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Do Negative Campaigns Mobilize or Suppress Turnout? Clarifying the Relationship between Negativity and Participation

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Does negative campaigning influence the likelihood of voting in elections? Our study of U.S. Senate campaigns indicates the answer is "yes." We find that people distinguish between useful negative information presented in an appropriate manner and irrelevant and harsh mudslinging. As the proportion of legitimate criticisms increases in campaigns, citizens become more *likely to cast ballots. When campaigns degenerate into unsubstantiated and shrill attacks, voters tend to stay home. Finally, we find that individuals vary in their sensitivity to the tenor of campaigns. In particular, the tone is more consequential for independents, for those with less interest in politics, and for those with less knowledge about politics.*

Election campaigns serve many functions, but principal among them is to motivate people to go to the polls. Indeed, research suggests that campaigns significantly influence the size of the electorate (Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko 1985; Copeland 1983; Hill and Leighley 1993; Patterson and Caldeira 1983; Ragsdale and Rusk 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). On the one hand, campaigns characterized by lots of spending, uncertain outcomes, and active efforts by party and campaign organizations stimulate citizens to go to the polls. On the other hand, when one candidate is grossly underfunded, when polls show one candidate with a commanding lead, and when visible reminders of the approaching election are largely nonexistent, many voters stay home on election day. The idea that certain types of campaigns can mobilize voters is attractive from a normative perspective, because the United States continues to experience low levels of voter turnout compared with other democracies around the world (Franklin 1996; Powell 1986).

Beyond uncertain outcomes and the industriousness of parties and campaign organizations, voters may be motivated by the amount, type, and tone of information produced during campaigns. Although scholars only recently have begun to examine the motivational aspects of information, Key (1964, 584) noted nearly a half-century ago that the topics discussed by candidates can be motivating: "A campaign . . . that presents the electorate with dramatic issues, that commands the attention of the media of communication will stir far more interest than a campaign whose outcome seems to the voter to be of slight immediate importance. The clashes of candidates whose personalities engage the emotions of masses of people will pull more voters to the polls than will a contest between nonentities."

Despite the appeal of Key's claims, researchers remain uncertain about the relationship between campaign information and voter turnout. Observers have noted that campaigns rich in information do not automatically and uniformly heighten turnout. In particular, when candidates engage in mudslinging, people may become alienated from the electoral process, which depresses turnout on election day (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Germond and Witcover 1996). Curtis Gans (Germond and Witcover 1996, 2562), reflecting on the low turnout in the 1996 presidential election, the lowest in 72 years, observed: "The trouble . . . was not with the candidates but with their greater-than-ever dependence on the negative advertising that was flooding the airwaves. The mudslinging disgusted the public to the point where more than half of the eligible voters simply washed their hands of the whole business and stayed home on election day."

The most impressive work examining the relationship between negativity and turnout is Ansolabehere and Iyengar's experimental and aggregate voting analyses (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere et al. 1994). Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995, 9) summarize by stating that "our most troubling finding is that negative or attack advertising actually suppresses turnout . . . We would even go so far as to say that negative advertisements may pose a serious antidemocratic threat." They argue that negative campaign information demobilizes the electorate because it increases voter disgust and alienation toward the competing candidates and the political process generally. After witnessing several weeks of negative campaigning, voters become convinced that both candidates are undeserving of elective office. Similarly, people become disaffected with the political system because institutions comprised of untrustworthy or unresponsive leaders are unappealing.

In contrast, Finkel and Geer (1998) argue that negative campaigns may enhance turnout. Their reasoning rests primarily on the importance and relevance of information contained in negative messages (West 1997). Finkel and Geer (1998, 577–8) maintain that "the causal processes suggested by Ansolabehere et al. (1994) . . . may be offset by alternative processes whereby negative advertising spurs turnout by increas-

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ing political knowledge and concern about the election's outcome." To be sure, the evidence linking negative campaigning with turnout is, like the arguments themselves, contradictory and depends on the research setting (laboratory experiments or actual campaigns), on the types of data (responses to surveys or aggregate election returns), on the campaign setting (presidential or subpresidential), and on the sources of the negative messages (candidates' commercials or media summaries of the campaign) (see Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Basil, Schooler, and Reeves 1991; Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Finkel and Geer 1998; Garramone et al. 1990; Goldstein 1997; Roddy and Garramone 1988; Southwell 1991; Thorson, Christ, and Caywood 1991).

In the end, the conceptual arguments and empirical evidence leave unanswered the fundamental question: Does the tone of campaign information affect individuals' likelihood of voting? In this article, we explore the relationship between the tenor of campaigns and the propensity to vote. We offer a differentiated conceptualization of campaign tone and develop a research design that avoids many weaknesses of earlier research.

THE TONE OF CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

We begin with the simple premise that negative information is helpful and motivates participation as long as it addresses *relevant* topics and is presented in an *appropriate* manner. Even politicians running for electoral office must adhere to certain norms of proper democratic discourse. According to Guttman (1993, 141):

> Deliberative democracy articulates a compelling conception of people as self-governing, who reflect, evaluate, and decide issues on the basis of a broad range of *relevant considerations* . . . in a society where every adult is treated as an autonomous person, and thereby granted political standing as an equal citizen. Accompanying this conception is an ideal of politics where people routinely relate to one another not merely by asserting their will or fighting for their predetermined interests, but by influencing each other through the *publicly valued* use of reasoned argument, evidence, evaluation, and persuasion that enlist reasons in its cause [italics added].

We expect that when negative messages are viewed as relevant and appropriate, they will mobilize voters for two reasons. First, since the preponderance of information people receive in their daily lives is positive, negative information is more unique, more salient, and more memorable (Hamilton and Zanna 1974; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Lau 1985). Given that uniqueness, citizens may view negative advertisements as more exciting and may pay them careful attention (Kanouse and Hanson 1972; Lau 1982; McGraw and Steenbergen 1997; Richey et al. 1982).

In addition, critical commercials may point out the potential risks associated with certain electoral choices. People may view this critical information as especially useful since they are more strongly motivated to avoid costs than to achieve gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Kanouse and Hanson 1972; Lau 1982, 1985; McGraw and Steenbergen 1997). Commercials containing criticisms may highlight controversial policy positions, an incumbent's inability to provide for constituents, and the personality flaws of opponents. When this type of negative information is presented to risk-averse voters, they may go to the polls as a way of minimizing those risks.

Thus, we expect negative messages, compared with positive appeals, to generate more interest and involvement in campaigns. These messages, however, need to emphasize legitimate issues or relevant personality characteristics, and they must be delivered in a suitable manner. We argue that campaigns with these types of critical messages will experience higher turnout on election day.

When negative messages center on questionable topics and are presented in an excessively strident or pejorative manner, however, voters may become alienated and stay home. The experts who produce negative ads are well aware of the fine line between legitimate criticism and harsh and shrill information that is only tangentially related to governing (Doak 1995; Goodman 1995; Kamber 1997). Goodman (1995, 22–3) summarizes:

> Is an ad negative if it highlights an opponent's public voting record with appropriate and irrefutable citations—or it hits hard at a candidate's lack of experience and qualifications for office—or it contrasts ideas, positions, or attitudes that have been written or publicly proclaimed? Come on. Arguably, the single most important ingredient that separates a negative ad from a competitive or comparative one is tone. Does it feel negative? Is it mean-spirited? Is it crudely produced? Does it go beyond the pale of good taste and appropriate manners? Cross any of these lines, and you've crossed the viewer.

Certain campaign topics are simply considered irrelevant or inappropriate; they do not resonate well with voters. And if candidates criticize opponents in an accusatory and ad hominem manner, their messages may strike a discordant tone with citizens, making them uncomfortable with the campaign and the candidates. In that case, we expect voters to disengage and stay home.

In summary, we expect participation to increase as the proportion of "legitimate" negative information increases because these negative messages are easier to remember, may be viewed as more helpful, and may heighten interest in campaigns. In contrast, negative messages will depress turnout when they focus on topics that voters feel are inappropriate and when the messages are presented harshly. The key distinction in negative messages, then, centers squarely on the usefulness of the information and the manner in which it is presented.

DESIGN

Several features of our research design allow us to examine the relationship between the tone of campaign information and voter turnout more precisely than past studies. First, we rely on survey responses from the 1990 NES Senate Election Study, whereas research

that uses aggregate data necessarily must examine the covariation between advertising tone and turnout rates across states. With aggregate analyses, it is difficult to develop well-specified models of turnout, because a multitude of influences need to be held constant (such as strength of party attachment, political interest, attitudes toward the candidates, and exposure to the candidates), which is not easy to do with aggregate data.

Second, Senate campaigns provide an ideal laboratory for examining the effect of negative messages. Because one-third of all Senate seats are contested every two years, these elections provide a larger number of cases than presidential elections. For example, in 1990 there were 30 contested U.S. Senate campaigns for analysis. In comparison, an examination of all presidential campaigns since the advent of political advertising in 1952 yields only twelve cases. In addition, Senate races are more heterogeneous than presidential races in terms of variations in the amount of money spent, the quality of the candidates, the content and tone of messages, and the substance and tenor of the media's reporting (e.g., Franklin 1991; Kahn and Kenney 1997; Westlye 1991).

Third, we develop measures of tone to capture the negativity of information emanating from the candidates' campaigns *and* from press coverage. Previous scholars have focused on how political advertising affects turnout (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Finkel and Geer 1998; Goldstein 1997), but media coverage also may have an influence. In fact, research indicates that voters rely more heavily on the news media than political ads for information about campaigns. People also view news sources as more credible than the messages disseminated by candidates (Alger 1996; Graber 1993; Joslyn 1984). Studies that fail to tap both types of information undoubtedly miss an important aspect of the electoral setting (Jamieson 1992; Just et al. 1996).

Fourth, we identified mudslinging races by interviewing campaign managers, who were asked to characterize the opponent's campaign as well as the media's portrayal of both campaigns. It is crucial to identify these races because voters may become disengaged when the discourse appears irrelevant and/or becomes unduly acrimonious or uncivil.

Fifth, we examined Senate campaigns during an off-year, 1990, to avoid contamination by the presidential campaign.[1] This control is crucial, since the presidential race dominates the nation during the months preceding an on-year election. Negativity in the presidential campaign may influence decisions about whether to vote at all, thereby indirectly affecting turnout in senatorial elections. Although that source of contamination was eliminated, many gubernatorial campaigns are held in the off-year, and voters often consider these the most important race in the state. Since the tone of a gubernatorial campaign can influence participation in the Senate contest, we also measure the level of negativity in the race for governor.

The next step is to develop measures that capture the amount of negative information presented by the candidates and by the press, while simultaneously controlling for its relevance and propriety. Below we describe the measures for the tone of candidate messages, the tone of news coverage, and the presence of mudslinging.

THE TONE OF CANDIDATE MESSAGES

In developing a measure of the tone of political advertising, we relied on a content analysis of the candidates' commercials. We examined *televised* political advertisements, since these are a central component of U.S. Senate campaigns (Herrnson 1995; Krasno 1994), and they represent the single largest expenditure by Senate candidates (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993). In addition, television ads, compared with newspaper ads, are considered significantly more effective in swaying voter opinions and are used much more frequently during statewide and national campaigns (Abramowitz and Segal 1992; Goldenberg and Traugott 1984; Jacobson 1997; Luntz 1988).

We obtained our sample of ads from the Political Commercial Archive at the University of Oklahoma, which has the largest collection of U.S. Senate advertisements publicly available. The archive had 564 ads for the 30 senatorial races in 1990. We sampled 183 of these for analysis (32%).[2] The number available per candidate in 1990 varied widely, since some candidates produced considerably more ads than others. Thus, we stratified the ads by candidate and randomly selected four (if available) for each candidate running for the U.S. Senate in 1990.[3] This maximized the number of candidates represented and produced a sample of ads for 49 of the 60 candidates running in 1990.[4]

To measure the tone of the commercials, we estimated the amount of negative information in each ad, including criticism of the opponent (i.e., negative information about issues or personality characteristics). We placed each commercial into one of three categories: no negative message (score = 0), a minor emphasis on negativity (score = 1), and a major emphasis on

[1] The NES Senate Election Study was only conducted in 1988, 1990, and 1992. Therefore, 1990 is the only off-year election for which information on public attitudes about Senate elections is available.

[2] The archive does not allow ads to be removed or copied. Three coders were sent to Oklahoma, and all worked separately at the archive. To check for sample representativeness with regard to negativity, we compared the proportion of negative ads in our sample with the proportion of negative ads available at the archive. The figure was 35% for our ads, compared to 37% for all the ads. (A list of all ads, noted as negative or positive, was provided by the archive.)

[3] For practical and financial reasons, we did not analyze ads aired by the political parties or by interest groups. In addition, we do not have data on how often particular ads were aired. Nevertheless, we are satisfied that our measure of the proportion of negativity presented in the candidates' ads captures the general tone of the messages.

[4] The archive did not have ads for eleven candidates. Nine of these were challengers, and two were incumbents. Almost certainly, five of the nine challengers produced no television ads, since they spent less than one cent per voter. The average spending for the other four challengers was only 86 cents per voter, considerably less than the average for candidates with ads at the archive (i.e., $1.54 per voter).

negativity (score = 2). We examined the validity of the advertising tone variable in two ways. First, we correlated the measure with an indicator derived from a content analysis of the *Congressional Quarterly* (1990) preelection issue. Based on that analysis, we scored campaigns from 0 (i.e., neither candidate was described as running a negative campaign) to 2 (i.e., both candidates were described as running negative campaigns). The correlation between the *CQ* measure and our measure is .32 ($p < .001$). We also looked at the population of ads at the archive and compared the proportion of negative to positive ads with our tone of advertising measure. The correlation is .53 ($p < .001$).[5]

Based on the three-point scaling of each commercial, we computed a negativity score for each race. The score ranges from 0 to 1 and represents the proportion of negative to positive messages associated with each race.[6] A score of 0 indicates that the content of both candidates' commercials contain no negative messages; a score of 1 indicates that the information presented in the ads of both candidates contains only negative messages. Table 1 gives the proportion of negative to positive information presented in the ads. In 43% of the races, no negative information appeared in any ads. About half the Senate races exhibited low to moderate levels of negativity. A high level of negativity characterized only 14% of the Senate races.

To capture the reach of the candidates' messages, we multiplied the negativity score by the amount of money spent during the race.[7] We rely on this measure, the *Tone of Commercials*, to determine whether the amount of negative information presented in the ads alters the likelihood that individuals will go to the polls.[8]

TABLE 1. The Negativity of the 1990 Senate Campaigns

A. The Tone of the Campaigns

	Commercials[a]	News Coverage[b]
No negativity	43%	0%
Low negativity	20%	50%
Moderate negativity	23%	37%
High negativity	14%	13%
	(n = 183)	(n = 2,400)

B. Level of Mudslinging in Campaigns[c]

	Campaign Managers
No mudslinging	27%
Minimal mudslinging	43%
Moderate mudslinging	20%
Extreme mudslinging	10%
	(n = 30)

[a]See note 6 for negativity scoring. Races with a negativity score between .1 and .3 were classified as low, races with a negativity score ranging from .31 to .50 were classified as moderate, and races with a negativity score greater than .5 were classified as high. This classification is used for illustrative purposes in this table only and is not used in the multivariate analyses.

[b]Zero indicates there were no criticisms in the news coverage. Low means that the amount of negative coverage was less than 10% of all press coverage, moderate represents negativity of 10–15% of all coverage, and high means that negative coverage exceeded 15% of the total. This classification is used for illustrative purposes here; we use the full variance of the variable in all the multivariate analyses.

[c]In developing the mudslinging measure, we created three-value measures for the managers' characterization of the opponent's campaign and assessments of the news media's coverage. For the managers' assessments of their opponents, races received a score of 0 when neither manager described the opponent as engaging in "mudslinging." If only one manager described the opponent as engaging in "mudslinging" the race received a score of 1; if both candidates viewed their opponent as having run a "mudslinging" campaign, the race received a score of 2. We relied on the same scale to assess the "mudslinging" in media coverage. We then added the two scales together to form a single scale ranging from 0 to 4 for each campaign. Therefore, races scored as 0 are classified as no mudslinging; races scored as 1 are classified as minimal mudslinging, races receiving a score of 2 are described as moderate mudslinging, and races with a score of 3 or 4 are classified as extreme mudslinging.

THE TONE OF NEWS COVERAGE

Newspapers rather than television news, were chosen to represent media coverage for several reasons. First, studies demonstrate that newspapers allocate more resources and more space to statewide campaigns, compared with television, thereby producing more comprehensive coverage (Leary 1977). Furthermore, Westlye (1991, 45) found that, compared with local broadcast news, "newspapers present an amount of information that more closely approximates what campaigns are issuing." In addition, while people rely heavily on television news to keep informed about national politics, they depend on local newspapers for coverage of senatorial and gubernatorial campaigns (Mayer 1993). Finally, people learn more about statewide campaigns from newspapers than from local news broadcasts (Clarke and Fredin 1978).[9]

To measure the tone of news coverage, we conducted an extensive content analysis of press coverage for each state holding a Senate election in 1990. We selected the largest circulating newspaper in each state

[5] One-quarter of the television ads were analyzed by all three coders to assess intercoder reliability, which averaged 92%.

[6] We summed the negativity scores for all commercials and then divided by the highest possible negativity score for each race. For example, in a race in which we coded eight commercials, the maximum negativity score would be 16 (i.e., a maximum score of 2 for each commercial). If each of the ads received a score of 1, then the race received a negativity score of .5 (i.e., 8(1)/16). In all multivariate analyses, we use the full variance of this measure.

[7] We divided the amount of spending by the voting age population to estimate spending per potential voter. This allows us to make sensible comparisons of expenditures across more and less populous states (i.e., California and New York versus Wyoming and Idaho).

[8] The measure of advertising tone has a mean of .46 and a standard deviation of .59. The mean indicates that the average amount of spending by both candidates to deliver negative messages is 46 cents per potential voter.

[9] Practical considerations also influenced our decision. Newspapers are routinely saved on microfilm, which makes them easily accessible. Tapes of local television news, in contrast, are seldom available after a campaign, so systematic examination of television news is very difficult.

for analysis, simply because more potential voters read these newspapers.[10] News coverage was examined between September 1 and election day. Specifically, we examined every other day from September 1 to October 15 (Monday through Saturday) and every day from October 15 through election day. To avoid problems associated with periodicity, we alternated sampling Monday, Wednesday, Friday (i.e., first week) and Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday (i.e., second week). In addition, every Sunday was examined for the entire period. We read all articles that mentioned either candidate in the first section, state section, and editorial section of the newspaper. We did not restrict our analysis to campaign-related stories, since people often acquire information about candidates in stories not directly related to the ongoing campaign (e.g., those detailing a senator's work on legislation relevant to the state). In total, 2,400 articles were coded for the 1990 campaign. In analyzing their content, we examined how many paragraphs in each newspaper contained criticisms of the candidates.

To operationalize the *Tone of News Coverage*, we divided the number of news paragraphs containing criticisms of the candidates by the total number of paragraphs written about the race.[11] The measure ranges from .02 (2% of paragraphs contain criticism of the candidates) to .16 (16% of paragraphs about the race include criticism of the candidates), which suggests that the proportion of negative coverage to overall coverage is relatively small in Senate campaigns.[12]

Table 1 presents the proportion of negative news coverage across the Senate races. In half of them, the percentage of negative paragraphs produced about the candidates was low, almost negligible. In nearly 40% of the races, there was only a moderate amount of negative news coverage. In only 13% of the cases did the proportion of criticism exceed 15%.

In summary, we measured the tone of commercials and the tone of news coverage by looking at the ratio of negative information to total information presented during campaigns. With these measures, we can determine whether participation rates change as the proportion of negative information changes. We turn now to assessing the relevance and propriety of the negative information.

IDENTIFYING MUDSLINGING

Negative information does not always serve the interests and desires of voters, so it will not always enhance turnout. We hypothesize that negative attacks in a harsh and strident tone and about topics with little relationship to the affairs of a state or the nation will alienate voters and suppress turnout. Although the fundamental hypothesis is straightforward, identifying campaign messages that breach the bounds of civility is challenging. Content analysis of ads and media coverage is problematic because of our subjective judgment in determining what "goes too far." As an alternative, we asked those who managed the campaigns to tell us when messages pushed the common parameters of decency and appropriateness. We interviewed campaign managers for each of the major party candidates running for the U.S. Senate in 1990.[13] We asked the managers to identify mudslinging races.[14]

The interviews asked a battery of questions regarding campaign strategies on both sides. To help us identify mudslinging, we focused on managers' perceptions of the opponent's campaign. In particular, we asked about the "main" themes presented by the opponent.[15] Most managers responded with substantive topics (e.g., economic policy, political experience, criticism of issue positions), but some did not. Instead, they accused the opponent of mudslinging. For example, one stated that the opponent waged a "smear" campaign characterized by unsubstantiated statements and allegations.[16] Other managers used such terms as "relentless" attacks, "deceptive" messages, and "unwarranted" or "unconscionable" criticisms. They observed that opponents did not offer substantive comments on legitimate topics in a proper manner. They viewed the opponent's strategy as "too" negative,[17] and they felt the negative themes "went over the edge" in terms of substance and tenor.

We also asked the managers: "What themes did the news media emphasize in their coverage of the campaign?" Most described coverage as either "too little" or "about right" and said that the focus was typically on substantive issue and trait themes. Nevertheless, a few stated that the coverage was exclusively negative, and they did not mention any substantive themes whatsoever. They stated, for example, that the media focused

[10] It is possible that various newspapers from the same state cover Senate campaigns differently. To assess this possibility, we compared coverage patterns in the *Miami Herald* and *Tampa Tribune*, the *Houston Chronicle* and *Dallas Daily News*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times* and *New York Daily News*. In general, coverage patterns across newspapers were similar in content, amount, placement, and tone.

[11] The coding of the newspaper articles was labor intensive. Intercoder reliability was assessed repeatedly during the process. On average, there was 92% agreement across the content codes.

[12] The measure of news tone has a mean of .09 and a standard deviation of .04.

[13] We completed interviews with 79% of the managers. These were conducted by Arizona State University students and by one of the authors using the ASU Survey Research Lab. The interviewers were trained, and sessions were continually monitored.

[14] In the literature (Doak 1995; Goodman 1995; Kamber 1997), advertising consultants emphasize a set of "rules" and "commandments" they consider necessary for successful advertising campaigns. Several of these deal directly with "good taste," "fairness," and "accuracy," which illustrates that campaign architects are sensitive to norms of civility.

[15] It is important to emphasize that we did not ask managers directly to identify the tone of their opponents' campaigns. Instead, managers offered negativity as the "main" theme of their opponents' campaigns when asked. The question asked was, "Now, thinking about [opponent's name], what were the main themes that [opponent's name] tried to stress in HIS(HER) campaign? Anything else?"

[16] We do not identify the specific campaign because the interviews are confidential.

[17] Interestingly, 73% of the managers who were accused of being too negative admitted that the main theme of their campaign involved mudslinging.

on "the dirty campaign" or the "negative personality traits" of the candidates.

In coding the responses, we developed three-category measures for the managers' characterization of the opponent's campaign and assessments of media coverage. If neither manager in a race described the opponent as engaging in mudslinging, the race received a score of 0; if only one manager did so, the race received a score of 1; if both managers viewed the opponent as mudslinging, the race received a score of 2. We relied on the same scale to assess the mudslinging in media coverage. We then added the two to form a single scale, ranging from 0 to 4 for each campaign.

We took several steps to assess the validity of the *Mudslinging* measure. First, we looked at the relationship between our measure and the main issues of the campaign according to the NES/SES. NES respondents were asked: "In your state, what issue did the candidates talk about most during the campaign for the Senate?" We found a statistically significant relationship (chi-square = 37.2, d.f. = 4, tau = .09, $p < .001$) between NES respondents who mentioned mudslinging as a main issue of the campaign and our index. Second, the mudslinging variable was correlated with the tone of advertising ($r = .58$, $p < .001$) and the tone of news coverage variables ($r = .24$, $p < .001$).[18] Although these are positively correlated, which suggests the validity of the mudslinging measure, the correlations are not exceedingly high, bolstering our confidence that mudslinging is not simply the presence of negative information. Finally, we determined that mudslinging assessments do not reflect a rationalization by unsuccessful managers. Those whose candidate lost the Senate race were not more likely to characterize the opponent or the news media as mudslinging. A smaller proportion of the unsuccessful managers (46%) made that assessment than did successful managers (54%).

As can be seen in Table 1, 27% of the campaign managers believed the candidates and the news media refrained completely from mudslinging. In 43% of the races, the campaign received a score of 1 on the mudslinging scale, which means that one of the managers described the rival candidate *or* the news media as overly negative. Twenty percent of campaigns received a score of 2, which indicates somewhat more acrimony. Finally, 10% of the races received a score of 3 or higher on the mudslinging scale.[19]

To determine the relationship between negative information and turnout, we controlled for five distinct forces that may influence the likelihood of voting: (1) the closeness of the Senate election, (2) the characteristics of concurrent campaigns, (3) attitudes about the candidates and the Senate campaign, (4) demographic characteristics, and (5) psychological involvement in politics.

[18] The correlation between the tone of news coverage and the tone of advertising is .32 ($p < .001$).

[19] The mudslinging measure has a mean of 1.17 and a standard deviation of 1.02.

MEASURING VARIOUS EXPLANATIONS OF TURNOUT

Closeness of Senate Elections

The closeness of the race influences turnout in senatorial elections (Ragsdale and Rusk 1995). As the competitiveness of the race increases, people are more likely to go to the polls. To capture *Closeness of the Senate Campaign*, we obtained polling data on the competitiveness of the race during the last ten days of the campaign.[20]

Characteristics of Concurrent Campaigns in the State

Although we removed any confounding influence of a presidential election by focusing on 1990, many states elect a governor in the off-years. To control for any potential influence from that source, we included three measures of gubernatorial campaigns. First, a simple binary variable assesses *Presence of a Gubernatorial Campaign* in the state, since a race for governor can affect a person's desire to vote in the Senate election (Hill and Leighley 1993; Patterson and Caldeira 1983). Second, relying on the final vote tally, we developed a measure to assess *Closeness of the Gubernatorial Campaign*. Third, we measure *Tone of Gubernatorial Campaign* through newspapers that were content analyzed for the Senate campaigns.

In addition, we looked at the competitiveness of the state campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives. As the *Proportion of Competitive House Campaigns* increases, we expect turnout in Senate elections to increase.

Attitudes about the Candidates and Attention to the Campaign

Following Ragsdale and Rusk (1995), we examined whether attitudes toward the candidates affect the willingness to cast votes in Senate elections. We used feeling thermometer scales to calculate the absolute value of the difference between ratings of the two candidates. This measure indicates whether people who like one candidate more than the other are more likely to participate. We expect that the greater the *Difference in Evaluations of the Candidates*, the more likely citizens are to vote in the Senate election.

We also examined whether people are more likely to vote if they feel positive toward at least one of the candidates. According to Ragsdale and Rusk (1995, 313), "citizens who perceive one or both candidates positively on a feeling thermometer are more likely to vote than those who perceive the candidates negatively or neutrally." To assess the importance of *Favorability toward Candidates*, we relied on Ragsdale and Rusk's operationalization and developed a three-point measure to assess favorability.

[20] See the Appendix for detailed information about coding and measurement decisions for the variables examined in the analysis of turnout. The variables are presented in alphabetical order.

Familiarity with the candidates also influences rates of turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). First, we looked at whether voters who had *Contact with the Candidates* are more likely to vote in Senate elections. Second, we measured *Exposure to the Candidates* via the mass media.[21] Third, we tapped *Knowledge of the Candidates*. Fourth, we measured whether people who are able to *Mention the Themes of the Campaign* are more likely to vote in Senate elections.

Demographic Characteristics

Educational Background, *Age*, *Income*, and *Employment Status* influence the likelihood of voting (e.g., Miller and Shanks 1996; Patterson and Caldeira 1983; Ragsdale and Rusk 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987; Teixeira 1992; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). In addition, people who own their home, who have lived in their community for a long time, and who reside outside the South (i.e., the former Confederacy) are more likely to participate in elections (e.g., Patterson and Caldeira 1983; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Thus, we included *Home Ownership*, *Length of Residency*, and *Residency in the South* when assessing turnout in the 1990 Senate elections.

Psychological Involvement

People who believe they have a greater stake in the election are more likely to participate (Campbell et al. 1960; Downs 1957). First, those who have a strong psychological attachment to a major political party vote at a higher rate than independents (e.g., Miller and Shanks 1996; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Second, those who are interested in the election are likely to go to the polls (Miller and Shanks 1996; Ragsdale and Rusk 1995). Thus, we included *Partisan Attachment* and *Interest in Campaigns* in our model of turnout. We now examine how the tone of Senate campaigns influences the willingness to vote.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the results of a logistic regression analysis predicting the likelihood of voting across the 30 contested Senate campaigns in 1990.[23] In general, the model fits the data well, predicting 78% of the cases correctly. Most striking for our purposes is that the tone of campaign information affects participation in Senate elections.[24] In particular, the coefficients estimating the influence of negative ads, the negativity of news coverage, and the presence of mudslinging are statistically significant and signed in the hypothesized directions.[25]

According to the results given in Table 2, people are more likely to vote as the proportion of negative information in the candidates' ads increases and as the proportion of media criticism of the candidates escalates, holding all remaining forces constant.[26] Even when controlling for a host of individual and contextual factors, negative information significantly enhances turnout.

The mudslinging variable is also statistically significant, and the negative sign conforms to our expectations.[27] The results demonstrate that when managers perceive the opponent as a mudslinger and believe that the media are focusing excessively on mudslinging, turnout declines. That is, voters exposed to such campaigns are less likely to vote in Senate elections, ceteris paribus. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the mudslinging variable reaches substantive and statistical significance, while controlling for the proportion of negative to positive information emanating from the candidates and the news media.[28]

[21] We developed separate measures for the competing candidates, since we believe the effect of contact and exposure may differ by the candidate's status (i.e., personal contact may be more powerful for incumbents and winners in open races than for challengers and losers in open races). Since only three open races were contested in 1990, we combined open and incumbent races in a single analysis. As stated in note 24, we controlled for open races and found no differences between open and incumbent races.

[22] Unfortunately, the NES/SES does not include measures of political efficacy and civic duty. Several researchers have shown that these measures of psychological attachment to the political system are related to turnout (e.g., Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Miller and Shanks 1996; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

[23] All variables are analyzed with SPSS 4.1 for IBM OS/MVS.

[24] We also looked at whether the characteristics of the candidates influenced turnout in Senate elections. The quality of the challenger, the seniority of the senator, and the type of race (e.g., incumbent-challenger race versus open race) failed to influence turnout. Therefore, these variables were not included in the final model.

[25] To examine whether the tone of news and tone of advertising have diminishing returns on turnout (e.g., once the proportion of negative campaign coverage becomes extremely high, the negativity of coverage begins to produce a decreasing level of turnout), we included a first-order polynomial for tone of news coverage and a first-order polynomial for tone of advertising in the analysis in Table 2. Neither variable approached statistical significance, and both were removed from the final model. We also looked at whether the influence of the tone of advertising depends on the topic of the ads (i.e., traits versus issues). We found no differences when we distinguished between issue ads and trait ads.

[26] In addition to looking at the proportion of negative information in the ads and in the news, we also examined the effect of comparative ads (positive information about the sponsor and criticism of the opponent) versus exclusively negative information on the likelihood of voting. We include the following measures in the logit model presented in Table 2: the proportion of comparative ads presented during a campaign, the proportion of exclusively negative ads presented during a campaign, and the comparative nature of press coverage (see Appendix). When we included these three measures and omitted the original tone variables, none of the new measures reached statistical significance ($p < .05$). Therefore, these variables were removed from the final model.

[27] We interviewed at least one manager from each race contested in 1990. When a manager was not interviewed, 0 points were added to the mudslinging scale for that race. We assessed an alternative method of handling missing data: When a manager was not interviewed, we relied on *Congressional Quarterly* assessments of mudslinging and on news coverage of mudslinging to calculate the score for the missing manager. We substituted this measure in the analysis in Table 2, and the results do not change substantively or statistically. The coefficient for mudslinging with the new measure is $-.09$, with a standard error of .04 ($p < .05$).

[28] The negative sign for the mudslinging variable is not the result of multicolinearity with the advertising and news coverage variables. We examined the typical criteria for diagnosing multicolinearity

TABLE 2. How the Tenor of Campaigns Influences Turnout: Logit Model Examining Participation in the 1990 Senate Elections

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Logit Coefficient	Beta
Mudslinging	−.07 (.03)*	−.15
Tone of Campaign		
Tone of commercials	.12 (.06)*	.15
Tone of news coverage	2.14 (1.06)*	.18
Closeness of Senate Campaign	−.0006 (.002)	−.02
Other Campaigns		
Presence of gubernatorial campaign	.22 (.13)	.19
Closeness of gubernatorial campaign	.02 (.03)	.08
Tone of gubernatorial campaign	−.002 (.05)	.005
Proportion of competitive House races	.10 (.09)	.07
Senate Attention/Evaluation		
Difference in evaluation of candidates	.004 (.001)**	.19
Favorability toward candidates	.11 (.05)*	.14
Contact with incumbent/open winner	.15 (.03)**	.43
Contact with challenger/open loser	.09 (.04)*	.20
Exposure to incumbent/open winner	.05 (.04)	.08
Exposure to challenger/open loser	−.03 (.03)	−.07
Knowledge of incumbent/open winner	.18 (.06)**	.21
Knowledge of challenger/open loser	.10 (.05)*	.15
Mention of campaign theme	.16 (.06)**	.16
Demographic Characteristics		
Educational background	.05 (.01)**	.29
Age	.05 (.009)**	1.7
Age^2	−.0003 (.0001)**	−1.2
Income	.02 (.02)	.06
Employment status	−.008 (.15)	.003
Home ownership	.16 (.07)*	.14
Length of residency	.002 (.001)*	.12
Residency in the South	−.09 (.08)	.07
Psychological Involvement		
Partisan attachment	.12 (.03)**	.25
Interest in campaigns	.18 (.02)**	.55
Intercept	−2.97 (.36)**	
N = 2,256		
% of cases correctly predicted = 78		

Note: The p-values are based on two-sided tests. Standard errors are in parentheses. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

These results suggest that people distinguish between legitimate and tempered criticisms, on the one hand, and acrimonious and unjust criticisms, on the other hand. Voters seem to find substantive and reasoned criticisms useful, and apparently these provide them with reasons to go to the polls. In contrast, excessive mudslinging by the candidates that is covered extensively by the news media alienates voters. People become disenchanted with the candidates and the media coverage and abstain from the electoral process.

The remaining variables in the model perform about as expected. The traditional correlates of turnout (i.e., education, age, interest in campaigns, and strength of partisan attachment) strongly shape the likelihood of voting. Similarly, and as demonstrated by recent studies (Ragsdale and Rusk 1995), attitudes toward the senatorial candidates influence whether voters go to the polls. An additional finding, largely unexplored in previous models of turnout in Senate elections, is the importance of contact. Our findings reveal that personal contact with candidates significantly elevates turnout.

Finally, the statistical insignificance of closeness of the Senate race is noteworthy. Our results suggest that competitiveness does not directly influence turnout. Instead, the closeness of the race undoubtedly leads candidates to step up campaign activities (Cox and Munger 1989), which increases people's familiarity and contact with the candidates (Kahn and Kenney 1997; Krasno 1984; Westlye 1991). Once we control for voter

(Koutsoyiannis 1977). The standard error of the mudslinging variable does not seem to be inflated, since it is less than half the size of its coefficient. The model does not have a large amount of explained variance with few significant variables (i.e., 17 of the variables in the model reach statistical significance at $p < .05$). As a final check, we dropped the advertising and news coverage variables from the equation presented in Table 2 and reestimated the model. The sign of the mudslinging variable remained negative.

attention to the campaign, personal contact, and knowledge of the candidates, the competitiveness of the race fails to have a direct effect on participation.

THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF NEGATIVITY ON TURNOUT: THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTER CHARACTERISTICS

Although we find that negative information influences the likelihood of voting, we do not expect that the campaign environment affects everyone equally. Why? Some people are motivated to vote because of personal characteristics. Key (1956), Campbell (1960), and Converse (1966) have identified motivational attributes, such as interest, and psychological traits, such as party allegiance, as fundamental characteristics that distinguish habitual voters from people who may or may not cast ballots in any given election. More recently, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995, 110) examined how information in the campaign environment affects the likelihood that partisans and independents will cast ballots. They hypothesize that "negative advertising is likely to engender the greatest disenchantment among those whose ties to the electoral process are weakest—the nonpartisan."

Habitual or "core" voters are likely to go to the polls regardless of the campaign setting. Information emanating from campaigns, on balance, should not persuade or dissuade significant numbers of these people from turning out on election day, irrespective of whether they are exposed to a campaign that is placid and positive, or discusses the relevant strengths and weaknesses of candidates, or brims with unsubstantiated and irrelevant allegations.

To be sure, habitual voters are not the only ones who are relatively immune to the effects of campaign information. People vary dramatically in their knowledge about politics (Converse 1962, 1964; Luskin 1987; Zaller 1992), and this variation in political expertise affects receptiveness to new information. Similar to habitual voters, political "experts" should be less influenced by the tone of campaigns. Because they, compared with political novices, possess a large storehouse of political data, the information delivered during campaigns will have less influence on their attitudes about the candidates and their decisions about whether to vote.

In contrast to habitual and sophisticated voters, the rest of the citizenry is only marginally involved in the political world (Converse 1964; Miller and Shanks 1996). Those with little interest in elections, no psychological link to one of the parties, and little store of political information on hand have a predisposition *not* to vote. Campaigns that provide serious, critical, and thought-provoking debate in an interesting and germane manner may engage and activate uninterested and distracted citizens. Indeed, the critical nature of some information may strike a responsive chord with these people and make them more receptive to news of the campaign. Yet, the positive effects of negative commentary may dissipate quickly if inherently uninterested citizens are bombarded with campaign rhetoric that is irrelevant or shrill (i.e., mudslinging). Politically trite dialogue may resonate with their typical stereotypes about politics and politicians, leading them to stay home on election day.

To see whether the relationship between campaign tone and turnout is conditioned by personal characteristics, we divided NES respondents into groups based on the strength of party attachment, political interest, and level of political sophistication. Respondents were classified as *Independents* or *Partisans* based on their answer to the "root" party identification question. The political interest question was used to classify people as *Low in Political Interest* (respondents "somewhat interested" or "not much interested" in political campaigns) or *High in Political Interest* (respondents "very much interested" in political campaigns). Finally, we developed a measure to assess two levels of political information based on answers to six questions: *Political Novices* (respondents correctly answering zero to four of the knowledge questions) and *Political Experts* (respondents correctly answering five to six of the knowledge questions).[29]

Given this categorization of respondents, we reestimated the equation in Table 2 to determine whether the effects of negative information on voting are conditioned by personal characteristics. The logistic regression analyses are presented in Table 3, and the pattern of findings is consistent with our expectations. First, we examine the set of people on whom we expect the tone of campaigns to have minimal effect: partisans, those interested in politics, and political experts. We find these respondents are unaffected by the negativity of campaign messages. Only one of the nine relevant coefficients in these three equations is statistically significant. The abundance of statistically insignificant coefficients demonstrates that the tenor of the campaign rarely influences participation among habitual and sophisticated voters. Furthermore, they are not demobilized by mudslinging.

We find a strikingly different pattern among independents, people with little interest in campaigns, and political novices. They are much more susceptible to the tone of campaigns. Of the nine coefficients of interest, seven are statistically significant, and all are signed in the hypothesized direction. Useful critical information, particularly information presented by the press, significantly affects the probability of voting among these groups. In addition, they react strongly to mudslinging, which consistently and significantly decreases their probability of voting.

These results suggest that the effect of negative information on turnout depends largely on a person's political profile. Psychological attachments to a party, interest in politics, and cognitive understanding of political matters affect responses to negative information. People with strong connections to the political world participate in elections, regardless of the tenor of campaigns. People on the margins of politics, in con-

[29] See the Appendix for information about measuring political sophistication.

TABLE 3. How Personal Characteristics Condition the Effect of Negativity on Turnout (Unstandardized Logit Coefficients)

Independent Variable	Partisans	High Interest	Political Experts	Independents	Low Interest	Political Novices
Mudslinging	−.06 (.05)	−.10 (.08)	−.05 (.07)	−.11 (.06)*	−.08 (.04)**	−.09 (.04)**
Tone of Campaign						
Tone of commercials	.16 (.09)*	.18 (.14)	−.04 (.13)	.11 (.09)	.11 (.07)	.19 (.07)**
Tone of news coverage	.84 (1.44)	2.22 (2.35)	2.37 (2.35)	3.20 (1.62)**	2.45 (1.19)**	2.19 (1.22)*
Closeness of Senate Campaign	.0009 (.003)	.006 (.005)	−.001 (.005)	−.002 (.004)	.002 (.002)	.0004 (.003)
Other Campaigns						
Presence of gubernatorial campaign	.27 (.18)	.28 (.29)	.55 (.31)*	.13 (.20)	.27 (.15)*	.17 (.15)
Closeness of gubernatorial campaign	.003 (.05)	.08 (.07)	−.06 (.07)	.03 (.05)	−.008 (.03)	.03 (.04)
Tone of gubernatorial campaign	.07 (.07)	−.09 (.12)	.007 (.11)	−.07 (.08)	.02 (.06)	.002 (.03)
Proportion of competitive House races	.16 (.13)	−.02 (.21)	.12 (.19)	.04 (.14)	.08 (11)	.02 (.11)
Senate Attention/Evaluation						
Differences in evaluation of candidates	.006 (.002)**	.004 (.003)	.01 (.003)**	.002 (.002)	.005 (.002)**	.002 (.002)
Favorability toward candidates	.06 (.06)	.06 (.11)	.12 (.10)	.20 (.07)**	.13 (.05)**	.11 (.06)**
Contact with incumbent/open winner	.15 (.03)**	.15 (.05)**	.10 (.05)**	.15 (.04)**	.16 (.03)**	.18 (.03)**
Contact with challenger/open loser	.12 (.05)**	−.02 (.06)	.12 (.07)*	.08 (.05)	.14 (.04)**	.09 (.04)**
Exposure to incumbent/open winner	.03 (.05)	.10 (.09)	.16 (.09)*	.08 (.06)	.08 (.04)**	.01 (.05)
Exposure to challenger/open loser	−.07 (.04)*	.05 (.07)	−.04 (.07)	.03 (.05)	−.05 (.04)	−.02 (.04)
Knowledge of incumbent/open winner	.08 (.07)	.44 (.13)**	.14 (.12)	.31 (.09)**	.13 (.07)*	.15 (.07)**
Knowledge of challenger/open loser	.20 (.07)**	.07 (.11)	.11 (.10)	−.04 (.09)	.13 (.06)**	.10 (.07)
Mention campaign theme	.14 (.07)**	.05 (.14)	.25 (.13)*	.19 (.09)**	.23 (.06)**	.12 (.07)*
Demographic Characteristics						
Educational background	.05 (.02)**	.04 (.02)**	−.001 (.03)	.06 (.02)**	.06 (.01)**	.05 (.01)**
Age	.06 (.01)**	.05 (.02)**	.08 (.02)**	.04 (.01)**	.05 (.01)**	.04 (.01)**
Age^2	−.004 (.001)**	−.0004 (.0002)**	−.0007 (.0002)**	−.0002 (.0001)**	−.0004 (.0001)**	−.0003 (.0001)**
Income	.01 (.03)	.03 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.04 (.03)	.03 (.02)	.04 (.03)
Employment status	.14 (.22)	.03 (.30)	−.54 (.36)	−.15 (.20)	−.10 (.17)	.15 (.17)
Home ownership	.19 (.09)**	.10 (.15)	.16 (.14)	.12 (.10)	.18 (.08)**	.16 (.08)**
Length of residency	.003 (.001)**	.003 (.002)	.0004 (.002)	.002 (.002)	.002 (.001)**	.003 (.001)**
Residency in the South	−.07 (.10)	−.16 (.16)	−.30 (.17)*	−.11 (.13)	−.08 (.09)	−.02 (.09)
Psychological Involvement						
Partisan attachment	—	.02 (.06)	.14 (.06)**	—	.17 (.03)**	.11 (.03)**
Interest in campaigns	.17 (.02)**	—	.18 (.05)**	.20 (.03)**	—	.18 (.02)**
Intercept	−3.00 (.47)**	−3.37 (.78)**	−2.44 (.80)**	−2.63 (.55)**	−3.97 (.39)**	−3.03 (.42)**
N	1,288	732	788	968	1,524	1,468
% of cases correctly predicted	78%	85%	84%	78%	74%	75%

Note: The p-value are based on one-sided tests since our hypotheses are directional. Standard errors are in parentheses. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

trast, are much more responsive to the tone, but they can distinguish between legitimate negative information and simple mudslinging. When useful and interesting criticism is available, especially via the news media, they are more likely to vote; when candidates hurl unsubstantiated and unjustified attacks at each other, they are "turned off" to the campaign and are more likely to stay home.

CONCLUSION

This article advances the debate about the influences of negative campaigning on turnout by suggesting that negative information does not have a uniform effect. Negative messages vary in content and tone, and voters respond to this variation. Some critical commentary is viewed as appropriate and useful, while other negative appeals are considered improper and unseemly. It appears that the influence of negative information on the likelihood of voting depends on this distinction.

To elaborate, on election day voters are asked to make a choice between candidates. Given this task, critical campaign messages are especially useful when they appear relevant and are delivered in an appropriate manner. From these messages, voters can amass reasons for choosing one candidate over another. As these reasons accumulate, the incentive to vote increases. Yet, campaign information is objectionable when it pushes the limits of civility and seems irrelevant to governing. Voters often choose to ignore information when it focuses on tangential topics or is presented in a strident and harsh manner that even political professionals feel is mudslinging. In these circumstances, people are disgusted by the nature of campaign discourse and choose to stay home on election day.

Beyond these conceptual contributions, we also demonstrate the need to distinguish between two sources of campaign information: communications from the candidates and from the news media. Since both sources provide the bits and pieces of information that people use when deciding whether to vote, measures of each source must be included in models of turnout. Analysts who examine only one source are bound to overestimate its influence on the behavior of voters.

Finally, we show that responses to the negativity of campaigns depend on political predispositions. Specifically, campaign tone is more consequential for independents, people with less interest in politics, and people with less knowledge about politics. When the proportion of legitimate criticism in the news increases, these groups are more likely to participate in the election. They also are adversely affected by mudslinging. When campaign rhetoric is uncivil and inappropriate, they are likely to abstain from the political process.

It appears that voters are quite capable of deciding whether campaigns adequately prepare them to cast a ballot on election day. Frankly, we worry less about the voters and more about the candidates and consultants who orchestrate these campaigns. Our findings show that campaign architects are able to identify messages that are not useful to the voters and know which tactics exceed common decency and good taste. We find that these types of messages actually depress turnout. Do political elites know this? If so, why do they continue to disseminate these messages? Is it a purposeful tactic used to alter the number of voters? Rather than stay home out of disgust on election day, citizens need to press candidates, reporters, and editors for explanations concerning the conduct of campaigns.

APPENDIX

Age: This is an interval variable ranging from 18 to 97. In estimating the effect of age, we also include a first-order polynomial (i.e., age^2) to pick up the curvilinear relationship between age and turnout.

Closeness of Senate Elections: The polling data were taken from two sources: content analysis of state newspapers and "Campaign Hotline," a political archive. The hotline is currently available through the *National Journal's* "Cloak Room" (db.cloakroom.com). The closeness of the race was calculated by coding the percentage difference between the two candidates in the polls. For example, if 52% of citizens preferred one candidate, while 42% preferred the other, then the race was given a score of 10% (i.e., 52 − 42 = 10). (Lower numbers indicate closer races.)

Comparative Nature of Press Coverage: This measure is based on the newspaper's balance of critical coverage. The measure ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents completely comparative coverage (e.g., printing the same amount of criticism about both candidates) and 1 represents exclusively negative coverage (e.g., printing only criticism of one of the two candidates). The measure of news coverage was calculated with the following formula: absolute value (criticisms of Candidate A − criticisms of Candidate B)/(criticisms of Candidate A + criticisms of Candidate B).

Competitiveness of U.S. House Races: We calculated the proportion of House races in the state in which the winner garnered 55% or less of the vote.

Contact with Candidates: Five items from the NES/SES survey were used to assess personal contact: met with the candidate, attended a meeting at which the candidate spoke, talked to a member of the candidate's staff, received mail from the candidate, and knew someone who had contact with the candidate (Jacobson 1997; Krasno 1994). We created an index ranging from 0 (reports no contact with the candidate) to 5 (reports contact with the candidate in all five situations).

Educational Background: This is an interval measure based on the question: "What is the highest grade of school or year of college you have completed?"

Employment Status: We created a binary variable that coded respondents who report being unemployed or temporarily laid off as 0, 1 otherwise.

Exposure to Candidates: We used three items from the NES/SES survey to assess media exposure: saw the candidate on television, read about the candidate in the newspaper, and heard about the candidate on the radio. These were combined into an index ranging from 0 (reports no exposure to the candidates) to 3 (reports exposure to the candidate in all three mediums).

Familiarity with the Candidates: We created a three-point measure for each candidate in Senate races to assess recognition and recall of the candidate's name. Those who could recall *and* recognize the candidate's name were given a score of 2; those who could accomplish only one of these tasks

received a score of 1; those who could neither recall nor recognize the candidate were scored 0.

Favorability toward Candidates: Respondents who rated both candidates positively (e.g., greater than 50 on the feeling thermometer) were coded 2; those who rated one candidate positively were coded 1; and those who rated neither candidate positively were coded 0.

Income: The six-point scale ranged from 1 (less than $10,000) to 6 ($60,000 or more).

Home Ownership: We created a binary variable that coded respondents who report owning their homes as 1, 0 otherwise.

Length of Residence: The interval scale was based on years at current residence (Ragsdale and Rusk 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Mention Campaign Theme: "In your state, what issue did the candidates talk about most during the campaign for the Senate?" Respondents who answered this question received a score of 1; those who did not offer a response received a score of 0.

Partisan Attachment: The standard seven-point party identification question was recorded into four categories: independents, 0; leaning partisans, 1; weak partisans, 2; and strong partisans, 3 (Campbell et al. 1960).

Political Interest: "Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you are very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested?" (Scoring differentiated those who were very interested from all others.)

Political Sophistication: Answers to six questions were used to measure political sophistication. Following Zaller (1992), we examined "correct" comparative placements of (1) George Bush and the (2) Democratic and (3) Republican parties on the seven-point liberal/conservative continuum. The answer was coded correct if a respondent said George Bush or the Republican Party was moderate to extremely conservative. Similarly, if the respondent said the Democratic Party was moderate to extremely liberal, the answer was coded as correct. We also measured levels of information about the senator not up for reelection in the state, since information about the senator seeking reelection is contaminated by the ongoing campaign. We use the following three NES/SES measures to assess knowledge of the senator not seeking reelection: (4) correct recognition of the senator's name, (5) correct recall of the senator's name, and (6) correct ideological placement of the senator. To measure the latter, we recoded ADA scores to range from 1 to 3 (1 = liberal, 2 = moderate, 3 = conservative) and averaged the scores for the two years prior to the respondent's interview date. Each answer to the ideological placement of the senator was also recoded from 1 to 3 (1 = liberal, 2 = moderate, 3 = conservative). If the difference between that score and the recoded ADA score was 0, the respondent correctly identified the ideological placement of the senator. If the score was different from 0, the identification was incorrect.

Proportion of Comparative Advertisements: Number of comparative ads/total number of ads. A comparative advertisement is a commercial presenting positive information about the sponsoring candidate and criticism of the opponent.

Proportion of Exclusively Negative Advertisements: Number of exclusively negative ads/total number of ads. An exclusively negative advertisement is a commercial presenting critical information about the opponent, without mentioning the sponsoring candidate.

Residency in the South: Respondents living in the states of the former Confederacy (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) were coded 1, 0 otherwise.

Tone of Gubernatorial Campaign: We examined headlines and stories about the gubernatorial race that appeared on the front page and the first page of the "state and local" section of the newspaper. Based on this content analysis, gubernatorial campaigns were scored on a four-point scale, ranging from extremely negative (1) to exclusively positive (4).

Vote: "Did you vote for a candidate for the U.S. Senate?" Respondents who answered "yes" were coded 1, 0 otherwise. Unfortunately, a validated vote is not available in the NES/SES.

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