Hearing the Campaign:
Candidate Messages, Public Perceptions, and Public Priorities

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DRAFT

(Of the Draftiest Sort)

Abstract

Presidential candidates, like all electoral candidates, attempt to influence the public's agenda, not only to change the basis of the vote decision, but also to set the direction of their hoped-for administration. Agenda setting during the presidential campaign improves the credibility of future mandate claims. Further, if citizens accept a candidate's messages about the importance of his campaign themes, these may develop into agenda expectations for which citizens may hold the president accountable.

This paper employs a national rolling-cross section survey conducted in the year leading up to the 2000 presidential election combined with daily advertising data to examine the dynamics of campaign agenda setting. I analyze the degree to which citizens perceived the candidates to be discussing various issues during the course of the campaign on the basis of the respondents' variable campaign environments and the effectiveness of the candidate issue emphasis on increasing the priority citizens give to a set of issues during the campaign.

Introduction

Recent scholarship on the concept of mandates demonstrates how presidents use the mandate argument strategically to influence lawmakers (Conley 2001); but strategic presidents must base their mandate claims on the issues emphasized in their campaigns. These claims are most valid when candidates have talked about an issue, citizens understand that a candidate has talked about an issue, and citizens agree with the assessment of the candidate that the issue is worthy of a high-level of national attention.

Using the 2000 presidential campaign, I examine whether citizens hear the issue content of the burgeoning advertising campaigns and whether they prioritize the issues the candidates are emphasizing in response. The campaign process is an opportunity for citizens to learn about the expectations they should hold for their leaders. If citizens do, indeed, learn in this way, the campaign serves as a more direct mechanism linking campaigns to future policy attention.

The present research focuses on the campaign period, but the broader implications are concerned with whether the campaign encourages conditions for accountability. Ultimately, if citizens hear a candidate emphasizing an issue, but do not agree that the issue is important, they are unlikely to hold the leader accountable for performance on the issue. Similarly, a citizen who prioritizes an issue but does not perceive the winning candidate to have focused on the issue may find little basis for holding the future president accountable for issue solutions. But when both conditions are met, when citizens both hear a candidate prioritizing an issue and prioritize the issue themselves, they are more likely to develop agenda expectations (or are more likely to be readily reminded of agenda promises) which can serve as a preliminary basis of accountability.

Setting the agenda

Changing citizens' issue priorities

The agenda-setting hypothesis - that "those problems that receive prominent attention on the national news become the problems the viewing public regards as the nation' most important" (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, p. 16) – has achieved wide currency. Evidence of agenda setting has been uncovered in experiments rating problem importance (Iyengar and Kinder 1987) as well as survey analysis correlating citizens' "most important problems" with the amount of issue coverage in the press (Behr and Iyengar 1985; Erbring et al 1980; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; McCombs and Shaw 1972). This evidence at both the individual level and the aggregate level provides a strong starting point.

What I will refer to as "the public agenda" is simply an aggregation of individual issue priorities.[1] Like other political opinions, issue priorities are formed from a combination of direct experience, exposure to and acceptance of elite or media messages, and predispositions (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). Issue priorities, however, rely more heavily on elite messages and less heavily on direct experience or predispositions than do issue position opinions.

Most citizens do not directly experience the "swarming confusion of problems," as Lippman noted decades ago (1922). Citizen priorities depend on social and political conditions, but media coverage and presidential attention have been found to be more important than actual conditions (Behr and Iyengar 1985; MacKuen 1981). Because the electorate relies on leaders and media to inform them of problems, to sound the "fire alarm" (Popkin 1991), they are particularly susceptible to persuasion regarding national political priorities.

In general, persuasion on issue positions requires that individuals both receive and ac-

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[1]The term "public agenda" is also used to refer to the set of problems government leaders intend to address, what Cobb and Elder (1972) referred to as the "institutional" or formal agenda. My use of public agenda is more akin to Cobb and Elder's "systemic agenda". I assume, in line with their work, that issues generally reach the institutional agenda after attaining some status on the systemic agenda.

cept elite messages about the issue or policy (McGuire 1969; Zaller 1992). Reception of elite messages varies based on political awareness (Zaller 1992). Altering issue priorities, too, relies on reception of elite messages by individuals,[2] but reception of the campaign agendas is advantaged by the pervasiveness of the messages. Roughly three-quarters of survey respondents in the 2000 National Election Studies report having seen a television ad about one of the candidates, and 60% report reading about the campaign in a newspaper in recent presidential campaigns.

Acceptance of elite messages – the second piece of the persuasion puzzle – varies based on awareness and predispositions. But issue priorities are less likely to be colored by partisan predispositions than are issue positions or solutions. Partisanship matters in problem identification, of course. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to view unemployment as an important problem, at both the mass and elite level. In general, though, there is more agreement between parties on the problems than on the solutions, particularly to the extent that campaigns focus most heavily on valence issues (crime, education), where there is only one real side, rather than position issues (abortion, prayer in schools). Most politicians claim to want to "save Social Security," though Democrats and Republicans support very different policies toward that end.

The public itself is more concerned that problems are "fixed" than with the pros and cons of various solutions (RePass 1971). Petrocik demonstrates the general consensus among voters of all stripes regarding which party will better handle particular problems (1996). When the issue agenda of the campaign favors one party, say the Republicans, traditionally Democratic voters are encouraged to defect. While ideologues may have strong preferences about particular policies, the average voter does not. Thus, while partisan predispositions may encourage standing priorities, and perhaps make individuals more likely to be exposed

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[2]With regard to agenda setting, in particular, MacKuen (1984) demonstrates that education, following politics and discussing politics – all correlates of political awareness – increase exposure to changing agenda coverage in the media.

to messages from their more preferred party, they do not provide a solid basis for resistance to messages once received.[3]

For issue priorities, then, partisan cues provide a less solid basis for resistance. Though resistance might be enhanced by political awareness to the extent it provides a greater understanding of "the world out there." MacKuen (1984), however, finds that higher education and more frequent political discussion do not provide much basis for resisting the integration of new messages into issue priority perceptions, though following politics does provide a basis for resistance.[4]

In short, acceptance of issue priority messages is less inhibited by partisan predispositions and political awareness than acceptance of issue position messages; thus, changing issue priorities should prove an easier hurdle to overcome than changing issue positions.

Campaign agendas and agenda setting

That citizen issue priorities are ripe for persuasion, however, does not guarantee that presidential candidates are the means of that persuasion. Most agenda-setting research treats the media as the primary agent of agenda influence. Agenda-setting studies often focus on campaign periods, and thereby conflate candidate agenda setting and media agenda setting (e.g., Erbring et al 1980; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Weaver 1981). Candidates, though, exert demonstrable influence on media emphasis and on the agenda more broadly (Flemming 1999; West 1997). In exercising discretion, candidates do not simply follow the lead of the public, but lead the public as well. And the limited resources available to candidates mean that the choices they make about what issues and ideas to emphasize contain information

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[3]Iyengar and Kinder (1987) also suggest the less partisan, the less educated, and the less politically interested will be more susceptible to agenda setting, though their multivariate analysis fails to bear this out.

[4]However, following politics also increases exposure to agenda messages, and the effect of exposure exceeds resistance among those who follow politics the most, making these individuals, in MacKuen's words, "the most responsive of all" (1984).

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about the candidates' real priorities.

Candidates, of course, do not construct campaign agendas by themselves, but pay attention to voter concerns and the agendas of their opponents. By virtue of their role as messengers, the media also play a role in agenda construction. But candidates, more than the media, actively attempt to convince the public of the salience of an issue, while agenda setting by the media is often an indirect consequence of news norms. Promotion of an issue or problem by a presidential candidate automatically frames the issue as both national in scope and important to the government. Presidential candidates talk about problems they would solve; out-party candidates often bring up problems the incumbent administration has presumably failed to address. Either way, presidential responsibility is implied. News coverage of issues, in contrast, exhibits more variation in the degree to which issues are framed as problems falling under the purview of national government (Iyengar 1991).

Contemporary presidential campaigns are very much about managing the campaign news (Cook 1998). And there is reason to believe they are quite successful. Political campaigns have been found to set the agenda of newspapers and television news via political advertising (Roberts and Maxwell 1994). Evidence from the 1992 election demonstrates that the issue focus in media-generated campaign stories and campaign-generated campaign stories in a national sample of newspapers were highly correlated (Dalton et al 1998), suggesting considerable candidate discretion in choosing the terms of the election. Kahn and Kenny find that in Senate campaigns, too, candidates can increase the news coverage of an issue by emphasizing it (1999), though the effect is particularly strong for challengers.

Further, presidential campaigns interact with the public in constructing a campaign agenda. Campaigns increasingly rely on public opinion polls and focus groups when developing their messages. Surely they take into account any noticeable uprising of concern for an issue. Yet there is little evidence that candidate agendas are driven by polls. Rather, candidates rely more on polls and focus group feedback to determine how to craft an issue

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message (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Issues of the utmost concern among the public cannot be ignored, but the public's issue concerns are rarely clear-cut (barring economic, domestic or foreign crises), and thus provide little clear guidance.

Candidates have discretion in agenda setting, but they do not have free reign, as they also must contend with their opponent's agendas. Despite rather dire claims about the absence of dialogue in contemporary campaigns (Simon 2002), the candidates frequently respond to one another's agendas, though often in an effort to de-emphasize their opponent's issues. In 2000, for example, when Al Gore charged George W. Bush with doing nothing to help seniors pay for their prescription drugs, Bush responded with a plan (albeit, a vague one), thereby hoping to make the issue less electorally relevant. From the voter's point of view, since both candidates possessed a plan, the problem would be addressed regardless who won. Candidates certainly have agendas they hope to publicize, but frequently find themselves in a position of discussing issues in hopes of diminishing them.

Given candidates have only limited time and resources with which to relay their adopted messages, choosing to focus on one set of issues rather than another during these communications represents an obvious opportunity cost to the candidates. Their choices regarding what issues to focus on are not simply cheap talk. Campaign messages impart information about a candidate's policy priorities. Even if candidates wish to remain ambiguous regarding their issue positions or their solutions to problems (Page 1978), they are necessarily clearer regarding what problems they believe need to be addressed. In some respects, the volume of attention to an issue speaks for itself. This clarity encourages citizen awareness of and responsiveness to those priorities.

Hearing issue priorities

For elections to contain issue information – whether for citizens in making a vote decision or for leaders in interpreting the meaning of the collective decision – it's imperative that

candidates both talk about issues and that citizens hear them doing so. Reception of priority messages from presidential campaigns is promoted by characteristics of both campaigns and citizens. Political information becomes more readily available during the campaign. At the same time, attention to politics increases among voters.[5] As part of their contribution to the political information environment, candidates repeat their dominant messages, increasing the chances that voters have received them.[6] These dominant messages frequently emphasize issue priorities over issue positions (Page 1978), which are more easily understood by voters and more easily communicated to them, for instance, in the relatively superficial communication forms that dominate the campaign.

The volume, repetition, and simplicity of candidates' issue priority messages increases the likelihood that citizens hear the candidates talk about certain issues. But what citizens "hear" a candidate talking about may also be a function of cognitive shortcuts like projection or heuristic inferences. Projection would imply that citizens who are concerned about an issue are ready to believe that a candidate they like is also concerned about an issue. Projection could also work negatively – citizens who are concerned about an issue are less ready to believe that a candidate they dislike is also concerned about the issue. Such self-based inference, though, may not be that common. Krosnick (1988) fails to find notable projection on candidate positions when projection effects are appropriately distinguished from persuasion and changes in sentiment toward the candidate. Conover and Feldman (1989), too, find projection less common than other inferential processes, particularly as the campaign wears on.

Conover and Feldman (1989), instead, emphasize inferences on the basis of candidate-categorization. Citizens use cues about a candidate's party, geographic origin, and demo-

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[5]The Vanishing Voter Project (Patterson, Kalb and Buhr 2001) nicely demonstrates this point for the 2000 campaign.

[6]The Bush administration has been especially open about this strategy. A January 14, 2005 Washington Post article notes the Bush strategy of using "campaign-honed techniques of mass repetition, never deviating from the script" to promote changes in Social Security (Allen and VandeHei 2005).

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graphics, they argue, to produce perceptions of candidate positions (see also Popkin 1991). The need to make inferences on the basis of heuristic information, though, is greater when the information that is being inferred is more ambiguous or difficult to obtain. Research on candidate perceptions focuses on candidate issue positions. Understanding a candidate's priorities should be a simpler process for citizens. Projection or, more likely, heuristic inferences are still quite possible with regard to "hearing" what a candidate is talking about, but they should play a lesser role than they do in "knowing" what a candidate's position is.

Hearing and prioritizing: Conditions for accountability

It is the combination of hearing, or perceiving to have heard, a candidate prioritize an issue and the prioritization of the issue by a citizen herself that sets the stage for future accountability. These outcomes themselves, hearing and prioritizing, need not be independent. Citizens hearing a candidate emphasize an issue may grant the issue a higher priority; citizens prioritizing an issue may be more likely to notice a candidate talking about the topic. And a similar set of characteristics may increase the probability of both of these outcomes. Characteristics of modern campaigning, in particular strategies of repetition, and of emphasizing priorities over positions, work to increase citizen reception of issue priority messages, to decrease information-processing costs, and to erode resistance to the priorities conveyed.

Research Design and Data

The 2000 study

This project relies on a national rolling cross-section survey conducted from November 1999 through Election Day 2000 combined with detailed advertising data to examine influences on hearing candidate talk on issues and prioritizing those issues.

The University of Wisconsin Survey Center administered the national telephone survey of the 48 contiguous states, conducting daily survey interviews from November 12, 1999 though March 5, 2001. The key questions of interest here involve citizen issue priorities, captured for four issues – improving education, reducing federal taxes, saving Social Security, and reforming health care – with closed-ended issue priority questions[7] and citizen perceptions of candidate attention to these same issues.[8] Sampling was carried out on a daily basis. Thus, each day's interviews represent a very small sample that is independent of every other day's sample. Approximately thirty interviews were completed each week, producing a total of 1,511 respondents through Election Day.

The survey data are combined with a data set of the presidential advertising campaign. The presidential advertising data are from the Campaign Media Analysis Group. This dataset tracks advertisements broadcast in the top seventy-five media markets, capturing information on what spot is aired, where it is aired, and when it is aired. The Wisconsin Advertising Project undertook extensive content analysis of these ads, including what issues, if any, are mentioned in each ad (Goldstein et al 2002).[9] Thus, I am able to incorporate information about the presidential campaign advertising environment for individual survey respondents.[10] While I cannot ascertain whether individuals actually saw the ads aired in

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[7]The questions read as follows, "As you know there are many important issues facing our country, but we have only limited resources for addressing these issues. Keeping this in mind, how much of a priority should the federal government give to [Saving Social Security], a very high priority, a high priority but not the highest, a medium priority, or a low priority." Respondents were asked to rate the priority they would give to each issue, with the order of issue presentation varied randomly.

[8]The survey questions read, "The presidential candidates talked about a variety of issues during this last campaign. Thinking about George W. Bush, how much did you hear him talking about [Improving Education] during the campaign? A great deal, quite a bit, some, very little, or not at all."

[9]The data was obtained from a joint project of The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law and Professor Kenneth Goldstein of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and includes media tracking data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group in Washington, D.C. The Brennan Center-Wisconsin project was sponsored by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Brennan Center, Professor Goldstein, or The Pew Charitable Trusts.

[10]Not every respondent resided in one of the top seventy-five media markets, however, so data on the information environment is unavailable for about 350 respondents.

their media markets, I can produce measures of how available candidate campaign issue themes were in a surveyed citizen's geographic and temporal context. Since much campaign information is transmitted via other sources – opinion leaders, social networks, or the mass media – the impact of such advertising does not rest solely on observation of the spots by individuals.

Issue priorities in 2000

While the 2000 presidential election will be remembered as one of the more peculiar electoral decisions in U.S. history, the campaign itself was not especially remarkable. Still, in arguing that the campaign influenced issue priorities, it would help to see that citizen issue priorities vary over time. Happily, this is the case in 2000.[11]

Figure 1 here

Education and Social Security are consistently rated as the highest priorities on average, followed by health care, with taxes trailing. These top two issues follow pretty similar paths, approximating the intensity of campaigning: peaking during the primaries, falling off during the slow summer season, rising again as the conventions approach, and trailing off to some extent after Election Day. Health care priority appears to be the most stable of the four, barely budging after the primary season. Taxes mirror the paths of education and Social Security priority up to convention season, but begin to decline in the general election.

Candidate advertising in 2000

What was the issue emphasis of the candidates' advertising during the campaign? While the 2000 campaign differed by region, with some areas receiving advertising saturation and

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[11]Figure one contains the average issue priority by week, smoothed via lowess regression.

others virtually ignored, it is helpful to get an overall sense of what the candidates focused on in the ads they actually aired.

The four issues tracked by the survey – education, health care, taxes, and Social Security – did indeed play a dominant role in the candidates' 2000 campaign agendas, though they were not all emphasized equally, nor were they emphasized to the same extent by each candidate.[12] A brief glance at Figure 2 reveals the degree to which the candidates (and the parties on behalf of the candidates) emphasized these issues in their advertising strategies. Bush and the RNC most frequently mentioned education in the ads they aired. Gore and the DNC emphasized health care above other topics. Mention of these issues far outpaced any other issue for each of the candidates. Social Security and taxes were also key issues, mentioned in 36% and 22% of the Bush ad airings, respectively, and in 14% and 26% of the Gore ad airings. In fact, these four issues were among the six most frequently mentioned issues in each of the candidates' ads.

(Insert Figure 2 here)

If the candidate messages influence citizen priorities, in the 2000 campaign these issues are some of the most likely issues to be affected. Of course, the presidential campaign is not a unitary entity. Candidates do not campaign as heavily, or with quite the same emphasis, everywhere; thus, citizens everywhere should not respond in a uniform fashion to the campaign. We can employ this variation in campaign contexts to compare the response of citizens inhabiting such different information environments.

Modeling Hearing and Prioritizing

I am interested in explaining two outcomes – hearing a candidate talk about an issue and prioritizing that issue highly – that are likely to be correlated. Thus, a model that allows for

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[12]All ads sponsored by the candidate's campaign or the national party committee are included.

correlation in the errors, something akin to a seemingly unrelated regression model, of these outcomes is preferable. Because both dependent variables are limited in nature, I chose to dichotomize each and employ the bivariate probit model (Greene 2000). Individuals calling an issue "a very high priority" are categorized as prioritizing the issue; individuals claiming to have heard a candidate talk about an issue "a great deal," or "quite a bit" are categorized as hearing candidate issue talk.[13]

The goal is to examine how candidate advertising emphasis influences hearing and prioritizing. But hearing and prioritizing also depend on other factors. Greater political awareness[14] should increase the probability of hearing campaign messages in general, but may decrease the likelihood of accepting a candidate priority message. Similarly, partisanship,[15] as a salient predisposition, may alter the perception of hearing – making partisans more likely to hear messages from their own candidates (either as a result of selective attention, projection, or heuristic-thinking) – and may influence the probability of prioritizing, as priorities themselves may be standing decisions based in partisanship.

In addition, the influence of candidate advertising emphasis may depend on awareness and partisanship. Candidate talk is more likely to be received by those paying attention, which suggests an interaction between candidate advertising emphasis and political awareness. Similarly, specific issue priorities promoted by candidates are less likely to be incorporated among the most aware. Partisanship, too, may condition the reception and acceptance of candidate issue messages, such that Democrats are likely to be more responsive to issue messages by Gore, and Republicans are more likely to respond to issue messages by Bush, suggesting an interaction between party attachment and candidate messages. And, of course, these characteristics – political awareness and partisanship – may condition one another

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[13]Ideally, a bivariate ordered probit model would be employed. This is an improvement for future revisions.

[14]The awareness scale is an additive index of three measures of attention to and interest in politics.

[15]Partisanship measured on a 7-point scale (-3 to 3), such that positive values represent degrees of Democratic identification and negative values denote levels of Republican identification.

and simultaneously condition hearing and prioritizing on the basis of candidate advertising emphasis. Thus, the most politically aware Democrats may be the most likely to hear the message conveyed by Gore's advertising emphasis, and the most likely to prioritize an issue in response.

Finally, individual characteristics may shape concern about, and thus, attention to messages about, an issue. Age, educational attainment, gender, and minority status are included as proxies for social positions and experiences that influence issue priorities.

Thus, the model of hearing and prioritizing an issue is:

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\begin{aligned}
Hearing\ issue_{im} \quad = \quad & \beta_0 + \beta_1 Ad\ emphasis_m + \beta_2 Aware_i + \beta_3 Party_i \quad\quad\quad\quad (1) \\
& \beta_4 Party_i \times Ad\ emphasis_m + \beta_5 Aware_i \times Ad\ emphasis_m \\
& + \beta_6 Aware_i \times Party_i + \beta_7 Party_i \times Aware_i \times Ad\ emphasis_m \\
& + \beta_8 Age_i + \beta_9 Education_i + \beta_{10} Female_i + \beta_{11} Minority_i + u_{1im} \\
Issue\ priority_{im} \quad = \quad & \beta_{12} + \beta_{13} Ad\ emphasis_m + \beta_{14} Aware_i + \beta_{15} Party_i \quad\quad\quad (2) \\
& \beta_{16} Party_i \times Ad\ emphasis_m + \beta_{17} Aware_i \times Ad\ emphasis_m \\
& + \beta_{18} Aware_i \times Party_i + \beta_{19} Party_i \times Aware_i \times Ad\ emphasis_m \\
& + \beta_{20} Age_i + \beta_{21} Education_i + \beta_{22} Female_i + \beta_{23} Minority_i + u_{2im}
\end{aligned}
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Here, i indexes individual respondents while m denotes the information environment, designated by a respondent's media market and time of interview. Hearing and prioritizing are not assumed to be independent in this model; in addition to responding to the same set of influences, the remaining conditional errors, u_{1im} and u_{2im} are allowed to covary (the expectation is one of positive covariance, as the more likely one is to hear about an issue, the more likely one is to prioritize an issue). This estimated correlation captures the influence of omitted factors that influence both outcomes simultaneously. The bivariate probit model

is estimated separately for each issue, and for each candidate's advertising emphasis.

The measure of candidate-issue ad emphasis requires further explanation. An individual's information environment is not only a function of the ads aired on the day they are interviewed, but depend on all the ads aired to which they or others in their social networks could have been exposed. In other words, the campaign information environment is a cumulative one (Salwen 1988). Accordingly, the measure of candidate-issue ads on any given day in a given media market is the sum of the ads on all days leading up to that one. It captures the number of times a candidate-issue connection has been made explicit within the campaign ads aired in a citizen's viewing area at the time of the interview.

In addition, the ad count was logged. Theoretically, it is implausible that a candidate could increase the priority of a given indefinitely simply by talking about it more and more. As an attempt at recognizing this constraint, I use the natural log of the ad count to reflect the decreasing marginal impact of more and more ad airings on the same issue.

Results

Tables 1 through 4 present the results. In a nutshell, the candidate advertising environment did influence the probability of hearing both candidates talk about education and Social Security, and for Gore, his advertising emphasis also influenced the likelihood of hearing Gore talk on taxes. In no case, though, was the influence of candidate talk conditioned by individual partisanship or awareness. The more each candidate emphasized education, Social Security, and for Gore, taxes, in a respondent's environment, the more likely respondents were to indicate hearing the candidates talking about these issues. In this sense, then, the candidate's messages, as conveyed in advertising, are getting through.

The influence of candidate advertising emphasis on priorities, though, is less clear cut. The only straightforward effect of candidate emphasis on issue priority occurs for Gore and

taxes, and the influence is negative. The more Gore emphasizes taxes in a targeted campaign area, the *less* likely individuals in that area were to prioritize taxes as an issue. Surely this is the direction Gore hoped for. Further, as Gore's emphasis on health care increased within an individual's media market, the more politically aware in that environment became less likely to prioritize health care. But this interaction was further conditioned by partisanship – aware Democrats became more likely to mention health care as the highest priority, aware Republicans became even more unlikely to do so.

A similar sort of result is seen for Bush and Social Security. The more advertising by Bush on Social Security in an area, the more likely the most aware respondents were to prioritize Social Security highly. This effect, again, is conditioned by party, such that aware Republicans were particularly responsive to Bush's Social Security message in shaping their priorities; aware Democrats, though, became less likely to prioritize Social Security as Bush emphasized it more heavily in the advertising campaign in their media markets.

Finally, in all but one case, the direction of the estimated correlations between the conditional errors are in the expected direction; but in no case do these correlations approach statistical significance. To the extent these decisions are correlated, the independent variables capture this dependency.

Education

Table 1 provides the results for hearing and prioritizing education. Briefly, the influence on hearing either Bush or Gore talk about education is essentially the same. For both candidates, individuals respond to the actual level of candidate talk about education (row 1). This is a reassuring result. In addition, while controlling for amount of candidate talk, the more politically aware are more likely to perceive both candidates talking about education (row 2). This might well be in response to education talk in other message media (newspapers, television) which vary less across media market. Partisanship (row 3) influences

perceptions of candidate talk for both Gore and Bush, as well. Democrats are more likely to notice Gore talking about education; Republicans are more likely to notice Bush talking about education. While the effect of partisanship could be picking up selective attention, projection, or heuristic thinking, the consistency across both Gore and Bush in this case preferences a selective attention or a projection explanation, as education hasn't traditionally been associated with the Republican party. Though actual candidate talk, partisanship and awareness have something to do with what citizens perceive candidates to be talking about, candidate talk is not conditioned by either partisanship or political attention (rows 4-7) – the effects are relatively general. Finally, age is related to perceptions of candidate talk on education (row 8); older respondents are more likely to indicate observing considerable attention to education on the part of the candidates.

Table 1 here

The priority models are similar across both candidates as well, unsurprisingly since the same dependent variable is being modeled in both cases. In both cases, partisanship (row 15) is one of the strongest predictors of education priority, such that Democrats grant education a higher priority, on average. On the one hand, this isn't terribly surprising, as education generally ranks as a higher priority in the Democratic platform, and thus party may serve here as a standing decision about what's important. On the other hand, given the intense attention Bush paid to education, one might have expected the gap between Republicans and Democrats to have diminished somewhat. Apparently Republicans did, indeed, resist the message of education priority on the basis of their partisanship. In addition, this result preferences the selective attention explanation for party's effect in hearing, above. A projection explanation would suggest that, caring about education less than Democrats, Republicans would be less likely to perceive Bush talking about education. Instead, while Republicans rate education as less important than Democrats, they indicated a greater like-

lihood of hearing Bush talk about it. Candidate issue emphasis, however, had no discernable influence on citizens' issue priorities, either directly (row 13) or conditionally as a function of partisanship, political awareness, or the conjunction of the two (rows 16,17, 19). Gender and minority status did influence prioritization of education (rows 22 and 23), such that women and minorities are more likely to rate it the highest priority.

Health Care

The results for health care are provided in Table 2. Again, there are similarities in what promotes hearing both Bush and Gore talk about health care, but for neither candidate, is actually talking about health care one of those factors (rows 1,4,5, and 7). Political awareness increases the probability of hearing Bush or Gore talk about health care, though the effect looks to be a little stronger for Gore (row 2). Since Gore emphasized health care more heavily than Bush, this seems an appropriate result. Partisanship also matters (row 3) – Democrats are more likely to perceive Gore to be talking about health care, and less likely to perceive Bush to be attending to the issue; the converse is true for Republicans. Respondent age (row 8), again, matters – older respondents are more likely to notice health care talk. After this, the results begin to diverge some for the candidates. Individual educational attainment, gender, and minority status are related to hearing Gore talk health care (rows 9-11), but education is only marginally related to hearing Bush talk heath care, and gender and minority status appear uncorrelated with these perceptions. Education, here, may be picking up something like political knowledge, and thus, that the more educated notice Gore talking about health care more and Bush talking about health care less than the less educated reasonably reflects the comparative attention the candidates paid to the issue.

Table 2 here

The priority citizens give to health care is, once again, related to partisanship (row 15). Democrats are more likely than Republicans to rate health care the highest priority. Older respondents (row 20) and minority respondents (row 23), too, grant health care a higher priority, while the more educated (row 21) are less likely to place it in the highest category. For Gore, though, there is some responsiveness to his ad emphasis, but the response is selective. The negative coefficient on the interaction between awareness and ad emphasis (row 16) indicates that the more politically aware, in general, were less likely to prioritize health care the more they were exposed to an information environment in which Gore talks a lot about health care. But the positive coefficient on the three-way interaction between awareness, partisanship, and ad emphasis (row 19) indicates that this negative effect is most pronounced among aware Republicans, and is transformed into a positive effect among aware Democrats. To the extent Gore was able to influence priorities on health care in his desired direction, he was only able to do so for his own partisans.

Social Security

For both Gore and Bush, the more they emphasized Social Security in their advertising campaigns, the more likely were individuals in the targeted media markets to indicate hearing the candidates talk about the issue (Table 3, row 1). As Social Security played an important role in this campaign, this is a comforting result – individuals do, at least some of the time, accurately perceive what the candidates are talking about. Once again, the more politically aware were more likely to report noticing the candidates talking about Social Security (row 2). And partisans were more likely to report hearing their own candidate emphasize the issue (row 3). For perceptions of Bush's attention to Social Security, partisanship and awareness appear to interact (row 6). Republicans, in general, were more likely to hear Bush talking about Social Security; but the more aware Republicans were even more likely to notice Bush's Social Security talk. Age continues to be related to perceptions of candidate talk (row 8) –

older respondents are more likely to hear both candidates emphasizing the issue. Minorities are more likely to indicate hearing Gore talk about Social Security (row 11), but this effect does not obtain for perceptions of Bush.

Table 3 here

Partisanship continues to be an important predictor of issue prioritization (row 15), with Democrats once again granting a higher priority than Republicans to Social Security. Social Security prioritization also appears to respond to Bush's advertising emphasis. In places where Bush's advertising campaign emphasized Social Security more, the more politically aware were more likely to rate Social Security the highest priority (row 16). This responsiveness is most pronounced among Republicans, but dampened among Democrats, as indicated by the significant and negative coefficient on the three-way interaction between party, awareness, and Bush's ad emphasis (row 19). Demographic characteristics seem particularly influential with regards to Social Security priority (rows 20-23); in particular, those in a position to rely more on Social Security – women, minorities, the elderly, and the less educated – are more likely to rate the issue the highest priority.

Taxes

Finally, the case of taxes is presented in Table 4. While the likelihood of hearing Gore talk about taxes responded positively to Gore's advertising campaign mentioning taxes, the likelihood of hearing Bush talk about taxes does not respond to Bush's actual attention to the issue (row 1). Political awareness increases the probability of hearing both candidates talk about taxes (row 2), though the effect appears to be a little stronger for Bush. Democrats are more likely to note Gore talking about taxes than are Republicans (row 3). Partisanship appears unrelated, though, to perceptions of Bush's emphasis. The influence of demographic characteristics vary between the candidates: as age increases, so does the likelihood of hearing

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both candidates emphasize taxes (row 8); the more educated are more likely to notice Bush talking about taxes, but not Gore (row 9); women are less likely to hear Bush talking about taxes, but gender makes no difference in perceptions of Gore (row 10); and minorities are more likely to perceive Gore to be talking about taxes, but minority status does not differentiate perceptions of Bush (row 11).

Table 4 here

The priority citizens give to taxes appears responsive to Gore's attention to the issue (row 13). The more his ad campaign mentions taxes, the less likely are individuals in targeted areas to prioritize taxes highly. Surely this the effect Gore would hope for, as he was unlikely to have the advantage on the issue.[16] A higher priority is also given to taxes among Republicans (row 15). And the effect of partisanship is enhanced by awareness (row 18). The most aware Democrats were particularly unlikely to rate taxes as a high priority; the most aware Republicans were particularly likely to do so. Finally, the most educated were less likely to rate taxes as the highest priority (row 21), and minority respondents were more likely to give a very high priority to the issue (row 23).

Discussion & Conclusion

In the 2000 campaign, the advertising emphasis of both Bush and Gore influenced what citizens believed they heard the candidates talking about – with Gore's emphasis influencing perceptions of his talk on education, Social Security, and taxes and Bush's emphasis influencing perceptions of his talk on education and Social Security. This is important, as citizens are often perceived to be quite ignorant of issue talk in campaigns. Much work on candidate perceptions focuses on the cognitive biases citizens use that are likely to induce

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[16]This points to a still poorly understood process – how candidates de-emphasize issues.

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a distorted understanding of candidates – selective attention, projection, or informational shortcuts. Surely citizens employ these cognitive mechanisms, otherwise the campaign environment should be one of the only things that matter, but so, too, do they respond to the actual campaign environment.

As for the cognitive biases at work, these results are more consistent with selective attention than with projection or inferential shortcuts. Democrats were more likely to indicate hearing Gore talk about each issue than were Republicans; Republicans were more likely to indicate hearing Bush talk about each issue than were Democrats. Yet some of these issues have clear party connections. Republicans "own" taxes; Democrats "own" health care and (so far) education (Petrock 1996). If citizens were guessing about candidate talk on the basis of party cues, Democrats and Republicans alike should "hear" Gore talking less about taxes, and Bush talking less about health care. In addition, priorities were consistently related to partisanship. If projection were the dominant influence on perceptions of candidate talk, Republicans, who place less of a priority on education, health care and Social Security, should be less likely to "hear" Bush talking about these; Democrats should "hear" Gore talking less about taxes. I don't mean to argue that these processes are not operating, only that they do not appear to be the dominant forces at play.

Issue priorities, on the other hand, appear less responsive to candidate messages, playing some role in only three out of the eight candidate-issue combinations considered here. Further, when candidate messages alter issue priorities, they are more likely to do so selectively. The effect of Gore's health care emphasis depended on awareness and partisanship; the effect of Bush's Social Security attention depended on awareness and partisanship; only Gore's attention to taxes had anything resembling a general influence.

Indeed, partisanship played a bigger role than originally suspected in determining priorities, even for these less controversial issue priorities. Party is both operating as a standing decision about what issues are important and serving as a means for resisting candidate

entreaties to prioritize an issue more highly.

While these responses, hearing and prioritizing, may be related, any dependency between them appears to be entirely captured by the campaign environment, and individual attributes like party and awareness. Across each of the eight models there remained no significant correlation among the errors.

American citizens are not widely regarded for their ability to attend to a campaign. Consequently, when we talk about accountability, we generally have in mind a rather thin form of accountability – voting the rascals out in response to economic failure or foreign crisis (Fiorina 1981). I want to suggest that citizens may be capable of more, of holding leaders accountable for the problems they emphasized in the campaign. Though for this to occur, citizens must hear candidates talking about problems, and they must care about those problems. While this doesn't seem to happen in all cases, across all issues, the analyses here indicate that candidate emphasis frequently plays an important role in promoting these conditions of accountability. More often, candidate campaigns promote hearing about the issues, so that people, upon reflection, can say, " Why yes, Bush *did* prioritize education in the campaign." This reflection encourages accountability for addressing an issue. Less often and more selectively, candidate campaigns encourage citizens to prioritize the issues themselves.

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Table 1. Hearing and Prioritizing Education as a Function of Candidate Talk

| | Hearing Candidate Education Talk | | | | | |
| | Gore | | | Bush | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
1. Candidate ad emphasis	0.056	0.021	0.007	0.040	0.014	0.003
2. Political awareness	0.561	0.064	0.000	0.356	0.078	0.000
3. Partisanship	0.136	0.023	0.000	-0.073	0.028	0.009
4. Aware × ad emphasis	-0.066	0.055	0.228	0.024	0.035	0.495
5. Party × ad emphasis	0.002	0.010	0.880	0.001	0.007	0.874
6. Party × aware	-0.013	0.030	0.661	-0.032	0.035	0.359
7. Party × aware × ad emphasis	0.017	0.013	0.184	-0.001	0.008	0.941
8. Age	0.006	0.003	0.013	0.008	0.003	0.001
9. Education	0.032	0.040	0.420	-0.033	0.040	0.413
10. Female	-0.107	0.084	0.203	-0.064	0.085	0.455
11. Minority	0.328	0.109	0.003	0.018	0.114	0.876
12. Constant	-0.707	0.195	0.000	-0.890	0.199	0.000

| | Prioritizing Education | | | | | |
| | Gore | | | Bush | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
13. Candidate ad emphasis	-0.001	0.020	0.979	0.013	0.013	0.317
14. Political awareness	0.021	0.057	0.714	-0.031	0.069	0.658
15. Partisanship	0.091	0.022	0.000	0.116	0.026	0.000
16. Aware × ad emphasis	-0.009	0.053	0.869	0.019	0.028	0.482
17. Party × ad emphasis	0.000	0.010	0.963	-0.010	0.006	0.137
18. Party × aware	0.035	0.028	0.210	0.038	0.031	0.226
19. Party × aware × ad emphasis	-0.002	0.012	0.884	-0.002	0.006	0.802
20. Age	-0.005	0.002	0.058	-0.005	0.002	0.066
21. Education	-0.012	0.039	0.766	-0.007	0.039	0.856
22. Female	0.315	0.081	0.000	0.310	0.081	0.000
23. Minority	0.239	0.112	0.032	0.238	0.111	0.033
24. Constant	0.420	0.190	0.027	0.367	0.193	0.058
25. ρ	0.003	0.054	0.954	0.057	0.054	0.294
Log Likelihood	-1303.989			-1273.408		
Model χ^2	215.500			157.040		
N	1072			1072		

Notes: Estimates are bivariate probit estimates obtained via maximum likelihood.

Table 2. Hearing and Prioritizing Health Care as a Function of Candidate Talk

| | Hearing Candidate Health Care Talk | | | | | |
| | *Gore* | | | *Bush* | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
1. Candidate ad emphasis	0.004	0.018	0.811	0.009	0.017	0.602
2. Political awareness	0.450	0.064	0.000	0.291	0.080	0.000
3. Partisanship	0.066	0.023	0.004	-0.064	0.029	0.029
4. Aware × ad emphasis	-0.015	0.050	0.770	-0.009	0.039	0.816
5. Party × ad emphasis	0.014	0.009	0.128	-0.002	0.008	0.826
6. Party × aware	0.019	0.030	0.539	-0.004	0.037	0.906
7. Party × aware × ad emphasis	0.002	0.011	0.855	-0.004	0.009	0.670
8. Age	0.011	0.003	0.000	0.011	0.003	0.000
9. Education	0.104	0.040	0.009	-0.087	0.045	0.052
10. Female	-0.184	0.083	0.027	-0.087	0.094	0.354
11. Minority	0.426	0.108	0.000	0.198	0.125	0.113
12. Constant	-1.077	0.195	0.000	-1.190	0.221	0.000

| | Prioritizing Health Care | | | | | |
| | *Gore* | | | *Bush* | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
13. Candidate ad emphasis	-0.012	0.018	0.488	-0.013	0.014	0.378
14. Political awareness	0.100	0.058	0.084	0.075	0.064	0.238
15. Partisanship	0.126	0.022	0.000	0.108	0.025	0.000
16. Aware × ad emphasis	-0.128	0.046	0.005	-0.041	0.030	0.176
17. Party × ad emphasis	-0.011	0.009	0.235	0.002	0.007	0.719
18. Party × aware	0.019	0.028	0.498	0.025	0.030	0.392
19. Party × aware × ad emphasis	0.022	0.010	0.038	0.007	0.007	0.277
20. Age	0.012	0.002	0.000	0.012	0.002	0.000
21. Education	-0.128	0.039	0.001	-0.126	0.039	0.001
22. Female	0.143	0.081	0.075	0.143	0.080	0.074
23. Minority	0.281	0.107	0.009	0.279	0.107	0.009
24. Constant	-0.280	0.187	0.136	-0.269	0.189	0.154
25. ρ	0.018	0.053	0.730	0.081	0.060	0.176
Log Likelihood	-1327.952			-1163.539		
Model χ^2	233.800			138.190		
N	1065			1065		

Notes: Estimates are bivariate probit estimates obtained via maximum likelihood.

Table 3. Hearing and Prioritizing Social Security as a Function of Candidate Talk

| | Hearing Candidate Social Security Talk | | | | | |
| | *Gore* | | | *Bush* | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
1. Candidate ad emphasis	0.069	0.028	0.015	0.044	0.017	0.009
2. Political awareness	0.521	0.062	0.000	0.182	0.073	0.013
3. Partisanship	0.092	0.022	0.000	-0.106	0.026	0.000
4. Aware × ad emphasis	0.073	0.094	0.436	0.037	0.042	0.370
5. Party × ad emphasis	-0.001	0.015	0.947	-0.006	0.008	0.471
6. Party × aware	-0.011	0.030	0.713	-0.068	0.034	0.042
7. Party × aware × ad emphasis	-0.016	0.021	0.435	-0.003	0.009	0.731
8. Age	0.013	0.003	0.000	0.014	0.003	0.000
9. Education	0.041	0.040	0.297	-0.014	0.043	0.747
10. Female	-0.152	0.084	0.071	-0.077	0.090	0.393
11. Minority	0.335	0.110	0.002	0.126	0.122	0.304
12. Constant	-1.085	0.197	0.000	-1.434	0.217	0.000

| | Prioritizing Social Security | | | | | |
| | *Gore* | | | *Bush* | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
13. Candidate ad emphasis	-0.030	0.028	0.277	-0.008	0.015	0.611
14. Political awareness	0.050	0.055	0.360	0.022	0.063	0.721
15. Partisanship	0.060	0.021	0.004	0.060	0.024	0.012
16. Aware × ad emphasis	0.097	0.080	0.226	0.089	0.036	0.013
17. Party × ad emphasis	-0.008	0.015	0.590	-0.002	0.008	0.816
18. Party × aware	0.018	0.027	0.511	0.042	0.030	0.157
19. Party × aware × ad emphasis	-0.027	0.019	0.164	-0.021	0.008	0.009
20. Age	0.019	0.003	0.000	0.018	0.003	0.000
21. Education	-0.171	0.039	0.000	-0.173	0.039	0.000
22. Female	0.272	0.081	0.001	0.264	0.081	0.001
23. Minority	0.333	0.108	0.002	0.329	0.108	0.002
24. Constant	-0.335	0.187	0.073	-0.312	0.189	0.100
25. ρ	0.020	0.054	0.713	0.042	0.057	0.458
Log Likelihood	-1297.465			-1199.635		
Model χ^2	253.890			208.520		
N	1067			1067		

Notes: Estimates are bivariate probit estimates obtained via maximum likelihood.

Table 4. Hearing and Prioritizing Taxes as a Function of Candidate Talk

| | Hearing Candidate Tax Talk | | | | | |
| | Gore | | | Bush | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
1. Candidate ad emphasis	0.057	0.025	0.022	0.017	0.015	0.231
2. Political awareness	0.205	0.069	0.003	0.555	0.078	0.000
3. Partisanship	0.052	0.025	0.036	-0.026	0.027	0.333
4. Aware × ad emphasis	-0.003	0.063	0.963	0.010	0.040	0.807
5. Party × ad emphasis	-0.007	0.012	0.558	-0.005	0.007	0.517
6. Party × aware	0.008	0.033	0.813	-0.009	0.036	0.795
7. Party × aware × ad emphasis	-0.001	0.014	0.920	-0.003	0.009	0.745
8. Age	0.010	0.003	0.001	0.006	0.003	0.026
9. Education	-0.060	0.044	0.169	0.089	0.040	0.027
10. Female	0.067	0.094	0.478	-0.222	0.084	0.009
11. Minority	0.427	0.117	0.000	0.111	0.112	0.321
12. Constant	-1.363	0.218	0.000	-0.927	0.200	0.000

| | Prioritizing Taxes | | | | | |
| | Gore | | | Bush | | |
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
13. Candidate ad emphasis	-0.073	0.026	0.006	-0.014	0.014	0.329
14. Political awareness	-0.006	0.056	0.913	-0.110	0.067	0.099
15. Partisanship	-0.107	0.022	0.000	-0.144	0.026	0.000
16. Aware × ad emphasis	0.009	0.057	0.873	0.003	0.030	0.921
17. Party × ad emphasis	-0.021	0.013	0.103	0.010	0.007	0.135
18. Party × aware	-0.067	0.028	0.015	-0.102	0.030	0.001
19. Party × aware × ad emphasis	-0.002	0.014	0.899	0.012	0.007	0.073
20. Age	0.001	0.003	0.686	0.001	0.003	0.744
21. Education	-0.111	0.040	0.006	-0.099	0.040	0.013
22. Female	0.027	0.083	0.745	0.025	0.083	0.759
23. Minority	0.367	0.107	0.001	0.402	0.108	0.000
24. Constant	-0.212	0.191	0.268	-0.269	0.194	0.167
25. ρ	0.051	0.060	0.396	-0.017	0.056	0.767
Log Likelihood	-1118.479			-1253.354		
Model χ^2	112.110			197.140		
N	1071			1071		

Notes: Estimates are bivariate probit estimates obtained via maximum likelihood.

Figure 1. Mean Issue Priority by Week

Figure 2. Candidate Advertising Emphasis

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