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"I am a Candidate for President": A Functional Analysis of Presidential Announcement Speeches, 1960-2004

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Abstract

This study investigates the nature of presidential announcement speeches, messages that introduce the current crop of contenders for the White House to voters and the news media. Announcement speeches are typically voters' initial exposure to these politicians *as* candidates for the White House. Seventy-five presidential announcement speeches from 1960 through 2004 were analyzed with the Functional Theory of Campaign Discourse. Acclaims were over three times as common as attacks; defenses were quite rare. Republicans and winners were more positive than Democrats or losers. These speeches were evenly split between policy and character. Democrats discussed policy more, and character less, than Republicans. Candidates emphasized issues owned by their political party more than candidates from the opposing party.

Key Terms: Presidential Announcement Speeches, Functional Theory, acclaims, attacks, defenses, policy, character

Introduction

When contemplating the beginning of the presidential campaign season, attention often focuses on the primaries and caucuses. However, voters and the news media usually first meet those seeking the presidency in the pre-primary campaign phase (labeled "surfacing" by Trent & Friedenberg, 2004) through announcement speeches in which candidates publicly declare their intention to run for the White House. This pre-primary phase clearly merits scholarly attention. The announcement speech provides candidates with their initial opportunity to introduce themselves to voters and the news media as a candidate for office, revealing the themes (policy and character) on which they intend to base their campaign. This is an important opportunity to create an initial impression of the candidate with voters that could influence how he or she is perceived throughout the remainder of the campaign. Although it is possible to change initial impressions, "first impressions can have considerable effect on person perception" (Bromley, 1993, p. 36), so clearly it is better to begin with a favorable impression than an unfavorable one. Furthermore, the declaration of intent to run appears to have become generally accepted as a key event in the modern campaign. Voters and the media expect to learn something about candidates in this speech. Finally, the announcement speech is an opportunity for candidates to attract media attention and coverage, which is crucial at the beginning of a

run for the presidency. Indeed, in the 2000 campaign Dan Quayle appeared on Larry King Live to announce that he soon would be giving an announcement speech! Unfortunately, there is a dearth of systematic research investigating the content of these key political campaign messages.

This study investigates presidential announcement speeches from 1960-2004 using the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (Benoit, 1999, in press; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit et al., 2003; Benoit, Wells, Pier, & Blaney, 1999) to content analyze the functions (acclaims, attacks, defenses) and topics (policy, character and the subdivisions of each topic) in these persuasive campaign messages. Petrocik's (1996) Issue Ownership theory is also tested with these texts. Although work has investigated primary campaign messages such as television spots (Benoit, 1999), debates (Benoit et al., 2002), or direct mail advertising (Benoit & Stein, 2005), heretofore this theory has not addressed the pre-primary or surfacing phase of the political campaign. This study will extend these theories to the surfacing phase of presidential campaigns. First, the literature on surfacing and announcement speeches is reviewed, then the method outlined and the sample of speeches is described. Results will then be presented followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings.

Literature Review

Announcement speeches must be understood as part of candidates' pre-primary activities, the surfacing phase of the primary campaign (Trent, 1978, 1994, 1998). Trent and Friedenberg (2004) argued that there are seven functions of the surfacing phase of a political campaign. First, announcement speeches are a vehicle for indicating a candidate's "fitness for office" (p. 25). Second, the surfacing phase marks the beginning of political ritual. A third function is to convey the candidate's "goals, potential programs, or initial stands on issues" to voters (p. 28). Fourth, voters learn about the candidate's personal style during surfacing. A fifth function is to identify a campaign's main themes. Sixth, the serious contenders are identified during the surfacing phase. Finally, relationships between candidates and the news media are developed during this phase. Although the surfacing phase encompasses more than just the announcement speech, it is fair to say that these messages are the most prominent component of this element of presidential campaigns. At this point in time, quantitative content analysis has not been utilized to systematically investigate the nature of announcement speeches. Nor is there a body of work using rhetorical criticism or case studies which analyze the nature or content of these messages.

Given the fact that contenders for the most important elective office in the world may be able to create an important initial impression with voters and the news media in these messages, they clearly merit scholarly attention. We will begin by describing the theory that under girds this analysis. Then we present the research questions posed in this study. Next, we explain the content analytic procedures employed in this study. We will present the results of our analysis and then discuss the implications of our findings.

Theoretical Underpinning

The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (Benoit, in press) and Petrocik's (1996) Issue Ownership theory will provide the theoretical underpinning for this study. Functional Theory begins with the assumption that, rather than seek an ideal candidate (every candidate has some flaws), citizens cast their votes for the candidate who appears *preferable*. Campaign discourse thus can be likened to an informal form of cost-benefit analysis, with utterances that tout a candidate's own benefits (acclaims), remarks that criticize an opponent's costs (attacks), and statements that attempt to reduce a candidate's alleged costs (defenses). In other words, campaign discourse is designed or *functions* to make the candidate appear preferable to opponents. These three functions can occur on two possible topics, policy and character. Pomper (1975) argued, for example, that some voters "change their partisan choice from one election to the next, and these changes are most closely related to their positions on the issues and their assessment of the abilities of the candidates" (p. 10). We will discuss first the three functions and then the two topics of political campaign discourse.

Functions of Political Campaign Discourse

The discourse candidates use to persuade voters that he or she is preferable to an opponent can enact one of three functions. First, a candidate may *acclaim* or engage in self-praise, discussing their own strengths (see Benoit, 1997). Acclaiming informs or reminds voters of a candidate's benefits. Second, candidates may *attack* their opponents, criticizing or providing unfavorable information about or evaluations of another candidate. Attacks can increase the apparent costs (drawbacks or disadvantages) of an opponent. Finally, when candidates are attacked, as they almost always are, they may choose to *defend*, or to rebut or refute those attacks. Defense has the potential to restore desirability lost from attacks. Each type of utterances furthers the function of making a candidate appear preferable to other candidates with voters (Benoit, in press). We have learned that in presidential campaign discourse acclaims are the most common utterance (and defenses the least) in key campaign message forms: television spots, debates, and direct mail brochures in the primary campaign phase; acceptance addresses; and television spots, and direct mail brochures from the general election campaign (Benoit, in press).

Topics of Political Discourse

These three functions can occur on two broad topics: policy (issues) and character (image or personalities). Policy positions–governmental actions and problems amenable to such action–are important because presidents implement policy at the federal level of government. Many voters are interested in knowing what the candidates for the Oval Office will do (or attempt to do) if elected. Will the president strive to implement public school vouchers? What will he or she do to protect us from terrorist attacks? Will the president assure funding for Social Security and Medicare? Functional Theory divides policy utterances into *past deeds* (past accomplishments by the candidate, or past failures by an opponent), *future plans* (specific campaign promises, or means to an end), and *gen-*

eral goals (policy ends or objectives). Each of these forms of policy can be the basis of an acclaim or an attack (and, for that matter, a defense).

The second possible topic of political campaign discourse is character. Candidates vary on many dimensions that are unrelated to policy, such as courage, industriousness, compassion, honesty, competence. Functional Theory subdivides character utterances into *personal qualities* (character traits like honesty, compassion, determination), *leadership ability* (competence and experience in office), and *ideals* (basic principles or core values). This can be an important topic because many citizens believe that our elected officials should be positive role models. We argue that character is important even for those voters who stress policy, because we must *trust* candidates to follow through, to the best of their ability, with their campaign promises (future plans and general goals). We must also believe they possess the requisite skills to implement their policy positions. Furthermore, we believe that unexpected crises could easily arise in a president's term of office. Precisely because these situations are unexpected, candidates have no reason to take a stand on the appropriate reaction to these crises during the campaign. When such situations arise, as in the tragic events of 9/11, voters must believe that the elected president will take the appropriate action even though no occasion arose during the campaign to make campaign promises about the proper policy for dealing with terrorism. Research (Benoit, in press) has established that presidential campaign discourse emphasizes policy more than character in television spots, debates, and direct mail brochures in both phases of the campaign as well as in nomination acceptance addresses. The Appendix provides examples of acclaims and attacks on the three forms of policy and of character.

We will also use Petrocik's (1996) Issue Ownership Theory to investigate the relative emphasis on various policy issues in announcement addresses. Petrocik observed that over time each of the two major political parties has acquired a reputation for being better able to handle a certain group of policy problems. For example, most people think that Democrats do a better job handling such issues as jobs, education, Social Security, and the environment. On the other hand, a majority of citizens believes that Republicans can better deal with such problems as national defense, foreign policy, crime, and taxation. Petrocik argues that a candidate can obtain a competitive advantage by stressing the issues on which his or her party is believed to do a better job handling by most voters. Table 1 illustrates why in 2002 Republicans would likely have preferred that voters would be more concerned with terrorism and crime than with Social Security or health care – and why Democrats probably would have preferred the opposite. A candidate starts with a "built-in" advantage with voters on issues his or her party owns.

Table 1. *Which political party do you trust to do a better job handling this issue?*

	Democratic	Republican
Terrorism	30	**51**
Crime†	27	**40**
Social Security	**50**	33
Health Care	**50**	35

Poll by ABC 9/23-26/02 except †Princeton Research Associates, 10/24-25/02.

Research Questions

Using the concepts from Functional Theory and Issue Ownership Theory, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relative frequency of the three functions of political campaign discourse in announcement speeches?

RQ2: What is the relative frequency of the two topics of political campaign discourse in announcement speeches?

RQ3: What is the relative frequency of the three forms of policy in announcement speeches?

RQ4: What is the relative frequency of the three forms of character comments in announcement speeches?

RQ5: Do Democratic announcement speeches emphasize Democratically-owned issues more, and Republican-owned issues less, than Republican announcements?

Answering these questions we will advance our knowledge of presidential primary announcement speeches and extend Functional Theory to the surfacing phase of the campaign. We will also contrast the functions and topics of Democrats versus Republicans and winners versus losers.

Method

Analytical Procedures

Four steps were employed in the analytic procedure used in this study. First, the candidates' statements in the announcement speeches were unitized into themes, or utterances that express a coherent idea. Berelson (1952) defined a theme as "an assertion about a subject" (p. 18). Holsti (1969) considered a theme to be "a single assertion about some subject" (p. 116). Themes vary in length (from phrases to a few sentences) due to the enthymematic nature of the discourse. Second, each theme was identified as an acclaim, attack or defense, utilizing these rules:

Acclaims portray the candidate favorably.
Attacks portray the opposing candidate unfavorably.
Defenses respond to, or refute, attacks.

The third step was to identify the topic of the theme (policy or character), according to these rules:

Policy utterances concern governmental action (past, current or future) and problems amenable to governmental action.

Character utterances concern characteristics, abilities or attributes of the candidates.

Fourth, a judgment was made about which specific form of policy (past deed, future plan, general goal) or character (personal quality, leadership ability, ideal) was present in the theme. Acclaims and attacks on each form of policy and character are illustrated in the Appendix with examples from the announcement speeches analyzed.

To illustrate our coding procedure consider the following excerpt from Al Gore's 2000 announcement speech:

<1> While some want to raise the cost of Medicare <2> and force seniors into HMO's, <3> I will make sure that Medicare is never weakened, never looted, never taken away. <4> I believe it's time also to help seniors pay for the prescription drugs they need.

This excerpt contains four themes. The first and second themes attack others for wanting to increase the cost of Medicare and to force seniors into HMO's (these themes attack future plans proposed by others). The third theme is an acclaim by Gore about his general goals (protecting Medicare). Incidentally, Gore's use of repetition ("never weakened, never looted, never taken away") does not constitute three themes. The fourth theme is an acclaim by Gore on his general goal of helping seniors pay for their prescription medicines.

Four coders separately analyzed the texts of the announcement speeches. To determine inter-coder reliability, Cohen's (1960) *kappa* was calculated on a randomly selected sample of about 10% the speeches. Separate *kappa*'s were calculated for classifying themes by function (.93), as policy or character (.87), for classifying character themes as personal quality, leadership ability, or ideals (.84), and for classifying policy themes as past deeds, future plans, or general goals (.92). Landis and Koch (1977) explained that values of *kappa* from .61-.80 reflect substantial agreement and values from .81-1.0 indicate "almost perfect" agreement (p. 165). Thus, these values provide confidence in the reliability of our analysis.

Research question five was answered by performing computer content analysis on the texts of Democratic and Republican announcement speeches. We followed the procedures established in previous research on issue ownership of presidential campaign messages (Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003/2004): The computer content analysis program Concordance was employed to count the frequency with which words related to Democratic (e.g., job, jobs, employed, unemployed, unemployment, health, doctor, medicine) and Republican (e.g., terrorist, al-Queda, 9/11, tax, taxes, taxation, budget, deficit) issues occurred in Democratic and Republican announcement speeches.

Sample

This study analyzed 75 presidential candidacy announcement speeches from 1960 through 2004 (see Table 2 for a list of the speeches included). Most of the texts were obtained from a webpage devoted to announcement speeches (www.4president.org); some were obtained from candidate web sites. The sample includes 41 speeches from Democratic and 34 from Republican candidates, 15 from nomination winners and 60 from losers. The mean number of words is 2093 (with a range of 373 to 4619). *Spearman's rho* reveals that these speeches have become longer over time (*rho* [$n = 75$] = .462, $p < .0001$) and they have been given earlier in the campaign over time (*rho* [$n=72$] = .451, $p < .0001$; we could identify the campaign but not the specific date for three speeches in our sample). Speeches from Democrats are significantly shorter than those from Republicans (1889, 2340; χ^2 [$df = 1$] = 47.88, $p < .0001$); speeches of winners are shorter than those of losers (1875, 2148; χ^2 [$df = 1$] = 18.4, $p < .0001$).

Table 2. *Announcement Speech Sample*

	Candidate	Date	Party	Words	Days before Convention
1960	John F. Kennedy	1/2/60	D	442	195
	Lyndon B. Johnson	7/5/60	D	1443	10
1964	Barry Goldwater	1/3/64	R	541	195
1968	Hubert H. Humphrey	4/27/68	D	2079	124
	Robert F. Kennedy	3/16/68	D	711	166
	Eugene J. McCarthy	11/30/67	D	805	273
	Richard M. Nixon	1/31/68	R	377	190
	George Romney	11/18/67	R	1056	264
1972	Shirley Chisholm	1/25/72	D	1128	211
	Fred R. Harris	9/24/71	D	568	334
	Hubert H. Humphrey	1/10/72	D	1673	226
	George McGovern	1/18/71	D	1600	583
	Edmund S. Muskie	1/4/72	D	1101	232
	John Ashbrook		R	513	
1976	Jimmy Carter	12/12/74	D	3130	582
	Frank Church	3/18/76	D	2130	120
	Fred Harris	1/11/75	D	461	552
	Terry Sandford	5/19/75	D	2894	424
	Sargent Shriver	9/20/75	D	2517	300
	Gerald Ford	7/8/75	R	373	408
1980	Howard Baker	11/1/79	R	936	259
	George Bush	5/1/79	R	1082	443
	Bob Dole	5/14	R	2854	430
	Ronald Reagan	11/13/79	R	3685	247
1984	John Glenn	4/21/83	D	2251	455
	Gary Hart	2/17/83	D	1800	518
	Jesse Jackson	1/16/84	D	662	185
	George McGovern	9/13/83	D	2708	310
	Walter Mondale	2/21/83	D	1994	514
1988	Bruce Babbitt	3/10/87	D	2659	499

	Joe Biden	6/9/87	D	559	408
	Dick Gephardt	2/23/87	D	1921	514
	Gary Hart	4/13/87	D	1095	465
	George Bush	10/12/87	R	2963	311
	Bob Dole	11/9/87	R	2878	283
	Pete DuPont	9/16/86	R	2606	702
	Jack Kemp	4/6/87	R	2530	500
1992	Edmund G. Brown	10/21/91	D	3374	264
	Bill Clinton	10/3/91	D	3118	287
	Tom Harkin	9/15/91	D	2607	306
	Bob Kerrey	9/30/91	D	2508	290
	Paul Tsongas	4/30/91	D	1077	474
	Paul Wilder	9/13/91	D	2240	307
	Pat Buchanan	12/10/91	R	1421	254
1996	Lamar Alexander	2/28/95	R	2802	534
	Pat Buchanan	3/20/95	R	2719	514
	Bob Dole	4/10/95	R	2119	493
	Robert Dornan	4/13/95	R	4619	490
	Steve Forbes	9/22/95	R	2854	328
	Phil Gramm	2/24/95	R	2835	538
	Alan Keyes	3/25/95	R	4341	509
	Dick Lugar	4/19/95	R	2771	484
	Arlen Specter	3/30/95	R	1963	504
2000	Lamar Alexander	3/9/99	R	2574	519
	Gary Bauer	4/21/99	R	3447	470
	Pat Buchanan	3/2/99	R	2289	520
	George W. Bush	3/7/99	R	2033	515
	Elizabeth Dole	3/10/99	R	432	512
	Steve Forbes	3/16/99	R	1044	506
	John Kasich	2/15/99	R	4273	535
	Alan Keyes	9/20/99	R	3294	318
	John McCain	9/25/99	R	2717	313
	Dan Quayle		R	2804	
	Bob Smith		R	3819	
	Bill Bradley	12/4/98	D	802	622
	Al Gore	6/16/99	D	2800	425
2004	Wesley Clark	9/17/03	D	1089	316
	Howard Dean	6/23/03	D	2232	402
	John Edwards	9/16/03	D	2368	317
	Dick Gephardt	2/19/03	D	4179	526
	Bob Graham	5/6/03	D	1766	450
	John Kerry	9/2/03	D	2956	331
	Dennis Kucinich	10/13/03	D	4018	290
	Joe Lieberman	1/13/03	D	1056	563
	Carole Moseley-Braun	9/22/03	D	2041	311
Total			41D; 34R	2108.3*	385.7*

*mean

Results

The first research question concerned the proportions of the three functions of political campaign discourse in these messages. Overall, acclaims were most common (78%), followed by attacks (22%), and, rarely, defenses (0.3%). A *chisquare* goodness of fit test confirmed that the difference between acclaims and attacks is significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 1508.46, *p* < .0001; defenses were excluded from the analysis). Democrats acclaimed less (73% to 84%) and attacked more (27% to 16%) than Republicans (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 76.9, *p* < .0001, φ = .13; defenses were excluded from this analysis). Winners also acclaimed more (82% to 77%) and attacked less (18% to 23%) than losers (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 12.05, *p* < .001, φ = .05; defenses were excluded). These results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Functions of Announcement Speeches and Acceptance Addresses, 1960-2004*

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defense
Announcement Speeches			
Democrats	1926 (73%)	702 (27%)	4 (0.2%)
Republicans	1818 (84%)	351 (16%)	6 (0.3%)
Winners	840 (82%)	184 (18%)	1 (0.1%)
Losers	2904 (77%)	869 (23%)	9 (0.2%)
Total	3744 (78%)	1053 (22%)	10 (0.3%)
Acceptance Addresses			
Democrats	1026 (79%)	271 (21%)	4 (0.3%)
Republicans	965 (74%)	321 (25%)	16 (1%)
Winners	1054 (78%)	284 (21%)	6 (0.4%)
Losers	937 (74%)	308 (24%)	14 (1%)
Total	1991 (76%)	592 (23%)	20 (1%)

The second research question addressed topic of utterances. The themes in these announcement speeches were divided evenly between policy and character (50% each); this difference was not statistically significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 0.04, *p* > .8[1]). Democrats discussed policy more (55% to 43%) and character less (45% to 57%) than Republicans (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 65.14, *p* < .0001, φ = .12). Although winners seemed to discuss policy more and character less than losers, these differences were not significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 3.01, *p* < .09). See Table 4 for these data.

Research question three concerned the distribution of the three forms of policy (these data are reported in Table 5a and 5b). Past deeds comprised 32% of the policy utterances, future plans constituted 16%, and general goals were most common at 53%. Research question four dealt with the forms of character. Personal qualities constituted 34% of utterances, leadership ability comprised 18%, and ideals were the most frequent character utterance with 48%. Table 5a and 5b reports these data.

Table 4. *Topics of Announcement Speeches and Acceptance Addresses,
1960-2004*

	Policy	Character
Announcement Speeches		
Democrats	1449 (55%)	1179 (45%)
Republicans	942 (43%)	1227 (57%)
Winners	535 (52%)	489 (48%)
Losers	1856 (49%)	1917 (51%)
Total	2391 (50%)	2406 (50%)
Acceptance Addresses		
Democrats	749 (58%)	548 (42%)
Republicans	685 (53%)	601 (47%)
Winners	798 (60%)	540 (40%)
Losers	636 (51%)	609 (49%)
Total	1434 (56%)	1149 (44%)

Table 5a. *Forms of Policy in Announcement Speeches, 1960-2004*

	Policy					
	PastDeeds*		FuturePlans		GeneralGoals	
Democrats	105	380	161	13	724	66
	485 (33%)		174 (12%)		790 (55%)	
Republicans	98	146	182	2	498	16
	244 (26%)		184 (20%)		514 (55%)	
Winners	30	86	103	4	298	14
	116 (22%)		107 (20%)		312 (58%)	
Losers	173	440	240	11	924	68
	613 (33%)		251 (14%)		992 (53%)	
Total	203	526	343	15	1222	82
	729 (32%)		358 (16%)		204 (53%)	

*acclaims/attacks

Table 5b. *Forms of Character in Announcement Speeches, 1960-2004*

	Character					
	PersonalQualities		Leadership		Ideals	
Democrats	282	115	146	81	508	47
	397 (34%)		227 (19%)		555 (47%)	
Republicans	319	97	177	37	544	53
	416 (34%)		214 (17%)		597 (49%)	
Winners	110	32	71	34	228	14
	142 (29%)		105 (21%)		242 (49%)	
Losers	491	180	252	84	824	86
	671 (35%)		336 (18%)		910 (47%)	
Total	601	212	323	118	1052	100
	813 (34%)		441 (18%)		1152 (48%)	

*acclaims/attacks

The final research question concerned the political party issue ownership. Candidates from both political parties discussed Republican issues more than Democratic issues; Petrocik et al. (2003/2004) explain that the Republican Party owns more national issues (e.g., national defense, a Republican issue, is a federal issue; education, a Democratic issue, is financed and regulated more by state and local than federal government). The important question, however, is the relative emphasis by candidates of the two major political parties. As issue ownership theory would predict, Democrats emphasized Democratic issues more than Republicans, 43% to 35%. Similarly, Republicans stressed Republican issues more than Democrats, 65% to 57%. Statistical analysis revealed that these are significant differences (χ^2 [df = 1] = 32.62, p < .0001, φ = 0.08). See Table 6 for these data.

Table 6. *Issue Ownership in Presidential Candidacy Announcement Speeches*

Candidates	Issues	
	Democratic	Republican
Democratic	**1056 (43%)**	1402 (57%)
Republican	807 (35%)	**1506 (65%)**

χ^2 (df = 1) = 32.62, p < .0001, φ = .08

Note: Democratic issues included in this analysis were education, health care, jobs, poverty, and the elderly; Republican issues were national defense, foreign policy, deficit, taxes, and illegal drugs.

Implications

Because we have no baseline data (no record of the content of announcement speeches from previous research), the figures reported in the results exist to a certain extent in a vacuum. Should 22% attacks, or 55% character, be considered high or low? For this reason we will offer a comparison to help interpret these data. Because announcement speeches serve to kick off the primary campaign, just as nomination acceptance addresses initiate the general campaign, we will compare announcement speeches with acceptance addresses (Benoit, in press). To be sure, there are important differences (e.g., the candidate has chosen to seek the party's nomination in announcement speeches; the candidate has won the nomination when acceptance addresses are presented). Nevertheless, it makes sense to compare the two campaign message forms.

In the years of this study, announcement speeches used functions in almost the same proportions as acceptances: acclaims were 78% of announcements and 76% of acceptances; attacks were 22% in announcements and 23% in acceptances (defenses were quite rare in both, but slightly more common in acceptances). These differences are not statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 0.91, p > .3). It seems likely that candidates are overwhelmingly positive in both message forms because they want to appear positive and upbeat to voters (and because

voters dislike mudslinging; see Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975). Thus, the distribution of functions in announcement speeches parallels the distribution in acceptance addresses.

Defenses are relatively infrequent in both announcement speeches and acceptance addresses, probably for several reasons. Defenses take the candidate off message (Benoit & Wells, 1996), make the candidate appear reactive rather than pro-active, and, because one must identify an attack to refute it, a defense may inform or remind voters of the attack. One might expect even fewer defenses in announcement speeches than acceptance addresses because there would be fewer attacks to prompt defenses at that stage of the process.

Previous research on the functions of discourse by Democrats and Republicans is mixed. Most message forms (primary and general debates, primary and general direct mail, general TV spots) show that Republicans acclaim more than Democrats. However, no difference was found in primary TV spots and Democrats were more positive than Republicans in Acceptances (Benoit, in press). These data, therefore, are consistent with most studies of function and political party.

Research (Benoit, in press) indicates that winners acclaim more, and attack less, than losers in several message forms (primary and general TV spots, primary and general direct mail, general debates, and acceptances). However, this effect was not detected here. It is possible that the news media pay more attention to these speeches than do voters–particularly given the fact that these speeches appear earlier in the campaign as time goes on (citizens may have little interest in the campaign when these speeches are given). Furthermore, there is a long period of time, with many events and other messages, between the announcement speech and the nomination, so it would perhaps be unusual if the announcement speech dictated the outcome of the primary campaign.

Both announcement speeches and acceptances were roughly split between policy and character. However, announcements devoted more utterances to character (50% to 44%), and fewer to policy (50% to 56%) than acceptances (χ^2 [$df = 1$] = 21.64, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .05$). Presidential candidates, many of whom are not well-known to voters, naturally focus on introducing themselves to the public in their announcement speeches (consistent with this trend of focusing more on character in the earlier phases of the campaign, primary messages discuss character more than general messages in debates [Benoit et al., 2002] and in television spots [Benoit, 1999]). Similarly, Diamond and Bates (1993) argued that phase one of the advertising campaign typically emphasizes biographical spots. Furthermore, it is possible that many candidates simply have not had time to develop many issue stands prior to their announcement, so they may have less policy to discuss. In fact, general goals–probably the easiest form of policy to use–is more common in announcements than in acceptances (53% to 44%).

The data for discussion of topics by candidates of the two major political parties is more consistent than the data for functions. Democrats discuss policy more than Republicans in most message forms (primary and general TV spots, debates, and direct mail); the difference for Acceptances, however, was not sig-

nificant; see Benoit, 2004, in press). Benoit (2004) explained that "Republicans. . . tend to argue for smaller government, which means less governmental policy to discuss" (p. 92). This tendency appears in announcement speeches, with Democrats slightly stressing policy more than character (52% to 48%) but Republicans emphasizing character over policy (57% to 43%).

This study confirmed predictions from Issue Ownership theory (Petrocik, 1996): Candidates discussed their own party's issues more than their opponents. This effect is quite consistent, occurring in primary and general TV spots, primary and general debates, direct mail advertising, and acceptance addresses (Benoit, in press). Candidates tend to stress the issues on which they are advantaged; i.e., the issues their party owns. Again, Table 1 vividly illustrates why this phenomenon would be likely to occur. It is not surprising that this effect would occur in announcement speeches; however, now we have confirmed this suspicion and quantified the size of the effect.

We noted earlier that Trent and Friedenberg (2000) identified several important purposes of announcement speeches (formal declaration, discourage opponents, outline reasons for seeking office; and introduce themes of campaign). However, none of these goals lead us to expect an equal emphasis on character and policy in these speeches. In fact, as just noted, the candidates begin with an emphasis on character in announcement addresses and then devote somewhat less time to character as the campaign progresses from surfacing (announcement speeches) to the primary and then on to the general campaign. This study reveals that biographical (character) information is even more important in the surfacing phase than current accounts suggest.

Conclusion

This study content analyzed 75 speeches announcing presidential candidacies to voters and the news media from 1960 through 2004. These speeches, like acceptance addresses, were primarily positive, with relatively few attacks and even fewer defenses. The topics of utterances in announcement speeches are about evenly split between character and policy, which means that they discuss character more (and policy less) in announcements than acceptances. These speeches discussed general goals most commonly, followed by past deeds and then future plans. Ideals were the most common character comment, followed by personal qualities, and, least often, leadership ability. Candidates do tend to stress the issues owned by their political party in their announcements. Previous research has investigated the nature of primary and general campaign messages (e.g., Benoit, 1999; Benoit et al., 2002). Now we have extended this understanding of campaign messages to an important event in the surfacing phase of a presidential campaign.

Footnote

[1]Cohen's (1988) power tables stop at *n* of 1000; the *n* for this test is 4797. The power of a χ^2 with an *n* of 1000 to detect small, medium, and large effects is .89, .99, and .99, respectively. Thus, this test has very high power. Each nonsignificant *chi-square* reported here has an *n* of over 1000 and the same power.

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Appendix
Acclaims and Attacks on the Forms of Policy and Character

Policy

Past Deeds

    Acclaim: Now the budget is balanced and we've run a surplus and the interest rates have come down, I've come to realize that the efforts we made in '89 and '90 and '91 and '92 and '93 (and then when we finally passed it in 1997) have changed the world. It's made people's lives better. It's given us more prosperity and better jobs (Kasich, 2000).

    Attack: The costs of the war [include] over 15,000 combat dead and nearly 95,000 wounded [and] a monthly expenditure in pursuit of the war running somewhere between $2 and $3 billion dollars (McCarthy, 1968).

Future Plans

Acclaim: Within the first few days of my administration I will send Congress a bill defining life as beginning at fertilization (Smith, 2000).

Attack: [President Nixon is] calling for the early enactment of a Family Assistance Plan that will easily double the already swollen cost of welfare to the taxpaying citizens of this country (Ashbrook, 1972).

General Goals

Acclaim: We'll be prosperous if we reduce taxes (Bush, 2000).

Attack: He [Bush] advocates economic policies which beggar the middle class *and* raise property taxes so that income taxes may be cut for those who run Enron (Dean, 2004).

Character
Personal Qualities

Acclaim: I've spent my life listening to the voices of America. I've worked construction and taught in our schools. I've worked as a short-order cook and a security guard. I've worked on the docks and on assembly lines (Graham, 2004).

Attack: Today, the politicians take polls to find out where they should go (Smith, 2000).

Leadership Ability

Acclaim: I have the strength, the vision, and the values to lead our nation to higher and safer ground (Lieberman, 2004).

Attack: Presidential delay, timidity, vetoes, divisiveness will not do the job (Humphrey, 1972).

Ideals

Acclaim: I seek the support of all who believe in the fundamental values of duty, decency, and constructive debate (Ford, 1976).

Attack: As a rule, one party has favored the extension of government power (Goldwater, 1964).

Note: The date denotes the campaign (some announcement speeches occur a year or more before the election). For texts, see http://www.4president.org

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