

**SURVEY ON CAMPAIGN CONDUCT  
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF RESULTS**

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## 1. Introduction

Since the fall of 1998, the University of Virginia's Center for Survey Research (CSR) has conducted two surveys for the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts. The first project was a telephone survey of 634 registered voters in the Commonwealth of Virginia, conducted from October 6 through October 22, 1998. Interviews were carried out by students from two classes in the departments of Sociology and Government and Foreign Affairs. The second survey, conducted from March 26 - April 15, 1999, involved 603 registered voters and was carried out entirely by CSR staff.

The primary objective of these surveys was to explore attitudes about campaign conduct. The first survey (Survey One) included questions about a broad range of campaign practices, seeking to establish – among other things – what kinds of campaign charges were perceived by voters as fair or unfair. Building on the Survey One findings, the second survey (Survey Two) included a series of randomly assigned hypothetical scenarios (“vignettes”) in which fictional candidates trade charges under alternative conditions (contextual “setups”). As discussed in sections 4 and 5, these alternative setups and vignettes proved to have strong effects on respondents' assessments of candidates.

The present analysis focuses on Survey Two. Unless otherwise indicated, all of the data in the tables that follow are from this second project. After a brief description of the sample, we turn to a discussion of a simple split-ballot experiment, an analysis of the vignettes, and an analysis of the alternative setups. This preliminary report outlines survey highlights; additional analyses and reports for a variety of audiences are being planned.

## 2. Survey Two Sample Characteristics

Telephone numbers for both Survey One and Survey Two were selected through a list-assisted random-digit dialing process designed to give equal representation to listed and unlisted households in all regions of the state. The telephone numbers for Survey Two were obtained from Survey Sampling, Inc., of Fairfield, CT; the sample for Survey One was obtained from Affordable Samples, of Old Greenwich, CT. Within households, a last-birthday procedure was employed to randomly select adult respondents. Only registered voters were eligible for the survey.

The resulting sample is 57.6 percent female, 82.2 percent white, and 13.6 percent African American (see Table 1). These demographics are similar to the characteristics of registered voters in Virginia as reported by the U. S. Census Bureau based on the Voter Registration Supplement to the 1996 Current Population Survey. Our sample is relatively well educated (47.1 percent with at least a college degree), median income is in the \$50,000 - \$75,000 range, and median age is 48 years. Nine out of ten respondents identify themselves as Protestant, Catholic, or other Christian, and more than a quarter of the entire sample identifies as an evangelical Christian.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample**

	<i>Percent</i>
female	57.6
male	42.5
African American	13.6
white	82.2
all others	4.1
Hispanic	2.5
college graduate or above	47.1
median income:	\$50 - \$75K
Protestant	61.6
Catholic	14.9
other Christian	12.5
Jewish	1.0
all others	3.9
none	6.0
evangelical Christian	25.7
married	64.7
widowed	8.5
divorced	10.9
separated	2.0
never married	13.9
median age	48 years
18 – 25	5.3
25 – 35	15.3
35 - 45	25.2
45 - 55	22.6
55 - 65	15.6
65+	16.0

As Table 2 indicates, the sample is relatively evenly split in partisan terms. Including independents who lean toward one of the parties, Republicans have a slight advantage with 47.0 percent of the sample vs. 40.2 percent for Democrats (and 12.8 percent “pure” independents). The sample is 20.1 percent liberal, 40.4 percent moderate, and 38.3 percent conservative, based on a single self-identification question. Just under half of the sample (48.2) can identify both U.S. Senators from Virginia; an additional 20.4 percent can identify just one, while 31.4 can name none.

**Table 2. Political Characteristics of Sample**

	<i>Percent</i>
strong Democrat	17.4
weak Democrat	12.8
leaning Democrat	10.0
Independent	12.8
leaning Republican	12.7
weak Republican	15.0
strong Republican	19.3
total Democrat (incl. lean)	40.2
total Republican (incl. lean)	47.0
liberal	20.1
moderate	40.4
conservative	38.3
know both VA Senators	48.2
know only one Senator	20.4
know neither Senator	31.4

These respondents are relatively engaged in politics (Table 3). Nine out of ten pay at least “some” attention to government and politics; almost half pay “a great deal.” More than 78 percent report having voted in 1998, and in the gubernatorial election of 1997 (71 percent report having voted in both).

When it comes to the quality of campaigns, respondents appear to differentiate between what has happened in Virginia over that last two decades and what has occurred nationally. At home, 18 percent of these registered voters think that the quality of campaigns has improved, 44.6 percent think it has stayed about the same, and 37.5 percent feels things have gotten worse. Respondents are much more critical of campaigns nationwide: Only 9 percent see things as having improved, just over one quarter feels campaign quality has stayed about the same, and almost two-thirds say that campaigns in the U.S. have gotten worse.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, almost a third of respondents (31 percent) report having voted against a candidate with whom they agreed on the issues because of poor campaign conduct; 15.9 percent say they have sat out an election because of campaign behavior.

<sup>1</sup> These questions were also asked on Survey One, with similar results: For Virginia campaigns the figures were 11.5 percent “better,” 49.8 percent “about the same,” and 38.7 percent “worse.” For U.S. campaigns the figures were 6.5 percent “better,” 29.4 percent “about the same,” and 64.1 percent “worse.”

**Table 3. Political Engagement and Assessment of Campaigns**

	<i>Percent</i>
<i>attention to government and politics</i>	
a great deal	47.4
Some	42.7
a little	8.0
not very much	1.8
voted in 1998	78.3
voted in 1997	78.7
<i>campaigns in Virginia in the last 20 years</i>	
Better	18.0
Worse	37.5
about the same	44.6
<i>campaigns in the U.S. in the last 20 years</i>	
Better	9.0
Worse	65.2
about the same	25.9
ever voted against a candidate because disapproved of campaign behavior	31.0
ever not voted in an election because disapproved of campaign behavior	15.9

### 3. Split-Ballot Experiment: Laws vs. Guidelines

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: In the first, they were asked whether they would support or oppose a series of four “voluntary guidelines” intended “to improve election campaigns.” In the second condition, respondents were asked about the same measures in the form of “proposed laws.” As Table 4 indicates, there is relatively high support for all of the four proposals: strong majorities embrace codes of campaign ethics, limits on campaign spending, the inclusion of a sponsor’s voice and image in every campaign ad, and candidates agreeing to participate in a set number of debates. Interestingly, the lowest level of support is found for the campaign ad disclosure proposal, something several reform efforts have emphasized. Not surprisingly, in each case respondents are more likely to support voluntary guidelines than legal requirements. When it comes to agreeing on debates, for example, support is more than 17 points higher for a guideline than a law. On average, respondents support 3.29 of the four guidelines and 2.99 of the laws.

**Table 4. Split-Ballot Experiment: Laws vs. Guidelines**

	<i>Guideline</i>	<i>Law</i>
code of campaign ethics	95.6	89.8
limit on campaign spending	89.7	87.6
include voice and photo in every ad	67.7	61.4
agree to specific number of debates	89.6	71.9
mean number supported	3.29	2.99

#### 4. Vignette Analysis

Survey Two was designed to explore voters' responses to a range of candidate behavior. In particular, we were interested in whether respondents were sensitive to the nature of the charges and counter-charges made during the course of a campaign, primarily through campaign advertisements. Accordingly, each respondent was confronted with a series of five vignettes, "situations involving two candidates running for office." In each, a hypothetical candidate (candidate A) runs an ad making one of twelve charges against his or her opponent (candidate B), and the opponent either fails to respond or counters with an ad that makes one of the same twelve charges.

The charges were taken from the Survey One, in which registered voters were asked to evaluate the fairness of each charge. As Table five indicates, perceived fairness ranges from a low of 7.7 percent for criticisms of a candidate's family members, to a high of 80.7 percent for criticizing an opponent for talking one way and voting another. These charges have been collapsed into three categories of perceived fairness: high (charges seen as "very" or "somewhat fair" by 70 percent or more of the sample), medium (37 to 63 percent) and low (7.7 to 27.8 percent).

**Table 5. Perceived Fairness of Campaign Conduct**

<i>Criticizing Opponent for. . .</i>	<i>Percent Very or Somewhat Fair</i>
talking one way and voting another	80.7
his/her voting record	75.8
his/her business practices	71.0
taking money from special interest groups	70.7
taking money from individuals with ethical problems	63.0
current personal troubles	56.1
current extramarital affairs	45.1
political actions of his/her party's leaders	37.1
past extramarital affairs	27.8
past personal troubles	25.9
personal lives of his/her party's leaders	19.1
behavior of his/her family members	7.7

**Source: 1998 Survey One (n=634)**

When these items are combined in a single measure of perceived fairness, a series of simple OLS regression models showed that tolerance for campaign criticism increases with education and political information. More educated and more informed voters are more likely to evaluate a given charge as fair. In general, perceived fairness was lower for Democrats and Clinton supporters. Although there are no effects of race or gender for this aggregate measure, when it comes to the individual fairness items, race has a significant effect on for two of the twelve criticisms (taking money from people with ethics problems and the political actions of party leaders).<sup>2</sup>

With Clinton approval in the model, party identification is significant in those two cases, as well as for criticisms based on past and current extramarital affairs, and past and present personal troubles. In every case, Democrats are less likely to consider a charge as fair. Clinton approval has a significant effect on perceived fairness for seven of the twelve charges, including criticisms of an opponent's voting record; the behavior of family members; the political actions of party leaders, the personal lives of party leaders, past and current extramarital affairs, and past (but not present) personal troubles. In every case, Clinton supporters are less tolerant of the charges, and there are particularly large effects in the case of extramarital affairs and criticisms based on the personal lives of party leaders. These findings suggest that Survey One respondents may have been sensitized by the impeachment hearings unfolding in the House of Representatives during the field period, and—if they favored the President--were therefore less likely to consider these charges as fair.<sup>3</sup>

In the remainder of this report, the unit of analysis shifts from the individual respondent to the individual vignette. Because each of the 603 respondents was presented with five vignettes, this yields an effective sample of 3,015 vignettes. Recall that candidate A leads with a charge taken from the low, medium, or high perceived fairness categories, and candidate B either does nothing or responds with one of the same charges. Thus there are twelve sets of vignettes, distributed as in Table 6. (In this table and in those that follow, the rows represent A's initial charge and columns represent B's response.)

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<sup>2</sup> Findings for individual fairness items are based on probit models of a collapsed dichotomous "fair/unfair" measure.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, it is possible that the causal arrow runs in the other direction: those who are least tolerant of campaign mud may have also been most put off by the Starr investigation, and rallied to Clinton's side. It would be difficult if not impossible to untangle these effects with the present data. More important, we have no reason to suspect that in Survey Two there was an interaction between Clinton support and the treatment conditions (and unfortunately the Clinton job approval question was not included in this survey).

**Table 6. Distribution of Vignettes**

<i>A's Charge</i>	<i>B's Response</i>				<i>total</i>
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>	
<i>fair charge</i>	234	241	228	260	963
<i>moderate charge</i>	233	233	247	270	983
<i>unfair charge</i>	251	281	265	272	1069
<i>total</i>	718	755	740	802	3015

Note: cell entries are number of vignettes in each category.

After every vignette, respondents were asked a series of five questions:

**A) vote intention:** “Given what you have heard about the candidates and their campaigns, who would you be more likely to vote for: [Candidate A], [Candidate B], or would you not vote at all?”<sup>4</sup> (Tables 7, 8, 9)

**B) perceived fairness of candidates’ ads:** “Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree: X’s advertisement was fair.” (Tables 10, 11)

**C) perception of negative campaign:** “Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree: X is running a negative campaign.” (Tables 12, 13)

**D) assessment of B’s response:** “Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree: B’s response was smart politically.” (Table 14)

**E) candidate evaluation:** “Is your overall view of X very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?” (Tables 15, 16)

We take up each of these questions in turn.

**A) vote intention:** As Table 7 makes clear, no matter what B’s response, candidate A always does best when making a fair charge. A gets the largest vote share (48 percent) when making a fair charge followed by an unfair response, and the smallest share (15.1 percent) when making an unfair charge that is met with no response, *or* with another unfair charge.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, no matter what charge A has made, B always does best by *not*

<sup>4</sup> In the actual vignettes, candidates A and B were assigned the names Jones and Smith, Brown and Green, Wood and Andrews, Miller and Waters, Wells and Adams.

<sup>5</sup> These percentages are based on all response categories, including non-voting and don’t know, and therefore understate vote share per se.

*responding*. In the face of a moderate or negative charge, B gets 62.9 and 57.1 percent support respectively (Table 8). Second to not responding, B’s preferred strategies would be to counter with a fair response or with a moderate response (both in turn yield diminishing levels of support). No matter what charge A has led with, B does worst with an unfair response.

These findings contain a simple but important lesson for A: **Lead with an early charge, but make sure it is fair one**. In the face of a fair charge by A, B will only win by not responding. Any other response leads to a win for A. (Compare the first row of Tables 7 and 8.) However, if A leads with an unfair charge, B will win no matter what B’s response. (Compare the last row of Tables 7 and 8.)

When it comes to turnout (Table 9), respondents are least likely to stay home when A makes a fair or moderate charge to which B does not respond (8.4 and 7.0 percent say they won’t vote), and most likely to abstain when A and B trade unfair charges (a striking 41 percent say they’ll sit out the election).

**Table 7. Vote for A**

A’s Charge	B’s Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	25.7	31.2	33.8	48.0
<i>moderate charge</i>	19.2	24.9	18.8	32.2
<i>unfair charge</i>	15.1	21.2	20.5	14.9

**Table 8. Vote for B**

A’s Charge	B’s Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	42.5	28.6	20.3	16.5
<i>moderate charge</i>	62.9	29.0	25.6	20.8
<i>unfair charge</i>	57.1	38.7	30.9	21.0

**Table 9. Turnout (percent not voting)**

A’s Charge	B’s Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	8.4	19.1	21.6	21.4
<i>moderate charge</i>	7.0	29.0	33.8	29.0
<i>unfair charge</i>	11.3	20.8	30.1	41.2

**B) perceived fairness of candidates' ads:** Tables 10 and 11 tell a simple and not surprising story: Respondents see “fair” charges as fair and “unfair” charges as unfair.

**Table 10. A's Ad Fair**

A's Charge	B's Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	52.0	53.6	56.6	57.5
<i>moderate charge</i>	32.3	41.7	34.1	35.7
<i>unfair charge</i>	22.8	32.1	27.2	22.7

**Table 11. B's Ad Fair**

A's Charge	B's Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	--	52.5	34.1	30.4
<i>moderate charge</i>	--	56.0	36.4	23.5
<i>unfair charge</i>	--	57.3	40.1	28.6

**C) perception of negative campaign:** Perceptions of negativity are correlated with the perceived fairness of charges. When A makes a fair charge that is met by no response, 53.6 percent see A's campaign as negative. While this may seem high, it rises to 82.0 percent when A makes an unfair charge. No matter what B's response, perceptions of A's negativity are higher when A makes a moderate rather than a fair charge, and highest with an unfair charge. Similarly, perceptions of B's negativity rise with the unfairness of B's response (Table 13). Given a fair charge by A, for example, only 20 percent see B's campaign as negative when B makes no response, rising to 55.3 percent with a fair response, 67.3 percent with a moderate response, and 75.1 percent with an unfair response.

**Table 12. A's Campaign Negative**

A's Charge	B's Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	53.6	54.6	52.8	54.6
<i>moderate charge</i>	73.0	66.4	74.2	66.8
<i>unfair charge</i>	82.0	70.5	79.2	78.7

**Table 13. B’s Campaign Negative**

A’s Charge	B’s Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	19.9	55.3	67.3	75.1
<i>moderate charge</i>	19.7	55.7	73.6	75.6
<i>unfair charge</i>	16.7	52.2	69.4	74.1

**D) assessment of B’s response:** Table 14 supports the earlier finding that B wins by not responding. No matter what charge A has raised, B is seen as “smart politically” to let it pass, and does worst by making an unfair response. In the face of an unfair charge by A, for example, 73.4 percent see a non-response by B as politically smart, but only 26.6 percent say responding with an unfair charge is smart.

**Table 14. B’s Response Smart**

A’s Charge	B’s Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	65.1	53.0	35.1	30.1
<i>moderate charge</i>	70.1	48.9	35.6	25.8
<i>unfair charge</i>	73.4	56.1	39.4	26.6

**E) candidate evaluation:** Tables 15 and 16 tell a now-familiar story. Overall evaluations of A are highest when A makes a fair charge, lowest when A makes an unfair charge. Evaluations of A are highest when A’s fair charge is met with an unfair response (.546 summary score) and lowest when A makes an unfair charge and B responds in kind (.287). Conversely, B always does well to respond with a fair charge, but does best by making no response at all. In the face of a fair charge by A, for example, B’s scores rise from .309 with a negative response to .365 with a moderate response, .476 with a fair response and .634 with no response. B does best (.714) when not responding to an unfair charge and worst (.309 and .287) when providing an unfair response to a fair or moderate charge.

**Table 15. Overall Evaluation of A (mean score)**

A’s Charge	B’s Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	.446	.505	.501	.546
<i>moderate charge</i>	.357	.412	.357	.410
<i>unfair charge</i>	.311	.377	.312	.287

**Table 16. Overall Evaluation of B (mean score)**

A's Charge	B's Response			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	.634	.476	.365	.309
<i>moderate charge</i>	.689	.475	.377	.287
<i>unfair charge</i>	.714	.523	.376	.310

## 5. Setup Analysis

Each set of vignettes was put into one of five hypothetical contexts (or setups). Respondents were randomly assigned to a condition in which they were predisposed to support A on the basis of issue positions, predisposed to support B, predisposed to support neither, or in which A was either a Democrat or Republican. For clarity, these last two setups have been converted to reflect consistent or inconsistent partisanship between the respondent and candidate A.

These alternative setups turn out to have strong effects. As seen in Table 17, respondents assigned to the A-support condition were more likely to report a vote intention for A than B (43.4 percent vs. 17.1 percent); while respondents assigned to the B-support condition were more likely to support B (53.2 percent) than A (13.6 percent). A similar pattern is evident when comparing the consistent and inconsistent party setups: 42.8 percent of those assigned to the consistent party condition express a vote intention for A (vs. 16.8 percent for B); in the inconsistent party setup support for A is at only 11.7 percent (vs. 45.7 percent for B). Interestingly, respondents assigned to the “neutral” setup were more than ten points more likely to support B than A.

Similar patterns are evident for the other outcome variables: Overall evaluations of B, for example, are higher in condition 2 than condition 1, and higher in condition 5 than in condition 4, just as one would expect. The other patterns in Table 18, however, are less clear-cut and will require additional analysis.

**Table 17. Candidate Support by Setup**

<i>Setup</i>	<i>Vote A</i>	<i>Vote B</i>	<i>A overall</i>	<i>B overall</i>
<i>1. support A</i>	43.4	17.1	.485	.431
<i>2. support B</i>	13.6	53.2	.372	.502
<i>3. support neither</i>	19.5	30.6	.386	.459
<i>4. same party as A</i>	42.8	16.8	.445	.398
<i>5. opposite part as A</i>	11.7	45.7	.318	.492

**Table 18. Evaluations by Setup**

<i>Setup</i>	<i>A negative</i>	<i>B negative</i>	<i>A's ad fair</i>	<i>B's ad fair</i>	<i>B response smart</i>
<b>1. support A</b>	65.5	53.8	37.9	36.9	47.9
<b>2. support B</b>	66.8	54.4	38.7	41.9	47.1
<b>3. support neither</b>	68.5	56.4	37.2	39.0	45.8
<b>4. same party as A</b>	65.6	57.7	42.3	37.2	43.0
<b>5. opposite part as A</b>	70.7	55.2	36.0	41.6	48.5

### 6. Interaction of Setup and Vignette

Tables 19-20 show vote choice by vignette (from Tables 7-8) controlling for setup. These analyses combine the two A-support setups (setups 1 and 4, issue-based and party-based support) and the two B-support setups (setups 2 and 5), so that one is either predisposed to support A, B or neither candidate. (As a result, there are fewer cases in the neutral category).

As is evident, the aggregate patterns reported earlier are intact after controlling for setup. For example, no matter what B's response, candidate A almost always does best when making a fair charge. Similarly, no matter what charge A has made, B always does best by *not responding*. There are, however, strong setup effects: Every cell in Table 19a is higher – usually much higher – than the corresponding cell in Table 19b. Regardless of the vignette, respondents seem to be taking their preexisting support for A to heart. It is not surprising, therefore, that given preexisting support for A, (compare Table 19a and Table 20a), candidate A defeats B in every case ***except for two: when A makes a moderate or unfair charge to which B does not respond, B wins even given preexisting support for A.*** Conversely, given pre-existing support for B (compare Table 19b and Table 20b), there is very little that B can do to lose the race, with one possible exception: ***Given pre-existing support, B can only lose the election by responding to a fair charge with an unfair response.*** However, the outcome is too close (28.7 percent for B, 31.0 percent for A) for us to be very confident in the difference.

**Table 19a. Vote for A, Pre-existing Support for A**

<b>A's Charge</b>	<b>B's Response</b>			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	42.4	58.8	50.0	64.9
<i>moderate charge</i>	33.3	39.8	38.6	53.2
<i>unfair charge</i>	29.0	36.4	40.9	30.2

**Table 19b. Vote for A, Pre-existing Support for B**

<b>A's Charge</b>	<b>B's Response</b>			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	14.1	14.0	18.0	31.0
<i>moderate charge</i>	4.8	15.2	8.3	18.0
<i>unfair charge</i>	6.2	10.8	7.3	7.2

**Table 19c. Vote for A, No Pre-existing Support**

<b>A's Charge</b>	<b>B's Response</b>			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	14.0	23.9	41.0	43.6
<i>moderate charge</i>	23.4	17.8	15.4	20.4
<i>unfair charge</i>	3.9	14.8	10.6	8.9

**Table 20a. Vote for B, Pre-existing Support for A**

<b>A's Charge</b>	<b>B's Response</b>			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	22.8	5.0	6.3	4.3
<i>moderate charge</i>	46.0	21.7	10.0	8.5
<i>unfair charge</i>	33.3	21.2	15.9	4.7

**Table 20b. Vote for B, Pre-existing Support for B**

<b>A's Charge</b>	<b>B's Response</b>			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	59.2	54.0	31.5	28.7
<i>moderate charge</i>	79.8	43.0	48.5	38.2
<i>unfair charge</i>	77.8	53.9	53.1	36.0

**Table 20c. Vote for B, No Pre-existing Support**

<b>A's Charge</b>	<b>B's Response</b>			
	<i>no response</i>	<i>fair response</i>	<i>moderate response</i>	<i>unfair response</i>
<i>fair charge</i>	54.0	13.0	18.0	20.0
<i>moderate charge</i>	63.8	22.2	7.7	16.7
<i>unfair charge</i>	70.6	40.7	19.2	14.3

## 7. Concluding Comments

The findings presented above make clear that voters have clear perceptions of what is and what is not a fair campaign advertisement. The varied conditions presented in the vignettes produced sharply varying responses from voters—they care about fairness in campaigns and will translate their concerns into electoral choice. Almost a third report having voted against a candidate because of poor campaign conduct—even though they agreed with that candidate on policy issues. We find that:

- Voters reward campaign practices perceived as fair, and punish candidates for engaging in unfair attacks. No matter how an opponent responds, a candidate will always do best by making a fair charge.
- Given any initial charge, a candidate will do best by staying “above the fray” and not responding directly.
- An exchange of unfair charges makes it more likely that voters say they will stay home on election day.

These conclusions can serve as useful guidance to political candidates and political advisors who must choose among alternative campaign strategies in a context where negative and unfair tactics have seen increasing use.

Our findings regarding campaign “codes of ethics” and campaign conduct laws will be of interest to those in the public policy arena who are seeking ways to bring about reform in our political campaign. Clearly, measures to improve campaign conduct enjoy very solid public support—especially the proposed voluntary measures.

The findings have implications for electoral research, as well. The study demonstrates the power of a factorial vignette design for revealing the structure of judgements that voters use in evaluating campaign conduct. In the future, researchers should pay greater attention to voter perceptions of campaign conduct. In the ongoing controversy over negative campaign advertising, researchers should distinguish more clearly between negative or critical advertising and messages that voters perceive as unfair.

## Acknowledgements

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Bill Wood, Executive Director of SIPL, directs the Project on Campaign Conduct and gave overall direction to the survey effort. Dale Lawton, Assistant Director of the Project on Campaign Conduct, served as primary point of contact between SIPL and the Center for Survey Research. Mr. Lawton helped to draft the survey instruments for both Survey One and Survey Two, participated in designing the vignettes, and carried out the analysis of results from Survey One. The initial survey drafts were based in part on instruments used in another Pew-funded project on campaign conduct.<sup>6</sup>

Prof. Paul Freedman of the Department of Government and Foreign Affairs served as study director for the project. He developed and refined both survey instruments and conducted the analysis for Survey Two. Mr. Freedman wrote the first draft of this report.

Prof. Thomas M. Guterbock, Director of the Center for Survey Research and Associate Professor of Sociology, served as co-investigator for the project and oversaw the data collection by CSR. He assisted in study design, advised on question wording, questionnaire flow, demographics, and sample weighting, and edited this report as co-author.

Alison Meloy, Survey Operations Manager for CSR, managed the data collection for both surveys. She participated in developing the vignette design and planned and carried out two pre-tests of the vignette-based questionnaire used in Survey Two; these pre-tests yielded crucial information that helped to make the final questionnaire workable. Ms. Meloy managed the interviewing process for both surveys. Interviewing for Survey Two was supervised by Larry Hollen. Interviewing for Survey One was supervised by teaching assistants in Sociology and Government as part of their research training and teaching duties.

John C. Fries, Research Analyst at CSR, programmed both surveys into CSR's Ci3 CATI system, and prepared the data files for the vignette analysis. The programming, sample design, and analysis phases of Survey Two presented special programming and data management challenges to ensure proper randomization of the vignettes across interviews. This study could not have been completed without Mr. Fries's expertise and extra effort. Mr. Fries also made valuable contributions to the vignette design and wording. Brian Meekins,

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<sup>6</sup> See "Public Attitudes Toward a Code of Campaign Conduct in Ohio and Washington: Findings from a public opinion survey of 1600 registered voters June 1998." Conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates and Deardourff/The Media Company for the Project on Campaign Conduct. Report published on the World Wide Web at [www.campaignconduct.org](http://www.campaignconduct.org).

Research Analyst at CSR, also assisted with sample set-up and sample management for both surveys.

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The Center for Survey Research is responsible for any errors or omissions in this report. Questions may be directed to the Center for Survey Research, University of Virginia, 539 Cabell Hall, Charlottesville, VA 22903. CSR also may be reached by telephone at 804-924-6523; by electronic mail at [surveys@virginia.edu](mailto:surveys@virginia.edu), or via the World Wide Web at <http://www.virginia.edu/surveys> .

**Sample vignette:**

*The following script gives an example of the type of scenario that voters were asked to evaluate in the survey. Each respondent was asked to rate five vignettes. Candidate names were different in each vignette within an interview. Features of the vignette such as the party of the candidates and the nature of the charge and response were systematically varied across vignettes. Only two “set-ups” were included in each interview. The five vignettes in any given interview were randomly chosen from among 780 possible vignettes (12 charges X 13 responses X 5 set-ups). The variable passages are shown in italics in the example.*

Now I'd like to present you with a series of situation involving two candidates running for political office. Although these situations have been made-up for use in this survey, each of them could happen. After describing each situation I will ask you a few questions about the candidates and their campaigns. First, imagine it is an election year and in your area there are two candidates running for political office. I'll call them *Smith* and *Jones*.

[SETUP:] *First, imagine you have been following Smith's campaign and you agree with Smith's position on the issues that are important to you.*

[VIGNETTE:] *Imagine that during an election campaign Smith runs an advertisement, saying that Jones takes money from individuals with ethical problems. Jones responds with an advertisement criticizing Smith for past extramarital affairs.*

Given what you have heard about the candidates and their campaigns, who would you be more likely to vote for Smith, Jones, or would you not vote at all?

- 1 [NAME 1]
- 2 [NAME 2]
- 3 WOULD NOT VOTE
- 4 NEED MORE (NOT ENOUGH) INFORMATION [VOLUNTEERED]
- 8 DON'T KNOW
- 9 REFUSED

For each of the following statements about the candidates' advertisements and their campaigns, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree:

- Smith's advertisement was fair.
- Smith is running a negative campaign.
- Jones's advertisement was fair.
- Jones is running a negative campaign.
- Jones's response was smart politically.

- 1 STRONGLY AGREE
- 2 SOMEWHAT AGREE
- 3 SOMEWHAT DISAGREE

- 4 STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 5 NEED MORE INFORMATION [VOLUNTEERED]
- 9 DON'T KNOW/REFUSED

Now I have some questions about your overall view of the candidates.

Is your overall view of Smith very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

- 1 VERY FAVORABLE
- 2 SOMEWHAT FAVORABLE
- 3 NEUTRAL [VOLUNTEERED]
- 4 SOMEWHAT UNFAVORABLE
- 5 VERY UNFAVORABLE
- 9 DON'T KNOW/REFUSED

How about your view of Jones? Is your overall view of Jones very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

- 1 VERY FAVORABLE
- 2 SOMEWHAT FAVORABLE
- 3 NEUTRAL [VOLUNTEERED]
- 4 SOMEWHAT UNFAVORABLE
- 5 VERY UNFAVORABLE
- 9 DON'T KNOW/REFUSED