The Effects of A Strategy-based Political News Schema:
A Markle Foundation Project Report

by

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, University of Pennsylvania
Joseph Cappella, University of Pennsylvania

Presented at
The American Political Science Association Convention
September, 1993

Abstract

Scholars and pundits have speculated that strategy-based political coverage invites voter cynicism and depresses the disposition to vote. This controlled experiment tested those suppositions.

With funding from the Markle Foundation, we exposed 276 individuals, selected to approximate the demographics of the 1992 voting population, to five days of broadcast or broadcast plus print news. The news was structured in either an issue- or strategy-based schema. All materials discussed the 1991 Philadelphia mayoral election.

The materials were created to resemble those in a local media market. Some of the materials had appeared in the Philadelphia market during the 1991 campaign. The rest were created under our supervision by the number one ranked local news show in the market and by a political reporter for the major local newspaper. Subjects were unable to distinguish between the materials we created and those that had originally appeared in the local paper and on the local news; they also reported that the print and broadcast materials which they read and viewed for us seemed similar to those found in local news.

Participants in the field experiment watched and read the news materials in their homes.

Those exposed to five days of strategy-based broadcast plus print news projected that they would be less likely to vote in the covered race than those exposed to five days of issue-based broadcast plus print news.

As rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke observes, as "we are using language, it is using us."[1] The language through which the press reports on politics assumes that the American electorate selects a president through a process called a "campaign" seen as a "game" or "war" between a "front-runner" and an "underdog" in which each "candidate's" goal is "winning." Candidates' words and actions are seen as their choice of what they presumably consider a means to victory. So enmeshed is the vocabulary of horserace and war in our thoughts about politics that we are not conscious that the "race" is a metaphor and "spectatorship" an inappropriate role for the electorate. Press reliance on the language of strategy reduces candidate and public accountability.

A schema is a cognitive structure through which we process events or information. So, for example, we share a "restaurant schema," which leads us to assume that upon arrival at a restaurant we will be seated, be offered a menu, order, and then receive a check. In her book *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy (Oxford, 1992)* Jamieson argues that the press invites the public to see politics through a strategy schema.

In the strategy schema, candidates are seen as performers, reporters as theatrical critics, the audience as spectators. The goal of the performer is to "win" the votes of the electorate, projected throughout the performance in polls. The polls determine whether the candidate will be cast as front-runner or underdog, whether the candidate will be described as achieving goals or "trying" to achieve them, and how the candidate's staged and unstaged activities will be interpreted. In the strategy schema, candidates do not address problems with solutions, but "issues" with "strategies." The language of the strategy schema is that of sports and war. This vocabulary lets reporters, candidates, and the public ask, "Who is winning, and how?" The posture invited of the electorate by this schema is cynical and detached.

The storyline of the strategy schema encourages voters to ask not "Who is better able to serve as president?" but "Who is going to win?" "Winning and losing are presented as all-important," writes political scientist Doris Graber, "rather than what winning and losing mean in terms of the political direction of the country in general or the observer's personal situation in particular. Taking its cues from the media, the audience accepts election news as just another story rather than as an important tale that will directly affect its own welfare in real life."[2]

News coverage "primes" or "cues" viewers and readers to see, store, and analyze "campaigns" through the strategy schema. The results are reflected in the way voters talk about campaigns. So, for example, political scientist Thomas Patterson found that in 1976 the "game" was the subject of voter conversation more often than were the substantive elements of the campaign.[3] When 106 focus-group respondents in a total of nine states[4] were asked weekly for twelve weeks of the 1990 general election to list what, if anything, they had learned about their statewide

campaigns in the past week from watching local and national news, 73 percent of the responses dealt with campaign strategy or who was where in the polls and why.

Two decades of research concluded that political news reports concentrate not on policy discussion or on the past performance of those seeking the office but on the strategy, gameplan, and horse race of campaigns.[5] In the most exhaustive study of the 1988 general election campaign, political scientist Bruce Buchanan found that 9.7 percent of the 7574 broadcast and print stories coded focused on policy issues, 19.2 percent on candidate qualifications, and 36.1 percent on campaign horse race.[6]

Why the focus on strategy? Increasingly, scholars agree with an explanation offered by political scientists Michael Robinson and Margaret Sheehan. "For a host of reasons, objective journalism has, for a century and a half, defined news as *events*, as happenings," note Robinson and Sheehan. "'Horse races' happen; 'horse races' are themselves filled with specific actions. Policy issues, on the other hand, do not happen; they merely exist. Substance has no events; issues generally remain static. So policy issues, or substance, have been traditionally defined as outside the orbit of real news."[7]

The strategy schema assumes that candidates' expressions of caring, the stressed features of their biographies, and the problems and solutions they offer are all the calculated product of strategic choice. Those who believe that the candidates are motivated by selfless conviction see reports framed by the strategy schema as invitations to the public cynicism. Those who believe that candidates are consummate sophists see strategy reports as realistic revelations of the fundamental Machiavellianism of those who seek public office.

In the jargon of social psychology, "a schema is an abstract or generic knowledge structure, stored in memory, that specifies the defining features and relevant attributes of some stimulus domain, and the interrelations among those attributes."[8] Social and cognitive psychologists have called them "interpretants," "frames,"[9] "cognitive maps,"[10] "scripts,"[11] or "knowledge structures."[12] Because they mediate cognition, we are largely unaware of the schemas that shape our sense of ourselves and the world.

Schemas influence how we perceive new information, how we remember old information, and how we relate the old and new. These pre-existing categories can function as prototypes, determining the features desired in an ideal incumbent president.[13] In the process of cognition we activate schemas, apply them, alter them, reject them.

Schemas simplify, organize, and enable us to process the world without confronting each situation anew. Once triggered, a schema helps us to fill in consistent information that has not actually been provided by an observable event. We store the inferred along with the observed. After the information has resided in memory for a while, we have difficulty distinguishing

2

one from the other.[14]

Individuals who have a clear knowledge structure about a specific area of inquiry are known by cognitive psychologists as "schematics"; those who have not developed such knowledge structures are termed "aschematics."[15] A person may be aschematic about politics because he has no interest in it, lacks experience processing political information, or lacks the ability to develop an elaborate knowledge structure. Without exposure to political information and experience in processing it, we cannot develop schemas to sort it.[16]

The strategy schema has the advantage of being a "story." As such, it employs a structure native to news, which reduces happenings to "stories." The narrative structure also pervades television, from the mini-dramas of housewives faced with ring around the collar to the larger dramas of Murphy Brown's pregnancy.

The optic created by a focus on political strategy presupposes that the campaign is a performance enacted through strategies designed to ensure victory. The viewer is a spectator observing the "sport" of politics. If the voter is invited to judge the "contest," it is to answer the questions, Who is the better campaigner? Who is running the more effective campaign?

By contrast, the problem-promise-performance approach relates the performance of the candidates to their promises and sets the solutions the candidate offers against the problems the voter sees as important.

Asking who better understands the challenges confronting the country and is better suited to address them here determines who would be better able to serve as president. This frame situates the viewer not as a spectator but as a judge whose vote has electoral consequences which, even if they do not determine outcome, provide a means of interpreting the "will of the people."

The strategy focus defines campaigns as contests; the problem-promise-performance schema as quests to "find" the "solutions" to the "problems" that trouble the country and to "find" the candidate whose past best forecasts a disposition and ability to solve them. Where, in the first, the language of sports and war focuses on "opponents" to be overcome, in the second a "quest" "searches" for "solutions" that will transform a troubling situation. One focuses on winning, the other on finding and solving.

Where one invites voter passivity, the other forecasts voter activity. The solution schema would ask, What are the central problems of concern to us as voters? What has each candidate said and done to find and implement solutions to these problems? Which candidate is better suited by temperament and training to address them and comparable problems and challenges that may arise? How can I know that? If I agree to support one candidate in her quest, will my support help produce the outcome I seek?

The two structures pivot on fundamentally different questions. Where the strategy schema asks, Who has campaigned

better? and Who will win? The solution schema asks, Who has more effectively combatted problems of social concern? Uncovered, created, found solutions? It may be that the candidate who "will" win is not the candidate who has found solutions. The quest schema invites us to join the "better" quester in seeking, finding, and implementing solutions. Among the steps in that process is casting a vote. For purposes of this study, we make the simple-minded assumption that reporting a strategy is sleazy and an issue horrible.

Our study was designed to determine 1) whether those exposed to a strategy structure in news will process the information in a candidate debate differently than those exposed to an issue based structure; 2) whether exposure to strategy based coverage has an effect on viewer-/reader cynicism; 3) whether exposure to strategy based or issue based structuring has any effect in the projected likelihood of voting. This paper reports our findings in the third area.

Methods

Three tests of the hypotheses were conducted in a two week period during March, 1993. One was done with a student sample of 69 individuals exposed to broadcast and print materials in a single session (the "Intense Broadcast-Print" experiment). The second was done on-site in 7 US cities but only included exposure to Broadcast materials (Broadcast-only). The third was also on-site in the same 7 cities and included exposure to Broadcast and Print (Broadcast-Print).

Stimuli and Subjects

Subjects. 276 participants were recruited in Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, Cleveland, Detroit, New York City, Portland, Ft. Lauderdale, by posting notices in church newsletters, bars, community centers, pizza parlors, and so on. We controlled for age, education, gender and race but not religion, income-level, height, or weight. In other words, we tried to find people more likely to know the price of a Big Mac than the price of a Lexus. Although the sample is not random, every effort was made to make the sample representative of the population of voters. Participants were paid for volunteering; the students received extra credit and the promise that their first exam would be graded by graduate students who cherish their younger brothers and sisters, cats and dogs.

The experiment was conducted from March 5-11 1993. Unfortunately, that was the week of the worst snowstorm of the 20th century. Our research leader in New York was snowed in. After hiring sled dogs, she reassembled her group. But her post test, unlike the others, was given over a three day period to people who, to put it kindly, were stressed out. Since they were New Yorkers to begin with, this raises the possibility that all 32 of them had, by that weekend, stepped outside the bounds of normalcy. Fortunately, since each site contained cells of individuals in each experimental condition, the effects of hypothermia and hyperventilation on the New Yorkers should be distributed equally across groups and should not diminish the

4

power of our findings.

One other melodrama, this one less remediable, plagued the experiment. On March 11, Kathleen Hall Jamieson on-site in Minneapolis, fell on the ice and shattered her wrist. As a result the posttests were given to the Minneapolis group by a woman on class 2 narcotics. We are relieved to report that the narcotics slowed Dr. Jamieson's speech to a point at which it was intelligible. Again since the effects were distributed across conditions, we see no reason to question the effect they might have had on the study.

Stimuli. Great attention was given to the creation of print and broadcast stimuli. The topic of the stories was the Philadelphia mayoral election of 1991. With the cooperation of a local newspaper and a local TV station in Philadelphia, several news stories pertaining to the mayor's race were selected and evaluated for their issue or strategy orientation.

When the segments were clearly of one type or the other, they were left unchanged. Changing them from one style to the other required considerable help from the management of the two major news sources. The newspaper stories were rewritten by a national political reporter to the style opposite from that of the original; strategy became issue and vice versa. Every effort was made to retain as much continuity in content as possible. Six print news stories were selected for use in the studies (two given on the second of a five day sequence). (See Appendix one).

The broadcast segments retained almost all of the original visual material but the introductions of the news segments and the voiceovers were changed to emphasize issue orientations, rather than the more typical strategy orientations. The rest of the newscasts including commercials and Philadelphia's standard murder and mayhem was left untouched. These changes would not have been possible without the help of the professional staff of the local news program which re-recorded news segments for us so that the changed segments would be comparable to the originals. Five broadcast segments were used in the studies, simulating a week's programming. (See Appendix two)

The print segments were reset using the same font and column layout of the original stories. Because we didn't want to squander grant money on working up whole pages, only the story itself was given to the participants, not the whole page. We rationalized what was, in fact, a crass economic decision by telling ourselves that it was important to focus the reader's attention on the stories and not permit the distractions of other extraneous materials. The broadcast segments were embedded in a typical 30 minute local newscast, although the story about the mayoral election was always the lead story.

Stories for the control groups were also necessary. They were of equivalent length, complexity, and tone to the election stories they replaced but the content was irrelevant to the mayoral election.

Finally, one of the televised debates among the four mayoral candidates was edited to 30 minutes. The debate was shown to all

participants prior to completion of the final questionnaire.
Design and Procedures

All three experimental tests employed a posttest-only design
with a control group. A pretest questionnaire was administered
which obtained demographic information, reports on political
sophistication,[17] and, regarding the presidential election of
1992, measures of political cynicism and personal narratives
about the election.

In the Intense Broadcast-Print study, student volunteers in
groups of 15-20 first filled out the pretest questionnaire. Then
each read a news story, watched a broadcast segment, and so on
for five repetitions. About one third received strategic
materials only, one third issue materials only, and one third
received control materials. Everyone then watched the 30 minute
debate segment and filled out a questionnaire on recall,
likelihood of voting, cynicism about the mayoral election,
personal narratives about the mayoral race and reactions to the
manipulations.

In the two field experiments, a researcher was dispatched to
each of the seven sites. Researchers were selected to be dialect
congruent with their group. A prime criterion in site selection
was the vacation and romantic potential of each for the
researchers who conducted the study on spring break.
Participants first filled out the pretest questionnaire, watched
and/or read news materials for 5 consecutive days in their own
homes. Most reported that they did as they were told and read
and/or watched one news exposure a day. Since we paid them to do
that, we assumed that they would tell us that whether or not they
had followed directions. A prime criteria in site selection was
the vacation and romantic potential of each for the researcher
who conducted study on spring break. They then came together as
a group to watch the final debate and fill out the posttest
forms. After completing the posttest, subjects were debriefed.
Pizza with cheese was served for the vegetarians and for those
whose religious dictates prohibit eating various forms of meat.

A broadcast-only version was employed because most voters
get the vast majority of their news about politics from
television. To simulate this situation, it was necessary to
require exposures solely to broadcast materials. Otherwise,
requiring exposures to print materials might be an effective, but
unrealistic, simulation of more typical social conditions. Three
experimental groups were formed via random assignment but also
trying to equalize distribution by race, sex, age, and education
but not sexual orientation or previous exposure to varsity level
athletics across groups. The groups received only broadcast
news, one half hour segment a night for five nights, issue
versions, strategy versions, or control versions. As before, all
groups came together on the sixth day to screen the final debate
and respond to the posttest forms.

A broadcast-print version exposed participants to print and
broadcast materials over a five day period. Five groups were
run: control; print-issue, broadcast-issue; print-issue,

broadcast-strategy; strategy-issue; strategy-strategy.
Otherwise, this experiment was identical to the broadcast-only
version in procedures. The two-way design allows us to ask
whether print or broadcast exposures are more or less effective
(or whether they interact) in producing changes in voters'
knowledge structures, behaviors, and attitudes.

Results

Only a small component of the results from our studies can
be presented here. Some are still being analyzed and others will
be reported elsewhere. First, characteristics of our sample and
the success of random assignment across conditions will be
reported. Second, participants' perceptions of our print and
broadcast segments will be described. Finally, results of the
three studies on likelihood of voting will be summarized.

Sample characteristics

Demographics. Every effort was made to select a sample
which would parallel the demographic characteristics of the US
voting population. Table 1 compares the distribution of people
in the Broadcast-only and the Print-Broadcast studies to the US
population (1990 census) and to the US voting population (NES
sample from the 1992 election). Four characteristics are
compared: age, gender, education, and race. Considering its
size and non-random nature, our sample shows good similarity both
to the population at large and to the voting population from the
1992 presidential election. The most significant departures are
in education. Our sample overrepresents the mostly highly
educated elements in the population (both general and voting) and
underrepresents the less educated (high school and less
education). This discrepancy suggests that generalizations from
our sample can probably only be made to the somewhat more highly
educated elements of the population. However, our sample is
quite similar to the general and voting populations in gender,
age, and racial composition.

7

Tables 1a-1d. Comparison by Percentage of experimental sample, national population, and national voting population: Significance of difference for (a) race, (b) age, (c) education, and (d) gender.

RACE	EXP %	NATIONAL %[*]		NES %[**]	
		Census	p value	Voters	p value
White	78.5	80.3	.45	86.5	.000
Afro-American	12.4	12.1	.88	9.8	.15
Asian	1.1	2.9	.08	--	--
Hispanic	5.8	9.0	.06	3.8	.08
Native-Am.	0.4	0.8	.46	--	--
Missing	1.5	-	--	--	--

[*] U.S. Bureau of the Census, press release CB91-216. - 1990
[**] U.S. Bureau of the Census, <u>Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1992</u> - "Current Population Reports," Series P20-466, Table 2

Table 1b. Age

AGE	EXP %	NATIONAL %[*]		NES %[**]	
		Census %	p value	Voters	p value
18-25	13.5	16.2	.22	10.8	.15
26-35	23.6	23.2	.87	20.1	.14
36-45	25.8	20.2	.02	22.3	.16
46-55	12.7	13.4	.73	16.0	.14
56-65	5.5	11.2	.003	13.3	.000
66-75	10.9	9.4	.40	11.4	.79
75 +	5.5	6.4	.54	6.2	.63
Missing	2.5	-	-	--	

[*] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Unpublished Data - 1991
[**] U.S. Bureau of the Census, <u>Voting and Registration</u>. . . . Table 1

Table 1c.   Education

EDUCATION	EXP %	NATIONAL %[*]		NES %[**]	
		Census	p value	Voters	p value
Some High Sch	1.8	20.8	.000	12.3	.000
High School	18.2	36.6	.000	32.9	.000
Some Coll/Assoc	26.2	23.7	.33	28.2	.46
Coll/Some Grad	31.3	11.9	.000	17.6	.000
Masters & Ph.D.	20.0	5.2	.23	9.0	.000
Missing	5.3	--	--	--	--

[*]   U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Current Population Reports,"
     Series P-70, No. 21 - 1987
[**]   U.S. Bureau of the Census, <u>Voting and Registration in the
     Election of November 1992</u> - "Current Population Reports,"
     Series P20-466, Table 7

Table 1d.   Gender

GENDER	EXP %	NATIONAL %[*]		NES %[**]	
		Census	p value	Voters	p value
Male	.429	.488	.05	.468	.19
Female	.545	.512	.27	.532	.67
Missing	.025	--	--	--	--

[*]   U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Current Population Reports,"
     Series P-70, No. 21 - 1987
[**]   U.S. Bureau of the Census, <u>Voting and Registration in the
     Election of November 1992</u> - "Current Population Reports,"
     Series P20-466, Table 2.

Random assignment. Participants in our study were randomly assigned to either the Broadcast-only or Broadcast-Print studies and randomly assigned to condition with each study. To find out whether the random assignment was successful, conditions within each experiment were compared on demographics, and two other measures from the pre-test: political sophistication and political cynicism. The latter two concepts were measured by a series of indicators.

Four demographic characteristics were evaluated: age, gender, education, and race. No significant differences across conditions (experimental and control) were found on any demographic feature for any of the studies. The experimental conditions were comparable demographically. The power to detect a significant difference was .60 in the Broadcast-only and .60 in the Broadcast-print studies (alpha = .05, moderate effect size).

Political sophistication was tapped by political involvement, civics knowledge, exposure to media coverage of politics, and "schematicity" (as measured by knowledge of political position of various groups and persons). Political cynicism was measured by three different types of questions, each reflecting in some way a cynical or skeptical attitude toward the political process. The measures were obtained during the pre-test phase and in the context of the 1992 presidential election. Space precludes discussion of the details of the psychometric properties of these measures here.

Comparisons across experimental conditions showed no significant differences among experimental groups or between experimental and control with one exception. One of our measures of schematicity (four different ones were tried) differed for one of the experimental groups in contrast to the other groups (Broadcast-Print study).

The absence of differences in demographic features and in measures of political sophistication and cynicism across experimental conditions means that any subsequent findings of difference across experimental conditions cannot be attributed to spurious factors related to an unsuccessful random assignment to condition. In short, random assignment to condition within study was quite successful.

Perceptions of print and broadcast segments. The key to our study is the successful manipulation of issue and strategy components of the print and broadcast stories without altering the comprehensibility, typicality or other features of the message which might create effects that are spurious. To test people's perceptions of the messages, two studies were carried out. The first was done on a student sample different from the samples in the field experiment. The second was done on the participants in the field experiment in a series of followup questions, after the conclusion of the experiment itself.

The student sample was exposed to 5 broadcast messages and 5 print messages in one of two orders:

(PI1)(BS1)(PS2)(BI2)(PI3)(BS3)(PS4)(BI4)(PI5)(BS5)
(PS1)(BI1)(PI2)(BS2)(PS3)(BI3)(PI4)(BS4)(PS5)(BI5)

where PI1 is print story 1 in issue format, BS1 is broadcast story 1 in strategy format, and so on. In this way each subject was exposed to both strategy and issue stories in both media, received them in the order that subjects in the field experiment did, and had full exposure to print and broadcast materials.   After each news story, eight questions were answered. Four of the questions assessed whether the messages were

10

comparable on understandability, interestingness, typicality, and personal relevance. Two of the questions tested strategic information: who's winning and knowledge of campaign strategy; two tested issue information: plans once in office and knowledge of issues in campaign. These results are summarized in Table 2.

2a. Judgements of broadcast stories during pretesting: Expected direction, correct direction, and incorrect direction.

ITEM	EXPECTED DIRECTION	# CORRECT DIRECTION	# SIGNIF[a] (RIGHT DIR)	# SIGNIF[b] (WRONG DIR)
Understand	I=S	4	4	1
Know Issues	I>S	3	3	0
Know Winning	S>I	5	3	0
Personal Relev	I=S	5	5	0
Know Strategy	S>I	1	0	1
Know Plans	I>S	4	2	0
Interesting	I=S	5	5	0
Typical	I=S	4	4	1
Total	I=S I>S S>I	18 of 20 8 of 10 6 of 10	18 5 3	2 0 1

Note Bene. [a] Significant and right direction means p < .10 for I>S or S>I expected or p >.10 for I=S expected.
[b] Significant and wrong direction means p < .10 when I>S or S>I expected but opposite to hypothesis and P< .10 when I=S expected.

Table 2b. Judgements of print stories during pretesting: Expected direction, correct direction, and incorrect direction.

ITEM	EXPECTED DIRECTION	# CORRECT DIRECTION	# SIGNIF[a] (RIGHT DIR)	# SIGNIF[b] (WRONG DIR)
Understand	I=S	5	5	0
Know Issues	I>S	4	4	0
Know Winning	S>I	4	3	0
Personal Relev	I=S	4	4	1
Know Strategy	S>I	4	3	0
Know Plans	I>S	5	2	0
Interesting[1]	I=S	2	2	3
Typical	I=S	5	5	0
Total	I=S I>S S>I	16 of 20 9 of 10 8 of 10	16 6 6	4 0 0

Note Bene. [a] Significant and right direction means p < .10 for I>S or S>I expected or p >.10 for I=S expected.
[b] Significant and wrong direction means p < .10 when I>S or S>I expected but opposite to hypothesis and P< .10 when I=S expected.
[1] Two of five issue stories and 1 of the straegy stories were rated more interesting than their counterparts.

12

If the messages function as they were designed, four of the questions should show no significant differences on any of the ten comparisons (e.g. PS1 > PI1). Of forty possible comparisons, 34 of them conform to hypothesis. The others are significantly different but not in any consistent way.

The two strategy questions should exhibit greater agreement in the strategy versions of the messages (e.g. BS2 > BI2). Of twenty such comparisons, 17 are in the correct direction, 11 are statistically significant (and the right direction) at p < .10. None are statistically significant in the wrong direction.

The two issue questions should show greater agreement in the issue versions of the message (e.g. BI4 > BS4). Of twenty such comparisons, 14 are in the correct direction, 9 are statistically significant (and in the right direction) at p < .10. One is statistically significant in the wrong direction.

Although one could hope for stronger and more uniform differences across all the messages, for the most part the issue versions were perceived to carry more information about plans once in office and issues in the campaign while the strategy versions were judged to be more informative about the horse race and the strategic action during the campaign. With the exception of interestingness of the print message, the messages were judged to be similar on typicality, comprehensibility, personal relevance and interest (broadcast only). The differences in interestingness for the newspaper stories did not favor the issue version or the strategy version and so we did not view this difference as jeopardizing our experimental manipulations.

The messages were also evaluated by the participants in the field experiment. Six questions were asked about the news stories: similarity to local news; likelihood of watching (reading) if local were similar; like normal news; segments like those normally watched (read); especially close attention paid to stories; watching (reading) was done in a normal way. If the messages were functioning as designed there should be no differences in either study across conditions.

The Broadcast-Print study shows no differences among conditions in how the print messages were perceived and no differences in how the broadcast messages were perceived. The means are not reported in Table 3 because the absence of difference is consistent with what was expected. This suggests that the print, broadcast, and control messages were judged equivalent on normalcy, typicality, and conditions of watching at least across conditions. The Broadcast-only study does show some differences particularly on questions related to normalcy and typicality (questions 1, 3, and 4). Results for the Broadcast-only study are presented in Table 3.

13

The differences observed in the Broadcast-only study are due to differences between control and the two experimental groups, not between the two experimental groups. How should we interpret these differences? First, the differences are not present in the Broadcast-Print study, even though the broadcast messages are identical to the ones in the Broadcast-only study. Therefore, the differences are not stable ones. Second, the differences between the issue and strategy versions of the broadcast news segments are not significant. Rather, the control news stories differ from the issue and strategy stories together. Since differences between issue and strategy conditions will be relative to the control as baseline, the important differences are those between experimental conditions. The bottom line is that the significant differences do not jeopardize the interpretations that we might make in comparing the effects of the issue and broadcast messages.

The two sets of results presented in this section make a strong case for the effectiveness of our messages in manipulating issue and strategy information and, at the same time, avoiding the introduction of confounds associated with typicality, comprehensibility, relevance, normalcy, attentiveness, and so on.

One of our central goals was to create messages that were ecologically valid. Great pains were taken to rewrite the print news stories in a way that would fit the norms of national news. Similarly, the broadcast stories should fit the norms of local news in style, content, and format. At the same time, these primary goals must serve the conditions of the experiment in achieving the desired manipulation and in avoiding possible confounds such as differences in comprehensibility or typicality. The data of this section, we believe, indicates considerable success on all these fronts simultaneously.

Likelihood of voting. A variety of outcome measures were obtained to evaluate the success of issue-based political news to alter knowledge structures about and attitudes toward politics. Measures of political cynicism, recall of issue-based and strategy-based material, personal narratives about the mayoral race, and reported likelihood of voting were obtained. Only results on voting likelihood will be presented here.

Other than actual voting itself, reported voting may be the most important one in our study. If issue-based reporting techniques can be shown to increase the likelihood of voting in contrast to strategy-based reporting, then, regardless of any other findings, the concept of issue-based reporting will have been shown to work to the benefit of the electorate. The control group is especially important in this segment of the analysis since it can be taken as the baseline level of voting likelihood and the experimental conditions compared to that baseline. We have hypothesized that issue-based messages will increase voting likelihood over baseline and that strategy-based ones will depress voting likelihood compared to the control baseline.

Two questions on voting were asked: likelihood of voting in the mayoral election and whether this likelihood was greater or less than normal voting likelihood. Table 4 presents the results from all three studies on these two questions separately (they correlated at .367, p< .001).

15

Table 3. Means and probability values for significance of difference on TV news evaluations in Broadcast-only study

| QUESTIONS | BROADCAST-ONLY: TV NEWS EVALUATIONS | | | |
	I	S	C	p
Like local news	2.55	2.35	1.89	.02
Likely to increase watching	1.92	1.76	1.68	.31
like normal TV news	3.76	3.89	5.00	.01
like typical TV segments	3.95	4.32	4.96	.03
Paid especially close attn	4.35	3.97	4.04	.48
Watching was normal	4.46	4.08	4.53	.39

Table 4. Means across experimental condition for likelihood of voting and change in voting norm: Broadcast-only, Broadcast-Print, Intense Broadcast-Print.

Broadcast Only	Issue N=37		Strategy N=37		Control N=30
Voting Likelihood (1=definite, 4=not)	1.38		1.70		1.57
Voting change (1=more, 3=less)	1.73		1.86		1.78
Intense Broadcast-Print	Issue-issue N=28		Strategy-strategy N=23		Control N=18
Voting Likelihood	1.61		1.44		1.78
Voting Change	1.86		1.91		1.89
Broadcast-Print[1]	BI-PI N=38	BI-PS N=37	BS-PI N=37	BS-PS N=36	Control N=19
Voting Likelihood	1.76	1.29	1.59	1.53	1.95
Voting Change	1.73	1.73	1.82	2.22	1.79

[1] Note Bene. BI-PI is broadcast-issue, print-issue; BI-PS is broadcast-issue, print-strategy etc.

No significant effects were observed in the laboratory version of the experiment with either question on voting (p= .42 and p= .70 respectively). In the Broadcast-only study, a borderline effect was obtained with $F(1,73)= 3.30$, p= .073 such that strategy-based news depressed likelihood of voting more than issue-based news. In addition, the strategy exposure was less than the control group's likelihood of voting while the issue group was above that of the control. No significant differences were observed on whether normal voting patterns would change.

The Broadcast-Print study yielded some voting changes as well. The first, and unexpected effect, was for print. Newspaper stories in issue format depressed likelihood of voting over those in strategy format with $F(1, 144) = 4.26$, p=.041. However, the question on changes in normal voting yielded opposite results. Broadcast-strategy exposure led people to report that they would be even less likely than usual to vote in this election if it were in their city than when exposure was to broadcast-issue news stories. The effect was very strong with $F(1, 143)= 9.92$, $p < .002$. No other effects were statistically significant. However, the combined effects of print-strategy and broadcast-strategy exposure yielded the strongest change in voting and tendencies toward a main effect for print (p = .11) consistent with hypothesis and an interaction effect (p = .11) such

that strategy-strategy exposure overwhelmed other combinations.

These results paint a favorable, but unclear, picture of the effects of strategy and issue messages. Broadcast messages do seem to depress likelihood of voting when in the strategy format and to enhance it in the issue format. Print, on the other hand, worked in the opposite way on self reported likelihood of voting, although in the same direction as broadcast messages on changes in voting patterns.

In order to try to account for these differences a series of covariance analyses were undertaken to determine if confounding factors cold explain both the expected and unexpected effects on voting likelihood. Two sets of covariates were explored: reported voting in the presidential and senatorial elections and pretest measures of political cynicism. Prior voting patterns had no explanatory effect on the relationships previously observed between experimental condition and reported voting in the mayoral race. However, pretest cynicism completely accounted for the unexpected effects of print reducing the previously significant F value to $F(1, 131)=$ 1.94, $p = .17$. Other effects either remained the same or became stronger after the covariation with pretest cynicism was completed.

In summary, broadcast messages which emphasize the strategic aspects of campaigns reduce the likelihood of voting (as reported by participants) and print and broadcast messages together make it even more unlikely that normal voting rates will occur. These are serious implications for the journalism and for the electorate. Although many media critics have argued that the nature of coverage of campaigns and politics, in general, has negative consequences for the electorate's participation, our studies offer a clear experimental demonstration of these effects.

Discussion

We have tried to argue, and believe that the data show, that our experiment is ecologically valid, our sample representative of (somewhat more educated) voters, and our broadcast and print news segments realistic and effective. Although our sample of participants was not random, it did match both voting and national populations in age, gender, and race but was somewhat more educated. Random assignment to experimental condition was successful with no differences observed in any of the demographic characteristics, pretest political cynicism, or pretest political sophistication.

Significant effort went into the design of our print and broadcast stimuli, in both form and content. The issue and strategy versions were perceived as similar in typicality, interestingness, personal relevance, and comprehensibility. People saw them (and read them) as different in providing information about candidate's positions and campaign strategy. The manipulations, in short, of strategy and issue structures yielded judgements consistent with those structures.

The most important indicator of the effectiveness of our news stories is the consequences they produce in members of the electorate. Voting is perhaps the most significant of the possible effects. Broadcast strategy messages decreased the likelihood of voting in the broadcast-only study and the combination of strategic reporting in the broadcast and print conditions led potential voters to report that their likelihood of voting was considerably less than usual in the hypothetical election to which they were exposed. These findings suggest that the nature of news coverage of elections can have a serious effect on voter participation. Simple

17

alterations in the structure of coverage from emphasis on wining and losing, cynical political motives, and other aspects of what is strategic to concerns with problems, solutions, plans, and the candidate's ability to govern can depress or elevate voter participation.

Other effects of strategic and issue-based messages on voter cynicism, knowledge of the campaign, and voter's understanding of campaigns as revealed through the stories they tell will be discussed in subsequent publications from this study.

1.   Blankenship, *Political Science Quarterly*, 314.

2.   Doris Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1989), p. 303.

3.   Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election* (New York: Praeger, 1980), p. 105.

4.   See Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics*, p. 303.

5.   Cf. Doris Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1980; Doris Graber, "Press and TV as Opinion Resources in Presidential Campaigns," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 40 (1976), 285-303; Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure, The Unseeing Eye: *The Myth of Television Power in National Elections* (New York: Putnam, 1976); James Stovall, "Coverage of the 1984 Presidential Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly* 63(1986), 443-49, 484; John M. Russonello and Frank Wolf, "Newspaper Coverage of the 1976 and 1968 Presidential Campaigns," *Journalism Quarterly* 56 (1979), 360-64, 432.

6.   Bruch Buchanan, *Electing a President: The Markle Commission Research on Campaign '88* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 39.

7.   Michael J. Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan, *Over the Wire on TV: CBS and UPI in Campaign '80* (New York: russell Sage foundation, 1983), p. 148.

8. J. Crocker, S.T. Fiske, and S.E. Taylor, "Schematic Bases of Belief Change," In J. R. Eiser, ed. *Attitudinal Judgment* (New York: Springer, 1984), 197.

9.   Marvin Minsky, "A Framework for Representing Knowledge," in Patrick A. Winston, ed. The Psychology of Computer Vision (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975); Donald Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, "Mimicking Political Debate with Survey Questions: The Case of White Opinion on Affirmative Action for Blacks," *Social Cognition* 8 (1990), 73-103.

10. Robert Axelrod, "Schema Theory: An Information Processing Model of Perception and Cognition," *American Political Science Review* 67 (1973), 1248-66.

11. Roger Schank and Robert Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977).

12. Ibid.

13. Donald R. Kinder, Mark D. Peters, Robert P. Abelson, and Susan T. Fiske, "Presidential Prototypes," *Political Behavior* 2 (1980), 315-37.

14. J.S. Picek, S.J. Sherman, and R. M. Shiffrin, "Cognitive Organization and Encoding of Social Structures," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31 (1975), 758-68.

15. Helen Markus, "Self-Schemata and Processing Information about the Self." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 (1977), 63-78.

16. Helen Markus and Joseph Smith, "The Influence of Self-Schemas on Perception of Others," in Nancy Cantor and John Kihlstrom, eds. *Personality, Cognition, and Social Interaction* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erblbaum, 1981).

17. Fiske, S.T., Lau, R.R., & Smith, R.A. (1990). On the varieties and utilities of political expertise. Social Cognition, 8, 31-48.