

# **Yes We Can! Valence Politics and Electoral Choice in America, 2008**

by

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This presentation uses data gathered in the CCAP six-wave national panel survey to investigate forces shaping the choices voters made in the 2008 American presidential election. Analyses indicate that a valence politics model works very well -- concerns about the deepening economic crisis, candidate images and mutable partisan attachments tell much of the statistical story. The 2008 presidential election was a classic Democratic win; Barack Obama assembled a coalition of working class people, minorities, women and youth. In this regard, African Americans overwhelmingly endorsed Obama, but their high level of support for a Democratic presidential candidate was not atypical. What was important was Obama's ability to motivate African Americans and other components of his party's base to go to the polls. Also, the victory of an African American candidate does not signal the irrelevance of race in contemporary American politics. Rather, racial attitudes had strong effects on candidate images, and these images were key determinants of electoral choice. More generally, although the "fundamentals" favored the Democrats in 2008, the election outcome was not a foregone conclusion. Running hard on valence issues, Obama was dealt a strong hand, and he played it well.