

Ansolabehere & Iyengar, "The Studies," *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink & Polarize the Electorate* (NY:Free Press, 1995)

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THE STUDIES

Forty years after the onset of large-scale campaign advertising, there is surprisingly little agreement over the effects of broadcast advertising on voters and elections. Obviously, the candidates and their political strategists impute considerable power to the thirty-second advertisement. Academic researchers, however, have been hard-pressed to identify any effects and have concluded that campaigns in general and campaign advertising in particular are relatively unimportant determinants of electoral outcomes. In fact, political scientists routinely forecast presidential and statewide elections using models that ignore campaign-related factors altogether. Presidential elections, for instance, are thought to hinge on the state of the country's economy and the popularity of the incumbent president, with the competing campaigns having negligible effects on the outcome.⁸

For a multi-billion-dollar industry to leave no traces of influence on its targets is mysterious. And despite the claims of the academics, such an influence is hardly demonstrated. The primary impediment to a more sophisticated and thorough understanding of the effects of political advertising has been technical. Most of the "minimal effects" evidence uncovered by researchers in the political communication field rests on sample surveys or polls. Surveys are ill-equipped to detect the effects of campaign advertising. This chapter describes a more powerful alternative to surveys—the controlled experiment.

Survey researchers who study the effects of campaigns rely on the logic of correlation. A representative sample of voters is contacted (generally over the phone) and asked various questions about their exposure to campaign messages. How often do they watch television news, listen to talk radio, read a newspaper, or converse about politics? Which prime-time programs do they watch? Do they remember watching any campaign advertisements? Which candidate do they prefer and why? And so on.

Responses to these questions provide the basis for assessing the effects of campaign communication. In an important study of the 1972 campaign by Patterson and McClure, for instance,⁹ survey respondents who reported watching television news frequently were considered under the potential influence of news reports, while those who could recall having watched a Nixon or McGovern advertisement were thought to be under the potential influence of advertising. For each medium of communication, Patterson and McClure compared users with nonusers. They discovered that people who could recall an advertisement were more informed about the candidates' positions on the issues than those who could not, whereas people who watched the news frequently were not as "advantaged" as those who watched the news less frequently. On the basis of this pattern of differences between users and nonusers, Patterson and McClure concluded that campaign advertising was more informative than television news coverage.

This inference, however, is questionable on several grounds. Individuals' memory for past events is notoriously frail, especially when the "event" in question concerns what they saw or did not see on television. Some survey respondents may have surmised that since it was election time, they must have seen a political advertisement. Among participants in our experimental studies who were exposed to *no* campaign advertisement, for example, 20 percent claimed to have seen one. Alternatively, many people who were unable to recall watching an advertisement may in fact have done so (repeatedly), only to then forget it. In our experiments, nearly half of all people who were exposed to a thirty-second advertisement could not recall that they had seen a political advertisement just one-half hour later.¹⁰ In short, survey measures of exposure to campaign communication are likely to be riddled with errors. Since exposure to communication is basic,

survey researchers are at an inherent disadvantage in the search for communication effects.

Even if we were to assume that survey researchers' indicators of exposure were "true," their ability to monitor the effects of campaign advertising would still be hindered. Consider the case of advertising recall. People who are able to remember a political advertisement differ in innumerable ways from those who cannot. In addition to having better memories, they are likely to be more interested in politics, more devoted to the candidates, more concerned about the issues, and more likely to vote. In Patterson and McClure's study, was it exposure to the candidates' advertisements that made voters who could recall watching an advertisement more aware of where McGovern and Nixon stood on the issues? Or was it their greater interest in politics that made them both more informed and more likely to attend to political advertising? Even worse, was it their superior information that allowed them to remember campaign advertisements? In general, the presence of multiple differences between voters deemed to be advertisers and nonwatchers makes it difficult for survey researchers to isolate the effects of advertising on any particular political response. While those who pour hundreds of millions of dollars into campaign advertising would like to know just what they get for their money, so far most survey researchers studying the effects of campaign communication have come away empty-handed.

The alternative to the sample survey is the controlled experiment. It is no accident that experimentation is the methodological paradigm of choice in all scientific disciplines. Because the researcher himself manipulates the phenomenon under investigation, he knows that the experimental participants were either exposed or not exposed to it. In the case of advertising, an "experimental" group is shown a particular advertisement, and a "control" group is not shown the advertisement. Because participants are assigned to the two conditions on a purely random basis, the researcher can be confident that the conditions will be no different from each other in composition.¹¹ These two basic features of the experiment—the ability to exercise physical control over the experimental stimulus and the use of comparison groups that are equivalent in all respects but the presence of the experimental stimulus—provide researchers with the all-important ability to attribute any

observed difference between the experimental and control groups to the effects of the experimental stimulus. If, for example, the experimental group proves to be more informed than the control group, the researcher knows that this difference was caused by exposure to political advertising, and nothing else.

Of course, experiments are not without their own liabilities. Most experiments are administered upon "captive" populations—college students who must serve as guinea pigs to gain course credit. As the eminent experimental psychologist Carl Hovland warned many years ago, college sophomores are not comparable to "real people."¹² A further weakness of the typical experiment is the somewhat sterile, laboratory-like environment in which it is administered, an environment that bears little resemblance to the noise and confusion of election campaigns. Clearly, a considerable leap of faith is required to generalize experimental results to the real world.

Our own studies were designed to overcome the limited generalizability of the experimental method. The experimental participants represented a fair cross-section of the electorate, the experimental setting was casual and designed to emulate "real life," and our studies all took place during ongoing political campaigns characterized by extensive advertising.

GENERALIZABLE EXPERIMENTS

We enhanced the realism and generalizability of our studies in several ways. Campaigns do not occur in a vacuum, and most voters hold a variety of beliefs and expectations about the parties and candidates. We were able to capture the interplay between "old" and "new" information because each of our experiments took place during an actual campaign and featured real candidates—Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, males and females, incumbents and challengers—as the advertisers.

Second, the advertisements used in our experimental studies were highly realistic. They were either selected from advertisements being used by the candidates at the time or were produced by us to emulate typical campaign advertisements. In the case of our own productions, we spliced together footage from actual advertisements or news re-

ports using studio-quality editing technology, making it difficult for all but the most sophisticated viewers to detect any differences between the experimental manipulations and the "real thing."

Not only did we rely on real instead of artificial presentations, our manipulations were also unobtrusive and presented in a "natural" setting. We embedded the experimental advertisements (and, in some cases, news reports) in a fifteen-minute recording of a recent local evening newscast. Candidates advertise heavily during local news programs (because the audience for news includes a large proportion of likely voters) and the appearance of the experimental campaign advertisement in the local newscast was thus inconspicuous.¹³

Significantly, the use of local news as the vehicle for the advertising manipulation permitted us to incorporate important elements of news coverage. In some cases, our studies focused on the joint effects of news and advertising. Following the 1992 Los Angeles riots, for instance, we produced advertisements that called for "law and order" and paired these advertisements with news stories about widespread looting during the riots. In other cases, we paired campaign advertisements with "ad-watch" reports that analyzed the advertisements.

We further minimized the aura of the "research laboratory" by presenting the experimental news tapes in an informal, living room-like setting. The viewing room was furnished with a couch, easy chairs, coffee table, and potted plants. Participants could snack on cookies and coffee while they watched the news, and in most cases participants came accompanied by a friend or co-worker.

We also enhanced the validity of the results by diverting participants from the true objectives of the study. Had we explained our interest in the effects of advertising at the outset, participants might have felt it necessary to pay careful attention during the commercial breaks (which would have been uncharacteristic of normal viewing patterns). We sought to eliminate the potentially biasing effects of "experimental demand" by telling participants that the research concerned "selective perception" of local news ("Do Democrats and Republicans really see the same news?"). Since the experimental stimulus consisted of a segment of a local newscast, this account of our intentions was intuitively credible. At the end of the study, of course, we fully informed the participants of the true purpose of the study.

An especially important step toward boosting the generalizability of our results was the use of a large, diverse pool of subjects (more than 3,000) who were reasonably representative of the Southern California voting-age population. Unlike the usual social science experiment, which relies heavily on conscripted college sophomores as subjects, our participants were people from many walks of life and included adults of all ages, employed and unemployed, whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics, men and women, city dwellers and suburbanites, and so forth.

Last, but not least, we administered numerous replications of each basic experimental design. These repetitions encompassed a large number of different candidates, issues, offices, campaigns, and time periods. Our studies included men and women candidates, incumbents and challengers, primary and general elections, two-candidate and multicandidate races, partisan and nonpartisan elections, and campaigns for President, U.S. Senator, Governor, and Mayor (of Los Angeles). This broad range of candidates and electoral contexts makes it most unlikely that our results are valid only for particular types of campaign or are otherwise idiosyncratic.

In summary, our studies differ from the typical laboratory experiment in several fundamental respects. We devised experimental manipulations that were relevant and realistic. The experimental setting was natural and the procedures unobtrusive. The people who participated in our studies were ordinary voters who, on election day, would have to choose between the candidates whose advertisements they had watched.

EXPERIMENTAL CONTROL

Despite our efforts to achieve a maximal degree of realism, the experiments did not compromise rigorous control over voters' exposure to campaign advertising. We devised two basic designs corresponding to the use of either one or two campaign advertisements. In the one-advertisement design, we limited the experimental manipulation to a single thirty-second commercial. In most (but not all) of the one-ad studies, we produced the experimental advertisement ourselves and aired it on behalf of several different candidates. As noted previously, our

advertisements met high standards of production and, unless the viewer was a political consultant, could not be distinguished from the flurry of political advertisements confronting the typical voter every day.

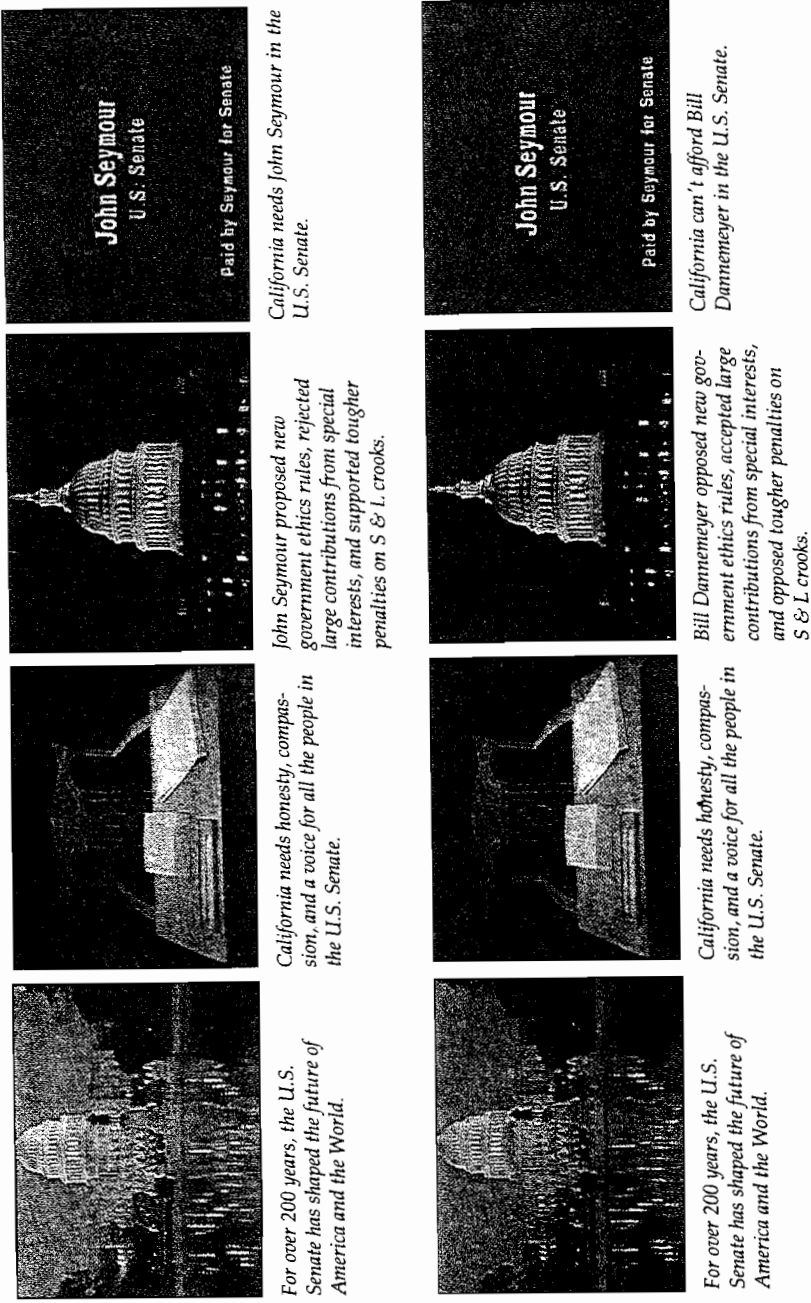
The objective of the one-ad design was to assess the influence of exposure to a single advertisement and to provide a precise estimate of the effects of particular characteristics of advertisements. Because advertisements aired by different candidates differ in numerous respects, it is virtually impossible to isolate the effects of any particular attribute of actual campaign advertisements. A positive and negative advertisement for Clinton will differ not only in their tone, but in the visuals, text, voice of the announcer, and musical background as well. It can be hard to disentangle the effects of any one component of the advertisement, and the researcher cannot be sure that it is advertising tone that is responsible for any differences in the effects of the positive and negative advertisements.

The one-ad design overcomes the "confounded variables" problem and isolates the effects of a single attribute of campaign advertisements, in most cases, advertising tone or valence. The advertisements that we produced were *identical* in all respects but for their tone and the candidate sponsoring the advertisement. Figure 2.1 describes the manipulation of advertising tone in the 1992 Senate primary election study. Viewers watched a thirty-second advertisement that either promoted the sponsor or attacked the opponent(s) on the general trait of "integrity." As illustrated in Figure 2.1, the visuals featured a panoramic view of the Capitol Building and the camera then zoomed in to a closeup of an unoccupied desk inside a Senate office. In the "positive" treatments (using the example of candidate John Seymour), the text read by the announcer was as follows:

FOR OVER 200 YEARS THE UNITED STATES SENATE HAS SHAPED THE FUTURE OF AMERICA AND THE WORLD. TODAY, CALIFORNIA NEEDS HONESTY, COMPASSION, AND A VOICE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE U.S. SENATE. AS U.S. SENATOR, JOHN SEYMOUR *PROPOSED* NEW GOVERNMENT ETHICS RULES. HE *REJECTED* LARGE CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SPECIAL INTERESTS. AND JOHN SEYMOUR *SUPPORTED* TOUGHER PENALTIES ON SAVINGS AND LOAN CROOKS.

CALIFORNIA *NEEDS* JOHN SEYMOUR IN THE U.S. SENATE.

FIGURE 2.1
Manipulating Advertising Tone: Senate Primary Study



In the “negative” version of this Seymour spot, the text was modified as follows:

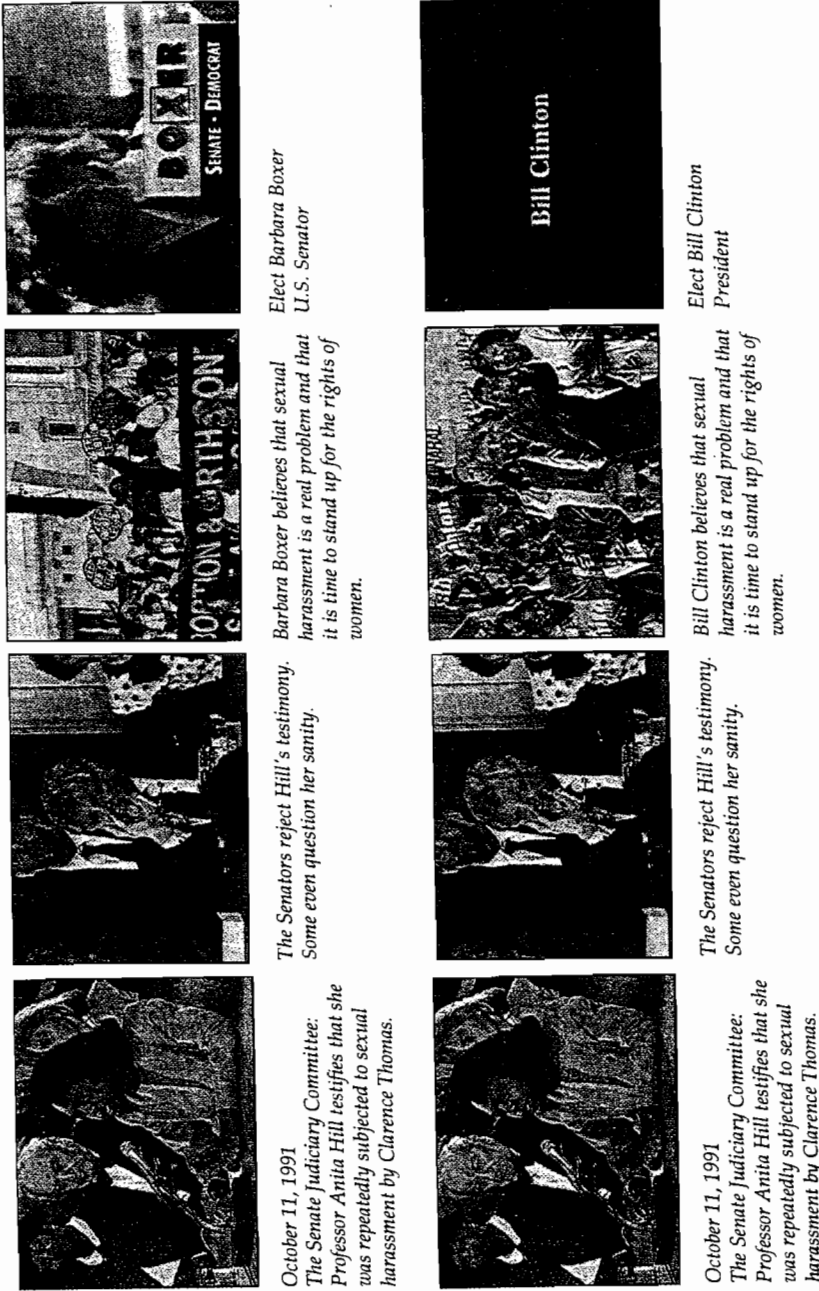
... CONGRESSMAN BILL DANNEMEYER *OPPOSED* NEW GOVERNMENT ETHICS RULES. HE *ACCEPTED* LARGE CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SPECIAL INTERESTS. AND BILL DANNEMEYER *OPPOSED* TOUGHER PENALTIES ON SAVINGS AND LOAN CROOKS. CALIFORNIA *CAN'T AFFORD* A POLITICIAN LIKE BILL DANNEMEYER IN THE U.S. SENATE.

In this way, by holding the visual elements constant and by using the same announcer, we limited differences between the conditions to differences in advertising tone alone.¹⁴ With appropriate modifications to the wording, the identical pair of advertisements was also aired on behalf of Dannemeyer, and for the various candidates contesting the other Senate primaries.

In other instances, we used the one-ad design to assess the extent to which the effects of advertising were conditioned by voters’ pre-existing beliefs about the sponsoring candidate. In some studies we showed viewers the identical issue-oriented advertisement from each of the competing candidates and varied the degree to which the issue in question was stereotypically “male” or “female.” As shown in Figure 2.2, the same advertisement on women’s issues was presented either as an advertisement for Barbara Boxer or as a spot for Bill Clinton.

A further extension of the one-ad design assessed the extent to which the effects of advertising were conditioned by voters’ partisan beliefs. In some studies we showed viewers the identical issue-oriented advertisement from each of the competing candidates but varied the degree to which the issue in question was stereotypically “Democratic” or “Republican.” In one experiment, for example, the identical “law and order” advertisements were aired on behalf of Senate candidates Barbara Boxer (Democrat), Dianne Feinstein (Democrat), Bruce Herschensohn (Republican), and John Seymour (Republican). Because the advertisements were replicas of each other (with the exception of the name and party of the sponsoring candidate), any differences in the effectiveness of the advertisement can be attributed only to the attributes of the sponsor. Thus, a stronger impact for a Republican

FIGURE 2.2
Manipulating the Sponsor: Women's Issues



sponsor would suggest that Republican candidates are especially credible on the issue of crime.

The final application of the one-advertisement design concerned the effects of ad-watch news reports. In these studies, which were aimed at the 1992 presidential campaign and the Feinstein versus Seymour 1992 California Senate race, participants watched a campaign advertisement that was followed by a news report that scrutinized and evaluated the same advertisement. The ad-watch reports were taken from CNN's "Inside Politics" program.¹⁵ In each case, the report began by replaying segments of the campaign advertisement, then raised questions about the facts and information presented, and concluded by rating the advertisement as either inaccurate or misleading. This arrangement captures the effects of exposure to ad-watch journalism as well as the extent to which the "targeted" candidate's advertising is strengthened or weakened by ad-watches.

The Two-Advertisement Design

In this design (which was used in four of our experiments), participants watched two advertisements, one from each of the candidates. Within this "paired" arrangement, we varied both the tone and content of the advertising. Thus, the spots were either negative or positive and addressed particular issues or personal attributes of the candidates. In one study, for instance, gubernatorial candidates Dianne Feinstein and Pete Wilson discussed either their competence or their integrity. In general, the content of the advertisements in the two-ad studies corresponded to the dominant theme of the respective campaigns. In one of our 1992 senatorial studies, for instance, Republican Bruce Herschensohn either attacked Barbara Boxer as a Washington "insider" who bounced checks with impunity or promoted his own "outsider" status. Democrat Boxer either promoted her legislative accomplishments on behalf of women or attacked Herschensohn as an ideological extremist. Similarly, in the 1992 presidential race, we used advertisements that varied in tone, but that focused on the state of the economy. Former President Bush either promoted his own economic record or attacked challenger Clinton's economic performance as Governor of Arkansas. For his part, Clinton

either attacked Bush on the state of the economy or promoted the "Arkansas miracle."

The principal objective of the two-ad design was to pursue questions relating to advertising strategy. Voters are exposed to information from different sources, and advertising is but one element of the campaign environment. The differing elements may interact to influence voters' choices. Most important, the effects of a particular candidate's advertisements may be conditioned by the opponent's advertising. If the effects of campaign advertisements are interdependent, then what candidates can hope to accomplish depends on their ability to anticipate or outguess their opponent.

The idea that advertising is a reactive "debate" is especially important in political campaigns. Unlike product manufacturers and retailers, candidates for public office feel free to air advertisements that feature their opponents. Campaigns have increasingly turned to "attack advertising," in which candidates or their surrogates attack or discredit their opponents. Although the impact of attack messages is thought to depend on certain qualities of the sponsoring and targeted candidates (such as their popularity), practitioners generally acknowledge that it is the response of the attacked candidate that is most important. It was our two-ad studies that allowed us to test exactly which kinds of responses work best in various situations.

The question of advertising tone is but one element of the strategic equation. Candidates must also select a particular theme for their advertising campaign. A candidate whose opponent is considered especially qualified on a particular issue might prefer to organize his advertising around alternative issues or, instead, attempt to neutralize his opponent's advantage by highlighting his own credentials on the issue in question. Our two-ad studies also allowed us to explore this question in some detail.

In summary, our studies followed one of two designs. In all cases, the experimental manipulation was limited to one or two advertisements, but in no case did participants watch more than one advertisement from a particular sponsor. The scale of exposure represented by our experiments is thus quite modest. The one-ad studies either isolated the independent effects of particular attributes of campaign advertisements or the joint effects of advertising, on the one hand, and

voters' partisan stereotypes, on the other. Finally, the two-ad studies addressed questions of advertising strategy by showing participants particular combinations of advertisements from each of the competing candidates.

SUBJECTS AND PROCEDURE

Our experiments all took place in the Greater Los Angeles area. We used several methods to recruit subjects, including advertising in local newspapers, distributing flyers in shopping malls and other public venues, announcing the studies in employee newsletters, soliciting the cooperation of office administrators, church pastors, restaurant managers, and others with access to large groups of people, and telephoning names from voter registration lists. Subjects were promised payment of \$15 for participation in an hour-long study of "selective perception" of local news programs.

Although the "sample" was obviously nonrandom, our participants resembled the composition of Los Angeles and the surrounding area. Across all the experiments, 46 percent of the participants were male, 52 percent were white, 24 percent were black. The median age was 34. Forty-eight percent of the participants claimed affiliation with the Democratic party, 21 percent were Republicans, and 31 percent were independents. Thirty-nine percent were college graduates, with the balance being evenly divided between high-school graduates and individuals with some college.¹⁶

We conducted the experiments at two separate locations—West Los Angeles and Costa Mesa (Orange County). The former is an urban neighborhood with a heavy concentration of Democratic voters. The latter, an affluent Orange County suburb, is predominantly Republican. The experimental facilities were identical in both locations—a three-room office suite consisting of two viewing rooms and a separate room for completion of questionnaires (in addition to a reception area).

When participants telephoned the facility, they were scheduled for a particular time period of their choice. Experimental sessions were available from 10 A.M. to 8 P.M., Monday through Saturday. The typical session consisted of two or three participants.

On arrival, subjects were given an instruction sheet that informed them that the research was about selective perception of local newscasts. They then completed a short pretest questionnaire, which addressed their social background, media activities, and political interest. Following completion of the pretest, participants were taken to a viewing room where, depending on the condition to which they had been assigned,¹⁷ they watched a fifteen-minute videotape recording (complete with commercials) of a recent local newscast.¹⁸

In the one-advertisement studies, the experimental or "treatment" advertisement was inserted into the first commercial break midway through the tape. The political spot was always shown in the middle position in a three-advertisement break. In the two-advertisement studies, the experimental advertisements appeared during the first and second commercial breaks.

Following completion of the videotape, participants completed a lengthy posttest questionnaire, which tapped their beliefs and opinions on a wide range of campaign issues. Of course, we also ascertained participants' voting intentions and their general level of involvement in the campaign. On completion of the posttest, subjects were paid and informed in full of the true objectives of the experiment.

THE CANDIDATES AND THEIR ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

Our studies monitored campaigns for various public offices in California beginning with the 1990 California gubernatorial election and ending with the 1993 race for Mayor of Los Angeles. In between we studied the 1992 primary and general elections for the U.S. Senate and the 1992 presidential election. Our "sample" of campaigns thus included contests for local, state, and national office.

The 1990 California Governor's Race

This campaign featured two well-known candidates, both of whom had attained national prominence. Democrat Dianne Feinstein had previously served two terms as mayor of San Francisco and was among the "finalists" for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination

in 1984. Like Feinstein, Republican Pete Wilson had also served as mayor of a major city (San Diego) before his election to the U.S. Senate in 1982.

Both candidates used extensive televised advertising throughout the gubernatorial campaign. Together, they spent approximately \$15 million on broadcast time. The prevailing tone of the campaign was decidedly negative. Feinstein attacked Wilson's performance as mayor of San Diego; suggested that he was ineffective, apathetic, and manipulable as a senator; and attempted to tar him with responsibility for the streak of savings-and-loan failures in California. Wilson responded in kind through advertisements which—among other things—highlighted the large budget deficits incurred during Feinstein's tenure as mayor of San Francisco, charged that Feinstein favored racial employment quotas, and asserted that Feinstein's husband had been a major beneficiary of the federal bailout of a failed thrift institution.

The candidates began the campaign virtually even in the polls, with about 20 percent of the electorate undecided. The race remained close through September. In early October, Wilson eked out a small lead, which ultimately proved insurmountable. He was elected with 52 percent of the vote.

1992 California Senate Primaries

Due to a series of unusual circumstances, both of California's U.S. Senate seats were contested in 1992. One seat was an election in the normal course for a full six-year term. The other election was intended to fill the two remaining years of Pete Wilson's term (Wilson having just been elected Governor).

Thus, there were four contested senatorial primaries. We studied both of the Democratic primaries, but for practical reasons could examine only one of the Republican contests.¹⁹

The Democratic primary race for the "long" (full term) seat was contested by three candidates, each of whom had extensive political experience. These were Marin County Congresswoman Barbara Boxer, Los Angeles Congressman Mel Levine, and Lieutenant Governor Leo McCarthy. Each candidate advertised extensively, airing a mixture of positive and negative messages. The candidates emphasized

their experience and problem-solving abilities. Both Levine and McCarthy attempted to associate Boxer with the Congressional “bounced checks” scandal. The race remained tight until two weeks before the election, at which point Boxer established a clear lead. On election day, she won the nomination with 44 percent of the vote.

The Democratic race for the “short” seat pitted two of the state’s most prominent Democrats—Dianne Feinstein and State Controller Gray Davis. Feinstein established a commanding lead over Davis in the polls. The Davis campaign attempted to narrow the gap through advertisements that emphasized Davis’s support for law and order (these featured scenes from the Los Angeles riots) and impugned Feinstein’s integrity. One such ad compared Feinstein with convicted tax evader Leona Helmsley. Davis’s efforts made no dent in Feinstein’s lead; she went on to win the nomination with 58 percent of the vote.

The Republican primary for the “short” seat featured two relatively unknown male candidates, John Seymour and William Dannemeyer. Although Seymour had served for two years on an interim basis as Pete Wilson’s successor in the U.S. Senate, he had attracted little public attention. Seymour’s opponent, however, was even less well known. Dannemeyer was a conservative Republican from Orange County who had served three terms in the U.S. Congress. Seymour’s financial advantage in the campaign was decisive, and he won the nomination easily.

1992 California Senate General Elections

The race for the “short” seat between Dianne Feinstein and John Seymour was one-sided from the outset. Seymour attempted to capitalize on the issues of crime and immigration and aired advertisements in which he urged that illegal immigrants be returned to their country of origin.²⁰ Feinstein’s advertising emphasized her support for employment training and other job programs, her prochoice stance, and her experience as mayor of San Francisco. Feinstein held a 20-point lead in preelection polls throughout the general election campaign. She won by 54 to 38 percent.

The race between Barbara Boxer and Bruce Herschensohn pitted a conservative southern California broadcaster against the liberal Con-

gresswoman from Marin County. Herschensohn immediately went on the attack, pointing out that Boxer had “bounced” several checks at the House bank and that she epitomized a corrupt Washington establishment. Herschensohn also made clear his support for limited government and individualist values. Boxer’s advertising concentrated on her record in Congress: she noted her exposure of Defense Department cost overruns, her leadership on environmental issues, and her constant support for women’s rights. In response to the harsh tone of Herschensohn’s attacks, Boxer began (toward the end of the campaign) to attack Herschensohn’s ideological extremism with advertisements claiming that Herschensohn opposed Social Security and federal aid for education.

Boxer enjoyed a wide lead in the polls when the race began. Herschensohn’s steady stream of attacks reduced the Boxer lead significantly, and by mid-October the race had tightened.²¹ Entering the final week of the campaign, Herschensohn trailed by only five or six points. A few days before the election, the press reported damaging information about Herschensohn’s frequent patronage of a risqué Hollywood nightclub. The last-minute flurry of attention to issues of character, combined with her own attacks on Herschensohn, helped Boxer and she pulled out a narrow victory of 48 to 43 percent.

1992 Presidential Campaign

Given the depth of the recession in California, President Bush faced an uphill battle to win the state. The polls indicated that Californians were profoundly dissatisfied with the incumbent, and by October the Bush campaign had virtually conceded the state to Ross Perot and the Democrats.

Bush and Clinton both relied heavily on negative advertising. Clinton’s advertisements hammered away at the state of the economy, Bush’s unwillingness or inability to improve Americans’ standard of living, and his plans for economic recovery and “change.” Realizing that the economy was not an issue on which their candidate was credible, the Bush campaign dwelled on issues of trust and character. Several advertisements reminded voters about Clinton’s misrepresentations of his past actions and his record as governor of Arkansas. The

Clinton advertising campaign counterattacked by suggesting that as Vice-President, Bush had been involved in the "Iran-Contra" scandal.²²

The Bush campaign's misgivings about California voters proved well-founded. Clinton carried the state by a wide margin, though Ross Perot also proved attractive to Californians, winning 21 percent of the vote.

1993 Los Angeles Mayoral Race

Six months after the 1992 elections, the polls in Los Angeles reopened. After twenty years in office, Mayor Tom Bradley retired from office. Following a contentious primary election, with a field of more than twenty candidates, the nonpartisan runoff to replace Bradley came down to city councilman Michael Woo and businessman Richard Riordan. Both candidates waged an intensely negative media campaign. Riordan blamed Woo for rising crime and high unemployment in the city, while Woo criticized Riordan's business deals (which he contended resulted in the loss of businesses to Mexico) and cited his support for "Reaganomics" as evidence of Riordan's ultraconservatism.

The race began tight, but Mr. Riordan eventually won by a comfortable margin.

The Sample of Advertisements

With all these races to draw on, our experiments could test many different kinds of advertising and contextual variables. Campaign advertising typically consists of two subject matter genres—image advertising and issue advertising. In the former, candidates attempt to highlight their personal strengths, particularly integrity or trustworthiness and competence or experience. In the latter, candidates attempt to position themselves advantageously (and their opponents disadvantageously) on major political issues.

Our studies featured both types of campaign advertisements. Image advertising was used in the 1992 Senate primary experiments, the 1990 gubernatorial study, the 1992 presidential campaign, and the 1993

mayoral race. In 1990, for example, some participants watched a Wilson advertisement that suggested that Feinstein's husband had improperly benefitted from the federal government's bailout of a failed savings-and-loan institution. Others saw a Feinstein advertisement that linked Wilson's opposition to stricter government regulation of S&Ls to his acceptance of campaign contributions from several thrift institutions.

Our manipulations also featured representative issue advertisements from each of the campaigns. In the 1990 gubernatorial campaign, both candidates emphasized their advocacy of the death penalty and their proenvironment stance (especially with respect to their opposition to off-shore drilling for oil). In 1992, the key issues facing the senatorial and presidential candidates included the state of the economy, crime, and women's rights. In the case of both Senate races, the presence of two women candidates and the lingering controversy over the hearings to confirm Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas made gender-related issues such as sexual harassment especially relevant. Not surprisingly, both women candidates made frequent reference to the Hill-Thomas hearings in their campaigns.

In conclusion, the studies span the entire gamut of political races—from local to presidential, primary to general. Our results are more generalizable than most. The "sample" of elections included races that were entirely negative in the tone of the campaign (such as the 1993 mayoral race) to races that included both positive and negative themes. Some races featured candidates who were ideologically distinct (such as Barbara Boxer and Bruce Herschensohn); others were characterized by candidates with very similar positions (such as Wilson and Feinstein in 1990). The issues central to each race were similarly varied—crime and the environment for the gubernatorial candidates, the economy and gender-related issues in the 1992 Senate and presidential races, and unemployment and crime in the 1993 mayoral campaign. All told, our studies encompass the full range of campaigns and candidates.