Assessing the Effects of Response Advertisements in Political Campaigns

by

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ABSTRACT

Do response advertisements influence individuals' evaluations of political candidates and vote preferences? This dissertation explores the impact of response advertisements on citizens' expressed vote preferences and favorability towards political candidates. This project utilized an original focus group to determine citizens feelings regarding American political campaigns more generally and attitudes towards negative campaigning more specifically, including how candidates should respond when attacked. Additionally, an experiment was conducted to determine which type of response advertisements influences citizen attitudes most.

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CHAPTER 1

ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF RESPONSE ADVERTISEMENTS IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

During the 1988 presidential campaign, Governor Michael Dukakis was the target of several negative ads from incumbent president George H.W. Bush's campaign. Dukakis refused to counterattack since he believed Bush's attacks to be unfounded. This decision "created the image that he was ineffectual and indecisive" (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995, 117). Similarly, in 2012, Governor Mitt Romney's campaign hesitated to counter-attack against some of incumbent president Barack Obama's attack ads. The president's advertisements

> "hammered Romney as a craven capitalist who sent jobs overseas, refused to release his tax returns and would give zillionaires like himself even heftier tax breaks at the expense of the middle-class… 'That was the key strategic calculation,' said political scientist George Edwards of Texas A&M University. 'Romney wanted a referendum on Obama's performance, but Obama made it a choice between two people…' Despite the onslaught, Romney had an opening in the early summer. He'd clinched the Republican nomination after a bruising primary battle and was leading Obama in the polls…Even some of his own strategists believe a more aggressive counterattack 'could have closed the deal and put the President away…' But Romney aides fretted that a counterattack would only draw more attention to the Obama campaign's accusations. 'Fear dominates the culture in Boston," another top Romney official [said]…'And a fear-based campaign is a losing campaign'" (Defrank 2012).

These examples illustrate what has become "common wisdom" among campaign consultants: the only way to defuse an attack is to counter-attack (Lau et al 1999), whether done directly by one's own campaign committee or through third party advertisements.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore whether and how this conventional wisdom might be correct. In other words, do counter-attacks (hereafter referred to as

"response advertisements or simply "responses") actually defuse the original attack? If so, what form of response is the most effective against the initial attack? I conducted an original within-subjects experiment to determine the influence of response ads on voters' evaluations of candidates and their voting preferences. From this experiment we can discover how both the nature of the policy matter (on- or off-topic) and civility of the response advertisements influences voters' evaluations of candidate.

I start from the assumption that political advertisements matter. Moreover, political advertisements have the capability to not only alter voters' evaluations of candidates as well as vote choice. If they did not, why do candidates spend millions of dollars on advertisements? At that very least, I start with the assumption that political candidates and consultants believe advertisements matter and, further, that it is a necessity that attacks are responded to. For example, in the *New York Times*, after Dukakis' defeat in 1988, it was noted that many blamed his loss on Willie Horton and Dukakis' lack of response "rather than [the success of] ideological conservatism" and Dukakis' lack of response (Wicker 1988).

Findings from this dissertation suggest that certain types of negative response advertisements are more effective than others. Specifically, positive advertisements, that directly respond on-topic to the policy matter of the initial allegations, as well as advertisements that hit back the opponent but end with a positive message, are more likely to not only increase the likelihood of individuals voting for the responder, but also increase the responding candidate's favorability rating while simultaneously decreasing the favorability rating of the initially attacking candidate. This project provides some

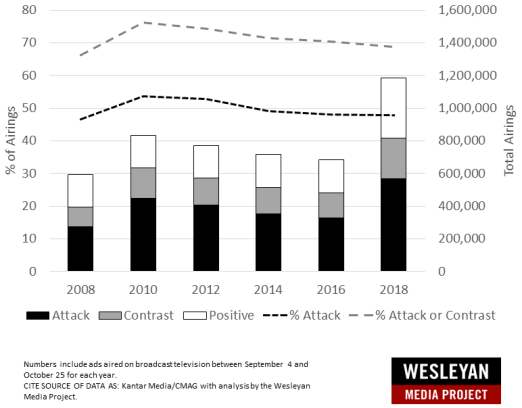
evidence that responding in a purely negative manner, or responding on an issue unrelated to the initial charge, are largely ineffective responses.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will review the literature on both negative and response political advertisements. Next, I will provide my theoretical underpinnings and hypotheses that will be tested in the subsequent empirical chapters. Lastly, I will provide an overview of the remaining chapters.

MODERN ADVERTISING LANDSCAPE

In order to more clearly understand the implications of this research project on "real world" politics, it is important to establish the types of political advertisements campaigns are actually airing. Political advertisements are typically classified into one of three categories; positive advertisements, which solely focus on the favored candidate. Negative ads, or attack ads, on the other hand, solely reference the opposing candidate (other than the “paid for” tag line required by federal law). Lastly, there are contrast ads, which reference both the favored and opposed candidate (Fowler, Franz, and Rideout 2016). Over the past twenty years or so, negativity has become the dominant advertisement tactic, from under 20 percent in 2000 to over two-thirds by 2016 (Franz and Fowler 2020). In the figure below (from the Wesleyan Media Project 2018), we can see the amount of advertisements that fit into the three classifications.

Table 1.1 Types of Ads as Percentage of Airings



Additionally, we can also look at the data by the competitiveness of the race.

Table 1.2 Tone in Federal Race Ads by Competitiveness, September 1 – Election Day

	Competitive	Uncompetitive
Positive	16.9%	80.6%
Contrast	22.0%	9.8%
Negative	61.1%	9.6%

Adapted from Fowler and Franz (2020)

Next, we can see the type of content political advertisements contain, as demonstrated by the 2018 midterms.

Table 1.3 Policy Content of Campaign Advertisements

Pro-Democratic	% of Airings	Pro-Republican	% of Airings
Health Care	48%	Taxes	24%
Prescription Drugs	12%	Health Care	21%
Corruption	12%	Immigration	18%
Budget	11%	Pro-Trump	17%
Campaign Finance	11%	Public Safety	17%

Numbers include ads aired on broadcast television between September 4 and October 25, 2018
Data adapted from Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project (2020).

Lastly, we can see, beyond the specific topics in the figure above, how often candidates focus on policy or personal characteristics.

Table 1.4
Policy Focus in Congressional Campaign Advertising by Ad Tone, 2014

	Positive	Contrast	Negative
Policy Matters	52.2%	60.3%	67.3%
Personal Characteristics	16.3%	9.9%	11.5%
Both	28.5%	28.9%	19.8%
Neither	3.0%	0.8%	1.5%

Data adapted from Franz, Fowler and Ridout (2016)

NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNS AND ADVERTISEMENTS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

The purpose of a political campaign is to win. Campaigns attempt to achieve victory in a multitude of ways: turning out their base voters, persuading the undecided, and debating their opponents. In recent decades, the tenor of American elections is perceived to have turned decidedly negative (Lau and Rovner 2009). Unsurprisingly, the amount of scholarship devoted to negative campaigns has also increased. Campaign television advertising "is by far the most pervasive communicative technique studied in the political communications literature" (Lau and Rovner 2009, 286). In large measure, this is due to the perceived explosion in the proclivity of campaigns to utilize negative advertising to win. For example, more than three million campaign advertisements were aired during the 2012 election cycle (Baum 2012). Campaigns spent approximatley two billion dollars in 2012 on campaign advertisments (Baum 2012; Fowler 2013; Fowler and Ridout 2013; Franz 2013). Illustrating this point further, more than sixty percent of all advertisements aired from June 1, 2012 to Election Day were negative advertisements. The presidentail election campaign of 2016 saw similar trends. About $110 million was spent on campaign advertisements in 2016, which was equivalent to approximately 70,000 different advertisements, 92 percent of which criticized either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump (Wallace, 2016)!

Given the pure abundance of time and resources spent on creating and airing campaign advertisements, political science remain conflicted as to the effect of negative advertsiments on voters. The literature on negative campaign advertising can be broken down into three broad categories: how voters respond to negative ads, whether negative ads mobilize voters, and the strategic decisions behind deciding whether to attack one's opponent. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am most interested in the effects negative advertsiments have on voters.

Certainly, campaign consultants believe advertisements work (Kamber 1997, Swint 1998). As noted above, it does not seem entirely rational for campaigns to spend nearly two billion dollars on advertisements in 2012, the majority of which were negative. While campaign practitioners believe negative advertisements work, what of existing political science research?

Several scholars have found that negative advertisements influence evaluations of targeted candidates (Fridkin and Kenney 2011, 2008, 2004; Geer 2006; Lau and Pomper 2002) and may also lead to increased voter mobilization (Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004; Fridkin and Kenney 2011, 2008; Geer 2006; Geer and Lau 2006 but see also Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Kahn and Kenney 1999), especially if the negative advertisement provides information that is directly relevant to governing (Fridkin and Kenney 2011, 2008). Other scholars have found negative advertisements lead to lower vote intentions and candidate evaluations (Pentony, 1998), and an increase in voter cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). More recent work suggests that the impact of negative campaign advertisements varies across voters, candidates, and even the message

itself, with these factors typically influencing each other, as well (e.g., Henderson and Theodoridis, 2017; Krupnikov, 2011, 2014; Mutz 2015).

But what of the causal mechanism at work? How exactly do negative ads "work"? Finkel and Geer (1998) hypothesize that negative advertising must provide a significant amount of relevant information to voters, that the negative information be given more weight than positive information, and the negative advertisements must produce stronger affective responses in voters. Finkel and Geer's hypotheses are positively affirmed in their study and, building on their findings, Freedman and Goldstein (1999, 11090) state negative advertisements may actually "help raise the perceived stakes in a campaign." For example, if a voter sees a particularly negative ad, he or she may feel that the criticism warrants their increased attention to the campaign. The negative ad, in essence, is sending a message that the election is important and worthy of that voter's attention.

Additionally, some scholars have found that negative advertisements decrease evaluations of incumbents but not challengers (King et al 2003); on the other hand, some studies have found that, when attacked, both incumbents and challengers experience lower evaluations from voters (Kahn and Kenney 2004). Furthermore, Kahn and Kenney (2004) found that the actual attacker experiences a decrease in voter evaluations. Recent scholarship has reported that the size of this boomerang effect is influenced by the specific characteristics of the candidate, as well as the voter viewing the advertisement (Dowling and Wichowsky, 2015; Krupnikov and Bauer, 2014; Krupnikov and Piston, 2015; Fridkin and Kenney, 2011; Lariscy and Tinkham, 1999).

While the research in political science is mixed, research in social psychology, has consistently found that negative information has a stronger impact on how people process information (Ito, Larsen, Smith, and Cacioppo 1998; Pratto and John 1991).

So, what might account for the discrepancies in findings – both within the political science literature and across political science and social psychology?

In both the social psychology and political science literature, the participants are often only exposed to negative information from one side or the other, as opposed to a mixture of positive and negative, or conflicting negative messages. The aforementioned forced exposure to only one-sided negative messages are difficult to generalize to an uncontrolled, natural campaign environment.

NEGATIVITY BIAS

The negativity bias refers to "an outcome where negative information contributes more to the formation or change of an opinion than does positive information" (Allen and Burrell 2002). There has been a large body of work in the social sciences science confirming the existence of the negativity bias (Lau 1982; Kernell 1977; Mueller 1973; Bloom and Price 1975; Beigel 1973; Richey, McClelland, and Shimkunis 1967). Altogether, research on the negativity bias shows that audiences are attracted to negative information for psychological reasons (Graber and Dunaway 2018). Essentially, scholars have demonstrated that negative information is more powerful an influence on individuals than either positive or neutral information. Moreover, individuals pay more attention to negative information for longer periods of time and give it more thought than positive information when decision making. Lastly, negative information is more likely

to grab the attention of individuals and is more memorable (see Baumeister, Bratslavsky, and Finklenaur, 2001; Bless, Hamilton, and Macki, 1992; Ohira, Winton, and Oyama, 1997; Pratto and John, 1991, and Robinson-Riegler and Winton, 1996). In sum, negative information is more important in the formation of impressions of others, vis-à-vis equally forceful positive information. Additionally, the consequences of negative evaluations are greater than those stemming from positive evaluations (Lau 1982).

There have been several hypotheses as to why negative information is more important than positive information in the formation of evaluations. One such explanation is the "cost-orientation" hypothesis that posits, "people are more strongly motivated to avoid costs than to approach gains" (Lau 1982). This is largely described as a genetic effect, since it is important for a species' survival to be adaptive and alert to danger. This effect should be particularly potent when the stakes are high, as such, this explanation most likely does not account for the negativity bias in political communication, since "politics and most political figures are fairly distant from people's everyday lives" (Lau 1982).

A second explanation has been the "figure-ground" hypothesis. Simply, this hypothesis posits that most people live in a positive world and, against this positive backdrop, negative information stands out because of its relative infrequency. Since most people implicitly expect politicians to be like everyone else, namely good people, when negative information surfaces, it is more likely to capture one's attention. However, this explanation seems lacking, as well. While it is true that in the past an "overwhelming majority of…political figures [were] evaluated positively" (Sears 1982; Sears and Whitney 1974; Klein 1996), the opposite tendency exists today (Perloff 2012).

Since neither of these explanations seems likely to hold in the modern political context, what then explains the persistent negativity bias findings in both political science and social psychology? To help answer this question, I turned to the contemporary marketing literature, and more specifically, the "motivational" hypothesis.

THE MOTIVATIONAL EXPLANATION

Most of the research on the negativity bias stems from a cognitive approach to evaluations. However, recent research in marketing (see Ahluwalia 2002; Ahluwalia, Unnava, and Burnkrant 2001; Till and Shimp 1998; Klein and Ahluwalia 2005) and social psychology (see Ditto et al. 1998; Kunda 2000) has moved towards a motivational explanation of evaluations. Put simply, the motivational explanation states that humans are genetically predisposed to be alert to danger signs. As such, people are "inherently more strongly predisposed to avoid costs than they are to seek gains" (Lau and Rover 2009; Druckman and McDermoot 2008; Hibbing and Alford 2004). Relative to political advertisements, as noted above, this means that there would be an "advantage to presenting unfavorable information about one's opponent, rather than presenting favorable information about oneself" (Holbrook et al 2001). However, Lau (1982) notes that politics is of limited relevance to most citizen's everyday lives and, therefore, negativity will be largely the result of cost/motivation considerations.

Since most experiments involve fictitious candidates and/or hypothetical campaigns, negative information is believed to be more relevant than positive information (Ahluwalia 2002). However, if the respondent is familiar with the candidate or campaign, the motivational explanation posits that even a weak preference is likely to

result in consistency motivation (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, and Chen 1996; Russo, Meloy, and Medvec 1998). Similar to the selective-exposure literature, the motivational explanation predicts that preference-inconsistent negative information may no longer be more relevant than preference-consistent positive information (see Ahluwalia, Unnava, and Burnkrant 2001). As such, the relevance assessment is subjective and is partially influenced by the preferences of the perceiver.

As a result, the motivational explanation predicts that the negativity effect is not universal. Rather, a voter's preferences should determine whether a candidate's negatives are more important than his or her positives. Additionally, only those motivated to dislike a candidate will be influenced by campaign information that is negative. Those voters that support a candidate, however, will not be motivated to ruminate on that candidate's negatives. As such, negativity should only have an effect on voters' evaluations for which the candidate's negatives are the prior preference (Klein and Ahluwalia 2005). For example, if a Republican voter is exposed to negative information regarding Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, that voter will be more influenced by that negative information vis-a-vis negative information regarding the Republican candidate, Donald Trump. Conversely, a Democratic voter will be motivated to dismiss negative information regarding Joe Biden while at the same time more likely to be influenced by negative information regarding President Trump.

A further expectation involves undecided voters. Since undecideds do not have strong preferences for one candidate over the other and have not decided for or against a candidate, undecideds should not be more influenced by negativity more than a neutral or positive message. The underlying assumption is that undecided voters have moderately

positive views of all candidates (Klein and Ahluwalia 2005; Ansolabhere and Iyengar 1995). This should mean that an undecided voter negative information preference is inconsistent. In other words, undecideds are not predisposed to believe or disbelieve negative information about any given candidate. (Klein and Ahluwalia 2005). To extend the previous analogy, an undecided voter should not be more predisposed to believe or be influenced by negative campaign information regarding either Democrat Joe Biden or Republican Donald Trump. If this is indeed the case, campaign consultants may get it "wrong" by attempting to target undecided voters with negative information regarding the campaign's opponent. As laid out above, the motivational expectation is that negative information may work for those that have prior preferences but that same strategy may backfire when targeting undecideds.

According to proponents of the motivational explanation, the theory is in contrast to the figure-ground explanation and prior research that examined undecided voters (e.g. Lau 1982), which found a stronger negativity bias for undecided voters than for partisan voters. Instead, the motivational explanation predicts a negativity bias for only those voters that want the candidate to lose. In other words, when voters evaluate their favored candidate’s opponent, negative information is consistent with their preferences and should therefore receive the greatest evaluative weight. Other segments of voters, however, are not likely to weigh a candidate’s weaknesses more than strengths. Again, this runs counter to the figure-ground hypothesis, which suggests all voters should be affected more strongly by negative, as opposed to positive, information. Additionally, as mentioned previously, following the figure-ground hypothesis, one should expect undecided voters (as well as those who prefer a candidate) to be the most affected by

negative information because these voters are judging candidates against a backdrop of positive expectations. The prediction of the motivational explanation, on the other hand, is that negativity is absent for these voters.

Altogether, the only segment of voters who should exhibit a negativity bias when exposed to negative political commercials, according to the motivational explanation, are those who are motivated to view the candidate negatively in the first place. Practically speaking, this is the group of voters that campaigns would consider to be the least critical segment of voters to attempt to persuade. For example, it would be irrational – and a waste of limited campaign resources – for a Republican candidate to attempt to persuade strong Democrats, and vice versa.

The motivational explanation further suggests that the voters that should present the largest return on a campaign's investment would be undecideds and those who lean toward the candidate; in other words, these two types of voters are not more likely to be sensitive to negative than to positive information. In other words, since voters may not have yet developed strong preferences (which would be especially true early in a primary campaign, since candidates are all of the same party), voters should be no more predisposed to be influenced by negative, as opposed to positive, messaging. Consequently, and contrary to the figure-ground hypothesis, there should be limited benefit to providing voters with negative information when compared to equally extreme positive information. This expectation again seems to go against what is regarded as "common sense" by campaign professionals. It is certainly possible that what works to motivate one segment of voters (co-partisans) is the exact opposite of what will motivate undecided voters.

RELEVANCE

Relevant information for voters is information that directly affects a voter's daily life (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 1984; Lau 1982; McGuire 1964; McGraw and Steenbergen 1997). For instance, a relevant message would be directly related to governing activities on salient issues, voting records, and personal traits related to good governance. Conversely, irrelevant messages would pertain to topics such as messages that are not salient, drug use in college, or details of one's divorce (Fridkin and Kenney 2019). Furthermore, prior research has found that information considered relevant (i.e., in this context, information relevant to governing) to an individual is more likely to be persuasive (Hovland et al 1953; McGuire 1964; Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

Following Fridkin and Kenney (2011), I also believe relevance to be an important dimension in determining the effect of campaign advertisements on a citizen's candidate evaluation. Relevance, in the context of a campaign advertisement, relates to whether the information provided in the advertisement relates directly to how a candidate will perform in office. Fridkin and Kenney (2008) specifically define relevance as, "discussions about issues, personal traits, or other topics that people consider pertinent for an electoral campaign" (308). Previous work has found that voters find advertisements regarding a candidate's voting record to be more relevant than information regarding a candidate's drug use in college (Fridkin and Kenney 2008). Additionally, Fridkin and Kenney's 2008 and 2011 studies find that relevant negative messages are more effective in shaping attitudes than irrelevant negative messages.

TONE

Negative campaign advertisements can also vary in tone, as well as content. While some negative advertisements are delivered in a more courteous tone, others can be considered uncivil and strident (Geer 2006). Following, Fridkin and Kenney (2008, 2011), I expect that negative messages differing in tone will vary in their impact on citizens' candidate evaluations.

Previous work has found that citizens are indeed able to distinguish between civil and uncivil messages and, additionally, the uncivil messages consistently produce more negative views of politicians and the political process (Brooks and Geer 2007; Fridkin and Kenney 2008; Mutz and Reeves 2005). In addition, Meyer et al. (1991) found that when the content or tone of advertisements breach norms of decency, good taste, and personal moral standards, the advertisement is more likely to catch the attention of the viewer (see McGuire 1976).

RESPONSE ADVERTISEMENTS

In addition to the previously discussed factors, the campaign context matters. Campaign advertisements are rarely a one-time affair, instead, campaign commercials typically flood the airwaves, especially the closer it gets to Election Day (Teinowitz 2008). In other words, campaign advertisements are rarely seen in a vacuum. This explains one reason why advertising effects are difficult for social scientists to uncover. This is because of the two-sided information flow: the more competitive the race, the more dramatically campaign advertising increases (Fowerler, Franz, and Ridout 2016). In other words, both campaigns are competing for voters' attention, trying to equal or

exceed the opposing campaign's amount of advertising (Zaller 1996). Advertisements are often aired many times over, responded to by the opposing campaign's own advertisements, or responded to by outside groups. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the volume of campaign advertising has been on the rise (Fowler, Franz, and Rideout, 2016). With more ads comes more information for voters to potential evaluate.

Nonetheless, the literature on the effects of response advertisements in minimal, at best. Garramone (1985) finds that response by the targeted candidate increased backlash against the opponent, but failed to influence perceptions of the target. Additionally, when attack advertisements are followed by a response from the target, issue responses are more effective than a response advertisement that focuses on the opponent's traits; furthermore, a positive response advertisement was evaluated more positively than a negative response but the negative response what more effective in discouraging voting for the attacking candidate (Roddy and Garramone 1988).

Most directly relevant to this dissertation project is the work of Craig, et al (2014). In the design of their experiment, they reviewed hundreds of real campaign advertisements to understand how candidates are likely to respond in the real world. This both confirms that candidates do indeed respond when attacked and provided evidence as to the types of responses candidates are likely to run. The major findings of this study are that remaining silent in the face of attack is a risky proposition for any campaign; additionally, denying the issue of the initial attack advertisement is found to be the most effective way to parry an attack, followed by responding with a response advertisement (which may or may not directly respond to the allegations of the original advertisement). Both Garramone and Craig et al, however, primarily focus on negative advertisements

that concern candidate traits, as opposed to issue advertisements. This is perhaps problematic, given the actual makeup of campaign ads. As shown at the beginning of the chapter, only about 16% of campaign advertisements address personal characteristics, while slightly over 50% deal with policy matters. It is important then to ensure that further research, as this dissertation aims to do, adequately emulates the actual campaign environment, which would specifically mean the use of ads discussing policy matters. Further, it is important to determine whether candidates discuss the same issues or focus on different policy matters in their advertisements. There is evidence that suggests that "as the number of ads increases…there is more issue convergence" (Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2016). In other words, as the number of ads increases in a given campaign, the more likely competitors are to discuss the same set of issues (see Franz 2012; Lipsitz 2013). The obvious benefit of increased issue convergence is that it is much easier for voters to see clear differences between the candidates if they present voters with their opposing policies.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

All of the previously discussed components individually contribute to the effectiveness of negative advertisements. However, it is the express purpose of this dissertation to combine these factors – combining a response advertisement with tone (civil or uncivil) and policy matters (on- or off-topic), in ways previous scholars have not done.

Most directly, my study begins with the findings of Fridkin and Kenney (2008, 2011) that show uncivil, relevant campaign advertisements to be the most influential

form of negative advertisements on candidate evaluations. Building from this, I am most interested in how the opposing campaign might negate this influence? What form should response advertisements take to be most effective?

The intended audience for negative advertisements may not be partisans but instead, undecided voters. This was a much-discussed topic during the 2012 election, as exemplified by the following exchange on NPR on October 25th, 2012:

"**MARGARET WARNER:** Now, what does -- what do these numbers tell us about who is being targeted, and has that changed at all for each campaign, what sorts of viewers they are going after?
MARA LIASSON: Well, they're clearly going after *undecided* voters. It's a very small universe. In these states [battleground states], there's probably about 800,000 truly undecided, persuadable voters. If you're spending a billion dollars...

MARGARET WARNER: You mean total?

MARA LIASSON: Total. Total. If you're spending a billion dollars on them that means the campaigns are spending $1,000 per *persuadable* voter. Now, to them, that's probably a bargain…" (emphasis added) (PBS News Hour 2012).

Since undecided voters are the prime targets of a candidate's advertising campaign, how might undecided voters react to negative campaign advertisements in the presence of a response? Following the motivational explanation hypothesis, I expect undecided voters to be equally influenced by both positive and negative response advertisements, provided the positive response is equally forceful. In other words, contrary to conventional wisdom, it may be worthwhile to respond to negative information in a positive way, as long as the message is equally forceful, civil, and relevant.

All in all, prior literature leads me to believe that relevant responses will be the most effective. If a campaign did not respond to allegations raised by an opponent, it

could signal to voters that the original negative message is true, or that the attacked candidate is weak. Reflecting on the Dukakis campaign, one campaign consultant claimed, "there's one thing the American people dislike more than someone who fights dirty. And that's someone who climbs into the ring and won't fight" (cited in Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991, 224). Similar to non-response, if a campaign does not ever address the issue of the attack and instead continues to communicate with voters on an issue that was not raised in the original attack advertisement, it could also signal that there is some validity to the original charge. Since stronger arguments are found to be more persuasive than weak arguments, I expect relevant responses to be the strongest argument a candidate can make against the initial attack (see Cacioppo and Petty 1989).

HYPOTHESES

The literature suggests two primary rival explanations for how best for a campaign to craft a message in response to an initial negative attack advertisement. The preponderance of political science and social psychology suggests that negative information has an increased ability to "stick" or cut through the noise of our everyday lives and make the largest impact on our evaluations and attitudes. Therefore, following the negativity bias literature, one would expect that an equally forceful negative response advertisement would be the most appropriate response a campaign can take. Specifically, a negative, uncivil, and on-topic advertisement – equal in all respects to the original advertisement – should prove the best form of response.

Some of the (limited) political science literature on response advertisements suggests, however, that denying the initial allegations, or responding to the original attack with a response that has little-to-nothing to do with the content of original attack, to be

the most effective response (see Craig et al., 2014). As a result:

Finally, the motivational expectation leads me to expect than an equally forceful positive response has the potential to be as influential as a negative response advertisement for a campaign's typical audience (in this, undecideds).

My hypothesis are as follows:

1) The Negativity Bias Hypothesis: negative, uncivil messages – on-topic relative to the initial ad – should produce the most powerful response.
2) Based on the limited research on response advertisements: negative, uncivil messages that are off-topic relative to the initial ad – should produce the most powerful response.
3) The Motivational Hypothesis: only those motivated to dislike the candidate should show a negativity bias, therefore negative information is not likely to be more influential than positive information. Thus, positive, civil messages – that are on-topic relative to the original ad– should produce the most powerful response.

I have laid out above how the message characteristics (i.e., relevance, civility, and tone), as well as target characteristics (e.g., partisanship) might influence the impact of response advertisements on candidate evaluations. I also provided several hypotheses that will address the research questions stated previously in this chapter:

1) Do response advertisements actually defuse the original attack?
2) What form of response is the most effective against the initial attack?
    a. Positive, negative, or a contrast ad?
    b. Civil or uncivil?
    c. On-topic to the policy matter of the initial ad or off-topic?

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Campaigns are more complex than a single advertisement. This dissertation will help advance our understanding of negative campaigning by expanding our understanding of the impact of the variability in the content and tone of negative campaign advertisements as well as examining the effects of response advertisements. Since most of the prior campaign advertisement literature only examines respondents' reactions to a single positive or negative commercial, this dissertation attempts to more closely emulate a campaign environment of dueling advertisements, both positive and negative.

Furthermore, this project has practical implications, as well. Determining the actual influence of response advertisements matters for an exploration of American politics, since elections are the chief way by which politicians are connected to voters. If it is shown that response advertisements are more influential on certain dimensions (variations on tone and whether the policy matter addressed is on- or off-topic to the original, as well as positive versus negative versus contrast responses), as opposed to others, it can serve as a guideline for campaigns in how best to structure responses. Additionally, in knowing how undecided voters might be affected by response advertisements, campaigns are provided with further guidance as to how best manipulate their responses to affect the desired voter population. Finally, if it is shown that a candidate's response has no discernable effect on voters' evaluations of candidates, that knowledge further serves as useful for a campaign seeking a strategy to best win over voters.

DISSERTATION OUTLINE

The subsequent chapters will be exploring the impact of response advertisements on voters' evaluations of the candidates and voting preferences. In Chapter 2, I outline my methodological approach. That chapter will detail my samples for the focus group and experiment. In addition to describing the participant data, Chapter 2 will also detail the specific methodology used in the experiment.

In Chapter 3, I examine the results of the focus group. The focus group had a two-fold purpose; first, to examine voters' tolerance of negativity and its place in American electoral campaigns. Second, the focus group participants were asked to rate whether the storyboards to be used in my experiment were appropriately negative or positive. In other words, the second goal of the focus group was to assess whether the negative advertisements I constructed were indeed deemed negative by the participants and that the advertisements that were constructed to be positive were viewed as positive.

Chapter 4 examines the results of the original within-subjects experiment conducted. This experiment was intended to gauge which type of response advertisement was most impactful in altering a voter's impression of the candidates. In short, generally positive messages, that are on-topic to the substance of the initial advertisement, and presented civilly, are found to be the most effective form of response.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I conclude with a summary of my findings. This final chapter will also discuss how the tone, civility, and whether the response was on-topic, interact to influence candidate evaluations and vote preference. The final chapter will end with an exploration of this study's implications for campaign advertisements along with possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER 2

DATA, MEASUREMENTS, AND METHODOLOGY

In order to explore whether response advertisements actually defuse the original attack advertisement, and what form of responses are the most effective against the initial attack, a variety of data had to be collected on how citizens feel about negative campaigning and how negative campaigns may – or may not – influence evaluations of the candidates and their potential vote choices. Specifically, I utilized a focus group, a manipulation check, and an original within-subjects experiment to test my hypotheses.

FOCUS GROUP

Prior to the experimental phase of this research project, I conducted an in-person focus group study utilizing Arizona State University undergraduate political science students. The focus group had two main goals: first, to determine attitudes towards American political campaigns in general, and negativity in American campaigns specifically. Second, the focus group study also allowed me to validate the coding of relevance and civility of the campaign advertisements to be utilized in the subsequent experiments.

For example, I chose an advertisement aired during a 2014 primary for Texas' 4th Congressional district, aimed at incumbent Congressman Ralph Hall. The advertisement, "Hall 1980,"[1] attacks Hall largely on the premise that he has been in Washington too long, and by inference, is too old to effectively serve in Congress. Focus group participants were then asked to respond to the ad. Was it civil? Uncivil? Relevant?

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkDhpXa0_BY Date last accessed: 9.6.19.

Irrelevant?[2] Following that discussion, I asked participants how Congressman Hall should ideally respond. Subsequently, I showed participants Congressman Hall's actual response advertisement.[3] Follow-up questions to the response advertisement were designed to gauge participants reactions in terms of the response advertisement's civility and relevance and overall effectiveness.

I also included advertisements that varied in tone. For example, an uncivil advertisement attacking Democrat Ross Miller that aired in Nevada suggested he was taking money from special interests and using it to party with Playboy Playmates.[4] This advertisement begins with many photographs taken from Miller's Instagram account, showing him with celebrities, Playboy Playmates, and partying. The narrator states "one can dream…but for Ross Miller, it's a reality." The advertisement continues by claiming Miller took $60,000 in special interest money, on top of his six-figure salary, all the while Miller "lives the life, and you [the voter] pick up the tab." The advertisement concludes by encouraging voters to "Tell Ross Miller: stop living the high life at our expense." Focus group participants were again asked to respond to the ad. Subsequently, I again showed participants the actual response advertisement from the Miller campaign.[5] Similar follow-up questions to the response advertisement were asked.

Lastly, participants were shown a web advertisement attacking Democrat Krysten

[2] Interestingly, I did not have to define these terms for the students, nor did I prompt the use of those terms. Student freely – and commonly – used these terms; given that these students were in a class with Dr. Kim Fridkin at Arizona State University, perhaps it's not so suspiring, after all.
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkYli69K7EY Date last accessed: 9.6.19.
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ple6rE_G1cQ Date last accessed: 9.6.19.
[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9JVs74-Trw Date last accessed: 9.6.19.

Sinema.[6] This advertisement was chosen because it is both uncivil ("radical left-wing activist") and irrelevant (Sinema sings and spirals during pagan rituals), while also containing some relevant issues (supported closing Luke Air Force base while in the state legislature). A similar discussion followed the presentation of this advertisement.

Finally, a manipulation check (see Mutz 2011) was required for the experimental advertisements that were created in reaction to the focus group discussion. Specifically, the manipulation check was used to assess the participants' impressions of the advertisements intended to be used in the experimental phase of this research project. Twenty-eight students in an undergraduate political science course at Arizona State University were given a packet with all of the advertisement storyboards. The packet's instructions stated that the participant had just viewed a story board for a campaign television advertisement that aired in a congressional district. Participants were then asked to rate the negativity of each advertisement story board on a scale ranging from 1 ("too negative") to 10 ("positive"); the midpoint (5), served as "neither negative or positive."[7]

FOCUS GROUPS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Focus group data, which is qualitative in nature, is important to this research project for a variety of reasons. Qualitative data, which rose to prominence in the second part of the twentieth century, was premised on the realization that human behavior is more complex and less rational than that of the inanimate subjects of research in the natural sciences (Flick, 2009: 57–59). Qualitative interviews with a small number of

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieIz8LZ0EjA Date last accessed: 9.6.19.
[7] See Appendix for the packet used.

respondents can reveal details that might be missed in a quantitative study. Thus, in utilizing a mixed methods approach, I aim to create a comprehensive picture of how citizens react to not only negative advertisements in general, but response advertisements in particular. Specifically, as Oates (2000: 187) argues, focus groups drive individuals to explain to others why they hold particular views – something that is typically lacking in a quantitative survey design. This can provide the researcher with greater understanding into the reasoning behind opinions that are held. Disagreement between participants may also demonstrate the strength with which individuals hold their beliefs. By being able to probe why participants held the beliefs that they do regarding what is – or is not – appropriate for a political advertisement, I will be better able to design the advertisement storyboards (that will be explained later in this chapter and again in Chapter 3). The focus group provides an advantage over simply presenting a questionnaire about what is appropriate for a campaign advertisement because, as mentioned above, I am able to fully explore the rationale behind what participants think is appropriate and, most importantly why they believe so. This deeper insight will allow me to better understand how to craft the advertisement storyboards.

Of course, with any potential research design there are advantages and disadvantages to using a student sample. Students, of course, are convenient for university-based researchers, such as myself, since universities have large numbers of students readily available. Additionally, it can be expensive and time-consuming finding non-student participants, thus complicating the completion of a research project. Lastly, students may be more willing to participate in research projects than the general population since they are more accustomed to research taking place.

However, there are also drawbacks. Certainly, students are not typical of the general population, in terms of age, race, or social class. This challenges the generalizability of the findings. In this case, with the students being recruited through opportunity sampling of political science courses, risks being even more unrepresentative of the general population as well as that of the student population (Brewer 2005). Additionally, Sears (1986) notes that college students may have social and political attitudes that are less crystalized relative to adults, they may be more egocentric, and their intelligence may be higher than average. Additionally, “coerced” participants may be more likely to sabotage the research particularly by seeking to disrupt what they think are the expected findings (the "screw you" effect; Masling 1966).[8]

Nonetheless, qualitative researchers, who are less concerned with generalization, tend to use very different techniques for choosing sample members. The selection of subjects in qualitative studies is often flexible. For example, Fetterman (1989: 43) argues that ethnographers use a process described as judgmental sampling. Briefly, this entails ethnographers relying on their judgement to select the most appropriate members of a subculture, predicated on the research question.” This is also known as purposive sampling. Here, the researcher is quite deliberately subjective, choosing those respondents who will best fit the purpose of the research (Harding 2019). Another distinctive feature of choosing members for focus groups is that it can be valuable to create a ‘community of interest’, where all participants will be motivated to explore the chosen topic. As such, focus group members should have something in common: there

[8] This is the opposite of "demand characteristics; I view this as less likely in the focus group but more likely to occur in the experimental phase of the research project.

should be similarities of interest although, certainly, not necessarily of beliefs (Barbour, 2007: 59).

For my research project, as mentioned above, I employed the purposive sampling technique (described in the previous paragraph) and utilized a student sample from an Arizona State University undergraduate political science class studying media and politics. The students were offered extra credit by their professor for attending class that day. I chose the purposive sampling technique in order to have a 'community of interest' that would be motivated to discuss the issue of negativity in American political campaigns.

Ultimately, I employed the use of a focus group to explore, in a descriptive sense, how citizens feel regarding the negativity more generally, as well as relevance and civility specifically, of American political advertisements. Chapter 1 explored what prior academic research suggests about the effectiveness of political advertisements, along with select quotes from political campaign professional, however, in order to get a better sense as to how "regular" people view American campaigns, and in particular campaign advertisements (as well as the benefits and drawbacks of different kinds of response advertisements), I conducted a focus group. As will be fleshed out more in Chapter 3 (which presents a more in-depth discussion of the focus group methods and results), this was the exploratory portion of my research project and was not intended to test any of my specific hypotheses as outlined in the first chapter. Instead, by gathering information as to how participants view American campaigns, I had three aims in analyzing my focus group data, following Gibson and Brown (2009: 128–129): examining commonality, examining differences, and examining relationships. Briefly, in turn, this means that

commonalities in the views expressed by the participants will allow me to determine whether attitudes are shared by a large segment of the participant or were simply the opinions of a few. Similarly, differences in the participants' opinions should be identified and examined to determine the relevance to the issues and themes of this research project. Since focus groups allow the researcher to explore the reasoning behind any given participants statements, in addition to examining and differences across the discussion and why other participants feel differently, this would provide deeper insight into how to craft the experimental campaign advertisements and to, perhaps, better understand the results of the experimental portion of this research project.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Dependent Variables

There are three dependent variables of interest in this dissertation: favorability and evaluations of both candidates and the respondents' vote intentions, using standard measures from the literature. Each dependent variable was measured three times. Once, after exposure to the biography of each candidate. Next, after expose to the initial attack advertisement. Finally, and for the experimental groups only, after exposure to the response advertisement. Given that the dependent variables are measured up to three times in the experiment (twice for the control group; three times for the experimental group)[9], it is possible that exposure to two negative advertisements in a row, as was the

[9] It is possible that this design is prone to a consistency effect, in which respondents intentionally try to get their survey responses to agree one another. However, given that there are results in which participants views changed after exposure to the campaign storyboard, there is little evidence of a consistency effect across all of the experimental conditions, as will be seen in Chapter 4.

case in some of the experimental conditions, could lead to a cumulative effect, meaning any sensitivity to negativity could be magnified. However, since my dissertation is looking at the effects of a response advertisement, and not two negative ads sponsored by the same candidate against the same opponent, and since many of the advertisements vary in tone (even if both are negative), the exposure to multiple ads could cancel each other out. Nonetheless, as will be discussed further below, given the nature of this experimental design, I cannot identify any longer-term effects to repeated attacks (Kushner and Lau, 2010).

In other words, I'm not only interested in how response advertisements affect participants' favorability evaluations of candidates but also how these advertisements will influence vote choice. I expect that if the original negative attack advertisement is followed by a positive response advertisement, respondents should report higher levels of intending to vote and have more positive feelings towards the candidate providing the positive campaign message. On the other hand, if the initial negative attack is followed by an equally forceful negative response, respondents should see this as "dirty politics as usual" as exhibit more inhospitable evaluations of the attacking candidates and be less likely to vote for the candidate that presented a strong negative message.

Independent Variables

In addition to the standard control variables (age, year in school, race, partisanship, political knowledge) additional questions were included to gauge how negative overall participants thought the fictitious campaign was and how relevant were

the issues discussed[10]. These are important controls because, as discussed by Fridkin and Kenney (2008, 2011, 2019) some individuals are more sensitive to negative information than are others, which may unduly affect their reactions to the advertisement pairs. In other words, those participants who believe that negativity is inappropriate in a political campaign may respond differently to negative (and positive) advertisements than a participant who is much more willing to tolerate a negative political campaign. Intolerance to negativity is an index of nine questions asked of participants; the responses were recoded such that all negative numbers (-1 and -2) indicate less tolerance of negativity while all positive numbers (+1 and +2) indicate a higher tolerance of negativity. The index sum was then averaged; the mean of the average scores is reported in the descriptive statistics table below.

In order to explore whether response advertisements actually defuse the original attack advertisement and what form of responses are the most effective against the initial attack, I conducted an online within-subjects experiment utilizing Arizona State University's Political Science Department's experimental lab. Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in a variety of political science courses. Demographic information for the student samples is presented below. The experiment was conducted online in February 2017.

[10] Similar to the intolerance to negativity index, I asked five questions about student loans and two about Wall Street; the responses were recoded such that all negative numbers (-1 and -2) indicate less support towards the government addressing the issue of student loans and Wall Street abuses. All positive numbers (+1 and +2) indicate a increased desire to see the government take an active role in both respective areas. The index sum was then averaged.

Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Age	
18-29	85%
30-44	11%
45-59	3%
60-69	0%
70+	0%
Year in School	
Freshman	6%
Sophomore	20%
Junior	32%
Senior	42%
Sex	
Male	51%
Female	49%
Race	
White	65%
African American	4%
Latino	14%
Asian	8%
Native American	0.3%
Other	9%
Ideology	
Very Liberal	10%
Liberal	20%
Slightly liberal	14%
Moderate, middle of the road	15%
Slightly conservative	15%
Conservative	15%
Very conservative	5%
Other	1%
Haven't thought much about it	4%
Partisanship	
Strong Democrat	11%
Democrat	16%
Independent, leans Dem	20%
Independent	8%
Independent, leans Rep	18%
Republican	14%
Strong Republican	7%
Other	3%
Don't know/not sure	4%
Political Knowledge	
Low (0-1 questions correct)	2%

Medium (2-3 questions correct)	10%
High (4-5 questions correct)	88%
Political Interest	
Very Interested	65%
Somewhat interested	29%
Not much interested	7%
Intolerance to Negativity	
Less Tolerant (avg. of -2 – -1)	63%
Neutral (avg. of 0)	8%
More Tolerant (avg. of +1 – +2)	30%

N = 361
Note: percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding

In order to determine the most effective type of response advertisement, the experiments utilized story boards that were created based on actual campaign advertisements used during recent elections.[11] Story boards, as opposed to actual advertisements were used in order to allow me to manipulate the relevance, tone, and civility of the response advertisement. Had actual commercials been utilized instead, this type of manipulation would have been impossible. The candidates were both male, in order to avoid any possible gender effects (Fridkin, Kenney, & Woodall, 2009; Gordon, Shafie, & Crigler, 2003; Hitchon & Chang, 1995; Dinzes, Cozzins, & Manross, 1994). The experimental conditions paired both an initial attack advertisement and a response advertisement. Following the findings of Fridkin and Kenney (2008, 2011) I used an initial attack advertisement that is both relevant and uncivil. The response advertisements varied relevance, tone, and whether the response was positive or negative (see below).

Experimental Conditions:

Advertisement A: Original Attack – Relevant and Uncivil
Advertisement B: Response – On-topic and Civil – Positive
Advertisement C: Response – Off-topic and Civil – Positive

[11] See Appendix A for the campaign storyboards.

Advertisement D: Response – On-topic and Civil – Negative
Advertisement E: Response – On-topic and Uncivil – Negative
Advertisement F: Response – Off-topic and Civil – Negative
Advertisement G: Response – Off-topic and Uncivil – Negative
Advertisement H: Response – On-topic and Civil – Contrast
Advertisement I: Response – On-topic and Uncivil – Contrast

For the response advertisements, I set aside personal traits in this project and crafted advertisements that addressed the substance of the "original" attack advertisement (i.e. being "on-topic"), as opposed to responding with a different subject matter. Conversely, off-topic responses are defined as a campaign advertisement that does not directly address the substance of the original attack advertisement. In essence, the off-topic responses are intended to create a campaign environment in which the attacked candidate does not respond to the initial charges (a la Dukakis and Kerry, as discussed in Chapter 1).

Contrast advertisements, on the other hand, are advertisements that start off negatively, hitting the opponent's record on the issue of the original ad, while pivoting to a positive message regarding the responding candidate's own proposal on the issue. Given that it would not make much sense for a candidate to respond to the initial ad and then pivot to a brand-new topic, both contrast advertisements are on-topic to the issue of the initial attack advertisement.

Lastly, for all response advertisements, civility was defined as whether the advertisements were delivered in a more courteous tone or an uncivil and strident tone. Specifically, Advertisement A (the original attack ad) has the topic of education and an uncivil tone ("…Sandlin **inexcusably** voted against…" and "…he even **irresponsibly** vote to…," "**does he get it**? **Does he even care**?")

The eight response advertisements are summarized in the table below, with complete wording available in Appendix A.

The control group was only shown one advertisement:

A: Original Attack – Uncivil

The experimental conditions were paired as follows:

AB (Negative – Positive)
AC (Negative – Positive)

AD (Negative – Negative)
AE (Negative – Negative)
AF (Negative – Negative)
AG (Negative – Negative)

AH (Negative – Contrast)
AI (Negative – Contrast)

Experimental subjects only viewed two advertisements – all participants viewed the same original attack advertisement and were then randomly assigned to one of eight possible responses (B – I).

Subjects in the experiment were not provided with the partisanship of the candidates. This served several purposes. One, it simplified the experiment in such a way that was more manageable. More importantly, it provided a critical test of the motivational explanation hypothesis; by removing the partisanship of the candidates, all subjects in the experiment can be considered political "undecided voters" and cannot use their partisanship as a shortcut in evaluating the candidates or their arguments. Since it is in a campaign's interest to target its advertising campaign at the undecided, or persuadable voter, this allowed me better determine whether positive or negative responses are most influential for undecided voters. Similarly, it allowed testing of the

motivational explanation hypothesis' prediction that the negativity bias is less present in a primary campaign. Since no party label is attached to a candidate, the experiments mirror a primary election in that, once again, subjects cannot rely on partisanship to make their evaluations, as all candidates are of the same party (in this case, no party).

Condition A (the "original" attack advertisement) recreates a relevant issue—education. The language in the advertisement was modified to create an uncivil version of the advertisement. I chose to not employ a policy advertisement that is likely to be viewed through a partisan or ideological lens (Iyengar, Jackman, and Hahn 2008). In other words, the content of the advertisement is structured in such a way as to minimize the possibility that the issues raised in the commercial will trigger partisan responses in the experimental subjects.

Prior to the exposure to the campaign advertisements, participants were provided with consent form. Participants that consented moved on to the next portion, which contained questions regarding political interest, knowledge (following Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), as well as partisanship and ideology questions. While these variables are not the main independent nor dependent variables, partisanship, ideology, and political knowledge could be important mediating variables that influence a participant's vote choice and/or candidate evaluations; as such, it was necessary to measure these qualities, and I used standard question wording from the campaign advertisement literature (see Craig, Rippere, and Grayson, 2014, for example), so that I could control for these potential confounding factors to isolate the effects of my variables of interest.

Next, participants completed a brief demographic survey. Then, the experimental portion of the project began. Participants were provided with brief biographies of the hypothetical

candidates and asked, based on the biographies just provided, to rate the candidates in terms of favorability and which candidate they would prefer to vote for. Next participants were shown the campaign storyboard for the initial attack ad. After the initial attack advertisement, participants again rated the candidates and stated their vote choice. For the eight experimental conditions, the response advertisement story board was then shown and participants again rated the candidates' favorability and expressed their vote choice. After exposure to the advertisements, participants were asked whether they found the response advertisement to be not really negative, negative but acceptable, or too negative and the attack should not have been made. Finally, the participants were debriefed[12].

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

As discussed regarding the benefits and drawbacks of a student sample for the focus group, the same issues are present here (and, thus, I will not repeat them). However, I do feel it is more likely that some participants may have felt "coerced" into participating in an experiment, or may be less likely to take an online experiment seriously, and thus participants may be more likely to sabotage the research (the previously cited "screw you" effect; Masling 1966).[13]

[12] See the Appendix B for the full pre-test and post-test questionnaires.
[13] This was not a pervasive issue in this experiment; however, there were 2 participants that filled out the first answer option for each question; those respondents were excluded from the data analysis to follow. However, with any survey, it is impossible to know whether the selected responses are the "true" attitudes of the respondent.

Table 2.2 Experimental Group Advertisements

Condition	Response Type	Content
B	Positive, Civil, On-Topic	- fighting for law to refinance student loans - every graduate should have more than lifetime of debt
C	Positive, Civil, Off-Topic	- end giveaways for companies sending jobs overseas - grow economy here - reform our tax system
D	Negative, Civil, On-Topic	- we are 44th in education funding - Sandlin raised taxes on middle class - Sandlin trashed our brand, costing us thousands of jobs
E	Negative, Uncivil, On-Topic	- we are 44th in education funding - Sandlin recklessly raised taxes on middle class - Sandlin lied, trashed our brand, costing us thousands of jobs; he cannot be trusted
F	Negative, Civil, Off-Topic	- working with Wall Street made Sandlin a millionaire - wanted to privatize social security - once for Wall Street, always for Wall Street. Not for me.
G	Negative, Uncivil, Off-Topic	- working with Wall Street made Sandlin a Millionaire; he cannot be trusted - wanted to privatize social security - once for Wall Street, always for Wall Street. Can't be trusted - Wall Street doesn't need corrupt, immoral Politicians giving more bailouts
H	Contrast, Civil, On-topic	- who can families trust to make college affordable - Roland Sandlin cut funding for colleges and universities, reversing his promise to freeze tuition, and driving up costs for students and parents. - Peter Berkley is fighting to keep college affordable and help graduates struggling with high student loan debt. Peter Berkley has offered solutions to keep college affordable, lowering student loan rates, and helping low-income students get a college degree.
I	Contrast, Uncivil, On-Topic	- who can families trust to make college affordable

- Roland Sandlin recklessly cut funding for colleges and universities, breaking his promise to freeze tuition, and irresponsibly driving up costs for students and parents.
- Peter Berkley is fighting to keep college affordable…

Beyond the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing a student sample, there are other issues in studying media and politics in general, and my research question in particular, in a laboratory environment.

The experiment conducted is strong on internal validity. Subjects were randomized into the control and experimental conditions and there are no statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of political attitudes or demographics. As such, I am confident that differences between groups in the two experiments are produced by the various experimental treatments (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Essentially, the randomization of participants into groups means I could more precisely estimate the effect of the advertisements themselves on voter preference and candidate evaluation without needing to adjust for the characteristics of the voters that could have driven both actual exposure to the ad (such as political interest; see Kushner and Lau, 2010) vis-à-vis observational data obtained from a survey instrument. Related, running an experiment allowed me to tests hypotheses about how response advertisements affect behavior in ways that would be considerably more challenging to isolate using a purely observational approach.

While experiments offer the two previously mentioned advantages over observational studies, there are drawbacks. In terms of external validity, the most obvious threat, unquestionably, is that an experimental laboratory simply cannot encapsulate the

forces at work in a political campaign. Candidates use a variety of methods to reach voters: rallies, direct mail, phone banks, and social media, to name a few. Experiments, on the other hand, are more appropriate for exploring a discrete event – such as a single advertisement and a single response. It goes without saying that even the most complex of experiments could never hope to achieve the scope of an entire campaign communication package. In other words, the experimental lab is, by necessity, a simplification of any realistic campaign environment. Namely, citizens and voters do not view advertisements in a laboratory setting. Should a voter encounter a political advertisement at all, they are either at home, likely engaged in some other activity during the commercial break, or in public (perhaps a restaurant with televisions). Further, it is rarely the case than any campaign happens in isolation; most campaigns occur simultaneously with many other campaigns for federal, state, and local offices. The laboratory simply cannot perfectly replicate the environmental distractions that likely would be present in "the real world."

A second limitation is more specific to my research question. In this case, I am measuring the immediate effect of two advertisements within the timeframe of the experiment itself; but I am not able to draw conclusions as to the duration of any potential effects found in the lab. In my research project on response advertisements specifically compared to the real-world, citizens and voters do not always see the response advertisement as soon as viewing the initial attack ad. There are many possibilities. One, voters may only see the initial attack ad. Or only the response ad. Or, perhaps they see the response before the initially produced attack ad by the opponent. Lastly, it's possible that

the time in between seeing the attack-response ads are such that the voter does not even recall the issues of the initial advertisement.

A third limitation is true more generally in experiments utilizing campaign advertisements. In essence, one of the earliest decisions that must be made is whether to employ actual candidate commercials, used during a real campaign or to utilize advertisements designed solely for the experiment. Using real advertisements, of course, increases the external validity; however, the experimenter is not able to manipulate the content of the advertisement. Creating advertisements, on the other hand, provides the researcher with more control, at the expense of external validity. I chose a middle ground between the two: I used real campaign commercials, conveyed to participants via storyboards, a common method in the study of candidate communication (see, for example, Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall, 2008 and Freedman and Goldstein, 1999). In the creation of the storyboards I used both actual images from the commercial itself and the actual text of the commercial itself, only modified to change the candidate's real name to the fictitious candidate name and to alter the civility of the advertisement. In other words, most of the aspects of the manipulated advertisements are identical to the real ad, except for candidate name and a changing of words to be either more uncivil or civil.[14]

Finally, it is possible that external validity was impacted by the pre-test questions. Specifically, asking participants questions about negativity in politics may have created

[14] The decision to use storyboards was also influenced by the results of the focus group discussion, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3; however, participants in the focus group did not take ads seriously if the production quality was low (i.e., "cheesy"). Storyboards avoid the issues of production quality (images, music, quality of actors playing candidate, quality of voiceovers, et cetera).

an interaction of testing and treatment that influenced how participants perceived the advertisements. Since the questions gauged political knowledge and beliefs regarding the appropriateness of negativity in a political campaign, it is possible that an individual's sensitivity to negativity was "primed" prior to the exposure to the negative advertisements.

Nonetheless, experiments do offer potential advances in our understanding of the effects of campaign communications. Namely, experiments more clearly establish the causal effect of an advertisement on the dependent variable(s). This causality may be the first step to understanding the wider political environment (Kushner and Lau, 2010). Put differently, if causal effects cannot be determined in the lab, it would be more difficult to observe those effects with the alternative methodology (observational studies).

Even with threats to external validity, I believe that there is still valuable information to be gained from my research project. First, campaigns themselves conduct trial runs of advertisements frequently in order gauge their effectiveness before committing to larger ad buys. So, even with the threats to external validity noted above, they do not negate the information gathered regarding a more effective approach to responding to negative advertisements from one's election opponent. In other words, as noted by Kushner and Lau (2010), "experiments are invaluable in demonstrating the mechanism at work," in this case, the mechanisms behind which response advertisement might be most effective. Second, the candidate biographies, as well as each advertisement story board were based on real candidates and political advertisements, from real political campaigns. In other words, the measures utilized in both experiments are realistic and mimic actual campaign information voters might typically be exposed to during an

election. Lastly, the use of an original experiment provides an expanded view of the impact of tone, civility, and relevance in response advertisements. In other words, I believe the experiment, along with the focus group discussion, both provide compelling evidence regarding how candidates should respond when attached by a political opponent. Overall, this experimental research project, despite the limitations outlined regarding the experimental approach, can advance our understanding of which response factors may have influenced participants' vote choices and evaluations of candidates.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I provided a detailed description of the data collected to test my hypotheses. My data collection utilized multiple methods utilizing hundreds of participants. Subsequent chapters will assess the data collected to determine whether and how response advertisements impact the voters' perceptions of the candidates during a U.S. House of Representatives campaign.

As discussed in the first chapter, understanding voter's impressions – and tolerance – of negativity in American political campaigns is crucial to exploring the research question of interest in this project. Chapter 3 will summarize the results of the focus group and demonstrate that citizens do indeed vary in their impressions of the role negative campaign advertisements in American campaigns. Chapter 4 will summarize the results of the experimental research conducted and will also demonstrate that citizens do indeed vary in their impressions of both candidates and elections.

CHAPTER 3

ASSESSING VARIATIONS IN THE CIVILITY AND RELEVANCE OF NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS: RESULTS FROM A FOCUS GROUP

In order to explore whether response advertisements actually defuse the original attack advertisement, and what form of responses are the most effective against the initial attack, a variety of data had to be collected on how citizens feel about negative campaigning. In this chapter, I examine the results of a focus group discussion that was held at Arizona State University, in an undergraduate political science course, on April 12, 2016. The discussion lasted nearly forty-six minutes with twenty-seven participants.

PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP

As discussed in Chapter 2, the focus group discussion had two primary goal; in this chapter, I will be discussing the intent of the focus group session: to determine attitudes towards American political campaigns in general, and negativity in American campaigns specifically. Furthermore, the focus group was designed to address several of my research questions outlined in Chapter 1, namely:

3) Do response advertisements actually defuse the original attack?
4) What form of response is the most effective against the initial attack?

Overall, the focus group was the exploratory phase of the dissertation project. The focus group was not intended to test any hypotheses, per se, but instead to get feedback from participants as to which type of response advertisements would be most effective, in order to inform the design of the response advertisements to be used in the subsequent experimental portion of this dissertation.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

The focus group occurred towards the beginning of the 2016 presidential election, during a fifty-minute class period of an undergraduate political science course, with twenty-eight participants. While not every student participated in the discussion, I facilitated in such a way as to get as many respondents as possible (i.e., students raised their hands to participate, and I did not call on the same students every single time) and to not let only a few voices dominate the discussion. I began the discussion by asking participants a general question: what did they like and dislike about American campaigns. The participants began by stating campaigns "help us get introduced to candidates we may not normally know," which provides "in-depth knowledge about what candidates think, or claim to think…". Very quickly, and conveniently for this researcher, the discussion turned to campaign advertisements with no prompting on my end. At this point, the discussion turned largely against the more beneficial aspects of a campaign, and the group largely disliked the role that campaign advertisements play in American politics.

Participants largely agreed that advertisements often engage in "ad hominem, personal" attacks rather than "the policy platform of the candidate" which was viewed as a detrimental feature of American campaigns. However, there was not total agreement on this issue. One participant believed that "character is pretty important. If someone's a bad person, who cares about their policy? They're evil. You don't vote for evil people." Further, another participant stated that character is important but "neglecting policy is more damaging than completely neglecting character."

I then prompted the participants to envision a new world, a perfect American society in which American political advertisements could live up to the notion of an ideal campaign. What would they want to see in advertisements? What would they not want to see? What sorts of ads might be persuasive?

The focus group participants largely[15] agreed on what would be persuasive: "facts" relevant to governing. They also largely agreed that ad hominem attacks, at least "superficial" ones, were out of bounds.

So, what specifically did the bulk of participants want to see in an ideal American media campaign? Policy proposals and why that candidates believe their platform is better for the future. Purely positive advertisements. Participants also stated they wished to see what candidates will do in the future, not a rehash of past political conflicts.

However, there was not universal agreement. At this point in the discussion, some participants wanted positive, issue-oriented ads only. Others stated a candidate's personal information might be relevant, while others disagreed. While others even demonstrated an "anything goes" attitude regarding the acceptable contents of a political commercial.

[15] Following Harding (2013) "…the qualitative researcher must find their own language with which to identify trends – findings are often expressed in terms such as 'some', 'the majority' and 'a number'. Of course, this will involve some subjective judgements on the part of the researcher: while the number of respondents referred to as 'all' is obvious, the researcher may need to decide at what figure 'few' respondents becomes 'some' respondents or 'a number' of respondents becomes 'many'." During the course of the focus group, it was not feasible to poll students in terms of how many agreed/disagreed with each statement made by a given student; I have aimed to be as accurate as possible given the transcript of the data (from an audio file of the focus group) and the notes I was able to take during the focus group discussion.

To get at the heart of my research question, at this point in the discussion, I posed a new question to the focus group: how should a candidate respond if they are attacked by their opponent? As might be expected, the responses were as varied as above.

Some participants believed that, if the initial attack was "a serious one" it should be addressed right away. In this instance, the participant brought up the attack advertisements hitting Hillary Clinton and her use of the private e-mail server as a "serious" issue worthy of response. This mimics some of the conventical wisdom outlined in the first chapter of this dissertation, and perhaps gets at some of the inherent weaknesses of the Dukakis and Kerry campaigns.

Echoing the participants earlier attraction to ads featuring facts, they articulated that response advertisements – focused on the facts of the matter – would likely be more persuasive. For example, one participant stated: "I would focus on their [the initial attack advertisement's] relevancy and the negativity of the ad…[S]o if it's very relevant and very negative, I would put [out an ad that counters] saying how negative [the initial ad] is." Another participant concurred and said relevant, and moderately negative, ad should be used in response. Participants specified that relevant meant issues pertaining to governance and did not include personal attacks. This, taken together, suggests that at least some focus group participants believe one must respond if a candidate is attacked on an issue relevant to governance.

At this juncture, I began to show the participants an actual campaign attack commercial and the opposing campaign's response advertisement (as outlined in Chapter 2). Now that a general discussion had been completed regarding what participants would hypothetically find appropriate, the goal now was to gauge their reactions to real response

advertisements. Participant were shown six actual campaign commercials and the actual response advertisement (i.e., three advertisement pairs). The initial attack advertisement was shown, and I asked the participants their reactions to the ad: was it fair? Unfair? Civil? Uncivil? Then, I asked respondents how they would recommend the attacked candidate should respond. Next, the participants were shown the actual response ad. Again, I asked participants for their specific or general reactions to the response ad and whether they felt it was effective and why.

The participants were as varied in their responses to actual ads as they were during the hypothetical portion of the discussion. Some participants said we should respond on the same topic and not hit one's opponent back on an unrelated issue. For example, one participant stated: "…the whole Trump's going bankrupt. I think he should have made an ad that would have been like, "yeah, that happened but here's how I can do better. Here's my chance to make that better."" Comments like this were common: directly address the initial charges. Other participants lobbied for staying positive, above the fray. In both cases, the participants advocated turning the negative into a positive, "play[ing] off [of a candidate's] legacy, what he was doing, the programs he's done to help people, as a reminder of what he's done." Depending on the severity of the initial attack, further participants advocated for "completely chang[ing] the subject." More specifically, many participants advocated for "…talking about actual things you've done, make it about your record, and your professional things." Some participants stated they believed this would be the best strategy because it would allow the attacked candidate to "get away from the [negative] image" of the initial attack advertisement and would shift

focus to making the attacked candidate appear to be "a serious worker" making it appear as if the candidate has "accomplished things."

I then asked participants how we could reconcile the various perspectives; in other words, under which circumstances do candidates respond on- or off-topic to the initial attack ad. Much like a famous Supreme Court Justice one quipped, a participant stated: "I'll know it when I see it." Other responses provided a bit more guidance. For example, participants advocated for a direct response to the substance of the initial attack ad when the attacked candidate's (potentially positive) reputation was at stake. In other words, if an attack had the potential to effectively impact voters in the negative direction regarding one's credibility or reputation, the attacked candidate must respond.

While some of the participants, in general, were lenient towards negativity when certain conditions were met (i.e., relevance to governance, credibility of the initial charges), by showing them actual advertisements, one thing became clear by the end: if the degree of uncivility reached a certain point – that goes beyond the pale – it makes the credibility of the ad suspect. For example, one of the advertisements shown[16] had very poor production quality (badly photoshopped images, overly dramatic voiceover, tacky graphics, silly music). This made the participants largely ignore the actual content of the message and instead focus on production quality issues. This was best exemplified by one comment from a participant: "if one part isn't thought out [content of advertisement versus production quality], then it loses its credibility. You've gotta have both." In other

[16] See advertisement attacking Kyrsten Sinema. https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=ieIz8LZ0EjA

words, if any political advertisement was of low quality (either in choice of actors, voiceovers, visuals, music, et cetera.) the advertisement would run the risk of losing any impact it may have had in terms of substance (i.e., the "facts" of the ad).

CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the varied responses were to be expected. Even with a relatively small, student sample, a wide variety of perspectives were expressed regarding the role of positivity, negativity, civility, and relevance in American political advertisements.

Taken together, these diverse viewpoints correspond with the rival explanations in the extant literature (as discussed in Chapter 1). On the one hand, the participants advocating for an "anything goes" approach, plus those that were more permissive regarding the role of negativity in political advertisements, fit within the literature that states negative information has an increased ability to "cut through" and make the biggest impact on citizen attitudes. The "anything goes" crowd was more permissive as long as the candidate demonstrated "accountability." Namely, this meant the candidate attaching their name to any attack made and not allowing others (e.g., super PACs) to do the dirty work for them. Further, participants felt that it would be "idiotic" to restrict the possible ads a candidate can produce. This participant claimed "it is the responsibility of journalists to be the fact-checkers," not citizens, and that candidates are simply responsible for "selling themselves" to voters. These participant attitudes fit within the "negativity bias" literature.

On the other hand, the limited political science literature on response advertisements suggests that denying the initial allegations, or responding to the original attack with a response that is off-topic, will be the most effective response (Craig et al.,

2014). This is in accord with the participants that favored "completely changing the subject" as the most appropriate response. As noted above, participants were in favor of completely changing the subject if the initial attack was personal, and switch to talking about one's own record and being more "professional..pick[ing a response topic that's] nice and serious, get[ting] away from the whole [negative] image." Further, some participants claimed that they liked the response advertisements that did not give the initial attack "any credence" because "what people do in their personal lives or what they do with their salary is irrelevant to their job if they're an elected."

Lastly, a separate segment of participants advocated for purely positive responses. For example, as a participant noted:

> "I'd like to see "here is the current policy we're running under" as an ad, and here is a cite proving this is a policy we're running under. Here's my policy and here's why it's better. Vote for me. Like, something straightforward like that. Positive. And there are no attacks..."

This is in alignment with the motivational expectation hypothesis, which expects that an equally forceful positive response has the potential to be as influential as a negative response advertisement

All in all, I took away several major conclusions from the focus group:

1) Some participants preferred candidates stay positive when attacked
2) Some participants preferred candidates respond directly to the substance of the attack
3) Some participants preferred candidates ignore the substance of the initial attack and build up their own record
4) Some participants preferred candidates both directly respond to the charges leveled at them but also build up their own record.

These findings were used to inform the crafting of the response advertisements used in the experimental portion of this research (as outlined in Chapter 2 and to be

discussed further in Chapter 4). The focus group results specifically led to the creation of a multitude of experimental manipulations on the relevance and civility of the advertisements. As such, the response advertisements are either positive or negative responses (with the negative ads also being either civil or uncivil in tone), as well as being either on- or off-topic to the policy matter of the original attack advertisement. The opinions of the participants also informed the creation of the contrast responses (i.e., ads that begin by negativity attack the opponent, but end on a positive message regarding the responder), in which both positive and negative information is contained within a single response advertisement.

As noted in Chapter 2, the response advertisements are as follows:

Advertisement B: Response – Relevant and Civil – Positive
Advertisement C: Response – Irrelevant and Civil – Positive
Advertisement D: Response – Relevant and Civil – Negative
Advertisement E: Response – Relevant and Uncivil – Negative
Advertisement F: Response – Irrelevant and Civil – Negative
Advertisement G: Response – Irrelevant and Uncivil – Negative
Advertisement H: Response – Relevant and Civil – Contrast
Advertisement I: Response – Relevant and Uncivil – Contrast

These experimental manipulations directly capture the four major findings noted above. For those respondents that preferred a positive response, advertisements B and C were created. For those respondents that were more permissive of hitting back with a negative attack, advertisements D, E, F, and G were created. Lastly, for those respondents that wanted a direct response to the initial charges levied, but also preferred a positive statement of the attacked candidate's record, advertisements H and I, the contrast ads, were created. Further, based on participant feedback regarding whether to respond on- or off-topic to the initial attack, both the positive responses and negative responses were

manipulated to be both on- and off-topic to the initial attack. The contrast advertisements remained on-topic in order to facilitate responding directly to the initial attack, while also highlighting the candidate's own positive record on the issue. This stemmed from some of the comments that participants made, such as: "acknowledge the initial attack and then just hav[e] something positive and [say] here's how I can better the situation and earn your trust…"

MANIPULATION CHECK

As a manipulation check (see Mutz 2011), it was necessary to determine whether respondents perceived the initial attack advertisement as being negative, as intended, in addition to the responses being perceived in the appropriate direction.

Once the advertisements were created based on the findings above, a manipulation check was conducted to ensure that participants would find the advertisements met the intent in terms of tone. In other words, were the positive advertisements perceived positively by participants? Were the negative advertisements perceived as negative? Lastly, were the uncivil responses perceived more negatively than the civil responses? Participants were drawn from an undergraduate political science course at Arizona State University, on April 26, 2016. Participants rated the advertisements on a scale from one (1) to ten (10), with one (1) being "too negative," five (5) being "neither negative or positive," and ten (10) being "positive." The mean rating, along with the standard deviation, is shown below.

Table 3.1 Manipulation Check

Advertisement Type	**Ad A**	**Ad B**	**Ad C**	**Ad D**	**Ad E**	**Ad F**	**Ad G**	**Ad H**	**Ad I**
Positive, Negative, or Contrast?	Negative	Positive	Positive	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Contrast	Contrast
Civil or Uncivil?	Uncivil	Civil	Civil	Civil	Uncivil	Civil	Uncivil	Uncivil	Civil
Standard Deviation:	1.30	1.46	1.53	1.53	1.25	0.64	1.40	1.26	0.97
Average:	**3.80**	**7.31**	**7.88**	**4.09**	**3.22**	**4.04**	**3.12**	**4.52**	**4.61**

n = 27

All advertisements were rated in the expected direction.

Ad A: the initial attack ad had an average rating of 3.80, placing it on the negative end of the spectrum, as designed.
Ad B: a positive response ad with an average rating of 7.31, placing it on the positive end of the spectrum, as designed.
Ad C: a positive response ad with an average rating of 7.88, placing it on the positive end of the spectrum, as designed.
Ad D: a negative, civil response ad had an average rating of 4.09, placing it on the negative end of the spectrum, as designed.
Ad E: a negative, uncivil response ad had an average rating of 3.22, placing it on the negative end of the spectrum, as well as being more negative than the civil ads, as designed.
Ad F: a negative, civil response ad had an average rating of 4.04, placing it on the negative end of the spectrum, as designed.
Ad G: a negative, uncivil response ad had an average rating of 3.12, placing it on the negative end of the spectrum, as well as being more negative than the civil ads, as designed.
Ad H: a contrast response ad with an average rating of 4.52, placing it closer to the middle of the spectrum, as designed.
Ad I: a contrast response ad with an average rating of 4.61, placing it closer to the middle of the spectrum, as designed.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I provided a detailed description of the data collected via a focus group to explore the validity of my hypotheses and to better gauge how participants feel

regarding the role of negative campaign commercials both generally speaking and specifically towards actual campaign commercials and their responses.

Participants, as expected, had varied opinions, matching the varied finding in the literature as to the most effective form of response advertisements. Some participants desired a purely positive response, while others were more forgiving of negative attacks. Similarly, some participants advocated for responses that were on-topic and addressed the issue head-on, while others proposed side stepping the issue and hitting their opponent back on an unrelated issue. Lastly, other participants were more likely to prefer an advertisement that responded to the initial attack, perhaps hitting their opponent's own record, while also promoting the positive aspects of that candidate's platform. All in all, the participants reactions were consistent with the mixed expectations in the literature.

Lastly, in addition to providing validity to my expectations based on the extant literature, the information gleaned from the participants was also vital in terms of informing the construction of the advertisements to be used in the experimental research of this dissertation project. The results of a manipulation check confirmed that the advertisements constructed for the experimental portion of my research project (to be further described in the next chapter) were perceived by participants in the expected direction (i.e., the negative ads were rated more negatively than the positive ads; the uncivil negative ads were rated more negative than the civil negative ads).

CHAPTER 4

ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF RESPONSE ADVERTISEMENTS IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS: RESULTS FROM AN EXPERIMENT

The focus group results from the previous chapter revealed important data regarding the potential avenues political candidates can take when determining how to respond when attacked by their opponent. In this chapter, I will present a brief review of the hypotheses outlined in the first chapter, as well as a brief review of the experimental methods detailed in the second chapter. The remainder of this chapter will explore the results of the experiment.

HYPOTHESES

As discussed in Chapter 1, the literature on response advertisements is sparse. Moreover, the more generalized literature on the effects of campaign advertisements presents mixed results. The general findings of the literature, as well as my alternative hypotheses are reiterated below:

4) The Negativity Bias Hypothesis: **negative**, **uncivil** messages – on-topic relative to the initial ad – should produce the most powerful response
5) Based on the limited research on response advertisements: **negative, uncivil** messages that are off-topic relative to the initial ad – should produce the most powerful response
6) The Motivational Hypothesis: only those motivated to dislike the candidate should show a negativity bias, therefore negative information is not likely to be more influential than positive information. Thus, **positive**, **civil** messages – that are **on-topic** relative to the original ad– should produce the most powerful response

METHODS AND RESULTS

In order to examine the hypotheses reviewed above, I conducted an online experiment using Qualtrics, overseen by the Arizona State University's Political Science Department's experimental lab. Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in a variety of political science courses. The experiment was conducted in February 2017. The experimental conditions were as follows:[17]

Table 4.1 Participant Groups

Conditions	Advertisement	Advertisement Qualities	Positive, Negative, or Contrast?	On- or Off-Topic?	Civil or Uncivil?	N
1	A	Initial Attack Ad	Negative	-	Uncivil	39
2	A + B	Response	Positive	On	Civil	38
3	A + C	Response	Positive	Off	Civil	41
4	A + D	Response	Negative	On	Civil	41
5	A + E	Response	Negative	On	Uncivil	41
6	A + F	Response	Negative	Off	Civil	40
7	A + G	Response	Negative	Off	Uncivil	39
8	A + H	Response	Contrast	On	Civil	41
9	A + I	Response	Contrast	On	Uncivil	40

Total N = 360

Condition 1 served as the control group for the experiment, while conditions 2 through 9 were the experimentally manipulated groups, varying tone, civility, and relevance. Participants were randomly assigned into one of the nine conditions. In terms of demographics (provided for the overall sample in Chapter 2), the randomization was successful. There were no statistically significant differences ($p < .10$) between the conditions. Therefore, if differences are found across the experimental groups, I can be confident that the differences are driven by the exposure to the experimentally

[17] See Appendix B for survey packet, including questions and advertisement storyboards.

manipulated advertisements. Additionally, as shown in Table 4.2 below[18], participants were asked to evaluate the negativity of each advertisement they were exposed to (similar to the manipulation check described in the previous chapter); all advertisements were rated by participants in the expected direction (i.e., no positive responses were rated negatively, nor vice-versa, and uncivil messages were evaluated more negatively than civil messages).

Table 4.2 Advertisement Negativity Ratings

Advertisement	Advertisement Qualities	Positive, Negative, or Contrast?	Civil or Uncivil?	Standard Deviation	Average	N
A	Initial Ad	Negative	Uncivil	0.52	**2.12**	39
B	Response	Positive	Civil	0.39	**2.82**	38
C	Response	Positive	Civil	0.5	**2.73**	41
D	Response	Negative	Civil	0.44	**2.04**	41
E	Response	Negative	Uncivil	0.44	**2.04**	41
F	Response	Negative	Civil	0.63	**2.36**	40
G	Response	Negative	Uncivil	0.58	**2.02**	39
H	Response	Contrast	Civil	0.53	**2.15**	41
I	Response	Contrast	Uncivil	0.53	**2.23**	40

Participants were instructed to imagine that they are a registered voter residing in Houston, Texas.[19] Next, participants were told that a special election campaign was under way to fill a vacancy in the United States House of Representatives from Texas. The two fictional candidates presented were Peter Berkley and Roland Sandlin. Participants were

[18] Question wording: You just viewed a story board of a television advertisement that **Peter Berkley** aired in your congressional district. Do you believe that these criticisms of **Roland Sandlin** are: (1) Too negative, should not be made; (2) Negative but acceptable; (3) Not really negative.

[19] The experimental design is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

then instructed to read a short biographical sketch for both candidates and to then answer several questions regarding those candidates[20].

First, participants were asked, based on what they learned about the candidates from the biographical sketches, who they would vote for, on a one (1) to five (5) scale, with one (1) being a strong leaning towards Berkley, three (3) being completely undecided, and five (5) strongly leaning towards Sandlin. Next, participants were asked to rate their favorability towards both candidates, on a one (1) to ten (10) scale, with one (1) being extremely unfavorable, five (5) being neither unfavorable nor favorable, and ten (10) being extremely favorable. Results are presented in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3
Participant Responses After Reading Biographical Sketches

Vote Choice	3.019 (0.95)
Berkley Favorability	5.967 (1.45)
Sandlin Favorability	6.014[21] (1.51)

Data presented as mean score
Standard Deviation presented in parentheses

These results are as expected. The candidates are rated similarly and there is not a statistically significant difference between the participant favorability ratings: both are rated mildly favorably. Additionally, given my attempt to create neutral, and similarly appealing, biographical sketches, participants being completely undecided in their vote choice is the exact result intended.

Next, I compared the average responses to the three above questions for each of the nine conditions within the experiment to ensure no group deviated statistically from

[20] See Appendix for the experimental packet.
[21] A t-test was performed and there was not a statistically significant difference in the favorability of Berkley versus Sandlin (p-value = 0.6687).

the overall group averages. None of the nine conditions reported a statistically significant difference from the overall group averages presented above.

EFFECTS OF INIITAL ATTACK ADVERTISEMENT

The subsequent step was to examine the effect of the initial attack advertisement on the control group (Condition 1). This project operates under the assumption that uncivil attacks on a topic relevant to governance have a larger potential to influence voters' perceptions. As such, this is the type of advertisement that candidates must respond to. I therefore designed the initial attack ad (which was based on an actual campaign advertisement[22]) to be relevant, negative and uncivil. I expected, then, that participants would view the attacked candidate more negatively after exposure to that advertisement. Throughout the experiment, Peter Berkley was always the initially attacked candidate; in other words, Roland Sandlin is the initial attacker. Similarly, in all of the response conditions, Peter Berkley is the candidate rebutting Sandlin's initial attack. The results from the control group are displayed in Table 4.4. below; a Welch two sample t-test was used to compare all results[23].

These results are in the expected direction. After reading the biographical sketches, the control group was undecided between the candidates; however, after exposure to the Sandlin attack on Berkley, participants moved towards the vote Sandlin position. Additionally, in terms of favorability, participants turned significantly more

[22] See Table 2.2 in Chapter 2 for a summary of the campaign storyboards; see Appendix A for the complete storyboards.
[23] I choose t-tests rather than regression models in an effort to simplify the interpretation of my results and to capture the change in support for candidates across time and also the level of support for each candidate during each stage of the experiment (see Craig and Rippere, 2016.)

unfavorable towards Berkley. While it was an insignificant result, participants'

Table 4.4
Control Group Responses After Viewing Initial Attack Ad (Negative and Uncivil)

	After Bio	After Initial Attack Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	2.923	3.385	-0.462	0.0423***
Berkley Favorability	5.923	4.718	1.205	0.00246***
Sandlin Favorability	5.846	6.026	-0.18	0.6196

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

favorability also mildly moved in a pro-Sandlin direction. These results are in alignment with the literature that finds that negative, uncivil advertisements do (in isolation) affect both participant vote choice, as well as candidate favorability.

Once the control group had been analyzed, I repeated the procedure above for each of the eight subsequent experimental conditions to ensure that each condition had results similar to the results above. In other words, I needed to ensure that each group's reaction to the initial advertisement – but before being exposed to the response advertisement – did not differ significantly from the control group. None of the eight experimental conditions had statistically significant differences from the control group in terms of their reactions to the initial attack advertisement.

Overall, the initial negative advertisement used in this experiment achieved its intended purpose, both in terms of influencing participants intended vote choice as well as in moving the attacked candidate's favorability in the negative direction. Next, I had to explore the question of whether some kinds of responses do a better job than others in restoring the equilibrium between the candidates.

EFFECTS OF RESPONSE ADVERTISEMENTS

After running the tests above, I then conducted an additional analysis, combining some of the conditions into larger groups. The intent was to isolate certain effects. For example, I was initially interested in whether all positive response ads grouped together had a larger effect than all negative response ads group together. Similarly, I was interested in the size of the effect of civil versus uncivil response as well as on- versus off-topic responses.

Given that the literature provides mixed guidance as to the effects of negative advertisements, two clear main expectations emerge for the initial analysis:

1) Negative advertisements will produce a larger change than either positive or contrast ads (this would be consistent with the negativity bias literature)
2) Uncivil advertisements will produce a larger change than the civil advertisements (this would be consistent with both the negativity bias and response advertisement literature)
3) On-topic responses will be more effective overall, compared to off-topic responses.

The following analyses were conducted, on all three dependent variables: vote choice, favorability of Berkley, and favorability of Sandlin:

1) All on- versus all off-topic
2) All civil versus all uncivil
3) All positive versus all negative
4) All positive versus all contrast
5) All negative versus all contrast

The results are presented below.

As shown in Table 4.5, there is not a statistically significant difference between a candidate responding to the policy matter of the initial attack advertisement or responding with an advertisement on a different policy area. In other words, the subject matter of the

advertisement itself does not appear to impact a voter's decision in this campaign, nor in how the voter's evaluated the favorability of either candidate.

Table 4.5
On-Topic Responses versus Off-Topic Responses

	Net Change Between Initial and On-Topic Response Ad	Net Change Between Initial and Off-Topic Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	0.435	0.350	0.085	0.470
Berkley Favorability	-0.527	-0.375	-0.152	0.314
Sandlin Favorability	0.582	0.467	0.115	0.4979

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Table 4.6
Civil Responses versus Uncivil Responses

	Net Change Between Initial and Civil Response Ad	Net Change Between Initial and Uncivil Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	0.440	0.342	0.098	0.403
Berkley Favorability	-0.605	-0.258	-0.347	0.029**
Sandlin Favorability	0.582	0.467	0.115	0.4979

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

We largely see a similar trend in Table 4.6, which examines the overall effects of responding in a civil or uncivil manner. While there was not a significant impact on participant's vote choice, nor their evaluations of the initial advertisement's sponsor, when the responding candidate responded in a civil matter, his evaluations were significantly more positive than when he responded in an uncivil manner.

Table 4.7 shows the identical results seen in Table 4.6; namely, that only the responding candidate's evaluation was affected significantly, again in the more favorable direction, when he responded with a positive, as opposed to negative, advertisement.

Table 4.7
Positive Responses versus Negative Responses

	Net Change Between Initial and Positive Response Ad	Net Change Between Initial and Negative Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	0.443	0.350	0.093	0.502
Berkley Favorability	-0.772	-0.213	-0.559	0.005***
Sandlin Favorability	0.341	0.534	-0.193	0.318

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

In Table 4.8 we see the comparison of all positive responses versus all contrast responses (which start negatively but end positively). Here, there is not a significant difference in vote choice nor favorability for the responding candidate. However, the initiating candidate's favorability did change, in the more negative direction, when the response advertisement was a contrast ad as opposed to a purely positive response ad. This is in the expected direction, as a contrast advertisement directly attacks the initial candidate's policies, while ending with a positive message regarding the responding candidate's policies.

Table 4.8
Positive Responses versus Contrast Responses

	Net Change Between Initial and Positive Response Ad	Net Change Between Initial and Contrast Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	0.443	0.469	-0.026	0.880
Berkley Favorability	-0.772	-0.704	-0.068	0.77
Sandlin Favorability	0.341	0.740	-0.399	0.060*

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Lastly, Table 4.9 shows the influence of all negative responses versus all contrast advertisements. In this case, the responding candidate's favorability is most improved with a contrast response ad, as opposed to a purely negative response ad.

Table 4.9
Negative Responses versus Contrast Responses

	Net Change Between Initial and Negative Response Ad	Net Change Between Initial and Contrast Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	0.350	0.469	-0.119	0.416
Berkley Favorability	-0.213	-0.704	0.491	0.009***
Sandlin Favorability	0.534	0.740	-0.206	0.314

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

These initial results do not fit with the expectations from the literature. Specifically, the on-topic quality of the response advertisement did not have a statistically significant effect on vote preference nor attitudes towards the attacked and attacking candidates. Similarly, civil versus uncivil responses did not have a significant impact on vote preferences nor the favorability of the initially attacking candidate (also the one being rebutted). However, when Peter Berkley responded in a civil manner in his response ad, his evaluations did move in a more favorable direction, and was statistically significant. The exact same result was present in the positive versus negative response analysis; Peter Berkley's favorability improved, while voter preferences and Sandlin's favorability were not statistically significant when comparing positive versus negative responses. Lastly, there are the comparisons of positive and negative ads versus contrast ads, respectively. Interestingly, in the positive versus contrast ad responses, Sandlin's evaluation was the only statistically significant result, and he moved in the more

unfavorable direction; this makes sense, as that indicates, after the contrast ad – which contains both anti-Sandlin and pro-Berkley messaging – Sandlin would be seen as more unfavorable. A similar result was found for Berkley in the negative versus contrast response analysis. In this instance, Berkley was viewed more favorably after his contrast response (a mix of anti-Sandlin and pro-Berkley messaging) than with his negative response (only anti-Sandlin messaging).

All in all, the initial analysis suggests that positive, civil responses positively affect the responding candidate's favorability. These initial results also suggest that contrast advertisements do a better job at both boosting the responding candidate's image, as well as tarnishing the image of the candidate that initially attacked. However, further analysis is required in order to determine the exact mix of factors that might produce the most effective response.

In order to determine the most effective mix of the variables explore above, I analyzed each of the eight experimental conditions in terms of the effect of the response advertisement. Those results are presented below. These results compare how the participants in each experimental condition indicated they would vote after exposure to the initial attack advertisement, as well as candidate favorability evaluations, compared against those same measures after exposure to the second advertisement.

Condition A + B contained a response advertisement that was positive and on-topic. This result is consistent with the initial analysis; namely, that positive responses moved the needle most in terms of improving Berkley's favorability after being attacked. Additionally, this result is still inconsistent with the prior literature on response advertisements and is also inconsistent with the expectations of the negativity bias.

Table 4.10
Condition A + B Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Positive and On-Topic)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	3.395	2.737	0.658	0.01419***
Berkley Favorability	5.026	6.053	-1.027	0.03013**
Sandlin Favorability	6.632	5.947	0.685	0.08413*

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

However, it is in alignment with the motivational hypothesis. Looking at vote choice, more participants in this condition moved from being completely undecided to voting for Peter Berkley – the candidate that responded to the initial attack positively. Similarly, more participants moved from a neutral evaluation of Berkley to a positive evaluation of Berkley, after the response advertisement. Lastly, more participants moved in the opposite direction for Sandlin; namely, moving from favorable to more neutral. Taken together, all of these results indicate that positivity and staying on-topic works to mute the effects of an attack advertisement, and suggest that this interaction of features is important, whereas some of these factors in isolation did not change voter preferences or evaluations of Sandlin.

Table 4.11
Condition A + C Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Positive and Off-Topic)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	3.439	3.195	0.244	0.2297
Berkley Favorability	4.683	5.22	-0.537	0.1283
Sandlin Favorability	6.024	6	0.024	0.9533

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Condition C contained a response advertisement that was also positive but on a policy matter different from that of the initial attack ad. As shown in Table 4.11, there was not a statistically significant effect on either candidate's favorability (though, both moved in the expected direction) nor the participant's vote choice (though, again, it did move in a more pro-Berkley direction). These results suggest that responding to an attack advertisement by ignoring the initial topic is not as effective as responding to the initial advertisement's policy area.

Table 4.12 shows a similar relationship to that of Table 4.11. Namely, while all of the dependent variables moved in the expected direction, none of the results are statistically significant in this advertisement pairing. This condition featured a response ad that was negative, civil, and on-topic to the policy matter of the initial advertisement.

Table 4.12
Condition A + D Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Negative, On-Topic, and Civil)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	3.439	3.2	0.239	0.2218
Berkley Favorability	4.634	4.95	-0.316	0.3658
Sandlin Favorability	5.707	5.561	0.146	0.594

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Condition E included a responding advertisement that was negative, on-topic, and uncivil. In Table 4.13 below, only the participant's vote choice and evaluation of the initially attacking candidate were significantly impacted by the response ad. Participants indicated a vote preference for the responding candidate and also rated the initial attack more negatively.

Table 4.14 below shows the results for Condition F: the negative, off-topic, and civil response advertisement. In this instance, participants were significantly influenced to vote in a more pro-Berkley direction. Similarly, participants evaluated Sandlin (the initial attacker) in a more unfavorable direction. In the case of Condition D (Table 4.12) and E (Table 4.13), the main driver appears to be the tone of the response advertisement, with the uncivil tone producing significant results, while the civil response does not.

Table 4.13
Condition A + E Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Negative, On-Topic, and Uncivil)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	3.585	3.195	0.39	0.06719*
Berkley Favorability	4.39	4.39	0	1
Sandlin Favorability	6.195	5.585	0.61	0.08801*

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

The results for Condition G are shown in Table 4.15 below. The results for this condition (the negative, off-topic, and uncivil response) are identical to the previous condition (negative, on-topic, but civil). In both instances, participants were significantly influenced to vote in a more pro-Berkley direction. Similarly, participants evaluated Sandlin (the initial attacker) in a more unfavorable direction. This suggests that the results previously presented (Table 4.6: all civil versus all uncivil responses) were driven primarily by the negativity of the response advertisement, not the civility or policy matter discussed.

Table 4.14
Condition A + F Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Negative, Off-Topic, and Civil)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice Berkley	3.575	3.125	0.45	0.0294**
Favorability Sandlin	4.775	5.2	-0.425	0.2518
Favorability	6.4	5.65	0.75	0.06198*

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Table 4.15
Condition A + G Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Negative, Off-Topic, and Uncivil)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice Berkley	3.513	3.385	0.128	0.1003*
Favorability Sandlin	5.179	5.333	-0.154	0.7335
Favorability	5.949	5.308	0.641	0.105*

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Table 4.16
Condition A + H Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Contrast, On-Topic, and Civil)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice Berkley	3.366	2.707	0.659	0.005759***
Favorability Sandlin	4.829	5.61	-0.781	0.04016***
Favorability	6.02	5.02	1	0.006022***

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Condition H was a contrast advertisement (i.e., an ad that started negatively and anti-Sandlin, but ended positively and pro-Berkley) and had a civil tone throughout. This is consistent with the initial results, that positivity, civility, and contrast advertainments have significant effects. Additionally, this result is somewhat inconsistent with all three

hypotheses based on the extant literature. On the one hand, it is consistent with the negativity bias hypothesis in that part of advertisement H was negative and on-topic; however, it was a civil, not uncivil advertisement. Similarly, it is consistent with the motivational hypothesis in that the positive, civil, and on-topic aspect of the contrast advertisement may have been the influential driver of the results. Looking at vote choice, the results are similar to the A + B condition: more participants in this condition moved from being completely undecided to voting for Peter Berkley – the candidate responding to the initial attack – this time hitting his opponent's record but then pivoting to a positive message regarding his own platform. Second, more participants moved from a slight negative evaluation of Berkley to a more positive evaluation of Berkley, after Berkley's response advertisement. Lastly, more participants moved in the opposite direction for Sandlin; namely, moving from favorable to more neutral regarding the initially attacking candidate. Viewing these results together, they indicate that a mixed message – both negative and then positive – and staying on-topic also works to mute the effects of an attack advertisement.

Lastly, as shown in Table 4.17 above, Condition I only had a significant impact in moving respondents to evaluate Berkley (the responding candidate) in a more favorable direction. The only difference between Conditions H and I are that Condition I is uncivil; this suggest that the civility of response ad H was the primary driver of the significant results for all three dependent variables.

Table 4.17
Condition A + I Responses After Viewing Response Advertisement (Contrast, On-Topic, and Uncivil)

	After Initial Attack Ad	After Response Ad	Difference	p-value
Vote Choice	3.5	3.225	0.275	0.1612
Berkley Favorability	4.825	5.45	-0.625	0.09377*
Sandlin Favorability	5.95	5.475	0.475	0.1929

Note: ***p<.01, **p<.05, * p<.10.

Overall, while statistical significance was found in many of the conditions, Conditions A + B and A + H produced the largest statistical difference after exposure to the response advertisement.

The two sets of results suggest that the limited, prior research on response advertisements – which did not include contrast ads – may not give us the full picture. Further, these results also indicate that the extant literature that only examines how voters respond to a single advertisement may also not be capturing the nuances of a real campaign, with dueling advertisements.

Looking at those conditions that were less effective, but nonetheless displayed significant results, a more complex story emerges. The response conditions E (negative, on-topic and uncivil), F (negative, off-topic, and civil), and G (negative, on-topic, and uncivil) all displayed similar results, in terms of statistical significance: voters' preferences moving in a more pro-Berkley direction and, in terms of candidate favorability, moving in a more anti-Sandlin direction. Together, these indicate that negative ads can indeed help re-establish the equilibrium that was seen after the biography sketches but before the initial attack advertisement aired by Sandlin.

Condition I (contrast, on-topic, and uncivil), however, is more of an anomaly; it only moved the evaluation of Berkley in a more favorable direction, which the previously three mentioned conditions did not (but the most effective forms of response did).

As the final part of my analysis, and because the literature has nearly nothing to say regarding variables that might moderate the impact of responses on vote preference and candidate favorability, I examined several possible interactions: the interaction of each condition with: sex, tolerance to negativity, and partisanship of the respondent, as well as any potential interaction whether participants believed the government should address the issue of student loan debt and whether the government is doing an adequate job managing Wall Street (the substantive topics of the advertisements). Certainly, it is possible that men and women respond differently to negative and positive messaging (e.g. Stryker, Danielson, and Conway 2015; Brooks 2010; Kern and Just, 1997; King and McConnell, 2003), so that was an interaction worth exploring. Along the same lines, it's possible that Democrats and Republicans are sensitive in different ways to positivity and negativity (e.g. Fridkin and Kenney, 2019; Stryker, Danielson, and Conway 2015), and thus that interaction should be tested. Lastly, I needed to ensure that the results were not driven by intolerance to negativity (Fridkin and Kenney 2019), or the participants' beliefs in whether the government should properly intervene to manage student loan debt and/or malfeasance on Wall Street. Using the three indexes described in Chapter 2, I wanted to determine if individuals that are less tolerant to negativity responded differently from those that are more tolerant, as well as whether those who support the government being involved in managing student loan debt (the subject of the initial attack advertisement and the on-topic response ads) and/or Wall Street (the policy matter of the off-topic

responses) different from those opposed to government intervention. Two-way ANOVAs were used to examine the interaction of these variables with the experimental conditions; none of the interactions were found to be statistically significant ($p < .10$).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the experiment are consistent with the prior literature in one respect: there is little consistency as to the effect of negative campaign advertisements. Additionally, given the extremely limited amount of scholarship regarding response advertisements, the results provided here are hardly surprising. However, based on the experimental results described above, the most effective way to respond when attacked is to remain positive – to some degree. As will be explored more in the final chapter, more research needs to be done to tease out the differences between the purely positive response and the contrast (both negative and positive) response.

Nonetheless, both results suggest when voters start off undecided in a campaign, positive responses are the most effective way to respond. This is consistent with the motivational explanation's expectation that the negativity effect is not universal. Specifically, it does indeed seem to be the case that only those motivated to dislike the candidate should show a negativity bias. In this case, since participants rated both candidates equally in terms of favorability after reading the biographical sketches and were unable to decide on whom to vote for, and since any typical voting heuristics were removed, participants were more likely to respond to positive messages rather than negative. These results, then, offers support for the expectation that undecided voters, who may not have strong preferences for one candidate over another and/or have not decided for or against a candidate, will not demonstrate a negativity bias. A negativity

bias did indeed seem to be absent in these participants. As such, the motivational explanation's prediction that negative information is not likely to be more influential than positive information in a primary campaign appears spot on, since a substantial number of voters will not have formed strong preferences regarding any of the candidates (Klein and Ahluwalia 2005). These results indicate, therefore, that there should be limited benefit to providing voters with negative information when compared to positive information.

In the next, and final, chapter, I will articulate the contribution of my research to the field, summarize the key findings of this research project, and explore avenues for future research to build on this dissertation's results.

CHAPTER 5

HOW RESPONSE ADVERTISEMENTS MATTER IN AMERICAN CAMPAIGNS

The conventional wisdom shared by political candidates and consultants alike – that negative ads "work" – seems to be a simplification. Certainly, some negative ads have their intended effects. However, many candidates "go negative" and lose the election. Further, positive ads "work," too. My findings suggest that both positive and negative ads do have their intended effects and that, more generally, candidates should respond at least somewhat positively when attacked by their opponent. The overarching motivation of this dissertation was to understand the influence of response ads and which type(s) of response(s) may be more effective than another.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, and contrary to common expectations, televised political ads are not being rapidly replaced by digital ad wars (Franz and Fowler 2020). In fact, 2018 saw more spending on televised spots than previous midterms. Additionally, scholars have demonstrated that issue convergence is on the rise – especially in the case of competitive races. In other words, candidates do not simply "talk past" one another; candidates are actively presenting voters with campaign messages on similar topics. Candidates, then are indeed discussing issues that are publicly salient (Kahn and Kenney 1999; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006). The results of my dissertation certainly offer support for this idea: candidates cannot afford to allow the opponent to control the information flow. How, then, should candidates respond?

The contribution of my dissertation project has several facets. First, the literature on response advertisements is minimal, at best. We simply do not have enough information regarding expectations regarding which types of responses are most effective, nor do we have enough information regarding the context of responding. Given the nearly infinite combinations of a campaign's context, this is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, my dissertation project attempted to more realistically replicate a campaign context. Specifically, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, most political advertisements – and certainly most negative advertisements – are on policy matters (Franz and Fowler 2020). Prior literature looks at response advertisements on the personal traits of candidates, which only account for about between 10% and 16% of all advertisements. This dissertation's results further expand our knowledge then in one key way: how candidates should respond to policy matters, which account for upwards of nearly 68% of all campaign advertisements.

Second, this dissertation has practical implications for political campaigns. As mentioned above, the conventional campaign wisdom is that attacks work. As Democratic campaign consultants James Carville and Paul Begala stated: "It's hard for your opponent to say bad things about you when your fist is in his mouth" (Westen, 2007). My results suggest this may not always be true.

The remainder of this chapter will summarize the findings of my focus group and original within-subjects design experiment. Then, I will expand upon the implications of my findings on response ads. Lastly, I will offer suggestions for future research.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research project began with a focus group exploring what exactly participants liked and disliked about American campaigns, especially political advertisements. Twenty-eight students in an Arizona State University undergraduate course of political science were the participant in the focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to gauge what participants felt would be the best way to respond to attack ads from one's opponent. In order to facilitate this discussion, participants were shown multiple real campaigns advertisements, including response ads. Participants were shown the initial attack advertisement and then gave their general impressions of the ad. Next, they were asked to craft a hypothetical response – what would be the most effective way to respond? Following that hypothetical discussion, I showed the participants the real campaign's actual response ad and then gauged how effective the participants felt the response was. As expected, the participants responses to the variety of ads was varied.

Several general findings emerged from the focus group. First, there was a general aversion to negativity; however, this was not universal. The group participants largely agreed that if a candidate is to "go negative," it needs to be on an issue relevant to performance in office, not on past personal foibles, such as college drug use or a contentious divorce. Second, responses need to be "factual;" in other words, verifiably accurate.

The second set of discussion results are specifically to the type of responses the participants would like to see sponsored by an attacked candidate. First, if the candidate is going to hit back with a negative response, it should be "factual" and on issues pertinent to the office sought. However, the majority of the group believe that candidates

needed to elevate above the fray and respond in a positive manner, on-topic to the initial attack ad's policy matter, without mudslinging.

Following the focus group discussions, I used the information gathered to inform the creation of my experimentally manipulated advertisements to be used in the experimental portion of the dissertation. Namely, I crafted response ads that fit the findings above: purely positive responses, purely negative responses, and contrast responses, which include an attack on the opponent's record but end with the sponsoring candidate's positive message. Conveniently, the focus group's insights also matched what we find in real campaign context: namely, that candidate's employ a mix of messaging, in which about 17% of ads in a competitive race are positive, 22% are contrast, and 61% are negative (Franz, Fowler and Ridout 2016).

All of the campaign advertisements constructed were based on actual ads aired in a real campaign for federal office. However, those advertisements were modified to remove the names of the real sponsoring candidate and to manipulate the civility of each ad, creating civil and uncivil versions. Before I could move on to the experimental portion of my research project, however, I had to ensure that the negative ads I manipulated were indeed perceived as negative, while the positive ads were perceived as positive. Similarly, I needed to ensure that the uncivil negative ads were viewed more negatively than the civil negative ads. I expected contrast advertisements to have evaluations somewhere in between those of positive and negative ads. Another undergraduate class in political science at Arizona State University was employed as the manipulation check on the advertisements. All ads were perceived in the expected direction, allowing me to proceed with the experimental portion of my dissertation.

Finally, I conducted an online experiment using Qualtrics, overseen by the Arizona State University's Political Science Department's experimental lab. There were 361 participants drawn from a variety of undergraduate political science courses. Participants were randomly assigned to the control group or one of eight experimental conditions. Participants were asked a variety of pre-test questions regarding demographic information, standard political knowledge questions from the literature, as well as questions designed to gauge their tolerance to negativity. Then, participants were showed two biographical sketches of hypothetical candidates running for the U.S. House of Representatives. Participants indicated which candidate they preferred to vote for and rated their favorability towards both candidates. As intended, the candidates were rated equally and the participants did not lean towards voting for one candidate over the other. Next, all participants were shown a negative attack ad against one of the candidates (the control group was only shown this ad). This ad had its intended effects. Participants were significantly more likely to exhibit negative evaluations of the attacked candidate and to prefer voting for the ad's sponsor. While it was not statistically significant, evaluations of the attacking candidate did move in the more favorable direction.

Next, participants in the experimental conditions were shown a response advertisement. Response ads varied along several dimensions: positive, negative, or contrast; civil or uncivil; and, lastly, whether the response was on- or off-topic to the initial ad's policy matter. The results of the experiment were consistent with the prior literature in one key respect: there was little consistency as to the effect of negative campaign advertisements (i.e., some "worked" and others "didn't work). Additionally, given the extremely limited amount of scholarship regarding response advertisements,

expectations as to the most effective form of response were unclear. However, my results demonstrate that the most effective way to respond when attacked is to remain positive – to some degree. Both a purely positive, and a contrast ad, were found to be the most effective two forms of response. Additionally, both advertisements were on-topic to the policy matter stated in the initial ad, and were civil in tone. This finding offers support for the notion that issue convergence can indeed have an upside for candidates and also supports the conventional wisdom that attacks much be responded to, but not necessarily in a negative fashion.

Altogether, the results of the experimental portion of my dissertation suggest that when voters start off undecided in a campaign, positive responses are the most effective way to respond. This is consistent with the motivated reasoning's expectation that the negativity effect is not universal. Specifically, it does indeed seem to be the case that only those motivated to dislike the candidate should show a propensity to be more influenced by negative information. In this case, since participants rated both candidates equally in terms of favorability after reading the biographical sketches and were unable to decide on whom to vote for, and since any typical voting heuristics such as partisanship were removed, participants were more likely to respond to positive messages rather than negative.

These results, provide support for the expectation that undecided voters, who may not have strong preferences for one candidate over another and/or have not decided for or against a candidate, will not be predisposed to negative evaluations of a candidate. As such, the motivational explanation's prediction that negative information is not likely to be more influential than positive information in a primary campaign (where voters cannot

use the party heuristic) appears accurate, since a substantial number of voters will not have formed strong preferences regarding any of the candidates (Klein and Ahluwalia 2005). These results indicate, therefore, that there may be limited benefit to providing undecided voters with negative information when compared to positive information.

There are several limitations, however, to generalizing the results of my dissertation to the larger population. Namely, that my samples contained undergraduate students. Generally speaking, the sample was younger and more politically knowledgeable than would be true of the general voting population. This was certainly true across the other major demographic characteristics, as well (such as race, et cetera). Additionally, the experiment was conducted using storyboards of campaign advertisements. It would be problematic to overstate my findings, given that in the "real-world" of campaigns, voters are not viewing storyboards of campaign ads. The power of an audio-visual medium could certainly produce effects that a printed source does not e.g., Hansen, et al 2006). Lastly, it is possible that times have changed in the era of President Trump. There is some evidence that there are corrosive effects of negative advertising on both voter turnout and trust in government (see, for example, Jackson, Mondak, and Huckfeldt, 2008; Geer, 2012, Lau et al., 2007), especially in the Trump era (see Citrin and Stoker, 2018; Gross and Johnson 2016; Samoilenko and Miroshnichenko 2019). It is possible that voters have learned to simply tune out, or at least process differently, negative messages in an era of consistent negativity and name calling (see Schaffner 2018). Finally, I was able to examine only one of many campaign possibilities: two white males, vying for a U.S House seat, based on a policy-focused campaign. My

results may have been different had any of the core features had been varied, as will be discussed below.

IMPLICATIONS

As briefly touched on above, my results have several real-world implications, as well as implications for future research. One, as political science literature has clearly demonstrated, negative ads don't always "work." This project bears that out. This project also furthers our understanding of a fuller campaign project, by trying to more closely mimic a campaign context; namely, this means utilizing advertisements on a policy matter, and not simply personal characteristics of the candidates. Second, by exposing participants to two advertisements, as opposed to just one, the information flow of a real campaign is moderately better replicated; but, more importantly, it provides scholars of media and politics with a fuller picture regarding how responses play a role in a campaign's media environment. Nonetheless, much work needs to be done and the furtherance of this project are nearly limitless.

For example, I chose two white male candidates to simplify the design process and to more clearly elucidate the characteristics of a response ad that might be more effective. However, further research could be done varying the attributes of the candidates. Male versus female, for example, and varying the order of attacked versus responding candidate. Women, for instance, find advertisements with women serving as the narrator of the ad as more credible than men do (Strach et al, 2015). Craig and Rippere (2016) also find that the gender of the ad-sponsoring candidate can have an influence and that women may face more backlash than men in sponsoring negative ads (see also Plutzer and Zipp 1996; Rosenthal 1995; Sanbonmatsu 2002). It's worth

exploring whether these effects hold in a dual-advertisement environment. Similarly, the race of the candidates could also be varied. It's possible that voters respond differently to attack or response ads, depending on the candidate (i.e., source) characteristics. Also, and perhaps most obviously, including the partisanship of the candidates could alter respondents' reactions to a given response advertisement. It seems logical to expect that a Democratic voter would respond differently to a Republican attack and a Democratic response, and vice versa (see Henderson and Theodoridis, 2015, for example).

Further, the effectiveness of a response ad may depend on the issue area conveyed. Further research could be done varying the topic of the ads, beyond the variation presented in this topic. Voter reactions, in other words, to response ads may largely be dependent on the policy matter of the ad itself. I chose issues not likely to trigger partisan leanings, which, of course, does not happen in real campaign contexts (see, for example, Iyengar, Jackman, and Hahn 2008; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Lavine, Johnson, and Steenbergen 2012; Stevens et al. 2015). Additionally, further research could vary the order of the advertisements. How might my results have been different if the positive ad was presented first, followed by a negative, positive, or contrast ad? In other words, the candidate seen as the "instigator" of the negativity might be perceived more harshly (see Krupnikov and Bauer 2014). Certainly, advertisements are not seen in the real-world in an order preferable to any given candidate. It's also possible that the office sought matters. Participants might react differently to a variety of responses if the office sought is the local dogcatcher, versus their state representative, or their United States senator. Ridout and Franz (2011), for example, find that advertising has larger effects on down-ballot races where candidates are less well-known. Also, an

advertisement's influence is largely contextual. For example, an advertisement will have more of an influence when one campaign is dominating the airwaves (Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2016).

Further research could vary the number of ads participants are exposed to. How might have opinions been moved if Candidate A or Candidate B presented more ads in the experimental setting (see Craig and Hill 2011, 135–38)? Researcher could also explore whether the sponsor of the responses matters. Might participants react differently to responses sponsored by an interest group than they do by the candidate him or herself? The existing literature does provide evidence that ads sponsored by an interest group are perceived to be more credible than an ad sponsored by a candidate (Brooks and Murov 2012; Garramone and Smith 1984; Garramone 1985; Groenendyk and Valentino 2002; Johnson, Dunaway, and Weber 2011; Ridout, Franz, and Fowler 2015; Weber, Dunaway, and Johnson 2012). Discovering whether these findings hold in the context of a two-way information flow that is true of campaigns would be of value. Similarly, some literature has found that advertisements starring "ordinary" Americans are perceived more favorably, especially by undecided voters (Fowler, Franz, and Ridout, 2013; Fowler et al, 2014). Additionally, in order to have a fuller picture of the impact of response ads, a varied sample is required. While surveying students can certainly untangle some of the causal mechanisms at work, there could be relevant differences between a local student sample and one that is more nationally representative. Lastly, how voters may be exposed to political advertisements is changing, albeit slowly. Might voters respond differently to an advertisement they are forced to watch (or, at least, cannot skip) on YouTube or Hulu than one they might ignore when presented on

broadcast television? For example, one study found that younger viewers were significantly less tolerant of online television advertising than were older viewers when compared to standard broadcast television advertising (Logan 2011). Researchers should experiment with the mode of delivery of the advertisement to see how that might mediate effects.

As laid out above, the sky is the limit for researchers interested in the effects of response advertisements. It is my sincere hope that researchers begin to craft inventive ways to explore the many possible combinations that exists in "real world" campaigns. What my research does demonstrate, however, is that negativity does work (i.e., the effects of the initial attack advertisement) but that that effect is mediated by whether the opposing candidate chooses to respond and the manner of that response. If the 2018 midterms are any guide, television advertisements are not going away any time soon, and not nearly as quickly as some have predicted. In fact, television advertising for the 2020 presidential election has already eclipsed the levels seen at the comparable point of the 2016 election (Wesleyan Media Project, 2019). Since television advertising (including digital advertising) is still the primary mechanism through which candidates for office can communicate with the majority of voters, it remains an area of study of importance. Just as candidates are finding new and different ways to contact voters, it is imperative that political scientists, and indeed all scholars that are interested in political communication and democracy, continue to expand our knowledge regarding one of the fundamental pillars of democracy: the linkages between politicians and voters, especially in how political messages are conveyed by those in power.

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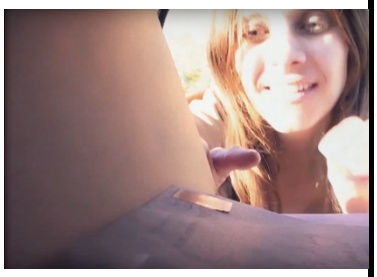
APPENDIX A

ADVERTISEMENT STORYBOARDS

Advertisement A: Original Attack – Relevant and Uncivil

		
It started with a letter,	then books, long hours,	all for this moment.
		
but for too many Texans, diplomas now come with a lifetime of debt.	**Peter Berkley** inexcusably voted against letting over 800,000 Texans refinance their student loans, to protect tax breaks for millionaires,	he even irresponsibly voted to let interest rates double so Texas students would pay more. **Peter Berkley.** Does he get it? Does he even care? [**Roland Sandlin** VOICEOVER]: I'm **Roland Sandlin** and I approved this message because our students deserve a brighter future.

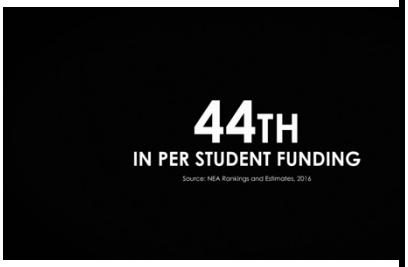
Advertisement B: Response – On-Topic and Civil – Positive

		
We are 800,000.	We are 800,000.	We are 800,000 Texans. Many of us went to college long ago.
		
But we're still carrying 21 billion dollars in student debt.	I'm **Peter Berkley** and I'm fighting for a law that would allow people to refinance their student loans just like you can a car loan or a home loan.	Every Texan deserves a chance to go to college. And every graduate should have more to look forward to than a lifetime of debt. That's why I approve this message.

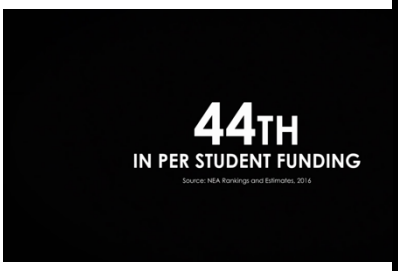
Advertisement C: Response – Off-Topic and Civil – Positive

		
Where does Texas go from here? I'm **Peter Berkley**.	And after years of our state moving backward, these would be my priorities as your congressman.	First, we need to end giveaways for companies that send jobs overseas
		
And grow our economy here.	And we need to reform our tax system so those at the top aren't getting tax breaks at your expense.	I'm **Peter Berkley** and I approve this message because we can start building a better Texas.

Advertisement D: Response – On-Topic and Civil – Negative

		
[**Roland Sandlin** VOICEOVER]: There is no limit to what every student in Texas can learn and achieve.	[NARRATOR]: Not when we're 44th in per student funding.	[**Roland Sandlin** VOICEOVER]: We should not ask for more money from you...
		
[NARRATOR]: He gave tax breaks to those at the top while raising taxes 67 ways on the middle class.	[**Roland Sandlin** VOICEOVER]: It's time to polish up our brand and once more say 'Come check out Texas.'	[NARRATOR]: **Roland Sandlin** trashed our brand, costing us thousands of jobs. We need a congressman with our priorities. [**Peter Berkley** VOICEOVER]: I'm Peter Berkley and I approved this message because we need a real leader in Washington.

Advertisement E: Response – On-Topic and Uncivil – Negative

		
[**Roland Sandlin** VOICEOVER]: There is no limit to what every student in Texas can learn and achieve.	[NARRATOR]: Not when we're 44th in per student funding.	[**Roland Sandlin** VOICEOVER]: We should not ask for more money from you...
		
[NARRATOR]: He recklessly gave tax breaks to those at the top while irresponsibly raising taxes 67 ways on the middle class.	[**Roland Sandlin** VOICEOVER]: It's time to polish up our brand and once more say 'Come check out Texas.'	[NARRATOR]: **Roland Sandlin** lied, trashed our brand, costing us thousands of jobs. We need a congressman with our priorities. **Roland Sandlin** cannot be trusted. [**Peter Berkley** VOICEOVER]: I'm Peter Berkley and I approved this message because we need a real leader in Washington.

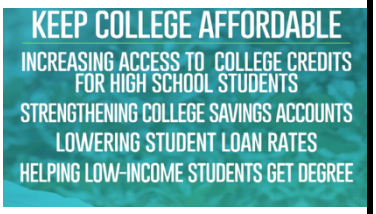
Advertisement F: Response – Off-Topic and Civil – Negative

		
I know working with Wall Street helped make **Roland Sandlin** a millionaire.	That was good for him. Not for me.	Because as a congressman, **Sandlin** stood up for Wall Street.
		
He wanted to privatize Social Security and invest it in the stock market. Wall Street would make billions in fees. Even if the stock market crashed.	**Roland Sandlin**, once for Wall Street, always for Wall Street. Not for me.	I'm **Peter Berkley** I approved this message because Wall Street doesn't need any more bailouts.

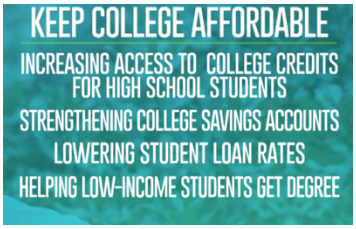
Advertisement G: Response – Off-Topic and Uncivil – Negative

		
I know working with Wall Street helped make **Roland Sandlin** a millionaire.	That was good for him. Not for me. **Ronald Sandlin** cannot be trusted.	That was good for him. Not for me. **Ronald Sandlin** cannot be trusted.
		
He wanted to privatize Social Security and invest it in the stock market. Wall Street would make billions in fees. Even if the stock market crashed.	**Roland Sandlin**, once for Wall Street, always for Wall Street. He can't be trusted.	I'm **Peter Berkley** I approved this message because Wall Street doesn't need corrupt, immoral politicians giving more bailouts.

Advertisement H: Response – On-Topic and Civil – Contrast

		
As thousands of students graduate across Texas	who can Texas families trust to make college affordable	and provide a better future
		
for the next generation?	**Roland Sandlin** cut funding for colleges and universities, reversing his promise to freeze tuition, and driving up costs for students and parents.	**Peter Berkley** is fighting to keep college affordable and help graduates struggling with high student loan debt. **Peter Berkley** has offered solutions to keep college affordable, lowering student loan rates, and helping low-income students get a college degree. I'm **Peter Berkley** and I approved this message because we simply can't afford **Roland Sandlin**'s plan.

Advertisement I: Response – On-Topic and Uncivil
Contrast

		
As thousands of students graduate across Texas	who can Texas families trust to make college affordable	and provide a better future
		
for the next generation?	**Roland Sandlin** recklessly cut funding for colleges and universities, breaking his promise to freeze tuition, and irresponsibly driving up costs for students and parents. **Sandlin** cannot be trusted.	**Peter Berkley** is fighting to keep college affordable and help graduates struggling with high student loan debt. **Peter Berkley** has offered solutions to keep college affordable, lowering student loan rates, and helping low-income students get a college degree. I'm **Peter Berkley** and I approved this message because we simply can't afford **Roland Sandlin's** plan.

APPENDIX B

EXPERIMENTAL PACKET

Dear Respondent,

The primary investigator in this research project is Professor Fridkin in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University. We are conducting a research study to see how people respond to political information.

If you decide to participate, you will complete this study online. You will be asked to read some political content and then answer some follow-up questions. Your participation in this study is expected to take approximately 30 minutes. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary.

If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You will receive 1 credit towards the 2 credits required for the research participation requirement by participating in this study. In order to fulfill the research requirement, you will need to complete 2 hours of research participation. If you do not wish to participate in this study, you can complete an alternative assignment to fulfill the 2 credits required for the research component of your class. **You must be 18 years of age or older to participate**.

Your participation will help us understand how people interpret political information. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All information obtained in this survey is strictly anonymous; your identity will never be connected to the responses and your name will only be used to award class credit. The results of this survey may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the research will not identify you. The results of this survey will only be made available in aggregate form (combined with all the other answers).

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Dr. Kim Fridkin at kahn@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Integrity and Assurance, at (480)965-6788.

If you agree to participate, please select "I Agree" below and continue to the study.

Sincerely,

Political Science Research Center Team
School of Politics and Global Studies
Arizona State University

Part One:

Answer the following questions. For each question, indicate the number that comes closest to describing how you feel. If you have no opinion, do not indicate any number.

1. Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. How closely would you say that you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?

    1 Most of the time
    2 Some of the time
    3 Only now and then
    4 Hardly at all

2. Generally speaking (setting aside how you might vote in a particular election), which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?
    1 Strong Democrat
    2 Democrat
    3 Independent, leaning toward the Democrats
    4 Independent, not leaning toward either party
    5 Independent, leaning toward the Republicans
    6 Republican
    7 Strong Republican
    8 Other
    9 Don't know/not sure

2. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. On a scale of one through seven, where "1" is very liberal and "7" is very conservative, where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about it?

    1 Very liberal
    2 Liberal
    3 Slightly liberal
    4 Moderate, middle of the road
    5 Slightly conservative
    6 Conservative
    7 Very conservative
    8 Other
    9 Haven't thought much about it

3. In general, political candidates should <u>avoid criticizing</u> their opponents because campaigns have become too negative.
    1 Strongly agree
    2 Somewhat agree

3 Somewhat disagree

4. In general, political candidates should avoid criticizing their opponents because campaigns have become too negative.

1 Strongly agree
4 Somewhat agree
5 Somewhat disagree
6 Strongly disagree

5. Candidates need to criticize their opponents because it is important for voters to know the strengths and weaknesses of all candidates.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

6. Some negative advertisements are so nasty that I stop paying attention to what the candidates are saying.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

7. Mean-spirited commercials attacking the opponent are appropriate during election campaigns.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. Negative advertisements attacking a candidate's personal life are inappropriate.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. I find negative political commercials attacking the opponent's personal life as a young person to be interesting.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. Negative advertisements have a place in campaigns.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. Negative advertisements make me feel less like voting on Election Day.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. Generally speaking, negative advertisements help people to learn about the candidates.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. Was there more negative political advertising in the 2016 election year than in previous years, less negative political advertising, or is the level of negative advertising about the same?
- More negative political advertising
- Less negative political advertising
- About the same level of negative advertising as other elections

14. Some people don't pay much attention to the political campaigns. How about you, would you say that you have been/were very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the political campaigns last year?
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not much interested

15. Do you happen to know what job or office Mike Pence now holds?

16. Do you happen to know what job or office Mike Pence now holds?

17. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and U.S. House to override a presidential veto?

18. Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives?

19. Would you say that one of the parties is more conservative than the other at the national level? If so, which party is more conservative?

20. Refinancing existing student loans at lower interest rates is an important policy that should be addressed by the government.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

21. Politicians should work to provide more tax breaks for repaying student loans.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

22. Politicians should work to ensure citizens are able to receive free tuition at community college.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

23. The president must address increasing oversight of student loan servicing practices.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

24. The president does not need to address any student loan policies.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

25. Based on what you have read and heard, do you think that the government is doing an excellent, good, only fair or poor job handling the financial problems on Wall Street?

- Excellent
- Good
- Only fair
- Poor

26. As you may know, the government is potentially investing billions to try and keep financial institutions and markets secure. Do you think this is the right thing or the wrong thing for the government to be doing?

- Right thing
- Wrong thing

Part Two

1. What is your current age?

1	18-29
2	30-44
3	45-59
4	60-69
5	70 or over

2. What year in college are you?
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior

3. What is your sex?

1	Male
2	Female

4. What is your race or ethnic identity?
   - White (or Caucasian)
   - African American (or Black)
   - Latino (or Hispanic)
   - Asian
   - Native American
   - other

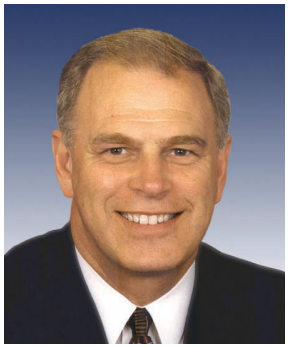
Part Two: Read the information presented and then answer the questions that immediately follow.

Imagine yourself to be a registered voter residing in Houston, Texas. It is the **spring of 2017** and a special election campaign is under way to fill a vacancy in the United States House of Representatives from Texas. On your ballot are **Peter Berkley** and **Roland Sandlin**, who face one another in the special election. Please read the following short biographical sketches of these candidates, and then answer the questions that immediately follow.

Peter Berkley

Age: 52
Family: married since 1993 to Ashley, three children aged between 17 and 22
Born and raised in Texarkana, TX; currently lives in Houston, TX
Education: B.A. (political science major) and J.D. from Baylor University
Profession: lawyer
Civic: volunteer youth baseball, basketball, and softball coach, Big Brothers (active for over 10 years)
Political: served one term (3 years) as a County Judge, four terms (8 years) as County Court at Law Judge

Roland Sandlin



Age: 56

Family: married since 1988 to Margaret, two children aged 21 and 25
Born, raised, and currently lives in Houston, TX
Education: B.A. (philosophy major) University of Houston and J.D. from University of Texas Law School.
Profession: criminal defense attorney
Civic: Public Library Advisory Board, local Red Cross Volunteers Board Member
Political: served one term (2 years) in Texas House of Representatives; currently in second term (8th year) as member of Texas University and Community College System Board of Regents

Answer the following questions. In each case, indicate the number that comes closest to describing how you feel. If you have no opinion, do not indicate any number.

1. Based on what you currently know about the candidates so far, would you probably…

1	strongly lean toward voting for Peter Berkley
2	slightly lean toward voting for Peter Berkley
3	be completely undecided between Peter Berkley and Roland Sandlin
4	slightly lean toward voting for Roland Sandlin
5	strongly lean toward voting for Roland Sandlin

2. Using a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means you feel *extremely favorable* toward the person and 1 means you feel *extremely unfavorable* toward the person, where would you rate **Peter Berkley** on this scale?

1	Extremely unfavorable
2	
3	
4	
5	Neither unfavorable nor favorable
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	Extremely favorable

3. Using a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means you feel *extremely favorable* toward the person and 1 means you feel *extremely unfavorable* toward the person, where would you rate **Roland Sandlin** on this scale?

1	Extremely unfavorable
2	
3	
4	

5 Neither unfavorable nor favorable
6
7
8
9
10 Extremely favorable

Part Three: Imagine now that it is late in the campaign and you see the following information in a television advertisement sponsored by **Peter Berkley**. Please read this information carefully and then answer the questions that immediately follow.

INSERT INITIAL ATTACK AD STORY BOARD HERE.

Answer the following questions. In each case, indicate the number that comes closest to describing how you feel. If you have no opinion, do not indicate any number.

1. Based on what you currently know about the candidates so far, would you probably…

   1 strongly lean toward voting for Peter Berkley
   2 slightly lean toward voting for Peter Berkley
   3 be completely undecided between Peter Berkley and Roland Sandlin
   4 slightly lean toward voting for Roland Sandlin
   5 strongly lean toward voting for Roland Sandlin

2. Using a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means you feel *extremely favorable* toward the person and 1 means you feel *extremely unfavorable* toward the person, where would you rate **Peter Berkley** on this scale?

   1 Extremely unfavorable
   2
   3
   4
   5 Neither unfavorable nor favorable
   6
   7
   8
   9
   10 Extremely favorable

3. Using a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means you feel *extremely favorable* toward the person and 1 means you feel *extremely unfavorable* toward the person, where would you rate **Roland Sandlin** on this scale?

   1 Extremely unfavorable
   2
   3
   4
   5 Neither unfavorable nor favorable
   6
   7
   8
   9

10 Extremely favorable

4. You just viewed a story board of a television advertisement that Peter Berkley aired in your congressional district. Do you believe that these criticisms of Roland Sandlin are:

1 Too negative, should not be made

3 Negative but acceptable

3 Not really negative

Stage Four: Imagine that it is nearing Election Day and you see the following television advertisement created by Roland Sandlin in response to the first advertisement you viewed. Please read this information carefully and then answer the questions that immediately follow.

INSERT RESPONSE AD HERE.

Answer the following questions. In each case, indicate the number that comes closest to describing how you feel. If you have no opinion, do not indicate any number.

1. Based on what you currently know about the candidates so far, would you probably…

1	strongly lean toward voting for Peter Berkley
2	slightly lean toward voting for Peter Berkley
3	be completely undecided between Peter Berkley and Roland Sandlin
4	slightly lean toward voting for Roland Sandlin
5	strongly lean toward voting for Roland Sandlin

2. Using a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means you feel *extremely favorable* toward the person and 1 means you feel *extremely unfavorable* toward the person, where would you rate **Peter Berkley** on this scale?

1	Extremely unfavorable
2	
3	
4	
5	Neither unfavorable nor favorable
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	Extremely favorable

3. Using a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means you feel *extremely favorable* toward the person and 1 means you feel *extremely unfavorable* toward the person, where would you rate **Roland Sandlin** on this scale?

1	Extremely unfavorable
2	
3	
4	
5	Neither unfavorable nor favorable
6	
7	
8	

9

10 Extremely favorable

4. You just viewed a story board of a television advertisement that Roland Sandlin aired in your congressional district. Do you believe that these criticisms of Peter Berkley are:

1 Too negative, should not be made

2 Negative but acceptable

3 Not really negative

Thank you for your participation in this research study. The goal of this study is to determine how people respond to political advertisements in political campaigns. We were interested in seeing whether people respond differently to varying response advertisements, based on the topic and the negativity of the response ad. While the advertisements in the experiment are based on actual advertisements aired by political candidates, the candidates featured in the experiment are not real candidates.

Again, thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL CERTIFICATES

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Kim Fridkin
Government, Politics and Global Studies, School of
480/965-4195
kahn@asu.edu

Dear Kim Fridkin:

On 1/24/2017 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification
Title:	Assessing the Effects of Rebuttal Advertisements in Political Campaigns
Investigator:	Kim Fridkin
IRB ID:	STUDY00005208
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Advertisement Storyboards.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • CITI Certification Certificate, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above); • recruitmentrevised.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Dempsey Dissertation consent formv2.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Sample Experimental Packet, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Dempsey, Matthew, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 1/24/2017.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Matthew Dempsey
Matthew Dempsey
Kim Fridkin

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Kim Fridkin
Government, Politics and Global Studies, School of
480/965-4195
kahn@asu.edu

Dear Kim Fridkin:

On 3/27/2014 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Assessing the Effects of Rebuttal Advertisements in Political Campaigns
Investigator:	Kim Fridkin
IRB ID:	STUDY00000825
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Focus_Group_Instructions_Student.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • IRBmcd.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Script to guide discussion for Focus Group, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Experimental%20Lab%20Note.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 3/27/2014.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Matthew Dempsey
Matthew Dempsey