

PUBLIC POLICY ADVERTISING AND THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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During the summer and early autumn of 1980, as voters prepared to turn President Jimmy Carter out of office and replace him with Ronald Reagan, magazine readers were bombarded with dozens of politically oriented advertisements sponsored by large corporations and business trade associations, such as the following:

OVER-REGULATION COULD COST YOU THE SHIRT OFF YOUR BACK

You might never get to wear cotton again.

IF YOU DON'T VOTE, DON'T PUT ALL THE BLAME FOR INFLATION ON WASHINGTON

If you want. . . a president committed. . . efforts to balance the budget, increase productivity, eliminate unnecessary regulation, create responsible monetary policy. . . then. . . vote accordingly.

INSTEAD OF ASKING DAD FOR THE CAR, WILL WE SOON BE ASKING BIG BROTHER?

Let the government decide when, where, and if we drive, and you can bet we'll be grounded from more than a Saturday night date.

Research in Corporate Social Performance and Policy, volume 5, pages 59-86

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ISBN: 0-89232-412-0

BY THE TIME YOU'VE READ THIS MAGAZINE [an average reading time of 108 minutes],
THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE SPENT \$117,678,081.96

THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Can we and our leaders bear the burdens of democracy. . . or will the cup of freedom slip from our trembling hands?. . . lack of good leadership. . . may be the only true crisis among our many great problems.

These alarming messages appeared at a time when the general public was troubled by the climbing cost of living, historically high interest rates, and unsettled international conditions such as those in Iran and the Middle East generally. By 1980 the electorate had also been witness for some years to a spirited onslaught by the private sector on government regulation and government intrusion into the lives of individuals.

It would have been easy, under the circumstances, to see the advertisements as an attempt by the moneyed interests to saturate the print media in an effort to insure the election of candidate Reagan who was, indeed, playing upon similar themes in his run for the presidency. Since political action committee contributions were restricted in amount, and direct corporate contributions were forbidden by law, money could be used instead to bend the will of the electorate if employed skillfully through sponsorship of public policy advertisements. Such ads, though forbidden on television, could be displayed in the print media as another tool in the hands of the Establishment to secure its position of dominance and affluence in the political economy. This was indeed the general perspective with which we began our inquiry into the use of public policy advertising by business during the 1980 presidential election.

The actual story turned out to be considerably more interesting and complex, an outcome frequently observed when empirical evidence replaces political bias. Without abandoning our initial views entirely, our subsequent study revealed that public policy advertising by business during the 1980 presidential election was multifaceted and often politically neutral or innocuous. Many ad messages could be interpreted as being as favorable to the Democrats as to the Republicans. The "Establishment threat" appeared considerably muted. One could even fault business for being so lacking in advertising skills as to have muffed a great opportunity to wield significant electoral influence in behalf of its favored candidate.

Given these (to us surprising) findings, a question is raised about the function of this type of advertising by business. One must wonder why so much money and effort are expended on this costly undertaking, what motives are at work in the business mind, and what final effects are achieved. These matters we discuss toward the end of the paper.

The initial task, however, is to seek answers to three general questions about the relationship of public policy advertising and electoral politics:

- To what extent does business try to influence presidential elections by means of mass media advertisements?
- In the 1980 presidential election, did business advertisements favor Reagan over Carter?
- Who sponsored the ads and what issues were uppermost?

HYPOTHESES

To answer these questions, two hypotheses were developed, as follows:

Hypothesis 1. If business wanted to influence the public's choice of presidential candidates by means of public policy advertisements, then one would expect:

- a. to observe a larger number of such advertisements prior to the election than following it, and
- b. that these advertisements would be concentrated in the period between the nominating conventions and election day, with their frequency increasing as election day approached.

Hypothesis 2. If business favored one presidential candidate over another, then one would expect to observe a larger number of public policy advertisements whose themes were consistent with the avowed views of the favored candidate than with the views of the other candidate(s).

With respect to Hypothesis 1b, it should be noted that the actual campaign for the presidency was underway long before the Democratic and Republican party nominating conventions actually selected their nominees. Few doubted that Jimmy Carter would be renominated by the Democrats, and Ronald Reagan was clearly the Republican front runner by the early summer of 1980. Therefore, political advertising in behalf of the pro-business candidate might well have been expected to appear prior to the nominating conventions, and indeed we discovered that to be the case, as discussed below. In general, though, we preferred to focus on the narrower period of the "official" campaign from July-August to the first week in November.

With respect to Hypothesis 1a, another observation is in order. Initially, we did not foresee the significance of public policy advertisements in the post-election period as a possible influence on public opinion concerning the newly-elected President's legislative proposals. Hence the number of ads appearing after the election might be larger than one would expect if looking only at electoral, as contrasted with post-electoral legislative, activities. This post-elec-

tion aspect of public policy advertising did become manifest and is discussed later in the paper.

METHODOLOGY

In order to test Hypotheses 1a and 1b, we chose the six months prior to the November election (May 1980 to November 4, 1980) and the six months following it (November 5, 1980 through April 1981). This twelve-month period was sufficiently long to observe frequency trends in public policy ads and, being centered on election day, could be expected to reveal any changes directly associated with the electoral campaign period.

Three magazines were identified as sources of public policy advertisements: *Business Week*, published for an audience interested in and presumed to be generally supportive of business; *Newsweek*, reaching a large general audience with varied points of view; and *Atlantic*, oriented toward an intellectual/professional audience not always sympathetic to business views and values.

All full-page advertisements appearing in these three magazines during the twelve-month period were examined and counted. From this sample, public policy advertisements were identified and counted. We define a public policy advertisement (PPA) as one that, directly or by implication, advocates a position on some matter of national or public concern. We prefer the term "public policy advertising" to the more commonly-used "advocacy advertising" to emphasize the public policy aspects of such ads and because all ads in one way or another advocate something, whether purchase of a product or service or the acceptance of a specific approach to a public policy problem.¹

Each PPA was examined for its public policy content. Generally speaking, an ad focused on one general, overriding theme, such as control of inflation, or the costs of government regulation, or the need for energy conservation. In addition, most PPA's had something to say about a number of other somewhat subsidiary but related issues, such as the desirability of offshore oil drilling or the need to control government deficits. Each PPA can therefore be identified with one major theme and often with one or more subsidiary issues. A theme or issue might appear as the main focus of one ad but be handled only as a subsidiary theme in another ad. Because of the large number and dispersion of all ad issues—both major and subsidiary—this paper discusses only those appearing as major themes.

The sample of public policy advertisements seemed to divide into three broad categories and one subcategory.

Category I ads were those intended to "sell" a public policy or a point of view, rather than an advertiser's product or service. In addition to those quoted at the beginning of this paper, examples include

- Pullman, Inc., calling for "a change of signals" on government regulation;

- a series of ads from the American Council on Life Insurance urging Americans to “support all reasonable and equitable steps” to control inflation and to mail in to the Council a “ballot” stating their willingness to restrict their use of credit, to oppose government regulation, deficit spending, and other inflation-inducing practices;
- a series of ads from the Chemical Manufacturers Association detailing the steps that member companies are taking to control water pollution, manage chemical wastes safely, and ensure worker safety and health, steps that “meet or exceed” federal requirements.

Category I ads make little or no reference to the sponsor’s product or service and do not contain sales appeals. These ads are the “purest” of all public policy ads, appealing directly and obviously to the reader’s interest in a public policy issue.

Category II ads sold an advertiser’s product or services along with, or by means of, public policy issues. They might well be called “piggyback ads,” as advertisers hitched a public policy issue onto a standard sales format, combining the two purposes into a single advertisement. Many of these ads covered energy-related issues such as advocacy of public lands exploration and drilling or national energy independence. Examples include

- a Tenneco series describing their exploration ventures throughout the country (and implying the company’s ability and willingness to use that expertise to plumb for public-lands minerals);
- an American Gas Association series promoting natural gas as a clean, efficient, economical, and abundantly available fuel (and implying its superiority over other energy sources);
- Association of American Railroads ads debunking the “myth” that rail transport is more costly than truck or barge transport (and decrying public subsidies to those forms);
- the famous Warner and Swasey ads, with their ideological messages so bald that they would belong in *Category I* were it not for the inset in each ad describing a particular Warner & Swasey machine.

Some of the energy-related ads fell into a subcategory, which we have labeled *Category IIA*, that had implications for national energy supplies or usage but made no direct political statement. Ads that seemed merely to be riding a bandwagon or capitalizing on the notion of energy conservation as a good selling point fell into this group. An example is seen in Alcoa’s ads touting their energy-saving windows, not just as good products but as making a contribution to the nation’s general need to conserve energy. Of all the PPA’s in our sample, *Category IIA* ads were the most neutral politically, and they were included only

because the ad's public policy message, though bland, helped justify the product's sales appeal.

Category III consisted of public relations ads that were meant to promote a company's image as a good corporate citizen by demonstrating its commitment or responsiveness to current public concerns or values. Others have called such ads "institutional advertising" or "corporate image advertising." Representatives of this type of ad include

- Control Data's descriptions of various social projects it has developed and funded;
- Champion International's informational pieces on the technological future and the choices people will be making then;
- Philip Morris's and MacDonald's announcements of art exhibitions and public television shows they have supported.

Although innocuous politically, *Category III* ads in general have as one purpose the instilling of faith in the general beneficence of private enterprises. Their appearance at a time (such as the 1980 presidential election campaign) when national debate raged about the purported superiority of private sector institutions over public sector initiatives would tend to exert some influence on public opinion favorable to the proponents of private enterprise.

In order to test Hypothesis 2 concerning political favoritism shown by public policy advertisements, we needed some standard against which to judge an ad's political content. For this purpose, each of the two major parties' platforms were analyzed, and a list was compiled of those issues of greatest interest to the business community and on which they might expend some advertising dollars. Additionally, we made use of a summary of such issues prepared by *Business Week*, and we drew on our own memory of the campaign (Campaign Issues References).

The respective positions of candidates Reagan and Carter were then identified and matched against a master list of salient business-related campaign issues. Table 1 singles out a few of the more prominent ones to illustrate the process. A comprehensive list of the criteria used to classify public policy ads as *Pro-Reagan* and *Pro-Carter* appears in Appendix I.

All public policy ads were then examined and classified as exhibiting a particular public policy posture: *Pro-Reagan*, *Pro-Carter*, *Neutral* (neither pro-Reagan nor pro-Carter but referring to a public policy issue), and *Shared Views* (Reagan and Carter shared a general viewpoint regarding the ad's major public policy issue). Following the election of Reagan to the presidency, the name of the pro-Carter ad posture was switched to *Pro-Democratic* for the six-month period after the election when legislative struggles replaced electoral ones.

A special cautionary note is in order at this point. The compilation of business-related campaign issues, the identification of a candidate's position on any one

Table 1. Positions of Reagan and Carter on Selected Campaign Issues, 1980

Reagan	Issue	Carter
Private development	• Synfuels development	Federal support
Through market pricing	• Energy conservation	Of key importance; with government aid
Through private research	• New energy sources	Favor, if environmentally safe
Favor private action	• Exploration and drilling on public lands and offshore	Restrain, with environmental safeguards
Increase	• Nuclear plants	Retire
Abolish	• Department of Energy	Retain
More free market, less government	• Free market vs. government controls	Government programs, controls, and guidance where needed
Broad-based reduction	• Taxes	Targeted, specific reductions
Through free market; no CPA	• Consumer protection	Through government action; favor CPA
Protection against government intrusion	• Freedom and privacy (personal)	Protect against government and business intrusion
Preserve and strengthen family traditions; no ERA endorsement	• Women's rights	Favor ERA

Source: 1980 Republican Platform Text and 1980 Democratic Platform Text as reported in *Congressional Quarterly*, July 19, 1980 and August 16, 1980.

issue, and particularly the classification of public policy advertisements as pro-Reagan or pro-Carter is hardly a precise or objective exercise. Judgment and interpretation, along with the biases and perspectives of the investigators, are involved. Other investigators might have reached different conclusions about the salience of some campaign issues or whether a particular ad leaned more toward one candidate's view than another's. In our case, where doubt existed we tended to put the ad into the neutral category. Although we are as confident about our own objectivity as most investigators appear to be, we acknowledge that other interpretations and ad classifications might have been made by others.

A final methodological note concerns analysis of the data. An SPSS program was used to tabulate and classify the data, and Chi-square tests of statistical significance were undertaken at relevant points. Much of the data is reported in the tables and charts in following sections of the paper, and significance tests are noted where appropriate.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a, positing that the number of public policy ads would be larger prior to the election than following it, was not confirmed. Although there were 254 such ads before the election and 208 after it, the difference between the two periods is not statistically significant.²

Furthermore, our 462 public policy ads represented only a modest proportion of total full-page ads of all kinds: 8.4 percent prior to the election and 7.7 percent following election day. These very low percentages created the first twinge of doubt in our minds about the alleged saturation of the media with business viewpoints, and this is a matter to which we return at a later point in the paper.

Hypothesis 1b posited a concentration of public policy advertisements in the post-convention and pre-election day period, with their frequency increasing as election day approached. This hypothesis was generally confirmed.

Public policy ads were indeed concentrated during the critical September/October/pre-election November period, numbering 132 (or 50 percent) out of a total of 264 for the entire six-month pre-election part of the year. In other words, half of all public policy ads in the six months preceding election day appeared in less than half that period. Additionally, as revealed in Figure 1, the month of September represented the highest monthly totals for each of the three publications in the pre-election period, and October almost matched this performance. Ad volume remained relatively high for *Business Week* during the pre-election segment of November but dropped off for both *Newsweek* and *Atlantic*.

With respect to the frequency rate increasing as election day approached, the Figure 1 data seem to indicate that this part of Hypothesis 1b is not confirmed, since the ad totals actually declined during October and in the pre-election segment of November. (The period prior to the election covered the November 1980 issue of *Atlantic*, the November 3, 1980, issue of *Newsweek*, and the November 3 and November 10, 1980, issues of *Business Week*, all of which were on the newsstands and delivered to subscribers prior to election day. This distinction between pre-election and post-election November is shown in Figure 1 and later in Figure 2.) However, another way of examining ad frequency is on a month-by-month basis. During the politically critical months of September and October when undecided voters were making up their minds, public policy ads ran at an average rate of 54.5 each month, while during the May-August period the average rate was only 33 ads per month. And in the pre-election part of November, the average rate was approximately 46 per month.

For these reasons, we conclude that Hypothesis 1b was generally confirmed, both as to concentration of ads and their increasing frequency prior to the election. It should be noted, however, that whether the figures on concentration and ad rates per month are statistically significant depends upon their variance from the number of public policy ads placed during these same months in other years, and our study did not attempt to ascertain this information.

Hypothesis 2 posited that there would be a larger number of public policy ads expressing views consistent with those of the favored business candidate than with the views of the other candidate(s).

This hypothesis was confirmed, as revealed in Table 2: 46.5 percent of all pre-election ads were pro-Reagan, while only 4.7 percent favored Carter positions. It is noteworthy that ads in the neutral category constituted 40.9 percent of pre-election totals, and this is another commentary on the question of media saturation to which we return at a later point. By dropping the neutral ads, we found the pre-election ads favoring Reagan views were 78.6 percent, with Carter-leaning ads making up only 8 percent, and shared viewpoints coming in at 13.3 percent. Either computation gives pro-Reagan ads an advantage of 10 to 1 over pro-Carter ads. Business was indeed sending a one-sided political message to the electorate.

The Advertisers

If the business community was intent on influencing public opinion in the public policy realm, as this study indicates, one wonders just who was doing the advertising and what major issues were thought to be the most important.

The total number of advertisers who sponsored public policy ads during the twelve-month period was 106; 88 of these were individual companies, 14 were trade associations, and 4 were governments. The ten most frequent advertisers,

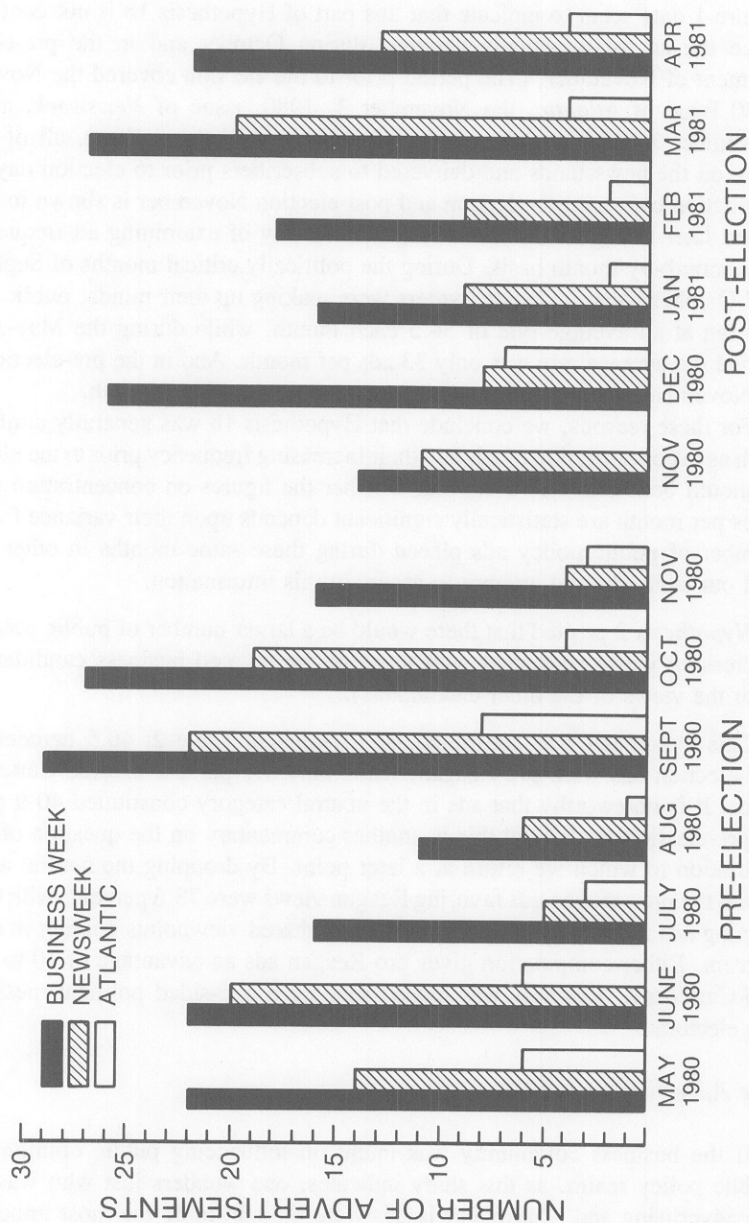


Figure 1. Advertisements by Publication

Table 2. Pro-Reagan vs. Pro-Carter (Pro-Democratic) Ads:
Pre- and Post-Election

<i>Posture of the ad</i>	<i>Pre-election</i>		<i>Post-election</i>		<i>Total</i>	
Pro-Reagan	118	(46.5)	89	(42.8)	207	(44.8)
Pro-Carter	12	(4.7)	16	(7.7)	28	(6.1)
Shared Views	20	(7.9)	16	(7.7)	36	(7.8)
Neutral	104	(40.9)	87	(41.8)	191	(41.3)
TOTAL	254	(100.0)	208	(100.0)	462	(100.0)

Note Figures in parentheses are percentages.

$\chi^2 = 2.03182$ (3df) (non-significant)

before and after the election, are shown in Table 3. Note that the first five are trade associations; they account for 63.8 percent of the ads from this top group before the election, 56.4 percent after it.

This predominance of trade association sponsors has been confirmed by other sources, including a public affairs executive of a Fortune-1000 corporation who told us that his and other companies often band together and use their trade associations for "message" advertising. In addition, a survey by *Industrial Marketing* reported that companies often "pool funds behind an organization or association" for two reasons: "One, the expense needed to even dent public

Table 3. Most Frequent Advertisers: Pre- and Post-Election

<i>Advertiser</i>	<i>Pre-election</i>		<i>Frequency of ads</i>		<i>Overall</i>	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Pre-election</i>	<i>Post-election</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Rank</i>
American Gas Association	14	1	9	2	23	1
American Council on Life Insurance	14	1	6	5	20	2
Chemical Manufacturers Association	14	1	5	8	19	3
American Insurance Association	12	2	5	8	17	4
Association of American Railroads	6	5	10	1	16	5
ARCO	7	4	8	3	15	6
ALCOA	8	3	4	9	12	7
Warner & Swasey	6	5	6	7	12	7
Control Data Corporation	7	4	4	11	11	8
Insurance Company of North America	6	5	5	8	11	8
TOTAL	94 ¹		62 ²		156 ³	

Notes:

¹This figure is 37.0% of all pre-election ads.

²This figure is 29.8% of all post-election ads.

³This figure is 33.1% of all ads.

*Advertisers ranking 4 and 6 in post-election frequency do not appear here because their overall rank was lower than 10 advertisers listed here.

opinion is staggering. Two, more than a few. . . companies have some serious credibility problems because of. . . years of bad press" ("IM's Survey"). In other words, by having trade associations promote the industry's point of view, companies can get, as one executive put it, "more bang for the buck." They also can protect themselves from the skepticism or incredulity that might arise from, for example, a Hooker Chemical Company ad on responsible chemical waste disposal. Given this rationale, it is not surprising that 82.1 percent of all *Category I* ads—those intended to promote a public policy or a point of view—were placed by trade associations, not individual companies.

Of all the ads sponsored by trade associations, 62.9 percent of those placed before the election and 53.1 percent of those after it were pro-Reagan. On the other hand, the largest percentage of ads by companies (50.2 percent before and 44.7 percent after the election) were neutral. The correlation between trade associations and numbers of pro-Reagan ads, as well as between companies and numbers of neutral ads, is significant at the .001 level. One might therefore infer that the trade association as ad sponsor can be used by individual companies to get across a political message deemed to be too sensitive for direct linkage to a given corporation's name.

Concerning the political posture of ads placed by the ten most frequent advertisers, we found that 45.7 percent prior to the election were pro-Reagan, as opposed to only 7.4 percent that could be called pro-Carter. Neutral ads accounted for 38.5 percent and shared views for 8.5 percent. Following the election, the pro-Reagan figure dropped dramatically to 29 percent of the top ten's ads, while neutral ads jumped to 46.8 percent.

Although our list of most frequent advertisers shows a varied group of industries, the total sample gives a more concentrated picture. There were three insurance associations and two insurance companies among the advertisers with five or more ads, for the highest industry concentration. They were followed by the oil industry, with four companies leading the petroleum charge. The oil companies, coupled with the energy industry's trade associations (such as the American Gas Association and the Edison Electric Institute), accounted for a huge preponderance of ads on energy-related issues. Although insurance, oil, and gas dominated the overall industry standings, the chemical industry's trade association tied for first place before the election and ranked third overall, a not surprising finding in view of the public's concern about the disposal of chemical wastes and the potential threat to workers and consumers of various chemical compounds used in production.

The Issues

An impressively large number of issues were called to the attention of the ad-reading public by the advertisers. Major issues—that is, the central theme of any ad—numbered 91; and subsidiary issues—that is, any additional accom-

Table 4. Most Frequently Occurring Major Issues
Pre- and Post-Election

Issue	Pre-election		Post-election		Total	
	Freq.	Rank	Freq.	Rank	Freq.	Rank
Energy conservation	34	1	22	1	56	1
Coal usage	9	5	18	2	27	2
New energy sources	14	2	10	3	24	3
Inflation control	14	2	7	5	21	4
Energy supplies (national)	10	4	7	5	17	5
Gas usage	7	7	8	4	15	6
Health care delivery	8	6	6	6	14	7
Government regulation, anti- or costs of	11	3	2	8	13	8
Tax incentives for business	5	8	8	4	13	8
National defense	8	6	3	7	11	9
Free/private enterprise, pro-	2	9	8	4	10	10
Product liability	8	6	2	8	10	10
Truck and barge public subsidies, anti-	2	9	7	5	9	11
Auto safety, improving and promoting	7	7	2	8	9	11
TOTAL	139 ¹		110 ²		249 ³	

Notes:

¹This figure was 54.7% of all pre-election ads.

²This figure was 52.9% of all post-election ads.

³This figure was 53.4% of all ads.

panying theme in any ad—totalled 70. Eliminating overlap between these two lists gives a grand total of 116 different issues that were included in the 462 ads in the sample. The entire list appears in Appendix II, and the most popular issues are contained in Table 4.

While energy and inflation dominate the Table 4 list of the most frequently appearing issues, a whole host of other controversial matters got their share of attention: health care delivery, government regulation, business tax incentives, national defense, and free enterprise. All of these issues were a central part of the campaign's political rhetoric. But energy accounted for over half (55.8 percent) of the public policy issues we found; and although we are reporting only figures on major issues here, energy loomed very large among the subsidiary issues as well.

The public policy advertisements in our sample carried different amounts of political weight. Some (*Category I*) were strong and direct in their appeal. Others (*Categories IIa and III*) offered politically bland or innocuous messages. Advertisers therefore were faced with questions of strategy in both the choice of media and the timing of PPA's for maximum intended impact. The choices made, as well as the allocation of ad budgets among the different types of PPA's,

Table 5. Category Distributions: Pre- and Post-Election

Category	Pre-election		Post-election		Total	
I	59	(23.2)	52	(25.0)	111	(24.0)
II	135	(53.1)	101	(48.6)	236	(51.1)
Ila	35	(13.8)	33	(15.9)	68	(14.7)
III	25	(9.8)	22	(10.6)	47	(10.2)
Total	254	(100.0)	208	(100.0)	462	(100.0)

Note:

Figures in parentheses are percentages. They may not add to 100 due to rounding.

$\chi^2 = 1.020$ (3df) (non-significant)

reveal a good deal about the motives embedded in public policy advertising by business.

A somewhat surprising finding, as revealed in Table 5, is that Category I ads (those intended to promote a public policy or a point of view, rather than an advertiser's product or service) numbered less than one fourth of all PPA's. The pre-election and post-election differences were minimal and statistically nonsignificant.

Media Placement Strategy

Remembering that *Category I* ads contained the most direct and unqualified public policy messages, where would business be most likely to place them for the largest political impact? A logical answer is in a mass circulation magazine of diverse readership, and indeed this is what we found. Both before and after the election, a higher percentage of ads in this category appeared in *Newsweek* (with a goodly sampling in *Atlantic* as well) than in *Business Week*, with the correlation between *Category I* ads and their appearance in *Newsweek* significant at the .001 level. Assuming that there is little need to preach to those who share your beliefs, it is understandable that ads of this sort would be concentrated in the magazines whose readership and political views were more scattered across the ideological spectrum.

The largest number of PPA's (51.1 percent of the total sample) fell into *Category II*, those ads intended to promote an advertiser's product or service along with, or by means of, public policy issues. Of these, 53.1 percent came prior to the election and 48.6 percent following it. The two-to-one disparity between *Category I* and *Category II* ads is striking. The motives and intents at work here are not entirely clear, but it is possible to infer that even those advertisers who advertise primarily to sell products or services are not averse to promoting a point of view or to raising public consciousness about a particular issue at the same time. In fact, given the preponderance of *Category II* ads, we

have concluded that the major motivation underlying our entire sample of PPAs is commercial rather than primarily or solely ideological or political.

This conclusion has been reinforced by other studies. An *Industrial Marketing* survey of "corporate" or institutional advertising practices (Maher) reported the most important objectives of such advertising as follows:

	Objectives	
	Primary	Secondary
• To improve the level of awareness of the company	61%	53%
• To provide unified marketing support for products, services, and capabilities	58%	47%
• To enhance or maintain the company's reputation and good will [our <i>Category III</i>]	24%	77%
• To advocate specific actions—or counter the advocacy of others—on issues of importance to the company, its industry or business in general [our <i>Category I</i>]	5%	22%
• To communicate the company's concern and record of achievement on social and environmental issues [our <i>Category I</i> and/or <i>II</i>]	3%	8%

These figures indicate that public policy advertising ranks quite low in comparison with other objectives held by those in charge of ad budgets. Estimates range from *Industrial Marketing's* 37 percent of a company's ad budget to a 10 percent figure given to us by a high-ranking officer in a Fortune-1000 corporation. A related bit of confirming information comes from a study of public affairs practices of large U.S. corporations: Of the various techniques employed by public affairs departments, "issues advertising" is used by only 23 percent of the companies and ranks last in a list of seven or eight such techniques (*Public Affairs Offices*).

Yet another aspect of *Category II* ads reinforces the notion that the primary intention of these ads is to promote the advertiser's product or services and only secondarily to promulgate a political viewpoint. Sixty-nine percent of these ads appeared in *Business Week* (67.4 percent before the election and 71.3 percent afterwards) whose readership is more likely to include the primary marketing audience of those industrial advertisers than either *Newsweek* (where only 26.7 percent of *Category II* ads appeared) or *Atlantic* (4.2 percent). The correlation between *Category II* ads and their appearance in *Business Week* is significant at the .001 level.

Those ads (*Category IIA*) that made no direct political or policy statement but

used the notion of energy conservation to promote their product were small in number and represented only 14.7 percent of all PPAs (13.8 percent before election and 15.9 percent after). They were divided almost equally between *Business Week* and *Newsweek*, with only a few in *Atlantic*. Energy conservation is a topic deemed equally well-suited for an industrial or a general-reader audience, as these figures seem to suggest.

Category III was the smallest at 10.2 percent of the total. This group of ads intended to promote an image of good corporate citizenship accounted for 9.8 percent of the sample prior to the election and 10.6 percent following it. During the pre-election period, just over half (52 percent) of these ads appeared in *Newsweek*, dropping to 36.4 percent after the election. Although the numbers of ads involved here are too small to compute statistical significance, one might normally expect corporate image advertising to be beamed at a general audience rather than a predominantly business one. In the post-election period, however, half of these *Category III* ads were in *Business Week*, perhaps a self-congratulatory response to or affirmation of Reagan's avowed faith in the private sector as an important source of support for social and cultural programs. There was little attempt either before or after the election to convince the intellectual/professional—and perhaps skeptical—readership of *Atlantic* of the virtuous citizenship of corporate America.

Timing Ads for Political Impact

Beyond the matters of advertisers and the issues they chose to target, plus the strategic choice of media vehicle, is the important question of timing the ads so they will have maximum impact on ad readers. Here the pre-election and post-election differences are quite illuminating.

Figure 2 shows pro-Reagan advertisements by publication for the twelve-month period. The ads peaked in all three magazines after the party conventions and before the election. Pro-Reagan ads in *Business Week* reached their highest point in September and their second highest point in October. For *Newsweek* and *Atlantic* the high point of pro-Reagan ads was recorded in October. Also interesting to note were an upsurge of pro-Reagan ads in both *Business Week* and *Newsweek* in June 1980, prior to the party conventions; another jump in December's *Business Week* and January's *Newsweek*, after the election but before the inauguration; and yet another concentration of pro-Reagan ads in all three publications in March 1981, during the period when the new President was building support for his economic program and tax bill. These media peaks illustrate that connections between public policy advertising and the political process were not limited to the choice between Reagan and Carter, and we return to the post-election era later on in the paper.

Some of the more unabashed political and ideological ads appeared only a few times, most of them before the election. For example, the Automobility

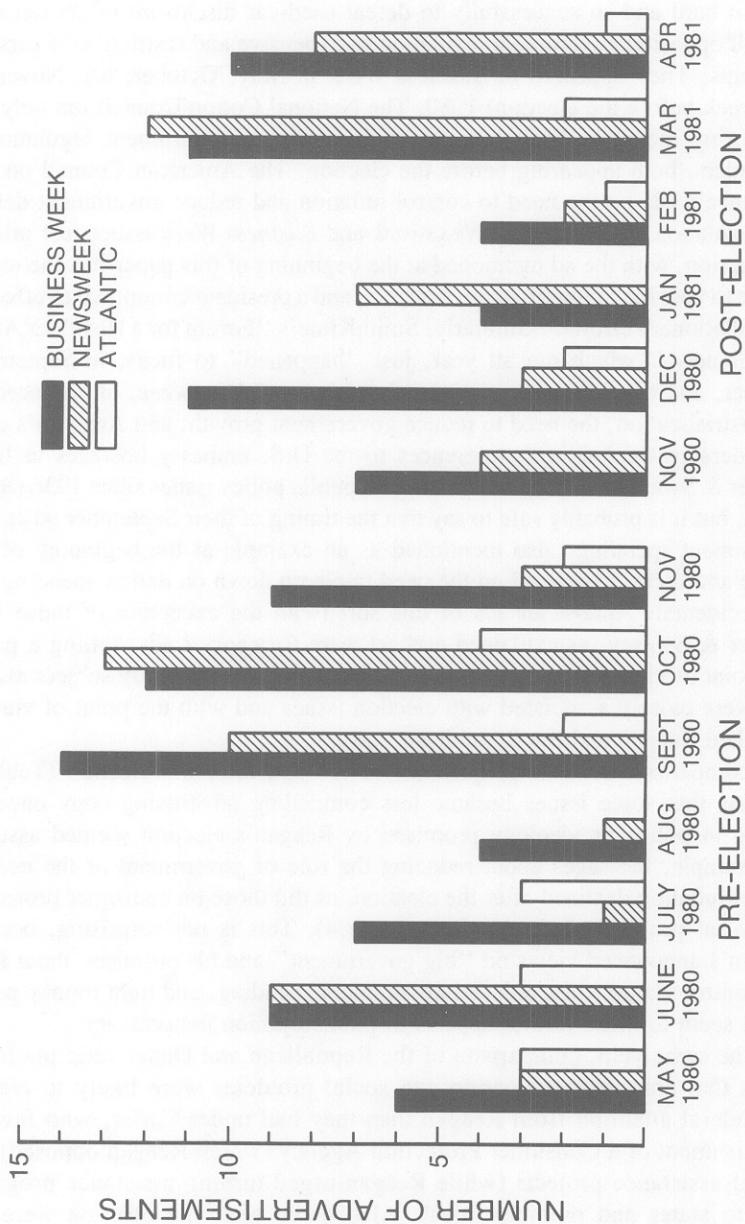


Figure 2. Pro-Reagan Advertisements by Publication

Foundation (of the National Automobile Dealers Association—the one that lobbied so hard and so successfully to defeat used-car disclosure rules) ran three ads, all opposing government regulation as expensive and restrictive of personal freedoms. They appeared in *Business Week* in May, October, and November (the week before the election) 1980. The National Cotton Council ran only two ads during the year, both warning of the costs of government regulation to consumers, both appearing before the election. The American Council on Life Insurance's ads on the need to control inflation and reduce government deficits and regulation culminated, in *Newsweek* and *Business Week* issues just prior to the election, with the ad mentioned at the beginning of this paper—the one urging people to vote for "congressmen, senators, and a president committed to effective anti-inflationary efforts." Similarly, SmithKline's "Forum for a Healthier American Society," which ran all year, just "happened" to focus, in September, October, and the first week in November issues of *Newsweek*, on the need for reindustrialization, the need to reduce government growth, and America's crisis in leadership (replete with references to the U.S. embassy hostages in Iran). Warner & Swasey has been advertising on public policy issues since 1936 (Sethi, p. 15), but it is probably safe to say that the timing of their September ad against government spending (also mentioned as an example at the beginning of this paper) and their October ad on the need to clamp down on deficit spending was not accidental. Almost all ads of this sort (with the exception of those from Warner & Swasey, as explained earlier) were *Category I* ads, selling a policy or a point of view rather than a product. By timing as well as by subject matter, they were closely associated with election issues and with the point of view of candidate Reagan and the Republican Party.

A comparison of issue frequencies before and after the election (Table 4) suggests that some issues became less compelling advertising copy once the change in policy or ideology promised by Reagan's election seemed assured. For example, messages about reducing the role of government or the need to control inflation declined after the election, as did those on consumer protection and social problems (not shown in Table 4). This is not surprising, because Reagan's announced views on "big government" and his promises about inflation control via tax cuts, reduced government spending, and tight money policy would seem to make further appeals to public opinion unnecessary.

In the same vein, comparison of the Republican and Democratic platforms shows that consumer protection and social problems were likely to receive less federal attention from Reagan than they had under Carter, who favored establishment of a Consumer Protection Agency (which Reagan opposed) and federal assistance projects (while Reagan urged turning assistance programs back to states and municipalities). Also down after the election were ads promoting energy conservation and environmental protection (the latter not included in Table 4), two more issues on which the Democrats promised a great deal more attention and control than did the Republicans. Both parties

avored energy conservation and environmental protection, but the Republicans advocated conservation through higher prices in the marketplace, rather than federal restriction, and also urged redressing the balance between energy needs and environmental protection, favoring the former and downplaying the latter. Somewhat surprisingly, however, ads promoting or extolling the free enterprise system quadrupled after the election; one would have thought that the ideological watchdogs might have relaxed a bit after free enterprise's champion was elected, but not so.

Before leaving the question of timing and intended influence, one other group of ads should be mentioned: those calculated to influence the legislative rather than the elective process. It was their post-election appearance (which through focusing on the election we did not anticipate) that caused so little overall difference in pre-election and post-election ad volumes. To be sure, an elected President is only halfway home; the promised program has to be pushed through Congress. For marshalling public opinion toward these goals, public policy advertising might prove as worthwhile as it had during the campaign itself.

Such ads did increase in frequency following election day (and post-election peaks were recorded in all three magazines, as shown in Figures 1 and 2). For example, there was a considerably larger number of ads advocating tax reform of one sort or another. United States Steel ran an ad three times during March 1981, as Congress was deliberating Reagan's tax proposals. The ad appeared twice in *Business Week* and once in *Newsweek*. The Savings and Loan Foundation sponsored ads in *Newsweek* urging readers to pressure Congress for tax incentives to encourage savings which, in this case, referred to proposed legislation allowing the "all-savers" certificate.

Other issues that bulked larger in numbers in the post-election period included advocacy of particular energy products (especially coal), the need to reindustrialize, and the importance of improving productivity. All of these post-election increases which occurred while the new President was urging passage of his economic programs were to be expected. National security is another issue that appeared more frequently after the election, again understandably, given Reagan's and the Republican Party platform's advocacy of a military buildup requiring Congressional approval.

These ads had no direct connection with the election *per se*, but they do illustrate the attempts by business to use the print media for political (in this case, legislative) purposes. It is also enlightening, and somewhat amusing, to note a slight change in the slogan the Savings and Loan Association used in its ads. The 1980 pre-election ads proclaimed, "If we all speak up, Washington *has* to listen" (emphasis theirs). By January 1981 that was changed to read, "If we all speak up, Washington *will* listen" (emphasis theirs). Does this change suggest that the people in Washington after January 1981, in Congress as well as in the Executive Branch, were thought to be more receptive than those there previously? A devoted ad follower could easily believe so.

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT PUBLIC POLICY ADVERTISING AND THE BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT

This study has focused on attempts by business to influence the electorate by means of public policy advertising, with special attention to the 1980 presidential election. As interesting and important as this topic may be, other more significant matters are intertwined with it, deserving comment.

Media Balance

It is sometimes, and perhaps even widely, believed that public policy advertising by business, supportive as it is of the system of private enterprise, represents a threat to balanced debate of public policy issues (Sethi, pp. 4, 17-18; and chapter 8). With its ample funds and easy access to the media, some argue, business may well crowd out opposing viewpoints while saturating the media channels with its own vested interest perspectives. In the worst case, elections would be sewed up and public opinion marshalled in favor of business-oriented legislative initiatives not necessarily in the public interest.

We do not find this argument convincing, so far as our study's findings are concerned. In our sample, public policy ads constituted only 8.3 percent of all types of full-page ads, suggesting that business in general does not assign a very high priority to this type of media message when compared with straight commercial selling, a point confirmed by others, as noted earlier. Moreover, those ads devoted almost exclusively to putting across some public policy message (*Category I*) represented only 24 percent of all public policy ads, suggesting that advertising budgets used for direct and exclusively political purposes are relatively modest. Surely if business were truly interested in saturating the print media with its political and ideological views, it would be more generous in funding such efforts. Just as surely, one would expect the occasion of a presidential election campaign to bring forth a maximum effort on the part of business to influence the electorate to choose that candidate perceived to be most favorable to business, but an 8 percent (or even a 24 percent) effort is not impressively large.

Additionally, we suspect that the public interest may well be preserved in these matters, somewhat fortuitously, by the ineffectiveness of the ad campaigns themselves. While many of the ads are attractive, attention-riveting, and emotion-stirring, an even greater number are dull, overly detailed, vapid, and unclear about intent. In some of them, business, while quick on the draw, has obviously shot itself in the foot. Few of the series of ads from any single source last long enough to have an enduring impact, the most obvious exception being Warner & Swasey's 41-year campaign to save America from socialism by promoting free enterprise. While extreme, their ads have at least gotten the message across.

The most that might be said about the inherent dangers of print media satu-

ration, so far as our study is concerned, is that we acknowledge a *potential* lack of balance. After all, pro-Reagan ads greatly outnumbered pro-Carter ads. Even here, though, checks exist. Internal Revenue Service rules concerning business expense deductibility act as a curb on an ad's political content by encouraging a mixed message of product promotion along with public policy views (Sethi, chapter 6).

Also, the natural cynicism many feel toward business advertising of any kind will tend to assert itself in these cases and will water down the effectiveness of an ad's public policy appeal. The skeptical and amused reactions we heard to United States Steel's "We're Involved" campaign some years ago, and to Mobil's more recent efforts, are two cases in point.

Some public affairs and advertising executives are aware of these limitations. One experienced corporate executive told us that he thinks threatening ads—the ones that predict dire consequences, such as Big Brother taking away your driving rights, or losing your cotton shirt due to government-induced inflation—are poorly received. Private surveys by corporations have shown that readers do not believe them and do not want to be bullied. The same surveys also found that what he called "overkill" ads, such as US Steel's and Mobil's, create skepticism.

Information-content ads, like those of the Chemical Manufacturers Association, have been found to be most effective, *given that*, according to this executive, part of the purpose of this advertising is to create a climate in which these public policy issues of concern to the company are thought about, to raise public consciousness that they *are* issues. This kind of consciousness-raising *could* lead to influencing the public policy process itself but is not the specific intent of the ad. Similarly, John Johnson, vice president of advertising at LTV, says, "I think strident advocacy advertising has peaked out. You've got to use a lot of restraint in this sort of thing. I don't think stridency is in a company's best interest. The public is really scared of that" (Maher, p. 59).

Our study's findings imply that there is an economic limit (although admittedly a high one in some cases) to the amount of money a firm or trade association is willing or able to devote to these public policy purposes, as well as some point of diminishing returns when the ad-reading public tires of messages of any kind. Moreover, if one imagines that magazine readers read nothing but the public policy advertisements, then it would be possible to see that a problem exists; but all three magazines we surveyed carry pro and con views on many topics of current public interest. As advertising executives well know (sob!), people do not buy magazines just for the ads.

For all these reasons, we think the dangers of print media saturation have been overplayed. One must look deeper into the culture for the significance that public policy advertising has for both business and society.

Sustaining the System

We turn now to the ideological significance of public policy advertisements and the probable role they play in sustaining the basic framework of the business

system. To the extent that *any* promotional ad aids a firm's profit-seeking goals, the general ends and structure of a private enterprise system are enhanced, though not always completely secured. It could be argued from this standpoint that all advertisements, whether purely commercial or intended to influence public policy, have ideological import and function. They help cement the system together, validating its declared purposes and higher ends. This is not to overlook the undoubted reality, though, that while all ads may share this common outcome or purpose, some public policy ads are clearly "more equal than others" in this regard. After all, a clarion call to confront, in the words of one ad, "the [national] crisis of leadership" stirs more political hackles than an appeal to use natural gas more efficiently. But each message, issued by a private firm operating within a capitalist order, contributes its small bit to legitimizing that system and its overarching values.

This latent or covert (and frequently overlooked) function of public policy advertising is considerably more important in fortifying the business system than is normally realized. Acting as it does at a lower, somewhat submerged layer of public consciousness than the media messages themselves, its cement binds the public mind more firmly to acceptance of things as they are. As long as this covert function is performed well, there is little need for a blatant media campaign that might squeeze out the opposition's viewpoints. Charles Lindblom has developed a similar line of thought, arguing that both commercial and political advertising form part of an overarching institutional system that safeguards the corporate and governmental *status quo* (Lindblom, chapter 15).

The Real Danger

In our view, the real damage from business's public policy advertisements occurs when an overly optimistic impression about the nation's problems is conveyed. The entire list of issues we culled from a year's supply of three major magazines' public policy ads identifies important—and sometimes critically important—problems that call for serious attention by both private and public sector leaders. A naive or otherwise ill-informed reader—and their numbers must be legion—could with little difficulty acquire from these ads a soothing picture of the social scene, national problems, and the role of business in it all.

The real lesson business apparently wants the ad-reading public to learn is: "We're doing our part concerning [some national problem], and we will do more—and probably solve the problem—if given a chance by government." This view, if widely adopted, would reinforce general acceptance of the business order while overlooking the negative impacts of business on society. It also projects an unbalanced picture of social and national reality. Few of our truly compelling national problems—including those identified in our ad sample—lend themselves to simplistic approaches or one-dimensional ideological solutions. Causing or even encouraging the public to believe so is a gross disservice

rendered by these ads. Therein lies the real danger of public policy advertising by business.

Again, Lindbolm's observations are pertinent.

To succeed in its purposes, which are perhaps only half understood by businessmen themselves, corporate molding of citizen volitions on grand issues does not need to accomplish tyranny over the mind, nor even a uniformity of opinion on the grand issues. Far short of either, we have already noted, it need only persuade citizens not to raise certain issues, not to make demands in politics on those issues (pp. 210-211)."

And:

Although sales promotion and manipulation of political volitions alike obstruct popular control by creating some degree of circularity in it, they may obstruct it again—hence doubly—through a more diffuse disservice to the populace. The messages confuse and deceive the public. The result is that, although people do not always do what leadership wants, they are incapable of knowing and protecting their own interests (p. 219).

We conclude by advertng to our initial belief that business made a strong effort through public policy advertising to influence voters to elect Ronald Reagan. The hypothesis was only partially supported by our study. Pro-Reagan ads did indeed peak before the election in the three magazines. More ads favored Reagan's position than Carter's. A few ads were obviously and enthusiastically pro-Reagan, constituting a direct attempt to influence voters and, later on, the legislative process. The overwhelming number and proportion of public policy ads, though, were devoted to selling products or services by linking their usage with one or more public policy issues, and we have concluded that the major motive operating in the sponsorship of those ads was commercial, not political.

Even more encouraging is the lack of confirmation that business saturates the print media with pro-business political messages to the exclusion of other points of view. Certainly, we found no concerted or sinister Establishment plot to influence public policy in this way. What did emerge was only a to-be-expected (and almost mild) preference for a conservative Republican presidential candidate over a moderately liberal Democratic candidate.

APPENDIX I

CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFYING PUBLIC POLICY ADVERTISEMENTS

Anything that directly advocated, or indirectly suggested or implied, or from which could be reasonably inferred a need for, any of the following public policies, policy directions, programs, or corrective action in prevailing policies and programs was considered to be:

Pro-Reagan

- Reduce the role of government, government costs, deficit spending, and taxes
- Control inflation (through fiscal and monetary policy, reducing government spending, etc.)
- Greater reliance on private, free market decisions
- Improve productivity and support reindustrialization
- Strengthen national security and national defense
- Protect freedom and privacy from government intrusion
- Control crime (too much permissiveness)
- Preserve family traditions
- Promote private transportation (automobiles)
- Protect consumers through free market
- Promote private health care, voluntary cost control, and deregulation of health care industry
- Base national energy policy on free-market decision making:
 - Rapid oil and gas decontrol
 - Deregulate coal mining and coal usage
 - Conserve energy through market pricing
 - Private synthetic fuels development (no government aid)
 - Energy independence through increased market supplies
 - New energy sources and technologies through private research
 - Private exploration and drilling on public lands and offshore
 - Increase nuclear power
 - Redress balance of energy needs and environmental protection
 - Abolish Department of Energy
- Strong, firm national leadership

Pro-Carter

- Restrain government spending and deficit spending
- Control inflation by monetary and fiscal restraint
- Deregulate anticompetitive industries (railroads and trucks)
- Reduce taxes selectively (not broad-based), and liberalize depreciation rates to stimulate industry
- Protect consumers by government actions, including a Consumer Protection Agency
- Favor a national health insurance program and comprehensive care
- Promote mass transit, deregulate trucks, provide railroad rate flexibility, and aid the automobile industry
- Protect privacy from government and business intrusion

- Favor passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (for women)
- Base national energy policy on energy conservation and environmental concern, aided by government:
 - Gradual oil and gas decontrol
 - Increase coal usage
 - Federal support for synthetic fuels development
 - Energy independence
 - Favor new and environmentally safe energy sources
 - Restrain private exploration and drilling on public lands, with environmental safeguards
 - Retire nuclear plants
 - Develop solar energy
 - More controls on oil companies
 - Retain Department of Energy

The pro-Reagan and pro-Carter criteria were derived from the respective platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties.

APPENDIX II

PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES AND THEMES APPEARING IN BUSINESS-SPONSORED ADVERTISEMENTS IN ALL ISSUES OF *ATLANTIC*, *BUSINESS WEEK*, AND *NEWSWEEK* FROM MAY 1980 THROUGH APRIL 1981

A major issue or theme is defined as the dominant message of a public policy advertisement. Less prominently featured but related issues and themes in an advertisement are defined as subsidiary issues and themes. Major issues totaled 91 and subsidiary issues 72. Eliminating overlap and duplication produces a grand total of 120 separate issues and themes that were featured in the ad sample.

<i>Issue or theme</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Subsidiary</i>
Air pollution control	X	X
Alaskan gas pipeline	X	X
Alcoholism, control of	X	
Aluminum can recycling	X	
Antitrust (revamp)		X
Arms control		X
Arson control	X	
Arts, support of	X	
Auto safety, improving and promoting	X	X
Balance of trade (international)		X
Carpooling, pro-	X	X
Chemical waste disposal, managing	X	

Coal gasification	X	X
Coal usage	X	X
Competition, market		X
Conservation of resources	X	X
Consumer protection	X	
Credit use, limit		X
Crime control	X	X
Defense spending, pro-	X	
Depreciation allowances for business	X	X
Deregulation	X	
Economic growth, pro-	X	X
Education, higher, support for	X	
Employing/training the disadvantaged/hard core	X	
Energy conservation	X	X
Energy independence	X	X
Energy supplies, national	X	X
Environmental protection	X	X
Export trade, increase/pro-	X	X
Family life, pro-	X	X
Fifty-five mile-per-hour speed limit, pro-		X
Food additives		X
Foreign policy, restoring/improving		X
Forest management, public interest	X	X
Free/private enterprise, pro-	X	X
Free speech	X	X
Freedom, pro-		X
Genetic engineering, future implications	X	
Global food supplies	X	
Government-business cooperation		X
Government-business-labor cooperation	X	X
Government-business-labor-education cooperation		X
Government growth, anti-/reduce	X	X
Government regulation, anti-/costs of	X	X
Government/deficit spending, anti-	X	X
Health care delivery	X	X
Hispanic rights	X	
Home buying and selling	X	
Home mortgage money	X	
Industrial minerals policy	X	
Inflation control	X	X
Innovation		X
Insurance rate discrimination		X
(by age, sex, marital status)		
International crises (Iran)		X
Leadership, reasserting America's in the world		X
Leadership crisis, national	X	
Liability claims against government	X	
Lifelong learning and career development	X	
Limit pollution controls	X	
Liquified natural gas		X
Literacy, improving	X	

Mass transit	X	
Media bias against business	X	
Medical (hospital) malpractice claims/costs	X	
Minority enterprise, aid to	X	
Monetary policy, improve		X
Municipal tax savings (city budget)	X	
National defense	X	X
Natural gas usage	X	X
New energy sources	X	X
Noise pollution	X	
Nuclear energy, pro-	X	X
Nuclear licensing procedure		X
Ocean resources, future policies	X	
Occupational safety and health	X	
Offshore drilling	X	X
Oil and gas exploration	X	
Oil usage	X	X
Pioneering spirit		X
Political risk of multinational corporations	X	
Prisoner education	X	
Privacy, personal, protection of	X	X
Product liability	X	
Productivity, improvement of	X	X
Profits, pro-	X	X
Public lands drilling/exploration, usage	X	X
Public television, support of (for children)	X	
Recovering domestic oil	X	
Red-lining		X
Reducing consumer (household) costs		X
Reindustrialization	X	X
Retirement/pensions	X	
Safe chemical products	X	
Scientific discovery, lag in		X
Shale oil recovery and mining	X	X
Shareholder ownership	X	
Single-issue politics, anti-	X	
Social experimentation, slowing		X
Social goals, strengthening		X
Social problems, solving		X
Solar energy	X	X
Space program, pro-	X	
Strip mining		X
Support new President (Reagan)	X	
Synthetic fuels	X	X
Tar sands oil recovery	X	X
Tax-free savings	X	
Tax incentives for business	X	X
Tax reduction for business		X
Technological future	X	
Technological innovation		X
Technological progress	X	

Transporting hazardous chemicals	X	
Truck and barge public subsidies, anti-	X	
Urban neighborhood renewal	X	X
Water pollution control	X	
Wildlife conservation	X	
Youth voting, pro-	X	

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was partially supported by the Business, Government, and Society Research Institute of the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh through a grant from the General Electric Foundation. The authors are especially grateful to Norma Walde for initial identification and classification of the public policy advertisements, to Sandra Kerbel for technical advice and helpful suggestions concerning analytical design, to Vasudevan Ramanujam for data analysis and construction of tables, and to others who made constructive comments on earlier versions of this paper.

NOTES

1. For other, more comprehensive definitions, see Sethi, pp. 7-14 and 53-55.
2. The period prior to the election covered the November 1980 issue of *Atlantic*, the November 3, 1980, issue of *Newsweek*, and the November 3 and November 10, 1980, issues of *Business Week*, all of which were on the newsstands and delivered to subscribers prior to election day.

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