HOW LONG IS TOO LONG?: HOW THE LENGTH OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS IN THE UNITED STATES NEGATIVELY AFFECTS VOTER ENGAGEMENT

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HOW LONG IS TOO LONG?: HOW THE LENGTH OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS IN THE UNITED STATES NEGATIVELY AFFECTS VOTER ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Presidential campaigns in the United States have become exponentially longer in the past several decades. We have also seen a great decrease in political engagement, which in turn is weakening our democratic system. I argue that the long presidential campaign season is detrimental to voter participation and is creating feelings of negativity within the electorate. Several scholars have made claims that this is the case, but little to no evidence has been found to support these arguments. A multi-method approach was used, analyzing both Pew Research Center data, as well as original survey data. Results illustrate that Americans are disengaging with presidential campaigns, in part due to their negative feelings towards the length. This research highlights several findings related to political participation and the long campaign season, finding support for the three main hypotheses.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to Mom, Dad and Sarah.

Many thanks,

SHELBY E. HODGKINS
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Presidential campaigns are an integral part of the United States’ electoral system. The first campaign in 1791, took place behind closed doors and in a more private arena, while present day presidential campaigns are a public spectacle for all to see. Candidates spend months and even years on the road campaigning for office, creating a long and tedious campaign season. The League of Women Voters states, “according to the Washington Post, the day after Bob Dole lost to Bill Clinton in the November 1996 election, Alexander was on the phone raising money for his next run.”¹ Lamar Alexander was never elected president, yet this is a prime example of how presidential campaigning starts many years before the election. Only days after the election of Barack Obama it seemed that Sarah Palin was already starting her campaign for 2012.

Several scholars have cited the length of the campaign as being discouraging for both voters and candidates.² While accusations have been made, very little concrete evidence has been found to support them. It is common knowledge that candidates running for the executive office most likely have a strong background in politics. Many candidates are still in office when they launch their campaigns for the presidency, including senators, congressmen and women, and even the sitting president. These candidates essentially forego their current jobs to solely focus on their campaigns.

We saw this occur in the 2008 election, where Barack Obama, who at the time was a junior senator from Illinois, spent a majority of his first term in office campaigning for the

presidency. Even now, President Obama has had to spend a good amount of time while in office campaigning for the 2012 presidential election. If the people we elect to office are constantly spending their terms campaigning and not doing their jobs, then how can we expect our democratic system to flourish?

Holbrook states that, “what goes on between elections is more important than what goes on during the campaign.” I question whether this is currently the case, because the markers of when presidential campaigns actually start have been blurred greatly over the past decade. For the purposes of this study, the campaign season begins when the first politician announces his or her candidacy.

Many politicians have acknowledged the lengthy campaign cycle, such as when President Obama appeared on The View and stated, “we shouldn’t be campaigning all the time. There’s a time to campaign, and there’s a time to govern.” Even though Obama acknowledged this, later that day he hosted two fundraisers in Manhattan, New York.

Little research has been conducted on how the lengthy campaign cycle affects the views and actions of potential voters. Most research on campaigning has focused on whether campaigns are actually effective in persuading voters, as well as negative campaigning and

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5 Ibid.
effective campaign strategies. This study will investigate how the length of the presidential campaign season affects voter engagement. Patterson states, “The long campaign of today runs in spurts, taxes peoples attention, and dulls their sensibilities. It serves to frustrate learning, just as it dampens interest and, in the nominating period, the inclination to vote.”6 This study will further explore whether there is evidence for Patterson’s claims.

In order to understand how the length of presidential campaigns is affecting voter engagement, we must first clarify how we define voter engagement. This study understands voter engagement and participation as Verba et al. defines it: “…activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action - either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”

While very little concrete research has been done about the effects of the extended campaign cycle, scholars have debated about it for many years. Patterson found that many scholars feel that the long campaign season allows for voters to make more informed decisions.7 On the other hand, Klein states, “voters are losing interest, and in a democracy, apathy could be fatal.”8 This second camp of scholars believes that the long campaign season creates negative feelings among voters. These two rivaling arguments have been speculated for many years, yet no one has put forth detailed research to support either side.

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Bennett and Bennett also studied interest in presidential elections and found that the public remains fairly stable in how they pay attention to campaigns. They looked at surveys pertaining to the 1980 and 1984 elections and found that Americans’ interest in the campaigns were not very high, but remained the same throughout the season. This research was done in the 1980s and much has changed in how presidential campaigns are run.

This study hypothesizes that the length of the presidential campaign season has led to overwhelming voter disengagement in the United States. A multi-method approach was implemented in order to provide an in-depth look at when and how voters engage, as well as how the length of the campaign season affects their activities. Both Pew Research Center data and data from a locally distributed original online survey will be analyzed for patterns concerning the above issues.

This thesis will provide a clearer understanding of how the long presidential campaign season impacts voter participation and whether certain aspects of the campaign are more harmful than others. As Erber and Lau state, “alienation from the political system may challenge its legitimacy and, ultimately, its very existence.”9 In order for a functioning democracy, voters must engage with the government and its entities, and the length of the campaign season is potentially discouraging citizens. The findings of this research could help in possibly putting limits on presidential campaigns, which could in turn encourage potential voters to get involved.

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Research Question

Does the length of presidential campaigns in the United States have an impact on voter engagement?

Hypotheses and Findings

Due to the fact that little to no research has been done concerning voters’ feelings toward the length of presidential campaigns, this study incorporated two different sets of survey data to better understand how voters view campaigns. This study also aimed to explore voters’ attitudes towards campaigns in an attempt to better understand the effects of the extended campaign cycle on how and when voters engage. The overarching hypothesis for this study was that the length of presidential campaigns is correlated with voter disengagement.

Three main hypotheses were explored and supported through the findings in this study; the first being that voters only engage during certain points or events in the campaign (H1). The second hypothesis was that voters would have negative feelings towards some aspect of the long campaign cycle, or the length of the campaign cycle itself (H2). Finally, the third hypothesis, was voters who do not favor the length of the presidential campaign will engage politically at a lower level than those who do favor the length of the campaign (H3).

Evidence was found to support these hypotheses as well as my contention that the length of the presidential campaign does have a negative effect on voter engagement. I found that over 60% of attention paid to the presidential campaign occurs solely in the weeks leading up to the general election, supporting that voters only engage during certain points of the campaign. This study also found that favorability of the length of the campaign is a strong indicator of whether
one is more or less likely to participate. In general, voters are disengaging with the campaign, in part due to the extended campaign season.

Outline of Thesis Chapters

This thesis focuses on how the length of presidential campaigns in the United States affects voter engagement. A multi-method approach was used to better understand the effects of the length of the presidential campaign cycle in the United States on voter participation. This first chapter has introduced the problem of voter disengagement due to the lengthy presidential campaigns in the United States, reasons as to why this research is important, as well as the main hypotheses and findings for this study.

Chapter Two provides an in depth review of the literature concerning presidential campaigns and voter engagement. Past research on the length of presidential campaigns, how and when voters participate with the campaign, as well as reasons for possible disengagement are discussed in great detail in these sections.

Chapter Three details the multi-method approach used in this research. First, trends in the public’s attention to the 2008 presidential nominating campaign and general election were examined through analysis of existing Pew data. I conducted a pooled time series analysis of the Pew News Interest Index of attention paid to news about the presidential election in 2008. This data was a compilation of weekly surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center from January 2007 to the end of October 2008. This statistical analysis identified trends in when voters pay attention to the presidential election.

The second method used data from an original survey concentrating on the possible reasons behind the trends in data pertaining to voter participation during the presidential
campaign season. Survey questions solicited responses pertaining to the feelings voters have about the length of the presidential campaign as well as whether those feelings have an effect on how they engage with the campaign. A convenience snowball sample was used and the survey was distributed digitally through Survey Monkey.

Chapter Four discusses the important findings concerning voter engagement and campaign length in the study. The important findings from both the Pew data and original survey data are discussed in the context of the three main hypotheses. Support was found for all three hypotheses.

Finally, Chapter Five discusses conclusions concerning the consequences of voter disengagement with presidential campaigns, limitations in the study, future research, as well as possible solutions in shortening the length of presidential campaigns.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Candidates running for the office of President of the United States spend many months on the road campaigning for support and votes from the public. These extended campaigns can have detrimental effects on both the candidates and the voters. Bennett and Bennett state, “critics of lengthy campaigns point to at least three harmful results: the candidates are exhausted, campaign costs have sky-rocketed, and the public is bored.”\(^\text{10}\) The latter of these results points to a major problem in American politics: the disengagement of the public. Verba et al. define political engagement as “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”\(^\text{11}\) Political scientists have repeatedly found that political engagement is significantly lower in younger citizens.\(^\text{12}\)

Zukin et al. state, “Consequently, changes in the nature and scope of participation affect the quality of our democracy.”\(^\text{13}\) The importance of an engaged public is rooted in a representative democratic society, upon which the United States was founded.

Little research on campaigns has focused on how potential voters are affected by the extended campaign cycle. Patterson repeatedly cites statistics from The Vanishing Voter Project,


which is to date the only research that looks at the length of campaigns and their effects on how people vote. *The Vanishing Voter Project* was a study conducted by the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University from November 1999 to January 2001.\(^{14}\) This study looked at how involved voters were with the 2000 presidential campaign, but did not specifically look at voters’ feelings towards the length of presidential campaigns. This research is key to understanding how voters engage with and how attentive they are to presidential campaigns. Patterson’s research suggests that voters are somewhat engaged with the campaign season, but engagement tends to increase during exciting or important events. In order to better understand the long campaign season, we must first discuss what factors have led to such an extended cycle.

*A Brief History of Presidential Campaigns*

In understanding the lengthy campaign season and its effects, it is important to delve into the history of why an extended campaign cycle even exists. There is currently no fixed date for the starting of presidential campaigning, allowing candidates to essentially campaign for years before an election. Ideally candidates would start campaigning closer to the election, but if one does not start early he or she could lag behind and lose fundraising and volunteer recruitment opportunities, such as Reagan did in the 1980 election.\(^{15}\) In Europe, active campaigns only last

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for a maximum of two months, due to the nominating system, yet campaigns in America can last for over two years.\textsuperscript{16}

While there has never been an official start date for presidential campaigns, it seems as though the length of the campaign season has increased greatly over the past three decades. A key event in the lengthening of campaigns came about in 1968 in the form of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, which placed nominating of candidates in the hands of the voters.\textsuperscript{17} Prior to this, primaries were held in only a third of the states, and candidates were chosen through party caucuses, which were controlled by party leaders. The commission mandated that the presidential nominees would be chosen by the public, through state contests held within a year of the election. The number of states holding Democratic primaries increased from 17 in 1968, to 40 in the year 2000, and the number of states with Republican primaries increased from 16 in 1968, to 43 in 2000.\textsuperscript{18} This greatly increased public involvement in presidential politics.

While the McGovern-Fraser Commission greatly increased involvement of voters, it had the unintended consequence of significantly lengthening the campaign season. This means that candidates have to appeal to voters long before conventions and the general election and do well in party primaries if they hope to clench their party’s nomination. The commission also unintentionally undermined the party conventions, rendering them less important over time.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Patterson, Thomas E. \textit{The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty}. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. Print. 104.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
Another change that has affected the length of the campaign season is the practice of front-loading. Front-loading is when party caucuses and primary elections are repeatedly scheduled earlier, with the first ones occurring a full nine months before the general election. By moving their primaries to earlier dates, states attempt to have a greater influence on the party nominations. The 2008 campaign was the longest in history because of the front-loading that occurred during the presidential primaries. Although front-loading can make or break a campaign, it can become monotonous for voters. Patterson found that the overall turnout rate in presidential primaries has decreased from 30% in the 1970s to a mere 17% in 2000, largely due to front-loading. More recently, voter turnout in the contested 2008 primaries reached 30.2%, which is slightly lower than the record high of 30.9% in 1972.

Although front-loading has been a factor in the lengthening of the campaign season, most presidential hopefuls begin their campaigns years before the start of the primaries. A presidential campaign actually begins long before candidates officially announce that they are running.

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25 League of Women Voters. *Choosing the President 2008: a Citizen's Guide to the*
the earliest stages of the campaign, candidates attempt to create a positive image in both the eyes of their party and the voters. Candidates will attend important party functions as well as frequently give public speeches.\(^{26}\) The *League of Women Voters* states, “the goals of these early visits are to build name recognition, make important connections with party leaders, and create a foundation of support in states that traditionally have set the tone for the primary season.”\(^{27}\) This “invisible” campaign can begin as early as the day after a presidential election.\(^{28}\)

One last aspect of the extended campaign cycle is the notion that once elected, the President must constantly campaign to hold a positive image in the eyes of the public. This means that the sitting president essentially never stops campaigning. Patrick Caddell, a pollster working for President Jimmy Carter, first conceived the theory of a “permanent campaign” in 1976.\(^{29}\) Several years later, Sidney Blumenthal went on to state that the permanent campaign “…remakes government into an instrument designed to sustain an elected official’s public popularity.”\(^{30}\) We can clearly see this in many of the public appearances that President Obama has made while in office. An example can be seen in the wake of the successful raid that killed Osama bin Laden. On Thursday, May 5, 2011, President Obama visited “ground zero” in New York City, the site where the twin towers collapsed after terrorists hijacked two planes killing thousands of people. The point of this visit was to pay respect to those who died on September

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\(^{26}\) Ibid.

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.


While this could have been a more private event, Obama essentially campaigned and attempted to boost his image by making it a very public spectacle. In addition, his presidential campaign to visit troops abroad seemingly turned into another opportunity for a photo shoot. Any sitting president running for reelection will find an excuse to use an appearance to boost their image in the eyes of the voters.

Public Interest in Presidential Elections

Presidential elections occur every four years in the United States, and on the surface, the public seems to be engaged. Columbia University’s Bureau of Applied Social Research completed the first comprehensive analyses of voter interest in campaigns in 1940 and 1948. They found that although at the outset there appeared to be general stability in the public’s attention to the presidential campaign, individual-level data discovered greater instability in campaign interest.\(^\text{32}\)

Keeter and Zukin found that approximately one-third of the public was highly interested in the 1980 election, which they found to be true from the beginning of the primaries all the way through to the general election.\(^\text{33}\) Their data came from three waves of surveys conducted for the 1980 National Election Study by the CPA (Center for Political Studies). The study gauged levels of interest in the election on a scale of ‘Very much,’ ‘Somewhat,’ and ‘Not very much.’\(^\text{34}\) They

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found these results to be true before the primary season, during the primaries, and through to the general election. The major flaw with this data is that it is cross-sectional, meaning different people were surveyed in each wave. These results do not represent changes in individual interest over the course of the campaign.

Keeter and Zukin mention that different stages of the campaign might draw interest from different groups.\textsuperscript{35} For example, Democrats might not pay as much attention to the 2012 presidential primaries because Barack Obama is already the Democratic nominee. On the other hand, Republicans might pay more attention during this time because there are several candidates vying for the Republican nomination. Although they did not find overwhelming evidence to support this claim in the 1980 election, we might have different findings with the advent of new technologies such as the Internet and the ability for campaigns to narrowcast and microtarget specific groups and demographics. Patterson has also found that a majority of voters only pay attention to the exciting or important events that take place during a campaign season.\textsuperscript{36}

In October of 2008, the Pew Research Center found that the public steadily found the presidential campaign to be interesting. In February 2008, 70\% of the public found the campaign to be interesting. That percentage lowered to 59\% in April and then rose again to 68\% in mid-September.\textsuperscript{37} This increase in interest does not necessarily lead to an increase in engagement.

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In May 2012, the United States Census Bureau reported that 64% of citizens 18 years and older voted in the 2008 election.\(^{38}\) While this is not a statistically significant difference from 2004, it is an increase from voter turnout in 1996 and 2000. Bennett and Bennett state, “Because campaign interest is a prime determinant of turnout, it is possible that lengthy presidential contests may have contributed to the diminution of interest in campaigns, which in turn dampens voter participation.”\(^{39}\) According to Zukin et al. voter turnout has always been low among younger citizens, while older voters have a higher turnout rate on average, which has remained fairly stable over the past several decades.\(^{40}\)

*Are Campaigns Effective?*

Many scholars have theorized about the effects of the long campaign season, yet no research has been found to support the perception that voters are truly affected by the length. Most research concerning campaigns has dealt with whether they are effective in persuading voters to change their minds. Holbrook has spent many years studying these trends and has found that the most important determinants of the outcomes of campaigns are the state of the national economy and the current president’s approval rating.\(^{41}\) He goes on to state that campaigns do


\(^{41}\)Holbrook, Thomas M. "Do Campaigns Really Matter?" *The Electoral Challenge:* 15
matter, but more so in the congressional arena than the presidential. Another scholar, Finkel, reexamined the effects of presidential campaigns on voter choice in 1980, finding that less than 5% of voters changed their minds over the course of the campaign. On the other hand, Holbrook has also found that the day-to-day campaign events and activities do have an effect on how candidates stand in the polls and play important roles in shaping state-level results.

So if campaigns are not the determining factor in who wins a presidential election, then why do candidates spend a great deal of time, money, and effort on them? The answer to this question is simple; candidates with weak and short-lived campaigns almost never make it past the primaries. McClurg and Habel assert “The challenge facing candidates and their organizations is how to use their resources (time and money) to produce information environments (messages) that allow them to gain enough support (votes) in the right places in order to achieve that goal.” Essentially candidates have to begin campaigning early to secure any chance of being elected.

Months before a politician announces that he or she is running for office, they take part in what is known as the “money primary.” The “money primary” is the first major hurdle
candidates face and it determines whether their campaign will last in the long run. During this time, candidates scramble to raise money in order to increase campaign momentum and viability.\textsuperscript{46} While the importance of money and fundraising for campaigns will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, it is important to note the great emphasis placed on money months before a campaign is officially launched.

McClurg and Habel posit that being able to mobilize base voters in a party is key to running an effective campaign.\textsuperscript{47} Several academic studies have found that the mere practice of contacting voters has a profound effect in motivating people to go out and vote.\textsuperscript{48} The practices of microtargeting and narrowcasting have become popular in the more recent elections, where campaigns are able to cater to specific groups of people in order to appeal to them on an individual level. Polling, garnering volunteers, and increased visibility in the media is also important for campaigns, all of which require money and funds.

Turning our attention to the voters, we find that the long campaign season might actually stir up feelings of negativity and resentment. While some scholars have pointed out that voters become apathetic and lose interest with a long campaign season, others feel as though the lengthy campaigns help voters make more informed decisions.\textsuperscript{49} It is important to understand

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\textsuperscript{49} Patterson, Thomas E. \textit{The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of}
both of these arguments because they are crucial to identifying the effects of the extended campaign cycle. It is also important to understand why campaigns are so long and if this seemingly permanent campaign season can be changed.

Informing Voters

Dissemination of information is key during presidential campaigns, and some scholars believe the long campaign season is positive because it allows voters to sort through a great deal of information and come to more informed decisions. Many scholars have put forth that a well-informed electorate is important for a functioning democracy. Journalist Robert Friedman states, “people often complain about the length of our presidential campaigns, but that year-long test of endurance actually serves at least one important purpose: It reduces the risk that voters will make a rash decision they will come to regret not too much later.” For voters, campaigns are opportunities to collect information that can help them make informed choices, yet many voters do not take advantage of this. Unlike most democracies, Americans get two chances to vote, in the primary and general elections. This increased involvement should in theory, encourage voters to absorb more information over time and make better-informed decisions.

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51 Ibid.
Nadeau, Nevitte, Gidengil, and Blais observed that political campaigns are actually information campaigns. During political campaigns candidates compete to inform voters of the issues and their policy stances. According to Nadeau et al., the great emphasis on informing voters can be viewed as a specific type of information campaign. Labeling presidential campaigns as information campaigns highlights the great amount of political information that is made available to voters during this time as candidates attempt to educate voters about their stances and platforms. Holbrook sees campaigns as opportunities for voter education as campaigns use information to persuade the public. During this time, voters have the opportunity to gather relevant information that can in turn help them make more informed decisions.

Voters are essentially overloaded with information from campaigns and are confronted with the task of sorting through the messages. Owen states, “Voters’ perceptions and interpretations of campaign messages are determined largely by their personal attitudes, orientations, and preconceptions.” Owen studied media messages in campaigns and found that the people use a screening process to determine what messages and information are relevant to

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their needs. They are then able to seek out these forms of campaign communication and essentially ignore the rest.\textsuperscript{58}

Voter engagement is important in participatory democracies and an informed electorate has a great deal more potential than an uninformed one. While a longer campaign may seem more informative, many elements play key roles in determining how much information is gained by voters as well as whether that information impacts how they vote.\textsuperscript{59}

If lengthy campaigns do, in fact, lead to more informed voters, why are many citizens still pondering who to vote for on Election Day? Unlike European elections, which only last a maximum of two months, United States presidential campaigns last over two years.\textsuperscript{60} While the question of voter competence arises, past research has found that most citizens can make a distinction between what is more and less politically important, and that they are capable of making reasoned decisions after sorting through all the information.\textsuperscript{61} Existing literature on the topic has found that learning does take place during elections in some shape or form, furthering that voters are absorbing information.\textsuperscript{62}


Another problem we face in determining if voters are becoming more informed during the long campaign season is the truth that voters in “swing states” are exposed to heavier campaigning. This leads us to assume that voters in non-swing states are probably less informed, regardless of the length of the campaign. This heavy concentration of campaigning in states that could affect who is elected seemingly overloads voters through the use of appearances, events, and campaign advertisements. The less important states are thus left in the dust, possibly disproving the theory that longer campaigns produce a more informed electorate.

When Voters Decide

Scholars have found that those citizens who decide who they are voting for before the campaign even begins are less likely to be affected by the events and messages that take place leading up to the election. These decisions are usually based on predispositions such as party ideology or identification. In contrast, voters who are undecided at the start of the campaign are more susceptible to these messages and events. Fournier et al. label these voters as ‘campaign deciders.’

Fournier et al. found a strand of studies that illustrated that “Campaign deciders possess higher levels of attention to political ads and to campaign coverage in newspapers and on television.” While this does not necessarily mean that these voters will be persuaded, it does

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64 Ibid.
point out that they are paying greater attention to the campaign than voters who had already made decisions about their votes.

Within the group of ‘campaign deciders’ Fournier et al. determine that there are two subdivisions: early campaign deciders and late campaign deciders. Fournier et al. state, “Early campaign deciders often express high interest in the campaign, high attention to media coverage, and high levels of political information; while late campaign deciders are generally uninterested, inattentive, and uninformed.”

If voters are only tuning in to key events, then they are most likely not being exposed to or engaging with the great deal of information the candidates are disseminating. Patterson found that key events in a campaign are especially important to the engagement of those who are less interested in politics. He found that the gap in political involvement between those who are more or less interested lessened during key events, such as primaries, conventions, and debates.

Apathetic Voters

While long campaigns may or may not inform voters, many scholars have stated that they increase apathy and disengagement among the public. Many voters are not even paying attention during the early stages of the campaign season, unless they are deeply invested in politics. Patterson states, “Americans have grown to dislike almost everything about modern campaigns. They offer a litany of complaints: too much money, too much theater, too much fighting, and too

much deception.”\textsuperscript{69} All of these complaints are greatly drawn out as the campaign season has recently grown exponentially in length.

A year prior to the 2000 primary elections, many Americans had not given any thought to who they would vote for, despite media polls that suggested voters were invested.\textsuperscript{70} Patterson states, “when asked in our \textit{Vanishing Voter} survey in late 1999 why they were not following the campaign more closely, more than half the respondents indicated ‘it’s simply too early in the campaign.’”\textsuperscript{71} As previously stated, many voters pay attention to the important events in a campaign, and ignore the rest of it.

Scholars also assert that the extended campaign cycle wears voters out. While important campaign events create spurts of enthusiasm, after these events pass, voters lose interest. The \textit{Vanishing Voter} national surveys found that during the month after the conventions in 2000, issue awareness dropped by 22%.\textsuperscript{72} Of those respondents, many claimed that the 2000 campaign season was overall boring and uninformative, which in turn can create feelings of negativity.\textsuperscript{73}

Although there is not much empirical research concerning the notion that long campaigns are tedious and dull citizens’ interest, scholars have cited time and time again that this is the

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
In attempting to understand why voters might lose interest in long campaigns, we now turn to research on voter engagement.

What is Voter Engagement?

Voter engagement and voter participation have been used interchangeably throughout this study thus far, yet we have not discussed what these terms truly mean in present day politics. Conway states, “classical democratic theory assumes that citizens in a democratic state are interested in and participate in politics, are knowledgeable about the process of government and the proposed alternative solutions to public problems, and vote in accordance with a set of values or principles.” Some revisionists of democratic theory believe that because citizens do not concern themselves with most governmental issues, they are satisfied with the political process and its subsequent outcomes.

Conway defines political participation as “those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government.” This first definition emphasizes active involvement that is goal oriented, but Conway states that there are other forms of political participation that can be classified as passive. She contends that attending ceremonial activities, and even paying attention to what is happening in the government or in politics are passive forms of engagement. Thus, Conway

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76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.
would consider following political campaigns through the media as passive forms of political participation.  

With the advent of newer technologies, some scholars argue that the act of monitoring the campaign is a form of active participation, while others believe it is not participation at all. Hart contends that engaging with the campaign through television provides an illusion that one is close to and participating in politics. He believes that this illusion leaves the public frustrated and confused, which in turn hinders real political participation. While acknowledging Hart’s viewpoint, this study asserts that monitoring the campaign has become a form of active participation, especially with the advent of the Internet and use of news and social networking websites.

In 1996, Davis and Owen found that new media users were more politically knowledgeable and active than most citizens. While it is not possible to know if these new media users were drawn to politics because of their use of technology, or if they had predispositions towards politics and found the use of new media as a means to enhance their knowledge, Davis and Owen posit that it is probably a little of both. They also state that new media’s accessibility might actually attract new people to politics. The monitoring of presidential campaigns through new media has become a form of active participation, possibly encouraging the public to engage in a multitude of ways.

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78 Ibid.
In August of 2008, the *Pew Internet and American Life Project* found that nearly 63% of adults had participated in at least one political activity in the preceding 12 months. The survey included both civic and political engagement questions, listing 11 specific types of engagement: (1) sign a petition, (2) contact a national, state, or local government official about an issue, (3) work with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community, (4) attend a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs, (5) contribute money to a political candidate or party or any other political organization or cause, (6) be an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government, (7) attend a political rally or speech, (8) send a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine, (9) work or volunteer for a political party or candidate, (10) make a speech about a community or local issue, and (11) attend an organized protest. This research was done prior to the 2008 presidential election in August and found that as education and income levels increased, political participation in a wide range of activities also increased.

Verba et al. uncovered similar findings in their analysis of what kind of person is more likely to be politically engaged. They found that as education and family income increased, so did political engagement. Small differences were found in regards to gender, except when it came to political information. They found that men tended to be better informed than women.

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82 Ibid.

According to data from the *National Election Studies* in 2000, 42% of adult Americans took part in some type of political participation related to the presidential campaign.\(^{84}\) The most common form of participation was trying to persuade others concerning the election, with 34% of respondents admitting to engaging in this activity in the 2000 election.\(^{85}\)

Zukin et al. distributed their own surveys pertaining to political and civic engagement in 2002. They found that 33% of respondents took part in trying to persuade others in voter preference, similar results to those found by the *National Election Studies* of 2000. Zukin et al. found higher levels of political participation in other forms in comparison to the NES 2000 data. They found that 26% of respondents posted a house sign, or wore buttons or stickers in support of a candidate in 2000. They also found that 13% of people contributed money to a political party, organization, or candidate and 6% had volunteered for a candidate or political organization in the preceding 12 months.\(^{86}\)

While voter engagement has been studied using traditional measures of participation, the Internet has led us to view many online activities as political engagement. Leticia Bode studied social networking habits and political engagement of college undergraduates, specifically looking at the popular social networking website, Facebook. Bode found that, “intensely engaging with one’s Facebook community facilitates behaviors and activities which spur

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\(^{86}\) Ibid.
political participation of all kinds.” Bode created a scale to measure what she called “Facebook Intensity.” This scale consisted of four variables measured across six categories, which reflected frequency or number. The four variables asked about how often the respondent checks and updates their Facebook, how many people they have “friended,” as well as how many “groups” they were a part of on the website.

Bode distributed a survey to college students in 2008, which yielded 542 responses. She asked about time spent on Facebook, how participants used the social network, as well as questions pertaining to political interest, political knowledge, and habit of talking about politics with others. One of Bode’s important findings that is pertinent to my research is that Facebook use can and sometimes does have a positive effect on how the users engage politically. Bode found that “Facebook Intensity” was positively correlated with self-reported voting during the 2008 presidential primaries, while “time spent on Facebook” was negatively correlated. Bode stated that “...in order to be motivated to participate electorally, engagement with one’s Facebook network is required, above and beyond simply spending time on the site in a more superficial manner.” The more invested someone was in social networking on Facebook, the more likely they were to participate electorally in the primaries.

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88 Ibid.
While engagement is key to this research, motivations for disengagement are also important. Bennett and Bennett mentioned that one of the detrimental effects of lengthy campaigns is the exponential costs associated with them.\(^{92}\) We now turn to campaign fundraising and finance during the extended presidential campaign season.

**Campaign Spending**

Campaign funding is very important in determining the outcome of a political race.\(^{93}\) During most of the nineteenth century, parties and organizations, rather than candidates, raised campaign funds.\(^{94}\) Campaign finance reform did not gain momentum in recent times until 1971, when the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) was passed. FECA set a limit on the amount of money a candidate could spend on media advertising, restricted the amount of money a candidate could donate to his or her own campaign, strengthened disclosure laws, limited how much money corporations and unions could donate to candidates, and started the concept of volunteer political action committees (PACs).\(^{95}\)

In 1976, *Buckley v. Valeo* ruled that limiting campaign spending was infringement on free speech. It also ruled that there should be no limit as to how much a candidate can invest in

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Campaign finance reform was a hot button topic during the 1980s, yet little legislation was passed during that time. In 1996, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 1997 was introduced. This act is more famously known as McCain-Feingold. The act sought to set limits on campaign spending and ban soft money contributions. There was no limit on how much donors could give to a campaign as long as it went into soft money accounts. Soft money “allows political parties to spend as much as they want as long as the money goes to "party building activities," such as "get-out-the-vote" efforts and generic advertising, such as "issue" ads.”

McCain-Feingold was presented to the House and Senate many times, but it did not pass until 2002.

Finally, in 2002, the Bipartisan Reform Act of 2002 was signed into law. This act “banned the collection of unregulated soft money by national parties, raised the limits on contribution amount by individuals to candidates for federal office, and set regulations on issue ads, called ‘electioneering communication.’” While this was a step in the right direction, many politicians believe much more needs to be done to regulate campaign financing.

These days, candidates are constantly fundraising in order to sustain their expensive and lengthy campaigns. Super PACs transpired in January 2010, after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, allowing limitless corporate and union donations.

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spending on elections. These groups, known as super PACs or independent-expenditure-only committees (IEOCs) are basically allowed to accept unlimited donations and make unlimited expenditures with the intention of electing or defeating federal candidates. While Super PACs are not allowed to contribute funds directly to federal candidates or parties, they can spend money on behalf of a candidate.99 This means independent groups can spend limitless amounts of money on advertisements endorsing or attacking candidates.

With the advent of the Internet, candidates have had to hire specialists to create and manage a web presence. Shea and Burton found that the cost of winning a seat in the House of Representatives has nearly doubled in the past twenty years. While many question whether more money equates to more votes, it is important to highlight that more money allows candidates to reach more voters. Winning an election is about mobilizing voters and reaching undecided voters, thus more money allows candidates to do exactly this.100

In 1976, candidates spent approximately $171.0 million dollars during the span of the presidential campaign. Two decades later, in 1996, this number had increased to $425.7 million. Most recently, the 2008 election shattered past numbers, with candidates raising and spending more than $1 billion dollars.101 The 2008 campaign was the costliest in history, with $5.3 billion in spending by candidates, political parties and interest groups on both the congressional and

presidential races. That number marks a 27% increase over the $4.2 billion spent during the 2004 presidential campaign. The Center for Responsive Politics found that the amount spent on the presidential race alone was $2.4 billion after all candidates and related expenses were included.102

As previously mentioned, candidates must begin fundraising months before they officially announce their campaigns. The “money primary” is essentially the race to raise funds that will in turn increase campaign momentum and visibility. The amount of money raised by candidates then has a “winnowing effect” in determining which candidates are competitive and viable.103 Along with this, both Jamieson and Goff cite the importance of money as a determinant of how much media coverage the candidate will receive.104 Goff states, “The necessity of campaign fund-raising for candidate survival, viability, and success during the pre-candidacy and early candidacy phases has created the new politics of the early presidential nomination process that today dominates presidential selection.”105 The ability to successfully fundraise early then becomes a main predictor of how well a candidate will fare in the election. Money is very important for campaigns, yet the exorbitant amount spent during presidential

elections possibly creates negative feelings in the minds of voters.

Conclusions

History has shown us that many factors came into play in the lengthening of presidential campaigns. Scholars have claimed that the long campaign season is detrimental to voter engagement, yet very little quantitative research has been provided. Some political scientists argue that long campaigns allow for a more informed electorate, while others posit that voters become tired and apathetic. What we do know is that the longer campaign has forced candidates to fundraise early and often, increasing the amount of money spent on campaigns over the past several decades exponentially. This chapter has extensively covered the literature pertaining to the topics of the long presidential campaign and political engagement. The next chapter will discuss the multi-method approach used for this study.

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CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A multi-method approach was used to better understand the effects of the length of the presidential campaign cycle in the United States on voter participation. First, I examined trends in the public’s attention to the 2008 presidential nominating campaign and general election. I conducted a pooled time series analysis of the Pew News Interest Index of attention paid to news about the presidential election. I also analyzed four other variables of interest pertaining to feelings about the 2008 presidential campaign. This data was a compilation of weekly surveys conducted by the *Pew Research Center* from January 2007 to the end of October 2008. This statistical analysis identified trends in when voters pay attention to the presidential election. Specific events were pinpointed and incorporated into the pooled time series model in order to assess their influence on voters’ attention to the campaign.

The second method used a survey concentrating on the possible reasons behind the trends in data pertaining to voter participation during the presidential campaign season. Survey questions aimed to elicit responses pertaining to the feelings voters have about the length of the presidential campaign as well as whether those feelings have an effect on how they engage with the campaign. A convenience snowball sample was used and the survey was distributed digitally through *Survey Monkey*. 
Pew Data Methods

Campaign News Interest

I performed a secondary analysis of aggregate statistics compiled by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press that focuses on attention paid to news about the 2008 presidential election. The News Interest Index surveyed participants weekly from January 19, 2007 to November 3, 2008. The News Interest Index aims at gauging the public’s interest in and reaction to major news events. This project was conducted in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism’s News Coverage Index, which is a continuous content analysis of the news. The News Interest Index survey collected data from Friday through Monday to determine interest in the most popular stories of the week.

The News Interest Index surveys a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older. The surveys are conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). I analyzed these data to determine if there were trends in when voters pay attention to the presidential campaign. This analysis will be used to determine if the length of the presidential campaign is affecting the public’s level of engagement and if voters are only paying attention to certain events during the course of the campaign. The data are based on a purposive sample that surveyed the same people weekly for the time period stated above about their news consumption. Pew surveyed 1,026 people.

I chose to analyze question 3f, which asked participants about attention paid to news about the presidential election. Question 3 stated, “As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very
closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely.” Part F of this question asked about “News about the presidential election.”

I created my own data set from the weekly percentages provided by Pew. I chose to only analyze the “very closely” responses in order to determine if and when fluctuations among these participants occurred. I manually entered the percentages into SPSS as decimals. Due to the fact that I created my own data set from the Pew data, no transformations were made. In creating the data set I was unable to use the time frames that Pew provided because SPSS formatting only allows for a single date to be entered per case. I chose to use the first day of each week when entering the data into SPSS. I did, however, delete one of the cases in the data set because it was the only time the question was asked in a different way. It asked about attention paid to the candidates in the election, instead of news paid to the presidential election, which was the week of October 24 to October 27, 2008. A total of 91 cases were used in this analysis.

**Dummy Variables**

I also created several dummy variables in order to account for special time periods that might be influencing the data. The dummy variables I created are as follows: (1) *Candidates Announce they are Running*, (2) *Super Tuesday*, (3) *Primaries*, (4) *Iowa Caucus*, (5) *Candidates Announce Running Mates*, (6) *Conventions*, and (7) *General Election*.

The first dummy variable, *Candidates Announce they are Running*, includes the dates that each of the top three candidates for each party (Republican and Democrat) announced that they were running for President. This includes John McCain (March 3, 2007), Mike Huckabee

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(January 28, 2007), Mitt Romney (February 13, 2007), Barack Obama (February 10, 2007), and Hillary Clinton (January 20, 2007). It was my original intent to include John Edwards, but he declared he was running on December 28, 2006 and my data do not begin until January 19, 2007.

The second dummy variable, Super Tuesday, includes Super Tuesday and the week after. Super Tuesday was on February 5, 2008 and the dummy variable ranges from February 8, 2008 to February 18, 2008. The third dummy variable, Primaries, includes all of the primaries for the 2008 election. This includes all dates between January 3, 2008 and June 16, 2008. The fourth dummy variable, Iowa Caucus, includes the actual date of the caucus (January 3, 2008) as well as one week before and two weeks after (December 14, 2007 to January 21, 2008).

The fifth and sixth dummy variables, Candidates Announce Running Mates and Conventions, were found to include the exact same dates, and thus I only used Conventions in my analysis. The dates included were August 29, 2008 (Republican) and August 23, 2008 (Democrat).

The final dummy variable I created was General Election. This begins at the first convention and ends at the week leading up to the election (August 22, 2008 to November 3, 2008).

Data Analysis

I completed a pooled time series analysis on the data. I ran multiple OLS regressions and the table below illustrates the different iterations I looked at as I tried to find the best fit. I tried to find the best fit for the model in de-trending the data to better identify the factors that caused spikes. I used a variety of dummy variables to test this in OLS as illustrated in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1: Pew Data OLS Regression Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Terms</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ Change</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa + Announce</td>
<td>.246 ↑</td>
<td>.522</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.998</td>
<td>1.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa + Announce + Primaries</td>
<td>.258 ↑</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.150</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>1.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries</td>
<td>.247 ↓</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries + Announce</td>
<td>.256 ↑</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries + Announce + Conventions</td>
<td>.282 ↑</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.979</td>
<td>1.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries + Announce + Conventions + General</td>
<td>1.171 ↑</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.783</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>.940</td>
<td>1.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries + Conventions + General</td>
<td>1.169 ↓</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.786</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>1.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries + Conventions + General + Announce + Super Tuesday</td>
<td>1.236 ↑</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>.885</td>
<td>1.130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After running many combinations of the independent time-events, I found events that indicated the Candidates Announce they are Running, Super Tuesday, Primaries, Conventions, and General Election improved the Durbin-Watson score (1.236) significantly from the original starting point and other combinations (indicated by the arrows next to the statistic in Table 3.1 above). I also determined that although the variable Candidates Announce they are Running was not statistically significant, it created more specificity in the final model. At one point I removed
the variable and realized it actually increases the Durbin-Watson when it is included in the model.

I also created four other dummy variables in order to analyze the means of attention paid to the campaign during four specific time periods of the campaign. The four variables were (1) Pre-Primaries, (2) Primaries, (3) Pre-Conventions, and (4) General Election. For the purposes of this study, the Pre-Primaries variable began on January 19, 2007 and ended on December 17, 2007. The Primaries variable included all of the primaries for the 2008 election. This includes all dates between January 3, 2008 and June 16, 2008. The Pre-Conventions variable covered the period of time after the primaries and before the conventions, which was from June 20, 2008 to August 18, 2008. The General Election variable began at the party conventions and ended the week of the presidential election, which was from August 22, 2008 to November 3, 2008. These variables were compared using an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test in SPSS to achieve a simultaneous examination of difference in means for attention paid to news about the 2008 presidential election. This comparison will further illustrate the differences in attention paid to the campaign during the four specific time periods mentioned above.

Other Variables of Interest

Using the same data set I also analyzed another set of questions. Question 9 stated, “How would you describe the presidential election campaign so far – is it…” It then asked about four different variables: (1) interest, (2) negativity, (3) information, and (4) length. Question 9a asked whether the campaign was “interesting” or “not interesting.” Question 9b asked if the campaign was “too negative” or “not too negative.” Question 9c asked if the campaign was “informative” or “not informative.” Question 9d asked if the campaign was “too long” or “not too long.” Due
to the fact that these questions were not asked on a weekly basis and that they were not all asked on the same dates, the data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel to create visual displays of trends. These results will also be compared to results of my own survey where these Pew Research Center questions were also asked, which will be described in greater detail in the next section.

Survey Methodology

In order to begin assessing the relationship between the length of presidential campaigns and political engagement, an original survey was created and distributed digitally. The second method used a survey concentrating on the possible reasons behind the trends in data pertaining to voter participation during the presidential campaign season. The survey can be found in Appendix A on page 82. Survey questions aimed to elicit responses pertaining to the feelings voters have about the length of the presidential campaign, as well as whether those feelings have an effect on how they engage with the campaign. Specific questions pertaining to when voters engage with the campaign and how they engage were used, as well as questions about whether participants feel the campaign is too long and how that affects their potential engagement. The survey consisted of 20 questions, ranging in scope from behaviors online, to behaviors on social media, to general participatory behaviors offline, as well as basic controls and demographics. Respondents reported the survey took about ten minutes to complete. A detailed description of the survey measures can be found below.

The survey was taken online by 227 participants over the course of two weeks. The survey remained in the field from February 15, 2012 to February 29, 2012. A convenience
sample was used and the survey was distributed digitally through Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey is a digital survey template that allows for the collection of data on the Internet.

Participants were prompted to take the survey through the use of personal email, Facebook, as well as my peer network in the Communication, Culture, and Technology program at Georgetown University. This snowball gathering method allowed for a large sample size. A recruitment message was sent out using my personal email, soliciting people to participate in the study, as well as send it on to their peers. An event was also created on Facebook using the same recruitment message.

The participants ranged from age 19 to age 88. The sample was 92.6% white, 1.3% black or African American, and 6% other. Most participants were fully employed or currently enrolled as students. Further descriptive statistics can be found at the beginning of Chapter 4.

**Survey Measures**

Survey measures were a combination of questions taken from prior studies, as well as newly created questions. Questions pertaining to traditional forms of political engagement, such as signing a petition or participating in a protest or rally, were taken from Zukin et. al. and the Pew Internet and American Life Project. Questions looked at both civic and political engagement questions, listing 11 specific types of engagement: (1) sign a petition, (2) contact a national, state, or local government official about an issue, (3) work with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community, (4) attend a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs, (5)

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contribute money to a political candidate or party or any other political organization or cause, (6) be an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government, (7) attend a political rally or speech, (8) send a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine, (9) work or volunteer for a political party or candidate, (10) make a speech about a community or local issue, and (11) attend an organized protest.109

Newer types of political engagement have come about in the past decade, especially with the rising popularity of social media. Questions asking about political engagement and social media habits came from a forthcoming study by Leticia Bode at the University of Wisconsin.110 Questions asked about social media use for political reasons, as well as other forms of engagement that take part using the Internet.

One set of questions asked participants to determine when they pay attention during the campaign. This question is on a four-point scale from “a lot” to “not at all.” It asks about attention paid to (1) primary debates, (2) party primaries, (3) Super Tuesday, (4) party conventions, (5) general debates, and (6) the last week before the election. These questions coincide with the dummy variables created during my prior analysis of Pew Research Center for the People & the Press data about attention paid to news about the 2008 campaign.

Additionally, several variables measuring respondents’ political leanings in general were included, in order to make certain that the relationships we are witnessing are not just random


expressions of some basic tendency to be political or to engage in political behaviors.

Respondents were asked in several different fashions whether they consider themselves to be politically interested and engaged. Most questions pertaining to engagement were asked on a “yes” or “no” scale. Participants were plainly asked if they had taken part in any of the following activities in the past 12 months. These questions aim to illustrate that many people do not take part in many traditional forms of political engagement, but tend to take part in some form of Internet engagement.

Four questions pertaining to the presidential campaign were taken from the Pew Research Center’s News Interest Index. All four measures came from question 9, which stated, “How would you describe the presidential election campaign so far – is it…” It then asked about four different variables: (1) interest, (2) negativity, (3) information, and (4) length.111 Finally, the questions pertaining to demographics were taken from *Pew Internet and American Life Project*.

This multi-method approach provided a detailed understanding of how and when voters engage with the presidential campaign, as well as how the length of the campaign affects voter engagement. This chapter has covered the specific methods used in this study. The next chapter will discuss the pertinent findings relevant to the three main hypotheses of this study.

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CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

A multi-method approach was used to find support for the three main hypotheses of this study, which are: (1) voters only engage during certain points or events in the campaign, (2) voters will have negative feelings towards some aspect of the long campaign cycle, or the length of the campaign cycle itself, and (3) voters who do not favor the length of the presidential campaign will engage politically at a lower level than those who do favor the length of the campaign. This chapter will cover the main findings of this study, examining both Pew data findings and original survey findings.

Below you will find key descriptive statistics from my original survey, as well as important findings and discussion pertinent to each of the three main hypotheses.

Descriptive Statistics

The original online survey created for this study was completed by 229 participants. Of those participants, 37.6% (86) were male, and 62.4% (143) were female. Participants’ age ranged from 19 to 88. When asked about education, 51.5% of participants reported they had a Bachelor’s degree, 34.1% reported they had a Graduate degree, 9.2% reported they had some college but no degree, 3.5% reported they had an Associates degree, and a mere 1.7% reported to having a High School degree or its equivalence. When asked about employment, 59% of respondents were employed full-time, 23.6% were students, 8.7% were employed part-time, 6.1% were retired, and 2.6% were not employed for pay. When asked about race, 92.6% of respondents were White, 2.6% were Asian, 2.6% were from multiple races, and 1.3% were Black
or African-American. Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia were represented in the sample.

Questions pertaining to politics asked about political party preference, political views, and voting behavior. Exactly 40.6% of participants reported they were Democrat, 27.9% reported they were Republican, and 25.3% reported they were Independent. When asked about political views, 38.9% reported to be Moderate, 24.9% reported to be Liberal, 19.7% reported to be Conservative, 10.5% reported to be Very Liberal, and 4.4% reported to be Very Conservative. Ninety-three percent of participants were registered to vote and 84.3% voted in the 2008 presidential election.

*Participation Variables*

Thirty-two variables were used to measure political participation. These questions asked participants whether they had taken part in the listed activities in the past 12 months. Of the 32 variables, “discuss the presidential election with other people in person” was reported to have been done by 91.7% of respondents. This was followed by “follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns on the Internet (80.8%)” and “follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns on television (80.3%).” The least popular forms of participation were “participated in a political protest activity (10.0%),” “work or volunteer for a political party or candidate (10.9%),” and “exchanged political views on a discussion board or group wall (12.7%).”

The full table containing the descriptive percentages pertaining to the participation measures can be found in Appendix B on page 88.
Campaign Length Variable

One variable asked specifically about the relationship between campaign length and political participation. This question stated, “how much of an effect does the length of the presidential campaign have on how you engage politically?” Of male participants, 22.1% responded stating that the length of the campaign had some type of an effect on how they engage. Of female participants, 41.5% responded stating that the length of the campaign had some type of an effect on how they engage.

Of those identifying as conservative, 17.3% responded stating that the length of the campaign had some type of an effect on how they engage, while 21.5% of moderates and 25.1% of liberals felt the same way. When asked about party identification, 19.9% of Republicans, 26.1% of Democrats, and 16.1% of Independents felt that the length of the presidential campaign had some type of an effect on how they engage.

Hypothesis I

\[ H_1: \text{Voters only engage during certain points or events in the campaign} \]

Several factors contribute to finding support for this hypothesis. Both the Pew data and my original survey data overwhelmingly illustrated that the public only pays attention to the presidential campaign right before the General Election.

The Pew data came from the omnibus News Interest Index, which focused on attention paid to news about the 2008 presidential election. I ran the frequencies and created a line graph to depict patterns in the data over time. I noticed that there were two large spikes in the data, indicting early in my analysis that attention paid to news about the presidential election is not constant and that there might be external factors causing changes. I determined that the two
spikes were around the time of the primaries and the general election. As Figure 4.1 illustrates, the data are skewed greatly towards the dates closer to the election, possibly finding early support for my hypothesis.

Figure 4.1: Pew Attention Paid to News about the Campaign

I ran a pooled time-series analysis in order to identify trends in the data that were time related. I identified possible events during the 2008 campaign season that could explain the spikes in the data and created dummy variables to represent these independent time-events. I originally created seven dummy variables, but found that a combination of five formed the best model. After running many combinations of the independent time-events, I found that the events *Candidates Announce they are Running, Super Tuesday, Primaries, Conventions, and General*
Election improved the Durbin-Watson score (1.236) significantly from the original starting point and other combinations. A pooled time-series analysis employs the use of multiple OLS regression tests to find the best fitting model. In this case, the five variables mentioned above most accurately explained the variance in those who paid “very close” attention to news about the presidential election. These five variables were used in the final model.

I did a block OLS regression model in the end to see if it better specified how each variable affected the $R^2$ Change. The numbers indicate that the General Election variable had the greatest affect on the overall model, by increasing the explanatory power of the model by 61.5%. As you can see in Table 4.1, the other four variables contribute very little to the final $R^2$ Change, indicating that the General Election draws the most attention from those paying attention to news.

Table 4.1: Pew Final OLS Regression Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Terms</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ Change</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Announce</td>
<td>.318</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announce + Primaries</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announce + Primaries + Super Tuesday</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announce + Primaries + Super Tuesday + Conventions</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>1.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announce + Primaries + Super Tuesday + Conventions + General</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>1.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Durbin-Watson for Model: 1.236
The statistics indicate that there are events that influence attention paid to the presidential election. The five dummy variables in the final model are statistically significant and improved the model’s heteroskedasticity by a substantial margin, showing support that something happened during the selected time periods that were related to time. As illustrated in the second table above, the General Election variable contributed the most in explaining variance in the model (61.5%). The second most contributing variable was Primaries, which is to be expected because there is a lot of news about the campaigns during that time period that spans from January to June. The Primaries variable contributed in explaining 13.8% of the variance in the model, which I find to be very low considering how important the early primaries were in 2008 for both Republican and Democratic candidates. The Conventions variable only contributed 2.8% in the explanatory power of the model, which makes sense considering conventions have become outdated campaign events that have lost popularity over time.112

The least contributing variables were Super Tuesday with 0.9% and Candidates Announce they are Running with 1.1%. I found it interesting that Super Tuesday contributed 0.9% to the overall model because it is such a hyped and talked about event. There is a usually great amount of news about the election leading up to Super Tuesday. Maybe because front-loading, or the practice of moving primaries or caucuses to earlier dates, has been occurring in the past few elections, people are disengaging early in the primary season. After the initial excitement of the first primary (Iowa Caucus), voters might get bored and tune out until the conventions or general election campaign. Also, Super Tuesday is most relevant to people in

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participatory states. Twenty-four states held their primaries or caucuses on Tuesday, February 5, 2008, which was the largest Super Tuesday in history to date. One would think with so many delegates at stake, interest in Super Tuesday would contribute more than 0.9%.

The ANOVA test, or comparison of means, better illustrates the mean differences in attention paid to news about the election across the four specific time periods. In order to determine if different levels of attention was paid to the election during different time periods, I created four distinct time period variables and compared their means. The four time periods were (1) Pre-Primaries, (2) Primaries, (3) Pre-Conventions, and (4) General Election. The Pre-Primaries variable began on January 19, 2007 and ended on December 17, 2007. The Primaries variable included all of the primaries for the 2008 election. This includes all dates between January 3, 2008 and June 16, 2008. The Pre-Conventions variable covered the period of time after the primaries and before the conventions, which was from June 20, 2008 to August 18, 2008. The General Election variable began at the party conventions and ended the week of the presidential election, which was from August 22, 2008 to November 3, 2008. When comparing the means we can determine that a higher mean score relates to a higher level of attention paid to the election.

Supporting previous findings, the General Election time period yielded the highest mean (.4910), followed by the Primaries (.3513), Pre-Conventions (.2911), and finally Pre-Primaries (.2058). As previously stated, the higher the mean score, the higher the level of attention paid to the event. The General Election time period had a significantly higher mean than any of the other time periods, further supporting that the public only pays attention to the campaign in the weeks leading up to the election as seen in Figure 4.2.
The evidence presented shows that there are periods of time during the campaign where attention paid to news about the election is very low. These findings support the first general hypothesis for this study, which was that voters only engage during certain points or events in the campaign. I found that people tune into campaigns only during especially relevant time periods, such as when something significant is happening. The data indicate that even during a campaign that has been cited as receiving high interest from the public, it was not until the general election that the highest percentage of the public tuned in to the campaign.

Although I cannot make a generalization about all elections, I found patterns in the 2008 Pew data that suggest that much of the public does not engage with the campaign until only a few weeks before the General Election. For the purposes of this study, the General Election variable included the time period after the conventions leading up to Election Day (August 22, 2008 to November 3, 2008).
Results from my original survey support these findings as well. Participants were asked how much attention they pay to the presidential campaign during the following events: primary debates, party primaries, Super Tuesday, party conventions, general debates, and the last week before the general election. An astounding 90.9% of participants admitted to paying attention during the last week before the election, while 75.1% paid attention during general debates, 54.9% paid attention during the party conventions, 58.6% paid attention during Super Tuesday, 65.8% paid attention during party primaries, and 63.7% paid attention during primary debates, as seen in Figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4.3: Attention Paid to Campaign Events

![Bar Chart: Attention Paid to Campaign Events](chart.png)

While these numbers may seem fairly high, they are a combination of the “a lot” and “somewhat” responses provided for participants. Results from my original survey also support the hypothesis because again, the General Election time period received the greatest amount of attention in comparison to the other events. Interest in the election jumped 15% from the general
debates to the General election time periods, which is a drastic increase considering they occur so close together.

Both Pew data and my original survey data found support for the hypothesis that voters only engage during certain points or events in the campaign. The public is not significantly engaged with the campaign until the weeks leading up to the general election.

*Hypothesis II*

\[ H_2: \text{Voters will have negative feelings towards some aspect of the long campaign cycle, or the length of the campaign cycle itself}. \]

Four separate Pew variables pertaining to the presidential campaign were analyzed for existing patterns. These variables were interest, negativity, information, and length. As previously stated, these variables were not measured on the same dates across the Pew News Interest Index in 2008.

The first variable, interest, was first measured in April of 2007 and it was found that 34% of respondents found the campaign to be interesting. Interest rapidly increases in February of 2008, during the Primary season, to 70%, but drops to 59% in April 2008. Interest picks up again in September 2008 to 68%. These trends are illustrated in Figure 4.4.
Results from my original survey completed in March 2012 found that 41.6% of participants found the election to be “interesting,” 29.9% found it to be “dull,” and 28.5% found it to be neither interesting nor dull, as seen in Figure 4.5 below. Findings from my original survey support Pew’s findings in that the public finds the campaign to be interesting. These trends are interesting because if the public finds the campaign to be interesting, we would expect the public to be participating at a higher level, which is not the case. In this case, campaign interest does not seem to lead to participation, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.
The second variable, negativity, was asked three times over the course of the campaign. In February 2008, 28% of respondents felt the campaign was too negative, this number increased to 50% in April 2008, then dropped to 43% in September 2008. These trends are illustrated in Figure 4.6.
Results from my original survey found that 58.9% of participants found the election to be “too negative,” 17.8% found it to be “not too negative,” and 23.3% found it to be neither too negative nor not too negative as seen in Figure 4.7 below.

Figure 4.7: Campaign Negativity Comparison
The third variable, information, asked whether participants felt the campaign was informative. This question was only asked twice over the course of the campaign. In February 2008, 65% of respondents felt the campaign was informative, this number dropped to 54% in September 2008. These trends are illustrated in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8: Pew Campaign Information

![Pew Campaign Information Graph](image)

Results from my original survey found that 31.5% of respondents found the election to be “informative,” 48.6% found it to be “not informative,” and 19.9% found it to be neither as seen in Figure 4.9 below. These results differ from Pew’s findings in that a majority of respondents to my original survey currently find the campaign to be not informative, while Pew respondents found the campaign to generally be informative. The 2008 primary season was very exciting, with many candidates vying for their party’s nomination, while the current primary season is only engaging for the Republican Party. Respondents who are not engaging with the primary season because they are not Republicans might find it to be not informative, possibly explaining the differences in the data.
The fourth and final variable, length, was first measured in April 2007 and it was found that 59% of respondents found the campaign to be ‘too long.’ This number increased to 66% in October 2007, then slightly dropped to 57% in February 2008. The final time this question was asked was in April 2008, where 65% of respondents found the campaign to be ‘too long.’ These trends are illustrated in Figure 4.10.
Figure 4.10: Pew Campaign Length

Results from my original survey found that 66.4% of participants felt the election was “too long,” 11.7% felt it was “not too long,” and 22.0% found it to be neither as seen in Figure 4.11 below. The Pew results pertaining to campaign length were supported by my original survey results, finding that a majority of the public find the campaign season to be too long. The premise of this research was to find if the public acknowledged the campaign season to be long, and understand how the length affected their participation. The data shows that the public has strong feelings about the length and understand the campaign to be too long.
As seen in the figures above, the public has negative feelings towards the campaign overall. While my original survey data and the Pew data do not agree on all fronts, the fourth question overwhelmingly illustrates that the public thinks the campaign season is too long.

Both Pew data and results from my original survey found that the public finds the campaign season to be too long. In order to better understand voters’ feelings towards the length of the campaign season, I created four variables that asked specifically about campaign length favorability. Further support for this hypothesis can be found in analysis of four campaign favorability variables in my original survey. The trends in these variables illustrate that the public in general has negative feelings towards the long campaign season. Table 4.2 illustrates that people are less likely to get involved over the length of the campaign. It also shows that the public loses interest and feels that the campaign wastes money because it is too long.
Table 4.2: Campaign Length Favorability Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The longer the presidential campaign goes, the more likely I am to get involved</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The longer a presidential campaign goes, the more likely I am to lose interest</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The length of the presidential campaign allows me to become more informed</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The length of the presidential campaign wastes money</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The trends in Table 4.2 illustrate that a majority of respondents were not favorable towards the length of the campaign. An astounding 86.9% of respondents not likely to get involved with the longer campaign and 63.3% were found to lose interest during the long campaign season. Interestingly, 56.7% of respondents felt that the long campaign season did not allow for them to become more informed, contrary to scholarly claims that a longer campaign season creates a more informed electorate. While not surprising, but still important, 88.9% of respondents felt that the long campaign season wastes money.

Support for the second hypothesis was found through both Pew data and data from my original survey. Voters were found to have negative feelings towards some aspect of the long campaign cycle, or the length of the campaign cycle itself, whether it be related to learning, money, involvement, or interest.
Hypothesis III

$H_3$: Voters who do not favor the length of the presidential campaign will engage politically at a lower level than those who do favor the length of the campaign.

In order to find support for this hypothesis, I created several indexes to explain the different dimensions of political participation, as well as an index that measures campaign length favorability. Multiple OLS Regression models were run in order to identify the relationships between these variables and overwhelming support was found for the hypothesis. The following is a discussion of the indexes as well as the findings pertinent to this hypothesis.

Omnibus Political Participation Index

In order to gauge voter engagement I created an index consisting of 27 political participation items. These items were measures that came from previous research conducted by Zukin et al.,\textsuperscript{113} the Pew Internet and American Life Project\textsuperscript{114} and Leticia Bode.\textsuperscript{115} I ran a reliability analysis and found the Cronbach’s Alpha to be .915, which is very strong and indicates that the index is highly reliable. The specific items used in the index can be found in Appendix C on page 91. This index was used to analyze voter engagement along with four other indexes, which are discussed below.


Participation Indexes

I ran a factor analysis of the 32 variables in the participation index to determine if there were different dimensions of engagement. I found there to be five dimensions of political engagement. One of the indexes was removed from the analysis because it did not specifically pertain to political engagement and was not a significant model. I created four indexes that each measured different types of political participation: (1) traditional campaign activity, (2) social media activity, (3) traditional media activity, and (4) new media activity. A breakdown of the specific variables in each index can be found in Appendix C on page 91.

A reliability analysis was run on the variables in each index to determine how reliable each index was. Table 4.3 illustrates the strength of reliability that was found for each index. The social media activity index was found to be the most reliable, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .856. All four indexes were found to be reliable and I was able to use them for further analysis of participation.

Table 4.3: Reliability Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index Name</th>
<th># of Variables</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Campaign Activity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Activity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Media Activity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Media Activity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.696</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Campaign Length Favorability Index

The favorability index was created using four variables that asked participants about their feelings towards the length of the campaign. Participants were asked to agree or disagree to the following four statements: (1) the longer a presidential campaign goes, the more likely I am to
get involved, (2) the longer a presidential campaign goes, the more likely I am to lose interest, (3) the length of the presidential campaign allows me to become more informed, and (4) the length of the presidential campaign wastes money. I ran a reliability analysis on the index and found it to be moderately strong with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .686.

I then ran a bivariate correlation of the four variables with the omnibus participation index in order to gauge whether there were significant relationships between the variables. The first variable pertained to length and involvement and was found to have a Pearson correlation coefficient of .179. Although this is a weak correlation it is positive and is statistically significant at the .011 level. We can infer that those who agree to the statement “the longer a presidential campaign goes, the more likely I am to get involved” are more likely to participate.

The second variable, which asked about losing interest during the campaign was found to have a correlation coefficient of .292 and was significant at the .000 level. We can infer that those who agree with the statement “the longer a presidential campaign goes, the more likely I am to lose interest” are less likely to participate.

The third variable asked about whether the longer campaign allowed voters to become more informed and was found to have a correlation coefficient of .282. This variable was statistically significant at the .000 level. We can infer that those who agree with the statement “the length of the presidential campaign allows me to become more informed” are more likely to participate.

Finally, the fourth variable, which asked about money and the campaign, was found to have a correlation coefficient of .219 and was significant at the .002 level. We can infer that
those who agree with the statement “the length of the presidential campaign wastes money” are less likely to participate.

While the correlations between the favorability variables and the omnibus participation index are fairly weak, they are early indicators of disengagement due to campaign length. A look back at Table 4.2 on page 65 illustrates that people are not favorable to the length of the campaign. The correlations discussed above allow us to infer that those who are not favorable towards the length of the campaign are less likely to participate. A brief analysis of the correlations of these four variables illustrates that the public is disengaging with political activity, in part, due to the length of the campaign.

**Findings**

I ran several OLS Regression analyses to determine the relationships between the participation indexes and the independent variables. I ran an OLS Regression model for each of the following five participation indexes: (1) Omnibus Political Participation, (2) Traditional Campaign Activity, (3) Social Media Activity, (4) Traditional Media Activity, and (5) New Media Activity. The following independent variables were used to determine the relationships between participation and campaign length favorability: age, gender, political party identification, education, employment status and the campaign length favorability index. The results are shown below in Table 4.4.
Table 4.4: Campaign Favorability and Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Omnibus Political Participation</th>
<th>Traditional Campaign Activity</th>
<th>Social Media Activity</th>
<th>Traditional Media Activity</th>
<th>New Media Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Favorability</strong></td>
<td>.403**</td>
<td>.431**</td>
<td>.320**</td>
<td>.263**</td>
<td>.342**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrat</strong></td>
<td>.282**</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.262**</td>
<td>.282**</td>
<td>.238**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republican</strong></td>
<td>.183*</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>.197*</td>
<td>.176*</td>
<td>.168*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>-0.050</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.156*</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fulltime</strong></td>
<td>-0.059</td>
<td>-0.104</td>
<td>-0.407</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part Time</strong></td>
<td>-0.045</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.102</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted R²</strong></td>
<td>.202**</td>
<td>.193**</td>
<td>.126**</td>
<td>.129**</td>
<td>.153**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>173</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05  
** p<.01

First, we can determine that 20.2% of the variance in the omnibus political participation index can be explained by favorability, party identification, gender, age, education, and employment status. Of the independent variables, only party identification and favorability were found to be significant. The favorability index was the strongest indicator of omnibus political participation (.403); meaning the more favorable one is towards the length of the campaign, the more likely they are to participate in general.

Next, we can determine that 19.3% of the variance in the traditional campaign activity index can be explained by favorability, party identification, gender, age, education, and employment status. Both favorability and age were statistically significant in this model, but age was found to be less significant at the p<.05 level. The favorability index was found to be the strongest indicator of traditional campaign activity (.431); meaning the more favorable one is
towards the length of the campaign, the more likely they are to participate in traditional campaign activity, such as attending a rally or volunteering for a candidate.

We can determine that 12.6% of the variance in the social media activity index can be explained by favorability, party identification, gender, age, education, and employment status. Both favorability and party identification were found to be significant indicators of social media activity. The strongest indicator was campaign favorability (.320); meaning the more favorable one is towards the length of the campaign, the more likely they are to engage in social media activity, such as discuss the election on social media websites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

We can establish that 12.9% of the variance in the traditional media activity index can be explained by favorability, party identification, gender, age, education, and employment status. Again, both campaign favorability and party identification were found to be significant indicators of traditional media activity. Within party identification, the Democrat variable was found to be the strongest indicator of traditional media activity (.282); meaning those who identify as Democrats are more likely to engage in traditional media activity, such as following the campaign on television or watching the debates.

Finally, we can conclude that 15.3% of the variance in the new media activity index can be explained by favorability, party identification, gender, age, education, and employment status. Both campaign length favorability and party identification were found to be the only significant indicators of new media activity. Campaign length favorability was found to be the strongest indicator of new media activity (.342); meaning those who favor the length of the campaign are more likely to engage in new media activity, such as following the campaign on the Internet or posting comments on a news website or blog.
The strongest relationships can be seen between the omnibus political participation index and campaign length favorability (.403) and the traditional campaign activity index and campaign length favorability (.431). The public is less likely to engage in political activities, especially those traditional ones, if they have negative feelings towards the length of the campaign. It is interesting to note that campaign length favorability was a weaker indicator for the media related activities than it was for the omnibus political participation and traditional campaign activities.

As seen in Table 4.4, all five participation indexes were found to be significant. The most important finding from these tests is that the campaign length favorability index was found to be significant at the p<.01 level in every model. These positive relationships illustrate that those who are favorable towards the length of the presidential campaign are more likely to participate. The opposite can also be said; those who are not favorable towards the length of the campaign are less likely to participate. This supports the hypothesis that voters who do not favor the length of the presidential campaign will engage politically at a lower level than those who do favor the length of the campaign.

General Discussion

Support was found for the three main hypotheses of this study. First, I found support for the hypothesis that voters only engage during certain points or events in the campaign. As seen in Figure 4.1, the Pew data illustrates that there were many high and low points of attention paid by the public throughout the 2008 campaign season. There are also many long periods where attention paid is very low, such as the months after the candidates announced they were running in the summer of 2007. The General Election variable accounted for 61.5% of the variance in the
pooled time series regression model. This means that of all of the attention paid to the campaign, more than 60% occurred solely during the weeks leading up to the 2008 election.

Support was found for the second hypothesis, which was that voters would have negative feelings towards some aspect of the long campaign cycle, or the length of the campaign cycle itself. The four campaign length favorability variables in my original survey found that voters are generally not favorable to the long campaign. Voters tend to lose interest, lessen involvement, absorb less information, and feel that the length of the campaign wastes money, spurring feelings of negativity.

Finally, support was also found for the third hypothesis, which was voters who do not favor the length of the presidential campaign will engage politically at a lower level than those who do favor the length of the campaign. The statistical analyses of voter participation in comparison to campaign length favorability, gender, age, education, party identification, and employment status found that favorability was a strong indicator of participation across all indexes. As favorability towards the length of the campaign increased so did the level of participation.

This chapter has discussed the important findings pertinent to the three main hypotheses in this study. The final chapter of this study will contextualize the main research question posed in Chapter I, discuss research limitations, propose future research, as well as make conclusions about the importance of this area of study.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Political scientists have studied presidential election campaigns for many years and have come to many different conclusions as to their adverse effects on voters. This study sought to answer a very important question: does the length of presidential campaigns in the United States have an impact on voter engagement? In examining this question, I have understood the length of the presidential campaign to begin when the first politician announces his or her candidacy and end on Election Day. While it is true that much campaign fundraising and organizing occurs before a politician announces his or her bid for office, it is almost impossible to pinpoint the exact day that each campaign truly begins.

Voter engagement is also important to define, because it has many different definitions in the realm of political science research. My understanding of political engagement is in line with the definition proposed by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady: “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action - either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”

This all-encompassing definition of participation guided this research study in understanding voter engagement.

Dalton purports that, “Citizens participate in public affairs less frequently, with less knowledge and enthusiasm, in fewer venues, and less equally than is healthy for a vibrant

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116 Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 
Much research has found that political engagement has steadily declined over the past several decades, which can be detrimental to a functioning democracy.

**Main Findings**

This research has yielded many interesting findings pertaining to voter engagement and the negative effects of the long presidential campaign season in the United States. Support was found for the three main hypotheses of this study. The first hypothesis was voters will only engage during certain points or events in the campaign. As discussed in the previous chapter, both Pew data and my original survey data illustrate that most attention paid during the campaign is done during the weeks leading up to the presidential election in November. While the public does pay attention during the primaries, it is evident that many people do not show any interest in the campaign until after the party nominees are announced. The months before and after the primaries were shown to receive little attention by the public, yet presidential campaigns were in full swing.

The second hypothesis was voters will have negative feelings towards some aspect of the long campaign cycle, or the length of the campaign cycle itself. Support for this hypothesis was found through analysis of both Pew and original survey data. The important findings pertinent to this hypothesis come from the campaign length favorability questions in my original survey. The majority of participants were not favorable towards the length of the campaign when asked about involvement, interest, money, and being informed.

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The third, and final, hypothesis was voters who do not favor the length of the presidential campaign will engage politically at a lower level than those who do favor the length of the campaign. Support was found for this hypothesis through analysis of campaign length favorability and political participation measures in my original survey data. Campaign length favorability was a strong indicator of all types of political participation, furthering that those who favor the length of the campaign are more likely to participate.

These findings are congruent with Patterson’s *Vanishing Voter Project* and found that voters are disengaging with the long campaign season. These findings are important because they highlight the negativity and lack of engagement surrounding presidential campaigns in the United States. Pinkleton et al. state, “Citizens are likely to participate in the political process to the extent that they feel their participation can make a difference.”\(^ {118} \) Citizens seem to be turned off to presidential campaigns because they seem never-ending. These findings are important because understanding why voters are disengaging can help politicians make changes to hopefully reverse these results.

*Engagement and Democracy*

As previously stated, the study of participation in the United States is necessary because it is the foundation of democratic theory. Some scholars have argued that participation is a main source of satisfaction for citizens – both satisfaction with the government and satisfaction with one’s own position in society.\(^ {119} \) Verba and Nie state, “if democracy is interpreted as rule by the

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\(^ {119} \) Verba, Sidney, and Norman H. Nie. *Participation in America: Politica Democracy* 72
people, then the question of who participates in political decisions becomes the question of the nature of democracy in a society. "120 Thus, it is pertinent that we understand the nature of how the public politically engages with the presidential campaign.

If the public is disengaging then we are moving away from a democracy. Conway states, "Nevertheless, the belief that widespread popular participation is necessary for the effective functioning of a stable democracy continues to find support, partly because participation is viewed as necessary to maintain open access to the system."121

Now let us turn to whether the “never-ending” campaign cycle is good for democracy by looking at the behavior of the candidates. It is common knowledge that most candidates running for the executive office most likely have a strong background in politics. Many candidates are still in office when they launch their campaigns for the presidency, including senators, congressmen and women, and even the sitting president. These candidates essentially forego their current jobs to solely focus on their campaigns.

We also saw this occur in the 2008 election, where Barack Obama, who at the time was a junior senator from Illinois, spent a majority of his first term in office campaigning for the presidency. Even now, President Obama has had to spend a good amount of time while in office campaigning for the 2012 presidential election. If the people we elect to office are constantly spending their terms campaigning and not doing their jobs, then how can we expect our democratic system to flourish?

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Limitations

With all research, limitations are present, which is true in the case of this research. Ideally, the original survey would have been distributed to a representative random sample, but due to time and monetary constraints a snowball convenience sample was used. The original survey was also only a snapshot of voter feelings towards the campaign during two weeks in February 2012. These responses were collected during the primary season, which may or may not have affected participant responses. Also, the 2012 primary season might have only been engaging for Conservatives because only Republican caucuses and primaries took place. Democrats might not be participating at all because Barack Obama is already known to be the Democratic nominee.

Finally, certain states might receive more attention from candidates because they are either “swing states” or they have a large number of delegates. This could be true for both the primaries and the general election. Those who reside in states that do not receive a great deal of attention might be less apt to participate.

Future Research

Future research in this area of study might consider using a large random sample. While findings might not be drastically different, a random sample might be able to provide a better representation of the different demographics in the United States. It would also be interesting to distribute this survey in both election years and non-election years to determine if negativity towards the long campaign season is found at a time when candidates are not actively campaigning.
Future research might also consider comparing types and intensity of engagement in “swing states” versus “non-swing states.” While voters in these contested states are faced with heavier campaigning, it would be interesting to see if voters actually participate more and if the types of participation differ from citizens in “non-swing states.”

Regardless of how this study can be altered in the future, it is very important that research on this topic continues. Voter engagement is pertinent to democracy and studying how the length of the campaign season affects participation needs to continue until we fully understand the issue.

Solutions

So if the extended campaign cycle is our problem, then how do we fix it? Klein feels that by condensing the election calendar, presidential campaigns will be shortened greatly. His plan for doing this would move the conventions into September, and to schedule the caucuses and primaries to begin in June. Condensing the election calendar would essentially get rid of the “dead period” that occurs in the months after the primaries and before the conventions.122 Klein also feels that having the primaries divided into four geographic areas and spread out over the months of June, July, and August could work.123 While this is just one of many possible options for shortening the campaign season, it does point out that the extended campaign cycle is negative in nature.


Final Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed the main research question that guided this study. Coming full-circle in this study, I am going to ask it again: does the length of presidential campaigns in the United States have an impact on voter engagement? The quick and easy answer to this question is yes. The length of presidential campaigns does have a profound effect on how, when, and to what extent voters participate. The mere finding that a majority of voters acknowledge the campaign season as long is telling in itself. Voters know the campaign season is long and thus a majority choose to participate and pay attention only weeks before the general election.

Claims that long presidential campaigns create a more informed electorate did not hold true through the findings presented in this study. The public seems to only pay attention to important or key events, and attribute less attention to the rest of the campaign season. Voters even admitted that the long campaign season does not leave them more informed. If this is the case, then changes need to be made.

In conclusion, the long presidential campaign season in the United States is detrimental to voter engagement. Keeter and Zukin stated it perfectly, “A presidential election is many things. It is a nation choosing leadership, it is reaffirmation of the democratic process, it is a spectacle. It is a time for citizens to become active participants in the political process.”124 If we continue to turn a blind eye to the negative effects of the long campaign season, we are essentially ignoring

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the opinions of many voters, which in turn weakens representative democracy in the United States.
APPENDIX A: SURVEY MEASURE

2012 Campaign Engagement Survey
Survey Codebook Sample Questions

Investigator: Shelby Hodgkins
Study: How Long is Too Long?: How the Length of Presidential Campaigns in the United States Negatively Affects Voter Engagement

1. Would you consider yourself to be a ‘political junkie?’*
   Yes
   No
   Don’t Know

2. How interested are you in the 2012 presidential election?*
   Very Interested
   Somewhat Interested
   Not At All Interested
   Don’t Know

3. When do you pay attention during the presidential election?*

   A lot   Somewhat   Very Little   Not at all   Don’t Know

   a.) Party Debates
   b.) Party Primaries
   c.) Super Tuesday
   d.) Party Conventions
   e.) General Debates
   f.) Last Week Before Election
4. Have you participated in any of the following activities in the past year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.) Sign a Petition in person*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.) Sign a Petition Online*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.) Contact a national, state or local government official about an issue**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.) Attended a political meeting, rally, or speech**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.) Be an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.) Work or volunteer for a political party or candidate*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.) Follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns on television*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h.) Follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns on the Internet*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.) Follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns through print (newspapers, magazines, etc.)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.) Discuss the election with other people in person*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k.) Discuss the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
election with other people on the Internet*
l.) Follow the election on social media*
m.) Post about the election on social media***
n.) Sign up to receive emails about a particular issue or candidate*
o.) Contributed money to a political campaign***
p.) Participated in a political protest activity***
q.) Read comments posted by readers on a news website or political blog***
r.) Posted comments on a news website or political blog***
s.) Exchanged political emails with friends and family***
t.) Forwarded the link to a political video or news article***
u.) Received a link to a political video or news article***
v.) Sent or received a text message about politics***
w.) Watched video news stories online***
x.) Watched political/candidate videos online***
y.) Watched political debates***
z.) Displayed your political preferences on your profile***
aa.) Became a “fan” or “friend” of a politician***
ab.) Joined a “cause” or political “group”***
ac.) Used a news or politics application/widget***
ad.) Exchanged political views on a discussion board or group wall***
ae.) Been invited to a political event by a friend***
af.) Displayed a political campaign button, sticker, or sign***

5. To what degree does the length of the campaign have an affect on how you engage politically?*
   More likely
   Less likely
   Not at all
   Don’t know

Agree or disagree:
6. The longer a campaign goes, the more likely I am to get involved.*
7. The longer a campaign goes, the more likely I am to lose interest.*
8. The length of the campaign allows me to become more informed.*
9. The length of the campaign wastes money.*

10. How would you describe the presidential election campaign so far – is it**
    a. Interesting, dull, neither, don’t know
b. Too negative, not too negative, neither, don’t know

c. Informative, not informative, neither, don’t know

d. Too long, not too long, neither, don’t know

11. Are you registered to vote?**

   Yes
   No
   Don’t Know

12. Did you vote in the 2008 presidential election?*

   Yes
   No
   Don’t Know

13. In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or Independent?**

   Republican
   Democrat
   Independent
   Other
   Don’t Know

14. In general, would you describe your political views as…**

   Very conservative
   Conservative
   Moderate
   Liberal
   Very Liberal
   Don’t Know

15. What is your gender?**

   Male
   Female

16. What is your age? ____**

17. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?**

   None or Grades 1-8
   High School incomplete (grades 9-11)
   High School graduate
   Technical, trade, or vocational school AFTER high school
   Some College (no 4 year degree)
College graduate
Graduate School
Don’t Know

18. What state do you live in?**
   1-50 listed

19. Are you now employed full-time, part-time, retired, or are you not employed for pay?**
   Employed Full-Time
   Employed Part-Time
   Retired
   Not Employed For Pay
   Student
   Don’t Know

20. What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or some other race?**
   White
   Black
   Asian
   Other
   Don’t Know

* Original survey question.
** Pew Survey Question/Zukin et al. Survey Question
*** Leticia Bode Survey Question
# APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATION VARIABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.) Sign a Petition in person</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.) Sign a Petition Online</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.) Contact a national, state or local government official about an issue</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.) Attended a political meeting, rally, or speech</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.) Be an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.) Work or volunteer for a political party or candidate</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.) Follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns on television</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h.) Follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns on the Internet</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.) Follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns through print (newspapers, magazines, etc.)</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.) Discuss the election with other</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Responded</td>
<td>Ignored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k.) Discuss the election with other people on the Internet</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l.) Follow the election on social media</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.) Post about the election on social media</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n.) Sign up to receive emails about a particular issue or candidate</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o.) Contributed money to a political campaign</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.) Participated in a political protest activity</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q.) Read comments posted by readers on a news website or political blog</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r.) Posted comments on a news website or political blog</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.) Exchanged political emails with friends and family</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t.) Forwarded the link to a political video or news article</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u.) Received a link to a political video or news article</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.) Sent or received a text message about politics</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w.) Watched video news stories online</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Percentage Who Did It</td>
<td>Percentage Who Did Not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x.) Watched political/candidate videos online</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y.) Watched political debates</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z.) Displayed your political preferences on your profile</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aa.) Became a “fan” or “friend” of a politician</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ab.) Joined a “cause” or political “group”</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ac.) Used a news or politics application/widget</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad.) Exchanged political views on a discussion board or group wall</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ae.) Been invited to a political event by a friend</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>af.) Displayed a political campaign button, sticker, or sign</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION INDEXES

Political Activity Index:*
1. Be an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government
2. Participated in a political protest activity
3. Contact a national, state, or local government official about an issue
4. Sign a petition online
5. Sign a petition in person

Traditional Campaign Activity:
1. Attend a political meeting, rally, or speech**
2. Work or volunteer for a political party or candidate**
3. Been invited to a political event by a friend**
4. Displayed a political campaign button, sticker, or sign**
5. Contributed money to a political campaign**

Social Media Activity
1. Became a “fan,” “friend,” or “followed” a politician on social media**
2. Displayed your political preferences on your social media profile**
3. Joined a “cause” or political “group” on social media**
4. Sign up to receive emails about a particular issue or candidate**
5. Used a news or politics application/widget**
6. Exchanged political emails with friends and family**
7. Received a link to a political video or news article**
8. Forwarded the link to a political video or news article**
9. Sent or received a text message about politics**
10. Follow the presidential campaign on social media**

Traditional Media Activity
1. Follow the coverage of the presidential campaign on television**
2. Follow the coverage of the presidential campaign through print media** (newspapers, magazines, etc.)
3. Discuss the presidential election with other people in person**
4. Watched the political debates**

New Media Activity
1. Watched political/candidate videos online**
2. Watched video news stories about the presidential campaign online**
3. Read comments posted by readers on a news website or political blog**
4. Follow the coverage of the presidential campaigns on the Internet**
5. Posted comments on a news website or political blog**
6. Post about the presidential campaign on social media**
7. Exchanged political views on a discussion board or group wall**
8. Discuss the presidential election with other people on the Internet**

*This index and the five variables it contained were excluded from the analysis because it was not a statistically significant indicator and the variables did not specifically measure political engagement.

**These 27 variables were included in the Omnibus Political Participation Index
Bibliography


