

NORMAL WINNERS: THE STRATEGIES OF STRONG CANDIDATES

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ABSTRACT

ELLEN GUTMAN GALANTUCCI: Normal Winners: The Strategies of Strong Candidates.

(Under the direction of James A. Stimson)

Much research has focused on what challengers do to win an election. Little research has been dedicated to exploring the behavior of candidates who are expected to win their elections. Candidates who find themselves in close races are likely to act differently than candidates in landslide elections because, as Kahn and Kenney (1997) suggest, voters evaluate candidates differently based on the intensity of the election. What things do candidates who are expected to easily win their elections discuss?

By content analyzing websites of candidates for the U.S. House, Senate, and state governorships from 2008, I find that candidates who are expected to win their elections are likely to act in ways that will not draw attention to the election. They are less likely to discuss controversial issues or mention their opponents than candidates in close races or those expected to lose. Alternatively, they focus on valence issues and constituent service. The same is true for their advertisements. Expected winners air fewer ads than candidates in competitive elections and the ones they do air tend to have less controversial content.

In addition to the content differences between expected winners and competitive candidates, the spending patterns are much different. When an incumbent faces a quality challenger, he or she is likely to spend significantly more money than an incumbent who does not face a quality challenger. The two most common theories for the reasons the incumbents spend so little are that they want to avoid raising funds in the future (Jacobson 2004) and that they want to save a war chest for future elections (Sorauf 1988, Goldenberg, Traugott, and Baumgartner 1986). However, by looking at the spending patterns of candidates expected to win their elections, I find that they spend nearly as much money and

expend as much effort to raise funds as other candidates, so that cannot possibly explain the decisions of these candidates. I also find that expected winners are willing to donate large sums of money to other candidates, parties, and committees, leaving them with fairly small war chests, so that cannot explain their behavior either. Instead, I find that expected winners make a strategic decision to refrain from spending on their own campaigns.

To Rob, for always being there for me.

And to my parents, for supporting me through the last 24 years of school.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 A THEORY OF CANDIDATE STRATEGY	9
3 VALENCE OVER VALUE: A LACK OF INFORMATION ON THE NET	22
4 THE STRATEGY OF LIMITED SPENDING	56
5 I'M A NORMAL WINNER AND I APPROVED NO MESSAGE	85

LIST OF TABLES

3.1 Average Difference in Overall Website Content, by Candidate Type	52
3.2 Types of Issues Discussed through Full Website.....	53
3.3 Average Difference in Homepage Content, by Candidate Type.....	54
3.4 Types of Issues Discussed on Homepage	55
4.1 Average Spending in House, by Type of Candidate, in Thousands of Dollars .	79
4.2 Average Spending in Senate, by Type of Candidate, in Thousands of Dollars .	80
4.3 Average Spending in House, by Type of Candidate, in Thousands of Dollars .	81
4.4 Portion of Funds Spent on Self and Donated, by Type of Candidate	82
4.5 Total Dollars in Thousands Spent by Candidates by Type of Expense	83
4.6 Percentage Spent by Candidates by Type of Expense	84
5.1 Average Number of Ads By Type of Candidate	103
5.2 Portion of Ads Focusing on Each Area, by Type of Candidate	104
5.3 Total Number of Ads Focusing on Each Area, by Type of Candidate	105
5.4 Proportion of Ads Discussing Issues, by Type of Candidate	106
5.5 Average Number of Ads Discussing Issues, by Type of Candidate	107
5.6 Focus of Television Ads by Type of Candidate: Total Number of Ads	108
5.7 Content of Ads By Type of Candidate: Total Number of Ads	109

LIST OF FIGURES

3.1 Bill Sali's 2008 Website	50
3.2 Marcy Kaptur's 2008 Website	51

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the citizens of the United States went to the polls in early November to vote in national elections, just like they do every two years. The people needed to make many important decisions regarding the election that would effect the future of our country. Would they choose to vote for Barack Obama or John McCain for the presidency? Did they prefer the Democrat or the Republican for the House of Representatives? Who should be their new governor or senator? Was it even worth their time to vote? And how would they make these important decisions?

In northwestern Ohio, voters found themselves making a familiar choice for the House of Representatives. They would have the choice between the incumbent, Marcy Kaptur, who had held the seat for two and a half decades, and the challenger, Republican Bradley Leavitt, who had also challenged Kaptur in 2006. Kaptur used the same strategy as she had in the previous election. She spent under a quarter of a million dollars campaigning, not including donations she made to other candidates. She did not run a single televised advertisement. She sent a few fliers to voters in her district but they did not provide voters much information about her plans for the next two years (The Center for Responsive Politics). When the election day came, the result was the same as it had been two years prior: Kaptur won with about 75% of the vote. How was it possible that a candidate could put nearly no effort into her reelection and still win so handily?

Two years later, Kaptur faced a much more well financed candidate than she had in 2008, Republican Rich Iott. Iott raised and spent nearly two million dollars on his challenge against Kaptur. He also had the country leaning in his direction - he was a Tea Party favorite in an election in which Republicans would take over many previously Democratic seats. While Kaptur changed her strategy slightly, she did not stray too far from her 2008 plan. She spent less than a third of the total amount of money that was spent by her opponent. She ran a few television ads this time, but they still did not tell voters much about her; her primary message for voters was that she “supports the troops” (Center for Responsive Politics, Wisconsin Advertising Project). She won the 2010 election by about 20% of the vote. While it was not the 50% she won by in 2008, her strategy was still working. How could a candidate spend so little compared to her opponent, hardly campaigning at all, and still win so easily?

About 2,000 miles west of Ohio, a very different election was occurring in 2008. Republican Bill Sali, a freshman in the House of Representatives, was also running for reelection. Republican Butch Otter had left the seat in 2006 to run for governor and Sali won a close primary and a close general election to replace him. The 2006 election had been a hard fought battle but running for reelection should have been easier for Sali. After all, the First District of Idaho was heavily Republican. John McCain would win the district with over 60% of the vote that year; George W. Bush had received nearly 70% four years earlier. And the Cook Political Report had labeled the election “Solid Republican.”

Sali began the election with force and purpose. He pegged his opponent, Walt Minnick, as a radical, saying “I ask you, what is Walt Minnick afraid of? I’ll tell you - he’s afraid

Idahoans will find out who the real Minnick is. An environmental extremist.” (Warren 2008) Sali explained to voters that his opponent would “increase taxes” once in office by referencing a statement Minnick had made more than a decade before, though Sali was misrepresenting Minnick’s actual views (Idaho Statesman 2008). Voters in Idaho should have liked what Sali was telling them; they did not want their taxes raised nor did they like extremists. Additionally, Sali was an incumbent Republican. All arrows should have pointed to an easy reelection victory. As the election approached, Sali lost ground, with pollsters predicting either candidate could potentially win. Then, on November 4th, Walt Minnick defeated Bill Sali by just over 4,000 votes. How could such a candidate possibly lose his reelection campaign?

Both Marcy Kaptur and Bill Sali “should” have easily won their elections. They were both incumbents running in districts that largely favored their party. However, they took very different approaches and strategies. Kaptur spent very little time campaigning and told voters almost nothing about her legislative plans for after the election. Sali, on the other hand, spent much more time and effort campaigning. He met with constituents, told voters why they should avoid his opponent, and discussed his plans for his time in Washington following the election. So how can it be that Sali lost the election and Kaptur won so easily? Why would voters support the candidate they rarely saw but oppose the candidate who was honest with them about his goals and plans for his time in office, most of which seemed to align with the views of the district?

But Kaptur and Sali are not the only candidates that devise surprising campaign strategies. Sander Levin ran for reelection in the House in 2008, as well. The Democrat had

been in office for two and a half decades, easily maintaining his seat. He raised a moderate amount of money compared to many other candidates and spent about \$200,000 on his campaign. At the end of the election, rather than saving any money he had left over, he donated nearly \$400,000 to others as he had spent on his own campaign, with the primary recipient of his donation being the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (Center for Responsive Politics). Why would a candidate choose to give more money away than he spent on his own election? Why would Levin choose to donate so much money rather than saving it for a future election?

A discussion of the different strategies these candidates took and the rationale behind them is the main focus of this dissertation. I seek to explain why candidates choose the electoral strategies that they do. In doing so, I hope to explain more than just what incumbents do when running for reelection or how they react to strong challengers. I will look at different types of incumbents and challengers and consider what they might do in the face of certain opponents. It will not be a story of incumbents who face quality versus weak challengers, as many have studied (Jacobson and Kernell 1983, Jacobson 1989, Epstein and Zemsky 1995). It will be about candidates who “should” win their elections versus candidates who are not expected to win. It will also consider the strategies of candidates in close “races,” who often take different strategies than expected winners and losers.

Much of the literature discussing candidate strategy focuses on incumbency as the primary factor that determines success. While many incumbents running for election will win their seat again, incumbency has no guarantees. Within research that examines incumbents and challengers, there is often a distinction between quality challengers, who have

held some previous elected office, and non-quality or weak challengers, who have never held an elected office (Jacobson and Kernell 1983, Jacobson 1989, Epstein and Zensky 1995). Others have attempted to create indices with additional criteria to determine the quality of a challenger for office. These include information such as previous attempts to run for Congress, even if they were unsuccessful, a candidate's "celebrity status," and any previously held non-elected public office. These measures do perform better than the dichotomous quality measure in predicting candidate behavior (Krasno and Green 1988). However, incumbency and quality of challenger are certainly not the only factors weighing into the decisions of these candidates when they choose strategies.

There are many instances in which the quality of challengers does not predict candidate behavior successfully. Quality challengers who have won elected office previously still rarely beat incumbents; less than 20% actually defeat the incumbents and win their elections (Epstein and Zensky 1995). While 20% is better than the 4% success rate of weak challengers, it certainly does not explain much about most elections. It does not give a clear picture of what incumbents are doing in these elections and why they might be choosing the strategies that they do. While some nuanced measures of the quality of challengers yield slightly better results (Krasno and Green 1988), it appears from this research that incumbency and the quality of the challenger are not the only important factors in determining the outcome of an election. These studies do not examine the strategies of the candidates once the election season is in full swing nor do most consider outside factors influencing the election, such as the coattails of a presidential election. They do not account for the swings of the country. Many elections, such as the midterm elections of 2010, propel candidates to

victory who were not expected to be successful when only looking at “quality.” Therefore, I take a different approach by looking at candidates’ expectations of winning. While the quality of the challenger is important, many other factors are as well. With the belief that candidates make decisions based on their expectations of winning rather than one aspect of their opponents, I look at the influence of such expectations on their strategies.

The question of whether campaigns really matter has also been debated in political science for many years (Finkel 1993, Key 1966, Campbell et al. 1960, Holbrook 1996). After all, many elections are highly predictable; the outcome of such elections can often be predicted long before the candidates have even filed to run (Fair 1978, Brody and Sigelman 1983, Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992, Holbrook 1996, Wlezien and Erikson 1996, Norpoth 1996, Campbell and Garand 2000, Campbell 2000, Hibbs 2000). Does that mean that an examination of candidates’ strategies is worthless as it does not matter what they do?

I contend that the reason campaigns seem not to matter is because expected winners choose strategies that will guide them to victory. These strategies are carefully considered at every step of the electoral process. Expected winners make decisions which will prevent their opponents from becoming relevant in the election so that the events throughout the campaign season prevent the election from becoming anything other than predictable. In other words, the reason campaigns seem not to matter much of the time is because candidates tend to take smart, strategic decisions that help to ensure repeated success.

Plan of this dissertation

Chapter 2 outlines a theory of the strategies that expected winners take in their elections. It will explain why some candidates might avoid discussing their political beliefs and policy

goals as well as why they might avoid engaging their opponents. It will present a definition of “normal winners,” which are candidates expected to win their elections, and discuss the ways such candidates attempt to prevent their opponents from becoming visible and relevant in their elections. They are expected to avoid discussing all controversial issues and do everything they can to keep people from paying close attention to the candidates and the choice they will have to make on election day.

Chapter 3 will include the first empirical test of this theory. Hundreds of websites from the 2008 congressional and gubernatorial elections will be tested to determine whether the patterns outlined in Chapter 2 hold. Normal winners, on average, are found to discuss fewer controversial issues on their websites, discuss their opponents less frequently, and are even less likely to mention their party affiliation than other candidates

Chapter 4 looks at the ways candidates spend their campaign funds. The conventional wisdom is that incumbents in safe elections spend little money because they would prefer not to raise money (Jacobson 2004) or because they want to keep a war chest (Goldenberg, Traugott, and Baumgartner 1986, Goidel and Gross 1994, Hersch and McDougall 1994, Box-Steffensmeier 1996, Hogan 2001) is challenged. The fundraising activities and expenditures of normal winners reveal that, even when expected to win easily, they continue to ask for donations and then give large sums of money to their party or other candidates rather than saving it in a war chest. Since neither of these theories holds, it seems expected winners make the choice to refrain from spending all of their money as a strategic plan to avoid making the election more competitive.

Chapter 5 examines televised campaign advertisements to look at another aspect of the

strategies of candidates. Many normal winners do not air ads during their elections and the ones who do tend to present very little information to voters. Like with their websites, normal winners tend to avoid discussing controversial issues and their opponents, instead preferring to focus on themselves and noncontroversial issues, like their support of safety from terrorists and a good educational system.

2 A THEORY OF CANDIDATE STRATEGY

Many different aspects of candidates and elections factor into the campaign decisions of those seeking office. While many researchers have examined the specific factors, I seek to look at the overall picture of the election and determine candidate strategies based on their judgment of the election. We need to move beyond looking at the specific factors and look for a new method of judging campaign strategies that will provide an explanation as to how the expectations that candidates have about how their likelihood of winning will influence their decisions throughout the election season. How can we differentiate between different types of elections in a way that will allow an investigation into the strategies candidates pursue?

What Is a “Race?”

Elections can take many different forms. Some are very competitive while others, barring any particularly unusual circumstances, can be predicted long in advance. On each election day, voters go to the polls to decide between different candidates in different “races.” We generally use the word race to describe all of these contests but many cases, elections are not competitive enough to really be considered races.

So what is a race? First, it must have two or more candidates competing for the position. An uncontested election is not interesting; if there are not two sides, the outcome

is predetermined. While there are certainly uncontested elections, most meet this requirement.

A second criterion for an election to be considered a race is that either side could win. This means that an unknown candidate in the contest against a seasoned veteran does not make it a race; in most cases, these candidates are not viable. Often, even major party candidates do not really have a chance in many constituencies. A heavily Republican area will almost never elect a Democrat; extenuating circumstances would need to exist to make the Democrat a possible winner of the election. Despite that, both parties will put a candidate in nearly every electoral contest. Therefore, a race must not just have two candidates but must have two candidates who each have the potential to win.

Third, an electoral contest is only a race if some people have not made their decision about which candidate to choose. If all voters have already chosen between the candidates, the second criterion is not met because both candidates do not have a chance of winning. If no one can be persuaded by the candidates, their strategies do not matter. If there is nothing that candidates can do to influence the votes of the people, the contest is predetermined and not really a race.

My fundamental thesis is that normal winners will do whatever they can to prevent their elections from becoming races. In all of the things that normal winners can control, they will attempt to avoid the election becoming close. All of the specifics in this essay are based on this central expectation.

How Often Do Races Occur?

These qualifications are fairly hard to meet. In many constituencies, one candidate wins with a large portion of the vote and voters were not even aware of the other candidate(s) in the contest. In most election years, at least 90 percent of candidates running for reelection for the House of Representatives win. Well over half of these incumbents amass more than 60 percent of the two-party vote. Even when an open seat is contested, close to half of the winners get more than 60 percent of the two-party vote (Jacobson 2004).

One reason so many of these candidates win by such large margins is because of a general lack of knowledge about challengers. When asked to name the candidates in an upcoming election for the House, only about half of voters can recall the name of the incumbent candidate; less than 20 percent can name the challenger in most years (Jacobson 2004). While the case of House elections may be more extreme than some other elections, such as gubernatorial or Senate elections, even fewer people know the names of the challengers in many state and local races.

This implies that real races are not very common. If almost no one in the district knows the name of one of the candidates, that candidate has little to no chance of winning. For the most part, people have already decided which way to vote.

This leaves three different types of elections. Some elections are uncontested. While this situation is the favorite of candidates since it guarantees victory, there is little that a candidate can do to ensure that no other candidates enter the race. Second, many elections are competitive races, in which either candidate could win. These elections are difficult to predict and candidates have little certainty over the outcome. The third type of election is

somewhere in the middle: an expected winner has competition but the other candidate is not a serious threat. When expected winners do have a competitor, there may be things that can be done to prevent the opponent from becoming serious. While this scenario is not as ideal as having no opponent at all, it is much easier to be successful than elections with competitive opponents.

Elections that are won easily can help to lay the groundwork for future elections. Why would anyone want to challenge a candidate who is nearly guaranteed success? If expected winners can make it look as though they can win any election by large majorities, strong potential challengers may choose to avoid running, as failure is a near certainty. By making decisions that will help to ensure easy success, these candidates may help to create careers as politicians, not just single terms. This prevents serious challenges in the future and helps to keep the officials in office for the long-term.

What can a candidate do to ensure that an opponent stays non-competitive? If the normal, expected winner can set the tone of the election, there may be opportunities to prevent a non-serious opponent from becoming more competitive. What strategy might such a candidate take to keep the election easy to win?

Theories of Candidate Strategy

To be able to develop a theory of candidate strategy, it is necessary to assume that candidates want to win their elections. While it is possible that some candidates have other goals in running, such as a third party candidate who wants to bring attention to a specific issue, it appears that candidates try to win their elections. Between the time, money, and energy spent by candidates during elections, it seems that candidates want to win.

Most elections have an expected, “normal” outcome, in which the voting patterns of voters continue from one election to the next. Many voters are partisans, who will vote for the same party in each electoral contest. There may be short-term forces that change the portion of the vote one party’s candidate receives, but one candidate is still usually expected to win. For example, if a Democrat has won the last three elections with 70% of the vote, even if the country is hostile toward Democrats in the next election, that candidate is still likely to win. He or she may only receive 60% of the vote, but that will still be more than enough to secure victory. The underlying party affiliation of voters is enough to make the election predictable, and therefore “normal” (Converse 1966). Such elections will have one “normal winner,” who is expected to win on election day. Any opponents to this expected winner are “normal losers,” because they are projected to be soundly defeated. “Race” candidates are those in elections with no clear expected winner and loser.

In normal elections, expected winners are often able to gather support even from members of the opposing party. While some will continue to support their party’s candidate, others will vote for the candidate that they know will win. If the voters of a district are 60% Democratic, a Democratic normal winner is likely to receive even more of the vote than the party affiliation shows. When a Republican candidate becomes competitive, Republican voters are likely to switch their support to this candidate rather than the Democrat. When the election stays non-competitive, the normal winner is likely to continue to pull these votes from the other side. These elections are ideal for normal winners; they help make success easy in the election. What can a normal winner do to keep pulling these votes from the opposing party’s voters and guarantee success?

Many events outside of the hands of the candidates can influence the choices that voters make, such as a presidential election influencing the views of voters on candidates for lower offices. But many things are within the control of normal winners. As much as normal winners can, they are expected to choose strategies that will allow them to win as easily as possible. Assuming they have some control over the tenor of the election, normal winners are expected to do everything they can to avoid the election becoming a race. What are the things a normal winner can do to prevent a “race?”

Discussing Issues

Candidates have the ability, to some degree, to create an image of themselves in the minds of voters. They have the opportunity to create a message for voters which includes information about their policy beliefs, specific plans, and agendas if elected to office. Or, they can be ambiguous with their messages, leaving out many of the details of their goals and opinions. Candidates have some ability to choose how much they will talk about issues throughout their campaigns. They can choose to tell voters their plans for their time in office, or they can avoid discussing such matters. While candidates may not have complete control over their ability to discuss issues (if a reporter asks a pointed question, candidates cannot always completely evade the issue), they do in many outlets, such as advertisements. What would normal winners be expected to do in such circumstances?

One way for normal winners to avoid having their elections turn into races may be to avoid discussing position issues. Position issues are inherently controversial and at least two sided (Stokes 1966). If a normal winner starts publicly discussing a position issue, it could invite the normal loser into a public debate. It could give the opportunity to the

normal loser to express him or herself and cause voters to start paying more attention to the election. Because some voters will disagree with the point of view of the normal winner on position issues, they may begin to question whether they support this candidate overall. At that point, some voters may begin to turn to the normal loser when they otherwise would not have noticed this second candidate, creating a closer election than would otherwise be expected.

A complete lack of issues throughout the election could be problematic, however. If voters notice that candidates do not appear to tell them anything about their views, it could hurt their electoral chances. While some research has shown that discussing few issues can increase the appeal of candidates to voters (Downs 1957), others have found that it can hurt the chances of some candidates (Shepsle 1972). If normal winners are concerned about the possibility of becoming too vague and ambiguous on issues and losing supporters as a result, they may choose to discuss valence issues as an alternative to position issues.

Valence issues do not provide normal losers the same opportunity to become involved in the public debate. According to Stokes (1966), valence issues are issues “on which parties or leaders are differentiated not by what they advocate but by the degree to which they are linked in the public’s mind with conditions or goals or symbols of which almost everyone approves or disapproves.” Whereas position issues may invite normal winners into the discussion, valence issues, about which nearly everyone agrees, do not invite the normal loser to participate. There is no need to contest claims of support for motherhood and apple pie. We all support America, education, and the troops. If a normal winner says he or she supports one of those things, no normal winner can respond by saying he or she

opposes it. Valence issues can help to keep the amount of debate between the candidates minimal, which could prevent a race from occurring.

In the parts of their campaigns normal winners can control, some may choose not to explain their views on any issues as all. However, when they do discuss issues, they are expected to primarily discuss valence issues rather than position issues.

Talking to Opponents

In some elections, the candidates will frequently discuss and debate the issues and the facts of the election. Many candidates will tell voters how much their opponents will hurt America or that they are lying about how they will vote on issues. The candidates may also participate in organized debates, in which voters can compare and contrast the plans of the competitors.

When such discussions happen, it may become easier for voters to compare the candidates. When the candidates are not speaking to each other, it is like they are running the 100 meter dash on opposite sides of the track. It is hard to tell the differences between their speeds because they are so far apart. The same is true for politicians; if the candidates are not comparing themselves or debating, it may be difficult for voters to see the differences between them.

Normal winners are unlikely to want voters to see these differences. If voters can compare the candidates because they are talking to or about each other, it means they are paying attention to the views of both candidates and the normal winner is taking positions on issues. When voters are comparing the candidates, it means voters could choose either candidate and either candidate could win the election. Normal winners want to avoid this

race situation by making it difficult for voters to see the differences between them and their opponents.

Another potential problem for normal winners in this situation is simply that the normal losers become more visible to voters. In many cases, normal losers are nearly invisible, with nearly no name recognition and much less knowledge by voters of their opinions on issues than for their opponents. However, when normal winners are talking to or about normal losers, it helps bring attention to these candidates, which they were unlikely to have otherwise. Normal winners would not be expected to do things that would bring recognition to their opponents so they are unlikely to discuss their opponents whenever possible.

The discussion of horse race polls may also bring attention to the normal loser. If polls are released that claim the election is close, regardless of whether or not it is true, it can make the contest appear to be close to voters. Since voters do not conduct their own public opinion polls, they tend to believe the polls released by campaigns. If voters believe that the contest is a race, it can lead them to pay attention to the normal loser, who they might otherwise ignore. Therefore, normal winners are likely to make it appear as though they are winning easily and by large margins. They are likely to avoid discussing horse race polling that gives the appearance that a race is occurring, especially if the polls that say the election is close. It draws attention to the election and gives credibility to the normal loser which can make the election appear to be a race.

Relationships with other Politicians

Beyond their opponents, normal winners may not want to be tied to other politicians. Whether it is the president, a member of Congress, or a governor, discussions of politicians

can be similar to discussions of issues. Other politicians can be controversial and, whether positive or negative, discussing them can cause the election to change and create a controversy that normal winners are likely to try to avoid. Even the most loved politician is not loved by everyone and has the potential to create controversy if associated with a candidate.

The problem of association for normal winners is that other politicians have views, some of which are well known. For example, if a candidate compares him or herself to President Barack Obama, voters may begin to assume the candidate has the same views as the president on everything. Even in places throughout the country where Obama is popular, voters may dislike some of the things he has done in office. If voters start believing the normal winner agrees with the things they dislike about Obama, it could hurt the candidate's chances of success because now voters have started to pinpoint his or her opinions and can judge accordingly. The accuracy of those assessments may even be wrong, but voters still feel like they know the candidates and may start to judge the candidates based on their issue positions, which would not have occurred otherwise.

Personal Information

Many candidates choose to discuss their personal lives and histories with voters. Haynes, Flowers, and Gurian (2002), drawing on Scammell (1998), discuss this as a possible strategy of campaigning. Scammell discusses two types of campaign strategies: competitive positioning, in which candidates define themselves based on where they are in relation to other candidates, such as with polling, and substantive positioning, in which candidates define themselves by the issues. Hanyes, et al. introduce a third: neutral or nonstrategic positioning. This type of campaigning includes such things as information about campaign

events, personal information, and other forms of information that are disseminated by every campaign but are not about issues or the other candidates.

Based on the name, it is pretty obvious that this is viewed by the authors as necessary but not a way to win elections. However, focusing on these aspects of a candidate can be quite strategic. It allows candidates to talk about something, so it appears as though they have something to say, but not talk about anything that could create a race. Personal information is very unlikely to anger any voters and can help to make a candidate seem more relatable.

Campaign Spending

Another way for normal winners to avoid races is to limit spending. Though normal winners generally have the ability to raise large quantities of money, if they spend all of that money, they might attract attention to the contest. Using money to advertise could cause people to pay attention to the election that would have otherwise ignored it. When candidates spend large sums of money on their contests, they are more likely to lose (Jacobson 2004). While it is commonly believed that spending is the effect of a close race, in that candidates spend more reactively when they have a more difficult election, some candidates may believe the opposite: spending a lot of money causes a close election. When candidates are spending more money in an election, it is usually because they are advertising more. When candidates advertise more, voters may start paying more attention to their message. When people start paying attention to an otherwise largely ignored election, it can turn the contest into a race. In order to prevent this from happening, normal winners may avoid spending copious amounts of money.

Turnout

Some citizens will choose to vote in every election; others will sit out each year. A third group exists which will choose to vote some of the time. This group can be influenced by the tone of the elections that are occurring. High turnout may occur because people are generally excited about one or more contests on the ballot.

Certainly, some candidates have little ability to influence turnout. In a presidential election year, for example, most of the other contests on the ballot will not motivate people to get to the polls if the presidential election has not already done so. In other years, however, some candidates lower on the ballot may have the ability to manipulate turnout. If high turnout occurs because people are paying attention to a particular election with a normal winner in the race, then something has gone wrong for that candidate. In this situation, people are paying attention to a contest that would normally be largely ignored, which means it has turned into a race. Since normal winners want to avoid turning the election into a race, they should not encourage a high turnout election.

This does not mean that candidates will stop their mobilization efforts on election day. Candidates will certainly want to encourage their supporters to get to the polls and participate. However, they will not spend their energy prior to election day encouraging a high turnout election.

Conclusion

Candidates can change their strategies throughout an election. As the situation dictates, they can attempt to become more or less visible to voters. They can choose the number of advertisements they release and the content of them. They can choose to focus on personal

matters or policy issues. If normal losers becomes more active in elections and start to gain traction with voters, the normal winners can respond as they see fit.

Normal winners never want to help normal losers to become well recognized and active in an election. If a normal loser can gain attention independently, as happens in some elections, the normal winner can do little about it other than change strategy and respond. If normal winners can control the tone and content of elections, at least to some degree, the pieces of their campaigns should reveal the strategies they choose to take in an effort to understand how they attempt to hold back their competitors. Through examining several aspects of candidates' strategies, it will be possible to test these theories of limited content and limited spending empirically in the next three chapters.

3 VALENCE OVER VALUE: A LACK OF INFORMATION ON THE NET

In 2006, Ohio's 18th congressional district needed a new representative. Republican Bob Ney, who had held the seat since 1995, had been implicated in relationship to the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal and several Democrats vied for his seat. Ney ran for reelection initially but dropped out in August, leaving Democrat Zack Space and Republican State Senator Joy Padgett as the top contenders for the seat.

The election was expected to be close from the beginning. Like much of Ohio, the 18th district was split nearly in half. The voters had narrowly chosen President Bush over his opponents in 2000 and 2004 but the Republican name had been tarnished by the actions of Ney. Additionally, the country as a whole was leaning more Democratic. President Bush's approval rating was in decline and the Democrats were pushing to take back the House of Representatives from the Republicans.

Knowing that the election would be close, Space went on the offensive. He filled his website with information about his positions on issues. He discussed the need for improving medical research by using stem cells, saying "This nation can, and should lead the way in researching this, the most promising medical development we have seen in decades." He promoted the "need to provide health care to every American" and outlined his plan to withdraw troops from Iraq by "transition[ing] our presence from an occupying force to one consisting primarily of special operations forces" and "building a coalition of nations

committed to securing the goals of independence, freedom, and democracy in Iraq” (Space 2006).

He also frequently discussed his opponents on his website. When Ney was still attempting to be reelected, Space linked in an article called “Ney Runs To The Border To Escape Failures On Illegal Immigration” and explained that voters were ready to “fire” Ney. After Ney withdrew from the election and was replaced with Padgett, Space linked to the article “Ney’s Handpicked Replacement ‘Flattered’ To Be Chosen By Corrupt Congressman.” Throughout the election season, Space continued to explain his position on issues and why voters should avoid his opponent (Space 2006). The election was expected to be close. While many elections can be predicted in advance, polling firms shied away from making a prediction on the 18th district. For the months leading up to the election, even into November, the race was considered to be a toss-up (Cook Political Report). After using a strategy in which he openly discussed his positions and ideals, Space ended up winning soundly with 62% of the vote.

The 2008 election for Space was a bit different. He was an incumbent this time and Barack Obama was running for the presidency. President Bush’s approval ratings were at an all time low. Space was likely to maintain his hold on his seat, with projections saying that he would defeat his Republican opponent (Cook Political Report). Space took a very different approach to campaigning this time around.

Space’s website was designed completely differently, with one key section missing: issues. He no longer used his website to explain his position on stem cells or Iraq. In fact, there was almost no information at all about Space. He still had a news section with links

to articles but very few provided information about Space as a politician. There was a small amount of information in the articles, such as that he planned to “attend [an] NRA Banquet in Zanesville” and his opinion that NAFTA was “irresponsible” but the bulk of the articles explained that he had been endorsed by groups like seniors and veterans and that he would provide “sensible leadership” for his district (Space 2008).

The expectations about the outcome of the election were much different in 2008 than in 2006. Now, Space was considered a normal winner; his election was not expected to be a close race. He altered his campaign to reflect his change of standing, limiting the amount of information provided to voters. Rather than discussing positions, he discussed being a “Friend of [the] Farm Bureau.” His strategy appeared to be much different than two years prior. In the end, he successfully defeated Republican Fred Dailey by 20% of the vote.

In 2010, Space found himself in an election that was different than the two prior. This time, the Republicans would have the advantage nation-wide. In his district, with a majority of voters tending to favor the Republican party, he could face a strong challenge. Early in the election, his seat was considered leaning Democratic, but that was changed to toss up about two months before the election (Cook Political Report). While the situation was different than 2006 because Space was now an incumbent, the outcome was just as much in question. What would Space’s strategy be this time around?

While the overall format of Space’s website in 2010 was the same as 2008, the information within it had changed. The news section was still the best source of information about the campaign on the website but nearly every article was now dedicated to Space’s opponent, Bob Gibbs, rather than being about Space himself. Two years earlier, he had focused

on his own campaign, rather than his opponent. This time, he chose a strategy more like he had in 2006 and used his website to attack his opponent. He had stories like “New TV ad: The Gibbs plan for positions he can’t outsource? Fill them with illegal immigrants.” He claimed “Gibbs’ campaign to deceive voters reaches new low” and “Go-Along Bob Gibbs chooses: Blind loyalty to party leaders...again!” Nearly half of Space’s stories referred to his opponent as “Go-Along Bob Gibbs” in the title.

In total, Space included 36 articles that attacked Gibbs for his political views, fundraising activities, and relationship with the Republican party between August and election day. In contrast, he included just four articles that focused on his own candidacy; three that described endorsements he had received from the NRA and veterans groups and a single article that focused on his vision for American and Ohio which was little more than the text of a television ad he ran at the end of October. It provided just two paragraphs about his goals to “transform Southeastern and East Central Ohio” if reelected (Space 2010).

On November 2, 2010, Space was defeated by Gibbs, who received 54% of the vote. From the beginning, the election was expected to be close. As a result, Space seemed to take a very different strategy than he had two years earlier. He started his attack on Gibbs shortly after the Republican primary, much like he had done against his opponents in 2006. Alternatively, his 2008 focused on his own campaign and goals. Why did he make this change between the elections? Why did he shift the focus of his campaign efforts? How might the information on websites like Space’s help to explain the strategy candidates use throughout their elections?

Zack Space ran in three very different elections. In each, his focus appeared to change,

based on the information on his website. If normal winners do choose strategies that reflect their beliefs about their chances of winning, websites could provide a place to examine the strategy that is used. By looking at their websites, it can be determined whether normal winners avoid discussing position issues and their opponents in this element of the campaign and discuss valence issues and personal information instead.

In this chapter, I examine the use of campaign websites to provide information to voters about the goals and ideals of candidates. These websites are all campaign websites, not official political websites. Members of Congress, governors, and many other elected representatives have official websites that are provided by the national, state, or local government for the officials to provide information to citizens. Those tend to have standard formats and the types of information can be limited. While politicians may hope that the information on such websites attracts voters to their cause, they are limited in their control over the content. They cannot include campaign information or any other information that exists outside the official duties of the job. Additionally, only already established politicians have official websites, making it difficult to judge the strategies of challengers and open seat candidates. Therefore, only campaign websites, which allow much more discretion by the candidates, are used.

What value can campaign websites have in a search for candidate strategy? How can they provide insight into the expectations candidates have about their elections?

Campaign Websites

Examining the strategy of political candidates can be difficult as very few parts of campaigns are completely within their control. When a reporter asks a candidate to respond

to a question, it can provide a glimpse of the candidate candidly; however, it does not say much about the overall strategy. When candidates run television advertisements, it shows a bit about the strategies of candidates; however, the time is usually limited to 30 to 60 seconds and not much can be said during that time. Websites are one of the best places to look for a complete strategy by the candidates.

One reason websites provide a good explanation of candidates' strategies is that they have essentially unlimited space; candidates can choose exactly how much of their message they want to provide to voters. If they want voters to know pages worth of information about a topic, they can include all of that information. If they want voters only to know a little about their thoughts, only that information needs to be included. Candidates can also post links to outside material, pictures from the campaign trail, and text of speeches that are not possible in most other outlets. While other campaign materials like television ads are important to consider, as will be done in Chapter 5, websites provide a more complete picture of candidates due to the amount of available space.

Second, the material has not been spun by the media. While candidates can link to news articles on their websites that have been interpreted by reporters, they can choose exactly which articles to include. The issues and biographies they include are in their own words (or, often, the words of a campaign staffer that have been approved by the candidate). The message goes directly to the reader with no middleman interpreting it. Many of the other parts of campaigns are spun before they reach voters. While the contents of websites can also be spun and used by the news, the exact text on websites has not been touched by anyone outside of the campaign, so it reflects the exact views of the candidates.

Finally, nearly every candidate has a website. Even for local elections, most candidates create a website to promote their message since the costs are minimal. Many candidates choose not to send out mailers to voters and others choose not to create television ads (Kahn & Kenney 1999). Many elections see very little coverage in the media. Using those materials can therefore be hard to analyze as the strategies of candidates with little advertising or news coverage cannot be determined. However, campaign websites do not face these challenges since nearly all candidates create them.

Of course, analyzing campaign strategies based on websites also creates some challenges. One problem with candidates' websites is that the average voters does not look at them. Many voters choose not to research the goals and views of candidates; many of those who do inquire about the candidates are likely to use information that is provided to them through the local newspaper or television, not information that requires time spent searching on the internet. However, candidates know that voters *can* visit their websites and prepare the materials in a way that will attract the support of those voters.

Candidates also know that journalists may visit their websites for information. Websites offer quotable material to journalists without the need to conduct formal interviews, which can be time consuming or difficult to schedule. They provide the exact positions candidates take on issues, in the candidates' own words, which makes it easier to identify those positions to voters. They also provide journalists information about which issues candidates believe are important in the election. Because websites require minimal effort on the behalf of journalists and journalists have little time to devote to most elections, they are likely to use candidates' websites to make their jobs easier. This allows the information

candidates publish online to reach well beyond the individuals who actually viewed the material. Therefore, it is a useful place to look when trying to determine the strategy of political candidates.

To think a little more about the strategies candidates take in their campaigns, it is important to consider the potential types of information on candidates' websites.

Political Issues

Political candidates have the option to discuss as many or as few political issues as they desire on their websites. Some outline clear plans for their time in office by explaining the issues that are important to them and the ways they plan to achieve their goals. Mary Bono Mack, a Republican from California's 45th congressional district, is one such candidate who explained her vision very clearly on her 2008 campaign website by taking a position on energy policy. Her website's home page included a picture of two children looking at windmills. Under the picture, the website read,

Congresswoman Mary Bono Mack has a plan to lower fuel costs and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Bono Macks comprehensive energy solution will expand and diversify Americas energy portfolio, creating new American energy sources and promoting a more secure energy future. This includes increasing domestic exploration of fossil fuels in an environmentally sensitive manner; bringing more refineries online; expanding clean energy sources like nuclear power; increasing renewable energies such as wind, solar, and geothermal; investing in alternative energy options to power our lives; and encouraging greater energy efficiency nationwide. Our energy needs will only continue to

grow, and Bono Macks plan would help meet these needs both now and into the future, helping keep our economy strong for our children. (Bono Mack 2008)

Mack has clearly explained her views on energy policy and what she would like to accomplish.

Candidates may also choose to discuss valence issues on their websites. These are issues with little room to disagree; they include things Americans generally all want. Jon Huntsman included several valence issues on his website in his reelection campaign for governor of Utah in 2008. He wrote,

Utahns elected business leader and former United States diplomat Jon Huntsman as governor in November 2004. Governor Huntsman is working to breathe new life into Utah by bolstering economic development, enriching public education, maintaining unparalleled quality of life, and enhancing confidence in public service. (Hunstman 2008)

He has not told voters anything about how he plans to achieve such goals. What will he do to increase economic development? How will he pay for the costs associated with improving the public education system? Voters are left with little information about the actual positions of Huntsman, only knowing that he has lofty goals. He has provided no details on how he plans to achieve them.

Candidates have the option to discuss one or both types of issues. Or, they can choose to discuss neither type of issue. When candidates are trying to attract attention, they may be more likely to use position issues as they can energize voters and force an opponent to

respond. However, in the case of a normal winner, the candidate is already ahead. Voters have largely tuned out the election and decided on their preferred candidate. The election is not a competitive race, and the normal winner would like to keep it that way. Because of that, normal winners would be expected to avoid discussing position issues. They have the potential to alienate voters that would otherwise vote for the candidate. If a voter liked Mary Bono Mack prior to visiting her website but finds out her views are different than those of the voter, it may encourage the voter to learn about her challenger. It may also provide an opening for the challenger to become more visible to voters by publicly discussing the same issue as Mack, making the election more competitive than it would have otherwise been. If normal winners have a goal of avoiding competitive races, they are not expected to discuss position issues when possible.

At the same time, candidates often cannot avoid talking about issues completely. If a normal winner says nothing about issues, voters may notice and question their beliefs. The ambiguity may cause voters to question whether the candidate actually stands for anything since they have no idea of what he or she wants to achieve in office (Shepsle 1972). However, since valence issues require no position taking and are liked by virtually everyone, there is no downside to a normal winner discussing such issues. There is no other side of the issue that voters may prefer that will cause them to switch their support to the normal loser. These have very little potential to make the election more competitive. Therefore, when normal winners want to avoid elections becoming more competitive races but feel compelled to discuss some issues, they are expected to discuss primarily valence issues.

Personal Information

Many candidates also discuss their personal history, education, family, and careers on their websites. Jill Long Thompson, Democratic candidate for governor of Indiana in 2008, discussed some of her background on her website. This included,

Jill Long Thompson, 54, grew up on the family farm outside of Larwill in Whitley County. She lives with her husband Don Thompson, a commercial airline pilot, in Marshall County on a farm near Argos. Most recently, Long Thompson served as CEO and Senior Fellow at the National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy. Jill Long Thompson was the first in her family to graduate from college. She earned an M.B.A. (1978) and Ph.D (1984) in Business from Indiana University, and a B.S. in Business from Valparaiso University (1974). (Long Thompson 2008)

This was just a small portion of the personal information about Thompson on her website, where she also discussed her previous employment and that she is a “fighter for working families.”

When candidates choose the personal information to include on their websites, they never choose anything that would offend any voters, even though such information may exist. Candidates never discuss cheating on their spouses or their addictions to drugs and alcohol on their website; candidates only focus on the positive information about their past. Voters would be very unlikely to judge a candidate like Thompson negatively because of where she went to school or because she is married. Even the biggest Purdue fans would be unlikely to vote against her because she went to Indiana. There is little chance

such information could alienate voters or make the election more competitive so there is no reason to expect that normal winners would avoid discussing their history. Therefore, normal winners are expected to discuss personal information freely on their websites.

Discussions of Opponent(s) and other Politicians

Candidates can also discuss their opponents and other politicians. Some candidates choose to include extended information about their opponents on their websites.

Jim Russell, a Republican challenger for the House of Representatives from New York, frequently discussed his opponent on his 2008 campaign website. He wrote,

For **nearly twenty years** now, this Congressional District has been represented by **multi-millionaire Nita Lowey**, who has voted **against immigration control** and **in favor of affirmative action**. She voted for **NAFTA**, which has put millions of American citizens out of work, and she voted to increase the number of **visas for foreign technical workers**. Nita Lowey's policies have contributed toward the decline of the **American middle class** while a **greedy global elite** profits by **equalizing our wages** with those of third-world workers." He continued, "**Nita Lowey says** that we shouldn't be **dependent on foreign oil**, but yet she **co-sponsored** the Arctic Wilderness Act which has **prevented any oil exploration or drilling** in the vast Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. No candidate cares more about our **environment** than I do, but the fact remains that in 2006 **only 6%** of America's domestic energy supply came from **renewable sources**, while **58% came from oil and natural gas**. We must **focus our national scientific talent** to reverse this situation as soon as possible,

but, although multi-millionaire Lowey might not know it, **Americans need relief NOW from the ever-increasing prices of gasoline and home heating oil**, especially during these economic hard times. Therefore, **I support the immediate limited and careful utilization of our domestic oil reserves**. (Russell 2008, emphasis in original)

While the website does contain some information about Russell's positions on issues, it is only in comparison to his opponent. Rather than simply presenting his views to encourage voters to choose him, he tells voters both why they should vote for him and why they should not vote for Lowey.

Similarly, Bill Haas, challenging Todd Akin for a House seat in Missouri in 2008, talked about the outgoing president. In addition to comparing himself to his opponent, he chose to compare himself and Akin to President Bush in an attempt to encourage voters to favor him. His website read,

So if you're tired of Bush's politics, tired of GOP politics, and tired of business as usual in Congress, vote for Bill Haas for US Congress, and help me get elected by your financial contribution and recommending me to others. You will be removing one of the most conservative of Bush's favorite congressmen, and getting a real good one in return. (Haas 2008)

He hoped that the voters would choose him on the grounds that he would work in opposition to the policies that were unpopular at the time, though he told voters little other than that he would be different.

One other form of a politician talking about his or her opponent comes in the form of discussing tracking polls or candidates' chances of winning the election. Bob Lord, running for Congress in Arizona, included a discussion of the party affiliation of voters on his 2008 campaign website in the hopes the election would appear to be very close. His website read,

Congressional District 3's voter registration numbers have changed substantially since 2006 and are setting the stage for an increasingly competitive race in November, statistics show. Since October 2006, 71 percent of new voters in the district registered for a party other than Republican. Only 29 percent of new voters registered as Republican. The raw numbers show exactly 34,647 new registrants out of a total of 48,499 have chosen to register for any other party than Republican. (Lord 2008)

Lord was a Democrat challenging a Republican incumbent. He attempted to demonstrate that the election would be close by explaining that most of the new voters in the district would support him, rather than the Republican incumbent. He hoped this information would help voters to see the election was very close and encourage them to start paying more attention to both candidates.

Normal losers tend to have nearly no name recognition among voters. Normal winners are more likely to be known by name by constituents. When a normal winner decides to discuss his or her opponent, it may lead voters to begin to recognize the name of a candidate they might otherwise not know. Normal winners would likely avoid bringing attention to these candidates by choosing not to mention opponents by name. Discussing opponents

could cause the election to become a more competitive race than it would have been without the attention. Normal winners are expected to avoid engaging their opponents.

Normal winners also would be expected to avoid discussing other politicians in most cases. Even popular politicians are disliked by some voters. And unpopular politicians retain some supporters, even at their lowest approval ratings. By comparing themselves or their opponents to other politicians, normal winners risk encouraging voters to think about both candidates differently and assume they hold the views of the mentioned politicians. If normal winners do compare themselves or their opponents to other politicians, it has the potential to attract some new voters. However, it also has the potential to cause voters to dislike them if the voters feel strongly in support or opposition to the other politicians. That could cause voters to think more positively about the normal loser and, with these new supporters, the normal loser may become a more competitive opponent. Normal winners would be expected to avoid such behaviors. When possible, normal winners are predicted not to discuss other politicians in relation to themselves or their opponents.

Finally, polls remind voters that an election is happening. While the voters may realize they need to vote soon, they may not think about the fact that there is another candidate in the election that they need to consider. Even if a poll says that the normal winner is going to win by a landslide, it could still encourage voters to think about the contest and remember there is more than one candidate in the election. When voters begin to notice the other candidate(s) in the election, the election could become more competitive. Therefore, normal winners are not expected to discuss polls on their websites.

In summary, there are several expectations about the actions of normal winners who

have the goal of avoiding their elections becoming competitive races. They are expected to avoid discussing position issues, their opponents, other politicians, and polling information. However, they are expected to freely discuss valence issues and personal information as they are unlikely to increase competition in the election.

Data

All of these above expectations are contingent upon candidates controlling the form of speech. One of the best places to examine expectations about the types of information candidates discuss when they have complete control of the language is their campaign websites. Campaign websites are one of the most open forums for candidates to discuss exactly what they believe their candidacy means for voters.

To analyze websites, images of candidates' websites from 2008 are used. These websites are available from the Library of Congress and archive.org's Wayback Machine. These two organizations have archived millions of websites by taking "snapshots," which are pictures of websites, over the last decade. These snapshots are taken of websites regularly; the Wayback Machine takes snapshots of many news websites close to once an hour. Almost all national political candidates' websites are available from one or both of these sources. For this analysis, nearly all candidates' websites for the House of Representatives, Senate, and governorships are included. In most cases, snapshots of candidates' websites are taken about once a week in the months leading up to an election. By September, campaigns are in full swing and nearly all candidates have websites that display the strategy that they are taking. Therefore, the first available snapshot after September 1 is used.

There are a few websites not included in these analyses. Only elections in which both a

Democrat and a Republican were running were used; where there is no candidate from one of the major parties, the strategy of normal winners may be a little different than elections with both. While there may be a third party candidate in these elections, a major party candidate's risk of losing the election is even lower when only competing against third party candidates so they may not be as concerned with sticking to the strategy of avoiding controversial issues. While normal winners are extremely likely to win, there is always a risk that voters could turn on them; that risk is much diminished when only one of the major parties has a candidate in the election. All third party candidates are also excluded because not a single third party candidate was successful in the 2008 election nor was any even in close contention. The most successful third party candidate did not receive even 25% of the vote total, making all third party candidates normal losers. Additionally, the theory outlined rests on the assumption that all candidates want to win their elections. However, this may not always be true for third party candidates, who may have other goals in mind (Canon 1993), so they are not used to this analysis.

There are a few elections that had a candidate from both major parties that have been left out of the dataset because one of the websites was not available through either of the sources. In almost all cases, the normal loser, despite being a major party candidate, lost so badly that snapshots were never taken of his or her website or no website was ever created. For example, Charles Hargrave's website was not accessible from the Library of Congress or the Wayback Machine. The Republican in California's 9th congressional district earned less than 10% of the vote in 2008.

This leaves 352 elections for the House of Representatives, 29 Senate elections, and 9

gubernatorial elections for a total of 780 candidates, half of which are Democrats and half are Republicans.

While candidates' websites can vary, they have some similarities. The homepage, or the first screen of the website, tends to have the overall message that candidates want to provide to voters. For some, candidates provide information about their political views, opinions, and why to avoid their opponents. Such is the case for Bill Sali's website, which is shown in Figure 3.1. Sali was the representative from the First District of Idaho in 2008 and was running for reelection. Almost half of the website is dedicated to discussing Walt Minnick, Sali's opponent. This includes a link to the website TheTruthAboutWalt.com, which was created by the Sali campaign, and the claim that Minnick is "to blame for high gas prices." He also discusses position issues such as the support of "English as the official language of the United States" and his support for the "repeal of the onerous estate/death tax." He seems to clearly want voters to know his views about his opponent and his policy goals more than anything else.

Alternatively, Figure 3.2 is the website of Marcy Kaptur, a veteran of the House of Representatives since 1983, when she was running for reelection in 2008. She does not mention a single position issue on her front page. Instead, she focuses on her desire to promote the "freedom to be independent" and the "freedom of opportunity and of work" with no explanation about how she plans to achieve these goals. She wants to "ensure affordable education" and "forge a health care system that works for all Ohioans." She tells voters they "can count on [her]" and references our founding fathers, saying she will "protect the freedoms our forefathers so bravely secured" but never mentions her opponent.

Rather than discuss her goals for her next term if she is reelected, she focuses on lofty issues that she provides no information about how to achieve.

Most candidates' websites, including these two, have a link that provides viewers more information about the lives of the candidates. These are titled "About Bill Sali" and "Meet Marcy" on the websites in Figures 3.1 and 3.2. These links generally tell voters of the education, families, and experiences of the candidates. While the specifics are different, nearly all candidates provide some information about their lives outside of running for Congress.

There is also usually a link that provides observers information about the policy ideals of candidates. Both Sali and Kaptur included such a link, titled "Issues" and "Agenda," respectively. There can be variation among these links because candidates have the option to choose the number and depth of their discussion of issues. Some candidates choose to discuss just a single issue while others discuss a dozen different policy goals. Some candidates provide just a few sentences about each issues while others provide paragraphs.

Many websites have additional links that can provide voters more information about themselves and their opponents. Some link to news articles, provide pictures, or explain how to get involved in the campaign. Some even blog on the campaign trail, telling voters about their experiences. Depending on the goals of the candidate, there can be wide variation in the content throughout these websites.

From each website, all content and pictures were coded. For this study, the most important codes were for the any issues that were discussed, personal information, any discussions of candidates' opponents, any other politicians, and any information about polling.

For each website, the number of times candidates discussed each of these things was tallied. All of this coding was done manually as a computer would not be able to distinguish some of the information. For example, many candidates discussed energy policies. Some, like Mary Bono Mack, outlined their plans very clearly, explaining exactly how to go about “reduc[ing] our dependence on foreign oil” and “promoting a more secure energy future.” These explanations would be coded as position issues; specific goals are included and she discusses how to achieve these goals. However, many candidates stated they had similar goals but provided no information about how they would achieve them. Those instances were coded as valence issues. Allowing a computer to code this information would not distinguish between these very different types of information. A more thorough explanation of coding procedures is available in Appendix A.

While the information throughout the website is important to examine, it is also clear that candidates choose the information for their homepages very carefully. For some, the first page will contain detailed information about their hopes and plans for their time in office. For others, the front screen tells voters how much candidates care about them with very little explanation about what they intend to do in office. Candidates seem to make strategic decisions about the full content on their websites as well as the message displayed on page one. This creates two different ways to examine the theories regarding the content of websites: the overall message throughout the website and the information chosen to be displayed on the homepage.

The Cook Political Report is used to determine which candidates are normal winners.

The Cook Political Report is “an independent, non-partisan newsletter that analyzes elections and campaigns for the US House of Representatives, US Senate, Governors and President as well as American political trends.” It rates elections based on how likely candidates are to win. Cook categorizes contests as “Solid Democrat/Republican,” “Likely Democrat/Republican,” “Lean Democrat/Republican,” or “Toss Up.” In elections where one candidate is expected to solidly win, the likely victor is considered to be a normal winner. Their opponents, who have little to no chance of victory, are normal losers. In elections that are likely, leaning, or toss ups, the candidates are considered to be in competitive races.

Throughout the election, Cook periodically revises their predictions about the outcome of elections. The first report Cook released in September of 2008 was used to determine which candidates are normal winners. By this point in the election, the candidates know the identities of their opponents and have fully devised their strategies. It is also close to the same date as the snapshots of the websites, since the first snapshot of candidates’ websites by the Library of Congress or the Wayback Machine in September was used (or, in a few cases, October if none were taken in September).

Results

The first expectation was that normal winners would be unlikely to discuss position issues throughout their websites. The results of a comparison between the number of issues discussed by type of candidate is in Table 3.1. On average, normal winners discuss just 1.76 position issues on their websites, compared to 3.89 position issues discussed by other candidates. In fact, 23% normal winners never discussed a single position issue on their entire websites.

Normal winners appear to discuss their political views and other controversial political information much less frequently than other candidates. They shy away from openly explaining their goals and how they hope to achieve them. This type of information can gain votes from the party base, but also has the possibility of alienating some voters that would have otherwise chosen the normal winner. Therefore, they avoid bringing this information to the attention of the voters.

The second expectation was that normal winners, if they did discuss issues, would only discuss valence issues. Nearly all normal winners discussed at least one valence issue, with the average normal winner discussing 4.13 valence issues throughout his or her website, which is an average of .76 fewer valence issues than other candidates, as shown in Table 3.1. While this difference is statistically significant, both types of candidates frequently tell voters that they support job creation and freedom without explaining themselves with each averaging more than four valence issues. The difference is that normal winners explain their views on almost no issues at all; other candidates at least discuss some position issues in addition to these valence issues.

There is also little difference in the frequency with which normal winners and other candidates discuss their personal lives and history, as expected. Normal winners, as well as other candidates, openly discuss their experiences and lives prior to running for Congress. There is little difference between the number of these discussions on normal winners' websites versus other types of candidates.

The next expectation was that normal winners would avoid engaging their opponents.

Normal winners are not expected to mention their opponents by name or even as “my opponent.” The differences between the number of times opponents are mentioned by type of candidate are also in Table 3.1. This is one of the strongest differences between the different types of candidates. Whereas only 34% normal winners mentioned their opponent, 72% of other candidates mentioned theirs at least once. Among candidates not expected to win their elections, opponents were mentioned an average of 2.77 times, whereas normal winners averaged just 0.68 opponent mentions each.

Normal winners were also expected to avoid discussing polling information. After examining the websites, it became clear that very few candidates discuss polls, regardless of probability of winning. So, while normal winners discuss polling less than other candidates, the differences are not statistically significant as this content is rare throughout websites.

Candidates for office can mention other politicians, as well. They have the option of talking about the president, a governor or member of Congress who is not their opponent, or anyone else who holds or has held a political office. I expected that normal winners would avoid mentioning all politicians, not just their opponents. This prediction is confirmed in Table 3.1. Again, there is strong evidence that normal winners take a strategy different than other candidates. Less than 20% of normal winners in 2008 discussed any other politician on their website. Alternatively, about 70% of normal losers mentioned another politician at some point on their website.

To look more deeply at the findings, I examined this same data using a multivariate analysis. This allows me to ensure that the findings hold when controlling for other possible

causes of the dependent variables. The reason for using the negative binomial distribution is that it works well with a dependent variable which is a count of occurrences, many of which are zero, like with this data.

The results of the multivariate analysis are in Table 3.2. The analysis contains dummy variables for candidates who are Democrats, running for the Senate, and for governor. A normal winner is anyone who was considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report.

The results of the regression have been converted to incidence rate ratios for easier interpretation. All else equal, for every time a non-normal winner discusses a position issue, a normal winner will discuss just .42 position issues, a difference which is statistically significant. In addition, normal winners discuss their opponents significantly less, with just .57 opponent mentions for every mention by other types of candidates. Normal winners discuss other politicians less frequently than other candidates, with just .39 mentions for every mention by other candidates. And, normal winners discuss polls less frequently, with .18 mentions for every mention by other candidates.

These differences are not shown with valence issues and personal information where the differences are not statistically significant. For these types of issues, normal winners act similarly to other types of candidates.

Each of these findings are as expected. Normal winners discuss controversial information on their websites much less than other candidates while continuing to discuss valence issues, which have no other side, and personal information.

These findings become even more pronounced when looking at just the homepage of candidates. The same difference of means analyses, but just for the text of the homepage

of websites, are in Table 3.3. If candidates want to emphasize certain aspects of their campaigns, it is likely they will include those messages front and center, as the first thing visitors to their website will see. Other information that does not have the same level of importance may be left off the front screen.

As with the full websites, normal winners discuss fewer position issues on their homepages than other candidates, averaging just .54 position issues per candidate. Other candidates are more likely to include these pieces of information as one of the first things they want voters who visit the site to notice. Normal winners also include fewer valence issues on their homepages than other candidates, though they discuss at least one on average. Normal winners appear to want their primary message to voters to be as noncontroversial as possible. The front page of a candidate's website is the first thing any voters will see when visiting the site. They will learn almost nothing about normal winners in this first impression.

The same is true for the discussion of opponents and other politicians. Normal winners rarely discuss anyone other than themselves on their homepages. While many other candidates do mention their opponents at least once on the first page, normal winners rarely do. Voters rarely know much about normal losers and they will not learn any new information from these pages. Normal winners tend to leave this information off of their homepages, thereby presenting a first impression to voters that focuses on their own candidacy.

Table 3.4 shows incidence rate ratios derived from a regression analysis of this data using the negative binomial distribution, like Table 3.2, but is limited to only the homepage of

the website. The findings are similar to those for the full websites. For each time other candidates discussed position issues, normal winners did just .47 times. They discussed their opponents just .10 times for each time other candidates mentioned their opponents. Other politicians were discussed .19 times for each mention by other types of candidates and polls were discussed just .18 times for each mentions by others. Each of these differences was significant. Like the full website analysis, the front pages of the websites showed little difference between normal winners and others for valence issues and personal information, with no significant differences.

Overall, normal winners provide very little information to voters on their websites. They do not provide in depth discussions of their political goals or views on issues. They do not compare themselves to their opponents. They focus on staying non-controversial and avoiding any subject matter that has the potential to increase the competition in the election.

Conclusion

Campaign websites provide candidates an easy way to display the things they care about in elections. Candidates can discuss as many or as few things on their websites given the nearly unlimited space provided. What do these websites contain?

Normal winners tend to provide some, but not too much, information. They keep the focus of their websites on their own views, not on those of their opponents. And, the views they tend to discuss contain very little information about their political beliefs. While other candidates readily discuss their opponents and their goals if elected, normal winners provide almost nothing about what they hope to achieve in office. Instead, they opt to

focus on positive, non-confrontational information. While normal winners' websites often contain at least one position issue that tells voters their views and how to achieve their goals, they are not front and center. Visitors to these websites must click on the right links to access the information, whereas other candidates are much more likely to keep that information visible as soon as voters look at their websites.

It seems Zack Space, when running for election in Ohio, was simply following the patterns of most candidates in his position. In 2006, when the victory in the election could go to either candidate, Space went on the attack. He discussed his opponent frequently and told voters about his views. He explained what his priorities would be if chosen to represent his district. This is similar to other competitive candidates, who tend to explain their views to voters and criticize their opponents. This can attract voters to their side and draw attention to a close battle.

In 2008, the election was much different, as was Representative Space's website. As an expected winner this time, he provided very little information to voters. Visitors to his website would not learn the name of his opponent this time, nor would they learn much about his views and beliefs. They would only learn that he was the preferred candidate of seniors and veterans. Again, this is in line with other candidates like Space. Expected winners tend to focus on themselves and provide less information to voters than candidates in closer races.

Space changed his strategy in 2010. As a candidate in a close race, he went on the offensive. He knew that his district tended to lean Republican and the country as a whole was following suit that year. Space, a Democrat, knew he would need to fight if he had

any hope of keeping his seat. He dedicated his website to attacking his opponent rather than promoting himself and explained why his opponent's policy goals would be harmful to America. This strategy was more like what he had done in 2006, when he was also in an unpredictable election. As a candidate in a competitive race, Space used very different tactics than he had in 2008.

Zack Space is not a unique candidate. He reacted to his circumstances, as do all candidates. When he was a normal winner, he avoided confrontation. Nothing on his website could be considered controversial or had the potential to alienate voters. In choosing this information to be the focus of his campaign, he avoided the attention of the voters and avoided his election becoming a competitive race. In looking at all of the available websites from the 2008 congressional and gubernatorial elections, it became clear that this was the most common strategy chosen by normal winners. They do whatever they can to win their seats and do it without the election even being competitive.

Figure 3.1: Bill Sali's 2008 Website

Sali for Congress

Re-Elect Congressman **Bill Sali** To The United States Congress

About Bill Sali | Issues | Get Involved | Contribute | TheTruthAboutWalt.com | Home

Re-elect Congressman Bill Sali

Congressman Bill Sali's solidly conservative voting record proves he is keeping his word to fight for Idaho and for a strong, free and prosperous America. Bill has stood tall by voting for lower taxes, smaller government and a strong national defense. Bill is also leading the charge to secure our borders and reform the way Congress and Washington, D.C. conducts the people's business.

Campaign News

- ▶ The Sali campaign launched a new website aimed at showing the truth about Walt Minnick's stances
- ▶ Sali: Micron job losses, stock market plunge require immediate attention by Congress
- ▶ WALT MINNICK DODGES TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Contact Info

Sali For Congress
 PO Box 71
 Kuna, ID 83634
 (208) 871-6011
 ▶ bill@billsali.com

Congressman Sali's Leadership Awards

- ▶ "Hero of the Taxpayer" from Americans for Tax Reform.
- ▶ "Taxpayer's Friend Award" from the National Taxpayers Union (ranked 26th out of 435 members)
- ▶ "Guardian of Seniors' Rights" award for protecting Social Security and the "Benjamin Franklin Award" for supporting repeal of the onerous estate/death tax from the 60 Plus Association.
- ▶ "Friend of the Shareholder" from the American Shareholders Association
- ▶ "Guardian of Worker Freedom" from the Alliance for Worker Freedom
- ▶ Named one of the U.S. House of Representative's "Best and Brightest" by the American Conservative Union
- ▶ "A in English" award for promoting English as the official language of the United States
- ▶ "True Blue Award" from Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council
- ▶ "Spirit of Enterprise Award" from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ "Defender of Economic Freedom" award from the Club for Growth. (No. 9 out of all 435 members of the House)

Latest Campaign News

- ▶ WALT MINNICK DODGES TOWN HALL MEETINGS
- ▶ Sali: Micron job losses, stock market plunge require immediate attention by Congress
- ▶ The Sali campaign launched a new website aimed at showing the truth about Walt Minnick's stances
- ▶ Gun Owners of America give Sali A+, criticize Minnick
- ▶ Major General Doty and Brigadier General Brooke announced the formation of Veterans for Sali
- ▶ SALI: MINNICK TO BLAME FOR HIGH GAS PRICES, DEMOCRAT EFFORTS TO HALT OIL DRILLING
- ▶ Sali votes against \$700 billion bailout plan
- ▶ Sali: House Democrats continue to block county payments program

Visit [TheTruthAboutWalt.com](#)

Bill Sali is...
 "a man of principle" "willing to work hard and tackle tough issues"
 - Tom Luna Idaho Public Schools Superintendent

Helpful Links

- ▶ Bill Sali's Official Campaign Blog
- ▶ See the Vice President endorsing Bill Sali
- ▶ Bill Sali on [Securing Our Borders](#) (pdf)

Figure 3.2: Marcy Kaptur's 2008 Website

Congresswoman ★★ ★
Marcy Kaptur

Meet Marcy Agenda WWII Memorial News & Updates Volunteer Contact Campaign Pictures Contribute Site Admin Home

Welcome

Dear Friends:

A special thanks to all for your continued support and confidence. Knowing that we are *working together* to protect the freedoms our forefathers so bravely secured for us over 200 years ago means a great deal to me.

Our battle is, once again, a battle for freedom. With each increase in the US trade deficit Americans lose more freedom: freedom to be independent, freedom to be self sufficient, freedom from creditors, freedom of opportunity and of work, freedom to make the most of their lives, and their children's futures. **Join me in the fight to regain our Independence.**

Check back often and stay in touch as we move toward the 2008 election -- so much is at stake for our community and nation. You can count on me to be your voice on important issues like energy and economic independence for America, a sound trade policy, and national security.

Together we will work to secure good paying jobs, protect Social Security and Medicare, preserve family farms, ensure affordable education, and forge a health care system that works for all Ohioans.

Sincerely,

Marcy Kaptur

Sign Up For Our Newsletter

Email Address

Zip

**Support Marcy
Donate Here**

Volunteer Today

**Learn About The
World War II
Memorial**

sitemeter

*Veterans' Glass City Skyway
Toledo, Ohio*

*Marblehead Lighthouse
Marblehead, Ohio*

Table 3.1: Average Difference in Overall Website Content, by Candidate Type

	Position Issues	Valence Issues	Personal Information	Opponent Mentions	Other Politicians	Polling Information	N
Normal Winners	1.76 (1.36)	4.13 (4.79)	7.34 (4.68)	0.68 (0.27)	0.30 (0.64)	0.06 (0.43)	245
Other Candidates	3.89 (3.10)	4.89 (2.97)	7.62 (4.48)	2.77 (1.84)	1.33 (1.29)	0.15 (0.44)	535
t	10.31	2.71	0.80	17.69	11.85	2.67	
p(T < t)	0.000	0.007	0.425	0.000	0.000	0.008	

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average number of times each type of information was discussed for each type of candidate through full website. Standard deviations in parentheses. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test.

Table 3.2: Types of Issues Discussed through Full Website

	Position Issues	Valence Issues	Personal Information	Opponent Mentions	Other Politicians	Polling Information
Normal Winner	0.42 (2.15)	0.76 (1.01)	1.20 (1.26)	0.57 (3.50)	0.39 (2.30)	0.18 (1.87)
Democrat	0.76 (0.98)	0.61 (0.32)	1.22 (1.98)	1.28 (0.19)	1.18 (2.16)	0.84 (0.09)
Senate	1.21 (1.83)	1.11 (0.27)	1.06 (0.09)	0.97 (0.06)	0.90 (0.20)	0.20 (0.48)
Governor	1.10 (1.81)	1.14 (0.84)	1.23 (1.05)	1.02 (0.67)	0.95 (0.07)	2.07 (0.99)

Coefficients are incidence rate ratios calculated using regression with negative binomial distribution. Z-values in parentheses. Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. All other candidates are in the baseline category.

Table 3.3: Average Difference in Homepage Content, by Candidate Type

	Position Issues	Valence Issues	Personal Information	Opponent Mentions	Other Politicians	Polling Information	N
Normal Winners	0.54 (1.03)	1.09 (1.89)	2.33 (1.78)	0.08 (0.41)	0.35 (0.61)	0.00 (0.00)	245
Other Candidates	1.24 (1.76)	1.31 (1.49)	2.41 (2.03)	1.08 (0.97)	0.62 (1.00)	0.014 (0.19)	535
t	5.79	1.75	0.53	15.51	3.91	1.15	
p(T < t)	0.000	0.080	0.596	0.000	0.000	0.249	

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average number of times each type of information was discussed for each type of candidate through full website. Standard deviations in parentheses. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test.

Table 3.4: Types of Issues Discussed on Homepage

	Position Issues	Valence Issues	Personal Information	Opponent Mentions	Other Politicians	Polling Information
Normal Winner	0.47 (3.02)	0.75 (1.84)	0.72 (1.00)	0.10 (6.45)	0.19 (1.99)	0.18 (1.53)
Democrat	1.20 (0.68)	1.78 (1.29)	1.38 (0.45)	0.76 (0.48)	0.83 (0.55)	0.72 (0.82)
Senate	2.27 (1.30)	1.28 (0.46)	1.14 (0.55)	1.26 (0.66)	1.07 (0.31)	1.20 (1.02)
Governor	1.92 (0.81)	2.49 (3.39)	1.93 (2.19)	0.96 (0.07)	1.13 (1.00)	0.79 (0.49)

Coefficients are incidence rate ratios calculated using regression with negative binomial distribution. Z-values in parentheses. Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. All other candidates are in the baseline category.

4 THE STRATEGY OF LIMITED SPENDING

Campaign spending is on the rise. In both 2010 and 2012, over \$3 billion was spent by candidates, parties, and interest groups for congressional elections. Some candidates seemed to have unlimited funds to use for unlimited advertising and campaign events. But many candidates choose to limit their spending rather than emptying their bank accounts.

Richard Shelby ran for reelection for the Senate in Alabama in 2010. He had been in office since 1987; it was his fifth time seeking election. Because he had been in office for so many terms and had previously chosen not to spend all of his money, he began the 2010 election season with more than \$13 million on hand. Over the election season, he raised more than \$5 million to add to it, making his total war chest about \$18.5 million. Of that, he spent just \$1.5 million dollars, or about 8% of his campaign's total worth, and saved the other \$17 million for the next election cycle (The Center for Responsive Politics). While Shelby saved more money in 2010 than any other candidate, his behavior is not out of the ordinary. Many candidates choose to spend only a portion of their cash and save the rest for later.

Why would a candidate choose to keep so much money and spend so little of it? Shelby won with about 65% of the vote in 2010. If he had spent a little more, maybe he could have secured a higher margin over his opponent. This would not have changed the outcome of the election, as he won handily, but it could have helped him gain confidence prior to

election day. Similarly to Shelby, Gary Miller of California spent only about 25% of his funds in 2008 (The Center for Responsive Politics); he won with about 60% of the vote. Again, this was still a large margin, but he did not win as soundly as many candidates. He ended the election cycle with more money on hand than he had when the election season started. Why would candidates make the choice to spend so little? Could spending more improve their margin of victory? Why would Miller campaign so little, choosing to limit the number of advertisements and events, when campaigning more could have potentially increased his confidence that he would surely win the election?

Like candidates' campaign websites, spending patterns may provide some insight into the strategies that candidates take when running for office. By looking at the total amount of money that candidates spend, the amount of money they leave for their future elections, and the specific places that candidates spend money, it can be determined whether these demonstrate the same findings as Chapter 3: that normal winners choose to avoid attention to their campaigns.

In this chapter, I will look at the amount of spending by candidates based on the expectations of whether they will win or lose their elections. I find that some candidates make the choice to spend less than what is available. Candidates who are expected to win elections, normal winners, choose to spend only a portion of what is available while other candidates, normal losers and those in close races, spend nearly every penny. I will begin by examining the different types of elections and candidates. I conclude that candidates expected to win their elections make a conscious choice to limit campaign spending with the belief that it is better for their campaigns to do so. The primary reason normal winners avoid higher

campaign spending is to avoid a visible campaign.

Limits to Candidate Spending

Candidate spending can vary widely by candidate, office, and year but there are many patterns in spending. One of the most widely cited studies of candidate spending is that of Gary Jacobson (2004). Jacobson finds that incumbents who spend more money actually do worse than incumbents who spend less. This is because incumbents in close elections, particularly incumbents with strong challengers, spend money reactively. If a strong challenger starts spending large sums of money and attracting attention, the incumbent will also start spending a lot of money as a means to fight back. When competitive challengers do not enter the race, incumbents refrain from spending so much money.

However, this account really only explains the actions of the candidates in close races. It theorizes why challenged candidates spend a lot of money. However, Jacobson does little to explain the actions of candidates who are expected to win their elections. He acknowledges that expected winners do refrain from spending but does not clearly explain the reasons, though he briefly posits an explanation, discussed below. If normal winners spend less than challenged candidates in close races, what are the possible explanations of why normal winners spend the way they do? What might explain why normal winners choose to limit their campaign spending?

Fundraising

Most incumbents running for reelection have a challenger from the opposing major party; why would they choose to campaign very little against major party opponents? Jacobson's explanation is that safe incumbents do not want to raise money if they do not have

to. He says, “Most members of Congress do not particularly enjoy asking for money, and many avoid doing so if they do not see a pressing need for it” (2004). In other words, if incumbents could raise and spend millions when challenged in a tight race, they probably are capable of doing the same in other years when they do not have strong opponents, as well. However, they choose not to raise the money in those years because they prefer not to constantly beg for cash.

On the surface, Jacobson’s reasoning seems plausible. Constantly begging friends for money seems like one of the least desirable parts of holding a political office. If a dislike of raising money is the reason in which incumbents do not spend money when not involved in “races,” that would imply that candidates would spend more money if they had more money but the effort that would be required to raise millions of dollars from voters would not be worth the benefit.

If candidates do not want to ask their friends for money, they also have the ability to raise money from interest groups. However, to attract this money, candidates would likely have to adopt policy positions in line with the positions of the interest group. Then, that money could be used to attract undecided voters but could also possibly alienate informed voters who vote based on those policy positions that are now public as a result of the interest group funding. Candidates have to consider the trade off of stating policy positions to raise funds and the possible loss of votes from informed voters as a result of the position (Baron 1994). Since normal winners are less concerned with gaining votes than other candidates because they are already expected to win their elections, this interest group money may not be as important to them as it would be for other candidates and they may choose to avoid

asking for it.

If normal winner incumbents are raising much less money than incumbents in close races but still spending all of their funds, fundraising can be considered the explanation for the lack of spending by these candidates. If this theory is correct, normal winners will spend as much as they can without having to ask for additional funds.

War Chests

One of the other common explanations for the way incumbents think about campaign spending is that they want to keep a war chest. Because incumbents can carry money over from one election to the next, they have the ability to save their money for a rainy day. This offers them several potential advantages.

First, war chests are commonly believed to ward off quality challengers. If a challenger, who is facing an uphill battle by the nature of being a challenger, sees that the incumbent has a million dollars in the bank, it may convince him or her to avoid the election entirely. The challenger may realize that the amount of money required to even be competitive with such a well financed candidate would be nearly impossible to raise, therefore making the decision that entering the election is not worth it (Goldenberg, Traugott, and Baumgartner 1986, Goidel and Gross 1994, Hersch and McDougall 1994, Box-Steffensmeier 1996, Hogan 2001). While some disagree with the validity of the deterrent effect of war chests (Krasno and Green 1988, Squire 1991, Milyo 1998, Milyo and Groseclose 1999, Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000, Goodliffe 2001), any candidate who believes that war chests can prevent strong opponents may choose to keep money saved in the bank.

The second potential advantage offered to incumbents with large war chests is that they

have money available if they need it. There may come a day when, regardless of the size of the war chest, a strong challenger will enter the election. At that point, the incumbent can swiftly attack the challenger, airing television advertisements and contacting constituents as necessary. Without the war chest, the incumbent would need to spend time raising money before the actual campaigning can begin. Having money in the bank from the beginning allows the incumbent to skip this step, making it easier to progress through the election season (Sorauf 1988, Goodliffe 2004).

If candidates fear future challengers and hope to make future elections as easy to win as possible, they may save money across election years, which requires candidates to refrain from spending in elections without strong challengers. If these candidates save large portions of their funds at the end of an election cycle, the desire to keep a war chest is likely the explanation for their actions.

Expenditures

Candidates may make spending decisions based on their lack of desire to raise money or the potential benefits they receive from a war chest. They may also make decisions based on where they intend to spend money during the election. That is, candidates may spend as much money as it costs to buy all of the things they want and then stop spending. Some candidates will spend every dollar they have to pay for the needs of the campaign. Other candidates may simply spend what they need to spend and save the rest. An examination of where candidates spend their money during their elections may also provide some insight as to why expected winners tend to spend less than their struggling counterparts.

One important use of campaign funds is a campaign staff. Anyone running for office

needs some assistance in creating a plan to help him or her win the desired seat. Nearly all candidates hire at least one employee and have one campaign office that must be paid for throughout the election.

There are also many logistical costs for campaigns. They must pay for campaign offices, electricity, furniture, and office products.

Most candidates spend time traveling prior to election day. Especially for candidates running for statewide offices or those with large electoral areas, the costs of vehicles and gas can be high. In addition, costs such as dry-cleaning and hotels while on the road can be quite expensive for some candidates.

Candidates also host events. Some of the events are for the purpose of attracting voters and “selling” themselves to the people. Such events might require costs associated with renting facilities and providing food.

A second type of event might be for the purpose of raising money. Similarly, events for the purpose of raising funds might require candidates to spend a lot of money, though of course the goal is much different. Along with fundraising events, candidates may spend money in other ways with the goal of gaining donations, such as mailings or telemarketing.

Some candidates are willing to give some of their funds to other candidates, political parties, or committees. In 2012, John Boehner donated more than any other candidate, giving close to \$12 million to the National Republican Congressional Committee, as well as additional money to the Ohio Republican Party and individual candidates (Center for Responsive Politics). Most of that money either went directly to other candidates or was used by the party on their behalf.

The biggest expense for many candidates is advertising. This may include television, radio, print, and internet advertising. When candidates want to gain more votes across a wider audience than events can achieve, they may turn to this type of self promotion. Over the course of a campaign, some candidates spend millions of dollars on advertising.

On each of these different types of expenses, there can be wide variation in the amount of money spent. Where might normal winners spend less than other candidates? Could any types of spending by normal winners increase the risk of elections becoming more competitive?

There may be some variation in the amount of money that is spent on a campaign staff, offices, and office supplies. A candidate in a close race would likely hire the best campaign staff that money can buy. However, it may be the case that an incumbent normal winner will also hire the best staff possible because many of those hiring decisions happen months or even years in advance of the election. Many politicians even keep the same campaign managers across elections to ensure they have the best staff available if a strong challenge does occur. Candidates may fear that spending too little in this area could result in mistakes being made and a closer election than would have occurred with a better staff. There may also be variation in the cost of campaign office space and travel, though they are almost certainly much more closely tied to the type of district (New York City vs. Wyoming-at-large) than the expectations of winning. While normal winners may spend less on these costs than candidates in competitive elections, this is unlikely to account for more than a small portion of any differences in total expenses between the two. For most administrative costs of a campaign, normal winners are unlikely to spend significantly less money than

competitive candidates, which means this will not account for the differences between the spending for these different types of candidates.

Additionally, some candidates spend a lot of time and effort on campaign events, promotional materials, and mailings. If the goal is to attract more voters, there is an expectation that candidates in competitive races would spend more money on such activities than normal winners since competitive candidates are more in need of support. There are a couple possible reasons why candidates might choose to spend the money or abstain from such campaign activities. It is possible that candidates believe that such events and materials will help them gain enough votes to make the spending worth the money. That is, they will make a calculated decision that the money will earn them enough votes to help win the election. Even among normal winners, candidates may believe that campaign events will help their cause enough to continue to hold them, despite their likely success without them. Alternatively, candidates may believe that the money either does not produce any new votes or that the small increase in votes would not offset the costs of the events and materials. Some candidates may even believe that additional events and materials could cause a loss of votes, particularly if they are forced to discuss position issues. If they are forced to take positions during events and those positions are broadcast to voters, it has the potential to alienate some voters and increase in the competitiveness of the election. If normal winners spend much less money than candidates in competitive elections on events and materials, this will provide evidence that they believe they are unlikely to gain votes from the events and materials or could lose some support.

Candidates may also spend money on advertising in an attempt to market their campaigns, including, but not limited to, television, radio, and internet advertising. Similarly, candidates could believe that the use of media has the potential to gain more votes, not gain votes or lose votes, or could cost some votes.

Normal winners may calculate that advertising through events or media could increase their share of the votes. After all, some researchers have found that advertising increases the portion of the vote candidates receive, even for incumbents without strong challengers (Gerber 1998, Partin 2002, Green and Krasno 1988, 1990). But, they are already expected to win the election. Therefore, normal winners may believe that, even if they can increase the number of votes received with such practices, it may not be enough to make it “worth it.” Others have found that such spending could result in little change in vote totals for incumbents (Glanz, Abramowitz, and Burkart 1976, Jacobson 1978, 1980, 2004, Bardwell 2005), and candidates who believe that may choose to abstain from much advertising as it will not change their vote total. However, normal winners may also fear that advertising has the potential to lose votes than other candidates, and some studies (Thomas 1990, Coates 1998) have shown instances where incumbents who spent too much money on advertising have lost votes as a result. Advertising can draw more attention to the election than would have otherwise been paid and make the election more competitive, which normal winners want to avoid. If normal winners advertise much less than other candidates, it would provide evidence that they believe advertising has the potential to increase the competitiveness of the election or, at the very least, that it will not help to ensure victory.

Another cost to campaigns is fundraising. Nearly all candidates spend some money

in the hope that it will pay off with more money than was spent. However, as discussed earlier, normal winners may choose to avoid asking for money due to the dislike of begging friends for cash. If normal winners spend less money than competitive candidates for the purpose of raising additional funds, this would lend support to Jacobson's expectations that the reason incumbents without strong challengers spend little is because of a dislike of fundraising (2004). However, if the amount of money normal winners spend raising funds is comparable to competitive candidates, this would imply that some other factor discourages spending among normal winners.

Finally, candidates may give money to other campaigns, parties, and committees. If the goal of normal winners is to keep a war chest, it is unlikely that they will give money away to other candidates. If normal winners frequently give money away, it diminishes the amount of funds for future elections, and would imply that the war chest theory above is not the primary motivation for normal winners' spending patterns.

Additionally, if normal winners are primarily motivated by a lack of desire to raise funds in each election, they would also be unlikely to give money away. Each dollar given to other candidates means a dollar the candidate will have to raise in the next election cycle. If normal winners donate large sums of money to others, this would also imply that candidates are not primarily motivated by a lack of desire to raise funds, since it forces them to do so in the future.

However, if normal winners *do* donate large sums of money, it would lend credence to the idea that they spend the amount of money they want to and then refrain from spending any more. If normal winners would rather see other candidates use their money than use

it on their own campaigns, it supports the theory that they have calculated the amount of money they want to spend and will not spend beyond it. They want to avoid making the election more prominent and spending more money to advertise and campaign more forcefully would do so, which could increase the competitiveness of the campaign.

Expectations

These three competing theories can be examined to determine which is most likely to predict the behavior of normal winners. Based on the theories, there are several expectations that need to be met for each to be supported by the data.

For the theory that normal winners want to avoid raising funds to be correct, they would be expected to raise less funds than other candidates. They would also avoid giving money to other candidates at the conclusion of the election if they meet the expectations of this theory, as giving money away requires them to raise more in the future, which they dislike.

If the theory of war chests is the most accurate, normal winners would be unlikely to donate money at the end of the election, as well. If normal winners have the option to keep a large war chest but give half of it away instead, they must not be primarily motivated by a desire to have money in the bank.

Normal winners may also have made the decision to spend a certain amount and then stop spending money. In this theory, they have decided that additional money spent would either earn them no new votes or potentially lose some. For this to be correct, normal winners spend much less throughout the campaign on things like advertising than other candidates. They would be willing to give away money they do not want to use during the election to other candidates.

Data and Methods

In every election, the Federal Election Commission compiles a database of all funds raised and expenditures throughout federal elections. This can be used to examine the questions regarding total money raised, cash on hand prior to the elections, and total money spent. All candidates are required to report all money that comes in or out of their campaign. The Center for Responsive Politics takes this information and codes the expenditures based on the purpose for which it was used.

There is a total of 1,803 candidates whose spending has been compiled by the FEC from the 2008 and 2010 elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate. This included 85 candidates with no challenger from the opposing major party, who will not be used in the analysis since their strategies are likely quite different than candidates with challengers. Third party candidates are also not included because their strategies may also be quite different. That leaves total of 1,718 candidates to be used for this analysis, half Democrats and half Republicans. A total of 765 of the elections included an incumbent running for reelection while 94 were elections for open seats. A total of 1,608 candidates were running for the House while 110 were running for the Senate.

From the Center for Responsive Politics, the sample is more limited. Because of the poor quality of the reporting from some candidates as well as the lack of information for many losing candidates, data was available for 541 of the 2008 and 2010 House candidates. While there was information available for fewer than 20 Senate candidates, they were not included in this analysis since the numbers were so small.

To examine the amount of money that each candidate had available to spend in a given

year, the amount of money raised in that election cycle was added to the amount of money left from previous election cycles, if there was any. Many incumbents running for reelection have money saved from a previous election cycle that could be used. Dividing the total expenditures of candidates by their total funds available provided the percentage spent for every candidate. In some cases, the percentages were over 100 when candidates overspent their savings and required a loan to pay for the expenditures. There were 37 candidates with a percentage over 100.

The Cook Political Report was used to determine which candidates are normal winners, normal losers, and candidates in competitive races, as in Chapter 3. The results that are reported are using the first Cook Political Report from September of the election year, when candidates have fully formed strategies and have clear expectations about the outcome of the election. Out of the 1,718 candidates, 617 of them were normal winners, described by Cook as “solid.” There were also 617 normal losers, since all candidates in the sample had an opponent. There were also 484 candidates in close races, which were in elections that were not solidly in the favor of one candidate.

Of the candidates available from the Center for Responsive Politics’ coding, 432 candidates were considered normal winners, using the Cook Political Report. There were 136 candidates considered to be in close races and 123 normal losers.

Results

Before analyzing specific places candidates spent money, I looked at the overall spending patterns of candidates. How much money did normal winners spend compared to other candidates?

Jacobson (1978, 2004) posited that incumbents with strong opponents and close elections would spend more money than candidates in easier election. Would this same information apply to normal winners versus candidates in close races? The average amount spent by likelihood of winning is in Table 4.1 for the House of Representatives and Table 4.2 for the Senate. Because Senate candidates spend so much more than House candidates on average, the two chambers are separated. Normal losers are excluded because they tend to have difficulty raising much money, so they spend much less but for different reasons. Normal winners are candidates considered to be “solid” by the Cook Political Report.

When comparing all normal winners to all candidates in close races, the normal winners spend less money on average. This same pattern holds when only looking at incumbents and only looking at open seats. This pattern is similar to the pattern found by Jacobson; candidates who are more confident in their ability to win an election spend less money on average than candidates in close battles.

Looking at the expenditures of these candidates a little more closely will show more about the variation between different types of candidates. Table 4.3 shows the average amount that normal winners and candidates in competitive races spent on different campaign activities when running for the House of Representatives. It includes administrative costs (described as “the operational costs of running a campaign, including staff salaries and benefits, travel expenses, office rent, utilities, equipment, office supplies and postage, taxes, food, meetings and administrative services such as accounting, compliance and legal fees”), campaign expenses (which includes “the most direct costs of campaigning, including political consultants, rallies, promotional material such as signs and buttons,

polling/surveys/research, get-out-the-vote expenses, and direct mail not related to fundraising”), fundraising expenses (“money spent to raise money, including event expenses, direct mail appeals, telemarketing, consultants and online contribution services”), media (including “payments for advertising and media production, including TV and radio air time, print advertising, blast faxes, phone banks, Internet ads and media consultants”), and transfers and contributions (such as “transfers and contributions from the candidate to federal and non-federal parties, candidates committees and leadership PACs, and other political committees”) (Center for Responsive Politics). Some spending by candidates may not be included in the chart if it did not fit into one of these categories. The information in this chart and table provide a lot of insight into the places that different types of candidates spend their money.

For administrative costs, the difference in spending between normal winners and competitive candidates is not statistically different. While normal winners do spend less than competitive candidates on average, these differences do not appear to account for the significant spending difference between normal winners and competitive candidates.

Campaign expenses, which includes things such as mailings and rallies, does show a significant difference between the actions of normal winners and competitive candidates. Normal winners are refraining from holding as many events and sending as much information to voters. While they do some advertising in this manner, they do a significant amount less than competitive candidates. This provides some support for the theory that normal winners make a decision to stop spending money even when the funds are available.

Normal winners also spend less money on events and activities geared toward fundraising activities, spending only about 60% of the amount that competitive candidates do, which is a significant difference. This provides some support for Jacobson's theory that expected winners in non-competitive elections choose to spend little money because they want to avoid having to ask for it. Because normal winners seem to put less effort into raising money than other candidates, they have less money to spend, which accounts for some of the differences in candidates' spending patterns.

Candidates also have an option of spending money on media. They can buy advertisements on television and the internet and must pay the costs to create these ads. Candidates in competitive races spend significantly more money on media than other types of candidates. Normal winners, on average, spent less than 15% of what competitive candidates did in this area. Buying media appears to be the largest difference in spending between normal winners and competitive candidates.

This provides support for the theory that normal winners are basing their decisions on how much money they want to spend, rather than how much money is available. Normal winners for the House of Representatives have the ability to spend far more than \$150,000 per election on advertising but make the decision to avoid doing so. This allows them to avoid voters seeing them too frequently and discourages voters from paying attention to the election.

Finally, candidates have the option of giving money to other campaigns and some do so readily. In fact, the average normal winner for the House spent more money on other candidates than advertising for his or her own election, with an average of over \$300,000

being given to other candidates or parties. This shows that candidates are fine with spending money in the election; they just do not want to spend the money on their own elections. They would rather have other candidates use the funds than use the money themselves.

This demonstrates some flaws to the theory that these candidates spend little money because they want to keep war chests. If candidates were really primarily motivated by the desire to save money, they would not give away such large portions of their funds. Instead, they would keep the money in the bank for the next election with the hope that it would discourage future challengers and help them to ensure victory should a quality challenger emerge.

This also means there are some flaws in the argument that normal winners are primarily motivated by a lack of desire to raising money in future elections. All of that money could be saved and help normal winners to avoid asking for so many donations in the next election. These donations amount to about 17% of the total funds normal winners had in the bank during the election, as shown in Table 4.4. If normal winners were so opposed to asking for money for themselves, they would not be willing to do it for the benefit of other candidates.

A regression analysis for this data is shown in Table 4.5. This examines some of the other possible factors that may be contributing to spending patterns as well as likelihood of winning. It includes a dummy variable for normal winners, who are those considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report, normal loser, who are the opposite, and all other candidates as the baseline category. Normal winners spent an average of \$1.6 million less than more competitive candidates. The biggest difference in spending was for media purposes,

where competitive candidates spent, on average, nearly \$1.4 million more than normal winners. Normal winners also spent significantly less on administrative costs (\$204,000), campaign expenses (\$159,000), and fundraising (\$130,000). However, normal winners donated an average of \$227,000 more to other candidates and parties than other candidates.

Table 4.6 shows this same information but rather than the raw number of dollars candidates spent, it looks at the percentage of available funds candidates spent on each of their expenses. Overall, normal winners choose to spend a lower percentage than other candidates, usually saving about 25% of their funds while competitive candidates save less than 5%. In addition to the savings, normal winners transfer nearly 20% more of their funds to other candidates and parties. Normal winners only spend about half of their funds, with the other half going to savings and donations. The biggest difference between normal winners and competitive candidates is in media, where competitive candidates spend 40% less of their funds than competitive candidates. Normal winners spend a larger percentage of their money on administrative costs, campaign expenses, and fundraising though the differences are each less than 7%.

One of the big differences here is the amount normal winners spend on raising funds. They actually use a larger portion of their funds for this purpose than any other level of candidate, with the average normal winner in the dataset spending over 10% of his or her funds to ask for money. This provides further opposition to the theory that normal winners are primarily motivated by a lack of desire to ask for money; they spend a large percentage of their available funds begging than any other type of candidate.

Conclusions

Political candidates carefully choose strategies that they believe will help them to succeed on election day. Casual observers of elections may believe this means that candidates always fight for every vote by trying to gain the support of as many people in the constituency as possible. It may appear that they campaign regardless of the circumstances and fight to convince as many voters as they can.

Among many candidates, this is not the case. Normal winners generally save money at the end of an election rather than spending everything they have to host more events and air more advertisements.

One of the possible explanations for this behavior, and the one most favored by researchers such as Gary Jacobson (2004), is that candidates choose to save money because they do not want to raise money if it is not necessary. While Jacobson is almost certainly correct that candidates strongly dislike this part of their job, the data does not support this as the primary reason why expected winners choose to save money at the end of the election. Normal winners for the House of Representatives spend an average of nearly \$120,000 to raise money on average while Senate normal winners spending just over half of a million dollars. This amounts to a larger percentage of their spending than any other type of candidate. Then, they turn around at the end of the election cycle and give the money away, with the average House normal winner donating more than \$300,000 at the conclusion of the election. Senate normal winners donate far more, with the average Senate normal winner donating nearly \$1.5 million to other candidates and parties. By making such large donations at the end of the election, normal winners are required to raise more funds in

the future than would have needed if they had saved that money. These donations account for about 15% of the average candidate's total funds for the electoral season, which could mean 15% less asking for money in the next election. While raising money may not be desirable, it does not explain the actions of normal winners. Normal winners spend too much time and money to raise additional funds and give too much money away for this to be the explanation for their lack of massive spending.

The second possible explanation for reduced spending for normal winners was that they want to save a war chest. If war chests can discourage challengers from entering future elections and help normal winners to defeat them if they do enter, normal winners would consider saving money rather than spending everything. However, this does not seem to be the case either given the data, which shows normal winners giving away so much of their money. In fact, the average normal winner would increase his or her cash on hand at the end of the election by 60% by refusing to make donations. The average House normal winner could save \$750,000 in the bank to scare off challengers in future elections and ensure victory if a strong challenger does enter. Instead, such a representative saves less than half a million - still a significant amount of money but not as secure of a war chest. For Senate normal winners, they could save \$3.5 million but they choose to save only \$2 million, on average. Again, this money can help but is not going to make as strong of an impact.

Because most normal winners do save some of their money at the conclusion of the election, there is some evidence that they are partially motivated by a lack of desire to raise funds and an interest in keeping a war chest. However, since candidates give away such

large sums of money, that cannot be their full motivation.

The third possible explanation was that normal winners choose not to spend more because they believe that it is not advantageous to do so. In this case, spending extra funds on advertising, raising funds, and campaign events is avoided because candidates believe they are better off by limiting exposure. When normal winners are seen too much by the public, they believe it will actually hurt their chances, or at least not improve their chances, of winning the election, according to this theory. Increased attention to the election could increase voter awareness of the candidates and make it more difficult for the normal winner; the election could turn into a competitive race. This is the opposite of the old saying that all publicity is good publicity - normal winners prefer to limit their exposure.

This must be the theory that best explains the actions of these normal winner. These normal winners are not trying to avoid raising funds; they are raising money in each election regardless of the circumstances. These candidates are not afraid to spend money because they want to keep a war chest; they are giving money away to other candidates. Normal winners must be making a decision about how much money they want to spend on their election and then they stop. They do not continue to advertise. They do not hire more staffers. They do not spend more money to drive around the state or district campaigning. Instead, they make the decision to quit spending money. This strategic decision to avoid additional spending on their own campaigns provides strong support for the theory that normal winners want to avoid a visible campaign. The primary monetary goal is not to save a war chest or to avoid raising money; it is to prevent voters from noticing that the election is approaching.

We are currently in a period in which voters claim anti-incumbent sentiment throughout the country. The approval rating of Congress is at near record lows. Candidates for all levels of elected office fear their opponents and do everything they can to claim electoral victory. For many candidates, this means campaigning as much as possible. But for normal winners, the story is different. Their strategy for being most successful is to avoid spending copious amounts of money. They have the funds to spend more but make the choice to refrain from campaigning excessively. It is not because they want to keep a war chest or because they want to avoid raising money. It is because they fear the consequences of an all-out campaign. They fear what will happen if too much attention is drawn to their campaign. And they fear that their opponents will jump at the opportunity to win over voters and turn the elections into close races. To prevent such a scenario, they refrain from spending more than the bare minimum.

Table 4.1: Average Spending in House, by Type of Candidate, in Thousands of Dollars

	Incumbent	Open Seat
Normal	1,182	1,195
Winners	(781)	(1,239)
N	626	33
Competitive	2,561	1,718
Candidates	(1,133)	(759)
N	164	91
t	18.14	2.83
p(T < t)	0.000	0.003

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Competitive candidates are any that were in elections considered “likely,” “leaning,” or “toss up” by Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average spending in the area for all House candidates in thousands of dollars. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Center for Responsive Politics.

Table 4.2: Average Spending in Senate, by Type of Candidate, in Thousands of Dollars

	Incumbent	Open Seat
Normal Winners	6,439	4,336
	(5,057)	(1,925)
N	34	3
Competitive Candidates	11,364	8,291
	(5,688)	(9,537)
N	20	24
t	3.30	0.70
p(T < t)	0.001	0.244

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Competitive candidates are any that were in elections considered “likely,” “leaning,” or “toss up” by Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average spending in the area for all Senate candidates in thousands of dollars. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Center for Responsive Politics.

Table 4.3: Average Spending in House, by Type of Candidate, in Thousands of Dollars

	Admin.	Campaign Expenses	Fundraising	Media	Transfers and Contributions	N
Normal Winners	305 (314)	217 (234)	120 (125)	158 (272)	304 (285)	432
Competitive Candidates	464 (6,221)	353 (253)	203 (364)	1,281 (1,342)	35.9 (91.9)	136
t	0.53	5.76	4.01	16.37	10.79	
p(T < t)	0.596	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Competitive candidates are any that were in elections considered “likely,” “leaning,” or “toss up” by Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average spending in the area for all House candidates in thousands of dollars. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Center for Responsive Politics.

Table 4.4: Portion of Funds Spent on Self and Donated, by Type of Candidate

	Total	On Own Campaign	Donated
Normal Winners	0.743 (0.197)	0.522 (0.206)	0.221 (0.165)
N	696	432	432
Competitive Candidates	0.977 (0.035)	0.932 (0.063)	0.045 (0.047)
N	483	115	115
t	25.82	21.07	11.31
p(T < t)	0.000	0.000	0.000

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Competitive candidates are any that were in elections considered “likely,” “leaning,” or “toss up” by Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average spending in the area for all House candidates in thousands of dollars. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Center for Responsive Politics.

Table 4.5: Total Dollars in Thousands Spent by Candidates by Type of Expense

	Total Spent	Admin.	Campaign Expenses	Fundraising	Media	Transfers and Contributions
Normal Winner	-1,613 (-10.32)	-204 (-3.65)	-159 (-4.12)	-130 (-5.11)	-1,374 (-12.27)	227 (3.56)
Normal Loser	-2,038 (-12.49)	-65.7 (-0.24)	-136 (-0.73)	-121 (-1.98)	-538 (-2.05)	49.9 (0.16)
Senate	5,495 (29.95)	1,481 (13.11)	771 (9.90)	437 (8.50)	3,755 (16.58)	712 (5.52)
Open	-627 (-3.27)	14.0 (0.08)	-257 (-2.24)	-110 (-1.45)	-587 (-1.76)	-452 (-2.38)
Challenger	-794 (-3.98)	-258 (-2.31)	-114 (-1.48)	-129 (-2.54)	-896 (-4.00)	-89.2 (-0.70)
Democrat	-65.8 (-0.65)	-15.6 (-0.35)	-4.76 (-0.16)	-62.4 (-3.08)	14.3 (0.16)	-26.1 (-0.51)
Year 2010	136 (1.37)	20.8 (0.47)	31.2 (1.02)	16.0 (0.79)	39.8 (0.45)	10.7 (0.21)
(Intercept)	2,777 (16.47)	507 (7.51)	364 (7.82)	274 (8.91)	1,487 (10.99)	81.9 (1.06)
R ²	0.46	0.31	0.20	0.19	0.49	0.08
Observations	1604	597	597	597	597	597

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Normal losers are candidates challenging candidates considered “solid.” All other candidates are considered competitive candidates are the baseline category. Coefficients are calculated using regression analysis. Z-values in parentheses. Source of data: Center for Responsive Politics.

Table 4.6: Percentage Spent by Candidates by Type of Expense

	Total Spent	Admin.	Campaign Expenses	Fundraising	Media	Transfers and Contributions
Normal Winner	-0.203 (-18.99)	0.068 (3.63)	0.040 (3.18)	0.020 (2.23)	-0.406 (-12.32)	0.194 (12.46)
Normal Loser	-0.023 (-2.08)	0.058 (0.64)	0.025 (0.40)	-0.013 (-0.31)	-0.090 (-0.56)	0.023 (0.31)
Senate	-0.004 (-0.33)	-0.003 (-0.07)	-0.038 (-1.48)	-0.008 (-0.43)	0.255 (3.82)	-0.025 (-0.80)
Open	0.053 (4.06)	0.078 (1.41)	-0.024 (-0.64)	-0.013 (-0.48)	-0.183 (-1.86)	0.016 (0.33)
Challenger	0.053 (3.91)	0.005 (0.14)	0.045 (1.80)	-0.026 (-1.45)	-0.090 (-1.37)	-0.006 (-0.19)
Democrat	0.007 (1.01)	0.006 (0.41)	0.003 (0.27)	-0.028 (-3.95)	-0.009 (-0.35)	0.023 (1.83)
Year 2010	0.010 (1.43)	-0.011 (-0.77)	0.018 (1.81)	-0.001 (-0.09)	0.001 (0.04)	-0.019 (-1.50)
(Intercept)	0.935 (81.18)	0.19 (8.45)	0.131 (8.63)	0.105 (9.74)	0.521 (13.06)	0.037 (1.97)
R ²	0.41	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.26	0.27
Observations	1604	597	597	597	597	597

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Normal losers are candidates challenging candidates considered “solid.” All other candidates are considered competitive candidates are the baseline category. Coefficients are calculated using regression analysis. Z-values in parentheses. Source of data: Center for Responsive Politics.

5 I'M A NORMAL WINNER AND I APPROVED NO MESSAGE

One of the biggest expenses of many campaigns is television advertisements. The average 30 second campaign advertisement on local TV costs about \$350 for each airing. Many candidates air ads hundreds of times and must pay to have the ads created, which can result in costs of hundreds of thousands - or even millions - of dollars. In 2012, about \$3 billion was spent on television advertising for national elections, which was nearly half of all money spent on campaigns.

The ads that aired throughout the country were diverse in content. Virginia Foxx, a Republican representative from North Carolina, aired an ad in which she discussed lowering the nation's debt, a popular topic for 2012 ads. She said that the debt the United States currently holds is a "burden that threatens the future of our children and grandchildren," adding that "stops job creation dead in its tracks." She said she would "protect the promises made to senior citizens," though she never explained what promises or how she would achieve them. Throughout this discussion, she showed average looking citizens who appeared to be distressed because of their financial situations. She followed this by showing herself, meeting with constituents (Foxx 2012). She went on to win her election fairly easily, 57.5%-42.5%. Why would Foxx choose to air an ad with so little content?

Rogers Williams, running for an open congressional seat in Texas, took a very different approach. He aired a 90 second ad in which he labeled himself "The Donkey Whisperer."

He spent the ad walking around in a field full of donkeys, discussing the lives of the donkeys to life under President Obama. He said things like “You know, all these [donkeys] want is more shelter, they want more feed and the government is making it harder on me, they’re taxing me to death.” He says “These donkeys don’t live in the United States of France, they live in the United States of America.” He tells one donkey “if [he] can get Obama out of healthcare, [he] can get [the donkey’s] teeth fixed.” Most of the advertisement is dedicated to promoting the idea that Obama is hurting the country but does not tell much about Williams’ plans to fix it if elected (Williams 2011). Despite taking quite a different approach than Foxx, the outcome was very similar; Williams defeated his Democratic opponent by about 20 points.

Randy Brock, a Republican state senator from Vermont, took an approach similar to Williams’ in his campaign against incumbent Peter Shumlin for governor. He ran an advertisement in which the camera follows bears walking through the woods for the full 45 seconds. The narrator says “There’s a bear in the woods. For most people in Vermont, the bear is easy to see. But others, like Governor Shumlin, don’t see the bear at all. Why can’t Governor Shumlin see any of the bears?” The ad continues by saying Shumlin supports “job killing cloud taxes” and “healthcare choices and freedom being taken.” The narrator finishes the advertisement by saying “If there are clearly bears in the woods, why can’t Governor Shumlin see any of them? Isn’t it smart to look out for bears, since there are bears?” (Brock 2012). This ad, unlike the two previously discussed, goes right after Brock’s opponent. Like the Williams ad, the visuals and audio are a bit unusual, using animals to make the point. Why did these candidates choose to display themselves this way

to voters? What leads candidates to select the ads they air and what factors influence their decisions?

While advertising does not tell us everything about what will happen in an election, it can inform voters about candidates' goals and ideals. Ads can help voters to learn about candidates, notice candidates that might otherwise attract little attention, and persuade. The content of political ads is not chosen at random; candidates strategically choose what messages they think will be appropriate for the campaign. What leads a candidate to choose different types of ads? To answer that question, the first step is to consider, in more depth, the possible purposes of television ads.

Information from advertising

Advertising can encourage learning about elections. The influence of ads on information has been widely studied, though the results are mixed.

The expectation that voters can learn from campaign ads rests on the assumption that those ads contain information about the candidates. After all, only when voters are informed about the candidates can they have the knowledge that will allow them to make "correct" decisions, choosing the candidates closest to themselves (Bartels 2000, Kelley 1960). Campaign advertisements can be one way to provide that information, packaged in a direct and simple way (Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004), though not all ads tell voters much information about the candidates.

Researchers have found that positive ads generally contain little information that will inform voters about the issues. They tend to discuss the personal qualities of the candidates with very little issue content that can tell the voters about the candidates' policy goals.

While voters may still be able to learn something about the candidates, the information provided tends to be limited to personal factors (Geer 2005, Mayer 1996).

While voters appear to learn little from positive advertisements, research suggests that they do learn from negative advertisements. One reason is that negative ads tend to contain more information about the issues and policy goals of the candidates (Geer 2005, Mayer 1996). In addition, voters often give more weight to the information that learned from negative ads than positive ads (Holbrook et al. 2001, Marcus and MacKuen 1993).

These patterns imply that voters can learn from televisions advertisements, but are more likely to learn from some than others. If normal winners are choosing to air advertisements, would they stay positive or go negative?

Based on the theory outlined in Chapter 2, normal winners are not expected to want voters to learn much about the candidates and the election. Under normal circumstances, when most voters are not paying much attention to the election, normal winners will win by definition. When those conditions change, normal winners may lose the security they previously felt. One of the things that can cause a shift for normal winners is if people start paying attention to the candidates and learning more about them. While some voters may learn things that they like about the normal winner, they were likely already planning to vote for him or her, given that normal winners are expected to have the support of the majority of voters, so they will not influence the outcome of the election.

However, some voters may learn things that they do not like about the normal winner. This possibility has the potential to shift votes, as some voters may begin to support the normal loser given this new information. If enough of these voters are shifting, the election

suddenly could turn into a close race, with no normal winner or loser - just two candidates who each have the potential to win.

If normal winners' primary goal is to win the election without letting to become a competitive race, they would be expected to avoid providing voters with a lot of information that could influence them. This means that they may avoid airing advertisements completely, as all ads could provide some information to voters. But, when normal winners do buy airtime, they are unlikely to choose negative ads, which tend to be more informative. To normal winners when considering whether to air ads and the content of any that are aired, the ignorance of voters is bliss.

Effects of advertising on turnout

Along with the ability to provide information to voters, advertisements may have some ability to influence turnout. While many people will make the decision whether or not to vote regardless of the campaigns at the time, some may make a decision based on the candidates and their campaigns.

As election day approaches, citizens need to make a decision about whether or not the election is important enough to go to the voting booth. Some citizens have already made the decision to participate well in advance of the election. These citizens make the decision to vote in all elections, or at least all elections of certain types. For these voters, not much could change their minds. The events of a single campaign will do nothing to convince these voters to stay home on election day.

Others are tuned out of the election completely and have made the decision to stay home on election day. Even the most exciting campaigns could not motivate these citizens

to pay attention, make decisions from the nominated candidates, and take the time to get to the polling booths to vote.

Many voters, however, fit into a third category. They vote in some elections and stay home for others. They make the decision to vote or stay home based on the circumstances at the time. They can be motivated by campaigns some years and discouraged from voting in others. There are many factors that can lead to the decision to turnout on election day and one of them is advertising.

There has been significant research about the purposes of advertising and its affects on turnout. Some research has demonstrated that negative advertising demobilizes the electorate (Ansolabehere et al. 1994, Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). Contrary to the previously held belief that an increase in political stimulation would increase the probability of voting (Campbell et al. 1966), Ansolabehere et al. find that “exposure to negative advertisements dropped intentions [to vote] by 5%.”

Others (Finkel and Geer, 1998) have found that some citizens are mobilized by negative advertising. It can increase the amount of information that some citizens have about the election, which actually makes them more likely to vote. At times, these types of advertisements provide information that traditional news sources do not (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995; McClure and Patterson, 1974). Additional knowledge about the election can help potential voters make more informed decisions, which makes them more likely to participate on election day. Regardless of whether negative advertising mobilizes or demobilizes voters, if candidates running for office believe turnout can be influenced by negative advertising, it may motivate them to create and air more negative ads.

Positive ads do less than negative ads to influence turnout. They tend to be forgotten more quickly and do less to motivate voters (Lau 1985, Finkel and Geer 1998). If candidates do not want to influence the turnout in the election, they may be more likely to use positive ads rather than negative ads.

Certainly, not all candidates can influence turnout significantly. For example, during a presidential election year, it is unlikely many candidates for mayor or city council will do much to influence the decision of voters to go to the polls or to stay home. However, to the extent that candidates believe they can influence turnout, they will likely gear their strategies to influence it in the way that is best for their campaign. Some candidates will choose advertising strategies with the hope of motivating voters while others may try to keep people home.

Under normal circumstances with normal turnout, a normal winner will win the election by definition. Therefore, normal winners would be expected to use few ads during their campaigns that might influence the number of people voting. While negative ads have the potential to motivate their base, they also have the potential to encourage voters that are on the fence to stay home. Or, such advertisements could encourage some to vote when they otherwise would not. The risk is not worth taking, since the normal winners would win without these influences. Therefore, normal winners are unlikely to air negative advertisements that might influence the turnout in the election. This will help normal winners to maintain the normality of the election, prevent a shift in the voting population, and ensure that the election will not become a close race.

To Persuade

One other clear purpose of campaign advertisements is to persuade potential voters. Certainly, some people will be influenced which way to vote by events throughout the campaign.

There has been surprisingly little research on the persuasive abilities of campaign ads. This is largely a result of Klapper's "minimal effects" hypothesis in which he argued that people choose to accept the messages they agree with and ignore the rest (1960). This selective exposure and selective retention was believed to result in very little ability for candidates to influence voters through advertisements. This became the widely believed finding in the discipline for many years.

More recently, experimental studies have allowed scholars to revisit the question and have challenged that conclusion, finding that advertisements do seem to influence voters (Chang 2001, Meirick, 2002, Valentino, Hutchings, & Williams 2004). However, the results are not always consistent; only some voters tend to be persuadable and only some of the time (Leighley 2004). Candidates may believe that the content of their ads can convince some voters to change their opinions on the election, and may choose to run advertisements with that goal in mind.

Without persuading any voters in either direction, normal winners will claim victory on election day. If all voters vote consistently with their normal behavior, which is to say that no one has been persuaded from his or her traditional preference, the election will never become a close race and the results will be highly predictable in advance. This is the ideal situation for normal winners as it provides them confidence that they will hold office at the

conclusion of the election. Because of that, normal winners are unlikely to run televised ads that may persuade voters. While such ads have the potential to gather additional support for the normal winners, they do not need it; they will win without new voters on their side.

Expectations

Given the possible reasons candidates might run advertisements, what are the expectations of what types of candidates run which types of ads?

Normal winners, in general, are expected to want few of the things that television advertisements provide. Their goal is to avoid the election turning into a race. They do not generally want to inform voters about their views or the views of their opponents as this can influence opinions and sway the public. They do not need to persuade voters; they are already expected to win the election by definition. And, they have no incentive to try to influence turnout because again, by definition, they will be victorious with normal turnout in the election.

Because normal winners do not want to change the outcome of the election from where it would have been without the ads, this leads to the expectation that they are unlikely to even run campaign ads prior to election day. Normal winners may not want to change the status quo, as they will win without trying to change the minds of any voters. Therefore, opting to skip ads altogether or air them very close to the election day when voters have already decided on their preferred candidates is the expected strategy of such candidates.

When normal winners do run ads, they are unlikely to run negative ads. Negative ads can influence turnout, persuade voters, and provide information; normal winners are not expected to want any of these things. By changing the opinions of some voters, these types

of ads can change the election from being “normal.” While ads in general could change the election, positive ads that focus on personal information are much less likely to swing the election than negative ads. Normal winners are likely to avoid running ads completely. When they do run ads, they are expected to be positive and personal, not negative or issue based.

Why Study Television Advertisements?

As discussed in Chapter 3, not every candidate runs televised ads during an election. Unlike websites, where nearly every candidate has one, tv commercials are only used by a portion of the candidates running for office. While some candidates choose not to run ads for strategic purposes or due to lack of money, many others do not advertise on television because tv markets rarely fit well with electoral districts. For example, there are more than twenty congressional districts that are at least partially within the New York City media market. The costs of advertising for a candidate in one of these districts are high while most of the people who would see advertisements could not even vote in the election. This presents some concerns as it becomes harder to determine the strategy of candidates who are not running ads.

One other problem with tv ads is that they tend to be very brief. Unlike websites, which offer essentially unlimited space, candidates can only fit a small amount of content into 30-60 seconds during the break of a tv show. However, this provides a glimpse into what the candidates believe are the most important things to tell potential voters. With such limited time, the goal of the advertisement needs to be front and center. This may help to understand what candidates want voters to see more than any other possible topics.

One other advantage of television ads is that most people see them. While very few voters visit the websites of candidates, most people see at least some advertisements in districts with heavy advertising.

Like websites, television advertisements are not perfect in helping to determine the strategy of the average candidate. However, where one falls short, the other one tends to succeed. If the same strategies seem to exist in both, it implies that the overall message that candidates want voters to see is consistent across their campaigns.

How to Study Campaign Ads

Since 1998, the Wisconsin Advertising (WiscAds) Project at the University of Wisconsin has collected and coded all political advertisements that aired in the 100 largest media markets throughout the country. The Campaign Media Analysis Group tracks information throughout campaigns and compiles an extensive collection of advertisements. The WiscAds Project then codes the ads to reflect every single airing of advertisements for congressional and gubernatorial elections. Each airing provides information about when and where the advertisement aired (time, date, and media market), the sponsors of the ad, and the content. The content includes such information as the overall tone of the ad (was it for attacking the opponent or supporting the sponsor), who was pictured or discussed in the ad (the candidate, the opponent, other politicians or celebrities), and whether specific issues were discussed (such as jobs, energy, or homosexuality).

For all candidates in the 2008 congressional and gubernatorial elections, I include all ads that were run by their campaigns. This does not include advertisements from PACs or other organizations that may have run ads regarding specific candidates, as those provide

no information about the strategies of the candidates themselves. From there, I could see the overall messages that candidates had for voters by looking at the total number of advertisements that contained issues, pictures or mentions of opponents and other politicians, and personal information, as well as the portion of ads that contained such information. For some candidates, especially those who only aired one or two separate ads, this may mean that 100% of their ads contain a certain type of information. For others, the ads are more split between different types of information.

Out of 435 elections for the House of Representatives, 45 candidates had no opponent from the other major party (or, in 27 of the cases, no opponent at all). One senator also lacked a major party opponent. While four of these candidates (three representatives and the senator) did run ads, the decision to air advertisements for these candidates is likely quite different than the decisions made by other types of candidates since they must not have been trying to ensure victory since it was already nearly guaranteed. Because of that, I have excluded them from this analysis.

From there, the ratings from the Cook Political Report were matched with the candidates. Like in previous chapters, expected winners in seats considered “solid” are normal winners, their opponents are considered normal losers, and all other candidates are considered to be in close races.

Results

The first step is to evaluate how likely normal winners are to run ads at all. Many of the normal winners running for office (those who are projected as being “solid” according to the Cook Political Report) refrained from airing any television advertisements. Out of 301

normal winners with opponents for the House of Representatives, only 86 of them, or less than 30%, ran at least one ad. This fits with the expectations and findings in Chapter 4 that normal winners air few ads overall.

Candidates in close races were significantly more likely to run television ads than normal winners and aired them with more frequency. Table 5.1 shows the difference in the average number of ads aired for normal winners and candidates in close races. This counts each individual time an ad airs as one. I excluded normal losers from this analysis because they often ran few ads due more to financial constraints than by choice. The average normal winner who bought any advertising time aired about 1100 ads while the average candidate in a close race aired more than twice as many. However, the number of ads aired was drastically different based on the type of election. Candidates for the Senate and governor aired far more ads on average than candidates for the House of Representatives so I have displayed them separately in the table. The pattern of normal winners airing less ads than candidates races holds across all three election types. In each, candidates in close races average more than twice as many ads aired than their normal winner counterparts.

It is possible to examine the content of the messages to determine whether normal winners include different types of information in their ads than other candidates. The average proportion of candidates' ads that mention their opponents is in Table 5.2. In just over one-eighth of ads, normal winners mention their opponent in any way; more than two-thirds of the ads aired by other candidates mention their opponents. Normal winners appear to focus on themselves while other candidates are much more likely to discuss their competition. This is further confirmed by examining the overall message of ads. For nearly

90% of normal winners' ads, the main goal seems to be to promote themselves. Only 5% have a primary purpose of attacking the opponent. For other candidates, far fewer ads had a primary goal of promoting themselves, with nearly 60% intended to either attack their opponents or contrast the two candidates.

The primary focus of ads is also displayed in Table 5.2. The expectation was that normal winners would focus on personal information rather than policy issues in their advertisements. There was not much difference in the proportion of ads by each type of candidate that focused on personal information, with normal winners slightly less likely to focus on personal information in my sample, though the difference was not statistically significant. When comparing the proportion of ads that focused on policy information, there was also no significant difference between normal winners and other candidates.

A further look into this information is in Table 5.3. This looks at the average number of ads in which House candidates discussed each type of issue rather than the proportion and is limited to comparing normal winners to competitive candidates, excluding normal losers. The findings are generally similar to those in Table 5.2, though there is no longer a significant difference between the number of ads that designed to promote the candidates. The other big difference is between the number of ads that focus on policy information. While normal winners spent a larger portion of their ads discussing policy matters, they actually air less than half the number of policy related advertisements. The same is true for Senate and gubernatorial candidates - while they are more likely to focus on policy in the ads they air, they actually air fewer ads discussing policy in total numbers than competitive candidates.

A closer examination into the personal information discussed reveals that normal winners do discuss personal information less frequently than other candidates, and the content of these ads is slightly different than the ads run by normal winners that focus on personal information. For normal winners, the personal information is almost always about themselves. Normal winners claim to be hard working and care about families. Alternatively, when other candidates focus on personal information, it tends to be about their opponent. More than 80% of the time, personal information ads run by these candidates were also attack ads, claiming things such as that their opponents have questionable relationships with lobbyists or that they do not respect women and minorities. Very few of these ads focused on the personal lives of the competitive candidates running the ads.

To further understand the content of the ads and explain normal winners' behavior, the specific types of issues they discussed are examined and displayed in Table 5.4. Like Table 5.2, these are the proportions of ads that discussed these issue areas. Normal winners discussed social issues, such as abortion or gay marriage, in a significantly smaller portion of their ads than other candidates. This fits with expectations because any candidate who discusses these issues must take a position. Whereas someone can support education without discussing his or her actual goals, there is no such ability with social issues. Normal winners appear to avoid discussing these matters more than other candidates.

Instead, normal winners focus on economic issues, social welfare issues, and foreign affairs. These are much easier to phrase as valence issues. Normal winners, in their ads, tend to discuss their plans to increase job creation, support strong education, and keep us safe from terrorists in lieu of telling voters they want to ban abortion or gay marriage.

These also tend to focus on their own views whereas other candidates tend to discuss their opponents views on issues. However, what this means is normal winners actually do frequently discuss issues throughout their advertisements, with the majority of ads containing some message about an issue.

Table 5.5 continues to support these findings, with the average number of each type of ads displayed, like in Table 5.3. Again, normal losers are excluded. Normal winners discussed each of these issues less frequently than competitive candidates, on average. While normal winners did have higher proportions of ads that focused on some of them, they have lower total ads.

Much like in chapters 3 and 4, these differences still exist when considering other possible factors that may influence the dependent variable. This analysis includes dummy variables for Senate and Governors elections, with House candidates as the base category and for Democrat, with Republicans as the base category. The multivariate analysis for total number of ads with each primary goal are in Table 5.6 by expectations of winning. The negative binomial distribution is used in this case because the dependent variable value is 0 for many of the cases and the coefficients are incidence rate ratios. As in the previous tables, normal winners seem to air each type of ad less frequently than competitive candidates.

For each advertisements in which candidates who are not normal winners mention their opponents, normal winners air just .13 advertisements that mention opponents. Normal winners' advertisements focus on attacking their opponents with just .13 advertisements for each time other candidates' advertisements focus on attacking. The candidates do not

have significant differences in the number of advertisements that promote the candidates.

Normal winners are significantly less likely to have their advertisements focus on personal information or policy information. For each advertisement by other candidates that focuses on personal information, normal winners run just .25 ads that focus on personal information. For every advertisement by others that focuses on policy information, normal winners run .53 ads that focus on policy.

They are also air fewer ads dealing with each policy area, as shown in Table 5.7, which presents incidence rate ratios, as well. For each advertisement by other candidates that discusses economic issues, normal winners air .50 ads that discuss economic matters. The same is true for social welfare policy; normal winners run half as many ads that discuss social welfare as other candidates. Both of these differences are statistically significant.

The same patterns do not hold for social issues and foreign/defense policy, where the differences are not statistically different for normal winners and other candidates. While normal winners did run fewer ads of each type in this sample, the differences are inconclusive for candidates outside of the sample.

It is clear throughout this analysis that normal winners are making the choice to avoid the discussion of many issues. Most choose not to air a single advertisement. Among those who do advertise on television, they rarely attack their opponents or discuss information as position issues. They focus on themselves and discuss how they will fix the economy, education, and save the world without giving much detail as to how.

Conclusion

Overall, this information continues to support the conclusions of previous chapters. Most normal winners are continuing to avoid confrontation. They do not want to make their elections competitive, so they air few advertisements, start their television campaign late if at all, and tell voters little about their opponents or specifics about their plans in office.

This may explain why a candidate like Virginia Foxx aired ads in which she discussed job creation and helping seniors but did not discuss any of her plans. Her ads focused on policy information but did not provide any specific details on how to achieve her goals. Instead, she promoted herself and reassured voters she would work on their behalf. She did not mention her opponent or take a strong stand on the issues. In turn, she avoided making the election competitive.

This also shows that Randy Brock's tactics when he ran for governor of Vermont were typical of candidates like him. He went on the attack against his opponent in his advertisements, as do most normal losers. He attempted to draw attention to the election and help voters realize that his opponent should not be reelected. While Brock was not successful in his challenge, this behavior is typical of candidates like him.

Table 5.1: Average Number of Ads By Type of Candidate

	House	Senate	Governor
Normal Winners	640	3,301	2,342
	(688)	(3,237)	(2,724)
N	86	15	5
Competitive Candidates	1,586	8,223	7,095
	(1,670)	(6,230)	(4,973)
N	160	28	11
t	5.03	2.85	1.9811
p(T < t)	0.000	0.003	.0338

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Competitive candidates are any that were in elections considered “likely,” “leaning,” or “toss up” by Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average number of ads for House, Senate, and gubernatorial candidates. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Wisconsin Advertising Project.

Table 5.2: Portion of Ads Focusing on Each Area, by Type of Candidate

	Mention Opponent	Promote Candidate	Attack Opponent	Focus on Personal Info	Focus on Policy	N
Normal Winners	0.132 (0.293)	0.887 (0.252)	0.052 (0.153)	0.111 (0.246)	0.603 (0.394)	106
Other Candidates	0.684 (0.349)	0.382 (0.328)	0.234 (0.275)	0.165 (0.254)	0.495 (0.394)	255
t	9.56	8.76	4.09	1.31	1.87	
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.190	0.061	

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average percentage of each type of ads for House candidates. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Wisconsin Advertising Project.

Table 5.3: Total Number of Ads Focusing on Each Area, by Type of Candidate

	Mention Opponent	Promote Candidate	Attack Opponent	Focus on Personal Info	Focus on Policy	N
Normal Winners	185 (719)	517 (475)	91.3 (428)	75.2 (243)	382 (415)	106
Competitive Candidates	1,160 (1,091)	723 (1,138)	416 (550)	252 (581)	825 (929)	160
t	8.11	1.77	5.13	2.97	4.62	
p-value	0.000	0.079	0.000	0.003	0.000	

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Competitive candidates are any that were in elections considered “likely,” “leaning,” or “toss up” by Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average number of each type of ads for House candidates. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Wisconsin Advertising Project.

Table 5.4: Proportion of Ads Discussing Issues, by Type of Candidate

	Social Issues	Economic Issues	Social Welfare Policy	Foreign/Defense Policy	N
Normal Winners	0.087 (0.123)	0.748 (0.692)	0.135 (0.153)	0.121 (0.146)	106
Other Candidates	0.214 (0.259)	0.692 (0.664)	0.074 (0.072)	0.161 (0.222)	255
t	9.56	8.76	4.09	0.97	
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.166	

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average percentage of ads in each issue area for House candidates. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Wisconsin Advertising Project.

Table 5.5: Average Number of Ads Discussing Issues, by Type of Candidate

	Social Issues	Economic Issues	Social Welfare Policy	Foreign/Defense Policy	N
Normal Winners	71.0 (322)	507 (599)	167 (243)	189 (344)	106
Competitive Candidates	205 (239)	1,187 (1,169)	429 (613)	333 (612)	160
t	3.90	5.52	4.19	2.21	
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.028	

Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. Competitive candidates are any that were in elections considered “likely,” “leaning,” or “toss up” by Cook Political Report. Coefficients are average number of ads in each issue area for House candidates. T-values are calculated using a difference of means test. Standard deviations in parentheses. Source of data: Wisconsin Advertising Project.

Table 5.6: Focus of Television Ads by Type of Candidate: Total Number of Ads

	Mention Opponent	Promote Candidate	Attack Opponent	Focus on Personal Info	Focus on Policy
Normal Winner	0.13 (7.12)	0.91 (0.45)	0.13 (4.43)	0.25 (3.18)	0.53 (3.15)
Senate	5.21 (4.75)	4.85 (5.93)	5.37 (3.20)	6.17 (3.36)	4.62 (5.78)
Governor	3.56 (2.32)	4.18 (3.50)	3.49 (1.53)	1.11 (0.12)	5.64 (4.25)
Democrat	0.49 (-2.73)	1.21 (1.03)	0.26 (3.24)	0.49 (1.82)	0.97 (0.14)

Coefficients are incidence rate ratios calculated using regression with negative binomial distribution. Z-values in parentheses. Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. All other candidates are in the baseline category. Source of data: Wisconsin Advertising Project.

Table 5.7: Content of Ads By Type of Candidate: Total Number of Ads

	Social Issues	Economic Issues	Social Welfare Policy	Foreign/Defense Policy
Normal Winner	0.87 (0.22)	0.50 (4.56)	0.50 (2.39)	0.74 (0.83)
Senate	5.37 (2.06)	4.81 (7.86)	6.11 (4.70)	4.35 (3.16)
Governor	5.31 (1.30)	4.48 (4.90)	5.70 (2.95)	0.51 (0.92)
Democrat	0.77 (0.46)	0.92 (0.64)	1.43 (1.37)	1.84 (1.81)

Coefficients are incidence rate ratios calculated using regression with negative binomial distribution. Z-values in parentheses. Normal winners are candidates considered “solid” by the Cook Political Report. All other candidates are in the baseline category. Source of data: Wisconsin Advertising Project.

APPENDIX A: CHAPTER 4 CODING PROCEDURES

All websites were coded by the author. First, they were copied from the Library of Congress and the Wayback Machine (archive.org) websites and then coded through the Atlas program. All wording, pictures, and links were coded according to their content (such as position or valence issue, personal history, or district information) and included the front page and any pages that could be accessed with a single click (such as issues or personal information).

Following the initial phase of coding, about 10% of the data was recoded by the author. This entailed pulling individual phrases and paragraphs from websites at random and coding them according to the same rules as the initial coding. The benefit of this process is that many of the passages did not contain enough information to identify the specific website or candidate to which they belonged. For example, one passage that was recoded was:

Almost everyone has something to say about the high price of health care these days. While insurance companies continue to raise prices, nothing is being done to reduce costs for the average consumer. I have a plan called the States Right to Innovate in Health Care Act that would encourage states to develop their own systems of universal care by clearing away the underbrush of Federal regulations. It would provide assistance, through implementation and planning grants, to help states transition to new regulations and to help states transition

to universal care. (From Representative John Tierney, Democratic incumbent from Massachusetts)

There is nothing in the text that informs the reader about the identity of the candidate. It could be a incumbent or challenger, normal winner or normal loser, it could even be a man or a woman. While many passages did contain information about the identity of the candidate, the majority did not. Even when passages contained information about the candidate, the author rarely remembered enough about the 2008 election to know whether the candidate was a normal winner, normal loser, or in a close race. Due to the volume of passages coded and the time between the codings (about eight months), it would have also been impossible to code based on memory of the candidates' websites.

The intercoder reliability between the two instances of coding was .78. Most of the differences between the two attempts was due to leaving off a code rather than changing a code. One example is from the website of Sam Graves of Missouri. His website said:

Congressman Sam Graves is a life long resident of Missouri's 6th Congressional District. As a small businessman and a sixth-generation family farmer. Sam has spent his life working to make Missouri a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

The first time I coded the website, I coded this passage as "personal information," "experience," and "incumbency" since he calls himself "Congressman," which implies he has held the office previously. In the second coding, I left off "incumbency" since the passage said little about him holding the office in the past. These types of differences made up the majority of the variation between the two instances of coding.

There were a limited number of instances in which the choice of coding something as a valence issue or position issue was challenging. In particular, several instances of candidates discussing taxes required the coder to make a difficult decision in how to code the issue. For example, Oklahoma Republican Representative John Sullivan explained on his website:

As we work through this rough economic period, it is important that American families are able to keep as much of their hard earned tax money as possible with tax credits and incentives and no tax increases.

While Sullivan does not explain specifics as to how he would like tax policies in the United States, he does take a position that is not exactly benign. Many tax credits have opposition from some voters and many voters believe that taxes should be increased in some situations, such as for the very wealthy. However, he also does not list specific tax credits or incentives he would try to increase, making this less obvious than many passages on the websites.

To account for the challenges of such passages, particularly those involving taxes, I ran all analyses with the individual issues separately. For all issues, the relationship was in the right direction; normal winners were less likely to take positions on issues than other candidates. There were a few issues in which the relationship was not statistically significant, but that was primarily due to having very few cases in which candidates discussed the particular issue or because some issues cannot really be discussed as valence issues, such as abortion.

Given that these concerns were addressed in the coding process, I have reason to believe

that the coding scheme was as accurate as possible.

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