It’s My Campaign I’ll Cry if I Want to: How and When Campaigns Use Emotional Appeals

Travis N. Ridout
Assistant Professor, Political Science
and
Kathleen Searles
PhD Student, Political Science
Washington State University

Problem

• Recent research in the arena of campaign advertising suggests that emotional appeals influence political attitudes and behaviors
• However, most of these studies focus on individual-level effects in a laboratory setting
• Assumption is that campaigns purposefully manipulate voter emotions

**Research Question**
• When do campaign’s “go emotional”, and which types of candidates are more likely to do so?

**Affective Theory**
• Antecedent of emotion
  o Cognitive appraisal theory
  o Attribution theory
• Consequences of emotion
  o Affect-as-information, i.e. mood theory
• Interdependence of emotion/cognition
  o Appraisal tendency effect
  o Affective intelligence theory
Expectations/Hypotheses

- Campaigns make enthusiasm, pride, compassion and anger appeals to shore up partisan support and thus maintain the status quo
- Campaigns make enthusiasm appeals to get out the vote
- Campaigns make fear appeals to release voters from their partisan anchors

Data and Method

- All ads from 26 different 2004 U.S. Senate races, Wisconsin Advertising Project
- Logit model clustered on state

Use of Appeals Over-time
Predictors of Use of Each Emotional Appeal
Predictors of Use of Each Emotional Appeal by Incumbency Status

Results

- Trailing candidates were significantly more likely to use fear, while leading candidates were significantly more likely to use enthusiasm/pride
- Trailing candidates were more likely to use anger appeals
- Party and gender differences
- Competitive races more likely to use anger appeals
- Fear appeals are used later in the race for challengers
- Anger ads are used later in the campaign by both challengers and incumbents
- Enthusiasm/pride appeals were
more likely to be used early in the campaign by both challengers and incumbents

Conclusions

• We find support for patterned use of specific emotional appeals
• Discrete emotions model worked well for predicting fear and enthusiasm/pride appeals, anger and compassion appeals were less predictable
• This research contributes to understanding of the use of emotional appeals in real world of political campaigns