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THE DYNAMICS OF ISSUE EMPHASIS:
CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND MEDIA COVERAGE IN STATEWIDE RACES

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1 Introduction: Electoral Campaigns in America

Electoral campaigns provide for recurrent points of contact between constituents and representatives and thereby play an important role in democratic theory and practice. However, most of the research on electoral campaigns in America has reached pessimistic conclusions about the possibility for these campaigns to inform the electorate, and to lead to informed voting. Over 30 years ago, Kelley argued:

The notion that the campaign should help the voter to cast his vote wisely is the ideal function assigned to it in American political thought. To say it does not serve this function well, is to do little more than to state the obvious. Campaign communication is filled with evasions, distortions, ambiguities, irrelevancies, and calculated efforts to mislead. Seemingly, it confirms the proposition that the rational interests of candidates and parties lead them to encourage irrationality in the electorate (Kelley 1960: 146).

This was underscored by empirical findings in the original electoral studies which provided evidence that little substantive information was provided to the electorate during presidential campaigns (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and

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McPhee 1954). While there was enormous amount of information available to the electorate during these presidential campaigns, most of it focused on the campaigns themselves, campaign tactics, and on the relative standings of the candidates themselves. Little of this information provided during the campaign to the electorate concerned policy issues or other political matters.

To make matters worse, these original electoral studies found that the information which was provided during the campaign changed few minds — for example, during the 1940 presidential election only 14% of the voters surveyed changed their voting decision during the course of that presidential campaign. Their conclusion was important, since it began what is now called the “minimal effects” hypothesis about electoral campaigns in America: “What the political campaign did, so to speak, was not to form new opinions but to raise old opinions over the thresholds of awareness and decision. Political campaigns are important primarily because they activate latent predispositions” (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944: 74).

The “minimal effects” hypothesis has had a long-lasting impact in the literature on electoral campaigns. For example, two prominent studies examined the effects of news media on political perceptions of voters and they have found that the news media has had little effect in changing the opinions and preferences of voters (Patterson and McClure 1976; Patterson 1980). Or, in an analysis of the 1980 presidential election, Finkel (1993) found strong support for an “activation” model of campaign effects, in which campaigns serve to activate existing political predispositions. This is similar to the findings of Bartels (1988), who found that presidential primary campaigns serve to mainly activate prior predispositions of voters.

This paper represents a component of a larger agenda to re-examine the role that electoral campaigns play in American democracy. In the next section I discuss some of the larger problems associated with the general “minimal effects” findings. Primarily, I argue that while presidential election campaigns are more informative than this literature has lead us to believe (Alvarez 1995), the place to look for campaign effects is in state-wide elections. Secondly, I argue that existing research has not taken the dynamic elements of campaigns into consideration, and neither has it looked closely at the effects of political institutions on campaign dynamics and strategies. In the remainder of the paper I present some preliminary evidence from a new data collection from the 1994 Senate and gubernatorial elections in California, which provide support for these arguments.

2 Problems With Existing Studies

The “minimal effects” findings have come primarily from studies focused on presidential elections. There is no question that presidential elections are very important to study, since they involve the race for the pinnacle of political power in America, and since they occupy political elites and the mass media for such long periods of time. However, while

presidential elections are extremely important to understand, they are poor laboratories for a general comprehension of electoral campaigns.

Presidential elections, while important and well-covered political affairs, are poor laboratories since there is very little variation in either the media coverage or the intensity of the campaigns in recent years (Alvarez 1995). First, comparisons of media coverage across the recent set of presidential election campaigns (1976-1988) has shown almost no variation in the proportions of coverage of “hoopla” to issues (Alvarez 1995; Graber 1983). Secondly, all presidential election campaigns are very intense and hard fought races, even in contrast to Senate campaigns (Westlye 1991). So with so little variation across presidential election campaigns, it will be very difficult to analyze the effects of campaigns and their coverage in the media.

Also, there is a very limited sample of presidential election campaigns. Presidential elections occur only every four years, and they usually involve only two competing candidates. So, historically we only have a small set of elections to study (52), and since the beginnings of the systematic collection of survey data about presidential elections in the 1940’s we only have a handful of campaigns to study.

A second problem with the “minimal effects” literature has been the relatively static nature of the analyses. Most of the survey data which has been collected with regards to presidential and congressional campaigns has been largely cross-sectional. And much of it is predominantly post-election interviews. There are few panel or rolling-cross section survey studies of presidential campaigns, and almost no such survey studies of congressional campaigns. In fact, the primary survey studies of congressional campaigns by the National Election Studies (both the post-election studies since 1978 and the Senate Election Studies in 1988-1992) are post-election surveys. These are good places to examine cross-sectional variation across electoral campaigns, and some studies have made progress in examining that variation (Franklin 1991; Krasno 1994; Westlye 1991). However, it is important to note that these studies shed no light on the dynamic aspects of campaigns. If we want to understand the dynamics of campaigns, or how information is transmitted and received by the electorate, or how variations across campaigns, contexts or political institutions influence campaign dynamics, static studies must be replaced by dynamic data collections.

And last, little is known empirically about the strategies used by candidates in their campaigns, how these strategies change or evolve over the course of the campaign, nor how these strategies are influenced by political institutions. That is not to say that there has been no empirical work on candidate strategies. For, there have been analyses of campaigning for congressional seats (Goldenberg and Traugott 1984; Hershey 1989). But in these works we do not get a very rigorous or systematic understanding of the dynamics of campaigns or the evolution of strategies. Additionally, there is an expansive literature on campaign finance (Erikson and Palfrey 1994; Green and Krasno 1988; Jacobson 1978, 1989). This literature is beginning to make progress towards understanding the importance of campaign dynamics and candidate strategic interaction (Erikson and

Palfrey 1994). But, while progress is being made in this latter area, it does not shed much light on the decisions candidates make about transmitting information to the electorate, nor about the interaction between candidates, the media and the electorate.

Of interest, though, is the work which has compared House and Senate campaigns. The general results have been that House and Senate campaigns vary with regards to the geographic constituency, challenger quality, and the intensity of the campaign (Gronke 1993; Jacobson 1992). But it is worth notice that these studies do not compare these campaigns while holding the geographic constituency constant in their analyses, so it is difficult to tell whether the differences which some argue exist between House and Senate campaigns are real or whether they are confounded by constituency differences.

Determining the effects of political institutions on campaigns and elections is of great importance. What effects do the attributes of the office which the candidates seek have on the campaigns they run, on the information the electorates receive about the candidates, and on which factors are important in determining the outcome? The literature has been largely silent on these questions.

3 Comparing State-Wide Campaigns: The 1994 California Elections

In this paper, I present a preliminary analysis of a component of a research project designed to circumvent these problems with studying electoral campaigns. In this project, the analysis is confined to one state-wide electoral campaign in 1994 for California's Senate and gubernatorial seats. The focus on two different electoral campaigns within a state allows me to control for constituency differences while examining institutional effects on campaigning. Additionally, in the next stage of this project I will expand the analysis to multiple states which have simultaneous Senate and gubernatorial races. This will allow for a large amount of contextual and campaign variation, which will provide the opportunity to understand the effects of electoral campaigns in greater detail.

Of course, at this point, this analysis focuses on only one case and as such it is difficult to generalize from. I am examining only four separate and hard-fought campaigns in one very large state, in what may be a very peculiar election context — a virtual Republican sweep in a midterm election. With those qualifications in mind, however, this study presents some surprising conclusions for the role of campaigns in state-wide elections, and perhaps for the study of campaigns in general.

There were two data collection projects initiated during the 1994 Senate and gubernatorial elections in California. The first, and the one which I will draw upon for the remainder of this paper, involved a content analysis of newspaper articles from a set of state and local newspapers in California from two weeks before the primary (June 7, 1994) until the general election (November 8). I will discuss this content analysis in more

detail in the next section. The second collection involved the development of a database of the television advertisements during the last eight weeks of the general election. These two databases will eventually be integrated with survey data from a number of sources so that the impact of both mass media coverage of the campaign and candidate advertising on the electorate can be examined.

4 Hypotheses — Coverage of Senate and Gubernatorial Candidates

There are five specific hypotheses I test below using the media content data from the 1994 California races. Each is derived from the literature, and each hypothesis is easily tested with this data. First, I expect that **candidates for the governor’s office will receive more coverage in the newspapers than candidates for the Senate seat**. This hypothesis has two sources in the literature. One source are a limited series of studies which have previously examined media coverage of Senate and gubernatorial races (Ostroff 1980; Ostroff and Sandell 1984; Westlye 1991). These studies of consecutive races in Ohio documented a dramatically higher level of newspaper coverage of the gubernatorial race than the Senate election.¹ And, in a recent study of a handful of states from 1988, Squire and Fastnow found: “Governors were routine news, senators only appeared in the papers now and then” (Squire and Fastnow 1994: 709). The other source comes from the common finding that governors are more visible to the electorate than are senators (Hinckley, Hofstetter and Kessel 1974; Squire and Fastnow 1974). The causal factor operating here is always argued to be superior media exposure by governors.

The second hypothesis is that **incumbents will receive more coverage in newspapers than challengers, no matter the seat they are running for**. There are also two primary sources for this hypothesis. The first source is the finding that incumbents generally have better access to the mass media, and that they are often more “newsworthy” than challengers (Westlye 1991). The second source stems from research on candidate visibility, where one of the clear advantages of incumbency is shown to be the vastly superior levels of name recognition and recall held by incumbents over challengers (Jacobson 1987).

The third hypothesis moves towards the composition of the newspaper coverage. One well-known way of decomposing coverage is into hoopla, personality and issue subjects (Patterson 1980). A primary finding about the composition of coverage in presidential races is that “Half or more of the election coverage in each of the major news sources dealt with the competition between the candidates . . . The election’s substance, on the other hand, received only half as much coverage as was accorded the game” (Patterson

¹However these studies are confounded by the fact that the governor’s race was in 1978 while the Senate race was in 1980. Clearly, the political context nationally had shifted during this two-year period, and from the arguments from Westlye (1991) it is apparent the context within Ohio politics had changed as well.

1980: 24). These relative proportions have been shown to apply to coverage of the presidential race in each of the elections from 1976-1988 (Alvarez 1995; Graber 1984). But it is not clear that this finding from presidential elections applies to coverage of state-wide races, given Westlye's finding in his data that "...most of the time stories about the Senate campaign provided substantive information about both candidates" (Westlye 1991: 50). So, the third hypothesis is that **hoopla coverage should be greater than personality and issue coverage in both the Senate and gubernatorial races.**

Yet there are reasons to believe that there is heterogeneity in the issues which are covered in Senate and gubernatorial races. First, the offices which each race concerns are quite different. The Senate race involves one seat of a hundred for one branch of the national legislature while the governor's race involves the seat of the state executive. Thus, the Senate race should focus more on national issues which that legislative branch has influence over while the governor's race should focus more on state issues and performance. This is commonly framed as the difference between a "federalist" and a "nationalist" view of expectations and elections (Stein 1990). In fact, a common result in the literature on voter choice in state-wide elections is that governors are held accountable for state economic performance while Senate elections are more influenced by national political conditions (Atkeson and Partin 1994; Chubb 1988; Stein 1990). Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis is that **coverage of issues under the control of the governor should dominate coverage of that race and not of the Senate race, while national issues should dominate coverage of the Senate but not the governor's race.**

Last, the fifth hypothesis is that **newspaper coverage of both races should be geographically homogeneous.** That is, coverage of both races should be identical across newspapers and across regions of California. The only work which I draw upon for this hypothesis comes again from coverage of presidential elections. There both Patterson (1980) and Graber (1983) have shown that this coverage does not vary significantly across newspapers or geographic locations. Of course, there may be good reasons to argue for geographic heterogeneity in the coverage of state-wide races, especially in a state as large and diverse as California. Given the lack of a dominant state-wide newspaper, that different areas of the state may have different concerns, and that the candidates may have had different campaign focuses in different areas, this will be an interesting hypothesis to test.

5 Data Collection

The newspaper content analysis covered the period May 23, 1994 until November 8, 1994. This period began two weeks before the June 7 primary in California, and ended on election day. The newspapers included in the study were the Los Angeles Times, Sacramento Bee, Pasadena Star-News, San Jose Mercury News, San Francisco Examiner, San Diego Union Tribune, and the Oakland Tribune. The papers were selected to give a balance of newspapers from northern California (San Jose Mercury news, San Francisco

Examiner, and Oakland Tribune) southern California (Los Angeles Times, Pasadena Star-News, and San Diego Union Tribune), and the state capital (Sacramento Bee).

The basic unit of analysis was an individual article. An article was selected for inclusion in the study if it was primarily focused on the 1994 Senate and gubernatorial elections in California. Once selected for inclusion, each article was read carefully by the coders and was assigned up to two themes or topics. Each theme or topic, then, was broken into three components: a person/actor, a subject, and an evaluation. The first two codes, for the person/actor and subject, were open-ended codes. This allowed for single or multiple person/actors to be coded, as well as multiple subjects. The evaluation codes were positive or negative. Additionally, information was coded about the article — where it was positioned in the newspaper, the date, length, and type (newspaper reporter, wire service, or editorial).

This produces a large dataset, with 2056 articles examined and coded. These are distributed across the seven newspapers in the study with 471 Sacramento Bee stories (22.9%), 445 Los Angeles Times stories (21.6%), 276 San Francisco Examiner stories (12.4%), 271 San Jose Mercury News stories (13.2%), 260 San Diego Union Tribune stories (12.7%), 192 Pasadena Star-News stories (9.3%) and 141 Oakland Tribune stories (6.9%).

To facilitate analysis, the focus is on each article-theme. I used only article-themes which were associated with only one of the four major-party general election candidates (Feinstein, Huffington, Wilson and Brown). Thus, no article-themes were used in the analysis which had more than one subject identified in the coding. Then, the data were slightly aggregated into two week periods, which produced twelve discrete time points. Two further steps were taken with the data so that I could test the hypotheses associated with campaign content. First, a variable was coded for the general subject of the article-theme — campaign hoopla, issue or personality coverage. The guidelines for these categories followed Patterson's (1980) division of coverage.² And last, of the article-subjects

²Specifically, the open-ended subjects generated by the coders were categorized as follows. **Campaign Hoopla:** debate, debating techniques, chances of winning, campaign schedules, advertising attacks, campaign staff, fundraising, media events, campaign visits, polls and potential voters, voter confidence, endorsements, women voters, television advertisements and coverage, political strength, money and campaign finance, past races, sports analogies, slate mailers, political action committee contributions, presidential and vice-presidential appearances, media fairness, election laws, and Wilson's presidential aspirations. **Issues:** governor's performance, political reforms and "change", death penalty, generation of jobs, campaign platform planks, crime, immigration, education, office record, state budget and taxes, small business creation, health care, tourism, Clinton's economic plan, trimming bureaucracy, California exports, worker's compensation reform, affirmative action, birth control and abortion, three-strikes bill, family values, environmental issues, term limits and Proposition 140, education, military base closings, liberalism, gun control, domestic partner's legislation, drugs, Proposition 13, welfare, foreign affairs, and highway construction. **Personality:** Brown family ties, SEC investigation of candidates, personal relations to celebrities, comparisons to other prominent politicians, past experience, Arianna Huffington, Huffington as a carpetbagger, candidate finances, candidate religions, families of candidates, personal ethics of candidates, general personalities, personal reasons for running, anti-semitic remarks, and hiring of nanny.

which were classified as issue-based, they were classified as falling into one of issue-areas: past performance, reform or “change”, crime, economy, ideology, immigration, education, fiscal affairs, social issues, environmental issues, foreign issues, and transportation. Of these, five were by far the most prominent — economy, crime, immigration, fiscal affairs and social issues.³

6 The Dynamics of Media Coverage in State-wide Races

6.1 Coverage by Race and Candidate

The first hypothesis posited that **candidate for the governor’s office will receive more newspaper coverage than candidates for the Senate seat**. There are two ways to test this hypothesis: looking at the number of stories in each period for both major party candidates in each race and looking at the number of stories in each period for each of the four candidates. I present both in Figure 1.

In the top panel of Figure 1 are the total number of stories in each biweekly period for the two Senate (Feinstein and Huffington) and the two gubernatorial (Wilson and Brown) candidates. This figure shows that for the majority of the 1994 campaign the gubernatorial candidates did outstrip the Senate candidates in newspaper coverage. Also, for much of this period (before the middle of October), the gubernatorial candidates received almost twice the newspaper coverage as did the Senate candidates.

However, in the last three periods of the campaign, from the middle of October through election day, the two Senate candidates began to receive more coverage than the gubernatorial candidates. The reasons for this sudden change at the very end of the campaign are unclear at this point; however, they probably can be traced to some combination of campaign events — Huffington’s surprising ability to run neck-to-neck with Feinstein, the last minute positioning by each candidate on the issue of illegal immigration and Proposition 187, and the fact that both candidates became embroiled in similar controversies of their employment of illegal immigrants in their households.⁴ But the general conclusion to be taken from this figure is that the simple version of the hypothesis that governor’s races receive more newspaper coverage does not hold.

By turning to the bottom panel of Figure 1, where I give the total number of stories

³These five were coded as follows. **Economy**: generation of jobs, general California economy, small business creation, tourism, Clinton’s economic plan, California exports, worker’s compensation reform, and military base closings. **Crime**: death penalty, crime, three-strikes bill, and gun control. **Immigration**: immigration, and Proposition 187. **Fiscal Affairs**: state budget and taxes and Proposition 13. **Social Issues**: health care, affirmative action, birth control and abortion, family values, domestic partner’s legislation, and welfare.

⁴As will be discussed in the discussion below, one of the next stages in this work will involve linking the trends in coverage to both campaign events and the relative standings of the candidates in each race.

for each of the four candidates, further complexity emerges — as do additional problems for the claims made about coverage of candidates in subnational elections. Recall that the second hypothesis claimed that **incumbents will receive more coverage in newspapers than challengers, no matter the seat they are running for**. And keep in mind that the incumbents here are Feinstein and Wilson.

First, the spike in the last three campaign periods observed in the top panel of Figure 1 clearly is due to an enormous change in the number of stories devoted to Huffington in the last month or so of the race. But, also worth notice is the observation that in the last three periods of the campaign the other three candidates — Feinstein, Brown and Wilson — each received almost the same levels of coverage. Other than Huffington, who was a clear outlier in the last month, the other candidates virtually received the same amount of coverage. And the coverage of incumbent and challenger in each race do seem to track each other, again with the exception of coverage of Huffington in the last weeks of the electoral season.

In the earlier periods of the election year, though, notice that there is not much of a bias towards disproportionately high coverage of the incumbents. In the first four periods of the campaign, Wilson did get slightly more coverage than did Brown, and he also received more coverage in mid-August. But during the other periods of the campaign, Kathleen Brown was getting as much written about her candidacy in the newspapers.

But, the same dynamic was not apparent in the Senate race. There Feinstein received more coverage than Huffington in only one early period of the campaign (the period ending June 19). In each of the remaining periods, Feinstein generally received less coverage than did Huffington, and in a few cases she received roughly equal levels of coverage. Thus, in the 1994 California races there was little sign of a positive bias towards coverage of the gubernatorial incumbent, and no sign of a similar bias towards the Senate incumbent.

6.2 Content of Campaign Coverage

The third hypothesis stated that **hoopla coverage should be greater than personality and issue coverage in both the Senate and gubernatorial races**. I test this hypothesis by presenting first the content of coverage across the races, then broken down by each race. I present in Figure 2 the total number of stories in each period broken down by the three types of coverage.

Figure 2 shows first that hoopla coverage — stories with themes devoted to campaign appearances, the horserace, and campaign activities — clearly was an important component of the coverage in California. In periods immediately surrounding the primary and general election, hoopla coverage dominated the other forms of coverage. However, and importantly, issue coverage was equilivant to or even greater than hoopla coverage during most of this electoral season. And issue-based coverage shows a very sharp spike

in the last weeks of October, during the period of time many voters may be making up their minds about which candidate to support.

Also worth mention in Figure 2 is the relatively lower level of personality based coverage during this election. During most of the election season, through mid-September, discussions of candidate personality were minimal across the state, numbering in general less than fifty article-subjects across the seven papers. Then, personality-based coverage picks up, and tracks the other two types of coverage through election day.

The results in Figure 2 are most striking when placed in the context of Patterson's results for the 1976 presidential election (Patterson 1980), which demonstrated that the relative proportions of hoopla to substantive (both issue and personality) coverage were roughly 60% hoopla and 30% substantive. Here, it is clear that in these two state-wide races the proportions were not 2:1, but were more like 1:1 or better for substantive coverage across the entire course of this election year.

Another test of the third hypothesis comes when I break down the coverage across the two different races. This is done in Figure 3, where the top panel gives the coverage content for the gubernatorial race and the bottom panel gives the coverage content for the Senate race. Beginning with the gubernatorial race, notice that the content of coverage in this race was dominated by issue-based coverage. Only in three of the periods did hoopla coverage exceed issue coverage. Also worth notice is that the peak of issue coverage in the governor's race occurred in the period just before the election — again, the time when we might expect that issue coverage would have the greatest effect on candidate choice. Last, personality coverage was a significant (almost at equal levels to hoopla coverage) factor in the last half of the election.

Turning to the bottom panel of Figure 3, notice that through mid-September that there was no clear “winner” among the three categories of coverage. Hoopla, issue and personality coverage were all at roughly equal and low levels. It was only in the last two full months of the Senate race that a dynamic emerged, with personality-based coverage dominating through the rest of the campaign. During this same period of time, issue-coverage actually was greater than hoopla coverage, until the last period of the campaign.

Thus, the two races demonstrated remarkably different dynamics of coverage content during this election. In the gubernatorial election, issue coverage generally dominated, peaking just before the election. In the Senate election, only in the last two months of the election did a clear pattern emerge, with personality-based coverage jumping to the front. These two differences are difficult to reconcile with the third hypothesis, which stated that hoopla coverage should dominate, no matter which race we examine. That clearly does not happen in these two races.

To get a better understanding what might be causing these two differences, I have broken these coverage content numbers down even further, and present them by candidate. The coverage content in the governor's race is given in Figure 4, which Wilson in the top panel and Brown in the bottom panel.

There it is apparent that the enormous amount of issue coverage in the early periods of the governor's race is driven largely by issue-based stories referencing Wilson, the incumbent. But even towards the end of the race, issue-based stories still dominate the other two forms of coverage for Wilson.

The picture for Brown is much more complicated. For her, hoopla coverage was much more prominent across the whole campaign, with hoopla often dominating her newspaper coverage, most especially during the primary season, in the middle of September, and in the last two weeks of the general election. However, issue coverage of Brown was sometimes quite high, and it was greater than hoopla coverage in the four weeks before the end of the campaign season. Again, in the governor's race voters were receiving what seems like an enormous amount of issue-based information from the state newspapers about both gubernatorial candidates.

But what about the Senate race? Similar graphs are given in Figure 5, with Feinstein in the top panel and Huffington in the bottom panel. In general, Feinstein received more issue coverage than hoopla or personality coverage. But she got only marginally more issue coverage, and in the period leading up to general election day, when the closeness of the Senate race became increasingly apparent, hoopla coverage for Feinstein beat the other forms of coverage by a wide margin.

But Huffington's coverage explains the dramatic rise in personality coverage seen in Figure 3 in the Senate race. Most of those personality-oriented stories in the last two months of the Senate race were about Huffington, no doubt arising as the media focused on Huffington's hiring of illegal immigrants as household workers. But notice that in the last three campaign periods there were also a substantial number of issue-based stories about Huffington, almost twice the number of hoopla stories.

Thus, it seems that as far as the Senate and governor's races in 1994 in California are concerned, the hypothesis that the media is concerned primarily about hoopla and campaigning clearly does not comport with the data. Across Figures 3-5 I have presented the content of the coverage broken down in different ways, and have shown that in general, hoopla coverage was not the dominant form of coverage in these campaigns.

But what of the fourth hypothesis, that **coverage of issues under the control of the governor should dominate coverage of that race and not of the Senate race, while national issues should dominate coverage of the Senate but not the governor's race**? Unfortunately, this turns out to be a difficult hypothesis to test. This is the case since the primary issue which was raised in both races in California could not clearly be labelled as either national or state — immigration and Proposition 187. Of the other prominent issues, social issues and crime also are difficult to call national or state. However, most of the discussion in the media of the economy and of fiscal affairs did focus on California's economy and fiscal matters, so I will think of those two issues as primarily ones which should have received disproportionate emphasis in the governor's race.

In Figure 6 I give the breakdown of the five prominent issues in the newspaper content data for both races. Here, there are a number of dynamics which deserve mention. In the first three campaign periods, in general the coverage focused on fiscal affairs, followed by immigration. Then, in the period August 7 through September 4, coverage of crime rose to prominence. Thereafter, through the end of the general election, immigration became the dominant issue.

To determine if this was true in both the Senate and governor’s races, I present in Figure 7 issue coverage broken down by the governor’s candidates (top panel) and Senate candidates (bottom panel). In the top, notice the spike in coverage of fiscal affairs in the first two months of the governor’s campaign — the periods including the primary and just thereafter. But, coverage of fiscal affairs diminishes rapidly in late June. Within the next month, crime enjoys a one-period rise to prominence in the governor’s race. Then in the next six periods, immigration becomes the dominant issue in the governor’s campaign. Only in one period, that running from October 3 through October 16, did another issue rise in coverage above immigration, and that was the economy.⁵

In the Senate race, both similarities and differences can be seen (bottom panel). Here, immigration was the dominant issue in mid June, but disappeared in the newspaper coverage of the Senate race until early October (at which time the Senate candidates began to take polarized positions on their support of Proposition 187). In mid- to late-August there is a rise in the coverage of social issues in the Senate race, paralleled by a similar rise in mid- to late-October.

Thus, in Figure 7 there is some support for the fourth hypothesis. In the issue coverage of the governor’s candidates, there were periods where issues which are primarily tied to the state were prominent — fiscal affairs and the economy. In the issue coverage of the Senate candidates, there were two periods where coverage of social issues, which the Senate does have some jurisdiction over, were prominent. But in both the Senate and the governor’s race, the overwhelming issue in California was immigration. And unfortunately for my desire to test this particular hypothesis, immigration is an issue which really is difficult to label either as either being a “federalist” or “nationalist” issue.

6.3 Geographic Homogeneity

The last hypothesis I advanced concerned the geographic distribution of newspaper coverage: **newspaper coverage of both races should be geographically homogeneous.** To test this, I examined coverage by the papers in southern California (Los Angeles Times, San Diego Union Tribune, and Pasadena Star-News), in the Bay Area (San Francisco Examiner, San Jose Mercury News, and Oakland Tribune) and in the

⁵Here is an area where having a database of campaign events will be very informative. During roughly this period of time, Brown released a 64 page booklet detailing her plans for the California economy. Undoubtedly the increase in coverage of the economy at this point in the governor’s race can be traced to coverage of her booklet and Wilson’s response to it.

state capital (Sacramento). In Figure 8 I give the number of stories for each set of papers over the campaign period.

It is apparent that coverage by the newspapers in this sample largely tracked one another. However, there are some minor patterns across the papers. The Sacramento Bee, to begin, had a relatively constant amount of coverage across the entire campaign period. There was a little more coverage around the primary and general elections, but in general, the level of coverage was very similar across periods. Both the Bay Area and the southern California newspapers had more coverage at the beginning and at the end of the campaign. Notice that the coverage in the southern California newspapers skyrocketed to almost 350 article-subjects about the four candidates in the two weeks prior to the election. Thus, while there is some heterogeneity in coverage across California newspapers, the picture that emerges is one of basic similarity across newspapers.

Additional evidence of minor heterogeneity is in Figure 9, where I break the geographic coverage down by the governor's race (top panel) and the Senate race (bottom panel). Beginning with the governor's race, it is clear that there is a lot of volatility in the geographic basis of coverage of this race. The Sacramento coverage peaks three times; around the primary, in mid-September, and right before the general election. The southern California coverage also shows three distinct peaks, but the second one occurs during late-September. And last, the Bay Area coverage of the governor's race really bottoms out during July, with a level of coverage across three papers which is lower than that of the Sacramento Bee.

But the Senate race (bottom panel) has a decidedly different dynamic. Here, there is almost no variance in the level of coverage (despite a very small increase before the primary until late-September. Then, coverage of the Senate race picks up dramatically in each of the three areas, and peaks in the period before the election.

So, there is slight evidence of geographic heterogeneity in the coverage of these two state-wide races in 1994. The differences in regional paper coverage are not very great, which indicates that these newspapers were covering basically the same stories at roughly the same time.

7 Discussion

Obviously, a study with an intensive focus on only one state in one election year is difficult to use as a platform from which to make general statements about our understanding of campaigns in America. I do think that it is clear from this preliminary work, however, that the dynamics of election campaigns are more complex and nuanced than we have been led to believe by past research.

As I have demonstrated above, a set of relatively non-controversial hypotheses taken from the literature on campaigns and elections did not fare well when confronted with

the data from the 1994 California Senate and gubernatorial elections. To restate the findings,

1. The candidates for the governor's seat did not generally obtain a disproportionate share of the newspaper coverage.
2. The incumbents in both races did not enjoy more coverage than did their challengers.
3. Substantive coverage of the candidates was substantial, and was not swamped by coverage of the horserace and of campaign events.
4. Issue coverage does seem tied to the political institution, but this connection seems partly predicated on the messages sent by the candidates.
5. Coverage across the newspapers appears to be similar over time.

Other than these relatively static findings, it is also apparent in these data that there were dynamics to the campaign and the information environment which need to be uncovered. That the information environment is dynamic is a result which also has serious implications for our past understandings of campaigns.

But these results are preliminary, and to better understand both the static and dynamic empirical findings, these data must be analyzed in combination with data on significant campaign events and on the perceptions and preferences of the electorate. Integration of these data will allow for a better understanding of the causal determinants of newspaper coverage, as well as the effects of such coverage.

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Figure 1: Coverage by Race and Candidate
Senate vs. Gubernatorial Media Coverage, California 1994

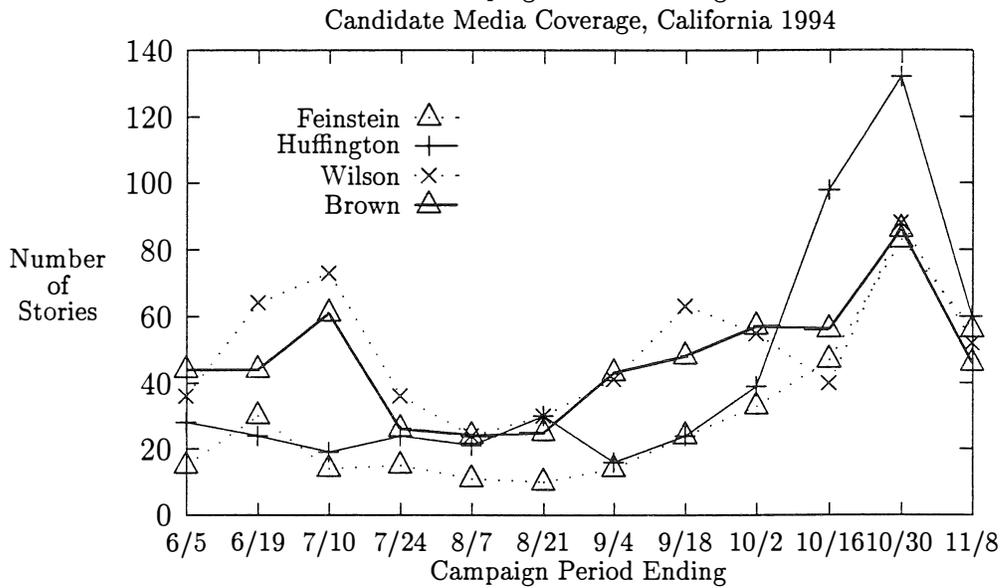
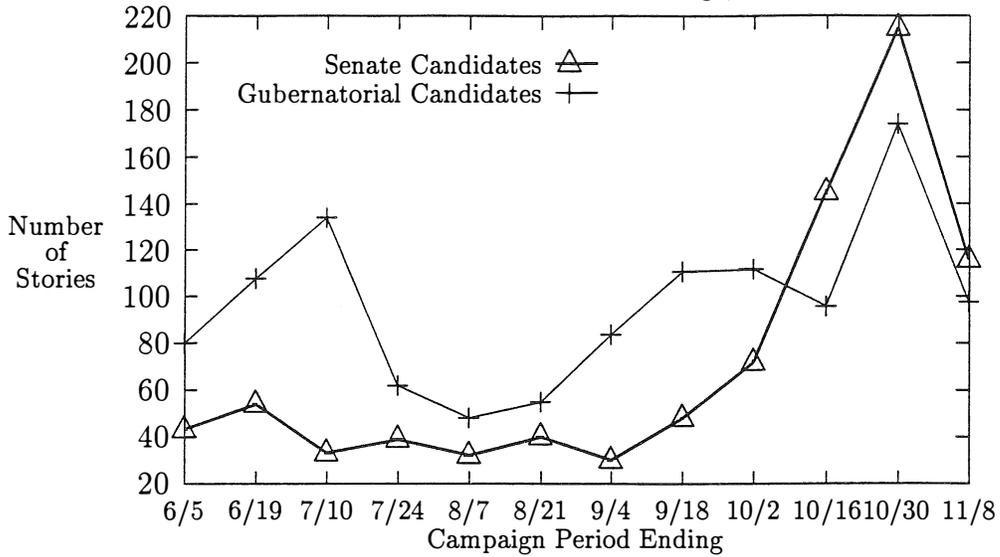


Figure 2: Content of Coverage
Subjects of Campaign Media Coverage, California 1994

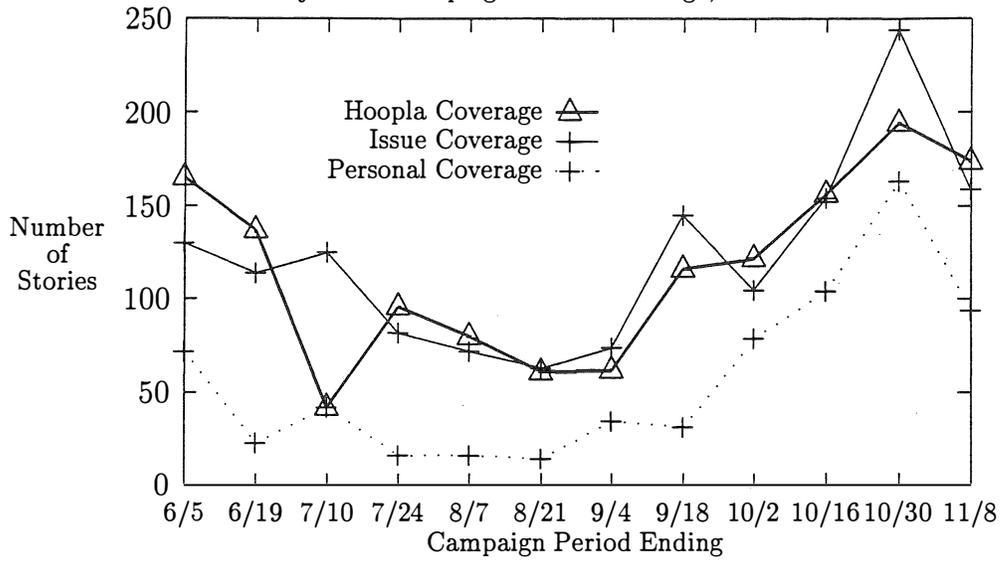
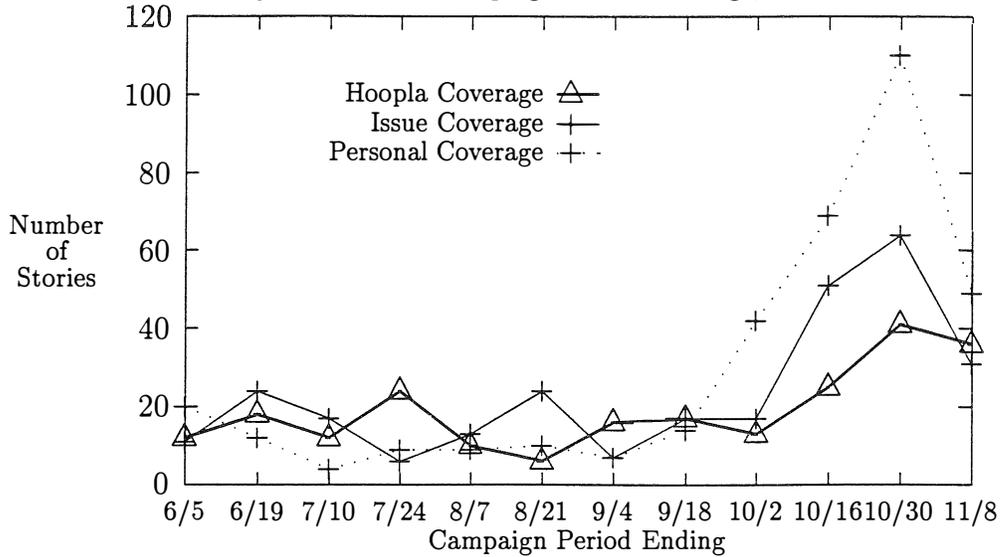


Figure 3: Content of Coverage by Race
 Subjects of Senate Campaign Media Coverage, California 1994



Subjects of Gubernatorial Campaign Media Coverage, California 1994

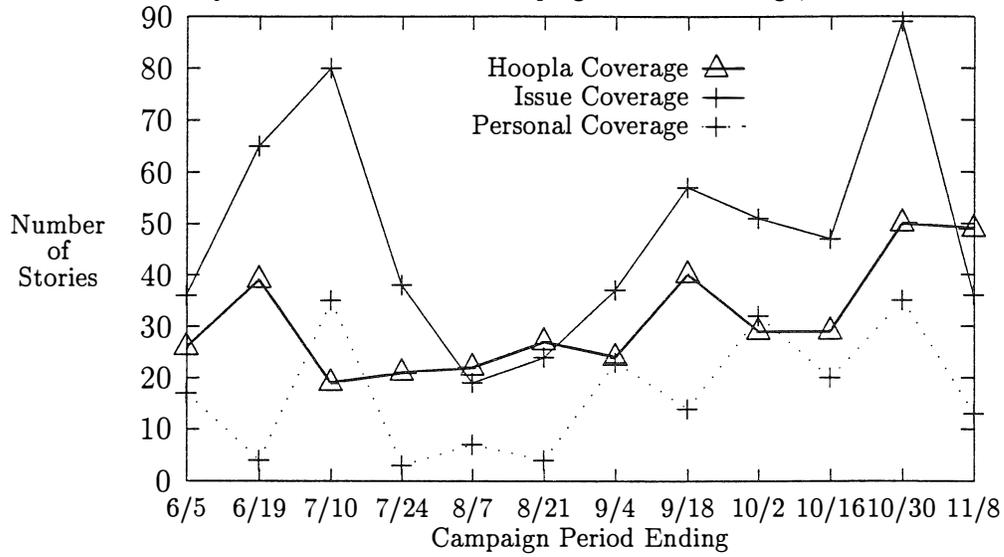
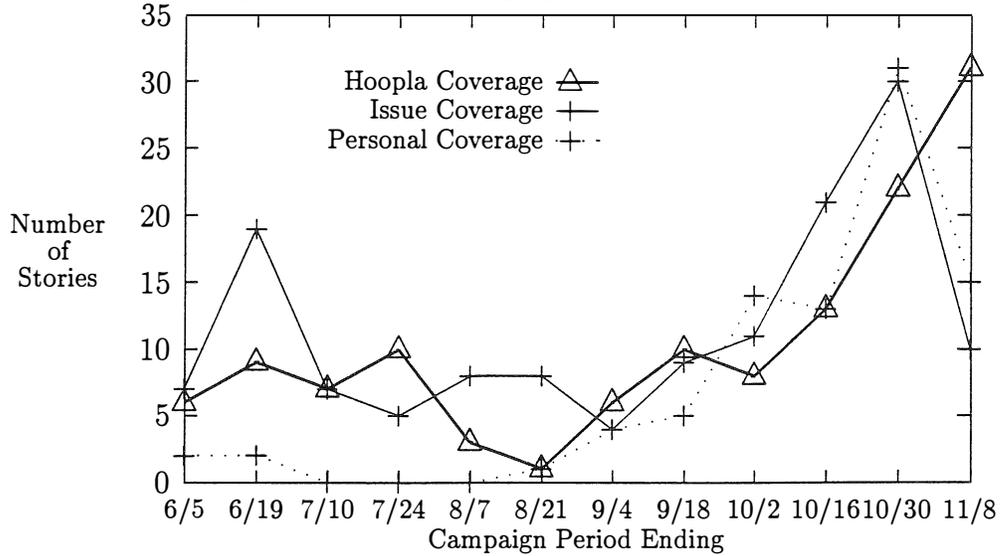


Figure 4: Content of Coverage by Gubernatorial Candidate
 Subjects of Feinstein Campaign Media Coverage, California 1994



Subjects of Huffington Campaign Media Coverage, California 1994

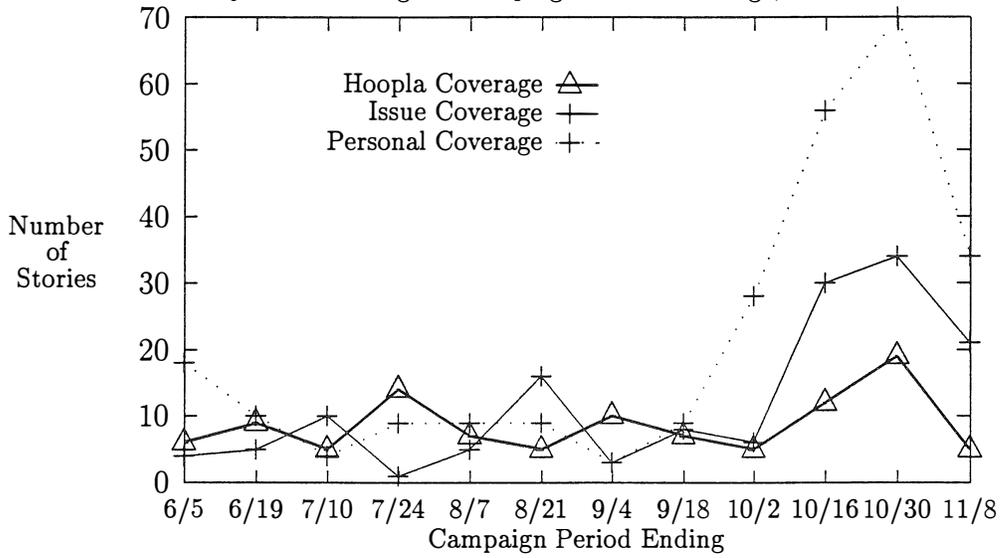
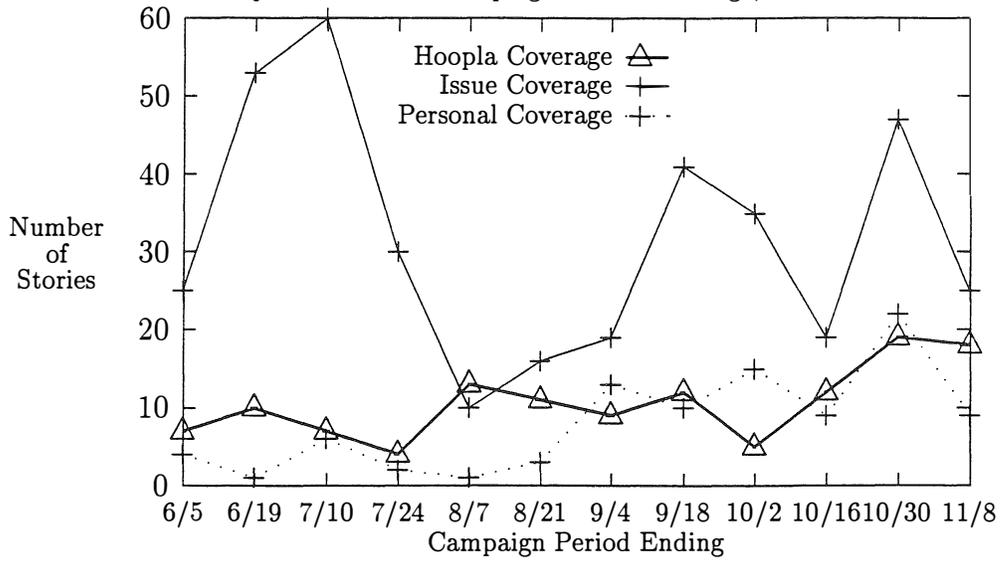


Figure 5: Content of Coverage by Senate Candidate
 Subjects of Wilson Campaign Media Coverage, California 1994



Subjects of Brown Campaign Media Coverage, California 1994

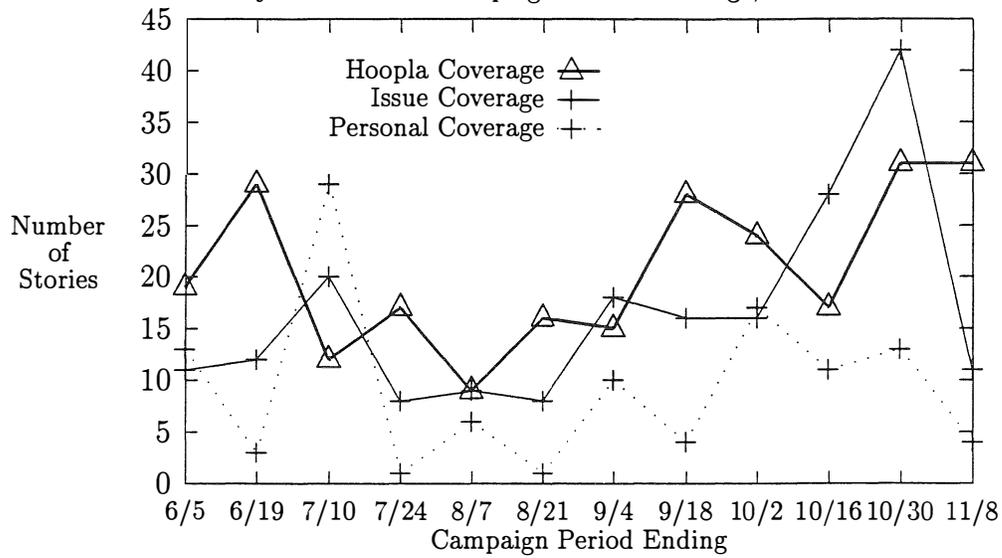


Figure 6: Issue Coverage
 Issue Coverage, California 1994

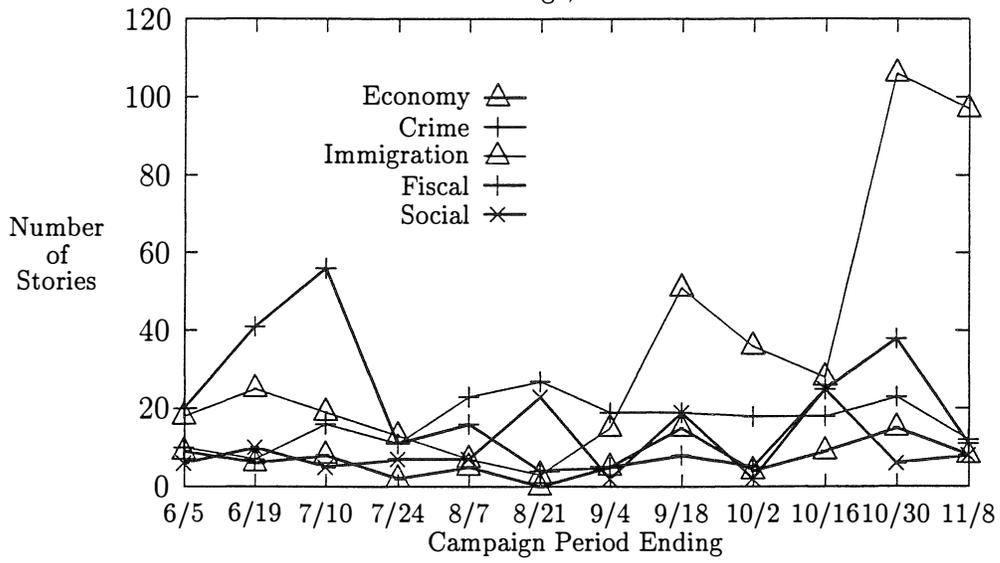
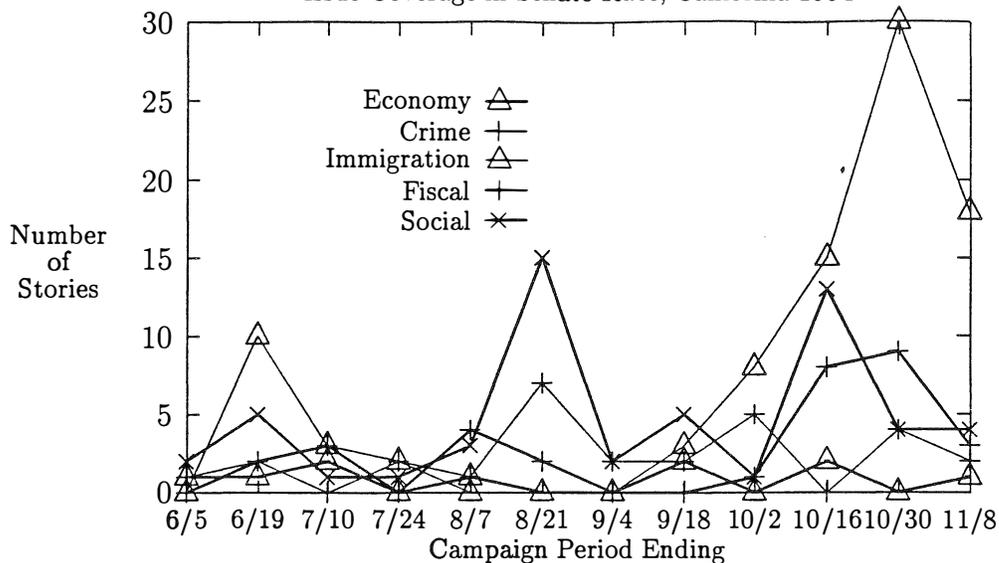


Figure 7: Issue Coverage by Race
 Issue Coverage in Senate Race, California 1994



Issue Coverage in Gubernatorial Race, California 1994

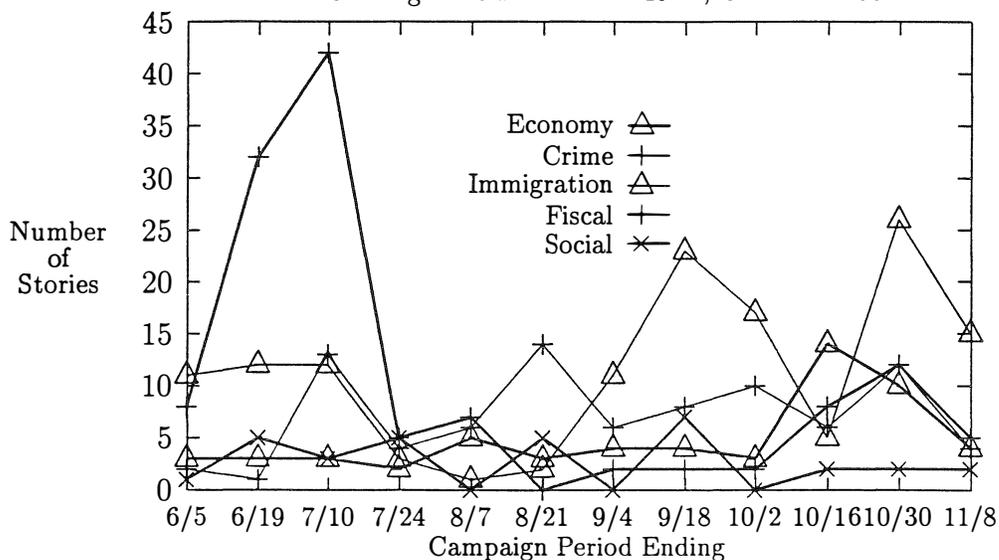


Figure 8: Coverage by Geographic Area
Media Coverage by Paper Coverage Areas, California 1994

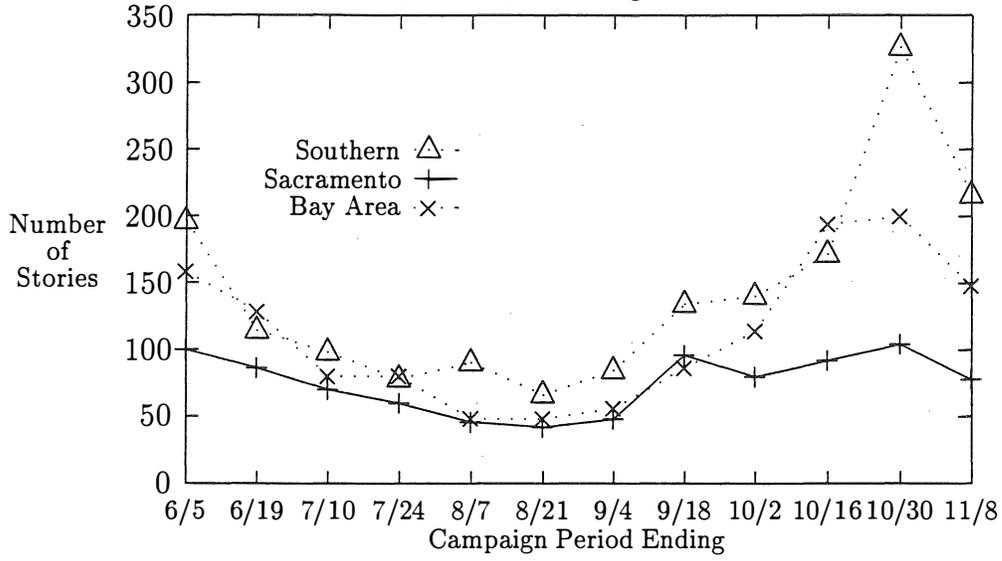
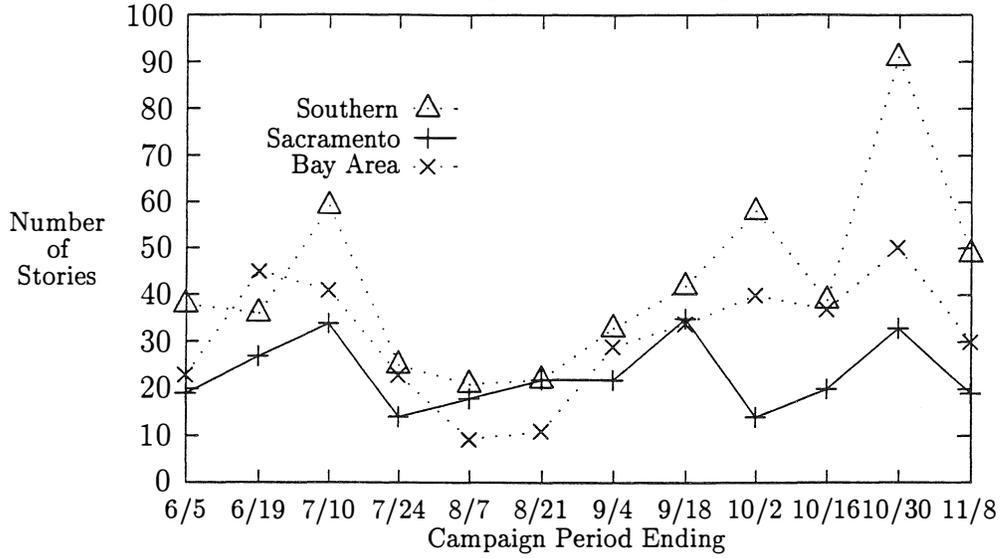


Figure 9: Race Coverage by Geographic Area
 Gubernatorial Media Coverage by Paper Coverage Areas, California 1994



Senate Media Coverage by Paper Coverage Areas, California 1994

