

THE DYNAMICS OF TARGETING STRATEGIES IN THE COMPOSITION OF
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

by

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ABSTRACT

In modern campaigns, candidates have more control over their own campaigns and they develop strategies to bring more voters and ultimately to win the election. These strategies need to be adjusted based on the changes of vote preferences as an indication of simultaneous feedback from voters during campaigns. Considering the campaigns as large-scale efforts to communicate information to voters, I focused on campaign message strategies. Candidates choose the most effective messages to reinforce and persuade voters, thereby increasing the chance of winning in the presidential election. To examine the candidates' strategic behavior on selecting types of campaign messages, I categorized messages into two dimensions – the positional versus valence issue dimension and the positive versus negative tone dimension. In this dissertation, I argue that candidates employ different types of campaign messages depending on the level of support from specific groups. Hypothetically, candidates deliver more positional issues to reinforce their base voters and deliver valence issues to persuade swing voters. In addition, I hypothesized that candidates deliver more positive messages to reinforce base voters and negative messages are delivered to persuade swing voters. Accordingly, the level of

support from base voters and swing voters affects the decision as to which types of messages a candidate uses. To examine these dynamic campaign strategies, I selected the 1992 and 2000 presidential elections to test campaign speeches and advertisements and extended the time period to 2012 for acceptance speeches. The coded messages are regenerated as the proportional difference in the two dimensions. Daily tracking polls conducted by Gallup are used to measure the level of support from base voters and swing voters. Using the cross-sectional regression estimations, the results of this study show that campaign message strategies and the level of support are interactive. Candidates employed positional issues more to reinforce their base voters and valence issues to persuade swing voters across all types of campaign messages. Unlike this clear strategic utilization of the positional versus valence issues, the results show the mixed effects of the level of support on decisions to employ the positive or negative messages.

INDEX WORDS: Campaign Strategies, Campaign Messages, Presidential Elections, Positional Issues, Valence Issues, Positive Messages, Negative Messages, Base Voters, Swing Voters, Speeches, Advertisements, Acceptance Speeches

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my lovely family, Kookyung Sung, Jongsuk Kim, Myoungjin Sung, and Jiwhan Sung, and to my sweet husband, Hyungrock Lee. Their complete faith and relentless encouragement have truly been invaluable. I owe my gratitude to all my family members. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Elections and campaigns are fundamental to American democracy. During election campaigns, enormous public policy proposals are introduced as a blueprint of the new administration. These public policies are subject to voter approval and require the support of elected officials. Therefore, campaign outcomes directly influence what government can do. In the United States, there are more elections, more frequently, than in any other developed country. Over a million elections are held in every four-year cycle, and these elections provide insight into American politics and policy.

The elections, like sports, are a zero-sum game. If someone wins, someone loses. Particularly in presidential elections, no candidate runs for office to lose. In modern campaigns, candidates exercise more control over their own campaigns. Candidates directly face the voters and ultimately bear the responsibility for their own campaign operation. If candidates fail to understand the political context of an election, they will almost certainly lose the election. Therefore, understanding the behavior of candidates is the key to understanding campaigns.

Effective campaigns must continuously adapt to changes in the political environment to achieve success. Faced with a given electoral environment, how can candidates maximize their votes? Who are the important actors? What types of environments do candidates face? What information do candidates have? How do candidates make a choice? There are no easy answers to these questions. However, we can find some clues by focusing on the behavior of candidates and the ways in candidates and their campaigns attract votes.

Campaigns can be thought of as large-scale efforts to communicate information to voters. The information they convey may be responsible for structuring vote decisions and election outcomes. Candidates, therefore, should have a clear and effective plan to win elections. The plan is called “strategy.” Strategies tend to be more stable than tactics, but this does not mean that they are fixed¹. Effective strategies react to voters’ feedback to lead their candidate to the White House. Therefore, candidates should draft effective campaign strategies to reinforce partisan voters and persuade swing voters by increasing the proportion of vote preferences toward the candidates in the electorate. Moreover, the dynamics in the election require candidates to adjust their strategies given the simultaneous feedback from those voters.

Early studies in voting behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944) found that the influence of campaigns on vote intention and electoral outcomes is minimal. According to these studies, though presidential elections are highly visible, elections can be explained by exogenous factors such as partisan identification or socio-economic and demographic characteristics. More recently, the minimal effects hypothesis has been supported by the contention that election outcomes are a function of macro-economic conditions (Alvarez and Nagler 1995; Campbell, Dettrey, and Yin 2010).

If electoral outcomes can be predicted by the pre-existing conditions such as incumbency, party attachment, or retrospective evaluation, it would seem that campaign strategies and tactics play little role in the election results. If so, why do candidates spend such enormous resources on their campaigns? For example, in 2008, the Obama campaign employed nearly 800 staffers, with hundreds of part-time employees and thousands of volunteers (Luo and McIntire 2008).

Moreover, over \$400 million was spent by the Obama and McCain campaigns in 2008 on

¹ As tactics are the means by which the strategy is carried out. Tactics may change given the environment but the strategic goals remain constant, unless they become inefficient. Then a new strategy may emerge out of necessity.

television ads alone (Fenn 2009). So what does this suggest? Candidates behave rationally to maximize their resources to win the election. With this assumption, the reason that candidates operate highly visible campaigns and spend enormous funds is that campaigns do matter to them. In other words, candidates try to employ effective campaign strategies and these campaign activities consequently help presidential candidates to win the election. Therefore, it is important to have right strategies to bring more voters for the candidates by increasing the chance of winning. Marry Matalin (Matalin 1995), a campaign manager for George H.W. Bush in 1992, recalled their convention strategies:

Opening night was designed to solidify our base. Between Perot peeling off our anti-tax, anti-big government voters, and Buchanan capturing the more conservative factions, we had a lot of outreach to do. The strategic concept was to get everybody back on the Republican bandwagon right off the bat, so the rest of the convention could be devoted to advancing Bush's economic agenda and demolishing Clinton's (p.302).

This evidence from behavior of candidates explains the importance of campaign strategies that may influence the election outcomes and vote preferences during the elections.

In addition, campaign studies also suggest the significant roles of the campaigns in elections. Holbrook (1996, 156) argued that "election outcomes and voting behavior are easily explained with just a few variables, none of which are related to the campaign." He advanced the theory that pre-existing national conditions create equilibrium and often candidates are out of equilibrium at the outset of a campaign. Therefore, campaigns play a role to move public opinion toward the expected outcomes or to move the candidate's ideas toward the equilibrium. Hillygus and Shields (2009) argued that not only do campaigns have more than minimal effects on the public, but these effects reflect the activation of issues at the expense of partisan loyalties, especially among those most exposed to campaign information. This research evidently supports the significant campaign effects in the elections as campaign managers perceived.

In addition, Gelman and King (1993) found that public support for candidates during the campaign season fluctuated in response to campaign events. For example, in the 1992 election the level of support for the candidates completely reversed itself from early summer to election day. Even aggregate partisanship changed in response to the influence of campaign events (Allsop and Weisberg 1988). Gelman and King (1993) also addressed the importance of campaign information, reporting that voters can form enlightened preferences through the information generated by campaigns or provided by the media. In other words, campaign information helps voters make their vote decision for the candidate based on their political predispositions. Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar (1993) pointed out that “fluctuations in polls show distinct patterns that can be linked to the pattern of campaign communications” (1993,162). Therefore, a political campaign should be understood as a process that generates the election outcome.

Recent studies have made formidable theoretical and empirical contributions to support the campaign effects, but understanding the actual components of the campaign process that drive the effects is still unsettled. In large part, the importance of campaigns has been examined to understand voting behavior or other campaign-related factors such as campaign finance and media coverage. Although candidates, as the main actor, play a significant role in campaigns, their behavior has received scant attention by scholars. Accordingly, we know much less about what influence candidates’ behavior in operating campaign strategies. In this dissertation, I empirically examine the component of presidential campaign strategies, especially by focusing on how the changes in the proportion of vote preferences influence candidates’ behavior and when they employ certain types of campaign messages. Candidates develop their campaign strategies based on information about the voting public and voters select a preferred presidential

candidate based on information learned during the campaigns. In other words, the key elements in the candidates' strategic decision process are existing public support among voters and candidates' expectations of how voter will react to subsequent campaign messages. Therefore, I place vote preferences as an independent variable and examine candidates' messaging behavior in response to existing voter support. What strategies do candidates use to appeal to voters to win the election?

The strategy Clinton implemented in 1992 was to solidify his Democratic base and attract swing or persuadable voters necessary to win the election. This strategy is applicable to all modern presidential campaigns. Candidates today cannot win with their base alone as the number of political independents has increased. However, candidates still must ensure the solid base support as a foundation for winning, especially in the competitive elections. Without securing their base, candidates cannot move to the strategies to target independents. For example, Karl Rove emphasized the strategy to motivate Republican voters to build a winning coalition in 2004. He assumed that political independents would equally split into the two parties no matter how he operates campaigns, so how to mobilize base voters would be more critical, especially in the highly competitive election. He, therefore, believed that the strategies to minimize partisan defectors and increase the base voter turnout are required to win the election. Rove sought to increase Republican candidate support among key groups such as suburban and evangelical voters who would ultimately hold the key for Republicans. This strategy aims at securing the support of disaffected voters through a grassroots appeal and turning them out in large numbers on election day. In 2004 his strategy consequently led to winning the race. While mobilization and persuasion try to bring swing voters onto the candidate's side, many fairly reliable supporters need to be motivated to actually cast a vote, which is the key to winning. Therefore,

candidates have to secure their base to safely and effectively win the election. Without well-constructed campaign strategies, candidates will certainly face difficult obstacles to win the election.

Campaign Message Strategies

How do candidates construct effective campaign strategies to win the election? To examine the campaign strategies based on the level of support, I focused directly on campaign messages. Campaign messages consist mainly of nomination acceptance speeches, campaign speeches, advertisements, and debates². As a rational actor in the election, the candidate chooses the most effective messages to reinforce and persuade voters, thereby increasing his or her chance of winning in the presidential election. To examine the candidate's rational behavior regarding campaign message strategies, I first distinguish two dimensions of the campaign message rather than focusing on specific issue topics or categories.

The first dimension of the message is the positional versus valence issues. The positional issues are more like partisan issues such as gay marriage or abortion. These issues are attached to one of the two parties, so voters easily identify which issues are associated with which parties. For example, Republican candidates tend to present their preference on the anti-abortion issues to appeal to conservative Republican voters. In contrast, pro-choice issues are delivered more frequently by Democratic candidates. For example, Bill Clinton in 1992 publically announced his pro-choice position and his position attracted Democrats more than Republicans. Unlike the positional issues, the valence issues require more general consent. For example, most voters

² The main criterion to test candidates' behavior in adopting campaign message strategies is whether candidates fully control their messages or not. Unlike other message types, debates are controlled by not only the candidates but also exogenous factors such as a moderator, discussion setting, and audiences. Therefore, debates are not included in this dissertation.

agree with the issue position on reducing the teenage drug abuse whether they are Republicans or Democrats. Hypothetically, a candidate emphasizes positional issues more when the base³ support is weak. Partisans tend to be ideologically polarized and support candidates who share their preferences. Therefore, candidates focus more on positional issues intentionally to mobilize their partisan supporters including leaners toward a particular party. In contrast, the candidate emphasizes valence issues to bring in more persuadable voters, generally known as independent voters because valence issues universally appeal to most voters. For example, reducing the crime rate is a concern of most voters and this non-partisan issue has general appeal. Because valence issues are not partisan, they can be used without risk to appeal to independents who are not strongly attached to a particular party. Thus, valence issues are generally considered as important determinants of election outcome among independent voters.

The second dimension is the positive versus negative messages. Positive messages contain the explanations or evaluations of candidates themselves. Their biographical stories or traits as a leader of the U.S. are good examples. These positive messages presumably target the base voters to provide reasons why they have to stay with their party candidates. For example, if candidates experienced divided primary elections, they tend to focus more on solidifying base voters by delivering positive messages while minimizing negativity of the candidates. In contrast, negative or attack messages are employed when candidates find it necessary to reach out and persuade independent voters. Negative messages include all contents in which candidates attack opponent. For example, if a candidate attacks on the opponent's characters or on opponent's record, the message is considered a negative message. Especially independent voters would receive more information about candidates by exposure to negative messages, which

³ The base in this dissertation includes partisan voters and leaners. Keith (1992) determined that the independent leaners are more like weak partisans and unlike pure independents. They are "closet partisans." Therefore, the positional issues can appeal to leaners.

generally contain a comparison between the two candidates, and these negative messages attract swing voters more than partisan voters who tend to strongly support their party candidates. Therefore, strategic candidates employ more positive messages in order to target the base voters while they emphasize more negative messages when reaching out swing voters. In addition, candidates convey positive messages at the early stage of the general election. Biographical advertisements, for example, air during this stage. However, negative messages are effective in persuading late deciders, who are generally independent voters, or in depressing their participation in voting⁴.

To examine these dynamic campaign strategies, I selected the 1992 and 2000 presidential elections⁵. In both of these elections, candidates were required to secure their bases at the beginning of the campaigns. For example, in 1992, the incumbent candidate, George H.W. Bush, received a job approval rating of about 29% in July and even partisans increasingly disapproved of him because of the economic recession and breaking his campaign pledges. In addition, in 2000, Vice President Al Gore consistently led the polls and won the nomination unanimously, but he needed to secure Democratic partisans who disapproved of Clinton's personal behavior, as well as liberals who were considering voting for Nader.

Second, unlike the 2004 election, during which terrorism dominated all attention, the 1992 and 2000 elections focused on a variety of campaign issues including the economy, taxes, foreign policies, social security, and education. Indeed, issues in the 1992 and 2000 elections

⁴ Adopting negative messages is more complicated than positive messages. Negative messages tend to provide more information to independents but at the same time, negative messages could bring a backlash like Bush's 1992 campaigns. In addition, candidates need to respond to the opponent's attack by delivering negative contents about the opponent. Negative messages are even employed to target the opposition partisans to question their candidates. These different circumstances all influence the decision of the level of negativity in messages. Although in this study I hypothesized the effect of the level of vote preference on the proportional negativity in the messages, I also tested the effect of competitiveness on the level of negativity in campaign messages in this study.

⁵ Campaign speeches and advertisements from 1992 and 2000 were examined in the chapters three and four. However, for the nomination acceptance speeches, I extend the time period up to the 2012 presidential election.

were focused more on domestic issues rather than foreign policies. Generally, domestic issues differ between two candidates and voters are able to distinguish the different candidates' positions on the issues. These two competitive elections brought a significant amount of positive and negative message content as well. Therefore, these issue variances generate appropriate components to examine the mechanism of candidates' delivering the right messages to the right voters at the right time.

Last, despite the similarity of the 1992 and 2000 elections, they also differ in election environments. While the 2000 election was a standard two-candidate race, the 1992 election was a three-candidate race. As a strong third party candidate, Ross Perot influenced the party identification as well as the support level of the two major party candidates. Perot drew votes more strongly from independents and picked up approximately the same share of defectors from both Republicans and Democrats (Alvarez and Nagler 1995). In contrast, Ralph Nader ran for office in 2000 but his impact was not significant compared with Perot in 1992 in terms of campaign spending, visibility, and the level of support. Including these different cases of the elections in the dataset will extend the scope of the explanatory power to examine how the level of support influences the composition of message contents in campaign strategies.

In sum, candidates use messages to reinforce and persuade their targeted groups – electoral base voters or swing voters. Depending on the necessity of increasing support from these groups, candidates employ different types of campaign messages. To examine candidates' utilizations of campaign messages, the messages were coded and rearranged as two dimensions of message types: positional versus valence issues and positive versus negative messages delivered in the nomination acceptance speech, campaign speeches, and advertisements. These coded messages are used as a dependent variable in this dissertation. The utilization of the

campaign messages relies on the level of support from the base voters or swing voters. As I hypothesized, the candidates' decisions in selecting campaign message types are influenced by the level of voter support. To measure the percentage of support from the base and swing voters in the electorate⁶, the results of daily tracking polls⁷ are used. Poll results provide short-term changes of vote preferences from both base voters and swing voters. Candidates monitor these changes sensitively and then adjust campaign message types when it is necessary to solidify the groups of voters. Even the level of the base support changes as the election progresses (Gelman and King 1993); therefore, candidates need to keep monitoring the level of stability of the base voters as well as swing voters. Accordingly, the level of support from either the base or swing voters affects the decision as to which types of messages a candidate uses. I hypothesize that candidates reinforce their base voters when the base voters' support is weak, and when the support of base voters is stable candidates move to deliver messages to persuade non-partisan voters, including pure independents and independent leaners.

Organization

This dissertation is organized in the following manner. In the next chapter I review the literature related to campaign politics and campaign messages from which I build the foundation of my theory. In addition to the discussion of campaign literature, I highlight two key perspectives in this dissertation. First, partisan identification is redefined into base voters and swing voters. I introduce existing studies related to party identification, but also suggest a new

⁶ Rather than using % of support, I calculated the % of support in the electorate. Practically, candidates are more interested in how many base or swing voters will potentially vote for them. For example, 95% of Republican support does not explain the % of support from Republican in the total electorate spectrum. Instead, the statement that 30% of support of the electorate comes from Republicans is more meaningful to modify campaign strategies.

⁷ Tracking polls conducted by Gallup are used to measure the level of support. However, the survey generally started from September. To measure the support in July and August, I employed all possible Gallup polls which contained same questions about party identification and vote preference to keep consistent with daily tracking polls.

perspective to define base voters and swing voters as the core measurement for testing the models. Second, campaign messages are analyzed as four types of messages– positional versus valence issues and positive versus negative messages – rather than categorizing messages to specific topics. These relatively broad types of messages are specified in chapter two with detailed explanations of the coding scheme. I then outline the research plan for testing and evaluating the theory.

I proceed to test my positional versus valence issues and positive versus negative message theories in chapter three. I first analyze the nature of campaign speeches in general and then examine how candidates utilize the composition of the messages in campaign speeches based on the level of support. I build upon the argument that candidates focus their attention on certain types of messages to target the right voters. Therefore, I test this component of my argument by examining two different types of campaign messages. First, I examine the candidates' strategic decisions of why they emphasize positional issues or valence issues more in their speeches. Second, I will also examine the question why candidates focus on addressing more positive messages or negative messages in the speeches. In addition, considering the complexity of developing the negative messages, the alternative theories are examined. The test investigates the situational effects on positive and negative messages when candidates lead the polls and opponents receive more support.

Chapter four presents examinations of message theories in campaign advertisements. I address how candidates attempt to craft campaign messages in campaign advertisements depending on the level of support. Campaign advertisements are different from campaign speeches. For example, advertisements deliver implicative messages in the limited time, generally for 30 seconds. Therefore, testing campaign message theories in different settings of

messages increases the generalizability. Therefore, in this chapter, I collect all campaign advertisements produced by candidates not by interest groups or party committees. Candidates deliver different types of campaign messages in advertisements depending on the necessity of increasing the support level of base voters or swing voters. When the support level of base voters decreases, candidates deliver more positional issues or positive messages to increase their support. By having daily tracking polls as explanatory components in this chapter, I expect to find a similar pattern of candidates' behavior in employing certain types of messages on the basis of the vote preferences.

Chapter five presets the analysis of acceptance speeches from 1992 and 2012. I examine the impact of voter support on shaping acceptance speech contexts. Specifically, by integrating survey results conducted before the conventions, I examine the influence of the level of voter preferences on campaign message structure – positional versus valence issues and positive versus negative messages. Even though the nature of speeches is different compared to campaign stump speeches and advertisements, I expect the candidates' strategic decision making in writing the nomination acceptance speeches is similar to the decision making in other messages. I assume that a candidate's emphasis on the different types of messages is based on the voters' level of support.

Finally, chapter six concludes by summarizing the results of the dissertation. It outlines the key findings and the theoretical implications for our understanding of campaign behavior and influence of voters in campaign strategies. This chapter then ends with a discussion of the study's applications and suggestions for future extensions of this research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORY BUILDING, AND DATA OVERVIEW

The goal of a presidential general election campaign is to win the elections. Therefore, candidates craft and update their strategies to increase their public support. Even though the dynamics of election campaigns require candidates to modify their strategies as public support shifts, a fundamental understanding of campaign strategy starts with identification of the main factors that influence vote choices and how candidates can use messages to persuade specific groups. In developing their strategies, candidates rationally make a set of interrelated decisions about how to gain the support of a plurality of voters. To achieve their ultimate goal, candidates strategically and intentionally deliver their campaign messages in a number of ways such as television commercials, public speeches, and debates. Indeed, they spend an enormous amount of money to get their messages out⁸.

To understand candidates' strategic behavior, I empirically examine the components of campaign strategies, especially focusing on the types of messages used to target specific groups of voters. The central questions in this dissertation are the following: How do presidential candidates craft their campaign messages to maximize support among specific groups? What kinds of messages do candidates utilize to reinforce their base voters and to persuade other voters? How do candidates strategically react to levels of voter support through the types of messages they convey?

⁸ Based on the Federal Election Commission data, for the first time ever in U.S. history, the candidates for president raised more than \$1 billion and the major two candidates – Barack Obama and John McCain – together spent total over \$1 billion in the 2008 election. Moreover, combined Obama and McCain spent a total of nearly \$450 million on TV advertising from January to November in 2008 according to the CNN election tracker.

In this dissertation, I seek to explain how candidates shape their campaign strategies based on changing public support rather than focus on voters' decision-making processes or vote outcomes. While electoral behavior studies focus on how campaign strategies influence vote choices, this dissertation will focus on how candidates behave in terms of message strategies to win the election. Instrumental rationality assumes that actors will choose the most efficient means to gain their predetermined goals (Fenno 1973; Franklin 1991; Riker 1986). By looking at campaign messages based on the assumption that candidates rationally and independently control messages, I assert that candidates' strategic decisions are reflected in their campaign messages.

Different campaign message strategies are employed by candidates depending on their levels of support in their electoral base and among swing voters. In particular, message strategy focuses on the types of issues the candidates emphasize and the tone of their campaign messages. This dynamic will explain the variation among candidates within any given campaign.

The Presidential Campaign Literature

Political campaigns, which are designed to win elections, have received attention in election studies of the United States. Early studies support the argument that campaigns are only indirectly relevant to election outcomes or have minimal effects on citizens' vote preferences (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Campbell et al. 1960), while some later studies have produced evidence that campaigns are important for electing government officials (Popkin 1994; Holbrook 1996; Campbell 2008). Voters have become exposed to alternative information sources in response to the development of modern campaign techniques. Information disseminating from the campaign environment can have significant effects on voters by providing them the information needed to evaluate candidates and make more informed decisions (Alvarez 1997; Popkin 1994; Finkel 1993).

Even though scholars have long studied presidential elections, the role of the campaigns is unsettled. While some scholars contend that campaigns only minimally affect election outcomes, others argue that campaigns play a much greater role in shaping election results by creating interest in the campaign, etc. However, the large majority of election studies focus on voting behavior, information processing, and attitudes, or other campaign-related factors such as campaign spending and media coverage. Compared to the research on voting behavior, there is much less research on candidate behavior. In sum, prior work examining campaigns and election processes is largely voter-centric.

From the 1830s to the 1960s, campaigns were usually operated by party organizations. This period is known as the “golden age of parties.” Campaigners in the elections were trained within parties. Sometimes candidates recruited a group of energetic and talented volunteers but most of them had never worked in a political campaign. By the 1970s, this circumstance had changed dramatically at the presidential level, in part because of nomination and campaign finance reforms. The reforms diminished the relative weight of party assistance to candidates and professional campaign consultants performed the work that had previously been done by party activists (Gerber and Green 2000). Individual candidates have played a more critical role in managing their campaigns since the 1970s. According to Putman (2000), 6% of the public reported working for a political party in the early 1970s compared with just 3% in the mid-1990s. In sum, candidate-centered campaigns created a new environment by giving candidates exclusive control over operating and managing campaigns. Therefore, as Franklin (1991) pointed out, without the candidates, there is only the psychology of vote choice and none of the politics.

Candidate's Strategic Behavior and Campaign Messages

Related to the assumption that candidates behave rationally to achieve their predetermined goal, changes in behavior result from changes of situation or information available to the actors (Morrow 1994). As applied to the campaign environment, the strategic behavior assumption suggests that candidates will adapt their behavior in light of actions taken by their opponents (Cox and Katz 1996), as a result of changes to the campaign environment such as economic conditions (Erikson and Wlezien 2013; Markus 1992; Finkel 1993), and, I contend in response to voters.

Studies of candidates' activities mostly focus on explaining how candidates allocate campaign resources (West 1983; Haynes, Gurian, and Nichols 1997; Gurian 1990; Franklin 1991; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003) and on assessing the audience that candidates attempt to influence with these resources such as media, party activities, interest groups, or the electorate. Considering the focus of this dissertation, I will limit my review only to the literature addressing how candidates present information to the electorate.

In what is known as the median voter theorem, Black (1986) predicted that candidates will put forth issue positions that capture the ideal point of the median voter, because the median's ideal is preferred to all other alternatives in the presidential contests. Since voters have stable preferences on most issues, this model cannot fully explain the dynamics during the campaign in terms of candidates' positions. Candidates strategically play to their strengths and their opponents' weaknesses rather than relying only on voters' ideal points. The theory of priming suggests that candidates use information to focus the electorate's attention on issues that highlight their strengths (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994).

Riker (1986) asserted that parties and candidates will focus their campaign rhetoric on issues that advantage them and ignore all others, because focusing on disadvantages is irrational. Especially, candidates tend to focus their attention on partisan issues to differentiate themselves from their opponents, and when both candidates address the same issue, they tend to frame their rhetoric in terms of playing to their strengths. Petrocik (1996) developed the “issue ownership” thesis, which predicts that candidates focus on issues historically associated with their party. Voters evaluate candidates’ points of view on important issues, and some issues will naturally advantage one party over the other. Therefore, candidates employ certain issues in their campaign messages to motivate predetermined target groups that are highly persuadable by the issue position of the candidate.

The abortion issue, for example, influences not only voters’ choice in presidential elections but also the strength of partisan attachments (Abramowitz 1995). Adams (1997) found that Democrats enjoyed an increasing advantage among pro-choice voters, just as Republicans were strongly favored by those with a pro-life position. As the Democratic Party becomes more pro-choice, the strongly pro-life voters may decide to become Republican activists, initiating a similar adjustment of the Republican Party (Aldrich 1995). In addition to the abortion issue, the gay marriage issue is considered as one of the positional issues, which divided Democrats’ and Republicans’ preference on the issue. For example, the gay marriage issue tends to mobilize the Republicans’ conservative base and in 2004 Bush’s opposition to gay marriage helped him to pick up more conservative voters (Hillygus and Shields 2005; Campbell and Monson 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand the relative impact of issues on voters, because these factors tend to matter in voter decision by playing a role in determining the election outcome (Alvarez and Nagler 1998).

The typical valence issues may also be considered important to the voters (Campbell and Meier 1979). The parties may instead focus on a common set of issues that are highly salient to the public. According to Stokes (1963), positional issues involve advocacy of government action reflecting a diffuse distribution of voter preferences, while valence issues merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the entire electorate. Candidates are strategically motivated to appear responsive to the public's concerns, regardless of the partisan issues typically attached to a certain party. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) refer to this strategy as 'riding the wave'. The economy and candidate evaluation are classic examples of the valence messages. For example, Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in 1980 asked voters the retrospective voting question, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" The performance of the Carter administration with respect to the economy was not favorable to most voters and this caused Carter's failure in his reelection for president (Campbell 2008). Moreover, the national economic conditions were critical in the 1992 presidential election. Bill Clinton's campaign emphasized an economic issue by attacking George H. W. Bush's record on unemployment and tax increases, and this salient issue helped Clinton beat the incumbent candidate. Alvarez and Nagler (1998) extended the effect of economy on election outcomes to the 1996 presidential election, and found that if the national economy had been as bad in 1996 as it was in 1992, Clinton would have lost in 1996.

In addition to the positional and valence issue dimension, one body of literature focuses on the effects of the positive and negative messages. Lau and Pomper (2002) demonstrated that negative information had a stronger impact on candidate evaluation than did positive information. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) reported that exposure to attack advertising can suppress voter turnout. In contrast, Kahn and Kenney (1999) suggested that turnout can be

increased when legitimate criticisms are aired, but voters are unlikely to turn out when unsubstantiated and strident information is communicated in a campaign. Brians and Wattenberg (1996) and Geer (2008) asserted that consumption of negative advertising is correlated with greater issue knowledge and the memorization of information, suggesting that negative advertisements may be substantially beneficial.

Studies on candidates' behavior also found that candidates who are trailing in the polls are more likely to go negative and that Republicans are more likely to employ negative campaign tactics (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Harrington Jr and Hess 1996; Flowers, Haynes, and Crespin 2003). Benoit et al. (1999) claimed that ads acclaiming the sponsoring candidates dominated among those who either held a safe lead or were in a competitive race, but attack ads dominated among those who trailed by a wide margin. In other words, candidates' competitive positions become a key to their campaign strategies. If one side is running far behind, it is expected to go on the attack in order to give itself a chance of catching up. Candidates, however, typically do not present messages that are exclusively positive or negative. Rather, they tend to present messages that mix positive and negative appeals (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995).

Studies of campaign messages have provided empirical explanations of why candidates format their campaign messages as they do. Candidates use campaign messages strategically to persuade voters or provide campaign information that influences voters' choices. However, how candidates decide the content and tone of their campaign messages is an importance but understudied component. By placing the candidates' behavior front-and-center, I seek to capture general patterns of strategic behavior. The theoretical and empirical examination of campaign message strategies may explain how candidates utilize and modify their campaign messages

depending on the changes in the level of support from specific voting groups in presidential elections.

As suggested by campaign message studies, candidates use two dimensions that to convey their messages: a position versus valence dimension and a positive versus negative dimension. Even though studies clarify the definition of these two dimensions and the effects of the messages, how candidates strategically decide the degree of the two dimensions is unanswered. Typically, the campaign messages contain both positional and valence issues and these issues are delivered in positive or negative tones. Campaign speeches tend to contain all types of campaign messages that can be categorized in the two dimensions. But even in the 30-second advertisements, the mixed types of messages are easily found.

Narrator: This was household income when President Obama took office. This was the national debt. Under Obama, families have lost over \$4,000 a year in income. And the national debt is now \$16 trillion and growing.

Romney: We have a moral responsibility not to spend more than we take in. Can't keep buying, and spending, and passing on debts to our kids and I'll stop it.

Narrator: Barack Obama, more spending, more debt. Failing American families.

Romney: I'm Mitt Romney and I approve this message.

This is the campaign advertisement produced by Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential election. Romney focused on the issue of the national debt by attacking President Barack Obama's administration in this ad. The words "more spending," "more debt," and "moral responsibility" are representing the positional messages by emphasizing the position of big government. In contrast, the words "income" and "failing American families" are presenting the valence messages. As we can see in this example, a proportional difference in utilizing message types is strategically designed by candidates. Why do candidates emphasize positional issues rather than valence issues? When do candidates go more negative or more positive in their

messages? I hypothesize that concerns related to affective response to candidates affect the candidates' selection of issues or tones.

In sum, candidates' discussions concerning campaign messages may stem from levels of voter support in this dissertation. I develop theory and hypotheses related to the tone and content of messages in the context of presidential campaigns. Logically, candidates at first should secure their base voters who identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans as well as hidden partisans, generally called leaners (Keith 1992). Without their support, candidates are unlikely to win a plurality of voters. To mobilize and motivate their partisan voters (who typically give 80% or more support to their party)⁹, candidates choose more positional and positive messages to establish credibility. When candidates comfortably secure and mobilize their bases, the candidates' selection of issues moves toward more valence issues and negative information to persuade swing voters. Moreover, candidates try to move into the opposition party's issues either to expand their support or to drop some opposition base voters into the swing voter group (Hillygus and Shields 2009). This is likely to happen after a candidate secures the support of both base and swing voters.

Base and Swing Voters in Campaigns

Partisanship is a crucial determinant of the voting decision. This has been recognized since the 1952 Michigan election study (Gurin and Miller 1954) and remains an essential element of a vote equation. Indeed, the importance of partisanship in voting for all levels of office is now accepted. The early studies in partisanship viewed that an individual's party affiliation represents a lasting attachment that forms early in life through a process of political

⁹ I apply a broader definition of partisans, which includes leaning independents who favor one of the parties. Even though leaners identify themselves as independents in surveys, their behavior is similar to that of weak partisans (Mayer 2008). Therefore, the definition of the "base" in this dissertation includes both partisans and leaners.

socialization (Abramson 1975; Beck 1974; Campbell et al. 1960). However, recent studies suggest that an individual's party identification is not necessarily permanent but can be caused by political factors such as party policies (Franklin and Jackson 1983; Franklin 1992), candidate evaluations (Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995), prior presidential voting behavior (Niemi and Weisberg 1993; Markus and Converse 1979), and evaluations of incumbent performance (Campbell, Dettrey, and Yin 2010; Fiorina 2002). In addition, the increase in the number of independents in the recent years (Mayer 2008) corresponds to the decrease in the proportion of the public who identified themselves as Democrats or Republicans.

The individual level of party identification introduces theoretical debates about the formation and causes of change in partisanship, but generally persistent individual party affiliations produce a fixed aggregate partisan distribution (MacKuen et al. 1992). While party identification is a very strong determinant of vote choice, empirical evidence shows that voters are becoming less motivated by partisanship (Aldrich 1995). For instance, in a 1986 survey by Larry Sabato, 92 % of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I always vote for the person who I think is best, regardless of what party they belong to." On the other hand, only 14 % of the respondents in the same survey agreed with the statement, "I always support the candidates of just one party" (Sabato 1988). This means that party affiliation does not guarantee that partisans always vote for their party candidate. When it comes to presidential elections, issues and candidate attributes also shape voter choice (Holbrook 1996; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992; Campbell 2008).

A major factor of campaigning is targeting the right voters, and aggregate-level party identification provides a fundamental component of where a campaign plan starts. The campaign professional is not interested in the total population but rather the base and persuadable voters.

Faucheux (2002) suggests that candidates at first should have a base or can create one, and then they should find persuadable voters or swing voters – those who are initially either undecided or leaning toward the opposition but subject to being swayed by the campaign’s persuasive message, because the base is not big enough on its own to win the race.

As we understand the key elements and the goal of the campaigns, aggregate base voters are critical to campaigns and are particularly important as volunteers and donors. The aggregate base vote calculation is simply intended to figure out how many votes can be taken as a baseline of voting coalitions. The number of strong partisan voters is probably smaller than the size of the partisan vote including weak partisan identifiers. Most die-hard Republicans rarely vote Democratic, and vice versa.

Persuadable voters or swing voters are the inverse of base voters. Swing voters could easily vote for one party or the other because they are not firm supporters of either major-party candidate and cannot be reliably counted on to march behind either party’s banner. Swing voters and independents are overlapping categories, though they are not identical groups. The swing voter label encompasses three different groups – independent leaners, pure independents, and undecided. Independent leaners’ voting behavior is as weak partisan as those who embrace party labels more openly (Mayer 2008). They initially call themselves independents but, when pressed, will concede that they feel “closer” to one party or the other unlike pure independents. However, undecided voters are respondents who tell pollsters that they do not know how they are going to vote in the upcoming election. They include not only those who are literally undecided but also those who have some current vote intention but are weakly committed to that choice. However, it is very difficult to obtain a clear, consistent, reliable measure of the “undecided vote” (Gelman and King 1993). In addition to this ambiguity of defining undecided voters, they at some point

tend to make their decisions, which will be reflected in the level of support. As I measure the level of support as a major independent variable in this study, it is not necessary to measure undecided voters independently. Therefore, in this research, I focus on partisanship and independent status on their vote intention rather than “undecided” voters.

Who are the swing voters? They are less partisan and consistently less involved in and informed about politics than the rest of the electorate. However, swing voters tend to watch presidential debates in about the same percentage as non-swing voters and are actually more likely to report seeing a political advertisement (Mayer 2008). In other words, some swing voters are less involved in campaigns while others actively participate in campaign activities. Therefore, swing voters tend to be a diverse group. All independents, including leaners and pure independents, share some characteristics that differentiate them in important ways from Republicans and Democrats, most are “closet” Democrats or Republicans. Therefore, swing voters need to be defined not as one homogenous group, but as two different kinds of voters: the hidden partisans and genuine independents (Keith 1992). This means that leaners can be treated as weak partisans because they behave like partisans. But at the same time, they can also be treated as persuadable independents, not committing themselves to either party.

Accordingly, the level of support from both partisans and swing voters significantly influences the content of campaign messages crafted by candidates. A campaign’s message is a critical part of the campaign strategy in that it goes to the heart of how candidates reach out to voters. A campaign message usually incorporates themes reinforced by a series of issue points that can be used most effectively when directed toward specific voter groups.

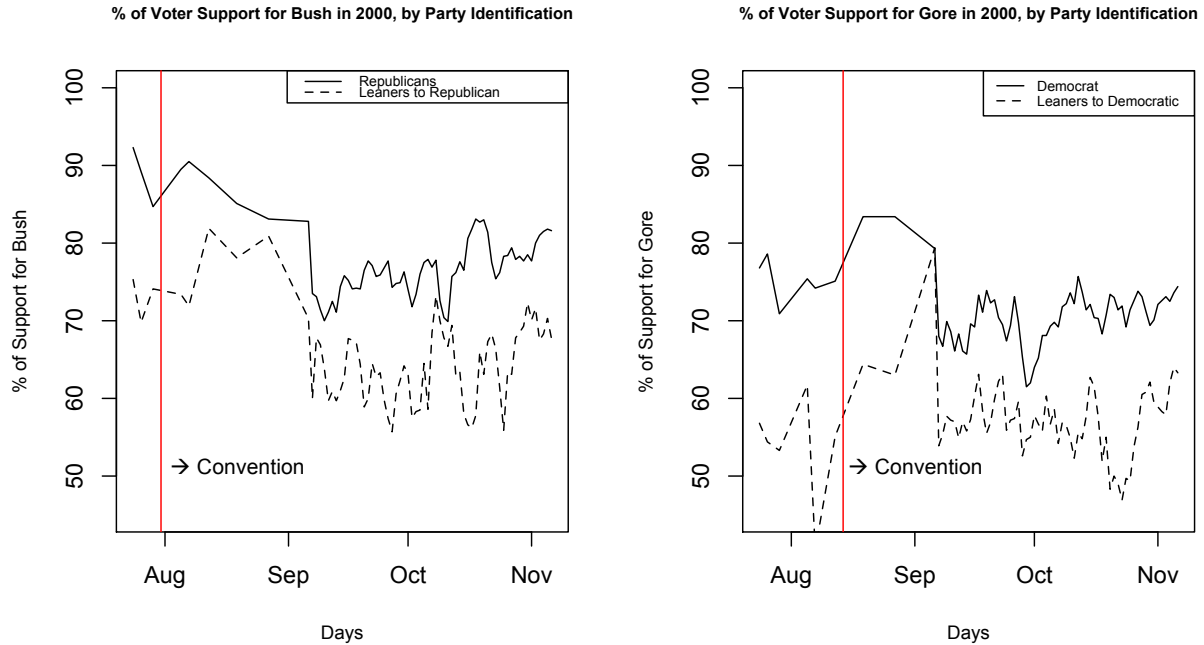
In campaigns, partisan voters should be secured as a foundation of the candidate’s base because their attachment to a particular party candidate may not be consistent. Wattenberg

(1996) found that since 1952 more voters have become independent of parties. He argued that this growing number of independents has been mostly based on a perception that the parties were irrelevant to voters, not on neutrality or dislike of the two parties. Moreover, the support of partisans is not consistently strong to the candidates as campaigns progress. For example, before the convention, partisan voters generally tend to give strong support to their party's candidates. However, as campaigns progress, partisans receive more information about their candidates and become more critical of their qualifications or issue standpoints. Figure 2.1 shows the level of support in 2000 by party identification. For example, both Republicans and Democrats supported their party candidates strongly in the early summer and the support continued through the national party conventions¹⁰. Immediately after the national party conventions, the partisans' support peaked as a reflection of the convention bumps (Holbrook 1996). However, once the fall campaign started, the level of support from both Republicans and Democrats changed by short-term effects such as campaign events (Gelman and King 1993). Then, the support tended to recover to the pre-election campaign level by approaching the "equilibrium" closer to Election Day (Holbrook 1993). This tendency shows that the partisan support is movable. Considering this pattern, candidates may need to modify their campaign strategies to address fluctuations in partisan support. In other words, candidates should recognize that the base is not consistently stable; therefore, the base has to be secured to minimize the number of defectors or maximize their voter turnout.

¹⁰ During this campaign period, many voters do not know about their candidates in detail or sometimes they do not even know who the opponent is. For example, in 2008, McCain became an official party nominee after the Super-Duper Tuesday, but until the early summer, Republicans could not conclude who would become their opponent between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. In this case, Republicans would show strong support for the party nominee, just following their party label. They tend to have a lack of information during this period, because the campaigns have not yet generated enough information about opponents and even their own candidate.

FIGURE 2.1

The Percentage of Voter Support by Partisan Identification in 2000



Source: Gallup Polls in 2000

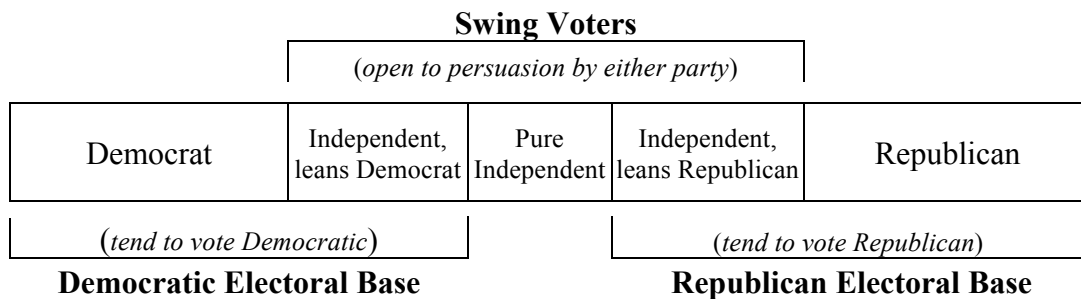
Figure 2.1 additionally shows the patterns of the support between the partisans and leaners. For example, as shown in the graph on the right, the support patterns between Democrats and independents leaning Democratic are similar after the Democratic National Convention on August 14th, but this pattern changes at the point the first presidential debate was held on September 9th and after the last presidential debate on October 17th. Meanwhile, the patterns of support from Republicans and independent leaners toward Republican are significantly different, as shown in the graph on the left. It seems the support of Republicans and leaners toward Bush in 2000 inversely mirror each other. This suggests that party leaners are not monolithic, sometimes behaving like partisans but not consistency.

What is the best way to treat partisan leaners? Campbell (2008) found that the loyalty rates of partisan leaners, whether Democratic or Republican, are about as high or higher than the loyalty rates of their weak partisan counterparts. Keith (1992) also suggests that independent leaners, as “closet partisans,” should be considered as partisans on par with weak partisans. However, individuals who do not identify with one of the parties may either lean toward one party or they may be pure independents. Pure independents are not only unattached to a party but also typically unattached to politics in general. This means that they are less interested, less informed, and less active than those who identify with a party (Miller and Wattenberg 1983). In addition on issues, they tend to moderately favor one party over the other while partisans tend to strongly favor their party candidates’ issue positions (See Appendix A). For example, Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde (2012) found that, in 1992, independents leaning Republican were not closer to either Clinton’s or Bush’s median position on important issues such as economic recession and social welfare. Rather, they positioned themselves as neutral, having no preference on these issues. However, in 2000, more Republican leaners were closer to Bush’s position on important issues. In other words, the voting behavior of leaners is much like partisans, but in terms of issue positions they tend to be more neutral. Accordingly, leaners have some things in common with partisans and other things in common with swing voters. Thus, they should be treated as both partisans and as swing voters. In this dissertation, I assert that positional issues affect leaners and partisans alike. Therefore, candidates deliver positional issues to reinforce the support not only of partisans but also independents leaning toward a particular party. I will refer to a party’s broader base, which includes the partisans and leaners of that party, as “the electoral base.” For clarification of terms and concepts, Figure 2.2 illustrates the classification of base voters and swing voters as used in this dissertation. Considering the dual characteristics of leaners, they are

included in the base as well as in swing category. Swing voters even include the leaners of the opposition party, whom candidates hope will be open to cross-pressure effects of persuasive messages.

FIGURE 2.2

Categories of Voters by Partisanship



Furthermore, the increase in the independents (Bartels 2000) requires candidates not only to secure their bases but also to persuade independents in order to attain a plurality of voters. According to Mayer (2008)¹¹, the 18 major-party candidates held on to 96% of their base vote over 9 elections from 1976 to 2004. The swing vote becomes more significant in close elections. For example, in the 2000 election both major-party candidates had a base vote of about 40 % of the total electorate. In this competitive race, how swing votes were divided between the two candidates determined who won the popular vote. In close elections, the candidate who wins the majority of the swing vote usually wins the plurality of the popular vote as a whole.

¹¹ In this study, the identification of voting groups is measured differently, not using the five-scale of the party identification questions. Employing the survey conducted by American National Election Studies, Mayer (2008) measured the Democratic base voters who were in the thermometer-rating scale scores between -100 and -16. Swing voters were those who are in the scale scores between -15 and +15, and Republican base voters were in the scale scores between +16 and +100.

Candidates typically need to reinforce their electoral base and then to develop messages to persuade swing voters. When candidates confidently secure their base voters, campaign messages intentionally target more swing voters to persuade them. In sum, campaign messages are strategically crafted and adjusted depending on the changing levels of voters' support.

Campaign Message Hypotheses

Despite the rich traditional studies on campaign effects, we know little about the candidates' decisions concerning the rhetorical content of campaigns. Studies on campaign rhetoric focused on what candidate say and how the media utilize messages (e.g., Flowers, Haynes, and Crespino 2003), but what we know relatively little about is the process of which candidates determine their communication strategies. Rhetorical content, as a principal feature in campaigning (Riker 1986), generates the question about the mechanism by which candidates determine and deliver the right messages to the right voters at the right time. However, this question of the candidate-centered campaign rhetoric has not been fully examined even though message tone and content are considered a core component of winning campaign strategies.

Campaign strategies, therefore, can be understood as the selection of particular message themes, and developing the appropriate messages starts from identifying the following questions of the election: Which voters are most likely and least likely to vote for the candidate and which voters can be persuaded? How does targeting voters' support influence the development of campaign messages? Candidates craft specific themes, words, and tones to appeal to specific voting groups in response to the level of support from those groups. The level of voters' support determines the level of emphasis on certain themes of the campaign message. Therefore, campaign messages can be treated as dependent variables and the degree of voters' support of a

certain candidate holds an explanatory power unlike previous research. This dissertation explains and measures the influence of voter support on candidates' message strategies.

In sum, candidates structure campaign messages strategically based on the necessity of the support of voting groups with attracting different levels of party identification. These campaign messages are contextually divided into positional issues or valence issues and positive or negative tone rather than categorized into specific issues. The salient issues differ election by election, but the issues employed by candidates broadly and consistently fall into positional and valence categories and into positive and negative categories. These distinctions provide a strong tool of generalization of the candidates' behavior in message strategies. No matter whether candidates emphasize specific economic or education issues, the broad tool of the message dimensions allows us to understand whether candidates emphasize the certain issues to reinforce the base or to persuade the swing voters.

Positional and Valence Issues

Positional issues tend to distinguish candidates more clearly and thus appeal to polarized voters. As voters come to weight certain considerations more heavily, the probability of their choosing the candidate who best matches their positions will increase. For example, a pro-choice voter will gravitate increasingly toward the pro-choice candidate, as abortion becomes a salient election-year issue. Candidates thus have an incentive to structure the campaign's agenda as much as possible. These positional issues generally tend to solidify the support of their base voters. Indeed, campaign messages are reinforcing for different groups within the electorate, depending on voters' partisan orientation and prior levels of information and interest (Zaller 1992).

Early voting behavior research suggests that most voters select a candidate based on partisan identification before the campaign even begins (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960) and this partisanship is a crucial determinant of the vote decision. Strong identifiers would be expected to vote for the party candidate in the highest proportion, while weak identifiers and independents leaning toward a party would vote for the party candidate in a somewhat lower proportion. The stability and influence of partisanship suggests rational reasoning to identify base voters at the beginning of the election because party identification is strongly related to the vote. This early forecast of partisan voters' choice influences campaign messages, heavily focusing on positional issues to target these base voters. Candidates generally perceive the partisan voters as the base for the campaigns. However, considering leaning independents' behavior, candidates could extend their definition of the base to include the leaners of the candidate's party, as previously discussed.

Candidates are more likely to be perceived as credible on partisan issues, and these issues are generally consistent and well defined. Therefore, candidates emphasize these positional issues in the campaign messages to reinforce their base voters. When candidates take distinct stands on positional issues, they strategically pressure their partisan voters to stay closer to their candidates (Hillygus and Shields 2009). Therefore, to secure partisans' support, candidates focus more on addressing positional issues.

To gain the support of a plurality of voters, candidates also need to consider persuadable independents. According to the Pew Research Center¹², the percentage of independents has increased significantly in the last fifty years, from about 20% in the 1950s to about 40% in recent years. The increase in the number of independents (Bartels 2000) indicates that candidates

¹² Pew Research Center, "The 2004 Political Landscape" in 2003 and "Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes" in 2007.

cannot win the election by securing only their partisan voters. Instead, candidates need to broaden their electoral base to swing voters to increase their chance of winning the election. It is therefore necessary for candidates to employ other types of campaign messages to target swing voters who are different from base voters. Candidates might be unable to attract the independent voters by using only positional issues heavily attached to parties since these voters are politically independents and typically less informed about the specific policies. Rather, they might more react more to messages on candidates' traits or highly salient valence issues such as economic recession or unemployment.

Valence issues such as the state of the economy, provide a tool to broaden campaign target groups to swing voters. Stokes (1992) defines valence issues as those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate. In other words, there are issues about which candidates are strategically motivated to appear responsive to the public's concerns, regardless of the partisan issues typically attached with a certain party. Therefore, candidates often focus on a common set of issues that are highly salient to the public in order to appear responsive to the public's concern (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Generally, valence issues are defined as issues on which all voters have the same position, such as reducing crime, or increasing economic growth (Stokes 1992).

Swing voters tend not to develop a committed preference for one of the candidates until late in the election cycle and these voters are deeply affected by what they learn during the campaign (Dimock and Horowitz 2008). However, the question of what issues and candidate qualities matter most to swing voters has not been examined. Stonecash (2008) found that swing voters are supportive of either candidate depending on which is better able to communicate a modest level of information about his/her candidacy and positions. Logically, valence issues are

more attractive to swing voters since we define them as a common set of issues that are highly salient to the public. In other words, campaign themes center on valence issues because these issues tend to easily appeal to swing voters. Therefore, candidates use valence issues strategically in campaign messages by assuming the positions of the swing voters and attempt to convince them to support candidates' positions.

In sum, a candidate strategically selects positional issues to reinforce the base support by clarifying and emphasizing the candidate's partisan positions, while a candidate selects valence issues to persuade swing voters as an expansion of the target territory.

Positional versus Valence Issue Hypotheses

H1: A candidate delivers more positional issues when the level of the electoral base support decreases.

H2: A candidate increases valence issues when the support level of swing voters decreases.

Positive and Negative Messages

Positive message are typically presented in campaigns to highlight the candidate, while negative messages generally refer to those that attack the other candidates' character, the issues for which the other candidate stands, or the party of the other candidate. For example, positive messages are about one's own accomplishments, qualifications, programs, and so forth while negative messages are about the opponent – his or her programs, accomplishments, qualifications, associates, and so on – with the focus usually on the defects of these attributes (Lau and Pomper 2002). However, candidates typically do not present messages that are exclusively positive or negative. Rather, they tend to present messages that mix positive and negative appeals.

Most studies related to positive or negative messages focus on the level of turnout as consequences of the messages in the aggregate. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) argued that

political strategists intentionally employ negative ads to discourage segments of the electorate from voting and are well aware that lower turnout is the result. However, other studies have found that television advertising actually contributes to political learning (Brians and Wattenberg 1996). Even negative ads could mobilize voters and consequently increase voter turnout (Goldstein and Freedman 2002). But, when and why some candidates present messages that are more negative in tone or more positive in tone is still unknown.

The preferred strategy for candidates is to present messages that are largely positive and these messages provide candidates the means to attract more partisan voters. For example, positive messages offer voters reasons why a candidate is worthy of their support by signaling what issues and traits are important to the candidate and why. However, negative messages provide more clear distinction between the two candidates, especially for independent voters who are most open to persuasion by campaign messages. Compared with positive messages, negative information is more memorable (Harrington and Hess 1996; Hamilton and Zanna 1974; Lau and Pomper 2002; Lau 1982). Citizens may view negative advertisements as more exciting and may pay more careful attention (McGraw and Steenbergen 1997). Geer (2005) found a conditional impact of advertising tone on turnout. Only among political independents did tone affect potential voters' probability of voting: Independents exposed to a negative campaign were more likely to participate in an election. Similarly, Djupe and Peterson (2002) discovered a mobilizing effect of negative advertising in the 1998 U.S. Senate primaries. In sum, swing voters, generally holding a lack of interest in politics or who are less informed, are more likely influenced by negative messages.

Therefore, I contend that positive messages target more partisan voters to provide candidates' clear issue positions as well as personal traits by minimizing uncertainty about the

candidates. Negative messages differentiate the two candidates in terms of the issue positions and personal characteristics and consequently they are persuasive to swing voters. Thus, candidates employ negative messages to target swing voters.

Positive versus Negative Message Hypotheses

H3: A candidate employs more positive messages when the base voters' support decreases.

H4: The decline of swing voters' support causes candidates to increase negative in campaign messages.

The employment of positive and negative tones in campaign messages is more complicated than the decision to deliver more positional or valence issues. There is no guarantee that delivering negative messages will increase the candidates' support even among swing voters because these messages do not provide voters any direct reasons to support the candidate, only reasons not to support their opponents. These negative messages often create a voter backlash (Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007). For example, in 1988, George H. W. Bush dominated the agenda with political attacks against Michael Dukakis, but, in 1992, Bush was the object of a backlash against negative ads that enabled his opponents to attract voters (West 2005). Almost twice as many people said Bush's commercials attacked Bill Clinton than said the ads explained Bush's own views according to the *CBS/New York Times* survey in September 1992.

Furthermore, the "attack-to-explain" response is strategically employed to minimize the risk of the negative perception toward the candidates. For example, Clinton in 1992 responded immediately to Bush's attacks, unlike Dukakis in 1988. When Bush ran attack ads in October accusing Clinton's tax plans in Arkansas, Clinton immediately ran the spot starting with a bold red headline: "GEORGE BUSH ATTACK AD." In fact, Bush's attacks were reported favorably by the press in 1988, but his 1992 attacks met a different consequence as Clinton took the lead in

responding. The press response was sympathetic to Clinton, and Bush was met with unfavorable headlines across the country. Bush's attack ads produced a strong voter backlash. The more each candidate was perceived as attacking, the more likely voters were to blame that candidate for negative campaigning (Kelley and Mirer 1974).

Therefore, from the candidates' perspective, negative messages are often risky as a strategic device because it is hard to benefit from an attack without being blamed for an unpleasant campaign. In other words, even candidates themselves cannot predict the effects of the negative messages. Considering the complexity of the process of decision-making in terms of positive and negative content, I introduce alternative hypotheses to test situational condition effects on positive and negative messages. For example, Skaperdas and Grofman's (1995) model assumes that both candidates try to appeal to undecided voters through positive messages, and that if two candidates wage equally positive campaigns, they will split the undecided vote evenly. When a front-runner can win without converting the opponent's supporters, then the front-runner will engage in more positive, and less negative, campaigning than his/her opponent. In other words, depending on the proportion of supporting voters, candidates could choose either positive or negative campaigning. Considering Skaperdas and Grofman's model, I expect that positive campaign messages are emphasized once candidates comfortably secure base voters. In contrast, candidates choose negative messages to push some of the opponent's weak supporters into undecided groups when the opponent leads in the polls.

Campaign Events to Deliver Campaign Messages

The actual content of presidential campaign messages is a primary resource for analyzing candidates' campaign strategies. Campaign messages are delivered by means of campaign

events: acceptance speeches at the national convention, campaign stump speeches, and television advertisements.¹³

National conventions are often considered as the point to shift the presidential campaign from the primary season to the general election campaign (Holbrook 1996; Trent and Friedenberberg 2004). The convention reaffirms and legitimates the nomination process, inviting both those participating and those watching to “share not only a glorious tradition but a grand and proud future” (Trent and Friedenberberg 2004). The conventions are especially important after a contentious primary season. The party attempts to come together behind its chosen candidate. The conventions are designed to demonstrate party unity, working to rally the party faithful, the base, and to activate them for the general election. However, the most important function is that the convention provides an opportunity for the candidates to introduce their campaign’s primary issue points, key ideas, and themes. Considering the size of the convention audience, the impact of these campaign events is potentially significant (Holbrook 1996; Campbell 2008). The Republican National Convention in 2004 had a total audience of 22.6 million viewers, whereas the Democratic National Convention had 20.4 million viewers (Holloway 2004), about the same number of viewers as in 2000. The nomination acceptance speeches of presidential candidates offer the broadest possible audience of any piece of campaign rhetoric (Hart 2000) and presidential candidates view the acceptance speech as the best opportunity to present themselves

¹³ Televised presidential debates are composed of a large set of campaign messages. Since the first televised presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon in 1960, debates have become critical campaign events by delivering sets of campaign issues. The debates have a persuasion effects in that voters may adopt the issue position taken by their preferred candidates (Holbrook 1999). Moreover, information gains and reinforcement of preexisting partisan tendencies result from debate exposure. Despite the important role of debates, I do not include debate in this dissertation. I examined the 1992 and 2000 elections and there were six presidential debates. Since I treated each speech as a unit of coding, each debate was treated as a single speech by each candidate. This sample size is too small for statistical tests. Moreover, in the debates, the settings, moderators, and discussion subjects control the messages strongly. While advertisements and campaign speeches are fully controlled by candidates, the message content of the debates is strongly controlled by external elements. Thus, debates were not included as campaign messages.

on their own terms in an uncontested format (Hart 2000; Holbrook 1996). Candidates address a wide audience of partisans as well as more moderate members of the general population. Accordingly, convention speeches should be crafted carefully to target audiences. For these reasons, candidates strategically design acceptance speeches to maximize the effects. Acceptance speeches reflect insight into a candidate's strategy, and pre-convention polls provide profiles of whom they will attempt to target. Therefore, different levels of support lead to the variance of the messages across elections (see Chapter 5).

Second, the campaign speech is a description of the themes candidates will emphasize while campaigning. These campaign messages serve to educate the public about the candidates by providing new information (Gelman and King 1993; Holbrook 1996; Peterson 2004). Values in campaign messages play a central role in structuring the political attitude of the public (Feldman 1988). Jacobs and Shapiro (1994) found that, in his public statements, John F. Kennedy emphasized and controlled the agenda such as increasing Social Security, passing Medicare legislation, reforming education, fighting unemployment, and combating the high cost of living and these topics became the salient issues in the race.

A candidate gives a speech to a local audience with the media recording quotes to be replayed on evening newscasts and written up in local newspapers. Media attention to particular messages could affect vote choices or political knowledge levels. For example, Iyengar and Kinder (2010) reported that the problems covered in the media were more correlated with candidates' evaluations and the vote than problems not covered by the media. The news media are the predominant agenda-setter in elections. Even though media effects are significant in recent elections, I limit my view only to campaign speeches delivered by candidates because the focus in this dissertation is not media effects on vote choices but rather the candidate's strategic

choices. Indeed, candidates consider sound-bite effects when delivering campaign speeches, and press releases containing the summary of messages are generally faxed to the press and media. However, one of the primary purposes of placing the candidate in front of the audiences is to communicate directly with them. Campaign appearances not only produce good visuals, but also allow candidates to convey information directly to core groups at rallies, fundraisers, and similar events. Therefore, campaign speeches are crafted to maximize their impact based on the decision of whom they need to target – either base voters or swing voters (see Chapter 3).

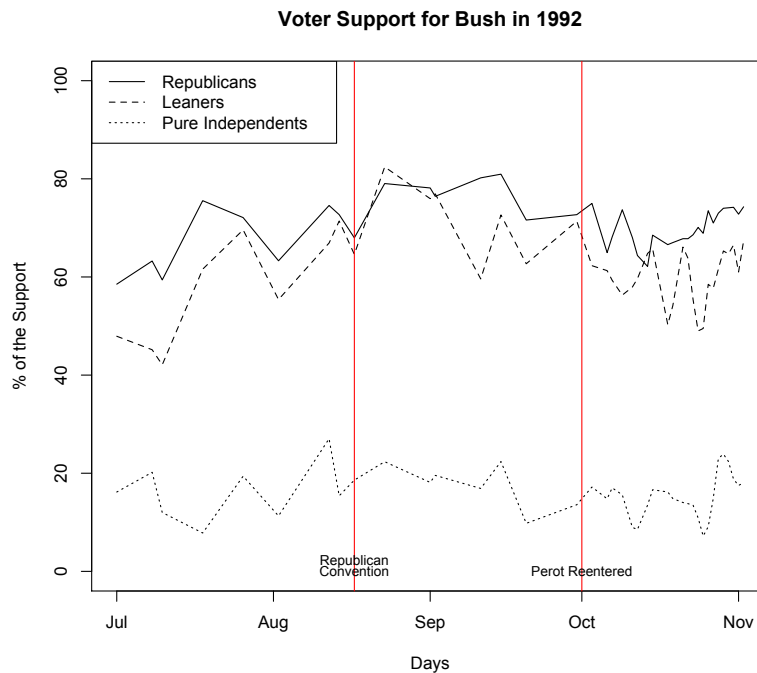
Third, campaign advertisements not only affect voters' opinions about the candidates but also the outcome of elections (Finkel and Geer 1998; West 2005; Shaw 1999). Thus, campaign advertising is an important resource used by candidates to gain the support of voters. For example, Shaw (1999) reports that in the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential campaigns candidates on average allocated 62% of their available funds to television advertising. In other words, candidates heavily rely on television advertisements to communicate their messages to voters. Campaign advertisements are the primary means used by candidates to influence voters' perceptions. Typically, advertisements run in front of politically broader audiences on television and increasingly emphasize issues and character (West 2005). Considering the expense of purchasing and producing advertisements and the limited content within 30 seconds, candidates should be act strategically in selecting the content of their messages to maximize the effect of the ads. This different environment between the speeches and advertisements could affect the specifics of campaign messages, but the rationale of candidates' behavior holds the same in both speeches and advertisements. Candidates select a certain dimension of campaign messages based on the levels of the voters' support (see Chapter 4).

Methods

The 1992 and 2000 Presidential Elections

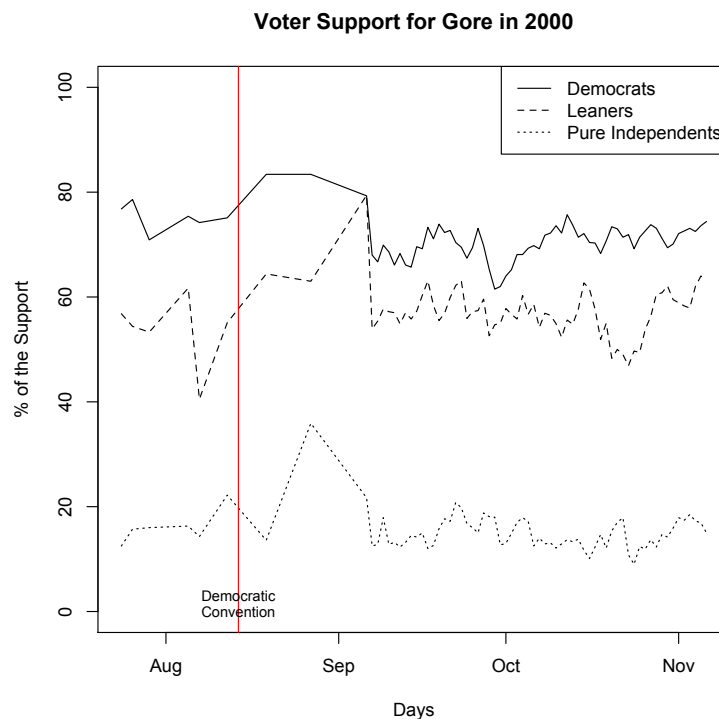
To examine these dynamic and sequential campaign strategies, I focus on the 1992 and 2000 presidential elections. These two elections satisfied conditions to test the hypotheses. First, in both elections, candidates were required to secure their partisan bases at the beginning even though the incumbent candidate was running for office in 1992. In fact, an election heavily leaning toward one candidate—such as the 1984 election won by Ronald Reagan with about 59% popular votes—is not appropriate to examine the types of messages and sequential strategic dynamics because the result was quite obvious. However, the 1992 and 2000 elections provide more variation in terms of the strategic contexts and thus the message strategies. Even though President George H. W. Bush received about an 89% job approval rating after the Gulf War, breaking his campaign pledge no to raise taxes and the economic recession damaged his approval rating, dropping it to 29% in July 1992. Therefore, President Bush would be expected to employ campaign strategies to motivate his partisan supporters during the general election period. Figure 2.3 presents the level of support for Bush in 1992 from the early summer to Election Day. After the Republican National Convention in August, Bush recovered the support from the Republicans and leaners up to about 80%, but Ross Perot's re-entering the race took voters away from the Bush and threatened his base support again. Even in the early summer polls, as a reflection of the low approval rating, Bush received only about 60% of support from Republicans.

FIGURE 2.3
The Percentage of Bush's Support in 1992 by Partisanship



In 2000, Vice President Al Gore consistently led the polls and won the nomination unanimously, but he did not attract some partisan voters who were disappointed by President Clinton's misbehavior. Gore, therefore, employed strategies that separated him from Clinton, hopefully without any loss of partisan supporters. Figure 2.4 shows the support level of Gore in 2000 by party identification. Before the Democratic National Convention, the support level of Gore among Democrats was down to about 75% despite their having experienced economic prosperity and peace under the Clinton-Gore administration. Even though the support from Democrats recovered after the convention, once the fall campaign started, it went down again to about 60%. This fluctuation showed the Gore campaign's struggle with securing partisan voters. In other words, Gore in this open-seat race needed to develop strategies to reinforce his base voters.

FIGURE 2.4
The Percentage of Gore's Support in 2000 by Partisanship



Second, the 1992 and 2000 elections had wide issue variations between the two candidates. Unlike the 2004 election, during which terrorism dominated all the attention, the 1992 and 2000 elections created various campaign issues such as economy, tax cuts, education, and “morality.” In the 1980s, candidates tended to emphasize foreign policies more due to the threat of Communism. However, by the 1992, campaign issues had shifted more to domestic issues, which generally differ between two major party candidates (Vavreck 2009). These two competitive elections brought a significant amount of positive and negative message content as well. For example, in 2000, Bush generated negative messages attacking Gore in the early stage of the campaign. However, he later repositioned himself as an explainer rather than an attacker. By the end of the campaign, there was no difference between Gore and Bush in terms of who was seen as attacking and explaining (West 2005). In other words, the candidates strategically

changed their positions during the campaigns based on the reactions from the voters. This is also a sign of how closely divided the presidential election had become the candidates by sensitively reacting by shifting responsibility for negativity away from themselves. These issue and tone variances illustrate the mechanism of candidates' delivering the right messages to the right voters.

Last, third party candidates emerged in both the 1992 and 2000 elections, but their impact on the major two-party candidates was different. Ralph Nader actively ran in the 2000 election as a candidate of the Green Party and attracted some Gore votes by running to the left of Gore on some campaign issues such as the environment. In part, in Florida, Nader received about 97,000 votes, which led to claims that he was responsible for Gore's defeat. Bush's victory margin in Florida was less than .01%. In contrast, in 1992, Ross Perot attracted many more voters than Nader had in 2000. He spent multi-million dollars for advertising and operating his campaign teams, and even appeared in some of the televised debates. Even though he dropped out of the race in July and re-entered in October, his impact on the election was significant. Perot drew more strongly from independents than from partisans and he did slightly better in an absolute sense among Republicans than Democrats. But for both sets of partisans Perot picked up approximately the same share of defectors. According to the NES survey, 49.5% of the Perot voters would have voted for Bush; 50.5% would have voted for Clinton. Thus the Perot voters would have been split almost evenly between the two candidates (Alvarez and Nagler 1995). The conditions of two elections are significantly different. The 2000 election is more like a typical general election, but the 1992 election is considered an exceptional example. Having different types of elections in the dataset to investigate the effect of voters' preferences on candidates' behavior increases the generalizability of the results.

Data Sources

The data used to test the above hypotheses were collected and pooled from all available nomination acceptance speeches, advertisements, and campaign speeches by major candidates competing in the 1992 and 2000 presidential elections. The first main data source was the Annenberg School of Communication and the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. They produced a CD-ROM in 1998 with the transcripts of speeches, television ads, and debates of general election campaigns from 1952 to 1996, with the exception of Barry Goldwater's. The collection on the Archive CD-ROM begins on September 1 prior to each general election and ends on the eve of Election Day, or Election Day itself if there were speeches. I code all the speeches as well as the ads candidates made, but none of the ads made on their behalf by interest groups, nonprofit organizations, citizens groups, or parties (or ads made in Spanish).¹⁴

Second, for the 2000 election data, I used the Stanford University Political Communications Lab and Stanford Mediaworks' compiled CD-ROM, which included every candidates' public speeches and advertisements. The CD-ROM was supplemented by a web site that contained the campaign contents including television commercials. I collected all transcripts in 2000 delivered by candidates from their website as well as from the CD-ROM.

Third, as an extension to primary data sources, I also collected other campaign speeches and advertisements from various sources such as the campaign web pages, media websites such as *CNN* and *C-SPAN*, and newspapers, especially the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* searching through *Lexus/Nexis*.

¹⁴ Campaign ads not produced by candidates are generally highly negative and focus on very specific issues beneficial to particular groups. For example, pro-choice non-profit groups would run issue ads containing messages that favor a pro-choice issue position whether or not the public favored the position. In addition, both party committees, DNC and RNC, ran relatively negative ads by attacking the opponent's record or character. This negativity in ads was significantly different from that in candidates' ads.

Last, for defining voting groups based on the party identification, Gallup tracking polls from September to Election Day were collected. The presidential election tracking polls, generally conducted on a three-day or daily basis, include party identification questions and voter preferences. The party identification questions in the tracking polls consist of 5-point scales from Democrat to Republican rather than 7-point scales used in the ANES data. The tracking polls are informative to specify voters' preferences based on their voters' partisanship in the last three months prior to Election Day¹⁵. Numerous tracking public opinion surveys are conducted during the campaign such as Gallup/CNN/USA Today, ABC News/Washington Post, Pew Internet & American Life, and CBS News/New York Time Polls. They regularly include "trial-heat" questions asking respondents to reveal their vote preference prior to Election Day. The polls used in this dissertation were the Gallup daily tracking polls starting from 1992. Because the daily tracking polls include day-by-day base opinions, these polls provide more accurate trends or influences of campaigns. Using the aggregate party identification voting cues from the trial-heat polls as lagged variables, I examined the effect of partisans' or swing voters' movements on selecting campaign messages.

Coding Contexts

Four different aspects of messages are used by candidates to reinforce and persuade their targeted groups, either the base or swing voters: position, valence, positive, and negative. To count the number of positional, valence, positive, and negative appeals, I created a coding

¹⁵ In addition to the tracking polls, I also employed other Gallup Polls generally prior to September. These surveys include the same questions about the party affiliations and vote preferences. Since the surveys are not on a daily basis, I used the closest polls to measure the lagged support level variable.

scheme, called “dictionary,”¹⁶ including sufficient subcategories of topics in the positional-valence and positive-negative message dimensions. Geer (1998) analyzed campaign advertisements by counting the number of appeals. For example, one advertisement might contain several issue and trait appeals rather than coding it only as one or zero. I adopted his coding unit in this dissertation. If candidates delivered four social welfare issues in an ad, I would count these as four positional issues since the dictionary appropriately defined social welfare as a positional issue. Following the same procedure, if a candidate attacked the opponent by mentioning his/her name or party, the number of negative appeals was counted as the number of negative tones. For example, if a candidate said, “I’m going to cut taxes and balance the budget,” then this statement would get two economic appeals – tax cuts and balance the budget. And then, since these economic appeals are positional issues representing Republican policies, I would code them as two positional issues. However, if a candidate said, “We must help those who haven’t shared fully in the recovery. We must build a lasting peace and create millions of new jobs,” then the dictionary would identify three valence issues in this statement – general economic concern (recovery), peace, and job creation, which are concerns of most voters. If a candidate said the two above statements together, then there would be two positional and three valence issue appeals. These numbers would transfer to the positional-valence score to show the proportional difference between the two message types. The positional-valence score in this

¹⁶ I used the computer program Yoshikoder to find words to define positional, valence, positive, and negative message appeals. Yoshikoder provides a general word count, custom dictionary word count, and a reading highlight function. For this computer-assisted content analysis, first, I created customized dictionaries including key words to define the types of appeals. These dictionaries were named positional-valence and positive-negative dictionaries. Each dictionary consisted of two levels – categories and patterns. Categories are concept words that fall into a larger construct such as economy or education. Patterns are individual words or phrases that fall into a category and are specifically searched for. For example, under the economy category, there are several patterns such as tax cut, deficit, unemployment, or job creation. Then, Yoshikoder generates keywords-in-text, called a concordance, which shows sentences that included the pattern words. Finally, using the concordance, local word contexts were coded as one of the four message types: positional, valence, positive, and negative.

example would be -.2, which means that this statement contains 20% more valence issues than positional issues.

In sum, first, to code the positional issues, I adopted measures from Petrocik (1996) integrating with Campbell's (2008) distinctions (see Appendix B). Examples of the positional issues include abortion, business tax cuts, national defense, and health care. In the 2000 election, Al Gore released a campaign ad on health insurance and Medicare:

The truth about prescription drugs isn't in this notebook. It's in your checkbook. Bush relies on insurance companies. They now charge \$90 a month. Under Gore, \$25 a month through Medicare. Under Bush, millions of middle-class seniors not covered. Under Gore, coverage available to all seniors under Medicare. Seniors choose their own doctor. Medigap still available. Under Bush, seniors forced in HMOs and insurance companies. Medicare premiums could rise 47%. Get all the facts.

In this ad, Gore delivered mainly positional messages and the coding dictionary of the positional-valence issue dimension recognized such words as "Medicare," "HMOs," and "insurance company," considering them as positional issues.

Second, valence messages refer to a statement on the values and symbols embraced by a candidate or general public concerns such as peace, prosperity, freedom, crime, leadership, and honesty (Salmore and Samore 1992). For example, one of George H. W. Bush's ads contained the statement, "You can't trust Clinton economics. It's wrong for you. It's wrong for America." Since the statement contained "trust," "wrong" (two times), and "economy," it was coded as four valence issue appeals.

Last, positive messages contained text related to the candidate such as references to his/her achievements or leadership. In contrast, negative messages included text referring to the opponent, such as his/her name, party, or campaign policies. In practice, from the previous example of Al Gore's ad, the dictionary of the positive-negative tone dimension picked up the

words “Bush” and “Gore,” counting them as either positive or negative appeals. In this particular example, as there were three usages of the word “Bush” and two of “Gore,” the positive-negative dimension score was -.2, indicating 20% more negative messages than positive messages delivered through this ad.

In this dissertation, visual elements were not considered in coding. It would be very difficult to code the visual elements of speeches such as gestures or background music in the ads and very subjective in the interpretations. For this reason, I focused only on verbal content.

Regarding the validity and reliability of the data, I followed Geer’s (1998) assessments in three ways. First, I randomly selected speeches and advertisements from the 1992 and 2000 campaigns. After establishing the coding rules and procedures, I tested the dictionaries in the computer context analysis program, Yoshikoder, and compared the results of the concordance, which were saved as a keyword-in-text file. Then, assistants and I individually coded the concordances generated from the sample speeches and ads. In this sample, our coding agreed about 90% of the time. Second, I recorded a set of campaign speeches and ads that I had examined a week earlier. In this case, the agreement was about 95%. Finally, I recoded a sample of data two weeks after the previous testing, and the agreement was 96%. Based upon the results of these tests, the content analysis results were sufficiently reliable.

Model Specification

As discussed, I used data collected from all available campaign speeches, advertisements, and acceptance speeches produced by major party presidential candidates to evaluate hypotheses derived from my theory. Since I have two major party candidates across elections, the models in this dissertation are specified as pooled, cross-sectional models. Even though data include a time

variable, they are not in a time series format, and observations of the dependent variable do not occur at regular intervals as time series estimators assume. Therefore, I used a cross-sectional regression estimation to test candidates' behavior in utilizing campaign messages.

Model One: Position versus Valence Issue Model (PV)

Model One examines the factors that motivate candidates to focus their messages on issues, especially position and valence issues. The dependent variable is a continuous measure coded 1 to -1 as indicating the balance between position and valence issues (Position – Valence). For example, if positional issues comprise 20% candidate's campaign speech and valence issues make up 80% of the speech, the *Positional versus Valence Issue Score* will be -.6. In other words, during this certain time, the messages contain more valence issues than the positional issues. Each chapter has different data sources depending on the campaign events – national convention acceptance speeches, general campaign speeches, and advertisements. For the national convention, each acceptance speech is coded as one unit of analysis. During the on-going campaign period, advertisements and campaign speeches are coded separately whenever messages are delivered.

Model Two: Positive versus Negative Message Model (PN)

Model Two examines the factors that motivate candidates to focus their messages on tones, especially positive and negative messages. The dependent variable is a continuous measure coded 1 to -1, indicating the distinction between positive and negative tones (Positive – Negative). For example, if a speech consists of 70% of positive tones and 30% of negative tones, the *Positive versus Negative Tone Score* will be coded as .4. In other words, during this certain time, more positive tones are contained in the messages than negative tones. In this example, I

expect that the messages are intended to target partisan voters rather than swing voters. Again, each chapter has different data sources depending on the campaign events – national convention acceptance speeches, general campaign speeches, and advertisements. The unit of analysis, each message, is applied to these types of data. In addition to this positive-negative message model, I additionally examine the effects of two different situations on the positive versus negative message dimension considering the complexity of going negative. First, when candidates lead the polls, I expect that candidates will deliver more positive messages. Second, when the opponent is ahead in the polls, I expect that candidates will deliver more negative messages.

Variables

There are two main independent variables in the models. *Base Voter Support* is measured as the percentage of support in the total electorate for a certain candidate among his/her partisans and party leaners in the tracking polls. As a lagged variable, the three-day rolling tracking polls conducted before the message is delivered are used. I expect candidates who deliver more positional issue messages are influenced by lower levels of partisan support.

Swing Voter Support is measured as the percentage of votes in the total electorate for a certain candidate among those who identify themselves in the polls as independents including pure and leaning independents. As a lagged variable, the three-day rolling tracking polls conducted before the message is delivered are used. I expect that if valence issues are emphasized more in the messages, this is caused by a lower support level among independents.

A difference in candidates' behavior that may result from proximity to Election Day is captured with a count variable labeled *Days Prior to Election*. The control variable equals one on Election Day and increases by one for each day prior to Election Day. I expect that candidates

will be focused more on valence issues the closer they are to Election Day, given that voter interest is likely to increase as Election Day approaches. Also, a dummy control variable labeled *Incumbency* is included because incumbent candidates are expected to mention more valence issues to emphasize their achievements under their administration and because their positions are already well-known. In addition, incumbents may go negative early because they tend to solidify their base more quickly than challengers as Barack Obama did in 2012.¹⁷

The message strategy models are tested in different environments such as national conventions, general election speeches, and TV ads. Therefore, control variables are differently applied in each case. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 individually explain detailed model specifications with different control variables while the *Base Voter Support* and *Swing Voter Support* variables are applied in all models.

¹⁷ Barack Obama ran negative ads attacking Mitt Romney before the national conventions, which considered the starting point of the general election campaigns. Comparing Obama, Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, was less well known to the public and Democrats had a chance to shape perceptions of him. For example, Since April, after Romney became the presumptive nominee, Obama pushed negative commercials more than positive commercials to create a perception of Romney as the unacceptable candidate to voters.

CHAPTER 3

CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES IN CANDIDATES' SPEECHES

Campaign messages are vital as one of the more influential campaign-level factors determining electoral outcomes by generating the campaign information. As campaigns progress, voters reduce their uncertainty about the candidates and their issue positions (Alvarez and Nagler 1998), and this campaign learning process consequently influences a vote decision (Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Popkin 1994). Candidates, therefore, should carefully present their campaign messages as an effective communication tool. Especially, as partisanship is getting weaker (Wattenberg 1996)¹⁸, voters tend to consider candidates' qualifications, the issues, or other forces such as the economic recession or wars, in addition to partisanship itself. Even partisan voters, who mostly vote for their party candidate, want to confirm the choice that they have already made before casting their ballots. This expectation pushes candidates to produce carefully constructed messages based on a coherent rationale to maximize votes. The development of a campaign message takes into account what the voters want and what the candidate has to offer (Bradshaw 1995). The attention that candidates give to certain issues increases the weight of the consideration of those issues when voters decide their vote choices (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Carsey 2000). Campaign issues even contribute to the voters' impression of candidates' character traits (Hayes 2005). Therefore, it is

¹⁸ Bartels (2000) found the increased impact of partisans on voting behavior in presidential elections. However, the number of partisans who identify themselves as Democrat or Republican has been decreased while political independents have increased. Campbell (2008) argued that depending on how to define independent leaners as either partisans or independents, the pattern of declining partisans could be concluded differently. However, it is clear that the number of partisans who identify themselves as either of the two parties consistently declines. For example, the results of NES data show that in 1952, 46.9% of respondents identified themselves as Democrats but in 2004, this declined to 32.2%. Moreover, the number of those identifying themselves as independents in 1952 was 23% but increased to 31.9% in 2004.

important to understand what factors determine the composition of campaign message content to gain more support to win the elections.

In general, campaign messages are designed to reach voters, persuade undecided voters, and motivate supporters. The predominant focus of scholarly research on campaign messages has been on how candidates benefit from emphasizing certain types of issues or tones such as issue ownership theory (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003), heresthetics (Riker 1990), issue priming (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994), and ride the wave (Sigelman and Buell 2004).

However, these studies focused on the effects of messages in campaigns rather than examine the influential components in message strategies. In other words, most campaign message studies have not focused on the influence of voters' preferences during the campaigns. Voters are the most important element in elections. Especially, partisans promote interest, involvement, and overt participation in campaigns. Accordingly, candidates should consider voters' preferences when deciding whether to modify their campaign strategies. What if candidates were receiving a lack of support from partisans during campaigns? Strategically, candidates should modify their strategies to appeal to partisan voters. Referring to the messages strategies, candidates would have emphasized more on partisan issues more to provide the reason to vote for their party candidates. Therefore, the vote preferences should be considered as the influential variable in campaign strategies.

Campaign dynamics consist of reciprocal relationships between candidates and voters. Candidates' campaign strategies try to influence the voters' decisions but at the same time, the level of vote preferences also affects campaign strategies. For example, candidates watch changes in the electorate by running tracking polls and the results of the polls are used in a targeting analysis. By recognizing the persuasive effects of campaign messages, candidates

adjust contents of the messages in response to the voters. Candidates, therefore, emphasize certain issues and utilize certain tones to strengthen their influences as the campaign progresses, and the level of emphasis in the content of messages depends on the changes in vote preference.

Among the many factors that influence voters, the most powerful determinant of the vote choice is partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960). The distribution of candidate preference is remarkably stable in terms of a fundamental voting cue, partisanship. In other words, at the aggregate level, partisans' support to their candidates tends to be stable¹⁹. Individuals who identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats are highly likely to vote for their party's candidates. Despite this stability of the base, recent studies found changes in partisanship. The percentage of partisans has dropped²⁰ while the percentage of independents, those who are not attached to either party, has gradually increased (Bartels 2000; Campbell 2008). In other words, the support from partisans is consistent, but the number of partisans is getting smaller. For example, since the 1970s, Democrats have lost some of their partisan support. Not only the number of Democrats relative to Republicans in the electorate but also that of weak Democrats has declined, leading to closely balanced proportions of partisans (Bafumi and Shapiro 2009). P

Particularly, in the 1992 presidential election, the emergence of the strong third party candidate, Ross Perot, attracted both Democrats and Republicans and he moved them away from their party candidates. Moreover, the Perot effect changed not only vote preferences but also partisanship. For instance, according to *Gallup* polls, right before Perot dropped out of the race in July, 32.6% of voters identified themselves as Democrats, and the percentage increased up to 38.8% right after Perot's drop. However, when Perot reentered the race in October, only 35.71%

¹⁹ From 1952 and 2008, for example, about 90% of strong partisans voted for their party candidates on average and about 70% of weak partisans voted for their candidates, according to NES data.

²⁰ Campbell (2008) counted leaners as partisans and confirmed the decline of those partisans since 1952. This means that parties lost their ground to independents.

of voters identified themselves as Democrats. In sum, when Perot dropped out of the race, some of the partisan voters returned to their party but some remained as independents²¹. Therefore, recognizing the shrinking size of their bases or weakening of the partisan strength, candidates should try to solidify partisans more to keep a stable playing field within the campaign. Accordingly, campaign message formation should be viewed as a part of the persuasive strategies targeting partisans and at the same time it can be extended to target swing voters or independents.

A perspective of candidates forming their messages in reaction to vote preference should be understood broadly. Theoretical and empirical research on campaign messages tends to focus on specific issue categories such as welfare, economy, or social security. However, the composition of the messages is more complex. For example, candidates can address the tax issue differently by emphasizing their policy standpoints. In 2008, Barack Obama said, "I will cut taxes for 95% of all working families, because, in an economy like this, the last thing we should do is raise taxes on the middle class."²² The opponent, McCain, also proposed, "Cutting the second-highest business tax rate in the world will help American companies compete and keep jobs from going overseas."²³ Even though both statements discussed about the tax issue, the messages aimed at two different voting groups – working families and business. In other words, the issue topic that the candidates delivered is the same, but the purpose of delivering the messages is different. Therefore, counting the number of issues mentioned in messages could misinterpret the candidates' strategic decisions in the message content. Rather than focusing on how many times

²¹ Democrats in 1992 reacted to Ross Perot more than Republicans did. Gallup polls showed that in July when Perot was in the race, 29.8% of voters identified themselves as Republicans. After Perot dropped out of the race, the percentage of Republicans went down to 27.07. In October, after Perot reentered the race, the number of Republicans increased up to 30.11% rather than reduced.

²² This statement is from the nomination acceptance speech in 2008 delivered by Barack Obama in Denver on August 28th.

²³ The statement is part of the nomination acceptance speech in 2008 delivered in St. Paul on September 4th.

the words of “economy” is mentioned, why candidates deliver certain types of messages is more important. In this example, it is not a matter of issue salience but rather a matter of appealing to partisans²⁴. Therefore, I suggest that issues should be categorized into a broad concept of message content – positional and valence issues. The strategic behavior of candidates on the messages is based on their rationale to maximize their votes. What kinds of issues appeal to partisans or swing voters? Why do candidates employ certain types of issues?

In this chapter, I examine impacts of support levels of the base voters and swing voters on campaign speeches. Each message appeal in campaign speeches is categorized as either a positional (party-based) issues or valence (salient) issue²⁵. Furthermore, positive and negative tones are coded to examine the influence of voters’ preferences on the composition of the message tones. In other words, I test the impact of the level of support from the base voters and swing voters on candidate message composition in terms of positional versus valence issues and positive versus negative tones in campaign speeches.

Candidates’ Behavior in Campaigns

As candidates pursue maximizing their chance of winning to bring in more votes, campaign messages play a critical role in communicating with voters by conveying campaign issues and tones. Candidates hope that their messages reinforce their partisan base and persuade swing voters. In spite of this clear goal of campaign messages, we know much less about the influences on the composition of the messages. Many studies found that voters’ choices are relatively stable based on factors such as partisanship, and socio-economic characteristics. Even forecasting

²⁴ A candidate has an advantage among issues owned by their party such as anti-abortion or gun control while valence issues such as crime, violence, and illegal drugs do not hold a clear advantage toward one of the two parties (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003).

²⁵ I counted the number of positional and valence issues in a speech and then calculated their proportional difference by subtracting the percentage of valence issues from the percentage of positional issues.

models suggest that early conditions such as economic conditions (Erikson and Wlezien 2013) or presidential approval ratings (Holbrook 2012) are sufficient to predict election outcomes before the general election campaign started. Certainly, candidates consider these factors when setting their campaign strategies, but at the same time, campaign strategies have to reflect the dynamics of changes during the campaign as a function of reciprocal response. These campaign efforts may move voters to the “equilibrium” and allow the forecasting models to be correct (Holbrook 1996).

While early research viewed campaign effects as minimal in the voters’ decision-making process (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944), recent studies showed that political messages directly and indirectly influence individual voting behavior and election results (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Bartels 1993; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Goldstein and Freedman 2002; Popkin 1994; West 2005; Zaller 1992). Therefore, finding the answer to the question of how those changes in voter preferences influence campaign strategies as the campaign progresses is important in campaign studies. This is true, especially, in the more competitive elections; even 1% of vote change can be decisive in determining the name the winner of the presidential election²⁶. This sensibility pushes candidates to continue reinforcing and persuading voters until election day and creates an interesting dynamic between voters who have a strong attachment with one party and those swing voters who lack a strong underlying relationship with either candidate.

Candidates emphasize the strength of the basic elements of the vote and consider persuading voters as secondary to the task of reinforcing the partisans. For example, in the 2004 presidential

²⁶ Under the Electoral College system, 1% of changes in vote preferences can be more critical, especially, in battleground states. For example, in the 2000 presidential election, Gore received about 48.84% and Bush received 48.85% in popular votes. Even though Gore carried the plurality votes, Bush defeated him. In this particular election, .01% of vote preferences in Florida determined the winner of the election. By winning in Florida, Bush could carry 25 Electoral College votes and became president.

election, the Republican campaign team employed the “base strategy” focusing on increasing turnout from the party’s conservative base. Their goal of the base strategy was to capture an equal number of Republican on Election Day as Democrats²⁷. In fact, John Kerry, a Democratic candidate, won the independents by a slim margin in this election. However, George W. Bush captured a large proportion of the electorate and support among Republicans (over 90%) and he won by about 3%.

Gelman and King (1993) examined the correlation between a variety of voter characteristics and their vote preferences using trial heat polls and found that campaigns strengthened the vote preferences. Hillygus and Simon (2003) found that conventions and debates have a significant ability to draw in partisans who are not yet convinced. These studies suggest that campaigns can draw in predisposed voters. In other words, candidates have to strategically solidify their partisans, as the campaigns progress, and levels of the support among partisans and swing voters influence candidate behavior and rhetoric.

Campaign messages are designed to establish candidates’ credentials and present their issue standpoints. A substantial number of studies have shown that some voters make decisions based on candidates’ policy positions, referred to as “issue voting,” as a reflection of their issue preferences (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Campaigns, therefore, can be seen as contests by candidates to emphasize certain topics or aspects of issues for persuading voters. This process often occurs throughout agenda setting, priming, and framing (Druckman 2004; Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Hammond and Humes 1993; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Petrocik

²⁷ In 2004, 37% of voters were Democrats, and 37% were Republican, which left 26% independent or unaffiliated. Karl Rove, Bush’s campaign manager in 2004, built the strategy to bring the same number of Republicans on Election Day as Democrats, since Democrats and Republicans shared the equal amount of percentage of the electorate. He asserted that if Republicans had the same number of voters on Election Day as Democrats, Bush would win the election, no matter what happened among the small group of persuadable voters. According to his analysis, the true swing voters, the persuadable middle electorate, were only 7%.

1996; Riker 1986, 1990). The “issue ownership” thesis also suggests that there are some issues that naturally advantage one party over and candidates should address those issues historically associated with their party (Petrocik 1996). These works provide evidence that candidates intentionally reach out to voters to reinforce and persuade them through delivering campaign messages. Accordingly, voters view candidates’ messages as a means of being informed about campaign issues and candidates’ traits (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994)²⁸.

The decision to go negative or remain positive in the campaign is also influenced by the levels of voter support. Skaperdas and Grofman (1995) developed a formal model positing that a candidate’s decision between using positive or negative messages was determined by the candidate’s position in the polls. Harrington and Hess (1996) used spatial modeling techniques to examine the influence that candidates’ specific attributes –ideology and other personal traits – have on the decision to attack. The applications of those models suggest that candidates who are trailing in the polls are more likely to go negative and Republicans are more likely to employ negative campaign tactics than Democrats (Theilmann and Wilhite 1998).

In addition, positive messages generally provide candidates direct benefits without risks, but negative tactics can give both benefits by gaining the support of some voters but also disadvantages by losing the support of other voters. In other words, going negative is an indirect means to increase candidates’ support in the electorate by undermining the opposition, but use of these tactics has risks and there is no guarantee that sponsoring candidates will increase their appeal among voters by focusing their attention on their opponent’s weakness (Damore 2005). Therefore, unlike campaign strategies in issue positioning (positional or valence issues), going positive or negative will provide mixed results on the influence of the level of support.

²⁸ Voters do not clearly separate issues and traits when evaluating candidates. Rather, voters tend to link the campaign issues and candidate traits together.

Therefore, I expect that, all else being equal, candidates will prefer to present messages that are positive in tone.

Candidates, as the major actors of campaigning, expect to make their preferred agenda more accessible to voters and thus help the voter's choice at the poll. Campaign message strategies, therefore, may explain how candidates compete to define and control campaign messages by changing their focuses on different types of voters in the presidential election. Based on the level of security in the base and swing voters, candidates employ either more partisan appeal (positional) issues or valence issues to reach out to their potential voters. Therefore, it is important to define the meaning of the base and swing voters as well as understand issue content in campaign messages including candidates' message tones.

The agenda-setting literature examined the dynamics of the agenda formation process, but many problems and limitations of the studies remain. One of the important criticisms, I raise is that the clear definitions of voting cue and issue categories tend to be overlooked. For example, partisan support is treated as the percentage of voter preferences and usually about 80% of partisans tend to support their party candidates over time. Another voting group, leaners, also behave like partisans even though in the polls they identify themselves as independents. The question is whether candidates view leaners as a part of the partisan base or as voters who can be persuaded. Moreover, coding issue content tends to ignore the different policy positions in issue categories. For example, education is viewed as one of the valence issues but addressing education issues within the emphasis on federal government involvement or state government authority could be considered as a positional issue.

Therefore, I suggest three key elements to understand campaign message strategies in presidential races. First, I measure message strategies as a dependent variable rather than treating

it as an independent variable; the degree of voters' support for a candidate holds an explanatory power. For example, the proportion of positional and valence issues in the message is a key dependent variable to examine how the proportion of messages is changed by the level of support from specific groups. If candidates need to secure their partisan bases, positional issues or partisan issues are delivered more than valence issues because partisans want to hear the party issues to solidify their vote preferences by confirming that their party candidates share the issues and ideology with them (Carmines and Stimson 1989).

Second, the level of support is measured with the size of a voting group. Partisans support their candidates strongly across elections but candidates need to know how large this group is in the electorate. The number of Democrats tends to be larger than that of Republicans and even the number of independents is increasing. As a candidate, for example, it would be meaningful to see the 85% of the partisan support as an indication of the degree of the secured base, but at the same time the size of partisan voters, either 35% or 40% in the electorate, should be considered.

Finally, I seek to define the base and swing voters from a candidate perspective. Realistically, candidates cannot divide voting groups clearly into partisan voters and swing voters because of leaners and weak partisans. If one is a swing voter, then there is no guarantee that such a person will change his or her vote preference, but rather only the belief that there exists the potential. At the same time, if one is a partisan voter, then there is no guarantee of his or her turnout on election day – only the belief that the voter has the likelihood to cast a vote for the candidate. Being aware of this uncertainty, candidates will deliver reinforcement content, i.e., positional issues, and persuasive content, i.e., valence issues. However, depending on the definition of the partisan or swing voters, the effect of the support differently influences the composition of the messages.

Types of Campaign Messages

In order to analyze campaign messages, the messages are contextually divided into positional and valence issues. Positional issues tend to distinguish two candidates more clearly and thus could be expected to polarize voters or appeal to partisans. As voters come to weigh certain considerations more heavily, the probability of their choosing the candidate who benefits from those considerations will increase. Partisans, therefore, give major consideration to partisan issues and reinforce their vote choice with party candidates who support partisan voters' considerations. In other words, positional issues are also considered as partisan issues and they are conceptually interchangeable. For example, "strong environment protection" or "universal healthcare" positions are generated by Democratic candidates, and Democrats are favorable to those issues. In contrast, Republicans tend to oppose Democratic positions and they are favorable to "oil drilling or "privatizing health insurance" positions. These positional issues are strongly attached to partisan preferences (Petrocik 1996). Positional issues, therefore, include directionality of the issues or solutions by differentiating candidates' positions from those of their opponents. For example, a pro-choice voter will gravitate increasingly toward the pro-choice candidates as abortion becomes a salient election-year issue and it is hard to imagine a Republican presidential candidate supporting the right of abortion. Candidates are likely to be perceived as credible over partisan issues and these issues are generally consistent and well defined (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003; Campbell et al. 1960; Vavreck 2009).

Thus, candidates emphasize these positional issues in the campaign messages to reinforce the support of their partisan voters. When candidates take distinct stands on positional issues, they strategically pressure their partisan voters to stay closer to their candidates. Therefore, to

increase partisans' support, candidates focus more on addressing positional issues. Consequently, this type of issue generally solidifies the support of their base-partisan voters by representing polarized partisan preferences (Zaller 1992).

Hypothesis 1: *The composition of campaign speeches is responsive to the level of support.*

Hypothesis 2: *With the increasing necessity of securing the base, candidates include more positional issues than valence issues in their campaign speeches.*

To win the election, however, candidates need to receive a broad range of support in the electorate. It is obvious that candidates should secure their partisan voters but also consider persuading swing voters to gain the support of a plurality of voters. For example, the average of partisan base size of Republicans in 1992 was about 31% of the electorate, while that of Democrats was about 36%. In the 1992 election, Governor Bill Clinton received 43% of the popular votes and President George H. W. Bush received 37.5%. This example presents two key points. First, securing the base, on its own, is not enough to win the general election. If Clinton could have secured all the partisan votes, the amount of support would not have been sufficient to win the election. Second, the size of the base is different between the two major parties. Generally Democratic candidates have an advantage over Republican candidates by having the larger size of the partisan base²⁹. In addition, by increasing the percentage of independents (Bartels 2000), persuasion of swing voters or independents is required to win the election. In the 1992 election, for example, about 35.1% of the voters identified themselves as independents including leaners according to the NES survey results. The number of independents in 1992 was

²⁹ According to the NES data in 2004, Democrats made up about 32.2% of the electorate, and Republicans about 35.9%. Historically, the number of Democrats in the electorate is larger than that of Republicans, especially in presidential election years, but the year of 2004 was exceptional. The results of Gallup polls in party identification show that in the pre-election poll, the number of Democrats was 37% and that of Republicans was 34%. However, in the post-election poll, notable shifts have been observed. In the first Gallup post-election poll, the number of Democrats was 35% and that of Republicans was 38%. This post-election shift in the national partisanship appears to be related to the party's election performance. If a party exceeds expectations in the election, a shift in Americans' party identification is evident.

surprisingly larger than that of Democrats (34.6%) and Republican (30.2%) loyalists.³⁰

Therefore, candidates should persuade swing voters in order to increase a chance of winning in the election. It is necessary for candidates to employ other types of campaign messages to target these swing voters consisting of independents who are different from base-partisan voters.

Valence issues such as improving the state of the economy or reducing crime provide a tool to broaden the campaign target group to swing voters. Valence issues are characterized as a common set of issues that are highly salient to the public in order to appear responsive to the public's concerns (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000). Generally, voters tend to have the same position on those issues. Valence issues merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate (Stokes 1963, 1992).

Hypothesis 3: With the increasing necessity of persuading the swing voters, candidates increase valence issues compared to positional issues in their campaign speeches.

Another body of political message studies focuses on the effect of positive and negative messages. Campaigns typically do present positive messages to highlight the candidate himself/herself, while negative messages generally refer to those that attack the other candidate's personality, the issues for which the other candidate stands, or the party of the other candidate. Many studies related to positive or negative messages address the level of turnout as a consequence of messages. The "demobilization hypothesis" posits that political strategists intentionally employ negative ads to discourage segments of the electorate from voting and are well aware that lower turnout is the result (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Simon 1999; Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Simon

³⁰ Ross Perot in 1992 appealed to weak partisans of both parties. Perot drew more strongly from independents but he also picked up the same share of defectors from both sets of partisans. However, even without this third party candidate, neither party.

2002). However, other studies have found that television advertising actually contributes to political learning (Brians and Wattenberg 1996). Even negative ads could mobilize voters and consequently increase voter turnout (Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Goldstein and Freedman 2002; Finkel and Geer 1998). However, these studies focus more on the effects of positive or negative campaigns rather than analyzing the conditions that motivate candidates to go negative or positive.

The preferred strategy for candidates is to present messages that are largely positive because these messages provide candidates the means to attract voters and reduce the risk of backlash (Basil, Schooler, and Reeves 1991). Positive messages offer voters reasons why a candidate is worthy of their support by signaling what issues and traits are important to the candidate and why. Studies in positive messages suggest that candidates will gain the advantage by describing themselves clearly to the electorate, thereby decreasing the voters' uncertainty about the candidates (Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Franklin 1991; Alvarez 1997). Accordingly, positive messages reinforce voters' predetermined preferences. Candidates, therefore, use positive messages to solidify the choices of partisans who generally vote for their party candidates to solidify their choices. However, negative messages provide more clear distinction between two candidates. Moreover, voters may be more likely to remember negative information (Lau and Pomper 2002; Newhagen and Reeves 1991; Basil, Schooler, and Reeves 1991). Citizens may view negative advertisements as more exciting and may pay them careful attention. Geer (2005) argued that political independents exposed to a negative campaign are more likely to participate in an election. In contrast, Skaperdas and Grofman (1995) suggested that positive campaigning is designed to attract undecided voters by familiarizing them with a candidate's concerns.

Hypothesis 4: Going more positive or negative in the content of campaign speeches is responsive to the level of vote preferences.

Hypothesis 5: *With the increasing necessity of securing the partisan voters, candidates go more positive than negative in their campaign speeches.*

Hypothesis 6: *With the increasing necessity of persuading the swing voters, candidates go more negative than positive in their campaign speeches.*

The causal effect of the voters' support on the candidates' decision to go positive or negative is complex. Positive and negative messages could appeal to both partisan voters and swing voters. Moreover, Skaperdas and Grofman (1995) suggested positive and negative campaigning could be a function of being ahead or behind. For example, negative campaigning is intended, in part, to reduce the support of one's opponent by moving a fraction of the opponent's supporters into the group of undecided voters or to suppress turnout among the opponent's supporters. Therefore, a candidate employs a negative tone more to make the opponent's supporters question their support for the opponent. If a candidate is ahead, there is no need to hurt the opponent by taking the risk of backlash. Rather, the candidate prefers to have a positive tone more. The alternative hypotheses of the positive and negative tone dimension, called situational models, are as follows:

Hypothesis 7: *When the candidate is ahead in the polls, positive messages are delivered more.*

Hypothesis 8: *When the opponent's support increases in the polls, the candidate delivers negative messages more to reduce the opponent's support.*

Data and Methods

To evaluate the candidates' campaign message strategies, I used data collated and pooled from all available campaign speeches delivered by major party presidential candidates competing in the 1992 and 2000 general campaigns.³¹ The 1992 election was specially selected because

³¹ This research did not include Ross Perot. Even though he rejoined the race during the general election period, Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush mostly ignored his positions. In actual campaign speeches, Perot was mentioned but

both candidates were required to secure their partisan voters at the beginning even though the incumbent candidate was running for office. In fact, an election heavily leaning toward one candidate—such as the 1984 election won by Ronald Reagan with about 59% popular votes and 98% Electoral College votes—is not appropriate to examine the types of messages and sequential strategic dynamics in that the result is rather obvious, meaning that voters' support for strong candidates, such as Reagan, already solid from the early stage of the race. However, in the case of the 1992 election, the job approval rating of President George H. W. Bush was about at 89% right after the Gulf war, but his breaking of the campaign pledge and the economic recession damaged his approval rating, dropping it to 29% in July 1992. Therefore, even the incumbent candidate needed to have considered employing campaign strategies to motivate his partisan voters during the general election period. Moreover, the emergence of the viable third party candidate, Ross Perot, hurt both Clinton and Bush by taking votes away from the major party candidates.

The 2000 presidential election also offers a favorable case for reinforcing and persuading influences. Although Al Gore was attached to the current administration, the vice president did not have a presidential record and advantages. While campaigning, Al Gore even struggled to separate himself from President Clinton who had a serious scandal with Lewinsky (Kamarck 2002). In addition, the competitiveness of the race became the key element from the beginning of the general election campaigns. Neither of the candidates was significantly ahead over the opponent. For example, in a poll conducted right after Labor Day, Governor Bush received 32.3% of support in the electorate and Al Gore received 34.8%. Due to the undeniably close election,

the two candidates did not consider him seriously. Also, national surveys included Perot in the choices, but the result did not affect the margin between Clinton and Bush. Therefore, I decided not to include Perot in this research.

campaign strategy and events had an important influence on the election outcome (Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004).

In this research, the campaign speeches produced by the two major candidates were coded and rearranged as two dimensions of messages: positional versus valence (PV) and positive versus negative (PN) messages. Campaign speeches were drawn from the *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse CD-ROM* and *In Their Own Words, Source Book for the 2000 Presidential Election*. These data sources contain all records of campaign speeches delivered by Clinton and Bush in 1992 and Gore and Bush in 2000 including speech dates, states/places where they talked, key issue tags, type of speeches, and audiences. In addition, I used the *LexisNexis* database of news transcripts to find speeches that might have been missed in the sourcebooks. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN*, and *PBS* carried campaign speech transcripts.

Each campaign speech, as a unit of analysis, was coded by employing the message dimensions³². First, to code positional issues, I adopted measures that integrated those of Petrocik (1996) with the distinctions by Campbell (2008). Also, the words including directionality or answers to solve the problems were considered as positional issues. For example, Clinton asserted in his speech, “We’re going to reinvest every defense cut,” and then this was counted as one positional issue due to the clear directionality of the defense budget, “cutting.” Second, valence messages denoted statements on the values and symbols embraced by a candidate or general public concerns such as peace, crime, and leadership (Salmore and Samore 1992). Last, positive messages included candidates’ strengths such as experience, achievement, trust, and leadership as well as prospective evaluations. In contrast, negative

³² For the reliability test, using randomly sampled content, other professional assistants coded the content. And they achieved a 90% level of agreement. In addition, speeches were recoded two weeks later and the 90% level of agreement remained the same.

messages were defined as any context related to the opponent. A candidate's mention of their opponent's name, party affiliation, or policies, was coded as a negative appeal. For example, Bush called Al Gore "Ozone Man" in his speech and this is clearly a negative appeal talking about the opponent. It was counted as one negative appeal. However, this coding scheme did not include the visual and image elements such as gestures and audience feedback to reduce the level of ambiguity. Indeed, nonverbal elements in the speeches would be very difficult to code and too complicated in terms of reliability.

The positional versus valence dimension (PV) was measured as the proportion of positional issues minus the proportion of valence issues. The smaller number of PV scores indicates that more positional issues were addressed in a speech. The positive versus negative dimension (PN) is measured exactly the same as the PV. The proportion of positive tones is subtracted from the proportion of negative tones. Therefore, a small number of PV scores means an increase of negative tones in a speech. For example, if a speech was coded as having 70 positional and 30 valence appeals, the PV score in this case would be .4, indicating that there were more positional appeals than valence appeals. The same rule applies to the PN dimension.

Based on these coding techniques, each speech was coded separately and the days prior to Election Day were calculated as a count variable that equaled zero on Election Day and increased the further away from Election Day. I expect that candidates would deliver more valence and negative messages to appeal to the remaining undecided voters as Election Day approaches.

To measure the level of support from partisan and swing voters, I used the Gallup's party identification question consistently and categorized independents who reported leaning toward a party as identifying with the respective party. As I discussed, leaning independents strongly

favor the party's candidate but at the same time they are considered as more persuadable than partisans. The level of support was measured by daily tracking polls conducted by Gallup³³. This "trial-heat" survey included the question asking respondents to reveal their vote preferences prior to Election Day on a daily basis. In addition, I used the question including third party candidate choices to reflect a real political environment. Using the aggregate party identification voting cues from the trial-heat polls as lagged variables³⁴, this study was designed to examine the effect of partisan or independent voters' movements on selecting different types of campaign messages.

In addition to the two independent variables, I included the following control variables: *Days Prior to Election* and *Incumbency*. *Days Prior to Election* was included to capture the impact that proximity to Election Day exerts on candidates' decisions to attack and deliver valence issues to undecided voters. I expected that proximity to Election Day increases the likelihood that candidates will disseminate more negative information about their opponents and more valence issues to persuade last-minute undecided voters. *Incumbency* was also included to test whether incumbent candidates are more likely to use valence issues since voters are more informed about the incumbents' policy positions and concerns than those of the challenger³⁵.

The model in this analysis of campaign speeches in 1992 and 2000 is specified as a pooled, cross-sectional regression model. While the data were collected over the course of campaigns, observations of the continuous dependent variable did not occur at regular intervals as time series estimators assume. Moreover, I assumed that the candidates' decisions to address more

³³ The Gallup Tracking Poll included all three phases in 1992 starting from September 28. Therefore, to collect the results of polls prior to September 28, it was necessary to use other types of Gallup polls. The Gallup consistently used the same questions in their survey questionnaires for both tracking polls and other polls and I could not find a significant difference in the poll results between tracking polls and other polls.

³⁴ To calculate the level of support from the partisans or independents, three-day cumulated tracking polls were used. For instance, Clinton delivered a stump speech on October 22; tracking polls conducted from October 19 to 21 were used to calculate the percentage of support before the speech.

³⁵ Incumbency is not included in the positive-negative message model. There is no strong supportive theory that an incumbent candidates delivers more or less positive or negative messages than the challenger does.

positional or valence issues and to go positive or negative were independently made based on the level of support when delivering the speeches. Therefore, the decisions did not depend on the time variable. Current decisions concerning the tones and content of messages at a certain time (t) were not influenced by such decisions at a previous time point (t-1).

Results

Positional versus Valence Issue Dimension

Depending on candidates' decisions whether to reinforce or persuade voters, the message content is changed. When the base is not secured, candidates should deliver more positional messages to reinforce partisan votes. For example, prior to delivering a speech on October 12, 2000, George W. Bush received about 70% of support from partisans, who identified themselves as Republicans. In the total electorate, it was only 17.4%. As a candidate who needed more support from the base, his rational decision to reinforce his base would be delivering more positional issues. Indeed, on October 12th, Bush delivered a speech in Pennsylvania that heavily focused on social security and Medicare issues.

Right now, Social Security earns only a 2 percent return on taxpayer money. Under my plan, even if a younger worker chooses only the safest investment - inflation-indexed U.S. bonds - he or she will receive twice that rate. And, through the power of compound interest, that will make a real difference during retirement.

As the example shows, the speech intentionally targeted partisan bases by emphasizing the partisan issue, social security reform. The rest of the speech also contained more positional issues than valence issues. The positional versus valence (PV) score of the speech was recorded as .07.

In contrast, prior to October 25th, Al Gore received only 49.7% of support from Democrat leaners and 9% from pure independents. In the whole electorate, it was 6.31% from leaners and

1.22% from pure independents³⁶ and the support from leaners, considering them persuadable, and pure independents at that time, was significantly low. The speech Gore delivered in Tennessee on October 25th reflected his desire to persuade swing voters by talking about education issues.

My plan begins by focusing on the classroom, because that's where learning takes place, and that is where standards really have to be lifted. We have to hire 100,000 new, qualified teachers to reduce class size. So there is more one-on-one time, more discipline and respect, and greater emphasis on fundamentals.

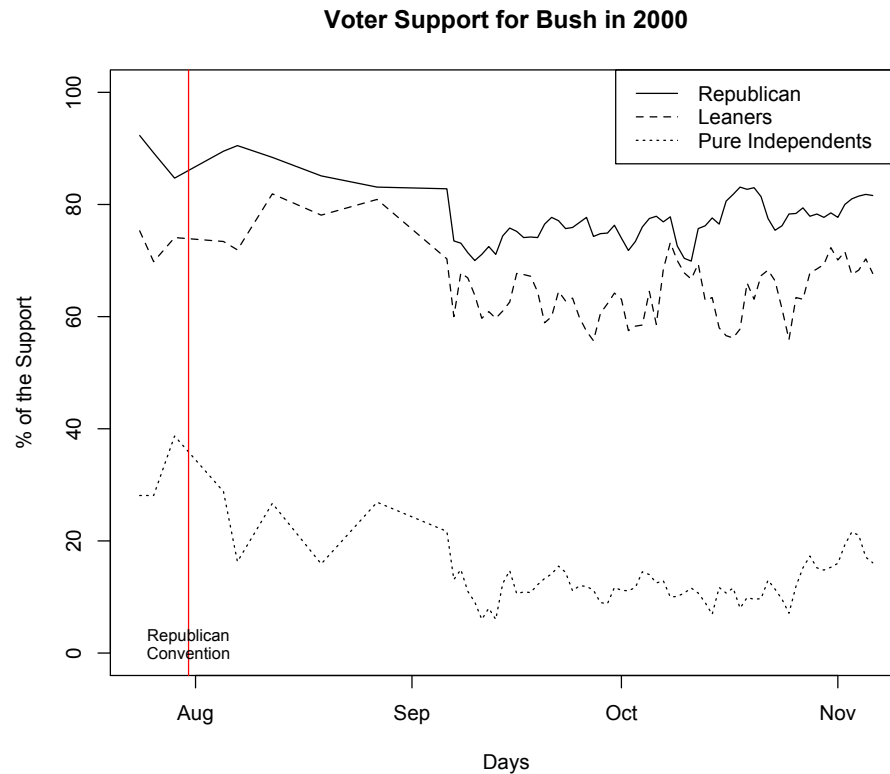
The positional versus valence score in this speech was -.64. The score indicated that valence issues were delivered more and the necessity of persuading swing voters seemed to drive the candidate to increase the portion of valence issues.

Before presenting the effects of the levels of support on campaign messages, it is important to clarify the definitions of voting groups. First, the *partisan base* is the group of voters who identify themselves as either Democrats or Republicans. Gallup tracking polls do not ask the strength of partisanship, so weak partisans are not clearly identifiable.

Second, the *electoral base* is the group who behave like partisans. The electoral base contains both partisan voters and leaning independents whose voting behavior is similar to self-defined partisans (Mayer 2008). Figure 3.1 shows the Republicans and Republican-leaners' support of George W. Bush in 2000. The partisans' support for Bush decreased as the campaign progressed and the support of Republican-leaners also decreased as Election Day approached. In other words, the pattern of movements was similar between partisans and leaners, and this pattern implies that the behavior of leaners mirrored that of partisans.

³⁶ Throughout the 2000 presidential election, the average percentage of leaners' support to Gore was 7.67% and that of pure independents was 2.22% in the electorate.

FIGURE 3.1
The Percentage of Bush's Support in 2000 by Partisanship



Last, the *swing voters* represent leaning and pure independents. The support of swing voters was measured as the percentage of support from independents – Republican leaners, Democratic leaners, and pure independents. Party leaners were again included in the swing voter group rather than mutually exclusive from the electoral base. Despite behaving like partisans, leaning independents' behavior can also be similar to that of pure independents (Miller and Wattenberg 1983) since leaners do not commit to their party affiliation. In other words, as an aggregate group, leaners broadly include those of hidden partisans and political independents who could shift their vote preferences from one candidate to another depending on their priority concerns or not to vote. As Figure 3.2 shows, in 1992, the movement pattern of support between Democrats and Democratic leaners did not mirror that of Republican partisans in 2000.

FIGURE 3.2
The Percentage of Clinton Support in 1992 by Partisanship

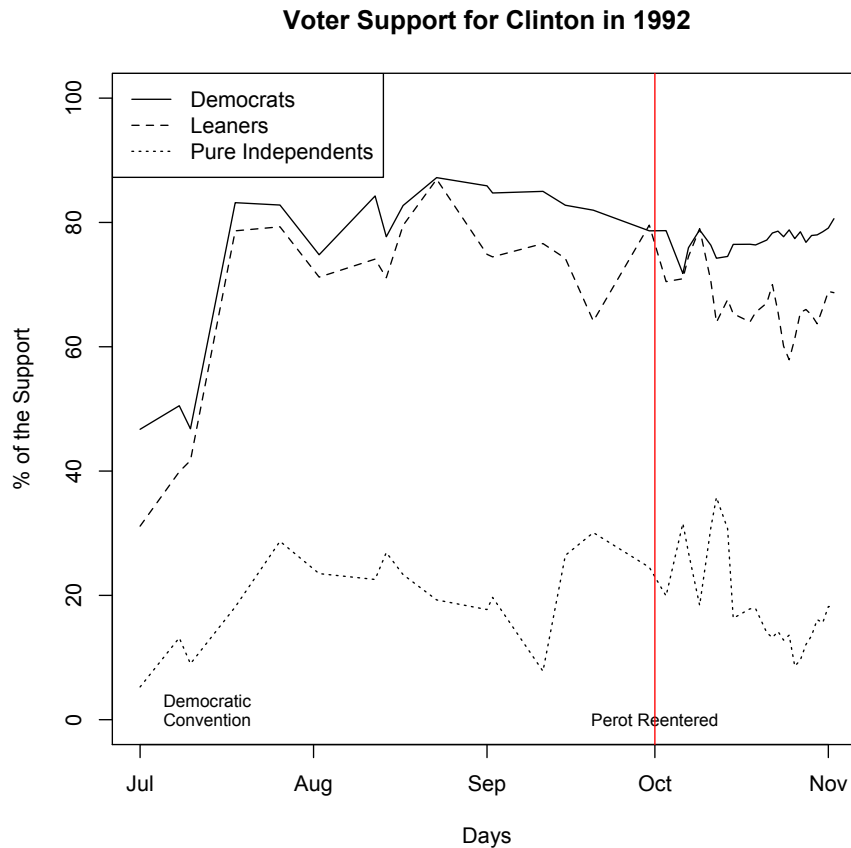


Table 3.1 presents the statistical results of the random-effects cross-sectional regression analysis, which measured the influence of support on candidates' message content³⁷. As anticipated, the unsecured levels of vote preferences affect the main contextual factors in campaign speeches. By increasing the electoral base support, candidates decrease the portion of positional issues. The coefficient of the electoral base support is -.044 in the pooled model. This means that a 1% of increase in the electoral base support leads to a .044 decrease on the positional versus valence index, on average. Substantively, as losing the electoral base support, candidates deliver more positional issues to reinforce their base voters.

³⁷ The t-test result confirmed that the years 1992 and 2000 were statistically different from each other by rejecting the null hypothesis, no difference between two groups. Therefore, the effect of *Year* was controlled in the pooled model but the coefficient of the year variable is not statistically significant. .

TABLE 3.1
The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positional vs. Valence Issues
in Campaign Speeches

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Poole |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | -.027** (.01) | -.05** (.007) | -.044** (.006) |
| Swing Voter Support | .039** (-.19) | .0287* (.014) | .037** (.0096) |
| Incumbency | -.19* (.094) | | -.372** (.067) |
| Days Prior to Election | -.0001 (.001) | .002** (.0007) | .0014** (.0005) |
| Constant | .461 (.328) | 1.3** (.221) | 1.2** (.256) |
| Number of Observations | 199 | 146 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .07 | .228 | .261 |

Coefficients of the pooled model are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension.

**p<.01, *p<.05

In addition, as swing voters are secured, candidates deliver more positional issues to reinforce the deciders' or partisans' vote choices. With an increase of 1% of swing voters' support, the positional versus valence index increases by .37, on average in the pooled model. Substantively, candidates deliver more valence issues when swing voter support decreases. These effects of the level of securing the electoral base and swing voters on the proposition of positional and valence issues in speeches were significant in 1992 and 2000 separately, as I expected.

To compare the effect of the base and swing voters' support, I standardized the support

variables³⁸ and the results show that the electoral base change has a larger impact than the swing voters' support on modification of campaign message strategies by delivering more positional issues when the base needs to be secured (see appendix C.2). Overall, increasing or decreasing the proportion of messages on positional and valence issues is relative to the electoral base and swing voters and tends to react more sensitively to the change in the electoral base support.

The significance of *Days Prior to Election* in 2000 and pooled models suggests that valence issues are more likely to be delivered as Election Day approaches. The result supports that candidates tend to use the valence issues to persuade remaining voters who are generally swing voters because partisan voters tend to make a decision earlier in the election. In addition, *incumbent* candidates tend to address valence issues more and this impact is statistically significant. Indeed, voters tend to be aware of the incumbent candidates' issue positions. As a highly publicized figure in politics, presidents have an advantage to advertise their issue positions to voters more easily than their opponents do.

Positive versus Negative Tone Dimension (PN)

A candidate's decision to go negative or positive is affected by the level of support from the base or swing voters. To test the effect of the securing level, I used the cross-sectional regression and the results are presented in Table 3.2. In the pooled model, which includes both the 1992 and 2000 speeches, the increasing support from the electoral base and the swing voters significantly influences the degree of positive and negatives tones in a speech. However, the results are not in predicted directions. In the reinforcing perspective, with an increase of 1% of the electoral base support, the positive versus negative index increases by .015, on average,

³⁸ The electoral base support and the swing voters support were standardized by rescaling to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation

rather than decreasing. In contrast, with a 1% increase of the swing voters' support, the proportion of positive and negative messages in a speech is reduce by .027, on average. Substantively, the results indicate that increasing partisan support introduces more positive messages while increasing swing support generates more negative messages.

TABLE 3.2

The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positive vs. Negative Tone in Campaign Speeches

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | -.007 (.01) | .022* (.011) | .0155* (.007) |
| Swing Voter Support | .03 (.022) | -.069** (.021) | -.027* (.0145) |
| Days Prior to Election | .004** (.001) | .003** (.001) | .003** (.0008) |
| Constant | -.004 (.183) | .423 (.32) | -.435** (.053) |
| Number of Observations | 199 | 146 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .064 | .128 | .22 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

Moreover, the impact of the base support on the positive versus negative index is slightly larger than the change in the swing voters' support in the pooled model (see appendix C.4). In addition, as election day approaches, candidates generate more negative messages as we expected. The impact of the Days Prior to Election variable is large compared to the level of support (see appendix C.4), and it is statistically significant. As election day approaches, the size of the pool of undecided voters shrinks. However, candidates apparently need to deliver negative messages to persuade those undecided voters by producing more negative evaluations about the opponent.

The effects of securing the base and persuading swing voters are indeed influential, but to go negative or positive in campaigns requires alternative explanations in order that candidates' behavior can be understood more clearly. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) argued that negative and attack ads are subverting democracy by polarizing the electorate and reducing voter turnout, particularly among nonpartisan or independents. In contrast, Skaperdas and Grofman (1995) suggested that positive campaigns attract undecided voters by familiarizing these voters with a candidate's concerns, thereby reducing voter uncertainty. Thus, the decisions on delivering more or less positive and negative messages are complicated and are changed by different conditions. For example, if the opponent is attacking, the candidate's decision to respond to the attack does not rely solely on the level of support.

Moreover, negative messages influence not only the candidate's base but also the opponent's base by driving opposition partisan voters to question their candidate. In 1992, for example, Bush's broken promise "read my lips: no new taxes" increased the voters' distrust of Bush and even some partisans reacted negatively to the broken promise. The complexity of the positive and negative tone dimension has led to testing alternative hypotheses, referred to as situational hypotheses. As previously mentioned, depending on the situation whether a candidate is leading or losing in the polls over the opponent, the candidates change the degree of emphasis on positive or negative messages (Flowers, Haynes, and Crespín 2003).

Table 3.3 presents the statistical results of the scenario-based effects on delivering more negative or positive messages. The pooled model shows that candidates run more positive messages when they are leading the polls over the opponents. With a 1 % of increase of the total support over the opponent, the candidate increases the proportion of positive messages in a speech by .005, on average. In other words, if a candidate is leading in the polls over the

opponent, the candidate delivers more positive messages rather than taking risks by delivering negative messages. The winning model confirmed this finding. If the candidate's poll standing over the opponent is positive, this condition is coded as winning position. If the candidate is behind the opponent in the polls, this condition is coded as losing position. In Table 3.3, the winning model shows that when the candidate is leading in the polls, with a 1% increase in the electoral support, the PN score increases by .028, on average. In other words, when a candidate is ahead in the polls, the candidate delivers more positive messages. However, in the losing position, the composition of the positive and negative messages is not affected by the increase of the electoral support.

In addition to the leading position, *Days Prior to Election* is also significant in the pooled and the losing models. This indicates that later in a campaign, once candidates have established themselves in the minds of voters through delivering positive messages to provide information about themselves and their issue concerns, candidates turn their attention to undermining their opponent's support as Election Day approaches.

TABLE 3.3
The Effects of Leading in the Polls to Utilize Positive versus Negative Tone in Campaign Speeches

| Variables | Winning Model | Losing Model | Pooled |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| % of Lead | .028** (.011) | -.009 (.011) | .0053* (0.002) |
| Days Prior to Election | .001 (.001) | .004** (.0009) | .005** (0.0006) |
| Constant | -.619** (.22) | -.368* (.214) | .173** (.036) |
| Number of Observations | 141 | 204 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .21 | .253 | .146 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

TABLE 3.4**The Effects of Changing in Opponent's Support to Utilize Positive versus Negative Tone in Campaign Speeches**

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| % of Opponent Support | -.009* (.004) | -.0059 (.009) | -.008* (.004) |
| Days Prior to Election | .0052** (.001) | .0029** (.001) | .0035** (.0007) |
| Constant | .408* (.181) | .637* (.327) | .18 (.198) |
| Number of Observations | 199 | 146 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .064 | .058 | .218 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05 one tailed

Finally, the regression coefficients in Table 3.4 describe the effects of the level of opponent support on the candidate's positive and negative tone in a speech. When the opponent support increases, negative speeches are delivered more to make the opponent's supporters question their candidate. In the pooled model, the influence of the opponent support on the message composition is statistically significant. As the opponent's support increases by 1%, the PN score decreases by .008, on average. This result indicates that an increase in the opponent support leads to an increase in the proportion of negative content in a speech. The strategy in this model is that candidates attempt to reduce their opponent's support by increasing the opponent's negatives. In this case, going negative may provide a chance for narrowing the gap between the candidate and the opponent.

Discussion and Conclusion

Campaigns include dynamic components potentially influencing vote decisions. Particularly, candidates independently and fully control campaign speeches as a part of the campaign

messages. In this research, I examined how the level of support among the base and swing voters influences the content of campaign speeches instead of measuring the effects of campaigns on vote preferences. Voting behavior has become a central focus of much of the political campaign research. However, instead of focusing on voter-centric arguments, the current research is more concerned with the questions of how to understand candidates' strategic behavior and what influences this decision-making process.

I have sought to contribute to political campaign research by providing an explanation of the candidate's strategic decision mechanism relevant to the level of support by voting groups. How and why does targeting voters' support influence the developing context of the campaign messages? Based on the results presented in this chapter, I found that the probability of choosing types of messages between positional and valence issues is significantly related to the necessity of securing the electoral base including partisan voters and persuading the swing voters. In addition, the level of support influences the degree of emphasis of positive and negative messages, but the directions of the effects are not as expected.

Most of all, in the positional and valence content, the results offer strong support for the importance of securing the base strategy. Specifically, it appears that candidates' decisions to address more positional issues in speech are a function of the level of support from the base. If candidates need to secure the base, they deliver positional issues more. In contrast, if the swing voters' support decreases, the candidates employ valence issues more to persuade swing voters. In the model, the effect of the base change was greater than that of the change in the swing voters.

The results concerning the positive and negative tones reflect the complexity of considerations going positive or negative. Overall, the portion of positive messages increases as

the base support increases, and a decrease in the swing voters' support increases the portion of positive messages as well. Compared to the effect of the base, the swing voters' support has a slightly bigger impact on employing positive content. However, the allocation of positive-negative messages in speeches is associated with the feedback between the two candidates. Generally, direct attacks have great potential for backlash (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991) and Bush's negative messages in 1992 are a good example. In contrast, Clinton in 1992 also attacked Bush's performance on such issues as taxes and economy but these issue-based negative messages rarely backlashed against Clinton (Roberts 1995).

Considering these responsive effects on the positive and negative messages, the results suggest that candidates' decisions on propagating more positive or negative messages can be explained by the candidate's positions in the polls. If candidates are ahead in the polls, they are less likely to deliver negative messages. Instead, more positive messages are delivered because there is no reason to have highly negative messages and take the risk of backlash. However, candidates deliver more negative messages when they need to reduce the opponent's support. The negativity of the opponents consequently affects swing voters' decisions as well as the strength of partisans' attachment to the opponent.

It is important to understand the candidates' decision-making process as a key factor in modern elections. Their decisions are quite dynamic, considering the nature of time and feedback from voters, and are sometimes very complicated. However, when we recognize the primary purpose of why candidates run for office, we can simplify the component of strategic considerations. The point is simply that candidates only want to win the election and to win the election they have to reinforce and persuade voters. Voters are the critical elements of concern

and consequently become the more important blueprint in building campaign strategies and understanding campaign dynamics.

CHAPTER 4

MESSAGE STRATEGIES IN CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS

Political advertising has played a prominent role in the general election campaigns ever since Dwight Eisenhower aired the first presidential campaign television commercial in 1952. Candidates use political ads to deliver campaign information directly to voters and many studies have examined the effect of the ads on the voters' decision-making process or election outcomes. Early studies suggested that campaign advertising has a minimal effect on voters' decisions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954), but more recent research has revealed the significant effects of the political ads on individual voting behavior and election results (Basil, Schooler, and Reeves 1991; Newhagen and Reeves 1991; West 2005; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Goldstein and Freedman 2002).

Television advertising is a powerful communication tool compared with other media such as radio and newspapers. Despite television's advantage of utilizing both audio and visual presentation, television advertising is quite costly. Candidates tend to spend an unprecedented amount of money on political ads. In 2008, for example, the Obama and McCain campaigns spent over \$400 million only on campaign ads according to the Campaign Media Analysis Group. The Obama campaign alone spent \$41 million for cable, \$17 million for radio, and \$281 million for broadcast and network TV ads (Kay 2009). Being the single highest expenditure in the presidential election campaigns, television ads are the major means by which candidates communicate their messages to voters (West 2005). Candidates, indeed, have made widespread use of TV advertisements to reach the mass public, persuade undecided voters, and motivate

their supporters in spite of the cost. To maximize the effects of spending, candidates strategically produce their ads to target the right viewers with the right messages. Political ads, therefore, cannot be explored without understanding candidates' behavior. Even though political ads interact with diverse elements of campaigns such as opponent responses, the number of times that the spots are broadcast, or the media markets, candidates' behavior regarding the ad content tends to be consistent and strategic. Therefore, I employ the reinforcement and persuasion perspective discussed in the previous chapter to understand candidates' behavior on producing campaign advertisements.

As I argued before, the advertisement content is selected depending on the level of support from the base and swing voters. Candidate strategies in advertising are all about winning the election. However, without securing the base, the probability of candidates' winning in the election would be reduced. There is no doubt that solidifying the base is the key element in the strategies, such as "base strategy" in 2004, and thus influences the content of advertisements. In other words, the electoral structure has significant implications for advertising strategies. For example, Shaw (1999) found that candidates apportion their time and advertising dollars in systematic ways and suggested that campaign strategies center on five categories: base Republican, marginal Republican, battleground state, marginal Democratic, and base Democratic. Although his argument is the state-based Electoral College strategy, his perspective could be applied to the electoral voters. None of the candidates, except George W. Bush in 2000, won the election without winning in the popular votes. Therefore, candidates' strategies to increase their popular votes and to reach more than half of the electoral college votes are connected in that having more votes will increase the chance of winning in more states. To achieve this goal, candidates consider securing the base as the most fundamental strategy to start

the campaign because partisans can support the candidates by not only volunteering and raising funds but also casting their votes.

Campaign Advertisements and the Effects

As a consequence of the rise in candidate-centered politics, candidates are aware of the increased role of the television advertisements in contemporary political campaigns to reach voters directly. These political ads can influence the election results. For example, in 1988, George H. W. Bush's "Revolving Door" ad on Michael Dukakis's criminal policies was sensational by enhancing the majority culture's fears about Black men raping White women by associating Dukakis's position on polices towards criminals with Willie Horton's crime spree. Even though Bush did not have to mention Horton in his ad, most viewers made the connection between Dukakis and heinous crimes (Jamieson 1996). This negative ad is considered a prime factor in Bush's defeat of Dukakis.

In addition, it has been shown that voters learn more about the candidates' issue position from the ad messages than from the news (Brians and Wattenberg 1996) as campaigns progress. For example, the spot "Bean Counter" by Al Gore addressed that "we need a patients' bill of rights to take the medical decision away from the HMOs and insurance companies and give them back to the doctors and nurses." Even though the spot only aired 30 seconds, it provided enough information about Gore's position to enhance the treatment of patients by protecting them from HMOs and insurance companies.

Realizing the ad effects, candidates have started to use advertisements more aggressively. As voters' assessments can change based on short-term information, candidates utilize the power of ads to secure their votes and sway undecided voters who wait until the closing weeks of the campaign to make up their mind. Accordingly, candidates take the development of advertising

strategies seriously. Generally, candidates often test campaign ads through focus groups or public opinion surveys (West 2005) aimed at investigating such questions as the following: What messages are most appealing? When and how often should a particular ad be aired? Who should be targeted? How should ads best convey information?

Research on political advertisements tends to focus on two dimensions: positive versus negative ads and issue versus image. The demobilizing hypothesis posits that political strategists intentionally employ negative ads to discourage segments of the electorate from voting, knowing that this can result in lower turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Simon 1999; Ansolabehere et al. 1994). In contrast to the demobilizing hypothesis, negative ads could mobilize voters and consequently increase voter turnout (Finkel and Geer 1998; Goldstein and Freedman 2002).

As a descriptive analysis, Kaid and Johnston (2001) found that Democrats used more negative spots than Republicans did and there was no difference in the number of negative and positive ads by incumbency status. However, West (2005) reported that Republican prominent ads were more negative than Democratic prominent ads.

Benoit, Blaney, and Pier (2000) analyzed over 800 general television spots and found that these spots were becoming more negative over time. He also found that incumbent party candidates used more acclaims (positive) than their challengers did, whereas the challengers used more attacks (negative).

This functional approach – positive and negative remarks – presented the limitation of these studies. First, previous research used the entire advertising as the coding unit to classify each advertisement as either positive or negative³⁹. However, many political advertisements

³⁹ Most studies in advertisements measured negative and positive ads as a dummy variable by coding it zero or one. For example, if the ad attacks the opponent, it would be recoded as one, indicating a negative ad.

contain both positive and negative messages. For example, George W. Bush's "Hyperbole" ad in 2000 presented the comparative spots:

Remember when Al Gore said his mother-in-law's prescription cost more than his dog's? His own aides said the story was made up. Now Al Gore is bending the truth again. The press calls Gore's Social Security attacks 'nonsense.' Governor Bush sets aside \$2.4 trillion to strengthen Social Security & pay all benefits. Al Gore: "There has never been a time in this campaign when I have said something that I know to be untrue. There has never been a time when I have said something untrue." Really?

This Bush ad contained both negative and positive comments. Even though it was heavily negative, the positive context was included based on a strategic decision. In other words, there is a reason that candidates do not air ads containing only negative contexts. Coding this ad as one negative commercial, therefore, could mislead the analysis of candidates' decision-making process.

In addition to the positive and negative dimension, previous investigation of political ads focused on the issue versus image dimension. Most studies confirmed that more ads discuss issues than focus on images such as personal characteristics. For example, Kaid and Johnston (2001) found that challengers and Democrats devoted a higher percentage of their television commercials to issues than did incumbent candidates and Republicans. Benoit, Blaney, and Pier (2000) also found that beginning in 1980, there has been a clear trend toward more focus on policy and less on character. Vavreck (2009) confirmed this trend through the analysis of the advertisements from 1952 to 2000. She also found that the dominant subjects of campaign ads were mostly issues such as economic or domestic issues rather than images such as personal characteristics, except the 1976 election dominated by highly trait-based ads from both Ford and Carter. As a combination of the two dimensions, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991) argued that voters do not condemn political attacks, but believe that attacks on some policy topics are more appropriate than attacks on personal characteristics.

However, like previous studies on the positive and negative dimension, these studies also treated the ad as one coding unit. Generally, political commercials contain both issue-based and trait-based contents. For example, in 1992, Bush delivered the ad on Clinton's economics:

Bill Clinton says he'll only tax the rich to pay for this campaign promises. But here's what Clinton economics could mean to you. \$1,088 more in taxes, \$2,072 more in taxes. 100 leading economists say his plan means higher taxes and bigger deficits. \$2,072 more in taxes. You can't trust Clinton economics. It's wrong for you. It's wrong for America.

This ad attacked Clinton's tax policy but at the same time questioned Clinton's personal trait, dishonesty⁴⁰. In other words, the message content of this ad not only includes "economy" but also "trait" of the opponent. Accordingly, attacks on both Clinton's character and his tax issue were reflected in this ad.

In this chapter, I investigate the candidates' political advertising behavior as a part of campaign message strategies. Candidates engage at first in securing their bases. As previously discussed, I include both partisans and leaners in the base. Candidates deliver partisan issues or positional issues to secure and reinforce their base. In other words, the level of support from the base influences the composition of positional issues in advertisements. Unlike previous studies on political ads, I coded the proportion of positional and valence issues in a particular commercial, as a measurement of ad contents, and the unit of coding is individual ads. The degree of emphasis on either positional or valence issues should be affected by the necessity of securing the base. In addition to reinforcing the base, candidates also persuade swing voters through advertisements. Persuasive strategies should be understood as an attempt to educate voters and clarify candidates' positions on salient issues. As independents are more persuadable than partisan voters, including all independents in the swing voter group, it is practical to

⁴⁰ The Bush campaign in 1992 began to criticize Clinton's character, highlighting accusations of the alleged extramarital affairs with Gennifer Flowers and draft dodging. Bush agreed to run highly negative ads but later these resulted in a backlash to Bush.

understand the candidates' perspective to widen their appeal to even the leaning independents of the opposition party. Therefore, in the persuasion strategy, the level of support from swing voters or all independents influences the proportion of valence issues over the positional issues.

Moreover, the candidates' decision to go with negative or positive ads relies on the level of support from base voters or swing voters. The decision is generally related to the targeting strategies. If candidates need more base support, they will deliver more positive tones to the base to secure their votes. In contrast, independent voters would be more sensitive to negative tones that generally inform voters why they should not vote for the opponent and provide a clear distinction between the two candidates in presidential elections.

Data and Methods

From sources described below, I collected political advertisements in the 1992 and 2000 presidential campaigns. For the 1992 advertisements, I collected candidates' ad transcripts from a CD-ROM produced by the Annenberg School of Communication and the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. For the 2000 election, the advertisements were drawn from the Stanford University Political Communications Lab and Stanford Mediaworks' e-book, which included every public speech and advertisement in the 2000 presidential campaign. Even though these two sources provided rich ad transcripts, I also accessed the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* through the *Lexis/Nexis* search to find the airdates of ads and other transcripts missing from the two sources.

TABLE 4.1
Distribution of Ads in the Sample

| | 1992 Spots | 2000 Spots | Total |
|----------------------|------------|------------|-------|
| Democratic Candidate | 28 | 20 | 48 |
| DNC | 2 | 20 | 42 |
| Republican Candidate | 18 | 21 | 39 |
| RNC | 1 | 16 | 17 |
| Total | 49 | 77 | 126 |

Table 4.1 presented the spot samples from 1992 and 2000. I found 49 ads from 1992 and 77 from 2000. Since this study focuses on analyzing candidates' behavior, I did not include DNC- and RNC-sponsored ads. However, if the ads were sponsored by both the candidate and national party committee, I included them in the dataset as candidate-sponsored ads. Therefore, only the ads controlled by candidates were included in the dataset.

Each campaign commercial, as a unit of analysis, was coded by two dimensional message types – positional versus valence and positive versus negative dimensions. The same coding methods described in the previous chapter were used in coding advertisements. First, to be coded as a positional issue, the appeal should include the directionality of the policy preferences or clear standpoints on the issues. The positional issues, therefore, tend to be equivalent to the partisan issues (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003). Second, the valence issues are the salient issues that concern most voters such as education, crime, peace, or leadership. These issues are sometimes connected with candidates' traits. For example, the Bush campaign aired the following ad immediately after the first debate on October 11th:

Man's voice: I saw the debate last night and I've just got one conclusion – it's all George Bush.

Woman's voice: I still have a lot of confidence in my president. I feel we need Bush to keep up from a big spending Congress.

Man's voice: I don't trust Clinton. The man says one thing and does another.

Woman's voice: First he denies it, and then he says, "Well, maybe it happened." You can't trust him. If Clinton gets in, what we're going to see are more taxes.

This is an excerpt from the advertisement run by the Bush campaign. It touched on the evaluation of the first debate, Clinton's distrust as a leader, and the tax issue. This ad focused on Clinton's tax-increase policy and associated it with his dishonesty characteristic. Therefore, this ad included both positional and valence messages.

Last, the positive messages included any kind of content related to the candidates themselves such as their experiences, accomplishments, or leadership, while the negative messages included the words referring to the opponent such as his/her name or criticism on his/her policy.

As I discussed before, all political ads were coded as a continuous variable indicating the proportional difference between positional-valence and positive-negative content rather than considering them as a dichotomous variable. The ad below is used as an example to illustrate the coding result. Gore ran the following advertisement on September 27th:

Vietnam veteran (V). Father of four (V). Married 30 years (V). Al Gore will fight for families (V). Tax cuts (P) for middle-class families including a \$10,000 a-year-tax deduction for college tuition (P). Continue welfare reform with time limits, work requirements (P). Force deadbeat parents to take responsibility for their children (V). A crime victims' bill of rights to protect victims, not just criminals (P). Fight violence and pornography on the Internet (V), helping parents block out what children shouldn't see. Al Gore. He'll put his values to work for us (V).

This Gore ad is straightforward in the positive versus negative messages. It is all positive appeals and no negative tone. Therefore, the positive versus negative score in this ad is +1. Regarding the positional versus valence dimension, this ad contains four positional (P) issues and seven valence (V) issues, indicating the positional-valence score as -.27. In other words, this ad is described as more valence-oriented and a positive ad according to my coding scheme.

The independent variables were the differences in the support level of party identifiers. As I hypothesized that campaign messages were influenced by the voter support, daily tracking polls conducted by Gallup⁴¹ were used. This “trial-heat” survey included the question asking respondents to reveal their vote preferences on a daily basis prior to Election Day. Thus, these polls provide the accurate short-term trends or influences of campaigns. Using the aggregate party identification voting cues from the trial-heat polls as lagged variables⁴², this study was designed to examine the effect of the base and independent voters’ movements on selecting different types of campaign messages.

For the control variables, I added *Days prior to Election Day*. While each advertisement was coded separately, the air days prior to election day were also calculated as a count variable that equaled one on the day before election day and increased the farther from election day. Closer to the election day, candidates tend to deliver more valence issues to target the remaining undecided voters. Rather than addressing partisan issues, candidates would appeal to these non-partisan voters with the issues they all care about such as crime, education, or general economic issues.

Last, incumbency was controlled in the models. In 1992, Bush held the incumbent advantages, that voters were already informed of his positions on certain issues. Therefore, incumbent candidates would focus on more valence issues as an emphasis of their accomplishments while in the White House.

⁴¹ The Gallup Tracking Poll included all three phases in 1992 starting from September 28. Therefore, to collect the results of polls prior to September 28, it was necessary to use other types of Gallup polls. The Gallup consistently used the same questions in their survey questionnaires for both tracking polls and other polls and I could not find a significant difference in the poll results between tracking polls and other polls.

⁴² To calculate the difference in the vote preference among partisan and independent voters, three-day cumulated tracking polls and the released dates of campaign advertisements were considered.

Results

The Positional versus Valence Issue Dimension

Table 4.2 presents the means of the two message dimensions by candidates. On average, George H. W. Bush in 1992 ran ads containing more positional issues and slightly positive messages than Clinton. The Bush campaign, in fact, produced more negative ads from the beginning of the campaign to attack Clinton's untrustworthiness. Unexpectedly, Bush suffered a substantial backlash of negative ads and decided to reduce the number of ads targeting both Clinton and Perot. Bush's negative ads impacted more negatively on Bush than on Clinton (Roberts 1995).

TABLE 4.2

The Means of Message Dimensions by Party

| Message Dimensions | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------|
| <i>Positional/Valence</i> | G.H.W. Bush | G.W. Bush | |
| | 0.21 | -0.31 | -0.064 |
| | Clinton | Gore | |
| | -0.132 | 0.036 | -0.06 |
| <i>Positive/Negative</i> | G.H.W. Bush | G.W. Bush | |
| | 0.06 | 0.54 | 0.313 |
| | Clinton | Gore | |
| | 0.03 | 0.206 | 0.105 |

In addition to the positive versus negative dimension, the means of the positional versus valence dimension suggest that Bush produced more valence messages than Clinton throughout the campaign. Bush could have the incumbent advantage by establishing the messages of his foreign policy expertise in the post-cold war era, or economic prosperity, but his strategic decision ran away from stressing his strength because of the voters' economic concerns. Even

though Bush was the incumbent candidate, his approval rating dropped dramatically to about 30% and even partisans disapproved of his job performance before the general election started. This indication of losing the base required the Bush campaign to return to securing his base to motivate and reinforce their support. Consequently, unstable support from the base led the Bush campaign to focus on positional issues.

In 2000, Bush's mean of the positive versus negative message dimension was .54 while Gore's was .206. This means that Bush delivered more positive messages than negative messages. The traditional trend of attacking in the advertisements is that the incumbent party candidate tends to attack more than the challenger does. However, Gore in 2000 employed attack ads more frequently than Bush. Contrary to previous findings, Republicans do not always deliver more negative messages, according to my coding procedure. By analyzing the advertisements in the proportional differences, the result that Republicans deliver more negative messages is inconclusive.

In addition, the positional versus valence issue scores between Bush and Gore are significantly different. This means that Gore delivered more positional issues than valence issues while Bush delivered more valence issues than positional issues. Many explanations could be considered as reasons why Gore delivered more positional issues, but I suggest that the level of support from the base would be less secured than Bush's base support⁴³. Figure 4.1 shows the

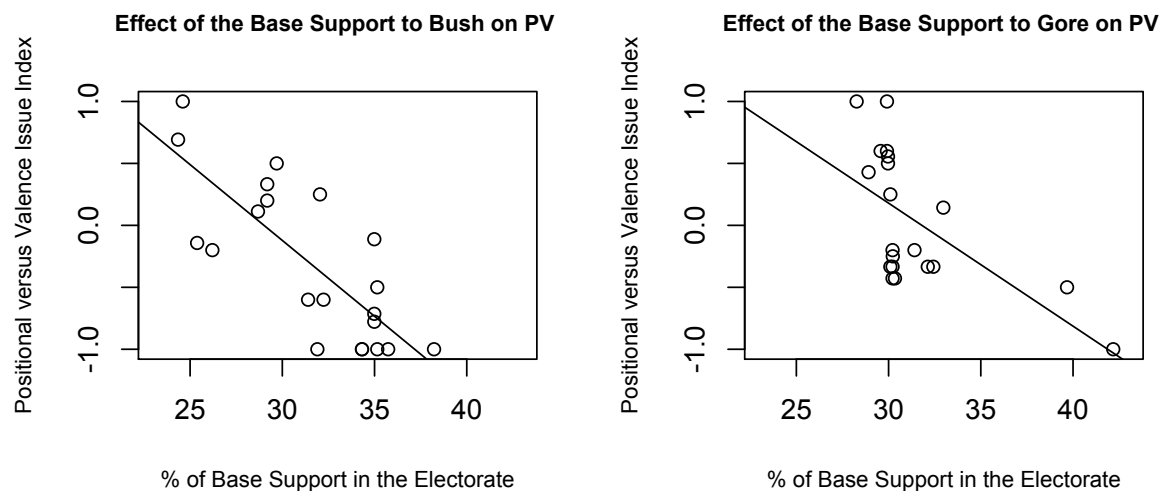
⁴³ There are additional explanations why Gore's base support was less secured than Bush. First, the third party candidate, Ralph Nader, attracted liberal democrats. Moreover, he focused his most extensive criticism on Gore, while ignoring Bush. It is no doubt that his supporters would cast their ballots for Gore if Nader were not in the race. Second, Democrats found Gore disappointing compared to Clinton. During the fall debates, Gore's personality problem came to the fore. Gore was more knowledgeable, but his body language and manner created an unfavorable impression among some viewers. Last, after the 8-year Democrat leadership, Republicans were very motivated to win the White House and thus eager to support the Republican candidate. Bush, therefore, motivated these enthusiastic partisans by consistently emphasizing the "compassionate conservative" message.

effects of the base voters' support⁴⁴ on the positional versus valence issue content of the advertisements in 2000.

As one can see, the range of the base voters' support to Bush is more broadly spread and the average base support is slightly larger than Gore's. In other words, Bush had more supportive bases before the campaign ads were aired. However, most Gore ads ran when the base support in the whole electorate was about 30%. Therefore, Gore had to delivered more positional issues by reflecting the influence of the level of base support.

FIGURE 4.1

The Effects of the Base Support on the Positional versus Valence Issues in 2000



Examination of the parameter estimates in Table 4.3 suggests that candidates' attention to the positional-valence issue dimension is influenced by the level of the base support and the direction of the parameters support the reinforcement argument. The results presented in Table 4.3 show that a 1% increase in the electoral base support leads to a .074 decrease on the

⁴⁴ The base voters in this figure include independent leaners to keep consistent with the measurement used in the models.

positional versus valence issue index in the pooled model. This means that the proportional difference in the positional versus valence issue content increased by .074, indicating that positional issues in the advertisements are delivered more than valence issues. This effect is statistically significant and supports the reinforcement hypothesis as I expected. In other words, candidates use the positional issues to secure the base and these strategic decisions applied to the 1992 and 2000 elections. In 1992 and 2000, as 1% of the base support decreased, the positional versus valence issue scores increased by .06, on average. It appears that candidates tend to have more positional issue-based advertisements when the base support is decreased.

TABLE 4.3

**The Effects of Vote Preferences on Using Positional and Valence Issues
in Advertisements**

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | -.06* (.03) | -.059* (.027) | -.074** (.02) |
| Swing Voter Support | -.01 (.04) | -.135* (.07) | -.024 (.036) |
| Incumbency | -.48 (.354) | | -.696** (.266) |
| Days Prior to Election | .001 (.003) | -.003 (.003) | -.003* (.0019) |
| Constant | 2.326* (.966) | 3.24** (.712) | 3.13** (.626) |
| Number of Observations | 46 | 41 | 87 |
| R-Squared | .23 | .562 | .379 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

In the persuasive perspective, the swing voters' support does not affect the composition of the positional-valence messages in the ads. None of the models, except the 2000 election, is strategically significant to support the effects of swing voters on the ads. In the 2000 election,

however, the swing voters' support affects the composition of the positional and valence issues in the ads and this effect is strategically significant. Regarding the casual effect, the directionality of the estimation is opposite from the expectation. The persuasive theory suggests that as the level of support from the swing voters decreases, more valence issues will be delivered to appeal to the swing voters. However, Table 4.3 shows that in the 2000 election, candidates delivered more positional issues when the swing voters' support decreased. Figure 4.2 presents the different voting groups in the positional and valence issue dimension. The first graph depicts the effects of the swing voters, or all independents' supports on the positional versus valence issue dimension. This graph confirms the swing voters' effect on the message in Table 4.3.

The second graph shows that leaning independents' support is negatively related the positional versus valence issue dimension⁴⁵. However, as the third graph illustrates, the pure independents' effect on the positional versus valence issue dimension is positively related to. This means that as the pure independents' support decreases, the proportion of the valence issues increases in the ads, and this supports the persuasive theory. Even though aggregate swing voters' support affects the message dimension unexpectedly, the persuasive theory holds the explanatory power among pure independents in 2000⁴⁶.

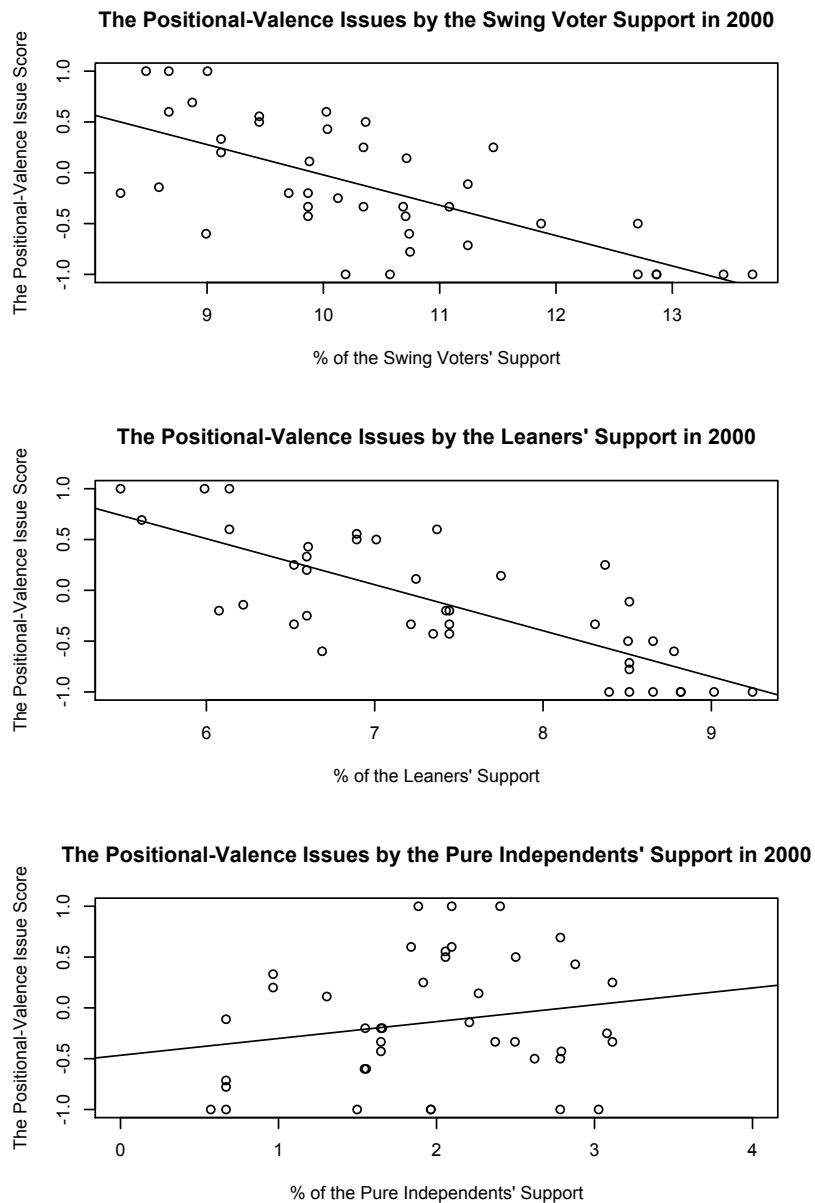
Regarding the control variables, the coefficient for *Incumbency* in the pooled model was strategically significant and in the predicted direction. It appears that incumbent candidates are more likely to focus on valence issues since voters are more aware of the incumbents' issue

⁴⁵ The reason that the direction of the swing voter's effect is inversed is possibly because of the behavior of leaners in 2000. The leaners are included not only in the base but also in the swing voter group. In 2000, it seems that partisan-like-leaners strongly affected the message composition. Indeed, I tested leaners' effect in 2000 and the result shows that the effects of the level of the leaners' support are statistically significant while they are not significant in 1992.

⁴⁶ I drew the graph of the pure independents' effects on the positional-valence issue dimension in 1992. Unlike the 2000 election in Figure 4.2, the level of support and the message dimension were negatively correlated. In addition, I tested pure independents' support on the messages in the cross-sectional regression model, but the pure independents' support was not statistically significant.

positions than those of the challengers. Therefore, the incumbent candidates try to focus more on valence issues such as emphasizing accomplishments on economy or foreign affairs as a leader of the U.S.

FIGURE 4.2
The Effects of Vote Support from Different Groups
on Using Positional versus Valence Issues in Advertisements



Another control variable, *Days to Prior to Election*, was strategically significant in the pooled model but it was not in the predicted direction. I expected that candidates would deliver more valence issues as they approached Election Day, but the results show that the candidates delivered more positional issues. However, this variable was not significant in the 1992 and 2000 models and the coefficient (-.003) was considerably small.

The Positive-Negative Tone Dimension

Table 4.4 presents the results of the cross-sectional regression for the models examining the effects of the level of support from the base and swing voters on the positive and negative tone dimension. None of the variables, except *Days Prior to Election* in the pooled model, obtained conventional levels of statistical significance. However, *Days Prior to Election* suggests that attacks are more likely to be made as election day approaches. Candidates do not take the risk of negative advertisements unless it is necessary to respond to the opponent's attack. Generally, negative ads are introduced more as election day becomes closer. In the early stage of the election, candidates deliver more positive messages to create a positive image or perception of the candidates.

The results of the examination of the situational hypotheses in the positive and negative tone in the ads are reported in Tables 4.5 and 4.6. When leading in the polls, candidates do not need to attack the opponent or create a negative image of the opponent, taking the risk of backlash or creating a negative image of the candidate (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995). In the speeches, this situational scenario is supported. However, in the advertisements, this assessment of the negative ads is not supported. Considering the different content between the speeches and 30-second ads, I suggest that the situational hypotheses are not supported in the ad models. Table

4.5 shows that only the duration effect was statistically significant in the predicted direction.

Closer to election day, candidates aired more negative ads than positive ads to appeal to the late-deciding voters.

TABLE 4.4

The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positive and Negative Tone in Advertisements

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | -.016 (.035) | .035 (.05) | -.009 (.027) |
| Swing Voter Support | .066 (.005) | -.032 (.138) | .043 (.062) |
| Days Prior to Election | .012* (.005) | .004 (.005) | .008** (.003) |
| Constant | -.496 (.694) | -.58 (1.3) | -.357 (.527) |
| Number of Observations | 46 | 41 | 87 |
| R-Squared | .145 | .08 | .132 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

TABLE 4.5

The Effects of Leading in the Polls on Utilizing Positive and Negative Tone in Advertisements

| Variables | Winning Model | Losing Model | Pooled |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| % of Lead | -.011 (.032) | .015 (.039) | .005 (.008) |
| Days Prior to Election | .005 (.004) | .0135** (.004) | .009** (.003) |
| Constant | .019 (.368) | -.22 (.55) | -.226 (.149) |
| Number of Observations | 47 | 40 | 87 |
| R-Squared | .166 | .211 | .13 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

Finally, Table 4.6 shows that only in the 2000 election did candidates react to the level of the opponent's support by delivering more negative messages. In other words, as the opponent's vote preference increases, candidates attack the opponent to question his/her qualifications or increase the uncertainty about the opponent. In both Tables 4.5 and 4.6, *Days Prior to Election* is statistically significant and in the expected direction.

Issue-oriented advertisements can often be clearly understood from the candidates' perspective. If candidates need more base support, they will employ more positional issue-oriented ads to appeal to the base generally associated with the party (Petrocik 1996). In contrast, when candidates need to persuade swing voters, they will air more valence issue-oriented ads to appeal to non-partisan voters who are easily persuaded and concerned more about salient issues such as education or economy.

TABLE 4.6

The Effects of Changing Opponent's Support in the Polls on Utilizing Positive and Negative Tones in Advertisements

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| % of Opponent Support | -.005 (.022) | -.064* (.031) | -.018 (.017) |
| Days Prior to Election | .013* (.006) | .012** (.004) | .01** (.004) |
| Constant | -.159 (.759) | 2.257* (1.05) | .437 (.625) |
| Number of Observations | 199 | 41 | 87 |
| R-Squared | .064 | .16 | .137 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05 one tailed

However, employing positive or negative ads is influenced by diverse elements such as political conditions, scandals, attacks by the opponent, unintentional backlash, or mixed messages with other organizations. For example, party-sponsored – DNC and RNC – ads used significantly more attacks than did candidate-sponsored ads. This may have been an attempt to shield the candidate from the possibility of backlash from voters (Benoit 2001). However, voters tend to be unable to distinguish between commercials sponsored by the candidates and ads run by those the parties (DNC or RNC) or interest groups.

In addition, in the 2000 election, Bush could not attack Gore aggressively because of the relatively healthy economy conditions. As the sitting vice president, Gore received credit on economic issues from the public. Due to this reason, the Bush campaign tried to avoid discussing economic issues in the ads. Gore also did not emphasize the accomplishments on the economy despite having the advantage. Even Gore looked like a challenger by separating himself from the Clinton administration. He tried to win the campaign without Clinton or the Clinton/Gore record. These types of political conditions influence the candidates' decisions to go positive or negative. Moreover, the nature of advertisements is different from the speeches in that ads have a time limitation, generally 30 seconds. In sum, the positional-negative ads are engaged in relatively diverse external conditions, so the results in this chapter could not support the effects of the level of support and even the situational effects.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite numerous fruitful studies on political advertising, there is a lack of research on the mechanism of strategic message building. Campaigns include dynamic components potentially influencing vote decisions. Particularly, candidates independently and fully control campaign

advertisements as a part of the campaign messages. These campaign messages are examined to see the effect rather than to focus on how candidates employ certain types of campaign messages. Voting behavior has become a more centralized focus of political campaign studies. However, rather than focusing on voter-centric arguments, the remaining questions to be explored concern how to understand candidates' rational behavior and what influences the decision-making process.

I have sought to contribute to this research by providing an explanation of the candidate's strategic decision mechanism relevant to the level of vote choice by each candidate. I found that the probability of choosing types of messages between positional and valence issue is significantly related to the base support. In other words, as the base support decreases, the portion of positional issues in advertising increases. Candidates use the positional messages to secure or reinforce their base voters. Without securing the base, candidates would experience difficulty in gaining popular votes, recruiting volunteers, or even fundraising. Therefore, candidates sensitively interact with the base during the campaigns. Additionally, I expected that positional issues would be more emphasized during the early stage of the campaign to gain comfortable support from the base, but the result of the analysis showed the inverse effect. In political commercials, candidates tend to have more positional issues as election day approaches.

Unfortunately, the positive and negative messages in the ads were not affected by the level of support from both base voters and swing voters. Only the duration effect remains significant in the predicted direction. Closer to Election Day, candidates tend to have more negative tones in the ads to appeal to undecided voters or even the opponents' supporters. Indeed, as the opponent's support increases, candidates increase the level of negativity to attack the opponent. This effect was significant in 2000.

Even though the level of support did not explain the positive and negative tone dimension, the findings on the positional and valence issue dimension contribute to providing a fundamental understanding of the candidates' strategic decision-making process. Moreover, the additional implications of these findings are twofold. First, previous studies treated the ad as a unit of coding but I suggested the proportional differences in each ad by defining the appeal as a unit of coding. This continuous variable captures the nature of the candidates' strategic decisions better than the dichotomous variable, coding as zero or one. The degree of the emphasis between positional and valence issues is influenced by the vote preferences. In particular, candidates react more sensitively and strategically to the base support.

Second, in terms of the reciprocal relationship, I utilized the short-term dynamic effects on the campaign message strategies. Popkin (1994) noted that in an environment of diminishing party loyalty, campaigns and candidates exerted a greater influence on voters than they did in the election of the 1940s. Voters cast their votes for the candidate who represents his or her respective party, but the individual candidates and their apparent preferability to voters are increasingly important. Therefore, candidates should be fully informed of the changes of the support from the base and swing voters as campaigns progress because voters also react to candidates' campaign messages immediately. In other words, this short-term trend of the vote preferences influences the candidates' decisions on content of the messages in the ads. As political ads are the most expensive element in campaigns, candidates should use the ads to maximize the effects, more specifically, bringing more votes. Therefore, practically, using the tracking polls to measure the vote trends reflects the dynamics of the campaigns more accurately.

It is important to understand the candidates' decision-making process as a key player in modern elections. Their decisions are quite dynamic, considering the nature of time and feedback

from voters, and are sometimes complicated. However, when we recognize the primary purpose of why candidates run for office, we can simplify the component of strategic considerations. The point is simply that candidates only want to win the election and to win the election they have to reinforce and persuade voters. Voters are the critical elements of concern and consequently become the most important blueprint in building campaign strategies and understanding campaign dynamics.

CHAPTER 5

NOMINATION ACCEPTANCE SPEECHES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

In 1932, Franklin Roosevelt attended the Democratic National Convention and became the first presidential candidate to accept his nomination in person at the convention. Since his significant appearance, the nomination acceptance speech has become critically important to every presidential candidate as a mark of the transition from the primary to the general campaign. As a campaign advertisement tool, the speech delivers the themes and issues that will constitute the fall campaign, especially with the growth of media influence. For example, in 2008, almost 38.4 million viewers watched Obama's acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, and more than 38.9 million people tuned in to coverage of the final night of the Republican convention⁴⁷.

The average TV viewership of the national conventions has consistently increased ever since both the Democratic and Republican conventions were first broadcast nationwide on television in 1952. The television news divisions consider the national conventions as the biggest extended political media events of the election year. Among the many varied events at the conventions, the presidential nomination acceptance address is regarded as the most important moment, receiving an enormous spotlight from the media and attention by the public. As the climax of the convention, thousands of party members enthusiastically and dramatically react to words of the speech and millions of viewers watch this spectacle via television. Accordingly, the

⁴⁷ By way of comparison, 97.5 million people watched the 2008 Super Bowl and 32 million saw the Academy Awards. The number of the viewership of the national conventions is from the Nielsen Wire [http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/media_entertainment/mccain-tops-obamas-record-breaking-ratings/] visited on 02/27/2011

acceptance speech is often considered the most important communication method to present the candidates' campaign issues during the transition to the general election campaign.

Because of this high volume of attention, candidates have to strategically construct the acceptance speeches to maximize the effect of messages by appealing to the electorate. Smith (2009) argued that acceptance speeches should appeal to the “two-faced” audiences of partisans and independents. Candidates should consider not only a contest for leadership of a political party but also a partisan contest of national leadership. Therefore, acceptance speeches have to unify all factions of the party, especially if candidates experienced the divisive primary, and have to establish the vision of the nation that framed the general election campaign. David Plouffe, Barack Obama's campaign manager in 2008, explained in the *Campaign for President*, ““First off, from a message standpoint, we still had a lot to fill in about him, even at that late date – who he was, his values, who he was going to fight for. That was a big part of our convention speech and the speeches everyone else made.”

First and foremost, the candidates want to unite the party and create excitement. Candidates set key party figures and deliver their issue standpoints as a reflection of partisan preferences. Charland (1987) viewed the acceptance address as an important vehicle for solidifying party support, setting candidates' campaign agenda, and contrasting it with that of the opposition. Especially, he treated acceptance speeches as instances of constitutive rhetoric that call into being a party of people who identify with an ideology and differentiate themselves from opposing ideas attached to the opposition party. Moreover, the desired goal of party unity tends to be emphasized more by the candidates who experienced divisive primaries. Pre-convention divisions within the party have persisted throughout the general election campaign (Atkeson 1998; Hacker 1965; Kenney and Rice 1987; Southwell 1986). In 2008, for example, the

Democratic Party experienced highly divisive primaries between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Although Clinton pledged her support for Obama in June, many of her supporters expressed considerable disappointment at her failure to become the first female presidential nominee⁴⁸. Obama in his acceptance speech showed his respect to Clinton, describing her as the “champion for working Americans and an inspiration to my daughters and to yours.”

In addition to the function of unifying the party, the acceptance speeches deliver key themes and issues candidates plan to develop during the fall campaign (Trent and Friedenberg 2008). As convention speeches are considered newsworthy events, the audiences are more easily exposed to the content of the speeches. Candidates, therefore, strategically emphasize their campaign themes and issues to appeal to active partisans but also to “inadvertent” convention viewers (Patterson 1980). During the convention, inadvertent viewers come across the convention coverage while watching television and decide to stay tuned. These inadvertent convention viewers tend to be political independents since they do not intend to watch the conventions. Considering the accessibility to the wide range of audiences, candidates need to strategically craft their acceptance speeches to deliver campaign issue standpoints. Benoit, Blaney, and Pier (2000) found that recent acceptance speeches from 1970 to 1996 focused more on policy than character. For example, in the acceptance speech in 2000, Al Gore emphasized policies more than George W. Bush did. Most of all, he discussed a strong position on health care in the speech to appeal to his partisan voters. Before the convention, Al Gore received about 24% of Democrats’ support⁴⁹ in the electorate in 2000 while Bill Clinton received about 32% of

⁴⁸ According to the 2008 ANES data, Clinton and Edwards supporters were much more likely to vote for Republican John McCain than Obama. About one-third of respondents who voted for Clinton or Edwards in the primary or caucuses indicated that they voted for McCain in the general election while Republicans were much more unified in their support for their party’s nominee.

⁴⁹ In addition, George W. Bush in 2000 received about 28% of Republican support in the electorate before the Republican National Convention. Since Bob Dole received about 24% in 1996, his partisan support was stronger than the previous election.

support from Democrats in 1996. This low level of support among partisans led Gore to deliver issues attached to the Democratic Party rather than salient issues. In his acceptance speech, Gore said, “It’s just wrong to have life-and-death medical decisions made by bean-counters at HMO’s, who don’t have a license to practice medicine, and don’t have a right to play God. It’s time to take the medical decisions away from the HMOs and insurance companies and give them back to the doctors and the nurses and the health care professionals.”

Despite the importance of the acceptance speeches as a part of campaign messages, the analysis of these message strategies has received little scholarly attention. How do candidates develop their acceptance speeches? What influences candidates in phrasing the speech? Since acceptance speeches are considered critically important, candidates’ strategic decisions to select particular types of messages can be examined. Acceptance speeches influence viewers to make them more inclined to follow the campaign and vote for a party’s candidates. Therefore, candidates should energize participants and encourage them to be actively involved in campaigns. Accordingly, acceptance speeches heighten partisan interests, thereby increasing turnout, and affecting personal judgments of the candidates and their issue stands.

The acceptance speech can be treated as the influential event but its purpose is to bring more voters during the transition to the general election campaign. This transition cannot be smoothly operated without consolidation of partisan bases. Therefore, the level of support before the convention affects the composition of the messages – whether to emphasize more positional or valence issues and deliver more negative or positive content. In this chapter, I will apply these reinforcing and persuasive strategies to the acceptance speeches and expect that the choice of speech content is responsive to the level of candidate support from base voters and swing voters.

Convention Effects in Campaigns

The acceptance speech, as a part of the official transition to the general election campaign, provides each party's nominee a significant rhetorical opportunity. As Wayne (2000) wrote in his book, "[acceptance speeches] articulate the principal themes for the general election" (p. 162). From the campaign manager's perspective, the most important function of party conventions is to set the tone and theme for the parties' general election campaigns to gain support for the nominee, especially through the acceptance speeches. As Dick Morris (1999), Bill Clinton's campaign adviser, explained following the 1996 campaign,

The most interesting part of the agenda is a page-long listing of issues and initiatives to be included in the president's speech at the convention. In the polling that ranked these issues, voters were asked if Clinton's advocacy made them more likely to back him at the polls. Based on this ranking, we formulated the president's speech, which reflected many of his major second-term initiatives. (p.616)

Accordingly, Morris expected to regain much of the public support lost before or after the Republican National Convention in 1996. Based on the information gained from internal poll results, he submitted the agenda note one week before the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The note consisted mostly of a list of the themes and tones that should be included in the acceptance speech. Another example is Richard Nixon's preparation for his acceptance speech in 1968. He commissioned several private polls to determine important issues and a candidate's traits preferred by voters, and Nixon's speech was fashioned on the basis of that research (Smith 1971).

These examples show how campaign managers utilize voters' preference on modification of campaign messages, especially in acceptance speeches. However, most studies on acceptance speeches have focused more on the analysis of composition of the speeches rather than the implications of vote preferences in the acceptance addresses. Moreover, these studies are often

found in communication research than in political science research. Smith (1971), for example, examined Richard Nixon's successful 1968 Republican acceptance speech and found that Nixon's strategies, targeting both party activists such as party leaders and a broad range of voters who tended to be less partisan, succeeded by focusing on salient or valence issues. He argued that most of the strategies applicable to the single audience situation could be applied to the dual audience situation. Later, Scheele (1984) also found that Reagan enumerated primary American values and his utilization of traditional values in the acceptance speech in 1980 effectively appealed to those who watched televised conventions. These studies recognized "the dual audiences" of the conventions, partisans who are actively involved in campaigns and independents who do not have strong attachment to either of the parties.

In addition to the dual audience perspective, other studies focused on the content compositions. Valley (1988) conducted an analysis of Democratic presidential nomination acceptance speeches and found that they mainly contained four references: reference to the past including records, traditions, and personality; to the present such as pledges, requests, or condition of the party; to the future including campaign plans; and to the current issues. However, his research did not answer the question of why candidates emphasize one certain type of reference more than the others. Rather, he suggested that incumbent presidents are more likely to spend considerable time reviewing their past accomplishments in their acceptance speeches.

Regarding the positive and negative tones in the speeches, Ritter (1996) found that acceptance speeches are becoming more negative by attacking the opposition more openly. This negativity was also reported in Gustainis and Benoit's (1988) study. They found that Reagan and Carter in 1980 spent a similar amount of time attacking each other. However, Reagan could

attack Carter's record as president effectively while Carter could only anticipate problems if Reagan were elected or could attack Reagan's inexperience as Governor of California.

Benoit (1999) analyzed presidential nominating acceptance speeches from 1960 to 1996 based on three functions – acclaims, attacks, and defense – and found a party difference and an incumbency effect in the proportion of usages of these functions in their speeches. Democrats acclaim more than Republicans while Republicans attack more than Democrats; and incumbents acclaim more than challengers while challengers attack more than incumbents.

These studies provided the types of compositions in the acceptance speeches –issues and traits. Even though the dual audience perspective recognizes the different types of voters who watch or participate in the conventions, how they influence the composition of message types is not yet examined.

The effects of the conventions are measured as the net differences between pre- and post-convention polls. Holbrook (1996) argued that the conventions tend to generate a considerable amount of information and energize partisan voters, even independents; therefore, an aggregate shift in candidate support favoring the convening party's candidate occurs after the convention. Indeed, a campaign bump typically adds about 5 to 7 percentage points to the candidate whose party is holding the convention⁵⁰, and these bumps are larger in united party conventions rather than divisive nomination contests (Campbell, Cherry, and Wink 1992). However, these convention studies have generally focused on the consequences of the convention as a whole, rather than on the acceptance speech. Assuming that the nomination speeches are intended to reinforce or persuade voters provides a better understanding of the convention effects. The

⁵⁰ The 1972 Democratic Party Convention was an exception. The comparison between pre- and post-trial heat polls showed that the support for George McGovern was decreased following the convention by 2%. However, the Republican party nominee, Richard Nixon also received only .7% of increase in the post-convention polls (Campbell, Cherry, and Wink 1992).

studies explored how voters react to convention events, but as a reciprocal relationship, how voters influence the acceptance speeches has not been empirically examined.

Therefore, I argue that the combination of message types is relative to the level of support for the candidates in pre-convention polls, especially among partisans and independents. Partisans tend to strongly attach to their party and consistently vote for their party nominee. Party label and partisan issues generally attract them to stay with their candidates. Thus, they rarely defect in part because the party represents the voter's own position better than do other parties (Hammond and Humes 1993; Jacoby 1988; Jarvis and Jones 2005; Petrocik 1996; Stokes 1963). In contrast, independents, or swing voters, generally do not commit their partisanship to either of the two parties. They tend to employ other evaluation criteria such as candidate characteristics and issue standpoints rather than following a party label itself. To win the election, candidates should appeal to partisan voters as a foundation of their base, and persuade swing voters to broaden the winning likelihood.

As David Plouffe said, all candidates run their campaigns to win. To win the election, candidates should approach these two different groups strategically. They have to secure their partisan voters and at the same time they need to persuade swing voters. As Smith (1971) found in his study, candidates are dealing with different types of messages to target different voting cues. For example, if a candidate needs to bring more partisan support, then the message will emphasize partisan issues to impress and motivate partisans. Unlike most previous studies, I posit that the candidate preferences from the two different voting groups influence message contexts of nomination acceptance speeches. This analysis differs from prior research by testing the impact of vote preferences on the messages rather than examining how messages affect vote

choices. Therefore, the support level of voters is the main causal factor to construct the messages and types of issues.

Data and Method

Message Analysis

This analysis is based on a direct measure of the issues and tones mentioned in candidates' acceptance speeches from 1992 through 2012. Acceptance addresses from the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates are coded into the positional versus valence issue dimension (PV) and positive versus negative dimension (PN). First, *positional* issues are defined as the specific candidates' policy positions and make a favorable comparison with the opposition (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003a). Positional messages are attached to partisan preferences. If the issues can draw a line between the Democratic and Republican parties and if the issues include directionality or partisan solution, they are considered positional messages. For example, the issue of abortion tends to be sharply divided along party lines. In particular, the majority of Republican voters tend to favor a "pro-life" position while most Democrats tend to favor a "pro-choice" position (Abramowitz 1995; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992). For example, in the 2008 national convention, Barack Obama touched on the issue of abortion: "We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country." His position on the abortion issue clearly appealed to Democrats, not Republicans. Moreover, positional messages include the concept of "prospective messages," which are candidates' future policies or specific planned actions such as policy proposals (Campbell et al. 1960; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976). This content generally includes the phrase of "I will." For example, George W. Bush delivered prospective and partisan messages in his acceptance speech in 2004.

We must strengthen Social Security by allowing younger workers to save some of their taxes in a personal account, a nest egg you can call your own and government can never take away.

Second, *valence* issues invoke candidates' positions or characteristics independent from partisan views, for example, leadership, strong economy, or low crime rates, which are valued by all voters (Degan 2007; Salmore and Samore 1992). Practically, when candidates emphasize valence issues, they pledge a common issue positioning such as providing better education, keeping peace, and reducing crime rates that does not clearly differ from that of the opponent. For example, Al Gore in 2000 emphasized his strong intention to lower crime rates in his acceptance speech: "So tonight I want to set another new specific goal: to cut the crime rate year after year – every single year throughout the decade."

Last, positive and negative tones are categorized. *Positive* tones are used to highlight the candidate himself or herself or the candidate's party while *negative* tones refer to attacks on the opponent's character, integrity, issue positions, experiences, or the opposition party itself (Salmore and Samore 1992; Damore 2005; West 2005).

These definitions of campaign messages are employed to analyze the acceptance speeches directly measuring the issues and tones raised by the candidates at the conventions. The issues and tones of the speeches were measured with the *Yoshikoder* software program, and a total of 12 acceptance speeches were analyzed with this computer-assisted content analysis. The dictionary includes all four categories – positional, valence, positive, and negative messages – and generates concordances as a keywords-in-context results to count the number of the unit of coding, "appeals" (Geer 1998).

The selected concordances are coded as either positional or valence issues in the positional versus valence issue dictionary and as either positive or negative tones⁵¹ in the positive versus negative message dictionary. The frequencies of each type of message are converted to the proportion of those messages for the comparison of the relative frequency within the positional-valence or positive-negative dictionaries. Therefore, the PV score represents the proportional difference between positional and valence issues in each speech, and the PN score represents the proportional difference between positive and negative tones⁵². A positive PV score indicates that there is more positional issue context than valence issue context in the speech and a negative PN score states that the speech contains more negative tones than positive ones.

The Level of Vote Preferences

Presidential elections are won by winning a majority of the electorate votes. That may seem clear and simple, but there are many segments to be considered at the individual level. Individual voters make a vote decision based on elements such as partisanship, candidate evaluation, gender, ideology, value, issues, and so forth (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller 1991; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Box-Steffensmeier, Boef, and Lin 2004). Particularly, partisanship is a strong characteristic that influences campaign strategies. For example, in the 2004, the Bush campaign team adopted the mobilization strategy as known as the “base strategy” to increase the partisan vote turnout in the competitive presidential race. However, candidate cannot win the election with only the base. It is necessary to extend their strategies to persuade swing voters. However, without securing the base support, candidates are less likely to win the elections.

⁵¹ The word list for positive tones includes words indicating candidates themselves or their parties. In contrast, the words in the negative tone list indicate keywords indicating an opponent or his/her party.

⁵² Positional-Valence (PV) score = the proportion of positional issues – the proportion of valence issues
Positive-Negative (PN) score = the proportion of positive tones – the proportion of negative tones

Therefore, analyzing the size of base voters and persuasive voters, as Karl Rove did in the 2004 election is an important strategic element. Partisan voters almost always vote a straight party ticket and often are enthusiastically involved in campaign activities such as fundraising or volunteering. However, the number of partisans is less than 50%. Especially, Republicans have a smaller number of partisans than Democrats. For example, right after the presidential election in 2012, 27% of the electorate identified themselves as Republicans and 32% Democrats⁵³. As a foundation of a winning coalition, candidates need to solidify partisan voters from the beginning of the campaign. And then, candidates move forward to persuade swing voters. The number of swing voters who identify themselves as independents has increased in recent elections. According to the Gallup Polls conducted in November in 2012, the number of independents in the electorate reached to 38%.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the base voters not only include partisans but also leaners because leaners tend to behave like weak partisans (Keith 1992; Campbell 2008). At the same time, leaners are also persuadable like swing voters who are less informed than partisans are and less interested in politics⁵⁴. Therefore, leaners are also included in the swing voter group. Figure 5.1 shows the proportion of partisanship in the electorate before the Republican Party Convention in August 2012. The Republican partisan base was 28% in the electorate while the Democratic base was 30.8%. The difference between two party bases was only 2%. In addition, leaners are equally split and only 5% of the electorate is pure independent. Applying the definitions of the base voters and swing voters, the number of the electoral base for Romney was

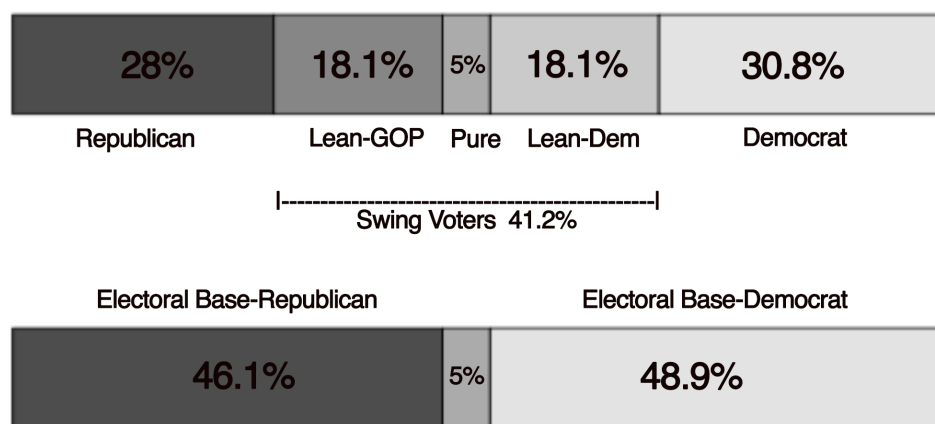
⁵³ This number is from the results of the Gallup survey conducted on November 15-18, 2012. Gallup uses the five-scale identification question: “In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?”

⁵⁴ There is no consensus on the definition of leaners. Fewer studies focused on independent leaners, but did not provide a clear distinction between partisans and leaners in the five-point scale. But based on the campaign manager’s analysis, I included them as both base and swing voter groups.

46.1% while Obama was 48.9%. Therefore, Obama had an advantage over Romney in terms of the reinforcing strategic perspective. Additionally, the number of swing voters in this example was 41.2%.

FIGURE 5.1

The Proportion of Partisanship in the Electorate (August 2012)



To measure the level of support among party identifiers, Gallup polls before the party conventions were employed in the dataset. The questions in the Gallup polls were consistent and allowed me to measure the same concept across elections. For example, in 2000, respondents were asked the question, “Now, suppose that the presidential election were being held today, and it included Al Gore as the Democratic candidate, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney as the Republican candidates, Pat Buchanan as the Reform Party candidate, and Ralph Nader and Winona LaDuke as the Green Party candidates. “Who would you vote for ___?”⁵⁵ Gallup also

⁵⁵ I selected this question including third party candidates as an alternative rather than a two-party trial-heat question because the question including the third choice more accurately captures voters’ full consideration of their possible choices. Indeed, the third party candidates have an impact on popular voting outcomes although it is typically minimum. Focusing only on the Electoral College votes generally overlooks the impact of third party candidates. In

measures party affiliation and the question reads as follows: “In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent?” and “As of today do you lean more to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?” To measure partisan support, the proportion of vote intention by party affiliation was employed in this analysis.

Model Specification

The positional issues are one of the important criteria to distinguish the difference between the two parties. The gun control and abortion issues are classic examples of positional issues representing partisan preferences. Candidates strategically use positional issues to appeal to partisans and to solidify their base. For example, President Bush in 1992 received the lowest approval rating throughout his presidency right before the convention. His approval rate in early August was 29% and his disapproval rate reached 60%⁵⁶, which was recorded as the lowest approval rating of Bush. Most of all, the approval rate among Republicans had consistently dropped. At the end of July, Bush had a 15% approval rate from Republicans and the rate had dropped 3.5 percentage points since June according to *Gallup*. This drop indicated that President Bush needed to focus his campaign on attracting partisan voters to win the general election.

Valence issues are also used in candidate speeches to receive more attention from the general audience, especially those who do not affiliate with either party. The spatial theory of voting suggests that each voter selects the candidate closest to his or her preferred policy positions, and rational candidates place their position at the median point of voter opinion,

1992, Ross Perot received about 19% of popular votes but none of the electoral votes. In addition, in the 2000 election, if there were no third party candidates, the Florida election outcome would have been different and it likely would have been enough to change the winner of the election.

⁵⁶ The percentage of Americans who approved and disapproved of the job George H. W. Bush was doing as president by Gallup. The poll was conducted from July 31 to August 2 in 1992 with approximately 1,001 national adults.

thereby maximizing the number of votes they will receive (Downs 1957; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Jessee 2010; Stokes 1963). Accordingly, valence issues are an effective message type to approach nonpartisan voters, even leaners of both parties; thus a strategic candidate uses valence issues to target swing voters.

Candidates typically do not present messages that are exclusively positive or negative. Rather, they tend to present messages that mix positive and negative appeals. In terms of strategies, candidates present largely positive messages to attract partisan voters because positive messages offer voters reasons why a candidate is worthy of their support by signaling what issues and traits are important to the candidate (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995). In contrast, negative messages by definition provide more clear distinction between two candidates, especially for independent voters who are most open to persuasion by campaign messages (Lau and Pomper 2002). Moreover, a decision to delivering negative messages is typically involves consideration of other factors such as a necessity to respond to an attack from the opponent or backlash of the negativity. However, the acceptance speech is different from other on-going campaign messages – advertisements or stump speeches. Having highly negative tones in the acceptance speeches would have brought a serious backlash by creating negativity toward the candidates. Moreover, candidates modify the speeches to advertise themselves and their policy positions. Therefore, they may prefer to have more positive messages (Benoit 2003). For example, in the 2000 election, Bush's speech included only 18% negative tones and Gore also delivered only 5% negative messages. Therefore, I examine the effect of the level of support on the positive versus negative message dimension, but expect to find that more positive messages are delivered considering the nature of the acceptance speeches.

The main purpose of this analysis is to test the influence of base and swing support on the campaign strategic decision-making process, not to test the effect of campaign messages on voting decisions or election outcomes. Therefore, campaign message strategies are treated as the dependent variable, coded as the positional versus valence score (PV) and the positive versus negative score (PN), representing both issues and tones in the speech. For example, a large PV score means that positional issues are addressed more frequently than valence issues. A negative PN score, this means that there are more negative tones than positive tones in the speech. Simply, smaller PV and PN scores tell us that the proportional difference between positional and valence issues or positive and negative tones is small. A zero score indicates that both positional and valence issues or both positive and negative tones are equally mentioned in the speech.

What influences these PV and PN scores? I argue that a candidate's message structuring is likely to depend on the level of the candidate support from the base and from swing voters as an indication of winning potential. Therefore, as the independent variables, the percentages of base and swing voter support are employed. In addition, incumbency and divisiveness in the primary are controlled. First, since incumbent candidates have already been in the White House, they tend to have more achievement to emphasize or advertise to voters than challengers and this would affect structuring their messages compared to challengers. Indeed, campaigns tend to differ in re-elections and open-seat elections because incumbent presidents have advantages (Campbell 2008; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1998; Weisberg 2002). Historically, since 1936, there have been 13 presidential elections involving an incumbent, and the incumbent candidates won 10 out of 13 times⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ Only three elections – 1976, 1980, and 1992 – have been recorded as challenger-winning elections since 1936. In 1976, Ford was defeated by Jimmy Carter and after four years, President Carter lost re-election against Ronald Reagan with a big margin. In 1992, President Bush was defeated by Democratic candidate Bill Clinton.

Second, divisiveness in the primary can be measured as a vote share difference between the top two candidates in primaries. Generally, parties with incumbent candidates tend to experience less divisive primaries. For example, in the 2012 election, President Obama received 88.7% of the total popular primary vote, without any serious challenger. However, out-party candidates or open-seat primaries tend to be more divisive than campaigns with incumbent candidates. If the party experiences highly competitive primaries, then this may have negative effects on the election outcomes such as a lower turnout or an increase in the number of defectors (Kenney and Rice 1987; Atkeson 1998; Hacker 1965). To minimize these negative carry-over effects, in which supporters of the losing candidate vote for the candidate of the other party or simply not to turn out, the divided party should first unify their party as they start the general election campaign and the convention typically is a good place to develop the party unity⁵⁸.

Results

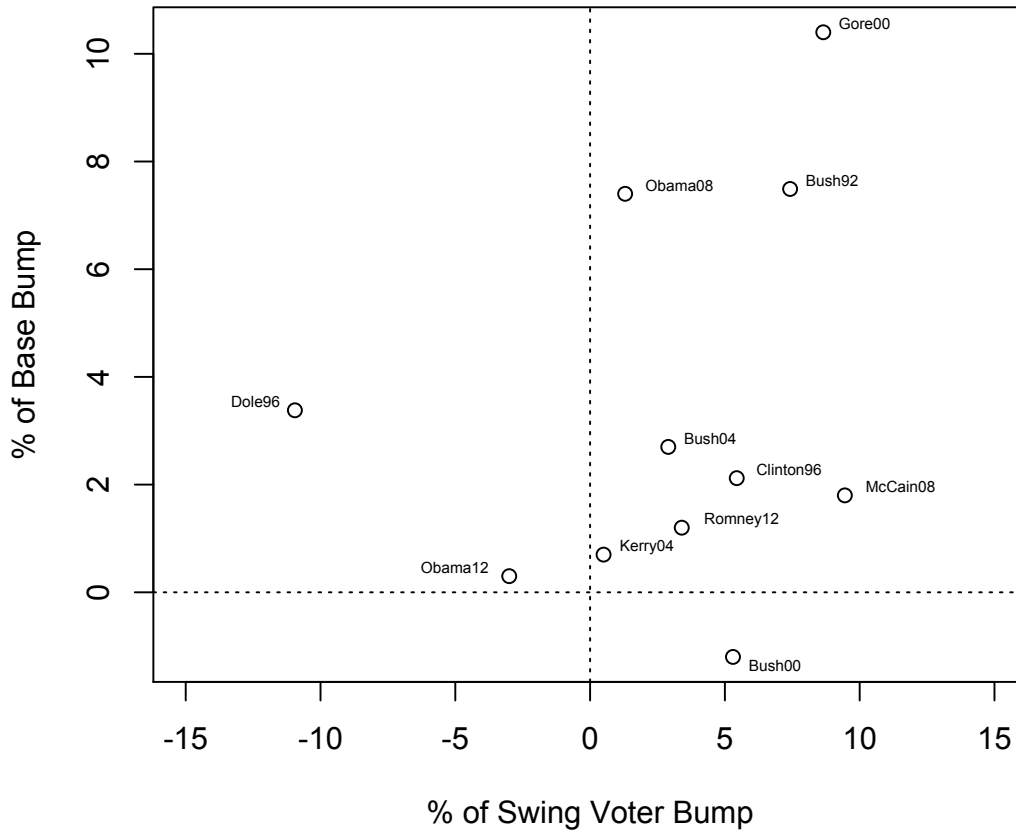
For a basic understanding of the nature of the conventions, Figure 5.2 presents a “bump” in the base and swing voter support in the electorate for the party holding the convention. The level of support before and after the convention is based on trial-heat polls taken right before and after the convention⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ The 2008 Democratic contest, for example, was divisive and lengthy. The difference of the popular vote in primaries between Senator Obama and Clinton was less than 1% and the race ended on June 7th when Senator Clinton conceded and announced her support for Obama. Due to this circumstance, Obama’s campaign manager, David Plouffee, could not underestimate the importance of the party unity theme at the convention and the convention delivered a fully and successfully united party appearance to the audience including partisans who supported Clinton in the primary races.

⁵⁹ Bill Clinton in 1992 is not included in this graph. Because of Ross Perot, Clinton received unusual lower support from the base and swing voters. After Perot dropped out of the race on July 15th, the support levels had significantly increased. To present a clear pattern of the bumps, I decided not to include this outlier in the Figure 5.2.

FIGURE 5.2

The Electoral Impact of Conventions, 1992-2012



Most candidates experienced increased support of both the base and swing voters after the conventions. The 2000 Republican convention was the only convention after which the base support was less than it had been before the convention. However, the net change among the base was only about 1.2%, and there was little room for improvement since Bush already received about 86% of the base support before the convention. Other than Bush in 2000, all candidates received increased support from their base by unifying and energizing their partisans successfully. Additionally, the swing voters' support for the candidates in the 1996 Republican convention and the 2012 Democratic convention was less than it had been before the convention. For example, Bob Dole's preference among the swing voters after the convention dropped about

11% compared to before the convention. In 2012, Obama did not have any advantage from the bump effects. The support from both the base and swing voters is almost the same in pre- and post-conventions.

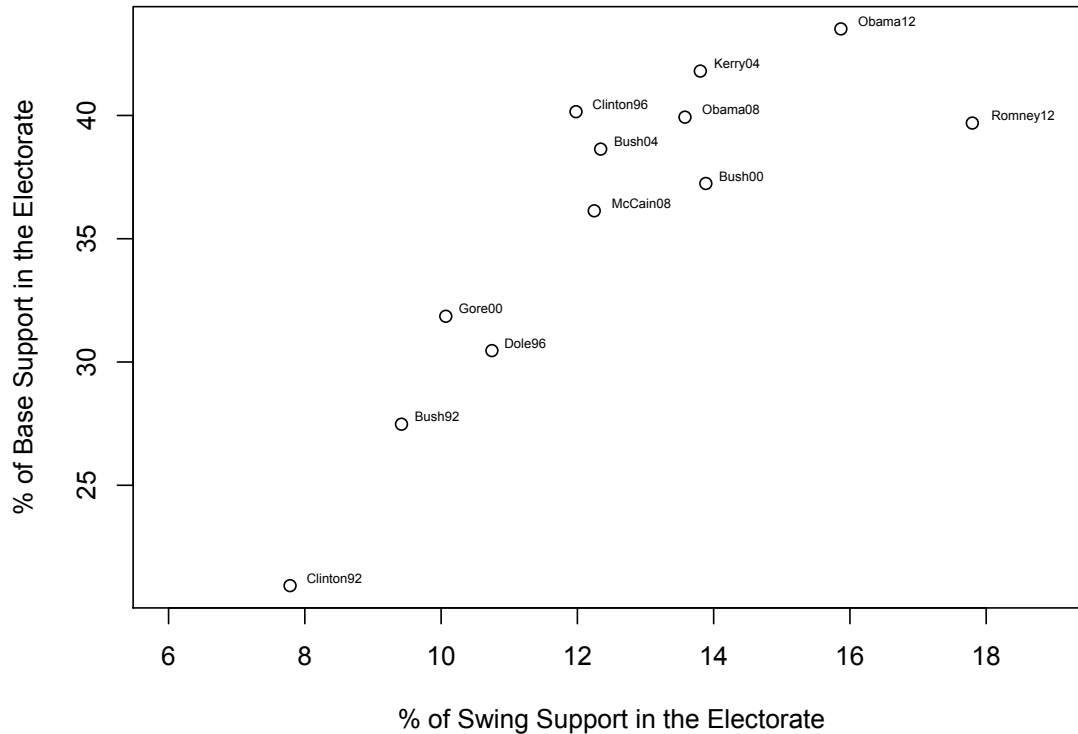
Categorizing voters into the base and swing voters provides more meaningful interpretation of the convention bumps. Most of all, it shows that the effects of conventions differently influence the base voters and swing voters. For example, Dole in 1996 gained more support from the base but lost the support of swing voters by a wide margin. This example indirectly explained the different behavior and impact of the base voters and swing voters. However, Gore in 2000 showed a similar pattern between the two groups. Both the support from base and swing voters after the convention was increased by about 10%.

Figure 5.3 shows the level of candidate support among the base and swing voters before the convention. The support of Clinton before the 1992 convention from both the base and swing voters was significantly low due to the third-party candidate, Perot. Despite Perot's dropping out of the race, the incumbent candidate, Bush, received a low level of support from both the base and swing right before the convention⁶⁰. Thus, both Bush and Clinton in 1992 started with low support of the base and swing voters. As strategic candidates, both needed to secure the base during the convention and the fall campaign.

⁶⁰ Perot is not the only factor causing a low level of support for Bush. His lower approval rating and somewhat divided Republican Party, as well as Perot's drawing some support that would have otherwise, gone to Bush were all integrated to lower the support from Bush.

FIGURE 5.3

The Level of Vote Preferences before Convention, 1992-2012



As shown in Figure 5.3, Mitt Romney in 2012 received more swing voter support than did any other candidate before the convention. These variations in support mean that each candidate faced different electoral circumstances. For example Clinton in 1992 might have needed to have a message strategy to secure his base strongly since his support from the base voters before the convention was affected by Perot. In 2012, Obama received stronger support from the base than did Romney, while Romney obtained more support from swing voters than did Obama. Therefore, these candidates focused on different messages at the convention to secure the base or to persuade swing voters, depending on which group they needed to target more. Without securing the base during the transition to the general election campaign, candidates would have a

difficult time to develop clear messages. A comfortably secured base would provide opportunities for candidates to move forward to persuade swing voters and expand the candidate support in the electorate. The group who received a high volume of support from the base includes more winning candidates – Clinton in 1996, Bush in 2000 and 2004, and Obama in 2008 and 2012. This tells us that securing the base should be considered as an important strategic element in winning the election.

Candidates received different levels of support from voters before the convention, and this affects how candidates constructed their own strategies to target either the base voters or the swing voters to increase their support. Table 5.1 presents the causal effect of these factors on candidates' message contents.

The first column in Table 5.1 presents the positional versus valence issue model. The results of this estimation support the base and swing voters' impact on the modification of message strategies. The coefficient of the electoral base of $-.027$ means a 1% of increases in the electoral base support leads to a $.027$ decrease on the positional versus valence index. In other words, by losing support from the electoral base, candidates tend to deliver more positional issues to secure the base.

Regarding the swing voter support, as 1% of the swing voter support increases, the positional versus valence message score increases by $.083$, on average. This means that the decrease of swing voter support increases the proportion of valence issues in the acceptance speeches, as expected. In other words, candidates deliver more valence issues when the level of support from swing voters decreases. These results support both reinforcing and persuasive message strategies. Moreover, candidates' response to the change in swing voter support is bigger than the change in base voters (see appendix E). The impact of swing voters on the

proportion of positional and valence issue composition is almost doubled compared to the impact of electoral base voters. However, the effects of incumbency and divided primaries on the positional versus valence issue score are not statistically significant.

TABLE 5.1

The Effects of Candidates' Support on the Acceptance Speeches, 1992-2012

| Variables | Positional-Valence Model | Positive-Negative Model |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | -.027* (.014) | .08** (.03) |
| Swing Voter Support | .083** (.032) | -.17* (.07) |
| Incumbency | -.099 (.16) | -.902* (.36) |
| Divisive | -.002 (.002) | .013* (.00) |
| Constant | -.192 (.251) | -.703 (.56) |
| Number of Observations | 12 | 12 |
| R-Squared | .525 | .665 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

The second column in Table 5.1 reports the result in the positive and negative messages. The most noticeable difference compared to the positional-valence model is that all variables are statistically significant. First, the coefficient of the electoral base support indicates that a 1% increase in the electoral base support leads to a .08 increase in the positive versus negative message score. This means that the decrease in the level of support from the electoral base increases the proportion of negative messages. In addition, swing voter support significantly influences the positive and negative message composition in the speech. A 1% increase in swing voter support leads to a .17 decrease in the PN score. Similarly, when swing voter support

decreases, candidates deliver more positive messages compared to the negative messages. These results present evidence that the levels of support from base and swing voters influence the composition of positive and negative messages in the speeches. However, this result is not in the predicted direction even though they show the significant effect on the strategic message construction under the positional versus valence issue dimension.

Although the positional versus valence model shows the unexpected results, considering the nature of the convention speeches, it would be understandable. As I discussed before, national conventions received a high volume of attention by the public including both partisans and independents. Therefore, highly negative messages could cause a backlash toward the candidate. Rationally, there is no reason that candidates take those risks at the convention. Historically, party nominees delivered more positive messages in their acceptance speeches to provide enough information about the candidates themselves and their policy positions (Benoit 2003). Indeed, positive messages tend to generate a more enthusiastic mood rather than suppress the energy.

Incumbent candidates also have a significant effect on the positive and negative tone. Being an incumbent candidate generates more negativity in the speech. From the 1992 and 2012 elections, incumbent candidates were more likely to receive strong support from partisans, with the exception of Bush in 1992, and this leads to a large coefficient value in the model. Moreover, strong support from the base indicates the stability of the partisan base and allows candidates to focus on negative messages to persuade swing voters.

In addition, divisive primaries matter in structuring speech tones. Candidates who had more competitive primaries tend to have more negative tones in their acceptance speeches. I expect that divisive primaries would encourage that the nominees to deliver more positive tones

to appeal more to partisans as a part of party unification efforts, but the coefficient for the divisiveness is not in the predicted direction. One possible explanation of this result may be found in the measurement of divisiveness. I measured it as the difference between the top two candidates' primary votes. However, it was measured as a dichotomous variable by coding it as 1 if the difference is less than 20%, otherwise zero (Kenney and Rice 1987). According to this measurement, only one election would be applicable, the 2008 Democratic primaries between Obama and Clinton. The gap between the two candidates in the polls was only .73%.

The national convention is different from other campaign events such as stump speeches, advertisements, or presidential debates. It plays a role as an official event to start the general election mode by officially announcing their party nominee. One of critical roles of the party convention is to unify the party and generate party pride. I argue that even this very first event of the fall general campaign is affected by the levels of support by considering the partisanship and their support as a core factor for the campaign strategies and the results indicate significant effects of the level of candidate support from the base and swing voters on the contents of acceptance speeches.

Discussion and Conclusion

Political scientists have examined the role of political campaigns and campaigns events in the vote decision-making process and electoral outcomes (Campbell 2008; Shaw 1999; Holbrook 1996; Gelman and King 1993; Finkel 1993), however, the effects of vote preferences on political campaigns have not yet been studied. In this chapter, I examine an influence on candidates' strategic behavior in constructing campaign speeches. Specifically, I argue that candidates' decisions in selecting types of messages are motivated by targeting either the base or swing

voters. In contemporary campaigns, the polls provide much information about voting cues, and consistently conducted polls during the election such as tracking polls provide more critical information to build or revise campaign strategies. As a game to win, candidates need to target the base to secure that support as a foundation of the winning coalition and target swing voters to exceed in plurality votes to carry more states. In this chapter, I examined nomination speeches delivered at the conventions as a first and official campaign event in a general election. We have seen significant effects of the base and swing support on using different types of campaign messages. The increase in either the base and swing voter support increases or decreases the proportion of positional-valence issues or positive-negative tones in messages. Especially, to secure the electoral base, candidates address more positional issues than valence issues. In addition, positive and negative messages are also influenced by the levels of support. The results show that when needing to secure their base, candidates deliver more negative messages. Moreover, when needing to persuade swing voters, candidates deliver more positive messages to reduce any possible risk of backlash. Even though the results of the positive versus negative message model are different than I expected, the model still shows the significant impact of voter support. Therefore, the overall results suggest that candidates' message strategies are affected differently by the levels of support among the base and swing voters.

Although the findings in this chapter are significant, there are several issues to be addressed. First, the analysis of acceptance speeches from 1992 and 2012 has a sample size of only 12. Adding more cases in this analysis would increase the reliability of the results. However, despite a small size of sample, the effect of targeting groups on campaign messages was confirmed. Second, the convention provides a different environment, compared to the general

election campaigns, as the first official campaign event after nomination selection races, and this introduces different dynamics in strategic decisions.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Our goal was to say that we wanted the same number of Republicans on Election Day as Democrats, and if we saw that we had the same number of people that said they were Republicans on Election Day as Democrats, we were going to win the election, no matter what happened among the small group of persuadable voters.

- Matthew Dowd, Chief campaign strategist, Bush-Cheney 2004⁶¹

In the 2004 presidential election, a Bush campaign focused on mobilization of the Republican conservative base to increase voter turnout. This mobilization is called the “base strategy.” In 2004, 37% of voters were Democrats and 37% were Republican, with the remaining 26% independents. According to exit polls, John Kerry won the independents just by about a 1% margin. So, how did Bush win by 3%? The Bush campaign captured a larger proportion of the electorate and support among Republicans – over 90% of Republicans⁶², a larger percentage than Reagan in 1984.

Do campaigns matter?

There is no firm answer to this question. Early voting studies (Campbell et al. 1960; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944) and economic and election literature (Fiorina 1981; Alvarez and Nagler 1995) contend that the influence of campaigns on vote intention and electoral outcomes is minimal. However, the practical examples have provided a different perspective. As we saw in the case of Bush’s base strategy, how

⁶¹ A transcript of an interview conducted on Jan 4, 2005 by *Frontline*
[<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/architect/interviews/dowd.html>]

⁶² According to the exit polls, 87% of Democrats voted for Kerry and 93% of Republicans for Bush. In addition, 11% of Democrats and 6% of Republicans were defectors. The result of the 2004 election was that 51% of the electorate voted for Bush and 48% for Kerry. It was a battle with a 3% margin.

candidate operates their campaign strategies seems to matter in election outcomes. Furthermore, recent studies have made formidable theoretical and empirical contributions to support the campaign effects (Holbrook 1996; Hillygus and Shields 2009; Damore 2005; Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Daron and Roberts 2000).

The majority of the prior studies examining the campaigns have focused on the effect of strategies in the voting behavior or electoral outcomes, but they provide only a little understanding about candidates' behavior in campaigns. In contemporary politics, individual candidates have more critical roles in elections by having exclusive control over operating and managing campaigns. In presidential election campaigns, candidates seek winning the election and this goal leads them to behave rationally. Their rationality to maximize the outcome of campaigns provides theoretical frames to examine their behavior. Therefore, the fundamental understanding about the campaign strategies should start from knowing the candidates' behavior.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to move our perspective of campaign strategies from a voter-centric to candidate-centric setting. What influences campaign strategies? How do candidates use their campaign strategies? Accordingly, I empirically examine the components of the campaign strategies, especially by focusing on types of campaign messages as a reflection of vote preferences in presidential elections. I assume that candidates develop their campaign strategies based on the understanding of their voters. Since voters are the most important element to be considered, their reaction to candidates is the key factor in the candidates' strategic decision process. Therefore, I place the vote preferences as an independent variable and examine the reciprocal relationship between voters and candidates. How candidates structure their campaign messages? What influences candidates' decisions on selecting specific types of campaign messages?

Overview of the Results

Based on the assumption that presidential candidates behave rationally and strategically, I focused on their campaign message strategies in general elections. Specifically, I argue that candidates utilize different types of campaign messages to reinforce their electoral base and persuade swing voters. Depending on the necessity of securing the targeted voters, candidates' messages are modified.

Candidates broadly categorize the electorate into two divisions – the electoral base voters and swing voters. The electoral base voters are a fundamental voting cue to increase the likelihood of winning because they tend to be involved in campaign activities such as volunteering or fundraising. Typically, they cast their vote for their candidates. Therefore, consolidation of the electoral base should be considered as a priority in developing campaign strategies.

In addition, candidates have to expand the size of voters by persuading swing voters because the base is not sufficient to win the election. The gradually increasing number of independents has pressured candidates to move their perspective from partisan-based to national-based (Stokes 1963; Hammond and Humes 1993). Accordingly, candidates need different strategies to persuade these swing voters.

On the basis of understanding the different types of voting groups and candidates' rationality, I examined how campaign message strategies are structured. In chapter three, I focused on the composition of campaign speeches in the 1992 and 2000 presidential elections. In this chapter, the campaign speeches are analyzed in the positional versus valence and the positive versus negative message dimensions. Based on the different types of messages, I argue that candidates deliver more positional issues when the electoral base voters are not secured. Thus,

the level of support from the base would affect the proportion of positional issues in the speeches. The results of the examination of campaign speeches supported that the proportion of positional issues in the speeches was increased by the level of support from the electoral base. Furthermore, swing voters support also influenced the proportion of the positional versus valence issue dimension. However, the effect of the base support was bigger than that of swing voters. Regarding the positive versus negative dimension, only the level of support from swing voters had an impact on the level of positivity in the campaign speech content. Alternatively, candidates' status, whether leading or losing in the polls, had an impact on the decision to go more negative or positive.

In chapter four, I demonstrated the application of theory in campaign advertisements from the 1992 and 2000 elections. Even though the nature of televised advertisements⁶³ and campaign speeches are different, I posit that candidates' message strategies in advertisements also follow the logic of campaign speeches. The analysis of advertisements presented the evidence of supporting that the level of support influences candidates' message strategies. A less secured base requires candidates to place more emphasis on positional issues.

Last, the analysis of nomination acceptance speeches from the 1992 and 2012 conventions was presented in chapter five. Since candidates' messages delivered at the conventions receive a high volume of attention from the public, acceptance speeches are critical. As a transition from the primary to general election campaign, candidates try to solidify their base and persuade swing voters. These candidates' behavior tends to be reflected in the acceptance speeches and this was emphatically supported in chapter five. Depending on the level

⁶³ Advertising is more limited than delivering campaign speeches. For example, televised advertisements are limited to 30 seconds and the frequency of the ads depends on candidates' financial ability to buy time. Advertisements also directly reach out to the mass public but accessibility of campaign speeches is limited to audiences.

of support from voters, candidates also modify their campaign strategies in terms of the proportion of message types.

The results from each chapter clearly show that campaign message strategies and the level of support are interactive. The level of support influences the decision of selecting types of messages. I found that candidates chose positional issues more to reinforce their base and these strategic decisions were evident in campaign stump speeches, advertisements, and acceptance speeches.

One of the most significant implications of these results is the application of the new perspective in examining campaign strategies. Most studies in campaigns focused on the effect of campaigns on election outcomes and vote choices. A few studies examined candidates' strategic behavior (Franklin 1991; Geer 1998; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Petrocik 1996; Sigelman and Buell 2004) but they overlooked the important component of strategies – voters. I borrowed the campaign managers' perspective to analyze candidates' behavior, for example, Karl Rove's base strategy to close the gap between registered Republicans and registered Democrats or James Cavil's strategy referring to "it's the economy, stupid." These strategies are constructed based on the technique to identify the base and persuasive voters. Micro-targeting methods analyze very specific segments of voting groups such as magazine subscribers or shoppers, but the partisanship still powerfully predicts voters' intentions on their preferences. Therefore, I measured the vote preferences as the influential factor on candidates' behavior while most studies considered campaigns as the influential element on vote choices. In sum, voters' reactions to campaigns influence the modification of campaign strategies during the election.

Another implication of this study is that it provides new measurements of campaign messages. As I explained in the second chapter, the message dimensions of positional/valence

and positive/negative reflect more applicable issue positions by candidates. In fact, salient issues in elections are not significantly different since the 1980s. Economy, education, social security, or other issues have frequently been used in presidential campaigns. However, candidates' presentations of these issues introduce diverse interpretations. For example, the phrasing of a tax cut for the middle class and the phrasing of a tax cut for the wealthy represent different meanings of the tax issue. Treating both phrasings as the same "tax" issue and just counting the number of issues mentioned in the messages will not be accurate to explain the rationality of the candidates' decision to choose these particular phrases. In addition, most messages contain both positional/valence and positive/negative content. Rather than coding the content as a dichotomous variable, I suggested measuring messages as the proportional differences to show the level of emphasis of message content. This measurement would provide the deeper understanding of message strategies.

Future extension

This research can be extended in a number of directions. First, future studies can attempt to find out at which point candidates are confident that their base is secured. Candidates use their campaign messages in a manner beneficial to securing their base or persuading swing voters as I discussed. The level of support from the base would reach a maximum point at some time if candidates were successfully operating their campaigns. In fact, it is not an easy task to determine the tipping point because each candidate would differently define the threshold. For example, Bush in 2004 strongly pursued solidifying the Republican base and his intention brought Republicans' historical victory in the house and senatorial races. However, since we know the number of partisans and independents in the electorate, it would be possible to find the

comfort zone of consolidation of the base. Moreover, incumbency or in-party conditions would affect the tipping point to switch strategies from targeting the base voters to targeting swing voters. For example, the level of support from the base for incumbent candidates is generally higher than that for challengers if the incumbent maintains a sufficient approval rating on their performances. Therefore, the tipping point in securing the base can be examined as an extension of this study.

Second, the research presented here focused on the national electorate in presidential elections. However, candidates also consider electoral college votes to win the election. Clearly, carrying more than 50% of electoral votes is the indication of winning. States are categorized as the base and swing states. For example, Ohio is considered a battleground or swing state while Rhode Island is considered a solid base for Democrats. Therefore, the concept of the base and swing voters can be applied to state-level analysis.

Finally, perhaps the most interesting extension of this research would be the application to different levels of elections. Congressional and senatorial elections are similar to presidential elections in terms of candidates' behavior. Candidates run their campaigns to win the election, not to lose. Candidates in competitive districts or states will try to secure their base voters and persuade swing voters to increase the likelihood of winning by carrying more voters. This strategic decision also follows the same logic I tested in this study.

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APPENDIX A

BALANCE OF ISSUE POSTIONS AMONG PARTISAN GROUPS

Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde (2012) presented Table A to report the relationship among the partisan identification and the balance of issues using the ANES surveys from 1976 to 2008. To measure the balance of issues, they gave individuals a score of +1 if their positions on an issue scale were closer to the average perception of Republican candidates, a score of -1 if their positions were closer to the average perception of Democratic candidates, and score of 0 if they had no preference on an issue.

TABLE A. Balance of Issues Positions Among Partisan Groups, 1992-2008 (percent)

| <i>Issue Positions Closer to</i> | <i>Party Identification</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| | Strong Democrat | Weak Democrat | Independent, leans Democrat | Pure Independent | Independent, leans Republican | Weak Republican | Strong Republican |
| 1992 | | | | | | | |
| Democratic Candidate | 40 | 36 | 30 | 26 | 13 | 13 | 9 |
| Neutral | 55 | 57 | 65 | 70 | 74 | 77 | 74 |
| Republican Candidate | 5 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 13 | 11 | 17 |
| 1996 | | | | | | | |
| Democratic Candidate | 44 | 27 | 35 | 17 | 13 | 9 | 1 |
| Neutral | 27 | 36 | 34 | 43 | 27 | 23 | 14 |
| Republican Candidate | 30 | 37 | 31 | 40 | 60 | 38 | 85 |
| 2000 | | | | | | | |
| Democratic Candidate | 30 | 26 | 25 | 20 | 8 | 10 | 2 |
| Neutral | 47 | 48 | 46 | 49 | 40 | 33 | 25 |
| Republican Candidate | 23 | 25 | 29 | 31 | 51 | 57 | 73 |
| 2004 | | | | | | | |
| Democratic | 72 | 55 | 57 | 40 | 19 | 21 | 9 |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Candidate | | | | | | | |
| Neutral | 8 | 11 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 5 |
| Republican | 21 | 33 | 34 | 50 | 73 | 73 | 86 |
| Candidate | | | | | | | |

2008

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Democratic | | | | | | | |
| Candidate | 60 | 46 | 47 | 28 | 16 | 14 | 8 |
| Neutral | 6 | 9 | 14 | 10 | 17 | 9 | 2 |
| Republican | 34 | 45 | 40 | 43 | 67 | 77 | 90 |
| Candidate | | | | | | | |

Source: Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde (2012, p.213-215)

APPENDIX B

CODING EXAMPLES BASED ON ISSUE OWNERSHIP

TABLE B.1

The Parties' Positions on Issues (Campbell 2008)

| <i>Issues</i> | <i>Democratic Position</i> | <i>Republican Position</i> |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Income tax cuts | Oppose or favor if targeted to middle- and lower-income citizens | Support across the board and favor capital gains tax cuts |
| Domestic program spending | Favor more spending or smaller cuts | Favor holding the line or larger cuts |
| National defense spending | Favor holding the line or larger cuts | Favor more spending or smaller cuts |
| Environmental policy | Highly support, with no roll back | Favor reducing government regulation to help business and development |
| Civil rights and affirmative action | Support aggressive enforcement | Oppose quotas and reverse discrimination |
| Crime policy | Support rehabilitation, address societal reasons for criminal behavior | Emphasize swift, sure punishment that fits the crime |
| Gun Control | Support | Oppose |
| Abortion rights | Support, "pro-choice" | Oppose, "pro-life" |
| Minimum wage | Favor keeping and increasing | Oppose increase because it would increase unemployment |
| Education | Favor more spending | Offer more parental choice, with vouchers for public or private schools |
| Health care | Favor greater government involvement and funding | Hold steady or reduce government role in, protect private healthcare system |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Balanced budget amendment | Oppose, as obstacle to flexible fiscal policy | Favor as necessary discipline on federal budget markers |
| Assistance to state and local government | Favor, targeting poorer communities, requiring compliance with national standards and policies | Offer less, giving funds and letting states and communities determine how to use them; more reticent about attaching strings to assistance |

TABLE B.2

Party Owned Issues (Petrocik 1996)

| <i>Issue Category</i> | <i>Democratic Issue</i> | <i>Republican Issue</i> | <i>Open Issues</i> |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Foreign Affairs: | War and Peace | China Defense Foreign Affairs (gen) Immigration Middle East Nuclear Weapons Soviet Union Terrorism Vietnam World Position | Foreign Aid |
| Economics: | Farming Labor Unemployment | Economics (gen) Home Purchases Home Starts Industry Inflation Interest Rates Jobs Prices Small Businesses Taxes Trade Wages | |
| Civil Rights: | | | |
| Government Management: | Women's Issues | Budget Deficit/Debt | Abortion Appointments Role of Govt. |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Social Control: | | Federalism Management(gen) Size Spending | Shut Down Special Interests |
| Miscellaneous Domestic issues: | Domestic violence | Crime Drugs Pornography | |
| | Aid to Disabled Day Care Education Elderly Care Energy Environment Medical Leave Healthcare Housing Infant Mortality Infrastructure Job Training Medicare Retirement Benefits Smoking Social Security Urban Aid Welfare Working Conditions | Deregulation | Religious Freedom Research and Technology Space |

APPENDIX C

CAMPAIGN MESSAGES IN CAMPAIGN SPEECHES

TABLE C.1.
The Effects of Vote Preferences on
Utilizing Positional vs. Valence Issues in Campaign Messages

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | -.005 (.01) | -.045** (.007) | -.033** (.005) |
| Pure Independent Support | .116** (.04) | .003 (.029) | .026 (.023) |
| Incumbency | -.076 (.101) | | -.398** (.069) |
| Days Prior to Election | -.0005 (.001) | .002** (.0007) | .0018** (.0005) |
| Constant | -.076 (.351) | 1.38** (.227) | 1.2** (.264) |
| Number of Observations | 199 | 146 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .07 | .21 | .23 |

Coefficients of the pooled model are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension.

**p<.01, *p<.05

TABLE C.2
The Effects of Vote Preferences on
Utilizing Positional vs. Valence Issues in Campaign Messages (Standardized)

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Electoral Base Support (STD) | -.132** (.05) | -.249** (.038) | -.216** (.029) |
| Swing Voter Support (STD) | .098** (.034) | .07* (.034) | .091** (.023) |
| Incumbency | -.19* (.094) | | -.372** (.067) |
| Days Prior to Election | -.0001 (.001) | .002** (.0007) | .0014** (.0005) |
| Constant | .002 (.053) | -.056 (.051) | .157 (.096) |

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----|------|------|
| Number of Observations | 199 | 146 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .07 | .228 | .261 |

Coefficients are cross sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

TABLE C.3
The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positive vs. Negative Tone in Campaign Speeches

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | .002 (.006) | .008 (.010) | .007 (.005) |
| Pure Independent Support | .093 (.059) | -.088* (.043) | -.0389 (.0338) |
| Days Prior to Election | .004** (.002) | .003* (.001) | .003** (.0008) |
| Constant | -.132 (.17) | .374 (.332) | -.384* (.178) |
| Number of Observations | 199 | 146 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .067 | .085 | .22 |

Coefficients are cross sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

TABLE C.4
The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positive vs. Negative Tone in Campaign Speeches (Standardized)

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Electoral Base Support (STD) | -.032 (.049) | .108* (.05) | .076* (.035) |
| Swing Voter Support (STD) | .074 (.053) | -.169** (.05) | -.066* (.03) |
| Days Prior to Election (STD) | .144** (.055) | .118** (.038) | .103** (.052) |
| Constant | .27** (.035) | .56** (.04) | -.083 (.07) |
| Number of Observations | 199 | 146 | 345 |
| R-Squared | .064 | .128 | .22 |

Coefficients are cross sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

APPENDIX D

CAMPAIGN MESSAGES IN ADVERTISEMENTS

TABLE D.1

The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positional vs. Valence Issues in Ads

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | -.068** (.024) | -.081** (.024) | -.08** (.0167) |
| Pure Ind. Support | -.167 (.112) | .079 (.095) | -.031 (.074) |
| Incumbency | -.671* (.366) | | -.711** (.281) |
| Days Prior to Election | .0004 (.003) | -.005* (.0026) | -.003* (.0019) |
| Constant | 2.836** (.9839) | 2.467** (.774) | 3.22** (.679) |
| Number of Observations | 46 | 41 | 87 |
| R-Squared | .269 | .5329 | .378 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

TABLE D.2

**The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positional vs. Valence Issues in Ads
(Standardized)**

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Electoral Base Support (STD) | -.35* (.178) | -.342* (.16) | -.432** (.115) |
| Swing Voter Support (STD) | -.025 (.114) | -.344* (.19) | -.06 (.09) |
| Incumbency | -.48 (.354) | | -.696** (.266) |
| Days Prior to Election (STD) | .001 (.093) | -.091 (.08) | -.093* (.05) |
| Constant | .268 (.185) | -.223** (.075) | .356* (.145) |
| Number of Observations | 46 | 41 | 87 |
| R-Squared | .23 | .562 | .379 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

TABLE D.3
The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Positive vs. Negative Tones in Ads

| Variables | 1992 | 2000 | Pooled |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Electoral Base Support | .004 (.041) | .0159 (.042) | -.001 (.02) |
| Pure Ind. Support | -.218 (.196) | -.198 (.165) | -.207* (.12) |
| Days Prior to Election | .014** (.638) | .005 (.0045) | .008** (.003) |
| Constant | -.077 (1.74) | .064 (1.35) | .231 (1.15) |
| Number of Observations | 46 | 41 | 87 |
| R-Squared | .156 | .114 | .16 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positive and negative message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05

APPENDIX E

CAMPAIGN MESSAGES IN ACCEPTANCE SPEECHES

TABLE E.1

**The Effects of Vote Preferences on Utilizing Messages in Acceptance Speeches,
1992-2012 (Standardized)**

| Variables | Positional-Valence Model | Positive-Negative Model |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Electoral Base Support (STD) | -.196* (.1) | .578** (.22) |
| Swing Voter Support (STD) | .35** (.13) | -.71* (.307) |
| Incumbency | -.099 (.16) | -.902* (.36) |
| Divisive | -.002 (.002) | .013* (.006) |
| Constant | -.192 (.251) | .013 (.238) |
| Number of Observations | 12 | 12 |
| R-Squared | .525 | .665 |

Coefficients are cross-sectional regression estimates with the positional and valence message dimension

**p<.01, *p<.05