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The Intersection of Politics and Sports

Alexander L. Curry

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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December 2012

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ABSTRACT

The Intersection of Politics and Sports

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Candidates for public office expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and financial resources in the hopes of connecting with voters. And because voters differ in their levels of political involvement, candidates need to utilize various avenues to make these connections with the electorate. One way that candidates convey their personal values and characteristics is by showcasing themselves as being involved in and knowledgeable about sports. This thesis utilized an experimental design to analyze whether a candidate's involvement in sports actually has an impact on how voters evaluate the candidate's image. Results indicated that voters' gender, as well as their levels of political knowledge, helps predict how they will evaluate a political candidate's image.

Keywords: Politics, Campaign, Candidate, Politician, Voters, Sports, Athletics

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my gratitude goes to my wonderful wife, Jill, for her work, sacrifices, patience, and love. Thank you, sweetie. Your love makes everything meaningful, and your support made this journey through the master's program possible. My thanks also go to Abigail, Ben, and Jason, who's smiles, hugs, and wrestling matches kept me sane throughout this process. I also thank my parents, for their unending encouragement. Without them, I would never have made it to BYU the first time, let alone the second.

My appreciation also goes to the members of my thesis committee, without whom I would have been lost in my quest to do this research. Ken Plowman, John Davies, and Mark Callister – thank you for always taking time to answer my MANY questions. And a special thanks goes to Quin Monson, who spent significant time helping me, in spite of not even being in the communications department. Thank you for your generous help.

Thanks also go to Matt Frei and Jordan Rogers, both of whom rendered invaluable assistance in making sure that the survey was complete and administered smoothly.

Finally, my gratitude goes to my Heavenly Father and to Jesus Christ. They bring meaning to my existence and to the reason for pursuing all truth, even in politics.

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The Intersection of Politics and Sports

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to uncover what impact, if any, the use of sports imagery by a political candidate has on voters' evaluations of said candidate. That candidates go to great lengths to connect with voters has been well documented in and out of academia. Through this author's observations, one avenue political candidates pursue to increase their standing in the eyes of voters is to portray themselves as being involved in sports. As will be presented in the literature review below, voters employ a wide variety of strategies to make their evaluations of candidates for public office. Some voters will look at a candidate's stances on certain political issues. On the other hand, many, if not most, voters do not base their voting decisions on careful considerations of candidates' policy positions. Instead, these voters tend to look for personality cues emoted by politicians. It is this author's premise that sports involvement emotes personality cues that will increase a politician's favorability amongst voters who have certain levels of political and athletic involvement. Additionally, sports not only helps in creating connections with voters of varying levels of political and sports involvement, but sports can also have an effect on voters of differing gender.

Before going further, it would be helpful to define two important terms that are frequently used throughout this thesis, namely political involvement and sports involvement. Eveland, Hayes, Shah, and Kwak (2005), among many others, have looked at political involvement as a combined measure of political exposure, political knowledge, and political interest. This author has likewise utilized this trio of measures as a basis for understanding and measuring levels of political involvement amongst the voters sampled in this study. Doing so

turned out to be a bit problematic, as will be described in greater detail in the Method section below.

Sports involvement is used two different ways in this study. First, sports involvement is used as a way of indicating that a political candidate plays sports or is a sports fan. Thus, whether Barack Obama is shown playing basketball or George W. Bush is shown sitting behind home plate at a Texas Rangers baseball game, in the context of this study, both individuals would be said to be involved in sports. The other use of sports involvement refers not to the candidates, but to the voters who are involved in sports. As with the candidates, this has reference to sports participation and fanship, but with the added caveat that sports involvement is also a construct consisting of measures of sports affinity, sports exposure, and sports participation. Study participants were measured for their levels of sports involvement, and, like political involvement, the measurement proved to be more straightforward in theory than in practice (more below in the Method section).

This research seeks to contribute to the field of communication, and specifically to the field of political communication, by being the first study to provide sound experimental results showing the impact that a candidate's sports involvement has on voters. Researchers have looked at a host of candidate and voter traits in hopes of gaining a better understanding of what happens in the minds of voters when they make their ballot box decisions. Sports involvement, as an often-utilized campaign tool, is an area that has yet to be explored, and it is this author's motive to open this area for empirical exploration. In doing so, the results of this study hold both theoretical and practical significance to the field.

Touching first on the theoretical significance, this thesis looks at several different theories that have been used to help explain how voters form their opinions of political

candidates. And while this study will touch briefly on the theories of homophily, para-social interaction, and the heuristic-systematic model, the main foundational theory used to guide the research is Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM), a dual-process model of attitude formation. Theoretical significance comes from the idea that sports involvement may be another tool that voters use to make their evaluations of political candidates. This thesis will help explain if voters really use that tool and to what extent voters' levels of political and sports involvement, as elucidated by the discussion of ELM below, mediate the use of candidate sports involvement as a tool for evaluating those who are running for office.

This study's practical significance is derived from this being the first study to address this topic – sports use by a political candidate – by way of experimental design, as will be discussed below in greater detail. Many politicians already use sports ties in their campaigns, yet no scientific studies have been undertaken as of this time to see what effect this may or may not have on voters. Before employing sports involvement in a campaign, it would seem wise for candidate's to ask questions such as: "Does showcasing my sports involvement have any effect on voters?" and "Does showcasing my sports involvement have a certain effect on some voters but not others?" This thesis seeks to answer those questions in order to provide greater practical guidance for campaign decision makers and those they are trying to get elected.

What this thesis is not is an investigation of how a candidate uses sports involvement over the course of an entire campaign. This delimitation is important to mention, as campaigns are often months-long affairs that expose voters to a large variety of campaign messages. This thesis is a snapshot of the moment when voters are exposed to a candidate's sports involvement and then asked to make evaluations about that candidate. While a longitudinal study would be of interest, such an investigation will have to wait. Until that time, this experiment will be

sufficient in opening up a new realm of inquiry into how sports involvement can have an effect on voters. A further delimitation of mention is the scope of the sample, which is registered voters in Salt Lake City, Utah. This author recognizes that the demographics of this city – and the sample in this study taken from it – are unique, just as samples from other cities and regions around the world are unique in their own rights. That being the case, this author is confident that the random sampling procedures used in this study are sufficient to produce valid results that would be replicable in other geographical areas.

Turning to the investigative method used in this thesis, as mentioned above, this study will use an experimental design to try and uncover a connection between sports involvement and how voters perceive political candidates. In brief, experiment participants (over 400 registered voters in Salt Lake City) were randomly presented with one of two survey treatments: The first presented a political candidate’s biography – in webpage form – that contained references to and images of the candidate’s involvement in sports; the second treatment was identical to the first, only without the sports imagery and text. Following exposure to one of the two treatments, participants answered several questions aimed at gauging their evaluations of the candidate they just read about, as well as their levels of political and sports involvement. Survey responses, collected using Qualtrics survey software, were then analyzed using SPSS statistical software. This author created this experimental design with the assumption that voters exposed to the sports treatment would have a different evaluation of the candidate than voters exposed to the non-sports treatment. Is there a difference? That is what this author has set out to answer with this thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will begin with a story from President Richard Nixon's 1972 reelection efforts, and will be followed by a brief discussion of the intersection of sports and politics. The paper will then move to a review of some theories that have been used to explain how voters evaluate candidates for political office, eventually settling on a review of ELM and how the theory pertains to political studies. The importance of sports and its connection to political campaigns will then be expounded, followed by a brief mention of how gender differences might play a role in how the image of a sports-involved candidate is perceived by voters. Finally, the literature review will conclude with the hypotheses that will be tested during the experimental design phase of this thesis.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon was looking for new ways to connect with voters as he was working on his bid for reelection (Sarantakes, 1997). In a press conference, a reporter asked Nixon, an avid sports fan, to name some of baseball's all-time greats. Instead of answering off the cuff, the President told him he would get back to him. Nixon then called together some of his top advisors and spent considerable time over several days coming up with two lists of baseball greats from different eras. Nixon's chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman recorded, "The [President] got into quite a thing about his baseball piece. He's spending an incredible amount of time today on the whole thing. Working out all the little details" (Sarantakes, 1997, p. 194).

President Nixon released his lists to major newspapers, where they subsequently received extensive coverage. In drafting the lists, Nixon and his advisors assumed that this foray into the sports world, and the impending discussion and dissection of his lists, would put Nixon in touch with a slough of potential voters who may not have been interested in politics, but who love sports. Within several months of the lists' release, President Nixon won reelection in a landslide

victory over George McGovern. Of course, releasing a list of baseball players alone would certainly not propel someone to the White House, but research by Sarantakes (1997) has uncovered that Nixon and his advisors thought Nixon's involvement in sports would prove a benefit in the reelection and have a positive effect on voters.

That politicians have tried to use a connection with sports to their political advantage is nothing new. We see "the use of „sportspeak“ by political leaders... as well as the posturing of politicians in sports backdrops such as ballfields and locker rooms" (Lipsky, 1979, p. 35) in many campaigns, including the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Then-senator Barack Obama, basketball in hand, driving to the hoop, was a common image not only in the sports pages, but also in mainstream news media during the 2008 campaign (Kantor, 2007). Through personal observation, this author noticed a more recent intertwining of politics and sports. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney made a personal visit to the pits prior to the start of the March 2012 Daytona 500, a visit that was upstaged by one of Romney's rivals, Rick Santorum. Santorum sponsored the #26 car and placed a "Rick Santorum: President" advertisement directly on the car. Not to be left out, candidate Newt Gingrich appeared soon after the race on XM satellite radio's NASCAR station in his own effort to connect with racing enthusiasts.

One researcher has suggested that, "politicians have used sport as a political backdrop to give their control a festive glory, much like the emperors of Rome and the medieval European kings" (Bonde, 2009, p. 1553). The efforts put forth by candidates and political advisors to portray a candidate in an athletic light indicate that they must think that this strategy works, that this imagery says something to the people about the candidate that cannot be said standing at a podium. As researchers, we must ask, "Does it actually make a difference?"

While intuition and political advisors might answer that question in the affirmative, after much searching and to the best knowledge of this author, no studies have been conducted that look at whether or not having a sports-involved candidate really does make a difference in the eyes (and votes) of the voting-age populace. There are few peer-reviewed articles dealing with sports and politics, and the several that do exist, like the Nixon piece referenced above, limit the discussion to a broad overview of how politicians have used sports in their campaigns (see Bonde, 2009; Fler, 2007). None of the articles address or study the question of whether or not a candidate's involvement in sports actually has an impact on voters. Using Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as a guide, the purpose of this proposed thesis is to try and start answering that question using reliable and testable scientific methods. That we live in a day when increasing numbers of voting age adults can actively avoid political communications and information, it is perhaps even more important than ever to understand how politicians are able to make inroads with an increasingly disinterested and disengaged electorate (see Bennet & Iyengar, 2008).

Theory

There is no shortage of studies that examine why voters chose the candidates they do. Researchers have looked at voter preference in regard to how candidates look (Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987), what gender they are (Kahn, 1993), what party they belong to (Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989), voters' levels of education (Powell, 1986), celebrity endorsement of candidates (Wood & Herbst, 2007), and the list goes on (Rahn, Krosnick, & Breuning, 1994). Mayhew (1974) concluded that "voters dissatisfied with party cues could be reaching for any other cues that are available in deciding how to vote" (p. 313).

There is also no shortage of theories that researchers have looked to in hopes of shining a brighter light on the mysteries of voter preference. There is para-social interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956), which is the idea that personalities in the media – including politicians – try to make a personal connection with their audience, and in return, some audience members begin to feel a personal connection with the media personalities. Bucy and Newhagen (1999) concluded that different television production techniques played a role in the types of associations that people had with then-candidate Bill Clinton. If different camera angles can play a roll in how people make para-social connections with political personalities, it would seem feasible that the types of activities – including recreational activities like sports – politicians are shown engaging in could also affect these connections.

Another theory that has been applied to political campaigns is homophily (see Allen & Post, 2004; Anderson & Kibler, 1978), which posits the notion that people are attracted to those who are most like themselves. Similarity with a candidate may be an important part of why people vote the way they do. In the case of the area under investigation in this thesis, we can ask if it makes a difference to a baseball fan to see a candidate enjoying a day at the ballpark? Perhaps it is not so much that sports involvement demonstrates similarities in behavior, as much as it demonstrates similarities in social class, which has been shown to be an important component of a person's less intimate (non-family and non-friend) social networks (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). It could be that sports act as a social equalizer that makes ivy-league-educated, millionaire political candidates seem more like the average Joe voter. Grabe and Bucy (2011) affirmed this thought in their research on visual framing when they record that candidates who wear sports clothing, “coupled with athletic activities or depictions of physical work...” exude a feeling of ordinariness that helps them appeal to voters (p. 219).

While both para-social interaction and homophily would provide interesting foundations for the research in this thesis, this author has chosen a theory that provides perhaps the best fit for the investigation, namely the elaboration likelihood model, or ELM. Introduced in 1986 by Petty and Cacioppo, ELM proposes that there are two routes by which individuals process information, namely a central route (high elaboration) and a peripheral route (low elaboration). Information processing via the central route occurs when individuals are sufficiently motivated and able to pay close attention to persuasive arguments. A key to this motivation and ability is involvement. Researchers have suggested that there are three different types of involvement, namely physical (or product), situational, and enduring (Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993). “When discussing political elections, enduring involvement might refer to a voter’s general interest in politics while situational involvement would reflect concern about the outcome of a specific election” (Faber et al., 1993, p. 70). Because the purpose of this thesis is not to look at voters’ interest in a specific election, but at their interest in politics in general, enduring involvement – referred to hereafter in this thesis as simply “involvement” – is what is being focused on in this study.

Possessing the proper motivations and abilities, politically involved individuals are more likely to engage in central route processing of political information. They will expend more mental energy in order to form opinions based on the merits of arguments. In the case of voter preference, central route processing would likely occur in voting-age adults who are highly interested in politics and who genuinely value policy over personality when it comes to choosing political office holders.

On the other hand, peripheral route processing occurs when: individuals are not as motivated to pay close attention to the arguments; they are overloaded with information; or they

are unable to process the information being presented to them. One or more of the above are likely scenarios that many voters find themselves in. In such cases, these less politically involved individuals engage in peripheral route processing and form opinions not on clearly thinking through arguments, but instead by relying on “persuasive cues such as source credibility and interpersonal similarity” (Nelson & Garst, 2005, p. 492).

Coombs and Cutbirth (1998) told us “the application of ELM to the political context is obvious. Members of the electorate no less than any other audience choose either the central route or the peripheral route in evaluating the information they receive on candidates and issues” (p. 206). With the overload of politics in ads, TV news stories, and newspaper headlines, combined with the relative complexity of some political issues, such as the intricate workings of the economy, it would seem plausible that ELM would apply to how numerous voters evaluate a candidate’s image and fitness for office. Nelson and Garst (2005) added: “When elaboration likelihood is low (i.e., in the absence of motivation and/or ability to scrutinize a message) issue-relevant thinking will be minimal. Individuals will thus form a position unrelated to the quality of the [candidate’s] case; strong arguments will not garner more support than weak arguments” (p. 492; see also Rahn, Aldrich, & Borgida, 1994; and Rapoport, Metcalf, & Hartman, 1989). Naturally, the reverse would also seem true; when elaboration likelihood is high, such as when a voter is very interested in politics, then issue-relevant thinking will be paramount, and candidates will be evaluated on the merits of their political activities and arguments.

A further case for the use of ELM in a political context comes from Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) notion of personal responsibility. When an individual feels that her personal engagement with an issue will have a significant effect on an important outcome, then she is more motivated to think critically about the issue before acting. Conversely, if she does not

believe that her engagement with an issue will have a significant impact on an outcome, then her motivation to think critically about the issue weakens. This has everything to do with voters. Some voters feel that their votes make a difference, and so will expend cognitive time and energy sifting through political information before going to the polls. Many others, however, feel that their votes do not make much of a difference, and so will expend relatively little energy sorting through the ins-and-outs of policies before casting their vote. As summed up by Petty and Cacioppo: “As personal responsibility for evaluation decrease[s], the quality of the arguments in a message [becomes] a less important determinant of the evaluations” (1986, p.150).

Need for cognition is also a key factor in ELM (Thompson, 1995). Those who like politics, who enjoy thinking through the issues, may choose to expose themselves to more politics. “Media researchers have found that the [need for cognition] influences motivations for media use and also impacts exposure to news and political content. Likewise, higher need for cognition is significantly related to greater interest in politics, more interaction about politics, and greater political activity” (Thompson, 1995, 936). Those with a need for political cognition may be more likely to scrutinize a political candidate on the merit of the candidate’s record and issue stances. On the other hand, those who lack the need for political cognition may shy away from basing their voting opinions on an intricate evaluation of a candidate’s political stances. Instead, this latter group may look to personality cues to make an evaluation of a candidate.

Before concluding this discussion of ELM, it is of interest to mention a closely related theory that has also been used in political communication research, namely the heuristic-systematic model, or HSM. Chaiken (1980) introduced HSM around the same time that ELM was put forth by Petty and Cacioppo, and both theories are based on a dual-process model of

attitude formation (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Likewise, both theories have been used to help explain how voters form their opinions about political candidates (see Kam, 2005; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). However, several differences exist between the two theories, which will be explained below, along with a quick overview of HSM.

According to HSM, when people are presented with a persuasive argument, they will either evaluate that argument systematically or heuristically (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Systematic evaluation, like central route processing in ELM, means that people will form opinions based on careful examinations of the arguments that are put before them. This takes cognitive effort, and will only occur for those who are properly motivated and able to process the information they are presented with. Up this point, HSM is very similar to ELM. One of the key differences between the theories comes in the process that occurs when people are not sufficiently motivated or able to thoughtfully evaluate information, namely heuristic processing.

Giving an excellent synopsis of this process, Todorov, Chaiken, and Henderson (2002) wrote: “Heuristic processing is a nonanalytic orientation to information processing. In a heuristic mode, people focus on the subset of information that enables them to use simple decision rules or heuristics to form a judgment. Persuasion effects are mediated by simple rules, schemata, or heuristics that associate heuristic cues with a probability that the advocated position is valid. Such heuristics are derived from experience and have some empirical validity. For instance, some persuasion heuristics are, „Experts can be trusted“ and „Consensus implies correctness” (p. 197).

So where is the big difference between HSM and ELM? Mondak (1993) related the following: “Several efficiency strategies reside beneath the umbrella of Petty and Cacioppo’s peripheral route, but heuristic processing appears to be of particular prominence” (Mondak, 1993,

p. 188). In other words, ELM does not discount that a reliance on heuristics is possible, but it also allows for other means of scrutinizing information when motivation and ability are low. Several other differences between HSM and ELM exist, including the exclusivity of the processing modes (see Chen & Chaiken, 1999), but this author has chosen to focus on ELM over HSM in this thesis because of ELMs allowance for broader methods of information processing and attitude formation when voters are engaged in peripheral route processing.

If many do not base their voting decisions on careful examinations of candidates' policy positions, and instead look for things like personality cues, then how do candidates' best go about emoting favorable personal characteristics? How do they portray themselves so that a relatively uninterested electorate will see them in a positive way? In relation to that question, studies have shown, for example, that two of the most important traits a candidate can possess in the eyes of voters are being energetic and friendly (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; Funk, 1997). "Politicians in general score higher than average in the two great attractors that drive voters' impression formation: Energy and Friendliness" (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004, p. 590). Other studies by Kahn (1993) and Carlson (2001) revealed that voters want to elect strong leaders. If emoting energy, friendliness, and strength are critical to achieving electoral success, how do candidates go about presenting themselves as energetic, friendly, and strong leaders? Additionally, other studies have shown that voters like candidates who are most like themselves, as mentioned above (see Allen & Post, 2004). How then do candidates, many of whom are incredibly wealthy and run in elite social circles, portray themselves as "regular" citizens? While answering these questions could take us in many directions, one intriguing avenue leads us to the intersection of politics and sports.

Sports

As elucidated by ELM and peripheral route processing, it has been shown that citizens who are less inclined to care about or know a lot about politics base their voting decisions on the perceived personality traits of candidates instead of the candidates' stances on issues (Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989). For example, voters who are more politically involved prefer to watch a debate to witness a substantive discussion of issues and to learn where the candidates stand, whereas those who are less politically involved prefer to watch a debate because it is an opportunity to get a feel for the "real" candidate (Lipsitz, Trost, Grossmann, & Sides, 2005).

Peripheral route processing not only involves looking for value cues, but also involves opinion formation based on interpersonal similarities, as mentioned above. Indeed, voters' levels of sports involvement could play a role in evaluating a candidate not only because it helps voters use central or peripheral route processing when making evaluations, but also because it has an impact on the important notions of interpersonal similarities as alluded to in the discussion about homophily. In this case, we can return to the Richard Nixon example to see how it would appear to be advantageous for politicians to portray themselves as being well versed in sports. Doing so would seem to help endear them to like-minded people who are interested in sports and perhaps not so interested in politics. During his bid for the U.S. presidency in 2004, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry attempted to make a sports connection with the electorate as well, but came up empty-handed in his attempts to persuade voters that he was a lifelong Boston Red Sox fan. When asked by a reporter to name his favorite player, he responded by saying "Manny Ortez." Not only did he flub by combining the names of two players, but he also mispronounced "Ortiz." He was derided in the media and labeled a phony fan, all of which led his campaign to go to

tremendous lengths to rebuild his sports reputation, including by having a photo shoot days before the election with Kerry playing catch with one of his daughters (Fleer, 2007).

Sports mattered to candidate Kerry, candidate Nixon, and many others. When then-Vice President George H.W. Bush was running for the presidency in 1988, he showed up at NASCAR events in hopes of overcoming what the media called his “wimp factor” (Zicker, 2010). As it turns out, a younger George H.W. Bush was actually a gifted first baseman who captained Yale’s baseball team, leading it to two college world series. Ronald Reagan, who in his acting days portrayed legendary Notre Dame football player George “The Gipper” Gipp, successfully employed the moniker “The Gipper” during his national political career. Before running for the Texas governorship or the U.S. presidency, George W. Bush, in addition to having a famous father, gained notoriety as the public face of the Texas Rangers owners group, making “Bush” and “baseball” synonymous in Texas (Fleer, 2007).

One need not look exclusively to presidential elections to find sports involvement and candidates crossing paths. This author’s informal search of candidate websites just prior to the 2010 national mid-term election uncovered that a large number of state and federal political candidates: (A) casted themselves as current or former athletes; (B) used sports as a literal backdrop for political advertisements, such as a family playing baseball; or (C) had pictures of themselves with local athletes and sports teams on high-traffic areas of their websites. For example, the first thing that popped up when navigating to the campaign homepage of Indiana Representative Baron Hill was a picture of Congressman Hill with a basketball under his arm.

In case one imagines that this author is even slightly suggesting that being linked to sports means automatic success in politics, it is worth mentioning a few candidates (of many) who proved that just because one shows an athletic side, or is a former athlete, does not mean

that victory at the polls is guaranteed. Football great Lynn Swann ran unsuccessfully for Governor of Pennsylvania in 2006. NBA big man Shawn Bradley threw his hat into the political ring in 2010, and came up short in trying to win a seat in the Utah House of Representatives. Gerald Ford, Michigan footballer and the only man to ever be President of the United States without being elected, lost his 1976 White House bid to Jimmy Carter (who was frequently photographed pitching from a softball mound during his campaigns). And Baron Hill, the incumbent congressman from Indiana mentioned above, lost his 2010 bid to return to the U.S. House of Representatives. No, being involved in sports definitely does not mean automatic success for political candidates. In fact, sports involvement, with its potential to attract less politically involved voters, could be a turn off for those who like to get their hands dirty in the details of politics. Perhaps these more politically involved voters could see a candidate's sports involvement as a distraction or as a sign that the candidate does not have anything of substance on which to base a campaign. A candidate's sports involvement could be a double-edged sword.

Nevertheless, the candidates cited in the paragraph above are further examples that suggest that some people, whether they be candidates or political consultants, believe that a connection with sports will help at the ballot box. When considering that politicians want to portray themselves as energetic leaders and regular citizens, and that voters need to learn about candidates in order to make their decisions, it would seem that sports are an interesting, and potentially significant, avenue of research into why voters vote the way they do.

Gender

Before moving on, one further aspect of this study needs to be discussed, namely the potential for male and female voters to differ in how they evaluate a candidate who appears to be involved in sports. "That sport is a masculine domain remains an unchallenged notion" (Matteo,

1986, p. 417). This statement, written in 1986, in large measure remains true, as will be demonstrated in the paragraphs below. In the years since that was written, research has shown that males have remained in the majority when it comes to playing sports and engaging in sports fandom. This male domination, however, has decreased in strength over time, and today, females have made inroads in the realms of sports fandom and participation. This section of the literature review will delve into how sports involvement is different for males and females, and what ramifications those difference may have for the research being conducted in this thesis.

A study by Gantz and Wenner (1991) showed that men are more involved in attending to sports and sporting events than women. In the realm of fandom, more recent studies have confirmed that men are more likely to label themselves as sports fans than women, but that this gap is shrinking. Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, and Jacquemotte (2000) noted that in certain professional sports leagues, including the National Football League and Major League Soccer, the size of the female fan base is nearly comparable to the male fan base. Further research by Wenner and Gantz (1998) looked at television viewing and found that the traditional stereotypes about sports fans – the male armchair quarterback and the football widow – do not always hold true. “Women and men often experience sport on television in different ways. At the same time, we have been surprised to find out how similar the sports viewing experiences of men and women can be if their interest and fanship are at similar levels” (p. 234). While similarities do exist, it is important to emphasize that those similarities are only evident when levels of interest between males and females are equal, and Gantz and Wenner (1991) showed that overall interest in sports is much higher for males than for females.

The same trend of larger male involvement is evident when it comes to playing sports. Wiley, Shaw, and Havitz (2000) noted that, “statistics on sports participation reflect the gendered

nature of this form of leisure activity. For example, in both Canada and the United States, men are considerably more likely than women to participate, and to participate frequently, in organized and informal sports activities” (p. 22). Studies looking at gender and sports participation have been repeated in other countries, with similar results. Van Tuyckom, Scheerder, and Bracke (2010), who looked at sports participation in 25 European countries, found that males were more likely to engage in sports in a majority of the countries they investigated. The opposite was true in just four of the countries, where females were in the majority for sports participation. Another study (Palacios-Cena, Fernandez-de-las-Penas, Hernandez-Barrera, Jimenez-Garcia, Alonso-Blanco, & Carrasco-Garrido, 2012) found that more than 52% of men in Spain participated in sports, compared to just a little over 33% of women. According to these studies, males participate in sports at a much higher rate than females, and this trend toward greater male sports participation could certainly have an impact on the results of this thesis.

In looking at the reasons why men are more involved in sports than women, researchers have often found that society’s expectations about gender roles are some of the most influential contributing factors. Gantz and Wenner (1991) as well as Wiley et al., (2000) both concluded that societal norms and stereotypes about masculinity were major reasons for the gender differences in sports involvement. Eccles and Harold (1991) also found that society played a large role in creating attitudes about gender and sports. Furthermore, their research involving adolescents and young children found that these attitudes were very strong and emerged at a young age.

Referring again to ELMs notion of peripheral route processing, it could be that some male and female voters would base their evaluations of a candidate in part on how that candidate

appears to be involved in sports. And as voters look to elect candidates most like themselves, males and females could have different evaluations of a candidate depending on the candidate's perceived involvement in sports. Societal norms about masculinity and sports may also play a role. Some men may be influenced by a sports-involved candidate due to societal pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes, thus feeling that it is the proper, manly thing to do to show support for a sports-involved candidate.

It should be noted, however, that just because females are in the minority when it comes to sports involvement and may not have the same societal pressures regarding sports as men, that those reasons do not necessarily mean that they would have a negative view of a sports-involved candidate. It could be that males and females will both have a positive evaluation of such a candidate. It is this author's premise that a positive association with a sports-involved candidate will exist for males and females, but that the association will be larger for males than for females due to males' greater levels of sports involvement.

Summary and Hypotheses

In review, it appears that voters who use central route processing are those with high levels of political involvement who possess the appropriate motivations and abilities to dissect a candidate's record and discern policy differences. On the other hand, those engaged in peripheral route processing appear to have low interest in politics, are overloaded with political ads and news, or are unable to understand some of the complexities of political policy. In addition to these scenarios, voters can also utilize peripheral route processing when evaluating candidates who they perceive are like themselves. It may be that candidates can connect with voters of lower political involvement and emote important values by showcasing themselves as being involved in sports. The connections, however, could come at the cost of losing the votes

of those with high political involvement who perceive sports as political gamesmanship and distraction. Gender will also play a role in how voters evaluate a sports-involved candidate.

Based on the above, the proposed thesis puts forth the following three hypotheses:

H1: When a political candidate is involved in sports, voters' evaluations of that candidate's image are negatively associated with voters' levels of political involvement.

H2: When a political candidate is involved in sports, voters' evaluations of that candidate's image are positively associated with voters' levels of sports involvement.

H3: When a political candidate is involved in sports, voters' evaluations of that candidate's image will be associated with voters' gender, namely a positive association for females, and a larger positive association for males.

Chapter 3: Method

The method section will begin with discussions on the reasons why this author has chosen to undertake a quantitative study of the topic at hand, as well as some of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in an experimental design. The discussion will then move on to describe the study's participants, how the sample of participants was obtained, and the demographics of the sample. Next, the experimental procedures will be touched on, including the manipulation of the candidate webpage, specifics about the questionnaire, and details about participants who's data, for various reasons, were not used in calculating the results. Finally, the method section will conclude with an outline of the measurement instruments, including the candidate image evaluation scale and the measures assessing voters' levels of political and sports involvement.

Methodological Approach

This author chose to undertake this thesis using a quantitative approach because, as already touched on above, there seems to be a consensus among campaign practitioners that showing a candidate as being involved in sports has some advantage at the polls, but this notion has yet to be explored experimentally. Whether it was Nixon and his baseball lists or Santorum and his Daytona 500 car sponsorship, there appears to be a steady stream of candidates over the years who have expended valuable resources to connect themselves with sports. Whether this works with voters, however, is another matter all together. To answer this question, this author has chosen to undertake a study involving an experimental design, the strengths of which are the possibility of finding a cause-and-effect relationship and reaching scientifically replicable conclusions about the impact of candidates' sports involvement on voters.

An experimental design is not without its weaknesses, and this author acknowledges several issues that could have arisen during the course of this study. The first issue, inherent in

studies involving online surveys, is that a participant does not generally have an easy way to ask researchers any questions while they are filling out the questionnaire if, for example, a participant does not understand a question. The emails inviting participation in this survey contained contact information for the Center for Election Studies and Democracy if the participant had any questions. In addition to making that contact information available, this author took three further steps to limit potential problems that could have arisen when participants took the survey: first, the majority of questions were taken from other studies that sought to examine political knowledge, news media exposure etc., hence the questions have already been found to be reliable in numerous other studies. Second, a pilot study utilizing an early version of this study's questionnaire was undertaken in 2010 involving around 50 subjects. This author's follow-up with the subjects helped clear up any ambiguities, which led to the present, clearer to understand version of the survey. The current version of the survey was also pretested just prior to the survey's launch, and the feedback from the eight pre-test participants was invaluable in removing ambiguity from the survey's instructions and several other questions. Third, before the total 30,870 emails (more on the sample below) were sent inviting participation in this study, a "soft launch" was conducted, where the invitation emails were sent to 500 people from the entire sample. The purpose of the soft launch was to see if any problems would arise before the survey launched to the entire sample. No problems with email delivery, with survey launch, or with respondents, arose, and the survey was launched to the entire sample several hours after the soft launch.

The other main issue that must be addressed in a quantitative study of this kind involves ensuring internal validity. The two main threats to internal validity in this experiment are demand characteristics and experimenter bias. The nature of the question order – particularly the

questions involving political interest and knowledge – and wording helps preclude participants from uncovering the motive of the study, which is a defense against demand characteristics. Furthermore, respondents were not given a “back” button on the survey at critical junctures, such as after viewing the webpage, answering the question related to the dependent variable, after each of the political knowledge questions, or when asked the manipulation check question. This was to prevent them from going back and changing their answers. Additionally, in order to minimize context effects, political interest questions were asked prior to political knowledge questions (Hoffman & Young, 2011).

As for experimenter bias, the nature of the experiment (it was administered online, thus all subjects received the same instructions and saw the same questions) and the fact that the experimenter did not meet any of the subjects, will help avoid this threat. Additionally, this author has worked closely with faculty in the BYU communications department and political science department in order to create an experiment that does not incline subjects to give answers in a manner that would lead to producing favorable, yet invalid, results. Further, data were analyzed with the help of faculty from the departments above to help preclude any bias or error from this author.

Participants

Emails were sent to 30,870 registered voters in Salt Lake City inviting them to participate in a survey about understanding how candidates connect with voters. The email was sent under the auspices of the Utah Voter Poll, a recurring survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, which is housed in Brigham Young University’s department of political science. The email contained a link to the survey connected with this experiment.

The 30,870 email addresses were obtained as follows: A random sample of more than 31,000 registered voters in Salt Lake City was taken from the publicly available Utah voter file. Because email addresses are not given in the Utah voter file, Acxiom (a company that specializes in marketing and identity data) was used to match publicly available contact information with email addresses.¹ After obtaining email addresses, the sample was uploaded into the statistical program Stata, and 50% of the voters were randomly assigned to this experiment's sports condition, and the other 50% were assigned to the non-sports condition.

The initial email inviting participation in the survey was sent on May 31, 2012. (Please see Appendix A for the invitation email, as well as the three reminder emails). Reminder emails were sent on June 4, June 6, and June 8 to those who had yet to take the survey. The survey closed at midnight on June 9, 2012. Once a respondent began the survey, he was not allowed to close the survey and begin again, as that option could introduce a time lapse that would make the experimental condition less impactful.

Of the initial 30,870 emails that were sent, 413 bounced back as undeliverable. In addition, those receiving the email invitation were given an option to opt out of receiving emails and taking the survey, of which 271 chose to opt out. This left the number of delivered and non-opt-out emails at 30,186. Of those, a total of 601 surveys were completed. Prior to statistical analysis of the data, responses from some participants were removed based on several parameters (more information on this below). After removal of said respondents, the total cases used in data analysis were 416. The demographics of the 416 respondents are as follows:

- Gender: 60.1% female.
- Age: average age was 50 years old.
- Education: 77.4% had an undergraduate or graduate degree.

¹ The sample used for this thesis had been used for one previous survey (not an experiment). The sample was invited to take a survey in November 2011 that dealt with Salt Lake City municipal elections.

- Race: 92.3% identified themselves as Caucasian, with the rest being from a variety of minority ethnic groups.
- Income: the highest percentage of respondents indicated that they made \$50K-\$75K per year.
- Political Leanings: 57.9% identified with the Democratic party to varying degrees, 27.3% identified with the Republican party to varying degrees, and 9.1% identified themselves as Independent.

Actual demographics for Salt Lake City, taken from available 2010 U.S. Census data², indicate: a 48.7% female population; 75.1% white population; 39.9% with a bachelor's degree or higher; and mean income of just over \$44K. Compared to Salt Lake City demographics, females, whites, more educated persons, and higher income earners were all oversampled in this study.

Procedures

In order to assess how voters evaluate a sports-involved candidate, survey respondents were invited to answer several questions after viewing a biographical webpage for a real candidate, Indiana's Baron Hill, who was seeking reelection to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010. Briefly, it should be asked (and answered): "Why use a candidate from Indiana and sample from Utah?" It may seem odd to do so. But, if statistically significant results are found in Salt Lake City, think how much stronger the results could potentially be in a place like Indiana, where basketball has been likened to a religion.

Two versions of the webpage were used, and each respondent only saw one version of the webpage. As explained above, Stata statistical software was used to randomize which version of the webpage each respondent saw. Survey responses were recorded in Qualtrics, and data was analyzed using SPSS 20 statistical software.

One version of the webpage contained sports content, which included a picture of the candidate as a basketball player, information about the candidate's high school and college basketball career, a line about Baron Hill's continued involvement in sports, as well as multiple

² Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/49/4967000.html>

references to “Hoosiers,” a common nickname for people from Indiana (please see Appendix B for a copy of the webpages and questionnaire). A total of 199 people viewed the sports webpage (70 males, 128 females, 1 no response to the gender question). The other version of the webpage is identical to the first, except that all sports content has been removed, including references to “Hoosiers,” which were replaced by phrases such as “people of Indiana.” “Hoosiers” could possibly conjure up sports imagery in the minds of sports fans familiar with the Indiana University Hoosiers basketball team, as well as those who are familiar with the popular 1986 Gene Hackman basketball movie of the same name. A total of 217 people viewed the non-sports webpage (94 males, 122 females, 1 no response to the gender question). In order to control for voter bias on the basis of political party, the candidate’s political affiliation (Democrat) was not indicated on either version of the webpage.

After viewing one of the two versions of the webpage, respondents were asked a series of identical questions regardless of the webpage version they were exposed to. The questions were aimed at gauging their evaluation of the candidate’s image, as well as their levels of political interest, political knowledge, non-sports news media exposure, and sports involvement. Respondents were asked several demographic questions, along with a question about whether they had ever heard of the candidate, Baron Hill, prior to taking the survey. Data from those indicating that they were already familiar with Baron Hill prior to taking the survey, as well as those who did not answer this question, were thrown out, since these respondents’ candidate image evaluations could have been based on outside knowledge of the candidate and not solely on what appears in the treatment. Twenty cases were thrown out for this reason.

Next, cases were also removed based on time spent viewing the webpage, as it is advisable to “[restrict samples] to those participants who spend a reasonable amount of time on

the treatment and questions – that is, participants who took long enough to answer thoughtfully” (Mutz, 2011, p. 89). A timer was used to measure how long respondents spent viewing the webpages in each treatment. The mean for the sports treatment was 98.72 seconds (SD 147.60) and 87.90 seconds (SD 142.53) for the non-sports treatment. Three respondents took more than 15 minutes (2 of whom took more than 30 minutes) viewing the webpage, which accounts for the exceptionally large standard deviation. Without those 3 respondents, the webpage viewing times for the sports and non-sports treatments become 91.53 seconds (SD 85.34) and 77.78 seconds (SD 65.73), respectively. Based on this author’s assessment, average minimal viewing time for a quick read of the webpage was 45 seconds for the sports treatment and 30 seconds for the non-sports treatment. Readers spending less than these amounts of time in either condition were removed from the data, which accounted for 141 removals. It should be noted that when statistical analyses were conducted with these 141 included in the overall sample, the only statistically significant finding related to the hypotheses occurred in the non-sports treatment; gender was found to be a predictor of IMAGE when a multiple regression was conducted. There are numerous possibilities for the difference in findings, which may or may not have a significant bearing on the ideas being presented in this thesis. It remains, however, this author’s determination to agree with Mutz’s premise – as stated above in this paragraph – that it is best to use a sample comprised of those who spent a reasonable amount of time with the treatments.

For a further 21 respondents, the variable measuring time spent on the webpage is missing data. Three of those people left remarks in the survey’s comment section, all of which make it seem like these respondents were not able to see the webpage. Two of the comments were: “I didn't see the ad about the candidate, so answering those questions when I hadn’t seen the ad you referred to, was totally impossible, and I couldn’t go back and try to find the ad, so, it

is not an accurate portrayal of my feelings....”; and “Who is the guy you were asking about???”

This author is not sure why they were not able to see the webpage, as an examination of data collected about their operating systems and web browsers did not indicate anything suspect.

Data from these respondents were thrown out.

Respondents were also given a manipulation check to ensure that those exposed to the sports condition actually remembered that the candidate was involved in sports, and vice versa. The manipulation check asked: “True or false: Baron Hill played basketball when he was younger?” Of the 301 respondents exposed to the sports treatment, 232 respondents (77.1%) answered true, passing the manipulation check. Two respondents (1.0%) answered false, 61 respondents (20.2%) answered that they did not remember, and 6 respondents (2.0%) did not have a response for this question. Of the 69 total respondents who did not answer “true” in the sports condition, only 32 remained after data were removed because of prior knowledge to Baron Hill and inadequate time spent on the webpage. Data from these remaining 32 were not thrown out of the analysis, as Mutz (2011) advised, so as not to introduce an element on non-randomness to the sample.³ Retaining these 32 cases did not affect the statistical significance of the results.

Measurement Instruments

Candidate Image

A seven-point semantic differential scale with a set of 12 bipolar adjectives was used to gauge respondents’ evaluations of the candidate’s image. The bipolar scale was created by Kaid (2004) and “has been used, with some variations and adaptations, for nearly three decades” (p. 234; see also Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, Yun, & LeGrange, 2007). Following data collection, several of the bipolar adjectives were recoded as needed and the measurement was tested for

³ Mutz (2011) noted: “If these “drop-outs” [referring to cases that do not pass the manipulation check] are non-random – that is, occurring more often in some conditions than others – then this approach can threaten the comparability of experimental groups” (p. 89).

reliability. The highest Cronbach's alpha (.89) was achieved by removing two sets of the bipolar adjectives, namely "calm/excitable" and "aggressive/unaggressive." Factor analysis confirmed that this measurement had two distinct factors: the first made up of all factors besides the two that were removed (42.65% of variance); the second made up of the two removed sets (12.50% of variance). This being the case, the candidate image variable – referred to hereafter as IMAGE – will be considered to be a construct made up of the 10 remaining bipolar adjective sets. This is the dependent variable.

In addition to this semantic differential scale, a feeling thermometer was also included in the survey in order to gauge respondents' feelings toward the candidate. This measurement is commonly used in political research, including in the National Annenberg Election Survey. This measurement was included in the survey as a back-up dependent variable in the event that there were problems with the reliability of the 12-item scale. No major problems with the 12-item scale arose; hence this measurement was not included in the analysis. Out of curiosity, this author did analyze the results using the thermometer as a dependent variable; no findings of note were detected.

Political Involvement

Political interest was measured by asking respondents about their level of interest in what is happening in government and politics, along with a question about how many days during a typical week they discussed politics with friends and family. These questions are identical to the political interest measurement used in the American National Election Studies 2008-2009 panel study questionnaires (hereafter referred to as the ANES panel). Upon combining the questions in hopes of building a political interest construct, Cronbach's alpha was a paltry .49. Because

combining the two questions produced an unreliable measure, this study simply used the “How interested are you in government and politics?” question as the measure of political interest.

Political knowledge was also measured using questions taken from the ANES panel. In order to discourage respondents from using outside sources for help in answering the questions, respondents were made aware that they had 60 seconds to answer each question before they were automatically advanced to the next question. The final question in the political knowledge block, which asked respondents to match four people to their respective political office, did not come directly from the ANES panel. This question came from a previous survey conducted by Quin Monson and was adapted from similar questions asked in the ANES and the National Annenberg Election Survey. Following data collection, the answers were recoded (correct answer = 1; incorrect answers = 0) and combined to produce a measurement of political knowledge ($\alpha = .71$). Of note, respondents were not given a “Don’t Know” option when answering the political knowledge questions (see Mondak & Davis, 2001). Prior and Lupia (2005) noted that “discouraging „Don’t Know“ responses reduces distortions because some people are more likely to guess than others in the absence of encouragement” (p.12).

Like the previous two measurements, political exposure was measured using questions taken from the ANES panel, and these questions asked specifically about how frequently (measured in days per week) respondents attended to news on TV, radio, the Internet, and in print. The answers to these questions were added together to produce a measurement of political exposure.

Prior to data collection, it was this author’s intention to combine the questions gauging political exposure, political knowledge, and political interest into one measure of political involvement, which has been done in other studies (Fiske, Kinder, Larter, 1983; see also Eveland,

et al., 2005). In attempting to do so, this author was left with a meager Cronbach's alpha of .39. Initially disappointed by this lack of reliability, this author was heartened to read Krosnick and Brannon (1993), which mentioned the difficulties others have had in creating a reliable political involvement measure. Instead of combining political interest, knowledge, and exposure, Krosnick and Brannon suggested that "it is most sensible to treat political knowledge, interest, and exposure as distinct constructs that may have distinct effects on political information processing and decision making. Multivariate analyses simultaneously examining these three dimensions clearly seem in order for future studies" (1993, p. 973). Furthermore, Kosicki, McLeod, and McLeod (2011), commenting on the confusing state of the many constructs that are used in political communication research, noted that "[political] involvement is a prime example of such a vague concept with multiple affective, cognitive, and behavioral meanings" (p. 559). In the quest for more valid results, this author has followed the suggestions of these authors by not combining the political interest, knowledge, and exposure measures into an aggregate measure of political involvement, the advantage of which will become apparent as the results are reported below.

Sports Involvement

The sports questions consisted of three sections aimed at measuring respondents' sports affinity, sports exposure, and sports participation. The three sports affinity questions were adapted from the TV affinity scale produced by Rubin, Palmgreen, and Sypher (1994). Following recoding of one of the questions, the sports affinity questions were combined, producing a Cronbach's alpha of .84. Sports media exposure questions were adapted from the ANES panel's political exposure questions referred to above, and responses to these questions were added together to produce a measure of sports exposure. Finally, time spent on athletic

activity was measured using two questions adapted from a scale used by Shank and Beasley (1998). Answers to these questions were added up to produce a measure of sports activity.

All of these questions were then combined in hopes of producing a measure of sports involvement. Upon doing so, the combined questions produced a Cronbach's alpha of only .57. A factor analysis was run, and it was clear that two factors were at play here. The first factor was a combination of the sports affinity and sports exposure questions (46.76% of variance). The second factor was made up of the sports activity questions (12.07% of variance). It could be that even though a person loves sports – playing, going to games, watching on TV, etc. – she may be limited as to the amount of time she can spend playing sports because of any number of constraints, including physical limitations, financial restraints or work responsibilities, to name a few. For example, an avid soccer fan may not be able to play frequently because her work schedule precludes her from joining her friends on the weekend to play. Other potential scenarios that might keep one from playing sports abound. That being the case, this author chose to exclude sports activity from the sports involvement scale, instead basing the scale on the dual components of belief (sports affinity measure) and behavior (sports exposure measure). When these two measures were combined, Cronbach's alpha was .84.

Chapter 4: Results

After centering the independent variables⁴ measuring political knowledge, political interest, political exposure, and sports involvement, a multiple regression was conducted in order to determine the predictors of how voters would rate the candidate's image in the sports and non-sports conditions. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations. The combination of variables significantly predicts image scores in the sports treatment ($F(5,180) = 3.20, p < .01$), but not in the non-sports treatment ($F(5,192) = 1.40, p = .23$). Table 2 shows the standardized beta coefficients. From the data shown, it is clear that gender is a significant predictor of candidate image evaluation in both the sports and non-sports treatments, and that political knowledge is a significant predictor in the sports condition. Sports involvement approaches significance in the sports treatment, but falls just short ($p = .08$). The adjusted R^2 is .06, meaning that gender and political knowledge account for 6% of the variance in how voters assessed candidate image.⁵ Using Cohen's 1988 guidelines (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2007), this denotes a small effect size.

H1 predicts a negative association with candidate image and political involvement in the sports condition. As the political involvement construct could not be tested, H1 as it currently stands is not supported. However, when the variables of political interest, knowledge, and exposure are examined, a negative association ($\beta = -.17$) is evident between IMAGE and political knowledge in the sports condition. As for H2, it was assumed that candidate image and sports

⁴ Gelman and Hill (2007) explain that when centering the variables "the residual standard deviation and R^2 do not change... and the coefficient and standard error of the interaction do not change, but the main effects and the intercept move a lot and are now interpretable based on comparison to the mean of the data" (p. 55).

⁵ The adjusted R^2 is lower than the unadjusted R^2 due to the number of variables used in the regression. The unadjusted R^2 takes into account the effect of all the variables being tested, whereas the adjusted R^2 looks at the variables that reach statistical significance, in this case, gender and political knowledge (see Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2007).

involvement were positively associated in the sports condition. This was disconfirmed in the study, as no statistically significant results were found in the regression.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for IMAGE and Predictor Variables in both the Non-Sports and Sports Treatments (N = 384)

| Variables | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Gender | Pol. Interest | Pol. Knowledge | Pol. Exposure | Sports Involvement |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Non-Sports Treatment (N = 198) | | | | | | | |
| IMAGE | 47.82 | 9.19 | .18** | .05 | -.05 | -.03 | -.06 |
| Gender | 1.57 | .50 | | -.025 | -.36*** | -.17** | -.31*** |
| Pol. Interest | -.05 | .87 | | | .18** | .24*** | -.02 |
| Pol. Knowledge | .01 | 2.28 | | | | .31 | .21*** |
| Pol. Exposure | -.03 | 5.90 | | | | | .29*** |
| Sports Involve. | -.13 | 7.94 | | | | | |
| Sports Treatment (N = 186) | | | | | | | |
| IMAGE | 48.31 | 8.26 | .18** | -.12 | -.21** | .25 | .27 |
| Gender | 1.65 | .48 | | -.02 | -.25*** | .02 | -.24** |
| Pol. Interest | .07 | .84 | | | .43*** | .40*** | .16* |
| Pol. Knowledge | .08 | 2.32 | | | | .44*** | .25*** |
| Pol. Exposure | .02 | 6.17 | | | | | .40*** |
| Sports Involve. | .06 | 9.25 | | | | | |

Note. N for both treatments is less than the previously reported totals of 217 for the non-sports condition and 199 for the sports condition. This is because multiple regression in SPSS uses only cases where no data is missing listwise. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

H3 looks at gender, stating that candidate image and gender would be positively associated for males and females, but that the association would be larger for males. Results from the multiple regression show that gender is a statistically significant predictor of candidate image. To help flesh out an interpretation of these results, a factorial ANOVA was performed, with IMAGE as the dependent variable, and gender and treatment condition (sports or non-sports) as the independent variables. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations from this between-subjects test. Table 4 shows that there was no significant main effect for the treatment variable ($p = .88$), but it does show a statistically significant main effect for gender, $F(1,407) = 10.72$, $p = .001$, eta for gender was .16. According to Cohen's guidelines (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2007), this indicates a small-to-medium effect size. No interaction effect

was observed ($p = .94$). Taken together, this indicates that males and females differed in their assessments of candidate image regardless of treatment.

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for Gender, Political Interest, Political Knowledge, Political Exposure, and Sports Involvement Predicting IMAGE in both the Non-Sports and Sports Treatments (N = 384)

| Variables | B | SEB | β |
|--------------------------------|------|------|---------|
| Non-Sports Treatment (N = 198) | | | |
| Gender | 3.37 | 1.46 | .18* |
| Pol. Interest | .55 | .78 | .05 |
| Pol. Knowledge | .06 | .32 | .02 |
| Pol. Exposure | -.02 | .12 | -.02 |
| Sports Involvement | -.01 | .09 | -.00 |
| Sports Treatment (N = 186) | | | |
| Gender | 2.90 | 1.33 | .17* |
| Pol. Interest | -.61 | .81 | -.06 |
| Pol. Knowledge | -.62 | .31 | -.17* |
| Pol. Exposure | -.01 | .12 | -.01 |
| Sports Involvement | .13 | .07 | .14 |

Note. For Non-Sports Treatment, $R^2 = .04$; $F(5,192) = 1.40$, $p = .23$.

For Sports condition, $R^2 = .08$; $F(5,180) = 3.20$, $p < .01$

* $p < .05$.

H3 hypothesized that when a political candidate is involved in sports, voters' evaluations of that candidate's image will be associated with voters' gender – namely a positive association for females, and a larger positive association for males. The results here suggest that image evaluations increased – albeit slightly – for males and females in the sports condition compared to the non-sports conditions. In addition, females had a higher overall evaluation in both conditions, but the differences in scores between the conditions were larger for males (difference of M between conditions was .20) than for females (difference of M between conditions was .07). In other words, going from the non-sports condition to the sports condition, male IMAGE evaluations increased .004%, whereas female IMAGE evaluations increased .001%. These results confirmed H3.

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and N for IMAGE as a Function of Treatment and Gender

| Treatment | Males | | | Females | | | Total | |
|------------|-------|-------|------|---------|-------|------|-------|------|
| | N | M | SD | N | M | SD | M | SD |
| Non-Sports | 94 | 46.37 | 9.40 | 121 | 49.34 | 9.07 | 48.05 | 9.31 |
| Sports | 68 | 46.57 | 9.17 | 128 | 49.41 | 7.52 | 48.42 | 8.22 |
| Total | 162 | 46.46 | 9.28 | 249 | 49.38 | 8.29 | 48.22 | 8.80 |

Table 4
Analysis of Variance for IMAGE as a Function of Treatment and Gender

| Variable and Source | df | MS | F | η^2 |
|---------------------|-----|--------|--------|----------|
| Gender | 1 | 814.24 | 10.72* | .03 |
| Treatment | 1 | 1.64 | .02 | .00 |
| Gender*Treatment | 1 | .49 | .01 | .00 |
| Error | 407 | 75.95 | | |

* $p = .001$

To sum up the results, H1 as written above is disconfirmed with the caveat that when political knowledge is looked at individually in the sports condition, there does exist a negative association with voters' political knowledge and the candidate's involvement in sports. Voter sports involvement had no statistically significant bearing on how voters evaluated the candidate, thus disconfirming H2. Finally, data showed statistically significant associations between voters' gender and their evaluation of the candidate's image. Males and females both had higher candidate IMAGE evaluations in the sports condition as opposed to the non-sports condition. Furthermore, although females had higher IMAGE scores in both conditions, the difference in mean scores between conditions was higher for males than for females. These results followed the pattern outlined in H3, thereby confirming this hypothesis.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Different voters use different criteria when they evaluate candidates for political office. Some voters will dissect a candidate's stance on certain issues, while others will base their opinions simply on the candidate's political party. Still others will judge candidates on more superficial standards, such as a candidate's physical appearance. And just as voters use a host of strategies for evaluating candidates, candidates employ a host of strategies as they attempt to win over voters. The focus of this study was to explore the intersection of politics and sports in the hopes of shedding light on what effect a candidate's sports involvement might have on how voters evaluate that candidate. With ELM as a theoretical guide for explaining how voters evaluate candidates, this thesis is the first study to utilize an experimental design to explain what effect sports involvement has on voters' evaluations of a political candidate's image. In light of this aim, what do the above results, especially the statistically significant findings and their relatively small effect sizes, mean? It would be beneficial to examine the theoretical, as well as the practical, implications.

Turning first to the theoretical implications of the results, the study was built on a foundation of ELM and the notions of voters' levels of political and sports involvement. Difficulties arose with testing political involvement because the construct as envisaged in this study proved to be unreliable. Because involvement – the bread and butter of ELM – in the political sense could not actually be tested, this study was unable to provide additional validation for ELM. Furthermore, sports involvement as constructed in this experiment led to no statistically significant findings. While not being able to create a reliable political involvement construct, as well as a lack of sports involvement findings, proved disappointing, it was still heartening to find that a relationship did exist between respondents' levels of political knowledge

and how they evaluated the candidate in the sports condition. As political knowledge decreased, candidate image evaluation increased for those exposed to the sports version of the webpage. Likewise, as political knowledge increased, image evaluation decreased. A similar pattern was not detected in the non-sports condition.

A measurement of political knowledge is not the same as political involvement. Knowledge deals with knowing certain facts about civics and current political leaders. It does not say anything about how interested a person is in politics, the levels of exposure a person has to political information, or the actions a person takes to engage in political activities such as voting or volunteering for a campaign. With all this in mind, this author maintains that the findings regarding political knowledge are in line with the ideas brought to light through ELM research as laid out in the literature review above. The literature suggests that when people are less politically knowledgeable, they may be more likely to evaluate a candidate's image on personality and other cues, not on where the candidate stands on political issues. Zaller (1992) reminded us that the nature of political contests makes for many voters who engage in peripheral route processing. He noted that, "most politics, at least in the contemporary United States, is notoriously low key and uninvolved. The stakes are theoretically high, but people find it hard to stay interested.... In such „low-involvement“ conditions, Petty and Cacioppo's work indicates that *most people* engage in „peripheral“ message processing, that is, processing that ignores the intrinsic quality of arguments and uses superficial cues such as source credibility as the basis for accepting or rejecting messages" (p. 47, emphasis mine). Because a candidate's sports involvement evokes certain qualities that are attractive to "most voters" – including the less-politically knowledgeable ones – those with less knowledge gave a higher image evaluation of the sports-involved candidate. So, while political involvement itself was not testable, political

knowledge was, and the findings are keeping in the spirit of the research pertaining to ELM and central versus peripheral route processing.

Turning to the practical implications, the results indicate that sports may indeed be a part of the puzzle – be it an ever so small part, as indicated by the relatively small effect sizes (more on this topic below) – in how voters look at the politicians vying for their votes. Candidates who are involved in sports may have a leg up on candidates who are not involved in sports when it comes to attracting less politically knowledgeable voters. This advantage not only increases as voters' levels of knowledge decrease, but perhaps more importantly, the advantage is seen with both male and female voters.

Before moving on, it is important to have a brief discussion about effect size. The experimental design in this study looked at how voters evaluated a candidate presented to them through media, in this case a webpage. Hence, this research is looking at a media effect – the effect a candidate's sports involvement, as presented via the medium of an Internet webpage, has on voters. In media effects research, a small effects size is not uncommon. Oliver and Krakowiak (2009) pointed out that small to medium effects sizes are frequently reported in media effects research. However, just because an effect size is small does not mean that it does not carry important ramifications when those effect sizes are magnified to encompass society as a whole (see Bushman & Anderson, 2001; also Sparks, Sparks, & Sparks, 2009). In other words, low effect does not equal no effect. A candidate's sports involvement may not turn out voters in droves, and it may not be the deciding factor when most people make their voting decisions. However, it may make a difference for some voters, and in a close election, those voters might just make the difference between who wins and who loses.

Returning to more of the findings' practical implications, while using sports in a campaign may increase a candidate's image in the eyes of males and females, there may be a tradeoff when it comes to voters who have varying degrees of political knowledge. Voters with high levels of political knowledge may see a candidate's use of sports as a distraction from politically substantive issues. This being the case, it would seem prudent for candidates to look at their internal campaign polling data – if available – to see where their strengths and weaknesses lie. If candidates perceive weaknesses amongst less politically knowledgeable voters, then using sports in the campaign may be an avenue to reach those voters. This course of action may alienate voters who are more concerned with a candidate's policy stances than with a candidate's jump shot in basketball. And while that potential for alienation may be the case, we are reminded by Zaller (1992) that, "real world conditions [of low political involvement], according to the work of Petty and Cacioppo and that of others, encourage reliance on peripheral cues" (p. 47). If most people engage in peripheral processing, then the percentage of those who could be alienated by the sports content could be relatively minor. The trade off for showing sports involvement may be politically worthwhile for office seekers, as it appears to have the potential to help win over more voters than it might alienate.

Moreover, sports involvement may be important not only because it communicates certain candidate traits to voters, but also because it may broaden a candidate's media reach, something especially important in our day of selective media exposure and avoidance (Stroud, 2011). Today, ours is a media landscape that gives people a practically limitless selection of news and entertainment in all their varieties. People not only have the option to frequently select what information they want to consume, but, thanks to modern technologies like cable television, the Internet, and digital video recorders, people also have the ability to frequently avoid

information they are not partial to. Prior (2007) pointed out that, “greater media choice leads to greater *voluntary* segmentation of the electorate” (p. 137, emphasis his). This segmentation continues to grow as more and more people, especially younger generations, are turning away from political news (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). The avoidance of political media creates two ramifications of significance to this study: First, political media avoidance means potential voters may lack crucial information needed to make informed decisions at the ballot box; and second, political candidates have an increasingly difficult time reaching voters who live in a custom-built media cocoon, practically isolated from political information. How does a candidate’s sports involvement have the potential to affect these two areas?

Speaking to the first ramification – the paucity of informed voters – it has long been declared that the ideal voter is the one who goes to the ballot box with a well-studied, thorough knowledge of candidates and propositions. Davies (2009) noted that, “in an ideal world... well-informed citizens make voting decisions based on beliefs about which candidate will serve their best interests” (p. 160), and he went on to equate those types of citizens with people who base their votes on political issues and candidates’ leadership abilities. This ideal has proven illusive, and the notion brought forth in this thesis would, at face value, tend to corroborate the impression that seemingly superficial qualities, like a candidate’s sports involvement, have some sway over voters’ decisions. Davies (2009) reported that, “...more politically interested voters, and voters with stronger goals of understanding and orientation were most likely to report that their voting decisions were based on a candidate’s stance on issues and leadership abilities” (p. 174). Conversely, those who were less educated in general, and who used media for entertainment purposes, were found to base their voting decisions on candidate characteristics such as likability and popularity.

It is possible, however, that a characteristic like involvement in sports by a candidate may have some deeper meaning to voters, whether voters realize it or not. Perhaps sports involvement does in fact provide some meaningful way to evaluate a candidate's fitness for office. John Adams, one of the Founding Fathers and the second US president, stated that, "liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people... of the characters and conduct of their rulers."⁶ In this same vein, Davies (2009) noted that an examination of a candidate's leadership abilities is an important component of an ideal voter. Do candidates' sports involvement tell us anything about their character, their conduct, or their leadership abilities? It certainly can.

While not related to the hypotheses examined in this study, looking at the research carried out in this thesis demonstrates that sports involvement does indeed make a difference in how people perceive specific personal attributes of a candidate. Table 5 (below) looks at the mean differences for the sets of bipolar adjectives that were used to evaluate the candidate's image. An independent samples *t*-test was conducted, and results indicate a statistically significant difference in means for the following sets of bipolar adjectives: active/inactive ($p = .01$); successful/unsuccessful ($p = .04$); calm/excitable ($p = .002$); unaggressive/aggressive ($p = .01$); and qualified/unqualified ($p = .04$). Interpreting these results indicates that in the sports condition, the candidate was seen as more active ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.13$ for sports condition; $M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.11$ for non-sports condition; $d = -.26^7$), more successful ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.10$ for sports condition; $M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.23$ for non-sports condition; $d = -.20$), more excitable ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.16$ for sports condition; $M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.17$ for non-sports condition; $d = .30$), and more aggressive ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.23$ for

⁶ From Adams, J. (1765). *A dissertation on the canon and feudal law*.

⁷ The effect size measure *d* "focuses on magnitude of difference rather than strength of association" (Morgan et al., 2007, p. 93). All of the *d* values listed here are considered small effect sizes.

Table 5

Comparison of Non-Sports and Sports Conditions for the 12 sets of Bipolar Adjectives used to Create the IMAGE variable (N = 216 for non-sports condition and 197 for sports condition)

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Strong/Weak | | | -.52 ^a | 407.18 ^a | .60 |
| Non-sports | 4.53 | 1.18 | | | |
| Sports | 4.59 | 1.19 | | | |
| Active/Inactive | | | -2.60 | 411 | .01 |
| Non-Sports | 5.34 | 1.11 | | | |
| Sports | 5.63 | 1.13 | | | |
| Friendly/Unfriendly | | | -1.66 | 411 | .10 |
| Non-Sports | 5.29 | 1.13 | | | |
| Sports | 5.47 | 1.07 | | | |
| Attractive/Unattractive | | | .29 | 411 | .77 |
| Non-Sports | 4.68 | 1.30 | | | |
| Sports | 4.64 | 1.22 | | | |
| Successful/Unsuccessful | | | -2.05 | 411 | .04 |
| Non-Sports | 5.13 | 1.23 | | | |
| Sports | 5.37 | 1.10 | | | |
| Believable/Unbelievable | | | .54 | 411 | .59 |
| Non-Sports | 4.57 | 1.48 | | | |
| Sports | 4.49 | 1.42 | | | |
| Honest/Dishonest | | | -.50 | 411 | .62 |
| Non-Sports | 4.72 | 1.19 | | | |
| Sports | 4.78 | 1.20 | | | |
| Sincere/Insincere | | | -.49 | 411 | .62 |
| Non-Sports | 4.77 | 1.36 | | | |
| Sports | 4.84 | 1.30 | | | |
| Calm/Excitable | | | 3.07 | 411 | .002 |
| Non-Sports | 4.99 | 1.17 | | | |
| Sports | 4.63 | 1.16 | | | |
| Unaggressive/Aggressive | | | 2.47 | 411 | .01 |
| Non-Sports | 4.33 | 1.17 | | | |
| Sports | 4.04 | 1.23 | | | |
| Qualified/Unqualified | | | 2.07 | 411 | .04 |
| Non-Sports | 4.72 | 1.32 | | | |
| Sports | 4.44 | 1.39 | | | |
| Sophisticated/Unsophisticated | | | .98 | 411 | .33 |
| Non-Sports | 4.30 | 1.25 | | | |
| Sports | 4.18 | 1.32 | | | |

^a The *t* and *df* were adjusted because variances were not equal.

sports condition; $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.17$ for non-sports condition; $d = .24$), but less qualified ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.39$ for sports condition; $M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.32$ for non-sports condition; $d = .20$).

What does this tell us? While not saying anything about those candidates who merely display a fan-like interest in a sport, those candidates who are shown as being actively engaged in sports – like the candidate used in this experiment – may be telling voters more about themselves than simply that they know how to shoot a basket. They are telling voters in subtle ways that they possess certain traits, some of which, like being active, are important to voters evaluations of leaders as mentioned above in the literature review. On the other hand, sports involvement also appeared to emote the idea that a candidate is less qualified. This would suggest that candidates should exercise caution in utilizing sports in their campaigns, especially if a candidate is already perceived as lacking the qualifications of a leader. In such a scenario, sports involvement could prove a detriment to the candidate in the eyes of some voters. With all this in mind, it might behoove the voter looking for the best leader to examine not only a candidate's voting habits, but the candidate's fitness habits as well.

In this discussion of political knowledge and less-informed voters, it is noteworthy to mention something about registered voters and actual voting. While registering to vote and actually going to the polls are not the same thing, the fact that all of this study's respondents are registered voters says that they have at least expressed interest in civic participation. Furthermore, these are the very people of interest to a study such as this, because these are the people who actually go out and vote. As an example, in the 2008 U.S. presidential election, 71 percent of voting-age adults were registered to vote, and 64 percent of voting-age adults actually voted. This translates into 90 percent of registered voters having actually voted (see File & Crissey, 2012). These numbers are not uncommon in recent U.S. presidential elections. With

this in mind, it is encouraging to know for the sake of this study's findings that people with low levels of political knowledge do go and vote. When these less-informed voters do head to the ballot box, they will in part base their evaluations of political candidates on non-issue factors, such as sports involvement.

The reverse of the argument that sports involvement actually tells us something substantive about candidates is that it might not tell us enough of what is really important. Sure, a candidate might be handsome or popular, but those characteristics provide little insight into how a candidate will perform at representing the people who elected him. Sports involvement might say something of a candidate's physical strength, but it tells us nothing about the candidate's policy strengths. So, if a candidate attribute like sports involvement is attracting the attention of more voters the next question to ask is, is it attracting the type of voter who is making informed ballot box decisions that will lead to the betterment of the electorate? Declining levels of civic engagement are often lamented, but the types of efforts employed to raise those levels should be thought out carefully. Feeding the malnourished with marshmallows might fill their stomachs, but what does it do for their long-term health? Likewise, attempting to attract more voters through emphasizing a candidate's personal qualities might increase voter turnout, but if these new arrivals are basing their voting decisions on candidate characteristics instead of political issues that have real ramifications for their lives and country, then what does such engagement mean for the health of the body politic? One counter to this argument could be that a candidate's sports involvement could spark an interest in politics that was not previously there, a topic which will be discussed next.

Turning to the second ramification, the question should be asked: With so many avoiding political information sources, how do candidates reach potential voters who have turned off and

tuned out political news? While political news avoiders certainly have a variety of interests, one place politicians could turn to find some of these potential voters is sports media. To cite one example (of many) from 2011, President Obama attended a NCAA college basketball game that was played on the deck of the USS *Carl Vinson*, an aircraft carrier stationed in California.⁸ Not only did the camera frequently show shots of Obama cheering in the stands, but he was interviewed at halftime by ESPN reporters and asked about topics ranging from basketball to politics. College basketball fans who tuned in to watch this contest between number one ranked North Carolina and Michigan State would have had trouble avoiding exposure to political information and President Obama, no matter how vehemently they may avoid political news. Sports-related content on television, the radio, the Internet, and in print are potential places for politicians to turn to in order to garner greater exposure and to make themselves familiar to those who would otherwise avoid political news. As Prior (2007) noted, “if... hard-to-screen messages can reach entertainment fans through the wall of disinterest, even people with a clear preference for entertainment may end up participating in the political process” (p. 284).

In summary, showing involvement in sports, and in particular playing sports, seems to provide an edge for politicians when it comes to how they are perceived by voters. Sports involvement appears to emote certain candidate characteristics, such as energy, that may appeal to men and women alike, as well as those with lower levels of political knowledge. In contrast to this appeal is that sports involvement may provide a way for voters to pick candidates not based on important political considerations, but on less important personality considerations. It may also be a turn off for voters looking for a more politically substantive candidate and campaign. While this may be the case, it is also possible that sports involvement may help a candidate reach

⁸ More information about Obama’s presence at the game can be retrieved from: http://espn.go.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/7221819/president-barack-obama-salutes-troops-carrier-classic

those disinterested in politics, potentially sparking a new or renewed interest in civic engagement in the lives of some sports enthusiasts. Prior (2007) wrote that “inequality in political knowledge and turnout increases as a result of voluntary, not circumstantial, consumption decisions” (p. 137). Perhaps sports involvement helps engage some people politically, helping to gently turn the tide in a small way from the present trend of inequality in political turnout and knowledge.

Limitations

Several limitations existed in this study that must be discussed. As referred to already multiple times, the inability to create a reliable “political involvement” construct ($\alpha = .387$) hampered the ability to test H1. This was partly overcome by conducting a multiple regression using the political interest, knowledge, and exposure variables, where a statistically significant finding was found for political knowledge in the sports condition.

Two other data items also posed limitations to the study, the first dealing with the manipulation check, the second dealing with the gender of the respondents in both conditions. Regarding the manipulation check, after cases were thrown out that did not meet the minimum time required to read the webpages, there were still 32 respondents who failed the manipulation check. This indicates that the manipulation as constituted in this study may have been too subtle. A stronger manipulation may have produced more robust results. As for the gender of the recipients, a randomization check revealed that there were nearly twice as many females (128) than males (68) in the sports condition, as well as more females (121) than males in the non-sports condition (94). Would different patterns of results have emerged had the numbers of females and males been more balanced? Only another study with a more even mix of males and females could provide that answer.

A further issue regarding gender, as well as other demographic variables, also bears discussing. Many of the demographics of those sampled do not match up well with the demographics of Salt Lake City residents. Respondents tended to be females who were well-educated, white, and earning an above-average income. How did this affect the results? One cannot tell in this single study alone. It could be that had the sample been different, for example if the sample contained more respondents who had not gone to college or who earned a smaller income, that results could have been different. Future studies, as addressed in the section below, will need to examine samples of voters who possess a wider array of socio-economic demographics than those in this sample.

The type of device used by respondents to take the survey could have also been a potential limitation to the study. A randomization check showed that close to 20% of respondents in both conditions used smartphones, such as iPhones, to take the survey. The nature of the electronic files of the manipulated webpages used in the treatments, along with current limitations in the Qualtrics survey software, may have given smartphone users a more difficult time in actually looking over and reading the candidate webpage they were asked to view. They would have had to scroll back and forth, as well as up and down, in order to read the entire page and eventually click the “next” button to continue with the survey. Did this prove problematic for some? It could have been, which is an issue that will have to be addressed with advances in survey software and other technologies.

Another potential limitation was the use of a webpage instead of a political advertisement as the treatment. While a candidate’s webpage is something more modern than a political mailer, it can be assumed that someone who is less interested in politics would not venture to a candidate’s website and read a biography filled with a litany of personal and policy

accomplishments. In the hopes of achieving greater ecological validity, future studies should expose subjects to campaign messages that are more difficult to avoid during campaign season, namely political advertisements. Billboards, political mailers, television commercials, Internet banner ads, and other advertisements are all capable of reaching even the most vehement non-news watchers. Ubiquitous during any campaign season, these ads provide the little information that some voters have about candidates, and since the politically uninvolved lack the foundational knowledge about politicians and policies that comes from robust news, they may be more susceptible to the persuasive messages being presented in these ads (see Haugtvedt, Schumann, Schneier, & Warren, 1994). As Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein (2004) said, "...if the political diet of most Americans is lacking in crucial information, campaign ads represent the multivitamins of American politics" (p. 725). This will be discussed further below in the Future Research section.

A further limitation to the practical applicability of this study is that it asked respondents to make an evaluation of a candidate after only one relatively brief exposure to a single piece of candidate information. In real life, political campaigns go on for weeks, months, and even years. During the duration of a campaign, voters often come in contact with a host of information from multiple people and parties upon which they can base their candidate evaluations and, ultimately, voting decisions.

In spite of the limitations, this author is confident in the vigor of the study's results. Numerous measures were taken, as outlined in the Methods section, to help ensure that the results of this experimental design would be valid. The random sample of respondents was presented with factual information about an actual candidate for public office. The webpages used in the sports and non-sports conditions were minimally-manipulated versions of a webpage

from the candidate's real campaign website. Survey questions used to collect data for the dependent and independent variables have been tested time and again in other studies, as well as in pilot studies conducted by this author. Data have been statistically analyzed with the assistance of multiple researchers to help eliminate any bias and ensure accuracy. While no experiments, including this one, are without their limitations, this author is confident that the results of this thesis are valid and aid in furthering our understanding of the complex communication dynamic that exists between voters and political candidates.

Future research

That politicians continue to go to great lengths to cast themselves as athletes and sports aficionados is a sign that they think doing so has an impact on the electorate, and this study confirmed that being involved in sports does make a difference. To this author, this indicates that studying sports and politics should continue to be a research topic. As mentioned above, future studies into how voters evaluate candidates should present subjects with treatments they would more likely be exposed to in real-life settings, such as a television commercial or web-based advertisement. Doing so may provide a more accurate picture of how voters of all stripes, especially voters with low levels of political knowledge, evaluate candidates who are involved in sports. Additionally, research involving sports and politics should look at whether sports involvement increases intention to vote and voter turnout. Does sports involvement by a candidate have enough of a draw for some people that it will help bring them to the ballot box?

Further research should also look at different sports to see if some sports are better than others at emoting favorable personality characteristics for candidates. For example, what does it say to voters when a candidate is involved in football as opposed to windsurfing? During the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, Democratic nominee for president John Kerry was

photographed windsurfing, and those pictures were widely disseminated in the media. Political pundits commented on how Kerry's participation in an elite sport "did not bring credibility or visual coherence to his „fighting for the middle class“ message (Grabe & Bucy, 2011, p. 231). This author recently heard several TV political commentators refer to an incident involving Mitt Romney riding a jet ski as Romney's "windsurfing moment."

Also, it would be worthwhile to see if a difference exists between those candidates who actually play sports as opposed to those candidates who merely show an interest in athletic teams or watching sporting events. As mentioned above, it would appear that actual participation in sports by a candidate would appear to emote more favorable characteristics than merely being a fan. Until studies are undertaken, however, one can only speculate. In addition, it may prove enlightening to sit down with study participants after an experiment and interview them to gain a better understanding of what seeing a sports-involved candidate means to them.

Conclusion

In the recorded history of our world, athletic achievement and physical prowess have frequently been associated with powerful leaders (Bonde, 2009). In ancient times, physical strength helped leaders conquer enemies and defend their homelands. Modern democratic governments no longer require leaders to wield swords in defense of their lands, yet voters are still attracted to candidates who are able to display strength and energy. Today, those who would be our leaders have turned to sports as one of many avenues to not only highlight their abilities, but also as an attempt to find a wider audience, to broaden their appeal, and to tell voters, "I'm a normal, down-to-earth citizen just like you."

Do the efforts of these politicians make a difference in the eyes of voters? The answer provided by this thesis is, yes. While this study's effect sizes were modest, they nevertheless tell

us that sports can make a difference. And when an election can be decided by only a few votes, it may mean the difference between being the winner or the loser. This thesis demonstrated that Nixon was on to something with his baseball lists, that “The Gipper” was conjuring up more than movie memories with his nickname, and that Obama was doing more than merely getting some exercise as he dribbled a basketball down the court. The intuition that drove these and other candidates to use sports involvement was correct, and that intuition is now backed up with empirical evidence. Sports involvement by political candidates does indeed have a subtle, but noticeable, effect on how voters evaluate candidates.

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Appendix A: Initial Invitation Email and Reminder Emails

Initial Invitation Email⁹

Dear \${m://FirstName},

Right now is an exciting time in politics, both in Utah and nationally. Candidates are trying harder than ever to win over voters. I invite you to participate in a Utah Voter Poll that will help us better understand how voters think about political candidates.

Your participation is very important to having an accurate sample of Utah voters. Please take a few minutes now to complete the questions. Most people will finish in about 10 minutes.

Follow this link to the Survey: \${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
\${l://SurveyURL}

Thank you for your participation.
J. Quin Monson, Ph.D.
Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy
Brigham Young University

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the survey about?

This survey addresses how voters think about political candidates.

How long will it take to answer?

About 10 minutes, depending on your answers and the speed of your internet connection.

What if I cannot access the survey?

Please respond to this email or call us at 801-422-5237.

Why did I get this email?

Your name was selected at random from a publicly available list of Utah voters.

Who is conducting this survey?

This survey is being conducted by the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University.

Are my answers confidential?

Yes! Your confidentiality and privacy will be completely protected. We only report results for

⁹ All emails contained the same "Frequently Asked Questions" section. This section will not be displayed in the reminder emails below.

groups of people, not for individuals. See our complete privacy policy at <http://utahvoterpoll.org/privacy.htm>.

How can I remove my name from this list?

Click on the removal link below or send an e-mail to utahvoterpoll@byu.edu from this e-mail address with “remove” in the subject line. You can also call 801-422-5237 or write us at Utah Voter Poll, Department of Political Science, 745 SWKT, Provo, UT 84602.

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:
\${l://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}

First Reminder Email

Dear \${m://FirstName},

You recently received an invitation to participate in the Utah Voter Poll. This is just a reminder that the survey is still available, but will soon close.

Follow this link to the Survey: \${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
\${l://SurveyURL}

Your participation is very important to us and helps us have an accurate sample of Utah voters. We hope you will take a few minutes now to complete the questions.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,
J. Quin Monson, Ph.D.
Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy
Brigham Young University

Second Reminder Email

Dear \${m://FirstName},

We are conducting an important survey of Utah voters that addresses how voters think about political candidates. It will close Saturday, June 9 at midnight. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey now.

Your *participation is voluntary*, and your answers are *completely confidential*. Your cooperation

is very important to us and necessary to make the survey accurate and valuable. The survey takes most people about 10 minutes to complete.

Follow this link to the Survey: [\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
[\\${1://SurveyURL}](#)

Thank you for your participation.

J. Quin Monson, Ph.D.
Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy
Brigham Young University

Final Reminder Email

Dear [\\${m://FirstName}](#),

This is your last chance to participate in the Utah Voter Poll. The survey will close tomorrow, June 9, at midnight. By taking the survey, you will be providing invaluable insights into how voters think about political candidates. Most people finish in 10 minutes.

Follow this link to the Survey: [\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
[\\${1://SurveyURL}](#)

Thank you for your participation.

J. Quin Monson, Ph.D.
Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy
Brigham Young University

Appendix B: QuestionnaireInstructions

Welcome to the Utah Voter Poll

Thank you for responding to our survey. Your time and opinions are greatly valued. Please note that your participation is voluntary and that all of your answers will remain strictly confidential.

While completing this survey, please do not use any outside sources (including Google, the person sitting next to you, etc.) to answer the questions; only use your own current knowledge. Please answer all questions. The survey should take 10 minutes.

To begin the survey, click on the "Next>>" button below. You can use the "Next>>" button on the bottom right of the screen to move to the next question. If during the survey you do not see the button, scroll down until you see it. Please do not use your browser's own forward or back buttons.

Thank you for your help.

(Browser Meta Info collected, which included: Browser; Version; Operating System; Screen Resolution; Flash Version; Java Support; User Agent. This question will not be displayed to the recipient.)

Please read the following instructions carefully before clicking the "Next>>" button below.

The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the voting preferences of adults. On the next page, you will see a biographical webpage for a real U.S. congressional candidate. Please spend several minutes looking over the webpage and reading the text of the webpage in its entirety. Once you are done reviewing the webpage, click the "Next>>" button, where you will then be asked several questions. You will not be able to refer back to the webpage, so please review it carefully before you move on.

Note: After clicking the "Next>>" button below, it may take a moment for the image of the candidate's webpage to load.

Sports webpage

Hoosiers for Hill Baron Hill: Tough. Independent. Fights for Southern Indiana.

ABOUT BARON | NEWS | ISSUES | MEDIA | GET INVOLVED | CONTACT

About Baron

BOOKMARK | EMAIL | PRINT | FONT SIZE: AAA

In 1998, the fine people of Southern Indiana elected me to serve in the United States House of Representatives, and I have had the distinct honor of representing them since then. I have served on the House Agriculture Committee, the Armed Services Committee, and the Joint Economic Committee.




I am a lifelong resident of Southern Indiana. It is the place where my wife of more than 35 years, Betty Schepman Hill, and I raised our three daughters – Cara, Jennifer and Elizabeth.

Betty and I stay active in the local community through our church and local civic organizations, and I have participated in the Elks Club, the American Red Cross, and the Seymour Chamber of Commerce. I also served as the President of the Seymour Jaycees. I have very fond memories of growing up in the Southern Indiana community of Seymour. The only time I left Southern Indiana was to attend college at Furman University. There I had a successful basketball career and graduated with a degree in history.



Following graduation, Betty and I returned to Seymour, where I ran a small business for 15 years, focusing on insurance and real estate services. After getting involved in some community organizations, my political interest was piqued, and I ran for the Indiana General Assembly. I had the honor of serving in that body from 1982-1990.

Growing up, I was highly involved in athletics, setting high school records in basketball, football and track. I am humbled to still be one of Seymour High School's all-time leading basketball scorers and was inducted into the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame in 2000. I still love playing basketball and being involved in sports in my Southern Indiana community.



I want to continue serving as an independent voice for the people of Indiana, fighting for more and better jobs for hard-working Hoosiers, real fiscal reform, a jobs package that will create homegrown jobs while significantly strengthening our national and economic security, and ensuring our troops and veterans have the benefits they need and deserve.

Baron Hill calls out a play for Seymour High School, 1970

» Contribute

» Volunteer

Email Signup
Stay in touch with the campaign!

Email Address
Zip Code Submit

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

Non-Sports webpage

Indiana for Hill
Baron Hill: Tough. Independent. Fights for Southern Indiana.

ABOUT BARON | NEWS | ISSUES | MEDIA | GET INVOLVED | CONTACT

About Baron

BOOKMARK | EMAIL | PRINT | FONT SIZE: AAA

In 1998, the fine people of Southern Indiana elected me to serve in the United States House of Representatives, and I have had the distinct honor of representing them since then. I have served on the House Agriculture Committee, the Armed Services Committee, and the Joint Economic Committee.



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I want to continue serving as an independent voice for the people of Indiana, fighting for more and better jobs for hard-working Indianans, real fiscal reform, a jobs package that will create homegrown jobs while significantly strengthening our national and economic security, and ensuring our troops and veterans have the benefits they need and deserve.

» **Contribute**

» **Volunteer**

Email Signup
Stay in touch with the campaign!

Email Address

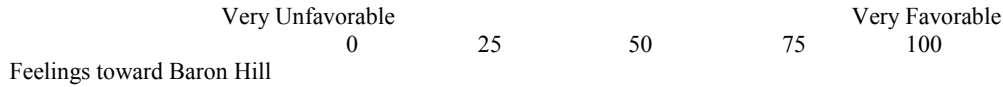
Zip Code

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

Candidate Evaluation

Based on the webpage you just viewed, please rate how favorably you feel toward the candidate, Baron Hill, on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 is very unfavorable, 100 is very favorable, and 50 is neutral.

To rate the candidate, place your cursor on the "slider bar" at the midpoint and drag the indicator to the desired position. A number will appear to the right of the slider bar to show you where you are at on the scale.



Below are several pairs of words that could be used to describe the candidate, Baron Hill, based on the webpage you just viewed. For each pair of words, please click on a circle that best represents your views. If you completely agree that a word describes the candidate, select the circle closest to that word. If you don't completely agree, you may select a circle between the two words.

(This was a 7-pt. scale)

| | | |
|-----------------|--|---------------|
| Strong | | Weak |
| Inactive | | Active |
| Unfriendly | | Friendly |
| Attractive | | Unattractive |
| Unsuccessful | | Successful |
| Believable | | Unbelievable |
| Dishonest | | Honest |
| Insincere | | Sincere |
| Excitable | | Calm |
| Aggressive | | Unaggressive |
| Qualified | | Unqualified |
| Unsophisticated | | Sophisticated |

Political Interest

How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?

Note: Click on the box below to select your response.

(Answer choices – which were made available in a drop down menu in this, and all subsequent questions – are: Extremely interested; Very interested; Moderately interested; Slightly interested; Not interested at all)

During a typical week, how many days do you talk about politics with family or friends?

(Answer choices are: 0-7)

Political Knowledge

Next are some questions to help us see how much information about politics gets out to the public. Please answer these questions on your own, without asking anyone or looking up the answers. Many people don't know the answers to these questions, but we'd be grateful if you would please answer every question, even if you're not sure what the right answer is.

You will have 60 seconds to answer each question after it appears on the screen. If you do not answer within 60 seconds, you will be automatically advanced to the next question.

How many times can an individual be elected President of the United States under current laws?

(Answer choices are: 1-6; an unlimited number of times)

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

For how many years is a United States Senator elected - that is how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?

(Answer choices are: 1-12)

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

How many U.S. Senators are there from each state?

(Answer choices are: 1-12)

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

For how many years is a member of the United States House of Representatives elected - that is how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. House member? (Answer choices are: 1-12)

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

According to federal law, if the President of the United States dies, is no longer willing or able to serve, or is removed from office by Congress, the Vice President becomes the President. If the Vice President were unable or unwilling to serve, who would be eligible to become president next?

(Answer choices are: Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; Secretary of State; Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; U.S. Senate Majority Leader; President pro tempore of the U.S. Senate)

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

What percentage vote of the House and the Senate is needed to override a Presidential veto?

(Answer choices are: A simple majority; Two-thirds; Three-fourths; Ninety percent)

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

Which office is currently held by each of the following: John Boehner; Mitch McConnell; Elena Kagan; Harry Reid?

(Answer choices are: US Senate Majority Leader; US Senate Minority Leader; US Speaker of the House; US House Majority Leader; US House Minority Leader; Chairman of the Federal Reserve; None of the above)

Timing: This page timer will not be displayed to the recipient.

For the rest of the questions on the survey, you may take as much time as you like.

With all that's going on in people's lives these days, some people keep up with politics, while others don't. The next 4 questions ask about your exposure to news and political information. Please click 'Next' to continue.

Political Exposure

During a typical week, how many days do you do each of the following:

Watch news on TV, NOT including sports?

Watch or read news on the Internet, NOT including sports?

Read news in a printed newspaper, NOT including sports?

Listen to news on the radio, NOT including sports?

(Answer choices are: 0-7)

Sports Block

You're almost done with the survey.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about sports.

Watching sporting events (either on TV or online) is very important in my life.

Going to professional or collegiate sporting events in person is very important in my life.

I could easily do without watching sports for several days.

(Answer choices are: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neither agree or disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree)

During a typical week, how many days do you do each of the following:

Listen to sports or sports-related programs on the radio?

Read or watch sports-related content on the Internet?

Watch sports or sports-related programs on TV?

Read sports-related content in a printed newspaper?

(Answer choices are: 0-7)

During a typical week, how many days do you do each of the following:

Engage in exercise activities such as running, yoga, lifting weights, etc.?

Engage in sports such as golf, tennis, basketball, softball, etc.? (NOTE: Do NOT include time spent on exercise activities such as running, yoga, lifting weights, etc.)

(Answer choices are: 0-7)

Other

True or false: Baron Hill played basketball when he was younger?

(Answer choices are: True; False; Don't Remember)

Did you know about Baron Hill prior to taking this survey?

(Answer choices are: Yes; No)

Demographics

The last few questions are for classification purposes and will help us properly analyze responses to this survey. As you may already know, we never disclose the identity of any individual. Your answers will always be kept strictly confidential. We only report results for groups of people, not for individuals.

You are:

(Answer choices are: Male; Female)

What is your current age?

(Answer choices are: 18-99)

Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a(n):

(Answer choices are: Strong Democrat; Not so strong Democrat; Independent leaning Democrat; Independent; Independent leaning Republican; Not so strong Republican; Strong Republican)

On most political matters do you consider yourself:

(Answer choices are: Strongly conservative; Moderately conservative; Neither, middle of the road; Moderately liberal; Strongly liberal; Don't Know)

What was the last year of school you completed?

(Answer choices are: Some high school or less; High school graduate; Some college; College graduate; Post-graduate)

What, if any, is your religious preference?

(Answer choices are: Protestant; Catholic; LDS/Mormon; Jewish; Other; No preference/No religious affiliation; Prefer not to say)

How active do you consider yourself in the practice of your religious preference?

(Answer choices are: Very active; Somewhat active; Not very active; Not active; Does not apply/Prefer not to say)

Are you:

(Answer choices are: American Indian/Native American; Asian; Black/African American; Hispanic/Latino; White/Caucasian; Pacific Islander; Other)

Are you currently:

(Answer choices are: Married; Divorced; Widowed; Living with partner; Single)

What do you expect your 2012 family income to be?

(Answer choices are: Under \$25,000; \$25,000 - \$39,999; \$40,000 - \$49,999; \$50,000 - \$74,999; \$75,000 - \$99,999; \$100,000 - \$124,999; \$125,000 - \$149,999; Over \$150,000)

Finally, for quality control purposes, please rate your experience taking this poll. Would you consider the experience:

(Answer choices are: Excellent; Good; Fair; Poor; Don't Know)

Thank you for completing the survey. If you have any comments about this survey or politics in Utah in general, please enter them here.

Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)