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July 10, 2000

THE 2000 NOMINATING CAMPAIGN: ENDORSEMENTS, ATTACKS, AND DEBATES

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SUMMARY

This report describes analysis of the 2000 presidential nominating campaign conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center over the past six months. The report draws upon the Annenberg 2000 survey for data on changes in the perceptions and opinions of the public, and upon content analysis of speeches, debates, advertising, and news coverage. The main conclusions are these:

- **Primary voters learned about endorsements.**
- **Learning about endorsements was magnified by advertising.**
- **Endorsements influenced votes.**
- **Bush's "breast cancer" attack worked best among people who did not know its source.**
- **Learning of McCain's opposition to some breast cancer research influenced women's opinions of him more than men's.**
- **Bradley's candidacy initially mobilized inactive Democrats and Independents.**
- **Gore's attack on Bradley's health care plan in the January 5 debate began the reversal of Bradley's gains in Iowa.**
- **Gore's attack on Bradley's vote against Iowa flood relief in the January 8 debate further fuelled Bradley's drop.**

THE ANNENBERG 2000 SURVEY

The Annenberg 2000 Election Study is a continuous monitoring of the electorate, comprised of national samples and oversamples of key states. To date, nearly 43,000 interviews have been conducted. The survey asks about turnout and vote intention, candidate recognition, knowledge, and evaluation, opinions on issues, media use and political discussion, candidate chances, cynicism and orientation to government, awareness of advertising and debates, and a wide range of demographics. Fieldwork is managed by Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) and carried out by Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc (SRBI) and Princeton Data Services (PDS). All interviews except post-election reinterviews are conducted as a "rolling cross-section" (RCS): the date of interview, like selection of the sample, is a product of random selection.

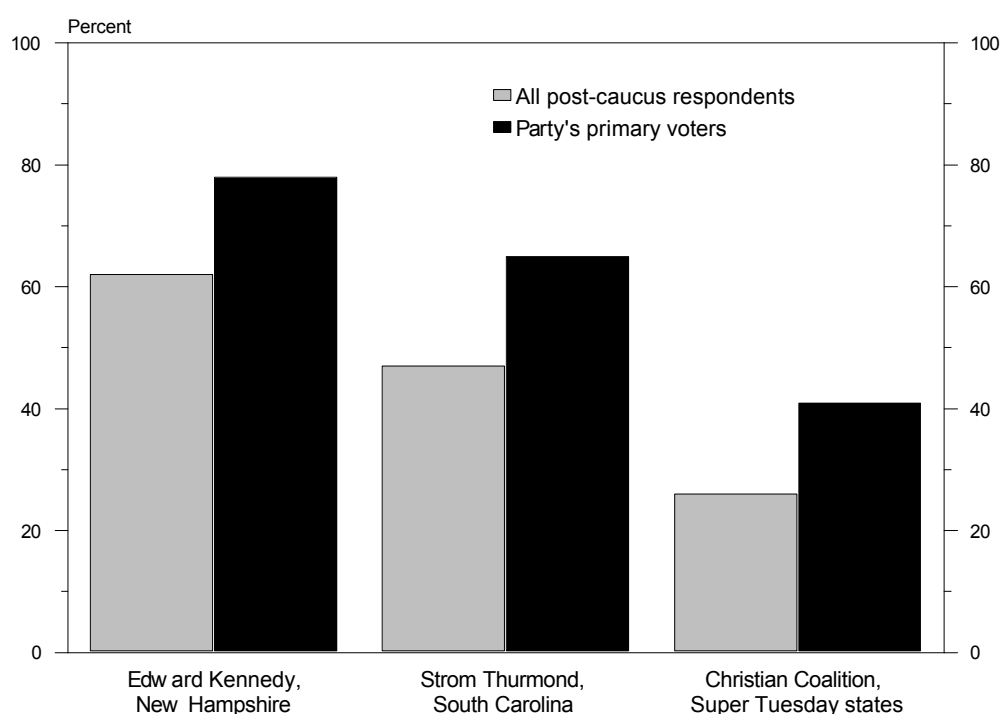
ENDORSEMENTS

- **Primary voters learned about endorsements.**

Primary electorates did learn of some endorsements during the nominating campaigns.

- 62 percent of New Hampshire residents interviewed after the primary, and 78 percent of those who had voted in the Democratic primary, knew that Edward Kennedy had endorsed Al Gore;
- 47 percent of South Carolinians, and 65 percent of those who had voted in the Republican primary, knew that Strom Thurmond had endorsed George W. Bush;
- 26 percent of the residents of Super Tuesday states, and 41 percent of those who had voted in a Republican primary, knew that the Christian Coalition had endorsed Bush.

Widely known endorsements in 2000 nominating campaigns



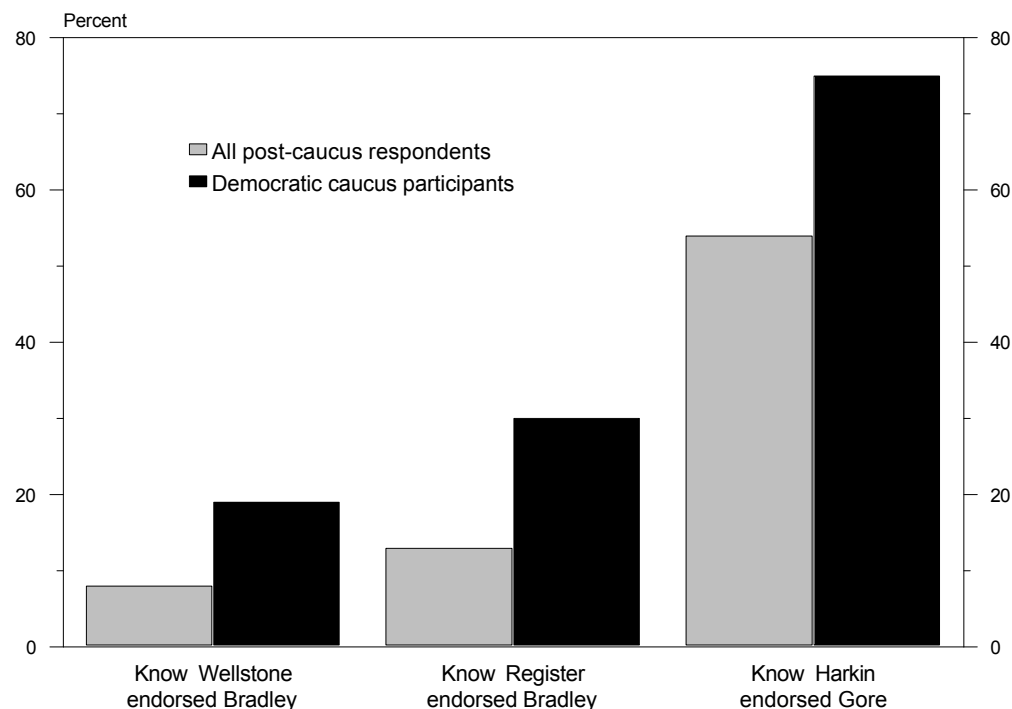
- **Learning about endorsements was magnified by advertising.**

Endorsements that were widely known tended to be those featured in candidate advertising. Although he is a senator from the neighboring state of Minnesota and appeared with Bradley frequently, only 19 percent of those who participated in the Iowa Democratic caucuses knew that Paul Wellstone had endorsed Bradley. Wellstone's endorse-

ment, made nine months before the Iowa caucuses, was not featured in Bradley's advertising.

The *Des Moines Register's* endorsement of Bradley was the subject of a Bradley television ad, but the *Register* endorsed on the day before the caucuses, and the Bradley ad ran only on the day of the caucuses. Nonetheless, thirty percent of participants in the Democratic caucuses knew that the *Register* had endorsed Bradley. In contrast, 75 percent of those who took part in the Democratic caucuses knew that Tom Harkin had endorsed Al Gore. Harkin's endorsement was featured in Gore television and radio ads that ran heavily in the weeks before the caucuses.

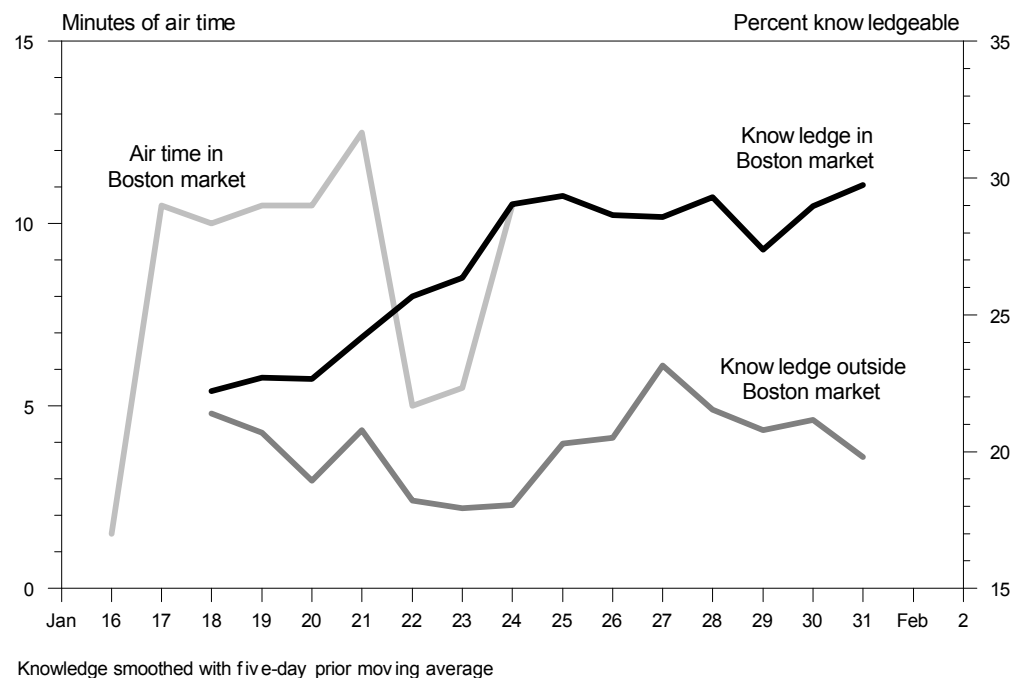
Knowledge of Democratic endorsements in Iowa



The trends in knowledge about Daniel Patrick Moynihan's endorsement of Bradley also illustrate the importance of advertising. Moynihan announced his endorsement in September 1999, and the Bradley campaign began airing an ad featuring Moynihan on Boston television stations on January 16. We began asking residents of New Hampshire about Moynihan's endorsement on January 18, when about 22 percent statewide knew the New York senator had endorsed the New Jersey senator. Over the following week, while the ad continued to air, knowledge of the endorsement grew—but only among New Hampshire residents in the Boston media market. Advertising an endorsement, in short, substantially enhances the electorate's awareness of it.

Air time bought for Moynihan endorsement ad and knowledge of endorsement, by media market

All New Hampshire respondents



- **Endorsements influenced votes.**

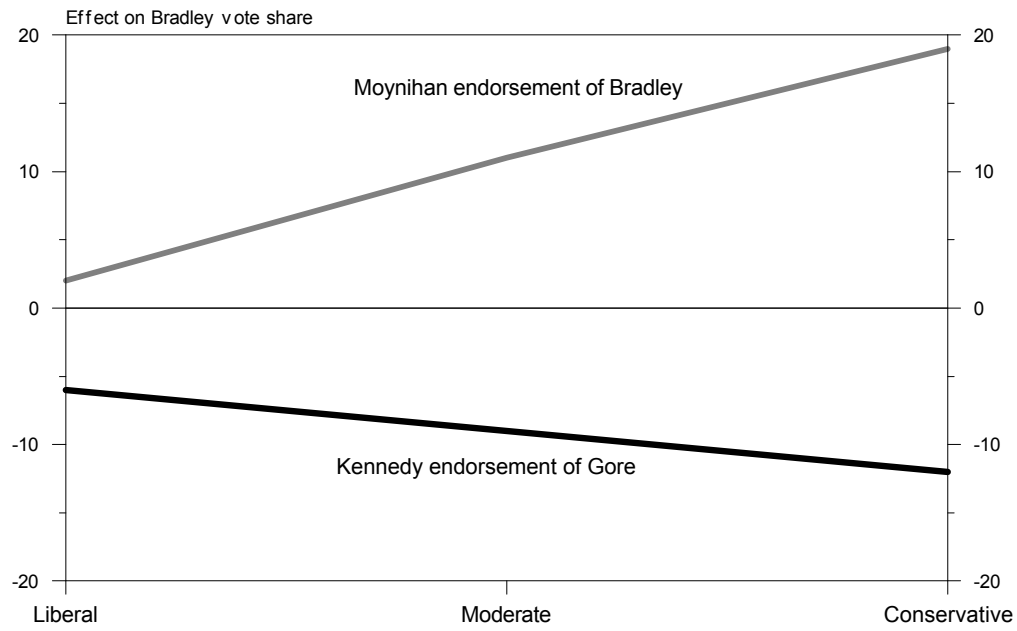
Endorsements did influence some groups of voters—some in the direction the endorser and the candidate hoped, others in the opposite one.

The Democrats in New Hampshire exchanged fire in the form of endorsements by prominent members of the Senate. Both Kennedy’s endorsement of Gore and Moynihan’s endorsement of Bradley influenced votes. Moynihan’s message, cast in the Bradley ad in terms of making government trustworthy, made considerably more difference among conservative Democrats than among liberals. The influence of Kennedy’s endorsement, which was featured in a Gore radio ad addressing health care, cut less sharply along ideological lines.

The *Manchester Union-Leader* endorsed Steve Forbes on December 12, and some conservative voters in New Hampshire evidently looked to the conservative paper to guide their choice. Among Republican primary voters who consider themselves conservative, those who knew of the *Union-Leader* endorsement were nearly twice as likely as those who did not to vote for Forbes; among the very conservative, knowledge of the endorsement raised the likelihood of voting for Forbes by a factor of five. But the influence of the endorsement was not confined to voters with the same ideological orientation as the paper: knowledge of the endorsement *reduced* the likelihood of voting for Forbes among liberal Republican primary voters in New Hampshire.

Effects of endorsements on Bradley vote share, by ideological self-identification

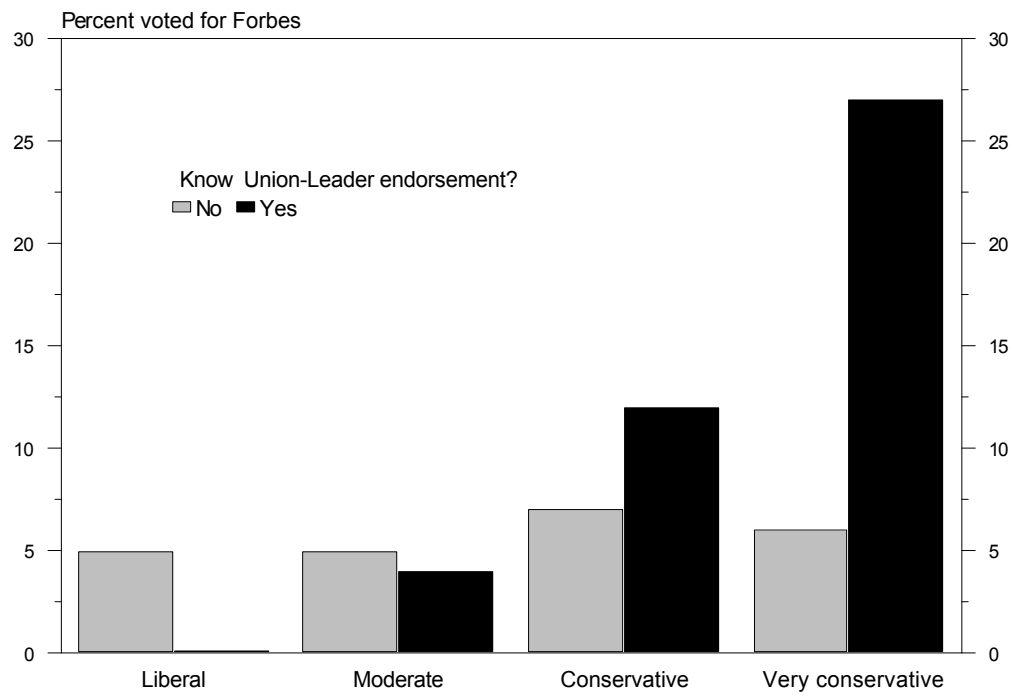
New Hampshire Democratic primary voters



Effects estimated in regression analysis controlling for pre-election vote intention.

Effects of Union Leader endorsement on Forbes vote share, by ideological self-identification

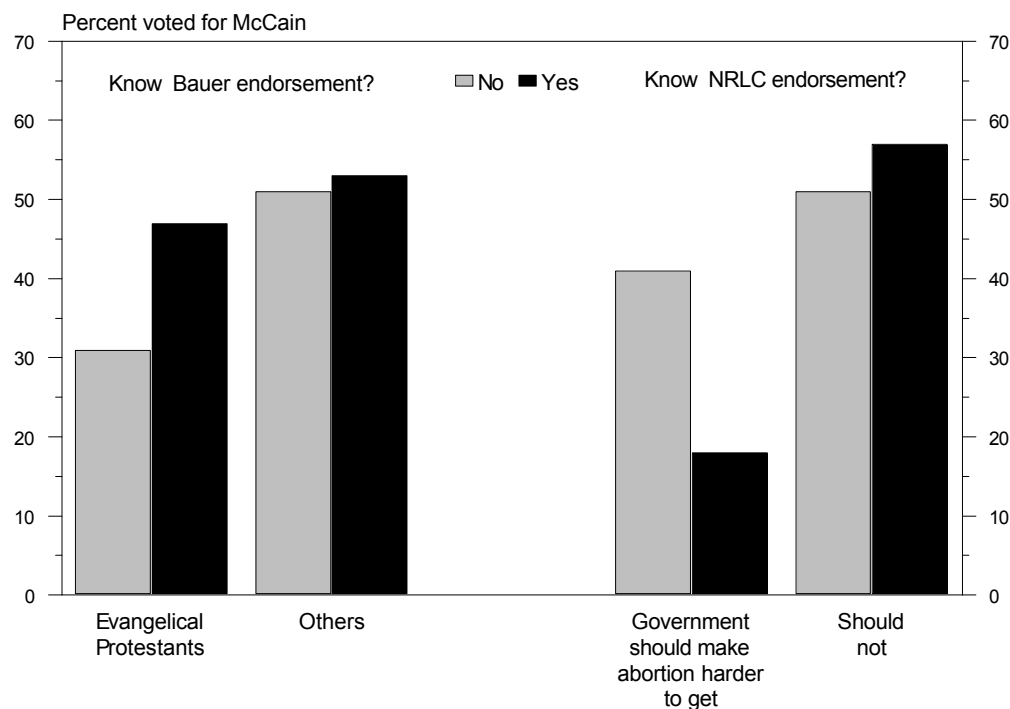
New Hampshire Republican primary voters



In South Carolina the major Republican candidates used endorsements to compete for the votes of the party's right wing. On February 9 the National Right to Life Committee endorsed Bush. Six days later former candidate Gary Bauer, a vocal opponent of abortion with close ties to the evangelical Christian community, endorsed McCain. Both endorsements were effective in appealing for the support of the groups they targeted. Evangelical Protestants who knew of Bauer's endorsement were much more likely to vote for McCain in South Carolina than those who did not. Opponents of abortion who knew of the NRLC endorsement were much less likely to vote for McCain than those who did not. And the NRLC endorsement had the opposite effect, albeit a much smaller one, among defenders of abortion rights.

Effects of endorsements on McCain vote share

South Carolina Republican primary voters



ATTACKS

On March 2 in New York, via radio, mail, and personal appearances by surrogates, the Bush campaign attacked McCain for having voted against legislation financing some breast cancer research. The radio ad, featuring a leader of a breast cancer patients and survivors group, was broadcast primarily in New York City and on Long Island. Bush contended that McCain's opposition to "earmarking" grants for breast cancer programs at New York University and the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System betrayed insensitivity to those afflicted with the disease and to New Yorkers. The McCain campaign pointed out that the funds at issue were a small fraction of a \$13 billion bill

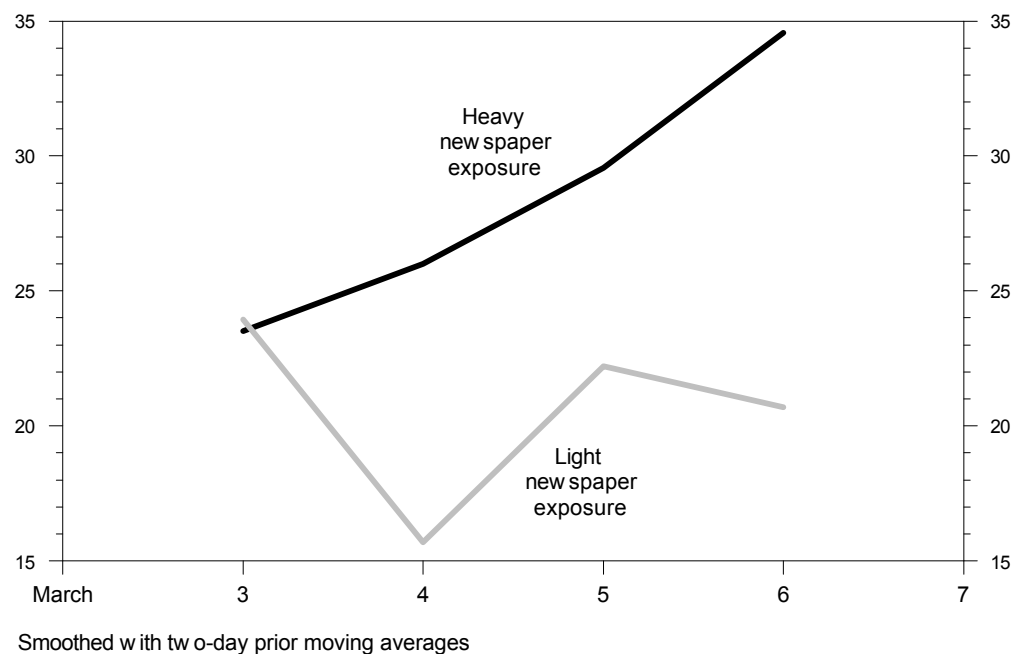
that McCain regarded as pork-barrel spending, that McCain objected not on the merits of the programs but because they were approved without public discussion, and that McCain had voted in favor of dozens of other bills involving cancer research and women's health. But the attack and the issues it raised received national attention in the press and in television newscasts.

- **Bush's "breast cancer" attack worked best among people who did not know its source.**

The Bush attack succeeded in informing the residents of Super Tuesday states whose interest in and exposure to news was relatively high. On March 3, frequent and infrequent consumers of newspapers were about equally likely to believe that McCain "opposed federal funding for some breast cancer research." Over the next three days, however, while the percentage of infrequent consumers holding that belief held roughly steady, the percentage of frequent consumers who knew of McCain's votes rose sharply. The rise was about as sharp outside New York as inside, suggesting that news coverage, rather than the advertising itself, was the main mode of transmission.

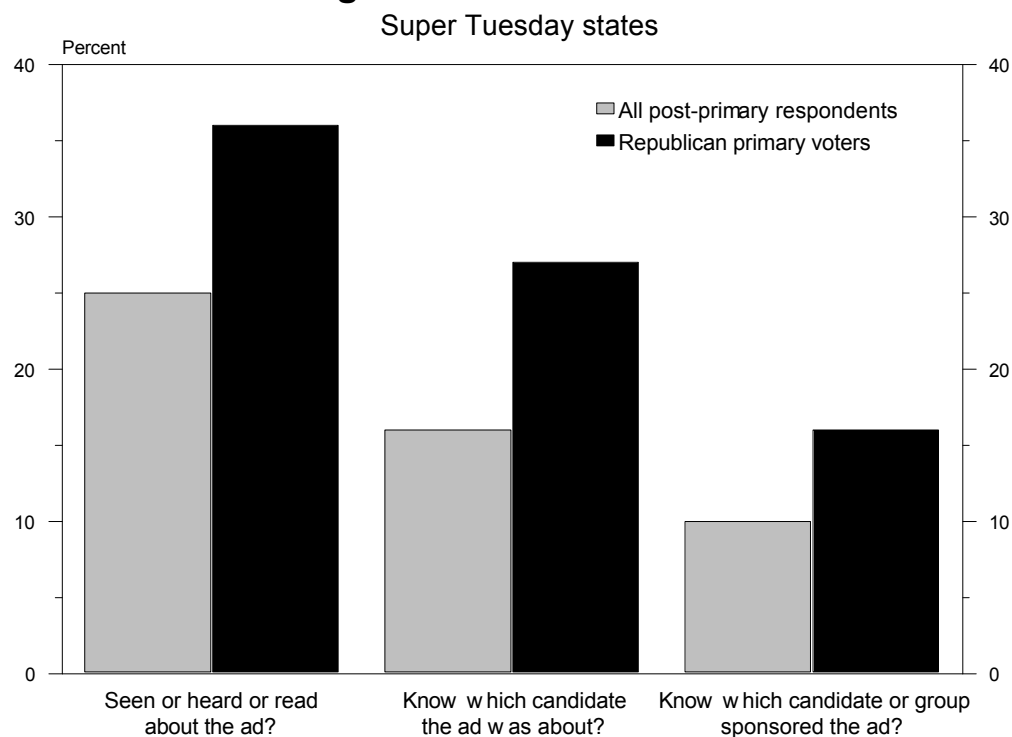
Knowledge that McCain opposed federal funding for some breast cancer research, by newspaper exposure

Percent of all respondents in Super Tuesday states



One way or another, however, substantial numbers of Republican primary voters knew about the ad by March 7, Super Tuesday. More than one-third reported after the election that they had seen, heard, or read about the ad. But not all of them knew much about it. Just 27 percent knew which candidate was the subject of the ad, and just 16 percent—fewer than half of those who had heard about it—knew who had sponsored it.

Knowledge of advertisement about McCain's opposition to federal funding for some breast cancer research



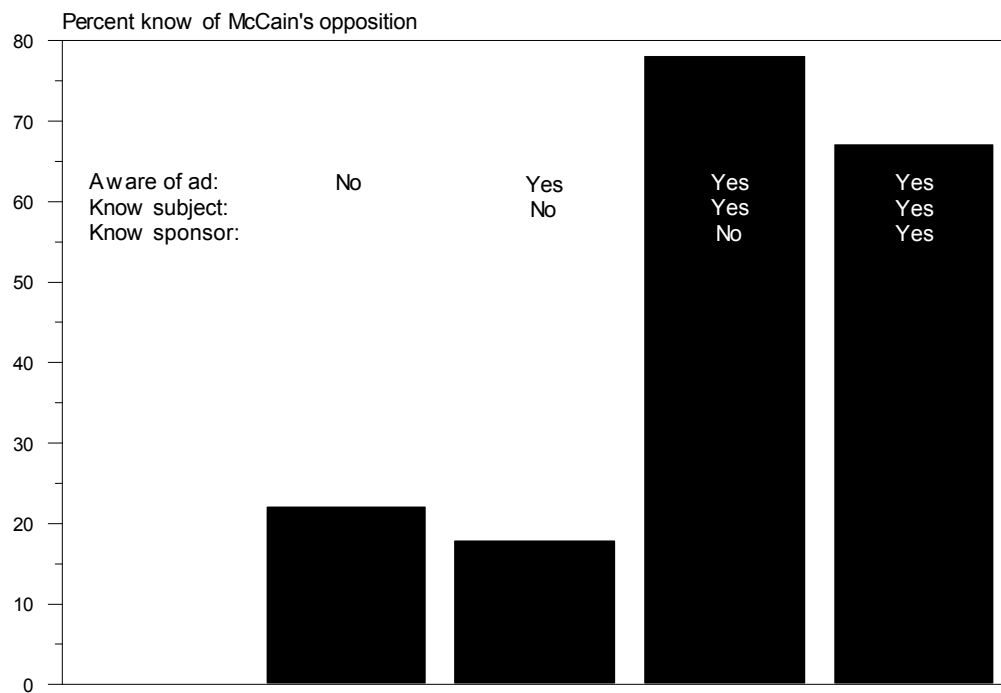
Information about the ad went hand-in-hand with knowledge of McCain's votes against funding. Residents of Super Tuesday states who knew of the ad and knew that it was about McCain were more than three times as likely as those who did not to know that McCain had opposed some spending on breast cancer research. But knowing that the Bush campaign had sponsored the ad was critical as well, for it encouraged some people, at least, to discount the information the ad (and the news about it) carried: among people who had heard about the ad and knew it was about McCain, those who knew its sponsor were 11 percentage points less likely than those who did not to believe that McCain had voted against funding for breast cancer research. Information about an ad's sponsorship apparently provides a cue to those who hear about it, a cue about the credibility of the claims in the ad.

- **Learning of McCain's opposition to some breast cancer research influenced women's opinions of him more than men's.**

Residents of Super Tuesday states rated McCain lower following those primaries than they had before, on average. But the drop was larger among those who had learned of McCain's opposition to some breast cancer research during the closing days of the campaign than among those who had not learned of Bush's charge. And the negative effect on ratings of McCain was dramatically larger among women than among men. Women no doubt were the group targeted by the Bush strategy. Our analysis indicates that the strategy succeeded most among women.

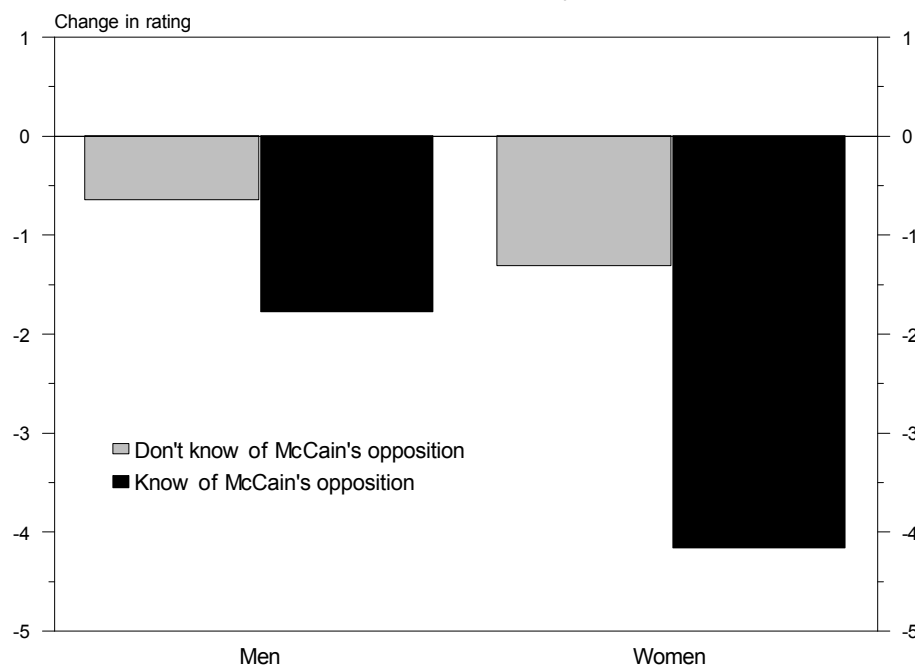
Knowledge that McCain opposed federal funding for some breast cancer research, by knowledge about advertisement

All post-election respondents in Super Tuesday states



Pre- to post-election change in evaluations of McCain, by sex and knowledge that McCain opposed federal funding for some breast cancer research

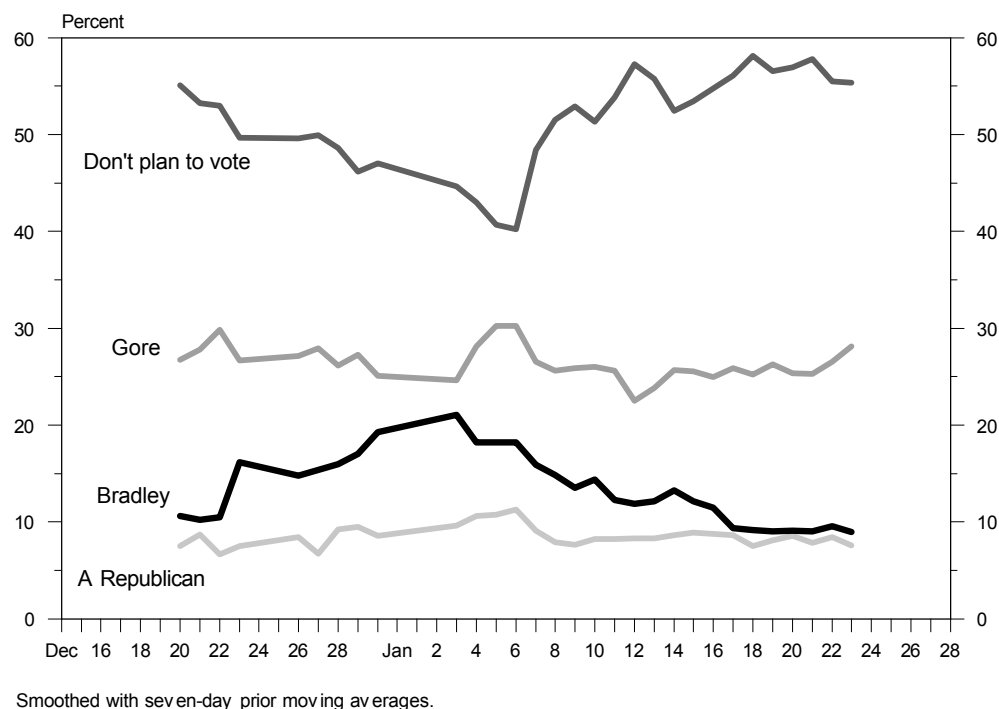
Super Tuesday states



DEBATES

As 2000 began, the Bradley campaign had momentum. National polls showed Bradley closing the gap with Gore and faring better than Gore in trial heats with Bush. News stories announced unexpected fund-raising success. Pundits began to take the Bradley challenge seriously. The polls in Iowa, site of the first official electoral test, gave the Bradley campaign further cause for optimism. The Annenberg Survey shows Gore's lead over Bradley among Democrats and Independents planning to vote in the Democratic caucuses shrinking from more than 15 points in mid-December to 5 points at the start of the year.

**Caucus vote intentions
of Iowa Democrats and Independents**

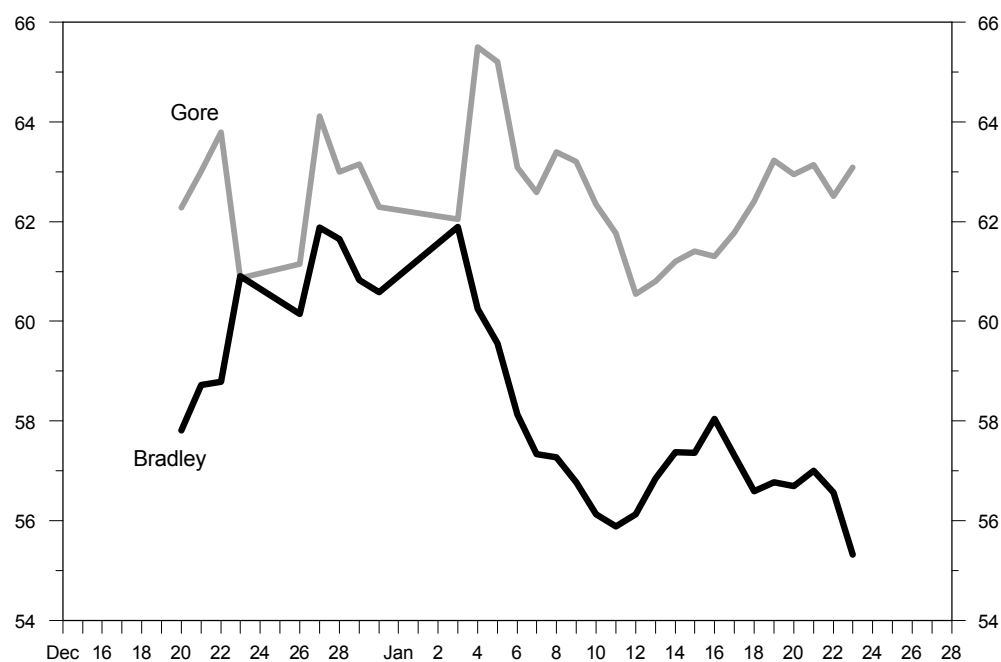


- **Bradley's candidacy initially mobilized inactive Democrats and Independents.**

The source of the challenger's rise in Iowa was growing enthusiasm for Bradley, not growing disenchantment with Gore. The percentage of Iowa Democrats and Independents intending to vote for Gore declined no more than a point or two while the percentage intending to vote for Bradley increased more than 10 points. Bradley's new supporters by and large came not from the Gore camp, but rather from the ranks of those who had previously planned not to vote. Gore's favorability rating did not drop systematically over these weeks; Bradley's climbed.

Evaluations of Bradley and Gore

Iowa Democrats and Independents



Smoothed with seven-day prior moving averages.

Early in January, Bradley's momentum evaporated. Between early January and the 23, the day before the caucuses, Bradley's share of the vote intentions of Democrats and Independents fell more than 10 points—back to its mid-December level. For the most part, those who fled the Bradley cause went back where they came from; Gore's share of vote intentions held steady, while more and more Democrats and Independents again planned to forego the caucuses. The influence of changes in favorability ratings of Gore is difficult to discern from the path of the average rating over time: ratings of Gore surged briefly during the first week of January, declined quite markedly over the next week, then recovered. Bradley's ratings are much less ambiguous: between January 3 and January 11, the average rating of Bradley fell sharply and consistently, a total of 6 points on the 100-point scale.

What precipitated the fall? Our answer is not a simple one; a series of events combined to bring Bradley's support down in Iowa. But the explanation in large measure rests on tactical choices made by the Gore campaign. And the story, as we see it, begins to demonstrate the influence of debates, not only on Iowa but also on the outcome of the process as a whole.

- **Gore's attack on Bradley's health care plan in the January 5 debate began the reversal of Bradley's gains in Iowa.**

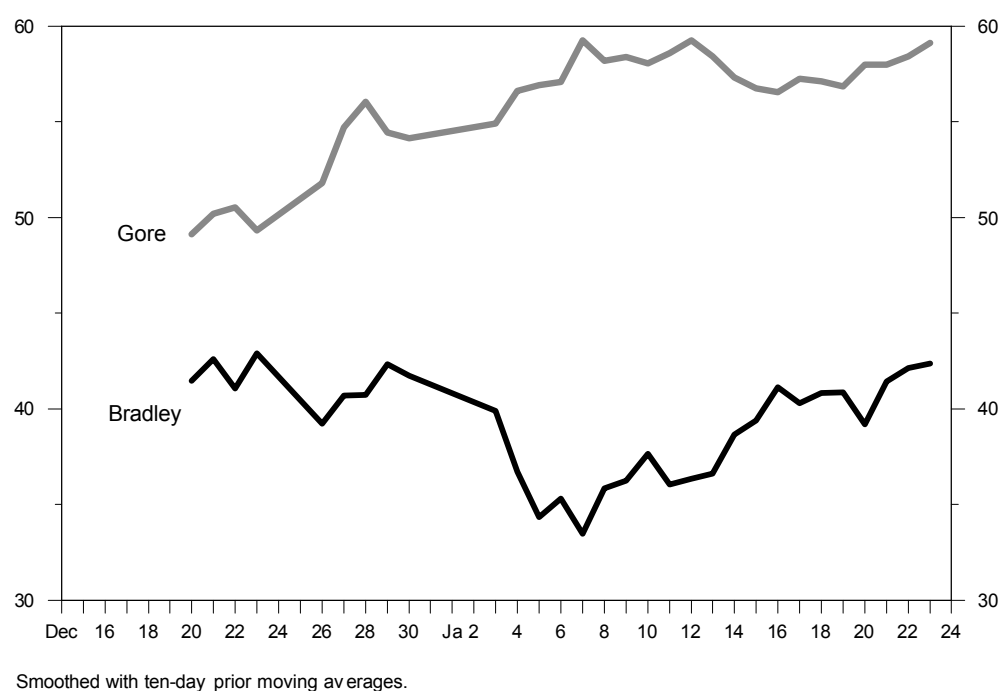
The initial blow was struck in and around the January 5 debate between Bradley and Gore, held not in Iowa but in Durham, New Hampshire. In a sense the impact of the debate must have been indirect, because just 14 percent of Iowa Democrats and Independents reported having seen any of it; for one thing, although the debate was broad-

cast live and nationwide, it was on MSNBC and C-SPAN, meaning that only cable or satellite subscribers could have seen it. But the debate was heavily covered in the news media. Forty-three percent of Iowans reported during the week following the debate that they had heard about it. More, of course, may have read or heard about what was said without knowing that it was said in a debate.

The candidates in the January 5 debate talked more about health care than about any other topic. By our count, 16 percent of the discussion involved the issue. The topic figured prominently in the *Washington Post* story published in the *Des Moines Register* the following morning and in network news stories the following night. The heart of the matter was Gore's charge that Bradley's health care plan was too costly and Bradley's response that Gore's plan did not extend health insurance to all Americans.

Who supports a universal health care program?

Percent of Iowa Democrats and Independents



The same day, Gore appeared with Senator Edward Kennedy in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to receive Kennedy's endorsement. In his remarks Kennedy, too, praised Gore's approach to health care, as he did in a radio ad the Gore campaign put on the air the following day. In short, on January 5 the Gore campaign sought to recast the agenda of the campaign to some degree, raising the salience of the health care issue and painting Bradley as too liberal on the issue.

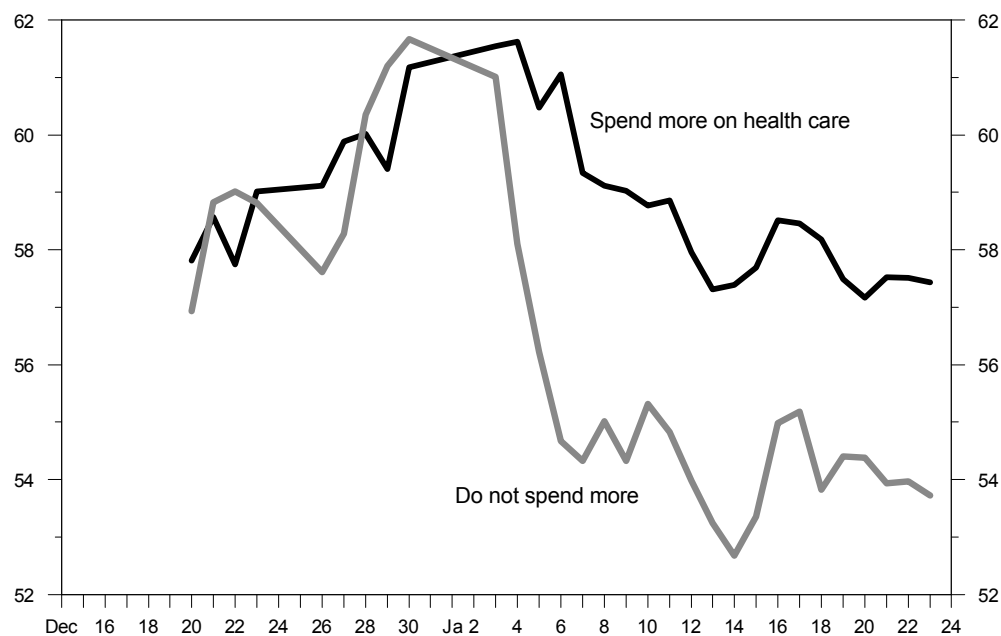
On both counts, the Gore campaign succeeded. Over the previous three weeks, substantially more Iowa Democrats and Independents had come to view Bradley as less liberal and Gore as more liberal on the issue of health care. The events of early January stopped the increase in the perception of Gore as an advocate of universal health care and reversed the decrease in that perception of Bradley. Over the three weeks remain-

ing before the caucuses, the percentage that identified Bradley as a supporter of universal health care grew by 10 points.

The Gore strategy drove a wedge between Iowans who supported and Iowans who opposed increased spending on health care. Ratings of Bradley among opponents of more spending plunged immediately. On January 3 the two groups' average ratings of Bradley differed by less than 1 point; on January 7 the difference was 5 points.

Evaluations of Bradley by position on spending more to provide "health care for people who do not already have it"

Iowa Democrats and Independents



Smoothed with ten-day prior moving averages.

This chain of events, we must stress, could not have had these effects in an election in which most people could be expected to participate. Gore was widely seen as the more liberal of the two candidates on health care. Informing opponents of increased spending that Bradley favored universal health care did not persuade many Bradley supporters to cast a caucus vote for Gore; it persuaded them to stay home on the night of the caucuses. But the consequence for Bradley was clear: a smaller share of the caucus vote.

- **Gore's attack on Bradley's vote against Iowa flood relief in the January 8 debate further fuelled Bradley's drop.**

Gore created a dramatic moment in the first debate held in Iowa, on January 8, when he introduced a farmer in the audience whose land had been flooded in 1993. As the man stood, Gore turned to Bradley and asked him, "Why did you vote against the disaster relief for Chris Peterson when he and thousands of others of the farmers here in Iowa needed it after those '93 floods?" Bradley responded by criticizing the Clinton administration's agriculture policy. He did not point out that he had voted in favor of the legislation that provided nearly \$5 billion in emergency flood relief in 1993 but against an

amendment to provide an additional \$900 million. Nor did Iowa journalists point it out, in the flurry of post-debate analysis of the vice president's attack.

Iowans who watched the debate or heard or read about it were much more likely than other Iowans to say that Gore, and not Bradley, had done more for the American farmer when he was a senator. The message that Bradley was insensitive to Iowa's farmers drove down Bradley's share of Democrats' and Independents' vote intentions still more.