

# MEDIA STRATEGIES IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Week 10 – Comm1A; Nov. 18-Dec. 4

Rational Candidates

Historical Development

Media Strategies

Going Negative

Effects of Campaigns on Election Outcomes

# Candidates as Rational Actors

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## Goals

To receive one more vote than any other candidate

Maximize turnout among supporters and minimize turnout among potential opponents

## Reaching Voters

“Retail politics” – face to face campaigns for national office ended in the 1940s

Since 1950s, main media platform = TV where all the voters are

TV ads and televised debates as major forms of campaign media; web audience not yet competitive

## Anticipation

What will journalists do to keep you honest?  
How do you respond?

What will your opponent do and how to counter her messages?

# From Party- to Candidate-Based Campaigns

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- In the era of de-polarized parties, candidates were selected by party leaders; most voters were moderates and candidates converged on the median voter
- With party polarization and the adoption of primary elections and the need for \$\$ in the 1970s, candidates now converge on the extremes
- Party ID is the most important determinant of voter behavior, imperative that you “hold the base” (i.e. receive at least 90 percent of the vote from co-partisans)

# Two Channels of Campaign Communication

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## Advertising and News = “Paid vs. free” channels

- Mix depends on newsworthiness
- Presidential campaigns generate considerable news coverage
- Statewide and local races generate none at all

## Advertising > news coverage in sub-presidential contests

- For referenda and initiatives, advertising is the only media

## Distinction between ads and news is now blurred

- Ad watches, fake ads, and news about ads and ad strategy

# Top Press Strategy

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- **Avoid feeding frenzies that sound alarm bells over your candidacy:**
  - Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, Joe Biden case studies
  - More recent instances – Sarah Palin interviews. Rev Wright and Obama, Herman Cain
  - Thus far, feeding frenzies on Trump and Carson have had minimal impact on their support – press scrutiny a sign of “authenticity” for the Republican base

# 2008: Palin on Newspaper Exposure

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# 2008: “Sniper Fire”

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# Trump Attacks Carson

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# Event Management

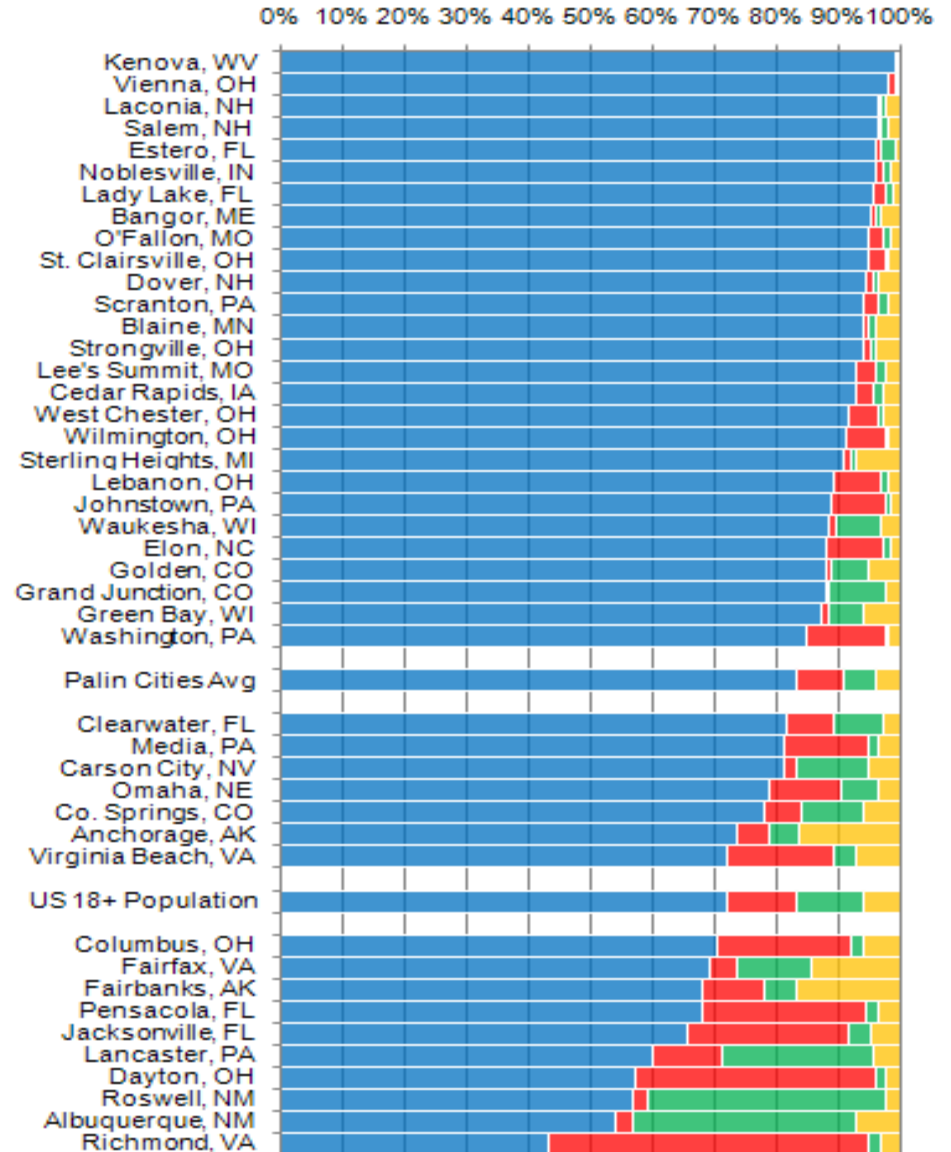
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- Targeting events strategically so as to:
  - ▣ Maximize their newsworthiness
  - ▣ Reach potential supporters, not opponents
  
- Obama and Palin events in 2008
  - ▣ Different racial composition of the audience

# Palin Travel Schedule

Palin events occurred in predominantly white cities

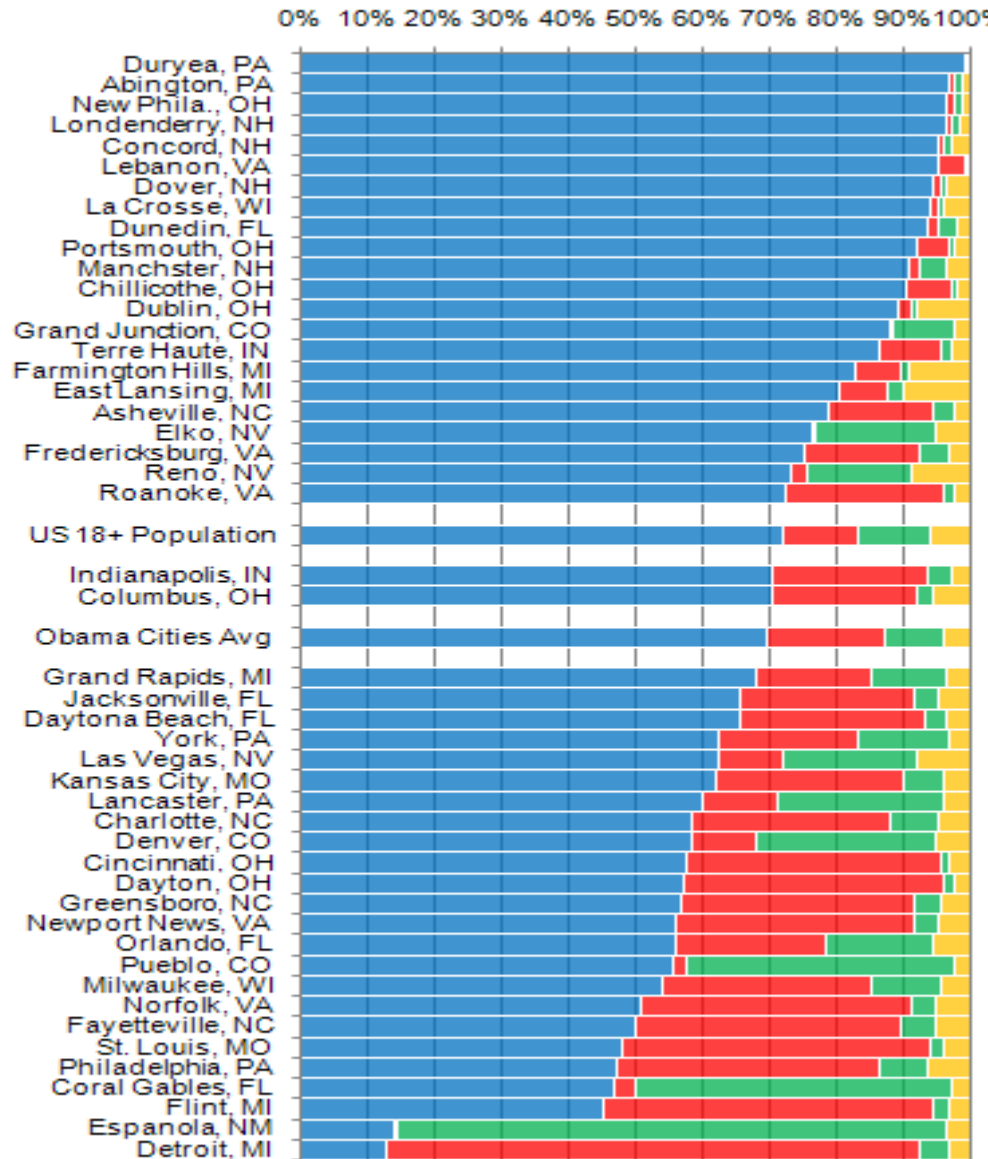
### Racial Composition: Palin Cities



# Obama Travel Schedule

Obama visited more racially diverse cities

Racial Composition: Obama Cities



# More Press Strategies

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## “Ride the wave”

- Coordinate campaign events and rhetoric with issues in the news; Paris attacks and refugee policy in 2016

## Regulate access

- “Rose Garden Strategy” vs. “straight talk express”

## Rely on lower-level news outlets

- They are less likely to be critical and ask tough questions (Clinton in 1992)

# Riding the Wave

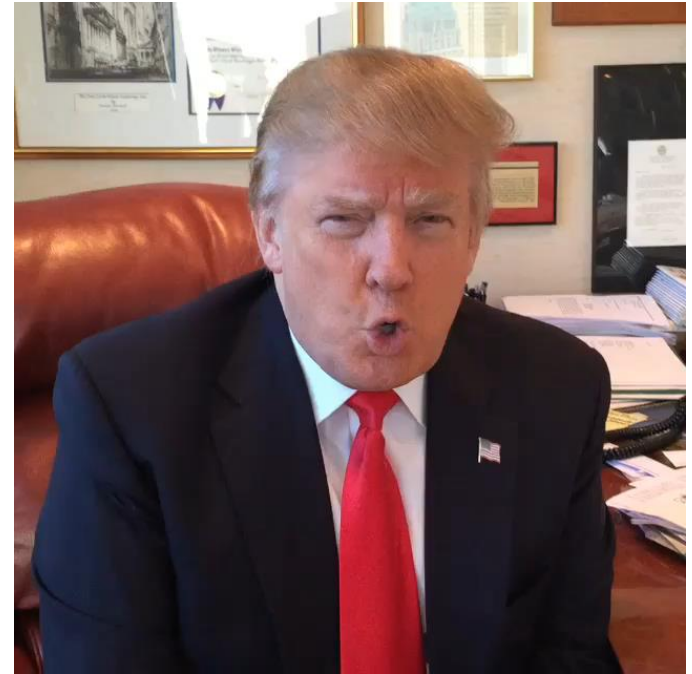
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November 27, 1978

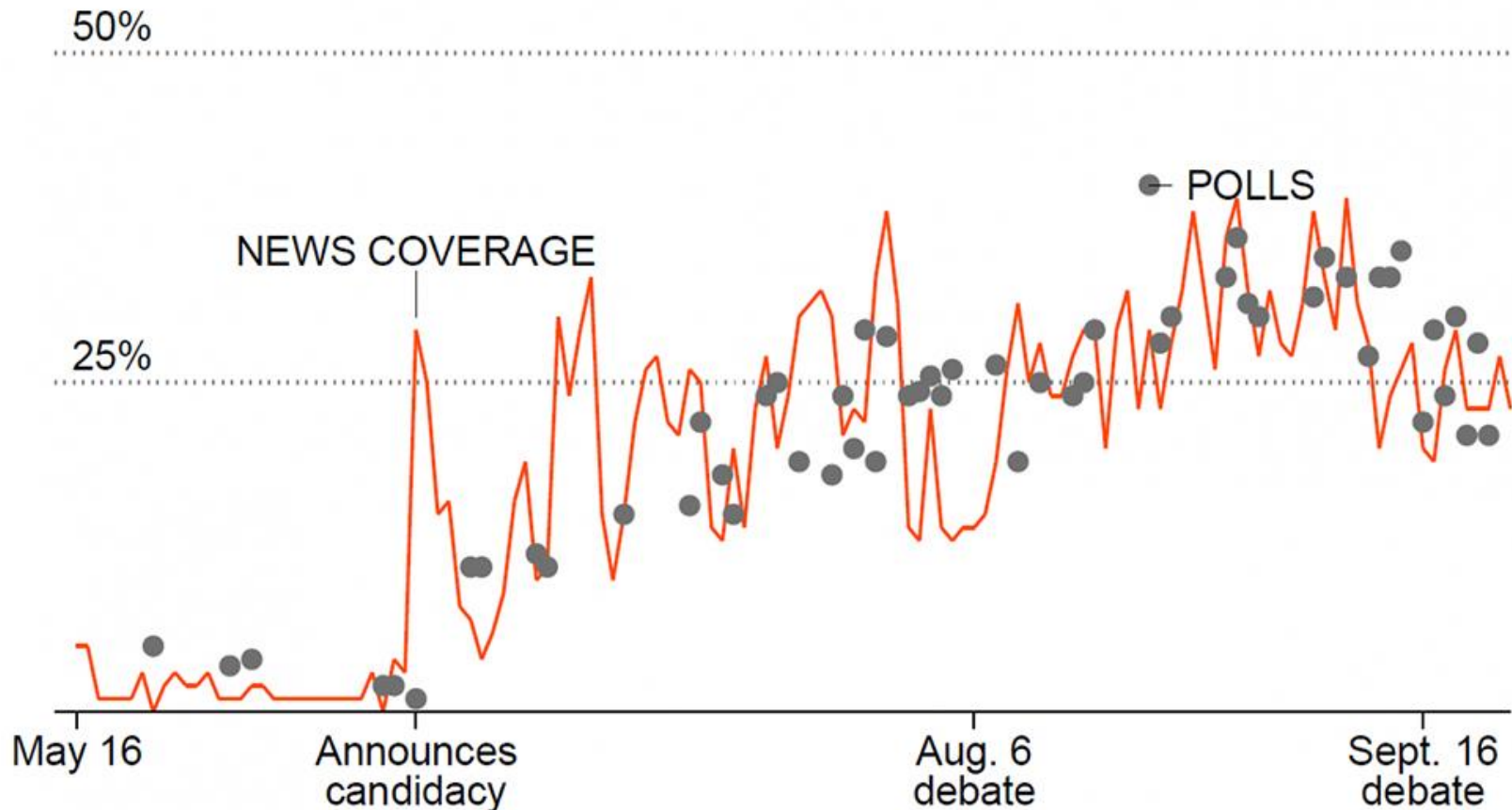


# Paris Attacks - 2016

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## Donald Trump's Share of News Coverage and National Polling Numbers



Data are generated using social analytic tools provided by Crimson Hexagon. Media coverage is calculated as Trump's percent of the coverage received by him, Christie, Fiorina, Carson, Bush, Kasich, Rubio, Huckabee, Paul, Perry, Santorum, Walker, and Cruz. Graph by John Sides.



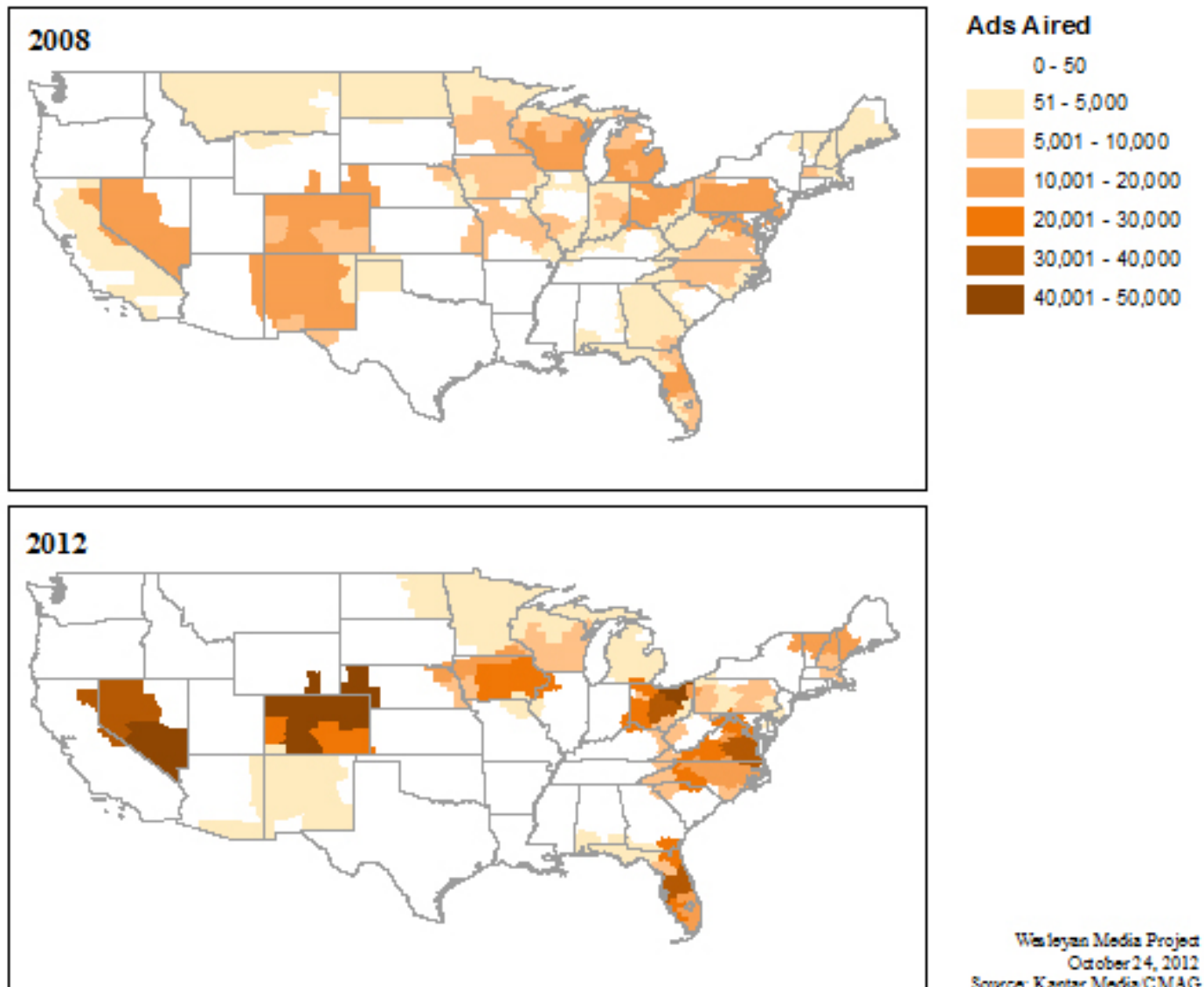
# The Ad Campaign

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- TV advertising highly targeted at “battleground” states – those states where the margin of difference is 5-6 points
- In recent years, number of such states has shrunk to around 10 – FL, OH, CO, PA, IA, NV, VA, MO

# Location of Ad Campaign

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# Advertising Spending by State 9/28 - 10/4 2008

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State	McCain	Obama
Colorado	\$801,000	\$980,000
Florida	\$659,000	\$2,213,000
Michigan	\$1,250,000	\$1,590,000
North Carolina	\$148,000	\$1,236,000
Ohio	\$1,727,000	\$2,218,000
Pennsylvania	\$1,645,000	\$2,202,000
Virginia	\$547,000	\$2,057,000
Wisconsin	\$896,000	\$1,189,000

# Ohio Ad Spending - 2012

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**Both  
parties  
invested  
>\$75  
million  
on OH**

Obama for America			\$52,751,499
Romney for President			\$30,720,890
Democratic National Committee			
Republican National Committee			\$4,466,851
Crossroads GPS			\$8,389,036
American Crossroads			\$8,634,916
Restore Our Future			\$5,529,443
Priorities USA Action			\$9,775,068
Americans for Prosperity			\$5,725,270
Planned Parenthood Action			\$1,877,946
Americans for Job Security			\$1,832,124

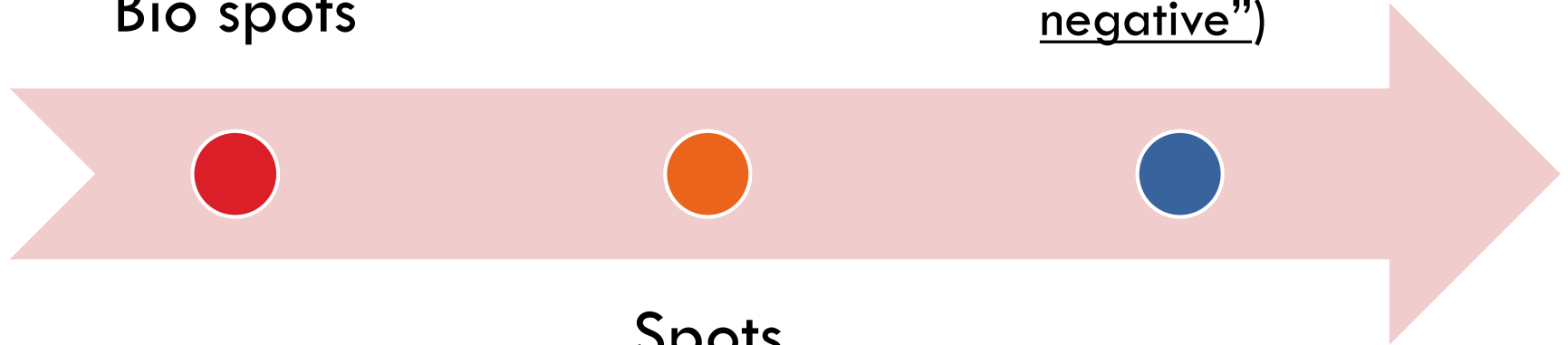
# Stages of Advertising

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Attacks on  
the opponent

- (“going negative”)

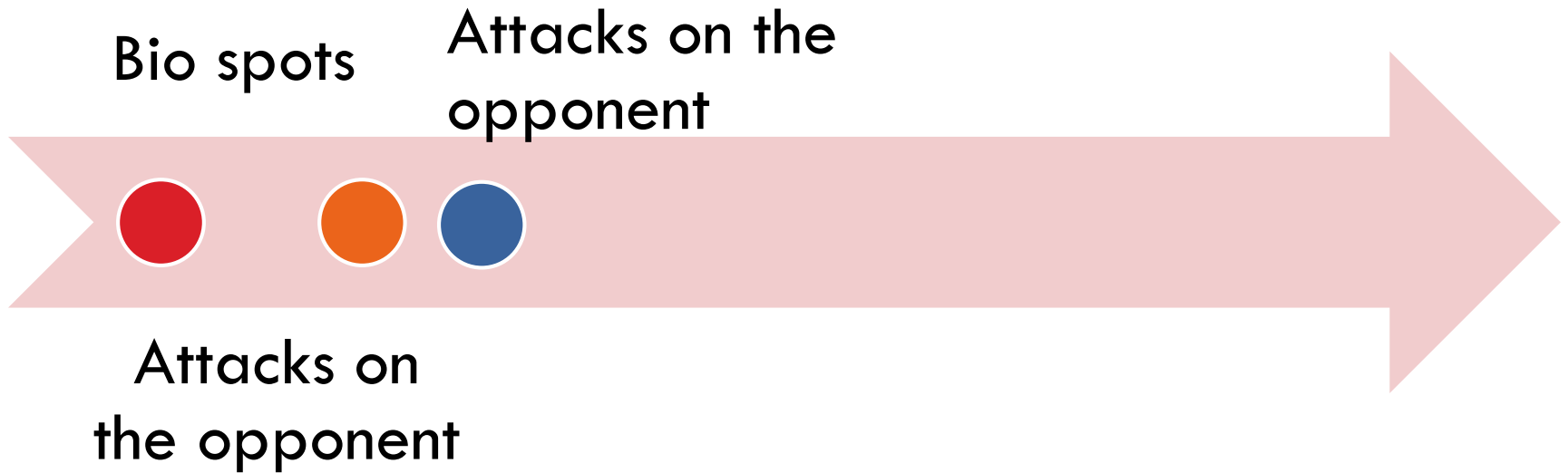
Bio spots



Spots  
promoting  
the sponsor

# Stages of Advertising (today)

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# Advertising Content

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- Content is synchronized with issues in the news
  
- General “Resonance” Principle
  - ▣ Design ads to fit the context and the candidate
  - ▣ Focus on “owned” issues

# Bio Ads

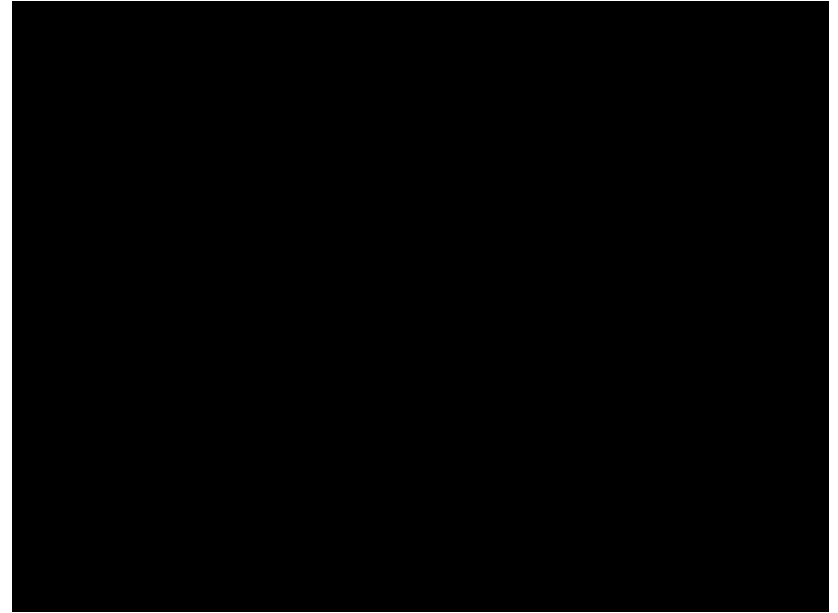
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# Bio Ads - 2016

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# Image vs. Issue Spots

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Image focuses on the candidate's persona



Issue focuses on performance record and policy positions

# Policy Ads; Positive & Negative

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# Performance Ads

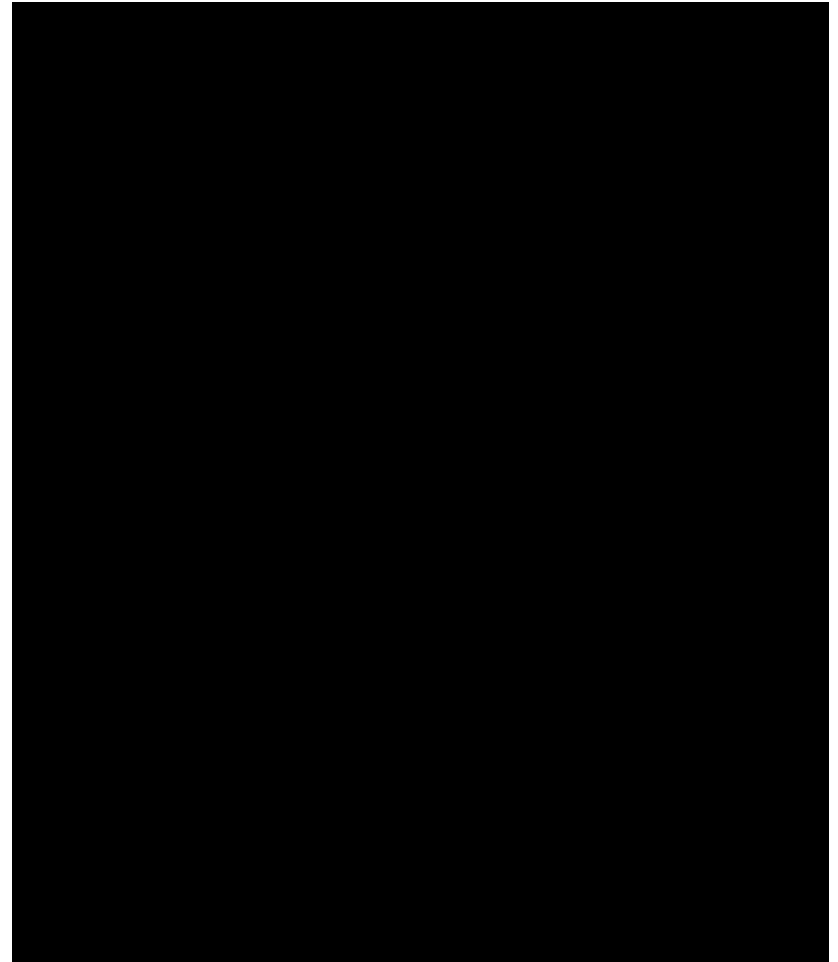
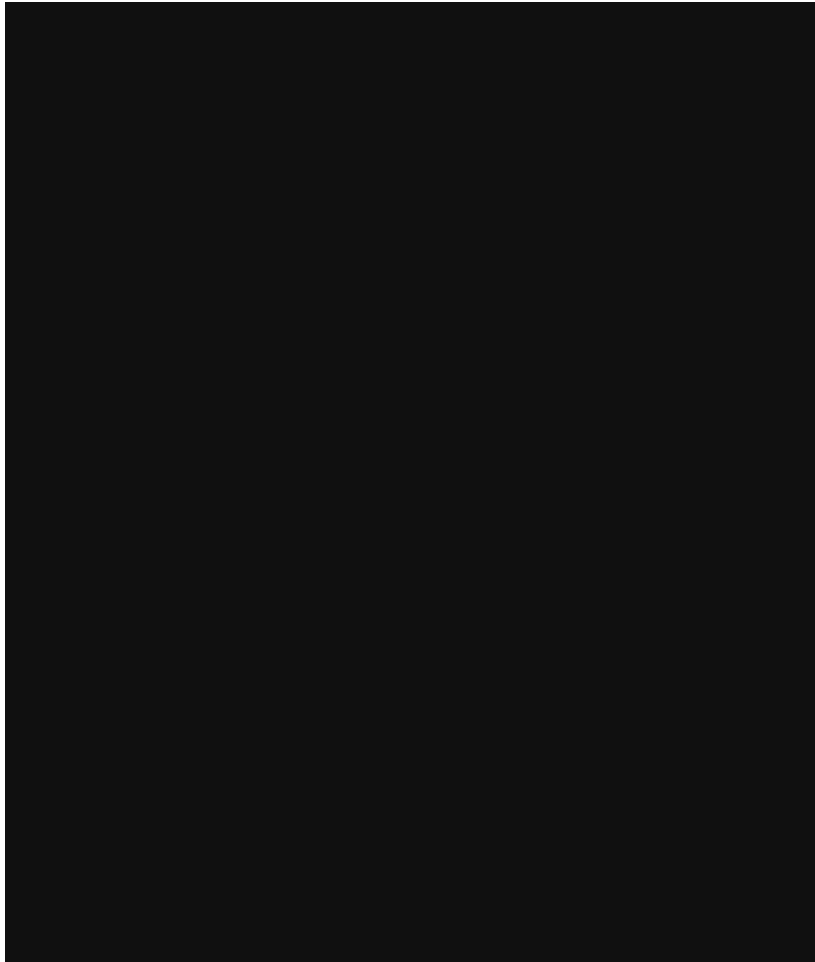
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- Elections as referenda on the performance of incumbent (administration)
  - ▣ Peace and prosperity as key indicators of performance
  
- Retrospective, not prospective, evaluations
  
  
- Performance on salient issues



# Special Case of Competence: Who Can Manage the Economy?

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# The Theory of “Issue Ownership”

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Each party with a portfolio of owned issues

- Republicans - Defense-national security, crime and
- Democrats - Unemployment, civil rights and the environment

Party reputations transmitted through socialization

Some issues can be temporarily “leased;”

- Bush and education
- Clinton and crime-immigration

Extensions to gender ownership

- “Running as a woman”

# More Recent Data

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<b>“Which political party do you trust more to handle...”:</b>		
	<b>Dem (%)</b>	<b>Rep (%)</b>
<b>National security and war on terror*</b>	36	48
<b>Taxes*</b>	37	44
<b>Environment*</b>	51	34
<b>Government spending*</b>	36	49
<b>Issues important to women**</b>	55	25
<b>Healthcare**</b>	43	35
<b>Helping the middle class**</b>	52	32
<b>*Rasmussen poll —November, 2013; **Washington Post poll — April, 2014.</b>		

# Wedge Appeals

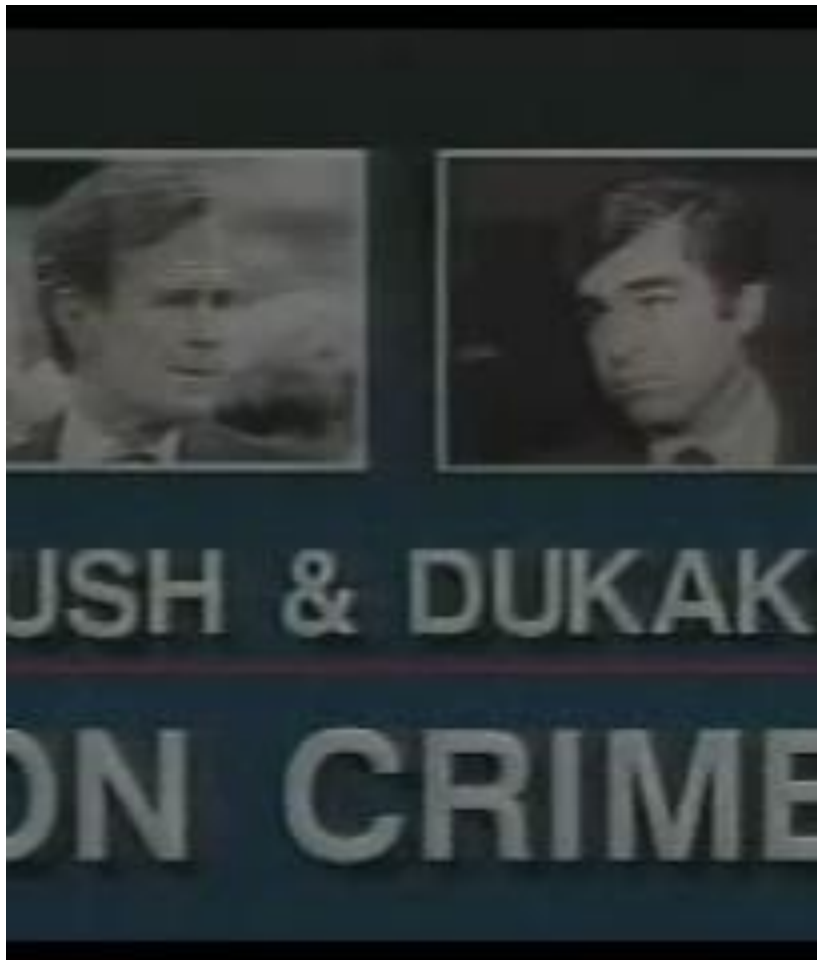
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- Advertising on racial identity rather than party
- Group interests as a basis for voting (us vs. them)
  - “Law and order” as a coded appeal to race in 1968
  - Race-crime association in 1988; LA riots in 1992; affirmative action in the 1990s (Prop 209)
  - Rise of illegal immigration in the 1990s
  - More recently, “family values,” same-sex marriage
  - Religion as a litmus test for refugee policy in 2016



# Us against Them: Wedge Appeals

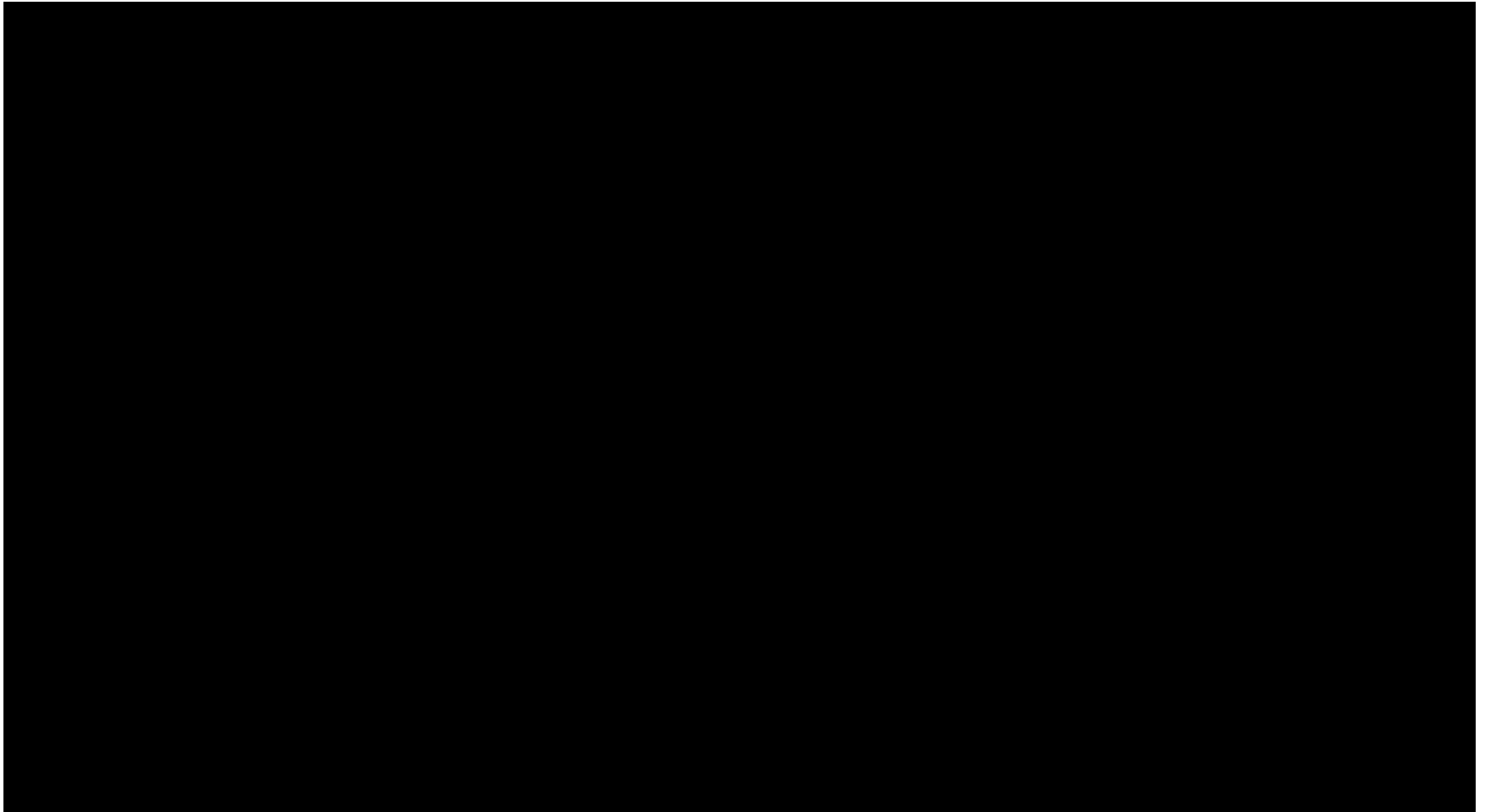
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# Wedge Appeals (Cont'd)

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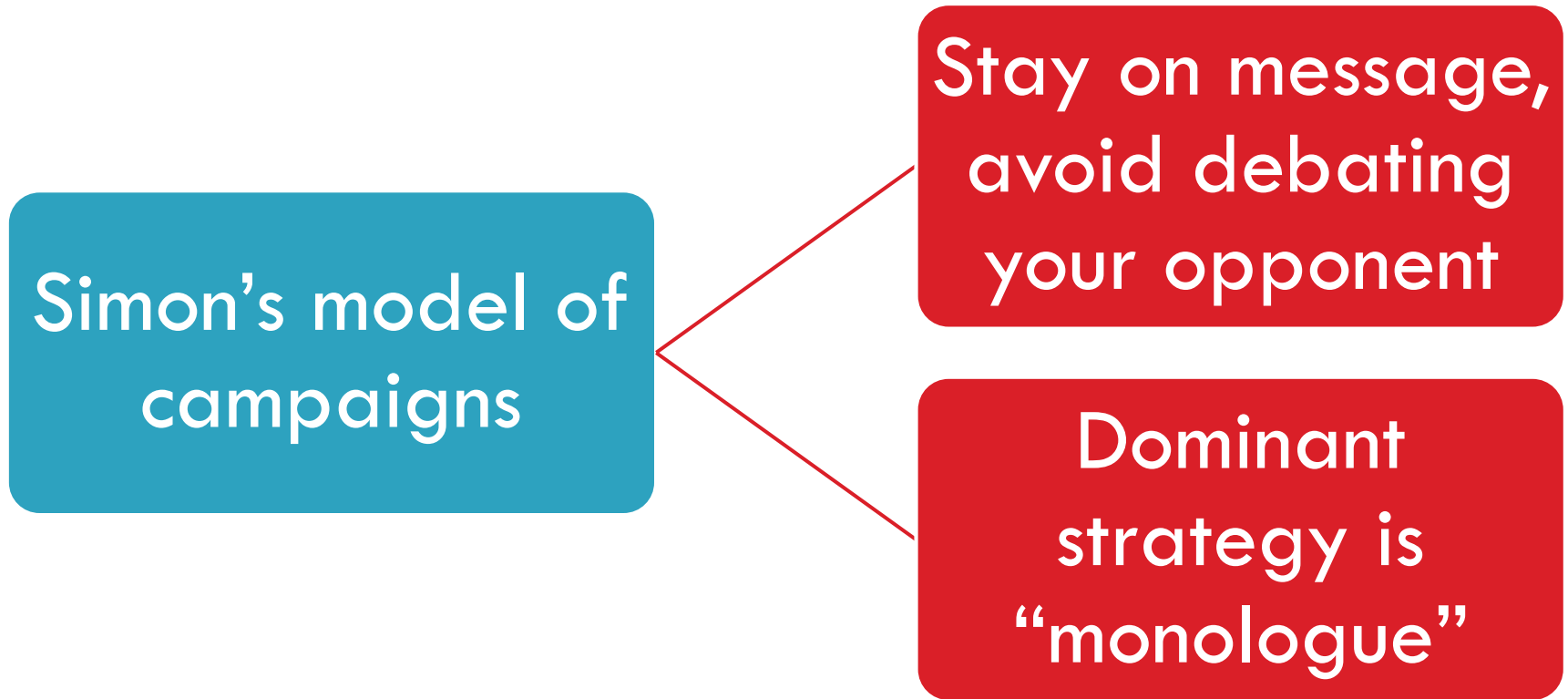
# More Wedge Appeals

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# Dialogue versus Monologue

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# Dangers of “dialogue:” Wilson-Brown Campaign in 1994

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Dismal state of the CA economy provided Brown with an advantage

Brown responded, and the campaign became a dialogue on these issues

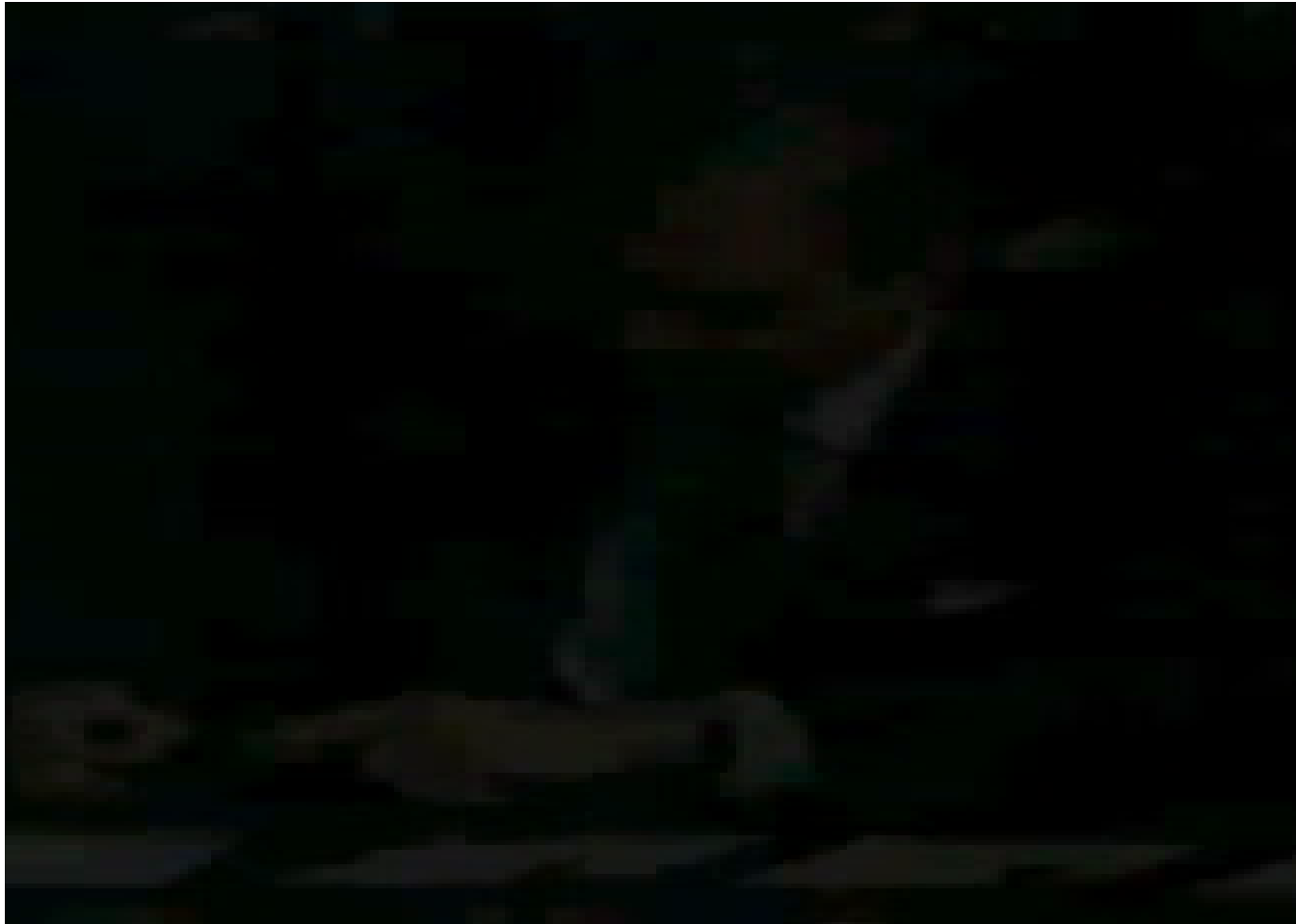
- Both of which favored Wilson

Wilson introduced crime and immigration as alternative issues



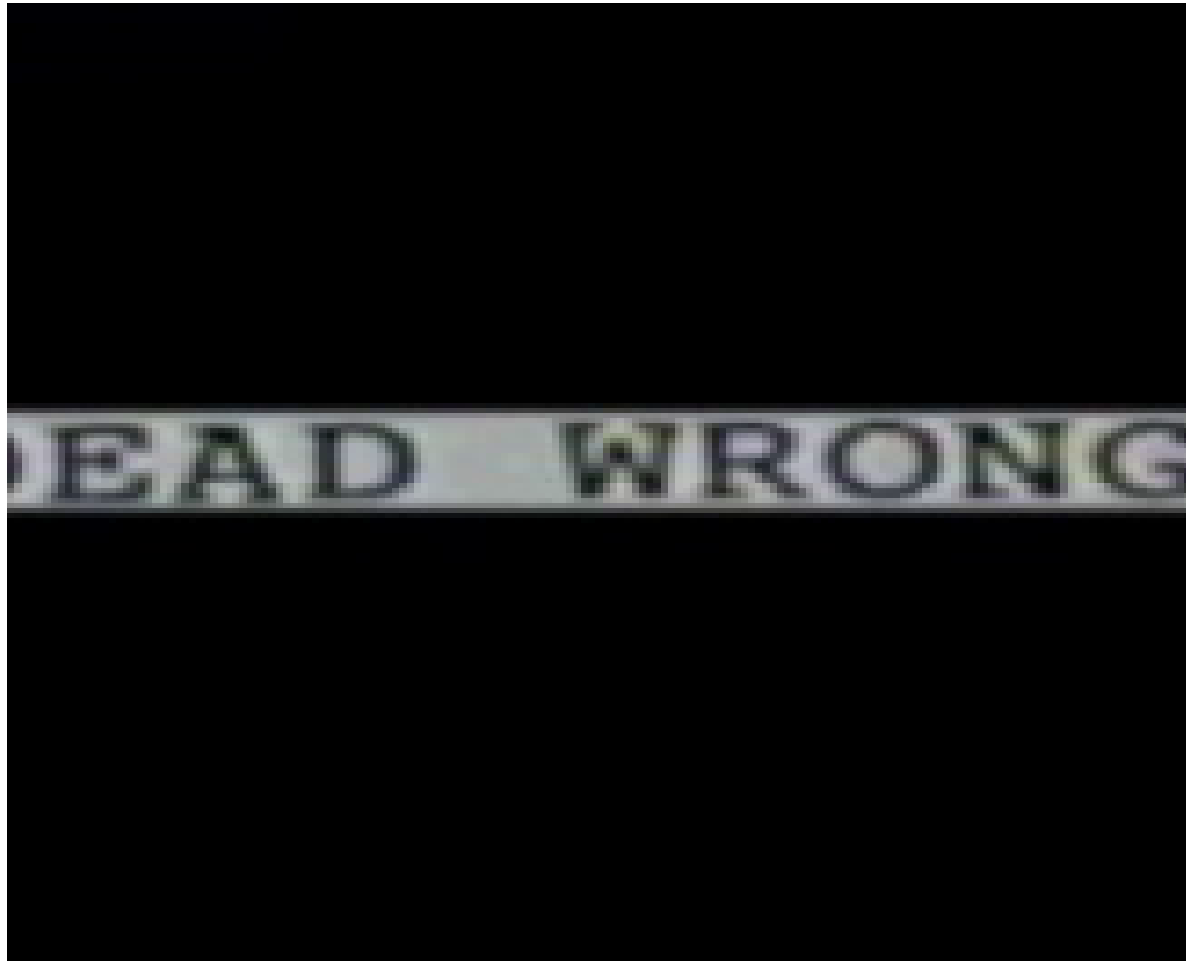
# The Risks of “Dialogue” - Wilson vs. Brown in 1994

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# Brown vs. Wilson

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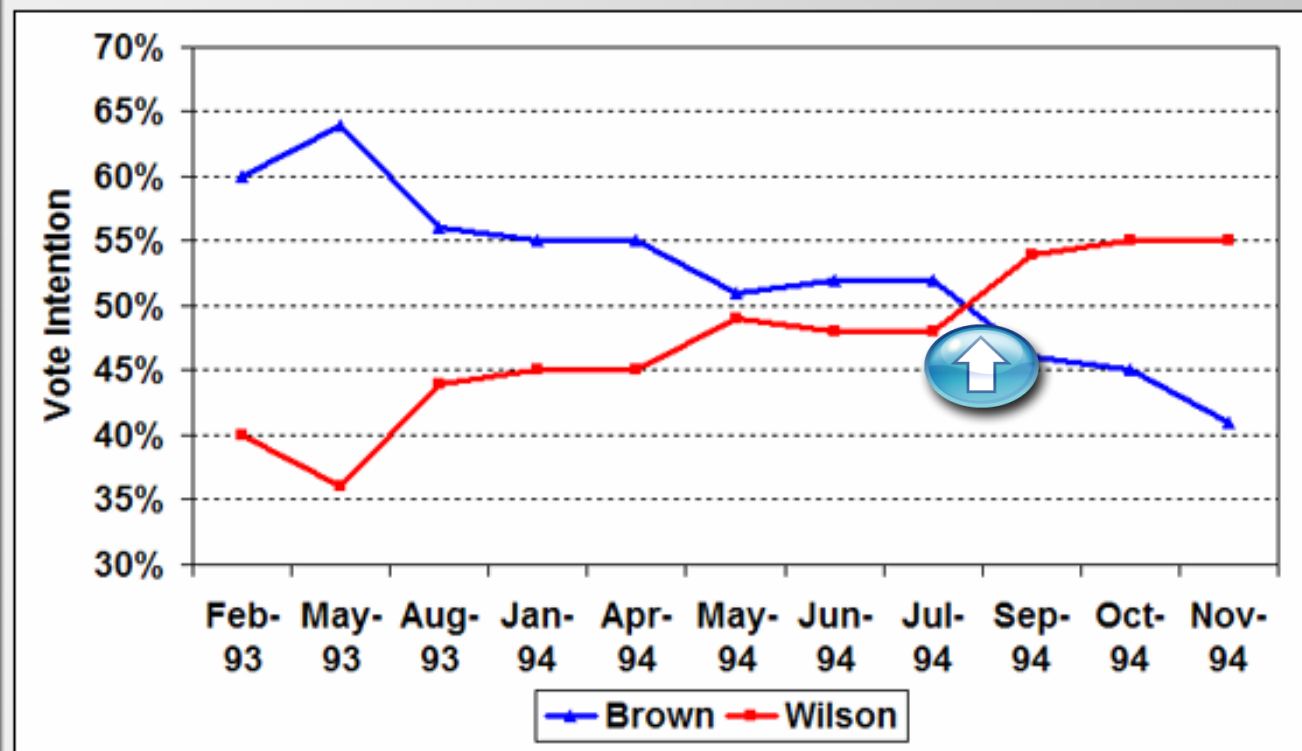


# Impact of Campaign on Brown Support

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Wilson ads begin in June, Brown responds and Aug-Sept are “dialogue” months

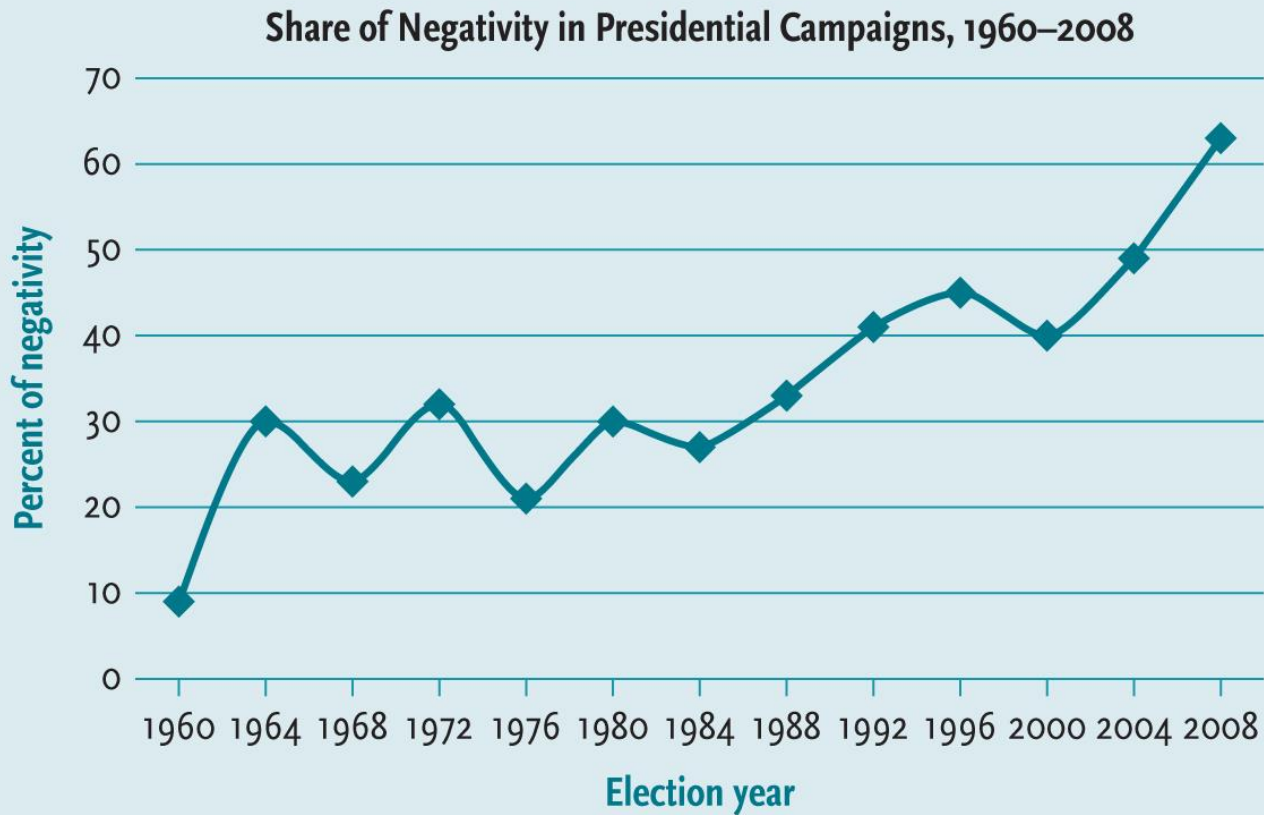
Figure 6.4: Erosion of Brown Support in 1994



Source: Field Institute. (1994). *The California Field Poll*.

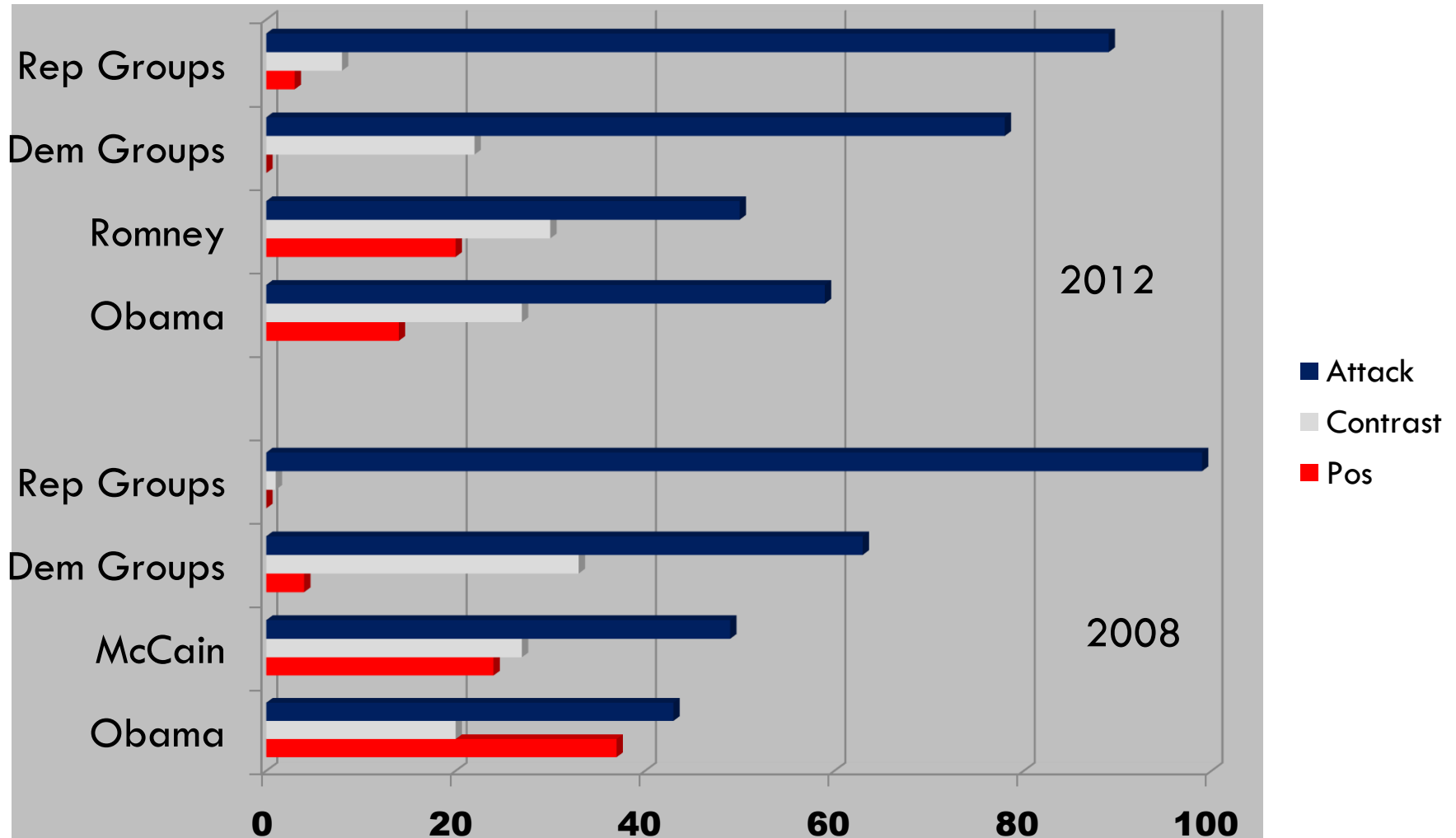
# Prevalence of Negativity

FIGURE 6.1 THE RISE OF NEGATIVE ADVERTISING



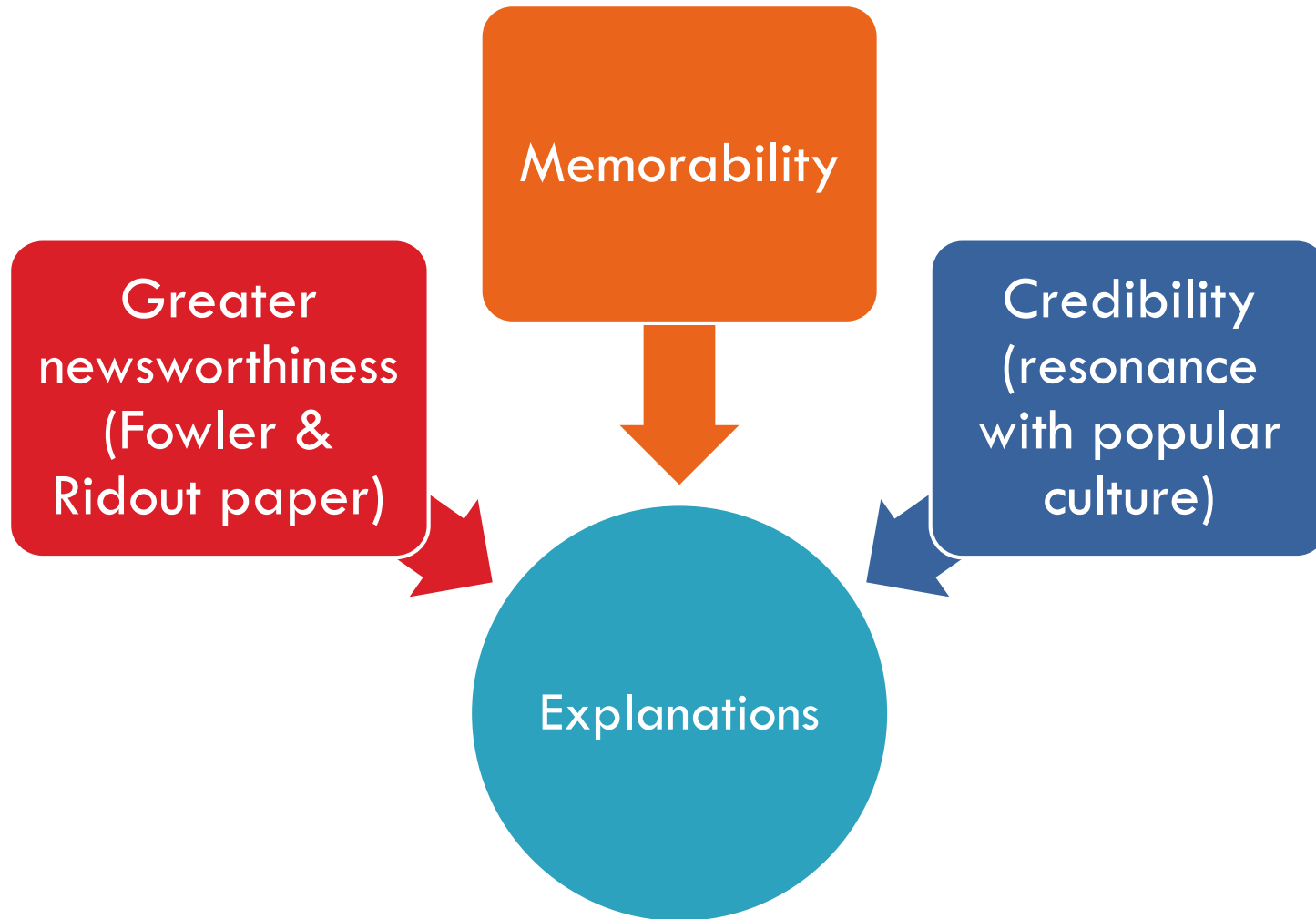
Source: Data from Geer, 2010.

# Tone in 2008 and 2012



# Why go negative?

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# Typology of Attacks

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## Forms of attack

- Character flaws
  - Integrity
  - Lack of values
- Inadequate performance, “flip-flops,” guilt by association
  - (Dole-Gingrich)

## Attacks invite counter-attacks

- Most campaigns arrive at a negative-negative equilibrium

# Using character attacks to elicit news coverage

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**Bill Clinton...**

**He's really something.**

<http://www.rnc.org>

# The “Swift Boat” Ad

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# “Fact Checking”

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# Candidate Response: Fake Ads

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- RNC attack on Clinton (“soldiers and sailors act”) never aired once, but was front-page news
- Swift Boat ad aired once in W. VA, at total cost of 20K
- Ad became a major news item in 2004; ad-related news increased dramatically thereafter
- Use of ad watch journalism has prompted campaigns to use controversial ads as “bait” for journalists; they get their agenda into the news and don’t mind the critiques offered by reporters

# Ads by Surrogates

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- McCain-Feingold Act (BCRA-2002)
  - ▣ Requires candidates to appear in ads – “accountability”
  
- Ads by PACS and surrogates generally more negative and controversial
  - ▣ Candidate can claim no responsibility

# Third Party Ads

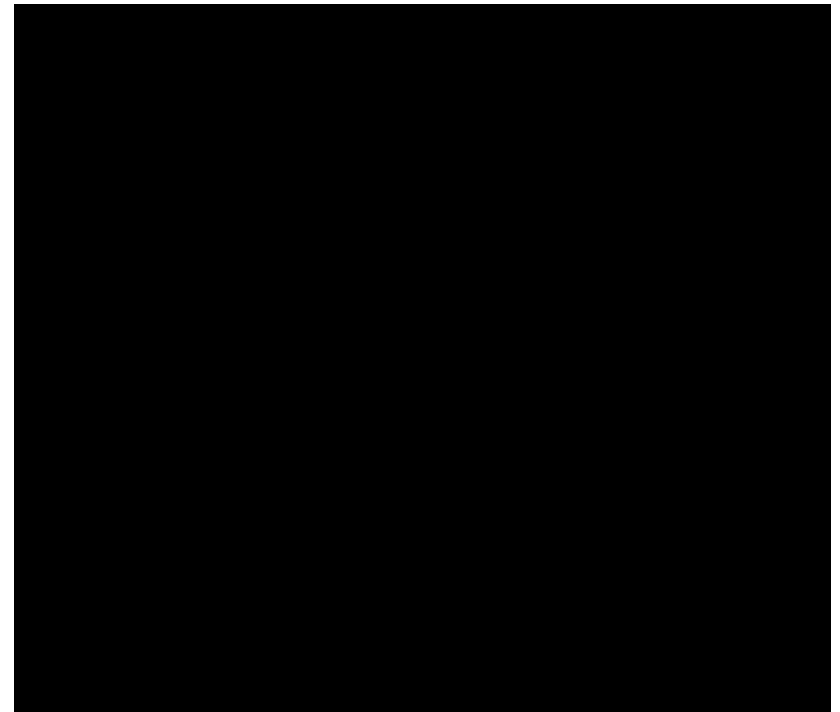
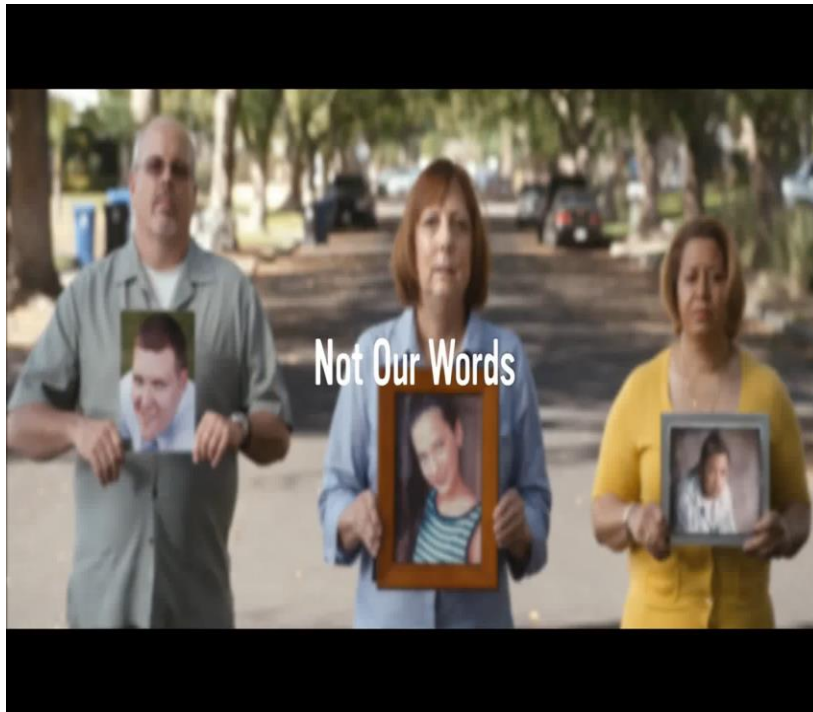
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**President Bush  
April 13, 2004**

# Issue Advertising

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# Candidate Debates

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- “Joint appearances” that are scripted by the campaigns
- Issues of eligibility
- Avoiding verbal and non-verbal gaffes
- Importance of news coverage; Ford in 1976, Gore in 2000, Bush in 2004, Obama in 2012 victimized by post-debate analysis

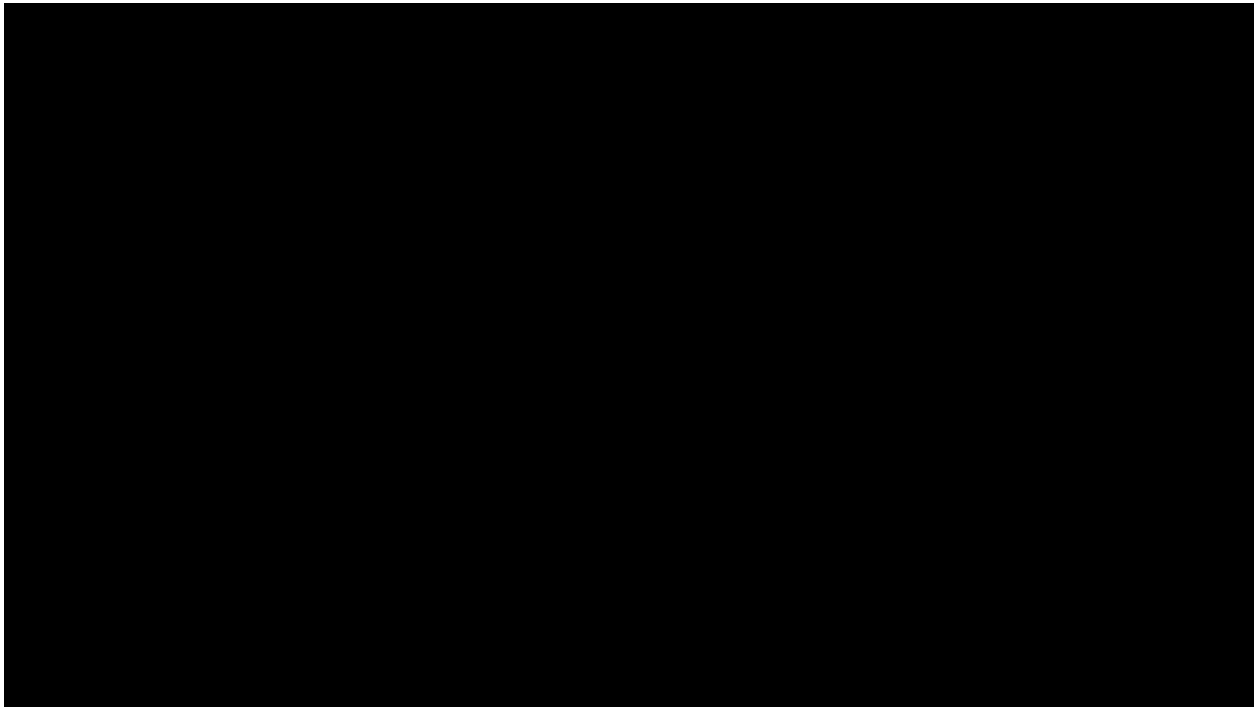
# 1976 – Ford on E. Europe

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# Gov. Perry's long term memory

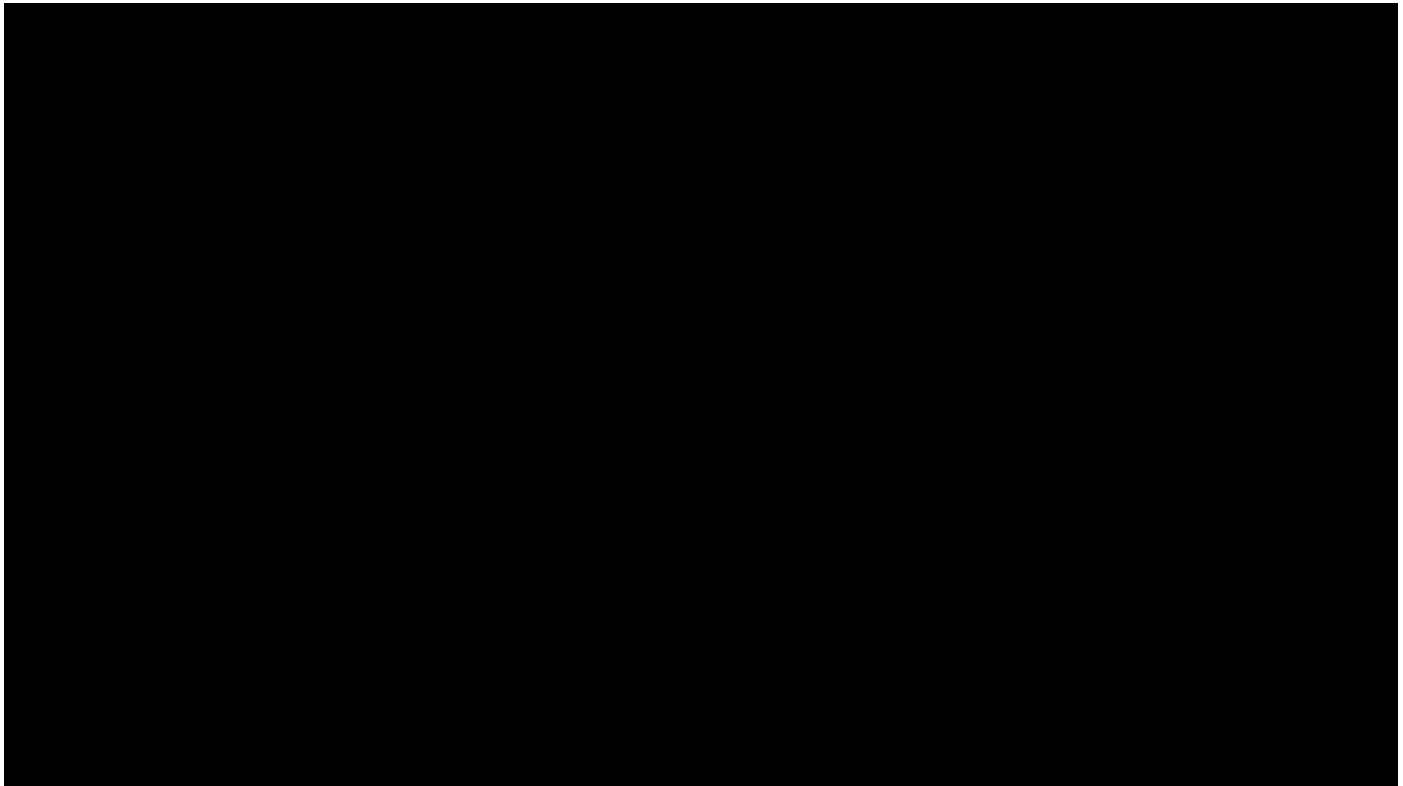
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# Gingrich's Counter-attack

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# Megan Kelly takes on Trump

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# Summary

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(1)

- Candidates strive to shape the flow of news and set the agenda for journalists

(2)

- Journalists resist by limiting coverage and providing greater scrutiny of campaign rhetoric

(3)

- Campaign messages evolve continuously as each side strives to gain the upper hand

# Effects of Campaigns

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- Minimal evidence of persuasion (crossover voting), principal effect is to get partisans enthused about their candidate (reinforcement effect)
- Exposure to campaign messages has polarizing effects
- Some evidence that voters acquire information during campaigns, but limited to personal traits of candidates
- Mobilize supporters to vote (GOTV – Enos & Fowler paper shows that use of data-based campaigns have significant effects on size of electorate)