

The Application of MECCAS to Advertising Strategy Development for the 1984 Reagan-Bush Presidential Campaign

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*Paper Presented to the American Marketing Association
Winter Marketing Educators' Conference
February 17-20, 1985
Phoenix, Arizona*

The application of MECCAS (Means-End Conceptualization of the Components of Advertising Strategy) requires identifying five strategic factors for an advertising campaign: (1) Driving Force: the value orientation of the strategy; the end-level of focus in the advertising. (2) Leverage Point: the manner by which the advertisement will tap into, reach, or activate the value of end-level; the specific, key way in which the value is linked to the specific features in the advertisement. (3) Executional Framework: the overall scenario or action plot, plus the details of the advertising execution. The executional framework provides the vehicle by which the value orientation is to be communicated—especially the gestalt of the advertisement: its overall tone and style. (4) Consumer benefit: the major positive consequences for the consumer that are to be communicated, verbally or visually, in the advertisement. (5) Message Elements: the specific attributes, consequences, or features about the product that are to be communicated, verbally or visually.

This afternoon, we would like to share with you some of the strategic communications research conducted last summer for the Reagan-Bush campaign. We will begin with a brief overview of the political environment in August of 1984 and will discuss some highlights of the national survey work conducted for the campaign by President Reagan's pollster, Richard Wirthlin, through his company, Decision/Making/Information.

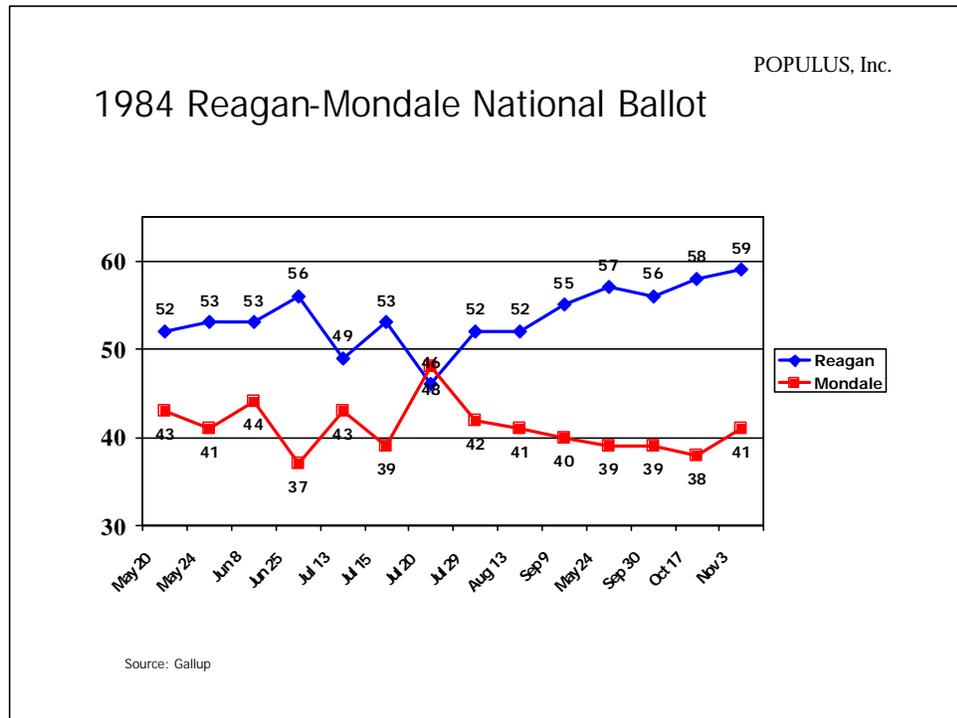
Then we will review the qualitative research we conducted with Tom Reynolds. Our work focused on developing a motivational understanding of the voter. This learning helped develop communication strategies for the campaign and was reflected in the campaign's television advertising. The same strategic outcomes were also the basis for many of the unpaid media efforts, such as in the speeches given by Reagan and by others who campaigned for the President.

From this overall perceptual and motivational framework of the electorate, based on our research, we will then focus on the translation of that research to advertising strategy, using the MECCAS model. By way of illustration, we will present several of the campaign strategies that resulted from the research.

The Political Environment, August 1984

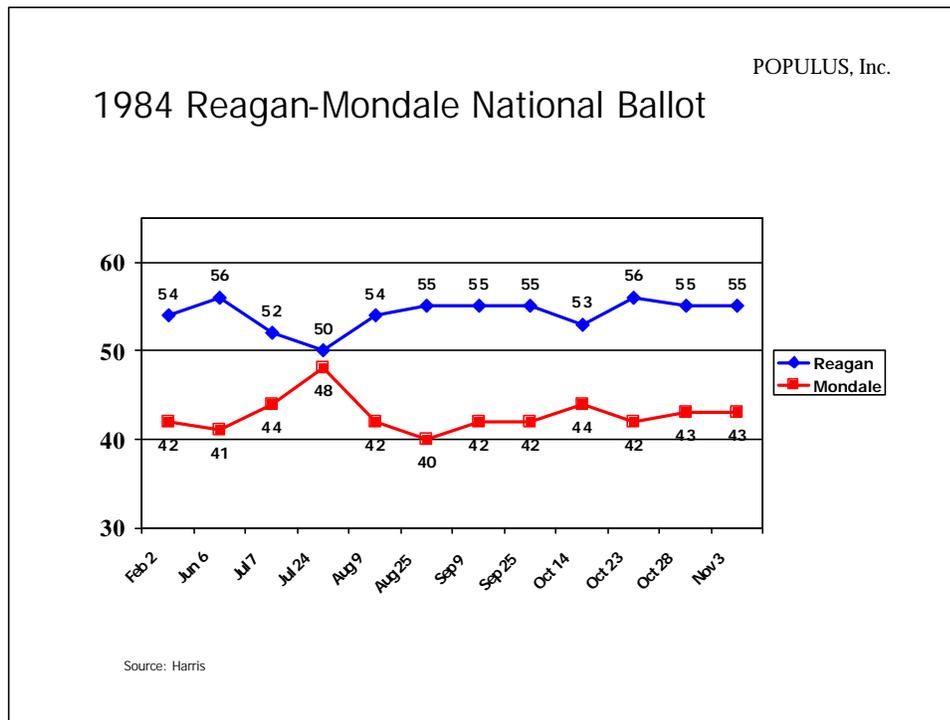
The President's landslide of 525 electoral votes on November 6 can easily color one's retrospective view of the campaign. That the President would win, and would win "big," may seem obvious now. Twenty months ago it wasn't.

In the period following the Democratic National Convention, Walter Mondale had effectively closed the gap with the President on trial ballots.



Gallup's July 20th poll had former Vice President Walter Mondale ahead 48% to 46%.

Similarly, the Harris poll, taken four days later, showed Reagan's lead down to a dangerously low two points.



The Democratic campaign was off to a strong start: no disasters at the convention, Geraldine Ferraro's nomination was initially a strong plus, and there was complacency in many Republican camps.

While Richard Wirthlin's polls didn't show the race quite this tight, there was far more disturbing evidence that portended future slippage. Last April, we measured the President's standing against Mr. Mondale on 31 issue and policy variables; the President led on 28 of the 31. A few months later, in mid-July, the President had lost a lot of ground and now led on only 21 of the 31 variables. More important, Walter Mondale had significantly narrowed the gap on 18 of the 21 issue clusters in which the President still led.

This was the deteriorating attitudinal situation in which we began our motivation research.

Research Objectives

Our research objectives were straightforward:

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Objectives

- Perceptions of issues
 - What voters talk about
- Impact of issues
 - How voters think
- Values and motivations
 - Why voters think the way they do
- Linkages
 - Why voters support a particular candidate

- 1) We wanted to identify what specific elements of the general political issues were most important to voters and then determine the voters' perceptions of the candidates on these issues. In short, we first wanted to understand the lexicon used to talk about the candidates -- both pro and con -- across political sub-segments.
- 2) We then wanted to determine how voters viewed the positive and negative outcomes of the candidates' position on each issue; that is, by what more personally relevant meanings did they interpret the issues. How did the policies, programs, and even the personalities of the candidates benefit voters? What political consequences were they seeking when they supported a particular candidate? In short, we were fundamentally interested in how the voters were thinking.
- 3) The next stage was to understand the end benefits derived from the policies, programs, and personalities we had identified. To do this, we had to discover the basic personal values that gave importance, weight, and ultimate meaning to the issues. The question we wanted to answer was why did voters think the way they did.
- 4) Finally, it was important to understand the linkages between each of these levels--issue, relevant outcomes, and personal values--so we could understand the bases of voters' perceptions, and thus their motivations to vote. In sum, we sought to answer the most fundamental question of all, why did voters support a particular candidate.

Research Methodology

To accomplish our objectives, we utilized one basic interviewing method, laddering, which we had used in the past to develop strategies for consumer products.

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Approaches

- Campaign theme development
 - Who could say what
- Attack themes
 - Who was vulnerable to what
- Non-verbal perceptions of Walter Mondale
 - What was the nature of his appeal

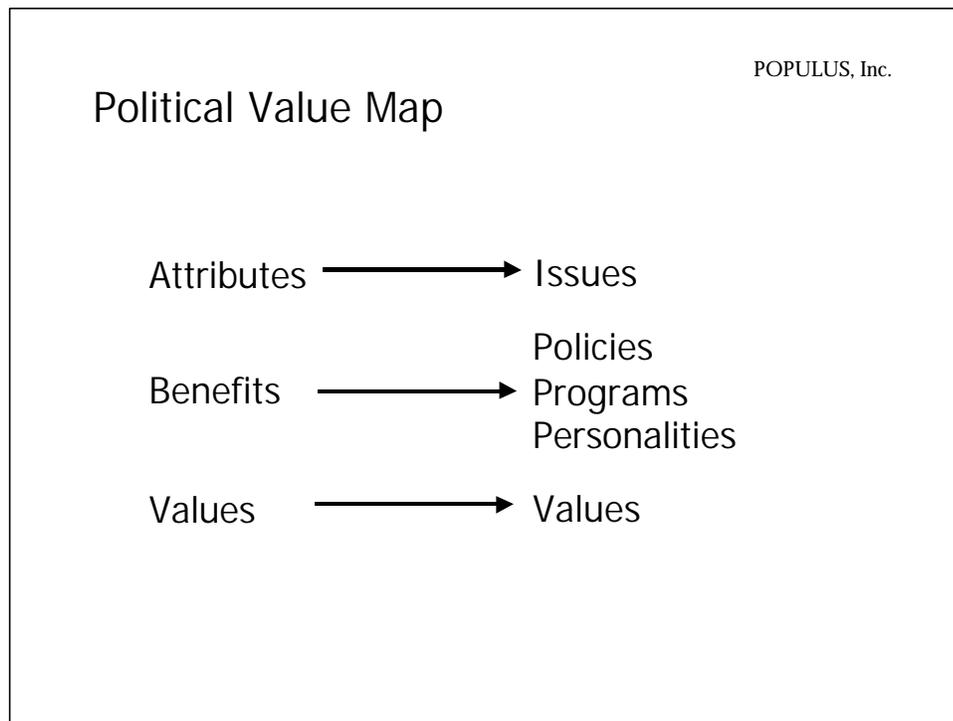
In this political application, however, we used three different analytic frames. The interviewing was conducted in early August in two crucial battleground states: Texas and Illinois. Some of the work was done in focused group interviews, some in small groups of three or four voters, and there were an additional one hundred individual depth interviews. Three different types of stimuli were employed so that the research was simultaneously able to address a number of tactical issues facing the campaign leadership.

- 1) "Campaign Theme Development and Evaluation" was conducted among soft Reagan and Mondale voters, that is people who were not firmly committed to a candidate but leaned in his direction ("soft identifiers"). Very briefly, we showed respondents a theme line and asked them to decide which candidate would be more likely to say that line and what it meant when said by each man. The results of this research led to the eventual campaign slogan for Reagan-Bush, "Leadership That's Working."
- 2) "Attack Theme Research" was done to identify the vulnerabilities of Reagan and Mondale. This portion of the research was conducted among each candidate's own soft supporters. Not only did we want to identify where each candidate was vulnerable, but also to discover the strength of voters' perceptions of vulnerability. The technique we used was, figuratively speaking, to throw a hand grenade on the table and see if it exploded. If it did explode, we wanted to see what kind of damage was done. The intention was to see if we could weaken respondents' perceptions and positions. And

then, if this tactic had caused some damage, we asked them to tell us how it could be repaired.

- 3) We also conducted a "Photograph Sort," a non-verbal analysis of voters' perceptions of Mondale, among soft Democratic sub-groups (Catholics, blue-collar workers, senior citizens) in order to understand the nature of his appeal.

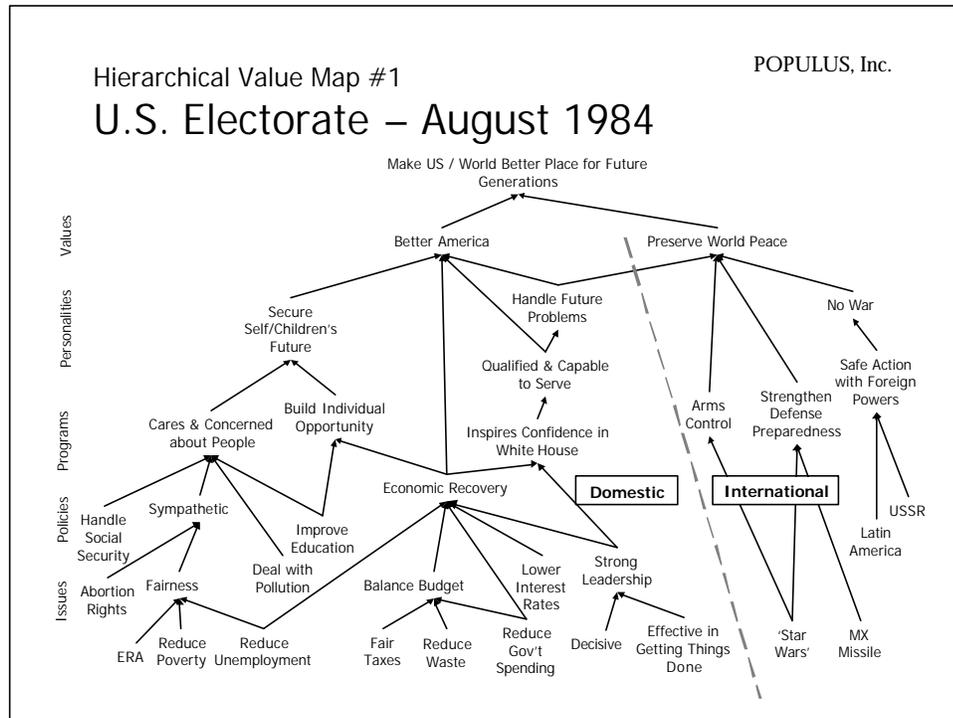
From the information we gleaned from our research we developed our value map. But before we show you the value map we constructed based on our learning, we would like to point out a couple of adjustments we made to reflect the political nature of the analysis.



In a political context, attributes become issues. Benefits are the policies, programs, and personalities of the candidates. And values...well, values remain values.

Voters' Hierarchical Value Map

This value map was constructed to reflect voters' perceptions in August. As a reminder, the timing was after the Democratic Convention but before the Republican Convention.



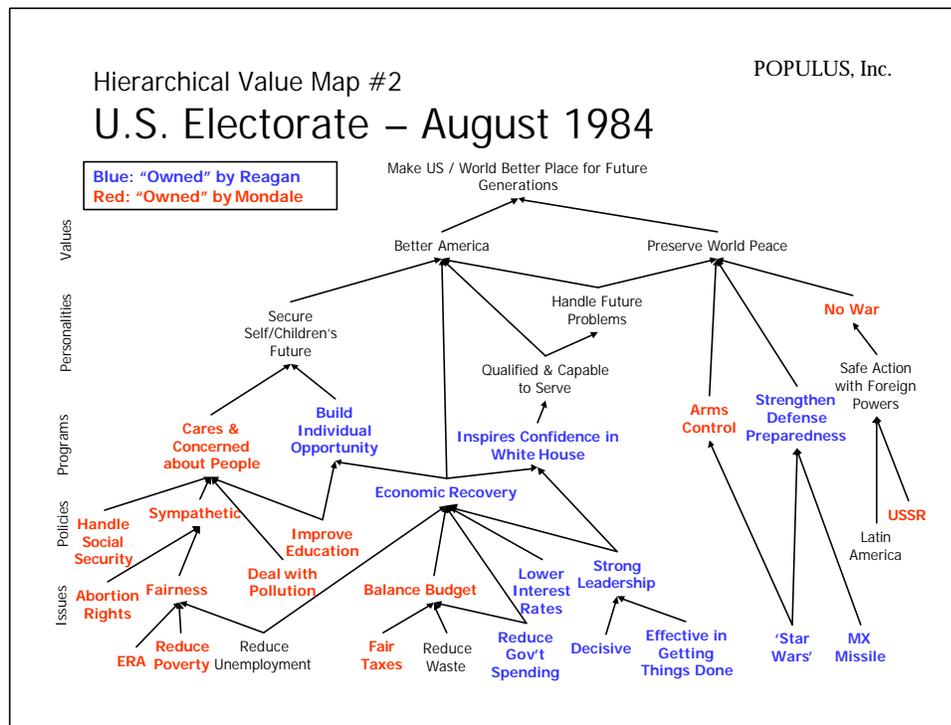
The apex of the map, or the highest value that united all voters is the FUTURE.

Beneath the apex, the map can be divided into two parts: "DOMESTIC" and "INTERNATIONAL."

On the domestic side, voters talked about "SOCIAL" issues and "ECONOMIC" issues. Compared to the international side of the map, domestic issues were more numerous and more complex. People tended to have a better understanding of what was going on in the United States because it involved their day-to-day lives. They were more likely to talk about these issues in a rational manner.

On the international side, voters often had a more emotional response. They thought they were less informed and they felt less able to control what goes on vis-à-vis the foreign policy of the United States.

In August, many of the points on the map could be described as being “owned” by one candidate or the other.



MONDALE owned those things marked in RED.

- As you can see, he had a corner on domestic social issues, but not on economic issues. Voters saw him as one of themselves and as being in touch with their lives and needs.
- Voters had no clear perception of the outcome of Mondale's economic proposals. In fact, they only understood that he was for fair (and in some cases, higher) TAXES and a BALANCED BUDGET. But they didn't know how he was going to accomplish these things.
- On the international side, Mondale was seen as being firmly committed to ARMS CONTROL and to a position of NO WAR. He would negotiate with the Russians. While they thought this would result in SAFE ACTION, they weren't sure that Mondale owned the linkage between the two.

REAGAN owned those things marked in BLUE.

- Reagan was attributed with a strong position on economic issues, while being weak in the social arena. Because he was perceived as being for the rich and big business, not for the little guy, he was not identified with domestic social concerns. Yet, his economic policies were seen as paying off.
- On the other hand, he was seen as taking a firm stance on DEFENSE PREPAREDNESS. While Reagan was saying this would lead to peace, some feared that this position was going to encourage war, not deter it. Therefore, there is no linkage from the issue to the value.

- Reagan also dominated the LEADERSHIP area. Voters talked about this quality of Reagan's in terms of his being a "father," a "coach," a "general." Whether they liked him or not, approved of his policies or not, he was almost universally perceived as a strong leader.

Some points, some issues, policies, and so on, could not be attributed to either candidate. While important to voters, neither Reagan nor Mondale had achieved, in August, a consensus perception in these areas. Most notably, unowned territory is at the VALUE LEVEL.

This leaves us with the question: How does a candidate motivate voters? Clearly, this motivation requires two things:

- First, the candidate must achieve ownership of as much attitudinal territory as possible.
- Second, and equally important, he must create linkages from his issue positions to motivating values. Yet, it does not seem that a candidate's position on an issue, in and of itself, is the pivotal point.

For example, the more credible way for Reagan to talk about the benefits of REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT was in the context of ECONOMIC RECOVERY. Mondale was more credible when he talked about the benefits of this same issue in a social context.

Similarly, Reagan had to find a credible way to communicate WORLD PEACE through DEFENSE PREPAREDNESS while Mondale could establish it through ARMS CONTROL.

This suggests that the motivating leverages to win votes are above the level of specific issues.

Next we will explain how this type of construct was used to develop the campaign's strategies. See if you can guess how this value map will look at a later point, on the crucial day, election day: What will be colored red and what will be colored blue on November 6th?

Advertising Strategies

The first creative strategy we would like to talk about is built upon the employment issue, the resulting economic recovery, the opportunity to secure a better future for one's self and children, and thus, achieve a better America. We have called this strategy "American Opportunity."

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American Opportunity

- Driving Force
 - A sense of SECURITY derived from the belief that all will have the opportunity to work toward a secure future
- Leverage Point
 - President Reagan understands that our future lies in an opportunity society
- Executional Framework
 - Reconstruction of the Statue of Liberty
- Voter Benefit
 - Together, rebuilding the American dream
- Message elements
 - Freedom of choice to pursue the work-reward ethic in an opportunity society

The Driving Force was the sense of security in the belief that under President Reagan's leadership all would have the opportunity to work for a secure future.

The Leverage Point turned on the belief that Ronald Reagan understood the basis of the country's success and his leadership was philosophically grounded in these traditional principles; he thus demonstrated his caring for the future of America and future generations.

The Executional Framework showed the reconstruction of the Statue of Liberty by a diverse group of American workers, each portrayed as free to pursue the opportunity of employment of choice. Their reconstruction of the Statue of Liberty mirrored the rebirth of national self-esteem under Reagan leadership.

The Voter Benefit was in the expression of freedom of choice in employment; fulfilling the need for individual growth; collectively building America.

The Message Elements reflected the fact that the American economy was built on the comprehensive principle of the work-reward ethic: the opportunity to do the work of your choice and receive a fair reward. The advertising communicated how this simple principle worked for our forefathers and is beginning to work again. It reminded voters that it is their

responsibility today to continue forward, building a growing economy that will enable their children, and their children's children, to realize the dream of their forbearers.

Let's watch the first commercial. (See Appendix A: "STATUE OF LIBERTY.")

The second creative strategy follows the same structural path as the first, but it is directed primarily toward a special audience.

The focus of this second strategy was to "Recreate the Pain" that afflicted many soft Democratic identifiers in the closing year-of the Carter-Mondale administration. This pain, both personal and national, resulted in the transfer of allegiance of many to the Republican Party.

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Recreate the Pain

- Driving Force
 - A sense of PERSONAL SECURITY derived from the economic leadership of the President
- Leverage Point
 - Reinforcement of the 1980 vote decision
- Executional Framework
 - Recreation of the pain of the failed economic policies of the Carter-Mondale administration
- Message Elements
 - The benefits of the first four years are only starting to be seen

The Driving Force that underlay the strategy was the sense of security under the continued leadership of President Reagan and the economic growth of his Presidency. It extended to providing security for one's children.

The Leverage Point was that the difficult decision made by many Democrats in 1980 to vote for Ronald Reagan had been vindicated by his performance as President.

Through the Executional Framework we wished to show these benefits of the Reagan Presidency. The idea was to personalize the sense of pain under the failed Carter Presidency and show how it resulted in one man's hardship. Like many Democrats, he had voted for Reagan in 1980 despite concerns and reservations because he was frustrated by the Carter-Mondale alternative.

The Voter Benefit was the reinforcement of the rightness of that 1980 ballot decision. Economic recovery had restored both personal well-being and a sense of national pride which justified an optimistic view of the future.

The key Message Elements attempted to communicate that the first four years have put in place the foundation of President Reagan's economic plan: one that puts faith in the individual to do his part in contributing to the process of economic growth. You will see in this commercial Larry Headley, a Democrat featured in a man-on-the-street commercial made for the 1980 campaign, whom we tracked down four years later. (See Appendix B: "HEADLEY MAN-ON-THE-STREET 80-84.")

The last approach we would like to share with you focuses on world peace. The positive benefits of defense preparedness were shown to lead to peace and a better future.

The third and last strategy is called "World Leadership for the Future." The Driving Force to activate voters' motivations was their sense of well-being from knowing that the world was more likely to be at peace in the near future and for future generations.

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World Leadership

- Driving Force
 - A sense of WELL-BEING derived from the likelihood of future peace
- Leverage Point
 - Decisive and strong leadership
- Executional Framework
 - Allegorical representation of USSR
 - President's personal commitment to peace for our children
- Voter Benefit
 - The knowledge that the program of preparedness and negotiations will bring lasting peace
- Message Elements
 - Strength of commitment, prepared for peace

The Leverage Point rested on Ronald Reagan's decisive and strong leadership that had restored the nation's military strength and had prepared the country for peace. The idea was that Americans no longer need fear the sort of humiliations encountered during the Carter administration.

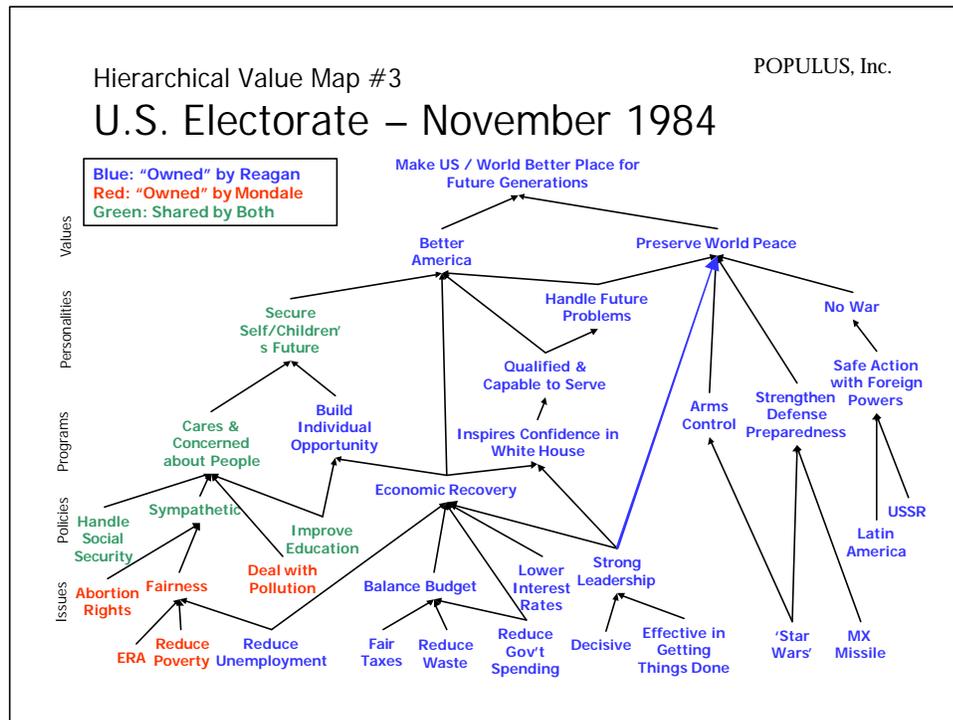
This strategy was delivered through several Executional Frameworks. One utilized an allegorical representation of possible threats through the depiction of the USSR as a bear. In this commercial, the Soviet threat was confronted without hostility, only with quiet resolve.

The second framework demonstrated the benefits of preparedness by showing future generations living and growing in peace. The President's personal commitment and quest for peace through strength was shown through his own words and thoughts.

The Voter Benefits were obviously high in the motivational structure. Our aim was to show that world peace could be achieved through accommodation: Peace is a product of preparedness and negotiations. The advertising reinforced the fact that the world is at peace now and could continue to remain so given the peace through strength positioning of Reagan's foreign policy.

Message Elements reflected the President's strength of commitment to a policy of preparedness and negotiation. Voters could assure themselves that the nation was prepared to meet aggression and strong enough that the country would never mislead others to mistake our resolve. (See Appendix C: "BEAR" and Appendix D: "PEACE.")

On November 6th, following thirteen weeks of campaigning and the two presidential debates, Ronald Reagan had seized electoral ownership of 49 states. He had also gained ownership of virtually all the linkages on our value map. There was also a new linkage: By then, STRONG LEADERSHIP was seen as leading directly to the PRESERVATION OF WORLD PEACE.



This research resulted in strategies that were of significant value to the campaign. The work brought the candidate and his advisors a better understanding of the electorate, its hopes and its fears. As you have seen, it facilitated communication into and out of the White House.

Thank you.

**Appendix A:
"STATUE OF LIBERTY"
(:30)**

VIDEO

Close-ups of individuals on construction crew working on project

Close-ups of individuals working on the Statue of Liberty torch.

Pull back to see entire Statue of Liberty surrounded by scaffolding.

TITLE: President Reagan.
Leadership that's working.
(Picture of Reagan)

AUDIO

ANOUNCER VO: It was a dream that built a nation

The freedom to work at the job of your choice.

To reap the rewards of your labors.

To lead a richer life for your children and their children beyond.

Today the dream lives again.

Today jobs are coming back.

And the economy is coming back

And America is coming back

Standing tall in the world again.

President Reagan.
Rebuilding the American Dream

Appendix B:
"MAN ON STREET: HEADLEY '80-'84"
(:30)

VIDEO

TITLE: AMERICA, 1980

TITLE: AMERICA, 1980
Larry Headley, Woodbury, N.J.

Larry Headley on screen.
SUPER: Larry Headley, Woodbury, N.J.

TITLE: AMERICA, 1984
Larry Headley, Woodbury, N.J.

Larry Headley on screen.
SUPER: Larry Headley, Woodbury, N.J.

TITLE: President Regan
Leadership that's working
(Picture of Regan)

AUDIO

LARRY HEADLEY VO: To me, they've changed because I have a family, four children. . .

. . .my wife and myself to support. And, I've been out of work since last April. Still looking for a job.

LARRY HEADLEY VO:
I remember that time very well.

It was difficult for me and my family being out of work. But things have sure changed. Today, I have a job, and I have a future.

Mr. Ronald Reagan's policies have made a difference in our lives. Mr. Reagan is a guy that I really believe in.

(No audio)

Appendix C:
"BEAR"
(:30)

VIDEO

Bear walking through the woods.

Bear crossing a river.

Bear on top of a ridge. Meets hunter face-to-face.

TITLE: President Reagan
Prepared for Peace
(Picture of Reagan)

AUDIO

ANNOUNCER VO: There is a bear in the woods.

For some people, the bear is easy to see.

Others don't see it all.

Some people say the bear is tame.

Others say it is vicious, and dangerous.

Since no one can really be sure who's right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the bear?

. . . If there is a bear?

(No audio)

Appendix D:
"PEACE"
(:60)

VIDEO

Shots of children throughout.

RR (On camera)

AUDIO

REAGAN VO: In my lifetime we've faced two World Wars.

A war in Korea.

And then Vietnam.

And I know this: I want our children never to have to face another.

A president's most important job is to secure peace, not just now, but for the lifetimes of our children. But it takes a strong America to build a peace that lasts.

And I believe with all my heart that working together we have made America stronger, and prouder, and more secure today.

And now, we can work toward a lasting peace, for our children and their children to come.

Peace is the highest aspiration of the American people.

Today America is prepared for peace. We will negotiate for it; sacrifice for it. We will not surrender for it, now or ever.