

Chapter 5

Duck or Punch? Dialogue in a California Gubernatorial Election

The 1994 California gubernatorial race presents an ideal situation to study the dynamics of campaign strategy with respect to the question of dialogue. It is also a classic piece of political drama. Kathleen Brown, the Democratic challenger, was by all accounts destined to win. Blessed with a national following as a rising star in the Democratic party, she attracted extraordinary early funding, had weak opposition within the party, and had established a solid reputation as state treasurer. Early polls (see Table 5.6, for details) showed Brown leading by a twenty-point margin. Pete Wilson, her Republican opponent, appeared to be a doomed incumbent, burdened by a statewide economic recession and a contentious Democratically controlled state legislature. A year before the election, a Los Angeles Times poll placed Wilson's approval rating at a dismal 29 percent. Yet, on election day, Wilson won a decisive fourteen-point victory, recast himself as a powerful figure in the national Republican party, and left Brown's political reputation in ruins. Why? I argue that this defeat was largely the result of Brown's decision to dialogue on the subject of crime. Thus, this case study serves as an empirical demonstration of the dangers of dialogue and provides a cautionary tale to those who would expect dialogue in any strong form from contemporary campaigns.

This election exemplifies a clash between two different approaches to campaigning. It pitted Brown's more traditional campaign style against Wilson's more contemporary approach, an approach consistent with what I consider to be a modern campaign. Brown was dedicated to creating dialogue while the Wilson candidacy was dedicated, by its own admission, to shaping an agenda favorable to Pete Wilson's electoral returns. His campaign team focused its efforts on priming the electorate to think about crime and immigration, issues where Wilson's position closely matched that of the median voter. On the other hand, the Brown team attempted to persuade the electorate that her crime-related stances were reasonable, either attempting to bring the electorate to her view or to convince them that she was "tougher" than she appeared. Therefore, Wilson was able to create an environment for the campaign that the Brown team fought within.

Although many factors typically play a role in electoral outcomes, this race was a testament to the skill of Wilson's team, particularly the effectiveness of its strategic choices. Notwithstanding the conclusion drawn by Brown's campaign director, who remarked "unfortunately for us, the defeat was so decisive and so total that it is very difficult for us to point to that fork in the road when the campaign went south on us," (Lubenow 1995, p. 24). I argue that Wilson's victory was neither predestined, nor the result of a simple miscalculation or bad execution

on the part of Brown's team. It came from a basic misunderstanding of the dynamic of contemporary campaign discourse. Wilson's operatives were skillful, and their success stemmed from their adoption of a particular campaign strategy. The outcome was thus the result of the dominance of Wilson's strategic paradigm.

My examination of this election provides an empirical test of the no dialogue hypothesis; namely, that a campaign strategy predicated on creating a dialogue will win fewer votes than one based on ignoring an opponent's initiatives. A set of controlled experiments, conducted during the campaign, constitutes the main portion of this case study. These experiments followed a highly naturalistic procedure that featured likely voters who viewed and responded to a sample of commercials actually employed by the candidates (see Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Iyengar and Kinder 1987, for details). Two of the experiments followed a "two-ad" design. This technique enables the assessment of the strategies the candidates employed, as well as alternative strategies that they chose not to use. These counterfactual conditions were based on ads that the candidates produced but used either sparingly or not at all. One experiment, already covered in the previous chapter, simply assessed the effects of a single Wilson ad in order to test and demonstrate some of the assumptions made about advertising effects. Finally, to corroborate my experimental evidence, I offer sample survey data obtained from a series of statewide polls conducted during the campaign.

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Why Study This Race?

The race for governor of California "is exceeded only by a presidential campaign in terms of the pressures and demands it imposes on participants" (Lubenow 1995, p. ix). As the most important election in the largest state, party leaders and political consultants pay close attention. California often sets the agenda for elections nationwide and is a testing ground for new techniques. In part, this is because California elections are much more comparable to presidential elections than most state elections. The sheer size of the state makes the electorate and the candidates heavily dependent on the mass media. The partisan ties of California's voters tend to be weaker than the ties in other states, and there is a relatively high proportion of independents. Much of the electorate has emigrated from elsewhere, leaving its voters without a stable context or strong social bonds to constrain their voting preferences. The proportion of "persuadables," voters whose decision could change in response to the campaign, is relatively high. As the larger society and other political entities come to resemble California more closely in these respects, the lessons of California's campaigns will be that much more valuable.

Just as there are trends in clothes and automobiles, there are trends in political campaigning. Consultants and campaign managers are quick to copy successful innovations, and Wilson's dramatic victory proved to be no exception.

The mobility of professional campaign staff hastens the diffusion of campaign technology. Several participants in the Wilson campaign worked for Bob Dole's unsuccessful 1996 presidential campaign, for instance. These participants and other observers undoubtedly will try again, attempting to use the tools that proved successful in California on other races.

More importantly, this race provides a unique opportunity to study the consequences of dialogue. The two candidates came down squarely on opposite sides of the question of dialogue's vote-getting value. Given the Darwinian, "survival of the fittest" nature of politics -- that is, the imitation of successful techniques and the abandonment of unsuccessful ones -- this kind of head-to-head clash of opposing campaign philosophies is rare, and therefore a valuable opportunity for study. To push the analogy further, imagine two species competing for the same ecological niche in the aftermath of a severe climatic change. Over the long term, the better-adapted species would thrive, leaving its less-well-adapted cousins extinct. However, for a brief period, the species would coexist, albeit in competition. This gubernatorial race represented such a clash of opposing schools. Further, Wilson's dim prospects before the campaign, followed by his victory, alerts us as well as other candidates to the effectiveness of his technique, and the penalties associated with Brown's adoption of dialogue as a campaign strategy.

My task is to link the outcome of this election directly to the strategy of the candidates, and to the particular messages that these strategies produced. To show that a candidate used a particular strategy and then won would leave my contentions open to several objections, as he or she could have won for any number of reasons. It is necessary to demonstrate that the candidates' behavior in the form of their strategic choices determined this outcome. Fortunately, this race has an extraordinary array of data available for the pursuit of empirical study. Among the unusual sources of information is a publication by the Institute for Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley, detailing the mindset and intentions of the campaigners. The IGS conference attracted a set of political professionals who participated in an essentially open hearing on their campaign experiences. Social scientists, public pollsters, and members of the press who were versed in the idiosyncrasies of this race also attended. The presence of members of the opposing candidates' teams, as well as more or less impartial political communication experts created a dialogue about the rationale behind and the effects of campaign activity.

Access to such information is ordinarily stymied by the fact that candidates do not want to be seen as strategic. Sincerity equates to political virtue, while the rational calculation it takes to win an election is taken for unseemly scheming. Further complicating the "search for truth" is the professional self-interest of political operatives who naturally wish to appear omniscient and, therefore,

omnipotent. In the aftermath of a campaign, all losses are predestined, mistakes are rationalized, and victories are linked to generic and even genetic political skill. Students of campaigns are often forced to rely on their own intuitions, or on journalists' accounts of the campaign, to discern the strategic intentions. At best, one may be able to conduct interviews of the participants, assuming they grant access and are reasonably forthcoming. In contrast to this murky picture, this conference produced a volume that goes some way toward providing the requisite inside information. So, while some of their statements may be self-serving rationalizations, at least they come straight from the participants immediately after the campaign in an open hearing. It is largely from this account that I reconstruct the candidates' strategic calculations.

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Background

This gubernatorial election, despite its peculiar features, fits the general model of elections and campaigns developed in chapter four. Each candidate had a set of self-perceived strengths and weaknesses and designed a campaign strategy in the face of these, the opponent's strengths and weaknesses, and the electorate's predispositions. The predispositions were in part the result of exogenous factors, or external events, that neither candidate controlled, but that influenced the outcome. I will briefly run through all the exogenous factors that formed the political environment, both to illustrate them and to show how the model applies to a particular situation. Then, I will focus on the strategic calculations that ensued given the relative stances of the candidates and the median voter. My purpose here is to underscore the difference in campaign approaches with respect to the question of message construction. Specifically, I trace the strategizing on behalf of both Brown and Wilson that led to dialogue on the subject of crime in the actual campaign.

The period prior to the election was difficult for California. That the events of this period seemed to have worked to Wilson's advantage is somewhat paradoxical, given that economic malaise usually curtails an incumbent's advantage. Aside from the economy, there were three big news stories, the aftermath of the civil unrest in Los Angeles following the Rodney King verdict, the Northridge earthquake of January 17, 1994, and the O. J. Simpson trial. Immediately prior to the campaign another tragedy occurred when Polly Klaas, a 12-year-old girl from Petaluma, California, was murdered. This crime and the public outrage following it undoubtedly furthered Wilson's goal. By 1994, the "year of the woman," which saw an increase in the number of female officeholders, was over. In its place was a rising Republican tide that led to their capture of the House and Senate for the first time in many decades. Of course, not all of California's women Democrats lost. Dianne Feinstein, for example, held on to her newly won Senate seat. As far as the Republican tide is concerned, Paul

Holm, a Republican pollster not connected to the Wilson campaign, estimated that it added “three or four points to Pete Wilson’s final numbers” (Lubenow 1995, p. 124).

Campaign finance is another important factor to rule out. As has been said, “money is the mother's milk of politics,” and Brown and Wilson’s reliance on money in this contest was typical. Only dollars could have bought the ads Wilson and Brown used to send their messages. Without ads, the candidates would have lost their voices and been written off by the media and the candidate and the campaign would have disappeared. However, my model (as developed thus far) assumes candidates have equal access to communicative resources and, thus, finance is irrelevant to dialogue. Was this true in the California race? Within reason it was true in its early and middle phases. Wilson ended up outspending Brown in the general election almost 2 to 1, approximately \$20 million to \$12 million dollars. Yet, this disparity was arguably the result of Brown's strategic failure. Prior to the end of the race, neither candidate lacked money. In fact, the volume of money the candidates were able to raise and spend impressed pundits. Brown did “go dark” during the final week of the campaign. She ran out of money because “major Democratic contributors smelled a loss and just shut their wallets,” according to Dan Borenstein, a Brown staffer (Lubenow 1995, p. 50). However, it is too simplistic to blame this fact for her loss because she had sufficient access to funds during the campaign’s critical period.

The potential contributors' second thoughts were due to poll results showing Brown far behind ten days before the election. The poll results, in turn, were themselves the result of campaign decisions. Brown had already spent over \$12 million at that point (not counting primary spending), and had already substantially disseminated her message. One might guess that a tighter race would have produced more money for Brown and less for Wilson in the last stages of the campaign, dramatically changing the spending ratio. While money is undoubtedly important, in itself it neither caused nor would have changed the outcome.

 The Issues

My model relies heavily on a representation of public opinion as a multi-dimensional space. It is critical to understand how the architects of the respective candidate’s strategy understood the political environment facing them. In other words, what themes did the candidates consider in the process of message creation? According to Celinda Lake, Brown's pollster and strategist: “There were three issues out there: immigration, crime, and the economy.” From the Republican side, George Gorton, a Wilson strategist, reinforces this view: “Reporters seem to think there were only two issues, crime and immigration. We worried every single day about the economy.” To these three, Brown herself added education. She felt it necessary to give major speeches on only these three

issues and on education. These constituted her positions for the press (and presumably for Wilson) in the fall prior to 1994. Education is also appropriate to consider in this discussion because of the role it played in both candidates' campaign planning, as well as the role it could have played in the campaign. These four areas -- crime, the economy, immigration, and education -- were considered by both candidates in their strategic calculations and made up the overwhelming share of the content of the campaign.

<C> *Crime.* From the beginning, everyone expected public safety would play a major role in the campaign. Wilson and his team loved his reputation as "tough on crime." The candidates' stances and reputations on crime-related issues could not have suited Wilson better. Unlike many Democrats, such as Dianne Feinstein, Brown had taken a firm anti-death penalty stance. Wilson, in contrast, appeared eager to enforce the death penalty. He matched this enthusiasm with support for the "three strikes" initiative which mandated 25-year-to-life sentences for criminals found guilty of a third felony and, later, a "one strike" policy imposing mandatory sentences on those convicted of violent rapes. Wilson also garnered the endorsement of almost every leading law enforcement association. Brown, on the other hand, had the endorsement of just one police union.

<C> *The Economy.* Whether in terms of job creation, inflation or something else, the state of the economy is a perennial campaign theme. Brown's reputation as treasurer and California's dismal economic performance during Wilson's term gave the Brown team reason to believe that they held the upper hand as far as the economy was concerned. According to Clint Reilly, head of the Brown campaign, "You guys can take the position that I'm a dunce or an idiot. But we believed at that stage of the campaign that the economy would be a winning issue for the Democratic candidate." This view led Brown and her campaign staff to devise the slogan "Restore the promise for middle-class families," in July of 1994. By October, this theme evolved into the "Plan for Building a New California" (Lubenow 1995, p. 50). This plan was a modest set of government-related economic policy proposals, centered around cutting state government by \$5 billion and investing that money in creating jobs, education, and making the streets safer. As far as economic matters were concerned, Wilson focused his rhetoric on the number of jobs created during his administration, but as George Gorton indicated, the notion of the economy as an important campaign consideration filled Wilson's staff with discomfort.

<C> *Immigration.* The shape of the immigration issue was determined by a ballot initiative with which Wilson was closely associated, though not officially linked. Proposition 187 essentially called for limiting or eliminating illegal immigrants' access to government services. Public support for Proposition 187 was very high

until October, when it dropped to only majority support. Support for the measure did not fall further after this point in time. Wilson's slogan -- "There is a right way and a wrong way, and to reward the wrong way is not the American way" -- matched the median voter's position almost perfectly. His pleas for federal government assistance in dealing with immigration-related costs also garnered a great deal of public approval. Brown, in contrast, was ideologically opposed to Proposition 187. Her sentiments were strongly reinforced by the presence of Latino groups in her presumptive coalition. Consequently, Brown found herself closely allied with the only significant bloc of opposition to this measure, in the face of solid majority support.

<C> *Education.* As a dimension impinging on the election, education was more of an also-ran. However, this does not mean that the candidates did not consider this subject when formulating their strategies. It also does not mean that education could not have been an important consideration under alternative strategies. On the face of it, Brown appeared to be better positioned on education. George Gorton remarked,

Education was something we were always very concerned about. We thought we would have to spend a certain period of time on education, and it would be a difficult argument for us to make. You have the CTA (California Teachers' Association), you have a woman liberal Democrat, and certainly the schools need a lot of help. So we assumed education would be one of the big three issues. And that worried us a lot (Lubenow 1995, p. 89).

The chronic problems with California's public schools, the support of the teachers, and her natural credibility seemed to make this theme tailor-made for Brown. Wilson's only serious link to this dimension was negative; he had proposed rather severe cuts in state educational support because of budgetary problems. However, as detailed below, Brown's strategy led to the disappearance of education as an issue. Her strategic decision in this area illustrates well the difference in campaign philosophies between her and Wilson.

 The Strategies

Against this backdrop Wilson's strategic calculus proceeded smoothly, and was summed up best by Dick Dresner, his pollster. Using the standard techniques of the modern campaign, polls and focus groups, Wilson's strategists discovered that people would say, "Yeah, I don't like Pete Wilson," and when asked why, they'd say "Well he hasn't done anything that I've heard about, so he mustn't be

doing a good job.” Dresner claims that they “discovered there was really no personal animosity between voters and Pete Wilson. There was a tremendous opportunity to fill in the blanks” (Lubenow 1995, p. 121). As a consequence, again according to Dresner, the Wilson campaign

Set out to occupy three issue spaces, and we took them one at a time. The first was crime. By making that an issue, by emphasizing the differences between Wilson and Brown, we gained a lot of ground ... The next one was immigration, and we went out to a tremendous lead on that. But the third one we always felt was the economy. You cannot run in this state and ignore what is happening with the economy. We were fortunate that people never really blamed it on Pete Wilson (Lubenow 1995, p. 143).

Thus, Wilson’s message centered on three issues: crime, immigration, and the economy, roughly in that order. Crime and, to a lesser extent, immigration commanded the greatest share of his resources.

The Brown campaign, in contrast, seemed to have difficulty articulating a single strategy. We can, however, reconstruct the calculations that led to choosing some campaign messages over others. According to Reilly, the Brown team initially considered three lines of attack. In the first place, Brown considered attacking Wilson’s job performance and putting Brown forward as a leader who could “put the state back on track” entailing a strategic focus on the economy and on education. The campaign managers apparently feared this approach would not work. Reilly claimed that their research, presumably focus groups and polls, indicated that a more promising avenue was a populist message targeted at middle-class voters, again prescribing a focus on the economy. Reilly, however, seemed to believe Brown’s stances, especially on the death penalty, were not ideologically consistent with a campaign focus on the economy; thus Reilly (apparently at odds with other Brown staff) decided that an attack on crime was necessary to ameliorate the negative impact of her anti-death penalty view. The third strategy he alludes to was an attack on Wilson, presumably on the subject of crime or immigration (Lubenow 1995, p. 72).

Shortly after the primary the Brown team appeared to adopt the third strategy; the Brown campaign actually attacked Wilson’s stance on crime, giving less attention to the economy and almost none to education. Reilly recounts Brown’s objective this way: “We were trying to deal with the issue of crime to the extent that we could build some credibility and neutralize Kathleen’s position on the death penalty” (Lubenow 1995, p. 76). In an attempt to “inoculate” against

weakness, Kathleen Brown made crime the subject of her first serious initiative of the campaign. Tactically, Brown structured her crime message around two prongs. The first prong was an attempt to attack Wilson's poor performance in dealing with the problem of crime and the need to take steps that were more effective. For example, in a seeming attempt to recapture the "Willie Horton effect," Brown attacked Wilson for releasing an inmate named Melvin Carter. The second prong evolved later in the campaign; it revolved around attempting to merge the issues of crime and education. Brown's message featured ads focusing on juvenile felons and the importance of school safety.

Brown at least initially avoided education and seemed to avoid emphasis on the economy in favor of talking about crime. Michael Reese, Brown's deputy campaign manager, stated "the strategy pre-Clint and post-Clint [Reilly] was that we had to neutralize crime and immigration as best we could." He concluded "that was a process we tried to do throughout, but, from the beginning, we knew we were not going to win either of those two issues" (Lubenow 1995, p. 87). To this comment, Don Sipple, who worked for Wilson, responded, "We would disagree whether the issue was Melvin Carter or one strike. Whatever the specifics, you're arguing within the context of our strongest issue" (Lubenow 1995, p. 85).

Why was education dealt with in this way? After some urging on the part of her colleagues at the IGS conference, Celinda Lake, Brown's pollster and strategist, discussed the Brown campaign's attitudes on other issues, notably education. "The problem was that it (education) was clearly a fourth-tier issue for everyone else, and we were doing fairly well in Northern California with the education voters. By the general (election) we were spread thin on money, so we were pulling our ads out of Northern California, out of the female market, into Southern California, into men. Yes, it was a good issue for us, but we felt we had that issue." The response to this logic by George Gorton highlights the differences, "That's not our theory of politics. We would have pounded education, to move it into a first-tier issue, make it the issue people walk into the ballot box thinking about. If they walk into the ballot box thinking about education, it's going to be very difficult for a conservative Republican man to win." Dick Dresner reiterates this sentiment and provides a succinct statement of the Wilson team's method and perhaps the best overall summary of the contemporary campaigner's goals:

The thing that sort of surprised me was the education issue. Our concept of how to approach the issue is not to ask if 10 people are concerned about the issue can I go from seven of those people to eight, and increase my vote? The more important question is, can I expand the number interested in an issue? If I can

control the agenda and expand the number of people who are concerned about immigration or crime, then I can change their focus from something else, whether it's the environment or education or whatever (Lubenow 1995, p. 79).

 Conclusion: Wilson's Victory; Dialogue's Failure

Wilson's emphasis on crime and immigration paired with Brown's strategy, which also centered on crime, was accompanied by steadily decreasing poll margins for Brown, ending in a near landslide (see Table 5.6). Wilson's strategists were happy to take credit. Dick Dresner claimed that

They were voting for Pete Wilson because of where he stood on an issue. By the end of the campaign in our polls, Pete Wilson was a popular governor. It was no longer a question of 'Who is this guy and what has he done?' If you asked people what the governor had done at the end (which we did in focus groups) they knew about three strikes, they knew about one strike, they knew about immigration and they even knew about some of the things he'd done in terms of the economy (Lubenow 1995, p. 123).

Less partisan observers were also quick to credit Wilson's team. John Brennan, pollster for the *LA Times*, underscored Dresner's point that "illegal immigrants along with violent felons became the focus. It was a master stroke for someone in political trouble" (Lubenow 1995, p. 111). Another public opinion expert, Mark DiCamillo, of the California Poll, agreed. "Asked to volunteer what they liked and disliked about each of the candidates in their own words, voters could easily play back Wilson's two major campaign themes: he's going to be tough on crime, and he's going to be tough on illegal immigration" (Lubenow 1995, p. 119).

Finally, even members of Wilson's opposition agreed that the key to his victory lay in the campaign. Paul Maslin, Democratic pollster:

One lesson we should all learn from the gubernatorial campaign is that these things don't come from thin air. That's not the way this process works. Dick summed it up when he said it's not a passive process. He's absolutely right. It was an active process by a campaign that said, 'We don't like this situation and we're going to change it.' And they did it as well as

any campaign I've ever seen in my life. Like it or not, they executed extraordinarily well (Lubenow 1995, p. 127).

In sum, the Wilson campaign managed to capitalize on his reputation, external events and the public's predispositions while Brown's efforts probably only served to increase attention to issue dimensions favorable to Wilson, winning her few votes. By choosing to engage in dialogue on a theme of Wilson's choosing, the Brown campaign squandered her early lead, curtailed her ability to raise funds, and gave the appearance of political incompetence. From a theoretical standpoint, these electoral results strongly support the model's prediction.

The "what if" question, raised by Michael Reese during the course of the conference, is the point of departure for the next section of empirical study. "What if she had seized education as an issue with the same vigor that Wilson had seized immigration? What if "The Plan" had been released earlier and with the financial resources needed to make an impact" (Lubenow 1995, p. 63)? In other words, what if Brown abandoned dialogue and followed the same generic strategy as Wilson? It is to this question that the next section turns.

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Rationale for Study Design

Experimental designs provide a rigorous test of causality. The logic is simple; the researcher compares the effects of two messages or sets of messages while eliminating all confounding factors. In this case, the design tests whether it was the candidates' strategic choices (in the form of combinations of advertisements) that caused the change in voting intentions. An exhaustive account of the experimental setting, participants, and procedures is supplied in appendix B.

It is often difficult to establish the causal role of campaign communications. If, for example, a challenger advertises a plan for economic recovery and defeats the incumbent, at least three interpretations are available. First, the proponent of campaign effects holds that the message was the cause and that had the message changed, so too would have the election's outcome. Second, some relatively objective circumstance, in this illustration the actual state of the economy, may have caused the defeat and the message itself was incidental. If so, the relationship between message and outcome is spurious. Finally, the causal order may be reversed. The challenger, for instance, may have chosen to focus advertisements on the subject of the economy, because voters were already concerned with that issue. Experimental techniques are a convenient and powerful way to disentangle these options and isolate the proper explanation.

The experimental method also enables the investigation of counterfactual phenomena. In the real world, only one course of campaign events can be

observed. Experiments, however, allow the researcher to simulate a series of strategic choices on behalf of each candidate. As a whole, the experimental design devised here allowed each potential candidate's message to be paired with each of the opponent's potential messages. Of course, the brief exposure to campaign ads mandated by the experimental setting is not of the same order of magnitude of exposure in an actual campaign. Nevertheless, these experimental results suggest which strategy would have been optimal, in terms of maximizing favorable vote intentions, for each candidate.

The experiments were administered from September 4 to November 2 of the 1994 California gubernatorial race. (Appendix B presents a complete description of the procedure.) As in Shanto Iyengar's work, the study employs a naturalistic approach designed to approximate a home environment, increasing confidence in the validity of the findings (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). All of the data reported comes from adult subjects. Many other steps were taken to increase validity. The stimuli were real television ads, and the subjects were purposefully misled as to the true purpose of the experiment in order to avoid "demand characteristics" or cueing participants to give answers desired by the experimenter (Campbell and Stanley 1967).

Given the campaign's history, there are two specific predictions about the effect of Brown's and Wilson's advertising. The first prediction concerns the best response to make in light of an opponent's choice. This is a direct test of the dialogue hypothesis. Dialogue is operationalized as follows: when faced with an opponent's choice of a dimension, candidates can either acquiesce in the opponent's choice of topic or they can try to change the subject by picking a different dimension. Dialogue only occurs when candidates do not change the subject.

The second prediction concerns the optimal choice of themes by a single candidate. In line with the claims made in the previous chapter, the model predicts that the candidate will gain the most votes by emphasizing dimensions on which he or she is closest to the median voter. Empirically, this suggests that the candidates will do better structuring their message around their best themes rather than spending time discussing themes on which the opponent's position is closer to that of the median voter. In other words, candidates should avoid attempts to inoculate against weakness. Inoculation is operationalized as follows: when constructing their campaign message, candidates can inoculate by attempting to pre-empt on dimensions thought to be favorable to an opponent; alternatively, they can stick to advertising on just those dimensions most likely to be favorable to them. A successful strategy based on inoculation would lead to dialogue, thus disconfirming the model.

Dialogue has thus far been the subject of scholarly and popular discussion, but not of extensive empirical scrutiny. Changing the subject seems to be a

dominant strategy according to conventional wisdom (Petrocik 1996; Budge & Farlie 1983). Petrocik's (1996) "issue ownership" view is particularly interesting in this regard. He posits that there is a well-understood difference between the two major parties' perceived competence on each issue dimension. Republicans, for example, are generally thought to be better at conducting foreign policy. Therefore, Democratic pretensions to foreign policy expertise will not be credible. The electorate chooses the party whose competencies best match the situation. The candidate achieves more by stressing the most relevant dimension on which he or she has an advantage in perceived competency, and never discussing an area when he or she is not perceived to be competent. This view and its associated evidence support the preliminary prediction that the candidate should only talk about his or her "own" issues.

On the other hand, many political consultants argue that the candidate should respond in kind to rivals' initiatives. While this dictum is most closely associated with personal attacks, the logic behind it extends to every campaign theme. Using the "marketplace of ideas" logic, it would seem that letting an opponent's initiative go unchallenged grants it legitimacy in the eyes of the voting audience. As Roger Ailes has been quoted as saying, "punch back when punched" (quoted in Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar 1993). Adherents of this school would favor the dialogue strategy.

Inoculation attempts spring from the same logic. Given an array of stances on many issues, political agents can determine which are the most popular for a candidate and, therefore, the most likely to be employed. The opposing candidate, in this event, can anticipate a likely message and prepare a response forewarning the electorate of upcoming content. Candidates can also attempt to inoculate themselves against weakness. Knowing that he or she is faced with a scandalous charge, for instance, a candidate may attempt to broadcast rebuttal messages, even in the absence of an opponent's attacks. In the California race, for instance, Brown's relatively unpopular opposition to the death penalty was perceived as a weakness and the subject of inoculation attempts.

In sum, my model predicts that candidates will never end up discussing the same issue dimension; thus, the campaign will contain no dialogue or debate. From the perspective of the choosing candidate, any dialogue-enhancing strategy is dominated or sub-optimal in terms of votes. The experimental prediction is clear--dialogue and inoculation should generate fewer votes relative to their dialogue-diminishing partner.

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Dialogue Experiment

A pair of two-ad experiments assesses the main questions raised by the model and the California race. The first experiment assesses the effectiveness of dialogue as a campaign strategy. Is a candidate better off discussing the same

subject as the opponent (enhancing dialogue) or ignoring an opponent's initiative by responding with a message on a different subject? Of course, the model predicts the latter strategy will garner more votes. The two-ad design exposed participants to two political commercials. One was inserted in the first break and another was inserted into the second break of a twelve-minute selection taken from a local news broadcast. Table 5.1 presents a list of all combinations used in the design.

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This methodology provides an opportunity to test for strategic effects by allowing the assessment of particular combinations of advertisements. In the illustration (Figure 5.1), two conditions are portrayed. In each condition, Wilson advertises on the theme of crime. Brown's response then determines whether dialogue will occur. In the "dialogue" condition, she responds to Wilson's ad with her own ad on crime; while in the "ignore" condition, she broadcasts an ad on the economy.

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Other issue dimensions are used to replicate the basic comparison between dialogue approach and a strategy of simply ignoring the opponent. Again, Table 5.1 lists all the themes employed. Wilson is presumed to lead with his best issue, crime, while Brown is presumed to lead with her best themes, the economy and education. The response determines the condition. In the dialogue conditions, the opponent responds on the same issue dimension as the first advertisement. Wilson's ad on crime is answered by a Brown ad on crime. In the ignore conditions, the better of the candidate's issues takes the place of a dialogue response. Wilson's ad on crime is answered by Brown's ad on the economy or education.

In the parlance of experimental science, this design has three factors, each having two levels. The first factor corresponds to the initiating candidate, either Brown or Wilson. The second factor corresponds to the theme on which the initiating candidate advertised -- the economy or education for Brown and crime or immigration for Wilson. The third factor represents the opposing candidate's response -- ignore or dialogue. The design is not fully orthogonal because Brown never produced an ad on immigration, eliminating three of the 12 possible conditions.

The experiment's central result concerns the effect of the strategic pairings on the aggregate vote. This data is presented in the right hand column of Table

5.1. Brown does best when she shows an ad on the economy and Wilson creates dialogue with her by also presenting an ad on the economy. Among these participants, Brown wins by 26 percent. Wilson does best in two conditions -- when Brown attempts to dialogue on crime and when Wilson ignores Brown's initiative on education and responds with an ad on crime. Among these two sets of participants, Wilson wins by 13 percentage points. The crime dialogue condition closely resembles how the actual race proceeded at the outset. It is interesting to note that Brown garnered more support when her ads ignored Wilson's crime message and dealt with alternative issues, such as her views on the economy or on education. These responses produced a virtual dead heat. I will return to a more general assessment of this point below.

Table 5.2 presents the overall results. The appropriate comparison is between the conditions representing a candidate's choice to dialogue and the conditions where the candidate makes the best possible response. Constructing the comparison in this way enables us to assess the "opportunity cost" of dialogue. What happens when a candidate chooses to devote thirty seconds of airtime to dialogue as opposed to spending that unit of airtime in a way that will garner votes most effectively? Again, a regression model specification assessed the effect of this choice after controlling for the effects of partisan identification. In this estimation, the data have been recoded so that positive numbers favor the candidate who made the choice. On average, the choice to dialogue costs the candidate 21 percentage points or one-fifth of the electorate. In comparison, the subject's partisanship accounts for roughly three-fifths of the subject's vote. The penalty associated with dialogue is large and statistically significant even after controlling for partisan effects.

Insert Table 5.2
About Here

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Inoculation Experiment

The second experiment concerns message construction by a single candidate. Do candidates do better when structuring messages around themes that favor them, or will an inoculation strategy prove more effective? Inoculation involves preempting an opponent's best potential themes via advertising. Should candidates stick to their own message, concentrating on themes they "own," or should their advertisements feature themes their opponents might use? In this way inoculation is like dialogue, given the assumption that the opposing candidates will opt to discuss themes favorable to themselves. The main difference between inoculation and dialogue is that inoculation treats the actions of a single candidate

as opposed to a pair of candidates. The theoretical prediction is that inoculation, like dialogue, will be a less than optimal strategy.

Eight pairs of issues were used. Half were in each of the conditions. The choice to inoculate was operationalized by replacing an ad on a seemingly favorable theme with an ad from the same candidate on a less favorable theme. If the candidate chose not to inoculate, two different ads on the same theme were shown. For instance, two different Brown ads on the economy were compared to one Brown ad on the economy and one Brown ad on crime. This experiment follows a 2 x 2 x 2 design, presented in Table 5.3, where the first factor corresponds to the candidate, the second factor corresponds to the candidate's own theme, and the third factor corresponds to the choice of the candidate's second theme, "on message" or "off message." If candidates stay "on message," they stick with their best theme; otherwise they go "off message" in an attempt to inoculate.

Insert Table 5.3
About Here

The results also appear in Table 5.3. Brown does best when she shows two ads on the economy -- a 36-point lead--while Wilson does best with two ads on immigration giving him a 5 percent lead. Brown also does well -- a 14-point lead - - when she shows two ads on education. That same margin appears when Wilson tries to inoculate by talking about a mix of crime and the economy. When Brown attempts to inoculate showing a mix of crime and education or the economy and crime, the strategies produce a dead heat and a 9-point lead, respectively. Wilson talking only about crime or Wilson mixing a message with immigration and the economy also led to dead heats.

Pooling these different combinations of messages gives us an overall estimate of the ineffectiveness of inoculation as a campaign communication strategy. The same technique employed in the dialogue experiment (see Table 5.4) reveals the average penalty from replacing a commercial discussing a message favorable to a candidate with an ad concerning a topic favorable to the opponent. The attempt at inoculation, on average, costs the sponsoring candidate 16 percentage points in the "trial heat." This effect is statistically significant at the .1 level.

Insert Table 5.4
About Here

In sum, the experimental evidence is consistent with the model. The choice to dialogue costs the candidate. The choice to inoculate, which leads to dialogue,

also results in a penalty. With regard to the governor's race, the evidence highlights Brown's mistake. Her decision to dialogue led to a net loss of electoral support, probably sufficient in concert with other factors to sway the course of the election. The evidence with respect to the broader theory will be interpreted more thoroughly below.

<A> Survey Evidence

I will briefly introduce another type of empirical data to support my contentions concerning Brown's loss. Experimental designs, while strong in terms of identifying causal agents, have their weaknesses. Because the experiments reported on below were conducted under a particular set of conditions, it is possible that the results obtained will not apply to other populations, times or settings (Campbell and Stanley 1967). The small number of subjects provides a minimal base, thus limiting the power of statistical inferences. Finally, the short exposures (30-second spots) are not perfectly analogous to the flow of information campaigns generate in the real world. For these reasons, I include an aggregate analysis of this race based on sample surveys to strengthen the experimental findings.

The Field Institute regularly surveyed California's population during the period prior to the election. Taken together, these polls chart the effect of the campaign on the electorate. Two questions play a paramount role in the analysis presented here. How will you vote for governor, and how will you vote on Proposition 184, the three strikes initiative? The latter question serves as a proxy for the respondent's overall attitude on crime. The raw survey data are presented in Table 5.5.

Insert Table 5.5 About Here

In the aggregate, the line describing Brown's support is quite stark. Over the roughly 21 months prior to the election her support declined in a nearly linear fashion, from roughly 60 percent 22 months out to only 45 percent in the period prior to election day. This represents an unmistakable downward trend in her share of the vote.

The critical issue revolves around the cause of this decline. My model holds that the decline is a function of the dialogue on crime. This dialogue, in turn, should have primed the electorate to weight crime more heavily in vote choice. This priming effect would then work to Wilson's advantage, given the proximity of his stance to that of the median voter. The only available measure of the public's attitudes toward crime concerned respondents' vote intentions on Proposition 184. To test the priming hypothesis in these data, I estimated one

regression model for each survey in order to chart the strength of the relationship between crime attitudes and the gubernatorial vote. The Proposition 184 question was only asked on five surveys. (The raw data appear in Table 5.5).

The particular specification follows the same estimation technique employed in the experimental analyses. Partisan identification is included as a baseline for comparison and as a control given the well-established effect of partisan feelings on vote choice (Miller and Shanks 1996; Converse and Markus 1979; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). The estimates produced by the five regression specifications appear in Table 5.6. As we can see, the effect of respondents' positions on Proposition 184 on the gubernatorial vote steadily increased while the effect of partisanship remained relatively constant. In January of 1994, the effect of crime attitudes was minimal; the coefficient was .05, significant at the .1 level, which means there was a slightly positive relationship between attitudes concerning crime and the vote for governor.

Insert Table 5.6
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By the end of the campaign in October of 1994, there was a very strong relationship between these two choices. In fact, the coefficient on Proposition 184 is over half the size of the coefficient on partisanship, .25 and .45 respectively, meaning the strength of the influence of crime attitudes was comparable to that of partisanship, the paramount political construct. In all, during the period of the campaign, the importance of crime attitudes in determining the vote rose almost linearly just as Brown's support was declining at the same rate. Figure 5.2 charts this relationship. While the survey data do not allow the direction of causality to be established, it is consistent with the experimental results.

Insert Figure 5.2
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Interpretation and Summary

We have two sets of empirical results, one that supports the mechanics underlying my theoretical model, and one that verifies the model's primary result. I will briefly summarize the empirical data and then place these studies into perspective using my game-theoretic approach.

The empirical premises of the model all concern the effect of campaign communications on the voters. In the experimental results presented in this and the previous chapter, I have verified two important assumptions. First, every ad, regardless of its sponsor, serves to increase the salience of that ad's theme in the voter's mind. Familiarity with the research discussed in the chapter four would

have led one to expect this priming effect to appear. Secondly, advertisements seem to inform voters of the candidates' positions with respect to their content, without altering either the voters' attitudes concerning that subject or changing the voters' perceptions of candidates' attitudes and stances toward that subject. In other words, also consistent with the literature, ads lead to opinionation but not to learning or persuasion. These two effects of campaign communication form the basis of my formal model.

The model's primary prediction is that the candidates' strategic calculus will eliminate the prospect of campaign dialogue in the real world. The two ad experiments verify this result by demonstrating the penalties imposed on the candidate who attempts to dialogue. On average, an ad devoted to dialogue cost the candidate one-fifth of an average vote compared to the best possible response, at least among these respondents. Similarly, an ad devoted to inoculation, a dialogue-enhancing message creation strategy, typically cost the candidate one-sixth of a vote on average, relative to a dialogue-diminishing strategy. These penalties may be somewhat exaggerated due to the experimental context, but it is clear that candidates seeking to win an election would be acting against their self-interest by adopting either form of dialogue-enhancing strategy when creating their messages.

Returning to the 1994 California gubernatorial experiments in more detail illustrates this point. The experimental results allow us to reconstruct the options available to each candidate whenever he or she made a strategic decision in the message construction process. Thus, they allow a more thorough analysis of each candidate's strategic calculation, which, in turn, reveals the intuition behind the dialogue hypothesis. I will first explicate the candidate's reasoning in the case of crime, and then point out how the same logic carries over to all other dimensions. Figure 5.3 summarizes this illustration.

Insert Figure 5.3
About Here

Four different scenarios are necessary to capture the logic underlying the candidates' decisions with respect to crime. They are labeled "control," "crime," "dialogue," and "ignore." These scenarios correspond to experimental conditions for which we have a known result. Control, for example, postulates no message construction or dissemination. The subject population's partisanship is slightly skewed toward the Democratic party, much like the partisanship of California in 1994. As would be expected with this skew and normal party voting, Brown wins in the control or no exposure condition. Specifically, as the one ad experiment indicates, she wins by 12 percent. The other three conditions represent other scenarios. Treatment represents subjects exposed to only a Wilson crime ad. The

remaining scenarios are taken from the two-ad experiments. In “dialogue,” subjects see a Wilson crime ad and a Brown crime ad, while in “ignore,” subjects see a Wilson crime ad and a Brown economy ad.

In my reconstruction of the decisions that produce a campaign, I am temporarily assuming that the choices are ordered so that each candidate chooses between a particular set of scenarios in a particular sequence. Figure 5.3 presents one possible set of decisions predicated on the assumption that Wilson chooses or “moves” first. Note, I place no theoretical importance on the first-mover / second-mover distinction; however, assuming Wilson moves first serves to clarify the counterfactuals with respect to this illustration. As first mover, Wilson is faced with the choice of advertising or not advertising. As a practical matter, this choice is uninteresting, but in theory, at least, it represents Wilson’s choice of themes and his strategic calculations. Facing a loss of 12 percentage points, perhaps representing his low initial public standing, he will opt for a crime ad. Were the game to stop here, after the incumbent aired his crime message, as it does for many under-financed challengers, Wilson would win by 12 percentage points. The more theoretically interesting choice is Brown’s: she can dialogue by showing a crime ad or she can ignore by showing an ad on the economy. Here Brown is faced with a 12-point loss or a marginal (two-point) win. As an instrumentally rational actor, she should select the ignore response with the economy ad. Thus, in this particular branch of the tree, dialogue is a dominated strategy and it is only because of the Brown campaign’s misplaced strategic direction that we witnessed it in the real world. Therein lays Brown’s mistake and the “point in the road where the campaign went south.”

The undesirability of dialogue from the candidate’s perspective is reiterated in the rest of the experimental results. Figure 5.4 presents this reinterpretation of data from the two-ad experiment. No matter whom the initiating candidate and no matter what the issue, the dialogue response is always the least desirable for the opposing candidate. There are other interesting points highlighted by this arrangement of the data, most notably the unrealized success of education as an issue for Brown, but the main point is clear -- dialogue does not win.

Insert Figure 5.4
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Table 5.1. Dialogue Experiment: Strategic Combinations and Results

<u>Condition</u>	<u>1st Ad.</u>	<u>2nd Ad.</u>	<u>Mean Vote</u>	<u>N of Subjects</u>
Dialogue	Wilson Crime	Brown Crime	-.13	39
Ignore	Wilson Crime	Brown Economy	.0	36
Ignore	Wilson Crime	Brown Education	.02	52
Dialogue	Brown Economy	Wilson Economy	.26	19
Ignore	Brown Economy	Wilson Crime	.05	20
Ignore	Brown Economy	Wilson Immigration	-.05	18
Dialogue	Brown Education	Wilson Education	.09	22
Ignore	Brown Education	Wilson Crime	-.13	23
Ignore	Brown Education	Wilson Immigration	.09	23

Table 5.2. Dialogue Experiment: Strategies' Overall Effect on Vote

Dialogue	-.21** (.10)
Subject's Party	.57** (.06)
(Constant)	.14
N	156
Adj. R Square	38 %

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Dialogue dummy scored zero = absence of dialogue, one = dialogue present. Asterisks represent approximate significance levels: ** = $p < .05$.

Table 5.3. Inoculation Experiment: Strategic Combinations and Results

<u>Condition</u>	<u>1st Ad.</u>	<u>2nd Ad.</u>	<u>Mean Vote</u>	<u>N of Subjects</u>
Don't	Brown Education	Brown Education	.14	22
Inoculate	Brown Education	Brown Crime	.0	17
Don't	Brown Economy	Brown Economy	.36	22
Inoculate	Brown Economy	Brown Crime	.09	23
Don't	Wilson Crime	Wilson Crime	.0	36
Inoculate	Wilson Crime	Wilson Economy	.14	37
Don't	Wilson Immigration	Wilson Immigration	-.05	21
Inoculate	Wilson Immigration	Wilson Economy	.0	20

Table 5.4. Inoculation Experiment: Strategies' Overall Effect on Vote

Inoculate	-.16*
	(.09)
Subject's Party	.49***
	(.06)
(Constant)	.15
N	197
Adj. R Square	26.6%

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Asterisks represent approximate significance levels: *** = $p < .01$; ** = $p < .05$; * = $p < .1$.

Table 5.5: Survey Results: 1994 California Races

Date	<u>Gov. Vote</u>			Brown's Share	<u>Prop. 184 Vote</u>			Yes Share
	Wilson	Brown	Und.		Yes	No	Und.	
February 1-8, 1993	286	414	95	60%	-N/A -			
May 14-22, 1993	256	450	145	64%	-N/A -			
August 12-18, 1993	287	369	107	56%	-N/A -			
October 8-15, 1993	254	326	128	56%	-N/A -			
January 9-15, 1994	264	323	110	55%	585	65	47	90%
April 1-9, 1994	332	412	88	55%	318	74	24	81%
May 11-16, 1994	344	355	59	51%	-N/A -			
July 12-17, 1994	241	265	102	52%	200	73	39	73%
September 13-18, 1994	277	233	58	46%	351	139	84	72%
October 21-30, 1994	473	388	75	45%	650	284	89	70%

Table 5.6. Survey Results: Relationship of Prop. 184 and Gubernatorial Votes

Date	Prop. 184 Vote	Partisan ID	Constant	Adj. R-sq.	N
January 9-15, 1994	.05*	.41***	.07	.20	1007
April 1-9, 1994	.11***	.56***	.07	.29	1009
July 12-17, 1994	.13***	.49***	.03	.28	846
September 13-18, 1994	.19***	.40***	-.01	.23	854
October 21-30, 1994	.25***	.45***	-.02	.30	1403

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients from an equation that estimated respondents' gubernatorial vote from their partisan identification and their intended Proposition 184 vote. Asterisks represent approximate significance levels: *** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .1$

Figure 5.1. Dialogue Experiment: Sample of Two-Ad Design

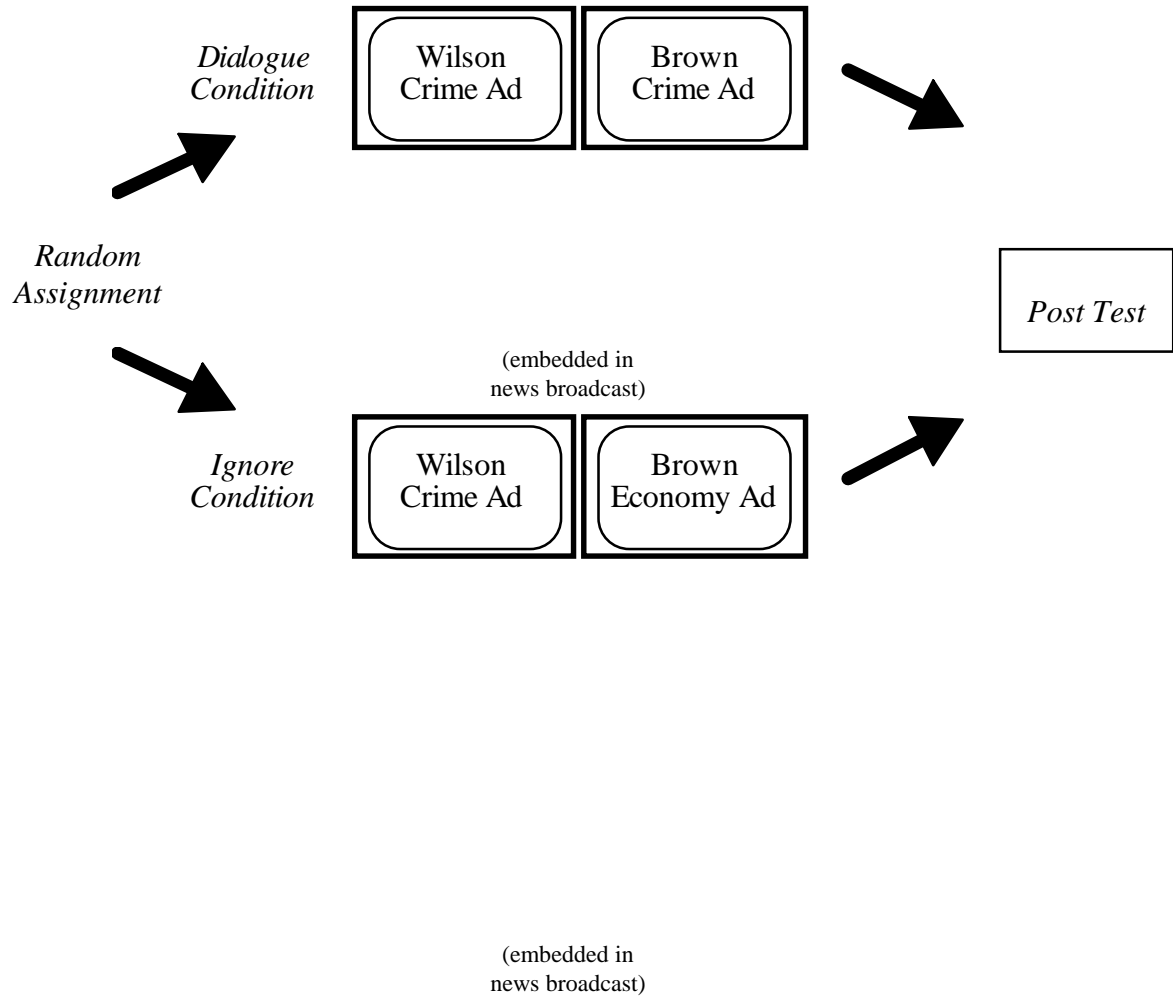


Figure 5.2. Survey Results: Brown's Vote Share vs. Weight of Crime Attitudes

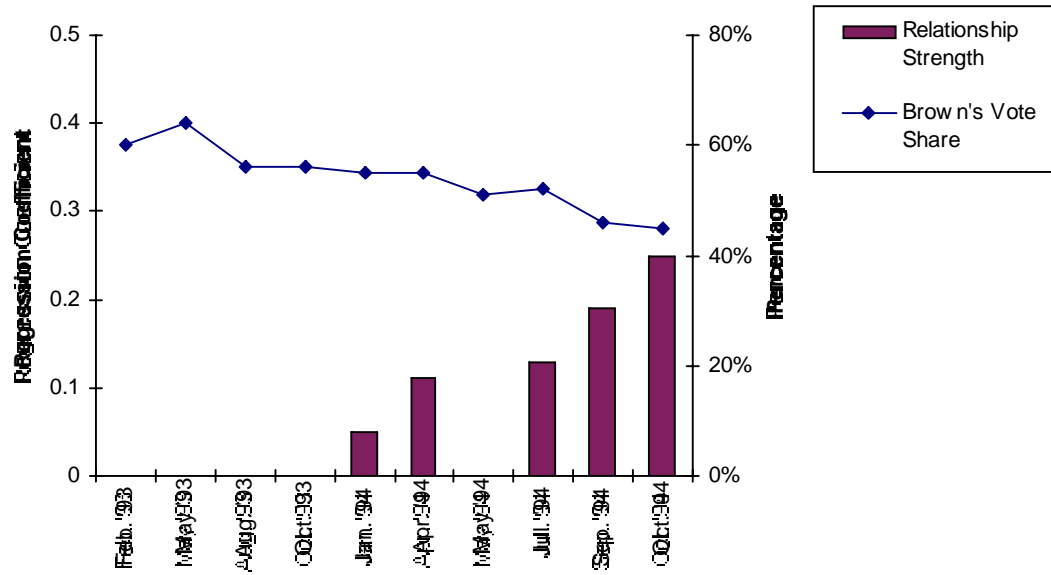


Figure 5.3. One Ad and Dialogue Experiment: Sample Decision Tree

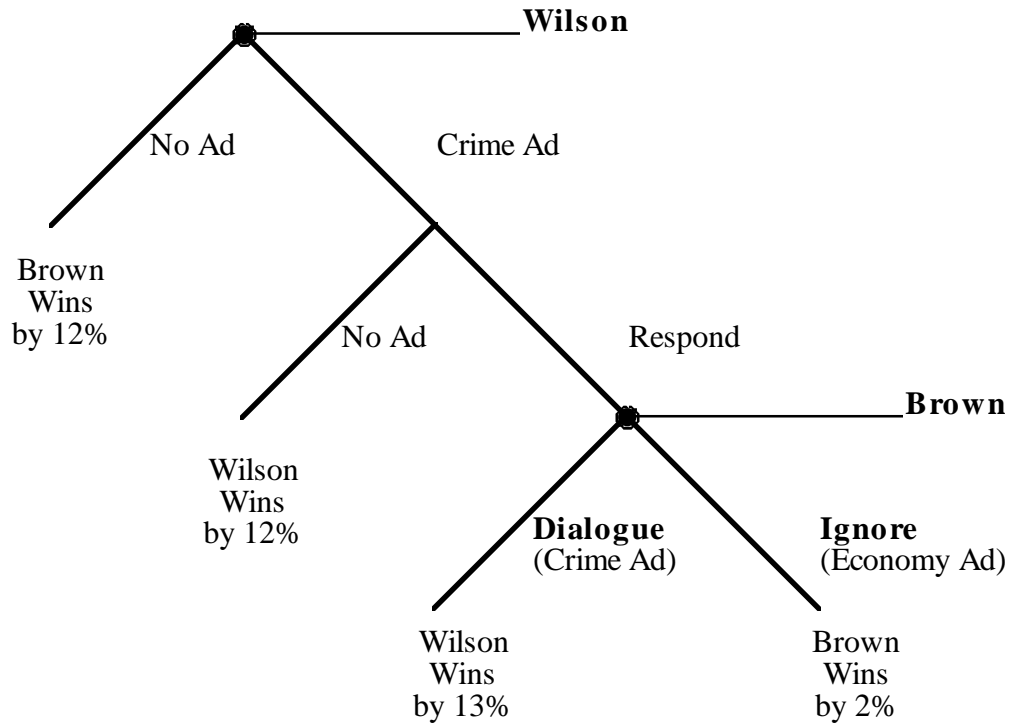


Figure 5.4. Dialogue Experiment: “Payoff” Matrix

(Underlined responses represent dialogue attempts).

		Initiating Candidate and Issue:		
		Wilson Crime	Brown Economy	Brown Education
Response: (Brown or Wilson)	Crime	<u>loses by 13%</u>	wins by 5%	wins by 13%
	Immigration		loses by 5%	loses by 9%
	Economy	wins by 2%	<u>loses by 26%</u>	
	Education	tie		<u>loses by 9%</u>

Note: Entries are electoral outcomes from the responding candidate’s perspective