

FEELING POLITICS

EMOTION IN POLITICAL
INFORMATION PROCESSING

Edited by

David P. Redlawsk

CHAPTER 9

RACIAL CUES IN CAMPAIGN NEWS: THE EFFECTS OF CANDIDATE STRATEGIES ON GROUP ACTIVATION AND POLITICAL ATTENTIVENESS AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS*

*Vincent L. Hutchings, Nicholas A. Valentino, Tasha
S. Philpot, and Ismail K. White*

Decades of scholarship in the field of electoral behavior have established that the chief influence of campaigns is to reinforce or activate latent predispositions so that voters behave consistently with their underlying interests (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Finkel 1993; Gelman and King 1993; Klapper 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Patterson and McClure 1976; Petrocik 1996; Zaller 1992). Little attention, however, has been devoted to identifying the specific process by which activation occurs. In particular, we have yet to identify specific catalysts, in the swirling confusion of campaign communication, for activating latent preferences.

The question of how campaigns remind citizens where they stand in relation to the parties and candidates vying for political power may seem trivial at first blush: the candidates clearly convey their partisan affiliations and the individual's own predispositions take over from there. The problem with this simple description of the activation process is that it brings us back to the point that the authors of the *American Voter* struggled with when they originally proposed the psychological model of voting behavior: The activation process does not seem to work equally well across elections

(Campbell et al. 1960). Sometimes Democratic voters are more effectively mobilized by the campaign, whereas at other times Republicans are more effectively activated. And this variation seems determinative in many elections (Finkel 1993). In other words, of the many messages articulated during the course of the campaign, what are the particular cues that effectively catalyze the activation process?

In this chapter, we attempt to fill this explanatory void by synthesizing older ideas about the role of group cues in campaign communication with new theories about the impact of emotional reactions in the realm of politics. We argue that candidates can activate latent support among large social groupings by emphasizing the distance between them and their opposition in terms of their support for group interests. The reason group cues are so effective in the activation process is that they trigger various emotional reactions among group members, reactions that in turn affect candidate evaluations and stimulate campaign learning (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). In sum, we hope to illuminate and precisely test a mechanism by which different campaigns produce fairly consistent, yet never identical, electoral outcomes.

Candidates, Campaigns, and Political Perceptions

How do campaigns activate voters and stimulate campaign learning? Less attention has been devoted to this question than the logically prior issue of *whether* campaign messages influence political preferences.¹ The implicit assumption of this literature is that campaign stimuli are influential because they raise the profile of group-relevant issues such that voters recognize the relationship between their political predispositions and their vote choice.² For example, Berelson and his colleagues found that Harry Truman's emphasis on working-class issues during the latter stages of the 1948 presidential campaign had the effect of activating support among voters interested in these issues (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954, pp. 262–270). Subsequent work focused on party identification as the most directly activated attachment during campaigns (Campbell et al. 1960). Since partisanship was theorized to lie “downstream” in the funnel of causality of factors ultimately producing the vote choice, it was reasonable to assume that campaign communication would be most effective if it activated this dimension. Still, none of these studies attempted to specify the types of campaign cues that would activate predispositions.

Recently, scholars have begun to explore the possibility that emotional reactions play a vital role in political mobilization and persuasion (Brader 2005; MacKuen et al. 2001a, 2001b; Marcus and MacKuen 1993; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). The theory of “affective intelligence” argues that political stimuli generate emotional reactions such as enthusiasm

or anxiety that then serve as powerful motivators of candidate evaluations and political attentiveness. Marcus and his colleagues draw important distinctions between the political consequences of enthusiasm and anxiety (Marcus, Neuman, and Mackuen 2000). The former is associated with what they refer to as the “dispositional system” that promotes the maintenance of previously learned behaviors, encouraging individuals to apply their traditional party allegiances. The latter emotion derives from the “surveillance system” and prompts individuals to respond to threatening information with increased attentiveness.

Although the theory of affective intelligence is provocative and holds significant promise, no studies to date have explored the particular message factors in campaign communication that produce emotional reactions such as enthusiasm or anxiety. Many of the claims are based on cross-sectional survey data, which might provide good estimates of the extent of emotional reactions in a population and their relationship to political perceptions, but are very imprecise as means for determining the timing or environmental triggers for these emotions. For example, although Marcus and MacKuen (1993) show that anxiety is associated with learning, they cannot determine whether this association occurs because of *campaign-induced* anxiety. However, other studies by these researchers have utilized experimental designs to manipulate anxiety levels via cues about the aggressiveness of unpopular groups (Marcus et al. 1995; Marcus, Wood, and Theiss-Morse 1998). Additionally, Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) report on a second set of experiments that explore emotional reactions to political advertisements. Still, these experiments rely on actual campaign ads and therefore cannot determine which particular aspects of the message produce the emotional reaction. Moreover, they do not demonstrate that these emotional reactions subsequently influenced candidate evaluations or led to increased learning effects. In other words, a general theoretical framework for linking campaign communication, emotional reactions, and campaign learning and persuasion has yet to be fully tested.

We suggest that candidate distinctiveness, particularly with regard to competing social-group interests, represents a powerful class of emotion-producing stimuli that candidates employ in their campaigns. In politics, feelings of enthusiasm or anxiety may be produced when candidates diverge on group-relevant issues. Some previous work has also argued that emphasizing relevant issues is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for activating political engagement and candidate support (Campbell et al. 1960; Key 1966; Page and Brody 1972). Specifically, this research argues that, in addition to raising salient issues, candidates must also clearly distinguish their position from their opponent's. In the absence of such differentiation and conflict, the voters have no clear basis on which to bring

their political predispositions to bear on their political judgments, even if the issues are prominently discussed in the media.³ The social psychological literature on adaptation level theory and the "contrast effect" is also important, because varying distinctiveness itself can alter the evaluation of a given object, even when that object is unchanged (Helson 1964; Manis and Moore 1978; Petty and Cacioppo 1981). In brief, ". . .when an object or issue is evaluated in the context of very positive stimuli, it will be rated less favorably along the same dimension of judgment than if it is evaluated in the context of very negative stimuli" (Petty and Cacioppo 1981).

Starting with these insights, we argue that political communication emphasizing candidate distance on issues salient to relevant social groups will trigger emotional responses, which will subsequently affect political evaluations and political learning. Our focus on groups is motivated by the assumption that the American party system is organized around various group cleavages in society such as race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, and region (Axelrod 1972; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Stanley and Niemi 1991). Additionally, decades of public opinion research suggests that group-based political thinking is pervasive and thus candidate appeals will be most effective when they resonate with group considerations (Converse 1964; Conover 1984, 1988; Conover and Feldman 1981; Dawson 1994; Nelson and Kinder 1996). Consequently, we hypothesize that an effective way for candidates to mobilize support among core constituencies and heighten campaign learning is to highlight the implications of the election for salient group interests by emphasizing candidate distinctiveness.

Since group interests are frequently in conflict, campaign appeals that generate support among one group may well diminish support among another group. A group dimension commonly considered to produce zero-sum political conflict in America is race (Bobo 2000; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). Studies of non-campaign news content have indicated that the typical frames used to depict blacks and whites may consistently reinforce and exacerbate racial conflicts in society (Entman 1992; Entman and Rojecki 2000). We expect, therefore, that appeals highlighting candidate distinctiveness on issues relevant to African Americans may, on average, drive white support away from the Democratic candidate as it generates greater support from blacks. In addition to affecting political preferences, campaign messages emphasizing candidate distinctiveness should also lead to increased levels of campaign learning. This is because when candidates diverge on group-relevant policy dimensions, at least one candidate necessarily adopts positions antithetical to one or more social groups. For this reason, we do not expect all citizens exposed to this message to respond with increased anxiety and hence attentiveness. Instead,

only individuals whose group interests are directly implicated should respond in this way (Boniniger, Krosnick, and Berent 1995). This expectation draws us into the long-standing debate in the field of political communication as to the most effective determinants of political news reception (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Hutchings 2001; Iyengar 1990; Price and Zaller 1993). In short, our examination of campaign distinctiveness should also provide us with information as to whether general interest in politics or group-specific interests best facilitates campaign learning.

In summary, we predict that media cues depicting candidates as distinctive on racial issues should effectively activate political support. If the candidates adopt the political parties' traditional stand on racial issues, African Americans should be drawn toward the Democratic candidate whereas whites should move closer to the Republican candidate. Second, when candidates do *not* appear distinctive on racial issues, campaign communications should *not* activate group-specific support in this way. Third, emotions act as the mechanism that mediates campaign activation. That is, candidate distinctiveness activates support because it heightens feelings of enthusiasm for candidates whose policy positions are consistent with citizen's underlying interests. Fourth, candidate distinctiveness should also produce greater political attentiveness, particularly among individuals most threatened by the issue positions of the candidate furthest from their ideal point. Fifth, this learning effect should also occur directly because of the heightened sense of anxiety engendered by the threat cues.

Methods and Procedures

In order to understand the process by which campaigns evoke feelings of enthusiasm and anxiety and thereby increase attentiveness and promote opinion change, one must manipulate the strategies adopted by major-party candidates and then measure the emotional and political reactions of the citizens exposed to those strategies. An experimental design is best suited to examine these issues. The chief virtue of experiments is that they allow the researcher to isolate and manipulate the factors that might produce changes in attitudes or behavior (Kinder and Palfrey 1993). This method has become increasingly popular in the study of political communications (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). While surveys are vital for estimating population means and trends, they are weaker at determining the causal impact of specific media content.

The data used to test our hypotheses are drawn from an experiment conducted in July of 2000 in our Media Lab at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The study utilized a convenience sample of 198 adult, non-student

residents from the area surrounding the university. Blacks were oversampled in this study and constituted 29 percent of our sample whereas whites represented 56 percent and the remainder (15 percent) identified as Asian American, Native American, Hispanic, or "other."⁴ Subjects were recruited individually with flyers distributed to local businesses, university office buildings and in a downtown area adjacent to the university. Each was told she or he would receive \$15 for answering questions about "current events." As subjects entered the lab they were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (two treatment conditions and one control), and then escorted to a computer terminal. In order to minimize interviewer biases, subjects interacted solely with the computer throughout the session. After completing a pretest questionnaire about the type of radio and television programs they preferred, the computer instructed subjects to read a series of short newspaper articles. Each subject in the treatment groups viewed two different nonpolitical articles and one political story.⁵ Those assigned to the control group read only the nonpolitical articles.⁶ Following the articles, subjects responded to a number of questions involving their political views, knowledge, and participatory intentions.

Our analyses focus on three dependent variables. The first are the emotions of enthusiasm and anxiety. Drawing on the work of Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) we measure reactions of enthusiasm to the candidates with a single question asking whether Al Gore has ever made our subjects feel hopeful.⁷ Anxiety is measured with a similarly worded item asking if George W. Bush has ever made subjects feel afraid. Candidate evaluations are measured by subtracting the feeling thermometer score for Bush from the thermometer score for Gore. The feeling thermometer, which ranges from 0 to 100, is regarded as a good measure of general evaluations of the candidates, in part because it captures both the direction and intensity of support (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1994). The difference variable has been re-coded so that it ranges from -1 to 1 with positive values indicating more favorable impressions of Gore, relative to Bush, and negative values indicating the reverse. Campaign learning is measured with perceptions of candidate issue differences on affirmative action, federal funding for public schools, and women's equality in the work force. Perceptions of each candidate's stand on these policies are derived from standard seven-point issue-scales.⁸ Difference measures are then computed by subtracting subjects' perceptions of Bush's position from their perception of Gore's position. These variables have been re-coded to range from -1 to 1, with positive values indicating the perception that Gore is the more liberal candidate, relative to Bush.

The political stories used in the experiment were written by the researchers and were designed to highlight either the Democratic or

Republican perspective on George W. Bush's efforts to court African American voters in the 2000 presidential contest. One version of the story (referred to as the *Similar Condition*) begins with the headline "Gore, Bush Similar on Black Issues" and is accompanied by color photographs of each candidate interacting amicably with NAACP Chairman Julian Bond. The article focused on appearances by Gore and Bush before the annual convention of the civil rights organization. This version of the story begins with the reporter observing that though the candidates have tried to distinguish themselves from one another, "...on issues affecting African Americans the candidates are taking surprisingly similar positions." The article goes on to note that Gore and Bush both support stronger enforcement of civil rights laws, racially diverse administrations, improvements in public education, and expanded access to health insurance.

The alternate version (referred to as the *Difference Condition*) carries identical issue content but depicts the candidates as sharply diverging with regards to the interests of African Americans. For example, the headline for this version reads, "Gore, Bush Differ on Black Issues" and is accompanied by a photo of Bush amidst a crowd of white supporters at Bob Jones University.⁹ Gore is again shown interacting comfortably with Julian Bond. The text of this article begins much like the previous version, except that the writer concludes, "...on issues affecting African Americans the candidates have adopted dramatically different positions." Their speeches before the NAACP are also characterized in starkly different fashions. In a colorful turn of phrase, Chairman Bond describes the vice-president's speech as substantive whereas Governor Bush "...had a drive-by photo opportunity." It is worth noting that Gore's position on the issues is the same as in the previous version, whereas Bush is now portrayed as far less sympathetic than Gore to black interests. Perhaps the most noteworthy example involves civil rights issues. The article notes "...Gore has a solid record on civil rights issues and is a strong supporter of affirmative action policies. Conversely, ... [Bush] strongly opposes affirmative action policies."¹⁰

Results

Candidate Distinctiveness and Emotions

Our first set of analyses involves the impact of candidate issue difference on emotions. Our expectation is that the story emphasizing Gore's support for black interests, relative to Bush's opposition, will generate heightened enthusiasm for Gore among African Americans and weaker countervailing reactions among whites and other nonblack subjects.¹¹ When the candidates appear similar on black issues, these effects should be muted. These

results are presented in figure 9.1.¹² In the control group, we find that enthusiasm for Al Gore reaches only moderate levels for both blacks and nonblacks, in spite of the Democratic bias in our sample. When the candidates are depicted as similarly interested in serving black interests, enthusiasm for Gore among blacks rises only slightly. Interestingly, in the similar condition, enthusiasm for Gore among nonblacks begins to decline, although this result is not statistically significant. However, when Bush adopts a staunchly conservative position on issues relevant to African Americans, black enthusiasm for Gore increases dramatically. Indeed, the predicted probability more than doubles, going from .29 to .61. Levels of enthusiasm among nonblacks remain largely unaffected. Surprisingly, enthusiasm among whites and other nonblacks does not decline any further in this condition perhaps owing to a “floor effect” within this generally liberal sample.

In general, the manipulation of candidate distance on racialized issues produced the pattern of results we expected at the outset. When the candidates are described as different on “black issues” African Americans are far more likely than whites to associate positive emotions with the Gore candidacy. However, this response is not preordained. When our subjects are not exposed to the story about the candidates or when Bush is described as a moderate, black enthusiasm for Gore remains muted. To the extent that whites and others are affected at all, they generally move in the opposite direction as a result of these same cues, becoming less enthusiastic about

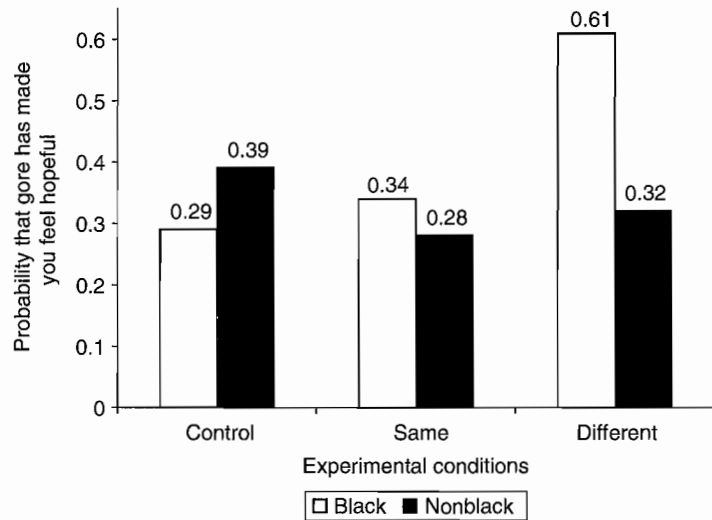


Figure 9.1 Probability that Something about Al Gore Makes Subject Feel Hopeful.

Gore when he stakes out traditional, liberal positions on issues of race, regardless of his position relative to Bush.

Candidate Distinctiveness, Enthusiasm, and Candidate Evaluations

In order to be politically consequential, campaign strategies must do more than produce an emotional response in various groups. They must also influence candidate evaluations. In table 9.1, we explore, on the one hand, whether candidate distinctiveness can activate candidate support, and on the other hand, whether apparent candidate similarities can effectively prevent this activation. The independent variables are located on the left-hand side of the table. Dummy variables are entered into the analysis for each treatment condition, with the control group as the excluded category.¹³ The principal variables of interest in these analyses are the race-by-experimental condition interactions, located near the bottom of the table. As anticipated, only the race-by-difference condition interaction is both positive and statistically significant. The net effect of the difference condition among blacks

Table 9.1 Predicting Effects of Manipulating Candidate Distance on Support for Presidential Candidates by Race

Predictors	Candidate Evaluations
Intercept	-.44*** (.08)
Similar condition	-.14* (.07)
Different condition	-.18** (.07)
Black	-.07 (.09)
Similar * Black	.15 (.14)
Different * Black	.31** (.13)
N	198
Adjusted R ²	.36

Note: The dependant variable is the difference between the Bush and Gore feeling thermometers. Higher values indicate greater support for Gore. Controls, not shown here, include party identification, ideology, and gender. Cell sizes are as follows: Control = 80; Similar Cell = 58; Different Cell = 60. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$ for one-tailed test, except constant.

($-.18 + .31$) is a 13-point increase in support for Gore, relative to Bush.¹⁴ Interestingly, although Gore remains committed to black concerns in both experimental conditions, when Bush appears more moderate black support for Gore does not change relative to the control group.¹⁵

Blacks are not the only subjects affected by the political stories. The negative, and significant coefficients on both experimental variables suggests that support among nonblacks for Gore, relative to Bush, *declines* after reading either political story. As anticipated, this effect is somewhat larger when the candidates' positions sharply diverge ($-.18$ versus $-.14$). However, this difference is not dramatic. Thus, highlighting candidate distinctiveness is an effective way to mobilize one's supporters. However, these results suggest that one risk in pursuing this strategy is that candidates may also succeed in mobilizing their opponents.

Having now established that candidate distinctiveness produces heightened enthusiasm and activates candidate support among African Americans, we turn to the question of whether the latter occurs because of the former. That is, does candidate distinctiveness lead to increased support for Gore because it primes feelings of hopefulness? We test this hypothesis in table 9.2. Here, the variable of interest is the three-way interaction of the difference condition by feelings of hopefulness by race, located at the bottom of the table.¹⁶ If our hypothesis is correct, then the coefficient on this variable should be both positive and statistically significant. This expectation is confirmed.

The substantive magnitude of the triple interaction is quite large. For example, turning first to those black subjects *who feel hopeful about Gore*, the vice-president enjoys no relative advantage over Bush on the feeling thermometers in the control group. Holding all other variables in the model to their mean or median produces a value of "()" indicating that black subjects make no distinction between the two candidates. However, among blacks who feel hopeful about Gore and who are exposed to information suggesting that the candidates take starkly different positions on black issues, Gore's relative advantage over Bush is significantly higher. These subjects give Gore a 36-point advantage over Bush on the feeling thermometer. The interaction of hopefulness and candidate distinctiveness has a different effect among nonblacks. In the control group, these subjects give Gore a 35-point advantage over Bush on the feeling thermometer. Interestingly, when the candidates are depicted as divergent on black issues, this advantage declines to 22 points. Among subjects *who do not feel hopeful toward Gore*, the effect of exposure to the difference condition results in less support for the Democrat. Moreover, this is true for both blacks and non-blacks. Thus, as anticipated, enthusiasm for Gore does act as a mediator of campaign activation but only for African Americans.¹⁷

Table 9.2 Predicting Effects of Manipulating Candidate Distance on Support for Presidential Candidates by Feelings of Hopefulness toward Gore and Race

Predictors	Candidate Evaluations
Intercept	$-.44^{***}$ (.09)
Different condition	$-.19^*$ (.09)
Gore hopeful	$.32^{***}$ (.09)
Different * Hopeful	.05 (.14)
Black	.13 (.11)
Different * Black	.01 (.18)
Black * Gore hopeful	$-.49^{**}$ (.18)
Different * Hopeful * Black	$.49^*$ (.26)
N	140
Adjusted R ²	.42

Note: The dependant variable is the difference between the Bush and Gore feeling thermometers. Higher values indicate greater support for Gore. Controls, not shown here, include party identification, ideology, and gender. Cell sizes are as follows: Control = 80; Different Cell = 60.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$ for one-tailed test, except constant.

Threat Cues and Campaign Learning

Our political stories manipulating candidate distinctiveness should have done more than just influence the relationship between enthusiasm and candidate evaluations. They should also have raised the specter of threat, especially for African Americans. This is because the prospect of a Bush presidency had much more dire implications for black interests in the difference condition than in the similar condition. In figure 9.2, we test whether the difference condition generates feelings of fear toward Bush. As anticipated, blacks are more likely to indicate that something about Bush makes them afraid when the candidates are depicted as different on black issues. This result is statistically significant, relative to the control, at the .05 level for a one-tailed test (results for the logistic regression analysis not shown). In the control group, neither blacks nor nonblacks have a high probability of indicating that Bush makes them fearful. Whites and other

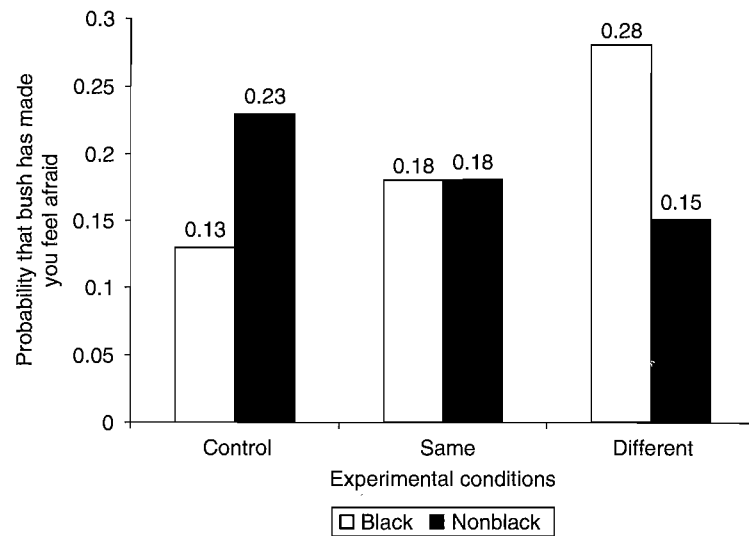


Figure 9.2 Probability that Something about George W. Bush Makes Subject Feel Afraid.

nonblacks are somewhat more likely to express this emotion, but this difference is not statistically significant. When the candidates' positions on racialized issues appear similar, there is a modest increase in feelings of fear among blacks and an equally modest decline among other subjects. Again, these effects fall short of statistical significance. However, when Bush adopts a more threatening posture toward African American interests, black anxiety toward Bush rises considerably. Even with the Democratic bias of our sample, we find that whites move in the opposite direction. Clearly, Bush's conservative position on black issues was perceived as threatening, but only for blacks.

In table 9.3, we examine the impact of group threat cues on campaign learning. As indicated earlier, information on the candidates' position on affirmative action and public school funding was included in our political articles. The articles made no mention of the candidates' stand on women's equality. Therefore, if the group threat cues were effective, they should increase perceptions of candidate difference on the two race-relevant issues and not on women's equality. Further, and consistent with the issue salience hypothesis, African Americans should be especially sensitive to this information. When the candidates differ on issues they consider important, blacks should be far more likely to recognize this than nonblacks. In addition to the controls described earlier, the analyses in table 9.3 also

Table 9.3 Predicting Effects of Manipulating Group Threat Cues on Campaign Learning by Race and Levels of Political Information

Predictors	Affirmative Action	School Funding	Women's Equality
Intercept	-.01 (.13)	-.17 (.10)	-.31** (.11)
Similar condition	-.34* (.19)	-.28* (.14)	-.12 (.16)
Different condition	-.32* (.18)	-.15 (.13)	-.10 (.15)
Black	-.34** (.11)	-.16* (.08)	-.04 (.09)
Similar * Black	.39** (.16)	.09 (.12)	.16 (.13)
Different * Black	.61*** (.15)	.33** (.11)	.16 (.13)
Political Information	.23 (.16)	.20* (.12)	.27* (.13)
Similar * Information	.51* (.26)	.32* (.20)	.21 (.21)
Different * Information	.47* (.23)	.30* (.17)	.14 (.19)
N	198	198	198
Adjusted R ²	.23	.27	.18

Note: The dependant variables are the candidate issue positions, ranging from -1 to 1, described in note 8. Higher values indicate perceptions that Gore is the more liberal candidate. Controls, not shown here, include party identification, ideology, and gender. Cell sizes are as follows: Control = 80; Similar Cell = 58; Different Cell = 60.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$ for one-tailed test, except constant.

include controls for subjects' level of political information, and the interaction of this variable with the experimental conditions.¹⁸ If, as some argue, citizens are primarily "information generalists" then the more politically informed should recognize when the candidates issue positions diverge, regardless of their race.

The first column presents the results for affirmative action policies. Interpreting these results at first glance is somewhat difficult in light of the multiple interaction terms. However, by manipulating the values on the experimental conditions while holding all other variables constant at their mean, we can generate predicted scores for a number of different groups. For example, nonblacks in the control condition, on average, view Gore as .34 points more liberal than Bush on this dimension. Non, blacks exposed to either the similar or difference conditions are only marginally different (i.e. .299 and .301, respectively). Thus, on balance the experimental conditions provide no information gain with respect to the candidates' position on affirmative action for the average nonblack subject. This conclusion is

somewhat different for nonblack subjects who score particularly high on the political information scale, which runs from 0 to 1. We find that Gore is perceived as significantly more liberal than Bush (i.e., a 15-to-17-point increase), after exposure to either of the manipulations, relative to the control group. Consequently, we conclude that citizens who are especially informed about politics in general are also more susceptible to learning about new political information.

Are citizens with a more group-oriented view of politics also more likely to learn about group-relevant political information? To answer this question, we examine how blacks' perception of the presidential candidates' stance on various public policies are affected by exposure to our news stories. As anticipated, we find that blacks are considerably more receptive to information about the candidates' position on affirmative action than are nonblacks. Interestingly, however, this effect is not a chronic one. Indeed, in the control group, blacks are significantly *less* likely than whites (i.e., 34 points) to view Gore as more supportive of affirmative action. It is unclear whether this is due to blacks' relative lack of attention to this issue, or their displeasure that Gore was not more forceful in defense of this policy. In any case, black attentiveness to, and accuracy about, the candidates' stands on affirmative action improves dramatically when exposed to the campaign news stories. Compared to the control condition, blacks recognize Gore as more liberal even when the candidates are depicted as similar on civil rights issues. Still, the net effect of this story merely eliminates the black-white gap observed in the control condition. When the candidates are characterized as different on affirmative action, blacks are far more likely to absorb and retain this information than are whites. In fact, the counterintuitive black-white gap in perceptions described in the control condition reverses. Instead of being substantially less likely than whites to view Gore as more liberal on affirmative action, blacks are substantially *more* likely to reach this conclusion. This difference translates into a 26-point black advantage in perceptions that Gore is the more liberal candidate.¹⁹

We uncover similar results, although more modest in size, for perceptions of candidate difference on public school funding (see column 2). Once again, very little campaign learning appears to occur among the typical nonblack in our sample. However, nonblack subjects particularly interested in, and informed about, politics are more apt to recognize candidate differences after exposure to the experimental conditions. As with perceptions of the candidates' positions on affirmative action, blacks in the control condition are somewhat less likely than nonblacks to view Gore as the more liberal candidate on education. This counterintuitive difference is unchanged in the similar condition. However, when the candidates are described as distinctive, the racial gap between blacks and the comparison group is

essentially eliminated. Finally, when asked about a nonracial issue that was not mentioned in our campaign coverage, the accuracy of neither blacks nor whites is affected. In summary, these results suggest that under some circumstances, more narrow group-oriented interests in politics are at least as effective a predictor of news acquisition as are more general interests.

Our last tests involve whether feelings of anxiety act as mediators of campaign learning just as enthusiasm influenced candidate support. Table 9.4 presents the triple interaction of race-by-difference condition-by-anxiety for both affirmative action and public school funding.²⁰ The three-way interaction is both positive and statistically significant for affirmative action but not school funding. In retrospect, this finding makes sense. Although education policies have indirect implications for black interests, affirmative action speaks directly to the mainstream black agenda. Efforts to dismantle these programs should provoke more anxiety among African Americans and this anxiety should induce more political attentiveness.

The magnitude of the race-by-difference condition-by-anxiety effect is not trivial. We find, for example, that a typical nonblack subject in the

Table 9.4 Predicting Effects of Manipulating Group Threat Cues on Campaign Learning by Race

Predictors	Affirmative Action	School Funding
Intercept	.08 (.11)	-.03 (.07)
Different condition	.04 (.11)	.02 (.07)
Afraid of Bush	.10 (.12)	.08 (.09)
Different * Afraid	-.15 (.19)	.14 (.13)
Black	-.28** (.12)	-.13 (.09)
Different * Black	.36* (.19)	.25* (.13)
Black * Afraid	-.53* (.26)	-.30* (.18)
Different * Afraid *	.67* (.34)	.14 (.13)
Black	.140	.140
N	140	140
Adjusted R ²	.15	.20

Note: The dependant variables are the candidate issue positions described in appendix 1. Higher values indicate perceptions that Gore is the more liberal candidate. Controls, not shown here, include party identification, ideology, and gender. Cell sizes are as follows: Control = 80; Different Cell = 60.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$.

control condition, who indicates that something about Bush makes them feel afraid, is more than capable of recognizing Gore's relative liberalism on this issue and consequently places him about .48 points higher on this scale than Bush. Nevertheless, these perceptions are largely unaffected by the experimental condition, as these subjects place Gore about .37 points higher than Bush. Blacks in the control group, who express some anxiety about Bush, on the other hand, are more likely to view him as the more liberal candidate (i.e., $-.33$) on affirmative action. This perception may reflect Bush's largely successful efforts to portray himself as a more "compassionate" Republican during this phase of the campaign. In any case, blacks who indicate that something about Bush makes them afraid and who are also exposed to the difference condition are significantly more likely to recognize Gore's more liberal position on affirmative action. The effect of exposure to the experimental condition is quite dramatic—on average, blacks in this condition view Gore as 60 points more liberal on this issue. Indeed, these blacks almost place the candidates as far apart as they can, given the range of this variable. Among subjects who do *not* express fear toward Bush, blacks are again more cognizant of Gore's relative liberalism in the difference condition. However, the discrepancy between the control and difference conditions is, much less stark here (i.e., a 40-point difference relative to a 93-point difference). Additionally, nonblacks are again largely unaffected by the stimulus.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to illuminate the process by which campaigns activate latent support in the electorate. We hypothesized that manipulating candidate distinctiveness with regard to a particular social group dimension would provide a powerful cue to group members. These cues were expected to produce emotional reactions that would in turn stimulate candidate support and boost issue attentiveness. In short, we argued that these processes underlie the real impact of the campaign: to activate latent group support for candidates, bringing evaluations and perceptions into line with preexisting interests. These hypotheses all found support in our results. When campaign coverage presents the candidates as distinctive, African Americans' support for Al Gore increased. Whites, on the other hand, expressed greater support for George W. Bush. Consistent with the affective intelligence theory, the effects among blacks were mediated through emotions of enthusiasm. Just as important, when Bush appeared more moderate, Gore's relative advantage among blacks did not materialize. Given that blacks represent arguably the most Democratic group in America, this result is significant. It suggests that even groups with a well-established

reputation for support for one political party can be dislodged, to a degree, when the right campaign strategy is adopted.

We also found that, when candidates highlight issues relevant to African American voters, blacks will be far more likely to absorb this information than nonblacks. Heightened emotional reactions, such as in this case anxiety, were also found to play a significant role in campaign learning. This was not the only mechanism at work here, however, as blacks who did not report such reactions nevertheless demonstrated evidence of increased attentiveness relative to nonblacks after exposure to the experimental conditions. This one study does not, of course, resolve the debate between proponents of the information generalist argument and the information specialist theorists. It does suggest, however, that some previous work may have been too quick to dismiss the role of domain-specific interests in encouraging political attentiveness.

These results advance our knowledge about American elections in several ways. First, although previous work has demonstrated the linkage between emotional states and political judgments, no one has explored one of the particular triggers that can produce the effect: candidate distinctiveness. Previous work has identified the importance of threat cues in the political environment, but without fully specifying the contours and limitations of this strategy (Brader 2005; Hutchings 2001; Marcus and MacKuen 1993). This chapter has shown that highlighting candidate difference most effectively heightens candidate enthusiasm and anxiety. Political opponents, however, can defuse these appeals by appearing to adopt more moderate positions. This finding runs counter to the issue ownership hypothesis, which states that candidates will be most successful when they stick to issues on which their party's reputation is strong (Petrocik 1996). However, our results fit nicely with the campaign strategies of recent presidential candidates. That is, we believe that neither George W. Bush's "compassionate conservative" platform, nor Bill Clinton's decision to run as a "new Democrat" were primarily ploys to gain supporters from the opposing camp. If that had been their goal, they would have to be considered failures. On the contrary, our results suggest that they were very effective ways of undercutting enthusiasm among their opponents' core supporters.

Second, our results help to explain why candidates highlight issue priorities even though most voters are inattentive to political matters most of the time. As Converse (1964) speculated almost 40 years ago, we found that voters are especially attentive when issues they regard as important are raised in political campaigns. In fact, we found that exposure to campaign news resulted in heightened learning effects among African Americans, in particular, even though this group traditionally scores lower than others on measures of general political knowledge. Thus, at least in some instances,

specialized interests are at least as effective a predictor of campaign learning as are more generalized measures of political interests. In short, issue appeals help to inform and mobilize core constituencies even if those constituencies are traditionally unengaged in politics.

Third, our results indicate that, contrary to some accounts racial group concerns may not be chronically salient to African Americans (Dawson 1994; Lau 1989a). We found that, relative to the comparison group, blacks were not monolithic in their enthusiasm for the Democratic candidate nor immutably critical of the Republican candidate. Further, African Americans did not necessarily view the presidential candidates as divergent on "black issues." These results suggest that, as with other voters, blacks' views of the political landscape are heavily shaped by the communication strategies adopted by political candidates.

Fourth, this chapter provides support for the notion that group-centric frames powerfully influence voters. Although our news articles were ostensibly directed toward African Americans they also influenced the views of whites and other nonblacks. For example, when Gore's positions as a race-liberal are juxtaposed to Bush's more conservative views, he gains black support but at the expense of support among other groups. These results suggest that adopting a position toward a high-profile group is an effective way to convey information about ones policy positions, but such a strategy does not come without costs.

Finally, this study also contributes to our knowledge about the manner in which voters evaluate candidates. Although the debate between the relative merits of the spatial model of electoral choice versus the directional model remains unresolved, neither argument addresses the role that *comparative* judgments play in candidate evaluations (Downs 1957; MacDonald, Rabinowitz, and Listhaug 1998; Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989; Westholm 1997). As we have shown, voters do not simply assess candidates based on how "close" they are to them on some uni-dimensional scale or, alternatively, which "side" of the issue the candidates come down on. They also consider the position of the candidates vis-à-vis each other.

We hope these results cast additional light on the process by which campaigns activate latent support among groups in the electorate. By adopting divergent positions on group-relevant issues, and utilizing media strategies that highlight those distinctions, campaigns and news media outlets that cover them provoke emotional responses from large segments of the citizenry. These negative emotions are then translated into increased attention to politics, and support for the candidates who would best serve the interests of the group. The implications of this particular process of activation are important.

The news media, with its preference for conflict and dramatic narrative, inadvertently feeds into this process. The public may or may not be well

served, because the dimensions made salient by the candidates are chosen strategically and may not be the ones that would maximize the public good in some larger sense. If, for example, it is a fairly straightforward matter to activate latent support along the dimension of race, then depending on the racial breakdown of a constituency, one or the other party will always have an incentive to do so. The religious right may also receive a fairly steady stream of political cues during campaigns because they represent a politically homogeneous group that will likely respond quite consistently. Alternatively, women are likely more difficult to activate *as a group* in any election, because of their more heterogeneous political views.

Although this study only focused on one group cleavage, we think a larger theory of the campaign activation process begins to emerge from these findings. However, more conclusive support for this theory must await future studies and an examination of additional groups. At this stage, our results suggest that campaigns will be best at activating those groups whose interests are relatively homogeneous with regard to the political system in which they are embedded.

Notes

* This research would not have been possible without the efforts of several graduate research assistants including Dmitri Williams, Lara Rusch, Matthew Beckmann, and Dara Faris.

1. The work of Charles Franklin represents an important exception to this trend (Franklin 1991). This scholar does examine the impact of campaign strategies on political perceptions, paying particular attention to the issue themes of incumbents and challengers. However, even Franklin's work is more concerned with the *number* of issue themes raised rather than the specific content of those themes or the ways in which the issues emphasized by each candidate might influence voter perceptions.
2. Some recent work (Bartels 1997; Gelman and King 1993) arrives at a similar conclusion, although for somewhat different reasons. This work finds that although the presence of campaigns are important in activating political predispositions, this has less to do with the specific content of the campaign than with the presence of a vigorous and competitive partisan contest.
3. In news coverage of campaigns, it is unlikely that a given dimension will even become prominent in the political arena unless there is substantial elite conflict surrounding it, since such conflict is one of the news media's most important triggers (Gamson 1992; Price 1989).
4. In spite of our reliance on adult subjects rather than students, our sample is not representative of the national population (although it compares quite well to the local population). For example, a disproportionate number of our subjects are Democrats (61%), and self-identify as ideologically liberal (50%).

5. All of the stories were presented so that they would appear authentic to the subjects. Thus, the masthead of the newspaper was superimposed over each article, and the byline was clearly visible at the beginning of each story. The entire stories are available upon request from the authors.
6. The nonpolitical stories dealt with wildfires throughout the United States, the new subway line in Los Angeles, and recent medical breakthroughs in restoring vision. The latter story was only viewed in the control group.
7. The specific question tapping this emotion read as follows: "Now we would like to know something about the feelings you have toward the candidates running for president. Has [Gore] ever made you feel [hopeful]?" This question (coded 0, 1), and all other emotion items used in this paper, is derived from the American National Election Study (ANES).
8. The specific wording for each question is as follows: "Some people feel that affirmative action policies should be ended. Others think that affirmative action should be continued." "Some people believe that the federal government should spend much less money for public schools. Others feel that federal spending on public schools should be greatly increased." "Some people think that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. Others feel that women's place is in the home." Subjects were then presented with a 7-point scale and asked, "Where would you place [GORE or BUSH] on this scale?"
9. At the time of Bush's visit, this southern university had a much-publicized policy of banning interracial dating.
10. To maximize the realism of the manipulation, great effort was expended in order to ensure that the information conveyed in each version would be credible to readers. For example, the candidates' websites were carefully reviewed so as to accurately summarize their policy positions. Additionally, our stories drew upon actual news accounts of each candidate's speech before the NACCP.
11. We group whites and other nonblacks together largely for convenience sake. Of the 30 subjects who indicate that they are neither black nor white, the vast majority classify themselves as "Other." Moreover, the political profile of these subjects is closer to whites than blacks. For example, 74% of blacks identify as Democrats whereas this is true of only 62% of whites and 59% of the remaining subjects. Finally, our results in figure 9.1, and throughout the paper, are not substantively altered if we focus solely on black and white subjects.
12. The results in figures 9.1 and 9.2 are derived from logistic regression analysis. The predicted probabilities are estimated by manipulating a hypothetical subject's race and the article that he or she read, while holding all other variables in the model at the population mean or median. The difference between blacks and nonblacks are statistically significant ($p < .05$; one-tailed test), relative to the control group, only in the Difference Condition. Results from the full model are available upon request.
13. Although subjects were randomly assigned to conditions, we found that the experimental groups differed on a few key demographic variables: partisanship,

- ideology, and gender. Consequently, all analyses include controls for these variables.
14. We also examined specifications that included interactions for the experimental conditions and partisanship and ideology. In both instances we found that these interactions fell well short of statistical significance and that the race by difference condition was unaffected.
 15. An alternative explanation for these results might be attributed to an artifact of our experimental manipulations. Although we attempted to keep our experimental conditions as similar as possible it is nevertheless true that the "difference" condition specifically mentions the candidates' positions on affirmative action whereas the "similar" condition only makes oblique reference to their positions on "civil rights." This decision was a conscious one as depicting Bush as a moderate on affirmative action would not likely ring true with our more politically informed subjects. At any rate, if this minor difference is what really accounts for our results then we should find that attitudes on affirmative action, rather than race, are actually responsible for the findings presented in figure 9.1 and table 9.1. To examine this possibility, we re-ran the analyses described earlier with interactions for attitudes on affirmative action and the experimental conditions. In the case of both feelings of hopefulness for Gore, and candidate evaluations, the race-by-difference condition interaction remained robust whereas the affirmative action interactions were substantively and statistically inconsequential.
 16. Subjects in the "similar" condition are omitted here as figure 9.1 and table 9.1 have established that African Americans in this group do not view Gore more favorably, relative to the control condition.
 17. The fact that our experimental manipulations also activate candidate support among nonblacks suggests that candidate enthusiasm may also work as a mediator for this group. To explore this possibility, we analyzed the effects of the three-way interaction of experimental conditions-by-race-by hopefulness for George W. Bush on candidate evaluations. Consistent with our expectations, we found that the results were statistically significant for nonblacks, but only with the interaction containing the difference condition. However, the difference condition does *not* significantly increase feelings of hopefulness for Bush among nonblacks (although the results are in the anticipated direction). It is possible that the Democratic bias in our sample makes it difficult to uncover this relationship.
 18. The content of these scales vary somewhat from study to study. Still, they generally ask respondents to identify the political office of several national political figures or to provide basic information about the operation of the federal government. We adopted a combination of both strategies in our study. First, subjects were asked to identify the political office of Dennis Hastert. They were then asked whose responsibility it is to decide if a law is constitutional, how much of a congressional majority is required to override a presidential veto, which party has a majority in the House of Representatives, and which party is more conservative at the national level. Roughly 50% of our sample was able to answer 3 of the 5 questions

accurately. Finally, as in most representative samples, blacks scored considerable lower on this scale than other subjects (.49 versus .66, when the scale is re-coded 0–1).

19. Given the nature of our experimental manipulations, we are principally interested in subjects' perceptions of candidate difference. Still, we also examined alternative ways of measuring campaign learning. For example, does exposure to our experimental conditions also encourage subjects to place the candidates on the right side (i.e., liberal or conservative) of an issue? In the case of affirmative action, this would entail recognizing that Bush is generally opposed to such policies whereas Gore typically favors them. Recoding the 7-point scales accordingly (e.g., all answers indicating the perception that Bush opposes this policy are coded "1" all else "0"), we find that both the similar and difference conditions significantly increase objectively accurate perceptions of both candidates. . .but again, only for African Americans.
20. We also examined the effects of the triple interaction for race*anxiety* similar condition. These results fell well short of statistical significance and were excluded on this basis.

CHAPTER 10

I LIKE HIM, BUT. . .: VOTE CHOICE WHEN CANDIDATE LIKEABILITY AND CLOSENESS ON ISSUES CLASH*

David P. Redlawsk and Richard R. Lau

The importance of likeability, broadly defined, has been understood by political candidates and their handlers probably for as long as campaigns have existed. Common phrases such as "clothes make the man [woman]" and "looks can be deceiving" tell us much about how human beings are impacted by the visual (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972). But candidate likeability goes beyond the physical, including personality traits that may be explicitly or implicitly applied to a candidate, sometimes simply on the basis of physical appearance (Riggle et al. 1992). Social psychologists have long documented a "beauty is good" stereotype (Berscheid and Walster 1974) where more physically attractive people are assumed to possess a range of more positive personality traits and to generate a more positive emotional response.

Candidate physical attractiveness and personality clearly play some role, perhaps even the leading role, for many voters (Ottati 1990). It may be that in 2000, Vice-President Al Gore was at a distinct disadvantage to Texas Governor George Bush, given the general consensus that although quite knowledgeable on the issues—sort of a "policy wonk"—Gore appeared wooden and often less than likeable, while Bush despite his apparent limited grasp of many issue details, came across as warm and approachable. While campaign consultants know in their gut that likeability matters, a surprisingly limited amount of political science research has directly addressed the question of the role likeability plays when compared to other information voters may acquire.