POLITICAL CHOICES IN HARD TIMES:

VOTING IN THE 2010 U.S. HOUSE ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

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The Republican surge in the 2010 Congressional elections was of historic proportions; a President's party had not lost so many House seats in over 70 years. Based on the results of analyses of national survey data, we argue that a potent combination of valence and positional issues did much to determine the choices voters made. Campaigning in 2008 during the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression, Barack Obama had boldly reiterated the mantra "Change You Can Believe In" to propel his successful race for the presidency. Obama played the valence politics game with great skill and considerable élan in 2008, but there were serious political consequences when heightened expectations went unfulfilled. Two years later, high unemployment and anaemic growth continued to beset the economy, and the President's landmark health care legislation and other controversial policy proposals were debated in a context of widespread disappointment with his performance. This context enhanced voters' susceptibility to Republican claims that the President's innovative policies in areas such as healthcare, climate change and immigration were ill-advised. Issues that might have been heavily valenced in good economic times became hotly contested position issues. The result was a politically toxic mix of valence and positional issues which corroded Obama's image and worked strongly against Democratic congressional candidates when voters made their choices on November 2, 2010.

KEY WORDS: 2010 congressional elections, economy, healthcare, Obama approval, position issues, valence issues

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The 2010 congressional elections produced a tsunami of political change. The membership and partisan composition of Congress changed significantly, with 109 new Members heading to Capitol Hill. The vast majority of these people are Republicans. Although the Democrats retained control of the Senate, surviving a swing of six seats to the Republicans, the GOP regained control of the House with a massive net gain of 63 seats. The Republican surge in the House was of historic proportions; a President's party had not lost so many House seats in mid-term elections since 1938. Reflecting on the result, political analysts and ordinary citizens alike would agree that President Obama hit the nail on the head when he ruefully admitted in a post-election press conference that his party had taken a "shellacking." In this paper we argue that the President also should have included himself, front and center, among the "shellackees" because the election was in no small way a referendum on his presidency.[1] Voters' images of the President powerfully affected their electoral choices. These images, in turn, were strongly influenced by adverse reactions to the country's struggling economy and negative opinions about health-care reform and other contentious policies championed by the President and his Democratic allies in Congress.

The importance of public reactions to the President for understanding what transpired in 2010 accords well with findings, old and new, in research on American voting behavior. Analyses demonstrating the importance of leader and candidate images have a lengthy history, stretching back to the pioneering "Michigan" election studies of the 1950s (Campbell et al., 1960).[2] More recently, leader and candidate images have been accorded key roles in the valence politics theory of electoral choice (e.g., Clarke et al., 2009; Clarke, Kornberg and Scotto, 2009). Consonant with research in political psychology and experimental economics, this theory argues

that voters use leader and candidate images as "fast and frugal" heuristics (Gigerenzer, 2008) — easily accessible cues that facilitate choice in political contexts characterized by high stakes and abundant uncertainty.

Like its Ann Arbor ancestor, the valence politics account of electoral choice also emphasizes the importance of voters' party identifications and their issue orientations. Regarding party identification, although valence theorists depart from their Michigan intellectual heritage by claiming that partisanship exhibits an ongoing dynamic (e.g., Clarke and McCutcheon, 2009), they endorse the often-made claim that partisan attachments serve as heuristic devices that help voters assess the merits of competing candidates and policy proposals on offer.

Issues matter as well. Following Stokes (1963; see also Stokes 1992), valence theorists maintain that the political agenda during election campaigns is typically dominated by issues upon which there is widespread agreement about the *ends* of public policy. The classic example is the economy—virtually everyone wants a healthy economy characterized by vigorous, sustainable growth and low rates of unemployment and inflation. Other prominent examples include affordable, effective health care, security from threats posed by terrorists and common criminals, and a clean, attractive environment. In all of these cases, overwhelming majorities endorse the goal in question, and political debate focuses heavily on "who can do the job." During election campaigns competing parties and their candidates try to convince the electorate that they are best able to achieve salient, consensually agreed-on goals.

Spatial models of party competition are the valence politics theory's principal rivals. Building on ideas articulated by Downs' (1957) over a half-century ago, spatial theorists assume voters are rational actors who have exogenously determined preferences in a shared, possibly multidimensional, policy space. Voters support parties and candidates closest to them in this space. For their part, parties and candidates are assumed to be vote maximizing political actors

who position themselves in this policy space in response to their perceptions of where voters are distributed. In the wake of Downs' path-breaking work, spatial modelers have produced an impressive array of formal work based on these assumptions, and various attempts have been made to modify them in light of empirical findings about how voters and parties actually are distributed in policy space (see, e.g., Adams, Merrill and Grofman, 2005; Enlow and Hinich, 1984; Merrill and Grofman, 1999; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989; Schofield, Gallego and Jeon, 2011).

Although the spatial models developed by various analysts differ in a variety of interesting ways, there is strong agreement among their proponents that *position issues*, i.e., issues upon which electorates have different opinions, are the ones that count most when voters go to the polls. In contemporary American politics, prominent current examples include hotly disputed policy proposals in areas such as health care, the environment, immigration reform and taxation. Social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage also draw considerable media attention and are said to motivate the major parties' core constituencies. In emphasizing the impact of these divisive position issues, spatial modelers contradict valence theorists who, as discussed above, contend that the political issues of prime importance strongly tend to be ones upon which there is widespread consensus.

Although the extent of change produced by the 2010 congressional elections was atypical, we argue that the forces driving individual voter choice were similar to those in several other recent American national elections.[3] As in those contests, core variables in the valence politics model—leader images, a key valence issue (the economy), and party identifications—have strong explanatory power. However, we also contend that valence considerations are *not* the whole story of what transpired in 2010. Position issues—issues that deeply divided the electorate—also had significant effects. Some of the most important of these latter effects were

indirect. Images of President Obama were influenced by both valence *and* position issues as he became a lightning rod not only for the millions of Americans frustrated with persistently high unemployment and flagging economic growth but also for all those who opposed the contentious policies that defined his Administration's legislative agenda. Those images, in turn, strongly influenced voters' choices in November 2010.

Chief among the position issues in play was the effort to control the costs and enhance the quality of health care via the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). By championing the PPACA, the President and his allies in Congress transformed health care from a valence issue to a positional one. The ensuing debate on the issue was deeply divisive, with the PPACA ultimately passing the House and Senate in March 2010 without the support of a single Republican. Heated controversies also were generated by the President's "Cap and Trade" proposal to mitigate the effects of global warming, his proposal to overhaul immigration laws in response to demands that vigorous action was needed to control the country's borders, and his determination to eliminate Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthy, defined as individuals and families earning over $200,000 and $250,000 per year, respectively. Analyses described below demonstrate that these position issues joined with valence considerations to exert powerful direct and indirect effects on voting in the 2010 House elections. These analyses utilize data gathered in the 2010 Political Support in America (PSA) study, the centrepiece of which is a national survey of 3,800 eligible voters contacted shortly before and immediately after the November 2nd elections. [4]

Fix It! The Economy as Issue and Context

The idea that the economy is a valence issue *par excellence* is humorously illustrated by a *Saturday Night Live* skit performed before the 2008 presidential election. In the closing weeks of the campaign, *SNL* featured a "Weekend Update" skit where Keenan Thompson's character

was repeatedly asked to describe the procedures he would favor to help the ailing economy, to which he emphatically responded that he just wanted to "Fix It!" When asked to elaborate, Thompson yelled "Fix It!" even louder. Over the past half-century, studies repeatedly have shown that most people do not possess substantial, well-organized stores of knowledge about government and politics (e.g., Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997) and it may be safely assumed that many of them have only a passing familiarity with arguments for and against competing macroeconomic policy prescriptions proposed to restore the good health of the American economy (e.g., Bartels, 2005, 2010). But, like Thompson's *SNL* character, voters *do know what they want*—a healthy economy—and many of them believe that it is the President's job to make it happen.

The extent of disarray in the American economy may be gauged by the unemployment rate which climbed from an already disturbing 7.7% when President Obama took office in January 2009 to an average of 9.7% throughout 2010. On the eve of the 2010 elections, nearly one in 10 Americans was officially joblessness. The latter statistic—dismal as it is—does not include the millions who were not on the unemployment roles because they had stopped looking for work or had failed to register with a jobs center. Although economists declared that the recession had officially ended in June 2009, for many Americans the distress continued.

The result was predictable; public reactions to the country's straightened circumstances remained massively negative, and the economy dominated the political agenda as the 2010 mid-term elections approached. Regarding the former, Figure 1 shows that more than half of those participating in the pre-election PSA survey reported that the economy had gotten worse in the previous year and only three in 10 thought it would improve in the near future.[5] Similarly, the number of people stating that their own financial circumstances had deteriorated was more than double the number who said they had gotten better, and pessimists far outnumbered optimists

when people were asked about their personal economic futures. Emotional reactions to economic conditions also were decidedly negative—close to half of those surveyed felt "uneasy," and sizable numbers were "disgusted," "angry," or "afraid." Although about one in five expressed "hope" that better days were ahead, hardly anyone reported being "happy," "proud" or perhaps most important, "confident," about how the economy was faring.[6]

(Figure 1 about here)

It long has been conventional wisdom that an election in hard times does not bode well for an incumbent president or a governing party (e.g., Duch and Stevenson 2008; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Vavreck, 2009). Voters predictably focus on the economy when times are tough, and this was very much the case in 2010. When PSA respondents were asked about "the most important issue facing the country," more than 40% named the economy generally and an additional 22% named unemployment specifically.[7] All told, close to 75% named an economic issue as most important (see Figure 2). The fact that President Obama had inherited the floundering economy and the possibility that his Administration's stimulus package (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—ARRA) and other policy interventions such as the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) may have prevented things from being much worse were seemingly irrelevant for many voters. Campaigning in 2008, Obama had repeatedly stated "Yes We Can!" and promised "Change You Can Believe In!" to an electorate increasingly exercised about the deepening financial crisis (see Scotto et al., 2010). Two years later, millions of Americans were still very concerned about the economy and still waiting for the change the President had promised. This was not good news for Democratic congressional candidates in 2010.

(Figure 2 about here)

Position Issues: Delivering or Distracting?

Although hailed by some observers as the most significant piece of social legislation enacted since the Great Society era of the 1960s, many voters may have wondered why the President seemed consumed with health-care legislation when the economy was in dire straits. In this regard, Figure 2 shows that less than one in 20 of the PSA respondents named health care as their preeminent issue. Moreover, their answers to a series of questions about the historic PPACA legislation revealed widespread dissatisfaction.[8] Perhaps most telling, by a margin of 48% to 38%, they favored repealing the Act, and 51% thought it was unconstitutional (see Figure 3). A majority also thought the legislation would impose heavy burdens on taxpayers and majorities or near-majorities did not believe the new law would help the economy or provide high quality, affordable health-care coverage. By making health care reform a major focus of his first two years in office, President Obama risked appearing less than fully engaged with the nation's pressing economic problems, while championing a piece of legislation that—rightly or wrongly—was deeply divisive widely unpopular.

(Figure 3 about here)

Widespread unhappiness with what critics derisively termed "Obamacare" was not the only problem vexing the President and his Democratic colleagues. Other hotly debated position issues did little to help him or his party. Immigration was a case in point. This issue was thrust into the national spotlight in the spring of 2010 by the passage of a controversial Arizona law championed by Republican Governor Jan Brewer. According to the Governor, her state's new law was designed to detect and deport illegal residents, and there was no intention to profile Hispanics or any other ethnic group. By opposing the bill and calling for comprehensive reform of immigration law, Obama risked being portrayed as "out of touch" on this emotionally charged issue. Seizing their opportunity, the President's opponents castigated his calls for reform as a

convenient cover for granting amnesty to hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of "illegals" and a transparent attempt to pander to the increasingly influential Hispanic vote.

The survey data indicate these charges may have hurt the President and his party—taking tough measures against illegal immigration had broad appeal. Over three-fifths of the PSA respondents endorsed the idea of putting more troops on the Mexican border and less than one-quarter were opposed. The popularity of a tough stance also is indicated by responses showing that a clear majority wished to deny health care and other public services to illegal immigrants.[9] Less than one in five were opposed. Immigration was clearly an issue that divided the electorate, and the asymmetry in that division was unlikely to be helpful to Democratic candidates in 2010.

There were other such issues. Environmental protection is a prominent example. Although "green words" typically resonate positively in the abstract, policy proposals designed to achieve this laudable end can prove divisive. One such proposal espoused by the Obama Administration involved Cap and Trade legislation that would invoke a combination of regulation and market principles to curb carbon emissions. Relabeling the proposal "Cap and Tax," conservative critics derided it as a "big government" scheme that would fleece taxpayers already hard pressed by the Administration's failure to restore the nation's economy to good health. Rightly or wrongly, many voters shared these reservations about Cap and Trade. When asked about the proposal, a large plurality (44%) of the PSA respondents opposed it, and 33% were in favor. On the larger issue of willingness to pay for greater environmental protection, nearly half were unwilling to support *any* tax increases for this purpose, and an additional 18% would endorse only a very small increase. Less than one person in ten was willing to raise taxes a great deal.[10]

Finally, tax policy was in the news because of the scheduled expiration of the Bush-era tax cuts at the end of 2010. President Obama did not duck this contentious position issue, but

rather strongly advocated a "middle-class tax cut" that would keep existing tax rates in place for families earning less than $250,000 a year. However, the President expressed determination to end the cuts for those earning more than this amount. Republican politicians and conservative commentators claimed that Obama's proposed tax policy would harm the fragile economic recovery; in their view his policy was a "jobs killer" that would deter small businesses from expanding their payrolls. Some also claimed that the President's proposal amounted to thinly disguised class warfare.

The PSA survey indicates that the tax debate divided the electorate fairly evenly. Although an overwhelming majority (88%) were in favor of keeping at least some tax cuts, 49% wanted to retain them only for those below the $250,000 threshold. A smaller, but still substantial, group (39%) endorsed the idea of keeping the Bush-era tax rates for everyone, rich and poor alike.[11] Sensing that there were both many proponents and many opponents of the Obama tax policy, Congress showed itself risk averse and adjourned before the 2010 elections without taking action.

Not Making the Grade: The President's Mid-Term Report Card

President Obama's inability to reverse the nation's economic (mis)fortunes, his alleged lack of focus on the problem, and his championing of deeply divisive policies were accompanied by a substantial decline in his job approval ratings. Typical are monthly Gallup surveys that show Obama's approval drifting downward from fully 66% when he took office in January 2009 to only 43% in November 2010. The PSA survey data echo the latter figure. Asked about the President's overall performance, his performance on the issue they considered most important, and his handling of various other issues and events, majorities or large pluralities gave him low grades in every instance (see Figure 4). [12] Close to half disapproved of Obama's overall performance and a clear majority disapproved of how he had handled the issue they considered

most important. Majorities also disapproved of his performance on the economy and immigration. Although evaluations of his handling of the war in Afghanistan and the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico were slightly more positive, large pluralities disapproved of what he had done in these areas. Overall, Obama's average disapproval rating (51%) far outstripped his average approval rating (29%). Similarly, when PSA respondents were asked a summary question about whether the President had met their expectations, only one in twenty answered that he had exceeded them and one in four said he had met them. Fully two-thirds stated they were disappointed with the President—43% very much so.[13]

(Figure 4 about here)

Given this array of negative assessments, it does not surprise that Obama's image in the public mind was less than stellar as the 2010 elections approached. The electorate was deeply divided about his leadership characteristics, but 57% thought that the word "responsive" did not describe him well. Similarly, half of those surveyed expressed reservations about his competence and trustworthiness.[14] Nor was he particularly well-liked. His average score on a 0 (dislike) to 10 (like) scale was only 4.6, almost a full point below the 5.5 score he had recorded immediately after his election as president in 2008.[15] Moreover, although Obama's 2010 score was significantly higher than the dismal rating (3.4) accorded Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, it was only a tenth of a point greater than that given to the insurgent right-wing populist Tea Party movement which was one of the President's harshest critics. Although Obama also outscored Tea Party favorite Sarah Palin (3.8), and the Democratic and Republican parties which had scores of 4.2 and 4.0, respectively, it was not because he was especially popular—it was more that Ms. Palin and the two major parties were even less warmly received.

The negative tenor of the survey data tempt one to lay full blame for his party's massive losses in the mid-term elections at the feet of a President whose promises were widely seen to

have exceeded his performance. Before doing so, it is useful to recall the late Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill's famous aphorism that "all politics is local."   Although not as extreme as O'Neill's saying, the conjecture that public reactions to Congress and its Members are key factors affecting voting for the House and Senate is a staple of the congressional elections literature (e.g., Jacobson, 2004). Accordingly, perceptions of the performance of local Members of Congress, judgments about the job Congress is doing, and the belief some voters have that the Presidency and Congress should be controlled by different parties should have played significant roles in voters' decision-making processes (e.g., Fiorina, 2003; Bafumi, Erikson and Wlezien, 2010).

Echoing the latter part of another venerable aphorism, namely that Americans "love their local Member of Congress but hate Congress," as well as the results of numerous opinion polls taken in the run-up to the 2010 elections, fully 78% of the PSA respondents judged that the 111th Congress was doing a bad job and merely 14% thought it was doing a good one. However, there was little evidence of widespread affection for local Members of Congress—a near majority judged that their Congressperson was performing poorly, and only just over one-third thought that he or she were performing well.[16] Many PSA respondents also endorsed the idea of balancing presidential and congressional power by having different parties control the executive and legislative branches of government. Specifically, 42% favored divided government and only 21% favored united government, with the remainder saying either it "didn't matter" or they "didn't know."[17] Overall, voters' opinions of Congress, its Members and its partisan composition vis à vis the executive branch echo reactions to the performance of the President and his Administration. The negative tenor is unmistakable, and they could give Democrats nothing to cheer about as the electorate prepared to go to the polls. The next section assesses which factors were most important for the decisions voters made.

Making Political Choices, 2010

We organize our analysis of how the several factors discussed above influenced voting in the 2010 mid-term House elections by investigating the explanatory power of rival valence politics and spatial models of electoral choice. The valence politics variables measure President Obama's image, judgments regarding party best on most important issue, party identification, economic evaluations, and emotional reactions to economic conditions. Party best on most important issue and party identification are a series of dummy variables[18] and economic evaluations and emotional reactions to economic conditions are factor scores derived from the principal components analyses described earlier.[19] We measure Obama's image with the "responds to the concerns of people like me," "competent," and "trustworthy" variables discussed in the previous section.[20] We also use responses to the question asking about the President's performance relative to expectations when he took office and the 0-10 "like-dislike" scale tapping feelings about him. A principal components analysis (PCA) of these five variables yields a single factor that explains 85.9% of the item variance. The Obama image variable is a factor score based on the results of this PCA analysis.

The spatial model utilizes several predictor variables to assess the explanatory power of salient position issues. These variables tap voters' positions on the hotly disputed PPACA health care bill, cap-and-trade and associated green issues, immigration, and abolition/retention of tax cuts for the wealthy.[21] The spatial model also includes a summary liberal-conservative beliefs scale based on attitudes towards same-sex marriage, abortion, a general "reduce taxes-increase social services" spending trade-off, desired levels of defence spending, and positions on a five-point liberal-conservative self-identification scale.[22]

The voting analyses also consider the explanatory power of several other variables that might confound inferences about the impact of valence and spatial predictors. These additional variables include evaluations of the performance of local House incumbents, preferences for

divided or unified government, racial attitudes and several socio-demographic characteristics (age, education, employment status, gender, income, race-ethnicity, religion). [23] Since the dependent variable (vote Republican = 1, vote Democrat = 0) in the vote models is a dichotomy, logistic regression analysis is used to estimate the parameters in various models (e.g., Long and Freese, 2006).

Table 1 summarizes the performance of the various competing models. As shown, a baseline model with only socio-demographic characteristics and racial attitudes fares relatively poorly—it has the smallest pseudo (McFadden and McKelvey) R^2 statistics (.16 and .28, respectively), the lowest percentage of correct voting predictions (71.5) and the largest (i.e., worst) AIC value. [24] A model that utilizes evaluations of the performance of the local Congressperson and attitudes towards divided government as predictor variables does somewhat better, although its' performance is not particularly impressive. Specifically, its' McFadden and McKelvey R^2's are .21 and .32, and it correctly classifies 72.9% of the voters. This model's AIC value is somewhat smaller (better) than that of its demographic-racial attitudes rival.

(Table 1 about here)

Our ability to explain voting in 2010 improves markedly when we consider the spatial and valence models. As Table 1 documents, both of these models have much more impressive fit statistics and much smaller AIC values than those considered above. However, the valence politics model does somewhat better than its spatial rival—the valence politics model's McFadden and McKelvey R^2's are larger, and it correctly classifies slightly more voters than the spatial model. The valence politics model also has a considerably smaller AIC value (620.90 versus 830.92).

Although the valence politics model's performance is impressive, it would be a mistake to conclude that its rivals are irrelevant. In this regard, Table 1 shows that a composite model that

includes all of the predictor variables in various models marginally outperforms the valence model. The composite model's McFadden and McKelvey R^2 statistics are the largest (.82 and .87 respectively) and nearly 96% of the choices voters made are correctly classified. Moreover, despite its richer parameterization, the composite model has the lowest AIC value (592.93). These results indicate that our ability to explain voting behavior in the 2010 congressional elections is enhanced by acknowledging contributions made by multiple models.

This conclusion is reinforced when we consider parameter estimates for several explanatory variables in the composite model (see Table 2). Regarding individual predictors, three of the valence politics variables have statistically significant effects. As expected, favoring the Republican Party on the most important issue enhances the probability of a GOP vote, and favoring the Democrats reduces that probability. Similarly, being a GOP party identifier is positively associated with choosing a Republican congressional candidate, and being a Democratic or "other" party identification is negatively associated, with such a choice. As also anticipated, people with more positive images of President Obama are less likely to vote Republican.[25] However, neither economic evaluations nor emotional reactions to the economy exert significant direct effects. However, as we shall see, the latter finding does not mean that the economy was unimportant in 2010.

(Table 2 about here)

As anticipated by the discussion of the composite model's performance, valence politics variables are not the only significant predictors of Republican voting. Among the spatial variables, persons who want to keep the Bush-era tax cuts for individuals earning over $200,000 and couples earning over $250,000 per year are more significantly more likely to vote for the GOP, and those with pro-Green attitudes and more liberal positions on the liberal-conservative beliefs scale are less likely to do so. But, attitudes towards the PPACA health care bill and

immigration reform do not have significant effects. As for other predictors, both evaluations of

the performance of local incumbents and attitudes towards divided versus unified government

behave as anticipated—positive evaluations of Republican incumbents prompt GOP voting as do

preferences for divided rather than unified government. Among the demographics only race is

significant; controlling for all other factors African Americans were more likely to vote

Democratic than were Whites. Position on the racial resentment scale is not a significant

predictor.

Given the logit model's nonlinear functional form, the coefficients in Table 2 do not

provide readily interpretable information about the *size* of the effects of various statistically

significant predictors. To illustrate their potential impact, we set each significant predictor at its

lowest value while all other predictors are held constant at their means (continuous variables) or

zero (dummy variables). The probability of voting Republican in the House race is calculated.[26]

Then that probability is recalculated when the predictor variable of interest is set at its highest

value. The resulting changes in probability of GOP voting are displayed in Figure 5. These

numbers illustrate the strong impact that President Obama's image had on vote choice in 2010.

Ceteris paribus, changing the Obama image variable from its lowest to its highest value

decreases the probability of voting Republican by fully .83 points on a 0-1 probability scale.

Other explanatory variables in the valence politics model have smaller, but still sizable, effects.

Selecting the Republicans rather than the Democrats as best on an important issue alters the

probability by .43 (-.24 to +.19) points, and being a Republican rather than a Democratic

identifier does so by .55 (-.21 to +.34) points.

(Figure 5 about here)

Regarding other significant predictors, position issues and liberal-conservative

ideological beliefs have the strongest impacts. Changing one's location from liberal to

conservative on the ideological beliefs scale boosts the probability of a Republican vote by .44 points. Attitudes towards environmental issues also have impressive effects; the probability of a GOP vote by a person with strongly pro-environmental issue positions was .45 points lower than that for someone with the strongest anti-environmental issue positions. Favoring retention of the Bush-era tax cut for the wealthy had a weaker effect, increasing the likelihood of a Republican vote by 15 points. Similarly, having a favourable evaluation of a local Republican Congressperson enhances the probability of choosing the GOP by .24 points and favoring divided government increases the propensity to vote Republican in the House elections by .20 points. The one significant demographic, being African American rather than White, decreases the likelihood of a GOP vote by .24 points.

The evidence displayed in Figure 5 strongly indicates that voters' images of President Obama had very large effects. This conclusion is reinforced by the data presented in Figure 6, which illustrates the evolution of the probability of voting for a Republican congressional candidate as Obama's image varies across its range from negative to positive. The figure illustrates that large differences in the likelihood of voting GOP are not confined to those with extremely positive and extremely negative images of the President. For example, among voters whose Obama image score is one standard deviation below the mean, the probability of casting a GOP ballot is fully .87. This number drops monotonically as Obama's image score becomes more positive, falling to .56 among people with average image scores and to .19 among those whose image of the President is one standard deviation above average. As Figures 6 also shows, 95% confidence bounds around the estimated probabilities are quite small, thereby buttressing confidence in the conclusion that variation in voters' images of Obama had powerful effects on choices they made in the 2010 elections.

(Figure 6 about here)

To investigate factors that affected the President's image, we specify a model that includes all of the predictors of Republican congressional voting described above except for the variables measuring evaluations of local Congresspersons and attitudes towards divided/unified government. To strengthen confidence that inferences about the impact of these predictors is not an artefact of failing to control for previously established feelings about the President, we include a measure of voters' attitudes towards Obama in November 2008, immediately after he was elected President.[27] Since the 2010 Obama image variable is a factor score, we estimate model coefficients with OLS regression.

The results, displayed in Table 3, tell an interesting story. Many coefficients are statistically significant, with negative images of the President being predictably related to factors such as Republican party identification, viewing the GOP as best on the most important issue, and holding conservative rather than liberal political beliefs. Obama also is more positively viewed by younger people, lower income persons, women, African Americans, and those not harboring feelings of racial resentment.

(Table 3 about here)

However, perhaps the most interesting results concern voters' reactions to the economy, and their issue positions. Both economic evaluations and feelings about the economy have significant effects, with negative evaluations and negative emotions being associated with more negative view of the President. Similarly, people opposed to the PPACA, those opposed to the Administration's environmental initiatives, and those holding harsh views on immigration all have more negative images of Obama. Equally predictable, people wishing to retain the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy have less positive views of him.

Overall, the joint impact of the several predictor variables in the Obama image model is impressive—the R^2 is fully .86. To illustrate which individual predictors have the greatest

explanatory power, we perform simulations similar to those described above, varying the values of significant predictors across their ranges, while holding other predictors at constant values. The results (see Figure 7) show that attitudes towards the PPACA health care bill have a very strong influence; they are capable of varying Obama's image (a factor score variable) by over one standard deviation (1.04 points). Economic evaluations and emotions also are powerful—the former can vary the President's image by .60 points, and the latter, by .30 points. Attitudes towards Green issues and positions on the liberal-conservative scale have sizable effects as well, being able to shift Obama's image by .20 points and .27 points, respectively. Effects of immigration attitudes (.09 points) and supporting tax cuts for the wealthy (.07 points) are less impressive.

(Figure 7 about here)

Among the other predictors, the impact of party judged best on most important issue is sizable, with a shift from the Democrats to the Republicans lowering Obama's image score by .43 (.22 + .21) points. The impact of party identification is smaller, with a shift from Democratic to Republican identification being associated with a .18 point (.12 + .06) downward shift in views of the President. Noteworthy also are the effects of race and racial attitudes—c*eteris paribus*, African Americans have .23 point higher Obama image score than do Whites, and a strong sense of racial resentment lowers that score by .16 points.

An important implication of the numbers displayed in Figure 7 concerns the *indirect* effects of attitudes towards health care and the economy on voting for the House of Representatives. As demonstrated above (Figure 5), the President's image mattered greatly for voting decisions and, as just discussed, that image was powerfully influenced by reactions to the economy and attitudes toward Obama's health care legislation. To illustrate the strength of these indirect effects, we calculated what Obama's image score would be when economic evaluations,

emotional reactions to the economy and attitudes towards health care are at their most positive. We then repeated this calculation when these variables are their most negative. Next, we varied Obama's image variable in the composite congressional voting model (Table 2) using the image scores just calculated. The result is that the probability of voting Republican in 2010 moves from .14 to fully .81. This large upward shift in the likelihood of GOP voting illustrates the strength of the joint indirect effects of reactions towards the economy and attitudes towards President Obama's health care legislation. Unfortunately for Democratic candidates for the House, when voters went to the polls in November 2010, many of them were negatively disposed towards the health care bill and adverse reactions to the economy were pervasive.

The conjecture that negative economic evaluations created an adverse climate for the President's heath care bill can be investigated by regressing the PPACA health care legislation evaluations variable onto the variables measuring economic evaluations and emotional reactions to the economy, with controls for partisanship, ideological beliefs, Obama's favorability rating in November 2008 and various socio-demographics. The results (Table 4) show the hypothesized positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$) coefficients for the two economic predictors (evaluations and emotional reactions), net of controls for several other factors. The effects of the economic predictors are quite strong—by themselves they can account for 41% of the variance in opinions about the PPACA. These results are consistent with the idea that voters' deep unhappiness with the economic distress besetting the country had sizable effects on how they received the President's landmark health policy legislation.

(Table 4 about here)

Conclusion: Valence Politics Leverages Position Issues

As a virtually unknown first-term Senator from Illinois, Barack Obama won the Presidency in 2008 partially on his ability to energize large numbers of Americans around his

positive image and the desire for change. Unfortunately for the President and his party, the inspiring rhetoric he employed to mobilize support during his successful campaign and his desire to be a transformative leader created soaring expectations. Once in office, the mismatch between his glowing rhetoric and the resistant realities of recession-ridden America set the stage for his party's dramatic reversal of political fortune.

The fact that much of the 2008 campaign centered on Obama's message of hope and change allowed opponents to link him with policies that proved to be more unpopular than many Democrats would have thought possible when the 111th Congress first convened. An influential coalition of Tea Party activists, mainstream Republicans, and conservative media commentators rebranded the health-care reform package as "Obamacare," and excoriated the President and Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, for pushing the PPACA through Congress. The 2010 PSA survey shows that, rightly or wrongly, many Americans were decidedly underwhelmed by the President's performance, thus creating a large, potentially receptive audience for such corrosive attacks.

The sputtering economy, a quintessential valence issue, was at the heart of his performance problem. Elected in 2008 in the midst of the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression, Obama had encouraged expectations that he would quickly "fix it." These expectations constituted the criteria by which, and the context in which his Administration and his allies in Congress were judged. The President had played the valence politics game with great skill and considerable élan in 2008, but there were serious political consequences when heightened expectations went unfulfilled.

Soon after his electoral victory, Obama had pledged that "help is on the way."[28] Two years later unemployment remained painfully high, the housing market was abysmal, growth was anaemic, and government debt was at an all-time high. The continuing economic distress

constituted a context of political debate that enhanced voters' susceptibility to Republican claims that the President's innovative policies in areas such as healthcare, climate change and immigration were ill-advised. What might have been heavily valenced issues in good economic times became hotly contested position issues. As the mid-term elections approached, Obama's seeming inability to resuscitate the economy, the mix of controversial policies he had championed, and a leadership style that led large numbers of people to conclude that he was both ineffective and unresponsive, prompted widespread unhappiness with the President and his policies. That unhappiness propelled the strong anti-Democratic tide that drowned many of the President's congressional colleagues on November 2nd, 2010.

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Table 1. Rival Models of Voting for Republican House Candidates in
2010 U.S. Congressional Elections

Model	McFadden R^2	McKelvey R^2	Percent Correctly Predicted	AIC†
Socio-Demographics	.16	.28	71.5	2511.45
Local Member/Divided Government	.21	.32	72.9	2343.81
Position Issues & Ideology	.73	.82	93.3	827.46
Valence Politics‡	.80	.86	95.2	620.90
Composite Model†††	.82	.87	95.9	592.93

† -Akaike Information Criterion (AIC); smaller AIC and BIC values indicate better
model performance.

‡ - includes party identification, party best on most important issue, Obama image.

††† -includes valence politics variables, position issues and ideology, attitudes
towards local incumbent House Member, desirability of divided government, racial
resentment, socio-demographics.
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Table 2. Composite Model of Voting for Republican House Candidates
in 2010 U.S. Congressional Elections
(Binomial Logit Estimates)

Predictor Variable	β	s.e.
Party Identification:		
Republican	1.704***	.370
Democrat	-.905***	.301
Other Party	-1.140*	.586
Party Best Most Important Issue:		
Republican	.859**	.344
Democrat	-1.078**	.405
Other Party	1.602***	.522
Obama's Image 2010	-1.711***	.264
Liberal-Conservative Beliefs	-.547*	.240
PPACA Health Care Bill	.011	.234
Cap-and-Trade/Green Issues	-.619**	.227
Immigration	.039	.080
Keep Tax Cuts for Everyone	.637*	.325
Economic Evaluations	.150	.167
Emotional Reactions to Economy	.054	.100
Employment Status	-.256	.488
Incumbent Performance & Divided Government	.251**	.100
Divided Government	.417*	.190
Racial Resentment	.137	.194
Socio-Demographic Controls:		
Age	.003	.009
Education	.118	.091
Gender	.034	.259
Income	-.054	.045
Race-Ethnicity:		
African American	-1.032*	.525
Hispanic	-.547	.545
Other	.231	.487
Religion:		
Protestant	.218	.372
Catholic	.123	.385
Other Christian	.002	.454
Jewish	-.243	.707
All Other	.116	.446
Constant	-2.310**	.956

McFadden R^2 =   .82
McKelvey R^2 =   .87
Percentage Correctly Classified =   95.9
N = 2269

*** - $p \leq$ .001; ** - $p \leq$ .01; * - $p \leq$ .05; one-tailed test.

Note: reference category for party identification is Independent; reference
category for party best on most important issue is "None, Don't know";
reference category for race-ethnicity is "White"; reference category for
religion is "None".

Table 3. Composite Model of President Obama's Image†
Immediately Preceding the 2010 Congressional Elections
(OlS Estimates)

Predictor Variable	β	s.e.
Party Identification:		
Republican	-.055*	.025
Democrat	.117***	.025
Other Party	.134***	.043
Party Best Most Important Issue:		
Republican	-.209***	.027
Democrat	.224***	.027
Other Party	-.115***	.037
Obama Favorability Rating November 2008	.090***	.012
Liberal-Conservative Beliefs	.090***	.012
PPACA Health Care Bill	.328***	.018
Cap-and-Trade/Green Issues	.064***	.017
Immigration	.011*	.005
Keep Tax Cuts for Everyone	-.068**	.027
Economic Evaluations	.119***	.011
Emotional Reactions to Economy	.038***	.006
Employment Status	-.008	.035
Racial Resentment	-.045***	.013
Socio-Demographic Controls:		
Age	-.006***	.0005
Education	-.001	.006
Gender	-.041**	.017
Income	-.004	.003
Race-Ethnicity:		
African American	.232***	.032
Hispanic	-.017	.037
Other	-.052	.033
Religion:		
Protestant	.005	.024
Catholic	.027	.026
Other Christian	-.045	.030
Jewish	-.037	.048
All Other	.020	.029
Constant	-.120	.068

Adjusted R^2 = .86
N = 2199

*** - $p \leq .001$; ** - $p \leq .01$; * - $p \leq .05$; one-tailed test.

† - measured in 2010 pre-election survey.

Note: reference category for party identification is Independent; reference category for party best on most important issue is "None, Don't know"; reference category for race-ethnicity is "White"; reference category for religion is "None".

Table 4. Model of the Impact of Economic Evaluations, Emotional
Reactions to the Economy and Other Predictors of Opinions
About the PPACA Health Care Legislation
(OlS Estimates)

Predictor Variable	β	s.e.
Economic Evaluations	.194***	.015
Emotional Reactions to Economy	.070***	.009
Party Identification:		
Republican	-.127***	.032
Democrat	.356***	.033
Other Party	-.180***	.055
Liberal-Conservative Beliefs	.478***	.018
Obama Favorability Rating November 2008	.116***	.016
Employment Status	.009	.048
Socio-Demographic Controls:		
Age	.002**	.0008
Education	-.013	.008
Gender	-.059*	.023
Income	-.009*	.004
Race-Ethnicity:		
African American	.232***	.043
Hispanic	.003	.052
Other	-.102**	.045
Religion:		
Protestant	.008	.034
Catholic	.059	.031
Other Christian	-.011	.042
Jewish	-.033	.066
All Other	.053	.040
Constant	-.499***	.085

Adjusted R^2 =   .75
N = 2199

*** - p $\leq$ .001; ** - p $\leq$ .01; * - p $\leq$ .05; one-tailed test.

Note: reference category for party identification is Independent; reference
category for party best on most important issue is "None, Don't know";
reference category for race-ethnicity is "White"; reference category for
religion is "None".

.

Figure 1. Public Reactions to Economic Conditions

A. Looking Back, Looking Ahead
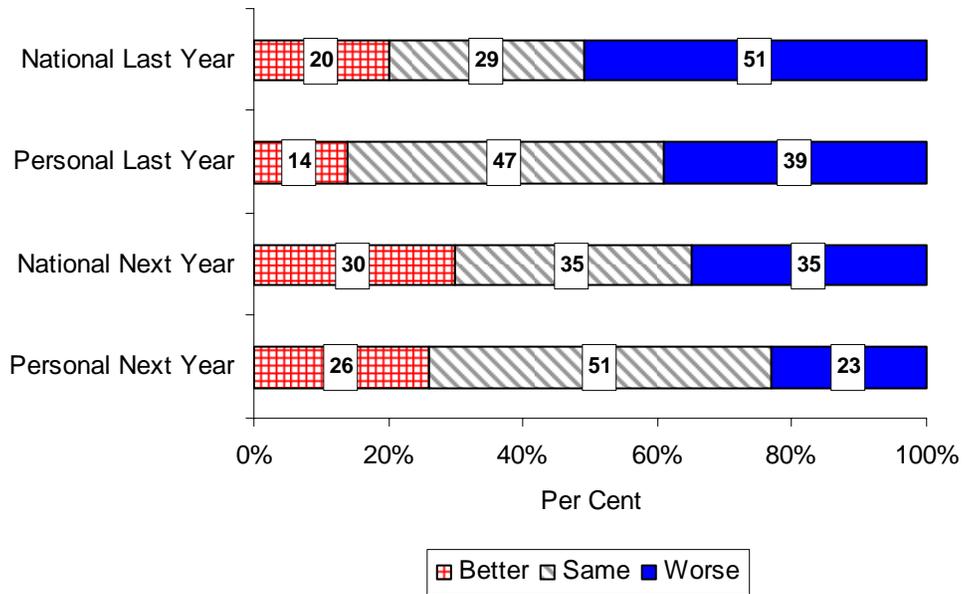
B. Emotional Reactions to Economic Conditions
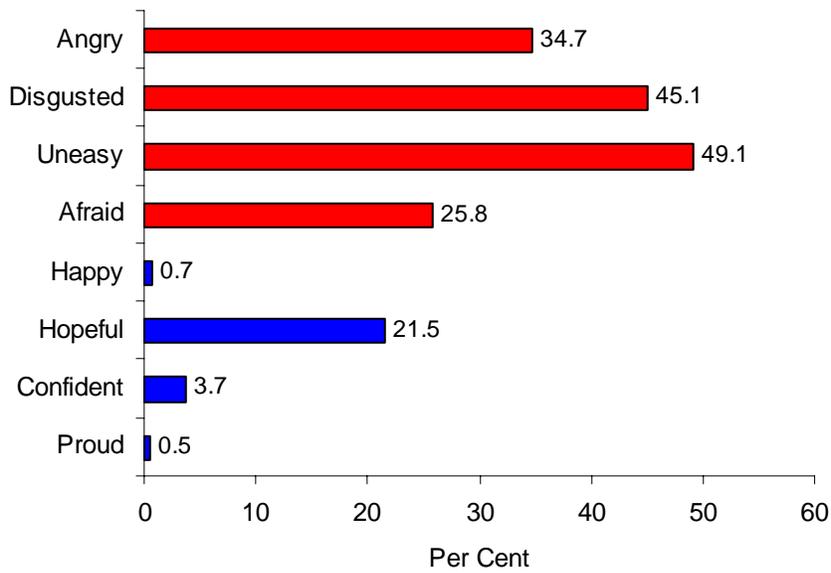
Source: 2010 PSA pre-election survey.

Figure 2. Most Important Issue Facing the Country
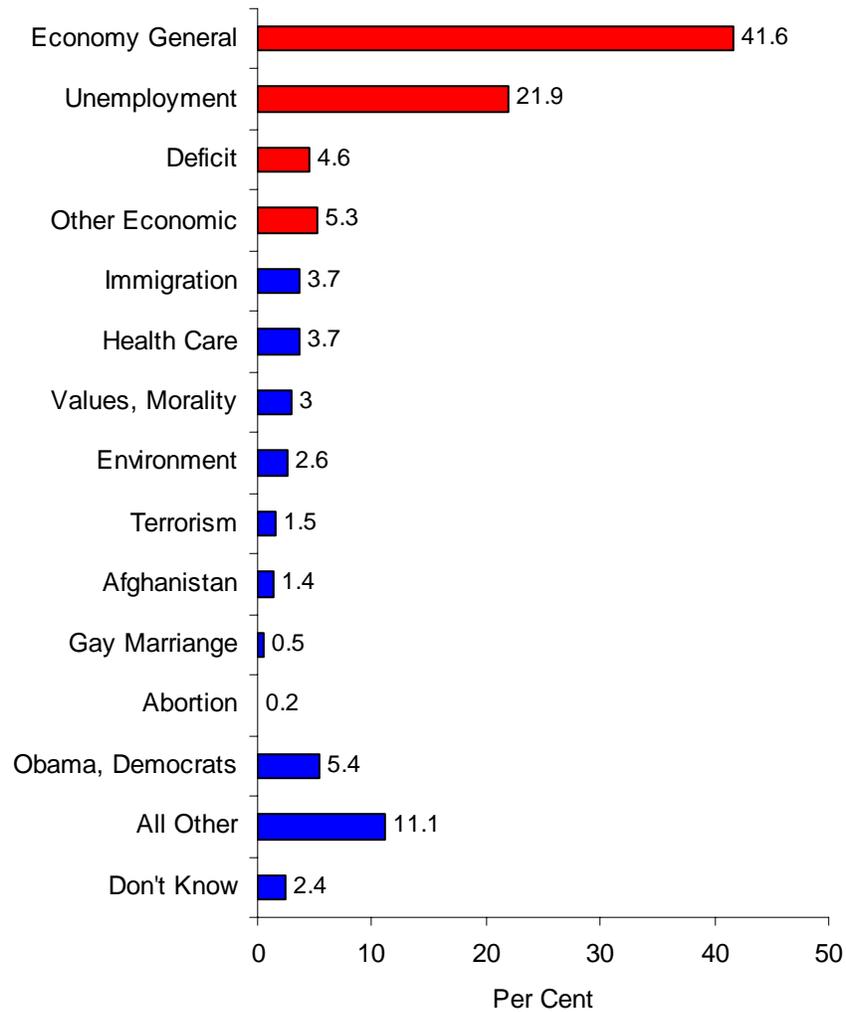
Source: 2010 PSA pre-election survey.

Figure 3. Public Reactions to PPACA Health Care Legislation
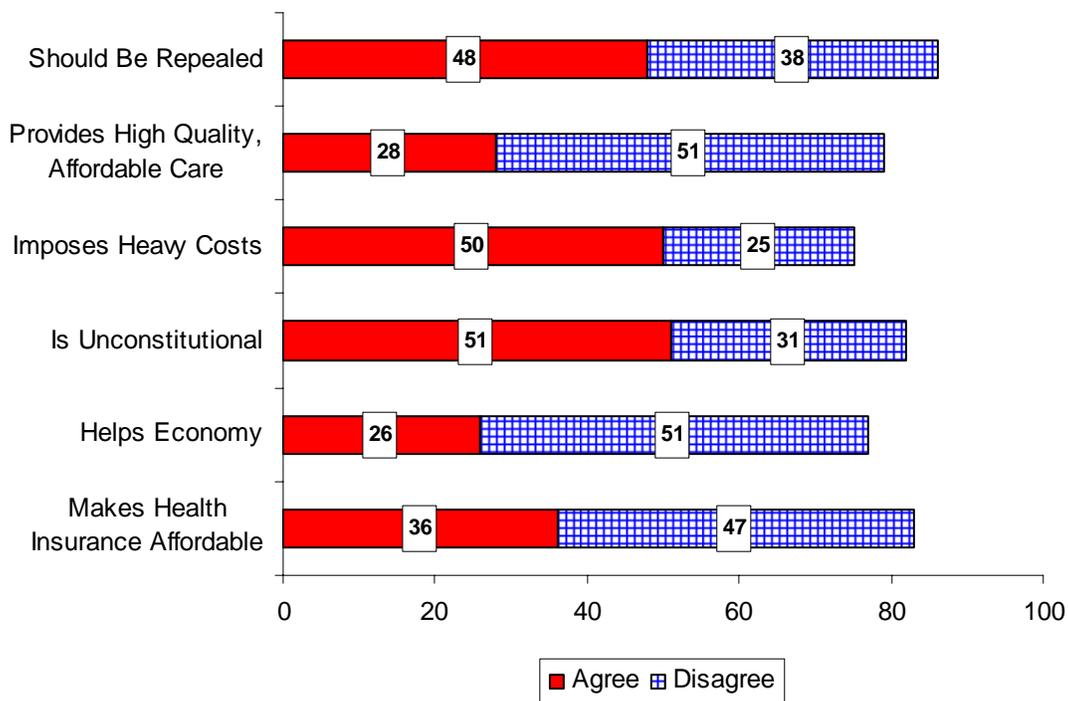
Source: 2010 PSA pre-election survey.

Figure 4. President Obama's Mid-Term Report Card - Approval Ratings in Various Policy Areas
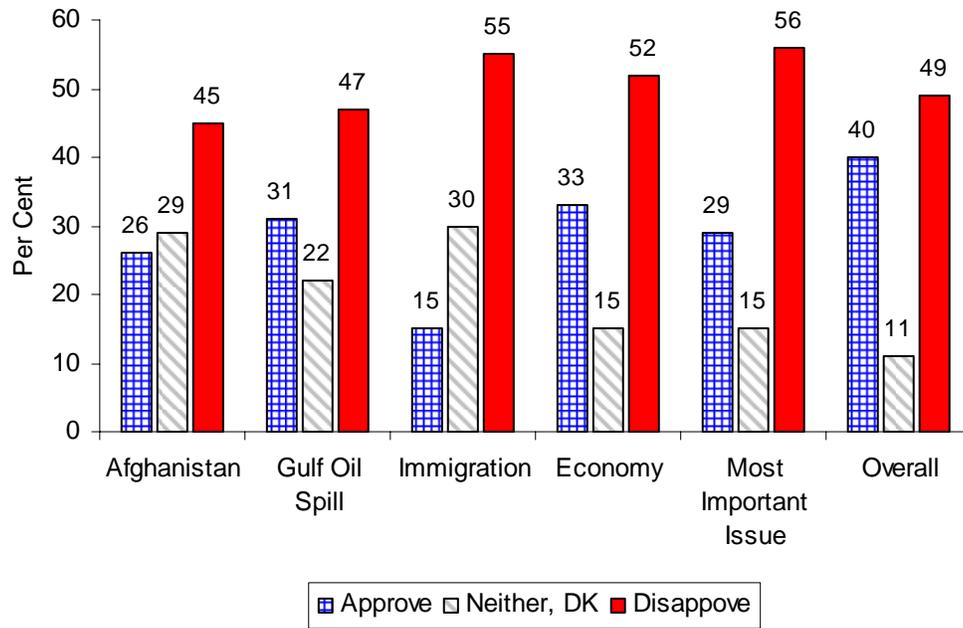
Source: 2010 PSA pre- and post-election surveys.

Figure 5. Change in Probability of Voting for Republican House Candidate in 2010 U.S. Congressional Elections Associated with Changes in Values of Significant Predictors
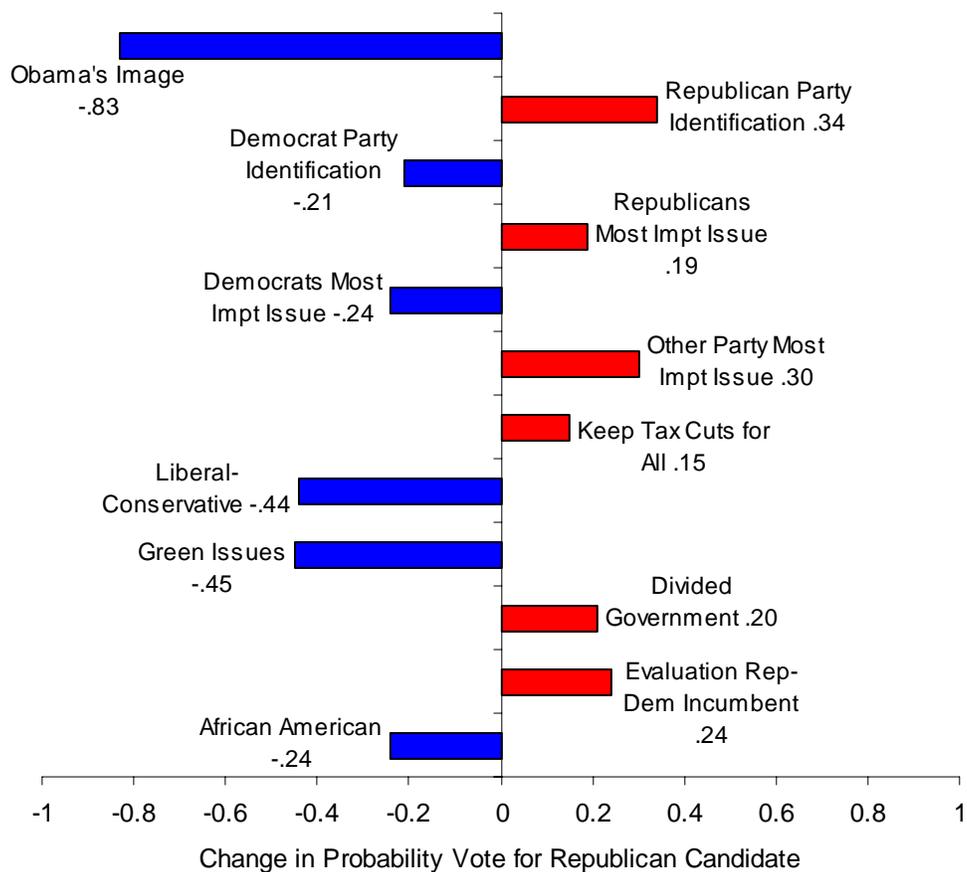
Note: each significant continuous predictor variable is varied across its full range, with other predictors held at their means. Significant dummy predictors are varied from 0 to 1, with other dummies in a set (i.e., party identification, party best on most important issue, race/ethnicity, religion) held at 0.

.

Figure 6. Changes in Probability of Voting for Republican House Candidate in 2010 U.S. Congressional Elections Associated with Changes in President Obama's Image
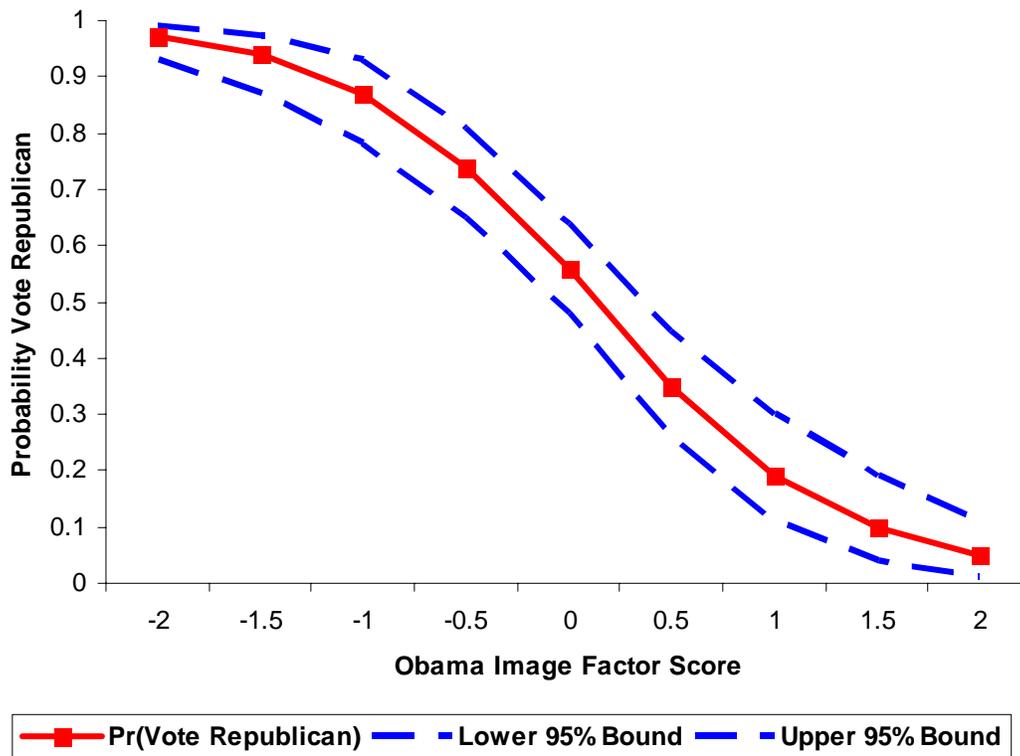
Note: dashed lines are 95 percent confidence bounds.

Figure 7. Changes in President Obama's Image Score Associated With Changes in Significant Predictors
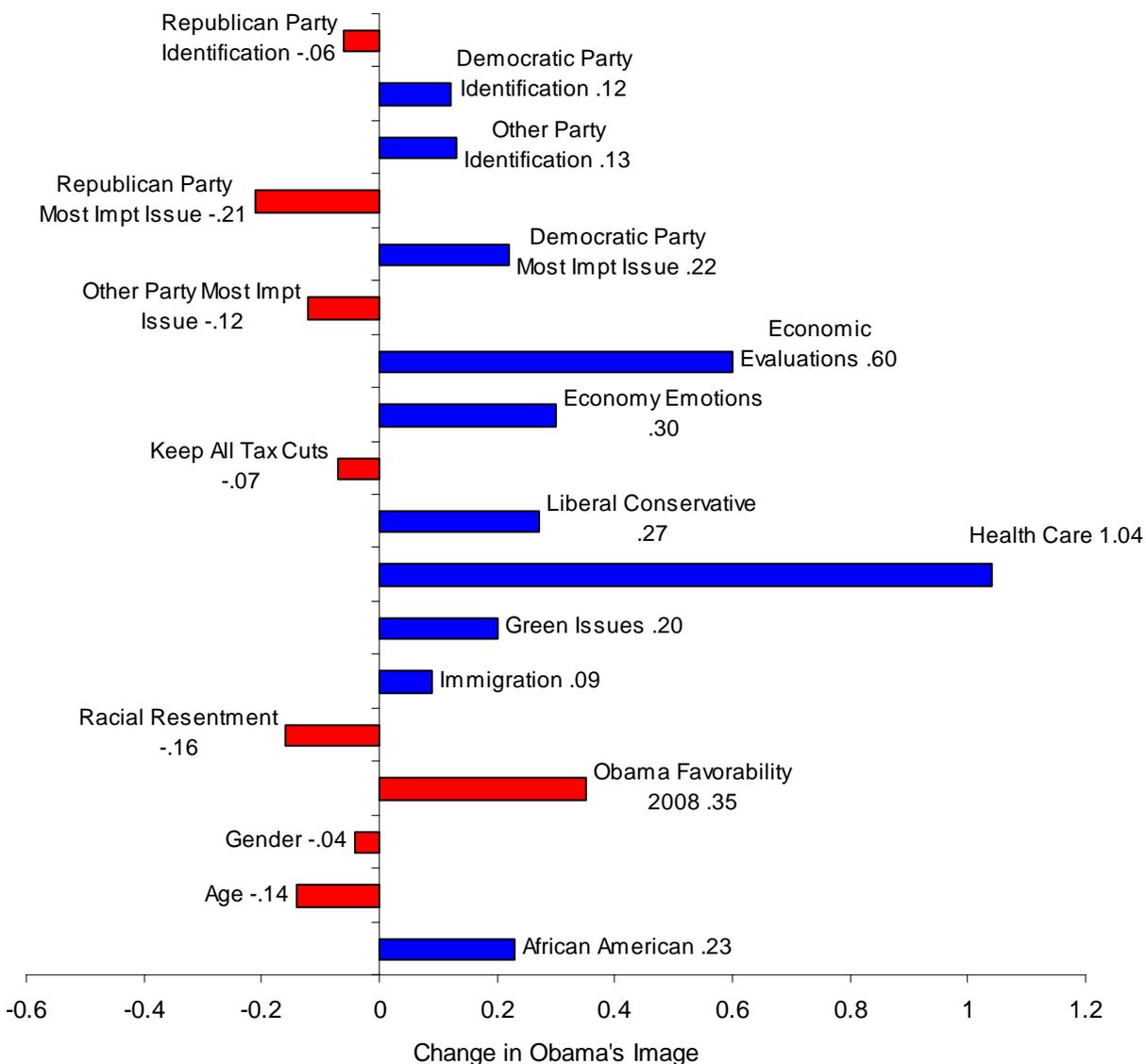
Note: predictor variables are varied across their full range.

Endnotes

[1] The idea that mid-term congressional elections may be viewed as referendums on presidential performance has a lengthy history and has stimulated lively controversy. See, e.g., Tufte (1975); Kernell (1977); Abramowitz (1985); Campbell (1997); Bafumi, Erikson and Wlezien (2010).

[2] The classic *American Voter* analyses are updated in Lewis-Beck et al. (2008).

[3] See Clarke, Kornberg and Scotto (2009). A substantial portion of the literature on congressional elections focuses on factors affecting outcomes of these contests, rather than on forces affecting individual-level voting behavior. For reviews, see, e.g., Campbell (1997); Jacobson (2004).

[4] The 2010 Political Support in America Study was funded by the National Science Foundation (U.S.), with additional financial support provided to xxxxx by the Economic and Social Research Council (U.K.), and to xxxxx and xxxxx by xxxxx. The authors thank these organizations for their generous assistance.

Fieldwork for the 2010 PSA national pre- and post-election internet panel survey (N = 3800) was conducted by YouGov/Polimetrix under the direction of Elizabeth Christie. All 2010 PSA respondents were initially 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP). Vote shares in the 2010 survey are Democrat = 47.1%, Republican = 50.5%, Other = 2.4. These figures differ by only 2.3%, 1.1% and 1.2%, respectively, from the actual national vote totals (average absolute difference = 1.5%). See Vavreck and Rivers (2008) for information on YouGov/Polimetrix respondent selection procedures. On the utility of internet surveys for studying political attitudes and behavior in the U.S., see Ansolabehere and Schaffner (2011).

All data and Stata output from the analyses presented in this paper may be downloaded from http://www.xxxxxxxxx.org.

[5] The reactions to economic conditions questions were as follows: a) "Would you say that over the *past year*, the *nation's economy* has..."; b) "Thinking about economic conditions, how does the financial situation of *your household* now compare to what it was *12 months ago*?"; c) "Thinking ahead, would you say that over the *next year*, the *nation's economy* will..."; and d) "Thinking ahead, how do you think the financial situation of *your household* will change over the *next 12 months*? Will it....""? Respondents could provide answers ranging from get/gotten much better (coded 5) to get/gotten much worse (coded 1). A summary economic evaluation variable was constructed using factor scores extracted from a principal components analysis of these four variables.

[6] Emotional reactions to the economy were measured by responses to the following question: "Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about the country's general economic situation? Respondents were able to choose up to four of the following emotions: angry, happy, disgusted, hopeful, uneasy, confident, afraid, or proud. A summary variable measuring emotional reactions to the economy was constructed by computing the difference between the number of positive and negative emotions cited.

[7] The question wording was "As far as you are concerned, what is the single most important issue facing *the country* at the present time?"

[8] The question on opinions about the PPACA health care legislation was administered in the pre-election survey. The wording was: "Here are statements some people are making about the *health care reform law* Congress passed in March 2010. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree." The statements were: a) "The health care reform law will make health insurance more affordable for millions of Americans"; b) "The health care reform law will help the U.S. economy by reducing the budget deficit by billions of dollars over the next decade"; c) "The health care reform law will help people like me and my family to get affordable, high quality health care"; d) "The health care reform law is unconstitutional because Congress does not have the power under the Constitution to require all Americans to buy health insurance or pay a penalty"; e) "The health care reform law will impose heavy regulatory and administrative costs on the states"; and f) "The health care reform law should be repealed". Responses to items (a, b, c) were coded 5 = "strongly agree" through 1 = "strongly disagree," and responses to items (d, e, f) coded 5 = "strongly disagree" through 1 = "strongly agree." In the multivariate analyses, a respondent's position on health care reform was measured as a factor score derived from a PCA of these six questions.

[9] In the multivariate analyses respondents' attitudes towards immigration were measured as the sum of their level of agreement with the statement: "Illegal immigrants should be eligible for health care, education, and other public services," and their level of disagreement with the statement: "The United States should put more troops on the border with Mexico to keep out illegal immigrants. The resulting variable ranged from 2 to 10.

[10] Opinions on environmental issues were captured by responses to four questions: (a) "There is a lot of discussion about 'Cap and Trade' legislation designed to protect the environment by limiting the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates 'Cap and Trade' would cost the American economy 22 billion dollars over the next decade. Some people think this is price worth paying but others disagree. Are you in favor of the 'Cap and Trade' legislation or opposed to it?" Reponses varied from "strongly favor" (coded 5) to "strongly opposed" (coded 1); b) "In order to deal with the issue of climate change, would you be willing to see your taxes increase:" a great deal (coded 5), somewhat (coded 4), don't know (coded 3), not very much (coded 2), or not at all (coded 1); c) "On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means 'not an important problem' and 10 means 'an extremely important problem', how would rate the issue of climate change:"; and d) "On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means protect the environment regardless of possible negative effects on the economy and 10 means promote economic growth regardless of possible negative effects the environment, where would you put *yourself*?" A summary factor score based on a principal components analysis of responses to the four questions was employed in the multivariate analyses.

[11] The question was: "The 'Bush-era' tax cuts are due to expire at the end of this year. Some people favor keeping the tax cuts for everyone, some people favor keeping the tax cuts only for people earning less than $250,000 per year, and some people favor eliminating the tax cuts for everyone. Please indicate what you favor." In the multivariate analyses, those who indicated that they wanted to keep tax cuts for everyone were coded "1" and those with other positions were coded "0".

[12] The wording of questions measuring respondents' evaluations of President Obama's performance in various policy domains was: "Do you approve of the way President Obama

handled/is handling a) the war in Afghanistan; b) the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; c) the issue of immigration; d) the economy; e) this particular issue (most important issue); and f) his overall job as president.

[13] The question was: "Which of the following phrases best describes your overall reactions to Barack Obama's performance as president?" Respondents could indicate that he a) has exceeded my expectations (coded 5); b) has met my expectations (coded 4); c) has been somewhat disappointing (coded 2); d) has been very disappointing (coded 1); or e) don't know (coded 3).

[14] In separate questions, respondents were asked how well the terms "responds to the concerns of people like me," "competent," and "trustworthy," described Barack Obama. Possible responses ranged from 1 = not very well at all to 5 = extremely well. A summary Obama image variable was constructed based on a PCA of these three image questions, responses to the Obama's performance as president question, and responses to a 0-10 "like-dislike" thermometer asking respondents about their level of affect for Barack Obama.

[15] The 2008 Obama "like-dislike" data are from the authors' question module (N = 1000) in the post-election wave of the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP).

[16] The congressional performance questions were: a) "Overall, how good or bad a job do you think the Congress in Washington has been doing in recent years?"; and b) "Overall, how good or bad a job do you think the Member of Congress from your U.S. House District has being doing in recent years?" Responses ranged from 5 = "very good job" to 1 = "very bad job." For the multivariate analyses, if a respondent had an incumbent Republican House Member in their District, those stating they had done a "very good job" were coded "5", and those stating that they had done a "very bad job" were coded "1". In cases where the respondent had a Democratic incumbent Representative, the coding was reversed. In cases where there was an open seat, respondents were assigned the neutral score of "3".

[17] Respondents were asked: "Do you think it is better when one party controls both the Presidency and Congress, better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans, or doesn't it matter?" Responses are coded: "it is better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans" = 1, and "it is better when one party controls both the Presidency and Congress" are coded 0.

[18] Party identification was measured using the standard ANES question battery. For multivariate analyses party identification was treated as a series of dichotomous variables, coded "1" if the respondent identified with the party in question and "0" otherwise. Independents are the reference category. Similarly, party best on most important issue was a series of 0-1 dummy variables with "none" and "don't know" as the reference category.

[19] See notes 5 and 6.

[20] See note 14.

[21] Details regarding measurement of these position issue variables are presented in notes 8 thru 11 above.

[22] The liberal-conservative beliefs variable was measured as the first component extracted (eigenvalue = 3.15 with 63% of the variance in the indicators explained by the first component) from a principal component analysis of answers to pro-con questions on the topics of abortion (coded 1 - 5), gay marriage (coded 1 - 5), the tradeoffs between less taxes and more spending (coded 0 - 10), attitudes towards defence spending (coded 0-10) and liberal-conservative self-identification (coded 1 - 5). Those who gave liberal self-identities, supported abortion rights and same-sex marriage, opposed defence spending, and wanted more spending even if there were tax increases are given high values on each of these variables and, hence, higher factor scores.

[23] The variables measuring evaluations of the local Congressperson's performance and attitudes towards unified/divided government are described in notes 17 and 18, respectively.

The racial resentment variable is a factor score extracted from a principal component analysis of the following questions with answer categories ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Higher component scores indicate greater racial resentment: a) "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African Americans to work their way out of the lower class"; b) "Many other minority groups have overcome prejudice and worked their way up. African Americans should do the same without any special favors"; c) "Over the past few years, African Americans have gotten less than they deserve"; and d) "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if African Americans would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites."

Education was coded such that those reporting "no formal schooling" were coded "1" and those reporting an advanced degree were coded "11." Income was a thirteen-level variable generated such that those earning under $20,000 per year are coded "1" and those earning over $250,000 per year are coded "13." Those not reporting an income are given a median value of "6". The "unemployed" dichotomous variable is coded "1" if the respondent reported not holding a job and "0" otherwise. Gender is a dichotomous variable with males coded "1" and females coded "0." The race-ethnicity and religion variables are a series of dichotomies coded "1" if the respondent self reports the belief, race, or ethnicity, and "0" otherwise. Whites and those reporting not holding religious beliefs are the reference categories.

[24] The AIC statistic imposes a penalty for the richness of model parameterization. AIC values are calculated as -2*model log-likelihood + 2k where k is the number of estimated parameters. See, e.g., Burnham and Anderson (2002).

[25] The possibility that the composite vote model estimates suffers from simultaneity bias involving congressional voting and the Obama image variable was investigated. A Hausman test (Hausman, 1978; Davidson and MacKinnon, 1993) using the composite vote model and the results of the Obama image model analysis discussed below was performed. The test result (t = -0.500 p = .614) indicates that the composite vote model estimates are not confounded by such a bias. Further confidence in the results is gained by noting that all of the component variables in the Obama image factor-score variable were measured in the pre-election wave of the 2010 survey and none of these questions were asked in proximity to questions asking respondents about their vote in the forthcoming congressional election.

[26] Probabilities were calculated using the CLARIFY program. See Tomz, Wittenberg and King (1999).

[27] All of the 2010 PSA respondents were originally interviewed in the multi-wave 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP). The question measuring attitudes towards Obama in the November 2008 CCAP post-election survey is: "Here is a list of politicians (list includes Obama, McCain, Biden, Palin). How favorable is your impression of each person, or haven't heard enough to say?" Response categories are "very favorable" = 5, "somewhat favorable" = 4 "neutral/haven't heard enough" = 3, "somewhat unfavorable" = 2, "very unfavorable" = 1.

Including a measure of feelings about Obama in 2008 raises the possibility that model misspecification might create a simultaneity bias. Given the elaborate theoretically driven, specification of the Obama image model, we believe this is doubtful. Also, the nature of the bias created by the presence of a lagged endogenous variable works to increase the size of the coefficient of that variable while diminished the size the coefficients associated with other predictors in the model. That, in turn, means that estimates of the significance of those predictors will be conservative rather than exaggerated. See, e.g., Ostrom (1990).

[28] Quote from remarks by President Obama in Chicago, Nov 26, 2008 as he named an Economic Recovery Advisory Board.