

NEW PERSPECTIVES AND EVIDENCE ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

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■ **Abstract** We review recent empirical evidence that shows political campaigns are more potent than widely believed, focusing on the conceptual and methodological advances that have produced these findings. Conceptually, a broader definition of effects—that includes learning and agenda-control, as well as vote choice—characterizes contemporary research. This research also features two kinds of interactive models that are more complex than the traditional hypodermic (message-based) approach. The resonance model considers the relationship between message content and receivers' predispositions, while the strategic model highlights the interactions between competing messages. Finally, we attribute the emergence of stronger evidence in favor of campaign effects to the use of new methodologies including experimentation and content analysis, as well as the more sophisticated use of sample surveys.

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INTRODUCTION

These are heady times for students of political communication. To an extent not previously seen, politicians' use—even manipulation—of the mass media to promote political objectives is now not only standard practice but in fact essential to survival. Recent months have seen political practitioners engage in high-stakes media games, including the apparently intentional leaking of secret grand jury proceedings to reporters, the national telecast of presidential deposition testimony, and the forced resignation of Speaker Newt Gingrich in the immediate aftermath of a failed advertising campaign. At the same time, the attention of political theorists, not to mention of other students of political processes, is turning toward the public arena. These scholars, especially those who style themselves “deliberative democrats,” argue that the health of democratic societies depends on the quality of political communication.

Public relations and media advocacy have penetrated virtually all governmental arenas, even extending into the traditionally invisible judicial process. However, it is in the context of political campaigns that these strategies are most extensive and likely to have the greatest real-world impact. Electoral reforms and the influence of the broadcast media have gradually rendered grassroots organizations and party infrastructure less relevant, thereby transforming political campaigns from labor-intensive clashes between disciplined party organizations to capital-intensive, choreographed media spectacles. The ever-increasing level of investment made by the candidates is truly stunning—estimated at over one billion dollars for the 1998 cycle alone.

One question that defies analysis is why the participants in the political marketplace continue to invest at these levels when decades of academic research into the effects of media-based political campaigns purports to demonstrate that exposure to campaigns mainly reinforces voters' preexisting partisan loyalties. Political scientists still routinely attribute electoral outcomes to structural variables—most notably, the state of the national economy and the level of the incumbent president's popularity—giving short shrift to the specifics of day-to-day campaign events. These are generally viewed as having “minimal consequences” (see Abramowitz 1996, Gelman & King 1993, Campbell & Mann 1996). Aside from this straightforward empirical claim, there are deeper questions concerning the aggregate effect of this communication on our system of governance.

Our objective in this chapter is to demonstrate that the conventional academic wisdom is mistaken. Campaigns do matter and can be pivotal. In the current regime, the consequences of campaigns are far from minimal. Our view is that the conventional academic wisdom is compromised by conceptual, as well as methodological, inadequacies. Our approach is to identify the existing roadblocks—both conceptual and methodological—to a better understanding of the effects of campaigns, and then to describe cases where scholars have documented the significance of campaigns. We conclude by discussing how new theoretical

and methodological vantage points can revive the study of modern, media-based campaigns while linking them to the central concerns of democratic theory.

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ROADBLOCKS

Perhaps the most fundamental obstacle to understanding the real-world role of political campaigns is a conceptual limitation on what effects are deemed relevant. Traditional research has looked mainly at persuasion (i.e. the effect of a campaign on voter preference). Within this definition, the law of minimal consequences has some validity because the evidence tends to suggest that exposure to campaigns merely activates voters' prevailing partisan sentiments (for a recent review of the evidence, see Iyengar & Petrocik 1998). Limiting the search to persuasion effects necessarily ignores a variety of other highly relevant campaign effects, the most significant of which may be turnout. Changes in the size and composition of the electorate can alter the distribution of candidate support. The single-minded quest for persuasion effects has also ignored the transmission of information, the setting of campaign agendas, and alteration of the criteria by which candidates are judged. Moreover, even if one were to accept persuasion as the benchmark for campaign effects, identifiable traces of persuasion are bound to be minimal because most campaigns feature offsetting messages. Observable effects should thus be limited to campaigns in which one candidate has a significant resource or skills advantage. This condition occurs rarely, if at all, in presidential campaigns, the races most often studied.

Turning to methodological issues, researchers have been (and still are) limited by their dependence on survey methods. The founding fathers of the field (including Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and their successors at the University of Michigan) capitalized on survey research. However, like all scientific techniques, survey methods have weaknesses, of which the logic of treating respondents' self-reported exposure to campaign communication as a reliable surrogate for actual exposure is particularly dubious. In this tradition, the standard test for campaign effects is the differences in voting behavior between respondents who self-report high or low levels of exposure to the campaign.

The assumption that self-reported exposure converges with actual exposure is problematic on several grounds. Most important, people have notoriously weak memories for past events, especially when the "event" in question concerns an encounter with a particular political campaign (e.g. see Bradburn et al 1987, Pierce & Lovrich 1982). In the experiments conducted by Ansolabehere & Iyengar (1998) concerning the effects of campaign advertising, for example, over 50% of the participants who were exposed to an advertisement were unable, some 30 minutes later, to recall having seen the advertisement. Respondents also make errors in the opposite direction, over-reporting exposure, possibly because these

affirmative responses speak well of their civic virtue. In short, the considerable measurement error in self-reports necessarily attenuates estimates of the effects of political campaigns (see Bartels 1993, 1997).

Adding further confusion to the evaluation of campaigns, self-reported exposure to campaign messages is often endogenous to political attitudes, including candidate preference. That is, those who choose to tune in to the campaign differ systematically (in ways that matter to their vote choice) from those who do not. To take the case of campaign advertising, people who can recall an advertisement are likely to differ in innumerable ways from those who cannot. In addition to having better memories, the former are likely to be more interested in politics, more attached to the candidates, more informed about the issues, and more likely to vote. The presence of feedback between vote intention and recall of advertising seriously undermines claims about the impact of exposure to advertising on participation. The 1992 National Election Study survey shows that respondents who recalled a “negative” campaign advertisement were more likely to intend to vote (Wattenberg & Brians 1999) than those who did not, leading to the conclusion that negative campaigning stimulated turnout. But was it exposure to negative advertising that prompted turnout, or was the greater interest in campaigns among likely voters responsible for their higher level of recall? When recall of advertising in the same survey was treated as endogenous to vote intention and the effects reestimated using appropriate two-stage methods, the sign of the coefficient for recall was reversed: Those who recalled negative advertisements were less likely to intend to vote (see Ansolabehere et al 1999). Unfortunately, most survey-based analyses fail to disentangle the reciprocal effects of self-reported exposure to the campaign and partisan attitudes/behaviors.

Survey researchers have turned to longitudinal designs for monitoring the effects of campaigns. This obviates some of the problem with “one-shot” designs and is understandable in light of the fact that modern presidential campaigns are year-long affairs (if not longer). The Iowa caucuses occur in January, the primary season ends in June, the nominating conventions are held in August, and serious “campaigning” begins after Labor Day. In this environment, most voters are likely to arrive at their presidential candidate choice well before September 1 (see Iyengar & Petrocik 1998, Bartels 1997). Despite a handful of studies that track campaigns over their entire life span, most of the longitudinal evidence is derived from surveys administered after September 1. Not surprisingly, this evidence has hardly dented the conventional wisdom. Finkel’s (1993) thorough analysis of the 1980 National Election Study panel survey typifies the literature: Precampaign attitudes and beliefs could account for almost 80% of the variance in vote choice. In addition, when attitudes did change during the campaign, they invariably did so in a manner consistent with voters’ longstanding partisanship.

Aggregate-level longitudinal studies, by tracking changes in national sentiment, also provide estimates of campaign-based “interventions” in public opinion. Given the importance of contextual factors such as the state of the economy, these studies have the especially valuable ability to compare the effects of short-

term campaign events on voter preference with the effects of the campaign context. Holbrook's (1994, 1995) studies of trends in candidate support during recent presidential campaigns finds that voters' initial attitudes are paramount. Although campaign events (such as conventions and debates) contribute modestly to net changes in the level of each candidate's support, the effects of the economy and the incumbent president's popularity dwarf these effects (Holbrook 1994, 1995).

Although aggregate time series and panels can generate estimates for the effects of specific events, like the cross-sectional survey, neither addresses the daily variation in campaign communication. In the case of panels, this would require that each respondent be matched to a particular set of media outlets for which the messages are coded for political content and slant—a virtual impossibility. In the case of the few time series studies that do incorporate measures of media content, because they necessarily aggregated to the national level, all voters in a given campaign are assumed to have received the identical message; the only variation in campaign communication occurs between elections. The problem with this aggregate approach, of course, is that it masks the considerable cross-sectional variation in the volume and tone of advertising. For example, Bill Clinton's advertisements were nowhere to be seen in California during the 1992 campaign simply because George Bush had conceded the state. Viewers in the “battleground” states, on the other hand, would have been exposed to much higher doses of advertising (see Shaw 1999, Goldstein 1999). This variation also lends itself to the study of campaign effects (discussed below). Even if one assumes that the candidates choose to campaign everywhere, they are hardly likely to deliver the same message to farmers in South Dakota as to high-technology workers in California. All this contemporaneous diversity in the content and tone of campaigning is ignored in aggregate time series methods (e.g. see Finkel & Geer 1998).

The survey design offering the greatest potential for the study of campaigns combines the panel and time series approaches. This is the repeated cross section in which interviews are carried out sufficiently frequently (on a daily basis) to yield reliable weekly or biweekly national samples that span the entire life of the campaign. This much more expensive design, dubbed the “rolling cross section,” was implemented by the National Election Study group for the 1984 presidential campaign and featured a January-November time frame. More recently, a similar design was implemented to study the Canadian election of 1988 (Johnston et al 1992). Because respondents are interviewed more or less continuously from the earliest stages of the campaign, it is relatively easy to aggregate groups of respondents into precise temporal groupings corresponding to “pretest” and “posttest.” Not surprisingly, the published reports based on these data sets (some of which are described in the next section) reveal several instances of campaigns that “work.”

In summary, the study of campaigns has been impeded by a “drunkard's search” syndrome of sorts, in which researchers congregate at the persuasion “lamppost,” and by methodological “correctness.” By excluding effects other

than persuasion and by remaining committed to the flawed logic of survey design, the state of campaign effects research is often mired in the uninteresting rut of minimal consequences.

BYPASSING THE ROADBLOCKS

Multiple Effects

The diminishing marginal returns from research into the persuasive effects of presidential and other campaigns has naturally encouraged scholars to explore other facets of voter behavior, none of which requires the abandonment of long-held partisan loyalties but which undermine the case for minimal consequences. Based on this research, we can add voter “learning”—the acquisition of information about the candidates and issues—and “agenda control”—the use of campaign rhetoric to set the public’s political agenda—to the catalogue of robust campaign effects.

Learning

Because voters tend to be risk averse and are loathe to support unknown candidates (see Alvarez & Franklin 1994, Bartels 1986, Westlye 1991), information is a precious campaign commodity. Typically, to be known is to be liked, and campaigns generate large quantities of “knowns” on subjects as diverse as family background, military service, and the details of policy proposals. As campaigns have evolved into media affairs, however, the information-function of campaigns has fallen into disrepute. The candidates’ media presentations, especially their reliance on the 30-second televised advertisement, appear superficial, and it is suspected that those superficial campaigns breed superficial voters.

The fears that campaigns are nonsubstantive are based on several observed regularities. The news media tend to treat the campaign first and foremost as a horse race. The candidates are entries, the consultants the jockeys, and the electorate the bettors (for evidence of the predominance of horse-race coverage, see Robinson & Sheehan 1980, Lichter 1988, Task Force on Campaign Reform 1998). Given this framework, daily events are accorded coverage in proportion to their bearing on the “odds.” The Dukakis campaign’s detailed position paper on education policy received no coverage in 1988, but the Massachusetts governor’s brief answer (during a televised debate) to a question about the hypothetical rape of his wife attracted headlines and endless commentary about the candidate’s diminishing chances to win.

In addition to the media’s preoccupation with the political game, market-based journalism must keep voters interested (see Kalb 1998). What better enticement than sex, sleaze, and scandal? In recent months, Americans have become all too familiar with the details of President Clinton’s relationship with Monica Lewinsky, as well as the moral quotient of some of his Republican antagonists (such as

Congressman Henry Hyde). In what might be called Gary Hart's Law, news about character drives out news about public policy (see Sabato 1991).

The final piece of evidence cited by critics of modern campaigns is that even when the candidates and the press do turn their attention to the issues or questions of performance and ideology, the rhetoric takes the form of truncated soundbites rather than well-developed and detailed arguments (Hallin 1994). Moreover, because of the strategic imperatives facing the candidates, these sound bites are generally ambiguous and one-sided (Simon 1997).

Given the rampant cynicism about the information value of media campaigns, it comes as a considerable surprise that campaign exposure—in the form of either paid advertising or news coverage—boosts citizens' political information. The evidence comes in several forms. In a series of experiments carried out by Ansolabehere & Iyengar (1995b, 1996), participants (ordinary citizens of southern California) exposed to a single 30-second advertisement were more able (by a significant margin) than those not exposed to the advertisement to identify the sponsoring candidate's position on the "target" issue. Exposure to issue-oriented advertising also increased the likelihood that participants would cite the candidates' positions on issues as a basis for supporting the sponsoring candidate. Brians & Wattenberg (1996) and Patterson & McClure (1976) obtained similar results using national and regional surveys, respectively. Both these studies found that exposure to campaign advertising (measured in terms of recall of campaign ads) contributed more to issue information than did exposure to newspaper or television coverage of the campaign. However, the question of which source looms larger in voter learning is still a matter of controversy.

There is evidence, contrary to the studies cited above, that news coverage has a greater informational value than do advertisements (Chaffee et al 1994, Zhao & Chaffee 1996). It is, however, difficult to compare results because Chaffee et al employed statewide and local surveys utilizing different designs and indicators. One possible explanation is that presidential advertisements [found to be informative by Ansolabehere & Iyengar (1995b, 1996), Brians & Wattenberg (1996), and Patterson & McClure (1976)] are more likely to feature issue appeals, whereas advertising in statewide or congressional races is more evenly divided between "issue" and "image" appeals (see West 1994, Kern 1989).

The conclusion that campaigns provide voters with substantive information is buttressed by survey designs that rely on alternative indicators of information. The most common framework examines the uncertainty in respondents' knowledge concerning candidates' positions. Franklin's (1991) study of US Senate campaigns in 1988 found that voters exposed to a senatorial campaign were more precise in their perceptions of their incumbent senator's position on a liberal-conservative scale. Alvarez (1997) confirmed this result for a broad array of knowledge and attitudes in analyses of contemporary presidential elections. Using more direct measures of voter knowledge, Bartels (1988) also found significant information gains during the presidential primaries of 1984. In a later study, he found that after accounting for measurement error, respondents in a panel survey

absorbed substantial amounts of information in the 1980 presidential campaign (Bartels 1993). Several scholars have demonstrated that voters exposed to a “hard fought” race, which makes larger volumes of information available, are more engaged and cast better-informed votes (Kahn & Kenney 1997). Generally, as expected, respondents most attuned to the campaign tend to learn faster and end up knowing more.

Although the conclusion that voters gain substantive information from campaigns may seem counterintuitive given what we know about the behavior of reporters, it should come as no surprise that information about the candidates’ personal traits and electoral chances is there for the taking. Popkin’s work (1992, 1996) has shown that voters, like good psychologists, make inferences about the candidates’ personalities based on what they see and read. The sight of President Ford attempting to eat an unshucked tamale sent Hispanic voters a clear signal about Ford’s sensitivity to their concerns; the Republicans’ unrelenting focus on impeachment in 1998 was understood by voters as a sign that Democrats were more concerned about education and social security. Popkin’s work is especially revealing because it shows that voters’ information about the candidates is highly sensitive to the ebb and flow of news. During the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton was saddled with the “Slick Willie” image in the aftermath of news coverage of his marital difficulties and avoidance of military service. Following his triumphant acceptance speech at the convention and the Clinton campaign’s masterful use of “alternative” media outlets, voters began to learn about Clinton’s economic plan and his track record on welfare reform and other issues. As information about Clinton’s policy expertise came to the forefront, impressions of Clinton’s character began to be couched more in terms of “the man from Hope” than “draft-dodger” (Popkin 1996). Finally, there is evidence that the barrage of horse-race stories raises the public’s consciousness of the candidates’ prospects (Mutz 1997). Experimental studies demonstrate that favorable poll results can lead to increased voter support (Brady 1984, Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995a). Thus, especially during the initial rounds of primaries, communication can set campaign “bandwagons” in motion (for evidence from the 1984 primaries, see Bartels 1988).

In sum, campaigns are information-rich events. Contrary to the prevailing wisdom, the information they yield is multifaceted, encompassing the candidates’ chances of winning, their personal traits and mannerisms, and most important, their policy and ideological bearings. Media campaigns may appear superficial, but they do educate citizens.

Agenda Control

If there is one issue on which political scientists and communications specialists agree, it is that ordinary citizens remain at arm’s length from the world of public affairs. As casual observers of the political scene, individuals do not monitor the entire political universe; instead, they attend selectively to a few issues that appear

important at the moment. Of course, the appearance of importance is very much a matter of what editors and journalists choose to cover or ignore. The more prominent some issue in the news media is, the higher the level of importance people accord that issue (see Iyengar & Kinder 1987, Baumgartner & Jones 1993, Rogers et al 1996, McCombs & Estrada 1996). Because candidates are the principal sources of news during campaigns, they are in an advantageous position to simultaneously influence the media and public agendas (see Semetko et al 1991, Dalton et al 1995)

The core implication of agenda setting for the study of campaign effects is that issues deemed significant by the electorate become the principal yardsticks for evaluating the candidates. This pattern (which is consistent with what the social psychologist calls priming) of weighting issues in accordance with their perceived salience has been documented in a series of experimental and nonexperimental studies (for a recent review of priming research, see Krosnick & Miller 1996). Iyengar & Kinder (1987), for instance, found that the news media's sudden preoccupation with the Iranian hostage issue in the closing days of the 1980 presidential campaign caused voters to think about the candidates' ability to control terrorism when choosing between Carter and Reagan. Naturally, this phenomenon proved disadvantageous to President Carter.

Given the number of considerations that the average voter employs, and the consequences of priming (which are tantamount to indirect persuasion in that altering the criteria can alter the choice), candidates are motivated to introduce and pursue issues on which they enjoy a comparative advantage. The candidate closer to the median voter on an issue like tax reform would want to address that topic, as opposed to discussing issues where he or she might be some distance away. Accordingly, a great deal of campaign rhetoric and strategy (discussed in the next section) is designed to capitalize on this "disequilibrium of tastes" (Riker 1980, Iyengar 1993). The rapid turn of events in the aftermath of the Gulf War bears this out. During the conflict, George Bush's popularity soared, but the end of the war prompted a shift in news coverage toward the economy. This cost President Bush dearly in the 1992 election because voters preferred Clinton by a wide margin on the economic dimension. Had the media continued to focus on security issues, we suspect that given Bush's edge on matters of national defense, the tables may have been turned (see Iyengar & Simon 1993, Krosnick & Brannon 1993).

The most compelling evidence of priming effects in the course of campaigns comes from the Canadian election study of 1988. The authors (Johnston et al 1992) show how the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States, as a result of the candidates' and parties' rhetorical posturing, came to the forefront of the public issue agenda. The candidates' efforts to position themselves on this issue had clear consequences; as the campaign progressed, voters' preferences on the issue increasingly came to influence their vote choice. Particularly striking in this case is the fact that a rival issue of equal, if not greater, relevance to Canadian politics—the Meech Lake Accords concerning Anglo-French rela-

tions—remained dormant. As the authors of this paradigmatic study conclude, “[r]hetoric, then, does play an important role in campaigns, but not just by persuading people. Rhetoric also plays a role—possibly its biggest role—by directing voters towards a specific agenda and considerations surrounding that agenda” (Johnston et al 1992:249).

As the examples of learning and agenda control suggest, campaigns can influence voters in more than one way. Confronted with partisan messages, most voters are loathe to roll over and declare their conversion; instead, they resist and rebut messages at odds with their prior preference. The acquisition of information and agenda control are more subtle forms of influence, often occurring “automatically” without the voters’ awareness. Their net impact on the bottom line, however, can be just as electorally significant.

NEW THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The earliest and still predominant way of thinking about the effects of campaigns has been to assume that candidates persuade voters simply by “injecting” them with appropriately designed messages. Assuming that the message is perfected (by carefully crafting the content and form of presentation), adequate exposure is all that candidates need; the more people they reach, the more likely they are to win. In this view, the all-absorbing task of the campaign consultant is to predict which variety of messages will be most advantageous and to design the campaign accordingly. In effect, campaigns are as good as the amount of resources and talents behind them.

The hypodermic model presumes that an effective campaign will be effective regardless of the office at stake, the political leanings of the electorate, the nature of the opposing candidate, or the circumstances of the moment. In contrast, more-promising theorizing about campaigns has emphasized the importance of the “environmental surrounding” and strategic logic of campaigns.

The Resonance Model

Although accepting the premise that voters can be persuaded, the distinctive premise of the “resonance” model is that campaign messages—whatever form they take—work their influence in concert with voters’ prevailing predispositions and sentiments. In contrast to the hypodermic model, which assumes that effects are due entirely to particular characteristics of each campaign, the resonance model anticipates that effects are contingent on the degree of fit between campaign messages and prevailing attitudes. New information intermingles with the old, and depending on the chemistry, voters’ choices will or will not be affected.

The most strongly charged ingredient of the electorate’s prior predispositions is, of course, party identification. Acquired during early childhood, this psychological anchor is known to withstand the vicissitudes of events and the passage

of time (Jennings & Niemi 1981, Niemi & Jennings 1991). Although much has been made of recent increases in the percentage of Americans who reject partisan labels, a good many of these “independents” are, in fact, closet partisans (Keith et al 1992). Party identification remains the salient feature of the American electoral landscape.

The importance of partisanship suggests an obvious prediction about the impact of campaigns. In hard-fought races, such as presidential contests, where virtually everyone is likely to encounter snippets of the campaign and where the contestants attain approximately the same decibel level, the principal impact of the campaign will be to push partisans into their respective corners. This prediction has been substantiated in nearly every systematic study of presidential elections since the 1940s: Campaigns reinforce voters' partisanship.

From the perspective of the resonance framework, the reinforcing effects of campaigns can be attributed to the interaction between the content of campaign messages (their slant) and voters' prior preferences. As part of one's attitudinal endowment, party identification is unlikely to be relinquished because of a particularly attractive advertisement or nasty news report. Messages that are counter-attitudinal will be actively resisted, whereas those that are consonant are accepted (for the classic discussion of acceptance factors in the persuasion process, see McGuire 1968; for the McGuire model extended to political campaigns, see Zaller 1992, 1996). It is this interaction between message content and prior attitudes that governs the reinforcement or “polarization” effect. Because it may be expected that the most intense partisans are least in need of reinforcement, it is often the less-intense Democrats and Republicans who will move the most during campaigns. In the experimental studies of Ansolabehere & Iyengar (1995a), partisan reinforcement was significantly higher among partisans with lower levels of political interest. Similarly, Iyengar & Petrocik (1998) found that as campaigns progress, weak partisans and younger voters become especially likely to adopt candidate preferences in accord with their partisanship.

The relevance of voters' partisanship extends well beyond the mere fact that Democrats will be more responsive to the Democratic candidate and vice-versa. Not only do most voters acquire a partisan identity, they also acquire beliefs about the groups served by the political parties and, by inference, the issues or problems on which they will deliver (see Petrocik 1996). For example, the public generally considers Democrats more able than Republicans to deal with the problem of education. Conversely, Republicans are seen as better than Democrats on taxation. These stereotypes about the differential policy responsiveness of the parties influence campaign strategy (the nature and effects of this influence are articulated in the next section). Campaigns that take advantage of (or resonate with) voters' expectations are considered most likely to be effective; a Democrat should be better off using appeals that emphasize his or her intent to strengthen public education, whereas a Republican should promote his or her support for lower taxes.

Ansolahehere & Iyengar (1995a) have tested this hypothesis experimentally by examining differences in the persuasiveness of Democratic and Republican campaign advertisements on the issues of crime and unemployment. The identical message was attributed to either the Democratic or the Republican candidate for US Senate in California in 1992. Gains from advertising on unemployment tended to be greater for the Democrats than the Republicans, with the opposite pattern holding for crime, leading the researchers to suggest that candidates have differing degrees of credibility on issues they address. In a later study, Iyengar & Valentino (1998) asked experimental participants to rate campaign ads aired by presidential candidates Dole and Clinton during the 1996 presidential campaign. They found that Republicans were more likely to rate Dole's ads as informative (and less likely to rate them as misleading) when the ads addressed "Republican" issues (drug abuse, crime, and illegal immigration). Conversely, Democrats were more impressed by Clinton's ads when they dwelled on "Democratic" issues (social security, welfare reform, health care).

The logic of what Petrocik (1996) calls "issue ownership" extends easily to attributes of the candidates other than their party affiliation. Gender is an especially visible attribute, and the popular culture provides several cues about the traits of males and females, cues that are amply reinforced by the media's depiction of women candidates (Kahn 1994). Given the availability of gender stereotypes, it might be anticipated that issues would have differential effects across candidates. "Masculine" issues such as defense or crime will be especially persuasive as campaign material when the candidate is a male war hero, whereas child care and matters of educational policy will resonate well with voters' beliefs about a female candidate who happens to be a mother. Ansolahehere & Iyengar (1995a), Iyengar et al (1996), and Iyengar & Valentino (1999) designed experimental tests of the predictions of the resonance model as it applies to the issue appeals of male and female candidates. This research compared the success of US senatorial candidates Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein with presidential candidate Bill Clinton when they broadcast an advertisement that dealt with sexual harassment. Advertising on gender-related issues yielded significant gains for Boxer and Feinstein but virtually no advantage for Clinton.

Given the presence of built-in differences between candidates in their ability to gain from specific issue appeals, these results suggest strongly that candidates should emphasize issues on which they enjoy comparatively favorable stereotypes. As we describe in the next section, this is an important ingredient of campaign strategy.

In sum, the insight offered by the resonance approach is that campaigns do not occur in vacuums but instead blend in with voters' partisan motives and attitudes. As such, the effects of interest are inherently interactive—either involving interactions between the content or source of campaign messages and voters' partisanship or involving higher-order interactions that also capture individual differences in exposure to campaign messages.

The Strategic Model

Another theoretical entry into political communication specifies campaign effects as interactions but focuses instead on the competition between message strategies. This perspective recognizes the ability of the strategic interactions between the competing candidates and between candidates and the press to create different campaign contexts. These new approaches are not exclusive but the emphasis differs; the resonance framework centers on the candidates' actions vis-a-vis the electorate, with little regard for the actions of their opponents. The strategic model, on the other hand, sees the effects of any particular message as conditioned by the effects of other "elite" actors; thus, in contrast to the hypodermic view, candidates and the media are interdependent rather than autonomous actors.

The recognition that campaigns are interdependent is especially important in the political world. Unlike commercial advertisers, candidates for public office feel freer to air advertisements that feature their opponents. Campaigns have increasingly turned to "attack advertising," in which candidates or their surrogates directly attack or seek to discredit their opponents (see Jamieson 1992, Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995b, 1996). Although the impact of attack messages is thought to depend on certain qualities of the sponsoring candidates (such as their popularity), practitioners generally acknowledge that it is the response of the attacked candidate that is more important. Generally, the attacked candidate is thought to suffer if he or she fails to rebut or otherwise discredit the attack. According to Roger Ailes' "First Law" of political advertising, "[o]nce you get punched, you punch back" (Ansolabehere et al 1993).

The question of advertising tone (i.e. attack versus self-promotion) is only one element of the strategic equation. For example, presidential campaigns mask further interactions between campaign messages. The level of exposure to one candidate's campaign is bound to fluctuate with the comparative volume of that campaign as well as with individual differences in political engagement and involvement (see above). Some campaigns will be louder than others, and some people are more likely than others to tune in. The combination of these effects can produce profound shifts in certain circumstances. These systematic differences in exposure produce, in Zaller's (1996) terminology, "reception gaps" whereby some voters are likely to encounter a message from one candidate but not the other. These voters tend to be drawn disproportionately from the middle level of the political involvement strata; as a result, the relationship between involvement and support for the louder candidate is curvilinear (for several tests of this model involving House elections where incumbents are presumptively the louder candidates, see Zaller 1992).

Game theory provides an elementary yet powerful tool for studying campaign strategy. The theory of games provides insights into the joint behavior of instrumentally rational actors, which can lead to an enriched and often counterintuitive understanding of campaigns. Candidates for elective office would seem to meet the definition of rational actors. They have clearly defined interests (gaining elec-

tion), and they invest considerable time, money, and effort in order to maximize their own "utility," namely their probability of winning. Moreover, they are less than certain about the motives and actions of their competitor(s); as such, campaigns can be modeled as simple games of incomplete information (Austen-Smith 1992, Banks 1990). For example, Simon (1997) developed a game-theoretic model that, consistent with issue ownership, predicts the absence of dialogue. If, in any campaign, there is a range of themes on which communication can occur and candidates choose to discuss only the themes that will maximize their vote share, then candidates will never address the same topic. Moreover, experimental techniques can be used to estimate game-theoretic payoffs, which yields a potent combination for research.

A study of the 1994 California gubernatorial race bears out this model and result. In this campaign, incumbent governor Pete Wilson exploited challenger Kathleen Brown's attempt to dialogue. Using the model as a guide, the options available to each candidate whenever he or she made a strategic decision concerning communication can be experimentally reconstructed. This reconstruction explains the candidates' behavior as well as Wilson's eventual victory. Four scenarios (experimental conditions) are required to fully capture this logic with respect to the issue of crime, of which three were counterfactual and one was actually observed. For example, under one scenario, neither candidate advertised. In this, the control condition, the estimate of the game-theoretic payoff indicated Brown would have won by 12%, roughly the skew in the partisanship of Californians. Three other conditions estimate the joint payoffs of the candidates' strategic choices. When participants were exposed to only a Wilson ad on crime, he won by 13% whereas when he showed a crime ad and she responded by talking about the economy, the contest ended in a statistical dead heat. In the final condition, both candidates discussed crime, and Wilson won by 12%, roughly the actual outcome of the election. These results have been corroborated with extant survey data (Simon 1997).

In structuring an advertising campaign, a candidate must anticipate not only his or her opponent's probable strategy but also the evolving behavior of the news media. In the aftermath of the 1988 presidential campaign, reporters have shown a penchant for examining campaign advertisements. In 1992, all major news outlets regularly offered "ad watch" reports that scrutinized particular campaign advertisements for accuracy and fairness. The intent behind this new genre of campaign journalism is, of course, to deter candidates from using false, distorted, or exaggerated claims. However, this form of news coverage also has the potential to provide the candidates with considerable free exposure by recirculating the campaign message to a larger audience. Some studies of ad watch reports have concluded that they actually have the effect of strengthening the impact of the scrutinized advertisement; others have shown that ad watch reporting works as intended (for a review of the evidence, see Task Force on Campaign Reform 1998).

The emergence of ad watch journalism provides candidates with incentives to design advertisements that are especially likely to attract news coverage. By making their advertisements newsworthy, candidates obtain additional (and free) exposure on subjects of their choosing. In 1996, the Republican National Committee produced an advertisement criticizing President Clinton for attempting to use his status as Commander-in-Chief of the US military to evade prosecution on sexual harassment charges. This controversial attack attracted front-page and primetime coverage for several days, but not once did it air as an advertisement.

In sum, interactions define campaign effects. At one level there is the interaction between candidates and a voter, at another there is the interaction between candidates, and finally there is the interaction between the candidates and the press. The deeper one looks, the more voting behavior seems a complex function of the volume/intensity of the contestants' appeals, voters' partisan preferences, and voters' level of exposure to the campaign. From the perspective of the candidate, accordingly, the goal is to design advertisements that simultaneously fit the voters' expectations, counter the opponent's strategy, and also succeed in attracting extensive news coverage. The clear implication of the resonance and strategic models are that efforts to study campaigns as "main effects" (for example, by simply regressing media exposure indicators against attitude change) are doomed to fail.

BEYOND SURVEY METHODS

Experimentation

As outlined above, the field's commitment to survey research has impeded researchers' ability to detect the traces of campaigns in public opinion. The scientific benefits of experimental design are well known, and there is no need to reiterate the standard argument here (for a recent discussion, see Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995b). A 30-second advertisement is a concatenated sequence of images and text. What was it that moved viewers in the infamous "revolving door" advertisement of 1988? Was it, as is widely alleged, Mr. Horton's race? Or was it the violent and brutal nature of his behavior, the fact that he was a convict, the race of his victim, or what? Modern, digital-based techniques of audiovisual editing make it possible to zero in on the explanation, whether text based or in the form of audio or visual cues. In the case of the Horton advertisement, for instance, we might construct identical facial composites of Mr. Horton but vary his skin color so as to estimate the effects of race. Alternatively, we might present the convict's face with and without a beard. In short, it is possible to dissect a message into core visual components and input these components into experimental manipulations.

Nevertheless, experimentation has its limits. Most experiments are administered on "captive" populations—college students who must participate in order

to gain course credit. Hovland's (1959) warning that college sophomores are not comparable to "real people" is especially apt for the field of political communication, given the well-known gap in political participation between the young and the old. Experiments also feature a somewhat sterile, laboratory-like environment that bears little resemblance to what William James (cited in Lippmann 1922:54) called the "blooming, buzzing confusion" of election campaigns. It is true that experiments can be made more realistic (by resorting to experimental procedures and settings that closely reflect the typical citizen's media experiences and by administering the experiments during ongoing campaigns). However, no matter how realistic their designs, experimenters must strive to replicate their results using alternative sources of evidence. Content analysis merged with surveys provides one such opportunity.

Content Analysis

Traditionally, content analysis has been used as a descriptive tool to identify characteristics of messages. This descriptive function often enables researchers to identify the relevant experimental manipulations. In the past, this process was sufficiently labor intensive to deter most researchers. Attempts to increase the rate of return by using computers to interpret and categorize language have yet to bear fruit. Nonetheless, technological developments have introduced dramatic economies of scale. These developments will accelerate the ability to simultaneously identify the distribution of campaign messages and incorporate these messages into experimental manipulations.

Until recently, researchers attempting to analyze the content of news coverage had to either subscribe to a representative set of newspapers from across the country or rely on one or two prestige outlets. Either method required vast amounts of labor, storage, and organization. The process was tedious, expensive, and subject to considerable human error. Today, most newspapers can be accessed through electronic databases offering full-text retrieval of articles that can be digitally searched and transferred to digital storage in a matter of minutes. Online services, such as Nexis and Westlaw, include major newspapers as far back as 1980. By using all the electronic archives available, contemporary research has access to virtually every newspaper published in the United States. What would take months to collect and compile can be accomplished in a week in a format already suitable for analysis. For instance, for research on candidate strategy in US Senate campaigns between 1988 and 1992, we compiled over 14,000 newspaper articles bearing on 50 races. The raw data set was constructed within a period of 6 weeks (for details, see Simon & Iyengar 1996).

Using this approach, experimental findings can be replicated with relative ease. One of the more consistent results from experimental studies is that exposure to negative (rather than positive) advertising reduces voter turnout (see Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995a, Houston & Roskos-Ewoldsen 1998, Houston et al 1999). This result has been replicated by analyzing the content of newspaper coverage

of all 34 US Senate campaigns in 1992. Based on the news reports of the candidates' advertising, the races were classified as either positive or negative in tone. The content-based measure of advertising tone was then used to predict voter turnout in the various senate elections (see Ansolabehere et al 1999).

CONCLUSION

As suggested in this review, research has begun to take a toll on the long-dominant minimalist view of campaigns. A major stimulus to this progression has been the increasing volume of traffic between political science, communications, and allied disciplines. The work of the eminent social psychologists Carl Hovland and William McGuire has served as an invaluable beacon for the current generation of campaign researchers. Calls by Hovland (1959) for methodological pluralism led gradually to the current flourishing of experimental and quasi-experimental work, which, as shown, provides the most unequivocal evidence of campaign effects. McGuire's (1968) theorizing about the exposure-acceptance matrix has been no less fertile, contributing to the current interest in interactive specifications of campaign effects.

We may anticipate further growth in campaign research from exchanges on other cross-disciplinary fronts, particularly the synthesizing of empirical work on campaign effects with rational-choice, game-theoretic models of communication. These models provide a well-developed set of analytic and mathematical tools from which to derive testable propositions. Game theory, with its emphasis on strategic interactions and the dependency of outcomes on individual choices, would seem especially appropriate to the study of campaign strategy and decision making.

Movements elsewhere in political science warrant further optimism. Many scholars have claimed that public deliberation is a vital and beneficial feature of democracy (Mansbridge 1980, Cohen 1989, Benhabib 1994, Gutmann & Thompson 1996). Their logic builds from John Stuart Mill's (1975) notion of a marketplace of ideas; put simply, free speech makes for better collective political decisions. Fishkin (1997) presents perhaps the clearest statement, arguing that the legitimacy of democratic government depends on the quality of public deliberation. Thus, theorists routinely call for a revitalized public sphere featuring vigorous debate. Empirical research into political communication stands ready to aid in answering this call through increased understanding of deliberative processes.

In sum, the study of campaign effects stands poised to make significant theoretical and methodological advances. As ongoing interdisciplinary efforts mature, we may expect an outpouring of evidence that campaigns contribute to the selection of political leaders and the formulation of public policy.

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