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Everything You Think You Know About Politics . . .

And Why You're Wrong

Kathleen Hall Jamieson

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→ Did You Know?

Whereas in 1992, 14 percent of the general-election presidential ads run by the Democrats and Republicans contained at least one misleading claim, in 1996, 52 percent were vulnerable to this charge.



During the 1996 general election, five major networks—CBS, CNN, FOX, NBC, and PBS—each provided time in which Bill Clinton and Bob Dole (among others in the case of CNN) addressed viewers in recorded minispeeches. We compared the free time to comparable ads by the same candidates and found that the free time contained more advocacy and more accuracy, and was less alarmist. On at least five topics, free time provided more policy detail than did network news stories that ran during the same period. The five topics were education, drugs, health care reform, foreign policy, and Social Security.

→ Chapter Ten

Does Political Advertising Affect Turnout? If So, How, When, and for Whom?

ADVERTISING CAN AFFECT voter turnout, a candidate's share of the vote, both, or neither. In this chapter, we focus only on the effects of advertising on turnout. In the following chapters, we examine its effects on voters' disposition to favor or oppose a candidate.

The dropoff in the proportion of the population casting a vote has elicited concern from pundits, reporters, and scholars. The explanations for the drop are various and include a diminished belief that a vote makes a difference in the eventual outcome of a race, a drop in the public's sense that balloting is a civic obligation, and a decline in the view that voting, regardless of effect on outcome, is a valued form of ideological expression. Others blame disenchantment with government practices dating from the Watergate era, a loss of interest in politics, the decline of political parties, and the rise of political advertising as a dominant means of communication between those who seek office and the governed.

Although many have written about the effects of political advertising, the information that we gathered about the 1996 presidential campaign was unique. In addition to voting data from the 1,000-plus counties associated with the top fifty media markets, we were able to assemble all the ads aired by the republicans, democrats, the AFL-CIO, and the Business Coalition in the general election presidential campaign. Information on exposure (GRPs) was used to determine how often viewers in each market saw

Candidate Advertising

attack and advocacy by the two major party nominees and two powerful interest groups.

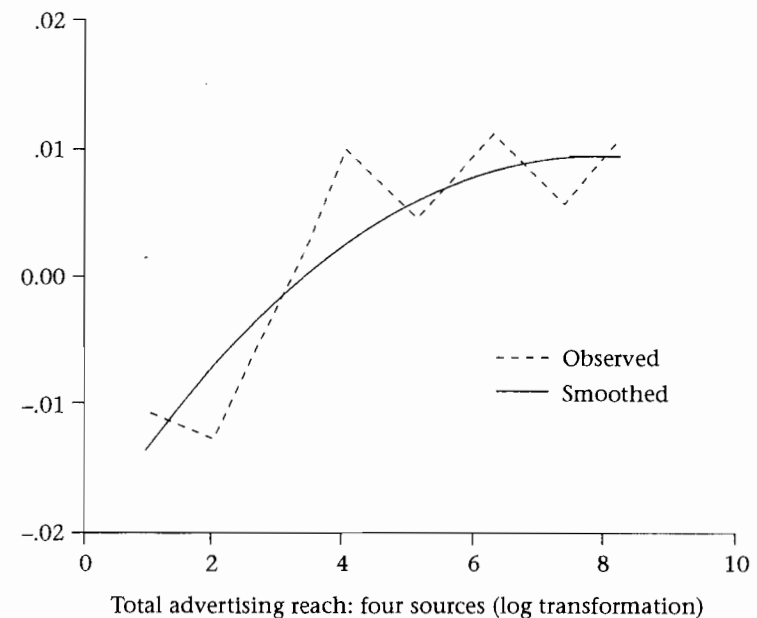
We used three sources of information to understand the effect of political advertising on voter turnout during the 1996 general election: voter turnout numbers by county in the top fifty media markets, the reach of advertising from four sources (Clinton and Dole campaigns, AFL-CIO, and Business Coalition), and the proportion of attack, advocacy, and contrast advertising. (Additional details about our method are reported in the appendix.) Although local news coverage of the presidential campaign is difficult to obtain, we do know from an analysis of ten markets that local coverage spikes upward when a candidate visits. We used candidates' visits as a surrogate for local news media coverage and for the mobilizing effect such contact has on supporters.

We analyze total turnout across the top fifty media markets. Using the election of 1992 as a baseline, we first ask whether total advertising in 1996 from the two major candidates increased turnout and whether this effect was linear or exhibited diminishing returns. Finally, we examine the possible effects of advocacy, contrast, and attack advertising to determine their relations to turnout. This procedure allows us to determine whether attack affects the electorate differently from the other types of content and which pattern of effects is activated in each case.

Advertising Is Associated with Increased Voter Turnout

Voter turnout in 1996 was calculated as a percentage: the number of voters voting for president in the county divided by the voting-age population. A statistical procedure called regression was used to analyze the relationship between turnout and advertising reach from the candidates and from issue advocacy ads from the AFL-CIO and the Business Coalition. This technique describes the association between two factors while holding other factors constant. By using this procedure, we can isolate the extent to which the ads of each type for Clinton, Dole, the AFL-CIO, and the Business Coalition have an effect on some other variable, such as turnout or voters' choices among candidates. In all cases we controlled for two other factors. The first was voter turnout in the county's presidential election in 1992. The vote in 1992 controls for a variety of factors that differentiate counties, including such factors as political interest. By controlling on the 1992 county vote, we ask whether advertising predicts 1996 turnout over and above the prediction that would be generated by the 1992 turnout alone. We also controlled for candidates' appearances in the

FIGURE 10.1 Average ad residuals, 1996 vote, controlling for 1992 vote



local media market. These appearances tend to generate local media coverage and energize partisans. Controlling for appearances essentially controls for local media coverage and partisan activation on turnout.

All three sources of advertising (the AFL-CIO, the Business Coalition, and the combined advertising of the Clinton and Dole campaigns) show positive effects on voter turnout, although the effects from the Business Coalition are not significant. These results mean that in counties where advertising was higher, so too was voter turnout, even after we controlled for the effects of 1992 turnout and the impact of candidates' visits.

The results seem to suggest that the more political advertising there is in a county, the greater the voter turnout. The effects are fairly similar across counties with a Democratic and Republican history. For example, in all cases, increases in advertising were associated with higher levels of voting. The size of the effects, though, did differ across types of counties. Candidates' advertising was strongest in moderate, Republican, and strong Republican counties and weaker in Democratic counties. Advertising by the AFL-CIO was most strongly linked to voter turnout in De-

mocratic and strongly Democratic counties but not in moderate or Republican counties. Overall, the data for 1996 indicate that advertising is associated with elevated voter turnout.

However, there are real limits to this claim. As the amount of advertising increases to very high levels, voter turnout starts to flatten out rather than continue upward. The best way to see the flattening effect is to group advertising reach into eight categories, each equidistant from the other, using special measures called logarithms. (See Figure 10.1.)

The vertical axis is voter turnout in 1996 after the effects of turnout in 1992 and candidate appearances are subtracted. The horizontal axis is intensity of advertising from low to very high in units that are equally spaced—but the units are the natural logarithms of actual advertising reach. The graph clearly flattens out at intense advertising levels. The relationship between turnout and advertising is best described by a straight line, with a clear trend toward flattening out. In other words, a critical amount of ad exposure enhances the ad's ability to stimulate voter turnout.

Joseph Cappella, Kathleen Hall Jamieson,
Dan Romer, and Ned Nurick

Chapter Eleven

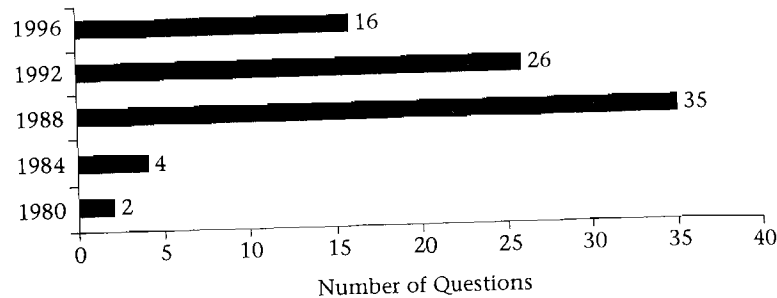
Are Attack Ads Necessarily Negative?

THE PHRASE “NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN” continues to haunt discussions of politics since it became a stock phrase in political discussion in 1988. So pervasive are the phrases “negative ads” and “negative campaign” that more than 1,000 uses appear when the nation’s newspapers are searched for the 1996 year. Whereas in 1980 only two national polling questions asked about negativity in presidential campaigns (Figure 11.1), in 1988 that number jumped to thirty-five (Public Opinion Online [Roper Center]). As we discussed earlier, the public is able to discern the value of evidence in attack ads as long as they don’t veer into ad hominem attack and false claims.

The phrases “negative campaign” and “negative campaigning” are troubling because it is unclear what they mean. As an earlier chapter noted, academics, pundits, and reporters tend to conflate ads that feature one-sided attack, contrast ads that contain attack, ad hominem attack ads, and ads featuring attacks that deceive. All are grouped under the word “negative.” “While both candidates used negative television ads, some political observers suggested that Mr. Weld’s relentlessly negative ads in the last week of the campaign backfired,” wrote Sara Rimer of the *New York Times* after the close of the Massachusetts Senate race in 1996.¹ “Mr. Dole never overcame the widespread sense that he was waging a negative campaign,” noted James Bennet of the *Times* after the 1996 presidential election.²

Presidents and presidential candidates are no more precise. “I saw a series the other night about how local campaigns were now becoming also dominated by negative ads,” said Bill Clinton.³ “They’re all negative ads,” said Republican nominee Bob Dole of the ads aired by the Clinton campaign in 1996.⁴

FIGURE 11.1 Number of poll questions asking about negativity in presidential campaigns.



Scholars have perpetuated the confusion. “Fed up with attack ads, negative campaigns and partisan rancor,” observed Harvard professor Michael J. Sandel, “Americans are also distressed at the coarsening of everyday life.”⁵

The academic literature on advertising contains articles that define an ad as negative if it contains any attack, if more than half of the ad attacks, if “most” of the ad attacks, if the ad is deceptive, and if the ad contains no advocacy other than that in the concluding tag line. So, for example, the widely cited book *Going Negative* by Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar makes no distinction between ads that contain both advocacy and attack and those that simply attack. It also doesn’t test to determine whether subjects in its experiments thought the ads being viewed were truthful or deceptive. Without those distinctions and ones provided by viewer impressions, it is difficult to know what is being argued given the proclamation in the book’s subtitle *How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*.⁶

Whatever the meaning, the context provided in press reports suggests that, consistent with Ansolabehere and Iyengar’s subtitle, “negative ads” and “negative campaigning” are bad for democracy. If candidates win after using negative ads or because they used negative ads, then—the logic follows—we have a regrettable situation in which behavior damaging to the body politic is required of those who want to win. “A good percentage of this money is spent on ads,” noted Eleanor Randolph in the *Los Angeles Times* in late October 1996, “particularly negative ads. And there were plenty of them this season, eroding the public trust, enhancing public cynicism and winning elections.”⁷

In 1998, a task force of academics convened by political scientist Larry Bartels of Princeton University broke from this indiscriminate use of the word “negative”: “We believe that the focus on the ‘negativity’ of campaign advertising is largely misplaced, reflecting and perpetuating a general conflation of the important distinction between ads that are characterized as ‘negative’ because they are contentious and argumentative, challenging claims about the records, characters and platforms of opponents, and ads that are characterized as ‘negative’ because they are nasty, inaccurate, or unfair.” That report accepts the distinction offered by Annenberg School researchers who distinguish among candidate “advocacy” ads (focusing on the candidate’s qualifications), candidate “attack” ads (focusing on the opponent’s failings), and candidate “contrast” ads (containing explicit comparisons between the candidate’s qualities, record, or proposals and the opponent’s).⁸

Imprecise use of the word “negative” is problematic because it combines types of discourse that are actually distinct. The standard use of “negative” in reference to ads also assumes that any attack is illegitimate when, instead, attack-based differentiation is an important way to determine that one candidate is better qualified than others. Finally, “negative” implies that attack ads are more deceptive than ads that simply make a case for a candidate when, it should be noted, the level of inaccuracy in advocacy ads is usually higher.

Since campaigns are increasingly played out in the media and advertising is a central component of political campaigns, determining the effects of attack advertising is important. There is also a significant “crossover” effect when the shelf life of campaign advertising is extended through media coverage of the ads. Today’s hand-wringing over the harmful effects of attack advertising comes amid a broader concern about citizen apathy and disengagement from civic life.

Although our focus will largely be with the scholarly evidence, the issue of the effects of attack advertising cuts across layers of American political and intellectual life. Oppositional ads have been the object of censure by politicians, concerned citizens, and members of the media—many of whom cite academic works to bolster their claims. For instance, in *U.S. News & World Report*, Stephen Budiansky noted: “Iyengar and Ansolabehere found that the real problem with negative ads is not that they fool people—they don’t—but that they suppress voter turnout. Rather than swaying voters to support one candidate or another, negative advertising reinforces the belief that all politicians are dishonest and cynical. A survey published last week by Arthur Miller, a professor at the University of Iowa, found that 42 percent of likely Republican voters in

Iowa are undecided—up from 34 percent in December—and many are so disgusted by the campaign they probably will not vote in their state's caucuses at all."⁹ Similarly, nationally syndicated columnist Jack Germond argued in the *National Journal*: "The trouble [of the low voter turnout in 1996], according to [Curtis] Gans, was not with the candidates but with their greater-than-ever dependence on the negative advertising that was flooding the airwaves. The mudslinging disgusted the public, he suggests, to the point where more than half of the eligible voters simply washed their hands of the whole business and stayed home on Election Day."¹⁰ It is far from clear, however, just what effects attack advertising does have. Despite the broad acceptance of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's findings, some academics and reporters have questioned them.

Studies on the effects of attack advertising have looked at a range of dependent variables. Some, for instance, have examined the effect attack advertising has on evaluations of the ads themselves. Garramone identified general antipathy toward "negative" advertising, finding that three-fourths of her subjects evaluated "negative" political advertising unfavorably.¹¹ In another study 72 percent of the subjects found such advertising to be "not very" or "not at all informative," with even more disapproving of the ads. However, the study itself suggests the contrary finding that the "negative" ads were more memorable.¹² Christ, Thorson, and Caywood's research suggests that individual responses to "negative" advertising are moderated by such variables as attitudes about the candidates.¹³

Other work has focused on the effects of "negative" advertising on sponsors of the ads. Faber, Tims, and Schmitt note that past research has uncovered both intended and unintended (backlash) effects of "negative" advertising.¹⁴ In an analysis of television advertising, Pinkelton shows that "negative" contrast ads lower the favorable perceptions of the ads' target but do not adversely affect evaluations of the ads' sponsor.¹⁵

Another area of study that has attempted to tie attack to the decline in voting has reached mixed conclusions. Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, and Valentino and Ansolabehere and Iyengar¹⁶ conducted experimental studies and analyzed aggregate-level data on the effects of attack political advertising. Using a nonrandom subject selection design, they built their studies around actual elections in California and focused on real candidates.

In a laboratory setting designed to approximate a home-viewing environment, viewers were shown a single ad that either attacked or promoted a candidate. Manipulations were performed on television advertisements produced to resemble actual ads. The researchers did not

test to determine whether the subjects in the experiment thought they were viewing real ads; thus it is unknown whether respondents granted this assumption. The authors were unable to replicate statistically significant findings when they used actual ads containing positive and negative content.

The ad was shown as part of a lengthier video reel that included other spots and local television news. The results of the study suggested attack advertising depressed intentions to vote by 5 percent compared with the results achieved by self-promotional ads.

The findings of the aggregate-level data are equally problematic. Although the authors concluded that states with attack campaigns witnessed a drop in voter turnout of 2 percent and states with positive campaigns witnessed a 2 percent increase, their study has no direct measure of advertising content. Rather, for an indicator of advertising tone, the authors relied on analysis of news coverage in the thirty-four subject states that held a Senate election in 1992. Consequently, the level of actual advertising attack was not measured. Instead, states were coded as generally positive, mixed, or generally negative based on news reports.

The shortcomings of that study were noted by Finkel and Geer, who investigated the effects of attack advertising on voter turnout by coding the content of ads rather than of news coverage. Using both individual- and aggregate-level data, they analyzed the nine presidential contests from 1960 to 1992. In contrast to Ansolabehere and Iyengar's method of identifying campaign tone by coding news coverage, Finkel and Geer turned to the Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive at the University of Oklahoma for copies of the ads that were produced for those races.¹⁷ To calculate advertising tone, Finkel and Geer subtracted the percentage of an ad's attack appeals from the percentage of its positive appeals. Rather than the description offered by Ansolabehere and Iyengar (negative, mixed, positive), this procedure yielded more refined data by producing a numerical index of the degree of advertising tone. Neither the aggregate- nor individual-level data revealed that negative tone affected voter turnout. However, the authors acknowledge that the archive is incomplete, and as we note elsewhere, it contains ads that never aired.¹⁸ Also affecting the findings is the fact that the authors lacked information on how often the ads aired, or how many persons saw them; thus they reached their conclusions of effect without a reliable indicator of audience exposure.

In response to the absence of exposure data characteristic of the two previous studies, Goldstein turned to Competitive Media Reporting

(CMR) data in an analysis of "negative" advertising's effect on voter turnout.¹⁹ CMR monitors the satellite transmissions of the national networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) and twenty-five national cable networks (for example, CNN, ESPN, and TNT). In addition, CMR monitors advertising in the country's top seventy-five media markets. CMR provides data on the content of ads, where they were aired, the day and the time they aired, and the program during which they aired.

Goldstein focused on the 1996 presidential race and the ads run by candidates Clinton and Dole. He coded the ads as all positive, contrast, or all negative. Goldstein acknowledged missing five Clinton-Gore ads and three Dole-Kemp ads out of a combined 161 ads. Once frequency of airings was calculated, the missing ads were estimated to account for about 2 percent of the total commercial broadcasts in the campaign.

Goldstein's data offer contradictory findings. At the county level, he found demobilizing effects, but at the individual level, he found none. Moreover, the county-level data suggested voter turnout was higher owing to the overall mix of ads than it would have been had no ads appeared. Although Goldstein's data offer a map of advertising exposure, it is a rough one at best. CMR captured the satellite broadcasts of the national networks, but it missed the ads purchased in local buys not in the top seventy-five markets and missed all cable advertising. More critically, Goldstein did not have data on gross rating points (GRPs) and therefore could not fix the level of viewer exposure to the ads, a fact he laments.

For some researchers, the claim that attack advertising demobilizes the electorate is still an open question. Although Finkel and Geer, and subsequently Goldstein, proposed further examination of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's claims, these follow-up studies suffer the critical weakness of being unable to specify how heavily the ads in questions were broadcast. In an attempt to nail down a measure of such exposure, Goldstein introduced CMR data to compensate for the past critical lack of data. His data, however, can offer only rough estimates of exposure, and therefore only tenuous connections between advertising tone and effects on voters.

There are only tentative explanations to account for the hypothesis that attack advertising might demobilize the electorate. It is important to discuss the theory associated with attack advertising in part as a reaction to the post hoc nature of so much of it. Ansolabehere and Iyengar, for instance, offer three post hoc explanations to account for their demobilization effect. One possibility they offer is the asymmetrical effect attack advertising has on partisans: Advertising attacking a candidate might cause his or her supporters to stay home on election day, whereas

the intention to vote remains unchanged for those supporting the sponsor of the ad. But as Finkel and Geer and others have pointed out, it is no less probable that supporters of the candidate who sponsors the ad may be energized and consequently turn out in larger numbers.²⁰

Ansolabehere and Iyengar offer a second explanation that suggests the overall tone associated with an attack campaign "generates blanket negativity toward both candidates," but they reject this hypothesis because their further research suggests voters do not penalize the sponsors of attack ads.

They settle on a third explanation: "Exposure to campaign attacks makes voters disenchanted with the business of politics as usual," creating a cynical and disengaged electorate.²¹ Yet, one could easily imagine the opposite being true. Why, for instance, would cynicism—if it is indeed generated by attack advertising—necessarily be associated with voter demobilization? Could it not also be associated with voter mobilization under the premise that it engages voters to effect some sort of change? Voters who are disenchanted with the business of politics as usual may as a response choose to participate in the political process in order to reform it.

Are we to understand that all questions raised about an opponent's past voting record, for instance, are harmful to the political process and should be considered inappropriate points of discussion? For example, is learning that candidate Smith voted against gun control injurious to the democratic process?

Finkel and Geer propose three reasons to believe attack advertising should enhance voter turnout.²² They first suggest that attack advertising has been associated with learning effects and the communication of greater policy information. They also note that negative information is given more weight by viewers because it is unexpected and non-normative while also offering greater differentiation of the candidates than does positive advertising. Their third explanation holds that attack advertising may create greater affective responses than positive advertising, resulting in greater enthusiasm to participate in the election. The greater effectiveness of attack advertising may also be accounted for by its enhanced capacity to be recalled.²³ Rather than having debilitating effects, Finkel and Geer posit, attack advertising can have quite salutary ones.

This then becomes a larger question. What, if any, are the effects of ads that attack, contrast, and advocate? If there are effects, where and why do they occur?

Before turning to these questions, we want to indicate why we believe that advertising and fair, accurate attack ads mobilize voters. Political

ads contain higher levels of issue information than the public discussion of them would suggest.²⁴ Indeed, despite the low repute in which they are held, supposedly negative advertisements actually contain more relevant issue content than ads containing no information about the sponsor's opposing candidate.²⁵ In order to assess issue content, we coded ads produced for presidential campaigns occurring between 1952 and 1996 to determine the percentage of policy content found among the different categories of political advertisements. This analysis also allowed us to determine the percentage of policy content in each candidate's arguments and to combine the percentages into a total for each election year.

Statements were coded as policy if they provided information about the difference between candidates' policy positions that would help a voter make an informed voting decision. References to character, "colorful" or scene-setting statements, summary statements introducing or concluding a list of policy statements, and biographical statements were considered nonpolicy. If a policy was mentioned but was preceded by a negative adjective, and no further detail about the policy was articulated, the statement was considered nonpolicy. For instance, reference to Bob Dole's "risky tax scheme" absent further elaboration would be a nonpolicy statement. Finally, sentences included in order to further emphasize a point—for example, "you know the result," or "make no mistake about it"—were also considered to be nonpolicy statements.

Nine hundred ninety-six individual arguments in general-election ads from the 1952–1996 period were coded for policy content. Only segments running five minutes or fewer in length were included in the database. For the purpose of consistency, longer televised segments were categorized in the database as speeches.

In order to code arguments for policy and nonpolicy content, we used an individual idea unit as the unit of analysis. This analytic scheme resulted in an ability to calculate the amount of policy content as a percent of total-words-in-arguments in the advertisements, thereby correcting for variations in ad length. It is important to note that policy content was not calculated for entire ads but rather was localized inside the arguments found in each ad. Advertisements generally contained only one argument, but some ads had a greater number. Thus, if a spot contained one argument coded as attack and two coded as advocacy, the policy content was calculated for each of these arguments rather than for the ad as a whole. The content analysis was conducted by four coders. Similar to analyses discussed earlier, reliability was greater than the 0.6 level using the stringent Krippendorff's reliability alpha.

Consistent with previous studies, our analysis showed that the attack advertisements did contain a greater percentage of policy words-in-argument than did advocacy or comparison ads. Forty-two percent of attack content was coded as policy, as was 39 percent of contrastive content, but only 32 percent of advocacy content was considered policy. This finding is significant considering that in academic and popular discourse, both attack and comparison ads often fall under the pejorative heading "negative advertising."

Yet both ad types offer more policy information to the electorate than the so-called positive ads. Notably, in none of the three categories did the percent of policy content equal or exceed the percent of nonpolicy content. When words found in arguments coded as attack were calculated as a percentage of total words, it became clear that attack words made up the smallest percent of total words in political ads (16 percent). Advocacy arguments comprised the largest portion of total words (53 percent); considerably less prevalent were contrastive arguments (only 32 percent of total words). Candidates who used advocacy ads were devoting the greatest amount of advertising time to the format yielding the least policy discussion. They were also talking about themselves a lot but devoting less time to discussion of their issue positions.

These findings raise the question, should academics and others continue advocating an increase in "positive advertising" without clearly delineating the type of content these ads contain? In order to contribute to the deliberative process, an ad should be informative. Ideally, candidates should be able both to state their own positions and to criticize those of their opponent without facing accusations of "going negative."

The percent of policy content in each argument of each ad category was also calculated for each major candidate running for president between 1952 and 1996. Only for Bush in 1992 did the advocacy category contain the highest percentage of policy words, although several of the candidates' contrastive arguments did contain the highest percent of policy. Interestingly, in both 1992 and 1996, President Clinton produced contrastive advertisements with levels of policy content exceeding 60 percent. In both campaigns, many of Clinton's ads contained lists of his policy positions and initiatives and the contrasting opinions and initiatives of Bush (1992) and Dole (1996), a format lending itself to heavy use of policy statements. For example, in 1992, the Clinton campaign ran the following ad:

Clinton: We've been under trickle-down economics for twelve years. Just keep taxes low on the wealthy and see what happens. Well, I'll tell you

what's happened. Most Americans are working harder for less money. Unemployment is up. Health care costs are exploding. We are not doing what it takes to compete and win. I've worked hard on a different plan. Let's give incentives to invest in new jobs. Let's spend more on education and training. Let's provide basic health care to all Americans—putting our people first—rebuilding this economy—making us competitive. If we do those things we'll compete and win and we'll bring this country back.

The significance of Clinton's tendency to use contrastive advertising is demonstrated in this analysis. Also significant is the 70 percent policy content of Carter's attack arguments in 1976 compared with the 32 percent policy content in his 1980 attack arguments. This disparity may be attributable to the fact that in 1976 Carter was running against an incumbent (Gerald Ford).

These data justify our presupposition that the best format for political advertisements is the one used so successfully by Clinton in the 1992 and 1996 elections: contrastive advertising that many critics have mislabeled as "attack." The content analysis demonstrated that the average contrastive ad contains nearly as high a percentage of policy content as do attack ads, making contrast a better choice than pure advocacy. This format also requires that candidates express their positions on issues while allowing them to criticize their opponents. Of major significance is that the contrastive format can present voters with a choice between two positions on important issues. Why the media would attempt to relegate all contrastive ads to the category "attack" remains to be understood.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Kate Kenski,
Mark Mendoza, Paul Waldman, and Susan Sherr

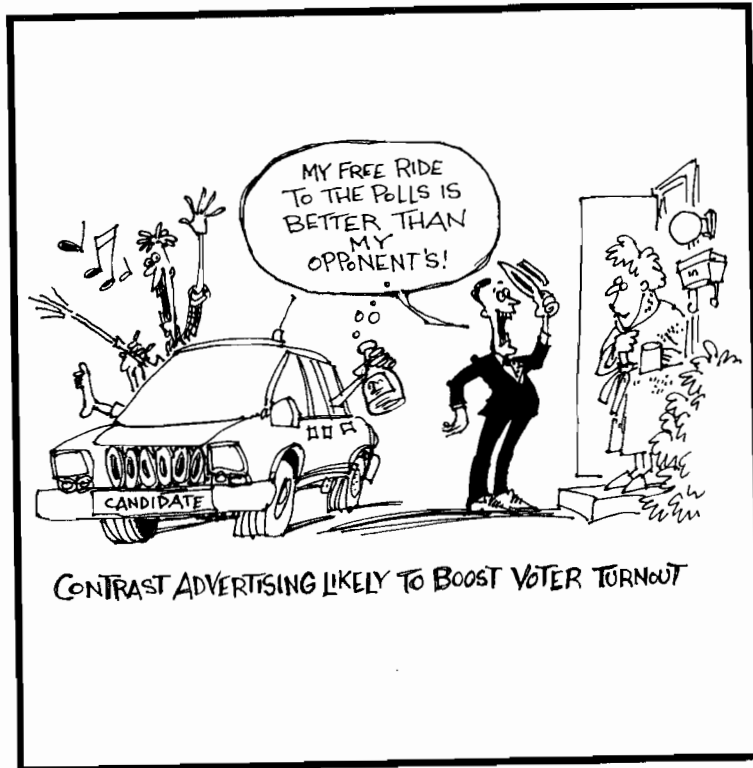
Chapter Twelve

Does Attack Advertising Affect Turnout?

SOME COMMENTATORS SEE A RELATIONSHIP between plummeting voter participation and the increasing prominence of "negative" political advertising. The more negative ads are, "the lower the turnout is," remarked President Bill Clinton at a press conference in November 1996. Others condemn political spots for "insistently" focusing on "either character assassination or divisive social issues that leave the electorate so angry and dissatisfied."¹ And many pundits and reporters accept as conventional wisdom the notion that attack in campaigns in general and in political advertising in particular minimizes voting. For example, according to nationally syndicated columnist David Broder, "negative campaigning and negative campaign ads have become so lethal and there are so many of them that voters do not want to vote for either candidate if even half of what the politicians are saying about each other is true."²

For decades scholars argued that campaigns in general and campaign communication in particular had little effect on ultimate voter preferences or on turnout.³ As we noted in Chapter 1, in the past decade the minimal-effects assumption—that nothing voters read or see on television is likely to dissuade them from voting according to their established preferences—has been challenged.⁴ The issue is whether campaigns are able to do anything beyond activating the existing dispositions of voters.

Here we address the question of whether attack ads mobilized, demobilized, or made no difference in the 1996 general-election campaign. Did attack advertising by Republican nominee Bob Dole and Democratic incumbent Bill Clinton in the 1996 general-election presidential campaign affect turnout?



Findings

To determine how advocacy, attack, and contrast may have affected turnout, we regressed turnout in 1996 (as percent of total eligible voters) on turnout in the previous general election (1992), along with visits by both candidates, total issue advertising by the AFL-CIO and Business Coalition, and total advocacy, contrast, and attack by Clinton and Dole. To increase the sensitivity of the distinctions between contrast and the two extremes of the discourse continuum, we restricted our definition of contrast ads to those that contained 30–70 percent attack.

This analysis showed that advocacy was weakly and positively related to turnout, attack was weakly and negatively related to turnout, and contrast was strongly and positively related to turnout.

Aside from the two candidates, the only source we analyzed that was related to turnout was the smaller and more targeted issue advertising directed by the AFL-CIO and generally supportive of Clinton's themes. Visits by the two candidates were positively but not reliably tied to turnout.

A second analysis in which each candidate's advocacy, attack, and contrast ads were entered into the prediction equation (instead of totals for both candidates' ads) showed that the strong relation between contrast and turnout was primarily a result of Dole's advertising and not Clinton's. The weak negative relation between attack and turnout also was primarily attributable to Dole. The weak relation between advocacy and turnout was characteristic of both candidates' advertising.

An important caveat is in order here. Clinton's and Dole's attack advertising weights were highly related to one another. In counties where Clinton spent money on attack ads, the Dole campaign did as well. In fact, the two were closely correlated. Despite this tangle, we believe our data show that the difference in the impact of attack ads on voter turnout between the incumbent and challenger is a real one.

Summary: Voter Turnout

Does advertising cause voter turnout, or are both advertising expenditure and voter turnout caused by some third force? Higher levels of advertising are associated with greater voter turnout. In our study, counties that received more advertising dollars and air time also tended to have a higher percentage of would-be voters who voted. However, in counties where races are heated, both advertising and voting turnout might be elevated in comparison with counties where races are less intense. The causality question cannot be answered with the data we have, but we do see a clear positive relationship between advertising and voter turnout.

Of three types of advertising content we have examined, contrast is the most effective in mobilizing voters. By our definition, this is advertising with only moderate levels of attack. Strong attack advertising can demobilize the electorate—as we see with the challenger’s advertising in the 1996 election. The stronger relation between contrast and turnout underscores the importance of this category of advertising and the need for the distinction between contrast and pure attack. In light of the evidence we presented in earlier chapters showing that advertising can contain substantial amounts of policy information, it is unsurprising that it has a mobilizing effect. Advertising is not, in other words, empty rhetoric. At the same time, the fact that the most accountable form of advertising—contrast—is also the most effective at drawing voters to the polls confirms the finding of the survey we reported in Chapter 7. Voters prefer contrast. Contrast mobilizes. In sum, contrast advertising is a win-win form of communication. Voters, candidates, and the process are aided by its use.

Dan Romer, Kathleen Hall Jamieson,
Joseph Cappella.

⇒ Chapter Thirteen

Does Attack Advertising Create a Backlash? Mobilize the Other Side? Depress or Increase Support by Those of the Same Party?

THERE IS NO CONSENSUS AMONG SCHOLARS about the effects of attack. The definitions of such concepts as “negativity” are often wildly dissimilar, failing in some cases to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate attack, or between attack that also makes a case for the sponsor and attack that does not.¹ As a result, it is difficult to summarize the literature. In general, some researchers believe that attack is effective,² whereas others find that it creates a backlash.³

Our analysis of the 1996 data shows that political advertising is associated with voter turnout even though the effects are not as simple as “demobilization” or “mobilization” across the board. Advertising is associated with increased voting, but the specific ad environment is a complicating factor. Advocacy ads from the incumbent spur voters more so than attack and contrastive ads. The challenger’s contrastive ads correlate with increased levels of voting as do his or her attack ads. Incumbents are granted the “benefit” of advocacy ads, whereas challengers are expected to offer a reason for change from the status quo, most often found in attack ads. In our study, advocacy from the Dole camp was linked to depressed voting.

All of this discussion ignores a very important question. It is possible that those being motivated to vote are the supporters of one's opponent and that the vote they cast hurts the sponsor of the ad. If so, the sponsor probably would have preferred that the voter stay home. Thus, what kind of voters were turned out by the Clinton and Dole ad campaigns? Did attack and contrastive ads from the Dole campaign produce more Republican or more Democratic voters at the polls? Did Clinton's advocacy ads encourage Republican votes or Democratic votes?

Vote Share As a Function of Dole's and Clinton's Patterns of Attack, Contrast, and Advocacy Advertising

In order to analyze the effects of advertising on vote share in the 1996 presidential race, we employed the same strategy as that used for voter turnout. To do this, we simply replaced voter turnout as a percentage of voters divided by those who are eligible with an equivalent measure using those voting for Clinton divided by the number of "eligibles." A similar measure for Dole was calculated and subtracted from Clinton's vote share to produce a difference score that reflected the difference in share between the candidates in each county. In addition, we controlled for the comparable share point difference in 1992. To assess the effects of advertising content, we calculated comparable difference scores for advocacy, contrast, and attack as defined in the previous chapter.

Our analysis of share point differences in the 1996 presidential general election indicated much clearer and stronger effects of both differential visits by the candidates and advertising content differences. The more either candidate visited each advertising market, the greater his share point gain. But more important for our purposes, content differences in advertising between the candidates produced differential effects on vote share. Advocacy ads were the strongest force for vote share, followed by contrast ads. Attack ads appeared to backfire on the candidate who sponsored them by producing a small but detectable decline in vote share.

Size of Effect of Advertising in the 1996 Election

To determine the overall effect of advertising on vote share in the 1996 election, we calculated the share difference of the total vote between Clinton and Dole (Clinton share minus Dole share) in each county. We then entered the difference in total weighted advertising between Clinton and Dole for each county into a regression analysis to estimate the potential effect of net differences in advertising by each candidate. Also included in the analysis was the total advertising by the AFL-CIO and the Business Coalition, the difference in the number of visits the two candidates made to each media market, and the difference in vote share for the two parties in 1992.⁴

Summary

The strong mobilizing effect that advertising has on voter participation diminishes with increasing advertising weight but is substantial nevertheless. Differential total advertising by the two major candidates in media markets affects their vote share in those markets. The effect is large enough to affect the outcome in the average county in the top media markets.

The relation between advertising content and election outcomes indicates that attack, defined as advertising with more than 90 percent attack content, reduces both turnout and the sponsoring candidate's vote share. Pure advocacy increases vote share but has little effect on turnout. Contrast advertising, defined as advertising with more than 30 percent but less than 70 percent attack, increases both turnout and vote share.

Pure attack advertising does reduce turnout and harm the sponsoring candidate's share. However, contrast advertising, which can contain substantial attack, appears to help the sponsor and increase turnout. This finding suggests that contrast advertising increases the sponsoring candidate's share by recruiting previously inactive voters to the candidate's side. We do not know whether the previously inactive voters were from the same party as the candidate or not. Nevertheless, the effects of contrast advertising are quite different from those of attack and underscore the importance of distinguishing contrast from pure attack advertising. Finally, advocacy advertising, which has the greatest effect on vote share,

Candidate Advertising

does not affect turnout. This suggests that advocacy gains its potency by taking share away from the opposition while leaving turnout largely unchanged.

Dan Romer, Kathleen Hall Jamieson,
Joseph Cappella.

→ Did You Know?

In 1996 the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), a labor organization consisting of seventy-eight unions with 13.1 million members, engaged in an extensive issue-advocacy campaign spending \$25 million to broadcast ads primarily in forty-four congressional districts. An analysis of station logs reveals that in at least fourteen of the districts, the labor group outspent one of the congressional contenders. In ten of the fourteen, the AFL-CIO outspent both congressional candidates combined.

The AFL-CIO is only one of the issue-advocacy groups that sponsored ads in these districts. Where the Democrat in these districts focused ads on the same topics as the AFL-CIO (that is, against corporate tax breaks, for pension protection, support of public education, the minimum wage, and Medicare), the issue advocacy drowned out the voice of the Republican and any independents in the race. Where the Democrat focused on other issues, the AFL-CIO's message drowned out both. In some of the districts in which the Business Coalition responded to the AFL-CIO by buttressing the case for the Republican, the candidates' voices became even less distinct and discernible.

→ Chapter Sixteen

Do Issue Ads Work? If So, When?

ADS CAN BOTH INFLUENCE PUBLIC ATTITUDES and, when they traffic in partial truths, mislead. This outcome is particularly likely when the issue is complex, reporting on the issue by the media is deficient, adwatching is minimal or nonexistent, and one side significantly outspends the other. This is as true of issue advocacy as it is of standard candidate advertising.

In political terms, issue advocacy is communication whose principal purpose is to promote a set of ideas or policies. By contrast, express advocacy explicitly advocates the election or the defeat of a candidate. The 1976 Supreme Court decision about campaign finance, *Buckley v. Valeo*,¹ noted that as long as the communication did not "expressly advocate" the election or defeat of a clearly identified federal candidate, the amount of money spent on it could not be limited because it was protected under the First Amendment of the Constitution. Nor could government require that the identity of those funding such ads be disclosed. *Buckley v. Valeo* outlines a series of "magic words" that cannot appear in any form in issue advocacy. They include "vote for," "support," or "oppose."

In recent years, issue advocacy has been a growth industry. In the 1996 election, the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania estimated that more than two dozen organizations sponsored issue ads and spent an estimated \$135 million to \$150 million. According to the 1996 Annenberg School for Communication general-election survey, 57.6 percent of those polled recalled seeing an issue advertisement. In addition, issue ads utilized more attack statements (41.1 percent) than other forms of political communication, such as candidate ads, debates, free air time, or news coverage.² After 1996, expenditures and the number of active groups continued to rise rapidly. In 1997 and

1998, at least seventy-seven groups sponsored broadcast issue ads and spent between \$275 million and \$340 million.³

Issue ads and high-profile policy debates went hand in hand during the 1990s. A great deal of press attention was bestowed on the issue-ad clashes during the 1993 and 1994 health care reform debate. The "Harry and Louise" advertisements sponsored by the Health Insurance Association of America (HIAA) were credited (some argue mistakenly) with building a popular outcry against that reform proposal and contributing to the defeat of President Clinton's Health Security Act. A \$14 million media buy powered the issue-advocacy campaign, which received extensive attention from the press and was parodied by the president and first lady.⁴

In 1996, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) used issue-advocacy advertising to demonize the Republican Congress, especially House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Georgia). The commercials were credited with influencing public opinion and building support for the Clinton-Gore reelection campaign. The DNC commercials were considered issue advocacy because they did not directly endorse a candidate but rather promoted a set of ideas or policies.

In the 1996 election, issue advocacy exploded as numerous groups followed the Democratic Party's lead and exploited the campaign finance loophole. The number of groups and the size of the expenditures continued to increase in the 1998 elections. The acceptance and legitimacy of issue advertisements increased as a number of interest groups, notably the tobacco companies, devoted significant resources to advocacy campaigns.

As the amount of advertising escalated, assumptions regarding the influence of commercials on public policy and election outcomes have followed suit. Is the influence of issue ads a myth? Or are these commercials a highly persuasive method that shapes the opinions of the electorate and pressures legislators? Analysts, including academics and reporters, do not agree on the success of issue ads. On the one hand, some theorize that issue-advocacy commercials are a powerful lobbying tool that has the ability to fundamentally shape policy debates. On the other, some point to dozens of "failed" campaigns in which the interest group did not affect legislation. The interested parties do agree that these commercials have altered the political environment and changed the dynamic of policy debates. But do issue ads enable wealthy, well-organized interests to overshadow competitors and reframe discussion in their preferred terms?

Between April and August 1998, the five major American tobacco companies sponsored a massive issue-advocacy campaign.⁵ This series of advertisements was unprecedented in a number of ways. The \$40 million media buy was larger in size and depth than previous efforts. In addition,

the issue-advocacy debate over the bill sponsored by Senator John McCain (R-Arizona) was largely one-sided. The antismoking organizations, such as the American Cancer Society and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, lacked the financial resources to adequately combat the industry's advertising and were outspent 40-to-1.⁶

The tobacco industry's issue ads about the McCain bill were a prime example of saturation advertising. The pro-industry side aired commercials at a high level of frequency and outspent its opponents. Saturation advertising is likely to elicit a level of recall sufficient to make it possible to identify an agenda setting or priming effect if one occurred. Did the advertisements change the way people (legislators and average Americans) viewed the issues surrounding the tobacco legislation sponsored by McCain? Did the advertisements or the surrounding media attention increase awareness of the legislation? Was public opinion recast to reflect the claims of the advertisements? Did the attitudes of those in media markets with more advertising differ from those in markets with little or none?

Even when such ads appear to influence policy and shape public discourse, little academic work has been done on their quantifiable effectiveness. Previous studies of issue advocacy are limited because they are descriptive (campaign-finance driven),⁷ narrow (legislative ads toward elites),⁸ or experimental (heavy emphasis on inoculation theory and source attribution).⁹ Each study highlights important aspects of issue advocacy but fails to address the overall influence of the ads.

Measures of effectiveness have been crude and limited due to the available sources. For example, the success of commercials is often gauged by the number of telephone calls to toll-free numbers included in an advertising campaign. The "Harry and Louise" ads sponsored by HIAA registered 300,000 calls between September 1993 and April 1994. Another common device is counting the amount of "free" air time in news that is devoted to the commercial after it is aired. HIAA's 1993-1994 health care reform advertisements received a total of 324 seconds of network evening news time, compared with 122 seconds for the DNC's commercials.¹⁰

A better gauge of effectiveness would be to focus on survey data and media-buy information to assess whether issue advertisements shift opinions. Comparing changes in judged accuracy of claims with exposure to advertising will help determine whether issue ads are successful in altering attitudes. Campaigns, not single advertisements, should be analyzed to determine whether attitudes differ in areas exposed and unexposed to the ads.

As the debate over issue-advocacy advertising has grown, so has the confusion over what constitutes an issue commercial. Each author's definition of issue-advocacy advertising reflects the manner in which the

Issue-Advocacy Advertising

subject is tackled. One group of scholars, spurred by the recent campaign-finance debate, describes the problems of issue-advocacy advertising and questions its effect on public discourse.¹¹ From another point of view, issue advocacy is a legitimate piece of a larger lobbying effort by traditional interest groups.¹² In a third conception, communication theories are applied to issue advocacy to measure effectiveness.¹³

Issue advocacy has a long tradition as a form of corporate image building. In this more traditional conception, "advocacy advertising, although a subset of corporate image advertising, is concerned with the propagation of ideas and the elucidation of controversial issues of public importance. It does so in such a manner that supports the position and interests of the sponsor while expressly or implicitly downgrading the sponsor's opponents and denying the accuracy of their facts."¹⁴

Corporations have used issue advocacy to address difficult or controversial topics. The majority of these campaigns have focused on elite print outlets, such as the *New York Times* editorial page or the *National Journal*. Since the 1970s, Mobil Oil Corporation has used issue-advocacy advertising to express its point of view, especially when it felt that the media were not portraying the company accurately or fairly. In recent years, industry coalitions, such as the milk producers, the beef coalition, and the cotton growers, have employed issue advocacy to battle competition or to change public behavior and opinion. Because of a lack of financial disclosure, it is difficult to assess whether the corporations involved in this type of issue-advocacy advertising also are involved in its political incarnation. Philip Morris's \$1 million campaign supposedly to stop youth smoking would fall under this category of issue ads.

Issue advocacy functions as one component of a larger traditional lobbying effort. Instead of individual corporations sponsoring advertisements, industry or activist groups form coalitions in service of common goals. Advertising is an "outside lobbying technique" used by interest groups to influence legislators and public opinion.¹⁵ Coalitions or individual corporations also utilize campaign contributions, grassroots lobbying, or public relations strategies to lobby Capitol Hill.¹⁶ In Burdett Loomis's conception, ads primarily target Washington elites in hopes of achieving favorable legislation.¹⁷

Legislative-issue campaigns focus on a particular piece of legislation, such as the national budget or NAFTA. By contrast, election-issue advocacy ads support preferred candidates or oppose those who do not share the sponsoring organizations' political views, without explicitly advocating their election or defeat. In many cases, legislative-issue ads target legislators in the hope of influencing votes. When this occurs, television

commercials are concentrated in the Washington, D.C., media market, and print advertisements are run in elite newspapers and journals.

By contrast, election-issue ads influence members of Congress by creating public opinion, or the illusion of it, in their districts. By influencing who is elected, issue advocacy affects legislation. However, these definitions are not rigid; interest groups will employ the targeting strategy that best suits their needs. In the case of the five largest tobacco companies' campaign of 1998, legislative-issue ads were addressed to legislators in the nation's capital but also aired nationwide on cable television to erode support for the bill.

Loomis outlines a series of attributes that are common in issue-advocacy campaigns.¹⁸ The 1998 tobacco campaign embodies each of them. First, when issue ads are present, one side's point of view dominates the public discourse. Second, in order to best control the debate, an interest will broaden or restrict the scope of conflict to achieve a favorable setting and manufacture "the dominant narrative that defined both the problems and potential solutions." In the case of tobacco, the industry expanded the scope of conflict from a negotiation among state attorneys general and federal leaders to a campaign addressing the general public. Finally, only a limited number of interests have the resources or desire to sponsor issue ads. Loomis realizes that the tobacco industry has both of these elements and prior to 1998 had embarked on several campaigns. "Tobacco companies—both individually and in concert—have embarked upon expensive campaigns to counter governmental actions by redefining smoking issues."¹⁹ In other words, the 1998 campaigns are textbook examples of how an interest can shape and dominate a debate.

Political scientist Darrell West expands on Loomis's assumptions by explaining that issue ads allow interests to control the content, the timing, and the delivery of the message.²⁰ The interest's position is directly transmitted to the public without having to rely on the press. In certain situations, the goal of issue advocacy may not focus on dramatically altering the opinions of the general public but instead focus on influencing elites with a show of force. "Even if citizens themselves are not swayed by grassroots appeals, elites can perceive that there is a groundswell of support or opposition in regard to particular proposals."²¹

Like Loomis, West argues that issue-advocacy ads create problems for representative democracy because the tactic favors powerful, rich, and well-organized interests.²² Even though issue advocacy is available to all interests, only a few can afford to engage in it. Consumer groups, public interest groups, political parties, and broad-based social movements are

limited in their ability to participate because of the cost involved in mounting a campaign.

However, West discounts the effectiveness of issue ads because of their link to known partisan groups and their past failures. He adds, "Interest groups which run ads have clear partisan objectives and therefore are not seen as credible by reporters, legislators, or the public."²³ This conclusion is based on the assumption that a group's identity and interests are clear from the ad. In practice, it is extremely difficult to discern this information from the individual ads, which is one reason the interest groups, especially an organization with a negative or tainted image, will often choose to air issue ads using "stealth" front groups. This tactic divorces the perceived accountability for the advertising campaign from the interest group. In addition, as we noted in Chapter 1, in the 1996 and 1998 elections, political parties were sponsors of issue advocacy. The parties have successfully utilized advertising campaigns to promote their agendas.

Issue Advocacy and Communication Theory

Burgoon, Pfau, and Birk posit that issue ads instill "resistance to potential slippage in the attitudes of supporters rather than [act] as a tool to convert opponents."²⁴ As a result, they note, issue ads appear in elite newspapers, target elites, and "employ lengthy arguments." In addition, they observe that the target audience is political conservatives who already have favorable opinions of business.

These scholars do not distinguish among types of issue-advocacy advertisements. To test their theories, their experiment relies on Mobil Oil print advertisements. They then apply their hypotheses to both corporate and political-issue advocacy. Within these categories, the researchers fail to divide ads according to the type of sponsor. In the experiment, this creates an uneven match between a nonprofit and a corporate product. If subjects base their assessment of the ad on the legitimacy of the sponsoring organization, the results may be skewed.

In contrast to Burgoon, Pfau, and Birk's framing, Leonard N. Reid, Lawrence C. Soley, and Bruce G. Vanden Bergh conducted an experiment to probe source attribution in issue-advocacy advertisements.²⁵ They found that when audience members are neutral toward an issue and generally uncommitted, they tend to respond more negatively to a trade organization or commercial sponsor than to a noncommercial sponsor of the same advocacy position. Knowledge about the sponsor influences the impact of the issue ad. When a newspaper reports additional infor-

mation about the ad or about the sponsoring group, the press alters the environment.

Source credibility is a fundamental concept in understanding how interest groups utilize issue advocacy. By employing a front group to sponsor issue advocacy, a controversial interest group may forestall a backlash. Average viewers may not be able to discern the source of the ads and thus may judge a commercial sponsored by a front group more favorably than an advertisement for an interest identified in its spots. Citizens have difficulty remembering advertising sources. For example, our study of issue-advocacy advertising in the 1996 presidential election found that only half of focus-group participants could correctly identify the advertising sponsors after directly viewing the commercials.

Charles T. Salmon, Leonard N. Reid, James Pokrywczynski, and Robert W. Willett advanced the earlier hypothesis of Reid and colleagues that source credibility influenced the strength of advocacy advertising. This team hypothesized that the format of the advocacy information is related to the effectiveness of the message. The public affairs information presented as a paid advertisement is less effective than a published press release. They found that noncommercial sources are considered less biased than commercial ones. "The implication of the finding is that although advertising in general is perceived as more biased than news stories, a message presented in an advertising format may be perceived as more interesting and more informative, and hence, be more persuasive than a message presented in a news format."²⁶ These communication studies concentrate on the strength of individual advertisements and the sponsor's credibility and fail to consider the effectiveness of the entire issue-ad campaign. Success of issue advocacy would be better assessed by examining how actual issue ads alter public opinion in a more naturalistic setting.

Issue Advocacy and the Tobacco Debates

In order to understand the effects of the issue advertising in the tobacco debate, it is useful to understand the context in which the deliberation about the McCain bill took place. In the 1990s, the tobacco debate moved to the federal level when the McCain bill sought congressional approval for an agreement between forty state attorneys general and the cigarette companies. In general, the McCain bill (S. 1415) would have increased the power of the Food and Drug Administration to partly restrict tobacco products, regulated tobacco advertising, increased the cost of a pack of cigarettes by \$1.10 over five years, penalized the industry if it

failed to reduce the number of young smokers, and assessed the industry \$516 billion over a twenty-five-year period. In return, a yearly cap of \$6.5 billion on awards to aggrieved smokers would be set, the companies would be provided immunity from all class action lawsuits and limited punitive damages from past activities, and tobacco farmers would receive financial help for losses that occurred as a result of the legislation.

The content of the legislation changed as debate over it proceeded. Because the changes affected the accuracy of the content of ads, we are providing a brief catalogue of them: On June 20, 1997, the cigarette makers reached an agreement with forty state attorneys general that broadened the power of the Food and Drug Administration to regulate tobacco products in some respects and restricted it in others, restricted advertising, increased the cost of a pack of cigarettes by about sixty cents over five years, penalized the industry by up to an additional \$2 billion a year if the number of young smokers didn't drop below targeted levels, charged the companies \$368.5 billion over a twenty-five-year period, and set a yearly cap of \$4 billion on awards to individuals. In exchange, this proposed settlement gave the companies immunity from all class action lawsuits and limited punitive damages from past activities. An important provision was that the settlement was subject to congressional approval.

Action was taking place at the state level as well: On July 3, 1997, the tobacco companies settled the Mississippi Medicaid lawsuit for \$3.6 billion. On August 25, 1997, the suit brought by the attorney general of Florida was settled for \$11.3 billion. On January 16, 1998, Texas settled its Medicaid lawsuit for over \$14 billion.

On April 8, 1998, the major tobacco companies declared negotiations dead and announced that they would take their case to the American people. Senate bill 1415, which was supported by President Bill Clinton, was voted out of the Senate Commerce Committee in April 1998 by a nineteen-to-one vote. The bill would have settled the lawsuits brought by the attorneys general with provisions that elicited \$516 billion from the industry over twenty-five years; increased the price of a pack of cigarettes at the manufacturing level by \$1.10 over a five-year period; increased the regulatory authority of the Food and Drug Administration over the manufacturing, sale, and marketing of tobacco products; imposed up to \$3.5 billion in annual financial penalties on the tobacco companies if youth smoking failed to drop at least a specified amount; provided \$10 billion over a five-year period to help those such as tobacco growers whose livelihood was negatively affected by the agreement; and placed a \$6.5 billion annual cap on the amounts cigarette companies could be assessed in damages. The money raised by the bill would have

funded medical research as well as a large-scale campaign to reduce youth smoking. The McCain bill would also have banned billboards advertising tobacco within 1,000 feet of schools and banned human, animal, or cartoon characters in ads for cigarettes. The Commerce Committee bill included financial aid to any tobacco farm owners who experienced a drop in demand as a result of the bill.

In the Senate Finance Committee, Chair William Roth (R-Delaware) tried to change the bill to direct the proposed tax revenue to tax reductions; his proposal was defeated. At the same time, the committee proposed upping the cost of a pack of cigarettes \$1.50 over a three-year period. This amendment, which was not binding, was favored by former FDA Commissioner David Kessler and former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, among others.

Negotiations between the White House and Senator McCain produced a tentative agreement that the yearly cap on liability be raised from \$6.5 billion to \$8 billion. The same discussions produced agreement that higher penalties be imposed on the tobacco industry if youth smoking didn't drop below the targeted rate.

On May 8, 1998, Minnesota settled for \$6.1 billion.

On May 21, the Senate voted to support the Gregg-Leahy amendment to S. 1415. That amendment eliminated legal protections for the tobacco companies, including the annual ceiling on the industry's liability. A Senate vote on the bill was postponed until the members returned from recess in June. "Industry Ad Campaign Helps Stall Tobacco Bill," noted a headline in the *New York Times*.²⁷

On June 10, the Senate, backed by President Clinton, "approved a compromise proposal attaching an unrelated marriage tax cut to the pending tobacco measure."²⁸ The Gramm amendment gave the self-employed a 100 percent deduction for the cost of their health insurance starting in 1999. It also cut the so-called marriage penalty for couples making less than \$50,000 a year. The amendment was endorsed by voice vote. This amendment altered the net tax impact of the bill on those most likely to be affected by the increase in the tax on cigarettes.

Other important amendments were made to the bill, as well, opening its sponsors to the charge that the intent of the legislation was funding non-tobacco-related government programs. The Senate adopted amendments providing veterans with \$3 billion to cope with smoking-related illness. The Coverdell amendment, funding anti-illegal drug enforcement and interdiction, passed 52-46.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce was among the groups lobbying for a cap on the fees trial lawyers could claim from the settlement. The Chamber's television ad attacked the transfer of funds from working Americans

making under \$30,000 to "millionaire" trial lawyers. (Because those with lower incomes are more likely to be smokers, a tax per pack will fall disproportionately on those making under \$30,000.) The Gorton amendment, passed 49-48 on June 16, set up a formula capping those fees.

The Durbin-DeWine amendment made the so-called look-back assessments (the penalties paid by the industry if the targeted reductions in youth smoking were not reached by the specified time) more company-specific and set reduction targets at 20 percent in three years, 40 percent in five years, 55 percent in seven years, and 67 percent in ten years. The Reed amendment disallowed tax deductions for advertising, promotional, and marketing expenses relating to tobacco-product use unless certain advertising requirements were met.

The cloture vote that would have moved S. 1415 to a final vote failed 57-42. A 53-46 procedural vote sent S. 1415 back to the Commerce Committee. Proponents of the bill were short of the sixty votes needed to waive the motion.

As all of this activity was going on, the airwaves in some markets were flooded with ads from the tobacco industry. Forming a coalition called the Tobacco Resolution, the five largest American tobacco companies initially joined forces to support a settlement and then, when protection from class action suits was lost, to lobby against passage of the McCain bill.²⁹ The alliance consisted of Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Lorillard Tobacco Company, Philip Morris Incorporated, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, and United States Tobacco Company.

The U.S. Tobacco Company was the only one of the five companies not among the sponsors of the first ad that began airing March 12. Its message focused on the benefits of the June 20, 1997, settlement proposal. "There's been bitter conflict about tobacco issues," said the announcer as reinforcing print appeared on the screen. "Isn't it time to move forward? The tobacco companies have agreed to a reasonable settlement." The ad then listed key elements of the agreement: "\$500 million a year to reduce youth smoking. Billions of dollars that can be spent on health care. Disclosure to the FDA about the health effects of tobacco products. An end to all outdoor tobacco advertising. No cigarette vending machines. Larger warning labels on cigarettes." The spot then asked, "What do the tobacco companies get? They don't get immunity. Class action lawsuits are settled now and not allowed in the future. Individuals can still sue tobacco companies. No limits on punitive damages for future conduct. A unique opportunity to move forward." The ad closed with the tag line "Get the Facts: Call 1-800-556-9969."

On April 8, the tobacco representatives announced that negotiations had not worked. The new campaign was built on the assumption articu-

lated in one of the television ads. "There was a historic resolution of tobacco issues. This would have changed the tobacco industry. Now politics has taken over."

On April 9, the first full-page print ad appeared in national papers. The same ad was run in regional papers on April 12.

On April 16, the tobacco companies began a \$40 million print, radio, and television campaign "to inform the American people about both the proposed national tobacco resolution and proposed legislation before Congress." As a small disclaimer at the beginning of the ad indicated, the first television ad aired by the industry in this series was sponsored by "America's four leading tobacco companies."

When ads ask viewers to do something—buy a product, vote for a candidate, call a number—one measure of their effectiveness is sales, votes, or calls. The tobacco companies' ads closed with a 1-800 number. Those who called were given the option to be patched through to Congress. Alternatively, they could send a telegram. From March 12 through July 28, reported industry spokesman Steve Duchesne, the ads elicited 469,368 calls. Of those, 133,414 were patched through to a congressional office, and 167,748 telegrams were sent. By contrast, after spending \$12 million on nine months of advertising, the campaign running the "Harry and Louise" ads had elicited 300,000 calls.

The tobacco ads were also characterized by on-screen documentation of the sources of the companies' claims. The backup documents were offered to stations to clear the ads but were not routinely made available to reporters. "We just haven't seen the critical review of what we were saying in the ads," said Duchesne. "I think that reflects the level of substantiation we have had to live up to. [Because the ads are sponsored by the tobacco companies] we are probably held to a higher standard by those clearing ads for the stations."

On Friday, July 17, the five companies began airing the fourteenth in the series of television ads begun in mid-April to block the bill. Each airing of ads lasted one to two weeks and played in thirty to fifty markets across the country. Some weeks, the group was on the air in fifty markets, in other weeks, thirty, and in some weeks below that level, reported Duchesne.

By and large, local buys were not made in Washington, D.C., or New York City, although the "Christmas tree" ad ran as part of a D.C.-area spot buy. Because the ads aired nationally on CNN, they reached the Washington market that way. The ads were aired coast to coast on both national and spot cable and spot broadcast. Print ads appeared in such elite media as the *Washington Post* and such specialty publications as *Amsterdam News* and *Roll Call*.

The commercials featured the themes of previous tobacco campaigns: smokers' and taxpayers' rights. The advertising focused on how the legislation would increase government bureaucracy, mandate the largest consumer tax increase in history, and create a black market for cigarettes. By tapping into popular antigovernment themes, these claims appealed to smokers but also to the general public. Thus, the advertising increased the scope of discussion from a narrow policy focus to one on civil liberties and the role of government.

The Tobacco Resolution advertising was reinforced by other issue-advocacy campaigns. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Smokers Alliance both aired commercials advocating the defeat of the McCain legislation. The Tobacco Resolution advertising aired across the nation, but the U.S. Chamber of Commerce sponsored commercials only in the Washington, D.C., media market.³⁰

A coalition of anti-tobacco groups attempted to combat the Tobacco Resolution advertising. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a nonprofit organization working to reduce youth smoking, was a vocal supporter of the tobacco-control legislation. The campaign sponsored a series of radio commercials calling for eight senators to support the bill.³¹ It also produced a commercial in conjunction with the American Cancer Society (ACS), the other leader in lobbying for the bill. The ACS aired advertisements featuring former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop that were shown in Maine, Colorado, Washington, Georgia, and Missouri and on CNN. This May 1998 campaign cost approximately \$1 million and was followed in September by a larger \$5 million buy.³² These efforts by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and American Cancer Society were not able to compete with the larger campaign sponsored by the Tobacco Resolution. The largest buy aired after the McCain bill had been declared dead and the tobacco companies' ads had disappeared. These anti-tobacco commercials chose to take a more direct approach and targeted undecided senators and Beltway elites in hopes of shoring up or increasing support for the legislation.

The tobacco industry's issue ads, a textbook example of the power of saturation advertising, allowed the industry to reshape the debate. The pro-smoking side aired commercials at a high level and outspent the proponents of the McCain bill. The power of the tobacco companies' campaign was magnified by the fact that there was little counterbalancing information in the news.

During the 1996 campaign, the Associated Press offered regular adwatches of presidential general-election ads. During the issue advocacy over the McCain bill, AP produced no adwatches. Neither did the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, which in 1996 developed alternative forms to evaluate the accuracy of campaign claims. CNN, which did not

adwatch the presidential general election of 1996 but did a thorough job in 1992, did not produce adwatches on this exchange either.

The only adwatch by a major media outlet was aired on ABC. In place of adwatching were stories that reinforced the inaccuracies in the ads by running them uncorrected in news. A National Public Radio piece reported: "Although some politicians are wary about making tobacco legislation a campaign issue, it may be out of their hands already. The tobacco industry has been running television ads warning of a Congress gone crazy over anti-tobacco legislation. The latest spot features a self-destructing cuckoo clock."³³ A clip of the ad airs. "These ads are running in fifty markets," continues the reporter.

In a similar move, an ABC *Nightline* report aired a segment of an industry ad that said, "Washington's tobacco legislation, what's in it for you? Half a trillion dollars in new taxes, new federal spending, cigarettes at \$5.00 a pack, creating a black market. No wonder it's opposed by millions of hard-working Americans."³⁴ The reporter then added, "The ads came on top of the millions in campaign contributions the tobacco companies have traditionally given to congressional candidates."

At issue then are questions such as these: Did the advertisements change the way people viewed the tobacco legislation sponsored by Senator McCain? Did the advertisements or the surrounding media attention increase the awareness of the legislation? Were opinions recast to reflect the claims of the advertisements? Did media markets with more advertising differ from those areas with little or no advertising? Did respondents who were heavily exposed to advertising judge the claims of the pro-tobacco side more accurately than those who did not view commercials on the subject? Did the claims of the anti-tobacco forces suffer in areas with heavy exposure? Or were there no discernible effects?

To determine the effect of the ads aired by both sides, Jamieson and Princeton Survey Research Associates created a survey administered to 1,242 adults, age eighteen and older, August 20-30, 1998. The survey sampled individuals exposed to different kinds of media climates. The breakdown was as follows:

- 318 individuals in the twenty-two media markets with heavy Tobacco Resolution campaign advertising—more than 3,500 gross ratings points (GRPs) of advertising on broadcast television outlets between April 1 and July 18;
- 309 individuals in the twenty-one media markets with moderate advertising—between 1,700 and 3,500 GRPs;
- 308 individuals in the twenty-one markets with sparse advertising—less than 1,700 GRPs;

- 307 individuals in twenty randomly selected comparable markets with no Tobacco Resolution campaign advertising on broadcast television.

On average, viewers in heavy advertising areas saw fifty-seven pro-tobacco ads on broadcast television over three and a half months. Viewers in moderate advertising areas saw twenty-five, and viewers in sparse areas saw nine. Because the industry did make national buys on CNN, there was some exposure to the ads in our "no" and "sparse" conditions. Because exposure was uniform across the markets, the relative level of gross ratings points in broadcast would reflect actual levels of difference between markets.

The margin of error for results based on the full sample of 1,242 is ± 3 percent. For results based on a subsample, the margin of error is ± 6 percent. Following are some findings from the study:

For three of the claims in the ads, individuals in areas with heavy pro-tobacco advertising judged the claims as more accurate than did those in areas with less or no advertising.

- "Under the tobacco plan Congress considered earlier this summer, the price of cigarettes would increase to \$5 a pack." In media markets with heavy pro-tobacco advertising, 22 percent of individuals judged this statement very accurate, compared with 15 percent in markets with no advertising.
- "The tobacco plan Congress considered would create a huge black market in cigarettes." Almost half (47 percent) of individuals in areas with heavy advertising said this statement was very accurate, compared with a third (35 percent) in areas with no advertising.
- "The tobacco plan Congress considered would create the largest consumer tax in history." Four in ten individuals (43 percent) in heavy advertising areas said this statement was very accurate, compared with three in ten (31 percent) in areas with no advertising.

These findings hold even after taking into account behavioral, attitudinal, and demographic factors that play a role in determining how people judged the accuracy of these statements.

- Those who smoke or live in a household where someone smokes were more likely than those who do not to think the tobacco plan the Senate considered would have increased cigarettes to \$5 a pack (22 percent versus 17 percent), created a black market (54 percent

versus 35 percent), and created the largest consumer tax in history (50 percent versus 29 percent).

- Those with an unfavorable opinion of government regulation of business were more likely than those with a favorable opinion to think the plan would have created a black market (46 percent versus 32 percent) and the largest consumer tax in history (41 percent versus 27 percent).

Individuals in areas with heavy advertising judged the two other widely aired claims as no more or less accurate than did those in areas with less or no advertising. The two claims were

- The Senate plan would create seventeen new bureaucracies.
- Under the plan, both smokers' and nonsmokers' taxes would increase.

There was no significant difference among markets on descriptive statements about the bill that were not found in the ads. These statements were that the plan eliminated the marriage tax penalty; the plan would aid tobacco farmers; the plan would reimburse the states and fund campaigns and medical research; the plan made health insurance tax deductible for the self-employed. In addition, there were no differences in perceptions of the accuracy of one claim by the anti-tobacco forces that was backed by a small television and radio buy. The claim made was that 3,000 kids start smoking regularly daily, and as a result one-third die prematurely.

Links between perceptions of the Senate bill and support for the bill underscore the relevance of this study. It is important to understand what shapes people's perceptions because perceptions shape opinion.

Exposure to pro-tobacco ads was unrelated to support for the Senate bill. However, perceptions of what the bill would have done and why the bill was or was not necessary shaped support for the bill:

- Four in ten individuals (39 percent) who thought the Senate tobacco plan would have spawned a black market for cigarettes supported the bill, compared with half (50 percent) who thought a black market was unlikely.
- The belief that the plan would have represented the largest consumer tax in history dampened support for the bill (38 percent versus 54 percent).
- Thinking the plan would have created seventeen new government bureaucracies dampened support (37 percent versus 49 percent),

as did thinking the plan would increase the taxes of both smokers and nonsmokers (38 percent versus 49 percent).

- Knowing the plan would have aided tobacco farmers increased support for the Senate bill (45 percent versus 38 percent), as did knowing the plan would have reimbursed the states for health expenses and funded anti-smoking campaigns and medical research (46 percent versus 32 percent).

Exposure to pro-tobacco advertising played a modest but statistically significant role in shaping people's perceptions of the accuracy of claims at issue in the tobacco debate. Specifically, there were dramatic and statistically significant differences in perception of the accuracy of the claim that "the tobacco plan Congress considered would create a huge black market in cigarettes" (see Table A16.1 in Appendix IV). The differences in perception paralleled differences in exposure to the industry ads' claim.³⁵

Overall, even after the study controlled for highly salient behaviors and attitudes and a range of demographic variables, exposure to pro-tobacco ads affected perception of the accuracy of three of the eleven claims tested. This finding is noteworthy because these perceptions shaped opinion about whether the Senate should have passed the tobacco bill.

In the case of the McCain bill, the tobacco industry was able to stall the legislation and then deny it a floor vote. This victory permitted the industry to broker a more favorable settlement between the corporations and the states involved in the class action suit. This case indicates that when the issue is complex, reporting on it deficient, adwatching minimal, and one side substantially outspends the other, ads (in this instance, issue ads) can influence public attitudes.

Deborah Beck and Kathleen Hall Jamieson

Appendix I

Methods for Analysis of Ad Impact

Definitions of Terms in Our Analysis of Advertising Impact

A **rating point** is a measure of audience viewership on a scale of 0 to 1400.¹ One rating point is equal to 1 percent of the potential viewing universe. The viewing universe is defined as those households with televisions capable of receiving a given broadcast signal. Consequently, an individual commercial broadcast that achieved a rating of 4.2 indicates that 4.2 percent of the potential viewing universe tuned into the commercial.

Gross rating points (GRPs) are the sum of rating points over a given time and include duplicated audiences. For example, a commercial that aired only twice and achieved a rating of 4.2 each time would record GRPs of 8.4, regardless of any overlap of audiences between the two airings. Likewise, if we were interested in determining the GRPs achieved by a specific political commercial from September 1 through November 3, we would simply sum the rating points achieved by each broadcast of the commercial during that time period. Because they measure duplicated audiences, GRPs have no upward bound.

For earlier years of broadcast television and for cable television in general, GRPs are not available. To establish viewership levels in these cases, we turn to dollars spent as the best available surrogate.

GRPs are reported by **designated market areas** (DMAs), "a Nielsen Media Research term for a group of counties in which a TV station obtains the greatest portion of its audience."² Each county belongs to only one DMA.

Because voting data are gathered and reported by county but advertising time is bought and reported by DMA, we assigned the same GRPs to each county within each media market. This procedure allowed us to determine the sizes of audiences within and across markets.

Since cable buys are reported in dollars, not GRPs, we created a cable GRP measure by dividing dollars spent on cable within a market by the number of GRPs purchased by one dollar of broadcast in the market. Information on cable buys was obtained from the campaigns. We assembled information on local media market buys in the top fifty markets in the United States by checking station logs

secured from Nielsen. To verify the accuracy of the Nielsen logs, we compared the Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Minneapolis Nielsen logs to the ones we copied in those markets.

To track national buys, we used data from the Dole and Clinton campaigns as well as reports from competitive media reports (CMRs). These sources were also used to confirm the accuracy of the station logs. When the records conflicted, as they did in twenty-seven cases, we queried the campaigns for assistance. When that failed to resolve the conflict, we accepted the accuracy of the station logs over the reports of the campaigns and CMRs.

Coding Attack Versus Advocacy

Content analysis of ads is performed at the level of the **idea unit**. We use idea unit, not sentence, as our unit of analysis because the verbal content of ads is often expressed in phrases rather than sentences. A single sentence may include idea units that advocate and others that attack (for example, "Clinton favors family medical leave but Dole opposes it"). Each idea unit is coded as either advocacy or attack, based on the assumption that that which does not attack, advocates. In the example above, we judge the idea unit "but Dole opposes it" as attack, and "Clinton favors family medical leave" as advocacy.

To determine what percent of an ad falls into each category, we count the words in idea units that attack and those that advocate as a percent of the total number of words in each ad. In this coding scheme, an ad in which 61 percent of the words occurred in idea units that focused on unfavorable characteristics of the opponent or his record would be assigned a value of 0.61 attack.

We assume that anything not coded as attack is advocacy. An ad that both attacks and advocates would be considered contrastive. For example, the words in capital letters in the following ad would be coded as attack, those in regular type as advocacy:

TO FIGHT DRUGS, ALL BOB DOLE OFFERS ARE SLOGANS, "JUST DON'T DO IT" AND LOOK WHAT HE'S DONE. VOTED TO CUT THE PRESIDENT'S SCHOOL ANTI-DRUG EFFORTS BY 50 PERCENT. AGAINST CREATING A DRUG CZAR. AGAINST CREATING STUDENT LOANS. AGAINST THE PRESIDENT'S PLAN TO LIMIT CIGARETTE ADS TO TARGET OUR KIDS. JOINED WITH NEWT GINGRICH TO CUT VACCINES FOR CHILDREN. THAT'S THE REAL BOB DOLE RECORD. "JUST DON'T DO IT." ONE SLOGANS CAN'T HIDE. President Clinton: Protecting our values."

In this seventy-seven-word ad, five words are advocacy and seventy-two attack, for 94 percent attack and 6 percent advocacy.

We establish an ad's attack score using the following formula: The number of words that occur in idea units that attack is divided by the total number of words occurring in the ad. If the example above constituted the entire ad, it would receive an advocacy score of 5/77, or 0.06. Its attack score would be 0.94.

To determine the **weight** of an ad, we multiplied an ad's duration in seconds by the gross rating points it achieved in the market. To further differentiate attack advertising from advocacy, we calculated the proportion of the ad's weight that was devoted to attack:

$$\text{Attack weight} = \text{ad duration in seconds} \times \text{gross rating points} \\ \times \text{attack score.}$$

Attack and advocacy weight add up to the total weight for each ad.

Each of the political advertisements aired by the Dole and Clinton campaigns was coded in terms of the amount of attack and the amount of advocacy (in GRP-seconds). A similar procedure was followed for the ads aired by the AFL-CIO and the Business Coalition.

To verify that the ad tapes secured from the campaigns were complete, we compared their contents to the station logs, to media reports, and to our record of ads taped off the air during the campaign in ten media markets.

Determining Voter Turnout

In our analysis of the effects of political advertising, we expressed voter turnout as a proportion: votes cast for president divided by voting-age population. Both sets of figures are available at the county level, our unit of analysis. Thus, there are three variables in this formula: votes cast, voting-age population, and county.

Votes cast for president (and other offices) are certified and disseminated by each state's Office of the Secretary of State. States provide vote totals for listed candidates on a county-by-county basis. Official state figures, however, are subject to revision. This is not an infrequent occurrence, although it is in most cases a trivial one. If one runs across different vote totals at either the county, state, or federal level, it is most likely due to the influence of official state revisions. Finally, one cannot assume that official state vote tallies reflect all votes cast, as some states may opt not to count absentee ballots in races so heavily decided that the absentee ballots could not possibly change the outcome.

Voting-age population data are based on the U.S. Census Bureau's county-level population estimates. The Bureau's estimate of a county's voting-age population includes the entire resident population age eighteen and older. Thus, those ineligible to vote for reasons of alien status, felony conviction, or mental incapacity are included in the voting-age population. Further, transient populations (such as students and military personnel) will be included in a county's voting-age population even though some may vote by absentee ballot in another county or state. Census Bureau figures are *estimates*, which the Bureau continuously revises. Consequently, they are fluid figures and apt to change.

Counties, our unit of analysis, are also subject to geographic and population change. The Census Bureau defines a county as "a type of governmental unit that is the primary legal subdivision of every State except Alaska and Louisiana." (The county equivalent in Louisiana is the parish, and in Alaska the borough.) Although relatively fixed, county boundaries sometimes do change. As part of its county population estimates, the Census Bureau publishes "Geographic Change Notes,"

which report boundary “annexations and de-annexations, formation of new counties (or equivalents), incorporated places, or minor civil divisions, disincorporation or disorganization of governmental units, and governmental unit mergers or consolidations.” The significance of boundary changes arises from the shifting population figures likely to occur when a county’s boundaries expand or contract.

The counties included in the sample are those in the top fifty media markets in the United States as of the 1996 presidential election. Of the 3,112 counties across the states, 1,101 fall into the top fifty media markets. Three of these counties were dropped from analysis because the official number of votes tallied in the 1996 or 1992 presidential races was greater than the number of reported eligible voters, according to the Census. Thus, the sample of counties is 1,098 for all of our analyses.

Measuring Total Advertising Weight

For each county in the sample, the “weight” of each ad was calculated by multiplying the ad’s GRPs by its duration. The total weight for each county was the sum of the weights across all ads aired. The “attack weight” was also calculated by multiplying each ad by the percentage of its content that was geared toward attack. “Advocacy weight” was calculated with an analogous formula. Thus, for each county, eight values described the advertising environment: “attack weight” and “advocacy weight” for the Clinton and Dole campaigns and for ads aired by the AFL-CIO and the Business Coalition.

By analyzing the association between attack and advocacy weight and voter turnout, we can assess the degree to which counties that receive more attack advertising have more or less turnout and whether Democrats or Republicans are advantaged by attack and advocacy ads.

We picked September 1 as the starting date for analysis on the assumption that voters think of the general-election period when answering questions about negativity in presidential campaign ads and because it seemed implausible to conclude that ads aired as early as June 1995, the start date of Clinton-Gore-DNC advertising, would have a measurable effect on general-election turnout and attitudes.

Describing Counties

This sample was divided into five groups as a function of how “Republican” the county was in the presidential elections of 1984, 1988, and 1992. The elections of 1984 and 1988 represented definitive victories for the Republican candidates, Ronald Reagan and George Bush. The 1992 election was a victory for Democrat Bill Clinton, but the margin of victory was narrow with Clinton earning only a plurality of the popular vote. Because of the strong bias toward Republican victories in this set of elections, we chose a measure that weighed the Republican margin of vote percentage in the three presidential elections leading up to 1996.

A second index was also calculated that counted the number of times the county voted more for the Republican candidate than the Democratic candidate. This number varied from 0 to 3. All analyses reported in the text were carried out on both indexes with no substantial differences in conclusions.

➤ Appendix II

A Nontechnical Technical Appendix

Surveys

This book draws on a large number of public opinion surveys. All the surveys analyzed here consist of interviews with people chosen at random from a particular population—whether residents of Philadelphia, registered voters in the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Area, the voting-age population of the nation, or of some other group. Random selection is the foundation of modern polling; paradoxical though it may seem at first blush, random selection ensures a sample of respondents that is representative of the population from which the respondents are chosen. Random selection permits generalizations about a population to be made on the basis of a sample and permits calculations about the precision of the generalizations.

The surveys employed here were conducted in several different ways. The most familiar is the **cross-section**, which involves interviewing all the individuals in a sample once, in a relatively short span of time. A cross-sectional survey is sometimes described as a “snapshot” of a population: It furnishes a picture of a population and of the differences among individuals at a single point in time. It cannot reveal changes in a population or within individuals over time.

Changes in a population are best studied in a **rolling cross-section**, in which the sampled individuals are interviewed only once, but a new random sample is interviewed every day or every week over a period of months or years. When such a survey is conducted carefully, the day-to-day or week-to-week differences among the samples can illuminate the causes of changes in a population.

Changes in individuals are the focus of a **panel** study, in which the people in a sample are interviewed repeatedly. The interval between interviews is sometimes weeks, sometimes months, sometimes years. Whatever the time span, the purpose of a panel is to identify how and why individual respondents have changed.

Content Analysis

At several points, the book relies upon content analysis to support claims about the nature of texts—television news, newspapers, candidates' speeches, and so on. Content analysis is a set of systematic procedures for characterizing a text, in large measure by counting and classifying elements of the text. The main advantage of content analysis, in comparison with less quantitative methods, is that it is reproducible: Making explicit the rules for classifying words or phrases makes it easier for different analysts to reach the same conclusions about a given text.

Statistical Analysis

The book takes advantage of statistical techniques beyond simple averages and percentages to analyze claims about politics rigorously. Technical material has been kept to a minimum, but some references to the methods employed are unavoidable. A sentence or two here about the most common may help make the analysis clearer.

Ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression makes it possible to isolate the effects of each of a large number of related factors simultaneously and efficiently. If the goal is to identify the relative importance of several potential explanations for something we observe, regression is frequently the technique of choice.

Logistic regression is a variant of ordinary least-squares regression used in the special case when what we wish to explain has only two possible outcomes—for example, whether an individual did or did not vote. The fundamental purpose of logistic regression is the same as that of OLS regression.

Factor analysis is a method for identifying patterns in a large collection of data—for example, in the responses individuals gave to a long list of questions about their knowledge of politics. In such a case, factor analysis might be used to find groups of questions that people tended to answer in the same way.

Statistical significance is used here (as in most social science) to identify quantitative results strong enough that we can be confident that they are not due to chance, to the fluctuations inherent in the process of sampling at random.