

Why don't you talk about policy? Valence campaigning in the 2008 US Congressional elections

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Liberal democratic theory conceptualizes elections as competitions over policy, in which candidates promote clearly formulated policy platforms. Yet many campaigns in modern democracies lack a strong policy focus. Instead, some candidates spent notable time and effort to advertise valence issues, such as their personal characteristics and abilities. So far we have no good explanation why some do and other don't. This paper presents a formal model of when we should expect candidates to run a valence campaign and when not. Based on Riker's idea of herethetics, our model produces predictions in line with the dominance principle: candidates who have a valence advantage should run a campaign that focuses on valence, rather than on policy. The model's predictions are tested in the 2008 US Congressional Elections. Valence advantage is empirically quantified from a voter model that is based on survey data. We find that candidates tend to broadcast fewer policy-related TV ads if they have a valence advantage over their opponent.

Liberal democratic theory portrays election campaigns as a debate about relevant issues. Candidates inform voters about their policy-platforms and citizens choose candidates that best represent their preferences. Even if candidates talk about different issues, campaigns are said to be about substance. Yet most campaigns in modern democracies are not only about policy. During campaigns some candidates put more time and effort into conveying a positive

personal image than into talking about policies. Moreover, there is often notable variation: some candidates mainly advertise policies they want to implement when in office, while others stress their personal characteristics and qualities. Why do they do it, and others don't? And what are the electoral consequences?

In this paper we propose a simple model of how candidates choose campaign agendas. We take stock in previous works on the origins of campaign agendas (Sides, 2006) that conceptualizes campaigns as a form of agenda manipulation, or heresthetics (Riker, 1986, 1996). Campaign agendas intend to "structure the situation so that the actor wins, regardless of whether or not the other participants are persuaded" (Riker, 1986, 60). In this light, campaigns are more about "changing the voter's environment" (Riker, 1990) rather than changing her mind about something. Very much in line with previous works (Sides, 2006, 2007), we argue that candidates can use campaigns to alter voting behavior by influencing the relative salience of the different considerations on which voters base their decision. However, contrary to the issue ownership literature (e.g. Petrocik, 1996), we argue that these consideration are not confined to policy issues, but also include non-policy factors. These non-policy factors are generally conceptualized to as *valence* (Stokes, 1963, 1992).

In this article, we extend classical theoretical models of party competition by providing a campaign model that allows candidates to choose the theme of their campaign agenda. Rather than modeling candidate positions (Adams et al., 2011; Groseclose, 2001) we focus on campaign strategies and explain under what conditions candidates are going to stress policy or valence factors. The interaction between candidate campaign agendas determines the overall campaign tone, which in turn determines how salient policy and valence considerations are in voters' electoral decisions calculus. Our model predicts that candidates whose valence advantage is larger than their policy advantage should avoid talking about policy during their campaign. In turn, candidates that are disadvantaged in terms of valence should stress policy considerations during their campaign. The campaign strategy a candidate chooses is not only merely influenced by her valence advantage or disadvantage, but is conditional on the candidate's policy-advantage.

Furthermore, we advance research on party competition and in particular research about U.S. congressional campaigns by providing a novel measurement strategy that allows to assess both,

a candidate's valence- *and* policy-advantage on the same scale together with the uncertainty we have about those advantages. In order to do this we will use the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and compare candidates expected vote shares under a "valence-only" counterfactual situation with a "normal" baseline scenario in a Bayesian set-up. Equipped with those measures we provide evidence for the prediction of our valence campaigning model for the 2008 US house election campaigns using the Wisconsin Advertisement Project (Goldstein et al., 2011) to measure the campaign communication strategies.

A MODEL OF VALENCE CAMPAIGNING

When should we expect rational candidates to run campaigns that heavily focus on valence aspects? We develop a stylized campaign agenda model, which starts on the premise that campaigns influence voting behavior, and electoral outcomes, by making some considerations more salient in the voter's rationale than others. This is generally referred to as priming (e.g. Jacobs and Shapiro, 1994; Druckman, 2004; Druckman, Jacobs and Ostermeier, 2008), a strategy of specifically emphasizing those topics that benefit the candidate. We argue that voters are not primarily influenced by the campaigns of individual candidates, but by the interplay of the campaigns of multiple candidates. We posit that the product of this interplay, which we call 'campaign tone', determines the relative importance that voters assign to different considerations, on which they base their vote choice. We entertain that the multitude of considerations that are or may be relevant for voters can be separated into two broad categories, policy and valence.

Policy and valence loosely translate into the categories used by Druckman (2004), who differentiate between issue and image priming. While issues refer to policy-related topics, image priming is when candidates try to "to elevate the salience of certain image perceptions or personality traits" (Druckman, 2004, 1181). Two forms of traits are distinguished: performance-based traits and interpersonal characteristics. While the former refers the abilities of a candidate, such as competence, experience or assertiveness, the latter refers to more subjective, subtle characteristics such as warmth, trust or amiability. In a similar vein, Adams et al. (2011) differentiate the strategic valence and character valence of a candidate, to which Stone and Simas (2010) refers as campaign valence and character valence. For our purposes, we define

valence to encompass all non-policy factors that are relevant for voter decision-making. More narrowly, we focus on what Stokes (1992, 147) referred to as the second element of valence politics, the positive or negative qualities of parties or leader.

If the campaign tone is policy-centered, such as in a campaign in which candidates debate the relevant policy issues of the day and exclusively advertise their policy-platforms, we expect voters to base their voting decision mainly on policy considerations. Vice versa, if the central campaign theme is which candidate is better suited for office, better at representing her constituency or has more integrity, we expect valence considerations to take the upper hand over policy considerations. If it is true that campaign tone influences voter behavior, and/or candidates think it does, candidates familiar with the art of heresthetics should then try to focus the electorate's attention on considerations on which they have an advantage over their opponents. This intuition of our argument loosely corresponds to Riker's dominance principle. In the following, we analyze how these advantages translate into whether a candidate's campaign will focus on policy or valence.

We consider a race with two candidates $j \in 1, 2$. The game has three phases: a planning phase, in which candidates cast their campaign agenda, the publicly visible campaign, in which candidate campaigns can influence voter decisions and a post-election phase, in which candidates receive payoffs. We assume candidates to enter the planning phase with given policy platforms y_1, y_2 . Policy-platforms are defined on a one dimensional policy space $X \in \mathbb{R}^1$. Both candidates further possess a specific valence θ_j which is strictly positive. Candidates are not able to change their position or valence during the campaign, as they are constrained by their biography and reputation. This corresponds to the idea that campaigns do not primarily intend to change the voter's mind about where a candidate stands or what her qualities are. As has been argued, changing perceptions or persuading voters is much more costly than changing the weight of considerations, according to which a candidate will be judged by the voter.

What candidates can however control is the theming of their own campaign, i.e. how much emphasis they put in their campaign agenda on policy and valence topics. As candidates have to talk about something, and there is only a limited amount of time and funds, we model the choice between policy and valence topics as a zero-sum game. In our model, candidates choose during the planning phase only one parameter γ , which expresses how much they want to

stress policy relative to valence topics, with $\gamma_j \in [0, 1]$. $\gamma_j = 1$ indicates that a candidate j 's campaign is focused solely on policy and $\gamma_j = 0$ solely on valence.

Naturally, candidates choose γ to maximize their winning chances. Platform position and valence terms are common knowledge, so is the distribution of voters on the policy dimension. The latter corresponds to the idea that candidates possess good information about the ideological composition of their district, such as the position of the median voter. Furthermore, both candidates know the functional form of voter utility functions, which is assumed to be homogeneous in the population: Each voter $i \in (0, \dots, N)$ receives utility for each candidates U_{ij} from the negative quadratic policy-distance from the voter position $x_i \in X$ to the candidates platform y_j , minus the distance of the other candidate $-(x_i - y_j)^2 + (x_i - y_k)^2$, and the candidate's valence advantage $\theta_j - \theta_k$. The relative saliency of both terms is a direct function of the overall campaign tone. We suppose that overall campaign tone can be expressed as a linear function of the candidates' individual strategies, where the strategies of both candidates have equal weight $\gamma = \frac{\gamma_1 + \gamma_2}{2}$, so that the overall campaign tone is policy-focused if $\gamma = 1$, if both talk about policy ($\gamma_1 = \gamma_2 = 1$), and vice versa.

The intuition of how candidates choose their agendas in this game is relatively simple. A candidate that starts a campaign with a valence-disadvantage should avoid to stress valence during the campaign and rather speak about policy. This allows her to lower the effect of the opposing candidates valence advantage, as the election will be more about policy issues, independently of the other candidates campaign agenda. her opponent, having a valence advantage, should indeed talk more about valence than about policy.

A more formalized version of the argument allows us to determine the exact conditions under which we expect candidates to stress valence over policy and vice versa. If the campaign tone is policy-focused, difference in policy distance matters a lot in voter evaluation of both candidates, if the campaign tone is valence-focused only valence affects utility. This can be written using a mixture between the two terms:

$$U_{ij} = (1 - \gamma) [\theta_j - \theta_k] - \gamma [(x_i - y_j)^2 - (x_i - y_k)^2] \quad (1)$$

Based on this we can formulate a simple probabilistic vote choice model. Suppose that

utility has a random component to it $V_{ij} = U_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}$, given certain assumption about ϵ_{ij} we can formulate different standard vote choice models. For simplicity we rely on a logit formulation, in which the predicted probability p_{ij} is given by

$$p_{ij} = \frac{1}{1 + \exp(U_{ij})} \quad (2)$$

Candidates attempt to maximize their vote share. This can be understood as the average predicted probability $V_j = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N p_{ij}}{N}$. Maximizing this with respect to the campaign strategy

$$\frac{\delta V_j}{\delta \gamma_j} = \frac{\delta V_j}{\delta U_{ij}} \frac{\delta U_{ij}}{\delta \gamma_j} \quad (3)$$

and substituting the utility specification (1) yields ¹

$$\frac{\delta V_j}{\delta \gamma_j} = \sum_{i=1}^N p_{ij}[1 - p_{ij}] \left[\frac{(1 - \gamma) [\theta_j - \theta_k] + \gamma [-(x_i - y_j)^2 + (x_i - y_k)^2]}{\delta \gamma_j} \right] \quad (4)$$

$$= \sum_{i=1}^N p_{ij}[1 - p_{ij}] \left[-\frac{1}{2}[\theta_j - \theta_k] + \frac{1}{2} [-(x_i - y_j)^2 + (x_i - y_k)^2] \right] \quad (5)$$

Of interest is the second term. As the first term is always positive, the second term determines if the expected vote share is increasing or decreasing given a candidate's campaign strategy ². To determine the conditions under which the expected vote share is increasing or decreasing in campaign strategy we can manipulate the second term further.

¹The logit Link function $\frac{\delta V_j}{\delta U_{ij}}$ simplifies to $p_{ij}[1 - p_{ij}]$

²Only in a two cases the first derivative has a critical point: First, if all p_{ij} are either 1 or 0. Second, if the average utility over all voters is zero. While we find the first point to be implausible, for the second case to hold, both candidates need the same average valance assessment and need to be equidistant to the average voter. Intuitively, in this case there would be nothing to gain from stressing one aspect over the other, as the opponent has the same advantages

$$\frac{\delta V_j}{\delta \gamma_j} = 0 \quad (6)$$

$$-\frac{1}{2}N [\theta_j - \theta_k] = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N [-(x_i - y_j)^2 + (x_i - y_k)^2] \quad (7)$$

$$-\frac{1}{2}N [\theta_j - \theta_k] = \frac{1}{2}N [-(\bar{x} - y_j)^2 + (\bar{x} - y_k)^2] \quad (8)$$

$$-\theta_j + \theta_k = -(\bar{x} - y_j)^2 + (\bar{x} - y_k)^2 \quad (9)$$

$$\theta_j - (\bar{x} - y_j)^2 = \theta_k - (\bar{x} - y_k)^2 \quad (10)$$

Where \bar{x} is the mean position in the electorate. The terms indicates the electoral advantage of the candidates in terms of their valence and distance to the mean voter. If these two are equal, e.g. both candidates are equidistant from the mean voter and have the same valence, the average utility is independent of either candidate's campaign strategy. In this situation, candidates cannot affect their average vote share by their choice of campaign agenda.

If one of the candidates has an electoral advantage in either policy or valence, she can increase this advantage by stressing this term over the other. The equation implies that average vote share is increasing in γ_j if $\theta_j - \theta_k < -(\bar{x} - y_j)^2 + (\bar{x} - y_k)^2$, so that if a candidate's valence advantage is smaller than her policy advantage, she should stress policy over valence. And the other way around: average vote share is decreasing in γ_j if $\theta_j - \theta_k > -(\bar{x} - y_j)^2 + (\bar{x} - y_k)^2$.

All in all, we expect the campaign agenda to depend on the candidate's valence or policy-advantage. In the next section we discuss a way to measure the theoretical concepts of valence versus policy-advantage using expected gains in vote share, and discuss how campaign agendas and overall campaign tone can be operationalized.

MEASURING VALENCE ADVANTAGE

The expectation that we derive from our simple model is that campaign focus is not only influenced by valence advantage, but is conditional on the candidate's policy-advantage. The intuition behind this proposition is that valence advantage plays out differently for candidates conditional on their distance from the median voter. A centrist candidate with a valence advantage who runs against an extreme candidate could still run a campaign that stresses policy,

if his policy-advantage is larger than his valence advantage. Incorporating this relationship into our empirical analysis therefore requires a measurement of both advantages on the same scale.

We propose a novel way to do so. The basic idea is to express advantage in the "currency" candidates care about - vote share. Advantage can then be thought of the difference between a counter-factual and a normal scenario. In this line of reasoning, valence (dis)advantage is the gain (or loss) in vote share if voters would base their vote choice solely on valence considerations. This can be calculated as the expected vote share if voters voted based on valence, minus the vote share the candidate could expect if voters "behaved normally". Vice-versa, policy advantage is the difference in vote share between a scenario in which voters cared only about policy considerations, and a normal scenario. Given that candidates think in terms of expected vote share, we find this to be a intriguing measurement. The difficulty lies in defining the "normal" scenario. We posit that we can proxy the "normal" weight voters assign to valence and policy considerations by estimating the weight from survey data. Following this line of argument we run a voter model to estimate the weight of valence and policy factors in a representative voter utility function. We then simulate the counter-factual scenarios to calculate valence advantage.

In order to estimate average valence weights, we set-up a standard logit model of intended vote choice, where voting for the democratic house-candidate is treated as success. The probability of each respondent nested within a district $p_{i[k]}$ is a function of the perceived difference in the valence between the democratic and republican candidate, $Valence_{i[k]}$, and the difference in uni-dimensional policy distance between the two candidates $Distance_{i[k]}$. We further control for the party identification of the respondent.

$$U_{i[k]} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Valence_{i[k]} + \beta_2 Distance_{i[k]} + \beta_3 PID_i \quad (11)$$

$$p_{i[k]} = \frac{\exp[U_{i[k]}}{1 + \exp[U_{i[k]}}] \quad (12)$$

$$Pr[Vote_{i[k]} = 1] \sim Bern(p_{i[k]}) \quad (13)$$

Given estimates for $[\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2]$ we can calculate the democratic candidate's expected vote share in the normal scenario as the mean vote choice probability over the respondents within a district, given their covariate values. $V_{i[k]} = \frac{\sum p_{i[k]}}{N_k}$, with N_k being the number of respondents

within a district.³ Expected vote share in the valence-only scenario is then given by setting the effect of policy on voting probabilities equal to zero, and calculating the mean predicted probability: $V_{i[k]}|\beta_2 = \frac{\sum p_{i[k]}|\beta_2}{K_k}$. Subtracting this value from the expected vote share obtained for the normal scenario yields the candidate's valence advantage, $V_{i[k]}^{Valence}$.

$$V_{i[k]}^{Valence} = V_{i[k]}|\beta_2 - V_{i[k]} = \frac{\sum p_{i[k]}}{K_k} \quad (14)$$

Our measure of valence advantage can be interpreted as the increase/decrease in vote share a candidate would receive if the election would be only about valence. Policy-advantage can be constructed in a similar way, by setting β_1 to zero. $V_{i[k]}^{Policy}$ is the difference in expected vote share if the election would only be about policy. In the logit formulation the electoral advantages for the republican candidate can be calculated analogously.⁴

We employ data from the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) to estimate the electoral advantages for the candidates of the 2008 House Elections, which took place at November 4, 2008. Our dependent variable is intended vote choice for either the democratic or republican candidate. The CCES includes three questions about the valence characteristics of the two candidates, whether the candidate is honest, knowledgeable or experienced. Answer categories are yes, no or Don't know. Based on these items we form an additive index (Adding up the positive assessments of the democratic and subtracting the positive assessments of the republican candidate) that ranges from -3 to +3. Positive values indicate a higher valence evaluation of the democratic candidate, and negative higher evaluations of the republican candidate. Respondents were further asked to indicate the house candidates' and their own position on an ideological scale ranging from 0 to 100. The quadratic distance to the democratic minus the quadratic distance to the republican candidate yields our measurement of policy-distance. For the measurement of a candidates party identification we employ the standard 7 point-scale question that ranges from "Strong Democrat" to "Strong Republican".

Employing Bayesian methods, we obtain estimates for the parameters, as well as the different expected vote shares. For the parameter estimates we specify uninformative priors over the β 's

³Where $\sum p_{i[k]}|\beta_2$ is given by $\frac{\exp[\beta_0 + \beta_1 Valence_{i[k]} + \beta_3 PID_i]}{1 + \exp[\beta_0 + \beta_1 Valence_{i[k]} + \beta_3 PID_i]}$

⁴ $V_{i[k]} = \frac{\sum 1 - p_{i[k]}}{N_k}$ and $V_{i[k]}|\beta_2 = \frac{\sum 1 - p_{i[k]}|\beta_2}{K_k}$ respectively

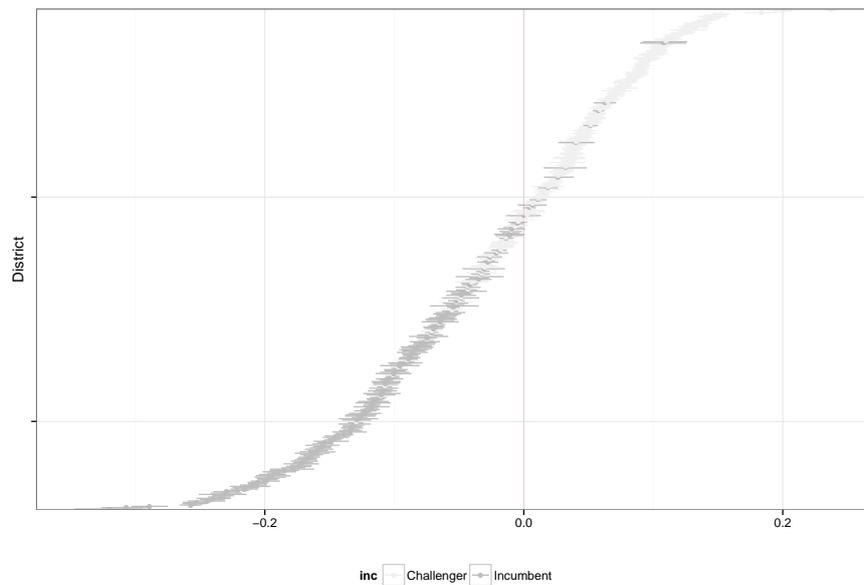


Figure 1: Difference between Policy- and Valence-Advantage over Congressional districts

⁵ and sample from the posterior using 10000 iterations, discarding the first 8000 iterations as burn-in⁶. Additionally, the Bayesian framework allows us to sample the expected vote share for each candidate from the posterior. For this, we calculate the mean choice probability over all respondents nested in the different districts at each iteration step. The valence (respectively policy-only) counter-factual can be obtained analogously by the average predicted probabilities if either β_1 or β_2 is set to zero. Subtracting the counter-factual from the normal expectation at each iteration yields an estimate of the two advantages. Our approach straightforwardly gives uncertainty over advantage measurements. Even more important, it can be easily integrated as a left-hand side variable in our later analysis of policy-focus.

Figure 1 shows the difference between policy and valence advantages for the Democratic candidates. Positive values indicate that a candidate would receive a higher vote share if the election would only be about valence, compared to an election only about policy. Thus, the values are directly interpretable, e.g. a value of -0.1 means that the candidate would increase his results by 10% points, if voters would base their voting decision only on valence considerations, compared to a scenario in which voters only cared about policy. The electoral-advantages

⁵ $\beta_k \sim N(0, 10000)$

⁶The Sampler is implemented using JAGS 3.3.0

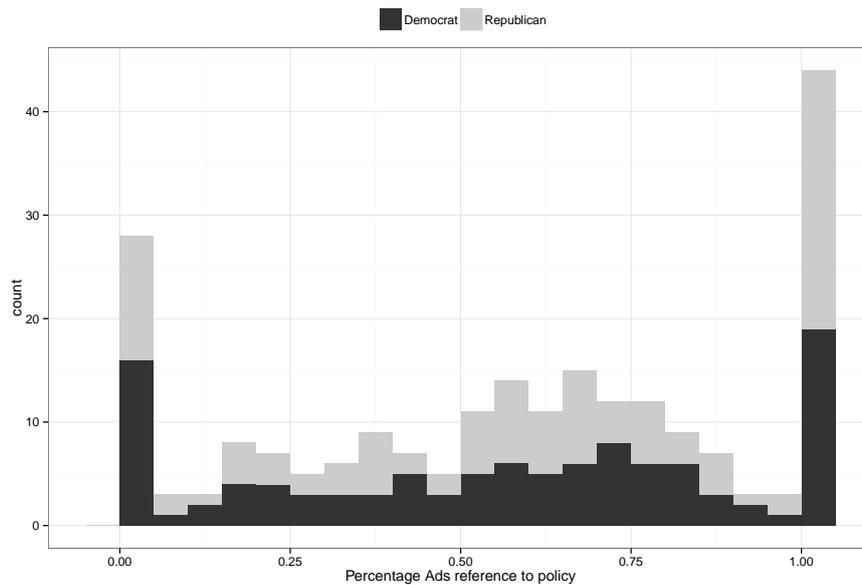


Figure 2: Percentage of Policy Ads broadcasted during the campaigns

vary heavily ranging from -0.3 to 0.2. As a validation check we color-coded the incumbents. Our prior expectations that incumbents tend to have a valence advantage over challengers is confirmed by the graph.

MEASURING CAMPAIGN FOCUS IN THE 2008 US CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

In order to investigate how valence advantages are related to the campaign agendas of candidates, we draw on an extensive dataset on televised candidate campaign ads. The Wisconsin Advertisement Project (Goldstein et al., 2011) coded advertisements that were collected by the private firm TNSMI/CMAG in 377 media markets during the 2008 congressional elections. Televised ads are a well-established indicator of campaign communication (e.g. Ansolabehere et al., 1994; Sides, 2006, 2007; Kaplan, Park and Ridout, 2006), and correlate fairly high with other measures, such as newspaper coverage (Ridout and Franz, 2008). Moreover, they are a form of direct communication between candidate campaigns and voters, and can be therefore understood, unlike newspaper coverage, as a concrete manifestation of a candidate's campaign agenda. As production and airing time is costly, candidate campaigns have to carefully choose the topics of these ads, and should focus on the topics which will be most effective in generating electoral support. As campaigns not only has to choose how many unique spots to produce,

but also how often they will be broadcast, it is therefore common practice to use the number of airings per ads to weight the content of the ads (Prior, 2001).

One specific category of the Project's coding scheme is of primary concern for our analysis. Coders identified if the advertisement's focus lay on advertising the personal characteristics of the candidate, or on the policies the candidate wanted to advertise, or contained both. This variable captures very closely the two concepts we want to measure - the valence or policy content of a candidate's campaign. We aggregate the fine-grained data set to the candidate-level, which yields counts of how many ads per candidate were valence only, policy only, or contained both. In the following we rely on the percentage of the number of total ads that solely advertised policy positions. A specific problem during the aggregation process is that the data set does not distinguish between ads broadcast during the primaries and during the election campaign. As we would expect candidates' primary campaigns to be very different as they are directed at a different electorate, we try to eliminate primary ads from our data set. We do so by defining a point in time after which we can, with high certainty expect to only capture ads that are not part of the primaries. In absence of precise data when primaries were over, we chose a conservative estimate, the 20th September 2008, as the cut of point. This left only 6 weeks before the elections, which were held on the 4th of November. Earlier ads are discarded. Furthermore, the campaigns of third-party candidates were also excluded, and also races in which ads for only one candidate were recorded.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the proportion of ads that have a direct reference to policy, for the democratic and republican candidate. The percentages vary over campaigns, but show similar patterns comparing democratic and republican candidates. Many observations are located at the end of the scales: Either all ads have a direct reference to policy, or none of the ads make direct reference to policy. This observation confirms our supposition that there is notable variation in the content of modern election campaigns. Campaigns often lack a clear policy-focus, which is in line with the theoretical expectation that candidates should either concentrate on policy, or valence aspects in their campaign.

Of further importance is the number of overall ads a candidate decides to broadcast during the campaign. While some candidates broadcast around 10000 advertisements, other candidates broadcast only a few. The lowest number of advertisements in our data set is observed in

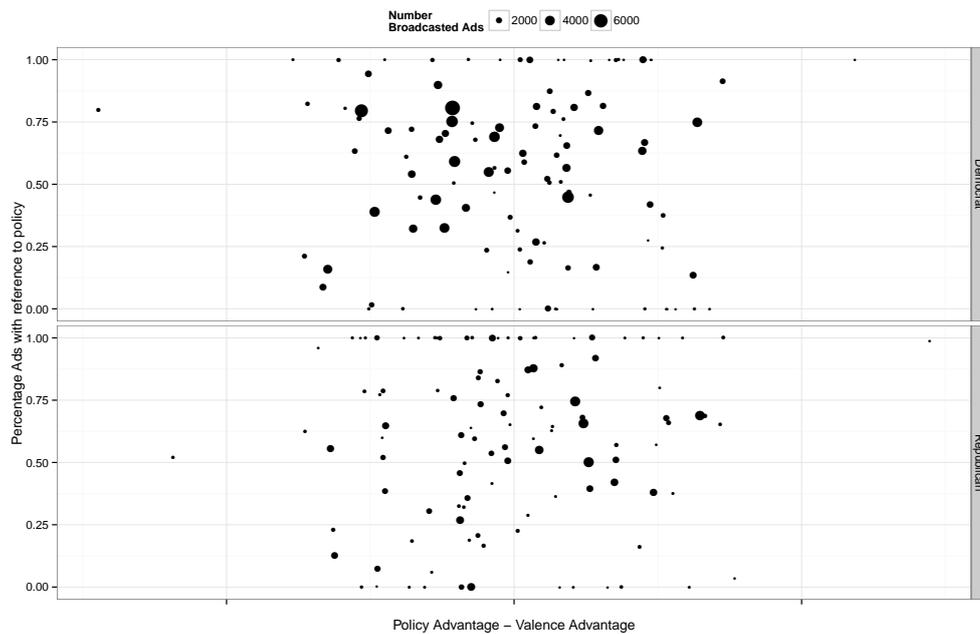


Figure 3: Scatter Plot

District Texas 3, where Sam Johnson, the Republican incumbent, televised his single unique, valence-focused advertisement three times. His challenger Tom Daley decided to broadcast his policy-ad only once. Although this observation is actually in line with our theoretical argument, with such low numbers of advertisements a key assumption of our theoretical argument might fail. Namely, that the overall campaign tone affects the aspects on which voters form their decisions. If candidates do not act as if their broadcast could influence the weights of policy versus valence, our implications do not hold. In our following analysis campaigns with more televised advertisements should therefore be weighted much more strongly.

RESULTS: A MODEL FOR BROADCAST TV-ADS WITH POLICY-FOCUS

Given our estimates of electoral advantages, we can directly relate them to the number of observed policy-ads. The results show tentative support for our argument: Candidates with a higher policy advantage tend to broadcast more policy-related ads, rather than valence-related ads. Figure 3 shows the scatter plot of electoral advantages and the share of ads with clear policy-reference for Democratic and Republican candidates. Following the argument that our model only holds for campaigns with a substantial number of advertisements, we vary the

size of the points. Bigger points imply more televised ads. The first point to note is that a clear policy or valence focus tends to coincide with fewer broadcasted advertisements. Not weighing the campaigns according to the number of ads does not reveal a clear pattern that would indicate a relationship along our theoretical expectations. Although, the weighted picture might indicate a small increase in policy-focus with increasing policy-advantage, however the relationship is very noisy.

In the subsequent, we model the relationship as a deliberate decision to broadcast advertisements with different focus. We suppose that each candidate can decide, how many of their total advertisements should have an explicit policy-reference. Following this line of argument, a binomial regression can be used to estimate the effect of difference in electoral advantages on the probability to broadcast policy Ads. Let $\#Ads_{jk}$ be the total number of ads by the democratic $j = 1$, respectively republican candidate $j = 2$, in a district k and $\#AdsPolicy_{jk}$ the number of ads that have a policy focus.

$$\pi_{jk} = \frac{1}{1 + \exp \left[- \left[\delta_0 + \delta_1 \left[V_{jk}^{Policy} - V_{jk}^{Valence} \right] \right] \right]} \quad (15)$$

$$\#AdsPolicy_{jk} \sim \text{Binom}(\pi_{jk}, \#Ads_{jk}) \quad (16)$$

Where $V_{jk}^{Policy} - V_{jk}^{Valence}$ is the difference in electoral advantages. This term directly refers to the theoretical condition. If candidates with larger policy advantage to be more likely to broadcast policy-ads, we expect δ_1 to be positive. We estimate this broadcast model together with our model of electoral advantage simultaneously using Bayesian estimation⁷ This allows us to take the estimation uncertainty about the electoral advantages into account when estimating the parameters δ_1 . The Figure 5 in the Appendix shows 99% credible intervals for the estimates of both the broadcasting and electoral advantage model. The posteriori of δ_1 is clearly different from zero. Thus, the probability to broadcast policy-ads increases with increasing policy-advantage. δ_0 is slightly above zero, which implies that candidates tend to broadcast around 50 % policy-ads, if they have no advantages or disadvantages.

⁷In both steps, we choose uninformative priors. After 10000 iterations, of which the first 8000 are discarded as burn-in, the sampler shows no sign of dis-convergence.

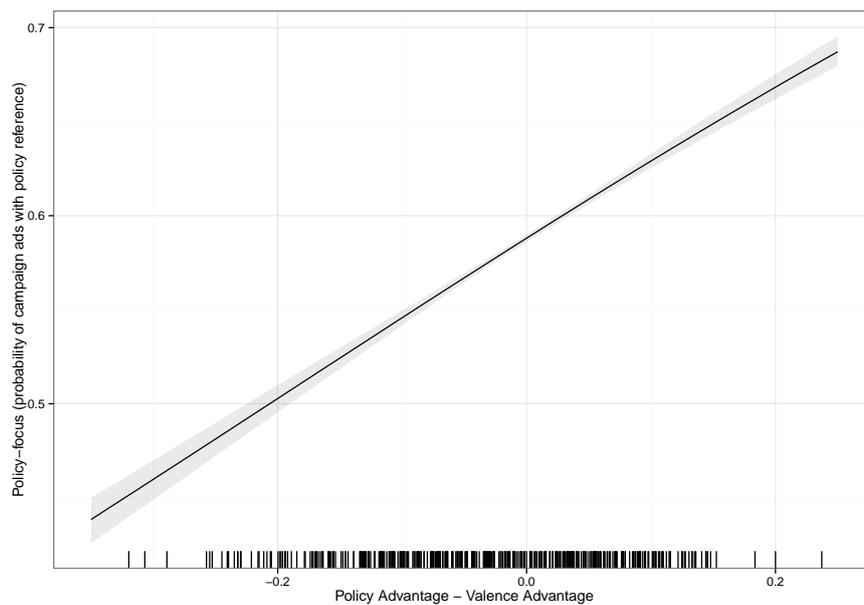


Figure 4: The effect of increasing electoral advantage in policy over valence on campaign focus

The strength of the effect is depicted in the Figure 4. With increasing policy-advantage the chances that a candidate decides to broadcast more policy-ads than valence ads increases. The effect has to be taken with some caution. While we observe many extreme-cases (where candidate only broadcast policy or valence ads) our model is not able to predict those, as the predicted probability only varies from 0.5 to 0.7. This also points to another problem: although the effect is pretty precise, the effect size is actually marginal. A candidate who can expect to loss 10% points if the election would only be about policy (compared to only valence) will broadcast 56 % of his ads with policy-reference. A candidate who can expect to gain 10% around 63%. This is by no means a strong effect and it's (statistical) significance probably is artificially increased by the binomial model, which treats each ad as independent decision. Still, we take the results as preliminary support for our argumentation and plan to adjust the model specification in further steps.

OUTLOOK

Why do candidates choose to advertise valence instead of policy? Given that campaigns offer the possibility to obtain electoral advantages by focusing voter attention on specific aspects of the candidate, we argued that candidates strategically choose their campaign focus. Using data

for the 2008 U.S. House Election, we find that candidates with valence advantage are less likely to broadcast ads that promote their policy-stances. We take this as an indication in favor of our argument: Candidates with a valence advantage attempt to increase their electoral advantages by shifting the public attention away from policy-issues.

Modern campaigns are not only about issues, candidates oftentimes spend notable time and effort to emphasize their personal characteristics and abilities. Candidates choose campaign agendas to prime voters and thereby increase their electoral advantages. Besides policy considerations, valence considerations can also greatly influence electoral outcomes. In plurality systems, two candidates should position themselves equidistant from the median voter. If this is true, electoral outcomes should be oftentimes affected by valence characteristics of the candidates. Our argument implies therefore that campaigns are often about valence, and not policy. Studies of campaign agendas should therefore not only focus on issues, but also on valence aspects.

Empirically, the study of campaigning is challenging. Especially for televised ads, only a small part of the candidate- and race-specific variation can be traced to the strategic calculus that is at the origin of campaign agendas. Future research should build more elaborate models that capture campaign dynamics and control for other factors that may influence campaign agendas. Furthermore, our argument relies on the premise that campaigns shift the weights of considerations in voter utility functions. This assumption should be explicitly tested in future research.

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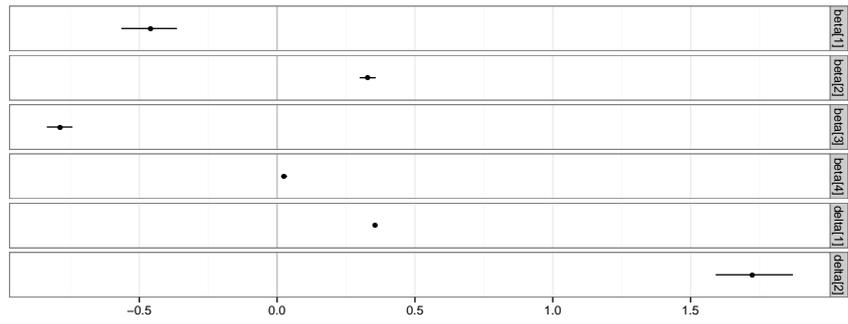


Figure 5: Model Results

A APPENDIX