ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	EMPATHY AND ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY
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In this dissertation, I examine the important role empathy has on voting behavior and election outcomes. First, I provide a rationale for why Americans find empathy a desirable trait in a leader. I argue that voters desire an empathetic leader, not because empathy is an inherently desirable trait as the literature so often assumes, but because this form of caring indicates that a politician is uniquely motivated and qualified to help others. And whereas prior scholarship emphasizes partisanship and global evaluations of politicians on support, I show how perceptions of empathy can serve as a heuristic for voters. This heuristic is especially important when voters do not have a partisan affiliation to influence their vote, such as in the case of pure independent voters and partisan voters in primaries.

Second, I present a theory to explain why some politicians are perceived as more empathetic than others. Perceptions of empathy, I argue, are shaped largely by the presence of commonalities that link voters with a politician. In discussing the importance of commonalities, I differentiate between sympathy and empathy. I argue that empathy in a politician, or their ability to walk in another's shoes, is more powerful than sympathy as a motivator of support. When a politician simply claims to "care" for the average American, voters may be skeptical. By demonstrating a common link with the voter, the politician overcomes what I call the "sincerity barrier," or the tendency of individuals to approach the promises of politicians with skepticism. The key theoretical contribution in this dissertation is a classification scheme for the types of commonalities perceived by voters that lead to stronger perceptions of empathy: 1) a shared experience; 2) a shared emotion; or 3) a shared identity. To support this theory, I rely on a mixed-method approach, using in-depth interviews with political professionals, nationally representative surveys, and behavioral experiments.

EMPATHY AND ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

by

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Chapter 1: An Empathy-Driven Model of Electoral Politics

"I'm an angry voter, how 'bout that? I'm angry about the way the country is working for the blue-collar worker." – Dave Williams of the Cement Finishers Local 179[1]

There are few places that have been more devastated by our trade policies than Pittsburgh… I'm angry at our leaders for being so damn stupid. – Donald Trump[2]

In the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, many political pundits wondered how a candidate who committed so many perceived gaffes managed to win over enough of the electorate to prevail in the Electoral College. Critics struggled to understand how the country had elected Donald Trump, a man who during the campaign sparred with everyone from Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan to a gold star family speaking about their son, a fallen U.S. Army Captain. *Vanity Fair* summed up the feelings of many when they ran a column simply entitled "Oh God, How Did This Happen?"

Yet for all the hand-wringing and head-scratching that followed the surprising outcome of the election, quotes like the ones above help illuminate an important reason why Donald Trump was able to hold together a winning electoral coalition: Trump was able to connect with voters in a way his opponent, Hillary Clinton, was unable to. Many

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[1] Washington Post, "Super Tuesday II: Clinton sweeps Florida, Illinois, Ohio and North Carolina; Rubio quits after Trump wins Florida," March 15, 2016.
[2] Donald Trump speech in Pittsburgh, PA. April 13, 2016.

white working-class voters saw in Trump a man willing to fight for the ideals they valued—someone who would not bend to the political establishment.

The personal connection that existed between Trump and blue-collar voters might seem surprising at first. Donald Trump was not known for his humble beginnings. He had not lived the average middle-class American life, nor had he spent decades in public service championing policies to benefit the poor, working, and middle classes. Instead, Trump grew up in a wealthy family, achieved success in business largely through the help of his wealthy father, and had lived his life in the public eye as a billionaire developer and reality TV star. Through his bravado and gold-plated lifestyle, Trump never tried to portray himself as the "common man" with working-class roots. Yet for all the apparent disconnect with average Americans, Trump exuded an anger and disgust with status quo politics that connected with people who had backgrounds that differed greatly from his own.

As I argue in this dissertation, the connection between Trump and white working-class Americans was one based on a type of empathy that is not adequately understood in the political science literature. Prior scholarship has too frequently treated empathy in a politician as an intrinsically valuable character trait without determining why citizens want it in a leader or examining how citizens go about determining a politician has it. With this research, I offer a new theory that explains why some politicians are perceived as more empathetic or compassionate than others and provides a rationale for why Americans find this trait desirable. Central to the theory is an argument for the importance of distinguishing between political sympathy and political empathy. While both of these traits may be defined as types of compassion, they are not equal in the eyes

of voters. A sympathetic politician will claim to care about Americans and want to better their lives, but an empathetic politician will find a common bond with the voter that lends credibility to that claim. This commonality suggests that the politician can more easily put themselves in the shoes of the common person and will, therefore, be more willing or motivated to solve the problems people face.

Empathy, as I show, can be perceived in various ways. A key feature of my theory is a more expansive conceptualization of political empathy that involves a classification scheme for the ways in which voters come to view a politician as truly caring about people like them: A shared experience; a shared identity; or a shared emotion. While Donald Trump may have lacked many common experiences to link himself to working class voters, it was through shared emotion, I argue, that he found a connection with voters who came from financial backgrounds immensely different from his own.

Empathy as a driver of support for Donald Trump runs counter to much of the common wisdom that existed during and even after the 2016 election. It was Khizr Khan, the father of fallen U.S. Army Captain Humayun Khan, who claimed that Trump was unqualified to be president because he was "without empathy for its citizens."[3] Trump's criticism of the Khan family drew widespread condemnation from both sides of the political spectrum. Trump's demand for a registry of Muslims living in the United States, his insistence on a border wall, and secretly recorded comments he made regarding his ability to get away with uninvited advances toward women had given many observers the impression he was incapable of compassion toward less-privileged Americans. This

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[3] NBC, Meet the Press Interview with Khizr Khan, July 31, 2016.

apparent disregard for others, coupled with his lifetime living in enormous wealth, would surely convince voters that he could not be trusted.

Yet Trump was facing an opponent in Hillary Clinton who had spent decades in politics and similarly faced questions of trustworthiness. While Trump was rich, it wasn't as though Hillary Clinton was poor. By 2014, Hillary and Bill Clinton had capitalized on their political fame to the tune of roughly $110 million.[4] Furthermore, Hillary Clinton had earned some of that wealth giving highly-paid speeches to various Wall Street financial institutions. Her unwillingness to disclose the content those speeches and the criticism that followed cast suspicion on her sincerity and willingness to work for the common person.[5] Ultimately, Clinton did not do what Trump or Obama before her had done. She failed to connect with her audience on a personal or emotional level. While Obama could inspire with "hope and change" and Trump could incite with anger toward the Washington elite, Clinton was a part of that same Washington elite. She was, therefore, less able to connect with voters.

Neither Clinton nor Trump, then, may have had an advantage in terms of common experiences or common identities with the voters. Yet Trump connected with many, especially those in the base of the Republican Party, who after eight years of President Obama were angry with the way things were going in the country. Like his own supporters, Trump was not afraid to call Democrats or Republican leadership stupid for the things they had done. This connection, based on a deeply-held emotional orientation toward opposing political leaders, was a huge driver of support for Trump.

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[4] Fortune, "How Hillary and Bill Clinton Parlayed Decades of Public Service into Vast Wealth." February 15, 2016.
[5] USA Today, "Mrs. Clinton, and your speeches?" May 15, 2016.

In 2016, the American National Election Studies (ANES) asked how often Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton made people feel angry. Unsurprisingly, a large proportion of individuals (around 40 percent) who voted in the primaries claimed the leading candidate of the opposing party "always" made them angry.

Figure 1.1 shows that anger was much more strongly associated with support for Trump in the Republican Primary than it was for Clinton in the Democratic Primary. Among GOP primary voters, those who said they were always angry with Hillary Clinton voted for Trump by a 2-to-1 margin. In contrast, only 42 percent of those who said they were less angry with Clinton said they supported Trump in the primary.

Figure 1.1: Support for Trump/Clinton in the 2016 Primary by Anger toward the Opposition Candidate
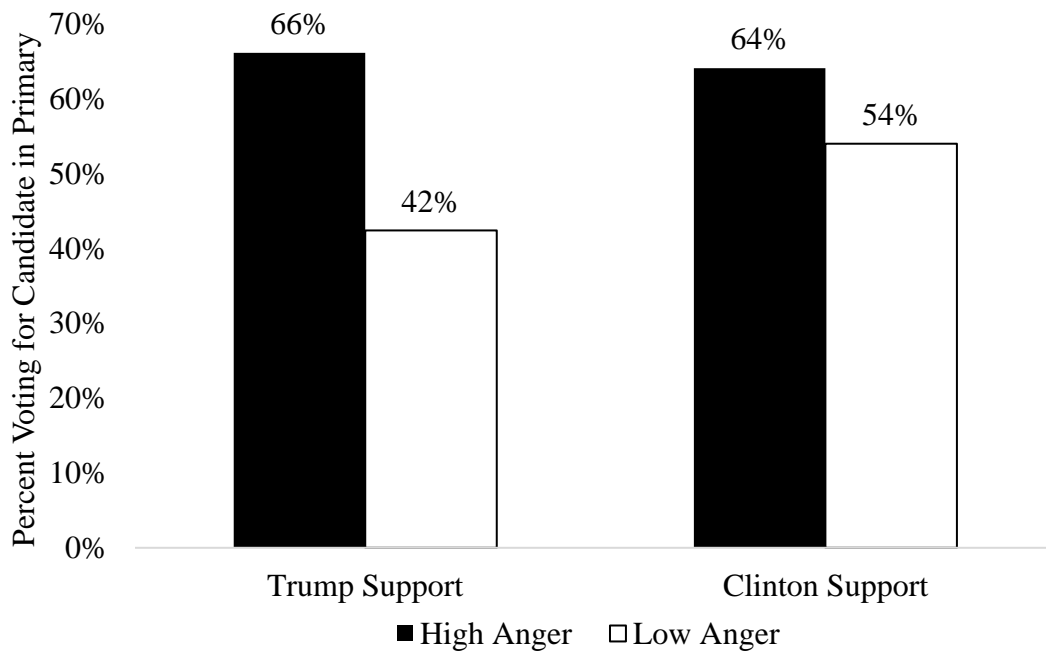
Source: 2016 American National Election Studies (numbers represent weighted frequencies)

In the case of Clinton, however, anger played only a modest role. Those who claimed to be angry with Trump did support Clinton at higher rates, yet the gap is less than half the 24 percentage-point gap among GOP primary voters. Trump's support was

dependent on the anger he exuded, which connected with the Republican base. Clinton, who did not show that same anger, was far less reliant on it for support.

1.1 Vulture Capitalism, Compassionate Conservatism, and "I Feel Your Pain"

While unique in many ways, the contest between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump was not exceptional in terms of the important role a personal connection played in voting decisions. Figure 1.2 plots what I call the "Democratic Compassion Advantage" (the degree to which the Democrat is perceived as more compassionate than the Republican in a given presidential election) and the vote margin. Since 1992, the Democratic candidate has been perceived as at least somewhat more compassionate than the Republican, but the margin correlates with an important shift in electoral fortunes.

Figure 1.2 Democratic Compassion Advantage and Electoral Outcomes 1992-2016
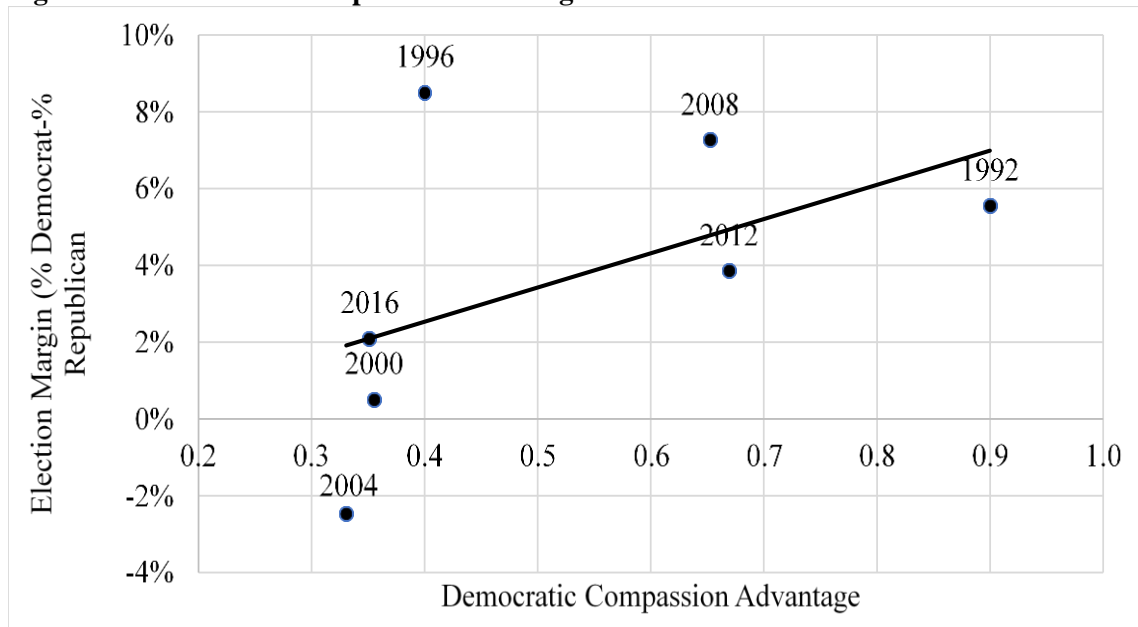
Source: 1992-2016 ANES

Using the modern era of 1992-2016 as a guide, Figure 1.2 suggests that being perceived as relatively more compassionate than your opponent can garner you more than four percentage points in the margin of the election. While this is only a crude measure of

compassion's influence on elections, and perceptions of compassion are certainly not the only factor that influences election outcomes, it is notable that this four-point swing would be enough to change the outcome of four of the last seven presidential elections.

In a number of the elections examined in this research, political observers noted the important role compassion, and more specifically, empathy played in determining the outcome of elections. The 2012 Election was particularly noteworthy, as numerous gaffes committed by Mitt Romney helped political opponents paint him as an out-of-touch or aloof technocrat.[6] Romney, who had already been criticized for his history of laying off workers while the head of "vulture capitalist"[7] firm Bain Capital, made things worse when he ineloquently stated he was "not concerned about the very poor" because they already had a safety net. While Romney was trying to put the emphasis of government aid on middle-class families rather than the very poor, claiming to be "not concerned" about families who are struggling the most was widely perceived as a misstep.

It would be far from his last misstep, however. In the second presidential debate, Romney tried to demonstrate his commitment to diversity by noting that, while Governor of Massachusetts, he had staffers come up with "binders full of women" who could be appointed to work for the state. Yet the notion that he needed "binders full of women" in order to hire qualified women lent further credence to the notion that he didn't understand the problems facing women in the workplace.[8] Additional anecdotes such as the time he tied his dog to the roof of his car[9] were used to demonstrate his lack of empathy for

[6] Newsweek, Niall Ferguson, "Romney is the Technocrat Candidate, but He's Politically Clueless." January 23, 2012.
[7] The Hill, "Newt Gingrich: Bain Capital 'undermined capitalism,' killed jobs." January 10, 2012.
[8] Second Presidential Debate, October 16, 2012.
[9] The Washington Post, "Mitt Romney's dog-on-the-car-roof story still proves to be his critics' best friend." March 14, 2012.

others, but even these stories may not have been as damning if his "robotic" demeanor didn't suggest to the voting public that the anecdotes reflected Romney's true personality.[10]

While Romney's own wealth likely contributed to the perception that he was out-of-touch with the common person, personal wealth does not make it impossible to connect with the masses. Donald Trump, despite his wealth, managed to connect on an emotional level with white working-class voters despite lacking true blue-collar experience. There is also strong evidence to suggest that, perhaps due to his personal style and demeanor, many Americans did not know Donald Trump was born wealthy. This lack of knowledge was associated with higher levels of support for Romney, mediated through the belief that he was empathetic toward others (McDonald, Karol, and Mason 2019).

The Romney example also contrasts against politicians such as George W. Bush who, like Romney, came from a background of tremendous wealth. Yet, unlike Romney, Bush had a personality and charm that connected with people who had backgrounds different from his own. Early in the 2000 campaign, Bush portrayed himself as representing a new kind of Republican, a "compassionate conservative." His laid-back demeanor, his record improving the public education system in Texas for poor and minority students,[11] and his ability to speak Spanish when visiting Latino voters lent credibility to his claims that he was in the presidential contest to better the lives of *all*

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[10] Brian Fung. The Atlantic, "The Uncanny Valley: What Robot Theory Tells Us About Mitt Romney." January 31, 2012.

[11] New York Times, "ON THE RECORD: Governor Bush and Education; Turnaround in Texas Schools Looks Good for Bush in 2000," May 28, 1999.

Americans rather than simply champion the cause of the business community, of which he was a part.

In 2004, Bush was further juxtaposed by John Kerry, a man who was painted as an out-of-touch wealthy windsurfing New England elitist, making it easier for George W. Bush to continue cultivating the perception he was the "compassionate conservative" fighting for the values of everyday Americans. While Democrats are generally perceived to be, on average, more compassionate than Republicans, the 2004 Election represents the smallest Democratic compassion advantage for all presidential elections from 1992 to 2016 (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). George W. Bush himself may have learned about the importance of connecting with voters on an emotional level by watching his own father lose out to Bill Clinton, whose "I feel your pain"[12] moments in the campaign catapulted him to the presidency. In contrast to the 2004 election where the Democrat's advantage on compassion was relatively narrow, Clinton's victory in 1992 represented the largest gap in the time period I examine here.

Examples such as these appear in nearly every presidential campaign and naturally receive attention from the media. Kendall (1995; 2000) shows that the media is drawn to stories about the personalities of the candidates for office, which are often simpler and easier to understand for a broad audience. In looking at the news coverage from old campaigns and in discussing the dynamics of campaign politics with both Republican and Democratic operatives, it becomes clear that campaigns and political pundits alike believe that perceptions of personality traits, namely those regarding compassion, are essential for winning over voters. In more recent decades, political

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[12] Clinton question and answer session, March 27, 1992.

scientists have also begun to examine the important role perceptions of compassion have in influencing voting decisions. The literature in political behavior and character traits finds strong evidence that voter perceptions of empathy, integrity, competence, and leadership influence vote choice and a host of other politically relevant measures of public support (Goren 2002; Holian and Prysby 2015; Kinder 1986; McCann 1990). Understanding why some politicians are perceived as compassionate while others are not, then, becomes paramount in explaining why some campaigns are successful while others are not.

1.2 Empathy's Importance on Voter Behavior

In this dissertation, I propose a new way of conceptualizing the politics of culpability and consequence. This theory accepts the argument that party ties are central to assigning blame and determining vote choice (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Lyons & Jaeger 2014) yet recognizes that small shifts in the way the public views the particular candidates in any election can lead to large changes in electoral outcomes (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 1992; Stimson 1991). I argue that a substantial number of voters cast ballots based on perceptions of candidate compassion, where the candidate's ability to project an image of caring for citizens trumps specific policy proposals in terms of winning voters.

The theory I present here helps explain vote choice among all Americans, but it is especially informative for explaining the vote choice of those who are most likely to sway an election. With regard to vote choice in a general election, this model places

central importance on the role of the independent voter. Independent voters,[13] by definition, cannot simply fall back on partisan preferences to justify their vote choice. Furthermore, I show that voters often infer the character traits of politicians based on important shared identities, one of which is partisanship. Democrats will be more willing to view a Democratic candidate as compassionate regardless of what other commonalities they may lack, and the same is true for Republicans. For independent voters, these evaluations are not so strongly influenced by partisanship. Still, in a media environment that focuses on personal stories, even the relatively disinterested independent voters who make up substantial portion of the American electorate should be able to develop an opinion as to the compassion of the candidates for office. And because partisanship cannot serve as a guide for their votes, perceptions of whether a candidate truly cares about people like them will play a more central role in their voting decisions. There are other contexts in which compassion should also matter a great deal. For example, I argue that perceptions of compassion matter to stronger partisans, especially with regard to voting in primaries where the partisan cue is not active.

The developments of the last thirty years in American political behavior make investigating the role of compassion crucial for understanding the election outcomes we see today and are likely to see in the future. Much of the scholarship in recent decades rightly focuses on the effect of partisanship on political behavior. Despite the important role partisanship plays in determining vote choice and general attitudes toward political actors, the rise in socio-political sorting has left Americans both deeply and evenly divided (see e.g. Mason 2013, Bishop and Cushing 2009). While the parties increasingly

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[13] Specifically, I refer to "pure independent" voters, who do not identify with either of the two major parties and who do not claim to "lean" toward one party or the other.

view each other with antipathy, pure independent voters (those who do not lean toward one party or another) remain a substantial portion of the American electorate. This group is further alienated by viciousness displayed by the two parties toward one another. Given the lack of a partisan lens and the relatively low levels of interest in politics, I argue that independent voters will fall back on character evaluations of the politicians in the selection of a candidate. And because the two partisan camps are so evenly divided, the roughly 15 percent of voters who do not lean toward either the Democratic or Republican parties become vitally important in determining the outcome of elections. As a result, more research is needed to examine the preferences of the relatively small number of persuadable voters who decide many political contests.

And while partisanship explains some variation in perceptions of compassion among those with partisan attachments, this relationship is far from deterministic. Some Republicans are willing to view the Democratic candidate as more compassionate, and some Democrats are willing to do the same for the Republican candidate. With the rise of social sorting, which generates both an increased preference for one's own group and a negative affect for the out-group (Mason 2018), the importance of compassion toward people *like you* is even more important today than it was in eras of low polarization. This is particularly true in primaries, where issue differences are minor and the debate can often center around issues of character, or who will be the strongest and most vociferous advocate for our "tribe." As a result, the dimension of empathy dealing with identity has become an increasingly important component in public opinion toward political leaders, one that is only expected to increase in the near future.

1.3 Defining Compassion and Explaining Variation

In much of the debate over the importance of whether a candidate cares about others, the terms "empathy," "sympathy," and "compassion" are often used interchangeably. In fact, in much of the prior work on voter perceptions of candidate traits, scholars define empathy as "caring about people" (Holian and Prysby 2015). Yet this framework is theoretically unsatisfying for two reasons. First, talking about empathy as an inherently desirable trait in a politician, as the literature so often does, fails to provide clear definitions of theoretically important concepts, most especially what "empathy" actually means to voters. I distinguish empathy from sympathy, because while either can represent compassion for another, empathy is a more personal and vulnerable form of compassion. Empathy requires someone to identify something in themselves that helps them connect with another, meaning empathy is conveyed through some type of commonality. This common bond better overcomes the public's tendency to be skeptical of political rhetoric. Second, equating sympathy with empathy obscures scholars' ability to identify the underlying mechanisms that lead individuals to connect more with a candidate who they perceive as empathetic. When we treat empathy, sympathy, and compassion as equivalent, it becomes more difficult to determine what voters are looking for in a politician. In short, prior work both erroneously equates caring to empathy and does not develop the process through which an individual decides a candidate "cares."

While politicians who are broadly seen as empathetic share particular characteristics, political science has yet to look rigorously at what the features of empathy are and why voters deem them desirable. Without understanding the causal mechanism underlying perceptions of compassion, any empirical study is of limited use. For political behavior scholars, my work should inform our understanding of what voters are looking

for in a politician. For political theorists, perceptions of a political leader's capacity for compassion shape the degree to which Americans trust their political institutions, which in turn shape what we want and expect from our government. For political professionals in charge of campaigns, the application of the theory I develop can help design new strategies to reach voters and win elections.

Compassion, as it applies to electoral politics, is best defined as a political candidate's ability to care for another (namely, caring for the individual making the evaluation). I do not refer here to sincere compassion on the part of the candidate, but instead to voter perceptions of compassion. I begin exploring the concept of compassion by considering what it means to the ordinary voter. In doing this, I differentiate between sympathy and empathy in order to illuminate what Americans are thinking of when they claim a politician "really cares" about people like them. Empathy, I hypothesize, more positively affects perceptions of compassion than sympathy because it implies that the politician can personally relate to the difficulties facing average Americans. Whereas sympathy refers to a general awareness of a problem, empathy denotes the ability of an individual to feel someone else's pain as if it were their own. This, I argue, makes the empathetic actor a more desirable leader in the eyes of voters. Someone who can feel the pain of another as if it were her own will be seen as more trustworthy when it comes to enacting policies that will benefit the voter and people the voter cares about. Because Americans care deeply about those in their own families and communities, empathy signals to the voter that the candidate is on the voter's side and will deliver on whatever instrumental or expressive benefit the voter values.

Perceptions of empathy, then, are one of the most accessible voting heuristics, as they do not require voters to have a deep understanding of policy or how particular campaign promises will affect their daily lives. This is critical, since voters on average have too many demands on their time to be fully informed about important political issues (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). In exploring the pathway from empathy to compassion and eventual political support, I identify three critical dimensions of candidate empathy perceived by voters: one based on personal experience (I've been through what you are going through); one based on identity (I am who you are); and one based on emotion (I feel the way you feel). The better a voter can identify commonalities along these dimensions that serve to link them to the politician, the more strongly they will believe that candidate truly cares about people like them. This has clear implications for explaining election outcomes.

The evidence I present in later chapters suggests that voters are most persuaded to support the candidate who can provide evidence of genuine empathy for the average voter. Genuine empathy is conveyed through a shared experience, identity, or emotion. A black voter will be less skeptical of a black candidate's capacity for compassion than they might be of a white candidate who claims to care about the struggles of minority populations; a working-class voter will be less skeptical of a candidate with strong ties to blue-collar communities; and a voter who feels angry or frustrated with the current state of politics will perceive a politician evoking those same emotions as being more understanding, relatable, and caring. All of these commonalities hint, whether implicitly or explicitly, that the politician is able to walk in the shoes of the voter. Personal traits,

experiences, and personas then, become critical tools that a politician has in order to demonstrate the ability to empathize with everyday Americans.

Genuine commonalities form an important bond between voter and politician when it comes to examining experiential empathy. Yet common experiences do not exist in all or even most cases. Many politicians come from extremely privileged backgrounds and cannot point to specific examples from their own lives that relate to those less fortunate. Empathic connections are, therefore, not always possible. Politicians must always look for ways to appeal to voters who have vastly different backgrounds and experiences. Because of this, I examine both empathy and sympathy in this dissertation. While empathy and sympathy, from a definitional sense, are both forms of compassion, I do not expect sympathetic actors to be perceived as compassionate as empathetic ones. Being perceived as sympathetic can be helpful, though I find that voters place greater importance on empathy rather than sympathy in terms of generating strong perceptions of compassion. Ultimately, the research presented here suggests that there is no substitute for genuine empathic connections. As a result, politicians who claim to care about the struggles of everyday Americans are viewed more skeptically than a politician who can convey an empathetic message based on some or all of the dimensions of empathy.

As the example of Donald Trump shows, sympathy is not the only tool at the disposal of a politician lacking an obvious commonality with voters. Trump's anger connected with voters in much the same way that hope and optimism did for Barack Obama in 2008. When a voter feels a particular way toward political leaders, the government, or society and then sees that reflected in a candidate for office, she will react

positively. She will believe that politician uniquely understands the way she feels and, as such, will be as motivated as she would be to enact positive changes once in office.

1.4 Overview

I will begin this dissertation by reviewing the extant literature in order to situate the following theory of political compassion in the broader context of voting behavior and electoral accountability (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, I develop a theory of political compassion. This theory first explains why compassion plays an important role in voting decisions, especially for independent voters and partisans in primaries. Second, the theory I develop explains why some politicians are perceived as relatively more compassionate than others, looking specifically at experiential, emotional, and identity-based empathy as critical linkages between voter and politician that lead to higher levels of perceived compassion.

To support this theory, Chapter 4 takes a look at the ways in which voter perceptions of compassion play out in the real world. Utilizing interviews with campaign professionals and a survey of political commentary online, I find strong evidence that campaigns and political journalists see perceptions of compassion as critical to convincing voters to support their candidate. I also bolster these interviews with a more empirically rigorous quantitative analysis, which relies on several large-N surveys. These analyses demonstrate the importance perceptions of compassion have on vote choice, which is especially pronounced among independent voters and partisan voters in primary elections. It is in these situations when the partisan lens is not active that perceptions of compassion become especially influential.

In Chapter 5, I directly test the theory of political compassion, which seeks to explain why voters view certain politicians as more empathetic than others, and therefore more desirable political leaders. Here I show precisely why empathy outperforms sympathy in terms of altering perceptions of whether a candidate "cares about people like you," leveraging the same sorts of personal stories political candidates themselves use in campaign speeches. In examining the importance empathy plays in developing positive perceptions of compassion, I go beyond experiential empathy and test the importance of emotional and identity-based empathy. This approach recognizes that there are numerous different methods a candidate has for revealing him or herself as empathetic that go far beyond personal experience. Finally, I discuss the broader implications of this research, both for political scientists and political professionals trying to engage a sometimes apathetic or misinformed electorate (Chapter 6).

Chapter 2: Models of Voter Choice and the Role of Compassion

While I argue perceptions of compassion are an important determinant of vote choice, they fit into a much broader fabric of academic research that seeks to understand what motivates voters to engage in political action and side with a particular party or candidate. The trait I refer to as compassion (also referred to as "empathy," "caring," or sometimes "integrity" in other research) is one of several candidate traits scholars have cited as influencing the public's opinion of political figures. Furthermore, the scholarship on character traits falls into a much broader literature on political behavior, voter persuasion, and the sociodemographic factors that play a large role in determining who votes for whom.

Vote choice is one of the most studied topics in political science, so the literature is both vast and nuanced. Most research recognizes that the many factors that influence vote choice also influence one another. I acknowledge, then, that voter perceptions of candidate character traits are not formed in a vacuum. Partisan, racial, religious, and other important social identities serve as perceptual screens for voters as they seek to learn about and understand the qualities of the competing candidates for office. These social identities often reinforce one another, enhancing the influence partisanship has over a host of other political behaviors.

Furthermore, global evaluations of candidates (i.e. the general belief that someone is a "good person") can influence evaluations of specific traits such as compassion in the same way evaluations of specific traits can influence global evaluations. This chapter serves as an opportunity to survey the literature on vote choice, partisan polarization, and trait evaluations, helping us to better understand precisely how and why perceptions of

candidate compassion, though influenced by other factors, still exert a powerful and independent influence on public approval and vote choice.

2.1 The Role of Partisanship in Electoral Accountability

Any attempt to study electoral behavior has, by necessity, recognized the critical role of political parties in terms of shaping attitudes toward policies and candidates for office. For the better part of a century, scholars have found that partisanship is transmitted through childhood and early adulthood socialization, and frequently persists as a lens through which individuals view political events (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler 2002). Despite an era in which scholars argued that the role of parties had diminished (Niemi & Weisberg 1976, Smith 1988, Burnham 1989), by the 2000s the importance of parties had once again become central to studies of voting decisions and political behavior more broadly (see e.g. Bartels 2000). The partisan sorting and affective political polarization phenomena of recent years have caused some scholars (see e.g. Achen and Bartels 2016) to reconsider whether American political behavior can be properly understood through either a Downsian framework of policy preferences (Downs 1957) or evaluations of politicians' performance in office (Hibbing and Alford 1981, Rudolph 2003, Abramowitz et al. 1988; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson 1992).

Beginning from this framework, it is easy to see how, even when the country finds itself in difficult times as it did in 2012, many voters may not take out their frustration on the incumbent party. On one hand, a Democratic voter might consider information on a struggling economy through the lens of her party identification, assigning blame to the previous administration or the Republicans in Congress. Likewise,

Republicans such as RNC Chairman Michael Steele were quick to blame the 2008

recession on Bill Clinton[14], while others pointed to forces outside the control of the

president. Drawing from the literature on motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990, Taber &

Lodge 2006), scholars argue that partisans perceive events in the country to be better or

worse depending on whether the current president is a copartisan, essentially turning a

survey item on the state of the nation into a proxy for partisanship (Redlawsk 2002).

They may even use a survey item on the welfare of the nation as a whole as an

opportunity to express support or opposition to the current administration, as the theory

of expressive choice implies (Schuessler 2000). Political psychologists, drawing from the

works of Tajfel (1971) have argued that partisanship forms a social identity that can

function even if it is devoid of true policy attitudes. It is a deep-seated preference to see

the in-group victorious and the out-group defeated that motivates political engagement

among those highest in this form of partisan identity (Mason 2018). From this

perspective, relatively few Americans are willing to receive new information on the state

of the nation and assign blame to leaders rationally and dispassionately.

2.2 The Role of Retrospective and Prospective Voting

      While a number of political behavior scholars place the greatest emphasis on the

strong role that partisanship plays in the politics of culpability and consequence, other

scholars still find evidence that new events do, in fact, shape the prospects for candidates

seeking public office. Prior work emphasizes the power of retrospective judgments on

voting decisions. Beginning with Downs (1957) and Key (1966), scholars have argued

that voters consider the past performance of the party in power in comparison to what the

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[14] Interview with RNC Chairman Michael Steele on ABC, "This Week," February 8, 2009.

other party might have done over that same time period. Attentive individuals seek to punish politicians for poor performance (Ferejohn 1986, Lanoue 1994), paying particular attention to the state of the economy or other key salient issues occurring at the time (Hibbing and Alford 1981, Rudolph 2003, Abramowitz et al. 1988; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson 1992).

Prospective voters, on the other hand, not only consider past performance, but frequently look to the national economic trends of the country and the promises of the candidates for future progress to inform their vote (Kuklinski and West 1981, Lockerbie 1991). Voters are not only looking backward but projecting the state of the nation moving forward in order to make a voting decision. Scholars conceptualize economic welfare in different ways, pointing not only to personal well-being (Chong, Citrin, and Conley 2001), but also to sociotropic considerations (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981) as influencing partisanship and vote choice.

Despite the vast literature on retrospective and prospective voting, I noted previously that more recent research has called into question many of the substantive conclusions these scholars put forward. For example, many scholars are now skeptical that American voters are competent enough to assign blame and give credit where it is due. Being the ideal civic citizen in the United States requires the individual to have basic knowledge about politics and current events and access to unbiased sources of political information. Political scientists have known for decades, however, that the American voting public lacks basic political knowledge, suggesting that they may be unaware of the facts necessary to punish bad performance and reward good performance (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

More recent studies have found that random events, even those completely outside the control of political officials, can still influence public approval (Achen and Bartels 2016). Furthermore, voters reward politicians for responding to crises, rather than preventing them, distorting policy and creating inefficient outcomes (Healy and Malhotra 2009). Despite the impact that partisan affective polarization has had in recent years, macroeconomic factors continue to predict election outcomes (Abramowitz 2013; Campbell 2012; Erikson and Wlezien 2012), suggesting that factors beyond partisanship continue to shape voter perceptions of candidates seeking office. In short, the extant literature on electoral accountability does not paint a flattering picture of the average American voter.

2.3 Wading into the Debate over the Importance of Candidate Traits

Prior work on partisanship and performance evaluations, while critical to our understanding of political behavior, pose something of a puzzle when we consider the electoral outcomes we often see. Scholars have recognized for more than a half century that static partisan and group attachments play a vital role in determining vote choice and public approval for elected officials (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Despite these findings, the outcomes of elections continue to shift based on the changing preferences of a relatively small number of voters (Stimson 1991). These shifts have become even more meaningful as the parties have become more evenly divided, increasing the competitiveness of elections at a national level (Lee 2017). Despite the predictive power of partisanship in determining vote choice, then, we lack explanations for critical variation in public support. This variation can often prove pivotal in determining who wins and who loses elections at the

national level. That Americans lack basic political knowledge and are, perhaps, unable to punish or reward political leaders rationally (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; see also Achen and Bartels 2016) further complicates this issue. Should we accept, then, as Achen and Bartels argue, that voting decisions at any given time come down to the current balance of partisan identities mixed in with a few random factors that are outside the control of politicians?

I argue against this view, not because I have a drastically more optimistic perspective to offer, but because I believe this view neglects the important role voter perceptions of the candidates themselves play in election outcomes. In presenting this theory, I borrow from Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), who posit that the average American voter does not want to take an active role in crafting policy and would rather leave decisions to leaders she believes are sufficiently competent to get the job done.

Given the inability of many Americans to live up to the ideal civic citizen and their proclivity to instead cling to politically relevant social identities, it becomes far clearer why many might choose to fall back on their own ideas about the character of one candidate compared to another. Generating an impression of a candidate, accurate or not, is relatively easy in a news cycle that provides daily sound bites from the campaigns and often focuses on personal narratives. Compared to more traditional forms of electoral accountability, focusing on character traits does not require a great deal of knowledge about the issues. It also does not require that a voter have the ability to project confidently into the future about how one party's campaign promises would affect her daily life compared to another party's promises. Instead, voters must get a feel for

whether the candidate cares about people like them, which is often surmised by looking at the personal histories or attributes of the candidate.

With this research, I argue that perceptions of candidate compassion have become an important, and often pivotal factor in modern American election success. Primary voters faced with the task of differentiating between ideologically-similar candidates pick the one who they believe cares more about people like them and will fight harder for their communities and issue agendas. And while partisans evaluating candidates in a general election are hard to persuade with compassionate appeals, compassion will be highly influential for the independent voters who often prove pivotal in national election outcomes.

Studies looking specifically at voter perceptions of compassion, however, have been sparse in recent years. Most of the seminal works on the importance of candidate character date back several decades. Fenno (1978) and Mayhew (1974) describe in great detail the pains members of Congress take to endear themselves to constituents, in part by building empathetic bonds. Fenno (1978) in particular describes the lengths to which members of Congress will go to convince voters they are not part of the Washington machine and have not forgotten their roots in their home district. This task has become even more difficult in recent years as partisan polarization has nationalized much of the media coverage of congressional politics, effectively throwing the "all politics is local" mantra out the window.

Yet it is Kinder (1986) that marked a shift in the literature away from the actual traits of politicians toward the way in which those traits are perceived by voters. Kinder asserts that voters want to attribute motivation to the actions of a president, something

that is made easier if the voter understands (or believes she understands) the type of character the president has. Kinder (1986) furthermore sets up a framework for classifying important candidate traits, including competence, leadership, integrity, and empathy.

Despite the typology put forth by Kinder (1986), scholars working both in the American context and in Europe have struggled to identify the precise dimensions of character as they apply to electoral politics. Some have argued for as few as two dimensions to character while others believe there are as many as six (see e.g. Aaldering and Vliegenthart 2016; Greene 2001; Johnston 2002). In particular, the review of the character traits literature by Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016) demonstrates that there is much disagreement in the field on the precise features of political character. This lack of consensus demonstrates not only the need for political science to provide clearer definitions for each trait, but also for more theorizing to explain why each trait matters to voters.

Aaldering and Vliegenthart find, as most others working in the candidate trait literature do, that perceptions of empathy and compassion have a clear and sometimes pivotal effect on vote choice and election outcomes (see also Goren 2002; McCann 1990; Miller and Shanks 1996). Still, in the context of American politics, which is characterized by strong partisanship, affective polarization, and motivated reasoning, some scholars argue the causal arrow runs in the opposite direction. Researchers working in this vein claim that perceptions of particular candidate character traits are actually an outgrowth of partisan attachments and global evaluations (Bartels 2002; Lodge and Taber 2013).

This perspective has both its advantages and drawbacks. I do not argue here that evaluations of candidate compassion should be examined without consideration for factors which may influence it. Indeed, the partisanship of the voter and politician matter a great deal in determining whether someone views a candidate as compassionate. Yet this relationship is not deterministic. Furthermore, Hayes (2005) points out that parties "own" particular traits much in the same way they "own" issue areas. While trait ownership advantages Democratic candidates on matters of compassion, Hayes and others (see e.g. McCann 1990) point out that these perceptions are still malleable and candidate-dependent. While Democrats are generally perceived as more compassionate and Republicans are perceived as stronger leaders, the degree to which the candidates outperform expectations based on partisanship plays an important role in overall evaluations of the politicians. Republicans, then, may rate the Democrat as more compassionate, making them more likely than their copartisans to defect in a general election.

A number of scholars have argued convincingly that, if the causal arrow truly ran in the opposite direction, perceptions of candidate character traits should fit on a single dimension (i.e. the general likability of the politician). This is not what the vast majority of character trait research finds (Funk 1996, 1999; Hayes 2005).

Additionally, reversing the causal arrow is theoretically unsatisfying. Arguing that individual trait evaluations are determined largely by global evaluations does little to explain how voters come to have these global evaluations in the first place. Making the case that voters believe a candidate is a "good person" and therefore a "compassionate leader" neglects the process by which Americans come to have a positive opinion of the

politician. Looking, as I do, at the process by which voters believe a candidate is compassionate and therefore a "good person" helps us better understand the bottom-up process by which voters develop positive attitudes toward politicians that ultimately result in election victories.

The argument I make here, then, does not deny the importance of static partisan attachments, but instead wishes to explain a different phenomenon. With this research, I present a theory that describes why voters perceive certain politicians as more compassionate than others. Indeed, if these perceptions were determined entirely by factors such as partisanship and trait ownership, this would be a very short research project. Partisanship and trait ownership, after all, do not vary much from election to election, so we would see little variation in perceptions of compassion from one candidate to the next. Yet this is not what the data show. With each new election cycle, particular candidates are seen as relatively more or less compassionate than the candidate who came before them. This advantage (or disadvantage) over time correlates strongly with vote choice, even after controlling for the many factors that influence vote choice and public approval. Despite the difficulty of modeling the complicated and messy processes that underlie voter decisions, my work here and others that have come before still find an independent effect of traits such as compassion, caring, and integrity on vote choice and other measures of public approval (Campbell 1983; Greene 2001; Holian and Prysby 2011, 2014, 2015; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986). As I show in later chapters, this variation can be the difference between winning and losing.

The focus paid by political scientists, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, on character traits made a great deal of sense in an era in which political news consumers were shifting away from print media and toward television. Television offered candidates the ability to shape voter perceptions through style rather than substance. Yet these studies largely focus on the bigger picture, establishing the impact of trait evaluations on public approval and vote choice. They do not attempt to explain why some politicians are seen as more compassionate, more competent, or stronger leaders.

In the past two decades, as the partisan dividing lines have grown deeper and more entrenched in the fabric of American politics, fewer studies concerned themselves with the perceived traits of politicians. Yet recent developments make greater research on this topic necessary. With the introduction of social media and the ability of American politicians to communicate directly to constituents, the United States finds itself in a political and media environment that places even greater importance on a candidate's ability to directly connect with the masses and cultivate their own public persona. President Trump cited Twitter as one of the key factors to his victory in 2016, and most of what he conveyed on that platform went beyond specific policy proposals. Indeed, more often Trump used the platform to convey his anger and disgust with the political establishment, which gave voters an idea for the type of person he was. Prior research suggests that a politician's personal touch will be especially critical in electoral situations where there is no partisan filter to inform one's vote, such as in the case of pure independents in general elections (Keeter 1987; Holian and Prysby 2014), though the logic extends to partisan voters in primaries as well. Trump was one such candidate that

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was able to leverage new forms of communication to appeal to a partisan base that was frustrated and angry with political leaders in the United States.

And while the literature on affective polarization and partisan sorting has not addressed matters of character traits, these phenomena directly inform who voters will perceive as more compassionate. As partisans are increasingly divided into camps based on who looks like them, sounds like them, and has had similar experiences to theirs, they will in turn find similar politicians more capable of caring for people like them. This helps explain further why certain candidates achieve electoral success.

Not only are personality traits such as compassion important determinants of vote choice, but perceptions of these traits are malleable. Looking at the 1984 election, McCann (1990) finds that impressions of candidate traits changed over the course of the campaign, shaping public opinion toward the candidates. Sullivan et al. (1990) analyze the same election and find that there is a desire among the general electorate for an "every man" political candidate who can understand and connect with the average American. These observational studies, however, have an important limitation: they cannot isolate the precise campaign events that shift public opinion for or against particular candidates. In this dissertation, I employ observational analyses, experimental designs, and elite interviews to examine the role of compassion in elections as well as examine how voters go about determining which candidates truly care about others. By examining the role of compassion in this manner, I maintain the external validity of prior observational studies while isolating the effect of specific types of appeals.

2.5 Why Study Compassion?

What makes it so essential to study compassion in America? As I have argued, political science has not placed sufficient emphasis on candidate traits in recent years. Part of that failure lies in the scope of the extant research. While prior research demonstrates that trait evaluations have an impact on vote choice (Funk 1996, 1999; Goren 2002; Holian and Prysby 2015; McCann 1990; Miller and Shanks 1996), no systematic research has attempted to explain why some politicians perform better than others on these traits. This lack of research is problematic, since scholars working in this literature have shown that candidate traits cannot be boiled down to a single dimension (Kinder 1986; Funk 1999). As a result, each individual trait evaluation can exert its own influence on candidate support and potentially vote choice.

While other traits (such as competence, leadership, or integrity) are worthy of greater research, I choose to focus on compassion for a number of reasons. First, the desire to have compassionate political leaders is based on the simplest of motivations: self-interest. A compassionate leader is desirable because she will be more motivated to solve the problems the voters themselves are facing. Self-interest provides a clear rationale for vote choice, as Anthony Downs explains in conveying his economic theory of democracy. Yet political scientists in years since point out that much of what we see in voting decisions cannot be explained by pure self-interest, forcing scholars to consider how voters go about determining what goes into their own self-interest. While scholars have argued whether or not heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts, are effective in leading voters to "correct" decisions (see e.g. Achen and Bartels 2016; Lupia 1994; Popkin 1994), a new line of thinking asserts that political decisions largely come down to which politically relevant group(s) one belongs (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Mason

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2018). Whether a voter chooses a party or a candidate due to a group identity or an ideological heuristic, the voter is still seeking to satisfy some sort of self-interest. And whereas candidate character traits such as "leadership" or "integrity" serve a communal interest, compassion is unique in that it is focused on the candidate's ability to care for the individual voter or those who are like the voter.

Compassion is also ripe for further research because of the crucial role it has played in the past several presidential elections and the centrality it plays in campaign messaging (explored more in Chapter 4). In 2012, many observers noted that Mitt Romney's failure had much to do with the narrative that he was a "vulture capitalist" who got rich on the backs of the American worker.[15] The 2016 Election provided more of a puzzle for many who believed that Donald Trump's behavior during the campaign exhibited little in the way of true empathy for regular Americans. Yet as I argue (in Chapter 5), his anger connected with many Americans, while Hillary Clinton largely failed to make empathetic connections with voters.

Even outside the context of an election, messages about compassion fill public debate. Even when focusing on specific policies, political groups seek to blend character with pragmatism. Debates about the minimum wage, health care, education, and taxation, all take on some kind of personal moral texture. In the aftermath of the failed Republican effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act in 2017, Senator Cory Booker claimed, "We owe tonight's victory of compassion and good policy…to countless ordinary Americans who made an extraordinary effort to speak up and speak out against a craven attempt to leave

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[15] The Hill, "Newt Gingrich: Bain Capital 'undermined capitalism,' killed jobs." January 10, 2012.

millions of Americans without coverage."[16] Themes of compassion exist across a broad spectrum of political discourse, yet compassion to this point has been studied only insofar as it affects vote choice. Implicit in the extant research is the assumption that compassion is an end in itself, an inherently positive trait that we should desire of all politicians. While this assumption is not incorrect, it ultimately obscures the more important consideration we as scholars should be making: why are some politicians viewed as more compassionate than others? And why does this variation exert an influence on vote choice? When we view compassion as a means to an end rather than the end itself, it becomes far clearer why voters prefer these types of candidates and why particular politicians have been so much more successful than others in cultivating these images. The next chapter seeks to lay this argument out in greater detail.

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[16] Senator Cory Booker press release, July 17, 2017.

Chapter 3: A New Theoretical Framework of Compassion and Political Behavior

3.1 Compassion and the "Huckaboom"

While examples of candidate compassion are numerous, perhaps none is more illustrative of the theory I advance here than Mike Huckabee's 2008 presidential candidacy. When Mike Huckabee announced his intention to run for president in January 2007, few political pundits or power-players within the GOP gave him any real chance of making noise in the primaries. As a relatively unknown governor of a southern state going up against the likes of well-known candidates Rudy Giuliani, Mitt Romney, and John McCain, Huckabee struggled to gain name recognition and his fundraising suffered as a result. By the end of the first quarter of 2007, Huckabee had raised a paltry $544,000.[17] By February, some were pushing Huckabee to drop out and run for Senate, noting his failure to gain traction early on.[18] Even as late as the Summer of 2007, Huckabee trailed well behind the leaders among the strongly conservative Iowa Republican voters, polling at only 8 percent.[19]

Yet for all his disadvantages, some pundits noted early on the qualities in Huckabee that gave him the chance to be an appealing dark-horse candidate. As an Evangelical Christian, he held the religious background of 65 percent of Republicans.[20] Pundits also noticed the manner in which his personal style seemed to connect with

[17] New York Times, "Republican Huckabee's Hopes are Clintonesque, But Treasury So Far is Not," April 19, 2007.
[18] The Hill, "Some push for Huckabee to run for Senate, not president," February 28, 2007.
[19] Washington Post-ABC News poll, "Iowa Republicans are not Thrilled with Presidential Field," August 5, 2007.
[20] Pew Research Center, "Trends in Party Identification of Religious Groups," February 2, 2012.

voters. As Huckabee struggled to gain traction in early 2007, Former Clinton adviser James Carville noted that, above all others in the 2008 field, "(Huckabee) likes people; he knows how to relate to people. He can talk the talk."[21] As the son of a mechanic, the first man in his family to graduate from high school, and a pastor in his community, Huckabee had a personal story that lent credibility to his folksy charm.[22] More than talking the talk, as Carville put it, he could walk the walk. Huckabee wowed in the GOP presidential debates with his defense of his Christian values and his quick, humorous wit ("What would Jesus do? Jesus was too smart for run for public office"[23]), Huckabee convinced conservative voters he could relate to them and understood their struggles. In August 2007, Huckabee scored a surprising second place finish in the Iowa Straw Poll,[24] and after another series of successful debates, Huckabee's popularity surged even further, culminating in a victory at the Iowa Caucuses.

What fueled this rise in popularity? Polls suggest that Huckabee's support was driven by the perception that he was compassionate, honest, and trustworthy. In July 2007, only 10 percent of GOP voters named him as the candidate who "best understands problems of people like you." By November, he was leading the field at 26 percent. The number viewing him as the most trustworthy similarly soared from 10 to 25 percent.[25]

Pundits attributed Huckabee's surge, named by some the "Huckaboom," to his easy-going nature and his ability to connect with voters. Despite their obvious ideological differences, comparisons to Bill Clinton, another Arkansas Governor born in Hope, were

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[21]James Carville interview on MSNBC "Imus in the Morning," February 27, 2007.

[22] Michael Scherer, Salon, "Can Mike Huckabee out-charm the GOP big three?" March 5, 2007.

[23] CNN GOP Debate, November 28, 2007.

[24] Christian Science Monitor, "Huckabee sees 'new life' in presidential bid after Iowa straw poll," August 17, 2007.

[25] The Washington Post, "Huckabee Gaining Ground in Iowa," November 21, 2007.

numerous. As the *Washington Post* pointed out, "He's the affable, compassionate, good guy and rock-and-roll evangelical who plays guitar and wants to hang with the Rolling Stones."[26] These qualities were desirable to a large number of Republican voters and fueled his meteoric rise in the polls. Ultimately, Huckabee's positive traits were not enough to win him the nomination, yet his surge in the polls signaled the desire on the part of the electorate for a sincere candidate who could show he connected with the struggles of normal voters.

In examining the story of Mike Huckabee in 2008 and numerous other campaigns, a pattern emerges that has to this point remained unexplored in the literature on campaigns and elections. The argument I lay out here begins with a departure from prior work. While the existing literature examines compassion as an intrinsically desirable quality in a candidate, I view it more simply as a means to an end. The end is good governance, however the voter conceptualizes it, but it ultimately comes down to some instrumental or expressive benefit the voter believes she will receive for supporting the candidate she views as more compassionate. Any attempt to boil perceptions of compassion to a popularity contest where the voter sides with the candidate that is "more likable," in my view, ignores the mechanism through which voters arrive at that conclusion.

By ignoring the mechanism through which voters determine a politician is likable, scholars sometimes chalk up election outcomes to random chance. Achen and Bartels (2016) claim that "election outcomes are mostly just erratic reflections of the current balance of partisan loyalties…the choice between candidates is essentially a coin toss." I

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[26] The Washington Post, "Music to His Ears; Mike Huckabee Hit a Chord in Iowa and is Off and Running," August 31, 2007.

do not discount the importance of partisan loyalties in vote choice, nor do I contest Achen and Bartels' central argument that voters are ill-equipped at assigning blame and giving credit accurately. Yet the notion that tightly-contested elections come down to a random coin toss ignores the tendency of voters, particularly the coveted "undecided" bloc, to ultimately side with the candidate they see as more compassionate. I admit that this process, especially among the most politically unsophisticated citizens, may be prone to bias through poor information processing. It may result in "incorrect" voting decisions. Despite these problems, it remains a critical piece of the puzzle when examining vote choice and election outcomes. Furthermore, the process through which voters determine whether a candidate is compassionate, I demonstrate, is not random but is instead the byproduct of key attributes possessed by the candidates and the voters themselves.

For Mike Huckabee, Republican voters began to see the candidate's ability to empathize with their struggles as evidence he would do more than previous Republicans had to ameliorate the problems they faced. While this method for evaluating a politician may or may not be normatively desirable (I cannot presume to know whether Huckabee's compassion for struggling Americans was genuine or not), I posit that it is a pervasive way of thinking in American elections that must be understood for all its complexities if it is to be addressed by political theorists and campaigns.

Compassion operates as a heuristic in much the same way as other types of cues. As Lupia (1994) notes, cues provided to relatively uninformed voters are heeded once the cue-giver is deemed trustworthy and credible. I extend this theory by arguing that most voters are uninformed about policy minutiae and understand the need to delegate decision-making to trustworthy individuals who are not only competent but understand

the problems normal Americans face in their day-to-day lives. Voters, then, view the compassionate candidate as the one who is better capable of this. If voters suspect a candidate is either A) unaware of the problems everyday Americans face or B) unmoved to action by these problems, why would a voter entrust them with elected office?

In examining this issue, the distinction between sympathy and empathy is paramount. A sympathetic candidate may be well aware of the issues people face in their lives, but if they cannot connect with those issues personally, they may lack the motivation of someone who has first-hand experience. Any casual spectator in a campaign cycle will hear candidates wax poetic about the inspiring people they meet on the campaign trail and the inspiring stories they have heard. Yet these stories are a dime a dozen. As I show in Chapter 5, these stories do help introduce candidates to voters, but they do not work as well as a real connection. An empathetic candidate who understands what it's like to grow up poor and spent decades working with others in the community can recall these experiences when talking to voters, making claims to care more credible. These sorts of politicians will be viewed by voters as more likely to be moved to action once elected to public office than someone who is simply told by a random person on the campaign trail that there is a problem.

3.2 How Campaigns View the Importance of Compassion

In my interviews with both Democratic and Republican political operatives, it is evident that issues of "character" are central to the messaging strategies employed by campaigns. Campaigns seek to connect with voters by presenting simplified messages that meld the personal characteristics of their candidate with the policies that the candidate champions. Chris Myers, the former Research Director for the National

Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) characterized good campaigns as "one-trick ponies," focusing on the individual trait or issue that is likely to win a race. "When people go to the ballot box," Myers said, "they just have so little room in their brains to store the different compartments of information. They have a predilection based on party, maybe some other attributes like gender or race or background or the way they talk or the job that they held, but generally speaking, it's just going to be a few characteristics that are the real driver." Campaigns that simplify the choice for voters and repeatedly call up their one or two winning characteristics, Myers reasoned, are usually the most successful.

When talking to Democrats, however, the importance of being perceived as truly "caring" is often even more direct. Jimmy Dinofrio, a veteran of Democratic National Committee (DNC) research department and the digital director for a number of independent political groups, spoke more straightforwardly about the importance of convincing voters that your candidate is indeed a compassionate person who will look out for the needs of the voters who put them in office. "The thing people want to know," Dinofrio claimed, "is that you're going to take care of them…That's a big part of the messaging. Figuring out how to present yourself as *like* the people who you want to vote for you." While that may seem straight-forward, Dinofrio noted tools campaigns have at their disposal for this messaging strategy are multi-faceted, so knowing precisely which buttons to push can be difficult for political operatives.

3.3 The Theoretical Framework for Compassion's Role in Elections

The theory I advance in this dissertation attempts to address a number of shortcomings in the literature. First, I seek to establish not only that perceptions of compassion influence vote choice, but also to provide a rationale for why compassion

matters to voters. In short, I develop a theory that explains *why* perceptions of compassion influence voting decisions. While scholars frequently treat compassion as inherently desirable, I argue that it is desirable because voters want a leader who truly wants to enact a positive change for constituents. This is more likely to occur if the leader is moved not by some abstraction, but by a personal motivation. Furthermore, I address a common misconception about perceptions of compassion: that they are completely determined by partisanship. I find that, while partisanship does explain some variation in perceptions of compassion, much of the variance remains unexplained and that variation exerts a tremendous amount of influence on vote choice. This remains true even in the most recent elections, which are characterized by high levels of affective polarization and negative partisanship in the electorate.

Second, I provide working definitions for compassion and its component parts in order to clarify what individuals are thinking about when they determine if a candidate truly "cares about people like them." Key in this definition is the distinction between empathy and sympathy, as both can be defined as "compassion" but empathy exerts a much stronger influence on perceptions that a candidate truly cares about citizens. Skepticism, I argue, is the primary reason why a sympathetic appeal is not always as effective a message as an empathetic one. I discuss the "sincerity barrier," or the propensity of voters to approach the promises of politicians with a healthy dose of cynicism, as the primary reason why empathy should outperform sympathy when it comes to cultivating positive perceptions of compassion.

Third, I dig into what it means for an individual to view a candidate as "empathetic." In doing so, I identify the three dimensions of empathy that make a

candidate more likely to receive support: shared experience, shared identity, and shared emotion. Because empathy ultimately boils down to the ability to walk in another's shoes, empathy as a link between voters and politicians requires some kind of commonality. As President Trump illustrates, a true commonality based on personal experiences is not always necessary, forcing us to reconsider what voters believe qualifies as a true commonality. While perceptions of Trump's compassion were admittedly poor, a significant portion of the American electorate *did* view him as caring about people like them. Trump, I argue, was able to tap into an anger that was felt throughout the base of the Republican Party after eight years of having Barack Obama in power. Experience, emotion, and identity all represent the types of shared attributes that act as critical linkages between candidate and voter, helping to convince Americans that a politician understands what it is like to live the life of the average person.

Drawing on the literatures of cognitive psychology and sociology, I argue that experiential empathy is important because it demonstrates a politician can personally relate to the struggles of the average citizen, making them more likely to want to help. Emotional empathy is somewhat different as it does not imply that a particular experience bonds voter and politician. Instead, emotional empathy signals to voters that a politician feels the same way voters do about the political issues facing the country and will therefore be similarly motivated to accomplish positive change. With identity-based empathy, the experiential or emotional cue may not be explicit. Individuals understand that our group identities are in important filter for the way we experience the world and how we feel about it. Members of the in-group are more capable of seeing the world from our perspective than a member of the out-group. Because of this, some individuals will

infer from a shared salient identity, such as the race or gender of the candidate, that he or she cares about and will fight on behalf of members of that group.

3.4 Why do voters want a compassionate leader?

The model of electoral choice I put forth relies on the electorate's ability to assess the personal characteristics of candidates for public office, specifically in relation to the candidates' capacity for compassion. Drawing on the framework from Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), I posit that Americans do not know, nor do they care to know, the minutiae of policy details. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse argue, it is unrealistic to expect Americans to have well-defined positions on a wide range of policy options. The requirements to be an ideal democratic citizen are simply unrealistic for most people. Instead, Americans often agree it is best for some legislative decisions to take place behind closed doors where well-informed experts can debate and make decisions in key areas of policy. I add to this framework by arguing that, in addition to expertise, voters also want someone making those decisions who cares about people like them, as that suggests they are someone they can trust.

Putting trust in someone, in this sense, is a rational behavior, as it seeks to estimate the probability that a politician will keep her promises to other people (Uslaner 2008). By promises, I am referring less to direct policy pledges candidates take during elections and more to the assurances candidates provide every campaign to work tirelessly to better the lives of their constituents. Empathy that is devoid of policy content is of special interest to any research agenda that speaks to the widening partisan divide. This is because candidates who make general empathetic pledges appeal to a broad range of citizens without alienating the voters that make up their own base. While particular

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types of policy pledges will undoubtedly win over certain types of voters, they will also turn off anyone who would be on the losing end of such a policy debate. Similarly, any politician who attempts to connect with voters based on overly-specific life experiences or experiences that are specific to only one group will be unlikely to connect with a large swath of voters. With empathetic pledges based on shared life experiences, there is little incentive to call forth events that resonate with such a small portion of the electorate. Because most Americans view themselves as working or middle class, however, politicians can connect with voters based on broad shared economic concerns such as being able to afford healthcare, save for retirement, or pay for a child's education. This sort of empathy, which connects the personal backgrounds of individual politicians with broader concerns found throughout American society, should resonate with a wider array of voters. With this more generic form of empathy, I argue, politicians can reach across the widening partisan gap. They appeal to others who might disagree with them not by moderating some issue position (which runs the risk of alienating co-partisans), but by appealing to a broader humanity.

Candidates on both sides of the political spectrum undoubtedly make these kinds of promises meant to appeal across the political spectrum, but some politicians are viewed as more credible than others when they make them. For example, John Kerry claimed in 2004 that he and running mate John Edwards would "be fighting for good paying jobs that let American families actually get ahead— an America where the middle class is doing better, not being squeezed."[27] While this message is attractive to a huge majority of voters, it is difficult for many to tell whether he means this or is simply

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[27] Remarks from Senator John Kerry in Pittsburgh, PA. July 6, 2004.

saying it to get elected. A skeptical citizen viewing John Kerry as an out-of-touch flip-flopper might remain unpersuaded by the message. Kerry's personal history was also a likely impediment to his credibility when claiming he would fight for middle class America. Kerry came from a well-off family, graduated from Yale, and married into the Heinz Ketchup fortune.[28] As such, he lacked the first-hand knowledge of what it was like to be struggling to stay in the middle class. When contrasted with previous prominent Democrats like Bill Clinton, who grew up poor in a broken family, Kerry's ability to connect with the average citizen was drastically diminished.

Drawing from this theory, I argue that voters admire and value a leader who understands their needs and, as such, will be better equipped to deliver on the issues that make a difference in citizens' lives. With policy, both sides will claim that their preferred stance on taxation, trade, etc. will benefit most Americans. But most Americans do not know precisely how changes to taxation or trade will affect their day-to-day life. Instead, they will determine their support or opposition to specific policies based not only on their partisan attachments, but on how they feel about the specific politicians in the election. This sort of cue-giving is not new to political science (see e.g. Lupia 1994; Popkin 1994), but none have systematically examined the important role compassion plays in this phenomenon. Support for particular candidates, policies, and parties, is partially based on whether the individual politicians involved can convince voters that they are not only aware of the pains everyday Americans face, but can, in the words of Bill Clinton, "feel" their pain. It is these toward these politicians that voters will be more open to claims of empathy.

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[28] John Kerry, Secretary of State Biography, accessed July 16, 2016.

This model of representation is of particular importance when we consider the effect perceptions of character traits have on voting decisions. Personal traits such as compassion, competence, and integrity provide independent explanatory power in models of voting behavior, even after we consider the impact of partisan considerations and retrospective or prospective judgements (see e.g. Greene 2001; Holian and Prysby 2015; Kinder 1986). I argue that individuals who rely on assessments of a politician's capacity for compassion in determining their vote want to support a candidate who intuitively understands their needs rather than one who needs a crash course in what life is like for the average working American. In order to demonstrate that she truly understands—that she can truly walk a mile in the shoes of another—a politician must demonstrate that there is a commonality that links herself and her experiences to those of the voters. The ability of one person to understand the subjective experiences of another is commonly referred to as empathy. As a result, it is perceptions of empathy that are most closely tied to assessments of compassion. Projecting an empathetic image leads to stronger perceptions of compassion, and empathy performs substantially better than sympathy in convincing voters that a politician is capable of effectively pursuing an agenda that will benefit Americans like them.

3.5 Compassion, vote choice, and the partisan lens

Undoubtedly, models of voter behavior that emphasize the importance of particular voter perceptions run into the criticism that partisanship explains a large amount of the variation in those perceptions. It is true that, for some Americans, any candidate who belongs to their own political party will be infinitely more compassionate than any candidate belonging to the opposing party. Yet not all Americans react in such a

binary fashion. While I note that identities (such as partisanship) influence perceptions of

compassion greatly, Americans have multiple identities that can be politically salient.

Experiences and emotions, two other pathways to perceiving empathy, do not require the

presence of a shared partisan identity. As a result, I find that perceptions of compassion

are not endogenous to partisanship. Even in the modern era marked by high polarization,

relatively few Americans blindly view the candidate who belongs to their own party as

better than the opposing candidate in every possible way. I argue in this dissertation that

perceptions of candidate compassion illuminate previously unexplained variation in voter

behavior.

Furthermore, the role compassion plays in determining voter behavior changes

depending on the particular attributes of the individual. While partisanship explains some

(though not all) of the variation in perceptions of compassion, what happens when there

is no partisan lens to guide voter behavior? It follows that, in situations where the partisan

lens is inactive, perceptions of compassion should play a relatively larger role in public

approval and voting decisions. I consider this in two contexts: pure independent voters in

general election contests and partisan voters in primary contests. Contexts in which the

partisan cue is not active are understudied in political science, yet they exert a great deal

of influence on who ultimately wins elections. It is in these situations that perceptions of

character traits such as compassion should be particularly influential in election

outcomes.

Given that independent voters are, on average, less politically engaged and

knowledgeable than partisan voters (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), a model that places

an emphasis on perceptions of candidate compassion has the best opportunity to explain

vote choice among this group. The ability to assess a politician on the basis of character traits does not require a great deal of knowledge about political issues or even the politician's stances on those issues. A large number of heuristics exist for Americans to overcome their own knowledge deficiencies (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; Lupia 1994; Popkin 1994), and perceptions of compassion will provide one of the most accessible heuristics for many in determining vote choice.

As Popkin (1994) notes, American voters "want to hire competent people, but without the time or resources to evaluate their past performance, we must make a judgment based largely on clues to personal character" (p. 65). While Americans across the political spectrum rely on heuristics to some degree, heuristics such as perceptions of compassion should play the largest role for those not using partisanship as a cue. More recently, Achen and Bartels (2016) argue that identity politics dominates partisanship and vote choice in modern America. They posit that the few persuadable voters' decisions come down to a random choice. While I agree that identity politics explains a large amount of the variation in individual vote choices, I argue that these decisions are not as random as they might seem. Instead, perceptions of compassion provide important cues to voters, especially those who lack strong partisan attachments. These perceptions give voters a way to arrive at what they feel is an acceptable decision. This should provide candidates perceived as relatively more compassionate with a major advantage regardless of policy positions. While using these heuristic strategies is no guarantee that Americans will arrive at the "correct" voting decision (however one conceptualizes that), these strategies are nonetheless employed by a significant number of American voters.

Finally, prior scholarship recognizes the interplay between perceptions of compassion with partisanship. Numerous scholars demonstrate that Democrats have a built-in advantage on issues of compassion, which help counteract the deficit they normally face with regard to leadership and morality (Hayes 2005, Holian and Prysby 2014). Furthermore, research suggests that partisan opponents are motivated to focus on personality traits on which they consider the president to be weak (Goren 2002, 2007). Despite the high degree to which partisanship predicts perceptions of candidate character traits, a number of studies continue to find an independent effect of traits such as compassion and integrity on vote choice and political approval (Campbell 1983; Funk 1996, 1999; Greene 2001; Holian and Prysby 2011, 2014, 2015; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986).

While independents provide an interesting case study for the role of compassion when the partisan heuristic is unavailable, primaries offer a different opportunity, as partisanship is accessible for voters but it does not allow them to distinguish between the candidates. Republican and Democratic primary voters are generally more knowledgeable about political issues and hold stronger opinions than independents do, yet they are being asked to differentiate between politicians that are, in many ways, very similar. Given these similarities, I argue that perceptions of candidate character traits should have a sizable effect on these elections. This line of reasoning leads to my first set of testable hypotheses.

H1a-Compassion→Vote Choice Hypothesis: Believing a candidate for office "cares about people like you" will increase support for that

candidate, even after considering the numerous other factmaors that

influence vote choice.

H1b-Partisan Lens Hypothesis: Believing a candidate for office "cares

about people like you" will be a stronger determinant of support in

situations where the partisan cues are not accessible heuristics (i.e. pure

independents and primary voters).

3.6 How do Voters Conceptualize Compassion? Empathy vs. Sympathy

In October 2016, Vice President Joe Biden said at a campaign event for Hillary Clinton that he was frequently asked whether he wished he could debate Donald Trump. He told the rally, "No, I wish I were in high school. I could take him behind the gym. That's what I wish."[29] For longtime observers of Joe Biden, the insinuation that he wanted to beat up Donald Trump for the things he said was not the least bit surprising. His sister Valerie, who has also served as his campaign manager in the past, noted, "the thing that Joe dislikes most in the world is a bully. And I think it has a lot to do with he knew what it was like to grow up being the brunt of a joke because he stuttered. I never even thought of it in terms of his struggling, he just went out and did it. But I think it's that empathy, which is different from sympathy."[30]

Valerie Biden Owens notes here that her brother's ability to connect with people is rooted in his own personal experiences which convey empathy, rather than sympathy. In the aftermath of Trump's 2016 victory, many in the Democratic Party believed that

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[29] Politico, "Biden suggests he wants to beat up Trump," October 21, 2016.
[30] Showtime, The Circus, "Valerie Biden Owens Speaks About Her Brother Joe's Presidential Aspirations." Published October 31, 2016.

Biden was the best politician to take on the new president, precisely because of his unique ability to convey an authentic sense of empathy to the average American. Nick Hackworth, a former Deputy Research Director for the Democratic National Committee and the Obama Re-Election Campaign specifically noted Biden's empathetic features as being attractive to voters.

> I think Biden is a great candidate. I think he's the perfect candidate against Trump. I think he's got the whole Scranton thing. This goes back to empathy. He's a Scranton guy, he can go to those white working-class places and they actually like him. What I always liked about Biden was that the guy was vice president, a senator since he was 30, but he still seems in awe of the coolness of a lot of the things about serving. He tears up when he's receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom. You would think after that long in public service, he would be over it all, but he still has this authentic sense of wonder.

Talking with campaign professionals, it becomes clear that they believe an authentic connection with voters, built through emotional and experiential commonalities, is key to winning support. Yet while many simply view compassion in a candidate as an inherently desirable trait and, therefore, an end in itself, doing this undercuts our ability to understand the underlying mechanism that connects perceptions of compassion with vote choice. Because of this, I not only demonstrate that these perceptions influence voting behavior but seek to explain why some politicians are successful at cultivating positive perceptions of compassion while others are ridiculed as "aloof" or "out-of-touch."

Additionally, I present a set of working definitions for compassion and its subsidiary forms of sympathy and empathy to clarify what is going on in the mind of the voter when they consider if a politician truly cares about people like them. For the purposes of this work, compassion is broadly defined as caring about other people. The motives for this caring can be numerous, but voters themselves can infer a motivation for caring so long as the candidate can convince voters she sincerely cares about average Americans, the issues that occupy their minds, and earnestly wants to make things better for Americans like them. To be seen as compassionate, a politician must be viewed as either sympathetic or empathetic. As I show, empathy has a much stronger positive effect on perceptions of compassion than sympathy does, in large part, I argue, because voters perceive empathy through a critical commonality which serves to link the voter to the leader. This distinction ultimately matters for Americans in the voting booth.

Holian and Prysby (2015) provide an in-depth examination of a number of different relevant candidate traits, paying special attention to empathy. Their definitions provide a useful point of departure for this work. Not only do the authors demonstrate the importance of believing a candidate "cares about people like you," but they provide a working definition they and others working in this literature use for "empathy." This definition, I argue, is problematic.

Holian and Prysby (2015) define empathy as "the recognition of another person's emotions, to feel what another person feels," yet they go on to say that "we can regard empathy as comprising compassion, concern, understanding, sympathy, and a general ability to feel what others feel, to walk in others' shoes" (pg. 29). While portions of this definition fit closely with the definition I use, they treat empathy as an umbrella term that

encompasses far more than it actually means. Yet Holian and Prysby (2015) are by no means alone in treating empathy this way. Their definition sums up the way scholars have interpreted this concept in the literature on candidate traits for decades, but it is inherently problematic. First, this definition provides little insight into why voters want a candidate who has this trait. Empathy, for voters, is a means to an end, not the end itself. I argue that empathy is desirable because it suggests that a politician has, in her background, experiences that make her uniquely motivated and qualified to solve the problems many voters themselves face. Yet Holian and Prysby (2015) do not examine how empathy leads to changes in political approval, leaving this mechanism unexplored.

Furthermore, Holian and Prysby (2015) are incorrect to consider empathy and sympathy as logically equivalent when the literature in cognitive psychology defines these concepts as distinct. Since 1996, scholars have often used the single survey item from the ANES regarding a candidate's ability to "care about people like you" as measuring empathy, when in reality this question fits with Holian and Prysby's broader definition, which more accurately refers to compassion.

In psychology, sympathy is defined as the process through which someone becomes aware of another's affliction and recognizes it as something that should be alleviated (see, e.g. Mercer 1972, Nagel 1970). It is the "emotional response stemming from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, which is not the same as what the other person is feeling (or is expected to feel) but consists of feelings of sorrow or concern for the other" (Eisenberg 2000, 671-672). Sympathy, then, is not about a personal understanding as to *why* another is pained, but instead it is the awareness that another is experiencing a negative emotion that should be relieved.

Whereas sympathy is a heightened awareness for the pain of others, psychologists define empathy as an attempt on the part of one person to understand the subjective experiences of another (see e.g. Wispé 1986). Sympathy refers only to a vague feeling of sorrow toward one who is suffering, but empathy refers to a more specific process of relating to another's pain. The difference can be said to boil down to being *concerned* about another's pain (sympathy) vs. *understanding* another's pain (empathy). The key distinction is that sympathy refers only to the general feeling of sorrow one has when they witness the suffering of another. With empathy, there is a higher level of understanding for the specific experience. The empathetic actor is not only aware of the pain of another but tries to understand the source of that pain as a way of knowing what that experience is like. As a result, an empathizer may be viewed as better able to relate to someone in pain than a sympathizer might. While a sympathizer might witness an injury and feel bad for the victim, the empathizer views the same injury with the ability to understand the complete emotional process the victim is enduring. Sympathy and empathy, though closely related, are the byproduct of different cognitive processes and, when those traits are perceived by voters, they might force individuals to react differently to the candidates.

Understanding the difference between these two concepts is essential for understanding how candidates can and will go about cultivating positive perceptions of compassion in order to win elections. Why is this distinction important? Compassion should matter to voters when they ask themselves two questions: First, does this candidate want to solve the problems average Americans face in their day-to-day lives? And second, do I believe this candidate when they say they care? With regard to the first

question, either a candidate's sympathetic or empathetic appeal should be sufficient for letting Americans know that they want to solve the problems facing everyday Americans. Yet with regard to the second question regarding the sincerity of a candidate's message, a sympathetic appeal may not be as effective as an empathetic one.

During the 1996 election, Bob Dole understood that Bill Clinton's ability to connect with voters was one of his greatest strengths, and as such made attempts to cast doubt on whether Clinton genuinely cared about struggling Americans. Yet in attempting to sever Clinton's connection with Americans, Dole underestimated the important difference between empathy and sympathy. When he was accused in the first presidential debate of wanting to dismantle programs that primarily help children and the poor, Dole shot back, "I'm not some extremist out here. I care about people." Dole's claims of caring, coupled with the numerous examples he cited earlier of working with legislators on social welfare programs, likely helped him make his case to the public. Still, it came up short of what Clinton could demonstrate. When the topic shifted to Dole's attacks on the Clinton Administration being filled with people who "never sacrificed, never suffered," Clinton was able to fire back with his own particular story:

> When Senator Dole made that remark about all the elitists, young elitists
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> in the administration, one of the young men who works for me who grew
>
> up in a house trailer looked at me and said, "Mr. President, I know how
>
> you grew up. Who is he talking about?"[31]

Whereas Dole pointed to his own experience in legislating as evidence he truly cared for the poor, the appeal was still a sympathetic one. While Dole may have very well

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[31] Transcript of the First Televised Debate Between Clinton and Dole, October 7, 1996. Accessed via *The New York Times.*

worked on social welfare programs to benefit the neediest segments of society, the voters themselves are not likely to check whether Dole truly played a central role in that legislation, nor will they know what motivated him to vote certain ways on particular pieces of legislation. Clinton, however, did not point to a legislative achievement to make his case, but to his own personal history and to the history of those who worked for him as evidence that the work they were doing in the White House was meant to better the lives of those less fortunate. This distinction is something voters pick up on, and it makes a great deal of difference in who they will vote for.

Why does this distinction matter? Scholars in psychology have found support for what is known as the "empathy-altruism" hypothesis. This line of reasoning claims that if you feel empathy towards another person you will help them, regardless of what you might be able to gain from that action (Batson 1981). An empathetic actor "reaches out" to the subject of empathy in an attempt to alleviate whatever negative emotion they may be feeling (Wispé 1986). A shortcoming of the empathy-altruism hypothesis for the purposes of this study is that the argument is framed entirely in terms of the empathetic actor, and not in terms of how the empathy of that actor is perceived by observers. Drawing from the literature in sociology, however, other scholars connect empathy to effective leadership, bridging the gap from the study of empathetic actors to the means by which individuals perceive empathy in others. Studies of workplace environments show that empathy shares a close tie with effective leadership in organizational settings (Cooper & Sawaf 1997; Goleman 1998; Yukl 1998). Individuals who perceive leaders as empathetic, in turn, also view those leaders as more credible and trustworthy (George 2000; Lewis 2000). Employees who believe a boss or other authority truly understands

their struggles also trust that boss to do right by them. Building on this research, Kellett, Humphrey, and Sleeth (2002) identify empathy and an ability to complete complex tasks as the two distinct behavioral routes that influence individual perceptions of whether someone is a leader. Individuals view empathizers as innate leaders because they receive a self-esteem boost from working with a leader who understands their needs and recognizes the problems they face as something that should be addressed. A leader who empathizes, they reason, confers a sense of self-worth on the follower. This act of empathy validates the opinion of the individual. In exchange for this validation, the follower provides satisfactory performance.

Sociological studies concerning the connection between empathy and leadership typically focus on the personal interactions of a small number of people. Despite this, I argue that the importance of empathic connections logically extends into electoral politics. By demonstrating a connection with a voter, an empathetic leader validates the opinions of the citizen. This makes the citizen more motivated to turn out and support that politician in an election. The electoral context, however, is unlike a small workplace in that the decisions leaders make affect more than just a small group. As a result, citizens should want empathetic leaders who will fight not only to make life better for the individual citizen, but for all the people that the citizen cares about (i.e. people like them). Drawing from this theory, I argue that voters admire and value a leader who they believe uniquely understands their problems and will deliver on promises to help.

3.7 Empathy and the Sincerity Barrier

While this theory lays out the expectations for why an empathetic appeal might be successful, I have not addressed whether a sympathetic appeal could serve the same

purpose. Unlike empathetic appeals, a sympathetic appeal does not imply the politician has the ability to put herself in the shoes of another. Taken from the point of view of the average voter, one might be suspicious, then, of the sincerity of a politician who claims to "care" about less fortunate Americans. Politicians have an incentive to mislead in order to win votes, and a voter may not feel comfortable simply trusting the sincerity of such a politician.

While politicians have never been viewed by the public as particularly trustworthy individuals, those operating in today's highly polarized and toxic environment find additional hurdles in appealing to voters across the partisan spectrum. Again, this trust to which I refer is not a generalized trust in human beings, but rather a self-interested trust that seeks to determine the likelihood that some politician under consideration will make good on her promises and deliver a better life to the voter. If a voter does not trust the politician who only claims to be compassionate without evoking some commonality with voters to lend the claim credibility, it makes little sense for her to offer support. A sympathetic appeal may be sufficient enough to overcome the skepticism of some voters but will likely fail for many more cynical citizens. I refer to this skepticism as the *sincerity barrier* in this research. While the sincerity barrier describes a cynicism likely felt by most voters evaluating campaign promises, I do not expect it to act as a constant for all voters. Instead, I suspect that the degree to which an individual is suspicious of a politician's promises will vary based on the characteristics of that individual and the context of the election, which I explore in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The existence of the sincerity barrier explains the different roles sympathy and empathy play in cultivating positive perceptions of compassion. While empathy refers to

a switch in viewpoint, to feel an emotion *as if* you were somebody else, sympathy refers to a feeling of sorrow for someone else's grief. Claims of sympathy from political candidates are common, though we often associate them with politicians who are not particularly effective at cultivating positive perceptions of compassion. In 2012, Mitt Romney employed the line, "I'm in this race because I care about Americans" when asked what motivated him to run for the presidency. This supposed motivation seemed like an apparent effort to overcome stories of his own personal wealth and business experience, which often portrayed Romney as an unfeeling wealthy businessman.[32] Yet Romney's claim to care did not necessarily mean he could put himself in someone else's shoes, so we cannot claim he was making an empathetic appeal. Without a shared experience, identity, or emotion to connect Romney with the voters, claims of caring can be met with suspicion. As a result, concerns about Romney's sincerity persisted and there remained a perceived disconnect between Romney and most American voters.

In summary, I argue that empathetic appeals should be especially effective when it comes to increasing positive perceptions of compassion for a political candidate. Sympathetic appeals should also be somewhat effective in improving these perceptions, as they at the very least represent an attempt on the part of the candidate to convey to voters that they are aware of the issues facing most Americans. Still, there remains a sincerity barrier that sympathetic appeals may not be able to overcome for a significant subset of more skeptical Americans. As a result, I suspect empathetic appeals should drive up positive perceptions of compassion more greatly than sympathetic ones.

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[32] CNN, Mitt Romney interview with Soledad O'Brien, February 1, 2012.

In studying the various, yet ultimately congruent ways in which psychologists have defined empathy and differentiated it from sympathy, it becomes clear that empathy in the individual operates as an extension of self. The empathizer can feel the emotions of another as if they were their own precisely because the line between the two individuals is blurred. Most people unconsciously engage in empathetic behavior, where the concept of self is extended to another, yet individuals are inconsistent when it comes to the particular circumstances under which they will engage in this sort of extension.

Empathy as an extension of self in modern society can be thought to operate as concentric circles, with those who are closer to you as being the easiest objects for empathy. This idea is not new. Individuals feel stronger connections to those in their families, to those in their communities, to those in their states, countries, regions, and so on (Nussbaum 1996; Slote 2001). Beyond this, there are ties based on cultural commonalities, such that people who belong to the same race or ethnicity may feel a deeper bond and be able to blur the line between self and other more easily (Dawson 1994). The greater the capacity for empathy, then, the easier it is for that individual to extend their conception of self beyond the racial, regional, and religious divisions that segment communities. Within the United States, traits such as race, religion, class, and sometimes region can influence the people with whom one identifies and for whom one can more easily empathize.

While these traits refer to an individual's ability to empathize with another, they also play a large role in how we perceive whether another will empathize with us. Will a low-income black woman believe to any degree that an upper-class white man cares at all

about her? Will a farmer believe someone who has worked in academia understands his day-to-day struggles? Unlikely. These people share little in common in terms of identity or experiences, so their attitudes toward society and government are not likely to align. Whether we consciously think about it, we understand that particular salient identities shape our life experiences, which in turn shape our individual political attitudes and our feelings toward government.

It is precisely for this reason that I consider the manner in which we perceive empathy in others (namely candidates for public office) as somewhat more complicated than true empathy in ourselves. The better a candidate for public office can convince the voters that they reside in one of the smaller concentric circles that define empathic capabilities, the easier it will be for them to win over those individuals' votes. There are a number of cues that Americans receive that suggest a candidate can, indeed, blur the line between themselves and the voter. These cues are transmitted through the commonalities that exist between the candidate and voter. Namely these include experience, emotion, and identity.

3.9 Experiential Empathy

Political empathy, as the literature in psychology notes, implies that the politician has the ability to experience whatever hardship the voter is experiencing **as if** it were her own. How can a politician convey the sentiment to the voter that they are able to experience the same kind of problems and have first-hand knowledge of the issues they face? I consider the commonalities of actual experience, identity, and emotion.

With experience, the connection from the politician to the voter should be relatively straight-forward and go something like: "The American people are facing

hardships and I have handled hardship too. So I know what it's like to have personally

lived the same types of experiences." With empathy of this type, intuitively one might

expect that the personal backgrounds of the voter and politician should matter a great

deal. Yet this is not always the case. As opposed to a working-class voter, a rich voter

observing Mitt Romney's upper-class upbringing and successful business career likely

viewed the candidate as truly caring about people like him. Yet this is not the classical

conception of political compassion, nor is it the conception I use in this work to define

experiential empathy. This is due to the fact that very few Americans believe themselves

to be extremely wealthy or out of touch with the experiences of the middle class, so

viewing a candidate has having those qualities should only appeal to a very narrow

portion of the electorate. Everybody from political opponents to comedians to even those

in the news media portrayed Romney as an "out-of-touch" candidate.[33] Romney, much

like John Kerry or even George H.W. Bush, did not fit the classic "every man" image

scholars find often characterize successful campaigns (Sullivan et al. 1990).

Being from a wealthy background, however, does not make it impossible for a

candidate to successfully cultivate these perceptions. George W. Bush, for example, came

from a wealthy political family, but because of his demeanor and the message he was

conveying, Bush was not perceived as an out-of-touch East Coast elite. Bush portrayed

himself as a rancher, somebody who could relate to people living in the rural areas, while

simultaneously speaking Spanish to the growing Latino community in Texas and

eventually nationwide. Despite his privileged background, these cues gave the impression

Bush could understand the struggles of those who did not share that background and

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[33] Amy Bingham, ABC News, "Is Mitt Romney Out of Touch?" February 27, 2012.
<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/mitt-romney-touch/story?id=15801839>

would strive to do something to alleviate those struggles while in office. Bush was further

juxtaposed in 2004 by John Kerry, a man of equal privilege, but one who *seemed*

privileged. Bush was able to grab the mantle of the "common man" in 2004 despite

lacking the same background as most Americans.

The reason Americans want an "every man" or "every woman" in elected office

(Sullivan et al. 1990) likely stems from the fact that most voters view themselves as

typical, everyday Americans. According to a 2015 Gallup poll, only one percent of

Americans classify themselves as "upper class."[34] Numbers such as these reflect an

anxiety felt by almost all Americans about their own personal finances, an anxiety they

likely feel the super-rich does not experience. Experiential-based empathy in politics

normally manifests itself as economic hardship, though I do not rule out the possibility

that there are other experiences that can serve as similar linkages to the voting public.

The reason I focus on economic hardship is that most Americans, even those relatively

well-off, are worried about future financial security. If a candidate can convince voters

that they understand at a personal level the kind of anxiety average Americans face, they

appeal to a broad array of voters. If, however, that same candidate tried to appeal to

individuals of a particular race or faith, they risk alienating a broad swath of the voting

public that does not identify with that race or faith. While I do not rule out the possibility

that experiential empathy can manifest itself in ways beyond economic experiences, they

provide the most clear-cut example for this particular dimension of empathy.

Given the way Americans think of themselves and the anxieties they face, I posit

that messages from politicians do not need to be specific to the circumstances voters

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[34] Gallup, "Fewer Americans Identify as Middle Class in Recent Years." April 28, 2015.

themselves face, but instead must reflect a shared experience that comes from worrying about future security and prosperity. While a farmer, for example, would react positively to a politician that is also a farmer, the alignment of such specific life experiences is generally rare. Politicians are running to represent people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences, so any theory that requires politicians to have experiences identical to those of the voter would be of limited value. The farmer, then, does not need to hear that a politician comes from a farming family in order to trust that the politician will deliver on her promises once in office. So long as she can convince the farmer that she understands the struggles that come with living that lifestyle, such as worrying about future income, planning for retirement, or saving for a child's education, she can cultivate positive perceptions of compassion. In this sense, a politician can make a personal connection with the voter without making the appeal overly specific. As I have discussed, empathy and sympathy are closely related. Experiential empathy, normally conveyed through personal stories of economic struggle, ends up being rather different than sympathy where there is no personal experience to fall back on.

The importance of the distinction between experiential empathy and sympathy stems from the types of appeals we tend to hear from candidates, who often employ these types of messages when melding policy with compassion. In the example above, Mitt Romney talks simply about how much he cares about Americans as his motivation for running for president. This contrasted strongly with the style of his opponent, President Obama. In talking about the crush of student loan debt, Obama was able to make the claim that "I was in my 40s when we finished paying off our debt and we should have

been saving for Malia and Sasha by that time."[35] The easiest way for Obama to make an empathetic appeal, as seen here, is to recall his own personal experiences or those of his family. Having lived this personally provides him the background to understand the stress student debt puts on people in a way simply being aware of the problem does not. Mitt Romney, on the other hand, came from a wealthy family and his personal wealth was a talking point throughout much of the campaign. No matter how much Romney may have wanted to make an empathetic appeal in order to secure votes, his ability to do so was limited.

The example of Romney helps to explain why candidates do not always choose to employ empathetic appeals. While candidates undoubtedly pander to their audiences, pandering has limits when there is no common experience to fall back on. As Hillary Clinton learned in 2016, appearing as though you have different messages to different audiences can harm one's candidacy. As a politician in the public eye for decades, voters were well-aware that she had not lived the typical American life. This already put her on shaky footing to appeal to working class voters. When leaked transcripts revealed she claimed to support open borders when speaking to the financial industry[36], it damaged her credibility with working class voters about protecting American industries from cheap imports.

Ultimately, while sympathetic appeals may not be as effective as empathetic appeals due to suspicions of insincerity, they should still drive up support for politicians. While some voters may consider claims of sympathy to be dubious, these claims at the very least provide an answer to the question of whether a candidate is aware of the

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[35] Chicago Sun-Times, June 10, 2014.
[36] Politico, October 19, 2016.

problems facing everyday Americans and understands that voters expect progress on these issues. The degree to which they are effective is critical for politicians who, like Romney, come from wealthy backgrounds and therefore cannot claim to have had the shared experience of student loan debt or the multitude of other experiences voters may consider relevant when forming an impression of a candidate's capacity for compassion. These theoretical expectations lead to a second set of hypotheses:

> *H2a-Experiential Empathy→Compassion Hypothesis: A politician who makes a credible empathetic appeal to voters relying on his or her personal experience will be perceived as more compassionate than a politician who makes a sympathetic appeal (which does not include a reference to personal experience), who in turn will be perceived as more compassionate than a politician who makes no appeal.*

> *H2b-Sincerity Barrier Hypothesis: Skepticism in the general public will drive the differential effects between empathetic and sympathetic appeals.*

3.10 Emotional Empathy

While experience is one of the more recognizable ways in which voters can perceive empathy, another type of empathy is often the one we see discussed in the day-to-day events of a campaign. Emotional empathy refers to the idea that a candidate feels the same way Americans feel about the problems facing the country and its people. If Americans are generally comfortable with the way things are in government, then we might expect successful politicians to evoke contentment and run on platforms that are concerned with maintaining American prosperity. Yet, in the modern era, this is not how we generally view government. While negativity bias normally creates an electorate

where maintaining the status quo is not an appealing message (Weaver 1986), the partisan gridlock in Washington that marks the polarized era has made it incumbent upon most politicians for office to express some level of dissatisfaction with the status quo. It is in this expression of dissatisfaction that emotional empathy helps politicians connect with voters and express the importance of both their participation and their vote choice in the election. Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders held vastly different political attitudes, yet both were seen as insurgent candidates riding a wave of discontentment. In their respective primaries, there was relatively little to differentiate them policy-wise from their numerous opponents, yet the common perception was that each was appealing to a bloc of voters who felt dissatisfied and angry with status quo politics in Washington.

2016 was not unique in this regard. Every time a political pundit refers to a candidate as "aloof" or "out-of-touch," it is often directed towards that politician's personal style and emotional means of connecting with his or her audience. It is frequently interpreted as an indication that the candidate for office is not sufficiently motivated to bring about the change the American people want. As Mark Halperin and John Heilemann (2013) described Mitt Romney's 2012 bid for the presidency, much of the time and energy of those working on the campaign went into combatting the idea that Romney was an "unfeeling, out-of-touch fat cat." Numerous anecdotes circulated about Romney throughout the campaign. He was attacked by Democrats and Republicans alike for the business practices of his firm Bain Capital. Even on a personal level, journalists and political opponents pointed to the time he tied his dog to the roof of his car[37] to show that Romney lacked compassion for not only other humans, but for his own pets. Yet,

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[37] The Washington Post, "Mitt Romney's dog-on-the-car-roof story still proves to be his critics' best friend." March 14, 2012.

perhaps even more than the actions themselves, it was the lack of emotion Romney displayed in these stories that may have been most damning. When Romney's dog Seamus had indigestion as part of his roof-of-the-car joyride (which may be the politest way to put it), Romney's hometown paper, *The Boston Globe* reported that he hosed down the dog and the car to clean things off. "It was a tiny preview of a trait he would grow famous for in business," *The Globe* reported, "emotion-free crisis management."[38] Romney's tepid defense of these actions did little to assuage critics.[39] When asked by *The Wall Street Journal* to explain himself, Romney's response was simply, "Oh please, I've had a lot of dogs, and I care for them very deeply."[40]

In 2016, many believed that Donald Trump would be done in by his lack of empathy for everyday Americans. Trump, born to a wealthy real estate developer and owner of the Miss Universe Pageant, had few experiences that would resonate with most Americans. Yet, in fact, the emotionally empathetic cue may have been a strong factor in explaining Trump's eventual win with key voting blocs in several swing states. Donald Trump's brash demeanor and "tell-it-like-it-is" attitude won over a large majority of America's white working-class voters, while Hillary Clinton's years in Washington and ties to the banking industry did not provide a strong contrast with Trump's wealthy background. While neither Clinton nor Trump found themselves greatly advantaged in terms of experiential empathy, Trump was consistently perceived as more authentic because of the emotional aspect of his candidacy. Whereas Mitt Romney failed to connect on an emotional level with would-be supporters, many of whom were angry with

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[38] The Boston Globe, "Journeys of a shared life." June 27, 2007.
[39] Brian Fung. The Atlantic, "The Uncanny Valley: What Robot Theory Tells Us About Mitt Romney." January 31, 2012.
[40] Mitt Romney interview with the Wall Street Journal editorial board. June 21, 2011.

the Obama administration, Trump connected because he appeared to feel the same anger his supporters felt.

The emotional aspect of empathy is often-times critical because it conveys the importance and urgency of the current moment. In 2012, why would a voter, especially one who is normally disinterested in politics, feel motivated to throw Barack Obama out of office if the man running against him didn't appear emotionally invested in the fight? The same could be asked for John Kerry, who similarly had to fight the perception that he was out-of-touch, not only because of his personal wealth but because of his perceived lack of emotion. Voters are turned off by this kind of robotic demeanor because it implies the politician is, in some way, not particularly motivated to change the status quo. If empathy is an attractive trait in a politician, as I posit, because it implies that the politician will not only be qualified to solve a problem, but *motivated* to solve the problems facing average Americans, then emotional empathy is critical in answering the question regarding motivation. Trump and Romney may have both argued that big government was killing job growth in America, but the anger Trump directed at the government convinced many Americans that, unlike Mitt Romney, Trump understood the gravity of the problem and was prepared to do something about it.

Anger is a useful illustration of emotional empathy, but it is not the only one. Barack Obama's message of hope and Bill Clinton's pain felt for less fortunate individuals are strong examples of emotional empathy as well. The example of Bill Clinton further shows how the dimensions of empathy can reinforce one another. Clinton had experiences that lent credibility to his claims of caring, yet he also exuded a pain in recalling those experiences that reinforced his connection with voters. Empathy is

communicated through a perceived commonality the voter feels with a candidate for office. What is essential, then, is that the voters perceive in a candidate the same emotion they already feel themselves. For that reason, I hypothesize that:

> *H3-Emotional Empathy→Compassion Hypothesis: When an individual feels a particular emotion with regard to politics, she will perceive a politician who shares that emotion as relatively more compassionate than one who does not share that emotion.*

3.11 Identity-Based Empathy

Sharing similar experiences and emotions are critical ways in which common bonds can be formed between politicians and those they represent. With identity, a third pathway I consider here, shared experiences and emotions can be conveyed without an explicit appeal. When the voters and the candidate share salient identities, it can communicate the candidate's ability to understand how individuals live and the belief systems that dominate their thought processes.

The common way scholars have sought to measure empathy is through the survey item that gauges whether a politician "cares about people like you." While I have argued that "cares" is a term loaded with meaning and can be divided along dimensions of sympathy and empathy, the phrase "like you" is equally important in determining how an individual will respond to the question. As a former Democratic operative (who wished to remain anonymous for this research) put it:

> I think that most people want to vote for somebody that is like them, or is like someone that they aspire to be. I think that's why [Facebook CEO and potential presidential candidate] Mark Zuckerberg all-the-sudden found

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Christ. Because he realizes that people want to vote for somebody like

them. And somebody like them is a believer in God.

Who precisely belongs in the group of "people like you" can vary from person to

person, but we know from the literature on social identity that particular characteristics,

such as race, religion, and sexual orientation, are especially salient in influencing political

attitudes (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Frable 1997; Huddy 2001; Miller,

Gurin, Gurin, and Malanchuk 1981; Tate 2003). In this way, empathy is not only about a

personal connection, but it is about a connection to a group. As voters, we do not get to

know politicians on a personal level, but instead must estimate their likelihood of

delivering on their promises for "people like me" through their attributes and the

messages they transmit over the course of a campaign. This also highlights the self-

interested nature of empathy when it comes to American politics. To this point, I have

mostly described empathy in normatively desirable ways: as a connection that shows a

politician is genuine in his or her promises. Yet empathy is also about how the

government is going to distribute the slices of the pie. The government has finite

resources to provide aid to citizens, and voters want to know that they and others, who

they perceive as the most deserving, will be taken care of. When a politician is a member

of the in-group for a salient identity, whether it is through race, gender, religion, etc., it

signals to voters that they will take care of those people who are also part of that group.

Shared salient identities are perhaps more important in the modern political era

than ever. In the past, most Americans did not have multiple identities that aligned neatly

behind one party or another. White Southern Protestants who held conservative views

found themselves tenuously aligned with Northern Catholics and Jews, vying for control

of the Democratic Party throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Beginning with the Civil Rights

Movement, however, White Protestants became increasingly associated with the

Republican Party, effectively sorting the parties into more clearly defined groups without

cross-cutting identities. This socio-partisan sorting has left both parties more

homogenous, eliminating the cross-pressures that used to moderate an individual's

partisanship. While identity politics has historically been used to describe the Democratic

Party's coalition (Mason and Wronski 2018), this is no longer true in the modern era. The

Democratic coalition, which had largely been characterized as a collection of historically

marginalized groups (i.e. African Americans, Catholics, women, etc.), is now no more

driven by identity than the Republican coalition. As white Protestants shifted

dramatically to the Republican Party, both party labels took on the characteristics of a

strong social identity, both in terms of in-group preference and out-group resentment (e.g.

Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018; Mason and Wronski 2018).

With a strengthening of partisan affect, voters themselves have evolved in what

they want and expect from leaders who represent them. Voters largely support candidates

who represent them descriptively and provide for their subjective interests (Barreto,

Segura, and Woods 2004; Rouse 2013; Tate 2003). The support voters give to those who

represent them descriptively, I argue, has a great deal to do with empathy. Black voters

believe that their ultimate well-being is enhanced when the entire group is better off

(Dawson 1994), and nobody can better empathize with the black experience in America

than a black politician. With the rise of affective polarization, white group identity

similarly fuels the degree to which white rural voters believe a politician can truly

empathize with them. As Cramer (2016) points out, white rural voters see government as

favoring those in urban communities, which are far more racially diverse and reflective of the Democratic Party coalition. White politicians, then, will be seen by this group as better able to correct for this imbalance, understanding and caring about the needs of white voters in a way a non-white politician could not. Moreover, with the rise of negative partisanship (Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018), it is no surprise that white Republicans might be turned off by a party that is seen as representing a different set of interests. With the Republican Party becoming more associated with white Protestantism, Republicans should be more supportive of those candidates who look and act like those in the Protestant community.

For Mike Huckabee, part of his appeal was experiential, but a significant portion of his appeal was based on his membership in groups critical to the Republican Party. Yes, he grew up poor and understood what it was like to struggle. When he advocated for a smaller government, voters might be more convinced that he was not approaching it from the perspective that he simply wanted to provide corporations and those at the very top the ability to keep more of their money. It was instead because he felt that was the best way to help those in his own community who were not wealthy and did not possess great political influence. With Huckabee, identity lent further credibility to this claim. His strong credentials as a Southern Baptist pastor and an Evangelical Christian were an added cue to socially conservative Republicans that he was sincere in his desire to bring Christian values to the White House. In this way, Mike Huckabee would have been able to win over some voters without emphasizing his humble beginnings, because he would already be trusted by those who shared his Evangelical Christian identity, an identity salient for many in the Republican Party in determining vote choice (Layman 1997).

With race, the empathetic cue is even more straight-forward. All experiences we have as individuals are strongly tied to our racial identities, such that those who are co-ethnic or co-racial have undoubtedly had experiences similar to our own. In part, this explains why congressional districts overwhelmingly choose politicians who belong to the same racial group as the majority of their voters (Mansbridge 1999; Pitkin 1967; Swain 1993). While many factors play into this, race provides a cue to voters about what issues and what types of people will be first and foremost in the minds of the politicians when they craft policy. Dawson (1994) finds that race can be more important than personal experience in determining one's own vote, as even wealthy black voters will support the candidate they believe will be better for the group as a whole.

Perhaps no example in modern history better illustrates the power of race than Barack Obama. Obama's personal history did not lend itself well to the narrative that he had a particularly strong understanding of the average black experience in America. As Ta-Nehisi Coates put it in 2007, "Obama is biracial, and has a direct connection with Africa. He is articulate, young and handsome. He does not feel the need to yell, 'Reparations now!' into any available microphone."[41]

Coates and others in the black community were referencing the uniqueness of Obama. Obama spent time in his childhood in Indonesia, was raised by white grandparents in Hawaii and attended private schools. He graduated from Columbia University and Harvard Law School. His struggles were not viewed by many as emblematic of the black experience in America. Yet for all this, Barack Obama was something that no other major party presidential nominee had ever been: non-white.

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[41] Ta-Nehisi Coates, Time Magazine, "Is Obama Black Enough?" February 1, 2007.

Black voters, then, could see in a presidential candidate an identity that held special importance to them. For Obama and black voters, race could serve as a cue that he understood the unique burden imposed on the black minority in the United States. This cue was undoubtedly important in influencing support for Obama, but it has also translated into support for a number of other candidates for public office.

While it is not often put in these terms, identity politics has a close relationship with candidate empathy. I wish to posit that genuine empathy is one of the most important reasons that voters want descriptive representation in government. As I previously noted, Americans want individuals in the highest offices who do not need a crash course in what the problems are that most Americans face. They want someone who is both aware of the problems and sufficiently motivated to solve them. Experience with a problem provides a politician with awareness. Emotion indicates to voters a desire to do something to solve the problem. With identity, there is both; a voter can infer that they have had similar experiences to a politician, and they can also infer that the politician will be motivated to help those people who belong to that group as well. As a result, I offer the following hypothesis:

> *H4-Identity-Based Empathy→Compassion Hypothesis: An individual who shares a politically salient identity with a politician will perceive that politician as more compassionate than a politician who does not share that identity.*

3.12 Discussion

I have argued that compassion matters to voters because it indicates that a politician is both aware of the problems facing the electorate and motivated to do something to alleviate those problems. I have furthermore argued that voters perceive

compassion in a politician by identifying some sort of commonality that binds them to the politician. When a voter perceives a commonality with a politician, it helps overcome the sincerity barrier, or the tendency of most Americans to approach the promises of politicians with skepticism. I also developed a classification scheme for the types of commonalities that link voters with a candidate and convince them a politician truly does care about people like them. These commonalities include a shared experience, a shared emotion, or a shared identity.

In the coming chapters, I empirically test the theory advanced here. I show that 1) perceptions of compassion are critical determinants of vote choice, 2) that compassion takes on a more important role in contexts where partisanship is muted or absent, 3) that Americans find politicians more compassionate when they can point to a legitimate commonality they have with the voter, such as experience, emotion, or identity, and 4) that skepticism in a highly polarized electorate poses the biggest threat to politicians seeking to cultivate positive perceptions of compassion across the voting public. Politicians that fail to set the narrative that they share common attributes with voters open themselves up for criticism, both from political opponents and a news media that seeks to focus on the gaffes and missteps of the major candidates for public office.

Chapter 4: Compassion in Elections

I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose

voters. – Donald J. Trump, then-candidate for President of the United States[42]

In the modern era of highly tribal partisan politics, quotes like this one from then-candidate Donald Trump strike many as credible evidence that compassion must not matter to Americans when it comes time to vote. How else could a politician claim that he could shoot someone and not lose votes, and then win the presidency less than a year later? I demonstrate in this chapter that, despite the quote above, perceptions of compassion exert a tremendous amount of influence on election outcomes, in no small part because of the precise phenomenon Donald Trump mentions here.

Trump's assertion that he could shoot someone and not lose votes, while hyperbolic, reflects the consensus among political scientists that most voting decisions are determined long before the parties have even selected candidates for the general election. Voting decisions often come down to partisanship, a stable attachment that serves as a lens through which citizens view political events (see e.g. Campbell et al. 1960). Partisan sorting and affective polarization have created party coalitions that are not only sharply, but evenly divided both in government and in the electorate (Lee 2016; Mason 2018). Can we imagine a modern presidential election in which one of the major party candidates failed to break into the upper-40s? In 2008, facing one of the worst economies in the past century and after eight years of having a Republican in the White House, John McCain still managed to garner 46 percent of the popular vote. And despite prognostications that "Never Trump" Republicans would bolt the Republican Party,

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[42] Trump Campaign Rally in Sioux Center, IA, January 23, 2016.

cratering support for Donald Trump, he still received a similar 46 percent of the overall popular vote. Recent elections have seen a tightening of both the floor and ceiling of popular vote share between the Democrats and Republicans. In this electoral environment, few votes are up-for-grabs each November, but those votes that are persuadable become even more critical in determining who wins and who loses. It is among these voters where I argue perceptions of compassion will play an even more important role.

To make the case that compassion matters to voters, I begin by listening to the voters themselves. From election to election, when asked what qualities they look for in a president, voters consistently claim they want a candidate who cares about people like them. This is particularly true for Democratic voters, who frequently cite compassion as being one of the top qualities in a candidate for office. Second, I summarize my theory of political compassion, pointing out why voters value a compassionate leader. I then discuss the data and methods I use to test this theory. Using data from the ANES, I find that perceptions of candidate compassion vary a great deal, even when the voters and the candidate share the same party. I find that this variation strongly predicts vote choice in recent presidential elections, especially among independent voters. Finally, using a survey of voters in the State of Maryland during a hotly contested Senate primary, I find that perceptions of compassion were strongly correlated with vote choice among primary voters. These data also suggest that shared racial identity was a major driver in perceptions of compassion for the two Democratic candidates.

4.1 Who Cares about Compassion? We ask Voters

From election to election, polling companies often update their questions to make the results more topical and interesting to a broad range of readers. This can make identifying the relative importance of compassion from year to year difficult. Yet in looking at polling data from the last ten years, what becomes evident is that both pollsters and the voters themselves seem to think compassion matters in voting decisions. Across different electoral contexts, pollsters frequently use a question featuring some variation of the description "cares about people like you" to gauge how strongly voters desire a politician who is in-touch with their needs. Democrats, in particular, are likely to cite this type of "caring" as being one of the more important qualities in a politician.

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show the results from two different surveys (one from Quinnipiac and one from the Pew Research Center) that asked primary voters in 2016 and 2008 to name the most important quality in a presidential nominee. I examine these two elections because they are the two most recent elections in which neither an incumbent president nor vice president was running, making both of the nominating processes fairly open, competitive, and not centered exclusively on the traits or attributes of the incumbent president.

The precise options offered to survey respondents differ between the two polls. "Can bring change," which was the most popular selection in 2008, is not even included in the 2016 poll. Yet even with these differences, we see that Democrats are overwhelmingly more likely to select "cares about people" when compared to Republicans. In 2016, 30 percent of Democrats selected "cares" compared to only 14 percent of Republicans. "Leadership," a trait owned by the Republicans (Hayes 2005), is the more common choice for Republican primary voters. The differences along party

lines are important to note because, as I show later on in this chapter, Democratic

candidates for the presidency generally have an advantage when it comes to perceptions

of compassion. Even Democratic candidates we view as being relatively out-of-touch or

insincere (i.e. Al Gore, John Kerry, Hillary Clinton) held an advantage in terms of

compassion. In the case of failed Democratic candidates, it is not that they were seen as

less empathetic than their Republican opponent, simply that they did not have the same

degree of an advantage as more successful Democrats.

Figure 4.1: 2016 Poll of Primary Voters—Most Important Quality in a Candidate
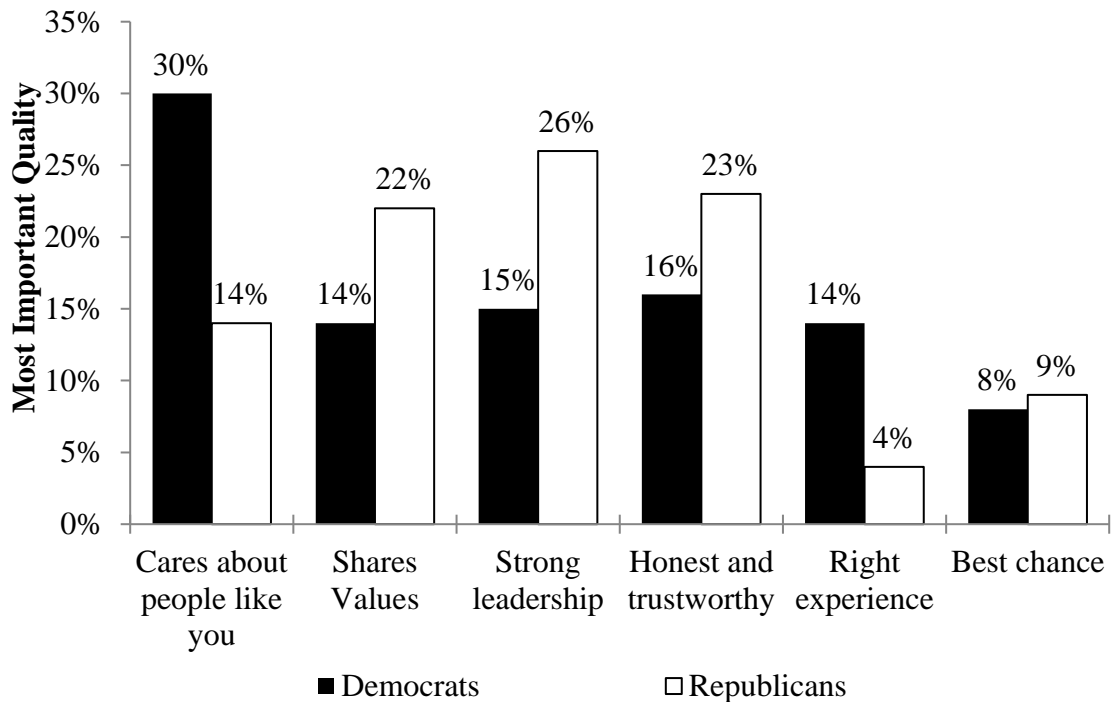
Source: February 2016, Quinnipiac Poll

Figure 4.2: 2008 Poll of Primary Voters—Most Important Quality in a Candidate
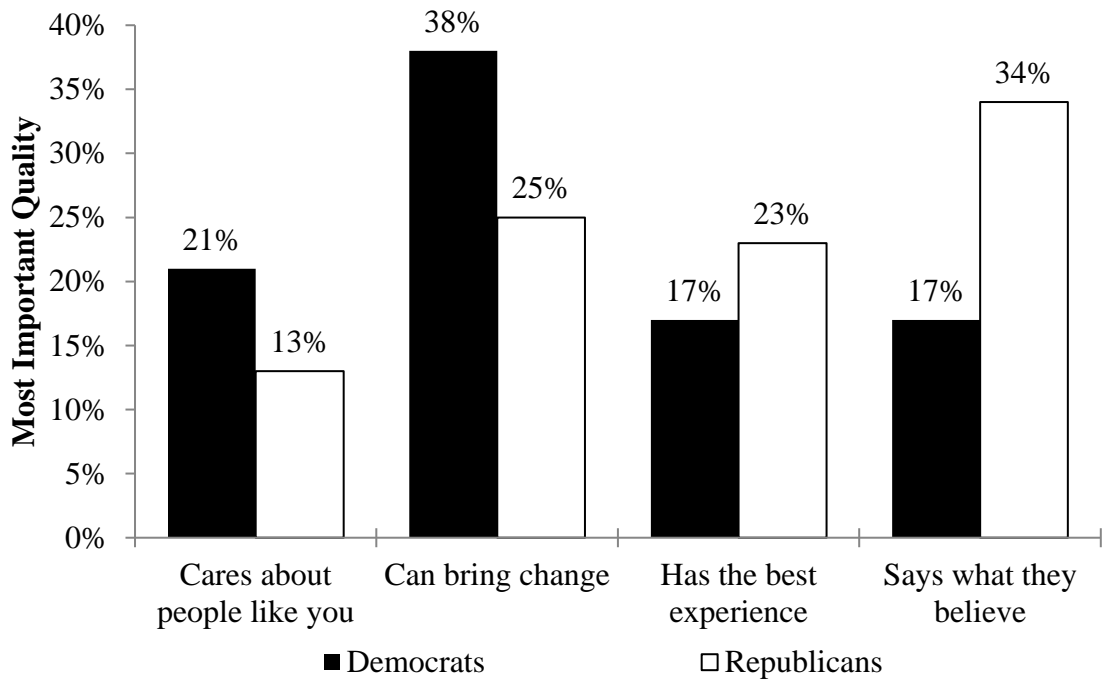
Source: Pew Research Center, January 2008

The 2008 poll from the Pew Research Center provides the most interesting results when considering the importance Democrats place on compassion. In 2008, "change" became the buzzword of the year. Most Obama campaign rallies featured a large blue sign with the word "change" written across it. As a result, it is not surprising to see that "can bring change" was the most popular choice among Democrats (and even the second-most popular among Republicans). Yet even in an election in which change was the primary message to Democratic voters, Democrats were still far more likely to say that compassion was the most important quality in a candidate. 21 percent of Democrats selected "cares about people like you," compared to only 13 percent among Republicans.

Frustratingly, the answer choices offered from one election to another change, and many answer choices are very similar to the "cares" item. In 2016, for example, "cares about people like you" was offered alongside "honest and trustworthy," even though many scholars argue that these two traits are closely related (see e.g. Aaldering Vliegenthart 2016) and difficult for voters to distinguish. Despite these factors, "cares about people like you" is consistently one of the more popular answer choices among voters, which explains why pollsters consistently include that option from election to election. What remains unclear, however, is why voters value this trait and how they determine if a politician is lacking in it.

4.2 Why Compassion Matters in Elections

Studying compassion requires a great deal of attention be paid to the role of partisanship, which explains a large portion of voting decisions in the United States. Surveying the literature on partisan polarization, it is clear that the party ties of everyday Americans matters in nearly every facet of political life. It matters when it comes to assigning blame for the problems the country faces, and it sets up the lens through which political news events are filtered and stored in memory (Campbell et al 1960; Converse 1964; Lyons & Jaeger 2014; Zaller 1992). Despite this, macro-level data show that small shifts in perceptions among the electorate can lead to large changes in electoral outcomes and policy moods (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002, Stimson 1991).

In previous decades when our politics reflected lower levels of polarization and the greater presence of cross-cutting social identities, it might have made sense for presidents seeking re-election to appear moderate on policy. They might take a popular position on a particular issue in the hope of peeling off moderate or cross-pressured

voters from the opposing party, yet they had to be careful not to shift too far to the middle for fear of losing others or depressing the vote among their copartisans.

The literature on partisan polarization and sorting, however, calls into question the need or wisdom of this tactic. If a person is a Democrat not due to her policy preferences but because partisanship is a stable social identity reinforced by other overlapping identities, she is unlikely to be persuaded by a token attempt of a Republican to moderate on an issue in order to win her over. Conversely if a Republican chooses his partisanship because the features of his identity also align well with the Republican Party coalition, no attempt by a Democratic candidate for president is likely to change his vote. The deep partisan divisions that run along social, racial, and class fault lines in the United States make it hard for the two sides to cooperate effectively (Mason 2015, Hetherington 2001)

In this kind of environment, it behooves a candidate to 1) turn out his or her copartisans through campaign mobilization and 2) convince the crucial middle ground of America that he or she is the best candidate to represent those voters' needs. How can a president best convince independent voters to provide their support? The answer is unlikely found in staking out positions on important issues, as independent voters are not only less likely to vote, but those who do vote are generally less knowledgeable about politics (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Because independents are lower-information voters without strong ideologies or partisan stances on important issues, they will instead lean on their own perception of presidential compassion. They will seek out a candidate who "cares about people like them" and is intuitively in touch with the needs of average Americans (the term "average American," though vague,

applies to most voters' self-conception). Compassion, as a trait held by a candidate, signals to independent voters that the president can be trusted. In that way, they believe that no matter how abstract the issue is or how little they care to learn about the details of a particular policy, the president will make sure that their needs are met. A president who can successfully do this not only wins over the most critical portion of the electorate but does so in a way that does not alienate the party base.

As I have noted, much of this theory also applies to partisans in primary elections. While partisans are normally more knowledgeable about policy issues than non-partisans, primary elections often present voters with competing choices that do not differ greatly when it comes to policy. As a result, the distinction between candidates in primaries is often on personality. The 2016 Democratic Primary, for example, was largely portrayed as a contrast in style and not substance. Even in early 2015, Democratic strategist Hank Sheinkopf viewed Bernie Sanders as "the populist symbol" contrasted against Clinton's "establishment candidate" persona.[43] Sanders sought to portray Clinton as being out-of-touch, more interested in the money "hustle" than in representing the views of normal Americans. While voters in presidential primaries have strong opinions about particular issues, the contests between two candidates of the same party are still quite often defined by overall perceptions of personality. I seek in this chapter to show not only that perceptions of compassion exert independent influence on voting decisions, but that they are especially important in situations where the partisan lens is not active.

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[43] Politico, "Socialist Sanders threatens Clinton more than made-for-TV O'Malley," May 28, 2015.

In this chapter, I seek to show not only that compassion matters to voters, but that it matters a great deal in situations in which the partisan lens is not active, such as among independent voters and partisan voters in primaries. In order demonstrate that perceptions of compassion influence vote choice, I rely primarily on data publicly available through the ANES. This source of data is advantageous for a number of reasons. First, the ANES does not suffer from biased sampling procedures many other surveys face and consistently produces reliable measures of political attitudes across a wide array of issue areas (see Jackman and Spahn 2014). Second, because the same (or similar) questions are asked across multiple iterations of the survey, there are a sufficient number of observations in the era of high partisan polarization (1992-2016) that is of particular interest to me, even when I look exclusively at voters (N=12,685). This includes a sufficient sample of pure independent voters (independents who do not "lean" toward either the Democrats or Republicans), who are of theoretical importance to my research agenda (N=989). In particular, I focus on the following survey item: "How well does the phrase, '[he/she] really cares about people like you,' describe [politician's name]" (see appendix for greater detail). Unlike the Quinnipiac and Pew Research Center surveys examined earlier in this chapter, respondents are not forced to choose the most important trait, and are instead asked to rate the intensity with which the phrase describes a particular candidate. This is more useful than a binary measure, since I seek to determine the degree to which variation on perceptions of compassion influence vote choice.

Because elections are comparative exercises, ratings of candidate compassion in a vacuum are not particularly informative. Instead, I want to compare perceptions of

compassion *in relation to* the opposing candidate. Therefore, I generate a "Democratic

Compassion Advantage" variable, which simply subtracts the rating given to the

Republican presidential candidate from the rating given to the Democratic candidate.

Since the scale operates from 1 to 5, the Democratic Compassion Advantage measure

goes from -4 to 4.[44] On this scale, a rating of -4 indicates that the respondent gave the

highest evaluations of compassion to the Republican and the lowest evaluations of

compassion to the Democrat. A rating of 4 would indicate the opposite, while a rating of

0 would mean that the respondent views the Democratic and Republican nominees for

president to be equally compassionate.

To demonstrate the role compassion plays outside of presidential election

contests, I rely on a survey from the 2016 Maryland Senate primary. I use observational

data obtained through the Washington Post-University of Maryland Poll, which included

questions related to both vote choice and perceptions of compassion in the competitive

Democratic Primary for the Senate seat between Chris Van Hollen and Donna Edwards

(N=617). The answer choice scale on measures of compassion in this survey ranged from

1 to 4, so the measure of compassion advantage used here (generated by subtracting the

rating for Edwards from the rating for Van Hollen) ranged from -3 to 3.[45]

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[44] In 2008, the ANES changed the answer choices from a four-point scale to a five-point scale that included the middle category (3) "moderately well." To maintain comparability, I coded the five point scale as described above and the four-point scale without a value for the number three. This coding decision is consistent with analyses used by other scholars working in the field of candidate character traits (see e.g. Holian and Prysby 2015)
[45] -3 on this scale indicates the greatest compassion advantage for Edwards, while a score of 3 indicates the greatest compassion advantage for Van Hollen.

Before looking at how compassion influences vote choice, I first establish that perceptions of compassion are not entirely endogenous to partisanship. Indeed, this research would be less important if Republicans and Democrats *always* saw their party's candidate as more compassionate. Partisanship is undoubtedly an important factor in determining who voters view as more compassionate, yet I maintain that a large degree of variation on measures of caring cannot be explained by partisanship and global evaluations alone. The personal backgrounds of the candidates, the emotions they evoke, and other salient identities they share with the voters should also matter when it comes to determining whether a politician is compassionate.

Figure 4.3 shows the distribution of all ANES respondents from 1992-2016 on the Democratic Compassion Advantage measure. The results here reveal a surprising degree of variation. Unsurprisingly, Democrats are motivated to see their candidate for the presidency as more compassionate, and Republicans on average do the same for their preferred candidate, but this relationship is far from deterministic. In fact among Republicans, the modal value for the Democratic Compassion Advantage is zero, meaning that those Republicans between 1992 and 2016 saw the two main candidates for the presidency as equally compassionate. Again, given the importance Democrats place on compassion relative to other character traits, this skew is to be expected. Yet even among Democrats, who on average view their candidate as far more compassionate, roughly 20 percent of them still saw the Republican as more able of caring about people like them. Not surprisingly, political independents are the most evenly divided on which

party's candidate is more compassionate, which further lends credence to the argument that compassion could be especially important among this voting bloc.

Figure 4.3: Democratic Compassion Advantage Distribution by Partisanship
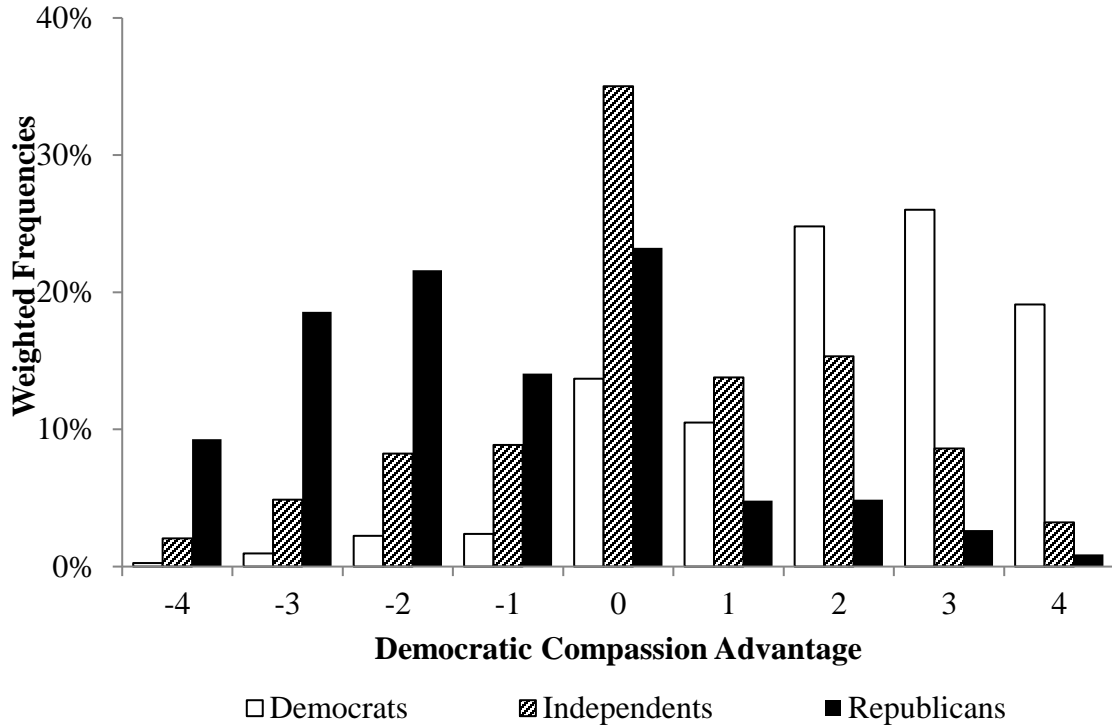
Figure 4.3 also reveals that Democratic candidates are, overall, perceived as more compassionate than their Republican counterparts, shown by the way the overall distribution skews slightly to the left. Since Democrats tend to "own" the trait of compassion (Hayes 2005), it makes sense that Americans are often predisposed to view the Democrat as caring more about people like them. Indeed, in every presidential election survey from the ANES since 1992, the Democrat has at least some kind of advantage. Even in elections in which the common wisdom said the Republican candidate was more in-touch with Americans, the Democrat is always viewed as more compassionate. Figure 4.4 shows the mean values for the Democratic Compassion Advantage across the presidential elections since 1992.

Figure 4.4 reveals a clear trend in which Democratic candidates who are successful in their bids for the presidency are perceived as being relatively more compassionate. The 1992 Election featured a Democrat in Bill Clinton who literally told voters that he felt their pain. Clinton's compassion contrasted with George H.W. Bush's personal style, which critics stereotyped as out-of-touch. Bush, furthermore, did not help himself on matters of relatability and compassion. Multiple campaign events, such as when he appeared to be astounded by common grocery store technology and when he checked his watch during a townhall presidential debate as a voter asked a question, suggested he was not particularly concerned with the lives of normal people. The elder Bush's son, George W. (i.e. the "compassionate conservative"), did much better. While voters did not perceive George W. Bush as more compassionate than either Al Gore or John Kerry, his folksy style, contrasted against the more wooden figures of Gore and Kerry, clearly narrowed the gap. And while many might have expected Donald Trump to be perceived as relatively out of touch (which is somewhat true, according to the data), he did not perform all that much worse than Hillary Clinton. The gap of 0.35 in 2016 is similar to those of 2000 and 2004, elections in which a Republican was also successful. Only 1996 somewhat runs somewhat counter to this trend, as Bill Clinton's re-election was still successful despite not having the same compassion advantage it had in 1992.

Figure 4.4: Mean Levels of Democratic Compassion Advantage by Election Year
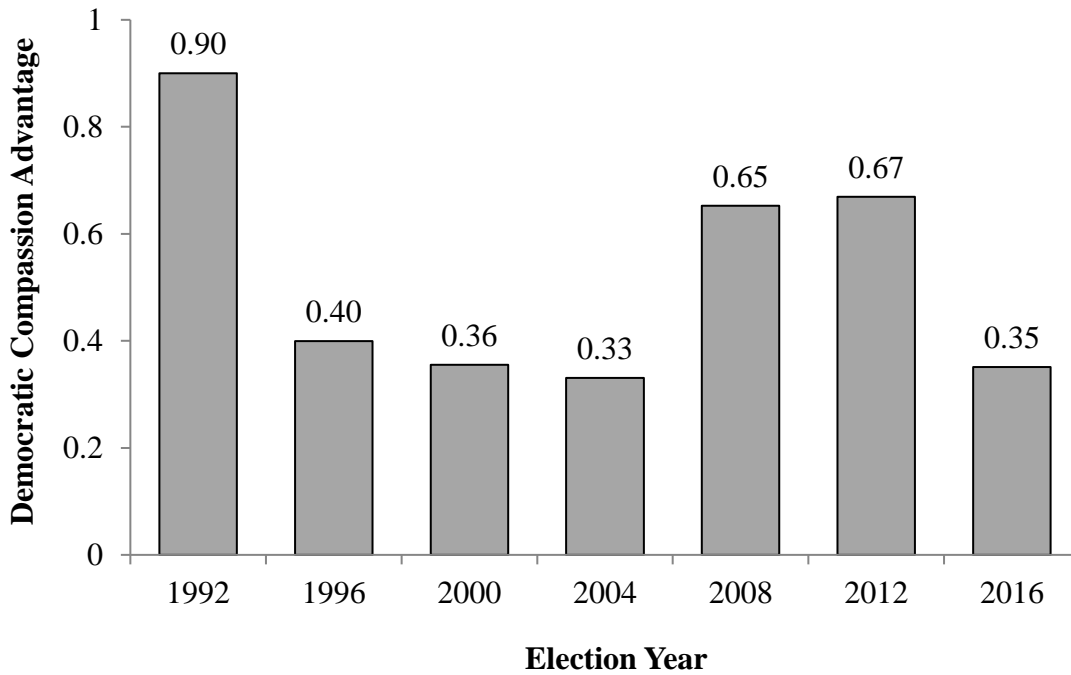
Source: American National Election Studies (1992-2016)

Many other factors go into determining the outcomes of elections, but these descriptive statistics all show a common theme: politicians get more votes when they are perceived as relatively more compassionate. While Democrats are advantaged when it comes to the question of who cares more, Republicans who minimize the damage on this characteristic are more often successful in winning the presidency. Figure 4.5 shows the descriptive statistics for vote choice across particular values of the Democratic Compassion Advantage, separated by party. Again, the trends we would expect to see hold true. Democrats in general are more likely to vote for the Democrat, but those few Democrats who do not see the Democratic candidate as more compassionate are unlikely to vote with their party in a general election. Republicans, likewise, are willing to vote for the Democrat if they see that candidate as more compassionate.

Figure 4.5 demonstrates clearly two important features of American presidential elections. First, partisanship matters in almost every facet of vote choice. Even after we control for perceptions of compassion, the gaps in the three lines show clearly that partisanship influences vote choice. Even among those Republicans who claimed the two candidates were equally compassionate, we see that only a little more than 10 percent chose to vote for the Democrat. Likewise, among Democrats who viewed the two candidates as equally compassionate, more than 70 percent voted for the Democrat. Yet second, the fact that all three lines have a clear positive trend should force us to consider the impact these individual evaluations of compassion have on vote choice, even after we take into account partisan attachments. The preferences of independent voters, who are of particular importance to election outcomes, are especially interesting. When independent voters view the two candidates as equally compassionate, only about 40 percent of them vote for the Democratic candidate. Again, this reflects the fact that Democrats on average are perceived as more compassionate than their Republican opponents. If the Democrat is not perceived as doing better on compassion, a trait the Democrats own, independents are not particularly supportive. Yet when the Democrat is perceived as just one point better than the Republican on perceptions of compassion, support for the Democrat surges to nearly 60 percent.

These results, while descriptive, reflect that the reality that partisanship alone cannot explain support for politicians. Whether right or wrong, voters of all partisan affiliations develop perceptions of a candidate's personal traits. While partisanship helps explain why some voters will view one politician more favorably than the other, a significant portion of the electorate is willing to view the candidate from the opposing

party as equally compassionate and sometimes *more* compassionate. These perceptions, I show, make a profound impact on each candidate's electoral fortunes.

Figure 4.5: Vote Choice by Democratic Advantage on Compassion, Grouped by Partisanship
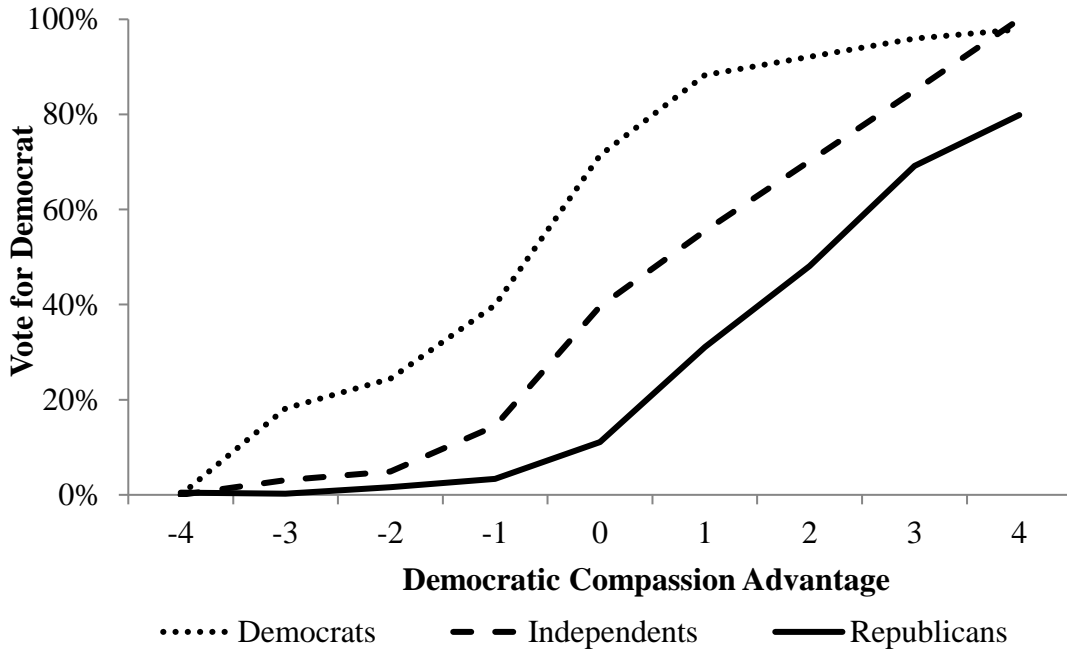
Source: American National Election Studies (1992-2016)

4.5 Calculating the Effect of Compassion on Presidential Vote Choice

Descriptive statistics, while illustrative, cannot account for all the factors that may simultaneously influence both perceptions of compassion and vote choice. I therefore use the ANES data but employ a more rigorous statistical model to make the case that vote choice is truly dependent on how compassionate voters perceive a candidate to be. The results in this section rely on a probit model that regresses two-party vote choice on a host of factors that are known to influence voting decisions (a full account of the variables included can be found in the appendix to this chapter). It uses a fixed effect approach to account for the differing years and elections in which these surveys took place. The bars in Figure 4.6 represent the change in the predicted probability of voting

for the Democratic candidate among partisans and independents, using coefficients from the probit regression.[46]

The only variable I manipulate in these models is the Democratic Compassion Advantage measure. This method of analysis requires picking particular values of Democratic Compassion Advantage in order to compute what effect this has on voting for the Democratic candidate for the presidency. Because it is hard to imagine that any voter would move from one end of the scale to the opposite side, I choose not to examine extreme values in this analysis. Instead, I use the distribution of responses in the sample to guide my simulations. I therefore find the predicted probabilities of voting for the Democratic presidential candidate for individuals one standard deviation below and above the mean in terms of the Democratic Compassion Advantage variable. I furthermore examine predicted probabilities at observed values rather than average values, because observed values demonstrate the average effect of the treatment across all respondents in our sample. Examining the treatment effect for only the "average case" rather than for all observations is an inefficient use of data and narrows the scope of inference we can draw (Hanmer and Kalkan, 2013). Figure 4.6 represents the summary of these analyses. It demonstrates that, even when we control for the myriad factors known to influence public approval and voting decisions, the effect of compassion on vote choice is strong and has the potential to be decisive.

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[46] Because omitted variable bias in a model predicting vote choice poses a major threat to the validity of the results, a large number of control variables are included here. These include perceptions of politicians' abilities as leaders, partisanship, considerations of retrospective personal finances, considerations of prospective personal finances, considerations of retrospective national economic performance, considerations of prospective national economic performance, gender, ideology, age, race, education, and family income. Full regression outputs can be found in the appendix.

Figure 4.6 notably provides strong evidence in support of both the Compassion→Vote Choice and the Partisan Lens Hypotheses. As the Compassion→Vote Choice hypothesis states, the probability that a voter will support the Democratic presidential candidate will be higher the more they perceive that candidate to have a greater capacity for compassion than his or her Republican opponent. This is supported by the difference between the white and the black bars in the figure. The white bars represent a relatively high Democratic Compassion Advantage, whereas the black bars represent a low advantage. As the figure demonstrates, voters across all partisan affiliations are more likely to support the Democratic candidate when they are relatively more positive about the Democrat's ability to care about other people. And as the Partisan Lens Hypothesis states, the importance of compassion in determining vote choice should be highest among those who cannot fall back on partisanship to inform their vote. The gap between the two bars among independents is far larger than the gap among partisans, lending support to this assertion as well.

The results show that not only do perceptions of compassion influence vote choice, but that this effect can be pivotal for voters in presidential elections. For the full sample, the effect is a massive 23 percentage points. Not only is this effect substantively large, but it is driven by voters who are of critical importance to winning the election. Democratic and Republican voters are both fairly locked in with respect to their preferences. A Democrat on the low end of the Democratic Compassion Advantage scale would still be 86 percent likely to vote for the Democrat. Republicans on the high end of the scale would still only be 11 percent likely to support the Democrat. This reaffirms what political scientists have known for a long time: partisanship matters. Yet even

among these partisans, we still see an effect for compassion on vote choice to the tune of

nearly 10 percentage points. These changes are not insignificant and would be decisive in

any recent presidential election, so it is important not to discount the potential for

compassion to influence the voting choices of even strong partisans.

Figure 4.6: Predicted Probability of Voting for Democrat by Partisanship at Differing Levels of Democratic Compassion Advantage
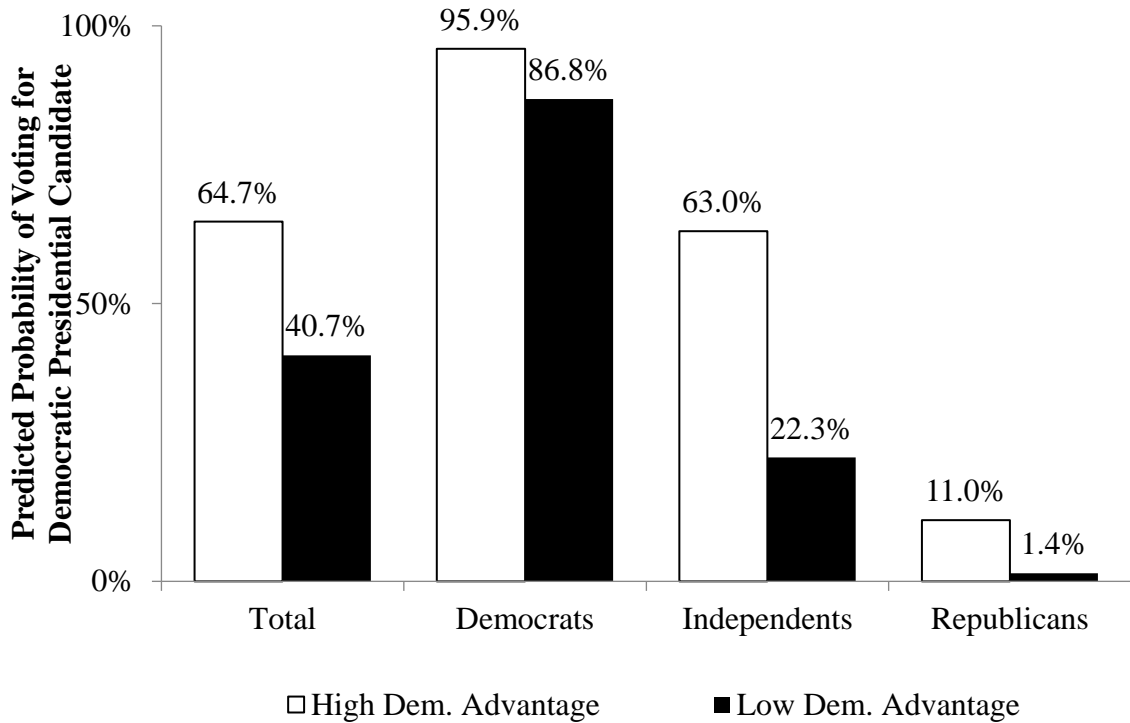
Source: American National Election Studies (1992-2016). Low and High Democratic Compassion Advantages are calculated by moving one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean in terms of this measure of advantage. This is done separately for each subgroup. For example, the marginal effect of compassion on vote choice for Democrats is calculated by moving from 0.4 to 3.6 on the measure of Democratic Compassion Advantage. For Republicans, it is calculated by moving from -3.0 to 0.6. That way, the values being used are realistic for all varieties of partisan.

For independents, however, the effects are far more impressive. The effect of

seeing the Democratic candidate as somewhat more compassionate than the Republican

takes them from being only 23 percent likely to support the Democrat to over 60 percent

likely. Not only is this roughly 38 percentage point effect substantively massive, but it

importantly crosses the 50 percent threshold where Democrats can expect to win over this

critical voting bloc. Much has been made in recent years about the importance of winning over the small number of undecideds who still exist from election to election, rejecting partisan entrenchments. That these voters' perceptions of a candidate's compassion alter their support should be of great interest to campaigns seeking a winning strategy.

4.6 The Role of Identity in Shaping Perceptions of Compassion

Examining the various dimensions of empathy using observational data poses a number of inferential challenges, which is why I employ an experimental design in the next chapter. Despite this, the ANES and the Washington Post-University of Maryland Poll do provide some insights into the role that identity plays in shaping perceptions of candidate compassion.

In 2008 the nomination of Barack Obama meant that, for the first time, one of the two major presidential contenders was black. This change provides a glimpse into the role racial identity can play in determining whether a voter believes a candidate cares about people like them. If partisanship, not race, determines the degree to which an individual perceives compassion in a candidate, we should expect that Democrats of all races would see Obama as similar in his capacity for compassion as other Democratic candidates that came before.

Figure 4.7 shows this not to be the case. Here I show how white and black Democrats rated the various Democratic presidential nominees in terms of compassion, standardizing their ratings on a 0-1 scale. Among white Democrats, Obama is perceived as barely more compassionate than all other Democratic candidates from 1992-2016, by a margin of about 1.5 points. The difference among black Democrats, however, is roughly 6 points, or four times the size found among whites. Considering the already high rating

black Democrats give to all Democratic presidential candidates, this positive shift for

Obama is notable, suggesting race and empathy are closely related. While Black

Democrats generally view the Democratic nominee as compassionate, Obama was

exceptional in this regard. Having a co-racial candidate for office, then, appears to play

an important role in determining why certain politicians excel in evaluations of empathy.

Figure 4.7: Perceptions of Democratic Candidate Compassion by Race
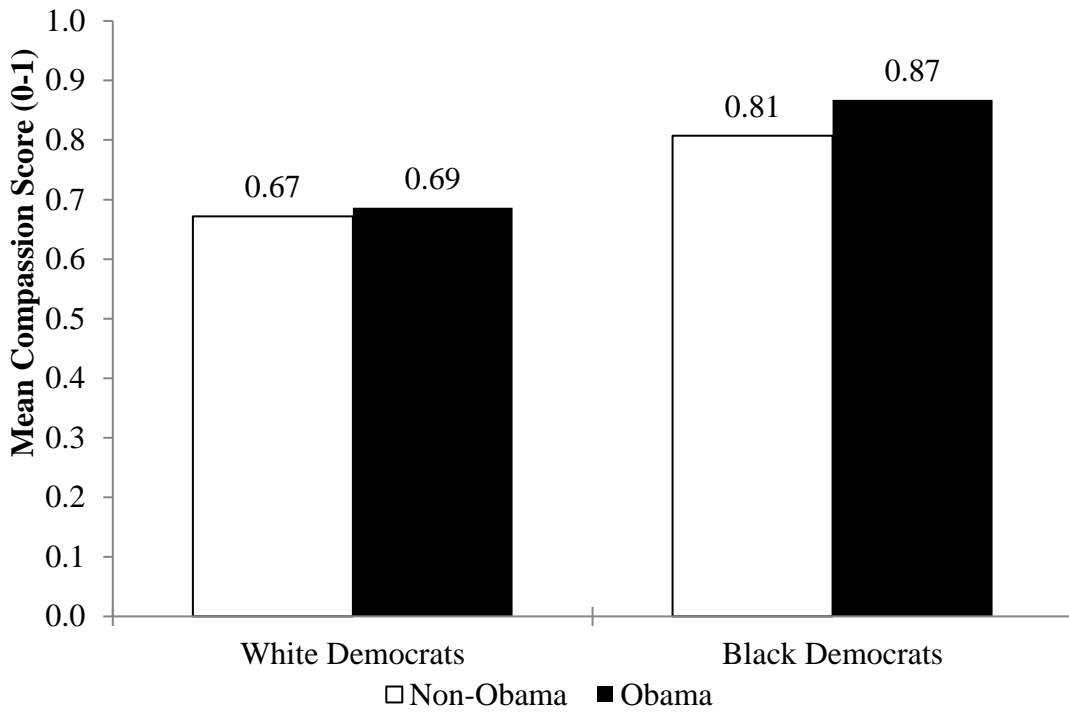
Source: 1992-2016 ANES

4.7 A Case Study: Compassion in the Maryland Democratic Senate Primary

While presidential elections offer the richest source of data to test the importance

of compassion in the political arena, the theory underpinning the importance of

compassion in vote choice operates similarly across many contexts. Chiefly, perceptions

of compassion should play an important role in primary elections. In a general election,

many voters rely heavily on their own partisan affiliation to select a candidate, yet

independents cannot do this. Similarly, partisan voters weighing two candidates that belong to the same party cannot simply fall back on partisanship to inform their vote. Instead, they must find some other factor that differentiates the two politicians, which I argue often comes down to perceptions of who is more compassionate.

Because Democrats are seen as "owning" the trait of compassion (Hayes 2005), we also see that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to cite it as a trait central to their voting decisions. In presidential contests that focus a great deal on the personal narratives, compassion will play an important role. Yet I also suggest that this trait will play an important role in any election where the personalities and backstories of the candidates receive sufficient attention.

As one way to look at the role of compassion in contexts beyond presidential elections, I look at the Maryland Senate Democratic primary that took place between Chris Van Hollen and Donna Edwards. Because the Democratic primary was hotly contested, high quality statewide data exist to estimate the role perceptions of compassion played and allow us to compare the effect in a primary contest to the effects previously analyzed in national elections. As I hypothesized previously, perceptions of compassion should play a larger role when partisanship is inactive. In the context of a primary, partisanship is present but does not allow us to differentiate between the candidates. Furthermore, while the two candidates shared a partisan affiliation, they were different both in terms of race and gender. I therefore explore not only how perceptions of compassion influence vote choice, but how race and gender played a role in determining who cares about people *like you*.

While I will examine the impact of salient identities on perceptions of compassion in the following chapter, suffice it to say that identity certainly appears to have played a role in determining whether voters saw Van Hollen or Edwards as more compassionate. Figure 4.8 shows that black voters overwhelmingly saw Edwards as being more likely to care about people like them. Despite Van Hollen and Edwards being indistinguishable in terms of partisanship, race served as a salient identity through which Democratic voters in the state of Maryland perceived the character of the candidates. It is not surprising, then, that Edwards is estimated to have won the black vote by roughly 20 percentage points.[47]

Figure 4.8: Perceived Levels of Compassion for Van Hollen and Edwards by Race
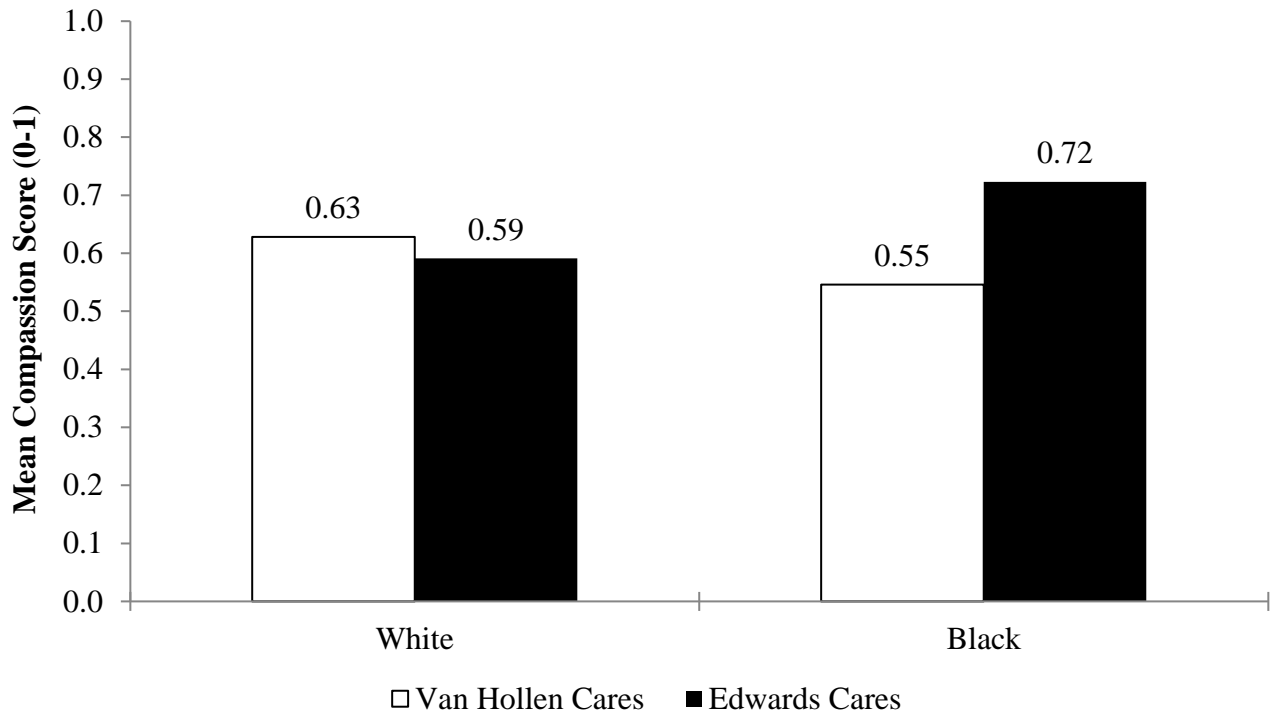
Source: April 2016, Washington Post-University of Maryland Poll

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[47] Numbers reflect the results from exit polling data collected by Edison Media Research for National Election Pool, The Washington Post and other media organizations

While not as drastic as race, gender also appears to have played at least a minor role in the primary. Figure 4.9 shows that men gave Van Hollen and Edwards similar ratings in terms of compassion. Yet Edwards scored notably higher than Van Hollen among women. Was this simply the result of a shared identity or was this because Edwards had made her own personal experience as a single mother a major selling-point of her campaign? It is impossible for us to say here with certainty, which is why I employ an experimental design in later sections to isolate these factors. What is clear from the responses from Maryland Democrats, however, is that shared race and gender are closely related with the notion that the candidate cares about people like them.

Figure 4.9: Perceived Levels of Compassion for Van Hollen and Edwards by Gender
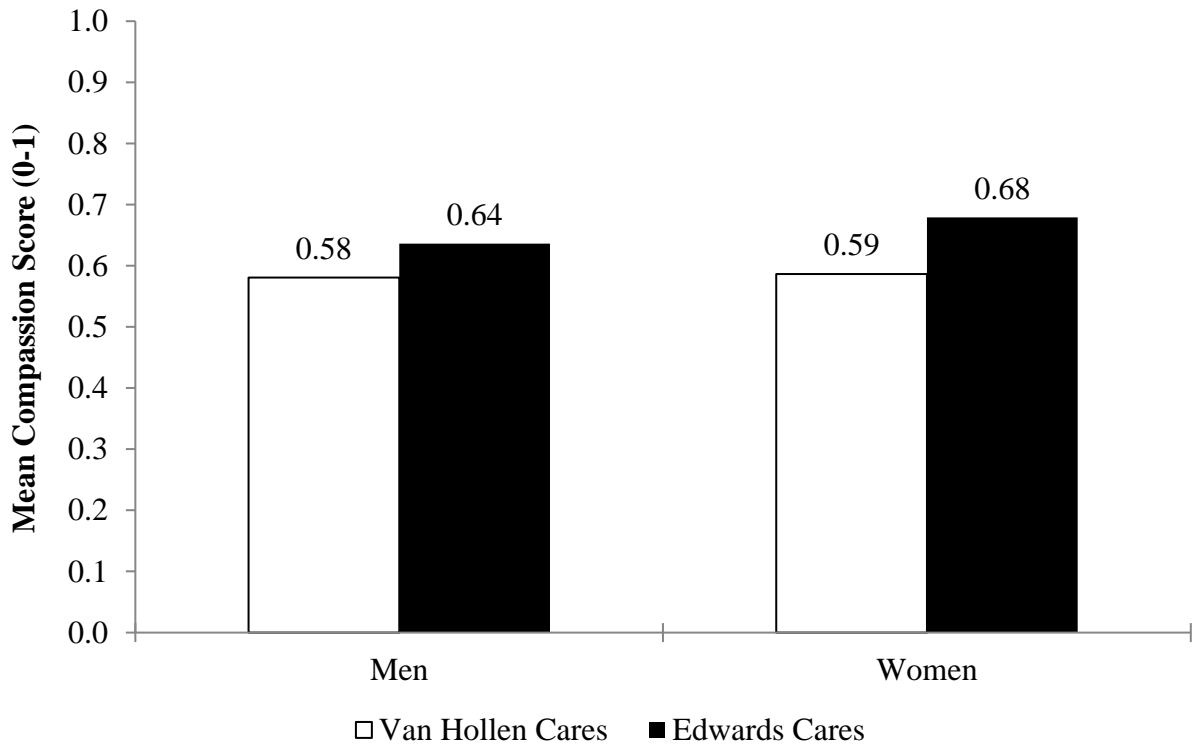
Source: April 2016, Washington Post-University of Maryland Poll

Once formed, perceptions of candidate compassion act in Maryland much the same way they acted in the prior analyses of presidential races. Using the same statistical methods on the Maryland data as I used on the ANES, I generated predicted probabilities for supporting Chris Van Hollen at one standard deviation below the mean in terms of his advantage on compassion and one standard deviation above the mean, holding all other variables in the model observed values.

Figure 4.10: Predicted Probability of Supporting Van Hollen at Differing Levels of Compassion Advantage
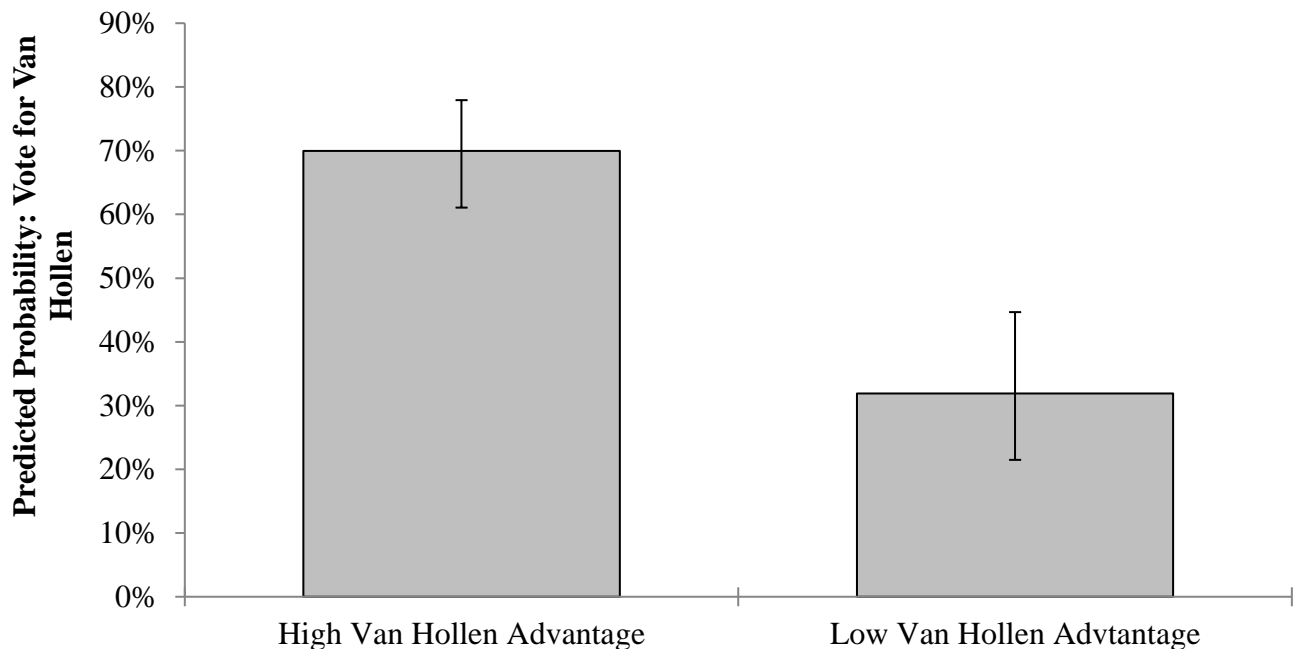
Source: April 2016, Washington Post-University of Maryland Poll

The results here are clear. Van Hollen benefits greatly when he is perceived as relatively more compassionate. Furthermore, the effect size we see in these results, roughly 38 percentage points, is nearly identical to the effect size found when looking at pure independents in presidential elections (shown in Figure 4.10). Compared with the effect sizes found among partisans, which hovered around 7 or 8 percentage points, the effect among independents and primary voters is relatively large. This underscores the

importance of compassion for two reasons. First, as I have posited in this dissertation, independents often determine the outcomes of elections. Yet second, and perhaps just as important, the candidates that appear on the ballot in a general election can only get there by winning a primary. While many factors undoubtedly play a role in who wins a primary, perceptions of compassion play an absolutely critical role in determining the outcome of those elections as well.

4.8 Discussion

The preceding results show that when voters believe a politician cares about people like them, they are indeed more likely to support them in an election, even after we control for the numerous other factors known to influence vote choice. In the next chapter, I seek to determine precisely how voters go about determining which candidates are the most compassionate. I suggest that empathy, more than sympathy, is key in cultivating positive perceptions of compassion. Empathy is perceived through some sort of commonality. I outline shared experience, shared emotion, and shared identity, as the key ways in which citizens perceive empathy and provide empirical demonstrations of this theory.

In this chapter, I have argued that voters seek politicians who are compassionate because they believe that candidate can be trusted to look out for their best interests. Kinder (1986) argues that people seek to ascribe a motivation for the actions of politicians, which is made easier if they believe they understand what kind of person each leader is. Having a positive perceptions toward a leader can make citizens find excuses when a politician they like fails, or give them credit for achieving things for their constituency that might have been out of the control of the politician in the first place.

Most voters do not have the time or energy to understand the intricacies of policy-making, nor is it reasonable for political scientists to demand that from them. As such, we must respect the fact that they will fall back on their perceptions of whether a candidate is a good person who truly cares about people like them.

While some scholars may find this normatively problematic because it leaves the electorate susceptible to a cunning demagogue, I posit that there are reasons for hope. As I show, voters are not as blinded by partisanship as some might expect. To be clear, partisanship informs Americans a great deal about the character of politicians. Partisans will infer character traits based on the simple fact that they have a partisan identity that bonds them with the politician they support. Yet partisanship is not everything. Republicans, in particular, are willing to see the Democratic candidate for president as more compassionate than the Republicans. Even Democrats are willing some of the time to admit that a Republican does seem to care about other people. This phenomenon leaves us with some optimism that there are opportunities for politicians to reach across the partisan divide by making credible empathetic appeals. It is precisely for that reason that I examine these types of appeals in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Empathy through Commonality

> *Actor Mark Ruffalo: Let's say I'm walking along and, OH, I stubbed my*
>
> *toe. Ohh that hurts!*
>
> *Murray Monster: Oh you poor thing. That hurts. I can imagine exactly*
>
> *you feel.*
>
> *Ruffalo: That's it!*
>
> *Murray Monster: That's what?*
>
> *Ruffalo: That's empathy!*
>
> - Sesame Street[48]

Empathy in American society acts as a powerful social norm. Group empathy is found to drive acts of charity across social contexts (Nook et al. 2016) and support for redistributive economic policies that benefit less privileged individuals (Zhao, Ferguson, and Smillie 2017). Through early childhood socialization (such as the Sesame Street segment quoted above), we are taught that it is important to understand the feelings of others and demand a degree of empathy from them as well. This, I have argued, extends to our politics. We not only understand that we are supposed to show empathy toward others in our community, but we expect others, particularly those entrusted to serve the community, to show that empathy for those they represent. We expect and demand that politicians show some degree of understanding and caring, at least toward those we care about, before we agree to vote for them.

As I show in this chapter, however, when empathy leaves the friendly confines of Sesame Street and enters the realm of American politics, it takes on a self-interested

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[48] "Sesame Street: Mark Ruffalo: Empathy," published on YouTube October 14, 2011.

quality. While empathy acts as a social norm, voters are interested not only in whether a politician cares about others more generally, but whether the politician cares about people like them specifically. In some cases, the consequences are normatively desirable: we expect politicians to show empathy for those who are struggling and an understanding not only for what they need but how they feel. In other cases the consequences are less normatively positive: we understand that politics is often about how we distribute resources, and we are not only concerned with making sure we get our own "fair share," but that the people who are most like us also get what we deserve (and sometimes more).

While empathy is clearly an important driver of public support, far less is known about how Americans determine whether a politician is low or high in empathy. I conceptualize perceptions of political empathy in a somewhat selfish light: Americans want to know that a leader will be looking out for *their* interests and the interests of those they care about. In the case of economic appeals, such as understanding the concerns of saving for retirement, being able to afford healthcare costs if something were to go wrong, or paying or a child's education, these concerns are nearly universal. A politician can convey empathy to voters in this way without being divisive or losing support from certain groups in the electorate.

Yet empathy is not always perceived through universal or near-universal appeals. When voters assess whether a candidate truly cares about people *like them* they may be examining the degree to which they believe the politician will prioritize their interests over the interests of others. This means that a candidate need not express some universal love for all humanity, but instead can show preference to those individuals they need to win a majority of the votes. In order to do this, voters must identify some source of

commonality that connects themselves to the politician. The presence of a commonality

suggests that the politician is on their side and will consider their needs and the needs of

those in the community of people who share this common characteristic. This leads them

to view that politician as truly caring about people like them. The sources of

commonality are varied but can be widely categorized as centering on experience,

emotion, and identity.

5.1 Returning to the Empathy Classification Scheme

The typology I advance here, which examines empathy as a commonality based

on experience, emotion, and identity, relies on a few assertions supported by the extant

literature. First, empathy is important to voters because they recognize that politicians are

human beings who care more about certain types of people than they do about others. The

voters themselves feel closer to those in their families than they do to strangers, feel

closer to those in their communities than they do to those from foreign locations, and feel

closer to people with whom they share an important identity than they do to those who

are from an out-group (Nussbaum 1996; Slote 2001). When politicians are attacked for

being excessively wealthy and out-of-touch with the common voter, the implication is

that they will be more concerned with helping out other rich people—those who share

similar experiences with the politician—rather than those whose need is greater. The in-

group/out-group bias need not be related solely to class-based divisions. They can center

on something as simple as partisanship, but there are a multitude of other political and

social cleavages that exists and are important in shaping perceptions of empathy.

In order to assess whether a politician is high or low in empathy for people like

them, voters are forced to rely on a number of characteristics. The first characteristic I

examine, a common experience, is exemplified in the exchange between Mark Ruffalo

and Murray Monster that begins this chapter. They have had a similar experience, so the

empathizer (Murray) understands the full emotional process involved with the pain of

stubbing one's toe rather than having simply heard that it is painful from someone else. In

campaign politics, experiential empathy is admittedly more complicated, but it can

manifest itself as any experience a voter has had, so long as they can see that the

candidate has also had that experience. Most often, however, experiential empathy

manifests as some sort of economic appeal. On issues of taxation, health care, or student

loans, politicians often point to their own financial anxieties or those of people in their

family to demonstrate their familiarity with the issue and their motivation for enacting

some sort of change in policy.

Politically, experiential empathy is noteworthy in that it is not outwardly visible

to the electorate. Unlike race, gender, or partisanship, the personal biographies of the

candidates must be learned through the course of a campaign. The news media, which

often focuses on personal stories, may give an impression of what a politician is like, but

journalists frequently do not focus on the stories regarding the candidates' pasts unless

the campaigns themselves are focusing on them (e.g. Gans 1979). As a result, voters are

likely to form an opinion as to the character of each politician, but that evaluation may

not be fully informed. For example, a 2018 nationally representative poll of American

adults found that only 51 percent knew that President Trump was born into great

wealth.[49] Many working or middle class Americans who wanted to support a politician

who had an understanding of the working class lifestyle, then, have incorrectly perceived

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[49] May 2018 University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll.

Trump as having had experiences similar to theirs. As McDonald, Karol, and Mason (2019) find, when Americans are correctly informed that Donald Trump was born wealthy and received sustained assistance from his father when building his business empire, it leads voters to view him not only as less skilled at business but also less empathetic toward the average American. In this way, perceptions of empathy based on common experiences are a heuristic, and like other heuristics they may be manipulated by the campaigns and result in poor voting decisions (Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman 2002).

Individuals also seek to determine whether a candidate cares by identifying a common emotion that drives their orientation toward the government. Donald Trump resonated with Americans who had backgrounds vastly different from his own in part because he exuded an anger and frustration with status quo politics that resonated with white working-class voters. This differentiated him from past GOP nominees such as Mitt Romney or John McCain, who had spent careers in politics, could not effectively claim the mantle of outsider, and focused more on working within the system than blowing the system up or "draining the swamp." Sharing an emotion, I argue, is a powerful driver of perceptions of empathy because the voters themselves are motivated to change the political status quo. This motivation is rooted in an emotion, whether it is hope for future change or anger about the lack of progress. Whether they are feeling hopeful or angry, they want to see that emotion reflected back to them in a candidate for office. This shared emotion indicates that the politician understands exactly how the voter feels. As a result, that politician should be just as motivated to enact positive change in office as the voter would be. When the politician appears aloof or disinterested, it

suggests that they are running not because of some deep-seated motivation to change the system, but to maintain the status quo.

While emotional empathy is somewhat more visible to the electorate than personal biography, it is still susceptible to manipulation and salesmanship. A politician who wishes to establish that they are the candidate of anger or hope can often do so with an assist from the news media, which takes cues from the campaigns and prefers to write stories that fit a predetermined narrative for describing that politician (Graber 1988; Kendall 2000). When a politician successfully convinces a voter that they feel a strong emotion toward government and the voter similarly feels that emotion (a phenomenon I refer to as "emotional resonance"), the voter should perceive that politician as more empathetic. With emotional resonance, a voter feels strongly about politics, either in a negative or positive direction, and sees that same emotion reflected back in the tone and rhetoric of the politician.

Finally, I examine identity as a lens through which voters determine a candidate truly cares about people like them. Unlike experience and emotion, these traits are visible to the public. While they may not necessarily lead to "correct" voting decisions (there is no guarantee that people sharing a salient identity will truly be more compassionate to one another), these traits are the least susceptible to manipulation by skilled political professionals.

While partisanship serves as the most obvious and important identity through which Americans will perceive candidates for public office, it is by no means the only one. A vast literature explores individual reactions to the candidates based on the use of stereotypes. Namely, these works explore race (Karl and Ryan 2016; Jones 2014;

McDermott 1998; Piston 2010), gender (Fox and Oxley 2003; Dolan 2014; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Sanbonmatsu 2002), and even occupation (Campbell and Cowley 2014; McDermott 2005). For any individual voter, the identities that are most salient will serve as the most crucial for determining whether a politician will be empathetic toward them once in office. Yet, as I show, the identities that are the most relevant to perceptions of empathy are those identities that align with one's political party. As Mason (2018) shows, when one's racial or religious identity aligns with their partisanship (such as being black and a Democrat or white and a Republican), individuals show greater in-group preference and out-group antipathy. It is here, most especially, that empathy can take on a self-interested meaning. Because politics often involves group competition for finite resources, we view ourselves and those in our own groups as more deserving of government aid. Here, empathy is self-serving, and often comes at the exclusion of other groups that may in fact be just as deserving and whose need may be greater.

5.2 Research Design

To test for the importance of experiential, emotional, and identity-based empathy, I examine the results from three separate survey experiments. In all three surveys, respondents are randomly treated with a candidate for office who has differing characteristics. These characteristics center on a personal family experience, an emotional orientation toward politics, or a particular identity. Depending on the characteristics of the respondents themselves, I hypothesize that these shared characteristics should lead to higher evaluations on measures of compassion.

All three surveys present respondents with David Allen, a fictional congressional candidate running for office in the upcoming election.[50] In the first experiment, David Allen makes either a sympathetic appeal for votes or an empathetic one. In the second experiment, Allen evokes either anger or hope in an emotional appeal to explain his motivation for seeking public office. In the third experiment, Allen does not make either an experiential or emotional appeal for votes, but is presented to respondents as being either white or black. I expect that respondents will infer the character traits of the politician (namely how empathetic they are) based on the race of the politician.

Experiment #1: 2016 SSI

To measure the importance of experiential empathy and test for the existence of the "sincerity barrier" facing politicians employing sympathetic appeals, I rely on a survey experiment administered in 2016 on a volunteer sample of 1,432 respondents[51] from Survey Sampling International (SSI).[52] The experiment portrays David Allen, a fictitious politician, making either a sympathetic appeal, an empathetic appeal, or an appeal with no direct claims of compassion to voters. While the nonrandom sampling procedure results in a pool of respondents that is somewhat younger and better educated than the voting-eligible population, any bias due to the sampling procedure exists across

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[50] In an attempt to maintain a high level of ecological validity, respondents were told that David Allen was running for Congress outside of the respondent's district.

[51] This represents the total sample used after eliminating respondents who failed an attention check at the outset of the experiment.

[52] SSI is a suitable platform to test these messages because, though the sampling technique was not purely random, SSI aims to be representative of the voting age population in the United States. Scholars who have examined SSI samples find that their surveys yield highly accurate results that replicate the relationships found in surveys using probability-based sampling methods (see e.g. Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). Analyses presented apply probability weights based on age, race, education, and income.

both treatment and control conditions, meaning that differences between treatment and control are attributable to the experimental manipulation.

The experiment was designed to isolate the mechanism central to the theory undergirding experiential empathy and the sincerity barrier. I use a fictitious politician but strive to provide enough detail to make him seem real. While the respondent is unfamiliar with David Allen, this lack of knowledge would not be unusual for a House candidate, especially for one early in the campaign cycle. Furthermore, this design limits any influence global evaluations of Allen could have on individual trait evaluations, since respondents have no prior knowledge about him. I manipulate both the message he conveys to supporters as well as his partisanship in order to examine the effect of having firsthand personal experience with hardship. Because some respondents will share Allen's partisanship and others will not, I can also examine whether empathetic messages more effectively overcome the sincerity barrier I suggest should be highest when the voter and the politician are not copartisans.

The use of a fictional politician was necessary for two reasons. First, the primary goal of this research is to establish that voters, at least in the abstract, respond more favorably to a politician who makes an empathetic appeal rather than a sympathetic one. To do this, I prioritize experimental control over ecological validity. Furthermore, placing the hypothetical candidate in the context of a congressional race, where name recognition is often low, minimizes the loss of external validity. Second, the use of a real politician would make it difficult to examine the role of the sincerity barrier, which is central to my theory. Because I operationalize this concept by manipulating the politician's

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partisanship, I cannot use a real politician for whom partisanship is immovable. With these considerations in mind, I constructed the survey vignettes as follows:

Control: David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat (Republican). He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen told the crowd, "I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."

Sympathy: David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat (Republican). He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen spoke of how much he cares about struggling families as his motivation for running. Allen told the crowd, "I care about the neighborhood mailmen and the part-time secretaries. I've heard the stories of grandfathers who worked as coal-miners to scratch out a living but couldn't even afford indoor plumbing. I've talked to families who have lived this hardship, and I care about those struggling to make ends meet. I'm running for Congress to help those Americans. I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."

Empathy: *David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat (Republican). He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen spoke of his own history growing up in a struggling family as his motivation for running. Allen told the crowd, "My dad was the neighborhood mailman and my mom worked as a part-time secretary. My grandfather worked as a coal-miner to scratch out a living but couldn't even afford indoor plumbing. My family has lived this hardship, so I understand the struggles of those trying to make ends meet. I'm running for Congress to help those Americans. I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."*

The differences between the empathy and sympathy treatments are subtle yet important. In the sympathy treatment, David Allen invokes the people he has met on the campaign trail (as politicians so often do) as his motivation for enacting positive change in office. Yet here there is nothing personal that should lead a voter to believe that he is especially motivated to solve the problems of everyday Americans. In the empathetic treatment, the mailman and the secretary are not abstractions he has learned about from the campaign trail but are instead central pieces of his family identity. For individuals approaching David Allen with suspicion, having blue-collar values "in his bloodstream" should be more convincing than simply claiming to have had contact with blue-collar Americans.

Experiment #2: August 2018 Mechanical Turk

The second experiment I examine looks at the effect of emotional resonance, or a shared emotional orientation toward government between politician and respondent, on perceptions of compassion. I hypothesize that citizens perceive empathy in a politician when they feel the way the politician appears to feel. If Murray Monster's claim of "I can imagine exactly how you feel" indicates empathy, then how the voter feels about politics and how the politician feels about politics should matter greatly. When the feelings of voter and candidate align, I predict significantly stronger perceptions of compassion. I administered the survey from August 1-2 on a sample of 989 respondents via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk).[53] The survey first asked respondents how they felt about the American government and politics in general. Respondents could rate how angry, anxious, enthusiastic, or hopeful they felt from "not at all" to "a great deal" (a 1-4 scale). In order to have a measure for how relatively angry or hopeful each person was, I classified individuals as being "more angry" if they said they felt more angry than hopeful toward government, "more hopeful" if the opposite was true, or "neutral" if they said they felt equally angry and hopeful about politics. Respondents were then randomly treated with a message from David Allen designed to be similar to the previous experiment. One message evoked hope and the other message evoked anger, but they were otherwise identical:

> **Anger/Hope Treatment:** *David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a*
>
> *seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. In his first public speech since filing to run*

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[53] Despite the non-random nature of the sampling procedure, the literature on experimental research using MTurk finds that researchers can make credible inferences regarding the relationships between treatments and outcomes of interest (Berinsky et al. 2012; Krupnikov and Levine 2014).

for office, Allen spoke of his [ANGER AND IRRITATION/HOPE AND OPTIMISM]

about the state of the nation as his reason for running. Allen told the crowd, "When I

see what's happening in this country, I can't help but feel [TICKED

OFF/HOPEFUL]. I believe the time has come for people to step up and do

something. I'm running for Congress because I know I can get something done for

everyday Americans. I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this

upcoming November election."

The difference between the anger and hope treatments had to be somewhat subtle

in order to maintain the internal validity of the experiment. Often, candidates who appear

angry identify the precise features of government that serve as the source of their anger

(such as unfair trade policies or the premature and avoidable deaths of those who lack

health insurance). Candidates who appear hopeful, on the other hand, often hold up the

strength of the American people as their source for hope and ignore Washington politics,

since Washington politics are more often a source of anger and frustration. Bringing these

ideas into the vignettes would likely have made the treatments stronger and more

realistic, but they would no longer have been different purely on the basis of the emotion

evoked. As a result, I focus the manipulations in this experiment on mentions of the

emotion and make sure the remaining text is identical.

Experiment #3: July 2018 Mechanical Turk

Finally, I examine the effect of sharing a salient identity on perceptions of

compassion by using an experiment nearly identical to the previous two. I administered

the survey from July 14-16 on a sample of 665 respondents. As in the previous two

experiments, respondents for this survey also read a story about congressional candidate

David Allen making a plea for votes. The text to the vignette was identical to the control

condition for Experiment #1. Yet for this experiment I attached a picture to the treatment

that varied the race of David Allen as either white or black. Because some will infer

partisanship based on the race of the politician, the survey vignette explicitly stated that

David Allen was a Democrat. The sample was limited to only white and black

respondents, with an oversample of black respondents in order to examine how white and

black respondents react to white and black candidates.[54] In order to ensure that white and

black respondents received a roughly similar number of co-racial vs. different race

appeals, I block randomized assignment to the two treatments by the race of the

respondent.[55] For every respondent, I constructed a variable based on whether or not the

appeal they received was "coracial," or coming from a politician who shared the same

race as the respondent.

Dependent Variables Used

In all three of the experiments, respondents rated David Allen on the same

evaluations (full wording can be found in this chapter's appendix). Following the

vignettes, respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with the

statement that David Allen "really cares about people like you." Respondents also rated

the degree to which they had a favorable or unfavorable view of Allen.[56] For ease of

interpretation, both of these dependent variables in the following analyses have been

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[54] The sampling procedure yielded 300 black respondents and 365 white respondents.

[55] Among the 300 black respondents in the sample, 148 received the white candidate treatment, while 152 received the black candidate treatment. Among the 365 white respondents in the sample, 184 received the black candidate treatment and 181 received the white candidate treatment.

[56] Full wording for the questions used in these analyses can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

standardized from 0 to 1 so that differences between groups can be interpreted as the percentage point change across the response scale.

By randomly assigning respondents to the treatment and control conditions I can examine support for David Allen across messages simply by comparing mean levels of support for the candidate across all conditions in all three experiments. The random assignment of subjects to the treatments across all the experiments was successful; as a result, I proceed in this manner in the next section.[57] Due to the success of random assignment to the conditions, differences in the dependent variable across conditions can be attributed to the manipulation rather than potential confounders (Kinder and Palfrey 1993).

5.3 Results

Experiential Empathy

I first test the Experiential Empathy→Compassion Hypothesis and the Sincerity Barrier Hypothesis. These hypotheses state that a candidate who makes a credible empathetic appeal will be perceived as more compassionate than someone who makes a credible sympathetic appeal, and that this effect will be driven mostly by those for whom skepticism should be highest. Empathetic appeals are made primarily by leveraging the personal experiences the politician has had or those of individuals close to them (such as close friends or family). Sympathetic appeals, on the other hand, occur when claims of caring are made without invoking any kind of personal connection to lend that claim authenticity and sincerity. It is precisely this reason, suspicions lack of sincerity, that I argue the effects will be driven by those for whom skepticism is highest. I choose to

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[57] All randomization analyses can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

operationalize skepticism in this section by looking at copartisans (people who share David Allen's partisanship) and anti-partisans (those who belong to the opposing party).

I assess the effect of empathetic and sympathetic appeals by examining the mean differences between conditions for the 2016 SSI experiment. The results portrayed in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 represent the increase in perceptions of David Allen's capacity for compassion when respondents are treated to a sympathetic or empathetic message. I look first at the overall effect of both the sympathetic and empathetic appeals relative to the baseline, shown by the first two bars in the figures. I also examine the differences between the sympathetic and empathetic appeals. Finally, I consider the differential effects for the appeals among those who share David Allen's partisanship (copartisans) or those who belong to the opposing party (out-partisans). Out-partisans are those who should most require an empathetic appeal, since skepticism among them should be highest.

Looking first at the effect sympathetic and empathetic appeals have on perceptions of compassion (Figure 5.1), I find that David Allen is not surprisingly perceived as substantially more compassionate when he makes some sort of compassionate appeal. Even the sympathetic appeal increases positive perceptions of Allen's compassion by statistically significant margins among out-partisans. Candidates who cannot make credible empathetic appeals, then, are well-served by outwardly claiming to care about less fortunate individuals even if there is no personal or family history to lend credibility to that claim.

What is more interesting, however, is that the empathetic appeal outperforms the sympathetic appeal among both copartisans and out-partisans. As these results show,

however, shared partisanship leads more individuals to give the sympathetic candidate the benefit of the doubt. The gap between the sympathetic and empathetic appeal more than doubles when looking only at those individuals who belong to the opposing party of David Allen. For context, out-partisans in the control condition give Allen a rating of 0.42 (on a 0-1 scale) on perceptions of compassion. For individuals in the sympathy condition, the number rises but stays below the 0.5 threshold. For out-partisans in the empathy condition, however that number rises significantly to 0.59. While Allen is a fictional candidate without the baggage of many real politicians, the fact that individuals from the opposing party on average view him as truly caring about people like them is noteworthy. In a congressional campaign such as the one that is proposed in this experiment, a relatively unknown politician would not be unrealistic. This suggests that, in introducing a candidate to a polarized and skeptical American electorate, campaigns can make general empathetic appeals that will appeal across the partisan divide without alienating voters in their own base.

I also examine the possibility that sympathetic and empathetic appeals are strong enough to improve not only specific evaluations of compassion, but translate to overall favorability. As shown in Figure 5.2, the importance of the sincerity barrier becomes even stronger. While compassionate appeals *do* boost approval for David Allen, the difference between a sympathetic and empathetic appeal is far more muted when looking exclusively at copartisans. These results suggest, as I have argued, that copartisans will give their preferred candidate the benefit of the doubt. They will view him as similarly favorable even when he only makes a sympathetic appeal without a personal or family history to show that he's sincere about his desire to help those less fortunate. Among out-

partisans, however, the story is much different. These results again reaffirm the importance of empathy among those for whom skepticism is highest. While those who share David Allen's partisanship do not support him at higher rates when the empathetic appeal is made, those who belong to the opposing party view him in a significantly more favorable light if he points to his own personal experience as his motivation for caring. The six-point-gap in terms of overall favorability is not only statistically significant, but substantively meaningful in the broader context of electoral politics. Partisan voters who view the opposition candidate in a more favorable light will feel more ambivalent about the choices presented to them. Ambivalent voters see the political world more clearly and therefore make more careful political choices (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). In an age where negative partisanship tends to drive so much of political behavior, these results suggest there are ways of introducing more clear-thinking means of selecting political leaders.

Figure 5.1: Effect of Sympathetic and Empathetic Appeals on Perceptions of Compassion among Copartisans and Out-Partisans
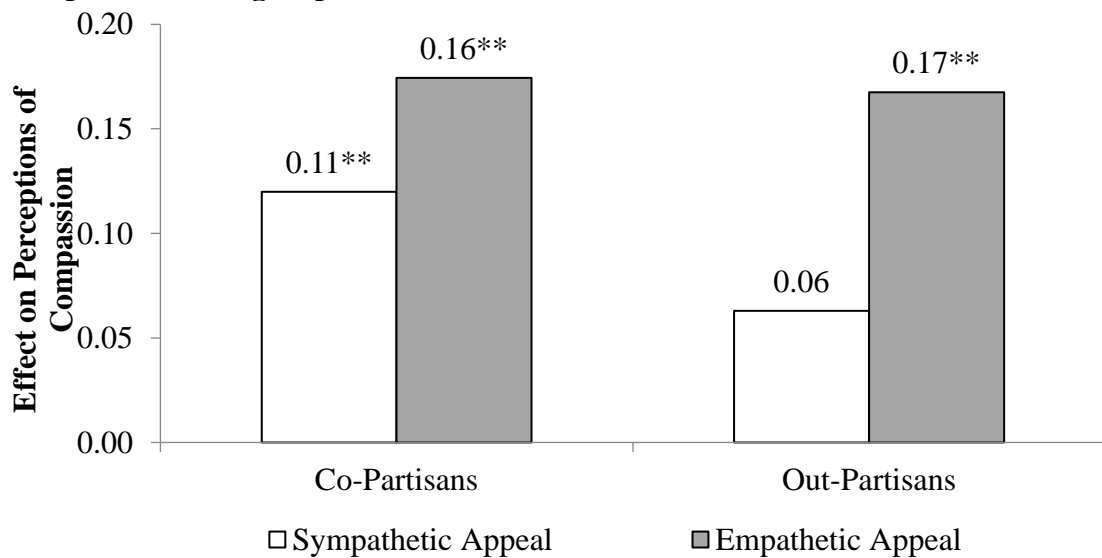
Effect on Perceptions of Compassion

- Co-Partisans: Sympathetic Appeal 0.11**, Empathetic Appeal 0.16**
- Out-Partisans: Sympathetic Appeal 0.06, Empathetic Appeal 0.17**

☐ Sympathetic Appeal ☐ Empathetic Appeal

**Effects are statistically significant at p<0.01 (one-tailed test).
NOTE: Differences between the Sympathetic Appeal and Empathetic Appeal conditions are statistically significant for the total sample (at p<0.05, one-tailed) and among anti-partisans (at p<0.01, one-tailed).

Figure 5.2: Effect of Sympathetic and Empathetic Appeals on Candidate Favorability among Copartisans and Out-Partisans
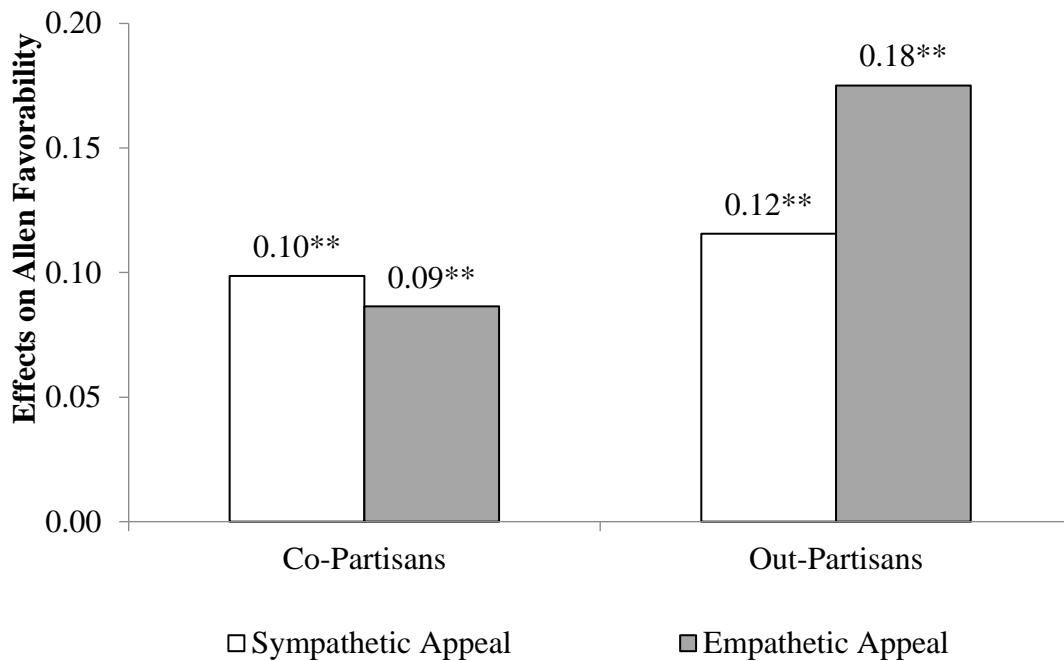
Effects on Allen Favorability

Co-Partisans: 0.10** (Sympathetic Appeal), 0.09** (Empathetic Appeal)
Out-Partisans: 0.12** (Sympathetic Appeal), 0.18** (Empathetic Appeal)

□ Sympathetic Appeal   ■ Empathetic Appeal

**Effects are statistically significant at $p<0.01$ (one-tailed test).
NOTE: Differences between the Sympathetic Appeal and Empathetic Appeal conditions are only statistically significant among anti-partisans (at $p<0.05$, one-tailed).

The results here clearly present some normatively desirable implications. In particular, they suggest a number of best practices for the types of campaigns that should be run and the prospect for individual politicians to correct some of the ill effects presented by polarized government. It is worth noting that out-partisans move more favorably for David Allen on both perceptions of compassion and overall favorability. This finding might strike some as odd at first. Generally individuals from the opposite party are the hardest to get, but here the effect of an empathetic appeal is at its greatest when the party of the citizen and politician do not align. While I have noted that he is different from some politicians in that he is not well-known and therefore does not have some of the political baggage other politicians have, his partisanship is laid out clearly for all respondents to see, which should make him considerably polarizing for partisan

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individuals. Yet this is not what the results show. By making a credible empathetic appeal—tying his story to the story of those in his family who have struggled before him—even individuals from the opposing party begin to have positive attitudes toward his candidacy.

In addition to this, Allen is not hurt in any way by making an empathetic appeal. He never performs significantly worse than when making a sympathetic appeal than an empathetic appeal, and his evaluations improve among citizens in his own party as well as citizens in the opposing party. The implication, then, is that running a candidacy based on a universal empathy is good politics, creating at least a modest disincentive for politicians seeking to run more divisive campaigns.

Emotional Empathy

I also test the Emotional Empathy→Compassion Hypothesis by looking specifically at shared characteristics between citizen and candidate. Here, I examine the impact of emotional resonance, which I define as when the voter and the politician feel the same way about government and politics in general. Again, I argue that those who share the emotion of a politician will be more likely to perceive that politician to be empathetic.

Before turning to the effect of emotional empathy on perceptions of compassion, I first consider the relationship that partisanship plays in the emotional orientation Americans feel toward government. Whether the party of an individual is in power or out of power should play a major role in how they feel about government at any given point in time. Furthermore, any politician who wishes to tap into a strong emotion in the American electorate must first be able to read the emotion of the American electorate, or

at least of their electoral constituency, correctly. After eight years of President Obama, Donald Trump was effectively able to tap into an anger and frustration felt widely in the Republican Party. Compared to Jeb Bush, whose more reserved demeanor earned him the nickname "low-energy Jeb,"[58] Trump appeared angrier and more motivated to take on the political establishment. Republicans appeared to respond positively to this emotion. At the time of this survey's administration, however, emotions had shifted.

Table 5.1 Emotions of Partisans toward Politics in 2018 MTurk Survey

	More Angry	**Neutral**	**More Hopeful**
Democrats (N=527)	68.7 percent	14.4 percent	16.9 percent
Republican (N=342)	31.0 percent	23.7 percent	45.3 percent
Independent (N=119)	64.7 percent	14.3 percent	21.0 percent

Table 5.1 shows how Democrats, Republicans, and Independents[59] rated how they felt toward government and politics in general. While an overwhelming majority of Democrats said they felt greater anger than hope toward government, a plurality of Republicans said the opposite. This is important to note when interpreting the figures in this chapter, as there are times when emotional resonance does not lead to vastly improved ratings of compassion. These null results, however, are most often found among a group that is small in number and therefore less politically consequential, such as hopeful Democrats or angrier Republicans. When the emotions partisans feel toward government do not align with the majority of those in their party, a shared emotion does not ultimately lead to higher levels of perceived empathy. I argue that this relationship (or

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[58] Vox, Matt Yglesias, "'Low-Energy': Donald Trump's favorite diss on Jeb Bush, explained." September 4, 2015.
[59] "Independent leaners," or those who claim to be politically independent but admit to leaning toward the Democratic or Republican Party, are grouped with partisans.

lack thereof) is due to the fact that hopeful Democrats and angry Republicans in an era

where Republicans controlled all major branches of government are likely identifying a

different object for their hope/anger than other respondents. For example, an angry

Democrat is most likely viewing the actions of the federal government under Donald

Trump in a negative light. A hopeful Democrat in an era where political events on the

national stage are not going at all well for Democrats may be focusing on some other

idiosyncratic event (such as the actions of their own personal member of Congress or

decisions of their state legislature). Seeing a politician running for Congress in another

district, then, evoking the language of hope and optimism, should not resonate with these

individuals. As I lay out in the theory, emotional resonance occurs when a voter can see

the emotion they feel about government reflected back by the politician. If the voter

perceives a mismatch in terms of the *object* of that emotion, it should not lead to higher

levels of perceived compassion. The politician and voter may both be hopeful, but if they

are hopeful about different things, it will not make a difference in who the voter will

support.

Turning now to whether a shared emotion drives positive perceptions of

compassion, I examine ratings of David Allen on the "cares about people like you" item

based on whether emotional resonance is present. Figure 5.3 shows that emotional

resonance, defined as sharing the emotion the candidate is evoking, leads to more

positive evaluations of compassion than when the politician evokes an opposing emotion.

Figure 5.3: Effect of Emotional Resonance on Perceptions of Compassion by Partisanship

Effect of Emotional Resonance on "Cares"

Values shown: Total Sample — Resonance on Anger: 0.05**, Resonance on Hope: 0.08**; Democrats — Resonance on Anger: 0.07**, Resonance on Hope: 0.03; Republicans — Resonance on Anger: -0.01, Resonance on Hope: 0.11**

□ Resonance on Anger   ■ Resonance on Hope
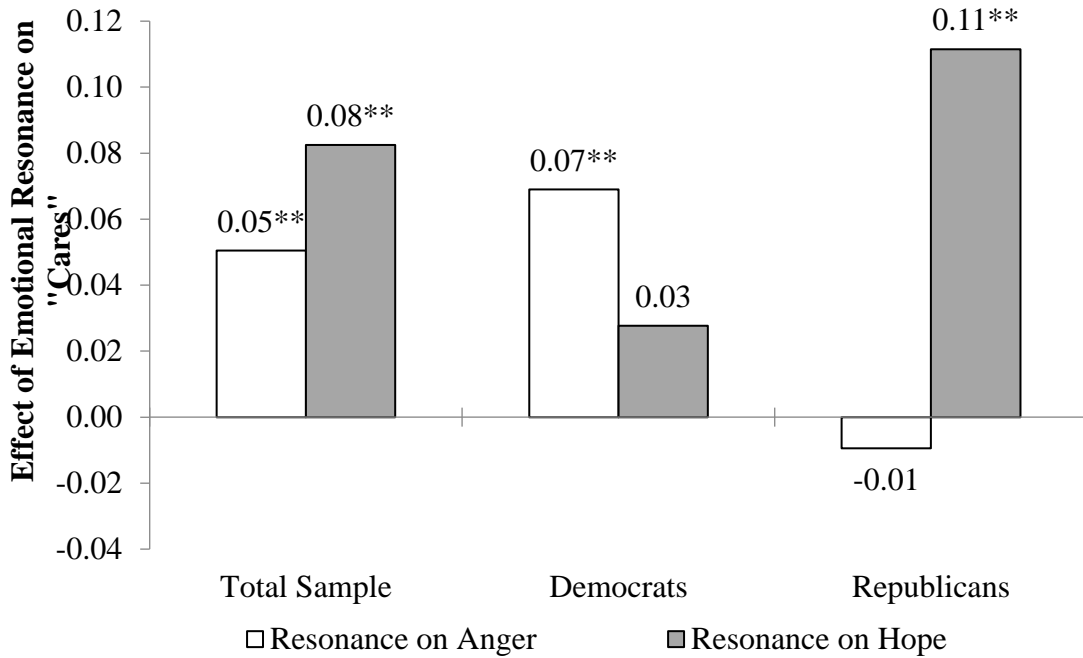
**Effects are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ (one-tailed test).

Among all respondents, emotional resonance appears to increase perceptions that a candidate is truly compassionate. Among respondents who were more angry than hopeful about government, the anger candidate received higher evaluations on compassion by a margin of five percentage points. Among those who were more hopeful, the hope candidate was perceived as more compassionate by an even greater margin of 8 percentage points. Importantly, it is angry Democrats and hopeful Republicans who are driving the results here. Angry Democrats (which constitute the clear majority of Democrats) are substantially more likely to evaluate the anger candidate more favorably than the hope candidate. The margin for hopeful Republicans is even larger. In the age of Trump, a candidate evoking a tenor of hopefulness is rated more positively by Republicans than one who focuses on anger as his motivation for running.

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The implications of this finding are somewhat difficult to discern. Certainly, Republicans appear to be happy on the whole now that Donald Trump is president rather than Barack Obama. Yet the implications for Trump himself are unclear. It would be difficult for a president who was elected based on a wave of right-wing discontentment to suddenly appear cheerful with the way things were going. In office, Trump continues to exude an anger with the Democrats in Congress, the media, and the "deep state," yet anger now appears to be associated most closely with Democratic voters.[60]

For the purpose of the 2018 midterm elections, it does not appear Republicans advantaged themselves by mirroring the anger of President Trump. The results presented here suggest that they were served best if they remained upbeat about the direction of the country under President Trump and showed a hope and optimism about the possibilities for the future if the Republicans could maintain control of Congress with Trump as president.

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[60] U.S. News and World Report, "Another Year of the Angry Voter." February 23, 2018.

Figure 5.4: Effect of Emotional Resonance on Candidate Favorability by Partisanship

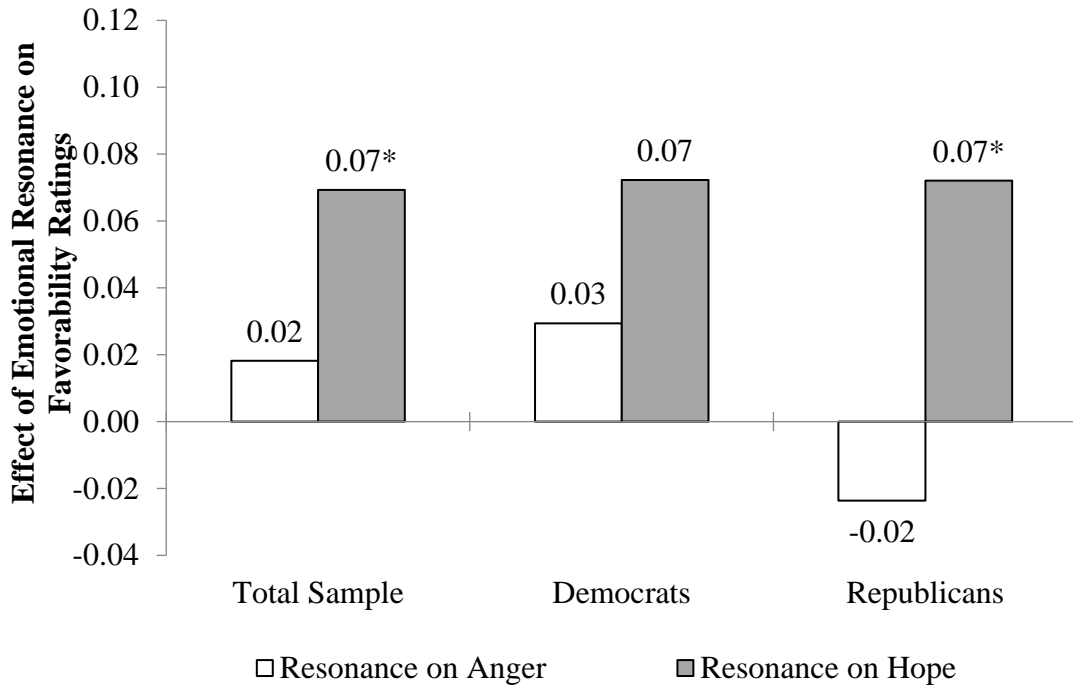* Effects are statistically significant at p<0.05 (one-tailed test).

As with experiential empathy, I find that candidate messages have less effect on overall favorability ratings than they do on measures specific to the trait of compassion, yet emotional resonance still on average has a positive effect. Emotional resonance on hope continues to have a strong positive effect on overall favorability, but the effect sizes are noticeably smaller and nearly disappear for emotional resonance on anger. This suggests that while emotional resonance may be enough to boost perceptions of candidate compassion, it is somewhat harder to boost overall favorability. It is important to keep in mind that these treatments were, by necessity, relatively subtle. Whereas Donald Trump's anger in 2016 was almost always directed at establishment politicians and Barack Obama's optimism in 2008 was almost always directed at the American people, these treatments could not identify a source for the emotion.

Furthermore, both Donald Trump and Barack Obama exuded anger and hope across multiple different events throughout the election, such that they began to be associated with the emotion. In the context of a short survey experiment, this type of repeated association is impossible, so it is not altogether surprising that the effects of emotional resonance on favorability are somewhat muted.

Finally, while neither effect for the Democrats is statistically significant, there is suggestive evidence that the hopeful politician was perceived more positively by the Democrats. While there were relatively few Democrats who said they felt hopeful, I leave open the possibility that hopeful politicians may resonate with Democrats more generally because they remind them of Barack Obama. While not testable with these data, it would not be surprising if Barack Obama's imprint on the Democratic Party was such that hopeful politicians in general do better on average with Democratic voters.

Identity-Based Empathy

Finally, I test the Identity-Based Empathy→Compassion Hypothesis. This hypothesis states that individuals will perceive a politician as being more compassionate if they share a salient political identity. Unlike experiences and emotions, many of the most salient identities are highly visible and therefore least likely to be manipulated through messaging. While many identities are politically relevant and are likely to determine the degree to which an individual views a politician as empathetic, I choose to focus on race as a source of identity-based empathy. I do this both for the simplicity's sake and because race is one of the most historically important political identities (e.g., Dawson 1994; Tate 2003). I hypothesize that individuals who belong to the same racial group as David Allen will view him as more compassionate. Those who belong to a

different group should view him as relatively less compassionate, even when partisanship is being held constant.

To test this hypothesis, respondents were shown a fairly benign appeal for votes from David Allen, yet a picture was attached that identified Allen as being either black or white. Respondents were randomly assigned to the two treatments, and were then classified as having been treated with a co-racial candidate or candidate of a different race. All the survey-takers were informed that David Allen was a Democrat in order to avoid some inferring from the race of the candidate. Figure 5.5 shows the effect of shared racial identity on perceptions of compassion.

Figure 5.5: Perceptions of Compassion for Co-Racial vs. Different Race Candidates
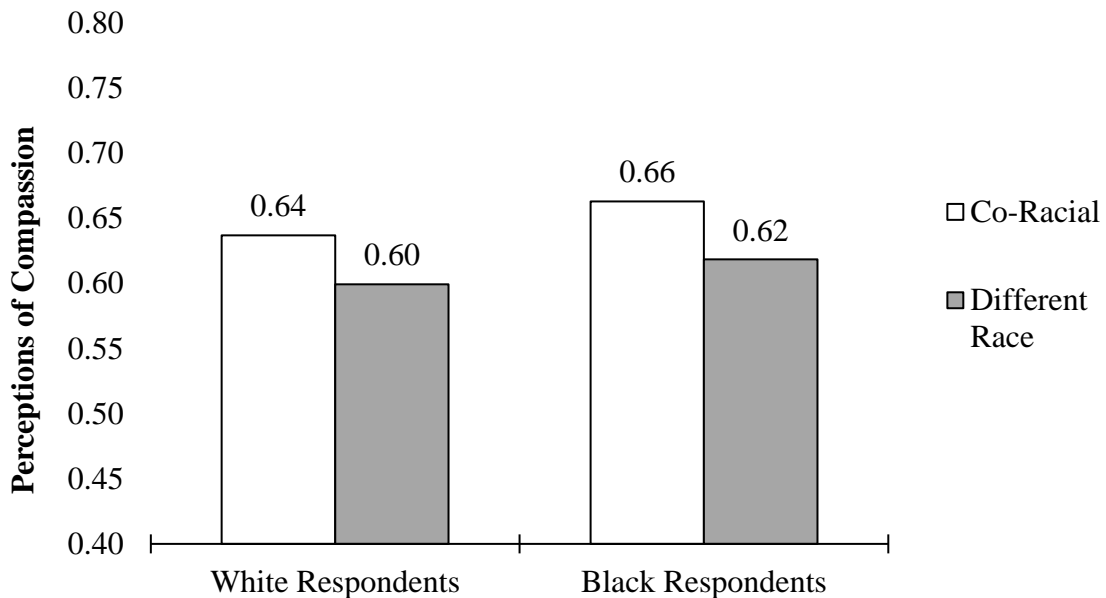
NOTE: The effect of being co-racial is statistically significant at p<0.01, one-tailed test.

Across both white and black respondents, sharing the same race as the politician leads to significantly more positive evaluations on compassion. Overall, co-racial candidates receive about 4 percentage points more positive evaluations on the trait of compassion. For the total sample it is clear that the race of the candidate on its own is

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enough to cue voters into whether a politician is truly compassionate toward people like them.

Figures 5.6 and 5.7, however, show that the story is more interesting when we consider the partisanship of the respondent. For white Democrats, the white politician fares no better than the black politician. This is likely due to the fact that the Democratic Party coalition is more racially diverse and less reliant on the white vote. White Democrats are in many ways out of alignment, as the white vote has increasingly shifted toward the Republican Party. When politically important social identities are out of alignment, as Mason (2018) argues, it results in cross-pressured groups that will be less likely to use race as an important filter for assessing politicians and political events. White Democrats examined here, then, likely feel a weaker attachment to their race than white Republicans, whose party relies far more on the white voting bloc and has come to be associated with representing the interests of white Americans. Black Democrats evaluating a Black Democratic politician, however, rate the politician much more positively on compassion than they do the white Democratic politician.

Figure 5.6 reaffirms the results shown back in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.7). In that analysis, I showed that white Democrats perceived Barack Obama to be roughly as compassionate as all the other Democratic nominees that had come before. Yet among black Democrats, he was perceived as significantly more compassionate. Those results, taken together with the ones presented in this chapter, indicate that black Democrats are likely advantaged in Democratic primaries. Though, as we see in the results among Republicans, they can pay a price for that when it comes time to court persuadable Republicans in the general election.

Among Republicans, there are an insufficient number of black respondents to examine them separately, but the affect of race among white Republicans is dramatic. Whereas white Democrats are no more likely to find a white Democratic politician compassionate than a black Democratic politician, Republicans see a huge difference. When David Allen is presented as a white Democrat, Republicans rate him highly, with a 0.62 (on the 0-1 scale). This is an incredibly high rating when we consider that the politician in the vignette was explicitly labeled a Democrat. Even in an era of high polarization, where Democrats and Republicans are at the very least thought to view each other with suspicion if not downright animosity, Republicans view the white Democrat as, on average, generally caring about people like them. Yet when David Allen is not presented as the white Democrat but is shown instead to be black, that rating plummets 13 percentage points. While Republicans do not view him in a completely negative light, they are far less willing to give Allen the benefit of the doubt that he cares about people like them when he is black. Race, when aligned with partisanship, clearly plays a strong role in determining whether a politician is viewed as compassionate or not.

Figure 5.6: among Democrats: Perceptions of Compassion for Co-Racial vs. Different Race Candidates
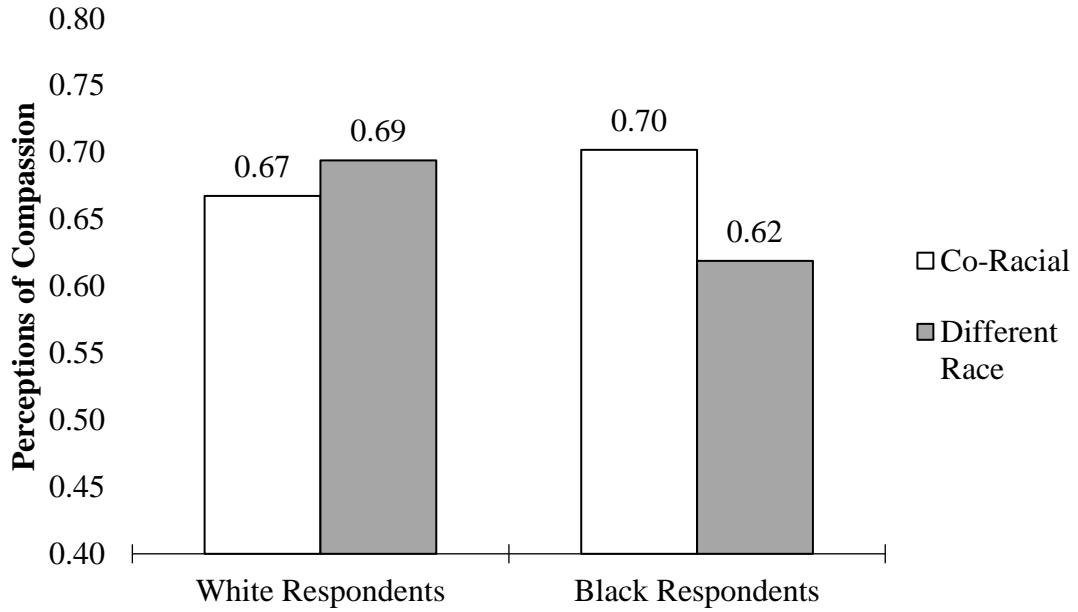
NOTE: The effect of being co-racial is statistically significant at p<0.01, one-tailed test among black respondents.

Figure 5.7: among White Republicans: Perceptions of Compassion for Co-Racial vs. Different Race Candidates
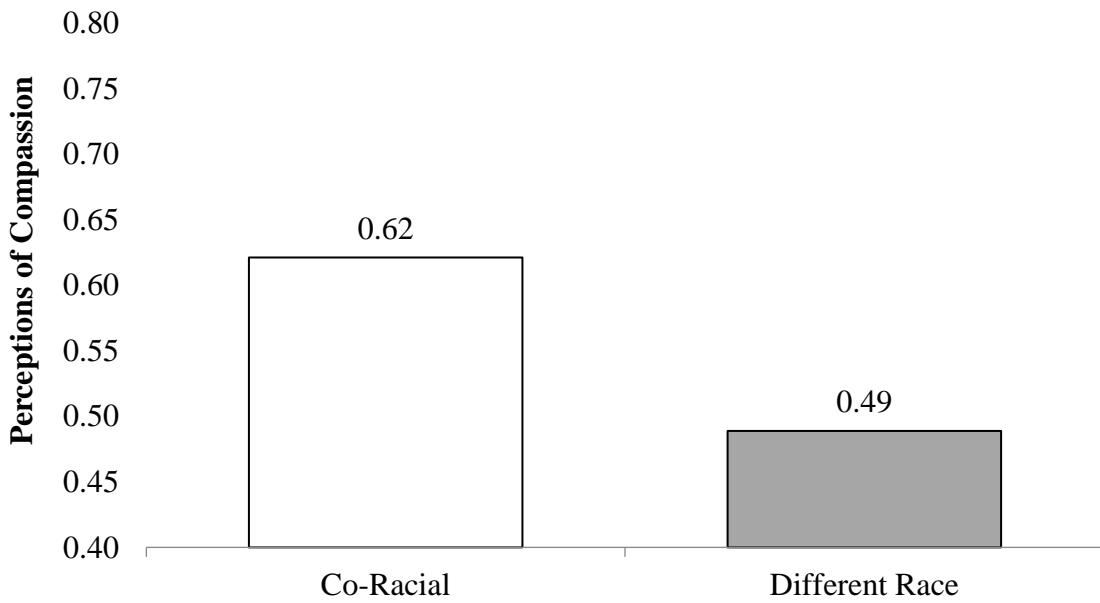
NOTE: The effect of being co-racial is statistically significant at p<0.01, one-tailed test among white respondents.

Figures 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10 show similar analyses on measures of general favorability. Shared racial identity, not surprisingly, leads generally to greater levels of support for both white and black respondents. Again, the effects are driven by black Democrats and white Republicans, for whom social identity is likely to be the highest.

Figure 5.8 shows again that citizens who share the same race as the candidate generally provide that candidate with higher favorability ratings. While the effect is much stronger among black respondents (likely due to black voters being more politically aligned with one party), the effects are consistent for both whites and blacks.

Looking at this by race, we see support for the assertion that partisanship alignment with other salient identities plays an important role for how the voters perceive the various politician. In Figure 5.9, we see that white Democrats give David Allen nearly identical ratings, indicating it does not matter to them whether the candidate is black or white. For black respondents, however, the gap is substantively massive at 11 percentage points. Again, while there are undoubtedly other factors that affect public support when it comes time to make a voting decision, these results indicate that black Democrats should have a built-in advantage when it comes to primary voting. White Democrats do not appear to penalize a black politician for not sharing the same race, while black Democrats advantage the black politician.

Again, as Figure 5.9 shows, white Republicans react opposite of white Democrats. When the individual's race aligns with their partisanship, as is the case with white Republicans, they view the coracial politician as significantly more compassionate. Overall, white Republicans are very mixed with regard to David Allen when he is presented as a white Democrat. The 0.48 rating suggests that they may be open to

supporting him in an election depending on the alternative provided. Yet when David

Allen is presented as a black Democrat, favorability drops by 10 percentage points. These

findings suggest that it is hard to reach across the partisan divide if it coincides with the

racial divide.

Figure 5.8: Candidate Favorability for Co-Racial vs. Different Race Candidates
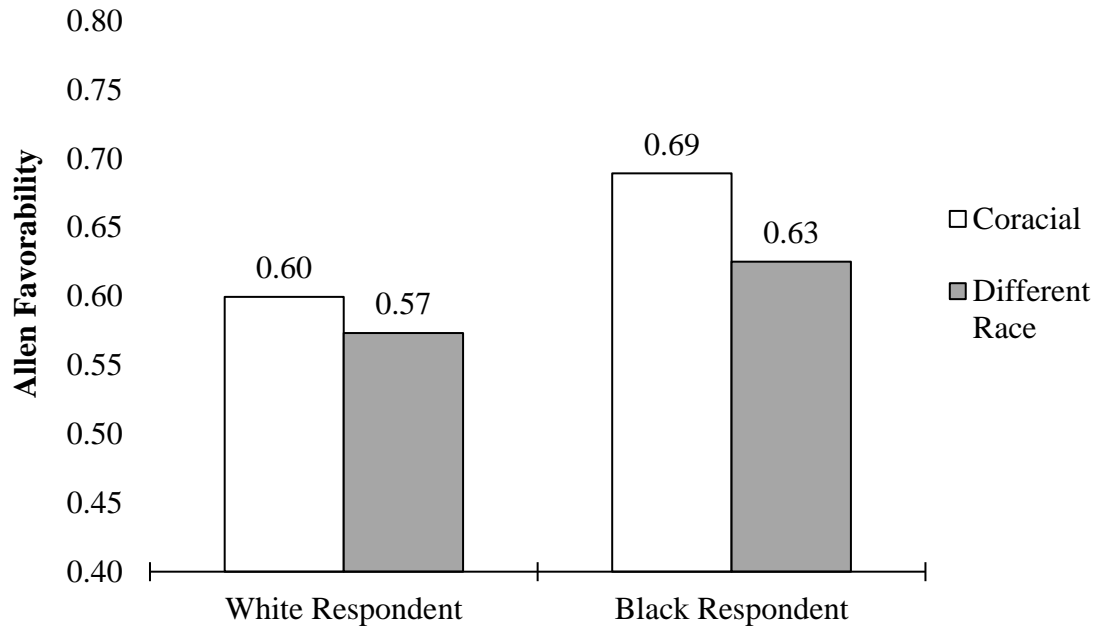
NOTE: The effect of being co-racial on favorability is statistically significant at p<0.01, one-tailed test.

Figure 5.9: among Democrats: Candidate Favorability for Co-Racial vs. Different Race Candidates
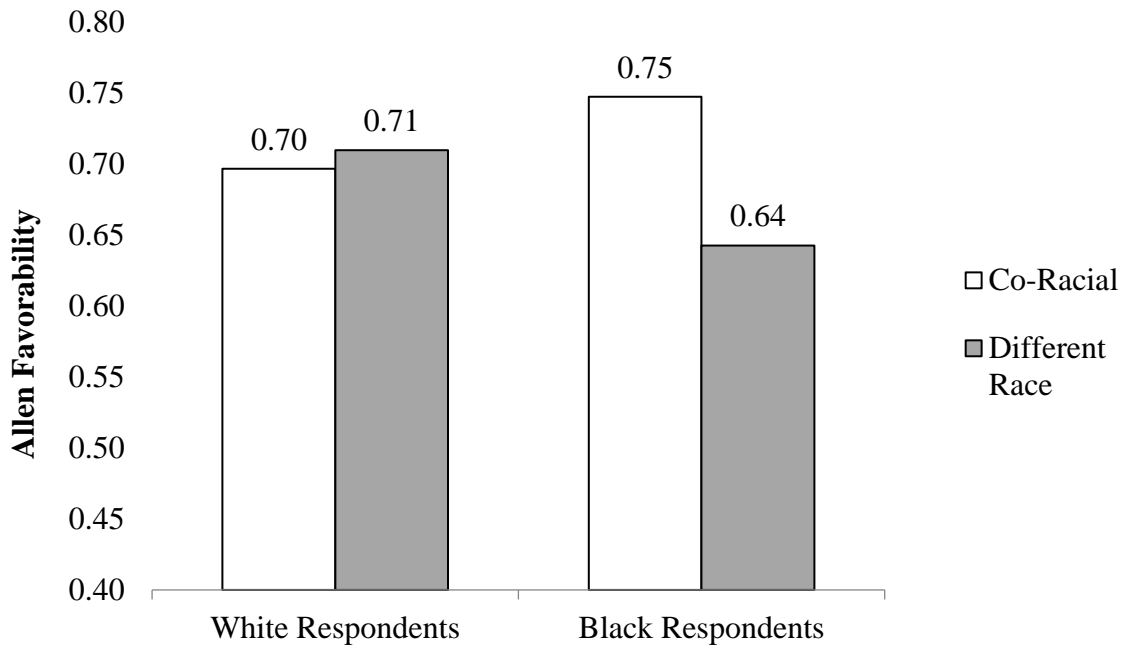
NOTE: The effect of being co-racial on favorability is statistically significant at p<0.01, one-tailed test among black respondents.

Figure 5.10: among White Republicans: Candidate Favorability for Co-Racial vs. Different Race Candidates
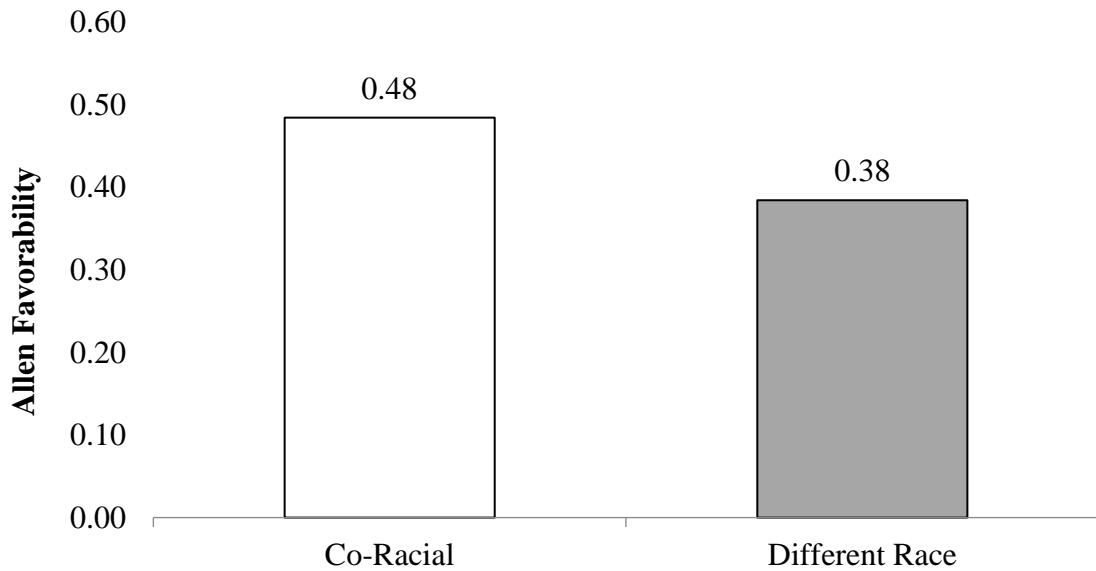
NOTE: The effect of being co-racial is statistically significant at p<0.05, one-tailed test among white respondents.

That race is an important determinant of political behavior is not a novel finding of this research. What is novel, however, is that an important part of the role that race plays comes down to the motivations inferred by Americans when they see the race of a politician and the degree to which they will view that politician as compassionate. A black politician does not need to make any kind of explicit appeal to black voters in order to be perceived as caring more about black people. In a Democratic primary, this phenomenon may be critical. A black candidate does not pay a cost in perceptions of compassion or favorability among white Democrats, but does get a benefit among the important black Democratic constituency. Conversely, a white Democrat can more effectively appeal to white Republicans in a general election than a black Democrat can. While not tested directly here, this phenomenon is likely to persist across multiple identities that are associated with the two parties (such as those based on gender, class, and religion). This has important implications for the types of candidates we see win primaries and the costs they might face in the general election.

5.4 Discussion

The results presented in this chapter suggest that Americans base their evaluations of candidate compassion on the quantity and intensity of the commonalities that serve to link them to the politician in question. While the potential sources of commonality are numerous, I have provided a simple classification scheme for these commonalities, which includes common experiences, common emotions, and common identities. All of these common traits are powerful determinants of perceptions of compassion.

From the perspectives of the voters, these results are straight-forward. They seek out and support candidates they believe better understand their problems and care for

them. They want a leader who is not only aware of the concerns and anxieties they face in their day-to-day lives, but can feel those concerns and anxieties as if those emotions were their own. This is made easier when the politician has had the same experiences as the voter, exudes the same emotion as the voter, or holds the same identities as the voter.

The implications of this research from the perspective of politicians and campaigns, however, are somewhat less clear. Certainly a candidate will be best served if she can demonstrate a clear linkage between herself and the voters through experience, emotion, and identity, yet these practices come with risk. I have shown here that credible empathetic appeals serve to increase perceptions of compassion among voters, yet not every candidate can make a credible empathetic appeal in all circumstances. Mitt Romney, for example, struggled to find experiences in his own background that resonated with working or middle class Americans. Hillary Clinton also struggled to cultivate positive perceptions of compassion. While she often pointed to her own mother's mistreatment as a child as one motivation for her political life,[61] the media focus on speeches she gave to Goldman Sachs and other Wall Street firms made it seem like she was more interested in enriching herself than helping others.[62] My research shows, however, that even when a credible empathetic appeal is not possible, making a sympathetic appeal can still generate a more positive public image. For politicians like John Kerry, Mitt Romney, and Hillary Clinton, who struggled to find personal stories that resonated with the American public, being viewed as truly empathetic may be difficult but being viewed as sympathetic may buttress some of the negativity on perceptions of compassion.

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[61] Hillary Clinton Campaign ad, "Family Strong." August 2, 2015.
[62] The Hill, "Sanders rips Clinton over Goldman Sachs ties." January 17, 2016.

Emotional appeals also clearly have a positive effect on perceptions of compassion, yet they must be employed with similar skill. Donald Trump was able to tap into much of the anger in the Republican base, yet few observers would suspect that his anger was inauthentic. If a politician is not truly angry or hopeful, it may be difficult for them to feign that emotion believably. Personal style, then, is a critical feature for this pathway to empathy. Donald Trump had been known for his bluster long before running for public office. John Kerry, on the other hand, was viewed by the public more as a statesman, had a lengthy political career prior to his presidential candidacy, and spoke with something of a patrician accent. While there was a portion of the electorate in 2004 that was likely angry with George W. Bush's presidency, Kerry's style was ill-suited to tap into that anger. Similarly, politicians must be able to accurately read the emotions of the American electorate. As my survey showed, emotions are closely related with the partisanship of the individual and the party that is in power. Democrats in 2018 were overwhelmingly angry, while Republicans were on average far more hopeful. Democratic candidates, then, that exude anger, are likely to have a major advantage over primary opponents that strike a hopeful tone. The independents in the sample, though small in number, also reflected an anger with status quo politics in the United States, suggesting that angry candidates in a general election are likely to have a leg-up on the competition.

Chapter 6: Compassion and its Value for Politics

In this dissertation, I have sought to 1) demonstrate that compassion matters in voting decisions, public approval, and ultimately electoral accountability; 2) provide a theory for why compassion matters to voters, one that centers around questions of who voters will trust when they do not know a great amount about policy and the information environment itself is not rich; and 3) develop an understanding for why voters perceive some politicians as compassionate while others are viewed as aloof or unfeeling.

While the literature on candidate traits often treats compassion as desirable without expounding on the reasons it is desirable, I argue that voters desire it in a leader because it serves a specific purpose: They are looking for an indication that that a politician will be uniquely motivated and qualified to help them and those they care about. They want to be able to trust that, whatever the policy may be, the politician will be keeping their needs in mind when making decisions on matters that affect them. While all politicians will claim that they care for others, even those politicians who have led lives very different from those of everyday citizens, many voters will be skeptical of such claims and look for evidence of sincerity. It is this question of sincerity that makes an empathetic politician so much more desirable than a sympathetic one. Perceptions of empathy, I have shown, come down to some critical commonality that links the voter to the politician. Sources of commonality ultimately come down to a shared experience, a shared emotion, or a shared identity.

6.1 The Importance of Empathy in the Context of Political Sophistication

These findings are notable in the context of research on American political behavior. For example, scholars have long argued that Americans largely fail to live up to

the ideals of civic citizenship. Political behavior research views Americans as largely

uninformed (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe 2016), but

beyond lacking opinions on many issues, Americans are often found to be unaware of

basic political facts (Anson 2018; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Making matters worse,

the information environment in which American voters are operating is deficient in many

ways. People do not seek out opposing views that might help them to become more

informed, instead favoring poor information environments that reinforce their prior

attitudes (Kuklinski, Quick, Jerit, and Rich 2001; Mutz 2006).

Against this backdrop, recent scholarship has even suggested that election

outcomes are a coin toss—that they reflect the balance of partisan identities and a few

random factors (Achen and Bartels 2016). It has been argued that these factors make

voters ill-equipped to assign blame or give credit where it is due. Healy and Malhotra

(2009), for example, find that voters reward politicians for responding to crises rather

than preventing them, which creates inefficient policy outcomes. Worse, some have

found that this environment creates a situation where misinformation is not only easy to

spread, but that it resonates among large swaths of the electorate (Berinsky 2017; Lenz

2012; Nyhan and Reifler 2010). Politicians who spread misinformation rarely pay a price

for engaging in this practice (Nyhan, Reifler, Porter, and Wood *forthcoming*; Wood and

Porter 2018).

I have argued against this somewhat more pessimistic view of American

democracy, arguing that some of the "randomness" Achen and Bartels (2016) find is

present in electoral contests can often hinge on perceptions of compassion. While some

may consider evaluations of candidate character to be a normatively undesirable criteria

upon which to select a leader or legislator, I have shown that these perceptions are not random. Perceptions of compassion are most strongly influenced by the notion that the politician is empathetic. Voters are able to infer the degree to which a candidate is empathetic by the characteristics of that politician, both those apparently visible and some less visible. I find that empathetic appeals, driven by some sort of commonality (whether they are simply perceived or are actually genuine), lead to significantly higher evaluations of candidate compassion. These empathetic appeals may be manipulated by skilled politicians and campaigns, though campaign history shows that the ability to manipulate the voting public into believing a candidate is empathetic comes with risk. Many politicians have had empathetic appeals backfire when they are seen as inauthentic or insincere.

Not only are these perceptions not random, but I argue here that they are not as normatively problematic as a heuristic for voters to use as some may believe. It is, after all, unrealistic to expect that voters will develop constrained ideologies or strong opinions on a sufficient number of policy details to arrive at a "correct" voting decision. Holian and Prysby (2015) go even further to argue that voters who use opinions on public policy to guide their votes will not necessarily arrive at better decisions than those who rely on candidate character assessments. They argue that the 2000 election largely hinged on economic considerations, but voters could not have foreseen the impact that 9/11 would have on politics. In retrospect, opinions about foreign policy and national security should have been more salient for voting decisions in 2000, but voters could not predict the future. Voters who cast their vote not based on policy but based on their assessments of candidate character, however, would likely not have regretted using those criteria to cast

their vote. Regardless of what issue is most salient, political character should remain relatively constant.

6.2 What Compassion Means for Electoral Competition and Democratic Theory

While most Americans are not highly informed or ideologically constrained in their political thinking, most scholars working in the field of American political behavior agree that polarization is not exclusively a phenomenon among political elites. Americans themselves are deeply and evenly divided between their two camps, such that out-group antipathy and in-group preference can grow even if true policy disagreement is absent (Mason 2018; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Barack Obama's assertion in 2012 that "we are not as divided as our politics suggest,"[63] while aspirational, is not supported by the evidence. Whether he was unaware of the nature of our polarized politics or simply unwilling to note them publicly, the American public truly is deeply entrenched in partisan camps.

Empathy, I posit, provides some hope for bridging what is becoming a deeper and deeper partisan divide. While empathy is not a panacea for political polarization, it represents a meaningful step forward toward more civil discourse and more functional government. Perceptions of compassion, driven by empathy, are highly influential in determining the vote choice of independent voters who often represent the swing voting bloc in any election. Empathetic appeals, furthermore, do not need to be divisive. With experiential empathy, for example, I show how rather broad economic appeals to help out all struggling Americans resonate with individuals, and they most especially resonate when the politician belongs to the opposing party of the voter.

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[63] Barack Obama victory speech, November 6, 2012.

In the past, the common sense approach to appealing to so-called "moderates" was to take a moderate issue stance. In the era of well-sorted party coalitions, taking moderate stances can hurt politicians among their own partisans. Furthermore, there is little evidence that independent voters, who are on average less politically knowledgeable than partisans, will be swayed by token attempts to moderate an issue stance. Recent research suggests that even those who claim to be "moderate" are not truly moderate but are instead cross-pressured (Broockman 2016). They often hold extreme views, but those views that do not align consistently with one party or the other. As a result, moderating one's policy stances is unlikely to appeal to this group of voters.

Instead, politicians may see the greatest electoral payoff by appealing to the humanity of those predisposed to be skeptical of their candidacy. When politicians show that they share the values and experiences of those who are most predisposed to dislike them AND receive a payoff in terms of the public image, it incentivizes political elites to raise the bar of discourse in this country and hopefully decrease the degree of vitriol we see in our politics, both at the elite level and among the masses.

Appendices

Chapter 4 Appendix

Items Used from ANES Data

Dependent Variable:

Vote Choice: Who did you vote for? [DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE/REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE/SOMEONE ELSE]

Independent Variable:

Compassion Trait: Think about [DEMOCRATIC/REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE]. In your opinion, does the phrase 's/he REALLY CARES ABOUT PEOPLE LIKE YOU' describe [DEMOCRATIC/REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE] [EXTREMELY WELL, VERY WELL, MODERATELY WELL, SLIGHTLY WELL, or NOT WELL AT ALL/ NOT WELL AT ALL, SLIGHTLY WELL, MODERATELY WELL, VERY WELL, or EXTREMELY WELL]?

Controls:

Leadership Trait: Think about [DEMOCRATIC/REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE]. In your opinion, does the phrase 's/he PROVIDES STRONG LEADERSHIP' describe [DEMOCRATIC/REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE] [EXTREMELY WELL, VERY WELL, MODERATELY WELL, SLIGHTLY WELL, or NOT WELL AT ALL/ NOT

WELL AT ALL, SLIGHTLY WELL, MODERATELY WELL, VERY WELL, or EXTREMELY WELL]?

Retrospective Personal Finances: We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that [you/you and your family living here] are BETTER off or WORSE off than you were a year ago?

Prospective Personal Finances: Now looking ahead, do you think that a year from now [you / you and your family living here] will be BETTER OFF financially, WORSE OFF, or JUST ABOUT THE SAME as now?

Retrospective National Economy: Now thinking about the economy in the country as a whole, would you say that over the past year the nation's economy has GOTTEN BETTER, STAYED ABOUT THE SAME, or GOTTEN WORSE?

Prospective National Economy: What about the next 12 months? Do you expect the economy, in the country as a whole, to GET BETTER, STAY ABOUT THE SAME, or GET WORSE?

Partisanship: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a [DEMOCRAT, a REPUBLICAN / a REPUBLICAN, a DEMOCRAT], an INDEPENDENT, or what?

> *Follow up*: Would you call yourself a STRONG [Democrat / Republican] or a NOT VERY STRONG Democrat / Republican]? / Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Republican Party or to the Democratic party?

Ideology: Where would you place yourself on this scale [1-7, 1 EXTREMELY LIBERAL, 7 EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE]**,** or haven't you thought much about this?

Age: What is the month, day and year of your birth?

Gender: Male or Female

Race: What racial or ethnic group describes you?

Education: What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Family Income: Information about income is very important to understand how people are doing financially these days. Your answers are confidential. Would you please give your best guess? The next question is about [the total income of all the members of your family living here / your total income] in 2011, before taxes. This figure should include income from all sources, including salaries, wages, pensions, Social Security, dividends, interest, and all other income. What was [the total income in 2011 of all your family members living here / your total income in 2011]?

Probit Models from ANES Data

Table A1: Probit Models, Regressing Vote for the Democratic Candidate on Perceptions of Candidate Compassion and Control Variables (Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Ind. Variable	Full Sample	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Dem. Compassion Advantage	0.308 (0.021)	0.271 (0.025)	0.350 (0.041)	0.427 (0.059)
Dem. Leadership Advantage	0.280 (0.021)	0.273 (0.029)	0.285 (0.034)	0.324 (0.054)
Retrospective Personal Finance	0.002 (0.026)	0.033 (0.036)	-0.038 (0.044)	0.028 (0.076)
Prospective Personal Finance	0.046 (0.038)	0.022 (0.051)	0.051 (0.056)	0.081 (0.099)
Retrospective National Economy	0.152 (0.033)	0.156 (0.046)	0.124 (0.054)	0.048 (0.095)
Prospective National Economy	-0.001 (0.031)	0.008 (0.039)	0.059 (0.058)	-0.058 (0.081)
Partisanship (7-point, 1=Democrat)	-0.296 (0.017)	---	---	---
Ideology (7-point, 1= extremely liberal)	-0.225 (0.026)	-0.199 (0.035)	-0.261 (0.046)	-0.209 (0.092)
Gender (Male)	-0.077 (0.055)	-0.070 (0.072)	-0.051 (0.103)	-0.074 (0.150)
Age	0.005 (0.002)	0.009 (0.002)	0.002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.005)
Race (white)	-0.349 (0.083)	-0.528 (0.125)	-0.141 (0.168)	-0.442 (0.198)
Race (black)	0.262 (0.177)	0.136 (0.226)	0.266 (0.358)	0.665 (0.323)
Education (5 categories)	0.032 (0.027)	0.093 (0.036)	-0.009 (0.051)	-0.112 (0.071)
Family Income	-0.009 (0.012)	-0.027 (0.017)	0.016 (0.020)	-0.015 (0.027)
1992	-0.264 (0.096)	-0.245 (0.126)	-0.223 (0.166)	-0.766 (0.276)
1996	0.035 (0.098)	-0.010 (0.127)	0.242 (0.162)	-0.705 (0.305)
2000	-0.160 (0.147)	-0.066 (0.194)	-0.810 (0.319)	-0.121 (0.832)
2004	0.156 (0.110)	0.178 (0.150)	0.112 (0.187)	-0.462 (0.379)
2008	0.397 (0.136)	0.428 (0.196)	0.330 (0.224)	0.268 (0.373)
2012	-0.173 (0.087)	-0.168 (0.121)	-0.202 (0.160)	-0.285 (0.199)
Constant	1.324 (0.191)	0.875 (0.262)	-0.127 (0.364)	1.177 (0.576)
Pseudo R^2	0.701	0.388	0.470	0.437
N	9,341	4923	3,711	707

NOTE: ANES sampling weight used. Fixed effects model used, with 2016 as the omitted year.

Dependent Variable:

Vote Choice: If the Democratic primary election for U.S. Senate in Maryland were held today and the candidates were (Donna Edwards) and (Chris Van Hollen), for whom would you vote?

Independent Variable:

Compassion Trait: In your opinion, how well does the phrase [s/he really cares about peple like you] describe [Chris Van Hollen/Donna Edwards]?

     1 Not well at all

     2 Not too well

     3 Pretty well

     4 Extremely Well

Controls:

Effective Trait: In your opinion, how well does the phrase [s/he would be effective at getting things done as a Senator] describe [Chris Van Hollen/Donna Edwards]?

     1 Not well at all

     2 Not too well

     3 Pretty well

     4 Extremely Well

Ideology: Would you say your views on most political matters are liberal, moderate, or conservative?

Gender: Pardon, but I'm required to verify - are you (male) or (female)?

Education: What was the last grade of school you completed?

    1 8th grade or less

    2 Some high school

    3 Graduated high school

    4 Some college

    5 Graduated College

    6 Post graduate

Family Income: Which of the following CATEGORIES best describes your total annual household income before taxes, from all sources?

    1 Under 20 thousand dollars

    2 20 to under 35 thousand

    3 35 to under 50 thousand

    4 50 to under 70 thousand

    5 70 to under 100 thousand

    6 100 thousand or more

Race: Are you of Hispanic origin or background?

    (IF "YES," ASK:) Are you White Hispanic or Black Hispanic?

    (IF "NO," ASK:) Are you white, black, or some other race?

    1 White

    2 Black

3 White Hispanic

4 Black Hispanic

5 Hispanic (no race given)

6 Asian

7 Other race

8 DK/No Opinion

9 NA/Refused

Age: What is your age?

Probit Model from Washington Post-UMD Data

Table A2: Probit Models, Regressing Vote for Van Hollen on Perceptions of

Candidate Compassion and Control Variables (Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variable	Full Sample
Van Hollen Compassion Adv.	0.687 (0.172)
Van Hollen Effectiveness Adv.	0.849 (0.163)
Ideology (3-point, 1=liberal)	-0.039 (0.136)
Gender (Male)	0.151 (0.192)
Education (6 categories)	0.058 (0.123)
Family Income	-0.029 (0.069)
Race (white)	0.158 (0.406)
Race (black)	-0.465 (0.421)
Age	0.002 (0.006)
Constant	-0.004 (0.006)
Pseudo R^2	0.4516
N	443

NOTE: Washington Post-UMD Sampling Weights Applied

2016 SSI Experiment: Experiential Empathy

Treatment Wording:

> **Control:** *David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat (Republican). He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen told the crowd, "I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."*

> **Sympathy:** *David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat (Republican). He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen spoke of how much he cares about struggling families as his motivation for running. Allen told the crowd, "I care about the neighborhood mailmen and the part-time secretaries. I've heard the stories of grandfathers who worked as coal-miners to scratch out a living but couldn't even afford indoor plumbing. I've talked to families who have lived this hardship, and I care about those struggling to make ends meet. I'm running for Congress to help those Americans. I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."*

Empathy: David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat (Republican). He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen spoke of his own history growing up in a struggling family as his motivation for running. Allen told the crowd, "My dad was the neighborhood mailman and my mom worked as a part-time secretary. My grandfather worked as a coal-miner to scratch out a living but couldn't even afford indoor plumbing. My family has lived this hardship, so I understand the struggles of those trying to make ends meet. I'm running for Congress to help those Americans. I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."

Post-Treatment Question Wording:

Overall, how favorable or unfavorable is your impression of David Allen?

   1   Strongly Unfavorable

   2   Somewhat Unfavorable

   3   Somewhat Favorable

   4   Strongly Favorable

Respondents then randomly assigned to read one of the following questions:[64]

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[64] Scholars involved in carrying out this study preferred the answer options offered in Question 2 of the questions, though the options in Set 1 reflect those most often used in well-respected surveys (such as the ANES). The results between those who received Question 1 and Question 2 were not appreciably different. In the later surveys, I employ only Question 2.

Question 1:

In your opinion, does the phrase, "he really cares about people like you" describe David

Allen extremely well, very well, moderately well, slightly well, or not well at all?

       1   Extremely well

       2   Very well

       3   Moderately well

       4   Slightly well

       5   Not well at all

Question 2:

In your opinion, does the phrase, "he really cares about people like you" describe David

Allen very well, somewhat well, neither well nor poorly, somewhat poorly, or extremely

poorly?

       1   Very well

       2   Somewhat well

       3   Neither well nor poorly

       4   Somewhat poorly

       5   Extremely poorly

Results:

Table C5-1: Treatment Effects of Compassionate Appeals on Dependent Variables of Interest (Control as Baseline)

Condition	Cares (Full Sample)	Cares (Co-partisans)	Cares (Opp. Partisans)	Fav. (Full Sample)	Fav. (Co-partisans)	Fav. (Opp. Partisans
Sympathy Treatment (N=445)	0.112**	0.120**	0.063	0.113**	0.099**	0.116**
Empathy Treatment (N=427)	0.162**	0.174**	0.168**	0.114**	0.086**	0.175**
Constant (Control) (N=560)	0.467**	0.530**	0.423**	0.591**	0.677**	0.500
Prob>F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	1,352	557	574	1,355	559	575

*statistically significant at p<.05 (one-tailed test)
**statistically significant at p<.01 (one-tailed test)

Table C5-2: Randomization Check-Multinomial Logit Predicting Assignment to Condition (Control as Omitted Category, Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variable	Sympathy Cond.	Empathy Cond.
Age	0.004 (0.005)	0.007 (0.006)
Gender (Male)	0.078 (0.163)	-0.236 (0.166)
Race (White)	-0.146 (0.190)	0.297 (0.198)
Education	-0.008 (0.063)	-0.088 (0.061)
Income	-0.019 (0.032)	0.020 (0.031)
Ideology	-0.020 (0.059)	-0.038 (0.064)
Partisanship	0.039 (0.046)	0.036 (0.047)
Constant	-0.195 (0.489)	-0.379 (0.485)
Chi-Square	0.421	
N	1,278	

<u>2018 MTurk Experiment: Emotional Empathy</u>

Treatment Wording:

Anger/Hope Treatment: *David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen spoke of his [ANGER AND IRRITATION/HOPE AND OPTIMISM] about the state of the nation as his reason for running. Allen told the crowd, "When I see what's happening in this country, I can't help but feel [TICKED OFF/HOPEFUL]. I believe the time has come for people to step up and do something. I'm running for Congress because I know I can get something done for everyday Americans. I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."*

Pre-Treatment Question Wording:

Please rate how you feel about American government today and politics in general.

    A. Angry

    B. Anxious

    C. Enthusiastic

    D. Hopeful

       Choices:

       1 Not at all

       2 Very little

       3 Somewhat

       4 A great deal

Post-Treatment Question Wording:

Overall, how favorable or unfavorable is your impression of David Allen?

1	Strongly Unfavorable
2	Somewhat Unfavorable
3	Neither Favorable nor Unfavorable
4	Somewhat Favorable
5	Strongly Favorable

In your opinion, does the phrase, "he really cares about people like you" describe David Allen very well, somewhat well, neither well nor poorly, somewhat poorly, or extremely poorly?

1	Very well
2	Somewhat well
3	Neither well nor poorly
4	Somewhat poorly
5	Extremely poorly

Results:

Table C5-3: Treatment Effects of Compassionate Appeals on Dependent Variables (Hopeful Candidate as Baseline)

Condition	Cares about People Like You			Favorability		
	Angry Resp.	**Neutral Resp.**	**Hopeful Resp.**	**Angry Resp.**	**Neutral Resp.**	**Hopeful Resp.**
Angry Candidate Treatment	0.050**	0.039	-0.082**	0.018	-0.035	-0.069*
Constant (Hopeful Candidate Treatment)	0.554**	0.590**	0.673**	0.567**	0.651**	0.670**
N	545	174	269	545	174	269

*statistically significant at p<.05 (one-tailed test)
**statistically significant at p<.01 (one-tailed test)

Table C5-3a: Treatment Effects of Compassionate Appeals on Dependent Variables (Hopeful Candidate as Baseline) – Among Democrats

Condition	Cares about People Like You			Favorability		
	Angry Resp.	**Neutral Resp.**	**Hopeful Resp.**	**Angry Resp.**	**Neutral Resp.**	**Hopeful Resp.**
Angry Candidate Treatment	0.069**	0.074	-0.028	0.029	0.041	-0.072
Constant (Hopeful Candidate Treatment)	0.532**	0.615**	0.674**	0.555**	0.635**	0.692
N	362	76	89	362	76	89

*statistically significant at p<.05 (one-tailed test)
**statistically significant at p<.01 (one-tailed test)

Table C5-3b: Treatment Effects of Compassionate Appeals on Dependent Variables (Hopeful Candidate as Baseline) – Among Republicans

Condition	Cares about People Like You			Favorability		
	Angry Resp.	**Neutral Resp.**	**Hopeful Resp.**	**Angry Resp.**	**Neutral Resp.**	**Hopeful Resp.**
Angry Candidate Treatment	-0.009	-0.009	-0.111**	-0.024	-0.097*	-0.072*
Constant (Hopeful Candidate Treatment)	0.660**	0.607**	0.678**	0.637**	0.679**	0.669**
N	106	81	155	106	81	155

*statistically significant at p<.05 (one-tailed test)

**statistically significant at p<.01 (one-tailed test)

Table C5-4: Randomization Check-Logit Predicting Assignment to Anger Condition (Hopeful Condition as Omitted Category, Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variable	Anger Condition
Age	-0.002 (0.006)
Gender (Male)	-0.245 (0.131)
Race (White)	0.103 (0.159)
Income	-0.015 (0.022)
Partisanship	0.032 (0.030)
Constant	0.059 (0.287)
Chi-Square	0.387
N	984

Treatment Wording:

Introduction: Now we would like to get your opinion about a candidate running for Congress outside of your state. Please read the following excerpt from a newspaper article describing the announcement of his candidacy and then tell us what you think about him.

BLACK CANDIDATE TREATMENT

David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat. He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen told the crowd, "I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."

David Allen

Q2b – WHITE CANDIDATE TREATMENT

David Allen, a local grocery store owner, is running for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat. He is forty-eight years old and has two children with his wife of twenty years. While he has long been a prominent citizen in his community and active in local politics, this is the first time he has run for Congress. In his first public speech since filing to run for office, Allen told the crowd, "I am asking each and every one of you for your vote this upcoming November election."

David Allen

Post-Treatment Question Wording:

Overall, how favorable or unfavorable is your impression of David Allen?

    1   Strongly Unfavorable

    2   Somewhat Unfavorable

    3   Somewhat Favorable

    4   Strongly Favorable

In your opinion, does the phrase, "he really cares about people like you" describe David Allen…

    1   Very poorly

    2   Somewhat poorly

3   Neither poorly nor well

4   Somewhat well

5   Very well

Results

Table C5-5: Treatment Effects of Coracial Candidate on Perceptions of Candidate Compassion

Condition	Full Sample	White Democrats	Black Democrats	White Republicans
Coracial (N=333)	0.041**	-0.027	0.083**	0.132**
Constant (Different Race) (N=332)	0.608**	0.694**	0.619**	0.489
N	665	188	209	131

*statistically significant at p<.05 (one-tailed test)
**statistically significant at p<.01 (one-tailed test)

Table C5-6: Treatment Effects of Coracial Candidate on Candidate Favorability

Condition	Full Sample	White Democrats	Black Democrats	White Republicans
Coracial (N=333)	0.044*	-0.013	0.105**	0.100*
Constant (Different Race) (N=332)	0.596**	0.710**	0.643**	0.384
N	665	188	209	131

*statistically significant at p<.05 (one-tailed test)
**statistically significant at p<.01 (one-tailed test)

Table C5-7: Randomization Check- Logit Predicting Assignment to Race Condition (Different Race as Omitted Category, Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variable	Among White Respondents	Among Black Respondents
Age	0.017	-0.007
	(0.011)	(0.008)
Gender (Male)	-0.026	-0.015
	(0.252)	(0.215)
Income	-0.035	0.006
	(0.045)	(0.036)
Partisanship	0.068	-0.002
	(0.069)	(0.049)
Constant	-0.971	-0.234
	(0.532)	(0.452)
Prob > Chi^2	0.458	0.944
N	291	353

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