

Shaping Campaign Agendas

*How Policy Opinions Affect Issue
Emphasis in US Senate Campaigns*

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Understanding Campaign Strategy

- Median Voter Theorem (Hotelling 1929, Downs 1957, Black 1958)
- One minor detail: It doesn't work.
- Candidates seldom converge on a single position.
- Two responses in subsequent research:
 - Change assumptions of MVT to better reflect reality
 - Spatial modeling literature, incorporating concepts such as alienation and indifference (affecting turnout, etc.)
 - See Stokes 1963, Osborne 1995, Grofman 2004
 - Look at other aspects of campaign strategies besides position-taking

Issue Emphasis

- Positions fixed across a range of issues
- Rather than adapt their positions to craft an optimal strategy, candidates emphasize issues on which they hold advantages.
 - Repass (1971): Individuals differ in perceived salience of issues, and salience affects vote choice.
 - Candidates seek to increase salience of issues on which they hold an advantage, so as to get more votes.
- Issue ownership
 - Each party has issues which they are perceived as better able to handle than the other party.
 - Thus candidates will emphasize these “owned” issues in campaigns to increase their salience with the voters.
 - Budge & Farlie (1983): Assessments of salience change in response to campaigns, and the mediating variable in translating salience into vote choice is voter perception of party competence.

Issue Ownership, Continued.

- Petrocik (1996): the “median” voter is non-ideological and “lacks a clear preference about social and policy issues.”
 - The important deciding factor for the voter is “not what policies candidates promise to pursue, but what problems ... will be resolved.”
 - Little room for spatial policy considerations.
- But.... What if assessments of issue ownership highly correlated with issue positions?
 - By asserting that voters do not care about specific positions, Petrocik allows for a potentially spurious result.
- At the very least, why couldn’t positional advantages play a role in issue emphasis, along with competence advantages (issue ownership)?
- Simon (2002): Creates a model of issue emphasis that mimics issue ownership model, except that advantages come from position rather than competence.

This Paper

- Reconciling spatial models with issue emphasis.
- Specifically, I code advantages in terms of position, and use them alongside issue ownership to predict issue emphasis.
- Three strategies for winning elections
 - Traditional model: Appealing to the center (independents)
 - Base strategy: Appeal to your own party's identifiers, to increase turnout & maximize resources
 - Dowd on 2004 election: So few real swing voters that they could win without them.
 - Wedge strategy: Appeal to your opponent's base, to lower their turnout & resources, and poach a few supporters as well.
 - Hillygus & Shields (2008): Candidates emphasize wedge issues to get opponent's partisans to cross over in voting.
- Ultimate result: *spatial considerations are an important component of issue emphasis.*

Overview of tests

- Look at US Senate campaigns in 2000 (50 candidates).
- DV = issue emphasis of each issue by each candidate, IVs = issue ownership, positional advantages based on public's issue positions, and fixed effects.
- Code issue positions of partisan groups in each state using Annenberg data.
- Code issue ownership for each party using poll data.
- Code issue emphasis for each candidate based on television ad spending using CMAG dataset.
- 7 issues: healthcare, Medicare, social security, education, the economy, taxes, and foreign affairs / defense.

Coding issue positions

- Create issue scales for each respondent on each issue using factor analysis (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008).
- Aggregate issue scales by partisan group in each district:
 - Traditional strategy: are independents more like Republicans or Democrats?
 - Base strategy: is base opinion homogenous or heterogenous?
 - Wedge strategy: is opponent's base opinion homogenous or heterogeneous?
- Recode aggregate opinion data to reflect advantages/disadvantages for each candidate.

Coding Issue Ownership & Emphasis

- **Issue Ownership**

- 7 mainstream polls (Gallup, Battleground 2000, CBS/NYT, etc...)
- “Which party do you think would be better at handling [issue]?”
- Minimum of 3 polls on each issue
- Advantage = (% “Democrats better” - % “GOP better”)

- **Issue Emphasis**

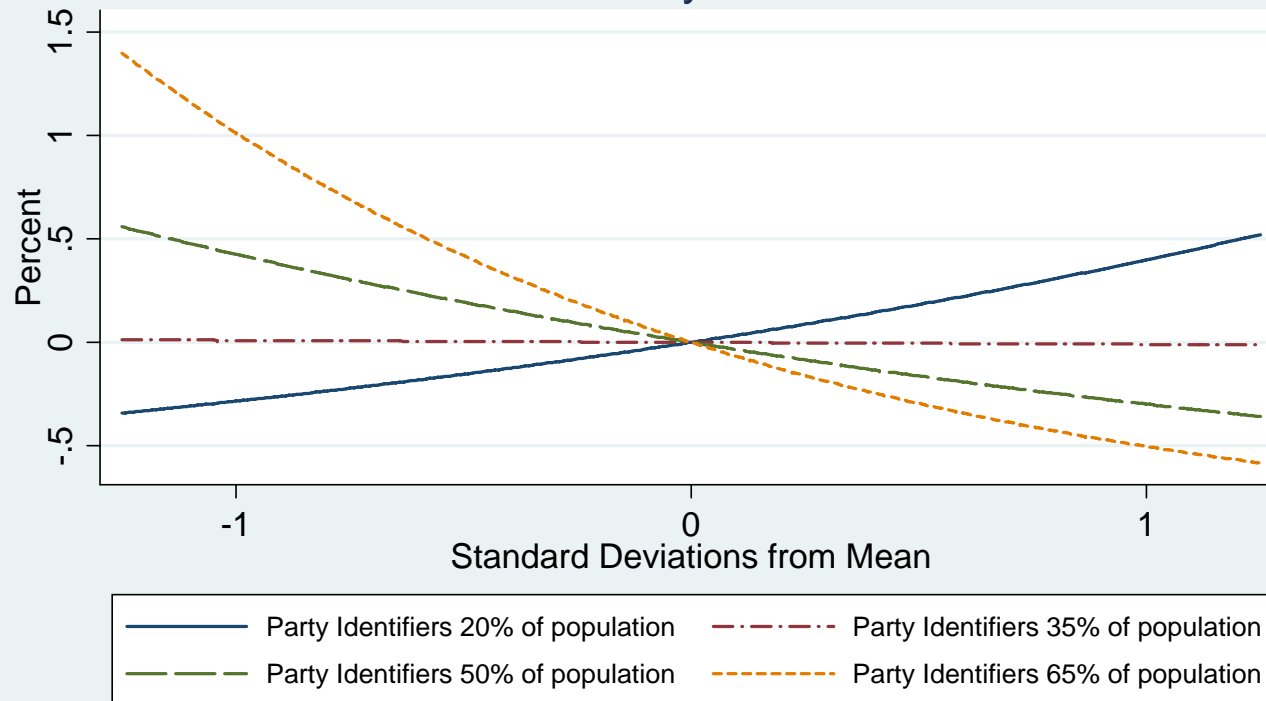
- CMAG dataset: codes all TV ads run in 75 largest media markets
- Each ad run includes topic and estimated cost.
- Issue emphasis = % of total ad spending (in dataset) devoted to [issue].

Findings

- **Issue ownership:** Significant effect in all models, which becomes more so when positional advantages are controlled for.
- **Positional advantages:** Effects are unclear when simply run alongside issue ownership...
- **BUT...**
- **When interacting positional advantages with the size of each group, strong results showing that campaigns respond to public's opinions in crafting issue emphasis strategies.**
- **Specifically:** Campaigns are more likely to emphasize issues on which they hold an advantage with the largest group (own base, opponent's base, independents) in the electorate.

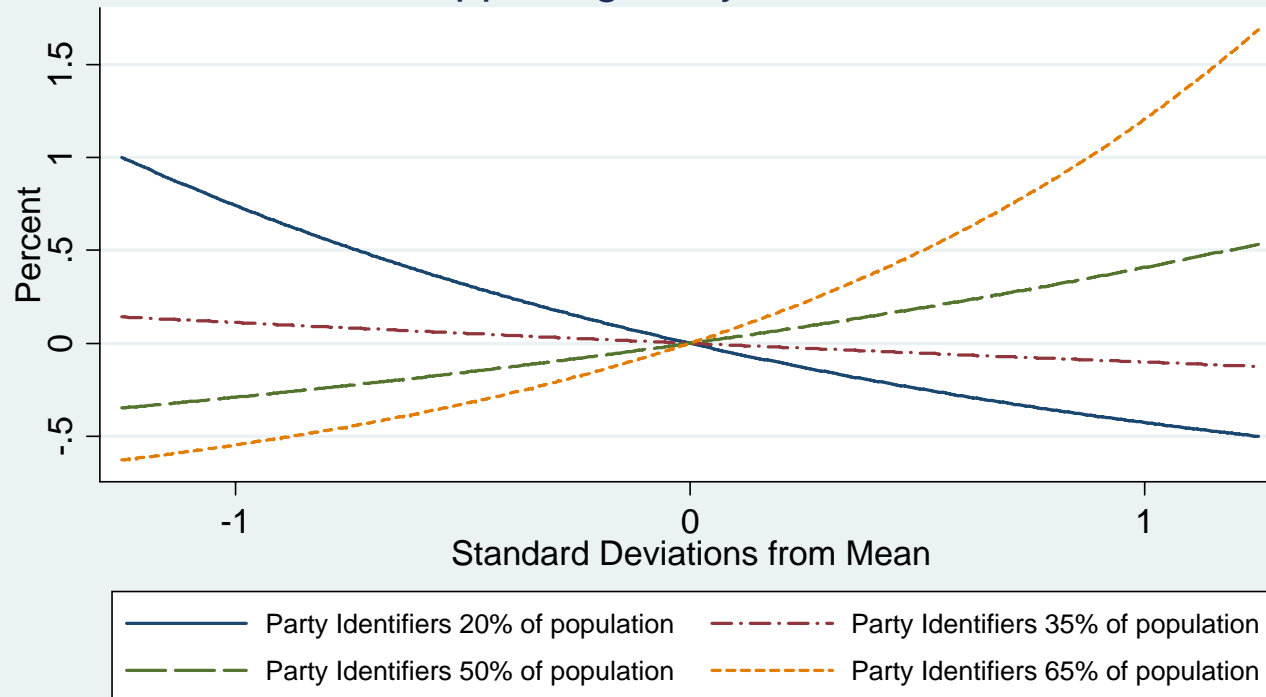
Base strategy

Change in Issue Emphasis as a Percentage of Total Ad Spending Based on Variance in Issue Opinions of Same Party Identifiers



Wedge strategy

Change in Issue Emphasis as a Percentage of Total Ad Spending Based on Variance in Issue Opinions of Opposing Party Identifiers



Conclusion

- Issue ownership is only part of the game
- There is a role for spatial/positional considerations in models of issue emphasis
- These three strategies provide a beginning, but there's surely more to it than just this.
- Linger questions:
 - Do these strategies work? If so, why, and how?
 - Does issue emphasis in campaigns reverberate beyond the election at hand?
 - Changes in public opinion, partisanship, etc.