

Mitt Romney or Cocoa Puffs:
*The Role of Political Advertising in the 2012 Republican
Presidential Primaries*

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ABSTRACT

The role of advertising in political campaigns evolves with every race and has the ability to shape the outcome for every candidate. This Capstone examines the history of political advertising in the United States through 2008 and provides an in-depth analysis of the campaign advertisements aired during the 2012 presidential primaries. As of May 2012, all signs point to Mitt Romney as the Republican nominee, but candidates such as Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and Ron Paul have shown strong results in some primaries, and have aired some noteworthy advertisements. This analysis focuses not on every advertisement aired throughout the campaign, but rather, on the most significant, creative and innovative advertisements. It looks at the most controversial ads, well-produced ads, and the differences between ads aired in different states. Further, it considers the impact of negative advertising on candidates as well as the negative ads focused on Romney now as he prepares to face President Obama in the general election in November. There are many wildcards within the process of determining the effect of an ad on a viewer; however, by examining the issues and tone within an ad, it is possible to learn more about a candidate's strategy and therefore, ability to win an election and the support of the American people. Further, this Capstone examines spending by super PACs and any resulting effect on primary victories. Using this data, connections are drawn between aired advertisements and actual primary results. As this Capstone is a supplement to the Political Advertising course, it includes four original campaign advertisement spots in addition to the research portion. The mock scripts are traditional thirty-second spots to be aired during a gubernatorial race in New Jersey. Additionally, this Capstone includes a blog created to publicize the Political Advertising students' reactions to a selection of 2012 Republican primary campaign advertisements. This website is meant to enhance the course experience as well as to offer a resource to outside parties interested in an analysis of this year's presidential primary race by American University students.

"The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process."

Adlai Stevenson, Presidential Candidate, 1956

Political advertising in the United States has become a billion-dollar industry, with the ability to shape election outcomes. It has played a role in campaigns for years, but has become more pronounced recently with the growing trend of Political Action Committees (PACs). PACs have been supersized, spending millions on attack ads; they have begun to wield a great influence upon the American public. Super PACs have played the biggest role yet in campaigns during the 2012 presidential primary, with more money being spent by the groups than ever before. The viciousness of the attack ads in this primary is unprecedented, and one can imagine it will only get worse with the coming of the general election. Super PACs can use their vast financial resources to entirely change the outcome of an election, and often uses lies and deceit in order to do so. The groups have made it easier for candidates to buy an election, and are dangerously close to controlling election results. In order to understand the potential of super PACs to shape an election today, however, it is first necessary to understand the evolution of political advertising in the United States.

The origins of political advertising in the United States are extensive. As far back as 1828, supporters of Andrew Jackson passed out handbills depicting John Quincy Adams as “driving off with a horsewhip a crippled old soldier who dared to speak to him, to ask an alms.”¹ Adams’ allies responded by attacking Jackson for “ordering other executions, massacring Indians, stabbing a Samuel Jackson in the back, murdering one soldier who disobeyed his commands, and hanging three

¹ West, Darrell M. *Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952-2008*. Washington, DC: CQ, 2010. 2. Print.

Indians.”² Early traces of political advertising, especially negatively charged ads, can be found this far back due to the customary act of marketing goods; at some point, it became clear that a candidate was essentially a good to be sold. Standard product advertising and political advertising are like night and day, but on some level, the basic principles are the same. From that moment in 1828, advertising in the political arena has grown exponentially. As one sees today, the industry has become a billion dollar one – a stark contrast to the days of scathingly written handbills passed out on the city streets.

The manner in which candidates are advertised has evolved over years of technological improvements and cultural changes. Handbills are certainly not the most common device used today to advocate for a campaign; in fact, handbills are nearly nonexistent. Radio became the most substantial communication medium of the early to mid-1900s. In 1930, nearly half of American homes had a radio, and that number rose to 80 percent by 1940.³ During this period, families truly prized their radios, often holding on to them as their only worldly possession during the Depression. They became household necessities, rather than a luxury that only the wealthy could afford in order to listen to jazz in the earlier part of the century.⁴

However, the radio did not have the same effect on the public as television one day would. Despite the accessibility to radio, the focus tended to be on candidates’ personal interaction with constituents. Though radio was commonly used and was the premiere form of communication at the time, it did not offer the

² op cit. West, Darrell M. 2.

³ Craig, Douglas B. *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000. 12. Print.

⁴ op cit. Craig, Douglas B. 14.

same impressionistic value that television was uniquely able to do. Despite his use of radio advertising, Harry S. Truman traveled 31,000 miles around the country, shaking over half a million hands. He gave speeches that reached more than six million people – in person.⁵ The intent of this trip was to publicize Truman's character, and to access as many Americans as possible in order to spread the word about his candidacy and personality. Truman's feat is shocking to Americans today, as the same trip would never occur in today's political arena. In Truman's view, a few radio ads could never have had the effect that a visual representation of the man himself could. Therefore, he traveled the country for weeks in order to put a face with the name. With television, this same feat would have been pointless. The airing of one introductory television advertisement could have a near similar, if not more profound, effect on the American public.⁶

The dawn of the television age shaped the entire political advertising industry as it is known today. Television became the medium of choice for candidates post-World War II. The 1952 election year became the first presidential race to utilize television advertisements, or "spots."⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower was the Republican candidate, facing Democrat Adlai Stevenson. The campaign was an interesting one, as incumbent Harry Truman had declined to run again. Stevenson was in a difficult position; Eisenhower was widely respected by the public, so criticism of Eisenhower could have backfired if Stevenson had criticized him

⁵ "1948: HARRY S. TRUMAN (D) vs. THOMAS E. DEWEY (R)." *The Times Looks Back: Presidential Elections 1896-1996*. The New York Times Learning Network, 2000. Web. 15 Apr. 2012. <<http://tv.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/elections/1948/index.html>>.

⁶ op cit. The Times Looks Back.

⁷ op cit. West, Darrell M. 2.

directly.⁸ Even the New York Times had endorsed the Republican candidate.⁹ On the other hand, Eisenhower had difficulty pinning the failures of the previous administration on Stevenson, because he had played no role in the Truman administration.¹⁰

The new ability to televise political ads coincided with the recent end of World War II. The first political spot to appear on television was "Eisenhower Answers America," the release of which is considered by many experts to be the most significant moment in political broadcasting history.¹¹ "Eisenhower Answers America" was a campaign of spots, spotlighting a multitude of average Americans asking questions of Ike. The ads typically showed a logo, featuring the text "Eisenhower Answers America." The next shot showed a person speaking alone, looking up and asking a question of Ike. Ike was then shown in the next shot looking down to answer the question:

American man: *"General, the Democrats are telling me I've never had it so good."*

Eisenhower: *"Can that be true when America is billions in debt? When prices have doubled, when taxes break our backs? And we are still fighting in Korea? It's tragic, and it's time for a change."*

⁸ "1952 Eisenhower v. Stevenson." *Kennesaw State University*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.kennesaw.edu/pols/3380/pres/1952.html>>.

⁹ op cit. *Kennesaw State University*.

¹⁰ op cit. *Kennesaw State University*.

¹¹ Wood, Stephen C. "Television's First Political Spot Ad Campaign: Eisenhower Answers America." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (2000): 265. Print.

The logo was then displayed across the screen once again.¹² This spot, “Never Had It So Good,” was one of many from this “Eisenhower Answers America” campaign. The total time of the spot, including the logo display, speech and second logo display, was only nineteen seconds. In the political advertising world today, this is a shockingly short spot, but it certainly got the point across. The majority of Stevenson’s ads were over one minute each, whereas the majority of Eisenhower’s ads were under 20 seconds.¹³ Eisenhower’s spots were quite simple, revealing his personality, in addition to the answers to the questions. Stevenson refused to appear in his own ads; his campaign manager criticized the Eisenhower team for trying to sell Ike “in the same manner as soap, ammoniated toothpaste, hair tonic, or bubble gum.”¹⁴ The ability to display a candidate’s character was a huge advantage of the popularization of television – at least for those candidates who weren’t camera shy. Eisenhower defeated Stevenson by a landslide, introducing a new political era where advertising reigned strong.¹⁵

With the arrival of the 1960s came the emergence of a new political tool that would forever change the political world: negative advertising. The 1964 presidential campaign of Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater is well known today

¹² “1952 Eisenhower v. Stevenson: “Never Had It So Good”” *The Living Room Candidate*. Museum of the Moving Image. Web. 15 Apr. 2012.

<<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1952/never-had-it-so-good>>.

¹³ “1952 Eisenhower v. Stevenson” *The Living Room Candidate*. Museum of the Moving Image. Web. 15 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1952/never-had-it-so-good>>.

¹⁴ op cit. “Never Had It So Good.”

¹⁵ op cit. Kennesaw State University.

for introducing the first television attack ad.¹⁶ This ad is arguably the most famous political advertisement, and perhaps any advertisement, that there ever was. "Daisy" ran just *once* as a paid advertisement on September 7, 1964, while NBC was broadcasting 'Monday Night at the Movies.'¹⁷ A one-minute spot, "Daisy" depicted a young girl counting the petals off of a flower, reminiscent of the "he loves me, he loves me not" game. As she counts, adorably incorrectly, an announcer begins to countdown to a massive nuclear explosion. The strong, impassioned announcement at the end of the spot serves as a dire warning to all American voters:

President Johnson: *"These are the stakes. To make a world in which all of God's children can live. Or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die."*

Announcer: *"Vote for President Johnson on November 3. The stakes are too high for you to stay home."*¹⁸

The juxtaposition of the two images was shocking, terrifying and unprecedented, which explains the great controversy that emerged as a reaction to its one showing. The protest was so pronounced that the ad was never replayed as a paid spot.¹⁹ Not only was the image of an innocent little girl in the presence of a nuclear explosion alarming, but it was also the first negative advertisement to appear in a presidential campaign, which was shocking in itself.

¹⁶ Cone, Steve. "The Big Bang of Attack Ads." *The Huffington Post*. 19 June 2008. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-cone/thermo-nuclear-politics_b_108058.html>.

¹⁷ op cit. West, Darrell M. 82.

¹⁸ "1964 Johnson vs. Goldwater: "Peace Little Girl (Daisy)"" *The Living Room Candidate*. Museum of the Moving Image. Web. 15 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1964>>.

¹⁹ op cit. West, Darrell M. 82.

“Daisy” was created by Doyle Dane Bernbach, an advertising agency known for its groundbreaking approach to ad creation; the agency is legendary in the advertising world for creating a unique environment where copywriters and art directors joined forces.²⁰ Though the ad was highly controversial when it aired, it is the perfect example of the use of earned media – a process in which advantageous publicity occurs without the use of paid advertising. For example, “Daisy” was replayed in its entirety by the major nightly news shows, magnifying its impact on the American public. Today, many controversial or shocking political ads are replayed on news networks, posted on blogs and spread virally through social media networks. Often, creatives design controversial ads exactly for this purpose – to reach a wider audience for free.²¹ The controversy worked in Johnson’s favor in 1964; Johnson was victorious over Goldwater after painting him as an extremist. Even the Republican National Committee noted: “This ad implied that Senator Goldwater is a reckless man and Lyndon Johnson is a careful man.”²² The 1964 presidential campaign was as significant in political advertising history as the 1952 election, but for a different reason. With the 1952 campaign, political advertising was born, but with the 1964 campaign – attack ads, a crux of the modern campaign, became a norm.

²⁰ Bayers, Chip. “Bill Bernbach: Creative Revolutionary.” *Ad Week*. 8 Aug. 2011. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/bill-bernbach-creative-revolutionary-133901>>.

²¹ Mark, David. *Going Dirty: The Art of Negative Campaigning*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. 47. Print.

²² op cit. “Peace Little Girl (Daisy).”

The emergence of significant advertisements greatly depended on the political climate leading up to the campaign. In the 1980s, when stagflation emerged as a crowning issue of the decade, campaign advertisements took on themes focusing on the economy.²³ In 1984, another of the most famous ads to have been broadcast in the United States was introduced. “Prouder, Stronger, Better,” better known as “Morning in America,” was a positive ad created by the Reagan campaign. It had no negative undertones, and was purely inspirational and motivating for Americans recovering from the economic downturn. The economy was gaining strength, jobs were returning, oil prices were low, and interest rates were high.²⁴ The national debt was not a major concern. America was feeling hopeful again. “Morning in America” portrayed beautiful images of the American landscape, city skylines, and Americans going to work, getting married, and buying homes. It listed encouraging statistics about interest rates, inflation and the general economic recovery. The hopeful tone continued to conclude the spot with one of the most powerful lines in political advertising history:

Announcer: *“It’s morning again in America, and, under the leadership of President Reagan, our country is prouder, and stronger, and better. Why would we ever want to return to where we were, less than four short years ago?”*²⁵

Reagan’s “Morning in America” ad is famous today for combining Reagan’s legendary optimism with examples of real economic strength. It gave the message

²³ op cit. West, Darrell M. 3.

²⁴ “1984 Reagan vs. Mondale: “Prouder, Stronger, Better”” *The Living Room Candidate*. Museum of the Moving Image. Web. 19 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1984>>.

²⁵ op cit. “Prouder, Stronger, Better.”

that America was in its prime, fully recovered from the struggles of years past. Reagan's opponent, Walter Mondale, didn't help matters in his campaign against the popular incumbent by announcing that he planned to raise taxes in his acceptance speech for the candidacy.²⁶ Mondale lost by the largest percentage of any presidential candidate since 1936, and "Morning in America" made history as one of the best political advertisements ever created.²⁷

The 1988 presidential campaign is infamous for the intensity of its attack ads. Democratic Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis was running against then vice president George H.W. Bush, and was doing well in the polls, especially among women, the elderly, African-Americans, and conservative-leaning Democrats.²⁸ In the summer preceding the election, Dukakis was clocking in at 17-percentage-points over Bush.²⁹ Republicans began to worry, and came out with the infamous 'Willie Horton' strategy that eventually took down the Dukakis campaign. During the summer, the GOP tested fresh advertising materials on a group of conservative-leaning Democrats.³⁰ This material involved Willie Horton, an African-American man serving a life sentence for murder without parole in Massachusetts. The state had introduced a weekend furlough program, and Horton was granted prison leave from which he never returned. Instead, he brutally raped a white woman, and committed armed robbery and assault. The Republicans used shocking and graphic coverage of Horton to anger and instill fear in the public, and in turn, place the

²⁶ op cit. "Prouder, Stronger, Better."

²⁷ op cit. "Prouder, Stronger, Better."

²⁸ op cit. West, Darrell M. 3.

²⁹ op cit. West, Darrell M. 3.

³⁰ op cit. West, Darrell M. 3.

blame upon Dukakis, who was governor of Massachusetts at the time this furlough program was introduced.³¹

The testing of the material focused on Reagan Democrats – in other words, swing voters that had the power to overturn the election. Bush aide Lee Atwater noted at one point, “By the time this election is over, Willie Horton will be a household name.”³² An independent group ran attack ads throughout the summer on the topic of Willie Horton, openly blaming Dukakis for instating a system of weekend passes for convicted murderers. The attack painted the Massachusetts governor as weak on law and order and violent crime – a very important public concern.³³ Infamous political strategist and ad creator Larry McCarthy, rather than the official Bush campaign, was responsible for the airing the ads through a super Political Action Committee (PAC); therefore, Bush was able to deny his involvement.³⁴ However, Bush frequently mentioned Horton during his months on the campaign trail and certainly embraced the negative image of Dukakis that resulted from the ads.³⁵ Bush easily won the election 53 percent to Dukakis’ 46 percent.

The 1992 election yielded vastly different results for Bush. He has been criticized for using too many attack ads throughout the 1992 campaign. The high

³¹ Farhi, Paul. "Two Political Ads Share More Than Fame and Controversy." *The Washington Post*. 7 Sept. 2004. Web. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A1151-2004Sep6.html>>.

³² op cit. West, Darrell M. 3.

³³ op cit. Mark, David. 200.

³⁴ Blumenthal, Paul. "Super PAC Ad Men Have Long History of Republican Attack Politics." *The Huffington Post*. 08 Mar. 2012. Web. 30 Apr. 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/08/super-pac-ads-mitt-romney-rick-santorum_n_1314880.html>.

³⁵ op cit. Farhi, Paul.

number of ruthless attack ads, paired with the unusual circumstance that his opponent was excellent at rebutting the ads, is partly responsible for the incumbent president's downward spiral. Bush received a large amount of criticism in response to his sharp personal attacks against Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, which including attacks on his personality and record as the governor of Arkansas.³⁶

In addition, for the first time since 1912, a third-party candidate performed significantly well in the election. Reform Party candidate Ross Perot utilized 30-second infomercial spots that drew positive feedback from the public.³⁷ His ads focused almost exclusively on deficit reduction, following the 1992 theme of focusing on economic issues. The ads were simple and factual, but contained threatening messages about the future for American children under the current national debt. Often, they featured him sitting at a desk, speaking in a heartfelt, confident fashion to the public.³⁸ Another successful aspect of Perot's candidacy was likely due to his run on his 'Washington outsider' persona. Perot's straightforward approach to the campaign is summed up well in a speech that was later replayed as an ad:

Ross Perot: *"To the American people... to the American people, I'm doing this because I love you. That's it."*³⁹

³⁶ op cit. West, Darrell M. 4.

³⁷ op cit. West, Darrell M. 3.

³⁸ "1992 Clinton vs. Bush vs. Perot." *The Living Room Candidate*. Museum of the Moving Image. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1992>>.

³⁹ "1992 Clinton vs. Bush vs. Perot: "Best Person Independent"" *The Living Room Candidate*. Museum of the Moving Image. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1992>>.

Clinton eventually dominated Bush and Perot, beating Bush 43 percent to 38 percent. Perot clocked in with an impressive 19 percent, the highest showing from a third-party candidate since the 1912 candidacy of Teddy Roosevelt.⁴⁰

The 2000 George W. Bush and Al Gore campaigns turned into the closest election in recent history. The race focused heavily on domestic issues, such as Medicare, Social Security, economic issues and education.⁴¹ Advertisements, however, were not overly brutal on opponents, and 2000 made for an interesting election year because there was no incumbent president in the race. One political advertisement from the 2000 campaign is remembered today as a significant moment in political advertising history. George W. Bush's "RATS" ad was the first campaign advertisement to use subliminal messaging.⁴² Text at the end of the ad read "BUREAUCRATS," but if closely watched, the word "RATS" is prominent at the part of the ad that criticizes Gore. "R-A-T-S" is visible for just one-thirtieth of a second – which led Democrats to accuse the Bush campaign of attempting to subconsciously influence voters. In response, Bush denied that his campaign had any intent to subliminally influence voters. The ad aired 4400 times in 33 cities nationwide, at a total cost of \$2.5 million; however, "RATS" was pulled from the air after a storm of criticism ensued.⁴³ The use of subliminal messaging had never been seen before in political advertising in the United States, so it is not surprising that it became so controversial. Bush went on to claim the presidency, but the winner of

⁴⁰ op cit. "1992 Clinton vs. Bush vs. Perot."

⁴¹ op cit. West, Darrell M. 4.

⁴² op cit. West, Darrell M. 4.

⁴³ "Bush Defends "Rats" Ad." *Online NewsHour*. PBS, 12 Sept. 2000. Web. 20 Apr. 2012.
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/media/media_watch/rats_9-12.html>.

the race had to be decided by the Supreme Court over a month after the election as it was simply too close to call. Bush eventually became the victor by just 537 votes.⁴⁴

"You've got to look at it and say, my Lord, it was just Obama's time. You know, his stars aligned right."⁴⁵

Fred Davis, Chief McCain Ad Maker

Eight years later, unpopular President George W. Bush had finished his second term and was leaving office with poor performance in the polls. Republicans and Democrats alike began the quest to find the perfect presidential nominee – the seat was open, and the primary races were heated from the start.

Neither Illinois Senator Barack Obama nor Arizona Senator John McCain struggled to find juicy tidbits about the other to include in a negative ad. Obama tended to focus on McCain's similarities to the greatly unpopular President Bush, and successfully linked the candidate to Bush's "third term" in office.⁴⁶ This chief strategy was quite effective with the American people, who were struggling as the recession began to hit and were more than ready for a change from the failed policies of the Bush Administration. Bush even confessed, after Obama's election, "I'm sure some people voted for Barack Obama because of me."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "2000 Bush vs. Gore: "Priority MD RNC"" *The Living Room Candidate*. Museum of the Moving Image. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/2000>>.

⁴⁵ op cit. Mark, David. 253.

⁴⁶ op cit. Mark, David. 254.

⁴⁷ op cit. Mark, David. 254.

Despite the prevalence of negative advertising against Obama, which readily called the eventual nominee a plethora of names including “an elitist, a radical, a socialist, a Marxist, a Muslim, a non-citizen, a non-American, and a celebrity,”⁴⁸ both the Clinton and McCain campaigns missed an opportunity to attack Obama on his association with the controversial Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Wright was Obama’s pastor, who had made many provocative remarks about many topics, including white racism. Clinton attempted to attack Obama on this during the primary season, but her ads ran too late; however, some say if Clinton had attacked Obama earlier in the race, her criticisms could have been more effective.⁴⁹ McCain himself made a decision not to attack Obama on the topic of Jeremiah Wright; the name was essentially banned from McCain campaign headquarters, despite the fact that this greatly angered McCain’s advisors.⁵⁰

The McCain campaign faced more negative advertising once Sarah Palin had been chosen as the vice presidential nominee. Palin became a joke of the nation when the Obama campaign gleefully highlighted her lack of knowledge of foreign and domestic issues.⁵¹ After she made a number of high profile, controversial comments (such as accusing Obama of “palling around with terrorists”)⁵², the Obama campaign had ammunition stacked against McCain.

The topic that eventually won Obama the election was that of the economy. In 2008, the recession had begun and Americans were most worried about the

⁴⁸ op cit. Mark, David. 253.

⁴⁹ op cit. Mark, David. 255.

⁵⁰ op cit. Mark, David. 257.

⁵¹ op cit. Mark, David. 261.

⁵² op cit. Mark, David. 262.

economic situation. The Obama campaign took advantage of McCain's inexperience with economic issues, and repeatedly blasted McCain for a statement he once made: "I'm going to be honest: I know a lot less about economics than I do about military and foreign policy issues. I still need to be educated."⁵³ In an era where the economy was the key issue, negative advertising proving that a candidate had no economic experience turned out to be the key to taking the election. Obama won the 2008 election by proactively, yet selectively, running negative advertisements against his opponent. His victory was also a possible repercussion of the mistakes made by the Clinton and McCain campaigns in not running certain inflammatory ads against him.

The 2012 Republican presidential primary is not over, but it has been one of the most heated battles in primary history. One of the biggest issues in U.S. elections is campaign spending today, and this primary is no exception. The massive amount of super PAC donations and donations from corporations after the Citizens United Supreme Court decision has made campaigns a billion-dollar industry. The question remains the same in every election: can large donations buy power? In the previously mentioned case of Barack Obama's victory in 2008, this wasn't so. First, super PAC ads made up only 3 percent of political ads aired in 2008. In January 2012, this number was at a whopping 44 percent.⁵⁴ This is partially attributable to the legalization of such practices since the Citizens United decision, which

⁵³ op cit. Mark, David. 262.

⁵⁴ Overby, Peter. "Study: SuperPACs Behind Nearly Half Of 2012 Ads." *NPR*. 30 Jan. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.npr.org/2012/01/30/146099697/how-did-superpacs-spend-their-money>>.

unregulated much political spending by corporations; in the 2010 midterm elections after the Court's ruling, political advertising spending hit new highs.⁵⁵

Though Obama did eventually raise the most funds for his campaign, the majority of his donations came from grassroots supporters, in amounts of \$1-\$100 dollars. Studies show the job titles of many supporters stood out as students, artists, unemployed, or self-employed.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the majority of John McCain's funds came from the \$500-\$1000 donation bracket.⁵⁷ There is no way to quantitatively measure the direct impact on voters of a dollar given to a campaign. The important issue to remember is that there are numerous political factors that go into the determination of where campaign donations go, who they are given to, what they are used for, et cetera. Fundraising has been the largest issue in the 2012 Republican presidential primary. Candidates have been slowly weeded out, depleting their funds in their strong efforts to kill rival campaigns.

Mitt Romney, the current frontrunner, has struggled with an image of being out of touch with the average American due to his wealth. In fact, an analysis of past presidents' wealth finds that were he to be elected, Romney would be the fourth richest president in history – behind George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John F. Kennedy.⁵⁸ Romney's wealth is estimated between 200 and 500 million

⁵⁵ op cit. Overby, Peter.

⁵⁶ "2008 Presidential Candidate Donations: McCain vs. Obama." *Pitch Interactive*. 3 Nov. 2008. Web. 15 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.pitchinteractive.com/election2008/>>.

⁵⁷ op cit. Pitch Interactive.

⁵⁸ Rapoport, Abby. "Just How Does Mitt Romney's Wealth Stack Up?" *The American Prospect*. 24 Jan. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://prospect.org/article/just-how-does-mitt-romneys-wealth-stack>>.

dollars – vast resources for funding a campaign, but also easily criticized by the average American.⁵⁹

Rick Santorum, arguably Romney's closest competitor before dropping out of the race in April, made approximately 3.6 million dollars after leaving the Senate in 2006. At that time, he was working as a consultant and a media commentator. Though his wealth does put him in a tax bracket along with many upper middle-class Americans, he is nowhere near Mitt Romney's status as a member of the infamous '1 percent'.⁶⁰ The reality is that in order to run a successful campaign, a candidate needs abundant resources. In today's times, it would be rare to see a candidate with a low- or middle-class income attempting to take on wealthier and politically experienced challengers.

The analysis of a political advertisement is a very complicated one. One must consider dozens of artistic and visual components, as well as the political climate. Like an advertisement for a laundry detergent or breakfast cereal, every font size and color must be excruciatingly calculated to determine the best outcome. However, political advertisements by nature do not have access to the resources that Clorox may have to run a commercial for its new bleach product. Generally, political ads must rely on fundraising in order to be played on television during primetime hours. Ad quality often differs within the political and commercial arenas, due to the time of preparation allowed. Political campaigns often prepare

⁵⁹ op cit. Rapoport, Abby.

⁶⁰ Braun, Stephen. "Rick Santorum's Tax Returns: Republican Candidate's Wealth Surged After Leaving Office." *The Huffington Post*. 16 Feb. 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/16/rick-santorum-tax-returns_n_1282736.html>.

ads quickly, in response to a scandal or new issue that has come to light. In the primaries, ads often focus on one state, and must be adjusted accordingly as they are played elsewhere. An ad focused on agricultural subsidies may work effectively in a small town in Iowa, but will not appeal to many voters in New York City. Campaigns must prepare ads quickly and efficiently, all within a strict budget. Visual quality often suffers. Therefore, the components that truly affect the outcome of a political race are the effectiveness of the messaging on the specifically calculated group of viewers, the themeline, the emotions, and so on.

At this point in the campaign, all signs point to Mitt Romney as the Republican presidential nominee. However, candidates such as Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and Ron Paul have shown strong results in some primaries, and have aired some noteworthy advertisements. This analysis focuses not on every advertisement aired throughout the campaign, but rather, on the most significant, creative and innovative advertisements. It looks at the most controversial ads, well-produced ads, and the differences between ads aired in different states. Further, it considers the impact of negative advertising on candidates as well as the negative ads focused on Romney now as he prepares to face President Obama in the general election in November. There are many wildcards within the process of determining the effect of an ad on a viewer; however, by examining the issues and tone within an ad, it is possible to learn more about a candidate's strategy and therefore, ability to win an election and the support of the American people.

Newt Gingrich Gets The Ball Rolling

Airing of 2012 campaign advertisements is traceable to as far back as May 2011, when super PACs started airing ads against the Republican candidates. “New Century. New Contract” emerged in September 2011, after Newt Gingrich had announced his candidacy for the presidency. The 30-second ad is unique due to its exclusion of any negativity. Even Gingrich himself is missing from the spot. The ad displays a simple gray/white background, a navy blue “NEW” logo, and a variety of red words that change quickly as the ad moves. The words read:

*“Ideas. Solutions. Leadership. Jobs. Prosperity. Start. Outlook. Voices. Ideas. Chances. Perspective. Future. Options. Day. Hope. Thinking.”*⁶¹

The final word, “thinking,” fades out to leave “NEWT” on the screen. The design is quite minimalist, leaving the viewer to truly consider the meaning of the words playing across the screen. In addition, the “New Contract” is a reference to the conservative Contract with America, a document created by the Republican Party in 1994. Gingrich was an original collaborator on the document. The Contract with America was a way to unite the Republican base before the midterm elections; it essentially brought Republican voters on board with a number of policy actions that GOP candidates pledged to take on if elected. The Contract was introduced six weeks before the midterm elections and nearly 99 percent of the GOP Representatives signed on; it was based on Reagan’s 1985 State of the Union address and featured some prominent conservative policy ideas, such as cutting big

⁶¹ “New Century. New Contract.” *YouTube*. 28 Sept. 2011. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaqtFhWIDvY>>.

government and taxes, and reforming welfare and social security.⁶² “New Century. New Contract” was directly advancing the “Contract with America” agenda, which Gingrich hoped would be successful once again. The ad was not aired for a specific primary as it was introduced in September 2011; however, Gingrich introduced his detailed “New Contract” in Iowa that following week, courting the state’s primary voters months before the important election would occur.⁶³

The Iowa Caucus

The Iowa caucus is arguably one of the most significant primaries in terms of the national attention it receives from the media during presidential election years. Winning the Iowa caucus doesn’t necessarily predict which candidate will win the election; for example, Rick Santorum and Mitt Romney came in at a virtual tie in 2012, with Santorum clinching the race by approximately 30 votes.⁶⁴ Santorum has since dropped out of the race. However, candidates focus much of their attention on the Iowa race due to the beneficial media attention they will receive if voters determine they could be a strong contender in the race.

An unusual phenomenon occurred in Iowa this year, with no candidates

⁶² "Republican Contract with America." *U.S. House of Representatives*. Web. 19 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.house.gov/house/Contract/CONTRACT.html>>.

⁶³ Jacobs, Jennifer. "Newt Gingrich Releases 21st Century Contract with America." *2012 Iowa Caucuses*. Des Moines Register, 28 Sept. 2011. Web. 21 Apr. 2012.
<<http://caucuses.desmoinesregister.com/2011/09/28/register-exclusive-newt-gingrich-releases-21st-century-contract-with-america/>>.

⁶⁴ "GOP Caucus Results." *Iowa Caucuses*. Des Moines Register, 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012.
<<http://caucuses.desmoinesregister.com/data/iowa-caucus/results/>>.

running any negative advertisements against Mitt Romney.⁶⁵ Instead, the candidates (Rick Perry, Ron Paul, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum and Michele Bachmann) ran negative ads against one another. Perry spent the most money on television ads in Iowa, totaling over \$4.5 million of his own campaign funds. Super PACs supporting Perry spent an additional \$1.5 million. Romney spent the closest to Perry, but the majority of his advertising funds came from super PACs spending close to \$2.7 million. Spending by Perry and Romney was followed by Paul, Gingrich, Santorum and Bachmann, in that order. Paul and Bachmann received no monetary support from super PACs in the Iowa caucus. This spending information is fascinating to consider in relation to election results. The data,⁶⁶ which was put together by a Republican media-buying firm, shows that positive television advertising had little effect on primary results, despite the vast amounts of money spent for that purpose. Rick Santorum's triumph over Mitt Romney proves this fact, as Santorum spent only \$21,980 compared to Romney's \$1.5 million. However, negative advertising has been found to be effective; the data found that negative television advertising in the 2012 Iowa caucus did significant damage to Rick Perry and Newt Gingrich's candidacies. Had any candidate decided to attack Romney, results in Iowa may have been different, and many commentators have noted this after the fact.⁶⁷

Ever since the Tea Party movement came into existence, it has become a necessity for successful Republican candidates to appeal to the far right Republican

⁶⁵ "How Much Did The Republicans Waste On Television Ads In Iowa?" *BuzzFeed*. 3 Jan. 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeedpolitics/buzzfeed-exclusive-how-much-did-the-republicans-w>>.

⁶⁶ op cit. BuzzFeed.

⁶⁷ op cit. BuzzFeed.

base. Romney has found this challenging, and many of Romney's critics note his relatively liberal background as former governor of Massachusetts, a Democratic-leaning state on the East Coast. The Tea Party, a conservative movement, tends to support the most conservative Republican candidates, and Romney has not been embraced by the Tea Party as of yet. The Tea Party movement was effective in returning Republicans to leadership during the 2010 midterm elections and because of this, Republican presidential candidates are striving to be endorsed by significant players in the movement during this election year. It is for this reason that some of the released Republican ads have been so controversial to the general public this election cycle. This race has proven to be a battle between Romney and the other more conservative candidates, like Santorum and Perry.

Rick Perry's "Strong" Campaign

Rick Perry proved his attempt at winning over conservative Iowans by releasing the most controversial advertisement of the election season so far. In early December, Perry geared up for the Iowa race by airing "Strong," a 30-second spot with major religious undertones.⁶⁸ The visuals feature Perry, standing with a forest in the background, wearing a stereotypically Western outfit – a denim shirt and tan jacket with a prominent belt buckle. He is alone, and speaks his message directly into the camera:

Perry: *I'm not ashamed to admit that I'm a Christian, but you don't need to be in the*

⁶⁸ "Strong." *YouTube*. 6 Dec. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=0PAJNntoRgA>>.

pew every Sunday to know there's something wrong in this country when gays can serve openly in the military but our kids can't openly celebrate Christmas or pray in school.

After this speech, he concludes with remarks about the strength of faith in the success of the United States. His logo appears and the video ends. This spot received a strong backlash, to the point that Perry's team disabled the comments section of his YouTube site playing the ad. The criticism, from both Republicans and Democrats alike, was largely focused on his incendiary comments that many considered to be homophobic or anti-gay.⁶⁹ However, Obama's repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell was quite controversial, and Perry's hope was to appeal to the ultraconservative voters and Tea Party base within Iowa.

"Strong" was not the only ad that Perry released in preparation for the Iowa caucus. On January 3, the day of the Iowa caucus, Rick Perry released what continues to be known as one of the best-produced positive campaign advertisements in this race. "America is Calling"⁷⁰ was an appeal specifically aimed toward Iowans, and the long one minute and twenty-six second spot featured images of Iowan churches, fields, and homes. The ad is reminiscent of a trailer for a feature film, with dramatic music and text. It is well-produced, which sets it apart from other political ads that tend to be put together quickly in preparation for a

⁶⁹ Gibson, Megan. "Rick Perry's Strong Campaign Ad Gets the Web Angry - and Laughing." *TIME*. 9 Dec. 2011. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <<http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/12/09/rick-perrys-strong-campaign-ad-gets-the-web-angry-and-laughing/>>.

⁷⁰ "America Is Calling." *YouTube*. 3 Jan. 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=4IBUNh0llpY#!>.

primary or in response to a criticism or scandal that has occurred. “America is Calling,” like “Strong,” has strong religious undertones. Images within the spot feature a steeple with a cross, Perry speaking at a church, and Perry kneeling as if he were praying. This understated yet prominent religious imagery is included in order to appeal to conservative Christian voters in primary states typically in the Midwestern and Southern regions of the U.S. It is also ripe with patriotism, with a red, white and blue color scheme, twelve shots containing American flags or flag imagery and one shot displaying the Statue of Liberty. Perry himself narrates the spot, with an inspirational urge to voters to support him rain or shine in the Iowa caucus that day:

Perry: *“This is your country. And your country’s calling. You go Tuesday, and you caucus for me, and you have my back no matter what the weather is or how far you gotta go. You have my back on the third of January and I will have your back in Washington, D.C. for the next 4 years. God bless ya.”*

Text appears across the screen at the end of the spot: “Today is your calling, Iowa.” The final shot features the Perry campaign logo along with the words “Vote Today.”⁷¹

“Strong” was introduced in early December, and many ads aired after its original showing, so the true effect of the controversial ad on primary results is unknown. “America is Calling” was aired on television in Iowa on the day of the Iowa caucus, January 3. However, Perry received just 10.3 percent of the Iowa vote,

⁷¹ op cit. “America is Calling.”

behind Santorum, Romney, Paul and Gingrich.⁷² As previously mentioned, data from a Republican media-buying firm showed that negative ads against Perry hurt him drastically in the Iowa primary.⁷³ Further, positive ads did little to help any of the candidates. Therefore, despite Perry's impressive "America is Calling" and more controversial "Strong" ad, his performance in the Iowa caucuses was subpar.

Rick Santorum Rebels

One early ad that ran in mid-January became famous because of its brutal attack on Mitt Romney. Rick Santorum's "Rebellion" ad⁷⁴ started in black and white, with 'establishment' followers walking in zombie-like formation. They walked through a prison-like structure while images of Mitt Romney flashed above them. The Santorum campaign accused Romney of supporting the Wall Street bailout and funding abortions. As the 'zombies' walk through the prison, they eventually fall off of a cliff; they are 'led blindly' by Romney and the moderate Republican establishment. Many compared "Rebellion" to the "1984" ad that Apple aired years ago, as the theme and tone of the ad were essentially the same.⁷⁵ The ad portrayed

⁷² op cit. "GOP Caucus Results."

⁷³ op cit. BuzzFeed.

⁷⁴ "Santorum Calls for a Rebellion Against the Establishment's Moderate Candidate." *Rick Santorum for President*. 18 Jan. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.ricksantorum.com/pressrelease/santorum-calls-rebellion-against-establishments-moderate-candidate>>.

⁷⁵ Burns, Alexander. "Santorum's '1984' Video." *Politico*. 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 21 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/2012/01/santorums-video-111407.html>>.

Santorum as the savior for the followers of the Republican party, a true conservative alternative to the liberal Romney.⁷⁶ The announcer noted:

Announcer: *"We should simply forget that Mitt Romney once bragged he's even more liberal on social issues than Ted Kennedy.*

In fact, we should simply follow them blindly...just like we did last time...over a cliff.

Not again."

"Rebellion" was one of the early ads that really began to paint Romney as the liberal, out of touch candidate. Santorum's place in the race was the true conservative alternative to Romney, a clear frontrunner. It was emotional, and played to the Tea Party base that Santorum was trying to appeal to in early January. The ad was posted on Santorum's campaign website, as the spot was nearly two minutes long – much longer than an average television spot of 30 seconds. It did receive some media attention, and considering there was no fee for television airing, it was cost-effective.

Florida: "Blood Money" and "Credits"

On January 27, super PAC Winning Our Future released an ad entitled "Blood Money" which unapologetically and forcefully attacked Mitt Romney. Winning Our Future is an established super PAC that supports the candidacy of Newt Gingrich.⁷⁷ Like Perry's "America is Calling," "Blood Money" was set up similarly to a trailer for

⁷⁶ op cit. Rick Santorum for President.

⁷⁷ Sands, Geneva. "Gingrich Super-PAC Slams Romney over Medicare 'blood Money'" *The Hill*. 27 Jan. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://thehill.com/video/campaign/207075-gingrich-super-pac-slams-romney-over-medicare-blood-money->>.

a feature film. The ad was released just four days before the heavily competitive Florida primary. It never mentioned Gingrich, but rather brutally attacked Romney, painting him as liberal, elite and corrupt.⁷⁸ At the outset of the one-minute spot, ominous and fast-paced music plays as uppercase text flashes on the screen along with relevant still shots:

"The Contradictions. The Tax Returns. The Cayman Islands. The Obamacare Inventor. The \$100 Million IRA. The Exclusive Tax Rate. The Swiss Bank. The Serial Flip Flopper. The Progressive. The Questionable Business Background. Questionable Conservative."

Through the use of these multiple phrases, "Blood Money" linked Romney to the plethora of criticisms that have already been slung at him in this race to the presidency. New York Magazine wrote that "Blood Money" took the "smear-covered cake."⁷⁹ The flashing text occurred for the first thirty seconds, and the second thirty seconds attacked Romney's record on Medicare and his links to Medicare fraud through a company that he was previously involved in. Winning Our Future intended for this ad to impact Romney's performance in the Florida primary on January 31. A large portion of Florida voters, and therefore an imperative group to target, is the elderly; the fact that half of the Winning Our Future ad focused on Medicare and Romney's failures in relation to Medicare is a testament to this.

⁷⁸ op cit. Sands, Geneva.

⁷⁹ Tartar, Andre. "Gingrich Goes Nuclear With 'Dishonest Mitt' Ad." *Daily Intel*. New York Magazine, 28 Jan. 2012. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://nymag.com/daily/intel/2012/01/gingrich-goes-nuclear-with-dishonest-mitt-ad.html>>.

Gingrich was not the only candidate to release attack ads in Florida; in fact, the race was so hotly contested that it quickly became a battleground for negative political advertising. The Romney campaign, not a super PAC, released “Credits” on January 28. Aired three days before the primary, the television advertisement proved to be a strong attack on Gingrich on his record of ethics violations as Speaker of the House.⁸⁰ It featured a black and white shot of an old-fashioned movie theater, with end credits flowing quickly down the screen. It was immediately clear that there were many, many names on this credits list. A male announcer with a deep, ominous voice proclaimed:

Announcer: *“These are not the end credits of a movie. These are the names of 196 House Republicans that voted to reprimand Newt Gingrich when he was Speaker. It was the first time in the House’s 208-year history it had disciplined a Speaker for ethical wrongdoing. 88% of Republicans voted against Newt Gingrich. These colleagues agreed. This isn’t the end of a Hollywood movie. This is a reality. Don’t let it happen again.”*

The ad was very strong, as the names that rolled across the screen were those of many of today’s most influential and respected Republicans, including current Speaker of the House Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL), Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO), and Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA). The text “88% of Republicans voted against Newt Gingrich,” which was displayed in bold on the screen as it was announced, is a particularly effective message when voters are determining the candidate best fit to cater to the needs of the Republican base.

⁸⁰ “Mitt Romney Ad: Credits.” *ElectAd*. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://electad.com/video/mitt-romney-ad-credits/>>.

Romney's ad was quite effective in painting Gingrich as a corrupt, ethically questionable Washington insider. Further, the dire warning at the end of the spot challenged viewers to really consider the future of the country if Gingrich were to be elected President.

In the end, Romney won the Florida primary, with 46.42 percent of the vote. However, Gingrich performed fairly well, placing a solid second place with 31.93 percent of the vote. Santorum trailed in third place with only 13.34 percent.⁸¹ Despite Romney's place as forerunner and his triumph in Florida, Gingrich performed better than he had in other primaries and the Winning Our Future ad may have helped him reach this level of success, despite Romney's attacks on his ethics.

Rombo Rolls in Michigan

The Florida primary came and went, and soon candidates were producing ads in the hopes of clinching the Michigan and Arizona races on February 28. Rick Santorum hoped to come back from his low performance in the Florida primary, touting himself as the true conservative alternative to the liberal Romney. February 14's "Rombo," based on the Sylvester Stallone action-movie hero, was an ironic product of the Santorum campaign, attacking Romney for his mudslinging in attack ads against Santorum.⁸² The ad, which aired in Michigan, exhibits a Romney look-

⁸¹ "Florida Republican Primary." *Election Center*. Florida Republican Primary. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/primaries/states/florida>>.

⁸² Camia, Catalina. "Santorum's 'Rombo' Ad Fires Mud at Romney." *On Politics*. USA Today, 15 Feb. 2012. Web. 18 Apr. 2012.

alike running through a warehouse, shooting mud at life-size cutouts of Santorum. Patriotic, fast-paced music plays in the background, and the announcer speaks in the style of a sports game:

Announcer: *"Mitt Romney's negative attack machine is back, on full throttle. This time Romney's firing his mud at Rick Santorum. Romney and his super PAC have spent a staggering \$20 million, grossly attacking fellow Republicans."*

The spot concludes with the Romney doppelganger accidentally shooting himself with mud, and with the announcer saying, *"And in the end, Romney's ugly attacks are going to backfire."* "Rombo" was an interesting take on a campaign advertisement, due to the fact that it was a negative advertisement blasting another candidate for the very same practice.⁸³

Also in preparation for the Michigan primary, the Romney campaign aired the television ad "Growing Up," a spot detailing his childhood in Michigan.⁸⁴ Michigan voters were already familiar with the Romney family, as Romney's father George was the Governor of Michigan from 1963 to 1969, but Romney needed to court the state as competitor Santorum's polling improved in the weeks preceding the election. The thirty-second spot first aired two weeks before the Michigan primary features Romney, dressed casually, narrating as he drives a Chrysler around Detroit. He speaks about his ties to the region as home videos of his childhood play across the screen. Shots of Detroit, foreclosed homes and car

<<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/onpolitics/post/2012/02/rick-santorum-rombo-ad-mitt-romney-/1>>.

⁸³ op cit. Camia, Catalina.

⁸⁴ "Growing Up." *Mitt Romney for President*. Web. 18 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.mittromney.com/embed/video/growing-up>>.

manufacturing plants are displayed as the candidate speaks. "Growing Up" was an appeal to Michigan voters to vote for the candidate who best understands the unique situation the state is in. The ad concludes with Romney's passionate plea to voters:

Romney: *"People here in Detroit are distressed. I want to make Michigan stronger and better. Michigan's been my home, and this is personal."*

The Michigan race went to Mitt Romney, who claimed 41.1 percent of the vote. Santorum came in a close second with 37.9 percent.⁸⁵ Romney's ad appealed to voters by establishing the candidate as a homegrown Michigander, yet Santorum's ad held appeal for voters who resented the dirty negative advertising tactics of Washington politicians.

Obama Strikes Back

President Obama began releasing a plethora of new campaign advertisements as well; some have attacked frontrunner Romney, though the majority are positive advertisements highlighting the policies that the current President has put into place since his term began in 2008. The Obama/Biden campaign has introduced a series of advertisements that are very atypical in the political arena. These thirty-second spots highlight the real-life stories of one family or a single constituent, allowing them to tell their story of how Obama's policies have changed their lives for the better. The "Change Is" spots are generally very

⁸⁵ "Romney Wins Michigan and Arizona, Santorum Holds 2nd." *2012 Election Central*. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.2012presidentialelectionnews.com/2012/02/romney-wins-michigan-and-arizona-santorum-holds-2nd/>>.

personal, and are an emotional appeal to voters in support of President Obama. The ads not only encourage Americans to vote for President Obama, they also combat Republican accusations that President Obama has not accomplished anything significant during his presidency. "Living with Half a Heart," released on March 10, is narrated by the mother of a toddler who was born with half of a heart.⁸⁶ She tells her emotional and impassioned story about how President Obama's Affordable Care Act saved her daughter Zoe and her family's finances; shots of Zoe with her family play across the screen as the mother talks.

Mother: *"By six months of age, Zoe was halfway to her lifetime health insurance cap. It was a huge relief to know that we didn't have to worry about whether or not she would have hit her lifetime cap by age three."*

While the mother is talking, uppercase words fill the screen. The first message reads, "The Affordable Care Act removed lifetime caps on health coverage." At the conclusion of the spot, text plays on the "Change" theme of Obama's 2008 campaign: "Change is health security for families." There are a number of "Change Is" advertisements that have been mostly released on the President's YouTube site; they include a cancer survivor praising the Affordable Care Act and a student facing debt from student loans.

Dozens of political advertisements have been released throughout the 2012 Republican presidential primary this year, but this paper seeks to analyze the most significant and controversial of all the advertisements released through this election cycle. As the primary season has advanced, candidates began to drop out. Herman

⁸⁶ "Living With Half a Heart: The Lihn Family's Health Care Story." *YouTube*. BarackObamaDotCom, 10 Mar. 2012. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuxZnhlr89I>>.

Cain on December 3rd, Michele Bachmann on January 4th, Jon Huntsman on January 16th, Rick Santorum on April 10th. A spokesman for the Newt Gingrich campaign announced on April 29th that the candidate plans to suspend his bid for the presidency on May 2nd.⁸⁷ If Gingrich drops out of the race, the remaining candidates will be Mitt Romney and Ron Paul, with Romney as the obvious frontrunner. Therefore, as the season progressed, campaign advertisements began to focus more on Romney and President Obama.

A final advertisement to consider is the Obama/Biden campaign spot "Romney versus Reality."⁸⁸ The campaign has been running a succession of "Romney versus Reality" spots, each focusing on a certain topic (for example, student loans). The introductory ad was added to the President's YouTube page on April 5. It is a one minute and 25 second video that juxtaposes videos of Romney criticizing Obama with videos of Obama proving the criticisms wrong. The ad intends to portray Romney as unfairly attacking President Obama with lies about his record, and it is quite successful at doing so. Like many of the Obama/Biden ads, it uses humor and irony to get its message through to voters:

Romney: *"In his State of the Union address, he didn't even mention the debt, or the deficits."*

Obama: [Speaking at 2012 State of the Union address]

⁸⁷ "Newt Gingrich to End Presidential Bid on Wednesday, Source Says." *CNN*. 29 Apr. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/29/politics/gop-gingrich/index.html>>.

⁸⁸ "Mitt Romney versus Reality." *YouTube*. 05 Apr. 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dM9DVC7kd7s>>.

“When it comes to the deficit, we’ve already agreed to more than 2 trillion dollars in cuts and savings.

Debt. The deficit. Deficit. Deficit. Deficit. Debt. That’s how we’ll reduce our deficit.”

After Romney’s debt and deficit comment, the video changes shots eight times, one for each time the President mentioned the debt or deficit during his 2012 State of the Union address. “Romney versus Reality” is not intended for television; rather, the campaign aims to use the distribution tools of social media as it did successfully in 2008.

Political advertising in the United States continues to evolve with every passing election year. The number of negative advertisements has skyrocketed since “Daisy” in 1964, and has become a staple of every presidential race. The 2012 Republican presidential primary is no exception. Each candidate has blasted another candidate on at least one issue, and all have spent millions to keep negative messages about their competitors in American minds. Many Americans disapprove of the use of negative advertising in political races, viewing the act as a dirty trick used by Washington insider politicians. However, most candidates do resort to its use at some point throughout their campaign, as it has become such a norm and an expected component of a campaign. The 2012 Republican presidential primaries have been unique, as super PACs have become a major component like never before; they have proven that negative advertising, and endless financial resources, can have a significant effect on primary results. Advertising, of course, shows only one aspect of a candidate’s presence in the race and one cannot scientifically consider a

candidate's personality. However, examining the usage of negative ads and spending on advertising can allow one to predict a candidate's success in future primaries. Mitt Romney has extinguished most of his prominent competitors, and will undoubtedly serve as the Republican presidential nominee against President Obama in November. Mitt Romney, interestingly enough, also has the most super PAC support, and most financial resources, of all the Republican candidates. President Obama has begun to release attacks ads against Romney, and the race will likely only become more heated as the two begin to focus only on each other in the race for the presidency. Whether advertising will determine the 2012 elections is impossible to say at this time; however, one can be certain that political advertising, and the dangerously strong influence of super PACs, will continue to shape the outcome of all elections for decades to come.

ORIGINAL CAMPAIGN SCRIPTS

COSTELLO 2032
"NEW NEW JERSEY"
:30 – Capstone

VIDEO

OPEN ON A BLACK AND WHITE, UNFLATTERING IMAGE OF JON CORZINE. OMINOUS MUSIC PLAYS SOFTLY.

CUT TO KELLY COSTELLO SPEAKING WHILE WALKING DOWN THE MAIN STREET OF A SMALL TOWN WITH HER MOTHER. PASS A LOCAL DINER, A HARDWARE STORE, OTHER SMALL BUSINESSES.

CUT TO AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM DURING CLASS. THE MOTHER IS TEACHING AND HELPING CHILDREN. KELLY WATCHES, SMILING.

CHILDREN DISPLAY PICTURES THEY DREW, SMILING, AND STAND WITH KELLY AS SHE SAYS THE LAST PHRASE. THE WORDS ARE DISPLAYED ON THE SCREEN:

Vote for me, Kelly Costello, for Governor on November 5. It's time for a new New Jersey.

AUDIO

KELLY COSTELLO: Our state has had its fair share of corrupt politicians -- Career politicians.

But New Jersey is my *home*, not my job. And that's why I know what we need here the most. Better investment in our schools. More support for our hardworking teachers, like my mother, who have been dedicating their lives to creating a stronger, better New Jersey for our children.

Isn't it time we focused on the things that matter?

Vote for me, Kelly Costello, for Governor on November 5. It's time for a new New Jersey.

VIDEO

MELISSA AND JIM GONZALEZ ARE A MIDDLE-AGED HISPANIC COUPLE. MELISSA SITS ON THE FRONT STEPS OF HER SMALL BUSINESS IN A LOWER CLASS AREA, WITH HER HUSBAND, BOTH IN CASUAL OUTFITS. SHE IS VERY EMOTIONAL AND EMPHATIC WHILE SPEAKING.

JIM GONZALEZ SPEAKING OVER SHOTS OF KELLY ON THE SAME STEPS WITH THEM (ON A DIFFERENT DAY), TALKING, LAUGHING AND SHAKING HANDS WITH THEM AS SHE TOURS THEIR BUSINESS.

MELISSA AND JIM ARE SITTING ON THE STEPS, LOOKING DIRECTLY INTO THE CAMERA, IMPASSIONED.

SHOT OF KELLY COSTELLO SMILING INTO THE CAMERA. WORDS READ: **KELLY COSTELLO FOR NJ GOVERNOR. IT'S TIME FOR A NEW NEW JERSEY.**

AUDIO

My name is Melissa Gonzalez, and I was born and bred here in Union City. When the recession hit, high taxes left our bills piling up. We thought we were going to lose it all – our small business, our home, our savings for our children's college educations. It was a hard time.

But then our Senator Kelly Costello signed the Small Business Support Act, cutting taxes so that small businesses like ours can really succeed.

We have Kelly Costello to thank for making the hard work we put into this place – **worth something.**

We're small business owners in Union City, and we'll be voting for Kelly Costello for Governor this November. We think you should too.

I'm Kelly Costello and I approve this message.

VIDEO

DERRICK WATTS IS A 32-YEAR-OLD AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN. DERRICK STANDS IN A CLASSROOM IN A CAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL, SPEAKING INTO THE CAMERA.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS COME IN, TALKING, LAUGHING AND GETTING READY FOR CLASS TO BEGIN.

DERRICK STANDS IN FRONT OF THE CHALKBOARD, LOOKING DIRECTLY INTO THE CAMERA, IMPASSIONED.

SHOT OF KELLY COSTELLO SMILING INTO THE CAMERA. WORDS READ: **KELLY COSTELLO FOR NJ GOVERNOR. IT'S TIME FOR A NEW NEW JERSEY.**

AUDIO

My name is Derrick Watts, and I teach here in the Camden school district. Camden schools have really struggled over the years, as budget cuts have taken away crucial funding for important programs.

But when Senator Kelly Costello took office, she increased funding that our schools badly needed. Testing scores went up and the high school graduation rate rose. Our hardworking students were finally given the tools necessary to succeed.

I'm a public school teacher in Camden, and I'll be voting for Kelly Costello for Governor this November. I think you should too.

I'm Kelly Costello and I approve this message.

VIDEO

BEATRICE ADAMS IS A 74-YEAR-OLD CAUCASIAN WOMAN. BEATRICE SITS IN HER MODEST KITCHEN, SIPPING A CUP OF TEA. SHE SPEAKS INTO THE CAMERA.

SHOTS OF KELLY ON THE SENATE FLOOR, SPEAKING AND THEN SIGNING A BILL.

BEATRICE WALKS OUT INTO HER BACKYARD, STANDING IN FRONT OF HER GARDEN.

SHOT OF KELLY COSTELLO SMILING INTO THE CAMERA. WORDS READ: **KELLY COSTELLO FOR NJ GOVERNOR. IT'S TIME FOR A NEW NEW JERSEY.**

AUDIO

My name is Beatrice Adams, and I was born and raised here in Ocean County. I love my neighborhood, but when my husband passed away a few years ago, I began to worry about feeling secure in my home by myself.

But when Senator Kelly Costello took office, she helped toughen gun control laws and increased funding for police forces. Since then, crime rates have gone down and our police have more resources than ever before.

I have Kelly Costello to thank, because I have never felt so safe in my own home.

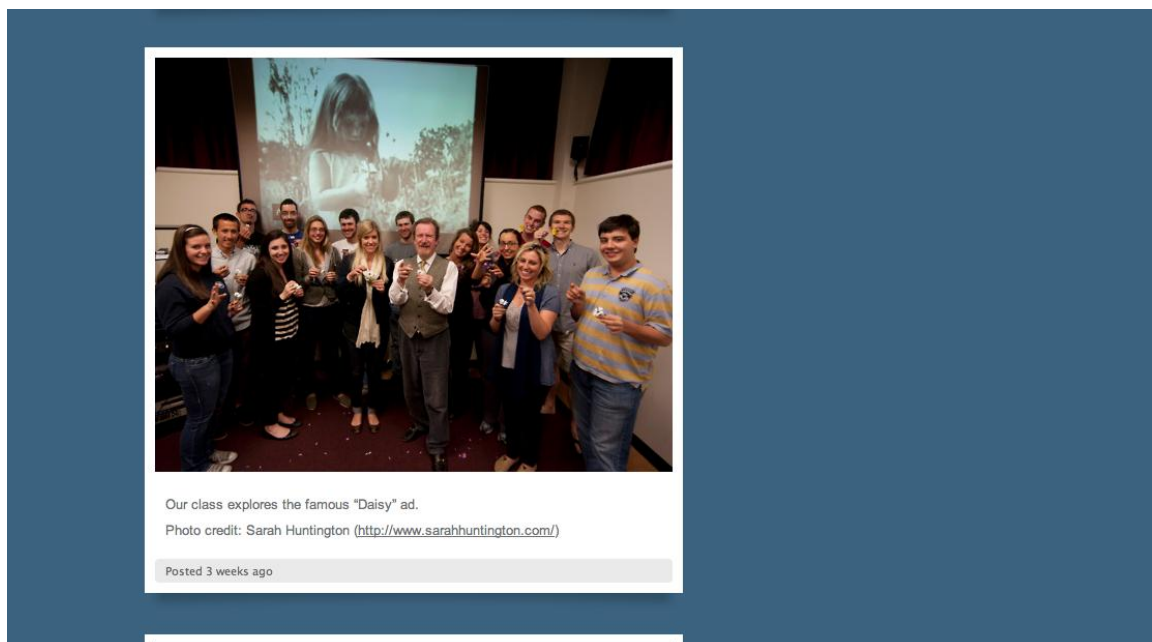
I'll be voting for Kelly Costello for Governor this November. I think you should too.

I'm Kelly Costello and I approve this message.

COURSE BLOG

Web Address: <http://aupoliticaladvertising.tumblr.com/>

Selected Screenshots:



AD OF THE WEEK: 1/24/12

"Rebellion" by Rick Santorum

Posted 2 months ago

Ad of the Week

We vote weekly on political advertisements released by the Republican primary candidates. Our professor, Drew Babb, developed a distinct set of criteria for use in grading each "spot." The qualities we vote (1-10) on are:

Attention Grabbing?

Production Values (Filming, editing, graphics, music, sfx, etc.)

Visuals

Copy

Themeline

Emotional?

Memorable?

Unmistakable branding?

Clear "Take Away"?

»Personal "Dig It" - Add 5 Points

»Personal "Hate It" - Subtract 5 Points

Each week, we will post our winning "ad of the week."

Posted 2 months ago

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Posted 2 months ago

Welcome

Welcome to the official blog of American University's Spring 2012 Political Advertising course. Throughout the semester, we will be analyzing campaign ads released by the Republican presidential primary candidates and the Obama reelection campaign. We will also take a look at television advertising from smaller races, such as the Virginia Senate race. Each week, we will vote and choose an ad of the week!

We hope that this blog will serve as a valuable resource to share our critical analysis of the campaigns with those outside of our course. We look forward to continuing our discussion of the role advertising plays in the US political sphere and welcome any thoughts and comments!

Posted 3 months ago

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