

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Purchasing Negativity:
Public Opinion on “Super PAC” Advertisements during the 2012
American Presidential Election

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Abstract

This major research paper is a qualitative study of American “Super PAC” advertising during the 2012 American presidential election. Super PACs, a type of “political action committee,” have the ability to collect unlimited funds to advertise on behalf of candidates and parties. Super PACs have attracted criticism from scholars due to the Super PACs’ negativity against opposing candidates. Using Albert Bandura’s *Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication*, and existing literature on political advertising, this study explores public opinion on negative television commercials. It employs data collected by *The Super PAC App* – a mobile application that recorded individual reactions to political advertising. It also employs qualitative content analysis on 20 negative Super PAC advertisements using codes created by political scientist John Geer. The results suggest that users of the App generally *disliked* negative Super PAC advertisements. Furthermore, the results indicate there are certain characteristics within negative advertisements that make them more *liked* or *disliked* by users of the App.

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Introduction

In 2010, the Supreme Court of the United States rendered judgment on two cases that changed how political advertising is conducted. In *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (FEC)* and *SpeechNow.org v. FEC*, the Supreme Court ruled that contributing money to political causes is protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution (Gaughan 2012).¹ The act of donating to political activities is now interpreted as the expression of an individual's opinion. Following this landmark decision, some political action committees (PACs) were authorized to collect unlimited donations to advertise on behalf of candidates.² These organizations morphed into an “advertising auxiliary” for official campaigns, and were later dubbed “Super PACs” (Farrar-Meyers & Skinny 2012).

Super PAC advertisements are notable in their negativity against opposing candidates (Brooks & Murov 2012). Political science scholars recognize that negative television advertising has increased in popularity in recent years, but they often question whether negativity is effective or acceptable to the electorate. Nevertheless, candidates must take advantage of Super PACs to help them campaign, or risk being

¹ The First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits congress from passing any law that infringes on the right to freedom of speech (U.S. Constitution Amendment I).

² A political action committee (PAC) is “any committee, association, or organization that accepts contributions or makes expenditures for the purpose of influencing the

² A political action committee (PAC) is “any committee, association, or organization that accepts contributions or makes expenditures for the purpose of influencing the election of an individual to public office” (Sabato & Ernst 2007).

outmatched (Gaughan 2012). The \$6 billion spent by Super PACs in 2012 dwarfs the \$1.2 billion that candidates invested in similar activities (Nader 2013). In this context, it is worth noting that President Barack Obama initially criticized the Supreme Court's decision in 2010, but ultimately accepted the support of Super PACs for his re-election campaign (Tarr & Beneson 2012).

Scholars have, as of yet, had little time to study the results of the 2012 election. However, some of those who have studied the election have employed creative methods to analyze data on public opinion. For instance, two graduate students developed a mobile and web application called the *Super PAC App* which allowed viewers to fact-check the allegations made by organizations in television commercials, and to share their own viewpoints (Super PAC App 2012). The data the *Super PAC App* collected during the 2012 election can provide interesting insights into what Americans thought while they viewed these advertisements, and will play a key role in this paper.

This study aims to update current understandings about the perception of political advertising in the United States. Drawing on social cognitive theory and existing literature on political advertising, I will explore individual reactions to Super PAC advertisements using data collected by the *Super PAC App*. I aim to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Do users of the *Super PAC App* like or dislike negative advertisements?

RQ2: What are the characteristics of negative advertisements that are liked by users of the *Super PAC App*?

RQ3: What are the characteristics of negative advertisements that are *disliked* by users of the *Super PAC App*?

The results of this study may help address a research gap surrounding agency in political participation. While there is extensive research available on possible subconscious effects of political advertising, there is less research on what voters actually think about these advertisements. Exploring what the electorate truly thinks about this new type of advertising may help discover if concerns about Super PACs are warranted.

Legal Background

As stated above, scholars have previously studied public perceptions of negative advertising. However, Super PACs are a recent addition to elections in the United States. Therefore, it is important to understand the political context surrounding Super PACs, because they have challenged traditional norms of political participation.

First, it should be noted that official political campaigns in the United States are subject to donation limits to “avoid the potential for *quid pro quo* corruption or, at the very least, the appearance of *quid pro quo* corruption” (Nader 2013).³ These rules apply to candidates, parties, and PACs; and were included in the *Federal Election Campaign Act 1971* and the *Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act 2002* (Johnson-Cartee &

³ *Quid pro quo* is defined as “perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties by bribery or favour” (Dimino, Smith & Solimine, 2011). The Supreme Court, in an attempt to safeguard politics from corruption, interpreted in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) that *quid pro quo* was corruption. This ruling upheld contribution limits.

Copeland 1997; Dowling & Wichowsky 2013). However, many citizens have objected to campaign limits throughout the last half-century because they were believed to impede the First Amendment. As Nader (2012) writes, for “...free speech absolutists, any attempt to limit or prohibit political spending is akin to restricting freedom of speech for everyone” (pg. 45).

Following several constitutional challenges, the expression of the First Amendment through political donations was recognized in 2010. These decisions struck down many of the donation limits outlined in the *Bipartisan Act* (Kimmel 2012). Similarly, the Supreme Court determined that independent PACs that were not associated with candidates did not meet the requirements of *quid pro quo*, as money could not *directly* influence a candidate. Critics of these new policies have a number of concerns. First, they clarify that although candidates and parties do not have direct access to the funds collected by Super PACs, they do benefit from their services. Second, they argue that America’s wealthiest citizens now have a stronger ability to finance campaigns that are favourable to their interests. Additionally, some of these donors have found loopholes and regulatory gaps that allow them to hide their identities, making it difficult to hold these individuals to account (Dowling & Wichowsky 2013). Nevertheless, proponents argue every American is equal at the ballot box. Although advertisements may sound particularly convincing,

it does not guarantee that the electorate will vote for the supported candidate.

Theoretical Positioning

Many argue that this new legal environment has challenged prevailing theories on political advertising. However, before I discuss the existing literature, I will first outline the theoretical positioning of this paper. This project will study political advertising from a sociopsychological lens, specifically drawing on Albert Bandura's (2001) *Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication*. Bandura's perspective on human cognition and action will provide a framework to help determine why Americans may like or dislike political messages.

Social cognitive theory proposes that humans have agency – they are “...self-developing, proactive, self-regulating and self-reflecting, not just reactive organisms” (Bandura 2001, pg. 94). Bandura's theory directly contrasts with that of other behavioural psychologists, such as B.F. Skinner, (1974) who argues human behaviour is directly influenced by the environment without the potential of personal intervention. Bandura argues learning occurs through *symbolic modeling*, where people observe the behaviours of others. Later, individuals weigh these symbols against others they've observed to determine how they should act in a given situation.

Bandura outlines several motivators that influence the types of behaviours people will model. First, an individual's *self-regulation* depends on *discrepancy reduction*, meaning individuals proactively strive to eliminate any contrary *symbols* of acceptable behaviour. People desire *self-efficacy*, and aspire to understand how to act appropriately in all situations. Therefore, they will constantly weigh new *symbols* to determine if they are applicable. In contrast, individuals may also engage in *exonerative comparison*, where an individual would justify normally immoral behaviours for its "utilitarian standards" (Bandura 2001, pg. 104).

Bandura suggests the media's impact on *modeling* has increased in recent years, especially with growing television viewership. He writes:

Television representations of realities reflect ideological bents in their portrayal of human nature ... heavy exposure to this symbolic world may eventually make the televised images appear to be the authentic state of human affairs (Bandura 2001, pg. 107).

Bandura argues the expression of emotion through this medium, and overall desensitization to certain behaviours, has made this *social construction of reality* particularly persuasive.

Social cognitive theory would suggest that voters do not simply vote for a candidate because an advertisement tells them to do so. Rather, they incorporate a variety of beliefs into this decision (McGuire & Ohsfeldt 1989). Most of the prevailing scholarly opinions on political behaviour are consistent with this belief. The literature outlined below

generally recognizes the regular and conscious interaction voters have with political messages.

Review of the Literature

Having established the theoretical positioning of this study, I will now consider previous studies directed at negative advertising. The literature surveyed in this paper examines prevailing opinion on the purpose of negative political advertisements, the effect these messages have, and sentiment towards these advertisements. Existing research conducted on Super PAC advertisements is also included, as is research on new communication mediums and how they can help scholars understand public opinion.

Negativity in Advertising

Definition and Purpose

First, it is important to define negativity in advertising. Negative political advertising is defined as “any criticism leveled by one candidate against another during the campaign” that exhibits a high level of normativity⁴ (Geer 2006a, pg. 30; Procter & Schenck-Hamlin 1996). The main goal of negative advertising is to differentiate a candidate from their opponent (Geer 2006a; Martinez & Degal 2010). “Candidates all favour a strong economy, for example. Such information would not help voters differentiate the candidates. Instead, voters need to know specific positions of candidates on the issues so as to differentiate the contenders” (Geer 2006a, pg. 103). Some scholars feel so strongly about the

⁴ Procter & Schenck-Hamlin (1996) argue negative political advertisements exhibit a “normative” style because they “fit a common pattern, possessing similar modes of attack and style” (pg. 147).

importance of political differentiation that they prefer the term “comparative advertising” to “negative advertising” (Hill 1989, pg. 14). This differentiation component is said to help acquire the attention of undecided voters and convert them to a particular side (Garrazone et. al. 1990, Johnson-Cartee & Copeland 1991, Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy 1993, Brians & Wattenberg 1996, Martin 2004, Craig et. al. 2005). Martin (2004) writes: “Negative campaigns frequently focus on attacking the issue positions of one another and may incidentally raise awareness within the citizenry about the range of problems to be dealt with” (pg. 552).

Necessity of Negative Advertising

Not all scholars agree that negativity is the only way to achieve differentiation. Jamieson (1992), for example, is critical of the negative tactics used by political candidates, and labels most negativity as “distortion, deception, and distraction” (pg. 206). Although negativity appears to help viewers differentiate, Jamieson argues that the tactics employed by candidates purposefully distract from the real issues. On the other hand, Geer (2006a) argues that negativity “creates a competitive dynamic that should yield a richer information environment” (Geer 2006a, pg. 13). Geer highlights that “democratic theory” in the United States is predicated on the opposition’s duty to criticize those in power (Geer 2006a, pg. 12). This debate is frequent amongst scholars, and is exhibited across a large variety of literature.

Why Engage in Negativity?

Although some scholars, like Geer (2006a), argue the differentiation aspect of negative advertising is the manifestation of a healthy democracy, not all candidates choose to be negative. There are a number of theories on why this may be the case. Harrington & Hess (1994) argue that the public's opinion on a candidate's personality ultimately determines if they will pursue a negative campaign. Some candidates strive to divert focus away from their personal shortcomings by attacking their opponents. Other scholars propose that incumbents and challengers pursue negativity differently. Geer (2006a) finds that the subject of negative advertising depends on the target: incumbents use character attacks against their opponents, while challengers use policy attacks against the incumbent.

Does Negative Advertising Work?

As noted above, scholars recognize that negativity is a tactic employed by candidates to help distinguish themselves from their opponents. However, there is a debate on whether negativity actually works to change the electorate's vote. Some scholars have found evidence that negativity is effective in having the electorate vote for an attacker (Ansolabehere et. al. 1994, Bullock 1994, Kaid 1997, Naman 2000, Carraro & Castelli 2010). Other scholars assert that negativity only works in certain circumstances. First, the subject of the advertisement must remain relevant and include evidence to back up their claims, or voters

will easily reverse their opinions (Kahn & Kenney 2004, Paek et al. 2005). Second, advertisements must be strategically placed within acceptable television programming. For example, Kaid, Chanselor & Hovind (1992) have found evidence that political advertisements shown during news broadcasts are effective, while advertisements shown during entertainment programming are not. Third, the success of negativity depends on position of the candidate. Many scholars have found that employing negative advertising hurts incumbents, but helps challengers (Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy 1993, Lau & Pomper 2004).

Alternatively, a significant number of scholars believe negative advertisements are not effective in altering public opinion (Pinkleton 1997, Robideaux 2004, Brader 2005). Some scholars have even found a “backlash” effect, where viewers begin to prefer the targets of advertisements, while liking the sponsor less (Haddock & Zanna 1997, Carraro & Castelli, 2010). Others have found evidence that viewers dislike both the sponsor and the target after viewing a negative advertisement (Bullock 1994, Kern & Just 1995).

The Impact of Negative Advertising

Having considered the definition and usefulness of negative advertising, I will now briefly address concerns scholars have on the long-term impact of negativity. Studying impact in detail would be outside the scope of this paper, but it is important to briefly outline these arguments because they encompass a large portion of the literature on negative

advertising. First, Granato & Sunny Wong (2004) suggest that negative advertising may prevent “message crystallization,” meaning that negativity distracts voters from grasping and understanding the issues (pg. 356). Similarly, Lodge et. al. (1995) found that voters often do not remember specifically why a negative advertisement denounced a particular candidate, but they instead remember the impression and judgment of the candidate that advertisement left with them.

Some scholars argue that these impressions, and overall cynicism, may ultimately deter voters from participating in elections. Scholars have dubbed this the *negativity-demobilization hypothesis* (Ansolabehere et al. 1994, Houston, Doan & Roskos-Ewoldsen 1999, Min 2004). Matsusaka (1993) hypothesizes negativity in modern campaigns may be responsible for declining voter turnout in recent years, and Ansolabehere et al. (1994) have found negative advertisements may decrease voting intentions by as much as five per cent (pg. 829). Stevens (2009) suggests that the more negative an advertisement is, the more likely an individual is to be demobilized. Furthermore, he finds that judgments formed from a single negative advertisement may affect the voter’s overall impression of the election.

However, not all scholars are convinced that the *negativity-demobilization hypothesis* exists. Some scholars have found no evidence to suggest that attack advertisements demobilize the electorate (e.g., Finkel & Geer 1998; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman and Babbitt 1999;

Wattenberg & Brians 1999; Brooks 2006; Jackson, Mondak & Huckfeldt 2009). Other scholars question whether advertisements are the only variable responsible for *negativity-demobilization*. Ridout & Fowler (2012) have found evidence that mass media framing of advertisements is what illuminates negativity in the eyes of the electorate. They argue that the media has a larger impact in whether the public will recognize negativity in advertisements. Similarly, the geographic location of a voter may have an impact in socializing voters on how to react to negativity. Sides et. al. (2003) have found evidence that residents of Illinois are demobilized by negative advertisements, while residents of California are mobilized.

What does the electorate think about negative advertising?

As noted above, the literature on attack advertisements is focused on answering questions relating to the usefulness of negative advertising, and the effect negativity has on the electorate. However, there is much less literature dedicated to determining the actual opinions of voters on the subject of negative advertising. Interestingly, studies that use “liking” and “disliking” as variables only seek to answer questions about an advertisement’s effectiveness in altering a vote, not an individual’s personal feelings about it. For example, Mathews & Dietz-Uhler (1998) use “like” and “dislike” in their study of “in-group” and “out-group”

perception of negative advertising.⁵ However, the authors equate “like” to “likelihood” that the study participant would vote for a particular candidate, rather than their feelings toward the advertisement overall. There are few studies that look at the perception of negative advertising outside of effectiveness.

The scholars that have studied this topic have come to several conclusions on the electorate’s impressions of negativity. First, scholars suggest that viewers may like negative advertisements as long as they are focused on the issues (Schenck-Hamlin, Procter & Rumsey 2000). On the other hand, advertisements that focus on character and personality tend to increase cynicism about politics. Similarly, Brooks & Geer (2007) argue that the electorate does not necessarily dislike negativity, but instead dislikes *incivility*, which may be the true result of demobilization in recent years. In addition to the contrast between issue and character based attacks, scholars argue that the source’s credibility and the type of claims used in the attack determine if voters will approve (Dermody and Scullion 2003). Voters approve of advertisements “based on legitimate criticism” but disapprove of advertisements that engage in “unsubstantiated” attacks (Dermody and Scullion 2003, pg. 93).

Third, scholars believe that partisanship may determine what advertisements are liked and disliked by certain individuals. Some

⁵ Matthews & Dietz-Uhler (1998) define the “in-group” as study participants that are assessing the behaviour of candidates in their own political parties. The “out-group” are study participants that are assessing the behaviour of candidates in opposing political parties (pg. 1903).

scholars suggest that partisan orientation matters because voters will support negative advertising when it is sponsored by their candidate of choice, and similarly will disapprove of advertising targeting their party (Martinez & Degal 1990). However, other scholars suggest partisanship is not infallible. Mathews & Dietz-Uhler (1998) found that partisans do not necessarily support candidates within their party that develop attack advertisements. Instead, they are often criticized for threatening the reputation of the party itself. Finally, long-term political standards may also impact personal opinions. Searing, Wright & Rabinowitz's (1976) *primacy principle* suggests that information that is learned the earliest is the most persistent. If an individual has always held an opinion on a particular issue, it is suggested they will support advertising that is consistent with those beliefs. These beliefs are unlikely to change, even with the introduction of convincing negative Super PAC advertisements.

Super PAC and Third Party Advertising

Having considered the extensive literature on negative advertising, it is now necessary to assess how Super PAC advertising fits into this literature. As mentioned in the introduction, the 2012 presidential election was significant because it marked the introduction of the Super PAC. There is currently limited research that has been conducted on Super PACs since the conclusion of the 2012 election. Nevertheless, some scholars have provided interesting insight into how Super PACs may have reshaped campaign advertising. First, it is important to note that 85 per

cent of “group” advertising in the 2012 election was negative, compared to 51 per cent in 2008 (Fowler & Ridout 2013). Fowler & Ridout (2013) hypothesize the increasing negativity is due to the establishment of Super PACs.

Regardless of this sharp increase, scholars have differing opinions whether Super PACs have as much influence as was previously feared. Some scholars believe that advertisements purchased by independent groups may be more effective than advertisements created by candidates or parties. Brooks & Murov (2012) argue “...a trait-based attack ad sponsored by an unknown independent group is more effective than an identical ad sponsored by a candidate in the eyes of the public overall” (pg. 402). They suggest that having a third party acknowledge the flaws of an opponent may be more credible than if it came from another candidate. On the other hand, some scholars suggest that Super PACs may not be as persuasive as previously thought. First, Dowling & Wichowsky (2013) found that the public is actually suspicious of advertisements from groups that do not disclose their donors. As noted in the introduction, Super PACs have been widely criticized for using regulatory loopholes to hide their donors’ identities. Second, Smith and Kimball (2012) doubt that Super PACs have more of a reach than candidates and parties. In 2012, the *Independence USA PAC* spent nearly

three times as much on its candidates than what its competitors did.⁶ Yet, these candidates only beat their opponents by up to twelve percentage points. Gulati (2012) argues “...at some point, each additional dollar spent and each additional television ad aired is subject to the law of diminishing returns” (pg. 417). All candidates will be adequately funded, so a larger investment does not guarantee a particular candidate will win.

Negative Advertising and Social Cognitive Theory

Having examined scholarly opinion on the impact of negative advertising, it is now necessary to consider how this literature fits in with *social cognitive theory*. First, Geer’s (2006a) theory that negative advertising helps voters differentiate between candidates is consistent with the idea that *self-regulation* requires the incorporation of new *symbols* to determine future behaviour. Voters weigh the messages provided to them before making a decision – and negative messages may be the strongest. Similarly, Geer’s (2006a) recognition of negative advertising as a “necessary evil” is consistent with *exonerative comparison* (Bandura 2001). Although some argue humans are not inherently negative, scholars believe negativity may be in the country’s best interest. The arguments posed by Geer’s (2006a) opponents are also consistent with *social cognitive theory* – specifically the *negativity-demobilization hypothesis* and *message crystallization* (Granato & Sunny Wong 2004). Voters require confidence and *self-efficacy* in their

⁶ *Independence USA PAC* was created by the former Mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, to assist in the election of candidates to mostly local and state contests.

abilities to understand politics. Negativity in this case could make it difficult for the electorate to process all of the information.

In summary, the literature on negative advertising suggests that scholars are focused on the macro-level effects of negative advertising, and less with the micro-level sentiment of Americans. While previous scholarly direction is important, it does highlight a gap in the literature that can be addressed in this MRP. When considering social cognitive theory, the *agency* of the electorate is important to consider. As stated above, voters incorporate a variety of beliefs into their voting decisions, and arguments by a Super PAC may not necessarily sway an individual's decision making.

Measuring Public Opinion

The above discussion of the literature emphasizes the major themes surrounding negative advertising. It is important to note, though, that scholarly studies on advertising rely on detailed research into political sentiment, which has become considerably difficult to conduct in recent years. In the past, it was a widely held belief that randomized telephone surveys were the best method to measure public opinion (Archer & Berdahl 2011). Telephone surveys were inexpensive, had high response rates, and created the most representative samples. However, Ansolabehere & Schaffner (2011) argue that previous methods of public opinion collection are no longer desirable or viable. They suggest that up to forty per cent of Americans are not accessible by landline telephones

because of the increase in exclusive mobile phone use, and the reluctance of many to answer calls from unknown callers.

Scholars have since endeavoured to find survey methods more suitable for the 21st century. Some scholars have found success in online surveys, while others have found success in measuring Twitter sentiment (O'Connor et. al., 2010; Shirazi et. al., 2011; Desouza & Bhagwatwar 2012; Skoric et al. 2012; and Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012). Ansolabehere & Schaffner (2011) determined that the differences between the results of political Internet surveys and telephone surveys on the same topic were too small to be statistically significant. The authors recognize that self-selection bias is a common critique against the use of Internet polls; however, they argue the process of weighting after telephone surveys demonstrates that previous surveying techniques are not ideal either.

There are several other limitations that impact new measurement technologies. First, communication platforms used within authoritarian countries are more likely to express anti-government sentiment than democratic countries. For example, Skoric et. al. (2012) found that opposition parties in Singapore were “overhyped” on Twitter compared to the ruling party, possibly because the mainstream media focused on the ruling party. This pattern suggests these platforms either cater to a subset of a population, or the electoral results themselves could have been skewed. Second, countries with compulsory voting laws also limit the predictive power of technological platforms. Political opinion estimates

gathered from online sources will be limited to those that are politically engaged. However, the final result of elections will include large segments of the population who vote because they are legally required to (pg. 2590).

Third, scholars warn against the assumption that entire populations are online. Desouza & Bhagwatwar (2012) note that regular access to smartphones and the Internet continues to be a luxury in North America. Fourth, scholars suggest that there may be some theoretical issues with communication technologies. Goggin (2011) argues that the technologies most widely used today were developed by companies who themselves have biases. This form of technological determinism being conducted by companies may theoretically limit how scholars can collect public opinion data (Baym, 2010). Finally, in light of the recent National Security Agency (NSA) data collection scandal, users may refuse to participate in these platforms if they are concerned about their personal privacy (Sinha 2014).⁷

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates scholars have been studying the negativity in advertisements for several decades. They have endeavoured to understand why certain candidates use negativity, if negative advertising actually works, identify possible effects of advertisements on voting behaviour, and to hypothesize how Super PACs

⁷ The “NSA data collection scandal” refers to allegations that the NSA collects mass amounts of data from online sources without warrants. Many scholars and journalists dubbed this discovery a “scandal” because this practice is argued to contradict the United States Constitution (Sinha, 2014).

have changed the political landscape. However, studies on the sentiment toward political advertising are limited, as are studies on new survey technologies. This major research paper will therefore combine these two topics in order to add to the literature in a unique way.

Methodology

Data Collection

Before outlining my analysis methodology in detail, I will provide a brief introduction to the data collection technology being used. As noted, the data used in this study was collected by the *Super PAC App*. The *App* was developed by Jennifer Hollett, a Master of Public Administration student at *Harvard's Kennedy School of Governance*; and Dan Siegel, a Master of Business Administration student at *MIT's Sloan School of Management* (Hollett & Siegel 2012). The *Super PAC App* initially began as an assignment for Hollett and Siegel's social television course, but it later launched Siegel's digital media start-up *Glassy Media* (Hollett 2013). Hollett and Siegel's motivation was to encourage Super PACs and political parties to remain transparent and accountable throughout the election (Hollett & Siegel 2012). The *Super PAC App* was funded by *The Knight Foundation*, a non-profit organization that supports innovation in journalism (Knight Foundation 2012, August 22). The *App* was later sponsored by *Newsweek* and the *Daily Beast*, and was featured on *CNN* (Keller & Carter 2012, September 14; Sutter 2012, August 22).

The *Super PAC App* was inspired by the popular music-recognition mobile application *Shazam* (Hollett 2013). When an individual views a political advertisement broadcast on television, they can open the *Super PAC App* on their iPhone and hold it up to the advertisement being shown. The *App* listens to the audio and identifies the advertisement for

the user. The *App* shows the user who sponsored the advertisement, how much money has been raised for the organization, and directs users to articles that fact-check the advertisement's claims. With this information available to them, users were encouraged to anonymously vote *love*, *fail*, *fishy*, or *fair*. These categories were inspired by the voting categories on the popular website *BuzzFeed.com* (Hollett 2013). For this study, *love* will be equated to *liking* an advertisement, while a *failure* will be equated to *disliking* an advertisement. *Fishy* and *fair* were not included in the study because these categories were used significantly less often than *love* and *fail*.

Although the *Super PAC App* was originally created to allow users to easily fact-check claims made in these advertisements, its voting feature ultimately became the most used function of the *App* (Hollett 2013). The *App* became so popular that the data collection software was made available on computer browsers, so users without iPhones could participate (Keller & Carter 2012). The *App* collected nearly 40,000 votes from users between August 22 and November 13, 2012 (Hollett 2013). The developers uploaded the *App*'s data and code to their website to demonstrate their own commitment to transparency.

This major research paper focuses exclusively on the voting component of the *App*. It should be noted that since the data from the *Super PAC App* is freely available online, has no policy prohibiting research, and did not collect identifying features of participants, it is

exempt from Research Ethics Board review.⁸

To be sure, this data has its limitations. As explained previously, scholars have concerns with new public opinion collection methods. Ansolabehere & Schaffner (2011) found that online public opinion polling might be becoming more accurate than telephone surveys. However, since the *App* did not collect personal information, the data cannot be weighed to counteract oversampling of certain demographics (such as age, location or partisan affiliation).

Similarly, self-selection bias is likely to have occurred through this method of data collection (Archer & Berdahl 2011). It can be hypothesized that individuals particularly interested and knowledgeable about politics would choose to download the *App*. This bias is another reason why political science scholars have overwhelmingly preferred random telephone polling to online methods: researchers want to reach all individuals regardless of their political opinions.⁹

Finally, as mentioned by Desouza & Bhagwatwar (2012), new technologies, such as mobile applications, continue to serve only small

⁸ Ryerson University's Research Ethics Board (2014) currently follows the guidelines set out by Queen's University in their Digital Data Collection Policy (2008).

⁹ Skoric et. al., (2012) suggest that telephone polls may not be the best predictor of elections. In their study, the authors found that Twitter can be an accurate predictor of elections, except in countries with mandatory voting. In those countries, politically active individuals participated in discussions on social media as much as individuals in countries with non-mandatory voting. However, at the ballot box, politically active voices were mixed with other citizens who were obligated to vote. This logic suggests that self-selection bias may be an acceptable bias in political research. In an era of declining voter turnout in non-mandatory voting countries, measuring only voters, and not the entire citizenry, is essential for pollsters that want to predict electoral outcomes (Putnam 1995). Of course, this study does not strive to predict outcomes of elections; however, Skoric et. al.'s findings provide a new way to look at self-selection bias.

subsets of the population. Thankfully, the *Super PAC App* was expanded into a regular website, allowing more individuals – not just iPhone users – to use its services. However, this expansion did not completely eliminate possible accessibility biases.

Subsample Creation

Having discussed the data collection software and its limitations, I will now outline how I organized the thousands of opinions collected by the *App*. I created a manageable subsample for analysis by selecting 20 specific national Super PAC advertisements that were chosen using seven criteria.

Table 1: Subsample Inclusion Criteria

1. Must have originated from a Super PAC
2. Must have been a national advertisement
3. Must have been persuasive in its orientation
4. Must have received 20 or more votes on the <i>App</i>
5. Must have reached 55% <i>like</i> or 55% <i>dislike</i> threshold
6. Must be a negative advertisement
7. Subsample may include up to three advertisements per Super PAC

First, the advertisement must have originated from a Super PAC. Candidate, party, non-profit, or regular PAC advertisements were eliminated from the data pool. Second, advertisements must have been broadcast nationally. I wanted to avoid hyper-local issues from skewing the overall findings. Third, I eliminated commercials created purely for satirical purposes — such as advertisements from comedian Stephen Colbert’s Super PAC: *Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow* (Colbert 2012). Fourth, advertisements that received less than 20

sentiment votes were eliminated to ensure the opinions of a few users did not skew the data.

Advertisements that met the first four criteria were then randomized using the RAND function on Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Office 2014). I then tested each advertisement for the three final subsample criteria, starting at the top of the list:

- 1) Was it clear that users definitively *liked* or *disliked* the advertisement?
- 2) Was the advertisement negative?
- 3) Would including this advertisement ensure diversity within the subsample overall.

To determine if users definitively *liked* or *disliked* an advertisement, I set a minimum threshold of 55 per cent *like* or 55 per cent *dislike*. To determine if an advertisement met the threshold, I manually counted the votes for *love* and *fail* and determined the percentage in either direction. If an advertisement did not meet the threshold, it would have been eliminated from consideration. However, I did not encounter any advertisements that did not meet the threshold. The next step was to assess the advertisements for their negativity.

Advertisements included in the sample must have been negative, with the goal of attacking an opponent. Some Super PACs created positive advertisements that spoke favourably about a particular candidate, but studying them would be outside the scope of this paper. To assess the negativity, I conducted preliminary content analysis.

The codes I used for my content analysis were developed by John Geer (2006) for his book *In Defense of Negativity*. Geer performed content analysis on American political advertisements from 1960 to 2000 – gathered from the Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive at the *University of Oklahoma*. Geer’s aim was to code the advertisements with as much detail as possible. He focused on three types of appeals – policy, traits and values – which are contained in a codebook 15 pages in length (Geer 2006b). Geer also tested for *intercoder reliability* with a research assistant, and achieved 91 per cent reliability.¹⁰

Several scholars and organizations have developed similar frameworks to assess advertisements (Kaid & Johnston 1991, Benoit, 1999, Goldstein & Freedman 2002, American National Elections Studies 2012). However, I chose Geer’s framework because it is extremely detailed and has been well received among political scientists, with many subsequent studies, such as Gilens, Vavreck & Cohen (2007), Shah et. al. (2007), and Valentino et. al. (2011) citing or using Geer’s framework. It is also freely available online.

In Geer’s (2006b) codebook, his *traits* code section is dedicated to contrasting positivity and negativity, which is what I used to confirm whether a Super PAC advertisement was negative. I imported Geer’s codes into *NVivo for Mac Beta*, the *Apple*-compatible adaptation of the

¹⁰ Intercoder reliability is defined by Archer & Berdahl (2011) as “the extent to which different coders reach the same conclusions and establish the same values when coding” (pg. 375).

popular qualitative research application (QSR International 2014). Three advertisements were eliminated from the list because they were positive: “Paul Ryan – For a Stronger America” and “Next Year, President Romney in Jerusalem” by the *Emergency Committee for Israel*; and “Now You See the Problem” by *Restore Our Future*.¹¹

The final criterion was established to ensure there was some diversity in the subsample. Some of the most popular and well-funded Super PACs created nearly 50 advertisements during the campaign, making it possible that two or three Super PACs would overwhelm the subsample. Therefore, I set a limit of three advertisements per Super PAC. The first three advertisements from a specific Super PAC were included in the subsample, and subsequent advertisements were eliminated from consideration. Using the above method, the final advertisement included in the subsample was the 40th advertisement on the list, and 20 advertisements were eliminated. Nine Super PACs were ultimately included (see Appendix A)

¹¹ These advertisements all argue Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and his running mate, Paul Ryan, have strong leadership qualities and deserve to hold office (Geer 2006b, Code T29).

Table 2: Advertisements Included in the Subsample

Super PAC	Advertisement Title	Sentiment
American Bridge 21st Century	<i>Look Who's Demanding To See Romney's Tax Returns</i>	74% like
American Bridge 21st Century	<i>Romney on Immigration</i>	58% like
American Bridge 21st Century	<i>Romney: The Etch-A-Sketch Candidate</i>	70% like
American Crossroads	<i>Build</i>	64% dislike
American Crossroads	<i>Obama's War on Women</i>	73% dislike
American Crossroads	<i>Wah Wahhhh</i>	64% dislike
Campaign for American Values	<i>New Morning</i>	72% dislike
Campaign for American Values	<i>Faith in the Public Square: Obama vs. Romney</i>	75% dislike
Emergency Committee for Israel	<i>Whose Democratic Party?</i>	66% dislike
Emergency Committee for Israel	<i>O Jerusalem</i>	62% dislike
Freedom's Defense Fund	<i>Obama Keep The Change</i>	82% dislike
Let Freedom Ring America	<i>European Prices</i>	80% dislike
Let Freedom Ring America	<i>Muslim Brotherhood</i>	78% dislike
Let Freedom Ring America	<i>Jennifer</i>	76% dislike
Planned Parenthood Votes	<i>Mitt Romney: "Get Rid of Planned Parenthood"</i>	62% like
Priorities USA Action	<i>Extremely Dangerous</i>	78% like
Priorities USA Action	<i>Small-Minded</i>	82% like
Priorities USA Action	<i>We The People</i>	77% like
Restore Our Future	<i>Mother's Day</i>	65% dislike
Restore Our Future	<i>Another Month</i>	67% dislike

Method of Analysis

Having outlined the subsample and inclusion criteria, I will now summarize how I analyzed this information. I continued to perform content analysis by importing the rest of Geer's (2006a) codes into NVivo. Geer's codebook has over 1000 codes; however, the majority of them were not used because they were not directly applicable to the 2012 election. Geer's codes provided a solid foundation for the *open coding* stage.¹² 52 codes were ultimately applied to the written and oral content of the subsample (see Appendix B & C). I then engaged in *axial coding* to identify codes that had similar themes that could be grouped together.¹³ Eight code categories were established.

Table 3: Categories Created from the Codes

Category Name	Description	Example
1. Symbolism	This category includes symbols that “represent” Americans, or principles Americans admire or respect (Willmoore & Carey 1995). These codes do not reference specific political positions in the campaign, but rather allude to enduring ideals held by most Americans.	“We the people, the middle class, who move our country forward. Work hard, raise families and <u>keep America strong.</u> ”
2. Campaign	This category includes references to the 2012 campaign specifically, and the conduct of an opposing candidate. References to this conduct include “negative campaigning” and mentions of campaign spending.	“Or what Obama’s allies are doing now. <u>Shameful, dishonest attacks.</u> With no record to run on, it’s the only strategy Obama has left.”

¹² Lindlof & Taylor (2011) define *open coding* as the “initial, unrestricted coding of data (pg. 250).

¹³ Lindlof & Taylor (2011) define *axial coding* as the creation of categories by making connections between codes assigned during *open coding* (pg. 252).

3. Ideology	This category includes mentions of the political ideology of an opponent. References to ideology include mentions of extremism, or explicitly calling opponent “liberal” or “conservative.”	“The <u>extreme right</u> is aptly named.”
4. Conduct	This category includes allegations that an opponent is deceiving or misleading the public. It also includes attributes of candidates that make it hard for the electorate to relate to them or support them.	“Clearly there’s a <u>problem</u> with [Romney’s] tax returns, otherwise he would release them.”
5. Jobs & Economy	This category includes references to one of the “most important issues of the campaign” (Cushman 2013). Topics include the economic crisis of 2008, unemployment and job creation, taxation, and the adequate management of government spending.	“Exactly three years after President Obama’s <u>government stimulus plan</u> , Jennifer’s story shows how it’s just not working.”
6. Religion	This category includes references to religion and the freedom to practice one’s religion. This category also includes allegations that a candidate does not support religion or religious activities.	“Obama has canceled National Day of Prayer events at the White House and he is trying to coerce churches into <u>violating their beliefs</u> .”
7. Foreign Policy	The category includes references to a candidate’s positions on foreign policy – specifically mentioning war, terrorism and diplomacy. Most of the advertisements in the subsample surrounded issues in Israel and Egypt.	“President Obama, you invited the <u>Muslim Brotherhood</u> to the White House, legitimizing the group that wants to undermine America and destroy Israel.”
8. Personal	This category outlines any attacks on a candidate’s private life that has no relevant connection to the candidate’s professional qualifications	“ <u>Ann Romney</u> (wife of Mitt Romney) raised five boys. She successfully battled breast cancer and multiple sclerosis. But what is White House insider Hillary Rosen saying about Ann Romney?”

Findings and Analysis

The methodology I applied to my subsample highlighted a number of trends among negative Super PAC advertisements. In this analysis, I will begin by answering the first research question, and explain a framework I used to understand the Super PAC voting results. Next, I will discuss how symbolism acted as a stand-alone trend among advertisements. Finally, I will answer the second and third research questions by identifying what it is about a negative advertisement that makes it *liked* or *disliked*.

When looking purely at the numbers, the answer to the first research question is clear: users of the *Super PAC App* tend to *dislike* negative advertisements. 7 of the 20 advertisements in the subsample are *liked*, while 13 of the 20 are *disliked*. However, further analysis of the subsample reveals that another variable may have affected that result. Advertisements that are *disliked* are sponsored by right-leaning Super PACs, while advertisements that are *liked* are sponsored by left-leaning Super PACs. Since this pattern occurs in every advertisement in the subsample, I did not take this as a coincidence.

I believe some form of user bias may have influenced the results – Democrats and left-leaning users may have voted in the *App* in larger numbers. This theory would confirm Martinez & Degal's (1990) belief that partisans dislike advertisements that are inconsistent with their political views. Unfortunately, as stated previously, no personal

characteristics were gathered from users. I cannot confirm if user bias actually influenced the results, nor can I weigh the results to mitigate against the effects of such bias.

Table 4: Continuum of Advertisements from most liked to most disliked

Like	
82%	Small Minded
78%	Dangerous
77%	We the People
74%	Look Who's Demanding to See Romney's Tax Returns
70%	Romney: The Etch A Sketch Candidate
62%	Romney on Planned Parenthood
58%	Romney on Immigration

62%	O' Jerusalem
64%	Build
64%	Wah Wahh
65%	Mother's Day
66%	Whose Democratic Party
67%	Another Month
73%	Obama's War on Women
74%	New Morning
75%	Faith in Public Square
76%	Jennifer
78%	Muslim Brotherhood
80%	European Prices
82%	Keep the Change
Dislike	

Furthermore, grouping advertisements into two categories based on whether they were *liked* or *disliked* would not have generated significant findings, as these groups would only explain what Democrats *like* or *dislike* about negative advertisements. Instead, sorting the advertisements from the subsample on a continuum from *most liked* to *most disliked* helped me identify patterns and trends within the subsample.¹⁴

¹⁴ There is a wide range of sentiment scores in the subsample. For example, the advertisement "Small Minded" is 82 per cent *liked*, and "Romney on Immigration" is

Symbolism

Before going into detail about what features of negative advertising are *liked* or *disliked* by users of the *App*, I will briefly touch on an interesting trend that arose during the preliminary stages of analysis: symbolism is found in nearly every advertisement in the subsample. The codes in the Symbolism category include content that uses images, and values that add underlying meaning to messages.

There are several different types of symbols in the subsample. First is the presence of “Americana” – images and values that have traditionally been associated with the American “brand” (Willmoore & Carey 1995).

EXAMPLE 1 - *Obama has repeatedly left God out when reciting the most important words in our founding documents.*
(“Faith in the Public Square,” *Campaign for American Values*)

EXAMPLE 2 - *To rebuild the American Dream, we need a president who believes in the American Dream.*
(“Build,” *American Crossroads*)

The above examples use the traditional American images of “founding documents” and “the American Dream” as fundamental ideals that viewers are expected to hold in high regard. The advertisement by *Campaign for American Values* argues that the “founding documents” legally guard American liberties, and therefore overlooking certain pieces of it (in this case, God) implies one is not truly committed to it.¹⁵

58 per cent *liked* – a difference of 24 per cent. That same difference exists between “Romney on Immigration” at 58 per cent *liked* and “Whose Democratic Party” at 66 per cent *disliked*.

¹⁵ The “founding documents” include, among others, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights (Chaplin Library of Rare Books, 2011).

Similarly, the advertisement by *American Crossroads* suggests that “the American Dream” is an ideal that all Americans should strive toward.¹⁶ The advertisement claims President Obama does not support small business, an important feature of “the Dream” (Samuel 2012). For that reason, the advertisement argues he is against the American Dream, and is not worthy of his position as president.

Another group of symbols in the subsample is comprised of political campaign symbols. One popular example is President Obama’s 2008 slogan “change,” which is used to compare his original campaign promises to his actual performance (Obama for America 2008).

EXAMPLE 3 - *That’s not the change I voted for.*
(“New Morning,” *Campaign for American Values*)

EXAMPLE 4 - *Tell Barack Obama he can keep his change.*
(“Obama Keep the Change,” *Freedom’s Defense Fund*)

In both examples, it is suggested that President Obama did not meet the electorate’s expectations, or he made decisions his supporters did not agree with. Super PACs also use President Obama’s 2012 campaign slogan “forward” and Mitt Romney’s slogan “believe” for similar purposes (Balz 2013).

EXAMPLE 5 - *Move our country forward.*
(“We the People,” *Priorities USA Action*)

EXAMPLE 6 - *We need a president who believes in the American Dream.* (“Build,” *American Crossroads*)

¹⁶ The “American Dream” was coined by James Truslow Adams in 1931, and is defined as “the dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world” (Cullen 2003).

The advertisement by *American Crossroads* is interesting because it uses two symbols in one sentence. Although Mitt Romney is not explicitly mentioned in “Build,” Romney’s slogan is used with the “American Dream” symbol, perhaps to encourage the viewer to create a connection between the two.

Finally, “the middle class” is also a popular symbol in the subsample.

EXAMPLE 7 - *Mitt Romney's budget plan will hurt the middle class.* (“We the People,” *Priorities USA Action*)

What is interesting about use of this symbol is it is never actually defined in any of the commercials it is featured in.¹⁷ Advertisers may presume the majority of Americans will hear “middle class” and immediately identify with it. This example demonstrates that advertisers believe symbols can be employed without definitions or clarification.

However, it is interesting to note that advertisements that include symbols are evenly spread across the *like* and *dislike* categories. It is possible that users simply do not notice the use of symbols in advertisements. It may also mean that symbols are not particularly convincing.

What makes an advertisement ‘Liked’ or ‘Disliked’?

Users liked advertisements that attack the professional behaviour of candidates.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that while the middle class is a term regularly used to describe the “average American,” many economists cannot agree on what constitutes the middle class, and question if the middle class continues to exist in its classic form (Bledstein 2001).

I will now compare characteristics that are present in Super PAC advertisements that make them *liked* or *disliked* by users of the *App*. The results from the subsample suggest that users *like* when advertisers reveal undesirable behaviour in candidates. Specifically, users *like* when an advertisement exposes “unscrupulous” behaviour during the campaign, highlight the “extreme” views of a candidate, or prove that a candidate has changed their position over time.

Codes that discuss a candidate’s campaign behaviour are collected in the Campaign category. There are a wide variety of campaign behaviours that advertisements attacked, including allegations that opponents were collecting too much money, were catering to special interests, or were engaging in smear campaigns. Users tend to *like* advertisements that highlight this conduct in candidates. For example, “Extremely Dangerous” by *Priorities USA Action* argues that donations by wealthy supporters to the Republican Party and right-wing Super PACs would adversely impact the election.

EXAMPLE 8 - *Charles and David Koch have been using their vast fortune to help fund conservative think tanks and politicians. (“Extremely Dangerous,” Priorities USA Action).*

This advertisement targets the Koch Brothers, well-known billionaires who financially supported organizations that sought to defeat President Obama (Fang 2013). 78 per cent of users *liked* this advertisement, suggesting that viewers *like* when advertisements show the origins of campaigns resources.

Users also *like* when “extreme” candidates are featured in advertisements. Extremism is collected in the Ideology category, which includes references to “extreme” behaviours, or specific ideologies such as “liberalism” or “conservatism.” In “Extremely Dangerous,” the advertisement quotes several prominent Republicans demonstrating their alleged “extreme” beliefs.

EXAMPLE 9 –

Newt Gingrich: *“I think dictatorial is a strong word but it may frighteningly be the right word.”*

Glenn Beck: *“He’s not with the terrorists, I’m not saying that, but he is sympathetic to their cause.”*

Michele Bachmann: *“I want people in Minnesota armed and dangerous on this issue.”*

(“Extremely Dangerous,” *Priorities USA Action*)¹⁸

The advertisement later encourages viewers to “stand up and fight back,” which appears to have resonated with the 78 per cent of viewers that *liked* the advertisement.

Finally, advertisements that claim a candidate changed their position on an issue – known colloquially as “flip-flopping” – tends to be *liked* by users of the *App* (Verdon 2008). In an *American Bridge 21st Century* advertisement called “Romney: The Etch-A-Sketch Candidate,” Romney’s is alleged to have changed his formal position women’s rights and gun control. The advertisement also includes a clip of Mitt Romney’s senior campaign strategist, Eric Fehrstrom, on *CNN*.

¹⁸ Newt Gingrich and Michele Bachmann were candidates for the Republican nomination for president. The nomination ultimately went to Mitt Romney. Glenn Beck is a conservative radio talk show host (Balz 2013).

EXAMPLE 10 - *Well I think you hit a reset button for the fall campaign. Everything changes. It's almost like an Etch-A-Sketch: you can kind of shake it up and we start all over again.*
(“Romney: The Etch-A-Sketch Candidate,” *American Bridge 21st Century*)

The above quote suggests that Mitt Romney’s team sees “flip-flopping” as an acceptable practice when transitioning from primaries to general elections. 70 per cent of viewers *liked* this advertisement, suggesting that consistency in one’s conviction is what viewers look for in candidates. This result is consistent with Balz, (2013) who argues that Fehrnstrom’s appearance on *CNN* solidified Mitt Romney’s image as a wavering politician. This image may have ultimately contributed to Romney’s electoral loss.

Romney is not the only candidate said to be inconsistent. The aversion to “flip-flopping” may also be present in “O Jerusalem” by the *Emergency Committee for Israel*. The advertisement alleges that President Obama changed his position on Jerusalem’s status as capital of Israel. The advertisement also demonstrates his administration’s reluctance to face this issue head on. The example below features a conversation between *Associated Press* writer Matthew Lee and *U.S. State Department* spokesperson Victoria Nuland.

EXAMPLE 11 –
Lee: *“You seem to be suggesting you do not regard Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, is that correct?”*

Nuland: *“I have just spoken to this issue. I have nothing further to say on it.”* (“O Jerusalem,” *Emergency Committee for Israel*)

Although this advertisement is *disliked* by 62 per cent of users, it is interesting to note that the advertisement is *more liked* by users than

most of the *disliked* advertisements in the subsample. This finding suggests that users tend to *like* advertisements *more* if they highlight “flip-flopping” in candidates.

Users disliked advertisements that make unsubstantiated attacks on a candidate’s professional conduct.

As stated, users of the *App* tended to *like* negative advertisements that showcase a candidate’s unprofessional behaviour. However, users only *like* advertisements that provide evidence that this misconduct took place. There were some advertisements in the subsample that allege a candidate was unprofessional, but then attempt to prove it with incomplete quotes, or quotes taken out-of-context. These advertisements are among the most *disliked* advertisements in the subsample. There are no specific codes or categories associated with this finding; however, the presence of this style became visible during the coding process. For example, “Jennifer” by *Let Freedom Ring America* features a woman speaking to President Obama in an online town hall about her husband’s unemployment.¹⁹

EXAMPLE 12 –

President Obama: “*I don't know your husband's specialty, but I can tell you that there's a huge demand around the country for engineers.*”

Jennifer: “*We're not getting that.*”
(“Jennifer,” *Let Freedom Ring America*)

¹⁹ President Obama has hosted several “town hall” meetings online throughout his presidency, on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Google+ Hangouts (Katz, Barris & Jain, 2013).

While most of the conversation between President Obama and Jennifer is presented in order, her quote “we’re not getting that” is included every time he responds to her. The use of the same audio and video suggests that she did not say that particular line multiple times in the real conversation. This advertisement is *disliked* by 76 per cent of users. In another *Let Freedom Ring America* advertisement, “European Prices,” President Obama is asked in an interview with John Harwood of *CNBC* if he thought high gasoline prices could help Americans.

EXAMPLE 13 –
Harwood: “Could these high prices help us?”

President Obama: “I think that I would have preferred a gradual adjustment” (“European Prices,” *Let Freedom Ring America*).

President Obama’s quote sounds like it has been cut off, suggesting that the quote may have been taken out-of-context. This advertisement is the second most *disliked* advertisement in the subsample at 80 per cent.

These findings suggest that users *like* advertisements that highlight misconduct in candidates, as long as the allegations are substantiated. This conclusion is consistent with the existing literature, particularly Dermody & Scullion, (2003) who also found that advertisements must have adequate evidence for them to be acceptable to viewers.

Users only like attacks on a candidate’s personal life if it is relevant to the responsibilities of the presidency.

Similarly to the above findings, users also have consistent opinions on how best to deal with misconduct that occurred outside the

professional sphere. Users *liked* advertisements that question areas of a candidate's personal life *only* if it could directly impact their professional life. This misconduct is exemplified in the fourth Conduct category, most notably in advertisements that question the maintenance of Mitt Romney's personal wealth.²⁰ In "Look Who's Demanding to See Romney's Tax Returns" by *American Bridge 21st Century*, Romney is criticized for not releasing ten years worth of his tax returns for public scrutiny.

EXAMPLE 14 - *The costs of not releasing the returns are clear, therefore he must have calculated that there are higher costs. ("Look Who's Demanding to See Romney's Tax Returns," American Bridge 21st Century)*

Although Mitt Romney's personal finances are a private matter, any evidence of fraudulent conduct would have the public question his integrity. What was particularly interesting about this advertisement is that it stresses that Romney is going against a precedent – followed by all modern candidates – that was initiated by his own father, who ran for president in 1968 (Valenzano & Edwards 2014). The advertisement also highlights this fact.

EXAMPLE 15 - *Everybody releases about 12 years, and actually, it's a practice started by none other than George Romney, his dad, back in '68. ("Look Who's Demanding to See Romney's Tax Returns," American Bridge 21st Century)*

The above advertisement shows left and right-leaning political pundits questioning why Romney would choose to not release his tax returns,

²⁰ Mitt Romney was widely noted for being the wealthiest presidential candidate in American history, with a personal net worth of \$200 million (Balz 2013).

implying that his behaviour is suspicious across party lines. 74 per cent of users *liked* this advertisement.

Once again, Balz (2013) argues that the discussion surrounding Romney's tax returns was detrimental to his campaign. He states: "...Romney had yet to define himself – and to the extent that he had, it was as a wealthy patrician who was unapproachable to the average voter" (Balz 2013, pg. 235). These advertisements were successful in defining Romney's image *for* him. Users of the *Super PAC App* appear to *like* that these personal qualities were revealed to them. Lodge et. al.'s (1995) work is consistent with these findings. Users may have forgotten the exact evidence against Romney; however, they may not have been able to get the negative image of Romney out of their head.

Users disliked advertisements that conducted irrelevant attacks on a candidate's personal life.

Although users *like* when advertisements addressed Mitt Romney's finances, they *dislike* all other advertisements that attack his personal life. The Personal category includes codes from the advertisement "Mother's Day" by *Restore Our Future*, which defends Mitt Romney's wife Ann from attacks by supporters of President Obama.

EXAMPLE 16 - *Ann Romney raised five boys. She successfully battled breast cancer and multiple sclerosis. But what is White House insider Hilary Rosen saying about Ann Romney?*

"Guess what, his wife has actually never worked a day in her life."
(*"Mother's Day," Restore Our Future*)

The advertisement defends Ann Romney's decision not to work because of her dedication to her children, and her affliction with multiple sclerosis. This advertisement is *disliked* by 65 per cent of users, which suggests that although this advertisement is a rebuttal, users still *dislike* any advertisement relating to a candidate's personal life. This finding is consistent with Schenck-Hamlin, Procter and Rumsey's (2000) findings on personal-based attacks. The authors found that viewers approve of issue-based attacks, but personal attacks may increase cynicism about politics. Further study on other personal attack advertisements would clarify this hypothesis; however, "Mother's Day" is the only personal attack advertisement in the subsample.

Users dislike advertisements relating to religion or foreign policy, but have no strong opinion about advertisements relating to the economy.

Another interesting pattern that arose in the subsample is the division in sentiment between different types of issues. Users appear to have specific opinions toward certain policy issues, but have less of an opinion about other areas. There are several issue-based advertisements that are *disliked* by users. The most popular topic is captured in the Religion category, which includes references to gay marriage and freedom of religion.

EXAMPLE 17 - *Obama is trying to force gay marriage on this country.*" ("New Morning," *Campaign for American Values*)

EXAMPLE 18 - *[President Obama] is trying to coerce churches into violating their beliefs.*

(“Faith in the Public Square: Obama vs. Romney,” *Campaign for American Values*)

Users overwhelmingly *dislike* these advertisements, with 72 per cent *disliking* “New Morning” and 75 per cent *disliking* “Faith in the Public Square.”

Users also *dislike* advertisements in the Foreign Policy category. In the advertisement “Muslim Brotherhood” by *Let Freedom Ring*, President Obama is alleged to support the *Muslim Brotherhood* regime in Egypt.

EXAMPLE 19 - *President Obama, you invited the Muslim Brotherhood to the White House, legitimizing the group that wants to undermine America and destroy Israel.*

(“Muslim Brotherhood, *Let Freedom Ring America*)

Similarly, “Whose Democratic Party” by *Emergency Committee for Israel* argues that the Democratic Party did not support their Israeli allies because they did not include them in their party platform. Again, these advertisements are extremely *disliked*, with “Muslim Brotherhood” at 78 per cent *disliked* and “Whose Democratic Party” at 66 per cent *disliked*.

Advertisements that discussed jobs and the economy, meanwhile, do not have strong sentiment in either direction. This finding is surprising because scholars, pundits and opinion polls agreed that jobs and the economy were the most important issues in the 2012 election (Cushman 2013). For example, in “Build” by *American Crossroads*, President Obama is quoted as saying he does not support small businesses.

EXAMPLE 20 - *People who have worked hard, started a business, and created jobs cannot believe what President Obama is saying about them.*

“If you have a business... you didn’t build that! Somebody else made that happen!” (“Build,” American Crossroads)

This advertisement has one of the lowest *dislike* scores among *disliked* advertisements at 64 per cent.

There are a number of reasons why religion and foreign policy may be a contentious topic, while the economy is not. First, as Granato & Sunny Wong (2004) suggest, negative advertising may be distracting viewers from the important issues. There is evidence in the subsample to support this claim. When looking at the number of users that voted on each advertisement, participation appears to be highest for the advertisements that discuss the personal characteristics of candidates. The advertisement “Look Who’s Demanding to see Romney’s Tax Returns” by *American Bridge 21st Century* received 509 votes, the highest in the subsample. Voters may have been less interested in the issues, and more concerned about the person running for president.

Another possible reason for the dichotomy between issues may be Searing, Wright & Rabinowitz’s (1976) *primacy principle*. The authors argue that certain political attitudes are steadfast because they are established so early on. Attitudes on religion and Israel could have been established early in life, whereas the economy could be an area that people are passionate about, while not having an established perspective on *how* it can be best handled. Voters may be interested in critiques of

President Obama's handling of the economy, but they are not receptive to critiques of Israel's status as an autonomous country.

Connections to Social Cognitive Theory

In summary, the results of this study suggest that there are specific trends and sentiments toward Super PAC advertisements. These findings are also consistent with *social cognitive theory*. When assessing symbolism, it suggests that advertisements strategically use symbols to encourage viewers to engage in Bandura's (2001) *symbolic modeling* and *self-regulation*. Voters are argued to be constantly adjusting their political beliefs as new information becomes available. These advertisements contrast the policies of opposing candidates with symbols Americans are already devoted to, in the hopes that the established symbol will triumph. Another interesting trend is the different sentiments within policy areas. Searing, Wright & Rabinowitz's (1976) *primacy principle* may suggest that Bandura's (2001) *symbolic modeling* only occurs when individuals do not already have an established, long-term belief about a policy. Human beings may be "self-reflecting organisms," but perhaps some existing opinions are more persistent.

Conclusion

The aim of this pilot study is to update current understandings about the perception of negative advertising to discover what characteristics of Super PACs are *liked* or *disliked* by users of the *Super PAC App*. The results suggest that users may have particular sentiments on negativity, which is consistent with Bandura's (2001) belief that individuals weigh a variety of messages before establishing an opinion. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that there may be a level of normativity in negative advertisements, as demonstrated by the frequent use of symbolism.

This study suggests that there are certain characteristics of negative advertising that users find acceptable or unacceptable. First, users *like* advertisements that attack a candidate's professional behaviour, but only if these attacks are substantiated. This finding is consistent with Dermody and Scullion's (2003) theory that voters *like* advertisements "based on legitimate criticism" (pg. 93). Second, users *dislike* attacks on a candidate's personal life, unless this behaviour could impact their conduct as president. Schenck-Hamlin, Procter & Rumsey (2000) similarly found that voters approve of issue-based attacks, but are cynical about personal attacks. Third, users *dislike* any content regarding religion or foreign policy, but have less of an opinion on the economy. This finding is consistent with Searing, Wright & Rabinowitz's (1976)

primacy principle, suggesting that opinions on religion are steadfast, whereas opinions on the economy are not.

While the findings of this study are intriguing, there are a number of significant limitations. First, it became clear during my analysis that some form of partisan bias may have affected the results. This bias indirectly helped substantiate Mathews & Dietz-Uhler's (1998) theory that partisan inclinations determine what political advertising voters deem appealing. However, since the *App* did not collect any personal information, it was not possible to weigh the results to counteract this bias. Similarly, other demographic information – such as age and location – could also not be weighed to ensure a representative subsample was created. Finally, the sample itself was restricted to users of the *Super PAC App*. As Desouza & Bhagwatwar (2012) suggest, not all Americans have access to the technology required to participate. What these limitations demonstrate is that the findings of this study cannot be confidently applied to the American population in general.

Nevertheless, there is great opportunity for further study of this topic and platform. First, future versions of the *App* could be adapted to make it more accommodating for scholarly study. I recommend that the *App* be modified to collect the demographics of its users voluntarily, which would assist in future scholarly study. I believe a strong rationalization as to the purpose and benefit of personal information collection would be acceptable to many future users of the *App*. For

future scholarly research, I recommend that further research on this topic be conducted quantitatively. This format would confirm whether findings such as mine are statistically significant. Quantitative study could be conducted using the 2012 results, but a study incorporating the 2016 results that are weighed with demographics would perhaps be the most compelling.

The need for additional research on negativity and Super PACs has been confirmed with more recent Supreme Court rulings on American campaign finance laws. Although many scholars were initially concerned about how Super PACs would change the political landscape, many did not predict that the *Citizens United* and *SpeechNow.org* cases would have inspired similar changes for candidates and parties as well.

In *McCutcheon v. FEC* (2014), the appellant, Shaun McCutcheon, claimed that “aggregate contribution limits” prevented him from exercising his First Amendment rights.²¹ McCutcheon argued he was not able to contribute to every political candidate he favoured in the 2012 election. The Supreme Court found that aggregate limits infringe on the First Amendment, citing a precedent from *FEC v. Wisconsin Right to Life* (2007). Chief Justice Roberts argued “...the Court must err on the side of protecting political speech rather than suppressing it” (*McCutcheon v.*

²¹Aggregate campaign finance limits were contained in the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, and “restrict how much money a donor may contribute *in total* to all candidates and committees” (*McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission* 2014, pg. 1). Before the 2014 ruling, aggregate limits were set at \$74,600 per person, per campaign cycle.

FEC, 2014, pg. 2). Despite this ruling, the Supreme Court upheld a candidate's maximum limit at \$2,600. Critics condemned this ruling, arguing it was a further move toward the "deregulation of American political campaigns" (Toobin 2014, April 3). By citing the precedent in *FEC v. Wisconsin Right to Life*, the Court prioritizes the protection of the First Amendment over *quid pro quo* corruption. Toobin (2014) suggests this ruling may inspire further challenges to campaign finance laws – possibly with the ultimate elimination of candidate and party aggregate contribution limits.

The potential for future legal challenges highlight the need for continued study of negativity and campaign advertising. The *negativity-demobilization hypothesis* proposed by many scholars, such as Ansolabehere et. al. (1994) and Stevens (2009), is a compelling theory that could be validated in future elections, should negativity continue to be prevalent. Bandura's (2001) suggestion that humans have agency may have unintended consequences – instead of using political information to make a decision, voters may choose not to make a decision at all.

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Appendix A: Subsample Creation

Below are the Super PAC advertisements randomized. I started at the top of this list, tested for the three remaining criteria, and then moved to the second advertisement and so on. As stated in the methodology, I first determined if the advertisement was at least 55% liked or 55% disliked. Second, I performed content analysis to confirm if the advertisement was positive or negative. Third, if three advertisements from the same Super PAC had already been chosen, subsequent advertisements from that Super PAC were not considered. Advertisements that were not included in the subsample are crossed out on this list.

Super PAC	Ad Title	Positive or Negative or More than 3?	# of likes	# of dislikes	Overall Sentiment
American Crossroads	Build	Negative	36	65	64% dislike
American Crossroads	Obama's War on Women	Negative	83	229	73% dislike
Emergency Committee for Israel PAC	Whose Democratic Party?	Negative	21	42	66% dislike
Freedom's Defense Fund	Obama Keep The Change	Negative	8	38	80% dislike
American Bridge 21st Century	Look Who's Demanding To See Romney's Tax Returns	Negative	378	131	74% like
Let Freedom Ring America PAC	European Prices	Negative	5	21	80% dislike
Emergency Committee for Israel PAC	Next Year, President Romney in Jerusalem	Positive			

American Crossroads Priorities USA Action	Wah Wahhh	Negative	55	101	64% dislike
American Bridge 21st Century	Extremely Dangerous	Negative	25	7	78% like
American Bridge 21st Century	Romney on Immigration	Negative	110	77	58% like
American Bridge 21st Century	Romney: The Etch A Sketch Candidate	Negative	68	29	70% like
Let Freedom Ring America PAC	Muslim Brotherhood	Negative	18	67	78% dislike
American Bridge 21st Century	Romney's Nugent Problem	Repeat			
American Crossroads	Actually Happened	Repeat			
American Bridge 21st Century	Mitt Romney: Member of the 47%?	Repeat			
American Bridge 21st Century	12 Debate Fact Check: American Bridge Corrects the Lies	Repeat			
American Crossroads	Debate	Repeat			
American Bridge 21st Century	Romney vs. Romney?	Repeat			
Planned Parenthood Votes	Mitt Romney: "Get Rid of Planned Parenthood"	Negative	23	14	62% like

Let Freedom Ring America PAC	Jennifer	Negative	7	23	76% dislike
Priorities USA Action	Small-Minded	Negative	49	11	82% like
Restore Our Future	Mother's Day	Negative	10	19	65% dislike
Emergency Committee for Israel PAC	Paul Ryan For A Stronger America	Positive			
Let Freedom Ring America Political Action Committee	Reform Promises	Repeat			
American Bridge 21st Century	Paul Ryan's Wheel of Lies	Repeat			
Restore Our Future	Another Month	Negative	10	21	67% dislike
Campaign for American Values	New Morning	Negative	10	29	74% dislike
American Crossroads	Words	Repeat			
American Crossroads	Run, Joe, Run	Repeat			
American Bridge 21st Century	Romney: I Said 'Let Detroit Go Bankrupt'	Repeat			
Let Freedom Ring America Political Action Committee	Missing Workers	Repeat			

Campaign for American Values PAC	Faith in the public square: Obama vs. Romney	Negative	5	15	75% dislike
Restore Our Future, Inc.	Now You See the Problem	Positive			
American Crossroads	Quantum of Easing	Repeat			
American Bridge 21st Century	The Romney Mourdock Ticket	Repeat			
American Crossroads	Sack It	Repeat			
American Bridge 21st Century	12 VP Debate Fact Check: American Bridge Corrects the Lies	Repeat			
Priorities USA Action	We The People	Negative	31	9	77% like
American Bridge 21st Century	Mitt Romney: A Mass. Failure	Repeat			
Emergency Committee for Israel PAC	O Jerusalem	Negative	13	22	62% dislike

Appendix B: Codes

Below are the codes derived from Geer's (2006b) codebook, and the categories created during the *axial coding* stage.

Category	Description	Code	Code Title	Example	#
Symbols	This category includes symbols that "represent" Americans, or principles Americans admire or respect (Willmoore & Carey 1995). These codes do not reference specific political positions in the campaign, but rather allude to enduring ideals held by most Americans. Some symbols include references to the American Dream and quotes from founding documents.	V01	Greatness/Spirit of America/Best America/Great Resources	"Now we really know he feels about small business ... the backbone of America ."	2
		V05	Founding Documents/Founding Fathers	" We the people "	2
		V17	Change	"That's not the change I voted for"	4
		V13	Believe	"We need someone who believes in the American Dream"	1
		V20	Liberty/Statue of Liberty	Our liberty comes from God	2
		V21	Equality	All men are created equal	1
		V50	America is strong/Keep America Strong	"Keep America strong ."	1
		V55	Forward	"Who move our country forward "	1
		V62	The American Way/The American Dream/American Values	The American Dream is being lost.	2
		V73	Don't turn back/Don't let opponent set nation back/don't undo all we've done	Destroying the Western civilization from within	2
		V76	Rights	"...Endowed with certain inalienable rights ."	1
		I920	Rebuild Country	"We can't rebuild America by tearing down the middle class."	2
		I017	Smear Campaign	"Taking on the politics of fear and smear ."	2
Campaign	This category includes references to the 2012				

Ideology	campaign specifically, and the conduct of an opposing candidate. References to this conduct include “negative campaigning” and mentions of campaign spending.	I820	Conduct of the Campaign	“Or do what Obama’s allies are doing now. Shameful, dishonest attacks .”	1
		I828	Opponent spends/raised too much money	“Billionaire Koch Brothers Donate \$88 Million to Fight Obama”	2
		I838	Special interests have too much power	“The money coming from secret right-wing millionaires will air more than two hundred million dollars worth of TV ads.”	1
		T182	There is no Alternative	Translation: Vote for me, or you’ll probably die	1
		I017	Smear Campaign	“Taking on the politics of fear and smear .”	2
	This category includes mentions of the political ideology of an opponent. This includes references to extremism or explicitly calling opponent “liberal” or “conservative.”	T176	Risky/dangerous/gambles/extreme	“Just plain extreme ”	1
		I887	Opponent is ideologically extreme	The extreme right is aptly named.”	2
		I888	Opponent is Liberal	“Judgeships, and government jobs for leftist cronies. “	1
		I887	Opponent is Conservative	“Santorum and Gingrich might force the governor’s to tax so far to the right it would hurt him with moderate voters”	2
		T101	Aloof/Inaccessible	“The best thing to do is just get everything out in the open ”	1
Conduct	This category includes allegations that an opponent is deceiving or misleading the public. It also includes attributes of candidates that make it hard for the electorate to relate to them or support	T107	Wealthy, Upper Class	“...Revelations in the news media is that he has several offshore investments ”	1
		T108	Flip Flop	“Well I think you hit a reset button for the fall campaign.”	1

	them.	T120	Dishonest/Misleading/broke promises/runs from record	“What’s Mitt Hiding : Demand to see his tax returns.”	4
		T128	Immoral/slick/unethical/shifts	“Clearly there’s a problem with the tax returns otherwise he would release”	2
		T155	Avoids issues/unsure where he stands/vague	“Well I think you hit a reset button for the fall campaign everything changes ”	1
Jobs & Economy	This category includes references to one of the “most important issues of the campaign” (Cushman 2013). Popular mentions include the economic crisis of 2008, unemployment and job creation, taxation, and the adequate management of government spending.	V28	Private/free enterprise/marketplace/small business	“People who have worked hard, started a business ”	1
		V39	Hardwork/energy/talent	“We’ve worked for everything we’ve gotten.”	1
		V60	Crisis/critical times	“The economic crisis of 2008.”	2
		I101	Economic Policy/Plan	“Exactly three years after President Obama’s government stimulus plan ”	1
		I103	Mismanagement of Economy	“There is a war on women. It’s called the Obama economy .”	2
		I109	Fights Corporations/Corporate Interests	“Big financial institutions, corporations ”	1
		I116	Doesn’t support small businesses	“Now we really know he feels about small business”	2
		I132	Unemployment too high/ lost jobs	“Since President Obama took office, the semiconductors and electronics manufacturing sector has lost 21,500 jobs ”	4
		I165	Raised taxes/taxes too high	“ Raising taxes on the average family by up to \$2000”	2
		I167	Too many loopholes for rich/corporations/tax cuts for rich	“While giving a tax break up to \$250,000 to multimillionaires.”	6
		I232	Excessive government spending	“Translation: I need another \$5 trillion”	1

		I265	Failed government programs	“It’s just not working. ”	1
		I267	Cut government regulation	“If anything government gets in our way. ”	1
		I560	Anti-Family/ hurts family/ hurts middle class	“We can’t rebuild America by tearing down the middle class. ”	1
Religion	This category includes references to religion and freedom to practice a religion. This category also includes allegations that a candidate does not support religion or religious activities.	Vo8	God or some religious connection/faith	“America was founded on the idea and our liberty comes from God ”	5
		T132	Not Religious	“So why was God booed by Obama's delegates ”	1
		I487	Anti Gay Rights	“Well, Obama is trying to force gay marriage on this country.”	1
		I522	Freedom of Religion	“[Obama] is trying to coerce churches into violating their beliefs.”	2
Foreign Policy	The category includes references to a candidate’s positions on foreign policy – specifically war, terrorism and diplomacy. Most of the advertisements in the subsample surrounded issues in Israel and Egypt.	V12	War	“ War , war, and more war.”	1
		V32	Safety/security from violence	“Muslim Brotherhood’s top leaders even write about taking over America. ”	1
		I613	Iran	“They [Muslim Brotherhood] want to conquer Israel and renew long severed ties with Iran ”	1
		I617	Handling of Jerusalem/Capital of Israel	“Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel , and it must remain undivided.”	1
		I643	Support Israel	“What has Obama done? He denies that Israel even has a capital city.”	1
		I648	Diplomacy/Negotiations	“Jerusalem policy... it’s permanent status issue. It’s got to be resolved through	3

				negotiations between the parties”	
	I650		Foreign/Economic Aid	“ You send them 1.5 billion of our taxpayer dollars [to the Muslim Brotherhood”	1
	I665		Terrorism out of Control	“He’s not with the terrorists, we are not saying that, but he is sympathetic to their cause”	1
	I684		Might use Nuclear Weapons	“A country building nuclear weapons to slaughter the Israeli people”	2
Personal	T118		Lazy	“Ann Romney has never gotten her ass out of the house. ”	2
	I540		Family Values	“Ann Romney raised five boys.”	2

Appendix C: Content Analysis

The following pages contain screenshots of the coding process from the NVivo for Mac application.

“Build” – *American Crossroads* (Continued next page)

Narrator: People who have worked hard, started a business, and created jobs cannot believe what President Obama is saying about them.

Obama: “If you have a business... you didn’t build that! Somebody else made that happen!”

(Reactions): “Ooo” “Unbelievable.” “What an insult.” “I am outraged.” “I cannot believe he just said that.”

[Caption: Marc Kiekenapp, Small Business Owner]

“I can’t believe the President of the United States could say that I have not made this.”

[Caption: John Heinrich, Small Business Owner]

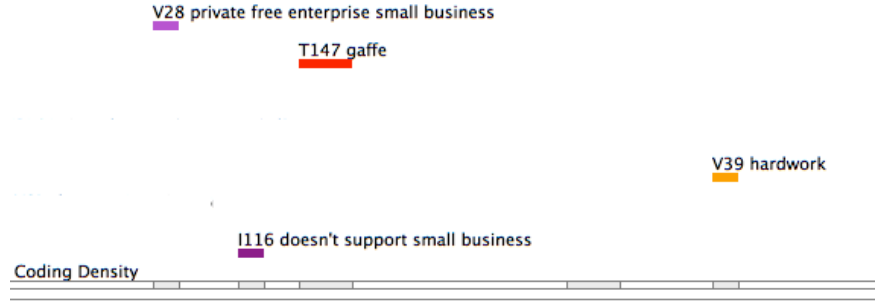
“The government had practically nothing to do with it. If anything government gets in our way.”

[Caption: Gloria Burkhardt, Small Business Owner]

“We’ve worked for everything we’ve gotten.”

[Caption: Michael Schafer, Small Business Owner]

“We risk everything, everyday.”



“Build” Continued...

Heinrich: “Came from my own personal savings.”

[Caption: Ginger Gillespie]

“I’ve invested 5 years.”

Kiekenapp: “20 years.”

Gillespie: “...Of my life into my business.”

Schafer: “Mr. President, I don’t think you understand that.”

Burkhardt: “...that the President of the United States would be that unsupportive.”

“Now we really know he feels about small business ... the backbone of America.”

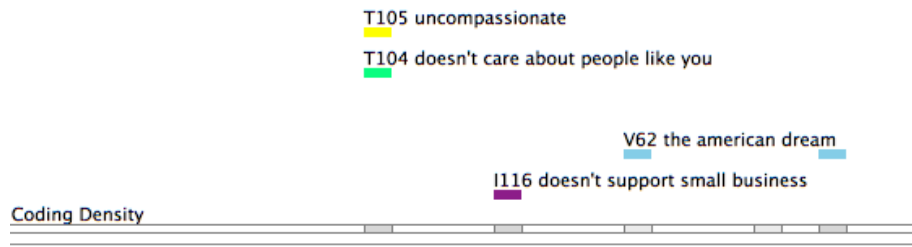
“We’re here to help improve this economy.”

Kiekenapp: “The American Dream is being lost.”

Obama: You didn’t build that! Somebody else made that happen.

[Caption: Barack Obama. Out of Touch.]

Narrator: To rebuild the American Dream, we need a president who believes in the American dream.”



“Obama’s War on Women” – *American Crossroads* (Continued next page)

Narrator: Some people say there’s a War on Women. We agree. It’s a war being waged in our economy.

Narrator: Under President Obama, the number of women in poverty has skyrocketed, hit hardest in every poverty related category.

[U.S. women are hit hardest in every category - Daily Beast 9/14/11]

Narrator: 17 million women now in poverty, 800,000 more than when Obama took office. 7.5 million women in extreme poverty.

[Caption: National Women’s Law Centre, 9/11]

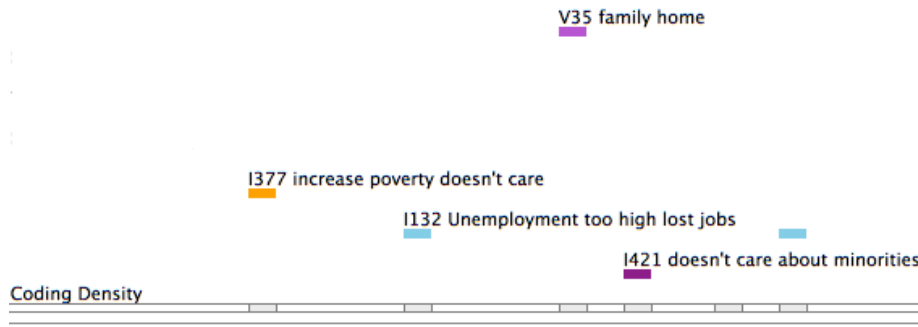
Narrator: 4 out of 10 female headed households stuck in poverty.

Narrator: The poverty rate for hispanic women growing faster than any other group, to 25 per cent.

Narrator: and two and a half million women over 65 are impoverished too.

Narrator: and the job market in Obama’s economy? Women aren’t faring as well as other groups.

[Caption: The Hill, 3/25/12]



“Obama’s War on Women” continued...

Narrator: during Obama’s so-called recovery, women have lost jobs, even as men have gained them. In fact, men are gaining four times as many jobs as women.

[Caption: Pew Research Center, 7/6/11]

[Caption: Pew Research Center, 3/21/12]

Narrator: and over 3 quarters of a million more women are unemployed.

[Caption: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 7/10/12]

Narrator: poverty. unemployment. fading hopes. That’s none the change we voted for. There is a war on women in American, And it’s hurting real women, every day.

[Caption: There is a war on women. It’s called the Obama economy.]

Narrator: We just can’t afford another 4 years.

I519 women not equal

T120 broke promises runs from record

I103 mismanagement of economy

“Whose Democratic Party?” – Emergency Committee for Israel PAC

President Obama refused to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s Capital.

“Governor Romney declared flatly that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.”

Our view is that that’s a different position is different than this administration.

The Obama Democrats followed

“Democrats striking any reference to jerusalem from their platform this time around”

Three times Obama democrats voted against supporting Israel

“All those delegates opposed say no

I’ll do that one more time all those delegates opposed say no

All those delegates opposed say no

I am... I guess...”

Is this still your democratic party? Or Obama’s?

The Emergency Committee for Israel was responsible for the content of this advertising.



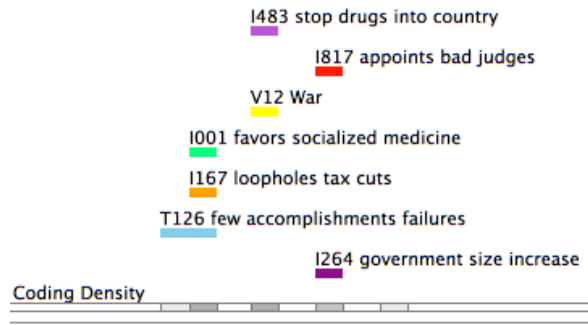
“Obama Keep the Change” – *Freedom’s Defense Fund*

In 2008, we warned you about Barack Obama. Now he’s President, and he’s worse than we imagined. Socialized medicine, tax letters to wealthy donors

Arms sales to Mexican drug lords that kill Americans. War, war, and more war.

Judgeships, and government jobs for leftist cronies.

Visit freedomdefencefund.com to tell Barack Obama he can keep his change.



“Look Who’s Demanding to See Romney’s Tax Returns” – American Bridge 21st Century

What’s Mitt Hiding: Demand to see his tax returns.

“Tax returns should he release the tax returns?”

"I would. I was asked that question: Should he release them? I think he should. The best thing to do is just get everything out in the open and then just say: 'hey I have nothing to hide and I'm going to release my tax returns.'"

"If there's nothing there, there's no there, don't create a there. In other words, put out as much information as you can."

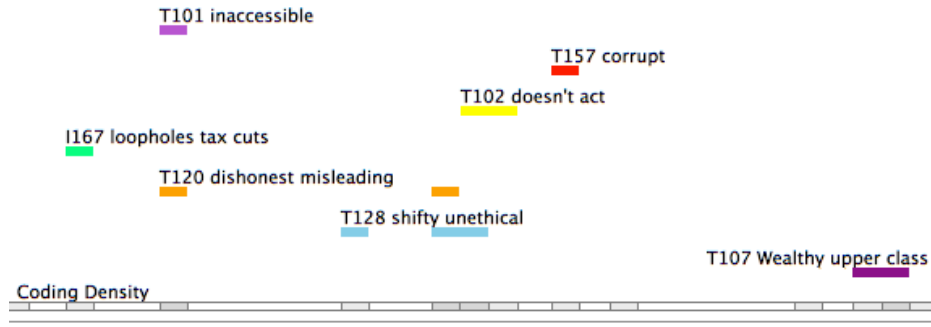
"But the cost of not releasing returns are clear therefore he must have calculated that their higher costs."

"There's something in those tax returns that's gonna set a fire. Clearly there's a problem with the tax returns otherwise he would release, you know, ten years tax returns. He's only released one year tax returns and that's that's a problem."

"There's obviously something there because if there was nothing there he would say have at it so there's obviously something there that compromises what he said in the past about something. But I think the bigger thing is its arrogance."

"Here's what he should do: he should release the tax returns tomorrow, this crazy, you got a release 6, 8 10 years aback tax returns."

"Everybody releases about 12 years and actually it's a practice started by none other than George Romney, his dad, back in '68, so anyway he hasn't released that and what we have then subsequently learned, it comes like revelations in the news media is that he has several offshore investments (or had), apparently has the company in Bermuda or whatever, and others, and a Swiss bank account, like and, just it's muddying the waters, and it's hurting Mitt Romney."



“European Prices” – *Let Freedom Ring America PAC*

“I wish it were three years ago, before President Obama took office. Gas was only \$1.83 gallon. Today, it's over three dollars and fifty cents. Almost double.”

“President Obama, do you have any idea how much it hurts when it costs over eighty dollars to fill up the tank?”

Could these high prices help us?

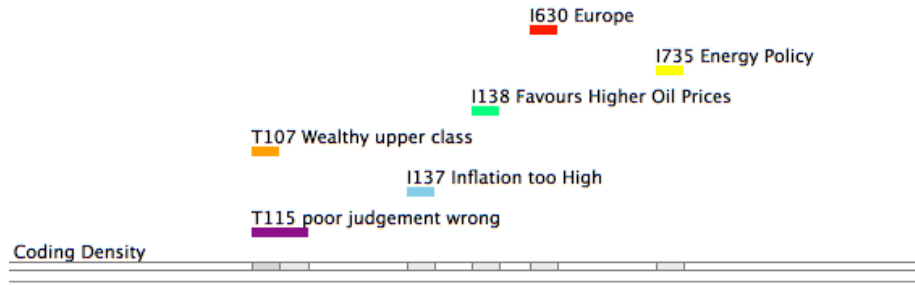
“I think that I would've preferred a gradual adjustment”

“Wait... you want higher gas prices, you just want to get there more slowly. And your energy secretary said that we have to figure out how to boost the price of gasoline to the levels in Europe”

“That would be nine dollars a gallon, maybe even 10”

“That could mean over two hundred dollars to fill up the tank. So this is your policy. Why mister president why?”

(Let Freedom Ring)



“Next Year, President Romney in Jerusalem” – Emergency Committee for Israel PAC

What's the capital of Israel? The Obama administration is embarrassed to say.

“Governor Romney declared flatly that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.”

“Our view is that's a different position than this administration holds”

[White House Spokesman Whiffs on Jerusalem]

President Obama is embarrassed to visit Israel.

Mitt Romney is proud to visit, and proud to say...

“it's a deeply moving experience to be in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel.”

Next year, President Romney in jerusalem, the capital of Israel

The Emergency Committee for Israel was responsible for the content of this advertising.



“Wah Wahhh” – *American Crossroads* (Continued next page)

Narrator: And now, a message from the President of the United States

Obama: from 2001 to 2008

[Caption: Translation: Blame Bush (whine sound)]

Obama: for more than a decade, the Bush tax cuts, a decade in the making. The economic crisis of 2008. The Bush tax cuts.

[Caption: Translation: Not my fault (whine sound)]

Obama: the wealthiest Americans contribute their fair share.

[Caption: Translation: Class warfare (whine sound)]

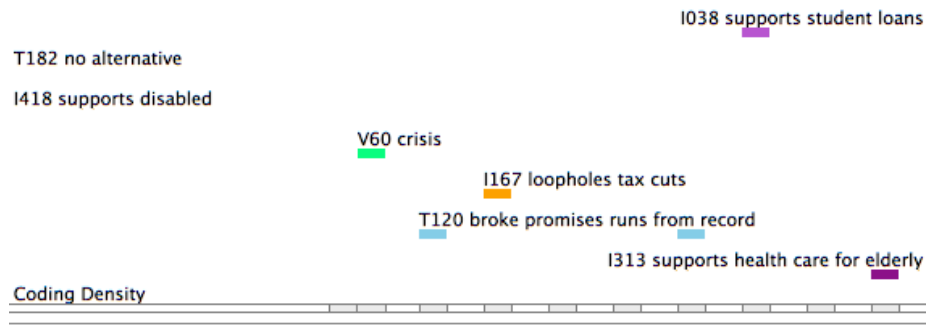
Obama: big financial institutions, corporations, big financial institutions, corporations.

[Caption: Translation: Blame everybody else (whine sound)]

Obama: 10 million college students would on average lose \$1000 each on financial aid.

[Caption: Translation: I can't get you a job so get mad at someone else (whine sound)]

Obama: Their plan to eliminate health insurance for nursing home patients.



“Wah Wahhh” continued...

[Caption: Translation: Vote for me, or you’ll probably die (whine sound)]

Obama: Children with autism or disabilities. typically taken countries up to 10 years to recover from financial crises of this magnitude.

[Caption: Translation: I need another \$5 trillion (whine sound)]

Obama: And what is holding us back is not a lack of big ideas, lack of big ideas, lack of big ideas. The Bush tax cuts, lack of big ideas,

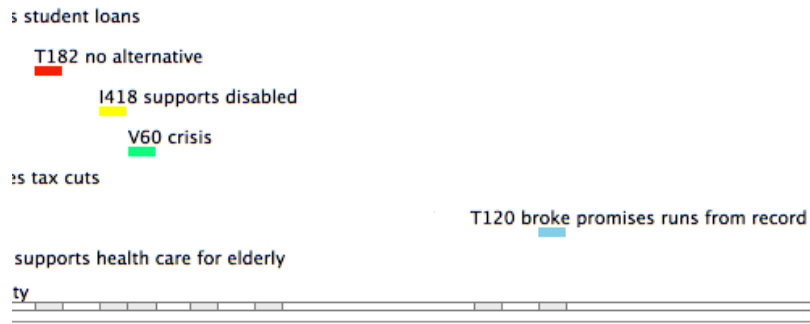
[Caption: (using Spongebob background) One hour later.]

Obama: Lack of big ideas, lack of big ideas.

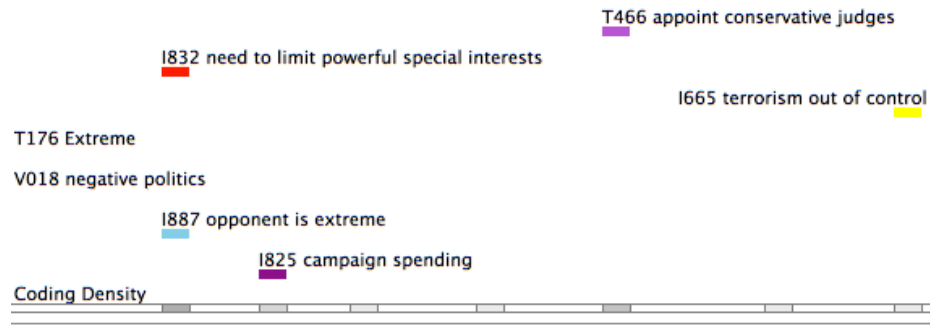
[Caption: Translation: I’m out of ideas, but you’re doing fine. (whine sound)]

[Caption: After 4 years of the same excuses ... Eventually they just sound like this: (whine sound). Good grief.]

[Caption: Translation: no to 4 more years of excuses]



“Extremely Dangerous” – *Priorities USA Action* (Continued next page)



Narrator: The extreme right is aptly named. They're extremely powerful

[Caption: Rove Organization to Raise \$120 Million for 2012 Election - CBS News 3/1/2011]

“The money coming from secret right-wing millionaires will air more than two hundred million dollars worth of TV ads.”

Narrator: Extremely well-funded

[Billionaire Koch Brothers Donate \$88 Million to Fight Obama - Politico 2/11/2011]

“Charles and David Koch have been using their vast fortune to help fund conservative think tanks and politicians”

Narrator: Extremely frightening

Mitt Romney: “I would have favored justices like Scalia and Thomas.”

Narrator: Extremely paranoid

[Fox, March 27, 2009]

Newt Gingrich: I think dictatorial is strong word but it may frighteningly be the right word

Narrator: Extremely hateful

“He’s not with the terrorists are not saying that but he is sympathetic to their cause”

“Extremely Dangerous” continued...

Narrator: Extremely irresponsible

[Breaking News: Donald Trump Speaking in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. MSNBC April 27, 2011]

Donald Trump: “I hope he fails. How’d he get into Harvard you not a good student? I don’t know why he doesn’t release his record

Narrator: Extremely ill-informed

[ABC News, September 11, 2008]

“Do you agree with the Bush Doctrine?”

Sarah Palin: “In what respect Charlie?”

Narrator: And just plain extreme

Michele Bachmann: “I want people in Minnesota armed and dangerous on this issue.”

Narrator: Which makes them all extremely dangerous. It’s time to stand up and fight back. Join us at PrioritiesUSAAction.org. Taking on the politics of fear and smear.”

Priorities USA Action is responsible for the content of this advertising.

point conservative judges

d to limit powerful special interests

:errorism out of control

T176 Extreme

V018 negative politics

I887 opponent is extreme

ampaign spending

ensity

“Romney on Immigration” – *American Bridge 21st Century*

Where does Mitt Romney Stand on Immigration

“My own view is a lot of people that come here or come across one across the border that have no skill no education and are looking for a free meal”

“With regards to those already here it is simply not right and unfair to say they’re gonna all get to stay”

“The answer is self-deportation which is people decide that they can do better by going home because they can’t find work here because they don’t have legal documentation to allow them to work here”

“The children they had born here are US citizens so to the children stay here in the parents go home? Well that’s a choice of course the parents would make”

“The question is if I were elected and Congress to pass the DREAM Act would I veto it? And the answer is yes”

“I don’t see how it is that a state like Texas if you’re illegal alien you get in-state tuition discount”

“illegal immigration is bringing in people who in some cases can be terrorists in other cases they become burden our society”

“I’m running for office for pete’s sake I can’t have illegals”

Mitt Romney: Divisive Rhetoric, No immigration plan



“Romney: The Etch A Sketch Candidate” – *American Bridge 21st Century*

“Is there concern that the pressure from Santorum and Gingrich might force the governor’s to tax so far to the right it would hurt him with moderate voters in the general election”

“Well I think you hit a reset button for the fall campaign everything changes it’s almost like an Etch A Sketch you can kind of shake it up and we start all over again”

Romney on the issues:

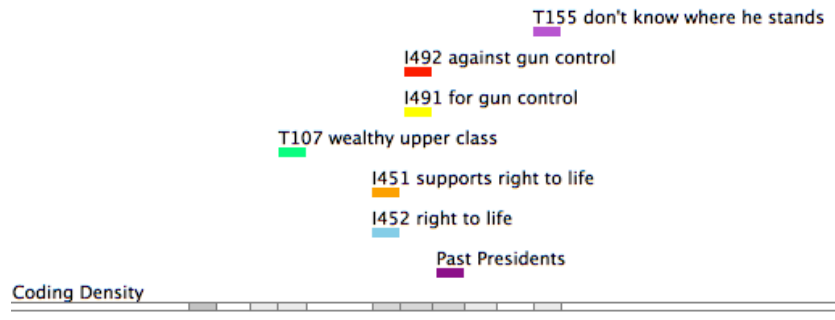
“I support a woman’s right to choose” (shake) “I believe strongly in protecting life”

“I don’t line up with the NRA” (shake) “I am a lifetime NRA member”

“I don’t want to go back to Reagan - Bush” (shake) “I would put reagan on Mt. Rushmore”

Romney: Man of Consistency.

“One reason to elect me is I know what I stand for, I’ve written it down, words have meaning.”



“Muslim Brotherhood” – *Let Freedom Ring America PAC*

“Here’s a Muslim Brotherhood rally for their new Egyptian President, Mohammed Morsi”

“Our capital shall not be Cairo, Mecca, or Medina. It shall be Jerusalem, Allah willing.”

They want to conquer Israel and renew long severed ties with Iran, a country building nuclear weapons to slaughter the Israeli people. Death to Israel.

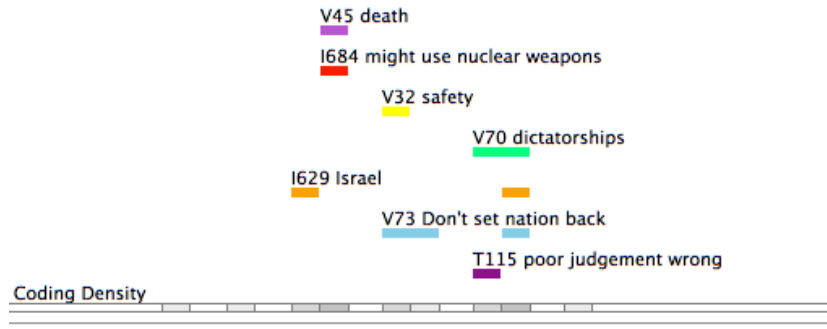
“The Muslim Brotherhood’s top leaders even write about taking over America.” (Destroying the Western civilization from within)

“President Obama, you invited the Muslim Brotherhood to the white house, legitimizing the group that wants to undermine America and destroy Israel.”

“You send them 1.5 billion of our taxpayer dollars.”

“why mister president, why?”

(Paid for by let freedom ring)



“Mitt Romney” Get Rid of Planned Parenthood” – Planned Parenthood Votes

[Caption: Mitt Romney March 13, 2012]

Romney: “Planned Parenthood, we’re going to get rid of that.”

[Caption: Really, Mitt?

Last year, planned parenthood provided 2.2 million people birth control

Last year, planned parenthood provided more than four million STD tests and treatments.

Last year, planned parenthood provided 1.5 million cancer screenings

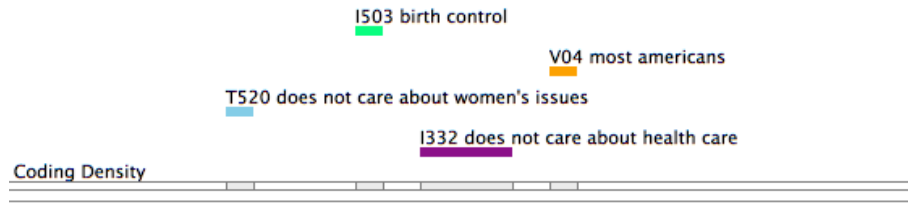
69 percent of voters oppose cutting funding for Planned Parenthood

Women count on planned parenthood

Women are watching

www.womenarewatching.org

(C) Planned Parenthood Action Fund]



“Jennifer” – *Let Freedom Ring America PAC*

“there are tons Americans just like my husband with no job. my husband has an engineering degree with over 10 years experience and he was laid off three years ago and has yet to find a permanent job in his field”

“well Jennifer, I don’t know your husband specialty, but I can tell you that there’s a huge demand around the country for engineers”

“we’re not getting that”

“Jennifer may may I ask you what kind of engineer your husband is?”

“he’s a semi-conductor engineer”

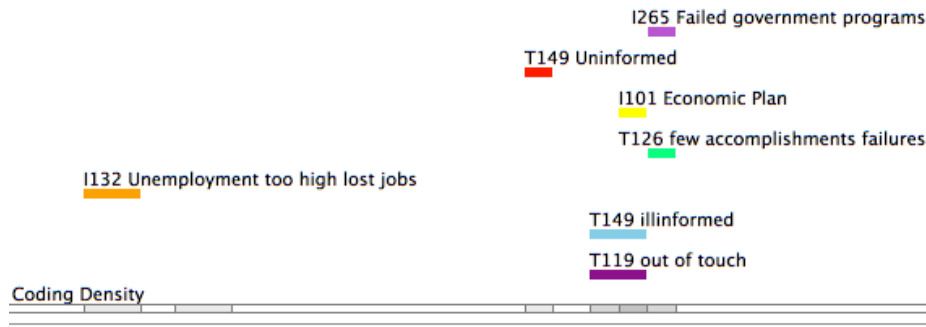
“See, that kind of engineer should be able to find something a right away”

“we’re not getting that.”

(Since President Obama took office, the semiconductors and electronics manufacturing sector has lost 21,500 jobs. Exactly three years after President Obama’s government stimulus plan, Jennifer’s story shows how... It’s just not working.).

“that kind of engineer should be able to find something a right away (echo: right away right away).”

“we’re not getting that”



“Small-Minded” – *Priorities USA Action*

[Caption: August 16, 2012]
Mitt Romney: “The fascination with taxes I paid, I find to be very a small-minded. I never paid less than 13 percent.”

Narrator: “But under one of a Paul Ryan’s budget plans Romney would pay only one percent.

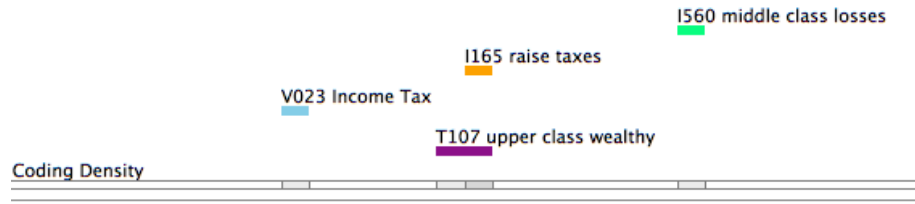
[Caption: Paul Ryan’s Tax Plan Would Slash Mitt Romney’s Tax Rate to 1 Percent - Roll Call 8/11/12]

Narrator: “That’s right, Mitt Romney’s worth two hundred million dollars, but under Paul Ryan’s budget he pay only one percent in taxes, while middle-class families would pay a thousand dollars more.”

[Caption: Romney would pay only one percent in taxes - Roll Call 8/11/12]
[Caption: Middle Class Families Would Pay \$1000 More - Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 7/7/10]

Narrator: “Romney and Ryan. If they win, the middle class loses.”

Priorities USA Action is responsible for the content in this advertising



“Mother’s Day” – *Restore Our Future*

Ann Romney raised five boys. She successfully battled breast cancer and multiple sclerosis. But what is White House insider Hilary Rosen say about Ann Romney?

[CNN 4/11/12]

Hilary Rosen: Guess what, his wife has actually never worked a day in her life.

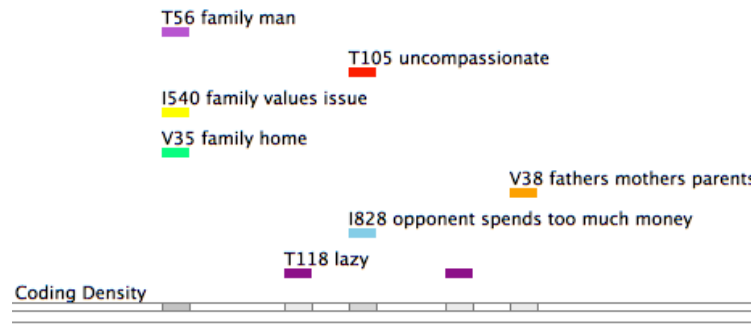
Narrator: “and Bill Maher, who gave a million dollars supporting Obama, attacks:”

[Caption: HBO, 4/13/12]

Bill Maher: “Ann Romney has never gotten her ass out of the house.”

Narrator: Happy Mother’s Day from Barack Obama’s team.

Restore Our Future is responsible for the content of this message.



“Paul Ryan – For a Stronger America” – Emergency Committee for Israel PAC

Paul Ryan knows that American leadership abroad requires a strong economy at home, and he knows the stakes.

“if we fail to put our budget on a sustainable path, then we are choosing decline is a world power”

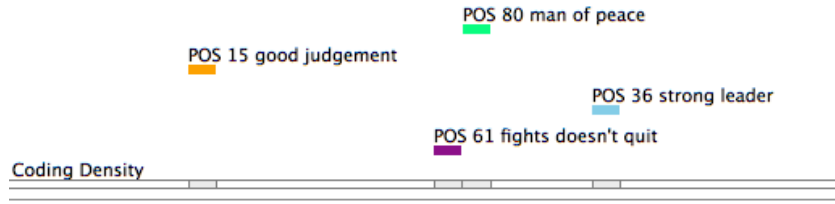
He knows who our friends are.

“Iran’s President called our ally Israel quote ‘a cancerous tumor that must be excised.’ Under President Romney, our adversaries will think twice about challenging America and our allies cause we believe in peace through strength.”

[Romney-Ryan for a Stronger America]

President Romney and vice president Ryan for a stronger America, at home and abroad.

Emergency Committee for Israel was responsible for the content this advertising



“Another Month” – *Restore Our Future*

[Caption: Unemployment rate rises to 8.3 percent nationally - Associated Press, 8/3/12]

[Caption: Nation's Unemployment inches up to 8.3 percent, a five-month high - Bloomberg News, 8/3/12]

Narrator: Another month. Even more Americans jobless. If you had President Obama's record what would you do? Would you joke?

[Caption: 6/13/11]

Obama: “shovel-ready was not as shovel-ready as we expected.”

Narrator: Deny reality?

[Caption: 7/23/12]

Obama: “We tried our plan, and it worked”

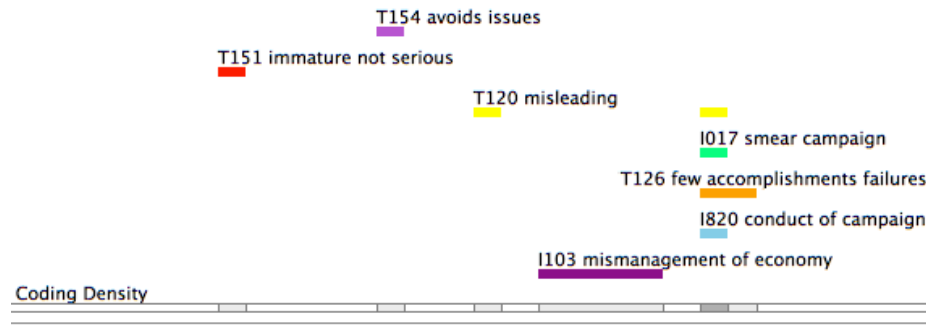
Narrator: Even insist...?

[Caption: 6/8/12]

Obama: “The private sector is doing fine.”

Narrator: Or do what Obama's allies are doing now. Shameful, dishonest attacks. With no record to run on, it's the only strategy Obama has left.”

Restore Our Future is responsible for the content to this message.



“New Morning” – Campaign for American Values

“Hey honey, how are ya?”

“Fine, I guess”

“What’s going on?”

“Well, Obama is trying to force gay marriage on this country. That’s not the change I voted for. Marriage is between a man and a woman.”

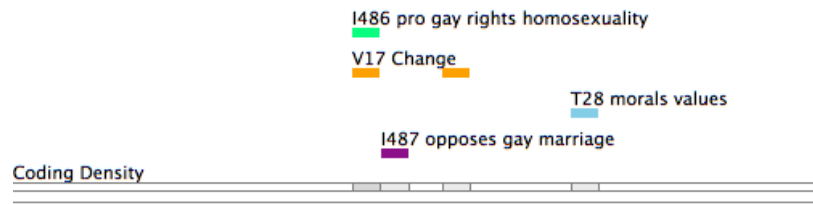
“that’s not the change I voted for either”

“what can we do?”

“we can vote for someone with values”

vote: romney-ryan

“Campaign for American Values PAC is responsible for the content of this advertising”



“Faith in the Public Square: Obama vs. Romney” – Campaign for American

“America was founded on the idea and our liberty comes from God. So why was God (text: God?) booed by Obama's delegates at the Democratic National Convention? This was no isolated incident. Obama has repeatedly left God out when reciting the most important words in our founding documents.”

Obama: “Hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal (text: endowed by our Creator) endowed with certain inalienable rights.”

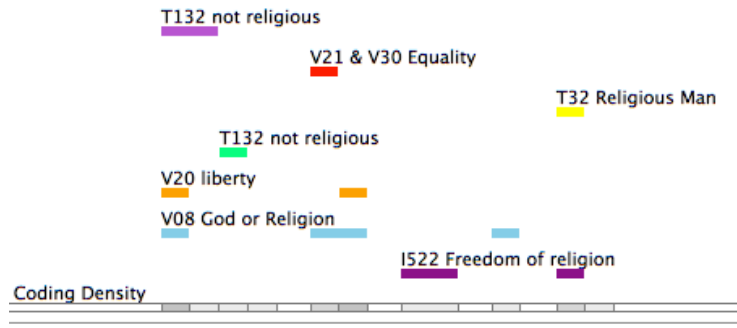
Obama has canceled National Day of Prayer events at the White House and he is trying to coerce churches into violating their beliefs.

But with President Romney America will remain one nation under god.

I will not take got out of my heart I will not take god the public square and I will not take it out of the Platform of my party.

Campaign for American Values PAC is responsible for the content of this advertising.

Values PAC



“We the People” – *Priorities USA Action*

Narrator: We the people, the middle class, who move our country forward, work hard, raise families and keep america strong. But Mitt Romney's budget plan will hurt the middle class.

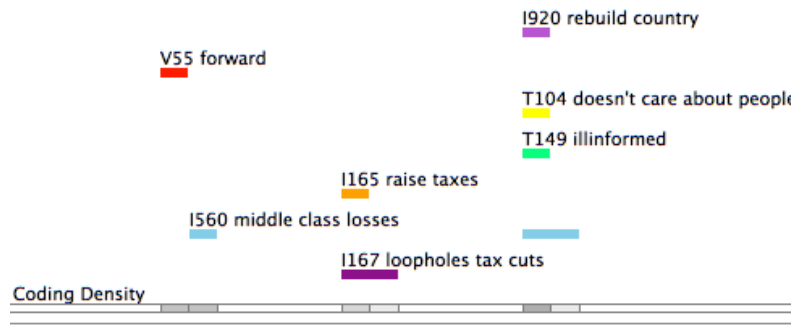
[Romney Plan - Raise taxes for middle class families by up to \$2000 - Tax Policy Center, 8/1/12]

Narrator: Raising taxes on the average family by up to \$2000. While giving a tax break up to \$250,000 to multimillionaires.

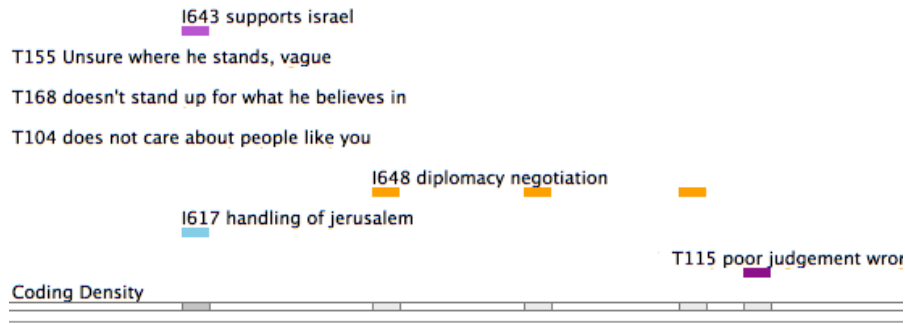
[Caption: Romney Plan - Cut taxes for multi-millionaires by \$250,000 - Tax Policy Center, 8/1/12]

Narrator: Doesn't Mitt Romney understand? We can't rebuild America by tearing down the middle class.

Priorities USA Action is responsible for the content of this advertising



“O Jerusalem” – Emergency Committee for Israel PAC (Continued next page)



(2008):

Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided.

(2012):

Is is the state department’s position that jerusalem is not part of Israel

“Well, you know that our position on Jerusalem has not changed. Jerusalem policy... it’s permanent status issue. It’s got to be resolved through negotiations between the parties”

“Is it the view of the United States that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel notwithstanding the question about the location of the US embassy?”

“We are not going to prejudice the outcome those negotiations, including the final status of Jerusalem.”

“Does that mean that you do not regard Jerusalem as the capital of Israel?”

“Jerusalem is a permanent status, it’s gotta be resolved through negotiation”

“You seem to suggesting you do not regard Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, is that correct?”

“I have just spoken to this issue. I have nothing further to say on it”

(2012):

“O Jerusalem” continued...

(2012):

“What do you consider to be the capital of Israel, Jerusalem or Tel Aviv?”

“I haven’t had that question in a while. Our position has not changed.”

“You already know our position.”

“She doesn’t know!”

“She doesn’t know, that’s why she asked!”

“She does know.”

“She does not know! Could you just give us an answer? What do you recognize?”

“Our position hasn’t changed.”

(2012):

“So if you want to know where my heart lies, look no further than what I have done”

(What has Obama done? He denies that Israel even has a capital city.)

I643 supports israel

T155 Unsure where he stands, vague

T168 doesn't stand up for what he believes in

T104 does not care about people like you

I648 diplomacy negotiation

I617 handling of jerusalem

T115 poor judgement wrong

Coding Density