MIND THE GAP:
ISSUE POSITIONS, CANDIDATE PREFERENCES, AND MOTIVATED
REASONING IN U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Democratic norms suggest that voters should support candidates with whom they agree on the important issues of the day. When voters perceive disagreement between themselves and their preferred candidates, they often experience cognitive dissonance and react by engaging in motivated reasoning, changing their issue positions (via persuasion) and candidate perceptions (via projection) to rationalize their candidate preferences. Although motivated reasoning has been studied extensively in political psychology, most of these studies have been limited to single issues and single motivated reasoning processes, making it impossible to generalize about how individual voters approach cognitive dissonance in complex campaign environments when multiple issues and processes are in play. I develop a multi-issue, multi-process theory of motivated reasoning that accounts for the full range of tools voters have for justifying their discordant candidate preferences with respect to issue proximity. Using panel surveys from three U.S. presidential elections, I demonstrate that voters tend to spread their motivated reasoning efforts across issues and across processes. These motivated reasoning strategies are both more effective at reducing cognitive dissonance and more cognitively

efficient, combining many small adjustments to voters' issue positions and candidate perceptions that add up to a substantial reduction in perceived voter-candidate disagreement. These findings have mixed implications for citizen competence and democratic accountability: multi-issue, multi-process motivated reasoning is less distortive of voters' political cognition than its single-issue or single-process counterparts, but it is also more intractable due to its lack of reliance on any one issue or process to rationalize candidate preferences.

To Mom and Dad

Acknowledgments

I knew little of and cared little for politics until my parents forced me to enroll in speech and debate as a freshman in high school. Were it not for my coaches, Judy Kroll and Sally Pies, I would never have become a voracious follower of news, learned to construct an argument properly, or written my first original oratory on the dangers of rationalization. Though I did not subject them to drafts of this dissertation, their fingerprints are all over it, and for that I am ever grateful.

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The Dynamics of Perceived Voter-Candidate Agreement

> The greatest deception men suffer is from their own opinions.
> —Leonardo da Vinci

On July 21, 2016, real estate billionaire Donald J. Trump accepted the Republican nomination for President of the United States at the GOP's national convention in Cleveland. To get there, he had to defeat 16 primary opponents and an increasingly vocal "Never Trump" faction which sought to prevent him from becoming the Republican standard-bearer in 2016. Among the charges levied by Never-Trumpers was the claim that Trump, a former Democrat, was out of step with Republican voters on important political issues. From Planned Parenthood to eminent domain to the role of government in healthcare and education, Trump was pilloried as insufficiently conservative (Hensch 2015; Krauthammer 2016; Limbaugh 2016). Even right-wing

news site Breitbart, which eventually became one of Trump's staunchest defenders, questioned his conservative credentials as late as January 2016 (Shapiro 2016).

One week later, in Philadelphia, former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was nominated by the Democrats as their 2016 presidential candidate. Like Trump, Clinton had endured an unexpectedly long and arduous campaign for the nomination – a far cry from the coronation many had anticipated. Though Clinton faced fewer competitors than Trump, she was forced to duel Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, a curmudgeonly democratic socialist who vexed the Clinton campaign with a record number of individual donors and fervent grassroots support. Sanders relentlessly lambasted Clinton for being cozy with big banks, hawkish on foreign policy, and insufficiently committed to progressive causes such as single-payer healthcare and tuition-free college. Although he never truly threatened Clinton's primary bid, Sanders's presence created a stark contrast that led many to judge Clinton as not being progressive, liberal, or even Democratic enough to lead the Democratic ticket (Bragman 2016; Kirchick 2016; MacArthur 2016; O'Hehir 2016).

Thus, as the United States shifted gears from the primary to the general election, supporters of both major-party nominees encountered areas of disagreement between themselves and their preferred candidates. Conservative Republicans who settled on Trump found themselves backing an ex-Democrat still clinging to some of his liberal views. Some liberal Democrats – espe-

cially those who preferred Sanders in the primary – regarded Clinton as a consolation prize who lacked their progressive stances. Meanwhile, moderate and independent voters whose issue positions did not neatly fit either candidate's platform were bound to disagree at least somewhat with whomever they chose to support. Across the ideological spectrum, many Americans saw themselves as out of sync with their preferred candidates on important policy questions – and with Election Day approaching, they faced increasing pressure to agree in an intensely polarized campaign environment.

Issue Positions and Democratic Representation

The 2016 presidential matchup of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump demonstrates a perennial problem of elections in representative democracies: for any diverse electorate, it is impossible to select two candidates such that every voter will agree completely with one or the other on the issues of the day. Some will prefer one candidate's positions on some issues and the other candidate's positions on other issues. Some will encounter issues on which they disagree with both candidates equally. A felicitous few will find that they share every one of their preferred candidate's positions from the get-go (the issue-voting equivalent of "love at first sight"), but most will perceive at least some gaps between where they and their preferred candidates stand on pressing policy matters.

The existence of these voter-candidate gaps does not by any means preclude democratic representation. So long as voters privilege politicians whose

issue positions most closely resemble their own, election- and reelection-minded candidates will be incentivized to stick close to public opinion, lest they be outflanked by challengers with more popular views (Downs 1957; Mayhew 1974). When public opinion changes, politicians who are unable or unwilling to adapt to the new zeitgeist will be replaced with ones who can and will. In this way, voters maximize the quality of their issue representation by holding candidates accountable for their platforms.

The linchpin of this accountability mechanism is that voters' issue positions and perceptions of the candidates' issue positions drive – and are not driven by – their candidate preferences. It is therefore unsurprising that public opinion scholars have reacted with dismay to findings that suggest the relationship works in reverse. Voters often begin with candidate preferences and, wanting to agree with the candidates they have chosen, adopt said candidates' issue positions in a process known as *persuasion* (Page and Jones 1979). They also frequently engage in *projection*, in which they maintain their own issue positions but selectively perceive their preferred or non-preferred candidates as agreeing or disagreeing with them, respectively (Markus and Converse 1979). Each of these processes narrows the relative distance voters perceive between themselves and their preferred candidates, potentially yielding results that are observationally equivalent to issue voting without voters having to consider issue proximity when forming candidate preferences.

Of course, issue voting is not the only method by which voters can or should hold candidates accountable; in many cases economic conditions, can-

didate characteristics, or other factors may be legitimate criteria on which to base one's vote. But there is an important distinction between forming candidate preferences using non-issue criteria on the one hand and reverse-engineering issue positions and candidate perceptions to rationalize those preferences on the other. In the former case, issues are dormant considerations that could be invoked in the future to judge how well voters are being represented. In the latter, the accountability mechanism for constraining the actions of politicians is weakened or even nullified by voters becoming blind to areas of disagreement. To the extent that voters' issue positions and candidate perceptions are distorted by their desires to agree with their preferred candidates, citizen competence and the quality of the democratic representation that rests upon it are jeopardized.

Understanding How Voters Close the Gap

To determine how effective voters are at evaluating politicians based on their policy platforms, we need to know how much their conceptualizations of policy space are distorted by selective interpretation of information to yield a particular conclusion – in this case, the conclusion that their candidate preferences are justified with respect to the issues. The extent to which this perceptual bias influences voters' issue positions and candidate perceptions has major implications for how we view voter decision-making. At one ex-

treme, voters' issue positions and candidate perceptions are fixed,[1] allowing them to triangulate the most proximate candidate in an unbiased fashion. At the other extreme, issue correspondence is purely an afterthought: voters freely and capriciously change where they see themselves and the candidates in policy space in order to rationalize predetermined candidate preferences. In between are various levels of citizen competence where voters engage in some justifying behavior regarding voter-candidate agreement, but only up to a point.

To accurately place the electorate on this spectrum, we must answer this question: *how do voters approach the problem of perceived voter-candidate disagreement?* When voters perceive gaps between themselves and their preferred candidates on the issues, what coping strategies do they invoke, how effective are these strategies at alleviating gaps, and how much do they distort voters' conceptualizations of policy space in the process?

Consider a hypothetical Trump supporter in the 2016 general election campaign. Initially drawn to the tycoon's business experience and outsider status, she gradually becomes more cognizant of his policy platform as election news coverage intensifies. On some issues, she sees herself and Trump as being of one mind. On others, Trump's position seems too conservative or too liberal for her taste but is still a better match for her own stance that the position she perceives Clinton as taking. More unsettling are the issues

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[1]Or, at the very least, they change only in response to new circumstances unrelated to candidate preference.

on which she finds herself agreeing with Clinton much more so than with Trump. This last set of issues, if they are of non-negligible importance to her, contribute the most to her nagging doubts about whether supporting Trump is the right choice.

How should we expect our conflicted Trump supporter to handle this situation? Obviously she would prefer the perceived gap between herself and Trump to be smaller – at least smaller than the gap she perceives between herself and Clinton. But how to make it so? Would she abdicate her problematic positions and adopt new ones more consistent with Trump's? Would she convince herself that Trump holds positions closer to – or Clinton positions farther away from – hers than she originally believed? Would she perhaps invoke both tactics to some extent? If she did make these adjustments, would they be large or small? Would they be limited to a few issues or spread out across the full gamut of policy questions? How much would her perceptions of policy space be altered in service of perceived voter-candidate agreement? Is there some threshold beyond which these alterations would become so cognitively demanding that she would give up on rationalizing her support for Trump and defect to Clinton?

Despite years of political science scholarship on persuasion and projection, the answers to these questions remain for the most part unknown. The reason for this lapse is a fundamental disconnect between the rationalization we want to understand and the methods we use to study it. Campaigns present voters with many issues and the opportunity to adjust where they stand and

where they believe the candidates stand on each of them. By contrast, most research designs attempt to isolate and analyze adjustment on a single issue, often treating either voters' issue positions or their candidate perceptions as fixed and therefore preventing voters from invoking either persuasion or projection, respectively.

Focusing on either persuasion or projection on a single issue allows for simple, clear observations about the process and in question, but at the expense of verisimilitude. Campaigns are complicated affairs, and all aspects of voters' conceptualizations of policy space can vary simultaneously. Studying how voters engage in, for example, projection on the issue of government spending when persuasion on that issue is off the table and no other issues are considered tells us something about political psychology, but this knowledge only applies to actual campaigns if we assume that voters behave the same way when they can be persuaded or project on the full range of issues. This is a precarious assumption to make. It is quite possible that the artificial constraints of single-issue, single-process studies are so constricting that any observations barely resemble how voters justify their candidate preferences in real electoral environments. As a result, the findings yielded by this body of research do not adequately answer the question of how voters rationalize perceived voter-candidate disagreement in complex campaign environments.

Persuasion and Projection through a Motivated Reasoning Lens

If we want to know how effective voters are at rationalizing their candidate preferences and how much that rationalization impedes democratic accountability, we need to study voters in their natural habitat: complex campaign environments where they are free to invoke persuasion and projection on more than one issue. We also need a theory of how voters use these processes that corresponds to the logic of proximity voting – specifically, a theory in which what matters is relative agreement with one's candidate not on any particular issue but rather across the range of issues featured in a campaign.

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop and test such a theory. I argue that persuasion and projection are best understood as types of *directional motivated reasoning* – that is, they are forms of information processing that are biased in favor of confirming preconceptions rather than reaching accurate assessments (Kunda 1990). Voters motivatedly reason about their issue positions and candidate perceptions to reduce the cognitive dissonance they experience from supporting one candidate while feeling closer to another candidate on the issues.

Motivated reasoning, like all information processing, requires cognitive effort, a scarce resource which voters prefer not to spend prodigally on political decisions that affect their lives tangentially at most. In terms of persuasion and projection, large adjustments to one's positions or percep-

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tions of the candidates' positions require greater cognitive effort than small ones: changing one's mind slightly on an issue entails less counter-arguing and re-interpretation than drastically redefining one's stance. Given the opportunity, voters will gravitate to cognitively efficient motivated reasoning strategies – i.e., those that consist of small self- and candidate adjustments rather than large ones.[2]

In elections where multiple issues and multiple processes are in play, voters have cognitively efficient motivated reasoning strategies that single-issue, single-process theories and studies fail to capture. Specifically, the ability to invoke both persuasion and projection to justify candidate preferences removes the need for voters to make major adjustments to any particular issue position or candidate perception. In most cases, voters can effectively reduce perceived voter-candidate disagreement through a combination of small adjustments. Tweaking one's conceptualization of policy space here and there is easier to mentally justify than drastically altering one's own position or perception of a candidate's position on an issue. By themselves, these minor tweaks do little to reduce the cognitive dissonance arising from incongruent candidate preferences, but together they can add up to a sizable effect on voters' perceptions of their relative proximity to their preferred candidates

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[2]Here, and throughout the dissertation, I refer to voters' combined invocations of persuasion and projection as "strategies" for semantic convenience. Use of this term is not meant to imply that motivated reasoning is entirely or predominantly a conscious undertaking. Decomposing motivated reasoning into its conscious and subconscious components is a formidable task for political psychologists, but the theory articulated in these pages is agnostic regarding the conscious or subconscious nature of motivated reasoning about issue proximity.

in policy space.

The possibility that voters reconcile perceived disagreements with their preferred candidates through multi-issue, multi-process motivated reasoning strategies has both positive and negative implications for our understanding of citizen competence and democratic accountability. On the one hand, voters' proclivity for small steps rather than giant leaps means that their issue positions and candidate perceptions are not completely distorted in the pursuit of voter-candidate agreement. Attitudes and beliefs about policy space exhibit some inertia, and many of the most prolific motivated reasoners are only "fudging the numbers" a little bit here and there. This should be encouraging for political scientists who associate attitude stability with citizen competence: voters might be biased perceptors of where they and the candidates stand on the issues, but their biases do not seem to be pulling them too far away from reality.

On the other hand, the diffusion of this rationalizing behavior across issues and processes means that motivated reasoning about policy positions is more potent than existing political psychology scholarship suggests. Single-issue, single-process studies often demonstrate conditions or manipulations that reduce voters' tendencies to engage in persuasion or projection, with the implicit hope that these mitigating factors might somehow be wielded to promote better voter decision-making. However, in light of the fact that voters spread out their motivated reasoning efforts into many small steps, these potential boosts to citizen competence appear more like artifacts of

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constrained research designs than promising future interventions for the betterment of the electorate. Imbuing voters with stable issue positions, eliminating candidate ambiguity through education or incentives, or clarifying where everyone stands on a particular issue all might make certain types of motivated reasoning more difficult, but none is a silver bullet. The very same traits of voters' rationalization strategies that make them less distortive of their conceptualizations of policy space also make motivated reasoning more intractable.

Plan for the Dissertation

Although motivated reasoning about issue positions has not yet been explored from the multi-issue, multi-process perspective described above, a great deal of scholarly ink has been spilled on voters' proclivity to mitigate cognitive dissonance through persuasion and projection. In Chapter 2, I summarize the conclusions drawn from this body of research and their relevance to citizen competence and democratic responsiveness. Acknowledging that these past studies offer many valuable lessons about how voters rationalize their candidate preferences, I explain in detail why this research agenda, notwithstanding these contributions, has heretofore fallen short of adequately illustrating voters' overall motivated reasoning strategies due to its reliance on single-issue, single-process research designs that fail to capture the unconstrained nature of real campaigns.

A multi-issue, multi-process theory of motivated reasoning about candi-

dates and issues is put forth in Chapter 3. Grounded in a motivated reasoning framework, I develop a set of expectations about how voters rationalize their candidate preferences in complex campaign environments where persuasion and projection are simultaneously available as motivated reasoning tactics. Key to this theory is the fact that, by spreading out their motivated reasoning efforts across issues and processes, voters are able to achieve major reductions in perceived voter-candidate disagreement (and therefore cognitive dissonance) through a combination of small, cognitively cheap adjustments. I explain how multi-issue, multi-process approaches to motivated reasoning in policy space are not only possible but also preferable in light of voters' desire to expend minimal cognitive effort on justifying candidate preferences.

How well does this motivated reasoning framework describe the way voters invoke persuasion and projection in practice? Chapter 4 investigates the multi-issue nature of voters' motivated reasoning strategies. Using panel survey data from the 1976, 1980, and 2008 U.S. presidential elections, I demonstrate that most voters regard themselves and their preferred candidates as being closer in policy space (relative to their non-preferred candidates) on not just one but several issues over the course of the campaign. These multi-issue strategies are both more common and more effective at reducing cognitive dissonance than their single-issue counterparts. Additionally, I explore variation in the dynamics of perceived voter-candidate agreement across issues to identify characteristics and circumstances that influence on which issues voters invoke persuasion and projection.

Whereas Chapter 4 deals with multi-*issue* motivated reasoning, Chapter 5 centers on multi-*process* motivated reasoning. Introducing a new method for decomposing motivated reasoning strategies into persuasion and projection, I find that a majority of voters balance persuasion and projection in pursuit of perceived voter-candidate agreement, rather than exhibiting overreliance on one process or the other. As with multi-issue strategies, multi-process motivated reasoning is shown to be more effective at increasing the relative proximity of preferred candidates within voters' conceptualizations of policy space. I also investigate the extent to which adjustments to issue importance ratings (an often overlooked motivated reasoning process) contribute to voters' cognitive dissonance reduction and whether instability in voters' self- and candidate placements is attributable to campaign-induced learning rather than biased information processing.

Having demonstrated multi-issue, multi-process motivated reasoning strategies consistent with my theory, I turn to the consequences of these strategies in Chapter 6. On the whole, these consequences yield a cautiously optimistic outlook on citizen competence. Motivated reasoning does not beget a complete distortion of public opinion, as the individual adjustments that comprise persuasion and projection effects tend to be small. Voters are not incapable of internalizing disagreements with the politicians they support, and can comfortably accept some daylight between themselves and their preferred candidates provided that they believe them to be the most proximate choice, all things considered. Additionally, voters' capacity for motivated rea-

soning is not infinite: as their cognitive dissonance increases, they become increasingly likely to switch to another candidate rather than striving tirelessly to justify their initial choice. Encouragingly, the proportion of voters who "get it wrong" by picking a candidate other than the most proximate one in policy space is small and consists primarily of voters who view themselves as roughly equidistant from the candidates.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the implications of this theory for political psychology and voter decision-making. The portrait of motivated reasoning developed in this dissertation does not resemble the stylized behavior of subjects in the single-issue, single-process theories designs that dominate research on persuasion and projection. These artificially constrained studies of the dynamics of perceived voter-candidate agreement have their merits, but they must be contextualized in order to be interpretable as indications of how voters reason about politics in complex campaign environments. Only by giving voters access to all the tools at their disposal to rationalize their candidate preferences with respect to issue proximity can we expect to observe how they actually cope with perceived voter-candidate disagreement.

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Issue Representation in Theory and Practice

> Happy will it be if our choice should be directed by a judicious estimate of our true interests, unperplexed and unbiased by considerations not connected with the public good. But this is a thing more ardently to be wished than seriously to be expected.
> —Alexander Hamilton

From a democratic theory standpoint, it is both natural and proper for voters to report that they agree with the candidates they support on the issues of the day. Whether this association between agreement and support portends good or ill for democratic representation depends on what comes first. If agreement precedes support, election- and reelection-minded politicians are incentivized to be faithful stewards of their constituents, who reward and punish them based on the positions they take. If support precedes agreement – that is, if agreement is generated to justify candidate preferences ex post facto – voters may be blinded to instances where candidates break rank with them on the issues, reducing said candidates' motivation to abide by public opinion (Lenz 2012).

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Worrisomely for democratic theory, much of the agreement voters perceive between themselves and their preferred candidates on the issues appears to be a consequence of candidate support rather than a cause thereof. Over the past half-century, political psychologists have zealously cataloged the characteristics and circumstances that prompt voters to modify their issue positions and candidate perceptions to justify their candidate preferences. These efforts have contributed substantially to our understanding of how political wishful thinking can override accuracy goals and render citizens less effective sentinels of their representation in government. However, the theories and research designs employed to study this topic share a common limitation: they do not allow us to make or test predictions about how individual voters grapple with dissonant candidate preferences in realistic campaign environments. Rather, they attempt to isolate single issues and single processes in ways that oversimplify both the problems voters face and the solutions available to them. Consequently, we do not know precisely how voters adjust their conceptualizations of policy space to rationalize their candidate preferences, how effective this rationalization is at alleviating cognitive dissonance, or whether potential interventions aimed at improving democratic accountability might dissuade them from sweeping disagreements with their preferred candidates under the rug.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. Beginning with issue voting in its idealized form, I will summarize the scholarly literature on how voter decision-making in practice falls short of the exactitude of rational choice the-

ory – that is, how voters wind up disagreeing with their preferred candidates in the first place. I will then explore the two principal means voters have for rectifying said disagreement *without* changing their candidate preferences – persuasion and projection – and the characteristics and circumstances which promote these processes. Finally, I will explain why existing scholarship, due to its reliance on single-issue, single-process theories and research designs, does not enable us to generalize confidently about how voters rationalize their candidate preferences, leaving crucial questions about citizen competence and democratic representation unanswered.

Issue Voting Idealized

Democracy is, among other things, a mechanism for translating public will into government policy (Dahl 1956; Manza and Cook 2002; Pennock 1979). One measure of the effectiveness of a democracy is the extent to which the policies it enacts and enforces reflect the desires of its populace. This correspondence between what people want and what government does is important from not only a theoretical perspective but also a practical one, as policy divergence from public opinion can yield distrust of and dissatisfaction with political institutions (Alesina and Wacziarg 2000; Citrin 1974; Gamson 1968; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

For a democracy to produce policies that align with voters' preferences, voters must in some way take those preferences into account when participating in politics, primarily through the electoral process (Dahl 1956; 1989;

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Macdonald, Rabinowitz, and Listhaug 1995). Politicians hoping to gain or maintain positions of power, so the logic goes, will be discouraged from straying too far from public opinion if they expect to be held accountable for their policy platforms at the ballot box (Bianco 1994; Mayhew 1974; McChesney 2007).

How do voters wield their ballots in a way that promotes accurate issue representation? The dominant model of issue voting in political science suggests that they minimize their loss of utility by backing the candidate or party whose positions are closest to their own (Downs 1957).[1] According to this proximity voting model, the issue positions of voters and candidates or parties can be represented geometrically as fixed points in "policy space." Voters achieve issue representation by privileging candidates whose locations in policy space are nearest to their own, incentivizing candidates to stake out popular positions in anticipation of such behavior.

Issue Voting in Practice

If choosing the candidate who best approximates one's issue positions maximizes issue representation, why do voters frequently support candidates who are not the most proximate options? Simply put, issue proximity is hard

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[1]A competing theory suggests that voters prioritize the candidate or party which is on their side of the issue and furthest away from the status quo (or some other neutral point), on the grounds that said candidate or party is the most likely to produce the policy change they desire (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). Some scholars have sought to combine this "directional" theory with proximity ones (Merrill and Grofman 1999). However, the Downsian model remains one of the most influential in the study of voter decision-making (Dow and Munger 1990).

to use in preference formation, other decision criteria are easy to use, and non-issue criteria often point voters to candidates other than the ones with whom they agree the most.

For all but the most cognitively invested voter, it is prohibitively difficult to apply proximity voting logic to candidate selection with precision. Any given election brings many issues to bear, most of which cannot be naturally mapped out in a way that allows for unambiguous distance judgments in policy space. Even diligent voters armed with crystallized opinions about policy and comprehensive information about the candidates' platforms might still struggle to determine exactly how much farther away one candidate is than another on the issues. A two-party system might make the slates of candidates more predictable in terms of policy platforms (Levendusky 2010), but many voters lack the capacity for cogent ideological thinking that would enable them to effectively take advantage of these simplified choice sets (Converse 1964; Jacoby 1991; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Knight 1985; Stimson 1975).

Beyond the intrinsic challenge of determining the most proximate candidate, voters often have few incentives for deliberate thinking about politics. Psychologically, humans desire to spend as little cognitive effort as necessary to reach conclusions (Allport 1954; Simon 1955; Taylor 1981). Naturally, this tendency to economize cognition conflicts with the desire to reach correct conclusions, leading to a trade-off between efficiency and accuracy (Hogarth 1980; Lau 2003). Because the choices individual voters make at the polls are

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usually much less influential on their wellbeing than choices made elsewhere, most voters have few incentives to pay close attention when preparing to cast their ballots (Kuklinski et al. 2001).

Even voters with the ability to parse complex policy space and the motivation to "get it right" in their political decision-making might nevertheless wind up forming candidate preferences using criteria other than Downsian proximity. Some may be party loyalists, relying on their partisanship as either a heuristic or an actionable social identity (Brader 2006; Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Popkin 1991). Others may differentiate candidates based on perceived traits (e.g., likability, physical attractiveness) or reputations (e.g., honesty, expertise, character) when choosing whom to support (Mondak and Huckfeldt 2006; Popkin 1991; Riker 1982; Schumpeter 1942). Still others may rely on retrospective assessments of economic performance to decide whether to support the incumbent candidate or party (Fiorina 1981; Key 1966; Kiewiet 1983; Markus 1988), although these assessments may reflect voters' short memories (Achen and Bartels 2016; Bartels 2008).

These non-issue voting criteria are not necessarily less legitimate or normatively desirable than issue voting, but they do have the potential to lead voters to prefer candidates with less proximate issue positions. Whenever the many decision criteria available to voters (issue proximity, partisanship, candidate likability, economic evaluations, etc.) do not all favor the same candidate, voters may find themselves cross-pressured by these competing

considerations (Groenendyk 2013; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012).

When Election Day rolls around, these cross-pressured voters have the option
to vote with their heads, their hearts, their guts, or their wallets, but not all
of the above.

Given the difficulty of discerning the most proximate candidate in com-
plex campaign environments, the relative ease of other voting criteria, and
the fact that different decision rules often yield different outcomes, it should
not be surprising that many voters wind up supporting candidates who are
not their closest analogs in policy space for one reason or another. In the
end, something – likely whichever consideration or considerations voters hold
most dear (Abelson 1968) – must win out, and issue proximity does not al-
ways do so. But cross-pressures do not vanish automatically after initial
preference formation; they may continue to discomfort voters unless they
can be tolerated, acceded to, or eliminated through cognitive effort.

Voter-Candidate Disagreement and Motivated Reasoning

Although voters have opportunities to form preferences for candidates other
than the most policy-proximate ones, they also have many chances to realize
and "correct" these spatial errors.[2] Election seasons are long and drawn out,
allowing campaigns and media to disseminate information that can clarify

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[2]Choosing a less proximate candidate in policy space is a mistake only if one accept the
notion that issue proximity is the *a priori* criterion for candidate selection. By describing
such a choice as an error, I am classifying it as such within a proximity voting framework
and not making a normative judgment about what constitutes a correct or incorrect vote.

voters' opinions on the issues of the day and where the candidates stand on them (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Lang and Lang 1966; Trenaman and McQuail 1961). Interest in presidential campaigns also increases as Election Day draws near (Bartels 2000), potentially tuning progressively more voters into this information flow.

If voters are exposed to information that causes them to observe a mismatch between conceptualizations of policy space and their candidate preferences, they may experience cognitive dissonance – the mental discomfort that arises from holding contradictory beliefs or ideas simultaneously (Abramowitz 1978; Festinger 1957; Greenwald et al. 2002; Heider 1958).[3] Such a situation can put voters in a bind. On the one hand, civic norms suggest that democratic citzens should be unbiased appraisers of politics (Campbell et al. 1960; Dalton 2008; Schudson 1998) whose duty it is to hold politicians accountable for the positions they take (Mutz 1998; Tetlock and Kim 1987). On the other hand, democratic citizens are not supposed to be wishy-washy and change their loyalties at the drop of a hat (Tetlock, Skitka, and Boettger 1989), and switching allegiance to a more proximate candidate upon encountering cognitive dissonance means overriding whatever decision criteria factored into the initial selection process.

Voters who experience cognitive dissonance from supporting one candi-

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[3]One can encounter cognitive dissonance even when supporting the "best match" from a slate of candidates, provided that one's issue positions diverge from one's perceptions of a preferred candidate's positions. However, cognitive dissonance of this type may be ameliorated by the assurance that one is supporting the "lesser of two evils" in terms of policy disagreements (Groenendyk 2013).

date and agreeing with another can reduce it by changing either their support or their agreement. The former entails overruling their initial preferences and adopting one justified by proximity voting. The latter involves updating their perceptions of policy space to rationalize their initial preferences, essentially reverse-engineering conceptualizations of policy space that would make their choices consistent with proximity voting. As with a mistake made on a math problem, one can redo the calculation to arrive at a different answer or "fudge the numbers" so that they add up, subtract, multiply, or divide to the original answer.

Of course, fudging the numbers on one's math homework is unlikely to satisfy students (and even less likely to satisfy teachers) as much as redoing the problem to get the correct result. But voters who are personally invested in their candidate preferences might well prefer rationalizing those preferences to deciding anew. We know from the work of cognitive psychologists that humans pursue competing goals when they reason, be it about politics or anything else. Accuracy goals (making correct decisions and judgments) often conflict with directional goals (validating previous decisions and judgments). We want to get things right, but we also want to believe that we have been getting them right all along. When accuracy is prioritized over consistency, the result is *accuracy motivated reasoning*, whereas consistency trumping accuracy yields *directional motivated reasoning* (Kunda 1990).

Directional motivated reasoning (hereafter referred to as "motivated reasoning" unless otherwise specified) is replete in politics (Lavine, Johnston,

and Steenbergen 2012; Taber, Lodge, and Glathar 2001). Political participation is often (some would say always) an emotionally-charged experience, especially when it is tied to ingrained identities like partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960; Groenendyk 2013; Lodge and Taber 2013). Paradoxically, the most politically sophisticated voters, who might seem best equipped to fulfill the norms of democratic citizenship, are often the most proficient at using motivated reasoning to reconcile discrepancies that might threaten their deeply held beliefs (Bartels 2008; Duch, Palmer, and Anderson 2000; Gaines et al. 2007; Lord, Ross, and Lepper 1979). From a democratic theory perspective, this is problematic: if knowledge about and engagement in politics makes voters better at ignoring disagreements with their candidates, political "sophistication" might negatively impact democratic responsiveness by preventing them from properly judging the actions of politicians (Fortunato and Hibbing 2016).

Persuasion and Projection

In terms of motivated reasoning about issue positions, there are two main processes by which voters attempt to reduce the relative distance they perceive between themselves and their preferred candidates in policy space. The first is *persuasion*, in which voters change their issue positions to be more consistent with those they perceive their preferred candidate as holding.[4]

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[4]Persuasion is very similar to the process known as cue-taking, in that both refer to situations in which candidates' perceived issue positions influence voters' issue positions. They differ conceptually in that cue-taking is generally considered to represent accuracy-

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Persuasion tends to be more common when voters have positive affect toward a candidate (Page and Jones 1979; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987), when the issues in question are highly salient (Dancey and Goren 2010), when voters are loyal partisans and issues are couched in terms of party cues (Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Layman and Carsey 2002; Page and Jones 1979), and when voters do not consider the issues at hand to be personally important (Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Carsey and Layman 2006; Markus and Converse 1979).

The second motivated reasoning process voters use to alleviate cognitive dissonance from voter-candidate disagreement is *projection*. Unlike persuasion, which entails adjusting one's own issue positions, projection consists of updating one's perceptions of where the candidates stand on the issues. Projection can take the form of either *assimilation* -– pulling a preferred candidate closer — or *contrast* -– pushing a non-preferred candidate further away (Merrill, Grofman, and Adams 2001; Sherif and Hovland 1961). Projection is most likely when preferred candidates are likeable and/or non-preferred candidates are unlikeable (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Kinder 1978; Markus and Converse 1979; Page and Jones 1979), when candidates take ambiguous policy positions that can be more freely interpreted by voters (Kenski and Jamieson 2006; Patton and Smith 1980; Tomz and Van Houweling 2009), when voters are inattentive or uninformed (Abramowitz 1978; Alvarez and

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motivated reasoning (i.e., deferring to presumed experts on policy questions) whereas persuasion is viewed as satisfying directional goals (Carmines and Kuklinski 1990; Lupia 1994).

Franklin 1994), and when voters attach high personal importance to the issues in question and are unwilling to budge on their own positions (Granberg and Brent 1974).[5]

For the most part, the scholarly literature on proximity voting does not classify persuasion and projection as motivated reasoning processes – at least not explicitly. Nevertheless, both processes clearly fit the bill: they are cognitively effortful attempts to justify past decisions (candidate preferences) by eliminating or reducing a source of cognitive dissonance (perceived voter-candidate disagreement). As I will contend in Chapter 3, treating persuasion and projection as types of motivated reasoning provides the necessary framework for understanding how voters attempt to rationalize their candidate preferences in complex campaign environments.

Why Single-Issue, Single-Process Studies Fall Short

As the litany of citations above suggests, persuasion and projection have occupied the attention of political scientists for many years and many pages. Yet our understanding of how voters rationalize their candidate preferences with respect to issue proximity remains hampered by the constrained nature of these theories and research designs. Too often, research on persuasion and projection is circumscribed to a single issue and focused on only one of the two processes, rendering it unsuitable for illuminating voters' motivated

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[5]Although most of the examinations of persuasion and projection cited here concern the American political system, these processes are not unique to the United States, though they vary with electoral systems (Drummond 2010).

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reasoning habits as they manifest themselves in real campaigns.

To illustrate the inadequacy of single-issue, single-process studies for generalizing about voters, consider an archetypal example from the political psychology literature. Abramowitz (1978) conducted a two-wave panel study of voters in Williamsburg-James City County, Virginia, during the 1976 presidential election, comparing respondents' positions and perceptions of Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford's positions on the issue of unemployment assistance before and after the first presidential debate. Abramowitz found that respondents who watched the debate were more likely to correctly identify Carter as supportive of a government works program to help the jobless and Ford as opposed to the same. However, respondents who heard their preferred candidate espouse a position with which they disagreed tended to adopt their preferred candidate's position, rather than defect to the other candidate.

Abramowitz (correctly) interpreted this result as evidence of persuasion. But what does this tell us about how voters actually parse politics during presidential campaigns? Abramowitz describes defection for those voters who initially disagreed with their preferred candidates as "rational voting," but how do we know that switching from Carter to Ford or vice versa is rational? Perhaps Ford's supporters agreed with him more than Carter on issues such as foreign policy, crime, and government spending, and were not about to let a little difference on unemployment policy drive them away. Furthermore, what if Carter supporters who disagreed with his position construed his debate answers as representing a more moderate position, closer to their own – that

is to say, what if they projected? The binary nature of the survey questions allowed voters to exhibit persuasion or projection, but not both.

The intent of this exercise is not to harp on Abramowitz's research design in particular but rather to highlight an endemic weakness of the research designs used to study persuasion and projection: *they do not resemble voters' natural habitat.* Both observational (e.g., Bailey, Sigelman, and Wilcox 2003; Kenski and Jamieson 2006) and experimental studies (e.g., Linder 2015; Tomz and Van Houweling 2009) construct environments in which voters are unable to engage in persuasion and projection simultaneously, or are at least unable to demonstrate through survey responses that they have done so. Moreover, these studies attempt to isolate persuasion and projection effects on single issues (or on multiple issues considered separately), when the very proximity voting theories on which expectations about persuasion and projection are founded hinge on proximity across all relevant issues in a campaign.

A separate class of studies aims not to document individual persuasion and projection effects but rather to assess the overall impact of persuasion and projection at the aggregate level (Markus and Converse 1979; McDonald, Çarkoğlu, and Moral 2015; Page and Jones 1979; Visser 1994). These examinations have the benefit of considering persuasion and projection together, often across multiple issues. However, it is impossible to infer individual motivated reasoning strategies from these aggregate estimates of persuasion and projection. Is the electorate made up of pure persuadees and pure projectors, or of voters who dabble in both processes? Is the overall persuasion effect

driven by a few voters being persuaded substantially or many voters being persuaded slightly? A thousand-foot view of motivated reasoning about issue positions tells us little about how any given voter rationalizes her candidate preference.

The Importance of Understanding Individual Motivated Reasoning Strategies

Ironically, for all the efforts expended on understanding the characteristics and circumstances that encourage or discourage persuasion and projection, political science remains unable to answer a simple question: if a given voter perceives her preferred candidate as not being the most proximate in policy space, how will she seek to reconcile that discrepancy? Single-issue, single-process theories and research designs offer clues to the answer but not the answer itself. Trying to infer actual voter behavior based on these artificially constrained scenarios is like trying to predict what plays a football team will call in a game based on observing practice sessions where they are only allowed to run the ball or only allowed to pass the ball. We know the motivated reasoner's playbook, but not the motivated reasoner's game plan.

Why does it matter how individual voters motivatedly reason about issue positions? First, the extent to which persuasion and projection interfere with democratic representation and accountability depends heavily on what sort of motivated reasoning strategies voters are invoking to rationalize their candidate preferences. An electorate whose issue positions and candidate

perceptions are only slightly perturbed by persuasion and projection is vastly different from one whose conceptualizations of policy space are massively distorted in the service of reducing cognitive dissonance. Second, apart from the question of electoral choice, knowing what sort of motivated reasoning is taking place is necessary for interpreting public opinion in the proper context – that is, for understanding how much of voters' attitudes are the product of wishful thinking rather than exogenous to their candidate preferences. Third, those interested in promoting citizen competence through some form of intervention aimed at reducing motivated reasoning – be they institutional reforms, civic education initiatives, or incentives for candidates to take less ambiguous stances – cannot hope to succeed without grasping the nature of the problem they wish to tackle. What works at dissuading one motivated reasoning strategy may be feckless at combating others.

An accurate sense of how voters cope with discord between their conceptualizations of policy space and their candidate preferences requires a theory of motivated reasoning that accounts for voters' ability to be persuaded and to project on multiple issues. In the next chapter, I propose such a theory.

3

A Theory of Motivated Reasoning about Issue Positions

> The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion...draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a great number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects or despises, or else by some distinction sets aside or rejects....
>
> —Francis Bacon

The nature of democratic politics gives rise to situations in which voters disagree with the candidates they support on matters of policy. Some of these voters, rather than switch their allegiances to more proximate candidates (if such candidates exist), adjust their conceptualizations of policy space to rationalize their candidate preferences. These adjustments have the potential to alleviate the cognitive dissonance that comes from disagreeing with a liked candidate, but they may also jeopardize democratic accountability, if voters distort their issue positions and candidate perceptions so much that they lose their ability to hold politicians accountable for their stances.

How do voters wield persuasion and projection to reduce the relative pol-

icy distance between themselves and their preferred candidates? How effective are these processes at reducing cognitive dissonance from voter-candidate disagreement? How much do they subvert voters' capacity for discriminating between politicians' platforms? Despite considerable efforts on the part of political scientists to document the characteristics and circumstances that lead voters to motivatedly reason about issue positions, answers to these crucial questions have not been forthcoming. Although much has been written on persuasion and projection, theories and research designs have been limited to either single-issue, single-process studies or aggregate examinations of overall tendencies of the electorate – neither of which allow for generalizing about motivated reasoning strategies at the individual level in realistic campaign scenarios.

In this chapter, I present a theory of motivated reasoning about issue positions in complex campaign environments. I part ways with the conventions of the literature in attempting to account for rationalization strategies that are uniquely applicable to multi-issue policy space where voters have both persuasion and projection at their disposal. Balancing the dual goals of alleviating cognitive dissonance and minimizing cognitive effort, voters are drawn to motivated reasoning strategies that are both multi-issue and multi-process. By combining persuasion and projection across several issues, voters can achieve substantial reductions in perceived voter-candidate disagreement through a combination of small, cognitively cheap adjustments to their issue positions and candidate preferences. Only when voters' conceptualizations

of policy space are extremely out of sync with their candidate preferences are these multi-issue, multi-process strategies less cognitively efficient than switching candidate preferences.

Pressure to Rationalize: Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

My theory concerns voters who already have a set of issue positions, a set of perceptions about the candidates' issue positions, and a preference for one of the candidates. I am agnostic about the sources of these positions, perceptions, and preferences. Although much of the work on persuasion and projection is grounded in the logic of proximity voting, for the purposes of my theory these candidate preferences need not have resulted from a Downsian, proximity-driven process. Indeed, motivated reasoning about issue positions is most likely to come into play in situations where candidate preferences are *not* based on voters' perceptions about the candidates' relative proximity in policy space, as these preferences are more likely to result in voter-candidate disagreement that produces cognitive dissonance.

Taking these parameters as given, I can estimate a voter's impetus for engaging in motivated reasoning about issue positions. That impetus is the degree to which a voter's candidate preference does not logically follow (from a proximity voting perspective) from her issue positions and candidate perceptions. Specifically, it is the voter's perceived distance between herself and her preferred candidate, relative to the distance she perceives between her-

self and the closest non-preferred candidate.[1] I term this relative distance *perceived spatial inconsistency.*[2]

When perceived spatial inconsistency is minimal, the proximity of the voter's preferred candidate in policy space relative to the proximity of the next closest candidate is maximized: the voter perceives her preferred candidate to be as close to her as possible and the next closest candidate as far away as possible on the issues. In terms of proximity voting, her candidate preference could not possibly make more sense. When perceived spatial inconsistency is maximal, this relative proximity is minimized: the voter perceives her preferred candidate to be as far away from her as possible and a non-preferred candidate as close to her as possible on the issues. From a Downsian perspective, her candidate preference could not possibly make *less* sense. Midway between these extremes is the point of indifference, where the voter perceives herself as equidistant from both her preferred candidate and her closest non-preferred candidate. Per proximity voting, her candidate preference makes sense, but no more or less so than a preference for the closest non-preferred candidate (see Figure 3.1).

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[1]Although my theory is constructed and explicated with the American two-party system in mind, its basic logic applies to multiparty contexts as well.

[2]Note that the word *perceived* here refers to the fact that the inconsistency is based on the voter's *perceptions* of the candidates' issue positions, which are not necessarily the same as the candidates' *actual* issue positions. It does not refer to whether the voter is cognizant of the inconsistency. Thus, it is possible for voters to possess what I call perceived spatial inconsistency – based on the mismatch between their candidate preferences and their conceptualizations of policy space – without being aware of the fact (though, in such cases, they are unlikely to experience cognitive dissonance from it). In my analyses, I rely on self-reported perceptions, and thus restrict attention to those who have explicitly indicated positions, though not comparative distances.
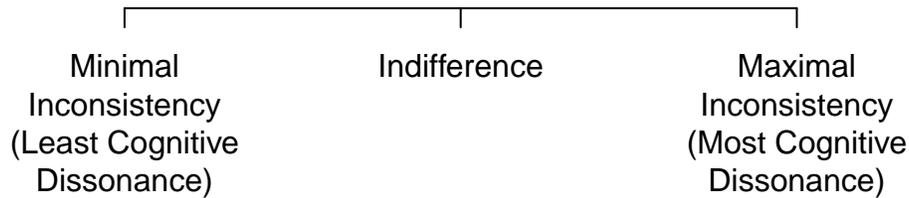
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┌───────────────────┬───────────────────┐
Minimal           Indifference         Maximal
Inconsistency                        Inconsistency
(Least Cognitive                     (Most Cognitive
Dissonance)                           Dissonance)
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Figure 3.1: Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

The initials of "perceived spatial inconsistency" are PSI, bearing a fitting resemblance to the abbreviation for pounds per square inch, a unit for measuring pressure or stress. Perceived spatial inconsistency, if recognized by voters, can lead to cognitive dissonance that produces stress and pressures them to adjust either their candidate preferences or their conceptualizations of policy space. This cognitive dissonance may stem from basic social-psychological compulsions to agree with those we like and like those with whom we agree (Fiske and Taylor 2008), democratic-citizenship norms linking issue agreement to political support (Kam 2007), or both. Regardless of its origin, cognitive dissonance increases as perceived spatial inconsistency grows and candidate preferences become less defensible in terms of proximity voting. Greater PSI means greater pressure to rationalize.

Pressure Valves: Tactics for Reducing Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

Voters who become aware of perceived spatial inconsistency may desire to alleviate the cognitive dissonance it creates. They can achieve this goal through one, some, or all of the following tactics:

- *Persuasion* (adopting issue positions closer to those one perceives one's preferred candidate to hold)

- *Assimilation* (perceiving one's preferred candidate's issue positions as being closer to one's own positions)

- *Contrast* (perceiving the closest non-preferred candidate's issue positions as being further away from one's own positions)[3]

- *Switching* (updating one's candidate preference to a more proximate candidate)

Within the standard spatial voting framework, these are the only tactics by which a voter can reduce spatial inconsistency.[4] Switching, because

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[3]Assimilation and contrast are the two faces of projection (Sherif and Hovland 1961).

[4]Although rarely considered alongside persuasion and projection in the political psychology literature, *reprioritization* – the act of downweighting the importance of issues on which voter-candidate disagreement exists relative to issues on which it does not – could theoretically be used to reduce perceived spatial inconsistency (Groenendyk 2013). I consider this possibility in Chapter 5. Other tactics, such as ignoring issues altogether or outweighing them with non-issue criteria, may reduce *cognitive dissonance* but do not affect *perceived spatial inconsistency* as defined here, and are therefore beyond the scope of this dissertation.

it entails "correcting" the preference that is supposed to follow from one's positions and perceptions, is a form of accuracy motivated reasoning. The other three tactics are forms of directional motivated reasoning, because they rationalize the preference instead of modifying it (Kunda 1990).[5] Figure 3.2 provides a visual representation of how these tactics might operate in a two-dimensional policy space.

How much perceived spatial inconsistency can voters bear without feeling compelled to reduce it? How much must they reduce before they are satisfied? In a strict proximity voting sense, any scenario where a voter perceives her preferred candidate as the most proximate (or one of several most proximate candidates) would be tolerable, and any other situation would be intolerable. From this perspective, anywhere at or left of the midpoint of the perceived spatial inconsistency scale in Figure 3.1 should not produce cognitive dissonance. However, this threshold might not manifest itself so clearly in practice for several reasons. First, voters may have heterogeneous levels of tolerance for cognitive dissonance in general or for perceived spatial inconsistency in particular (Krause 1972; Ray 1999). Second, voters are unlikely to have both the ability and the motivation to calculate the relative proximity of their preferred candidates with perfect accuracy (Kuklinski et al. 2001; Simon 1955), and may therefore continue to reduce perceived spatial inconsistency past the point of indifference until their candidate pref-

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[5]These tactics map neatly onto Festinger's (1957) methods of dissonance reduction. Switching represents changing a behavior or cognition. Persuasion, assimilation, and contrast represent justification by changing conflicting cognitions.
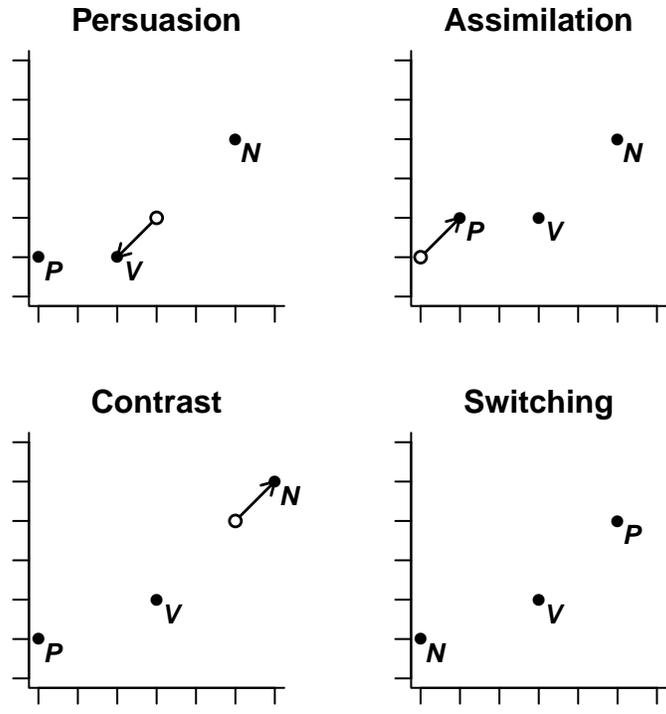
Figure 3.2: Tactics for Reducing Perceived Spatial Inconsistency
(V =voter, P =preferred candidate, N =non-preferred candidate)

erences are clearly justifiable. Third, even if voters could calculate candidate proximity with mathematical precision, they might nevertheless attempt to reduce perceived spatial inconsistency beyond the point of indifference as insurance against future shocks that might perturb their conceptualizations of policy space in dissonance-inducing ways. For any or all of these reasons, voters may "run up the score" when motivatedly reasoning about issue positions, going beyond what is technically necessary to rationalize a candidate preference with respect to proximity voting.

The Cognitive Cost of Motivated Reasoning

These motivated reasoning adjustments are not costless. If they were, there would be nothing stopping voters from completely recalibrating their conceptualizations of policy space to eliminate perceived spatial inconsistency altogether, and voters would never consciously hold candidate preferences that conflicted with their positions and priorities. Rather, motivated reasoning requires cognitive effort to change one's preconceptions, selectively interpreting information or thinking of counterarguments to prior judgments (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2015). The attitudinal inertia voters must overcome to modify their positions and perceptions creates a tradeoff between minimizing cognitive dissonance and minimizing cognitive effort.

Predicting how voters balance these two goals requires some scheme for assigning relative "costs" to specific motivated reasoning adjustments. This is a formidable task. As discussed in Chapter 2, a plethora of voter characteristics and election circumstances contribute to the relative ease or difficulty of certain motivated reasoning processes on certain issues. Moreover, many of these factors interact with each other and impact some voters and circumstances more than others. This heterogeneity makes it difficult to make claims about the relationship between motivated reasoning and cognitive effort that will apply equally to all voters in all circumstances.

In spite of these differences in characteristics and circumstances, one fact about the relationship between motivated reasoning adjustments and cogni-

tive effort should be generalizable across cases: all else equal, the larger an adjustment is, the more cognitive effort it will require. For example, a voter who is extremely opposed to government spending would have to expend less cognitive effort to change her position to moderate opposition than to change her position to moderate support – which, in turn, would require less cognitive effort than changing her position to extreme support. The further she travels in policy space from her initial position, the harder she will have to work to counter-argue her preconceptions and justify the change. Ceteris paribus, small adjustments (whether they be persuasion, assimilation, or contrast) should demand less brainpower than large adjustments of the same type.

Beyond this assertion about small steps versus giant leaps, attributing cognitive costs becomes much thornier. Previous studies of motivated reasoning about issue positions have rarely considered more than one issue or process at a time, and have never developed a theoretical framework for understanding how voters employ more than one process in multi-issue policy space. The challenge in developing such a framework is that every voter has a unique cognitive cost structure for motivated reasoning, depending on the issues and processes in question. As recounted in Chapter 2, the literature on persuasion and projection demonstrates that some voters are more persuadable than others and that some have a greater capacity for projection than others. Likewise, cognitive costs for motivated reasoning may vary depending on the issues in question. Although the cognitive cost of any motivated

reasoning adjustment should in principle increase with the size of the adjustment for any *particular* motivated reasoning process on any *particular* issue, making generalizable comparisons across issues and processes is not so simple.[6]

Rather than attempt to grapple with the myriad of heterogeneous influences on the cognitive costs of motivated reasoning, I elect to treat all motivated reasoning adjustments of the same size as equally cognitively demanding, regardless of the issue or process involved. This assumption is convenient for the purpose of developing a theory about voters' motivated reasoning strategies, but it is not part of that theory. As such, the extent to which my theory is supported by the empirical work in the next few chapters should not be taken as evidence that all issues and processes are cognitively equal in the motivated reasoner's mind. However, it will suggest that whatever heterogeneity exists in the cognitive costs voters face when motivatedly reasoning about issue positions is not so great as to make my theory useless for understanding the rationalization of candidate preferences.

Spreading Motivated Reasoning Across Issues

Past research on motivated reasoning about issue positions has established that voters, when faced with self- and candidate placements in one-dimensional

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[6]Even voters' perceptions of issue importance, which have been shown to relate to persuasion and projection (Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Granberg and Brent 1974; Markus and Converse 1979), present difficulties in that issue importance ratings may themselves be subject to motivated reasoning (Groenendyk 2013). I examine this phenomenon in Chapter 5.

policy space, are driven to increase the relative proximity of themselves to their chosen candidates. What happens when more than one issue is at stake – when policy space is not collapsed to a single dimension? Do voters apply the same motivated reasoning strategies regardless of the complexity of the campaign environment in which they are operating, or does the presence of additional issues change their approach?

Consider the scenario depicted in Figure 3.3. A hypothetical voter V in two-dimensional policy space finds herself too far from her preferred candidate P and too close to her non-preferred candidate N for comfort. V could alleviate the cognitive dissonance arising from this situation by moving her position 2 units to the right to position x, 2 intervals up to position z, or 1 interval to the right and 1 interval up to position y.[7] Of these three new positions, which is V most likely to take up?

Each of these three new positions is closer to P than it is to N, meaning that V's preference for P over N would be spatially consistent if she allowed herself to be persuaded to any one of them. However, y requires V to move herself a distance of only $\sqrt{2}$ intervals in policy space, whereas x and z are located 2 intervals away from her starting point. If V seeks to minimize the distance she moves herself and the cognitive effort expended to accomplish said movement, y serves her purposes best.[8] Indeed, for almost every config-

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[7]Of course, these are not the only possible relocations V could undertake, but bounded rationality (Simon 1955) and exogenous factors (see Chapter 2) might combine to limit V's options to a small set of adjustments which includes these three.

[8]Technically, the most efficient way for V to "spend" $\sqrt{2}$ intervals of movement would be to move to a point on the line NP that is $\sqrt{2}$ intervals away from her initial position. In
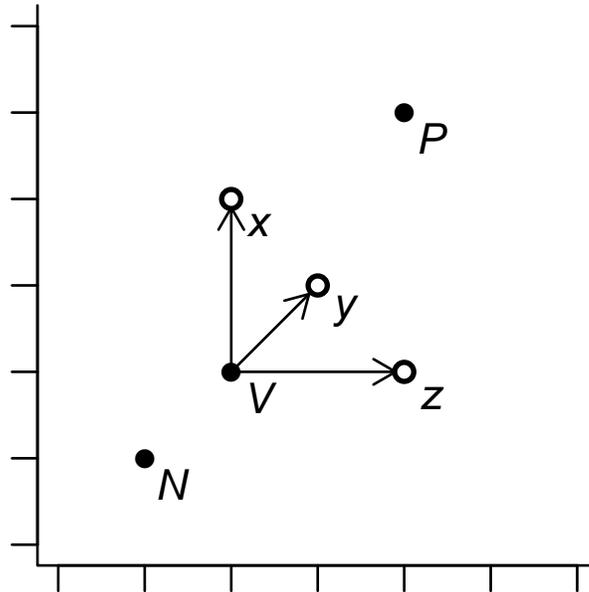
Figure 3.3: One-Dimensional versus Two-Dimensional Persuasion

uration of voter and candidates in multidimensional policy space, the most efficient motivated reasoning strategies in terms of cognitive costs involve adjustments in more than one dimension – that is, on more than one issue. The relative cognitive efficiency of diffusing one's motivated reasoning efforts across several issues underlies what I call the *multi-issue* hypothesis:

Multi-issue hypothesis: Voters will spread motivated reasoning efforts across multiple issues rather than concentrating them on a

practice, voters lack the precision to be able to make such an exact adjustment. Moreover, even if they possessed such exactitude in their conceptualizations of policy space, standard survey measures would still be too blunt to detect this nuance.

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single issue.

Within the scholarly literature on motivated reasoning about issue positions, this is a novel expectation. If one were to apply a traditional single-issue research design based on the vertical issue dimension of Figure 3.3, V's movement to y would be interpreted as resulting in indifference between P and N, because the candidates would be equidistant from y vertically speaking. Perceived spatial inconsistency, however is about relative proximity not on any *particular* issue but across *all* issues. From a multi-issue perspective, V's movement to y justifies her preference for P over N by making P the most proximate candidate in her mind, not merely one of two equally proximate candidates. When we approaches questions about motivated reasoning with a more realistic view of the campaign environment – where more than one issue may be in play – new, more cognitively efficient rationalization strategies become visible.

Spreading Motivated Reasoning Across Processes

We know from existing scholarship that, given the opportunity to be persuaded, voters will be persuaded under certain circumstances. Likewise, we know that, given the opportunity to project (either by assimilating or contrasting), voters will project under certain circumstances. Do these same tendencies manifest themselves when both persuasion and protection opportunities are available to voters simultaneously, or do voters update their mo-

tivated reasoning strategies to reflect the fact that they have multiple tactics at their disposal for reducing perceived spatial inconsistency?

Figure 3.4 displays another configuration of voter V, preferred candidate P, and non-preferred candidate N. As before, V perceives herself to be closer to N than to P, an inconsistency which creates cognitive dissonance. V could resolve this inconsistency by moving herself 2 intervals left to position y, by moving P 2 intervals right to position y, or by moving herself 1 interval left to position z and P 1 interval right to position x. Each of these three strategies would require a total movement of 2 intervals in the horizontal dimension and render P the most proximate candidate in V's conceptualization of policy space, justifying her preference according to the logic of spatial voting. Which strategy would V prefer?

Of these three options, moving V to z and P to x has the advantage of dragging neither V nor P particularly far from their original positions in policy space. Recall my proposition that smaller motivated reasoning adjustments require less cognitive effort than large ones. It may be the case that this relationship between adjustment size and cognitive cost is linear, in which case all three options would be equally cognitively demanding. A more plausible alternative is that the relationship is quadratic or exponential, such that two small adjustments would require less cognitive effort than a large adjustment equivalent to the sum of the two small ones.[9] If one two-

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[9]To starkly illustrate this point, consider a voter in six-dimensional policy space who can either move herself one interval on six seven-point issue scales or six intervals on one seven-point issue scale. The former would require little in the way of counter-arguing her
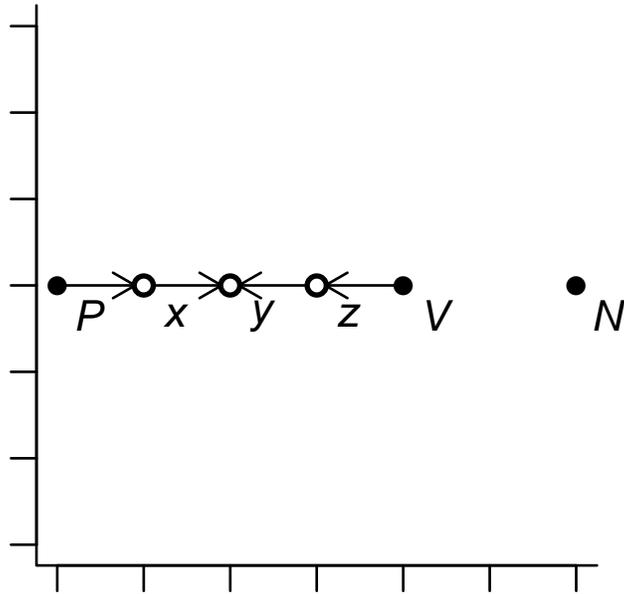
Figure 3.4: Persuasion versus Assimilation versus Both

interval move requires more cognitive effort than two one-interval moves, meeting one's preferred candidate halfway in policy space may be a more efficient strategy than relying on persuasion or assimilation by itself, and voters should spread their motivated reasoning efforts across processes just as they should across issues. This constitutes my *multi-process* hypothesis:

original issue positions. The latter, by contrast, represents a major shift that forces her to the other side of the issue in question, which would be harder to square with either belief perseverance or democratic citizenship norms.

Multi-process hypothesis: Voters will spread motivated efforts across multiple processes rather than concentrating them on a single process.

As with the multi-issue hypothesis, this expectation is not part of the conventional wisdom on motivated reasoning about issue positions. The standard approach to studying persuasion and projection is to focus on one of the two, often by precluding the other with a research design that limits subjects' motivated reasoning options. Applying such a design to the scenario displayed in Figure 3.4 would regard either moving V to y or moving P to y (depending on whether the focus was persuasion or projection) as a strategy for rationalizing V's preference for P over N. However, it would fail to capture moving V to z and P to x as a multi-process strategy with the same rationalizing effect, due to its singular focus. Allowing voters to engage in more than one motivated reasoning process at once reveals additional means by which they can reduce perceived spatial inconsistency and alleviate cognitive dissonance.

To Switch or Not To Switch?

Of the aforementioned tactics for reducing perceived spatial inconsistency, switching to a more proximate candidate is the odd one out in that it represents accuracy motivated reasoning rather than directional motivated reasoning. Whereas persuasion, assimilation, and contrast are all means of

rationalizing a candidate preference with respect to issue proximity, switching entails abandoning a discordant preference for an alternative that follows more logically from one's conceptualization of policy space.

Although switching has the potential to considerably alleviate cognitive dissonance, it also requires voters to overrule whatever decision criteria produced their initial candidate preferences. Suppressing these criteria – be they party identification, candidate likeability, or something else – may be prohibitively difficult if they represent deeply-held predispositions, such as party identification (Stokes 1966). In most cases, as much or more perceived spatial inconsistency can be reduced by small, cognitively cheap motivated reasoning adjustments. Unsurprisingly, voters in the United States tend to stick with their preferred candidates throughout the presidential campaign season (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Erikson and Wlezien 2012). Thus, although I suspect switching to be more likely as perceived spatial inconsistency increases, I also expect it to be a relatively rare occurrence, invoked only when the discrepancies voters face are too cumbersome to motivatedly reason away (Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson 2010). Generally speaking, motivated reasoning represents a more amenable remedy for cognitive dissonance.

How large of an effect switching has on perceived spatial inconsistency depends on the relative proximity of one's preferred candidate in policy space. If the midpoint of perceived spatial inconsistency scale in Figure 3.1 is 0, switching between the two most proximate candidates flips the sign of per-

ceived spatial inconsistency. Thus, the higher perceived spatial inconsistency is initially, the greater the benefits from switching will be (see Figure 3.5).[10] This relationship undergirds what I call the *switching* hypothesis:

> *Switching hypothesis: As perceived spatial inconsistency increases, the likelihood of a voter switching her candidate preference increases.*

The Empowered Motivated Reasoner

When faced with perceived spatial inconsistency between their conceptualizations of policy space and their candidate preferences, voters have many options for responding to the pressure. Most of these options – specifically, those that involve more than one motivated reasoning process on more than one issue – have escaped previous attempts to study how voters rationalize their candidate preferences. Single-process, single-issue studies shed some light on the mechanisms behind motivated reasoning, but we cannot confidently generalize from results of these studies to voters' behavior in their natural habitat: complex campaign environments where all motivated reasoning processes are available.

If, instead of isolating processes and issues, we consider all of the ways in which voters might reduce perceived spatial inconsistency, we can make more

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[10]If one or more of the candidates involved in the switch is not one of the two most proximate (which may occur in multi-candidate or multiparty settings), the effect of switching on one's perceived spatial inconsistency may not necessarily be a sign flip.
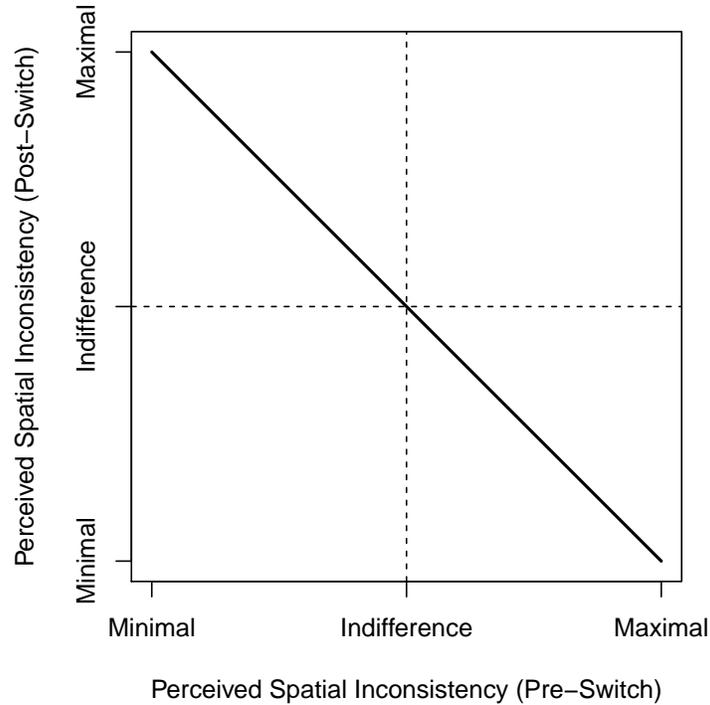
Figure 3.5: Effect of Switching between the Two Most Proximate
Candidates on Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

realistic predictions about the motivated reasoning strategies they would em-
ploy. First, motivated reasoning across multiple issues will generally be more
prevalent than motivated reasoning on single issues. Second, motivated rea-
soning strategies that combine persuasion, assimilation, and contrast will
generally be more prevalent than motivated reasoning consisting of only one
of these processes. Third, switching candidate preferences will generally oc-
cur only when perceived spatial inconsistency is so high that rationalizing
preferences through motivated reasoning is prohibitively costly in terms of

cognitive effort. I test these predictions over the course of the next three chapters.

4

Multi-Issue Motivated Reasoning

> Is this just math that you do as a Republican to make yourself
> feel better, or is this real?
>
> —Megyn Kelly

Presidential campaigns involve many issues. Candidates stake out positions on them, news media disseminate those positions, and voters make decisions about which candidates to support in an environment that proclaims explicitly and implicitly that "issues matter." This issue emphasis can sometimes cause voters to form candidate preferences based on issue proximity (accuracy motivated reasoning) or to reverse-engineer sets of issue positions and candidate preferences that justify their non-issue-driven preferences (directional motivated reasoning).

The extents to which accuracy and directional goals influence voter psychology bear heavily on citizen competence and democratic representation. Unfortunately, past scholarship on persuasion and projection, reliant as it is on single-issue theories and research designs, offers little in the way of

predictions about how motivated reasoners navigate complex campaign environments when multiple issues are in play. This oversight is especially problematic if, as I theorized in Chapter 3, multi-issue motivated reasoning strategies offer voters cognitively efficient ways to reduce the cognitive dissonance that stems from perceived voter-candidate disagreement.

In this chapter, I test my first hypothesis – voters will spread motivated reasoning efforts across multiple issues rather than concentrating them on a single issue – using panel surveys from three U.S. presidential elections. I begin by measuring the change in perceived spatial inconsistency between the beginning and end of the general election campaign season, establishing that voters do indeed reduce the relative distance they perceive between themselves and their preferred candidates as the campaign wears on. I then demonstrate that a majority of voters exhibit motivated reasoning strategies that are balanced across the issues, reducing perceived voter-candidate disagreement on not just one but several issues as Election Day draws nearer. Finally, I examine the relationship between "issue balance" and reduction in perceived spatial inconsistency, showing that motivated reasoners are more effective at mitigating voter-candidate disagreement the more "balanced" their applications of persuasion and projection are.

Examining Motivated Reasoning Using Panel Studies

The grist for this investigation into multi-issue motivated reasoning is a trio of panel studies conducted during U.S. presidential election campaigns: the

1976 Presidential Campaign Impact on Voters study (Patterson 1982), the 1980 American National Election Studies panel, and the 2008-2009 American National Election Studies panel.[1] Panel studies are especially suited to examinations of attitude change because they interview the same respondents more than once. This feature allows analysts to compare individual respondents at different points in time, which means that individual changes can be explicitly demonstrated rather than inferred from trends in staggered cross-sectional surveys (Markus and Converse 1979).

These three panel studies all satisfy a narrow set of criteria necessary for capturing the complexity of motivated reasoning at the individual level. In each study, respondents were invited to place themselves and the major party presidential candidates on the same seven-point issue scales at more than one point in time.[2] The precise points in time when these self- and candidate placements occurred varies, but each study included at least one wave fielded before the Democratic and Republican national conventions had nominated the major party candidates and one wave fielded in October or early November, just before Election Day.[3] This repetition allows me to

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[1] The 1976 PCIV sampled residents of Erie, Pennsylvania, and Los Angeles, California. Both the 1980 and 2008-2009 ANES panels used nationally representative samples.

[2] The 1976 PCIV featured nine issues: abortion, school busing, crime, defense spending, foreign policy, wage controls, government-guaranteed jobs, taxes, and welfare. The 1980 ANES featured four: defense spending, inflation, Russia, and government spending. The 2008-2009 ANES featured eight: a "path to citizenship" for illegal immigrants, detention of terror suspects, healthcare, same-sex marriage, prescription drugs, taxes, work visas, and warrantless wiretaps. Question wordings for these scale placements can be found in Appendix A.

[3] The 2008-2009 ANES did not ask voters to place themselves alongside the candidates on seven-point issue scales in its summer wave, so I used their January 2008 self-placements

compare how voters viewed themselves and the candidates in policy space at the beginning and the end of the general election campaign.[4]

It is worth noting that motivated reasoning about issue positions is not a phenomenon unique to the summer and fall of presidential election years. Citizens of democracies may encounter cognitive dissonance whenever political actors they like take actions they do not like, or political actors they do not like take actions they do like (Cohen 2003; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). Some potential voters may enter the general election campaign having already completed all of the motivated reasoning they will do for that cycle, while others may not get around to persuasion and projection until moments before they cast their ballots (or even later). However, the run-up to a major election, when choices loom and voters prepare to decide, is when the pressure to rationalize one's candidate preferences is usually greatest. The internecine conflicts of the primary season have subsided, political news coverage is ramping up, and voters are confronted with the slate of candidates with which they are stuck. Thus, although I cannot claim to capture all motivated reasoning about issue positions with these panel studies, I suspect that a great deal of the justification processes voters undergo when faced with perceived spatial inconsistency occurs within this conventions-to-election period.

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instead.

[4]All of the panel data analyzed in this and the following two chapters are drawn from pre-election waves.

Measuring Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

As delineated in Chapter 3, perceived spatial inconsistency is defined as the distance a voter perceives between herself and her preferred candidate in policy space, minus the distance she perceives between herself and her closest non-preferred candidate. A perceived spatial inconsistency value less than (or equal to) zero indicate that a voter prefers the most proximate candidate (or one of several most proximate candidates). Cognitive dissonance increases with perceived spatial inconsistency, as does the pressure to rationalize one's increasingly discordant candidate preference.

In line with existing research on spatial voting (e.g., Enelow and Hinich 1984), I calculate perceived spatial inconsistency as a difference of Euclidean distances. Specifically, I subtract the distance a voter perceives between herself and her closest non-preferred candidate from the distance she perceives between herself and her preferred candidate.[5] For the purpose of distance calculation, each issue is treated as a unique dimension in policy space. In cases where voters answer "don't know" or refuse to place themselves or one

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[5]It is worth emphasizing that here, and throughout this dissertation, candidates' locations in policy space are always measured subjectively (using voters' candidate placements), not objectively (based on exogenous definitions of where the candidates stand on the issues). The reason for using subjective placement is that cognitive dissonance, the driving force behind motivated reasoning, stems not from objective facts about the world but rather from mental representations of these facts, which may be but are not necessarily based on objective reality (Blais et al. 2001; Kedar 2009; Westholm 1997). Although accurate candidate perceptions are important for democratic accountability, this information problem is distinct from the decision problem of proximity voting: one can have low perceived spatial inconsistency and low cognitive dissonance even while maintaining false premises about the candidates.

of the candidates on a particular issue scale, I drop that issue dimension from the calculation rather than imputing a scale placement.[6]

Formally stated, the equation for perceived spatial inconsistency is as follows:

$$PSI = \sqrt{\sum(V_i - P_i)^2} - \sqrt{\sum(V_i - N_i)^2} \qquad (4.1)$$

where V_i, P_i, and N_i represent the voter's position, perception of her preferred candidate's position, and perception of her closest non-preferred candidate's position on issue i, respectively. The resulting measure of perceived spatial inconsistency is rescaled to range between -1 and 1 such that higher numbers indicate greater perceived spatial inconsistency and 0 represents perceived equidistance between one's preferred and closest non-preferred candidate in policy space.

The Dynamics of Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

Before analyzing how voters shrink the relative gaps they perceive between themselves and their preferred candidates over the course of a general election campaign, it is important to establish whether those relative gaps actually shrink. Figure 4.1 displays histograms of perceived spatial inconsistency at

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[6]This decision to drop issues for which voters' self- or candidate placements are missing is based on the assumption that voters' refusal to place themselves or the candidates on a particular issue scale is uncorrelated with their perceived spatial inconsistency on that issue. To the extent that survey nonresponse is itself a mechanism for reducing cognitive dissonance (by refusing to acknowledge perceived voter-candidate disagreement), my estimates of perceived spatial inconsistency levels will be biased downward.

the beginnings and ends of the general election campaigns of 1976, 1980, and 2008. The light bars of each histogram represent voters whose candidate preferences are spatially consistent ($PSI \leq 0$) – that is, voters who perceive their preferred candidate to be at least as proximate in policy space as the nearest alternative – while the dark bars indicate voters whose candidate preferences are spatially inconsistent ($PSI > 0$).

For all three elections, the story told by these histograms is the same. Overall, voters see themselves as closer to their preferred candidates (relative to their non-preferred candidates) in the fall than in the summer. At the beginning of the general election campaign season, even before the candidates have been officially crowned as their parties' nominees at the conventions, most voters already perceive their preferred candidate as being the better analog for their issue positions (or at least as good as the alternative). The size of the minority of voters with spatially inconsistent preferences shrinks between the summer and fall waves of each panel, and the overall distribution of voters shifts leftward on the perceived spatial inconsistency axis. Simply put, the average voter's candidate preference and conceptualization of policy space are less likely to cause her to experience cognitive dissonance at the end of the general election campaign than at the beginning.

Determining the conditions under which these perceived voter-candidate gaps arise is not the central focus of this dissertation, but a cursory exploration into the determinants of perceived spatial inconsistency may provide some useful perspective. To that end, I estimated linear regressions with
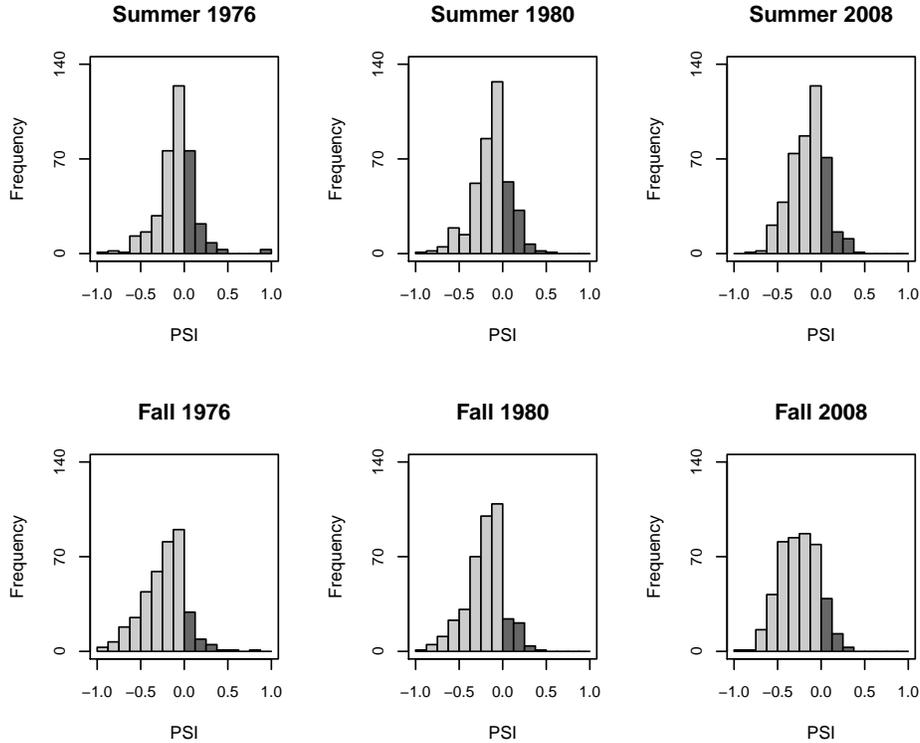
Figure 4.1: Change in Perceived Spatial Inconsistency in Three U.S. Presidential Elections (dark bars indicate voters with spatially inconsistent candidate preferences)

initial perceived spatial inconsistency as the dependent variable and a set of "usual suspects" for the independent variables: sex, age, education[7], income (as a percentile of the sample), attention to politics[8], whether respondents

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[7]Education was captured using two indicator variables: one for respondents with a high school diploma or GED but no four-year college degree, and one for respondents with at least a four-year college degree. The omitted category is thus respondents with no high school diploma or GED. Respondents declining to report education levels are omitted.

[8]This attention measure is based on self-reports on a three-point scale in 1976 and 1980 and a five-point scale in 2008. All three are rescaled to range from 0 to 1 in the models reported here, where 0 represents the least attentive to politics and 1 represents the most attentive to politics.

supported the Democratic presidential candidate at the beginning of the general election campaign, and partisan and ideological extremity (based on folded-over seven-point ideology and partisanship items).

The results of these three linear regressions (displayed in Table 4.1) offer three clues as to the origins of perceived spatial inconsistency. First, the coefficient on attention to politics is negative in all three models and statistically significant at the 0.05 level in the 1980 and 2008 models (in the 1976 model, it narrowly escapes statistical significance). One interpretation of this finding is that more attentive respondents may have been thinking about the prospective candidate slates in advance of the party conventions, and therefore may have already formulated spatially consistent candidate preferences (either through proximity voting or motivated reasoning) by the time of the general election campaign. Second, the coefficient on ideological extremity is also statistically significant and negative in 1980 and 2008 (and also negative and nearly significant in 1976). Committed liberals and conservatives appear to begin the general election season with less perceived spatial inconsistency, perhaps due to the fact that their issue positions are more ideologically constrained and therefore more likely to jibe with those of their preferred candidate. Third, the coefficient on support for the Democratic candidate is statistically significant and negative in 1976 and 2008 and statistically significant and positive in 1980. Although I have only three elections' worth of panel data to work with, it is suggestive that in each of them perceived spatial inconsistency starts out higher on average for supporters of

the candidate from the incumbent party. It is possible that out-party candidates who lack well-known résumés are easier targets for projection at the primary election stage, or that voters who support them without knowing their issue positions give them the benefit of the doubt and assume agreement early on in the campaign season.[9]

Variation in Motivated Reasoning Levels across Issues

Average perceived spatial inconsistency decreases over the course of the general election campaign in a way that is consistent with motivated reasoning. But is this decrease more prevalent on certain issues than others, or are most issues equally susceptible to motivated reasoning? To answer this question, I begin by decomposing perceived spatial inconsistency into issue-specific measures. Because issue positions and candidate perceptions are measured using a seven-point scale, these issue-specific perceived spatial inconsistency values vary from -7 to 7. Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 display the average dissonance reduction by issue and candidate support for 1976, 1980, and 2008, respectively.

Several patterns are evident here. First, of the 42 combinations of issue and candidate support, 40 exhibited an average decrease in perceived spatial inconsistency (the exceptions being Reagan supporters on inflation in 1980

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[9]Even though 2008 Republican nominee John McCain was not a sitting president, he agreed with many of incumbent George W. Bush's stances and was criticized by his Democratic opponent Barack Obama and others as representing "four more years of the same Bush policies" (Danner 2008).

Table 4.1: OLS Regression, Determinants of Initial Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

Variable	1976	1980	2008
Male	−0.021	−0.002	−0.017
	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.017)
Age	0.000	−0.002*	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
High school	−0.011	−0.136***	−0.020
	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.046)
College	−0.014	0.013	−0.017
	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.019)
Income (percentile)	−0.056	−0.013	−0.034
	(0.047)	(0.046)	(0.034)
Attention	−0.066	−0.076*	−0.083*
	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Supports Democrat	−0.091***	0.081***	−0.162***
	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.018)
Partisan extremity	0.002	−0.026	−0.028**
	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.009)
Ideological extremity	−0.020	−0.039**	−0.030***
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.009)
Constant	0.054	0.193**	0.170**
	(0.074)	(0.062)	(0.059)
R^2	0.07	0.17	0.23
Number of observations	293	334	477

Dependent variable: Perceived spatial inconsistency at start of general election campaign

Standard errors in parentheses

Omitted education category: No high school diploma

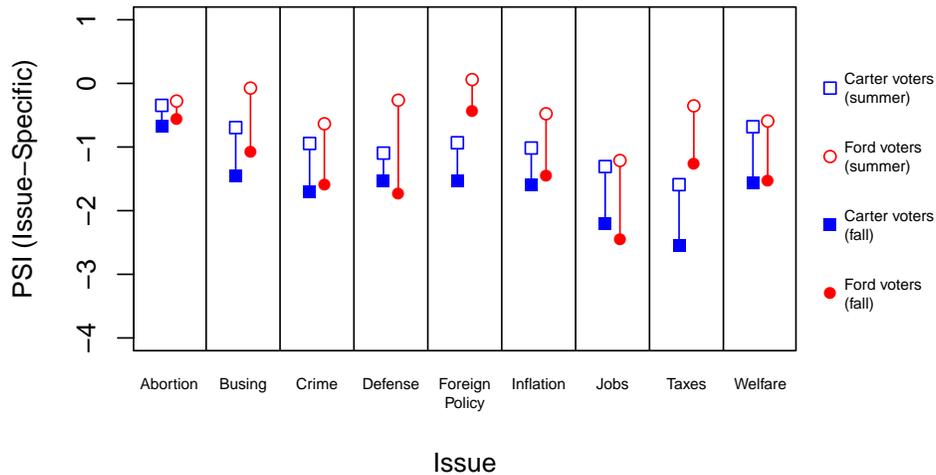* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Figure 4.2: Perceived Spatial Inconsistency Reduction by Issue and Candidate Support, 1976

and Obama supporters on detention of terror suspects in 2008). Second, within each election dissonance reduction is broadly similar across issues, even when initial levels of relative proximity are not. The major exceptions to this similarity can be easily reconciled by consulting the political science literature. In 1976, change is minimal on the issue of abortion for both Carter and Ford supporters, consistent with past research that suggests that attitudes about morally-charged issues are less liable to change (Converse and Markus 1979; Markus and Converse 1979). In 1980, average dissonance reduction is largest for both Carter and Reagan supporters on the issue of defense spending, a topic on which Carter's position changed considerably
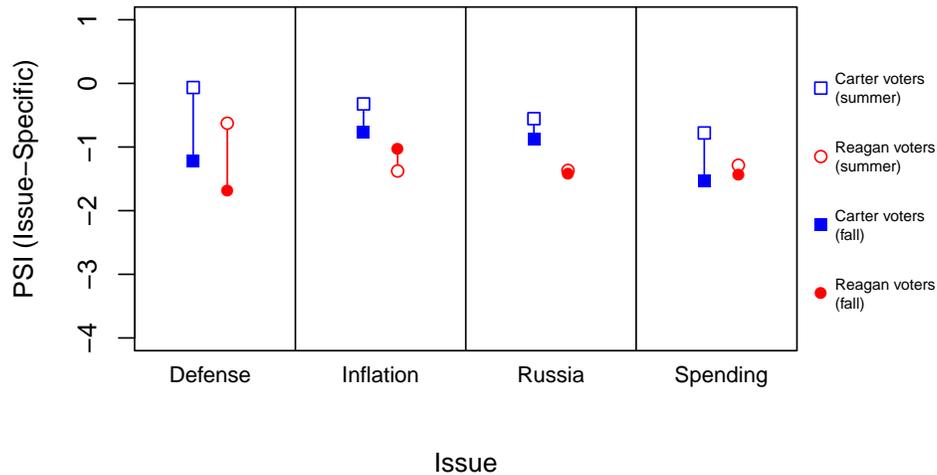
Figure 4.3: Perceived Spatial Inconsistency Reduction by Issue and
Candidate Support, 1980

during the campaign as he pivoted to a more hawkish stance (Lenz 2012);
this shifting may have given both his supporters and his opponents leeway to
perceive him as close or as far away as would justify their candidate preference
(Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012).

Although the average reduction in perceived spatial inconsistency is simi-
lar for most issues, this similarity does not necessarily indicate that individual
voters spread their motivated reasoning efforts across multiple issues. Such
a pattern could just as well be observed in an electorate consisting of voters
who each motivatedly reason about one issue, provided that each issue is
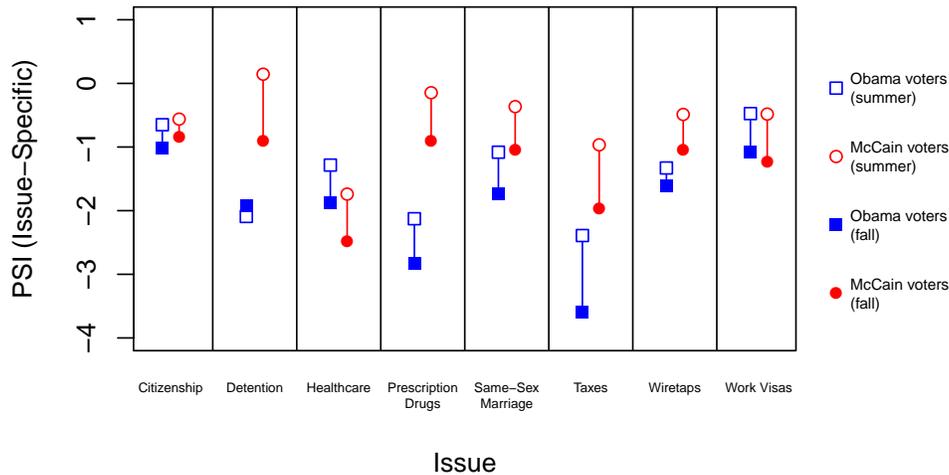the subject of a roughly equal amount of motivated reasoning. To fully as-

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Figure 4.4: Perceived Spatial Inconsistency Reduction by Issue and Candidate Support, 2008

sess voters' motivated reasoning strategies, we must move from the aggregate level to the individual level.

Issue Balance and Dissonance Reduction

My multi-issue hypothesis suggests that voters will spread their motivated reasoning efforts across multiple issues. This diffusion allows them to achieve substantial reductions in perceived spatial inconsistency (and therefore cognitive dissonance) without having to drastically adjust any single issue position or candidate perception. By invoking motivated reasoning on more than one issue, voters can effectively rationalize their candidate preferences in terms

of issue proximity without completely subjugating their original conceptual-izations of policy space to directional concerns.

Determining whether voters exhibit these multi-issue strategies requires a measurement of how balanced their motivated reasoning efforts are across issues. I construct this measure for voters who reduced perceived spatial in-consistency on at least one issue by calculating what proportion of a voter's total reduction in perceived spatial inconsistency occurs on each issue (treat-ing any within-issue *increases* in perceived spatial inconsistency as zeroes), taking the standard deviation of this set of proportions, dividing this stan-dard deviation by its maximum possible value, and finally subtracting this quotient from one. This yields an "issue balance" score, for which a value of 0 indicates the least balanced motivated reasoning strategy (reducing per-ceived spatial inconsistency on only one issue) and a value of 1 indicates the most balanced motivated reasoning strategy (reducing perceived spatial inconsistency equally across all available issues).

Figure 4.5 displays histograms of issue balance scores for each of the three elections, demonstrating how single-issue studies of motivated reason-ing fail to capture the complexity of voters' rationalization efforts. Although some panel respondents (represented by the left-most bar in each histogram) exhibit perfectly imbalanced motivated reasoning strategies – that is, they increase the relative proximity of their preferred candidate on only one issue – these represent a minority of respondents in all three cases.[10]

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[10]The percentages of respondents who increased their preferred candidate's relative prox-imity on only one issue were 11.8% in 1976, 43.3% in 1980, and 9.0% in 2008. The
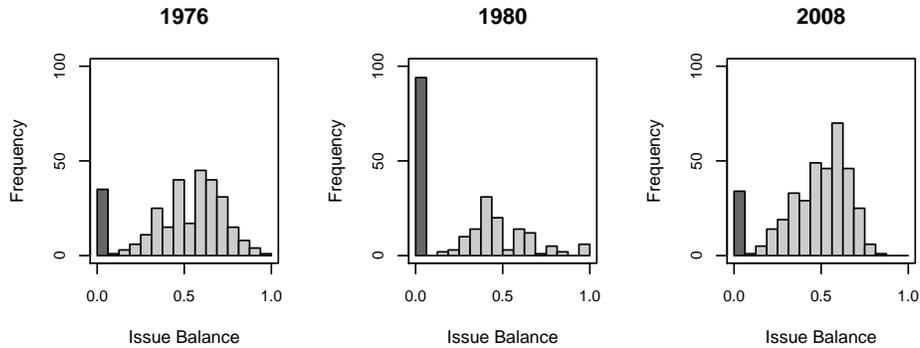
Figure 4.5: Issue Balance of Motivated Reasoning Efforts

My theory suggests that voters spread their motivated reasoning efforts across multiple issues for the sake of cognitive efficiency. If this were true, I would expect a negative relationship between issue balance and change in perceived spatial inconsistency, driven by the fact that voters with more ground to cover in policy space have greater impetus to pursue cognitively efficient, multi-issue strategies. Figure 4.6 corroborates this expectation: respondents whose motivated reasoning is confined to a single issue tend to reduce perceived spatial inconsistency significantly less than respondents who invoke multi-issue strategies.

This negative relationship between issue balance and change in perceived spatial inconsistency is not merely a function of many large adjustments doing more to reduce perceived spatial inconsistency than few large adjust-

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percentage of single-issue motivated reasoners is higher in 1980 than in 1976 and 2008, most probably because the 1980 ANES panel featured only four issue scales and thus gave respondents half as many opportunities to narrow the gap as respondents in the 2008-2009 ANES panel had and less than half as many opportunities as were available to respondents in the 1976 PCIV.
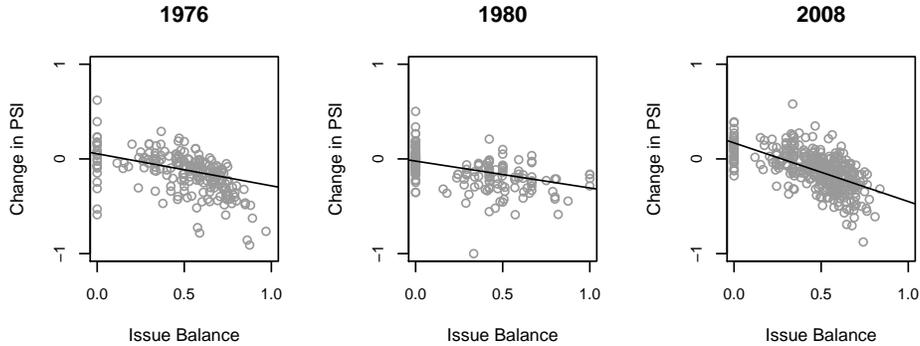
Figure 4.6: Issue Balance and Change in Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

ments. As I will show in Chapter 6, these most balanced, most effective motivated reasoners primarily rely on many small steps to alleviate cognitive dissonance rather than many giant leaps. At the start of the general election campaign, most voters are not so out of step with their preferred candidates on so many issues as to be able to "score" this high on issue balance by any means other than making adjustments on multiple issues that are small by themselves but add up to a big effect on perceived voter-candidate agreement.

Motivated Reasoners in Multi-Issue Policy Space

These findings suggest that single-issue theories and studies of motivated reasoning tell only part of the story of how voters rationalize their candidate preferences with respect to issue proximity. Voters abide in complex campaign environments where they can mitigate perceived voter-candidate disagreement on more than one issue. Not only are these multi-issue motivated reasoning strategies prevalent in the American electorate, they are

also more effective in terms of alleviating the cognitive dissonance that stems from inconsistent candidate preferences.

How should results from single-issue studies of motivated reasoning about issue positions be interpreted in light of these findings? I submit that the sizes of persuasion and projection effects from research designs that deal with only one issue are likely to be overestimated. When voters are confined to a unidimensional policy space and encouraged to reduce perceived voter-candidate disagreement, their options are much more limited than they would be in the complex campaign environments of real presidential elections, and they may be forced to make large adjustments to their self- and candidate placements on a single issue in order to achieve what they could do less effortfully in their natural habitat with several small adjustments spread out across multiple issues.

5

Multi-Process Motivated Reasoning

> I am new enough on the national political scene that I serve as a
> blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes
> project their own views.
>
> —Barack Obama

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that most voters spread their
motivated reasoning efforts across multiple issues, and that these multi-issue
strategies are more effective at reducing perceived spatial inconsistency and
cognitive dissonance. While doing so, I was agnostic to the specific motivated
reasoning processes that brought about those reductions; I merely examined
changes in the relative proximity of voters' preferred candidates at two points
in time without regard for how much persuasion or projection (and, within
projection, assimilation or contrast) contributed to those changes.

Multi-process motivated reasoning is trickier to gauge than multi-issue
motivated reasoning. Issue scales can be neatly analyzed separately from
one another, because changes in voters' self- and candidate placements on
one issue do not affect the measurement of changes in their self- and candi-

date placements on another issue. Not so with persuasion and projection. Persuasion, characterized as it is by voters' positions being drawn to where they perceive their preferred candidates to stand, is much more easily measured when those candidate perceptions are fixed in policy space. When projection is happening simultaneously, those perceptions need not be fixed, and trying to determine whether and how much persuasion should be credited with reducing voter-candidate disagreement relative to projection is like trying to determine how far north one has traveled when the North Pole itself is traveling. The same is true of projection, which is defined relative to voters' own issue positions. Several studies of persuasion and projection have used simultaneous equation modeling to compare these processes' impacts (Markus and Converse 1979; Page and Jones 1979), but, as we have seen, these aggregate estimates are of little use for illuminating individual motivated reasoning strategies.

In this chapter, I introduce a method for estimating persuasion, assimilation, and contrast effects at the level of the individual voter, using counterfactuals to decompose overall reductions in perceived spatial inconsistency into separate reductions attributable to specific processes. I apply this method to the three panels examined in Chapter 4. Consistent with my theory, I find that voters tend to employ multi-process motivated reasoning strategies that are more effective at alleviating cognitive dissonance the more "balanced" they are among persuasion, assimilation, and contrast. Additionally, I present evidence suggesting that this multi-process reduction in perceived

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spatial inconsistency is not merely accuracy motivated reasoning (i.e., cue-taking from and learning about the candidates) masquerading as directional motivated reasoning. Finally, I consider the possibility that reprioritization – the changing of issue importance ratings to downplay voter-candidate disagreement – may also be a motivated reasoning process at play in voters' rationalization efforts, though its impact on motivated reasoning about issue positions turns out to be tertiary compared to those of persuasion and projection.

Measuring Multi-Process Motivated Reasoning

In principal, the overall effect of motivated reasoning on perceived spatial inconsistency should be just as decomposable into separate process effects as it was into separate issue effects in Chapter 4. However, quantifying those separate process effects is less intuitive due to the presence of "moving targets" in the form of voters' issue positions and candidate perceptions. One who is interested in measuring perceived spatial inconsistency reduction on the issue of government spending can safely ignore what is happening on the issue of foreign policy, but one who is interested in measuring perceived spatial inconsistency reduction attributable to changes in voters' self-placements cannot safely ignore changes in where voters place the candidates.

As an illustration, suppose that a voter moved herself from 1 to 6 on a seven-point issue scale over the course of the general election campaign while also moving her perception of her preferred candidate from 7 to 2

on the same scale. Assuming her placement of her non-preferred candidate stayed constant her net reduction in perceived voter-candidate disagreement is 2 intervals $(6 - 4)$. She moved both herself and her preferred candidate 5 intervals in policy space, so it seems reasonable to say that persuasion and assimilation were equally responsible for this reduction. But how large was each separate process effect? The voter moved herself 5 intervals closer to her preferred candidate's starting position but 4 intervals *farther* from her preferred candidate's ending position. Using her preferred candidate's starting position as the "target" seems to overstate the persuasion effect, but using her preferred candidate's ending position seems to understate the persuasion effect.

To account for the complicated dynamics of voters' conceptualizations of policy space, I use counterfactuals to estimate the impacts of persuasion, assimilation, and contrast on perceived spatial inconsistency reduction. For persuasion, I begin by calculating how much a voter's perceived spatial inconsistency would have changed if her initial candidate perceptions did not change between the beginning and end of the campaign. That calculation is given here:

$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_1})^2} \right) - \left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_1})^2} \right)$$

$$(5.1)$$

where V_{i_1} represents the voter's self-placement on issue i at time 1 (the start of the general election campaign), P_{i_1} and N_{i_1} do likewise for the voter's preferred and non-preferred candidate placements, and V_{i_2} represents the voter's

self-placement on issue i at time 2 (the end of the general election campaign). I then calculate how much a voter's perceived spatial inconsistency would have changed if her *final* candidate perceptions had been constant throughout the campaign, using the following calculation:

$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_2})^2} \right) - \left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_2})^2} \right)$$
(5.2)

which is identical to the previous equation except in that voter's initial candidate placements (P_{i_1} and N_{i_1}) are replaced with their final candidate placements (P_{i_2} and N_{i_2}). These two estimates are averaged to calculate the voter's overall persuasion effect. Similar procedures yield individual-level estimates of assimilation and contrast effects by holding all but P_i and all but N_i constant, respectively.[1]

This procedure generates estimates of how much of each voter's reduction in perceived spatial inconsistency can be attributed to persuasion, assimilation, and contrast. I can convert each process estimate to a proportion by dividing it by the sum of all the process estimates (after converting positive process estimates to zeroes) and then use these proportions to generate "process balance" scores the same way I generated issue balance scores in Chapter 4.[2] As with issue balance, a process balance score of 0 indicates that a voter reduced perceived spatial inconsistency through exactly one motivated reasoning process, while a score of 1 indicates that a voter depended

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[1] The specifications for assimilation and contrast are reported in Appendix B.
[2] A positive process estimate indicates that the net impact of that process was to increase perceived spatial inconsistency and cognitive dissonance.

upon each motivated reasoning process equally.

Process Balance and Dissonance Reduction

Just as the distributions of issue balance scores lent credence to my multi-issue hypothesis in Chapter 4, the distributions of process balance scores shown in Figure 5.1 suggest that single-process motivated reasoners (those who score 0 on process balance) represent only about a quarter of all motivated reasoners in these three campaigns; the percentages of respondents who increased their preferred candidate's relative proximity through only a single process were 27.2% in 1976, 28.4% in 1980, and 20.6%. More commonly, perceived spatial inconsistency is reduced through combinations of persuasion, assimilation, and contrast effects.

Issue balance was shown to be associated with greater reductions in perceived spatial inconsistency in Chapter 4, consistent with my claim that spreading out motivated reasoning efforts across issues is more cognitively efficient. Figure 5.2 displays a similar relationship between process balance and change in perceived voter-candidate disagreement. Single-process motivated reasoners generally achieve little in terms of increasing the relative proximity of their preferred candidates when compared to their more process-balanced counterparts. Overall, strategies that draw on multiple processes to combat perceived spatial inconsistency accomplish larger reductions in cognitive dissonance than strategies that stick to a single process. Even though very few respondents approach perfect process balance, the fact that the majority
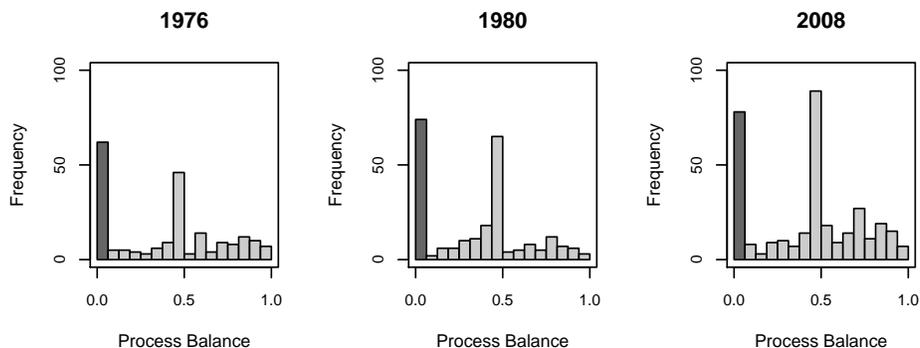
Figure 5.1: Process Balance of Motivated Reasoning Efforts

of them are reducing perceived spatial inconsistency through more than one process is a phenomenon that slips under the radars of single-process research designs.

Motivated Reasoning or Unbiased Information Gathering?

Up until this point, I have operated on the assumption that changes in voters' conceptualizations of policy space which reduce perceived spatial inconsistency are the result of directional motivated reasoning. However, rationalization is not the only reason why voters might report less perceived voter-candidate disagreement at the end of the general election campaign compared to the beginning. Accuracy motivated reasoning could alleviate cognitive dissonance if voters, in the act of learning the candidates' stances and taking cues from perceived policy experts, update their issue positions and candidate perceptions in ways that increase the relative proximity of their preferred candidate in policy space. Conflating accuracy motivated reason-
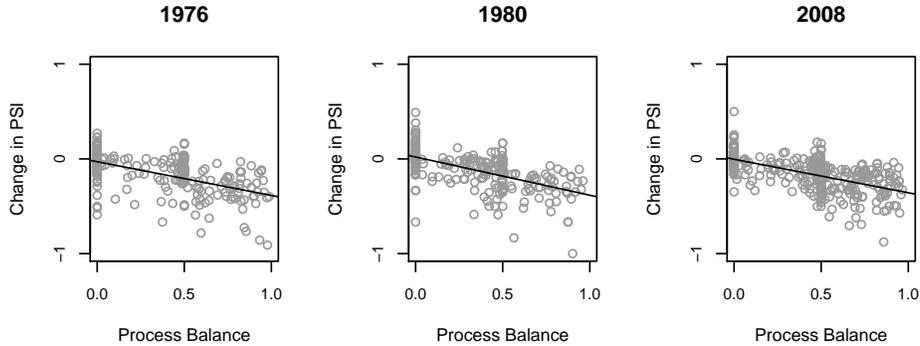
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Figure 5.2: Process Balance and Change in Perceived Spatial Inconsistency

ing with directional motivated reasoning can lead to inaccurate conclusions about citizen competence, as it risks classifying normatively desirable behavior (becoming more informed about candidates and issues) as normatively problematic behavior (persuasion, assimilation, and contrast).

The fact that changes in perceived spatial inconsistency are considerably biased in favor of reduction (as seen in Figure 4.1 on page 60) is evidence against the alternative explanation that randomness is responsible for change, but this does not rule out accuracy motivated reasoning as a possible contributing factor. If, for example, a latent liberal Democrat begins the general election campaign without knowing where she or either candidate stands on some issues, learning and cue-taking could reduce her perceived spatial inconsistency even if she was completely unbiased in her information gathering.

At face value, the patterns of persuasion, assimilation, and projection in the three panels considered here suggest that learning may be an important factor in cognitive dissonance reduction. Figure 5.3 displays the average

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shares of perceived spatial inconsistency reduction attributable to persuasion, assimilation, and contrast, suggesting that contrast was the dominant process on average in 1976 and 2008 and about even with persuasion and assimilation in 1980. This claim would seem to contradict much of the scholarly literature on projection, which nearly always finds greater assimilation effects than contrast effects (Granberg and Brent 1974; 1980; Granberg and Jenks 1977; Kinder 1978; King 1978; Sherrod 1971).[3] However, voters tend to have less knowledge of the positions of candidates they do not support (Merrill, Grofman, and Adams 2001), which could cause them to learn more about their non-preferred candidates over the course of the general election campaign (because of ceiling effects with regard to their preferred candidates) and therefore give the appearance of a substantial contrast effect.

Because accuracy motivated reasoning and directional motivated reasoning are observationally equivalent, there is no way to categorically separate one from the other using observational survey data. To approximate how much of what I have classified here as persuasion, assimilation, and contrast effects may be attributable to learning and cue-taking, I recalculated those process-specific effects *without* including any self- and candidate adjustments that started at the midpoints of issue scales. Midpoint scale placements often signal that respondents do not have well-formed issue positions or candidate perceptions (Asher 1988; Presser and Schuman 1980). By separating adjustments to midpoint placements from adjustments to other placements, I can

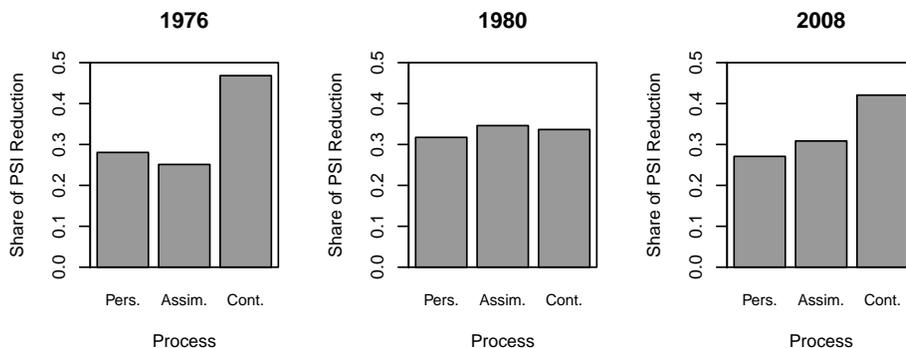[3]But see Granberg and Robertson 1982.

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Figure 5.3: Average Shares of Perceived Spatial Inconsistency Reduction by Process.

estimate roughly how much reduction in cognitive dissonance is due to voters updating neutral, default positions and perceptions (which I designate learning and cue-taking) compared to how much is attributable to changes in non-neutral positions and perceptions (which I deem persuasion, assimilation, and contrast).

Figure 5.4 again shows the average shares of perceived spatial inconsistency reduction attributable to persuasion, assimilation, and contrast, but with the learning and cue-taking components colored light grey.[4] Three aspects of these decompositions are worth highlighting. First, cue-taking and learning effects (as represented by the proxy of self- and candidate adjustments from scale midpoints) do contribute to the increase in the relative

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[4]The bar heights in Figure 5.4 do not match those in Figure 5.3 because the method of disaggregating adjustments into directional-motivated and accuracy-motivated components sometimes results in different estimates of how much reduction in perceived voter-candidate disagreement is due to changes in self-placements, changes in preferred candidate placements, and changes in non-preferred candidate placements relative to one another.
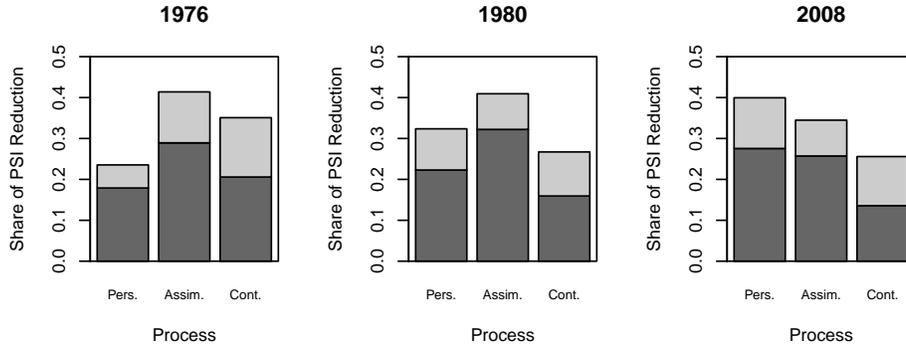
Figure 5.4: Average Shares of Perceived Spatial Inconsistency Reduction by Process, Decomposed by Starting Placement (Light Parts of Bars Indicate Reduction Attributed to Accuracy Motivated Reasoning)

proximity of voters' preferred candidates during presidential campaigns. Second, motivated reasoning (persuasion, assimilation, and contrast) does more on average to reduce perceived voter-candidate disagreement than cue-taking and learning. Third, the unusually high estimates of contrast effects in Figure 5.3 appear to be largely the result of voters learning about their non-preferred candidates – indeed, accuracy motivation seems to account for a larger portion of what was previously assumed to represent contrast effects than for either persuasion or assimilation effects in all three elections. Cue-taking and learning do alleviate cognitive dissonance, but not to the extent that motivated reasoning does.

How is process balance affected by separating out cue-taking and learning effects from persuasion, assimilation, and contrast? Recalculating process balance based on these new process shares increases both the average process balance scores and the number of multi-process motivated reasoners in

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all three elections. Based on these new calculations, only 10.2% of respondents in 1976, 25.0% in 1980, and 14.2% in 2008 rely on single-process motivated reasoning strategies, further underscoring the fact that single-issue, single-process theories and studies of motivated reasoning about issue positions fail to account for how voters parse policy space in complex campaign environments.

Issue Reprioritization: An Overlooked Motivated Reasoning Process?

My theory of motivated reasoning about issue positions regards each issue as a separate, equally-weighted dimension of policy space, such that any perceived voter-candidate disagreement on one issue is just as dissonance-inducing as a disagreement of the same size on another issue. This assumption ignores the possibility that voters prioritize certain issues over others, caring more about perceived spatial inconsistency on the issues they consider most important than on issues which are of secondary or tertiary concern (Converse 1964; Hutchings 2003; Iyengar 1990).

Taking into consideration heterogeneity in issue importance complicates the estimation of perceived spatial inconsistency and cognitive dissonance. It also introduces another potential means for voters to rationalize their candidate preferences with regard to issue proximity: reprioritization, the act of altering one's issue importance ratings to downplay areas of perceived voter-candidate disagreement and highlight areas of perceived voter-

82

candidate agreement. Although reprioritization is almost never considered alongside persuasion and projection as a process of candidate preference justification, it aligns neatly with the tendency of motivated reasoners to discount dissonance-inducing information (Gaines et al. 2007; Groenendyk 2013; Rudolph 2006) and offers the advantage of maintaining one's self- and candidate placements on disagreeable issues while still ameliorating cognitive dissonance.

To evaluate whether reprioritization plays a role comparable to persuasion, assimilation, and contrast in preference rationalization, I began by recalculating perceived spatial inconsistency to account for heterogeneity in issue importance. This was accomplished by inserting respondents' issue importance ratings (I_i) into the equation on page 58:

$$\sqrt{\sum((V_i - P_i) \times I_i)^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_i - N_i) \times I_i)^2} \qquad (5.3)$$

Each of the three panel surveys considered here measured issue importance differently. The 1976 PCIV asked respondents to sort the nine issues into groups of three: three most important issues, three least important issues, and three issues of middling importance. The 1980 ANES asked respondents to rate, on a scale from 0 to 100, how important it was that government move policy to their preferred position on each issue. The 2008-2009 ANES gave respondents five personal importance options for each issue: extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, and

not important at all.[5] I standardized these measures to interval scales such that the lowest rating was always 0 and the highest rating was always 1. Thus, at the extreme, voters were able to completely exclude a disagreeable issue from their relative proximity calculation by assigning it a weight of 0.[6]

How does reprioritization compare to persuasion, assimilation, and contrast in terms of reducing perceived spatial inconsistency? Figure 5.5 shows the average shares of perceived spatial inconsistency reduction by process when reprioritization is included alongside the other three processes.[7] In all three elections considered here, reprioritization accounted for a smaller portion of dissonance reduction than did persuasion, assimilation, or contrast. On average, reprioritzation appeared to do 14.6% of the work in 1976, 11.1% in 1980, and 14.2% in 2008.[8] Moreover, some of this contribution may reflect accuracy motivated reasoning (learning about what issues are most important during the campaign) rather than directional motivated reasoning (downweighting disagreeable issues on purpose).

Whether issue reprioritization operates in a way similar to persuasion and projection in voters' motivated reasoning strategies remains up for de-

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[5]The specific question wordings for these issue importance ratings can be found in Appendix A.

[6]I chose to transpose the 1976 PCIV ratings to 0, 0.5, and 1, rather than using mid-range estimates for the least and most important categories (0.125 and 0.875, respectively) to preserve this option of assigning a zero-weight to an issue.

[7]The persuasion, assimilation, and contrast bars in Figure 5.5 do not match those in Figures 5.3 and 5.4 because they were calculated using issue importance weights.

[8]At the individual level, reprioritization was the least impactful motivated reasoning process for 91.1% of respondents in the 1976 PCIV, 92.8% of respondents in the 1980 ANES panel, and 89.1% of respondents in the 2008-2009 ANES panel.
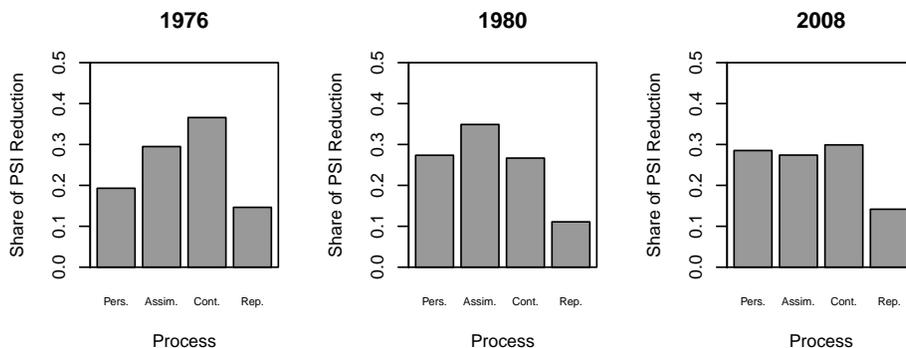
Figure 5.5: Average Shares of Perceived Spatial Inconsistency Reduction by Process, Including Reprioritization

bate. Political scientists are divided over how well the importance survey respondents place on particular issues represents how much each issue actually impacts their attitudes and decision-making (Grynaviski and Corrigan 2006; Malhotra and Tahk 2011; Wlezien 2005). At the very least, factoring importance ratings into the measurement of perceived spatial inconsistency renders policy space much more complicated in terms of voters' ability to parse it. Additionally, my naïve approach of converting issue importance ratings to a 0-to-1 linear scale may not accurately capture what these ratings mean to voters.[9] Nevertheless, there is at least some evidence here that the dynamics of issue importance ratings influence voters' perceptions of the relative proximity of their preferred candidates in policy space.

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[9]This is especially true of the 1976 PCIV, whose unusual tripartite ranking system for gauging issue importance offered minimal opportunities for respondents to indicate nuanced importance ratings.

Multi-Issue, Multi-Process Motivated Reasoners

That voters modify their conceptualizations of policy space to justify their candidate preferences has been well-established in the political psychology literature. However, *how* voters achieve this justification – which specific motivated reasoning strategies they employ to alleviate cognitive dissonance – has in the past only been conjectured. Artificial constraints imposed upon voters in motivated reasoning studies have enabled political scientists to isolate single motivated reasoning processes on single issues, but these effects observed in isolation do not necessarily resemble what actually takes place among voters in their natural habitat. At best, single-issue, single-process studies reveal only one facet of the motivated reasoning that takes place over the course of a campaign as the pressure to agree with one's preferred candidate is ratcheted up.

In this and the previous chapter, I have assessed how voters cope with perceived spatial inconsistency when left to their own devices in multi-issue environments and with persuasion, assimilation, and contrast (and perhaps reprioritization) all at their disposal. The results of this assessment match my expectations. Voters who engage in motivated reasoning tend to do so on more than one issue and through more than one process – and the more they spread out their motivated reasoning efforts across issues and processes, the larger their reductions in perceived spatial inconsistency.

The findings reported in this chapter bespeak a complexity of voters' mo-

tivated reasoning strategies that goes undetected by single-process studies. When survey or experiment participants are presented with fixed candidate placements on issues scales or asked to provide self-placements which are then treated as fixed, the means by which they are able to reduce perceived spatial inconsistency and cognitive dissonance are severely constrained. Forcing respondents to use any one motivated reasoning process or none at all is likely to produce overestimates of how much voters would invoke said process in complex campaign environments.

6

Motivated Reasoning and Citizen Competence

> You never agree with any one candidate 100 percent. I don't
> agree with myself 100 percent.
>
> —Rudy Giuliani

When voters undertake the task of rationalizing their candidate preferences in terms of issue proximity, they tend to do so on more than one issue and through more than one motivated reasoning process (persuasion, assimilation, contrast, and perhaps reprioritization). These multi-issue, multi-process strategies arise out of voters' desire to minimize the cognitive costs they incur while trying to alleviate the cognitive dissonance stemming from their discordant candidate preferences. Spreading cognitive effort across issues and processes allows voters to reduce perceived spatial inconsistency more efficiently than they could by focusing on a single issue or process.

The evidence presented in Chapters 4 and 5 clearly tells a different tale from the one told by the single-issue, single-process theories and studies that dominate the persuasion and projection literature, but are these two tales

substantively distinct? If motivated reasoning efforts impact public opinion and voter decision-making identically regardless of how they are allocated, there is little use in complicating their measurement as I have done here to account for multi-issue, multi-process strategies.

In this chapter, I argue that the rationalization strategies documented in Chapters 4 and 5 *do* matter for our understanding of the relationship between motivated reasoning and citizen competence. First, the act of spreading motivated reasoning across issues and processes reduces its impact on attitude stability, allowing individual self- and candidate placements to remain fairly stable even as perceived spatial inconsistency is alleviated. Second, because voters consider the full range of issues when evaluating candidate proximity, they are willing and able to sustain some areas of relative disagreement with their preferred candidates (provided that those candidates still appears to be the most proximate options). Third, voters' inclination toward small steps rather than giant leaps means that their appetite for motivated reasoning about issue positions is not limitless: beyond a certain threshold of perceived spatial inconsistency, switching candidate preferences becomes the more desirable option. Fourth and finally, motivated reasoning about issue positions does appear to impact "correct voting" (narrowly defined as based solely on perceived spatial inconsistency), but not egregiously so.

Motivated Reasoning and Attitude Instability: Small Steps or Giant Leaps?

The question of how stable the public's political attitudes are over time weighs heavily on questions of democratic theory. If public opinion is fickle and changes regularly for spurious reasons, democratic representation based on voters' issue positions seems less advisable for good governance (Converse 1964; Feldman 1989; Krosnick 1991; Pierce and Rose 1974). Persuasion and projection, being the biased adjustment of self- and candidate placements on issue scales, threaten to destabilize public opinion in the process of rationalizing candidate preferences.

Does motivated reasoning about issue positions lead to wild distortions of voters' conceptualizations of policy space? An examination of self- and candidate adjustments in the 1976 PCIV, 1980 ANES, and 2008-2009 ANES panel studies suggests the answer is no. Figure 6.1 displays bar graphs of all the single-issue self- and candidate adjustments from these panels, broken down by election and by which political actor (the voter, her preferred candidate, or her non-preferred candidate) was being moved in policy space. Across all subsets, at least a supermajority (more than 60%) of self- and candidate placements either do not change between the summer and fall panel waves or change by only one interval on a seven-point scale.[1]

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[1]For voters' issue positions, these percentages was 73.1% in 1976, 64.0% in 1980, and 67.9% in 2008. For voters' perceptions of their preferred candidates, the corresponding percentages were 62.7% in 1976, 66.5% in 1980, and 62.1% in 2008. For voters' perceptions of their non-preferred candidates, the percentages were 62.6%, 60.4%, and 63.1%.
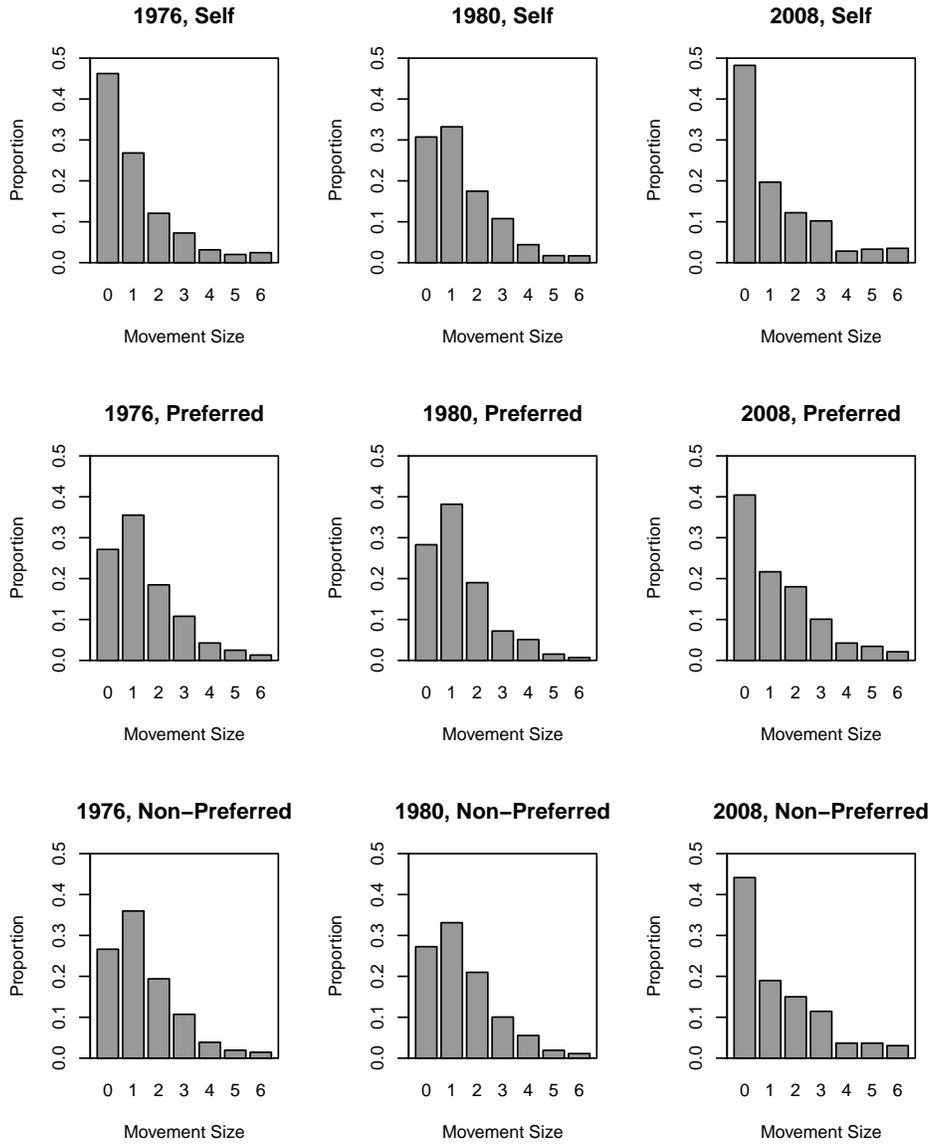
Figure 6.1: Individual Self- and Candidate Adjustment Sizes by Year

Even though perceived voter-candidate disagreement shrinks substantially over the course of each of these presidential campaigns, the multi-issue, multi-process nature of voters' motivated reasoning strategies enables them to justify their candidate preferences without relying on huge single-placement adjustments. Whether these snapshots of attitude instability are reassuring or disquieting depends largely on one's priors, but for the purposes of this dissertation what is noteworthy is that motivated reasoning is not radically distorting voters' individual positions and perceptions. A few small steps for self- and candidate placements can mean a giant leap for perceived spatial inconsistency *without* also radically redefining one's conceptualization of policy space.

Survival of Disagreement among Motivated Reasoners

One of the most commonly cited downsides of motivated reasoning in politics is that it blinds voters to areas of disagreement between themselves and their preferred candidates. Voters' willingness to contort their issue positions to maintain agreement with the parties and politicians they support presents an obstacle to issue representation and democratic accountability: the more voters follow, the less able they are to lead (Cohen 2003; Gaines et al. 2007; Groenendyk 2013; Lenz 2012). Acknowledging individual disagreements with a preferred candidate – even if that candidate is in fact the "lesser of two evils" in terms of issue proximity – is a valuable political ability, as it enables voters to accurately evaluate the quality of their representation and to reward

more proximate candidates should they come along.

Does motivated reasoning about issue positions wipe out voters' disagreements with their preferred candidates? To answer this question, I counted the number of "disagreements" (defined as issues on which a voter placed herself closer to her non-preferred candidate than to her preferred candidate) reported by respondents in the fall waves of the 1976, 1980, and 2008 panels. 60.1% of respondents in 1976 harbored at least one disagreement at the end of the general election campaign, compared to 35.4% in 1980 and 70.0% in 2008.[2] However, these individual disagreements did not tend to prove catastrophic in terms of cognitive dissonance. Using simple logistic regressions, I calculated predicted probabilities of having a spatially consistent candidate preference ($PSI \leq 0$) by number of disagreements for each of the three elections, shown in Figure 6.2.[3] Voters are able to report up to 3 disagreements in 1976, up to 1 disagreement in 1980, and up to 3 disagreements in 2008 and still be more likely than not to have a nonpositive perceived spatial inconsistency score.[4]

The fact that individual disagreements persist without driving voters to

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[2]Recall that the 1980 ANES panel only asked four seven-point issue questions compared to nine in the 1976 PCIV and eight in the 2008-2009 ANES, which may explain why the number of respondents in 1980 who reported at least one disagreement was much smaller – there was simply less about which to disagree.

[3]The first and last confidence intervals in each plot have no substantive interpretation. A voter who disagrees with her preferred candidate on zero issues will necessarily have nonpositive perceived spatial inconsistency; a voter who disagrees with her preferred candidate on all issues will necessarily have nonnegative perceived spatial inconsistency.

[4]Once again, the smaller value for 1980 is most likely a reflection of its circumscribed policy space relative to those of the two other panels.
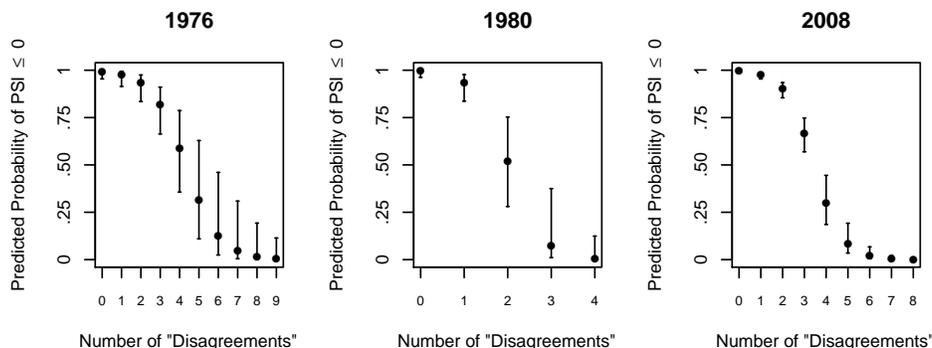
Figure 6.2: Predicted Probability of Final PSI ≤ 0 by Number of Voter-Candidate "Disagreements"

rectify them demonstrates the importance of treating proximity voting and motivated reasoning as the multi-issue phenomena they are. Single-issue studies that find substantial motivated reasoning effects may be overstating voters' compulsion to rationalize their candidate preferences by effectively reducing policy space to a single dimension. When voters are asked to place themselves and the candidates on only one issue scale, placing themselves closer to their non-preferred candidates is an uncomfortable admission that their preferences are not justified by issue proximity. When multiple issues are considered, disagreeing with one's preferred candidate on one or more issues becomes tolerable as long as the respondent believes that the overall balance of policy considerations justifies her candidate preference.

Perceived Spatial Inconsistency and Preference Switching

The survival of individual voter-candidate disagreements in spite of persuasion and projection suggests that motivated reasoners can withstand some perceived spatial inconsistency, but can perceived spatial inconsistency withstand motivated reasoning? Is there a threshold of discord between conceptualizations of policy space and candidate preferences beyond which motivated reasoning becomes unwieldy and switching to a more proximate candidate preferable? Motivated reasoning requires cognitive effort (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2015), and experimental studies have found that voters give up on rationalizing if the task is too hard or their cognitive load is too high (Groenendyk 2013; Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson 2010). Do multi-issue, multi-process strategies render motivated reasoners unstoppable?

If there is a limit to the amount of perceived spatial inconsistency that voters can comfortably motivatedly reason away, we should expect to find a positive relationship between perceived spatial inconsistency at the start of the general election campaign and the likelihood that voters will have switched candidate preferences by Election Day. Table 6.1 reports the results of logistic regressions testing this relationship, with controls for the "usual suspects" of political behavior research. Initial perceived spatial inconsistency is indeed a statistically significant predictor of preference switching in all three elections considered. Figure 6.3 displays this relationship graphically: the probability that a voter will abandon her initial candidate

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preference increases sharply as perceived spatial inconsistency increases past the midpoint of the scale (representing the point of indifference). However, as indicated by the rug markers in Figure 6.3, very few voters begin the general election campaign with especially high levels of perceived spatial inconsistency – possibly because they have already accomplished their motivated reasoning tasks before the major party nominating conventions.[5]

Multi-issue, multi-process motivated reasoning is a powerful tool for rationalizing candidate preferences. But it is not all-powerful. At high levels of perceived spatial inconsistency, the number and size of the small steps necessary to alleviate cognitive dissonance makes justification less attractive than switching to the more proximate candidate.

Motivated Reasoning and Proximity Voting

The principal concern associated with motivated reasoning in politics – the reason it occupies so much scholarly attention and creates such consternation – is that it might lead voters to make bad decisions. As is true of many "machines," the quality of democracy's output depends in part on the quality of its input. Cottage industries have developed within political behavior and political psychology to assess the extent to which voters are voting "correctly" based on a variety of policy and non-policy considerations (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Lau and Redlawsk 2006), as well as whether individual votes

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[5]Americans tend to become further entrenched in their candidate preferences as the campaign wears on, and are less likely to switch allegiance late in the game compared to citizens of other Western democracies (Blais 2004; Gelman and King 1993).

Table 6.1: Logistic Regression, Determinants of Switching
Candidate Preference

Variable	1976	1980	2008
Initial PSI	2.327*	5.271***	6.017***
	(1.116)	(1.147)	(1.193)
Male	−0.240	−0.007	0.178
	(0.436)	(0.367)	(0.351)
Age	−0.028	−0.014	0.027*
	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.012)
High school	0.092	0.033	0.206
	(0.643)	(0.561)	(0.851)
College	−0.761	0.225	0.331
	(0.570)	(0.437)	(0.398)
Income (percentile)	−0.627	0.660	0.746
	(0.857)	(0.757)	(0.703)
Attention	−0.960	0.770	−1.009
	(0.618)	(0.655)	(0.718)
Supports Democrat	−0.329	−0.250	0.242
	(0.457)	(0.384)	(0.368)
Partisan extremity	−0.698*	−0.378	−0.142
	(0.282)	(0.228)	(0.181)
Ideological extremity	−0.235	−0.848***	−0.582**
	(0.230)	(0.254)	(0.189)
Constant	2.406	−0.155	−2.371*
	(1.266)	(1.024)	(1.163)
McFadden's R^2	0.50	0.57	0.66
Number of observations	250	272	439

Dependent variable: Switched candidate preference
Omitted partisanship category: Independent/other
Standard errors in parentheses
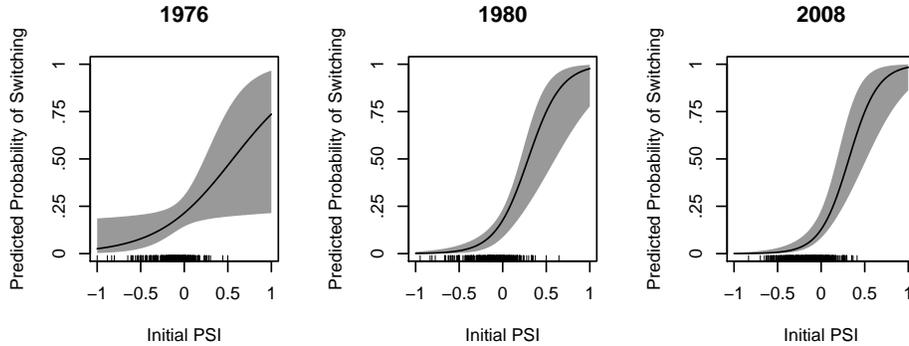* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Figure 6.3: Predicted Probability of Switching Candidate Preference by Initial Perceived Spatial Inconsistency (Shaded Areas Indicate 95% Confidence Intervals)

need to be "correct" at all so long as the electorate "gets it right" in the aggregate (Althaus 1998; 2003; Page and Shapiro 1992).

How many voters start with discordant candidate preferences and maintain those preferences throughout the campaign, reconfiguring their conceptualizations of policy space to justify them? Figure 6.4 shows the proportion of non-switchers – those who reported backing the same candidate in the summer as they did in the fall – with perceived spatial inconsistency less than or equal to 0 in three different circumstances: in the summer, after they have "learned" (read: updated their midpoint self- and candidate placements), and in the fall.[6] Two things are readily apparent. First, learning and cue-taking (as proxied by midpoint adjustments) do little to increase the share of

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[6]This is not meant to suggest that learning takes place before motivated reasoning in actual presidential campaigns. Rather, it suggests a hypothetical point in the campaign when voters have updated their midpoint scale placements (used as a proxy for learning and cue-taking) but have not adjusted any other self- or candidate placements.

voters with spatially consistent candidate preferences – in fact, they reduce that share in 1976 and 1980. Second, the share of spatially consistent voters goes from 79.3% to 89.8% in 1976 (+10.4%), from 79.9% to 89.5% in 1980 (+9.6%), and from 79.7% to 89.8% in 2008 (+10.2%). If these self- and candidate adjustments are classified as persuasion and projection, roughly 10% of voters are "fooling themselves"[7] into voting incorrectly through motivated reasoning.

It is important to stress that this operationalization of correct voting is extremely blunt. It is based solely on relative candidate proximity in four- to nine-dimensional policy space where all issues are assumed to be of equal importance to voters. Moreover, it ignores any number of potentially relevant considerations – retrospective economic evaluations, candidate quality, group interests – that may reasonably factor into the correctness of a vote. Consequently, the claim that roughly ten percent of voters are lured into voting incorrectly as a consequence of motivated reasoning is probably an overestimate. Nevertheless, it offers at least a ceiling for how often fudging the numbers in voters' conceptualizations of policy space actually leads them to the "wrong" candidate preferences.

Can Motivated Reasoners Be Competent Citizens?

In presenting this chapter's findings, I have deliberately glossed over the $64,000 question of political behavior: are citizens competent?
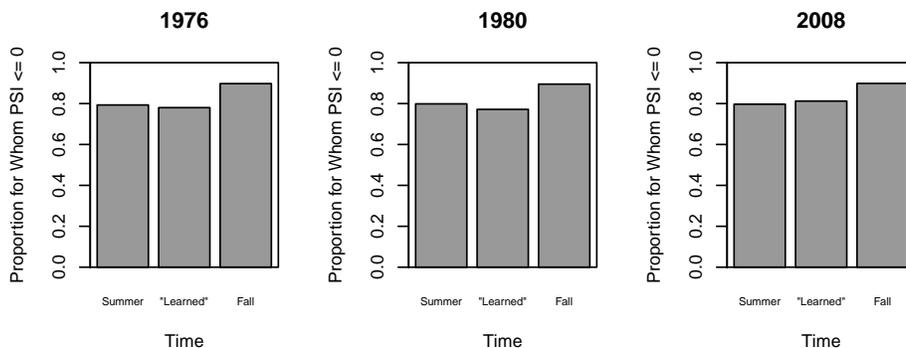
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[7]And don't believe it.

Figure 6.4: Proportion of Non-Switchers with Spatially Consistent
Candidate Preferences (PSI ≤ 0)

This question has animated political science for as long as voter psychology and decision-making have been studied. Today the debate continues apace with no sign of stopping, and one dissertation narrowly focused on motivated reasoning about issue positions is unlikely to put a stop to it. What I can say based on the results presented here is that voters are neither hyper-competent nor hypo-competent: motivated reasoning interferes with good political judgment partially, but not completely. Readers who began this chapter with high regard for American voters are likely to have lowered their esteem, and readers who embarked with low regard for American voters are likely to have raised theirs.[8] This is a cop out, of course, but a middling stance between straw-men extremes is the best answer that can be gleaned from these findings.

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[8]Unless, of course, those readers are motivated reasoners who have selectively interpreted the information in this chapter so as to reinforce their preconceptions and come away even more convinced of what they already thought about the American electorate.

What I can say with confidence is that the cognitive cost of motivated reasoning, by encouraging multi-issue, multi-process strategies, makes citizens *more* competent than they would otherwise be. Because voters tend to rely on small steps rather than giant leaps to rationalize their candidate preferences, their issue positions and candidate perceptions remain relatively stable and they are able to recognize and comfortably maintain at least some perceived disagreements with their preferred candidates. Voters with high levels of perceived spatial inconsistency are not so attached to their candidate preferences that they are unwilling to switch when motivated reasoning is prohibitively demanding, and only a fraction of voters wind up with "incorrect" votes as a consequence of motivated reasoning about issue positions – probably fewer than my estimates suggest, given the many other considerations which may matter for preference formation but which are unaccounted for here. When motivated reasoning is examined in the complex campaign environments that constitute voters' natural habitat, its detrimental impacts on citizen competence appear less bleak.

7

Conclusion

> People have got to think. Thinking isn't to agree or disagree.
> That's voting.
>
> —Robert Frost

In democratic politics, cognitive dissonance is a double-edged sword. Wanting to agree with the candidates we support on pressing policy matters compels us to choose the candidates who best represent our issue positions, which gives candidates a reason to stake out responsive, representative platforms. Yet the very same impulse also tempts us to adjust our conceptualizations of policy space to rationalize our candidate preferences, reducing candidates' incentives to hew to public opinion when they campaign and govern. The balance of power between accuracy motivated reasoning and directional motivated reasoning determines the extent to which voters are sentinels of their policy interests as opposed to slaves to their candidate affinities.

Fittingly, motivated reasoning about issue positions (whether or not it is

explicitly acknowledged as such) has attracted considerable attention from scholars of political behavior and political psychology. However, the theories and studies generated by this attention have been hampered by their narrow focus on how single processes (usually either persuasion or projection) operate on single issues. In Chapter 2, I argued that these simplified theories and research designs place unrealistic constraints on voters' rationalization capabilities that cast doubt on the generalizability of their results. Artificially fixing voters' issue positions or candidate perceptions and reducing policy space to a single issue fundamentally changes the problem of perceived voter-candidate disagreement, and severely limits the motivated reasoning strategies that can be brought to bear in response to the ensuing cognitive dissonance.

What is needed to understand how voters invoke motivated reasoning in complex campaign environments is an approach that recognizes the extensive options they have for rationalizing discordant candidate preferences. To that end, I offer a multi-issue, multi-process theory of motivated reasoning in Chapter 3. Oriented toward the problem of reducing perceived spatial inconsistency, I theorize that voters will gravitate toward the motivated reasoning strategies that offer the most bang for their buck – the most dissonance reduction relative to the cognitive effort they will expend. These efficient motivated reasoning strategies turn out to be spread out across both issues and processes, a diffusion which can yield a substantial reduction in perceived spatial inconsistency despite relying primarily on slight adjustments to vot-

ers' issue positions and candidate preferences. Not only are these multi-issue, multi-process strategies undetectable by single-issue, single-process studies, they are among the most useful and realistic means by which voters justify their discordant candidate preferences.

Chapter 4 takes up the task of testing the multi-issue facet of this theory. Using panel studies from three U.S. presidential elections, I show that perceived spatial inconsistency decreases overall during the general election campaign period, and that this decrease is spread out across issues at both the aggregate and individual level. Most voters reduce cognitive dissonance by making adjustments on multiple issues, tending to balance their efforts across issues rather than expending lopsided efforts on single issues. This multi-issue proclivity reduces the distortive effect of motivated reasoning on any one issue position or candidate perception.

I shift from multi-issue motivated reasoning to multi-process motivated reasoning in Chapter 5. Much of the challenge associated with studying persuasion and projection simultaneously at the individual level has been due to the fact that the complicated dynamics of issue positions and candidate preferences creates multiple moving targets, making clear effects estimations difficult. I confront these dynamics by estimating what the effect of each process – persuasion, assimilation and contrast – would be in isolation of the others. My findings demonstrate a tendency toward balanced, multi-process strategies among motivated reasoners, akin to the balanced, multi-issue strategies manifested in Chapter 4. Additionally, I present evidence against the claim

that these motivated reasoning strategies are merely unbiased learning and cue-taking in disguise, and for the claim that issue reprioritization contributes somewhat to voters' cognitive dissonance reduction (though not as much as persuasion, assimilation, and contrast do).

Chapter 6 takes the results from its two immediate predecessors and interprets them in terms of citizen competence. Overall, the multi-issue, multi-process nature of voters' rationalization processes about issue positions appears to mitigate the problems associated with motivated reasoning. The diffusion of motivated reasoning efforts across issues and processes keeps attitude instability relatively low and allows for the preservation of individual voter-candidate disagreements (provided they are not too large or too numerous). At the same time, multi-issue, multi-process motivated reasoners are limited in their ability or willingness to rationalize especially disagreeable candidate preferences, and only around ten percent of voters appear to be voting "incorrectly" as a result of motivated reasoning that occurs during the general election campaign (based on a purely proximity-driven definition of correct voting). Although motivated reasoning about issue positions still inhibits voters' ability to accurately parse policy space, the severity of this inhibition is reduced by the fact that motivated reasoners spread their efforts across issues and processes rather than concentrating them on a single issue or process.

Only in America?

One of this dissertation's vulnerabilities is its reliance on data from only three elections. This narrowness of scope is the unfortunate result of hunting where the ducks are. For me to be able to apply my methodology to a data set in a way that would generate within-subject measures of change in perceived voter-candidate agreement, I needed A) self- and candidate placements B) on more than one specific issue scale C) from the same respondents at more than one point in time. Each of these criteria is severely limiting in its own right; together, they make for slim pickings within the relatively small universe of panel survey data (Leeper 2014).

Nevertheless, my "drunkard's search" method of case selection is not in and of itself a defense against the argument that these three elections – 1976, 1980, and 2008 – may be idiosyncratic. All three were victories for the out-party. Two of the three featured Jimmy Carter. The oldest celebrated its fortieth birthday last year, perhaps a relic of a bygone political past where issue proximity simply worked differently. Even assuming that findings based on these three panels accurately characterize *American* political psychology, there remains a world of disparate electoral institutions and political cultures where persuasion, projection, and proximity voting may well operate in vastly different fashions (Drummond 2010; Kedar 2009).

Without having tested my theories in additional times and places, I can offer only conjectures in response to these objections. My theory is grounded

in the social psychology of cognitive dissonance and cognitive miserliness – basic human compulsions to rationalize away contradictions and spend little effort doing so. These desires are psychological, not political, in origin. They are not the unique product of certain electoral systems or political cultures. I suspect that I would observe similar multi-issue, multi-process dynamics if my theory and methods were applied to other national executive elections in the United States and abroad, and I intend to attempt to validate this expectation to the extent that data availability makes it possible. Determining how much (if any) of the observations in this dissertation are specific to particular national, temporal, or electoral circumstances will be a critical part of gaining a fuller understanding of motivated reasoning about issue positions.

Measuring Motivated Reasoning

If nothing else bears remembering from this dissertation, this admonition should: *single-issue, single-process studies cannot accurately describe how voters motivatedly reason about issue positions.* A persuasion study that focuses only on government spending and does not allow for or measure projection will overstate the extent to which voters engage in persuasion on government spending in complex campaign environments; the same is true for any other process and any other issue in isolation. Simplifying the problem of voter-candidate disagreement in this fashion fundamentally changes both the nature of the cognitive dissonance voters face and the options they have for alleviating that cognitive dissonance.

For demonstrating that persuasion or projection *exists* for certain voters under certain circumstances, a single-issue, single-process research design has some utility. For measuring *how much* of that process takes place in real campaigns, such research designs are inadequate. Yes, voters may project favorable views onto their preferred candidates on the issue of abortion when only projection on only that issue is allowed. Would they project just as much if they were permitted to adjust their own positions as well? What if they could be persuaded or project on the issue of immigration as well? Would not voter-candidate disagreement on one issue become more tolerable when agreement on other issues could act as a counterweight? Without giving voters access to these additional types of rationalization and measuring whether and how they are invoked, we can only guess.[1]

Any scientific enterprise that endeavors to explain how something works "in the real world" must ensure that its theories and research designs resemble the real world in which the phenomenon under investigation takes place. Too often in motivated reasoning research, simplicity comes at the price of verisimilitude, which leads to studies that ask one question (how do voters rationalize discordant candidate preferences?) and answer a completely different one (how *would* they rationalize discordant candidate preferences if they could only do it like this?). As I have argued here, the myopia of

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[1] A single-issue approach might suffice when examining the motivated reasoning tendencies of issue publics who disdain all issues except for the one being evaluated (Converse 1964; Iyengar 1990). These, however, are extreme cases, and are still vulnerable to the pitfalls of single-process studies if they permit persuasion or projection but not both.

single-issue, single-process designs causes political scientists to miss the forest for the trees when it comes to the dynamics of perceived voter-candidate agreement.

Beyond Issue Voting

Issue proximity, despite not being the only legitimate consideration in candidate preference formation, enjoys a privileged position in the pantheon of voter decision-making criteria. Both academic and popular theories of democracy extol the virtues of the voter who puts aside petty partisan prejudices and carefully considers the issues at stake (Dalton 2008; Klar and Krupnikov 2016), with some awarding bonus points to those who do so with ideological rigor (Converse 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017). Many political scientists have given up hope that this responsible, ideologically-constrained citizenship has been, is now, or ever shall be standard or even common in democratic polities; nevertheless, candidates, journalists, and pundits perpetuate the kabuki theatre that is issue-centric campaigns.

My examination of motivated reasoning is limited to the arena of policy space. However, just as I have demonstrated that a multi-issue, multi-process perspective of motivated reasoning reveals additional strategies by which voters might rationalize their candidate preferences, expanding beyond the realm of policy space might open up even more powerful and efficient ways of justifying one's candidate preference. If operating in multi-issue policy space affords more leeway to motivated reasoners than does single-issue policy space, how

much more flexibility would they enjoy when non-policy considerations are factored into candidate preference formation and justification? The ambiguity of abstract economic indicators (growth, unemployment), the complexity of foreign policy entanglements, and the subjectivity of candidates' personal traits are all just as rationalizable (if not more so) as self- and candidate placements on issue scales.

Attempting to account for motivated reasoning strategies that incorporate non-policy factors in addition to issue proximity would be a daunting task, both in terms of the plethora of considerations that might merit inclusion and the challenge of formulating measurement strategies that can effectively compare motivated reasoning across them all. I do not expect such an ambitious undertaking to be accomplished soon, if ever. However, more circumscribed studies of candidate preference rationalization (this dissertation included) ought to recognize that their observations or experimental constructions of campaign environments likely understate the number of criteria about which voters could motivatedly reason and, consequently, the variety of strategies available to voters.

Dissonance versus Democracy

In *Federalist No. 10*, James Madison warns, "As long as the connection subsists between [man's] reason and his self-love, his opinions and his passions will have a reciprocal influence on each other; and the former will be objects to which the latter will attach themselves." The Founders were well aware of

the perils of entrusting political power to the masses, not the least of which was our propensity for biased information processing that would interfere with sound political judgment. The American experiment has persisted in spite of this bias, but continued existence is a low bar for success and is certainly no excuse for complacency in the face of the motivated reasoning that imbues voter decision-making.

How should viewing motivated reasoning about issue positions from a multi-issue, multi-process perspective change our thinking about its impact on democratic representation and accountability? I submit that the image of motivated reasoning sketched in this dissertation is in some ways more problematic and in other ways less problematic than past studies have suggested. On one hand, multi-issue, multi-process motivated reasoning is a much more potent rationalization tool on account of its capacity for wringing considerable reductions in cognitive dissonance out of relatively minor adjustments to voters' conceptualizations of policy space. This diffusion of cognitive effort makes voters' candidate preferences much harder to budge while also making motivated reasoning more intractable. On the other hand, the fact that directional goals can be accomplished through such minor adjustments to voters' issue positions and candidate perceptions reduces the distortive impact of motivated reasoning on voters' political cognition, increasing attitude stability and allowing voters to comfortably admit to some individual disagreements with their preferred candidates.

If cognitive dissonance imperils citizen competence and democratic ac-

countability by encouraging voters to engage in motivated reasoning, cognitive miserliness defends those same pillars of democratic governance by channeling that motivated reasoning through multiple issues and processes. Determining which of these forces wins out in terms of the electorate's internal struggle between accuracy and directional motivations is beyond this dissertation's bailiwick. The ubiquity of motivated reasoning demands the attention of those concerned with the quality of democratic governance – but that attention will only advance our understanding of political psychology and voter decision-making if it approaches motivated reasoning the same way that voters do.

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Appendix A: Question Wordings

For each survey, the first item is presented with question wordings for all questions about that item – self-placement, candidate placements, and (except for the 1976 PCIV) importance rating. For subsequent items, only the text unique to that issue scale is provided.

1976 Presidential Campaign Impact on Voters (PCIV) study

Busing

> Now, we are going to do some scales on a number of political issues. You will be using them in much the same way as the previous scales.

> Some people think achieving racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools out of their own neighborhoods. Others thing letting children go to their neighborhood schools is so important that they oppose busing.

> Which number on the scale would best describe your feelings on this issue or haven't you thought much about it?

> Where would you place (CANDIDATE) on this scale or don't you know about his position?

Jobs

As a way to reduce unemployment, most people feel the government should help business to prosper so that more jobs are created. But people have different opinions about the government directly providing jobs. Some people want a federal job program, where the government <u>directly</u> provides jobs to those who cannot otherwise find employment. Others do not want the government <u>directly</u> to provide jobs to those out of work.

Defense

Some people think our military strength has diminished in comparison to Russia and that much more must be spent on planes, ships, and weapons to build a stronger defense. Others feel that our military defense is adequate and that no increase in military spending is currently necessary.

Inflation

Some people feel that the government should take direct action to control wages and prices so that inflation can be kept in check. Others think that government control of wages and prices is not the way to deal with inflation.

Crime

Some people emphasize tougher laws and longer jail sentences to deal with the high crime rate in this country. Others emphasize trying to solve problems of poverty and unemployment that turn some people to crime.

Foreign Policy

Some people feel that America must be willing, except for the use of military force, to become deeply involved in the internal affairs of other countries when it seems necessary. Others feel the government should stay out of the internal affairs of other countries.

Welfare

There is a lot of talk these days about the level of spending by the federal government for social welfare programs. Some people feel that the current level of social welfare spending is necessary because almost everyone receiving this government help really needs it. Others feel a great deal of this social welfare spending is wasted because a lot of people receiving this government help don't deserve it.

Abortion

Some people favor legalized abortion, that is, they feel that a woman who desires an abortion should be able to have one. Other people are against legalized abortion.

Taxes

Most everyone favors a cut in personal income taxes, but there is disagreement about the nature of a tax cut. Some people want a tax cut that is intended to benefit all income groups about the same. Other people want a tax cut that is intended to benefit modest and low income groups much more than it benefits the high income groups.

Issue Importance Rankings

These yellow cards list the issues we've just talked about. We want to get an idea of the importance to you of these issues.

Please sort the cards into the most important issues to you, those that are somewhat important, and the least important to you. Put three cards in each category.

1980 American National Election Studies (ANES) Panel Study

Defense

> Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. Suppose these people are at one end of the scale at point number 1. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between at point 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6.

> Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

> Where would you place (CANDIDATE)?

> You placed yourself at point (NUMBER) and what the government is doing at point (NUMBER). Using the blue card (showing scale from 000-100), tell me: how important is it that the government (continue what it is doing so that it stays close to/change what it is doing so that it comes closer to) your own position on this issue?

Spending

> Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Other people feel it is important for the government to continue the services it now provides even if it means no reduction in spending.

Russia

> Some people feel it is important for us to try very hard to get along with Russia. Others feel it is a big mistake to try too hard to get along with Russia.

Inflation

Some people feel the federal government should take action to reduce the inflation rate, even if it means that <u>un</u>employment would go up a lot. Others feel the government should take action to reduce the rate of <u>un</u>employment, even if it means that inflation would go up a lot.

2008-2009 American National Election Studies (ANES) Panel Study

Same-Sex Marriage

(Do you/does (CANDIDATE)) favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose an amendment to the U.S. Constitution banning marriage between two people who are the same sex?

(Do you/does (CANDIDATE)) [favor/oppose] that (a great deal, moderately, or a little / a little, moderately, or a great deal?)

Taxes

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose raising federal income taxes for people who make **more** than $200,000 per year?

Prescription Drugs

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. government paying for all of the cost of prescription drugs for senior citizens who are living on very little income?

Healthcare

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. government paying for all necessary medical care for all Americans?

Detention

Imagine that the U.S. government suspects a person in the United States of being a terrorist. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the government being able to put this person in prison for months without ever bringing the person to court and charging him or her with a crime?

Wiretaps

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. government being required to get a court order before it can listen in on phone calls made by American citizens who are suspected of being terrorists?

Work Visas

Citizens of other countries who have come to live in the United States without the permission of the U.S. government are called "illegal immigrants."

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose allowing illegal immigrants to work in the United States for up to three years, after which they would have to go back to their home country?

Illegal Immigration

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. government making it possible for illegal immigrants to become U.S. citizens?

Appendix B: Process Measurement Calculations

To estimate the amount of perceived spatial inconsistency reduction attributable to each motivated reasoning process (persuasion, assimilation, contrast, and reprioritization) I calculated how much perceived spatial inconsistency would have been reduced if *only the variables affected by the process in question* (issue positions, preferred candidate perceptions, non-preferred candidate perceptions, and issue importance ratings, respectively) had changed. This was done according to the following procedure:

- Calculate how much changing the variables in question would have reduced perceived spatial inconsistency if all other variables were held constant at their initial values (when $t = 1$).

- Calculate how much changing the variables in question would have reduced perceived spatial inconsistency if all other variables were held constant at their final values (when $t = 2$).

- Average the two calculations. If the result is positive (indicating an increase in perceived spatial inconsistency), the process is treated as having contributed zero to the overall reduction in cognitive dissonance.

These process amount calculations are presented formally below. V_{i_1} and V_{i_2} indicate the voter's self-placements in the summer and fall, respectively; similar expressions are used for preferred candidate placements (P_{i_1} and P_{i_2}), non-preferred candidate placements (N_{i_1} and N_{i_2}), and issue importance ratings (I_{i_1} and I_{i_2}).

Without Importance Ratings

Persuasion

$$\left(\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_1})^2} \right) - \right.$$
$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_1})^2} \right) +$$
$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_2})^2} \right) -$$
$$\left. \left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_2})^2} \right) \right) / 2$$

$$(B.1)$$

Assimilation

$$\left(\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_1})^2} \right) - \right.$$
$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_1})^2} \right) +$$
$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_2})^2} \right) -$$
$$\left. \left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_2})^2} \right) \right) / 2$$

$$(B.2)$$

Contrast

$$\left(\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_2})^2} \right) - \right.$$
$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - P_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_1} - N_{i_1})^2} \right) +$$
$$\left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_2})^2} \right) -$$
$$\left. \left(\sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - P_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum (V_{i_2} - N_{i_1})^2} \right) \right) / 2$$

$$(B.3)$$

With Importance Ratings

Persuasion

$$\left(\left(\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} \right) - \right.\right.$$

$$\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} \right) +$$

$$\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} \right) -$$

$$\left.\left. \left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} \right) \right) \right) / 2 \qquad \text{(B.4)}$$

Assimilation

$$\left(\left(\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} \right) - \right.\right.$$

$$\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} \right) +$$

$$\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} \right) -$$

$$\left.\left. \left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} \right) \right) \right) / 2 \qquad \text{(B.5)}$$

Contrast

$$
\left(\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_1})^2}\right) - \right.
$$

$$
\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2}\right) +
$$

$$
\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2}\right) -
$$

$$
\left.\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_2})^2}\right)\right)/2
$$

(B.6)

Reprioritization

$$
\left(\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_2})^2}\right) - \right.
$$

$$
\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - P_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_1} - N_{i_1}) \times I_{i_1})^2}\right) +
$$

$$
\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_2})^2}\right) -
$$

$$
\left.\left(\sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - P_{i_2}) \times I_{i_1})^2} - \sqrt{\sum((V_{i_2} - N_{i_2}) \times I_{i_1})^2}\right)\right)/2
$$

(B.7)