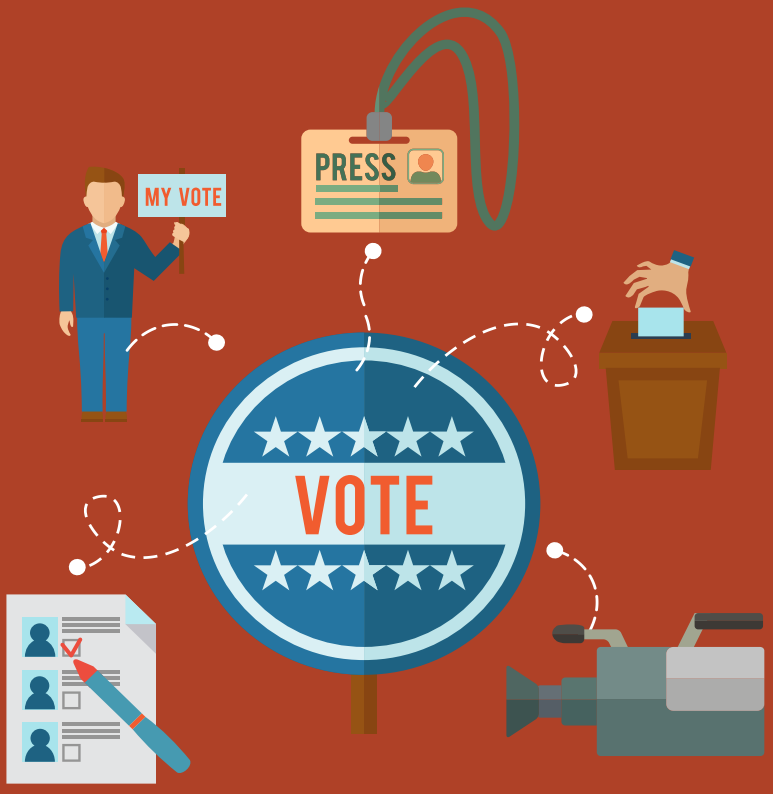
COMMUNICATION AND MIDTERM ELECTIONS

Media, Message, and Mobilization



Edited by **JOHN ALLEN HENDRICKS**
and **DAN SCHILL**

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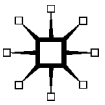

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PREFACE

From reading our literature, observes political communication scholar Richard Perloff, you would assume that the only campaigns in America are for the presidency. Indeed, as political scientists James Druckman, Martin Kifer, and Michael Parking note, scholarship on the content of (congressional) campaign communications remains underdeveloped. Congressional and gubernatorial campaigns are the foundation of democratic governance and have tremendous policy implications; however, they are often overlooked as an area of inquiry. This book attempts to address this gap in the research to better understand the role of communication and media in the political process and is intended to serve as an important monograph on the 2014 midterm elections.

Midterm elections are a significant research topic, and the 2014 races left a lasting impact on the American political system as the Republican Party took leadership of both chambers of Congress. Hence, President Obama is forced to reckon with a Republican Senate and House of Representatives. Once the dust settled after election, in the Senate, there were 54 Republicans and 46 Democrats; in the House of Representatives, there were 247 Republicans and 188 Democrats; and in state houses around the nation, there were 31 Republican governors and 18 Democratic governors.

Midterm elections are different from elections in presidential years for at least two reasons. First, turnout is typically lower in midterm years, which was the experience in 2014—it witnessed the lowest voter turnout since World War II. Presidential elections interest the electorate through attention-grabbing debates and conventions and wall-to-wall political ads, while midterm elections for Senators, house members, and governors, and other races only attract highly interested and motivated citizens. In recent years, this change in voting patterns has favored the GOP because the core of the Democratic coalition comprises individuals who turn out to vote at much higher levels in presidential elections. For example, the 2010 electorate was older, predominantly white, and more male-dominated than in the 2008 presidential election—the same trends were true for 2014.

A second difference is that the president's party almost always does worse in midterm elections. Even popular presidents such as Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Reagan saw their party lose seats in Congress among significant executive branch successes. Only twice—in 1934 and 2002—did the president's party gain seats in both the House and the Senate. In fact, in midterms since 1862, the president's party has averaged losses of more than two seats in the Senate and about 32 seats in

the House. One reason why this occurs is that presidents often see their popularity slide downward over their presidency, suggesting a cycle of unrealistically high expectations followed by inevitable disillusionment. In 2014, Obama's approval ratings were low, with about 53 percent disapproving and 41 percent approving on Election Day, depending on the poll.

As was witnessed in 2014, this trend is especially true in midterm elections six years after a president takes office, a year that is historically bad for commanders-in-chief. In what political scientist Colleen Shogan called the sixth-year curse, presidents' sixth years are typically filled with scandals, economic depressions, and weakened political coalitions. In fact, the 1998 election—when voters were widely believed to be punishing a Republican overreach in their impeachment of Clinton—represents the only time since the Civil War when a president has survived a sixth-year election with anything close to gains in both chambers. The opening chapter in the book, written by the book's editors, elaborates on this six-year-itch phenomenon and is a comprehensive review of the trends, headlines, and milestones that characterized the 2014 midterms in terms of media, messaging, and mobilization.

Issues raised in the Obama-Romney presidential campaign played out in the 2014 midterm and are the focus of the first section of the book. One takeaway from the 2012 presidential race was the importance of digital analytics in measuring political campaign effectiveness. In chapter 2, Jessica Baldwin-Philippi (Fordham University) explores the extent to which these campaign techniques were integrated into lower ballot races in 2014. Similarly, Joshua Scacco (Purdue University), Regina Lawrence (University of Oregon), and Ori Tenenboim (University of Texas-Austin) consider the impact of voter identification laws and messaging on citizens in 2014. Of course, midterm elections are not just about federal political candidates or governors. Partially due to gridlock in government, several states are considering constitutional amendments to advance political agendas. Amy Jasperson, Charles Kelley Jr., and Kirby Bennett (Rhodes College) analyze how the abortion issue played out in a 2014 ballot referendum in Tennessee. Political polarization continues to influence the electorate's voting decisions, and the role of partisan media in fostering polarization is explored by focusing on the 2014 campaigns in Iowa, North Carolina, and Georgia by Freddie J. Jennings, Rocío Galarza, and Benjamin R. Warner (University of Missouri-Columbia) in the fourth chapter.

A central focus of this book is media coverage of the candidates and campaigns, and the second section of the book features chapters on this important topic. Daniela Dimitrova and Sisi Hu (Iowa State University) analyze how the midterms were framed on local broadcast television news programs, and Joan L. Conners (Randolph-Macon College) examines how the Senate candidates were visually framed in photographs taken from newspaper front pages across the country. Predictably, the midterm elections proved to be a target for late-night comedians, and Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris (Eastern Carolina University) test how exposure to political humor influenced how viewers understood the major political issues, particularly the understanding and framing of the president's foreign policies.

The third section of the book scrutinizes the role of communication technologies and digital media in the midterm elections, an increasingly important research area in political communication. Terri L. Towner (Oakland University) experimentally evaluates how reading Twitter posts influences voters' political attitudes about a candidate's credibility. A primary communication channel used by the candidates in the midterms was social media profiles, and Nicole Smith Dahmen (University of Oregon) studies how the candidates used visual images on Twitter in 2014 to reach out to supporters and persuade undecided voters. As more and more women campaign for political office, the awareness of the role gender plays in a campaign is also important. Regina G. Lawrence (University of Oregon), Shannon McGregor, Arielle Cardona, and Rachel Mourão (University of Texas–Austin) study this issue relating to how female candidates presented themselves on digital media.

The final section of the book includes three chapters on one of the most important areas in media and politics research—political advertising. David Lynn Painter (Rollins College) and Tom Vizcarrondo (Full Sail University) assess the impact of television advertising in Florida, and Lindsey A. Harvell (James Madison University) and Gwen Nisbett (University of North Texas) measure advertising influence in Texas. Concluding the book with a nationwide study of advertising, Hyun Jung Yun (Texas State University) and Jae Hee Park (University of North Florida) analyze the differing effects of advertising themes adopted by candidates in red, blue, and purple states.

In summary, this book is a systematic look at media and politics in the 2014 elections. Campaign communication is of core relevance to the field of political communication and an important topic of study. Furthermore, the book includes leading scholars using various research methodologies to generate new understandings—both theoretical and practical—for students, researchers, journalists, and practitioners.

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PART I

THE 2014 ELECTION: ISSUES AND AGENDAS

CHAPTER 1

MEDIA, MESSAGE, AND MOBILIZATION: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE 2014 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Dan Schill and John Allen Hendricks

There are many ways to slice and dice election results—especially in midterm elections where all 435 seats in the US House of Representatives are on the ballot, in addition to about a third of the US Senate, 36 of the 50 state governorships, 46 state legislatures, and numerous other state and local races. And while it is true that "the midterm election of 2014 was entirely in keeping with the partisan kaleidoscope that has characterized American national elections since 1980" (Shafer, Wagner, & Engle, 2014, p. 608), several important trends, headlines, and milestones were marked in 2014: Democrats suffered significant and humbling defeats; historically low turnout (especially among groups that tend to vote Democratic) propelled a sweeping Republican wave; billions of dollars were spent airing millions of ads; the battle over control of the Senate majority resulted in closely fought races in several states including Alaska, which experienced the most expensive race in US history on a per-vote basis; unprecedented amounts of "dark money" linked to outside groups were used to buy television advertisements; working-class White voters continued their decades-long defection from the Democratic Party; and Republicans devoted substantial time and resources to catch up with Democrats in the use of digital and social media. The goal of this chapter is to expound on these trends and describe what happened in 2014 in terms of media, messaging, and mobilization.

But first, what were the big headlines? The GOP made across-the-board gains in 2014. Republicans gained 13 seats in the US House of Representatives, bringing them to their largest majority in the chamber since 1928 with 247 seats. In the US Senate, Republicans won 24 elections for a net gain of nine seats and a total of 54 seats and the largest net gain since 1958. Turning to the races for governor, three more governors' mansions will now see Republican residents after 2014 GOP pickups. As a result of the 2014 outcome, Republican governors now preside over

31 of the nation's states (Shepard, 2014). These numbers are in line with historical averages as the president's party typically loses seats in midterm election years (see Table 1.1). Incumbents running for reelection rolled once again with 92 percent of House incumbents, 80 percent of Senate incumbents, and 73 percent of gubernatorial incumbents winning reelections (Kondik & Skelley, 2014). In fact, because of 2010 redistricting and solidly partisan states and districts, few races were truly competitive. In particular, of the 435 House seats up for grabs in 2014, 228 were solidly Republican and 182 dependably Democrat, while only 25 were toss-ups as evaluated by the Cook Political Report (2014).

On the topic of campaign finance, 2014 was the year big money broke out. A *Politico* analysis of campaign finance and tax filings found that the 100 biggest campaign donors gave $323 million in 2014—nearly as much as the $356 million given by the 4.75 million small donors (those who gave $200 or less) combined (Vogel, 2014). As described later in this chapter, mega-donors were most likely to give their contributions in so-called "dark money" to independent groups—to the tune of at least $219 million—that were not required to reveal their donors' identities. Vogel (2014) concluded that the campaign finance trend lines "reflect a new political reality in which a handful of super affluent partisans can exert more sway over the campaign landscape than millions of donors of more average means" (para. 4). Conservative groups, in particular, took advantage of the openings from federal court decisions and significantly impacted the midterms, primarily through opposition research, get-out-the-vote efforts, and advertising (Confessore, 2014). For instance, "billionaires Charles G. and David H. Koch appeared to be the largest overall source of outside television spending on behalf of Republicans. Seven

Table 1.1 Gain or loss for president's party in midterm election years, 1962–2014

Year	*President*	*Governor*	*Senate*	*House*
1962	Kennedy (D)	0	+3	−5
1966	Johnson (D)	−8	−4	−47
1970	Nixon (R)	−11	3	−12
1974	Ford (R)	−5	−5	−48
1978	Carter (D)	−5	−3	−15
1982	Reagan (R)	−7	+1	−26
1986	Reagan (R)	+8	−8	−5
1990	G. H. W. Bush (R)	−1	−1	−7
1994	Clinton (D)	−10	−8	−54
1998	Clinton (D)	0	0	4
2002	G. W. Bush (R)	−1	+1	+8
2006	G. W. Bush (R)	−6	−6	−30
2010	Obama (D)	−7	−4	−63
2014	Obama (D)	−3	−9	−13

Data adapted from Stanley and Niemi (2013) and authors' research.

Koch-backed groups spent roughly $77 million on television advertising…including 11 Senate races, and almost double that amount on grass-roots organizing" (Confessore, 2014, para. 7). Koch groups were the biggest outside spenders on television advertising in Iowa, Arkansas, and Louisiana, airing a combined $25 million in ads, and Republican candidates won the competitive Senate races in all three states.

Regarding issues, the most important issue, at least from national media coverage, was President Obama's job performance. Supporting the notion that midterm elections are a referendum on the president, Costas Panagopoulos (2014) systematically analyzed weekly polling throughout the election and found that voter sentiments were fueled primarily by negative assessments of the president and negative perceptions about the state of the national economy. Of course, while the midterms were a strong repudiation of the president, it should be noted that Americans remain even more unsatisfied with Congress with one humorous poll (Public Policy Polling, 2014) finding Congress less popular than jury duty, potholes, and toenail fungus.

Much of the instant analysis on and following Election Day centered on the question of whether Republican victories constituted a "wave." A lingua franca among pundits, journalists, and citizens quickly developed, with *Politico* going so far as labeling 2014 "the year of the Republican wave" (Robillard, 2014, para. 1). The 2014 Republican wave was a result of both a favorable terrain—with a majority of races in conservative red states—and a favorable issue climate (Goldstein & Dallek, 2014). Regarding terrain, an often overlooked factor in 2014 was the division of Senate seats into classes with one-third of Senate seats up for election every two years. In 2014, the seats under contestation tended to be in Republican-leaning states, and Highton, McGhee, and Sides (2014) concluded based on election modeling that this "class bias" was markedly more important than a national Republican partisan tide. Considering the issue climate, the outlook was also not advantageous to Democrats: President Obama was unpopular and there was a general sense of anxiety in the country, as indicated by right track/wrong direction surveys and economic assessment questions (Goldstein & Dallek, 2014). Political scientists have long recognized that voter perceptions of the state of the economy can impact elections (Sides & Vavreck, 2013), but some evidence suggests voters blamed President Bush for the poor economy in 2012, but held Democrats responsible in 2014 (Campbell, 2014). Further, disillusionment inside important segments of the Democratic coalition and reinvigorated enthusiasm among conservatives also enabled Republicans. Although the GOP victories should not be discounted, as Goldstein and Dallek (2014) contended, "Republicans mostly (but not entirely) won where they should have won in 2014" (p. 637).

Who Voted in 2014? Turnout and Demographic Factors

Although the 2014 midterm election proved to be a pivotal election for the Republican Party by garnering enough votes to take the top leadership roles in both chambers of the US Congress, it also demonstrated one of the lowest voter turnouts in US history. Only 36.4 percent of those eligible to vote participated in the election, making it the worse election for voter participation since World War II,

and some of the most populous states such as California, New York, and New Jersey actually witnessed a decrease in voter participation (DelReal, 2014; Montanaro, Wellford, & Pathe, 2014; Topaz, 2014). As *PBS NewsHour* reported, "You have to go all the way back to 1942 for lower numbers when turnout in that midterm was just 33.9 percent. They had a pretty good excuse back then—many adult-age Americans were preoccupied with fighting in a world war" (Montanaro et al., 2014, para. 1). Placing low voter turnout in 2014 in perspective, *The New York Times* Editorial Board (2014) stated, "The abysmally low turnout in last week's midterm elections—the lowest in more than seven decades—was bad for Democrats, but it was even worse for democracy. In 43 states, less than half the eligible population bothered to vote, and no state broke 60 percent" (para. 1).

The overall voter turnout was 22 percent below that of the 2012 presidential election and 5 percent below that of the 2010 midterms (McDonald, 2014). However, not all voter turnout data were was disappointing. In 14 states, participation in 2014 increased from that in 2010 (see Table 1.2). In nine of those 14 states, there was a competitive gubernatorial race underway that may have driven greater participation (Montanaro et al., 2014).

Just as in 2010, the 2014 electorate was dramatically more Republican, more conservative, and older than in 2012 or 2008 (*New York Times*, 2014), and more younger and minority voters opted to not participate in the midterm election than in 2012 (Topaz, 2014). While the citizens who chose to cast a ballot in 2014 were split evenly among the parties—with 36 percent identifying as Republican, 35 percent as Democrat, and 28 percent as independent or something else—this differed greatly from 2008 and 2012 when Democrats witnessed six to seven point advantages in turnout (*New York Times*, 2014).

Moreover, several surveys indicated that the country was divided in 2014. Nationally, 52 percent of voters supported Republican candidates for Congress, while 47 percent backed Democrats (*New York Times*, 2014). In a postelection survey, while exploring the reasons for low voter turnout, the Pew Research Center found that even though the electorate as a whole chose Republicans, there did not appear to be an overwhelming amount of voters who were "happy" that the Republicans were now in the congressional leadership position. Specifically, regarding Republican control of the Senate, 48 percent of Americans said they were happy and 38 percent were unhappy ("Little enthusiasm," 2014). The same survey found that voters were about evenly split regarding the Republicans' policy stances with 44 percent approving while 43 percent disapproving of the Republicans' vision for the future. Likewise and as previously mentioned, President Obama lacked the confidence of many voters in 2014. The Pew Research Center found that 52 percent disapproved of his job performance while only 43 percent approved of it ("Little enthusiasm," 2014).

As Jeffrey Stonecash (2014) showed, "we have two political parties that consistently draw upon very different constituencies" (p. 646). The exit polls of voters conducted by the National Exit Pool (Kiley, 2014; *New York Times*, 2014) identified several continuing and notable trends regarding which groups of voters turned out and voted for Republicans or Democrats. The so-called gender gap persisted in 2014 as men preferred Republican candidates by a 16-point margin

Table 1.2 State voter turnout in the 2014 midterm election compared to the 2010 midterm election

		2010 (%)	*2014 (%)*
Top 15 increases			
Louisiana	+12.9	38.9	43.9
Nebraska[a]	+10.1	37.5	41.3
Arkansas[a]	+9.9	37.5	41.2
Wisconsin[a]	+9.4	52.0	56.9
Maine[a]	+7.4	55.2	59.3
New Hampshire[a]	+6.8	45.7	48.8
Alaska[a]	+6.6	51.9	55.3
Washington, DC	+4.8	28.9	30.3
Colorado[a]	+4.7	50.6	53.0
Kentucky	+4.2	42.4	44.2
North Carolina	+3.8	39.2	40.7
Florida[a]	+3.4	41.7	43.1
Kansas[a]	+2.6	41.7	42.8
Iowa[a]	+1.4	49.9	50.6
Oregon[a]	+0.2	52.6	52.7
Top 10 decreases			
Missouri	−27.4	44.5	32.3
Washington (state)	−27.3	53.1	38.6
Delaware	−27	47.5	34.5
California[a]	−25.5	44.0	32.8
Indiana	−24.5	37.1	28.0
Oklahoma[a]	−23.2	38.8	29.8
Nevada[a]	−23.0	41.3	31.8
Alabama[a]	−22.1	43.0	33.5
Utah	−20.7	36.3	28.8
Mississippi	−19.7	37.0	29.7

Adapted from Montanaro et al. (2014).

[a]States where a gubernatorial election was held in 2014. In total, there were 33 states with gubernatorial elections. National Governors Association (2015, January 8). 2014 general election results. Retrieved from http://www.nga.org/cms/ElectionResults

(57 percent voted for Republicans, 41 percent for Democrats) and women favored Democrats by a four-point margin (51 to 47 percent). Generational divides seen previously also endured as younger voters largely supported Democrats while older voters primarily supported Republicans. Specifically, voters aged 18–29 backed Democrats by an 11-point margin and voters over the age of 65 went Republican by a 16-point margin. Taken as a group, the voters who turned out in 2014 were significantly older than those who propelled Obama to reelection in 2012. Twenty-two percent of the electorate in 2014 was over the age

of 65, while this group of voters comprised just 16 percent of the 2012 electorate (Kiley, 2014). Correspondingly, younger voters made up 19 percent of the electorate in 2012 and just 13 percent of those who showed up to vote in 2014. These seemingly small disparities added up to several million additional Republican votes in 2014. Other gaps were also persistent in 2014 (*New York Times*, 2014). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans supported Democrats by a 52-point margin (76 to 24 percent). Urbanity was also a notable differentiator, as voters who lived in large cities favored Democrats (61 to 39 percent), while those in the suburbs and rural areas backed Republicans (56 to 44 percent and 61 to 39 percent, respectively). Differences based on race were again in evidence in exit polls. White voters were 24 points more likely to support Republicans, while Black and Hispanic voters favored Democrats by an 80-point and a 26-point margin, respectively.

After each election, experts and political analysts continually attempt to discern whether voting patterns clearly emerge to be of use for predictive purposes in future elections. Oftentimes, in midterm elections, the public is reminded of the political "six-year itch." Ornstein (1986) explained the six-year itch:

> The president's party loses seats in the off-year election that follows his White House triumph—a phenomenon that has occurred in every off-year election save one since the Civil War. Since the Second World War, off-year losses for the President's party in the House have averaged fifteen seats in the second year and forty-eight in the sixth; in the Senate the average losses are zero in the second year and seven in the sixth. (para. 6)

This phenomenon is due to a number of political issues, including poor candidate recruiting patterns and low voter turnout (Ornstein, 1986). Benjamin Wallace-Wells (2014) explained in *New York Magazine* the "green lantern theory of the presidency," which postulates that the president can accomplish any goal as long as he is willing to do so and uses the right tactics. Hence, pertaining to Obama and the results of the 2014 midterms, Wallace-Wells suggested, "Perhaps by six years in, when any presidency is closer to the end than the beginning, the ways in which he has failed this impossible standard become clear, and more or less every president comes to seem a disappointment" (para. 6).

Importantly, it is recognized that voter profiles/demographics are less varied during midterm elections and more varied during presidential elections. This occurrence is known as a "Dual Electorate" (Topaz, 2014). In short, it means that those who vote in midterms are quantitatively different than those who vote in presidential years. Accordingly, when attempting to glean voting patterns from the 2014 election, Topaz (2014) asserted:

> The somewhat reductive, but still largely truthful, narrative is that there are two electorates in America. There's the smaller, older, whiter electorate that gave Republicans big wins in 2010 and 2014; there's the larger, younger, more diverse one that helped congressional Democrats and Obama in 2008 and 2012. It's tempting—and perhaps accurate—to suggest flatly that the 2014 election told Washington nothing it already doesn't know. (para. 31)

In addition to the Dual Electorate and as mentioned earlier, midterm election results consistently confirm that fewer voters participate than in presidential elections. DelReal (2014) shared:

> Voter turnout during presidential elections is, as a rule, significantly higher. More than 58 percent of eligible voters submitted ballots in 2012 and nearly 62 percent did so in 2008. By contrast, only 41 percent of eligible voters voted in 2010 and 40.4 percent in 2006 (para. 4).

This trend is not new. Figure 1.1 clearly shows the wide gap in turnout rates between presidential and nonpresidential elections that has persisted for at least 150 years. This Dual Electorate, combined with low turnout in midterms, has led to both increased polarization and rapid oscillation from election to election. Ronald Brownstein argues that this "whiplash nature of modern politics, with voters careening back and forth between parties" has "encouraged both sides to treat every legislative choice primarily as an opportunity to score points for the next election" (2014, p. 20). It should be noted that this back-and-forth is far from a new phenomenon. Angus Campbell (1960) identified the trend in survey data over 50 years ago and labeled it the "surge and decline" phenomenon.

Additionally, the sitting president's popularity also must be factored into the results of a midterm election. Two days prior to the election, Gallup polling revealed that Obama's job approval rating was only 40 percent while his disapproval rating was at 54 percent (Dennis, 2014). Further buttressing this notion of an unpopular

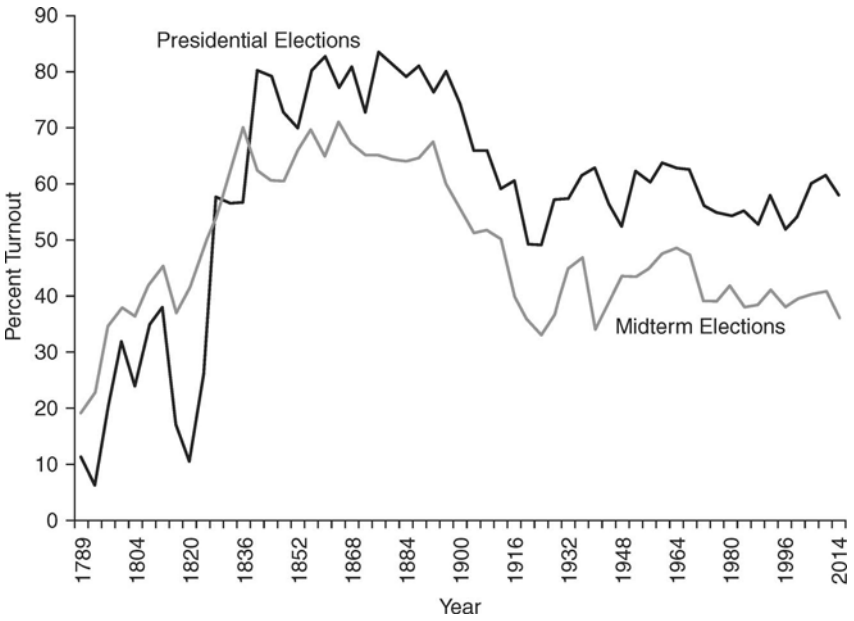

Figure 1.1 Voter turnout rates: Presidential and midterm elections, 1789–2014.

Obama, Topaz (2014) found "exit polls show[ed] one-third of voters nationally said their House vote was meant to express opposition to Obama" (para. 26). And attitudes toward the president appeared to be determinative as those who disapproved of Obama voted Republicans by a 70-point margin (85 to 15 percent) and those who approved of the president chose the Democrat by a 76-point margin (88 to 12 percent) (*New York Times*, 2014). The political adage that "All politics is local" appeared to be more folklore than reality as Americans clearly factored in the president when they voted for Congress in 2014. Several Republicans used this gap to their advantage and linked the Democratic candidates to the president. For example, leveraging Obama's negative job approval ratings, Karl Rove's political action committee (PAC) created an ad that was aired in several states in the final weeks of the campaign in which a young girl who is participating in a spelling bee is asked to spell the congressional Democratic candidate's name, and she says, "O-B-A-M-A." The spelling bee judge responds, "Close enough."

Issues and Agendas

Unlike past midterm elections, no national dominant theme emerged in 2014, leading Rucker, Costa, and Gold (2014) to quip, "this is an election about nothing—and everything" (para. 4). In the 2014 midterms, coverage of the issues was reported to be down by significant margins. A Pew Research Center study found that 60 percent of voters thought there was less coverage of the issues than in previous elections ("Little enthusiasm," 2014). Another factor that sways an individual to vote a particular way is political party affiliation. As expected, 95 percent of Republicans and 93 percent of Democrats voted for their party's candidate (*New York Times*, 2014), but what about so-called undecided voters? Interestingly, a nationwide survey conducted by the *New York Times/CBS News* found that undecided voters rarely shifted from one political party to the other. Rather, they typically shifted from being undecided to being affiliated with their political party, or vice versa (Vavreck, 2014a). In sum, the survey found "only 6 percent of undecided partisans made a move to the candidate from the opposite party" (para. 9). There was some movement in competitive states as roughly 20 percent of the electorate changed their mind at least once in the final three months of the race, but most were moving in and out of being undecided, not switching between the parties (Cohn, 2014; Vavreck, 2014a).

Considering the messages being pushed by the campaigns, a wide range of issues was discussed without a national, dominant theme. And Republicans and Democrats were often campaigning on different sets of issues. Specifically, a comprehensive content analysis by Fowler and Ridout (2014) found that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was the top issue mentioned in pro-Republican Senate ads (present in 28.6 percent of ad airings), followed by jobs (23 percent), and the deficit (15.6 percent). On the other hand, pro-Democratic ads emphasized taxes (24.7 percent), jobs (18 percent), and Medicare and Social Security (14.9 percent each). While they agreed on jobs being the top issue, the parties also diverged in US House ads, as pro-Republican ads tended to focus on taxes (27.4 percent), the ACA (26.1 percent), jobs (22.8 percent), the deficit (17.2 percent), and government spending

(15.2 percent). Across the aisle, taxes (29.1 percent), Medicare (20.3 percent), Social Security (17.7 percent), jobs (16.7 percent), and education (15.3 percent) were the top issues in ads aired in favor of Democrats. In contrast, there was more interparty agreement in the top issues in gubernatorial races with both Democrats and Republicans focusing on the issues of taxes, jobs, and education in their ads.

In a mid-October 2014 Pew Research Center poll, only 21 percent of Americans considered the economy as "excellent" or "good," and only 27 percent of those polled thought economic conditions would improve (Drake, 2014). This economic uncertainty undoubtedly was a drag on Democratic campaigns. A Gallup poll found a large amount of agreement between the parties as to the top issues in the campaign with both Democratic and Republican voters viewing the economy, jobs, and fixing the federal government as important to their congressional vote (Newport, 2014). On the other hand, partisan voters prioritized other issues quiet differently. While Republicans were more likely to rate the situation with Islamic militants and the deficit in their top five issues, Democrats were more likely to cite equality in pay and income and wealth distribution in their list. Lynn Vavreck, a political science professor at UCLA, stated, "Party identification drives movements away from being undecided, and opinions on same-sex marriage or gun control predictably matter, too" (2014a, para. 10). Political analyst Charlie Cook asserted from the 2014 election that the Democratic Party's focus on issues such as the ACA, same-sex marriage, and gun control rather than pocketbook issues that affect working class, White voters hurt the Democratic Party. Cook declared, "Democrats have chosen to focus on issues that the liberal base of the party really likes, but the working-class person in West Virginia or Arkansas or Louisiana or Alaska doesn't necessarily identify with" (cited in Topaz, 2014, para. 8). In each of those states, a Republican won a Senate seat held by a Democrat. In the same vein, an October 2014 Pew Research Poll found that voters sided with the Republicans on the following issues: threat of terrorism, budget deficit, the economy, and immigration (Edsall, 2014).

As elaborated later in this chapter, the 2014 midterm experienced an increase in the amount of dark money being poured into the various campaigns around the nation. When external money enters into a political race, the ability to control one's message is greatly diminished (Topaz, 2014), although Franz (2014) found that "issue convergence" between the campaigns and outside groups was not strongly or consistently related to election outcomes in 2014. Losing the ability to control the message, or the agenda, occurred to many candidates in 2014. Particularly, in Anchorage, Alaska, where the local television station aired more than 16,000 ads, the majority of those ads "focused on issues such as oil, marijuana and coal mining" and was financed by money from outside of the state (Breitman, 2014, para. 5). This trend—with groups unaffiliated with the campaigns making the messaging decisions—was repeated in congressional races across the country.

Media Coverage

Observers tend to think of midterm elections as national contests like presidential elections. But there are also some important distinctions between midterm election years and elections in the midyears. For instance, congressional elections are often

dominated by small events such as house parties, rallies, and town celebrations, rather than large campaign events. Such races are more difficult for journalists—especially national and beltway reporters—to cover and can place more emphasis on locally important issues, ad buys, and get-out-the vote efforts. As analyst Andrew Tyndall observed, "The national news media have an awful time covering Congressional elections. They can't work out how to make a critical swing district in Kentucky interesting to people who don't live in Kentucky" (cited in Jurkowitz, 2003, p. 49). The adage that the National Football League is made for television but the National Hockey League is not can be repurposed as a metaphor for midterm election coverage. In terms of elections, the presidential election is best suited for television coverage, while midterms are made for newspapers and the Internet. Local news is particularly important as research finds that citizens exposed to a lower coverage of their local congressional election are less able to evaluate their member of Congress, less likely to express their opinions about the House candidates in their district, and, ultimately, less likely to vote (Hayes & Lawless, 2015).

The 2014 midterm election appeared not to be a topic of immense interest to most Americans. In fact, the Pew Research Center labeled it a "meh" midterm (Motel, 2014, para. 1). Approximately a month prior to the election, the Pew Research Center found that only 15 percent of Americans "very closely" followed news about the election, 22 percent followed news of the midterm election "fairly closely," 25 percent "not too closely" and 39 percent "not at all" followed news coverage of the 2014 midterm election (Motel, 2014, paras. 1–2). And, these responses were lower in 2014 than in previous midterms. The 15 percent who closely followed the race in 2014 was down notably from the 25 percent and 21 percent who watched closely in 2010 and 2006, respectively. In Pew's tracking poll, interest in the midterms never topped 16 percent in a given week over the course of the entire election.

In addition to a lack of interest in the election news, there was a dearth of national news coverage of the issues in the 2014 midterms. An analysis conducted by a liberal research group, *Media Matters*, found that 65 percent of network news coverage pertaining to the election did not cover a prominent issue of the midterm that was identified as important to the American electorate—such as the economy and health care (Power & Robbins, 2014). Instead, the study found that journalists framed the election mainly in strategic terms and focused on who was winning or losing and the role of Obama in the campaign, with *ABC* mentioning Obama in 75 percent of their segments and *NBC* referencing Obama's low popularity in nearly half of their reports. Similarly, a conservative media research group, Media Research Center, found that *ABC*, *CBS*, and *NBC* news aired only 25 news stories between September 1 and October 20, even though these three networks put together reach about 23 million American viewers (Drennen & Noyes, 2014). David Uberti (2014), of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, asserted that without the dramatic us-vs-them narrative typical in presidential years, "reporters seemed to take every…opportunity to look ahead rather than focus on the actual races in the works" (para. 1). As reported in later chapters in this book, while the national media largely passed on covering the midterms, the midterms were a focus of local newspapers and television affiliates.

On election night, although viewership of the midterm election was down from previous midterm elections, *Fox News* drew the largest share of the television audience, totaling 6.3 million viewers, with the cable channel even outdrawing the broadcast networks (Ariens, 2014). Regarding Fox's election night victory, Bill Carter of *The New York Times* (2014) declared, "With interest down sharply across the board in television coverage of the midterm elections, *Fox News* had about as big a night as the Republican Party, drawing the biggest audience not only in cable but also beating the broadcast networks' limited coverage" (para. 1). As discussed in the next section, voters did not just obtain news about the 2014 midterms via television. The Pew Research Center found that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, along with cell phones, served as a primary means for obtaining election news. Specifically, Pew found that over one-quarter (28 percent) of registered voters used their cell phones to read 2014 election news and nearly a fifth (16 percent) of registered voters were friends and followers of politicians in 2014 (Smith, 2014).

Digital and Social Media

The Democratic Party pioneered the use of the Internet in Howard Dean's failed 2004 run for the White House (Edgerly, Bode, Kim, & Shah, 2013). Much has evolved since 2004 relating to Internet and social media usage for political purposes. It has been suggested that Barack Obama's savvy use of the Internet and big data crunching of the electorate's Internet usage patterns catapulted him into the Oval Office (Hendricks & Denton, 2010; Hendricks & Kaid, 2011) and contributed to his reelection in 2012 (Hendricks & Schill, 2015). With Obama leading the way, Democrats are generally considered to have a leg-up over Republicans in their use of digital communications. However, despite social media playing a prominent role in 2014, Samuelsohn (2014b) astutely noted about the 2014 midterms, "Democrats learned another tough lesson—technology can't win every election" (para. 1). Technology may not win elections, but it does help shape the agenda. On that point, one study found that social media "set the press's agenda and shape journalists' understanding of the election" (Kreiss, 2014, p. 3).

By the 2014 midterm election, Republicans had gained significant headway concerning the successful use of the Internet and big data analytics. The Republican National Committee had spent $100 million and two years gathering data that enabled it to predict "the right mix of voters, for fundraising e-mail lists and to mount a sophisticated social media monitoring effort" (Samuelsohn, 2014b, para. 7). Fittingly, the Pew Research Center found that Republicans (25 percent) and Democrats (29 percent) engaged equally with social media for political purposes in 2014 and to stay abreast of breaking political news (Smith, 2014). Of the two most used social media platforms, Facebook (71 percent) and Twitter (23 percent) played prominent roles in the midterm election to generate voter interest and participation (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). For example, Facebook placed a banner across the top of each user's newsfeed reminding them it was Election Day. Facebook also provided its users with prepared messages proclaiming they had voted, which could be shared on newsfeeds for friends to see.

Twitter similarly created the "#Election2014 dashboard" that served as a one-stop shop for all things political in 2014 (Gross, 2014). It was civically minded of these social media platforms and absolutely required of politicians to engage with the electorate via both platforms since Facebook saw 1.35 billion monthly users and Twitter 284 million monthly users in 2014 (Soergel, 2014).

The campaigns also had some fun on social media; for example, Kentucky senator Mitch McConnell's campaign posted a two-minute silent video of stock footage of the candidate on YouTube; Texas gubernatorial candidate David Dewhurst attacked his opponent in an elaborate spoof video of the popular animated movie *Frozen*; and a photograph of Louisiana senator Mary Landrieu trended on Twitter when she helped a college student do a keg stand (Fuller, 2014). Candidates also piggybacked on popular online memes through countless selfies and ice-bucket-challenge videos. The White House also made online news when President Obama uncharacteristically wore a tan suit to a summer press conference, when he appeared on the satirical web series *Between Two Ferns* with comedian Zach Galifianakis to promote his healthcare plan, and when First Lady Michelle Obama paraphrased the popular song *Turn Down for What*—by saying "turnip for what" while holding a turnip—to promote healthy eating on the Vine short-video-sharing app. New to the 2014 elections were "listicles," which is an article on the Internet in the form of a numbered or bulleted list. Listicles could be found on social and digital platforms such as BuzzFeed, a news and content provider, and Cracked, a website featuring humorous content, among other sites. At one point in the 2014 campaign, Mark Begich, Alaska's Democratic candidate for the Senate, found himself in a "dueling listicle" on BuzzFeed with Americans for Prosperity, a conservative group (Selyukh, 2014).

Undeniably, social media and digital media strategies were essential to being competitive in political campaigns in 2014. Buttressing this assertion, Selyukh (2014) stated,

> Where a 2010 gubernatorial or congressional campaign could proudly claim an active presence on Twitter as something almost fashion-forward, in 2014 a multifaceted digital strategy is seen as a prerequisite, even if little research exists to show how much online politicking translates into votes (para. 2).

Importantly, digital media strategies continued to become more sophisticated, and the Republican Party has made great strides to catch up with the Democratic Party's lead (Samuelsohn, 2014a). Edgerly et al. (2013) asserted, "The wide adoption of social media has enabled and facilitated 'new' election campaign practices like microtargeting, personalization, interactivity, and sustained engagement. These new practices are dramatically changing the landscape of contemporary politics" (p. 95). Moreover, "the question campaign practitioners now ask is no longer *whether* they should utilize social media for election campaigns, but *how* they should use social media to increase their ability to reach voters and increase their electoral margins" (p. 95). Above all, obtaining a competitive political advantage revolves around the development and implementation of an effective digital strategy. Accordingly, Kilmas (2014) succinctly explained social media's role in an election: "In politics,

television is seen as a way to reach undecided voters, while the Internet is viewed as a tool to encourage already committed supporters to get more involved" (para. 5).

And what did this social media outreach to supporters look like? The Data Science research group at Facebook systematically analyzed how all candidates for governorships and congressional seats used Facebook in 2014—in total, about 150,000 posts and 20 million "likes," comments, and shares (Messing, Franco, Wilkins, Cable, & Warshauer, 2014). Republicans tended to focus more on policy making and endorsements, while Democrats tended to talk about fundraising and mobilization. The economy was the most frequently discussed political issue, followed by economic mobility, foreign policy, money in politics, and fiscal issues. As to be expected, Republicans and Democrats emphasized different issues on average. Specifically, Republicans shared a greater percentage of posts about government ethics, abortion, gun control, and foreign policy, while Democrats were more likely to post about economic mobility, women's issues, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. Regarding frequency of Facebook activity, Democratic and Republican candidates posted about the same number of messages. Facebook was used more frequently by challengers as they posted an average of 221 times in the last three months of the campaign, compared to just 126 average posts from incumbents. A close election also appeared to generate more campaign communication as candidates in competitive elections posted double the number of Facebook posts on average compared to candidates in less competitive House and Senate contests.

While political communication—especially television advertising—is often negative as candidates must contrast their campaign with that of their opponent, on Facebook in 2014, the tone was dramatically different. As noted previously, campaigns use television to broadcast messages to a wide swath of voters; the data show that campaigns use Facebook to motivate and mobilize their supporters rather than to persuade swing voters (Kilmas, 2014; Wilson, 2014). Specifically, the most common topic was inviting followers to campaign events (about 12.5 percent of all posts), followed by expressions of gratitude to supporters (just under 11 percent of all posts), requests for supporters to volunteer to assist the campaign in some way (just under 10 percent of all posts), campaign vision statements using words such as "unite," "believe," and "change" (about 9 percent of all posts), and posts on the economy and jobs (about 9 percent of all posts). Of course, candidates also used the social media platform to run ads, and one exploratory study found that targeting Facebook ads to individuals who had already voluntarily provided their e-mail addresses to campaigns resulted in spillover effects. The individuals who had provided the campaigns with their e-mail addresses were more likely to make a financial donation when solicited via e-mail (Willis, 2014).

In terms of citizen interaction with the candidates, two interesting trends emerged about Facebook posts (Bakshy, 2012). First, a larger share of comments were posted by men, but a greater proportion of "likes" came from women. This differs from previous research in that women contributed the majority of "likes" and comments on candidates' Facebook pages during the 2012 election. Second, there were age differences in terms of the amount of Facebook engagement in 2014. Age and Facebook interaction were negatively related as older users contributed more comments and "likes" than younger users.

Advertising

During the 2014 election, when combining races at the federal, gubernatorial, state, and local levels, ads were aired nearly three billion times at an estimated cost of $1.7 billion (Wesleyan Media Project, 2014). These three million ads were primarily targeted toward undecided voters, "a small set of registered voters who are unsure about their votes in races that could pivot control of the Senate" (Vavreck, 2014a, para. 1). However, 2014 was not a year of record-setting ad volumes, as totals were roughly in line with previous midterm years (Fowler & Ridout, 2014). The analysis by Fowler and Ridout (2014) quantified the number of ads and amount of money expended on ads nationwide. In federal and gubernatorial races, $1.4 billion was spent on a total of 2,516,513 airings (see Table 1.3). Advertising was top-heavy in Senate races with nearly three-quarters (74.3 percent) of ad airings occurring in the ten most competitive races (see Table 1.4). The race to represent Georgia's twelfth district topped the list of House races with a staggering 26,136 ads aired in the last three months of the campaign. Turning to gubernatorial races (Table 1.5), the contest in Florida led the nation with over 100,000 ads aired from September 1 to Election Day. Taken

Table 1.3 Volume of ads and estimated ad spending (January 1 to Election Day)

	Airings	*Estimated cost (in million dollars)*
US House	592,767	325.8
US Senate	980,594	488.7
Governor	943,152	598.9
Total	2,516,513	1,413.4

Data adapted from Fowler and Ridout (2014).

Table 1.4 Ad spending and ad volume of top Senate races in 2014 (September 1 to Election Day)

	Total ad spending (in million dollars)	*Total ads*	*Republican ads*	*Democratic ads*
North Carolina	52.6	69,349	29,125	40,224
Colorado	34.2	43,587	20,700	22,763
Georgia	27.1	37,192	15,362	21,830
Kentucky	26.3	46,979	25,439	21,537
Iowa	25.2	62,186	33,377	28,809
Michigan	20.9	28,426	9,834	18,592
Louisiana	17.9	39,550	16,157	23,393
Arkansas	17.3	32,164	15,739	16,425
Kansas	11.3	22,310	10,487	19
Alaska	4.2	28,889	14,319	14,570

Data adapted from Fowler and Ridout (2014). The Kansas Senate race did not include a Democratic candidate, which accounts for the low number of Democratic ads. In all, 11,804 ads were run in support of independent Kansas senate candidate Greg Orman.

Table 1.5 Ad spending and ad volume in top gubernatorial races in 2014 (September 1 to Election Day)

	Total spending (in million dollars)	*Total ads*	*Republican ads*	*Democratic ads*
Florida	69.4	106,523	69,220	37,303
Texas	34.2	59,979	41,199	18,769
Illinois	52.6	46,640	21,898	24,742
Michigan	27.0	42,863	24,845	18,018
Wisconsin	20.1	47,963	20,096	27,867
New York	17.9	23,920	3,594	20,303
Pennsylvania	16.0	17,592	8,168	9,424
Georgia	15.9	24,294	11,441	12,821
Kansas	11.7	25,103	12,618	12,485
Maine	6.5	19,844	7,140	10,453

Data adapted from Fowler and Ridout (2014).

in total, just over 50 percent of ads were negative, 26.4 percent were positive, and 22.9 percent were contrast spots, numbers roughly similar to 2010 and 2006.

In 2014, KTUU in Anchorage, Alaska, aired 13,200 ads for the Alaska Senate race alone. In total, including ads aired for the Alaska House seat, the television station aired 16,406 political ads during the midterm election (Breitman, 2014). Further, $40 million was spent on political advertising in Alaska from groups outside of the state using "dark money," and that money favored the Republican candidate (Tanfani, 2014). In total, $60 million was spent on political advertising in Alaska, which equates to $120 per voter—making Alaska's 2014 midterm election the most expensive in US history on a per-vote basis (Wallack & Hudak, 2014).

The plethora of political advertising was not simply limited to Alaska. There were so many political ads purchased that some television stations had to actually refund money to political groups because there was simply no time slots available to air the ads. For example, WMUR in New Hampshire, as a result of no additional airtime, reported to the Federal Communications Commission that it had refunded money to one PAC (Ballhaus & Mullins, 2014). In Iowa, another television station created a 4:00 p.m. newscast in order to have enough airtime to accept the political advertising, while in some major media markets where Senate races were underway such as Denver (Colorado), Wichita (Kansas), and Manchester (New Hampshire), there simply remained no additional time to air political ads on behalf of candidates and/or PACs (Ballhaus & Mullins, 2014). And if any spots were available, campaigns had to pay spiking costs to guarantee airtime for last-minute persuasion efforts. For example, in the last week of the campaign, Arkansas Republican candidate Tom Cotton bought a $15,000 spot during the 5 p.m. news broadcast on KARK, and Fox affiliate KLRT in Little Rock charged a Democratic PAC $11,000 for a spot during the Sunday night NFL game (DeMillo & Elliott, 2014). Even online, where ad space is seemingly endless, many campaigns and outside groups found that premium online advertising space had long been booked and was unavailable (Parker, 2014).

Estimates on how much money was spent on political advertising during the 2014 midterms were inconsistent. A study by the Wesleyan Media Project (2014) found that more than $1.3 billion were spent on 2.2 million political ads. In a study conducted by the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), Novak and Choma (2014) found that $3.67 billion, compared to $3.63 billion in 2010, were spent on the 2014 elections. No matter the measure, at least a billion dollars were spent on television ads in the 2014 midterm. A majority of that money, known as "dark money," came from donors whose identities were not revealed to the American electorate. In fact, with 35.4 percent of ad spending coming from groups that do not disclose their funders, Fowler and Ridout (2014) called 2014 "the year of dark money" (p. 676). More dark money was spent in the 2014 election than in any prior elections in American history, and these anonymous donors actually outspent the candidates themselves in 29 federal races (Center for Responsive Politics, 2014). By one count, nearly 75 percent of the 2014 dark money came from conservative groups (Maguire, 2014). Much of this money was from so-called super PACs and political nonprofits and has been a result of the US Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (Elliott, 2014; Franz, 2014).

Further, it was estimated that Democrats spent $1.64 billion in total while the Republicans bested them by spending $1.75 billion. Chris Cillizza of *The Washington Post* astutely observed:

> Here's some perspective on how astronomically the cost of elections have soared over the past few years. In 2008, according to CRP calculations, $2.8 million was spent on the presidential race. In 2004, "just" $1.9 billion was spent. So, the cost of the 2010 midterms is projected to be roughly double what was spent on a presidential election just a decade ago. Double! (2014, para. 5)

Vavreck (2014b) correspondingly explained why so much money is spent on political advertising:

> Political advertising—when done well—can shape a race. And although candidates in these midterm elections were all facing the same national trends and challenges, they made unique connections with voters through ads. Whether positive or negative, the success of the ads depended as much on how they connected the candidate to the voters as on how they framed the opponent. (para. 2)

One of the best examples of what Vavreck (2014b) has asserted is the political commercial introducing Iowa Senate candidate Joni Ernst, titled "Squeal," in which she shared that she grew up on an Iowa farm castrating hogs. Ernst stated that if voters sent her to Washington, she would "make 'em squeal!'" Indeed, this resonated with Iowa voters as Ernst handily won that primary and Senate seat.

Conclusion

Did media and political communication make an impact in 2014, or was the election, in effect, over before it started because of the six-year-itch trend, negative economic fundamentals, and negative attitudes toward the president? As this chapter

sketched out, like in all elections, a multiplicity of complex factors accounted for campaign victories in 2014, including persuasion, communication, mobilization, and economic and partisan fundamentals (Goldstein, Dallek, & Rivlin, 2014). Midterms are often forgettable, and history will tell if the trends discussed in this chapter have lasting implications; however, some implications are already clear. For example, Republican control of the Senate will limit President Obama's ability to shape the federal courts in the remainder of his second term and "will most likely leave the composition of the current Supreme Court intact, leave Justice Kennedy as the pivotal swing vote, while elevating the Court as a campaign issue in the 2016 presidential election" (Clayton & Salamone, 2014, para. 1). Additionally, midterms can also have long-term consequences for political parties. Large losses in the two midterm elections during Obama's presidency "have wiped out an entire generation of Democratic state officeholders, costing the Democrats more than 900 state legislative seats and 11 governorships," according to an internal Democratic National Committee report (cited in Confessore, Martin, & Haberman, 2015, para. 14). Regarding the next presidential election, it is not clear which faction of the Dual Electorate will vote in 2016. Analyst Charlie Cook, however, warns against "extrapolating too much" from 2014, saying, "2014 was a huge, important election, but it was not a representative cross-section of the country" (cited in Topaz, 2014, para. 35). Moreover, the country remains divided and dissatisfied. The previous exit poll found that a majority of voters disapproved of Democrats and Republicans alike and that only 20 percent trust Washington to do what is right (*New York Times*, 2014). Only time will tell if these frustrations continue among the electorate and which aspects of 2014 were long-term trends and which were momentary anomalies.

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CHAPTER 2

THE CULT(URE) OF ANALYTICS IN 2014

Jessica Baldwin-Philippi

Following the success of the 2008 Obama campaign, both academic study and journalistic inquiry has devoted serious attention to the rise of digital communication within electoral campaigns. Increasingly, the use of analytics and data-driven strategy has been at the center of this interest. For example, the Obama "cave" has been both mythologized and studied deeply. Sasha Issenberg's *Victory Lab* bore into the 2008 Obama campaign's use of data, and updated its account following the 2012 race. The 2012 presidential campaign brought analytics-based get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts on both sides of the aisle. The Republicans' Orca and Democrats' Narwhal projects garnered attention both before and after Election Day, with many news outlets attributing their makers' respective success and failure to the tools themselves, and the larger project of successfully executing a modern, data-driven campaign. But analytics-based campaigning is not as original an invention as these stories of digital pioneers would lead us to believe. Long before the rise of digital strategy, campaigns routinely tested the materials they produced. Employing a variety of methods, from focus groups to surveys to dial tests, campaigns test what issues are salient to voters, poll public opinion on a variety of topics, and test the use of specific language or phrases; all before the "official" message(s) went out, in order to produce the most persuasive ones possible. But with the rise of digital messaging came the availability of analytic data that could capture what citizens did with messages and provide a measurement for success that could be assessed in real time. As new platforms were adopted for campaign communication, new analytics regarding these behaviors became available—how many people visited particular pages on campaign websites and how long they stayed there, how often they opened e-mails, what links were clicked, whether they shared content within social media platforms, and so on. Although the testing of messages and targeting of potential voters has long been of concern for campaigns, the 2008 Obama campaign was the site of new, analytics-based strategies for doing so (Issenberg, 2012). In a reaction to the successes of the 2008 campaign, the 2010, 2012, and 2014 campaigns all occurred within calls to institute what many consultants called

a "culture of analytics" or a "culture of testing" that would involve a greater amount of testing as messages are circulated to the public. This effort would also expand to the local level, rather than just national campaigns, which would likely increase the success rates of persuasive and mobilizing messages.

While the benefits of analytics-based messaging have been widely extolled, the study of their deployment has largely occurred at the presidential level, and although the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns can provide insight into what's happening in the most advanced of campaigns, findings from presidential elections tell us little about the more local practices that occur in midterm elections. As a result, this chapter will focus on the adoption of a culture of analytics at the congressional and state-wide level, tracing changes from its initial adoption in 2010 through 2014. Using data gained from interviews, professional training sessions, and digital strategy manuals, this chapter couples the perspectives of communications directors and staffers (as well as digital staffers) with those who have backed the development of a culture of analytics and trained staffers in such strategy, in order to compare the vision set forth for a culture of analytics with the on-the-ground reality of its implementation during the 2014 election cycle. Rather than merely detailing the spread of analytics-based communication strategies, this chapter will focus on how the use of analytics in messaging decision impacts the messages campaigns produce, as well as the goals and visions of communications offices.

In order to answer these questions, this chapter takes a qualitative approach that investigates the development of what has been called a culture of analytics over time, focusing particularly on its adoption from 2010 to 2014. As campaign practices evolve over time, this focus on their evolution contextualizes emerging strategies, and situates their emergence within a variety of actors—both technical and social—that mediate the processes of creating and circulating messages. This work draws on actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) to focus on both individual staffers and consultants, as well as the technologies they deploy, and emphasizes both the material aspects of analytic-driven campaigning as well as their patterns of use. We often think of campaigns as contingent due to the way they can be disrupted and swayed by international and domestic events, but they are also products of broader public discussions of tactics, politics and governance as well. Moreover, not only must campaigns be contextualized according to how they've evolved from campaigns that have come before, but also as direct products of intra- and inter-party infrastructure and investment (Kreiss, 2012). In line with calls for communication studies as a discipline to more deeply investigate the material aspects of communication technologies (Gillespie, Boczkowski, & Foot, 2014), this chapter also focuses on the affordances and interfaces of the analytics and testing tools campaigns use in order to highlight what metrics of success campaigns can gather data for, and, in turn, value.

This research therefore combines the investigation of professional training sessions and campaign manuals with reflections of actual campaign communication strategies and tactics. As a result it draws on data spanning from 2010–2012, including in-depth interviews of over 40 campaign consultants following the 2010 and 2012 campaigns, brief (approximately 20–30 minutes) interviews with an additional fifteen staffers and consultants—nine of whom were staffers in a single campaign

in 2014, and six of whom were consultants working on multiple campaigns—following the 2014 election, and textual analysis of live training sessions at professional consulting conferences and written manuals by leaders in the field over the course of those four years. These interviews were conducted predominantly with political professionals working at a relatively local level. While major Senate races can draw prominent, experienced staffers who are used to running national campaigns, the majority of midterm races are run by those at the state-wide and/or regional level. As a result, all but three of the interview participants of interviews presented herein are either staffers or consultants primarily for congressional, gubernatorial, and/or statewide office. The remaining three have experience at the national level, in either major Senate races or in working for national campaigns. All quotes appearing in this paper come from personal interviews conducted in December 2014, although personal identifiers have been removed, as these political professionals spoke with me under the condition of anonymity.

Additionally, as it draws on shifts in analytics-based strategy and the rise of the culture of testing over time, it draws on prior fieldwork as a participant observer inside an Illinois race for federal office in 2010 (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015). Using qualitative methodologies, this work seeks not to test traditional theories of political communication, but illuminate the current state of cutting edge strategy, its impact on the goals and decisions of campaign staffers, and the normative implications of these practices. Though deductive and quantitative approaches still drive most political communication research, inductive approaches that expand the theories tested by the discipline have been called for in recent years (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Karpf, Kreiss, & Nielsen, 2014).

Roots of the Culture of Analytics

Long before there was a "culture of analytics" developing within electoral politics and advocacy work, campaigns were concerned with testing what issues are salient to voters, so that campaign communications might be more productive. More than merely the forbearers of the discipline of political communication, early studies of public opinion and persuasion in politics set the stage for the use of empirical data for determining what issues and messages were most relevant, persuasive, and mobilizing to citizens (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). With clear implications for how to leverage public opinion when constructing campaign messages, data was important to campaigns as early as the 1960 elections, when Kennedy relied upon polling data to decide if and how to address his own Catholicism during the campaign (Issenberg, 2012). Combining public opinion research with publicly available data like that collected in the census and voting records, campaigns could target these messages, matching issues and stances to segments of constituents. Over time, potential voters' data has become more available and varied, leading to contemporary abilities to micro-target according to highly individualized data concerning our online and offline behavior. As users browse, search for, and click on political and non-political content alike, so-called browser cookies record and track use behavior in order to improve the specificity with which advertisers can target users. In the political

realm, "political" cookies, or ones tracking demographics important to political affiliation (sometimes including offline voter data), are used to target political ads that are increasingly personalized.

Although political professionals view the use of analytics for microtargeting as a fundamental and revolutionary element of campaign strategy, academics have criticized its impact on democratic culture, arguing that it is a main factor in what Phil Howard (2006) has called political redlining and what Daniel Kreiss (2012) has called computational management, wherein citizens are likely to receive content that is significantly different from that provided to others based on their perceived interests and political leanings. This data is particularly productive to campaigns, as it can aid more than one area of campaigning; for instance, the communications office's construction of messages and the field office's ability to locate categories of voters (likely voters, swing voters, oppositional voters, etc.) and tailor their GOTV strategies accordingly.

These uses of data to craft persuasive, targeted messages have long existed, but the recent rise of the "culture of testing" and the "culture of analytics" is slightly different due to its focus on testing messages as they are circulated in real time. These terms—and the practices they most directly encompass—only truly gained traction in the years following the 2008 Obama campaign's stunning victory, which was often credited for its innovative use of data and digital campaigning (Hendricks & Denton, 2010; Hendricks & Kaid, 2011). Think pieces following the landslide victory dubbed it the "social media election" and hailed the success of digital messaging strategies, and set about introducing the rest of the world to digital campaign strategy with a flood of manuals for social media campaigns (e.g., Delany, 2011, 2013; Harfoush, 2009). Analytics and data are often at the heart of these success stories (Engage, 2013; Scherer, 2012). For instance, much attention has been given to the fact that Obama's 2008 campaign made wide use of A/B testing—randomly assigning a selection of users to one of two options in order to determine which option works better—for nearly all content and affordances of their campaign website, as well as e-mail content (Issenberg, 2012; Kreiss, 2012; McKenna & Han, 2014). More than just one-off tactics designed to aid in successfully crafting and circulating a handful of messages, testing proponents seek to develop an integrated culture of analytics that is widespread, systematic, and ongoing. "You can't just test one e-mail and expect it to work out," notes one such consultant, emphasizing that testing has to become part of the everyday culture of campaigns if it is to be the most successful (Personal communication, December 19, 2011).

Three ideas are at the core of the ideal notion of developing a culture of analytics or testing. These qualities have been gleaned from the many trainings and conference presentations given by leaders in the field of data-driven campaigning, notably the Analyst Institute, New Organizing Institute, and MoveOn.org, as well as post-hoc accounts of what aspects of data-driven campaign strategy are important (Issenberg, 2014, Howard 2014). Rather than reduce data-driven campaigning to the features most likely to be used by campaigns, this definition attempts to present the deepest version of the concept, and the one that the most equipped and experienced political professionals argue will lead to the most success. First and foremost, this new approach goes beyond targeting to focus on using analytics both

to target and assess the success of a message. Therefore, while campaigns always hold persuasion and mobilization as overarching goals, a message's success at that task is now knowable and testable. Second, this approach to digital campaigning is not about conducting a handful of experiments or surveys with messaging strategy, no matter how valuable those tests might be. Rather, it is about testing on a widespread and constant scale, and about developing ways to use analytics to assess all messages. With a preponderance of data available, this approach argues that campaigns must begin to ask meaningful questions of this data, and ask them of all messages. Finally, a culture of testing is about using these results to make future decisions. While tests on particular messages may tell campaigns a lot about which message or tactic works in a particular moment, a culture of testing should build knowledge throughout the lifecycle of a campaign. In order to do so, the results of each test need to themselves be catalogued and studied for themes, patterns, and outliers. The flip side of this approach is that while knowledge about what type of message ought to be used can be accumulated and perfected, testing must remain ongoing, in case an overlooked variable may change a message's success rate.

Tracing this tradition back to a less digitally-focused set of experiments around political persuasion and mobilization carried out by Alan Gerber and Donald Green in the early 2000s (Gerber & Green, 2000, 2001; Green & Gerber, 2001), Sasha Issenberg's 2012 treatise on the use of analytics in the 2008 Obama campaign, *The Victory Lab,* roots this culture of testing primarily in the area of experimentation and empirical testing, rather than merely using digital media. These academic and professional studies tested a variety of messages asking citizens to vote before the election, then used actual voter data to examine which of their methods were most effective for getting citizens to the polls. Thus the culture of testing was born before it was even named as such. Following this tradition, digital campaigning made use of a preponderance of data that could be harnessed for purposes beyond the micro-targeting that had, until then, dominated discussion of political experimentation, and rigorously (and, at times, not so rigorously) tested messages.

Digital communication amassed a large network of supporters in the 1990s and early 2000s—both from those primarily interested in fundraising on the right and grassroots movements that came to be known as the "netroots" on the left. While both sides discussed blogs and using data to target constituents, testing messages was not yet part of the conversation. Following the Obama campaign's success in 2008, digital campaigning gained favor, but staffers and consultants still grappled with how to make productive use of these digital platforms. While those at the forefront of the analytics movement have been proselytizing for numerous cycles—at elite levels, these practices began in 2004, and Dan Mintz (2011), founder of MoveOn.org says he'd been leading a how-to session at progressive training series RootsCamp "for as long as he could remember" (para. 1)—uptake has been slow. In 2010, digital content was still a mystery, and campaigns at the congressional, senate, and gubernatorial levels were still feeling their way through attempts at productive use of these digital platforms (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015). Following the 2010 midterms, the drive to foster and support a culture of testing took off in a major way. Perhaps due in no small part to the failure to replicate the digital machinations of the Obama campaign just two years prior, major political consulting firms

and groups well-known for developing and institutionalizing cutting edge strategy called on campaigns of all sizes and levels to rigorously analyze the effects of their messages, share those effects, and begin to construct a more cohesive and nuanced understanding of best practices. In February of 2011, the New Organizing Institute held its first training in what they called the "culture of analytics and optimization," which built off of the earlier RootsCamp trainings and brought together dozens of practitioners in a training that was more replicable and scalable (Mintz, 2011, para. 1). Six months later, many of the speakers from NOI's trainings presented at three panels at Netroots Nation, the national conference for progressive, technology-minded professionals, all of which discussed the importance of analytics and the best practices for developing a culture of testing. By 2014, the number of panels on analytics or data jumped to eleven. Whereas the data panels in 2011 made up roughly 25% of those discussing online strategy, by 2014, analytics-based panels jumped to nearly 50% of those focused on digital, including trainings for a variety of analytics platforms, from e-mail management systems to Google Analytics, Blue State Digital tools, and the SQL programming language. Although the organizations that are leading this charge are those on the left, the manuals and case studies that these findings produce are used by practitioners on both sides of the aisle, and therefore impact those beyond the immediately present audience. At national consulting conferences like Netroots Nation, panels focusing on explaining the benefits of a culture of analytics testing and detailing how to begin undertaking the necessary experiments were widespread from 2011–2013 (Field notes: June 17–19, 2011; June 7–10, 2012).

We know quite a bit about how a culture of analytics operates within the upper echelon of political strategists. Academic research and journalistic accounts of campaign tactics all tell us that these practices are widely and successfully used at the presidential level (Katz, Barris & Jane, 2014; Issenberg 2014). These campaigns benefit not only from an influx of financial resources that are unparalleled, but the prestige of working with a presidential campaign enables them to hire the best in the field as well. Despite their relatively limited financial resources, advocacy groups have also developed strategies that highlight their focus on a culture of analytics. As David Karpf (2012) has argued, a set of contemporary advocacy groups emerged in the years since 2006, and they have often been vocal proponents of developing a culture of analytics. Precisely because they lack the temporal constraints of campaigns, advocacy groups must simultaneously consider what messages work at a particular moment, which work over the long term, and how they can all be used toward multiple goals. Advocacy campaigns have both the ability and the imperative to test messages over time, and as a result, groups like the New Organizing Institute and the Analyst Institute have become leading evangelists for and teachers of developing a culture of testing within all campaigns.

Field operations—those whose job it is to GOTV come Election Day—have made some of the most massive advances in the use of data and analytics. Despite the fact that the practices of message creation, circulation and consumption that occurred across social media spaces have been the center of much attention in both popular and academic study, field operations have, in many ways, achieved more calculable and public victories in their use of analytics than communications offices.

Over the past four years, the national field operations of both the Democratic and Republican parties have made developments in their use of data and analytics, thus benefitting local candidates for federal office in their efforts to do the traditional field work of getting out the vote, be it by knocking on doors or calling citizens at home (Madrigal 2012; Katz et al., 2014). In 2010 and before, while the work of whom to contact was done using data provided by databases from the party, local volunteers and staffers were then provided with little more than a clipboard and a pencil, with little chance that most notes would be recorded back into the database upon completion. In the four years since—thanks to both improvements in the usability of both parties' database technology and the proliferation of mobile phones—staffers and volunteers are able to directly add information to voter files as they canvass. While the door-knocking aspects of the ground game are still alive and well (Nielsen, 2012), campaigns add to its traditional GOTV benefits by using canvassing as an opportunity to create more data in the field, which can then contribute to decisions made by the field, finance, and communications operations of the campaign. At this time, however, campaigns' use of this data has not been to test canvassing messages, but to refine their micro targeting efforts, the most notable of which have been Project Narwhal on the Democratic side and the Republican's Project Orca, both of which were designed to improve canvassing and field operations, even as Project Orca failed in a wide-scale and visible way on Election Day. Technological issues aside, while the hype of data-driven campaigning has been a popular narrative, its direct impact is often questioned (Sides & Vavreck 2014; Rougier 2014)

From the success stories of presidential and advocacy campaigns, the use of testing and analytics is clearly happening, but the question remains: How does the language of proponents of testing match up to the reality of campaigns in 2014? Which of the forms of testing have trickled down to the level of congressional midterm elections? What aspects of developing a culture of analytics are they focusing on, and how has that changed from the recent past? Beyond these descriptive questions, there is also a larger question concerning the implications of these practices for democratic culture.

Analytics in the 2014 Elections

In many ways, communications offices have made leaps and bounds in the time between the 2010 and 2014 campaigns. In other ways, the plodding pace of campaign innovation is clear, and the improvements seem incremental at best (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015; Norris, 2007). While campaigns' overall use of data and analytics has certainly improved, it is a vast overstatement to say that it meets the goals of a culture of testing, which ask campaigns to use data in ways that go beyond targeting to assess messages' success, to testing messages on a widespread and constant scale, and to use those results to make future decisions. As this section details, the early inroads made in 2010 have persisted in the subsequent four years, as campaigns went from the blunders of 2010 to limited uses of data in 2014.

On the one hand, campaigns have made very real advancements since 2010, if for no other reason than the state of digital campaigning at the local level was previously

rudimentary. At that time, campaigns were only on the cusp of making sense of the new digital tools at their disposal. Uses of analytics to test messages were few and far between, and campaigns were struggling with the basics, such as how to target or increase circulation in new social media spaces. In 2010, a communications director of a major congressional campaign, used to the targeting capabilities offered by Facebook ads, found himself confused and frustrated upon seeing that he could not target direct messages to citizens (Field notes, September 1, 2010). As a result of this inability to target messages, he questioned the usefulness of the entire platform. A major Chicago-area campaign that was in an extremely tight race described being so concerned with gaining Facebook friends that a member of the communications/digital team went so far as to purchase Facebook friends (personal communication, April 26, 2011). Realizing that this strategy held many problems, not least of all that it fails to reach actual voters, staffers then spent many of their valuable hours ridding the campaign's Facebook page of faux friends. Likewise leaders in digital campaigning often find themselves warning against artificially inflating their e-mail lists, showing it to be a recurring issue. These consultants making such mistakes were not technologically illiterate either, and within them, some rudimentary testing of messages was being done. Both were familiar with targeting their e-mail lists according to citizens' demographic information and/or interest in certain issues. Even in 2010, those in federal races were using targeted e-mail lists, and occasionally also deployed an A/B test to determine the content of a splash page that preceded the campaign website during the final two weeks of the campaign (Field notes, October 17, 2010). Generally, communications directors for Senate and Congressional campaigns were well-versed in targeting e-mail lists, but only those at the Senate level were testing those messages in order to determine what type of subject header, content, and images were best at gaining attention or mobilizing constituencies (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015; Personal communication, April 27, 2011).

Much has happened since 2010—new social media platforms have emerged, the proliferation of smartphones has given campaigns new channels through which to reach voters and provides staffers with reams of data at their fingertips. And campaigns have certainly gotten on board with digital strategy—many advances have come in the form of engaging citizens on more cutting popular platforms like Instagram or Tumblr, producing more aesthetically pleasing content (well composed, better lighting, retouched graphics, etc.) across many social media platforms, and codifying norms for what to publish in these channels instead of merely duplicating content across them. Likewise, as analytics-based strategy has gained popularity, many consultants and staffers are eager to voice their dedication to digital. Staffers and consultants earnestly argue that "you *need* to make use of analytics and data in strategy, or you'll be left behind" (personal communication, December 11, 2014). Consultants at a variety of levels and from both political parties have adopted the rhetoric of a digital, analytic-driven campaign, as it offers the cache of both success and innovation in an environment where strategies have been slow to adapt since the normalization of TV ads. Unfortunately, the talk does not always match the tactics.

As a result of analytic-driven campaigns' success at the presidential level and an earnest desire to modernize, there has been slippage and equivalences made between

relatively banal and longstanding uses of data and the very rigorous approach by those early advocates of a culture of analytics. As such, the culture of analytics has become a rhetorical move through which politicos can signal their adherence to analytic-based strategy, rather than a clear designation of tactics. What is clear, however, is that while everyone is speaking the language of data-driven campaigning, not all are living up to the bar set by those who have been calling for a culture of analytics since 2008. While the concept of a culture of analytics has clear tenets—testing for success with a clear outcome, accumulating data and testing in a manner that is ongoing, and using this data to make current and future decisions—there is a variety of practices that staffers and consultants lump under the rubric of a culture of analytics. These methods vary widely in their rigor, and, for that matter, difficulty level, and thus campaigns' actual embrace of the culture of analytics ranges from purely rhetorical moves to redefine traditional practices to the adoption of truly rigorous experimental testing of messages.

Rebranding the Use of Traditional Data

At the most basic level, campaign professionals have begun to define traditional practices of using data from polling, focus groups, and dial tests as examples of data-driven campaigning. While this is certainly not wrong—the information these tests breed are in fact data—political operatives are strategically attempting to associate these traditional and limited forms of data with those that can test the successfulness of a message for a variety of goals, which they simply cannot do. While polls and focus groups are methodologically rigorous, often taken repeatedly, and can be useful in targeting messages to certain populations, they are unable to measure the success of individual messages or assess what particular elements of messages are persuasive or mobilizing. Thus, these tactics will return qualitatively different results, with analytics being capable of measuring actual messages in real time, while polling and the like experimentally stimulate effects.

When asked about their use of analytics in message creation and testing, multiple staffers brought up polling data they used to determine macro-scale strategy, providing examples of how they used that information to know what issues resonated generally speaking, or among certain key demographics (Personal communication, December 8, 2014; December 15, 2014). These two staffers, both working at the congressional level, brought this up unprompted, asserting that it was important in the construction of e-mail messages in particular, which was the case only when there were no other types of data being used to assess messages. One staffer seemed particularly eager to find a way that their campaign did use any kind of analytics. Although this campaign used an e-mail constituent management system that organized e-mailing in a way that enabled targeting and measuring outcomes like click-through and open rates, they did not make use of its features, saying "we knew what our message should be from our polling, and we wanted to stay on message, in e-mails or in press releases" (Personal communication, December 8, 2014) One noted that she had experienced message testing in her work for an advocacy organization, but not campaigns, saying "we just didn't have the bandwidth—or the time, really—to write a bunch of different e-mails. Even the fundraising e-mails,

which we scheduled way ahead of time, were rushed" (Personal communication, December 15, 2014).

Essentially, these tactics amount to no more than targeting, but campaign professionals are able to use them to rhetorically signal their own adoption of a culture of data, due to the slippage of analytics and data as terms that are involved in testing a message before it is circulated and after. In such cases, speaking of these practices in terms of data and analytics is designed to assert membership in a more cutting edge class of campaigns, as they are part of all campaigns' strategy development, but were only invoked by staffers who were speaking about a form of messaging they otherwise would have not been able to discuss in the way of analytics. This expansion of the concept of the culture of analytics highlights the importance of the term as a rhetorical signifier of innovative, successful campaigning and signals its dominance among professional campaigners.

Pre-made Analytics

Central to the importance of analytics-driven campaign strategy is their ability to be used in ways that extend beyond merely enhancing targeting operations, and allow for assessment of messages' productivity and/or success in real time. The ability to track the amount of clicks on a website, views of an ad, or donations made through a fundraising platform has long been a feature that is "baked-in" (i.e., a feature that is built in and is simple and easy to use) to digital platforms. Without much effort on the part of staffers, e-mail management systems can catalog what audiences do with the messages, collect data on whether an e-mail was opened, if it was shared in other social media spaces, and/or what links were clicked. Likewise, domain hosts provide web traffic data for campaign websites that also tells campaigns where visitors are located, and what linked them to the site. Social media sites report on metrics such as how many individuals see, share, or like posts, and occasionally provide data on audiences as well. Online ads, be they in social media platforms like Facebook or search engines like Google, provide an overview of how many people see the ad, how many click on the ad, and what they do on the linked website after the fact.

Across the board, 2014 campaigns began to make significant use of such tools—all but two staffers said they used the in-app analytics in social media and gave their attention to baked-in analytics from their e-mail management systems and campaign webpages. Moreover, one of the two who reported not using such tools clarified that even when they were not purposeful, they were given attention and interpreted, saying: "Well, I guess I looked at them, but I didn't *use* them. I didn't change posts according to them, or consider an un-shared post a failure if it was on-message" (Personal communication, December 15, 2014b) Campaigns gravitate toward these tools, even if they are not always deployed in the most scientific of ways, largely because they are easy to access and interpret. When asked why she used this type of analytics, one staffer remarked: "They're right there! You can just take a quick look and see what type of messages perform well" (Personal communication, December 18, 2014). Another argued that the baked-in analytics were the most practical in the time crunch of a campaign, saying, "I don't have to take

time to set something up before posting a message….I can look at the numbers when I have the time, and still use that [information] the next time we need to post a message" (Personal communication, December 3, 2014). A consultant who finds them helpful, even if not the holy grail of social media campaigning, spoke to their usefulness as well as their limits: "Of course [I use them]. There's no point in not looking at information. I think it's important to use other engagement analytics alongside Facebook['s], but together you can better understand what types of messages are getting you more dollars or e-mail signups of whatever your goal is" (Personal communication, December 19, 2014).

Beyond the in-platform analytics, there are reams of third-party services that will parse additional social media or web analytics to provide different metrics of evaluation that combine multiple platforms. For instance, Google Analytics will enable staffers to look at in-depth data on how audiences get to and use their website, as well as how successful particular goals or requests are. Popular social media analytics packages such as SproutSocial, CrowdTangle, Attentive.ly go beyond simply presenting the number of audience members ("impressions") for a message, or how many people have shared it, now providing more complex metrics of vague terms like "engagement," an unspecified equation combining the amount of people looking at and interacting with a message, purported to mean that audiences are more deeply interacting with the message. These third-party systems offer clearly-represented metrics that therefore seem to measure more thoroughly than those built into social media platforms themselves, like Facebook Insights. In these third-party tools, algorithms rank combinations of measures such as likes, shares, attention, users' networks, and/or comparison with other similar pages. In some cases, these tools can be used across a variety of platforms, and others focus specifically on one application or service, all at a variety of price points anywhere from $50 to $500 a month depending on the number of accounts supported and the amount of data desired.

Use of third-party analytics measuring tools was also widespread in the 2014 midterms, even if they were not quite as dominant as those that come built into the platforms themselves. In a recent discussion on political consulting listserv, Progressive Exchange, a question about what third-party analytics programs others used resulted in a conversation of over 38 posts, and a list of over 26 additional packaged tools by which to measure a variety of markers of a message or campaign's success (Progressive Exchange, 2014). Campaign staffers and consultants alike are more likely to use third-party tools to analyze campaign websites, likely due to the proliferation of Google Analytics as a simple, well-known, system through which to assess websites at free to little cost, with most campaigns choosing the free platform. While baseline use of these tools occurs, there are wide variations in the complexity with which they can assess a message. At tool trainings regularly put on at conventions such as Netroots Nation and Personal Democracy forum, campaign staffers and activists attempt to bolster their knowledge beyond what seems to be the baseline of being able to spot trends and peaks in attention or engagement. For example, the breadth of such trainings has increased exponentially in recent years—Netroots Nation's single training devoted to Google Analytics in 2011 increased to five platform-specific training sessions in 2014 (including Google Analytics, Blue

State Digital's suite of tools, and database management software SQL, among others) and an additional, multi-tool showcase. While consultants overwhelmingly used additional approaches to assess messages, campaign staffers often stopped at this point. Of the nine interview participants who were staffed in a single campaign (as opposed to consulting on multiple), only two discussing the use of analytics beyond those built into the platforms themselves.

When these tools were used—by both consultants and staffers—their purpose was predominantly to identify what type of content was the most popular. In the language of staffers, success itself is equated with a message's popularity, with the amount of individuals who have seen ("impressions" in the parlance of most analytics), liked, or forwarded/shared a message. One staffer put it succinctly by saying, "Those [native] analytics told us what *worked*….They told us what people wanted" (Personal communication, December 11, 2011b). Here, "worked" is merely a synonym for some combination of what ends up with higher likes and greater reach. Visually, the native analytics of Facebook overwhelmingly emphasize these very measures. Under default settings, administrators of a campaign's page receive updates when an individual shares or likes a post, and the number of individuals reached is displayed on the campaign page itself, making it more visible than the other, more detailed analytics available under the "Insights" tab. Under the Insights tab, the analytics of the overall page (as opposed to specific message) are provided prior to a per-message breakdown. In each of these, the number of likes, the reach (total impressions), and "engagement" (a combination of likes, comments, shares, and how many times any links were clicked) are provided. These "engagement" analytics begin to provide insight that is deeper than popularity of topics or issues, but also require more advanced strategies to respond and in combination with other forms of analytics to understand if other actions such as donating or signing up for a newsletter should be taken. Twitter, on the other hand, provides people with an overview that is more concerned with how the campaign as a whole is doing, rather than only focusing on particular messages. Although retweets and "favoriting" mirror the drive for popularity seen in Facebook's analytics, Twitter's "engagement" metric is a sum of all replies, retweets, and mentions, and speaks more to how much a campaign is being discussed by the public of users than merely what type of content is popular.

Third-party analytics programs are where these measurements become more diverse, and more nuanced, but they are also less likely to be used by campaigns. These tools use a variety of analytics and additional algorithms to explain indicators beyond popularity, and can provide analytics that assess how well campaigns are achieving any number of campaign-determined goals, such as a specific fundraising effort, attendance at an event, or a drive to grow an e-mail list. It is the work of integrating analytics from multiple spaces—combining those from a campaign's Content Management System with social media analytics and web traffic, for instance—that makes these more sophisticated analytics possible. For consultants who specialize in digital media or communication strategy, but are not bogged down with the everyday grind that occupies much of a communications or digital director's time, these tools were widely used in 2014 and recommended. In contrast, staffers not dedicated to communication tasks did not describe them as part of

their toolkit. While some campaign staffers did enlist such third-party applications, far fewer did so than use the tools native to social media platforms themselves. One campaign staffer who was well versed in using more advanced metrics to test e-mail campaigns explained that because they could measure campaigns more precisely in their e-mail messaging and online advertising, that was where the attention to analytics went (Personal communication, December 7, 2014).

Consultants, in particular, also brought up the use of an additional advanced approach to social media analytics: using social network analysis to find their top digital opinion leaders across different types of messages. This approach was enlisted by half of the consultants interviewed, though it went unmentioned by any of the staffers. This tactic enabled campaigns to precisely gauge who their digital opinion leaders are, and subsequently use that information to target them specifically, or reach out to solicit help in a direct way. Campaign staffers have reported knowing who their digital volunteers are in the past (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015), but such an approach has been far from scientifically accurate.

Over time, both baked-in and third-party analytics have become more nuanced, enabling campaign staffers and consultants to glean a superficial understanding of what type of content is working best with little to no technical knowledge or time spent. Although this type of analytics enables real-time assessment of messages according to a few different metrics, campaign staffers in congressional races remain unlikely to use these affordances to directly compare messages in an experimental way that can ensure campaigns are circulating the more productive messages. Even consultants, who make more regular use of these tools, are primarily using them to spot trends, as simplistic bar and line graphs remain the primary way this information is represented to users.

Testing

At the heart of the development of a culture of analytics is the element of scientifically testing messages, rather than merely eyeballing trends, though far fewer political professionals embrace these tactics than speak of the value of analytics. The most straightforward and simple way to empirically test messages against one another is A/B testing. When A/B testing, campaigns produce two messages, assign them to recipients randomly for a limited time while collecting data that shows them how many people opened, clicked on, or otherwise acted according to the campaign's goals to determine which iteration worked better, and then use the message that performed better for the duration. With clear roots in testing the efficacy of a message in a focus group setting, A/B testing is particularly productive for content on campaign websites, e-mails to supporters, and digital ad buys, as a message can be given to a limited number of individuals at the outset, and the population can be enlarged once the best message is determined. Major proponents of the culture of testing also advocate for more advanced testing involving randomized controlled samples and numerous iterations in order to use "our resources more effectively, to gain more votes to turn more people out to vote, to be more persuasive, and if we want to win elections, running the best, most evidence-based campaigns is the way to do it" (UptakeVideo, 2011, 1:21).

By and large, congressional-level campaigns' exposure to these forms of scientific testing is limited, despite their professed enthusiasm for analytics. Although this discourse is strong at a national level, and therefore relatively widely discussed in professional trade publications and major conferences, it simply is not a predominant aspect of more local campaigns. Most pronounced was the fact that very few consultants and staffers engaged in randomized, controlled sample testing in 2014, though they did regularly A/B test messages. Five out of the six consultants used A/B testing, and most used it for both website and e-mail content. Although staffers were far less likely to use A/B testing, it was still a viable tactic, with three of the nine staffers interviewed engaging with such comparative analysis. Despite using this tactic, staffers (especially at the congressional level) were unlikely to describe conducting such tests in a routine or ongoing way. Instead, most staffers reported A/B testing only for very important messages; a website splash page, the website home page, and a major fundraising e-mail were all examples given (Personal communications, December 7, 2014, December 11, 2014, December 18, 2014). Outside of the presidential level, those who do attend to controlled sample testing are, overwhelmingly, either consultants or staffers for the most competitive of Senate races; often, they are consultants who are working at these top levels. This is not necessarily due to a widely different set of knowledge about what analytics can be used for, since even interviewed consultants who have knowledge of how to use analytics complain about the feasibility of such an approach within the time constraints of a campaign (Personal communication, December 8, 2014b).

Advertising tells a slightly different story. While social media, e-mail, and website content largely went untested, campaigns were much more familiar with using analytics and testing to determine how an online ad was succeeding, and making the appropriate changes from these findings. For instance, campaign staffers who did not A/B test any e-mail or web content, and did not use social media analytics to drive content, were familiar with testing multiple versions of Facebook ads to see which perform best. This illuminates how staffers and consultants alike make a mental distinction between paid media (e.g., Facebook ads) and owned media (e.g., e-mail messages). While the developments in digital communication platforms have enabled campaigns to test messages of all types, paid advertising remains the dominant purview of testing, and campaign staffers at the congressional level in 2014 were less familiar with the process of using analytics to test or assess messages and less dedicated to doing so when they were equipped with the skills.

Conclusion

In 2014, campaigns operating at levels more local than presidential campaigns and Senate races spoke the language of a culture of analytics without fully executing the messaging tactics truly involved in the practice. While the benefits of analytics-based messaging have been widely extolled, communications offices that employed such strategies have largely been limited to presidential campaigns, Senate races, and consultants working for a handful of candidates in a removed way. While the occasional well-funded congressional race, or exceptionally analytics-adept staffer can bring these skills to lower-ballot campaigns, dedication to the practices behind

the highly touted "culture of analytics" is less widespread than dedication to its rhetoric. Staffers had fully bought into the cult of analytics, situating their own actions within the analytic turn that has recently marked digital political strategy, but were far less likely to engage with analytics and data in the full range of ways that those originally advocating for a culture of analytics and testing argue are necessary to improve a campaign's success. While consultants are likely to be rigorously testing messages and drawing from a wider variety of analytics across multiple platforms, campaign staffers at the local level are less likely to do so. To some degree, this echoes earlier findings that the adoption of emerging technologies within campaigns is slow to trickle down from the national to local level (Rackaway, 2007), but this points to a different direction of the flow of adoption. Here, the increasing and deepening engagement in the culture of analytics does not trickle down from local to national, but trickles across, and is adopted by consultants first, regardless of which level of campaigns they were working with. While national and Senate races do demonstrate stronger uses of analytics by both consultants and staffers, these differences between the roles emerge at local levels.

Although those who treat the use of analytics as a purely rhetorical exercise are few, campaign staffers in particular are less likely to deeply engage in practices that assess messages' success in a way that is widespread and ongoing, and can lead to data-driven findings that impact future decisions. Instead, messages are tested for very exceptional or important cases, such as the home page of a campaign website; the analytics that are passively gathered by communication platforms are looked at for general trends, rather than empirically tested; if staffers notice trends in what content is popular in terms of impressions and shares, that will be invoked as a reason to produce more of it. In short, analytics play a role in contemporary campaigning at the local level, but their use within campaigns themselves is often more superficial than discourses focused on the possibilities of analytics describe.

Campaign staffers' engagement with the culture of testing often occurs—and ends—at the level of giving attention to the analytics that are built into communication platforms, such as Facebook Insights or e-mail management systems' open rates. As a result of defaulting to what is easily available, campaigns often still lack control over what they can measure. By virtue of giving their attention to the data that is collected by default and represented in an easy to read way, campaigns also privilege the messages that these algorithms reflect as especially successful. Notably, these analytics focus on popularity, highlighting the amount of impressions content generates, how many times it is liked or favorited, and how often it is shared about other metrics. While other analytics are available, software structurally highlights algorithms that privilege popularity, thereby motivating (and subsequently discouraging) the production of certain types of content (Gillespie, 2014). Fox example, Facebook highlights notifications specifically for likes and shares and displays bar graphs that visually represent the amount of people reached. While it also measures additional actions such as "engagement," or if audiences click on links provided, the system itself cannot track analytics of more action-oriented behavior, such as which users donate once a link is clicked, or how long they stay on that page. While Twitter provides data on a user's audience through a "followers" section of their analytics, that information is a click deeper than analytics displaying an account

and individual tweet's impressions, retweets, favorites, or an account's mentions. Additionally, despite widespread criticism of giving too much attention to open rates, they are still one of the first analytics displayed to users of nearly all e-mail management systems. These uses of analytics are certainly an important beginning step into testing messages and engaging analytics more rigorously, but their limited use results in an attention to the type of content that encourage campaigns to focus on messages that are popular, rather than mobilizing.

Overall, 2014 marked the limited adoption of what has come to be known as the culture of analytics. While the rhetoric of analytics has thus far outpaced the adoption of meaningful analytics techniques, they are still being used by campaigns. That said, the actual practices of their use fall short of the rigorous testing of messages and experiment-based decision-making regarding content that has come to serve as the main justification for undertaking the practice. Moreover, as campaign staffers and consultants do take up these practices in a limited capacity, they will shape the type of messages communications offices produce. As campaigns continue to integrate these practices, attention to continued adoption of these tactics is needed in order to understand whether smaller local campaigns can manage the production of additional content, even if they have the skills to work with analytics. Additionally, investigation into the types of messages analytics-based campaigns create, and their similarities to and differences from campaigns that do not operate within the culture of analytics will shed light on how much these tools influence the production of content moving forward.

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CHAPTER 3

THE "DOCUMENTED VOTER": VOTER ID MESSAGING IN THE 2014 TEXAS MIDTERM ELECTION

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In the weeks leading up to the 2014 midterm elections, nationwide speculation and controversy swirled around voter identification laws. In fact, in 2014, a majority of states conducted their elections under laws that mandated a variety of methods for verifying the identity of persons attempting to vote (Underhill, 2014).

Supporters advocated for enhanced voter ID laws to safeguard the integrity of elections, while opponents decried them as unnecessary and, worse, a new form of voter suppression similar to the practices of the Jim Crow south. In Texas, which had recently passed one of the strictest laws in the nation, the subject was heated. When state Attorney General and Republican gubernatorial candidate Greg Abbott faced his Democratic opponent, state senator Wendy Davis, in their only debate, Abbott claimed, "Voter fraud is real. It must be stopped. And voter identification is one of the tools to put a stop to it. I'm the only candidate running for governor who stands for election integrity." Senator Davis retorted, "Mr. Abbott heads up a party whose platform calls for the repeal of the Voting Rights Act. And let's be clear what this is about. It is about suppressing minority votes" (Jiang, 2014, para. 4–11).

Once the ballots were cast, the actual effect of these laws on voter turnout was unclear. Texas Democrats blamed the new voter ID law for the state's dismal voter turnout (according to McDonald [2014], Texas turnout ranked forty-ninth in the nation) and pointed to at least one close House race that might have favored the Democrat if turnout had been higher. State Republicans dismissed that argument, pointing to the tide of Republican wins around the country and to their party's turnout efforts. As reviewed in this chapter, the effect of voter ID laws on turnout has been mixed. But an equally important subject has been left unexamined: what we call the "spillover" effects of voter ID laws. Whether or not such laws suppress voting on Election Day, what effect has the heated debate over such laws had on civic attitudes that are the building blocks of political participation?

The citizen who would otherwise vote but does not because of legal hurdles has concerned researchers for decades. In their classic account of *The American Voter*, Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) pointed to "legal disabilities" as an important reason why politically motivated individuals may fail to vote on Election Day (p. 108). For Campbell et al., the concern was voter registration requirements that act as a barrier to participation—a concern that continues to receive attention (Gershtenson, Plane, Scacco, & Thomas, 2013; Patterson, 2003). Thomas Patterson (2003), in his examination of *The Vanishing Voter*, saw legal requirements that set polling hours and voter registration closing dates as contributors to the decline in voter participation. It is within this tradition that we ask whether campaign messaging over the "Documented Voter," or the physical documentation individuals must provide to vote in American elections, influences political and participatory attitudes.

In this chapter, we briefly describe the Texas voter ID law and the research that has sought to determine whether such laws operate as their advocates or detractors contend. We then turn to a potentially more fundamental and pernicious possible effect: that the voter ID debate *itself* may undermine citizens' attitudes toward the political system and their sense of political efficacy. Whether or not the presence of such laws actively keeps people who would otherwise have voted from doing so, it is possible that media coverage and political debate about these laws activate negative attitudes about politics, even among people predisposed to vote. If so, the suppressive effect of voter ID may be wider than has yet been considered.

Voter Identification Laws in Texas

Voter identification laws were widespread throughout the United States leading up to the 2014 midterm election. Texas's voter identification requirement, passed in 2011, is considered one of the country's most restrictive. It requires voters to present one of seven government-issued forms of identification (driver's license, concealed hand gun license, military ID, US passport, citizenship documentation, or a personal or election identification card issued for a fee). Poll workers must determine whether the name on that identification properly matches the individual's name on the official list of registered voters, and if not, that voter can be either required to sign an affidavit regarding his or her identity or permitted only to cast a provisional ballot. These regulations raised concerns that poll workers could turn away legally registered voters based on minor discrepancies, and that eligible citizens could find it expensive and difficult to obtain the required documentation to vote.

Compounding the law's potentially suppressive effect, a legal battle played out in the weeks preceding Election Day that created considerable uncertainty. On October 9, US District Judge Nelva Gonzales Ramos overturned voter ID, asserting that it "creates an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote, has an impermissible discriminatory effect against Hispanics and African-Americans, and was imposed with an unconstitutional discriminatory purpose" (*Veasey v. Perry*, 2014, p. 2). Linking Texas's law to a history of voter disenfranchisement, Judge Ramos further held that the law "constitutes an unconstitutional poll tax" (p. 2). Shortly after publishing this opinion, Ramos issued an injunction barring use of the law

in the Texas midterm election. That injunction was challenged by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott (also the state's Republican gubernatorial candidate in 2014). Uncertainty followed as counties attempted to prepare citizens for the upcoming election. Travis County registrar Bruce Elfant, for example, issued a memorandum on October 13 advising citizens that they "may" need identification to vote.

Within days, the US Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals and the US Supreme Court both stayed the injunction and greenlighted temporary implementation of voter identification requirements in the midterm election. Although the US Supreme Court issued an unsigned ruling, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg argued for the potential harms of voter ID to the electoral process in a widely circulated dissent. "The greatest threat to public confidence in elections in this case is the prospect of enforcing a purposefully discriminatory law," Justice Ginsburg wrote, explaining that the law "risks denying the right to vote to hundreds of thousands of eligible voters" (*Veasey v. Perry, Texas NAACP v. Berry, United States v. Texas*, 2014, pp. 6–7).

Although the legality of voter identification requirements remains a divisive issue for the federal courts, the court of public opinion overwhelmingly favors stricter ID laws. Seventy-four percent of likely voters nationwide supported voter ID laws in the lead-up to the 2014 election (Rasmussen, 2014). In Texas, an October 2014 poll found that 67 percent of registered Texas voters were favorable toward the state's identification requirement. Moreover, a plurality of citizens (43 percent) believed that the law would have "no effect" on voter turnout (Ramsey, 2014).

Voter ID Messaging

Proponents of stricter identification requirements have relied on two principle messages—the *fraud* message and *no-big-deal* message. The *fraud* message rests on the belief that voter fraud is real and particularly consequential in close electoral contests. For example, an article from *The Wall Street Journal* (2008) cited cases of potential fraud in the 2000 presidential election, as well as actual fraud in a 2005 race for a Tennessee state Senate seat, the 2004 gubernatorial race in Washington state, and an Indiana mayoral election. The Indiana case precipitated that state's implementation of a stricter identification law that was later upheld by the US Supreme Court. Underlying the fraud message, voter identification is seen as a means for promoting democratic equality and legitimacy "by protecting the votes of all who vote legally. When voter fraud occurs, it dilutes and weakens the votes of all law-abiding voters" (Rousu, 2014, para. 4).

The *no-big-deal* message perpetuated by proponents argues that voting is no different than many other transactions in which consumers must prove their identity. According to US senator Tim Scott (R-SC), "You can't get on a plane without showing who you are. You can't cash a check without showing who you are. So why shouldn't you have to show who you are when you vote? I don't really get the whole deal" (as cited in Fuller, 2014, para. 11). Driving the point home, lawmakers such as US senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) have asked in response to voter ID requirements, "What's the big deal?" (as cited in Fuller, 2014, para. 14).

Opponents of voter ID have relied on the *no fraud* and *voter suppression* messages. They argue that the current election process is largely secure and free of fraud.

As such, voter ID laws are a reaction to a nonexistent problem. According to the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law (2011), "There may be evidence of isolated instances of alleged voter fraud, but proponents of these photo ID bills cannot point to substantial convictions" (p. 1). Given this view of the facts, critics have often impugned the real intentions of voter ID proponents. According to critics, voter identification laws stem from hidden aims to disenfranchise groups that traditionally vote Democratic and in the process suppress electoral participation. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, for example, individuals of color, those in poverty, and the elderly are "more likely to be disenfranchised by these laws since they are less likely to have photo ID than the general population" (Gaskins & Iyer, 2012, p. 1). Judge Ramos adopted a similar argument in her federal court ruling, as did Justice Ginsburg in her Supreme Court dissent (*Veasey v. Perry, Texas NAACP v. Berry, United States v. Texas*, 2014).

As these arguments suggest, the main effect feared by critics of voter ID laws has been the suppression of voting by eligible citizens. Research on that question has yielded mixed results. The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2014) reviewed ten studies that estimated the effects of various voter ID requirements. Although five studies found that such requirements had no significant effect on voter turnout, five other studies showed statistically significant effects, with one showing an increase of 1.8 percent in voter turnout in Indiana and four others finding or predicting decreases in turnout nationwide of between 1.5 and 3.9 percent. The GAO study also noted a decrease in voter turnout in Kansas and Tennessee in the 2008 and 2012 general elections after the implementation of voter ID requirements. Other studies have found voter ID to have mixed effects on turnout (Ansolabehere, 2009; Hood & Bullock, 2008; Lott, 2006). As the *New York Times* explained, while the effect of voter ID laws on the 2014 midterm results nationwide was unclear, "At the least, however, the country is in the midst of a broad experiment with voting restrictions at a time of already depressed voting rates" (Gabriel & Fernandez, 2014, para. 5).

Voter turnout is not the only matter of concern for studies of voter ID. Research also has explored how public arguments and racial attitudes undergird support for voter ID laws. The arguments used by proponents and opponents of identification laws matter. David Wilson and Paul Brewer (2013) tested several pro- and anti-voter ID arguments, concluding that "support for voter ID laws is susceptible to political communication effects" (p. 19). For instance, the *suppression* argument that voter ID laws can prohibit eligible individuals from casting a ballot reduced support. Pro-voter ID arguments about protecting eligible voters and preventing "people from voting multiple times" did not move attitudes, perhaps because of the high levels of support individuals reported for voter ID in the study (p. 8). When Wilson and Brewer (2014) later embedded messages about the potential harms of voter ID to particular groups of eligible voters like African Americans, support for laws also was reduced.

The public debate surrounding voter ID also can affect public support for identification requirements. Atkeson, Alvarez, Hall, and Sinclair (2014) tested what we term in this chapter as the *fraud* and *suppression* messages in a survey of New Mexico citizens. When individuals were asked to choose between two competing

perspectives framed in the voter ID debate, "ensuring that everyone who is eligible has the right to vote or protecting the voting system against fraud," most participants responded favorably to the *suppression* message (p. 10). However, when asked to consider only one message, the majority of individuals agreed that voter ID laws guard against voter fraud and do not inhibit electoral participation. In other words, when exposed only to the proponents' argument, more people were likely to support that viewpoint, but when exposed to both *fraud* and *suppression* messages, concern about these laws' effects on participation increased.

Racial and discriminatory animus also may underlay some public support for voter ID laws, according to recent research. At the political elite level, one field study by Matthew Mendez and Christian Grose (2014) tested the responsiveness of legislators in 14 states with the largest Latino populations to e-mailed questions about voting requirements. Legislators were randomly assigned to receive an e-mail message asking if a driver's license was required to vote. Mock messages were constructed to appear as if they came from an Anglo/White constituent or a Latino constituent, written in either English or Spanish. State legislators who supported voter ID laws were significantly more responsive to inquiries from White constituents compared to Latino constituents. In another field study documenting response bias at the elite level, Ariel White and her colleagues (2015) contacted all local election officials across the United States by e-mail with either an information-seeking message about voter ID sent by a Latino or non-Latino-sounding individual or a control e-mail about voting in primary elections. Election officials were less likely to send responses to individuals with Latino names compared to individuals with non-Latino names. Additionally, responses to individuals with Latino names were less likely to contain completely accurate information.

Examining racial attitudes and public support for voter identification at the citizen level, Wilson, Brewer, and Rosenbluth (2014) uncovered potentially troubling undertones among individuals in the general population as well. In Wilson et al.'s (2014) experiment, individuals either saw an image of a White voter and a poll worker, or an African American voter and a poll worker on Election Day. White participants who saw an image with an African American voter had higher support for voter ID laws (73 percent) compared to participants who saw an image with a White voter (67 percent). These various studies suggest that the pro- and anti-voter ID messages, particularly the *suppression* message, warrant additional testing on outcomes beyond public support for identification requirements.

Beyond studies of voter turnout and public support, we know little about the potential "spillover" influences of messages associated with the voter ID debate. Protracted and divisive public debates can have negative democratic outcomes, especially when they feature media repetition of inaccurate claims (Lawrence & Schafer, 2012), including increased public belief in false or misleading messages (Jerit & Barabas, 2006; Nyhan, 2010). With this possibility acknowledged, we build on prior voter ID messaging scholarship described above to test prominent campaign messages used about identification laws in Texas during the 2014 midterm election. We pay close attention to how these media messages influence political attitudes that form the basis for political participation.

The Voter ID Debate and Political Attitudes

One overlooked possibility amid the popular focus on voter identification laws is that the debate *itself* may have critical democratic consequences. How might such laws—or, more specifically, the debate about such laws—impact the attitudes that are the precursors to political participation? Arguably, uncertainty and controversy over voter documentation could erode efficacy, trust, and positive attitudes toward voting.

For example, any uncertainty or confusion sown by acrimonious debate, conflicting or inaccurate news reports, or protracted legal battles over voter ID laws could affect individuals' sense of internal efficacy. In the classic definition, internal efficacy reflects "the extent to which the citizen believes himself to be effective in politics" (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 83) and, in particular, how knowledgeable people believe themselves to be. The voter ID controversy could potentially leave individuals feeling uncertain about their own eligibility to vote, or about their own grasp on the facts and legal questions at stake in the debate. Either way, individuals' sense of efficaciousness could be undermined. Controversy over voter ID laws may also undermine individuals' external efficacy—their belief that public officials care what citizens think and that citizens can affect what government does (Converse, 1972). If the debate over voter ID appears to turn on false claims about voter fraud, or if voter ID laws are perceived as an underhanded attempt by one party to suppress likely voters of the other party, cynical attitudes about politics could be triggered.

Either by eroding internal or external efficacy, exposure to the voter ID debate could further an individual's sense that "politics is a distant and complex realm that is beyond the power of the common citizen to affect" and reduce their sense that "the affairs of government can be understood and influenced by individual citizens" (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 104). This effect, if it occurs, could be consequential, since internal and external efficacy predict one's propensity to participate in politics (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Campbell et al., 1960). Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli Carpini (2006) observe that efficacy is a form of "political capital" since it "reduces the 'costs' associated with participating by making the system familiar and providing the confidence to get involved" (p. 129).

By the same token, exposure to the voter ID controversy could reduce trust in government by eroding the basic sense of an "exchange" between citizens and government in which elites are expected to produce satisfactory policy (Citrin, 1974; Hetherington, 1998; Williams, 1985). If citizens do not feel their expectations of government are being met, either because they have been led to believe that voter fraud is widespread or because they see the voter fraud claim as itself fraudulent, trust—another precursor to political participation—may be undermined. At a more prosaic level, exposure to the voter ID debate may educate or remind people about the discretion allowed to election officials to decide who may or may not vote. Depending upon individuals' predispositions, the voter ID debate may activate distrustful attitudes toward government bureaucrats.

Finally, exposure to the voter ID debate may activate preexisting beliefs or create new attitudes about the difficulty of voting. To the extent that obtaining or presenting documentation is framed as a hardship, exposure to the debate may prime

beliefs that voting is difficult, inconvenient, or not worth the effort (Gershtenson et al., 2013).

Method

To assess the possibility that the voter ID debate may have affected the building blocks of political participation, we conducted a statewide experiment with an embedded survey during the final days of the 2014 midterm election campaign in Texas. The experiment allows us to make causal claims about how the voter ID messages in the campaign environment influenced political efficacy, trust in government, and attitudes about the voting process. By including messages that permeated the Texas electoral landscape during the voter ID debate, we add external validity to the findings while enhancing our ability to make claims about what might have occurred to Texans' political attitudes in the final week of the 2014 campaign.

Participants were recruited via Survey Sampling International, an online survey vendor. Texas residents who were aged 18 years or older were targeted based on the 2010 US Census. In total, 544 Texans completed the survey from October 27 to November 2, 2014. Although the sample was more male and educated compared to the Texas Census, participants represented a range of demographic and political backgrounds. Fifty-nine percent of the sample was male; the average age was 45.58 years (SD = 17.3); a plurality of the sample had some college education (44.5 percent); and the modal household income was less than $30,000 a year (32.7 percent). Forty percent of the sample identified as Independent, 33.7 percent as Democrat, and 26.6 percent as Republican. Racial and ethnic groups were well represented—arguably the most important within the context of Texas demography and the previously described debate about the "targets" of voter ID laws: 79 percent of participants identified as White and 11 percent as African American. Thirty-two percent of the sample reported Hispanic or Latino descent.

Upon entering the survey, participants answered a series of open- and closed-ended questions about what they "had heard or learned" about Texas voter ID laws within the past six months, which individuals are most affected by the laws, and whether they had heard or read about recent legal actions related to voter ID. Survey respondents then answered questions about their media use and likelihood of voting in the upcoming election. Each participant then was randomly assigned to one of five groups. In four of the groups, a different message about voter ID was embedded as a paragraph in a short news article about "The Voter ID You Won't Need at the Polls," originally published in *The Texas Tribune*, which discussed the fact that under the state's voter ID law, Texans are not required to present their voter registration card in order to vote. The first group saw a news message about the necessity of voter ID to prevent fraud (the proponents' *fraud* message), the second group a news message about a lack of need for the law because voter fraud is rare (the opponents' *no-fraud* message), the third group a message about voter ID not being an inconvenience (the proponents' *no-big-deal* message), and the fourth group a news message describing how voter ID is a "big deal" for particular age and minority groups who cannot obtain the necessary identification (the *suppression*

message). Individuals in the fifth group did not see a news article with a voter ID message and immediately advanced to the follow-up questions.

All participants answered questions about their attitudes toward voting and the election process, trust in government, political efficacy, as well as political knowledge and demographic measures. Questions pertaining to efficacy were obtained from the American National Election Study (ANES). Responses were averaged to create measures of internal and external efficacy with higher values on a five-point scale indicating greater levels of efficacy. Respondents' internal efficacy ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.79$, $r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) was measured with the questions "How often do politics and government seem so complicated that you can't really understand what's going on?" and "How well do you understand the important political issues facing our country?" External efficacy ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.89$, $r = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$) was measured with the questions "How much do public officials care what people like you think?" and "How much can people like you affect what the government does?" Measures of trust were obtained from the ANES and from Gershtenson et al. (2013). Responses to "How often can you trust the government to do what is right?" and "I trust local government officials to fairly administer elections" were averaged to create the trust measure ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.84$, $r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). Higher values on the five-point scale indicate greater levels of trust. Measures of voting attitudes were adapted from Gershtenson et al. (2013), including the statements "Voting in elections is an easy process" ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.95$), "There are legitimate reasons why individuals do not vote" ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.10$), "Those who don't vote on a regular basis are lazy" ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.19$), "Voting in elections can be confusing at times" ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.11$), and "Government officials make the election and voting process more difficult than is needed" ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.18$). Voting attitudes were analyzed separately and higher values for each statement indicate greater agreement on a five-point scale.

Findings

If exposure to the debate over Texas's voter ID law is the prerequisite for the spillover effects of the voter ID debate, our survey suggests that Texas citizens were quite aware of the state's efforts to change access to the ballot box. More than 80 percent of individuals in the survey had heard something about voter ID in Texas, and 54.6 percent had heard about the legal battle over implementation of the law. Whether independently of or because of their exposure to elite debates, in open-ended items some respondents freely echoed the main arguments for and against the identification requirements in addition to commenting generally about the law (e.g., "we have to show IDs"). For example, one individual articulated the *suppression* message, explaining that the law "would hurt the disadvantaged and minorities." Another participant invoked the *fraud* message that the law was directed at "cheaters and frauds." Citing the *no-big-deal* message, one citizen remarked that "you can not get on an air plane or buy alcohol without ID try getting pulled over just not carrying you're [sic] ID." These accounts offer an additional layer of external validity for the campaign and media messages we tested.

Table 3.1 External efficacy OLS regression model

	External efficacy coefficient (SE)	
	Step 1	*Step 2*
Constant	1.24★★★ (0.26)	1.43★★★ (0.27)
Race (1 = White)	−0.02 (0.09)	−0.02 (0.09)
Education	−0.02 (0.05)	−0.01 (0.05)
Gender (1 = female)	−0.18★ (0.08)	−0.19★ (0.08)
Hispanic	0.10 (0.08)	0.10 (0.08)
Age	−0.001 (0.002)	−0.001 (0.002)
Income	0.06† (0.04)	0.06† (0.04)
Political knowledge	−0.04 (0.03)	−0.03 (0.03)
Media use	0.07★★ (0.02)	0.07★★ (0.02)
Democrat	0.04 (0.10)	0.04 (0.10)
Independent	−0.01 (0.10)	0.02 (0.10)
Trust in government	0.41★★★ (0.04)	0.40★★★ (0.04)
Fraud message	–	−0.20† (0.11)
No-fraud message	–	−0.23★ (0.12)
No-big-deal message	–	−0.28★ (0.11)
Suppression message	–	−0.04 (0.12)
Overall model	F [11, 480] = 12.51, $p < 0.001$	F [15, 476] = 9.87, $p < 0.001$
R^2	0.22	0.24†

★★★$p < 0.001$, ★★$p < 0.01$, ★$p < 0.05$, †$p < 0.10$

Experiment randomization failed to account for Democrat and Independent partisan affiliation. The interaction coefficients for condition and Democrat as well as condition and Independent were not significant in the full OLS model and are excluded.

Our findings suggest that the messages invoked in the voter identification debate had an effect on a critical building block of electoral participation. External efficacy, or the belief that public officials care what citizens think and that citizens can affect what government does, proved highly susceptible to two of the four voter ID messages tested. Controlling for demographic characteristics, political orientation, media use, and trust in government in an OLS regression model, reading the *no-fraud* message in a news story led to a significant reduction in external efficacy compared to participants who received no message in the control condition (B = −0.23, SE = 0.12, $p < 0.05$). Exposure to the *no-big-deal* message also led to a significant decrease in external efficacy (B = −0.28, SE = 0.11, $p < 0.05$; see Table 3.1).

Although voter ID messaging influenced attitudes toward governmental responsiveness, internal efficacy—another precursor of electoral participation—was not affected significantly by voter ID messages ($F(4, 517) = 2.08$, $p = 0.08$). Neither pro nor con messages had a measurable effect on how informed individuals felt on the internal efficacy measure. Perhaps, as a result of high levels of awareness about the voter ID debate or the timing of our study so near to Election Day,

individuals' feelings about how much they understand politics, government, and current political issues did not change as a result of the four messages tested.

The limits of the messages associated with the voter ID debate are illustrated further when examining trust in government and attitudes about the voting process. Neither pro- nor anti-voter ID messages significantly influenced levels of trust in government ($F(4, 522) = 4.54$, $p = 0.16$). Moreover, each of the five attitudinal measures for the voting process also was not influenced by the voter ID messages.

Explaining the (Selective) Spillover Effects of Voter ID Messaging

The results of our study suggest that the voter ID debate has exerted some effect on one of the attitudinal precursors of political participation. Namely, exposure to critics' argument that very few documented cases of voter fraud occur depresses an individual's sense of external efficacy, as does exposure to proponents' argument that requiring would-be voters to show photo identification is "no big deal." In contrast, our survey finds no measurable effect of exposure to the debate either on people's sense of internal efficacy or on their trust in government or the electoral system. This finding illustrates how messages used during the voter identification debate may have had *selective* spillover effects on only some precursors to participation. Nevertheless, given the importance of external efficacy to political participation, this effect deserves attention.

Interestingly, the valence of the messages is not what made them influential, since both a pro and a con message had negative effects on external efficacy. Instead, it may be the nature of these messages that exercised the effect. The *no-fraud* message relies on the notion that voter ID laws are unneeded because the electoral process is already secure. Passing laws to correct a problem that does not exist may lead individuals to believe the government is not attuned to real-world events or is distant from reality, which could influence whether individuals feel that government officials care about and are affected by citizen concerns. The *no-big-deal* message equates voting with other, more pedestrian activities like driving a car or buying alcohol. By comparing voting with such mundane transactions, proponents may be subsequently reducing the role that government plays as a result. If voting is "no big deal," then the outcomes from voting—representative government—become "no big deal" by deduction. Citizens may lose faith that officials care and are influenced by public concerns.

Turning to our finding that exposure to the voter ID debate does not affect trust in government, a common sense explanation may exist: both the pro and con messages suggest that government has "worked." The *fraud* message implies that by passing voter ID laws the government is handling the problem of preventing fraud and ensuring that only eligible individuals vote. The *no-fraud* message argues that the system already works and that the electoral system is secure. In each case, the government has managed a problem that might leave trust attitudes unmoved. Indeed, when Joseph Gershtenson and his colleagues (2013) experimentally tested voter registration processes, trust in local government officials to manage elections also did not change, even as attitudes about the registration process became more

negative. Trust may be less moveable than other democratic constructs, particularly in an electoral context.

Similarly, the fact that the *suppression* message does not depress pro-civic attitudes may have a straightforward explanation. Intuitively, we might expect individuals to have less trust in government if they believe eligible individuals are being denied voting access. However, some individuals in this condition may gain increased trust in government (if they believed individuals who were denied access should not be voting anyway), while others would experience reduced trust (if they believed individuals who were denied access should be able to vote). The net effect would be no change in our measure of trust in government. These possibilities warrant additional research.

Finally, we found little if any effect of exposure to the voter ID debate on attitudes about voting. Respondents' beliefs about the difficulty of voting, measured in our survey in a variety of ways, were not changed by exposure to the debate. Individual attitudes on these measures may have been unmoved due to the pre-Election Day timing of the study. Prior research has found that attitudes related to the voting process, including registering to vote, can change *after* a behavioral event associated with voting, such as completing the registration process (Gershtenson et al., 2013). It may be the behavior itself—such as successfully producing (or not) identification to vote—that influences some voting attitudes. If this is the case, voter ID messaging may move some attitudes (i.e., external efficacy) and not others. The timing of future attitudinal studies should be considered in this light.

Conclusion

This chapter provides some of the first evidence that how political leaders and the media *talk* about voter ID matters. It is not just the law itself that matters, it is the messaging too. Indeed, simply being exposed to the debate about this issue erodes one of the building blocks of civic engagement—external efficacy. These findings raise critical questions for how the voting access debate may affect pro-civic attitudes and behaviors in nonelectoral as well as other electoral contexts.

Central to the notion of representative democracy is the idea that public debate *benefits* citizens in terms of their knowledge and engagement with the workings of civic life. Theoretically speaking, the debate over voter ID may belong to a category of policy debates that ultimately has had a negative impact on citizens. As has been documented in the protracted debates around healthcare reform and certain other contentious issues (Jerit & Barabas, 2006; Lawrence & Schafer, 2012; Nyhan, 2010), greater exposure to the debate may actually be bad for one's democratic health. Indeed, our findings point to both pro and con voter ID messages as culprits in reduced levels of external efficacy. When messages central to arguments both for and against a particular issue have negative outcomes, an extended public debate may have problematic spillover effects. These types of public debates warrant considerable future attention from researchers.

Pragmatically speaking, our findings raise a red flag for both supporters and opponents of voter ID. Although proponents may privately hold aims to reduce turnout among certain segments of the voting electorate, the *no-big-deal* message

advanced by some political leaders and media elites could indirectly meet this aim while undermining views about government in the process. A reduction in external efficacy also could affect participation across all segments of the electorate in the long term, including proponents' supporters. If faith in the integrity of elections erodes slowly over a longer period of time than captured in this study, proponents should have reason to be concerned about how today's messages may affect tomorrow's participation and opinions of electoral legitimacy. This possible long-term outcome deserves a watchful eye from scholars and practitioners.

For opponents of voter ID, our findings point to both short- and long-term problems associated with debate messaging. In the short term, this chapter identifies a failure of messaging related to the potential harms of identification requirements. Critics who have relied on the *suppression* argument to make their case, whether at the citizen or elite level, should reassess the effectiveness of the message in light of our findings. Individuals did not respond to this opposing message the way that critics would hope. Most respondents in our study did not think that voting is hard, even with voter ID laws in place. This finding also may help to explain the resonant power of the *no-big-deal* message in some circumstances.

Over the long term, critics of stricter voter ID requirements also must balance the benefits of seemingly powerful messaging with the drawbacks associated with contentious public debates. An ongoing, acrimonious debate using the voter ID messages described here—including the *no-fraud* message—may further undermine participation because of its effects on external efficacy. In a state like Texas with historically low voter turnout, the best intentions of opponents may be perpetuating a participation drought. If the goal of proponents is to suppress voter turnout, it may be the *critics'* messaging that serves the goals of proponents. In this manner, voter ID opponents may rhetorically fall into a trap without realizing it.

When scholars and practitioners look back at the 2014 midterm election in Texas, the events that transpired—a Republican sweep of state offices, Democratic soul searching, and dismally low voter turnout—will be looked at in the context of an acrimonious debate over the influences of a voter identification law. Did voter ID lead to the loss of a Democratic congressional seat? Were stricter identification requirements responsible for protecting the vote? Perhaps a third question is in order, as well: How did the public debate surrounding voter ID affect the ultimate outcome? Although we cannot definitively answer this question, we are left to wonder if it is not voter ID laws, but rather the debate itself, that is having a depressive effect on political engagement.

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CHAPTER 4

COMMONSENSE PROTECTIONS OR GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE IN PRIVATE DECISIONS? COMPETING MEDIA FRAMES IN THE BATTLE OVER TENNESSEE'S ABORTION AMENDMENT

Amy E. Jasperson, Charles Kelley Jr., and Kirby Bennett

Campaign seasons, especially in midterm elections, are more than just about federal political candidates. As efforts to make progress in Congress meet with gridlock, and as significant efforts are mounted to alter state constitutions to advance political agendas, scholars of political communication need to focus attention on the campaign strategies employed in issue campaigns at the state level. This chapter outlines one of the 2014 battles on abortion, an issue of prominence on political agendas in states across the nation (Wyler, 2014). Tennessee Amendment 1 was an effort to rewrite the Tennessee Constitution to eliminate privacy protections for women on the issue of abortion. This case is striking in that, prior to the 2014 vote, Tennessee law provided the most protective privacy laws for women in the South. As abortion clinics closed in surrounding states, Tennessee remained a state where an abortion could be obtained without the same restrictions and obstacles faced in other states, causing pro-life forces to dub Tennessee an "abortion tourism" state (Wadhwani, 2014a). The outcome of this campaign is significant for the direction of women's abortion rights in the South. Further, the framing strategies used in this campaign have implications for future communication efforts related to this issue. In particular, we found that both sides used frames that are typically used by the other side. We analyze the significance and possible implications of these "reframing" efforts and discuss the boundaries of such strategies going forward. This research examines the nature of campaign messages generated by the Yes-on-1 and No-on-One groups as they waged their battle over abortion rights in Tennessee.

The results suggest that all frames are not created equal and that activists must deploy all resources to connect with and mobilize voters.

Abortion and the 2014 National Landscape

At the fortieth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project (2013a, 2013b) took the pulse of the public on the issue of abortion and measured attitudes toward overturning the court decision that protects legal abortions. While some shift in attitudes had occurred, the divisions between groups on the issue have changed little. A solid majority, 63 percent of those surveyed nationally, opposed overturning *Roe v. Wade*. However, awareness of the issue and perceptions of its importance as a topic of concern on the public's agenda have declined since 2006. Proponents of overturning the decision, Pew found, primarily included White evangelical Protestants and those who attended religious services once a week. Similarly, a majority of evangelical Protestants, White Catholics, and Black Protestants believed it was morally wrong to obtain an abortion. A majority of Republicans also believed abortion was morally wrong. However, Republicans were divided on the topic of overturning *Roe v. Wade*. More Democrats and Independents opposed overturning the court decision, and they either believed that abortion was morally acceptable or did not view abortion as a moral issue.

Underlying these poll numbers and behind the scenes of the national discussion, state legislatures and activists are engaged at the local level debating the conditions under which a woman may legally terminate her pregnancy. In general, states have acted to regulate a wide range of abortion-related public policy details—who may legally perform abortions, where abortions may be performed, the timing and conditions under which abortion is prohibited, restrictions on public funding, buffer zones around abortion providers, abortion counseling (including ultrasound requirements), and waiting periods, as well as parental consent and notification requirements (Guttmacher Institute, 2015). Between 2011 and 2014, states have enacted 231 abortion restrictions (Guttmacher Institute, 2014b) (see Figure 4.1).

During the 2014 legislative session in particular, state legislators introduced 341 bills regulating abortion, resulting in 26 abortion restrictions (Nash, Gold, Rathburn, & Vierboom, 2015). The Guttmacher Institute, an organization whose mission is to advance sexual and reproductive health, has labeled 27 states "hostile or extremely hostile" to abortion (meaning that the state has enacted four or more major restrictions to abortion). Based on this typology, all states in the south are considered hostile to abortion rights. In addition to the recent restrictions, 17 states also introduced measures to expand access to abortion with four bills passing in the last legislative session (in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Utah) (Nash et al., 2015). Clearly, public policy making on this issue continues to be dynamic.

Beyond state legislative action, the National Conference of State Legislatures' state ballot measure database (n.d.) indicates that 147 initiatives and referenda were considered across the states in the fall 2014 general election. Three of these November ballot issues dealt with abortion. Two of the ballot initiatives (North Dakota and Colorado) would have granted "personhood" to a fertilized egg, also

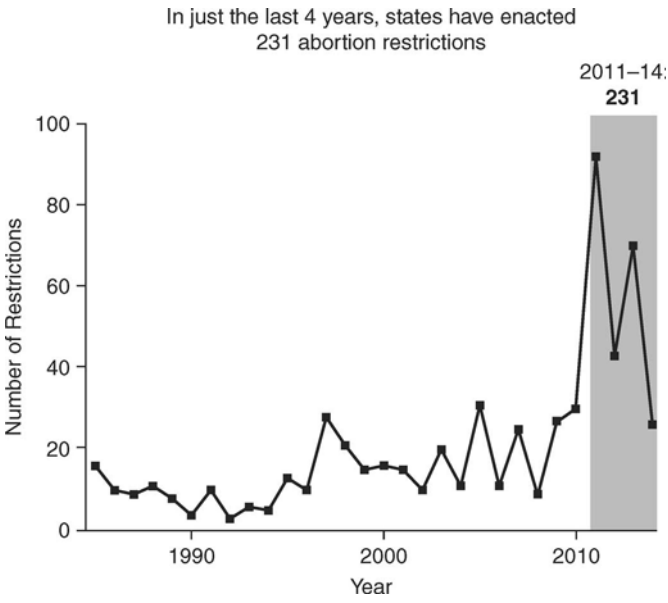

Figure 4.1 Numbers of state-enacted abortion restrictions over time.
Source: Used by permission, Guttmacher Institute, 2014b.

referred to as an "unborn human being." These initiatives failed at the ballot box with approximately 65 percent opposition in both cases. A third initiative, known as Amendment 1, redrew the lines of individual privacy protections and expanded the power of the Tennessee state legislature to restrict abortions. This amendment to the Tennessee Constitution passed by 53 percent (Wadhwani, 2014b).

The outcome of Amendment 1 will have a significant impact on access to abortion in the South. Tennessee, a state with nine abortion clinics, borders seven other states, four of which (Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Mississippi) have six or fewer abortion clinics (Guttmacher Institute, 2014a). Women seeking an abortion have few other options for facilities that can perform these procedures (Phillips, 2014). The number of hospitals performing abortions has declined significantly since 1980 (Guttmacher Institute, 2014a), making abortion clinics more important in fulfilling this function.

Background on Tennessee Amendment 1

According to the language adopted in Amendment 1, the Constitution of Tennessee would be amended by adding the following language: "Nothing in this Constitution secures or protects a right to abortion or requires the funding of an abortion. The people retain the right through their elected state representatives and state senators to enact, amend, or repeal statutes regarding abortion, including but not limited to, circumstances of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest or when necessary to save the life of the mother" (Tennessee Senate Joint Resolution 127, 2009, para. 2).

Amendment 1 was a response by the Tennessee legislature to the decision of the Tennessee Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood of Middle Tennessee v. Sundquist* (2000). In its 4–1 decision, the Tennessee Supreme Court reaffirmed greater protections for privacy and reproductive rights under the Tennessee Constitution than under the US Constitution (Locker, 2011). In recognizing the fundamental right to privacy, the Court struck down as unconstitutional the restrictions that state law had attempted to place on abortions (American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee, n.d.). For this reason, the state legislature proposed to amend the Tennessee Constitution giving the state legislature authority to enact, amend, or repeal state laws regarding abortion, including in cases of rape, incest, or when necessary to save the life of the mother. In addition, should the US Supreme Court ever reverse *Roe v. Wade*, the legislature could vote to make all abortions illegal (Locker, 2011). For Amendment 1 to be placed on the ballot, it had to pass two votes in two successive sessions of the Tennessee General Assembly. It passed its first vote in 2009 and its second vote in 2011 (TN SJR0127, 2009). This action then placed the amendment on the ballot in the next general election in which there was also a gubernatorial contest, November 2014. Amendment 1 would pass as long as it received a majority of all citizens voting on the amendment *and* a majority of those voting for governor.

The Battle for Voters' Hearts, Minds, and Souls

The Political Landscape

While 2014 was a campaign year with a governor's race and a US Senate race on the ballot in Tennessee, neither of these campaigns was closely contested. In addition, with no presidential election at the top of the ticket to mobilize voters, the Amendment 1 campaign had to engage voters. Region and party identification are important factors in Tennessee elections. According to the Cook Political Report's Partisan Voting Index, seven of Tennessee's nine congressional districts lean Republican by an average of 20 points. The two districts that lean Democratic contain Nashville (leaning Democratic by five points) and Memphis (leaning Democratic by 25 points), the two biggest cities in the state. Even though a majority of the states' population lives in Democratic districts, the governor and a majority of the House and Senate are Republican (Cook Political Report, 2013).

The second contributing demographic that helped Amendment 1 get to the 2014 ballot is the large religious presence in the state of Tennessee. Tennessee is considered a part of the Bible Belt due to the large population of Protestant fundamentalist groups (City-Data.com, 2010). The largest of these groups in the state is the Southern Baptist Convention with close to 1.5 million members. Other prominent fundamentalist groups in the state are Churches of Christ, Church of God, and Assemblies of God. These groups are known for being politically conservative and are active in the abortion debate (Pew Research, 2013a). For example, the Southern Baptist Convention has passed 18 resolutions condemning abortion (Pew Research, 2013a). These religious groups are a powerful political force in Tennessee campaigns.

Two Sides of the Issue

In order to mount the Amendment 1 campaign, each side created a registered referendum committee to support its campaign—Yes-on-1 promoted the amendment and Vote-No-on-One Tennessee, Inc. opposed the amendment (Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance, 2014). As of the last filing before Election Day, Vote-No-on-One Tennessee, Inc. raised significantly more money ($4,254,862) than Yes-on-1 ($1,686,741) (Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance, 2014).

Yes-on-1 Message. Support for Amendment 1 was led by Yes-on-1 along with support from Tennessee Right to Life. The Yes-on-1 campaign appealed to Christian ideology using pastors, politicians, and other community members as spokespersons (Yes-on-1 Group, 2014). The primary argument made by this side was that this prolife amendment could restore common sense protections for the unborn. Supporters wanted to prevent tax dollars from being used for abortion and argued that abortion facilities should be licensed and inspected like surgical centers. Yes-on-1 established grassroots coordinators in 95 counties to coordinate local outreach efforts (Yes-on-1 Group, 2014). Additional public support for Amendment 1 came from the Duggar family, which had a television show depicting their life with 19 children, and Alveda King, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They began campaigning on November 4, 2013, one year before Election Day at an event, "Heartbeats for Life," at Cornerstone Church in Madison, Tennessee (Ertelt, 2013).

Yes-on-1 campaign funds came from local Tennessee organizations and individual donors. Some notable donors included large churches from around Tennessee, lawyers, physicians, Tennessee Right to Life, Republican Party organizations, homemakers, business owners, and retired individuals (Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance, 2014).

In addition to donating funds, many Protestant and Catholic churches made strong public statements of support, with ten Tennessee denominations passing resolutions or making official statements (Roach, 2014). At the November annual meeting of the Tennessee Baptist Convention in 2013, members approved a resolution in support of Amendment 1. The resolution urged "all Tennessee Baptists to work vigorously toward the passage of Amendment 1" (Wilkey, 2013, para. 38). The *Biblical Recorder*, a Southern Baptist news source, reminded its readers that while a church cannot support a candidate, it could take a position in an issue campaign (Roach, 2014). "Because the issue is 'a matter of policy,'…it is appropriate for you to encourage your congregation to vote yes on this amendment without fear of adverse scrutiny" (Toalston, 2014, para. 20). One article mentioned that Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, recorded a video message supporting Amendment 1 and held a meeting for 50 Nashville area church officials in September calling for their support of this amendment (Roach, 2014).

No-on-One Message. Opposition to Amendment 1 was led by Vote-No-on-One Tennessee, Inc. Other groups on this side included the Democratic Party of Tennessee, Planned Parenthood, and Healthy and Free Tennessee.

Vote-No-on-One characterized Amendment 1 as an effort by politicians to interfere in a woman's private medical decisions. It also argued that the amendment would allow politicians to place burdensome and unnecessary restrictions and regulations on abortion, including banning all abortions, even in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape, incest, or when necessary to protect a woman's health (Vote-No-on-One Tennessee, 2014c). The No-on-One website argued that Amendment 1 was confusing in its wording and could mislead voters to believe that the amendment provided rape, incest, or health-of-the-mother exceptions (Vote No on One Tennessee, 2014c). The group further asserted that the Amendment gave politicians too much authority to regulate abortion—a private decision that should be made by a woman in consultation with her medical doctor, her family, and her faith. No-on-One supporters organized grassroots teams across the state. They provided information tables at events and held informational meetings on campuses to educate students.

Vote-No-on-One Tennessee, Inc. received funding from across the country (Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance, 2014). The largest donor was Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest ($800,000). Planned Parenthood of Middle and East Tennessee donated $189,500. The other large donors were Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Northwest, the American Civil Liberties Union, Community Action Fund of Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties, and Planned Parenthood Advocates of the Mid-South. Additional Planned Parenthood chapters from as far away as Kansas made contributions along with bankers, lawyers, and physicians from Tennessee (Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance, 2014).

Public Opinion on Abortion in Tennessee

A Vanderbilt University poll surveyed 1,505 respondents in April and May of 2014, taking the pulse of Tennesseans on a range of political issues (Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 2014). One survey question asked if respondents would favor or oppose giving the state legislature more power to regulate abortions. Overall, 71 percent of those surveyed said they were opposed to giving the state legislature more power, while 23 percent supported the idea behind the Amendment. Of the 23 percent in favor of Amendment 1, 32 percent were Republicans, 21 percent were Independents, and 15 percent identified as Democrats. This initial indicator suggested that it would be a tough sell to get Tennesseans to give away privacy rights and instead grant more power to the legislature to regulate, even on the topic of abortion.

Yet by September 2014, results from a poll commissioned by a conservative Christian policy group, the Family Research Council, raised doubts. Results of the poll of 600 voters indicated that 50 percent supported Amendment 1 as stated verbatim (Siner, 2014). A third poll, conducted by Middle Tennessee State University during the end of October, also showed evidence of a hotly contested debate with 39 percent support, 32 percent opposition, and the rest undecided (Smith, 2014). Voters in the state grappled with their position and remained divided on this issue. In November 2014, while opponents mobilized primarily in the urban areas, supporters from rural counties across the state came out in support of Amendment 1 and it passed with 53 percent of the vote (Wadhwani, 2014b). What could explain

this apparent movement on the issue between May and November? We investigated the power of campaign messages from each side to inform, persuade, and mobilize voters across the state on Amendment 1.

Framing and Public Opinion

The literature on agenda setting and framing informs our understanding of the power of communication messages. Advertising and news media set the agenda for voters in campaigns (West, 2013). Each side of an issue campaign will strategically frame the issue by emphasizing its message strengths. According to Entman (1993), political elites will select aspects of the issue in order to advocate for a particular "problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). *Frames in communication* refer to words, images, phrases, and presentation styles used to provide information about an issue, while *frames in thought* refer to citizens' understandings of an issue (Klar, Robison, & Druckman, 2013). Frames in communication can influence frames in thought by shaping voter attitudes and election outcomes. For this reason, campaigns strategically choose the way they frame these messages.

A range of studies speak to the power of framing in shaping public opinion on a wide range of issues from hot-button topics to more mundane and less accessible policies (Grant & Rudolph, 2004; Gross, 2008; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Klar et al., 2013; Nelson, Clauson, & Oxley, 1997). Issues involving civil rights and liberties can often bring democratic values into conflict (Grant & Rudolph, 2004; Nelson et al., 1997). On the issue of abortion, past research outlines the conflict in core beliefs between the right to privacy and the right to life (Alvarez & Brehm, 1995). The larger media environment matters since citizens' commitment to democratic values is sensitive to contextual information, and framing can operate through emotional as well as cognitive channels (Grant & Rudolph, 2004; Gross, 2008; Gross & D'Ambrosino, 2004). Affective information contributes to the resolution of value conflict by helping citizens to make trade-offs. Predispositions such as party identification can mediate the effects of frames on opinion, and party elites and other opinion leaders can activate these cues in the minds of voters. In addition, when the information environment makes competing frames accessible, citizens are able to choose the frame that matches most closely with their core values. In some cases, primacy, repetition, or recency can make a difference for framing effects. While some competing frames may cancel each other out, in other cases, the stronger frame—that which is more available, accessible, and applicable or relevant to the issue at hand—will have more influence. In a fragmented media environment, citizens' choices of messages make a big difference for which frames resonate and shape opinion (Klar et al., 2013).

This literature suggests that the amount of messages and frames they employ may help shed some light on the eventual vote outcome. How did both campaigns construct frames in communication in order to connect with the core values and frames in thought of Tennessee voters? Was there an imbalance in the number or tone of campaign stories that could explain the shift in opinion since spring 2014? Was there more to understanding the appeals in 2014 beyond competing frames

of protecting individual privacy versus unborn life? How was the Yes-on-1 side able to convince voters to trade their privacy rights for more regulation? Answers are found in examining how political elites and opinion leaders framed the debate in a variety of media environments and attempted to mobilize engagement in a low-turnout election year. We would expect to see that the quantity and balance of media messages would matter for support and opposition to Amendment 1. In particular, an advantage in the quantity of media messages for one side should be associated with a similar advantage in the direction of the vote. In addition, we would expect to see that highly competitive media markets with large amounts of spending by both sides would be associated with a more highly engaged electorate. Also, we expect that each side will frame Amendment 1 to connect with different core values. Based on past literature, one may expect that the Yes-on-1 side would focus on moral and religious frames, while the No-on-One side would highlight individual privacy rights. Finally, we expect to see other subtle nuances in message framing that attempt to tip the scales toward one value over another since both religion and individual privacy are important values for Tennesseans. An analysis of messages in traditional and social media should provide a greater understanding of the election results.

Method

Procedures and Measures

In order to capture and analyze the message environment, we collected advertising buys and online news coverage from across the state to provide measures of each campaign's message strategy as well as the degree to which these messages were reflected in press coverage. We also analyzed the Facebook pages for both Yes-on-1 and No-on-One campaigns in order to get a sense of social network messages and how they attempted to inform, persuade, and mobilize highly interested voters who sought out more information. While there were other groups that had a presence in educating voters, we focused on Yes-on-1 and No-on-One since these were the two groups formally established to lead the effort.

Advertising buys. Broadcast television ads, a traditional form of media, reached a wide range of voters over a broad geographical area and provided a useful indicator of campaign message strategy. To determine the power of strategically planned and campaign-controlled advertising messages across the state, we collected the ad buys from political files at each of the national network-affiliated local television news stations in each of the six media markets in Tennessee (Memphis, Jackson, Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and the Tri-Cities). We collected these from the period of Labor Day through Election Day 2014. Five counties received no television advertising messages about the issue since they belonged to non-Tennessee media markets. These ad buy data were aggregated to construct six measures in total, three that focused on the number of ads aired and three that focused on ad expenditures. First, we aggregated the total number of ads aired by the Yes-on-1 and No-on-One campaigns by media market to determine the overall balance of ad messages in each market. Ad balance was calculated by subtracting the number

of No-on-One ads from the number of Yes-on-1 ads. A positive value meant an advantage for the Yes-on-1 campaign, while a negative value meant an advantage for the No-on-One campaign. This measure told us which side enjoyed an advantage in each market. Second, the total numbers of ads aired in each market were added together to obtain the total number of ads aired by each side statewide. This measure told us if one side enjoyed a message advantage in advertising statewide. Third, the total number of ads aired in each market from both sides gave us a sense of the strategic importance of the market. These measures provided a sense of which side enjoyed a message advantage as well as which markets were considered strategic targets. The next three measures recognized that not all ads are created equal. Some cost more to air since they air during programming with larger audiences and reach more potential voters. Therefore, advertising expenditures by each side were important to examine. For a fourth measure, we aggregated the total amount of money spent on ads by the Yes-on-1 and No-on-One campaigns by media market to determine the overall balance of expenditures by each side in each media market. This measure provided insight into which side dominated each regional media market across the state. Fifth, the total amounts spent by each side in each market were added together to obtain the total amount spent by each side statewide. This measure told us if there was an imbalance in spending statewide. Sixth, the total amounts spent by each side in each market were added together to obtain the total amount spent on advertising by both sides in a given market. This measure told us the importance of the voters in that market for each side. We could see the markets where significant resources were spent and markets where fewer message resources were allocated.

Data on vote and turnout. Data collected from the Secretary of State's website (2014a, 2014b) provided votes in favor of the amendment, votes against the amendment, and turnout by county. In order to analyze the previously outlined ad buy data in relation to the county data, counties were aggregated into media markets. Given the small number of media markets, Spearman's rank order correlation tests were used to evaluate the association between ranked variables in relation to one another. Specifically, we analyzed the rank of ad expenditures (our most robust measure of the expected impact of ads) by market in relation to the rank of vote choice by market to determine if spending by each side was associated with votes for their side. We also analyzed the rank of total ad expenditures by both sides in a given media market as a percentage of all statewide expenditures by both sides relative to the rank of average voter turnout in each media market. This allowed us to determine if more spending was related to greater average turnout. The total spending in a market served as an indicator of the strategic resource allocation devoted to each market by both sides.

Online news. We created a dataset of online news coverage on Amendment 1 from local print-based media outlets available online across the state from Labor Day through Election Day 2014 to provide a comprehensive measure of traditional news. We collected news content from the primary source of news in each major city. We also included smaller news outlets and outlets from smaller cities that made content available online. Content in the dataset came from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, *Memphis Flyer*, *Memphis Daily News*, *Memphis Business Journal*, *Jackson Sun*,

the *Tennessean*, *Nashville Scene*, *Southern Standard*, *Paris News*, *Oak Ridger*, *Lebanon Democrat*, *Tullahoma News*, *Chattanoogan*, *Chattanooga Times*, *Mountain Press*, *Rhea Herald News*, *Herald-Citizen*, *Knoxville News Sentinel*, *Knoxville Daily Sun*, *Columbia Daily Herald*, *Johnson City Press*, *Greeneville Sun*, *Cleveland Daily Banner*, *Tennessee Journalist*, *Daily Times*, and the *UT Daily Beacon*. We coded for the type (news or opinion editorial) and tone of the content (Yes-on-1, No-on-One, or balanced). Analysis of online news told us whether one side had an advantage in terms of how media covered the message.

Social media messages. We also analyzed the Facebook posts of the Yes-on-1 and No-on-One campaigns from Labor Day through Election Day as an indicator of social networking efforts to connect with base voters, in particular. The messages, measured in posts, provided a more comprehensive view of the message framing strategies and mobilization efforts of both sides aimed at their most engaged voters. Message tone was coded as representing one of three categories—messages that were positive toward the Facebook page source, contrast message comparing the two sides, and attacks against the opponent. Posts were coded for the presence or absence of gendered imagery, the presence or absence of imagery indicating age, and the presence or absence of racial images. These images provided a sense of the more subtle aspects of appeals aimed at connecting with each side's target audiences. In addition, we coded for links and videos to assess each side's efforts to engage voters in deeper information seeking and learning. We also coded the number of likes or shares of the original post to provide a measure of message resonance. Further, posts were coded for the presence of mobilizing messages in their content. As opposed to informational messages or persuasive messages, mobilizing messages included calls to general action, calls to vote, or calls to do both. While traditional ads also include mobilizing messages (i.e., vote yes or no), Facebook posts can share this content as well as draw potential voters into the issue on demand due to their mobile, interactive qualities.

Finally, we coded for the quantity and content of frames in communication based on the message appeals identified in traditional ads aimed at each side's target voters. We coded for use of five frames: religion/faith, life, privacy, government regulation, and medical decisions. A post was coded as using a message frame if that frame was present anywhere in the post. Therefore, posts could be coded as having more than one message frame present, and in fact, this was common. Several examples below demonstrate both the use of frames and the presence of multiple frames.

A post was coded as using a religion/faith frame when there was a specific reference to God and/or faith, or when a religious leader or a church was included in the post. A complimentary yet separate type of frame, a life frame, was coded in any post that made specific reference to the word or concept of life. For example, one post said that Amendment 1 restored life to Tennessee (Yes on 1 Facebook post, 2014c). For posts with privacy rights frames, these made specific reference to the individual right to privacy, including words or phrases like "private decisions" or "personal choice." The government regulation frame referred to any action giving politicians power or authority to make decisions and included words like regulation or interference. The medical/health frame referred to health-related decisions and included any reference to medical procedures, doctors, and medical professionals.

For instance, in a No-on-One post, a Presbyterian minister said the amendment intrudes on our God-given private lives (Vote-No-on-One Tennessee Facebook post, 2014a). This example would be coded for the presence of a regulation frame, a religion/faith frame, and a privacy frame. An additional No-on-One post said that Amendment 1 would strip away our basic privacy rights and force governmental interference into private medical decisions (Vote-No-on-One Tennessee Facebook post, 2014b). This example would be coded as having the presence of a privacy frame, a government regulation frame, and a medical frame.

Analyses. This study utilized Pearson's chi-squared tests and Spearman's rank order correlation tests to measure association between variables.

Results

The No-on-One side enjoyed an advantage in the traditional media environment, measured by the overall ads aired statewide, the amount of expenditures on advertising. and the quantity and tone of online news stories. The quantity and balance of ad messages in the media market were associated with vote choice. Further, the rank of the total amount of ad expenditures in the media market as a percentage of the overall expenditures in the campaign across the state was associated with the rank of average turnout by media market. In other words, more abundant media messages were associated with greater mobilization overall. However, in this close midterm election, it appeared that mobilization fell short for the No-on-One side. At the same time, Yes-on-1 enjoyed an advantage in the social media environment, represented by Facebook posts on Amendment 1, where different uses of frames by the two sides illuminated their efforts to creatively adapt their message strategies to Tennessee voters.

Ad Buys

In terms of the balance of campaign messages in the advertising environment across the state, the No-on-One campaign aired slightly more spots total, with 4,180 ads relative to the 3,899 spots aired by Yes-on-1 (see Table 4.1, four left columns) for a total of 8,079 ads aired across the state from Labor Day through Election Day.

By looking at each media market, we can gain a clearer sense of the balance of messages. Results show that No-on-One had an advertising advantage in the number of ads aired in the Nashville (522 more ads), Memphis (464 more ads), and Knoxville (264 more ads) media markets. Yes-on-1 showed an advertising advantage in Jackson (657 more ads), the Tri-Cities (171 more ads), and Chattanooga (141 more ads). In fact, in the Jackson market, the No-on-One side did not air any spots. A map of the balance in advertisements by media market provides a visual depiction of these data (see Figure 4.2).

The darkest shade on this map indicates the greatest imbalance in the number of ads aired favoring the No-on-One side in the Nashville media market. The lightest shade shows the greatest imbalance in the number of ads aired favoring the Yes-on-1 side in the Jackson media market. As the figure legend indicates, the Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville markets aired more No-on-One ads while

Table 4.1 Ad expenditures by Tennessee media market

Media market	*Number of yes ads*	*Number of no ads*	*Ad balance*	*Money spent by yes side ($)*	*Rank for yes side*	*Money spent by no side ($)*	*Rank for no side*	*Total spent by market ($)*	*Rank of total spent*
Nashville	452	974	−522	339,945.00	1	875,495.00	1	1,215,440.00	1
Tri-Cities	958	787	171	264,310.00	2	412,050.00	3	676,360.00	2
Chattanooga	1,089	948	141	263,695.00	3	273,705.00	5	537,400.00	5
Knoxville	602	866	−264	192,255.00	4	363,542.00	4	555,797.00	4
Jackson	657	0	657	191,231.25	5	0.00	6	191,231.25	6
Memphis	141	605	−464	50,470.00	6	537,845.00	2	588,315.00	3
Totals	3,899	4,180	−281	1,301,906.25		2,462,637.00		3,764,543.25	

Ad balance = Yes-on-1 – No-on-One. A positive ad balance indicates more Yes-on-1 ads, while a negative ad balance indicates more No-on-One ads.

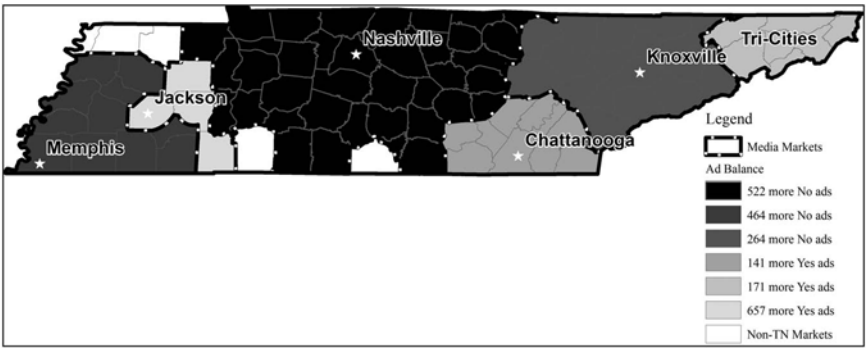

Figure 4.2 Balance in advertisements by media market (September to Election Day 2014).

Note: The darker the color of the media market, the greater the ad balance in favor of No-on-One. The lighter the color of the media market, the greater the ad balance in favor of "Yes-on-1."

The figure was created using ArcGIS 10.2 from ESRI.

Chattanooga and the Tri-Cities aired slightly more Yes-on-1 ads, and Jackson aired significantly more Yes-on-1 ads.

Advertising expenditures provide an even more robust measure of expected advertising power in reaching a target audience. The No-on-One side outspent the Yes-on-1 side overall (see Table 4.1). Based on our aggregation of the political file data from media markets across the state, a total of $3,764,543.25 was spent by both sides on television advertising on the three local affiliates of the national networks (*ABC*, *NBC*, and *CBS*) (see Table 4.1, ninth column). The No-on-One campaign spent $2,462,637 statewide (65.4 percent of the total amount spent on ads), while the Yes-on-1 campaign spent $1,301,906.25 (34.6 percent of the total amount spent on ads) (see Table 4.1, fifth and seventh columns, respectively). Nashville was the top targeted market by both sides (see "Rank" columns); the No-on-One side spent 72 percent ($875,495) and the Yes-on-1 side spent 28 percent ($339,945) of the total amount of money spent in this media market. The No-on-One side spent the next largest amount in the Memphis media market. This was the second largest gap in spending in a media market between the two sides since it was a priority for the No-on-One side (rank equals 2) but least important for the Yes-on-1 side (rank equals 6). The No-on-One side spent more money on ad buys than the Yes-on-1 side in every market except for Jackson where it did not compete. It cost more for No-on-One to air fewer ads relative to Yes-on-1 in markets like Chattanooga and the Tri-Cities, suggesting that No-on-One chose to run fewer ads on more highly watched programming that would reach a larger audience.

Ad Messages in Relation to Vote Choice and Turnout

A statewide map of the winning vote percentage by county provides a visual picture of the preferences of voters across the state on Amendment 1 (see Figure 4.3).

In Shelby county (which includes Memphis) and Davidson county (which includes Nashville), 60.1 percent or more voters support the No-on-One side.

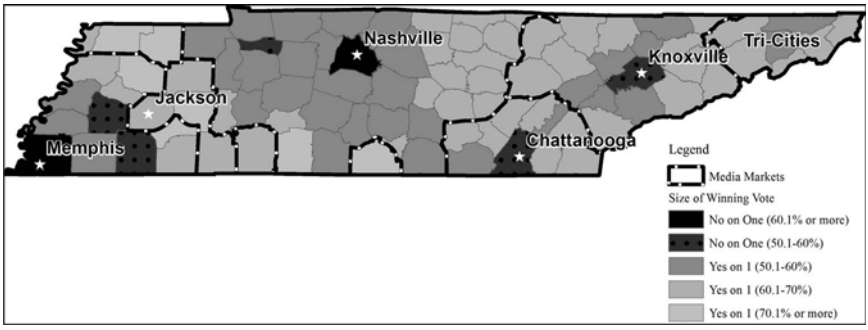

Figure 4.3 Percentage of winning vote on Amendment 1 by county.

Note: The darker the color, the greater the margin of victory for No-on-One. The lighter the color, the greater the margin of victory for Yes-on-1.

Map created using ArcGIS 10.2 from ESRI.

Further, the No-on-One side earned 50.1 to 60 percent of the vote in just five other counties. All of the other counties across the state favored Yes-on-1, with some counties showing more than 70 percent of the vote in the county voting yes. Given that Amendment 1 passed with 53 percent of the vote (Wadhwani, 2014b), this map illustrates the point that the strongest No-on-One voices came from the most populated counties. Shelby county (including the city of Memphis), Davidson county (including the city of Nashville), Knox (including the city of Knoxville), and Hamilton (including the city of Chattanooga) along with three smaller counties were the only counties where No-on-One won a majority of voters. The Yes-on-1 vote won the rest of the counties across the state. To verify this relationship between urban counties and vote choice, we analyzed the relationship between the population density of each county and direction of the vote. The correlation between population density of registered voters and vote choice was 0.623, suggesting a significant relationship between urban counties and a No-on-One vote.

Figure 4.3 also nicely illustrates that voters in the same media market were not equally influenced by media messages. Simply looking at the top targeted market of Nashville on this map, we see that despite the ad balance in favor of No-on-One (Figure 4.2) and the largest spending advantage in favor of No-on-One (Table 4.1), Davidson county (which includes Nashville) and Houston county were the only counties in the Nashville media market where a majority of voters voted no on the amendment. Other demographic factors such as partisanship, ideology, and religion are also important factors at work that can filter media messages and influence voters' attitudes on this issue.

In addition, it appears that the level of turnout in many of these rural counties across the state that voted Yes-on-1 was able to counteract turnout levels among the large populations in the urban counties that voted No-on-One (see Figure 4.4).

This map provides a visual representation of turnout by county where the darkest shaded counties had the largest turnout (over 40.1 percent) while the lightest shaded counties had the lowest levels of turnout (less than 20 percent). We see that

Figure 4.4 Voter turnout by county.

Note: The darker the color, the higher voter turnout by county.

Map created with ArcGIS 10.2 from ESRI.

Table 4.2 Spearman's rank order correlation test between No-on-One spending and no vote by media market

Rank	*Ranked media market*	*No-on-One spending in media market (%)*	*Rank*	*Ranked media market*	*No vote by media market (%)*
1	Memphis	91	1	Memphis	56.5
2	Nashville	72	2	Nashville	48
3	Knoxville	68	3	Knoxville	45
4	Tri-Cities	60.9	4	Chattanooga	44.5
5	Chattanooga	50.9	5	Tri-Cities	39.5
6	Jackson	0	6	Jackson	34.6

$\rho = .943$, $p < 0.01$. A ranking of 1 indicates the highest value (of spending, of No vote) and a ranking of 6 indicates the lowest value (of spending, of No vote). It is important to remember that this table provides No vote by media market, not No vote by county as shown in Figure 4.3.

the turnout levels for urban counties (that voted no on Amendment 1) was lower than turnout in counties surrounding Nashville and Knoxville that voted yes on Amendment 1. In the low turnout of a midterm election, the Yes vote was able to bring more voters to the polls.

A Spearman's rank order correlation test can help us investigate the relationship between data on ad expenditures by media market from Table 4.1 and data on vote choice and turnout. Table 4.2 shows the rank order correlation between No-on-One ad spending and a No vote by media market.

The Spearman's rank order correlation test indicates that the ranked variable for the percent of No-on-One spending in the media market is significantly correlated (if not perfectly correlated) with the rank of the percent of no votes cast by media market ($\rho = 0.943$, $p < 0.01$). For example, in the top media market for percent of No-on-One spending (Memphis), 91 percent of the market expenditures came from the No-on-One side. This market also had the highest rank of no votes of all media markets at 56.5 percent. The same held true for Nashville (72 percent of

Table 4.3 Spearman's rank order correlation test between all spending in media market and average turnout by media market

Rank	*Media market*	*All spending in media market as a percentage of total statewide spending*	*Rank*	*Media market*	*Average turnout by media market (%)*
1	Nashville	32	1	Nashville	34.88
2	Tri-Cities	18	2	Tri-Cities	34.43
3	Memphis	16	3	Memphis	34.18
4	Knoxville	15	4	Jackson	33.66
5	Chattanooga	14	5	Knoxville	32.98
6	Jackson	5	6	Chattanooga	32.45

$\rho = .829$, $p < 0.05$. A ranking of 1 indicates the highest value (of spending, of average turnout) and a ranking of 6 indicates the lowest value (of spending, of average turnout). The total spending in the media market includes both sides and the total statewide spending includes both sides.

the market expenditures came from No-on-One, ranked second in the percent of no vote by media market) and Knoxville (68 percent of the market expenditures came from No-on-One, ranked third in percent of no vote by market). There was not a perfect correlation in that No-on-One spent 60 percent of the total amount in this campaign in the Tri-Cities (ranked fourth), but this only translated into a no vote from 39.5 percent of voters in the media market (ranked fifth behind Chattanooga).

In addition, the rank of the percentage of advertising expenditures in the market on both sides as a percentage of all advertising spending in the 2014 campaign correlates with the average turnout by media market ($\rho = 0.829$, $p < 0.05$) (see Table 4.3). In other words, the media markets where we see the greatest advertising spending (Nashville, Tri-Cities, Memphis as the top three) were also the markets with the highest ranked average turnout by market. While the presence of the ad campaign clearly was associated with greater mobilization of voters in the media market, other factors also mattered.

Online News

Balance of Yes-on-1/No-on-One in news. Of the 156 stories that appeared in online news across the state, 65 percent were news stories and 34 percent were opinion editorial pieces. In terms of the tone of online content (both news and opinion editorial pieces) about this Amendment, 38 percent stories were balanced, 37.2 percent favored No-on-One, and 23.7 percent favored Yes-on-1. Of the news coverage, 55 percent was balanced, 26.5 percent favored No-on-One, and 16.7 percent favored Yes-on-1. A strong majority of the op-eds, 57 percent, favored the No-on-One side, while 37 percent favored Yes-on-1, and 5.6 percent were balanced in their commentary. Overall, these percentages suggest that, while the majority of news coverage was balanced, the No-on-One side still enjoyed a slight advantage over the Yes-on-1 side when it came to framing the debate in traditional online

media. Also, a chi-squared test showed that the tone of the coverage of Amendment 1 in traditional online news outlets was statistically correlated with the type of story (news or editorial) ($\chi^2 = 39.047, p < 0.001$).

Social Media

A total of 372 posts were made on both Yes-on-1 (284 posts) and No-on-One (88 posts) Facebook pages between Labor Day and Election Day. A chi-squared test shows that the posts from the Yes-on-1 and No-on-One Facebook pages were statistically associated with distinct types of strategic message posts ($\chi^2 = 12.630, p < 0.05$). While almost three-fourths of posts overall highlighted the positive aspects of each side's own message (73.4 percent), 13.7 percent were contrast posts and 12.9 percent were attacks on the other side. On the Yes-on-1 page, 75.7 percent of the posts were positive, while 14.8 percent were contrast and 9.5 percent were attacks. On the No-on-One page, 65.9 percent were positive, 10.2 percent were contrast posts, and 23.9 percent were attacks. While both groups used these posts for mainly positive messages, these findings also suggest that the No-on-One campaign was more likely than the Yes-on-1 group to use this tool for efforts to persuade with contrast and attack messages as a proportion of their overall messages.

Images. Similarly, the Yes and No groups employed different strategic uses of pictures, links, and videos to engage voters ($\chi^2 = 36.845, p < 0.001$). Almost 59 percent posts of the Yes side used pictures with less use of links (13 percent) and video clips (15.5 percent). The No side used pictures (47.7 percent of posts) and links (42 percent of posts) relatively equally to communicate their messages with less use of video (only 10 percent of posts). Around 83 percent of the pictures and videos were found through the Yes-on-1 page, indicating that this side was more actively posting.

Gender, age, and race. Yes and No posts were associated with different uses of imagery. Overall, 202 posts included images of people, giving voters the ability to visually connect with the group. Sixty-seven percent of all images included women only, while 33 percent included men only. A chi-squared test showed that each side was associated with different uses of gender images ($\chi^2 = 3.955, p < 0.05$). Eighty-two percent of No-on-One images featured women only, while 18 percent showed men only. For the Yes-on-1 posts, 61.5 percent featured women only, while 38.5 percent featured men only. Given the overall number of posts, 65.6 percent of female imagery came from the Yes-on-1 posts, while 32.4 percent came from the No-on-One posts. In terms of age, a chi-squared test revealed that each side was associated with different use of age ($\chi^2 = 22.206, p < 0.001$). Almost 94 percent of the No-on-One images showed adults only, while around 6 percent showed both adults and children. No posts showed children by themselves. Yes-on-1 posts were more likely to show children and mixed groups; 56 percent of the Yes-on-1 posts showed adults only, with 9.7 percent of images showing children and 34 percent showing images of both children and adults. On the issue of race, a chi-squared test indicated that each side was associated with different images of race in their posts ($\chi^2 = 24.623, p < 0.001$). Overall, 86.2 percent of images from these two Facebook pages showed White supporters exclusively, while 93.3 percent of the Yes-on-1

posts and 66 percent of the No-on-One posts showed only White supporters in images. These images send implicit messages to voters about the target audiences for messages from each of the campaigns. While the No-on-One side showed more racial diversity, the Yes-on-1 side showed more gender diversity and highlighted mixed groups of adults and children.

Mobilization messages. Social media messages are also an ideal tool for requesting action from followers. A chi-squared test showed no significant difference in the extent to which either side tagged geographical locations around the state, indicating no imbalance in targeting efforts through Facebook pages. However, there was a significant association between the two sides and their use of Twitter hash tags ($\chi^2 = 40.061$, $p < 0.001$). While 37.3 percent of the Yes-on-1 posts included Twitter hashtags, linking these messages with the instantaneous, interactive platform, less than 1 percent of the No-on-One posts included hash tags. Most strikingly, a chi-squared test showed an association between the side of the issue and the use of calls to action ($\chi^2 = 19.577, p < 0.001$). Around 76 percent of the requests to take action (come to an event, pick up a lawn sign) were found on the Yes-on-1 site. Further, 85 percent of the posts requesting followers to vote came from the Yes-on-1 side. Overall, the Yes-on-1 side appeared to have an advantage in its strategic efforts to expand its messages in another social media platform and in its specific efforts to influence behavior along with attitudes.

Frames. We generally think of debates over abortion as a conflict between protecting unborn life and protecting the individual's right to privacy or personal choice. As the issue evolved in Tennessee, Amendment 1 also became an issue of competing visions of government regulation. We analyzed the variety of frames in communication used by Yes-on-1 and No-on-One (see Table 4.4). We confirmed some expectations and discovered some new strategic insights.

The most prevalent frame used in the Facebook posts was the life frame (39 percent of all posts) followed closely by the religious faith frame with 38 percent of all posts (see Table 4.4). Similarly, government regulation frames were present in 31 percent of posts. Fewer posts made specific reference to medical/health frames (17.5 percent of posts) and private choice and personal decision making (13.4 percent of posts).

Table 4.4 Percentage of frames by group on Facebook pages in the 2014 Tennessee Amendment 1 campaign

Frame	χ^2	*Total posts (%) (N = 372)*	*Posts containing frame (%)*	
			Yes-on-1 posts (N = 284)	*No-on-One posts (N =88)*
Religion/faith	113.43	38	23	86.40
Life	58.22	39	50	4.50
Individual privacy	186.42	13.40	0	57
Government regulation	44.27	31	22.50	60
Medical/health	48.27	17.50	9.90	42

All values of χ^2 are significant at the 0.001 level.

Religious faith and the culture of life. Overall, 38 percent of all posts used a faith frame, tapping into religious values. There was a significant association between the two sides and their varying use of this frame, but it is not in the direction that one might expect ($\chi^2 = 113.428$, $p < 0.001$). Eighty-six percent of the No-on-One posts made reference to faith or religion in guiding individuals, while only 23 percent of the Yes-on-1 posts used a specific faith-based religious frame. In addition, 53.5 percent of all posts referencing faith came from the No-on-One side with 46.5 percent coming from the Yes-on-1 side.

As an alternative angle, the Yes-on-1 side preferred to use the life frame to connect with their voters ($\chi^2 = 58.215$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, 39 percent of all Facebook posts used a life frame, applying it to the life of the "unborn." Fifty percent of Yes-on-1 posts used the life frame, surpassing Yes-on-1's use of the religion/faith frame. Only 4.5 percent of the No-on-One posts referenced life, generally in the context of protecting the life of the mother. Ninety-seven percent of the posts referencing life came from the Yes-on-1 side.

Individual privacy and personal decision making. Of all of the Facebook posts, only 13.4 percent referenced the personal decisions of women or their right to privacy. There was a significant association between the two distinct sides and their use of this frame ($\chi^2 = 186.420$, $p < 0.001$). There was no use of the privacy frame by the Yes-on-1 side, while 57 percent of No-on-One posts used a privacy frame. In other words, 100 percent of the Facebook posts using this frame came from the No-on-One side and this frame was used slightly less than a government regulation frame by the No-on-One group.

Government regulation. We found that more frames, 31 percent, referenced government regulation. The use of this frame almost reached the level of the religious faith and life frames. Both sides used a government regulation frame by characterizing it according to their own terms. There was a significant association between the two sides in their differential use of the regulation frame ($\chi^2 = 44.271$, $p < 0.001$). On the one hand, the Yes-on-1 side argued for "common sense protections" in 22.5 percent of posts. On the other hand, the No-on-One side used government regulation as a negative counterpoint to privacy rights, arguing that Amendment 1 would give more power to politicians. No-on-One characterized the amendment as extreme government "interference" that "goes too far." Sixty percent of the No-on-One posts used this frame, second only to the number of posts referencing faith.

Medical/health. We also found that both sides employed a medical/health frame in Facebook posts. There was a significant association between the two sides and their use of this frame ($\chi^2 = 48.265$, $p < 0.001$). The Yes-on-1 side used this frame (9.9 percent of its posts) to connect to the idea of government regulation, using health and safety as justification for common-sense protections. The No-on-One side used this frame (42 percent of its posts) to link medical decisions made by a woman in consultation with her doctor to her right to privacy.

Discussion

The results summarized above demonstrate that both sides made a difference in their strategic use of messaging. In trying to understand the apparent shift in opinion on

Amendment 1 from the opposition earlier in 2014 to its victory on Election Day, an analysis of media messages relative to vote choice and turnout helps in understanding the outcome. First, in the aggregate, ad spending by Vote-No-on-One was correlated with more votes for their preferred side. Similarly, the more money spent in a market on advertising, the higher the average turnout in that market. This suggests that advertising messages on both sides worked as intended and made some difference by media market. In addition, the balance of online news messages across the state was slightly more favorable toward the No-on-One side, particularly in its opinion editorial content. Yet, on Election Day, the messages on the Yes-on-1 side were more powerful in mobilizing voters. One possible factor to explain this difference in mobilization could be social media messages that were more plentiful on the Yes-on-1 side. Visitors to Facebook who were interested in learning more about and engaging in this issue were more likely to see adult women on the No-on-One side and mixed groups of women, men, and children on the Yes-on-1 side. Both sides of the campaign showed primarily images of White people, although the No-on-One campaign was more diverse than the Yes-on-1 side. In particular, the Yes-on-1 side dominated in the use of mobilizing posts and in linking to other interactive social media spaces like Twitter.

The power of particular message frames could also make a difference in persuading voters which way to vote or whether to vote. Voters on the Yes-on-1 side and the No-on-One side found familiar frames in media of protecting unborn life or individual privacy. It was not surprising that protecting life was the predominant frame in Facebook posts from the Yes-on-1 side. It was unexpected that individual privacy was not the most prevalent frame coming from Vote-No-on-One, although it was still a frequently used frame found in 57 percent of Facebook posts.

The dominant use of the faith/religion frame by the No-on-One side could be seen as an effort by this side to reframe the role of religion in the debate on Amendment 1. The grounding of opposition to abortion in religious values was established earlier in this chapter (Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, 2013a, 2013b). Some religious voices were strongly supportive of Amendment 1. Generally, religious values are publicly invoked in arguing for protecting unborn life, and one could argue that religious leaders have enjoyed dominance and credibility in their use of a faith/religion frame in arguing for restrictions on abortion in the past. The idea of "issue ownership" suggests that some parties or political actors enjoy greater credibility in some policy areas versus others (Petrocik, 1996), and we would expect religious leaders to enjoy greater credibility on issues involving faith. By regularly speaking of personal decisions involving a woman, her doctor, family, and faith, the No-on-One side publicly recognized the role of faith and connected it with personal decisions in a way that attempted to make a No vote acceptable for people of faith. Such an argument could have resonated with the large faith community in Tennessee, a state where powerful religious groups shape political and social agendas. At the same time, a faith/religion appeal may have faced an obstacle in attempting to reframe a dominant argument that has been used to justify the opposing side. While clearly separate from restoring life and protecting the unborn (Yes-on-1's most frequently used frame), the use of the faith/religion frame by the No-on-One side may have suffered due to the constraints

of issue ownership. With religious leaders on both sides of Amendment 1 invoking a faith/religion frame, and religious leaders within the same denominations taking opposing positions, citizens could be conflicted. In this case, one might expect they would turn to their own church community for guidance. It is also difficult to reframe an existing and well-entrenched understanding of an issue (Klar et al., 2013), particularly for issues that are deeply rooted in personal values. As noted in the literature, competing frames can either cancel each other out, or voters decide that one frame is more compelling. In particular, faith/religion-based frames, rooted in one's self concept and having affective as well as cognitive meaning, will be difficult to change once they become attached to an issue position (Klar et al., 2013).

In attempting to reframe an understanding of religion/faith in relation to Amendment 1, the No-on-One side faced a highly engaged opponent who used strong and emotional identity-based rhetoric. Well-organized church groups had been following the Amendment 1 issue while it evolved in Tennessee since the 2000 court decision. Amendment 1 supporters had the advantage of establishing the first frame for understanding this issue. For example, on the subject of the Amendment 1 vote, the Tennessee Baptist Convention President Larry Robertson told the *Baptist & Reflector*, "This is not a political struggle but a moral one. I ask every Tennessee Baptist registered to vote in our state to vote Yes on 1" (Wilkey, 2014a). Randy C. Davis, Executive Director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, also was quoted as saying, "Tennesseans are facing 'the most monumental vote' in our state's 218-year history…It will be an indictment on Christians if Amendment 1 does not pass" (*Baptist & Reflector*, 2014, para. 1–2). This statement, as part of a longer column, was also published in newspapers across Tennessee. He continued, "We have a moral and spiritual obligation to vote Yes on 1" (para. 15). Not only can the church provide the primary frame for understanding the issue among believers, church leaders are powerful cue-givers. And many were providing regular cues to their congregations during the Amendment 1 debate to support Yes-on-1. An Editor's Note appearing in the October 21 *Baptist & Reflector* stated, "because of the importance of Amendment 1 to the State Constitution on Nov. 4, churches are encouraged to make copies of this story and provide to members who do not receive the *Baptist & Reflector*" (Wilkey, 2014b, para. 1). In a Facebook post, Yes-on-1 publicized information designating church services on September 28, 2014, as Yes-on-1 Sunday when people would be urged to share pro-Amendment 1 educational materials with their congregations (Yes on 1, 2014a). While the Baptist church is just one church with strong ties in Tennessee, these messages demonstrate the persuasive power of the religious/faith frame communicated in a centralized and organized way from leaders of faith who supported Yes-on-1. Finally, one picture posted on the Yes-on-1 Facebook page showed a list of residents, business owners, and members of the religious community who pledged to vote yes on the Amendment that appeared as an ad in the newspaper (Yes on 1, 2014b). This image of support for Yes-on-1 that names people in the community provided strong public message of social pressure from the community. In this way, churches and communities associated with the Yes-on-1 side initiated persuasive group-based public messages aimed at their members, whereas the No-on-One side emphasized the *personal* decision between a women, her doctor, family, and faith.

At the same time, the Yes-on-1 side was also challenged by having to campaign on difficult issue terrain. "More government regulation" is not a frame that is generally met with enthusiasm by most citizens, especially conservatives, independents, or libertarians weighing their thoughts on political issues. The government regulation frame was favored by the No-on-One side that used it slightly more than the individual privacy frame and presented it as the opposite side of the same coin—a negative counterpoint to individual privacy. The No-on-One side sought to characterize Amendment 1 as extreme government intrusion into private life and medical decisions. This framing may have created value conflict among people of faith who also believe in small government, and it forced the Yes-on-1 side to attempt to reframe the issue and campaign using a frame "owned" by the opposition. This framing created a similar quandary faced by No on 1 with the faith/religion frame. By repeatedly contextualizing Amendment 1 as "common sense" protections for the unborn and women, Yes-on-1 attempted to reframe the public's understanding of the amendment as reasonable, balanced government involvement. In the end, the question of the comparative strength of frames still remains. In understanding the issue through a lens of either religious faith or government intrusion, which frame won out? In the low turnout environment of a midterm election year, more voters decided to give politicians the ability to regulate further at the expense of personal privacy rights.

This case provides an exemplar of the lesson that all frames do not have the same persuasive strength. The statewide advantage enjoyed by the No-on-One side in terms of number of ads aired, ad expenditures, and quantity and tone of online news coverage was not enough to sway a majority of voters on Election Day. The dominant message found in the traditional forms of media was counterbalanced with powerful, clear, faith, and value-based messages communicated through religious news, grassroots engagement by churches, and social media messages aimed at voters on a mission.

Since this study provided a first-cut at these data, the small number of cases for some variables (i.e., news stories and op-eds in some regions of the state) posed an obstacle to a more comprehensive analysis. Some measures were the best measures available, but we did not always have access to the ideal data. For example, gross ratings points (GRPs) that capture the percentage of households exposed to an advertising message along with the number of times a household is exposed to an advertising message (Weichmann, 1993) are the preferred measure for assessing advertising impact in a market. GRPs were not available to us in the public file records. In addition, quantifiable measures of grassroots mobilization and outreach efforts like phone banks, church meetings across the state, and interpersonal networks not documented via social media would be useful measures to account for mobilization efforts, but systematic data collection was not possible. However, the data employed in this study do provide a comprehensive sense of the nature of the message environment surrounding the debate on this issue. Further studies need to analyze these data in the context of other demographic and political variables to investigate factors that moderate the strength in frames of thought.

In conclusion, the Pew Research Center survey referenced at the beginning of this chapter provides some clues to the secret of frame strength. Frames in

communication can only map onto frames in thought if citizens are knowledgeable about the issues under discussion and if they are convinced that the issues are items of public and personal importance. It is difficult to capture the public's attention in a midterm election year. If an issue does succeed in getting the public's attention, which "problem definition," "causal interpretation," or "moral evaluation" (Entman, 1993) will shape the public's understanding? As noted by Klar et al. (2013), the most prevalent frame is not always the most effective, and the first frame that voters encounter can be difficult to change once it is consistently reinforced. In addition, those ideas that are the most ingrained in our core beliefs, or most integral to our self concept, and possibly infused with emotion help to make trade-offs when voters face value conflicts. Government interference that violates personal privacy could not dissuade voters from voting for common-sense protections for the unborn. The media environment provides cues to voters, but different voters construct their own environments based on their preexisting beliefs. While issue frames may shape voters' attitudes, they must also effectively capture the voter's hearts, minds, and souls. Unless they are able to move voters to action, they will matter little in efforts to shape ballot initiatives and legislative lobbying battles that will continue to evolve around the country on similar issues.

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CHAPTER 5

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION IN THE 2014 MIDTERM ELECTIONS FOR THE US SENATE: THE CASES OF IOWA, NORTH CAROLINA, AND GEORGIA

Freddie J. Jennings, Rocío Galarza, and Benjamin R. Warner

At the height of the 2014 US midterm elections, the Pew Research Center published a report on polarization in the American public (Dimock, Doherty, Kiley, & Oates, 2014). In their report, they argued that ideological division and party antipathy between Democrats and Republicans is higher now than at any point in the past few decades. Though political science has long debated whether ideological polarization is on the rise (Abramowitz, 2010; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011), Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) have demonstrated a rise in affective polarization, or the extent to which feeling (affect) toward candidates and political parties is separating such that people increasingly like their own party and dislike (or even hate) the opponent. A great deal of research has demonstrated the role of partisan media in fostering polarization (Feldman, Myers, Hmielowski, & Leiserowitz, 2014; Garrett et al., 2014; Levendusky, 2013; Stroud, 2010), and some have examined the effects of campaign communication on affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2012; Warner & Greenwood, 2014; Warner & McKinney, 2013). However, as with much of political communication research, these studies have neglected midterm and down-ballot elections. This chapter offers a corrective to this by exploring the role of political communication in three hotly contested campaigns for the US Senate in the 2014 midterm elections. Residents of Iowa, North Carolina, and Georgia were surveyed to assess the relationships among political communication, political interest, political confidence, and affective polarization toward the candidates for US Senate.

The Growth of Polarization

Political polarization has been the source of considerable scholarly attention and controversy. Though there is little debate about the polarization of political elites in the United States (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006), the extent to which the public is polarized is subject to some disagreement. Fiorina and colleagues (2011) argue that, though political elites are quite polarized, the mass public tends to hold mostly moderate ideological positions. However, Abramowitz (2010) argues that elite polarization has permeated the American public and that voters have developed clear and distinct ideologies. Rather than changing parties, Layman and Carsey (2002) suggest that individuals will adjust their political views to align with their chosen party. Thus, changes in the political elite cue changes in the public.

Though the debate about ideological polarization remains unsettled, affective polarization, or the increase in favorable evaluations of in-party candidates and unfavorable evaluations of out-party candidates, is clearly on the rise (Iyengar et al., 2012). In fact, data presented by Abramowitz (2010), Fiorina et al. (2011), and the Pew Research Center's report all tell the same story: candidate evaluations are polarizing. Drawing on the group polarization phenomenon (Sunstein, 2009), well documented by decades of social identity research (Hornsey, 2008; Tajfel, 1970), Iyengar and colleagues (2012) argue that the recent increase in affective polarization is driven by greater negative affect toward the partisan out-group. In other words, Democrats increasingly dislike Republicans, and Republicans increasingly dislike Democrats.

By redirecting polarization research away from policy preferences and toward affect, Iyengar and colleagues (2012) have also facilitated a shift away from the rational voter model of media and campaign effects toward the rationalizing voter model forwarded by Lodge and Taber (2013). A rational voter receives pertinent information, carefully considers it according to her interests and preferences, and votes accordingly. Conversely, the rationalizing voter processes information in real time and uses this information to form and update affective evaluations of the objects under consideration. This process is biased by previous affect such that attitude-consistent information is privileged and incongruent information is more likely to be ignored or counterargued. Attitudes toward political objects are constantly being updated when people encounter new messages through the "affect transfer" process (Lodge & Taber, 2013, p. 56); existing attitudes can transfer positive and/or negative feelings from related (and sometimes unrelated) attitudes to the object under consideration. This mechanism can help explain how affective polarization develops and how it implicates voting behavior particularly regarding a midterm election when previously unknown candidates are introduced into the already polarized campaign environment.

Though the possibility of partisan-selective exposure and affective polarization is often presented as a threat to the health of democratic culture (Sunstein, 2009), the polarization that may result from fragmented media use and political communication is not necessarily negative. In fact, "partisan media exposure should motivate political participation" (Stroud, 2010, p. 121). Abramowitz (2010) has argued that polarized citizens are also the most engaged, interested, and knowledgeable. With

greater engagement and exposure to partisan media, initial political views are corroborated (Sunstein, 2009). This leads to an increase in political confidence (Stroud, 2010) and political information efficacy (PIE), or the extent to which people feel they possess the information necessary to engage in meaningful political participation (Warner & Greenwood, 2014). In short, the more polarized an individual, the more likely he or she is to participate (Dilliplane, 2011). The most interested and engaged in politics show substantial polarization, while the least engaged remain largely moderate (Abramowitz, 2010). So though the campaign environment may polarize the electorate, the result may be greater engagement by an informed public. Conversely, moderates may find a polarized political climate alienating (Fiorina et al., 2011) and may be even more likely to opt out of politics in favor of entertainment (Prior, 2007).

Polarization and Political Communication

If the level of affective polarization in the United States is mounting, the causes of this increase must be studied. A major influence on polarization is engagement with political communication. Warner and Greenwood (2014) found that those who engaged in more frequent political communication during the 2012 presidential election were also more likely to express high levels of affective polarization. Political communication influences affective polarization through a variety of communication platforms that include partisan media (Garrett et al. 2014; Levendusky, 2013; Stroud, 2010), political advertisements (Geer 2010; Iyengar et al., 2012), debates (Warner & McKinney, 2013), and interpersonal political conversations (Binder, Dalrymple, Brossard, & Scheufele, 2009).

The relative importance of partisan media and media choice in affective polarization has been the object of numerous recent studies. The relationship between partisanship and media choice is now well established; those who consume partisan media tend to be more polarized (Prior, 2007). Garrett (2009) demonstrated that people do tend to prefer attitude-congruent media but do not avoid incongruent information. Meanwhile, polarized individuals are most likely to select congenial media (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013), as are people with higher political interest, at least for controversial topics (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Longitudinal research confirms that affective polarization predicts greater use of attitude-congruent media over time (Feldman et al., 2014; Garrett et al., 2014; Stroud, 2010). Additionally, Prior (2007) has argued that as moderates select entertainment media over political media, the share of moderates actively involved in politics decreases. If those who opt out of political media are also those most influenced by the content of partisan media, then the effects of partisan-selective exposure should be minimal (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). This moderate opt-out means that those most engaged in politics are also more polarized as a result. Moreover, even if partisan media are used by a relatively small number of people (Prior, 2013), the effects of partisan media stretch beyond the immediate audience because those who use partisan media are among the most vocal and active and because the content of partisan media spreads well beyond the immediate audience (Levendusky, 2013).

Additionally, longitudinal survey research has conclusively found that when accounting for prior media use and prior affective polarization, the use of pro-partisan media consistently predicts increased affective polarization (Feldman et al., 2014; Garrett et al. 2014; Stroud, 2010). These studies report a spiraling effect in which partisan media make people more polarized, and these people, because they have become more polarized, are more likely to increase their partisan media use in the future, thus becoming even more polarized. In each case, the effect of media choice on polarization was larger than the effect of polarization on media choice. For example, a highly polarized Democrat is more likely to watch *MSNBC* than a moderate Democrat. Viewing *MSNBC* is then likely to make this viewer dislike Republicans more than before. This person will be even more likely to watch *MSNBC* in the future as a result of her increased dislike for Republicans. Crucially, the effect of *MSNBC* on dislike is stronger than the effect of dislike on the choice to use *MSNBC*. It should be noted that *MSNBC* is only used as an example and that both liberal and conservative media have been found to have this effect.

Though partisan media has been studied extensively in the polarization literature, the effects of campaign communication on polarization have received considerably less scholarly attention. Warner and Greenwood (2014) found that in a political campaign those who frequently engage in political conversation with others and pay attention to media coverage are more likely to be polarized. In their study of the impact of exposure to political attack ads on affective polarization, Iyengar and colleagues (2012) found that in battleground states, where the campaign was more intense with more exposure to attack ads, polarization increased more than in non-battleground states. They also found that polarization increased over the course of a campaign due to campaign exposure, particularly in battleground states. Similarly, Warner and Greenwood (2014) found that those who engaged in political communication were more polarized as time passed and the election entered later phases. In addition to the influence of political attack ads, Binder and colleagues (2009) suggested political talk as a driving force behind political attitude extremity. In other words, exposure to campaign ads, political discussions, and more general communication are all associated with polarization.

Unlike ads and discussions, debates present a unique opportunity for exposure to balanced messages; nonetheless, as mentioned above, voters process the information they receive through partisan bias (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Thus, even though debates are balanced, they can increase polarization (Warner & McKinney, 2013). This finding was particularly strong in people who were originally less polarized, which could be a positive outcome because debates may polarize by reducing uncertainty, apathy, and/or ambivalence. So though campaign communication has been studied less frequently than partisan media as a source of polarization, the existing research suggests that campaign communication polarizes communicators.

Rationale

Based on the above, we propose the hypothesized theoretical model of affective polarization presented in Figure 5.1. First, people who are more interested in

politics should be more likely to seek information about news and current events (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Prior, 2007). As a result, they should be more attentive to campaign coverage in the news, more aware of direct communication from the campaigns via campaign ads and debates, and more likely to participate in interpersonal conversations about the campaign. As these individuals gather information about the election, they should use this information to formulate opinions about the candidates. However, people are biased processers (Lodge & Taber, 2013) and can be expected to selectively seek (Garrett & Stroud, 2014) and selectively interpret (Lodge & Taber, 2006) information about the candidates in a way that reinforces their existing partisan preferences. Therefore, the communication activity that results from political interest should also result in greater affective polarization. Thus, the model hypothesizes a direct effect of political interest on both political communication and affective polarization and an indirect effect of political interest on affective polarization through political communication.

Affective polarization is also a function of political confidence. As Mutz (2006) argued, people who are more ambivalent about political parties are also less polarized, in part because they are not certain of their own attitudes, or because they have competing attitudes that prevent them from formulating firm commitments to one party. However, people who are increasingly certain they are correct should not exhibit this ambivalence and will be willing to stake out increasingly extreme positions as a result of their growing confidence (Sunstein, 2009). People who are more confident in their political knowledge should thus also be more affectively polarized. These individuals should be higher in political communication because they have confidence in their own knowledge about the campaign and should thus be more willing to engage in future communication. The effect of PIE on affective polarization should, therefore, also be indirect through political communication. The more confident a person is in her knowledge, the greater the volume of her political communication and the more affectively polarized she should be as a result.

Finally, there should be a direct effect of campaign communication (e.g., exposure to ads, consumption of campaign news, and discussion about the campaign) on affective polarization. Interpersonal discussion, communication from the news media, and direct communication from the campaigns all provide opportunities to expand the pool of persuasive arguments people are exposed to about the candidates and provide perspectives that confirm preexisting biases. Each of these processes is linked to polarization (Stroud, 2010; Sunstein, 2009). Furthermore, these messages should provide partisan cues that increase the salience of party identification as a processing heuristic for the evaluation of political content (Knobloch-Westerwick, Johnson, & Westerwick, 2014). In other words, as people process new information about the candidates, they will be more likely to use partisanship as a shortcut to ease processing such that Democrat-friendly information will be embraced by left-leaning communicators and discounted by right-leaning communicators. This polarization has been observed in the context of campaign advertisements (Iyengar et al., 2012) and presidential debates (Warner & McKinney, 2013). Campaign communication should thus directly influence affective polarization. The theoretical model of affective polarization described above is summarized in Figure 5.1.

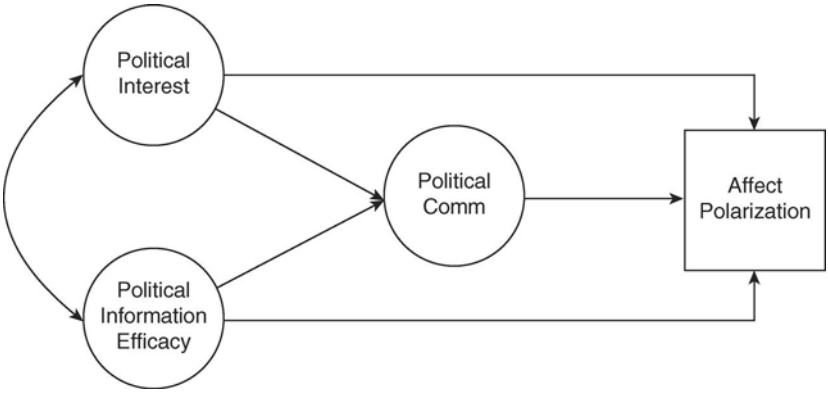

Figure 5.1 Theoretical model of affect polarization.

Method

Procedure

Participants were recruited from Qualtrics' panel aggregator that includes over 20 actively managed market research panels. Participants in all of these panels are randomly selected and proportioned to the general population. An e-mail message was sent to participants to inform them about the survey. Qualtrics' partners do not maintain representative samples on a state-by-state basis and so these sub-samples, though drawn from a representative sample of US adults, do not fully represent the populations of the specific states. Because of the difficulty in sampling specific states, particularly in the 2014 midterm elections when low-population states such as Montana, Alaska, and Arkansas were among the most closely contested Senate races, the states targeted for this study were selected with two primary criteria: first, the states needed to be viable for Qualtrics' panel partners to guarantee a sufficient sample; second, the states needed to feature a competitive election for US Senate. The three states selected were Iowa, North Carolina, and Georgia. According to Nate Silver's popular election forecast, these states featured three of the four most competitive Senate races two weeks before the election (October 23) and three of the six most competitive races on the day before the election (November 3). Participants were contacted starting October 10 and data collection was completed on October 17.

Participants

In total, 992 registered voters responded to the survey. Of those, 311 lived in Iowa, 290 in North Carolina, and 391 in Georgia. The respondents from Iowa were predominantly White/Caucasian (n = 297, 96%), had an average age of 48.8 (SD = 17) years, and were more female (n = 202, 65%) than male (n = 109, 35%). In general, the Iowa respondents were better educated than the general

population, with 95 (31%) having earned a college degree and another 66 (21%) having earned a graduate degree, 92 (30%) reported having some college, 52 (17%) graduated high school, and only 4 (1%) did not have a high school or equivalent degree. The respondents from North Carolina were primarily White/Caucasian (n = 236, 81%) or Black/African American (n = 40, 14%), had an average age of 50 (SD = 16.7) years, and were more female (n = 194, 67%) than male (n = 96, 33%). North Carolinian respondents were also better educated, with 81 (28%) having earned a college degree and another 61 (21%) having earned a graduate degree, 94 (32%) reported having some college, 48 (17%) graduated high school, and again only 4 (1%) did not have a high school or equivalent degree. Georgians were also primarily White/Caucasian (n = 281, 72%) or Black/African American (n = 85, 22%), had an average age of 49.5 (SD = 16.3) years, and were more female (n = 277, 71%) than male (n = 114, 29%). A plurality (n = 150, 38%) reported attending some college, 89 (23%) reported graduating from college, 75 (19%) earned a graduate degree, 64 (16%) stopped after high school, and only 5 (1%) did not have a high school or equivalent degree.

All respondents were asked to place themselves on a partisanship scale that included response options such as strong Democrat, Democrat, lean Democrat, no preference, lean Republican, Republican, and strong Republican. Of the respondents in Iowa, 124 identified as Democratic, 122 as Republican, and 65 expressed no preference. In North Carolina, 122 identified as Democratic, 113 as Republican, and 53 expressed no preference. In Georgia, 152 identified as Democratic, 179 as Republican, and 58 expressed no preference. As can be seen, the state sub-samples from the Qualtrics' panel partners were not representative of the state electorates from which they were drawn. However, they were randomly drawn from a representative sample of the US population, so, though they do not reflect the parameters of their states, bias in estimating theoretical relationships and effect sizes should be minimal.

Measures

Affective polarization. Candidate feeling thermometer scales were used to calculate affective polarization. First, participants evaluated the candidates, indicating their overall feeling toward the Democratic and Republican senatorial candidates competing in their state: Bruce Braley and Joni Ernst (Iowa), Kay Hagan and Thom Tillis (North Carolina), and Michelle Nunn and David Perdue (Georgia). Participants were told that a score from 0 to 49 indicated an unfavorable feeling (0 being the most unfavorable and 49 being only slightly unfavorable), that 50 was a neutral evaluation, and that a score from 51 to 100 was considered favorable (100 being the most favorable and 51 only slightly favorable). This scale is commonly used by the National Election Studies survey (Rosenstone, Kinder, & Miller, 1997). To calculate polarization, the evaluation of the Republican candidate was subtracted from the evaluation of the Democratic candidate, and the absolute value was taken as the level of polarization. Thus, a value of 0 would mean no polarization at all and 100 would represent absolute polarization. This

polarization measure resembles the scales used in prior research (Iyengar et al., 2012; Stroud, 2010).

Political interest. Interest in politics was measured with a three-item scale. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with three statements on a five-item scale (from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*). These items include "I am interested in politics," "I follow politics closely," and "Politics are important to me personally." The scale was reliable ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.01$, $\alpha = 0.925$).

Political information efficacy. PIE was conceptualized by Kaid, Tedesco, and McKinney (2004) to measure the level of a voter's confidence in his or her political knowledge and the extent to which she believe she possesses sufficient information to productively engage in the political system. To measure PIE, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a five-point scale (from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) on four statements reflecting one's political confidence, including "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics," "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country," "I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people," and "If a friend asked me about the [Iowa/North Carolina/Georgia] Senate election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for." Consistent with several past studies in which this measure has been used (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney & Rill, 2009; McKinney & Warner, 2013), the scale was reliable ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.41$, $\alpha = 0.917$).

Political communication. To measure the amount of political communication that respondents engaged in during the midterm elections, we asked participants to think "of the midterm U.S. Senate election between [David Perdue and Michelle Nunn]" and respond on a five-point scale (from *very rarely* to *very often*) to three questions, including "How often have you talked about the election with people you know?" "How often have you seen or read about the election on the news?" and "How often have you seen or heard about the campaigns from the candidates or their advertisements?" The scale was acceptably reliable ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.86$, $\alpha = 0.762$). Descriptive statistics for each state are presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Descriptive statistics for variables included in communication and polarization structural model

	Iowa		*North Carolina*		*Georgia*	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Affective polarization[a]	49.81	33.31	48.39	32.31	49.23	32.96
Political interest[b]	3.38	1.03	3.62	0.97	3.55	1.01
Political information efficacy[c]	4.70	1.45	4.96	1.30	4.77	1.45
Campaign communication[b]	3.56	0.88	3.63	0.78	3.49	1.90

[a]0–100 scale.
[b]1–5 scale
[c]1–7 scale.

Results

To test the hypothesized model, a latent variable structural equation model was specified using the *Lavaan* software developed by Rosseel (2012) for the *R* ecosystem. Prior to model specification, age, sex, race, income, educational attainment, religiosity, state of residence, ideological strength, and partisan strength were tested as covariates. Only age, ideological strength, and partisan strength exerted significant influence on polarization. Though not depicted, all three variables were included as covariates in the structural model. The results are presented in Figure 5.2. The model fit the data well: $\chi^2(56) = 400.86$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.079 (0.072–0.096), CFI = 0.954, NNFI/TLI = 0.936, SRMR = 0.097. Though not represented in the figure, polarization was significantly influenced by age such that older people were more polarized ($\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.001$), and partisan strength was such that those who indicated they were strong Democrats or strong Republicans were more polarized ($\beta = 0.227$, $p < 0.001$). However, ideological strength was not significant. In other words, those who indicated they were either extremely liberal or extremely conservative were no more polarized when age and partisanship were included in the model. Amount of political communication was also influenced by age such that older people engaged in more frequent communication ($\beta = 0.095$, $p < 0.001$). However, those who expressed strong partisan leanings were not more frequent communicators, nor were strong ideologues.

As can be seen in Figure 5.2, the amount of political communication significantly predicted polarization. However, contrary to the hypotheses, neither political interest nor PIE had a significant direct effect on polarization. As expected, those with more PIE were also higher in the amount of political communication. More interested respondents were also higher in political communication. To test the mediated hypothesis that political interest and PIE would indirectly influence political polarization by increasing political communication, the bootstrapping procedure recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004) was adopted. They suggest that at least 1,000 bootstrapped resamples of the indirect effect be drawn and that the 95% confidence interval be inspected to determine if it crosses zero. A 95%

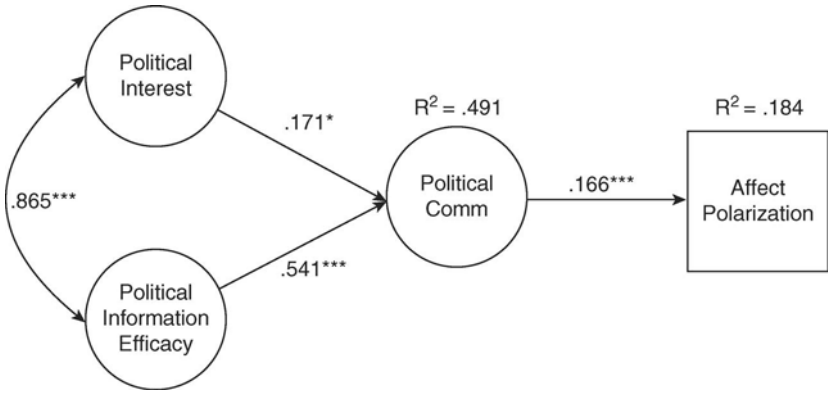

Figure 5.2 Structural model of affect polarization.

confidence interval of the indirect effect that does not cross zero is evidence of an indirect effect consistent with mediation.

PIE had a significant indirect effect on polarization through political communication as evidenced by the 95% confidence interval that did not cross zero, $B = 0.289$, SE = 0.096, LLCI = 0.104, ULCI = 0.493. The more confident a person was in her political knowledge, the stronger she was in political communication and the more affectively polarized she was as a result. Political interest also had a significant indirect effect on polarization through political confidence, $B = 0.091$, SE = 0.060, LLCI = 0.005, ULCI = 0.239. The more politically interested a person, the stronger she was in political communication and the more affectively polarized she was as a result. However, the role of political interest was considerably smaller than PIE, and the lower limit of confidence interval was only just above zero. So though there was evidence of mediated hypotheses, PIE was a more important factor in determining the amount of communication and subsequent affective polarization.

Discussion

Our findings demonstrate that political communication was central to affective polarization in the 2014 midterm elections. Evaluations of candidates for the US Senate in Iowa, North Carolina, and Georgia were all more polarized as people engaged in more frequent political communication. Furthermore, we found evidence that this political communication was, in part, a function of political confidence and political interest. More confident individuals and, to a lesser extent, more interested individuals were much more likely to engage in political communication and were much more affectively polarized. The significance of these findings as well as the limitations and directions for future research are discussed below.

Even after controlling for strength of partisanship, political interest, and PIE, those who were immersed in communication about the campaign expressed much more polarized affect toward the candidates. In other words, people who sought more campaign information, discussed the campaign more, and were attentive to the communication of the campaigns themselves were more likely to strongly favor the in-party candidate and strongly disfavor the out-party candidate even when controlling for strength of partisanship, ideology, and a number of other variables. This finding further confirms that political campaign communication polarizes evaluations of the candidates, a finding previously demonstrated in research about political ads (Iyengar et al., 2012), political conversations (Binder et al., 2009), and televised presidential campaign debates (McKinney & Warner, 2013). Additionally, Warner and Greenwood (2014) found political communication led to an increase in affective polarization in the 2012 election. This study extends previous findings by modeling the role of political interest and political efficacy in the development of affective polarization and testing the mediated relationship of political communication. However, this study did not distinguish between types of campaign communication. Future studies should attempt to distinguish between interpersonal discussions, media diets, and exposure to campaign communication to determine whether the effects of campaign communication differ depending on the medium.

We also found that those who are more politically interested are also most likely to seek political information, a corroboration of Arceneaux and Johnson's (2013) argument. Furthermore, on the basis of Abramowitz's (2010) finding that the most interested are also more polarized, we hypothesized a direct effect of interest on affective polarization as well as an indirect effect through the influence of political interest on political communication. We found no evidence of a direct effect of political interest on affective polarization. Though political interest was related to polarization, it was only through political communication. In other words, those who were more politically interested were not necessarily more polarized, but become more polarized as their interest led them to polarizing communication. Political interest is not polarizing, but it does motivate polarizing behavior.

Though political interest exerted indirect influence on polarization, the role of interest was substantively smaller than that of political confidence. Because those who are confident in their political knowledge will also be more polarized (Stroud, 2010; Warner & Greenwood, 2014), we hypothesized that those with high PIE would be more affectively polarized. Again there was no direct effect of confidence on polarization. Simply being more confident in their political knowledge did not make our respondents more polarized. Instead, the relationship between political communication and PIE indirectly influenced affective polarization. In other words, those who were confident in their political knowledge engaged in more political conversations, were more attentive to communication from the campaigns, and used more political media. It was this activity that was associated with their greater polarization. The relationship between PIE and polarization links the works of Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007)—who found that individuals high in information efficacy are more likely to vote and discuss politics—and Abramowitz (2010)—who found that those who are most polarized are the most engaged. Though both political interest and confidence were significant contributors to political communication and thus polarization, the effect of confidence was much stronger.

This study also tested a number of control variables, most of which did not influence polarization. Partisan strength was a strong predictor of affective polarization. This is not particularly surprising; those who consider themselves "strong" Democrats or Republicans should have stronger in-group/out-group biases and should have more polarized feelings toward the major party candidates. Age was also a significant predictor; older respondents were consistently more polarized than younger respondents. This was not a theoretical expectation of our model though age is a widely known source of variance in political attitudes. If researchers consistently find that younger people are less polarized than older people, even after accounting for differences in partisan strength, interest, confidence, and communication behavior, it would be interesting for political communication researchers to explore the causes of this difference.

These findings provoke questions about the ultimate consequences of political polarization. For Abramowitz (2010), a polarized electorate is more engaged, more informed, and more participative in the political process. Thus, as political communication generates more polarization, the electorate moves closer to the democratic ideal of an engaged, informed citizenry. This positive framing of

political polarization corresponds with Warner and McKinney's (2013) finding that a majority of communication-induced polarization occurs for those who are initially the least polarized and, presumably, the least informed and engaged. If the primary function of political communication, then, is to develop candidate preferences among the apathetic, the uncertain, or the ambivalent, the findings presented here can be read optimistically. However, the literature on polarization has emphasized the negative consequences of high levels of polarization in the electorate, particularly for governing when political elites are highly polarized (McCarty et al., 2006). Polarization may also generate intolerance, which undermines deliberative democracy (Mutz, 2006). Finally, Sunstein (2009) warns that extreme polarization can lead to political violence. It is, therefore, clear that more work needs to be done to clarify the character and consequences of political polarization.

Limitations

Though this study advances the conversation about political polarization and applies existing findings to the context of a midterm, there are important limitations. First, because the survey was cross-sectional, we cannot establish the causal direction of effects. We hypothesized that the frequent political communication would result in more affective polarization. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that affective polarization leads to more political communication. A person who is highly polarized is more likely to watch partisan media and engage in more political conversations. Indeed, longitudinal research on partisan media use suggests that causality goes both ways (Garrett et al., 2014; Stroud, 2010). The same may be true for other forms of political communication. Exposure to political communication may cause affective polarization, and this polarization could motivate more political communication. This is especially plausible in a midterm election where candidates are often unknown at the start of the campaign and some level of communication must precede polarization before people have enough information to form initial candidate impressions.

Similarly, the direction of causality between political confidence and political communication is debatable. Though we found support for our hypothesis that PIE leads to increased political communication, others have found that exposure to political communication increases political confidence. Sunstein (2009) argues that individuals exposed to attitude-congruent information (in media and conversation) become more confident in their perspectives and polarize as a result, a plausible reversal of our finding. This relationship could also be a spiral in which political confidence leads to more exposure to political communication, this increased communication results in greater confidence, and so forth.

The strategy used to measure communication about the campaign poses another limitation to the study. First, exposure to political communication was self-reported. Participants may not accurately remember or honestly report the amount of political communication they experienced. Individuals certainly do not log each time they see a political ad or have a political conversation. However, they should be able to assess whether their exposure was high or low, and even if inexact, this report should still create distinctions between high and low communicators. Similarly, our

measure grouped three different forms of communication and so cannot disentangle the nuanced distinctions between discussion, media use, and attention to campaign ads and debates. Instead, the measure allows us to distinguish between those who were generally immersed in the campaign and those who only encountered campaign information infrequently. Despite the limitations of this strategy, our findings provide predictive validity for the self-reported communication measures. We were able to identify differences based on those who reported high communication even after controlling for strength of partisanship, political interest, PIE, and many sociodemographic variables.

Finally, though the sample was drawn from a random and representative sample of the United States, the individual sub-samples of each state were not proportioned to their population. Our findings should not be interpreted as reasonable estimates of the individual state parameters (e.g., the true polarization score for the Iowa electorate). However, the purpose of this study was to test theoretical variable relationships, not to estimate population parameters of individual states. Therefore, any sampling bias should only affect our results if an unmeasured and uncontrolled variable moderates the relationships tested here. Given the limited conditions under which our sample would bias effect sizes and the broad spectrum of variables we tested as controls, readers should feel confident that the effects presented here approximate the true variable relationships being tested.

Future research should test the relationships observed here in longitudinal and experimental studies to better assess the nature of causality. Additionally, future studies should seek to identify the mechanisms that underlie the polarizing effects of political communication by investigating rational and rationalizing processes, particularly through tests of attitude confirmation, social comparison, and affect transfer. There is also need for more research comparing the effects of various media of communication. Do ads polarize more than debates? Are media more or less polarizing than interpersonal conversation? Most studies, to date, either focus on one medium or do not have the appropriate measures to compare across communication formats. Finally, more work needs to be done to clarify the consequences of polarization. As Abramowitz (2010) has argued, more polarized individuals tend to best represent ideal democratic citizens, as they are more knowledgeable and engaged in the political process. However, polarization may also undermine democracy if it breeds intolerance (Mutz, 2006) or even violence (Sunstein, 2009). This study demonstrates that campaign communication is central to polarization in midterm elections. The consequences of polarizing communication may be beneficial or disastrous. It is possible that polarization is truly both a burden and a democratic boon. The next phase of research on political polarization in elections should focus more heavily on understanding the consequences of polarization.

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PART II

MEDIA COVERAGE AND EFFECTS OF TELEVISION, NEWSPAPERS, AND LATE-NIGHT COMEDY SHOWS IN 2014

CHAPTER 6

THE 2014 MIDTERM ELECTIONS ON LOCAL TELEVISION: FRAMES, SOURCES, AND VALENCE

Daniela V. Dimitrova and Sisi Hu

Midterm elections have become increasingly important in the US election cycle not only because of the number of legislators and governors that are being selected for office but also because these elections serve as a litmus test for the parties and the sitting president. The 2014 midterms were no exception; they provided a wake-up call for the Democratic Party and multiple opportunities for both new and seasoned politicians to present themselves to the public. A major player in this political arena was, of course, the news media, which in any democracy is expected to inform the public of the political issues of the day and also hold politicians accountable.

This chapter takes an in-depth look at the news coverage of the 2014 midterm elections on local television. Despite the rise of social media and various Internet-based publications, local television without doubt remains the main information source for the average American (Pew Research Center, 2014). According to Pew's most recent *State of the Media* (2014) report, local television reached nine out of ten American adults in 2014. Despite the decrease in original news reporting and continuing advertising challenges, local television's audience increased for the first time in five years (Pew Research Center, 2014). And, 46 percent of those surveyed by Pew report they watch local TV news "often" compared with 31 percent who frequently watch national evening news and 24 percent who turn to cable news on a regular basis. Considering the importance of local television news, this chapter focuses on the coverage of two television stations in Iowa, a critical state in US politics (Redlawsk, Tolbert, & Donovan, 2010). Specifically, the chapter investigates what types of frames, sources, and valence were used most frequently in the midterm election coverage and concludes by noting what implications this type of election coverage has for the US electorate as well as practicing journalists.

Media and Elections

The importance of news media in democratic societies has been well documented (Cook, 2005; Graber & Dunaway, 2014; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). As stated by the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2013, p. 11), "the media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy," especially in electoral contexts. The news media are often referred to as the Fourth Estate because of their important watchdog function in society where political elites, including individual political candidates, parties, or governments, come under public scrutiny through investigative news reporting (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Additionally, journalists are tasked with the responsibility to inform the public of the news of the day, reporting on political issues and policies, the latest developments in election campaigns, and updates on important issues such as voter registration and election results. The public expects the media to be truthful, credible, and independent (Entman, 1989; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Last but not least, the news media, broadly defined, provide a platform for politicians and citizens alike to present their views and opinions to the public at large. In such a way, the media also serve as a conduit to communicate messages to the electorate (Graber & Dunaway, 2014), either indirectly mediated through journalistic reports or directly by broadcasting political commercials or live debates between political candidates. In the end, although the media are not the only information source for the general public, "in a world dominated by mass communications, it is increasingly the media that determine the political agenda" (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2013, p. 12).

Election News Frames

Of course, these normative functions of the media as an institution are only imperfectly fulfilled in reality (Cook, 2005; Entman, 1989). One of the most common criticisms of news media coverage of political issues is the tendency to focus on style rather than substance (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Historically, the increasing trend in election coverage has been to present the political campaign as a strategic game, focusing on the horse-race rather than political issues (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Kerbel, Apee, & Ross, 2000; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). In general, it has been documented that US media increasingly cover election campaigns by emphasizing who is winning or losing and what tactics politicians use to move ahead in the polls, being less likely to report on policy or ongoing political issues. This trend is observable not only on national network news (Dimitrova, 2014) but also on public broadcasting stations (Kerbel et al., 2000). The present study assesses how common such coverage was prior to the 2014 midterm elections by examining the balance between issue frames and political strategy/game frames in local television news coverage.

Another way to examine the framing of the election coverage is to compare the use of episodic versus thematic framing. In the classic definition offered by Iyengar (1991), episodic frames focus on the immediate event or incident without providing context about underlying issues or big-picture implications. Thematic coverage, on the other hand, provides background and larger context, for example by including

historical developments, relevant statistics, or other analysis. Presumably, the public can benefit from being exposed to the larger issues and the contextualization of political information. Simply looking at the latest poll or the latest campaign stump of a particular candidate without linking it to their previous record in office or the likely reasons for changing poll standing is of little use to many viewers (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). Iyengar (1991) discussed how episodic versus thematic coverage has inherently different effects on the public. In a series of experiments, he demonstrated that episodic coverage leads the viewer to blame individuals for societal problems, while thematic, contextual coverage links responsibility to larger social institutions and actors. Hence, episodic election coverage may deprive viewers of the ability to attribute responsibility to larger social forces.

News Sources and Valence

Another important aspect of media coverage relates to which sources are favored in the reporting. Research has consistently shown that the news media can potentially influence the framing of politics by choosing whose perspectives to include in their coverage (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Sigal, 1973) and whose to exclude. For example, Wagner and Gruszczynski (2016) documented that the framing of abortion and taxes in US media coverage significantly influenced people's attitudes and levels of polarization. The effect was different depending on which sources were quoted to frame the issues—partisan politicians or the journalists themselves; in fact, the study showed that journalistic sources were more influential. Slothuus and de Vreese (2010) also found that citizens were more likely to follow a frame if their political party supported the frame; in other words, partisan sources resonated more strongly with partisan voters.

One of the most commonly used sources for in-story quotes in American news coverage has been so-called elite sources (Manning, 2001). In a comprehensive analysis of crime coverage, for example, Lawrence (2000) documented that official sources such as police officers and local administrators were significantly overrepresented in crime news. Another example concerns war and conflict coverage where US politicians and government officials again dominated the news reporting (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005). This has been the case in previous military conflicts (Hallin, 1986) as well as in routine news reporting (Gans, 1980; Sigal, 1973). Of course, the sources that are included in the news reporting have higher potential to frame the issues or events for the public (Entman, 1989).

The reliance on different types of news sources is similarly consequential for television news, which offers quick soundbites of those competing for political office, but not necessarily the views of ordinary citizens. What does it mean for democratic governance if the only voices included in news coverage are the so-called elite sources? Again, this may be a question of balance. Historically, authoritative sources such as politicians or government officials have been disproportionately used by journalists for a number of reasons, including reliability, access, and established relationships (Gans, 1980; Manning, 2001; Sigal, 1973). The impact of journalistic routines and the typical news-gathering cycle may be especially key in the case of television news reporting, where news needs to be current and fresh. Nevertheless,

the inclusion of a more diverse set of sources, going beyond the voices of the political elite, is still desirable from a normative standpoint (Gans, 1980; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Naturally, politicians may be given more frequent opportunities to present their views on air as opposed to ordinary citizens and outside experts, but what is the right balance between elite and nonelite sources? Would the inclusion of local perspectives and views from the average citizens of Iowa not contribute to a richer description of the issue? Trying to assess if this is a concern, this chapter examines quantitatively which sources are most commonly used in the midterm election coverage and also presents some qualitative examples of how different sources were used in the coverage.

A third focal point of this chapter is the question of coverage tone. Since research has clearly demonstrated the importance of tone in the overall framing of issues, we attempt to measure the valence of the news reporting, focusing in particular on explicitly positive or negative coverage versus objective/balanced reporting. De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2003), for example, linked valence to framing, arguing that some news frames are born with "good or bad" implications and include positive and/or negative elements. Particularly in election news coverage, a more positive tone toward a given party is often related to an increase of votes for that party (Hopmann, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2010). In recent years, US media have sometimes been labeled as too "liberal" or too "negative" (Halbrooks, n.d.). For example, a study of television news coverage during the 2008 US presidential election found that CNN's reporting adopted a primarily negative tone toward both major candidates; at the same time, however, CNN aired relatively more positive reports toward Obama (Smith & Searles, 2014). One of the questions we examine in this chapter is whether there is a tendency toward negativity in the 2014 midterm coverage and, if so, whether that tendency can be observed empirically. In other words, we investigate whether the rules of objective and balanced news reporting are still practiced in local television news election coverage.

Background on the Iowa Midterm Elections

Iowa, a relatively homogenous state of just over three million people, has a special political importance in recent US history as the first state in the nation to hold a presidential caucus (Redlawsk et al., 2010). Generally considered a swing state, Iowa waivers from blue to red, leaning Democratic in certain elections and Republic in others. When looking at the presidential level, the state has been reliably blue since 1988, with the exception of Bush's narrow victory in 2004. At the same time, Iowa has had a number of Republican governors elected to office. Currently, the state legislature is divided between Democrats and Republicans. As the state that kicks off the presidential race, Iowa, for good or bad, has become a required place for political candidates to visit, especially during caucus season, and a good litmus test for experienced and new politicians alike (Entman, 1989).

The 2014 midterms featured several competitive congressional races in the state. A US Senate seat vacated by retiring Democratic senator Tom Harkin was particularly attractive to both parties. Republican Joni Ernst and Democrat Bruce Braley faced off in the battle for his Senate seat. The Braley–Ernst race was perhaps the

most prominent race during this election cycle. Estimates show that the two contestants spent more than $22 million total during their 2014 campaigns (Obradovich, 2014a). In the end, Ernst won Iowa's US Senate race by 8.5 percentage points and became the first female senator from the state of Iowa and also the first female veteran elected to the US Senate—notable precedents for the state and for the Senate, respectively.

In the gubernatorial election, the sitting Republican governor Terry Branstad faced no real challenge from the Democratic contender Jack Hatch. The fact that the governor was elected to serve in this office five times before confirmed his popularity in the state. Branstad took close to 60 percent of the vote on November 4, 2014, and was thus reelected to a historic sixth term, having the potential to become the longest serving governor in US history (Noble, 2014).

At the state level, Democrats held onto their slim majority in the Iowa Senate, and Republicans picked up two open seats to pad their majority in the Iowa House. Even though the balance between the state Senate and Iowa House of Representatives remained unchanged, both US senators representing Iowa would be Republicans for the first time since 1984. In the words of political columnist Kathy Obradovich, in the wake of the 2014 midterms, Iowa has shifted from a truly bipartisan state to what can be best characterized as "red-violet" (Obradovich, 2014b).

Research Questions

This chapter investigates four research questions in order to shed light on the local television coverage of the 2014 midterms in Iowa:

RQ1: What is the balance between strategic game frames and issue frames in the local television coverage of the 2014 midterm elections?

RQ2: Is episodic coverage more common than thematic coverage?

RQ3: Which news sources are used most frequently?

RQ4: Is the election news reporting mostly neutral, positive, or negative?

Method and Data

Data for this content analysis come from two local broadcast television stations in Des Moines, Iowa: KCCI-TV Channel 8, the CBS affiliate and also the market leader, and WOI-TV Channel 5, the local ABC affiliate. Their early evening local newscasts aired between 6 and 6:30 p.m. represent the most popular local news block and, therefore, were selected for analysis.

The time period used in this study was Labor Day through Election Day 2014, a typical time selection for many election analyses (e.g., Dimitrova, 2014; Grabe & Bucy, 2013; Waldman, & Devitt, 1998). To create a representative sample for the entire time period, a two-week constructed week technique was chosen (Lacy, Fico, & Riffe, 2005). Hence, we randomly sampled two Mondays, two Tuesdays, two Wednesdays, two Thursdays, and two Fridays from the selected time period and downloaded the early evening newscasts aired by both stations on those dates.

Each news story that explicitly mentioned the midterm election, politics or political issues, and the campaign as a whole was retrieved for analysis. A digital service called SnapStream was used to record and store the television newscasts. The advantage of this service is that it includes a search option, which was used to verify that the manual selection of stories done by the coder was correct. This sampling approach yielded a total of 70 news stories—43 from the ABC affiliate and 27 from the CBS affiliate—that are analyzed below.

Variables were developed based on the research questions stated above. Of particular interest were the frames used in the coverage. Several questions used in previous research were adapted to capture the essence of each frame.

Following previous research (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006), the issue frame section included three questions:

- Does the story deal with substantive public policy issues, problems, and solutions?
- Does the story provide descriptions of politicians' stances or statements about substantive policy issues?
- Does the story deal with general implications or impacts of legislation on the public?

The coder could choose 1 for Yes and 0 for No. An additive score ranging from 0 to 3 was computed for each news story.

Similarly, three questions were developed to capture the frequency of use and intensity of the strategic game frame:

- Is the story mainly about politicians or parties winning or losing elections, debates, governing negotiations, or winning or losing in politics generally?
- Does the story predominantly deal with politicians or parties' strategies for winning elections such as campaign tactics or legislative maneuvers?
- Does the story focus on the politicians or parties' standing in the polls?

The next set of frames considered were the episodic and thematic frame, which relied on two questions each. The episodic frame asked whether the story mainly focused on one particular event, incident, or case without contextualization and whether the story focused mainly on ordinary people's experiences. The thematic context frame, on the other hand, asked whether the story dealt with the event in a broader context by explaining its meaning or implications for society and whether the story provided essential history or background for the issue or event.

The first author trained the main coder (second author) and tested initial intercoder agreement on six stories from ABC news that were not part of the sample. Variables that contained any disagreement were discussed at length and recoded until perfect agreement was reached. The main coder then proceeded with the sample stories following the deductive coding approach described.

Two additional aspects of the coverage were also coded. First, we tried to capture whether the coverage involved a human interest angle by providing a human example or human face of the issue or problem. Second, we attempted to gauge

the level of personalization by noting whether the story went into the private lives of (one of the) political actors or focused on the personal qualities, traits, or image characteristics of the actors.

Finally, we also looked at media meta-framing by asking whether the story explicitly focused on how the media cover politics (whether fair or biased, whether contain praise or criticisms), the interactions or relationships between journalists and politicians, or the way political actors actively try to shape the news.

Additionally, we incorporated a number of news source variables as follows: domestic politicians or government officials (e.g., elected officials and candidates running for office), campaign or party operatives (e.g., party consultants, pollsters, campaign managers, and other campaign/party officials), international politicians, ordinary citizens (e.g., people who get to speak not due to their position within a certain hierarchy but rather as a "person on the street"), experts (which may be academic sources or other nonpartisan sources with expert credentials such as affiliates of different think tanks), spokespersons for unions, individual businesses or business organizations, spokespersons for social movements or grassroots organizations, and media analysts or other media representatives beyond the journalist covering the story. The coder recorded the number of times a particular type of source appeared in the news story. The source could be identified on the screen, within a soundbite, or referenced by the reporter.

Valence of coverage was measured by a three-point variable: positive, negative, or neutral or balanced, which included stories with mixed tone.

Results

Election News Frames

The first research question of this study asked about the balance between strategic game frames and issue frames in the local television coverage. The results show that less than a quarter of the coverage was focused on issues. Specifically, only 22.9 percent of the television news stories in our Iowa sample contained some issue coverage prior to the 2014 midterm elections. In contrast, more than half of the coverage—52.9 percent—was framed through a strategic game frame. To test whether this difference was statistically significant, a two-tailed paired-samples *t*-test was conducted. This statistical test was appropriate since we were looking to compare the means of two different variables for the same group of cases. The results show that the mean for issue framing ($M = 0.41$, $SD = 0.84$) was significantly lower than the mean for strategic game framing ($M = 0.80$, $SD = 0.94$), and the mean difference was statistically significant, $t(69) = -2.25$, $p = 0.03$. Therefore, one can conclude that strategic game frames were significantly more common than issue frames in the 2014 local election coverage.

Some examples to illustrate each of the different types of frames follow. A typical television news story was one that reported on the latest poll results of the Braley–Ernst Senate race, the most prominent race in the state. Stories about the race employed the so-called strategic game frame, including information on who is winning or losing and campaign strategies that both candidates would pursue

in order to win the open seat. Even when the coverage tried to address substantive issues as in the case of fact-checking Bruce Braley's statements, the journalists still concentrated on his personal qualities. Another interesting aspect of the coverage focused on which outside political candidate came to endorse their campaign. There was a report about Mitt Romney visiting Iowa to endorse Joni Ernst, for instance. In the case of Braley, stories such as the one aired on WOI-TV on October 10, 2014, talked more about the fact that First Lady Michelle Obama mispronounced his name during her visit as opposed to his actual policy proposals or campaign agenda.

In general, stories that discussed political issues were less common. One example aired on KCCI-TV Channel 8 on September 9, 2014, was a news report featuring Republican governor Branstad's education policy, discussing how Iowa can learn from the experience of other states regarding education policy, and encouraging wider adoption of online education. Other examples included stories about Iowa's unemployment rate and proposals regarding the legalization of medical marijuana.

Related to the question of who or what may influence election outcomes, several news reports discussed campaign funding by mentioning which organizations or individuals were behind the two major campaigns, or comparing the fundraising efforts between frontrunner Joni Ernst and contender Bruce Braley. Some stories focused on the influx of political ads in the state and discussed the possible impacts of their negative tone. Out of the 70 stories examined here, three (4.3 percent) focused on campaign funding. Both sides made accusations about "big money" coming from out of state. In one of the debates, Braley claimed that Ernst had financial backing by the Koch brothers. According to *The Des Moines Register*, she did not dispute getting campaign support from the Kochs (Obradovich, 2014a) but, in turn, alleged that Braley was backed by a California billionaire who funded some of the attack ads against her.

The second research question concerned the balance between episodic coverage and thematic coverage. The results demonstrate that episodic coverage was clearly more prevalent: an overwhelming 94.3 percent of the news reports were coded as episodic, while only 25.7 percent were classified as thematic. To test whether this difference in the coverage was statistically significant, a two-tailed paired-samples *t*-test was used. The results show that the mean for episodic coverage ($M = 0.97$, $SD = 0.29$) was significantly lower than the mean for thematic coverage ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.55$) and that their mean difference was statistically significant, $t(69) = 8.07$, $p = 0.000$.

Television news reports, perhaps not surprisingly, relied on more event-oriented reporting as opposed to longer, more contextual stories about politics. One interesting example was a piece on Democratic senator Tom Harkin's last steak fry in Iowa after his nearly 40-year service in the US Congress. Although the story mentioned his service, the main focus was on the event itself and the expected guests who included Hillary and Bill Clinton. By talking about the guests and shifting the focus from Tom Harkin to Hillary Clinton, the story served as a preview of her possible candidacy for 2016 presidential election. It did not contextualize the event or take time to discuss Harkin's legacy or contributions to the state; rather, the reporting focused on the guest list and availability of tickets for the steak fry.

Some stories in our sample moved from entertainment to scandal. In a now infamous federal campaign payment case, former Iowa state senator Kent Sorenson was accused of receiving payments in exchange for switching from one Republican presidential campaign to another prior to the 2012 Iowa caucuses and then obstructing investigation. This example demonstrates how the media can fulfill their watchdog function, but also shows the tendency to cover unusual, unexpected, and "deviant" events (Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger, 1991).

Previous research has discussed the tendency of US media to air self-referential stories about the media themselves (Esser, Reinemann, & Fan, 2001). This type of meta-communication has been described as an additional stage of election coverage following issue and strategy coverage; it has also been seen as a natural outcome of political marketing. Only one of the 70 television news stories examined here focused on the role of the news media in the election, noting the uneasy relationship between journalists and politicians. Specifically, a story aired on KCCI-TV Channel 8 on October 23, 2014, discussed how the Ernst campaign team issued a statement saying that *The Des Moines Register*, the newspaper of record in the state, had run several editorial pieces criticizing Ernst. However, this was the only media-focused election story in our sample.

News Sources and Valence

Research question 3 asked which news sources were used most frequently in the election coverage. We included a range of different sources in our investigation. By and large, politicians and government officials were the most frequently used news sources in the local television coverage. Descriptive statistics show that they appeared in 35.7 percent of the sampled news stories; campaign officials appeared in 7.1 percent of the sample, adding up to 42.8 percent of the stories quoting elite sources (see Table 6.1). For example, a story aired on October 13, 2014, on WOI-TV Channel 5 covered the Braley–Ernst debate and included both candidates' soundbites in the report. Similarly, a story aired on October 27, 2014, on WOI-TV Channel 5 that analyzed why candidates bring big names to their campaigns and how they choose certain places to visit incorporated the viewpoints of both candidates' campaign managers.

The second most commonly used sources were nonpartisan/academic experts, which appeared in 10 percent of the coverage (see Table 6.1). A story aired on October 22, 2014, on WOI-TV Channel 5, for example, featured an academic expert—a professor from Iowa State University who directs a center on women and politics. This was an appropriate choice for the story since the tagline was "Women Candidates in Iowa" and the professor could contribute her expertise on the subject. A story aired on the same channel on September 24, 2014, featured a business organization, Bankers Trust, as a source in addition to the expected government official—the Iowa lieutenant governor Kim Reynolds in this case. Individual businesses or business organizations were cited in 2.9 percent of the stories examined here. The fifth ranked sources were spokespersons for unions, which appeared in only 1.4 percent of the stories. The voices of ordinary citizens or social movements/grassroots organizations were, however, missing from the local election

Table 6.1 News sources used by local Iowa television channels in 2014 midterm election

News source	*Television channel*		*Total*
	WOI-TV	*KCCI-TV*	
Domestic politician	15 (34.9%)	10 (37%)	25 (35.7%)
Nonpartisan/academic expert	3 (7%)	4 (14.8%)	7 (10%)
Campaign/party official	2 (4.7%)	3 (11.1%)	5 (7.1%)
Individual business/business organization	2 (4.7%)	0	2 (2.9%)
Union spokesperson	0	1 (3.7%)	1 (1.4%)
Media analysts/journalists	0	0	0
Ordinary citizens	0	0	0

$N = 70$. Cells display story counts for each type of news source with percentages in parentheses.

coverage. Media analysts and other journalists as sources were also absent from the coverage. Not a single citizen or media analyst was quoted in the 70 stories analyzed for this chapter. To sum up, other types of sources beyond elite news sources were extremely rare. This has some implications for democracy and citizenship, as discussed later.

Finally, research question 4 asked about the valence of the coverage. Was the election news reporting mostly neutral, positive, or negative? The norms of objective reporting in the United States lead us to expect that explicitly positive or negative reporting would be rare (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). This was indeed the case: a vast majority of the news coverage, 98.6 percent, was coded as neutral or balanced and not slanted; only one out of 70 stories was coded as negative. It was a story aired on October 23, 2014, on KCCI-TV Channel 8 criticizing the negative political ads in the state aired by both parties. The by-and-large predominantly neutral coverage goes against recent accusations that the news media are biased, too liberal, or excessively filled with negativity (Halbrooks, n.d.).

Discussion

Politicians today are dependent on the news media since the general public relies on obtaining information about politics and political candidates primarily through media coverage. Some have even argued that in this day and age the media themselves have become a political institution (Cook, 2005; Graber & Dunaway, 2014). At the very least, the news media remain the main channel through which the American electorate learns about political issues and events (Pew Research Center, 2014) at any level. The findings of this content analysis show several general trends in local television news when it comes to reporting midterm elections. First, reporting tends to favor the horse-race over policy coverage. The midterm elections were typically presented through a strategic game frame rather than substantive issue frames. Second, episodic, event-oriented coverage was common, while contextual coverage with sufficient background to the issue or event was rare. The viewer was

left without a clear vision of what this event/issue might mean for the future in terms of either individual or societal implications—a potential shortcoming from a liberal democracy perspective.

Perhaps due to the nature of television news and the need to make the story more relevant for the local viewer, there was a degree of personalization in the coverage. Stories tended to provide a human face to complex political issues and sometimes looked into the private lives of politicians to show their character and qualifications. In several cases, election news focused on the unexpected and unusual, suggesting that perhaps deviance remains a newsworthiness factor for US media (Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger, 1991). Politicians' criminal activity and their alleged connections with billionaires were some examples of stories under this category.

Although the analysis focused on local news and local politicians, the stories often took a national angle, especially in cases when famous visitors such as Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton came to the state of Iowa. Those stories turned to the national political scene rather than the local elections. It may be interesting for future research to examine how local and national issues are intertwined in local election news coverage.

Local reporting by and large relied on elite news sources, far from the multiperspectival news ideal that Gans (1980) imagined. Voices of ordinary citizens, experts, or nongovernmental organizations were quite rare. Perhaps unconsciously, television news reporting relied heavily on the views of the political elite rather than ordinary people. The lack of diversity among the TV news sources has important implications for citizen engagement. As Entman (1989) notes, this type of media coverage does not contribute to a free marketplace of ideas as theoretical models of a liberal press might suggest. On the contrary, the findings of this study support Entman's thesis that journalists might be a part of an "interdependent news system" and in practice "may fall short of the ideal vision of a free press as a civic educator and guardian of democracy" (p. 3).

The tone of the 2014 midterm coverage was generally neutral. The election coverage as a whole stayed away from positive or negative valence. It seemed to follow the well-established journalistic formula of presenting facts about "who, what, where, and when" the event took place without explicit bias or slant. The findings are in line with Entman's argument that today's media possess a "devout adherence to objectivity norms" (1989, p. 9), perhaps as a way of protecting themselves from any accusations of bias.

Implications

While the results of this study are based on an Iowa-only sample and may not be directly applicable to other states, many of the trends identified here are consistent with academic research on election news coverage of national/presidential elections (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Cook, 2005; Kerbel et al., 2000; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). Considering the similarity of local television programming across the country, the homogenization of content, and the role of commercial pressure (McManus, 1994), it is more than likely that similar coverage of the midterm elections was observed in other local TV markets.

Using caution about generalizability of the findings, this analysis nevertheless extends research on general election coverage and sheds light into the role of local televisions news during the 2014 midterm elections. It also brings to the fore several theoretical and practical implications. Applying the tenets of framing theory, the study found an overreliance on the horse-race rather than a focus on political issues and use of more episodic rather than thematic coverage. Considering the relationship between media frames and audience frames (Entman, 1993), one might predict that the viewers exposed to this type of election news coverage will not be able to develop contextual understanding of the political issues of the day and may be more likely to learn about politicians' latest standing in the polls as opposed to their policy stances or record in office (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Predominantly strategic framing may also suppress information retention among voters (Valentino, Buhr, & Beckmann, 2001), while lack of context may shift responsibility to individual actors rather than institutions (Iyengar, 1991).

The study also confirms theoretical expectations about elite-driven coverage since government officials, political candidates, and their campaigns remain the dominant news sources on local television (Lawrence, 2000; Manning, 2001). Elite-driven coverage may inadvertently allow politicians and their campaigns to set the agenda for the general public when it comes to elections news reporting (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2013; Entman, 1989).

The practical implications of this chapter relate to the normative functions of the media as the main information source for the American electorate (Pew Research Center, 2014). Given the continued significance of the news media, journalists should try to provide more context and background when they cover midterm elections and attempt to report more often on political issues and policy developments (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Diversification of journalistic sources and continued investigative reporting are two additional recommendations.

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CHAPTER 7

VISUAL FRAMING OF 2014 US SENATE CAMPAIGN: CONFLICT BIAS IN NEWS COVERAGE

Joan L. Conners

When voters think of a political campaign, some may think "contest" or "competition," while others may think "conflict." Some voters may see these as interchangeable synonyms when thinking of electoral politics. For others, these may be dramatically different concepts, perhaps each related to campaigns and elections, but with varying connotations. If we think of these in the context of media coverage of campaigns, examples may quickly come to mind of news stories that have demonstrated these ideas. But how do news reports demonstrate the notion of contest, or conflict, in a campaign and with what possible effect on voters? These questions underlie the issues raised in this chapter on news coverage of the 2014 US Senate campaigns.

A central question of this study is whether there is a "conflict bias" in political coverage. Conflict bias is heightened media attention to events that directly reflect or indirectly suggest a conflict, a disagreement, or a confrontation. This differs from a political bias in news, which is considered favoritism toward one candidate or another, which the media are accused of regularly. News media are likely to cover conflict in general; in the specific context of political campaigns, news media are more likely to focus on conflict between candidates, to the potential detriment of other topics of news coverage.

This chapter will report and discuss the findings of a content analysis of news coverage of the 2014 US Senate elections. Specifically, front pages of daily newspapers in each of the 34 US Senate races from 2014 were examined. The prominence of news attention to the US Senate races will be assessed, specifically through an analysis of front page attention to the race, and evidence of a conflict bias will be examined through news photographs and headlines.

Literature Review

The context for this analysis of 2014 Senate campaign coverage is situated in three different theoretical areas: conflict bias, prominence of coverage in agenda setting, and visual framing. The intersection of these areas and related research provide a foundation for the current examination of campaign coverage, to explore to what degree a conflict bias is present in campaign coverage, how prominent such coverage is, and how different aspects (verbal and visual) of coverage demonstrate conflict.

Conflict Bias

Rather than examine news coverage for evidence of a partisan bias, this study will explore the presence of what may be a more common, and potentially problematic, issue in coverage: conflict bias. Such portrayals may be more common than partisan bias, as conflict has no political affiliation—it can fit any candidate of any political party. It simply requires the ability to contrast a candidate to one's opponent, perhaps to demonstrate a divide wider than actually exists or to focus on disagreement rather than consensus. Conflict bias in news can be problematic in that it not only misrepresents a campaign, boiling it down to a simplistic candidate-vs.-candidate strategy. Such coverage also ignores what are likely more relevant aspects of a campaign, in particular, information a voter may wish to consume for the purpose of deciding how to cast one's ballot.

Bennett's (2012) dramatization news bias closely parallels this conflict bias. "Drama, after all, is the quintessential medium for represented human conflict…The main principle guiding the casting of newsmakers in their nightly roles has more to do with their potential as dramatic actors than with any natural preeminence they may have in the political scheme of things" (p. 54). Other framing research confirms this attention in coverage to conflict, as Paletz and Entman (1981) assert, "Drama is a defining characteristic of news. An event is particularly newsworthy if it has some elements of a dramatic nature" (p. 17).

Past campaign and media research reflect this conceptualization of a conflict bias as well. For instance, Reber and Benoit's (2001) research on negativity of coverage is relevant, as negativity often highlights conflicts and disagreements in a campaign (between candidates, or within a campaign, for example). Their research found that news coverage of the 2000 presidential primary debates focused more on attacks and defenses of political candidates rather than on remarks from the debate praising the candidates and their accomplishments. And as Benoit, Hansen, and Stein (2004) state, "Attacks (and defenses) are by nature conflictual and therefore might be expected to be more interesting to readings of newspapers articles than acclaims" (p. 255).

The conflict bias is also demonstrated in Edwards's (2012) conceptualization of oppositional positioning, which she describes as having two individuals in an image "set in an oppositional face-off" (p. 686). Edwards explored this aspect in news coverage of the 2004 presidential debates and found opposition positioning "captures and heightens political conflict within and outside of campaigns"

(p. 692). In Conners's (2008) analysis of coverage of the 2004 presidential debates, headlines demonstrated more conflict than photographs themselves. Conners concluded, "The visual positioning of candidates as if they were looking directly at each other suggests confrontation and possible conflict, and was quite common in the individual photographs of Bush and Kerry in the debates" (p. 20). However, in many instances, such positioning was done through editing and layout of photographs rather than the photograph itself presenting actual conflict or disagreement between candidates. This analysis will examine such patterns in campaign coverage more broadly, not just within the context of political debate coverage.

Prominence and Media Agenda

Agenda-setting research has thoroughly examined how the salience of issues raised by media coverage is reflected in public opinion. The focus from that research most relevant here is: besides repetition of coverage of an issue, how is an issue made more salient in news coverage? As Fortunato (2014) states, "the exposure characteristics of frequency, placement, and the amount of time and space devoted to an issue as determined by the media imply issue importance" (p. 4). Fortunato's analysis of news attention on Angelina Jolie's 2013 *New York Times* op-ed piece about her double mastectomy examined prominence when a story was featured in a network newscast. While other national and international news took place during the same time period, the national television networks covered the Jolie story within their first five stories on the news the evening her op-ed appeared. In broadcast coverage, story order is one variable that reflects prominence, as well as story length and the number of reporters assigned to cover an event. For newspaper coverage, Carroll and McCombs (2003) describe a number of qualities that demonstrate the newsworthiness of an issue, beyond the frequency with which a story or issue gets reported: "Newspapers communicate a host of cues about the relative salience of the objects on their daily agenda. The lead story on page one, front page versus inside page, the size of the headline, and even the length of a story all communicate information about the salience of the various objects on the news agenda" (p. 37). During a political campaign, voters may use those cues to assess the importance of an election or a particular candidate.

While the frequency of coverage is clearly a primary variable for examining salience of an issue in news coverage, the prominence of that coverage also reflects the importance of that issue on the media's agenda. There is only so much real estate on the front page of a newspaper; there can only be one cover for a magazine, and only one "lead" story on a network newscast. In online news, stories placed higher on a screen, with more space dedicated to them, more photos, and larger headlines, demonstrate prominence.

The issue of how Senate races are covered, in terms of whether they are on the media agenda or not, and how prominently they are featured in coverage, is relevant to explore in a midterm election. In a presidential election cycle, all other races compete for media attention with the presidential campaign; a presidential debate is likely to garner attention and consume front page attention in newspapers, at the cost of attention to local and state races. Kaplan, Goldstein, and Hale (2005) found

that in television news in October 2004, 55 percent of local TV newscasts aired a story about the presidential campaign, while only 8 percent aired a story about a state or local campaign. Having a presidential candidate visit one's state may have the same result, even if other candidates make appearances at those events. Given that premise, state-level races, such as those for the US Senate, have a better chance of frequent and prominent coverage in midterm elections than they do during a presidential election.

Competition for media coverage exists within midterm elections as well. For example, if news organizations have one or two reporters to cover campaigns, a US Senate race may compete for attention against a gubernatorial campaign, numerous House races, as well as other statewide and local elections. In this era of declining revenue for news operations, few organizations can afford to have individual reporters assigned to individual candidates except at the presidential campaign level (Gulati, Just, & Crigler, 2004; Hayes, 2008). It is likely in state-level news operations that a single reporter will be assigned to cover the candidates in multiple state-level or local races.

Visual Framing

Given the importance of aspects of prominence of a news story discussed above on potential agenda-setting effects, the visual elements accompanying a news story contribute to that effect as well, by the framing of an issue as well as the salience of that issue. Wanta (1988) suggests photographs to be influential, saying "if a newspaper devotes a great deal of space to an issue by running a large picture, the reader should perceive that issue to have a great deal of importance and should raise it above the other issues on his or her agenda" (p. 108). Entman's (1993) notion of framing is that of a process: "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). The framing of an issue allows for some elements to be made more salient, which may result in influencing how people think about that issue, as well as whether or not they think about it at all. Research by Coleman and Banning (2006) explored these effects in the context of network TV news framing of political candidates; they found that viewers' exposure to candidates' nonverbal behaviors through news coverage was correlated with perceptions of candidate qualities. They note that while agenda-setting research typically finds a second-level effect through verbal content, "surely pictures may also have some effect" (p. 321).

Grabe and Bucy's (2009) extensive analysis of candidate character frames in television news coverage of four presidential campaigns demonstrates the complexities as well as the importance of the visual framing analysis. They note a struggle in frame control occurs between image handlers and journalists. While a campaign may seek to present a candidate as a "populist campaigner"—one of their three character frames (in addition to the "ideal candidate" and the "sure loser" frames), that framing may not be consistent with the imagery presented through news coverage or the candidates' own appearance or actions.

Given the research described above on news attention toward conflict in campaigns, the prominence of coverage in the context of agenda setting, and the importance that visuals play in framing an issue in news, this study explores these factors in the context of the coverage of the 2014 US Senate elections to understand how these campaigns were covered in newspapers.

Method

The front pages of daily US newspapers in states with a US Senate race in 2014 were collected through the online Newseum.org collection. Given the focus of this study on the prominence of media coverage, newspaper front pages demonstrate the most prominent area of attention and, therefore, are most appropriate for this analysis. Online images of front pages were captured as JPEGs daily during the final two months of the 2014 campaign from September 2 through November 4. This time period follows the conclusion of most state-level primary elections for the US Senate (a few concluded in early September) and is also a common timetable used in the analysis of campaign coverage (e.g., Dunaway & Stein, 2013; Kahn & Kenney, 2002). Newspaper front pages from the capital city of states with a US Senate race were collected, and when they were not available, the paper from the largest city in that state was chosen. In cases where that paper's front page was not available through Newseum.org at the time of data collection, a paper from another major city in that state was collected.

For each news story, the state, newspaper title, and date were recorded. Front pages were then coded to identify whether a story related to the US Senate race appeared or not, or whether another race was covered instead and, if so, what other election was covered (e.g., governor, US House, a story about voters and voting, a race in another state, a ballot issue in that state, or another local or statewide race in that state). In cases where more than one election story appeared on the front page, only the US Senate story was noted if there was one, and only the story taking up the largest percent of the front page was coded for other election coverage.

News headlines of US Senate stories were recorded and coded for the tone of the coverage (negative, neutral, positive) about the race; if an individual candidate was named, the headline was coded for tone toward that particular candidate. Headlines were also noted whether they mentioned a Senate candidate by name or not, which is a sign of how prominently a candidate was profiled in the news coverage. While headlines do not represent the entirety of coverage of a campaign event or candidate, they are one indicator of the tone of the coverage, if conflict was either present or suggested by the reporting. Andrew's (2007) research on newspaper headlines provides the justification for such an analysis, as he suggests headlines provide a shortcut to readers: "A reader who scanned the headlines during the campaign likely found a more abundant supply of negative and positive comment on the main parties and leaders than did someone who more closely followed this campaign in the news and opinion section of their paper" (p. 37).

Prominence of a story was measured by whether the story appeared above the fold of the paper or not, and what proportion of the front page was consumed by that story (less than 25 percent, 25–50 percent, more than 50 percent). These

variables are indicators of prominence in how much attention the story received on the front page of the paper in terms of placement (above the fold suggests greater prominence) and size (the larger the story on the front page, the more prominent it is). This analysis does not take into consideration the length of a story once it continues on from the front page of the newspaper, but only how prominently it was featured on the front page.

Visuals accompanying US Senate news stories were coded as well; if a story had an accompanying photograph on the front page, it was coded further. The presence or absence of a US Senate candidate in that photo was noted, the tone of the photograph was coded (negative, neutral, positive) regarding the candidate featured, and the type of candidate action in the photograph was also coded (a simple "head shot" of the candidate, or if the candidate was pictured meeting people, smiling, or speaking at an event). Photographs as well as headlines were then analyzed further on a qualitative basis for evidence of conflict bias.

As principal investigator, the author coded all 1,322 newspaper front pages in this collection. To test the reproducibility of the coding scheme, four undergraduate students were trained for preliminary coding of a sample (n = 259) of this data set. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's (2004) alpha. Reliability was acceptable for all aspects coded, including the presence of a US Senate story (α = 0.84), the presence of other election-related news (α = 0.83), headline tone (α = 0.72), story placement (α = 1.00), proportion of front page (α = 0.73), presence of a front page photo (α = 1.00), picture tone (α = 0.74), and candidate action in photo (α = 0.72). These tests confirm reliability of these measures, as they indicate that coders other than the principal investigator could consistently apply the coding scheme. Only the author's coding of election coverage is reported in this analysis.

Findings

A total of 37 percent of the 1,322 newspaper front pages collected for this analysis featured a news story related to the 2014 elections. The proportion focusing on US Senate campaigns, the elections of particular focus in this study, composed 9.8 percent of the sample (n = 130) and are described following this initial description of the overall election coverage.

Of election-related news coverage when a US Senate race was not featured on the front page of a daily newspaper (n = 360), gubernatorial elections were covered most frequently (n = 140), followed by voters (n = 47) and US House races (n = 44). Few stories featured attention on a race occurring in a neighboring state (n = 8) or on ballot issues (n = 13) voters would be considering. An additional 108 front page election stories were coded as covering "other" races; for example, such stories that covered races for mayor, school superintendent, state treasurer, lieutenant governor, or state supreme court were included in this particular category.

In analyzing the amount of attention over time (see Figure 7.1), the last two months of the 2014 midterm election started with a considerable amount of coverage, often in the form of early poll results (an average of 31.7 percent of front pages the first four days in September). Through the rest of September, front page coverage of election averaged 26.6 percent. In the first half of October, coverage

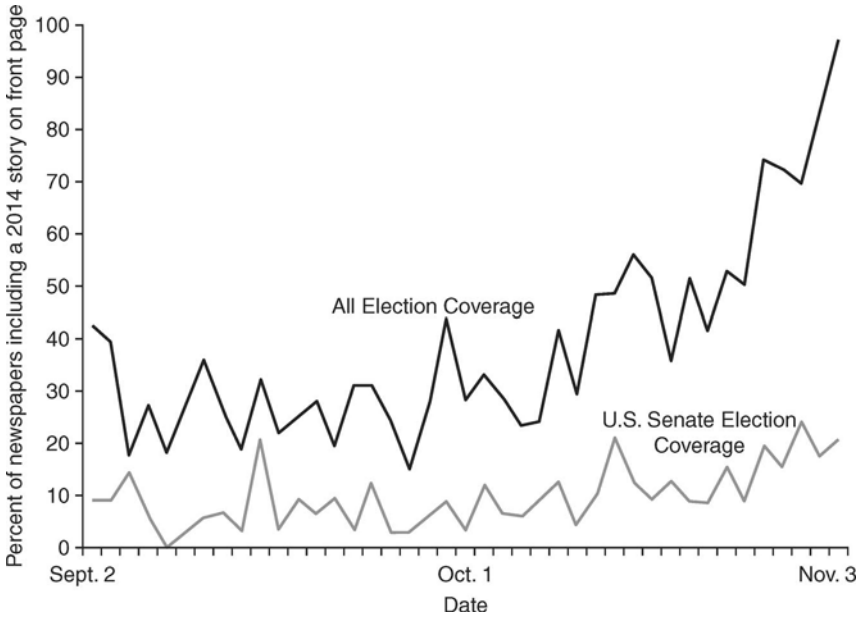

Figure 7.1 Percentage of newspapers covering 2014 elections on front page, September 2 to Election Day.

increased slightly (34 percent of front pages), and the second half of October had a steady increase in coverage, with an average of 55 percent of front pages covering an election. In the final days of the 2014 election cycle, campaign coverage appeared on more than 90 percent of front pages.

In tracking the lower line in Figure 7.1, coverage given to the US Senate races, there is a fairly flat and persistently low rate of coverage across those two months, with a slight increase in the final two weeks of the campaign. The early peak on September 15 (20.6 percent of front pages covered a Senate race) occurred with an influx of poll results in many races, as well as controversy occurring in some Senate races (in particular Kansas, where the Democratic nominee Chad Taylor withdrew from the race and questions followed whether his name would remain on the ballot or not). The rest of September had typically under 10 percent of front pages covering Senate races. The peak on October 19, with Senate race coverage appearing on 21.2 percent of front pages, took place as many debates were held and poll results were updated.

From these results, it should be noted that some papers publish in tabloid style (e.g., the *Delaware State News*), so they may have just a couple of stories on the front page. In most traditional newspaper formats, a front page could easily feature four or more stories, along with briefs on news as well as teasers to stories appearing elsewhere in the day's edition. These results suggest that while prominence of elections overall increased in the final month of the campaign, rarely did 20 percent of front pages feature the US Senate race in the final two months of the 2014 campaign.

In looking further at those 130 news stories on the US Senate races (9.8 percent of the sample collected), the greatest rates of coverage appeared in states with high-profile races. In some states these were open seats with no incumbent, while in other states they were races where an incumbent faced a serious challenger to remain in office (and in a number of instances in 2014, those incumbents lost their seats). For example, Kansas had the highest rate of coverage of US Senate races, with 55 percent of front pages featuring a story on that race between September 2 and November 3 (see Table 7.1). This was the Senate race in which Democrat Chad Taylor withdrew as well as where independent candidate Greg Orman offered a serious challenge to incumbent Pat Roberts. These higher rates of coverage show greater media attention in more contested races. These races may be seen as inherently involving more conflict, either as open races without a potential incumbent or as closed races where an incumbent could not easily assume reelection. It should also be noted that of the 34 states having US Senate races in 2014, most had no front page news coverage, including Alabama, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Many of these states had high-profile gubernatorial elections that likely dominated election coverage, which diverted attention away from the US Senate race.

Within these front page stories on the US Senate races, the majority of headlines (59.7 percent) were coded to be neutral, with negative headlines leading 20.2 percent of news stories and positive headlines leading 20.1 percent of stories. These findings suggest a conflict bias was not very prominent in such coverage, at least as far as negative headlines might demonstrate. Three themes were identified through qualitative analysis of the headlines. First, many of the headlines covered some aspect of the horse-race competition. Such stories typically reported who was leading or trailing in polls, who had a favorable status as a frontrunner, who was closing the gap, or who was still struggling in the race. The popularity of such a focus is consistent with Love and Fico's (2006) findings from 2004 Senate campaign coverage, in which strategy frames (including the horse-race of who is winning or losing) were found in more than half of their sample, while policy frames (coverage that discussed candidate's issue positions) were found in only one-third of stories.

Examples of such horse-race headlines in 2014 include the following: "Underdog Wade remains confident against Coons" (*Delaware State News*, October 6, 2014),

Table 7.1 States with front page coverage of 2014 Senate race

State	*Percentage of front pages covering Senate race*	*Nature of Senate race*
Kansas	55.0	High-profile challenge
Alaska	36.8	Incumbent lost
Kentucky	31.6	High-profile challenge
New Hampshire	29.3	High-profile challenge
North Carolina	17.5	Incumbent lost
Georgia	15.0	Open seat
West Virginia	14.7	Open seat
Iowa	14.6	Open seat

"Braley, Ernst race will go down to the wire" (*Omaha World Herald*, October 31, 2014), "Despite gains by Weh, Udall leads by wide margin" (*Albuquerque Journal*, September 15, 2014), "Durbin holds formidable lead" (*Chicago Tribune*, September 15, 2014), "Peters has rebuilt lead in race for senate seat" (*Detroit Free Press*, October 3, 2014), and "Merkley, Wehby race looks lopsided" (*Register-Guard*, October 21, 2014). Some of these headlines suggest the closeness of the contest, while others call attention to either the gains one candidate has made or the margin one candidate enjoys. For example, in the Kentucky Senate campaign, noted above for a higher rate of coverage on the newspaper front pages, the headlines conveyed the back-and-forth close nature of this race: "Grimes now back in lead" (*Courier Journal*, October 7, 2014), "McConnell, Grimes locked in dead heat" (*Lexington Herald Leader*, October 21, 2014), followed by "McConnell widens lead" (October 31, 2014).

A second predominant theme of US Senate campaign headlines was coverage of candidate debates, where the debate is framed as a competition, in which candidates "battle" or "spar" with each other. Headlines rarely declared winners and losers, although they are common in the coverage of presidential debates (Conners, 2008). Debate headlines of Senate races that demonstrated this "debate as competition" frame included the following: "Sparks fly in final Franken McFadden faceoff" (*Pioneer Press*, November 3, 2014), "Gillespie slams Warner on Puckett allegations" (*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, October 14, 2014), "Hagan, Tillis clash in their opening debate" (*Charlotte Observer*, September 4, 2014), "Capito, Tennant trade barbs" (*Charleston Daily Mail*, October 8, 2014), and "Orman, Roberts tangle in Overland Park" (*Topeka Capital-Journal*, October 9, 2014). Even without naming candidates, generic headlines on Senate debates presented conflict: "Plenty of punches and a fiery finish" (*Des Moines Register*, September 29, 2014), "Politicians pitch and punch" (*Clarion Ledger*, October 31, 2014), "Senate candidates spar on records, health care" (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, October 14, 2014), and "U.S. Senate candidates' key differences show in debate" (*Daily Oklahoman*, October 8, 2014). A few others that demonstrate this generic approach are noteworthy for criticizing both candidates—"Senate rivals clash with familiar barbs" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 3, 2014) and "Senate opponents offer few specifics" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 14, 2014), and there was one rare instance where the headline presented consensus between two opposing candidates—"Senate hopefuls agree on need to stop ISIS" (*Des Moines Register*, October 29, 2014).

A third theme of Senate news that demonstrated conflict was headlines that either repeated an attack made by one candidate against an opponent or raised some question about a candidate and were, therefore, coded as negative. When considering the races involved in these headlines, many of them were elections noted earlier for being more competitive than other US Senate races in 2014, such as Alaska, Kansas, West Virginia, and Georgia. Questions or concerns about the candidates are apparent in the following examples: "Sullivan swims upstream to fight Begich on fisheries" (*Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 1, 2014), "Was an Anchorage budget shortfall Begich's fault?" (*Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 22, 2014), "Judges OK ballot change, blast Tennant" (*Charleston Daily Mail*, October 2, 2014), "Email: Pryor folks vetoed debate topic" (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, September 17, 2014),

"Light shed on Orman's dealing with felon" (*Topeka Capital-Journal*, September 24, 2014), "Roberts' attendance under scrutiny" (*Topeka Capital-Journal*, October 14, 2014), and "Closer look at Nunn's nonprofit" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 16, 2014).

In assessing the prominence of the candidates in campaign coverage, 60.8 percent of headlines on a US Senate race named at least one candidate. While stories covering US Senate races were not common in daily newspapers as noted above, such reporting featured candidates prominently in coverage by naming them in headlines. In looking at other variables of prominence (see Table 7.2), while campaign coverage was typically placed high on the front page, it did not dominate the front page by the size of the stories.

In assessing the photography for evidence of a conflict bias in coverage through visual framing (see Table 7.3), more than two-thirds of Senate campaign stories featured at least one photograph on the front page. In considering how active the candidate was in the photo, almost half (47.5 percent) of candidate

Table 7.2 Profile of prominence of 2014 Senate front page coverage

	Percentage of news stories
Prominent placement	
Above the fold	74.4
Below the fold	25.6
Prominent size of story	
More than 50% of front page	11.2
25–50% of front page	22.4
Less than 25% of front page	66.4

Table 7.3 Profile of visuals in 2014 Senate front page coverage

	Percentage of news stories
Visuals	
Story includes front page photo(s)	67.2
No photo on front page	32.8
Activity in photo	
Head shot	47.5
Speaking	35.0
Meeting	11.3
Smiling	6.2
Tone of photo	
Positive	17.3
Neutral	82.7
Negative	0.0

photographs featured the simplest and smallest of candidate head shots with a story. Candidates appeared fairly active in 52.5 percent of photos, speaking at events, meeting people, or smiling. Given what activity was featured in the photographs themselves, there was little evidence of conflict in these photos, whether it could have been demonstrated by some sort of disagreement, contrast, or competition. Even though debate coverage photography often portrays the conflict between opposing presidential candidates (Conners, 2008; Edwards, 2012), that did not appear to be the case in most photographs featuring US Senate candidates.

The photographs of candidates in campaign coverage, beyond those that were simple head shots, demonstrate a few different patterns in visual framing. Most of these, however, do not highlight a conflict bias. For example, many candidate photographs were from political events in which the candidate was framed as the "serious speaker." In such photos we see little in the visual except for the candidate who is standing at a microphone or podium in the midst of speaking; he or she typically looks stern and not cheerful. Candidates featured in this visual frame included Greg Orman in Kansas and Mary Landrieu in Louisiana. A contrasting image to this serious speaking was the "smiling meet and greet" candidate, oftentimes featured in the photograph with a political celebrity attending a rally with the candidate. Such photographs portrayed candidates either posing for a picture with someone attending a political rally or smiling and waving to the crowd while on stage at an event with a political figure. Campaign events that featured such high-profile endorsements are seen in the photographs of Senate races in Kentucky (featuring Hilary Clinton with Allison Lundergan Grimes), New Hampshire (Bill Clinton with Jean Shaheen), Minnesota (Michelle Obama with Al Franken), and Kansas (Mitt Romney and Bob Dole with Pat Roberts).

Political debates produced two typical images in news coverage: either the "candidate face off" that featured the conflict inherent in the event or a more generic debate scene featuring the "lineup of candidates." In the "face off" frame, Senate candidates were seen standing on stage or sitting at a table together, looking at each other, often both trying to speak at the same time. Such framing relies on the physical staging of the debate and was found in coverage of the Senate races in Illinois, Alaska, and Minnesota. Newspapers otherwise featured both candidates in separate photos, but the layout was constructed with two photos next to each other, so candidates appeared to be turned toward each other. This is a construction of the "face off" not as it occurred in the debate setting itself but as it was constructed in the newspaper's coverage to highlight conflict. Coverage of debates in the North Carolina Senate race, in particular, demonstrated this approach. In the debate "lineup of candidates" approach in photos, images featured candidates at their respective podiums, but no candidate was highlighted more than the other. In other cases, the photograph was a wide-angle shot of the stage of the debate event, and the candidates themselves were not the main focus of the scene. While one may typically associate a political debate with conflict, photographs of debates in New Hampshire, Georgia, West Virginia, and Iowa did not highlight that quality.

Discussion

News headlines in coverage of US Senate races in 2014 frequently demonstrated a conflict bias, by focusing attention on the competition or controversy between candidates. However, conflict or competition was not apparent in the visuals that accompanied campaign coverage. There may be a number of explanations for this finding; while approximately two-thirds of front page Senate campaign stories featured a photograph, half of these were stamp size head shots supplied by the campaign that provided little substance for evaluation. As Conners (2008) found in photographs of the 2004 presidential debates, the conflict was not usually demonstrated in the photograph itself but rather in how a newspaper cropped or organized photographs, presenting similar photos of candidates in a type of virtual face-off. Another explanation stems from the fact that coverage of the US Senate race, beyond political debates, did not offer much direct contrast between candidates. Therefore, a photograph that demonstrated conflict or contrast would be inconsistent to use with such a news story. And since news coverage of the Senate campaigns was quite infrequent in some states, such coverage was typically presented in a neutral approach.

The front page photographs in Senate campaign coverage demonstrated patterns in the visuals, but rarely portrayed conflict. Political debates were the one type of campaign event that had such images, and even then not all photographs featured conflict. Some moments of conflict occurred in the debate between candidates and were captured in pictures. However, conflict was also created in the visual construction of the news story of a political debate. Other frames not focused on conflict highlighted either the seriousness of the candidate or the positive enthusiasm a candidate expressed at a campaign event.

In terms not finding much evidence of the conflict bias in visual framing, a number of factors might explain this. These results could be interpreted as confirming reporters are remaining objective in their coverage of elections, at least in news photography, since this study found more than 82 percent of photos with Senate campaign stories were coded as neutral. Perhaps news organizations rely on dramatic headlines to get attention by featuring conflict rather than through photographs. Another interpretation of these results may be that the frequent use of stamp size headshots shows a reliance on campaign-supplied photos; it appears that photographers were not often sent to cover campaign events with reporters, perhaps evidence of newsroom staff cuts.

When reviewing the analysis of headlines for Senate campaign news, one would reach a different conclusion than from photographs, as there was plenty of conflict present in headlines of campaign stories in 2014. In this component of news stories, headlines are promoting conflict in a variety of ways. For example, the horse-race contest and competition is featured in the "who's winning/who's losing" reporting. Such reporting has been criticized for its lack of relevance to issues (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003) and its misdirection away from priorities for voters (Bennett, 2009). This pattern appears to be alive and well in the 2014 Senate race news headlines.

The "debate as contest" approach in headlines, popular in presidential debate coverage, continues in coverage of US Senate debates as well. Debates are cast in

news headlines as battles or sporting events in which the candidates "spar," "duel," or "face off." Such coverage heightens the drama of the debate, even if the debate itself is not very dramatic. Interesting in such coverage, though, is the lack of attention on the winner or loser—what is the use of a sporting match coverage without reporting the outcome? The horse-race mentality of "winner vs. loser" does not appear to translate to the debate arena in campaign coverage of Senate candidates—at least at the headline level. This may be evidence that objectivity in reporting persists and that reporters are not playing favorites in Senate races. In presidential debate coverage, candidates have many surrogates speaking on their behalf to media before and after a debate, so we hear many voices casting their verdicts as to who "won" a debate. But in the coverage of state-level debates, as shown in the news of the 2014 US Senate races, the focus appears to be more substantive and on what the candidates said about particular issues, not on who won or lost.

The headlines that either repeat an attack or raise a question about a candidate also demonstrate conflict, often introduced by an opponent's campaign. Fogarty's (2013) research on scandal coverage in the 2006 congressional elections is relevant here, as he found coverage to be higher on scandals in races when challengers pushed the scandal, made it an "issue" in a campaign, and were willing to comment on it in news coverage. Some political scandals may be discovered as a result of investigative reporting or through concerns raised by nonpartisan independent organizations, but a scandal going public may also be the outcome of opposition research by campaigns. Regardless of the origins of such negative coverage, readers should not be surprised to see scandals in campaign coverage.

The implications of finding the persistence of conflict in news headlines may be of concern when considering the possible impact on voters. This type of coverage is part of a broader pattern that, with repeated exposure from multiple sources in an election cycle, could impact voters. The impact might be on undecided voters, in terms of influencing whom to consider supporting in a race. That impact might be more widespread on voters in general, especially if the attention on conflict and attacks turns them off to voting altogether. Such disengagement would not likely occur in a vacuum, but rather in conjunction with other factors, such as the fatigue of witnessing attacks in political advertising, or political cynicism beyond the scope of electoral politics. News coverage then becomes one piece in a larger puzzle that could explain less-than-impressive voter turnout rates, even in national elections.

Turning to the results regarding coverage overall for the US Senate races in 2014, and the prominence of that news reporting, about one-fourth of all election-related coverage was on the Senate races in the last two months of the campaign. These results suggest that even in a midterm election cycle, Senate races compete with other elections for attention and resources. In some news organizations, one reporter may be covering multiple races at the same time, while in others the race may be considered important enough to warrant more staff dedicated to covering elections. In a rare instance, a news organization may afford the resources to have one reporter cover the Democratic nominee and another cover the Republican nominee in a race. While the results are not impressive in how much news attention US Senate candidates received in the 2014 midterm election, in a presidential election cycle, Senate campaigns might warrant a smaller proportion of news attention.

Although midterm campaigns compete for prominent coverage with other state-level and local races, they are not competing for attention against a national election. If a presidential candidate or key surrogate spokesperson is visiting one's state, the local news media might still ignore a state-level candidate involved in that campaign event.

Limits in campaign coverage are not necessarily a result of reporter preferences or bias, but usually simple economics of what gets readers or viewers' attention and what resources a newsroom can afford to cover elections in terms of reporter assignments. While newsroom constraints influence a reporter's choice to cover one political race over another, the news consumer is also affected by these patterns of campaign coverage. Morris and Forgette's (2007) notion of a "news grazer," although defined in a context of television news, is relevant to consider for print media as well. Remote control in hand, news grazers are passive viewers, flipping to a new channel when they lose interest in content. In thinking of such viewers as grazing news readers, the elements of prominence of coverage could provide heuristic cues to attract their limited attention. The result may be that grazers are attracted in print news to the prominence of coverage on the front page, with a compelling visual and perhaps a conflict-based headline. Such coverage could be influential in shaping news grazers' perceptions of a campaign in their limited exposure to news.

When considering reporter resources in a campaign, the financial pressures and expectations on existing news organizations make increasing or improving campaign coverage a challenge. In a presidential election cycle, debate coverage is provided nationally through wire services and syndications operated within news conglomerates. Local reporters are typically covering state-based elections, but the front page may still be dominated by national coverage that did not originate in that newsroom. A visit by a prominent national candidate to a state may dominate a reporter's time and divert attention away from state-level candidates. If today's political reporters are covering more races, as well as current events by existing elected officials, it should be no surprise that campaign coverage of state-level elections is not greater. But it is still unfortunate, when considering the agenda-setting factors of the news media. In this circumstance, what is not being made salient to voters is the elections that are taking place in their local communities, in their congressional districts, or in their states.

Conclusions formulated here were restricted given limitations of this study. A larger sample of newspapers, perhaps involving more papers from states with a Senate race, would allow for the possibility of more variability in results, or perhaps confirmation of those reported. The coding conducted was highly descriptive with many nominal-level variables, which prevented more sophisticated inferential statistical analysis. A coding scheme that involves additional variables and more extensive measures could allow for further statistical testing and exploring the statistical significance of patterns discovered. And while there appears to be plenty of visuals in print coverage of presidential campaigns (Edwards, 2012), there were fewer in the Senate races studied here. The lack of variety among photographs also restricted the analysis of visual framing.

Future research could extend this analysis in a couple of directions. While this study did not find compelling visuals accompanying most newspaper coverage, extending a visual framing analysis to television news, such as that conducted by Grabe and Bucy (2009), would likely result in a wider variety of visuals to assess. The televisual medium is more likely to use a variety of visual images of a political candidate. A comparison of print versus broadcast coverage of the same campaign events would be intriguing for studying the visual frames across two different mass media. Another direction to take would be to extend this analysis to a presidential election cycle to address two key questions. First, how does state-level campaign coverage differ from presidential coverage in reflecting a conflict bias? Second, how does midterm election coverage differ from that in presidential election years in terms of prominence and the use of visuals? A comparison of these findings to a similar study of coverage during a presidential election cycle would allow one to see how unique midterm elections are and how different news coverage is for state-level campaigns versus presidential elections.

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CHAPTER 8

THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF LATE-NIGHT POLITICAL HUMOR: FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE SALIENCE IN THE 2014 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris

A multitude of studies have shown that national media coverage of Congress has declined over the past several decades (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2005; Kimball & Patterson, 1997; Lichter & Amundson, 1994). Local coverage of individual members of Congress is much more extensive than national coverage of the institution (Arnold, 2006), and as a result, press secretaries and communication directors working for individual members of Congress prioritize local media coverage over national coverage.

National media coverage of Congress as an institution increases as elections approach. While Congress takes a back seat to the media's fixation on the race for the White House during presidential election years (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2005), congressional midterm elections garner a good deal of attention. Coverage, however, is not necessarily focused on individual races or the institution as much as it focuses on the election as a referendum on the sitting president (Cohen, Krassa, & Hamman, 1991). The overall approach is retrospective, focusing on how the president and his party have performed in addressing key policy issues and events since the previous presidential election. This focus seems to be shared by voters. For example, more than half (52 percent) of midterm voters in 2014 considered their votes to be either for or against President Obama (Pew Research Center, 2014). This retrospective focus on the president's handling of his job is particularly the case with respect to foreign policy and national security issues, where the role of Congress is almost always portrayed as secondary to that of the president (Morris & Clawson, 2005).

Our intention in this chapter is to investigate how media framing of President Obama's handling of foreign policy issues in the weeks preceding the 2014 congressional midterm elections influenced people's emotional perceptions of those issues and events. Our focus is on Obama's handling of foreign policy, in particular

his response to the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Russian aggression in Ukraine. Each was front-and-center in the media's coverage of issues in the weeks preceding the 2014 midterm election.

More specifically, our interest is in a particular type of midterm campaign coverage: political comedy. Why political comedy? The number and type of venues in which the media covers political issues and events have expanded dramatically in recent decades (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). Within this newly expanded media landscape, political humor has emerged as a source of news and entertainment for a significant portion of the American population (Baym, 2005; Lichter, Baumgartner, & Morris, 2015). In the past several years, academics have taken note of the effects of political humor on viewers' evaluations of public officials and political candidates (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006, 2008, 2012; Becker, 2012; Young, 2004, 2008). Journalists and others have also begun to take humorists' perspectives on politics seriously (e.g., Dowd, 2006). Indeed, a 2009 poll from *Time* magazine (Linkins, 2009) showed that Comedy Central's Jon Stewart was a more trusted journalist than the three network nightly news anchors (at the time, Brian Williams, Charlie Gibson, and Katie Couric).

Most previous investigations into political humor have focused on the potential effects of humor on opinions of public officials and presidential candidates. Very few studies have examined attitudes toward specific policy issues, and we are aware of no studies that examined the effects of political humor viewership about policy issues in the context of often-pivotal midterm elections.

Foreign Policy Events and Public Anxiety

Our interest in foreign (as opposed to domestic) policy issues during the midterm election campaign is twofold. First, foreign policy issues were featured in the news a good deal throughout the summer and into the fall campaign of 2014. This was particularly true of the activities of ISIS and the Russian occupation of Ukraine. Second, our focus on foreign policy is driven by the unique nature of foreign policy and national security topics. Compared to domestic policy issues, foreign policy and national security are often associated with higher levels of anxiety for the public (Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005).

This anxiety is not necessarily the result of individual knowledge about foreign policy and national security issues. Indeed, the mass public tends not to evaluate political issues and events from a policy-based perspective (Converse, 1964). This would require a certain knowledge and understanding of the issues. Many have suggested that the public is by and large ignorant about foreign policy (Almond, 1977, but see Aldrich, Sullivan, & Borgida, 1989, and Wittkopf, 1990, for counterarguments). But because foreign policy issues and events are covered by the media (Gans, 1979), this coverage has the potential to affect public opinion. This may even be true among people who are less knowledgeable about the issues (Baum, 2003; Berinsky, 2009). In short, individuals who encounter news about foreign policy may still be affected even if they do not fully comprehend the particulars of a given issue.

Media coverage during the 2014 midterm election campaign focused heavily on two widely held sources of concern for the American public: military conflict with terrorist groups in the Middle East, in particular ISIS, and Russian aggression in Ukraine. Political comedians followed suit. This is not uncommon given that the monologues of late-night comics tend to be topical in nature (Lichter, Baumgartner, & Morris, 2015). The primary focus of the jokes was on President Obama's handling of and responses to these crises, but this is, again, consistent with most news coverage. What effect did late-night "coverage" of these potentially anxiety-producing topics have on viewers' feelings about the issues? In the following section, we discuss our expectations.

Threat, Anxiety, and Anxiety Reduction

Certain political issues have the ability to translate into a sense of personal threat among the mass public, and research has shown that the perception of threat has the potential to change attitudes and behavior among individuals (Gusfield, 1986; Hansen, 1985; Miller, Krosnick, Lowe, & Holbrook, 2002; Miller & Krosnick, 2004). In some cases, the sense of threat has been shown to sometimes compel political action (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000). Whether anxiety about a political threat contributes to constructive or unconstructive political attitudes and behavior is debatable. Several political psychology scholars argue that anxiety motivates interest and the desire to learn more about the issue (Brader, 2005, 2006; Marcus & Mackuen, 1993; Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000). Others argue that anxious individuals demonstrate flawed information processing and are thus more likely to make poorer decisions than those without anxiety (Eysenck, 1992; Gadarian & Albertson, 2014; Matthews, 1990). But normative questions about whether anxious citizens are better democratic citizens are beyond the scope of this study.

Our interest is in the role political humor played in producing anxiety over the activities of ISIS and Russian aggression in the context of the 2014 midterm elections. The effect of humor on anxiety has been addressed by a wide range of psychology and social psychology scholars (Adams & McGuire, 1986; Christie & Moore, 2005; Dienstbier, 1995; Goldstein, 1987; Kelter, Dacher, & Bonanno, 1997; Strick, Holland, van Baaren, & van Knippenberg, 2009; Yovetich, Dale, & Hukak, 1990). These findings suggest that humor reduces anxiety over a series of issues, including bereavement, physical pain, and potential risks and threats. While the theoretical reasoning differs across studies, the overall consensus is that humor influences cognition in a manner that diminishes the impact of the source on levels of anxiety.

We contend that humorous coverage of foreign policy crises during the 2014 midterm elections had such an effect. Grounded in the psychology literature outlined above, we intend to demonstrate that exposure to political humor lowered anxiety surrounding President Obama's handling of the Russian incursion into Ukraine and the activities of ISIS. We suggest that political humor in the context of an election campaign may serve as "comfort food" for the mass public. In the section below, we discuss the experimental methodology we used to test our expectations. After presenting our findings, we outline implications for how political

humor may play a role in anxiety reduction surrounding foreign policy events during a midterm election.

Methodology

We tested our hypotheses using a post-test-only experimental design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Subjects were recruited from several Introduction to American Politics classes during the final week of the 2014 midterm campaign (November 3–6, 2014). At our institution, students in these classes are comprised primarily of freshman and sophomores, although some juniors and seniors enroll as well. We first explained that we were conducting a generic survey about political issues and that their participation was voluntary (well over 99 percent chose to participate). Each student was then given one of three survey packets, corresponding to one of the experimental conditions. The first was a control condition in which individuals were not subjected to any stimuli and completed a post-test survey only.

In two experimental conditions, subjects were asked to read an information page prior to completing the survey. This page contained a brief introduction explaining that we were interested in their thoughts about some contemporary political humor, asking them to read a few jokes "taken from well-known late-night comedians (for example, David Letterman, Jimmy Kimmel, Jon Stewart)" before completing the survey. None of the jokes contained attribution to a specific late-night comic. In addition, we inserted a political cartoon between the second and third jokes. We did this so that even if a student did not take the time to read the jokes or did so hastily, they would at least have been exposed to some measure of political humor. Cartoons are not reproduced here because of copyright issues.

Jokes were selected as follows. We asked our graduate assistants to collect 30–35 jokes on each subject via searches on Google.com. The lists presented to us by these students did not have the names of comics listed. We selected the final five based on how humorous we thought they were; the fact that five of the ten jokes selected were told by Jimmy Fallon is purely coincidence. In the second experimental condition, jokes revolved around President Obama's approach to dealing with the threat of ISIS. The issue had been in the news throughout the summer and figured into the fall campaign as well. Jokes included:

> "President Obama said that over 40 countries have offered to help the U.S. fight ISIS. Of course they said it the same way your friends do when they promise to help you move. 'Yeah just call me, you know, if I'm around. It'll be fun.'" (Jimmy Fallon, September 24, 2014)
>
> "During a speech last night, President Obama announced that the U.S. will lead a huge multinational coalition to fight the terror groups in Iraq. Of course, most people just turned it off because they thought it was a rerun." (Jimmy Fallon, September 11, 2014)
>
> "This week President Obama gave a big speech from the White House where he outlined his plan to quote 'degrade and ultimately destroy' the terror group ISIS. When asked how, he said, 'I'll build their website.'" (Jimmy Fallon, September 12, 2014)

> "President Obama is sending troops back to Iraq. He said, 'Don't worry, we should not be there any longer than a Kardashian marriage.'" (David Letterman, June 18, 2014)
>
> "President Obama is sending a couple hundred troops to Iraq. We spent six years trying to figure a way to get out of Iraq. And now we're back. But this time there is an exit strategy. Barack Obama has an exit strategy. In 2016, he's gone." (David Letterman, June 17, 2014)

A political cartoon ("ISIS Strategy" by Rick McKee, September 24, 2014, http://www.cagle.com/news/isis-bombing/) showed Obama writing the words "Dear ISIS, I now have a strategy" on a missile. The idea is that Obama's response to the ISIS threat may have been less than timely. Russia–Ukraine jokes included the following:

> "Today Russia announced that it will join America's fight with the terror group ISIS. Then Putin said, 'But I did not say which side.'" (Jimmy Fallon, September 26, 2014)
>
> "President Obama has convinced the leaders of the world's biggest economies to move the G-8 summit out of Russia this summer and meet in Brussels instead. Then Vladimir Putin said, 'All good. By summer, Brussels will be part of Russia.'" (Jimmy Fallon, March 25, 2014).
>
> "The situation in Ukraine keeps getting more tense. And now Vladimir Putin has moved 10,000 troops to the Russian-Ukrainian border. Russia says its troops are there only for a training exercise. When asked what they're training for, Russian officials said, 'Invading Ukraine.'" (Jimmy Fallon, March 14, 2014)
>
> "Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a treaty this morning that formally absorbs Crimea into the Russian Federation. So if you felt bad because you didn't know where Crimea was, don't worry, it's gone." (Seth Meyers, March 18, 2014)
>
> "New reports show that the Crimean vote to join Russia on Sunday did not include an option for 'no.' There were only two boxes on the ballot, one for 'yes,' and one for 'murder my family.'" (Seth Meyers, March 12, 2014)

A cartoon ("Obama's Condemnation" by Gary Varvel, March 14, 2014, http://www.cagle.com/news/russia-and-ukraine/page/2/) showed Obama in a Ukrainian border guard shack watching a (presumably Russian) tank driving into the country. Obama shouts, "Putin! Stop! Come back here or I'll be forced to draft a strongly worded condemnation." Similar to the ISIS cartoon, the message is that Obama's response to Russian aggression may have been inadequate.

In order to ensure that students read the jokes—in other words, were subjected to the experimental stimuli—the survey packet instructed them to "select the TWO (2) that you think were funniest and second-funniest. In other words, pick a first and second place winner." Jokes were numbered (randomly), and the first two questions of the survey asked respondents to enter the identifying number of the jokes they thought were funniest.

Our final sample consisted of $n = 74$ for the control condition, $n = 74$ for the ISIS humor condition, and $n = 77$ for the Ukraine humor condition.

For each humor condition, respondents were asked three questions, all variations of a standard thermometer or Likert scale question (response options 1–10),

designed to measure their perceptions of the salience and importance of the issue, as well as how anxious the issue made them feel. For example, the ISIS humor condition asked, (1) "In general, how important do you think the activities of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are to the US today?"; (2) "In general, how often do you think about the activities of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)?"; and (3) "In general, how anxious do the activities of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) make you?" Respondents were asked to select a value from 1 to 10, in which 1 refers to not at all important/often/anxious and 10 refers to very important/often/anxious. The Ukraine humor questions substituted the words "the issue of the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine" for "the activities of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)." Subjects in the control group were also asked these six questions. All of these questions served as dependent variables in both of our models.

The primary independent variables of interest were the experimental conditions, included in the models as a dummy variable (1 = read humor, 0 = did not read humor). The control group was the reference category in each case. We controlled for several standard demographic and political variables as well. These included age as entered by each respondent, gender ("What is your sex?"), and race ("What is your race?"). The mean age of our respondents was 19.5 (*SD* = 3.1) years; females constituted 48.9 percent and nonwhites constituted 32.4 percent of our sample. Political party affiliation was measured by asking respondents, "What is your political party affiliation?" Responses were coded 1 = strong Republican, 2 = Republican, 3 = weak Republican, 4 = independent or other, through 7 = strong Democrat. A total of 39.8 percent of the sample identified as Democrat (response choices 5, 6, or 7) and 8.9 percent as "independent or other" (29 respondents selected an "I don't know, or I haven't given it much thought" response and were coded as missing data).

The study also included variables designed to control for respondents' civic knowledge, attention to the news, and viewership of late-night political humor. Civic knowledge was measured by asking five multiple choice questions: "Who is the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?" "Do you know which party has a majority in the House and Senate of the U.S. Congress?" "Which of the following individuals is a Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court?" "How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to override a presidential veto?" and "How many times may a member of Congress be re-elected?" Correct responses were scored as "1" and incorrect as "0." Results were added to form an index, with a range of possible values from zero to five. The mean score for this variable was 2.2 correct responses (*SD* = 1.31).

Attention to news about the congressional campaign was measured by the following question: "How closely would you say you have been following news about the upcoming (2014) congressional elections?" (3 = very closely, 2 = somewhat closely, 1 = hardly at all, and 0 = not at all). Almost half (49.8 percent) of the sample reported following news about the campaign somewhat or very closely. We also controlled for viewership of late-night political humor ("Watch Late Night"). We first asked how often respondents viewed "late-night television talk shows such as David Letterman, Jimmy Fallon, or Jimmy Kimmel" (3 = regularly, 2 = sometimes,

1 = hardly ever, 0 = never); 41.4 percent reported watching one of these shows sometimes or regularly. A second question asked subjects how often they viewed *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and/or *The Colbert Report* ("Watch Comedy Central"); 37.3 percent responded they did so sometimes or regularly. Finally, 51.4 percent reported they keep up with the news ("Web News") by visiting "the websites of network television news (for example, CNN.com, ABCNews.com, etc.), major national newspapers (for example, USAToday.com, NYTimes.com, etc.), or other online news magazine and opinion sites such as Slate.com or the *National Review* online" sometimes or regularly.

Findings

The study employed ordinary least squares (OLS) regression in order to test respondents' perceived salience, importance, and anxiety of the activities of ISIS and the issue of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Two models were tested, one for each set of issue-specific dependent variables (the same control group was used in both models). The results from each analysis, combined into a single table to conserve space, are presented in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 shows some partial support for our expectations. Subjects who were exposed to late-night jokes about the activities of ISIS were less likely than those

Table 8.1 Effect of reading humor on perceived salience, importance, and anxiety concerning the activities of ISIS and Russia's invasion/occupation of Ukraine

	Activities of ISIS			*Russian invasion of Ukraine*		
	Issue importance	*Think about*	*Anxious about*	*Issue importance*	*Think about*	*Anxious about*
Read humor	−0.35 (0.35)	−0.93 (0.44)**	−1.05 (0.48)**	0.66 (0.34)	0.11 (0.31)	0.05 (0.38)
Age	−0.07 (0.06)	−0.11 (0.08)*	−0.05 (0.08)	−0.00 (0.06)	0.17 (0.06)***	0.04 (0.07)
Gender	0.38 (0.37)	0.00 (0.46)	0.75 (0.51)*	−0.73 (0.38)**	−0.65 (0.35)**	−0.38 (0.43)
Race	−1.23 (0.45)***	−0.39 (0.56)	−1.04 (0.61)**	−0.29 (0.41)	−0.39 (0.38)	−0.18 (0.46)
Party ID	−0.02 (0.12)	−0.30 (0.15)**	−0.37 (0.16)***	0.03 (0.11)	0.03 (0.10)	−0.02 (0.12)
Civic knowledge	−0.16 (0.13)	−0.08 (0.17)	−0.25 (0.18)*	0.02 (0.15)	−0.10 (0.14)	−0.19 (0.17)
Follow news	0.22 (0.24)	0.61 (0.30)**	0.59 (0.33)**	0.01 (0.24)	0.29 (0.23)*	0.24 (0.28)
Watch late night	−0.25 (0.23)	0.13 (0.29)	0.19 (0.31)	0.18 (0.21)	0.23 (0.20)	0.18 (0.24)
Watch Comedy Central	0.12 (0.20)	0.23 (0.26)	−0.01 (0.28)	−0.24 (0.20)	0.01 (0.19)	0.04 (0.23)
Web news	0.34 (0.17)**	0.59 (0.23)***	0.47 (0.25)**	0.18 (0.18)	0.51 (0.17)***	0.48 (.21)
Constant	9.16 (1.28)***	6.58 (1.61)***	7.03 (1.76)***	5.62 (1.31)***	−1.36 (1.22)	2.22 (1.49)*
Adj. R^2	0.12	0.18	0.21	0.01	0.20	0.02
N	119	119	119	133	133	133

Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$ (one-tailed).

in the control group to report that the activities of ISIS made them anxious. The effect in both cases was statistically significant. This was not the case with regard to the importance attached to the issue. However, reading late-night jokes about the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine had no statistically significant effect on any of the three dependent variables measured. There was, in other words, no measurable discounting of the importance of the Russian/Ukraine issue on the part of subjects as a result of having been exposed to humor about the subject.

Interestingly enough, there was no significant effect of previous exposure to late-night political humor. Watching late-night humor or Comedy Central (Stephen Colbert and/or Jon Stewart) did not have a main effect on the perceived importance or threat of ISIS or Russian/Ukraine. When the experimental condition was interacted with previous exposure to late-night political humor or Comedy Central, the effect on the dependent variable was insignificant (results not shown).

With regard to the other variables included in the analyses, we found that those following news and news about the campaign considered the issue to be more important. This is not surprising, as we would expect individuals who follow the news with regularity to take matters of foreign (as well as domestic) policy more seriously than those who do not. Preexisting civic knowledge, however, had no discernible impact on the dependent variables. In fact, the coefficients are actually negative in all cases but one. While it would be expected that those who are more knowledgeable would demonstrate more concern on matters of foreign policy, it is also the case that civic knowledge and the tendency to follow the news are correlated ($r = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$), thus introducing multicolinearity into the models. However, when the models were reestimated with the "follow news" variable dropped, the civic knowledge variable remained insignificant (results not shown). Ultimately, this set of findings suggests that following the news relates more closely to issue salience, perceived importance, and anxiety about ISIS and the Russian invasion of Ukraine than overall civic knowledge. Furthermore, it is worth noting that neither civic knowledge nor the tendency to follow the news interacted with the experimental stimuli to significantly impact the dependent variable.

Democrats seemed to attach less importance to the activities of ISIS, which is consistent with the tendency of self-identified Democrats and liberals to place less emphasis on the salience of foreign policy events than those who identify as Republican and conservative (Petrocik, 1996). While females were more likely to discount the importance of the Russia/Ukraine issue, the effect of age was inconsistent. This finding is not surprising given the small variability in the age range of our subjects (19–23). Furthermore, our analysis demonstrated that nonwhite subjects tended to take the threat more seriously than Whites. This effect was most prevalent concerning the ISIS threat.

Discussion

The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that political humor may have the ability to affect the importance that individuals give to foreign policy issues. While our results were not conclusive, they show that exposure to political comedy from late-night talk show hosts associates with lower perceptions, less frequent thinking,

and lower levels of anxiety regarding ISIS. This was not the case with respect to the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine. This may be the result of the fact that most Americans are likely to better identify with the threats of Islamic terrorists than the troubles of a country like Ukraine, a country many Americans could not locate on a map. In fact, descriptive statistics suggest this may be the case. Subjects in the control group had a mean "anxious about" score of 5.96 (*SD* = 2.79) regarding the issues of ISIS and only 3.49 (*SD* = 2.11) for Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Though our results are somewhat ambiguous, it seems as if political humor may serve as the "comfort food" of a foreign policy news diet. In other words, consistent with the literature discussed earlier in the chapter, humor may reduce anxiety regarding these issues, helping viewers feel better about news and the state of world affairs. The analysis also adds to a growing literature on the effects of political humor on political attitudes, learning, and knowledge (Becker, 2012; Xenos & Becker, 2009; Young, 2004).

From a substantive perspective, the results in Table 8.1 suggest the possibility that late-night humor can change, if only subtly, the dynamics of a midterm election. Humor is associated with lower levels of perceived threat about the activities of ISIS. This may have served to devalue the importance of the issue in the eyes of some voters. All other things being equal, this would have advantaged Democrats and disadvantaged Republicans, who were running (at least implicitly) in support of or opposed to Obama's handing of the issue.

There are now a number of late-night comics that make light of political topics, nightly or weekly. Importantly, many people allow these humorists to help shape their understanding of the political world. The humor of these individuals may move people to discount, if only marginally, the importance of the issues being discussed during the campaign. This would affect the relative efficacy of campaigns centered on these issues. This may be especially true with respect to foreign policy, inasmuch as the public is less attentive to foreign policy. Members of Congress may have more trouble campaigning on these issues.

There are a few obvious limitations to this study. First, the experiment was conducted on college students, meaning that the sample was both younger and better educated than the general public. This limits the generalizability of the findings. There are limitations with regard to the study's internal validity as well. Jokes delivered by late-night talk show hosts are heard by individuals watching television in the comfort of their own home. These jokes were read in a college classroom. It could be argued that this translates to a conservative design, inasmuch as people would presumably find the humor funnier if delivered by the comedian himself.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that foreign policy typically plays a less prominent role than domestic policy issues in congressional midterm elections. The old saw that "all politics is local" generally applies to congressional elections as well. Moreover, late-night comics focus most of their ire on individual politicians, especially presidents and presidential candidates, rather than public policy issues, foreign or domestic (Lichter, Baumgartner, & Morris, 2015). However, it is not unheard of for foreign policy to factor into midterm elections. For example, most consider

that the 2002 elections were largely a mandate on how well George W. Bush had handled—and would continue to handle—national security in the wake of 9/11.

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PART III

TECHNOLOGY IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

CHAPTER 9

THE INFLUENCE OF TWITTER POSTS ON CANDIDATE CREDIBILITY: THE 2014 MICHIGAN MIDTERMS

Terri L. Towner

The number of people actively participating in online social networking is ever increasing. According to a Pew Research Center survey (Smith, 2014), 16 percent of registered voters follow political candidates, parties, or officials on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter; this has increased from 6 percent since 2010. Forty-one percent reported they follow political figures on social media so they could find out about political news before other people (Smith, 2014). Twitter, a microblogging site that allows users to post 140 characters or less, is becoming increasingly popular among the public as well as current officeholders and political candidates. In the 2012 Republican primaries, for example, all candidates seeking office were present on Twitter. Twitter use is not limited to the top of the ticket, however. Twitter was also widely employed by candidates vying for US Senate, US House, and governor in 2010 (e.g., Hanna, Sayre, Bode, Yang, & Shah, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012). Indeed, Twitter has become a vital communication tool for campaigns, politicians, political parties, protesters, and voters (Price, 2012; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013).

Given the rising proportions of voters and candidates turning to Twitter, it is critical to examine how this platform, particularly the campaign messages tweeted to users, is influencing candidate credibility and vote choice as well as political trust, efficacy, and participation. It is well known that the mass media is capable of communicating information about candidate credibility and viability to citizens. This is important as candidates who are perceived as more credible may be more electorally successful (e.g., Burgoon, 1976; McCrosky, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1974; Miller & McReynolds, 1973; Stephen, Harrison, Husson, & Albert, 2004). In addition, it is important to examine the effects of candidate tweets on political trust, efficacy, and participation, as it is largely unknown if exposure to Twitter messages can build trust, increase one's faith in government, and mobilize young voters. If the experimental findings confirm a positive link between tweets and political attitudes, this

should encourage candidates to employ Twitter and other social media as another way to influence voters.

This study examines how candidate Twitter messages or "tweets" influence political attitudes toward candidates and government during the Michigan midterm elections. First, a content analysis of gubernatorial and senatorial candidate tweets was completed to determine the tweets' frames or topics used during the fall campaign. Second, a survey experiment was conducted in which participants were exposed to specific tweet frames. The content analysis concluded that candidates largely framed tweets to communicate calls to action, policy information, and general campaign information. Exposure to the latter tweet frames confirmed that tweets containing policy and general campaign information increased credibility of the gubernatorial and senatorial candidates. Only exposure to general campaign tweets significantly influenced vote choice in Michigan's senatorial election. None of the tweet frames influenced vote choice in the gubernatorial election. Last, exposure to candidate tweets had no influence on political trust, efficacy, and participation; however, call-to-action tweets gave a moderate boost to external efficacy among respondents.

Twitter and Campaigns and Elections

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter has become an important object of study for understanding campaigns and elections. Much of the previous literature focuses on Twitter adoption and activity by presidential candidates as well as Congress members. For instance, in the 2008 presidential campaign, both Barack Obama and John McCain used Twitter largely to disseminate campaign information, to announce events and appearances, and to publicize the release of campaign ads (Ancu, 2011). Following the social media trend, all presidential candidates vying for the Republican Party's nomination employed Twitter in the 2012 primaries, with a majority tweeting about their policy opinion followed by calls to action, campaign information, and personal posts (Moody, Cohen, & Fournon, 2013). The 2012 presidential candidates, Obama and Romney, frequently used Twitter to reach voters, with Obama far outpacing Romney on the number of tweets per day (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2012). Regarding message strategy, both candidates focused on promoting themselves across several digital platforms. Obama used Twitter largely to ask users to volunteer, vote on Election Day, and share campaign information with others, whereas Romney employed Twitter to solicit donations, ask for votes, and share campaign information (Svensson, Kiousis, & Strombak, 2014).

Since early 2007, many Congress members have adopted and maintained Twitter pages. Research examining the congressional Twittersphere primarily focused on the predictors of Twitter adoption and activity. For example, Lassen and Brown (2011) found that members were more likely to employ Twitter if they were young, served in the Senate, and were urged by party leaders to use the platform. Williams and Gulati (2010) have similarly chronicled patterns on Twitter, concluding that political party and monetary contributions received were the most significant predictors of early Twitter adoption and activity. Indeed, Twitter usage is also likely driven by a Congress member's desire to communicate more openly with their

constituents (Chi & Yang, 2011; Williams & Gulati, 2010). Thus, this research suggests that Congress members are using Twitter to communicate with their constituents. But how is Twitter specifically being used and to what effect?

Drawing on a content analysis of tweets in 2009, Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers (2010) found that the majority of Congress member tweets were purely informative (54.7 percent), mostly including links to related news coverage, press releases, and blogs, followed by tweets about Congress members' location and activities—all unrelated to official business (27 percent). Twitter was rarely used for external communication, personal messages, or official business reasons. Simply put, Twitter was largely employed by Congress members as a platform for self-promotion rather than direct interaction with other users. In another study, Congressional tweets were found to vary depending on whether Congress was in or out of session (Glassman, Strauss, & Shogan, 2009). Specifically, tweets were more policy-oriented when Congress was in session, whereas tweets were more constituent- or district-oriented when Congress was in recess (see also Edelman Digital, 2012; Haber, 2011; Hemphill, Otterbachker, & Shapiro, 2013).

By the 2010 elections, Twitter was a widely embraced campaign tool by both congressional incumbents and challengers. The latter was particularly true among 2010 US Senate candidates in competitive races (Amman, 2010; Haber, 2011). Similarly, in the 2012 US House races, candidates who were female, affiliated with the major party, in competitive races, and incumbents were more likely to use Twitter than candidates who were male, associated with a third party, in noncompetitive races, and challengers (Evans, Cordova, & Sipole, 2014). Concerning Twitter content, the 2010 congressional Twittersphere (predominantly candidates for Senate) mostly consisted of tweets about campaigning, calls to action, media or press releases, and opponent attacks, whereas personal messages, candidate ideology, and policy issues were rarely tweeted (Haber, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012). In the 2012 US House campaigns, Evans, Cordova, and Sipole (2014) found that a majority of candidates tweeted about personal information (29 percent), followed by the campaign (24 percent), media content (12 percent), and issues (11 percent). Furthermore, House candidates did not all tweet alike. For instance, challengers tweeted more than incumbents particularly about campaign information, news reports, and opponent attacks. In addition, Republican Twitter users were more likely to attack the Democratic Party and Obama, whereas Democratic Twitter users were more prone to assail the Republican Party or Romney (Evans et al., 2014).

While a good portion of the literature on Twitter and politics focuses on presidents and Congress members, limited study centers on gubernatorial candidates' tweets. This is surprising as there are clear differences between national and gubernatorial elections, such as voter turnout is often lower in gubernatorial elections than in presidential or congressional elections. In addition, gubernatorial candidates as well as citizens are frequently tweeting about gubernatorial races (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013). Examining the Twittersphere in the 2010 gubernatorial races, Pole and Xenos (2011) found that 66 percent of the candidates employed Twitter. On Twitter, gubernatorial candidates promoted their campaign websites, solicited donations, and posted calls to action (Pole & Xenos, 2011). Similarly, Bekafigo and Pingley (2014), examining four gubernatorial races in Kentucky, Louisiana,

Mississippi, and West Virginia in the 2011 election cycle, found that candidates largely tweeted policy messages (29 percent) followed by calls to action (25 percent) and character traits (9 percent). Indeed, few political candidates at both national and state levels today would neglect utilizing social media; however, the effects of these mediums and their messages on citizens as well as election outcomes are still not fully understood.

Research examining the effects of new media on political attitudes is largely mixed. Regarding political participation, some research concluded that social media use can increase offline political participation (Bode, 2008; Towner & Dulio, 2011a, 2011b; Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison, & Lampe, 2011), whereas other scholars found no empirical link (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Dimitrova, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Groshek & Dimitrova, 2011; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). Scholars have established that social media use can increase *online* political participation (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2009; Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga, & Shah, 2010; Vitak, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2011). More recently, Towner (2013) found that attention to 2012 campaign information on Twitter as well as other online sources significantly increased both offline and online political participation. Regarding political knowledge, several studies revealed that those who obtain news and information from social networks learned very little information about politics and candidates (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Baumgartner, Morris, & Morris, 2014; Groshek & Dimitrova, 2011; Pasek, More, & Romer, 2009; Towner & Dulio, 2011c, 2014). Similarly, research focusing on democratic norms is also inconclusive, with attention to social media having varying effects on government trust and political efficacy (Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma, & Ponder, 2010; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Towner & Dulio, 2011a, 2011b).

Another research stream focuses on social media's ability to predict electoral outcomes. For instance, Parmelee and Bichard (2012) discovered that candidates who tweeted messages focusing on the campaign trail, personal topics, candidate ideology, and opponents significantly predicted a campaign loss in senatorial and gubernatorial races in the 2010 elections. Some research considers social networks as a measure of political opinion or an "electoral pulse." Williams and Gulati (2008) found that the number of Facebook supporters is an indicator of electoral success. DiGrazia, McKelvey, Bollen, and Rojas (2013) offer evidence suggesting that the number of Republican candidate mentions in the Twittersphere was positively linked to Republican vote margin in the 2010 US congressional elections.

In sum, the uses and effects of social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, have been widely examined in the social sciences; however, there are no experimental studies to date investigating the impact of exposure to specific candidate tweets on political attitudes. In other words, this chapter seeks to provide experimental evidence that Twitter can be used as a significant campaign tool to help inform and mobilize Twitter users in midterm elections.

Twitter Use in the 2014 Michigan Midterms

Using the 2014 Michigan midterm elections as a case study, this chapter first explores how the gubernatorial and senatorial candidates employed Twitter as a campaign tool.

Specifically, a frame or content analysis of campaign tweets from the 2014 gubernatorial and senatorial candidates in the Michigan midterms is conducted. Frames are "story lines" or constructions of an issue or message. That is, frames organize the meaning of the message to tell the audience what and how to think about the message, ultimately determining the essence of the message (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Iyengar, 1991; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Frames are important in campaigning, as candidates (and the mass media) use framing to create packaged messages that voters can easily understand and interpret. Most importantly, these frames can influence voter opinion about candidates (Morreale, 1991).

Previous research indicates that candidates and campaigns are using online tools, such as websites, blogs, and YouTube, to frame messages to users (Bichard, 2006; Chambers & Bichard, 2014; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006; Wicks & Souley, 2003). Thus, it is not surprising that candidates would frame campaign messages on Twitter. Examining candidate tweets in the 2010 elections, Parmelee and Bichard (2012) find that candidates emphasized several frames in their tweets, particularly tweets about the campaign trail or events, their opponent, ideology, and personal information. The authors found that the latter candidate tweets predicted a campaign loss. Building on Parmelee and Bichard's (2012) work and that of others (Evans et al., 2014; Haber, 2011), this chapter examines the frames used by candidates on Twitter during the Michigan midterm elections.

The Michigan midterm elections can easily be pegged as competitive. At the gubernatorial level, incumbent Republican governor Rick Snyder—who won by 18 percent in 2010—was bidding for another term in office against Democrat Mark Schauer, a former US Representative. In early October 2014, polls put Snyder and Schauer in a dead heat (Public Policy Polling, 2014), with pundits describing the gubernatorial race as a toss-up. In Michigan's senatorial race, US Representative Gary Peters (Democrat) and Terri Lynn Land (Republican), former Michigan secretary of state, fought for the open seat vacated by retiring Democratic US senator Carl Levin. (It is important to note that three minor party candidates for governor as well as three minor party candidates for senator were also on the Michigan ballot. Minor party candidates are not examined here, as the focus was on the major party candidates). Throughout the campaign, Gary Peters maintained an edge over his challenger and by October had a 7 percent advantage. No formal, televised debate occurred between the senatorial candidates; however, a televised town hall debate was held between the gubernatorial candidates on October 12.

Attesting to the campaigns' competitiveness, all candidates actively used Twitter. One month before Election Day, Rick Snyder had 3,728 Twitter followers on @RickForMI and 2,933 tweets. Mark Schauer had 5,486 followers on @MarkSchauer and 2,933 tweets. Similarly, Gary Peters's @Peters4Michigan boasted 3,409 followers and 1,245 tweets. Terri Lynn Land (@TerriLLand) had 6,921 followers and 6,483 tweets. Indeed, Twitter was a frequently used campaign tool in the Michigan midterm elections.

To examine the Twittersphere in the 2014 Michigan midterm elections, a content analysis was conducted on all tweets ($N = 2{,}746$ tweets) from the gubernatorial and senatorial campaign Twitter feeds from August 1, 2014, to October 27, 2014. The unit of analysis was the individual tweet. Drawing on previous content analyses

of Twitter messages (Evans et al., 2014; Haber, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012), each tweet was coded for the following tweet topics or frames: policy mentions, call to action, character traits, general campaign information, endorsements, horse-race, and factual, noncampaign information. (1) Policy tweets were related to salient political issues in the Michigan election, such as jobs, economy, auto industry, and education. (2) Call-to-action tweets contained appeals to register to vote, donate, volunteer, watch a debate, attend a rally or meeting, and follow the candidate on Facebook or Instagram. (3) Character trait tweets were coded for mention of a candidate's (or challenger's) leadership skills, experience, and abilities to hold office. (4) General campaign information tweets were coded for mentioning upcoming appearances, debates, events, and the candidate's daily activities. (5) Endorsement tweets were coded for declarations of support from interest groups, individuals, local unions, community groups, and political parties. (6) Horse-race tweets contained polling numbers and forecasts, focusing on the candidate's (or challenger's) position in public opinion. (7) Factual, noncampaign information tweets were general statements about holidays, major athletic events, weather conditions, family and personal life, and other miscellaneous content.

For the content analysis, evaluations were made for each tweet alone, disregarding information or video content linked from the tweets. Each tweet was coded with only one topic. If multiple topics were clearly evident in the tweet, only one additional topic was coded. Overall, only 5 percent of the tweets received double codes.

Consistent with previous studies, each tweet was also coded for overall message tone—positive or negative (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2010). For example, policy tweets were coded as negative if the message attacked the opponent's policy platform or criticized prior policy decisions, whereas positive policy tweets applauded the candidate's past policy successes or highlighted the promise of their future policy agenda. Call-to-action tweets were largely coded as positively toned, as these tweets asked voters to register to vote, pick up a yard sign, and vote. Character tweets were coded as negative when the message attacked an opponent's leadership ability, character, or personal background. A positive character tweet centered on praising the candidate's political skills, credibility, and leadership ability. General campaign tweets were coded as positive when candidates posted about constructive interactions with voters and the willingness to debate, whereas general campaign tweets were coded as negative when candidates tweeted about an opponent's unwillingness to debate or a poorly executed rally. Endorsement tweets were largely coded as positively toned. Horse-race tweets were coded as positive when a candidate was winning or ahead in the polls, whereas horse-race posts were coded as negative when the candidate was behind in the polls or losing momentum (Damore, 2002). Last, factual tweets were coded as mostly positively toned, as many of the messages focused on nonpolitical content. No neutral category was coded.

Table 9.1 shows that the most frequent tweet types for both gubernatorial and senatorial races were policy tweets followed closely by campaign information and call-to-action tweets. The latter finding that more tweets mentioned policies than characteristics is consistent with previous literature, asserting that state-level campaigns are more policy-oriented (Beyle, 1990; Carsey, 2001; Kone & Winters, 1993). Over a third of the tweets in both elections mentioned a policy. Table 9.2 illustrates

Table 9.1 2014 Michigan candidate tweet frames and tone

	Michigan gubernatorial election (%)	*Michigan senatorial election (%)*
Frames		
Policy	37	38
Campaign information	29	34
Call to action	20	12
Character traits	8	12
Horse-race	5	1
Endorsement	3	5
Factual, noncampaign information	3	4
Tone		
Positive	74	78
Negative	26	22
N	2,163	583

Table 9.2 2014 Michigan tweet tone by frames

	Michigan gubernatorial election (%)		*Michigan senatorial election (%)*	
	Positive	*Negative*	*Positive*	*Negative*
Frames				
Policy	32	50	33	56
Campaign information	30	29	39	16
Call to action	27	1	14	3
Character traits	3	22	7	29
Horse-race	6	3	2	1
Endorsement	4	0	6	0
Factual, noncampaign information	5	1	4	0
N	1,594	569	457	126

that policy tweets were evenly divided on tone with both positive tweets touting the candidate's policy plans and negative tweets blasting the challenger's lack of policy plans. Regarding campaign information tweets, Table 9.1 also shows that 29 percent of gubernatorial tweets and 34 percent of senatorial tweets provided Twitter users with information about candidate appearances and upcoming events. As Table 9.2 reports, gubernatorial candidates tweeted both positive (30 percent) and negative (29 percent) tweets about campaign information, whereas senatorial tweets were more positive (39 percent) than negative (16 percent). Call-to-action tweets were also popular among gubernatorial (20 percent) and senatorial (12 percent) candidates. As expected, a majority of the call-to-action tweets were positively toned (see Table 9.2). Comparatively, candidates were less likely to tweet

Table 9.3 2014 Michigan tweets by candidate

	Snyder (%)	*Schauer (%)*	*Peters (%)*	*Land (%)*
Frames				
Policy	44	33	38	38
Campaign information	18	35	26	42
Call to action	25	17	18	6
Character traits	6	9	14	11
Horse-race	1	7	1	1
Endorsement	4	3	7	2
Factual, noncampaign information	8	2	5	2
Tone				
Positive	86	67	73	84
Negative	14	33	27	16
N	750	1,413	297	286

about character traits, endorsements, horse-race coverage, and factual, noncampaign information.

In addition to variations in content, there were also some differences regarding who was tweeting and what they were tweeting. The gubernatorial challenger Mark Schauer (1,413 tweets) was much more likely to tweet than the gubernatorial incumbent Rick Snyder (750 tweets). In the senatorial race, Gary Peters (297 tweets) and Terri Lynn Land (286 tweets) tweeted about the same number of tweets in the three months before Election Day. Table 9.3 shows that Rick Snyder tweeted more about policy (44 percent) and calls to action (25 percent), whereas Schauer tweeted more about campaign information (35 percent). Peters and Land tweeted the same percentage of policy tweets (38 percent), but Land tweeted more campaign information (44 percent) and Peters tweeted more calls to action (18 percent). Considering tweet tone in the gubernatorial race, Schauer, the nonincumbent, was more likely to post negative tweets (33 percent) than Snyder. In the senatorial race, Peters posted more negative tweets (27 percent) than Land (16 percent).

Candidate Credibility, Vote Choice, Political Trust, and Efficacy

Although research on Twitter as a political tool has begun to examine usage as well as effects on political attitudes and behaviors, few scholars have considered how specific tweets influence citizens' attitudes. As the content analysis shows (see Table 9.1), the gubernatorial and senatorial candidates' tweets largely focused on general campaign information, policy information, and call-to-action frames. Considering the latter findings, the following research question is proposed: How do candidate tweets framed as "general campaign information," "policy information,"

and "call to action" influence candidate credibility, vote choice, vote likelihood, political efficacy, and political trust?

Many factors influence citizens' perceptions of candidates, often focusing on a candidate's personal attributes and characteristics. For example, how competent or knowledgeable a candidate is perceived to be, whether a candidate is trusted to do the right thing, and how qualified the candidate is to hold office. Research indicates that these components of candidate credibility are directly associated with votes and election outcomes (e.g., Abramowitz, 1991; McCurley & Mondak, 1995; Mondak, 1995; Nimmo & Savage, 1976). Candidate credibility develops over the campaign, largely processed by voters from media, debates, advertising, candidate communication, and online tools. Svensson, Kiousis, and Strombak (2014) argue that Obama and Romney both sought to cultivate relationships with voters using e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter. Clearly, candidates who build and sustain relationships with voters may be viewed as more credible, ultimately resulting in more votes. The authors found that Obama and Romney's tweets focused largely on collaboration, common interests, and openness—all strategic frames to build relationships (Svensson et al., 2014). Therefore, it is expected that exposure to Twitter messages will positively influence perceptions of credibility for the Michigan gubernatorial and senatorial candidates. It is, therefore, hypothesized that candidate credibility will increase with exposure to general campaign information (H1a), policy information (H1b), and call-to-action (H1c) tweets.

As Election Day approaches, voters must ultimately determine which candidate deserves their vote. Countless studies show that demographics and political predictors, particularly education levels, age, race, gender, party identification, and many other variables, significantly influence vote choice. Television advertisements or other media have also been shown to increase citizens' knowledge about the candidate (e.g., Becker & Dunwoody, 1982; Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Lowden, Anderson, Dozier, & Lauzen, 1994; Weaver & Drew, 1993; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995), but the notion that they can persuade citizens to vote for (or against) a particular candidate is still debated. Indeed, candidates rely on traditional and new media to create and spread their campaign messages in order to increase their likelihood of winning. Recent research attests that state-level candidates use Twitter to highlight policy issues, attack their opponent, remind citizens to vote, and communicate general information (Evans et al., 2014; Haber, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Pole & Xenos, 2011). Parmelee and Bichard (2012) found that tweet frames, particularly tweets about the campaign trail, personal information, opponents, and ideology, significantly predicted an electoral loss. In this experimental research, it is expected that exposure to tweet frames may also have direct and immediate effects on respondents' vote choice. Therefore, it is hypothesized that vote choice will be significantly influenced after exposure to general campaign information (H2a), policy information (H2b), and call-to-action (H2c) tweets.

The Internet is often considered a tool that can both politically inform and mobilize the electorate (Corrado & Firestone, 1996; Grossman, 1995). For example, some scholars found that web-based political information significantly boosts citizens' civic participation, mobilization, and engagement (e.g., Castells, 2001; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Sweetser & Kaid, 2008). Most importantly, several

scholars found evidence that attention to social media can encourage offline political participation (Bode, 2008; Towner, 2013; Towner & Dulio, 2011a, 2011b; Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison, & Lampe, 2011) as well as online political participation (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2009, 2010; Towner, 2013; Vitak et al., 2011). Building on this research, it is expected that exposure to candidate tweets may yield similar results. Therefore, it is hypothesized that respondents will be more likely to vote in the 2014 midterm election with exposure to general campaign information (H3a), policy information (H3b), and call-to-action (H3c) tweets.

There is also reason to believe that Twitter messages influence attitudes toward government, as candidates employ social media to communicate about national and state politics, economic statistics, and general political events. Thus, social media messages may affect how respondents perceive the political system's effectiveness. For instance, Towner and Dulio (2011a) found that respondents exposed to 2008 presidential campaign information on YouChoose'08 exhibited significantly lower trust in government than those exposed to candidates' websites, television network websites, and Facebook (see also Hanson et al., 2010; Towner & Dulio, 2011b). The latter finding was not surprising, as YouChoose'08 largely contained satirical skits, sarcastic commentary, personal attack ads, and music videos that were beyond the campaigns' control. These online messages encouraged government cynicism. In this research, however, most tweets are directly from the campaign or the candidates themselves. Those exposed to these tweets may feel that this direct information is more accurate and credible. In addition, users may feel that Twitter makes candidates more accessible, transparent, and accountable, ultimately building trust. Due to the frames tweeted by the candidates in the Michigan midterms, it is expected that respondents' government trust will increase with exposure to general campaign information (H4a), policy information (H4b), and call-to-action (H4c) tweets.

Last, tweets may also influence attitudes toward the political process, particularly citizens' external political efficacy. When one has strong external efficacy, they believe that their involvement in politics is effective and that the government will respond to their demands. As such, strong external efficacy is often linked with higher political participation (Balch, 1974; Converse, 1972; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). Due to the amount and ease of information provided on online media, citizens can openly deliberate, communicate with candidates, and learn how to mobilize and participate in the electoral process. Using an experimental design, Towner and Dulio (2011a) found evidence that exposure to candidate Facebook pages increased political efficacy, suggesting that those exposed felt social media gave them the opportunity to influence government and political leaders beyond traditional methods (e.g., letter writing and phone calling). In contrast, Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) found that college students' attention to election information on social media was not significantly linked to political self-efficacy. It is expected, however, that respondents' levels of political efficacy will increase, particularly when exposed to candidates' call-to-action tweets (H5c). Call-to-action tweets—asking citizens to volunteer, pick up a yard sign, attend a really, and register to vote—may result in increased feelings of political commitment, civic duty, and empowerment. However, the same feelings are likely not evoked when exposed to general

campaign information and policy tweets. Thus, no significant relationship is anticipated between respondents' political efficacy and exposure to general campaign (H5a) and policy information (H5b) tweets.

Method

Participants

A total of 342 undergraduate students enrolled at a medium-sized public university in Michigan participated in the study. The average age of respondents was 23.60 years ($SD = 7.31$). Fifty-nine percent were females, and 79 percent identified themselves as Caucasian. Majors in political science comprised 20 percent of the respondents, with others drawn from psychology, education, communication, and business. Thirty-three percent identified themselves as either a strong Democrat or Democrat, and 30 percent identified as either a strong Republican or Republican. Thirty-six percent identified as independent or having no preference. All respondents reported having access to the Internet. Sixty-two percent reported having a Twitter account. In terms of Twitter usage, 10 percent reported using Twitter for politics several times a day, whereas 46 percent reported never using Twitter for politics. Forty-two percent reported viewing the Twitter profile of at least one of the gubernatorial and senatorial candidates in Michigan.

Procedures

Subjects were recruited from introductory-level courses in political science. One week before Election Day, participants were e-mailed a link to the study, asking them to complete an online survey about the 2014 Michigan midterm elections. After clicking on the link, subjects read the survey instructions and were asked to view "screenshots" of the gubernatorial and senatorial candidate Twitter accounts. Willing participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups. The first group viewed Twitter feeds with select general campaign information tweets ($N = 78$) by the gubernatorial and senatorial candidates. The second group saw Twitter feeds with only select policy tweets ($N = 96$). The third group viewed Twitter feeds with only call-to-action tweets ($N = 91$). A fourth group saw nothing, serving as the control group ($N = 77$). Subjects assigned to the experimental conditions were instructed to view the Twitter "screenshots." Subjects also answered questions about attention to traditional and online media, perceived candidate credibility, political efficacy, trust in government, campaign interest, vote likelihood, vote choice, political affiliation, and demographics. The entire study was conducted online, and participants did not know which group they were placed into. Control group participations completed the same survey but viewed no Twitter feeds.

Design

An experiment with a post-test-only, control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) was conducted to examine the effects of Twitter content on young adults.

The experiment allowed one to control the content subjects viewed and read—exposure to a particular Twitter feed—and allowed one to make causal statements about exposure to Internet sources. To increase realism, the experiment was conducted during the height of the 2014 midterm elections in Michigan, one week before Election Day.

Twelve mock Twitter feeds were created using Adobe InDesign. These Twitter feeds were designed to appear as if the four candidates were attempting to disseminate campaign information. To compare the post-test survey results from the groups, steps were taken to ensure that the candidates' Twitter feeds were as similar as possible. Regarding format, each of the candidate's Twitter feeds contained the same number of tweets, hyperlinks, and retweets. To eliminate extraneous factors, the Twitter feeds did not display the candidate's number of tweets, following, followers, favorites, or lists. Tweeted pictures or videos as well as tweet date and time also did not appear in the feed. The worldwide trend, which is displayed in the sidebar of each Twitter page, was also removed. To maintain realism, each candidate's profile picture, picture header, tweet handle, profile information, and Twitter join date were replicated. The latter was also done in case participants had previously seen the candidate's Twitter page. The primary difference between each experimental condition was that one group was exposed to the candidates' Twitter feeds with only general campaign tweets, one group saw the candidates' Twitter feeds with only policy tweets, and one group saw the candidates' Twitter feeds with only call-to-action content.

The content of the tweets was based upon the content analysis reported above, further increasing experimental realism. Actual tweets by the candidates were used in the mock feeds. Tweets were carefully selected to ensure that there was similarity in the tweet content among the candidates in each experimental group. For instance, in the policy condition, all candidates tweeted about education funding, jobs, economy, fixing Michigan's roads, and women's issues. In the call-to-action condition, all candidates tweeted about picking up yard signs, donating, registering to vote, and volunteering. In the general campaign information condition, all candidates tweeted about economic statistics, debates, events, rallies, and media interviews. Consistent with the content analysis (see Table 9.2), a majority of the general campaign information and call-to-action tweets included in the mock feeds were positively toned. Similarly, more negatively toned policy tweets were inputted into the mock feeds.

Experimental Results

To measure attitudes toward candidates, a series of survey items about candidate credibility were asked. Credibility is defined in terms of the quality of being trusted and believed and, therefore, is often measured as a multidimensional construct. Respondents were asked to rate how well six personality, character, and leadership attributes described each candidate (1 = not well at all, 2 = not too well, 3 = neutral, 4 = quite well, 5 = extremely well). These attributes were (a) "experienced," (b) "knowledgeable," (c) "qualified," (d) "dependable," (e) "honest," and (f) "trustworthy." These items were combined to measure the overall credibility of the candidate,

with higher numbers indicating higher credibility. The reliability coefficient for the six-item credibility index was around 0.94 for all four candidates. Table 9.4 displays ordinary least squares results when candidate credibility is regressed against indicators of exposure to the Twitter feeds (1 = exposed, 0 = not exposed; the control group is the omitted category). Control variables were also included, particularly race (1 = White, 0 = nonwhite), gender (1 = male, 0 = female), campaign interest, and party identification. For campaign interest, respondents were asked, "Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested or not much interested in the political campaigns so far this year?" (1 = not at all interested, 3 = moderately interested, 5 = extremely interested). To measure partisan attachment, subjects were asked, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?" (1 = strong Republican, 3 = independent/no preference, 5 = strong Democrat).

As Table 9.4 shows, perceptions of candidate credibility for Snyder, Schauer, and Peters were positively and significantly associated with exposure to general campaign information tweets. This association was not significant for Land. However, when Peters and Land's indices were combined to create a comprehensive measure of overall senator credibility, exposure to general campaign information tweets had a significant positive effect ($p < 0.05$), even when controlling for race, gender, party identification, and campaign interest. Considering the latter findings, H1a is confirmed: exposure to general campaign information increased perceptions of credibility. Table 9.4 also shows that exposure to policy tweets positively influenced perceptions of Schauer and Peter's credibility, but did not influence Snyder

Table 9.4 Michigan 2014 candidate credibility

	Snyder	*Schauer*	*Peters*	*Land*
Experimental conditions				
General campaign information	1.48* (0.871)	1.36* (0.774)	3.15*** (0.806)	−0.565 (0.927)
Policy	0.180 (0.840)	1.24* (0.747)	1.76** (0.777)	−0.095 (0.893)
Call to action	1.06 (.840)	0.818 (0.746)	1.06 (0.776)	−0.908 (0.893)
Controls				
White	−0.469 (0.732)	0.393 (0.650)	0.405 (0.676)	−0.131 (0.778)
Male	−0.192 (0.590)	−1.36*** (0.524)	−0.038 (0.545)	−0.723 (0.627)
Democrat	−2.62*** (0.287)	1.59*** (0.255)	1.33*** (0.265)	−1.71*** (0.305)
Campaign interest	0.012 (0.234)	0.655*** (0.208)	1.03*** (0.216)	0.550** (0.248)
Constant	26.1*** (1.45)	14.9*** (1.29)	16.7*** (1.34)	20.2*** (1.54)
Adj. R^2	0.20	0.16	0.18	0.11
N	325	325	325	325

All estimates are unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables (candidate credibility) were based on an additive index of six measures.
*$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

or Land's credibility levels. Thus, there is some evidence for the hypothesis that policy tweets boost candidate credibility (H1b), although the effects are modest. Last, in contrast to expectations, exposure to call-to-action tweets did not significantly influence candidate credibility (H1c). It is worth noting that party identification was clearly a strong predictor of candidate credibility, as Democrats were significantly more likely than Republicans to view Schauer (D) and Peters (D) as credible. Democrats were also significantly less likely than Republicans to view Snyder (R) and Land (R) as credible.

Table 9.4 provides evidence that Twitter messages, particularly exposure to general campaign information, positively influence candidate credibility. Indeed, candidates who are perceived as credible may be more successful at the ballot box (Stephen, Harrison, Husson, & Albert, 2004). Therefore, the effects of exposure to the Twitter conditions on vote choice were tested. To measure respondent's vote choice, the following questions were asked: "If you were going to vote, who do you think you would vote for in the election for Michigan Governor?" (1 = Rick Snyder; 0 = Mark Schauer) and "If you were going to vote, who do you think you would vote for in the election for Michigan Senator?" (1 = Gary Peters; 0 = Terri Lynn Land). Columns 1 and 2 in Table 9.5 show the results from a logistic regression in which vote choice was estimated as a function of the same predictors used in Table 9.4. In column 2, the results illustrate that the general campaign information tweets significantly influenced votes in the Michigan senatorial election, providing some verification for H2a. Call-to-action and policy tweets, however, did not influence senatorial vote. There was also no significant links between the Twitter conditions and vote choice in the gubernatorial race (column 1). Not surprisingly, party identification was the stronger predictor of candidate vote choice. Table 9.5 shows that Democrats were significantly less likely to vote for Snyder (column 1) and more likely to vote for Peters (column 2) compared to Republicans.

Furthermore, the effects of exposure to the Twitter conditions on vote likelihood in the Michigan midterm elections were tested. To measure vote likelihood, subjects were asked whether they expected to vote in the midterm elections next week (1 = yes, 0 = no). Clearly, this is a prospective measure of a vote that may or may not be cast; however, it offers a gauge of an individual's willingness to participate politically. Column 3 in Table 9.5 shows that exposure to the Twitter conditions had no significant influence on vote likelihood, offering no empirical evidence for H3a, H3b, or H3c. It appears that levels of campaign interest largely predicted vote likelihood in the Michigan midterm elections.

The effects of the Twitter conditions on government attitudes, particularly trust and political efficacy, were also tested. Pinkleton and Austin's (2002) Likert scale was employed, particularly three items that best reflected the political system, to measure political cynicism: (a) "It seems like our government is run by a few big interests who are just looking out for themselves," (b) "It seems like politicians only care about themselves or special interests," and (c) "Politicians are not interested in people's opinions." All three items were measured on a scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The reliability coefficient for the political trust index was 0.78. The index of three survey items was regressed against the same predictors used in Table 9.4. These results are reported in column 1 in Table 9.6.

Table 9.5 2014 Michigan candidate vote choice and vote likelihood

	Snyder	*Peters*	*Vote likelihood*
Experimental conditions			
General campaign information	0.545 (0.554)	1.24** (0.583)	−0.779 (0.461)
Policy	−0.363 (0.528)	0.390 (0.490)	−0.725 (0.430)
Call to action	−0.035 (0.514)	−0.143 (0.465)	−0.751 (0.440)
Controls			
White	−0.030 (0.447)	0.086 (0.451)	0.010 (0.366)
Male	0.489 (0.371)	0.131 (0.364)	−0.498* (0.289)
Democrat	−1.66*** (0.231)	0.939*** (0.184)	−0.198 (0.146)
Campaign interest	0.019 (0.022)	−0.161 (0.150)	−0.877*** (0.136)
Constant	4.34*** (0.895)	−1.86** (0.774)	5.15*** (0.886)
Pseudo R^2	0.36	0.20	0.17
N	215	194	291

All estimates are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

Table 9.6 2014 Michigan government trust and external efficacy

	Trust in government	*External efficacy*
Experimental conditions		
General campaign information	−0.050 (0.452)	0.071 (0.188)
Policy	−0.038 (0.436)	0.098 (0.182)
Call to action	0.009 (0.436)	0.249** (0.082)
Controls		
White	−0.062 (0.380)	0.076 (0.158)
Male	0.224 (0.306)	0.113 (0.128)
Democrat	0.358** (0.149)	0.056 (0.062)
Campaign interest	0.507*** (0.121)	0.321*** (0.051)
Constant	7.27*** (0.753)	1.44*** (0.314)
Adjusted R^2	0.04	0.19
N	325	325

All estimates are unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

In contrast to the expected relationships (H4a, H4b, and H4c), the estimates show that exposure to the Twitter conditions had no influence on participants' trust in government, offering no evidence for the proposed hypotheses.

Lastly, the influence of exposure to the Twitter conditions on external political efficacy was examined. To gauge external political efficacy, respondents were asked the following: "How much do you agree or disagree that people like you don't

have any say about what the government does?" (5 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 1 = strongly agree; higher values indicated higher efficacy). In column 2 in Table 9.6, respondents exposed to the call-to-action condition were significantly more likely to agree with the statement, suggesting that call-to-action messages foster feelings that one can make a difference in politics. This finding offers evidence for H5c. As expected, there was no significant relationship between general campaign information and policy tweets and respondents' political efficacy (H5a and H5b).

Discussion and Conclusion

On Election Day in Michigan in 2014, the current governor Rick Snyder (R) beat challenger Mark Schauer (D) in the gubernatorial race by 4 percent. Gary Peters (D) beat Terri Lynn Land (R) in the race for senator by 13 percent. These candidates employed a laundry list of traditional and online media to communicate their campaign message to voters. This chapter focused on their use of a somewhat newer form of social media—Twitter. How did Twitter play a role in the Michigan midterm elections? Did tweets influence voter's political attitudes and behaviors, ultimately affecting election outcomes? This chapter examined how Michigan's gubernatorial and senatorial candidates used Twitter in their campaigns. Most importantly, this research tested how exposure to candidates' Twitter messages or tweets influenced candidate credibility and vote choice as well as political participation, trust, and efficacy.

First, a content analysis of tweets revealed commonly tweeted frames. In general, a dominant frame tweeted by candidates was "policy information," which included messages about policies on education funding, the auto industry, creating jobs, and fixing roads. Consistent with prior findings (Bekafigo & Pingley, 2014), candidates are relying on social media as a platform to communicate their policy opinions as well as attack their opponents' policy positions. It is well known that the mainstream press, such as television and hardcopy newspapers, devote little time and space to substantive policy issues, focusing more on "horse-race" coverage (Graber & Dunaway, 2015; Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004; Kahn, 1991; Patterson, 1993). The latter is particularly true regarding media coverage of midterm elections, as nonsubstantive news content is more pronounced (Arnold, 2004). Thus, state-level candidates may view social media such as Twitter as a more viable conduit to conveying their policy positions to the public, without the risk of editorial exclusion or journalist interpretation. In addition, candidates are clearly aware that their Twitter followers are loyal supporters and likely party activists (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013). Hence, candidates appear more willing to tout their policy positions to an already attentive audience on Twitter.

Candidate tweets also emphasized "general campaign information," ranging from messages about events, debates (more specifically, the lack of debates in Michigan), speeches, interactions with voters, campaign ads, and more. This result is consistent with prior research showing that campaign information is frequently communicated via Twitter (see Parmelee & Bichard, 2012) and other forms of media. This tweet frame is not surprising as campaigns are motivated to keep voters informed

about upcoming campaign activities and events. Knocking on doors or making phone calls to advertise rallies and events may become less important campaign tools in the candidate's toolbox. In many ways, Twitter (and other online media) has become the digital megaphone, as it allows candidates to spread announcements farther and faster.

Also in line with prior work (Bekafigo & Pingley, 2014; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012), the next dominant tweet frame used by candidates was the call-to-action frame. This frame included calls to volunteer, solicitation for donations, encouraging citizens to pick up yard signs, appeals to register to vote, and requests to retweet. In other words, Twitter users were asked to "do something." Interestingly, gubernatorial candidates relied on the call-to-action frame much more than the senatorial candidates, suggesting that competitive races force those candidates to focus more on mobilizing voters.

It is worth noting that the use of specific tweet frames varied by candidate. The incumbent (Rick Snyder) tweeted more about policy and calls to action than the challenger (Mark Schauer). The higher number of policy frames from an incumbent is not surprising, as a sitting officeholder can tweet about prior policies, active legislation, and political agenda. For instance, Snyder tweeted about how he reinvented Michigan's business climate, invested in the education system, and signed particular bills into law. Challengers are limited to tweeting about their future policies. The incumbent governor's call-to-action tweets also slightly outnumbered the challenger's tweets. The latter can be explained by a push to mobilize voters as the gubernatorial race became more competitive closer to Election Day. In the battle for the open US Senate seat, Terri Lynn Land tweeted almost twice the amount of general campaign information as Gary Peters. Land's tweets largely contained messages about campaign stops, thanking volunteers, events, and interactions with voters. It could be suggested that Land dedicated more tweets to general campaign information, as she was behind in the polls throughout the fall campaign.

The prevailing tone of candidate tweets was positive, which is consistent with previous research on Twitter messages (Bekafigo & Pingley, 2014; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012). Indeed, candidates do use Twitter to "go negative," but only rarely. Overall, candidates tend to negatively frame policy tweets, confirming that candidates are more than willing to attack their opponents' issue positions on social media such as Twitter (Bekafigo & Pingely, 2014). Consistent with traditional campaigning, challengers were more likely to go negative on Twitter (but see Parmelee & Bichard, 2012). This suggests that perhaps challengers feel that their loyal Twitter followers will be impacted more by negative messages rather than positive tweets.

Second, and most importantly, the experimental analysis in this chapter demonstrated that various tweet frames—general campaign information, policy information, and call to action—had different effects on respondent attitudes. The most notable finding was that respondents who viewed general campaign information tweets were more likely to perceive candidates as credible (Table 9.4). In many ways, these tweets were purely informational. Candidates tweeted about visiting an automotive factory, eating lunch with union members, delivering a speech at a campaign event, campaign bus stops around the state, media interviews, and more. That is, a majority of tweets are not "packaged ads" or clearly "handled or manipulated

messages." Instead, these tweets were more personal, directly from the candidate and campaign. As a result, these general information tweets helped respondents create a positive, more credible image of the candidate and campaign. Indeed, citizens may feel a greater connection with a candidate who tweets about visiting their city or their place of employment. There was also some evidence that policy tweets significantly increased candidate credibility. This suggests that candidate messages regarding "what I would do if elected" and policy issues are considered useful and effective to citizens, leading to more positive perceptions of candidates. These findings suggest that it is important for candidates to deliver messages about substantive policy issues by employing online media, as they do influence political attitudes. It is also interesting to note that almost all tweets from candidates were one-way messages from the campaign to the voter and not interactive. This implies that candidates can increase their credibility via Twitter and other online media with one-way communication.

Another notable finding is that exposure to general campaign information tweets significantly influenced vote choice in the senatorial campaign (see Table 9.5). Those exposed to general campaign information were more likely to vote for Gary Peters (ultimately the winner) and less likely to vote for Terri Lynn Land (the eventual loser). Based on the experimental results regarding senatorial credibility, the latter should not be surprising. Table 9.4 shows that exposure to general campaign information tweets significantly boosted Peters' but not Land's credibility. None of the Twitter conditions influenced vote choice in the gubernatorial election. Instead, vote choice was largely influenced by respondent party identification. Undeniably, vote choice is often dictated by voters' party allegiance.

Furthermore, exposure to the tweet framing conditions had no influence on vote likelihood in the midterm elections (see Table 9.5). This confirms cyber-pessimists' assertions that online interactions do not translate into offline behaviors. Simply put, exposure to online media does not mobilize citizens to the polls. Instead, Twitter is just a vehicle for campaign information to reach those using Twitter, which can influence attitudes.

Lastly, candidate tweet frames had very little influence on government attitudes, but the call-to-action tweets had a positive influence on political external efficacy (see Table 9.6). This suggests that when candidates indicate that citizens have the power to make an electoral difference, efficacy will increase. Candidates can use tweets to create a sense of political empowerment to generate support in spreading the word and encouraging other voters to participate. Social media, such as Twitter, are an opportunity for individual involvement in the electoral process.

It is important to note some limitations of the study. First, while there are benefits to a controlled survey experiment, particularly establishing causal connections, there are also costs. That is, the observations are gathered on a structured, online survey rather than a real-world environment. In addition, the experimental design is based on a brief, one-shot exposure to three Twitter conditions. A second limitation is that the experiment is not conducted on a randomly selected sample from a national population. Instead, the sample is one of convenience, as subjects were recruited from introductory courses at a university. As a result, the sample did not include young adults who are not in college, nor did it include a broader sample of adults, limiting the study's generalizability.

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CHAPTER 10

PICTURING THE SENATE CANDIDATES: IMAGE BUILDING IN THE TWITTERVERSE

Nicole Smith Dahmen

In late Spring 2014, Joni Ernst was a relatively unknown name in Iowa (Rucker & Balz, 2014). Then she released a provocative ad that immediately went viral, propelling her to the top of the Republican primary and to an eventual victory in the Iowa Senate race. The "squeal" ad became the talk of cable news and was viewed nearly 4,000 times on YouTube in the first three days. The ad showed Ernst in a hog barn, boasting that her experiences "castrating hogs" on an Iowa farm prepared her to "cut pork" in Washington. After eschewing her conservative values, the ad concludes with the infamous line, "Let's make 'em squeal." Of the ad, Philip Rucker and Dan Balz (2014) of the *Washington Post* wrote, "At a time when voters tune out many political messages, the ad was a vivid reminder of the enduring power of a *single image*" (para. 2).

The power of visual communication is well documented (Ephron, 1978; Goldberg, 1991; Zelizer, 2010). And image building in the political communication process is not new (Graber, 1987; Schill, 2012). The new element in the equation, however, is social media. With their speed and reach, social media enable public participation and images like the Ernst ad to go "viral," which can help—or hurt—a candidate (Do, 2014). While a variety of questions are studied in this chapter, the goal is to understand how Senatorial candidates visually built their image—through person perception theory—via Twitter in the 2014 midterm election.

Social Media and Political Communication

In the 2012 election, 47 percent of voters cited the Internet as their primary campaign news source, making it the second most frequently used news source after television (Kohut, Doherty, Dimock, & Keeter, 2012). Research has clearly shown that the use of the Internet as a campaign news source continues to increase. Social

media—by providing a direct connection to the candidates—play a critical role in the increasing popularity of the Internet as a political news source (Smith, 2011). In fact, during the 2014 midterm election, 16 percent of registered US voters engaged with social networking sites (SNS) for political communication purposes (Smith, 2014). Participants stated that they used social media during the midterm elections to learn about political news before others and to feel more connected with candidates (Smith, 2014). And, social media use is continuing to grow. Pew Research Center data indicated that as of January 2014, 74 percent of online adults used SNS and 19 percent of them used Twitter (Anderson & Caumont, 2014). Further, of Twitter users, 8 percent used the SNS as a news source.

Likewise, a social media presence is commonplace—really, a necessity—for politicians and candidates today. Regarding the most recent presidential election, Jenna Wortham (2012), a *New York Times* technology reporter, wrote, "It's not enough for the presidential candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney to kiss babies, shake hands and lunch at small-town diners to win over voters. In 2012, they also need to cozy up to citizens online" (para. 1).

A visit to the websites of most of the current US senators will quickly show that the related social media links are one of the most prominent features—generally placed on the top right—of the homepage. The most prevalent SNS used by current senators are Twitter and Facebook; also popular are YouTube, Instagram, and Flickr.

Social media have implications for politics and political communication that we are only just beginning to understand. Calling social media a "foundational change" for political communication, Gainous and Wagner's (2013) research examined social media in the political communication process, suggesting a new model for communication that shows how social media bypasse traditional media by providing a platform for direct, two-way communication between candidates and audiences.

Much of the appeal of SNS comes from the use of visuals. Called a "breakout trend," the use of visuals—and subsequently visual marketing—is key on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Walter, 2012). Related academic research has clearly demonstrated the power of visuals as communication tools (Ephron, 1978; Goldberg, 1991; Zelizer, 2010). Previous research, for instance, has shown that the inclusion of a photo with a news story increases audience attention to the story (Adam, Quinn, & Edmonds, 2007). In addition, previous research has indicated that pictures are easier to recall than words (Paivio, Rogers, & Smythe, 1968).

The importance of visuals in political communication has also been well demonstrated by scholars. As Schill (2012) concluded, "Images clearly play a foundational role in the political communication process" (p. 133). But despite their prominent place in the mass media, the study of visuals is often overlooked in mass communication scholarship (Griffin, 2001; Schill, 2012). And specifically considering politics, Schill (2012) noted that the study of visuals is "one of the least studied and the least understood areas" of political communication scholarship (p. 119). This is especially problematic as Dauber (2001) argued that in our "media-saturated environment, ignoring visual imagery provides less and less satisfactory work" (p. 655). In an effort to correct the lack of understanding regarding visual communication

in political communication scholarship, Schill (2012) examined the existing literature and theoretical understanding of the role of visuals in political communication. He argued that visuals have ten critical functions in political communication, from setting the agenda to creating emotion to facilitating image building and identification. It is critical that research on communication and media in the political process not ignore the powerful role of visuals in providing information and provoking emotion.

Image Building in a Digital Age

Doris Graber's (1987) work demonstrated the power of visuals in creating a candidate's image. But because most voters do not have direct access to political candidates, these constructed images come from mass media presentations. Political strategists work diligently to create favorable visual impressions of candidates. While candidates cannot directly control which images are used in the mass media, they can control critical aspects of what is actually in those images. This can include such tangible items as a candidate's wardrobe and patriotic symbols, the lighting and backdrop, and the presence of an attentive crowd.

Consider, for example, George W. Bush's 2003 infamous "mission accomplished" photo-op; the "carefully orchestrated media event" aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln was a spectacle designed to build support for Bush and his political agenda (Kellner, 2004, p. 335). Calling it "one of the most audacious moments of presidential theater in American history," Bumiller (2003) explained the ability of the White House to use "the powers of television and technology to promote a presidency like never before" (para. 1). As another example, in July 2006, President George W. Bush issued his first veto as president, rejecting legislation to expand federal support for embryonic stem cell research. Bush made the announcement surrounded by "snowflake" babies (babies born as a result of another couple "adopting" a frozen embryo that was in excess from an in vitro fertilization procedure). The Bush White House created an anti-stem cell research visual frame by positioning Bush in the middle of the snowflake babies and their parents (Dahmen, 2009). And the Bush White House won the "framing war" as leading newspapers, including the *New York Times*, ran the Bush photo-op (Dahmen, 2009). Bush is certainty not alone. In 2013 Obama claimed that he did skeet-shooting all the time at Camp David. In an effort to "silence the skeptics," the White House subsequently released a photo of Obama skeet-shooting (Baker & Landler, 2013, para. 3).

Yet, in a highly saturated media environment, successful political campaigning requires these types of carefully planned and executed media spectacles to actually be broadcast by traditional media. But social media add a new caveat to this process: candidates now have a *direct* means by which to communicate with the voting public. Political strategists can put an image in a voter's mind directly through social media channels *without* the traditional news media as a filter or a gatekeeper.

And, history has shown that an effective social media strategy can contribute to a candidate's success (or failure). Barack Obama and his campaign team were masterful in their use of social media during the 2008 presidential election (Carr, 2008). According to *New York Times* media equation columnist David Carr (2008),

the Obama campaign used social media to create an "unforeseen force" (para. 6). The Obama team leveraged the power of social media in all aspects of the campaign from fundraising to pushing the agenda to encouraging people to vote (Carr, 2008). Obama has continued to be active on social media; as of this writing, he is the third most "followed" person on Twitter, with more than 50 million followers ("Top Twitter User Rankings," 2014).

The social media effect is relevant in other national and state elections, too. Research on the Massachusetts special election Senate race in January 2010 found that Scott Brown (the winner) had a more effective social media strategy in connecting with voters than did his competitor, Martha Coakley (Davis, 2010). The data showed that Brown had a more active social media presence and more prominently featured social media sites on his official campaign website (Davis, 2010). And in the 2014 midterm elections, the focus of this chapter and book, a digital and social media strategy was already proven relevant. Returning to the Joni Ernst "squeal" ad, its viral success was credited with propelling her to "Internet stardom." As a direct result of the ad's success online, "her fundraising spiked and the attention helped her definitively win the GOP primary" (Do, 2014, 0:45).

Picturing the Presidential Candidates 1984–2012

Grounded in the theoretical foundation of person perception, Moriarty and Garramone (1986) conducted landmark research on news media photos in the presidential elections of the 1980s. Moriarty and Popovich (1991) wrote, "Visuals are more than decoration; they perform important roles in communication such as conveying realism, credibility, and attitudes" (p. 372). This work presented evidence showing the importance of visuals in establishing voter preferences (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). Media audiences "can and do" draw conclusions from photos (Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979, p. 17).

Person perception theory, attributed to Schneider, Hastorf, and Ellsworth (1979), is a visual communication theory that examines photos of people in regard to behavior, context, and perspective. Photos provide information about their subjects "through 'stop-action' slices of behavior such as facial expression and bodily postures" (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986, p. 729). In addition, nonverbal behaviors, as captured through photos, can be interpreted as either positive or negative by a viewer (Clore, Wiggins, & Itkin, 1975). Once behavior is identified, the behavior within a certain context is considered (Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979). Context generally includes activity, interaction, dress, and peers; for example, a cheering crowd can lead to a more favorable impression than an inattentive crowd (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986).

The final factor under consideration is perspective. Once the image is taken, the news media then have the decision of which photos to use and how to use them; these considerations also have a direct effect on voter impressions of candidates. Photographic considerations such as angle, size, and page position add to the viewer's perception of the photographic content. For example, a close-up shot is viewed as more favorable because it presents an intimate view of the candidate, similar to a lower angle shot that places the candidate in a position of superiority

over the audience (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). In addition, news media treatment of the photo contributes to the overall perspective of the photo: larger photos and photos at the top of the page imply greater importance and are thus evaluated more favorably by audiences (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986).

In studying newsmagazine photos of the 1984 presidential election, Moriarty and Garramone (1986) found that the number of photos of Ronald Reagan significantly outnumbered those of Walter Mondale; moreover, Reagan was presented more favorably than Mondale in regard to facial expressions, body language, and context. However, in a follow-up study of the 1988 presidential election between George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis, Moriarty and Popovich (1991) found evidence that newsmagazines attempted to provide more balanced visual coverage. Nonetheless, Bush received higher visual coverage (more photos and larger images), and he was depicted as "more cheerful and confident than Dukakis" (Moriarty & Popovich, 1991, p. 379).

Visuals of presidential candidates have also been studied in daily newspapers. In a study of the 1996 presidential election, Waldman and Devitt (1998) examined photos of Bill Clinton and Bob Dole in five leading newspapers. The study found that Clinton received slightly more favorable pictorial treatment; however, the week-by-week analysis found that the favorability of the two candidates rose and fell together (Waldman & Devitt, 1998). A study of the photographic coverage in the *New York Times* of the 2000 presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore showed that Bush "dominated" in regard to total number and size of photos, leading German (2010) to conclude that Bush received greater visual attention than Gore (p. 51).

Research on the 2012 presidential election between Obama and Romney found that while there were significant differences between the photographic presentations of Obama and Romney in newspapers, as an aggregate, the visuals were generally balanced and differences would likely go unnoticed by audiences (Dahmen, in press). In looking at the details of the visuals of the 2012 presidential election, Romney was more often pictured in casual dress than Obama. And this is likely a direct result of strategic campaigning by Romney and his advisors. One of the goals of the Romney campaign was to redefine his "reputation as a 1950s square" (West, 2011, para. 1). Romney was often seen without a tie or in jeans with his shirtsleeves rolled up. Wittily put by *Esquire* magazine, Romney's campaign strategy was to "stop dressing well" (Soller, 2011, para. 1). The intention was that a more casual appearance would help to forge a greater connection with the voters as well as to downplay the appearance of being wealthy.

Yet, this is not a unique strategy. German's (2010) research on the 2000 Bush/Gore election found that in an effort to break his "stiff and cold" image, Gore was often pictured in more casual dress; conversely, Bush was more often pictured in a suit and tie to "compensate for his perceived lack of political experience" (p. 56). Unique or not, the goal is the same: shape the image of the candidate to form a favorable impression in the mind of the voting public.

What happens to image building when the mass media gatekeepers are removed from the process? Again, social media have changed the ways in which candidates

can connect with voters. Through social media, candidates can now *directly* share information with voters. Political strategists can put an image in a voter's mind *directly* through social media channels without the news media as a gatekeeper. Historically, person perception theory has only been used to study the *news media* presentation of political candidates. But, as previously discussed, in a social media age we must consider visual representations of candidates beyond the scope of the news media. This chapter extends the well-established person perception theory to the study of political candidate photos presented through social media channels, specifically Twitter.

Welcome to the Twitterverse

Twitter is an SNS that allows users to post short messages of 140 characters or less, called tweets. Launched in March 2006, Twitter has become wildly popular. According to the data provided by Twitter (2015), the site now has 288 million monthly active users and 500 million tweets are sent per day. Tweets may be accompanied by a photo, video, or link. Photos may be uploaded directly via Twitter or by a third-party site or application (such as Instagram) in which case the images are linked through a URL. Twitter has dramatically changed mass media communications (Gross, 2011).

And Twitter itself recognizes the site's value as a news tool, especially regarding political communication. According to Adam Sharp (2014), Head of News, Government and Elections at Twitter, "Citizens, politicians, other government officials and journalists turn to Twitter every day to connect in creative ways that enrich the public discourse" (para. 1). For the 2014 midterm election, Twitter launched its own election "dashboard" (election.twitter.com) and promoted the "#election2014" hashtag. Sharp (2014) defined the dashboard as a place to "follow the chatter running up to the midterms, see what's driving the real-time election conversation around issues and candidates, and connect with the candidates directly" (para. 2). The site provides interactive user experiences, real-time tweets, and data visualizations.

This chapter studies image building in the 2014 senatorial election at the intersection of visual communication and social media. Applying the well-established theory of person perception, this chapter examines the visual presentation of the candidates themselves through their own campaign-controlled images. While a variety of questions are studied in this chapter, the guiding question is: using the tenants of person perception theory, how did senatorial candidates visually present themselves via Twitter in the November 2014 midterm election?

Research Methods

In the November 4, 2014, midterm Senate election, 36 Senate seats were up for election; 33 seats were on the regular six-year election cycle and three seats were due to special elections. The 36 Senate seats up for election were held by 21 Democrats and 15 Republicans. All of the leading candidates in each of the 36 Senate races maintained an official campaign Twitter account. Those candidates

who were incumbents maintained a separate "candidate" account from their official Senator account. For example, Mary Landrieu, the three-term Senator from Louisiana, had two Twitter accounts: @SenLandrieu, the official Senate account, and @MaryLandrieu, the official campaign account. Again, data were collected from the *campaign accounts* only. Data were collected from September 10, the day after the final Senate primary, through November 3, the day before the election.

On September 10, the first day of data collection, all of the candidates' Twitter profile pages were analyzed. Data were collected on a number of variables, including the listed number of tweets, photos/videos, followers, and number following. These same data were collected again on November 3, the final day of analysis. Screen captures were made of the profile page of each Twitter account on both the first and last day of the period of analyses. Descriptive, qualitative analysis was done to understand the use of images and the visual design of the candidates' Twitter profile pages.

The remainder of the data collected and analyzed for this chapter focused on a select subset of the Senate candidates. Called the "most wide-open Senate battlefield in more than a decade," many of the 36 races were too close to predict, even in the final week leading up to the election (Parti, 2014, para. 1). The Senate races in these key battleground states form the basis for data analysis for this chapter. There were two key theoretical motives for examining the battleground states. First, the election results from these states would ultimately predict the balance of power in the Senate between Democrats and Republicans, so they were critical races that deserved close academic scrutiny. Second, because these races were incredibly close, it is important to fully understand the campaigns of the two leading candidates as, ultimately, small differences in campaign strategy could lead to a candidate's victory.

Polling data aggregated by the *New York Times* (2014) was used to select races to analyze for this chapter. Nine races were considered "competitive," with the chance of one candidate winning over the other being 90 percent or less. These nine battleground states were Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, New Hampshire, and North Carolina. For this chapter, the official campaign Twitter accounts for the two leading candidates in each of these nine competitive Senate races were tracked and analyzed. However, because the November 4 Senate race in Louisiana resulted in a run-off, which was not decided as of this writing, Louisiana was removed from analysis.

The official Twitter "election accounts" of the two leading Senate candidates from the eight battleground states were analyzed, a total of 16 accounts. The name of the Senate candidate along with their Twitter ID can be found in Table 10.2. All tweets during this time period were read and examined; if the tweet included any type of visual, the visual was coded. All visuals were coded for the type of visual (photo, graphic, video). The purpose of this chapter was to examine depictions of the candidate in Twitter photos, so only photos including the candidate were analyzed.

The unit of analysis was an individual photo. Candidates were photographed engaging in different types of activities, such as giving a speech or media interview,

meeting with voters, greeting people, working, or appearing in a posed group shot. In addition, for the photo to be included in the sample, it had to appear in a tweet in a native photo format, meaning that the photo had to appear as part of a typical Twitter feed and the photo was not linked in through a third-party application, such as Instagram. Finally, to be included in the sample, the tweet and associated photo must have originated from the candidate's Twitter account; retweets, modified tweets, and quoted tweets were not included in the sample. The remainder of the visual analysis of each of the candidate photos was based on the related variables for person perception theory.

An independent coder coded all of the quantitative data. The author and an independent coder reviewed the coding protocol and operational definitions in several training sessions; using the protocol, an unrelated sample of similar content was coded in these training sessions. The author and the coder reviewed individual photos to arrive at a "common understanding" of coding categories and "borderline cases"; this is a type of consensus coding similar to the method employed in Fink and Schudson's (2014) research on changes in news content since 1950 (p. 18). As Fink and Schudson (2014) rightly note, no coding is "foolproof" (p. 12). And coding social media content certainly presents its own share of coding challenges (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). However, given the well-established coding categories in person perception theory and the consensus coding approach, the author feels confident in the data and subsequent findings.

Data for the study were collected through quantitative coding based on the theory of person perception. The coding protocol was developed based on previous studies of the pictorial representation of presidential candidates in an effort to continue a pattern of systematic analysis (e.g. Clore, Wiggins, & Itkin, 1975; German, 2010; Moriarty & Garramone, 1986; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991; Waldman & Devitt, 1998). Person perception theory can effectively be applied to the study of candidate photos on social media by coding for variables related to the candidate's behavior, the photo context, and the perspective and aesthetic value. Table 10.1 summarizes the three coding categories with succinct operational definitions of each attribute.

Each photo was given a score of +1 (more favorable), 0 (neutral), or −1 (less favorable) for each attribute. Each category was then summed and averaged by the number of attributes to create a composite score for the three categories of behavior, context, and perspective. Finally, a total score was created for each photo based on the summation of the categories of behavior, context, and perspective. A higher score represented a stronger, more favorable photo in terms of person perception theory. To analyze findings, mean scores were computed for each attribute and category and for the total score. The mean scores were then compared using an independent samples *t*-test. Mean scores were compared along two dimensions: (1) Democratic candidates compared to Republican candidates for the eight battleground states and (2) the two leading candidates compared against each other within each battleground state. In Kansas, there was no leading Democratic candidate. As such, no Democratic candidate was included for Kansas for dimension 1.

Table 10.1 Coding guidelines with succinct operational definitions for 2014 candidate Twitter images

Category	*Attribute*	*More favorable (+1)*	*Neutral (0)*	*Less favorable (−1)*
Behavior	Torso	Standing tall, upright	Neutral/cannot determine	Bowed, slumped, dejected
	Arms	Cheering, waving, shaking hands	Neutral/cannot determine	Hanging at sides, folded
	Face	Cheerful, confident	Neutral/cannot determine	Unhappy, worried, tired
Context	Activity	Dynamic: speaking, shaking hands	Neutral/cannot determine	Passive: reading, resting
	Interaction	Cheering crowd, attentive peers	Neutral/cannot determine	Alone, inattentive crowd/peers
	Background	Flags, signs, political icons	Neutral/cannot determine	Backroom, isolated
	Dress	Suit and tie, professional	Neutral/cannot determine	Casual, wrinkled
Perspective	Proximal distance	Close, head and shoulders	Medium, waist up	Long, full body
	Camera angle	Below, looking up at	Eye level	Above, looking down at
	Aesthetic quality	High quality, in focus, high resolution, good color value and lighting	Neutral	Poor, fuzzy/blurry, pixelated, poor color value and lighting, stretched

Findings and Discussion

According to Twitter, a user's profile page "shows the world who you are" (Bellona, 2014). Twitter profile pages allow users to display two types of images as part of a user profile: a profile image and a header image. All candidate profile images and header images were considered in this portion of the qualitative analysis. For profile images, the most common practice for the Senate candidates was to use a relatively formal head-and-shoulders photo; the candidate was usually pictured in professional or business casual dress with visible patriotic symbols, such as American flags. These photos were generally studio portraits. There were also instances of candidates using a more candid head-and-shoulders portrait, such as the candidate speaking at a podium. A final noticeable trend was to use a family photo for the profile image.

Data showed two trends for header images. The first trend was to use a photo of the typical landscape of the candidate's representative state—for example, the mountains of Wyoming, the cornfields of Iowa, or the fall foliage of New England. Figure 10.1 demonstrates the typical profile/header image use: a formal head-and-shoulders photo for the profile image and a landscape photo for the header image. The second trend was to use campaign graphics, rather than a photo, for the header

Figure 10.1 A typical profile/header image design.

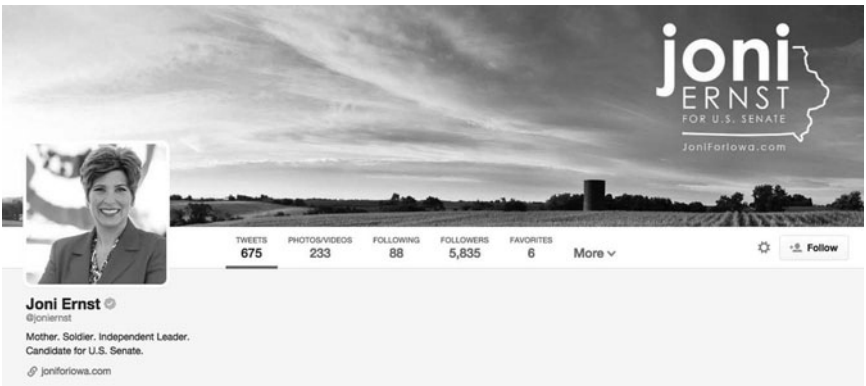

Figure 10.2 Campaign graphics in the header image.

image. These graphics were often stand-alone visuals, but they were occasionally superimposed over the candidate photo (see Figure 10.2).

There were also instances in which candidates used a campaign graphic for a profile image and a photo of the candidate in a formal pose or on-the-job for the header image (see Figure 10.3). And, of course, there were candidates who took unique approaches to profile and header images. For her header image, Susan Collins of Maine used a unique approach of a photo taken from just behind her during a campaign rally; the back of Collin's head, the faces of the crowd, and the local establishment are seen in the panoramic photo. There were also instances of candidates—for example, Cory Booker of New Jersey, Ed Markey of Massachusetts, and James Lankford of Oklahoma—who did not take advantage of the header image space, instead just leaving the default solid area of color.

In addition to considering image content, the aesthetic quality of the profile and header images was considered. Not surprisingly, candidates generally appeared to give careful consideration to the selection and use of profile and header

Figure 10.3 Campaign graphic in the profile image and candidate photo in a formal pose or on-the-job in the header image.

images: they had good aesthetic quality, with images in sharp focus and with good color value and lighting. However, this was not always the case. There were a number of instances in which candidates used dark, blurry, stretched, or awkwardly cropped photos for their profile or header images. There were also a few instances in which candidates appeared to use placeholder images or images that appeared awkward, either through the cropping or poor construction of a composite image.

The findings now turn to the focal point of inquiry for this chapter: the application of person perception theory to the images posted by the candidates via their Twitter accounts. The rest of the findings consider the analysis of the Twitter accounts of the leading candidates in each of the eight competitive Senate races. Twitter allows for the posting of both still images and videos. In addition, candidates posted a number of different types of images, including photos (realistic images captured with a digital medium) and graphics (logos, charts, diagrams, etc.). Frequency of use of the different types of visuals was calculated; the data are presented in Table 10.2.

By comparing mean scores for the person perception variables, the leading candidates were grouped according to political party. Methodological guidelines led to a sample of 542 photos of Democratic candidates and 578 photos of Republican candidates. Table 10.3 shows mean scores for each attribute as well as mean scores for the three categories: behavior, context, and perspective. As seen in the table, results across the data were significant, with the exception of the "camera angle" attribute. Taken as a whole, Democratic candidates presented themselves significantly more favorably than Republican candidates.

As previously discussed, three attributes make up the category of behavior: torso, arms, and face. Previous research has shown that behavior is evaluated more favorably when the torso is upright or tall, the arms are active through cheering or waving, and the face is cheerful or confident (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986). For the category of behavior, there was a significant difference between the photographic presentations of the candidates from both political parties ($t = 10.642$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, in looking at the attributes for the behavior category, significant

Table 10.2 Frequency of image types used via Twitter for the leading candidates in eight competitive 2014 Senate races

		Photos	*Graphics*	*Videos*	*Total*
Alaska	Mark Begich (D) @MarkBegich	16	13	5	34
	Dan Sullivan (R) @DanSullivan2014	50	92	7	149
Arkansas	Mark Pryor (D) @PryorForSenate	119	43	2	164
	Tom Cotton (R) @TomCottonAR	103	74	10	187
Colorado	Mark Udall (D) @MarkUdall2014	202	54	54	310
	Cory Gardner (R) @CoryGardner	21	3	23	47
Georgia	Michelle Nunn (D) @MichelleNunnGA	93	81	25	199
	David Perdue (R) @Perduesenate	68	150	22	240
Iowa	Bruce Braley (D) @TeamBraley	81	109	22	212
	Joni Ernst (R) @joniernst	33	30	0	63
Kansas	Greg Orman (I) @OrmanForSenate	43	26	24	93
	Pat Roberts (R) @PatRoberts2014	251	72	28	351
New Hampshire	Jeanne Shaheen (D) @JeanneShaheen	206	97	23	326
	Scott Brown (R) @SenScottBrown	115	18	40	173
North Carolina	Kay Hagan (D) @kayhagan	180	60	35	275
	Thom Tillis (R) @ThomTillis	110	115	25	250
Total		1,691	1,037	345	3,073

Table 10.3 2014 Twitter candidate mean photo scores with standard deviation by attribute, category, and total by political party

Category	*Attribute*	*Democrats (N = 542)*	*Republicans (N = 578)*	*t*
Behavior	Torso	0.86 (0.37)	0.74 (0.50)	4.702***
	Arms	−0.03 (0.73)	−0.26 (65)	5.767***
	Face	0.48 (0.55)	0.19 (0.48)	9.146***
Overall behavior index		0.44 (0.34)	0.22 (0.33)	10.642***
Context	Activity	0.67 (0.48)	0.54 (0.53)	4.263***
	Interaction	0.32 (0.54)	0.14 (0.56)	5.556***
	Background	0.19 (0.40)	0.35 (0.50)	−5.708***
	Dress	0.41 (0.54)	0.14 (0.58)	8.110***
Overall context index		0.40 (0.27)	0.29 (0.33)	5.989***
Perspective	Proximal distance	−0.40 (0.62)	−0.63 (0.55)	6.512***
	Camera angle	0.33 (0.86)	0.24 (0.87)	1.774
	Aesthetic quality	−0.37 (0.72)	−0.51 (0.65)	3.331**
Overall perspective index		−0.15 (0.51)	−0.30 (0.44)	5.362***
Total score		0.69 (0.77)	0.21 (0.70)	10.759***

Score on any given attribute or category could range from a high of +1 to a low of −1; total score could range from a high of +3 to a low of −3. Higher means indicate a stronger, more dominant photo in terms of person perception theory.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

differences were found in all three attributes. Democratic candidates were presented with significantly more favorable behavior for the torso attribute ($t = 4.702$, $p < 0.001$), arms attribute ($t = 5.767$, $p < 0.001$), and face attribute ($t = 9.146$, $p < 0.001$).

Interesting findings can be seen in the three behavior attributes. Both Democratic and Republican candidates scored high on the torso attribute, indicating that candidates from both parties were frequently pictured standing tall or upright, which is a favorable behavior. In the arms attribute, both parties skewed toward negative values, with candidates' arms tending to hang at their sides or be folded; however, Republican candidates were more frequently pictured with negative arm behavior than Democratic candidates. While both Democratic and Republican candidates' facial behavior skewed positively, facial behavior of the Democratic candidates was significantly more confident or cheerful. This is a noteworthy finding as "expression is arguably the most critical part of a photo of a candidate, since the reader is naturally drawn to the photo's central element and to the face of the familiar personage" (Waldman & Devitt, 1998, p. 309). Again, it is important to note that for all three behavior attributes, Democratic candidates scored significantly more favorably than Republican candidates. As a whole, Democratic candidates were presented significantly more favorably than Republican candidates in photographic presentations for the behavior category.

A reader evaluates a candidate's behavior in context (Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979). For this chapter, the category of context included activity, interaction, background, and dress (see Table 10.1). Dynamic activity (speaking, shaking hands) is evaluated more favorably similar to a cheering crowd and attentive peers (positive interaction) (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986). A more favorable background includes flags, signs or presidential icons, while a more favorable dress is indicated by a suit and tie (Waldman & Devitt, 1998). As detailed in Table 10.3, when considering the overall context index, significant findings indicate that Democratic candidates presented themselves more favorably than Republican candidates in regard to context ($t = 5.989$, $p < 0.001$). With the exception of background, the context of Democratic candidates' photos was significantly more positive: they were more often pictured speaking or shaking hands ($t = 4.263$, $p < 0.001$) and with the presence of a cheering crowd or attentive colleagues ($t = 5.556$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, they more often appeared in professional dress ($t = 8.110$, $p < 0.001$).

However, Republican candidates were presented significantly more favorably in regard to background; they were more often pictured with American flags, campaign signage, or other positive political icons ($t = -5.708$, $p < 0.001$). This is a critical finding as previous research has clearly indicated that audiences more favorably evaluate candidate images when the candidates are pictured with patriotic symbols (Waldman & Devitt, 1998). Moreover, it is important to note that this was the *only* attribute on which Republican candidates scored higher than Democratic candidates. Recalling George W. Bush's infamous "mission accomplished" photo-op, perhaps this finding could be attributed to the political savviness of the Republican Party and their political operatives who are highly mindful in staging the scene (Bumiller, 2003; Kellner, 2004).

Moving to the final category of analysis, the perspective category considered the observer's viewpoint through such photographic attributes as lens distance to subject (proximal distance) and camera angle. A close-up shot is viewed as more favorable similar to a lower angle shot, which places the candidate in a position of superiority over the audience (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986). In a journalistic context, news media treatment of the photo contributes to the overall perspective of the photo: larger photos and photos at the top of the page imply greater importance and are thus evaluated more favorably by audiences (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986). However, because this study looked at social media use of photos by the candidates themselves, the attributes of photo size (Twitter presents images in standard sizes) and page location were not relevant. However, what is relevant to the behavior category in a social media context is the aesthetic quality of the photo. Traditionally in a photojournalism context and from an aesthetic perspective, photos that are in focus, high resolution, and with good color and lighting value present a subject more favorably compared to blurry, pixelated, stretched photos with a poor color or lighting value.

As with the other two categories, Democratic candidates presented themselves significantly more favorably in the perspective category when comparing the overall index ($t = 5.362$, $p < 0.001$). Significant differences between the photographic presentations of the two parties yielded in the attributes of proximal distance and aesthetic quality. For the attributes of both proximal distance and aesthetic quality, photos of candidates from both parties skewed toward negative; candidates tended to be photographed from at a distance and the photos were of poor aesthetic quality. However, Democratic candidates were photographed at significantly closer distances ($t = 6.512$, $p < 0.001$) and with a significantly higher aesthetic quality ($t = 3.331$, $p < 0.001$). Democratic candidates were photographed at slightly higher camera angles and hence presented more favorably than Republican candidates, though the difference was not significant. These findings reveal curious results regarding the perspective category and the application of person perception theory to photos on social media; this is a considerable finding warranting much attention and the implications will be considered in the conclusions of this chapter.

Turning to the eight competitive Senate races, the data now compare the two leading candidates from each state using the person perception categories. Table 10.4 presents the mean photo scores by category and total for each leading senatorial candidate in the eight competitive races. As seen in Table 10.4, significant differences were found between the category means and the total means in seven of the eight competitive races. And in six of the eight competitive races, the total scores of Democratic candidates were significantly higher than their Republican competitors.

There were no significant differences found in the visual presentation between Mark Begich (D) and Dan Sullivan (R) in Alaska. However, the finding should be approached with caution as both candidates posted only a small number of photos, so the analysis was based on a small n, especially for Begich with only five photos meeting the criteria for analysis. In Kansas, the results were mixed, with the Republican candidate Pat Roberts scoring significantly higher in the behavior category ($t = -3.292$, $p < 0.01$) and the only Independent candidate in the analysis,

Table 10.4 Mean photo scores with standard deviation by category and total for 2014 leading Senate candidates by state

State	*Category*			*t*
		Mark Begich @MarkBegich (*N* = 5)	Dan Sullivan @DanSullivan2014 (*N* = 35)	
Alaska	Behavior	0.20 (0.45)	0.40 (0.32)	−1.242
	Context	0.35 (0.29)	0.36 (0.32)	−0.048
	Perspective	−0.67 (0.33)	−0.45 (0.39)	−1.200
	Total score	−0.12 (0.74)	0.31 (0.55)	−1.547
		Mark Pryor @PryorForSenate (*N* = 67)	Tom Cotton @TomCottonAR (*N* = 73)	
Arkansas	Behavior	0.61 (0.28)	0.39 (0.29)	4.516★★★
	Context	0.41 (0.30)	0.26 (0.30)	2.962★★
	Perspective	−0.30 (0.41)	−0.16 (0.40)	−1.954
	Total score	0.72 (0.67)	0.48 (0.64)	2.123★
		Mark Udall @MarkUdall2014 (*N* = 111)	Cory Gardner @CoryGardner (*N* = 17)	
Colorado	Behavior	0.37 (0.33)	0.29 (0.31)	0.847
	Context	0.27 (0.26)	0.26 (0.30)	0.080
	Perspective	0.04 (0.48)	−0.57 (0.37)	4.982★★★
	Total score	0.67 (0.73)	−0.01 (0.55)	3.645★★★
		Michelle Nunn @MichelleNunnGA (*N* = 61)	David Perdue @Perduesenate (*N* = 44)	
Georgia	Behavior	0.32 (0.39)	0.19 (.26)	1.964
	Context	0.26 (0.25)	0.19 (0.29)	1.347
	Perspective	0.06 (0.49)	−0.13 (0.52)	1.897
	Total score	0.65 (0.82)	0.25 (0.73)	2.546★
		Bruce Braley @TeamBraley (*N* = 41)	Joni Ernst @joniernst (*N* = 18)	
Iowa	Behavior	0.32 (0.33)	0.26 (0.29)	0.636
	Context	0.38 (0.24)	0.14 (0.38)	2.884★★
	Perspective	−0.28 (0.34)	−0.53 (0.41)	2.487★
	Total score	0.42 (0.59)	−0.10 (0.49)	3.264★★
		Greg Orman @OrmanForSenate (*N* = 200)	Pat Roberts @PatRoberts2014 (*N* = 34)	
Kansas	Behavior	0.13 (0.32)	0.32 (0.36)	−3.292★★
	Context	0.37 (0.32)	0.22 (0.28)	2.524★
	Perspective	−0.36 (0.38)	−0.26 (0.44)	−1.286
	Total score	0.13 (0.73)	0.28 (0.74)	−1.143

continued

Table 10.4 Continued

State	*Category*			*t*
		Jeanne Shaheen @JeanneShaheen (*N* = 132)	Scott Brown @SenScottBrown (*N* = 108)	
New Hampshire	Behavior	0.42 (0.32)	0.24 (0.34)	4.350★★★
	Context	0.45 (0.24)	0.19 (0.36)	6.609★★★
	Perspective	−0.37 (0.47)	−0.27 (0.46)	−1.649
	Total score	0.50 (0.74)	0.15 (0.73)	3.658★★★
		Kay Hagan @kayhagan (*N* = 125)	Thom Tillis @ThomTillis (*N* = 83)	
North Carolina	Behavior	0.53 (0.34)	0.21 (0.32)	6.739★★★
	Context	0.53 (0.24)	0.33 (0.28)	5.321★★★
	Perspective	−0.03 (0.53)	−0.23 (0.50)	2.746★★
	Total score	1.03 (0.81)	0.31 (0.68)	6.636★★★

Because of the volume of data, this table aggregates the attributes and presents only the three categories of behavior, context, and perspective as well as the total scores for the two leading senatorial candidates for each of the eight swing states. Score on any given category could range from a high of +1 to a low of −1; total score could range from a high of +3 to a low of −3. Higher means indicate a stronger, more dominant photo in terms of person perception theory.
★$p < 0.05$; ★★$p < 0.01$; ★★★$p < 0.001$.

Greg Orman, scoring significantly higher in the context category ($t = -2.524$, $p < 0.05$).

For the remaining six competitive races analyzed for this chapter, the Democratic candidate scored significantly higher than the Republican candidate for most of the categories and all of the total scores (see Table 10.4). This is an especially interesting finding for the Iowa Senate race. As was previously discussed, many have credited Republican Joni Ernst's win, in part, to the viral success of her "squeal" ad (Do, 2014). Yet, Ernst included very few visuals in her tweets. In addition, those photos presented Ernst significantly less favorably than Bruce Braley, her Democratic competitor.

Based on the person perception findings, the data show that the Democratic Senate candidates visually presented themselves more favorably than the Republican candidates in the critical categories of behavior, context, and perspective. However, once the votes were counted in the November 4 election, the Republican candidates beat the Democratic candidates in seven of the eight races analyzed. So what do the person perception findings tell us in regard to visual communication and political communication via Twitter? The final section of this chapter puts the current findings in context with existing theory and implications for the future.

Conclusions and Implications

As Waldman and Devitt (1998) note, a day on the campaign trail of any presidential candidate produces a range of photos, from the "happy" and "determined" to the "glum" and "silly" (p. 309). Newspaper editors must then decide which photos to

use and how to use them. The content and use of photos "will have a substantial effect on how the candidate is perceived by readers" (Waldman & Devitt, 1998, p. 309). This is the foundation of person perception theory.

Previous scholarship presents clear evidence of differences in the photos of presidential candidates in the news media. Waldman and Devitt (1998) argue that the findings of their research indicate "pictorial representations may have a substantial influence on opinions and attitudes toward candidates" (p. 304). German (2010) aptly concludes, "Subtle differences in photographic images, unnoticed on a day-to-day basis, may significantly influence public perception and understanding of presidential candidates as those images are repeated over the course of an election campaign" (p. 59).

However, Moriarty and Popovich (1991) conclude in their analysis of the 1988 campaign that, while there was "evidence of subtle differences," newsmagazines attempted to provide "balanced visual coverage" (pp. 379–380). In studying news media photos of Obama and Romney in the 2012 presidential election, Dahmen (in press) concluded that as an aggregate the visuals were generally balanced and differences would likely go unnoticed by audiences.

Historically, person perception theory has been applied to only print news in presidential elections. But as we well know, print news is in decline and more voters are turning to online news sources (Pew Research Center, 2012). In a digital age, media scholars must think beyond print newspapers and beyond news media presentations of political candidates. In a world of Web 2.0 and social media, voters have more direct access to candidates through the tightly controlled (and strategically planned) websites, blogs, and social media channels of the candidates themselves.

As discussed previously, political strategists attempt to tightly control the behavior and context of a candidate for political office. But they are then at the mercy of the news media as to how (and which) images would be used and thus presented to the voting public. But social media allow candidates to communicate directly with the voter, without the filter of the news media. As such, in a social media environment, political strategists now have direct control of the behavior, context, and perspective of the visual presentation of the candidates via their official social media channels.

This chapter purported to apply person perception theory to the candidate-controlled images in the tweets of the candidate's official campaign Twitter account. The underlying supposition of this chapter was that if the candidate (and his/her political strategy team) does indeed have total control over his/her social media communications, it follows that he/she would put forth visuals that presented the candidate in a highly favorable manner, regarding candidate behavior, context, and perspective.

But this was not the case. Generally speaking, the mean scores for the three critical person perception categories were low and, in fact, often had negative values (see Table 10.3). Regarding behavior, candidates were more often pictured with their arms hanging at their sides or folded, which can lead to a negative impression of the candidate (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986). Considering the context in which the candidates were presented, candidates frequently appeared alone or

with an inattentive crowd or without the presence of flags or other patriotic symbols, which can also lead to a negative impression of the candidate (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986). Interestingly, where candidates scored the lowest was in the category of perspective; they were frequently photographed from at a distance and the aesthetic quality of the images was generally quite low. What makes this finding particularly interesting is that in a print news environment, candidates do not have control over which images are used or how they are used. But in the Twitter environment, candidates have direct control over the selection and use of images, yet they willingly used images that did not necessarily picture the candidate in a positive perspective (or behavior or context).

There are several plausible reasons as to why candidates (and their strategy team) used images that did not necessarily present a favorable image of the candidate. The first reason relates to a critical aspect of the nature of social media communications: speed. Generally, tweets are sent out quickly, especially in the case of live-tweeting an event (such as a fundraiser or speech). Content is needed for tweets, and that content must come quickly. The nature (and the expected speed) of tweets does not necessarily allow time to thoroughly think through the message and accompanying image, which is certainly a downside of social media communications that has led to many well-documented social media missteps. For example, the Twitterverse, and subsequently the national media, publicly ridiculed Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal following a tweet in which he incorrectly used "your/you're" (Berman, 2015; Petri, 2015). Second, and related, because these social media messages are sent out quickly, readily available content must be used, which often means snapping a quick photo with a camera phone that ultimately results in a low aesthetic quality photo. In a social media environment, there is not always time to consider all photographic aspects, from camera angle and lighting to background and candidate dress. Essentially, a communication team is forced to use whatever images they have available and/or can readily get.

A third plausible reason that the majority of analyzed images were not highly favorable images relates to the potential value and still limited audience of social media. Social media communications are still relatively new, and their political audience (registered voters who engaged with political candidates via Twitter) is still relatively small. Because of this, the impact of social media communications on an election is still potentially limited.

The data showed that the two leading political parties showed significant differences in the quality of the candidate presentation via the images included in candidate tweets. Democratic candidates presented themselves significantly more favorably than did Republican candidates. But in seven of the eight competitive races studied for this chapter, the Republican Senate candidate won the race. So does this mean that the tweeted images did not have an effect on the voting public? Of course, the answer is not simple.

As previous scholars of political communication and person perception theory acknowledge, images certainly have an effect on audiences. This has been well proven. But in the case of person perception data, as previous scholars have stated, subtle (yet statistically significant) differences in the visual presentation of candidates are likely to go unnoticed by voters. In addition, and as other chapters in

this book demonstrate, there were a number of reasons from ideological shifts to money—many of which were outside the control of any one candidate's campaign team—that resulted in Republicans taking control of the Senate.

The implications of the findings must also be considered from a scholarly and theoretical perspective. Regarding the perspective category, for the attributes of both proximal distance and aesthetic quality, photos of candidates from both parties skewed toward negative; candidates tended to be photographed from at a distance and photos were of poor aesthetic quality. Republican candidates scored significantly lower in these two attributes than did Democratic candidates; yet in seven of the eight competitive Senate races analyzed for this chapter, the Republican candidate won the race. While social media allow candidates and their strategists to have direct control over the text and visual messages, the nature of social media also requires speed and readily available content, so there is not always time to consider, for example, aesthetic quality of photos. But perhaps this is not necessarily a bad thing. Perhaps it speaks more to the visual style of social media communications. Consider Instagram's rapid assent and subsequent market domination. A recent survey suggests that Instagram's rise in popularity corresponds with "a larger shift to a more visual style of communication" and audiences' desires "to share photos to describe their life experiences" (Hempel, 2014, para. 21). Perhaps it is the authenticity, rather than the aesthetics, of photos on social media that makes them powerful communication tools. In a political communication context, perhaps seeing a fuzzy photo of a candidate engaging with voters in a local eatery, per se, creates a more meaningful and authentic connection with audiences than a highly polished newspaper photo. Regarding the application of person perception theory to social media photos, traditional perspective variables may be largely irrelevant in a social media context. Conceivably what really matters, and what engages and motivates voters from a social media perspective, is the visual authenticity seen in the behavior and context categories. As Gainous and Wagner (2013) assert, social media are dramatically changing political communication. But it is a change we are just beginning to study and understand.

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CHAPTER 11

PERSONALIZATION AND GENDER: 2014 GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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On June 25, 2013, the Senate chamber of the Texas state capitol became the scene of a remarkable political showdown. For 13 hours, citizens at the capitol—along with over 100,000 viewers via a live web stream and thousands more on Twitter—watched and waited for the conclusion of a contentious filibuster of Senate Bill 5 (SB 5), which would impose numerous restrictions on abortion access and clinic facilities. Standing at the center of the filibuster showdown, state senator Wendy Davis became a national political celebrity literally overnight. Her pink running shoes, worn to withstand hours in which she could not relinquish the podium, quickly became an online meme.

While Davis's filibuster succeeded on June 25, Governor Rick Perry called a second special session the very next day, which later passed SB 5 into law. But the ripple effects of Davis's filibuster made her the poster woman of the effort to "turn Texas blue." Democrats in Texas and across the country waited in anticipation until Davis officially announced she would run for governor on the Democratic ticket against Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott.

Almost immediately, the primary election contest turned negative, with Davis attacking Abbott's role in cutting education funding and gender pay discrimination. Abbott's supporters launched highly personal attacks, dubbing Davis "abortion Barbie"—a not-so-subtle twist on attacks made against vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin in 2008, and a dig at Davis's carefully coiffed appearance. A February 2014 *Dallas Morning News* story (Slater, 2014) stoked the negativity by revealing that Davis's personal life story had not played out exactly as she had often claimed on the campaign trail. The story contrasted Davis's narrative about being a teen mother who worked her way from a trailer park to Harvard, with records showing

that while she was raising her first daughter alone at age 19, she was not legally divorced until she was 20. The story also revealed that Davis spent considerable time in Cambridge pursuing her Harvard law degree while her then-husband lived permanently with their daughters in Texas and that her husband was granted custody of their teenage daughter when they divorced. Widely distributed and debated, that particular story became a flashpoint in a broader debate about gendered barriers to political power: Why, media critics and Davis supporters asked, was Davis's personal life being held up to such close scrutiny? *Texas Monthly* journalist Erica Greider (2014) wondered about the "biohazard" of running for office while female.

Davis was ultimately defeated in the general election by a margin of 20 percent. Although many factors contributed to her defeat, including long historical advantages for Republicans in Texas, low voter turnout, and Abbott's superior campaign organization, the question of how Davis's gender affected the outcome lingered long after Election Day.

The Wendy Davis saga seems to perfectly encapsulate a long-standing concern about whether distinctly gendered binds still operate in subtle and unsubtle ways to limit women's entry into powerful political offices. The controversy over the details of her personal life story highlights once again a difficult balancing act women candidates may be required to perform as they burnish their credentials both as competent leaders and as "true women" (Lawrence & Rose, 2009). Seen through this lens, the controversy over Davis's personal biography, particularly questions about the quality of her motherhood, is troubling.

Yet at the same time, followers of senator Davis know that she emphasized her personal biography as a central feature of her social media campaign. Her Twitter post on January 21, 2014, illustrates a running theme in her social media communications: "I share my story of being a single mother, of fighting for a chance at a better life not because my story is unique, but because it is not." With posts like this, Wendy Davis shared rather than avoided details from her personal life and linked her controversial personal story to her policy agenda for Texas.

With over 100 female candidates running for statewide elected executive offices, the 2014 midterm elections offer a revealing window on the dynamics of gender in electoral politics today. The entrance of more women—and more kinds of women—onto the political stage and the dramatic changes in communications technologies available to candidates raise new questions for research. What modes of adaptation do women employ as they compete for office, usually against men? How and to what degree do female candidates associate themselves with "women's issues" and make explicit gender-based appeals? And of particular interest in this chapter, how do women candidates exploit opportunities to use social media to highlight their private lives and make themselves more "personable"?

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook represent an important part of modern political campaigns. While web sites have long offered an opportunity for candidates to present a carefully curated version of themselves to the public, social media allow candidates to convey more spontaneous and personal, even intimate, aspects of themselves. In this chapter, we examine social media strategies, opportunities, and challenges for female gubernatorial candidates in 2014. We focus particularly on the degree to which female gubernatorial candidates adopted

gendered, feminized modes of self-presentation and relatedly the degree to which they engaged in "personalizing" communications online. We also explore how voters responded to candidates' social media strategies, examining the extent to which women candidates face gendered challenges in the fast-moving, chaotic, and sometimes vitriolic environment of social media.

Personalization, Gender, and Candidates on Social Media

The growing "personalization" of politics has been observed by many scholars (e.g., Holtz-Bacha, Langer, & Merkle, 2014; Van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2011). Personalization is a mode of political discourse that favors personal narratives over abstract policy discussions and heightens the politician's need to cultivate and project his or her private "self" to the voting public (Corner & Pels, 2003; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Schulz, 2004; Stanyer, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008). Today, as Stanyer observes, "the political self" is often "constructed [in part] through the selective disclosure from private life" (2008, p. 420). Politicians may embrace personalized politics as a way to create clearer distinctions from their opponents, as Meeks (2014) argues. Personalizing communications may also offer strategic benefits in the context of an increasingly complicated campaign environment in which messages must be carefully tailored for different audiences (Serazio, 2014).

Social media are well matched to the personalizing trend in electoral politics, as they have enabled a new culture of personal identity construction that is at once both private and public (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media allow politicians to get "up close and personal" with constituents, sharing images of themselves (literally and figuratively) in ways that can seem disarmingly personal and spontaneous. Though politicians may have been slower on average than the general public in adapting these affordances, social media "allow politicians (and voters) to stage their public *and* private roles, and to shift between them seamlessly and more or less consciously and strategically" and thus "add to the spaces where candidates may involve voters in personal encounters" (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013, p. 759). Indeed, the Norwegian politicians interviewed by Enli and Skogerbø reported that "sharing personal updates and pictures attracted considerably more attention from readers and voters than updates with political statements." "When I post photos of my children," one politician said, "I get immediate response, when I write about politics, it's quiet" (p. 763). More anecdotally, digital campaigning consultants for Barack Obama and Mitt Romney recently told a C-SPAN audience that candidates showing their personal side on social media could present a strategic advantage because it "humanizes" the candidate. As one consultant put it, "You need a candidate who is comfortable with sharing personal things" (C-SPAN, 2014, 55:47).

But how these personalizing strategies work for female candidates has not been much explored. Politicians may engage differently in personalizing communications depending upon their gender considerations. Women who seek political office can struggle against well-documented double binds stemming from enduring gender stereotypes that associate women with caring and other "communal" traits rather than with dominance, decisiveness, and other "agentic" leadership traits. Women entering the political field can thus face unique challenges: conforming to expected

gender roles makes it difficult to seem leader-like, while conforming to expectations of leadership makes it difficult to seem appropriately feminine (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Jamieson, 1995). These binds may be more evident when women seek executive offices, associated in the public's mind with unitary leadership traits more readily attributed to men (Fowler & Lawless, 2009; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Iyengar, Valentino, Ansolabehere, & Simon, 1997; Kahn & Gordon, 1997; Paul & Smith, 2008; Rose, 2012; Schaffner, 2005). Despite accumulating studies suggesting gender stereotypes no longer play the same inhibiting role for women in electoral politics (Brooks, 2013; Dolan, 2014), research still finds differences in how women politicians are perceived when they run for executive office (Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose, & Weber, 2013; Meeks, 2012; Smith, Paul, & Paul, 2007).

The literature on political rhetoric has long contended that women leaders employ a more personal rhetorical style (Blankenship & Robson, 1995; Bystrom, 1996; Campbell, 1989). Yet recent research on candidate campaign strategies finds that in many ways women and men do not campaign significantly differently (Banwart, 2010; Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid, & Roberson, 2004; Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2009) and that what appear at first blush to be gender-based differences in candidate communications can be better explained by the candidate's party and other factors (Dolan, 2005, 2014). Fridkin and Kenney's (2014) recent study of senators' communications with their constituents finds, however, that female senators emphasize their agentic traits (e.g., assertive, competent, authoritative) significantly more than their male counterparts, particularly in their political ads. These gender effects hold while controlling for party and other factors, suggesting that female senators are still quite mindful of navigating double binds.

Fridkin and Kenney (2014) propose strategic stereotype theory to explain these complex findings: politicians seek to capitalize on gender stereotypes that benefit their political aims while counteracting potentially damaging gender stereotypes. For female senators, they argue, the challenge is to deactivate stereotypes that associate men with agentic leadership traits while carefully capitalizing on stereotypes that associate women with caring. Fridkin and Kenney theorize that communal trait stereotypes, while still a hindrance, can sometimes benefit female politicians strategically because voters seek both competence and caring from their representatives and because men are at a stereotypical disadvantage when it comes to caring.

In short, candidates' personal traits are important aspects of campaign communication that can relay gendered information. How candidates present their personal lives to their constituents can represent an important individuating influence on political impression formation, allowing voters to rely on candidate-specific information rather than on stereotypic information to form their evaluations of candidates (see McGraw, 2003). At the same time, candidates can send messages that seek to counteract or to exploit gender stereotypes.

One area in which stereotyped expectations may still loom large is related to gendered family roles. Indeed, the binds around family roles seem particularly challenging to navigate. While women may be allowed out of the home (metaphorically speaking) to pursue public and political careers, women candidates have often avoided reminding voters of their parental status for fear of evoking gendered dichotomies contrasting public "competence" with private "nurturing" (Jamieson,

1995; Witt, Paget, & Matthews, 1994). Yet women who fail to seem sufficiently nurturing can face penalties as well. This complex set of binds may be one reason research in this area seems contradictory. Several studies have shown that on campaign websites, female candidates are less likely to be shown with their families (Bystrom et al. 2004; Niven & Zilber, 2001), suggesting that male candidates do not perceive a parenting penalty and that female candidates perceive their competence will be questioned if their motherhood is highlighted. Yet Druckman et al. (2009) found that female candidates in House and Senate races were *more* likely to feature material about their families. This strategy may also make good sense, given recent research suggesting that gendered expectations of women as nurturers persist. For example, Stalsburg's (2010) sample of college students gave less favorable ratings to hypothetical childless female candidates than to female candidates portrayed as mothers.

Overall, as traditional gender stereotypes have begun to at least partially give way and as women have gained a greater foothold in politics, a potentially greater array of strategies of self-presentation have become available, particularly on social media. But advisable strategies for the female candidate are still not clear, particularly in terms of their biographies, personal characteristics, and family status—exactly the material that lends itself to personalizing communications on social media. Moreover, if little research has examined how women candidates navigate gender politics in their social media communications, even less has explored how voters respond. If female candidates deploy personalized strategies online, does this invite more engagement from their social media followers?

These puzzles have led us to explore candidate personalization on social media in greater depth. In a recent study (McGregor, Lawrence & Cardona, 2014), we examined the social media communications of female/male dyads of gubernatorial candidates during the 2014 midterm elections, including both primary and general contests. That study found that nearly all candidates, regardless of gender, used social media primarily for traditional campaigning messages (e.g., fundraising appeals, publicizing public appearances, and mobilizing followers to participate) and to a lesser degree for policy and issue talk—findings that are consistent with other studies of candidates' use of social media (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & van't Haar, 2013; Klinger, 2013; Kreiss, 2014; Pew Research, 2012a, 2012b). Personalizing messages that invited the public to view the candidates in more intimate, personal terms were less frequent and in some contests virtually nonexistent, and personalization declined as Election Day drew nearer. But we observed a wide variation in our sample: several candidates did not use social media for personalizing at all, while up to one-third of the social media feeds of a few candidates—both men and women—featured more personal posts particularly during the primary season. (For example, a May 29 Facebook post from Republican Greg Abbott of Texas read, "#ThrowbackThursday My daughter has always been my biggest fan!" and featured a photo of a younger Abbott with his elementary-school-aged daughter holding a campaign poster from a previous election in which Abbott ran for Texas Attorney General.) Indeed, controlling for factors like

party, incumbency, competitiveness, and election season timing suggested that overall gender may not be a strong stand-alone predictor of personalization on social media.

Based on that preliminary analysis, it would appear that both male and female candidates see some advantages as well as drawbacks to personalizing communication, depending on the electoral contexts they face. And although we were unable in that study to generalize from our limited candidate sample, we did notice some patterns in the ways female candidates used personalizing communication to strategically "play" to advantageous gender stereotypes.. For example, South Carolina incumbent Nikki Haley employed gendered self-presentation in relatively normative ways, using social media to highlight events from her roles as a mother and wife.

That more qualitative assessment of candidates' social media strategies is the focus of the remainder of this chapter. First, we explore the content of candidates' social media streams. Recognizing that there is variation in how frequently female candidates personalize on social media, we focus here on *how* they personalize. We explore two dimensions of personalization in particular: how female candidates tie (or do not tie) their personalizing messages to the policy issues they talk about, and how "feminized" their personalizing messages are. In other words, is personalization integrated into the policy positions candidates take, or is it kept separate from their policy positions? And when female candidates personalize, to what degree do they convey traditional images of femininity and gender roles? Second, we explore how online publics interact with the candidates. When female candidates personalize, does that invite more engagement and/or more personal—even inappropriately personal—responses from followers? Personalization may have its strategic benefits for some candidates, but are there downsides when a candidate opens her personal life to public view?

Below we sketch profiles of three candidates who employed different approaches toward gender and personalization on social media: Wendy Davis (D) of Texas, Mary Burke (D) of Wisconsin, and Nikki Haley (R) of South Carolina. These three candidates illustrate variation in their overall use of social media in general and in how they personalized in particular while offering underlying variation in terms of both quantity and style, across both major political parties and a variety of electoral contexts, including an incumbent (Haley), a challenger who lost by a relatively narrow margin (Burke), and an open-seat candidate who lost by a large margin (Davis).

Before diving into our qualitative assessment, a brief overview of our three chosen candidates is in order. We mention these candidates' marital and parenthood status because, as it becomes clearer below, these were important elements in at least some of these candidates' social media strategies. A divorced mother of two, Wendy Davis is a Harvard-educated lawyer and former Democratic Texas state senator who rose to national attention after her 11-hour abortion bill filibuster, but lost the gubernatorial election by a 20 percent margin. As we will see in greater detail below, Davis was fairly active on social media, especially in the weeks leading up to the election, and though she did not heavily emphasize personalizing messaging (as seen in Table 11.1, such posts comprised only 5.3 percent of her total social media

Table 11.1 Primary uses of social media by three select female gubernatorial candidates, 2014

Candidate	*Personal (%)*	*Campaigning (%)*	*Policy (%)*	*Other (%)*	*Total number of social media posts*
Wendy Davis	5.09	74.15	8.66	12.09	4515
Mary Burke	5.93	63.02	13.92	17.14	1890
Nikki Haley	10.62	32.79	11.75	44.84	979

communication), she often used material from her personal life to drive home her policy messages. Harvard-trained businesswoman Mary Burke, the unmarried, childless Democratic challenger in Wisconsin, used social media similarly to Davis in quantitative terms, with personalizing communication making up around six percent of her social media communication. Qualitatively, however, Burke personalized in a more gender-neutral manner, by using social media to cheer on her favorite Wisconsin sports teams, for example.

Governor Nikki Haley, married mother of two who handily won reelection in red-leaning South Carolina, engaged in the most personalization of any female gubernatorial candidate in 2014 (10.62 percent). In fact, during the primary season, we found up to 24 percent of Haley's social media posts were purely personal anecdotes. Qualitatively, Haley's brand of personalization differed from that of Burke and Davis. Haley often featured traditional femininity in her personalizing posts, but rarely tied it to policy issues. As we explore further below, each strategy seemed to elicit a distinct—and sometimes distinctly gendered—reaction from voters who followed these candidates on social media.

Method

These candidate differences first became clear as we conducted a quantitative content analysis of candidate social media streams that required us to read thousands of candidate tweets and Facebook posts (McGregor et al., 2014). During this time, we noticed substantive differences among female candidates that suggested diverse strategic deployment of femininity and personalization. To explore these differences further, we conducted a closer qualitative analysis of tweets and Facebook posts from the three female gubernatorial candidates outlined above.

Following an iterative approach, the qualitative analysis included both inductive categories emerging from recurring types of posts and deductive identification of content related to personalization, issues, or campaigning—the main uses of social media by candidates established in previous research. For the deductive process, we looked for posts containing campaigning messages, like this one from Wendy Davis' Twitter feed, "Today, the road to the November election begins. And I'm honored to be your nominee to run for Governor of Texas." We also identified posts about policy issues, like this one from Mary Burke, "Walker just signed a bill to restrict early voting. It is voter suppression—it is attacking democracy, as far as I'm concerned." Lastly, we identified personal posts, like this one from Nikki Haley on Facebook, "After a long hectic week, we're having mother/daughter fun tonight at

the Darius Rucker concert! Happy Friday!" Through this process, we noticed the emergence of hybrid types in which the candidate weaved personal content into campaigning or policy messages, as discussed further below.

To explore voter responses to candidates' messages, we also qualitatively analyzed the ten most retweeted posts by each politician, along with the ten most "replied to" posts and the replies from online publics. For both the Twitter and Facebook data and for both candidate and follower posts, we restricted our inquiry to the year leading up the election—January 1 to November 4, 2014.

Three Candidates, Three Social Media Strategies

Echoing the findings of our earlier quantitative analysis (McGregor et al., 2014), our qualitative analysis suggests that for these candidates the main focus of social media communication was traditional campaigning and highlighting policy issues. Tweets like "Don't forget to vote today! If you don't know where to vote you can check here: http://t.co/cYlRtLIKom" from Haley (R-SC) were typical of candidates' get-out-the-vote efforts. Other messages focused on typical campaigning moves such as targeting the opponent (or status quo), especially from challengers like Burke (D-WI) ("As governor, I'll put people ahead of politics and Wisconsin ahead of special interests. RT if you're on #TeamBurke!"). Policy discourse was also a focus of some of the candidates' social media posts, such as this post from Davis (D-TX): "I call for eliminating the statute of limitations on rape to ensure that survivors are not denied justice in Texas."

Yet some posts designed primarily to mobilize voters or highlight policy stances also included personalizing aspects symptomatic of a more personalized style of politics. For example, Mary Burke combined personalization with campaigning in this tweet that linked to a picture of her and her niece on the campaign trail: "Nothing better than a #WI road trip with family—and today my niece Courtney is traveling with the #BurkeBus!"

Beyond the many posts that used social media for traditional campaigning and policy talk, these candidates diverged noticeably in the ways they engaged in more purely personal talk on Twitter and Facebook. Differences emerged in how traditionally gendered their self-presentations were and in the extent to which the candidates married their personal talk to policy issues.

Burke may simply have had less traditionally feminine material in her personal life to draw on, as she is unmarried and has no children. When she did offer glimpses into her personal life, they were decidedly nontraditional in terms of gender—like posts about mowing the lawn, playing her with two Golden labs, or cheering on the Packers or Badgers. In fact, Burke challenged traditional gender roles in various ways. One tweet from Burke featured a photo of her greeting two men and their dogs: "Great to chat with Jim and Dan and their dogs, who look just like my two! Congrats on 26 years, Jim and Dan!" Without her own nuclear family to feature, Burke chose to feature a gay couple, a nod to her support for marriage equality. She subverted conventional female presentation in other ways as well. Many of her personalizing posts cheered on Wisconsin sports teams, placing her firmly as a sports fan, an arena not traditionally associated with femininity.

In contrast, Haley's social media accounts presented an image of traditional family and femininity while offering an inside look into her home life, her daily routine, and her personal preferences. Haley shared her excitement over her daughter earning her driver's license, her views on the movie *The Lone Survivor*, and her predictions about the *Bachelor* finale, among dozens of other personalized posts. She deployed her children extensively on social media, often to help bolster her image as a devoted mother. For example, she posted about quality time spent with her son: "Went out for pizza with my son today. We had fun chatting about school and summer plans. Now we are watching the Nets vs Raptors. I love mom/son time!" On Mother's Day, her Facebook page featured a post from her daughter and son that read,

> We wanted to make this Mother's Day extra special for our mom. Please leave her a message to help us show her how many people agree with us that she's doing an awesome job! She may have an extremely busy job, but she always finds time to spend with us. She knows that to be a good Governor, she has to be a good mom. From helping us get ready for school, to attending sporting events, and of course Haley family fun nights, she never forgets that she's our mom first.—Rena and Nalin Haley.

By the final month of the campaign, personalized messages subsided, giving space to snapshots of Haley's final days on the campaign trail. Still, pictures of her family often accompanied campaigning content on the road.

Like Haley, Wendy Davis used social media to present a personalized image of herself. Davis also featured her children prominently in campaigning posts and even set up a separate Twitter feed called Dogs for Davis. But Davis shared little of the day-to-day personal tidbits so common in Haley's feed. Instead, Davis's personalized posts evoked or were directly tied to policy. For example, responding to questions about her role in raising her daughters, Davis posted, "This race isn't about what happened to my family thirty years ago. It's about what's going to happen to your family thirty years from now." Davis's digital strategy appeared to be carefully crafted to associate policy stances with her personal history as a single, working mother. She explicitly tied the two together in this tweet shortly after her autobiography was published, revealing her two terminated pregnancies: "I'm a product of my life experience. The legislator I've become, and the governor I will be, is all informed by that." Beyond equal pay and abortion access, the Davis campaign also focused on reforming education to provide easier access to college, which she tied to her own personal history in this tweet: "I was the first in my family to graduate from college, like so many hardworking Texans. It wasn't easy, but it changed my life. #MyTexas." Davis did not always tie policy explicitly to personal characteristics, but almost all the issues she chose to highlight were gendered in nature. Her post exhorting that "We need to #TrustWomen to make their own healthcare decisions—not corporations, #SCOTUS, or @GregAbbott_TX" was typical of this gendered policy strategy. Gender reoccurred in her posts about education, like this tweet: "I hope young, single, struggling moms looking for a path forward find something inspiring in what I was able to achieve through education." She also used social media to attack her opponent, Greg Abbott, over his opposition to equal pay: "Greg Abbott

would veto equal pay. I'll ensure women are paid the same as men for equal work. Plan to vote at http://MyTexasVotes.com."

Overall, our findings suggest that Haley found a strategic advantage in highlighting her family. As a successful Republican incumbent, she used pictures of her family and posts about date nights with her husband to reassure voters of her relatively safe brand of professional accomplishment tempered by traditional femininity. By tying personalization and gender to policy, Davis adopted a more explicitly political form of personalization. Many political scientists have decried the personalization of politics, warning that it waters down the democratic process (e.g., Bennett, 2012; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). But arguably, personalizing communication that serves as a vehicle for more serious policy talk, like that from the Davis campaign, may hold more potential democratic value. However, our findings on voter engagement below suggest that Davis's policy personalization did not resonate well with many voters. Burke differed from both Davis and Haley in substantive ways. She personalized only slightly more than Davis (5.93 percent compared to Davis's 5.09 percent; see Table 11.1), but unlike Davis, Burke did not tie personalizing information to policy stances. This does not mean she personalized in gender-normative ways—in contrast to Haley, Burke subtly challenged gender stereotypes, posting about sports and personalized support for marriage equality.

Engagement on Social Media

As explored above, candidates use social media for a mix of messages, but most frequently use it for straightforward campaigning. For the three candidates highlighted here, campaigning content proved to garner the most engagement, as measured by the number of retweets, likes, and replies such posts received. Messages like "A new @MULawPoll shows me LEADING Scott Walker among likely voters, 47–46! #WIcandobetter #TeamBurke" from Burke reverberated among followers on social media, usually producing positive responses. Messages combining issues and campaigning, in the form of credit-claiming for her probusiness policies (e.g., "Manning S.C. beats out China for bike factory!"), were popular for Haley, yielding extremely positive feedback, including "Hailey N 2016 4 POTUS" and "YEAH! GO USA."

While the number of retweets or comments candidate posts received provides a measure of the success of a post (or strategy choice), a deeper look into the content of the replies and comments to our candidates' messages shows that qualitatively, active engagement by followers was not uniformly positive. For example, the 913 replies Davis received to her most popular tweet ("No false attack can take away my story. And no sleazy political trick will stop me from giving voice to yours") belies the deeply negative tone of most of the replies, which accused Davis of lying or abandoning her children or negatively framed her stance on abortion (a common theme in engagement with Davis).

In fact, the tenor and focus of comments from voters was rarely personal for all our three featured candidates except Davis, even though both Burke and especially Haley posted fairly personalized images on social media. This seems to suggest that posting personalizing content does not necessarily lead to personalizing responses,

but that the *way* female candidates personalize can shape the kinds of responses they receive. Burke did use social media for personalizing posts, though offering little in the way of traditional gender or feminine depictions; the tone of discussion on her Twitter and Facebook pages shifted between support and attacks, but topics were limited to policy or her work experience. By not presenting deeply personal aspects of herself, Burke did not invite voters to comment on her personal life in the way that Davis and Haley appear to. For example, many of Burke's personal posts revolved around sports, and it is unlikely that a fellow Wisconsinite would react negatively to a positive post about the Green Bay Packers or the Wisconsin Badgers. On the other hand, Haley often posted pictures of her family and talked about her personal likes and activities, but never tied her personalized content to policy issues. Perhaps for that reason, negative replies posted to her accounts were not personal but rather limited to policy issues. In terms of engagement, Davis stands as an outlier. Her policy-focused posts were not always tied to personalizing information, yet the responses to her on social media were almost always vitriolic and personal, and her personalized posts that highlighted policy issues seemed to garner almost entirely negative feedback. Far from rare was a reply like "@WendyDavisTexas You truly are a low rent piece of pig excrement. You just aborted your campaign, Abortion Barbie." From our analysis here, we might hypothesize that the combination of personal and policy can prove disadvantageous to women candidates, at least as far as social media interactions are concerned. It is also possible that the acrimonious nature of responses can be explained by the contentious nature of the policies, like abortion and gender equality, which Davis campaign chose to highlight in connection with her personal life.

Haley often incorporated highly personal posts into her social media repertoire as well, but did not receive the same negative feedback. Interestingly, Haley's highly personalized and feminine posts did not receive the same level of scrutiny as did Davis's. Replies to Davis were more personal and tied to gender; for Haley, negative replies, albeit rare, were mainly aimed at her policies. While no definitive conclusion can be reached from our limited sample of cases, we speculate that such differences may come from *how* candidates chose to personalize, as well as possible differences in scrutiny of Republican and Democratic women. For example, Republican voters may be unlikely to react negatively to traditional depictions of femininity and family, like those featured in Haley's posts, and political opponents may find little use in criticizing Haley's balanced portrayal of family and politics. On the other hand, the Davis campaign featured a more liberal and nontraditional depiction of family and gender, which was often tied to contentious policies, and drew ire from conservative opponents. As such, we believe these differences may also be explained by the way the candidates chose to portray their femininity. While Haley broadcast a more conservative femininity, reassuring the electorate of her role as a wife and a mother, Davis tied her less traditional personal history to a series of controversial policy issues, such as abortion and gender rights. Our findings suggest those messages resonated negatively among her conservative critics on social media.

It is worth noting that the reach of the candidate's social media accounts described above varies greatly. For example, Haley's most popular post was retweeted only 135 times in comparison to 1,829 times for Davis's most famous tweet. Hence, it

is possible that the candidates in our sample strategically adapted to the impact of their social media accounts, tailoring their messages according to their perceived audiences. In addition, these perceived audiences may not be the public at all—candidate strategists report developing social media strategies with the media, not the public, in mind (Kriess, 2014).

Conclusion

In examining the social media accounts of three female gubernatorial candidates in 2014, we focused on their presentation of personalization and femininity, as well as how those efforts reverberated with online publics. Our findings suggest that female candidates display varying images of their feminized, personalized selves. As far as engagement from online constituents can provide a measure of success, we observed that although other female candidates might find an advantage in presenting gendered/personal communication tied to their policy stances, for Davis—a moderate liberal and advocate of reproductive rights running in a solidly red state—this proved to be a disadvantageous strategy.

In assessing *how* female candidates personalize on social media, we examined the ways in which they employ femininity in their personal performances and to what extent personalization is integrated into policy positions. As our findings suggest, there is a spectrum of both femininity and personalization that candidates display on social media. First, as seen in Table 11.1, Haley spent almost 11 percent of her social media posts on personalizing, while both Burke and Davis hewed closer to 5 percent. Burke (D-WI), for example, did share personal information on social media, but she tended to avoid traditional gender displays, and although that choice is likely based in part on the realities of her own personal life, her campaign evidently saw no strategic advantage in trying to employ traditional notions of femininity on social media.

Meanwhile, Haley's mastery of the highly personal norms of social media suggests she understands well the culture of Facebook. Haley's social media stream strategically created a sense of intimacy with those following her page—a window into her personal life, but not into her political life. In addition, Haley's personal posts operated within traditional gender norms, where her electoral success and policy issues have little to do with date nights with her husband. In contrast, Davis, in combining the personal and the political in social media posts, created a feeling of intimacy with herself *and* her political beliefs. Davis stands alone in personalizing not only herself but also the issues on her platform.

To varying extents, all the candidates here used social media to craft images that combined agentic leadership traits with communal caring traits. Some women candidates, like Haley, perhaps featured their family to exploit gender stereotypes. Her family-centric posts, combined with credit-claiming and campaigning posts, paint a picture of a woman in executive office "having it all." On the other hand, Davis employed her family and personal history to paint a picture of a gendered struggle that led to success. This strategy appears designed to counteract gender stereotypes, all while tying personal narrative to policy stances. From the range of strategies

represented here, it is clear there is no consensus among women candidates about the benefits or drawbacks of hewing to gender stereotypes.

As we reflect on our findings, Fridkin and Kenney's (2014) strategic stereotype theory may help again to explain the complex picture of women candidates' campaign strategies. Our findings suggest that gendered personalization can be an asset, but perhaps only in certain forms—and always, of course, dependent upon the particular voters the candidate hopes to reach. All three women we focus on here did their part to deactivate stereotypes that associate men, not women, with agentic traits. Though incumbent Nikki Haley had more policy accomplishments to claim credit for than either Mary Burke or Wendy Davis, each presented herself as competent in policy areas they cared about, and in different ways, each emphasized personal strength. Yet each candidate was also attentive to presenting images of personal warmth and caring, and the two who are mothers repeatedly drew attention to themselves as mothers. The difference lies in the degree to which Haley versus Davis presented their motherhood in explicitly political terms. For Haley, motherhood and family served as an implicit symbol of acceptable and expected feminine nurturing to counterbalance her policy strengths. For Davis, motherhood was politicized, summed up in her battle cry Twitter post: "I share my story of being a single mother, of fighting for a chance at a better life not because my story is unique, but because it is not."

Perhaps largely because of the context in which she ran, Davis certainly does not seem to have received any electoral benefits from her hybridized form of personalization. She did garner intensely vitriolic, negative, and *personal* engagement from the public on Twitter and Facebook. Some of this may be due to the particular context of a race under the national spotlight and tied to abortion. Future research should examine larger samples including multiple candidates engaged in this form of hybridized personalization to pinpoint any electoral and/or engagement advantages.

While this work focuses on female candidates, our previous work has examined personalization in candidates of both genders (McGregor et al., 2014). Personalization is a useful heuristic category, but our analysis here suggests candidates implement it in deeply nuanced ways. Candidates, both male and female, strive for balance of self-presentation (and personalization) among a variety of factors, including competitiveness of the race, office position, party affiliation, and, of course, gender. While our sample size here is limited, we believe these insights can guide future research on personalization and gender in candidate communication. Future research should explore hybrid forms of personalization like Davis displayed, which linked personalization and policy. Other possible hybrid forms we see evidence of include those linking campaigning with personalization—perhaps a less discursive and "safer" form of personalization.

Additionally, as our results suggest, candidates utilize personalization to display femininity in a variety of ways, from the traditional to the disruptive. Future research should incorporate the study of women candidates in legislative races since we know they often face different challenges. This may also provide a chance to study female/female dyads, rather than the male/female dyads present in these executive elections, as well as opportunity to research social media strategies in the

context of campaign dyads, since campaign strategies are at least in part developed with specific opponents in mind. Lastly, future studies with larger samples should examine the relationship between party and feminine presentation in personalization and engagement. Do Republican women face a different set of constraints than Democratic women, and do they experience different sorts of feedback from their social media followers? If so, is it because they broadcast a more conservative femininity, which leaves less room for personal attacks? We suggest that future research further investigate how different personalization strategies lead to different outcomes, as well as how party and ideological differences interact with personalization online.

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PART IV

ADVERTISING IN THE 2014 POLITICAL PROCESS

CHAPTER 12

CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING IN FLORIDA'S 2014 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION: CANDIDATE IMAGES, VOTER ENTHUSIASM, AND PARTISANSHIP

David Lynn Painter and Tom Vizcarrondo

Spending on televised political advertising or campaign spots topped $1 billion in the 2014 midterm elections, exceeding all previous midterm records (Kang & Gold, 2014). Although senatorial contests received most of the national media attention in these elections, the gubernatorial campaign in Florida was the most expensive (Olorunnipa, 2014). Most of the $150 million spent in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign was devoted to televised political advertising (Center for Public Integrity, 2014). Altogether, ad spending on behalf of Republican Rick Scott, the incumbent, totaled at least $73 million and ad spending on behalf of Democrat Charlie Crist, the challenger and former Republican governor, totaled more than $38 million (March, 2014).

The volume of the televised political advertising in Florida's gubernatorial campaign was noteworthy because of its negativity (Wesleyan Media Project, 2014). Nearly 70 percent of the ads were negative, about 19 percent were mixed, and 11 percent positive (King, 2014). Moreover, Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign presented a situation far too familiar to many US voters: making a choice between two unpopular candidates who are seen as fundamentally flawed and running negative campaigns (Gomez, 2014). In fact, only about 40 percent of Floridians rated either gubernatorial candidate positively, while 48 percent disapproved of Scott and 47 percent disapproved of Crist (Public Policy Polling, 2014).

Ad sponsorship in Florida's gubernatorial campaign was also distinctive because both major party candidates directed supporters to donate to their respective party organizations, not to their campaigns (Baye, 2014). This tactic, fueled by changes in campaign finance regulations favoring political party over candidate fundraising

and spending in Florida, resulted in the Republican Party spending more for campaign spots on behalf of Rick Scott than any other single entity in any 2014 state-level contest (Ballhaus, 2014). Overall, 76 percent of the ads were sponsored by the political parties, 18 percent by political action committees, and six percent by the candidates' individual campaigns (CPI, 2014).

This experimental investigation analyzes the effects of political party-sponsored ads in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial election by parsing the influence of ad tone (positive versus negative) and content focus (issue versus image) on changes in candidate image evaluations and gains in voter enthusiasm. Rather than focus on simple exposure effects or the direction of the effects on viewers' attitudes toward the candidates, this study compares the sizes of the changes (decreases and increases) in participants' pre-test and post-test candidate image evaluations to determine which types of ads exerted the greatest influence. This analytic approach facilitates testing the notion that negative ads are more powerful than positive ads by predicting that viewers of negative ads will report changes in candidate evaluations that are larger than the changes reported by viewers of positive ads. Similarly, viewers of image ads, and especially negative image ads, are expected to report changes in candidate evaluations that are larger than the changes reported by viewers of other types of ads. Alternately, none of the viewers of any of the ads are expected to report decreases in voter enthusiasm, so viewers of positive ads, and especially positive image ads, are predicted to report the greatest gains in voter enthusiasm. Finally, this investigation finds its place in the literature by analyzing the interaction effects of ad tone, content focus, and viewer partisanship on the size of the changes in candidate image evaluations and gains in voter enthusiasm.

Candidate Image Evaluations

The rationale for studying changes in viewers' attitudes toward the candidates after exposure to televised political advertising is supported by research that indicates that attitudes toward a candidate are an important predictor of voting decisions (Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaiser, & Amadori, 2008; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk 1986). Rather than solely cognitive or emotional responses to political information, attitudes toward the candidates are based on affective intelligence processes or a combination of political socialization, information processing, and attitudinal variables that shape political judgments (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000; Redlawsk, Civettini, & Emmerson, 2010). Research indicating voters' attitudes toward the candidates summarizes these electoral judgments and may account for half the variation in voting decisions, outperforming policy preferences and partisanship as predictors of vote choice (Jacoby, 2004; Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, & Sullivan, 1990). Kaid and Chanslor (2004) defined candidate image as "a combination of appearance dimensions and candidate characteristics relevant to job performance (honest, able, qualified, etc.) as perceived by voters and interacting with each voters' own characteristics and predispositions" (p. 84), and scholars have measured affect toward the candidates using candidate image evaluations since at least 1976 (Hellweg, 2004).

Enthusiasm

In addition to influencing relative affect toward a candidate, televised political advertising can also influence a wide range of viewers' political cognitions and attitudes (Goldstein & Ridout, 1988; Kaid, 2004). For instance, researchers have investigated the influence of campaign information on voters' enthusiasm (Brader, 2006; Marcus & Mackuen, 1993; Marcus et al., 2000) and involvement levels (Kim, Painter, & Miles, 2013; Painter, 2013). Research on emotional responses to political advertising indicates that ads that elicit enthusiasm "powerfully influence candidate preferences and stimulate interest and involvement in the campaign" (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993, p. 678). This research is guided by traditional political science theories predicting that an interaction between election context and citizens' affective political predispositions shapes electoral decision making (Campbell et al., 1960; Downs, 1957).

In this study, enthusiasm is conceptualized as an affective, psychological construct instead of a purely emotional response to campaign information. The enthusiasm construct used in this investigation adapts the classic involvement scale (Zaichowsky, 1985) from the behavioral and communication sciences to include the phrasing used to measure voter enthusiasm among leading polling organizations (Gallup, 2014b; Pew, 2014). This approach is in line with research analyzing the influence of campaign information on the election's salience or viewers' feelings of urgency about participating in the election (Kim et al., 2013; Painter, Fernandes, Mahone, & Al Nashmi, 2014). Based on the agenda-building theory, this research suggests that political ads may prime viewers' perceptions of candidate characteristics and the election's salience (Herrnson & Patterson, 2000; Painter, 2013; Sulfaro, 2001; West, 2014).

Ad Tone

Over the past three decades, the saturation of competitive media markets with negative presidential campaign ads spurred research on the influence of negativity on the effects of campaign spots. Much of the literature on political advertising focuses on the effects of presidential candidate-sponsored messages on specific sets of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral variables (for summary, see Kaid, 2004). This body of research provides compelling evidence that negative candidate-sponsored messages may negatively influence viewers' affect toward the target (Cundy, 1986; Marcus et al., 2000; Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1993; West, 2014). The affective effects of negative advertising are not always straightforward, however, since candidates risk incurring negative responses to their own candidacy, or a backlash effect, when attacking opponents in political advertising (Dowling & Wichowsky, 2014; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Lemert, Wanta, & Lee, 1999). Moreover, scholars appear to have reached a consensus that negative ads negatively influence viewers' affect toward both the sponsor and the target, generally lowering evaluations of both candidates, even when sponsored by a third party (Meirick, 2011; Painter, 2014b).

When analyzing the purposes of political campaigns, Hart (2002) argues that elections bring a sense of immediacy to electoral decision making and engage

a dialectic process by sharpening the differences among the candidate options. Similarly, Claibourn (2012) argues, "a good campaign is one that provides citizens with the necessary information to both make a reasoned vote choice and to hold leaders accountable to their agenda" (p. 64). Positive ads serve a vital function in communicating the candidates' distinctive skillsets and issue agendas (Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Claibourn, 2012). Moreover, research suggests that positive ads are differentially more effective than negative ads in eliciting positive emotions and positive affect toward the sponsoring candidate (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993).

Overall, research on the influence of candidate advertising in statewide elections mirrors that of presidential candidates: positive ads exert significant positive influences on viewers' evaluations of sponsoring candidates and attitudes toward politics (Tedesco, 2002). Negative ads, on the other hand, may exert significant negative influences on both the target and the candidate on whose behalf the ad was aired, regardless of sponsor (Painter, 2014b). Moreover, research indicates that political ads characterizing candidates as fundamentally flawed due to a lack of character qualities such as honesty and trustworthiness are particularly effective in eliciting feelings of disgust and political alienation (Brader, 2006). Based on this line of research, we formulated two hypotheses testing the main effects of ad tone:

H1a: Viewers of negative political party ads will report greater changes in candidate evaluations than will viewers of positive political party ads.

H1b: Viewers of positive political party ads will report greater gains in voter enthusiasm than will viewers of negative political party ads.

Issue and Image Ads

In addition to tone, scholars also distinguish between issue and image ads dependent on whether the content focuses predominantly on policy stances or candidate characteristics (Kaid & Johnston, 2001). Over the past several decades, political ads have increasingly focused on issues over images, and research suggests that issue ads may exert differentially greater influence than image ads on viewers' evaluations of the candidates, political cognitions, and emotional responses (Cho, 2013; Kahn & Geer, 1994; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Roddy & Garramone, 1988). Dependent upon the candidates in the electoral context, however, more image ads emphasizing the sponsored candidates' experience, honesty, and other image characteristics—and the opponents' lack thereof—may be more influential than issue ads (Basil et al., 1991l; Brader, 2006). For instance, in competitive races featuring unpopular candidates, political ads highlighting the sponsor's character and experience as well as attacking the opponent's trustworthiness, leadership skills, and competence may be more influential than issue ads (Brader, 2006). Although image ads may not provide specific information about policy positions or legislative details, they do provide information that may resonate with viewers and shape their evaluations of the candidates' images. Moreover, in television advertising, image information may be communicated by both verbal and visual content in the presentation,

regardless of the predominant focus of the content in the campaign spots (Kaid & Davidson, 1986).

When analyzing the differential effects of image and issue ads on viewers' enthusiasm about participating in the upcoming election, no prior research could be located in the literature. However, a study of the Florida 2010 gubernatorial election indicated that viewers' perceptions of the election's salience were influenced more by exposure to a candidate's social media pages than by exposure to the campaign's official website or to online news reports, both of which outlined the candidate's issue positions (Kim et al., 2014). Additionally, research on the 2012 presidential election suggests that viewers exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages expressed more urgency about participating in the upcoming election than did those exposed to the CNN and Fox campaign news sites or to the official campaign websites (Painter et al., 2014). Since social network sites—the candidates' Facebook pages in particular—contain more images and less issue information than campaign websites or online news sites, we expect ads highlighting the candidates' image characteristics to exert more influence on viewers' enthusiasm levels than ads focused on specific policy positions.

Therefore, we pose two hypotheses to test for the main effects of the ads' content focus:

H2a: Viewers of image ads will report greater changes in candidate evaluations than will viewers of issue ads.

H2b: Viewers of image ads will report greater gains in enthusiasm than will viewers of issue ads.

Interaction Effects

To determine which of the four conditions reported the greatest changes in candidate image evaluations and gains in voter enthusiasm, we tested for interactions between ad tone and content focus. To formulate predictions about the direction of the interaction effects on the dependent variables, we combined the predictions in the main effects hypotheses. In order to do so, we also considered the election context in which both major party candidates were perceived as fundamentally flawed by voters (PPP, 2014).

Rick Scott (R), the incumbent in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign, was the former chairman and CEO of Columbia/Hospital Corporation of America, a company that pled guilty to 14 felonies and paid more than $2 billion in civil lawsuits under his leadership in 2002, the largest fraud settlement in US history up to that time (Caputo & Klas, 2014). Charlie Crist (D) was a former one-term Republican governor who literally and metaphorically embraced President Obama and his stimulus policies in 2009 (Caputo & Klas, 2014). After presiding over the foreclosure crisis and record-setting unemployment rates during the great recession, Crist decided not to seek a second term as governor, choosing instead to run for the US Senate. He lost to Marco Rubio in the 2010 Republican primary, then ran as an Independent and lost the general election, and then became a registered Democrat after Obama's reelection in 2012 (Gomez, 2014).

In this electoral context, the honesty and trustworthiness of both candidates may be a legitimate consideration in light of their previous behaviors, experiences, and character traits. Indeed, ads portraying Scott as a dishonest fraudster and Crist as an untrustworthy flip-flopper abounded in the campaign; positive ads attempted to characterize Scott as a successful business leader or Crist as an advocate for the common people, although much less frequently (Caputo & Klas, 2014). Based on this electoral context and the prior research upon which the main effects hypotheses were formulated, we argue that ad tone (e.g., negative vs. positive) and content focus (e.g., image vs. issue) will interact to influence both candidate image evaluations and voter enthusiasm. Specifically, we predict:

H3a: Viewers of negative image ads will report the greatest changes in candidate evaluations.

H3b: Viewers of positive image ads will report the greatest gains in voter enthusiasm.

In addition to the main and interaction effects of the manipulated independent variables, this investigation also parses the influence of the viewers' partisanship since citizens' emotional attachments to the political parties can powerfully influence their cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to political advertising (Rahn, 1993). Thus, we pose two research questions to parse the influence of the viewers' partisanship on the effects of ad tone and content focus on their changes in candidate evaluations and levels of voter enthusiasm:

RQ1: How do the interactions among viewers' partisanship, ad tone, and content focus influence changes in candidate image evaluations?

RQ2: How do the interactions among viewers' partisanship, ad tone, and content focus influence changes in voter enthusiasm?

Method

Participants and Design

A 2 (positive vs. negative) × 2 (images vs. issues) × 3 (Republican, Democrat, Independent) pre-test–post-test factorial design was used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. Participants were 674 students from either a large Florida career college or research institution. Participants completed the project online between October 14 and October 24, 2014. The participants were 53 percent male and 47 percent female, with an average age of 20.4 years. Participants were 64 percent White, 13 percent African American, 13 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent another ethnicity. Thirty-one percent of participants were Democrats, 27 percent Republicans, and 42 percent Independents. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four (i.e., image-positive, image-negative, issue-positive, issue-negative) conditions and completed the project online. There were no differences in demographic or partisanship variables among any of the four conditions ($p > 0.50$).

Procedure

Participants in all conditions completed a pre-test questionnaire that included items measuring demographics, partisanship, candidate image evaluations, and voter enthusiasm. Upon completion of the pre-test questionnaire, participants received video and written instructions and then were exposed to the stimuli advertisements. Survey software randomized the order of the stimuli ads in each condition and would not advance until each embedded advertisement played in full, forcing exposure to both video instructions and advertisements. After exposure to the stimuli, participants were directed to the post-test questionnaire that included items reassessing candidate image evaluations and voter enthusiasm levels.

Independent Variables

Manipulated. This experiment used four conditions to test the influence of ad tone and content focus on viewers' candidate image evaluations and enthusiasm about participating in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial election. After an exhaustive review of the ads aired in this race, the researchers narrowed the focus to the political party ads. This decision was based on the predominance of ads sponsored by the political parties and to maintain consistent source attribution across the four conditions. As shown in Table 12.1, participants in each of the four conditions watched two 30-second ads (one ad per candidate) that were classified as image-positive, image-negative, issue-positive, or issue-negative (Kaid & Johnston, 2001). Please see the Appendix for a list of ads by condition.

Measured. In addition to manipulating ad tone (positive vs. negative) and content focus (issues vs. images), this investigation also measured viewers' political party affiliations as an independent variable. In the pre-test, participants identified their political party affiliation by answering a single item: "Generally, how would you describe your identification with the political parties in the United States?" Participants identified themselves as Republicans, Democrats, Independents, or other.

Table 12.1 Stimuli ads by condition, sponsorship, tone, content focus, and title

Ad condition	*Sponsorship*	*Ad tone*	*Content focus*	*Ad title*
Positive issue	Democrat Party	Positive	Issue	Table
	Republican Party	Positive	Issue	Jobs
Positive image	Democrat Party	Positive	Image	Fair
	Republican Party	Positive	Image	Believe
Negative issue	Republican Party	Negative	Issue	Paid the price
	Democrat Party	Negative	Issue	Gone
Negative image	Republican Party	Negative	Image	Flippin' nuts
	Democrat Party	Negative	Image	Answers

Dependent Variables

Candidate image evaluations. In both pre-test and post-test, participants were asked to complete a series of semantic differential scales for each candidate using 12 bipolar adjectives on a seven-point scale to measure candidate image evaluations (Garramone, 1986; Kaid, 2004; Kaid, Fernandes, & Painter, 2011; Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991). The bipolar adjectives included unqualified/qualified, dishonest/honest, unbelievable/believable, unsuccessful/successful, unattractive/attractive, unfriendly/friendly, insincere/sincere, excitable/calm, unaggressive/aggressive, unsophisticated/sophisticated, weak/strong, and inactive/active. The Cronbach's α indicated the scale was reliable at 0.89 in the pre-test and 0.94 in the post-test for Crist, and 0.86 and 0.91 for Scott in the pre-test and post-test, respectively.

Enthusiasm. In both pre-test and post-test, participants were asked to complete a series of six items measuring their enthusiasm about participating in the 2014 gubernatorial election on a seven-point Likert scale (Gallup, 2014b; Pew, 2014; Zaichowsky, 1985). The items included: compared to previous elections, I feel a sense of urgency about participating in the 2014 election; compared to previous elections, I am more enthusiastic about the 2014 election; compared to previous elections, the 2014 election is more important; the upcoming election has significant value in today's society; the upcoming election is well known in today's society; and the upcoming election has fundamental value in today's society. The Cronbach's α indicated the scale was reliable at 0.81 in pre-test and 0.86 in post-test.

Results

Main Effect of Ad Tone: Positive vs. Negative Ads

Hypothesis 1a predicted that viewers of negative ads would report greater changes (decreases and increases) in candidate image evaluations than would viewers of positive ads. To test this prediction, the candidates' pre-test evaluation scores were subtracted from their post-test evaluation scores to create an evaluation change variable. The results of two ANOVA tests revealed that viewers of negative ads ($M = -4.78$, $SD = 9.61$) reported significantly greater changes in their image evaluations of Crist than did viewers of positive ads ($M = 0.39$, $SD = 8.23$, $F[1, 671] = 50.60$, $p < 0.01$). The difference in the size of the changes in Scott's image evaluations among viewers of negative ads ($M = -1.71$, $SD = 8.26$) and viewers of positive ads ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 6.36$), however, was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). That is, participants exposed to negative ads reported decreases in Scott's evaluations, but the size of this decrease was equivalent to the size of the increases reported by participants exposed to positive ads. Thus, these findings provide conditional support for H1a because negative ads exerted greater changes only in Crist's candidate image evaluations.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that those exposed to positive ads would report greater gains in voter enthusiasm than would those exposed to negative ads. To test this prediction, participants' pre-test enthusiasm scores were subtracted from their post-test enthusiasm scores to create an enthusiasm change variable. The results of an

ANOVA test revealed that participants exposed to positive ads ($M = 8.64$, $SD = 3.71$) reported greater gains in enthusiasm than did those exposed to negative ads ($M = 7.21$, $SD = 4.40$), and this difference was significant, $F(1, 671) = 7.77$, $p < 0.01$. This result provides strong support for hypothesis 1b because viewers of both positive and negative ads reported increases in voter enthusiasm, but viewers of positive ads reported significantly greater gains in voter enthusiasm than did viewers of negative ads..

Main Effect of Content Focus

The second set of hypotheses tested the influence of content focus (i.e., issues vs. images) in the political advertisements. Hypothesis 2a predicted that those exposed to image ads would report greater changes in candidate image evaluations than would those exposed to issue ads. The results of two ANOVA tests revealed that those exposed to image ads ($M = -3.03$, $SD = 8.41$) reported greater changes in Crist's image evaluation than did those exposed to issue ads ($M = -0.85$, $SD = 9.13$, $F[1, 671] = 8.02$, $p < 0.01$). For Scott, on the other hand, the changes in candidate evaluations among those exposed to image ads ($M = 0.45$, $SD = 4.22$) and those exposed to issue ads ($M = 0.27$, $SD = 5.61$) were statistically equivalent ($p > 0.1$). Thus, similar to the finding in H1a, these results provided conditional support for H2a because they were candidate-dependent.

H2b predicted that those exposed to issue ads would report greater gains in voter enthusiasm than would those exposed to image ads. The results of an ANOVA test revealed that those exposed to issue ads ($M = 8.06$, $SD = 4.84$) reported marginally greater gains in enthusiasm than did those exposed to image ads ($M = 8.33$, $SD = 3.90$), but this difference was not significant ($p > 0.05$). This result failed to support H2b.

Interaction Effects

The final set of hypotheses tested for interactions among the independent variables. H3a predicted that those exposed to negative image ads would report the greatest changes in candidate image evaluations among the four conditions. To test this hypothesis, two factorial ANOVAs were conducted. As shown in Table 12.2, the results of the analyses revealed a significant interaction effect on changes in Crist's ($F[1, 671] = 16.73$, $p < 0.01$) as well as Scott's image evaluations ($F[1, 671] = 22.22$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 12.2 Changes in image evaluations and voter enthusiasm by tone and content focus

	Positive ads (n = 169)	*Negative ads (n = 164)*	*Image ads (n = 172)*	*Issue ads (n = 177)*	*F*	*p*
Crist	0.39	−4.78	−3.03	−0.85	16.73	0.00
Scott	1.99	−1.71	0.45	0.27	22.22	0.00
Enthusiasm	8.64	7.21	8.33	8.06	0.81	0.21

A series of simple effects tests revealed that those exposed to negative image ads ($M = -5.70$, $SD = 9.10$) reported greater changes in Crist's image evaluations than did those exposed to negative issue ads ($M = -3.97$, $SD = 8.63$), positive image ads ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 8.58$), or positive issue ads ($M = -1.84$, $SD = 8.05$). Similarly, those exposed to negative image ads of Scott ($M = -3.49$, $SD = 10.11$) reported the greatest negative changes in his image evaluations compared to those exposed to negative issue ads ($M = -0.13$, $SD = 7.08$), positive image ads ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 7.59$), or positive issue ads ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 3.87$). Thus, the interaction between tone and content focus significantly influenced changes in image evaluations of both candidates. However, the size of negative change in Scott's evaluations among those exposed to negative image ads was statistically equivalent to the size of positive changes reported by those exposed to positive image ads. Accordingly, these results provided conditional support for the prediction in the hypothesis because they were candidate-dependent.

H3b predicted that those exposed to positive image ads would report the greatest gains in enthusiasm about participating in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial election. The results of a factorial ANOVA, however, revealed that the interaction between tone and content focus on voter enthusiasm was not significant ($p > 0.05$). Thus, we failed to find support for this hypothesis.

Viewer Partisanship Interactions

RQ1 asked how the interaction among viewers' partisanship, ad tone, and content focus influenced changes in candidate image evaluations. The results of a factorial ANOVA revealed a significant interaction among the three independent variables on changes in image evaluations for Crist ($F[2, 671] = 7.17$, $p < 0.01$) and Scott ($F[2, 671] = 12.92$, $p < 0.01$). For Crist, the results of tests of simple effects revealed that Republicans ($M = -9.21$, $SD = 6.68$) and Democrats ($M = -8.44$, $SD = 10.88$) exposed to negative image ads reported the greatest (and statistically equivalent) decreases in positive image evaluations, while Independents exposed to positive image ads ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 8.57$) reported the greatest gains in his image evaluations. For Scott, on the other hand, the results of tests of simple effects tests revealed that Democrats ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 8.45$) and Republicans ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 4.32$) exposed to positive image ads reported the greatest (and statistically equivalent) gains in image evaluations, while Democrats exposed to negative image ads ($M = -9.39$, $SD = 12.29$) reported the greatest decreases in image evaluations. On balance, when accounting for the influence of partisanship, these results indicate that image ads (vs. issue ads) exerted the greatest influence on changes (decreases and increases) in candidate image evaluations.

RQ2 asked how the interaction among partisanship, ad tone, and content focus influenced gains in enthusiasm about participating in the 2014 elections. The results of a factorial ANOVA revealed that the interaction among the three variables was significant ($F[2, 671] = 13.53$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, the results of tests of simple effects revealed that Republicans exposed to positive issue ads ($M = 12.06$, $SD = 2.92$) reported the greatest gains in enthusiasm about the election.

Discussion

This investigation tested the influence of ad tone, content focus, and viewer partisanship on the effects of political party-sponsored television advertising on changes (decreases and increases) in candidate image evaluations and gains in voter enthusiasm in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign. The results of the analyses comparing changes in candidate image evaluations revealed significant main effects and interactions. Overall, negative ads exerted greater influence than positive ads on the size of the changes in Crist's image evaluations because the size of the increase reported by viewers of positive ads was less than 10 percent the size of the decreases reported by viewers of negative ads. Alternately, the size of the increases in Scott's image evaluations among viewers of positive ads was statistically equivalent to the size of the decreases reported by viewers of negative ads. Similarly, when testing the effects of the ads' content focus, viewers of image ads reported decreases in Crist's image evaluations that were more than 300 percent larger than the decreases reported by viewers of issue ads, but image and issue ads exerted statistically equivalent influences on changes in Scott's evaluations. Thus, the interaction between ad tone and content focus resulted in negative image ads exerting the greatest influence on Crist's image evaluations.

Viewers of negative image ads also reported the greatest decreases in Scott's image evaluations, but the size of this decrease was statistically equivalent to the size of the increases in Scott's image evaluations among viewers of positive image ads. When parsing the influence of ad tone and content focus by viewers' partisanship, both Republicans and Democrats who viewed positive image ads reported the greatest increases in Scott's image evaluations, but only Independents who viewed positive image ads reported increases in Crist's evaluations. Exposure to negative image ads, on the other hand, resulted in Democrats reporting the greatest decreases in Scott's image evaluations, but both Republicans and Democrats reported the greatest decreases in candidate image evaluations for Crist. In sum, then, image ads exerted the greatest influence on changes in the candidates' image evaluations when accounting for the influence of tone and viewers' partisanship. Moreover, as summarized in Table 12.3, these results indicate that the effects of televised political advertising in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign were particularly harmful to Crist's candidacy.

Although every major newspaper in the state endorsed Crist, his approval ratings dropped by nearly 12 percent over the course of the campaign, and he lost the election by approximately 80,000 out of the 5.9 million votes cast (Florida Department

Table 12.3 Changes in image evaluations and voter enthusiasm by viewer partisanship

	Republicans (n = 182)	*Democrats (n = 209)*	*Independents (n = 283)*	*Total net change*
Crist	−0.94	−1.87	−2.56	−1.91
Scott	2.52	−0.60	−0.38	1.34
Enthusiasm	9.93	9.07	6.90	8.71

of State, 2014; PPP, 2014). In this study, the influence of viewing negative image ads aired by both political parties resulted in Democrats reporting decreases in image evaluations for Crist, their own party's nominee, that were statistically equivalent to the decreases reported by Republicans for Crist. Positive image ads, on the other hand, exerted positive effects on Crist's image evaluations only among Independents, but members of both political parties reported significantly greater increases in evaluations of Scott.

Theoretically, this study suggests that political party-sponsored advertising in midterm elections may exert powerful influences on changes in candidates' image evaluations. These results also indicate that the effects of the ads on changes in viewers' affect toward the candidate may be shaped by the candidate options in the electoral context and consistent with the direction of the ad's tone and viewer's partisan biases. Moreover, in a closely contested race between unpopular candidates, political party-sponsored image ads, especially negative image ads, may exert particularly strong influences on candidate image evaluations. These results support political operatives' belief in the power of negative advertising and research indicating that negative advertising exerts greater influence than positive advertising on candidate image evaluations (Garramone, Atkin, & Pinkleton, 1990; Krupnikov, 2012; Meirick, 2011). Likewise, these results extend prior research indicating image ads may exert powerful influences on candidate image evaluations (Kaid & Chanslor, 2004), with the direction of the changes (gains or losses) dependent upon viewer partisanship (Basil et al., 1991; Campbell et al., 1960; Downs, 1957; Krupnikov & Pitston, 2015).

To test the effects of political party advertising in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign on changes in voter enthusiasm, we developed an affective, psychological construct based on the classic involvement scale and voter enthusiasm questions used by leading polling organizations. This scale proved reliable in this study and the results suggest that positive ads exerted significantly greater positive effects on voter enthusiasm than negative ads. Although simple effects were not the focus of this study, it must be noted that the increase in voter enthusiasm reported by viewers of negative ads indicates that negative advertising may positively influence voter enthusiasm levels, albeit not as powerfully as positive ads.

When testing the interaction effects of ad tone, content focus, and viewers' partisanship, the results of the factorial ANOVAs revealed that Republicans exposed to positive issue ads reported the greatest changes in enthusiasm. Thus, while all participants reported significant gains in enthusiasm across the experimental conditions, positive issue ads exerted the greatest effects when parsing the influence of viewers' partisanship. Moreover, this result indicates that the net effects of political advertising in Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign were positive for Scott, not only in terms of positively influencing relative affect toward his candidacy but also by heightening voter enthusiasm among members of his political party. In practical terms, the results of this study support research emphasizing the importance of coordinating campaign advertising strategies to target specific audiences with specific types of ads to achieve specific goals in dynamic statewide campaigns (Carsey, Jackson, Stewart, & Nelson, 2011). This research also underscores the importance of developing advertising strategies that will activate

the candidates' base of support by heightening voter enthusiasm, especially in closely contested races.

Although Florida's 2014 gubernatorial campaign was a compelling context for investigating the influence of political party-sponsored advertising in a midterm election, this focus on one specific election in one particular state may also be a limitation. While Florida is regularly considered a crucial swing state in national elections (Cillizza, 2012), these findings may be particular to the unique circumstances of this election, in which both candidates had been previously elected governor and were well known within the state. Additionally, while diverse and representative of their generation in both demographic and ideological terms, the participants in this project were all college students. That said, the results of a meta-analysis of televised political advertising studies, however, suggest that the differences in effect sizes between student and nonstudent samples are not significant (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2007). Finally, the design in this study used ads from both candidates in the four treatment conditions; thus we were unable to isolate the influence of one campaign's ads on the candidates' image evaluations and voter enthusiasm. Future research comparing the effects of ads between candidates may delimit the effects of particular partisan campaigns on viewers' attitudes and behaviors.

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CHAPTER 13

MIDTERM VOTERS: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HEURISTIC SYSTEMATIC PROCESSING MODEL AND POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS

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Political advertising has a rich history. Some political advertisements have shown to be quite damaging toward candidates. For instance, George W. Bush's "swift boat" ad during the 2004 campaign proved quite destructive to the Kerry campaign, ultimately damaging Kerry's credibility as a veteran. However, advertisements are not always damaging. While political ads have shown a strong, rich history, the effects of political advertising have been somewhat mixed and inconclusive.

It has long been known that political advertisements typically inform voters who are not necessarily interested in politics, leaving these voters more informed after viewing an advertisement (Patterson & McClure, 1976). For those uninterested voters, it is possible that they may base their vote largely on what they see in advertisements. Recently, Bartels (2014) found that political advertising effects are party specific. These political advertisement effects wane over time for Republicans, but remain consistent for the undecided and Democrats. This research further exemplified that short-term effects can be eroded or reversed by counterarguing by those who are predisposed to resist. For example, individuals extreme in their ideological viewpoints may be predisposed to resist persuasion to a counterattitudinal message merely because it is labeled as counterattitudinal (e.g., Republicans resisting a Democratic message). This puts an interesting spin on political advertising effects and one that had not been found until recently. But, at the end of the day, the goal is for the advertisement to persuade and mobilize voters.

Previous research has investigated different aspects of political advertisements. For example, there has been a focus on tone (e.g., Finkel & Geer, 1998; Lau et al., 1999; Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991), topic (e.g., Goldstein & Ridout, 2004; Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Roddy & Garramone, 1988), and candidate attributes (e.g., Kaid, Fernandes, & Painter, 2011). However, much of the

extant research tended to examine these advertisement aspects individually without much consideration to the complex interactions between concepts like tone, sponsorship, or ad type. This project seeks to contribute further to understanding the ad components. Previous research has examined the interaction of tone, topic, and candidate sponsor (the candidate the ad is supporting) with intent to vote and attitude toward a particular candidate (Harvell & Pfau, 2012). There was a significant interaction, but interestingly some advertisements caused a boomerang effect (i.e., causing a reverse of the intended effect for some candidates). Specifically, both positive issue and negative image advertisements worked in favor of the candidate sponsoring the advertisement. However, the positive image and negative issue advertisements did not work in favor of the candidate sponsoring the advertisement. The voters viewing these ads had favorable attitudes and a higher intent to vote for the opposing candidate. One limitation of this study was that the sample consisted only of young voters. Therefore, the current exploratory study continues to investigate the three-way interaction of tone, topic, and candidate sponsor among voters in all age groups.

This study uses the Heuristic Systematic Processing Model (HSM) to delve deeper into how voters process certain types of advertisements. This could lend more nuanced insights into why some of these advertisements produce the intended effects while others do not. If the boomerang effects are occurring in all age groups and we can decipher how voters are processing certain advertisements, this could change the way we build persuasive messages within political ads.

Heuristic Systematic Processing Model

The HSM is an information processing model concerned with the motivation to attend to persuasive messages (Chaiken, 1980). Similar to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the HSM relies upon two tracks of information processing—the more peripheral heuristic route and the central systematic route. The HSM is just one of the models created by scholars interested in how information is processed and what aspects of a persuasive message lead to attitude change. While both ELM and HSM are viable, this project employs the HSM because heuristic processing relies on readily accessible existing knowledge and gut instinct (Chaiken, 1980). This is useful for examining political ads because many people tend to be bombarded with political ads during a campaign season and only pay cursory attention. The HSM also contends that people process affective information more heuristically. The systematic route relies on a more cognitively demanding process. This is also useful given this project is incorporating tone as a variable.

The HSM assumes people will be cognitive misers when confronted with a persuasive message (Chaiken, 1980). When a person has little motivation to fully investigate and ponder a message, they use heuristic processing as a shortcut. More specifically, people use existing knowledge structures to quickly evaluate information. This is governed by heuristic memory structures, which Chaiken (1980) argues relies on accessible and relevant information. For instance, a voter may envision a conservative ideal when a politician alludes to traditional moral values.

Because of the expedient nature of heuristic processing, people tend to make snap judgments based on message characteristics like source similarity and source popularity (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Because messages are not deeply evaluated, heuristic processing does not lead to long-term attitude change.

Systematic processing is a much more involved process that evaluates the content and source of the persuasive message. Unlike heuristic snap judgments, systematic processing deeply evaluates the content and quality of the message (Chen, Duckworth, & Chaiken, 1999). Instead of relying on a vague heuristic like "Reagan Republican," a voter using systematic processing would evaluate whether the message was deemed credible, examine sources cited, and reference hard evidence like a voting record. A person must be highly motivated to systematically process a message.

Information systematically processed either falls in line with current attitudes and thus helps support them or conflicts with current attitudes (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Affirmative information strengthens attitudes and can lead to message acceptance and augmentation of current attitudes. Conflicting information, on the other hand, incites counterarguing and no attitude change.

The HSM is particularly interesting as a framework for evaluating political advertising because people process positive and negative ads differently (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). Comparative and negative ads tend to contain more specific information and cited evidence (Geer, 2006). Positive ads tend to allude to more abstract characteristics such as values and patriotism. Given this, people process negative ads more systematically. Compared to positive ads, negative ads are linked to greater accuracy and recall (Newhagen & Reeves, 1991) and inspire greater information-seeking behavior (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). The HSM helps explain that because negative ads are often more dire and alarming, they inspire the need for surveillance information processing (i.e., paying closer attention) (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). Surveillance processing in a political advertising context means people will view negative political information more thoroughly and thus more systematically. Positive ads, on the other hand, do not create the same amount of alarm and people tend to process this information less thoroughly (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). With positive ads, people process information more heuristically (Franz, Freedman, Goldstein, & Ridout, 2007). Thus, it is asked:

RQ1: How are the different advertisement combinations of tone, topic, and candidate sponsor processed by voters?

Positive vs. Negative Advertisements

Negative political advertising is not new and these ads have been common practice in campaigns since 1952 (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991). Negative ads even follow pretty much the same format since their inception in 1952 (Jamieson, 1992). And, campaigns still heavily use negative advertising as a main mode of communication with voters (Fowler & Ridout, 2010). Negative advertising occurs when 30 seconds are spent criticizing and belittling opponents instead of promoting their own ideas (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1997). Negative issue ads tend

to attack opponents' public policies, public records, and issue stances (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991). On the other hand, negative image advertisements attack opponents' personal traits, administrative abilities, and/or moral character (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1997).

It is no surprise that negative advertisements are not popular among voters. Voters tend to perceive these ads as lacking truthfulness and fairness (Daignault, Soroka, & Giasson, 2013; Devlin, 1995; Garramone, 1984; Painter, 2014; Pinkleton, 1997). But, these ads tend to be remembered better and are often perceived as having more useful information (Bradley, Angelini, & Lee, 2007; Daignault et al., 2013; Garramone et al., 1990). Even with the heightened awareness, some scholars have argued that these ads are not always a positive thing for campaigns. For instance, negative ads can polarize the electorate and can lead to a decrease in voter turnout (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). Moreover, for negative ads, research has shown a backlash against their sponsors, while others are shown to decrease target candidate support (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Bartels, 2014; Fernandes, 2013; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Harvell & Pfau, 2012; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991; Krupnikov, 2014; Phillips, Urbany, & Reynolds, 2008). It has also been argued that candidate characteristics play a key role in the valence voters give to political advertisements (Chou & Lien, 2010). For example, if a voter feels the candidate is a good person, then he or she may valence their feelings toward that candidate as positive. Political advertisements making voters feel a certain way about candidate characteristics can help with voter valancing of candidates.

Recently, research has been completed that gives us more information about negative advertising. For instance, negative Super PAC advertisements in 2012 produced net decreases in affect toward Mitt Romney and net increases toward Barack Obama, further lending support to the fact that political advertising can influence affect (Painter, 2014). Negative ads also continue to generate heightened awareness levels and more persuasive resistance (Daignault et al., 2013). There also tends to be more cognitive elaboration when people watch advertisements with which they identify ideologically (Daignault et al., 2013).

Negative advertisements, with repeated exposure, can influence voter perceptions of political candidates in many ways. First, evaluations of candidate sponsor can increase before decreasing when ads are placed closely together (Fernandes, 2013). However, research has also shown that it is possible for the candidate being attacked to be benefited as well (Fernandes, 2013).

Second, when the repeated exposure of the negative ads was spread out, evaluation of the sponsor candidate increased with more repetition, but the evaluation of the target candidate decreased with more repetition (Fernandes, 2013). Overall, political advertisements (both positive and negative) were shown to have the ability to both mobilize and demobilize voters (Krupnikov, 2014). This research found that the effects of negative advertising is highly conditional; an identical ad can have very different effects depending on the person's point of exposure (Krupnikov, 2014). For instance, when voters repeatedly see negative ads placed close together in a television program, research suggests that "the candidate sponsoring the ad might suffer a backlash effect as a function of too much repetition within a short period" (Fernandes, 2013, p. 285). Based on this research, it is predicted:

H1: Negative advertisements are more influential than positive advertisements on willingness to vote for a particular candidate.

H2: Negative issue-focused advertisements are more influential than negative image-focused advertisements on willingness to vote for a particular candidate.

H3: Negative issue-focused advertisements promote more negative attitudes toward the opposing candidate than negative image-focused advertisements.

Issue vs. Image vs. Comparison Advertisements

Political advertisements attempt to persuade voters about political candidates through focusing on (1) issues, (2) images, or (3) comparisons to their opponent (Brader, 2005). It is important for candidates to put forth not only their issues but also a favorable image (Johnston & Kaid, 2002). Candidates also compare their issues to their opponent's issues in comparison ads. With these being the three main types of advertisements, it is imperative to gain a firm understanding of which ad is most appealing to voters. As the election nears, more advertisements tend to be aired (Meirick, Robertson, Harvell, Nisbett, Jefferson, Kim, & Pfau, 2010).

There has been some interesting research that serves as the guide for this study regarding issue, image, and comparison advertisements. When these ads are attack ads, voters have been shown to like issue advertisements over image advertisements (Roddy & Garramone, 1998). It is important to note, though, that these differences did not transfer to voting intent (Roddy & Garramone, 1998). In regard to producing greater voting intent and an overall stronger positive effect on attitudes, issue ads tend to win over image ads (Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991).

Researchers typically know quite a bit about issue and image advertisements, but what is less well known is comparison advertisements, and extant research mirrors this interest. Comparison ads focus on comparing the candidates side-by-side. Recently, research showed that partisan viewers in a primary election had lower sponsoring candidate evaluations for comparative ads attacking a primary opponent than for a positive or comparison ad attacking eventual general election opponents (Meirick, Nisbett, Jefferson, & Pfau, 2011). Interestingly, this study also showed that Independents responded more favorably to positive ads than comparison ads. While these studies provide interesting insights into political advertising effects, the results are still mixed, warranting further research, especially in the area of comparison advertisements. It is asked:

RQ2: How does political tone (positive vs negative), topic (issue vs image vs comparison), and candidate sponsor (Republican vs Democrat) interact to determine an advertisement's influence on potential voters?

Method

Texas Gubernatorial Ads from 2014

Ten ads were chosen from the 2014 Texas gubernatorial race between Greg Abbott (Republican) and Wendy Davis (Democrat). These ads were candidate-sponsored and were chosen because they were the best representations of positive/negative

issue/image categories, according to the authors. Because this race was not a presidential race, the ads chosen were often the only options in their respective categories. However, when multiple ads fit into a category, the authors subjectively made the decision of the best representation of each category based on the definitions provided in the introduction. All advertisements were from the respective candidates. To understand party, tone, and content, participants were randomly assigned to view one of the following ads: (1) Negative Republican Issue—This ad included imagery of Davis and discussed her possible ethical violations and abuses of power. The ad suggested she was a typical politician. (2) Negative Republican Image—This ad featured Wendy Davis and focused on her appearance as a political insider. (3) Positive Republican Issue—"Healthy Texans" showed imagery of Abbott in a medical setting and images of medical workers. It also showed military veterans who needed medical support. The ad focused on Abbott's health policy plan. (4) Positive Republican Image—"Madrina" focused on a testimonial from Abbott's mother-in-law, Mary Lucy Phalen. She spoke about Abbott's family, faith, values, trustworthiness, and commitment to service. (5) Negative Democrat Issue—The ad addressed the issue of sexual predators and Abbott's record on the issue. (6) Negative Democrat Image—"Time Went By" focused on child sexual abuse and questioned Abbott's values in failing to stand up for the children. (7) Positive Democrat Issue—"Are You In?" showed imagery of Davis's entry into the governor's race and images of a wide variety of Texans. It showed media clips talking about the race and Davis's successes. (8) Positive Democrat Image—This ad showed imagery of the countryside and cities of Texas. It focused on testimonials about how Wendy Davis embodies the Texas spirit, including her personal triumphs and personal beliefs. (9) Comparative Democrat Issue—"Court" showed imagery of a lonely little girl in a schoolroom interspersed with images of Abbott and Davis. The ad attacked Abbott's education record and promoted Davis's education plan. (10) The control condition featured the "Bill" from the *School House Rock* cartoon series. He sung a song about the congressional legislative process. It was political, yet not campaign-focused.

Participants and Procedure

The survey utilized the online survey service Qualtrics and was distributed via social media and e-mail. The survey was distributed from October 18 to November 3. It relied upon a convenience sample with a 25 percent completion rate for those who clicked through to the survey. The survey was promoted through the researcher's contacts in Texas with a request to distribute the link further via social media posts and e-mail. Given the use of social media for survey distribution, a set response rate was not determinable. Survey instructions stipulated that participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and a Texas registered voter. Participant ($N = 87$) ages ranged from 19 to 64 with an average of 31. While this response rate was low, a power analysis used prior to data collection indicated this number to be sufficient given the research design.

Of those participating, 33 percent were male and 67 percent female. In terms of race and ethnicity, 21.4 percent were African American, 3.6 percent Asian, 57.1 percent

White, 7.1 percent mixed/other, and 10.7 percent no answer; 17.4 percent were Hispanic regardless of race. In terms of education, 1.2 percent had some high school, 42.4 percent high school degree, 29.4 percent some college, 11.8 percent college degree, and 15.3 percent postgraduate work. In terms of income, 43 percent made under $20,000, 22.1 percent between $20,000 and $39,999, 15.1 percent between $40,000 and $59,999, 8.1 percent between $60,000 and $79,999, and 11.6 percent made over $80,000. Participants included a range of political ideological affiliations including 12.6 percent Republican, 33.3 percent Democrat, 26.4 percent Independent, 5.7 percent Libertarian, and 28.7 percent no affiliation.

After reading an informed consent form and agreeing to participate in the study, participants were randomly assigned to one of the ad conditions. After viewing the ad, participants answered two open-ended questions about what they thought of the ad and what they viewed. These questions were intended as a manipulation check to ensure the video was viewed. It was intended that participants not answering this question would be thrown out. However, all participants answered this question to the point it was clear he or she viewed the video. Additionally, the second question was used to determine how participants processed the message. This qualitative data was coded in order to determine heuristic and systematic processing. A thematic analysis of the open-ended questions was completed. The themes that emerged were then categorized as either heuristic or systematic processing or not using either category. Key phrases not focusing on the argument (e.g., clothing, background music, accents, etc.) were coded as heuristic processing. Key phrases focusing on the argument or facts of the ad were coded as systematic processing. The authors used the definitions of heuristic and systematic processing set forth earlier in this chapter as a guide for the thematic analysis. The participants falling into the "no category" group often answered their open-ended questions with one word (e.g., ok, good, bad, etc.). Participants then answered questions about how they viewed each candidate and likely voting behavior in the 2014 election. They then answered questions about ideology and demographics.

Candidate evaluation was measured using a semantic differential scale based on Miller and Burgoon (1979). Items included foolish/wise, unfavorable/favorable, negative/positive, unacceptable/acceptable, wrong/right bad/good, competent/incompetent, intelligent/unintelligent, happy/unhappy, contented/gloomy, hopeful/despairing, pleased/annoyed, and qualified/unqualified. Reliability for the scale was evaluated using a Cronbach's α test. Reliability was excellent for the Davis measure ($\alpha = 0.981$, $M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.39$) and Abbott measure ($\alpha = 0.970$, $M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.45$). Voting behavior for both candidates was measured using a self-report in which participants were asked about their voting likelihood in the upcoming Texas gubernatorial election. Using a scale from 1 to 100 percent, participants reported their percentage likelihood to vote on November 4, 2014.

Findings and Discussion

Cognitively Processing Political Advertisements

The first research question investigated what kind of cognitive processing is taking place among voters when viewing different political advertisements. The authors

qualitatively put voters into processing categories when they were prompted to describe, in their own words, the advertisement. In order to get a feel for the overall processing of these messages, frequency counts were conducted: 42 percent of voters used the heuristic (peripheral) route, 35 percent used the systematic (central) route, and 20 percent did not fall into a processing category.

In order to investigate the relationships among tone, topic, candidate, and processing, three chi-squares were separately run for each of the independent variables. Advertisement tone (positive, negative, or comparison) and processing was found to be significant, $\chi^2 = 12.68$, $p < 0.05$. Further investigation of the frequency counts showed that for positive and negative advertisements, the majority of voters are processing heuristically. However, for comparison ads, there were slightly more voters processing the message systematically. Hardly any respondents seemed to process comparison messages heuristically ($n = 3$); it was nearly half (systematic) and half (did not fall into a category). Topic ($\chi^2 = 3.42$, $p = 0.755$) and candidate ($\chi^2 = 6.86$, $p = 0.152$) with processing did not show significant effects.

Once the groundwork was laid for an understanding of how processing works, we delved further into the processing analysis to investigate what role processing had on intent to vote for a particular candidate and positive or negative attitudes toward a particular candidate. It is important to note that the two processing categories were coded simultaneously. For intent to vote, there was no relationship present with processing for either candidate (Democrat: $F[2,80] = 0.877$, $p = 0.420$; Republican: $F[2,73] = 1.93$, $p = 0.152$). However, a significant relationship was found between attitude toward the candidate and processing for the Democratic candidate, Wendy Davis, but not for the Republican candidate, Greg Abbott (Democrat: $F[2,86] = 3.42$, $p < 0.05$; Republican: $F[2,86] = 0.20$, $p = 0.818$). Further investigation of the model showed that heuristic processing produced the highest level of positive attitudes for Davis, with no category processing producing the lowest level of affect (see Figure 13.1).

The only significant relationship found with processing was with tone. Specifically, when the ads had a specific tone (i.e., negative or positive), voters processed those messages heuristically. Somewhat with positive, but especially with negative tone, voters were probably either angry or happy regarding the message. Qualitatively speaking, many participants with these ads seemed angry with the candidate sponsoring the advertisement. Therefore, it can be argued from these results that maybe positive ads are too positive and the negative ads are too negative, ultimately turning voters off and potentially causing these ads to have the opposite of the intended effect. Interestingly, comparison ads caused voters to process these messages systematically. Much like with positive and negative ads, these messages could also prime voters to lean toward systematic processing. Comparison advertisements typically focus on a comparison of issue stances between the two candidates. While this study did not find a significant relationship between processing and topic, it may be that this subset of the Texas voting population just did not pick it up.

Processing did not seem to affect intent to vote. While this study did not examine separately decided versus undecided voters, future research on processing and political advertisements should. It could be that this subset of voters was largely decided, so it did not matter how they processed a message; it would not affect

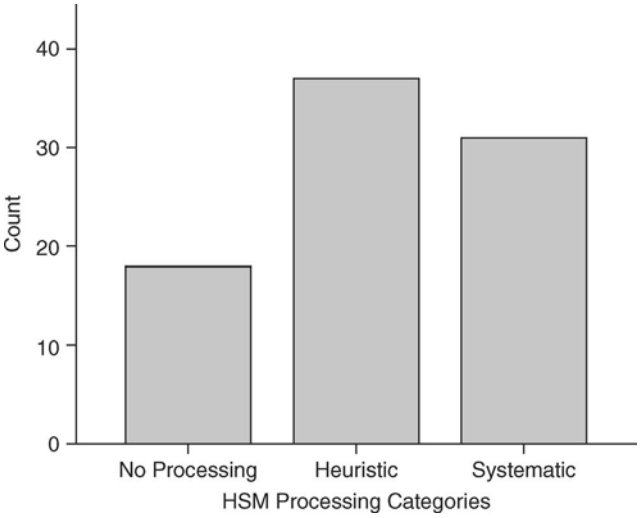

Figure 13.1 Relationship between attitudes toward Wendy Davis and processing.
Note: A higher mean attitude score equals a higher level of positive attitudes for Wendy Davis.

how likely or not they would be to vote for a candidate. On the other hand, processing did show some effect on attitudes toward a particular candidate. There was a significant relationship between attitudes and processing for Wendy Davis. Specifically, heuristic processing produced the highest level of positive attitudes for Davis, while no category processing produced the lowest level of positive attitudes (see Figure 13.1). There are many things at play here that could explain these results. First, gender could have played a role. The fact that Davis is a woman and a mother (similarly to Hillary Clinton in Harvell & Pfau, 2012) could have helped generate positive attitudes and pushed voters into heuristic processing, especially with her image advertisements. Second, it could be that this subset of voters already liked Davis. Therefore, future research should add in some pre-test attitude measures to see if the advertisement had any influence on their processing and/or attitudes toward the candidate.

Intent to Vote vs. Affect toward Candidate

Three separate 2 (negative, positive) × 3 (issue, image, comparison) × 2 (Republican, Democrat) ANOVAs were run to test the three separate hypotheses. The second hypothesis argued that negative issue-focused advertisements would produce an increased level of intent to vote for a particular candidate than negative image-focused advertisements. This hypothesis was partially supported. For Wendy Davis advertisements, the relationship argued in H1 was not significant: $F(7, 83) = 0.216$, $p = 0.806$. However, there was a significant relationship found with Greg Abbott ads: $F(6,75) = 2.96$, $p < 0.05$. As seen in Figure 13.2, intent to vote (1) increased when the issue ad was negative rather than positive; (2) decreased when the image

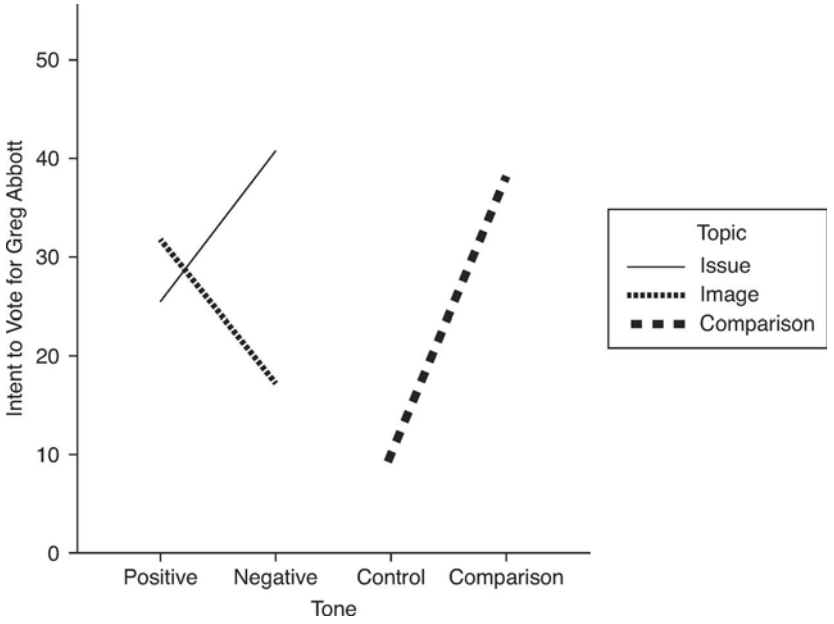

Figure 13.2 Issue vs. image vs. comparison ads and intent to vote for Greg Abbott.

Note: Intent to vote variable is 0–100 percent. There was no change in the control condition; hence there are only three lines versus four lines.

ad was negative rather than positive; and (3) did not change significantly with comparison ads.

The first hypothesis argued that negative advertisements would produce increased levels of intent to vote than positive ads. This hypothesis was not supported for either Davis ($F[3,83] = 0.430$, $p = 0.732$) or Abbott ($F[3,75] = 0.856$, $p = 0.468$). The third hypothesis, which argued that negative issue-focused ads would promote more negative attitudes toward the opposing candidate than negative image-focused ads, also was not supported for either Davis ($F[7,88] = 0.467$, $p = 0.628$) or Abbott ($F[7,88] = 0.291$, $p = 0.748$).

Tone vs. Topic vs. Candidate Interaction

To investigate research question two, a 2 (positive, negative) × 3 (issue, image, comparison) × 2 (Republican, Democrat) ANOVA was run. For intent to vote, there was a significant interaction for Davis, $F(1,83) = 5.42$, $p < 0.05$, but not for Abbott, $F(1,75) = 2.54$, $p = 0.116$. For attitude toward a specific candidate, the same significant interaction was found for Davis, $F(12,88) = 2.13$, $p < 0.05$), but not for Abbott, $F(12,88) = 0.886$, $p = 0.350$.

There was a significant interaction present, but it is somewhat complicated. This study did not find any evidence of a boomerang effect occurring among the significant findings. However, the present study did find that the significant interaction

only occurred for the Democratic candidate and not the Republican. This was consistent in both the dependent variables. It is interesting to note that while the three-way interaction was prevalent mostly with Democrats, the two-way interactions were in favor of the Republicans. This could be because of the ads used. Some of the messaging used by the advertisements could have led voters to a certain conclusion about the candidate. Future research must focus on these significant interactions and the differences in the messaging used.

Replication

The findings of this study should hold true with an electorate of a wide variety of ages. Both current study and previous research showed significant effects for the Republican candidate; however, the present study shows opposite effects as the original study.

The data suggest what previous research has argued (Dresner & Wickers, 2003)—young voters do think differently than the rest of the electorate. What is interesting here is that according to this subset of Texan young voters, it produced opposite effects for the Republican candidate. However, it is important to note that for the Democratic candidate (who also was a woman) in the Harvell and Pfau (2012) study, the ad worked in the exact same way as the significant interaction did with the Republican candidate of the present study. This is a rather puzzling finding and one that future research must delve into further. The Republican ad responses worked opposite of each other in both studies. This could be a lack-of-knowledge issue. The Republican candidate in the 2012 study was John McCain. Greg Abbott, the Republican candidate in the present study, is extremely well known in Texas. Therefore, the ads may not have had as much of an effect on voters as the 2012 study. Also, the present study was a gubernatorial race, and the 2012 study looked at the frontrunners in a presidential primary. The level of race also could have played a role in the opposite ad effects. Interestingly, in the 2012 study, both candidates' ads produced significant effects, whereas in this study, only the Republican ad produced results. Greg Abbott did end up defeating Wendy Davis, so maybe the overall favorability during the last days of the election (when this data was collected) among voters played a role too.

While tone significantly interacted with topic to produce significant results with intent to vote, when topic was collapsed, the significant relationship vacated as well. Therefore, it can be argued from both this study and the 2012 study that topic (issue vs. image vs. comparison) does make a difference. Additionally, negative issue-focused ads did not promote more negative attitudes than negative image ads toward the opposing candidate.

One of the main findings of the Harvell and Pfau (2012) research was that some ads backfired and did not work in the intended way (positive image and negative issue ads). It was important to see whether these findings could be replicated. Interestingly, all of the ads worked in the intended way of the sponsor candidate in the present study for intent to vote. Attitudes toward a particular candidate were not investigated due to the lack of significant model.

Limitations

While this study initially set out to investigate all ages of voters, the mean age ended up being rather low (in the early thirties). While this is a limitation, this study lends further exploratory findings to young voter research as well as replicates previous research in this area. Additionally, the response rate was extremely low for this study. This is attributed to technological issues and young voters' lack of desire to access online experiments from their phones. Lastly, the participant number is low. However, after a power analysis, we do have the minimum number for adequate statistical power.

Implications for Campaigners and Researchers

The main purpose of this study was to somewhat replicate the 2012 research and see whether some of the same effects occur when voters of all ages are sampled. Due to previous research showing boomerang effects, we wanted to delve further into how voters are processing political advertising messages. By adding a processing element into this study, we wanted to investigate whether certain messages led to certain types of processing. After determining this, we wanted to see how this affected attitudes and intent to vote for the candidates showcased in the political advertisements.

The findings of the current study allow campaigners to breathe a sigh of relief. Their advertisements seem to be working in the intended way. However, these results help argue that, qualitatively, voters seemed to get most angry when they heuristically processed an advertisement message. Therefore, it may be beneficial for campaigners to design ads that evoke central processing. In order to do this, campaign ad designers must focus on issue-focused ads. By doing this, the advertisement will most likely have a priming effect for voters to think about the issues and, therefore, centrally process the message. However, as mentioned in previous research, if the issues are inaccurate, that has the potential to backfire among young voters and furthermore could ignite more anger among older adult voters. If any voter finds out the facts are inaccurate in an advertisement, then credibility will be lost. And, voters are not likely to vote for candidates who do not appear credible.

Campaigners and political communication researchers also need to look at the differences between decided and undecided voters. These individuals also need to determine how much attention they want to pay to young voters. It may be suggested that online ads—advertisements that are most likely seen the most by young voters—be tailored to them taking into account boomerang capabilities, whereas the television advertisements can still be tailored to the entire electorate of all ages. Lastly, campaigners and political communication researchers need to pay close attention to how candidate identity affects voter behaviors and cognitions.

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CHAPTER 14

BLUE GOVERNORS IN RED STATES AND RED GOVERNORS IN BLUE STATES

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The geopolitical boundary has been an important topic for discourse in American politics. There are a significant number of studies about the effects of geopolitics in general elections (Yun, Jasperson, & Kaid, 2010; Yun, Opheim, & Hanks, 2014), but the area of research regarding midterm elections is very limited in its scope and target. Moreover, research in gubernatorial campaigns and elections and the practical campaign techniques has been less explored. There have been no general or consistent conclusions regarding the campaign dynamics in gubernatorial elections. Some studies argue that the process and effect of campaigns and electoral behaviors are the same in both presidential and gubernatorial elections (e.g., Peltzman, 1992), while other studies assert that gubernatorial elections are different from presidential elections and that voter preferences in governor's races are more likely bound by political and socioeconomic conditions of the states they are in (Brown, 2010). A midterm election provides an optimal circumstance to observe gubernatorial campaigns since a presidential campaign does not overshadow lower and state levels of elections and campaigns (Vavreck, 2001). The current study observes the effective themes of gubernatorial campaigns across battleground and nonbattleground states during the 2014 midterm election.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Geopolitical Color in Midterm Gubernatorial Elections

The geopolitical color of states based on the partisan proportion of voters as well as its interaction with political candidates' parties have been a long and heavy discussion point in American political campaigns and elections (Ceaser & Busch, 2005; Levendusky & Pope, 2011). At least since the 2000 election, journalists and political commentators have used the terms "blue states" and "red states" to refer to those

states whose residents predominately vote for the Democratic Party (blue) or the Republican Party (red), with "purple states" being ones without an overwhelming majority of support for either party.Voters in blue states are definitely different from voters in red states in terms of their socioeconomic characteristics, policy attitudes, and political beliefs (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2005). Political candidates from both major parties in different geopolitical colors of blue, purple, and red states have predetermined advantages and disadvantages in their election races, and their campaign strategies achieve different degrees of success (Yun et al., 2010).

Some candidates experiencing special circumstances during their campaigns, such as campaigning under one of the worst economic recessions, take unconventional and aggressive campaign approaches to win their elections by borrowing opposing party's campaign strategies and mixing their political color with the color of the other party, expanding their campaign platforms and promises (Ceaser & Busch, 2005; Issenberg, 2013). However, there have been consistent arguments for effective campaign strategies and rhetoric related to particular political times, spaces, and circumstances depending on the proportion of partisan voters within each state (Gelman, 2010; Johnston, Blais, Brady, & Cret, 1992; McGhee & Sides, 2011).When other factors in campaigns get ambiguous, such as in instances where the quality of competing candidates is not known, a partisan cue becomes the most important indicator for campaign mobilization at the state level of elections (McGhee & Sides, 2011).

When it comes to geopolitical discussions for more state-bound elections like for governors' offices, the effect of geopolitical color based on electoral partisanship magnifies (Bonneau & Cann, 2015; Khemani, 2001). For the governor's office, Democratic candidates in blue states and Republican candidates in red states often operate their campaigns as a confident winner from the beginning of their campaigns, while candidates whose partisanships are incongruent with the dominant partisanship of their states, or who run their campaigns in swing states, often run dynamic campaigns to change the preset of the political game and to persuade broader electorates (Guillory, 2012; McGhee & Sides, 2011).

The parameters by which people define or identify someone as being a good and popular governor are broad and vary depending on political and social contexts. In campaigns and elections, the definition can be narrowed down to a leader of a state who successfully sends out a positive signal that he or she performs well for the state's affairs (Brown, 2010).The most agreed-upon scholarly argument about governors' evaluations is that a strong and improved state economy is the most direct indicator for a successful governor, but positive approval ratings for a good state economy and blame for a negative economic condition depend on the congruency of a governor's political party with the predominant public partisanship in a state. For example, when the state economy is bad in a red state, a Democratic governor tends to get more blame than a Republican governor would; this is also true vice versa in blue states (Brown, 2010;Wolfers, 2002).

The dynamics of geopolitical color are directly related to the effective campaign strategy in gubernatorial elections. Gubernatorial candidates try to minimize their party identities if voters' predominant party is opposite to their own party. For instance, Republican gubernatorial candidates in blue states run more liberal

campaigns, and Democratic gubernatorial candidates in red states tend to be more conservative during their campaigns. For gubernatorial candidates whose party is in congruency with the majority electorate in their states, the traditional model, "keep your base and reach to the center," seems to work as their best campaign tactic (Lawton, 2014). As discussed, the same political performance and campaign strategies are evaluated and interpreted in different ways across blue, purple, and red states. Therefore, candidates deliver political messages that are more adaptive and appealing to their target voters in certain geographical locations (Iyengar & Simon, 2000). The mediating effects of partisanship and political color are stronger for midterm elections and even stronger for the second midterm elections based on the "presidential penalty" theory. In midterms, voters are more likely to use party identification for their voting choice against the president's party to express their dissatisfaction with the president (Knight, 2014).

Theme of Political Advertising in Gubernatorial Races

Research shows that political advertising can matter. Political advertising, the most conspicuous form of campaign communication, informs voters and increases their awareness (Iyengar & Simon, 2000; Kaid, 1997, 2004; Valentino, Hutchings, & Williams, 2004). In gubernatorial races, the same political statements and messages can be interpreted and perceived in a very different way by the time and place of the campaign (Carsey, 2009). Although candidates use various types of political advertising, and each advertisement has mixed themes and traits (Vavreck, 2001), each candidate puts different relative emphasis and focus on certain types of advertising, themes, and topics depending on his or her relative advantages in the specific circumstance of the race (Kaid & Johnston, 1991). Gubernatorial candidates often focus on a popular and specific agenda of their states and attack the opposing candidates on the issue from the perspectives of their own party (Carsey, 2009; Stein, 1990). This chapter explores the various themes of political advertising that gubernatorial candidates adopt in their campaigns and examines the effects of those themes across different political grounds of blue, purple, and red states.

Self-Praise vs. Attack Advertising

There have been seemingly endless discussions on the effectiveness of positive and negative advertising in American political campaigns. Some argue that the negative attack advertising intensifies voters' cynical attitudes and lowers voting turnouts (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Kaid & Johnston, 1991); however, others argue that voters remember and recall more from negative advertisements than positive advertisements, that voters believe attack advertising is more credible than self-praise or acclaiming advertising, and that political information in negative advertisements gives voters more motivation and intention to vote (Kaid & Johnston, 1991; Robideaux, 2013; Wattenberg & Brians, 1999). In the advertisement analysis from 1980 to 1996, Benoit and his colleagues (1998) found that Democratic Party candidates were more likely to adopt the acclaiming strategy and Republican Party candidates more often used attack strategies. At the level of

gubernatorial elections, although the candidates adopt both self-praise and attack advertising in their campaigns, the candidates use attack advertising more frequently in order to target the competitor on specific state issues (Carsey, 2009).

Past- vs. Future-Oriented Advertising

Gubernatorial candidates always face a difficult decision whether they should emphasize their past accomplishments or speak strictly to future plans for their states (Carsey, 2009). Benoit and colleagues' functional analysis looked into the theme of past and future orientations in political advertising. Their study confirmed that political candidates used both past accomplishment and future promise themes in their campaigns, and they often used the themes in conjunction with other themes such as issue-specific appeals and negative attack tactics depending on candidates' strategic positions (Benoit et al., 1998).

Issue- vs. Image-Oriented Advertising

Issue and image advertising are classic distinctions in political campaigns (Berelson, 1966; Kaid, 1981). Political candidates tend to take an issue-focused approach based on the strategic calculation that their targeted issues would give them comparative advantages in the races (Iyengar & Simon, 2000). Image advertising, in contrast, is adopted more frequently by candidates who hold a lead and have relative advantages in the races (O'Cass, 2002). In their study of the 1982 Texas gubernatorial election, Faber and Storey (1984) found that only one-third of voters recalled the content of image advertisements, and voters overall were more likely to remember advertisements for their preferred candidates.

Advertising with State Cue

Gubernatorial elections are all about their own states, and researchers have agreed on the importance of a state-specific agenda in state-level campaigns (Carsey, 2009). Naturally, gubernatorial candidates tend to pay more attention to specific state affairs than candidates at the federal-level elections. Whether a gubernatorial candidate decides to elicit a specific state cue by mentioning the name of his or her state or by drawing out public sentiment and schema associated with the state's issues and image, or a candidate goes broader in his or her advertising, depends on his or her comparative advantage in the campaigns. If a candidate's party is associated with issues that are important to his or her state, the candidate is more likely to go with the state-specific issues (Carsey, 2009; Stein, 1990).

Advertising with Party Cue

Gubernatorial candidates are sensitive to the prevalent partisanship that exists in their states. Although most candidates tend to use their political parties to their advantage in the campaigns, it depends on the congruency between candidates' political parties and the dominant party of their voters. If the electorate is hostile to

a candidate's party, the candidate tends not to explicitly deliver party cues in his or her advertising, while a candidate who perceives that his or her party is more popular in the state than the competitor's party is more likely to explicitly express his or her party affiliation in advertising (Vavreck, 2001). Overall, in midterm elections, one-third of political candidates use their party cues in their advertising by directly mentioning their parties, emphasizing party-owned issues, or eliciting party images, and the party is the most important indicator for voters' decisions when all other factors and conditions are indifferent (Vavreck, 2001).

Social Media as Enhancer of Gubernatorial Campaigns

Social media have been used extensively in political campaigns and elections since the 2008 election where almost all major party candidates used at least one type of social media (Hayes, 2008). Political communication via social media, such as distributing political information and informing voters about campaign events using Facebook or Twitter, is becoming more common and popular, and now even a necessary channel for political campaigns (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). Although there are mixed findings about the benefits of using social media for political education and mobilization (Hong & Nadler, 2012), more studies argue that social media increase voters' political information efficacy and voter turnouts (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Social media may be considered hybrid elements of advertising and campaigns (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and are often used to enhance and amplify the effects of conventional campaign messages in traditional forms of television and radio and to boost the effects of political advertising and other campaign activities by reaching out to mass audiences at almost no cost (Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, & Hovy, 2010).

The most popular social media services in American campaigns are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Bullas, 2013; Pew Research, 2012). Facebook enables users to create their own profiles and provides them with a platform to share and interact within their friend networks; Twitter lets users send short messages back and forth in real time; and YouTube allows users to share user-created videos.

In the 2014 midterm election, almost all candidates used at least two or three different social media services. When we looked into 2014 gubernatorial candidates' campaign websites, the most common social media links listed were Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Out of 72 major party candidates running for governorships, only one candidate did not use Facebook, only two candidates did not use Twitter, and only 19 candidates did not upload any videos to YouTube. Candidates not only posted their campaign messages and shared their political advertisements on their social media accounts, but they also initiated political discussions or forums via their social media to interact with their electorates (Hong & Nadler, 2012; Messing, Franco, Wilkins, Cable, & Warshauer, 2014). Some argue that Republican candidates use social media differently from Democratic candidates. For example, Rainie and his colleagues found that Republicans use social media accounts to interact with their own groups within their political boundaries, but Democrats use social media to reach out more broadly to people outside of their political groups (Rainie, Zickuhr, Purcell, Madden, & Brenner, 2012).

On the voters' side, social media have become an important source of political information (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Voters are getting their political information using their portable personal devices like smartphones rather than sitting in front of the TV or turning on the radio. Studies have shown that paid television subscriptions have been going down in the last few years and people are becoming "cable-less voters" (Zara & Sirota, 2014). Social media use among voters across all different partisanships has increased (Snyder, 2014), but voters' intentions and patterns of social media use vary according to the existing political atmosphere across blue, purple, and red states (Yun, Opheim, & Hanks, 2014). Specifically, in 2012, social media users in battleground states more actively used social media in their political communication and believed that social media helped with their political activities online. In strong blue and red states, social media users were more selective in their information exposure, less likely to share potentially conflictive views with others, and overall more passive about their political communication via social media (Yun et al., 2014).

However, it is still controversial how much Facebook "likes," Twitter "followers," and YouTube uploads contribute to campaign outcomes (Johnson & Kaye, 2014). Political candidates have often unconditionally adopted and passively used social media for their campaigns simply because their opponents used social media (Yun, Park, & Dugas, 2010). Some social media indicators such as Facebook "likes" can be unreal or faked by social media robots called "socialbots" (Conte, 2014). Social media can be an effective channel for certain voter demographics, such as young voters or females, but the effectiveness is not generalized and representative of the average voter (Sheets, 2014). Therefore, solid theoretical arguments regarding the degrees of contribution of social media to general politics, policies, campaigns, and elections are not well established.

Research Questions

RQ1: Is there an effective theme of political advertising in midterm gubernatorial races across the different geopolitical grounds of blue, purple, and red states?

RQ2: Do social media amplify the effects of campaigns in midterm gubernatorial races across the different geopolitical grounds of blue, purple, and red states?

Measures

Gradual Poll Results and Final Outcome

This study was designed to understand how various themes in campaign advertising contribute to public ratings and how social media enhance the campaign effects for gubernatorial candidates in different political grounds of blue, purple, and red states over the course of the 2014 midterm campaign and election. As other major election study institutions have recognized (American National Election Study, n.d.; Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research, n.d.), the more important question is when and how different campaign strategies work, and how

and why voters make up their minds rather than knowing who the winner is and what the final election result is. Therefore, rather than limiting the study to only the final election results, the current chapter used three different assessments of public ratings during the peak campaign season up to the Election Day—two months before the election, one month before the election, and the final election outcome.

After all primary elections for intraparty contests were concluded across the nation, by September 9, and before the voting date in the 2014 midterm election, the average poll results were traced for the two months from September 15 and October 15 for each gubernatorial candidate. Out of the list of the polling institutions that tracked changes in electoral voting intentions over time—Public Policy Polling, Quinnipiac, CNN/Opinion Research, CBSNews/NYT/YouGov, Rasmussen Reports, SurveyUSA, and major university polls in each state—the polls that were conducted at two specific timelines, two months (September 15) and at one month (October 15) before the Election Day, were gathered and averaged. The final election results were recorded as the third public rating in the study. The public ratings could range from 0 to 100 and were the percentages of voters' choices between their gubernatorial candidates.

Geopolitical Color of State

The last four presidential election results were used to categorize the blue, purple, and red states. If a state continuously voted for Democratic Party presidential candidates for the last four general elections, the state was coded as a blue state. If a state voted for Republican Party presidential candidates for all four past presidential elections, the state was coded as a red state. If a state voted at least once for a different party presidential candidate for the last four general elections, the state was coded as a purple or swing state.

Since there were gubernatorial elections in only 36 states in the 2014 midterm election, the total number of Republican and Democratic candidates was 72. According to the coding system, 36 candidates ran their campaigns in blue states, 28 candidates competed in red states, and only 8 candidates were in purple states. In order to overcome the uneven numbers of cases for the blue, purple, and red states, the weighting function was applied. Weights of 4.5, 1.34, and 1 were assigned to purple, red, and blue states, respectively, for a more reliable and robust comparison across different states.

Themes of Political Advertising

This research explored how a theme of political advertising played a different role and which theme would be the most effective advertising strategy for gubernatorial candidates in different political grounds during the 2014 midterm election. Each candidate adopted almost all different types of political advertisements for their campaigns, but each candidate emphasized a certain aspect of the campaign and concentrated on a certain theme based on his or her comparative advantages in the election battle.

Among the 2014 gubernatorial candidates' campaign advertisements paid by candidates themselves after all primaries, for each candidate the most viewed political advertisement through a YouTube search was selected to identify the main theme of their campaigns. Political candidates themselves and party or campaign staff on behalf of their candidates posted the most targeted and selective political ads to YouTube and used the service to disseminate campaign themes. As the Internet increasingly becomes as an important information source for voters and as online video becomes an important political communications tool for campaigns (Zara & Sirote, 2014), finding the most viewed political advertisement on YouTube seemed to be the most legitimate way to select the most representative advertisement of each candidate. There were a couple of candidates, such as Andrew Cuomo and Mary Fallin, who ran heavy campaigns in their first-term elections or during the primaries and did not make and air their own TV advertisements after the primaries in the 2014 midterm election. For those cases, the most viewed political advertisements aired anytime during their 2014 campaigns were selected.

The five major approaches of political advertising in previous scholarly research (Kaid & Johnston, 2001) were used to identify the main themes of the most representative political advertisement for each gubernatorial candidate. The themes adopted for this study were self-praise vs. attack; past orientation vs. future orientation; image orientation vs. issue orientation; state cue; and party cue. Each theme was coded in a dichotomous manner of 1 and 0. If the most representative political advertisement of a candidate was predominantly attacking the opposing candidate, the theme of self-praise vs. attack was coded as 1, otherwise 0. If the advertisement emphasized future plans rather than past accomplishments, the theme of past orientation vs. future orientation was coded as 1, otherwise 0. If the advertisement focused on issues over images, the theme of image orientation vs. issue orientation was coded as 1, otherwise 0. If the advertisement presented a cue about state by either directly mentioning the name of the target state or eliciting issues within or image of the target state, the theme of state cue was coded as 1, otherwise 0. Lastly, if the advertisement delivered a cue related to a political party by mentioning a specific political party or providing schematic information associated with a party, the theme of the party cue was coded as 1, otherwise 0. Two coders coded the most viewed political advertisement for each gubernatorial candidate, and the Cronbach's α intercoder reliability achieved a consistency value of 0.92.

Social Media

In the 2014 gubernatorial elections, excepting for Sam Brownback from Kansas, Robert Goodman from Nevada, and Charles Brown from Tennessee, every candidate used both Facebook and Twitter. Like televised political advertising, social media are no longer an optional campaign tool for political candidates (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Yun et al., 2010). Therefore, whether a candidate used a type of social media was not a question and the real question was how well a candidate used social media to boost their campaigns.

To observe how social media helped gubernatorial campaigns, the three most dominant social media services—Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—were selected.

The number of Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and YouTube videos uploaded by each gubernatorial candidate were recorded on November 3, the day before the 2014 midterm election. However, the raw number of the counts varied by the state population and the level of competitiveness of the races. Therefore, they were recoded as dichotomous values of relative counts between two major party contesters in each state to assess which candidate had a larger social media impact. If a candidate had a larger number of Facebook "likes" than his or her opponent, he or she was coded as 1 and the opponent candidate as 0. The same coding system was applied to Twitter followers and YouTube video uploads. Of the 2014 gubernatorial candidates, the average Facebook "likes" were 50,278, average Twitter followers 27,755, and average YouTube video uploads 44.

Sample

There were gubernatorial races in 36 states in the 2014 midterm election. Gubernatorial candidates from the major parties, Democratic and Republican, were selected for this study for the purpose of researching the dynamics of the party in different geopolitical battlegrounds. There was one third-party candidate who won his election and there were a couple of third-party candidates who earned significant support and were recognized in many ways. Although they were highly recognized during the campaign and even afterwards, they were not relevant to the focus of the current study and were not generalized and representative enough due to the small number of cases.

For example, Bill Walker, an independent candidate in Alaska, actually beat his Republican opponent, Sean Parnell, by 1.4 percent and won the election, but he was excluded from the analysis for the above-stated reason. There were a few candidates from minor parties who were competitive and gained significant levels of support and votes throughout the campaigns and elections. Robert Healey, from Rhode Island who was independent, earned 22.1 percent of the total final votes, and Mufi Hannemann, an independent in Hawaii, received 11.7 percent of the total final votes. Eliot Cutler, an independent candidate in Maine, raised more campaign funds ($2,674,715) than his major party opponents, Democrat Mike Michaud and Republican Paul LePage, who raised $2,415,304 and $1,403,915, respectively (National Institute on Money in State Politics, 2014). Cutler kept the state-level poll ratings above 10 percent before Election Day and received 8.4 percent of the total final votes. These independent candidates were excluded from the study. Therefore, a total of 71 gubernatorial candidates were analyzed in this study.

Results

To compare the effectiveness of various advertising themes across blue, purple, and red states and to understand the role of social media over the course of the 2014 gubernatorial campaign, repeated-measures ANOVA combined with contrast tests were used. The interactive effects of advertising theme and gubernatorial candidates' partisanship across different geopolitical grounds of states were examined as well as social media's role in the campaign.

Self-Praise vs. Attack Advertising

Using repeated-measures ANOVA and contrast tests, the study confirmed that the candidates' strategy, whether they focused more on self-praise or on attacking their competitors, brought out different levels of effectiveness for the two major party candidates across different political grounds of blue, purple, and red states, $F(6,132) = 4.44$, $p < 0.01$. The contrast tests found that the public rating fluctuated by the theme of self-praise vs. attack advertising across different states especially for the last month of the campaign, $F(3,66) = 6.15$, $p < 0.01$ (see Tables 14.1 and 14.2).

Specifically, Republican gubernatorial candidates who avoided attack advertising and emphasized self-promoting messages in purple states (+13.70 percent) were likely to get increasing support from voters than their counterparts (+1.00 percent), even compared to the Republican candidates in blue (+6.22 percent) and red states (+6.67 percent) for the last month of their campaigns. However, Republican candidates in blue states tended to be more effective in damaging their opponents using attack themes and got significantly increased support (+7.08 percent) than Republicans using the same strategy in red states (+3.27 percent) (see Tables 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3).

Past- vs. Future-Oriented Advertising and Issue- vs. Image-Oriented Advertising

When analyzing tactics on whether governors should emphasize their past accomplishments or their future plans, the data showed that it did not matter much on the pre-election polls or voting totals. Both strategic focuses mildly helped both major party candidates' campaigns across blue, purple, and red states; however, they were statistically insignificant.

However, the repeated-measures ANOVA showed that the issue- vs. image-oriented advertising strategy made a significant difference in the gubernatorial elections, $F(6,132) = 2.46$, $p < 0.03$, and the contrast tests found that the advertising theme was especially more important toward the end of the campaign, $F(3, 66) = 4.10$, $p < 0.01$. In blue states, image-oriented advertisements were more likely to increase positive ratings for both Democratic (+6.00 percent) and Republican (+7.60 percent) party candidates than issue-oriented advertisements (+1.65 percent for Democrats and +6.22 percent for Republicans). However, in purple and red states, Republican candidates whose advertising focused on issues (+9.38 percent in purple states and +6.22 percent in red states) rather than images were more likely to gain voters' support than Democratic candidates (+1.00 percent in purple states and +2.79 percent in red states) during the last month of their campaigns (see Tables 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3).

State Cue

In gubernatorial elections, eliciting a cue about their own states has been one of the important key campaign strategies for candidates. The study confirmed that the strategy achieved different degrees of success for the two major party candidates across

Table 14.1 Repeated-measures ANOVA on changes in candidate ratings by advertising themes in interaction with state color and party

Factors and interactions	*Type III sum of squares*	*d.f.*	*Mean square*	*F*	*p*
Gradual rating	356.86	2	178.43	50.82	0.00
Gradual rating * State color	2.33	4	0.58	0.17	0.96
Gradual rating * Candidate party	127.36	2	63.68	18.13	0.00
Gradual rating * Self-praise vs. Attack	16.24	2	8.12	2.31	0.10
Gradual rating * Past-oriented vs. Future-oriented	5.82	2	2.91	0.83	0.44
Gradual rating * Image-oriented vs. Issue-oriented	7.01	2	3.50	1.00	0.37
Gradual rating * State cue vs. No state cue	67.08	2	33.54	9.55	0.00
Gradual rating * Party cue vs. No party cue	40.19	2	20.09	5.72	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Self-praise vs. Attack	93.52	6	15.59	4.44	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Past-oriented vs. Future-oriented	36.82	6	6.14	1.75	0.11
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Image-oriented vs. Issue-oriented	51.80	6	8.63	2.46	0.03
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * State cue vs. No state cue	81.65	8	10.21	2.91	0.01
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Party cue vs. No party cue	166.06	10	16.61	4.73	0.00
Error (factor 1)	463.50	132	3.51		

different political grounds, $F(8,132) = 2.91$, $p < 0.01$, and different stages of campaigns, $F(4,66) = 12.50$, $p < 0.01$, from two months to one month before the election and from one month before Election Day, $F(4,66) = 2.89$, $p < 0.03$. The strategy influenced candidates' ratings from the early stages of the campaigns. From primary elections to Election Day, political advertising with state-specific cues helped gubernatorial candidates who were ideologically incongruent with their states' prevalent political colors (i.e., Democratic candidates in red states and Republican candidates in blue states) more so than candidates whose political parties were ideologically congruent with the dominant partisanships of their states (i.e., Democratic candidates in blue states and Republican candidates in red states) (see Tables 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3).

In the early campaign period at the start of the general election, in blue states, Republican candidates' emphasis on state-specific agendas (+2.50 percent) was a

Table 14.2 Contrast tests on changes in candidate ratings by advertising themes in interaction with state color and party

Factors and interactions	*Assessment*	*Type III sum of squares*	*d.f.*	*Mean square*	*F*	*p*
Gradual rating	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	0.26	1.00	0.26	0.11	0.74
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	547.01	1.00	547.01	71.86	0.00
Gradual rating * State color	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	0.27	2.00	0.14	0.06	0.94
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	4.31	2.00	2.15	0.28	0.75
Gradual rating * Candidate party	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	12.38	1.00	12.38	5.42	0.02
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	137.41	1.00	137.41	18.05	0.00
Gradual rating * Self-praise vs. Attack	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	24.41	1.00	24.41	10.69	0.00
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
Gradual rating * Past-oriented vs. Future-oriented	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	3.06	1.00	3.06	1.34	0.25
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	11.65	1.00	11.65	1.53	0.22
Gradual rating * Image-oriented vs. Issue-oriented	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	13.32	1.00	13.32	5.83	0.02
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	6.47	1.00	6.47	0.85	0.36
Gradual rating * State cue vs. No state cue	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	0.57	1.00	0.57	0.25	0.62
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	107.89	1.00	107.89	14.17	0.00

Gradual rating * Party cue vs. No party cue	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	39.78	1.00	39.78	17.41	0.00
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	75.20	1.00	75.20	9.88	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Self-praise vs. Attack	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	9.72	3.00	3.24	1.42	0.25
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	140.47	3.00	46.82	6.15	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Past-oriented vs. Future-oriented	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	31.60	3.00	10.53	4.61	0.01
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	59.47	3.00	19.82	2.60	0.06
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Image-oriented vs. Issue-oriented	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	6.96	3.00	2.32	1.02	0.39
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	93.65	3.00	31.22	4.10	0.01
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * State cue vs. No state cue	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	114.25	4.00	28.56	12.50	0.00
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	88.11	4.00	22.03	2.89	0.03
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Party cue vs. No party cue	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	54.47	5.00	10.89	4.77	0.00
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	251.76	5.00	50.35	6.61	0.00
Error (factor 1)	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	150.78	66.00	2.28		
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	502.43	66.00	7.61		

Table 14.3 Mean and standard deviation of candidate ratings by advertising themes in interaction with state color and party

State color	*Party*	*Theme of advertising*	*Sep. 15 poll*		*Oct. 15 poll*		*Nov. 4 election results*	
			M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Blue	Democrat	Self-praise	45.97	5.19	46.11	5.45	49.25	5.09
		Attack	45.51	6.50	44.61	6.11	45.86	5.28
	Republican	Self-praise	39.49	6.77	42.49	5.88	48.71	6.23
		Attack	37.89	5.95	38.24	5.20	45.31	5.84
Purple	Democrat	Self-praise	39.93	3.04	40.93	4.46	41.93	6.66
		Attack	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Republican	Self-praise	54.00	2.12	53.50	0.53	67.20	3.61
		Attack	43.15	1.22	43.40	2.12	48.45	0.27
Red	Democrat	Self-praise	33.00	4.17	34.60	4.88	34.64	6.82
		Attack	37.61	5.78	37.37	6.82	41.44	3.23
	Republican	Self-praise	50.72	6.06	50.86	5.30	57.54	7.59
		Attack	56.27	9.15	55.00	8.05	58.27	4.36
Blue	Democrat	Past-oriented	45.76	6.66	45.68	6.19	47.78	6.17
		Future-oriented	45.84	3.65	45.29	4.93	48.17	3.97
	Republican	Past-oriented	38.91	5.94	39.60	5.60	47.27	6.36
		Future-oriented	38.64	6.97	41.60	6.25	47.13	6.27
Purple	Democrat	Past-oriented	41.90	1.17	43.90	1.17	46.45	0.69
		Future-oriented	36.00	0.00	35.00	0.00	32.90	0.00
	Republican	Past-oriented	43.15	1.22	43.40	2.12	48.45	0.27
		Future-oriented	54.00	2.12	53.50	0.53	67.20	3.61

Red	Democrat	Past-oriented	39.55	4.27	40.85	3.46	41.88	2.97
		Future-oriented	31.83	3.67	31.58	4.23	35.33	6.51
	Republican	Past-oriented	52.94	7.39	53.32	6.15	59.22	7.70
		Future-oriented	49.33	5.41	47.83	3.38	53.88	1.06
Blue	Democrat	Image-oriented	40.10	1.39	40.47	1.53	46.47	3.10
		Issue-oriented	46.93	5.36	46.54	5.56	48.23	5.66
	Republican	Image-oriented	35.86	6.36	38.80	4.84	46.40	3.83
		Issue-oriented	39.90	6.13	41.29	6.22	47.51	6.93
Purple	Democrat	Image-oriented	–	–	–	–	–	–
		Issue-oriented	39.93	3.04	40.93	4.46	41.93	6.66
	Republican	Image-oriented	–	–	–	–	–	–
		Issue-oriented	48.58	5.83	48.45	5.41	57.83	9.96
Red	Democrat	Image-oriented	38.75	2.59	39.80	0.25	40.20	1.64
		Issue-oriented	35.08	5.83	35.50	6.44	38.29	6.48
	Republican	Image-oriented	57.15	9.91	57.15	7.39	61.45	2.72
		Issue-oriented	51.03	6.32	50.85	5.48	57.07	7.25
Blue	Democrat	State cue	45.50	5.73	45.39	5.77	47.52	5.70
		No state cue	46.83	5.49	46.03	5.66	49.38	3.79
	Republican	State cue	39.02	6.29	41.52	5.84	47.74	6.11
		No state cue	38.30	6.84	38.77	5.93	46.12	6.60
Purple	Democrat	State cue	36.00	0.00	35.00	0.00	32.90	0.00
		No state cue	41.90	1.17	43.90	1.17	46.45	0.69
	Republican	State cue	47.00	5.30	47.70	6.68	56.00	8.27
		No state cue	50.15	6.20	49.20	4.03	59.65	11.61

continued

Table 14.3 Continued

State color	*Party*	*Theme of advertising*	*Sep. 15 poll*		*Oct. 15 poll*		*Nov. 4 election results*	
			M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Red	Democrat	State cue	35.86	6.03	35.96	6.56	38.58	6.56
		No state cue	34.85	2.34	37.50	3.16	38.75	0.19
	Republican	State cue	53.28	6.81	52.25	5.96	58.16	7.29
		No state cue	46.87	5.35	49.93	6.58	55.97	5.91
Blue	Democrat	Party cue	55.00	–	51.00	–	46.90	–
		No party cue	45.25	5.21	45.21	5.58	47.99	5.45
	Republican	Party cue	36.25	2.47	36.40	2.26	46.45	7.28
		No party cue	39.09	6.59	41.13	5.98	47.29	6.24
Purple	Democrat	Party cue	40.80	0.00	42.80	0.00	47.10	0.00
		No party cue	39.50	3.71	40.00	5.30	39.35	6.84
	Republican	Party cue	42.00	0.00	41.40	0.00	48.20	0.00
		No party cue	50.77	5.05	50.80	3.99	61.03	9.51
Red	Democrat	Party cue	40.80	0.00	39.60	0.00	41.50	0.00
		No party cue	35.23	5.56	35.91	6.26	38.35	6.16
	Republican	Party cue	52.95	9.32	52.70	7.67	56.25	5.57
		No party cue	51.49	6.14	51.37	5.47	58.27	7.51

There are a number of cells with no mean and standard deviation values because no case was found for the specific combined factors.

good strategy against Democratic candidates. In red states, however, it seemed better not to use state-specific topics in their elections for both Democratic (+2.65 percent) and Republican (+3.07 percent) candidates. In contrast, in the last month of the campaign, in red states, Democratic candidates' state-targeted political advertising helped their ratings (+2.62 percent) significantly. In purple states, broader focuses beyond state-bound agendas seemed to help more with ratings for both Democratic (+2.55 percent) and Republican (+10.45 percent) candidates (see Tables 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3).

Party Cue

Like state cues in political advertising, party cues did play an important role in gubernatorial races across different states, $F(10,132) = 4.73$, $p < 0.01$, from the early campaign period after all primaries, from two months up to one month before the Election Day, $F(5,66) = 4.77$, $p < 0.01$, and from one month up to the Election Day, $F(5,66) = 6.61$, $p < 0.01$. Interestingly, Democratic candidates whose advertising strategy emphasized their party in blue states tended to gradually lose public support (−8.10 percent). In purple states, Democratic candidates (+5.15 percent) were more likely to gain public support by eliciting party cues in their political advertising, but Republican candidates whose political advertising emphasized their own party (−4.06 percent) were actually less likely to gain support from the public over the last two months of their campaigns compared to using advertising with no party cues (see Tables 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3). These findings answered the first research question: Whether there is any effective theme for political advertising in midterm gubernatorial races between two major party candidates across battleground and non-battleground states. The results suggested that each specific advertising strategy should be adopted in a different stage of the general election campaign depending on candidates' comparative advantages in their races.

Social Media

The second research question posited that social media intensify the effects of campaigns in midterm gubernatorial races. The study confirmed that the effectiveness of social media use varied by different party candidates and in different geopolitical grounds of blue, purple, and red states. Candidates' major social media use tended to be more effective in swing states in the final peak of the general election campaigns. As discussed above, in the 2014 midterm election, nearly every gubernatorial candidate used Facebook and became "friends" with their voters. Most candidates used Facebook to post their campaign messages and events and upload political advertisements in a routine way. Repeated-measures ANOVA and contrast tests showed that Facebook use and counts of "likes" did not make any difference in the outcomes of the gubernatorial campaign across different states, $F(6,162) = 0.60$, $p < 0.73$ (see Tables 14.4, 14.5, and 14.6).

Unlike Facebook, although almost all gubernatorial candidates used Twitter in the 2014 midterm election, the number of followers made a difference in the two major party candidates' ratings across different political grounds, $F(10,162) = 3.28$, $p < 0.01$, for the last month of their campaign, $F(5,81) = 4.10$, $p < 0.01$. If a candidate had more Twitter followers than his opponent, he or she was more likely to gain higher support toward the end of the campaign. In swing states, both Democratic (+4.30 percent) and Republican (+10.23 percent) candidates who had a larger number of Twitter followers than their opponents tended to have significantly increasing ratings for the last month of their campaigns. In non-battlegrounds, such as blue and red states, overall candidates did not have significant differences in their ratings by having a larger number of Twitter followers (see Tables 14.4, 14.5, and 14.6).

Gubernatorial candidates who utilized YouTube more proactively by posting and uploading their own political advertisements and other video clips were more likely to gain public support, $F(10,162) = 2.64$, $p < 0.01$, in the last month of their campaigns, $F(5,81) = 3.36$, $p < 0.01$. Overall, the candidates whose number of YouTube uploads were higher than their opponents ended up with higher ratings, but the tendency was stronger for Republican candidates in the swing states (+13.70 percent) (see Tables 14.4, 14.5, and 14.6).

Table 14.4 Repeated-measures ANOVA on changes in candidate ratings by social media in interaction with state color and party

Factors and interactions	*Type III sum of squares*	*d.f.*	*Mean square*	*F*	*p*
Gradual rating	1220.85	2	610.42	117.30	0.00
Gradual rating * State color	66.74	4	16.69	3.21	0.01
Gradual rating * Candidate party	213.26	2	106.63	20.49	0.00
Gradual rating * Facebook likes	4.89	2	2.44	0.47	0.63
Gradual rating * Twitter followers	25.20	2	12.60	2.42	0.09
Gradual rating * YouTube video uploads	153.37	2	76.68	14.74	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Facebook likes	18.82	6	3.14	0.60	0.73
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Twitter followers	170.67	10	17.07	3.28	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * YouTube video uploads	137.62	10	13.76	2.64	0.01
Error (factor 1)	843.06	162	5.20		

Table 14.5 Contrast tests on changes in candidate ratings by social media in interaction with state color and party

Factors and interactions	*Assessment*	*Type III sum of squares*	*d.f.*	*Mean square*	*F*	*p*
Gradual rating	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	20.90	1.00	20.90	4.64	0.03
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	1626.01	1.00	1626.01	133.52	0.00
Gradual rating * State color	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	2.05	2.00	1.03	0.23	0.80
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	86.84	2.00	43.42	3.57	0.03
Gradual rating * Candidate party	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	1.45	1.00	1.45	0.32	0.57
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	340.64	1.00	340.64	27.97	0.00
Gradual rating * Facebook likes	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	4.14	1.00	4.14	0.92	0.34
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	1.08	1.00	1.08	0.09	0.77
Gradual rating * Twitter followers	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	2.61	1.00	2.61	0.58	0.45
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	26.84	1.00	26.84	2.20	0.14
Gradual rating * YouTube video uploads	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	6.22	1.00	6.22	1.38	0.24
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	264.37	1.00	264.37	21.71	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Facebook likes	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	13.29	3.00	4.43	0.98	0.41
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	15.36	3.00	5.12	0.42	0.74
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * Twitter followers	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	16.24	5.00	3.25	0.72	0.61
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	249.70	5.00	49.94	4.10	0.00
Gradual rating * State color * Candidate party * YouTube video uploads	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	31.43	5.00	6.29	1.39	0.24
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	204.41	5.00	40.88	3.36	0.01
Error (factor 1)	Sep.15 vs. Oct. 15	365.29	81.00	4.51		
	Oct. 15 vs. Nov. 4	986.39	81.00	12.18		

Table 14.6 Mean and standard deviation of candidate ratings by social media in interaction with state color and party

State color	*Party*	*Social media*	*Sep. 15 poll*		*Oct. 15 poll*		*Nov. 4 election results*	
			M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Blue	Democrat	Facebook likes <	44.15	5.39	44.00	4.85	46.16	4.10
		Facebook likes >	48.37	5.10	47.93	6.17	50.71	6.05
	Republican	Facebook likes <	37.33	5.78	37.96	4.86	43.93	4.94
		Facebook likes >	39.70	6.68	42.28	5.99	49.28	6.08
Purple	Democrat	Facebook likes <	36.20	7.15	37.70	6.92	37.43	9.86
		Facebook likes >	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Republican	Facebook likes <	–	–	–	–	–	–
		Facebook likes >	48.58	5.83	48.45	5.41	57.83	9.96
Red	Democrat	Facebook likes <	33.57	5.49	33.60	5.63	35.68	7.83
		Facebook likes >	38.55	5.04	40.55	4.11	41.25	3.33
	Republican	Facebook likes <	47.82	6.40	47.78	4.33	52.64	4.60
		Facebook likes >	54.18	6.36	53.96	5.73	60.50	6.47
Blue	Democrat	Twitter followers <	45.54	6.16	45.67	6.10	48.59	4.48
		Twitter followers >	45.95	5.43	45.44	5.54	47.52	5.92
	Republican	Twitter followers <	38.44	5.82	40.04	5.63	47.08	5.88
		Twitter followers >	39.31	7.41	41.49	6.52	47.39	6.98
Purple	Democrat	Twitter followers <	34.67	7.70	36.00	7.25	34.20	9.34
		Twitter followers >	40.80	0.00	42.80	0.00	47.10	0.00
	Republican	Twitter followers <	42.00	0.00	41.40	0.00	48.20	0.00
		Twitter followers >	50.77	5.05	50.80	3.99	61.03	9.51

Red	Democrat	Twitter followers <	32.36	5.93	31.82	5.88	33.50	8.60
		Twitter followers >	36.81	5.11	38.19	4.96	39.83	5.13
	Republican	Twitter followers <	51.08	5.70	51.43	4.82	55.66	3.93
		Twitter followers >	53.02	8.60	52.18	7.60	60.40	9.20
Blue	Democrat	YouTube video <	46.14	6.53	45.19	6.12	46.89	5.16
		YouTube video >	45.52	4.98	45.80	5.44	48.77	5.51
	Republican	YouTube video <	37.70	5.11	39.83	4.24	45.75	5.45
		YouTube video >	40.47	7.93	41.81	8.00	49.47	6.87
Purple	Democrat	YouTube video <	33.93	6.87	35.27	6.28	34.63	9.92
		YouTube video >	43.00	0.00	45.00	0.00	45.80	0.00
	Republican	YouTube video <	43.15	1.22	43.40	2.12	48.45	0.27
		YouTube video >	54.00	2.12	53.50	0.53	67.20	3.61
Red	Democrat	YouTube video <	34.38	4.91	35.66	5.54	36.48	7.79
		YouTube video >	36.26	7.09	35.86	7.32	38.86	6.34
	Republican	YouTube video <	50.57	8.26	51.40	7.26	56.72	5.23
		YouTube video >	52.91	5.99	52.01	5.19	58.43	8.14

There are a number of cells with no mean and standard deviation values because no case was found for the specific combined factors.
<: When a candidate has less amount of the specific social media use than his or her opponent.
>: When a candidate has more amount of the specific social media use than his or her opponent.

Discussion

This study confirmed that there were interactions among political advertising themes, candidate partisanship, and geopolitical color in gubernatorial elections. As measured on pre-election polls and Election Day vote tallies, there were different degrees of successes in political advertising themes between major party gubernatorial candidates across different political grounds of blue, red, and purple states. Positive self-praise advertising worked better than negative attack advertising, especially for Republicans in political battlegrounds. In addition, when Republican candidates delivered issue-focused themes rather than image themes in the swing states, they were more likely to gain increasing support. Previous research supported the finding that in swing states political campaigns were more effective in informing and persuading voters and voters were more open to campaign messages (Yun et al., 2010, 2014). In addition, as conventional wisdom, in midterm—especially second midterm—elections, people tended to be more hostile to the president's party in 2014. In the hostile mood toward the Democratic party of the president, Republican gubernatorial candidates who ran more positive and more issue-focused campaigns gained more public support than Democratic candidates who used the same campaign strategies, especially in the battleground states where there was a greater potential for campaign effects (Woolley & Peters, 2014).

Moreover, gubernatorial candidates who ran their campaigns in ideologically incongruent states (i.e., Democrats in red states) were more likely to take advantage of state-specific advertising than the candidates in ideologically congruent states (i.e., Democrats in blue states). In other words, as other studies have argued about relatively disadvantaged candidates' strategies (Krakel, Nieken, & Przemeck, 2014; Milita, Ryan, & Simas, 2014), an effective strategy for candidates with a disadvantaged status in ideologically incongruent political grounds is to draw attention to specific state issues to gather support based on the target electorates' interests and to stay away from party-based approaches or general issues. However, as issue ownership literature suggests (Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003), in swing states it seems to be a more efficient strategy to cover broader topics to appeal to wider ranges of voters. Moreover, in those battleground states, broader liberal party cues seem to appeal to Democratic voters more than narrower conservative party cues (Hillygus & Shields, 2009).

Gubernatorial candidates' social media use was more likely to boost their campaign effects and thus help with candidate approval ratings. The tendency was stronger in swing states than blue or red states as previous studies confirmed (Yun et al., 2010, 2014). Among the various ways of using social media, being an active Twitter user drawing more followers and having more proactive YouTube uploads were associated with significant increases in candidate ratings toward the end of the campaign. However, we also need to understand that most political candidates have used social media for their campaigns for the reasons that their opponents used social media in their campaigns and they could also use it at almost no cost. The candidates often did not consider philosophical or ethical reasons for social media usage; rather, they often unconditionally adopted it in their campaigns to be equipped with the same tool their competitors had. Political candidates simply updated them periodically, often by their campaign staff. Social media have been

often utilized in a very homogenous and superficial way without comprehensive knowledge of the users; therefore, we often cannot find significant effects (Lippay, 2010). The insignificant effects of Facebook usage may have been the result of a passive and indifferent way of using it among the candidates.

In gubernatorial races, party cues and state cues played important roles from the early stages of the campaigns, while attack and issue-oriented advertising started to be more effective toward the end of the campaign. Therefore, candidates in gubernatorial races should adopt effective advertising themes and strategies in a timely manner. The current study suggests that advertising with state and party cues should come on the plate early in campaigns, and then attack and issue-specific advertising should be concentrated in the second half of the general election campaigns, utilizing social media, in order to maximize the effects of their campaigns in gubernatorial races. Most importantly, the effects vary by the time and place of campaigns. These effects are generally stronger in the swing states than non-battleground states, and the strategies are more effective for candidates whose party opposes the president's party in midterm elections. In other words, in the 2014 midterm election under a Democratic president's administration, Republican candidates in battleground states had to be aware of those campaign opportunities.

The current chapter concludes that there are different degrees of success in different advertising strategies and social media use between the two major party candidates over the course of the general election campaign across different states. However, due to the limited number of gubernatorial candidates and a small proportion of third-party candidates, the current study excluded the third-party candidates and did not discuss effective campaign strategies for other minority candidates, such as females and ethnic minorities. Further investigation into effective advertising strategies and social media use for female, ethnic minority, and third-party candidates should be made in future research.

In addition, in future studies, it would be more fruitful to examine the effects of debates combined with political advertising in gubernatorial elections across different partisan states. This current study did not consider debates due to inconsistent patterns of debate participation in the gubernatorial elections, and as a result, the effects of debates could not be legitimately compared. In gubernatorial elections, candidates' participation in debates varies by their own campaign strategies, their media markets, and other circumstances pertaining to their states. In addition, some debates were nationally televised and some were locally and informally aired; therefore, it was even harder to provide cohesive theoretical arguments or reliable methods of debate analyses. Although political advertising is the most dominant form of campaigns, political debate is also one of the prominent discourses of American political campaigns (Kaid, 2004), and it would be theoretically and practically useful if future studies provide the combined effects of themes of political advertising and debates.

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