

ALL POLITICS IS NATIONAL: HOW THE PUBLIC'S VIEWS ON PRESIDENTIAL
POLICY AFFECT THE NATIONALIZATION OF
SENATE CAMPAIGNS

by

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POLICY AFFECT THE NATIONALIZATION OF
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OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

United States election campaigns have evolved into extremely complex animals with mudslinging, blaming, and a compilation of many issues. In recent elections, the economy is a heated issue with the policies of the various branches of the government put under utmost scrutiny. Specifically, the focus has become the President, and what his administration has done to help or hurt the economy. The President is not just mentioned in national executive elections, but legislative elections as well.

The economic issues that are discussed in legislative elections have become increasingly national, upstaging the local economic conditions. This nationalization of issues seems to stem from the public's attention to these issues, who they often attribute these issues to and look to for solutions: the President. So I have chosen to examine this phenomenon, paying specific attention to Senate elections. The purpose of this study is to explain how the public's attitudes toward the President's economic policies affect the nationalization of Senate campaigns over time.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Campaign Strategy

Campaigns utilize refined strategies to ensure the greatest chance of victory in an election. These strategies depend upon several factors, specifically the competitiveness of a state and the issues that are most important to voters. Resources are spent in areas of the country that will bring about the most benefit. "Individual voting can differ dramatically across campaign context, thus providing rare individual level evidence of campaign effects that result from the strategic allocation of campaign resources over the electoral map," (McClurg and Holbrook 495). Depending on the competition within the state,

campaign resources will be spent in certain states than others because voters behave differently depending on the information they receive and the political environment. This information will be narrowly tailored to fit the circumstances that exist within the state and the issues will be framed. Issue framing is defined as “selectively highlight[ing] considerations [on issues] that mobilize public opinion behind policy,” (Jerit 1).

Candidates will focus their rhetoric on the aspects of an issue that will get them the best support from the public and this will be evident in their campaign advertisements as well as speeches and public statements.

Campaigns tend to focus on battleground states because non-competitive states are either a sure thing, or a lost cause. In battleground states, every vote matters, and campaigns have several strategies to get every vote possible for their candidate. “Intense campaign environments create more opportunities for underlying campaign messages to get to voters and in such a way that the intended meanings are less ambiguous for voters,” (McClurg and Holbrook 497). The conditions within the state, political and otherwise, must be accounted for by campaigns, and the campaign materials, like advertisements, will vary accordingly.

These political conditions also contribute to how issues are presented to voters. Those who seek policy changes tie their positions on issues to the personal wellbeing of unhappy voters who want to see something different in their government. “The overwhelming majority of proponents’ rhetorical efforts were devoted to framing the debate in terms of security, the status quo and crisis,” (Jerit 15). Campaigns tap into what voters feel they need most, and then tailor the presentation of issues to be a solution to their problems. Another typical tactic used by campaigns is a “he said/she said” style of

discourse with shallow blaming of an opponent with the candidate's position on the issue never presented (Jerit 17). The spin put on issues in campaign advertisements highlight the most popular portions of a candidate's opinion on an issue and focus on the negative attributes of an opposing faction rather than giving the positive effects of their positions. These strategies have grown more sophisticated over time, but the general patterns remain the same. Focusing on specific states and framing issues to match public opinion has become the best strategy for campaigns to get the most votes and win elections.

The Rising Role of National Politics

The scope of elections has shifted as certain types of issues have become more effective to win voters. These issues are approached from the national level and have a wider effect on the country as a whole. "National issues such as the state of the economy or the performance of the presidency may influence voters," (Jacobson 168). Voters are focusing on the President's policies and other issues that affect not only their district or state, but also the entire country. The President, and his national policies have become a major point of concern to voters when they decide whom to vote for as their Senators and Congressmen. Legislative elections are influenced by the "national-level trends running in favor of one majority party or Presidential candidate," (Levendusky, Pope, and Jackman 738). The national issues take precedence over local issues and dictate the partisanship and vote choice in legislative elections. Campaigns will therefore focus on the national trends because they are the issues that will most persuade voters to vote a certain way.

This nationalization has grown in incidence in the past few elections as voters link their legislative representatives with national issues and the most national figure: the

President. One indicator of this change is the trend of ticket-splitting over several decades. “The incidence of majority party ticket-splitting—voting for a Democratic for one office, a Republican for the other...shows a sharp rise in ticket-splitting from the 1950’s to the 1970’s, followed by a decline that ended in 2004 at the lowest levels in three decades,” (Jacobsen 164). The decrease in ticket splitting shows that voters link congressional candidates to the President based on party and vote according to their preference for or against the President. National themes, which in the past were focused upon in Presidential campaigns, have become more relevant in congressional elections, causing this linkage. “At the district level, in addition to shaping alternatives by influencing strategic decisions to run or contribute money, national conditions affect the success or failure of candidacies by defining the campaign themes available to candidates in different situations,” (Jacobson 174). The themes of campaigns have become increasingly nationalized since the Reagan administration, for it is the best strategy to win the most votes, causing campaign materials to focus on national, rather than local issues.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Economic Figures

The United States economy has experienced dynamic changes in the past several election cycles, with progress and hardship highlighted as administrations change, and politicians seek to highlight their idea of creating economic prosperity. In the elections of 1988 and 2008, the economy experienced vastly different levels of economic conditions, contributing to the voters’ outlook on the success of the future of their country.

Two measures that provide an excellent picture of the economy during the times of the election are unemployment rates and Gross Domestic Product, specifically the

percent change from the preceding period in Real GDP. In order to capture the changes that the American voters focused upon, it is important to study the conditions of the administration before the election. Therefore, data from four years before the election is beneficial to understand the conditions that citizens voted on.

1988 Conditions

In the election year of 1988, the United States was experiencing the consequences of “Reaganomics” with changes in Real GDP as a result from the recession that hit the country in the first term of Regan’s administration. Between 1984 and 1988, many rises and falls occurred, with a hopeful turn for the better in the year before the election. A healthy economy is achieved with a growth rate over 3% a year. During the time period of 1984-1988, growth rates were at or above 3% with the growth rate during the election year at 4.2%. The implications of these changes are that steady growth was a condition that many Americans grew accustomed to. Though many programs had been created to bring the economy into the place of growth that increased spending and lowered taxes, voters focused on the growth and had fewer economic worries when choosing their candidates for political office.

In 1988, voters lived with an economy with unemployment rates steadily falling as more jobs were created with the boost in government spending under the Reagan administration. After the rate skyrocketed during the recession from 1981-1983, citizens were content with a decrease in unemployment that started around 1984. Between the years of 1984 and 1988, the unemployment rate fell from 8.0% to 5.7%. Voters were not particularly worried about the economy at this point, for they recognized the steady increase in prosperity as shown in the lowering of the unemployment rate.

2008 Conditions

In 2008, the economy was experiencing vastly different conditions than in 1988 and was struggling. In terms of Real GDP, percentage change from the preceding period were dropping, with growth seeming unlikely, unless changes were made. During the time period of 2004 and 2008, Real GDP experienced a downward trend with the 3% growth boundary approaching. 2006-2008 had growth rates below 3% with negative growth of -.03% in 2008. This downturn led to the worst recession since the Great Depression. The citizens of the U.S. were very nervous about their economic futures, for growth seemed very far away considering how the policies and actions were taking place in the government and in businesses with large stakes in the prosperity or failure of the economy.

In 2008, a much more turbulent economy existed for voters, with hard times brewing and insecurity on the rise. In terms of unemployment, the years of 2004-2008 showed another steady decrease in unemployment, with the exception of the last year providing a small upswing, which catapulted into a much larger increase. Between 2004 and 2008, the unemployment rate fluctuated between 4% and 6%, ending with a rate of 5% in 2008. Voters had become accustomed to a slow decrease in the unemployment rate and were extremely anxious about the future of the economy as they witnessed a drastic increase in the rate in only 12 months.

Illustration I: GDP Percentage Change from Preceding Period (1980-2013)

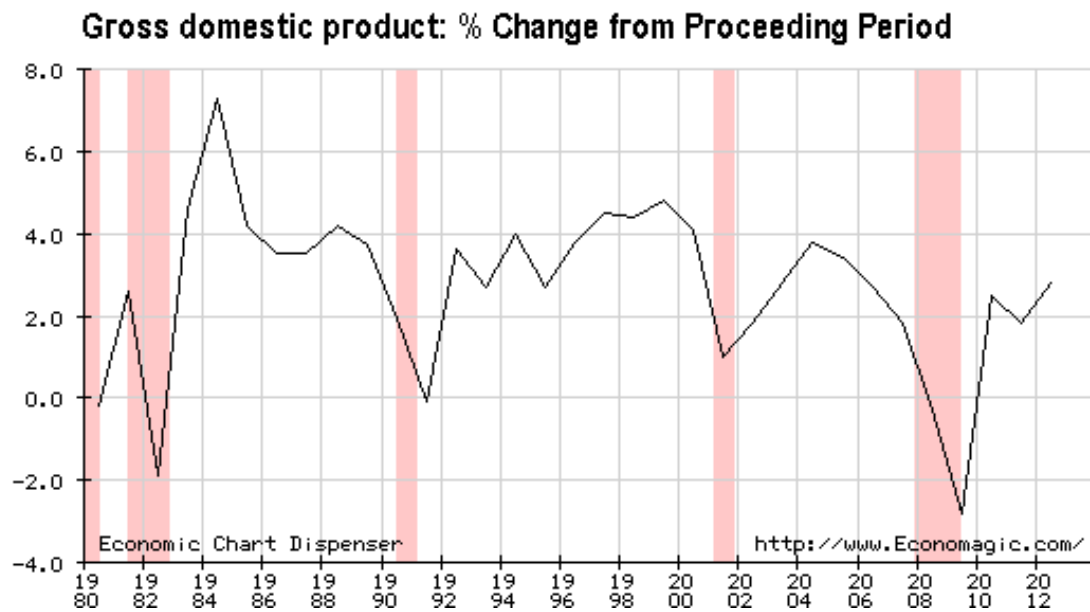
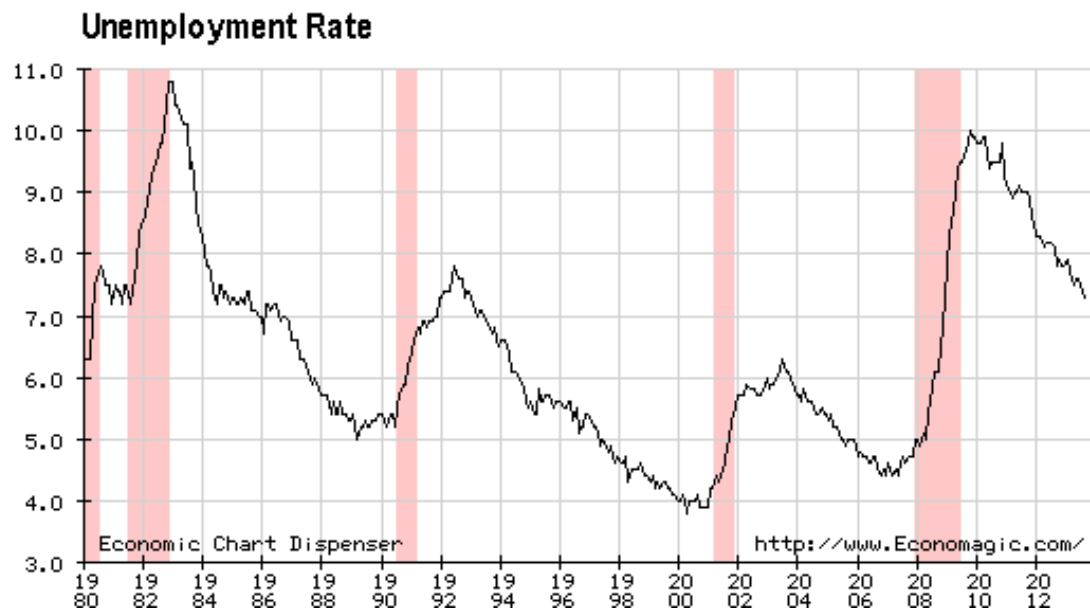


Illustration II: Unemployment Rate (1980-2013)



Important Issues

1988

During the campaigns for the 1988 election, the issues touched upon by Presidential and congressional candidates were scattered. Voters focused primarily on the issues of the Presidential campaign and many “non-issues” were discussed more often than the usual serious issues. According to Barbara Farah and Ethel Klein, the “real issues” were not discussed, and were overshadowed by themes of patriotism and security. The issues most discussed were the Pledge of Allegiance, national security, and personal security. Family security took the place of larger issues, like the economy, and soon, “attention quickly veered from block grants or tax credits to what is happening to American mothers, fathers, and children,” (Farah, Klein 114). Additionally, as noted by Jean Bethke Elshtain, abortion was another high profile issue of the 1988 election that the public felt needed to be addressed, often over the usual “real issues” like the economy or foreign policy.

For House and Senate candidates, the national issues of the Presidential candidates were not primary pieces of their campaigns. “The issues that determine the outcomes of congressional races . . . focused on particular, local issues and questions,” (Farah, Klein 116). The national issues did not matter nearly as much, and local issues were important to district voters. “Members of Congress are increasingly at ‘the service of the organized,’ that is, of constituents for whom particular questions have become salient. Such issues may include prevent[ing] a toxic waste dump from being located in one’s district or state, protecting scenic shore line, keeping an army base open, or supporting policies for the elderly,” (117). Congressional candidates favored the issues

that were most important to their voters. Often these were specialized problems unique to the area the candidate hoped to represent.

2008

During the campaigns for the 2008 election, the nation was experiencing an economic crisis comparable to the Great Depression. Campaigns and voters alike focused primarily on the uncertain fiscal future of the country and most other issues became secondary. “Growing public disenchantment with Bush and the economy fed an increasing sense of dissatisfaction among voters with the overall direction of the country,” (Jacobson 103). The issue of the economy was everywhere, in every level of the election. Every single office, from Mayor to President, utilized the economy as the greatest issue in their campaigns. The greatest framing of the economy as an issue was the need for change in policy and the departure from current conditions. “The economic crisis...strengthened the consensus among voters that the country was on the wrong track,” (Jacobson 110). The right track involved a better economy, with different routes proposed by Republicans and Democrats. These proposals offered ideal solutions that would not harm the taxpayers, while still fixing every worry. Unfortunately, “there are no fiscal measures that can pump money into the economy quickly and efficiently,” (Quirk and Nesmith 91).

Although the economy was the major issue of the 2008 election, other issues were also referenced in campaigns. These issues involved “extraordinary threats to the nation’s well being—potentially calamitous climate change and war and terrorism,” (Quirk and Nesmith 90). Additionally, candidates discussed immigration reform and healthcare reforms. Most of these issues gave an advantage to Democrats who advocated change,

something many Americans were desperate for. Many issues were connected, creating a synergistic relationship and giving each issue more significance than if it were approached on its own.

HYPOTHESES

In order to explain the relationship between Presidential perspective and Senate campaigns, I have formed three hypotheses that contain every element of the research question. First, the “Time Hypothesis,” states that the public’s perspective of the President’s economic policy will affect Senate Campaign ads more in later years. Second, the “Competitiveness Hypothesis” predicts how levels of competition in the political environment affect the substance of an ad and states that the public’s perspective of the President’s economic policy will affect the content of Senate campaign ads more in unsafe states than in swing states, due to the uncertain nature of the parties’ political standing in the state. Finally, the “Nationalization Hypothesis” states that the level of economic issues within ads will be more nationalized, rather than focusing on local issues, in later years.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to test my hypotheses, I conducted a content analysis of individual elections that meet certain criteria. These elections were chosen for their timing, competitiveness and the level of support for the party of the standing President. To show the difference over time, I studied elections in 1988 and 2008. I chose these election years because they represent modern campaigns that are still adequately spaced apart in time. Within each year, I analyzed competitive Senate elections in Presidential battleground states and substantial oppositional states. This came out to twelve cases in

all, with six from each election year, with three from battleground and three from opposition states.

Choosing Cases

The process for determining the cases for the experiment involved measuring the level of support for the previous President cross-referenced with the competitiveness of the national Senate election. For the 1988 Presidential level of support, battleground states were chosen based on the lowest margin of victory for either candidate, and opposition states were chosen based on the largest margin of victory for the candidate of the opposing party of the previous President. This candidate was Michael Dukakis. For the 2008 Presidential level of support, I utilized the New York Times' election predictions, choosing battleground states by the classification of "tossup," and opposition states by the classification of "strong Democrat."

After determining the categorization of Presidential support, I selected cases based on their competitiveness. For 1988, elections were chosen based on the lowest margin of victory, and for 2008, based on Congressional Quarterly's risk scores of "tossup" or "lean" for one party. Finding competitive Senate elections is important to this analysis because a lopsided election will not contain adequate campaign materials to study for both candidates representing opposing parties.

Analysis of Variables

The operationalization of the variables in my study is modeled after an experiment by Jackson, Mondak, and Huckfeldt who conducted a content analysis on election media. In analyzing advertisements, the "coding scheme initially classifies ads as promoting a specific candidate, attacking a candidate, or contrasting the candidates; the

latter category divided into subgroups,” (Jackson, Mondak, and Huckfeldt 60). The variables in this study are similar to mine, with the sequence of the relationship reverse of my own. The dependent variable is the political perspective of the citizens and the independent variable is the negativity of the campaign advertisements.

The dependent variable for this study, the nationalization of Senate elections will be measured by analyzing the content of Senate campaign advertisements in each of the twelve cases. The content within these ads of focus are the mention of the President, the economy, other candidates, and attribution of issues. The independent variable for this study, the attitudes toward the President’s economic policies will be measured using exit polls from each election. For 1988, I will use the CBS News exit polls that have been accessed through the Roper Center. Unfortunately, the data for one of my cases, Rhode Island is not available, but the public opinion can be inferred based upon other states in the North Eastern region. I am focusing on the questions about the economy as the most important issue and the approval of the previous President, Ronald Reagan. For 2008, I will use NBC news exit polls that are accessed through their website. The most important questions in the 2008 polls are similar to those in 1988 and involve the most important issue in the election and the approval of the previous administration of President Bush.

Coding the Dependent Variable

In order to analyze the content of Senate campaigns, the viewing of advertisements from the chosen elections is the best way to derive the most tailored data. The University of Oklahoma has the Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive, an extensive database of television advertisements viewable to researchers. This archive provided the raw material for measuring the dependent variable of my study.

Each advertisement was viewed and coded with a coding scheme that measured specific attributes that contributed to the understanding of nationalization of campaigns. The coding scheme is broken up into two primary sections focusing on the economy and attribution of attitudes. Each question in the coding scheme has a simple “yes/no” answer, with the exception of a question measuring the temperature of an advertisement. The questions also focus on whether or not certain attributes are mentioned. A mention can be an allusion or a verbal, pictorial, or written representation.

Validity

This study has aspects of real world evidence fused with an experimental design. Because the cases were deliberately chosen based on specific criteria, like the level of Presidential competition within the state, the study of real world variables has an experimental approach. This ensures the external validity of the study because these criteria apply to more than just the cases within the experiment. States in other election years may also fit these criteria and come to similar results. As long as the state in question has competitive Senate elections and is a Presidential battleground or opposition state, the findings will apply.

DISCUSSION

Independent Variable Results

The election exit poll data from 1988 and 2008 illustrate distinct differences between the two elections in regards to popularity of the previous President and the importance of the economy as an issue. In 1988, President Reagan had a fairly high approval rating, though many of his policies were questioned. Additionally, voters were not entirely worried about the economy. On average, only 8.4% of voters in the states in

my experiment felt that the economy was the most important issue. Economic conditions were fairly sound, but the sustainability of prosperity was unsure. However, voters felt that other issues, such as punishing criminals, helping the middle class, environment and pollution, defense spending, US-soviet Relations, and abortion were also important and possibly more important than the economy.

Table I: 1988 Exit Poll Results

State	Pres. Approval	Economy Important Issue
WA	53%	9%
CA	49%	6%
WI	55%	4%
RI	*	*
MN	52%	14%
MA	54%	9%
Avg.	52.6%	8.4%

Unlike 1988, the election of 2008 showed a much more dismal perception of the previous President. President Bush's approval rating was on average 26.5% among the cases, which occurred for several reasons. President Bush did not communicate with the American people adequately during his second term, and was blamed for the many problems associated with the government. Additionally, voters did feel that the economy was an extremely important issue. More than half of voters polled felt that the economy was the most important issue to be considered in determining their votes for Election Day. Economic conditions were fairly poor coming up to the election and citizens reflected this in their votes.

Table II: 2008 Exit Poll Results

State	Pres. Approval	Economy Important Issue
NC	31%	60%
NH	21%	58%
CO	30%	54%
OR	27%	54%
MN	25%	61%
NJ	25%	60%
Avg.	26.5%	57.8%

Time Hypothesis Results

As stated in my hypothesis, I expected my data to show that over time, the public's perspective of the President's economic policy will affect the content of Senate campaign ads more in later years. Upon compilation of the advertisement data, the most functional categories of the coding scheme to utilize are the number of times the President is mentioned and the mention of the economy in general. Cross-tabulation of these two categories provides a stark difference between the two elections in the experiment. In 1988, the President and economy were mentioned only 5 times, in only 1.8% of advertisements for the cases analyzed. The results are vastly different in 2008 with the President and economy mentioned 65 times, in 16.4% of advertisements. This is an increase by a factor of over 9 in the 20 year span of time between elections. It should also be noted that the percentage of advertisements mentioning the economy in general was 32.8% in 1988 and 48.8% in 2008, only an increase by a factor of 1.4.

Table III: 1988 Time Hypothesis Data

	President is Mentioned			
Mention of Economy in General		No	Yes	Total
	No	176 (66.4%)	2 (0.7%)	178
	Yes	82 (30.9%)	5 (1.8%)	87 (32.8%)
	Total	258	7	265

Table IV: 2008 Time Hypothesis Data

	President is Mentioned			
Mention of Economy in General		No	Yes	Total
	No	170 (42.9%)	33 (8.3%)	203
	Yes	128 (32.3%)	65 (16.4%)	193 (48.8%)
	Total	298	98	396

Time Hypothesis Conclusions

From the data collected, the evidence suggests that the time hypothesis is correct.

Economic mentions were very similar in both elections, yet the attribution of the

economic problems was vastly different. The fact that mentions of the President increased significantly suggests that he now makes more of an impact on campaign advertisements. With each election, the President has been linked to the issues much more closely and this linkage has trickled into Senate campaign advertisements.

The President is no longer a separate entity from the rest of the government. While the three branches have always worked together, campaigns are linking the President to Senate candidates more recently, as the public's perception can help their candidate or hurt their opponent. More specifically, a negative perception of the President creates a larger tie to the Senate in campaign advertisements. In general, voters tend to focus on the negative, so a negative portrayal of the President can be a valuable tool for a campaign team.

While economic conditions were questionable and the likelihood of prosperity uncertain, American voters were not extremely concerned with the economy in 1988. Less than 10% felt that it was the most important issue and Reagan's approval was extremely high. Conversely, similar, and slightly worse economic conditions in 2008 sparked enormous worry about the economy with over 50% of voters indicating that the economy was the most important issue in the election. President Bush's approval was below 30%, with much of voter's dissatisfaction stemming from the poor health of the economy on his watch. Campaign staffs fed upon this negativity and inserted it into advertisements for their Senate candidates. However, it was not just the difference in approval for the President that caused him to make a good advertisement tool, but the fact that fault of negative conditions rests on the shoulders of the President much more in

recent years. This increased fault led to lower approval ratings and did not have the same effect twenty years ago.

Competitiveness Hypothesis Results

The “Competitiveness Hypothesis” for my experiment states that the public’s perspective of the President’s economic policy will affect the content of Senate campaign advertisements more in unsafe states than in swing states, due to the uncertain nature of the parties’ political standing in the state. Upon focusing on the results for swing and unsafe presidential states, I have concluded that for 2008, my competitiveness hypothesis is correct. For this hypothesis, I am only interested in recent trends within an election, not a change in content over different elections. Testing this hypothesis involved using the same categories as the Time Hypothesis, mentions of the President and economy in general, with an added category for the competitiveness of the state.

Upon separating the 2008 data indicating mentions of the President and economy by swing state and unsafe Presidential state, there is a clear difference between the two types of states. A relationship between mentions of the economy and President only exists in unsafe states. The probability of a relationship is 0.000 in unsafe states, but is 0.078 in swing states, which means the relationship is not statistically significant. In competitive states, the President’s economic policies do not have a major effect on the campaign advertisements. His policies do, however, have an effect on Senate advertisements in non-competitive states.

Table V: 2008 Competitiveness Hypothesis Data

	Swing State				Unsafe State			
	President is Mentioned							
Mention of Economy in General		No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
	No	70 (38.7%)	11 (6.1%)	81	No	100 (46.5%)	22 (10.2%)	122
	Yes	36 (42.0%)	24 (13.2%)	100	Yes	52 (24.2%)	41 (19.1%)	93
	Total	146	35	181	Total	152	63	215
	p=0.078				p=0.000			

Competitiveness Hypothesis Conclusions

Campaigns utilized extremely different tactics depending on the competitiveness of the state in which their candidate was running. In swing states, the party preference of the public was uncertain; therefore it would be dangerous to attack the previous President. In the instance of 2008, if the majority of a state voted Republican, harsh criticism of President Bush in a Senate ad may offend voters and lose the election. Swing state campaign managers focused advertisements on other issues in an election, candidate achievements, or on an opponent.

In unsafe states, where the previous President's party is weak and has unpromising chances of winning, campaign managers have greater freedom to be critical. Campaigns that have a safe majority often use this to their advantage and produce attack advertisements that focus only on what the President has done wrong. Furthermore, campaigns for candidates in the unsafe party will use advertisements to distance themselves from the previous President. The lack of competition within a state offers a campaign more flexibility with what is appropriate to include in an advertisement to

ensure a clean victory. If voters in the state thoroughly dislike the previous President, he is a great device to use in commercials.

Nationalization Hypothesis Results

The final hypothesis of my study states that the level of economic issues will be more nationalized in later years. I expected to find that in more recent elections, the subjects of campaign commercials are primarily nationalized rather than local. Upon viewing the advertisements, I have determined that the nationalization hypothesis is correct. This hypothesis has been tested with number of mentions of the national economy compared to the number of times the local economy is mentioned. Between 1988 and 2008, there is a considerable increase in the number of times the national economy is mentioned in the ads observed. In 1988, only 16.9% of advertisements mentioned the national economy. On the other hand, 33.1% of advertisements mentioned the national economy in 2008, which is double that of twenty years prior.

Local issues had a slight advantage in advertisements in 1988, appearing in 18.5% of campaign commercials compared to national issues only being mentioned in 16.9% of ads. As time progressed, national issues took greater precedence, and local issues took a back seat. In 2008, only 14.6% of advertisements included local economic issues compared to 33.1% mentioning national issues.

Table VI: Nationalization Hypothesis Data

	1988			2008		
	No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Total
National	220	45 (16.9%)	265	265	131 (33.1%)	396
Local	216	49 (18.5%)	265	338	58 (14.6%)	396

Nationalization Hypothesis Conclusions

Senators' roles as politicians have shifted in the past few elections, with a focus transferring from what affects local economic issues and constituent needs to countrywide issues and broader problems. This change in level of concern does not mean that Senators are forgetting about their constituents and only focusing on one facet of politics. Constituent interests have changed from being only about the local economic conditions, such as jobs in their communities, local property taxes, and income producing industries. Constituents now care more about the economy of the country as a whole and look to their Senators to provide the most stable and prosperous conditions. As markets become connected and the world becomes smaller, citizens perceive nationwide matters as closer to home and more important. Local issues have taken the back seat to national issues when considering a candidate for Senate. Senators are still listening to what their constituents want, for the scope of issues is what has changed, not the amount of attention paid.

CONCLUSION

As the President has become a national icon for policy and politics, other branches of the government have followed suit. Responding to how the President is perceived, campaign staffs tailor advertisements to fit the opinion of voters. The economic issues in Senate advertisements have become increasingly nationalized and local issues have become secondary.

The Time Hypothesis shows that the President's policies have made a greater impact on Senate campaigns in later years. 2008 provides a large jump from only two decades prior, and I expect that more recent elections will demonstrate an even larger

effect. Similar conditions existed in 1988 and 2008, yet an added influence, the President, caused campaigns to respond to the concerns of the voters and shape campaigns with national themes. The Competitiveness Hypothesis shows how security and hopelessness can shape the way campaigns present the issues. In competitive races, mentioning the previous President, no matter how unpopular, can prove detrimental, so other topics and politicians are discussed. In unsafe Presidential states, campaigns have more leeway to bring up the President and condemn him. The Nationalization Hypothesis presents proof that in recent years, discussion of national economic issues has increased in advertisements and local issues are less important to campaigns.

The President and the Senate have become increasingly linked in the mind of voters and campaign managers have taken notice and connected them in advertisements. Because voters are exposed to this connection in commercials months before an election, the perceived relationship between the President and Senate is strengthened. This causes a cycle in which two separate branches of the government are heavily associated in the mind of the voter.

APPENDIX

Code Book for Campaign Ad Analysis

The Economy

- 1) Does the ad mention the economy in general? Y/N
- 2) Does the ad mention a specific problem with the economy? Y/N
 - a. Mention unemployment? Y/N
 - b. Mention (deficit) spending? Y/N
 - c. National debt? Y/N
 - d. Taxes Y/N
- 3) Does the ad note any past economic success from its candidate? Y/N
- 4) Does the ad mention economic issues form the national level? Y/N

If yes, which ones?

 - a. Mention unemployment? Y/N
 - b. Mention (deficit) spending? Y/N
 - c. National debt? Y/N
 - d. Taxes Y/N
- 5) Does the ad mention economic issues from the local level? Y/N

If yes, which ones?

 - a. Mention unemployment? Y/N
 - b. Mention (deficit) spending? Y/N
 - c. National/local debt? Y/N
 - d. Taxes Y/N

Attribution of Issues

- 6) Does the ad mention the president? Y/N
- 7) Does the ad show him in a positive, neutral or negative light? P/0/N
- 8) Does the ad mention the candidate supporting the president? Y/N
- 9) Does the ad mention the candidate opposing the president? Y/N
- 10) Does the ad attribute economic problems to the president? Y/N
- 11) Does the ad mention a specific economic issue caused by the president? Y/N

If yes, which ones?

 - a. Mention unemployment? Y/N
 - b. Mention (deficit) spending? Y/N

- c. National debt? Y/N
- d. Taxes? Y/N

12) Does the ad attribute economic problems to opposing candidate? Y/N

13) Does the ad attribute specific economic problems to opposing candidate? Y/N

If yes, which ones?

- a. Mention unemployment? Y/N
- b. Mention (deficit) spending? Y/N
- c. National debt? Y/N
- d. Taxes Y/N

14) Does the ad attack the opponent for a different reason?

Y/N

If yes, which ones?

- a. Integrity Y/N
- b. Illegal Behavior Y/N
- c. Other Y/N

*"the President" means the previous sitting president

1988-Reagan

2008-Bush

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ABSTRACT

Campaign ads are meant to persuade citizens to vote a certain way and employ particular strategies to achieve this. The strategies have changed over the past few decades, and the subjects of the advertisements have shifted. Advertisements no longer focus upon the issues within a given constituency, but instead cover national issues, and the symbol for national politics: the President. Considering 2 elections, 12 different campaigns, the public opinion of voters, and over 800 advertisements, I examine the President's role in the changing scope of economic issues in Senate campaigns. This analysis shows that as the public's opinion of the President's policies and role in government changes, Senate campaign advertisements adapt and the issues discussed become nationalized.