

# 7 Who Responds to Election Campaigns? The Two-Moderator Model Revisited

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Campaign events affect election outcomes. This claim, once unpopular, is now virtually undisputed (e.g., Johnston et al. 1992; Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004; Holbrook 1996; Blais et al. 1999, 2003; Blais and Perrella 2008; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck 2002; Brady and Johnston 2006). But which voters are influenced by campaign events and the information they generate? Scholars and campaign operatives alike have assumed that some voters are too set in their ways to be open to conversion and some voters pay too little attention to be swayed by campaign information; this likely leaves only a minority susceptible to changing their minds on the basis of the news of the campaign. In spite of this widely recognized argument, however, most research on campaign effects demonstrates only the total effect of campaign events.<sup>1</sup>

Finding the subset of voters susceptible to campaign influence should provide a more satisfying portrayal of the campaign processes that can drive election outcomes (Hillygus and Shields 2008). Indeed, some campaign effects that are important to outcomes but statistically undetectable among all voters might be visible if we know where to look.

To do so, we deploy and revise the dominant model of persuasion by new information, elaborated by Zaller (1992, 1996), and based in earlier work by Converse (1962) and McGuire (1968, 1969). It conceives of attitude change as resulting from a pair of cognitive psychological mechanisms: (1) reception of persuasive information and (2) acceptance of that information. This two-moderator model of attitude change has received much theoretical attention, but its empirical implementation has been sporadic and unconvincing. Only Zaller himself – in an early article (1989) and an infrequently referenced chapter towards