COOKING THE GOOSE:
CANDIDATE UNFAVORABLE RATINGS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

The rational campaign seeks to derive the maximum possible benefit from the smallest possible investment of resources. This paper examines a simple question: Are campaigns generally rational in believing that a "comparative" approach will yield a more fruitful result than a purely positive strategy? Put another way: Are campaigns rational in seeking to increase the proportion of voters holding an unfavorable impression of the opponent, or would they be better served by concentrating on bolstering their own favorability?

The paper examines tens of thousands of private pre-election survey interviews, conducted on behalf of twenty-nine campaigns in a wide variety of states, to assess the relationship between candidate impressions, voting behavior, and election outcomes. I find that campaigns are most successful when voters hold polarized impressions of the two candidates. This general relationship between impressions of competing candidates and voting behavior produces a sort of Prisoner's Dilemma, which virtually guarantees candidates will seek to contrast themselves with their opponents.

CHRISTOPHER C. BLUNT, PH.D.

MARKET STRATEGIES, INC.

855 NORTH 1800 EAST ROAD • LODA, IL 60948

CHRISTOPHER_BLUNT@MARKETSTRATEGIES.COM

A great volume of research has examined the effects of negative advertising on voter perceptions of candidates (West, 1997), turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Freedman and Goldstein, 1999), and voting behavior (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Jamieson, 2000; King et al, 1998). Implied in this research, but seldom examined as a separate question, is a larger issue: are campaigns *generally* rational in believing that a "negative" or "comparative" approach will yield a more fruitful result than a purely positive strategy? The rational campaign seeks to derive the maximum possible benefit from the smallest possible investment of resources. Are campaigns best served by concentrating on bolstering their own favorability, or are they rational in also seeking to increase the proportion holding an unfavorable impression of the opponent? This paper seeks to explain why campaigns perceive "negative" and " comparative" strategies to be so fruitful.

Contemporary political reporting is replete with rules of thumb about candidate unfavorable ratings. When a candidate's unfavorable reaches a certain point, his credibility is deemed to be beyond repair and the election unsalvageable. Sometimes the unfavorable rating is expressed in absolute terms, and other times it is expressed in relationship to the percent rating him favorably. Regardless, unfavorability is thought to be a "harder" perception than favorability, and therefore both more difficult to improve and more relevant to the vote choice. Surprisingly, however, the political science literature has little to say about the general relationship between favorable/unfavorable impressions of competing candidates and voting behavior in particular elections.

This paper examines tens of thousands of private pre-election survey interviews, conducted on behalf of presidential and subpresidential campaigns in a wide variety of states, to assess the relationship between candidate impressions, voting behavior, and election outcomes. The data provide quantification of the absolute and relative

relationships between candidate impressions and vote choice, and how these relationships

change over time. Ultimately, the paper assesses the rationale for candidates' "going

negative," providing a greater understanding of candidate behavior (why campaigns

accentuate negative and comparative themes rather than purely positive information about

themselves) — and supplies a more rigorous understanding of the point at which a

particular candidate's goose can truly said to be cooked.

Data and Methodology

The data set includes cross-sectional pre-election survey interviews in twenty-nine

statewide races between 1990 and 2002. All interviews were conducted by professional

interviewers by Market Strategies, Inc., on behalf of Republican candidates and campaign

committees. The interviews were conducted in fourteen states. Of the twenty-nine

contests, eight were gubernatorial races, eleven were for U.S. President, and ten were for

U.S. Senator. Many series of interviews were conducted over the course of the entire year

(or longer) leading up to the election in question.

The data set is based on interviews with 81,369 unique individual registered voters.

However, some of the original survey interviews contained data for multiple races (for

example, the same respondent might be asked questions about both the U.S. Senate and

gubernatorial contests on the ballot in his state that year.) In building the final data set,

such respondents were given multiple entries — one row for each race about which they

were asked. Therefore, the final data set includes 135,454 entries. Table 1 shows the

breakdown of data entries for each of the twenty-nine races.

It should be noted that this is not intended to be a representative sample of all

states and all types of races. I used every available interview for every available race,

however, and in so doing have included a great variety of political milieux. These races are

Table 1			
Summary of Races Used in Analysis			
Year	State	Race	N=
1990	IL	U.S. Senate	800
1990	IL	Governor	3,679
1990	IN	U.S. Senate	4,158
1990	SD	Governor	3,000
1990	VT	Governor	1,005
1991	PA	U.S. Senate	5,706
1992	MI	President	2,302
1992	MO	President	3,350
1992	MO	U.S. Senate	3,950
1994	IL	Governor	7,778
1994	MO	U.S. Senate	5,654
1996	MI	President	3,099
1996	MI	U.S. Senate	1,001
1998	IL	U.S. Senate	6,101
1998	IL	Governor	8,500
1998	MO	U.S. Senate	8,290
1998	NV	U.S. Senate	4,053
1998	NV	Governor	3,953
2000	IA	President	2,747
2000	IL	President	4,352
2000	ME	President	2,096
2000	MO	President	10,408
2000	MO	U.S. Senate	11,000
2000	NM	President	3,953
2000	OR	President	1,453
2000	TN	President	2,001
2000	WI	President	6,455
2002	IL	Governor	7,149
2002	MI	Governor	7,464

drawn from a great many years, from every geographical region, include some Republican incumbents, some Democratic incumbents, some open seats, some Republican victories, some Democratic victories, some landslides, some squeekers, and some upsets. This great diversity should work to even out some of the idiosyncratic factors present in any one race. Most importantly, the enormous number of data entries allows examination of combinations of attitudes that typically are impossible to study in individual studies.

The voter's impression of each candidate is coded as a five point scale: very unfavorable (-2), somewhat unfavorable (-1), neutral/no opinion (0), somewhat favorable (+1), very favorable (+2). Subtracting the Democratic impression score from the Republican impression score yields a 9-point polarization scale. This combined measure ranges from –4 (very favorable impression of the Democrat/very unfavorable impression of the Republican) to +4 (Republican very favorable/Democrat very unfavorable), with 0 meaning impressions of both candidates are the same.

In addition to this measure of polarization, I built an additional composite variable, with thirteen mutually exclusive combinations of Republican and Democratic candidate impressions. Such combinations include Very Favorable toward Republican/Somewhat Favorable toward Democrat, Favorable toward Democrat/Unfavorable toward Republican,

and so forth. All thirteen of these categories will be detailed in the relevant analysis section.

The vote intention is a simple trial heat result, coded Democrat (-100), Undecided (0), Republican (+100). Computing means for this variable, as will be done in the analysis, yields a measure of "net Republican" strength in the trial heat. Positive mean numbers represent the number of percentage points by which the Republican candidate leads; negative mean numbers represent the number of percentage points by which the Democrat is winning.

Finally, party identification is the seven-point University of Michigan scale, ranging from Strong Democrat (1) to Strong Republican (7).

I am grateful to Mr. Fred Steeper, principal of Market Strategies[1]. I have worked closely with Mr. Steeper for twelve of the thirteen previous years, and under his direction was responsible for the management, execution and analysis of much of this research. Although some of Mr. Steeper's clients have retired from politics, many more remain active in public life. Naturally, the latter are concerned about preserving the confidentiality of their data. For this reason, I am unable to disclose top-line results in specific races. Instead, I will refer to aggregate relationships in the data.

The paper is organized as follows. First, I will describe the general relationship between candidate impressions, party identification, and voting behavior, and how these relationships change over time. Next, I will break candidate impressions into favorable and unfavorable components, and examine their comparative impact on voting behavior. Finally, I will analyze the relationship between election eve candidate impressions and actual election day results.

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[1] Market Strategies is a widely-respected, national Republican research firm headquartered in Michigan.

All of this analysis will work together to explain why campaigns believe "negative" or "comparative" strategies are generally the most rational to pursue. I find that unfavorability is somewhat more relevant to the vote choice than is favorability, and that campaigns are most successful when voters have polarized impressions of the two candidates. More importantly, I find that the relationship between impressions of competing candidates and voting behavior produces a sort of Prisoner's Dilemma for candidates, which virtually guarantees campaigns will seek to contrast themselves with their opponents.

Candidate Impressions, Partisanship, and Voting Behavior

The political science literature is replete with examples of partisanship dominating the vote calculus, almost to the exclusion of campaign-generated considerations. At the outset of the present investigation, therefore, a brief examination of the general relationship between candidate impressions, partisanship, and voting behavior is in order. After all, if candidate impressions and voting behavior are little else than surrogates for party identification, it hardly seems worth exploring the independent relationship between candidate impressions and the vote.

Table 2 confirms a strong relationship between party identification and both the vote (r=.57) and the nine-point polarized impressions of the two candidates (r=.52). However, the relationship between the polarized impressions and the vote is even stronger (r=.74).

Table 2 Zero Order Correlations: Candidate Perceptions, Party, and Vote				
	GOP Candidate	Democratic Candidate	Polarized Impressions	Vote
Democratic Candidate	-.42	1.00		
Polarized Impressions	.85	-.84	1.00	
Trial Heat (Vote)	.63	-.62	.74	1.00
Party Identification	.44	-.43	.52	.57
All correlations significant at p<.001				

Of course, some portion of that relationship is due to the influence of party

identification. When, in Table 3, the effects of party identification are partialled out of the

correlation matrix, the relationship between polarized impressions and the vote slips only

to r=.62. In other words, the candidate impressions have a slightly stronger *independent*

relationship with voting
(partial r=.62) than does
party identification itself
(r=.57).

	GOP Candidate	Democratic Candidate	Polarized Impressions
Table 3			
Partial Correlations: Controlling for Party Identification			
Democratic Candidate	-.28	1.00	
Polarized Impressions	.80	-.80	1.00
Trial Heat (Vote)	.50	-.49	.62
All correlations significant at p<.001			

Perhaps most interesting is the role of campaign activity in making these candidate-

based considerations relevant for the vote. Table 4 replicates the correlation matrix shown

in Table 2, but compares relationships found in the 18,463 interviews conducted on election

eve (typically the final week of October or the weekend preceding the election) with

relationships found in the 38,892 interviews conducted before September. This gives some

sense of the changes in relationships that occurred over the course of September and

October, which are traditionally the most active campaign months and the period in which

voters will have the greatest exposure to campaign messages.

One of the most remarkable findings is the *non*-activation of party identification as a

voting consideration; the relationship between party identification and the vote was

virtually unchanged between the pre-Labor Day period (r=.57) and election eve (r=.55).

Rather, the big changes in this period concern candidate impressions and the relevance of

those impressions for the vote choice. First, note the dramatic increase in polarization

between impressions of the Republican and Democratic candidates. Before Labor Day,

there was a small but significant negative correlation (r= -.23) between feelings about the

competing candidates. In other words, voters with a positive impression of one candidate

	Republican Candidate		Democratic Candidate		Polarized Impressions		Vote	
Table 4 Change in Zero Order (Pearson's r) Correlations: Candidate Perceptions, Party, and Vote								
	Election Eve	Pre-Sept	Election Eve	Pre-Sept	Election Eve	Pre-Sept	Election Eve	Pre-Sept
Democratic Candidate	-.49	-.23	1.00	1.00				
Polarized Impressions	.87	.79	-.86	-.77	1.00	1.00		
Trial Heat (Vote)	.68	.52	-.67	-.50	.78	.65	1.00	1.00
Party Identification	.46	.35	-.45	-.33	.53	.43	.55	.57
All correlations significant at p<.001. Election Eve n=18,463. Pre-Sept n=38,892.								

tended to have a somewhat less positive (or even a negative) impression of the other candidate. By election eve, however, the size of this correlation more than doubled (to r= -.49), indicating a much greater polarization in feelings about the two competing candidates by the conclusion of the campaign. Furthermore, these polarized impressions grew substantially more relevant for the vote between Labor Day (r= .65) and Election Day (r=.78).

Although there does not appear to have been any *direct* activation of party identification between Labor Day and Election Day, it is quite possible that partisanship was activated *indirectly,* as a shaper of candidate impressions. If this is the case, once the effects of party identification are partialled out, we would expect to see much less dramatic Labor Day-to-Election Day increases in the relevance of candidate impressions for voting behavior. Furthermore, because partisanship was supposedly playing a greater indirect role on election eve than it had been in September, the election eve correlations should be reduced by a greater amount than the pre-September correlations.

Table 5 shows that when party identification is partialled out, the size of the correlation tends to be reduced by about the same amount in both time periods. This indicates that party identification was about as strong of an indirect voting consideration on election eve as it was before September. In other words, there was little direct or

Table 5 Change in Partial Correlations: Controlling for Party Identification						
	Republican Candidate		Democratic Candidate		Polarized Impressions	
	Election Eve	Pre-Sept	Election Eve	Pre-Sept	Election Eve	Pre-Sept
Democratic Candidate	-.35	-.12	1.00	1.00		
Polarized Impressions	.82	.76	-.82	-.74	1.00	1.00
Net GOP Vote	.57	.42	-.55	-.40	.68	.55
All correlations significant at p<.001. Election Eve n=18,463. Pre-Sept n=38,892.						

indirect activation of partisanship as a shaper of the vote choice. Even with party

identification removed, impressions of the two candidates still grew increasingly polarized

(-.12 to -.35) over the period in question, and the partial correlation between polarized

candidate impressions and the vote still increased from .55 to .68. In other words, over the

period in which voters were exposed to the largest volume of campaign communications,

impressions of the two candidates grew increasingly polarized and relevant for the vote —

and this shift was based on more than just an activation of partisan considerations (i.e.

Democrats simply growing more pro-Democrat and anti-Republican). Rather, these

changes appear to be founded in a consideration of the information with which voters were

presented over the course of the fall. (See chapters 4 and 5 of Blunt, 2002 for a much more

in-depth analysis of this phenomenon in individual races.)

Returning to the full data set, I used Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) to

determine the net Republican vote associated with each degree of polarization in the

candidate impressions, *controlling for party identification.* MCA is an analysis of variance

technique which estimates the specific relationship between a particular independent

variable (in this case, polarized candidate impressions), holding other characteristics (in

this case, party identification) constant, and overall net Republican vote. MCA computes a

predicted mean value of the dependent variable, net Republican vote, for each category of

polarized candidate impressions, controlling for party identification.

Table 6 shows, in dramatic fashion, the impact of establishing even the slightest bit of daylight between impressions of two competing candidates. Controlling for party identification, when impressions of the two candidates are identical (for example, somewhat favorable of both), the net Republican vote is +2 (more or less a tie). However, among voters with even a one-point difference in feelings about the two candidates, the favored candidate opens up a trial heat advantage of at least fifty percentage points. Among those with a one-point better impression of the Democrat (for example, very unfavorable toward the Republican but only somewhat unfavorable toward the Democrat), the net Republican vote is –50 (a fifty point lead for the Democrat). Similarly, among those with a one-point better impression of the Republican (for example, very unfavorable toward the Democrat but only somewhat unfavorable toward the Republican), the Republican enjoys a 54 point

Table 6		
Multiple Classification Analysis: Net Republican Vote by Polarized Impressions and Party Identification		
	Net GOP Vote	N of cases
Party Identification		
Strong Democrat	-70	22,185
Weak Democrat	-37	18,824
Leaning Democrat	-34	19,203
Independent	7	15,879
Leaning Republican	54	17,826
Weak Republican	58	18,171
Strong Republican	82	20,219
Polarizaed Candidate Impressions		
Polarized Pro-Democrat	-73	10,030
2	-72	11,367
3	-67	11,643
4	-50	12,235
Neutral (Both same)	2	31,401
6	54	17,591
7	71	14,568
8	75	12,151
Polarized Pro-Republican	75	11,323
N=132,308. Net vote numbers for party identification categories are raw, unadjusted for polarized impressions. Net vote numbers for polarized impression categories are adjusted to control for effects of party identification.		

advantage. The vote advantage climbs by another 17 points among those with at least two degrees of difference between candidates, and then the trial heat point spread levels off in the low-to-mid-seventies among those with the most polarized feelings.

Clearly, there is a very strong relationship between feelings about the competing candidates and voting behavior, even when controlling for party identification. The rational campaign will therefore seek to establish some difference in feelings about the two candidates in voters' minds, as this translates into at least a fifty-point trial heat advantage when it is successful.

Favorability versus Unfavorability

There are two general ways a campaign can create differences in feelings about the two candidates: by concentrating on increasing favorable impressions of one's own candidate, and hoping voters end up liking that candidate more than the opponent; or by increasing the unfavorable impressions of one's opponent while bolstering or defending one's own favorability. The key question facing a given campaign is this: is it more effective to use marginal dollars to do nothing but shore up one's own favorability — or to dedicate some of those marginal dollars to providing a contrast with one's opponent? The answer to this question will, of course, vary greatly depending on the political milieu of a given race. This section of the paper examines the relative voting impact of favorable and unfavorable impressions *in general,* and shows why, when given a choice, so many campaigns also seek to introduce unfavorable information about an opponent.

Table 7 shows the results of another Multiple Classification Analysis, predicting the net Republican vote by impressions of the individual Republican and Democratic candidates, controlling for party identification (which is not shown in the table, because it is identical to what was displayed in Table 6) and impressions of the other candidate.

These results illustrate, in dramatic fashion, why candidates also seek to drive up their opponents' unfavorable ratings rather than merely bolstering positive impressions of themselves: unfavorability is somewhat more relevant to the vote than favorability. For example, a Democrat enjoys a 29 point lead among those with a favorable impression of him — but leads by 37 points among those with an unfavorable impression of the Republican. The same is true from the Republican candidate's perspective: he leads by 36 points among those with a favorable impression of him, but by 44 points among those who dislike the Democrat. From either candidate's perspective, then, driving up the opponent's negative yields eight more points of trial heat spread than does driving up one's own favorability.

The other interesting observation from this table is that *degree* of unfavorability does not seem to matter much. The key is driving the opponent into any kind of

Table 7		
Net Republican Vote by Candidate Impressions (Controlling for Party Identification) Multiple Classification Analysis		
	Net GOP Vote	**N of cases**
Percpetions of Republican		
Very Unfavorable	-36	19,987
Somewhat Unfavorable	-36	20,043
Neutral/None	-16	20,617
Somewhat Favorable	27	43,030
Very Favorable	51	28,631
Collapsed:		
Favorable	36	71,661
Unfavorable	-37	40,030
Percpetions of Democrat		
Very Unfavorable	44	21,759
Somewhat Unfavorable	42	19,947
Neutral/None	25	30,432
Somewhat Favorable	-18	35,329
Very Favorable	-44	24,840
Collapsed:		
Favorable	-29	60,169
Unfavorable	44	41,706
N=132,308. Net vote numbers for candidate impression categories are adjusted to control for effects of party identification *and impressions of the other candidate.*		

unfavorable territory; once party identification and impressions of the other candidate are taken into account, there is no significant difference in voting behavior between those with a *somewhat* unfavorable and a *very* unfavorable impression of a given candidate.

It appears from this analysis that if a candidate must choose, and all else is equal, it is more rational to attempt to increase the opponent's negative rating than to increase one's own positive rating. It is therefore not surprising to observe so many candidates sponsoring "attack" or "comparative" advertising, rather than waging all-positive campaigns.

Table 7 suggests that candidates may be faced with a sort of Prisoner's Dilemma game. If engaging in an all-positive campaign can be thought of as "cooperation," and attacking (or comparing one's self with) the opponent is considered "defection," Table 7 shows that, all else being equal, it is nearly always more rational to defect than to cooperate. The dominant strategy in this game appears to be increasing the opponent's negative, while responding quickly to his attacks (and thus keeping one's own negative from increasing) — *not* engaging in a love-fest with one's opponent.

Is Negativity Really Rational?

A somewhat more in-depth exploration of this dilemma with which candidates are faced provides a clearer illustration of the dominant incentive to defect. I built a special combination variable with thirteen mutually exclusive categories, based on specific voter perceptions of both the Republican and Democratic candidates. The thirteen categories include every significant combination of perceptions. (For example: Democrat Favorable/Republican Unfavorable, Very Favorable Democrat/Somewhat Favorable Republican, and so forth.) The extraordinarily large number of data records ensures at least 1,000 cases for even the most obscure combinations of perceptions. Table 8 shows the

net Republican vote for each of these combination categories, controlling for party identification.

Note that for the first three categories, when perceptions of the two candidates are identical, the race is essentially a tie. Interestingly, it doesn't matter whether the "identical perceptions" are favorable, unfavorable, or no impression; when impressions of both candidates are the same, voters divide evenly between them.

If we consider this situation of identical perceptions to be a sort of original position, the remaining rows investigate what would happen to the vote margin if a given candidate was free to shape the ensuing campaign discourse himself. For example, suppose the electorate is a truly blank slate, with no impression of either candidate. In such a condition, the Republican leads in these interviews by two points (essentially a tie). Suppose the Democrat in this race, operating in a vacuum, has a choice: he can broadcast either purely positive messages about himself, or purely negative messages about his opponent. If these are the only choices, he is actually better off ignoring his opponent and increasing his own favorability; such a strategy nets him a 59-point lead (Outcome #4). To attack his opponent, while himself remaining unknown, yields only a 34-point lead (Outcome #5). The calculus is similar for the Republican. Attacking the Democrat, while remaining unknown to voters himself (Outcome #5), yields only a 47-point lead; building up one's own favorability, while leaving the Democrat unknown, makes for a 59-point lead (Outcome #4). These figures may help explain the "let sleeping dogs lie" strategy. Early in a campaign cycle, when one or both candidates is unfamiliar to voters, it is common for candidates to concentrate on building favorability of themselves. It seems that only once the race is joined, and both are broadcasting messages in earnest, that distinctions are most commonly drawn with opponents.

Table 8			
Net Republican Vote by Candidate Impression Combinations, controlling for Party Identification (Multiple Classification Analysis)			
Outcome Type		**Net GOP Vote**	**N of cases**
	Both Same: Unfavorable	1	4,526
	Both Same: Favorable	2	15,450
	No Impression of Either Candidate	2	11,425
1	Favorable R/Unfavorable D	74	32,017
	Favorable D/Unfavorable R	-72	28,994
2	Very Favorable R/Smwt Favorable D	65	4,742
	Very Favorable D/Smwt Favorable R	-65	4,625
3	Very Unfavorable R/Smwt Unfavorable D	-35	1,117
	Very Unfavorable D/Smwt Unfavorable R	39	1,213
4	Favorable R/No impression of D	59	14,827
	Favorable D/No impression of R	-59	6,359
5	Unfavorable R/No impression of D	-34	4,181
	Unfavorable D/No impression of R	47	2,833

Ultimately, Table 8 confirms that this comparative strategy appears to be the

dominant one. As large of a lead as one enjoys (65 points) when impressions of one's self

are very favorable and impressions of the opponent are only somewhat favorable (Outcome

#2), it is even better (72-74 points) to put one's opponent in unfavorable territory while

maintaining favorable impressions of one's self (Outcome #1). This is, in fact, the nature of

the "comparative" strategy: to contrast one's own strengths and popular positions with the

opponent's shortcomings and unpopular stances, and in so doing to create the maximum

number of voters with fully polarized (favorable of one, unfavorable of the other)

impressions of the two candidates. Given that a campaign opens up a 70+ point lead with

voters whose impressions are polarized in this manner (Outcome #1), and that no other

combination of impressions approaches this spread in the trial heat, it is not surprising to

observe a substantial volume of "comparative" discourse in modern campaigns.

Although in theory a candidate could open up a 65-point lead by winning a love-fest

(Outcome #2: establishing himself as very favorable, while his opponent remains only

somewhat favorable), Table 8 provides further evidence that the risks of this strategy

outweigh the potential benefits. If a candidate loses the love-fest, he loses by 65 points. If,

on the other hand, he defects from the love-fest and introduces negative information about

his opponent, he has the potential to leap-frog ahead to a lead in the low-70s (Outcome #1).

Even if this strategy generates some degree of backlash against him, as long as the

candidate can paint his opponent as *even more* negative (Outcome #3), he still wins by at

least 35 points. Furthermore, even if he ends up being disliked even more than the

opponent, the potential downside of Outcome #3 remains less than a forty point deficit.

While that is large, it is not nearly as large as the 65-point deficit resulting from the loss of

a love-fest (Outcome #2).

In short, when all else is equal, the potential up-side from aiming at Outcome #1

appears to outweigh the potential risks of falling short of that outcome. This calculus helps

explain the prevalence of comparative strategies in modern campaigns.

When is the Goose Cooked?

Of the twenty-nine races examined, twenty-six included interviews conducted on

election eve (for analysis purposes, I will consider "election eve" to be the week or weekend

before the election). For each of these races, I computed the percent favorable, unfavorable,

and no impression for each candidate. From this, I constructed a new data file, with 26

entries (one for each race). An examination of patterns and summary statistics in this file

provides interesting profiles of winning and losing campaigns.

Table 9 shows, for winning and losing candidates, the average, minimum, and

maximum percents with various perceptions: favorable impression, unfavorable impression,

net favorable, and no impression. The column on the far right displays the same statistics

for the spread between the winners' and losers' ratings. I will also report, in the text, some aspects of the distribution of certain variables that are impossible to show in the table.

None of the winning candidates had a favorable rating of less than 44 percent, and none had an unfavorable rating of more than 46 percent. Among losers, by contrast, the average favorable rating was 46 percent, and the average unfavorable rating was 40 percent. Only one of the losers had an unfavorable rating of less than 27 percent[2]

Not a single winning candidate had a negative net favorability rating (percent favorable minus percent unfavorable); in fact, none of the winners had a net favorable of less than +10 percent. Among the losers, by contrast, the *average* net favorability rating was just +6, less than the *lowest* of the winners. Seven of the twenty-six had net favorability ratings in negative territory (more people unfavorable than favorable).

Table 9 Profile of Winning and Losing Candidate Impressions			
	Winners	**Losers**	**Spread**
Percent Favorable			
Mean	57	46	11
Minimum	44	20	-11
Maximum	76	58	42
Percent Unfavorable			
Mean	32	40	-8
Minimum	16	14	-28
Maximum	43	54	4
Net Percent Favorable			
Mean	25	6	19
Minimum	10	-14	-6
Maximum	57	25	64
Percent No Impression			
Mean	10	14	-4
Minimum	2	2	-44
Maximum	30	66	23

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[2] The exception was Baron Hill, Democratic nominee for Indiana U.S. Senate in 1990. Although his unfavorable was just 14 percent, 66 percent could not even form an impression of him. The remaining 20 percent were favorable.

Furthermore, perhaps most importantly, only two of the twenty-six losers had a net favorability rating that was better than that of the winning candidate, and none of these spreads was greater than six points. In one other case, the two candidates had identical net favorability ratings. However, in the other 23 cases (88 percent of the time), the candidate with the better net favorability won the election.

Although it is difficult to generalize from twenty-six cases, the great diversity of political circumstances represented by these races produces an instructive rough general profile of voter impressions of winning and losing candidates. When has a candidate's goose been cooked? No single rule of thumb is accurate one hundred percent of the time, but the more closely the candidates in a given race resemble the winning and losing candidate impression profiles here (late in the campaign cycle), the closer the race is to being decided.

The most reliable indicator appears to be a comparison of the two candidates' net favorability ratings. This finding reinforces the principal conclusion of the earlier portion of this paper: it is the *spread* between impressions of the two candidates which is ultimately tied most closely to voting behavior. This is further evidence of the rationality of a "comparative" campaign strategy, which seeks to highlight differences between two candidates and what they stand for.

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