Week 5: Media Effects

- How do ads affect voting behavior?
- ...and spending?
- ...and news coverage?
- ...and media messages in general?

The Start:
The Idea of the “Magic Bullet”

- Expectations based on WWII propaganda, Orson Welles’s War of the Worlds, etc.
- Based on simple stimulus-response models
- Focus on linear effects and direct persuasion by media messages
The Surprise:
Limited Effects

The Columbia Studies
- Studies of media effects during presidential campaigns 1940 (and again in 1948), using recently developed method of opinion survey

Findings
- little change in people’s attitudes and vote intentions as a result of media coverage
- selective exposure + perception dominate
- only effect: Campaigns reinforce existing partisan attachments, activate latent predispositions

The Minimal Effects Paradigm:
Why the bullet isn’t magic

The effect of media on vote choice is constrained by:
- Partisan identification
- Evaluations of the economy
- Strength of people’s prior beliefs and attitudes

And... finding effects is difficult, especially using survey research
Surveys vs Experiments

- How do we study campaign effects?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of both methods?

Research Design

**Surveys**
- Internal validity low/ causality problem
  (Self-reports)
- External validity high/ generalizability advantage
  (Representative samples)

**Experiments**
- Internal validity high/ causality advantage
  (Control over exposure)
- External validity low/ generalizability problem
  (Convenience samples of ads and people)
Advertising Effects

- The Going Negative experiments
  ⇒ One-ad vs Two-ad experiments
  ⇒ Different issues
  ⇒ Different tone
  ⇒ Different electoral levels

Results from Going Negative:
1. Ads change Votes

- Single ad increased vote share for ad sponsor on average by roughly 8%
- All experiments had significant effects
- Party ID, gender, race, past voting behavior were controlled for
- Ads increased character and issues evaluations
- Ads had priming effect: Opinions on issue/character emphasized in the ad had bigger effect in vote decision
Results from Going Negative:  
2. Reinforcement

- Reinforcement vs Conversion
- Figure 4.1: Effects are 14% for same party identifiers (reinforcement), but only 5% for opposing party identifiers (conversion)
- Among weak partisans, reinforcement particularly high (and no sign of conversion)
- No effect among independents!

⇒ Ads mostly strengthen party loyalty

Results from Going Negative:  
3. Knowledge

- Effect is largest among same-party identifiers with little knowledge
- Knowledgeable same-party identifiers support their party even without ads
- Among independent or opposite-party identifiers, knowledge difference are not important: Effects are generally low

⇒ No evidence of manipulation (voting against your party) among less-knowledgeable weak partisans ("swing voters")
Results from Going Negative:

4. Issues

- Issues work better for one party than the other
  - Economy in 1992 better for Democratic party; crime better for Republican Party
  - Democratic economy ads worked better than Republican economy ads; reverse for crime ads
  - Among Democrats, economy ads worked better than crime ads
  - Among Republicans, crime ads worked better than economy ads
  - Issue Ownership (more later)

Results from Going Negative:

5. Tone

- Negative ads worked better than positive (in general elections)
- Negative ads worked for Republicans and Independents, but not for Democrats
Advertising Effects in Senate Campaigns

- How does money change votes?
- Spending is an imprecise measure of campaigning
  ⇒ Research costs, polls, staff do not persuade directly
  ⇒ Advertising costs differ by media market:
    A dollar buys more for some candidates than others
  ⇒ Independent groups (parties, interest groups) campaign on candidate’s behalf

Advertising Effects in Senate Campaigns

- Spending is only proxy for campaigning—why not use advertising data?
  ⇒ CMAG ad buy data
- Just number of ads is not enough either
  ⇒ Need to account for likelihood of seeing the ad
  ⇒ Exposure measures
- Note: This is much more sophisticated and data-intensive that early, much-criticized survey research
Advertising Effects in Senate Campaigns

- Compare three effects on vote decision (see table 2)
  - Campaign spending
    - no significant effect
  - Number of ads in respondents media market
    - marginal effect, if anything
  - Exposure to political ads
    - significant effect

Media Effects

- Zaller argues that idea of limited effects is wrong, that “massive media impact” is not a myth
  - Why?
  - Why is it so hard to observe massive impact?
Media Effects

- Media effects are conditional: Not everyone is equally susceptible to persuasion

- **Reception gap**
  - not everyone gets the same dose

- **Yielding gap**
  - not everyone has the same amount of prior knowledge

Media Effects

- Reception gap and yielding gap make people at middle levels of news attention ("habitual news reception") most susceptible to persuasion for two different reasons
  - Because they only get the "loud" message (reception gap)
  - Because they don't have much prior knowledge to argue against the "loud" message (yielding gap)
Reception Gap

Influence gap = Reception gap

As campaign intensity increases, the reception gaps shifts to the LEFT (because even people who pay less attention now get both messages).
Reception Gap

- Example: Congressional elections
  ⇒ Of the people who identify with the challenger party, who defects to the incumbent (loud message)?

Yielding Gap

- Consider one-message environment
- Probability of receiving message increases with news attention ("habitual news reception")
- Probability of yielding to the message decreases with news attention
  ⇒ Because people who pay more attention are more likely to have prior knowledge and firm opinions that contradict message (the role of political values)
Yielding Gap

Likelihood of Receiving a Message

Habitual News Reception

Yielding Gap

Likelihood of Yielding to a Message

Habitual News Reception
Yielding Gap

Likelihood of Being Persuaded by a Message

Habitual News Reception

People with medium levels of news reception are most susceptible to persuasion.
Reception and Yielding Gaps

- Note that both gaps have the same effect: People at middle levels of attention are most easily persuaded
- Examples
  - Gulf War
  - Vietnam, over time

Gulf War: Generally the right thing to do? (mainstream issue)
Media messages support sending troops unanimously (one-message model)
Liberals and Conservatives accept message, if received.
Reception and Yielding Gaps

Gulf War: The specifics (partisan issue)
Media messages mixed, some pro, some contra (two-message model)
Conservatives accept pro message/reject con message, if received.
Liberals accept con message/reject pro message, if received.

Another example: Vietnam over time
Reception gap AMONG LIBERALS changes between 1964 and 1966
Reception and Yielding Gaps

Another example: Vietnam over time

Reception gap AMONG LIBERALS changes between 1964 and 1966

Yielding gap between Cons. and Libs. emerges, as some critical messages appear

Media Effects

- Zaller argues that idea of limited effects is wrong, that “massive media impact” is not a myth
  ⇒ Why?
  - Because among some people, often those who pay medium attention to news, media have large effects
  - They receive the loud message, but not the weak one (reception gap)
  - AND they are not politically knowledgeable enough to counter-argue the message they receive (yielding gap)
Media Effects

- Why is it so hard to observe massive impact?
  - Because self-reports of news exposure are bad measures
  - Because variation in message strengths is required to observe it
  - Media effects are everywhere. But we don’t see them, if competing messages are of similar “loudness”, because their effects neutralize each other.

Media Effects

- Consider the variation in the examples
  - Vietnam:
    First strong pro-war message, later dissenting views
  - House elections:
    Loud incumbent message, weak challenger message
  - Democratic Primary 1984:
    Mondale surprise loss to Hart, then rebound
  - Presidential election...?
Media Effects

- Campaign Effects or Media Effects?
  - Campaign effects: Effects of campaign events staged by the candidates, debates, conventions
  - Media effects: Effects of ads, news coverage, any message that reaches you through the media

⇒ hard to distinguish because most people learn about campaign events through the media
⇒ often used interchangeably
⇒ But: Shaw tries to distinguish the two

Campaign Effects/ Media Effects

- Shaw examines if poll standings of presidential candidates are affected by
  ⇒ campaign events
  ⇒ TV coverage of campaign events
  ⇒ newspaper coverage of campaign events
Campaign Effects/ Media Effects

Figure 1. Presidential candidate support, 1992–1996.

Campaign Effects/ Media Effects

Figure 2. Media coverage of presidential candidates, 1992–1996.
Campaign Effects/ Media Effects

- **Shaw’s results**
  - Candidates benefit from positive TV coverage of their campaign events, suffer from negative coverage (media effect)
  - Campaign events also help the candidate independent of how favorable the coverage was (campaign effect)
  - Favorability of general (not event-specific) newspaper coverage affects poll standings (media effect)

Media/ Campaign Effects: Summary

- **Our four studies:**
  - Ansolabehere/ Iyengar: Going Negative
  - Goldstein/ Freedman on Senate campaigns
  - Shaw: Media/ Campaign Effects
  - Zaller: Massive Media Impact

- **Summarize and integrate their findings:**
  - What is causing the effect?
  - How does the effect affect people?
  - Who is most affected? Under what circumstances?
Voting in Congressional Elections

- Gronke, chapter 6:
  What determines how people vote?
- How important are media/ campaign effects compared to the ‘fundamentals’?

Step 1: Know the candidates’ names
- What determines if people can recall candidate name? (decreasing order of importance)
  ⇒ Political interest
  ⇒ Institution (House or Senate)
  ⇒ Campaign-intensity
  ⇒ Challenger quality (for recall of challenger name)
  ⇒ Challenger spending
  ⇒ Incumbent spending
Voting in Congressional Elections

**Step 1:** Know the candidates’ names

- “Institution matters, but campaigns, and especially individual motivation to become informed, matter far more.”
- Among the campaign variables, challenger quality has the largest impact on recall of the challenger name.

Campaign intensity also helps challengers more than incumbents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall</th>
<th>Low-intensity Probability</th>
<th>Average Probability</th>
<th>High-intensity Probability</th>
<th>Increase (low to high)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House incumbent</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.395</td>
<td>.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate incumbent</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.408</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House challenger</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate challenger</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>.362</td>
<td>.265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voting in Congressional Elections

**Step 2: The Vote**

- The major determinants
  - Individual characteristics: Party ID
  - National forces: Presidential approval
  - Candidate evaluations: Likes & Dislikes, incumbent helpfulness
  - Candidate contact

**Step 2: The Vote**

- What’s most important?
  - 1. Party ID and Presidential approval
    - “First and foremost, most voters are loyal to their parties, loyal to their president, and loyal to their incumbent.”
  - 2. Candidate evaluations
    - Balance of likes and dislikes about incumbent and challenger
  - 3. Candidate contact
    - It matters, but clearly less important than 1. and 2.
Voting in Congressional Elections

Step 2: The Vote

- Two House/Senate differences
  - Presidential approval is more important in House elections
    - If you like what the president is doing, you vote for the candidate of the president's party in House elections
    - In Senate elections, voting is independent of presidential approval, probably because of the "greater personalization" of Senate elections
  - Campaign intensity is more important in House elections
    - Even after we consider all other factors, challengers still do better in intense House elections
    - Intensity has no effect in Senate elections

Voting in Congressional Elections

- Fundamentals matter more than campaigns
- Even if we consider candidate likes and dislikes a product of the campaign, party ID and presidential approval are still more important
- Candidate contact (meeting the candidate, seeing him on TV, etc.) has only a small effect
- Qualification: Maybe Gronke misses some of the campaign effect, because he does not pursue insights from Zaller or Goldstein/Freedman