

You Take the High Road and I'll Take the Low Road? The Interplay of Attack Strategies and Tactics in Presidential Campaigns

Lee Sigelman
The George Washington University
Emmett H. Buell, Jr.
Denison University

Formal models and conventional wisdom converge on the idea that the strategy and tactics of major-party opponents in presidential campaigns should vary as a function of the competitive situation in which the two sides find themselves. That idea forms the core of our interpretation of the circumstances underlying negative campaigning. We test it by analyzing the statements of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 1960 through 2000 campaigns. The data are consistent with our interpretation. Strategically, tickets were most likely to go on the attack in races in which they were running far behind. Tactically, vice-presidential candidates were most likely to out-attack their presidential running mates in races in which their ticket was running far ahead. Close contests in which neither side enjoyed a clear or enduring lead seemed to complicate strategic choices for both tickets and thereby to confound the tactics of presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

Most election forecasters maintain that campaigning in U.S. presidential races rarely alters outcomes preordained by the economy and a few other factors (e.g., Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992; but see Campbell 2001). By contrast, most campaign strategists believe that good campaigners can beat bad ones, even when the initial odds appear daunting. Advisers to leading candidates try to devise strategies that will sustain their initial advantage, while those advising candidates who are lagging behind search for a strategy that will narrow the gap. If a strategy seems to be working, candidates will stick to the game plan, making relatively minor adjustments as circumstances warrant. If the plan is falling short, candidates and their advisers will cast about for alternatives, perhaps on a weekly or even daily basis.

“Strategy” refers to basic decisions that must be made at the outset of a campaign and continuously revisited as the contest plays out. Much of what falls under the rubric of strategy comes down to whether the opposition should be attacked or not on a particular issue, whether a preemptive strike should be

launched or not, and whether a particular line of attack should be tempered or not. In 1964, for example, Lyndon Johnson devised a strategy to make the most of misgivings that many liberal and moderate Republicans harbored about their party's nominee, Barry Goldwater. Johnson decided to denounce the "extreme" conservatism of Goldwater and his supporters, but not the GOP itself (Johnson 1971, 88–111). He impressed this plan upon his running mate, Hubert Humphrey, immediately after the Democratic convention, reportedly saying, "Let's just make it a general rule never to refer to Goldwater as a Republican" (Solberg 1984, 259).

"Tactics" pertain to the responsibilities of the campaigners once a strategy has been adopted. Having decided on a particular line of attack, the candidates and others in the campaign organization must decide who will assume the most responsibility for taking the fight to the opposition and who, if anyone, will remain above the fray. In the 1964 strategy session mentioned above, Johnson decreed that both he and Humphrey would make the case that mainstream Republicans should shun Goldwater. Humphrey followed Johnson's orders to the letter. Campaigning in New Mexico, for example, he maintained, "Large numbers of Eisenhower Republicans, Scranton Republicans, Rockefeller Republicans—that is, solid, constructive, middle-of-the-road Republicans—cannot bring themselves to vote for Goldwater. They are putting country above party, principle above politics" (Mazo 1964).

A peculiar feature of the American political system, the vice-presidency, provides an opportunity to observe the interplay of these strategic and tactical choices. In this paper, we use the 1960 through 2000 presidential campaigns as test cases of how competing tickets decided the strategic issue of how much to attack the opposition and the tactical issue of how the presidential and vice-presidential candidates should put this strategy into practice.

The Argument

We assume that winning is the foremost objective of all the candidates nominated for president and vice-president on major-party tickets. This assumption cannot be safely applied to third-party and independent candidates because they run for purposes other than winning presidential elections (Schattschneider 1942, 35–36). During the last four decades of the twentieth century (the period considered here), all of the Democratic and Republican candidates campaigned with the intent of winning, though some (like Goldwater) realized that the odds were long. No independent or third-party candidate competing in these contests could have expected to win, though some surely expected to affect the outcome. Because we assume that winning is the goal of the campaign strategy, we confine our attention to major-party candidates.¹ Given the competitive situation in which

¹ Even if we had wanted to include third-party and independent candidacies, it would have been virtually impossible to do so, owing to the paucity of news coverage accorded vice-presidential can-

the two major parties find themselves in a given campaign, the questions that concern us are, first, the strategic one of how heavily each side should be expected to attack the other and, second, the tactical one of whether the two members of a ticket should be expected to play similar roles in executing their campaign strategy.

We begin with the strategic issue. To win, each side tries to make a convincing case that it deserves the voters' support. At the extremes, this case can be entirely positive, focused on the strengths of one's own side, or entirely negative, focused on the shortcomings of the other side. In practice, the strategic issue is not to attack never or always, but how to achieve an appropriate balance between too little negativity and too much. Conventional wisdom about campaigns holds that candidates will strike a balance appropriate to their understanding of the competitive situation in which they are involved. Formal models of campaign strategy reach precisely the same conclusion.

Consider first the formal models, as exemplified by Skaperdas and Grofman's (1995) model (see also, e.g., Riker 1996). This model assumes that both sides (X and Y) try to appeal to undecided voters through positive messages and that if X and Y wage equally positive campaigns, they will split the undecided vote evenly. As X and Y proceed with these positive appeals, the pool of undecided voters shrinks, yielding diminishing returns for each side. Thus, to dislodge some of the opponent's current supporters into the undecided column, where they will either remain or become available for capture, X and Y devote some resources to attacking each other rather than pursuing a strategy based purely on self-promotion.

The crucial insight conveyed by this model is that the extent to which X and Y attack one another hinges on where each stands in the "horserace." If front-runner X can win without converting Y's supporters, then X will engage in "more positive, and less negative, campaigning than his opponent" (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995, 52). In this scenario, Y cannot catch up simply by drawing at the same rate as X from the undecided pool. To win, Y must attack X in an attempt to push some of X's supporters into the undecided column. If X's lead over Y is slim or if the situation is unstable, the resulting uncertainty should lead X to go on the attack in hopes of widening the lead, while Y should be expected to wage a less negative campaign than if X held a clear lead. In sum, the model implies that the side that trails is more motivated to attack the leader than vice versa and that the difference between the two sides in their propensities to go on the attack varies as a function of the leader's margin over the trailer.

didates on these tickets. One searches mainstream news sources in vain for mention of La Donna Harris (who ran with Barry Commoner in 1980), Pat Choate (with H. Ross Perot in 1996), Ezola Foster (with Pat Buchanan in 2000), or Winona La Duke (with Ralph Nader in 2000). Others, like Curtis LeMay (with George Wallace in 1968), Patrick Lucey (with John Anderson in 1980), and James Stockdale (with Perot in 1992) attracted some notice, but not nearly enough to make possible the sorts of comparisons undertaken here for major-party tickets.

Campaign strategists, unschooled in abstract models like Skaperdas and Grofman's but guided by experience on the campaign trail, think about the same set of circumstances in virtually the same way. Let X be Ronald Reagan, Y be Walter Mondale, and the year be 1984. Always far behind, Mondale was like a boxer who, trailing hopelessly on the judges' cards, could win only by landing a knockout punch. Reagan, by contrast, was content to tuck into a defensive posture, conduct an upbeat "It's morning again in America" campaign, and occasionally hit back. Mondale and his advisers decided to throw caution to the winds, devising a strategy that gave him "some chance of a major upset" but also risked overwhelming defeat (Maisel 1993, 270, 276).

Prior research provides evidence on behalf of this emphasis on the candidates' competitive positions as a key to their campaign strategies. In an analysis of presidential campaign advertising, Benoit (1999, 182) reports that ads acclaiming the sponsoring candidate dominated among those who either held a safe lead or were locked in a tight race, but attacks dominated among those who trailed by a wide margin. Others have uncovered similar differences in senatorial and presidential primaries (Djupe and Peterson 1999; Haynes and Rhine 1998), and still others have documented differences in candidates' press releases and consultants' preferred strategies depending on who is ahead and who is behind (Haynes, Flowers, and Gurian 1999; Theilmann and Wilhite 1998).

In sum, if one side is running far behind, it should be expected to go on the attack in order to give itself a chance, however slight, of catching up. By contrast, the side that enjoys a clear lead presumably has little incentive to attack. The actions of opponents who are locked in a close, competitive contest should be less predictable, with strategists recommending whichever balance seems most promising for a particular ticket, given the personalities of the candidates and a host of other situational peculiarities.

Once each side has settled on a strategy, tactical considerations come into play. Conventional wisdom holds that vice-presidential candidates should be expected to carry the main burden of negative campaigning. This image dates back to Richard Nixon's ferocious assault on Adlai Stevenson's patriotism and manhood in 1952, subsequently reinforced by the tactics of William Miller in 1964 and Robert Dole in 1976. However, some other vice-presidential candidates (most notably Henry Cabot Lodge in 1960 and Jack Kemp in 1996) stood out for not going on the attack.

Were Lodge and Kemp simply prominent exceptions to the general rule? We doubt that the situation is that simple. Rather, the tactics employed by the two candidates on the same ticket presumably depend on the circumstances in which they must compete. Both candidates on a ticket that trails badly must go all out to undermine their opponents' support. At the other extreme, the main task for a ticket that enjoys a wide lead is to avoid losing its current supporters, and a time-tested way to do this is for the presidential candidate to stay "presidential" (upbeat, statesmanlike, and above the hurly-burly of the campaign).

Meanwhile, the vice-presidential candidate can be deployed as a sniper, tasked to keep the opponents pinned down and on the defensive. In close races, the roles played by the two running mates are harder to anticipate. Not only is the competitive situation difficult to read, but the personalities of the candidates and their views on particular issues will probably play a part in deciding who attacks and how often.

In sum, we expect presidential and vice-presidential candidates to differ most in their attack roles when they are leading by a comfortable margin, to differ least when they are trailing badly, and to exhibit no consistent pattern when they are running neck and neck with their opponents.

Data and Methods

We test our argument by analyzing statements by the major-party presidential candidates and their running mates in the 1960 through 2000 campaigns. We extracted these statements from a total of 10,286 news items published in the *New York Times* about these 11 presidential contests. Consisting of news articles, brief notes, and verbatim texts (some partial, others complete) of speeches, interviews, debates, and advertisements, these news items constitute everything that the *Times* published about a campaign in its news sections from Labor Day to Election Day.

Our unit of analysis is the campaign statement, not the news item; a given news item might contain multiple campaign statements (or none at all). A campaign statement consists of either verbatim remarks attributed to one of the candidates or a paraphrase thereof. For example, a news item might quote one candidate accusing an opponent of “reckless disregard of the truth” on foreign policy. The item reporting this attack might or might not provide additional allusions or specific examples to embellish X’s initial remark, but, embellished or not, X’s statement would constitute an attack against Y on the topic of foreign policy. The same news item might also present a lengthy analysis of X’s position on welfare, replete with direct quotations or paraphrases from X’s speeches, interviews, and press releases—none of which attacked Y. Because all the latter information related to X’s views on welfare, we would treat it as a separate statement by X. As these examples suggest, statements vary in length, ranging from just a few words to several paragraphs.

We coded statements rather than entire news items for the same reason that many researchers analyzing the negativity of televised campaign commercials have elected to disaggregate whole ads into “idea units,” “arguments,” or “utterances” (e.g., Benoit 1999; Jamieson, Waldman, and Sherr 2000). Like the categorization of entire ads, gross classification of an entire news item conceals as much as it reveals about the item’s content, especially when the item contains both attack statements and non-attack statements. A more refined analysis based on topically identified statements provides a more precise calibration of a campaign’s tone.

Over the 11 campaigns, we coded a total of 8,150 statements by the major-party candidates.² Though massive, this database obviously does not capture everything that was said or transpired during any of the campaigns. Rather, it contains everything that the *Times* saw fit to print about these contests. Walter Lippmann's (1922) metaphor still holds: like a searchlight, news coverage illuminates some features of the political landscape while leaving others in darkness. Campaign coverage in the news media unquestionably provides a partial representation of who said and did what. Even so, nearly all of what citizens learn about presidential campaigns comes from news reports and advertisements in the mass media, from media-supplied pictures in their heads (Lippmann 1922; Patterson 1980, 3). Although our database does not include everything the participants said, it does include every statement the nation's newspaper of record deemed worthy of reporting. The *Times* is by far the most comprehensive and authoritative source of information for analysis of the 11 contests in our study.³

In coding these statements, the most basic distinction we drew (and the crucial one for present purposes) was between attacks and all other statements. Attacks are statements in which the candidate whose words were quoted or paraphrased clearly criticized the opposition. The residual category of all other campaign statements contains no criticism of the opposition; it includes neutral or admiring observations about the opposition, commentary on the progress of one's own campaign or poll standings, and issue pronouncements that make no attack on the opposition. Although the distinction between attacks and other statements can be problematic (see, e.g., Jamieson, Waldman, and Sherr 2000), we encountered few problems when applying it, as the reliability of our coding attests.⁴

²These 8,150 statements were 51.1% of the 15,940 statements we coded overall—the others being either by third-party candidates or by an array of other major-party campaign spokespersons. Not included in the presidential and vice-presidential statements considered here are those attributed jointly to one of these two principals and someone else (e.g., another campaign spokesperson, a public official, or a relative). Insofar as we are aware, ours is the most extensive content-analytic data set that has been compiled on attack strategies in presidential campaigns; for some other pertinent efforts, see, for example, Jamieson, Waldman, and Sherr (2000) and Kaid and Johnston (1991).

³As a check on the comprehensiveness of the *Times*'s campaign coverage, we coded all *Washington Post* news items on the 1992 campaign. The *Times* provided far more comprehensive coverage: the number of attacks that we coded from the *Times* exceeded the number that we coded from the *Post* by 31%. Patterns of coverage in the two papers closely paralleled one another. For the six source and target categories in the broader project from which these data are drawn (Democrats attack Republicans, Republicans attack Democrats, Democrats attack third party, Republicans attack third party, third party attacks Democrats, and third party attacks Republicans), the percentage in a given category never differed by more than two percentage points between papers; for example, 47.3% of the attacks reported in the *Times* and 46.6% in the *Post* were by Republicans against Democrats.

⁴To test the reliability of our distinction between attacks and other statements, a check coder recoded 162 statements drawn as equally as possible from the 1964, 1972, and 1984 campaigns. The check coder agreed with the main coder in 159 of these cases, for 98.1% intercoder agreement. Kappa for the matrix of agreements and disagreements between the two coders is .962 ($p < .001$), strong evidence of intercoder reliability.

Our analysis centers on the major-party candidates' propensities to attack their major-party opponents, where propensities are measured simply as the number of attacks attributed to a candidate divided by the number of statements attributed to the same candidate. For example, vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro attacked the Republicans in 75 of the 140 statements that were attributed to her during the 1984 campaign, for an attack propensity score of .536.

We drew on preelection polls, scholarly accounts, and press reports to classify each of the 11 campaigns as either "runaway" or "fluid." All campaigns in which one ticket consistently led by a wide margin in the polls throughout the general election period fell under the runaway heading (1964, 1972, 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996); all others were classified as fluid (1960, 1968, 1976, 1980, and 2000).⁵ After making these initial distinctions, we subdivided the 12 tickets in the runaway category according to whether they were the winning or losing side. Table 1 identifies the candidates and describes the competitive situation in each campaign.

Results

Of the 8,150 statements by major-party presidential and vice-presidential candidates, 4,659 (57.2%) were attacks on major-party opponents. Table 2 catalogues the attack propensities of the 22 tickets, arrayed chronologically and according to each ticket's competitive position in the race. These propensities ranged all the way from .332 for Clinton-Gore in 1996 to .757 for Kennedy-Johnson in 1960. The negativity of Kennedy-Johnson may come as a surprise, but the contrasting situations in which these three tickets competed provide an initial hint of the broader pattern observable in Table 2. Before we elaborate on that point, though, let us briefly note two other aspects of the data.

First, the rightmost column of the table reveals no increase in attack propensities over the years. In most campaigns, the two tickets' combined propensity to attack varied by only a few percentage points in either direction from the overall figure of 57.2%, and even in the most attack-ridden campaigns (1964 and 1972), the combined attack propensity of the two tickets was less than eight percentage points above the overall figure. One campaign, however, stands out from the rest: only 42.0% of the candidates' statements in 2000 were attacks, by far the lowest figure registered in any of the campaigns studied here. The counterpart figure for 1996 (.482) was the second lowest, so it seems clear that if anything, the trend in recent years has been away from—not toward—greater negativity in presidential campaigns. Still, we need to caution against overinterpretation of these results, which pertain solely to the following: (1) the attack propensity of presidential and vice-presidential candidates rather than all the many groups and indi-

⁵ We classified the 1968 race as fluid rather than a runaway—even though support for Nixon and Agnew held steady in Gallup surveys throughout the fall—because Humphrey and Muskie surged and nearly closed the gap during the final days.

TABLE 1
Major-Party Tickets by Competitive Position, 1960–2000

Year	Tickets in Runaway Races		Tickets in Fluid Races	
	Leading	Trailing	Democratic	Republican
1960			John F. Kennedy Lyndon Johnson	Richard Nixon Henry Cabot Lodge
1964	Lyndon Johnson Hubert Humphrey	Barry Goldwater William Miller		
1968			Hubert Humphrey Edmund Muskie	Richard Nixon Spiro Agnew
1972	Richard Nixon Spiro Agnew	George McGovern Sargent Shriver		
1976			Jimmy Carter Walter Mondale	Gerald Ford Robert Dole
1980			Jimmy Carter Walter Mondale	Ronald Reagan George Bush
1984	Ronald Reagan George Bush	Walter Mondale Geraldine Ferraro		
1988	George Bush Dan Quayle	Michael Dukakis Lloyd Bentsen		
1992	Bill Clinton Al Gore	George Bush Dan Quayle		
1996	Bill Clinton Al Gore	Robert Dole Jack Kemp		
2000			Al Gore Joseph Lieberman	George W. Bush Dick Cheney

viduals who speak for the opposing sides in presidential campaigns, and (2) the tendency to criticize the opposition, which does not necessarily involve personal, underhanded, or nasty attacks. Even so, these results do provide an initial basis to doubt that presidential campaigns have become progressively more negative.

A second noteworthy aspect of these data (though not one that is immediately ascertainable from Table 2) is their inconsistency with conventional wisdom about partisan differences in campaign strategy. Goldstein (1982) argued that whereas Republicans cannot credibly appeal to voters by promising to enact enticing new social programs, Democrats can make such promises. Therefore, Goldstein concluded, Republicans must wage more negative campaigns than their Democratic opponents if they are to attract more voters. However, from 1960 through 2000, the attack propensity of Democratic candidates (59.9%) significantly outran that of Republican candidates (54.4%).⁶

⁶Nor does it matter if we confine our attention to the campaigns of 1960 through 1980, the last year that could have shaped Goldstein's thinking. Indeed, in those six campaigns, the tendency of Democrats to out-attack Republicans was especially pronounced (63.8% versus 54.0%).

TABLE 2

Attack Propensities of the Presidential Tickets, 1960–2000

Year	Tickets in Runaway Races		Tickets in Fluid Races		Total
	Leading	Trailing	Democratic	Republican	
1960*			.757 (523)	.481 (520)	.619 (1043)
1964*	.549 (335)	.728 (382)			.644 (717)
1968			.522 (414)	.517 (387)	.519 (801)
1972*	.401 (152)	.756 (349)			.649 (501)
1976*			.568 (317)	.468 (293)	.520 (610)
1980			.629 (380)	.568 (396)	.598 (776)
1984*	.469 (382)	.722 (515)			.614 (897)
1988*	.558 (389)	.642 (366)			.599 (755)
1992*	.548 (310)	.659 (384)			.610 (694)
1996*	.332 (190)	.563 (352)			.482 (542)
2000*			.342 (401)	.496 (413)	.420 (814)
Total*	.497 (1758)	.681 (2348)	.574 (2035)	.506 (2009)	.572 (8150)
			.540 (4044)		

Note: Attack propensity scores are proportions of total statements (in parentheses) containing attacks on the opposition. Asterisks designate campaigns in which the difference between attack propensity scores was significant at $p < .05$ (one-tail test for runaways and two-tailed test for fluid races). In the total row, the difference between leading and trailing tickets was significant at $p < .05$, as was the total difference between Democratic and Republican tickets in fluid races; the grand total for fluid races was also significantly different from the totals for leading and trailing tickets in runaway races.

The Strategic Pattern

To what extent and in what ways did the competing sides' attack propensities vary as a function of competitive circumstances? One clear pattern is that in all of the six runaway elections, without exception, the ticket that trailed significantly out-attacked its opponents. Overall, 68.1% of the statements by candidates on trailing tickets were attacks. Especially aggressive were the Goldwater-Miller ticket in 1964 (72.8%), the McGovern-Shriver ticket in 1972 (75.6%), and the Mondale-Ferraro ticket in 1984 (72.2%). By contrast, just 49.7% of the statements by members of the leading tickets in the same races were attacks, and their attack propensities fell all the way down to 33.2% for Clinton-Gore in 1996.

We expected attack propensities to be less predictable in fluid contests, and that expectation, too, was borne out. In two of these five contests (1968 and 1980), the tickets exchanged attacks more or less evenly, but in the other three (1960, 1976, and 2000), one side attacked significantly more often than the other. Overall, 54.0% of the candidates' statements in fluid races were attacks. Thus, as expected, tickets that were locked in close contests were much less likely to go on the attack than were tickets that were lagging far behind their opponents. On

the other hand, the difference was much narrower between tickets involved in tight races and front-runners in runaways—a pattern consistent with Benoit's (1999) findings for presidential campaign ads. In sum, major-party tickets were far more attack-oriented if their election prospects looked bleak than if they were either nursing a safe lead or involved in a close race.

The Tactical Pattern

Altogether in these 11 contests, presidential candidates exhibited an attack propensity of .570, while their running mates scored .576. At first glance, this negligible difference seems to negate the stereotype of vice-presidential candidates as attack dogs. However, by itemizing attack propensities separately for each member of every ticket, Table 3 reveals that some vice-presidential candidates did indeed play the part.

Recall our argument that the two members of a ticket should differ most in their attack roles when they lead their opponents by a comfortable margin. In four of the six runaway campaigns (those of 1964, 1972, 1992, and 1996), the vice-presidential candidate on the front-running side significantly out-attacked his running mate, by an average of 26.6 percentage points. The two exceptional cases were 1984, when George Bush was almost as upbeat as Ronald Reagan, and 1988, when Dan Quayle was only somewhat more likely than Bush to go on the attack. Even with those two exceptions taken into account, vice-presidential candidates on front-running tickets were 12.8% more attack-oriented than their running mates.

We have already seen that tickets that lagged far behind their opponents tended to be extremely attack-oriented. Table 3 establishes that in general and as expected, both members of these tickets carried the attack to their opponents: 69.1% of the statements by presidential candidates on trailing tickets and 64.5% of the statements by their running mates were attacks. Once again, though, the general pattern was not always reflected in specific cases. For example, in 1964 William Miller, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, easily exceeded presidential candidate Barry Goldwater's attack propensity (82.0% to 68.5%), even though Goldwater was among the most attack-prone of the presidential candidates considered here. Exceptions of a different type occurred in 1972, 1984, and 1996, when the trailing presidential candidates waged considerably more negative campaigns than their running mates. George McGovern (78.7%) proved more negative than Sargent Shriver (65.9%); Walter Mondale (79.2%) surpassed Geraldine Ferraro (53.6%) in taking the fight to Reagan-Bush; and Bob Dole (59.2%) was chagrined to discover that Jack Kemp (25.8%) simply would not serve as a hit man. In 1988 and 1992, there was no real difference between the attack propensities of the running mates on the trailing side.

In fluid contests, as previously noted, both sides must struggle to gain an accurate picture of the competitive situation, and they are likely to experience considerable difficulty in deciding which strategy to adopt and what tactics to pursue.

TABLE 3
 Attack Propensities of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential
 Candidates, 1960–2000

Year	Candidate	Tickets in Runaway Races		Tickets in Fluid Races	
		Leading	Trailing	Democratic	Republican
1960	Presidential			.759 (415)	.579 (390)
	Vice-presidential			.750 (108)	.185 (130)
1964	Presidential	.435* (200)	.685* (260)		
	Vice-presidential	.719 (135)	.820 (122)		
1968	Presidential			.562 (308)	.515 (264)
	Vice-presidential			.406 (106)	.520 (123)
1972	Presidential	.288* (80)	.787 (267)		
	Vice-presidential	.528 (72)	.659 (82)		
1976	Presidential			.538* (253)	.394* (216)
	Vice-presidential			.688 (64)	.675 (77)
1980	Presidential			.622 (315)	.546 (324)
	Vice-presidential			.662 (65)	.667 (72)
1984	Presidential	.484 (244)	.792 (375)		
	Vice-presidential	.442 (138)	.536 (140)		
1988	Presidential	.547 (338)	.625 (304)		
	Vice-presidential	.627 (51)	.726 (62)		
1992	Presidential	.518* (272)	.662 (328)		
	Vice-presidential	.763 (38)	.643 (56)		
1996	Presidential	.298* (168)	.592 (321)		
	Vice-presidential	.591 (22)	.258 (31)		
2000	Presidential			.311* (322)	.490 (361)
	Vice-presidential			.468 (79)	.538 (52)
Total	Presidential	.464* (1302)	.691 (1855)	.570 (1613)	.515 (1555)
					.543 (3168)
	Vice-presidential	.592 (456)	.645 (493)	.588 (422)	.476 (454)
					.530 (876)

Note: * denotes $p < .05$ for the difference between the presidential and vice-presidential candidate on the same ticket, with a one-tailed test. $N = 8150$.

We therefore expected to find somewhat greater intraticket variation in fluid races than in runaways and, for the most part, we did. Consider, for example, the extremely close race in 1960, when Kennedy (75.9%) and Johnson (75.0%) exhibited high and nearly identical levels of negativity, while Nixon (57.9%) and Lodge (18.5%) followed altogether different routes—Nixon by being combative, Lodge by rarely taking the fight to the Democrats.⁷ Obviously, both sides looked at the same polls and studied the same electoral map, only to come away with

⁷Lodge's meager attack score squares with a Nixon biographer's description of him as an especially insipid campaigner (Ambrose 1987, 580).

different understandings of the appropriate strategic and tactical response. The same thing happened in 1968, though this time it was the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, Edmund Muskie (40.6%), who campaigned more as a statesman than a hatchet man, while a desperate Hubert Humphrey (56.2%) still managed to assail the Republicans in most of his statements. Nixon (51.5%) and his running mate, Spiro Agnew (52.0%), by contrast, used essentially the same playbook. More generally, across the 10 tickets that were involved in closely contested elections, idiosyncrasies like Lodge's diffidence and Johnson's aggressiveness cancelled one another out, producing little overall difference between presidential (54.3%) and vice-presidential (53.0%) candidates.

Conclusion

The data examined here revealed sizeable differences of degree where our argument provided a basis for anticipating such differences. These data also revealed small and inconsistent differences in situations where our argument laid no foundation to expect large or consistent differences.

Strategically, one type of campaign stood apart from the others. Trailing tickets in runaway races consistently exhibited high attack propensities, bearing out our argument that the competitive situation leaves long shots no other choice. Leading tickets in runaway races were less distinctive because some tickets in fluid races campaigned as if they, too, enjoyed a comfortable lead. Tactically, one type of ticket also stood out, but this time it was leading tickets in runaway races, not trailing tickets in the same races. On front-running tickets, vice-presidential candidates out-attacked their ticket-mates, a tactical difference that did not emerge in other competitive circumstances. Overall, then, our results indicate that in runaway races the side that trailed could be counted on to wage an especially negative campaign and the vice-presidential candidate of the leading ticket could be counted on to play an unusually aggressive role; fluid campaigns could be counted on to produce less consistent strategic and tactical differences.

Findings about the major parties' propensities to attack and the sharing of this responsibility between presidential and vice-presidential candidates only scratch the surface of the strategic and tactical aspects of presidential campaigns. Other key questions—such as the balance between personal and issue-based attacks, the timing of attacks as a campaign unfolds, and the impact of credible third-party challengers—remain unanswered, though the larger database from which the findings reported here are drawn holds out promise for shedding new light on those questions as well.

Nor do the results reported here necessarily mean that the strategic and tactical maneuvers of the contending sides actually pay off. For example, despite their nonstop attacks, Goldwater-Miller, McGovern-Shriver, Mondale-Ferraro, and several other tickets that entered the general election campaign lagging far behind their opponents made little or no headway and ended up losing by lopsided margins. Thus, to return to the theme with which we began, an understanding of

attack strategies and tactics does not necessarily hold the key to predicting campaign outcomes, but our argument, buttressed by the results summarized in Tables 2 and 3, does provide some new guideposts for understanding what candidates do and say during presidential election campaigns.

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Lee Sigelman is Columbian College Distinguished Professor of Political Science, George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, and editor of the *American Political Science Review*.

Emmett H. Buell, Jr., is professor of political science, Denison University, Granville, OH 43023.

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