

# Educating the Least Informed: Group Endorsements in a Grassroots Campaign

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*Theories of low-information rationality claim that uninformed voters can compensate for their lack of political knowledge by employing heuristics, such as interest group endorsements, to make voting decisions as if they were fully informed. Critics of low-information rationality contend that politically unaware voters are unlikely to use group endorsements effectively as a heuristic since they are unlikely to know the political relevance of interest groups. We address this debate by entertaining the possibility that contextual information coupled with a source cue may enhance the effectiveness of group endorsements as a heuristic. We test competing expectations with a field experiment conducted during the 2006 election in two highly competitive Pennsylvania statehouse races where a well-known liberal interest group endorsed Democratic candidates and canvassed both core supporters and Republicans believed to be likeminded. Our results reveal that Republicans used the endorsement as a negative voting cue and that the group's endorsement helped some Republicans compensate for their lack of awareness about politics.*

There is mounting evidence that partisan groups are well served by grassroots mobilization campaigns (e.g., Arceneaux 2007; Nickerson 2005; Nickerson, Friedrich, and King 2006; Vavreck, Spiliotes, and Fowler 2002).<sup>1</sup> By dispatching campaign workers to call on potential supporters, either in person or by phone, political parties can boost support for their candidate at the polls. Over the past few election cycles, partisan organizations have also adopted more risky campaigning strategies wherein they contact voters who typically prefer the opposition but are believed to be open to persuasion (Cornfield 2007). For instance, the campaign may believe particular voters are cross-pressured, like evangelical Christian Democrats or pro-choice Republicans, and can be swayed with the right message to vote for the campaign's desired candidate.

Thus far, scholars have focused their attention on more traditional mobilization campaigns where the

partisan group (e.g., a political party or issue advocacy group) targets core supporters, individuals who have supported them in the past, and undecided independents. Although these efforts appear to pay off in terms of persuading those targeted to support the campaign's candidate, it is less clear that more risky strategies, which involve contacting voters who are affiliated with the opposition party, have the same desired effects. If people are merely responding to the message tailored for them, then nontraditional strategies should be effective despite the fact that it is delivered by an opposing political group. However, there are strong theoretical reasons to expect that people consider the source of a message in addition to the content of the message (e.g., Druckman 2001; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994). Voters may decide to reject recommendations from sources that they do not trust, even though the endorsement highlights areas of agreement that they share with the

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<sup>1</sup>Mounting evidence also suggests that nonpartisan groups can effectively boost turnout through grassroots mobilization (e.g., Gerber and Green 2000; Green and Gerber 2004; Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003).

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candidate. After all, an untrustworthy source would have every intention to mislead the voter by highlighting information they want to hear, while failing to tell them that the candidate only agrees with them on a handful of issues. Of course, using source cues in this manner requires that the message recipient know something about the source (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). Some scholars argue that only those with high levels of political awareness are capable of seeing the political relevance of endorsements by issue advocacy groups (cf. Lau and Redlawsk 2001), while others have found that the least politically aware use interest group endorsements to make decisions as if they were politically informed (e.g., Lupia 1994).

We address this debate by entertaining the possibility that contextual information coupled with the source cue may enhance the effectiveness of group endorsements as an information shortcut. We test competing hypotheses with a randomized field experiment conducted during the 2006 election in two highly competitive statehouse races in suburban Philadelphia where a well-known liberal activist group endorsed the Democratic candidates and canvassed both core supporters and Republicans whom they thought to be persuadable.<sup>2</sup> The group allowed us to randomly assign individuals to either receive contact from the group or not. We then measured the political preferences of subjects in the treatment and control groups by conducting a telephone survey after the election. Field experiments are ideal for studying the effects of grassroots mobilization, because random assignment furnishes unbiased causal effect estimates of the group's canvassing by balancing the treatment and control groups with respect to both observed and unobserved covariates (cf. Gerber and Green 2000).<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, if it were not for the experimental intervention, there should be no differences in outcomes between treatment and control groups. If statistically significant differences are discovered, they are likely attributable to the effect of the group's contact.

Because the experiment was conducted in the course of an ongoing campaign among individuals who were unaware that they were subjects in an experiment, our study maintains the internal validity of laboratory experiments aimed at studying the effects of group endorsements (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001) while studying political behavior in a real setting. We also add to the growing field-experimental literature devoted to studying the persuasive effects of partisan campaigning (Arceneaux

2007; Gerber 2004; Nickerson 2005). While previous work has focused on campaigns orchestrated by a political party or candidate, we extend this research by studying the canvassing operation of an issue advocacy group. These groups are becoming increasingly involved in grassroots mobilization, as aptly illustrated by the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign where issue advocacy groups knocked on just as many doors as the two major parties combined (a total estimated at 17 million) and most likely more (Bergan et al. 2005). Thus far, though, research on issue advocacy group campaigns has focused primarily on the effects of mass media advertising (e.g., An, Jin, and Pfau 2006; Cooper and Nownes 2004). Before discussing the experiment in more detail, we begin by drawing on psychological theories of heuristic information processing to develop hypotheses about the effects of endorsements made by opposition political groups.

## Information Shortcuts and Political Campaigning

The past 50 years of research on voting behavior, beginning with seminal work by scholars at Columbia and Michigan (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960), has certainly dispelled the notion that many voters put much cognitive effort into understanding politics. Americans are thoroughly uninformed on most matters of importance (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), and few hold stable attitudes on political issues, much less organize their political beliefs into one coherent, overarching ideological system (Converse 1964). Nevertheless, people want to make correct decisions and are capable of doing so without engaging in effortful and systematic analysis of the options facing them (e.g., competing political candidates) by taking advantage of information shortcuts, or *heuristics* (Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 1989; Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

Because the cognitive capacity of humans is limited, people cannot collect and consider, much less remember, all relevant pieces of information for complex decision tasks such as voting (Simon 1957). Accordingly, "people are economy-minded souls who wish to satisfy their goal-related needs in the most efficient ways possible" (Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 1989, 220), and cognitive shortcuts help individuals make complex decisions with minimal effort (e.g., Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Nisbett and Ross 1980). In politics, it would be irrational for voters to do otherwise. It would be far too costly to gather every bit of information necessary to compare candidates across a complex issue space.

<sup>2</sup>The group requested that we not use its name.

<sup>3</sup>Of course, randomization generates balance within sampling variability. Imbalances can occur by chance, but it is possible to calculate the probability that observed effects are due to sampling error with standard frequentist tests of statistical significance.

Instead, voters often rely on political heuristics to make decisions as if they were fully informed (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Fortunately a number of easy-to-collect and understand information shortcuts are available to voters during a campaign (Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001; Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991; Rahn 1993). Whether a candidate is affiliated with their political party, shares their cultural background, or has the backing of trusted political groups may communicate just as much about the candidate's issue positions and job qualifications as an in-depth study of all available information.

In this study we restrict our focus to the effects of political endorsements. Previous research finds that voting decisions are substantially influenced by the endorsements of candidates by political groups (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994). Building on Brady and Sniderman's (1985) proposition that people use a *likability heuristic* to estimate the ideological position of political and social groups, Lupia (1994) argues that individuals need only know whether they like or dislike the group endorsing a candidate to transform the endorsement into an information shortcut. If people see a political group as aligned with their values and interests, then they can trust that the group would make the same decisions they would have with complete information. Conversely, if people see the group in opposition to their values and interests, then they can assume that the group would make the opposite decision than they would. As long as people choose to like groups that align with their values and dislike those that do not, endorsements become credible source cues that citizens can use as an efficient information shortcut (Lupia 1994; see also Druckman 2001, but see Kuklinski and Hurley 1994).

Currently, there is a debate about the usefulness of heuristics, like endorsements, to politically uninformed citizens. Some scholars argue that heuristics are most useful among the least politically informed (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991). Because these individuals do not pay much attention to politics, they lack "encyclopedic knowledge" about the candidates and must use information shortcuts to help them make accurate voting decisions. Rather than undermining their ability to make good decisions, low-information voters need only look to someone who has an incentive to possess accurate information about the candidate (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Issue advocacy groups are well suited to fill this role, because they have a strong incentive to know how the candidate votes on the issues important to their group. In fact, the group need not even be aligned with the voters' interests, because signals from opposition groups can also be informative by indicating whom the voter should *not* support (Lupia 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Thus, by using an en-

dorsement as a heuristic for whether the candidate would be a good representative for their interests, politically unaware voters can make decisions as if they possessed full information about the candidates.

In contrast, other scholars caution that an information shortcut can only be effective and efficient insofar as the heuristic is both accessible and activated in the individual's mind (Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 1989). If the individual lacks the contextual information necessary to realize the political implications of a group's endorsement, then he or she will be no better off knowing this piece of information than not knowing it (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Zaller 1992). Accordingly, endorsements from even well-known organizations may actually better serve people who are more aware of politics and, thus, possess a greater store of contextual knowledge (Lau and Redlawsk 2001).<sup>4</sup>

While we find compelling the theoretical argument that heuristics must be accessible in order to be useful, we consider the possibility that endorsements may be accompanied by contextual information that helps individuals figure out the group's agenda (cf. McDermott 2006). Under these circumstances, endorsements may actually make the heuristic accessible to those with low levels of political awareness and help the message recipients determine whether the source is on their political team. Politically unaware citizens who can place the group in the political landscape should be able to use the group's endorsement as a useful cue.

If this supposition is correct, it may explain conflicting evidence regarding the effects of endorsements among the politically unaware. In laboratory experiments where the endorsement is stated with little accompanying contextual information about the group's agenda (e.g., Group X endorses Candidate Y), the heuristic is understandably inaccessible in the minds of many politically unaware citizens and, therefore, is used less effectively by them (Lau and Redlawsk 2001). However, in real-world political settings, endorsements are often accompanied by contextual information (e.g., Group X endorses Candidate Y because of Z) either in the endorsement itself or the news coverage that surrounds it, which may allow even politically unaware individuals to recognize the political relevance of the endorsement. This is the mechanism that Lupia (1994) suggests in explaining the results from his California insurance reform ballot proposition study. Politically unaware individuals who knew the endorsement position of either the insurance industry or consumer rights

<sup>4</sup> *Contextual information* refers to any piece information that citizens can use to understand "the ideological or partisan implications of a persuasive message" (Zaller 1992, 42).

groups presumably understood the political agenda of these interest groups and used the signal sent by them to vote in line with their preferences. In addition, group endorsements—especially ones delivered personally by a grassroots campaign—may lead individuals to seek out more information about the candidates, causing them to gain access to more easy-to-use heuristics (e.g., party affiliation).

Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish this conclusion on the basis of observational data alone. Perhaps those respondents who knew the endorsement position of various interest groups yet still scored poorly on the political knowledge scale were part of an issue public (Converse 1964) that cared about insurance reform and, thus, systematically processed information about the ballot proposition, leading them to simultaneously know something about the interest groups' positions as well as vote more in line with their predispositions. Or, perhaps, the knowledge scale lacked precision and those who knew the interest groups' endorsements were actually more politically aware than those who did not, despite having the same score on the knowledge scale.

Whatever the case, we are able to address these limitations by randomly assigning some individuals to receive contact from an issue advocacy group and others to receive no contact. By forming these groups randomly, we reduce the probability that differences in endorsement effects across levels of political awareness can be explained by unobserved factors or measurement error. In the next section, we outline our experimental design in greater detail as well as explicitly state the empirical expectations drawn from the theoretical discussion in this section.

## Experimental Design

### Data and Hypotheses

In the fall of 2006, we conducted a field experiment with the help of a well-known liberal issue advocacy group that focuses on women's issues.<sup>5</sup> The group endorsed the Democratic candidates in two competitive

<sup>5</sup>Although we cannot reveal the name of the interest group, we can give the reader some idea about how liberal the group is. We identified U.S. representatives and senators in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress who voted with the group 100% of the time, and calculated the average Poole-Rosenthal first-dimension DW-Nominate score (Carroll et al. 2008) for these members. In the U.S. House, the mean Poole-Rosenthal score for 100% supporters was  $-0.437$ , a score given to both Elijah Cummings (a Democrat from the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in Maryland, which encompasses Baltimore) and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (a Democrat from the 20<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in Florida, which includes Broward and Miami-Dade counties). In the U.S. Senate, the average Poole-Rosenthal score for

statehouse races (Districts 156 and 161) located in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and deployed both paid and volunteer campaign workers to canvass the districts on behalf of the Democratic candidates. The group selected 67,076 individuals from 39,595 households from the registered voter file who it believed could be persuaded to support its preferred candidate. Its target universe consisted of over 24,000 registered Democrats, approximately 11,000 unaffiliated voters, and nearly 32,000 registered Republicans (22,000 females and 10,000 males or individuals who did not list their sex but vote infrequently). The group chose to contact female and infrequently voting Republicans, because it surmised that these Republicans may be more sympathetic to liberal stances on women's issues, such as access to birth control and abortion, and, thus, open to supporting certain Democratic candidates.

The group's decision to contact Republicans as well as Democrats allows us to test various theoretical expectations regarding the effects of interest group endorsements on voting preferences.<sup>6</sup> If the group (and other practitioners) is correct in its assumption that voters are only concerned about the candidates' issue position on access to birth control, its campaign should increase support for the Democratic candidate among Republican subjects (Hypothesis 1). However, if citizens treat the endorsement as a heuristic, we would expect Republican subjects to use the endorsement of the Democratic candidate by a known liberal interest group as a negative signal, reducing support for the Democratic candidate (Hypothesis 2).

We can also use this design to address the debate—largely between laboratory experiments and observational studies—over the way in which political awareness moderates the use of the endorsement heuristic. Similar to experimental designs in laboratory studies (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001), the endorsement in our field experiment comes from a well-known interest group, and similar to observational studies (e.g., Lupia 1994), we study a setting where the message provides contextual clues that might help politically unaware individuals realize the group's agenda and effectively use the endorsement as a heuristic. Specifically, the endorsement of the Democratic candidate makes an explicitly liberal statement about reproductive rights, which is a highly partisan and salient issue

100% supporters was  $-0.362$ , which was very close to Christopher Dodd's score (Connecticut-Democrat, score =  $-0.361$ ). The median Poole-Rosenthal score in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress for the House was 0.226 and 0.199 for the Senate, indicating that the group was well to the left of the median member of both chambers.

<sup>6</sup>In a companion piece, we study the effects of the group's endorsement on issue attitudes and issue importance (see Arceneaux and Kolodny forthcoming).

(Adams 1997). If this contextual information is not powerful enough to make plain the group's place in the political landscape, then we expect politically unaware subjects to miss the source cue and increase the probability that they accept the message's recommendation to vote for the Democratic candidate (Hypothesis 3). If the contextual information does help, then politically unaware subjects should be more likely to use the endorsement as a heuristic and vote more in line with their partisan attachments than they otherwise would have (Hypothesis 4).<sup>7</sup> To be clear, the design does not allow us to tease out the independent effects of the message and the source cue; it only allows us to test whether politically unaware voters use the combination of the source cue and the contextual information contained in the group's message to behave as if they were politically aware voters.

## Background

### Pennsylvania Politics: Competitiveness of the 2006 Elections

The 2006 elections were competitive on a national scale. However, since Pennsylvania has always been tightly contested statewide, expectations ran high that the Democrats might gain control of one chamber of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the House of Representatives (mostly because only half the Senate was up for reelection). To add to the already pro-Democratic mood in the state (buoyed by the candidacies of Democratic incumbent Governor Ed Rendell and Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Bob Casey Jr., both favored to win statewide), the legislative elections had the added dimension of a highly public "scandal"—the pay raise lawmakers first approved in the summer of 2005 and later rescinded. Since support for the pay raise was bipartisan, 15 incumbents were defeated in primary challenges in May 2006: 11 Republicans and four Democrats (Jacobson 2006). The pay raise issue helped set up an anti-incumbent mood and increased media attention to normally low-information elections such as the statehouse throughout the 2006 election cycle (Jacobson 2006). Going into this election, Democrats needed to pick up eight seats statewide to control the lower chamber in Pennsylvania.

<sup>7</sup>As for politically aware subjects, there are two possibilities. On the one hand, their greater store of contextual knowledge should help them use the endorsement as a heuristic and choose the candidate who better lines up with their preferences. Yet, on the other hand, given the availability of information on the election from other sources and the partisan nature of the decision, they may be able to make a choice that lines up with their preferences in the absence of the endorsement cue.

## Swing Districts in Southeastern Pennsylvania

Also on primary day in May 2006, a special election was held in Chester County (west of Philadelphia) to fill a vacancy in a state Senate seat caused by the death of the incumbent Republican. The Democratic candidate defeated the Republican by a 13-point margin in a highly Republican district. This victory directed the attention of parties and interest groups to the entire southeastern region for opportunities to increase their numbers (Petersen 2006). The 156<sup>th</sup> district (in Chester County and overlapping with the 19<sup>th</sup> Senate district) and the 161<sup>st</sup> legislative district (in neighboring Delaware County) were especially attractive opportunities.

**The 156<sup>th</sup> district.** According to Jeff Price of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the 156<sup>th</sup> district of retiring Republican Elinor Z. Taylor had voter registration of 20,941 Republicans, 12,185 Democrats, and 6,236 who cited no affiliation. Price (2006) noted that "even with that GOP registration edge of roughly 7–4, political observers are predicting a close race, given the strength of Democrats at the top of the ticket—Gov. Rendell and U.S. Senate candidate Bob Casey Jr.—the current tough national political climate for Republicans, and the upset victory by Democrat Andrew Dinniman in May's State Senate race in Chester County. Dinniman's 19th District overlaps the 156th."

The candidates in this open seat race were Republican Shannon Royer and Democrat Barbara McIlvaine Smith. Royer was a West Chester Borough Councilman and long-time legislative staffer, first for Congressman Bob Walker in the 1990s, and just before this campaign, served as the regional coordinator for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Smith was also a member of the West Chester Borough Council, as well as an educator and activist in the area who had previously announced her intention to retire from politics. She was recruited to make this race. On election night, the results were too close to call. It took over a month of recounts before Democrat Smith was declared the winner by 28 votes on December 21, 2006. The outcome of this race determined that the Democrats would have the majority in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives by one vote.

**The 161<sup>st</sup> district.** This district's dynamic was quite different, as Democratic challenger Bryan Lentz took on 28-year Republican incumbent Tom Gannon. This district is in Delaware County and had proven safe for Rep. Gannon since 1978. Gannon voted for the unpopular pay raise, though he later backed its repeal. Lentz, a former prosecutor and Iraq War veteran, presented himself as a

TABLE 1 Descriptive Summary of Experimental Assignment

Experimental Condition	District 156		District 161	
	Number of Households	Number of Individuals	Number of Households	Number of Individuals
Door-to-Door Canvass	12,515	20,441	12,833	22,768
Phone Call	2,846	5,055	4,434	5,149
Control	4,150	6,195	2,817	7,468
Total	19,511	31,691	20,084	35,385

mainstream Democratic alternative. Lentz proved to be a strong candidate from the start and was quick to line up support from a variety of interest groups. The dynamic shifted clearly toward Lentz in late September in response to an ad run by the House Republican Campaign Committee alleging that Lentz, as a defense attorney, “helped” put a child predator back on the street (Schaeffer 2006). The ad was roundly criticized, and the race became extremely close after that. On Election Day, Lentz beat Gannon by 820 votes out of 27,870 cast.

### Protocol

We randomly assigned households into one of three experimental conditions. Subjects in the first condition were slated to receive door-to-door canvassing, those in the second group were slated to receive only a phone call, and subjects in the third group were assigned to receive no contact (see Table 1).<sup>8</sup> A randomization check confirmed that the available covariates in the voter file (age, party registration, household size, sex, precinct, and voter history) do not jointly predict experimental assignment (District 156: no phone number listed,  $\chi^2[47] = 43.49$ ,  $p = 0.619$ , phone number listed,  $\chi^2[235] = 230.98$ ,  $p = 0.562$ ; District 161: no phone number listed,  $\chi^2[61] = 55.24$ ,  $p = 0.684$ , phone number listed,  $\chi^2[310] = 302.06$ ,  $p = 0.616$ ).<sup>9</sup>

After the election, we hired a reputable survey research firm to conduct a survey of a random sample of subjects from all of the experimental conditions in both districts. From each target population we randomly sam-

pled 12,000 households with phone numbers listed in the voter file, of which 2,000 completed interviews (1,000 in each district). After removing noneligible phone numbers from the sample (e.g., fax line or business number), the response rate is 30.6%, which is in line with the performance of current-day telephone surveys.<sup>10</sup> Because we were unable to survey everyone in our sample, the generalizability of our results is necessarily restricted to the population of individuals who take telephone surveys. Although this is not ideal, analyses of observational survey data are subject to the same limitation on generalizability. The advantage of our study over an observational one is that the incomplete response rate does not adversely affect the internal validity of the study. Randomization checks for the survey data show that available covariates do not jointly predict experimental assignment (District 156:  $\chi^2[230] = 211.28$ ,  $p = 0.807$ ; District 161:  $\chi^2[295] = 297.82$ ,  $p = 0.443$ ). Moreover, the response rates do not differ significantly across experimental groups, demonstrating (as one would expect with randomly assigned groups) that the same proportion of survey takers existed in each of the groups (District 156:  $\chi^2[5] = 3.11$ ,  $p = 0.684$ ; District 161:  $\chi^2[5] = 3.53$ ,  $p = 0.619$ ).

The interest group with which we worked was not the only one in the field, as many other interest groups and party organizations attempted to influence these two statehouse races. Because of the extensive attention paid to other up ballot races (governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House—both the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> districts) in media and television advertising, groups active in the 156<sup>th</sup> and 161<sup>st</sup> used direct contact extensively. In the case of our group, this included door-to-door canvassing and phone calls. Because subjects were assigned to these conditions randomly, the effects of television advertising, news coverage, and the efforts of the other groups and candidate campaigns cancel out, allowing us to estimate the *marginal* effect of our group’s effort. Subjects in each

<sup>8</sup>Some subjects in the door-to-door canvassing condition were assigned to receive a follow-up phone call, but the additional phone call did not have perceptible effects on candidate preferences.

<sup>9</sup>We regressed treatment assignment on the covariates using multinomial logit in order to obtain these quantities. The randomization check is split between listed and unlisted phone number samples, because we stratified the randomization by whether the voter file recorded a phone number for the household.

<sup>10</sup>The response rate was calculated using AAPOR definition 1, which is the most conservative (AAPOR 2006).

group were equally likely to receive contact from another group or campaign and read or hear the same news stories. Consequently, random assignment controls for unobservable factors that influence subjects' voting decisions.

The group had canvassers and phone callers work from the same script. Following standard protocol in partisan grassroots operations, campaign workers first asked treatment group contacts to identify the issue (or issues) they saw as the most important and followed by asking how important they viewed "protecting access to family planning services." The third and final question asked contacts which statehouse candidate they would vote for "if the election were held today." If the contact said that protecting access to family planning was important to them (and they did not overtly express opposition), campaign workers concluded the contact by reading the following endorsement of the Democratic candidates.

Okay, thanks for answering those questions. Just to let you know, [GROUP] has endorsed (Bryan Lentz/Barbara McIlvaine Smith) because of (his/her) stance on access to birth control, cervical cancer screenings, mammogram services, and (his/her) support for reproductive health-care rights. *(If they say: Does that mean (he/she) supports abortion? Answer: It's my understanding that (he/she) has expressed the right to choose abortion, though that is not (his/her) top priority.)*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>All door-to-door canvassers worked from this script. Phone bank callers were randomly assigned to read either this script or one very similar. There are no consistent significant differences between the two scripts with respect to vote preference. Consequently, we do not make a distinction between the scripts in the analyses reported here. The alternate script read:

Okay, thanks for answering those questions. Just to let you know, [GROUP] has endorsed (Bryan Lentz/ McIlvaine Smith) because (he/she) believes the current attacks on birth control and reproductive healthcare must stop. (Bryan Lentz/McIlvaine Smith) will work on behalf of Pennsylvania families to keep government intrusion out of personal healthcare decisions. *(If they say: Does that mean (he/she) supports abortion? Answer: It's my understanding that (he/she) has expressed the right to choose abortion, though that is not (his/her) top priority.)*

Also, volunteer canvassers (but not paid canvassers) in the 156<sup>th</sup> handed out campaign literature as well as reading the script. As discussed below, however, we do not find differences in treatment effects across the districts.

## Measures

We measured candidate preferences, our dependent variable of interest, in the postelection survey by asking respondents, "In the election for your state house representative the candidates were ([Democrat Barbara McIlvaine Smith and Republican Shannon Royer]/[Democrat Bryan Lentz and Republican Tom Gannon]). Which candidate did you vote for?"<sup>12</sup> We instructed interviewers to rephrase the question as "Which candidate did you prefer?" if respondents said they did not vote. We coded responses as 1 if they voted for or preferred the Democrat, 0 if they voted for or preferred another candidate, and 9 if they did not answer the question. By combining these responses with information from the Pennsylvania voter file released after the election, we are able to identify the voting preferences of subjects who actually voted, creating a measure of vote choice. For the vote choice measure we coded responses as a 1 if they voted for the Democrat, -1 if they voted for another candidate, 0 if they abstained from voting, and 9 if they voted but did not answer the vote preference question.

As for theoretically relevant independent variables, we measured the partisanship of subjects with the standard SRC question wording, "Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?"<sup>13</sup> We also measured political awareness in the standard fashion by asking subjects factual questions about politics, coding correct answers as 1, coding incorrect answers as 0, and summing the responses into a single political awareness scale (cf. Price and Zaller 1993).<sup>14</sup> Specifically, we asked respondents to identify the political jobs held by Condoleezza Rice, Tony Blair, John Roberts, and Harry Reid.<sup>15</sup>

## Method

The estimation of causal effects is somewhat complicated by the fact that the group, like all campaign organizations,

<sup>12</sup>We randomly rotated the order in which the candidates were listed.

<sup>13</sup>We rotated the order in which Democrat and Republican were listed.

<sup>14</sup>The scale reliability coefficient for these four items,  $\alpha = 0.661$ .

<sup>15</sup>We accepted as correct answers Secretary of State or any mention of the State Department or National Security Advisor for Rice, British Prime Minister or any mention of leader of England for Tony Blair, Chief Justice of U.S. Supreme Court or any mention of Supreme Court justice for John Roberts, and because of recent change in control of the U.S. Senate, we accepted either majority or minority leader for Harry Reid.

was unable to contact everyone targeted. Failure to treat a portion of the treatment group does not bias inference if it is handled properly. An inappropriate approach would compare those whom the group contacted to those whom it did not. It ignores random assignment and, thus, forfeits the benefits of randomization. Survey respondents who are home and open to talking to campaign workers are likely to be more politically engaged than those who are unavailable. Unless we can perfectly account for the selection process that underlies the willingness to speak with campaigns, comparing contacted individuals to people who were not contacted may generate biased causal estimates.<sup>16</sup>

Instead, we compare respondents who were assigned to the treatment group—irrespective of whether they were contacted—to respondents who were assigned to the control group and calculate the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect. Since assignment is random, these experimental groups should not differ significantly in their preferences for the candidates, and if they do we can confidently attribute the difference to the intervention of the campaign. The ITT effect also has an intuitive interpretation, as it quantifies how many individuals a campaign must *attempt* to contact in order to gain (or lose) one supporter. Unfortunately, after the election, the group was unable to record all of the contacts it made during the election, making it impossible to directly measure the average-treatment-on-treated (ATT) effect. However, this does not undermine our analysis, because not only is the ATT effect a function of the ITT effect, but also the ITT effect provides a conservative estimate of the treatment-on-treated effect.

In order to understand this, consider the model underlying the observed vote preference in the treatment and control groups,

$$\begin{aligned} P_C &= \alpha p_r + (1 - \alpha) p_{nr} \\ P_T &= \alpha(p_r + t) + (1 - \alpha) p_{nr}, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where  $P_C$  = proportion of the control group preferring the Democratic candidate,  $P_T$  = proportion of the treatment group preferring the Democratic candidate,  $p_r$  = proportion of reachable subjects who support the Democratic candidate,  $p_{nr}$  = proportion of nonreachable subjects who support the Democratic candidate,  $\alpha$  = proportion of the group that is reached by the campaign, and  $t$  = the effect of the treatment on candidate preferences among the treated. By randomly assigning subjects to the treatment and control groups, there should

<sup>16</sup>More formally, the problem with this approach is that it requires the assumption that there is no unobserved covariate that is correlated with both contact,  $c_i$ , and the dependent variable. If there is,  $\text{cov}(c_i, u_i) \neq 0$ , where  $u_i$  = the disturbance term. This, of course, violates a major assumption underlying all regression approaches and leads to biased parameter estimates.

be no statistically significant differences in these parameters between these groups. As a result, even though some individuals were systematically more likely to receive the message than others, when  $P_C$  is subtracted from  $P_T$ , the baseline preferences of both reachable and nonreachable subjects cancel, generating an unbiased estimate of the ITT effect. One can easily calculate the treatment effect by algebraically solving for  $t$ ,

$$t = \frac{P_T - P_C}{\alpha}. \quad (2)$$

Because  $\alpha$  is a noninteger that falls between 0 and 1, the ITT effect is smaller by definition than the ATT effect. Consequently, the ITT effect, in addition to being an unbiased estimate of the effect of random assignment, is also a conservative estimate of the effect of exposure to the campaign's message.

## Empirical Results

We test Hypotheses 1 and 2 by regressing candidate preference and vote choice on treatment indicators and various covariates (partisanship, household size, age, female, and an indicator for voting the previous federal election).<sup>17</sup> Because Hypothesis 2 predicts that the effect of the group's endorsement of the Democratic candidate on candidate support is conditional on the subject's partisanship, we interact the treatment indicators with indicators for partisanship. Table 2 reports the multinomial logit estimates for the candidate preference models, and Table 3 reports the multinomial logit estimates for the vote choice models.

Since neither the statistical significance nor the direction of multinomial logit coefficients are readily interpretable, we use Monte Carlo simulations to estimate the effect of assignment to canvassing and phone calls on the dependent variables for Republicans, Independents, and Democrats. These results are reported in Table 4.<sup>18</sup> Note there are no significant differences in effects between the two districts, which suggests that it is appropriate to pool the samples to obtain more precise estimates.<sup>19</sup> On balance, the results offer no support for Hypothesis 1 and strong support for Hypothesis 2. Even though the group

<sup>17</sup>Since the covariates are orthogonal to treatment assignment, their inclusion in the model does not affect treatment effect estimates. However, their inclusion does reduce unexplained variance in the dependent variable and, thus, produce more efficient standard error estimates.

<sup>18</sup>The Monte Carlo simulations were performed with the *Clarify* package for *Stata* (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

<sup>19</sup>The only difference that approaches statistical significance is the difference in the canvassing effect on vote choice among Democrats ( $t = 1.212$ ,  $p = 0.226$ , two-tailed).



TABLE 2 Multinomial Logit Estimates for Candidate Preference Models

	District 156		District 161		Pooled Sample	
	D vs. R/O	NR vs. R/O	D vs. R/O	NR vs. R/O	D vs. R/O	NR vs. R/O
Canvassing Treatment	-0.630 (0.513)	-0.185 (0.621)	-0.183 (0.437)	-0.494 (0.517)	-0.354 (0.331)	-0.357 (0.394)
Phone Treatment	-0.083 (0.476)	-0.504 (0.603)	0.110 (0.412)	-0.014 (0.477)	0.021 (0.310)	-0.250 (0.372)
Democrat	1.895 (0.664)	-1.104 (1.230)	1.099 (0.514)	-1.939 (1.130)	1.406 (0.402)	-1.602 (0.823)
Republican	-1.275 (0.558)	-3.006 (1.156)	-1.189 (0.517)	-1.372 (0.642)	-1.206 (0.375)	-1.909 (0.543)
Canvassing × Democrat	0.333 (0.765)	0.907 (1.351)	0.559 (0.619)	1.409 (1.291)	0.486 (0.475)	1.271 (0.921)
Canvassing × Republican	-0.249 (0.676)	1.527 (1.231)	-0.500 (0.645)	-0.091 (0.810)	-0.439 (0.462)	0.487 (0.630)
Phone × Democrat	-0.264 (0.718)	1.224 (1.308)	-0.055 (0.568)	1.125 (1.191)	-0.114 (0.439)	1.200 (0.871)
Phone × Republican	-0.615 (0.613)	1.514 (1.212)	-0.409 (0.580)	-0.102 (0.718)	-0.529 (0.417)	0.419 (0.593)
Household Size	0.006 (0.041)	-0.003 (0.066)	0.001 (0.066)	-0.125 (0.143)	0.006 (0.034)	-0.046 (0.085)
Age	0.011 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.007)	0.003 (0.005)	0.009 (0.007)	0.006 (0.003)	0.004 (0.005)
Female	-0.193 (0.175)	0.589 (0.270)	-0.125 (0.163)	0.511 (0.243)	-0.167 (0.118)	0.536 (0.179)
Vote 2004	0.885 (0.269)	-0.035 (0.320)	0.192 (0.250)	-0.065 (0.346)	0.518 (0.181)	-0.058 (0.232)
District 156					0.101 (0.114)	-0.189 (0.162)
Constant	-1.112 (0.545)	-0.890 (0.684)	-0.320 (0.509)	-1.092 (0.700)	-0.740 (0.368)	-0.930 (0.496)
N	999	999	999	999	1998	1998
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.228		0.160		0.187	
χ <sup>2</sup>	422.881		307.272		705.759	

Notes: D = prefer Democratic candidate, R/O = prefer Republican or other candidate, NR = nonresponse. Standard errors in parentheses.

sought to contact Republicans who are sympathetic to its cause, the group's endorsement of the Democratic candidate actually reduced support among self-identified Republicans. Republicans who were assigned to be canvassed were 10 percentage points (12.9 percentage points in the 156<sup>th</sup> and 7.7 percentage points in the 161<sup>st</sup>) less likely to support the Democratic statehouse candidate relative to Republicans in the control group, and phone calls reduced Republican support for the Democratic candidate by 7.2 percentage points (10.8 in the 156<sup>th</sup> and 4.1 in the 161<sup>st</sup>). The group's endorsement had similar negative effects among Republicans, though somewhat muted, on the probability of actually casting a vote for the Democratic candidate.

In contrast, the group's endorsement had no statistically significant effects on the candidate preferences and voting behavior of Independents and Democrats. The lack of consistent effects among Independents makes sense given their heterogeneity, but it is somewhat surprising that the group did not boost support for the Democratic candidate among Democrats. With the possible exception of door-to-door canvassing in the vote choice model for the 161<sup>st</sup> district, Democrats in the treatment groups were no more likely than Democrats in the control group to support the Democratic candidate. Nearly 78% of Democrats in the control group reported that they preferred the Democrat in their statehouse race in the postelection survey. Perhaps this high rate of baseline

TABLE 3 Multinomial Logit Estimates for Vote Choice Models

	District 156			District 161			Pooled Sample		
	R/O vs. Abstain	D vs. Abstain	NR vs. Abstain	R/O vs. Abstain	D vs. Abstain	NR vs. Abstain	R/O vs. Abstain	D vs. Abstain	NR vs. Abstain
Canvassing Treatment	1.957 (0.833)	0.655 (0.592)	0.618 (0.773)	0.817 (0.558)	0.040 (0.516)	-0.467 (0.602)	1.221 (0.455)	0.335 (0.387)	0.000 (0.466)
Phone Treatment	1.634 (0.804)	0.714 (0.541)	0.028 (0.738)	0.160 (0.542)	0.250 (0.471)	-0.171 (0.530)	0.762 (0.438)	0.464 (0.354)	-0.096 (0.427)
Democrat	0.221 (1.101)	1.396 (0.646)	-1.061 (1.253)	0.049 (0.695)	0.940 (0.555)	-1.987 (1.139)	0.129 (0.581)	1.160 (0.418)	-1.613 (0.831)
Republican	2.111 (0.840)	-0.369 (0.681)	-20.674 (0.595)	1.358 (0.600)	-0.264 (0.631)	-0.770 (0.792)	1.597 (0.472)	-0.309 (0.460)	-1.376 (0.717)
Canvassing × Democrat	-1.608 (1.206)	-0.909 (0.758)	-0.431 (1.417)	-1.369 (0.853)	0.237 (0.667)	0.504 (1.407)	-1.443 (0.674)	-0.331 (0.496)	0.217 (0.975)
Canvassing × Republican	-1.782 (0.918)	-1.256 (0.839)	19.360 (0.000)	-0.821 (0.696)	-0.599 (0.793)	-0.126 (1.029)	-1.152 (0.535)	-0.942 (0.572)	0.336 (0.838)
Phone × Democrat	-1.641 (1.176)	-0.918 (0.703)	0.540 (1.343)	0.054 (0.765)	-0.147 (0.612)	0.989 (1.219)	-0.652 (0.629)	-0.525 (0.458)	0.818 (0.891)
Phone × Republican	-1.581 (0.882)	-1.110 (0.752)	19.590 (0.772)	-0.689 (0.663)	-1.048 (0.712)	-0.184 (0.884)	-0.988 (0.509)	-1.064 (0.513)	0.369 (0.779)
Household Size	0.165 (0.097)	0.170 (0.097)	0.131 (0.144)	0.137 (0.084)	0.056 (0.085)	-0.066 (0.181)	0.142 (0.066)	0.122 (0.066)	0.039 (0.125)
Age	0.035 (0.005)	0.043 (0.006)	0.021 (0.009)	0.015 (0.005)	0.016 (0.005)	0.016 (0.008)	0.025 (0.004)	0.030 (0.004)	0.019 (0.006)
Female	-0.084 (0.183)	-0.231 (0.191)	0.678 (0.352)	-0.230 (0.182)	-0.502 (0.182)	0.361 (0.305)	-0.155 (0.128)	-0.395 (0.131)	0.469 (0.229)
Vote 2004	1.835 (0.305)	2.002 (0.340)	20.381 (0.888)	2.564 (0.438)	1.573 (0.303)	2.237 (0.735)	2.068 (0.245)	1.731 (0.222)	3.004 (0.721)
District 156								0.208 (0.123)	0.280 (0.203)
Constant	-5.478 (0.903)	-4.776 (0.701)	-23.184 (0.000)	-4.228 (0.721)	-2.634 (0.602)	-3.894 (1.026)	-4.681 (0.534)	-3.800 (0.462)	-5.163 (0.912)
N	999	999	999	999	999	999	1998	1998	1998
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.201			0.139			0.160		
χ <sup>2</sup>	500.656			350.462			802.250		

Notes: D = vote for Democratic candidate, R/O = vote for Republican or other candidate, NR = nonresponse, Abstain = did not vote. Standard errors in parentheses.

support placed a ceiling on the marginal effect that the group could have obtained in boosting support for the candidate. Yet, as the vote choice models attest, it appears that the group had limited success at bringing these supporters to the polls. So, unfortunately for the group, its grassroots campaign did much to antagonize Republicans and little to bolster support for the candidates among Independents and Democrats.

In order to test Hypotheses 3 and 4, we reestimate the candidate preference and vote choice models shown in Tables 2 and 3 but include political awareness and interact it with treatment assignment and partisanship. Because

there are no substantive differences between the 156<sup>th</sup> and 161<sup>st</sup> with respect to the campaign's effect on candidate preferences, we focus on the pooled sample. These results are displayed in Table 5. As above, we continue to find little evidence of effects among Democrats and Independents—not even across different levels of political awareness.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, we devote the discussion

<sup>20</sup>The interested reader can calculate the effects of endorsements across levels of awareness for Democrats and Republicans from the parameter estimates reported in Table 5. Alternatively, figures showing these effects are available from the authors upon request.

**TABLE 4 The Effect of the Group’s Candidate Endorsement on Candidate Preference and Vote Choice by Treatment and Partisanship**

	District 156		District 161		Pooled	
	Canvassing	Phone	Canvassing	Phone	Canvassing	Phone
<b>Candidate Preference</b>						
Republicans	-0.129* (0.064)	-0.108* (0.063)	-0.077‡ (0.063)	-0.041 (0.059)	-0.102* (0.045)	-0.072* (0.043)
Independents	-0.119 (0.105)	0.027 (0.102)	0.000 (0.094)	0.029 (0.086)	-0.047 (0.068)	0.025 (0.066)
Democrats	-0.053 (0.077)	-0.059 (0.073)	0.052 (0.084)	-0.015 (0.078)	0.000 (0.058)	-0.045 (0.054)
<b>Vote Choice</b>						
Republicans	-0.075† (0.056)	-0.054 (0.054)	-0.051 (0.055)	-0.049 (0.072)	-0.056† (0.036)	-0.049† (0.036)
Independents	0.001 (0.107)	0.066 (0.099)	-0.019 (0.078)	0.046 (0.073)	0.001 (0.057)	0.057 (0.059)
Democrats	-0.064 (0.105)	-0.042 (0.099)	0.106 (0.093)	0.005 (0.087)	0.010 (0.068)	-0.029 (0.064)

\* $p < 0.05$ ; † $p < 0.10$ ; ‡ $p \approx 0.11$ , one-tailed tests. Standard errors in parentheses.

**TABLE 5 Multinomial Logit Estimates for Candidate Preference and Vote Choice Models That Include Political Awareness as a Moderator (Pooled Sample)**

	Candidate Preference		Vote Choice		
	D vs. R/O	NR vs. R/O	R/O vs. Abstain	D vs. Abstain	NR vs. Abstain
Canvassing Treatment	-1.000 (0.774)	-0.050 (0.793)	1.907 (1.397)	-1.504 (0.868)	-0.121 (0.981)
Phone Treatment	-0.512 (0.708)	-0.701 (0.761)	2.423 (1.362)	-0.301 (0.752)	-0.051 (0.926)
Democrat	0.840 (0.831)	-3.090 (1.764)	2.534 (1.493)	0.432 (0.869)	-2.392 (1.818)
Republican	-0.076 (0.898)	-0.407 (1.108)	2.776 (1.468)	0.359 (1.020)	-0.208 (1.489)
Political Awareness	0.048 (0.240)	-0.226 (0.279)	0.667 (0.424)	-0.040 (0.269)	-0.044 (0.333)
Canvassing × Democrat	0.468 (1.000)	2.696 (1.879)	-2.570 (1.646)	0.719 (1.090)	1.966 (2.003)
Canvassing × Republican	-1.197 (1.101)	-1.465 (1.260)	-1.747 (1.567)	-0.523 (1.299)	-1.102 (1.720)
Canvassing × Awareness	0.255 (0.281)	-0.204 (0.328)	-0.139 (0.459)	0.776 (0.332)	0.052 (0.402)
Phone × Awareness	0.248 (0.262)	0.193 (0.308)	-0.578 (0.444)	0.334 (0.294)	-0.035 (0.370)
Phone × Democrat	0.179 (0.911)	2.557 (1.845)	-2.593 (1.571)	0.157 (0.963)	1.524 (1.931)
Phone × Republican	-0.670 (0.976)	-0.665 (1.197)	-2.528 (1.521)	-1.336 (1.131)	-0.945 (1.602)

*continued*

TABLE 5 Continued

	Candidate Preference		Vote Choice		
	D vs. R/O	NR vs. R/O	R/O vs. Abstain	D vs. Abstain	NR vs. Abstain
Democrat × Awareness	0.273 (0.328)	0.698 (0.654)	-1.000 (0.537)	0.294 (0.339)	0.342 (0.667)
Republican × Awareness	-0.480 (0.346)	-0.772 (0.527)	-0.404 (0.487)	-0.316 (0.418)	-0.593 (0.691)
Canvassing × Democrat × Awareness	0.049 (0.397)	-0.878 (0.765)	0.409 (0.614)	-0.436 (0.421)	-0.968 (0.820)
Canvassing × Republican × Awareness	0.344 (0.418)	1.021 (0.593)	0.141 (0.535)	-0.127 (0.518)	0.727 (0.786)
Phone × Democrat × Awareness	-0.155 (0.363)	-0.629 (0.697)	0.773 (0.575)	-0.297 (0.377)	-0.298 (0.723)
Phone × Republican × Awareness	0.030 (0.379)	0.571 (0.564)	0.556 (0.513)	0.142 (0.461)	0.667 (0.737)
Household Size	-0.004 (0.038)	-0.010 (0.063)	0.109 (0.063)	0.084 (0.063)	0.042 (0.115)
Age	0.006 (0.003)	0.005 (0.005)	0.024 (0.004)	0.029 (0.004)	0.019 (0.006)
Female	-0.063 (0.123)	0.416 (0.184)	-0.052 (0.132)	-0.229 (0.135)	0.437 (0.234)
Vote 2004	0.377 (0.182)	0.055 (0.236)	2.013 (0.247)	1.580 (0.226)	3.046 (0.723)
District 156	0.125 (0.116)	-0.173 (0.165)	0.184 (0.125)	0.289 (0.127)	-0.069 (0.205)
Constant	-0.761 (0.701)	-0.547 (0.783)	-6.402 (1.366)	-3.553 (0.757)	-5.069 (1.163)
N	1998	1998	1998	1998	1998
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.209		0.178		
χ <sup>2</sup>	789.766		894.416		

Notes: D = prefer/vote for Democratic candidate, R/O = prefer/vote for Republican or other candidate, NR = nonresponse, Abstain = did not vote. Standard errors in parentheses.

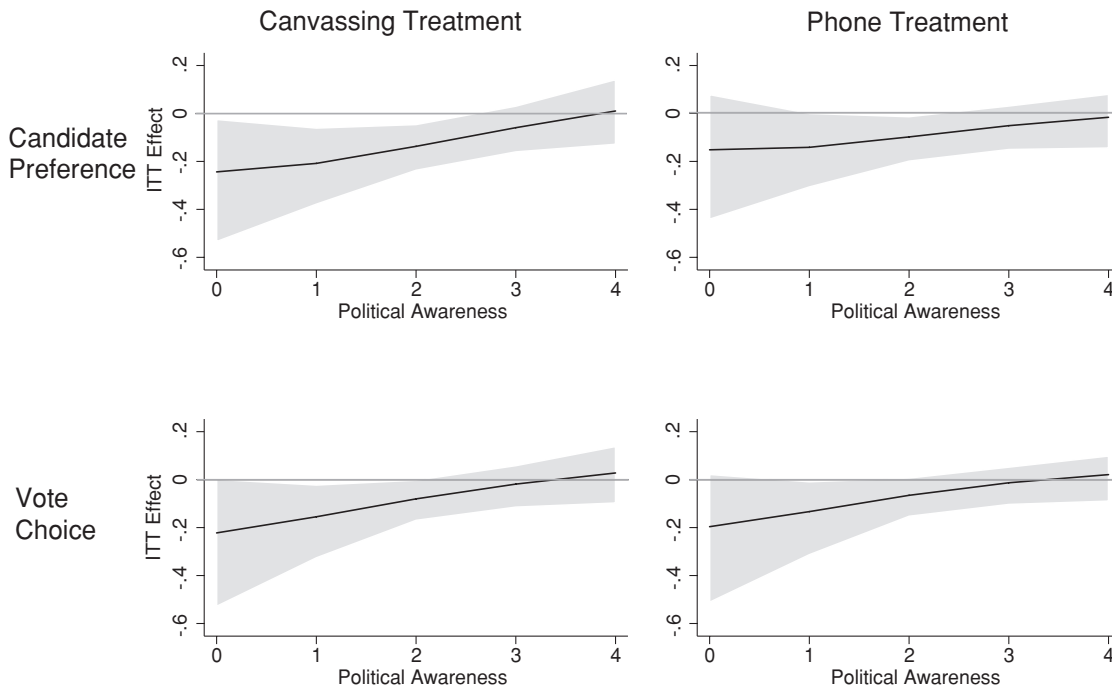
to the way in which political awareness moderates the group's endorsement effect on vote preferences among Republicans. Given the complexity of the models in Table 5, we use Monte Carlo simulations to estimate the effects of canvassing and phone calls on voting preferences across levels of political awareness.<sup>21</sup> These results are displayed in Figure 1. The sloped line represents the ITT effect at different levels of political awareness, the flat line references zero, and the shaded area denotes the 95% confidence interval around the ITT effect. The results for the candidate preference model are shown in the first row, and the results for the vote choice model

are shown in the second row; canvassing effects are in the first column and phone call effects are in the second column.

The findings strongly support Hypothesis 4. Politically unaware Republicans in the treatment group were less likely to support the endorsed Democratic candidate than politically unaware Republicans in the control group. The negative effect of the endorsement diminishes as political awareness increases, and politically aware Republicans in the treatment group are no more likely to oppose the Democratic candidate than politically aware Republicans in the control group. It is likely that these individuals had already made the decision to oppose the Democratic candidate, neutralizing the negative effect of the group's endorsement.

<sup>21</sup>The Monte Carlo simulations were performed by the *Clarify* package for *Stata* (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

**FIGURE 1 The Effect of Endorsing the Democratic Candidate among Republicans across Levels of Political Awareness**



Notes: ITT effects estimates calculated from pooled model in Table 5. The flat line references zero, the sloped line represents the ITT effect, and the shaded area represents the 95% confidence interval. Confidence intervals simulated with the *Clarify* program (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

## Discussion

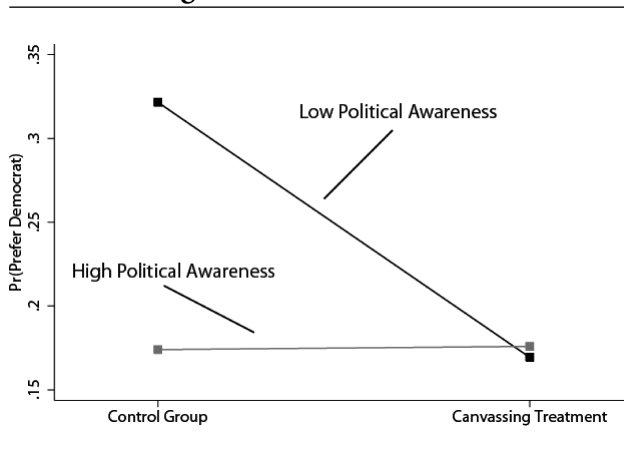
In sum, these results strongly suggest that voters use candidate endorsements as a voting heuristic in real-world settings. In the election we studied, voters in the entire population were exposed to a wide variety of appeals on television, in direct mail, and in direct contact regarding the Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race, the Pennsylvania governor’s race, and (in the case of television in particular) three competitive U.S. House races. The information available to voters about these two statehouse races was relatively low by contrast. The group that we worked with canvassed and phoned exclusively in these two statehouse races because of the possibility that the Pennsylvania statehouse could change from Republican to Democratic control and the importance of statehouse composition to the regulation of their core policy areas. By focusing exclusively on the statehouse races, the group may have given persuadable voters, especially those who pay little attention to politics, one of the few pieces of information available to them about these races, and it appears that Republicans in particular used the group’s endorsement as a negative signal.

Moreover, our findings also corroborate the thesis that politically unaware citizens can use the endorsement heuristic as a way to compensate for their lack of knowledge when they are given contextual clues that help them see the political significance of the message. In our study, the group did more than announce its endorsement; it also explicitly identified the candidate’s stance on an easy-to-understand issue (birth control and abortion rights) on which even politically unaware individuals likely have crystallized attitudes (Carmines and Stimson 1980).

Of course, it is also possible that the group mistakenly targeted prolife Republicans who merely rebuffed a persuasive message at odds with their predispositions rather than using the endorsement as a heuristic. To rule out this alternative explanation, we restrict the analysis to Republicans who expressed prochoice attitudes. In the postelection survey, we asked subjects, “Would you like to see the government and the courts make it harder to get an abortion than it is now, make it easier to get an abortion than it is now, or leave the ability to get an abortion the same as it is now?”<sup>22</sup> Figure 2 displays a simple

<sup>22</sup>We rotated the order in which “make it easier” and “make it harder” were listed.

**FIGURE 2** The Effect of Endorsing the Democratic Candidate among Republicans Who Support Abortion Rights



comparison of support for the Democratic candidate among Republicans who either support the status quo or want to liberalize access to abortion in the canvassing treatment group to similar Republicans in the control group for both politically aware and unaware respondents (we subdivide the sample at the median of the political awareness scale, *political awareness* = 2). The results show that even politically unaware Republicans who received an ostensibly proattitudinal message were less likely to support the Democratic candidate and more likely to behave like politically aware prochoice Republicans, who probably know that Democrats tend to be prochoice. Consequently, then, it does not appear that the support (or lack of support) for the Democratic candidates among prochoice Republicans hinged on the candidate's support for reproductive rights.

Why would prochoice Republicans be led to vote against the Democratic candidates upon learning that they share their views on reproductive rights? There are a number of possibilities, all of which are consistent with the thesis that contextual information contained in real-world group endorsements aids even the least informed. One possibility, following the reasoning offered by Lupia and McCubbins (1998), is that subjects inferred from the group endorsement that the candidate was more liberal than they would prefer on other issues—even though they agree with the candidate on the abortion issue.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, it is also possible that subjects inferred the ideology of the candidate directly from the candidate's stance on the birth control issue. This is certainly possible, but we do not see it as evidence of a persuasion effect. Instead, we believe that it fits with our theoretical argument that individuals can use contextual information (e.g., the candidate's issue position) to draw inferences about the candidate's ideology, and constitutes

Indeed, press coverage of women's rights organizations focuses heavily on the more liberal items in their issue agenda, such as abortion, which may lead even the politically uninformed to perceive these groups as extremely liberal (Barakso and Schaffner 2006). Another possibility is that the group may have spurred individuals to learn more about the candidates by paying more attention to news coverage or visiting their web sites. If so, Republicans in the treatment group may have not only learned their positions on issues that they did not agree with, but they may have also been more likely to learn that the endorsed candidate was a Democrat. In effect, the group endorsement may have enabled low-information voters to use an easy-to-use heuristic—partisanship. Finally, it is also possible that the controversial nature of the issue or the notoriety of the group is responsible for the negative effects uncovered here. Perhaps a different issue or a lesser-known group may have had more success (but see Nickerson 2007).

Additional research in both the lab and the field will help disentangle these possible mechanisms. This study contributes to our understanding of elections by rigorously demonstrating through the experimental method that group endorsements can help low-information voters behave as if they were informed, corroborating the causal direction posited in observational studies (e.g., Lupia 1994). Now is the time to push beyond the debate over the use (or misuse) of heuristics among the politically uninformed and devote more attention to identifying the *conditions* under which heuristics compensate for low levels of political information. It also offers some insight into practical politics. One should not read our findings as an indication that issue advocacy groups, such as women's rights organizations, should avoid engaging cross-pressured members of opposition groups. It is possible that given the right message or the right targeting strategy, groups could successfully increase their support with this approach. Instead, these findings demonstrate that groups should be careful about whom they talk to and what they say.

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evidence that even politically unaware individuals can use group endorsements (whether it be information in the message itself or the source cue) as a heuristic.

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