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Priming the Vote: Campaign Effects in a U.S. Senate Election

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A growing body of evidence suggests that campaigns affect voters by priming the criteria on which voters base their decisions. Yet virtually all of this work uses simulated campaign rhetoric and/or relies on indirect measures of vote choice. This paper combines a content analysis of media campaign coverage with an Election Day exit poll to explore the impact of a real-world campaign—the 2000 campaign for the U.S. Senate in Minnesota—on voters' decisions. In this case, the campaign did in fact prime exposed and attentive voters to base their decisions on the issues and images emphasized in the campaign. Such campaign effects were reinforced by interpersonal discussions. The results constitute the first demonstration of priming effects in a U.S. election with voters at the polls.

KEY WORDS: priming, campaign effects, candidate image, deliberation, Senate elections, voting

Do campaigns affect voting behavior in the United States? For many years, the conventional academic wisdom suggested that campaigns and the accompanying media coverage had minimal effects on voters (e.g., Finkel, 1993). This wisdom has recently shifted, however, and many scholars now believe that campaigns fundamentally shape voters' decisions (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 2000).

What is the evidence? Many scholars have cited correlations between campaign variations and aggregate differences in voting behavior (e.g., Shaw, 1999); others offer experimental evidence that simulated elite rhetoric affects voters' evaluations (e.g., Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Although this research is important, its reliance on simulated campaign rhetoric and/or measures of voters' "intentions" means that we have little direct evidence of a genuine campaign influencing individual voters' decisions at the polls: "Academic research on the impact of

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campaign activities on electoral behavior has remained largely inconclusive" (Althaus, Nardulli, & Shaw, 2001, p. 2).[1]

In this paper, I combine a content analysis of media campaign coverage with an Election Day exit poll to explore the impact of a real-world campaign—the 2000 campaign for the U.S. Senate in Minnesota—on voters' decisions. Following basic political psychology research, I focus on how campaign media coverage primes voters to rely on the issues emphasized in the campaign. The exit poll is ideal for this, as it taps voters' reasoning at the time when they express their electoral decisions (Traugott & Lavrakas, 2000, p. 21). I also introduce the possibility that media campaigns prime image criteria. I find compelling evidence that the campaign did in fact prime exposed and attentive voters to base their decisions on the issues and images emphasized in the campaign.

The results constitute the first demonstration of priming in a U.S. election with voters at the polls. As such, the results enhance our understanding of campaign effects, and also show that findings from basic political psychology research apply to actual electoral settings (thereby speaking to the external validity of that research). I also move beyond prior demonstrations of priming effects by offering an exploratory investigation of the interactive effects of interpersonal discussions and priming.

Measuring Campaign Effects

Documenting the impact of campaigns on voting behavior has proven to be one of the most perplexing problems in political science. To see why, consider what it requires. First, researchers must agree on the dependent variable—that is, what the campaign and accompanying media coverage will affect. Scholars have recently broadened their focus beyond vote choice to include turnout decisions, learning, and priming the criteria underlying vote choice (Iyengar & Simon, 2000; Jamieson, 2000, p. 17).

In what follows, I focus on priming effects that occur when a speaker's (e.g., campaign's) emphasis on an issue causes people to then base their evaluations on that issue. For example, Krosnick and Brannon (1993) used a survey to show that the media's emphasis on the Persian Gulf war in 1991 led many citizens to base presidential evaluations on the president's effectiveness in managing the war. Although most priming research consists of laboratory or survey demonstrations of issue priming of presidential evaluations, we also know that campaigns spend considerable time attempting to prime issues, and thus we can expect campaign priming of the criteria underlying vote choice (e.g., Druckman, Jacobs, &

[1] I am interested in the impact of campaigns on *individual* voters' decisions, so aggregate data are not sufficient. Johnston et al. (1992) and Mendelsohn (1996) used rolling cross-sectional data to measure campaign effects (see also the panel study of Berelson et al., 1954). My study builds on and differs from their work (see Althaus et al., 2001, for a critique of past efforts).

Ostermeier, in press; Johnston, Blais, Brady, & Crete, 1992). Moreover, despite the near-exclusive focus on issues, the logic easily extends to the priming of prevalent images (e.g., integrity, leadership; see Druckman & Holmes, in press; Funk, 1999; McGraw & Ling, 2003, p. 24; Mendelsohn, 1996).

Once scholars identify a type of behavior—such as priming—they must decide how and when to measure it. Pre-election surveys or experimental research typically gauge reactions well before Election Day, using vote intention measures or public opinion more generally. This can be problematic, however, as these measures may capture short-term responses to particular campaign events, or experimental stimuli. Indeed, Druckman and Nelson (2003) found that media effects uncovered in experiments tend not to persist (see also Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder, & Rich, 2000, p. 811). Over the course of a campaign, effects could appear but then fade as voters return to their initial preferences (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Traugott & Lavrakas, 2000, pp. 13–21). As Althaus et al. (2001, p. 6) explained, "Studies using experimental designs . . . test for short-term effects, often measured just minutes after exposure. . . . Such studies tend to find effects, but their limited external validity makes it difficult to generalize from them." Ideally, to evaluate the impact of an entire campaign on voters' decisions, we would need to measure the campaign over time (instead of specific events) and then measure voters' decisions at the polls.[2] This approach would nicely complement extant experimental work; it may lack the internal validity of experiments, but it greatly enhances the external validity of priming studies (see Mendelsohn, 1996, p. 114).

Measuring the independent variable—the campaign or concomitant media coverage—raises further difficulties. To show that a campaign affects voters, one must assess the campaign content so as to form expectations of how the campaign might matter. Most research fails to directly do this, instead relying on single-message simulated campaign rhetoric (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) or making informal inferences about message content. Although these approaches can demonstrate that campaigns (or at least single campaign events) *can* affect voters, they do not constitute evidence that real-world campaigns affect voters' final decisions (see Jamieson, 2000, p. 16).

The final difficulty involves demonstrating that the campaign content *caused* a change in voters' decisions (see Iyengar & Simon, 2000, pp. 151–152). On its face, this seems simple—one must show that those exposed to the campaign act

[2] Althaus et al. (2001, p. 6) explained that vote intention measures also are problematic because people typically overstate their likelihood to turn out and vote; thus, a survey may end up focusing on actual nonvoters. This is less of a problem with an exit poll because the respondents obviously did turn out. Others measure voters' decisions after the election. The problem here is that voters may not accurately report their vote choices (e.g., bandwagon effects), and even more important, reasons for their votes could be rationalizations that are influenced by post-election events (see, e.g., Chaffee & Rimal, 1996, p. 273; Jamieson, 2000, p. 16; Traugott & Lavrakas, 2000, p. 21). Of course, as with all studies of priming, there is the possibility that my findings reflect general rationalizations rather than derivations.

differently than they otherwise would have. In practice, however, this task presents numerous challenges, including (1) measurement that the voters under study were in fact exposed and attentive to the given campaign, (2) evidence that the type of behavior under study moved in a way consistent with the campaign, and (3) evidence that it was in fact the campaign that caused the change in behavior, which means ruling out alternative (non-campaign) causes such as preexisting party identification. If the analysis involves a comparison of those exposed and attentive to the campaign versus those not exposed or attentive, it must be clear that this difference is due to exposure/attention and *not* due to other characteristics such as political knowledge (i.e., a self-selection problem).

A Research Strategy

No single research strategy can successfully overcome every methodological hurdle (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 2000; Jamieson, 2000). For example, experimental work can establish definitive causal relationships, but it almost always relies on simulated single-exposure communications and vote-intention or alternative candidate evaluation measures. The most persuasive work comes from rolling cross-sectional surveys that enable researchers to follow voters over time to see whether voters change as the campaign progresses. Using such data, Mendelsohn (1996) found that the 1988 Canadian campaign primed voters to base their vote intentions on perceptions of leadership while interpersonal discussions primed the most salient issue (Johnston et al., 1992; see also Dobrzynska, Blais, & Nadeau, 2003; Wlezien & Erikson, 2002). I build on Mendelsohn's study by using an alternative research design, with voters at the polls (instead of pre-election surveys) to examine priming during an American election.

Specifically, I focus on the 2000 campaign for the U.S. Senate in Minnesota. I measure campaign content through an intensive content analysis of local newspaper and television news coverage. I chose news coverage because prior work suggests that citizens receive much of their campaign information from local news coverage (e.g., Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Kahn & Kenney, in press). Moreover, news coverage often captures the essence of political candidate ads and statements, and thus can be used as a general campaign measure (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 2000, pp. 164–165; Kahn & Kenney, in press).

I gauged the impact of the campaign by implementing an exit poll on Election Day. The exit poll allows me to probe the role of the entire campaign (or at least salient events from the entire campaign) in priming the criteria underlying actual vote choice (rather than vote intention). As mentioned, an exit poll is ideal for this task because it assesses people's reasoning immediately after they cast their votes. In this case, any effects are not fleeting because they presumably affected actual vote choice. On the exit poll, I measured vote choices, image perceptions, issue positions, and demographics. (I discuss below how I deal with the thorny issue of measuring campaign exposure and attention.)

This approach of combining a content analysis with an exit poll enjoys the advantage of having relatively strong measures of campaign content and voters' decisions. I thus can test my basic priming hypothesis that, relative to those not exposed or attentive to the campaign, exposed and attentive individuals will be significantly more likely to base their vote choices on the issues *and* images emphasized in the campaign, all else constant. This hypothesis follows from the aforementioned basic research on issue priming, and then extends it to images. I also provide an exploratory analysis of the competing effects of interpersonal conversations.

The 2000 U.S. Senate Campaign in Minnesota

The 2000 campaign for the U.S. Senate in Minnesota pitted Republican incumbent Rod Grams against Democratic challenger Mark Dayton. Grams had been a Minneapolis–St. Paul broadcast news personality until 1992, when he was elected to the U.S. House. He won his Senate seat in 1994 and was known as a "doctrinaire conservative" (Salisbury, 2000). During the campaign, *Congressional Quarterly* labeled Grams as the most vulnerable of incumbent senators. Dayton, heir to the Target Corp. (formerly Dayton Hudson Corp.) department store family fortune, had held numerous state government posts, most notably state auditor from 1991 to 1995, and was seen as an "equally doctrinaire liberal" (Salisbury, 2000). The race received considerable national attention, given its closeness and the possibility of an incumbent defeat. Dayton pulled away in the final weeks and won with 48.8% of the statewide vote, versus 43.3% for Grams.[3]

To capture campaign content, I assembled a team of content analyzers who analyzed local newspapers—the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*—every day from 13 September (the day after the primary election) through 7 November (Election Day). The team also analyzed one (randomly chosen) broadcast each evening from each of the four main Minneapolis–St. Paul television news programs (from 14 September through 6 November). This resulted in an analysis of 112 newspapers and 216 broadcasts. The team identified every newspaper article on the Senate campaign, or, in the case of television news, every story on the campaign.[4] They then coded the article or story for a number of characteristics including length, position (e.g., lead or not), type (e.g., editorial, news story), and sound bites (either in print or on a broadcast). Most important, they coded the content of each story; they coded each paragraph in the case of newspapers, or each story in the case of television news, as covering any

[3] The ballot also included five minor party candidates from the Independence, Constitution, Libertarian, Grassroots, and Socialist Workers parties. The most successful of these was James Gibson of the Independence party (the party of then-current Gov. Jesse Ventura), who received 5.8%. All other minor party candidates received less than 1%.

[4] Kahn (1991) highlighted the importance of focusing on Senate campaign–specific coverage (rather than more general cross-campaign coverage).

Table 1. Local (Minneapolis–St. Paul) News Coverage of the 2000 U.S. Senate Campaign

	Local newspapers	Local TV news
Average percentage of days of Senate campaign coverage	88% (n = 112)	34% (n = 216)
Average number of Senate campaign stories on a given day	1.9 (n = 112)	0.42 (n = 216)
Average percentage of Senate campaign stories with issue frame	31% (n = 213)	21% (n = 90)
Average percentage of Senate campaign stories with strategy frame	45% (n = 213)	53% (n = 90)
Average percentage of Senate campaign stories with image frame	21% (n = 213)	21% (n = 90)
Average percentage of Senate campaign stories with other frame	3% (n = 213)	5% (n = 90)

of 28 issues (e.g., defense, Social Security), 11 candidate personal/image characteristics (e.g., leadership, honesty, empathy), and/or 13 strategic elements (e.g., poll results, ads, fundraising). They also coded each article/story as predominantly using an issue frame (e.g., focus on candidate issue positions), an image frame (e.g., focus on candidate background, characteristics), or a strategy frame (e.g., focus on polls, candidate travel).[5] The goal of the content analysis was to capture the main themes of the campaign, as relayed to voters via the media.

Table 1 shows summary statistics from the content analysis; data from the two newspapers and four television stations are merged into media averages.[6] The newspapers included Senate campaign coverage on 88% of the days coded, whereas television news did so only 34% of the time ($z = 9.29$; p ″ .01 for a two-tailed differences-of-proportions test). Moreover, on a typical day, newspapers included 1.9 Senate campaign stories, whereas television news reported less than half of a story. Even when the television news included a story, its average length was only 71 seconds (across all newscasts with or without stories, there was an average of about 30 seconds of coverage). The table also shows that both media reported the plurality of their stories with a strategy frame, although the newspapers used an issue frame significantly more often—31% versus 21% of the time ($z = 1.77$; $p < .10$ for a two-tailed differences-of-proportions test).

[5] Coders also could code an article/story as having an "ad watch" frame or an "other" frame; however, these were rarely invoked. I assigned one coder to each newspaper or broadcast for a given day. I then took a sample of papers and broadcasts and had a second coder code as well. Using this approach, I found high levels of reliability, with upwards of 85% reliability. Other coding details are available from the author.

[6] Neither the newspapers nor the television broadcasts substantially differed across papers or stations (in terms of content).

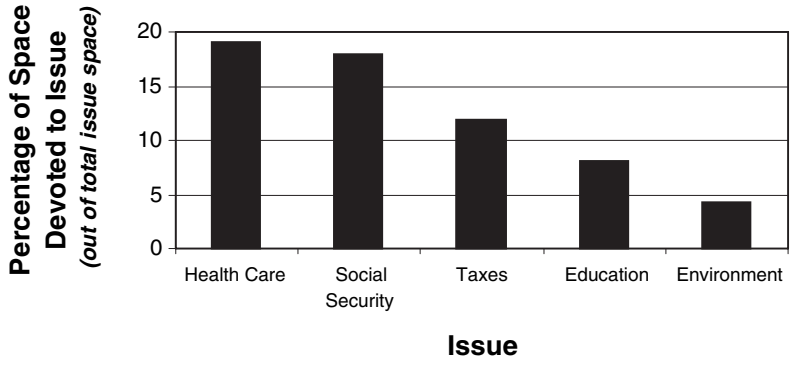

Figure 1. Issue focus in Minneapolis–St. Paul newspapers.

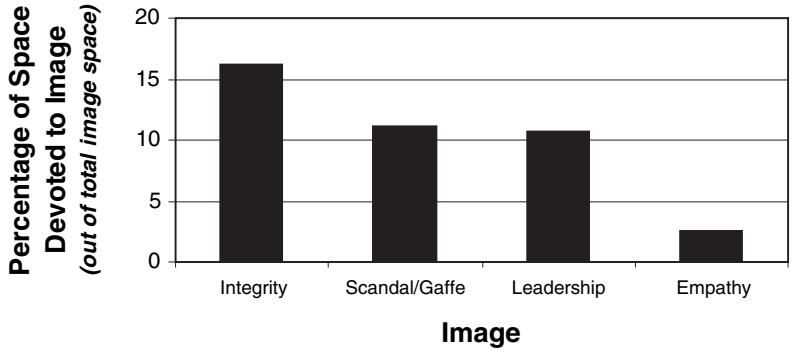

Figure 2. Image focus in Minneapolis–St. Paul newspapers.

Given the paucity of television coverage (see Alger, Allen, Stevens, & Sullivan, 2003), I focus on newspaper coverage—although, not surprisingly, the content of the television news strongly resembled newspaper coverage (see also Kahn & Kenney, in press, who make clear that in Senate elections, newspapers are a more important source). Figures 1 and 2 show the proportions of space (in terms of number of paragraphs) devoted to the top issue and image categories relative to the total number of issue and image paragraphs, respectively; other issues and images received no more than nominal attention.[7] The issues of health care and Social Security enjoyed significantly more attention than any other issue,

[7] I do not further analyze the strategy coverage because the content of such coverage is not directly related to the criteria on which voters typically vote (see Kahn, 1991, for related discussion).

together claiming nearly 40% of issue coverage (recall that 28 issues were coded). Taxes constituted the next most important issue, although it was significantly less prevalent than health care or Social Security (e.g., compared to Social Security, $z = 6.33$; $p < .01$ for a two-tailed differences-of-proportions test). Shortly before Election Day, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported that the "two candidates agree the most important issues in their race are Social Security . . . and health care" (Salisbury, 2000).

As for image, the campaign focused mainly on integrity, which received significantly more attention than any other image (e.g., compared to leadership, $z = 5.43$; $p < .01$ for a two-tailed differences-of-proportions test). This was followed by scandals, leadership, and empathy.[8] Note that most of the scandals raised questions of integrity, including such things as Grams' involvement in an illegal attack e-mail and Dayton's truthfulness about his actions during the Vietnam war. Integrity also received considerable attention as the result of a widely discussed candidate ad where Grams' mother said, "Have you ever had someone spend millions to tell lies about someone you love?"[9] In sum, the overall campaign focused on Social Security, health care, and integrity. I thus expected that, in deciding for whom to vote, those who were exposed and attentive to the campaign would rely on these issues and this image to a greater extent than those who were not exposed or attentive, all else constant.

Assessing the Campaign's Impact with an Exit Poll

To assess the impact of the campaign, I conducted an Election Day exit poll. As explained, this approach ensures that any documented effects were not fleeting responses to single exposures, as in experiments. It also allows for relatively accurate measures of vote choice and reasoning because respondents had just cast their votes.

I conducted the poll by assembling 17 teams of two student pollsters each. I then randomly selected polling locations throughout the Minneapolis–St. Paul metro area; the polling places included both city and suburban locales. Each polling team spent a randomly determined 2- to 3-hour daytime period at their polling place. A pollster asked every third voter to complete a brief, self-administered questionnaire in exchange for $3.

To ensure a representative sample of voters—and not just those who had the time and interest to complete a lengthy survey—I limited the number of items on

[8] The bulk of personal/image coverage consisted of factual biographical information.

[9] Grams' mother continued, "Mark Dayton? Uff-da. Vote for Rod." About 40% of exit poll respondents recalled this ad. I conducted an informal coding of ads by having the television coders record and describe all ads that appeared during the news. To the extent that these ads dealt with issues, they largely focused on Social Security and health care. Moreover, a few other notable ads included attacks on the other candidate's integrity, including a Dayton ad that accused Grams of lying about Dayton's Social Security plan, and a Grams ad attacking Dayton's health care plan, asking "can you afford to believe him?"

Table 2. Description of Exit Poll Respondents

Variable	Sample data
Senate vote choice	Voted for Dayton, 55%; voted for Grams, 37%
Presidential vote choice	Voted for Gore, 58%; voted for Bush, 30%; voted for Nader, 10%
Party identification	Democrat, 53%; independent, 24%; Republican, 23%
Gender	Male, 50%; female, 50%
Ethnicity	White, 84%; African American, 3%; Asian American, 3%; Hispanic, 2%; other/no answer, 9%
Age	18–24, 18%; 25–34, 23%; 35–44, 21%; 45–54, 20%; 55–64, 9%; 65–74, 6%; 75+, 3%
Education	High school or less, 13%; some college, 30%; college degree, 32%; advanced degree, 25%
Political knowledge	0 correct, 31%; 1 correct, 25%; 2 correct, 44%
Local newspaper	Did not subscribe, 18%; subscribed and read <5 days a week, 35%; subscribed and read ≥5 days a week, 47%
Campaign discussion	Discussed <4 days a week, 45%; discussed ≥4 days a week, 55%

the exit poll. Specifically, I asked voters to report their senatorial and presidential vote choices. To evaluate the criteria underlying vote choices, I measured image perceptions, issue positions, and demographic characteristics (see Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 99; Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, & Sullivan, 1990). I gauged image perceptions by asking voters to report—on 7-point scales—which candidate they thought was more compassionate, a stronger leader, and more honest, with higher scores indicating a movement toward Dayton (see Funk, 1999). Issue positions were measured by voters' self-ratings and ratings of each candidate on 7-point scales for positions on Social Security, health care, and taxes.[10] From these, I constructed items such that higher scores meant relatively closer issue positions to Dayton. I measured party identification (on a 7-point scale with higher values indicating more Democratic), gender (0 = male, 1 = female), minority status, age, education, and political knowledge in order to include them as standard controls (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993).[11]

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the sample. The vote totals of 55% for Dayton and 37% for Grams almost perfectly match the actual totals that the candidates received in the metro area (where Dayton received 54% and Grams received 36%).[12] The table also shows that the respondents come from diverse

[10] Each issue item focused on the particulars of the issue. The Social Security item focused on privatization, the health care item focused on universal coverage, and the tax item focused on cuts.

[11] I coded self-identified African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics as minorities. I measured political knowledge with two questions: one asking about the length of a senator's term, and another asking about who determines whether a law is constitutional.

[12] The Independence party candidate, James Gibson, received 6% among survey respondents. The survey did not include items asking about Gibson, and thus I focus exclusively on Grams and Dayton voters.

backgrounds in terms of party identification, gender, age, and education. In contrast to many experimental and even some survey samples, this sample includes a set of actual heterogeneous voters.

I tested for campaign priming by comparing the decisions of voters exposed and attentive to the campaign (denoted "campaign" voters) with those of voters who were less exposed or attentive (denoted "non-campaign" voters). The dependent variable was Senate vote choice, where 0 = Grams and 1 = Dayton. I expected that, relative to non-campaign voters, campaign voters would rely substantially more on Social Security positions, health care positions, and integrity perceptions, all else constant. As discussed, measuring campaign exposure/attention is difficult—individuals have poor memories and a tendency to exaggerate; it also may be the case that campaign voters systematically differ from non-campaign voters in ways that mimic campaign effects (e.g., campaign voters might rely more on issues).

To measure campaign exposure and attention, I asked respondents whether they subscribed to either of the two local newspapers and how many days, on average, they read the front-page and/or metro sections of the paper. I used this measure because people receive substantial campaign information from local newspapers (e.g., Mondak, 1995); it accounts for both exposure and attention; and it perfectly matches my campaign content measure, and thus there is no concern of the medium not capturing the campaign content (Price & Zaller, 1993, p. 136). This measure also deals relatively well with two common problems (see also Southwell, Barmada, Hornik, & Maklan, 2002). First, it does not ask for a self-assessment of a subjective state (such as interest in the campaign; see Zaller, 1992, p. 76) or for recall of a unique event (such as remembering a campaign ad): People presumably know whether they subscribe to a local newspaper, and they have some reliable sense of how often they read it.[13] Second, although those exposed may differ systematically from those not exposed, these differences stem largely from sociodemographic variables for which I can control (e.g., education, age), and not from political variables (see Bizer, Krosnick, Petty, Rucker, & Wheller, 2001).[14] Moreover, unlike a measure such as campaign ad recall, there is little reason to suspect that people will assert higher levels of this measure simply because they were in fact affected by the campaign (see Althaus et al., 2001, pp. 7–8; Iyengar & Simon, 2000, pp. 151–152). Table 2 provides some basic statistics on this measure. Using a median split, I created two groups of voters:

[13] By asking about subscription (and not just reading as in National Election Study measures), I avoid the problem of asking people how often they receive news from sources to which their attention may widely vary, such as radio or television news (Price & Zaller, 1993, pp. 135–136). The main drawbacks of the measure are the possible inaccuracies in measuring attention and the equating of attention with processing.

[14] Newspaper subscription and reading is correlated with age, education, and race, but not with party identification or Senate vote choice. It is correlated with political knowledge as well, for which I can control. I do not pursue the use of instrumental variables because the exit poll was so limited in its inclusion of variables.

the campaign group (who subscribed to a newspaper and read it at least 5 days a week) and the non-campaign group.[15]

To test for priming effects, I regressed vote choice on the aforementioned variables, first for all voters and then separately for campaign and non-campaign voters. I standardized all variables on a 0 to 1 scale and used a logit model. (Recall that higher values of all issue and image variables indicate movement toward Dayton.) To control for the presidential campaign, I also included a variable indicating whether the voter voted for Gore.

The first column of Table 3 shows that all voters, taken together, based their votes on issues, images, and party identification. Those closer to Dayton on Social Security were significantly more likely to vote for him, as were those who had higher perceptions of his leadership skills and his integrity. Not surprisingly, the more Democratic a voter, the more likely he or she would vote for Dayton. Interestingly, voting for Gore did not significantly affect the likelihood of voting for Dayton, controlling for other attributes (see also Kahn, 1991). Thus, it appears as if voters focused on items emphasized in the campaign—Social Security and integrity.

The story becomes more intriguing in the second and third columns of Table 3, which separate out the non-campaign and campaign groups. The non-campaign voters did *not* rely on Social Security or integrity (neither variable is significant); rather, they based their votes on taxes and leadership effectiveness—an issue and an image that were *not* particularly emphasized in the campaign. In sharp contrast, campaign voters, as expected, focused on Social Security and integrity—the central issue and image in the campaign.[16] Party identification mattered for both groups in the expected direction, as did minority status (although, curiously, in opposite directions for the two groups). Health care played no role in any of the voters' decisions.[17]

To establish the significance of the priming effect, I reran the first pooled model and included a dummy variable for campaign voters along with interactions between campaign and every other independent variable. I do not display the results here, but I find that *both* interactions, between campaign and Social Security ($p < .05$) and between campaign and integrity ($p < .10$), are significant.

[15] In the campaign group, 29% subscribed only to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 52% subscribed only to the *Star Tribune*, and 19% subscribed to both.

[16] That campaign voters were primed away from the less emphasized criteria (i.e., taxes and leadership effectiveness) fits perfectly with priming research showing that "increases in the impact of some issues should be accompanied by decreases in the impact of other, unrelated [less emphasized] issues" (Miller & Krosnick, 1996, p. 82). In other words, priming research suggests that non-campaign voters will base their decisions on some criteria but that these criteria may fade for campaign voters with the introduction of new criteria.

[17] The insignificance of health care may be due to a questionnaire problem. Specifically, the exit poll health care question focused exclusively on universal coverage, whereas the campaign focused on both universal coverage and drug prices. It may have been the case that voters focused more on drug prices (rather than universal coverage).

Table 3. Priming Senate Voting

Independent variable	Data set			
	Everyone	Non-campaign voters	Campaign voters	Everyone
Health care position	–0.05 (1.76)	–0.89 (2.42)	–1.10 (3.46)	–0.92 (1.87)
Social Security position	4.66*** (1.48)	0.83 (2.19)	8.21** (3.59)	2.20 (2.99)
Taxes position	1.66 (1.56)	4.34** (2.25)	3.13 (3.44)	2.87* (1.81)
Leadership effectiveness	2.31** (1.01)	3.89** (1.72)	2.15 (2.09)	3.20*** (1.24)
Integrity	3.80*** (1.30)	1.90 (2.23)	7.01*** (2.74)	4.96* (2.66)
Empathy	1.24 (1.24)	2.74 (2.22)	0.80 (2.17)	1.10 (1.47)
Party identification	2.99*** (1.07)	2.95** (1.51)	4.41** (2.29)	4.11*** (1.30)
Gender	0.07 (0.42)	–0.33 (0.64)	0.88 (0.99)	–0.21 (0.50)
Minority	0.79 (0.70)	3.45*** (1.35)	–4.99*** (1.91)	0.77 (0.73)
Age	–0.67 (0.80)	–1.18 (1.40)	0.91 (1.43)	–0.52 (0.99)
Education	1.39 (0.89)	3.07** (1.36)	0.40 (1.50)	2.13** (1.01)
Political knowledge	0.06 (0.27)	0.11 (0.36)	–0.47 (0.58)	–0.11 (0.29)
Vote for Gore	0.43 (0.49)	–0.01 (0.74)	–0.25 (1.06)	0.24 (0.56)
Campaign	—	—	—	–2.01 (2.78)
Campaign × Social Security	—	—	—	5.43 (4.53)
Campaign × Integrity	—	—	—	–1.83 (3.56)
Discussion	—	—	—	1.87 (2.56)
Discussion × Social Security	—	—	—	–1.12 (3.93)
Discussion × Integrity	—	—	—	–3.67 (3.06)
Discussion × Campaign	—	—	—	–10.17* (5.24)
Discussion × Campaign × Social Security	—	—	—	15.07** (7.48)
Discussion × Campaign × Integrity	—	—	—	9.62* (5.88)
Constant	–9.35*** (1.55)	–9.49*** (2.41)	–12.22*** (3.17)	–9.86*** (2.43)
χ^2	302.69***	156.04***	176.30***	322.40***
Number of observations	348	180	168	348

Note. Dependent variable: Senate vote choice, where 0 = Grams and 1 = Dayton. Entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
***p ″ .01, **p ″ .05, *p ″ .11 (two-tailed).

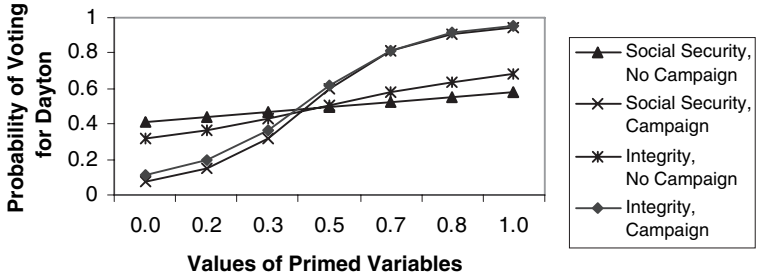

Figure 3. Effect of primed variables on the probability of voting for Dayton.

This shows that, relative to non-campaign voters, campaign voters were in fact significantly more likely to base their votes on Social Security and integrity. Substantively, the priming impact is large. Figure 3 shows the predicted probability of voting for Dayton, holding all variables at their median values but then varying non-campaign and campaign voters' values for Social Security or integrity. For example, if the median non-campaign voter moves from total agreement with Grams (0) on Social Security to total agreement with Dayton (1), the voter's probability of voting for Dayton moves from .42 to .58. The analogous move for a campaign voter changes the predicted probability from .08 to .95.

The results thus strongly support the priming hypotheses: Campaign voters based their votes on one of the two issues emphasized in the campaign and on the most salient image, whereas non-campaign voters did not rely on the central campaign issues or image. The results also provide considerable credence for my measure of campaign exposure and attention. As discussed, if campaign voters systematically differ from non-campaign voters in ways other than campaign exposure—for example, if they are more likely to vote on the basis of issues (or images) regardless of campaign content—then it might not be the campaign causing the differences between the voters (i.e., a self-selection problem). Yet the finding that all voters relied on issues and images suggests that the campaign determined the issues and images on which campaign voters focused, and it was not that campaign voters were the only ones using issues and/or images.

This is the first evidence of a campaign priming effect with voters in a U.S. election: Campaigns can in fact shape the criteria on which voters base their votes. The results show that the potentially fleeting effects found with artificial rhetoric in the laboratory, or found indirectly with surveys, work during actual U.S. elections. The priming effect has important normative and strategic implications. First, as Jamieson (2000) explained, elections "are a means of choosing leaders, but they are also a way for the governors and the governed to connect with each other. They tell us what we should expect from our leaders, how we should evaluate

them, which actions are good and which bad, and what constitutes success of failure" (p. 17). In short, if campaigns alter the criteria on which voters focus, then they also change the basic relationship between citizens and public officials (e.g., the issues on which citizens expect officials to act).[18] Second, the priming effect has implications for candidate strategy; candidates have an incentive to try to get the issues and images most favorable to them on the agenda, as this can sway attentive voters (see Druckman et al., in press). I treated the entire campaign as a unitary priming force, thereby ignoring the candidates' independent efforts.[19] Candidates also need to consider which issues will be primed, which voters will be primed, and how this affects the issue positions they adopt (e.g., they have an incentive to move toward the median on primed issues if they are attempting to capture attentive voters).

An Exploratory Investigation of Interpersonal Discussions and Campaign Effects

Like nearly all prior work on priming, I have treated voters as if they operate in a social vacuum with no access to alternative communications via interpersonal discussions. Yet interpersonal discussions can substantially shape voters' decisions (e.g., Beck, Dalton, Greene, & Huckfeldt, 2002; Berelson et al., 1954; Druckman & Nelson, 2003). An important question then concerns how campaign effects and interpersonal communication affect one another. On the exit poll, I asked respondents how many days in an average week they discussed the campaign with their family and/or friends.

This measure is not ideal; it asks respondents to recall and report a unique behavior during the campaign season (unlike newspaper reading) and it does not capture the mix of the discussion networks. Nonetheless, I used the measure to speculatively explore the interaction between campaign and interpersonal discussion effects. To do so, I reran the regression reported in the first column of Table 3, and also included the significant interactions between campaign and Social Security and between campaign and integrity. This captures the previously reported campaign priming effects. I then added a dummy variable distinguishing those who engaged in more than the median amount of discussion from those who did so less (see Table 2), along with interactions between the discussion variable and both Social Security and integrity. These interactions measure whether

[18] This accentuates the fundamental importance of priming: It matters even if final vote choices do not happen to change (as was the case here with campaign and non-campaign voters voting for Dayton at similar rates—58% and 62%, respectively). Also, under different circumstances, it is easy to see how final vote choices could change.

[19] Along these lines, there are at least two other issues in need of further research. First, my content analysis captures the entire campaign and ignores changes in the campaign over time (e.g., changes that would allow for an analysis of primacy and recency effects). Second, I focus exclusively on priming, and thus I do not explore the possibility that candidates also persuaded voters to change their issue positions and/or image perceptions.

engaging in discussions primed Social Security and/or integrity. I also included three-way interactions among campaign, discussion, and both Social Security and integrity to test for reinforcement effects from the discussions.

The results are shown in the final column of Table 3. The direct campaign priming effects of Social Security and integrity disappear, as indicated by lack of significance on the two-way campaign interactions. Also, the lack of significance on the two-way discussion interactions shows that discussions by themselves did not prime. However, the significance of the three-way interactions among campaign, discussion, and both Social Security and integrity suggests that the campaign priming effects manifested themselves only among voters who *both* attended to the campaign *and* discussed the campaign. That is, the campaign priming effects documented earlier tell only part of the story—the campaign had an effect on voters who were exposed and attentive *and* who experienced reinforcement via interpersonal discussions.[20]

Although the questionable validity of the discussion measure makes these results exploratory, they raise some intriguing questions. When are campaign effects contingent on reinforcement from interpersonal discussions?[21] Are there conditions where interpersonal discussions counteract campaign priming effects? Do campaigns and interpersonal discussions ever prime alternative, orthogonal criteria? The important point is that most work on campaign effects focuses narrowly on the impact of media and political elites; as Beck et al. (2002, p. 57) explained, "Most studies of voting behavior in the United States . . . have paid little attention to context" (but see Mendelsohn, 1996). Future work will benefit from exploring the dynamic interaction between campaigns and interpersonal discussions.

Conclusion

Scholars, pundits, and campaign strategists have long been interested in the questions of whether and how campaigns affect voters. In recent years, researchers have compiled an array of suggestive evidence that campaigns and the media might affect voters by priming the criteria underlying vote choice. Yet these studies use laboratory demonstrations that are "far removed from the actual context of vote decisions," or surveys that fail to directly account for rhetoric and/or use vote choice measures that are "likely to be biased systematically in a variety of ways" (Althaus et al., 2001). We thus lack direct evidence of priming

[20] Mutz and Martin (2001) found that interpersonal discussions typically involve people with similar views; it may be that the reinforcing role of discussions stems from people concerned with and exposed to similar information. See also Mondak (1995, pp. 101–124).

[21] There is some relationship between campaign voters and discussion voters; however, the two variables are clearly distinct. For example, 49% of the non-campaign voters are in the high discussion group, whereas 62.5% of the campaign voters are in that group (and thus, 37.5% of campaign voters did not discuss the campaign more than did the median voter).

in a U.S. election with voters at the polls. My results fill this gap, showing that the content of a U.S. Senate campaign primed the criteria underlying exposed and attentive voters' decisions.

I see these results as more significant than yet another demonstration of priming effects. They show that basic laboratory research that is aimed at enhancing our understanding of political communication does in fact do so outside of the laboratory in a real-world electoral setting. This is confirmation that laboratory experiments offer critical insights into political behavior; alternatively, the fact that the results match those found in the lab enhances my confidence in the exit poll. As discussed, the results have clear implications for how we think of campaigns both normatively and strategically. Finally, the exploratory findings on interpersonal discussions raise intriguing questions that require further inquiry.

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