments

Population 1: Military personnel

Interpretation of Environment	ENVIRONMENT	
	Abortion	Gays in Military
Ethical	43%	35%
Material	57%	65%
Totals	100% (n=86)	100% (n=91)
$X^2=1.2$, d.f.=1, n.s.		

Population 2: ROTC members

Interpretation of Environment	ENVIRONMENT	
	Abortion	Gays in Military
Ethical	35%	19%
Material	65%	81%
Totals	100% (n=34)	100% (n=31)
$X^2=2.1$, d.f.=1, n.s.		

Population 3: Undergraduate students

Interpretation of Environment	ENVIRONMENT	
	Abortion	Gays in Military
Ethical	57%	25%
Material	43%	75%
Totals	100% (n=74)	100% (n=71)
$X^2=14.7$, d.f.=1, $p<.001$		

A manipulation check examined if, as expected, the altering of issues and media emphasis upon ethical dimensions produced differences across the two environments. A crosstab was run between the political environment subjects received and interpretation of the environment for each subpopulation.

Data in Table 2 confirm that individuals were more likely to ascribe an ethical interpretation to the political environment containing abortion than to the environment containing gays in the military, although the differences were statistically significant only among undergraduate students. In addition, even though abortion has been discussed consistently by media and politicians as a "moral" issue and was framed similarly in this study, only among undergraduate students did a majority of subjects interpret the abortion environment in this manner. This figure – and the 65% to 81% of

subjects in each subpopulation who interpreted the gays in the military environment in primarily material terms – clearly indicate that many people, even in a controlled research setting, *do not* automatically accept the media's framing of an issue, consistent with what several scholars have argued.⁴⁶

The last portion of the questionnaire focused on demographic and orientational variables: gender, age, education, religiosity, political party affiliation, and public affairs media use.

To avoid omissions, subjects were asked to indicate their age by selecting one of several standard age breaks. The level of education was measured in a similar manner, with subjects selecting one of six categories. Religiosity was determined by subjects' responses on a 5-point scale to the question, "How important is your religion to you?"; responses ranged from "not at all important" to "extremely important." Political party affiliation was assessed by having subjects indicate whether they considered themselves Democrats, independent/unaffiliated, or Republicans. An index of public affairs media use was additively constructed based on four questions which asked subjects to indicate how often they used broadcast media (two items) and print media (two items) to gain information about politics or public affairs in the past week.⁴⁷

Finally, an additional variable was constructed to examine the potential differential involvement of the subpopulations with the issues under consideration. The subpopulations were coded as 1=students, 2=ROTC members, and 3=military personnel, with the expectation that students would be the most involved with the issue of abortion and the least involved with gays in the military; conversely, military personnel were expected to be the most involved with the issue of gays in the military and the least involved with abortion. In each political environment, ROTC members (primarily male students not yet serving as military personnel) were expected to occupy a middle position. This variable also allowed examination of whether the hypothesized relationship was robust across the pooled sample or solely within one particular subpopulation.

Results

The study's design allowed for replication of hypothesis tests across subjects receiving two differing political environments using two distinct measures of the dependent variable. The hypothesis was tested first at the zero-order level followed by tests of robustness. All analysis was performed at the individual level within political environments.⁴⁸

The research hypothesis predicted that individuals with an *ethical* interpretation of an environment will be highly likely to use a *noncompensatory* decision-making strategy, and individuals with a *material* interpretation of an environment will be highly likely to use a *compensatory* decision-making strategy.

For the first test of the hypothesis, crosstabs for each research group were run within each subpopulation. Specifically, we examined the relationship between individual interpretations of the environment and the decision-making strategy described in the open-ended measure. The results provide strong support for the hypothesis (see Table 3).

The figures in Table 3 show a very strong relationship between issue interpretation and subjects' decision-making processes. Among individuals with an ethical interpretation of the political environment, about three-fourths or more used a *noncompensatory* decision-making strategy in five of six cases across the subpopulations. Further, about three-fourths of subjects

TABLE 3

*Interpretation of Environment by Open-Ended Measure of Decision-Making Strategy*Population 1: Military personnel

Strategy Used	<u>Environment 1: Abortion</u>		<u>Environment 2: Gays/military</u>	
	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation
Compensatory	92%	22%	77%	25%
Noncompensatory	8%	78%	23%	75%
Totals	100% (n=49)	100% (n=37)	100% (n=57)	100% (n=32)
	$\chi^2=44.0$, d.f.=1, $p<.001$		$\chi^2=23.0$, d.f.=1, $p<.001$	

Population 2: ROTC members

Strategy Used	<u>Environment 1: Abortion</u>		<u>Environment 2: Gays/military</u>	
	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation
Compensatory	90%	8%	60%	17%
Noncompensatory	10%	92%	40%	83%
Totals	100% (n=21)	100% (n=12)	100% (n=25)	100% (n=6)
	$\chi^2=21.6$, d.f.=1, $p<.001$		$\chi^2=3.6$, d.f.=1, $p=.056$	

Population 3: Undergraduate students

Strategy Used	<u>Environment 1: Abortion</u>		<u>Environment 2: Gays/military</u>	
	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation
Compensatory	61%	26%	83%	53%
Noncompensatory	39%	74%	17%	47%
Totals	100% (n=33)	100% (n=42)	100% (n=52)	100% (n=17)
	$\chi^2=9.0$, d.f.=1, $p<.01$		$\chi^2=6.1$, d.f.=1, $p<.05$	

with a material interpretation used a *compensatory* decision-making strategy in four of six cases.

For a second test of the hypothesis, t-tests were run with the decision-making strategy index as the dependent variable. Within each subpopulation, means of subjects with an ethical interpretation of the political environment were compared to subjects with a material interpretation of the same environment (see Table 4).

The pattern of results across the subpopulations again provides support for the hypothesis: the mean index scores indicate individuals with an ethical interpretation of the political environment were more likely to use

TABLE 4

Interpretation of Environment by Mean Decision-Making Strategy Index Scores

Population 1: Military personnel

	<u>Environment 1: Abortion</u>		<u>Environment 2: Gays/military</u>	
	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation
Index mean	20.3	28.1	21.6	25.9
Totals	(n=49)	(n=37)	(n=59)	(n=32)
	$t=5.06, p<.001$		$t=2.83, p<.01$	

Population 2: ROTC members

	<u>Environment 1: Abortion</u>		<u>Environment 2: Gays/military</u>	
	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation
Index mean	18.4	28.3	21.3	25.2
Totals	(n=22)	(n=12)	(n=24)	(n=6)
	$t=4.54, p<.001$		$t=1.20, p=.12$	

Population 3: Undergraduate students

	<u>Environment 1: Abortion</u>		<u>Environment 2: Gays/military</u>	
	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation	Material Interpretation	Ethical Interpretation
Index mean	20.8	27.0	23.7	25.8
Totals	(n=32)	(n=42)	(n=53)	(n=18)
	$t=4.64, p<.001$		$t=1.30, p=.10$	

a *noncompensatory* strategy, while individuals with a material interpretation of the environment were more likely to use a *compensatory* strategy (although differences were not statistically significant in all cases).

Results in Tables 2, 3, and 4 also shed light on the differential roles of abortion and gays in the military in individuals' issue interpretations and decision making. As stated earlier, we expected abortion to be a more powerful social-moral issue than gays in the military. Two components reflected in the tables support this perspective. First, as revealed by the manipulation check, a greater percentage of subjects formed an ethical interpretation of the abortion environment than of the gays in the military environment. The difference was greatest among undergraduate students: 57% formed an ethical interpretation in the abortion environment, compared to 25% in the gays in the military environment; comparable figures for

TABLE 5
*Difference in Use of a Noncompensatory Decision-Making Strategy
 between Ethical Interpreters and Material Interpreters for Each Environment*

Subpopulation	<u>Open-Ended Measure</u>		<u>Strategy Index</u>	
	Abortion Environment	Gays/Military Environment	Abortion Environment	Gays/Military Environment
Military personnel	70% (n=86)	52% (n=89)	7.8 (n=86)	4.3 (n=91)
ROTC members	82% (n=33)	43% (n=31)	9.9 (n=34)	3.9 (n=30)
Undergrad students	35% (n=75)	30% (n=69)	6.2 (n=74)	2.1 (n=71)

ROTC members were 35% (abortion) and 19% (gays in the military). Notably, the gap in an ethical issue interpretation was smallest among military personnel – 43% in the abortion environment compared to 35% in the gays in the military.

Secondly, the difference between ethical interpreters and material interpreters in their use of a noncompensatory decision-making strategy was consistently greater in the abortion environment than in the gays in the military environment. The pattern of differences can be determined by performing the following calculation: subtract the percentage of material interpreters using a noncompensatory strategy from the percentage of ethical interpreters using a noncompensatory strategy in each subtable of Table 3. For example, among military personnel in the abortion environment, 8% of material interpreters used a noncompensatory strategy compared to 78% of ethical interpreters, a difference of 70%. A similar subtractive process was performed with the mean index scores in Table 4. Figures were calculated for each subpopulation in the two political environments.

In all comparisons, differences in the abortion environment between ethical interpreters and material interpreters in use of a noncompensatory strategy were greater than differences in the gays in the military environment and, in most instances, substantially greater (see Table 5).

Despite the differing impact of these issues, though, the relationship between issue interpretation and voters' decision-making strategies was consistently supported across the three subpopulations, thereby providing strong support for our theory. To assess whether these findings were nonetheless a result of common association with other factors considered likely to influence the voting process, we performed tests of robustness that controlled for a host of demographic, orientational, and issue importance factors.

For tests of robustness, the three subpopulations were pooled. This was done for three reasons: (1) to increase variance on potentially confounding variables that were homogeneous within specific subpopulations; (2) consistently similar results were found across all three subpopulations at the zero-order level; (3) the small sample size would not have allowed regression analysis of the ROTC members. Thirteen independent variables were then grouped in four conceptually distinct blocks: block one consisted of demo-

TABLE 6
*Regression of the Decision-Making Strategy Measures on Relevant Variables
 for Subjects in the Environment with Abortion*

	<u>Open-Ended^a</u>		<u>Strategy Index^b</u>	
	Final Beta ^c	Change in R ² .08**	Final Beta ^c	Change in R ² .06*
<u>Demographics</u>				
Age	.11		.25*	
Gender	-.02		.02	
Education	-.10		-.11	
<u>Orientation</u>		.03		.03
Religiosity	.05		-.03	
Political party affil.	-.02		.08	
Group involvement	-.12		-.03	
Public affairs media	-.07		-.10	
<u>Issue importance</u>		.17***		.11**
Abortion	.16		-.05	
Economy	-.03		-.11	
Education	-.01		-.14	
Health care	-.12		-.14	
Number impt. issues	.01		.13	
<u>Issue interpretation</u>		.16***		.16***
Environment Interp.	.47***		.48***	
Total R ²		.44***		.36***
	(n=172)		(n=171)	

Notes:

^a Coded as 0=compensatory, 1=noncompensatory.

^b Compensatory=low, noncompensatory=high.

^c Beta weights from final regression equation with all blocks of variables included.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

graphic characteristics (gender, age, education); block two consisted of personal orientation variables (religiosity, subject group involvement, political party affiliation, public affairs media use); block three consisted of issue importance variables (importance ascribed to each issue, number of issues considered important); and block four consisted solely of issue interpretation (coded as 0=material, 1=ethical).

For subjects in each environment, these blocks were entered in sequential multiple regressions with the open-ended decision-making strategy measure and decision-making strategy index alternately serving as the dependent variables.⁴⁹ Within blocks, variables were entered simultaneously. Analysis was performed in this manner for two reasons: (1) to examine whether the hypothesized relationship remained robust when simultaneously controlling for a variety of variables which may provide possible alternative explanations; (2) to examine if issue interpretation explained

additional variance in decision making beyond that accounted for by variables conventionally found to influence voting behavior.

For the first test of robustness, regressions were run with each decision-making measure for individuals receiving the political environment with abortion. As predicted, an ethical interpretation of the environment was related to use of a *noncompensatory* strategy and a material interpretation of the environment was linked to use of a *compensatory* strategy even after accounting for the influence of demographic, orientational, and issue importance variables (see Table 6).

The data in Table 6 reveal that the traditional variables did account for a substantial amount of variance in the decision-making measures: variables included in the first three blocks explained a combined 28% of variance in the open-ended measure and 20% in the strategy index. Consistent with the perspective offered by many researchers, a particularly significant variable block was issue importance, although its contribution diminished substantially once issue interpretation was added to the equation.

Three points should be noted about the relationship between issue interpretation and decision making in the abortion environment. First, as indicated by the change in R-square, issue interpretation explained a large amount of additional variance in subjects' decision-making strategies – 16% in each dependent measure – beyond that accounted for by the three previously entered variable blocks. Second, the robustness of this relationship is further supported by the standardized betas of .47 and .48 for the interpretation variable, indicating that when simultaneously controlling for all other independent variables, interpretation of the political environment remained a powerful predictor of an individual's decision-making strategy. Third, interpretation of the environment was the *only* variable significantly related to decision making across both dependent measures. In short, it is clear that in a political environment with a powerful social-moral issue, such as abortion, an individual's interpretation of the issues in either ethical or material terms exerts a major influence on the voting process.

In contrast, gays in the military appears to be a less powerful social-moral issue, as suggested earlier and supported by tests of the hypothesis at the zero order. However, if the relationship between issue interpretation and decision making remains robust with an issue of much shorter duration in American politics and involving considerably different values in conflict, this would lend substantial support to our theory. For a second test of robustness, then, regressions with each decision-making measure were run among subjects receiving the political environment with gays in the military. As predicted, the relationship between issue interpretation and decision making endured even after accounting for the influence of demographic, orientational, and issue importance variables (see Table 7).

Again, as shown in Table 7, the conventional variables did account for a substantial amount of variance in the decision-making measures: the variables included in the first three blocks explained a combined 30% of variance in the open-ended measure and 22% of variance in the strategy index. Consistent with results among subjects receiving the abortion environment, a particularly important variable block was issue importance.

Several points are noteworthy regarding the relationship between issue interpretation and decision making in the gays in the military environment. First, the amount of additional variance in the decision-making measures explained by interpretation of the political environment (5% and

TABLE 7
*Regression of the Decision-Making Strategy Measures on Relevant Variables
for Subjects in the Environment with Gays in the Military*

	<u>Open-Ended^a</u>		<u>Strategy Index^b</u>	
	Final Beta ^c	Change in R ²	Final Beta ^c	Change in R ²
<u>Demographics</u>		.00		.03
Age	-.09		.02	
Gender	.05		.02	
Education	-.01		-.17*	
<u>Orientation</u>		.09**		.02
Religiosity	-.16*		-.12	
Political party affil.	.06		.01	
Group involvement	.22*		.01	
Public affairs media	.10		.02	
<u>Issue importance</u>		.21***		.17***
Gays in military	.19*		.05	
Economy	-.12		-.07	
Education	-.03		-.15	
Health care	-.24*		-.19	
Number impt. issues	.00		-.10	
<u>Issue interpretation</u>		.05***		.02*
Environment Interp.	.24***		.17*	
Total R ²		.35***		.25***
	(n=175)		(n=178)	

Notes:

^a Coded as 0=compensatory, 1=noncompensatory.

^b Compensatory=low, noncompensatory=high.

^c Beta weights from final regression equation with all blocks of variables included.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

2%) was much less than among subjects receiving the issue of abortion (16% in each measure). Second, the standardized betas indicating the strength of the relationship between subjects' interpretations of the political milieu and the decision-making strategy (.24 and .17) were substantially smaller than the corresponding betas (.47 and .48) among subjects receiving the environment with abortion. Nevertheless, for individuals receiving the less-powerful social-moral issue of gays in the military, the relation between issue interpretation and decision making meets the test of statistical significance across *both* dependent measures even after controlling a host of alternative explanatory variables. This provides considerable support for the underlying theoretical relationship.

Finally, we conducted some additional analysis to examine the popular wisdom that voting based heavily upon one or two issues – i.e., noncompensatory decision making – is not widespread but rather is concen-

TABLE 8
*Difference in Use of a Noncompensatory Decision-Making Strategy
 between Ethical Interpreters and Material Interpreters
 for Individuals Varying in Religiosity and Political Party Affiliation*

Party Affiliation	<u>Open-Ended Measure</u>		<u>Strategy Index</u>	
	Low Religiosity	High Religiosity	Low Religiosity	High Religiosity
Democrat	51% (n=62)	42% (n=43)	5.4 (n=62)	3.5 (n=42)
Unaffil./ independent	59% (n=87)	63% (n=51)	6.7 (n=88)	9.0 (n=51)
Republican	33% (n=44)	52% (n=67)	3.4 (n=45)	5.2 (n=68)

trated primarily among conservatives, particularly religious conservatives. To examine this question, we constructed a typology based upon subjects' religiosity and political party affiliation. The typology was constructed in three steps. First, subjects reporting their religious faith as at least a "4" ("substantially important") on the five-point religiosity scale were coded as "high religiosity," while subjects reporting their religious faith as a "3" ("moderately important") or lower were coded as "low religiosity." Next, these codings were combined with subjects' reported political party affiliation (Democrat, independent/unaffiliated, or Republican) to create a six-cell typology. Subjects in the two political environments were then pooled to achieve reasonable cell sizes.

Two points should be made about the typology. First, subjects in the two political environments were distributed relatively evenly across the cells. Second, the percentage of subjects with an ethical interpretation of an environment was fairly consistent across the different types of people, ranging from 30% among both highly religious Democrats and low-religiosity Republicans to 45% among low-religiosity Democrats.

We then examined the difference between ethical interpreters and material interpreters in their use of a noncompensatory decision-making strategy separately for each type of person. Similar to our treatment of the data in Table 5, the pattern of differences was determined by subtracting the percentage of material interpreters using a noncompensatory strategy from the percentage of ethical interpreters using a noncompensatory strategy. The results generated from this analysis are displayed in Table 8.

If popular wisdom is correct, the difference in noncompensatory decision making should be greatest among highly religious Republicans and least among low-religiosity individuals, regardless of political party affiliation. Conversely, our theory suggests that large differences in noncompensatory decision making should not be confined to just one type of person. Indeed, the results show that differences between ethical interpreters and material interpreters in their use of a noncompensatory strategy were consistently large for *each* type of person. In fact, the relationship between issue interpretation and decision making was statistically significant across both dependent measures for all individuals – highly religious and non-religious, Democrat, Republican, and independent. Regardless of typology

condition, subjects with an ethical interpretation of the political environment were highly likely to use a *noncompensatory* strategy, while subjects with a material interpretation of the political environment were highly likely to use a *compensatory* strategy. Clearly, noncompensatory decision making is *not* restricted to a small group of people. This additional analysis provides strong support for the potential generalizability of the theory.

Discussion

The results of zero-order tests of the hypothesis clearly indicate that individual interpretations of political issues play a significant role in voters' decision making, while the tests of robustness demonstrate that this relationship is substantial even when simultaneously accounting for a variety of demographic, orientational, and issue importance variables. Differences between ethical interpreters and material interpreters in the decision-making strategy they used were substantial and consistent. The magnitude of these differences was large in both political environments and for a variety of types of people, for example, Democrats who indicated religion was not very important in their lives as well as highly religious Republicans.

These findings suggest that voters proceed through a series of stages when they evaluate issue coverage in media and make electoral decisions. To begin, they interpret the issue information based upon their activated schema. For some voters, issues may be interpreted as closely tied to personal principles, especially when "moral" issues are involved, such as abortion, euthanasia, pornography, school prayer, and gay rights. These issues often are framed to emphasize their ethical dimensions, which may provide contextual cues for the activation of particular values. Due to the strong linkage of moral and ethical values to individuals' self-conceptions, voters who form an ethical interpretation of an issue are motivated to place that issue at the center of their evaluation of the environment and to use their own stand on that issue as a filter through which candidate judgments are initially processed. A candidate who does not share the voter's position on the ethically interpreted issue is in conflict with the voter's self-identity, and therefore is removed from consideration via a noncompensatory decision-making process.

The results of the study also indicate that for individuals who do not form an ethical interpretation of an issue, there is less of a filtering process. Instead, materially interpreted issues are considered in a relatively equal manner since none of the issues are deeply tied to an individual's self-conception. These voters are not strongly motivated to achieve a match between their position on any single issue and the candidates' stands; rather, they are likely to allow candidates' stands on various issues to offset one another. Consequently, voters who do not interpret an issue in ethical terms become more likely to use multiple criteria to arrive at a decision, resulting in more a more balanced and comprehensive choice process.

Confidence in this theory is particularly strengthened because findings supporting it were obtained in research conducted with three different sub-populations – military reservists, ROTC members, and undergraduate students – and replicated using two different measures of the decision-making strategy. Further, the results were consistent across subjects encountering two political environments containing issues differing considerably in the ethical dimensions involved and in their duration as issues in American politics. In sum, then, the findings provide *strong* support for the theoretical

perspective that an individual's interpretation of a political environment as either ethical or material significantly shapes the mental processes involved in voting.

We recognize that there is a degree of artificiality in this study's research design. Subjects were presented with relatively limited information about candidate positions on only four issues. Little information was provided about personal characteristics of the candidates; indeed, we minimized differentiation among candidates by making them similar in characteristics such as educational and occupational background, age, gender, and party affiliation. The strength of the research design, however, is in maximizing internal validity by (a) carefully controlling a variety of variables that may influence individuals' decision making, and (b) measuring and then statistically controlling other potentially confounding variables. What is most difficult in studying underlying *decision-making processes* – as opposed to examining factors that influence a specific vote choice – is being able to ascertain the information available to voters *and* then determining how they use that information in arriving at a decision. Research designs which control available information and carefully measure the ways subjects process the information, utilizing several approaches to measure decision making, are more effective than questionnaire-based field studies for close examination of the mental processes used by voters.

Generalizability of the findings of this study is another matter, of course. It is nearly impossible to conduct the same kind of carefully controlled study with random assignment to different political environments using a random sample of voters. Nevertheless, several steps can be – and have been – taken in our research program to broaden generalizability.

First, we have tested several populations of adults besides college students, selecting subpopulations that vary considerably in a number of important respects: education level, age, gender, occupation, religiosity, party affiliation, and ideological orientations toward relevant issues. Concurrent examination of several groups, as we have done here with military reservists, ROTC members, and undergraduate students, enables replication of hypothesis tests across differing populations. Second, we have varied the ethically framed issue included in the environments, creating a variety of different value conflicts. In this study, the use of two ethically framed issues, abortion and gays in the military, enabled examination of the theorized relationship across issues that differ in several basic characteristics. Third, we have used several different approaches to measure the key dependent variable, type of decision-making process. Consistency in results across the differing dependent measures, as in this study, increases confidence in both individuals' ability to self-report their cognitive activities and in our ability to tap those processes. To the extent that the pattern of findings across the research program consistently supports the basic hypothesis, as occurs here, confidence in the generalizability of the theory is increased.

Additional support for generalizability can be found outside the laboratory. Data from national polls conducted at about the same time as this study buttress our basic argument. For example, when randomly sampled adults were asked how they would react if they found a candidate whose views they agreed with on most issues, but who "took a position on abortion that [they] disagreed with completely," 47% of respondents indicated that they "probably" or "certainly" would not vote for that candidate.⁵⁰ In a different survey, 24% of the public said that regardless of a candidate's position on other issues, they would "never vote" for a candidate "who

favors abortion," while 34% said they would "never vote" for a candidate "who would restrict a woman's rights to have an abortion."⁵¹

Further, when a national sample of registered voters was asked what might be the consequences of knowing that a candidate favored a "proposal to allow gays in the military," 46% of respondents indicated that it would make them "much more" or "much less" likely to support that candidate.⁵² For a corresponding question on abortion in another poll, 50% of respondents indicated that it would make them "much more" or "much less" likely to support that candidate.⁵³

This poll data, then, in combination with the steps we have taken in executing this study, lend support to the generalizability of our basic argument. Nonetheless, examination of the linkages between issue interpretation and decision making should be pursued in an actual electoral setting to further test the external validity of the theoretical relationship explored here. Future survey research on election contests should use thought-listing procedures more extensively to allow respondents' interpretations of issues to be coded. The contribution of voters' issue interpretations to the electoral decision-making process could then be compared with other factors thought to influence voting behavior, namely individual perceptions of candidates' character, image, and party affiliation. This type of analysis could be combined with content analysis of the news media to determine if individual issue interpretations parallel the framing of these issues in press coverage. In this way, laboratory-based research could be complemented with field-based research to more comprehensively consider how media coverage of "moral" issues such as abortion, school prayer, and gay rights interact with individuals' values to influence the mental processes involved in voting.

NOTES

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22. Philip E. Tetlock, "A Value Pluralism Model of Ideological Reasoning," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50 (April 1986): 819.

23. See, for example, Jagdish Sheth and Bruce L. Newman, "A Model of Primary Voter Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research* 12 (September 1985): 178-87; Robin M. Hogarth, *Judgment and Choice* (NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1987); Paul Slovic, Sarah Lichtenstein, and Baruch Fischhoff, "Decision Making," in *Stevens' Handbook of Experimental Psychology: Learning and Cognition*, vol. 2, ed. Richard C. Atkinson, Richard J. Herrnstein, Gardner Lindzey, and Robert D. Luce (NY: Wiley, 1988), 673-738; Oswald Huber, "Information-Processing Operators in Decision Making," in *Process and Structure in Human Decision Making*, ed. Henry Montgomery and Ola Svenson (Chichester: Wiley, 1989), 3-22; Domke and Shah, "Interpretations of Issues and Voter Decision-Making Strategies."

24. John W. Payne, James R. Bettman, and Eric J. Johnson, "Behavioral Decision Research," *Annual Review of Psychology* 43 (1992): 92; see also James R. Bettman, *An Information Processing Theory of Consumer Choice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); Robert S. Billings and Stephan A. Marcus, "Measures of Compensatory and Noncompensatory Models of Decision Behavior: Process Tracing versus Policy Capturing," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 31 (June 1983): 331-52; Jane Beattie and Jonathan Baron, "Investigating the Effect of Stimulus Range on Attribute Weight," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 17 (May 1991): 571-85.

25. According to the spatial theory of voting, candidates are perceived as points in a multi-dimensional space. Along each issue dimension voters must compute the distance between their position and each candidate's position. These issue "distances" are weighed and summed to produce an overall measure of distance between voter and candidate, and the candidate found to be closest to the voter is chosen. See John A. Herstein, "Keeping the Voter's Limit in Mind: A Cognitive Processing Analysis of Decisionmaking in Voting," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40 (December 1981):

843-61; Melvin J. Hinich and Walker Pollard, "A New Approach to the Spatial Theory of Electoral Competition," *American Journal of Political Science* 25 (May 1981): 323-33.

26. Donald E. Stokes, "Spatial Models of Party Competition," *American Political Science Review* 57 (June 1963): 368-77; George Rabinowitz, "On the Nature of Political Issues: Insights from a Spatial Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 22 (November 1978): 793-817; James Onken, Reid Hastie, and William Revelle, "Individual Differences in the Use of Simplification Strategies in a Complex Decision-Making Task," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 11 (February 1985): 14-27; George Rabinowitz and Stuart Elaine Macdonald, "A Directional Theory of Issue Voting," *American Political Science Review* 83 (March 1989): 93-121.

27. Two primary types of noncompensatory decision-making strategies have been theorized: *conjunctive* and *lexicographic*. In the conjunctive strategy, individuals have certain minimum standards on issues considered important. To remain in consideration, candidates must meet these minimum standards; if they fail to do so, they are eliminated. The decision is based on which candidate remains, or is the best among remaining choices. In the lexicographic strategy, individuals compare candidates on one issue considered most important. The candidate that is closest to the subject's belief on that issue is chosen. If candidates tie, they are compared on the next most-important issue. See Peter Wright and Fredric Barbour, "The Relevance of Decision Process Models in Structuring Persuasive Messages," *Communication Research* 2 (July 1975): 246-59.

28. Payne, Bettman, and Johnson, "Behavioral Decision Research," 93; see also Wright and Barbour, "The Relevance of Decision Process Models in Structuring Persuasive Messages"; Amos Tversky, Shmuel Sattath, and Paul Slovic, "Contingent Weighting in Judgment and Choice," *Psychological Review* 95 (July 1988): 371-84.

29. Peter Wright, "Consumer Choice Strategies: Simplifying vs. Optimizing," *Journal of Marketing Research* 12 (February 1975): 60-66; John W. Payne, "Contingent Decision Behavior," *Psychological Bulletin* 92 (September 1982): 382-402; Donald MacGregor and Paul Slovic, "Graphic Representation of Judgmental Information," *Human-Computer Interaction* 2 (1986): 179-200; Sirkka-Liisa Jarvenpaa, "The Effect of Task Demands and Graphical Format on Information Processing Strategies," *Management Science* 35 (March 1989): 285-303; Eric J. Johnson, Robert J. Meyer, and Sanjoy Ghose, "When Choice Models Fail: Compensatory Representations in Negatively Correlated Environments," *Journal of Marketing Research* 26 (August 1989): 255-70. Notably, *affect referral*, a decision-making strategy that is neither compensatory nor noncompensatory, has also been theorized. In this strategy, an individual makes a decision based primarily on an affective feeling about the various alternatives or attributes, of which he or she has previous information. For reasons discussed in the method section, the present research did not examine the strategy of affect referral.

30. Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie, and Waring, "Value-framing Abortion in the United States"; Tetlock, "Structure and Function in Political Belief Systems"; Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*.

31. See Shah, Domke, and Wackman, "Values, Framing, and Voter Decision-Making Strategies"; Domke and Shah, "Interpretations of Issues and Voter Decision-Making Strategies." Several scholars have similarly distinguished between (a) different conceptions of issues, or (b) different types of

values. Most broadly, scholars have grouped together individual concerns about religious morals, personal principles, and basic rights into a broader conception of symbolic or ethical concerns as contrasted against concerns grounded in economics or individual self-interest. While drawing upon this previous work, the distinction between ethical and material interpretations in this research substantially differs from these earlier conceptualizations. Specifically, Sears and Funk distinguish between "self-interest" (material- or economic-oriented) and "symbolic" (value-oriented) interpretations of issues, but they offer an affective approach to this distinction and generally do not examine socio-tropic concerns; see David O. Sears and Carolyn L. Funk, "The Role of Self-Interest in Social and Political Attitudes," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 24, ed. Mark Zanna (NY: Academic Press, 1991), 1-91. Inglehart distinguishes between "materialist" (economic- or fiscal-oriented) and "postmaterialist" (freedom-, quality of life-, and self-expression-oriented) values, but these are conceived as traits tied to individuals or nations rather than contextualized individual interpretations of issues; see Ronald Inglehart, "The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies," *American Political Science Review* 65 (December 1971): 991-1017; Paul Abramson and Ronald Inglehart, *Value Change in Global Perspective* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). Finally, Rokeach distinguishes between "instrumental" (means-oriented) and "terminal" (ends-oriented) values, but ethical and material issue interpretations may be grounded in either of these types of values. For example, the instrumental value of courage (standing up for your beliefs) may be the basis for an ethical interpretation, while the instrumental value of capability (competent, effective) may be the basis for a material interpretation; see Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values*.

32. Snyder and DeBono, "A Functional Approach to Attitudes and Persuasion"; Monroe, "Psychology and Rational Actor Theory."

33. Swann, "Self-Verification: Bringing Social Reality into Harmony with the Self"; Tetlock, "A Value Pluralism Model of Ideological Reasoning."

34. For an overview of political science research on voting behavior, see Herbert B. Asher, *Presidential Elections & American Politics* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1992).

35. See, for example, Tetlock, "A Value Pluralism Model of Ideological Reasoning."

36. The study was conducted during a two-month span in spring 1993, during the height of debates concerning the status of homosexuals in the armed forces.

37. The combination of three candidates and four issues was chosen to balance concerns about information overload with the ability to distinguish decision-making strategies. More information likely would have led to overload, and fewer candidates or issues would have made it more difficult to differentiate compensatory or noncompensatory strategies. To avoid presenting subjects with too much information, for each issue two of the three candidates held the same position, with each candidate in disagreement once, except on the issues of abortion and gays in the military. On those two issues, there were mild differences between the two candidates in agreement. For abortion, the candidates held the following views: (1) prolife; (2) politically prochoice but personally prolife; (3) prochoice. For gays in the military, the candidates held the following views: (1) antigays in military; (2) moderately in favor of repealing the ban on gays; (3) strongly in favor of repealing

the ban.

38. The candidates' positions were composites or variations of actual political stances, taken from several campaigns. The fictitious candidates were male; of similar age (range: 45 to 50), education (each from a public Big Ten university), and occupation (each a small business owner); and were competing for the Democratic nomination in a Congressional District primary in a nearby state, a political sphere likely to be unknown among the subjects. No other differentiating character or image-oriented factors were included in the design. All of the articles were given female bylines. In addition, in an effort to reduce possible order effects such as primacy and recency, two specific steps were taken: first, the order of issue articles was randomized; second, candidate positions within the articles (i.e., left to right on the page) were rotated.

39. K. Anders Ericsson and Herbert Simon, *Protocol Analysis* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); Zaller and Feldman, "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response."

40. Responses were coded as compensatory if the subject seemed to weigh each relevant issue position without quickly eliminating a candidate due to his stand on an issue deemed salient; in other words, subjects apparently used multiple criteria to evaluate a candidates' overall worth. Subjects were coded as noncompensatory if they eliminated a candidate early in the information processing, after which information regarding that candidate was no longer considered; if there was mention of a minimum standard or litmus test that each candidate must meet to remain in consideration; or if only one issue was clearly predominant in the decision-making process. Implicit to each noncompensatory strategy is the use of an over-riding criterion to eliminate a candidate if he did not satisfy certain standards on which voters will not compromise. Twenty-one subjects across the subpopulations did not answer these questions or provided responses that could not be coded. For undergraduate students, two coders agreed on 132 of 151 codable responses as compensatory or noncompensatory, yielding an intercoder reliability coefficient of .87. Using the formula for Scott's *pi*, which corrects for agreement by chance, intercoder reliability was determined to be 74% greater than by chance. For ROTC members, two coders agreed on 60 of 64 codable responses as compensatory or noncompensatory, yielding an intercoder reliability coefficient of .94, which was 87% greater than by chance. For military personnel, two coders agreed on 157 of 176 codable responses as compensatory or noncompensatory, yielding an intercoder reliability coefficient of .89, which was 77% greater than by chance. The remaining responses in each subpopulation were discussed and then classified. See William A. Scott, "Reliability of Content Analysis: The Case of Nominal Scale Coding," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 19 (fall 1955): 321-25.

41. See Wright and Barbour, "The Relevance of Decision Process Models in Structuring Persuasive Messages"; Hogarth, *Judgment and Choice*.

42. Among undergraduate students, the index had mean inter-item correlations of .285 and a Cronbach's alpha of .78; among ROTC members, the index had mean inter-item correlations of .395 and a Cronbach's alpha of .85; and among military personnel, the index had mean inter-item correlations of .375 and a Cronbach's alpha of .84. When the subpopulations were pooled (to test for the robustness of the hypothesis), the factor analysis accounted for 42.3% of variance in the index, which had mean inter-item correlations of .349 and a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

43. For the correlations between decision-making measures, we report

the Kendall's Tau correlation because the open-ended decision-making measures was not a linear variable.

44. The split was made between "5" and "6" in importance for three reasons. First, an importance of "6" is only one scale point removed from "7," the scale point labeled "extremely important"; thus, individuals reporting an issue as a "6" or "7" probably considered the issue as at least fairly important. Second, so as to maintain consistency across issues, only one cut point was used, and the split between "5" and "6" closely approximated the mean importance score of each issue more consistently than other possible splits. Third, the cut point between "5" and "6" yielded a fairly normal distribution of the new variable, number of issues considered important, for subjects in both political environments.

45. Twenty-five subjects did not answer these questions or failed to provide enough information to reliably code. For undergraduate students, two coders agreed on 125 of 146 codable responses as having a material interpretation or ethical interpretation, producing an intercoder reliability coefficient of .86, which was 70% greater than by chance. For ROTC members, two coders agreed on 59 of 64 codable responses as having a material interpretation or ethical interpretation, yielding an intercoder reliability coefficient of .92, which was 80% greater than by chance. For military personnel, two coders agreed on 161 of 177 codable responses as having a material interpretation or ethical interpretation, yielding an intercoder reliability coefficient of .91, which was 81% greater than by chance. The remaining responses in each subpopulation were discussed and then classified.

46. See, for example, Lau, Smith, and Fiske, "Political Beliefs, Policy Interpretations, and Political Persuasion"; Shah, Domke, and Wackman, "Values, Framing, and Voter Decision-Making Strategies"; Neuman, Just, and Crigler, *News and the Construction of Political Meaning*; Graber, *Processing the News*.

47. The public affairs media use index had a Cronbach's alpha of .70 among military personnel, .74 among ROTC members, and .56 among undergraduate students.

48. The analytical approach used in this research is necessary to get "within the cognitive system of the individual" (Lavine, Sullivan, Borgida, and Thomsen, "The Relationship of National and Personal Issue Salience to Attitude Accessibility on Foreign and Domestic Policy Issues," 298).

49. Although one of the measures of the dependent variable, the open-ended decision-making strategy measure, was dichotomous, linear regressions were run in order to allow comparison of (1) the beta weights – particularly their direction – for each independent variable, and (2) the amount of variance explained by each block across the two dependent measures. When using the open-ended measure as the dependent variable, logistical regressions were also run to compare the results, and there were no distinguishable differences between the linear and logistical regressions. For abortion, the final block of issue interpretation (Wald = 26.5, $p < .001$) correctly predicted an additional 6.9% of responses after the first three blocks were entered, totalling 82.1% correctly predicted. For gays in the military, the final block of issue interpretation (Wald = 9.4, $p < .01$) correctly predicted an additional 2.9% of responses after the first three blocks were entered, totalling 79.6% correctly predicted. For both regressions, issue interpretation was the greatest single predictor in the final equations.

50. Harris Poll conducted 5-10 June 1992 with a national sample of 1,255

adults (data from the Roper Center, University of Connecticut).

51. Time/CNN Poll conducted 9 April 1992 with a national sample of 1,250 adults (data from the Roper Center, University of Connecticut).

52. U.S. News and World Report Poll conducted 29-31 August 1993 with a national sample of 1,000 registered voters (data from the Roper Center, University of Connecticut).

53. NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll conducted 20-21 October 1992 with a national sample of 1,008 registered voters (data from the Roper Center, University of Connecticut).