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Red Dog, Blue Dog, Yellow Dog: How Democrats Can Use Strategic Communications to Attract Republican and Conservative Voters

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In recent election cycles, a rightward shift among white Southerners, and in some cases the loss of African-American supporters through racial redistricting, turned many long-held Democratic districts in the South red. Kentucky is an excellent example of this shift in voting behavior. Even though registered Democrats outnumber Republicans, the GOP controls the Governor's mansion, most other statewide elected offices, both chambers of the state legislature, and all but one of Kentucky's congressional seats. To win back those seats, Democrats in states like Kentucky will need to appeal to conservative voters. Unfortunately, little scholarly research directly addresses the practical question they need to answer: How can Democratic candidates attract right-leaning voters without sacrificing their credibility among voters on the left? On the basis of survey research conducted in Kentucky's 6th Congressional district during the 2018 midterm election, this paper argues that conservative voters respond positively to some crossover messaging from Democratic candidates, particular with respect to social issues.

Key words: Kentucky, voting behavior, political messaging

In the American South, you can classify what kind of Democrat someone is by the color of dog used to describe them. A Yellow Dog Democrat, for example, is so staunchly partisan that the Democratic Party could run a "yellow dog" for office and still count on the vote. Once common, before Republican presidential candidates started making headway in the region, Yellow Dogs

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eventually were displaced by Blue Dog Democrats defined by their ideological moderation – if not their willingness to side with the GOP at the national level.[3] So many Blue Dog Democrats populated Congress in the Nineties that they organized their own caucus. By the time they formed this pack, however, the Blue Dog Democrats already were endangered. A rightward shift among white Southerners, and in some cases the loss of African-American supporters through racial redistricting, turned formerly Democratic districts in the South into prime hunting ground for Republicans.[4]

One such seat belonged to U.S. Rep. Ben Chandler, Democrat from Kentucky. Chandler comes from a long bloodline of Kentucky Democrats, including a grandfather who served as governor and senator. When he faced reelection in 2012, he epitomized the sort of Blue Dog Democrat being swept from Congress. Technically, the 6th District voters he served tended to be members of his own party, but outside of the main urban concentration in his district, many had shifted so decidedly toward the GOP in national politics that they can only be called Red Dog Democrats. Existing literature shows that unlike moderate Republicans, who have declined in recent years, the number of genuinely conservative Democrats has held steady,[5] their ability to serve as swing voters sustained by new registrants in many locales.[6] Chandler's resistance to portions of President Barack Obama's legislative agenda, most notably the Affordable Care Act, could not protect him from the discontent of right-leaning Democratic voters, who replaced him in 2012 with conservative attorney Garland "Andy" Barr.

Kentucky is a prime haven for Red Dog Democrats. Even though registered Democrats outnumber Republicans, the GOP controls the Governor's mansion, most other statewide elected offices, both chambers of the state legislature, and all but one of Kentucky's congressional seats.[7] Dispirited Democratic leaders now find themselves hunting for a way to

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[3] David R. Colburn, *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans : Florida and Its Politics since 1940* (Gainesville : University Press of Florida, 2007).

[4] Lublin, David, and D. Stephen Voss. 2003. "The Missing Middle: Why Median-Voter Theory Can't Save Democrats from Singing the Boll-Weevil Blues." Journal of Politics 65(February): 227-37.; Lublin, David, and D. Stephen Voss. 2000. "Racial Redistricting and Realignment in Southern State Legislatures." American Journal of Political Science 44(October):792-810.; Lublin, David, and D. Stephen Voss. 2000. "Boll-Weevil Blues: Polarized Congressional Delegations into the 21st Century." American Review of Politics 21(Fall & Winter): 427-50.

[5] Adam J. Schiffer, "I'm Not That Liberal: Explaining Conservative Democratic Identification," *Political Behavior* 22, no. 4 (2000).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Commonwealth of Kentucky - State Board of Elections, "Voter Registration Statistics Report " (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Secretary of State, 2017).

restore political competition in the state, which likely means winning back voters who have left their party – whether through their official voter registration or just through their voting records. Unfortunately, little scholarly research directly addresses the practical question they need to answer: How can Democratic candidates attract right-leaning voters without sacrificing their credibility among voters on the left?

The 6th Congressional District of Kentucky remains the sort of place where Democrats would need to turn their fortunes around. A Democrat was elected in Kentucky's 6th as recently as 2010, and it contains almost 100,000 more registered Democrats than Republicans.[8] With an unpopular sitting president serving as figurehead for the GOP heading into the 2018 midterm election, the district has drawn three high-profile Democratic contenders ready to challenge Rep. Barr. This research paper takes advantage of the leverage provided by that real-life political contest to address the practical question of how a minority party can attract voters who normally do not support them. It does so through the use of a survey experiment in which a student sample viewed video advertisements intended to appeal to right-leaning constituents, with the ads randomly assigned so as to vary issue domain and messaging. Results underscore the almost-intractable difficulty that candidates face when trying, in terms of their message, to appeal to the center: More often than not, any inroads they make with unlikely supporters are counterbalanced by discontent among their likely base.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

"When I was 12 years old, I knew exactly what I wanted to do when I grew up – I wanted to fly fighter jets and land on aircraft carriers," says Amy McGrath in a highly circulated YouTube video announcing her candidacy. Neither the words nor the imagery makes her sound like a Democrat: She's seen standing on a runway in front of a fighter jet, wearing a leather bomber jacket. At one point, while she's speaking, B-roll footage of swooping military jets booms in the background.[9] Her quirky ad excited Democrats nationwide, judging from the campaign contributions that flowed in afterward, because it seemed an approach that might fly in a district that Cook Political Report's Partisan Voter Index (PVI) scores as R+9 (which is to say, the likelihood of electing a Republican is 9 points higher than the national average).[10]

Existing research gives some hope that messaging might be able to help her, or another Democratic nominee, peel away normally Republican

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Amy McGrath for Congress, "'Told Me' — Amy Mcgrath for Congress Announcement Video (Ky-6)," (YouTube.com 2017).

[10] David Wasserman and Ally Flinn, "Introducing the 2017 Cook Political Report Partisan Voter Index," ed. The Cook Political Report (2017).

voters. Political advertising can be effective in changing voters' attitudes towards candidates, at least in some form.[11] Kahn and Geer studied a Pennsylvania gubernatorial race, experimenting with different types of advertisements to see how negative ads, positive ads, trait-centered ads, and issue-centered ads affected voter attitudes differently.[12] They found that while the choice between trait-centered and issue-centered ads made no difference, positive ads generally were much more effective than negative ones.

Different types of messaging will have different effects on voter feelings, but what really matters is how their attitudes inform the choices voters make in the ballot box. Many political scientists are skeptical about whether campaign strategies such as messaging are effective, noting the rise of (increasingly polarized) partisanship.[13] These real-world observations do not necessarily discount the value of pursuing crossover voters, however, because campaign advertising typically does not try to attract them; candidates these days advertise to their own base.[14]

Crossover ads might help Democrats in particular. Robideaux studied, like Kahn and Geer, how voters responded to advertisements, varying their level of negativity/positivity. However, the research distinguished how Republicans and Democrats responded. Robideaux noted that Republicans in the study were more likely to be swayed by Democratic messaging than Democrats were likely to be affected by Republican messaging.[15] One reason for such asymmetry would be if some Republican-leaning voters fall into the sort of voter pool that I am calling Red-Dog Democrats, people who lean against the national Democratic Party as currently positioned, but who feel no special identification with the GOP. The benefit of a study centered in Kentucky's 6th District, one that escapes some of the limitations of an experimental study by piggybacking onto a real-world contest, is that it's the sort of place rife with such voters.

My research uses a student sample similar to the one employed by Robideaux, but like Kahn and Geer, I expose them to advertising using different types of crossover appeal, with the hope of distinguishing the relative

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[11] M. Michael Franz and Travis N. Ridout, "Does Political Advertising Persuade?," *Political Behavior* 29, no. 4 (2007).

[12] Kim Fridkin Kahn and John G. Geer, "Creating Impressions: An Experimental Investigation of Political Advertising on Television," ibid.16, no. 1 (1994).

[13] Larry M. Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996," *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 1 (2000).

[14] Constantine J. Spiliotes and Lynn Vavreck, "Campaign Advertising: Partisan Convergence or Divergence?," *The Journal of Politics* 64, no. 1 (2002).

[15] Douglas R. Robideaux, "Party Affiliation and Ad Attitude toward Political Ads," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 10, no. 1 (2002).

success of particular strategies. Building on previous research that casts doubt on the usefulness of negative advertising for this purpose, however, I will focus entirely on positive messages. Varying the messaging seems critical because most electorates are ideologically diverse, forcing candidates to appeal to more than one type of voter to win. The varying communication strategies that campaigns pursue show up in the types of advertising that candidates use. Some candidates tack to the center, either during a primary (playing up their electability) or in the general election. Some candidates play to the far extreme, hoping to rally their bases. The relative success of these opposing strategies depends, of course, on the nature of the voters in a given locale – and given the challenges faced by Democrats in red-state districts, my research will experiment with the latter messaging.

The approach they use for attracting crossover voters also can vary. Both liberals and conservatives typically give signals and code words that, because they are subtle, might excite the base without worrying other voters. Conservatives might make references to the military or guns, describe themselves in an upbeat way as "pro-life" or "pro-family," and employ nationalist/patriotic themes – whereas liberals might underscore diversity/inclusion while praising corporations and emphasizing environmental/sustainability themes. Democrats who need to reach beyond the liberal base, therefore, might choose signals and imagery known to appeal to conservatives, while hewing close to the Democratic Party platform otherwise.

On the other hand, Democrats might try to inspire defection (i.e., voting for the candidate of the opposite party) using issue positions and policy preferences – which, according to one especially appropriate study, will reign supreme over candidate traits, voter information, or any other factor.[16] Campaigns typically have more control over the issue positions they take than they will over imagery, which opponents also can help shape. They might adopt a position directly contrary to their own party's inclinations, distancing themselves from the party brand, or they might send moderate signals on an issue that normally undercuts their party in the area. My research tries both sorts of approaches: issue-based appeals and symbolic appeals. I also use a sort of middle-ground approach: An issue-based appeal communicated indirectly through association with a political group, encouraging conservative participants to use that group affiliation as a heuristic while perhaps not offending left-leaning participants.

Like the political scientists dubious about how much campaigns matter, I am not optimistic that messaging can induce crossover voting. As Bartels wrote, voters make decisions in the ballot box based not on new information

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[16] Paul S. Herrnson and James M. Curry, "Issue Voting and Partisan Defections in Congressional Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2011).

they learn from campaign communications, but what they already know about their own partisan identity.[17] Unlike in a pure laboratory setting, in which participants express feelings about fake people, real Democratic candidate will not be able to mask their own partisan identity without alienating their own likely supporters. Democrats sounding conservative dog whistles in a primary contest will attract fewer "blue dogs" and "red dogs" (who are unaccustomed to answering the party's call) than they will madden the "yellow dogs" who can switch to another candidate. The framing of my survey experiment will allow me to look beyond how conservatives and moderates respond, and observe liberals and Democrats as well, thereby replicating this real-world dilemma

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

I designed an experimental study that examines how voters' attitudes about candidates are affected by different types of political advertising. Carrying forward the focus on Kentucky's 6th District Congressional race, the experiment contains advertisements that featured each of the candidates competing in the Democratic primary at the time: Amy McGrath, Reggie Thomas, and Geoff Young. The sample, meanwhile, was drawn from students studying, and generally residing, within that district.

Development and production of mock advertisements

The advertisements used in the experimental design are not real. For purposes of control, I designed and created "mock" advertisements on behalf of each candidate that maximized realism to the fullest extent possible. I used iMovie for the video production after reaching different types of software, which offers templates for text, transitions, and music. I also downloaded video stock footage from Videoblocks, an online service that provides stock video, photo, and audio content for usage in projects such as this.

Each video, approximately one minute and thirty seconds long, begins and ends the same. It starts with a landscape B-roll of a Kentucky horse farm, with text overlay saying "##Candidate Name## for Congress." The second frame is a photo of the candidate, with text in the lower left corner that says "##Candidate Name##, Democrat for Congress" on two lines, to make sure that (as in real life) the participant would know the candidate's party. For consistency, I chose photos of each candidate in which they are smiling in front of a neutral, light-colored background. Each advertisement also features a standard track of background music chosen from iMovie's library: "Pendulum." The ending of each advertisement, meanwhile, includes B-roll footage of a waving American flag, followed by a shot of the U.S. Capitol Building with the text overlay "##Candidate Name## for Congress."

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[17] Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996."

The differences comes in the middle sections, toggling the advertisement characteristics and thereby creating my dependent variables. A voice-over also reads a brief script to reinforce the ad's purpose. I allowed the candidates to communicate ideas to potential voters in three different ways: through policy promises, endorsements, or symbolism. (No ad attacks or even references opponents, which is not so extraordinary for a primary campaign.[18]) A control ad speaks only of so-called "valence" matters – widely agreeable sentiments – with no issue appeal.

The issue appeals

I chose one sociocultural issue, one fiscal issue, and one "symbolic" issue to distinguish ads from the "valence" control ad. For a sociocultural issue, I chose guns and gun control because the topic is relevant in current debate, and issue positions can be striated easily along ideological lines. Candidates could oppose gun control or support a limited version of it: a ban on assault rifles. Choosing gun control addresses an issue relevant to the blue vs. red cultural gap, while avoiding matters most closely related to religious or moral identity. For the fiscal issue, the topic is government spending and taxes, with candidates either offering a "no new taxes" pledge or calling for "responsible" deficit reduction through modest taxes only on the rich. The symbolic appeal mimics McGrath's own ad campaign by stressing patriotism and support for the military. The valence issue is education. Table 1 details all of these advertisement types.

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[18] Brian T. Kaylor, "A Burkean Poetic Frames Analysis of the 2004 Presidential Ads," *Communication Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2008).

Table 1: Complete listing of mock advertisements

	Type of advertisement	Synopsis
1	Sociocultural Position-based Moderate	"Common sense' gun control – ban on assault rifles
2	Sociocultural Position-based Conservative	Will vote no on any gun control legislation
3	Sociocultural Information-based Moderate	Endorsed by the Committee for Responsible Gun Ownership; national board member for three years; an organization promoting "common sense" gun reforms while protecting guns for hunting, sport, and self-defense
4	Sociocultural Information-based Conservative	Endorsed by the National Rifle Association; national board member for three years; an organization committed to protecting the 2nd Amendment and opposing gun control
5	Fiscal/economic Position-based Moderate	Promises to support "responsible" deficit reduction and an increase on taxes for the wealthiest Americans
6	Fiscal/economic Position-based Conservative	Will vote no on any legislation that would increase taxes
7	Fiscal/economic Information-based Moderate	Endorsed by No Labels; national board member for three years; is a bipartisan organization committed to combatting the deficit through a combination of spending cuts and tax reform
8	Fiscal/economic Information-based Conservative	Endorsed by the Committee for Small Government; national board member for three years; is an organization committed to smaller government and deficit reduction through spending cuts
9	Presence of symbolism	Contains strong patriotic symbolism and mentions support for the military; avoids "strong military," or ideological clues, just support for the military
10	Valence issue	Candidate generally supports education; ambiguous in terms of public, private, etc.

The endorsement ads present an implied issue position. These ads contain an explanation about each organization's purpose, using either real or fictitious organizations depending on what would sound conservative or middle of the road. The endorsement ads parallel the position-based ads, addressing gun control or taxes. In terms of structure, the endorsements are similar to the

policy promises: one conservative in nature, one moderate. Each ad first announces an endorsement by an organization, then states that the candidate has been a "national board member for three years," ending with an explanation of the organization's purpose. For gun control, the conservative ad uses the National Rifle Association (NRA), while the moderate ad uses the fictitious Committee for Responsible Gun Ownership, a group supposedly promoting "common sense" gun reforms while protecting guns for hunting, sport, and self-defense. The economically oriented ad uses tax policy, a salient issue that divides voters ideologically.[19] The conservative ad features an endorsement by the Committee for Smaller Government, while the moderate ad refers to No Labels, a bipartisan organization committed to combatting the deficit through a combination of spending cuts and tax reforms.

The symbolism-based ad contains strong military imagery and themes of patriotism. No specific issue position appears. This ad type is designed to test how voters respond to communications that make no policy promises at all, reaching across partisan lines only through connotation. Finally, the public generally supports education, although they might differ in how to do so.[20] Similar to the approach behind the symbolism ad, it avoids any specific policy positions, stressing that the candidate "supports education to bring forth a better future." Technically, the valence ad is not a "control" because it is not completely neutral: It still seeks to elicit a positive response from participants.

PARTICIPANTS

My sample drew more than a hundred students from a large lecture-hall introductory college class taught in Lexington, Kentucky, within the 6th Congressional District. Students discharged a class obligation if they participated, but they could select a different and equivalently easy assignment should they wish. The instructor receiving the participation data had no access to the survey responses, while I had no access to the participation data. Fifteen students were exposed to each ad type, five per candidate, which limits what I can say about possible interactive effects – whether the appeal works differently for a white man, a white woman, or an African-American man. Nonetheless, randomization across the candidate types should prevent the results from being contaminated by the specific demographic traits of any one individual.

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[19] Frank Newport, "Role of U.S. Gov't Remains Key Source of Party Differences," Gallup, http://news.gallup.com/poll/186032/role-gov-remains-key-source-party-differences.aspx.

[20] Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney, "The Importance of Issues in Senate Campaigns: Citizens' Reception of Issue Messages," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2001).

PROCEDURE

The experiment was distributed to students Canvas (an online learning and classroom management software). However, I built the survey itself using Qualtrics, and posted the mock advertisements in a hidden YouTube location. Upon opening the survey, each respondent answered a basic test of political ideology to determine whether they were conservative, liberal, or moderate. Given the multidimensional nature of ideology, especially among young people still forming their political identities, respondents also receive variations of those base identifiers, gauging economic ideology, social ideology, and foreign-policy ideology. They simply asked: "On issues of _____, I identify as," with response options for conservative, moderate, and liberal. The last question in this initial bank sought to ensure response validity: It started as a policy question but then instructed the respondent to give a particular answer. Respondents who failed to answer the test question correctly did not get to continue, and had to complete the other assignment in their course.

Next, respondents gave initial thermometer scores for the three Democrats, which would capture a mixture of what they already might have known about the candidates and how they reacted initially to the candidate's looks and demographic traits. That is, respondents were asked to rate each candidate, with a low "temperature" being least supportive and a higher temperature conveying more warmth. After watching the advertisement, each respondent received the "thermometer reading" question again about the candidate featured in the ad. The difference between the initial score and the subsequent score represents an immediate response to the ad.

I used JMP statistical analysis software for data analysis. After tabulating the difference between the pre-test and the post-test, I then ran one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests on the means of the differences (y-variable) by each different type of advertisement (x-variable) to determine if the differences were statistically significant. In short, the p-values generated by this test informed me whether or not the respondents' attitudes were changed by the advertisements enough that the shift likely did not occur by chance. The results could be filtered by respondent ideology and demographic information.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Looking only at conservative respondents, the ads on average did make a difference (*Table 2*). Apparently, conservative voters will react differently to a Democratic candidate depending upon some combination of the candidate demographics and the ad message.

Table 2. ANOVA outputs, overall data, conservative respondents only

All ANOVA	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
Exposure w/ candidate	26	277.56818	10.6757	2.0518	0.0205*
Error	39	202.91667	5.2030		
C. Total	65	480.48485			

Expanding the category of "conservatives" to include self-professed moderates who nonetheless claimed conservatism in at least one issue area broadens the pool of potential voters for a Democratic nominee. Including baseline moderates who are conservative on a subset of issues seems critical for my research question given that Blue Dog Democrats likely fall into that category. It also nearly doubles the same size. We see that when these respondents are included, increasing the sample size, the p-value remains low, providing stronger evidence that my skepticism about the short-term power of advertising might be misplaced (*Table 3*). The Mean Square stays almost the same, so the predictive power of exposure remains about the same.

Table 3. ANOVA outputs, overall data, conservative respondents (including base moderate identifiers)

All ANOVA	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
Exposure w/ candidate	29	294.90339	10.1691	1.7383	0.0258*
Error	88	514.80000	5.8500		
C. Total	117	809.70339			

Exploring Responses to Specific Types of Advertisements

The previous analysis separated respondents based on every variant of advertisement. My primary interest in varying the candidate's demographic traits, however, was to prevent the results from being contaminated by use of a particular type of Democrat. Grouping the ads by message, without distinguishing the candidate used – which is to say, asking for results averaged across candidate demographics – only reduces any uncertainty whether respondents reacted differently depending upon the ad message.

Had I stopped here, I might have concluded that crossover appeals work well, at least in the short term, with conservatives. The results are not so optimistic. Table 5 sorts the ads according to how respondents differed from the central tendency. At the top of Table 5, with highest means, are the advertisement types that had the highest net positive effect on conservative respondents. Ads with negative means turned respondents off.

Table 4. Means of broad-based advertisement types, conservative respondents (including base moderate identifiers)

	Number	Mean	Std Error	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Guns/Information/Moderate	12	2.8333	0.69014	1.465	4.2013
Guns/Position/Moderate	11	1.9091	0.72083	0.480	3.3379
Valence	14	1.4286	0.63895	0.162	2.6951
Guns/Information/Conservative	12	1.4167	0.69014	0.049	2.7846
Symbolism	13	1.2308	0.66307	-0.084	2.5451
Taxes/Position/Conservative	8	1.1250	0.84525	-0.550	2.8004
Taxes/Information/Conservative	10	0.8000	0.75601	-0.699	2.2985
Guns/Position/Conservative	11	0.0909	0.72083	-1.338	1.5197
Taxes/Information/Moderate	14	-1.2143	0.63895	-2.481	0.0522
Taxes/Position/Moderate	13	-1.2308	0.66307	-2.545	0.0835

Figure 1: Responses with broad-based advertisement types
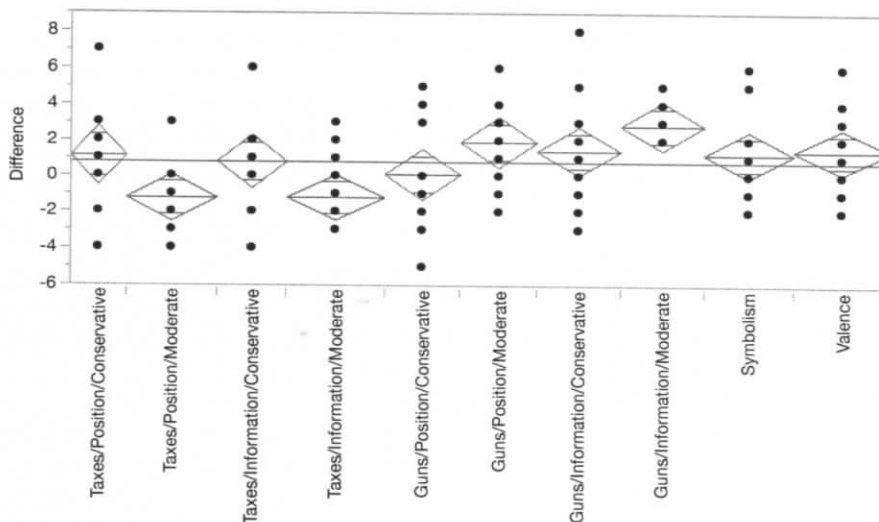
Those results represent bad news for the power of crossover advertising, at least insofar as a campaign might hope tacking to the center could improve the impact of their ads. Most of the experimental ads performed no better among conservatives than the generic valence ad offering bromides about education. Figure 1 visualizes that pattern, showing the scatter plot of responses with diamonds establishing confidence intervals.

Every ad related to tax policy – whether conservative or moderate, explicit or indirect through an endorsement – left respondents colder toward the Democratic nominee than a pro-education puff piece. Conservative respondents responded more positively to only one sort of ad: The one announcing an endorsement from the National Committee for Responsible Gun Ownership (ad type 3 in Table 1). The next highest mean also results from a moderate gun advertisement, except position based – promising to protect the 2nd Amendment but pursue modest gun control, such as a ban on assault rifles. The more starkly pro-gun ads returned results that were more mixed, although it's impossible to say whether that is because they doubted the credibility of a strong pro-gun ad from a Democrat or instead because they themselves have mixed feelings about gun control.

As a whole, almost every advertisement shifted candidate favorability upward (as shown by the positive means). The two "moderate" tax-policy ads are the exception: Indicating support for deficit reduction through higher taxes on the rich failed to win over young conservatives. The inclusion of

"economic" conservatives did not explain why the ad backfired, because when they are removed, the backlash remains in place (analysis not shown).

Adding Candidates to the Mix

For the previous section of analysis, I andomized over the type of candidate, so that ad impact would not be contaminated by the respondent pool's specific reaction to messaging from a black or female politician (although, at the time, those were the two serious candidates in the race). However, I return to the question of candidate identity now, in case advertising interacts with race or gender.

Respondents did not react differently to the candidates at the outset, giving them statistically indistinguishable thermometer scores. Presumably, few of my respondents knew about the candidates in the 6th district, because the white male candidate (Geoff Young) is neither a serious contender and almost certainly would attract lower scores from politically aware district residents.

I begin by looking at post-advertising responses to the candidates overall, averaging across ad types and maximizing the sample size. I find that respondent reaction to the ads did interact with the candidate's demographic traits. Based on the means, Amy McGrath received the highest net increase from conservative voters, at 1.13. Geoff Young followed at 0.7, and Reggie Thomas trailed at 0.55 (Table 7).

Table 7: Means by candidate, conservative respondents (including base moderate identifiers)

	Number	Mean	Std Error	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
McGrath	36	**1.13889**	0.44037	0.2666	2.0112
Young	44	**0.70455**	0.39833	-0.0845	1.4936
Thomas	38	**0.55263**	0.42863	-0.2964	1.4017

Separating the treatment across both candidate and ad type cannot offer findings with any confidence, due to the limited sample size. At first glance, the means for each advertisement are displayed in Table 8. These means largely follow the same pattern as the previous analysis without candidates: sociocultural (guns) ads are at the top of the list, mostly regardless of candidate; fiscal/economic (taxes) ads trend toward the bottom. Specifically, the Guns/Information ads (i.e., the endorsement ads) perform well across all three candidates.

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Table 8: Means by each advertisement type, conservative respondents only (including base moderate identifiers)

	Number	Mean	Std Error	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
McGrath/Guns/Information/Conservative	4	3.5000	1.2093	1.097	5.9033
McGrath/Guns/Information/Moderate	4	3.0000	1.2093	0.597	5.4033
Young/Guns/Information/Moderate	4	3.0000	1.2093	0.597	5.4033
Thomas/Guns/Information/Moderate	4	2.5000	1.2093	0.097	4.9033
McGrath/Symbolism	4	2.2500	1.2093	-0.153	4.6533
McGrath/Valence	4	2.2500	1.2093	-0.153	4.6533
McGrath/Taxes/Information/Conservative	4	2.0000	1.2093	-0.403	4.4033
McGrath/Guns/Position/Moderate	2	2.0000	1.7103	-1.399	5.3988
Young/Guns/Position/Moderate	5	2.0000	1.0817	-0.150	4.1496
Young/Symbolism	5	1.8000	1.0817	-0.350	3.9496
Thomas/Guns/Position/Moderate	4	1.7500	1.2093	-0.653	4.1533
Young/Guns/Position/Conservative	5	1.6000	1.0817	-0.550	3.7496
Thomas/Taxes/Position/Conservative	4	1.5000	1.2093	-0.903	3.9033
Thomas/Taxes/Information/Conservative	2	1.5000	1.7103	-1.899	4.8988
Young/Taxes/Position/Conservative	2	1.5000	1.7103	-1.899	4.8988
Thomas/Valence	6	1.1667	0.9874	-0.796	3.1290
Young/Valence	4	1.0000	1.2093	-1.403	3.4033
Young/Guns/Information/Conservative	4	0.5000	1.2093	-1.903	2.9033
Thomas/Guns/Information/Conservative	4	0.2500	1.2093	-2.153	2.6533
McGrath/Taxes/Position/Conservative	2	**0.0000**	1.7103	-3.399	3.3988
Thomas/Taxes/Position/Moderate	3	-0.3333	1.3964	-3.108	2.4418
McGrath/Taxes/Information/Moderate	5	-0.4000	1.0817	-2.550	1.7496
Thomas/Symbolism	4	-0.5000	1.2093	-2.903	1.9033
Thomas/Guns/Position/Conservative	4	-0.7500	1.2093	-3.153	1.6533
Young/Taxes/Information/Conservative	4	-0.7500	1.2093	-3.153	1.6533
Young/Taxes/Position/Moderate	5	-1.2000	1.0817	-3.350	0.9496
Young/Taxes/Information/Moderate	6	-1.3333	0.9874	-3.296	0.6290
McGrath/Taxes/Position/Moderate	5	-1.8000	1.0817	-3.950	0.3496
McGrath/Guns/Position/Conservative	2	-2.0000	1.7103	-5.399	1.3988
Thomas/Taxes/Information/Moderate	3	-2.3333	1.3964	-5.108	0.4418

Do the ads seem to interact with candidate traits in any significant way? One pattern stands out. Messaging for McGrath and Young mattered; I cannot say it did for Thomas.

To begin with McGrath, the ANOVA analysis generated a p-value of 0.0378 (Table 9). McGrath generated especially positive responses when her ad reported an endorsement by a pro-gun group (review Table 8). Position taking,

with an attempt to entice prospective voting support, fell flat. Young's ads also varied in the response they produced (Table 10), but in his case, taking an explicit pro-gun stance outperformed his valence ad (again, review Table 8).

Table 9: ANOVA outputs, McGrath responses, conservative respondents only (including base moderate identifiers)

McGrath ANOVA	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
Exposure w/ candidate	9	127.80556	14.2006	2.4211	0.0378*
Error	26	152.50000	5.8654		
C. Total	35	280.30556			

Table 10: ANOVA outputs, Young responses, conservative respondents only (including base moderate identifiers)

Young ANOVA	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
Exposure w/ candidate	9	94.20238	10.4669	2.4643	0.0292*
Error	32	135.91667	4.2474		
C. Total	41	230.11905			

Ads for Thomas produced a scattershot effect, compared to his valence ad, with the results not statistically distinguishable. That is because, in general, conservatives still rated him coldly after seeing an upbeat ad on his behalf (Table 11). When Thomas called for increased taxation on the rich, the response was overwhelmingly negative compared to when the white candidates suggested the same thing.

Table 11: ANOVA outputs, Thomas responses, conservative respondents only (including base moderate identifiers)

Thomas ANOVA	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
Exposure w/ candidate	9	67.47807	7.49756	0.9375	0.5092
Error	28	223.91667	7.99702		
C. Total	37	291.39474			

Angering the base?

Even so-called red states and even safe Republican districts contain more than just conservative voters. This experiment also included 82 survey respondents who identified as liberal. An expanded definition that includes "moderates" with at least one liberal issue area provides even more data: 130 observations. Liberals responded differently, depending on the messaging, as well – a result that, despite the small sample size, instills confidence given a p-value of 0.0018 (Table 12).

Table 12: ANOVA outputs, Broad-based advertisement types, liberal respondents (including base moderate

All ANOVA	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
Exposure w/o candidate	9	161.88410	17.9871	3.1805	0.0018*
Error	120	678.64667	5.6554		
C. Total	129	840.53077			

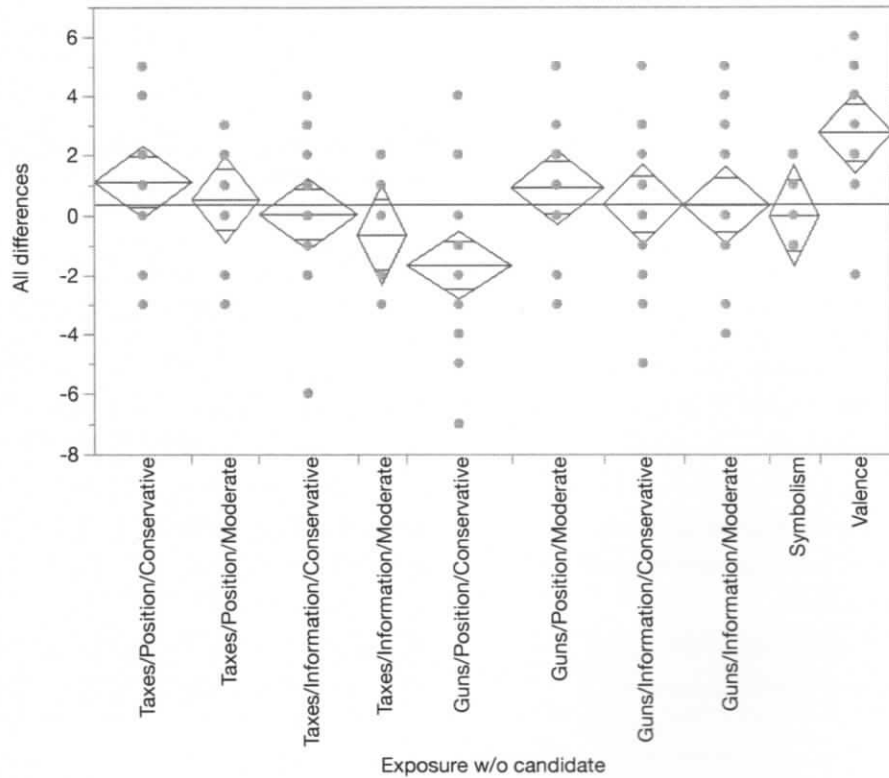**Table 13: Means of broad-based advertisement types, liberal respondents (including base moderate identifiers)**

	Number	Mean	Std Error	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Valence	12	2.7500	0.68650	1.391	4.109
Taxes/Position/Conservative	16	1.1250	0.59453	-0.052	2.302
Guns/Position/Moderate	15	0.9333	0.61402	-0.282	2.149
Taxes/Position/Moderate	11	0.5455	0.71703	-0.874	1.965
Guns/Information/Conservative	13	0.3846	0.65957	-0.921	1.691
Guns/Information/Moderate	14	0.3571	0.63558	-0.901	1.616
Taxes/Information/Conservative	16	0.0625	0.59453	-1.115	1.240
Symbolism	8	**0.0000**	0.84079	-1.665	1.665
Taxes/Information/Moderate	8	-0.6250	0.84079	-2.290	1.040
Guns/Position/Conservative	17	-1.6471	0.57678	-2.789	-0.505

Whereas conservatives reacted in a relatively muddled way to the different crossover messages, usually warming to a candidate supportive of guns but turning away from a Democrat talking tax policy, liberal respondents showed no such confusion. Compared to the valence advertisement, every single crossover message dampened their enthusiasm for the Democrat (Table 13).

Still, the crossover messages usually resulted in net positive means. Positive but fluff advertising from a Democrat worked best with liberal voters – but most upbeat attempts to reach out to moderates and conservatives still either helped a little or at least did no harm. At worst, crossover ads hurt Democrats among liberals due to the opportunity costs they sacrifice by neglecting to send an attractive message to their base.

The one stark exception again appeared when we look at the social issue of gun control. As Figure 2 shows, taking a starkly pro-gun position eroded the response among liberals badly.

Figure 2: ANOVA scatter plot, broad-based advertisement types, all liberal respondents (including base moderate identifiers)

Candidate demographic traits operated in the opposite direction among liberal respondents. Liberals responded more favorably to ads from the African-American candidate, less enthusiastically to ads from white candidates, especially the white woman.

Table 14: Means by candidate, liberal respondents (including base moderate identifiers)

	Number	Mean	Std Error	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Thomas	47	**0.638298**	0.38407	-0.1212	1.3978
Young	47	**0.468085**	0.38407	-0.2914	1.2276
McGrath	45	**0.244444**	0.39251	-0.5318	1.0207

Comparing Conservative and Liberal Responses

After examining the means and variance between conservative respondents and liberal respondents, we can how differently the two groups reacted to each sort of advertisement. Here are the ad responses, side by side:

Tables 15 & 16. Liberal and Conservative Respondents

Liberal Respondents	N	Mean
Valence	12	2.7500
Taxes/Position/Conservative	16	1.1250
Guns/Position/Moderate	15	0.9333
Taxes/Position/Moderate	11	0.5455
Guns/Information/Conservative	13	0.3846
Guns/Information/Moderate	14	0.3571
Taxes/Information/Conservative	16	0.0625
Symbolism	8	0.0000
Taxes/Information/Moderate	8	-0.6250
Guns/Position/Conservative	17	-1.6471

Conservative Respondents	N	Mean
Guns/Information/Moderate	12	2.8333
Guns/Position/Moderate	11	1.9091
Valence	14	1.4286
Guns/Information/Conservative	12	1.4167
Symbolism	13	1.2308
Taxes/Position/Conservative	8	1.1250
Taxes/Information/Conservative	10	0.8000
Guns/Position/Conservative	11	0.0909
Taxes/Information/Moderate	14	-1.2143
Taxes/Position/Moderate	13	-1.2308

Two gun ads performed notably better than the valence ad among conservatives. The valence ad, with no crossover message, performs best among liberals. One ad undermined candidates with both groups: the fiscally responsible "moderate" message on taxation, combining deficit reduction with

taxes targeting the rich. A "moderate" pro-gun position that still embraced a ban on assault rifles, meanwhile, fared well in both groups. Note that this moderate position on guns mirrors what we see in public opinion on gun control, while the lack of enthusiasm for fiscal discipline fits with the overall political message across political parties right now.

IMPLICATIONS

As stated previously, to win races, Democrats in states like Kentucky need conservative voters. One might think the obvious solution would be to run centrist Democratic candidates, but that solution presents multiple problems. First, the necessity of political fundraising pushes candidates to appeal to donors, which are oftentimes solidly on the right or the left.[21] Second, conservative Democrats alienate their own base, losing staunch liberals to third-party candidates or driving down turnout. That leaves Democrats in red states in a sticky, if not impossible, situation most of the time.

This study provides some hope, however. Conservative voters do respond positively to some crossover messaging from Democratic candidates. The results may not undermine the existing literature casting doubt on the influence of campaigns.[22] We do not know, for example, whether these short-term positive responses would persist. At a minimum, the candidate might need to be genuinely moderate or conservative, rather than just one willing to finesse a campaign message. But whether candidates matter or campaigns matter, something does seem to break through the ideological barrier.

Across the board, social issue-based advertising affected voters more powerfully than economic issues. While that lopsided response may be an outgrowth of my decision to use a student sample – most have not yet fully entered the workforce, and their place in the national economy has not solidified – I doubt it. It mirrors the polarization over cultural issues, and the moralization of what might have been more-technical issues at an earlier time. It also parallels the shift in Kentucky from being a swing state governed by Blue Dog Democrats, when economic issues played a greater role in national politics, to being a reliably Republican state now that social issues defined by competing identities dominate political discourse. Either way, this importance placed on social issues shows the most-direct route for appealing to the Blue Dog Democratic voters who still exist in large numbers across Kentucky and other Southern states – who tend to be fiscally moderate, if not liberal, while retaining their traditional values. Specifically, a moderately pro-gun ad played well across ideologies.

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[21] Eric Heberlig, Marc Hetherington, and Bruce Larson, "The Price of Leadership: Campaign Money and the Polarization of Congressional Parties," *The Journal of Politics* 68, no. 4 (2006).

[22] Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996."

Candidate traits mattered less, aside from a few possible interactive effects from certain ads. Candidate race influenced responses, but in opposite directions depending on voter ideology, resulting in a wash. In terms of informing political campaigns how to communicate with conservative voters, the limited power of candidate identity is just as well: Candidate traits cannot be manipulated in the same way that communications can. Future research with a larger sample could explore whether crossover appeals vary significantly in their power depending on the candidate who tries to make them.

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