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# Truth or Consequences?

Character and Swing Voters in  
the 2000 Election

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## Abstract

Character is a common theme in presidential elections, but research on how it affects the vote has lagged. With the country more polarized, the influence of swing voters on election outcomes has increased. This article examines the impact of evaluations of candidate character on the vote choices of independent voters, using the 2000 election as a test case. It finds that character had a greater impact on the voting of independents than of partisans, and that the importance of character evaluations was disproportionately concentrated on George W. Bush.

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In a politically polarized environment, independent voters—individuals who call themselves independents and identify with neither major party—are crucial to electoral success. Candidates run their campaigns on this assumption, and academic models routinely confirm that partisan voters are much more difficult to sway (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Miller and Shanks 1996). However, despite the wide recognition of the importance of independent voters in an environment where partisans are less easily moved (Bartels 2000), scholars struggle to understand the factors that influence the voting decisions made by independents.

Concurrent with the rising importance of independents, researchers have started to take a closer look at the influence of character on the vote. A series of recent presidential elections in which character was salient seems to have piqued scholars' interest (e.g., Doherty and Gimpel 1997). Overall, however, the results of these studies are mixed. In general, the impact of character on vote choice is attenuated once one considers the traditional explanations of voting decisions, such as party identification, policy preferences, and the voter's background characteristics.

The analysis in this article seeks to synthesize these two literatures by asking an important, though previously overlooked, question: What role do character evaluations play in independents' voting decisions? The study of character among independents is an important test case for the role of character in American politics. Precisely because they lack strong party affect, independent voters should be sus-

ceptible to character-based appeals. Consequently, if character matters at all, it should matter most among independents.

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The inquiry begins by reviewing past research on character, then examines the context of the 2000 presidential election and an explanation of why character should matter most to independents. Hypotheses concerning the impact of character on voters in the 2000 presidential election are tested. The results show that character plays a large role

in independents' voting decisions. The analysis concludes with a discussion of the implications of character evaluations in contemporary politics.

### **Past Research**

While research on character is broadly applied in the study of social phenomena, two general approaches are especially salient. One examines the degree to which character influences or impedes democratic ideals in a variety of fora. The second investigates the degree to which character evaluations affect an individual's decisional process.

Much of the theoretical work in the public service literature seeks to provide a theoretical basis for analyzing questions of ethics (e.g., Garofalo and Geuras 1999; Svava 1997). Such theories are often explicitly or implicitly applied to a range of topics that includes the development of guidelines designed to enhance ethical behavior in public service (e.g., Josephson 1998), the examination of the degree to which democratic competition invites political corruption (e.g., Maletz 2002; Thayer 2000), and how the various aspects of character are, or ought to be, applied in the evaluation of a politician's behavior.

One application is seen in the work of James Pfiffner (2002), who developed a theoretical framework for evaluating ethical questions by identifying and analyzing the concepts of trustworthiness, reliability, loyalty, responsibility, prudence, and integrity. Taken together, these dimensions compose the entirety of character. Pfiffner treats them as independent and argues that a deficiency in one dimension should not be used to disparage the entirety of an individual's character. Strength or overabundance in one dimension (e.g., trustworthiness) could compensate for a lack in another (e.g., integrity). This view is consistent with virtue theory, which "emphasizes the whole person in ethical evaluation rather than the details of action" (Geuras and Garofalo 2002, 59).

Examples both supporting and contradicting Pfiffner's admonition abound. As Calvin Mackenzie (2002) points out, using George W. Bush as an example, the public has knowingly elected many politicians with a history of ethical lapses. Bill

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The authors thank Mike Abrams, Laura Bishin, Jamie Carson, John Cesario, Joe Doherty, James Gimpel, David Karol, Daniel Pedreira, and Daron Shaw for their comments, criticism, and praise for the paper. While editors are most often recognized for cleaning up text, Jonathan West deserves a special note of thanks for expanding the definition of editorial assistance.

Clinton's public approval ratings actually increased in the face of the impeachment scandal amid charges that seemed overly political in the eyes of an ethically ambivalent public (Bartels and Zaller 2001; Thompson 2000). However, voters often overlook the nuances described by Pfiffner. Even if a politician is weak in only one dimension of character, that aspect can easily become the criterion on which the whole character is judged. Indeed, it seems that the Bush campaign was successful in characterizing Al Gore in precisely this way.

A second field of research builds an understanding of how character evaluations affect the way individuals make decisions and how the decision-making process affects political outcomes. This work is based on the finding that personality characteristics are commonly used to form and update evaluations that precede decisions. For instance, people apply the same criteria that they find useful and informative in ordinary life to evaluate presidential candidates (Rahn et al. 1990). Thus in presidential politics, character is both directly and indirectly informative.

Character can be *directly* informative about a candidate's temperament and suitability for office. The traits of competence and integrity are especially important (Iyengar et al. 1980). Scandals that lead voters to question a candidate's judgment or to see the candidate as unpresidential can quickly ruin a candidacy (Stoker 1993). Character is also *indirectly* informative in that it provides clues as to how a candidate might govern once in office (Barber 1992; Miller et al. 1986) as well as to the candidate's concerns and priorities (Popkin 1991).

A handful of studies examine voters' emotional response to presidential candidates and its effect on vote choice and presidential approval (e.g., Marcus and Mackuen 1993; Marcus, Russell, and Mackuen 2000; Ragsdale 1991). Conclusions about the impact of character on an individual's vote for president are mixed. Focusing on perceptions of whether Bill Clinton was telling the truth about his draft status during the Vietnam War, Doherty and Gimpel (1997) find a large role for character evaluations beyond the impact of the economy in the election of 1992. In contrast, Miller and Shanks (1996) find that the impact of character evaluations on vote choice is substantially attenuated once economic and approval measures are controlled.

This analysis complements the existing literature in two primary ways. Theoretically, it provides an important empirical link to the theoretical work of scholars like Pfiffner (2002) and thereby makes it possible to evaluate the degree to which voting behavior corresponds to the nuanced view of the world advocated by virtue theorists. In addition, the analysis allows for an evaluation of the consequences of character assessments. In particular, the discussion in this paper evaluates the degree and manner in which character influences election outcomes while controlling for traditional explanations of the vote.

### **The Rise of Independents: A Role for Character?**

In the 1970s and 1980s, when the conventional wisdom said that fewer Americans identified strongly with either major party, the prospects for attracting votes from erstwhile supporters of the other party improved (cf. Keith et al. 1992). More recently, however, as Bartels (2000) contends, individual partisanship has become *increasingly* important to vote choice. This assertion implies that the votes of partisans are increasingly predictable—there is no phenomenon of “Bush Democrats.” More-

over, in 2000, the country was about as evenly split along party lines as it had been at any time in the preceding fifty years (National Election Studies 2004). Persuading independent voters is critical to success in presidential elections.

Individuals often make important inferences about candidates based on fairly subtle cues (Popkin 1991). Among independents, the partisan cues that so frequently determine vote choices are absent. Conventional wisdom holds that “swing voters” are driven by the candidates’ perceived stands, with a preference for moderation (Miller and Shanks 1996; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979). That such voters would not only be more moderate than hardcore partisans, but also more susceptible to campaign themes and election-specific issues (Shaw 1999), is widely recognized. For example, Frankovic and McDermott (2001) write that in the 2000 election, “Swing voters, who typically decide an election, were the most uncertain.” As Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1979) found, “voters who are cross-pressured by issues, or by party and issues, tend to be moderate, or swing, voters and support the candidate they see as the most moderate” (2001, 90).

This paper contends that a candidate’s character is important to independents precisely because the salience of cues such as character is increased for those not motivated by partisan considerations. When character looms large in an election, especially when there is a perception of clear differences between presidential candidates, it is likely to be central to the voting decisions of independents. This hypothesis is tested by examining the 2000 presidential election.

## **The Context**

The 2000 election is an appropriate test case for examining the effect of character on independent voters. First, character was a major theme in the election. From the outset, the Bush campaign sought to make character salient as a voting criterion. Second, there was substantial variation in the public’s perceptions of candidate character. These factors allow for the examination of whether or not character mattered in independents’ voting decisions, whether its effects were larger than for partisans, and whether a shift in the perception of a candidate’s character was strong enough to influence individual voting decisions.

The confluence of a strong national economy, the absence of international conflict, and a recent presidential scandal centered on personal integrity all helped to make character a central issue. For George W. Bush, a campaign centered solely on a traditional Republican platform of deficit reduction and tax cuts made little sense. The Lewinsky scandal had stigmatized the ethically embattled Clinton administration, and when combined with the lack of alternative campaign themes, this made an emphasis on character appealing.

The use of character as an issue was expected to disproportionately benefit Republicans. The Republican Party portrays itself as the “moral” choice because of its link with the Christian Right as well as an emphasis on so-called family values that, excepting Nixon, dates at least to the Eisenhower administration. Indeed, Petrocik (1996) argues that the public perception of Republicans as better promoters of moral values provides an “issue ownership” that advantages Republican candidates to the extent that candidates make these issues salient.

The Bush campaign launched its offensive against Gore’s character immediately after the two candidates had secured their parties’ presidential nominations. The

nature and composition of the attacks, for the most part, can be delineated into two phases. The first phase attempted to raise doubts about Gore's integrity and honesty. More specifically, the Bush campaign attacked Gore's character by highlighting such things as his fundraising visit to a Buddhist temple for President Clinton's 1996 re-election bid and his purported claim that he had invented the Internet.

The second phase was undertaken on the campaign trail. Here the Bush campaign continually attempted to tie Gore to Clinton. The following quotation is typical: "My opponent's campaign is a fitting close to the Clinton-Gore years. They're going out as they came in. Their guide? The nightly polls. Their goal? The morning headlines. Their inspiration? The fruitless search for a legacy."<sup>1</sup> This Bush statement highlights another essential component of the second phase—the attempt to question Gore's leadership ability by tying the impetus behind the Clinton-Gore policy positions to the whims of public opinion via polling data.

The strategic purpose of this attack was twofold. First, the Bush campaign was able to discredit Gore's character such that Bush seemed the only sensible choice. This tactic effectively freed the Bush campaign from having to demonstrate that its candidate was capable of leading the country, and instead placed this onus on the Gore campaign. Second, and most important, the Bush campaign attempted to link the issues of leadership and character in voters' minds. The Bush campaign presented strong character as a prerequisite to leadership. This strategy was perhaps most visible in George W. Bush's repeated promise to return honor and integrity to the White House and in commercials such as "Trust" that questioned Gore's ability to tell the truth (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2003). By implication, Gore lacked character and therefore could not lead effectively.

While Bush sought to make character salient, Gore's response on the character issue was limited primarily to the selection of Joseph Lieberman as the vice-presidential candidate.<sup>2</sup> This decision was made in large part to distance Gore from the Lewinsky fiasco and inoculate him on questions of character.<sup>3</sup> Lieberman's speeches regularly highlighted Gore's integrity and honesty as the central reasons for electing him.<sup>4</sup> This tactic, one of two attempts to undermine a Republican advantage on the character issue, largely failed. The Gore campaign's general response to Republican attacks on character was to rise above the fray. The campaign did this by publicly refusing to counterattack<sup>5</sup> or by simply ignoring Bush's allegations.<sup>6</sup> Instead, Gore highlighted his record and his superior knowledge of issues. These differences in strategy show why the 2000 election is such a good test laboratory for examining the impact of character among independents. While character was salient, it was used by only one side.

### **Quantifying Character**

The thesis laid out above—that independents are more susceptible to character-based appeals—was tested by examining whether or not the voting decisions of independents were influenced by perceptions of candidate character and whether or not the impact of such perceptions was stronger among independents. In addition, a comparison was made of the probability that independent and partisan decisions to vote for a candidate would change when evaluations of the candidate's character shift from favorable to unfavorable.

A study of the impact of character on voting requires a data source that includes

variables commonly used to explain voter behavior as well as variables that tap the themes that were prevalent in this election. The ideal data set should poll known voters, because the focus of interest is on how these themes affected vote choice. The Voter News Service, General Election Exit Poll 2000 (VNS) best meets these requirements. The VNS is unique, because unlike such widely used opinion polls as the American National Election Study, it samples known voters—the population of interest—as they leave the voting booth. Additionally, the VNS asks several questions that directly tap the impact of character on the vote choice. Finally, the poll is performed in numbers large enough to draw valid inferences—in the case of the form examined herein, 3,106 respondents.<sup>7</sup>

While the exit polls were controversial because they led to the incorrect call on the night of the election, that call was based not on the national sample employed here, but on the Florida state sample, which is substantively distinct (Mitofsky 2001). Indeed, the accuracy of the national poll employed for the purposes of this paper is guaranteed by the weights developed by the investigators and is easily validated. The official results show that Bush garnered 47.9 percent of the votes cast nationally, while the exit poll estimated that Bush obtained 47.6 percent.

Overall, about 23 percent of respondents identified themselves as independents. In order to assess the impact of the various influences on independents' vote choices, the analysis is restricted to these self-identified voters. The variables included in the analysis are taken from the literature on character and are described below and defined in Appendix A.

The dependent variable in this analysis is whether the respondent voted for George W. Bush. The *Bush Vote* is explained by a series of independent variables commonly used to explain an individual's voting behavior. The variables included in the model borrow heavily from Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960), Doherty and Gimpel (1997), and Miller and Shanks (1996).

First, a series of sociological and demographic variables are included in the model to account for an individual voter's background characteristics. Specifically, a series of dichotomous variables that account for whether or not the voter is *Black*, *Latino*, or *Female* are included. Each of these is scored 1 for group members and 0 otherwise and should be negatively signed. *Education* reflects the respondents' highest degree attained. Increasingly advanced degrees are scored more highly. Political philosophy, or *Ideology*, has also been demonstrated to have a large impact on the vote (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Voters' perceptions of economic trends are the second major factor hypothesized to affect voting decisions. The variable *Economy* accounts for the impact of economic evaluations by assessing the degree to which a respondent is worried about the future performance of the stock market (perceptions of current conditions).<sup>8</sup> Higher scores indicate less concern about the market. Unfortunately, the VNS does not contain retrospective economic evaluations (e.g., Fiorina 1981).

Third, attitudes toward salient issues may influence voters who are issue-driven. To account for the impact of issue evaluations on vote choice, dummy variables are included that tap respondents' preferences on three salient issues. The issues include questions about each candidate's plans for investing *Social Security* proceeds in the stock market, *Tax Cuts*, and strengthening *Gun Control* legislation. For each of these dummy variables, the position propounded by Bush is coded 1. The position closest to that held by Al Gore is coded 0. Similarly, some voters' decisions may be driven

by perceptions of the degree to which the candidates are knowledgeable. Two controls that account for the degree to which voters perceived Al Gore or George Bush as knowledgeable are also added. These two variables, called *Gore Knows* and *Bush Knows*, are coded 1 if the candidate was perceived as knowledgeable and 0 if seen as unknowledgeable. The *Gore Knows* variable should be negatively signed, while *Bush Knows* should be positively signed.

Fourth, the degree to which the incumbent administration is favorably viewed is held to influence vote choice. Voters' evaluations of President *Clinton* are operationalized using a three-point scale that assesses whether the voter would have liked to see the next president continue Clinton's policies or change to more liberal or conservative policies (retrospective evaluations of presidential performance). Higher scores are associated with support for George W. Bush.

Two questions from the poll are used to operationalize distinct aspects of character. First, the dummy variables *Bush Lies* and *Gore Lies* were created based on the question "Regardless of how you voted today, which of these candidates do you think would say anything to get elected president?" Respondents who replied "Bush" or "both would" were coded as viewing Bush as untruthful. Those who replied "Gore" or "neither" were coded as viewing Bush as truthful. Respondents who responded "Gore" or "both would" were coded as viewing Gore as untruthful. Those who replied "Bush" or "neither" were coded as viewing Gore as truthful. The second character question assesses the degree to which the candidates ran fair campaigns. In particular, responses to the question "Did either of these candidates attack the other unfairly?" are examined. Responses to this question were used to create the variables *Bush Unfair* and *Gore Unfair* coded as in the question above. If character exerted an independent influence on vote choice in the 2000 election, then the truthfulness and fairness variables should be large and significant predictors of the vote controlling for traditional influences. In particular, variables that improve the likelihood of voting for Bush, *Gore Lies* and *Gore Unfair*, will be positively signed, while those that decrease the probability of voting for Bush, *Bush Lies* and *Bush Unfair*, will be negatively signed.

The statistical model incorporating these variables is specified as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Bush Vote} = & a + \beta_1 * \text{Ideology} + \beta_2 * \text{Clinton} + \beta_3 * \text{Black} + \beta_4 * \text{Latino} \\ & + \beta_5 * \text{Education} + \beta_6 * \text{Female} + \beta_7 * \text{Economy} + \beta_8 * \text{Bush Knows} \\ & + \beta_9 * \text{Gore Knows} + \beta_{10} * \text{Bush Lies} + \beta_{11} * \text{Gore Lies} \\ & + \beta_{12} * \text{Bush Unfair} + \beta_{13} * \text{Gore Unfair} + \beta_{14} * \text{Social Security} \\ & + \beta_{15} * \text{Tax Cuts} + \beta_{16} * \text{Gun Control} + e. \end{aligned}$$

### **Results: How Much Does Character Count?**

Probit, which is appropriate when the dependent variable is dichotomous, as in the case of examining whether or not a respondent voted for Bush, is used to estimate factors affecting *Bush Vote*. However, because the exit polls were not based on a simple random sample, we need to account for sample weights in order to ensure representativeness.<sup>9</sup> The results of this estimation are seen in Table 1.

These results are interesting for several reasons. First, the socio-economic background characters *Black*, *Latino*, *Sex*, *Ideology*, *Economy*, and *Education*, which are so powerful in vote analyses that examine the mass public (e.g., Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), while correctly signed, are surprisingly silent. None of these factors

**TABLE 1**  
**Probit of Influences on the Bush Vote**

	<i>Independent voters</i>	<i>Restricted model</i>
Constant	-2.28** (0.758)	-3.39*** (0.493)
Bush lies	-1.07*** (0.225)	
Gore lies	0.699** (0.258)	
Bush unfair	-0.883** (0.305)	
Gore unfair	0.635* (0.316)	
Bush knowledgeable	1.50*** (0.177)	
Gore knowledgeable	-1.23*** (0.231)	
Black	-0.217 (0.40)	-0.537 (0.347)
Latino	0.081 (0.438)	-0.005 (.324)
Sex	0.116 (0.182)	0.145 (0.139)
Ideology	0.170 (0.168)	0.439** (0.14)
Economy	0.137 (0.115)	-0.061 (0.087)
Education	-0.017 (0.087)	-0.002 (0.062)
Social Security	0.712*** (0.181)	0.865*** (0.143)
Tax cuts	0.211 (.186)	.677*** (.144)
Gun control	0.276 (0.193)	0.755*** (0.152)
Clinton approval	0.479*** (0.133)	0.544*** (0.121)
P>F	0.00	0.00
N	591	614

Standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

affected the votes of independents. Indeed, among the conventional explanations of the vote, only *Clinton Approval* and *Social Security* are statistically significant. Second, consistent with expectations, the candidate knowledge and character variables are highly significant and correctly signed.<sup>10</sup>

The preceding results show that character plays a significant role in vote decisions by independents. However, they do not depict whether the impact of character is different for independents and for partisans. This phenomenon is examined by



**TABLE 2**  
**Probability of Voting for George Bush When Perception of Candidates Shifts from Favorable to Unfavorable Response on a Series of Character Variables Using Probabilities from Weighted Survey Data**

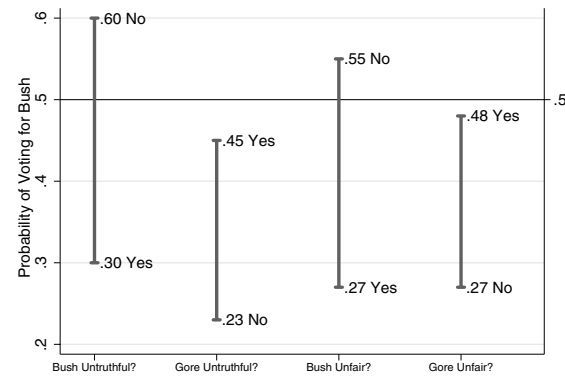
<i>Action</i>	<i>Independents</i>		<i>Partisans</i>	
	<i>Probability shift</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>Probability shift</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Bush lies	-0.31	0.08	-0.10	0.05
Gore lies	0.22	0.08	0.07	0.05
Bush unfair	-0.28	0.08	-0.16	0.04
Gore unfair	0.21	0.08	0.17	0.05
Bush lies and is unfair	-0.55	0.08	-0.26	0.05
Gore lies and is unfair	0.39	0.08	0.24	0.06

comparing a baseline model that explains voting decisions without accounting for the influence of character among independents with an “unrestricted” model that does account for the influence of character among independents. A likelihood ratio test is used to compare the explanatory power of the two models. The precise specification of the two models can be seen in Appendix C. The results of this test depict significant differences ( $\chi^2(4) = 41.19; p < 0.00$ ) across the models. A model accounting for character differences among independents is significantly different from one that does not. This result provides additional support for the thesis that character has a disproportionate impact among independents.

The statistical analyses given above show that character variables play an important and statistically different role among independents. However, these results say little about the magnitude of the impact of the character variables in the voting calculus. In particular, owing to the difficulty in interpreting probit coefficients, assessing the magnitude of the impact of character is not straightforward.

The magnitude of the character variables is calculated by creating a hypothetical “average” voter—one with characteristics set to the average of each of the variables included in the analysis. By manipulating the character variables one at a time, from truthful to untruthful and fair to unfair, the manner in which shifts in character perceptions influence the probability of voting for Bush can be examined. Moreover, by estimating the same quantities for the traditional voting model among all voters one can examine whether the impact of character is disproportionately large among independents. These simulations are performed using the Clarify procedure developed by King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000), which uses simulation to calculate both the quantities of interest and the confidence intervals. The results of these calculations are seen in Table 2.

Several results emerge from Table 2. First, the impact of character is huge. A shift in the perception of a candidate’s character substantially changes the probability of voting for George Bush. In no case does the impact of change in a character variable change the vote probability by less than twenty percentage points. Second, the effects of shifts in character are asymmetric. In each of the three cases examined, a change in the perception of Bush’s character has a disproportionately large influence on the vote as compared with a shift in the perception of Al Gore’s character.



**Figure 1. Change in the Probability of Voting for Bush When Character Variables Shift from Favorable to Unfavorable**

Third, comparing across columns, the impact of character is seen to be disproportionately large among independents. In every case, the magnitude of the shift in the probability of voting for Bush is larger for independents than for partisans.

While depicting the size, shifts in the predicted probabilities fail to explain whether or not such changes in vote probabilities are determinative of an individual's final voting decision. Put more simply, a 10 percent decrease in the probability of voting for him that causes a voter to go from being 80 percent to 70 percent likely to vote for Bush is less substantively important than a shift from 55 percent to 45 percent. In this latter case the vote decision changes as a result of the shift. Consequently, it is important to examine the impact of these probability shifts in combination with their magnitude.

The impact of these shifts is depicted in Figure 1. The figure shows the probability of voting for Bush relative to the 50 percent line, an important referent above which all voters would vote for Bush and below which all voters would vote against him. Perhaps most obvious from this figure is that in each of the Bush plots the shift in the probabilities easily crosses the 50 percent threshold. In contrast, the Gore character evaluations do not lead to a shift across this line. In other words, a shift in the average voter's perception of Bush from truthful or fair to untruthful or unfair leads this average voter to change from voting for Bush to voting against him. These plots suggest that for many voters a shift in the perception of Bush from fair to unfair or from truthful to untruthful led them to change their vote. The shifts for Gore are not only smaller but less substantively significant, leading to no such change.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In today's polarized political climate, the importance of independent voters for the outcome of presidential elections cannot be understated. The findings demonstrate that character was a significant influence on independents' voting decisions in 2000. While past studies frequently overlook the impact of character on independents, the results presented herein show that character evaluations have a significant influence on the vote. The impact of character is larger for independents than for partisans. Moreover, the results suggest that for some candidates the impact of character can be decisive. More specifically, shifts in the perception of

George W. Bush from truthful or fair to untruthful or unfair led voters who supported him to oppose him.

These asymmetric results suggest that the impact of character is far more complex than generally assumed. While many studies do not allow for the estimation of asymmetric effects, the results demonstrate that such effects can not only occur but can be substantively quite large. The findings indicate that character evaluations of Bush affected voting decisions, whereas evaluations of Gore did not.

The findings also indirectly support the nuanced view of character articulated by virtue theory and espoused in practice by Pfiffner's (2002) emphasis on the multiple dimensions and complexity of character. Clearly different aspects of character affect voting decisions to differing degrees. Future research ought to further investigate the degree to which these different dimensions affect political decisions.

The results also speak to questions of electoral strategy. Given the campaign context described herein, the results might be seen as suggesting that a candidate's greatest strength also poses potentially the greatest weakness. While Bush raised character as an issue in the campaign, he was also the candidate for whom character seemed to have the greatest substantive impact. While this is probably because voters who cared most about character went to the ballot box to vote for Bush and against Gore, it suggests a unique vulnerability on the part of those making such charges. In particular, the findings suggest that those who stand on a specific issue as the rationale for their candidacy are especially susceptible to charges against them on that issue. If such charges are made effectively, the candidate who espouses the issue as central appears especially vulnerable on the issue. In the context described above, Al Gore might have been substantially advantaged had he been able or willing to use the character issue against George Bush.

## NOTES

1. George Bush, as quoted in the *Guardian*, October 27, 2000.

2. See *New York Times*, September 7, 2000, A27; *Montreal Gazette*, August 17, 2000, A1.

3. Ironically, Gore was selected, in part, to inoculate Clinton on character issues. See Betty Fouhy interview at [www.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/2000/8/7/fouhy/](http://www.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/2000/8/7/fouhy/).

4. *New York Daily News*, August 17, 2000, 2.

5. See *Buffalo News*, October 4, 2000.

6. See *Washington Post*, July 28, 2000, A16.

7. The sample most appropriate for investigating character issues (i.e., the gray form) constituted about one-quarter of the entire exit poll ( $N = 13,265$ ), which consisted of four separate surveys.

8. Unfortunately, this was the only question in the study that assessed perceptions of national economic trends. However, Gleisner (1992) shows that the change in the Dow Jones Industrial Average during an election year significantly affects a presidential candidate's vote share.

9. The weights are incorporated through application of the survey weights and estimation using the `svyprobit` command in Stata.

10. An alternative explanation is that vote decisions are not influenced by character, but that character evaluations are used to justify the vote choice after the ballot is cast. This hypothesis is examined and rejected in Appendix B.

11. It is also possible that respondents who voted for candidates other than Bush or Gore evaluated both Bush and Gore as unfair and untruthful. However, no responses fit this pattern.

12. This is an extremely conservative test because it requires the voter to behave in a manner consistent with the thesis on only one issue on the entire survey.

13. Using other variables as instruments obtains substantially similar results.

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**Appendix A**  
**Variables Used in Statistical Analysis**

<i>Variable name</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Coding</i>
Bush vote	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question C.	1 if respondent voted for Bush, 0 otherwise.
Party	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question DD.	1 if Republican, 0 otherwise.
Ideology	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question EE.	1 if liberal, 2 if moderate, 3 if conservative.
Black	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question B.	1 if Black, 0 otherwise.
Latino	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question B.	1 if Latino, 0 otherwise.
Female	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question A.	1 if female, 0 otherwise.
Bush knows	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question T.	1 if Bush alone, or if both Bush and Gore have the knowledge to serve effectively as president, 0 otherwise.
Gore knows	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question T.	1 if Gore alone, or if both Bush and Gore have the knowledge to serve effectively as president, 0 otherwise.
Bush lies	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question P.	1 if Bush alone, or both Bush and Gore would say anything to get elected president, 0 otherwise.
Gore lies	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question P.	1 if Gore alone, or both Bush and Gore would say anything to get elected president, 0 otherwise.
Economy	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question Z.	1 if very worried, 2 if some what worried, 3 if not too worried, 4 if not worried at all.
Education	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question BB.	1 Did not complete high school, 2 high school graduate, 3 some college or associate degree, 4 college graduate, 5 postgraduate study.
Bush unfair	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question AA.	1 if Gore alone, or both Bush and Gore attacked their opponent unfairly, 0 otherwise.

Gore unfair	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question AA.	1 if Bush alone, or both Bush and Gore attacked their opponent unfairly, 0 otherwise.
Gun control	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question Y.	1 oppose, 0 support.
Tax cuts	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question S.	1 A larger plan providing an across-the board tax cut to most people, 0 A smaller plan targeting tax cuts to lower- and middle-income people.
Social Security	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question R.	1 support, 0 oppose.
Clinton	VNS general election exit polls, 2000. Question I.	1 Change to more liberal policies, 2 Continue Clinton's policies, 3 Change to more liberal policies.

All question locations are based on the Grey form. Question wording was identical across forms, but the question order varied.

### **Appendix B Endogeneity: An Alternative Explanation?**

A rival explanation for the cause of these results is that instead of character influencing vote choice, respondents might try to justify their vote choice on the basis of *post hoc* character evaluation. The patterns of responses to the character questions reveal whether or not a respondent could have engaged in *post hoc* behavior. For each of the character questions asked, voters are asked to evaluate whether: both Bush and Gore, Bush alone, Gore alone, or neither Bush nor Gore engaged in untruthful or unfair behavior. As seen in Table B1, only those who both responded “Bush alone” and voted for Gore or responded “Gore alone” and voted for Bush, patterns of behavior depicted by paths 2 and 3, can possibly be engaging in the *post hoc* justification of their vote, since to answer otherwise is to fail to provide any justification for voting for one over the other.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, these answer combinations allow for the identification of voters who are not behaving in a manner consistent with the predictions of the *post hoc* justification process.

This insight into the patterns of behavior required for *post hoc* justification makes it possible to assess the degree to which such behavior explains the results presented in Table 1. The impact of character among those respondents who did not engage in *post hoc* justification can be tested in order to see whether character influenced the vote decision. Specifically, if character is merely a function of *post hoc* rationalization, it should not be a significant predictor of the vote for individuals who did not engage in *post hoc* rationalization.

Whether or not character matters among these (non-*post hoc*) individuals is

(continued)

investigated in order to bolster confidence in the mechanism underlying the results presented in Table 1. More specifically, respondents are categorized according to whether or not they may have engaged in *post hoc* rationalization by using the knowledge variable as an instrument. The knowledge instrument is especially useful because while knowledge does not reflect an aspect of character, it is a proxy likely to be used by someone who engaged in the *post hoc* process, thereby making it possible to include both the fairness and truthfulness items in a model. The model estimates the impact of the fairness and truthfulness variables among those who did not engage in *post hoc* rationalization by omitting the knowledge variable and using it to identify those voters who are behaving inconsistent with the *post hoc* justification (those whose behavior is described in paths 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8).

Taken together the results in Table B1 provide strong evidence against the *post hoc* rationalization thesis. In almost every case, the results of these analyses are significant and in the expected direction, consistent with those presented in Table B2.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the coefficients on the fairness variables are *larger* among the group of respondents who did not engage in *post hoc* rationalization of their vote.<sup>13</sup>

In combination, these results suggest that character played a large role in the 2000 election. While the possibility that some *post hoc* evaluation occurred cannot be eliminated, inclusion of these respondents clearly does not inflate the estimates of the impact of character. For the large portion of the sample that could not logically have engaged in such rationalization, character was a statistically significant influence on the vote.

**TABLE B1**  
**Mapping of Answers and Motivations**

<i>Candidate exhibiting negative character trait</i>	<i>Vote choice</i>	<i>Behavioral motivation</i>
1. Bush alone	Vote for Bush	
2. Bush alone	Vote for Gore	Post hoc rationalization?
3. Gore alone	Vote for Bush	Post hoc rationalization?
4. Gore alone	Vote for Gore	
5. Both Bush and Gore	Vote for Bush	
6. Both Bush and Gore	Vote for Gore	
7. Neither Bush nor Gore	Vote for Bush	
8. Neither Bush nor Gore	Vote for Gore	



**TABLE B2**  
**Influences on Bush Vote for Voters That Did Not Justify Post Hoc**

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*Knowledgeable*

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Constant	-1.68** (0.794)
Bush lies	-0.896*** (0.257)
Gore lies	0.437 (0.359)
Bush unfair	-0.967*** (0.316)
Gore unfair	0.736** (0.341)
Bush knowledgeable	
Gore knowledgeable	
Black	-0.078 (0.507)
Latino	0.045 (0.45)
Sex	0.14 (0.205)
Ideology	0.167 (0.191)
Economy	0.048 (0.13)
Education	-0.028 (0.096)
Social Security	0.753*** (0.208)
Tax cuts	0.153 (0.214)
Gun control	0.258 (0.22)
Clinton approval	0.464*** (0.153)
P>F	0.00
N	270

Standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Voters who did not claim that character issues were unique to one candidate or the other but instead ascribed the characteristics to both or neither candidate.

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### Appendix C

#### Restricted and Unrestricted Models Used to Assess the Impact of Differences in Character Between Partisans and Independents

##### *Unrestricted Model*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Bush Vote} = & \alpha + \beta_1 * \text{Ideology} + \beta_2 * \text{Clinton} + \beta_3 * \text{Black} + \beta_4 * \text{Latino} \\ & + \beta_5 * \text{Education} + \beta_6 * \text{Female} + \beta_7 * \text{Economy} + \beta_8 * \text{Bush Knows} \\ & + \beta_9 * \text{Gore Knows} + \beta_{10} * \text{Bush lies} + \beta_{11} * \text{Gore lies} \\ & + \beta_{12} * \text{Bush Unfair} + \beta_{13} * \text{Gore Unfair} + \beta_{14} * \text{Social Security} \\ & + \beta_{15} * \text{Tax Cuts} + \beta_{16} * \text{Gun Control} + \beta_{17} * \text{Party} \\ & + \beta_{18} * (\text{Independent} * \text{Bush lies}) + \beta_{19} * (\text{Independent} * \text{Gore lies}) \\ & + \beta_{20} * (\text{Independent} * \text{Bush Unfair}) \\ & + \beta_{21} * (\text{Independent} * \text{Gore Unfair}) + \varepsilon. \end{aligned}$$

##### *Restricted Model:*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Bush Vote} = & \alpha + \beta_1 * \text{Ideology} + \beta_2 * \text{Clinton} + \beta_3 * \text{Black} + \beta_4 * \text{Latino} \\ & + \beta_5 * \text{Education} + \beta_6 * \text{Female} + \beta_7 * \text{Economy} + \beta_8 * \text{Bush Knows} \\ & + \beta_9 * \text{Gore Knows} + \beta_{10} * \text{Bush lies} + \beta_{11} * \text{Gore lies} \\ & + \beta_{12} * \text{Bush Unfair} + \beta_{13} * \text{Gore Unfair} + \beta_{14} * \text{Social Security} \\ & + \beta_{15} * \text{Tax Cuts} + \beta_{16} * \text{Gun Control} + \beta_{17} * \text{Party} + \varepsilon. \end{aligned}$$

$$LR \chi^2 (4) = 41.19; P > \chi^2 = 0.00$$

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