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Selling Social Conservatism

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CHAPTER 1

<u>Introduction</u>

Conventional wisdom over the past few elections has told us that the Midwest, dominated by so called "red states," are strongly conservative and citizens in these states voted according to their socially conservative values (Kohler, 2006). After the 2004 elections, Democrats bemoaned their failure to win back to White House, claiming that voters "took [their] moral values to the polls" (Brown, 2004). After the 2004 elections, pundits around the nation commented on the exit poll numbers because fully 22 percent of all voters surveyed said they chose their presidential candidate because of "moral values" (Colwell, 2004).

The political discussion over "moral values" became so important that Democrats looked for ways to reword their message to make it more palatable to voters. Bob von Sternberg of the <u>Minneapolis Star-Tribune</u> reported in a front page news article about efforts by Minnesota Democrats to reshape their efforts at winning the "moral voters." He also reported with some skepticism that "moral values" has been the top issue for presidential voters since 1996, thereby suggesting that the only thing new about the issue is that the press paid attention to it.

Ideological divergence among candidates naturally results from differences between candidates in the issues and techniques used when they campaign for election. A pro-life candidate in a district that is heavily pro-choice would rationally downplay that policy position and the opposite would be true for a pro-choice candidate. Similar framing techniques are used on a plethora of policy issues across the country, but the Midwest presents a particularly interesting case study for campaign framing because of

the strong views on social issues held by a large percentage of the constituency. Determined to better understand the relationship among Midwestern candidates who used language to suggest their "moral values" and those who did not, I asked "what might be the possible influences of socially conservative issue advertisements in Midwestern Congressional races in 2000 and 2002?"

I wondered about the techniques that Midwestern candidates used to win election. Was there something significantly different between a winning candidate and one who lost? Did they look different, speak different or talk about different issues? Did voters tend to believe them more than their less successful counterparts?

These questions reflect a set of assumptions made by scholars and journalists about the nature of politics, language and reality in the Midwest. We hear about the red state versus blue state division in every presidential and midterm election, but are we certain that this implied division exists? Are voters actually persuaded by the social position of candidates, or does some other factor more strongly influence their candidate choice?

I examined 1,858 television advertisements run by political candidates in Midwestern states. I categorized the ads according to the candidate who ran the ad and then coded them based on the presence of socially conservative language. I created a Microsoft SPSS database and ran descriptive statistics, cross-tabs and linear regressions to discover what influence these ads may have on the electorate. What I found surprised me.

In the elections I examined, socially conservative advertising created no major effect on the outcome of the election. How could this be, in the Midwest, the bastion of

red states?   Perhaps our presumptions about voters in the Midwest were wrong. What if the important variables are candidate legitimacy or name recognition? Or maybe party identification? If a candidate's views on social issues did not influence the electorate, than what did?

I needed an understanding of voter behavior, however, in order to answer these questions. What drove voters to the polls? Could language hold this power? Rhetorical and political theories show that language has the ability to move people to vote, but it is simply a part of the whole reason people go to the polls. The vast majority of voters chose to vote because of a number of factors, including the use of language and television advertising by candidates.

Theoretical Background

My project combines work from several different fields such as American politics, rhetoric and political campaigning. Therefore, I draw on multiple theories and rely on multiple theoretical assumptions to inform my project. In particular, I draw from the rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke as well as the political theories of Ruy Teixeira, Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone. Burke's dramatistic approach allows me to discuss the role of language in the ads to simultaneously create, distort, and reflect political realities. The work by Teixeira, Wolfinger and Rosenstone help me demonstrate who votes in the first place and how those people are convinced to participate. When combined, the theories suggest that language in an advertisement is important because it helps to frame political issues, motivate a person to vote, and increase the percentage of the vote received by a candidate.

Of these four theorists, Kenneth Burke is by far the most prolific and provides the most encompassing and expansive theory. As a rhetorical critic and theorist, he claims that life and rhetoric can be understood and analyzed as a drama (Hart & Daughton, 2005). A Burkeian scholar describes rhetorical acts dramatistically—as involving an act, agent, scene, agency, and purpose and thereby illuminating the motives of the rhetor (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Burke extensively develops two key terms, "identification" and "division" (Herrick, 2005). Identification symbolically unifies people through rhetoric, essentially by creating linguistic common ground and shared meaning between the speaker and the receiver (Herrick, 2005). In contrast, division is created when the listener must make choices between identifying with the speaker and not identifying with him or her (Herrick, 2005). This conflicting choice is reflected in the divisions also created by the rhetor.

Burke's theory applies particularly well to campaign commercials because the speaker, in this case the candidate attempts to create identification with his or her audience. This enhances the candidate's ability to relate and persuade the audience to support them. In addition, it provides the voter with a stake in the election, which, when combined with political theories, proves particularly important for my project.

Though the political theories I draw from are not as well developed as are Burke's, they are important to my project. An understanding of why voters choose to participate is necessary before we can understand why commercials may or may not work. Wolfinger and Rosenstone's (1980) work combines a number of theories to create a new explanation for why an individual votes. They look at individual studies on socioeconomic status, age, sex, registration laws and the stakes a voter has in an election.

Such theories have merit they argue, but a more plausible theory is that all of these factors influence a person's likelihood to vote or not vote (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

Teixeira (1987) analyzes the same evidence that Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) use, except he asks diametrically opposed questions and offers reasons for *depressed* turnout in an election. He examines education, age, marital status, moving, occupation, income, sex, race, location, party identification, political efficacy and campaign knowledge (Teixeira, 1987). Like Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980), Teixeira argues that a *combination* of these factors affects the likelihood of a voter turning out in an election.

How do these theories undergird this research project? Burke's theory of dramatistic rhetoric justifies the use of television commercials as an area of study because he claims that rhetoric can unify or divide individuals, which is especially apropos for a study such as mine. Socially conservative language can unify conservative voters, which could in turn create a voting bloc and potentially increase the political efficacy and stakes for those voters.

When conservative voters are convinced that the stakes are high in an election, Teixeira, Wolfinger and Rosenstone would argue that they are more likely to turn out to vote. Therefore, if a candidate uses conservative language and identifies with voters, they are more likely to win an election because turn out among their supporters would be increased.

Similarly, socially conservative language also should serve to divide liberal voters, especially in a district that is already perceived by residents to be conservative, as

are many Midwestern districts. Here, Burke's idea of division comes into play. In these conditions, liberal voters must make a choice between a candidate who uses socially conservative language and their own beliefs. According to Burke's theory, division is likely to cause liberal voters to feel detached from the candidate who uses socially conservative language. If the opposing candidate fails to respond with his or her own position on the issue, liberal voters would lose their stake in the election and they might believe that their vote has little impact on the outcome of the election. Again, Teixeira, Wolfinger and Rosenstone would claim that such conditions would depress turnout among liberal voters.

I expect that beyond the typical reasons for vote choice, the language used in television commercials builds strength in conservative voters and causes liberal voters to lose faith in the system. After the voters have identified with a candidate, the natural step is to see if they vote. I surmise that conservative voters are likely to turn out in higher numbers for candidates who employ socially conservative language regardless of other district demographics. I also expect that liberal voters are likely to stay at home when a candidate uses socially conservative language and the opposing candidate fails to respond. Similarly, I expect races that involve two candidates who clearly state their views on socially conservative issues to be closer than races where only one candidate talks about socially conservative views.

These four theorists have done a great deal of valuable work, but in order to understand, interpret, and predict the potential effectiveness of political commercials as rhetorical devices, I combined their theoretical frameworks. I build on their work, test

the predictive value of this combined approach and examine its ability to explain the actions of voters in the Midwest.

Methodology

Compiling multiple theories into a single one means that my approach is unique; few scholars have designed studies to ask the questions I ask. My study depends on this theoretical and methodological diversity to hold certain variables constant and to properly isolate my independent variables.

I performed content analysis on television advertising for Midwestern congressional candidates from the 2000 and 2002 elections. These elections span an important period in the electoral history of the United States. 2000 was the open seat race for the presidency with President Bush and Vice-President Gore facing each other and 2002 was the first year under President Bush, a Republican. In 2000, President Bush billed himself as a "compassionate conservative" and talked extensively about socially conservative issues. The inclusion of the 2002 elections highlights this shift in issues because they occurred under President Bush but were not dominated by the rhetoric of a Presidential election.

To better understand the candidates and voters of the Midwest, I drew upon the work of researchers such as Sonya Salamon (1995), who presents a picture of the Midwest that places the people in context with the average American's view of rural areas. Using census data, she explains that the Midwest is extremely homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity. In addition, the region grows older as young people leave the traditional farming life and seek employment in urban centers (Salamon, 1995). Two factors cause this; first the lack of a consistent and predictable lifestyle from farming and

secondly the increasing prevalence of corporate farms (Salamon, 1995; Browne & Swanson, 1995).

Aside from the demographics of Midwesterners, Salamon talks of the relationships and interactions within these areas. The people connect with their communities and with each other because fewer people exist to participate in each organization (Salamon, 1995). Whereas in a city, one might have different people that he or she sees at church, work and school, the same people partake in each group in rural areas (Salamon, 1995). In addition, Salamon claims that the Midwest presents an example to strive to for other rural areas of America.

The work performed by Leland Glenna in 2003 tells us more about this section of the populace, however. Glenna used a number of statistics gathered from the 1970s through the 21st century to show the state of the rural church (Glenna, 2003). Most importantly, he shows that more rural individuals consider themselves to be conservative than do urbanites (Glenna, 2003). In addition, he shows that rural residents are more likely than those living in cities "to attend church services, to read the Bible, and to hold more conservative beliefs and values regarding gender roles, sex, and the work ethic" (Glenna, 2003, 265). Differences in belief abound in the areas of premarital sex, social change and the role of religion in solving modern day problems (Glenna, 2003).

Despite the seemingly disparate pictures drawn by Glenna and Salamon, they interconnect in interesting ways. Salamon's work shows that Midwesterers have strong social ties, both to each other and to the community (Salamon, 1995). These ties have lasted for generations, just as the state of religion in rural America has (Salamon, 1995; Glenna, 2003). Both scholars explain that rural populations are more resistant to change

than their urban counterparts (Salamon, 1995; Glenna, 2003). Rather than one view of rural life as idyllic and another view as hyper conservative, they merge easily into a view that social change spreads slower in rural areas than in urban centers.

After deciding to focus on the Midwest, I obtained unbiased and complete data for the 2000 and 2002 congressional elections from the Wisconsin Advertising Project at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They recorded the dialogue and screen shots from every four seconds of all political television commercials shown in the largest media markets in the United States. Although the Wisconsin Advertising Project provides SPSS and Excel files with their own statistical analysis of the commercials, I instead performed my own content and database analysis.

The Wisconsin Advertising Project sorted the advertisements according to the individual or group that ran the ad and used a series of questions to look at attributes that were assigned to the candidate or opponent. They also examined the images used in the advertisements, such as American flags and other pervasive political icons. Their analysis is extensive but uses a technique that does not answer my research question.

I selected 1,858 commercials using the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of a Midwestern congressional district. Based on the Bureau's definition, I examined congressional districts in the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio.

After selecting the advertisements for the candidates seeking these seats, I analyzed the language used in each commercial. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1997) provide a useful example of how content analysis can be performed without the use of images. Based on their textual analytic methods, I pulled the text from each ad and

examined it without images and without a description of the visuals or audio in the advertisement. I looked for the subject of the advertisement, specifically those ads that addressed socially conservative issues. I recorded if the ad was in favor, against or unclear about the candidates' position on the issue or issues. All of this information was entered into my SPSS databases which also contained demographic and other important information about the district that aided my analysis.

I examined the spoken words in each commercial rather than the pictures or production values because words are a universal aspect of every commercial. Screen shots were only taken every four seconds, thus I used only spoken language in the ads. I cannot say if words were written on the screen between each four second screen shot. Words written on the screen may have a significant influence on the advertisement's power, but because of the methods with which this data was collected, I could not study words that were contained in screen shots.

Previous scholars have discussed the importance of the words spoken by the narrator or candidate as compared to the aesthetics of the commercial (Shaw, 2004; Franzen, 2003). They show that words influenced the voters and, because I looked at the potential influence of advertisements on voters, this way is the most logical component of the advertisement to study.

I defined certain issues as "socially conservative" and coded the advertisements accordingly. My main source for these issues was Utter and Storey (1995), who reported the results of two major public opinion surveys of the 1990s. Their section entitled "social and moral issues" provided me with a base set of issues. These include homosexuality (and gay rights), pornography, abortion, God, prayer in public schools and

faith or values, especially as it pertains to the specific district. In addition, gun ownership and legalization of marijuana were added, which, while not religious issues, are issues of importance to socially conservative voters, especially in the Midwest.

I coded campaign commercials based on the side of the issue taken by the campaign. For example, advertisements mentioning a pro-life stance were coded as socially conservative, as were advertisements advocating more prayer in public school. I also coded commercials as socially liberal when the campaign took the opposite position. However, the total number of socially liberal commercials in this data set was insignificant.

After coding the advertisements, I entered the data into an SPSS database. I recorded the number of advertisements used by each candidate, the number of socially conservative ads used by each candidate on each issue, and the position of the candidate on each issue (if it was discernable). In addition, the database contained biographical information on each candidate, the percentage of the vote the candidate received, the percentage of voters that supported President Bush in 2000, the amount of money raised by each candidate, and the amount of money spent by each candidate. I obtained this information from various sources, including Congressional Quarterly's <u>Politics in America</u> and the website www.opensecrets.org.

I ran descriptive statistics on my data to discover how candidates performed who used or did not use socially conservative language in their advertisements. In addition, I ran regressions to discover if a candidate could reasonably expect to perform better or worse and by how much if they used socially conservative language or if they supported or opposed a specific issue. Regressions allowed me to account for variables other than

socially conservative advertisements and essentially equalize them across candidates. I then saw whether factors such as the use of socially conservative language potentially influenced the percentage of vote that was received by a candidate. I hoped to support or disconfirm my hypotheses by controlling for factors such as the past performance of same party candidates, support for President Bush (which would give a rough estimate of Republicans versus Democrats in the district), money raised and spent, gender and age.

Because of the data collected in addition to the advertisements, I was able to see if the ads might have influenced the overall vote totals of candidates. I determined if candidates who used socially conservative language received a higher percentage of the vote. In addition, I was able to discover who used socially conservative advertisements more often and if their use could have changed the vote totals over time.

Hypotheses

I tested a number of hypotheses in this project and I explain my conclusions in greater detail in upcoming chapters. Initially, I expected that winning candidates used socially conservative advertising more frequently than losing candidates. I expected to find that candidates who used socially conservative advertising received a higher percentage of the vote than their same party candidate in previous years. I also suspected that socially conservative advertising became more prevalent in later elections (i.e. more socially conservative ads ran in 2002 than in 2000) and I tested this assumption. Finally, I expected to find that candidates who used socially conservative advertising performed better than candidates who did not use such advertising.

I start this thesis by locating its contribution to the existing literature. I summarize the current literature on political campaigning, scholarship on socially

conservative issues and the effectiveness of political advertisements. Chapter 2 discusses

these seemingly diverse areas of study and the interaction between each subfield in order

to demonstrate the intellectual significance of this research project.

The following chapters detail my hypotheses and explain my analysis and report

my findings. Chapter 3 presents my results on the use of socially conservative

advertisements by winning candidates and the increased prevalence of these

advertisements. This chapter employs descriptive statistical analysis to show what type

of candidates used socially conservative advertisements. Chapter 4 uses regression

analysis to look at the electoral performance of candidates who used socially conservative

advertisements, both within their party and among other candidates in the election. My

final chapter summarizes my findings and explains their significance. I also discuss the

limitations of my study and my suggestions for future research directions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

I conducted an extensive literature search prior to designing this research project. However, in this chapter I selectively feature the most relevant literature to my project. More information and scholarship exists on all sections of my literature review, but my original research design and findings allowed me to be discerning in what scholarship I included. A great deal of information is available on parts of my research topic but little scholarly material specifically pertains to my research questions or the way in which I combine those components.

The literature search makes clear that scholars have examined the production and effectiveness of television commercials for presidential candidates, but few studied the efficacy of advertisements for congressional candidates. Likewise, the Midwest has been written about many times, but little research discusses political participation in the Midwest. Similar inadequacies abound in the research available on socially conservative language and the development of political television commercials. In sum, individual scholarly materials have not been synthesized into a coherent framework.

The lack of scholarly synthesis also reflects the separation between academics and professionals in political campaigns. Researchers have focused on easily studied races and issues. Conversely, political professionals write practical manuals and trade publications to help others in the business. They gain far more knowledge from field experience than from closely examining their methods.

This chapter summarizes current research on campaign advertising and demonstrates that my project's approach to the topic is unique and significant. I

contribute to the scholarly literature by examining a range of potentially causal factors, as well as by focusing on Midwestern congressional advertisements. I have divided this review into three major sections. First, I examine relevant theory on the development of political television advertising. This information comes primarily from trade publications of political professionals. Next, I analyze information on the effectiveness of political television advertising. Finally, I identify socially conservative language and look at the recent history of the religious and social right.

Political Television Advertising

The vast majority of research concerning political television advertising examines Presidential races. In addition, the researchers often employed qualitative methodology to study the advertisements. This literature adds great depth to the American politics field, but it does not serve my project's needs. Instead, I focus on scholarship that concerns congressional campaigns and those that employ methodology that can inform my project.

Political television advertising has come a long way since the 1952 Dwight Eisenhower ads. Most congressional races in America require television advertising and the ability to reach voters has increased exponentially since their inception (Shaw, 2004; Friedenberg, 1997). The placement options available to campaigns abound, from local television to cable and satellite providers. Campaigns theoretically reach every voter who has access to a television (e.g. Franzen, 2003; Shaw, 2004; Shimmel, 2003).

Television dominates congressional media races. Research shows that television advertising allows candidates to convey their message to the voters and validate the campaign to supporters (Shaw, 2004; Faucheux, 2002). In addition, campaign

professionals agree that television commercials are only as effective as the message they present. An advertisement will do nothing for the candidate and could possibly hurt him or her if it lacks proper knowledge of the district and a script that responds to the needs of the voters, (Friedenberg, 1997; Hendrix, 2003; Shaw, 2004; Faucheux, 2002).

Friedenberg (1997) observes that developing a television commercial requires finding the audience for the commercial. An effective television commercial is directed at swing voters, those people who might vote for a candidate but have not yet decided that they will. Knowledge of the district and polling help define this audience for the campaign (Friedenberg, 1997; Hendrix, 2003). The content of the ad must be established after determining the audience and that content creates an image of the candidate for the voters.

Candidates increasingly need television advertising to gain legitimacy in major races (Shaw, 2004). An effective televised ad campaign requires the work of professionals specializing in political advertisements (Shaw, 2004). These professionals often come at great cost to the campaign, but candidates rely on image and advertisements and the images contained therein are essential to producing the picture-perfect candidate (Shaw, 2004; Faucheux, 2002).

Political television advertisements strive to evoke the desired image of the candidate (Hendrix, 2003; Shaw, 2004). The average 30 second television spot has 29.5 seconds of audio, so the message must be direct, specific and well scripted (Hendrix, 2003; Shaw, 2004; Friedenberg, 1997). Hendrix (2003) suggests using the candidate's own words to begin developing the script for the advertisement. After drafting the script, she implores the campaign strategist to re-write and re-work the script to clarify the

message (Hendrix, 2003). According to political professionals, campaign success relies on original scripts. The least reputable political professionals repackage television commercials from campaign to campaign and these techniques quickly equate one's candidate with the worst side of politics (Faucheux, 2002; Hendrix, 2003).

Campaign professionals agree that the technique behind producing television advertisements are important to the overall look and success of the ad (e.g. Shaw, 2004; Faucheux, 2002; Hendrix, 2003). However, the real value of an advertisement comes from the message and information presented in the advertisement (Franzen, 2003; Hendrix, 2003). Franzen (2003) writes,

> The most important element in any TV spot is a strong controlling concept. The finest production values in the world won't save a dumb idea. Yet, less than stellar production will often be overlooked if the concept is sufficiently arresting. (397)

The most important components to a successful campaign are the language, message and images of the television advertisement. The message must be tailored and directed at the voters who are likely to be influenced by the television spot. In addition, the ad must be placed in a market that will reach those viewers. With proper polling and script writing, the desired voter sees a television ad with a message that resonates with the viewer. Logically, therefore, we must ask if campaign advertisements are effective at changing the minds of voters.

Campaign Advertising Effectiveness Research

Campaign advertising effectiveness research tends to focus on individual advertisements and uses qualitative methodologies. Researchers rarely employ empirical data to support claims regarding campaign advertisements. Researchers have conducted little research on the proven effectiveness of television advertisements as a general

medium. Rather, research on campaign advertising tends to focus on negative ads and individual Presidential campaign commercials.

Academics spend a great deal of time evaluating the effectiveness of negative campaigns (e.g. Jamieson, 1992; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991; Lau & Pomper, 2004). They also overwhelmingly use descriptive and cross-sectional methods to study advertising, focusing almost entirely on the U.S. Presidency (e.g. Jamieson, Auletta & Patterson, 1993). These studies describe the campaign techniques used at a specific time and, perhaps, explain the rationale for those tactics.

Prior to the 1980s, academics and political consultants agreed on the ineffectiveness of negative advertising, believing that negative ads held more disadvantages for the candidate than advantages (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991). However, the last three decades have seen academics and political professionals diverge from each other. Political consultants value negative advertising as an effective strategy (Doak, 2003; Seder, 2003). This opposes the academic community, which remains skeptical about negative ads (Lau & Pomper, 2004; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991). Neither side disputes the emotive effects of negative ads on the voters, however. Rather, researchers are simply not convinced that the backlash from negative ads outweigh the benefits (Lau & Pomper, 2004; Jamieson, 1992).

Kathleen Hall Jamieson's work on questions of negative advertising merits closer examination, for she both studies the backlash of negative ads and sees their value in campaigning. She recognizes that negative ads, when combined with other types of advertising, serve a valuable purpose in highlighting the differences between candidates (Dolan, 2004; Jamieson, 1992).

Dolan and Jamieson's studies underscore the point that political advertising helps the candidate win who sponsored the advertisement. How an advertisement achieves this goal, however, depends on a number of factors. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991) remind us that voters can express themselves in more ways than simply voting for a candidate; they can vote for a candidate, for their opponent, against the candidate, against the opponent or not vote at all. Thus, a campaign ad must convince the voter to express him or herself in one of those five ways. In any given election, all five of those ways may be used to help a candidate win (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991; Sabato, 1981).

Scholars also commonly focus on a theme in advertising and examine ads from a variety of elections to support their hypotheses (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1997; Berger, 2000). This approach allows scholars to examine an advertisement in depth and draw inferences about the effectiveness of that ad (Berger, 2000). Often times, however, scholars base inferences on anecdotes or, in the case of Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1997), the ads simply serve as examples to support their claims about the effectiveness of advertising in general. This use of advertising is important and useful in creating an effective argument, but its prevalence in the research community seems to preclude other approaches to studying campaign ads. The scholarly literature clearly demonstrates that currently available research inadequately explains the effectiveness of advertising.

The Religious Right and the Language of Conservatism

This study also relies on an understanding of what constitutes the Religious Right and socially conservative language. A great deal of information exists about the Religious Right and its most recent transformation into a powerful political organization. Beginning in the 1980s, the Religious Right emerged as a public and vocal force in

politics, lobbying for their own social agenda and creating the concept of a social conservative to contrast with fiscal conservatives who had previously dominated politics on the right. Socially conservative issues became part of the national political dialogue.

The relatively new phenomenon of the politicization of the Religious Right arose in the 1980s when conservative Protestants merged with the political right to form their now well-known and powerful lobbying force (Hammond, 1985). However, the relative newness of the movement should not lead us to believe that they are going away or will fade from public view. As Hammond (1985) shows, the Religious Right has existed since the 1920s, but they only recently became politically involved.

Clyde Wilcox (1996) enumerate some of the most important issues for the Religious Right, writing,

> [T]he Christian Right has no single agenda but rather a collection of overlapping agendas. Some Christian Right activists focus almost entirely on ending abortions in America; others are concerned primarily with their efforts at home schooling their children. Some are motivated to fight what they call the 'radical homosexual agenda'; others seek to reduce the amount of sexual material in television, movies, and popular music. Some seek to promote a role for religion in public life: prayer in public schools, nativity scenes on city land, and a public acknowledgement that the United States is a Christian (or sometimes Judeo-Christian) nation. Some activists care about all of these issues and more, whereas others focus on one issue to the exclusion of others (6-7).

This makes creating a "list" of socially conservative issues difficult, but it does provide a baseline of issues from which qualitative analysis can begin.

The language of the Religious Right reflects language of socially conservative issues and the public ubiquitously associates the Religious Right with conservative social ideology. Wilcox (1996) and Glenn Utter and John Storey's (1995) The Religious Right: A Reference Handbook enumerate the issues of greatest importance to social conservatives. Using survey data from 1994, Utter and Storey show the differences in

belief between evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and those professing no religious preference. They exclude Catholics and Jews, rationalizing that they are not pertinent to a discussion of the Religious Right (Utter & Storey, 1995). They find significant differences in the beliefs held by the three surveyed groups on premarital sex, homosexuality, sexually explicit materials, abortion, and school prayer (Utter & Storey, 1995). Utter and Storey talk about the use of these issues by social conservatives and how the languge of the Religious Right became the language of social conservatives.

The movement behind socially conservative issues arose as a major part of political campaigns and the Religious Right became resolute in their convictions to their most important issues. These actions created an adversarial environment; rather than seeking to educate in hopes of a compromise, the strategy of social conservatives has been to elect as many of their own kind as possible. The Religious Right has now become an ongoing "player" in American electoral politics.

Discussion

A great amount of work exists on the Religious Right; similarly, a large amount of scholarly work has been conducted concerning television and political advertising in America. In addition, campaign professionals write a great deal about the strategies behind their television commercials. There exists little scholarly work, however, that synthesizes these areas of study or that utilizes empirical data to support claims of effectiveness.

Similarly, researchers employ quantitative methodology throughout their examination of the Religious Right, but scholars looking at television commercials rely on anecdotal and qualitative analyses to conduct their research. Researchers appear to

believe these methods to be mutually exclusive. However, they need not function in this manner and the use of quantitative methodologies speaks to the originality of my research. By combining methods used in different fields of study, I draw from multiple bodies of work and make a unique contribution to the scholarly literature.

We could not look at commercials and see how well they perform their job of influencing voters if we did not know their original intent. We cannot deduce the intent of a campaign without knowledge about targeting and media buys. Similarly, we rely on theories behind commercials to know if the commercials are effective. Though political consultants measure success differently than political scientists, the information gathered by political scientists could assist political professionals in numerous ways. Although their first duty is to win campaigns, political professionals also concern themselves with the greater good or harm that comes from their work because it influences the electorate and, therein, future elections.

In turn, the issue of social change and more specifically, the individual issues of social conservatives entered into electoral campaigns. This meant that socially conservative issues entered the dominant media of political campaigns. Television commercials introduced the candidate, but also told the voters how that candidate would vote on the most important social issues to the district.

To date, scholars have failed to synthesize these seemingly disparate fields of study. However, understanding the changes that are occurring in electoral politics and the Midwest necessitates this synthesis. My research examined the effectiveness of television commercials that dealt with an issue set that increasingly influence politics. Some entities, like the Wisconsin Advertising Project, collected the data but do not

analyze it with regard to social conservatism or specific geographical regions. Others

solved problems of definition or theory. I synthesized all of this work, and therefore

extend the scholarly literature in important and unique ways. Chapter 3, therefore,

examines the use of socially conservative television advertising by candidates in the

Midwest and explains who used socially conservative advertising and how those

candidates performed.

CHAPTER 3

USE OF SOCIALLY CONSERVATIVE ADVERTISING

Socially conservative advertisements have become an important part of political campaigns in the Midwest, but before I examine the potential effectiveness of these advertisements, it is important to have an understanding of which candidates used them. This chapter uses data collected by the Wisconsin Advertising Project to examine two hypotheses, along with describing the candidates who most often employed socially conservative advertising. First, I test the hypothesis that socially conservative advertisements were more prevalent in recent elections than past elections. After this, I test to see if winning candidates employed socially conservative advertising more often than losing candidates. This provides the transition into a deeper evaluation of the potential influence of these advertisements on the outcome of campaigns, which will be examined in Chapter 4.

Prevalence of Socially Conservative Advertising

My initial examination of the use of socially conservative advertisements indicates that they were used more often in recent elections. As Table 1 shows, the percentage of campaigns that employed socially conservative advertising jumped from 13.7% in 2000 to 18.5% in 2002. In addition, 28 campaigns employed socially conservative advertising in the 2000 elections, while 34 used similar advertisements in 2002.

Table 1: Campaigns Using Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races, 2000/2002

Used socially conservative advertising	2000 (n=205)	2002 (n=189)
Yes	**13.7%**	**18.0%**
No	**86.3%**	**82.0%**

This basic analysis does not account for a number of factors which could skew these results. These results include all the campaigns run in the Midwest, many of which encompass little or no portion of a major media market. To account for this, I coded which campaigns had any type of television advertising recorded in the selected media markets, as well as which districts had at least one candidate running an advertisement in the market, reasoning that this would provide a measure of districts where television advertising was a viable option. As evidenced by Table 2, the percentage of campaigns that used socially conservative advertising greatly increased when I removed the campaigns which did not use television advertising of any kind.

Table 2: Campaigns Using Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races Which Employed Television Advertising in Recorded Media Markets, 2000/2002

Used socially conservative advertising	2000 (n=56)	2002 (n=65)
Yes	**50.0%**	**52.3%**
No	**50.0%**	**47.7%**

I discovered some interesting results by selecting only candidates who employed television advertising in these markets. Initially, the low number of campaigns that used television advertising surprised me. Only 34.4% of Midwestern Congressional campaigns used television advertising at all in 2002 and that number dropped to 27.3% of campaigns in 2000. However, of those campaigns that used television advertising, a significant number of campaigns used some form of socially conservative advertisement. Half of the campaigns which used television in 2000 also used socially conservative advertisements, and 52.3% of those campaigns used socially conservative ads in 2002.

This data shows less support than I anticipated for my initial hypothesis on the prevalence of socially conservative advertisements. When looking at all Midwestern house races, a +4.3% difference exists in the use of socially conservative advertisements from 2000 to 2002. That difference drops to +2.3% when I excluded campaigns which did not use television advertising.[1] Although I recorded slightly more socially conservative advertisements in 2002 than in 2000 (n=93 in 2002 versus n=83 in 2000), my hypothesis is slightly supported. The data show a slight correlation between the campaigns that used socially conservative advertisements and the election year. The data never varies from the positive correlation and this pattern leads me to conclude that my first hypothesis is slightly supported.

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[1] I also ran this frequency using a variable I created that records if advertisements were used in the district. This variable should show which districts are located in the media markets. When the frequency is run with these campaigns, the difference again increases towards the level in Table 1, showing a +3.6% difference from 2000 to 2002. This analysis, however, does not account for factors such as money raised or the partisan divide of a district, which can influence a campaign's desire and ability to run television advertisements.

Use of Socially Conservative Advertising by Successful Campaigns

After testing for the prevalence of socially conservative advertisements, I proceeded to examine the overall electoral success of campaigns which used socially conservative advertisements. To test my hypothesis, I excluded all campaigns which did not use socially conservative advertising (as well as a single case of an unopposed candidate who used socially conservative advertising). I then ran a frequency to find the percentage of campaigns that were successful in the given year. As Tables 3 and 4 show, candidates who used socially conservative television advertising were not more successful in 2000 and 2002 than candidates who did not employ such advertising. In 2000, candidates were equally successful and in 2002 they were less successful. This analysis does not take in to account a number of variables, but it begins to suggest a pattern about the success of candidates who used socially conservative advertising. Despite the fact that candidates who used socially conservative advertisements in 2002 were less successful than candidates that advertised without these ads, they were still successful 60% of the time.

Table 3: Success of Campaigns That Employed Advertising, By Use of Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races, 2000

Used socially conservative television advertising	Yes (n=27)	No (n=27)
Won	**63.0%**	**63.0%**
Lost	**37.0%**	**37.0%**

Table 4: Success of Campaigns That Employed Advertising, By Use of Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races, 2002

Used socially conservative television advertising	Yes (n=35)	No (n=30)
Won	**60.0%**	**63.3%**
Lost	**40.0%**	**36.7%**

This data shows that the use of television advertising was *more strongly correlated to electoral success than the specific use of socially conservative television advertising.*[2] Because of this data, I believe that my second hypothesis is not supported. Socially conservative advertisements have a positive correlation to electoral success, but the correlation is the same as the use of any television advertisement in 2000 and the correlation is weaker than the correlation for use of any television advertising in 2002. This data does not account for other variables and these findings do not necessarily negate the possibility of supporting my other two hypotheses. In fact, the percentages of successful campaigns that used socially conservative advertising is encouraging because it suggests that there was some factor in the election that increased the campaign's vote total to a winning margin. In my next chapter, I discuss what those factors were for these successful campaigns.

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[2] When the selection criteria are expanded to include all districts where television advertising was used, socially conservative advertising begins to show a stronger correlation to overall electoral success. In 2002, for example, 61.7% of candidates who used socially conservative advertising in these districts won, whereas on 41.3% of candidates who did not use socially conservative advertising won. Unfortunately, these numbers are skewed due to the inclusion of campaigns which did not run advertisements. This therefore over-represents the importance and use of socially conservative advertisements. The same would hold true for 2000.

Who Used Socially Conservative Advertising

I examined the use of socially conservative advertising by the pool of candidates as a whole, but I also looked into the data to see who specifically used socially conservative advertising. This allows us to better understand the motivation behind advertisements and allows me to speak further as to the type of candidate who was most likely to use socially conservative advertising.

Table 5 shows that male candidates used socially conservative advertising far more frequently than female candidates in 2000. In addition, Republicans used such ads more often than Democrats and open seat candidates used them more frequently than any of the other candidate types. Table 6, however, shows many of these margins narrowing significantly, except for party identification. In fact, in 2002, the difference between Democrats and Republicans grew from 6.2 percent to 11.1 percent.

Table 5: Demographics and Percentages of Candidates Using Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races, 2000

	Used Socially Conservative Advertising	Did Not Use Socially Conservative Advertising	Percentage Using Socially Conservative Advertising
Women	1	22	4.3%
Men	27	155	14.8%
Democrats	11	93	10.6%
Republicans	17	84	16.8%
Incumbent	10	78	11.4%
Open Seat	11	13	45.8%
Challenger	6	82	6.8%
Unopposed	1	4	20.0%

Table 6: Demographics and Percentages of Candidates Using Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races, 2002

	Used Socially Conservative Advertising	Did Not Use Socially Conservative Advertising	Percentage Using Socially Conservative Advertising
Women	4	20	16.7%
Men	31	134	18.8%
Democrats	12	81	12.9%
Republicans	23	73	24.0%
Incumbent	18	64	22.0%
Open Seat	3	9	25.0%
Challenger	14	70	16.7%
Unopposed	0	4	0.0%

These numbers become even more startling when we look at the candidates who ran advertising in 2000 or 2002 (excluding candidates who did not run any television advertising). In this case, women consistently used socially conservative advertising less frequently than men. In addition, Republicans used socially conservative advertising far more often than Democrats. However, the numbers for race type have little consistency and show no correlation between years.

Table 7: Demographics and Percentages of Candidates Using Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races When Candidate Used Television Advertising, 2000

	Used Socially Conservative Advertising	Did Not Use Socially Conservative Advertising	Percentage Using Socially Conservative Advertising
Women	1	5	16.7%
Men	25	23	52.1%
Democrats	11	17	39.3%
Republicans	15	11	57.7%
Incumbent	10	16	38.5%
Open Seat	10	3	76.9%
Challenger	5	8	38.5%
Unopposed	1	1	50.0%

Table 8: Demographics and Percentages of Candidates Using Socially Conservative Advertising, U.S. House of Representatives Races When Candidate Used Television Advertising, 2002

	Used Socially Conservative Advertising	Did Not Use Socially Conservative Advertising	Percentage Using Socially Conservative Advertising
Women	4	7	36.4%
Men	29	24	54.7%
Democrats	12	18	40.0%
Republicans	21	13	61.8%
Incumbent	17	16	51.5%
Open Seat	3	6	33.3%
Challenger	13	8	61.9%
Unopposed	0	1	0.0%

Discussion

Despite the fact that my second hypothesis was not supported, these findings do not necessarily negate my final two hypotheses. My next chapter examines the potential influence of these advertisements in more detail, holding variables constant through the use of regressions, as opposed to the basic statistical analysis used in this chapter.

Socially conservative advertisement use in 2000 and 2002 is interesting on many levels. The most striking finding was the high percentage of campaigns that used these advertisements. Although I was not able to show a significant increase in the percentage of campaigns that used socially conservative advertisements, half of all Midwestern campaigns in 2000 that used advertisements used socially conservative language in at least one of their advertisements.

In addition, the increased percentage of campaigns that used socially conservative advertisements in 2002, though small, still suggests an increased awareness of changes in the electorate and recognition of the most effective method of communicating with voters. The literature and theory suggest that campaigns would be well advised to take the changing aspects of the Midwest into account when developing communication strategies and my initial analysis shows some support for a claim that the campaigns are doing just that.

Candidates must recognize who comprises their electorate in order for their campaigns to succeed in the Midwest. Campaigners can no longer assume that their electorate is primarily agrarian or rural. Rather, prior research suggests that voters in the Midwest are becoming less concerned with economic issues and more concerned about the preservation of their "way of life", which is reflected in socially conservative issues. A smart campaigner, therefore, would look to these voters and suggest that their candidate will protect that way of life. The data from 2000 and 2002 suggest that campaigns recognized this reality and reacted accordingly.

In my fourth chapter, I delve deeper into the data by examining the potential effectiveness of these advertisements while holding other variables constant. This

analysis cannot change my conclusion on my second hypothesis, but it can explain these findings further. Perhaps campaigns that ran non-socially conservative advertising were in safer districts, thereby raising their chances of victory. Or possibly campaigns that ran socially conservative advertisements had less money, therefore limiting their ability to effectively convey their message. A number of possibilities are available to explain these descriptive findings. My next chapter reports the findings of that analysis.

CHAPTER 4

POTENTIAL INFLUENCE OF SOCIALLY CONSERVATIVE ADVERTISING

This chapter examines the performance of candidates who used socially conservative advertising. In contrast to the preliminary analysis performed in Chapter 3, I utilized more sophisticated statistical modeling to control for variables such as party identification or amount of money spent. In so doing, I isolated campaign commercial variables and the potential gain in electoral success of using these advertisements.

I compared the performance of the candidates who used the advertisements against other candidates who did not use socially conservative language. In Chapter 3 I employed simple statistical mechanisms, specifically the use of descriptive statistics and frequencies. These models, however, do not provide the information available from cross-tabulations and regressions. I now provide the statistical significance as well as isolation of key variables. These statistical models demonstrated that *candidates could not expect a potential advantage from running socially conservative advertising*.

Candidate Performance Against Same Election Candidates

I ran a series of regressions for each election in order to examine the performance of candidates who used socially conservative advertising against other candidates in the same election who did not use such advertising. I isolated variables that likely influenced the vote totals for candidates and discovered trends with regard to advertising in congressional elections. I discovered that *candidate incumbency and television advertising were more indicative of electoral success than using socially conservative advertising*.

To begin, I ran a linear regression on the entire set of candidates, using general election vote totals as my dependent variable. Independent variables included candidate party, vote received by President Bush in 2000, amount of money spent, candidate incumbency and use of socially conservative advertising. This regression showed that candidate status is the only variable that was significant for 2000 or 2002.[3] As Table 9 shows, incumbency remained one of the largest indicators of electoral success.

Table 9: Linear Regression, General Election Vote Total Against Independent Variables, U.S. House of Representatives Races, 2000/2002

Variable	2000 (General Election Vote)	Significance	2002 (General Election Vote)	Significance
(Constant)	31.977		31.911	
Party	1.256		.263	
Gender	.887		2.444	
Vote Received by President Bush	-.016		.015	
Money Spent	-3.37E-7		7.71E-8	
Used Socially Conservative Ads	2.791		-1.166	
Incumbent	35.018	***	36.474	***
Open Seat	15.099	***	16.299	***

Party – Republicans=0 Democrats=1; Challenger candidate status used as constant
* Significant to .1   ** Significant to .05   *** Significant to .01

As numerous other studies have shown, incumbents enjoy an enormous electoral advantage over their challengers. Other variables offer insights into these races as well, including my findings that socially conservative advertising had very little effect on these races. Although more candidates used socially conservative ads in 2002 than in 2000, this data indicates that such candidates suffered electoral losses when they did. Conversely, fewer candidates used socially conservative advertising in 2000 than in

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[3] Because I deal with a population of candidates instead of a sample, significance is less important. However, significance still provides information about the data set and I report it here for that reason.

2002, but those who did so appear to enjoy a slight bump in their overall vote totals. This

data set, however, reflects the entire population of candidates in the Midwest, including

candidates who did not or could not run advertising in a major media market. Because of

this limitation, I next selected candidates who ran television advertising during the

election and ran the same linear regression. As Table 10 shows, the use of television

advertising was a major indicator of electoral success.

Table 10: Linear Regression, General Election Vote Total Against Independent Variables, U.S. House of Representatives Races Where Candidate Ran Advertising, 2000/2002

Variable	2000 (General Election Vote)	Significance	2002 (General Election Vote)	Significance
(Constant)	66.295		48.600	
Party	-4.005		-7.771	***
Gender	-7.353		-2.433	
Vote Received by President Bush	-.393	**	-.039	
Money Spent	-2.92E-6	*	1.57E-6	
Used Socially Conservative Ads	2.084		-2.971	
Incumbent	20.543	***	17.349	***
Open Seat	6.638	*	7.609	**

Party – Republicans=0 Democrats=1; Challenger candidate status used as constant
* Significant to .1   ** Significant to .05   *** Significant to .01

Examination of the constant in this case shows a highly significant rise in the vote

total received by candidates who used television advertising. In 2000, a *challenger* could

expect to receive over 66% of the vote, provided he or she used television advertising.

Though the same candidate could not expect the same percentage in 2002, they could get

very close to the 50% they would need to win with the help of television advertising.

Although the use of television advertising did not guarantee a win for a candidate in

either election, candidates who used television advertising performed better than

candidates who did not employ television ads.

These findings indicate the power of television advertising in raising a candidate's name recognition and viability and, in turn, their vote totals. Incumbency remains strong as a positive indicator of elector success, providing an advantage of over 17 percentage points to a 2002 candidate and over 20 points to a 2000 candidate. Party identification, which had only a marginal effect over all candidates, is strongly negatively correlated for candidates who ran television advertising. This means that Republicans running television advertising could legitimately expect to receive 4 to 7 percentage points more than Democrats in the exact same situation. This finding reflects the overall conservative political culture of the elections, specifically in the Midwest, where Republicans performed better overall than Democrats.

The possibility exists that candidates in certain districts benefited more from using socially conservative advertising than others. If true, the most logical division would occur along rural, urban and suburban lines. Voters in urban areas of the Midwest consistently vote heavily Democratic, while suburban district and rural districts tend to vote Republican. Unfortunately, no district level data on the rural and urban split was available for the 2000 elections. I performed regression analysis, however, on varying levels of rural and urban districts from 2002. This rural district variable indicates what percentage of the district lives in a rural area. These findings further supported my conclusions regarding socially conservative advertising.

As Table 11 shows, using of socially conservative advertising carried a slightly negative correlation with overall vote received across every category of rural and urban district. This supports my conclusion that socially conservative advertising was less influential in the Midwest than I originally thought.

Table 11: Linear Regression, General Election Vote Total Against Independent Variables, Candidates for U.S. House of Representatives Where Candidate Ran Advertising, 2002 by Percent of District that is Rural

	General Election Vote				
Percent of District Population living in Rural Area	$\leq 5\%$	$\geq 15\%$	$\geq 20\%$	$\geq 35\%$	$\geq 50\%*$
Constant	42.334	49.135	53.240	57.214	179.173
Use of Socially Conservative Advertising	-4.139**	-3.669**	-4.577**	-7.471**	-82.398**

* Only six candidates ran in districts with at least 50% of the residents living in a rural district **and** used television advertising, which explains the skewed regressions for this category.

** None of these coefficients carries statistical significance.

The use of socially conservative advertising, therefore, does not seem to have influenced a candidate's vote total as I originally thought. In both elections, a candidate's use of socially conservative advertising seems to have much less influence than the use of television advertising in general. It appears that v*oters were less concerned with the issues at play in the television advertisements than with the appearance of the candidate on television*. Instead, commercials served as a boost to name recognition and vote totals, regardless of their subject matter.

Candidate Performance Against Same Party Candidates

Because party identification for Democrats has a strong negative correlation in my findings, I decided to examine its influence closely. I sorted each data set by party identification and ran the regressions again. This regression allowed me to examine the same independent variables (such as amount of money spent or percentage of the district that vote for President Bush) and their influence among Democrats and Republicans separately. I discovered that, although party identification of the candidate was important, the most important variables are incumbency and the vote received by President Bush in 2000 (which gives a rough estimate of party identification within a district). I also found that, although Democrats could not expect the amount of money

spent to positively affect their race, Republicans actually enjoyed a noticeable advantage

as they spent more money.

As Tables 12 and 13 show, for every percentage point received by President Bush

in a given district, Republicans would gain over .7 percentage points, while Democrats

would lose approximately the same amount. These findings indicate that the Midwestern

public supported President Bush more than they supported a Republican congress,

suggesting that voters who supported President Bush did not support the Republican

Party congressional candidate.

Table 12: Linear Regression, General Election Vote Total Against Independent Variables, Republican Candidates for U.S. House of Representatives Where Candidate Ran Advertising, 2000/2002

Variable	2000 (General Election Vote)	Significance	2002 (General Election Vote)	Significance
(Constant)	.744		4.455	
Vote Received by President Bush	.720	***	.709	***
Money Spent	2.52E-006	*	1.12E-006	
Used Socially Conservative Ads	1.880		-2.817	
Incumbent	23.761	***	25.269	***
Open Seat	12.874	***	12.216	***

Challenger candidate status used as constant
* Significant to .1   ** Significant to .05   *** Significant to .01

Table 13: Linear Regression, General Election Vote Total Against Independent Variables, Democratic Candidates for U.S. House of Representatives Where Candidate Ran Advertising, 2000/2002

Variable	2000 (General Election Vote)	Significance	2002 (General Election Vote)	Significance
(Constant)	71.712		69.458	
Vote Received by President Bush	-.716	***	-.654	***
Money Spent	-1.81E-006		1.41E-007	
Used Socially Conservative Ads	-3.098		1.437	
Incumbent	26.256	***	25.236	***
Open Seat	7.312	***	10.633	***

Challenger candidate status used as constant
* Significant to .1   ** Significant to .05   *** Significant to .01

Although the money spent variable appears to have a negligible effect on the overall outcome of the race, it is based on individual dollars spent, so the effect must be multiplied by the amount of money each candidate spent. For example, candidates in contested races in 2002 spent an average of $634,367 on their races. This means that a Democrat spending the mean could only expect to gain .089 percentage points, while a Republican could expect to gain .710 points. Again, this effect seems negligible until we look at the highest spending races in the election. For example, Representative John Dingell (D-MI) spent $3,387,665 and Representative Joe Knollenberg (R-MI) spent $2,446,119 in 2002. In these cases, Representative Dingell's calculated advantage is .477 percentage points, while Representative Knollenberg's is 2.739 percentage points. And Representative Knollenberg spent considerably less money than Representative Dingell!

The same calculations can be completed for candidates in 2000 and the findings are even more striking. In 2000, a Republican candidate could expect to gain 2.52 percentage points for every million dollars spent, while a Democratic candidate actually lost 1.81 percentage points for every million dollars spent.

Discussion

  My hypotheses regarding the potential effectiveness of socially conservative advertising have not been supported by my research, but my findings are important nonetheless. Although many studies have shown the effect of incumbency on electoral success, I also demonstrated the effect of television advertising on overall electoral success. In addition, I showed the effect of money on electoral success and discovered the apparent advantage that Republicans hold in this regard.

  The differences between the 2000 elections and the 2002 elections became clear through my research. It appears that voters in the midterm elections were less concerned with socially conservative issues than voters in the 2000 elections. I assumed that President Bush made the 2000 elections about social issues while the 2002 elections were about what actions congress might take. This is not to say that Democrats were favored more in 2002. Indeed, my findings show quite the opposite. Instead, I offer this as an explanation of the socially conservative advertising variable. While this variable was positively correlated to vote totals in 2000, it was negatively correlated in 2002. This suggests that Republicans and Democrats alike found ways to get votes that did not include using socially conservative advertising. The overall success of Republicans over Democrats says that they were more successful in their efforts to court voters.

  Republicans consistently outperformed Democrats in the 2000 and 2002 elections and my findings isolate the variables which led to this success. My data shows that both Republicans and Democrats benefited from their status as an incumbent. Both parties benefited from party identification of voters in the district as well. However,

Republicans gained more from spending money and they also performed better than Democrats in open seat races.

I posit that Republicans performed better in the Midwest because congressional districts voted more consistently for President Bush and thereby gave the advantage to Republican candidates. For example, President Bush only lost 34 of the 100 districts in 2000, meaning two-thirds of all Midwestern congressional districts voted for President Bush. In addition, Republicans are traditionally better fundraisers than Democrats, enabling them to spend more money in their races.

My final chapter analyzes my findings from Chapters 3 and 4 and discusses the overall importance of these findings on American electoral politics. I also discuss the limitations of my research as well as suggest further research for future American political scholars.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This project addressed four hypotheses and in the process, answered other questions regarding the use of advertising in Midwestern congressional races. Although most of my hypotheses were not supported, I believe equally important questions have been answered in the process.

<u>Conclusions</u>

My findings tell a different story than what I expected, but my expectations were based on the representation of political campaigns in the media over the past half decade. In 2004, the most common way to explain President Bush's victory was to say that people voted because of their "values." Advertisements go to great lengths to show that their candidate "shares the values" of their constituency, while their opponent is "out of touch" with those same values.

In addition, the most controversial (and popular) political talk shows do not focus their attention on the differences between the parties on paying down the national debt or increasing tariffs on imported goods. Instead, they talk about wedge issues like gun control, abortion and the place of religion in government. They talk about social issues because people can relate to one side or the other. Viewers are able to say "I agree, abortion should be illegal" or "We should have stricter laws about buying guns."

My research, however, suggests that candidates do not gain from making their positions on these issues the focus of commercials in a campaign. The influence of socially conservative advertising is varied and usually negative in my findings, but the influence of television advertising in general is consistently positive. *Voters did not*

judge candidates by the content of their advertising; rather they examined the legitimacy

of the campaigns.

Similarly, candidates increased their name recognition when they ran television advertising, instead of increasing awareness of their key issues. It appears that voters were less likely to be affected by the content of the advertisement and more likely to be influenced by the candidate's mere presence on television. In part this confirms with conventional wisdom, which says that candidates always are looking to increase name recognition.

In addition to using television advertising, other strong indicators of electoral success were party identification and incumbency. These two variables have been known to influence overall vote totals for many years, but my findings analyze these variables as they pertain to the Midwest. Specifically, by performing analyses on the entire population of major party campaigns and then solely on campaigns which used advertising, I have a partial measure of race competitiveness, since sacrificial lamb candidates will rarely use their campaign funds to run advertising.

With regard to party identification, I first found it strange that Democrats performed slightly better than Republicans in the Midwest when I examined the entire population. This seemed to defy scholarship which says the Midwest is considerably more conservative than other parts of the country. In addition, it does not explain the reasons why so many more Republicans were successful in these elections than Democrats. However, after looking at candidates who used television advertising, Republicans started performing significantly better than Democrats. These findings suggest one of two things. First, that Republicans were more careful in their choices of

districts in which to run candidates. They may have stayed out of races where they had little or no chance of winning, giving Democrats a larger margin of victory (since they had no major party opposition) and skewing the overall data on vote totals. The other possible explanation is that the districts that were Democratic in the Midwest are very solidly Democratic, while Republicans hold less secure seats.

Especially in 2000 and 2002, this second explanation seems plausible. Because Republicans held the majority in the House, it would seem likely that more of their districts are swing or Democratic districts that have elected Republicans. This would cause their margins of victory to be closer than in a particularly safe district. In addition, Democrats have traditionally done better in large urban centers than in rural or suburban districts. Because the Midwest has fewer urban centers, Democrats should hold fewer seats overall from these areas. However, the Democratic margin of victory in urban areas should be significantly higher than a Republican's margin of victory in a suburban or rural district. Again, these differences would skew the data over the entire population, but would be reduced in analyses that only looked at campaigns that used television advertising, because non-competitive candidates would not run advertising.

My project does not, however, produce any new insights into the importance of incumbency for candidates, other than to say that it is once again shown to be a huge, if not the largest, indicator of electoral success. This suggests that, despite the polls that say Americans are increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of Congress, the voters consistently blame congressional problems on somebody else's congressman or congresswoman. In much the same way, incumbency also raises a candidate's name recognition (like television advertising), and therefore it makes sense that incumbency

and television advertising would hold similarly dramatic influence over a candidate's performance.

I concluded that television advertising in Midwestern congressional races served an important role in moving voters to the polls. Although television advertising did not strongly correlate to vote totals, it did retain a consistently positive correlation. Television advertising served as a proxy variable in many ways for campaign viability, but the ads also indicated viability to voters. *A candidate could not win or lose an election based solely on the use of television advertising, nor could the use of socially conservative advertising automatically doom a campaign to fail.* Instead, as Wolfinger, Rosenstone and Teixeira stated, a number of factors convince people to vote. My findings show that, in addition to party identification and candidate incumbency, television advertising helped candidates in 2000 and 2002 by boosting their vote totals.

Limitations of Research

This work has produced results that should interest the greater academic community and, despite the failure of several hypotheses, has addressed common misconceptions about the use of television advertising. That being said, my research had certain inadequacies. It had a limited scope and lacked many qualities necessary to serve a predictive function.

The most significant limitation of my project is that it did not address campaigns over an extended period of time, therefore reducing my ability to use this data to predict future races. I only examined two election cycles because this data was the easiest to obtain and was available in the format I needed. Unfortunately, this limits the scope of my project to the most recent elections, and specifically to these two. Had I conducted a

longitudinal study over the past ten or fifteen election cycles, my project would have more predictive value.

In addition, the political climate during the 2000 and 2002 elections was similar, as both elections occurred with a Republican congress and during a short period of time. The major difference between the two elections was the attacks of September 11th, 2001, which resulted in a change in issues addressed by candidates from 2000 to 2002. This project could speak to wider issues in political campaigning if it examined more elections or if a different political culture had existed at the time of these two elections.

Suggestions for Future Research

Initially, I suggest that a similar study be conducted over a longer period of time. If data can be obtained from elections prior to 2000, I could use the methods I have employed to build a similar database with this data. From there, I could add each subsequent election as the data become available. By keeping a continuously updating set of databases, the long term effectiveness of television advertising could be examined. These databases would allow me to show the effects of television advertising in difference cultures and as an overall variable with regards to other factors.

In addition, I could perform a similar analysis on the 1994 elections (which saw a high turnover of incumbents) against the 2000 and 2002 elections, which saw very little turnover from incumbents. If a similar turnover should occur in the 2006 elections, this data could be used with the 1994 election data to provide another data source where incumbency may not have played as large of a role.

Another obvious expansion of this research is to examine the United States as a whole, as opposed to Midwestern campaigns only. My choice of Midwestern campaigns

was based on a number of factors, but my methods could just as easily answer questions about campaigning in the United States in general. This would also allow me to examine the effect of the rural population variable and, with simple sorting, could address the use of television commercials in any region or set of regions across the United States. This expansion could be applied to all new research, not simply my examination of the 2000 and 2002 elections.

My methodology could also very easily be employed to examine television advertising as it affects United States Senate campaigns or gubernatorial campaigns. In these situations, however, a longer time frame would be necessary in order to gain any semblance of significance, because of the low number of gubernatorial or Senate campaigns in any given election. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to note the influence of television advertising on candidates who are assumed to have more name recognition than a congressional candidate.

My findings are significant only for these elections and elections with a similar political culture. Because of this, I suggest that future scholars conduct research that expands on this methodology, looking at the influence of these variables across more elections, across a wider geographic area and across other types of elections. Perhaps congressional candidates never gain enough name recognition for their television ads to serve any other purpose. Maybe voters view Senatorial candidates as having more relevance, and therefore choose Senators based on the issues involved in their television advertising. Or maybe voters on the east and west coast care more about what their candidates believe in as opposed to party identification, so the influence of television advertising will be tempered by the message in those ads.

<u>Discussion</u>

      This project speaks to what many people consider the most visible part of any political campaign. It examined the use of television commercials and found that *what a candidate says is not nearly as important as that they said it*. My analysis suggested that a candidate who runs television advertising creates a persona for the voters, and that persona has far less to do with the issues they are addressing than the media would have the general public believe.

      This study showed a unique facet of television advertising in Midwestern congressional campaigns. Although we tend to study the content of television advertising, and conventional wisdom tells us that television issue advertisements can sway the electorate, I showed that these effects are not due to what the candidate said. Rather, voters seem content that candidates saying anything at all. Despite nearly a decade of exit polls and journalists telling us that "moral values" are the deciding factor for voters, it seems that communication is truly the determining aspect. For most voters, the decision is simple. If a candidate has incumbency, party, and viability, the candidate stands a good chance of getting elected. But if that candidate uses television advertising on top of those circumstances, more often than not, they are going to elect him or her to the United States House of Representatives.

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