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The Dynamics of Issue Ownership in Presidential Campaigns

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This effort examines the dynamics of the agenda-setting process in presidential campaigns by assessing the conditions that motivate candidates to discuss issues associated with their opponent's party. The article's argument contends that occurrences of issue trespassing are a function of the context in which a campaign is occurring and factors stemming from the campaign process. The hypotheses are tested against data collected from all available campaign advertisements produced by major party candidates competing in the 1976 through 1996 presidential elections. The results of the logit analysis indicate that candidates' decisions to address issues owned by their opponent's party are a function of their competitive standing, their partisanship, the importance of an issue to the electorate, and the tone of their campaign messages.

Increasingly, the field of campaign politics is moving away from an emphasis on voters (e.g., voting behavior, information processing, and attitude formation) and toward analyses of candidate behavior (e.g., Damore 2002; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Kahn and Kenney 1999; Shaw 1999a, 1999b; Simon 2002). This shift has resulted in the emergence of a body of knowledge that has improved our understanding of the supply side of the campaign process, particularly in terms of the study of campaign strategy.

I seek to further this research by building on prior work examining the theory of issue ownership (Petrocik 1991, 1996) to assess how presidential candidates compete to define and control campaign agendas. Briefly, the theory of issue ownership posits that the parties hold reputations for their ability to handle certain issues. These reputations, in turn, provide candidates with credibility over issues associated with their party. By increasing the salience of party-owned issues, candidates can stack the campaign agenda with issues that accent their strengths and highlight their opponents' weaknesses.

While the advantages that candidates may reap from discussing party-owned issues is apparent, what is less obvious, and which is the focus of this effort, is why candidates would choose to trespass on issues associated with the opposition's party. Indeed, evidence from recent presidential campaigns indicates that such behavior is common, if not always successful (i.e., Dukakis in the tank). Investigation of this behavior and the study of campaign agenda setting more generally have implications for our understanding of campaign strategy and political communication, as well as the linkage between campaign processes and election outcomes.

The research begins by assessing the strategic considerations that underlie candidates' decisions about which issues to discuss during a campaign and which issues to avoid. Next, I draw on prior research to develop a set of hypotheses that capture the conditions under which presidential candidates will address issues associated with their opponent's party. In particular, I argue that these decisions are shaped by the context in which a campaign is occurring and the dynamics of the campaign process. These hypotheses are then tested with data collected from all available campaign advertisements produced by major party candidates competing in the 1976 through 1996 presidential elections. After presenting the results of the analysis, the paper concludes by discussing its implications for the literature.

AGENDA COMPETITION

As Riker (1993: 1) notes: "Agendas foreshadow outcomes: the shape of an agenda influences the choices made from it." As applied to the study of campaigns, Riker's axiom suggests that candidates who are able to define campaign agendas hold a distinct advantage over candidates operating under agendas established by their opponents.¹ Given this link between agendas and outcomes, understanding how campaign agendas emerge is a critical component of campaign strategy.

Investigation of this process, however, necessitates *ex ante* specification of candidates' agenda setting strategies. To this end, Riker (1993) argues that candidates should focus their attention on issues that either play to their strengths or their opponents' weaknesses while avoiding issues that either accent the opposition's strengths or highlight their own weaknesses (e.g., the Dominance Principle). Execution of this strategy may allow candidates to increase

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¹ In contrast to agendas in legislative settings, campaign agendas are more fluid in nature. Whereas legislative agendas are fixed sets of proposals that are voted on sequentially, campaign agendas emerge over time and result from the joint choices candidates make about voter receptivity to their issue packages.

the saliency of issues over which they are perceived as credible in the campaign environment.² This, in turn, increases the likelihood that candidates will be evaluated in terms of their strengths and the opposition candidate in terms of their weaknesses.

Clearly, the Dominance Principle provides a useful template for assessing agenda competition in the campaign arena. For the construct to be tractable, however, indicators of credibility need to be observable. To wit, past research suggests that policy reputations (Carmines and Kuklinski 1990), incumbency (Kahn and Kenney 1999), and candidates' backgrounds (i.e., military experience) can serve as sources for credibility. However, incorporation of these criteria into a general model of agenda competition is problematic because they are largely idiosyncratic and hence do not lend themselves to systematic evaluation. Because of this limitation, a more generalizable construct for examining the agenda competition process in presidential campaigns is used here: candidates' partisanship and the theory of issue ownership (Petrocik 1991, 1996).

The theory of issue ownership rests on the proposition that because of long standing party reputation, candidates' are more likely to be perceived as credible over issues owned by their party (also see Campbell et al. 1960; Norpoth and Buchanan 1992). For instance, voters see Republicans as being better able to handle foreign policy and government management issues, while the Democrats are perceived as more capable on civil rights and social welfare issues. Prior research suggests that these partisan issue associations are consistent and well defined (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Hamill, Lodge, and Blake 1985).³

Given the basic thrust of the issue ownership argument, it might be expected that as candidates compete for leverage over campaign agendas they will focus their campaign messages on issues owned by their party and ignore issues associated with the opposition party to maximize perceptions of their credibility over the campaign agenda. The data presented in Table 1, however, tell a different story. These data present the distribution of appeals taken from all available campaign advertisements produced by major party candidates competing for the presidency between 1976 and 1996. The data are divided into five categories: appeals focusing on candidate traits and backgrounds, appeals addressing neutral and performance issues, and appeals that highlight either party-owned or opposition owned issues.

² Credibility is a necessary antecedent for persuasion (e.g., Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

³ Consistent with political psychological approaches to the study of voting behavior (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1989; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Rahn 1993), I assume that voters are more likely to rely on information that is salient in the campaign environment when formulating their vote choice. Thus, the purpose of campaign messages is not to change voters' attitudes per se, but to prime the information that voters draw on when evaluating candidates. Consistent with strategic actor models of agenda setting, I assume that, it is the inter-candidate competition for agenda control that affects what information is salient to voters.

Table 1 yields a number of insights into how major party presidential candidates present their campaign messages; specific to my purposes, two considerations merit discussion. First, to some degree, it appears that all candidates issue trespass. This ranges from a high of 34 percent for Walter Mondale in 1988 to a low of 4 percent by George Bush in 1988. Second, issue trespassing is more common among Democrats than among Republicans. Of the total instances of issue trespassing in the data, Democratic candidates account for 74 percent. It appears that in some cases presidential candidates abandon the efficacy of the Dominance Principle and campaign in their opponent's issue territories.

THE LOGIC OF ISSUE TRESPASSING

What accounts for the discrepancy between the theoretical predictions outlined above and these data? The work of Downs (1957) provides a useful starting point for explaining this behavior. Specifically, Downs (135) argues that to appeal to the largest segment of voters, candidates in a two-party system should cast "some policies into the other's territory in order to convince voters that their net position is near them." Thus, some level of issue trespassing should be expected as a function of normal campaign strategy.⁴ Prior research also suggests additional factors, most notably the context in which a campaign is occurring and factors stemming from the campaign process that may affect occurrences of issue trespassing. Below, I more fully elucidate the hypothesized relationship between these factors and candidates' decisions to issue trespass.

Environmental Factors

As the work of Holbrook (1996) and others suggests, macro-level forces (e.g., the state of the economy) shape the context in which campaigns transpire. This, in turn, may constrain candidates' selection or avoidance of specific issues. In particular, environmental factors may affect the decision to issue trespass at two levels. First, candidates may adapt the content of their campaign messages in response to

⁴ Although this strategy is rational from the perspective of candidates, its implications for voters may not be so satisfactory. In addition to spending a good deal of time discussing moderate policies, candidates who employ this strategy are likely to heighten ambiguity about what they stand for. Moreover, evidence from the voting behavior literature indicates that the payoffs for this strategy may be less than expected. In their analysis of voter recall of Dukakis and Bush's discussion of opposition party issues during the 1988 presidential campaigns, Norpoth and Buchanan (1992) find that because of voters adherence to long-standing partisan stereotypes, voters failed to associate the candidates with the trespassed issues. With this said, it is important to remember that campaigns do not target all voters equally, but rather direct their resources towards voters at the margins whose decisionmaking ultimately determine election outcomes (Shaw 1999a, 1999b). As a consequence, seeking evidence of campaign effects by analyzing the behavior of all voters is likely to miss subtle effects that have large implications in the aggregate.

≡ TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF CANDIDATE APPEALS IN THE 1976-1996 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS (MAJOR PARTY CANDIDATES)

Year	Candidate	Traits and Background	Neutral Issues	Party Issues	Opposition Issues	Performance Issues
1976	Ford	66% (141)	1% (2)	16% (35)	8% (17)	9% (20)
	Carter	44% (44)	1% (2)	16% (16)	13% (13)	26% (26)
1980	Reagan	45% (94)	1% (3)	13% (28)	5% (10)	36% (76)
	Carter	53% (65)	1% (1)	16% (20)	16% (19)	14% (17)
1984	Reagan	34% (45)	3% (4)	26% (33)	5% (6)	32% (41)
	Mondale	30% (27)	2% (2)	22% (20)	34% (31)	12% (11)
1988	Bush	52% (54)	0	31% (32)	3% (3)	14% (15)
	Dukakis	29% (59)	1% (2)	30% (60)	26% (52)	14% (27)
1992	Bush	44% (35)	2% (2)	24% (19)	16% (12)	14% (11)
	Clinton	36% (44)	1% (1)	23% (28)	17% (22)	23% (28)
1996	Dole	34% (44)	0	50% (66)	11% (14)	5% (6)
	Clinton	8% (16)	6% (12)	42% (89)	30% (63)	14% (32)
1976-1996	All Candidates	39% (668)	2% (31)	26% (446)	15% (262)	18% (310)

Note: Data collected from all available campaign advertisements produced by major party candidates. Values in parentheses are number of unique issue appeals gleaned from the advertisements. Determination of issue ownership for each party's candidates was taken from Petrocik (1996) and Petrocik et al. (2003-2004).

the mood of the country. Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) suggest that politicians are informed about movements in the nation's ideological tenor and adapt their behavior in response to changes in the public's mood, a strategy they refer to as rational anticipation. Thus, when the public mood does not provide a context amenable to issues owned by a candidates' party, candidates may opt to trespass in order to appear in line with the desires of the electorate.

At a more explicit level, this same logic may result in a greater likelihood of candidates discussing issues that are important to voters even if the opposition party owns those issues. In this case, trespassing may allow candidates to associate themselves with concerns that are already salient in the minds of voters, as opposed to simply abdicating these issues to their opponents. Aldrich and Griffin (2003: 247) succinctly capture this point by noting that "if voters identify certain issues as priorities, we would expect the candidates to speak more often and show more advertisements about these issues."

Occurrences of issue trespassing also may be affected by voters' expectations about the role of the president. Jacobson (1990), for instance, suggests that the electorate expects presidents to pursue diffuse collective goods such as balancing the budget, lowering taxes, and greater governmental efficiency and evaluates presidential candidates in terms of their competence in dealing with national problems. Given that voters' expectations about the role of the president positively correlate with issues owned by the Republican Party, these institutional expectations may work to the advantage of Republican candidates. As a consequence, Democratic candidates may feel obliged to discuss Republican issues in order to satisfy voters' wants. Indeed, this dynamic may account for much of the partisan differences in the data presented in Table 1.

The Campaign Process

In addition to the context in which a campaign is occurring, factors stemming from the campaign process may affect the decision to issue trespass. Foremost here is candidates' level of support, which past research has shown to be a strong predictor of variation in candidates' behavior (e.g., Damore 2002; Kahn and Kenny 1999; Shaw 1999a). As applied to the context of interest here, I expect that trailing candidates will be more likely to issue trespass in order to reconnect with voters. That is, given that the opposition's lead may stem from voter receptivity to its campaign messages, issue trespassing may provide the means by which trailing candidates can attach themselves to issues that may loom large in voters' evaluations.⁵ More generally, because of their disadvantaged status, trailing candidates may be more willing to accept the risks associated with issue trespassing. In contrast, candidates who are ahead in the polls have little incentive to alter their messages.

A second campaign attribute that may affect candidates' decisions to trespass is the tone of their campaign messages. Here, I anticipate that to increase the veracity of their

⁵ However, I expect that when candidates issue trespass they will alter the frames through which they discuss opposition owned issues (Petrocik 1996). Whereas a Republican may choose to discuss crime reduction in terms of strengthening law enforcement, a Democrat may focus on the issue by highlighting investments in education and job training. By using an alternative frame to present an issue candidates may be able to reshape voters' understanding of an issue in manner that highlights their perceived strengths. More generally, Chong (1996) and others argue that the frames through which elites present issues can have strong effects on how voters understand what issues are and are not about. However, to date, the study of how candidates choose to frame issues is a void in the political communication literature (Simon 2002).

attacks, candidates' party-owned issues will form the basis of candidates' negative appeals. In so doing, candidates can explicitly highlight their opponents' weaknesses over issues that accent their credibility. Moreover and as is argued elsewhere (Damore 2002), the returns for discussing party-owned issues positively may be limited given that voters may be inclined to associate candidates with such issues favorably. However, when candidates issue trespass they will do so positively in order to assert their credibility over issues that might otherwise be perceived as weaknesses. If candidates were to use opposition-owned issues as the basis of their negative appeals, these attacks may falter given that candidates may not be perceived as credible in this regard.

DATA AND METHODS

Data gathered from all available campaign advertisements produced by major party candidates competing in the 1976-1996 presidential elections are used to test the hypotheses specified above. An overview of the data collection, coding, reliability, and validity is provided by Damore (2002, 2004). Due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, logistic regression is used to estimate the model. Robust standard errors (clustering on each candidate) are used to control for lack of independence among observations. The model's unit of analysis is the appeal, which represents a unique mention of an issue within an ad.⁶ The determination of issues follows Smith (1985). The number of observations in the model is 708 taken from 476 ads. Excluded from the dataset are appeals focusing on neutral and performance issues, as well as appeals addressing traits and candidates' backgrounds.

Variables and Measures

The dependent variable is a dichotomous measure that is coded 1 for a trespassed issue and 0 for a party-owned issue. Data used to create this measure are taken from Petrocik (1996) and Petrocik et al. (2003-2004) and are summarized in Damore (2003).

Four independent variables are specified to assess the affect that the larger context in which a campaign is occurring has on candidates' likelihood of issue trespassing. A dummy variable, *Democrat*, is included to test if Democratic candidates are systematically more likely to issue trespass than their Republican counterparts. *Salient* is included to assess the affect that issue specific public opinion exerts on candidates' decisionmaking. The variable is measured as the percent of respondents identifying an issue as being the most important problem in pre-campaign Gallup polls.

Both variables should have a strong and positive effect on the likelihood of issue trespassing.

Two interaction terms, *Democrat* × *Mood Change* and *Republican* × *Mood Change*, are included to evaluate the influence of public mood on candidates' decisionmaking. The partisan components of the terms are dummy variables and the mood component is measured as the change in domestic policy mood between the third quarter in the year prior to the election and the third quarter of the election year using data taken from Stimson (1999). Negative values for the mood term suggest that the country is moving in a conservative direction and positive values are indicative of a liberal shift. Thus, the sign for the Democratic term should be negative and the sign for the Republican term should be positive.⁷

Support Difference and *Tone* are included to assess the influence that the campaign process has on candidates' decisionmaking. *Support Difference* is measured as the difference in candidates' poll standings (moving over time). With the exception of 1992, the data for this measure are taken from Gallup. For 1992, data presented by Goldman et al. (1994) are used.⁸ I anticipate that the variable's coefficient will be negative, indicating that candidates who are behind are more likely to issue trespass. *Tone* is a dummy variable that takes on the value of 1 if the tone of an appeal is negative, and 0 if positive. An appeal is considered negative if it focuses on a candidate's opponent and positive if it focuses on the candidate producing the ad (e.g., Damore 2002). The sign for the coefficient should be negative suggesting that when candidates go negative party-owned issues will form the basis of their attacks.

Three control variables also are included in the model. *Opposition Emphasis* is used to control for discussion of issues that may result from the dialogue that emerges over the course of a campaign. Specifically, past research (e.g., Damore 2003; Simon 2002) finds that as the opposition's attention to an issue increases so does the likelihood that candidates will discuss the same issue. The variable is measured as the percent (moving over time) of the opposition candidates' total appeals devoted to an issue. *Candidate Emphasis* is included to control for the affect that candidates' decisionmaking at earlier points in a campaign may have on their subsequent decisionmaking. Again, the variable is measured as the percent (moving over time) of candidates' total appeals devoted to an issue. Finally, because many of the model's variables are temporally dependent, I include *Days Prior to Election* to control for time. The variable is measured as the number of days prior to Election Day on which an appeal was generated.

⁶ Using the appeal as the unit of analysis provides a finer measure of candidate behavior given that candidates discuss multiple issues in an advertisement, often focus on the same issues or traits multiple times within an advertisement, and typically include positive and negative appeals in the same advertisement.

⁷ Due to collinearity issues, *Mood Change* is not included as a main effect.

⁸ I use the data presented by Goldman et al. (1994) for 1992 because they provide tracking data for the campaign. Gallup does the same for 1996. However, for the other four campaigns, Gallup reports poll results intermittently. For dates when candidates' poll numbers were not available, these data are estimated assuming monotonic linearity between dates when Gallup did report polling data.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the results of the logit analysis for the model examining the factors that affect candidates' decisions to discuss issues owned by their opponent's party. The fit of the model appears to be strong. The significance of the chi-square value suggests that the inclusion of the independent variables provide a significant improvement in the model's explanatory power. The PRE statistic indicates that the model makes a modest improvement in reducing prediction error. Inspection of the parameter estimates suggests support for the hypotheses specified above as the coefficients for all six variables of substantive interest are in the predicted and all but two obtain conventional levels of statistical significance.⁹

The performance of the variables assessing the influence that the context in which a campaign is occurring exerts on candidates' likelihood of issue trespassing suggests a number of insights into the process by which campaign agendas are formed. First, consistent with the descriptive data presented in Table 1, the sign and significance for *Democrat* suggests that Democratic candidates are more likely to discuss issues owned by the Republican Party as compared to the propensity of Republican candidates to discuss Democratic issues. This behavior is likely driven by voters' expectations about the role of the presidency. That is, because voters' expectations about the type of issues that presidential candidates should address correlate with issues associated with the GOP, it appears that Democratic candidates strategically adapt the content of their messages in response to these expectations.

Consistent with Aldrich and Griffin (2003), the results also indicate that candidates are more likely to issue trespass if the electorate has identified an issue as a priority. Specifically, the sign and significance for *Salient* suggests that as the importance of an issue to the electorate increases so does the likelihood that the candidates will discuss the issue even if it is associated with the opposition party. Lastly, although in the predicted direction, the insignificance of the public mood interaction terms indicates that change in the country's mood does not systematically affect candidates' decisions to issue trespass.¹⁰

The performances of the two variables assessing the influence that the campaign process has on occurrences of issue trespassing are consistent with theoretical expectations. The sign and statistical significance of *Support Difference* indicates that candidates who are trailing in pre-election polls are more likely to discuss issues associated with their opponent's party, presumably as a means to jump-start their campaigns. The performance of *Tone* suggests that

TABLE 2

LOGIT ANALYSIS OF ISSUE TRESPASSING IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS, 1976-1996

Independent Variables	Coefficients (robust standard errors)
Democrat	1.03** (.358)
Salient	5.59** (2.48)
Democrat * Mood Change	-.007 (.037)
Republican * Mood Change	.082 (.201)
Support Difference	-.026*** (.007)
Tone	-.705*** (.223)
Opposition Emphasis	-.223 (.257)
Candidate Emphasis	-4.04 (3.35)
Days Prior to Election Day	.002 (.005)
Constant	-.702 (.633)
Number of Observations	708
Wald chi-square	61.44
Log Likelihood	-415.64
PRE (tau)	7%

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05 (one tailed test), robust standard errors cluster on each candidate.

when candidates attack they are more likely to do so by addressing issues owned by their own party and when candidates present a positive message they tend to use opposition owned issues as the basis for these appeals. As discussed above, this behavior is designed to maximize the veracity of candidates' appeals.

Due to the nonlinear nature of logit analysis, the coefficients presented in Table 2 do not indicate the linear effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. To assess more clearly the substantive effects of the analysis, Table 3 reports predicted probabilities for values of the statistically significant variables. For these predictions, the values of the independent variables of interest are varied while all other variables in the model are held at their means. Thus, these values capture the net affect of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Examination of the values presented in Table 3 indicates that the model's statistically significant variables also have strong substantive effects. This is most apparent in the difference in

⁹ Because *Opposition Emphasis*, *Candidate Emphasis*, and *Days Prior to Election Day* are included as controls, I do not discuss their substantive effects.

¹⁰ When the model is run separately for each party's candidates the mood term remains in the predicted direction and is statistically significant for Democrats at the .03 level and approaches significance for Republicans (p = .08).

≡ TABLE 3
 PREDICTED PROBABILITIES FROM LOGIT ANALYSIS OF ISSUE
 TRESPASSING IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS, 1976-1996

Value of Independent Variable	Probability of Issue Trespassing
Candidate Party	
Democrat	.45
Republican	.22
Tone	
Positive	.42
Negative	.27
Salient	
0	.31
10%	.45
20%	.58
Support Difference	
+13 (-1 SD)	.28
0	.35
-13 (+1 SD)	.44
-26 (+2 SD)	.52

Note: Values are net effects, all other variables in the model are held at their means.

the probabilities of issue trespassing for Republican and Democratic candidates. All else equal, Democratic candidates are 23 percent more likely to issue trespass. The predicted probabilities for *Tone* and *Salient* also suggest comparable effects. If, for example, candidates present a negative message, the probability that they will use opposition issues as the basis of these appeals decreases by 15 percent as compared to when presenting a positive appeal. The change in the probability of issue trespassing also appears to be strongly influenced by the saliency of an issue in the electorate. Indeed, if 10 percent of the electorate identifies an issue as a priority, the likelihood that candidates will discuss the issue even if it is associated with the opposition party increases by 14 percent. This value increases an additional 13 percent as an issue's saliency increases to 20 percent. Finally, changes in the probability of issue trespassing for candidates who are trailing in the polls suggest similar effects.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the outset, the study of candidate behavior and campaign strategy has received much less attention in the literature, particularly as compared to analyses of voters. This effort seeks to help fill this lacuna by extending our understanding of the agenda-formation process in the campaign arena by assessing the conditions under which presidential candidates will discuss issues that are associated with their opponents' party. The result of the analysis indicate that candidates' decisions to issue trespass are shaped by their partisanship, the tone of their campaign message, their competitive standing, and the importance of

an issue to the electorate. The model failed to detect systematic evidence that changes in the public mood affect candidates' decisionmaking (although see note 10).

The implications these findings have for our understanding of campaign strategy in presidential elections are at least threefold. First, consistent with prior research, the analysis suggests that candidates' level of support accounts for a good deal of variation in candidate behavior. Here, I find that candidates who are trailing in the polls are more likely to alter their messages in a manner that distance their candidacies from the issues traditionally championed by their party. In so doing, these candidates are willing to accept the potential risks that may result from issue trespassing in hopes of reenergizing their campaigns. In contrast, candidates who are ahead in the polls have little incentive to adjust their messages, and as a consequence, they appear to behave in a more risk adverse manner.

Second, the evidence presented here lends credence to Aldrich and Griffin's (2003) argument that the priorities of voters should exert a strong influence on the issues that candidates choose to discuss. Specifically, the results indicate that issues that are perceived as important to the electorate are more likely to be discussed by presidential candidates regardless of the issues' partisan ownership. Although this finding could be construed as support for Aldrich and Griffin's (2003) contention that the issue ownership approach to agenda setting is problematic (because it presupposes that candidates' selection of issues are made irrespective of the wants of voters), I am unwilling to go that far.¹¹ Given the preponderance of evidence indicating that party-owned issues are a staple of candidate rhetoric in presidential campaigns (e.g., Petrocik et al. 2003-2004), a more fitting conclusion on this point might be that the discussion of party-owned issues is tempered by pragmatic assessments of the issue environment in which a campaign takes place.

Finally, these findings offer insight into the difficulties facing Democratic presidential candidates as they compete to define campaign agendas on terms favorable to their candidacies. As Jacobson (1990) suggests, traditional Democratic themes run counter to the expectations that voters have about the type of policies and goals that presidents should articulate. More to the point, as the data in Table 1 and the multivariate analysis suggest, Democratic candidates are aware of this dynamic and have generally sought to overcome it by discussing Republican issues. However, with the exception of Bill Clinton, these candidates have been unsuccessful in convincing the electorate that they are credible over such issues. More broadly, the agenda setting strategy

¹¹ Aldrich and Griffin (2003) base their analysis upon campaign advertisements and speeches made by Al Gore and George Bush during the 2000 presidential campaign. Interestingly, in their analysis of issue ownership in the 1952-2000 presidential campaigns, Petrocik et al. (2003-2004) find that the 2000 campaign is an outlier that does not comport with either their or my theoretical expectations. Specifically, they find that in 2000, Republican George Bush, not Democrat Al Gore, was the candidate most likely to issue trespass.

employed by recent Democratic presidential candidates raises a host of questions. For instance, pragmatically, one might speculate if it is in the Democratic Party's best interest to nominate candidates who have credibility in Republican turf. Normatively, we might question if candidates whose messages emulate those of the opposition are capable of engaging voters and providing a meaningful choice.

While the above insights are important and for the most part novel, I would be remiss to ignore the limitations of this effort. Most notably, the theory and analysis advanced here is limited to the study of presidential candidates. Clearly, these contests are atypical of most campaigns because of the media attention they command, the voter interest they receive, and the ability of presidential candidates to disseminate their messages. As a consequence, determining the generalizability of the analysis presented here is difficult. At the very least, these findings are consistent with Petrocik et al.'s (2003-2004) analysis examining patterns of candidate attention to party-owned issues in the 1952-2000 presidential elections.

With this said, I conclude by noting that this effort has provided a unique examination of an important, albeit under-studied, component of the campaign process. Whereas past research has tended to concentrate on the effects that information presented during a campaign has on voters' decisionmaking, this effort has sought to increase our knowledge about the process that shapes the information that candidates choose to present to the electorate, and in so doing, extend our understanding of the supply side of the campaign process.

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