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Elections in America

Edited by
Kay Lehman Schlozman



Elections in America

First published in 1987, *Elections in America* focuses upon different substantive aspects of elections in America. The essays in the volume orient themselves differentially with respect to these alternative perspectives on the role of elections in democratic governance. Although varied in substantive focus, methodological approach, and theoretical orientation, these essays critically examine what we think we know about elections in America and bring together both past and present to bear on the investigation of the continuing evolution of the role played by elections in American democracy.

Divided into five parts—the elections as a democratic institution; party reform and the nomination process; the electronic campaign; money and politics; and the 1984 elections, this book is a must read for students and researchers of political science, particularly of American politics.



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Preface

In the modern age those who find themselves in conflict may resolve their differences in any of several ways. Like Arthurian knights or modern armies, they can resort to combat. Like neighbors in a legendary town meeting, they can discuss and discuss until a consensus emerges. Like workers and managers they can sit at a bargaining table until a compromise is reached or a mediated solution is imposed. Like good friends at loggerheads over whether to take in a movie or a ball game, they can take turns. Like citizens in a democracy, they can vote. Americans take voting seriously: They are called to the polls more frequently to fill more offices than in any other modern democracy. What is more, they bring many different—and competing—expectations to the electoral process.

One of the predominant ways in which students of modern American politics have construed elections is as a democratic institution. Such a view of elections implies that elections ideally should give citizens—on a more or less equal basis—a meaningful opportunity to communicate their preferences to political leaders and to render those leaders responsive to such expressions of public sentiment and accountable for their conduct in office. This construction of the meaning of elections

rests heavily on their representative function, reflecting the popular will and giving citizens the wherewithal to punish elected leaders. As a corollary, it emphasizes the role of elections in the building of majorities of relatively like-minded citizens and focuses upon the way in which the assembly of voter coalitions serves to channel social and ideological conflict and to facilitate the peaceful resolution of public conflicts.

An alternative perspective treats the election as a republican rather than a democratic institution; that is, as a mechanism for selecting meritorious individuals in whom to entrust the government of the republic. In *The Federalist*, No. 57, Madison articulates this point of view:

The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold the public trust. The effective mode of obtaining rulers is the characteristic policy of republican government. . . .

Who are to be the objects of popular choice? Every citizen whose merit may recommend him to the esteem and confidence of his country.¹

Implicit in such a conception is a more limited role for members of the public. While they function as the ultimate arbiter in choosing elected officials, the emphasis shifts from the importance of responsiveness to the importance of leadership.

Another approach, compatible with either a democratic or a republican view of the central purpose of elections, focuses on the election as an educational institution. Whether the election is construed fundamentally as an agency of citizen control or as a mechanism of leadership selection, those who adopt this perspective emphasize the importance of an informed public. According to this conception, citizens must be armed to make enlightened choices. Hence, it is important for the electoral process—in particular, campaign practices and the way that campaigns are reported in the media—to be constituted in such a way that the nature of the electoral choices will be clarified rather than

1. *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961), pp. 350–351. It should be noted that elsewhere Madison takes a more democratic view of elections. In discussing the House of Representatives in *Federalist*, No. 52, for example, he remarks (p. 327):

As it is essential to liberty that the government in general should have a common interest in the people, so it is particularly essential that the branch of it under consideration should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people. Frequent elections are the only policy by which this dependence and sympathy can effectually be secured.

obscured, thereby enhancing the probability that reasonably attentive citizens will command a basic understanding of the alternatives.

In still another conception, the election is construed as a legitimating institution. In this view, elections confer legitimacy on public officials and, thus, create the conditions whereby they are able to govern. By participating in elections, citizens come to support both a particular set of victorious incumbents as well as the regime more generally. Ordinarily, those who focus on the legitimating aspect of elections argue that such legitimacy provides democratic governments with the support necessary to perform effectively in office. For observers of a more critical frame of mind, however, the legitimacy thus granted simply buys off more disruptive forms of dissent and grants to public officials license to manipulate an unwary electorate.

In short, we expect elections to perform several functions: to channel social conflict; to give the public an instrument by which to hold government officials accountable; to act as the vehicle for the expression of citizen preferences; to facilitate in the selection of able leaders; to help citizens to make enlightened choices; and to provide public officials with the wherewithal to govern effectively. However, it is not simply that elections are expected to serve multiple purposes simultaneously. Rather what is demanded of elections is contradictory. For example, elections cannot operate to render leaders both responsive to popular wishes and, at the same time, able to govern effectively. What is more, the several expectations of what elections should do are not only discordant with one another but they also come into conflict with other values fundamental to American democracy. For example, electoral finance reforms entailing limitations on the sources or amounts of campaign contributions inevitably involve balancing the claims of political equality—the premise that each person's vote should carry equal weight—against First Amendment guarantees of freedom of expression.

The essays in this volume focus upon different substantive aspects of elections in America, and orient themselves differentially with respect to these alternative perspectives on the role of elections in democratic governance. For all their diversity, however, they share a concern to ground rigorous empirical analysis of the realities of electoral politics in the themes that have long engaged the attention of theorists of democracy. Moreover, those essays probing common substantive areas speak to one another, even when they are most conspicuously in disagreement. In fact, it is the illuminating nature of those disagreements—in addition to the extraordinarily high quality of the essays—that makes their conjunction in this volume so rewarding.

The first two essays deal quite explicitly with the election as a

democratic institution. Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba explore the terrain between democratic and republican concepts of elections and probe the tension between democratic responsiveness and political leadership. They propose alternative models of the ways in which American presidential elections can serve as an agency by which an incumbent president is held accountable to the public and corresponding models of how presidents might respond to the pressure generated by the desire to be reelected (or to be succeeded by a fellow partisan). Their conclusion stresses that any understanding of the presidential election as a democratic institution must encompass the constraints imposed on the president not only by the electorate at large but also by the political elites and attentive publics on whom he depends for political and electoral support.

Amplifying and elaborating upon the themes with which he has long been identified, Walter Dean Burnham confronts the issue of the election as a purely democratic institution. Using both contemporary and historical data—including some fascinating figures showing turnout in gubernatorial elections of the Confederacy—he focuses on the importance of both high levels of turnout and strong political parties to act as intermediaries if elections are to function democratically. His conclusion, which includes a discussion of the development of the state and public policy under Ronald Reagan, emphasizes the somewhat dim prospects for the realization of electoral democracy in the present era.

Probing the implicit opposition between democratic and republican interpretations of the role of elections, both of the essays on the reform of presidential nominating procedures in the Democratic party offer a chronology of the successive Democratic commissions and their attempts at reform and counterreform. William Crotty uses the opportunity to survey the entire history of changing presidential nominating procedures beginning with the preparty era in the colonies and places his discussion in the context of two contrasting orientations in democratic theory: one emphasizing representative democracy and the role of competing elites who govern in the name of the public; the other focusing upon participatory democracy and the importance of citizen participation in the making of decisions. He concludes by reviewing the unfinished business of reform—the various alternative proposals for still further tinkering.

Austin Ranney's approach is distinguished by his explication of the objectives of the reformers and counterreformers and evaluation of the degree to which these objectives have been achieved. He points out that the post-1968 reformers had as their goal not simply opening up participation in presidential nominating politics, but facilitating access for

issue and candidate enthusiasts—especially those having particular preferences. He also offers a final provocative (and, by his own admission, implausible) suggestion for reform: that within a year of losing the presidential election, the out-party would select its candidate for the ensuing election so that the candidate-designate could assume a role not unlike the British Leader of the Loyal Opposition.

In their focus on what is presented about candidates on television news—and what is absorbed by the public from those broadcasts—the two essays examining the role of the media in campaigns contain an implicit concern with the election as an educational institution. Interestingly, on the basis of empirical analysis of the content of network news broadcasts about the candidates in the 1984 presidential contest, Doris Graber and Michael Robinson come to opposite conclusions about the significance of television in shaping public opinion. Using a technique that permits the coding of visuals as well as text, Graber finds that the generally negative messages conveyed by the words were balanced by the much more benign impression communicated by the pictures. In fact, she shows that the gap between the negative coverage in the text and the positive evaluations of the candidates by the public narrows substantially when the potential impact of the visuals is taken into consideration. From this evidence she concludes not only that television news contributed to the public's favorable image of Ronald Reagan but, more generally, that television matters.

Robinson's longitudinal technique involves tracking both coverage of the candidates in the text (but not the visuals) of the network news and changing public evaluations of the candidates. His findings challenge the common wisdom that Reagan was impervious to bad news, showing both that he was portrayed quite negatively by the network news and that his ratings in the polls suffered in the aftermath of such coverage. Furthermore, presenting evidence that, as evaluations of the two vice-presidential candidates by the network news moved in one direction, public opinion actually moved in the opposite direction, Robinson argues that network journalism is not a major force in shaping either the public's issue agenda or its evaluations of candidates and concludes that television does not have the determinative effects that are often attributed to it.

The area of campaign finance raises complicated questions for democratic theory and difficult tradeoffs among cherished values. At least in part, proponents of different schemes ground their advocacy in differential commitment to various of these values. Implicit in Gary Jacobson's analysis of the potential consequences of limitations on aggregate campaign spending in House elections is a concern with the necessity of

electoral competitiveness if incumbents are to be held accountable to voters. He evaluates the effects of spending by the incumbent and the challenger on the probability that the challenger will win and finds that it takes cash for challengers to become known to voters and, hence, that challengers must spend a lot to win. On this basis, he concludes that, even though most incumbents are able to outspend their opponents substantially, ceilings on spending would help incumbents and attenuate electoral competition.

Frank Sorauf's essay moves in a somewhat different direction. He points out that most systematic analyses of congressional campaign finance have focused on the House and argues that it is critical to distinguish the House from the Senate. In his comparison of the two houses, he finds significant discrepancies between them with respect to the amounts and sources of campaign funding and the relative advantage enjoyed by incumbents. In his conclusion, Sorauf discusses the relationship of such dissimilarities to the differences in the electoral politics of the House and Senate.

Although they adopt quite different perspectives, the four final essays all deal with electoral politics in the Reagan era. Aaron Wildavsky moves away from the concern with democratic responsiveness that is present—at least implicitly—in several of the essays and focuses on leadership. Taking on those who deem Reagan to be “dumb,” he argues that, on the contrary, Reagan is a brilliant political strategist. By concentrating on a limited number of objectives, Reagan not only has been effective in realizing his policy goals, but has succeeded in appropriating the electoral agenda so that the Democrats have become the “me-too” party, mouthing Republican rhetoric. Furthermore, according to Wildavsky, by adroitly using tax cuts to starve the Democrats of the revenue they need to promote their favorite social programs, Reagan has neutralized their most effective weapon for generating political support.

John Petrocik's essay on electoral turnout and candidate choice in the 1980 and 1984 elections brings us squarely back into the realm of the election as a democratic institution by its focus on the ways in which electoral outcomes reflect or fail to reflect voter preferences. Petrocik questions the widely accepted generalization that, despite the fact that the social characteristics of nonvoters might predispose them to support the Democrats, variations in turnout do not affect electoral outcomes because nonvoters tend to favor the winner by substantial margins anyway. He shows that in 1980, nonvoters favored Carter by a large majority (though perhaps not by enough to have denied Reagan his victory); and that in 1984, contrary to their usual habits in a landslide presidential election, nonvoters did not have a lopsided preference for

the winner, but rather gave Reagan only a slight edge. From these results, Petrocik concludes that, while we should not immediately discard the received wisdom, we should continue to monitor its validity.

Offering complementary interpretations, the final two essays probe what was on the minds of voters as they went to the polls in 1984 and, thus, cast light on the ways in which elections can facilitate the organization of coalitions of relatively like-minded groups of citizens. Kathleen A. Frankovic uses panel data from a national panel survey as well as exit polls from the primaries in the separate states to consider the campaign for the Democratic nomination. She demonstrates that voters distributed themselves into candidate camps in quite reasonable patterns on the basis of both demography and issue positions: in brief, the stereotypes of "Walter Mondale's traditionalists, Gary Hart's Yuppies, and Jesse Jackson's blacks" seem to hold up fairly well. In addition, she finds that momentum played a role in voter decisions and that Mondale's and Hart's supporters grew progressively less committed as the season went on. She concludes by pointing out that however reasonable the process of sorting out, the process produced a candidate who did not represent the country.

Warren Miller focuses on the general election and evaluates the relative importance of various factors in determining a preference for Reagan or Mondale. He shows that, unlike Carter, Reagan benefited from a positive evaluation of his performance in office but that, contrary to 1980 when voters mandated a more conservative set of policies, there was no evidence of public support for further movement to the right. In addition, he demonstrates that party identification continues to have an important influence on vote choices and that the substantial amount of partisan switching—switching that, of course, resulted in a net benefit to the Republicans—increased the congruence between partisanship and ideology and left the parties more ideologically distinctive. He concludes by showing that these processes of sorting out may not only transform the parties but force us to give new meaning to the concept of party identification.

Although varied in substantive focus, methodological approach, and theoretical orientation, these essays have in common a willingness to examine critically what we think we know about elections in America and a desire to bring an understanding of both past and present to bear on the investigation of the continuing evolution of the role played by elections in American democracy.



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K.L.S.

I

The Election as a Democratic Institution



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1

Sending Them a Message— Getting a Reply: Presidential Elections and Democratic Accountability

Kay Lehman Schlozman
Sidney Verba

There have been many interpretations of the part played by elections in popular government. Elections have been viewed as a legitimating institution, functioning to give elected leaders the wherewithal to govern. Alternatively, they have been construed as a republican institution, functioning as a mechanism for choosing meritorious individuals in whom to entrust governmental power. Our concern is with the election as a democratic institution, particularly with the way in which American presidential elections serve as an agency by which an incumbent president is held accountable to the public. That is, our concern is to understand whether and how presidential elections give voters a meaningful opportunity to render the president responsive to their wishes and to make judgments about his conduct in office.

To consider the election as an instrument of accountability requires making a link between the analysis of the behavior of citizens and the analysis of the behavior of presidents. Political scientists have attempted to make this connection in various ways. Students of elections study the consequences for the presidency of the nature of the electoral process. For example, there has been much concern with the impact on the nature and quality of presidential candidates of the recent changes

in presidential nominating procedures and campaigning.¹ Conversely, students of the presidency deal with the reaction of the president to the public: his attempts to monitor and manipulate public opinion, as well as the relationship between his behavior in office and public preferences, public expectations, and the promises he has made in the past.²

In the vast literature on presidential elections and presidential behavior, however, concern with citizens usually is kept separate from concern with incumbents. Works on voting and elections focus on the behavior of individual voters and the aggregate electorate, presenting alternative perspectives on voting behavior—whether it is rational or not, policy oriented or not, party dominated or not, prospective or retrospective—and on the factors that influence shifts in the voting preferences of the electorate as a whole. The literature on the presidency deals with the way in which decisions are made in office, the role of presidential style and personality, the structure of the presidential office, the relations between the president and the rest of the Washington community. The link between the behavior of the electorate and the behavior of the president is less often considered.

Our purpose is to attempt such a link: to see how well the various models of electoral behavior articulate with what we know of presidential behavior. In so doing, we add neither new research nor new data. Instead, we use existing research on the American electorate and on presidential behavior to see how well the two bodies of research hold together. And, as we see, the fit is imperfect. There is a disjunction across three levels of analysis—the individual voter, the electorate in the aggregate, and the president—in terms of which of several models commands the greatest explanatory power. The electoral model that best fits the behavior of the individual voter does not fit the behavior of the

1. See, for instance, Byron F. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983); and Nelson W. Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Many of the issues are summarized and extensive bibliographic citations are contained in Robert E. DiClerico and Eric M. Uslaner, *Few Are Chosen* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), chaps. 1–3, 6.
2. Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro have analyzed the relationship between public opinion and presidential policy in "The Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," *American Political Science Review* 77 (1983): 1071–1089, and in "Presidents as Opinion Leaders—Some New Evidence," *Policy Studies Journal* 12 (1984): 649–661. For a comprehensive account of the way presidents have been "going public" more frequently recently in order to increase their influence in Washington—an approach that requires careful monitoring and manipulation of public opinion—see Samuel Kernell, *Going Public* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 1986). For an analysis of the relationship between presidential performance and the promises made in a campaign, see Jeff Fishel, *Presidents and Promises* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1985), esp. chaps. 2 and 7.

electorate as a whole. And incumbents behave in ways that do not fit either model neatly. In trying to solve the puzzle of this disjunction, we hope to shed light not only on political science literature on elections but on the substance of political representation in the United States.

Models of Voters and Models of Incumbents

Let us begin by suggesting three models of voter behavior and three corresponding models of presidential behavior that might help to illuminate various ways in which elections can function to facilitate presidential accountability. We can delineate three kinds of voters: policy voters, retrospective voters, and “Michigan” voters;³ and three parallel kinds of incumbents: instructed delegates, nervous performers, and trustees. We propose these categories as ideal types in order to clarify the electoral links between voters and presidents, and do not wish to reify them. In short, we would not expect all presidents or all voters—or even any particular voter or particular president—to conform perfectly to a single type.

Our three types of voters are derived from the literature on voting. Because of our particular concern with the relationship between voters and incumbents, however, these categories do not correspond to any well-known typology. *Policy instruction voters* evaluate the policy alternatives presented to them in an election and choose that which best fits their policy preferences. Such prospective choices on policy matters are possible only when candidates or parties offer the electorate clearly identifiable options on the issues of greatest salience. Voters select from among these alternatives and choose a government committed to carrying out the promises made during the campaign. Voters retain control by refusing to reelect an incumbent party or candidate that has reneged on these promises or by changing allegiance to a challenging party or candidate that seems to offer a more attractive program.

This model is really a more generalized version of the party government model. The party government model involves clearly identifiable policy alternatives being presented by strong parties. Although the exis-

3. We have searched unsuccessfully for an alternative, and more appropriate, designation for such voters. We use the quotation marks deliberately, to indicate our awareness that our use of the term reflects the caricature of the voter that often emerges in discussions of *The American Voter* (Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* [New York: Wiley, 1960]). The portrait of the average voter contained in that work is painted with a much less broad brush than is often presumed to be the case.

tence of such recognizable party programs may be necessary for elections to act as policy instruction mechanisms, we specify only that there be such clearly articulated choices, not that strong parties act as the vehicle. Policy instruction can take place under weak parties as long as parties or candidates offer voters comprehensible alternatives.

Retrospective voters cast ballots on the basis of their evaluation of the performance of the incumbent candidate or party rather than on the basis of their preference for alternative programs. Dissatisfied retrospective voters exercise control by punishing the incumbent who fails to deliver—whose administration is characterized by foreign policy humiliation, political scandal, or economic sluggishness.⁴ This is a form of constraint that is blunter, but no less potent, than that exercised by the policy voter. Unless the incumbent is running again or unless the incumbent's party has placed a successor candidate in the field, however, retrospective voters cannot hold the incumbent accountable in this way. Thus, retrospective voting depends on some continuity in the electoral system.

"Michigan" voters are the residual category. Concerned neither to choose among policy alternatives nor to render retrospective judgments, "Michigan" voters respond to any of a wide array of forces in making ballot choices: unstinting party loyalty that is not tied to issues, preference for the personal style or ethnicity of one of the candidates, persuasion by a friend, media coverage, and so on. While the ballot cast by each such voter is equal in weight to that cast by a retrospective or policy voter in the collective decision to retain the incumbent or his party, this type of voting is the loosest form of electoral constraint.

Analogous to these three kinds of voters are three categories of incumbents. These ideal types are derived from the normative theory of representation. Once again, however, we have juggled what are familiar categories by adding one for the incumbent whose actions reflect a concern with the constraint imposed by the retrospective voter. The *instructed delegate* is well known from the theory of representation. He construes his responsibilities as to reflect, insofar as possible, the wishes of the electorate. Such a conception of the representative role places distinct limits around the president's autonomy in governing, for

4. In applying their famous measure of the "levels of conceptualization," Campbell *et al.*, (*ibid.*, chap. 10) discussed those individuals who cited only the "nature of the times" in explaining their votes and cast ballots for or against a candidate because times were good or bad. Such voters, considered to be relatively apolitical in the original formulation, have been raised in status over the years so that we now recognize them as retrospective voters.

he feels the need to be responsive to the specific policy preferences of the public. There is an additional requirement, however. In order to assume such a role a president needs detailed information about those preferences.

Like the instructed delegate, the *nervous performer* feels constrained by the public. Nevertheless, he strives to satisfy voters by governing effectively rather than by following their specific policy preferences. Although his actions are informed by a concern for his own, or his party's, success in the next election, he exercises much more discretion in governing than does the president who adopts the role of instructed delegate. The nervous performer will probably find it useful to monitor public satisfaction, but he will require much less precise information about citizen preferences than the instructed delegate. That is, it will be critical for him to know *that* the public wants something done, but much less important for him to know exactly *what*.

The *trustee* is also familiar from representation theory. Political observers from Burke to Schumpeter have argued that political leaders who seek to govern in the best interests of the public cannot be slavish in their devotion to the preferences of the public. Like the nervous performer, the trustee is guided by his own judgment in attempting to govern effectively. Unlike the nervous performer, he does not have his eye fixed on his own or his party's success in the next election. Because he does not feel constrained by the public, the trustee does not need information about either their policy preferences or their level of satisfaction.⁵

Implicit within our discussion of ideal-typical voters and presidents has been a concern with two dimensions central to electoral accountability—information and control. We have shown that all three kinds of voters retain ultimate control over the selection of political leaders, although they vary in the degree to which they seek to constrain the actions of the incumbent and to pressure him to respond to their preferences. Similarly, we have contrasted three kinds of incumbents in terms of the degree to which their behavior is guided by a desire to respond to such pressure and the level of information required for each representative role. We have not yet confronted the issue of how these various kinds of voters communicate what has animated their electoral choices and how the instructed delegate and nervous performer get the information they need.

5. The portrait is somewhat overdrawn. Trustees would still want information about public preferences if they needed to satisfy some of those preferences in order to remain in office to continue their trustee activities.

The Vote as a Source of Information

The policy instruction model—and to a lesser extent the retrospective model—of electoral control depend on the transmission of information to incumbents about the views of the public. To what extent can an election act as the vehicle of such information? We can differentiate the information communicated to political leaders by various participatory acts along two dimensions. The information about citizen preferences communicated by different modes of participation can be differentiated in terms of its bias: the degree to which it emanates from a representative group of citizens. It can also be distinguished with respect to its precision: the degree to which it provides a detailed guide to public preferences.

With respect to bias, voting, like all political acts, is not universal; in recent American presidential elections, nearly half the eligible electorate has failed to turn out. Furthermore, nonvoters are, at least in demographic terms, somewhat different from voters. Nonvoters are more likely to be of lower social status—to have less education, lower income, and less prestigious occupations, to be from minority and non-English-speaking groups—than voters.⁶ What is more, compared with other democracies, voting in the United States is both less widespread and more stratified. That is, a smaller proportion of the eligible electorate actually goes to the polls, and there is a closer relationship between turnout and measures of social status in the United States than in other democracies.⁷

Even so, voting—the political act which requires the least initiative and investment of the fewest resources of money, information, and skill—is the most nearly universal.⁸ In addition, since those who com-

6. The main causal variable appears to be education rather than other status characteristics. But that does not change the descriptive statement that poorer people and minorities are likely to be underrepresented among voters. See Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

7. See Sidney Verba, Norman Nie, and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80 (1986): 17–44. The reason why it is less stratified in other nations is not unrelated to the ease of voting. While voting is the easiest participatory act in the United States, it requires greater effort and resources than in democracies where registration requires less initiative (often being the responsibility of the government) and where strong political parties take a more important role in getting voters to the polls. Under such circumstances it may take more activation not to vote than to do so.

8. Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 31, show that, of the large number of political acts they study, voting is the only one in which more than half of the population engages.

mand few political resources are likely to vote if they participate at all, the relationship between participation and measures of socioeconomic status—income, education, and occupation—is lower for the vote than for any other participatory act. The electorate is much more representative of the population as a whole than is any other group of activists—letter writers, organization members, campaign donors, and so on. In short, in comparative terms voting is the most egalitarian form of political participation.

Ironically, although voting is the political activity that involves the most nearly representative group of citizens, in comparison with other forms of participation—particularly the direct expressions of opinion by individuals and groups—voting permits the conveyance of rather imprecise messages. Totally apart from the capacities of individual citizens and their propensity to use the incumbent's position on disarmament, his performance in office, his haircut, or his party affiliation as criteria in making electoral decisions, voting as an act clearly carries little information; in casting a ballot a single individual communicates only his or her secret preference for a particular candidate.⁹

Even if citizens are inclined to act as policy voters and to use issue positions as the only criterion in making vote choices, presidential elections, for several reasons, provide uncertain mandates and cannot be expected to supply to the instructed delegate the information he needs to govern.¹⁰ First, the nature of governing undermines the election as an instrument for the communication of information about public preferences. The process of electing and the process of governing are very different. Elections involve intermittent choices; governing goes on continuously. New issues that did not even exist at the time of the campaign—the overthrow of a dictator in Haiti or the Philippines, the explosion of the space shuttle—arise all the time and demand presidential attention and judgment. Under such circumstances, even a certain electoral mandate provides the president who would be an instructed delegate with no guidance to popular opinion. In addition, even when issues are given a full airing during the campaign and even when the electoral returns give an indication of the public temper on various

9. Students of elections know that there is more information in the ballot than this discussion implies. Sophisticated scholars can tease out information about public attitudes and preferences from patterns of voting: split-ticket voting, drop off, roll off, and ballot spoiling. Such information can tell a lot about the importance of partisanship in elections (split-ticket voting, drop off, roll off), the relative salience of various offices (roll off), and the degree of alienation (spoiled ballots.) See Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," *American Political Science Review* 59 (1965): 7–28.
10. A strong and well-reasoned statement of this position is contained in Nelson Polsby

matters of policy concern, issues inevitably assume a very different form in the halls of government from what they were during the campaign. Even at their most elevated, the terms of election debate are necessarily general. In comparison, the terms of policy action are complex and nuanced. When policy is made, discussion of broad outlines gives way to discussion of the details that dictate the nature and extent of its impact. Proposals are refined and adjusted; there is bargaining and negotiation among many actors and lots of tinkering at the margin. Even an interpretable electoral mandate cannot be a source of cues when the discussion is at this level of specificity.

In addition, the American party system with its two relatively weak and undisciplined parties exacerbates the inability of electoral outcomes to transmit precise messages about public sentiment. Where parties are stronger, they tend both to reinforce a single fundamental cleavage, thus moderating competing conflicts, and to create an environment in which it is more difficult for candidates to obfuscate issues and for the media to treat national elections as sporting events. Where there are more parties, they can permute issues in multiple ways and thus offer citizens a wider variety of issue bundles.

In the United States, an agenda of citizen concerns that includes many issues of differential salience to various individuals is not easily accommodated by the dichotomous presidential vote choice. Not all the issues about which potential policy voters are concerned are necessarily discussed in a particular campaign. Voters who care deeply about an issue, say, abortion, may find that the major-party candidates offer no choice—because they take the same position or because they say nothing about it at all. Furthermore, if there are other issues of substantial concern—say, aid to the poor or competition from foreign imports—policy voters might find that the candidate who takes the preferred position on the first issue may adopt less congenial postures on the others. Under such circumstances, in choosing one candidate or the other, voters—individually and collectively—express very little about their policy concerns. Correspondingly, the victorious candidate cannot know whether he won because of (or in spite of) his stand on abortion, welfare reductions, or import restrictions—or because of his predecessor's performance in office or his photogenic smile. In short, on its own the electoral outcome does not permit the victor to discriminate among the policy, retrospective, and "Michigan" voters.¹¹

and Aaron Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections*, 6th ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1984), chap. 7.

11. We should note that the existence of minor-party candidates does not obviate the problem. Minor-party candidates—for example, Strom Thurmond in 1948 and George Wallace in 1968—sometimes offer voters meaningful choices on policy issues and,

Other Sources of Information about Citizen Preferences

Of course, our argument about the inevitability of mandate uncertainty ignores the other ways in which an incumbent who is so inclined can gather information about popular attitudes. Political leaders, from the Turkish caliph who visited the bazaar in disguise to Ed Koch, who inquires incessantly how he is doing, have sought information about the public's frame of mind. Contemporary politicians have a tool that can give them information with a new level of precision and validity, the public opinion poll. Exit polls, which have large samples, an immediacy to the voting act, and the ability to include voters only, provide a particularly important mechanism for understanding the motivations of voters and their policy preferences.

As a source of information, polls are distinctive in that they are unbiased. Modern sampling techniques can guarantee within a specifiable margin of error that the opinions expressed in the poll are representative of the electorate as a whole. Polls are much more limited, however, when it comes to the precision of the information they contain. As our comments with respect to the contrast between the level of generality of public discourse about political issues and the level of specificity of the terms of policymaking should make clear, polls cannot provide the kind of detailed information needed when policy is being made. Their questions necessarily oversimplify policy choices and cannot deal with the complex contextual nature of policymaking. Furthermore, rival polls using different sampling techniques and different versions of questions often elicit different results. In consequence, although the meaning of a poll is probably less ambiguous than that of an electoral mandate, it still may be subject to alternative interpretations.

In view of these characteristics, poll results place a lower level of constraint on the president than do electoral results. Although an incumbent cannot ignore the electoral defeat that sweeps him from office, there is nothing to force the president to pay attention to the polls. Indeed, he has wide latitude in how he treats the results of public opinion polls: He can ignore them; he can read them in ways that suit his political or ideological purposes; he can consult them as a guide to public approval of his performance; or, if he wishes, he can use them to gain a much clearer picture of what is on the minds of voters than he can from the returns alone.

Direct contacts between citizens—especially such political elites

thus, the opportunity to register their views. Nevertheless, the logic still applies: There may be no like-minded minor-party candidate; the minor-party candidate may adopt a congenial position on one issue, but an uncongenial stand on others; and so on. Hence, even when there is a minor-party option—and there is not always—mandate uncertainty remains.

as campaign activists, campaign contributors, and pressure group representatives—and the president or his aides constitute a second source of information about citizen preferences that can supplement an uncertain mandate, information that is in several ways well suited to the process of governing. First, while elections must occur at fixed intervals, there are no restrictions on the timing of direct communications. Hence they are more likely to coincide with the rhythms of policymaking and to provide guidance with respect to citizen views on subjects not contained on the campaign agenda at the time those issues are being considered. In addition, these communications permit the transmission of much more precise messages than are possible through voting, more precise even than the information contained in polls. One implication of this level of detail is that it is more difficult for the president to misread or read self-servingly such direct communications. At least individually, if not collectively, such messages are much less likely to be ambiguous—and, thus, amenable to alternative readings—than are either public opinion polls or electoral mandates.

Although the information derived from direct contacts—particularly direct contacts with political elites—is more precise than that contained in electoral mandates or even in polls, it is considerably more biased than the information derived from either of these two sources.¹² Those who engage in the forms of political activity demanding the highest levels of information, skill, contacts, and financial resources—writing letters, working in campaigns, making contributions, being active in organizations—are in critical ways less representative of the public at large than both those who turn out to vote and, especially, those who respond to polls. In part, the skew is socioeconomic: It is well known that political activists are drawn from the ranks of those of high economic, educational, and occupational status.¹³ However, the bias is ideological as well. Such activists are more likely than less involved voters to care intensely about particular, often quite narrow, policy matters and to have less moderate views.¹⁴ Thus, the set of the

12. See E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), chap. 5.

13. See Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, chaps. 8 and 12; and Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political Participation*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1977), pp. 90–106. On the socioeconomic bias of pressure politics in particular, see Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), esp. chaps. 4, 5, and 15.

14. This generalization has found support in studies of various kinds of political activists. See, among others, Herbert McClosky, Paul J. Hoffman, and Rosemary O'Hara, "Issue Conflict and Consensus among Party Leaders and Followers," *American Political Science Review* 56 (1960): 406–429; Jeane Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite*:

messages conveyed by such political activists overrepresents not only the opinions of the socioeconomically advantaged but also points of view that are farther from the political center.

How much freedom the president and his advisers have in deciding whether to ignore or to pay attention to such direct communications is a complicated issue. Clearly, while such contacts yield much less ambiguous information than do electoral mandates, they do not carry the kind of ultimate consequences that give to elections their potential as mechanisms of democratic control. Only elections can deprive incumbents of office. Thus the president may often discount or disregard what he is told. Under certain circumstances, however, direct communications do constrain the president and his aides to listen to the messages being conveyed. Campaign activists, contributors, and representatives of large and powerful organizations command resources—among them, political and electoral support, contributions, and information—that the president needs if he is to make sound policy, govern effectively, and win reelection.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the president who values such assistance has an incentive to pay attention to those who provide it.

Our discussion leads to an ironic conclusion about the information conveyed to policymakers. Participatory acts vary in their difficulty and in the amount of information, skill, contacts, and money they demand. In general, the less exacting the form of participation, the more demographically and ideologically representative the group of participants. Voting is a relatively easy form of participation. It is also both the most nearly universal and representative. Nevertheless, the information conveyed by electoral outcomes, even elaborated by public opinion polls, is very imprecise. The more difficult forms of participation, on the contrary, afford activists with wider latitude for presenting detailed and complex arguments on policy matters. They are also characterized by more pronounced levels of ideological and socioeconomic skew. Thus, there is a built-in dynamic such that increasing amounts of information about public preferences are accompanied by increasing bias in its sources.

Men and Women in National Politics (New York: Russell Sage and Twentieth Century Fund, 1976); and Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter: Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), chap. 12.

15. These political elites, particularly the organized interest representatives, mobilize certain resources—for example, honoraria, invitations on fact-finding trips, and future jobs—that are less important to the president than to legislative and state-level policymakers. On the degree to which organized interest activity constrains policymakers, see Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*, pp. 310–317, 323–330, 391–398.

Evaluating the Models

We have delineated several models of how voters might behave and how presidents might respond to them, and have indicated both the different levels of constraint imposed by various kinds of voters and the different levels of information required by presidents who construe their policy responsibilities in various ways. We have also discussed the limitations of the election as a medium of information to the incumbent who seeks information about public preferences. It is now appropriate to evaluate these models in terms of the actual behavior of voters and incumbents. In so doing, we distinguish the behavior of individual voters from that of the electorate taken in the aggregate, and distinguish both, in turn, from the response of the incumbents.

What Voters Do

We have delineated three types of voter: policy instruction voters, retrospective voters, and "Michigan" voters. Although few controversies have figured so importantly in American political science as that over the best explanation of the individual vote choice, support can be found for each mode of voting. The earliest studies of the vote painted a portrait of the model American voter as essentially impervious to policy concerns, not well informed about politics, and animated by habitual partisanship or the personal qualities of the candidate in making vote choices.¹⁶

Recent literature has placed more emphasis on the ability of the average voter to make politically relevant choices. But there has been considerable controversy among academic analysts of politics with respect to the degree to which such choices are based on specific forward-looking policy preferences and the degree to which they are retrospective evaluations of performance.¹⁷ There is evidence that voters respond in ways that are consistent with the policy instruction model. Particu-

16. The original statement of this point of view is contained in Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, *The American Voter*. For a later statement, see Philip E. Converse, "Public Opinion and Voting Behavior" in *The Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), vol. 4, chap. 2.

17. On the issue voting controversy, see the discussions and bibliographic references contained in Herbert B. Asher, "Voting Behavior Research in the 1980s: An Examination of Some Old and New Problem Areas," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, ed. Ada Finifter (Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association, 1983), pp. 339–368; Herbert Asher, *Presidential Elections and American Politics*, 3d ed. (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1984), chap. 4; and Richard G. Niemi

larly when given a clear choice on an issue of salience, voters are likely to be able to state a policy preference, to understand reasonably accurately the difference between the candidates on the issue, and to vote for the proximate candidate.¹⁸

In addition, there is evidence that voters make retrospective judgments. They consider the performance of the incumbent administration and reward or punish that performance depending on whether they deem it successful.¹⁹ It seems that they are especially likely to base their votes on such judgments when the performance of the previous administration has been perceived as outstanding—especially when it has been perceived as being outstandingly bad.²⁰ We should note that such judgments about governmental performance might rest on several bases—perceptions of foreign policy successes or failures, governmental efficiency or corruption, economic prosperity or downturn.²¹ Perhaps because it is deemed more salient by voters and perhaps because it is least tied to particular episodes and thus easiest to measure on a sustained basis, analyses of retrospective voting tend to emphasize eco-

and Herbert F. Weisberg, eds., *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1984), pt. A.II.

18. See Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter*, chaps. 17, 18, and 20. For a recent paper that provides clear evidence for issue voting, see Merrill Shanks and Warren Miller, "Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation: Complementary Explanations of the Reagan Elections," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, September 1985.
19. The classic statement is in V. O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate* (New York: Vintage, 1966). In *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), Morris Fiorina explores this concept in depth. For analyses of recent elections from this perspective, see D. Roderick Kiewiet and Douglas Rivers, "The Economic Basis of Reagan's Appeal," in *The New Direction in American Politics*, eds. John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985), chap. 3; and Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., *The American Political Economy: Macroeconomics and Electoral Politics in the United States* (manuscript, 1985), chap. 7. For an evaluation of the elections literature that stresses the centrality of Key's insights, see Peter Natchez, *Images of Voting, Visions of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).
20. See Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting*. Shanks and Miller, "Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation," provide the most extensive analysis of the relative role of policy and performance voting in the 1980 and 1984 elections—and find both.
21. Although most of the literature on retrospective voting deals with voter response to economic conditions, the model can be applied to performance evaluation in other areas. There is evidence that at various times during the Vietnam war, the public was divided on what policy the government ought to pursue, and that those policy preferences were rather loosely held. But the public was more strongly convinced that whatever was being done was inadequate and that some solution needed to be found. See the discussion of the role of Vietnam in the 1968 election in Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, pp. 107–108.

conomic performance as the basis for judgments about the capability of those in office.²² At the same, however, it is clear that the older view of the voter has not lost its relevance. Some voters are impervious to both policy and performance concerns and cast ballots on the basis of a variety of other concerns, particularly party loyalties and candidate appeal.

To summarize, evidence suggests that individual vote choices have multiple sources, among them policy preferences, retrospective evaluations, and a panoply of additional factors consistent with a "Michigan" model of the voter. For some voters, a single model of voting is appropriate. For others, a single model has explanatory power in one election, another model in the succeeding one. For some voters, however, a multidimensional explanation is needed because, for example, partisan loyalties or candidate preferences can interact with views on policy issues or contaminate judgments about the success of the incumbent. Of course, there is dispute about the relative weight that should be assigned to various determinants of the vote. The relative effects of such factors seem to vary with the characteristics of the voters themselves, the nature of the choices they are offered, and the particular statistical model used. Still, no single model suffices to explain fully the motivations of individual voters.

What Electorates Do

When we ask what affects the outcome of an election, rather than what animates individual voters, the recent evidence tends to support the performance evaluation model. Those who have considered the relationship between the outcome of presidential elections and the performance of the economy before the election find that a substantial portion of the vote shift from election to election can be explained by

22. In making judgments about economic performance, retrospective voters who cast ballots on the basis of economic conditions seem to give more weight to their perceptions of national economic health than to their own personal economic circumstances. See Donald E. Kinder and D. Roderick Kiewiet, "Economic Discontent and Political Behavior: The Role of Personal Grievances and Collective Economic Judgments in Congressional Voting," *American Political Science Review* 23 (1979): 495–527; Kinder and Kiewiet, "Sociotropic Politics: The American Case," *British Journal of Political Science* 11 (1981): 129–161; Richard A. Brody and Paul M. Sniderman, "From Life Space to Polling Place," *British Journal of Political Science* 7 (1977): 337–360; Kay Lehman Schlozman and Sidney Verba, *Injury to Insult* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), chap. 6; and Gerald Kramer, "The Ecological Fallacy Revisited: Aggregate versus Individual Level Findings on Economics and Elections, and Sociotropic Voting," *American Political Science Review* 77 (1983), 92–111.

economic performance. Many of the recent presidential elections have hinged on retrospective evaluations of the incumbents.²³

How can individual voting behavior appear so multidimensional, while relatively simple assumptions about performance evaluations seem to fit the data on election outcomes? The answer has to do with the fact that we are now attempting to explain aggregate vote shifts rather than individual votes. Of the various determinants of individual vote choices, performance evaluations are probably the most volatile; that is, performance evaluations are relatively likely to vary from election to election. Furthermore, changes in performance evaluations are more likely to be unidirectional across the electorate; that is, changing performance evaluations are likely to confer a clear advantage on one candidate or the other. Although a poor economic performance for the economy as a whole does not affect all voters in the same way, it will on average reduce the favorable rating of the incumbent, a tendency enhanced by the fact that, as we have seen, voters tend to be influenced by their perceptions of the state of the economy as a whole more than they are by their own economic circumstance.

Policy preferences, in contrast, are more viscous. Not only are policy preferences less likely to undergo change but, if they do, such changes are less likely to be unidirectional in their impact on the election outcome. If a candidate with a strong issue position comes along—even more so, if a pair of candidates with strong and opposed issue positions comes along—voters will be likely to consider this issue in casting ballots.²⁴ As voters sort themselves out in terms of their preferences on this issue, there will be movement in both directions. Some of these movements will cancel each other out, and the resultant impact on a particular candidate's support may be relatively small.²⁵ Thus the net effect of changes in performance evaluations is likely to be substantially stronger than the net effect of changes in policy preferences. It is for this reason that economic performance is so powerful in explaining aggre-

23. See Hibbs, *American Political Economy*, chap. 7; and D. Roderick Kiewiet and Douglas Rivers, "The Economic Basis of Reagan's Appeal."

24. See Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter*. They find strong issue voting in 1964 and 1972 when there was a candidate offering a true issue choice, and even stronger issue voting in a mock election between Barry Goldwater and George McGovern. Recent work finds issue voting also in the Reagan elections although it may be muted by the role of other factors such as personality and the effects of the negative retrospective evaluation of Carter.

25. Miller and Shanks, "Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation," distinguish carefully between the effects of various factors on individual votes and the effects on the net vote outcome. They show that in 1984 individual votes were affected by policy preferences, but the policy effects cancelled each other out on the aggregate level.

gate electoral outcomes, while many factors play a role in individual vote decisions.

What Presidents Do

If the retrospective voting model stands up to empirical test better than the policy instruction model as an explanation of the outcome of elections, it cannot be said to have as decisive an advantage when it comes to explaining how policymakers behave. Presidents appear, at one time or another, to fit each of the three models we have discussed. They often act as trustees, their behavior unaffected by the outcome of the last election or by the anticipation of the next. They also often appear as nervous performers, calculating the electoral effects of their acts with an eye to the coming election. But what may be surprising is that they often act as if they had received policy instruction at the previous election. In light of what we have said about the limited capacity of elections to convey information and the tendency of aggregate election outcomes to reflect retrospective performance evaluations rather than prospective policy directives, this is somewhat puzzling.

It is hardly astonishing that presidents often act as trustees. Public policy analysts know that many factors have consequences for policy outcomes, only one of which is the preferences of citizens. Especially if the issue is highly technical and relatively invisible, there is likely to be little electoral guidance that the president can take even if he were so inclined. Under such circumstances, in making policy the president must rely on cues from a wide variety of sources ranging from his advisers to congressional leaders to interest groups to his own conscience. Thus the president is inevitably a trustee, no matter how concerned he may be about his own electoral future or that of his party.

Presidents also behave as nervous performers. According to this model, the incumbent who wishes to be reelected, or who wishes to be succeeded by a fellow partisan, must concentrate simply on being effective. Certainly the politician whose principal goal is to become a celebrity, to line his pockets, or to retire from office might not be motivated to concentrate on governing successfully. Nevertheless, most elected officials seem to care about how they perform and to have the public good, however they might define it, at heart. Hence, almost by definition, we might conclude that presidents are responding to the fact that winning electoral margins are created out of retrospective judgments of performance.²⁶

26. Clearly, the incumbent who wants to run again and is eligible to do so will be more concerned about the potential punishment meted out by retrospective voters. Even the

There is a more rigorous empirical test that is relevant to the question of whether presidents behave as nervous performers. It has been argued that there is a political business cycle; that is, that incumbent presidents, knowing they will be judged on the health of the economy, pull whatever economic levers they control in order to guarantee that the economy is purring at the time of the election. The evidence that presidents actually engage in such preelection manipulation of the economy is mixed. There is evidence of successful and possibly self-conscious economic expansion under Nixon in 1972 and Reagan in 1984, but no evidence that this has been a persistent pattern for preelection years.²⁷ Since long before electoral analysts arrived on the scene with their sophisticated statistical models, presidents have been aware of the fact that Americans will vote their pocketbooks. But it is not clear that presidents control the economic levers necessary for the short-term manipulation of the economy for political ends or that they are willing to engage in such manipulation at the expense of other policy goals.²⁸

The interesting fact is that, despite what we have said about the inevitability of mandate uncertainty, evidence suggests that presidents behave as if they have been instructed by a policy mandate. If presidents simply responded to the pressures generated by the possibility of electoral punishment by voters making retrospective evaluations, then they would be interchangeable—except insofar as they differed in their managerial capabilities. We know, however, that it matters who wins a presidential election. In spite of the pressures on a president to move to the center and to avoid policies that will alienate voter support, presidents do not all behave alike. According to a recent study, contrary both to popular wisdom about how candidates behave and to great pressures on them to obfuscate issues, presidential candidates make a large number of promises—promises sufficiently specific that it is possible to test whether they have been kept.²⁹ What is more, victorious candidates take their promises seriously—initiating proposals on a substantial number of them—and are likely to face punishment if they renege.

president who anticipates retirement will not be impervious to such considerations. He will probably be concerned to maintain public approval for several reasons: He knows that erosion of public support can jeopardize the realization of his policy objectives; he will not want his party—and with it his performance—to be repudiated at the next election; and he will wish to receive kind treatment from historians, who may judge harshly a president who is unable to lead the public.

27. See Hibbs, *American Political Economy*, chap. 9.

28. Kiewiet and Rivers, "The Economic Basis of Reagan's Appeal." Hibbs argues that such overt manipulation of the economy would soon be noticed and discounted by the public (*The American Political Economy*, chap. 9).

29. Fishel, *Presidents and Promises*, esp. chaps. 2 and 7.

Moreover, it seems to matter not only which particular individual is elected but which party's candidate is successful. Especially with respect to macroeconomic policy, there are aggregate differences between presidents of the two parties in terms of the policies they pursue; for example, compared with their Democratic counterparts, Republican presidents are more likely to tolerate high levels of unemployment and less likely to support redistributive measures.³⁰

In addition, presidential victories, especially decisive ones, are often accompanied by substantial departures in the direction of public policy. This is most obviously the case during periods of electoral realignment when the response to national crisis is not simply a reformulation of electoral coalitions but major changes in policies affecting broad categories of people.³¹ But even non-realigning elections can have such an impact on policy.³² This is especially likely when the electoral result is a landslide. It seems that, although newly elected presidents take concrete steps to fulfill a substantial number of their policy promises, they cannot guarantee the passage of proposals they initiate.³³ That is why landslides are particularly likely to produce policy departures. A landslide gives a president the wherewithal to govern. The wider the electoral margin, the more likely that political observers will interpret it as a mandate for policy change and the more likely that the president will face a supportive Congress; hence, the greater his capacity to deliver on his campaign promises.

This logic raises a conundrum. If voters are animated by concern with governmental performance rather than by commitment to a policy program, and if presidential candidates have every incentive to take ambiguous issue positions and face political opposition if they go back

30. See Hibbs, *The American Political Economy*, chap. 8; Edward R. Tufte, *Political Control of the Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), chap. 4; and Schlozman and Verba, *Injury to Insult*, chap. 11.

31. For an elaboration of the policy consequences of electoral realignments, see Walter Dean Burnham, Jerome M. Clubb, and William H. Flanigan, "Partisan Realignment: A Systemic Perspective," in Joel H. Silbey, Allan G. Bogue, and William H. Flanigan, *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 45–77. See also David Brady, "A Reevaluation of Realignment in American Politics," *American Political Science Review* 79 (1985): 28–49, for the way in which realigning elections affect long-term changes in Congressional policy.

32. See Hibbs, *The American Political Economy*, chap. 8; Tufte, *Political Control*, chap. 4; Susan Hansen, *The Politics of Taxation: Revenue without Representation* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Gerald Pomper, *Elections in America: Control and Influence in Democratic Politics* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1970); Benjamin Page, *Who Gets What from the Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 92; and Schlozman and Verba, *Injury to Insult*, chap. 11.

33. Fishel, *Presidents and Promises*, esp. chaps. 2 and 7.

on their campaign pledges, why do presidential candidates even make specific promises? And if electoral mandate contains so little policy content, why does policy alternate with a fair amount of regularity and predictability, as if there were a policy mandate? For even a partial answer to the puzzle, we must look beyond the loose constraints imposed on the president by the electoral outcome to those placed on him by his ideology and the elite political community in the country, especially in Washington to which he is especially sensitive.

Why Aren't Presidents Interchangeable?

The very uncertainty of an electoral mandate—even an electoral mandate supplemented by polls—permits the president wide latitude in interpreting the election result, which he may do in ways that serve his ideological and political purposes. The message conveyed by the electoral outcome may be insubstantial as a cloud, but the clever victor will see in it the shape of the political ends he wishes to pursue and will manage (as Hamlet did with Polonius) to convince others that they see the same thing. Yet we need not assume that the victorious president who reads a mandate into his electoral triumph is merely being manipulative. It is only natural for a president who believes sincerely in what he has been saying to interpret the electoral outcome, especially if it is decisive, as a mandate to pursue the policies he advocated during his campaign.

The president's freedom in interpreting his uncertain mandate is exemplified by Ronald Reagan's comportment in office. The main theme of various scholarly and journalistic analyses of the 1980 election is that the outcome reflected dissatisfaction with an incumbent who was widely perceived to be incompetent.³⁴ As such, it did not provide a

34. This appears to be the view of most political science analyses of the 1980 election. See, for instance, William Schneider, "The November 4 Vote for President: What Did It Mean?" in *The American Elections of 1980*, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), pp. 177–211; and Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., "President Reagan's Mandate from the 1980 Election: Shift to the Right?" *American Politics Quarterly* 10 (1982): 387–420. As we have pointed out, Miller and Shanks ("Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation") differ somewhat from this interpretation. They find substantial policy voting in 1984 as well as in 1980. The effects of policy voting are, however, felt more on the individual than on the aggregate level, that is, policy voting explains individual vote choices better than it explains who won the election. For 1980 they conclude that conservative policy preferences were marginally more important in explaining the election outcome than were negative evaluations of President Carter's performance. But for 1984, the situation is the opposite and they

clear message as to how to improve on President Carter's performance. Nevertheless, Reagan seems to have been impressively successful in interpreting it as an indication of a public preference for a more conservative departure in policy. Although there was a vast amount of polling data available in the Reagan presidential elections, the data allow of selection and interpretation. And although almost all observers read these data as indicating little ideological shift to the right, the Reagan administration could find evidence for such a shift in the poll results.³⁵ To repeat, then, a president who finds it politically expedient or ideologically congenial has considerable latitude in reading the meaning of the election.

The uncertainty of the mandate, even when accompanied by extensive polling, creates a situation in which it is difficult to know whether a president is acting as a trustee or as a delegate. Given the alternative interpretations that can be read into either the results of an election or the welter of survey data and analyses that accompany it, and given the natural tendency for all of us—especially elected officials—to read into data that which we would most like to see, it is no wonder that a president will consider his victory as a mandate for the positions that he would like, in any case, to pursue. When he does so, it is difficult to evaluate whether he is behaving as a sincere delegate, honestly convinced of public support for his program, or whether he is behaving cynically, acting self-consciously as a trustee while dressing in delegate's clothes.

There is another dynamic at work—implicit in none of the three models of electoral democracy—that helps to explain why elections produce changes in policy. What it takes to get nominated and to run a campaign is quite different from what it takes to get elected. In order to gain a nomination and to conduct a campaign it is necessary to cultivate the support of party activists and campaign supporters and donors, as

find, as do others, that performance evaluations were more important in explaining the overall outcome. See also, Warren E. Miller and Merrill Shanks, "Policy Directions and Presidential Leadership: Alternative Interpretations of the 1980 Presidential Election," *British Journal of Political Science* 12 (1982): 299–356.

The best overall summary of the literature on the two Reagan elections is that they were retrospective evaluations of performance—inadequate performance by Carter in the 1980 election, much better performance by Reagan in the 1984 election. See also, Kiewiet and Rivers, "The Economic Basis of Reagan's Appeal."

35. As an illustration of the fact that presidents can see within public opinion polls a number of things—including a clear mandate—if they want to, we might mention that the one interpreter of the 1984 election that we have heard call it a mandate for conservative change is Richard Wirthlin, President Reagan's chief pollster. (Comment by Richard Wirthlin at the Thomas P. O'Neill Symposium on Presidential Elections, Boston College, 4–5 October 1985.)

well as various other political influentials in Congress, the media, and interest groups. These political elites have policy concerns, and they communicate their views much more effectively than either the average citizen or the electorate as a whole. This explains why candidates actually make commitments when the logic of majority building gives them every reason to obfuscate. These elites are likely to demand that presidential candidates take positions, to monitor how presidential incumbents treat their pledges, and to hold them accountable if they fail to live up to their promises.

These elite groups differ in significant ways from the electorate as a whole. As we have seen, they tend to be drawn disproportionately from higher socioeconomic groups. In addition, their political views are likely to be stronger, more precise, and less centrist than those of the public at large. The need to curry favor with those whose support he needs thus constrains the president to respond to a set of activists who differ from ordinary citizens in important ways and exposes him to expressions of preference about policy matters that are relatively precise in their content, but not necessarily representative of the opinions of either the public at large or the electorate. In addition, this introduces a countervailing tendency to the centrism implicit in American two-party electoral politics: The logic of building an electoral majority is centripetal, pushing candidates to converge at the center; the logic of dealing with political activists is centrifugal, pushing candidates to diverge ideologically.

It is, however, too simplistic to pose responsiveness to elites as an alternative to, or a replacement for, responsiveness to citizen preferences. Attention to elite preferences does not necessarily mean that citizen preferences are unrepresented, only that representation is more complex than it would be if the intermediate elite level of information and constraint were missing. Although the campaign activists, party leaders, interest group advocates, and other political elites that provide the incumbent with information and support have their own sets of preferences and concerns, which differ from those of the citizenry as a whole, they do not inhabit a realm totally cut off from the public. Their commitments to particular organizations (especially to the political parties) and to particular constituencies sometimes place them in a position to act as conduits for expressions of public preferences. Furthermore, some of these elite groups, particularly media elites, may have as one of their highest priorities ensuring that the incumbent pays attention to broadly defined public preferences.³⁶ Nevertheless, al-

36. Furthermore, the media may increase the likelihood that an incumbent will fulfill campaign pledges, since they will criticize him for not so doing.

though attention to elite-generated information is not necessarily antithetical to responsiveness to public preferences, it is hardly the same thing. Elites may speak for the public— or they may speak for themselves. And the public they speak for is likely to be a highly skewed one, far from representative of the public at large.

Conclusion: Presidential Responsiveness and Elite Accountability

Thus we are forced to alter our understanding of the nature of presidential accountability. To whom is the president accountable? Two-party competition in America brings pressure on presidential incumbents to be responsive to broad majorities and to be accountable to citizens on a relatively equal basis. The need to be responsive to political influentials introduces a serious bias into the relatively egalitarian tendency of electoral politics, however. Although the political activists who must be cultivated are drawn disproportionately from the ranks of those of high economic, educational, and occupational status, this bias is more ideological than socioeconomic. If the overall thrust of electoral politics is broadly majoritarian and centrist, the process just described puts candidates under pressure to be responsive to those with narrower concerns and to those farther from the political center.

The result may be a dual form of accountability. The dynamics of aggregate electoral outcomes force a president who seeks reelection for himself or his party to be responsive to a public that will reward or punish him for his performance in office. It may not be easy to measure the effects of this mechanism of accountability, since it does not always manifest itself in crude presidential attempts to manipulate the economy for electoral purposes, and it otherwise consists of a general injunction to "try hard." Nonetheless, the prospect of the next election undoubtedly looms large in the minds of incumbents. The general pressure from the public evaluating the state of the nation is supplemented by pressures from more elite groups: from campaign activists, from those in the president's entourage, from leaders of supportive interest groups, from the congressional delegation of the president's party. To these people, the president will have made more specific pledges during the campaign, and they expect at least some follow-through. Furthermore, the media will carefully monitor the president's pledges and their fate in the new administration. Thus these special publics are a source of detailed policy instruction to the president. Moreover, their attentiveness to the administration is a source of constraint that the president

cannot afford to ignore. In short, we must add still another to our models of presidential accountability. The dictates of the electoral process force the president to be accountable to political elites—and to elites who are much more capable of giving specific content to that accountability than is the public at large.



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2

Elections as Democratic Institutions

Walter Dean Burnham

I

The literature on the subject of elections as democratic institutions is vast, as befits its vital importance. Our focus needs to be on the United States. But a fuller comprehension of the “American problem” in this regard—and there is a problem—requires a general overview of the issues, no matter how unoriginal.

Elections come in a wide variety of types. Moreover, these types do quite different kinds of “work” for the political system as a whole. In general, elections exist to provide a legally definitive means of determining the identity of the key political elites in the system. They thus exist chiefly because earlier modes of legitimation (e.g., hereditary monarchy, oligarchic cooptation) have lost general legitimacy with the advent of modern complex society and economy. Associated with this, as countless observers from Weber to Duverger and Sartori have pointed out, has been the rise of the so-called masses and their entry into political life.¹

1. See Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford, 1946), pp. 77–128; Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (New York: Wiley, 1960); Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, pt. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

As the latter in particular insists, the chief operational justification for the existence of single parties and electoral processes surrounding them in "modernizing" Third World societies is that they permit elites to penetrate and control civil society.² They create means not only for mobilizing but for "channeling" that civil society in the political realm. Many of the same arguments can be extended, of course, to "totalitarian" elections in countries such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet bloc today. The "single party" claims to speak for the entire political community (German-Aryan race-nation, or workers and peasants, as the case may be). Elections in such environments serve vital elite interests. They are devices for "channeling" civil society and for securing its unanimous acclamation. By this bonding, they heighten and deepen elite control.

Most of us in the West, with its pluralist traditions and norms, would regard all this as a sham insofar as the "democratic" character of electoral institutions in such environments is concerned. Definitions of what constitutes "democracy" notoriously and fundamentally differ as between the USSR and the United States, for example. For most in the West, at least, elections without choice cannot be democratic institutions at all. Nominally free elections in which incumbent elites more or less drastically and grossly limit major components of choice are remarkably common around the world. Issues of legitimation are very likely to arise. For instance, one may look at the 1986 Philippine election. President Marcos and his allies not only controlled the mass communications media before the election; they also rigged the count in so blatant a way that computer workers at Election Central walked off the job rather than give further credence to this charade. This election itself actively destabilized the Marcos regime, and paved the way for its overthrow by the Aquino forces, the Church, and the Americans a few weeks later. One could say that by performing this function, the 1986 Philippine election was a "democratic institution," but only by a most peculiar and ironic formulation of that term's meaning.

Democratic choice can be constrained in a variety of ways, some gross and obvious indeed, others more subtle. For example, major portions of the electorate may be excluded altogether, either formally or de facto. Classic historic examples include the *régimes censitaires* common in an earlier stage of "political development" in nineteenth-century Europe and found (with typically local variants) in some parts of the United States (e.g., Louisiana, Rhode Island) long after the Age of Jackson had come and gone. They also include—with vital relevance to the development of American national politics as a whole—the massive

2. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 39–47.

southern racist purges of blacks from the regional electorate after 1890, leaving a situation not fully overcome even at the legal level until the 1960s;³ and, of course, the contemporary South African electoral regime, a classic case of “democracy for the *Herrenvolk* only.”

By the same token, the massive and one-sided use of corruption and violence (or the threat of violence) against electoral opponents is an obvious mechanism of constraint of choice. Here, too, American historical experience gives some quite noteworthy examples. These include, at the least, much of southern politics as a whole between the onset of Reconstruction and the turn-of-century “progressive,” “clean-government” purges of the regional electoral system; the remarkable stranglehold over Maryland politics during the Civil War imposed by the Union army; and many local variants from the Plaquemines parish (Louisiana) frauds in the 1844 presidential election,⁴ through the “swamping of consent” by the Pendergast machine in Kansas City in elections during the 1930s, to the “controlled votes” in Duval County and other Hispanic south Texas counties, which gave Lyndon Johnson his victory in the 1948 senatorial primary, and beyond.

A more subtle set of problems involves the practical organization of the electoral market itself in institutionalized forms. But while subtle, these problems are no less real. The first question that requires to be addressed is whether this market is organized through the channels of mass-based parties ramifying through civil society or whether prepartisan “notability” politics, on the one hand, or candidate-dominated elections wired through contemporary electronic media and ad hoc operative organizations, on the other, dominate the mechanisms of for-

3. It may be worth citing the most extreme American case for major office that I have been able to identify: the South Carolina senatorial election of 1926. In this election, Senator E. D. (“Cotton Ed”) Smith, a colorful character and a dedicated racist, won reelection unopposed to a fourth term. His vote, also the total, was 14,560. As the adult citizenry amounted to 801,000 that year, this gives us a turnout rate of 1.8% of the potential electorate! The authoritative modern account of how situations like this developed in the former Confederate states is J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). See also V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), pp. 489–663.
4. A detailed and indignant account of this 1844 fraud (obviously from the pen of Horace Greeley himself) is found in the 1845 *Whig Almanac* (New York Tribune, *The Tribune Almanac for . . . 1838 to 1868 . . .* vol. I [New York, 1868], p. 6 (“Were the Whigs Beaten by Fraud?”). This essay, among other things, clearly specifies the methodology to be employed in looking for fraudulent vote surplusage. See also this publication’s acid review of the 1872 election results in Louisiana: *Tribune Almanac*, 1873, p. 78 (“The above are the pretended returns of a series of the most fraudulent elections ever held in any country...”).

mal choice. A general proposition is repeatedly advanced in the theoretical literature on parties. As Maurice Duverger says, a regime without such organizations "is of necessity a conservative regime. To suppress parties would be an admirable way for the Right to paralyze the Left."⁵ A great deal of American political history, and indeed of contemporary American politics, can be said to revolve around this theme. For what is at issue is the problem of the extent to which a formally or legally open electoral system lacks a mechanism for mobilizing and representing some popular will, and some organized popular constraint on elite policy actions.⁶

Rather more recently, observers have also detected a significant relationship between the presence or absence of mass partisan channels and governmental capacity. The latter is not just a "democratic" issue but is—probably preeminently—an issue for elites and for state management. There are important reasons for thinking that the American constitutional scheme, that ingenious Madisonian power centrifuge, produces crises of political or state "realization" in direct proportion to the relative absence of partisan channels between rulers and ruled; and that, moreover, this has *always* been the case back to the very beginning. In short, without effective parties and their role in mobilizing, while channeling, public support, a more or less instant "governability crisis" is built into the constitutional regime.

A more general and probably even more subtle set of issues concerning choice is raised by the question of what parties (if any) come to dominate the mechanisms of electoral politics. There are two striking dynamic singularities about American politics that come instantly to view on any comparative analysis. The first of these is the complete failure of any organized socialist or laborite political organization to achieve institutionalization within the organized schedule of choices offered to voters—and this despite the well-known facts that such movements have everywhere else arisen in response to capitalist industrialization and that the United States itself is the leading industrial-capitalist country. The second singularity, which I have long viewed as structurally and functionally inseparably linked to the first, concerns the participation rate in American national elections. It is notorious that American turnouts are incomparably the lowest and most class-skewed to be found in any major advanced industrial-capitalist country today.

5. Duverger, *Political Parties*, p. 426.

6. This issue is also raised, but with an American rather than European formulation, both by E. E. Schattschneider and V. O. Key, Jr. See Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), esp. pp. 47–77; and Key, *Southern Politics*, pp. 298–311.

More than that, over the past century American turnouts have tended to decay—sometimes to ancient bipartisan levels—while mobilization toward a “saturation” point has elsewhere been the norm.⁷

This is hardly the point to turn yet again to that much discussed question of why it was that political socialism failed to establish itself in the American context. I confine myself to two observations at this point. The first is that where there is no left, there will be a more or less unstable and inchoate center and a more truly partisan representation of right-wing interests in an advanced industrial—capitalist political economy. Where the center tends to break up under stress and lacks the will, organization, leadership, or policies to galvanize lower-strata elements who would elsewhere be the natural clientele for a left, the right will come to dominate in a context of vast but very class-skewed demobilization—precisely the setting of the 1920s and the 1980s. Over the very long run, and especially in the context of hegemonic (or ex-hegemonic) power in the world economy as a whole, something like the 1920s or the 1980s will probably be the modal point, the “central tendency” around which the system as a whole will tend to pivot.

Second, Marxists in particular have always insisted that there is a radical difference between formal or legal permissiveness and actual developed possibilities for choice among the ruled through the mechanisms of electoral politics. This obviously serves the tendentious purpose of denying a legitimacy to “capitalist democracy” that its practitioners claim. Nevertheless, their point is a telling one. It has been made in different forms by many non-Marxist analysts, notably E. E. Schattschneider and V. O. Key, Jr. When one evaluates the representativeness or “democratic institution” character of elections, it is simply not enough to arrive at an affirmative judgment on the basis of legal or formal permissiveness. It may, perhaps, be emotionally satisfactory for many to blame nonvoters for not voting in American elections, but such satisfactions hardly rise to the level of serious analysis. Choices that have come to be operationally skewed and constrained are no less so than those produced by manipulations of legal and formal parameters

7. The long-term American picture has been presented by many authors, by myself in “The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe,” *American Political Science Review* 59 (1965): 7–28. The European pattern has been particularly discussed by Stein Rokkan and his associates; see, e.g., Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 1–64, 367–444. For a specific contrast by an author showing the turn-of-century European “politics of mobilization” at work, see Stanley Suval, *Electoral Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 24–25 (and the whole of chap. 2, “The Rush to the Polls”).

that are now pretty universally regarded as illegitimate. It is precisely for this reason that the long-term analysis of turnout and the social incidence of nonvoting are of such major importance to understanding the properties of a political system—of ascertaining, for example, the extent to which a purportedly democratic system is in effect not much more than a broadly based oligarchy.

Let us turn to the discussion of several major episodes in the two-century history of the American electoral system that touch on the issues we have presented above. Discussion must be severely limited in scope, particularly concerning the “system of 1896,” about which the present author and others have written extensively elsewhere.⁸

*The Beginning: The Deferential–Participant
Republic, 1789–1828*

The period before 1824–1828 is sometimes referred to as the era of the “first party system,” involving competition between the initially ascendant Federalist party and the Jeffersonian Republicans, ascendant in their turn after the pivotal election of 1800–1801. But there is something very peculiar about this “party system,” so much so that contemporary historians such as Ronald Formisano have denied that it ultimately amounted to a party system at all.⁹ For example, Donald Stokes could demonstrate statistically the existence of forces tending to restore two-party competition in congressional elections from the 1860s to the 1960s.¹⁰ But it is just the absence of such forces that is central to the electoral dynamics of that long-ago period. Throughout vast reaches of the country, particularly west of the Fall Line on the Atlantic seaboard, the Federalist party never acquired organizational shape or more than a handful of voters at any time. The presidency, of course, was not fully “democratized” until after the 1824 election. Reasonably close partisan competition at the center—in Congress itself, that is—existed only between 1793 and 1801, less than a decade. And, as if in ratification of this difference, the Federalists simply evaporated as soon as the conflict stimulus of a divisive war was removed in 1815. Then followed a unique

8. See, e.g., Walter Dean Burnham, “The System of 1896: An Analysis,” in Paul Kleppner *et al.*, *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 147–202.

9. Ronald P. Formisano, “Federalists and Republicans: Parties, Yes—System, No,” in Kleppner *et al.*, *ibid.*, pp. 33–76.

10. Donald E. Stokes, “On the Existence of Forces Restoring Two-Party Competition,” in Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966), pp. 180–193.

“era of good feeling,” the very definition of the lack of sufficient *internal* transport, communications, or political issues to support a national electoral market at all.

As this was not a fully partisan “system,” so electoral mobilization was far lower than at any later time until well into the twentieth century. In *form*, elections around 1800 or 1820 were frequently (though by no means always) identical with elections held around 1840 or 1860. Their *content* was revolutionized by the arrival of permanent, institutionalized parties as channels for a mass democracy.

Perhaps the clearest way of seeing this is by evaluating electoral data for the whole period extending from 1788 to 1840. Most compendia—implicitly recognizing the absence of a national electoral market before the mid 1820s, as well as the fact that congressional election data in particular are frequently missing—do not present this information. This is something of a pity, since a great deal of it is available. Tables 1 and 2 give what, stretching a point, could be called the “national” results for these elections held in (or near) presidential years; Table 1 with the ascertainable presidential vote, Table 2 with a summation of state-level returns for governor or, infrequently, for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The pre-1828 presidency was not the focus of electoral politics. This is another way of saying that there was no nationwide electoral market before then. In all elections down through 1824, turnouts were much higher for nonpresidential offices than for presidential electors. Indeed, it is not until 1840 that the subsequently normal patterns—presidential turnout higher than participation rates for other offices—are finally achieved. The massive popular ascendancy of the Jeffersonian Republicans from 1804 onward is clearly visible, especially in Table 2. Only the divisive impact of American involvement with the “world war” of the time in 1808 and 1812 provided a temporary reversal of this trend. In the presidential returns, this produced the highest turnout (41.6 percent) found until 1828, and an apparently close race in 1812. In that wartime election, the weak incumbent, James Madison, ran not against a Federalist, moreover, but against a dissident Republican (De Witt Clinton of New York) who attracted many normally Republican voters, as a comparison of Tables 1 and 2 for 1812 suggests.

As is clear from these arrays, elections in early federal times (pre-1800) produced turnout rates of about one-quarter of the potential electorate in nonpresidential races, and far less than that in presidential contests. Thereafter, the norm was a participation rate of between two-fifths and about one-half of the potential electorate. This “system,” like all others, behaved as a system. But its nature was best defined by

TABLE 1
 Ascertainable Popular Vote in Presidential Elections, 1789–1840

Year	Number of States with		Estimated Potential Electorate (thousands)	Total Vote Cast	Percentage of Potential Electorate					
	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote			Voting	Nonvoting	DR	Fed	Other	
1789	10	5	270.6	31,105	11.5	88.5	0.8	10.7	—	
1792	15	2	143.5	5,639	3.9	96.1	-	3.2	0.7	
1796	16	3	268.8	54,853	20.4	79.6	8.7	11.7	—	
1800	16	4	198.3	62,284	31.4	68.6	19.5	11.5	0.4	
1804	17	7	535.9	135,230	25.4	74.6	17.8	7.1	6.3	
1808	17	7	460.9	169,859	36.9	63.1	24.3	12.5	0.0	
1812	17	7	618.3	257,409	41.6	58.4	21.5	20.1	0.0	
1816	19	6	583.4	119,439	20.5	79.5	14.5	5.8	0.1	
1820	20	10	789.5	77,497	9.8	90.2	8.5	—	1.3	
							<i>Jackson</i>	<i>Adams</i>	<i>Crawford</i>	<i>Clay</i>
1824	24	18	1,347.3	359,738	26.7	73.3	11.2	8.4	3.5	3.5
							<i>Dem</i>	<i>NR</i>	<i>Other</i>	
1828	24	22	2,003.9	1,143,510	57.1	42.9	32.1	25.0	—	
1832	24	23	2,285.7	1,295,164	56.7	43.3	30.9	21.4	4.4	(Anti-Mason)
							<i>Dem</i>	<i>Whig</i>	<i>Other</i>	
1836	26	25	2,659.0	1,502,646	56.5	43.5	28.8	27.8	—	
1840	26	25	3,004.0	2,411,031	80.3	19.7	37.6	42.5	0.2	

TABLE 2
 Ascertainable Popular Vote, Major Nonpresidential Offices in or Near Presidential Years,
 1789–1840

Year	Number of States with Returns	Potential Electorate (thousands)	Total Vote Cast	Percentage of Potential Electorate				
				Voting	Nonvoting	DR	Fed	Other
1789	9	429.4	114,983	26.8	73.2	0.9	24.1	1.7
1792	8	488.4	114,301	23.4	76.6	6.2	16.0	1.2
1796	10	543.6	137,113	25.2	74.8	11.4	10.6	3.2
1800	15	803.3	326,600	40.7	59.3	21.8	18.5	0.4
1804	13	810.5	311,738	38.5	61.5	27.3	10.9	0.3
1808	14	952.9	484,803	50.9	49.1	31.6	18.7	0.6
1812	15	1,112.4	527,392	47.4	52.6	28.9	18.2	0.2
1816	16	1,297.6	571,521	44.0	56.0	33.0	10.9	0.1
1820	22	1,545.7	598,143	38.7	61.3	35.9	2.4	0.4
1824	23	1,809.2	919,951	50.8	49.2	44.2	6.5	0.1
						Dem	NR	Other (Anti-Mason)
1828	23	1,984.2	1,137,901	57.3	42.7	31.0	20.8	5.2
1832	23	2,117.6	1,383,659	65.3	34.7	31.9	26.0	5.9
						Dem	Whig	
1836	25	2,663.8	1,609,063	60.4	39.6	30.8	29.3	0.2
1840	25	3,023.1	2,317,090	76.6	23.4	37.2	39.3	0.2

Professor Formisano's characterization of the whole period as one of "deferential-participant" rather than fully democratized politics.¹¹ Election results were shaped accordingly. The system makes sense if we assume that it reflected the norms, expectations, and issues associated with *late-colonial* electoral and "party" politics. This was the case across a surprisingly wide front. The United States achieved political independence in 1783, but many elements of a "colonial situation" long survived that date. At that time, the United States was at best a dependent semiperipheral component in the world economy; its economic and psychological orientation was more nearly transatlantic than was again to be the case until the 1940s.

The ideological and power conflicts erupting out of the French revolution and the Napoleonic Wars sucked the Americans into their train. Following the logic of semiperipheral development, the Jeffersonians in power adopted key Federalist (even Hamiltonian) development policies. But they did everything they could to drive Federalist men from political life. In a real sense, the symbolisms of Federalist "Anglomania" and Jeffersonian "Francophilia" not only defined partisan identity among the relatively narrow "political class" of the time but were instruments for resolving what the American national character would become as full psychic, economic, and geopolitical independence was finally achieved. The Federalists came to be seen consensually as on the "wrong" side of these very fundamental independence issues. The Jeffersonians thus became America's "party of revolutionary institutions," leaving literally no room for a discredited opposition after 1815. As for the War of 1812 itself, we should note that contemporary historians and publicists usually called it "the Second War of American Independence." The description strikes one today as unusually precise.

When we turn to politics in Washington, James S. Young provides us with a complementary guide.¹² He also demonstrates convincingly that nonpartisanship and governability problems are closely linked. These politicians in the main hated power and its exercise, and were very aware of the huge personal sacrifice involved in moving to the frontier capital with its pestilential climate. They picked up many cues other

11. Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789-1840," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 473-487. See also his comprehensive work on a single state, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). The late-colonial (and transatlantic) connection is spelled out by J. R. Pole, *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).
12. James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

than party for their actions, including the socializing climate of the boardinghouses where they lived. Insofar as the national government was concerned, it lacked an organizing focus because it had few or no entrepreneurial political linkages with the people, over whom it presided more than it ruled. It was, in his words, "government at a distance and out of sight," feeble and held pretty much in contempt not only by the public outside but by many of the politicians inside too.¹³

While Young only hints at the electoral connection, the sorry record of the federal government's performance during the 1812–1815 crisis (and later) suggests something of peculiar importance to our argument. In the absence of party bonds crossing the vertical and horizontal walls set up by federalism and the separation of powers, elections—if they had any effect at all—served to buttress these walls, increase the fragmentation of power, and contribute to the "governability crisis" of the time. One might indeed be tempted to speculate a bit further and suggest two structural propositions. The first of these is that the Constitution by itself is a radically and inherently deficient framework within which to conduct the steering functions of government. Something else needs to be added if it is to "work." Second, this deficiency inevitably and speedily becomes obvious when and to the extent that political parties have decayed or do not exist at all. As long as a state is not really necessary—and this was historically, uniquely the American case throughout most of our history—these issues are likely to agitate only tidy-minded intellectuals. But when the state becomes necessary, the steering problem becomes not only hopeless but genuinely serious.

Young believes that government was saved from this exiguous, shadowy existence when the rise of partisanship in the Jacksonian era "unlocked the American genius for politics." This is probably the consensus view, mirrored by V. O. Key, Jr.'s later characterization of party as the "solvent of federalism."¹⁴ Such reflections are not only linked to governability issues but to a widespread—if often only indistinctly articulated—sense among party theorists that the energizing potential of democracy has a force that is almost unimaginable to Americans of the present generation.

Union and Confederate Politics, 1861–1865

The second of our cases, the contrast between politics in the Union and the Confederacy, simply underscores both points we have been discussing. As a recent study by James Oakes has stressed, southern

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–27.

14. V. O. Key, Jr., *American State Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1956), pp. 34–41.

slaveholders of the antebellum era were far less patriarchal than entrepreneurial.¹⁵ It might be something of an exaggeration to describe them as liberal democrats whose major disagreement with their northern counterparts was whether Lockian property rights extended to labor as well as to land and capital. But there can be no doubt in any case that the antebellum South supported a lively and usually very fully mobilized electoral regime based on party, a good example of “*Herrenvolk* democracy.” When the region seceded in 1860–1861, all this came to an abrupt end. Apart from a brief and abortive experiment with partisan competition during Reconstruction, rejected as “illegitimate” by most of the South’s whites, it remained nearly extinct until our own time, a century after Appomattox.

As a consequence, the electoral contrasts between South and North could hardly have been greater. Confederate election returns are as much, if not more, *terra incognita* as election data for the early Federal period. The presidential election of 1861 returned Jefferson Davis unopposed. I have found the popular vote for this election in only one state, Georgia. Here, very characteristically, the turnout fell from 85.8 percent of the potential electorate in 1860 to 40.8 percent in 1861. Similarly, election data for the Confederate Congress are only episodically available. Quite apart from possible losses due to military action, such data have probably not been subject to the intensive searches and scrutinies of scholarship that are usual elsewhere, since there is no partisan “definition” behind the candidacies. To be sure, the Confederacy was under siege and subject to invasion, as the Union was not; but such states as Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas were not the scene of serious military action until near the very end (1864–1865).

In the North, on the other hand, party not only survived but was an essential ingredient of political life. Abraham Lincoln viewed the war as a “people’s contest.” The Republican party was the indispensable political means through which an organized, energized collective will was created and sustained through the immense stress of this war. Moreover, as Eric McKittrick sagely observes, there was a unique symbiosis between events on the battlefield and events at the ballot box—two forms of participation, one might say, in collective decision making.¹⁶ If it was

15. James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Random House, 1982).

16. Eric McKittrick, “Party Politics and the Union and Confederate War Efforts,” in *The American Party Systems*, ed. William N. Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, 1975), pp. 117–151. This essay, destined clearly to be the most influential in that collection, merits that sometimes overused sobriquet “seminal.”

important for the war effort that Meade defeat Lee at Gettysburg in July 1863, it was no less important that the Copperhead Democratic candidate for the Ohio governorship, Clement Vallandigham, go down to overwhelming defeat in October. And so he did, and with an unprecedented participation rate of 91.5 percent of Ohio's potential electorate!

On the mobilization side, the contrasts between the two experiences are provided in Tables 3 and 4.¹⁷

The mobilization levels in the northern states were awesome by today's standards in the United States, though hardly exceptional by those of such contemporary pluralist systems as Sweden, West Germany, and Italy. If they sagged slightly during the Civil War itself, this was largely a by-product of the fact that a significant share of the potential electorate was on the battlefield. The elections that immediately followed Lee's surrender at Appomattox, those of 1866 and 1868, were scarcely if at all less polarizing than the war itself, since this "last capitalist revolution" did not stop its momentum with the end of armed struggle. Thus, more than three-quarters of potential voters came to the polls in the 1866 off-year congressional election. Only once again in American history—during the 1894 election, which inaugurated a critical realignment sequence—was such an outpouring ever approximated in these states. Similarly, 1868 centered directly on the many unresolved issues left by the war, including Reconstruction itself. It would seem that about seven-eighths of the North's potential electorate really did come to the polls that year. Mobilization levels in these states, on the aggregate, were usually to remain at or close to that mark until after the turn of the twentieth century.

By contrast, Confederate turnouts during the Civil War very promptly declined, even in the first relatively peaceful year, from immediate prewar participation levels not much inferior to those of the North. It is noteworthy in this respect—at least insofar as we can tell from a rather fragmentary record—that congressional (i.e., "national") turnout rates fell much farther than did those in gubernatorial contests. Still, the overwhelming impression this record leaves is that of a reversion to the

17. The northern states aggregated here are defined as being free states in 1861, and having been original or admitted to the Union before 1850, for here was where the Union war effort was concentrated. The southern states aggregated here (Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) are those for which at least some returns for the 1861 and 1863 elections to the Confederate Congress were available for inclusion. For Table 4, showing gubernatorial turnouts during this period, the reporting is organized annually, since each year saw a substantial number of major state elections during this period. The turnouts are aggregates for all states in both regions, admitted before 1850 and for which data are available.

TABLE 3
Turnouts in the Union and the Confederate States,
National Elections 1858–1869 (and 1980–1984)

Year	President			House of Representatives		
	Potential Electorate (thousands)	Number Voting	Turnout	Potential Electorate (thousands)	Number Voting	Turnout
Fifteen Northern States Admitted Before 1850						
1858–1859				3,652.3	2,575,993	70.5
1860–1861	3,861.8	3,235,377	83.8	3,869.7	3,217,822	83.2
1862–1863				4,063.5	2,805,618	69.0
1864–1865	4,259.5	3,506,089	82.3	4,262.4	3,313,388	77.7
1866–1867				4,482.7	3,473,434	7.5
1868–1869	4,721.7	4,144,957	87.8	4,723.6	4,126,842	87.4
1980	66,165.6	37,982,063	57.4	66,165.6	35,320,930	53.4
1982				67,160.7	28,635,830	42.6
1984	67,836.3	39,431,687	58.1	67,836.3	37,050,248	54.6
Six Southern States with CSA Congressional Returns						
1858–1859				630.7	412,704	65.4
1860–1861	658.3	519,042	USA 78.8	506.0	176,901	CSA 35.0
1862–1863				249.6	61,129	CSA 24.5
1864–1865		Nonparticipating		389.3	135,214	USA* 34.7
Fundamental change in electoral base with Reconstruction Act of March 1, 1867						
1980	23,256.9	11,087,216	47.7	23,256.9	9,439,703	40.6
1982				24,392.6	7,709,148	31.6
1984	25,283.9	12,552,149	49.6	25,283.9	10,754,447	42.5

Note: 1865 congressional returns are for the U.S. House of Representatives under President Andrew Johnson's initial reconstruction plan; none of the men chosen were seated by the House.

Fifteen northern states: Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin.

Six southern states: Alabama, Arkansas (1861 only), Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee (1861 only), Texas.

TABLE 4
Turnouts in the Union and Confederate States,
State (Gubernatorial) Elections, 1858–1869

Year	Fifteen Northern States Admitted before 1850 ^a				Confederacy			
	Number of States	Potential Electorate (thousands)	Voting	Turnout	Number of States	Potential Electorate (thousands)	Voting	Turnout
1858	9	1,586.1	1,106,442	69.8	1	129.9	96,465	74.3
1859	10	1,588.2	1,098,712	69.2	7	884.8	614,125	69.4
1860	11	2,932.8	2,444,132	83.3	3	218.5	185,028	84.7
1861	9	1,526.1	980,948	64.3	6	CSA 586.0	355,912	60.7
1862	10	1,872.6	1,251,501	66.8	1	CSA 134.0	76,095	56.8
1863	10	2,255.2	1,690,235	74.9	5	CSA 583.7	220,707	37.8
1864	10	2,532.6	2,019,303	79.7	1	CSA 134.5	72,561	53.9
1865	10	1,828.7	1,142,367	62.5	9	905.3	321,364	35.5
1866	10	2,565.9	1,939,218	75.6	3	314.8	140,978	44.8
1867	9	1,739.8	1,269,735	73.0				
1868	11	2,986.8	2,607,931	87.3				
1869	10	2,558.1	1,773,280	69.3				

^aFifteen states: Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin.

patterns of pre-Jacksonian national election turnouts, particularly in the 1815–1827 period. The eclipse of turnout in Confederate congressional elections is but one of many structural indicators that a national electoral market had disappeared. The much more substantial participation rates for state elections equally finds its parallel in the pre-1828 American picture. When parties are effectively removed in such settings, somewhere between two-fifths and rather better than one-half of the potential electorate remains politically active enough to come to the polls.

This seems the perfect complement to the chaotic, every-person-for-himself world of Confederate “insider” politics that McKittrick describes. In the North, the maintenance and intensification of party conflict provided vital assets to Abraham Lincoln and the war effort generally. For one thing, the existence of a very large Democratic minority provided the administration with essential information as to where its (and the war effort’s) opponents were located. Second, this minority, which nearly carried the 1862 congressional elections, was the most powerful imaginable force for maintaining the Republican party’s cohesion and for constraining factional conflicts within it. The political elites of this party, with very few exceptions, were given a mighty incentive to remain “in the same story,” both for office winning and for fundamental ideological reasons. The elections themselves, granted the obviously enormous strength of “party identification” in the electorate, gave the party’s election managers indispensable and remarkably precise indicators of the current state of public opinion. In October 1863, more than 55 percent of Ohio’s adult male white citizen population, presented with the stark alternatives of support for the Union or peace-at-any-price opposition, voted for the Union—a very convincing expression of public opinion indeed!

The Confederacy had a constitutional structure very closely similar to that set up for the country as a whole by the 1787 document. But there was no partisan integument to bind the whole together. As stress mounted, conflicts erupted between the president and vice-president, between the executive and Congress, between the Confederate Senate and House, and between the Richmond government and the state governments. Opposition seeped in here, there, and everywhere; so did administrative and political paralysis. We will of course never know whether the Confederacy could have overcome the immensely superior resources of the Union in any case. But it is very clear that the lack of any organized counterweight to the “pitting of ambition against ambition” welded into the constitutional structure made its own significant contribution to failure. Back in the War of 1812, incoherence and incompetence had not led to fatal results because, for the British, the Americans

were still as hard to reach as they had been in the first war of American independence, and because, for them in any case, it was a sideshow that lost its point as soon as Napoleon had been disposed of. The Confederacy was not to be so lucky.

The System of 1896

I suppose that as a student of these matters I am best known for two lines of work. One has dealt with critical realignments and their central systemic significance in American electoral history. The other has concentrated on the long-term correlates and implications of the massive decline in partisanship and participation across this century, especially in recent decades. The two are of course closely related—so much so that it becomes possible to assert that, granted these modern changes in electoral markets, the classic critical realignment sequence has probably become extinct. My first work on the subject now lies 20 years in the past, and was a study in the long-term decay of the mass popular element in American politics.¹⁸

The causal story told there was, in the main, that industrial, capital-accumulating elites everywhere (whether capitalist, communist, or Third World hybrid) require insulation from the mass pressures and protest that are certain to arise from the acute and unequally distributed pain of the accumulation process. Among large pluralist polities, only in the United States was a fully developed, institutionalized, and mobilized electoral politics in existence *before* the industrialist transformation of economy and society got under way. The contradictions between the “developmental elite’s” need for insulation from democracy and the fact that some form of democracy already existed were eventually resolved in favor of insulation. The mechanisms of resolution were worked out in the political era that began in the realignment of 1894–1896 and lasted until the debacle of the Great Depression nearly 40 years later.

The institutions of democracy survived and indeed were extended during this period in new ways—for instance, with the direct election of U.S. senators in 1913, the spread of Progressive era reforms such as the direct primary, the initiative, referendum and recall in the period extending from about 1903 until our involvement in World War I rather more than a decade later; and, of course, the arrival of nationwide woman suffrage in 1920. But while the institutions survived, democracy itself was very substantially displaced. And, as always, as partisanship

18. Walter Dean Burnham, “Changing Shape,” Reprinted in *The Current Crisis in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), chap. 1.

decayed and was broken up by progressive statutory changes, participation withered. In this case, it declined to the point that the lowest national turnout rates ever achieved since 1828 were registered during the 1920–1926 period.

This causal story received a lot of attention, much of it critical. And there is no doubt that the theme of *conscious elite manipulation and imposition on a mass public* was stressed excessively in this first account. This was a relatively early attempt. Indeed, it appeared on the scene before the full flood of post-1960 party decomposition, the public's "confidence gap," and economic and imperial stress had burst over the United States.

The protracted modern American crisis, affecting economics, politics, cultural values, and the country's geopolitical role, has contributed immeasurably to a notable intellectual realignment. Today, to take but a few examples, Immanuel Wallerstein and his coworkers have developed a voluminous literature centered on the dynamics of the world economy. Analysis of the state—once considered by dominant pluralist political science to be little more than a metaphysical construct, a bit of "mind-stuff," in Arthur Bentley's phrase—has returned in full force, and is linked to historical and comparative analyses of its evolution. This has often been associated with a profound shift from the meliorist assumptions about "nation building" in the early political development literature to a much greater stress on conflict, force, penetration, extraction, and control. This shift in problematic has been noteworthy not only among Latin American social scientists in recent years, but among an increasing number of North American and European scholars as well. And there is now an entire "growth industry" subfield within political science, "political economy." The 1965 story would thus undoubtedly be told somewhat differently today, in this changed and deepened intellectual context. But its underlying argument has, I think, lost little of its force. Changes in the field of inquiry over the past two decades may, if anything, underscore certain parts of it.

III

Demobilization and the Current Political Scene

Changes in the immediate contexts surrounding American elections over the past quarter century have been as comprehensive as they have been obvious. Presidential campaigns have been profoundly altered by delegate-selection rule changes placing a vastly increased weight on success in primary elections, particularly very early in the campaign

season. The campaigns themselves have reached back further and further, to the point where we now have what Sidney Blumenthal aptly calls "the permanent campaign."¹⁹ The 1988 nomination process is now already under way. The electoral mechanism has come to be dominated by candidate "organizations," composed of insider operatives, advertising and media consultants, and pollsters such as John Dear-dourff, David Garth, Pat Caddell, and Robert Teeter. The themes developed both in primary and general election campaigns have become imagistic, personalized, suited in short for television as the chief medium for reaching a vast mass electorate. All of this takes money, and the rise of so-called independent fund raising and political action committees has been spectacular, especially since the Supreme Court's 1976 decision in *Buckley v. Valeo*, asserting that when money talks in politics, it talks with constitutional protection.

Citizens have apparently responded to these changes in two ways—by abstention, on the one hand, and by increasing "voting specialization," on the other. By the 1974–1984 period, turnouts had declined outside the former Confederate states to lows not seen since the 1920s, and in a number of cases to lows never before registered at all.²⁰ As a number of studies have shown, the delay in turnout after 1960 was

19. Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). Blumenthal provides an answer to the conundrum of the "missing critical realignment" in the 1968–1972 period. He believes that such a realignment occurred right on schedule but that it involved the definitive displacement of the old party-aggregation mechanisms by the instruments and practices of the "permanent campaign." There is something quite attractive about this idea, and the parallel view that we are now in a "sixth electoral system." But if this notion is valid, it implies something historically *unprecedented*: the first *antipartisan* realignment in American history and, perhaps, even a "realignment to end all realignments."
20. Excluding the states of the former Confederacy, the gross regional presidential turnout pattern looks like this for selected presidential elections:

Year	Nonsouthern Turnout	Year	Nonsouthern Turnout
1876	85.0	1920	57.3
1880	85.5	1940	72.9
1896	86.0	1960	72.8
1916	69.1	1980	57.0
		1984	57.5

(Note: As usual in my turnout work, these estimates are derived from relevant citizen rather than the usual voting-age adult population.) Thus a number of states even in 1984 registered the lowest participation rates since before 1840, or since their admission to the Union if that came later: Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Utah. If Civil War disfranchising elections are disregarded, Missouri and West Virginia should also be added to the list.

particularly heavy among those working-class, poor, and nonwhite groups that had always participated least in modern elections. So much has this become the case that we can say that today the *real* class polarization in the electoral races is not between Democratic and Republican voters so much as between both and the "party of nonvoters." By now, the latter constitutes nearly half of the potential electorate in presidential elections (44.8 percent of the adult citizen population in 1984), and more than three-fifths in off-year elections.

The magnitude of change in this regard must be examined in concrete detail to be fully appreciated. Let us take as a case in point all the cities and towns over 10,000 population in 1960 located in the Boston metropolitan area and analyze change in participation between 1960 and 1980. The 54 cities and towns here have shown little relative change in their gross economic status or even, as a whole, in their internal demography taken as unweighted whole units. Moreover, the traditional (i.e., 1928–1960) pattern of aggregate partisanship has a well-known underlying structure of economic and cultural differentiations. A convenient summary of the latter is the proportion of no votes cast in a 1948 birth-control referendum, for this pitted Catholics against non-Catholics throughout the state. The explanatory power of this single variable may be appreciated by noting that it explains 84 percent of the variance in the percentage Democratic of the 1960 presidential vote, with a regression equation of $Y_c = 4.295 + 0.995X$.²¹ The economic variables are taken from the 1980 census: median owned-housing values in thousands of dollars and percentage of population living in rented quarters. Dependent variables include percentage turnout of voting-age population in 1960 and 1980, and the 1960–1980 turnout decline relative to each unit's 1960 participation rate.

This is obviously an exploratory and incomplete analysis; no one pretends that there were not substantial changes between 1960 and 1980. Still, the differential patterns are very powerfully etched in the data. This is particularly true, of course, when multiple-regression analysis including all of the independent variables is included. The evidence seems quite overwhelming that (a) economic differentials become much better predictors of turnout in 1980 than in 1960; (b) of the two economic variables, the more influential appears to be the percentage of popula-

21. Viewed in ecological-regression terms, this says that in a hypothetical unit that was 100 percent in favor of birth control in 1948 (i.e., zero no votes), Kennedy's 1960 percentage of the vote was 4.3. By the time we reach a jurisdiction where the no votes equaled 96 percent of the total, Kennedy's vote was 99.8 percent. Particularly between electoral events a dozen years apart (and when one is not a partisan event), *r*'s of .917 are not very commonly encountered.

tion living in rental quarters (which of course is strongly associated with old core cities rather than suburbia);²² (c) the cultural variable, so strong a predictor of the 1960 Democratic vote, contributes very little to the equation where 1960-1980 relative participation decline is the dependent variable (i.e., the "explanation" here is overwhelmingly economic). The equations are presented in Table 5.

The extent of differentiation in these changes may be best appreciated by (ecological) regression estimates of the dependent turnout variable, positing hypothetical values of the dependent variables. If we assume a value (of course, unrealistic) of zero for owned-housing value and 100 percent renters in a hypothetical unit, equations 3 and 4 would yield a 1960 turnout of 68.4 percent, a rate falling to just 25.7 percent in 1980. But in a unit with median housing values of \$100,000 in 1980 but no people living in rental quarters, the turnouts would be 90.4 percent and 85.8 percent respectively. The gap between these two cases thus grows from an already substantial 22 percent in 1960 to a massive 60.1 percent in 1980; or, put another way, the 1960-1980 turnout attrition in our imaginary exclusive suburban jurisdiction would have been only 4.6 percent of the 1960 base), while in our imaginary central-city *Bidonville* the 1960-1980 decline is 42.6 percent or fully 62.5 percent of the 1960 base.²³

22. It is worthy of note that scholars have found a strong relationship in Thatcher-era British elections between home ownership (rather than Council house tenancy) and propensity to vote Conservative. See Ian McAllister and Richard Rose, *The Nationwide Competition for Votes: The 1983 British Election* (London: Pinter, 1984). Mrs. Thatcher's well-known commitment to privatizing the state-owned housing stock probably rests on ideological grounds rather than considerations of electoral advantage; but electoral payoffs may well ensue as a by-product. One senses in the Massachusetts data, at least, the progressive emergence of an empirical "stake in society" phenomenon. In terms of political theory, this of course is an ancient matter of dispute, going back at least to the colloquy between General Ireton and Colonel Rainborough in the 1647 Putney debates. See A. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates* (London, 1951), pp. 53-64. The suspicion grows that future American survey analysis might profitably explore this set of issues more fully in the future.
23. One of the more attractive reasons for studying the Boston area—in addition to its multiplicity of economically diverse jurisdictions and its combination of relatively slow growth and stability—is that even by 1980 the nonwhite and Hispanic components of the population were normally very small. The Boston urbanized area's 1980 population was 5.9 percent black and 2.5 percent Hispanic (the latter partly an overlapping category). The black maximum is reached in Boston (22.4 percent), and the Hispanic in Chelsea (14 percent). But since the materials presented here are in terms of unweighted whole jurisdictions, the influence of differences on this dimension range from small to minute. One assumes (in a very preliminary way, of course, and without checking) that the independent contribution to turnout depression from these two low-participation groups will be very small.

TABLE 5
Social Indicators and Turnout in Fifty-four Boston-Area Cities and Towns, 1960 and 1980

Variables (3 independent)	$R^2 = Y =$
$X_1 = \$$ owned housing 1980 (in 000)	
$X_2 = \%$ pop. in rental quarters	
$X_3 = \%$ No, birth control, 1948	.903
$Y = \%$ Democratic of vote, 1960	$33.176 - 0.233X_1 + 0.183X_2 + 0.610 X_3$
	(1)
$X_1, X_2, X_3 =$ same as above	
$Y = \%$ relative turnout decline, 1960-1980	.702
	$25.186 - 0.221X_1 + 0.309X_2 + 0.008 X_3$
	(2)
Variables (2 independent)	$R^2 = Y =$
$X_1 = \$$ owned housing 1980 (in 000)	.311
$X_2 = \%$ pop. in rental quarters	
$Y =$ turnout, 1960	$83.437 + 0.069X_1 - 0.151X_2$
	(3)
$X_1, X_2 =$ same as above	
$Y =$ turnout, 1980	.791
	$62.712 + 0.231X_1 - 0.370X_2$
	(4)
$X_1, X_2 =$ same as above	
$Y = \%$ relative turnout change, 1960-1980 (i.e., decline)	.714
	$24.766 - 0.215X_1 + 0.319X_2$
	(5)

Much else could be said about this file, but space precludes. Turnout decay is clearly maximized among the poorer, core-Democratic voting groups that turned out very fully in 1960 (and still more fully in 1940, it may be added). The higher in the social structure one climbs via these aggregates, the smaller this participation decay is, both theoretically in one case actually becoming a turnout increase at the very top. Such findings are substantively identical with those that can be readily located from the 1964-1980 files of the Census Bureau's P-20 reports on voting and nonvoting. As turnout declines over time, it declines both relatively and absolutely most rapidly among the lower socioeconomic classes.²⁴ What aggregate analysis demonstrates is a point that cannot be mentioned in Census Bureau surveys: This decline falls most heavily

24. See, e.g., my 1978 essay, "The Appearance and Disappearance of the American Voter," in Burnham, *Current Crisis in American Politics*, pp. 121-165. The most comprehensive treatment of these files is Steven J. Rosenstone and Raymond Wolfinger, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

within the *Democratic party's* old core working-class electorate mobilized by Al Smith and still more by the New Deal, and demobilized since 1960.

There are obvious and important democratic-theory implications in all this, a chief reason for the huge increase in scholarly interest in the American participation problem over the past 20 years. Granted the demographics and the class composition of the "party of nonvoters," there seems little reason to doubt that these would be largely Democratic voters, had the Democratic party been interested in, or capable of, the mobilizing incentives to reach them; or left voters if the political system and political culture had ever made room for a left party in the schedule of alternatives offered in the American electoral market. The Michigan survey research group has recently stressed the significance of respondents' sense of their own "external political efficacy"—their sense that they have any leverage over the political process—as a major variable separating out voters from nonvoters. If your sense of external political efficacy is relatively high, you tend to vote; if not, you tend not to. Another analyst, Arthur Hadley, has found something rather similar: The chief discriminator seems to be whether the respondent thinks that his or her life is amenable to rational planning or alternatively, is at the mercy of Lady Luck.²⁵ Controlling for the usual demographics, those who believe that they are more or less in charge of their destinies tend to vote; others, very similar to them but thinking that chance decides, tend to abstain. The broad linkages between either of these explanations and the different subcultures of American social classes are patent.

If nonvoting has risen to the point where about one-quarter of the people who would have voted as late as 1960 have dropped out by 1984, then an inference seems to follow. Something out there has produced more and more citizens who have little positive sense of their own ability to influence politics, and perhaps more and more for whom their lives are decided by the Wheel of Fate. It goes without saying that a supine, apathetic and fatalistic working class—for there is where the "party of nonvoters" is mostly concentrated—would hardly be the most fertile soil in which to root institutions democratic in any but a formal sense. The journalists Jack Germond and Jules Witcover have entitled their sour if engrossing report on the 1984 election *Wake Us When It's*

25. Arthur T. Hadley, *The Empty Polling Booth* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979). Sociologists have known for a long time that psychic damage is inflicted on lower-class people in a class society. This set of issues and their political implications have been well illuminated for the contemporary American scene in a recent study by Kay L. Schlozman and Sidney Verba, *Injury to Insult: Unemployment, Class and Political Response* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979).

Over .²⁶ The "permanent campaign" produces elections that occasion such dismissive terms. Apathy and passivity punctuated by celebration and acclamation are major realities at one level of politics, the intense activity of intense activists dominate at another.

The rise of "voting specialization" among those adults still remaining in the active electorate has its own significance. It too has been largely dependent on the complex of political change displacing party by the "permanent campaign." This too has received a huge amount of attention, particularly with respect to the recent emergence of an "incumbent insulation" effect in congressional elections.²⁷ If party is the "solvent of federalism" (and to some extent of separation of powers as well), what happens when the solvent is itself dissolved? Our historical cases suggest one range of possibilities. In the contemporary electoral process, there is another set. Highly visible offices are surrounded by the technologies and personnel of the "permanent campaign." Congressional elections are not highly visible as a rule. In that arena, canny incumbents seek to present themselves in myriad ways as representatives of their districts as a whole against the claims of all other districts and other voters. They do this because that way electoral success lies.

Critically large minorities of voters today "specialize" by splitting their tickets in favor of incumbents. Such phenomena of yesteryear as "presidential coattails" have largely evaporated—except in the constantly declining pool of open seats, where partisanship and coattails retain more residual importance. Thus, in 1984, one poll asked Reagan voters whether their support for the Reagan–Bush ticket made them more likely or less likely to support other Republican candidates, or made no difference to their vote for other offices. About 29 percent of respondents said that their presidential choice would make them more likely to vote for Republicans, 4 percent said it would make them less likely to do so, while 65 percent said that it would make no difference at all. This is on all fours with another poll indicating that only 2 percent of Reagan's voters listed party as their chief reason for voting for him ("He's a Republican"), and only another 8 percent chose compatibility of views or issues as their chief reason for doing so. Similarly, of those who have heard of their House member and formed a judgment, more than four-fifths of respondents were favorably disposed—84 percent of respon-

26. New York: Macmillan, 1985. Immensely detailed blow-by-blow reporting, done in a remarkably "turned-off" style, even by today's rather cynical journalistic standards.

27. See, e.g., Walter Dean Burnham, "Insulation and Responsiveness in Congressional Elections," *Political Science Quarterly* 90 (1975): 411–435. But, for a cautionary view, cf. Thomas Mann, *Unsafe at Any Margin* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978).

dents with Republican congressmen.²⁸ The election tells us a coherent story, one generally very well described within the canons of modern survey research.²⁹

Structurally the result is that electoral coalitions become increasingly sharply diverse along office-specific lines. This in turn stimulates the prospect for divided partisan control of the several branches of government, reduced agreement among fellow partisans in different institutions, and, thus, blockage and incoherence in policy making over the longer term. Perhaps the most straightforward way of seeing the evolution of this diversity is by examining the state-by-state relationship between partisan outcomes for president and other major offices during this century, 1900–1984.

In virtually every respect, the 1984 election is a typical event of this “sixth,” candidate-dominated, “permanent campaign” electoral era. Structurally, it resembles the 1972 election probably more closely than any other. Insofar as turnout is concerned, there was, to be sure, a very slight increase over the modern depths reached in the 1980 election; nationwide, it rose from 54.5 percent of the estimated citizen-adult electorate in 1980 to 55.2 percent in 1984. But this increase was paltry enough, granted the quite unprecedented concern about nonvoting and the well-publicized competitive efforts made by activists on both sides to register new voters. Richard Reeves and some others during the summer of 1984 had expected and predicted an “ideological campaign.”

28. Walter Dean Burnham, “The 1984 Election and the Future of American Politics,” in *Election 84: Landslide Without Mandate?* ed. Ellis Sandoz and C. V. Crabb, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1985), pp. 204–261.
29. E.g., see Martin P. Wattenberg, “Realignment without Party Revitalization: Changing the Partisan Balance in a Candidate-Centered Age” (mimeo.; prepared for delivery at the Fortieth Annual Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, 1985); and cf. with his *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952–1980* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984; the second edition of this work is now in press). The theme of the essay is that while the Republican share of party identifiers was higher in 1984 than in any earlier year over the past generation, the affective relationships of respondents to party as such remained very feeble. They showed little change from the situation that first fully emerged between about 1968 and 1972 (cf. Blumenthal). One implication, which Wattenberg discusses in this 1985 paper, is that the very meaning of “party identification” may be undergoing profound change. Changes toward the present state have a clear “breakpoint” character clustering around midpoints 1966 (party-line voting of identifiers, split-ticket voting) and 1970 (attitudes toward parties, with “breakpoint” decline in positive-negative evaluations and similar increase in neutral–neutral evaluations). All of this, one may note, is virtually isochronic with the attitudinal data dealing with confidence in American national institutions reported by Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, *The Confidence Gap* (New York: Free Press, 1983).

TABLE 6
 Disintegration of Party Coalitions: r^2 by State,
 President versus U.S. Senate, U.S. House, Governor
 (Percentage democratic of two-party vote, 1896–1984)

r^2 : President with:

Year	U.S. Senate	U.S. House	Governor
1896		.941	.963
1900		.970	.941
1904		.798	.726
1908		.769	.794
1912		.610	.891
1916	.835	.475	.606
1920	.798	.695	.546
1924	.549	.265	.877
1928	.295	.239	.678
1932	.606	.317	.685
1936	.700	.559	.598
1940	.763	.657	.613
1944	.879	.680	.758
1948	.813	.598	.884
1952	.620	.750	.649
1956	.723	.503	.555
1960	.425	.546	.358
1964	.136	.388	.149
1968	.229	.257	.096
1972	.012	.125	.170
1976	.070	.187	.439
1980	.236	.064	.003
1984	.143	.258	.012

Explanations and definitions:

1. Partisan percentages: Percentage Democratic of two-party vote, 1896–1908, 1916–1920, 1928–1944, 1952–1984; percentage Democratic of three-party vote, 1912; percentage Democratic and Progressive of three-party vote, 1924; percentage Democratic + Progressive + States' Rights Democratic of total vote, 1948.
2. States with uncontested Senate or (for whole state) House elections omitted. For Senate, only elections for full terms are included; number of states ranges between 27 and 33.
3. The base of House elections are the contiguous 48 states less the 11 states of the ex-Confederacy; also less any other state where, statewide, there was no major-party opposition in any election. (Number ranges from 34 to 37).
4. The bases of gubernatorial elections are those 13 states in which, in 1984, presidential and gubernatorial elections occurred simultaneously. N in 1896 = 12; thereafter 13.

This was hardly surprising in view of the intense ideological focus of the Reagan administration and its one-sided, if quite unacknowledged, declaration of class war in its 1981 policy realignment. But the ideological election never materialized. Both sides competed, as it were, to ensure that no such campaign would ever be fought. For Ronald Reagan, the basic issues were that "America is back" and "standing tall," and that the election-year growth in per capita disposable income was 5.8 percent, the largest since 1936. Walter Mondale, as he confessed after the election, was never really able to find a coherent theme at all. And indeed, one can say that, in general, it is very likely impossible to mount an ideological campaign of any kind under the conditions given by the "permanent campaign." To do so successfully would imply its displacement from the center of election management and organization by something else—a new partisan system, perhaps.

Ronald Reagan carried 49 states, but the Republicans made only 14 gains in the elections to the House—the chief conservative disappointment of 1984. Almost all Democratic incumbents running for reelection survived Reagan's 18.4 percent landslide margin over Mondale, and most quite easily. All they had to do to achieve this success was to run an average of 19 percentage points ahead of their party's presidential candidate. Ronald Reagan carried 368 congressional districts to Walter Mondale's 67. Of these 368 districts, 187 returned Democrats and 181 elected Republicans. This was a "first": Not even in 1972 were more Democrats than Republicans elected in districts that Richard Nixon carried. And there were other "firsts" as well. More than three-quarters of all nonsouthern House seats were won by noncompetitive landslide margins (defining these as districts with 60 percent or more of the total vote for the winner)—by far the largest proportion in the past 160 years. Of the 436 seats, 408 (93.8 percent) were contested by incumbents, and 392 of these incumbents (96.1 percent of those running) were reelected; also a record. Finally, we may ask what the proportion of the House supporters of an incoming administration has been. Here we count each presidential inaugural as launching an "incoming" administration; there have been 49 such cases from 1789 to 1985. In the latter year Ronald Reagan entered his term along with 182 Republicans in the House. At 41.8 percent of that body's membership, this was the lowest partisan-support level of *all time*. The gap is wider than ever.

IV

Are there important policy consequences to all this? If we were to take the implications of Young's and McKittrick's arguments seriously,

we should anticipate finding some; and I don't think we would be disappointed in this respect. One of the two most noteworthy policy events of recent years, it may well be, is the massive and in many ways strikingly extensive policy realignment engineered by Ronald Reagan and his allies in and after 1981. The other, quite possibly, is the adoption by Congress in 1985 of that extraordinary expedient, the Gramm–Rudman resolution, for forcing the balancing of the budget in the years ahead, that is, for addressing certain very serious consequences of the Reagan policy realignment.

This is scarcely the place to launch an essay accounting for these and other current developments in the policy universe. Such accounts already abound; one can anticipate with some certainty that their volume will reach tidal-wave proportions in the years immediately ahead.³⁰ Our task here is more narrowly conceived: to discuss some elements of the connection between change in elections as democratic institutions in the United States and these events.

There has been much discussion as to whether the 1980 and 1984 elections formed part of a realignment sequence. Viewed in classic terms at least, the issue remains very much open. I have attempted elsewhere to suggest reasons why an electoral politics organized by the “permanent campaign” very probably cannot produce such classic realignments in the electorate.³¹ Be all that as it may, there can be little doubt that the policy changes launched in 1981 constitute a policy realignment that in many respects is as comprehensive in its scope as those that followed the elections of 1860 and 1932. Grappling with the huge federal deficit generated by this policy realignment—whether within the rubrics of Gramm–Rudman or not—will, to the extent that it is “serious,” further the objectives of the 1981 policy realignment. These objectives are, essentially, to achieve the dismantling of the domestic functions of the American national state (i.e., the federal government); and moreover in such a way as to make it as difficult as possible for any subsequent political generation to put this Humpty-Dumpty back together again. The data of the 1980 and 1984 elections, as is now notorious to scholarly analysts, preclude the view that the intense activists' ideology surround-

30. Two on the negative side: Thomas B. Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* (New York: Norton, 1984); and Walt W. Rostow, *The Barbaric Counterrevolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983). Positives include Paul Craig Robert, *The Supply-Side Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), and a collection of conservative essays edited by John H. Moore, *To Promote Prosperity: U.S. Domestic Policy in the Mid-1980s* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1984). See also Herbert Stein, *Presidential Economics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), for a perceptive conservative's assessment of major issues over the longer term.

31. “The 1984 Election,” esp. at pp. 246–253.

ing this comprehensive policy change has been based on a large increase in ideology within the American electorate. Moreover, as we have seen, the flourishing of "voting specialization"—in 1984 especially—constituted something of an acid test of the capacity of the system as now organized to generate the *partisan* (hence mass) base for such realignment. The system failed that test: one of the two or three most important results of the 1984 election.

Our analysis suggests important structural reasons, squarely linked to the changing position of elections in American politics, why one can have policy realignment without electoral realignment today. But in fact this is not the first contemporary instance. For we should recall that there was another "critical realignment" in policy that preceded the 1981 variety. This realignment goes under the now conventional name of the Great Society of 1965 and afterward. It was certainly made possible by the results of the 1964 election, but the most striking feature about the Great Society programs is that, as a whole, they failed to achieve general legitimacy. They too were to some considerable extent the fruit of activists; politics operating in a growing vacuum of clear electoral support.

All of this is by now an oft-told tale. What is of particular interest to our analysis here is that—very much as later in 1981—the policy process came increasingly to be dominated if not captured by highly specialized, insider activist groups. But there was a major difference with 1981 and later in another crucial respect. Ronald Reagan and many others have made an intensive effort to spread the word. This might be expected of an intensely and cohesively ideological group of activists. One purpose of their exercise was to maintain the consolidation of the middle class around Ronald Reagan that had crystallized in and after the 1980 election. By contrast, the activists surrounding the Great Society's initiatives seem never to have given serious thought at any time to the political education, much less the mobilization, of the mass electorate itself. In the end, this meant that policy was increasingly made in a political vacuum insofar as this broader public was concerned. Bricks were made without straw wholesale, and when the day of reckoning finally came during Jimmy Carter's inept and ill-starred presidency, the structure simply fell apart like the One Hoss Shay. The state that interest-group liberalism created was in truth an *interregnum state*. One is faintly reminded of the Confederate political scenario that McKittrick paints.

It goes beyond the scope of this essay to make any predictions as to whether in the long run the "Reagan revolution" will overcome the massive legitimation problems this *interregnum state* in due course created for itself, or whether the crisis will move to a new and "dialectically" higher plane of intensity. Clearly the purpose of Reagan's revital-

ization movement is to end the crisis by "returning to fundamentals" across a broad front. Equally clearly, the historical date is neither 1924 in domestic politics nor 1960 in the international arena. Still more clearly marked, if anything, is the failure of a solid institutional integument (i.e., a political party) to dominate all of the divided branches of the federal government and to stimulate incentives for politicians to remain more or less "in the same story."

We now turn to the background of Gramm–Rudman and its possible near-term significance. The federal deficits triggered by the 1981 tax cut and the massive defense buildup had mushroomed over several years. During the summer of 1985 the process for settling on the 1986 budget led to a protracted three-way deadlock. One of the three layers in this triangle was President Reagan. He insisted on continuing the defense buildup and set his face against any large-scale tax increases. He seemed indifferent to the budget-deficit issue. The second set of players was the Republican-controlled Senate, extremely sensitive to the deficit and interested in raising taxes. The third group in the equation was the Democratic majority in the House, which sought to protect the party's historic interest in domestic programs. The deadlock that ensued was finally broken prior to the 1985 summer recess, but on grounds satisfactory to no one.

In the early fall, the federal debt approached \$2 trillion, having doubled since Reagan's accession to the presidency. This was a "triggering situation", evoking a proposal coauthored by Republican Senators Phil Gramm (Tex.) and Warren Rudman (N.H.), and enjoying bipartisan sponsorship. This device was intended to impose an automatic, across-the-board series of budget reductions, excluding only social security and some poverty programs, in the event that the two houses of Congress and the president could not agree on a deficit-reduction formula. By 1991, we are told, the budget deficit will at last be eliminated. The prospect is for an increasingly grim and desperate political struggle, dominated by each collective actor's interest in ensuring that the public does not blame him or them for the pain amplification that is in prospect. Everyone seeks deniability; everyone avoids responsibility as far as possible. It is hardly surprising that what we see looks less like old-fashioned partisan conflict than a clear institutional collision; not so much Democrat versus Republican as President versus Senate versus House.

But then, is something like this not exactly what the analysis here would lead one to expect? With the decay of the partisan integument and the skewed demobilization of the American electorate as dominant themes, elections as democratic institutions acquire a visibly different role in the American system as a whole than they once did. Their

representative quality becomes problematic to the degree that the results are sociologically skewed. Their results contribute to digging deeper the great constitutionally defined chasms among political branches rather than, as once, contribute to building policy and power bridges across these chasms. These issues become more serious as we move to the threshold of the twenty-first century. One wins elections with the instruments of the "permanent campaign," but at a price. The democratic qualities of the exercise undergo marked, even notorious decay; and the problem of governability grows, it seems, ever more intractable.

V

As we have been at pains to emphasize here, the relationship between elections and democracy in American political history has been remarkably complex and ambiguous. To be sure, this is within a context we take for granted—pluralist rather than totalitarian, in which elections are free, open to competition, and important to the business of governing. But once we leave the easy distinction between the United States (or any other advanced capitalist, pluralist political system) and the Soviet Union, the ambiguities become not only significant but dominant. Perhaps this is because we have very high standards for evaluating the actual performance of the electoral system, measured by the degree to which it approximates our ideal of what a democracy should look like, and what—on past occasions—it came fairly close to being. Nevertheless, we can say that if democracy is to mean anything beyond the most procedurally trivial, it must rest upon mobilizing and consulting the adult population on the one hand, and upon energizing our cumbersome political system on the other—while keeping it accountable to the ruled as well.

Undemocrats, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, have often feared the potential of a mobilized and consulted population enough to seek the reduction of its political influence in a host of ways. In particular, the antipartisan tradition runs very deep in American political history. It has not infrequently prevailed, but always at a major cost to effective governmental performance. Elections duly proceed under these conditions, but also in a political context that makes them active contributors to mass public indifference to the *res publica* on the one hand, and to power fragmentation and state incoherence on the other. In earlier, simpler times the relevant elites and elitists could usually be quite sanguine about these costs. For only very rarely until the past half century or so was there any real need for a state in any case. The

situation in the present and for the foreseeable future is quite otherwise. Many elites, including those currently in or near the seats of power, may continue their historically conditioned antistate rhetoric and even act accordingly, insofar as they have the power to do so. But in fact today they also need what only a state mechanism can give them, if they and their economic and geopolitical interests are to be defended adequately.

If this analysis is even remotely on the right track, then the "sixth electoral era," the era of the "permanent campaign" can only be transitional. If state management *must* be built, the political fragmentation that elections now contribute to producing in an antipartisan age must be more radically curtailed than ever before in our history. Half-measures will not suffice in the long or even the intermediate, run.³² The "permanent campaign" can and does elect people, but it cannot and does not give them the power to govern with the kind of coherence and cross-institutional will that effective state action will come to require. Accordingly, something must happen to the elections themselves, and to the role of the citizenry. Either both will have to be practically eliminated, insofar as any major influence on "serious politics" at the center is concerned, or they will have to be revitalized. The first will require some form of dictatorship, naked or more probably veiled with a strong demagogic, Bonapartist flavor.³³ The second would require not only a vast revitalization of party but the development of sharply focused political alternatives and reinvolvement of the public at large in deciding what the fundamental business of American society is to be all about.

One very interesting thing about the 1980s is that party very clearly is being revitalized, at least at some levels. The arguments that A. James Reichley and others are making to this effect should clearly be given great weight.³⁴ Such revitalization was manifest in the 1981 policy revolution in Congress, which was to a very substantial extent a Republi-

32. This, or something very like it, forms the basis of Samuel Huntington's assessment in Huntington et al., *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1975, "A Report to the Trilateral Commission"), pp. 59–118, including his view that the United States suffers (or then suffered) from an "excess of Democracy." A different kind of conservative, Kevin Phillips, worries about the possibilities in *Post-Conservative America* (New York: Random House, 1982).

33. There are those who think that we are more than well on our way to that destination already. See Bertram Gross, *Friendly Fascism* (New York: Evans, 1980).

34. A. James Reichley, "The Rise of National Parties," in John A. Chubb and Paul Peterson, eds., *The New Direction in American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985), pp. 175–200. But compare and rationalize with, e.g., Wattenberg's findings and argument (see note 29).

can party victory. Partisan polarization in Congress generally has become much more visible than prior to 1981. Ideology with national or international focus seems much more salient a component of this party politics than in the days of a more loose-jointed, localist pragmatism.

Yet, if this is so, another noteworthy feature of politics in the 1980s, thus far, has been the quite clear failure of this renewed partisanship to penetrate the electorate sufficiently to change its basic attitudes and behavior. Here again, a very large gap among "political instances" now exists. There are plenty of ancient, if not very exact, parallels to this. It may correspond historically to that phase in British party development of partisanship within the legislature *first*, only much later being built up through expansions of the legal electorate and entrepreneurship in building mass organizations to channel that electorate's voting activities. For that matter, there may be some analogy, however limited, to American politics at the heyday of intense partisan conflict at the center in the 1790s, coexisting with very unevenly developed mobilizing organizations and turnouts fluctuating from 25 to 50 percent of the eligible citizenry.

One assumes that, like the "permanent campaign" itself, this current disjunction of realms in American politics may be too unstable to endure much longer. Back in 1960, E. E. Schattschneider commented that "the choice is between participation and propaganda, between democratic and dictatorial ways of *changing consent into support, because consent is no longer enough.*"³⁵ As usual, he was onto something—in this case, to the political implications of contemporary American state building. Twenty-five years down the road, things have developed to the point that we can perceive the thrust of his remark much more keenly than we could then. In recent years, and with the "permanent campaign" playing its key role, American politics has sometimes seemed to be an action play on Antonio Gramsci's now-famous words: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appears."³⁶

Perhaps the drift toward nationalized and ideologically distinct parties that Reichley perceives will at some point move out from the activist center and into the mass electorate. If this were to occur, it would of course profoundly change the role and meaning of elections in the American political system; and, one would assume, in the direction of revitalizing democracy. One can see many obstacles in the way, and a

35. E. E. Schattschneider, *Semisovereign People*, p. 112.

36. Quentin Hoare and G. N. Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International, 1971), p. 276.

serious assessment of the prospects for such a change would require specifying concrete causal factors making it more than an academic's pipe dream. In an "interregnum" of the sort Gramsci mentions, with an interregnum state to boot, it is much easier to see the obstacles than the opportunities for resolving blockage this side of dictatorship. In any case, the actual course of events is unlikely to follow the lines laid out in anyone's tidy formulas.

Considering the magnitude of political change now going on and in immediate prospect, and the even greater magnitude of the constitutional issues at stake, the story of American politics over the rest of this century may sometimes strike us as irritating, puzzling, or really alarming; but it will not be dull. As always, elections will be a decisively if ambiguously important part of that story. What particular shape, form, and content these elections assume will, as always, give us a sovereign clue as to this story's outcome.

II

Party Reform and the Nomination Process



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3

Party Reform, Nominating Processes, and Democratic Ends

William Crotty

Even if there were only two men left in the world and both of them saints they wouldn't be happy. One of them would be bound to try and improve the other. That is the nature of things.

—FRANK O'CONNOR, "Song without Words"

There are many emphases or tendencies within the rubric of democratic theory. Two may have particular relevance for evaluating presidential nominating systems. The first may be called an emphasis favoring a plural elite, indirectly representative approach and the second a participant-oriented, more direct approach to and involvement in democratic decision making. The following introduces these two contrasting perspectives that help set the conceptual groundwork for the developments in nominating systems over time and, even more explicitly, the controversy over nominating forms that has taken place in the contemporary era. The characteristics of the system and the alternative reforms being discussed are then reviewed.

First, a look at two competing emphases for democratic operations.

Two Tests of Democratic Evaluation

Pluralistic elite arguments focus on the need for a small number of individuals, or competing groups of people, to make decisions as the representatives in the name of much larger bodies. The values maximized in this approach, reputedly, are stability, judgment, experience, knowledgeability, and realism (i.e., this emphasis conforms to the way in which things are actually done). The role and obligations of the individual in this type of representative system are minimal. Basically, they exercise a choice among a handful of leaders and policy directions put forth by the decision-making elite within the context of an election. Leadership is responsible and accountable to people through a competitive vote.

Within this schema, political parties play a crucial role; it is their obligation to choose leaders of the highest capability to present to the voters. The mass public, or even the party's base, has little role in the party's leadership selection. Their influence is confined to the election and choosing between the finalists put forward by the two major parties. Accountability is achieved in this approach through the presentation of the candidates seeking reelection to the electorate on the conclusion of their term in office.

The approach emphasizes continuity and the indirect representation of people's views. It has no place for mass democracy or direct participation in political decision making, and some of the advocates of a pluralistic elite democracy fear such participation as potentially weakening the state and contributing to the rise of the demagogue or the totalitarian. Most individuals, in addition, they would argue, are apathetic, unequipped to pass judgment on matters requiring any degree of reflection or knowledge, and reasonably content with their apathy and their place within the political order.

Most contemporary theorists in political science would probably fall into this camp.¹ Its chief and most influential advocate would be Joseph A. Schumpeter. In his book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* Schumpeter chose to emphasize the procedural arrangements that define the choices of the citizenry and establish its effective linkage with the leadership he felt to be so important. Democracy he defined as

1. The problem is discussed within different contexts in Robert A. Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 305–323; Berelson, "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16 (Fall 1952): 313–330; and Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962).

the “free competition for a free vote.”² He identified it with the “democratic method” and defined this as the “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”³

Schumpeter saw his approach as an improvement over the classical conceptions of democracy presented in the explanations of the roots of American government. In his views, and those of others, the classic conceptions were speculative, developed before democracies were to develop in the modern world; static and underarticulated in their treatment of governing institutions; and unrealistic in the demands they placed on the citizenry for able, informed, and wise decision making. Schumpeter believed the classical conceptions underestimated the role of political leadership and underemphasized the importance of the structures needed to produce this leadership.

Within Schumpeter’s conception of representative democracy the political party plays a key role. It is the party’s job to produce the leadership choices to be presented to the voter. The parties, in this approach, are “combat teams”: relatively closed and cohesive in their organization; internally like-minded in their approach to government; and warring with each other for the support of the public. The individual, in turn, has no direct influence in party deliberations; the individual’s role is confined to passing upon the choices made available by the political parties and then judging post facto (through the next election) the adequacy of performance once in office.

In contrast to the plural elite or representative democracy emphasis is one we could call *participatory democracy*. In today’s world, this view has fewer champions and is less well developed. Two of its contemporary advocates are Carole Pateman and Peter Bachrach⁴ and although much of their concern is with the quality of individual life and its relationship to the workplace, in particular, through democratizing of decision-making structures in the work environment, it can be applied to political parties and presidential nominating systems.

The participatory approach builds on the writings of Jean Jacques

2. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), p. 27.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

4. Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); Bachrach, ed., *Political Elites in a Democracy* (New York: Atherton Press, 1971); and Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). Also of value in this regard are: Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Rousseau and John Stuart Mill and rejects the Schumpeterian emphasis on authority, power, and elitism. In place of one classical democratic theory, as seen and attacked by Schumpeter, it sees a number of competing, equally useful theories of democratic behavior. It criticizes the contemporary theorists who stress the stability and performance capabilities of individual political or social institutions (political parties, for example) without linking them to the vitality of the whole system, which it would claim is, and should be, the theorists' real concern.

The theory of participatory democracy is built around the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is therefore an educative one, educative in the very widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures. Thus there is no special problem about the stability of a participatory system; it is self-sustaining through the educative impact of the participatory process. Participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so . . . participation . . . has an integrative effect and . . . aids the acceptance of collective decisions.⁵

These are the words of Carole Pateman. They go to the core of the argument: A participatory emphasis leads to stability, acceptance, and legitimacy in a democratic order. These arguments are normally used against any type of participatory emphasis in institutions. For Schumpeter and other critics, the emphasis is seen as unrealistic: ". . . in the participatory theory 'participation' refers to (equal) participation in the making of decisions, and 'political equality' refers to equality of power in determining the outcomes of decisions," an approach quite different from that favored in contemporary theory or practice.⁶ For Pateman and many other supporters, "for a democratic society to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist."⁷

Such an approach would result in a major redirection of concerns. Two factors are of concern here. As Pateman points out, it goes against the beliefs and value structures of many of today's theory builders and social scientists. For them, "the notion of a participatory society [is a] utopian fantasy—and dangerous fantasy at that."⁸ Many would argue

5. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, pp. 42–43.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 44. Bachrach makes a similar point in *Theory of Democratic Elitism*, p. 99.

that such an approach is antidemocratic; eventually destructive of the very institutions and processes it supposedly favors. This point has relevance for the study of political parties and the changes and contemporary debate over presidential nominating structures.

Second, such an approach goes against the way institutions operate and what people believe is necessary for a democratic order in today's world. "No longer is democratic theory centered on the participation of 'the people,' on the participation of the ordinary man, or the prime virtue of a democratic political system seen as the development of politically relevant and necessary qualities in the ordinary individual; in the contemporary theory of democracy it is the participation of the minority elite that is crucial and the non-participation of the apathetic, ordinary man . . . that is regarded as the main bulwark against instability."⁹ This point also has meaning in the current debate over nomination reforms.

Bachrach's argument, while related, is a little different. Bachrach posits "a fundamental distinction between democratic and elite theories"¹⁰ and is even more forceful, if anything, in his rejections of democratic elitism: "All elite theories are founded on two basic assumptions: first, that the masses are inherently incompetent and second, that they are, at best, pliable, inert stuff or, at worst, aroused, unruly creatures possessing an insatiable proclivity to undermine both culture and liberty."¹¹ Bachrach would favor a different conception: "For democratic theory, especially classical democratic theory, conceives the public interest in terms of both results and process. Thus public interest is measured by the soundness of the decisions reached in the light of the needs of the community and by the scope of public participation in reaching them."¹²

An individual is the best judge and protector of his or her own interests: ". . . first . . . political awareness emerges within the consciousness of man when he realizes that he has personal interests to protect and, further, that politics are instrumental in the shaping and determination of his interests. Second, each man is presumed to be the best judge of his own interests. Third, if an individual must choose between courses of action, he is assumed to be the most qualified to decide which course will best serve his interest."¹³

Bachrach takes an approach he calls "self-developmental" (partici-

9. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 104.

10. Bachrach, *Theory of Democratic Elitism*, p. 1.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

13. Bachrach and Baratz, *Power and Poverty*, p. 204.

patory), which includes "the opportunity for development which accrues from participation in meaningful political decisions"¹⁴ and feels in a Schumpeterian elitist perspective that "the common man is not given sufficient opportunity to participate in meaningful decision-making and is therefore deprived of an essential means to develop his faculties and broaden his outlook."¹⁵ It is, according to Bachrach, a critical issue of our times and one that pervades all aspects of society's institutions.¹⁶

Bachrach puts his point strongly: "Classical theory . . . is based on the supposition that man's dignity, indeed his growth and development as a functioning and responsive individual in a free society, is dependent upon an opportunity to participate actively in decisions that significantly affect him. . . . Man's development as a human being is closely dependent upon his own actions."¹⁷

The challenge is to apply such approaches to twentieth-century politics and political institutions. It is worth emphasizing that both theoretical perspectives are prodemocratic. They approach their points from what they consider is best for democratic operations and what best fulfills democratic expectations. There is both a prescriptive and, in current political thinking, an empirical side to the arguments. Nonetheless, given that the political end sought is related—a stronger, more fulfilling democratic order—is not to say that the two perspectives do not employ quite different approaches and value priorities. The practical applications of the different emphases result in a contrasting operation of political institutions. The gulf between the two, in both practical and theoretical terms, is wide.

These two points of view help shape a conceptual framework in which to view the changes in nominating forms, historically and over the last two decades in particular, and the controversy that has surrounded these developments. We return to these perspectives at the end of this essay, but first some background on developments that have affected political parties and the changes that have taken place in the presidential nominating system.

Political Parties in the Contemporary Age

Political parties perform a number of functions important to a democracy. They recruit candidates for public office; they organize and

14. Bachrach, *Theory of Democratic Elitism*, p. 95.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

16. Bachrach, "Introduction," in Bachrach, ed., *Political Elites in a Democracy*, p. 2.

17. Bachrach, *Theory of Democratic Elitism*, pp. 98–99.

fund campaigns; they mobilize large portions of the electorate to support their candidates and policies; they provide a basis for governing once the election is over, interconnecting government officials, legislative representatives, and voters; they attempt to educate the public about the issues and policy alternatives most relevant to the nation's problems; they hold, or attempt to hold, public officeholders accountable for their actions; and they represent the policy concerns of large sections of the population. They can be seen as a balancing and linkage mechanism, giving power through organization and numbers to those who would not normally have it. They are a principal contributor to the democratic enterprise.

Unfortunately, political parties are in trouble. Candidate groups, whose short-term loyalty is given to the candidate who finances them, have risen to challenge the parties' role in campaigns and recruitment. The media, especially television, have served as a more significant and personalized linkage mechanism, introducing and educating candidates, campaigns, and policy issues and alternatives to the voter far more effectively than the political parties ever did. Campaigns for public office, and often it would seem the act of governing itself, have become a competition for effective television coverage.

With the rise of a media politics has come an emphasis on for-hire experts—pollsters, demographic analysts, public relations specialists, direct-mail fund-raisers, speech writers, political strategists, television specialists, and the like—to provide the services needed in the modern campaign. These services are independent of the political parties that in a different culture and age supplied their functional equivalents.

Further independence from the party system is encouraged by the use of the PACs (political action committees), whose growth since 1974 has been nothing short of astounding. From less than 100 PACs 11 years ago, they have grown to where now better than 4,000 such groups exist. The largest growth has been in business and trade association PACs, although the most visible impact has been made by ideological PACs of the New Right in the elections of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The PACs help determine the issues in a campaign (the proabortion versus antiabortion debate, for example); fund campaigns and candidacies; and run independent issue campaigns on television, as a number of them did in support of Ronald Reagan, or as they have done in behalf of a given issue position. They can even recruit candidates, as they have, to challenge for a nomination or to run in an election. In many respects, they are like political parties, except that they speak with disproportionate weight for select minority viewpoints and often in direct opposition to, and competition with, political parties.

The federal funding of presidential prenomination and general elec-

tion campaigns has again weakened the power of the political party over its own nominating and campaign functions, while giving emphasis to the movement toward a media-sensitive candidate-oriented politics, independent of significant party control.

Voters have been affected also. Fewer and fewer identify with the parties—they are losing the young—and even among those who do affiliate, fewer vote consistently with or for their party than in the past. The most significant development of the past generation has been the rise of the independent voter, not emotionally attached to either party. Independent voters constitute approximately one-third of the active electorate, and their numbers are growing; they provide the key constituency in a nationwide election.

Each of these trends will continue. Political parties today do not play the role in society—they do not command the allegiance or exercise the influence on elections or policymaking—that they did a few short decades ago. The social context has changed and with it the pressures on an environment within which the political parties must operate. The political parties are scrambling to catch up, to redefine their role in relation to society's needs, and to place themselves in a position of influence within a changing social order.

All of this has significance for nominating systems. Traditionally and expectedly, political parties have sought to control their own nominating structures. It has been a struggle, and they have not always succeeded to the extent that they would have preferred. Nominations for public office are considered the single most crucial activity the parties engage in. To a large extent, it has been a barometer of the parties' fit with, and adaption to, the broader political system. And so it continues to this day. The history of nominating changes is one of experimentation; an effort to adapt structure to emerging democratic needs.

The Search for the Perfect Nominating System

It is well to remember that today's nominating system is the product of experimentations with forms to fill the needs of democratic representation. The process is still evolving. In the search, the effort has been made to select leaders of reasonable competence who speak for a significant portion of the electorate, who can be held accountable to their supporters, and whose actions in the exercise of power can be kept within the restraints of democratic tolerance. Who should decide who is

qualified to lead? Who should be eligible for consideration? What constitutes a reasonable test by fire for prospective chiefs of state? How much consultation and what groups should be allowed in the process? And what institutions, or combination of institutions, can best serve what are often antagonistic ends? It has not been an easy search. Historically, it can be divided into several phases: the preparatory period and its seemingly open nominations, followed, in progression, by the caucus, convention, and primary systems—and all setting the stage for the most recent of the bouts with reform in the years since 1968.

Nominations in the Preparatory Period

In the era before the rise of political parties or nominating structures of any kind, pretty much anyone who chose to could run for political office. In some respects, it appeared to represent the democratic ideal. In reality, it was probably the most restrictive system of representation of those to be discussed. Only people of high moral character and individual integrity were assumed to be of quality to seek office. Individual self-recruitment, as well as blatant campaigning, were discouraged. Individuals were chosen to run usually by people of wealth and substance in the immediate community. Clearly, candidates represented the interests and values of those who chose them. Elections were usually noncompetitive; issues were not discussed; and incumbents were not expected to defend their tenures in office. The eligible electorate in some instances constituted only 5 percent of the adult population. It was all very gentlemanly, aboveboard, and nonpartisan. In such a system, relatively small minorities of the wellborn could presume to speak for the community; and they could do so with little fear of effective challenge to their exercise of power.

It was in this context that the rise of political parties—organizations that gave voice to the powerless—began the mobilization of a mass electorate to balance the influence of wealth. The issues in contention had become too great during the nation's formative years—involving nothing less than the type of society that should emerge, the groups and values that should receive preferential representation, and the political forms most appropriate to realizing such ends—to settle any more through the imposition of an elite-imposed consensus (as to political candidacies, issues, and resource distributions). The experimentation with forms to satisfy the new order had begun. The first of these was the caucus.

Caucus Nominating Systems

The forerunner of the caucus had served the colonists well during the Revolutionary period. They had been used to discuss political issues, select leaders, and determine policy directions. The form was adopted to select presidential candidates and centered on legislative representatives of the same party meeting during sessions or in the capital city to discuss candidacies and select the individual to represent the party in the general election. The system worked reasonably well between 1800 and 1824, and, of course, caucuses still constitute a part of the nominating process today.

At the time, the process was considered a major improvement over the structureless preparty era, and one that allowed coalitions of like-minded individuals, mostly through their legislative representatives, to pick one of their own to champion their cause in the election.

The caucus system, however, had inherent problems. Legislators could view other races as extensions of their legislative battles, picking candidates or backing coalitions acceptable to them on this basis, and often did. The legislative caucus also could be out of touch with its constituency and unrepresentative of its interests. The refusal of the congressional caucus to select Andrew Jackson as its nominee for president in 1824 reflected these weaknesses, and the caucus, long a subject of controversy, was doomed. It was to be replaced by a more inclusive, more representative, and more democratic institution: the convention.

Convention Nominating System

The first national convention held by a major political party took place in 1832. At it, the Democrats nominated Andrew Jackson for president. They (based on the model pioneered by the Anti-Mason party in 1831) also developed the form and procedures that have, with relatively minor modifications, come down to the present day.

The convention was considered a major democratic achievement. Its only business was to nominate a presidential candidate and prepare the party for the presidential campaign. Its membership was confined to party supporters, and it was elected by the party's base to conduct its business. It was similar to a legislature, but one with specified business, a narrower if clearer focus, and a very short life. The format has proved very useful, and the convention remains a key ingredient of the nominating process.

Nevertheless, the convention, like the caucus before it, soon fell into disfavor. And for many of the same reasons. Its proceedings were often

considered arbitrary and undemocratic, controlled by a party boss; delegates had little influence on the deliberations; decisions were made in "smoke-filled rooms" by a small group of political leaders; and its relationship to the grass-roots constituency it presumed to represent became strained. It did not help that political parties of the day and their leaders were considered corrupt; politics—both candidates and the favors of government—was for sale.

Discontent set in, and when it peaked in the Progressive era of the early twentieth century it resulted in the introduction into the presidential nominating system of possibly the most radically democratic idea of all: the primary.

Primary Nominating Systems

The primary was meant to circumvent the political party and the political boss, neutralizing their power over nominations and thus their control of elective office. Advanced by the Progressives, it was expected to return politics to the control of the people and provide a corrective to the corruption and other abuses of political power of the day. It was a popular idea, adopted in some form by most of the states in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Unfortunately, the primary, much like its predecessors, never fulfilled all its objectives. The process was exploratory. As it evolved, the power of primary voters in most states (there were exceptions, as in Oregon or Wisconsin) was reduced to casting nonbinding advisory votes on either (or both) the delegates to be selected to the national conventions or the candidates for the presidential nomination. The real decisions as to who would attend the national convention and how the state's convention vote would be committed were decided elsewhere, usually by a state-level party committee or a state-level convention representing the party professionals. The primary systems that came down to the contemporary era were mostly of this advocacy nature, not the check on party powers envisaged or the cure-all for the ills of the political system once thought.

Political parties and party bosses, many of whom remained uncomfortable with primaries (their electorates could, when aroused, be unpredictable), adapted to the changes. One way, as noted, was making their outcomes virtually meaningless. A second approach, favored by many political machines, was to control the primary outcomes by turning out a well-disciplined machine vote, enough to determine the positions at stake. In those instances, primaries actually worked to the machines' advantage. Whatever the shortcomings of the candidates in terms of competence or integrity once in office, the political boss could

claim that the public had spoken. Whatever the consequences, it was the will of the people.

In addition, turnout in primaries is low. They demand much of voters in terms of information and motivation, more than most are willing to invest. Primary campaigns, similar to nonpartisan elections, can be even more frivolous, personality oriented, and issueless than general election campaigns. A party label in the latter races often forces some degree of concern with policy matters or the conduct of office by the opposing parties. It also ensures a minimal degree of like-minded voting: People can assume, more often rightly than wrongly, that in the absence of extensive information, Democrats can be expected to stand for one set of priorities and Republicans another. Casting a party-based vote on this basis is a relatively economical way to achieve policy ends. Such a guidepost is absent in the primaries; it is one reason why bloc, regional, personality, and demagogic voting are more common.¹⁸

Primaries were also expensive. The expected improvement in the quality of candidates selected never materialized. Voter interest in these events flagged, after an initial burst of enthusiasm, and, in sum, the primaries never quite fulfilled the expectations of their proponents. It was a hard lesson in the realities of American politics. Consequently, the emphasis on primaries subsided, and the nominating system that came down to the recent decades was a mix of nominating forms—caucus, convention and primary—with relatively low levels of public participation and under the control of party professionals with binding decisions as to presidential candidates and a party's policy commitments made by a small coterie of elected and party officials and interest-group leaders. The contours of the system were essentially the same for both Republicans and Democrats. All this was to change with the explosive events that characterized the late 1960s and ushered in the most recent of the reform eras.

Recent Experiences: Reform and Postreform Eras

The presidential year of 1968 proved to be something of a watershed in American history. Troops were in the streets, cities burned, political (Robert Kennedy) and moral (the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.) leaders were assassinated, city and campus riots followed each other with regularity, an undeclared "war" continued in Southeast Asia and

18. The most forceful statement of this point of view is found in V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1949).

not incidentally on television, a "police riot" took place at the Democratic National Convention, and Richard Nixon was elected president. The turbulence and discontent of the 1960s, the civil rights revolution, Vietnam, and a social order under attack all came to a head in the election year. The society was divided; the result was a "crisis of authority," if you happened to be in authority, or "crisis of legitimacy," if you happened not to be.

Those who would change social policies peacefully were advised to "work within the system," that is, within the established procedures for nominating candidates for office and for electing representatives. The experience of those who attempted this route within the Democratic party, the political party then in power and the one that was the object of discontent, coupled with the general turmoil that characterized the society as a whole led to the reform movement.

The focus of reform was, and has continued to be, the Democratic party. Republicans, a minority party since the early 1930s (although this perception may be changing), find little to fault with their procedures. There is no constituency of consequence pushing for reform within the party and its leadership, which will have seen the party, despite its relatively small number of identifiers (about 20 percent of the electorate), control the presidency for two-thirds of the period 1953–1989. No one feels a need for change. Consequently, the discussion to follow focuses primarily on developments within the Democratic party, the one that did substantially change its presidential nominating structures.

The Democrats have had five committees (counting the present, and recently appointed, "Fairness Commission") to assess its presidential nominating procedures. A discussion of each committee follows.

The Reform Years, 1968–1976

THE McGOVERN–FRASER COMMISSION, 1968–1972

The first, and by all odds the most significant of the reform bodies, the McGovern–Fraser Commission had the greatest impact on nominating structures. The problem the commission was to encounter was anticipated by the report of one of its immediate predecessors. Established in the waning days of the 1968 pre-convention battle to review the undefined mass of state and national nominating rules and institutions as a prelude to national convention action (and as a prelude to the appointment of the McGovern–Fraser group), it concluded that the "state systems for selecting delegates to the National Convention itself,

display considerably less fidelity to basic democratic principles than a nation which claims to govern itself can safely tolerate."¹⁹

The McGovern–Fraser Commission, after completing its own, more intensive investigation of nominating practices, was equally pointed:

... the day Eugene McCarty announced his candidacy [November 28, 1967], nearly one-third of the delegates [to the national convention] had in effect already been selected. And, by the time Lyndon Johnson announced his intention not to seek another term [March 1968], the formal delegate selection process had begun in all but 12 of the states. By the time the issues and candidates that characterized the politics of 1968 had clearly emerged, therefore, it was impossible for rank-and-file Democrats to influence the selection of the delegates.²⁰

The McGovern–Fraser Commission's intention was to turn power over to rank-and-file Democrats by giving them a meaningful, even decisive, voice in the selection of presidential nominees. It did this by recommending a model it expected state parties to adopt (under penalty of not having their delegations seated at the next national convention) that decreased or eliminated the decision-making role of party officials and party committees in the process; made all national convention delegates elective and forced them to declare, pre-caucus or pre-primary, their support and commitment to vote for a given candidate (or their intention to remain formally "uncommitted"); provided fair, written rules to safeguard the participation of all party members who wished to take part in the process; and increased the representation of minorities and women. Ninety-seven percent of the commission's guidelines were adopted by the state parties. The effect was to lessen the significance of the national convention in the process (additional power reverted to the state caucuses and primaries); made the decision of the grass-roots party voter the determining factor in choosing a presidential nominee; brought more blacks, youth, and women into the process; increased participation in presidential nomination decision making by between two-and three-fold; and diminished the role and influence of party professionals in the process. The end result was a reshaping of nominating processes and a redefinition of the political power structure within the party.

19. Quoted in William Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 16.

20. Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, *Mandate for Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Democratic National Committee, April 1970), p. 30.

THE MIKULSKI COMMISSION, 1972–1976

Drastic changes are never universally welcomed, and the reaction to the new nominating system was strong.²¹ A new commission, the Mikulski Commission, was established to review the rules, especially as they related to organized labor, ethnic groups, and party professionals, to see if some accommodation of their interests could be achieved. This was done to an extent; the rules were redrawn, and party personnel were given more of a role in the process—although not enough to satisfy critics.

This was not the real significance of the Mikulski Commission's work. In effect, the group ratified and endorsed the assumptions and values of the new nominating system and introduced one important modification, and extension, of the McGovern–Fraser Commission's work. It introduced the proportional representation of a candidate's popular vote as the criterion for dividing a state's national convention delegate vote. This was considered a further concession to the grass-roots democratic emphasis found in the McGovern–Fraser Commission's recommendations.

The work of the Mikulski Commission, along with its sister group, the Sanford Commission, which wrote a national party charter and attempted to restructure the national party's organization in line with assumptions prevalent in presidential nominating processes, represented the high-water mark for the reformers. From here on, the stage was dominated by those who attempted to reverse many of the actions of the McGovern–Fraser and Mikulski commissions and return to something more closely approximating the pre-1968 forms.

The Postreform Years, 1976–1988

THE WINOGRAD COMMISSION, 1976–1980

The Winograd Commission was the first group actively to take up the challenge of closing participation and redirecting political influence away from grass-roots party constituencies and back toward party leaders. Its recommendations discouraged the further expansion of primar-

21. The debate over the new forms has been contentious. For different accounts, see William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983); Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischief of Faction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); James W. Ceaser, *Reforming the Reforms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1982); and Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978).

ies and advocated a greater reliance on caucus nominating systems; it provided for one-quarter of a state's delegation to be elected at large, favoring candidates with politically recognizable names and ready-made constituencies; it set aside an additional 10 percent of a delegation for specific, appointive party officials (governors, state chairs); it diluted minority outreach standards; it gave party leaders more control over slate making and party meetings; and it weakened the reliance on proportional representation. Symbolism, as well as practical results, are important in politics, and this was a beginning. The process would be accelerated in the years to follow.

THE HUNT COMMISSION, 1980-1984

The Winograd and Hunt commissions did not reject much of what the earlier commissions had accomplished. Mostly it was a difference in priorities and emphasis in reacting to an environment that had not been friendly to the parties. While the early commissions had focused on increasing participation, protecting the role of the individual in the process, and promoting the interests of minorities, the later commissions spoke more of "consensus building" within the party, of party renewal, of strengthening the party organization, of winning elections, and of the ability to govern once in office. The new emphases would arguably achieve such ends.²² The Hunt Commission was unusually clear in voicing its position.

[The post-1968 nominating] rules have not been without their critics . . . and we have felt it necessary to consider their possible negative effects. Unquestionably, there are features of our presidential nomination system that have weakened the party. Primaries have proliferated, removing decision-making power from party caucuses and conventions. Our national convention has been in danger of becoming what one critic has called a "rubber stamp electoral college." To an alarming extent our party's public officials have not participated in and thus have felt only a limited responsibility for our recent national conventions. Some of these developments, of course, are beyond the reach of any rules a single commission could write. But it is within our power to influence such trends, and we have done our work with this end in view.²³

22. A sympathetic presentation of this point of view is found in David E. Price, *Bringing Back the Parties* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1984).
23. Commission on Presidential Nomination, *Report of the Commission on Presidential Nomination* (Washington, D.C.: Democratic National Committee, 26 March 1982), p. 3.

and:

Our Commission believes the future is potentially bright for our party system, but we are not inclined to take its durability and its health for granted. Accordingly, strengthening the party as a cohesive force in government and within the electorate has been a primary concern as we have recast the rules governing our nomination process.

Our concern . . . has been not only for the party system in general but for the strength of the Democratic Party in particular. This is a time of testing for our party. The adversities of 1980 have fired our determination to build our strength from the precincts up, to mobilize our voters, to articulate our convictions and aspirations with a new clarity. Signs of the party's organizational, financial and philosophical renewal abound. We have seen the work of our Commission in this broader context. *We know that recasting rules and procedures is only a small part of the overall task of party renewal. But it is a critical part, and we have thought it important to scrutinize each proposal change in light of its implications for the Party's organizational strength and for its capacity to campaign and govern effectively.*²⁴

Again, as with the plural elitists and participant-oriented approaches, there are no bad guys in this debate. There are, however, different priorities, resulting in contrasting power configurations and conceptions of what best promotes "party renewal."

To achieve its goals, the Hunt Commission moved farther along the path laid out by the Winograd Commission. More emphasis was placed on party committees in the delegate selection process, and more discretion, given to party officials in managing these; the "binding" rule was weakened, and an effort was made to include more unpledged delegates, as well as national and state party officials, in national conventions; proportional representation was further weakened and provision made for "bonus" votes given to district or state winners; an attempt was made to shorten the prenomination season; "loophole" or "winner-take-all" primaries at the congressional district level were introduced; and 568 nonelected delegate positions (in addition to the Winograd's 10 percent "add-ons") were set aside for party and elected officials (governors, mayors, and congressional legislators, among others). The effect was to increase the presence and influence of party professionals in the process and at the convention, and through ex officio and bonus vote awards, a shortened campaign season, and different delegate allocation formulas, to promote coalition building behind one or two front-running candi-

24. Ibid., p. 2. Italics added.

dates. It would appear that the rules worked as intended in 1984 (see below).

THE FAIRNESS COMMISSION, 1984–1988

A new commission was sought by Jesse Jackson and Gary Hart delegates to the 1984 Democratic National Convention in the belief that the 1984 nominating rules discriminated against their candidates (see below). The intent was to have the procedures assessed and many of the innovations introduced under Winograd and Hunt commission sponsorship repealed. This is unlikely to happen. Party leaders seem determined to take a low-key approach and go with what they consider “mainstream.” As one legislative leader, reflecting much of the current thinking on nominating rules, said, the “so-called democratizing rules . . . tend to fractionalize the party into narrow constituencies.”²⁵ The makeup of the commission, dominated by national committee members, and its early reporting date (the end of calendar year 1985) ensured against any thorough review or broad revision of the delegate selection rules.

The Nominating Rules in 1984

Jesse Jackson was to claim before the Democratic party’s new Fairness Commission that its rules favored the “big shots over the long shots” and that the party whose nominating rules disadvantaged minorities was “being dragged along kicking and screaming into the future.”²⁶ Jackson claimed to receive 21 percent of the popular vote in the 1984 prenomination race but only 11 percent of the national convention’s delegate vote.²⁷

Jackson has an argument. He received about 19 percent of the primary vote but only 10 percent of the national convention vote from primary state delegates. Walter Mondale received 39 percent of the popular vote and 49 percent of the primary delegates’ vote; Hart received 36 percent and 36 percent. A few examples of some of the disparities in primary states between the popular vote received in the

25. Quoted in Ronald Browstein, “Democrats Once Again Decide That the Party . . . Should Go Another Round on Its Rules,” *National Journal*, 28 July 1984, p. 1439.

26. Frances Frank Marcus, “Jackson Assails Democrats on Rules,” *New York Times*, 25 August 1985, p. 19.

27. *Ibid.*

primary election and the proportionate share of the delegate vote received by the candidate in the national convention are shown in Table 1.

Gary Hart actually won five state primaries—Indiana, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Ohio, and Rhode Island—but, after the the “bonus votes” and superdelegates (*ex officio*, appointed delegates) had been appointed, Mondale gained control over the delegates to the national convention. If a strict proportional representation system had been used in the primaries, it could have been a different nominating race. Mondale would have lost 350 delegates going into the convention (he eventually won the nomination at the national convention with a plurality of 184 votes); Hart would have lost a handful of votes; and Jackson’s total would have increased by two-thirds. To carry the argument a little further, and in the other direction, if a state-by-state, winner-take-all system had been used in the primaries (outlawed under the reform guidelines), Mondale’s total entering the convention would have increased by about 100 votes; Hart’s by 250 votes; and Jackson would have lost two-thirds of the delegates he had. The rules do matter. In 1984, through a modified and *de facto* winner-take-all allocation, they advantaged the front-runner, Walter Mondale.

In the caucus states, with 37 percent of the national convention delegate vote, Mondale took 43 percent of caucus votes and received 52 percent of the delegates chosen through the caucus systems; Hart’s totals were 31 percent and 33 percent; and Jackson, 12 percent and 11 percent. Party professionals like caucuses. It is easy to see why. Others believe they are inherently resistant to challenges by party outsiders or long-shot candidacies. They do, as did the total package of rules in 1984, favor the party-supported front-runner.

Of the 568 “superdelegates” chosen, Mondale received 83 percent, Hart 12 percent and Jackson 4 percent.

To complicate matters further, several states held both a nonbinding primary election and caucus delegate selection meetings. As an example, 600,000 voters chose Hart in the Wisconsin primary. A few days later, the caucus meetings were held; 34,000 Democrats attended, and the majority chose to support Mondale. At the national convention, Mondale received 65 percent of the delegate vote, Hart 28 percent, and Jackson 7 percent.

The consequences of these elaborate postreform changes are debatable. Their utility is in question when the favored nominee loses 49 states, and 59 percent of the popular vote goes to his opponent. The odds are, however, that significant changes are unlikely to be introduced for the 1988 election year.

TABLE 1
Candidates' Percentages of the Delegate Vote, 1984

Candidate	State	Pluses		Minuses		
		State Popular Vote	Convention Delegate Vote from State	State	State Popular Vote	Convention Delegate Vote from State
Walter Mondale	Alabama	34	50			
	Florida	32	50			
	Illinois	41	55			
	Maryland	44	68			
	New Hampshire	28	50			
	North Carolina	35	57			
	Pennsylvania	47	68			
	Rhode Island	35	45			
Gary Hart	Georgia	27	40			
	Connecticut	53	64			
	Massachusetts	39	52			
	New Hampshire	37	50			
	Ohio	42	51			
	Rhode Island	45	55			
Jesse Jackson				Florida	39	28
				Illinois	35	23
				Maryland	25	5
				Pennsylvania	35	9
	District of Columbia	67	73	Connecticut	12	2
				Florida	12	0
				Illinois	21	0
				Ohio	16	5
			Pennsylvania	17	9	

Characteristics of Present Nominating Procedures

1. The present nominating rules are not based on a one-person/ one-vote assumption. They are elaborate (running between 50 and 100 typed pages in many states); legalistic; extraordinarily detailed; and open to authorization and interpretation only by national party authorities, a development that further centralizes control and decision making.
2. The nominating season is long; in effect it has informally begun as soon as the previous nomination campaign ends. This may not be new, simply more visible than it has been in the past.
3. The process is expensive, although much of the cost is subsidized by the taxpayer through the Federal Election Commission (FEC).
4. The media play a significant role in the process, possibly more critical even than that of the political party, in educating voters about the candidates and issues, interpreting the meaning of results (New Hampshire or Iowa, for example), and declaring "winners." It is a role that may well be a manifestation of today's media-oriented and media-dependent society, and one the political parties can do little to change.
5. The nominating system is obscure, complicated, and well beyond the grasp of the ordinary citizen or party member. And it is controversial. None of this is new: It has been inordinately complex and continues to be so. And it has been controversial and undoubtedly will continue to be so, given the significance of its choices for the nation.

Further Alternatives

Given the controversy that surrounds nominating processes, there is a continuing quest for new and different forms that somehow will satisfy critics. The search is never-ending. Among the alternatives now being discussed are the following:²⁸

Regional primaries. This plan would require primaries, if held in a state, to take place on the same day in each region of the country. The ordering of regional primaries would be decreed by lot each election year. The chief benefits would be to rationalize the system to remove small and unrepresentative states like New Hampshire and Iowa from playing a decisive role early in the process, and to reduce the campaign time and the costs of individual campaigns.

A national primary. The oldest proposal of those under consider-

28. These proposals are discussed in William Crotty and John S. Jackson III, *Presidential Primaries and Nominations* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1985), pp. 213–233.

ation, a national primary would allow all party members or all voters to decide the nominee, either by plurality vote or in a two-stage runoff arrangement. The idea is based on the one-person/one-vote concept and totally eliminates caucuses, conventions, and disproportionate or non-elected delegate allocations. Its major weakness is that it virtually removes the political party from the process, further undermining what should be a crucial social institution in the representation of mass views. The price is high, and the absence of any political agency effectively to replace the party has deprived it of support.

The standardization and simplification of rules. Among the most modest of the series of proposals, this alternative would attempt to reduce the number and complexity of rules governing the nominating process and to standardize the procedures and their requirements by state. To do so would be an improvement. Nevertheless, there are hidden costs. If the political parties undertake the standardization effort, little, in terms of the responsibility for the process, would be changed. If the Congress, or a commission established and empowered by it, does the restructuring, as called for in most of the proposals, it could represent a significant step in the further decline of the parties' management of their own procedures. Further, there is a question as to the direction standardization should take. Some would argue for a return to the Schumpeterian emphasis on plural elite decision making that underlay the rules and procedures of the prereform era. To an extent, and on a modest level, this has been the trend since 1976. Others would prefer a standardization effort close to that found in the participant-oriented approach identified with the McGovern–Fraser and Mikulski commissions.

Other alternatives. Finally, there are a series of more exotic, less-well-known proposals. Among these would be *approval voting* which would allow primary voters to cast a ballot for every candidate that they favored (or approved of). The plan would favor the better-known party centrists, and if this is what the supporters of the Winograd and Hunt regulations have been hoping to achieve, offers an easier and more legitimating and potentially more effective approach than the present one.²⁹

Another proposal, for a national postconvention primary, would allow the two parties' national conventions to propose two or three candidates for the party's membership to vote on in a primary to follow the convention. Caucus and convention nominating systems would be used only to select the national convention delegates, and the conven-

29. The concept is discussed in Steven J. Brams, *The Presidential Election Game* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), esp. pp. 193–229.

tion would choose the nominee, without resort to a primary, if an overwhelming majority of the delegates backed the same candidate.³⁰

These proposals are but ideas. They have received little public attention, and in the present context they are not likely to. Chances are that nominating procedures in the immediate future for both political parties will reflect more of the past. Basic change is unlikely.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to make several points. First, procedure is substance. The nominating rules—technical, dull, removed from public debate—are important. They can be conducive to favoring certain candidacies or points of view. Some groups gain, others lose. We are all affected. The rules are anything but neutral.

Second, there are fundamental differences in value assumptions underlying the contemporary debate over nominating forms. Earlier we attempted to spell this out and cast it in terms of a Schumpeterian plural elite, indirect representation perspective versus a participant-oriented approach. One (plural elites) marked the New Deal party system nominating standards (1932–1968); the other (participant oriented) the early rounds of the reform movement (1968–1976). The present system is an ambivalent mix of both.

Third, the party system and its nominating system are in flux, as is the society. Political parties and their nominating structures are going to have to adapt to meet new and, as yet, largely unanticipated demands. It is a time of change, and nominating processes both reflect this and are attempting to respond to the pressures occasioned by an evolving political order.

Fourth, and more indirectly, the ongoing battle over forms and value assumptions in presidential nominating systems is unlikely to abate. It will continue, and its long-run future ramifications are unclear. In fact, many of the questions that have spurred controversy in the past have yet to be answered satisfactorily. What type of nominating system is best suited to the present democratic climate? What form of nomination can best respond to the concerns of a society in change? Whom should political parties represent? Who should be represented in nominating decisions? How should they be represented? How satisfied are citizens

30. The mechanics of the proposal are discussed in Thomas Cronin and Robert Loevy, "The Case for a National Pre-Primary Convention Plan," *Public Opinion*, December/January 1983, pp. 50–53.

with present arrangements and their outcomes (Reagan, Mondale, Carter, and Ford)? Should the present forms be changed? If so, how and how radical should the alterations be? What are the hidden costs—who wins, who loses—in opting for new approaches? And, of course, ultimately how adequately do present nominating processes, or their proposed alternatives, serve the democratic purpose?

These are the questions being asked and the ones that have framed the ongoing debate. They remain open, and they are likely to be so for a very long time.

4

Farewell to Reform—Almost

Austin Ranney

The years since 1968 have seen one of history's greatest periods of reform in the way Americans organize and populate their political parties and in the way they choose their presidential candidates. In addition, those years have generated a small but thriving cottage industry of political scientists, journalists, and politicians who comment on the reforms, merits and urge retention or repeal of the old reforms and/or addition of new ones. It may come with poor grace from one who, like me, has worked with pleasure and even modest profit in that industry, but I think the time has come to declare a moratorium on further tinkering with the rules of the presidential nominating game for awhile so that we can all get used to the ones we now have and consider carefully whether the mess we have is likely to be better than the different (and probably unanticipated) mess we would create by junking old reforms or adding new ones. But I am unable to resist the temptation to bow out with just one more suggestion for reform.

First, however, it seems appropriate to review the goals of the people who have been changing the rules since 1968, assess the extent to which their goals have been achieved, and consider other consequences of the rule changes. We should begin the review by recognizing that there

have been two major groups of rule changers.¹ One we may call “the reformers,” a group that includes such luminaries as George McGovern, Harold Hughes, Don Fraser, Ken Bode, Carol Casey, David Mixner, Barbara Mikulski, and Richard Stearns, who dominated the McGovern–Fraser and Mikulski commissions, and people such as John Gardner, David Cohen, and Fred Wertheimer, who led Common Cause’s efforts to change the federal campaign finance laws. The other we may call “the counterreformers,” a group that includes such notables as Rachel Horowitz, Evelyn Dubrow, Tom Mann, James Hunt, John Perkins, Geraldine Ferraro, and David Price, who worked in the Winograd and Hunt commissions to detoxify some of the earlier reforms.

Each group had its special goals and its special list of rule changes for achieving them. Each sometimes managed to get some of its proposals adopted, and each sometimes had to watch the others have their way. So we may ask of each: To what extent have the rule changes they put through achieved their goals and to what extent have they had consequences that their advocates neither anticipated nor wanted?

As Alfred E. Smith, another Democrat who changed the presidential nominating process, used to say, let us look at the record.

Reform, 1968–1976: Goals and Achievements

Candidates and Policies

Most of the talk about reform since 1968 has focused on the quality of the presidential nominating process—how to make it more open, more fair, more sensitive to the wishes of the rank and file; how to reduce the

1. This discussion concentrates on the Democratic party’s rule changes because that is where most of the discussion and action have been. I recognize that some Republicans have also been concerned with their party’s presidential nominating rules, but most of their rule changes have come as by-products of changes in state presidential primary laws made by Democratic governors and legislatures.

My understanding of the Democratic rule changers and their goals is based in part on my experiences as a member of the McGovern–Fraser and Winograd commissions, and in part on a number of academic studies of the reforms. Among the latter, I have paid special attention to Nelson W. Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Byron Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: Reform Politics in the Democratic Party* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984); Jeane Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1976); James W. Ceaser, *Reforming the Reforms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1982); William J. Crotty, *Political Reform and the American Experiment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); and Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). I have also borrowed freely from my own *Curing the Mischief of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

power of big money; how to restore effective peer review; and so on. In some cases the participants were quite sincere in focusing on the quality of the process rather than promoting the causes of particular candidates or issues. But the fact is that in presidential nominating politics, as in any other competition, rules are never neutral. Any rule is bound to work to the advantage of some kinds of candidates (and even some particular candidates) over others. Thus, when you change the rules, as William Cavala so tellingly showed, you are bound to change the game.² Most of the people involved in the post-1968 fights over the rules have been well aware of this fact of life, and most have sought a process that would help the candidates and issue positions they favored.

As Byron Shafer has shown, the McGovern–Fraser Commission was created and its decisions were dominated by a group of political activists in the Democratic party who in 1968 were dedicated to ending American participation in the Vietnam war and to dumping Lyndon Johnson as a necessary means to that end. Most of them began by supporting the protest candidacy of Eugene McCarthy, although some subsequently abandoned him in favor of Robert Kennedy. All of them were outraged by the fact that even though they had forced Johnson to withdraw, the party regulars were able to use their monopoly over the rules and the delegate selection process to win the nomination for Hubert Humphrey and adopt a (somewhat watered down) win-the-war platform, even though Humphrey had not entered a single primary. The antiwar forces' one great victory in the 1968 convention was to win the convention's mandate for the appointment of a party commission to recommend changes in the rules. Shafer has also shown how the antiwar reformers dominated the McGovern–Fraser Commission's proceedings and recommendations through their majority on the commission, through the leadership of George McGovern and Donald Fraser, and, most of all, through the tireless, skillful, and effective pressure of the commission's staff for new rules that would prevent any coalition of regular party leaders and their henchmen from ever again dictating a nominee or platform as, in the staff's view, such a coalition had in 1968.

Four nominees and platforms have been adopted since the McGovern–Fraser rules first went into effect, and the reformers have won one and lost three. Certainly everything went their way in 1972—the kinds of people chosen as delegates, the content of the platform, and the identity of the nominee. As some observed, the kind of people who demonstrated in the streets in Chicago in 1968 sat in the delegates' seats in Miami in 1972. The platform was strongly liberal and antiwar. And

2. William Cavala, "Changing the Rules Changes the Game," *American Political Science Review* 68 (March 1974): 27–42.

above all, George McGovern was the perfect candidate: He had always fought hard against the war; he was identified with or sympathetic to all of the new liberal policy thrusts; and he had presided over the rules changes that made the 1972 convention what it was.

After 1972, the reformers won some and lost more. In 1976 Jimmy Carter was even more of an outsider, uncommitted to and uncontrolled by the party establishment, than George McGovern had been, but Carter was independent of the reformers as well, and his policy views were a good deal more centrist than theirs. His administration was nevertheless very generous to them, especially in its appointments to middle-level policymaking positions. Even so, he never really belonged to them, and in 1980 many of them supported Edward Kennedy's unsuccessful effort to dump him. In 1984 many of them preferred one of the antiestablishment candidates—Alan Cranston, Gary Hart, or Jesse Jackson—to Walter Mondale (who, among other deficiencies, had begun as the protégé of Hubert Humphrey, the puppet of villains in 1968, the establishment's point-man against McGovern in 1972, and the beloved elder statesman in 1976 only after he withdrew from presidential politics).

Thus, since their heyday in 1972, the original reformers have suffered many disappointments in the party's nominees and platforms. Yet most of their reforms are still on the books (some, to be sure, in diluted form), and so they can justly claim to have had a major and probably permanent impact on the nature of the presidential nominating process. Accordingly, their record of success in achieving the goals they sought is very good. Their main goals are outlined in the following section.

Participation and Finance

1. *Increased Participation for Issue and Candidate Enthusiasts; Decreased Power for Party Leaders, Regulars, and Insiders.* The first goal of most of the original reformers was *not*, as is sometimes said, to increase participation in, and control over, the presidential nominating process by just anybody or even by the kind of people who vote in presidential primaries. One of the first issues the McGovern–Fraser Commission discussed was whether or not we should recommend a national presidential primary; and one of the few items on which we all agreed was that we did not want such a primary. It would, we felt, give too much of an advantage to the big names, make it difficult for an antiestablishment outsider to get his foot in the door, and put a premium on television advertisements and the big money needed to buy them. A majority of the commission wanted to make participation and control

easier for the kind of people who had worked so hard for McCarthy (and, to a lesser degree, Robert Kennedy) in 1968—people who in a particular election year became enthusiastic about and actively supported a particular candidate (such as McCarthy, McGovern, Morris Udall, Robert Kennedy, Edward Kennedy, Gary Hart, and Jesse Jackson) and/or a particular cause (such as antiwar, affirmative action, equal rights for women, and equal rights for gays and lesbians). Concomitantly, these commission members wanted to eliminate all reserved places and end all special influence for the kind of party leaders, party regulars, and insiders who had wangled the nomination for Humphrey in 1968 and supported Edmund Muskie and Humphrey in 1972.

To accomplish that goal they put through a number of rule changes. The leading items were these:

Easier access. The McGovern–Fraser rules required each state party to adopt a set of rules for selecting its national convention delegates and make those rules readily available to anyone who wanted them. The rules had to be clearly written so as to make it easy for any Democrat to use the delegate selection process to express his or her preference for one of the candidates for the presidential nomination (Guideline B-2). They also required the times and dates for all meetings involved in the delegate selection process to be uniform in all parts of each state and uniform from one year to the next in that state (Guidelines A-5 and C-1). They also wanted to confine participation to people who wish to be Democrats and are not already members of another party, “allow non-Democrats to become Party members, and provide easy access and frequent opportunity for unaffiliated voters to become Democrats” (Guideline C-5). And they urged each state party to seek changes in any part of its state registration laws that inhibited people from registering and voting (Guideline A-3).

No special advantages for party insiders. The McGovern–Fraser rules were also intended to abolish all traditional special advantages for party leaders, regulars, and insiders. The rules abolished all ex officio slots for delegates and required that all delegates be chosen by a primary, caucus, convention, or committee process that begins in the calendar year of the national convention and not before (Guidelines C-2 and C-4). They also abolished proxy voting, which previously had enabled party leaders to make easy use of the votes of their supporters (Guideline B-1) and the unit rule, which delegation leaders had previously used to control their delegations even when some dissidents had slipped through their nets (Guideline B-5). And they required that any process of putting together a slate of candidates for delegate positions had to be entirely

open to participation by all interested Democrats and not held behind closed doors as in the past (Guideline C-6).³

These goals of the original reformers were almost entirely achieved in the convention of 1972, although some of them, as we will see, were subsequently weakened by some of the rule changes made by the counterreformers after 1976. However, their overriding goal of transferring power over nominations and platforms to the kind of issue and candidate enthusiasts who supported McCarthy, Kennedy, McGovern, and Udall was not achieved, largely because of the unanticipated and unwanted proliferation of presidential primaries in the states after the McGovern–Fraser rules were adopted. The particulars are shown in Table 1.

The data in Table 1 show that shortly after the McGovern–Fraser rules were adopted, a number of states, including most of the big states, replaced their caucus–convention systems with presidential primaries. They did so for a number of reasons, including the belief that it was a more democratic way of doing things and their expectations that primaries would bring the candidates, the media, and the big campaign-

TABLE 1
Proliferation of Presidential Primaries, 1968–1984

Coverage	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984
Number of states using a primary for selecting or binding Democratic convention delegates	17	23	29	31	30
Number of votes cast by delegates chosen or bound by primaries	983	1,862	2,183	2,489	2,091
Percentage of all votes cast by delegates chosen or bound by primaries	37.5	60.5	72.6	74.7	53.2

Source: Austin Ranney, ed., *The American Elections of 1984* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), appendix F, p. 333.

3. This rule provided the basis for the exclusion of Mayor Richard J. Daley's Cook County delegation (a group of insiders if ever there was one) from the 1972 convention. The McGovern–Fraser rules were published by the Democratic National Committee: Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, *Mandate for Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Democratic National Committee, 1970).

ing money to their states. But most observers agree with Nelson Polsby that in many states a prime cause was the belief of Democratic leaders in the legislatures and governors' offices that going to primaries was the best way of complying with the new rules without upsetting all their other accustomed party procedures and arrangements.⁴

Whatever the underlying motives, it is clear that the proliferation of primaries has, more than anything else, blocked the original reformers from achieving their goal of having the presidential nominating process controlled by issue and candidate enthusiasts. For one thing, it has meant that a majority of the Democratic delegates (not as big a majority in 1984 as in the three preceding conventions, but still a majority) are chosen by millions of voters in the primaries rather than by hundreds of activists in local caucuses and conventions. Issue and candidate enthusiasts have a big edge in caucuses and conventions, where people can participate only by going to the considerable extra effort of attending meetings of many hours' duration on evenings and weekends; but their edge disappears in primaries, where people can participate merely by spending a few minutes at the local polling place without having to make or listen to hours of speeches in behalf of causes or candidates.

Most of the original reformers are only too well aware of what the primaries have done to their hopes. Some, notably Donald Fraser, have publicly advocated that the party should permit only a limited number of states to hold primaries (about the number that held them in 1968) and should refuse to seat delegates selected by primaries from unauthorized states. Others are not willing to go quite that far or think it is futile to try; but it is clear that the proliferation of primaries has done far more damage to the achievement of the original reformers' main goal than any of the rules changes brought about by the counterreformers (see below).

2. *Proportional Representation of Selected Demographic Groups.*

The second great goal of the original reformers was to get guaranteed representation for certain special groups in proportion to their presence in the general population or the Democratic electorate. The groups favored by the McGovern–Fraser Commission were blacks, women, and young people; and they have subsequently been joined by Hispanics, Native Americans, gays, and lesbians. The commission began by prohibiting all forms of discrimination in the delegate selection process on the basis of race, color, creed, or national origin (Guideline A-1) and on the basis of age or sex (Guideline A-2). Then it went considerably further by requiring “State Parties to overcome the effects of past

4. Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, pp. 55–59.

discrimination by affirmative steps to encourage representation on the national convention delegation of young people . . . and women in *reasonable relationship to their presence in the population of the State*" (Guideline A-2; emphasis added). The guideline was accompanied by a famous footnote stipulating that "it is the understanding of the Commission that this is not to be accomplished by the mandatory imposition of of quotas," and the Mikulski Commission explicitly ruled out numerical quotas as a goal or a guideline. The rules were later changed, however, to require that each state's delegation be equally divided between men and women, and most state parties have taken the position that the best way to avoid challenges at the convention is to make sure that their delegations are "balanced"—that is, that they have women, blacks, young people, Hispanics, and Native Americans in proportions close enough to their proportions in their states' populations that the delegations are not likely to be challenged for discriminating against any of these groups. The 1984 convention apparently added gays and lesbians to the protected groups, although it is not clear just how their numbers in the states' populations are to be ascertained so as to provide a base for measuring the representativeness of the delegations.

How well the group-representation rules have worked is shown in Table 2. The data in the table show that the quota and quasi-quota rules for demographic representation have worked very well indeed, except perhaps for people under the age of 30. The proportion of women among the delegates jumped from 13 percent in 1968 to 40 percent in 1972, and since the equal-representation rule was adopted, women have constituted 49 percent (1980) and 50 percent (1984) of the delegates. Indeed they may have made a mistake in settling for the at-least-half formula: the CBS News poll in 1984 showed that 55 percent of Democratic identifiers but only 50% of the delegates were women. Perhaps even this inequity will be corrected by yet another rule change, but at present there is no sign of it. Blacks are now represented among delegates in greater proportions than their presence in the general public, but in smaller proportions than their presence among Democrats: The CBS News poll found that 22 percent of Democratic identifiers were blacks, while the candidacy of Jesse Jackson made 18 percent of the delegates black. This was their highest figure yet, but it was still below their proportion of Democratic identifiers. But where have all the young people gone? The proportion of delegates under the age of 30 jumped from 3 percent in 1968 to 22 percent in 1972, but it has tailed off since then, and in 1984 it was only 8 percent. We do not know whether most of the young absentees were once again discriminated against by their

TABLE 2
Demography of the Delegates, 1968–1984

Group	Democratic National Convention Delegates					Dem. Identifiers,
	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1984
Women	13%	40%	33%	49%	50%	55%
Blacks	5	15	11	15	18	22
Under age 30	3	22	15	11	8	25

Group	Republican National Convention Delegates					Rep. Identifiers,
	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1984
Women	16%	29%	31%	29%	46%	52%
Blacks	2	4	3	3	—	1
Under age 30	4	8	7	5	—	23

Source: The data for 1968–1980 are taken from CBS News delegate surveys, reported in Warren J. Mitofsky and Martin Plissner, "The Making of the Delegates, 1968–1980," *Public Opinion*, October/November 1980, pp. 37–43. The data for 1984 are taken from the CBS News/*New York Times* delegate survey reported in the *New York Times*, 16 July 1984.

elders or whether they were out working for the reelection of Ronald Reagan; we only know that the demographic representation rules have worked well for all of the originally protected groups except them.

In addition, Table 2 shows that even without quota rules the Republicans have also changed their ways. The proportion of women among delegations to GOP national conventions rose sharply from 16 percent in 1968 to 29 percent in 1972, hovered at that level for the next two conventions, and rose sharply again to 46 percent in 1984. Blacks have regularly constituted only 3–4 percent of Republican delegates, but even that is higher than their mere 1 percent of Republican identifiers.

All in all, then, the reformers' goals of guaranteeing quasi-proportional representation for women, blacks, and young people have been achieved fully for the first two groups but not for the third.

3. "Fair Reflection" of Candidates' Support. The original reformers gave a high priority to the goal they called "fair reflection," by which they meant several things. For one, they meant "timely selection" of the delegates—that is, ensuring that no part of the selection process begin

until the calendar year of the convention. In 1968 and before, many delegates were chosen a year or two before the year of the convention, long before it was clear who the contenders for the nomination would be (in 1968 they complained that large numbers of delegates had been selected months and even years before McCarthy had launched his candidacy against Johnson and Johnson had withdrawn).

For another thing, they meant that the delegates had to be apportioned among the states and within each state "on a basis of representation which fairly reflects the population and Democratic strength within the State," and the commission recommended "a formula giving equal weight to total population and to the Democratic vote in the previous presidential election" (Guideline B-7).

But, most important, it meant junking the old winner-take-all rules, which, as in California, awarded *all* of a state's delegates to the candidate with the most popular votes in the presidential preference primary regardless of how small was his margin over the votes of his competitors. In the McGovern–Fraser Commission's words:

The Commission believes that a full and meaningful opportunity to participate in the delegate selection process is precluded unless the presidential preference of each Democrat is fairly represented at all levels of the process. Therefore, the Commission urges each State Party to adopt procedures which will provide fair representation of minority views on presidential candidates (Guideline B-6)

Presumably the levels of proportionality achieved in each year are best seen by comparing the leading candidates' shares of the popular votes in the presidential preference primaries with their shares of the votes at the convention, as in Table 3.

The figures in Table 3 do not tell the whole story, for they do not take account of candidates who dropped out of the race and released their delegates to other candidates. Even so, they show that in two-candidate or three-candidate Democratic races the old discrepancies between votes in the primaries and votes at the convention have been reduced considerably. In 1968, for example, Humphrey did not contest any primaries and got only 1.7 percent of the primary votes, but won on the first ballot with 67.1 percent of the convention votes. In 1972 McGovern got only 25.3 percent of the primary votes—slightly fewer than Humphrey's 25.8 percent—yet won on the first convention ballot with 61 percent of the convention votes. In 1976 Carter won only 38.8 percent of the primary votes but won with 74.4 percent on the first ballot; yet the convention votes of his leading antagonists (Brown 10 percent, Udall 11 percent) closely matched their shares of the primary votes (15 and 10

TABLE 3
Candidates' Percentage of the Votes in Presidential Preference
Primaries and on Convention First Ballots, 1968–1984

<i>Year and Candidate</i>	<i>Votes in Preference Primaries</i>	<i>Votes on First Ballot</i>
Democrats		
1968		
McCarthy	40.8	22.9
Kennedy	35.7	—
Humphrey	1.7	67.1
Other	<u>21.8</u>	<u>10.0</u>
	100.0	100.0
1972		
Humphrey	25.8	1.2
McGovern	25.3	61.9
Wallace	23.5	12.5
Muskie	11.5	.7
Other	<u>13.9</u>	<u>23.7</u>
	100.0	100.0
1976		
Carter	38.8	74.4
Brown	15.3	10.0
Wallace	12.4	—
Udall	10.0	11.0
Jackson	7.1	—
Other	<u>16.4</u>	<u>4.6</u>
	100.0	100.0
1980		
Carter	51.2	63.7
Kennedy	37.1	34.5
Other	<u>11.7</u>	<u>1.8</u>
	100.0	100.0
1984		
Mondale	37.8	55.8
Hart	36.0	30.6
Jackson	16.6	11.9
Other	<u>7.6</u>	<u>1.7</u>
	100.0	100.0

(continued on next page)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Year and Candidate	Votes in Preference Primaries	Votes on First Ballot
Republicans		
1968		
Nixon	45.5	51.9
Reagan	43.5	13.6
Rockefeller	4.4	20.9
Other	6.6	13.6
	100.0	100.0
1972		
Nixon	91.5	99.9
Other	8.5	.1
	100.0	100.0
1976		
Ford	53.3	52.6
Reagan	45.9	47.4
Other	.8	—
	100.0	100.0
1980		
Reagan	60.7	97.3
Bush	23.5	.6
Anderson	12.4	1.9
Other	3.4	.2
	100.0	100.0
1984		
Reagan	98.7	99.9
Other	1.3	.1
	100.0	100.0

Sources: The data for presidential preference primary votes and convention votes for 1968 are taken from the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1968*. The data for presidential preference primary votes for 1972–1980 are taken from Richard M. Scammon, ed., *America Votes*, vol. 15 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1983), pp. 21–39. The data for convention voting in 1972, 1976, and 1980 are taken from the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* for each year. And the primary votes and convention votes for 1984 are taken from Austin Ranney, ed., *The American Elections of 1984* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985).

percent respectively). In 1980 Carter had 14 percent more of the primary votes than Kennedy and 29 percent more of the convention votes, but had majorities of both votes. And in 1984 Mondale barely edged Hart in the primaries but won comfortably at the convention, while Jackson's much-protested shortfall of 11.9 percent of the convention's votes for his 18.6 percent of the primary votes was considerably smaller than comparable shortfalls for other candidates in other years.

Ironically, Table 3 shows that the Republicans, whose rules continue to allow each state party to use winner-take-all primaries if it wishes, have nevertheless produced primary-to-convention vote relationships more proportional than those of the Democrats. In prereform 1968 Nixon won a plurality of 45.5 percent of the primary votes, which produced 51.9 percent of the convention's votes. The two-candidate contest of 1976 was undecided right down to the convention's first ballot, and Ford's winning share of 53.3 percent of the primary votes produced 52.6 percent of the convention votes, while Reagan's second-place shares were 45.9 percent of the primary votes and 47.4 percent of the convention votes—by far the most proportional result of any of the conventions of either party. In the other Republican contests either the candidate had no serious opposition (1972, 1984) or locked things up so early that most of the competition dropped out well before the convention (1980).

On balance, then, the original reformers failed to achieve their goal of "fair reflection" even in the Democratic process of 1972, which otherwise came the closest of any of the post-1968 processes in either party to fulfilling their hopes and expectations.

4. *Ending the Power of Big Contributors.* Before the 1970s, most of the money raised for the preconvention campaigns of aspirants for presidential nominations and for the postconvention campaigns of the nominees was raised by very large contributions from relatively few contributors, and many reform-minded people believed that "fat cats" on both the right (such as W. Clement Stone and the Mellon family) and the left (notably Stewart R. Mott) played far too great a role in both parts of the presidential selection process. The movement to end that role was spearheaded by Common Cause and its leaders, especially John Gardner, Fred Wertheimer, and David Cohen. Greatly aided by the general revulsion against the excesses of the Committee to Reelect the President in 1972, the reformers won a historic victory in 1974 when Congress adopted a number of sweeping amendments to the Federal Elections Campaign Act (enacted in 1971), and there were further amendments in 1976 and 1979. The details are well known to all presidential politics

buffs, so I will note here only that the reforms sought to end the power of the fat cats by (a) requiring that all contributions of \$200 or more to a party or candidate be reported and made a matter of public record; (b) imposing a \$1,000 limit on the amount any person can contribute to a particular candidate for any one election; (c) providing for the federal financing of both pre-convention and post-convention presidential campaigns; (d) limiting the federal financing of pre-convention campaigns to matching funds for the contributions candidates could raise in sums of \$250 or less; and (e) imposing state-by-state limits on expenditures by any presidential aspirant who accepts federal matching funds.

These financial reforms and their impact have already generated a considerable body of literature.⁵ Much of it concentrates on the reforms' unanticipated consequences, such as the rise of PACs; the proliferation of money spent on behalf of candidates but uncontrolled by them; the development of sophisticated techniques, such as computerized direct-mail solicitations, for raising large amounts of money in small contributions; and the large portions of campaign budgets and candidates' time and energies that now have to be spent on raising money. The original reformers have not welcomed all these consequences, but for our present purposes the point is that the reforms have accomplished almost all of their original goals: Most of the money spent by candidates and their organizations is raised in small contributions or provided by the federal government; far more people are making contributions than ever before; and the Stones, the Mellons, and the Motts have become minor factors in the presidential selection process. Some observers believe that the cure has turned out to be worse than the disease, but there can be no doubt that the financial reforms of the 1970s have almost entirely eliminated the symptoms at which they were directed.

Summary

On balance, then, when we compare the goals of the original reformers with what has happened as a result of their rule changes, the record is one of many successes, a few failures, and quite a few consequences they neither anticipated nor wanted. Presidential candidates are no longer selected by secret negotiations among party leaders who command large blocs of delegates. The rules governing delegate selection are clear, a matter of public record, and easy to find.

5. See, for example, Herbert Alexander's studies of finance in the 1976, 1980, and 1984 elections, and, with Brian A. Haggerty, *The Federal Election Campaign Act After a Decade of Political Reform* (Los Angeles: Citizens' Research Foundation, 1981); Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, pp. 36–38; and Stephen J. Wayne, *The Road to the White House*, 2d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), chap. 2.

Access to the delegate selection process is wide open to anyone who wishes to participate, and more Americans than ever before—and far more than in any other country—are participating: In 1984, for example, despite the fact that only one party had a contest, nearly 27 million people voted in the presidential primaries and thousands more participated in the caucuses and conventions choosing delegates. In 1988, when both parties are likely to have hot contests, the number of participants should go well over 30 million. To be sure, most of these participants are ordinary citizens voting in primaries rather than the dedicated issue and candidate enthusiasts favored by most of the original reformers. Then, too, all delegate selection is “timely” in that no delegates are formally chosen before the year of the election. In fact, of course, presidential politics is now almost continuous: Mondale and Kennedy formed organizations and started campaigning for the 1984 nomination early in 1981, and a number of aspirants in both parties for the 1988 nominations actively, if not officially, were campaigning at the 1984 conventions. Thus delegate selection has become full-time rather than timely. The original reformers can certainly tell themselves that their efforts have changed the presidential nominating process profoundly and probably permanently.

Counterreform, 1978–1984

The Critics' Charges

In 1972 George McGovern, the first chairman of the Democrats' first reform commission, became the party's first presidential nominee under the reformed rules, handily defeating such establishment contenders as Edmund Muskie and Hubert Humphrey, even though he won only one-third of the votes in the primaries. In November, however, he lost the general election to Richard Nixon by the third-greatest landslide in the history of presidential elections, winning only 37.5 percent of the popular votes and 3 percent of the electoral votes.⁶ Even so, the next Democratic reform commission, headed by Barbara Mikulski (1973–1974), made only a few minor changes in the McGovern–Fraser rules, the most important being those firmly establishing the principle of proportional representation (“fair reflection”) of candidates' popular votes in caucuses and primaries in the composition of state delegations. In 1975–1976 Jimmy Carter and his fellow Georgian outsiders took full advantage of their superior understanding of the nature and consequences of the new rules to mount one of the best-conceived and

6. See Austin Ranney, ed., *The American Elections of 1984* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), appendix C, p. 321.

best-executed campaigns in history, culminating in Carter's 1976 nomination against heavy odds. He went on to a narrow victory over Republican Gerald Ford in the general election, but his administration was widely regarded as a failure, and he was defeated in 1980 by Ronald Reagan, while the Democrats sustained a startling net loss of 12 seats in the Senate and the Republicans took control for the first time since 1954.

After 1976, Carter's success in winning the nomination coupled with his failures as a president and a general election candidate touched off a growing body of criticism of the reforms and insistent calls for a number of counterreforms.⁷ Their main charges included the following:

- The presidential nominating process created by the reforms provided for no "peer review"—no way for the people who had worked closely with the presidential aspirants and personally knew their strengths and weaknesses to screen out the incompetent or promote the competent. The decision was left almost entirely to people who knew the aspirants only as television images.
- The process encouraged outsiders to run *against* the "Washington establishment" and thereby made them build their coalitions for winning the nominations without developing good relations with the people and groups inside Washington with whom they would have to do business after they were elected.
- By placing such emphasis on the cultivation of issue and candidate enthusiasts, especially by person-to-person "retail politics" in Iowa and New Hampshire, the nominating process was greatly prolonged, and it became all but impossible for anyone holding a major office (except an incumbent president) to win a nomination.

Whatever the merits of these charges, the Democrats' third reform commission (the Winograd Commission, 1975–1977) was dominated by representatives of the Carter administration and confined itself to a few minor changes intended to make Carter's renomination secure against challenges by Edward Kennedy or anyone else. But Carter's

7. The leading academic critics were Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*; Ceaser, *Reforming the Reforms*; Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978); and Scott Keeter and Cliff Zukin, *Uninformed Choice: The Failure of the New Presidential Nominating System* (New York: Praeger, 1983). There were also two private commissions, one headed by former North Carolina governor Terry Sanford and another sponsored by the Miller Center for the Study of the Presidency at the University of Virginia, both of which took "counterreform" positions similar to those described in the text.

defeat in the 1980 general election led to demands for a fourth commission that would truly reform the McGovern–Fraser reforms and provide a nominating process that would maximize the Democratic party's chances of recapturing the White House.

The Hunt Commission, 1981–1982

The Democratic party's Commission on Presidential Nominations, known as the Hunt Commission because of its chairman, Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina, was appointed by Chairman Charles Manatt of the Democratic National Committee in July 1981. From the outset it was clear that Manatt, Hunt, and most of the commission's members agreed with many of the counterreformers' views and aimed at implementing as many as possible while leaving in place what they regarded as the desirable parts of the original reforms. They had two main goals: (a) to increase the likelihood that one of the presidential contenders would lock up the nomination early so as to minimize the party's internal conflicts and give the winner plenty of time to unite the party for its drive to win the election in November; and (b) to provide a substantial number of guaranteed delegate positions for the party's congressmen, governors, mayors, and other leaders so that they could play a major role in ensuring that both the nominee and the platform would have the maximum appeal to the voters.

To accomplish these goals, the Hunt Commission made several major reforms of the reforms. For one, they allowed the states to raise their "thresholds"—the share of the votes a candidate had to win in a primary before he was entitled to any delegates at all. For another, they allowed the states to institute "winner-take-more" rules whereby, for example, a candidate who won a plurality of the votes in a congressional district would get either all the delegates from that district or a "bonus" delegate in addition to his proportional share of the district's delegates. Most important, they allocated a total of 568 delegate slots (14.4 percent of the total) for *unpledged* elected officials and other party leaders. The Democratic caucuses in the House and Senate would each elect up to three-fifths of their members as delegates, and the remainder would be chosen by the state parties with the understanding that first priority would be given to governors and large-city mayors. An additional 305 delegate positions were reserved for *pledged* party and elected officials.

There was, of course, some grumbling about these changes by adherents of the original reforms, but the counterreforms were firmly in place for the contest for the 1984 nomination, and many "mainstream" Democrats expected great things from them.

Consequences of the Counterreforms in 1984

Thomas E. Mann has done the most thorough and convincing study I have yet seen of the impact of the Hunt Commission's reforms on the Democratic party's 1984 nominating process and convention.⁸ He concludes that the counterreforms achieved some of their goals, but on the whole their results fell short of their authors' hopes. For one thing, contrary to the commission's expectations, most of the "superdelegates" from the House of Representatives were chosen in January 1984, and most of them soon publicly endorsed Mondale.⁹ Thus they did not act, as some had hoped, as the custodians of the balance of power, remaining neutral until their services were needed to settle a contest left undecided by the state primaries, caucuses, and conventions. The superdelegates were, however, very important to Mondale's victory. During the period from the New Hampshire primary to "super Tuesday," when his candidacy was hanging by a thread and he was close to withdrawing, his large bloc of votes from the House superdelegates kept him in the lead and cushioned the blows from Hart's victories in the primaries that might otherwise have ended his candidacy early.

Despite the winner-take-more rules and Mondale's early successes in the House selections and the Iowa caucuses, the sudden rise of Gary Hart after the New Hampshire primary, the success of Jesse Jackson in taking massive numbers of black votes away from Mondale, and the predictable penchant of the media for portraying the contest as a close fight rather than a foregone conclusion kept Mondale from clinching the nomination until June and led him to make a number of concessions to the Hart and Jackson forces at the San Francisco convention in order to prevent a donnybrook on prime-time national television. So the counterreforms failed signally to produce an early winner backed by a united and enthusiastic party ready to go all-out for a November win.

On the other hand, the winner-take-more rules and the superdelegates together probably saved Mondale's candidacy. And most people believed that he was a far more mainstream, insider, and regular candidate than the men nominated in 1972 and 1976. If so, the rules certainly helped to produce the kind of candidate the counterreformers wanted.

Also, the new rules, as intended, substantially increased the representation of party leaders among the delegates, as is shown in Table 4.

8. Thomas E. Mann, "Elected Officials and the Politics of Presidential Selection," in Ranney, *American Elections of 1984*, chap. 4.

9. According to Mann, the 164 House "superdelegates" were chosen on January 25–26 and confirmed on February 1, 1984. Their presidential commitments were recorded in an unofficial tally as Mondale 70, Glenn 19, Cranston 13, Jackson 8, Hart 5, Askew 4, Hollings 3, and Uncommitted 42.

TABLE 4
Percentage of Democratic Elected Officials
Becoming Delegates

Office	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984
Governors	96	57	44	72	86
U.S. Senators	61	28	18	15	62
U.S. Representatives	32	12	14	13	68

Source: Thomas E. Mann, "Elected Officials and the Politics of Presidential Selection," in *The American Elections of 1984*, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1985), chap. 4.

Yet none of this helped in the November 1984 election. The fact is that while McGovern, the outsider nominated under the original reformed rules in 1972, lost to a Republican incumbent in history's third-greatest landslide, Mondale, the insider nominated under the counterreformed rules in 1984, lost to a Republican incumbent in history's second-, fifth-, or seventh-greatest landslide, depending on the measure used. Evidently, then, *neither* set of rules could guarantee a winner or prevent a crushing defeat. Perhaps no set of rules can.

*The Fairness Commission and Future Rule Changes*¹⁰

In 1985 the Democratic party appointed another rules commission, just as it has after every presidential election since 1968. The new commission was mandated by the 1984 Democratic National Convention as a result of demands by the supporters of Jesse Jackson and Gary Hart that the rules be changed to eliminate the injustices done to their candidates in the 1984 contest. They urged that the new commission be called the Fairness Commission and that it launch such counter-counterreforms as sharply reducing the number of superdelegates, lowering or abolishing the popular-vote thresholds for allocating delegates to presidential aspirants, and eliminating the winner-take-more rules. The Mondale forces at the convention were prepared to give in on all these points in order to prevent floor fights, but other leaders, notably the late Representative Gillis W. Long of Louisiana, chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, rounded up enough support on the floor to make the Hart-Jackson proposals recommendations rather than mandates for the new commission.

10. See Rhodes Cook, "Harmony Is in, Bickering Out as Democrats Consider Rules," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, March 1, 1986, pp. 509-510; and Cook, "Brushing Aside Complaints, DNC Approves Rules for 1988," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, March 15, 1986, p. 627.

Outgoing national chairman Charles Manatt left the appointments of the commission members to his successor, and the new chairman, Paul G. Kirk, Jr., took steps to ensure that it would not radically change the counterreformed rules. He persuaded the Democratic National Committee to request that the commission be appointed mainly from members of the DNC and that it retain at least as many slots for superdelegates in 1988 as there had been in 1984. In February 1985 he appointed 40 members from the DNC and only 10 from outside, and named as chairman Donald L. Fowler, a former South Carolina state chairman and a veteran of several previous rules commissions.

In November 1985 the commission recommended only a few minor changes to the DNC, all intended to strengthen rather than reverse the counterreform thrust of the Hunt Commission's rules. Specifically, they recommended a slight expansion in the number of convention seats reserved for superdelegates; allowing such states as Montana and Wisconsin to select their delegates by primaries open to participation by Republicans and independents; and lowering the "threshold" share of votes a candidate must receive in a presidential primary in order to qualify for delegates from the 20 percent used in most places in 1984 to 15 percent in 1988. The DNC overwhelmingly adopted these recommendations in March 1986. And some observers concluded that the Democratic party, like me, seemed ready to bid farewell to reform—almost.

A Farewell Proposal

After nearly two decades of participating in changing the rules of the presidential nominating process and of writing about the consequences, good and bad, of what the reformers and counterreformers have done, I am strongly in accord with the stance of the Fowler commission. We can, I think, expect that future rule changes (if any) will, like their predecessors, accomplish some of their authors' goals, fail to achieve some others, and probably produce some unanticipated consequences desired by neither the reformers nor their critics. Yet I am reluctant to leave the discussion without offering one last proposal for reform.

My proposal is simple: The party that loses a presidential election should choose its nominee for the next election no later than one year after the election it has lost. Under this proposal, if, say, the Democrats lose the presidential election of 1988—which is certainly possible, although far from certain—they would choose their nominee for 1992 no later than November 1989; and if the Republicans lose, they would follow the same schedule.

Am I serious? Well, I remember that in the 1950s the well-known British humorist—analyst C. Northcote Parkinson gave a lecture at the University of Illinois, and afterward one of my colleagues in the political science department asked another, “Is he serious?” The other replied, “Well, sort of.” That is how I feel about my farewell reform suggestion. I am quite aware that its chances of being adopted are about nil, but at least it has the virtue of being new to the voluminous commentary on presidential selection rules, and it might be fun—perhaps even instructive—to discuss it. So I will end by briefly discussing its rationale and its pro’s and con’s.

The Source: The British Leader of the Loyal Opposition

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the party with the largest number of seats in the British House of Commons has won the right to form the Government, and its leader has automatically become the prime minister. The party with the second-largest number of seats has won the right to become the recognized Opposition, and its leader has become the recognized Leader of the Opposition. The prime minister chooses leading members of the governing party to be the members of his or her ministry and cabinet, and the Leader of the Opposition chooses leading members of the Opposition party to become members of the “shadow cabinet,” each following the Government’s actions in a particular policy area, criticizing them, and presenting the Opposition’s alternatives. As long as the traditional British two-party system survives (which, under the growing dissatisfaction with both the Conservative and Labour parties and the rise of the Liberal—Social Democratic alliance, may not be long) the essence of British politics will be the contest between the Government team and the Opposition team. As Allen Potter sums it up:

Opposition with a capital “O” is provided by a party—or parties, though the conception fits more naturally in a two-party than a multi-party system—prepared to become the Government; and that entails willingness to govern as well as to oppose which is, however, not a willingness to govern, or to oppose, too much. Her Majesty’s Opposition as well as Her Majesty’s Government behave so as not to call into question the structure of constitutional conventions and understandings regulating their relationship. “What we mean by the ‘Opposition,’” wrote Lord Campion, formerly Clerk to the House of Commons, “is the party for the time being in the minority, organized as a unit and officially recognized, which has had experience of office and is prepared to form a Government when the existing Ministry has lost the confidence of the country. It must have a positive policy of its own and not merely oppose destructively. . . . Our system alone,” he added

with insular pride, "can produce a responsible Opposition, one with a consistent policy known to the country in broad outline, one which is not anxious to win at the expense of ruining the game."¹¹

Since 1937, the post of Leader of the Opposition has been an official government position of ministerial rank, and its occupant is paid a salary comparable to those paid to cabinet-rank ministers. He has no legal duties, but he is treated as Her Majesty's alternative prime minister, and he is universally recognized as *the* official spokesman for the Opposition. When the Government wishes to consult with the Opposition, they go to the Leader of the Opposition. Everyone knows that if the Government is turned out at the next election, the Leader of the Opposition will be the new prime minister. Thus, when political commentators and ordinary voters are evaluating the prime minister, they do not have to ask "compared with whom?" They know that the answer is always: compared with the Leader of the Opposition.

Things are very different in the American system.

Fragmentation of Leadership in the American Out-Party

It is not clear that the United States ever has a party or any other organized group that can be called *the* Opposition in the British sense. When, for example, the Republicans control the presidency and the Democrats control one (1981–198?) or both (1953–1961, 1969–1977) houses of Congress, the Democrats are, in British terminology, the Opposition in the executive branch but the Government in part or all of the legislative branch. And, let us remember, divided party control of this sort is quite normal: Of the 20 national (presidential and midterm) elections from 1946 to 1984, only 9 gave control of the presidency and both houses of Congress to one party, while 11 divided control between the parties.

On the other hand, when one party controls the presidency and both houses of Congress, it resembles, at least superficially, the Government in Great Britain. Its adherents are in command of all the major policy-making agencies, and it has a clear leader—the president. That does not mean, of course, that the party's members in Congress always do what the president directs. Some of them almost always go their own ways, and enough of them do so often enough that it is, to say the least, not unusual for a House or Senate controlled by the president's fel-

11. Allen Potter, "Great Britain: Opposition with a Capital 'O,'" in *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, ed. Robert A. Dahl (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 16.

low partisans to deny some of his wishes. But even when they are resisting the president, no senator or representative of the president's party dreams of claiming that he or she and not the president is the true leader of the party.

But the out-party bears little or no resemblance to the British Opposition party, mainly because it has no single person who is generally regarded as its leader. Most of the textbooks on American parties remark that the defeated presidential candidate is sometimes called "the titular leader,"¹² but everyone knows that he has no power over anything the party does. The most he can do is to try to rewin the party's nomination for the next election. In this century, however, only William Jennings Bryan, Adlai Stevenson, and Richard Nixon have succeeded in doing so, and even they had to work hard for their renominations. The out-party's highest-ranking congressional leaders get some special attention, particularly if their party controls the chamber they lead: thus Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., the leading congressional Democrat, has received far more media attention while Republican Ronald Reagan has been president than he received when Democrat Jimmy Carter was in the White House. But hardly anyone thinks of the Speaker as equivalent to the leader of the Opposition.¹³ The fact is that the American out-party has no leader, no one having or regarded as having the power to set party policy or even to say what it is, until it nominates its presidential candidate well over 3 years later.

My modest proposal is intended to fill that gap much sooner. If the out-party chooses its next presidential candidate within a year after its loss, it will be without an acknowledged leader and spokesman for only that year, not for the present 3+ years. It is intended to provide the United States with something like the British Leader of the Opposition—an official and recognized head of the out-party and an alternative president most of the time between presidential elections rather than, as at present, only in the 5 months between the out-party's nominating convention and the general elections.

The idea is certainly novel, but is it good? I think it has some advantages and some disadvantages.

12. And some textbooks note the familiar quip that a more appropriate title for the defeated presidential candidate would be "the hind-titular leader."
13. The Republican National Committee tried to give Speaker O'Neill this status in a widely televised advertisement in 1981–1982, in which an O'Neill look-alike was shown careening about in an automobile while the voice-over warned about "the Democratic party's devotion to big government spending."

Advantages

Given the fragmentation and low cohesion of American parties, the out-party's presidential candidate, even if nominated 3 years before the election, could never have the same power or authority as the British model. He could never force or even persuade *all* his fellow partisans in the Congress or in the state parties to accept his policy positions as the party's positions. Yet the stakes in winning the presidency are so high that many of them might well be inclined to go along with him whenever possible, and the out-party would probably present a more united front than now.

Moreover, having a single acknowledged leader of the out-party would force the news media to portray interelection politics quite differently. In present circumstances they give half or more of their political coverage to the president, and, since the FCC's "fairness doctrine" requires them to present "both" sides of every controversial public issue, they scatter the rest of their coverage among dozens of the president's critics in the Congress and elsewhere. Under this proposal they would have an alternative president to turn to whenever they wanted authoritative critical statements about the president's policies, appointments, and performance. That should somewhat reduce the incumbent president's built-in advantage by creating an alternative president and giving him 3 years instead of 5 months in which to establish his presidential stature and credibility.

Finally, it might well make interelection politics more focused, more comprehensible, and therefore more interesting for ordinary citizens than now. It would allow them to focus on two leaders rather than, as now, on one leader and an opposing gaggle of critics and rivals rushing on and off the political stage. We know that the presidential campaign debates of 1960 and 1976–1984 attracted far greater audiences than any other campaign events and that more ordinary voters got more accurate information about the policy positions and personal qualities of the candidates from watching those debates than they did from any other campaign events. We know that the gladiatorial atmosphere of the debates had something to do with their huge audiences and the relatively close attention the viewers paid to what was said. If *both* parties had generally acknowledged leaders during most of the time between elections, it is likely that the networks, the League of Women Voters, and the viewers would demand some debates in the interelection years. And the net result would probably be a noticeable increase of popular interest in and knowledge about the party, policy, and personal issues before the nation.

Disadvantages

My proposal has one obvious disadvantage that probably outweighs its possible advantages: It has no chance of being adopted in the foreseeable future. Why not? For one thing, the members of the out-party are likely to resist committing themselves to a candidate so far in advance of the next election. After all, political circumstances in 1992 might be very different from those in 1989, and the 1988 losers might well want a different kind of candidate in 1992 from the one they would choose in 1989. Moreover, if the in-party's president was in his second term, it would not do to have the party choose his successor 3 years before he was scheduled to leave office, and it would not be fair for them to be without a candidate for those 3 years while the leader of the out-party was building himself up. Consequently, we would probably have to repeal the Twenty-Second Amendment to make the proposal work. (I, for one, have always thought the two-term limitation is a poor idea, and I would welcome the amendment's repeal; but I am well aware that most people feel otherwise, and in any case it is seldom easy to amend the Constitution.)

In addition, my proposal is certainly out of keeping with the rest of our politico-governmental system. It makes good sense in a British-style system in which politics is essentially a contest between the Government team and the Opposition team, with the leaders of the two teams drawing more of their authority and visibility from their team leadership positions than from their personal qualities. But it would make little sense in the traditional American system, in which, however we reform or counterreform the rules of the presidential selection process, that process is—and is intended to be—essentially a series of sporadic personal contests among individual political entrepreneurs, not a continuing contest over personnel and policies between two political parties. For over a century now, a number of eminent political scientists and political practitioners have urged the American people to abandon their personalistic politics in favor of British-style party politics, but with little success. There is no reason to suppose that many of the people or their political leaders would welcome the creation of a British-style Leader of the Opposition.

So my modest suggestion is unlikely to receive serious consideration. It may have only the virtue of being different from the reform and counterreform proposals that have dominated the discussion of the presidential nominating process since 1968. Even so, some may feel, as I do, that that in itself might be a worthwhile reform of the discussion about reform.



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5

Kind Pictures and Harsh Words: How Television Presents the Candidates

Doris A. Graber

Introduction

Modern presidential candidates spend most of their campaigning time, money, and effort to appear on America's millions of television screens. Campaign managers would undoubtedly agree with newsman James Wooten's comment that "the entire apparatus, focus and structure of a campaign and 99.9 percent of staff energies are directed toward the evening network broadcast."¹ The reasons for this focus of efforts are easy to grasp. The candidates want a chance to display their personalities and talents before the vast television audience. Often, they would like to get their stands on issues across, too. But television news stories are far too short to explain issues adequately. So the emphasis in the nightly news is not on issues but on demonstrating the capacity to handle issues of all kinds well.

1. "Politicians and the Press—1984's Uneasy Partners," *U.S. News and World Report*, October 8, 1984, p. 82.

The Importance of Personality

The needs of the television medium are not the primary reason for dwelling on personality. Even before the television age, personal characteristics were the politician's trump cards. When candidates shook hands firmly, kissed babies, and handed out cigars, the thrust was not on issues. The purpose was to convince the voters that the candidates were strong, compassionate, and generous. The stress on human qualities recognizes the fact that most people are neither capable nor inclined to weigh complex issues and determine which candidate has the most agreeable issue package. This holds especially true for offices, such as the presidency, where major issues facing the victor are baffling and controversial with the outcome partly determined by other political actors.

Given these uncertainties, and given the fact that most people feel familiar with presidential candidates from observing them on television, it should come as no surprise that many voters' choices are based heavily and often exclusively on assessments of personal qualities such as trustworthiness and competence.² If these seem sound, they are willing to accept the candidate's professional judgments, crediting him or her with

2. Richard Wirthlin, President Reagan's pollster, reports that Reagan voters, interviewed 2–3 days after the election, gave the following reasons for choosing Reagan: 42% effective at getting things done, 29% issues, 12% leadership, 8% personality, and 5% partisan politics. Mondale voters' decisional criteria were 44% issues, 23% leadership, 15% partisan politics, 12% performance, and 8% personality. "Moving Right Along? Campaign '84's Lessons for 1988: An interview with Peter Hart and Richard Wirthlin." *Public Opinion* 7, no.6 (1985): 10. Likewise, in answers to open-ended questions asked for the National Election Studies, a large proportion of the responses involve mention of character traits. See John H. Kessel, *Presidential Campaign Politics* (Homewood, Ill: Dorsey Press, 1984), pp. 247–275. Gregory Markus and Philip Converse, using 1972–1976 panel data from the National Election studies, concluded that "candidate evaluations have been shown to be a primary determinant of the vote, with policy considerations and even partisan orientations affecting the vote either exclusively or largely through the way they help to shape feelings towards the presidential rivals" ("A Dynamic Simultaneous Equation Model of Electoral Choice," *American Political Science Review* 73, [1979]: 1068). Also see Herbert Asher, *Presidential Elections and American Politics: Voters, Candidates, and Campaigns since 1952* (Homewood, Ill: Dorsey Press, 1984); and Richard Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1984). J. David Gopoiian found that "candidate attributes are the most important variables involved in the process of candidate choice" in primary elections. He studied people's responses to CBS News/*New York Times* primary election exit pollsters in 20 primaries in 1976. See his "Issue Preference and Candidate Choice in Presidential Primaries," *American Journal of Political Science* 26, (1982): 523–546. For a more general discussion of learning about the candidates during the primaries, see Scott Keeter and Cliff Zukin, *Uninformed Choice: The Failure of the New Presidential Nominating System* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

sufficient expertise to implement the chosen policies. Basing voting decisions on candidate images does represent a rational approach to decision making. Average persons have considerable experience in forming impressions of other people's character traits by observing them. They also have a fund of lay theories that helps them in making inferences about character traits and their behavioral consequences on the basis of appearance and behavioral cues. Character traits thus are extremely valuable as judgmental criteria. A candidate's potential performance as president cannot be appraised until one knows whether the candidate has integrity and empathy, is competent to do the job, and has leadership capabilities. Average people are not the only ones who rely heavily on character traits in choosing a president. Recent research findings show that stress on character traits has been highest among the best-educated voters. They realize that personality is crucial to a president's success in office.³

The nature of people's images about the presidential candidates is apt to be closely related to the nature of information presented by newspapers and television.⁴ A study of media information therefore assesses one of the chief stimuli to public opinion formation about presidential candidates. Television is a particularly important medium in this respect. It has become the most widely used news source for the average American. The ability to see people and events at close range, almost as if one were an on-the-scene observer, makes television stories vivid, emotionally stirring, and memorable. When television news provides an opportunity to view candidates repeatedly at close range in many different settings, it creates ideal conditions for forming images about the character and qualifications of the candidates. Since seeing the

3. Doris A. Graber, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide* (New York: Longman, 1984), p. 70; and Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President* (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp.134-138. Also see Arthur H. Miller, Martin P. Wattenberg, and Oksana Malanchuk, "Schematic Assessments of Presidential Candidates," *American Political Science Review* 80 (1986): forthcoming. Cognitive processing research indicates that once images of the candidates' personalities have been acquired, they provide the framework for subsequent perceptions, which are then processed in conformance with the established image. Overall evaluations of candidates are highly dependent on such trait evaluations.
4. David H. Weaver, Doris A. Graber, Maxwell E. McCombs, and Chaim H. Eyal, *Media Agenda-Setting in a Presidential Election* (New York: Praeger, 1981). Also see Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections*; and Graber, *Processing The News*. Benjamin Page, Robert Shapiro, and Glenn Dempsey report that "media content variables account for more than one-third of the variance in measured public opinion change." A single news commentary by a trusted reporter or anchor can precipitate as much as four percentage points of opinion change. See their "The Mass Media Do Affect Policy Preferences," American Association for Public Opinion Research paper, 1985, pp. 14, 30.

candidates is so important when one wants to assess television's role in informing people about the candidates' personalities, one needs to consider the pictures as well as the words and sounds presented. That is what the research reported here is all about.

Gauging the Meaning of Television News

Gauging the meaning of television news is a formidable task. Social scientists have long known how to gauge and record—code is the technical term—the meanings of spoken words. But they have not devised any systematic ways to gauge and record the meanings of pictures. In fact, many social scientists have argued that there is no point to recording picture messages, contending that these messages convey different meanings to each viewer, or that these messages add nothing to the text that accompanies them. My current research, as well as the work of other scholars, disproves both of these contentions. It also proves that there are practical, effective ways to code the whole message contained in television newscasts. I call the method that I have developed *gestalt coding*.

What does *gestalt coding* entail? The procedure is grounded in information-processing research that has demonstrated that average people can quickly reduce the mass of news items reaching them to a trickle of useful bits of information. They begin the process with an initial scanning of news in which attention is given selectively to items that, at first glance, promise to be rewarding. This is followed by condensation and simplification of the selected items to extract their meanings. Thereafter, various processing tactics are used to integrate the information into the existing cognitive structures, often called *schemata*, or to reject it if it seems to be unsuitable.⁵

Gestalt coding mimics these steps. It starts with identification of the kinds of information that people normally use as cues in interpreting the news under consideration, such as candidate traits during a presidential election. The nature of salient clues may be gleaned from research in psychology, communication, and nonverbal behavior, or it may be discovered through open-ended questions in survey research, depth interviews, or laboratory experiments.⁶ Based on knowing how people typically select and process news segments dealing explicitly or implicitly

5. Graber, *Processing The News*, pp. 81–91, 123–146.

6. The relevant literature is vast and growing by leaps and bounds. Helpful works are Paul Ekman, ed., *Emotion in the Human Face*, 2d ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Nancy Cantor and John F. Kihlstrom, eds., *Personality, Cognition and Social Interaction* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1981); and Richard R. Lau and David O. Sears, eds., *Political Cognition* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1986).

with presidential characteristics, gestalt coders can extract and record the messages conveyed by each segment.

In making coding decisions, the context of each story within the total newscast, the manner of introducing and sequencing stories, and the meanings conveyed by sound components other than words are taken into consideration. Particular attention is given to the anchor's opening statements because such statements often set the frame and tone for the entire story. For instance, Ted Koppel opened an ABC newscast on September 6, 1984, by stating: "As predicted, Walter Mondale took the gloves off today on the subject of religion and politics." This kind of statement prepares the viewer to regard what follows as Mondale's attempt to launch strong attacks, rather than polite challenges, to his opponent's policies. It suggests qualities of strength and determination.

During the final stages of interpretation of the coded materials, the general political context at the time of the news broadcast and major contemporaneous news trends are also incorporated into the analysis. For instance, the fact that Reagan's age had become an important issue after the first presidential debate was likely to affect people's attention to close-up pictures showing presidential puzzlement, wrinkles, or tremors. Inclusion of contextual factors is thus essential for accurate estimates about picture elements likely to be observed and about the meanings apt to be extracted during information processing.

To recapitulate the essence of gestalt coding: The major elements considered in assessing the meanings conveyed by television news are (a) the general political context prevailing at the time of broadcast; (b) the anchor's lead-in and subsequent anchor and reporter verbal and nonverbal editorializing; (c) the audiovisual message conveyed by the combination of words, nonverbal sounds, and pictures; and (d) the interactive effects among episodes within the same story and among stories in the same newscast.

The decisions required for gestalt coding are neither unduly complex nor unduly idiosyncratic. The audiovisual language used in television news broadcasts is designed to be easily understood because it must convey common meanings to a vast, diverse audience that has no time to ponder obscure symbols or grasp delicate shadings of information. With news items rarely exceeding 2 minutes in length, the language must be, and is, highly stereotypical and stark in both words and pictures. Audience tests, in which audiences view television news stories and then are asked about the common, rather than idiosyncratic, meaning of the audiovisual message, reveal widespread agreement.⁷ Coders do equally

7. This finding, reported extensively in the consumer research literature, is also supported

well. In our study, they agreed on 89 out of every 100 coding decisions. Judging by audience and coder tests, the gestalt coding method is therefore both valid and reliable.⁸

To make the television news analysis of candidate personalities comparable to the findings of major opinion polls, we patterned our classifications of personality traits on the traits used in the National Election Studies. In these studies, conducted under the auspices of the University of Michigan's Center for Social Research, interviewees are asked to judge the degree to which presidential candidates possess a series of traits. The traits are as follows: hardworking, decent, compassionate, commands respect, intelligent, moral, kind, inspiring, knowledgeable, sets a good example, really cares about people like you, and provides strong leadership. Reciting these traits one by one, interviewers asked in 1984 how much the word or phrase fitted the subject's impression of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates. Four options were given: a great deal, somewhat, a little, or not at all.⁹ The trait data,

by my experiments. These involve intensive testing of perceptions of newscasts viewed by groups of adults.

8. Content analysis data were divided into those that required discretionary decisions and those, like date and length of broadcast, that did not. Of the latter, 10 percent were double coded. Reliability was in the 99 percent range. All discretionary data were either double or triple coded. Traits were assessed as groups, rather than individually, because the distinctions among the individual traits used in the National Election Studies are fuzzy. For example, it is difficult, in practice, to distinguish a coding of "intelligent" from a coding of "knowledgeable." Reliabilities ranged from 65 to 100 percent, largely depending on whether distinctions between adjacent values were fine or marked. For character traits, the average reliability was 74 percent; for campaign and policy skills, it was 93 percent. The following formula was used to check reliability: $R = 2P_{ab}/P_a + P_b$, where R is reliability, P_a is the number of observations of the first coding, P_b is the number of observations of the second coding, and P_{ab} is the number of agreed-upon observations. The following elements were coded: network, date, story, and episode number and length; anchor and reporter names; verbal and visual aspects of the anchor lead-in and subsequent story; general style and tone of the story; candidates and audiences shown on television in close-ups or long shots and their activities and interactions; the candidate who was the story's focus and the source of the information about this candidate; positive and negative comments about the candidate's competence, leadership, integrity, empathy, campaign skills, and specific policy skills expressed verbally, audiovisually, or visually at varying levels of intensity; weakening or strengthening of the message through choice and sequencing of internal episodes; weakening or strengthening of the message through voice tone and sound effects, or anchor and reporter comments; extent of contradiction between the verbal and visual aspects of the message.
9. Using Reagan and "hardworking" as examples, the exact question would be: "Now we'd like to know about your impressions of *Ronald Reagan*. I am going to read a list of words and phrases people use to describe political figures. After each one, I would like you to tell me how much the word or phrase fits your impression of Ronald Reagan.

according to political scientist Donald Kinder, cluster in four groups that he calls Competence, Leadership, Integrity, and Empathy.¹⁰ When asked about the traits, well over 90 percent of Kinder's interviewees were willing and able to rate the candidates because people are accustomed to interpret information about presidential candidates in terms of character traits. In successive interviews, spaced a month apart, their ratings proved to be highly stable because such ratings usually are grounded in a large, constantly reinforced body of evidence. Only a major upheaval can change them.¹¹ We have adopted Kinder's terminology for this study.

To assess the trait information provided by television news broadcasts, we analyzed the content of all nightly election news stories on the three major television networks for the period from Labor Day through November 7, the first postelection day.¹² Since the day's election news is packaged as a story consisting of distinct events that may vary considerably in focus, we divided these stories into "episodes." For instance, under the general story heading "Final Campaign Swing," a news anchor and reporters may talk about four distinct political events taking place in different cities. We would record each of these events as an episode of that particular story.

Altogether, the 10-week period yielded 238 episodes on ABC, lasting 6 hours and 28 minutes; 227 episodes on NBC, lasting 5 hours and 53 minutes; and 168 episodes on CBS, lasting 4 hours and 50 minutes.¹³ If one figures that the average newscast offers 23 minutes of news, presidential election coverage took up 28 percent of the nightly coverage on

The first phrase is hardworking. How much would you say hardworking fits your impression of Ronald Reagan: *a great deal, somewhat, a little, or not at all?*" Four additional traits were added later: understands people like you, fair, in touch with ordinary people, religious. Aside from the last, they are encompassed in the trait categories used for our study.

10. Donald Kinder, "Presidential Character Revisited," Lau and Sears, eds., *Political Cognition*.
11. Pearson's correlations for the four central traits ranged from .79 to .84. *Ibid.* For a discussion of the stability of trait perceptions, see George C. Edwards, III and Stephen J. Wayne, *Presidential Leadership, Politics and Policy Making*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 112. Also see Graber, *Processing The News*.
12. Commercials were excluded from the analysis. For a fine analysis of commercials, see Montagu Kern, "Political Advertising in the 1984 Election," American Association for Public Opinion Research paper, 1985; Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections*, pp. 195–203, and Stephen A. Salmore and Barbara G. Salmore, *Candidates, Parties, and Campaigns* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1985), pp.145–154.
13. There were 99 "stories" on ABC, 78 on CBS, and 107 on NBC. During the 10-week period, election news unrelated to the presidential/vice-presidential level consumed 48 minutes on ABC, 45 minutes on CBS, and a mere 14 minutes on NBC.

ABC, 26 percent on NBC, and 21 percent on CBS. This is a hefty percentage of the total, particularly when one considers that few other news areas, aside from sports and weather, receive sustained coverage on an almost daily basis.

While the information pool is large, it does not begin to cover all the news available to American audiences to form their images of the presidential candidates. Both Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale, and to some degree George Bush, had been in the political limelight for decades, so most people's images about them were likely to be well-formed. Geraldine Ferraro was the only new face on the national scene.

By the time Labor Day rolled around, the 1984 presidential campaign was already many months old. In addition to television news, the most pervasive medium, it had been covered through radio, newspapers, and newsmagazine reports. News offerings had been supplemented by live coverage of the national conventions and the presidential and vice-presidential debates. Advertising contributed additional images to supplement coverage provided by the "free" media. Image rehearsal, image revisions, and, possibly, some new image creation were already in full swing.

The news stories analyzed here therefore represent primarily familiar stimuli, reiterated in the format of well-established television themes. Except for people who had not paid much attention to the campaign earlier, or people eager to flesh out their schemata with previously missed information, the most likely impact of post-Labor Day news was reinforcement of existing candidate perceptions. The significance of the data in terms of public opinion formation lies primarily in the fact that they represent the last batch of stimuli reaching the public prior to voting. They could either reinforce or alter voters' schemata. Polling experts know what Yogi Berra knew, that "it ain't over till it's over." The Democratic team's surge in the public opinion polls following the first presidential debate indicates that this is wise counsel.

The Findings

The Scope of Trait Information

Overall, the study showed that television provides ample information about candidate traits. Even though we recorded only clear-cut explicit and implicit trait information messages, we counted 2,034 such messages on the three networks during the 10-week period. Implicit messages must be included in the count because candidates and journalists rarely tell the voters explicitly that the contenders are competent or

incompetent, trustworthy or untrustworthy, or excelling or failing in leadership capacities. Instead, these qualities are suggested through the ways in which candidate personal and professional behaviors and policy stands are presented and discussed. Emphasis on a cutback in funding for social programs becomes a message that the candidate lacks empathy for the poor; the ability to spout facts and figures in a presidential debate signals competence to handle presidential decision making.

A bit more than half of the messages (1,050) readily suggested the character traits noted earlier. The remainder (984) dealt more directly with achievements that are indicators of the existence or absence of these traits. They were recorded under the categories "campaigning skills" and "policy skills." Campaigning skills include the ability to handle the television medium, the ability to present a political agenda that appears sound and attractive to mainstream Americans, and the ability to project a winner image. Policy skills include the ability to unify conflicting political interests, to handle domestic and foreign policies well, and to keep defenses strong and the country at peace. Obviously, all these skills, mentioned explicitly or suggested by reference to illustrative behavior, attest in varying degrees to the candidates' competence, leadership, integrity, and empathy.

Trait information was packaged in small enough doses—1 to 2 traits per episode and 5 to 10 traits per story—so that the messages were simple and clear. The fact that 1 or 2 trait mentions per episode were the mode is typical of television news, which attempts to keep information segments simple and uncluttered by focusing on a limited array of facts or concepts. Of course, the price of this simplicity often is oversimplification.¹⁴ With the average story having two or more episodes, habitual viewers were exposed to 5–10 traits per story, night after night—a rate of constant rehearsal likely to keep forgetting to a minimum.¹⁵

Some traits were mentioned far more often than others. In 1984 the heaviest emphasis went to traits that were Reagan's strong suits: leadership, a winner image, and the ability to communicate well on television. Postelection polls show that strong leadership was mentioned most

14. For an analysis of the relationship between presentation style and intelligibility, see James H. Watt, Jr., and Robert Krull, "An Examination of Three Models of Television Viewing and Aggression," *Human Communication Research* 3 (1977): 99–112; and Frederick P. Schneider, "The Substance and Structure of Network Television News: An Analysis of Content Features, Format Features, and Formal Features," PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1985.

15. Fourteen percent of the episodes mentioned 1 trait, 28 percent mentioned 2 traits, 27 percent mentioned 3 traits, 18 percent mentioned 4 traits, 8 percent mentioned 5 traits, 1 percent mentioned 6 traits, and 3 percent mentioned 7 traits.

often by Reagan voters as the reason for their choice.¹⁶ The winner image, too, is highly important in an election because people use it as an indicator that candidates for public office are capable. A candidate who seems to be winning obviously has public approval. People then assume that there must be sound reasons for this approval because the public's judgments deserve respect.¹⁷ A bandwagon effect ensues.

The 1984 patterns of emphasis differ from patterns in most other presidential elections, which show that judgments about competence were most often cited as the chief reason for voting choices.¹⁸ When the messages about competence are augmented by information about specific policy skills, however, the competence category again swells into first place. Since there often are wide discrepancies between the messages that candidates try to emphasize and those that journalists choose to air, the fact that Reagan's strong suits were stressed probably hinged more on journalists' preferences than on the efforts of Reagan's campaign managers.

Specific policy skills constituted the largest single category of mentions. The reason is that Reagan, as the incumbent, had a lengthy record in domestic and foreign policy that challenger Mondale attacked frequently. In addition, Mondale proposed a series of very specific policies of his own, such as deficit reduction and tax plans, and plans for negotiating a nuclear disarmament agreement with the Soviet Union. These plans provided the Reagan administration with targets for numerous attacks on Mondale's policy skills and for sniping at policy failures during the Carter administration.

The heavy emphasis on policy skills is particularly interesting because visuals were used comparatively rarely to demonstrate either policy successes or failures. This seems to indicate that, contrary to common beliefs, topics are not necessarily shunned when visual phrasing is difficult. Most reports about policies were presented in the context of candidates discussing issues. This format personalized the news. It

16. See the *Los Angeles Times* and the CBS News/*New York Times* November 6, 1984, exit polls, as reported in *Public Opinion* 7, no. 6, (1985): 42. Also see Gerald Pomper with colleagues, *The Election of 1984* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1985), p. 84.
17. Keeter and Zukin, *Uninformed Choice*, pp. 151–155; Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President* (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp. 125–132; and Graber, *Processing the News*, p. 164.
18. Doris A. Graber, "Press and TV as Opinion Resources in Campaigns," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 40 (1976): 285–303. Miller, et al., "Schematic Assessments," factor-analyzed five themes that routinely appeared in the images that survey respondents had formed of presidential candidates from 1952 to 1980 on the basis of news coverage. Respondents used the competence category most often. Use of leadership as a major criterion varied from campaign to campaign.

called attention to the candidates' skills to cope with policy problems, rather than to the substance of the policies. Overall, only slightly over 3 percent of the episodes focused primarily on the substance of policy issues.

On the whole, the news about traits was more positive than negative. Sixty-one percent of the character traits were stated in a positive vein; this dropped to 55 percent for campaign and policy skills. The positive cast was even stronger when one considers the impact of visual support, which tends to enhance message impact. Except for policy skills, visual phrasing for positive traits was far more ample than visual phrasing for negative traits. Pictures thus accented positive messages, while negative messages frequently lacked this support.

Table 1 tells the story. Positive aspects of character traits and campaign skills had pictorial support in 66 and 63 percent of the cases, respectively. On the negative side, bad traits mentioned with visuals constituted 17 percent for character traits, 35 percent for campaign skills, and 8 percent for policy skills. Relatively few traits were carried exclusively by picture messages. These patterns of visual support suggest that most messages about policy-related traits and most negative messages about character traits and campaign skills are comparatively low in impact.

Reagan versus Mondale

Network news treated the presidential and vice-presidential candidates unevenly. In each case, many different favorable and unfavorable aspects of coverage are involved so that it is difficult to make precise assessments about the ultimate balance of forces. To use "winner image" traits as an example: The winner label was applied nearly five times as

TABLE 1
Visuals for Traits and Skills

	No Pictures	Audiovisuals	Visuals Only
Good character traits	35%	51%	15%
Bad character traits	82	15	2
Good campaign skills	37	54	9
Bad campaign skills	65	30	5
Good policy skills	80	20	1
Bad policy skills	93	7	1
N = 2,034 mentions			

often to Reagan as to Mondale. In Reagan's case, however, more than half of the messages (58 percent) were purely verbal with no picture support. Mondale had a lower proportion of words without pictures (47 percent). Given the fact that a pictorial winner image is likely to be more convincing than a purely verbal message, the smaller number of pictures may have measurably reduced Reagan's advantage.

At the other end of the spectrum, the "loser image" trait was pinned on Mondale nearly twice as often as on Reagan. But, for Reagan, nearly half (48 percent) of the mentions of this undesirable trait had visual support. For Mondale, only a third (33 percent) had pictures. Accordingly, Reagan outranked Mondale in undesirable pictures by 15 percentage points. The pictures thus helped make Mondale look more like a winner and less like a loser than emerged from the purely audio portions of the telecast. For Reagan, the reverse was true.

Mondale also did better in his ratings on television performance than was acknowledged by his critics, including Mondale himself. In fact, during a postelection interview, Mondale blamed his defeat on his inability to master the television medium. Television news analysis does not support this verdict. Reagan's share of mentions as a good television communicator exceeded Mondale's by only 25 percent. This is unexpectedly moderate, considering the fact that Reagan had been anointed as "the Great Communicator" by a number of prominent commentators. Overall, Mondale received a 53 % positive rating for all campaign skills mentioned in the news, compared to a 68 % rating for Reagan—a mere 15% differential.

A look at the sources of news messages shows predictable differences in candidate treatment. When the news comes from Republican sources, it tends to stress the virtues of Republican candidates more than the virtues of Democrats. When Democrats are the source, the case is reversed. Besides tapping slightly more Democrats than Republicans as news sources, however, the networks managed to present quite a few Republican sources that were hostile to their leader. Therefore, many of the negative messages about the Republican team's traits and skills come from Republicans. In fact, negative messages from Republican sources outnumber negative messages from Democratic sources in all trait and skill areas except for empathy. Airing criticism from the candidates' own camp is likely to have a particularly strong effect because it is not readily discounted as mere partisan sniping.

Table 2 provides an overview of presidential and vice-presidential news coverage, arranged in groups of negative and positive traits and skills. The legend shows that Reagan and Bush received the lion's share of coverage—64 percent with most of that going to Reagan. The vice-

TABLE 2
Visuals for Traits and Skills—Candidate Differences

	No Pictures		Audiovisuals		Visuals Only	
	RR	WM	RR	WM	RR	WM
Good character traits	28%	37%	59%	49%	13%	14%
Bad character traits	80	92	18	8	2	—
Good campaign skills	44	34	51	54	5	11
Bad campaign skills	67	64	30	27	3	10
Good policy skills	79	76	19	24	2	—
Bad policy skills	94	100	5	—	1	—
	GB	GF	GB	GF	GB	GF
Good character traits	36%	40%	36%	41%	28%	19%
Bad character traits	76	83	21	17	3	—
Good campaign skills	19	21	69	71	13	8
Bad campaign skills	40	56	60	44	—	—
Good policy skills	100	80	—	20	—	—
Bad policy skills	100	100	—	—	—	—

Note: N = 1,743 mentions. Ronald Reagan = 57.9%; Walter Mondale = 26.4%; George Bush = 6.4%; Geraldine Ferraro = 9.2%.

presidential coverage was skimpy, as usual, depriving these candidates of much needed visibility. The Democratic vice-presidential contender fared somewhat better than her Republican counterpart. Besides, Geraldine Ferraro had more picture support to highlight her good traits and less picture support to illustrate her bad ones than was true of George Bush.

On balance, in both words and pictures the nightly newscasts favored the Democrats. Pictures accented their virtues more and their flaws less. They made Democrats look closer to ordinary people than Republicans. Purely verbal trait descriptions also were far kinder to Democrats than to Republicans. Nevertheless, several countervailing factors tended to make coverage more balanced. These included the facts that Reagan's good pictures were generally better and more varied and interesting than Mondale's, that Reagan received the lion's share of coverage, and that a disproportionate share of this coverage emphasized traits favoring him. Moreover, Reagan and Bush were shown less frequently under attack by hecklers than was true of their Democratic rivals.

Other Kinds of Editorializing

There are other ways of favoring one side over the other besides choice of story focus, positive or negative slants of coverage, and differences in picture treatment. Our approach to editorializing was designed to capture elements omitted from most previous analyses, which have noted a lack of bias in television news stories covering presidential elections. We looked for instances where the thrust of the broadcast message was distinctly altered in strength or substance by verbal comments by news personnel, by the tone of their commentary in a story presented as "straight news," or by the way the news presentation was structured. For instance, if Walter Mondale's presentation of a deficit reduction plan was followed by endorsements by several highly credible witnesses, this was recorded as a strengthening of the message that

TABLE 3
"Spin" through Sequence, Sound, Anchor, or Reporter Effects

	Neutral	Strengthens	Weakens	Mixed	Good add	Bad add
Sequence Effects						
Reagan	44%	41%	11%	5%		
Bush	55	33	8	5		
Mondale	48	34	13	5		
Ferraro	44	43	9	4		
Sound Effects						
Reagan	71%	25%	2%	2%		
Bush	60	28	3	10		
Mondale	53	40	5	2		
Ferraro	67	27	4	2		
Anchor Effects						
Reagan	72%	10%	2	1	4%	11%
Bush	77	5	8	3	3	5
Mondale	76	8	2	0	5	9
Ferraro	74	11	4	2	2	7
Reporter Effects						
Reagan	46%	11%	6%	1%	6%	29%
Bush	49	13	3	3	5	28
Mondale	37	16	6	2	11	29
Ferraro	48	15	6	0	15	17

Note: N = 535 episodes, Reagan = 57.9%; Bush = 7.3%; Mondale = 24.3%; Ferraro = 10.1%. See text for explanation of categories.

should be attributed to news personnel. If news personnel had instead chosen to weaken the message by including several highly credible witnesses who challenged its soundness, this, too, would be coded as media influence on the thrust of the message.

Looking only at straight news, rather than commentary or editorials, we found considerable evidence of various kinds of editorializing. Table 3, arranged according to the candidate who was the chief focus of discussion, tells the story. The table records the percentage of episodes involving presence or absence of four kinds of editorializing "spin."¹⁹ *Sequence Effects* refers to spin resulting from the interaction of episodes within a broadcast that may strengthen and/or weaken a particular message or leave it unaffected. *Sound Effects* refers to the impact of sounds other than words; music or crowd noises would be an example. *Anchor Effects* and *Reporter Effects* refer to the spin produced by the manner in which the anchor or reporter tells the news. It includes voice intonation, selection and combination of words and pictures, and a variety of subtle and not-so-subtle editorial comments, including the lead-in to the story. In addition to scoring spin that weakened or strengthened the episode as presented by anchors and reporters, we also recorded comments that added new positive or negative substance.

Contrary to our expectations, a substantially larger proportion of reporters' stories reflected positive or negative spin than held true for anchors. Next to reporters, the sequencing of stories produced the highest proportion of stories with spin. Sound Effects ranked next. There were fairly minor differences among the candidates in the rates of spin in stories about them. For instance, Reagan received less spin than Mondale from Sound Effects and Reporter Effects but more spin than Mondale from Sequencing and Anchor Effects. Considering such cross-cutting directions in news slanting, the overall effect for each candidate is difficult to judge.

In general, strengthening effects of both positive and negative messages were far more prevalent than weakening effects. This is not surprising, since newspeople select the points they wish to make. They would want to lessen the story's impact only in those relatively rare instances when a story highlights an undesired point. Accordingly, sequencing effects tended to strengthen messages about Reagan four times more often than they weakened them. The ratio for Mondale was 3:1. Reporter and anchor effects showed similar patterns, while sound effects were more disparate. The ratio between strengthening and weak-

19. The term "spin" comes from Maura Clancey and Michael Robinson, "The Media in Campaign '84, Part I," *Public Opinion* 7, no. 6 (1985): 49.

ening sounds was 12:1 for Reagan and 8:1 for Mondale. Since Mondale had higher proportions of positive messages and lower proportions of negative ones, the trends in message spin helped his image.

When reporters and anchors went beyond the news story's message to add editorial commentary, the thrust was predominantly negative. Anchors made editorial comments in roughly 14 percent of the stories, with a 3:1 ratio between negative and positive comments. Reporters editorialized in 38 percent of the stories, making 35 negative comments for every positive one. The explanation that media analysts offer for such a negative approach is that newspeople like to pose as worldly-wise cynics who believe very little of what they hear, especially when it comes from politicians.

Comparisons among Networks

When newspeople are criticized about aspects of their work, they often claim that they are mere information conduits who enjoy little discretion in news selection. That is sheer nonsense, of course, as shown by comparisons among similar news sources serving the same clientele in the same news markets. Comparisons of network newscasts for the same time period show substantial variations in news choices and even in the treatment of the same news event.

Our study of election coverage in 1984 provides further grist for the mills of scholars who contend that news personnel have considerable discretion in determining what news to present and how to structure it.²⁰ Sure enough, there are a lot of similarities when newspeople cover basically the same story for the same type of audience when they look over each other's shoulder to make sure that the competition is not scooping them in providing an attractive picture show. The substance of stories and basic structures are similar. But the manner of audiovisual presentation differs and these differences may have a profound impact on the meanings that viewers extract from the news. The networks also differed in the amounts of coverage given to the election and in their treatment of Republicans and Democrats. Much work remains to be done to assess the impact of such differences.

Here are a few examples of internetwork differences: As indicated,

20. Schneider, "Network Television News," compared television newscasts over a 6-month period. He concluded that "the three networks tend to differ in the look of news items more than in the substance or structure of news items. . . . Variations occur primarily in the styles used to construct and present news accounts. Variation in the use of visual techniques and audio features is extensive. . . . The results of comparing the profiles of the three networks lead one to conclude that the networks use the medium of television differentially."

the time devoted to presidential election news varied. The ABC network carried 38 percent of the total for the 10-week period, compared to NBC's 34 percent and CBS's low score of 28 percent. The length of the average election news episode varied as well, and so did the extent to which news was reported by reporters from the studio without visuals taken on location. Generally, NBC spent more time on individual news items than its sister networks, with much of the additional commentary coming from reporters talking from the studio. The impact of such "talking head" coverage depends on the reporter's credibility. It often is less effective than on-scene coverage of an event. On episode length, CBS took the center position, but rated highest on the proportion of broadcasts from locations outside the studio. The ABC network had more short episodes than the other networks and was at mid-range for limiting visuals to a reporter on camera. In the last few weeks of the campaign, all networks increased the length of election news episodes; otherwise, there were few systematic fluctuations either from week to week or from beginning to ending of the general election campaign.

When it came to close-up pictures of candidates, which are especially valuable as visual cues to trait images, the networks showed little variation in their treatment of Republican contenders. But NBC used substantially more close-ups of Mondale and Ferraro than its sister networks, and CBS was especially low in close-ups of Mondale. If close-ups aid in developing emotional bonds, as most film-makers believe, these differences could be consequential.

Table 4 provides a graphic illustration of internetwork differences in visual phrasing of favorable and unfavorable traits and skills. The table shows that there were substantial differences in the use of pictures in traits and skills messages. Aside from illustrating positive campaign skills, NBC was least likely to provide pictures to support verbal commentary reflecting candidate traits. Without countervailing influences—we detected none—this tended to make its trait coverage less graphic and involving. Overall, CBS provided the greatest amount of visual support for character traits and campaign skills, while ABC provided the greatest visual support for policy skills. There were comparatively few instances when trait information was delivered through visuals without supporting verbal commentary; CBS had the highest number of instances, followed by ABC, with NBC trailing. In a comparatively high proportion of these cases, the visual information was at odds with the verbal commentary. When that happens, experimental research indicates that the visual message tends to prevail over the verbal.²¹ The table

21. Dan G. Drew and Thomas Grimes, "The Effect of Audio-Visual Redundancy on Audio and Video Recall in Television News," Association for Education in Journalism paper, 1985.

TABLE 4
Visuals for Traits and Skills—Network Differences

	ABC			CBS			NBC		
	None	Audvis	Vis	None	Audvis	Vis	None	Audvis	Vis
Good character traits	29%	54%	18%	31%	51%	18%	46%	49%	6%
Bad character traits	81	18	1	74	22	4	90	9	1
Good campaign skills	45	46	9	31	60	9	36	56	8
Bad campaign skills	66	29	5	49	41	10	77	21	2
Good policy skills	63	35	3	83	16	1	95	5	0
Bad policy skills	90	7	3	89	11	0	98	2	0

Note: N = 2034 mentions. None = no pictures; Audvis = audiovisuals; Vis = visuals only. ABC = 34% of coverage; CBS = 31%; NBC = 36%. Positive coverage: ABC = 64%; CBS = 61%; NBC = 51%.

also shows substantial variations in the amount of positive commentary. Specifically, on ABC, 64 percent of the traits mentioned were positive; on CBS, the figure was 61 percent. It dropped to 51 percent on NBC.

People's Images versus Television Images

How do viewers' perceptions of the traits and skills of presidential contenders compare to the images presented by television news? Before examining the data, a few cautions and explanations are in order. As noted, the chances that post-Labor Day broadcasts would have a great impact on the viewers' perceptions of the candidates were small because most viewers had formed their perceptions before Labor Day. Short of sensational disclosures, and aside from influence on late deciders, the impact of post-Labor Day television is likely to be quite limited. Nonetheless, a match between late media data and opinion data is appropriate because late media data, short of sensational events, closely resemble early media fare. Television themes and images, once established, tend to be reinforced rather than changed. The news we analyzed was "more of the same."

The data for people's trait images presented in Table 5 come from the preelection surveys conducted in 1984 by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research for the National Election Studies project. The table omits policy and campaigning skills because the Michigan data on these traits are not sufficiently comparable to our data. It focuses attention on the frequency of mention of positive traits. The television data, which parallel the time span during which preelection interviews were held, are divided into data based on words only (called *Words*) and data based on word and picture combinations or on pictures only (called *Pix*). The reasons for the division are apparent from the table: a vast difference between the thrust of information conveyed by words only, compared to audiovisual or visual presentations.

Table 5 demonstrates clearly that the surveyed public held very favorable trait images of both candidates. As happens routinely in the postelection afterglow, the favorable trait mentions even increased 4 to 13 percentage points. When the preelection poll figures are compared to the verbal aspects of television news—which is the usual way in most current content analyses—a vast gap appears between the poll results and the television news story appraisals for Reagan. Verbal television messages gave Reagan a 13 percent favorable score on competence; the public gave him a 76 percent score. The difference between the public's and the television news verdicts on Reagan ranges from 63 percentage points for competence, 54 percentage points for integrity, 35 percentage

TABLE 5
Positive Mentions of Candidate Traits: Poll versus Media Images

	<i>Competence</i>			<i>Leadership</i>			<i>Integrity</i>			<i>Empathy</i>		
	<i>Poll</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Pix</i>	<i>Poll</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Pix</i>	<i>Poll</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Pix</i>	<i>Poll</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Pix</i>
Reagan	76%	13%	65%	70%	41%	87%	78%	24%	62%	61%	26%	79%
Mondale	86	72	95	51	46	98	80	81	100	76	76	100

Note: $N = 2,257$ for the polling samples (though not all respondents answered all trait questions) and 750 trait mentions for Reagan and Mondale. Poll = NES sample; Words = verbal analysis only; Pix = audiovisual and visual analysis.

points for empathy, to 29 points for leadership. In all cases, television news verbal messages were far less positive than the public's judgments. When pictorial aspects of news messages about Reagan are considered, however, the situation changes drastically. The gaps become comparatively narrow, shrinking to 11 percentage points for competence and 16 for integrity. For leadership and empathy, television trait messages were actually more positive than poll judgments, running ahead by 17 and 18 points, respectively.²²

A similar analysis for Mondale shows much narrower gaps between public judgments and television trait message scores because the Democratic candidate received far higher positive scores on television than his Republican rival. Looking at purely verbal presentations, Mondale's television images showed comparatively small deficits for competence and leadership (14 and 5 percentage points) coupled with a tiny advantage (1 percentage point) for integrity and an even score for empathy. When it comes to the picture story, the trait images that emerge from television are so positive for Mondale that they exceed positive poll ratings in all categories. The differences are moderate for empathy, integrity, and competence (24, 20, and 9 points). They are wide for leadership (47 points), for which the public gave Mondale exceptionally low scores.

The data permit some speculation but no firm conclusions about the interrelation between poll and media images. They show that the fit is reasonably good in most areas, with a few major exceptions, such as ratings for Reagan's competence or Mondale's leadership potential. Whether these major discrepancies reflect a correspondence with earlier television presentations or whether there are major misfits throughout the life span of a politician's televised existence cannot be judged from our data. Any claims about causality involve risky inferential leaps because we lack precise assessments of all the potential influences that shaped the public's opinions and voting choices.²³

One thing is clear, however. The fit shown in Table 5 between the public's images and the images presented on television is considerably

22. When one combines the visual and verbal figures without considering the greater impact of pictures, the figures are unduly skewed toward resembling the verbal data. Weighting is therefore particularly essential when purely verbal comments outnumber audiovisual and visual comments.

23. Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections*, pp. 158–267; Kessel, *Presidential Campaign Politics*, pp. 221–297; Patterson, *Mass Media Election*, pp. 95–169; and William C. Adams, "Media Power in Presidential Elections," in *The President and the Public*, ed. Doris A. Graber (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues 1980), pp. 111–141. Everett C. Ladd, "On Mandates, Realignment, and the 1984 Presidential Election," *Political Science Quarterly* 100 (1985): 1–25.

better in the Reagan case when we examine the meanings conveyed by audiovisual messages rather than limit the examination to verbal messages only. In line with prevailing folk wisdom, one might argue from this that pictures, compared to spoken words, are considerably more potent in delivering their messages. Obviously, that argument is too facile. It assumes, probably correctly but without definite proof, that Reagan's public image benefited from favorable television coverage. But it ignores the fact that, in Mondale's case, the fit between television messages and public views is actually worse when audiovisuals are considered than when the focus is on verbal aspects of the messages only. Can this fact be reconciled with the claim that audiovisual coverage mattered for Reagan?

The answer is a tentative yes. Survey evidence indicates that people apply diverse judgment criteria to various candidates. In 1984, for example, when exit pollsters asked voters for their reasons for voting for Reagan, 62 percent of the responses related to traits and skills. For Mondale, the figure was 43 percent. Issue-related responses accounted for 44 percent of the responses of Mondale voters, compared to 29 percent of the responses of Reagan voters.²⁴ Such differences make it plausible that television may have helped one of the contenders while doing little for the other. The fact that audiovisuals stressed the traits that many people used more often in judging Reagan than in judging Mondale may account for the closer fit between audiovisual and poll data in the Reagan case.

There is another plausible explanation, of course, although it runs counter to much of the evidence on media agenda setting and ignores a substantial portion of available television news.²⁵ One can side with Michael Robinson's claim in this volume that the media's messages about the merits of the candidates had little influence on the vote. The public formed its favorable opinions about both candidates on the basis of available good news about the state of the nation, ignoring the far more frequent accounts of bad news. Accordingly, the similarity between poll results and audiovisual messages about Reagan and verbal messages about Mondale was purely fortuitous.

There is one certain conclusion to be drawn from Table 5 however: One cannot adequately judge the messages conveyed by television news without including audiovisual and visual aspects of these messages.

24. See Hart and Wirthlin, "Moving Right Along," p. 10.

25. See Roy L. Behr and Shanto Iyengar, "Television News, Real-World Cues, and Changes in the Public Agenda," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49 (1985): 38–57, and sources cited there; see also David B. Hill, "Viewer Characteristics and Agenda Setting by Television News," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49 (1985): 340–350.

Examination of only the verbal aspects seriously distorts the meanings conveyed. That is an important finding that shows that the usual modes of television news analysis are fatally flawed and must be changed.

Summary and Conclusions

Besides the insights about the importance and feasibility of coding television pictures, our analysis has yielded a number of interesting findings about the substance of television coverage of the 1984 presidential campaign. We found the following:

1. Television provides ample information about candidate traits. This gives the public a solid basis for making assessments of the candidates' personal and professional traits and skills. Newscasters package this information in small enough doses—1 to 2 traits per episode and 5 to 10 traits per story—to keep trait messages simple and clear. Moreover, constant repetition, night after night, provides the kind of rehearsal that makes forgetting unlikely.

2. Some traits are covered far more amply than others. In 1984 the heaviest emphasis went to traits that were Reagan's strong suits: leadership, a winner image, and the ability to communicate well on television. Considering that leadership traits ranked at the top of reasons given by Reagan voters for their choice, he evidently benefited from this aspect of television coverage.

3. The ratio between purely verbal and audiovisual or purely visual messages differs depending on the nature of traits and their positive or negative character. Policy skills and negative traits and skills in general were discussed predominantly without pictorial support. If pictures enhance message impact, as is often true, this suggests that messages about policy-related traits and negative messages in general were relatively low in impact. By contrast, most messages about character traits and campaign skills, and most positive messages in general were supported by pictures. This imbalance in pictorial support may account for the highly positive thrust of the public's images in the face of ample amounts of negative television news.

4. The networks differed substantially in the amounts of visual phrasing used for various traits. They also differed in the treatment accorded to Republicans and Democrats. On balance, in both words and pictures, the Democrats were favored. Pictures accented their virtues somewhat more and their flaws somewhat less. Purely verbal trait descriptions were far kinder to them than to the Republicans. Several

countervailing factors tended to make coverage more balanced, however. These included the facts that Reagan is exceptionally photogenic and personable, that he received the lion's share of coverage, and that a disproportionate share of this coverage dealt with traits favoring him.²⁶

The summary of findings leaves one crucial question unanswered: Did character traits and television information about them really affect the outcome of the 1984 election? Some analysts would say no, arguing that Reagan was a shoo-in once the conventions were over because the state of the economy and the absence of major foreign policy crises made reelection a certainty. I disagree with that answer, contending that a victory or loss at the polls hinges on a combination of many factors. A strong plus or minus in any one of several key decisional areas can determine the outcome. Trait coverage by television is such a key factor, and there are indications that it mattered substantially in 1984. Given the interdependence of the various ingredients of the voting decision, however, it is beyond current measuring capabilities to assign precise and realistic numerical weights to any major factor, including television news.

Michael Robinson's essay in this volume does make a numerical evaluation of sorts of network news influence. He contends (p. 145) that news broadcasts "had some measurable influence on his [Reagan's] political fortune, just not very much," and that the same held true for all the other candidates. The problem with this verdict is that it considers only a very limited range of meanings conveyed by news broadcasts. It focuses on reporters' interpretations of the news, which Robinson calls good or bad "press." It excludes the effects of presentation of "objective" news reports from the range of media effects, even though the choice of such news items is subject to media discretion. Robinson concedes that the "good news" reports about events helped Reagan and damaged Mondale. But, given his definition, he does not count this as a media effect. I would argue that news story choices should be counted, and they are included in my trait analysis. More important, Robinson's analysis is predominantly verbal, largely ignoring audiovisual and visual messages. Hence the finding of lack of correlation between media messages and public perceptions that Robinson cites as evidence of lack of media influence is based on only a limited portion of the television news messages conveyed during the 1984 presidential campaign. His judgment of limited television news impact may well be correct when considering only the verbal content of reporters' assessments, which consti-

26. On Reagan's personal charm, see Ervin Duggan, "Presidential Likeability: Is Niceness Enough?" *Public Opinion* 8, no. 2, (1985): 16-18.

tute the candidate's "press." But when the full scope of available news, as well as "press," are included in the analysis, and when the content analysis is audiovisual as well as verbal, media effects appear to be far more robust.

Turning to the general thrust of television news during the 1984 campaign, it was a mixed picture for Ronald Reagan with much of it bad, just like the tenor of verbal trait messages. Throughout the campaign year, television news stories cast doubts on the solidity of peace and prosperity. There were constant warnings about looming economic and foreign policy disasters that an incompetent Reagan was not likely to handle well. Content analysis data reported by Maura Clancey and Michael Robinson indicate that the 10 most heavily covered issues in 1984 included 9 that put the Republican ticket in a bad light.²⁷ The fact that newspeople chose to focus on these issues explains why my trait analysis showed that out of a total of 325 negative mentions of campaign and policy skills, 69 percent reflected poorly on Reagan, compared to 31 percent for Mondale.

That bad news can affect public opinions about presidential performance is demonstrated by the numerous polls that tracked Reagan's job ratings throughout his administration and showed them ebbing as well as flowing in tune with news about events. While people are not totally at the mercy of the media in assessing the state of the nation, the opportunity to use nonmedia sources to verify the accuracy of media images is severely limited. Hence, spreading gloom about the economy and the prospects for continued peace could have cost Reagan the election, regardless of the merits of these predictions. Fortunately for the President, these negative media effects, reflected in job ratings, were balanced by countervailing media forces, reflected in trait assessments.²⁸

The fact that people retained faith in Reagan despite the serious attacks on his competence in major policy areas may well be the result of the countervailing effects of trait judgments made on the basis of favorable television news pictures, bolstered by similar messages from Rea-

27. Clancey and Robinson, "Media in Campaign '84," pp. 49–54; and Maura Clancey and Michael Robinson, "The Media in Campaign '84: Part II", *Public Opinion* 8, no. 1 (1985): 43–48.

28. Edwards and Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, p. 113, quote a November 1978 Gallup poll which indicated that nearly twice as many people liked President Carter at midterm as approved of his handling of the presidency. Also see the discussion of voting choice criteria on pp. 112–119. The relationship between popularity and job performance expectations is explored in Lee Sigelman and Kathleen Knight, "Expectation/Disillusion and Presidential Popularity: The Reagan Experience," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49 (1985): 209–213.

gan's television advertisements.²⁹ Throughout his presidency, Reagan's personal popularity has remained high, based largely on the Reagan that people meet when his televised image enters their homes. Research has shown that the emotional impact of such pictorial personality images tends to outweigh the impact of less well personalized news and the impact of purely verbal messages.³⁰ The fact that the news about horrendous deficits, bloodbaths in Lebanon, and mounting nuclear holocaust threats, along with uncomplimentary verbal images of Reagan, did not cancel out the visual offerings thus does not provide evidence that television news lacks impact. Instead, it lends support to other findings that indicate that people's susceptibility to media information hinges on the nature of countervailing factors. Among such factors, the picture aspects of audiovisual presentations tend to be more potent than verbal messages that contradict picture meanings. As long as seeing is still believing, good pictures will remain the trump cards of the television age.

Even if one accepts the argument that Reagan did not need the television trump card in 1984 because he could have won the election merely on the basis of people's experiencing economic well-being and peace, television coverage still deserves an important share of the credit for his reelection. When journalists raised the age issue following Reagan's disappointing performance in the first presidential debate, there was a surge of support for the Democratic ticket. Television commercials, designed to make Reagan look vigorous, and Reagan's vibrant images in the news and in the second debate evidently were major factors in diffusing the serious concerns about age-related disabilities. These concerns could have cost Reagan the election. Television was also a factor in making Mondale seem less attractive by comparison with Reagan than he might have been otherwise.

Furthermore, image creation neither starts nor ends with the presidential campaign. All presidential candidates in the television age begin

29. Wirthlin, "Moving Right Along," pp. 10–11; Myron Levine, "The Selling of the President 1984: The Reagan Advertising Strategy," Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research paper, 1985; and Salmore and Salmore, *Candidates, Parties, Campaigns*, pp. 145–154.

30. Gregory J. McHugo, John T. Lanzetta, Denis G. Sullivan, Roger D. Masters, and Basil G. Englis, "Emotional Reactions to Expressive Displays of a Political Leader," Working Papers on Expressive Displays and Political Leadership (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Committee for the Experimental Study of Social and Political Behavior, 1984); Denis G. Sullivan, Roger D. Masters, John T. Lanzetta, Basil G. Englis, and Gregory J. McHugo, "The Effect of President Reagan's Facial Displays on Observers' Attitudes, Impressions, and Feelings about Him," American Political Science Association paper, 1984.

their campaigns with the boost of a favorable television-created image, or the burden of an unfavorable one. Without a chance to display his infectious smile, his grandfatherly demeanor, and his "nice guy" qualities to millions of Americans, Ronald Reagan, burdened by his image as a superannuated, intellectually lightweight movie actor with right-wing friends and ultraconservative leanings, might never have reached the presidency.³¹ To phrase it more generally, in the vein of Marshall McLuhan: For aspirants to the presidency in the television age, the medium is often more than the message; it may become destiny.

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31. "The American people are not going to elect a 70-year-old, right-wing, ex-movie actor to be president." Hamilton Jordan, quoted in William Schneider, "The November 4 Vote for President: What Did It Mean?" in *The American Elections of 1980*, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), p. 212.



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6

News Media Myths and Realities: What Network News Did and Didn't Do in the 1984 General Campaign

Michael J. Robinson

Boring! Every journalist I spoke with during the Reagan–Mondale campaign felt that the 1984 presidential election was boring. Jack Germond and Jules Witcover sat down together in 1985 and actually wrote a 562-page book about how bored they had been the year before. They called their book *Wake Us When It's Over*,¹ and frankly, it's the longest book about somebody else's boredom I ever plan on reading. As far as most journalists were concerned, we might all just as well have stayed in bed.

Not everybody shares that opinion, however. Political scientists find the Reagan–Mondale campaign much more exciting, what with a “critical election” a possibility for no less than the fourth time in just the last five go-arounds. Every political science book about 1984 looks excitedly at the campaign, focusing intensely on the not-so-boring question as to whether realignment has finally taken place.²

1. Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, *Wake Us When It's Over: Presidential Politics of 1984* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).
2. See, for example, Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter, “A Critical Realignment? The New Politics, the Reconstituted Right, and the 1984 Election,” in *The Elections of 1984*, ed., Michael Nelson (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1985). Also see Austin Ranney, ed., *The American Elections of 1984* (Raleigh, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), esp. chap. 7, William Schneider, “The November 6th Election: What Did It Mean?”

I belong to a profession that should be even more excited about the 1984 general campaign; agitated even. Having been labeled a “media analyst” in 1984 by several television news operations, I, media analyst, look back at the general election more in awe than in boredom. It seems to me, in fact, that 1984 gave media analysts excitement plus; it handed us an obligation—an obligation to explain what *didn't* happen. The Reagan–Mondale election called into question some of the basic premises of “media theory,” the conventional wisdoms about the power of the news media. Fact is, most of our basic notions and axioms of presidential politics in a network news era didn't pan out in 1984. The general election particularly made almost all the new theories about the “new politics” look bad or silly.

What looks especially bad are all the recent ideas, mine included, about the “power” of network journalism and journalists. For me, however, the first doubts about the power of television news began during the 1980 election. In the Carter–Reagan general election I found, at best, a crazy-quilt relationship between network news coverage and the way the race was going. I began talking about news media mythology.³ But 1980 still had something of a network news quality to it, and I kept my revisionist notions somewhat in check.

At a minimum, the Carter–Reagan campaign reinforced the received wisdom that network news (and the eastern press) has made reelection a distinct implausibility for any incumbent.⁴ So much for that theory; 1984 proves that reelection in the age of network news is not so tough after all. Reagan's electoral college vote went up from a near-record total of 489 in 1980 to a record total of 525 in 1984.⁵

But the one-term TV presidency is little more than a media-based corollary. The 1984 campaign may justify a more thorough revision of basic premises about network news power in presidential campaigns. And that is what I plan to do in this essay, a little revisionist thinking about network news and public opinion.

I start with a confession: I'm practicing revisionism in some instances against myself. Although I've always doubted the theory that network news has consummate power to mold public opinion, I have consistently believed that network campaign journalism is something of

3. Michael J. Robinson, “The Mass Media in 1980: Was the Message the Message?” in Austin Ranney, ed. *American Elections of 1980*. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981).

4. The notion that the national media had all but obliterated the political powers of the incumbency has a 15-year history by now but probably began with Daniel P. Moynihan's essay, “The Presidency & the Press,” *Commentary*, Vol. 15, March 1971, 41–52.

5. Modern media theory or no, only one elected president since Hoover has lost a reelection bid: Carter.

a force, not merely a factor.⁶ But much of what happened in 1984, particularly once the nominations had been decided, moves me to think that “force” may be too strong a word.

As it happens, lots of people look back at 1984 and say that network news failed to achieve much independent effect. Because, they say, Reagan was president.⁷ This school of thought argues that the independent power of network news affects everybody but Reagan, and this school at least implies that network power will be restored, once Reagan exits, stage right. But as long as I’m practicing revision, let me go all the way and say that both sides of the “Reagan-is-unique” argument look wrong to me. I think Reagan came through the network news campaign rather typically; network news had some measurable impact on his political fortune, just not very much. And that leads me to my second heretical notion: that network news had about as much impact on the rest of the field as it did on Reagan. In the end neither Reagan nor Bush nor Mondale nor Ferraro seemed especially vulnerable to the cues and spin that the networks were presenting. So I’d even go so far as to say that things are not going to change that much when Reagan does retire.

But if any of that is true, what media determinism is there left to believe in? Not too much, actually. So let’s start from theoretical scratch. Let’s look at four basic premises about network news power—premises relevant mainly to the Reagan years and premises that existed much earlier—and see how well the axioms do. And should the axioms fail, let’s consider what, if anything, network journalism does mean in national campaigns, for voters and the process.

AXIOM 1. *Ronald Reagan has an invisible shield: a Teflon coating on the Teflon theory*

Most network news theory has been with us since about the time Spiro Agnew turned the noun *nabob* into a household word. But because so much of that theory seems contradicted by the Reagan presidency, political analysts have gladly accepted the idea that Reagan is unique; *Teflon-coated* is the term.

When Congresswoman Pat Schroeder first applied the Teflon label

6. In *Over the Wire and on TV*, Margaret Sheehan and I offer the point that network news was more consequential than powerful in 1981; but with 1984 now videotape history, even that thesis seems a bit questionable. See *Over the Wire and On TV: CBS and UPI in Campaign '80* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983).
7. Martin Schram is currently finishing his book on media effects in 1984; one of his main contentions is that Reagan won because he neutralized the print press by having a unique capacity to exploit network news.

to Reagan, sure enough, it stuck. And that was no surprise. Democrats loved the Teflon label because it had the partisan advantage of implying that Reagan was much less than he appeared to be. Reporters loved it because it explained why Reagan was doing so well in so ill a world. And media analysts tended to accept the label too—because it allowed us to believe that news coverage and “spin” really did have an independent effect, just not when it came to Teflon Ron.

The Teflon theory was almost as rich in dimensions as it was rich in sponsors. Divided into at least three parts, the Teflon theory held essentially that (a) bad news never seemed to tarnish Reagan’s image; (b) the news media themselves never much bothered to turn bad news (events) into bad press (criticism); and (c) bad press didn’t have any effect on Reagan’s popularity even when the media did manage to apply it.

As for the first premise—that real-world conditions, when moving in the wrong direction, did not hurt Reagan—we can safely discount the whole zany notion. William Adams has all but demolished the theory that reality slides off Ronald Reagan. Using Gallup data and employment statistics for the first term, Adams found that “for every 1 point increase in unemployment, Reagan’s popularity decreased 6 points.” And, more remarkably, “changes in joblessness . . . can count for about 80 percent [*italics mine*] of the changes in Reagan’s job rating.”⁸ And Adams goes on to show that during his first term Reagan was anything but exceptional. In January 1983 Reagan’s approval rating was 35 percent—a lower approval score at the midterm than had been suffered by any of the six presidents who preceded Reagan! At the beginning of his second term, Ronald Reagan had a lower approval score in the Gallup poll than the two elected Republican presidents who preceded him. Yes, Ike and Nixon (!) had greater popularity than Reagan at the beginning of their second terms.

As for the premise that the media never turned “bad news” (negative real-world conditions) into bad press (negative, subjective assessments), that idea also has little basis in fact. Back in 1983, when the Reagan-never-gets-bad-press thesis was at its peak, the Media Analysis Project found that for every evening news piece that said or directly implied something favorable about Reagan or his administration, there were 13 pieces that moved in the opposite direction.⁹

And as far as the general campaign goes, we found a similar pattern: When looking at more than 800 campaign and presidency pieces during

8. William C. Adams, “Recent Fables about Ronald Reagan,” *Public Opinion*, October/November 1984, pp. 6–9.

9. Michael J. Robinson, Maura Clancey, and Lisa Grand, “With Friends Like These . . .,” *Public Opinion*, June/July 1983, pp. 2–3.

September, October, and the first week in November, Reagan was treated more negatively in *absolute* levels than anybody else, even George Bush. Whether one classifies pieces as merely bad news or, more tellingly, as bad press, it is obvious that Reagan got his share of downside news coverage (see Table 1).

But, for us, the most important part of the Teflon theory is the last—that the “press coverage” about Reagan had no effect; or more precisely, had less effect than press coverage had on other politicians or candidates. Well, then, is it so? Or, as a social scientist would ask, is there any statistical relationship between Reagan’s press, however defined, and Reagan’s *image*, however defined? And, is the *level* of relationship unique to Ronald Reagan? Did the *spin* that the networks presented—did the subjective position of the campaign coverage—effect Reagan’s popularity?

A Quick Note on Methodology

Let me make three points, admissions really, about our methodology. First, our “press” measure (we call it “spin”) is mostly based on words, not pictures, a fact that led NBC’s Ken Bode once to label our study “television news research for the blind.” And, in fact, Doris Graber’s research, included in this volume, suggests that the pictures presented by the networks during the campaign offered a different image of the candidates than that presented by text alone. So, our assessment of “spin” comes from a heavy reliance on text instead of video.

Second, our particular measure of “press” focuses on what the journalists said about the candidates qualities as a *leader*, not about how

TABLE 1
Number of “Bad News” and “Bad Press” Pieces for Each
of the “Final Four” National Candidates, September 3
through November 5, 1985

	Reagan	Mondale	Bush	Ferraro
“Bad news” pieces	34	8	4	19
“Bad press” pieces	<u>81</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	115	21	19	25

Note: These evaluations deal with all aspects of each candidate except his or her standing in the race.

well the candidate was doing in the race at that time. The emphasis here is on *person*, not on *polls*.

Third, most campaign news coverage (74 percent of total news time) does not reach the level of good press or bad press; most pieces are neutral about the candidate or sufficiently vague as to be ambiguous. That fact alone might help us understand why the networks don't have much independent impact and would certainly help us beat back any notions that network news is wild-eyed or out of control. Nonetheless, all this objectivity does mean that much of the news on evening television doesn't fit into our research schemes very neatly—doesn't have any measurable "spin."

We do believe in our spin measure, however. And we also think that looking at subjective assessments by the reporters is the best way we know of to get at the *independent* effect of press coverage on public perceptions. Yet, we readily acknowledge limitations. Were Churchill still alive, he might wish to add our spin measures to his now legendary list of laws and sausage—commodities we need or want, but which ought not be publicly viewed in the making.

Reagan as Least Teflon-Coated

Whatever the problems with our measure, we did apply it consistently to the "final four" candidates. And, no matter which measure of public support we used—in fact, no matter which way we redefined "press"¹⁰—Reagan actually showed more vulnerability to his press measure, week by week, than any of the other three candidates. Using Patrick Caddell's favorability scores and our press measure, that correlation was just slightly greater than +.3. To some degree, when Reagan's press was bad, he lost support; when his press was good, he gained a little. And, when compared with Mondale, Ferraro, or Bush, Reagan's popularity appears to have been most likely to rise and fall as a function of network news "spin."

Now let's make three things perfectly clear. First, although there is more change associated with Reagan's "spin" press score than for the other three candidates in the field, there wasn't much change to explain, not in terms of favorability at any rate. The Caddell survey shows Reagan's favorability never higher than 66 percent, never lower than 62 percent in over 2 months' time. Second, "spin" is often wrapped in

10. Opinion readings for Bush and Ferraro are even more ad hoc than for Reagan and Mondale.

“reality,” so we have not—cannot—make any definitive statements that “reality” caused X amount of change, while subjectivity caused Y amount of change.

Third, the Caddell measure is not a day-by-day, or week-by-week measure, even for Reagan. This is a gerry-built set of correlation coefficients based on the best evidence we have as to “image” and to “press.” In graduate school we learn as catechism that correlation is not causality. In this instance, correlation may not even be correlation. Even so, *nothing* in these empirical findings suggests that Reagan was (or is) uniquely impervious to “bad press,” let alone bad news or “reality.” And the “historical” findings show the same thing.

Consider, first, the “first debate.” Reagan, according to data provided by DMI, lost 6 points of his 18-point lead over Mondale during the three days following the debate. That represented the largest drop-off in presidential debate history.¹¹ In fact, in one of the very few instances during the entire campaign in which network news spin seemed really to have mattered—after the first debate—it was *Reagan* who bore the brunt of the media-based impact. Had it not been for evening news spin, Reagan might have tied—or “won”—the first debate, at least in the public’s collective mind.¹²

Thinking back to 1984, one might ask why Reagan did suffer from a slightly greater correlation between press and image than his rivals or running mate. My guess is the answer involves volume and salience. Reagan got so much more coverage than the rest of the candidates that there was more penetration possible, little as it was. As for salience, my guess is that the electorate was just more willing to listen to press “spin” about Reagan than about Mondale.¹³ The electorate certainly seemed more interested in everything else associated with Reagan than with his opponent; why not “press” as well?

Putting it all together, Axiom 1 falls flat. Granted, Reagan didn’t suffer all that much as a consequence of network news spin in Campaign

11. Even Gerald Ford lost nothing but momentum following his disastrous second debate with Jimmy Carter. And Gallup shows only a 3-point shift in the lead after Nixon lost his first debate with Kennedy.
12. The first wave of public reaction, as measured by ABC, had Reagan leading, just barely, on the “Who won?” question. The “last poll,” conducted by CBS 2 days later, had Reagan behind on the “Who won?” question by 49 points.
13. Political communications research does suggest that salient topics are more likely to produce attention to news themes and agendas, though not necessarily more opinion change. See Lutz Erbring, Edie N. Goldenberg, and Arthur H. Miller, “Front-Page News and Real-World Cues: A New Look at Agenda-Setting by the Media,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1980): 16–49.

'84. But he suffered at least as much as the rest of the nominees of autumn—maybe more than the rest. There isn't much truth to the Teflon thesis, at least not during Reagan's first term and reelection bid. But the Teflon theory seems to have a Teflon coating of its own. People who believe Reagan had in his first term a magical shield seem themselves to be somewhat impervious to the facts of the case.

AXIOM 2. "Press" does most to the "least well known": The strange cases of Bush and Ferraro

It makes perfectly good sense to believe that news coverage, spin or otherwise, will have more effect on those leaders who are least well known, or newest, in the race. This is, of course, our second axiom, and it's a thesis with research to back it up.¹⁴ But the press odysseys of Bush and Ferraro during September, October, and November suggest that news themes do not necessarily matter most for those the public knows least.

George Bush: The Real Teflon Candidate

Both Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale reached the autumn of 1984 as very old news items—known commodities, to say the minimum. Geraldine Ferraro and George Bush were comparatively unknown in 1984. A recent Gallup survey conducted for the Times Mirror Corporation indicates, in fact, that even now, 3 out of every 10 Americans cannot identify Bush and Ferraro when shown their respective publicity photos.¹⁵

Less salient, less well known, both Bush and Ferraro *should* have been more vulnerable to news spin than their running mates. But neither was more vulnerable. Both proved *less* vulnerable in fact.

I could just as easily start with Ferraro, the lady, as with Bush, the gentleman. But out of deference to feminist values, let's not have "ladies first." Instead, let's begin with the "gentleman," George Bush. As it happens, however, Bush is painted a gentleman only in my copy. Bush was never pictured as a gentleman on network evening news during the campaign. All three networks covered Bush as something else, a cross between a wimp and a boor.

My research with Margaret Sheehan from the 1980 campaign shows

14. Thomas Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President* (New York: Praeger, 1980), esp. chap. 12.

15. Times Mirror Corporation, "Free Press, Free People Survey," July 1985.

that Bush's network news honeymoon ended years ago—in late January of 1980 to be precise. Press spin went negative about Bush as soon as he foolishly and impetuously described himself to the media as the “Big Mo” candidate following his victory in the Iowa caucuses. His press got worse that summer when Bush not only accepted Reagan's offer to run for vice-president but also insisted to reporters that he'd never really said no before the asking. With at least eight instances of Bush's having publicly said no early on—eight instances on videotape, no less—Bush's press at the 1980 Republican convention took on at times a tone best described as vaudevillian.¹⁶

In 1984 Bush's network “press” was even worse. Nineteen eighty-four was the third consecutive presidential campaign in which I have systematically monitored evening news. And my mind is made up: On a percentage basis, Bush received in this general campaign the worst press ever endured on network television by a national candidate.

How bad was it? Although 60 percent of his news time was classified as neither good nor bad press, the remaining 40 percent of it was all bad press or bad news.

There were 8 pieces about Bush's rude behavior and profanity. And 3 more concerning Barbara Bush's comment that Geraldine Ferraro was a rich bitch. There were 12 stories about Bush's outrageous claim during his debate with Ferraro that the Democrats had said the 253 marines who had been killed in the Beirut Massacre of 1983 had died in shame. Neither Ferraro nor Mondale had ever said the marines murdered in Beirut had died in shame.

The spin in Bush's soft news coverage was always negative. In mid-September NBC's John Severson characterized Bush as hostile. In early November, in a preelection wrap-up on Bush, Carole Simpson did something I think may have been unprecedented on evening news—a lengthy piece about all the bad press Bush had been getting in the news media! Simpson presented and discussed the “Doonesbury” series in which Bush had locked his manhood away in a blind trust. She quoted George Will on how Bush had already lost the early 1988 campaign. Then Simpson quoted at length from a *Washington Post* editorial that described Bush as “the Cliff Barnes of American politics— *blustering, opportunistic, craven, and hopelessly ineffective* all at once” (italics mine). Simpson ended by assessing all the damage this kind of reporting might be having.

What about all this bad press? What about Bush as Cliff Barnes? Blustering? Probably. Opportunistic? Perhaps. Craven? Doubtful. But ineffective? No chance. The networks eventually helped to persuade me

16. Robinson and Sheehan, *Over the Wire*, esp. chap. 5.

that Bush isn't so hot. But they failed to persuade too many other viewers. In the end, Bush was effective.

The correlation between Bush's spin score (the worst ever recorded) and his favorability score was about half the size it had been for Reagan. Using our admittedly crude measures of spin and favorability, we found that Bush's press explains less than 5 percent of the change in Bush's overall image. And that's *statistical* explanation, which in this case may be more of an artifact than a meaningful figure. What's more, there is precious little real-world evidence that Bush's egregiously bad press had any effect on his standing or his image.

The percentage of people nationwide supporting Bush for vice-president, as opposed to Ferraro, went up during the general campaign.¹⁷ In August the figure was 56 percent, in September it was 63 percent. In October it was 64 percent. Favorability shows much the same thing. Although there was a modest increase over time in the percentage of people feeling unfavorable toward Bush, the clearer pattern is ever upward toward favorability. Starting the year with a meager 28 percent favorable, a reflection mostly of his invisibility, Bush peaked just in time for the November vote, at 51 percent favorable (see Figure 1).

Overall, Bush's line of favorability looks very much like the path of an empty jumbo airliner taking off smoothly in good weather (see Figure 1). But then look at his press scores for the 10 weeks during which we measured them. His bad press totals jump up with each passing month, which means, of course, the press score was plummeting downward. So, while his image was taking off, his press was experiencing windshear.

Any pundit worth his or her honorarium can reconcile this seemingly perverse public response. It's really not Bush at all; it's his boss doing all this *for* him. Bush, in this interpretation, is the "mushroom candidate," the one who can thrive in the deep and protective shade that Reagan's large political shadow produces. Maybe so. But if a vice-president's image is so fully determined by his boss, and so poorly explained by his own network press, then the power of network news *reporting* seems almost pathetically weak. In fact, if George Bush can be called the Cliff Barnes of American politics in the *Washington Post*, have that moniker applied to him literally on the evening news, and still continue to increase his favorability quotient, one also has to ask a final question: Who was the *real* Teflon Republican in 1984? Was it the stylish Ronald Reagan or the boorish George Bush?

Politically speaking, Geraldine Ferraro was Bush's opposite. But in terms of network news—at least during the *general campaign*—Ferraro was Bush's obverse. It goes too far to say Ferraro's press was positive; her

17. The NBC News poll, September 12 and October 22.

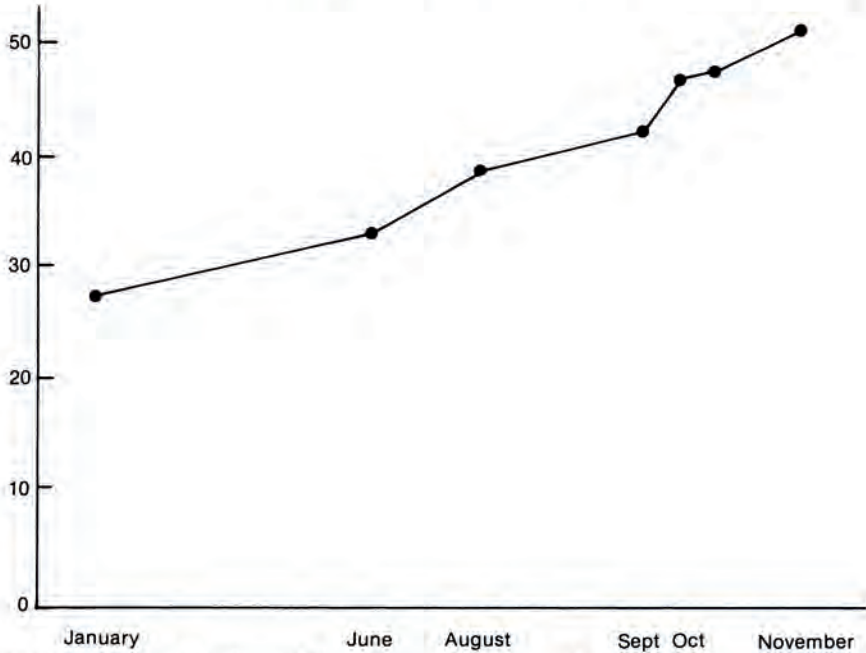


FIGURE 1. Bush's favorability score (percentage favorable). From CBS/New York Times poll figures.

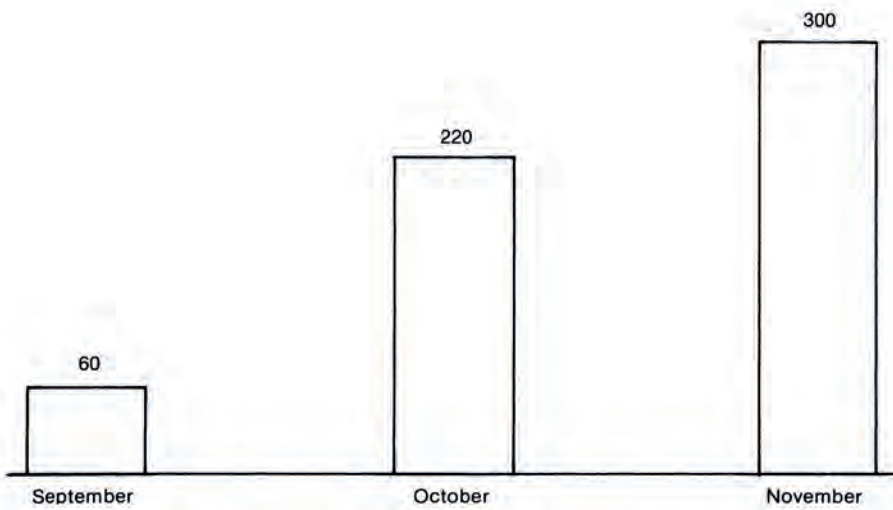


FIGURE 2. Bush's average "bad press" per week in news seconds, September, October, and November.

spin score for the months of September, October, and November was a paltry +4. But that means, using our scale, that she was by election day 44 press points ahead of Bush,¹⁸ who finished the campaign at a chilly -40.

There were even a few instances on evening news when Ferraro got honest-to-goodness favorable press, something quite rare in network campaign reporting. There was a piece in which Roger Mudd gave her fairly good marks for coordinating her message with Mondale. And, also on NBC, there was commentary in which John Chancellor gave Ferraro the nicest verbal valentine any candidate would enjoy all year. Chancellor told us all that Ferraro had emerged as a “poised and self-assured candidate, growing in campaign skills everyday . . . well organized . . . increasingly effective . . . effective as a fundraiser” too. And Chancellor would engage in something almost never practiced in network campaign journalism—hyperbole that is *positive*. “You don’t hear,” concluded Chancellor, “the phrase the weaker sex very often these days. Geraldine Ferraro may have buried that old phrase forever.” Compare that with the “Cliff Barnes” labeling given George Bush.

But this time the tie between press and public image was other than weak. It was practically macabre. The newest candidate in the field by far—a candidate about whom only 7 percent could express any opinion in April—would do worse politically when her press improved, better when her press got worse.

So it wasn’t just that Ferraro shared the same nonrelationship between press and image. Her story is unique: She was the only one of the “final four” to have achieved a distinctly negative correlation between her press and her image: -.33. Even Bush’s press-opinion relationship was less bizarre than that.

Our data show that Ferraro’s press was its best in the last 10 days of the campaign. Yet the Wirthlin thermometer data showed Ferraro doing pretty badly in the last week of the campaign. Her final thermometer reading on November 5 was 47, 5 points lower than it had been on Labor Day and down 7 points from its high point, following the vice-presidential debate.

The CBS/*New York Times* poll indicates the same basic pattern: Ferraro’s favorability percentage declined 5 points during the last 2 weeks of the campaign, when our measures for her press spin were at their highest.¹⁹ During September, October, and November, Ferraro turned out to be the kaleidoscope candidate. Viewers looked into their

18. Remember, our findings do not include August, Ferraro’s worst month of news and “press.”

19. The CBS/*New York Times* poll.

television sets and seemingly saw patterns that were inside out, if not upside down, compared with the fractured bits of color behind the tube.

So, in the end, what's a political scientist to conclude about the power of network campaign reporting, even when the candidates are comparatively unknown? Were we the only media analysts ever to find so weak a relationship between reporting and opinion? I'd almost be willing to start over in 1988 and keep quiet for the time being.

But the fact is, we're not the first team of political scientists to find very weak links between press and public opinion. Patterson and McClure, in *The Unseeing Eye*, also found that network news fails pretty badly in shifting candidate images during a general campaign.²⁰ There are lots of serious studies that show more effect,²¹ but none of that comes through with Bush or Ferraro.

Reality, of course, does have an effect. When Ferraro had to admit her taxes were really underpaid and her financial statements to the Congress really were questionable, her image did change; and real events can count too, especially if dramatic: When, during the campaign, the American embassy annex was blown up in Beirut, Reagan lost some support. But once one gets down to something as ephemeral as press—how a story is played, which visuals are selected, whether innuendo is included, if commentary takes place—the impact can be minimal, even with politicians who are relative unknowns.

AXIOM 3. *The “press” comes first, opinion then follows: Ferraro, Hart, and compensatory journalism*

Ferraro's case calls into question a third axiom, that press precedes opinion—that first the news changes and then the polls follow in turn. Yet Ferraro is only one of several candidates whose campaign history implies that public opinion actually determines a candidate's press. In the light of 1984 I might even be willing to argue that, for many candidates, public opinion influences “press” more than press influences public opinion.

At one level, admittedly superficial, the public-to-press connection is practically undeniable. Our year-long survey of CBS evening news back in 1980 indicates that the best single predictor as to who gets how

20. Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure, *The Unseeing Eye: The Myth of Television Power in National Politics* (New York: Putnam, 1976).

21. One of the best has been coauthored by my partner in this volume, Doris Graber. See *Media Agenda-Setting in a Presidential Election: Issues, Images and Interest* (New York: Praeger, 1981). The other authors are David Weaver, Maxwell McCombs, and Chaim Eyal.

much coverage in the early campaign is standing in the polls. William Adams documents the same basic pattern for the early campaign in Campaign '84. Among the six formally announced candidates who campaigned throughout 1983 for the Democratic nomination, the rank-order correlation between standing in the Gallup poll (December 1982) and time on evening news throughout 1983 was unity—that is, perfect correlation.²² Despite talk of a king-making press corps, it is perfectly clear that the networks follow “the polls” almost slavishly (objectively?) in deciding who gets how much air time. In this respect, there is no question but that polls cause press.

What I am suggesting goes beyond that simple truth. I think, in view of 1984, that one can reasonably maintain that how one is doing in the public mind (the polls) has a substantial impact on press “spin” and a measured effect on the news agenda. That’s mostly what the negative correlation between spin and image is all about in Ferraro’s campaign. It’s not that the public spitefully rejected a network line about Ferraro being better than Bush. It’s much more that the public had pushed Ferraro so far back in the polls, the networks decided it might be time to give up criticizing Ferraro, or, at the least, move off the more adversarial approach.

What happened to Ferraro (and to Bush) is a frequent pattern in the national media. Let’s consider the press history of Gary Hart in 1984. Hart’s history is as good as Ferraro’s in showing that the polls drive press at least as efficiently (and rapidly) as press drives polls.

Hart’s case is a special one in 1984, the only real instance in which network news power shines through. Gary Hart, in fact, represents the single greatest problem for me when arguing that spin and press rarely make much of a difference. But, at least at the outset, it was opinion causing press, not the other way around.

To begin, Hart’s polls in December explain why it was he was getting no coverage in January. Throughout January, when only 3 percent of the Democratic electorate was supporting him for the nomination, Hart was able to attract fewer than a dozen mentions (not stories, but mentions) on network evening news. No polls meant no press. But once his support score had materialized—or seemed to have materialized, in Iowa—his share of the news hole increased measurably.²³ Again, “public opinion” was shaping press, quite forcefully in fact.

Then, of course, the arrow of causation turned around. The press was moving and the public was following. In February Hart’s mentions

22. William C. Adams, “Media Coverage of Campaign '84: A Preliminary Report,” *Public Opinion*, April/May 1984, pp. 9–13.

23. Adams, “Media Coverage.”

on evening news were three times what they had been in January. News mentions in March were three times what they had been the month before.²⁴

Right after New Hampshire, the public followed the “news” and the “spin” with almost reckless abandon, moving the polls for nomination preference more dramatically in 2 weeks than they had ever been moved before. Chalk one up for the press-to-opinion school of thought. But then causation seemed to shift again—back to a situation in which polls changed “press.”

As Hart’s support climbed, network news correspondents like ABC’s Jack Smith and Bruce Morton began reporting that Hart had been at times ineffective, ambitious, cliché-ridden, lacking in charm, and truth to tell, not so new after all. Roger Mudd would imply in a now-legendary interview that Hart was a fraud, asking Hart why Americans have come to see politicians as phonies.

There is no question that Hart’s polls in early March went way up; press spin in mid March went way down. But was it opinion that caused the “press change?” Or reality? Or events? Or something else? Around Super Tuesday time, I’d say it was the polls. There were no events—all the spin was about things that had happened years before—Hart’s changes in name, religion, hairstyle, and so on. And the network correspondents came close to acknowledging that the polls and shifting public opinion were the driving force.

Roger Mudd, defending his hard-nosed interview with Hart on Super Tuesday night, told the *Washington Post* that he didn’t care if the public liked what he had done or not; Mudd felt the public needed to know how the newcomer Hart would handle pressure.²⁵ Bruce Morton began his bad press piece about Gary Hart with the implicit message that the polls were making this kind of report necessary. Morton led off by noting that “Gary Hart’s the hottest political property around—at least this week.” And then Morton warned us that Hart wasn’t really so young, wasn’t so new-politics, wasn’t so good at getting his new ideas “as far as the Senate floor.”

We’d seen all this before, of course, most vividly with Teddy Kennedy in 1979, after he announced his candidacy and after his huge lead over Carter for the nomination was accepted as fact. Having seen the state of public opinion, news organizations reacted by compensating for the widely shifting polls.

“Compensatory journalism” has always been a press norm. In fact

24. These figures were obtained from the *Vanderbilt Television News Index and Abstracts* for January, February, and March 1984.

25. Cited in Tom Shales, “What Mudd Slung,” *Washington Post*, March 15, 1984.

compensation comes in three or four easily recognizable formats. Surprise victors, for example, are usually entitled to extra press; emerging front-runners usually merit increasingly tougher press; incumbents are typically denied benefit of the doubt by reporters who evaluate them. Fact is, campaign news organizations have a whole unwritten set of practices that are tied quite tightly to public opinion.

Some press critics see compensatory journalism as commercialism, a consequence of the need to titillate.²⁶ I see compensatory journalism mostly as more a consequence of cynicism and of watchdoggery. But whatever the motivation for compensatory journalism, whatever its justification, the important thing to remember is that compensatory journalism explains why, in a presidential campaign, the public often has more immediate impact on the press than the press has on public opinion.

What this means for candidates isn't completely obvious. What it means for us is that Axiom 3 needs to be held under suspicion. Gary Hart and Geraldine Ferraro, in the end, teach us an important lesson about network news power: The press cares lots more about what the public is thinking than the public cares about the messenger, or the medium.

AXIOM 4. *The news media (networks) set the agenda*

It is almost catechism now in mass media research: The news media may not be effective in telling us what to think, but are exceptionally good at telling us what to think about. Ever since Bernard Cohen penned that felicitous thesis, the research has been fast and frequent. Using high-powered correlational analyses,²⁷ or in some instances experimental designs,²⁸ political science and mass communications departments have demonstrated that the news media do have the capacity to shift public concerns in a direction in keeping with their own agenda. Doris Graber has done some of the best statistical research into the agenda-setting theory of the news media. She finds, like most others, that the news media can play a major role in agenda setting.²⁹

Agenda-setting theory is too important and too well-documented to

26. Charlie Peters offers the most blatant confession. See "Tilting at Windmills," *Washington Post*, February 29, 1985.

27. See Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs, *The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda Setting Function of the Press* (St. Paul: West, 1977).

28. Shanto Iyengar, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder, "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Political Consequences of Television News Programs," *American Political Science Review*, 76 (1982), 848-854.

29. David Weaver et al., *Media Agenda-Setting*.

be dismissed or disdained. And given that network news coverage of Middle East terrorism during the TWA hostage crisis in Beirut made *Shiite* a household word—albeit a dirty household word—in 1985, it makes very little sense to argue that news has no agenda-setting power. But in the light of the 1984 data we've collected or borrowed, a little revisionism seems warranted here as well.

I have two problems with agenda-setting theory. First, it typically neglects what *leaders* are saying to the press and, hence, to *their* publics. Professor Graber has assiduously warned that most agenda-setting research does have a missing link—the extent to which candidates influence news agendas. Conventional thinking is less cautious. But if the link between leaders and public opinion is stronger than the link between press and opinion, it makes more sense to see leaders as the real agenda setters. Leaders set the agenda for the press and then the press moves that agenda on toward the public as a matter of course.

Second, I have problems with the confusion between the media agenda and the *real* agenda—those honest-to-goodness issues that are neither a figment of editorial discretion nor a ploy by candidates to define the issues in their self-interested way. But in 1984 I even have some difficulty finding the basic link—the typically close tie (high correlation) between press agendas and public agendas.

During the fall campaign Maura Clancey and I classified all campaign and presidency pieces on the basis of principal issue involved. Then we took from Pat Caddell's polls the list of public concerns—what the people told Caddell about the issues that were most on their minds on election eve. We then checked for the level of overlap between the media's agenda and the public's.

There are problems with this approach. Some of them are ours; some of the problems belong to the news media. For example, just under 60 percent of the campaign-related reports had no issue content,³⁰ hence no palpable issue agenda. So the basic idea that networks present much of an issue agenda is a bit hypothetical. What's more, we did all this as something of an afterthought; Caddell's categories and ours are not identical. Unlike most agenda-setting research, we can't talk about the precise correlation between news agendas and public concerns; we can talk only loosely about overlap.

But there isn't that much overlap to talk about. Checking over the top 10 issues on evening news and the top 10 issues in public opinion, it's

30. In order for a piece to be considered an issues piece, at least two sentences about a substantive policy dispute had to appear in the story.

fairly clear that the lists are, at best, distantly related to one another (see Table 2).

Five of the top 10 issues on evening news don't even make the public rankings! Religion, abortion, Lebanon, defense policies, U.S.–Soviet relations, were big in the news, not so big in the public's mind. And the five that make both rankings do not always show a tight relationship one to the next. The best (or worst) example must be unemployment, which was the public's number-one concern and was tied for tenth place on the media's list. In percentages the public was eight times as likely to concern itself with unemployment as the networks were to cover the issue. Equally telling is public lack of interest in U.S.–Soviet relations. Although we don't know for sure what constitutes Caddell's category of U.S.–Soviet relations, we had the same label in our study. On evening news that category ranked as issue number one. In fact, U.S.–Soviet relations got almost twice as much coverage as the next most fully covered issue. Yet only 1 percent of Caddell's respondents considered U.S.–Soviet relations our most important problem.

Not surprisingly, the exotic issues of "religion in politics" and "abortion policy" mattered more to the media (or to the candidates) than to the general public. Nor is it surprising that the public just didn't care that everybody else—candidates and the media—was letting unemployment slide as an issue. For the electorate, unemployment was the number-one issue for sure.

Doris Graber noted a similar pattern in 1976, when she discovered that obtrusive issues have a life of their own, outside the media's

TABLE 2
Two Issue Agencies: Network News versus Public Opinion

<i>Top 10 Issues on Evening News</i>	<i>Top 10 Issues in Caddell Survey</i>
1. U.S.–Soviet relations	1. Unemployment
2. Tax policy	2. General economy
3. Religion in politics	3. Arms control
4. "Lebanon"	4. Deficits
5. Deficits	5. Taxes
6. Nuclear arms policy	6. Poverty
7. Defense policies	7. Foreign affairs
8. Social security policy	8. Threat of war
9. Abortion policy	9. The elderly
10. Unemployment issues	10. Size of government

agenda.³¹ Personally, I'd call unemployment part of the *perennial* agenda—those basic issues that cut deeply enough that news agendas are practically irrelevant to their existence. Perennial agendas almost always matter the most, media or no.

There is a corollary to agenda-setting theory, one holding that press agendas do more to shape *images* than public concerns.³² If so, that thesis, as I understand it, fares even worse in 1984 than the original theory.

Table 3 presents the list of campaign issues receiving the most attention on evening news. Campaign issues deal with candidate *behavior*, not with substantive proposals for public policy. And as Table 3 clearly implies, the person who got his candidate's wages from the evening news campaign issues agenda would have had to come away thinking that Bush and Reagan were jerks. Nine out of the top 10 most fully covered campaign issues were bad news issues for the Republicans.

Nine out of 10 of the most heavily covered campaign issues imply either that Reagan and Bush were not very good at getting the job done or that Reagan and Bush wouldn't be the kind of guys you'd want in power. Yet, Richard Wirthlin's data show clearly that Reagan's single greatest asset was the public's perception that he could get the job done. And the third greatest asset for the GOP was public support for the kind of leadership that ticket would provide.

What comes through, then, is that the press did not much influence

TABLE 3
Campaign Issues Receiving Most Attention on Evening News

1. Beirut failures (as a campaign issue)
2. Reagan's age as a potential problem
3. Bush's "shame" remark about the marine deaths in Beirut
4. Reagan's lack of availability to the campaign press corps
5. CIA-distributed manual to the <i>contras</i> in Nicaragua defining assassination of Sandinistas as an acceptable policy
6. Ferraro vs. Archbishop O'Connor in their dispute about abortion policy
7. Reagan's ties to fundamentalist religious leaders
8. Reagan's ties to hecklers who followed Mondale and Ferraro
9. Bush's rude campaign behavior ("kick ass" included)
10. Events associated with the criminal legal problems of Roy Donovan, Reagan's secretary of labor

31. David Weaver et al., *Media Agenda-Setting*.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

the public agenda, substantively or politically. The news media may have, in fact, "wasted" its chance by focusing on the usual, and tired, campaign agenda. Who really cares whether the incumbent makes himself available to the press?

I'll grant one to the agenda-setting theorists. To a degree that surprised everybody in my shop, the networks did go off a bit in deciding what the news agenda would be. Tom Patterson had made us aware that networks do like to avoid "diffuse issues" and prefer "clear-cut issues," the most sensational issues.³³ But this time out, we found evidence that the networks were taking more liberties with the "substance agenda" than we had expected.

Maura Clancey's comparison between Reagan's campaign speeches and network coverage of his campaign, for example, indicates that the networks were behaving quite independently in deciding how Reagan should be substantively defined. So, for example, in covering Reagan, the networks gave four times as much attention to U.S. – Soviet relations as to tax policy, even though in "life" Reagan gave four times as much attention to tax policy as to Russo – American relations.³⁴ But the public let that go past them too. So, whether we consider the substance agenda on evening news, or the campaign issues agenda on evening news, 1984 was a bad year for agenda-setting theory.

Most political scientists tend to feel that the networks have a direct, causal relationship with public concerns. But 1984 leads me to believe that the relationship is as likely to be casual as it is causal.

Why So Much Slippage?

Were it not for Gary Hart, I'd almost be willing to take on the grand axiom: that network journalism has much independent effect on presidential preferences and voting. Some of the most unlikely of candidates wound up looking Teflon coated—impervious to campaign news spin—so the big question must be "why so much slippage?" in 1984—slippage between press and public opinion.

In one of her most recent books, Doris Graber makes a point that applies not just to the 1984 campaign, and not just to the 1976 campaign

33. For his most recent statement on network news affinity for redefining candidate issue agendas, see Thomas Patterson and Richard Davis, "The Media Campaign: Struggle for the Agenda," in Nelson, ed., *Elections of 1984*, chap. 4.

34. Clancey used the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* as a complete record of all Reagan's statements during the fall.

she was studying at the time.³⁵ The point *always* pertains: Publics do not listen, watch, or read very closely, especially to news about politics. So, axiomatically, if there is no communication, there is no influence.

Throughout 1984 we found evidence that it wasn't merely press that failed to stick. News, *real* news, slipped away as well. In April the Media Analysis Project conducted a national telephone survey to gauge whether "the news" was getting through about the early campaign. The only thing getting through to even half of the electorate was that Hart had won the New Hampshire primary, but 45 percent of our sample didn't even know that. Almost two-thirds did not know that Gary Hart was the Democratic candidate who had shortened his name. And in the midst of all the "Meesegate" coverage last spring, almost two-thirds could not give us an answer as to why White House adviser Ed Meese had been in the news lately.³⁶

Keeter and Zukin, in their New Jersey studies, make the same point about 1980. Despite all the network hype for John Anderson in the 2 weeks following his second-place showings in Vermont and Massachusetts, half the electorate still could not think of Anderson's name when asked who was running for the Republican nomination.³⁷ Slippage is a continuing story.

But is there anything to say about the 1984 fall campaign that might explain why public opinion seemed so weakly linked to news and to "press"? Assuming that the Teflon was thicker this time around than usual, I'd suggest three separate approaches that might help us at least to understand the 1984 campaign. Call the first approach *situational*, the second *textual*, and the last *developmental*.

Situational factors. These interpretations emphasize the unique nature of *this* campaign, the special "environment" in which reporters and candidates operated in 1984. At the top of the pile of situational theories sits, of course, "the Reagan thesis," the one we've been discussing all along.

I'll spare everybody one last recitation of that theory. It has its advocates and utility. But as I've tried to show, it has its limitations as well.

There are two other "environmental" interpretations worth men-

35. Doris Graber, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide* (New York: Longman, 1984).

36. Michael J. Robinson and Maura Clancey, "Teflon Politics," *Public Opinion*, April/May 1984, pp. 14-18.

37. Scott Keeter and Cliff Zukin, *Uninformed Choice: The Failure of the New Presidential Nominating System* (New York: Praeger), 1983, p. 68.

tioning about 1984. The first is a "spatial" interpretation, so labeled by political scientists to symbolize the ideological gap (space) between the nominees. The thesis is simple enough: the broader the perceived space between the candidates, the less likely it is that "press" will affect many voters.

I used this approach in 1980, suggesting that, with a right-wing Republican like Reagan opposing a traditional Democrat like Carter, press issues like "Billygate" would carry little weight with the public.³⁸ In 1984 the "spatial" approach should have been every bit as useful, with Reagan just about as conservative as ever, and with Mondale campaigning slightly to the left of Carter. A space that large should have been wide enough to neutralize a hundred slurs by Sam Donaldson or a C5's worth of negative innuendo.

Spatial theory has its strengths. But spatial theory suffers from another important truth: Richard Wirthlin's postelection polls indicate that only a quarter of the electorate voted for Reagan or for Mondale with justification having directly to do with issues.³⁹ So I think issue space is not a great explanation for all the slippage in 1984.

My personal preference among the situational factors is the third, which centers on the nature of the *times*, as opposed to the nature of the candidates or the campaign. The year 1984 was a good news year, one of the best news years in recent memory. But, as always, it was a bad news year for candidates on the evening news, especially for the incumbents.

My guess is that when the news is good—what with our economy recovering, our Olympians soaring, our invasions succeeding—bad press means almost nothing, regardless of target. Call this the news vs. noise interpretation of Teflon politics.

Back in 1980, bad press for Carter reinforced bad news about everything else. In 1984 antiincumbency bias contradicted the news, if not reality. Good news should always neutralize bad press.

Were we able to measure all this effectively, I'd suspect that bad press and bad news interact, producing a political multiplier effect. No doubt Jimmy Carter believes that news—press multiplication does take place. Carter, notwithstanding, if there is any condition that lends itself to "Teflon politics" it is one in which the "news" per se and noise from the reporters contradict each other.

Obviously, I like this interpretation. At least it's novel. But the "news vs. noise" thesis leads to two other political corollaries that make

38. Robinson, "The Mass Media in 1980."

39. "Moving Right Along? Campaign '84's Lessons for 1988: An Interview with Peter Hart and Richard Wirthlin," *Public Opinion*, December/January 1985, p. 10.

sense. First, “news vs. noise” implies directly that incumbents only need “good news,” not “good press.” Even small doses of good news are more than sufficient antidote for “bad press.”

Second, “news vs. noise” also implies that Carter and Reagan aren’t so different after all—that “candidate” as a factor is a weak sister to real news, and, of course, reality. According to Gallup, the public *liked* Carter to the end, but that was about as inconsequential for Carter in 1980 as Reagan’s bad press was for him in 1984.

Textual approaches. The second school emphasizes rhetoric and text. The focus lies with what the networks and national press “say,” or, in 1984, *didn’t* say about the campaign. To some degree my work is “textual” in nature, but it pales alongside the thinking of this election’s most outrageous “textualist.”

Rolling Stone’s William Greider sees 1984 not simply as a network news failure but as something approaching a network news cabal.⁴⁰ Greider argues that ABC’s Roone Arledge was so obsessed to hype his ratings for the Olympic games, he shifted news coverage to the sorts of things he felt would increase interest in the Olympics—news and “infotainment” about the “new patriotism,” and so on. Arledge didn’t care if this helped Reagan, as long as it helped ABC. And, as television’s pace-setting hermaphrodite—a man who was then half news, and half sports—Arledge was in a perfect position to shape the coverage of NBC and CBS as well, helping Reagan as they went merrily along.

As we used to say, “Oh, Wow.” But there is something in Greider’s essay that does ring true with me: that the stories and words on evening news were so sufficiently cautious (responsible?) that they were insufficient to do much political damage (good?) in a general campaign.

The Media Analysis Project did find a healthy amount of innuendo on evening news and even some instances in which the networks were playing games with the news agenda. But what didn’t we find?

- We didn’t find any “issue bias” that might have helped Mondale or hurt Reagan. Only 3 percent of the campaign news showed any bias, left or right, on substance issues, and that 3 percent was equally divided, liberal and conservative.
- We didn’t find any meaningful “nonverbal” communication. Over 90 percent of the stories had no “bias by voice inflection”; well over 95 percent of the campaign stories were “bias free” when it came to “visuals.”

40. William Greider, “Terms of Endearment: How the Media Came to Be All the President’s Men,” *Rolling Stone*, December 20, 1984, pp. 83–144.

- Nor did we find any “gonzo” journalism of any kind. Most of the “bad press” had to do with “manipulation” or “cynical” practices by the Republicans. Bob Simon presented a lengthy, two-part feature on the fundamental failures of this administration in the Middle East, but comprehensive, left alone, heavy-handed criticism was a rarity. It’s important to remember that three-fourths of the campaign news was, by our measure, neither good press nor bad press.⁴¹ Roone Arledge aside, one can make a good case based in text—a rhetorical case—that networks just didn’t say enough to make much of a difference in a race with two well-known commodities competing against each other.

Roger Mudd can make a claim for being the hardest-nosed campaign journalist around, what with “Teddy” in 1979 on CBS (a program that helped to erode the Ted Kennedy mystique) and his Gary Hart interview on NBC in 1984, the interview in which Mudd implied that Hart was a phony. But when asked why the networks never really went wild-eyed after Reagan for his stupidity, duplicity, and the like, Mudd replied that reporters can only do those kinds of stories so many times.⁴²

It’s silly to regard network campaign journalism as cowardly, and just as silly to consider it as totally objective. But network news has enough day-to-day worries just trying to keep the uninterested listening. Only every so often can it choose to risk openly offending partisans. Compared to what candidates and incumbents want said about them, network reporting borders on slander or sedition. But compared to what Peter Zenger envisioned, network journalism is banal.

Development theory. Recently I’ve been toying with a third interpretation about slippage. It involves change in the *electorate* and at least suggests that the 1984 election may be the first in a new series of elections, a series in which network news begins to lose some of the independent impact it has until recently possessed.

The developmental approach holds that news audiences, with time, acclimate themselves to the newest mode or genre of political communications. Hence, they become less vulnerable to the spin and noise, more focused on the “news.” It is possible, of course, to take the opposite tack: that as the radio news generation dies, the television news generations will be even more sensitive to network noise and spin. But there is also reason to think that an audience that has come of age with television will be more discriminating about the differences between “spin,” “news,” and “reality.”

41. Still, Reagan and Bush were three times as likely as the Democrats to elicit “spin.”

42. Remarks made at George Washington University symposium on the 1984 campaign, Washington, D.C., November 20, 1984.

My own research with political advertising suggests that paid television has lost some of its potency over the last three presidential elections.⁴³ It's worth considering whether the same thing might be happening with campaign journalism. I have no direct evidence for this "acclimational theory," but there is a little bit of modern media history to support it.

In the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt pioneered with radio, and the results were phenomenal—obviously "Radio Roosevelt" did have an independent political effect. After Roosevelt, however, politics dropped back to a more normal pattern. In the 1960s, Kennedy pioneered with presidential television, and the impact was, at first, major, but somewhat less over time.

The Roosevelt and Kennedy histories have to do with politicians themselves using the newest medium for political impact. The Roosevelt and Kennedy cases imply that leaders get much more out of a new weapon at the outset, when audiences are more naive about that weapon, and journalists are still trying to come to terms themselves with a modern mode of communications. I think the same logic can be applied to modern audiences and modern reporters. It is at least arguable that 1984 may be a point at which news audiences have grown sufficiently accustomed to news spin and agendas that they handle them more adroitly. It's possible that media savvy will cause the network news audience to move in the direction of its old-fashioned political values—values like standing by an incumbent, any reasonable incumbent at least.

I confess: Acclimational theory is thread-bare speculation. But it has its romantic appeal for the media middle-aged, those of us who grew up between radio and television.

Conclusions

The first conclusion is obvious: *Network news is not an imperial medium*. In this election the news reporters, whatever they were trying to say or do, lost out to incumbency, to demography, to personality in the competition for political influence. Gary Hart was about the only press "victory" in 1984. Take away the raw power of real news and information—take away reality—and the power of network journalism seems no more imperial a force than Her Majesty's navy, sufficient to defeat the Argentines perhaps, but less than a world-class power.

Clearly, not everyone will accept my conclusion. And I'd see at least

43. Michael J. Robinson, "The Power of the Primary Purse," *Public Opinion*, August/September 1984, pp. 49–51.

two ways to attack it. First, anybody could argue that my methods are specious or my correlations spurious. But the stronger rebuttal, I feel, lies with those who would say my focus is too narrow—too myopic to appreciate what network news means to the broader process of recruiting nominees or running campaigns. In short, candidate “opinion” is hardly everything.

I plead guilty to focusing so closely on voters and so little on “process.” But I’ll try to make amends by devoting my second conclusion to the broader issues of network news and presidential politics. My second conclusion is that even *when adopting the broader perspective, network journalism did not, in 1984, seem like a major force.*

Everyone believes—many have written—that simply because television news exists, things are quite different in presidential politics. Academics believe it;⁴⁴ politicians believe it;⁴⁵ television journalists believe it too. John Chancellor recently offered his own version of what I call “the existential theory” of network campaign news.⁴⁶

The basic tenets of that theory are what you’d expect. Because television news exists, “style” counts for much more; because network news exists, political organization counts for less; because network news exists, the wrong kind of people get nominated. And at least until 1984, because network news exists, incumbents don’t get much respect, let alone reelected.

I accept some of the “existentialist” thesis and some of the theory that extends from it—but now only to a point, and in view of 1984, to a much less certain point. Take the assumed importance of political “style,” the thing Lyndon Johnson hated most about network news—its capacity to make looks and voice and charm the sine qua non of presidential politics. But let us not forget: LBJ beat Barry Goldwater by almost 500 Electoral College votes. Yet, I think, any objective assessment would show that Goldwater looked better, sounded better, and handled television better than LBJ.

In 1984 a slightly nerdy Walter Mondale wound up beating a very sexy Gary Hart. On the basis of style alone, it was Jack Klugman over Tom Selleck. And in the fall a very vibrant, very attractive, and very engaging Geraldine Ferraro lost badly to George Bush, the most wooden vice-presidential nominee since John Sparkman.

44. Keeter and Zukin make an existential case that is quite reasonable.

45. Lyndon Johnson blamed television per se for the breakdown in urban-based coalition politics.

46. Remarks at the William Benton Broadcast Journalism Fellowship Conference, University of Chicago, March 1–2, 1985.

True, Reagan won, and Reagan was the “style” candidate. But that’s what we say in retrospect. Suppose that during the Kennedy years you’d been told about a 74-year-old man with weathered features, a man who wore brown suits, who told corny jokes about his age, who preached nineteenth-century values and eighteenth-century economics, and who acted like George M. Cohan on the Fourth of July. Would you have fretted that this was the coming of the quintessential “style” candidate McLuhanites had warned us about? In fact, the original “style” argument was that cool, youthful, subtle candidates would prevail. That’s not Reagan, and hasn’t been Reagan since he first came on the national political scene.

As for “organization,” yes, network news does have an existential effect. But in 1984 Mondale finally won his nomination, in the end, because of “party” and political organization. Reagan, too, won more states than he would have, had not the GOP proven itself again the party of organization. Things got so old-fashioned during the early campaign that black churches and labor unions were not only making news, they were influencing votes. Egad! When Governor Mario Cuomo embraced Mondale for the nomination before the New York primary, Cuomo even brought “endorsements” back as an effective tool in presidential politics.

But what about the *quality* of the nominees? Political scientists have been most concerned about the tendency of the network news system to give us defective, or inappropriate, nominees for president. Scott Keeter and Cliff Zukin speak for a class of political scientists who consider the “system”—primaries plus network news—to be the problem with the modern presidency.⁴⁷ The thesis is, simply, that network news so magnifies the importance of winning primaries and caucuses that it all but obliterates the importance of coalition building among professional politicians as a criterion for election. The often lamented conclusion is that if we only had a recruitment system like Britain, we’d do much better at getting the right person in office, or at least nominated for the job.

In 1983 the British “system” gave voters Michael Foote and Margaret Thatcher as choices; in 1984 the American system put up Reagan and Mondale. Which of us liberals would have preferred Foote over Fritz? Which of you conservatives would have chosen Thatcher over Reagan?

As I read presidential history, the old American system, pretelevision, put almost as much a premium on being a multistarred general as

47. Keeter and Zukin, *Uninformed Choice*, chap. 8.

being a professional politician. To my mind, no background is less appropriate for being president than having been a military leader.

The new system has elected but one real amateur, and that was Jimmy Carter. In 1984, the new system actually gave us two insiders, professionals both. So what's the beef?

Whether I look at the minitheories about image or the grand criticisms about the recruitment process, network news seems not to have done what it was expected to do; it didn't even do what it's *not* supposed to do. In fact, the only thing I feel certain about now is that, in 1984, all the candidates planned their campaigns with evening news foremost in their minds. But that is not network news power. It comes much closer to being what John Chancellor talks about—consequences of the mere existence of cameras and lights and 50 million evening viewers, most of whom will end up voting.

There is no disputing the fact that with each passing election, candidates worry more about evening news presentations. Nor is there any disputing that candidates spend more every year for consultants who are hired to manipulate the message and package the news. But, for me, that's about all there is not to dispute in evaluating the power of network news.

In 1984 the news media wound up mostly doing their job. So did the candidates. So too, I think, do most of the voters. Maybe that's why the political specialists who analyzed the race felt it was so *boring*. But even some of us Mondale Democrats would dispute that charge.

IV

Money and Politics



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7

Enough Is Too Much: Money and Competition in House Elections

Gary C. Jacobson

Most Americans think that too much money is spent on election campaigns. Nearly two-thirds of the people polled by Harris shortly after the 1982 midterm agreed that “excessive campaign spending in national elections is a very serious problem.”¹ The public’s favorite campaign reform, by a wide margin, was to cut spending.²

Many members of Congress concur; schemes to limit campaign spending have been a familiar component of campaign finance reform proposals for years. The ceilings on spending in House and Senate campaigns originally imposed by the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 ran afoul of the First Amendment. But the Supreme Court upheld limits on spending in publicly funded presidential campaigns, implying that spending restrictions could pass constitutional muster if combined with public subsidies for congressional candidates.³ So each periodic flurry of congressional attention to campaign finance regulation

1. U.S., Congress, House, Committee on House Administration, Task Force on Elections, *Campaign Finance Reform: Hearings*, 98th Cong., 1st sess., June 8, 16, 21, 23, July 8, August 22, 23, and October 12, 1983, p. 154.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
3. *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1, 96 S.Ct. 612, 46 L.Ed. 2nd 659 (1976).

includes proposals for imposing spending limits in return for public funds.

By now, the arguments for and against ceilings on campaign spending provoke a sense of *déjà vu*. They were trotted out once again during the latest round of hearings on campaign finance regulation conducted by the House Administration Committee in 1983. Proponents claimed that limits (and subsidies) would reduce the demand for campaign contributions and hence the clout of special interests, especially those represented by political action committees (PACs). They would curtail the unfair advantage enjoyed by wealthy candidates. Members could spend less time hustling campaign cash and more time doing their job. Ceilings would defuse the arms-race mentality; candidates would no longer feel compelled to spend ever larger sums of money purely out of fear of what their opponents might spend. Most campaign spending is wasted anyway.⁴ The major reform proposal, H.R. 2490, thus imposed a general election spending ceiling of \$200,000 in return for a dollar-for-dollar match in public funds of donations of \$100 or less, up to a total of \$100,000. It also limited the total take from PACs to \$90,000 and a candidate's personal contribution to \$20,000.

Inevitably, these arguments were countered with the equally familiar claim that spending limits, regardless of their benefits, remain fatally flawed because they stifle competition and protect incumbents. The resources of office give members an enormous head start; challengers must spend lavishly just to get in the ball game. The amount of money required for a serious House campaign varies widely according to local circumstances; no single limit could suit all of them. Most campaigns are underfunded; more rather than less money is needed for a healthy electoral system.⁵ Opponents of H.R. 2490 embodied their idea of reform in H.R. 3081, which would loosen restrictions on fund raising and spending by the parties.

No one should be shocked to learn that H.R. 2490 was supported primarily by Democrats and that H.R. 3081 was a Republican bill. Republican fund raising has become so successful that the party's main financial problem is figuring out how to spend the money legally for its candidates. House Republicans also have ample reason to look out for the interests of challengers. Democrats, threatened by a rising Republican tide and the growing prospect of abundantly financed opponents, are more easily persuaded that campaign spending is getting out of hand and has to be curtailed.⁶

4. Task Force on Elections, *Hearings*, pp. 46–66 and *passim*.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–112, 226–227, 169–173, and *passim*.

6. Gary C. Jacobson, "The Republican Advantage in Campaign Finance," in *The New*

With Republicans in control of the Senate and White House, neither party was in a position to impose its version of reform, and no campaign finance legislation emerged from the 98th Congress. But there is no reason to think that the issues raised again in 1983 (as in 1979 and 1974 and 1971) have been settled. In particular, the notion that congressional campaign spending ought to be limited seems to have as many lives as a cat. The potential effects of expenditure ceilings thus deserve further examination.

Proposals to limit campaign spending rest, at least implicitly, on the assumption that some level of spending is "enough"—enough to inform voters sufficiently for them to have a real choice between known alternatives. Candidates (including unknown challengers) who spend that amount will be as competitive as the substance of their campaigns can make them; money spent beyond the limit makes little or no difference. Furthermore, the same level of campaign spending is assumed to be "enough" under a wide variety of electoral circumstances. Both assumptions are certainly true at some level; \$2 million is surely enough under all but the most improbable conditions, for example. The real question is whether the limits typically proposed allow sufficient spending for competitive campaigns—specifically, challenges to incumbents—across the usual range of electoral circumstances. This is the question the work reported here is intended to answer. The research also illuminates some broader aspects of congressional election politics, which are discussed in due course.

How campaign spending limits would alter the competitive balance depends, of course, on how campaign spending affects election results. Previous research on campaign spending effects has focused almost exclusively on how spending is related to the share of votes candidates receive.⁷ The standard approach has been to regress the vote on the candidates' expenditures, variously measured, and some control variables. The reported findings have been remarkably consistent, particularly with regard to House elections. No matter what model is estimated (and many different specifications and functional forms have been tried),

Direction in American Politics, ed. John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985), pp. 143–173.

7. For a short review and listing of this literature, see Gary C. Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered: Congressional Elections, 1972–1982," *Public Choice* 47 (1985):8–9. Welch discusses a model in which "the probability of election is the final product" but only estimates the equation for the "intermediate product," the vote percentage; see William P. Welch, "The Economics of Campaign Funds," *Public Choice* 20 (Winter 1974): 88.

it turns out that campaign expenditures have sharply different electoral effects depending on whether or not the candidate is an incumbent.

The more nonincumbents (particularly those challenging incumbents) spend, the greater their share of the vote. The more the incumbents spend, the *smaller* their share of the vote.⁸ Incumbents do not lose votes by spending money, of course; they merely spend more the more strongly they are challenged, and the stronger the challenge, the worse for the incumbent. With the challenger's level of spending (the best measure of the strength of a challenge) controlled, the effect of the incumbent's spending is, in virtually every model or election year, very small and statistically indistinguishable from zero. In nonlinear models, the sign of the coefficient on incumbent spending is wrong more often than not. Even in the lone case (a linear model for the 1974 election) where the coefficient has the right sign and is significant at the .05 level (one-tailed), it is far smaller than the coefficient on challengers' spending.⁹

These findings indicate that, in general, any policy restricting campaign spending is likely to protect incumbents and diminish electoral competition. The more specific question of how drastically any particular spending limit would curtail competition can also be addressed using these equations.¹⁰ But an alternative approach, taken in this paper, promises a clearer idea of what restrictions might do to the competitive position of challengers. It also provides a better sense of how much money is needed to wage a competitive campaign under a variety of electoral conditions.

The main difference is that I examine the effects of campaign spending on a challenger's *chances of winning or losing* rather than on his or her vote share. Despite the necessarily intimate connection between the two, the analyses do not merely duplicate one another. The most striking difference is that a focus on winning or losing turns up the first solid evidence that what incumbents spend *does* make a significant difference in House elections. It also indicates that, contrary to the common conception of "marginality," the margin of victory in one election has a relatively modest effect on the probable outcome of the next, once spending is taken into account. Before considering the evidence of these and other points, however, it is necessary to take a prefatory look at the simple relationship between how much challengers spend and how frequently they win.

8. Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered."

9. *Ibid.*, tables 4-7.

10. See Gary C. Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 209-220.

Campaign Spending and the Chances of Winning

The basic data on the connection between how much money House challengers spend on the campaign and how frequently they win are summarized in Table 1.¹¹ Dollar figures have been adjusted for inflation (1984 = 1.00), so the data can be aggregated across election years. These elementary figures are, by themselves, quite instructive. First, note that challengers who spend more money win more often. This is scarcely news, to be sure, in view of the thoroughly documented link between challengers' expenditures and votes. But viewing the actual proportion of victories at different levels of spending puts the connection in sharper perspective.

Taking all election years together, the odds against challengers who spend less than \$100,000 are long indeed; two-thirds of all House challengers fall into this category. Chances are only slightly better for challengers who spend between \$100,000 and \$150,000; they and the first group subsume three-quarters of all challengers. Prospects improve considerably as spending rises from \$150,000 to \$300,000. The most extravagant challengers (spending \$400,000 or more) win more than one-third of their contests. About 13 percent of all House challengers from 1972 through 1984 spent more than \$250,000 and may be considered competitive by the arbitrary but reasonable criterion that they have at least one chance in four of winning. Most spent far too little to make a contest of it.

Of course, not all election years are alike. Some elections feature national political tides—driven by recessions, scandals, presidential politics, and the like—that strongly favor one party's candidates. Conditions in other years seem nearly neutral between parties. Obviously, a House challenger's chances of winning will vary with the strength and

11. The campaign spending data were compiled from the following sources. For 1972, Common Cause, *1972 Congressional Campaign Finances*, 10 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1974). For 1974, Common Cause, *1974 Congressional Campaign Finances*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1976). For 1976, Federal Election Commission, *Disclosure Series No. 9* (House of Representatives Campaigns), April 1977. For 1978, Federal Election Commission, *Reports on Financial Activity, 1977-78, Interim Report No. 5* (U.S. Senate and Houses Campaigns), June 1979. For 1980, Federal Election Commission, *Reports on Financial Activity, 1979-80, Final Report* (U.S. House and Senate Campaigns), January 1982. For 1982, Federal Election Commission, *Reports on Financial Activity, 1981-82, Interim Report No. 3* (U.S. House and Senate Campaigns), May 1983. For 1984, Federal Election Commission, *Report on Financial Activity, 1983-84, Interim Report No. 9* (U.S. House and Senate Campaigns), May 1985.

Electoral data are from Congressional Quarterly, *Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C., 1975) and *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 35 (March 19, 1977): 491-498; 37 (March 31, 1979): 576-582; 39 (April 25, 1981): 717-725; 41 (February 19, 1983): 386-394; and 43 (April 13, 1985): 689-695.

TABLE 1
 Winning House Challengers by Level of Campaign Spending,
 1972–1984 (percentages)

Expenditure Range (\$1,000s)	All Years		Neutral Years		Good Years		Bad Years	
0–49	.1	(1,179)	0	(685)	.5	(218)	0	(276)
50–99	2.1	(326)	1.0	(195)	4.8	(84)	2.1	(47)
100–149	4.6	(194)	.9	(107)	10.7	(56)	6.5	(31)
150–199	11.6	(155)	6.3	(80)	29.5	(44)	3.2	(31)
200–249	16.0	(119)	12.1	(66)	34.5	(29)	4.2	(24)
250–299	26.2	(84)	12.2	(41)	55.2	(29)	7.1	(14)
300–399	27.3	(106)	20.6	(63)	48.4	(31)	8.3	(12)
400–449	34.0	(47)	28.1	(32)	58.3	(12)	0	(3)
500+	39.3	(61)	41.4	(29)	55.0	(20)	8.3	(12)
Total	6.4	(2,271)	4.2	(1,298)	15.9	(523)	1.8	(450)

Note: Expenditures are adjusted for inflation (1984 = 1.00); the number of cases is in parentheses; neutral years were 1972, 1976, 1978, and 1984; 1974 and 1982 were good years for Democratic challengers, bad years for Republican challengers; 1980 was a good year for Republicans and a bad one for Democrats.

direction of national partisan tides. Table 1 shows that challengers favored by national forces—Democrats in 1974 and 1982, Republicans in 1980—win more frequently at every level of campaign spending.¹² Those spending more than \$250,000 win more than half the time; anything over \$150,000 is enough to make a race of it. Note also that challengers are able to spend more money in good election years; for example, 23 percent spent more than \$200,000 in the good years, compared to 18 percent in neutral years and 14 percent in bad years.

In the absence of strong partisan tides, challengers have a much harder time winning and need to spend more than \$400,000 to have at

12. For this exercise, a good (bad) year was defined as one in which a party won (lost) at least 20 more House seats than it had in the previous election. Democrats picked up 49 seats in 1974 and 26 in 1982; Republicans gained 34 in 1980. For the neutral years, net shifts were 12 to the Republicans in 1972, 1 to the Democrats in 1976, 15 to the Republicans in 1978, and 16 to the Republicans in 1984. Although using such a standard in a study of the challenger's chances of winning risks circularity, some way is needed to take partisan trends into account, and this classification seems reasonable on its face. Only 1984 is somewhat ambiguous, because there was a fairly large shift (3.8 percentage points) in the national two-party vote to Republican House candidates, even though the party did not pick up many seats. If 1984 is classified as a good Republican (bad Democratic) year, some of the numbers in the tables change, but in no case is the substance of any conclusion affected.

least a one-in-four chance of winning; about 5 percent manage to do so. Against contrary partisan tides, challengers raise the least amount of money and find it difficult to win no matter what they spend.

This first pass through the data suggests that the budget adequate for a competitive campaign against a House incumbent varies considerably depending on national forces. When partisan conditions favor challengers, \$250,000 is sufficient for an even chance of winning, and anything above \$150,000 gives the challenger a fighting chance. Under more or less neutral conditions, more than \$300,000 is necessary to have a fighting chance, and the rate of winning exceeds 30 percent only when spending surpasses \$500,000. In bad election years, no amount of campaign spending gives much hope of victory; the best challengers can do spending at any level above \$250,000 is to gain about 1 chance in 12 of winning.

The direction of national partisan trends is not the only variable likely to affect the connection between challengers' campaign spending and chances of victory. District-level variables may also intervene. Conceivably, for example, the more the incumbent spends in defense of the seat, or the better entrenched he or she is, the smaller the chance of a successful challenge at any given level of campaign spending.

Analysis of these interactions requires more complicated statistical techniques. The dependent variable—winning or losing—is dichotomous, so probit analysis replaces the multiple regression analysis commonly used in studying campaign spending effects.¹³ Probit equations estimate the probability that a challenger will win an election, given the values taken by the independent variables. A feature of probit is that the effects of any single independent variable depend on the values taken by the other independent variables. Thus unlike regression equations, probit equations cannot be interpreted directly from the estimated parameters. Results are therefore presented in tabular form, and the equations from which table entries were derived are confined to the appendix.

As an example, probit-based estimates of a challenger's probability of election at different spending levels are listed in Table 2. This is simply another way of looking at the data summarized in Table 1, so the table makes the same substantive points. The challenger's probability of winning increases with spending, but to very different levels depending on national partisan trends. For example, the probability of winning for a

13. For a comparison of probit and ordinary least-squares regression, see John Aldrich and Charles Cnudde, "Probing the Bounds of Conventional Wisdom: A Comparison of Regression, Probit, and Discriminant Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 19 (August 1975): 571–608.

TABLE 2
 Probit Estimates of a House Challenger's Probability of
 Winning at Various Levels of Campaign Spending,
 1972–1984

Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	All Election Years	Neutral Election Years	Good Election Years	Bad Election Years
25	.00	.00	.01	.00
50	.01	.00	.03	.01
75	.03	.01	.07	.02
100	.04	.02	.11	.02
150	.09	.05	.20	.03
200	.13	.08	.28	.05
250	.18	.12	.35	.06
300	.22	.16	.42	.07
400	.30	.23	.52	.09
500	.37	.31	.60	.10

House challenger who spends \$300,000 is .16 in years without strong partisan tides, .42 when partisan conditions are favorable, but only .07 in bad years. A challenger spending \$200,000 in a good year is more likely to win than one spending \$400,000 in a neutral year.

Does It Matter What Incumbents Spend?

A challenger's chances of winning seem to depend strongly on how much he spends on the campaign. Obviously, his prospects might also depend on what the incumbent spends. Certainly members of Congress believe so, for their campaign finance activity is sharply reactive; the more threatened they feel by a challenge, the more money they raise and spend.¹⁴ Few question the necessity for, and efficacy of, spending generously in response to a vigorous, well-financed challenge.¹⁵ But, as noted, extensive research has produced remarkably little evidence that spending by incumbents has any effect at all on the vote once other variables (including the challenger's spending) are taken into account.¹⁶ Because it is hard to accept that members of Congress are so

14. Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered," table 10.

15. Task Force on Elections, *Hearings*, pp. 65–66, 82–83, 172–173.

16. Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered."

wrong about something so basic to their calling, these findings have remained puzzling.

In an earlier essay, following an idea suggested to me by John Ferejohn, I proposed as an explanation that perhaps

spending by incumbents provides very small but still positive marginal returns, so that it makes perfect sense for incumbents to spend very large amounts of money to counteract serious challenges. After all, when an incumbent is defeated, it is normally in a very close contest; small shifts in the vote make the difference between victory and defeat. Even if the electoral effects of spending are too small to measure amid the noise of the data, they may be large enough to be worth the effort.¹⁷

In other words, it may take a great deal of money to buy very few additional votes, but if the election is close enough, those few votes may make all the difference. If this is true, then spending by incumbents might influence the chances of winning or losing, even though its influence on the vote is statistically negligible. The results of probit analysis of the effects of campaign spending by both candidates on the challenger's probability of winning are consistent with this argument. The equations are listed in the appendix. All the coefficients for incumbent spending have the proper (negative) sign; only in bad years for the challenger's party does the coefficient fail to achieve at least a .10 significance level (one-tailed).

The challenger's likelihood of winning at various combinations of campaign spending by the two candidates, computed from the probit estimates, is listed in Table 3. The table displays several noteworthy patterns:

1. As expected, campaign spending has a greater payoff to challengers than to incumbents. This is clearest from the entries along the diagonal (highlighted in the tables). At equal spending by both candidates, the higher the level, the more likely the challenger is to win. This holds for all election years. A obvious implication is that ceilings on campaign spending are, other things equal, biased in favor of incumbents, and the lower the ceiling, the greater the bias.

Proponents of spending limits like to argue that other things are rarely equal. Incumbents are usually able to raise much more money; only about 20 percent of House challengers achieve at least rough equality with incumbents in campaign spending at levels (i.e., above \$100,000) where it could matter. Challengers would be helped by ceilings that kept incumbents from fully exploiting their fund-raising ad-

17. *Ibid.*

TABLE 3
 Probit Estimates of a House Challenger's Probability
 of Winning at Various Levels of Campaign Spending
 by the Challenger and Incumbent, 1972-1984

Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	Incumbent's Expenditures (\$1,000s)					
	50	100	200	300	400	500
All Election Years						
50	.02	.01	.01	.01	.00	.00
100	.07	.05	.04	.03	.03	.02
200	(.22)	.17	.14	.12	.11	.10
300	(.35)	(.29)	.24	.22	.20	.18
400	(.46)	(.40)	(.34)	.31	.28	.27
500	(.54)	(.48)	(.42)	.38	.36	.34
Neutral Election Years						
50	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
100	.03	.02	.02	.01	.01	.01
200	(.14)	.11	.08	.07	.06	.05
300	(.27)	(.22)	.18	.15	.14	.13
400	(.39)	(.33)	(.27)	.24	.22	.21
500	(.49)	(.42)	(.36)	.33	.30	.28
Good Election Years						
50	.06	.04	.02	.02	.01	.01
100	.22	.16	.10	.08	.07	.06
200	(.49)	.39	.30	.26	.22	.20
300	(.66)	(.57)	.47	.41	.37	.34
400	(.77)	(.69)	(.59)	.54	.50	.46
500	(.83)	(.77)	(.68)	(.63)	.59	.56
Bad Election Years						
50	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00	.00
100	.04	.03	.02	.02	.01	.01
200	(.08)	(.06)	.05	.04	.04	.03
300	(.12)	(.10)	(.08)	.07	.06	.05
400	(.16)	(.13)	(.10)	.09	.08	.08
500	(.19)	(.16)	(.13)	.11	.10	.10

Note: Entries in parentheses are hypothetical; these combinations approximate fewer than 0.1 percent of the actual cases.

vantage. By the evidence in Table 3, this view is mistaken. Consider, for example, a neutral election year. Suppose both candidates are limited to spending \$200,000 and both spend this amount; the challenger has a .08 probability of winning. Now suppose that without the ceiling, the incumbent is able to raise an additional \$300,000 but the challenger only another \$100,000. The challenger would still be better off, for his probability of winning if he spends \$300,000 to an incumbent's \$500,000 is .13. The same holds in other kinds of election years and for many different combinations in which the increase in spending by incumbents is much larger than the increase in spending by challengers.

Of course, a spending ceiling would be accompanied by campaign funds from the public treasury; otherwise, it could not survive a constitutional challenge. If every candidate were guaranteed \$200,000 for the campaign, Table 3 projects that, on average, 14 percent of the challengers would be successful—considerably more than the 6.4 percent who actually did win between 1972 and 1984 (see Table 1). But neither H.R. 2490 nor any other public funding proposal has included a guaranteed floor of this sort. Some scheme of matching individual contributions is invariably proposed; recall that H.R. 2490 would match dollar-for-dollar private donations of \$100 or less up to a total of \$100,000. If we assume that *all* contributions in previous elections were matchable (probably no more than half actually would have been), make the adjustments, and impose a spending limit of \$200,000, the projected percentage of challenger victories declines to about 4 percent. Advances made by low-spending challengers would not offset the diminished prospects of those who could have spent more than \$200,000.

2. Under most plausible scenarios, then, spending limits would reduce the chances of a challenger victory, even though incumbents usually raise a lot more money. This is not to say that the incumbent's level of spending has no effect on the challenger's probability of winning. The more the incumbent spends, the less likely the challenger is to win.

Variations in levels of spending by both candidates have the most dramatic effect in election years favoring the challenger's party. This makes intuitive sense. The more money challengers raise, the more effectively they can exploit whatever weapons national conditions supply for attacking incumbents; the effects of money and powerful campaign themes are naturally interactive.

Incumbents facing contrary tides should also find more value than usual in campaign spending. Defensive campaigns require more than routine continuation of the reelection work a member has been doing all along. New messages have to replace old ones. Staunch loyalists find it

necessary to open some distance between themselves and their party's leaders. Members may have to fight to impose a favorable definition of what the contest is about—for example, making its focus local rather than national. Changing the message, pushing a more profitable definition of what is at stake, and carving out a more independent political identity require extensive publicity, and publicity costs money.¹⁸ Hence it is not surprising that the incumbent's level of spending makes the most difference when national tides favor the challenger.

3. Theoretically, a well-financed challenger would enjoy a solid chance of defeating a poorly financed incumbent even without a favorable national tide. But the set of such campaigns is virtually empty. The entries in parentheses are almost purely hypothetical; they represent less than one-tenth of one percent of the actual cases. When seriously challenged, almost every incumbent responds with a vigorous campaign of his own. This is one reason why it has been difficult to find evidence that campaign spending by incumbents affects their vote share;¹⁹ there are simply too few cases of low-spending incumbents facing high-spending challengers.

The Effects of Marginality

Regardless of election year trends, some members of Congress are more vulnerable than others—or so the preoccupation with incumbent “marginality” typical of the recent literature on congressional elections presupposes.²⁰ Presumably, the more firmly entrenched the incumbent,

18. Gary C. Jacobson, “Running Scared: Elections and Congressional Politics in the 1980s,” in *Congress: Structure and Policy*, ed. Mathew McCubbins and Terry Sullivan (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

19. Jacobson, “Money and Votes Reconsidered.”

20. See, for example, John R. Alford and John R. Hibbing, “Increased Incumbency Advantage in the House,” *Journal of Politics* 43 (1981): 1042–1061; Richard Born, “Generational Replacement and the Growth of Incumbent Reelection Margins in the U.S. House,” *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979): 811–817; Walter Dean Burnham, “Insulation and Responsiveness in Congressional Elections,” *Political Science Quarterly* 90 (1975): 411–435; Albert D. Cover and David R. Mayhew, “Congressional Dynamics and the Decline of Competitive Congressional Elections,” in *Congress Reconsidered*, ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer (New York: Praeger, 1977); Robert S. Erikson, “The Advantage of Incumbency in Congressional Elections,” *Polity* 3 (1971): 395–405; John A. Ferejohn, “On the Decline of Competition in Congressional Elections,” *American Political Science Review* 71 (1977): 166–176; David R. Mayhew, “Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals,” *Polity* 6 (1974): 295–317.

the less likely a challenger is to win at any particular level of campaign spending, and the more the challenger has to spend to achieve any given probability of winning. Put another way, a challenger's chances of winning may vary more sharply with levels of campaign spending the more precarious the incumbent.

The vote margin in the last election is the most widely used measure of incumbent's vulnerability. Probit equations estimating the challenger's probability of victory as a function of the vote share won by his party's candidate in the previous election and his level of campaign spending are listed in the appendix. They are interpreted in Table 4, which displays the challenger's likelihood of winning at various levels of campaign spending and previous incumbent vote margins.

What is rather surprising, in the light of political scientists' fascination with the size of House incumbents' vote margins, is the modest influence of the incumbent's vulnerability, measured this way, on the challenger's probability of winning. Except, perhaps, in bad years, campaign spending is far more important. Only for all election years combined and for election years without clear partisan trends is last election's vote related to the challenger's chances of victory beyond a .05 level of statistical significance. In years especially good or bad for the challenger's party, the coefficient has the proper (positive) sign but is so imprecisely estimated as to be statistically indistinguishable from zero—a caveat to keep in mind while examining the table.

Money's primacy over marginality is especially striking in election years favoring the challenger's party. The table suggests, for example, that a challenger spending \$200,000 against an incumbent who won by 40 percentage points last time would have a greater chance of winning (.24) than would one spending \$100,000 against an incumbent who had barely squeaked through (.14). More generally, an extra \$100,000 adds more to the chance of winning than does a drop of 30–40 points in the incumbent's previous margin of victory. On the evidence of these probit estimates, a wide margin of victory in one election does little to improve chances against a well-funded challenger riding a favorable partisan tide in the next election. Incumbent security rests far more on avoiding formidable opposition than on intrinsic electoral advantages.

The same holds true in election years without strong partisan trends, albeit to a lesser degree. A challenger's probability of winning depends more on what he or she spends on the campaign than on how "marginal" the incumbent is. Generally, an additional \$100,000 is worth about 20 percentage points in vote margin. Note also that it takes a substantial amount of money to have much chance to defeat even the most marginal incumbent. That is, apparent "vulnerability" only translates into a seri-

TABLE 4
Probit Estimates of a House Challenger's Probability
of Winning at Various Levels of Campaign Spending
and Previous Incumbent Vote Margins, 1972–1984

Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	Incumbent's Previous Vote Margin					
	(percentages)					
	40	30	20	10	5	.1
All Election Years						
50	.01	.01	.01	.01	.02	.02
100	.03	.04	.05	.05	.05	.06
200	.10	.12	.13	.14	.15	.16
300	.18	.19	.21	.23	.24	.25
400	.24	.26	.29	.31	.32	.33
500	.30	.33	.35	.37	.39	.40
Neutral Election Years						
50	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01	.01
100	.01	.01	.02	.02	.03	.03
200	.05	.06	.07	.09	.10	.11
300	.10	.12	.14	.17	.18	.19
400	.15	.18	.21	.24	.26	.27
500	.20	.24	.27	.31	.33	.35
Good Election Years						
50	.03	.03	.04	.04	.04	.05
100	.10	.11	.12	.13	.14	.14
200	.24	.26	.28	.30	.31	.32
300	.37	.39	.41	.43	.45	.46
400	.47	.49	.51	.54	.55	.56
500	.55	.57	.59	.61	.62	.63
Bad Election Years						
50	.00	.01	.01	.01	.01	.02
100	.01	.01	.02	.03	.03	.04
200	.02	.03	.04	.05	.06	.07
300	.03	.04	.06	.07	.08	.09
400	.05	.06	.07	.09	.10	.11
500	.06	.07	.09	.11	.12	.13

ous risk of defeat if the challenger spends enough money to exploit it. Only in bad years for the challenger's party does campaign money not readily compensate for the supposed electoral handicap represented by the incumbent's previous vote margin. An extra \$100,000 is equivalent to only about 10 percentage points in vote margin.

Proponents of spending limits often claim that the preoccupation with maintaining competition is misplaced because only a few seats are competitive in any event, and these few seats can be contested effectively by challengers with limited funds because they are inherently marginal. The evidence here suggests the contrary. It takes a substantial amount of money to have much chance of defeating even a very marginal incumbent, and even ostensibly "safe" incumbents can be put at serious risk by a well-financed challenge.²¹

21. And incumbents with large margins in the previous election do sometimes attract well-funded opponents. The data include 32 cases in which a challenger spent more than \$300,000 against an incumbent who had won by more than 30 percentage points last time. Eight of them won.

The results of the analysis in this section shed some light on the thorniest technical issue in the study of campaign spending effects. Because most campaign contributors favor candidates who have at least a plausible chance of winding up in office, candidates (especially nonincumbents) who are expected to do well raise, and therefore spend, more money. Hence the direction of causality is ambiguous: Candidates may spend more money because they have a higher probability of winning, as well as gain a higher probability of winning because they spend more money. In technical terms, both variables are endogenous; they simultaneously determine one another. Any single-equation estimate of the coefficient on an endogenous variable is biased and inconsistent. The standard solution to this problem is to use a two-stage estimation procedure in which an instrumental variable replaces the endogenous variable. When this has been done for models of the money-votes connection, the estimated coefficients on spending by challengers and incumbents have basically duplicated the supposedly biased ordinary least-squares results. That is, simultaneity bias appears to be minimal.

One explanation is the model is misspecified; indeed, it may not be possible to specify any model, because we lack systematic measures of variables that influence one of the endogenous variables but not the other. But it is also conceivable that the relationship is, in fact, largely recursive. Expectations affect contributions, but spending has powerful effects independent of expectations. Candidates who would be expected, on other grounds, to be competitive will not, in fact, do well *without* money, and candidates without good prospects who do, for some reason, manage to spend a lot of money do better than anyone would have expected. Because the most common criterion (apart from readings of national tides) for assessing a challenger's prospects is the incumbent's margin in the last election, the probit equations interpreted in Table 4 support this view. Still, insofar as things other than national partisan trends and the incumbent's margin last time affect assessments of the challenger's chances, simultaneity bias is possible and may afflict the coefficients on campaign spending in the probit equations discussed in this paper. For a further discussion of the simultaneity problem, see Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered."

These findings help clear up a puzzle in the recent literature on congressional elections. The typical vote margin enjoyed by House incumbents increased sharply during the 1960s. This inspired the extensive research literature documenting—and attempting to explain—what was variously specified as the “decline in competition” or the “vanishing marginals” or the “increased incumbency advantage.”²² But by every reasonable measure, House members have been working harder than ever at staying in office.²³ Are they paranoid, or have political scientists misread the data?

In another paper I argue the latter—specifically, that competition has not declined, the marginals, properly defined, have not vanished, and so House incumbents are just as much at risk now as they were before the changes of the 1960s.²⁴ The evidence presented in this section underscores an important component of that argument: A “safe” margin in one election does not by itself assure victory in the next election. What happens next time depends far more on the strength of the opposition, the vigor of the incumbent’s response, and the direction of partisan tides. The sense of insecurity incumbents express in their choice of activities is by no means unjustified.

Further evidence that House incumbents’ campaign finance practices are rational appears when all four factors—spending by both candidates, partisan trends in the election year, and marginality—are taken into account. The equations are again listed in the appendix. They are interpreted in Table 5. Although all three variables necessarily interact in the probit model, the table basically reiterates the findings reported separately in Tables 3 and 4. The challenger’s level of spending (along with the direction of partisan trends) has the greatest influence on his probability of winning, but the incumbent’s spending and previous vote margin also make some difference. (Note, however, that only the coefficient on challenger’s expenditures is statistically significant in bad years and that the coefficient on previous vote margin is not significant in good years.) For example, in a good year for the challenger’s party, if both candidates spend \$300,000, the challenger has a .34 probability of winning against an incumbent who had won by 40 percentage points last

22. Ferejohn, “On the Decline of Competition”; Mayhew, “Vanishing Marginals”; Alford and Hibbing, “Increased Incumbency Advantage in the House.”

23. Jacobson, “Running Scared,” tables 3–6.

24. Gary C. Jacobson, “The Marginals Never Vanished: Incumbency and Competition in Elections to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1952–1982,” *American Journal of Political Science*, in press.

TABLE 5
A House Challenger's Probability of Winning at Various Levels of Campaign Spending by Both Candidates and Previous Incumbent Vote Margins, 1972-1984

		Incumbent's Expenditures (\$1,000s)								
		100			300			500		
Vote Margin		40	20	.1	40	20	.1	40	20	.1
All Election Years										
Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	100	.04	.06	.08	.02	.03	.05	.02	.02	.03
	200	.14	.18	.23	.09	.11	.15	.07	.09	.12
	300	(.24)	(.30)	(.25)	.16	.21	.26	.13	.17	.21
	400	(.34)	(.40)	(.46)	.24	.29	.35	.20	.25	.30
	500	(.42)	(.48)	(.54)	.31	.37	.43	.26	.32	.38
Neutral Election Years										
Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	100	.01	.03	.04	.01	.01	.02	.00	.01	.01
	200	.07	.11	.17	.04	.06	.10	.03	.04	.07
	300	(.15)	(.22)	(.30)	.09	.13	.20	.06	.10	.16
	400	(.24)	(.32)	(.42)	.14	.21	.29	.11	.17	.24
	500	(.32)	(.41)	(.51)	.21	.29	.38	.17	.24	.32
Good Election Years										
Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	100	.13	.17	.22	.06	.08	.11	.04	.05	.08
	200	.35	.41	.48	.20	.25	.31	.15	.19	.24
	300	(.51)	(.58)	(.65)	.34	.41	.47	.27	.33	.39
	400	(.63)	(.69)	(.75)	.46	.53	.59	.38	.45	.51
	500	(.72)	(.77)	(.82)	(.55)	(.62)	(.68)	.47	.54	.61
Bad Election Years										
Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	100	.01	.03	.05	.01	.02	.03	.01	.01	.02
	200	(.03)	(.06)	(.11)	.02	.04	.07	.02	.03	.06
	300	(.06)	(.10)	(.15)	.03	.06	.10	.03	.05	.09
	400	(.08)	(.13)	(.19)	.05	.08	.14	.04	.07	.11
	500	(.09)	(.15)	(.23)	.06	.10	.16	.05	.08	.14

Note: Entries in parentheses are hypothetical; these combinations approximate fewer than one-tenth of 1% of the actual cases.

time, .41 if the margin was 20 points, and .47 if the incumbent barely won. If the incumbent spends \$500,000 rather than \$300,000, the respective probabilities are .27, .33, and .39.

Table 5 suggests that House members would be well advised to raise and spend more money the more their opponents spend, the narrower their victory last time, and the worse things look for their party. This is

exactly what they do. All these variables are strongly related in the predicted direction to incumbent expenditures.²⁵ By the evidence presented here, House incumbents' campaign finance practices reflect an accurate assessment of electoral realities. So do the financial practices of challengers, who generally raise and spend all the money they can get their hands on.

Frugal Winners

Clearly, challengers have little chance to win unless they spend rather substantial amounts of money. Still, a few have managed to win with frugal campaigns. How did they do it? A case-by-case analysis reveals that scandal, good media markets, and unusually inept incumbents occasionally permit challengers to win on the cheap. From 1972 through 1984, 11 (of 1,505) House challengers spending less than \$100,000 (in 1984 dollars) won: Six were Democrats who evidently benefited from Watergate in 1974; two defeated House members who were under indictment at the time of the election; the remaining three apparently capitalized on careless or inept congressmen, though as an explanation of incumbent defeats, this verges on tautology. The fit between most of these districts and local media markets was close enough for House candidates to be considered worthy of news coverage and to use advertising dollars efficiently.

Another 30 (of 349) challengers won while spending between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Ten of them were 1974 Democrats; four more took advantage of incumbents beset by scandal of one sort or another; others defeated incumbents who displayed various signs of incompetence. More than two-thirds ran in good media markets. Taken together, these cases suggest that it is sometimes possible to defeat an incumbent with no more than \$200,000—if national tides are very strong or if the incumbent is a crook or out of touch and if local media can be used efficiently. These are, to say the least, atypical circumstances.

The data also suggest that the chances of winning with less than \$200,000 have diminished over time; 22 of the 41 were elected in 1972 and 1974, only 19 (6 of whom defeated incumbents who were in trouble with the law) from 1976 through 1984. A more general implication is that challengers have needed to spend more money with each passing elec-

25. Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections*, pp. 113–118; 237; Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered," tables 10 and 13.

TABLE 6
 Probit Estimates of a House Challenger's Probability of Winning at Various
 Levels of Campaign Spending, by Year, 1972–1984

Challenger's Expenditures (\$1,000s)	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
50	.02	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00	.00
100	.07	.06	.05	.04	.03	.03	.02
200	.20	.18	.15	.13	.11	.09	.08
300	.32	.29	.26	.23	.20	.17	.15
400	.42	.39	.35	.31	.28	.25	.22
500	.50	.47	.43	.39	.35	.32	.29
Percent spending more than							
\$300,000	4.4	3.7	6.4	11.0	14.9	10.9	17.3
\$500,000	.3	.3	.9	2.6	6.0	4.5	5.3

tion to have the same chance of winning. Such is indeed the case according to a probit equation (listed in the appendix) that includes the election year as a variable. Table 6 displays its results.

Even with expenditure figures adjusted for inflation, the cost of a competitive challenge has grown considerably over this period. For example, by 1982 it took \$500,000 to gain the same chance of winning (.32) that was reached in 1972 with \$300,000. Had challengers not been able to raise more money in real terms with each passing election, the number of successful challenges would have, by implication, fallen. But House challengers have managed to increase their fund-raising sufficiently to offset any effects of a decline in the marginal impact of campaign money on the probability of winning, so their chances of defeating an incumbent remain unchanged. The average level of (inflation adjusted) campaign spending by challengers has nearly doubled since 1972. More to the point, the lower two rows in Table 6 show a growing share of challengers spending at the higher levels. Indeed, about the same proportion spent more than \$500,000 in the latest three of these elections as had spent more than \$300,000 in the first three. Thus a kind of equilibrium has been maintained.

These findings deliver another blow to the notion that there is some level of campaign spending sufficient for all times and circumstances so that a ceiling could be imposed on expenditures without seriously

interfering with electoral competition. What might have appeared a reasonable ceiling in 1972 would by now seriously stifle competition even if adjusted for inflation. The figure of \$200,000 proposed in 1983 as part of H.R. 2490, even with \$40,000 extra allowed for fund-raising and including another \$50,000 or so of coordinated spending by national party committees, would be projected to reduce the number of successful challenges significantly even now, and the effect would probably grow over time.

The only saving grace would be that the limit applies exclusively to general election campaigns. Shrewd challengers with enough money would spend freely in the primary campaign. The timing of the primary would then become an important strategic factor. Challengers with late primaries would be better off than those with early primaries, for the former would have a much shorter general election campaign in which to spend their limited cash and a longer period of unrestricted spending—yet another reason why it is impossible to specify a spending ceiling that makes any sense for all House districts.

Concluding Observations

The question “How much is enough?” simply has no fixed answer in the ranges usually considered for campaign spending limits. A million dollars is probably “enough” in all but a tiny number of cases, though a few House candidates have spent more than that in recent years. But it is hardly worth imposing a ceiling that almost no one approaches anyway. Any limit that really does reduce campaign spending and its attendant problems of fund-raising, PAC influence, and so forth will also be low enough to diminish the chances of a successful challenge under a variety of normal electoral circumstances.

The public, Common Cause, and many members of Congress clearly regard what is objectively only “enough” money for a competitive campaign under many conditions as being “too much.” But competitive campaigns are unavoidably expensive. There is simply no way for most nonincumbent candidates to capture the attention of enough voters to make a contest of it without spending substantial sums of money. This reality is illustrated in Table 7, which lists probit-derived estimates of the probability that a voter in the 1982 House elections could (a) recall the names of the incumbent and challenger; or (b) recognize the names from a list.²⁶ These are useful measures of campaign effects because

26. The data for Table 7 were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data for the 1982 American National Election Study

TABLE 7
 Probit Estimates of Recall and Recognition of House Incumbents and
 Challengers, 1982, by Campaign Expenditures

Campaign Expenditures (\$1,000s)	Recall Candidate		Recognize Candidate	
	Incumbent	Challenger	Incumbent	Challenger
25	.25	.11	.93	.51
50	.33	.17	.93	.60
75	.38	.22	.93	.66
100	.42	.27	.93	.69
150	.47	.33	.94	.74
200	.51	.38	.94	.77
250	.54	.42	.94	.79
300	.57	.45	.95	.81
400	.60	.50	.95	.84
500	.63	.54	.96	.86

familiarity with House candidates is well known to be strongly related to the vote choice; voters are particularly reluctant to cast votes for candidates whose names they do not recognize.²⁷

A very large proportion of voters recognize the incumbent's name no matter what he spends on the campaign. Indeed, incumbent recognition rates are so high as to leave little room for improvement; familiarity on this level is one undeniable advantage of incumbency. For challengers, in contrast, campaign spending and recognition vary together strongly, so the more a challenger spends, the narrower the incumbent's advantage on this dimension. The gap between the proportion able to recall the names of the two candidates without being cued by a list also diminishes as spending increases. Both candidates improve their standing on this more stringent measure of familiarity by spending more money, but the challenger gains relatively more than the incumbent.²⁸

These patterns help to explain the connection between campaign spending and the probability of a successful challenge. They also show

were originally collected by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, the University of Michigan, under a grant from the National Science Foundation. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

27. Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), pp. 86–101.
28. Similar findings for 1974 are reported in Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections*, pp. 145–157, and for 1978 in Jacobson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, pp. 101–102.

how much money it takes to apprise voters of even the most elementary piece of information—the candidate's name. Again, a fully competitive campaign, in which most voters know enough about the candidates to make a minimally informed choice, is obviously an expensive campaign.

In aggregate, the evidence is overwhelming that ceilings on campaign spending at the levels commonly proposed would stifle competition and protect incumbents in House elections. Competitive campaigns are not merely a product of structural factors—for example, a distribution of partisans that makes some districts inherently marginal—overlay by national forces. They are far more the result of vigorous, amply funded challenges. If the goal is to retain or enhance the benefits of electoral competition—keeping legislators responsive, letting voters change the direction of policy by replacing elected officials—limits on congressional campaign spending are a fundamentally bad idea.

Appendix: Probit Equations

The probit equations listed below were estimated using the probit facility in SPSSx. To derive the entries in the tables, the specified values for the variables are inserted into the equations and the probability is calculated as $(P^* - 5)$ times the cumulative normal distribution function. The expenditure variables are logged in recognition of diminishing returns; the coefficients for the logged variables also had smaller standard errors than their linear equivalents. The ratio of the coefficient to its standard error is shown in parenthesis. A ratio of at least (+ or -) 1.29 is necessary for a .10 level of statistical significance (one-tailed), 1.65 for .05, 2.33 for .01, and 3.09 for .001. Cases include only candidates with major party opposition in both the current and previous election.

VARIABLES

P^* = probit, from which challenger's probability of winning is derived.

CE = natural log of challenger's expenditures in \$1,000s, adjusted for inflation (1984 = 1.00).

IE = natural log of incumbent's expenditures in \$1,000s, adjusted for inflation (1984 = 1.00).

PCV = vote for candidate of challenger's party in previous election for this seat.

TIME = 1972 = 1, 1974 = 2, . . . , 1984 = 7.

TABLE 2

All Years (N = 2,164)	$P^* = -.610 + .847 CE$ (-1.63) (12.23)
Neutral Years (N = 1,251)	$P^* = -1.632 + .986 CE$ (-2.39) (8.01)
Good Years (N = 492)	$P^* = -.403 + .910 CE$ (-0.68) (8.21)
Bad Years (N = 421)	$P^* = .796 + .474 CE$ (0.92) (2.86)

TABLE 3

All Years (N = 2,164)	$P^* = -.037 + .967 \text{ CE} - .222 \text{ IE}$ (-0.09) (11.07) (-2.57)
Neutral Years (N = 1,251)	$P^* = -1.108 + 1.124 \text{ CE} - .232 \text{ IE}$ (-1.48) (7.03) (-1.58)
Good Years (N = 492)	$P^* = .652 + 1.079 \text{ CE} - .355 \text{ IE}$ (0.88) (7.77) (-2.20)
Bad Years (N = 421)	$P^* = 1.284 + .578 \text{ CE} - .191 \text{ IE}$ (1.28) (2.76) (-0.99)

TABLE 4

All Years (N = 2,164)	$P^* = -.935 + .812 \text{ CE} + 0.13 \text{ PCV}$ (-2.20) (11.63) (1.82)
Neutral Years (N = 1,251)	$P^* = -2.140 + .912 \text{ CE} + .022 \text{ PCV}$ (-2.80) (7.19) (1.89)
Good Years (N = 492)	$P^* = -.689 + .879 \text{ CE} + .011 \text{ PCV}$ (-1.04) (7.59) (0.98)
Bad Years (N = 421)	$P^* = -.046 + .464 \text{ CE} + .025 \text{ PCV}$ (-0.04) (2.51) (1.06)

TABLE 5

All Years (N = 2,164)	$P^* = -.354 + .941 \text{ CE} - .259 \text{ IE} + .016 \text{ PCV}$ (-0.77) (10.66) (-2.92) (2.26)
Neutral Years (N = 1,251)	$P^* = -1.525 + 1.076 \text{ CE} - .305 \text{ IE} + .026 \text{ PCV}$ (-1.90) (6.66) (-1.97) (2.17)
Good Years (N = 492)	$P^* = .344 + 1.056 \text{ CE} - .399 \text{ IE} + .017 \text{ PCV}$ (0.44) (7.48) (-2.42) (1.40)
Bad Years (N = 421)	$P^* = .422 + .549 \text{ CE} - .218 \text{ IE} + .028 \text{ PCV}$ (0.32) (2.55) (-1.12) (1.15)

TABLE 6

All Years (N = 2,164)	$P^* = -.625 + .922 \text{ CE} - .096 \text{ TIME}$ (-1.59) (12.08) (-3.41)
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TABLE 7

Probability of Recognizing:	
Incumbent (N = 524)	$P^* = 5.80 + .137 \text{ IE}$ (11.41) (1.23)
Challenger (N = 524)	$P^* = 3.91 + .346 \text{ CE}$ (25.28) (9.85)
Probability of Recalling:	
Incumbent (N = 524)	$P^* = 3.22 + .340 \text{ IE}$ (7.91) (4.61)
Challenger (N = 524)	$P^* = 2.29 + .451 \text{ CE}$ (8.01) (7.91)



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8

Varieties of Experience: Campaign Finance in the House and Senate

Frank J. Sorauf

Campaigns for public office in the United States have always cost dearly. From the early days of party politics to the mid-twentieth century, some of the costs of campaigning were paid in cash, but many were not. Volunteer labor and the apparatus and political expertise of the party organization provided the bulk of the resources most campaigns needed. Beginning in the years after World War II, however, cash began to loom much larger in the financing of campaigns. The new technologists of campaigning—the media specialists, the pollsters, the consultants of all kinds—rented their facilities and their services for cash. Candidates found that they could free themselves from the domination of weakened party organizations, but they needed larger and larger sums of cash to do so. In short, what had been largely a barter economy of campaign finance dominated by the parties became a cash economy managed by the candidates.

Not long after the shift to cash resources had been accomplished, American campaign finance was again transformed, this time by sharp increases in the cost of campaigning. Herbert Alexander's estimates of the costs of all campaigns in presidential years show an increase in costs only somewhat greater than the rate of inflation through 1964. Beginning in 1968, however, campaign costs leaped upward dramatically and

continued a steep climb into the 1980s.¹ The cost of campaigning for the Congress climbed just as dramatically; for example, it rose from \$99 million in 1976 to \$374.1 million in 1984, an increase of 278% against an increase of only 81% in the Consumer Price Index. Not surprisingly, those groups and people who provided the ever greater cash resources became major players in the game of electoral politics.

It is only a small and perhaps inevitable step from the fact of money in campaigns to questions about the impact it makes on American government and politics. The concerns of scholars, journalists, and reformers alike tend to cohere around two central questions. First, does money affect the outcomes of elections? That is, can candidates win greater percentages of the two-party vote by raising and spending extra increments of cash, and if so, how large are the boosts in the percentages? Second, do the sources of the money win influence over the policy decisions of successful candidates whose campaigns they aided? And which contributors win it, in what measure, and for what goals? Quite simply, these new participants in American electoral politics raise questions of the greatest moment for the distribution of political influence in the United States.

The patterns of campaign finance are not, however, identical for all campaigns, even for those that would seem to be similar. Even in the financing of races for the House and Senate there are important differences. Although it has been our custom to talk about congressional campaign finance—even to legislate on it—as though it were all of a single piece, it is increasingly clear that it is not. And those differences are important, first, for what they tell us about money in elections and in legislative politics and, ultimately, for the different ways they frame the questions of impact and influence in the two houses of the Congress.

All this is not to suggest that the patterns of campaign finance in the two houses are dramatically or fundamentally different. They are not two different systems so much as two variants of a single system: the voluntary, candidate-centered American system of campaign finance. Certainly the differences between patterns in the House and Senate should not obscure the fact that those patterns have far more in common than they have with the party-dominated systems of campaign finance in races for the European parliaments. But within the politics of a single nation, especially one that tends to minimize and mute differences, even modest differences may be more than ordinarily instructive.

Finally, a few preliminary observations about data seem in order.

1. Herbert E. Alexander, *Financing Politics*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1984), fig. 1.2.

In the exceptionally arcane world of data about American campaign finance—a world that even the best newspapers and journalists in the country have trouble understanding—one's conclusions are more than usually the result of the questions one asks. And the questions one asks, whether one knows it or not, are very much the result of one's definitions. It is true, for example, that spending by candidates for the House was actually lower in 1984 than it was in 1982. (The drop, though, was less than 1 percent.) But that is true only if one counts the reports of all candidates making reports, a total that includes losers in the primaries and even some candidates who were in neither the primary nor the general election. If one counts only the candidates in the general elections of 1982 and 1984, there was a small increase in spending in 1984—less than 1 percent again. On the other hand, if one corrects for the 7.5 percent inflation between 1982 and 1984—that is, if one measures in constant dollars—the drop in expenditures is substantial.

To achieve some order and consistency and to help the reader through the maze of data, I generally use the financial totals of only the major-party candidates in the general election. (Those figures include totals for the entire 2 years of the election cycle, including whatever primary campaigning the candidate may have had to do.) That is to say, the data generally do not include the spending by any minor-party and independent candidates or by those major-party candidates who never made it into the general election.²

Levels of Spending

Both as scholars and as citizens, we know much more about big spending than we do about little spending. Given the American fascination with record setting, “gee whiz” statistics, and gigantism in general, that should not surprise us. Even the Federal Election Commission spurs the keeping of records with its “top 10” lists of candidate spenders, PAC contributors, and independent spenders. And yet, perhaps the most salient feature of the data on campaign expenditures is the enormous range of campaign outlays for the two houses (see Table 1). While both

2. In almost all instances I use data on major-party candidates in the general election. Those data exclude both minor-party candidates (i.e., candidates of other than the Democratic and Republican parties) and candidates who did not run in the general election. The latter limitation excludes candidates who lose in primary, special, or runoff elections; candidates who explore candidacy but who withdraw before actually running in an election; and candidates who win primary, special, or runoff elections but for some reason (e.g., death) do not run in the general election.

All data in this paper come from the final reports of the Federal Election Commis-

TABLE 1
Expenditures of All Major-Party, General Election Candidates
for House and Senate, 1980–1984^a

	1980	1982	1984
Totals			
House candidates	\$116,534,534	\$176,135,932	\$178,843,188
Senate candidates	76,079,771	114,403,480	143,503,759
Averages^b			
House candidates	139,897	211,448	219,171
Senate candidates	1,071,546	1,733,386	2,110,349
Greatest expenditure			
House candidates	1,947,209	2,337,537	1,779,281
Senate candidates	3,317,901	7,172,312	16,499,387

^a Includes all reported expenditures, primary and general election campaigns, for the 2 years of the election cycle.

^b The standard deviations for the House averages for the three cycles of the table are 158,376, 209,347, and 212,383; for the Senate averages for those 3 years they are 779,228, 1,636,083, and 2,938,302.

successful and unsuccessful candidates for the House and Senate may spend millions on their races, others spend nothing. Even successful incumbents—Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin and Representative William Natcher of Kentucky's second district, for example—have recently spent below the \$5,000 threshold for reporting. Indeed, in 1980, 1982, and 1984 there has been at least one major-party candidate for the House and Senate reporting no campaign expenditures. Averages of campaign expenditures, in other words, conceal a great deal of variation.

All campaign expenditure data make it clear, of course, that Senate races cost more than House races. In 1984, for instance, the average major-party candidate for the House spent \$219,171 in the 2-year elec-

sion on Senate and House Campaigns; the 1977–1978 data come, in the absence of any final report for that year, from Interim Report 5. They also share one structural limitation: They omit some candidates who spend small sums. Only candidates who raise or spend at least \$5,000 are required to file reports with the FEC; some of these candidates report nonetheless, but many do not. The resulting "error" cuts two ways: It underestimates totals a bit by eliminating some very small sums, and yet it overestimates any average figure (e.g., average receipts of House challengers) by reducing the number of candidates in the divisor.

Finally, the reader must bear in mind that any set of data, including this one, catches activity at a specific time—in this case, as of December 31 of the second year of an election cycle. What appear as loans taken by a candidate from his or her own resources may, for example, be replaced by contributions in postelection fund-raising.

tion cycle; the comparable average for the Senate was \$2,110,349 (Table 1). Something of the difference between races for the two houses can also be captured by looking—in the best American tradition—at the upper end of the spending scale. In the 1984 elections 37 of the Democratic and Republican candidates for the Senate (54 percent of them) spent more than \$1 million in the election cycle; only four of the major-parties' general election candidates for the House (less than 1 percent) spent as much.

To compare expenditures in House races with those in Senate races, however, is to ignore differences in the size and scope of their constituencies. Since there are 435 districts for House races and only 50 for the Senate, the "average" member of the Senate represents 8.7 times more people and 8.7 times more acreage than do the members of the House. Obviously, Senate races will cost more than House races. The more meaningful question is whether they cost more by some more nearly equal standard of the size of the political, representational task—that is, by some standardized "political unit." One might even speculate that the marginal cost of campaigning would decrease with the number of "political units" represented. In other words, one might well expect economies of scale in campaigning. If that is not the case, one faces the possibility that campaigning itself may be so different in races for the two houses that there are, consequently, different mechanisms setting the levels of spending for each.

In reality, Senate campaigns have in recent years been—on the average—about 8 or 9 times as expensive as those for the House. Even when one controls for the number of races, the ratio of the Senate averages to those for the House was 7.7 to 1 in 1980, 8.2 in 1982, and 9.6 in 1984. Senate campaigns do not appear to involve very considerable economies of scale. That conclusion, of course, does not take into account differences in the square mileage of House and Senate constituencies. In one sense a greater number of people does assume a greater extent of territory, and consideration of the former does involve an assumption about the latter. I am at a loss, however, to know how one might decide whether an increase of 8.7 times in area introduces an additional burden on the campaign beyond that of the increase in the number of people.

One can, of course, control for the number of people a campaign must reach. In doing so, one begins to see something approaching parity in the cost of House and Senate campaigns (see Table 2). In some years the House average was greater, in some the Senate average.³ If one looks

3. In reaching these averages I have used census data on total population in the state or district. I realize that population may translate into eligible voters and actual voter turnout at different rates in different parts of the country, but I doubt that the variation

only at the more closely competitive races—on the assumption that competitiveness does indeed affect the campaign and its need to spend money—the differences become significant, even dramatic (Table 2). Perhaps, then, with even a rough attempt to control for some important differences in the campaign tasks, Senate campaigns are not in fact more expensive than those for the House. Perhaps, indeed, there are even some efficiencies of scale in congressional campaigning.

Conventional wisdom, nonetheless, notes that Senate campaigns are literally more expensive than House campaigns and that the major reason is the availability and cost of television for Senate campaigning. Television markets more closely approximate the larger Senate constituencies and are therefore a more efficient way of reaching the larger numbers of voters. Candidates for the House, in contrast, represent districts that may be only a small part of a television market; in a metropolitan area of 3 million people a House candidate would have to buy television time reaching an audience of which only about a fifth live in the congressional district.

But do candidates for the Senate in fact allocate more of their campaign budgets for television? Hard data are not easy to come by. Reports to the FEC are notoriously unspecific about the purposes, even the recipients, of campaign expenditures. Edie Goldenberg and Michael Traugott surveyed a sample of 1978 House candidates, and their data do say a great deal about the outlays of House campaigns.⁴ Their respondents reported spending 58.1 percent of their funds on advertising and media expenses; only 23.4 percent of those funds went to television, however. Thus some 13.6 percent of all budgets went for television. One can suppose, moreover, that the variation from campaign to campaign was substantial, depending on the congruence of the local television market and the congressional district.⁵

For Senate campaigns, we have only isolated scraps of evidence. In 1983 Richard E. Cohen brought together a considerable amount of anecdotal data on expenditures in congressional campaigns.⁶ According to

in translation will be of major consequence for the averages computed here. The calculations of the averages may require a word of explanation. The divisor in Senate races is an "average population," that is, the total population of states with Senate races in that year divided by the number of those states; in House races it is simply the U.S. population divided by 435.

4. *Campaigning for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1984).

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–91. The use of television did not differ greatly among incumbents, challengers, and open-seat candidates, although incumbents spent a smaller percentage of their budget (but larger sums of money) on television.

6. "Costly Campaigns: Candidates Learn That Reaching the Voters Is Expensive," *National Journal*, April 16, 1983, pp. 782–788.

TABLE 2
Average Dollars Spent per Person in District or State by Major-Party
Candidates for Congress, 1978–1984^a

	1978	1980	1982	1984
All campaigns				
House	\$.40	\$.52	\$.76	\$.77
Senate	.57	.46	.66	1.17
Competitive Campaigns ^b				
House	— ^c	\$1.07	\$1.29	\$1.69
Senate	— ^c	.52	.97	1.77

^a See note 3 for an explanation of the calculations used here.

^b Defined as those in which the eventual winner won by less than 55% of the vote.

^c The FEC computer tapes necessary for this calculation are not available for the 1977–1978 election cycle.

his informants, Senator Richard Lugar, Republican of Indiana, spent \$1.354 million on television exposure out of a total of \$3.2 million spent on his 1982 campaign. That was a hefty 42.3 percent of the budget. In the same year in California, Democrat Edmund G. ("Jerry") Brown spent 71.4 percent of his funds on television (\$3.8 million of \$5.32 million), while his Republican opponent, Pete Wilson, spent 50.1 percent (\$3.5 million of \$6.98 million). In Minnesota in the same year David Durenberger, a Republican, spent \$936,000 of \$3.97 million (23.6 percent) on television time. His Democratic opponent, Mark Dayton, spent 52 percent of his funds (\$3.7 of \$7.1 million) on television.⁷ Even though these 1982 spendings come 4 years later than the Goldenberg–Traugott data on the House, they are from two to five times greater than the House average in 1978. Differences of that magnitude are not easy to dismiss.

To conclude, then, two facts are probably beyond dispute. In absolute numbers, candidates for the Senate do spend more on the average than do candidates for the House. And they apparently spend a larger percentage of their outlays on television advertising. It is the relationship between those two facts that is in dispute. Certainly television is a more effective medium for reaching the greater population and the greater expanses of the average Senate constituency. But that is not to say that Senate candidates spend more because of their dependence on television for campaigning. They spend more than House candidates primarily because they have larger constituencies. Television may possibly even be a way of keeping down their costs of campaigning. Indeed,

7. *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, November 5, 1982.

behind any attempt to link expenditure levels to television campaigning is the assumption that the costs of campaigning are driven by the costs of what is purchased. That assumption ignores the possibility that costs are determined by the sums of money available for spending, but that is another argument and another article.

Sources of Campaign Money

There are only five possible sources of a candidate's money: individual contributors, party committees, political action committees, the candidate's own resources, and the public treasury. Since there is no public funding of congressional elections, one can eliminate that last possibility in this discussion. In addition, individuals, PACs, and party committees may spend their money in the campaign in ways other than direct contributions to candidates. For the moment, however, those expenditures will be set aside while we concentrate on the sources of the money the candidate receives and controls directly.

As simple as the calculus of contributions is—only four sources for congressional campaigns—the data of the Federal Election Commission until recently have not matched it. (Data on campaign finance, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, are rarely pure and never simple.) We have a full series of data on PAC and party contributions, but before 1984 the FEC did not report the candidates' self-financing, and it reported only the largest individual contributions (see Tables 3 and 4). But the result, imperfect as it surely is, gives one a far better picture of the pattern of contributions than one gets of the pattern of candidate expenditures.

Contributions to House candidates differ from those to Senate candidates in one major way: PAC contributions account for a far larger percentage of the receipts of House candidates (Tables 3 and 4). Moreover, the difference is increasing because PACs are assuming a progressively greater role in House campaigns, while, in contrast, they provided a smaller percentage of Senate receipts in 1984 than they had 4 years earlier. Incumbents in each house get an even larger percentage of their receipts from PACs; in 1984 PACs accounted for 42.7 percent of incumbent receipts in the House and 23.9 percent in the Senate.

If not from PACs, where do Senate candidates get their money? Since they also get a little bit less from party committees than do House candidates, they make up the difference perforce in larger reliance on their own funds and especially on the largesse of individual contributors (Tables 3 and 4). As for party contributions, neither set of candidates relies on them for direct contributions even as much as they did in 1978

TABLE 3
Receipts of Major-Party General Election Candidates
for the House; 1978-1984

	1978	1980	1982	1984
Total receipts	\$92,283,124	\$124,277,436	\$185,057,418	\$197,275,458
PAC contributions (percentage)	22,852,326 (24.8)	35,869,784 (28.9)	57,894,951 (31.3)	72,891,962 (36.9)
Party contributions (percentage)	4,883,402 (5.3)	4,524,312 (3.6)	5,773,245 (3.1)	5,340,792 (2.7)
Individuals (\$500+) (percentage)	11,379,401 (12.3)	18,708,219 (15.1)	29,348,420 (15.9)	32,789,727 (16.7)
Individuals (all) (percentage)	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a	94,992,673 (48.2)
Candidate \$\$, loans (percentage)	(data not reported by FEC)			11,893,230 (6.0)

Note: The percentages fall short of a 100% total because of missing data of various kinds. Among the missing categories of receipts are cash transferred from other candidates, loans from sources other than the candidate, money from refunds (e.g., deposits refunded), and earned income (e.g., interest on campaign funds invested for the period between contribution and expenditure).

^a For 1978, 1980, 1982, the FEC aggregated data only on individual contributions of \$500 and over.

TABLE 4
Receipts for Major-Party General Election Candidates
for the Senate; 1978-1984

	1978	1980	1982	1984
Total receipts	\$67,197,777	\$78,140,028	\$117,263,546	\$147,638,897
PAC contributions (percentages)	8,893,700 (13.2)	15,919,371 (20.4)	21,791,044 (18.6)	27,900,914 (18.9)
Party contributions (percentages)	1,169,887 (1.7)	1,157,468 (1.5)	1,179,558 (1.0)	1,032,389 (.7)
Individuals (\$500+) (percentages)	14,409,101 (21.4)	19,798,035 (25.3)	30,575,552 (26.1)	36,981,271 (25.1)
Individuals (all) (percentages)	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a	95,691,902 (64.8)
Candidate \$\$, loans (percentages)	(data not reported by the FEC)			15,871,250 (10.8)

Note: The percentages fall short of a 100% total because of missing data of various kinds. Among the missing categories of receipts are cash transferred from other candidates, loans from sources other than the candidate, money from refunds (e.g., deposits refunded), and earned income (e.g., interest on campaign funds invested for the period between contribution and expenditure).

^a For 1978, 1980, and 1982, the FEC aggregated data only on individual contributions of \$500 and over.

or 1980. Indeed, no datum sets American campaign finance apart from that of other Western democracies so decisively as the .7 percent contribution of parties to the treasuries of Senate candidates. (The parties have, however, increased dramatically their spending "on behalf of" their candidates in recent years. We turn to that and related developments shortly.)

Any number of explanations for these different patterns of candidate receipts suggest themselves. Seniority and the committee system influence the distribution of influence more directly in the House, and that may suit the focused legislative goals of many PACs. The politics of electing House members is also less visible, less publicized than Senatorial politics, and that fact, too, may make it harder for House candidates to tap significant sums from individual contributors. Moreover, structural conditions are certainly at play. House elections come every 2 years, and the pressures of continuous campaigning encourage candidates to raise money quickly and in the relatively large sums PACs give. Senate candidates, on the other hand, must raise larger sums of money by reason of their larger constituencies, and those sums probably dictate a strategy of more broadly based fund-raising.

Finally, since the average Senate campaign is raising and spending eight or nine times as much money as the average House campaign, more individuals and committees obviously contribute to them. But at the same time the number of contributors is additionally a function of the size of contributions and thus, in part, the statutory limits on contributions—\$1,000 for individuals and \$5,000 for PACs⁸—that apply to both. So, one wonders: Is the ratio of the number of contributors to House and Senate campaigns similar to their ratios of total receipts and expenditures? Or do Senatorial candidates deal with relatively fewer contributors of relatively larger average sums? Certainly differences in the sheer numbers of contributors (and potential contributors) define the very politics of fund-raising and contributor cultivation.

Senate candidates do receive contributions in larger chunks than do House candidates, and that fact does reduce the proportionate number of contributors—but not as much as one might think (see Table 5). The evidence on large contributors (the only systematic data available on individual contributors) suggests that the average number of contribu-

8. The limits are "per candidate/per election." For example, a PAC may give a maximum of \$5,000 per election to a candidate in the 2-year election cycle. Since primary and general elections are for these purposes each separate elections, the de facto limit for the 2 years may be \$10,000. These and all other statutory provisions of the Congress regulating campaign finance may be found in volume 2 of the U.S. Code, sections 431 through 455.

TABLE 5
 PAC and Individual Contributions over \$500 to 1984
 Major-Party Candidates for House and Senate

	House	Senate
Individual contributions (\$500+)		
Average amount per candidate	\$40,183	\$543,842
Average number per candidate	56	724
Individual contributions (total)		
Average amount per candidate	\$116,413	\$1,407,234
Average number per candidate		(data not available)
PAC contributions:		
Average amount per candidate	\$89,328	\$410,308
Average number per candidate	97	228

tors to campaigns for the two houses is in about the same 12:1 ratio as the sum of the contributions. The number of individual contributors increases more or less as the sums do—that is, that average sums contributed are about the same in races for the two houses. The size of PAC contributions is, however, greater in Senate campaigns, approximately twice that of the average in the House. Thus, the number of PAC contributors is proportionally smaller in the Senate—smaller both as a collective target for fund-raising and as a constituency to respond to in policy matters.⁹

By whatever factor of expansion, therefore, Senate candidates face a much more arduous fund-raising effort and manage a much vaster constituency of contributors than do House candidacies. Senator David Durenberger, a Minnesota Republican, has divulged a great deal more about his 1982 contributors than most candidates do, and the story is illustrative even if it comes from a campaign more costly than the average in its year. Some 25 percent of his receipts came from 688 different PACs contributing an average of \$1,553 apiece. The remaining 75 percent came from 34,200 individuals.¹⁰

9. I am aware of the danger of even estimating the "average" size of contributions by dividing an average by an average. In the one instance for which there are data on the average size of contributions—those by PACs—the averages for 1984 (\$928 and \$1,803 for House and Senate) are very close to the figures one gets if one divides the average amount of contributions by the average number of contributors.
10. U.S. Congress, Senate. Committee on Rules and Administration. *Hearings on Campaign Finance Reform Proposals of 1983*, Senate Hearing No. 98-588, 98th Cong., 1st sess., January 26-27, May 17, September 29, 1983, pp. 128-132.

The tasks of raising money for House and Senate campaigns are, therefore, significantly different. The magnitudes of the sums to be raised are of different orders, and since candidates for the Senate do not raise money in vastly larger chunks, they raise it from significantly larger numbers of PACs and individuals. The task of fund-raising must unquestionably be more burdensome than that which a House candidate faces. Of course, it is a burden assumed only one-third as often. More important, perhaps, the differences in funding may have different consequences for legislative politics. Successful candidates for the House come to office with a far greater reliance on PAC contributions than the winning senators. Senatorial candidates come into office with a larger and more diverse constituency of contributors. Just what effect contributors have on legislative decision making, and whether the larger number of contributors increases the total pressure on a senator or whether they cancel or offset each other, are matters that cannot be settled here. How one settles them for oneself defines much of the significance of the funding differences.

Noncontributory Spending

In addition to their own direct spending, candidates may be "benefited" in the campaign by two additional forms of spending beyond their immediate control. Individuals or groups (including PACs) may spend without limit to urge the election or defeat of any candidate. Because they must do so without the candidate's knowledge or cooperation, the expenditures are called "independent." Second, political party committees may spend "on behalf" of their candidates for the Congress. The statutory limits on these party expenditures are complex and arcane.¹¹

Independent expenditures on House and Senate campaigns differ in two very important ways (see Table 6). The sums spent on Senate races are vastly greater, and the chances of the spending being in opposition to a candidate (the so-called negative spending) are greater in the Senate campaigns. In 1984, for instance, the independent expenditure totals for each house's campaigns (Table 6), when divided by the number of contested elections in each (367 in the House and 32 in the Senate), yield

11. The basic statutory provisions limit national party committee expenditures to \$10,000 for a House candidate and to \$20,000, or 2 cents per eligible voter (whichever is greater), for a Senate candidate. Those figures are stated in 1974 dollars and adjusted upward every 2 years (2 U.S.C. sec. 441a(d)). In addition, interpretations of the FEC permit national committees to act as agents of state party committees and spend in their name on behalf of congressional candidates.

TABLE 6
Independent Spending in House and Senate Campaigns, 1980–1984^a

	1980	1982	1984
House campaigns			
For	\$486,866	\$686,627	\$1,207,860
Against	54,207	927,141	142,547
Total	541,073	1,613,768	1,350,407
Senate campaigns			
For	311,223	263,686	1,734,039
Against	1,225,229	3,499,564	1,186,552
Total	1,536,452	3,763,250	2,920,591

^a In practice, independent expenditures have been only on behalf of or in opposition to major-party candidates in these three elections. The only exception: \$646 spent on behalf of a minor-party candidate for the House in 1980.

very different averages: \$3,680 in the House and \$91,268 in the Senate. And in any given year the percentage of the independent expenditures going into “negative” campaigns is greater in the Senate than in the House. In the three elections from 1980 to 1984, spending in opposition to candidates accounted for 10.0, 57.5, and 10.6 percent of independent spending on House campaigns. The percentages for the Senate for those three elections were 59.0, 93.0, and 40.6.

The political right has made the great bulk of these independent expenditures, just as it has dominated independent spending in the presidential campaigns of 1980 and 1984. The National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) alone accounts for 52 and 58 percent of the money spent in the two congressional campaigns of 1980 and 1982. It is not surprising, therefore, that independent spending has worked largely to the benefit of Republican candidates—or was at least intended to work to Republican profit (see Table 7). The Republican advantage narrows in 1984, but it is apparent in all three elections. It is also apparent in the races for both houses, but the edge is consistently greater in races for the Senate. That edge, however, has gradually diminished from 1980 to 1984; in that latter year independent spending is 55.2 percent “pro-Republican” in the House campaigns and 62.0 percent in those for the Senate.

In the party spending “on behalf of” the party’s candidates, Republican committees have a persistent advantage over the Democrats, although the Democrats have, to be sure, increased their activity in recent elections (see Table 8). More important for the purposes of this analysis,

TABLE 7
Partisan Intention of Independent Spending, 1980–1984

	1980	1982	1984
House campaigns			
"Pro Democratic" ^a	\$183,602	\$286,719	\$605,230
"Pro Republican" ^b	356,825	1,327,049	745,117
Senate campaigns			
"Pro Democratic" ^a	123,891	504,022	1,109,966
"Pro Republican" ^b	1,412,561	3,259,228	1,810,625

^aThese totals combine expenditures on behalf of Democratic candidates and in opposition to Republicans.

^bThese totals combine expenditures on behalf of Republican candidates and in opposition to Democrats.

TABLE 8
Major-Party Spending "on Behalf of" Candidates, 1978–1984

	1978	1980	1982	1984
House campaigns				
Democratic	\$72,892	\$256,346	\$694,321	\$1,774,452
Republican	1,297,079	2,226,544	5,293,260	6,190,309
Total	1,369,971	2,482,890	5,987,581	7,964,761
Senate campaigns				
Democratic	229,218	1,132,912	2,265,197	3,947,731
Republican	2,723,880	5,434,758	8,715,761	6,518,415
Total	2,953,098	6,567,670	10,980,958	10,466,146

the sums of party money are consistently higher in the Senate. Even with the surge of spending on House campaigns in 1984, spending on Senate campaigns is 31 percent higher.

Finally, when one combines data on independent expenditures with data on party spending, one striking and summary conclusion is very apparent (see Table 9). That part of the campaign goes on overwhelmingly in the races for the Senate. The difference, in fact, is even more striking when one remembers that in candidate-controlled expenditures the House campaign totals consistently outrun those in Senate races (Table 1). Even with the narrowing of the gap in 1984 the candidate expenditure ratio, House to Senate, is 1.25:1. In these outlays it is 1:1.44. If one looks at the average of these "outside" expenditures per contested

TABLE 9
Independent Spending and Party Spending for Candidates, 1980–1984

	1980	1982	1984
House	\$3,023,963	\$7,601,349	\$9,315,168
Senate	8,104,122	14,744,208	13,386,737

campaign, the contrast is dramatic—\$25,382 for each House campaign and \$418,336 (a figure 16.5 times greater) for each one for the Senate.

The Incumbent Factor

Few themes run as persistently through scholarship on the Congress as the theme of incumbency power. Something approaching an academic industry sedulously assesses its various effects, most especially its ability to stifle electoral competition and assure the reelection of incumbents by safe margins.¹² Such electoral dominance by incumbents, however, is primarily a phenomenon of the House of Representatives. Not surprisingly, the power of incumbency in campaign finance is also far more apparent in House campaigns.

The different status of incumbency is most dramatically stated by aggregate totals. In 1984 House incumbents spent \$115.5 million seeking reelection, an ample 64.5 percent of the \$179 million that all general election candidates spent. By contrast, the Senate incumbents in 1984 spent \$72.1 million in their campaigns, only 50.1 percent of the \$143.7 million spent by all general election candidates. Even when one corrects for different numbers by taking averages, the differences between House and Senate campaigns are all too apparent (see Table 10). The average House incumbent is spending a figure farther beyond the average figures for challengers and open-seat candidates than is his Senate counterpart. In 1984, for example, the average incumbent's expenditure in House campaigns is a figure 55 percent of the combined averages of challengers

12. On the subject of the "vanishing marginals," see especially Morris P. Fiorina, *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Thomas E. Mann, *Unsafe at Any Margin: Interpreting Congressional Elections* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978); and David R. Mayhew, "Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals," *Polity* 6 (1974): 295–317.

TABLE 10
Average Expenditure of Major-Party Candidates Running
in General Elections, 1980–1984

	1980	1982	1984
House			
Incumbents	\$164,453	\$263,434	\$280,241
Challengers	99,633	128,409	131,108
Open-seat candidates	208,059	292,647	380,519
Senate			
Incumbents	1,357,232	1,796,054	2,484,715
Challengers	845,570	1,189,012	1,041,577
Open-seat candidates	1,119,676	4,141,921	4,466,636

and open-seat candidates; in the campaigns for the Senate the incumbent average is only 45 percent of the the total of other candidates' outlays.

Incumbents, moreover, raise their money earlier than do other candidates, and House incumbents raise it even earlier than senators. In the world of early money—"seed money," as it is fashionably known—no money is earlier than the money in the bank, the cash on hand, as the 2-year election cycle begins. House incumbents in the aggregate begin the election cycle with almost five and a half times more cash than do members of the Senate (see Table 11). The average amounts of cash on hand in any one year are as convincing. In 1984 the 412 House incumbents running for reelection had an average of \$45,137 on hand on January 1, 1983. The average Senate incumbent—there were 29—had \$106,863, but the House figure was 16.1 percent of the average House incumbent's expenditures, while the Senate figure was 4.3 percent.

House incumbents also tap sources of contributions somewhat differently than do senators. In 1984, for example, they raised 42.7 percent of their campaign money from PACs; Senate incumbents raised only 23.9 percent of theirs from PACs. Those percentages, however, are in about the same relationship as all candidates' contributions from PACs in the two houses. But Senate challengers find it easier to raise PAC funds, and thus Senate incumbents do not enjoy the relative advantage over them in raising PAC money that House members do. In 1984, for example, House incumbents raised 42.7 percent of their funds from PACs, but their challengers got only 23.5 percent of their funds from

TABLE 11
Cash on Hand of Incumbents and All General Election Candidates, 1980–1984

	1980	1982	1984
House campaigns			
Total cash on hand	\$7,738,018	\$12,352,076	\$18,700,900
Incumbents' total	7,695,445	12,206,800	18,596,369
Senate campaigns			
Total cash on hand	571,936	1,947,061	3,313,988
Incumbents' total	523,837	1,938,258	3,099,036

PACs; in the Senate the two comparable percentages were 23.9 and 18.6.¹³

This aspect of “incumbent power” invites explanations in keeping with the general conventional wisdom about House incumbents. A number of them come to mind, but most of our hunches, it seems to me, come down to two explanations: one growing out of structural characteristics in the Congress, the other reflecting the electoral politics of the Congress.¹⁴ First, the traditional power of the leadership, the committee system, and the majority in the House invests the incumbent members, especially those achieving substantial seniority, with greater legislative power than incumbents in the Senate have. Second, challengers and open-seat candidates find it easier to raise money for Senate races simply because they stand a better chance of victory against Senate incumbents. The PACs whose parent organization have lobbying programs thus take a more pragmatic approach to House races, protecting access by supporting incumbents. When the chances of defeating either individual incumbents or the incumbent majority are smaller—and they surely are in the House—a pragmatic policy of “working with” incumbents is predictable.

13. There is the possibility that what appear to be incumbent-related phenomena are in fact majority related. The test for that possibility in these data is the Senate, since partisan control of it shifted after the 1980 elections. There are no indications in data on the Senate campaigns that the campaign finance of Republican candidates for the Senate, even Republican incumbents, changes after 1980. See, for example, Table 12.
14. The first explanation seems to me to dominate the interpretations of congressional campaign finance in American political journalism; the leading exponent of the latter is Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983).

There is, of course, an accelerating dynamic in such an explanation. The more money House candidates raise, especially before, or early into, the election cycle, the more capable they will be of frightening off challengers by making it difficult for them to raise money with which to compete. And the more they reduce the possibility of losses, either of the individual or the majority party, the more they press a pragmatic, incumbent-centered strategy on many contributors. The lessons have apparently not been lost on Senate incumbents, for one sees a gradual strengthening of their "early" financial position in the last two election cycles. Given the nature of power and organization in the Senate, however, they may find it harder to press their advantage than have House incumbents.

Summary and Conclusions

That campaign finance in House and Senate campaigns differs in so many ways cannot be accidental. Those differences suggest, at the least, that campaigns for the two houses differ markedly and that, therefore, the very politics of election and reelection to the two houses differ. For patterns of campaign finance are mirrors that reflect the style and quality of the politics they pay for.

Before we venture into speculation on the more basic differences that the differing patterns of campaign finance reveal, it is probably appropriate and useful to recapitulate the differences in the ways in which House and Senate campaigns are financed.

- Senate campaigns cost more than those for the House, but the cost differences are "narrowed" if one controls for size of population and for competitiveness of elections.
- Campaigns for the Senate rely more on television as a way of reaching the greater populations and geographic expanses of the senatorial constituencies.
- Candidates for the House rely more on contributions from PACs than do candidates for the Senate, who in turn count more on individual contributions and their own resources. Neither count very substantially on direct party contributions.
- Senate campaigns draw from a much larger and diverse number of contributors than do those for the House. Only in the instance of PACs do the size of the contributions increase over those to House campaigns, thus reducing the ratio of contributors below the ratio of the aggregate sums contributed.

- Candidates for the Senate benefit more substantially from political expenditures they do not make, that is, independent expenditures by individuals and groups and spending on behalf of candidates by political party committees.
- Incumbent candidates for the House spend a much larger share of the expenditures of all general election candidates than members of the Senate do; they also raise more funds early enough to take the initial funding step that can intimidate potential rivals.

Those are substantial differences, and they appear to be the major ones between the campaigns for the two houses of Congress in the 1980s.

What does one infer or deduce from these bits of data about money in congressional campaigns? I would suggest the obvious first: There are differences in the patterns of campaign finance because there are differences in the electoral politics of the two houses. We have here two kinds of American legislative campaigns, each shaped by the nature of power in the two houses and by the nature of their constituencies and their wider publics. Those differences in campaign politics can, I think, be discussed around four themes: visibility, ideology, institutions, and electoral strategy.¹⁵

First, to *visibility*. Like the men and women they elect, Senate campaigns are more public and celebrated than those for the House. The prestige of the Senate and the place of its constituencies in American federalism demand attention. To reach their more extensive electorates senatorial candidates rely more on television—and probably on the rest of the media, too. As creatures of television, they and their names and faces are familiar, and they often become celebrities of a sort. Perhaps it is that visibility that enables them to raise large sums of money from individual contributors and that enables national organizations to raise money for independent spending on their campaigns. House campaigns, on the contrary, are far less visible and much more a local political event. Campaigning is far more apt to be on a direct candidate-to-voter basis, and few House candidates ever develop the “star” quality necessary to tap large numbers of individual contributors.

It may at first thought seem contradictory that these personalized campaigns for the Senate are also more partisan and issue centered—more concerned with *ideology*—than those for the House. But the evidence strongly suggests it. The independent expenditures that focus

15. What follows relies heavily on Jacobson, *ibid.*, on Richard F. Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), and more generally on the work of political scientists on congressional politics.

more on Senate campaigns—and are more apt to be “negative” in Senate campaigns—are the work primarily of a small number of ideological or issue-involved PACs raising money in nationwide direct mailings.¹⁶ And 1984’s elections to the Senate brought new innovations in independent spending: A Los Angeles millionaire spent more than \$1 million to defeat Senator Charles Percy of Illinois, 17 different groups and individuals spent more than \$730,000 in the Texas race, and independent spending in the Helms–Hunt contest in North Carolina reached \$1.43 million. The contribution strategies of corporate PACs point in the same direction (see Table 12). Even though they support Democratic candidates heavily in House campaigns—and have been criticized in corporate and business circles for doing so—they behave less pragmatically and more ideologically in their support of Republican candidates for the Senate.¹⁷ Perhaps it is the very celebrity of the Senate that invests its campaigns with issue and ideological significance. Perhaps it is the storied influence and independence of the individual senator. Or perhaps it has something to do with the images and realities of media campaigning.

If ideology governs a good deal of the campaign finance of the Senate, it is pragmatism that dominates that of the House—and that fact certainly reflects a number of characteristics of the House as a legislative institution. The short 2-year term of representatives forces them to campaign and raise money almost constantly, and the smaller confines of House districts dictates a more restricted, home-folks politics. The ability of House incumbents to win reelection in great numbers, combined with the structures in the House that promote influence based on seniority and majority, puts incumbents in singularly strong electoral and financial positions. Under such circumstances many contributors, especially PACs, will allocate funds in ways that protect access to and good working relationships with members of the House. For their part, incumbents seek funds early and aggressively in fund-raising campaigns that exploit that very strategy. In short, House campaigns reflect an insider’s politics in which the maintenance of alliances, rather than ideological challenges, are of the essence.

Finally, as Gary Jacobson has argued so persuasively,¹⁸ the *electoral*

16. Aside from liberal and conservative ideologies, the specific issues most heavily supported are opposition to gun control and abortion.

17. Table 12 also offers evidence that differences between the two houses are not artifacts of different party majorities. Note the evenness of corporate PAC support for Senate Republicans, both before and after the shift in the Senate majority after 1980.

18. See Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, and Gary Jacobson, “Money in the 1980 and 1982 Congressional Elections,” in *Money and Politics in the United States*, ed. Michael J. Malbin (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1984).

TABLE 12
Contributions of Corporate PACs to Major-Party Candidates
by Political Party, 1978–1984

	1978	1980	1982	1984
House				
Democrats	\$2,368,452 (41.1%)	\$4,494,225 (38.6%)	\$6,536,014 (36.0%)	\$10,084,947 (44.0%)
Republicans	3,392,953 (58.9%)	7,153,786 (61.4%)	11,599,493 (64.0%)	12,823,124 (56.0%)
Senate				
Democrats	780,204 (23.4%)	1,835,469 (28.5%)	2,314,738 (28.0%)	2,900,458 (25.4%)
Republicans	2,558,138 (76.6%)	4,609,547 (71.5%)	5,960,892 (72.0%)	8,497,685 (74.6%)

strategy of contributors shapes the patterns of campaign finance. Their calculus of advantage unquestionably detects different opportunities in House and Senate campaigns. Given the electoral strength of House incumbents, the chances of electing members of the Senate seem greater, as do the chances of winning a Senate majority. Perhaps the value of the Senate seat, in terms of power or influence, seems greater; it is 1/51 of a majority rather than 1/218, even leaving aside the influence of a freshman senator vis-à-vis a freshman representative. Small wonder that contributors are more willing to invest in the campaigns of Senate challengers and open-seat candidates and, by contrast, prone to support incumbents of the House seeking another term.

Whatever the explanations for the two congressional systems of campaign finance, one final reality behind them ought to be noted. Each candidate for either house develops and ultimately relies on a "resource constituency." Years ago, a candidate's campaign resources came largely from the electoral constituency and, within it, largely from the candidate's political party. In the cash economy of today's campaigning, the resource constituency is much more diverse and increasingly drawn from outside the electoral constituency. Because it is increasingly separate and different, it amounts to a new set of actors in the campaign and a new claim on the elected candidate's attention and decisions in public office.

The data of this chapter suggest some of the ways in which the resource constituencies of House candidates differ from those of candidates for the Senate. I have a hunch, furthermore, that the gulf between resource and electoral constituencies is greater for Senate candidates, if

only because they develop a more national (i.e., "out of state") resource base. At the least it seems clear that the political actors who make up the resource constituencies become influences in the campaign itself, affecting the recruitment of candidates, the extent of the campaign debate, the very nature of electoral competition. It may also be the case that their effect on policymaking in the House will differ from their effect on policymaking in the Senate. But that, as I noted earlier, involves a long and closely argued debate and, perforce, another article.

V

The 1984 Election



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9

President Reagan as a Political Strategist

Aaron Wildavsky

When I speak of politicians as strategists, I mean (a) that they have a vision, a broad sense of direction toward which they wish the nation to move; and (b) that they use effective and creative (nonobvious) means in pursuing these ends. Nothing is implied about the desirability of the directions chosen, for then politicians could be strategists only by being in accord with the preferences of the analyst. But I do mean to rule out nondemocratic means and ends, for one of the major tasks of a strategist is to work by persuasion rather than coercion. The more a politician alters prevailing policies and expectations concerning behavior while moving events in the desired direction, that movement and direction being compatible with democratic norms, the better the strategist.

There is a difference between being fact smart and being strategy smart. Jimmy Carter was fact smart. Unfortunately for him,¹ but fortunately for Ronald Reagan, the presidency does not depend on memory for facts. The short-answer theory of the presidency—that president is best who would score highest on a short-answer test—leaves a lot to be desired.

1. See Jack Knott and Aaron Wildavsky, "Jimmy Carter's Theory of Governing," *Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 1977, pp. 49–67.

President Reagan's disinterest in, and misstatement of, facts about many aspects of public policy have led some observers to characterize him as dumb.² His flouting of the conventional wisdom on such issues as deficits has led others to dismiss him as obtuse. The fact that he keeps besting them deeply discomforts his policy opponents. Even then, they seek explanations outside of Ronald Reagan's strategic abilities. They denigrate the public, to whose low mentality the boob in the White House appeals. Or they upgrade his communications skills, damning with faint praise by suggesting he possesses some ineffable essence that exudes persuasiveness. Amiability as a substitute for understanding is the farthest his critics will go in allotting their limited supply of credit. The thesis of this paper, by contrast, is that President Reagan is a superb political strategist.

Getting the Democrats to Support Republican Issues

The extraordinary character of the 1984 presidential campaign provides ample evidence of the profound effect that Ronald Reagan has had on national political debate. His steadfast support of across-the-board tax cuts in the face of immense pressure from established opinion led his Democratic party opponent, Walter Mondale, to make the achievement of a balanced budget into a positive moral virtue. Thus a Republican issue that, given its diffuse nature, never served that party well, became the mainstay of Democratic speeches and advertisements. At one stroke

2. President Abraham Lincoln, often viewed as a paradigm of seriousness, allocated his time predominantly to war and union. A lot got left out. In a distinguished series of essays on Lincoln, David Donald observes that

Less than any other major American President did Lincoln control or even influence the Congress. Noting that many of the Civil War congressmen were his seniors and humbly declaring "that many of you have more experience than I, in the conduct of public affairs," Lincoln bowed not merely to the will but to the caprice of the legislators. . . . The President had remarkably little connection with the legislation passed during the Civil War. He proposed few specific laws to Congress; his bill for compensated emancipation is notably exceptional. He exerted little influence in securing the adoption of bills that were introduced. In some of the most significant legislation enacted during his administration Lincoln showed little interest. The laws providing for the construction of a Pacific railroad, for the creation of the Department of Agriculture, for the importation of "contract laborers" from Europe, for the tariff protection of American manufacturers, and for the establishment of land-grant colleges had little connection with Lincoln aside from his formal approval of them. That approval was usually granted without hesitation. Less than any other important American President did Lincoln use his veto power. . . . Lincoln was also ineffectual in controlling the executive departments of the government. He and his cabinet never formed a unified administration. [David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era* (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 191–193.]

the Democratic party denied its traditional (and mostly successful) recourse to spending to create employment; it also obligated itself to keep the revenues it can raise from new taxes to reduce the deficit. The presidential campaign reduced the Democratic party issue—fairness—to a price tag of \$30 billion, the additional sums Mondale would have spent on social welfare. If this 3 percent of total spending was all fairness amounted to, the remaining 97 percent was thereby blessed as “fair.” Even if he had lost the election, Ronald Reagan would have won the battle over future domestic policy.

If Mondale was so smart and Reagan so dumb, why did the Democrats campaign on Republican issues? Surely the sanctity of the Constitution—due to President Reagan’s support of constitutional amendments on budget balance, abortion, and prayer—and budget balance are not the issues the party of government intervention would choose to present itself. Virtually nothing was heard from the Democratic party about social welfare. Hardly a peep sounded in regard to a massive jobs program. That undoubtedly was the president’s fault, for he shifted the entire debate in an economically conservative direction.

Domestic Policy Leadership

Denigration of the president has led Democrats to underestimate his policy guidance. For Ronald Reagan has integrated public policy with political support so as to provide creative policy leadership.

Ronald Reagan is the first president since Herbert Hoover (though, considering his activist temperament, Calvin Coolidge might be better) to favor limited government at home. Pursuing his aim of restricting the reach and reducing the resources available to the federal government, Reagan helped cut income taxes across the board by approximately one-fourth over 3 years, reducing the highest bracket from 70 to 50 percent. His acceptance of historically high deficits, in an effort to use resource scarcity to depress domestic spending still further, is eloquent testimony to his single-minded devotion to decreasing the size of the domestic government compared to the size of the economy.

Rumor has it that the president is so dumb he cannot understand complex tax questions. Presumably that is why we hear little or nothing about raising taxes but a great deal about cutting spending. Shaping the congressional agenda so that the major debate is whether defense or domestic programs should be cut the most, even though this is not entirely to the president’s liking, represents a substantial strategic success.

Ronald Reagan has succeeded in coordinating domestic policy. Every official in Washington is aware of what the president wants—less. When there are conflicts, the goal of reducing the size of government wins out.

Even when the president's ostensible aim is not achieved, his adherence to priorities provides a sense of direction. Reagan's initiative on restructuring the federal system, for instance, failed for a number of reasons, including his unwillingness to come up with the cash to cover the transition. Nevertheless, the budget cuts have had a similar effect. For, as Richard Nathan's studies of the responses show, a number of state governments have elected to fill in the spending gap.³ Perforce, state governments are exercising greater responsibility.

Emphasis on individual policies underestimates the accomplishments of the first Reagan administration. There may, for instance, be less deregulation than you or I or, indeed, the president would wish. Consideration of such matters, important as they are, however, does not begin to exhaust the moral influence of the president's devotion to more limited government. For there is an extensive and persuasive (yet unrecorded) influence on individual behavior that weans people from dependence on government. My favorite overheard conversation, in Berkeley no less, goes like this: "It would be a great idea to do such and such. Wonderful. Let's get a government grant. Yeah. Oh, well, with Reagan around that's impossible. Do you suppose we could sell the service and do this ourselves?" Though the uncoordinated efforts of millions of people moving to take care of themselves are not heard at a single time and place, so they are not recorded as events, they add up to a transformation of expectations, and, therefore, of practice in a self-reliant direction.

The sheer strategic brilliance of getting the opposing candidate to adopt your major theme of limited government through a born-again commitment to budget balance, while using the current imbalance as the only effective ceiling on spending the nation has known for a half century, has blinded Democrats to the policy genius of Ronald Reagan. He may not be that great a communicator, since Democrats have missed how badly he has outmaneuvered them, but he has provided both policy leadership and a political strategy to go with it.

The Do-Good Game

Democrats believe in using others people's money to support causes they deem desirable. "Doing good" requires at least a modest increment

3. Richard P. Nathan and Fred C. Doolittle, "The Untold Story of Reagan's 'New Federalism,'" *Public Interest*, no. 77 (Fall 1984): 96–105.

of resources over the prior year; this way, most everyone gets a little and a few receive a lot. "Tax and spend," as the slogan went, adding only "elect and elect," was in truth their motto. Ronald Reagan has changed all that. It is not so much that he led the drive for tax cuts (although he did) but that he prevented the substantial tax increases necessary to play the do-good game—you support my good cause and I'll support yours, as long as no one has to take less.

Before Reagan, the federal government's tax take was approximately 19 percent of gross national product. Now it is just 18 percent. How can this be with a 23 percent cut in the income tax? The built-in tax increases passed on by prior governments—social security above all but also bracket creep (due to end this year) and "windfall" energy taxes—have kept the overall federal tax rate constant. Had nothing changed, the tax take would have risen to about 23 percent, the 4 percent difference making up most of the entire deficit. It could be argued, to be sure, that Democrats could not have gotten away with such a substantial increase in the tax take, but I believe that without a visible increase in the income tax, they would have done (or, more precisely, failed to undo) exactly that. The crucial clue here is the dog that didn't bark; the missing factor for the Democrats is the tax increases that would have gone into effect automatically that they did not get to spend.

President Reagan has appropriated tax cuts (his good cause) that would otherwise have been available to Democrats for their favorite causes. With one blow, the president wiped out a decade of incremental increases in spending the Democrats would have used to smooth their way. These "it might have beens" are the saddest words as far as the mainline, liberal, left-of-center Democrats, the bulk of the party activists, are concerned.

Look at the deficit as a political strategy. Democrats need to justify a modest deficit either as a fiscal stimulant or as a response to pressing social problems. In the past, Republicans simply rejected deficits, proposing lower spending and higher taxes to fill the gap. To the extent that they follow Reagan's strategy, however, Republicans now justify a larger deficit in order to keep marginal tax rates low, and hence economic incentives strong. They follow their president in arguing that if taxes are increased, "they [the liberals] will only spend it." Every time it looks like the Democrats might lower the deficit sufficiently to do good as they see it, Reaganite Republicans will counter with tax cuts so that taxpayers can do good as they see it. Indeed, instead of knee-jerk budget balancing, the Republican party of the future may view a declining deficit as an invitation to cut taxes still further.

Indeed, *if* (it is a big supposition) Reagan's successor is a Republican who continues to starve liberal Democrats of revenue, the Democratic

party may well self-destruct. The reason Democrats have so little to say (observe the vigor of conservative versus liberal publications) is that they literally do not have the money to say it with. Allow them their spending increments and, *voilà!* they would have plenty to talk about. In short, it is not a nonexistent decline in intellectual capacities but the lack of food for thought—namely, money to spend on good causes—that makes modern Democrats appear dumb.

Keeping the Party Together

Ronald Reagan enjoys unparalleled supremacy within the Republican party because he is a perfect exemplar of its two main tendencies: social conservatism and what used to be called economic liberalism (i.e., reliance on free markets). To retain this position he must lend support to both wings of his party. But not, I hasten to add, at the same time. For if the two wings have to decide whether government should restrict individual choice, they would soon be at each other's collective throats. So far the president has managed to sidestep this conflict. One way has been to separate the two wings in time. Social issues have been stressed at election time and economic issues in between. Another way has been to separate the combatants in space. This separation may be accomplished through local option or by shifting the arena via proposals for constitutional amendments. Had the president not papered over the potential cracks in his party coalition, there would not now be talk about the possibility of party realignment.

The existence of a party realignment is a retrospective judgment. From the vantage point of today, there is only a large presidential victory not accompanied by corresponding change in congressional seats. Tomorrow remains to realize itself. What can be said is (a) that the 1984 election offered voters big policy choices; and (b) that President Reagan continues to pursue a distinctive strategy that (c) *could* rally extensive support in the future.

The election policy equation (courtesy of a suggestion by Alex Mintz) may be written as:

$$\text{revenue} + \text{deficit} = \text{defense} + \text{domestic expenditure}$$

The candidates filled in the policy equation in asymmetrical ways:

Mondale	+	-	=	-	+
Reagan	-	+	=	+	-

In the past, as the party of responsible finance, Republicans would

try to cut spending and deficits; generally they were successful at neither. Under Reagan, they have abandoned the tasks at which they failed in the past in favor of others that are easier to accomplish.

So far, the Democratic party appears poised to campaign on two issues in 1988: taxes and defense. Everyone knows that tax increases do not constitute the best election promises. But by 1988, I expect, Democratic stultification with their inability to support deserving people will grow beyond their bounds of toleration. For them, politics is good causes; without money to fund them, politics lacks all point. Anger at President Reagan justifies being against the large deficits that he is for. Thus the Democratic party's campaign will not so much emphasize higher taxes as lower deficits.

By this time, however, the president will have laid one and possibly two booby traps for them, so the Democrats will have to propose straight, out-and-out tax increases. The first "trap" was the passage of tax indexing (to take effect this year), which, until now, has resulted in higher revenues without higher tax rates as inflation pushed taxpayers into higher brackets. The second "trap" is in the flat (more accurately, a broad-based, low-rate income) tax. Of course, if rates are to be lowered, tax preferences must be reduced, which means that some higher-income people will have to pay more even if income tax rates go down. For present purposes, however, the point is that with far fewer preferences (assuming such a policy is passed), each increase in tax rates will be far more visible. After all, if the promise of this tax reform is to reduce rates, it will be even more difficult than in the past to raise them. Given that rates cannot be raised, moreover, the only way to increase revenues is by cutting preferences. By joining preference cuts to rate cuts, the tax reform limits the reduction of preferences as a revenue-raising technique. Thus Democrats will have to make the argument implicit in their party's preferences: Higher progressive taxes are necessary in order to support social programs. Since most of the people have most of the money, tax increases will have to cover the broad middle masses. That, as Republicans have discovered, is not necessarily the most popular path.

The President as Intervenor of Last Resort

Ronald Reagan has not only altered trends in public policy, he has also transformed the role of president. Indeed, his alteration of the presidential role may be Reagan's most significant contribution. Until Reagan's time, it had been assumed that the breadth of presidential

decision making would expand with the scope of government. The invention of presidential machinery to reach into other institutions (congressional liaison; mass media; officials for contact with mayors, governors, racial, ethnic, and religious groups) had resulted in making the concerns of external institutions part of those in the White House. But Reagan has changed roles and confounded expectations. He has chosen to reinterpret leadership not to mean what it meant before. Instead of the presidency being the institution of "first resort," stepping in to solve problems, real and alleged, as soon as (perhaps sooner than) they manifested themselves, in Reagan's time the presidency has become the institution of "last resort," entering the fray only when others abdicated. And not always then.

There are, of course, other things the president would like than smaller domestic government, but these are secondary, not primary. Thus the president is not nearly as conflicted about the use of his personal resources because his priorities are clear. The contrast with the mobilization regime of President Kennedy, or the restless opportunism of Present Nixon, or the harmonization of government actors under President Ford, or the managerial style of President Carter, all of whom had long lists of priorities, even if they altered them frequently, could hardly be greater. It may be that steering in a single important direction, so as to get part of the way, will become more attractive than steering in different (Nixon) or to many (Kennedy or Carter) directions or just emphasizing implementation (Ford) of existing programs.

Among the many criticisms raised about President Reagan, there is one especially relevant to him as a strategist: He is allegedly run by his staff. My observations are different. From his days as governor of California onward, Ronald Reagan, following his own understanding of how he might best use his talents, has deliberately structured his staff so that he would (a) make the critical choices; and (b) save his time.

There is evidence on Reagan's use of staff. In a book that can be described either as generally critical (because of the president's lapses) or disparagingly admiring (because of his undoubted successes), Laurence I. Barrett reveals that the president is quite capable of reining in his staff. Here, for instance, is an adviser who reported that the president not only rejected advice that three large tax reductions in a row might be too much but insisted that his preferences be respected.

You look at all the stories being published about backing and filling and they give the impression that Reagan was changing back and forth. That's wrong. The people around him were changing, or some of us were. We were having doubts, and the news coverage reflected that. Reagan hardly moved at all. At one meeting Reagan got a little impatient

with us. He said, "Listen, you guys are talking to each other and no one is asking me what I think. I'm sticking with it [the ten-ten-ten approach]."⁴

It deserves to be emphasized that the president resisted not merely advice from his own staff, including an ever-insistent David Stockman, but also from most of the nation's vocal economists and business spokesmen. Without these cuts, I might add, there would have been no distinctiveness to the president's program and no real reason for electing him rather than any other person.

I am reminded of the insightful discussion of the pluses and minuses of removing a subordinate that takes place in James Gould Couzzen's fine novel (set in the Air Force), *Guard of Honor*. The man has many shortcomings, but these are known. His associates have learned how to take them into account. A new man might well be more talented, but his hidden defects would, for a time, remain unknown, and his colleagues would have to invest time and effort in discovering them.

In exactly this sense, President Reagan has an investment in his staff. His reluctance to fire is based on his investment in them as well as a realization that everyone makes mistakes. When they arranged among themselves to swap places, Baker going to the Treasury, Regan to the White House, the president swiftly ratified their choice. Is this passive behavior? Or is this a wise realization that weeks of search were unlikely to provide a chief of staff that was necessarily better and about which he would certainly have known a good deal less?

Fusing Personal Style and Policy Preferences

Changes in the role of the presidency and in the expectations surrounding it help explain one of the mysteries surrounding President Reagan's public standing. Following upon a series of apparently discredited or unpopular presidencies (how they will look in retrospect is another matter), President Reagan is seemingly immune to the vicissitudes of fortune. He makes errors of fact with apparent impunity. Failing policies (e.g., Lebanon) leave him apparently untouched. The pall that hung over Nixon's or Carter's last year, stubbornly refuses, despite what critics consider substantial provocation, to settle on him. Why not?

Attention has been focused on the president's personal constitution (a charm that makes him difficult to hate) rather than on the changes he

4. Laurence I. Barrett, *Gambling with History: Ronald Reagan in the White House* (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 133.

has wrought in the institutional constitution. Though Reagan reads a prepared speech well, one would have thought the first presidential debate of 1984 disposed of him as a "great communicator." The emphasis on this inexplicable skill, however, does obscure the need to talk about the substance of what he does and how he does it, that is, his strategic capacity.

I think personality and role work together; indeed, the fit is so close (limited government propounded by a man who likes to work limited hours) that it has deflected attention from the radical change in practices. A president such as Jimmy Carter, who expects to have enacted a series of substantial changes in policy based on his personal study of them, naturally reinforces expectations that he will do as advertised. A president who preaches self-reliance to the citizenry does not have to work as hard or know as much about public policies the government should not have or to provide help for people who should look after themselves. Role and responsibility are related.

Presidents not only make policies, policies make presidents. Ronald Reagan has arisen as a political force in response to policies promulgated by the Democratic party. His strategic creativity (apart from appropriating Democratic symbols such as Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman) lies in crafting responses to take advantage of Democratic weaknesses.

When the Federalists struggled with the Antifederalists over whether the Constitution would replace the Articles of Confederation, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison turned the tide of opinion by reversing the direction of the political argument. Localism, which had been seen as the source of republican virtue, became parochialism, a source of special interests. The national government, then regarded as corrupting public virtue by introducing artificial inequality into public life, became the source of disinterested wisdom. Whether or not Ronald Reagan has realigned the electorate, he has reversed the arguments by which political action is justified; he has succeeded in taking the tag of "special interests" away from "the plutocrats" and pinning it onto the Democrats.

An intuitive understanding of the variety of views in American political life, and how to transcend them, is a rare gift. In one area, at least—tax reform—I think Ronald Reagan has this gift. Since it would be out of place here to give my reasons for believing that the heart of American exceptionalism lies in the belief that liberty and equality are (or can be made to be) compatible,⁵ let us just take this for an assump-

5. See my "The Three Cultures: Explaining Anomalies in the American Welfare State," *The Public Interest*, No. 69 (Fall 1982): pp. 45–58; "Industrial Policies in American Political Cultures," in Claude E. Barfield and Wm. A Schambra, eds., *The Politics of*

tion. The recent history of tax reform, meaning essentially a broader-based income tax with fewer and smaller tax preferences, is full of ups and downs. After Ronald Reagan made it a major feature of his second term (not that others, like Senator Bill Bradley and Representative Richard Gephardt had not pushed the idea to little avail before), he worked hard to make it popular, but with mixed success. Every time the president and tax reform were counted out, however, he and it have bounced back. Why?

The three major American cultures—individualism, egalitarianism, and hierarchy—are rendered compatible in one piece of legislation. People of low income either pay no taxes or pay less. Some businesses pay more but the individuals in them pay much lower marginal rates and the reduction of tax preferences is promoted as increasing incentives. All the while, higher deductions for children reduce somewhat the cost of larger families. Observe that the president defends the reform on the grounds it is fair, will spur economic incentives, and is good for the family. These terms are contemporary code words for greater equality of condition (fairness), greater equality of opportunity (incentives) and greater hierarchical order (the family). Obviously, Reagan saw something in this issue others did not see.

While it is too early to say whether tax reform will pass, the fact that such a radical change is given a good chance (Senator Robert Dole, the Republican majority leader, calls it “unstoppable”), whereas it had before been considered near hopeless or even utopian, speaks to the president’s willingness to go out on a limb for an apparent loser that he felt would eventually gain support. And the fact that, if passed, tax reform would make it difficult to raise income tax rates in the near future, thereby holding down spending, will not, from Reagan’s point of view, hurt either.

No leader is perfect, and Ronald Reagan is no exception. Anyone can think of problems that remain unresolved. The decisive movement of blacks into the Democratic party, for instance, is not only bad for democracy, it is also a barrier to the potential emergence of a Republican majority able to capture not only the presidency but also both houses of Congress. Should Mexican Americans also become overwhelmingly Democrat, the Republicans might forever remain a minority party. It may be that there is an undercurrent of Republican support among blacks and Mexican Americans based on individualism and family values. If so, not

Industrial Policy (1986), pp. 15–32; and “The Party of Government, the Party of Opposition, and the Party of Balance: An American View of the Consequences of the 1980 Election,” in Austin Ranney, ed. *The American Elections of 1980* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), pp. 329–350.

enough has been done to make manifest the administration's identification with these people, even if it cannot accede to those among them who view larger government as the main solution to existing problems.

By showing that the presidency can still be a powerful office, Ronald Reagan may have strengthened more than his own office. In a poll of academics who specialize in the presidency, the *National Journal* observed that these observers gave Reagan credit for "his success in . . . reviving trust and confidence in an institution that in the post-Vietnam era had been perceived as being unworkable."⁶ As Seymour Martin Lipset points out, ". . . it is ironic that the President's successes . . . have greatly increased faith in governmental institutions, while they have done little to reduce the high level of distrust of private power. . . ."⁷ Irony, like unanticipated consequences, is the stuff of life. Strategic success may be a double-edged accomplishment.

But I think not. The president's vision is made up of social conservatism as well as economic liberalism (i.e., limited government). He believes in institutions, and he believes they should be effective in doing the jobs his political philosophy deems appropriate for them. Strengthening belief in America, to him, signifies strengthening its institutions. Enlarging Americans' understanding of the positive moral effects of economic freedom is one of his outstanding accomplishments. Viewed in this light, the president properly stands for defense of the nation—its institutions, as well as its people, with a division of labor among them that emphasizes self-reliance at home. One does not have to agree with this philosophy to recognize that growing respect for the presidency, which, together with other representative bodies, stands for the nation, symbolizes victory in the larger struggle in which Ronald Reagan has been engaged: to restore respect for (while restoring the traditional boundaries of) existing American institutions.

Foreign Policy

In regard to foreign and defense policy, the president has provided only partial leadership. He wants more for defense, but more for *what* remains unclear. Instead of being guided by a single, overarching framework, he is faced with innumerable smaller decisions that, like Lebanon, often turn out badly. Instead of managing internal conflict, as he does

6. Dom Bonafede, "Presidential Scholars Expect History to Treat the Reagan Presidency Kindly," *National Journal* 17, no. 14 (April 6, 1985): 743-747.

7. Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Confidence Gap: Down but Not Out," typescript, April 1985.

domestically because he knows what he wants, the president lacks a doctrine from which he can give guidance.

Viewed from his own standpoint, the president has scored some successes in defense policy. The defense budget is considerably larger than it would have been without him. The navy is far more formidable. Nuclear forces have been enhanced. And so much is in the pipeline, it will not be easy to undo. The Central American situation either has not gotten worse or, in El Salvador, for the time being, has improved somewhat. And NATO has stood firm in countering the SS-20s with its own missile.

Why, then, do I speak of failure? The United States lacks support for its foreign policy. European opinion is aghast. American opinion is skeptical. It takes a vast effort to get tiny sums for Central America. The opinion that the United States is the aggressor remains widespread among its elites. The gap between rhetoric and action—two minor interventions amid the continual need to deny bellicosity—bothers friend and foe alike.

In sum, the consent necessary to maintain foreign and defense policy has not been secured. Should a time of trouble arise, therefore, no one can say whether even the most modest use of force would be sustainable nor the least adverse consequence supportable. Among all the contenders for the Democratic party nomination for president, for instance, there is not one that agreed on the desirability of using force except under conditions—no serious Soviet objection, completely containable consequences, high moral stature of allies—that cannot be met. Yet the forces in society these candidates represent (for the Democrats are still the majority party) will remain in Congress and country when the election is over. Nor does one have to go to Democrats to find opposition to foreign military involvements. The conditions laid out by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger—massive public support, overwhelming superiority, absolutism in advance for defeat, an open-ended commitment to do whatever it takes—are no less impossible. Leaving behind a legacy of opposition to foreign and defense policies in a democratic nation cannot be regarded as a success.

When he came into office, Ronald Reagan had long since decided to break with the prevailing doctrine of enhanced governmental intervention by trying to implement a rival doctrine of free market economics. In regard to defense and foreign policy, however, he did not challenge the direction of existing policies. The United States remained the democratic pillar of a bipolar world in which containment of communism was its major responsibility. Thus the United States remained the decision maker of first resort, undertaking to act first whether or not its allies went

along. The president was faced with a continuing stream of decisions concerning intervention without substantial support either from his own people or his nation's allies. The choices were ambiguous; the results, except in Granada, tenuous; the willingness of elites and citizens to support drawn-out endeavors, dubious.

The truth is that the United States now possesses more conventional capacity than its people are willing to use. There is a blatant mismatch between public support and the missions assigned to the armed forces. The task of the Reagan administration, therefore, is to reduce the disparity by increasing domestic support and decreasing the need for it.

"Star Wars" as a Political Strategy

The president has begun to meet one of the requirements of leadership in the international arena: forging a connection between defense and foreign policy. His Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars" to aficionados) promises genuine defense against nuclear attack. Whether the defense would be partial or total, it would be defense. The rationale of Star Wars goes way beyond whether it will be possible to stop a significant proportion of Soviet missiles in their early or mid-launch phase. For the very idea of defense challenges the conventional wisdom that there is no defense. Instead of promising to reach arms agreements that, at best, would still leave the world subject to mass destruction, the president promises to render these weapons far less destructive.

Question: Why is the United States spending so much money on defense? *Answer:* to defend the United States, its allies, even its foes against nuclear attack. Thus the president has seized high moral ground. In accord with his optimism and his identification of America with progress, he also promises to harness technology to the cause of life.

The president now has part of a defense policy that he can explain to his people. Suppose it fails? At worst, the nation will have developed conventional antiballistic missiles that do work and that will make its land-based missiles less vulnerable to attack. But a strategy for nuclear defense is not enough. The president still needs to know where he wants the nation to go with conventional defense.

An alternative vision of American foreign policy, parallel to his domestic program, would enable the president to better exercise leadership. Instead of a bipolar world, with America at its apex, he could seek a multipolar world in which the United States intervenes only as a last resort. Instead of arguments over how much NATO should do to protect against an extremely unlikely conventional war, its capacity to

help defend the United States through an independent nuclear deterrent would make its contribution more acceptable while requiring far less hectoring. And smaller conventional forces for wars the nation lacks support to fight would alleviate budgetary difficulties. With such a strategic vision, or any sharper alternative, the president would be better able to choose among conflicting advice and advisors. He is not as good at being a status quo president as he is (compare tax reform) a radical president.

A Meteoric Leader in an Antileadership System

What has Reagan wrought, in sum, that justifies the sobriquet "strategist"? He has devised appropriate means for keeping his party together. He has provided policy guidance (with the exception noted) to coordinate the far flung efforts of his administration. He has integrated his personality with his policy positions and his administrative style. He looks confident because he is comfortable. He has altered expectations, at least in domestic policy, from government as the intervenor of first resort to intervenor of last resort so as to suit his policy preferences.

In critical areas of policy, the president has shaped the congressional agenda to his liking. Though he cannot control outcomes, not being all-powerful, he has been able to keep items, such as income tax increases, off the agenda and to keep those he wants discussed, such as cuts in domestic spending, at the forefront of concern. He has exposed the weaknesses of his opponents; the deficit has deprived them of the opportunity to keep supporting their constituencies. Indeed, he has, so to speak, converted them to a Republican doctrine, budget balance, that will make their political lives much more difficult. Nor was this easy. Confronted with the necessity of giving up not only his tax cuts but all that this implied in terms of his vision of limited domestic government, and incurring large deficits in view of his party's historical opposition to them, Ronald Reagan chose limited government. And unless there are drastic economic changes, the large, tax-led deficits he helped create have not been noticeably harmful. Reagan has also begun to enunciate a rationale for the high rate of military spending in terms of actual defense through the Strategic Defense Initiative. Yet, to his critics, this is not enough.

A good part of the objections to Reagan's style comes from those who think that presidents should have many more preferences and should intervene far more directly to achieve them. They must wish someone else was president because their advice would be suitable only for a

different person. This is the essence, I take it, of James D. Barber's characterization of Reagan as a "passive-positive" President, that is, someone who is upbeat but reactive rather than proactive. I think not. The difference in appraisal really boils down to whether having many preferences, and therefore, priorities, will get presidents further in advancing their objectives than having very few. In today's political context, where the call for the exertion of leadership is followed immediately by efforts to tear it down, the risk of having a big agenda is big stultification. I see no reason to tie Ronald Reagan to a mode of behavior that has not worked for his immediate predecessors.

Whether by accident or design, Ronald Reagan's political style fits well with the opportunities and constraints offered by the American national political system in the 1980s. The constraints are not only structural—the separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism—which usually operate to restrict what chief executives can do on their own. Hierarchy, the expectation that authority inheres in formal position, has historically been weak in America. Nor are these constraints entirely political, his Republican party being a mere majority in the Senate (where Reaganite conservatives are but one faction), a distinct minority in the House of Representatives, controlling only a third or so of the governorships and state legislatures. All this means is that the president has to bargain. Nothing new there.

On top of his party's minority status, the president faces a political milieu both desirous and distrusting of leadership. Were this not so, it would be difficult to explain the series of failed presidents who preceded him. When we look at the social movements that have risen as presidents have fallen, with but two interconnected exceptions—the antiabortionists and Protestant fundamentalists such as the Moral Majority—they are devoted to greater equality of condition. The civil rights movement, the women's movement, gay rights, children's rights, gay power, and more, are avowedly devoted to diminishing differences between groups of people. The point here is that authority is a form of inequality, for it would allow some people to decide for others. Viewing the presidency as part and parcel of American social life, it is not so surprising that it has been buffeted (the higher the rank, the stronger the winds) by fierce political storms.

Were these critical currents directed against individual officeholders, they might more easily be withstood. But they are not. It is the political system itself, not a policy or a politician or a party, that is held to blame or, to use the current code, that is deemed unfair. System blame has grown to epidemic proportions. When groups of leaders were asked by Sidney Verba and Gary Orren whether poverty in America was the

fault of the poor or of the system, for instance, 86 percent of black leaders, 76 percent of feminists, 68 percent of Democrats, 50 percent of media, and 44 percent of intellectuals blamed the system.⁸ No wonder Democratic as well as Republican presidents have been held in disrepute!

Presidents are elected for fixed terms and given large constitutional and legislative responsibilities. They cannot appear only at ceremonial occasions, following the national consensus on policies where it exists and returning to obscurity when conflict threatens.

What, then, are our poor presidents to do when the same people who urge government to do much more simultaneously blame the system that has to do it? Efforts to provide across-the-board guidance on a panoply of problems fail, à la Jimmy Carter, because they become the simultaneous focus of criticism of those who believe the government has taken on too much and those who believe it has not done enough because the system from which decisions stem is fatally flawed. Similarly, it is not partisan bias that afflicts the media but the disposition to system blame that leads its practitioners to excoriate politicians.

Nevertheless, amid the continuous casting of blame, the demand for presidential leadership continues unabated. Whether the subject is deficits, social security, disarmament, trade, tax reform, immigration, or whatever, there is no substitute for the president. Hence presidents are tempted into action only to discover that whatever they do is not what they were somehow supposed to have done.

Enter Ronald Reagan. By undertaking a very few major initiatives, with widespread consequences, he is seen as a positive leader. By reserving his imprimatur for only the matters he considers most vital, he makes an infrequent target. By disclaiming intimate factual knowledge of specifics, he reduces the expectation that the president is responsible for whatever is disliked. And when the complaints that the president has provided insufficient leadership rise to a crescendo, he may notice, along with us observers, that the demand to do more in the future does not decline (indeed, it may well be enhanced) just because he has refused to rise to the bait before.

Were the United States a country in which authority inhered in position, presidents could emulate Jimmy Carter by emitting constant calls for action. But it is not; and they should not. While no one can look back from a future that is yet to unfold, so we cannot yet know how successful President Reagan will be in changing the vision of America

8. Sidney Verba and Gary R. Orren, *Equality in America: The View from the Top* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 74.

through the long-run alteration of ideas, he is providing about as much direction as the existing American antileadership system can support. For what he does not attempt as well as for what he does, President Reagan is the appropriate leader for his time.

10

Voter Turnout and Electoral Preference: The Anomalous Reagan Elections

John R. Petrocik

Politicians and political scientists often perceive different political processes, at least as each describes what the other believes. The discrepancy is less apparent in discussions of election outcomes. Success is attributed to the issues raised and a campaign that canvassed the electorate and got out the vote. Failure is laid on the doorstep of party voting and the loser's inability to get the issues across, or to insulate himself from the issues that cut against his party in the election. Of course, the style of the analysis and the manner in which cause is attributed differ, but there is at least agreement on variables.

Yet some major differences separate them. A favorite explanation of defeat among politicians, especially incumbents, is a failure to persuade sympathetic voters to turn out. While believing that increases in turnout can have profound effects, political scientists generally are disinclined to believe that turnout is a frequent, major influence on outcomes.¹ It is not that political scientists do not believe that turnout differentials can be harmful. Rather, they are inclined to see so many contingencies and invoke so many qualifications that it seems imprudent to believe that

1. Adam Przeworski, "Institutionalization of Voting Patterns, or Is Mobilization the Source of Decay?" *American Political Science Review* 69 (March 1975): 49–67.

turnout declines are root causes of many defeats, especially incumbent defeats. Moreover, turnout was a major factor in the outcome of an election far less frequently than were partisan defections and switches. A flawed candidate and damaging issues are the typical centerpieces of academic accounts of elections.

Nevertheless, participation rates and changes in the size of the electorate are important factors in understanding party system change, and the voter dynamics that undergird explanations of party system change figure prominently in theoretical explanations of why turnout change rarely explains election outcomes. This paper reviews that theory and presents some data that illustrate the underlying dynamics. It then applies the theory to the American presidential elections of 1980 and 1984. Both elections, but especially the former, violated the theory. The unexpectedly wide margin for Ronald Reagan in 1980 was made possible by a failure of prospective Carter voters to turn out on election day. The 1980 election may be the only one in recent American history in which the winning candidate depended on turnout for his victory. The last portion of the paper considers some explanations for this unusual event.

The Democratic Potential of Nonvoters?

More than a few would find nothing surprising in a report that nonvoters heavily preferred Jimmy Carter. Chronic nonvoters are younger, less educated, poorer, black, and otherwise marked by attributes associated with support for the Democratic party. It is conventional wisdom, therefore, that low rates of participation favor the Republicans. As a factual matter we have demonstrated that Democratic identifiers have lower rates of participation in elections. According to the national election surveys of the Center for Political Studies, the Democrats have suffered a turnout disadvantage of about 10 percentage points in every national election of the past three decades. Furthermore, we have shown that Democratic partisans—strong identifiers and those less committed—are more responsive to short-term factors that depress turnout.² Democrats who are otherwise comparable to Republicans will usually display larger interelection turnout fluctuation. The party difference seems to disappear at extremely high or low turnout levels, say above 70 percent or below 30 percent, but within the range of turnout variation that characterizes most American elections, the asymmetry offers the

2. Philip E. Converse, "The Concept of a Normal Vote," in *Elections and the Political Order*, Angus Campbell et al. (New York: Wiley, 1966).

Republicans a measurable advantage. Political practitioners have been attentive to the implications of turnout differences between Democrats and Republicans, often factoring it into their campaign plans. Estimates of the size and preferences of the core electorate, for example, have figured in calculations of when special elections should be held and whether local elections should be scheduled to coincide with national elections.³

Normative considerations aside, although they surely have played a role, the diffident response of Republicans to proposals for a more permissive registration system is nourished by a conviction that a higher turnout guarantees more Democratic votes.⁴ The behavior of Democratic politicians and their allies excite this suspicion at every turn. As the 1984 presidential election approached, left-wing Democratic activists Frances Piven and Richard Cloward proposed a strategy to help the Democratic party realize its objective of mobilizing millions of new Democrats with a plan to register voters at social welfare offices. The logic underlying their proposal was straightforward: If the unregistered were black and poor and likely to be Democrats, the disadvantaged who use the services provided by welfare agencies were even more likely to be the kinds of Democrats who would vote against Reagan and the Republicans.

When the balance sheet was totaled, neither the Democrats nor Piven and Cloward were successful. Few government agencies, even those under the control of Democrats, implemented the Piven–Cloward proposal, and Democratic party registration efforts were more than matched by the Republicans. On election day, the registration footrace promoted by the Democrats was won by the Republicans. But would a more successful Democratic effort have produced the outcome they

3. A recent example of this occurred in Santa Monica, California, where a liberal majority of the City Council succeeded in rescheduling local elections so they would take place concurrently with national general elections. Before the change, Santa Monica, like every other California city, conducted its municipal elections during odd years. The public rationale for changing the date was to improve voter turnout and reduce the cost of elections. The unspoken expectation, which was the major motivation behind the proposal, was that they would improve turnout of liberal and Democratic voters, thereby improving the prospects of liberal and Democratic candidates.
4. Raymond Wolfinger has proposed a reform that would allow those who move to obtain from any post office a form, much like a mail-forwarding notice, for postcard registration. The logic is that this small, relatively inexpensive change would allow the many Americans who move every year to overcome the hurdle that residential mobility presents to registration and voting. Despite evidence that this scheme would favor neither party, the principal sponsors of the bill introduced into Congress were Democrats and “mugwump” Republicans.

sought? Was there a Democratic majority to be constructed out of unregistered or registered but nonvoting members of the age-eligible electorate? There is a good reason to believe that the Democratic problem would not have been solved by greater turnout alone. Of course, a registration drive that targets only those who prefer the Democratic candidate can swing an election. But an increase in turnout that results from exciting voter interest generally does not ensure a disproportionate mobilization of Democratic votes.

Wolfinger and Rosenstone found that even the most plausible liberalization of the laws governing registration would have only a small effect on the partisan balance of the electorate.⁵ While the turnout rate might increase as much as nine percentage points, the demographic profile of the electorate would change only slightly. Partisan changes would be even smaller. According to their estimates, the Democrats would increase their share of the electorate a minuscule .3 percent. Republicans would actually increase more; their share would rise about .5 percent.

Of course, a 9- or 10- point increase is bringing a disproportionate number of independents into the active electorate. Would a 20- or 30-point increase in the voting population have the desired effect? Would such a large electoral expansion mobilize the hardcore nonvoters among whom Democrats have a substantial advantage? Would they vote Democratic? Would voting holidays, weekend voting, compulsory voting, or same-day registration get to these nonparticipating Democrats? Maybe, but maybe not. There are more than a few anecdotal instances of a huge electoral expansion working against the Democrats. A good example might be the Minnesota general election of 1978. For the first time, Minnesota voters did not have to preregister weeks before the general election. It did not save the Democrats. They lost the major statewide offices on the ballot in that year. The new voters did not cause the loss. But the ability of chronic nonvoters to perk up on election day and vote also did not save the Democrats. Simply having a larger electorate available was no guarantee of success.

The Predictable Nonvoters

The most important feature of nonvoters is not their income and education; nor is age or ethnicity the critical distinction between them

5. Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

and voters. However important such social distinctions might be as distal causes of nonvoting, there are even larger differences between voters and nonvoters in such attitudes and perceptions as general political interest and concern with the outcome of the election at hand.

Table 1 illustrates these differences by stratifying the 1980 electorate in terms of the regularity of the voter's participation in presidential elections. Chronic nonvoters were almost twice as likely as regular voters to be political independents, and even the partisans among them were less likely than regular voters to be strong partisans. They were less interested in the campaign, cared less about the outcome of the election, were less inclined to talk about politics with others, less informed about the issue positions of the candidates, and much less likely to have strong opinions about current political issues. Demographic differences are substantially smaller, and invoking the conventional wisdom that small differences do not explain large ones, it is clear that attitudes and not demography are the more proximate explanation of the regularity with which individuals vote.

There is nothing serendipitous in Table 1. The data are a familiar replication of widely understood findings. A nonvoting Republican is likely to be as uninformed and unconcerned about the election as a nonvoting Democrat, and this indifference is a more immediate source of political choices than income, status, age, or ethnicity. Low information levels and lack of interest in politics are more germane than nominal

TABLE 1
Attitude Characteristics Associated with the Regularity
of Participation in Elections

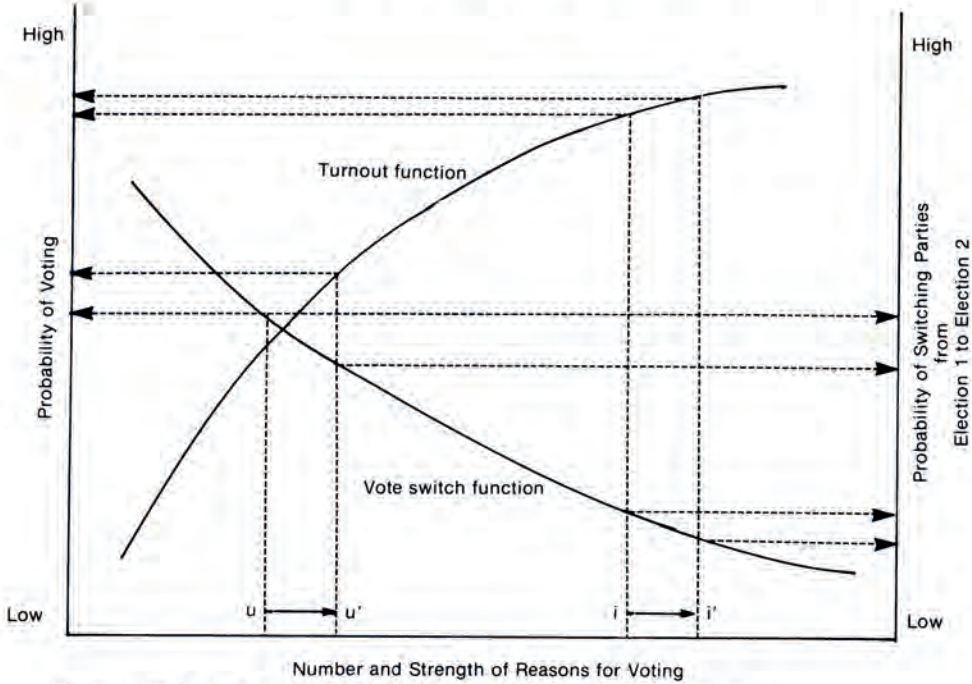
Characteristic	Respondent Votes				New Voter
	Always	Usually	Occasionally	Never	
Partisan independence	-.08	-.14	.10	.25	.29
Partisan strength	.13	.23	-.07	-.31	-.32
Information	.23	.00	-.23	-.34	.04
Political interest	.33	.11	-.30	-.52	-.50
Interest in campaign	.33	.09	-.28	-.56	-.40
Concern with election outcome	.13	.10	-.10	-.38	-.15
Issue extremity	.07	.03	-.03	-.11	-.18

Note: Table entries are standard scores to facilitate comparisons among the groups in terms of the variables. Scores below zero are less of the trait than the average voter. Scores above zero are above the population average.

partisanship because they make the avowed party commitment a consequential attitude. Lacking supportive attitudes and perceptions, a “non-voting” Democrat or Republican comes to an election more susceptible to persuasion by the events and issues of the moment. The interested, informed, and opinionated partisan is not only more likely to vote but he or she is more likely to resist or reject news and events that favor candidates of the opposition party. Of course, regular voters, with their “wealth” of supportive attitudes, are not immune to the short-term factors that mark every election. By filtering them through a partisanship reinforced by other beliefs and perceptions, however, they are better able to resist them. Newly eligible voters, irregular voters, and chronic non-voters—because they lack supportive attitudes and because they lack a history of regular voting that would reinforce their nominal partisanship—are more likely to respond to the events and personalities of the election. In brief, peripheral voters (i.e., those who rarely or never vote) will be more responsive to the thrust of an election: A candidate favored by regular voters will usually be even more favored by peripheral voters. Figure 1, which adapts data presented in the original application of this “immunization” theory presents the expected pattern.⁶

A dramatic increase in the turnout rate, therefore, may not augur well for the party nominally supported by the nonvoters. While it is possible to imagine a high-turnout election in which the forces that encourage turnout do not favor one of the candidates, as a practical matter the short-term forces that stimulate participation normally contain a directional component. Consequently, the irregular voters who turn out are more likely to increase the favored candidate’s majority than they are to vote for the candidate of their party, *ceteris paribus*. In the typical American election, this means that the nonvoter pool, whatever the balance of Democrats over Republicans among its members, can be relied on to vote for the Democrat only if the Democratic candidate is favored. If events, issues, or personality considerations favor the Republican, the peripheral electorate (irregular voters and chronic nonvoters) are more likely to vote for the Republican.

6. The literature on this topic is quite extensive, and its applicability to any particular election is disputed. However, the classic studies remain William A. Glaser, “Fluctuation in Turnout,” in William N. McPhee and William A. Glaser, *Public Opinion and Congressional Elections* (New York: Free Press, 1962); William N. McPhee and Jack Ferguson, “Political Immunization,” in *ibid.*; and Angus Campbell, “Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change,” in Campbell *et al.*, *Elections and the Political Order*. A persuasive critique of the surge-and-decline critique model (though probably not the concept of immunization) is found in Samuel J. Kernell, “Presidential Popularity and Negative Voting,” *American Political Science Review* 71 (March 1977): 44–66.



$u' - u$: Effect of short-term force on involvement of low-involvement voters
 $i' - i$: Effect of short-term force on involvement of high-involvement voters

FIGURE 1. A comparison of the responsiveness of involved and uninvolved voters to short-term forces that increase turnout and vote switching.

The responsiveness of the peripheral electorate is illustrated in Figure 2, which regresses the Democratic vote of three different groups of voters—regular voters, irregular voters, and nonvoters—on the total percentage voting for the Democratic candidates.⁷ Seven presidential

7. There are some differences among the studies in the definition of the groups, but there is no evidence that these differences affect the relationship. In the seven presidential elections, regular voters are those who report voting in all presidential elections for which they have been eligible; irregular voters are those who have been eligible to vote for at least a decade but do not report having voted in every presidential election during that period; nonvoters are those who have voted in few or no presidential contests. In the trial heat—mock elections, regular voters are the respondents who voted in both of the immediately preceding presidential elections (1968 and 1972); irregular voters participated in one of them; nonvoters voted in neither.

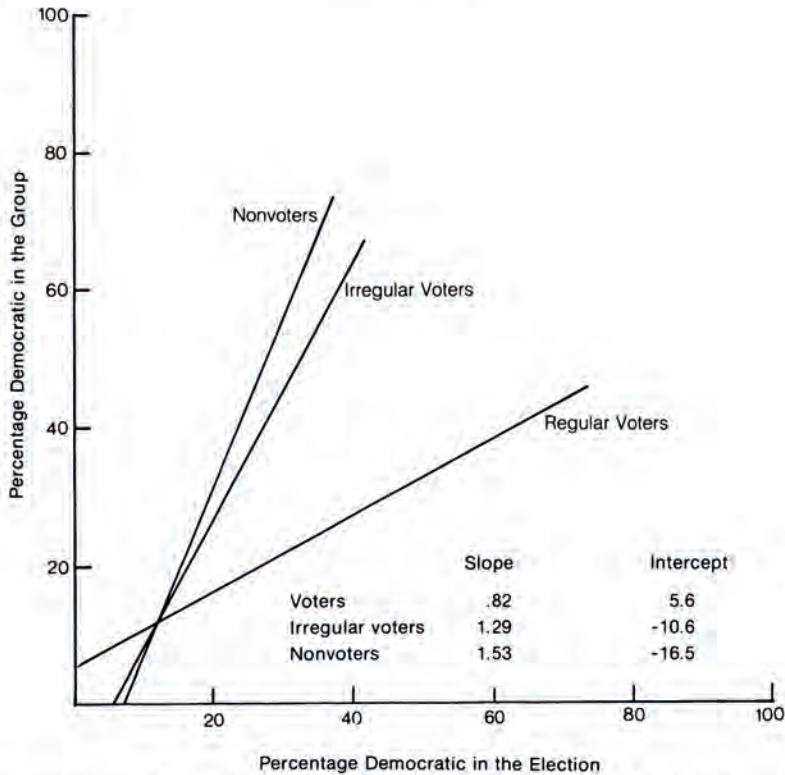


FIGURE 2. The differential responsiveness of core and peripheral voters to short-term forces.

elections, from 1952 through 1976, and five trial heats from a 1974 national survey, provide the units of analysis for the regression.⁸

As the slopes in the figure indicate, the more peripheral the group, the more responsive they are to short-term forces.⁹ Lacking a frequently

8. The seven presidential elections are the standard NES studies for the years 1952 through 1976; the mock elections come from a national study done between December 1973 and February 1974. In the latter study, respondents were presented with five different trial heats and asked to choose one of the "candidates." The data in Figure 2 present the results of a regression of the proportion within each group who voted for the Democratic candidate on the aggregate totals for each "election." The unit of analysis is the election, and the *N* for each slope is 12.
9. Conceptually, a short-term force is any factor (an issue or event for example) that results in an unusual preference for one of the candidates. It is not possible to measure this concept directly with these data. In Figure 2 it is represented as a change in the total

exercised partisan commitment, the interelection shifts that favor first one party and then the other have a much more dramatic effect on marginal voters. Regular voters change their Democratic preference at a rate that is 18 percent below the change in the population, irregular voters change their vote at a rate that is 29 percent greater than the change in the total vote, and the swing of irregular voters is 53 percent greater than the change in the choices of the total electorate. The recall data, hypothetical choices, and self-characterizations on which Figure 2 depend limit the accuracy of the estimates. The magnitude of the differences may not be quite as large as the estimates in Figure 2, but the order of the differences is certainly correct, and it illustrates the importance of the peripheral voter. Their responsiveness provides a disproportionate share of the swing between the Democrats and the Republicans.

Consider the data in Table 2, which examines two different elections and two different kinds of electorates. The elections differ in terms of the magnitude of the winning Democrat's margin. In the first election the winning candidate is only narrowly preferred, while in the second election the winner commands a large majority. The table also contrasts the behavior of two different kinds of electorates—a core-voter electorate and a peripheral-voter electorate. The core-voter electorate reports the preferences and turnout rate of those respondents who report voting in the two previous elections, plus all those who just became eligible to

TABLE 2
Candidate Preferences of Core and Peripheral Voters,
Close and Lopsided Elections, Trial Heats

	Core Voters		Peripheral Voters	
	Close Election	Lopsided Election	Close Election	Lopsided Election
Voted				
Democrat	32%	43%	27%	48%
Republican	29	35	13	15
Did not vote	39	23	60	37
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	845	845	601	601

Democratic vote. This operationalization assumes that short-term forces result in vote changes. Although not immune to challenge, it is a reasonable approximation of the structure at issue.

vote.¹⁰ All others are deleted from the table. The peripheral-voter electorate reports the candidate preferences and turnout of those who reported not voting in one or both of the preceding presidential elections.

Among the voters who are (perhaps overgenerously) regarded as core voters, the support for the Democratic candidate increases from 52 percent of all those who voted in the first, close, election to about 56 percent in the second, lopsided, contest. This 4-point swing is exactly half of the swing that characterizes the peripheral electorate. Sixty-eight percent of the marginal voters who are willing to make a choice (to "vote") in the close election opted to support the favored Democrat; in the second election, where the votes of the core electorate were 4 points more Democratic, the Democrat's share of the peripheral electorate increased 8 points, to 76 percent.

The impact of this responsiveness, when it involves an increase in the turnout rate, is illustrated in Table 3, which simulates election outcomes using the data from Table 2. The first election—a low-stimu-

TABLE 3
Effect of Electoral Expansion on the Two-Party Division
of the Vote, Trial-Heat Elections

	<i>Close Election</i>	<i>Lopsided Election</i>	
Turnout	43%	51%	71%
Percentage Democratic	52	56	63
<i>Contribution of Core and Peripheral Voters to Changes in the Vote Between Close and Lopsided Elections</i>			
	<i>Core</i>	<i>Peripheral</i>	<i>Total</i>
Percentage change in			
Democratic vote	+ 8	+ 16	+ 23
Republican vote	+ 4	+ 5	+ 9
Nonvoting	- 12	- 21	- 32

10. The core electorate includes voters who report participating in the 1968 and 1972 elections and voters who became politically eligible between 1972 and the time of the survey. All others are treated as marginal. The close election was a trial heat between Hubert Humphrey and Charles Percy (then senator from Illinois); the lopsided election pitted Percy against Edward Kennedy.

lation, close contest—registers only the choices of the core electorate. The high-stimulation, lopsided election—in which participation increased to over 70 percent—presents the candidate preferences of all those who were willing to make a choice in the trial heats. Two comparisons are important. The first is between the choices of a “core electorate” in a close and then a lopsided election. The second comparison is between the vote outcome in the lopsided election when only “core voters” are participating and the outcome when peripheral voters are a significant fraction of all those participating.

The nearly balanced short-term forces of the close election produce a 52 percent victory for the Democratic candidate, with a turnout of 43 percent. These same voters, in a election in which there are strong short-term forces favoring the Democrat turnout at a higher level (about 51 percent “voted”) and they give the Democrat a 56 percent victory. The 11-point increase in turnout added just under 8 points to the Democrat and about 4 points to the Republican. Virtually all of the increase in the Democrat’s margin came from new voters (a group without settled habits and, therefore, sensitive to short-term tides). Among older voters who had voted in both preceding presidential elections and who also chose a candidate in the close trial heat, there is only a small switch to the favored Democrat in the lopsided election (up 1 percent to 53 percent).

The forces that cause an increase in the participation rate and a swing to the Democrat among core voters produce larger effects among the more marginal irregular voters. As Table 3 shows, irregular voters increase total turnout to 71 percent and they tip the election to the Democrat. They add almost 16 points to the Democratic vote, but less than 5 points to the Republican vote. What might have been a 56 percent Democratic win if the turnout rate had been kept at 50 percent becomes a 63 percent Democratic victory when the turnout rate is 71 percent, and the favored Democrat routs the Republican.

The point to emphasize is that while peripheral voters are difficult to mobilize, every one who participates increases the magnitude of the winning candidate’s margin, whether that candidate is a Democrat or a Republican. They significantly overcontribute to the interelection swing. Regular voters make up over half of the “electorate” in this analysis, but they contribute only about 26 percent of the increase in the Democrat’s vote between the close and the lopsided contest. Irregular voters (16 percent of this electorate) produced 22 percent of the increase in the Democratic margin, and “nonvoters” (25 percent of the total) contributed almost 37 percent of the increase in the Democratic candidate’s vote.

These data are not a peculiarity of the trial heats in which the

respondents were asked to participate, nor are they evidence of untapped Democratic support among nonvoters. They are exactly what the theory asserts: evidence of the responsiveness of marginal citizens to the prevailing political wind. Figure 3 presents similar data for recent presidential elections.

A 100 percent turnout in 1956 would not have changed the outcome of the election. Eisenhower was more popular than Stevenson among nonvoters than he was among voters. Eisenhower's 57 percent victory would have been greater with a higher turnout, since 72 percent of the nonvoters had indicated a preference for Eisenhower before the election. Similarly, a 100 percent turnout would not have saved Goldwater from defeat. There was no conservative Goldwater majority among nonvoters

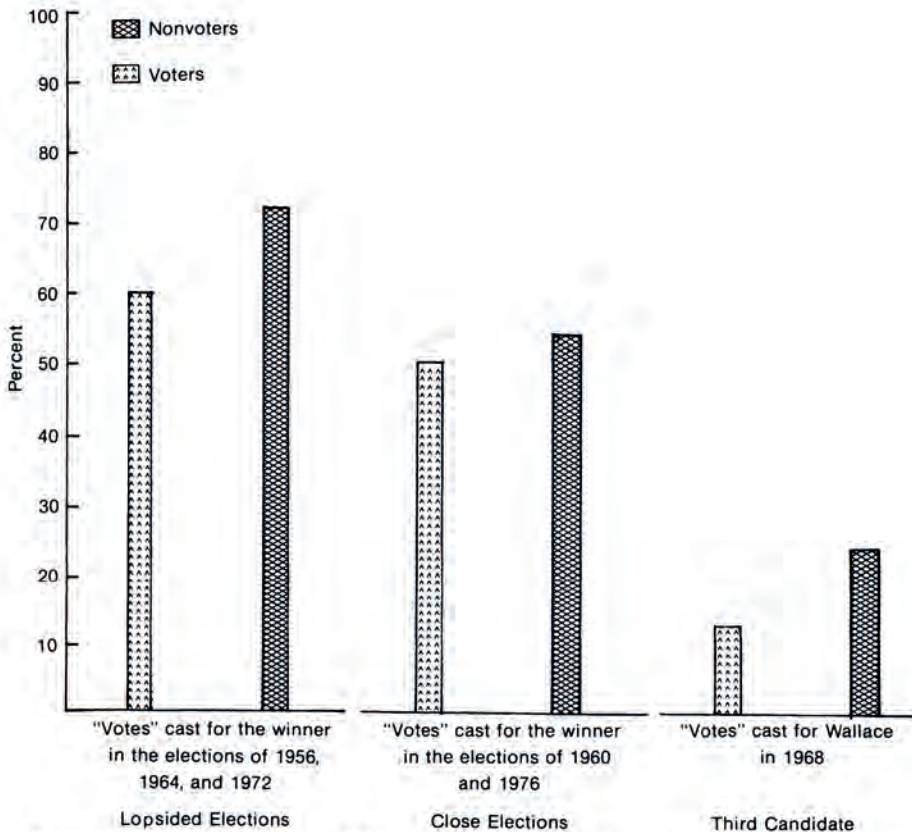


FIGURE 3. A comparison of the preferences of voters and nonvoters in three different kinds of elections.

in that year; their preference for Johnson was 16 percentage points greater than that of reported voters.

Nonvoters are also unusually responsive to insurgent candidacies. George Wallace did 12 percentage points better among nonvoters than he did among those who cast a ballot. The same unhabituated political commitments that leave peripheral voters vulnerable to first Republican and then Democratic tides also leave them available to political movements of the sort represented by Wallace.¹¹

In contrast to 1956 and 1964, where first a Republican and then a Democrat enjoyed a strong short-term surge, or 1968 when an insurgent candidate rallied uncommitted voters, the elections of 1960 and 1976 were closely fought, and no candidate commanded unusual support. Both elections were narrowly won by the Democrats. The events, personalities, and issues that accorded neither party an advantage among voters also left nonvoters evenly divided. Their preference for the winner was almost indistinguishable from that of the voters.

The general conclusion seems irresistible: nonvoters may be a reproach to the civic norms of American democracy, but they are not a pool of supporters that can normally be expected to reverse the choice of the voters. In a very close contest, such as the 1968 race between Humphrey and Nixon, nonvoters have the potential to change the outcome. Unanticipated and idiosyncratic turnout by a small number of irregular voters could reverse the outcome among the core electorate in a close election. A quiet, targeted canvassing campaign that does not stimulate counter-efforts can provide the winning edge. But turnout that results from generalized stimulation will only reinforce and exaggerate the preferences of regular voters. The peripheral voters who are mobilized will be very responsive to the short-term forces that reinforce partisanship, promote defection, and help the truly independent voter select his or her candidate. Either candidate could benefit from turnout. The partisanship of peripheral voters is less a determinant of their behavior than it is of the choices of regular, core voters.

The Reagan Elections

Against the background of such strong theory, repeatedly confirmed by empirical studies, the 1980 and 1984 presidential elections are sig-

11. The role of electoral mobilization in the fueling of flash political movements is widely discussed. Generally, the available data indicate that electoral mobilization plays a critical role in the success of such movements. For a recent analysis along these lines,

nificant anomalies. Consider the 1980 election. As election day approached, there was a near consensus that the margin of the winner would be small. National election study interviews during the months of September and October found 39 percent supporting Carter, 35 percent for Reagan, less than 10 percent for Anderson or another third-party candidate, and 16 percent undecided or planning to abstain. On election day Reagan carried a 51 percent majority, while Carter received about 40 percent of the vote. Were there last-minute changes, as many post-election commentaries asserted? Not according to the NES data.

As Table 4 shows, the bulk of the change between the preelection intention and the outcome reflects a failure to vote. About 6 percent of the voters switched their vote intentions among the candidates (Carter to Reagan, Anderson to Carter, etc.), while almost 41 percent failed to follow through on their candidate preference with a vote. Carter suffered most severely for nonvoting. Forty-six percent of his preelection support did not vote, and only 46 percent followed through on their earlier intention to vote for him. In contrast, only 35 percent of Reagan's original supporters failed to turn out on election day, and approximately 62 percent followed through on their intention to vote for him. The 11-point turnout discrepancy was sufficient by itself to swing the electorate from Carter to Reagan. Small changes in preference toward the end of the

TABLE 4
Comparison of Preelection Vote Intention with Reported Vote, 1980

	Vote Intention, September–October				Total
	Carter	Reagan	Other	Undecided/ Will Not Vote	
Reported vote					
Carter	18	(1)	1	3	22
Reagan	2	22	2	4	30
Other	1	(1)	3	1	6
Did not vote	18	13	4	7	42
Total	39	36	10	15	100

Note: Table entries are percentages of the total number of cases. The (1) within parentheses indicates less than 1%.

see Courtney Brown's study of the role of electoral mobilization in the rise of the Nazis in Germany, "The Nazi Vote: A National Ecological Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 76 (June 1982): 285-302.

campaign simply reinforced Reagan's margin. Without the turnout discrepancy, Reagan might still have eked out a small majority. Switching during the last weeks of the campaign eroded Carter's margin and provided a tie, with 41 percent preferring Reagan and 40 percent supporting Carter. But Reagan's final plurality was a result of biased nonvoting.

The Reagan–Mondale election of 1984 was less anomalous, but it too failed to conform to the accustomed pattern. Reagan and Mondale lost equivalent portions of their preelection support to nonvoting (25 to 27 percent), and switching (about 3 percent). The striking feature of the 1984 election is the failure of nonvoters to "surge" in the direction of the winner. Nonvoters preferred Reagan to Mondale, but at a rate that was identical to Reagan's margin among reported voters.

Table 5, which compares the 1980 and 1984 elections to the lopsided elections of 1956, 1964, and 1972, documents the anomaly. In each of the earlier elections the candidate preference of ultimate nonvoters (as of late fall, just before the election) was more supportive of the winner than was the reported choice of voters. In 1980, by contrast, nonvoters were mirror images of voters: Voters chose Reagan over Carter by 52 to 38 percent, while nonvoters chose Carter over Reagan by 51 to 37 percent. There was a smaller discrepancy in 1984, but again nonvoters were less supportive of the winner than voters were, an unprecedented occurrence.

Some Possible Explanations

Explanations of voter turnout fall into two distinct categories. The first class of explanations emphasizes attitudinal attributes (general political interest, concern about the outcome of the particular election, etc.); the second class of explanations attends to the role of institutional and structural features of the election (election laws, the party system, etc.). Some of the specific variables subsumed by these explanations have changed little in recent years and are unlikely reasons for the anomalies of 1980 and 1984. But other characteristics have been less constant, or at least might have been less constant, and therefore deserve some examination as possible causes of the distinctive feature of these elections.

Attitudes: A New Kind of Nonvoter?

Traditionally, nonvoters have been America's civic embarrassment. While institutions (restrictive voting laws and a weak party system) are often held responsible for our comparatively low turnout, the most

TABLE 5
Comparison of Candidate Preferences of Voters and Nonvoters
in 1980 and 1984 with Earlier Lopsided Elections

	Presidential Election				
	1956	1964	1972	1980	1984
Support for winning candidate					
Voters	57	61	63	52	59
Nonvoters	71	71	65	37	58
Difference	+14	+10	+ 2	-15	- 1

Note: Entries are percentages. The "difference" row is the percent supporting the winning candidate among the nonvoters minus the percent voting for the winning candidate among the voters.

notable feature of nonvoters is their disinterest and detachment from politics. The nonvoters of 1980 and 1984 were not an unusual group in this regard. Given their weaker partisanship, modest interest in politics, lower education, and smaller incomes, they had a substantially lower probability of voting than those who turned out on election day. The nonvoters were less informed about the issues and the candidates, less likely to have a position on any issue, and even when they did hold a preference, less likely to feel strongly about it (data not shown).

Their failure to behave like previous nonvoters was therefore, all the more peculiar. If their attitude profile were dissimilar to previous generations of nonvoters, it is possible that the candidate preferences of nonvoters in 1980 and 1984 might be laid at the doorstep of a "new" nonvoter. The unchanged attitude profile eliminates such a possibility. It is not even possible to identify a subset of the nonvoters who might be regarded as "new style" nonvoters.

Consider the following possibility for 1980: Despite the apparent similarity between 1980 nonvoters and the earlier generation of nonvoters, those in the 1980s (or, at least, nonvoters in the 1980 and 1984 elections) were purposively abstaining. A priori, it is at least plausible that purposive abstention occurred in 1980, and perhaps in 1984 as well. As Martin Wattenberg has shown, the electorate held neither candidate, in either election, in particularly high esteem.¹² If the disdain were

12. Martin P. Wattenberg, "The Hollow Realignment: Partisan Change in a Candidate-Centered Age," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, August 29-September 1, 1985.

sufficiently strong for some voters, they might have regarded both candidates below the threshold of acceptability. In 1980 these nonvoters may have preferred Carter to Reagan, but neither to either. Such strong-minded individuals might have been sufficiently numerous to produce at least some of the results reported above.

One way to evaluate this possibility is to compare the attitudes and preferences of nonvoters who were not expected to vote in November with those who had a high probability of turning out on election day.¹³ Not all the nonvoters were likely to stay home on election day. About 30 percent of the nonvoters, representing 11 percent of the total electorate, had better than a .9 expectation of voting. Approximately 60 percent of the nonvoters in 1980 had less than a .5 probability of turning up at the polls, and approximately 40 percent had less than a .15 probability of voting (see Table 6). Yet these unexpected abstainers do not explain the contrary behavior of nonvoters.

As Table 7 illustrates, probable voters who did not vote in the 1980 election are virtually indistinguishable from participators in terms of their evaluations of the candidates, ideological orientation, and the strength of their issue preferences. Carter supporters who did not vote match Carter voters in terms of the affect they feel toward the candidates; they share the same perceptions of Carter's (and Reagan's) qualities as a strong leader who solves problems; both groups give Carter high marks for his job performance; the strength of their issue positions are equivalent. Nonvoting Carter supporters differ from Carter voters along only two dimensions: political interest and involvement, and ideological self-identification. Neither difference is a plausible explanation for the failure of so many Carter supporters to vote. The involvement and interest difference would have led us to expect responsiveness to Reagan—the candidate of the short-term force. The weaker liberalism of the Carter nonvoters (.16 standard deviations less liberal than the Carter voters) is too small a difference to support a rational abstention explanation. Rational abstention is made particularly incredible by the substantial liberalism of the Carter nonvoters. As Table 7 indicates, they are almost half a standard deviation more liberal than the average American and almost a full standard deviation more liberal than Reagan supporters.

13. Expected turnout was calculated following an analysis of the voter validation portion of the 1980 election study. The estimates are based on a conversion to probabilities of the maximum likelihood estimates derived from a probit equation. Details of the conversion will be supplied on request. The variables used for the calculation of the maximum likelihood estimates are intending to vote, being over 30 years of age, campaign interest, having a college education, and have an annual income over \$15,000.

TABLE 6
Probability of Voting and Actual Turnout,
1980 and 1984

	Estimated Probability of Voting Before the Election		
	Low	Moderate	High
1980 Election			
Did vote	8%	56%	75%
Carter	3	27	26
Reagan	4	25	42
Other	1	4	8
Did not vote, but preferred	92%	44%	25%
Carter	45	25	13
Reagan	33	16	10
Other	14	3	2
1984 Election			
Did vote	17%	79%	88%
Mondale	10	38	32
Reagan	7	41	55
Did not vote but preferred	83%	21%	12%
Mondale	34	11	4
Reagan	48	10	8

Note: "Low" refers to calculated probabilities equal to or less than .5; "moderate" refers to calculated probabilities of between .5 and .8; "high" refers to calculated probabilities greater than .8. Footnote 13 provides more detail on the calculation of these estimates.

In summary, none of the attitude differences between Carter voters and the nonvoting Carter supporters explain the abstention of the latter. Even more puzzling, the data in Table 7 undermine any explanation of rational abstention. These unexpected nonvoters did not stay home because of any measurable dissatisfaction with Carter or any weaker partisanship. Their failure to vote is inexplicable in terms of prevailing theory.

Institutions and Organizations as Voter Mobilizers

For most of this century, American politics has lacked the linkage between partisanship and social cleavages that play a prominent role in

TABLE 7
 Characteristics of High-Probability Voters, 1980

	Preferred Carter		Preferred Reagan	
	Voted	Did Not Vote	Voted	Did Not Vote
Candidate evaluations				
Thermometer ratings				
Reagan	-.84	-.64	.60	.80
Carter	.64	.75	-.71	-.93
Carter job approval	.65	.71	-.69	-.79
Carter personal qualities				
Strong	.37	.40	-.45	-.64
Problem solver	.55	.56	-.60	-.66
Leader	.56	.65	-.64	-.87
Issue orientation				
Self-identified as liberal	.63	.47	-.42	-.48
Issue extremity	.10	.07	.14	.24
Partisanship				
Party identifier	.20	.28	-.13	-.13
Strength of identification	.28	.31	-.14	-.16
Political involvement				
Regular voter	.44	.04	.48	.17
General political interest	.25	-.03	.35	.28
Interest in 1980 campaign	.58	.35	.51	.38
Concern with election outcome	.35	.08	.02	.09

Note: Table entries are standard scores to facilitate comparisons among the groups in terms of the variables. Scores below zero are less of the trait than the average voter. Scores above zero are above the population average.

mobilizing the vote in many other electoral democracies.¹⁴ These variables along with differences in electoral systems have figured in explanations of the comparatively low level of turnout in the United States,

14. See Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); John R. Petrocik, "The Limits of Individual Variables: Electoral Participation, Attitudes, and Party Systems," paper presented at the third annual meeting of the International Society for Political Psychology, Boston, June 4-7, 1980; and John R. Petrocik and Thad A. Brown, "Electoral Mobilization and Party System Change," research in progress, UCLA, 1986.

but they are not available as explanations for the preferences of nonvoters in 1980 and 1984. Moreover, there is no variation on these themes that might account for the preferences of nonvoters in the 1980s.

Changes in electoral law have been modest and, in any case, not directed at structures that would change the surge characteristics of nonvoters. Patterns of party canvassing have not changed significantly, nor, according to the best evidence, has there been a significant change in the rate at which nonvoters have been canvassed. A higher rate of canvassing by the Democrats might have helped their cause in 1980, since those canvassed by the Democrats voted, and they voted Democratic. Nevertheless, Republican canvassing produced more Reagan votes. More Democratic canvassing might have stimulated more Republican canvassing, with an unfavorable net effect for the Democrats (as the 1984 registration drive illustrates).

Changes in the linkage between groups and the parties also have played no discernible role in shaping the preferences of nonvoters in 1980 and 1984. While it is possible to offer interpretations of these elections that would link the preferences of nonvoters to changes in the party bias of various party coalition groups, the data show no differences among the relevant segments of the electorate. Indeed, neither gender, age, socioeconomic status, nor ethnoreligious groups (with a couple of exceptions) behaved differently than the population as a whole.

Conclusion

Serendipity may be essential to progress; it may even be essential to advances in knowledge. It is certainly not helpful when explanations of outcomes are sought. A large body of theory and data on persuasion and social influence has allowed us to construct a model of nonvoting in the United States that diminishes its practical significance in elections. Irregular voters and chronic nonvoters have been perceived as substantively insignificant. Unlike the regular voter, who learns "brand loyalty" by repeatedly voting for candidates of the same party, the peripheral voter responds strongly to the bias of an election. As a result, it is rare to find an election that would be reversed by getting nonvoters to the polls. On the contrary, nonvoters are more likely to exaggerate the choices of the regular electorate. The 1980 election confronts this comforting view by completely contradicting it. Reagan might still have won, but a rush to the polls by the nonvoters would have made it closer; it might have reversed it.

Our model of nonvoters is far too strong to consider revising it in light of these results, but these peculiar findings do demand more attention. Nonvoting is not a major research topic these days, but these data argue for upgrading its status. The findings are anomalous. More important, these data raise the possibility that it is a topic of substantive significance.

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11

The Democratic Nomination Campaign: Voter Rationality and Instability in a Changing Campaign Environment

Kathleen A. Frankovic

The theory of voting behavior in general elections in the United States is well defined and highly detailed. The road to the nomination has been less clearly defined. Candidates win the nomination with different strategies in different years. Obviously winning candidates must be adequately funded (or at least well organized) and able to articulate their goals and plans for the office. Issues seem to matter in some years, personality characteristics in others. And these days, candidates must subject themselves to the light of television news and project their image via television advertisements.

The road to the nomination requires a different strategy from the road to the White House. Candidates appeal not to the voters as a whole but to the committed voters of their own party, or at least those who choose to be affiliated with their party that year. Consequently, candidates who can win a nomination often have a hard time winning the general election, as demonstrated by the losing bids for the presidency of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and George McGovern in 1972.

The 1984 campaign for the Democratic nomination again resulted in a general-election loss for the candidate who survived the selection process. This chapter reviews the campaign for the nomination and examines the results of what were many separate state contests con-

ducted in an environment that focused attention on candidate momentum and campaign tactics. It then explores the question of what can be learned from the 1984 campaign that has relevance to the general conduct of nominating campaigns.

The Context of the 1984 Campaign

Before the Democratic nomination contest in 1984, the expectation was for a contest between two front-runners: Walter Mondale (vice-president under Jimmy Carter) and John Glenn (senator from Ohio and former astronaut). The competition was set in semi-ideological terms—Mondale the endorsed candidate of such traditional Democratic voting blocs as labor, and Glenn the moderate pragmatist who hoped to appeal to moderate and conservative Democrats, especially in the areas of the country that had become more likely to vote Republican than Democratic in national contests. There were six other candidates—Senator Gary Hart of Colorado, Florida's Governor Reubin Askew, California Senator Alan Cranston, Senator Ernest Hollings of South Carolina, former senator and former Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, the only black candidate in the race—all of whom in late 1983 had limited support nationally, as well as limited financing.

The candidates would campaign for the right to face Ronald Reagan, the popular Republican incumbent. Although it would seem that this prospect should not have attracted a large field of contenders, it should be noted that in 1983 and before, when the decisions to run were made, Ronald Reagan did not appear invincible. A recession in 1982 lowered the president's popularity. The Republican party staved off a greater defeat in the congressional elections that year by an infusion of money for campaign expenditures and a focus on local concerns. By the beginning of 1984, however, the economy had improved, and aided by public support for the invasion of Grenada, the president's popularity had improved.

More immediately, the potential Democratic nominees faced a nominating process that had changed dramatically in this century, beginning with early steps toward openness at the beginning of the century and dramatic reforms instituted by the McGovern–Fraser Commission after the 1968 election. After the 1976 election, the Democrats took a step toward closing the process. The concern was that too much openness might, in fact, be a bad thing for the party, as candidates with little support within the party hierarchy could win the nomination. To close the process, the Democrats applied already existing rules that required

voters in Democratic primaries or caucuses to declare their affiliation with the party. They also created a bloc of "superdelegates" from elected and party officials, who would be unpledged and presumably would give a degree of stability to the selection process, and limited the allocation of delegates to those candidates achieving a vote of at least 20 percent of the total cast in a state or district.

Raising thresholds (restricting delegates only to those candidates who achieved 20 percent or more of the vote) meant increased professionalization of the campaign. Candidates who could not meet the minimum vote required to capture delegates would become ineffective candidates. This aspect of the 1984 Democratic party rules for delegate selection came under attack from Gary Hart and, especially, from Jesse Jackson, who claimed 20 percent of the total vote but received only 11 percent of convention delegates. Thresholds, combined with "loop-hole" primaries (which allowed candidates to capture all or most of the delegates in districts they may have won by only a narrow margin), added to the strength of candidates who captured the majority of the vote in a state. For example, on the last day of the primary campaign, a narrow preference for Gary Hart from the voters in California brought him the vast majority of delegates, while a solid majority for Mondale in New Jersey gave him nearly all the delegates, and left Gary Hart with none.

These changes were meant to pave the way for the accession to the nomination of an "insider" candidate, specifically either Ted Kennedy or Walter Mondale. The Hunt Commission meetings (responsible for determining the party's rules for the 1984 campaign) made its decisions after securing the agreement of four individuals, representing Kennedy, Mondale, Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill, and Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO, all party insiders and regulars. After Senator Kennedy declined to run, however, Mondale was perceived as the sole beneficiary. Glenn and the other Democrats had to combat not only a traditional Democrat but someone whose supporters had helped rewrite the rules to his benefit for the 1984 campaign.

There were also environmental considerations. Many states had moved up their delegate selection process to the first month of the campaign. This occurred partly because of the shortened "window," which required each state's delegate selection process to begin no earlier than the second Tuesday in March and no later than the first Tuesday in June,¹ and partly because states assumed they would receive more attention from candidates and press if their primary or caucus was held

1. Four exceptions were granted to the "window" rule: New Hampshire, Iowa, Wyoming, and Maine were granted 1-week dispensations. New Hampshire and Iowa were then permitted another week's leeway. Iowa's caucuses were held February 20, the New Hampshire primary February 28.

early in the campaign. In 1980 several southern states, urged on by Jimmy Carter, had moved their primaries toward the front of the calendar, joining such New England states as New Hampshire and Massachusetts, which were expected to be strong for Edward Kennedy. In 1984, 8 primaries and 12 caucuses were held in the first week of the official "window." Adding in the states granted exceptions to the "window" rule, 24 states and territories began the process of selecting over one-third of the total delegates by March 20, the end of the first full week of legal delegate selection. In addition, the nonbinding Vermont primary was held the week before the "window."

The frequency and visibility of primary debates meant that candidates would be seen by more voters than ever before in a format they could not control. While important debates before primary elections go back at least as far as 1972 (when Hubert Humphrey accused George McGovern of a scheme to bankrupt the country with his \$1,000 per family proposal), in 1984 there were over 20 scheduled debates among the contenders for the nomination. The Democrats met in Iowa, New Hampshire, Georgia (where Mondale made his "Where's the beef?" remark), and on a network broadcast from New York (the "Dan Rather debate"). Helped by a ruling from the Federal Communication Commission declaring debates to be bona fide news events, most of those debates were televised in the state in which they occurred, and some were broadcast to a national audience. The debates forced a nationalization of campaigns for the nomination not seen before. In becoming more national, the campaigns also became more professional.

Professionalization of campaigns was also encouraged through the increasing control of the process by the Federal Election Commission. This meant more than campaigns simply hiring accountants to meet FEC filing requirements. Candidates were eligible for matching funds, as before, but those matching funds would be withdrawn if a candidate did not reach the minimum threshold of 20 percent of the vote for 2 consecutive weeks. The federally imposed campaign spending limits threatened to affect at least one candidate's ability to wage his campaign, as Walter Mondale spent a lot of money early in the process and was in danger of exceeding the total limitation before the primary campaign ended.

Participation by voters increased in 1984, even though personal contact was replaced by television, direct mail, and other impersonal techniques that became necessary once the process of delegate selection expanded outward. The campaign also saw the institutionalization of participation by a variety of interest groups, who offered candidate endorsements and then tried to deliver on their promise. Labor, teachers, and women's organizations endorsed candidates before the first primary. While organized support became an issue in the 1984 campaign,

this search for endorsements may have been exacerbated by some of the rule and schedule changes, which suggested (at least to some) that the more organized support a candidate had, the better he might do.

Contemporary analyses of the 1984 Democratic nominating process emphasized party loyalty, candidate exposure, and the previous week's results. With less time to campaign in the early primary states, candidates were forced to rely on television, whirlwind campaign trips, and tactics rather than a sustained strategy. Conventional wisdom about the campaign was that the Democratic party was divided in two: old-fashioned traditional Democrats, interested in solving economic problems, especially unemployment and poverty, by traditional Democratic methods; and new Democrats—younger, better educated, searching for new ideas, and less interested in the old ways that Democrats did things (and certainly not interested in the traditional Democrats' candidate, Walter Mondale).

The environment of the 1984 campaign, however, heightened drama during its early weeks; gave candidates, apart from the insiders for whom the rules were written, a chance for public exposure and acclaim; and as the campaign continued, spotlighted the shifting loyalties of what seemed to be weak ties to the candidates. How instability and consistency in candidate support worked is the focus of the remainder of this paper. The data I examine include CBS News/*New York Times* and CBS News exit polls of the primary electorates (and caucus electorates in two states, Iowa and Texas) and CBS News/*New York Times* national polls conducted during the primary season.²

The First Month: Early National Movement in Candidate Support

So many of our judgments about the 1984 Democratic campaign are stereotypical—based on characterizations of states and their interests—that it is necessary, even now, to look back to determine the

2. There is an important qualification to make about the CBS News/*Times* national polls. The group on which all estimates are based is not made up exclusively of Democratic identifiers but includes those individuals who describe themselves as Democratic primary voters—people who intend to participate in the 1984 Democratic primary or caucus in their state, or who say they usually vote in Democratic primaries. All are registered voters. About one-quarter of them do not call themselves Democrats, but this yields a voter pool comparable to that found in the typical primary state, where approximately one-quarter of the voters thought of themselves as something other than Democrats. This selection procedure limits the respondents to those who express an interest in the Democratic nomination campaign.

realities of the campaign and its meaning for the politics of 1984 and beyond.

It is particularly important to examine the changes that took place in the first month of the campaign, when Mondale's apparently insurmountable lead disappeared and then returned. Those very quick changes have not been adequately explored and deserve reconsideration in order to discover the motivation of the early movement to Gary Hart—whether it was primarily an anti-Mondale reaction or a pro-Hart movement. Exploration of that issue also sheds light on how candidates win support in the early stages of a campaign, when images are being formed, and when, as in 1984, a surprise challenger achieves recognition on the basis of a single victory. The evidence suggests that not only were images of the less well-known challengers unformed early in 1984 but images of the front-runner were often just as minimal.

Sizable movement took place in the 1984 nominating campaign in less than one month, from immediately before the New Hampshire primary on February 28 through the Illinois race on March 20, when Mondale reestablished himself as the front-runner.³ Although what took place in that month is perhaps the most important aspect of the Democrats' campaign in 1984, the rise of Gary Hart is not particularly well documented. His rise was so swift that many of those measuring public opinion in 1984 simply had no pre-New Hampshire data with which to track the change. But there are some data that show the shift in cross-sectional support for the Democratic candidates over the principal series of weeks involved.

The CBS News/*New York Times* national poll conducted before the February 20 Iowa caucuses indicated Gary Hart as the choice of only 1 percent of possible primary and caucus attendees. After his distant second place finish in the Iowa caucuses, Hart's support rose to 7

3. The schedule of primaries and caucuses in that first month was as follows:

Iowa caucuses	February 20
New Hampshire primary	February 28
Maine caucuses	March 4
Vermont primary (nonbinding)	March 6
Wyoming caucuses	March 10
Super Tuesday: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Rhode Island; Democrats Abroad primaries; Hawaii, Nevada, Oklahoma, Washington, American Samoa caucuses	March 13
Arkansas, Latin America, Michigan, Mississippi, South Carolina caucuses	March 17
Puerto Rico primary	March 18
Illinois primary, Minnesota caucuses	March 20

percent. One week after the New Hampshire primary, where Hart was the surprise winner, Hart led Mondale as the choice of Democrats by 38 percent to 31 percent. Two weeks after that, after a narrow loss to Mondale in the March 20 Illinois primary, Hart was again behind, 42 percent to 35 percent.

After the Illinois primary, CBS News and the *Times* reinterviewed 377 of the 464 Democrats (86 percent) interviewed before the New Hampshire primary.⁴ The panel's shift in support for the various Democratic candidates mirrors that recorded in cross-sectional studies, although it is not as dramatic.⁵ Despite a few differences between the panel and cross-sectional results, the panel provides evidence to explain the rise of Gary Hart. Half of those reinterviewed after the Illinois primary changed preferences from the preceeding month; two-thirds of those moved toward Gary Hart. One-quarter of those who supported Mondale in February moved to Hart in March. One can characterize the individuals who moved toward Gary Hart, and especially those who moved from Mondale to Hart, on the basis of their preswitch attitudes.

The findings suggest that those who switched to Gary Hart had reasons for doing so. The switchers are like the Hart primary voters: better educated, more independent, more interested in deficits, more favorable toward Ronald Reagan. In addition, the switchers seemed distinctly more susceptible to the Hart momentum. They were, on the whole, more likely to report paying little attention to the campaign. However, they were paying enough attention to be able to absorb the Hart message of new ideas and his claim of being free from special interests.

In February respondents were asked a number of questions about special-interest politics, including their definitions of a special-interest group, whether or not they were members of special-interest groups, and what their reactions were to special-interest groups endorsing presidential candidates.

4. The total includes one respondent who had taken a job in Saudi Arabia in the interim.
5. This panel study underscores one difference between cross-sectional and panel analysis. A smaller proportion of Democrats interviewed in the mid-March cross-sectional survey say their choice had changed in the past month than were documented as changers in the panel. The preferences of the panel, however, indicated more support for Mondale than in the cross-section, suggesting that the earlier interview either solidified some in their preferences at a time when the country was clearly shifting, or made them less willing to admit their minds had changed. There is also evidence of poor memory on the part of the panel respondents. Half of those who switched to Hart claimed they had made up their minds to support Hart before the New Hampshire primary, at a time when, according to their own answers, they actually favored Mondale for the nomination.

There were relatively few differences between Mondale supporters and supporters of other candidates in perception of interest groups. A difference did emerge in the way the two groups described interest groups. Mondale supporters were less able to define what an interest group was than were supporters of other candidates; and they were much less likely to think of unions when asked to name an interest group (even though a disproportionate share of Mondale supporters in February were themselves union members). There were also differences of opinion in February on the appropriateness of union endorsement of presidential candidates. The non-Mondale voters were more opposed to the unions endorsing candidates. The data are displayed in Table 1.

The question of unions endorsing candidates becomes even more critical when one examines those in the February wave who moved from one candidate in February to another in March. Mondale support-

TABLE 1
Democratic Attitudes about Interest Groups and Politics, February 1984

	Mondale Supporters	Other Supporters
Define "special interest"		
Don't know	52%	44%
Unions	3	12
Rich groups	16	16
Poor groups	10	10
Issue-specific	6	11
Are you part of a special interest?		
Yes	33%	37%
No	59	55
Approve of your group endorsing?		
Yes	18%	22%
No	9	10
Approve of unions endorsing?		
Yes	45%	40%
No	45	56
Unweighted sample size	244	166

Questions: (1) In this presidential campaign, there's been a lot of talk about special interests and special-interest groups. When you hear the term "special-interest group," what kind of group comes to mind? (2) Think about yourself, the organizations you belong to, and the types of people you associate with. Do you think other people would say you are a part of a special-interest group? (3) Do you think it's appropriate for the group you just mentioned to endorse candidates for president, or is this something they shouldn't get involved in? (4) Do you think it's appropriate for labor unions to endorse candidates for president, or is this something they shouldn't get involved in?

Source: CBS News/New York Times national telephone survey, February 21-25, 1984.

ers in February who remained Mondale supporters in March thought the endorsement of candidates by labor unions was appropriate by 47 percent to 37 percent. Those who favored Hart in March, but had supported someone other than Mondale in February, were negative, 40 percent to 57 percent. But those who switched from Mondale to Gary Hart were especially opposed to labor union endorsements, 34 percent to 63 percent. These are preswitch attitudes, so they are not simply artifacts of a reduction of cognitive dissonance; those switchers were programmed to move toward Hart once the anti-special-interest argument was articulated.

In the March panel wave, those individuals who switched preference from Mondale to Hart demonstrated their susceptibility to the Hart themes of new ideas and rejection of the traditional politics of the Democratic party. They also were different from the February Mondale supporters who remained Mondale supporters in March. For example, when asked whether it was better to solve problems with traditional methods or to try new ways of solving problems, the Mondale-to-Mondale group chose traditional methods, 54 percent to 36 percent. The February Mondale supporters who switched to Gary Hart favored new ways, 61 percent to 33 percent. On a question of whether it was more important to help the poor or to cut the budget deficit significantly, those who stayed with Mondale favored helping the poor, 61 percent to 22 percent; those who moved to Hart favored cutting the deficit, 51 percent to 31 percent. This issue emphasis was already evident in February, before the movement toward Hart began. Those individuals who switched to Gary Hart had been more likely to mention the federal budget deficit as the country's most important problem in February than were those Mondale supporters who remained with Mondale in March.

Other characteristics were dominant in the switching group. Like those who favored Hart in the early primaries and caucuses, the switchers were more likely to be from the Northeast, to be less Democratic in their partisanship, better educated and better off financially, younger, and less likely to be paying a great deal of attention to the campaign. Before the New Hampshire primary, 46 percent of the Mondale-Hart switchers said they were paying little attention to the campaign; only 30 percent of those who remained with Mondale were paying little attention. This suggests that the switchers were susceptible to the momentum of the campaign, prime candidates for moving toward a new candidate.

(There is a residual category of panel respondents—those Democratic voters who supported someone other than Hart or Mondale. The vast majority of them favored the nomination of Jesse Jackson, and their

attitudes more closely resemble those who remained with Mondale than those who switched toward Gary Hart, giving some credence to the notion of a split Democratic party.)

Aside from demographic and issue differences between those who left Mondale and those who stayed with him, switchers evaluated candidates differently from non-switchers. Even before they moved away from Mondale, the switchers thought less of his presidential qualities than those who remained. They also had some initial ambivalence toward supporting Mondale in a fall confrontation with Reagan, as illustrated in Table 2. As a group, they were already primed to defect. The Democrats who supported someone other than Mondale in February and moved toward Hart in March were clearly negative toward Mondale in the initial interview, suggesting that a core of anti-Mondale feeling existed among some Democrats even before the first primary.

TABLE 2
February Evaluations of Mondale among Democratic Voters
by Their Choice for the Nomination in February and March

	Choice for Democratic Nomination		
	Mondale Mondale	Other Hart	Mondale Hart
February:			
March:			
Mondale and crisis			
Confident	71%	36%	53%
Not confident	21	50	31
Mondale as strong leader			
Yes	89%	51%	77%
No	4	39	18
Opinion of Mondale			
Favorable	83%	24%	67%
Not favorable	3	42	12
Prefer for president			
Mondale	81%	42%	67%
Reagan	15	41	31
Unweighted sample size	129	97	55

Questions: (1) Do you have confidence in Walter Mondale's ability to deal wisely with a difficult international crisis, or are you uneasy about his approach? (2) Do you think Walter Mondale has strong qualities of leadership? (3) Is your opinion of Walter Mondale favorable, not favorable, undecided or haven't you heard enough about Walter Mondale yet to have an opinion? (4) If the 1984 presidential election were being held today, and the candidates were Ronald Reagan, the Republican, and Walter Mondale, the Democrat, would you vote for Ronald Reagan or Walter Mondale?

Source: CBS News/New York Times national telephone panel survey, February 21-25, and reinterviewed, March 21-24, 1984.

By March, the initial ambivalence in attitudes changes to polarization. Not only do those who switch from Mondale become more negative in their evaluations of him, but those who remain with him underscore their original position by becoming, if anything, more favorable in their evaluations of Mondale than they had been in February. Some of those March evaluations are seen in Table 3.

Switchers from Mondale to Hart were also different from non-switchers in their opinion about the Republican incumbent. It has already been noted that the switchers were more likely to indicate in February that they would vote for Reagan in a Mondale-Reagan confrontation. But they were also more likely to approve of the way Reagan handled his job as president, and especially more likely to approve of his economic performance. Differences were less clear in evaluations of Reagan's handling of foreign policy. These evaluations are shown in Table 4.

The higher economic job rating given to the president in February by those moving to support Hart in March seems predicated on concern for

TABLE 3
March Evaluations of Mondale among Democratic Voters
by Their Choice for the Nomination in February and March

	<i>Choice for Democratic Nomination</i>		
	<i>Mondale Mondale</i>	<i>Other Hart</i>	<i>Mondale Hart</i>
<i>February:</i>			
<i>March:</i>			
Mondale and crisis			
Confident	85%	24%	42%
Not confident	10	69	51
Opinion of Mondale			
Favorable	94%	22%	38%
Not favorable	1	50	18
Prefer for president			
Mondale	85%	45%	50%
Reagan	13	43	42

Questions: (1) Do you have confidence in Walter Mondale's ability to deal wisely with a difficult international crisis, or are you uneasy about his approach? (2) Is your opinion of Walter Mondale favorable, not favorable, undecided, or haven't you heard enough about Walter Mondale yet to have an opinion? (3) If the 1984 presidential election were being held today, and the candidates were Ronald Reagan, the Republican, and Walter Mondale, the Democrat, would you vote for Ronald Reagan or Walter Mondale?

Source: CBS News/New York Times national telephone survey, March 21-24, 1984.

TABLE 4
Democratic Voters' Attitudes toward Reagan by
Their Choice for the Nomination in February and March

	Choice for Democratic Nomination		
	Mondale Mondale	Other Hart	Mondale Hart
February:			
March:			
Reagan handling job			
Approve	25%	52%	35%
Disapprove	67	39	63
Reagan handling foreign policy			
Approve	25%	25%	23%
Disapprove	65	61	67
Reagan handling economy			
Approve	17%	55%	45%
Disapprove	67	39	53
Unweighted sample size	129	97	55

Questions: (1) Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling his job as president? (2) Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling foreign policy? (3) Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling the economy?

Source: CBS News/*New York Times* national telephone survey, February 21–25, 1984.

the deficit and willingness to institute budget-cutting methods to achieve a deficit reduction. Switchers were also more willing than other Democrats to blame Democrats in Congress, and not Reagan, for the deficit.

In short, in the first month of the active nomination campaign, the individual voter discovered candidate location for himself or herself. This process occurred during the first period of intense campaigning by the candidates and intense coverage by the media. Those who originally began as Mondale supporters, perhaps for no other reason than that he was the best-organized, most familiar, and best-covered candidate, sorted themselves out after New Hampshire based on some rational strategy, following their issue positions, especially their feelings about issues and interest group politics.

Just as the panel data suggest a certain amount of rationality among those who moved toward Hart, cross-sectional analysis also demonstrates real change in Democratic perception of Hart. The rapidity of the change toward Hart was fostered by the speeded-up selection process, and the move was responsive to the images presented in the media of

Hart, and of the contrast between Hart and Mondale. That contrast is nowhere more dramatic than in the first evening of sustained television coverage of Gary Hart, the night of his second-place finish in the Iowa caucuses. The story that night was both Mondale's expected victory and Hart's surprise second-place finish. Network broadcasts uniformly featured three candidates—Mondale, Hart, and John Glenn (whose poor showing raised questions about whether he would continue in the race).

On the CBS News "Campaign '84" special broadcast on the night of the Iowa caucuses, the analysis of Gary Hart's finish included the following adjectives: *distant, solid, surprise, big surprise, surprised, strong showing, tremendous*. (To be fair to that broadcast, the following statements also were made by reporters: "Hart lost badly," and, "When you've lost three to one, you've lost.") Hart himself added to the image of surprise and novelty that was being created for him by repeated statements that he, not Mondale, was the candidate who had new ideas and independence from special-interest groups. In sum, his image was that of youth, innovativeness, and newness. In contrast, Walter Mondale's statements focused on his background, and his campaign themes of competence and experience. "I know what I'm doing; I've been in the Senate, been in the White House, dealt with the Russians, worked with the allies. I know how to get things done." In doing this, the two candidates positioned themselves at opposite ends of two dimensions: youth versus experience, and independence versus knowledge.

Members of the public responded to the declared differences and sorted themselves out accordingly. By early March, Democrats were citing experience, youth, and related personal qualities as the biggest differences between Mondale and Hart. Those same items were the most frequently mentioned in open-ended "like/dislike" questions about the two candidates. Democrats were far more likely to describe Mondale as experienced enough to be president, not independent, and a typical Democrat than they were to ascribe those characteristics to Hart. Even those who favored Hart overwhelmingly believed Mondale was experienced enough to be president; it either was a less-important quality to them than Mondale hoped it would be or perhaps they equated Mondale's experience with age and contrasted it to Hart's relative youth.

Some of this veneer of difference and newness appears to have left Hart after the Illinois primary, when campaign errors transformed newness and youth into inexperience and incompetence in the minds of some voters. The very image that Hart had cultivated made it more difficult for him to write off the mistaken charge of unfair advertising he directed at Walter Mondale, and his inability to deliver on a promise to get campaign ads that attacked Chicago Alderman Edward Vrdolyak off

the air. In contrast, Mondale never lost the majority's judgment that he had the appropriate experience to be president, even when his support among Democrats dropped from 57 percent to 31 percent and then came back up to 42 percent. Those changes in national opinion are documented in Table 5.

Even at Mondale's ebb, the public continued to view him as experienced enough for the job. By March, however, the public seemed to want more than experience or, as noted above, gave a different meaning to

TABLE 5
Democratic Voters' Evaluations of Mondale and Hart

	<i>Pre-N.H.</i>			
	<i>Jan.</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	<i>Early March</i>	<i>Late March</i>
Mondale or Hart for nominee				
Mondale		57%	31%	42%
Hart		7	38	35
Mondale has enough experience				
Yes	77%		79%	78%
No	16		13	16
Hart has enough experience				
Yes		22%	45%	34%
No		25	28	39
Mondale a typical Democrat				
Yes			65%	77%
No			20	14
Hart a typical Democrat				
Yes			34%	40%
No			39	37
Is Mondale sincere?				
Yes			31%	
No			56	
Is Hart sincere?				
Yes			48%	
No			34	
Likely Democratic				
Primary voters	470	464	567	429

Questions: (1) If you had to choose between only Gary Hart and Walter Mondale, who would you like to see the Democrats nominate? (2) Do you think Mondale has enough experience to be a good president? (3) Do you think Hart has enough experience to be a good president? (4) Do you think of Walter Mondale as a typical Democrat, or is he different from most Democrats? (5) Do you think of Gary Hart as a typical Democrat, or is he different from most Democrats? (6) Do you think that most of the time Walter Mondale says what he really believes, or do you think he says what he thinks people want to hear? (7) Do you think that most of the time Gary Hart says what he really believes, or do you think he says what he thinks people want to hear?

Sources: CBS News and CBS News/New York Times national telephone surveys.

experience from the one the Mondale campaign desired. Hart scored favorably on experience in early March, but lost some of that 2 weeks later. In the meantime, while voters were increasingly likely to describe Mondale as a typical Democrat, typicalness seemed less of a negative quality after the Illinois primary.

After the first month, the evaluations of Democrats nationally stabilized. Gary Hart never regained the lead in the polls that he had after New Hampshire, and the qualities attributed to Hart and Mondale remained constant through the end of the primary campaign.

The 1984 Campaign in the States

As in the national surveys, once the voters sorted themselves out during the first month of the primary season, there was a great deal of stability in voting patterns from state to state. The existence of a pattern should not be surprising.

Each of the candidates offered particular appeals to particular Democratic voters. John Glenn soon faded as a major candidate, and, after the first few weeks of primary and caucus voting, there were only two candidates considered possible nominees: Walter Mondale and Gary Hart. There was, of course, a third major candidate, Jesse Jackson. Jackson, however, was never viewed as a potential nominee. His vote was almost entirely a black Democrat's vote—in no primary or caucus did Jackson receive 10 percent of the vote of white primary participants, while his support from blacks ranged from a low of 50 percent in Alabama (where Walter Mondale had the support of Birmingham's mayor) to nearly 90 percent as the season wore on. Blacks who did not vote for Jackson went mainly to Mondale, and frequently they provided the difference between victory and defeat in a primary state. Gary Hart never received more than 7 percent of the vote cast by blacks; and in Alabama, North Carolina, and Texas his share dropped to 1 percent. (State-by-state breakdowns of the vote of blacks are provided in Table 6.)

For example, in Alabama and Georgia, the two March 13 primary states captured by Mondale, Gary Hart won more votes from whites than Walter Mondale did. In Illinois, the state in which the campaign's momentum turned back to Mondale, he and Hart split the white vote. Mondale won an absolute majority of white voters in only six major state contests—the New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Maryland, and New Jersey primaries, and the Texas caucus. White Democrats' support for Mondale ranged from a low of 20 percent in Vermont to a high of 58 percent in New Jersey.

While that distribution of white voters for Mondale suggests great

TABLE 6
1984 Democratic Primaries: Black Participation
and Black Voter Preference, by State

State	Date	Percentage Black	Percentage Total Jackson Vote	Votes Cast by Blacks			
				Mondale	Hart	Jackson	Total
Ala.	3/13	41%	22%	47%	1%	50%	98%
Ga.	3/13	28	19	31	5	61	97
Ill.	3/20	25	24	16	3	81	100
Conn.	3/27	6	11	12	7	81	100
N.Y.	4/3	24	27	12	3	85	100
Pa.	4/10	17	17	18	3	77	98
Tenn.	5/1	26	22	22	2	76	100
Tex.	5/5	33	31	16	1	83	100
Ohio	5/8	20	20	17	3	79	99
Ind.	5/8	13	13	20	6	73	99
Md.	5/8	25	25	14	2	82	98
N.C.	5/8	28	26	15	1	83	99
N.J.	6/5	22	24	11	2	86	99
Calif.	6/5	11	18	16	5	78	99

Source: CBS News and CBS News/New York Times 1984 Democratic primary exit polls.

variation in his and Hart's support, there was much more consistency than is first apparent. One can study the distribution of Mondale and Hart support in the states, primary by primary, by looking at collected exit-poll data for subgroups of white voters. The first observation is the consistent pattern of support from various voting groups. Older voters consistently were more likely to vote for Walter Mondale than were younger voters. Those voters who thought of themselves as Democrats were more likely to support Mondale than were those who described themselves as Republicans or Independents. Less-educated and lower-income respondents were more favorable to Mondale than were those with more education and higher income.

The tables in the Appendix are organized state by state within region, demonstrating some of those consistencies among white voters in support for the two major candidates.

As suggested in those tables, labor union membership was very important to Mondale's primary performance. Aggregate analysis gives a correlation of .38 between the proportion of voters living in a household with a labor union member and vote for Mondale in the 19 state

primaries and caucuses for which data are available. Controls for aggregate partisanship, education, income, and age fail to decrease the relationship. (The partial correlation for percentage labor and percentage Mondale vote, with those four variables controlled, is .37.) The only other demographic variable that retains any sizable explanatory power after the other demographics are controlled is age (the partial correlation of percentage under 45 and Mondale vote is $-.28$). While the correlation between proportion of the state's voters who thought of themselves as Democrats and Mondale vote is .61 uncontrolled, once controls for other demographics are applied, the partial correlation drops to $-.07$.

Still, there is much that labor union membership cannot explain. When one compares the vote for Mondale from union households with the overall white primary vote for Mondale, one notices that the difference between the two tends to be relatively small, but varies considerably among the states. The percentage of the labor vote Mondale received ranged from a low of 22 percent in Vermont to a high of 74 percent in the Texas caucuses. The difference between the Mondale vote from union households and the overall white vote in those states ranged from as few as 3 points to as many as 24 points. The largest differences between Mondale's overall support and his support from union households were in the South and Midwest. Iowa and Alabama are examples of states where Mondale's support was distinctive. They were also states that voted early in the primary season, a time when the anti-Mondale vote was diffused among several candidates, while labor provided a candidate orientation for its members. The other states where the difference exceeded 10 points were states that voted after the April break, and included three states that Mondale lost to Gary Hart (Ohio, Indiana, and Nebraska), and three southern states he carried (Tennessee, Texas, and North Carolina).

Demographic distributions in the states provide even clearer evidence of consistency in support for Gary Hart. Aggregate measures of age, income, education, partisanship, and union membership all exert an independent effect on support for Hart. Partial correlations for those independent variables and vote for Hart are age (proportion under 45), .29; income (proportion with family incomes under \$35,000), $-.54$; education (proportion college graduates), .46; partisanship (proportion Democratic), $-.28$; and union (proportion union household), $-.21$.

While demographics mattered more for the Hart vote than it did for the Mondale vote, the results are reversed when one examines the importance of issues. Essentially, the more important the traditional Democratic issues of jobs and helping the poor were to Democratic voters in states, the higher Mondale's share of the white vote (partial

$r = .51$). The more often defense and the deficit were named as issues, the lower the Mondale vote (partial $r = -.52$). A high level of voter concern for arms control meant a lower level of Mondale support, but the relationship is weaker than for the other two issues (partial $r = -.28$). The three issues predict the Hart vote less well, although the correlations are in the opposite direction from those for the Mondale vote. The overall correlations are jobs and helping the poor, $-.18$; defense and deficit, $.07$; and arms control, $.28$. It should be noted that some of the lowered correlations reflect the lack of cohesiveness of the non-Mondale vote in the early primary states; concerns about defense and the deficit were strongly correlated with support for John Glenn in New Hampshire and the March 13 southern primary states.

This pattern of support by issues is underscored by the overall state results. Mondale typically won a majority from those who named the traditional Democratic issues (with only two major exceptions, Indiana and Ohio); Hart won a majority from those who worried about defense and the deficit. Arms control had a changeable effect: Hart beat Mondale among those voters who worried about it in early primary states, but, as time went on, the impact of concern about arms control was less consistent.

There are patterns to the vote that cannot be explained as simply. Ideology, which should be related to vote (given the relationship between concern for specific issues and the vote), shows no consistent relationship to support for either Mondale or Hart. Sex is inconsistent in its relationship to the vote. In some of the early primary states, women give a higher share of their vote to Hart than do men. In later states, the pattern is reversed. Voters' answers to a question that asked whether labor unions are too powerful was much more divisive early than later in the primary season.

Those inconsistencies force us to deal with the impact of timing and momentum on support for both Hart and Mondale. Clearly, timing mattered. Overall, Mondale did much better in the later weeks of the primary season than he did in the earlier ones, while some of Hart's strongest showings (Vermont and Connecticut) occurred early. Mondale's second-best performance among white voters came on the last day of the primary season, in New Jersey.

That suggests that voters were influenced by the momentum of the campaign. In fact, many individuals did not begin to focus on the campaign until their state's decision neared. Typically, one-fifth of the voters polled in each state reported making up their minds in the final few days. Since those self-reports are not entirely trustworthy, that

percentage is most likely an understatement.⁶ Half or more claimed not to have decided until a month before. Late decision making is typical in a campaign such as this one, where images were not particularly well formed, and where attention to the campaign was not necessary until one's own vote decision neared.

Although the momentum of the campaign affected some voters, there is no simple linear relationship between time of primary or caucus and vote. One of the reasons for this is the limited nature of what were described, during the campaign, as great electoral victories. The Ohio and Indiana primaries, acclaimed as surprise Hart victories, were elections where Hart received barely half of the white vote cast. Week-to-week changes in the vote for both candidates do not support a pure momentum theory of candidate support. In fact, the correlation between Hart's vote and the 1-week lag of Hart's vote results is negative ($r = -.22$). Practically, this means that, frequently, a good week for Hart was followed by a bad week. For example, Hart carried 62 percent of the white vote cast in Connecticut; the next week he fell to 36 percent in New York's election. Hart's performance in the primaries held on Super Tuesday, March 13, no matter how successful, could in no way equal Vermont's 69 percent vote for him the previous Tuesday.

Demographics and issues dominated candidate support and make an explanation of the nominating campaign based solely on momentum untenable. Democratic voters differed from state to state, and their concerns also differed. It is understandable that Walter Mondale carried a state such as Pennsylvania, where double-digit unemployment made jobs and helping the poor clearly dominant in voters' minds. It is understandable that he lost in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Connecticut, where those concerns mattered less. In addition, there are differences in state political cultures, which make the overall history and political characteristics of a state important in party politics.

But one cannot eliminate entirely the role of timing in the 1984 campaign. State differences in demographics, issue concerns, and political culture cannot totally explain this election. When a primary campaign takes place, there is both a state component and a national one. The national campaign changes over time. Voters in a state such as Maryland or Ohio cast their ballots in a different context from voters in New Hampshire. Some candidates quit the campaign, while others achieved higher levels of visibility and notoriety among voters. Candidates behaved differently from week to week. Enormous television ex-

6. See note 5.

posure, and the fact that tactics became more important than strategy, meant that any mistakes could be subject to greater than usual scrutiny. Some of that press scrutiny clearly took place in reaction to Hart's difficulties in Illinois. Likelihood of candidate error was increased by the tightening of the campaign season and the concentration of primaries at the beginning of the "window." Candidate decisions were being made under severe time constraints.

There is one clear pattern in voters' attitudes that must be interpreted as an effect of timing on the campaign. As exposure to the candidates increased, it highlighted what seems to be an increasing tendency on the part of the American voting public: less and less intense support for a candidate, and more volatility in expressing support for one candidate or another. In 1980, conventional wisdom tells us that each time it appeared that Jimmy Carter was about to sew up the nomination, the tide would turn, and Edward Kennedy would win the next primary; changes sometimes seemed to occur almost overnight. While that pattern was nowhere near as obvious in 1984, it did occur, not only away from Hart after the post-New Hampshire euphoria subsided but in the opposite direction, illustrated by Hart's narrow wins in Ohio and Indiana, two states that, issue by issue and demographic by demographic, look more like Mondale's Pennsylvania and Illinois than like Hart's New Hampshire and Connecticut.

Both the national polls and the state exit polls demonstrate a softening in a candidate's strong support (with Jesse Jackson the sole exception) as the campaign went on. Table 7 shows this weakening of support for Hart and Mondale, both nationally and in individual states. As those candidate ties loosened, movement from one candidate to another became easier and may account for some of the later movements in apparently contrary directions for some voters. Hart and Mondale supporters could shift back and forth as their preference became weaker, or could cast a vote for Jesse Jackson as a protest against the dominant candidates. The Jackson voter, who typically remained strongly committed to Jackson, never needed to find an alternative.

Discussion

This analysis of the Democratic nomination campaign of 1984 illustrates both rational behavior and dissatisfaction on the part of the voters. It also underscores the role of timing in the voters' decision making. In 1984, Democratic party rules resulted in more events in less time than ever before. The rapidity of the process meant that in the early stages,

TABLE 7
Democratic Voters' Strength of Support

	Mondale Voters	Hart Voters	Jackson Voters
<i>U.S. (4/84)</i>			
Strongly Favor	51%	44%	64%
Like with reservations	33	44	26
Dislike others	10	9	4
<i>Texas (5/5/84)</i>			
I strongly favor my candidate	72%	44%	78%
I like him but with reservations	20	36	13
I dislike the others	5	16	5
<i>Ohio (5/8/84)</i>			
I strongly favor my candidate	48%	41%	68%
I like him but with reservations	35	40	20
I dislike the others	15	17	9
<i>Indiana (5/8/84)</i>			
I strongly favor my candidate	58%	44%	60%
I like him but with reservations	28	39	25
I dislike the others	9	13	9
<i>North Carolina (5/8/84)</i>			
I strongly favor my candidate	54%	39%	76%
I like him but with reservations	33	36	14
I dislike the others	10	23	4
<i>Maryland (5/8/84)</i>			
I strongly favor my candidate	49%	36%	74%
I like him but with reservations	35	35	18
I dislike the others	12	26	6
<i>Nebraska (5/15/84)</i>			
I strongly favor my candidate	49%	41%	53%
I like him but with reservations	39	43	26
I dislike the others	8	12	20
<i>Oregon (5/15/84)</i>			
I strongly favor my candidate	42%	36%	40%
I like him but with reservations	43	43	36
I dislike the others	10	17	20

Questions: (U.S.): Which of these statements best describes your choice: I strongly favor my candidate, or I like him but with reservations, or I dislike the others? (State): How would you describe your vote?

Sources: CBS News and CBS News/New York Times national telephone survey, April 1984, and Democratic primary exit polls.

voters could sort themselves out; and those who were the least bit dubious about Walter Mondale left him and moved toward Gary Hart. Voters who were anti-Mondale before New Hampshire consolidated their support behind Hart. That move had issue content, and the data

from primary states support that interpretation. Hart voters and Mondale voters exhibited fundamental differences, with Hart voters more distinctive on demographic characteristics, Mondale voters more distinctive on union membership and issue concerns. As the campaign continued, images of the candidates became tarnished, and in many states, their supporters could be characterized as lukewarm at best.

How much of the remaining instability can be linked to the particular 1984 campaign environment and how much of it is typical of the nomination process? Certainly, the crowding of major events into the first month of the selection process forced candidates and their staffs to react quickly and to respond to concerns of the moment rather than to any long-term interests. It meant that potential voters had limited time to absorb information about the candidates. Focus on concerns of the moment throughout the campaign also meant that particular events and particular candidate tactical decisions and mistakes received extensive publicity. In retrospect, perhaps whether or not the Hart campaign could pull an anti-Vrdolyak commercial from the airwaves is irrelevant to whether or not Hart would make a good president. At the time, whether or not he could became relevant. Under those extreme conditions, it is impressive and surprising that there was any issue content at all in the early move to Gary Hart and the return to Walter Mondale. The data suggest the issue content was real and more than minimal.

The intensity of early campaign activities seems to have left a mark on the perception of the candidates themselves. The campaign began quickly, and for most of the eight original candidates, it ended quickly. Within two weeks of the New Hampshire primary, there were only three candidates left in the race, as none of the others could retain either his core of original supporters or his federal matching funds. But for those three, the intense scrutiny and the focus on tactics affected the way voters viewed them. By March and April, voters who had chosen either Mondale or Hart developed negative evaluations of their choice's chief competitor. The scrutiny to which candidates were exposed weakened support for both, as even those who voted for one or the other ended up with reservations about the man they supported. Jesse Jackson managed to avoid this weakening among his own supporters, although his image among other Democrats was not favorable.

While the intensity of the early portion of the campaign may have added some instability to the voters' decision making, some of the other environmental constraints of the 1984 election, such as the creation of a bloc of unpledged delegates and the increased activity of traditional interest groups, may have insured some stability. Walter Mondale, who would eventually win the Democratic nomination, would never fall

behind in the delegate count because of his support from unpledged delegates. Union identification and support helped Walter Mondale operationally and with some voters; it also hurt him by creating an issue that worked against him with other voters.

There are implications beyond 1984. There is no reason to think that the early stages of delegate selection will be any less frantic in future campaigns than they were in 1984. Southern states are likely to implement what would be, in effect, a regional primary, and that primary would occur very early in the campaign. Federal regulations regarding matching funds will be at least as strict as those in 1984, forcing candidates to perform well in the early states. And the early primaries and caucuses will dominate political news coverage.

After the first few weeks of primary voting in 1984, only two candidates with a chance to win the Democratic nomination and one candidate with appeal to a particular group of Democratic voters remained in the race. Recent history suggests that this pattern is typical. In 1980, 1976, and 1972, the Democratic race for the nomination quickly narrowed to only two viable contenders, and there is evidence in all 3 years of increasing dissatisfaction with the available choices—either in the shifting of support back and forth between the two candidates, as in 1980, or in the emergence of alternatives late in the primary season, as in 1976. The relatively quick winnowing of the field in 1984 is not unusual and may, in fact, be helpful. It helps create issue content in candidate support, and sets a pattern of support that continues throughout the campaign. But as the intense exposure to a few potential nominees continues, the focus turns more and more to campaign tactics and candidate mistakes, making voters less happy with the choices they have to make.

As it turns out, the contemporary analysis of divisions within the party, which went so far as to talk about the existence of three parties—Walter Mondale's traditionalists, Gary Hart's "Yuppies," and Jesse Jackson's blacks—was essentially correct. Timing mattered, and voters grew increasingly tired of even their own candidate, but in the end, the candidate who won represented the largest branch of the party. In 1984 that was the traditional Democrats. But, like Barry Goldwater and George McGovern, Mondale did not represent the country. In 1984, however, perhaps no Democrat did.

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TABLE A-1
White Total and Candidate Vote Percentages, Northern Industrial States

<i>Date and State:</i>	<i>3/20, Ill.</i>			<i>4/3, N.Y.</i>			<i>4/10, Pa.</i>			<i>5/8, Ohio</i>			<i>5/8, Ind.</i>			<i>6/5, N.J.</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>
Total Whites		47	45		57	36		50	43		44	50		43	50		56	38
Sex																		
Male	50	48	43	43	58	36	47	49	44	47	41	52	49	42	51	46	56	37
Female	50	47	47	56	57	37	52	52	43	52	46	48	51	43	50	54	56	39
Age																		
18-29	18	38	49	13	42	48	16	36	56	18	31	60	17	36	58	14	35	59
30-44	28	44	47	29	51	43	27	41	49	32	36	57	32	38	52	25	42	47
45-59	23	45	50	23	56	36	24	56	40	24	49	46	27	46	50	24	59	36
60+	29	58	39	34	68	27	32	61	34	26	57	39	23	50	44	37	71	26
Party ID																		
Dem	63	49	45	80	60	36	79	54	41	70	50	45	71	47	48	71	62	34
Ind	30	40	49	18	44	40	17	34	53	26	28	63	23	32	55	25	40	49
Rep + Ind	35	42	47	19	45	39	20	35	52	29	28	63	27	32	57	28	41	48
Pol Philosophy																		
Liberal	22	40	48	35	54	39	22	46	48	24	37	52	18	39	55	28	52	41
Moderate	51	48	47	48	60	35	52	52	42	52	46	49	53	44	49	49	56	39
Conservative	21	52	40	13	59	36	22	51	40	20	47	50	24	42	49	19	60	34
Reagan approval																		
Approve	32	47	47	20	54	41	24	36	53	26	29	66	25	33	53	25	47	47
Disapprove	64	47	45	77	59	35	73	55	40	70	49	45	70	47	48	70	59	35

Unions too powerful																			
Yes	52	39	55	50	49	47	54	42	52	56	31	64	51	33	60	52	47	46	
No	44	56	36	46	67	25	42	60	33	40	59	34	46	53	40	43	66	29	
Union household																			
	40	55	38	39	63	31	45	56	38	41	53	42	42	52	41	35	62	31	
Income																			
< 12.5K	20	48	40	14	63	31	24	58	38	21	47	48	25	47	49	18	63	33	
12.5-25K	28	47	46	25	57	36	33	49	41	31	47	45	33	45	46	23	54	41	
25-35K	23	44	52	20	53	39	22	44	50	22	39	54	21	42	50	21	52	42	
35-50K	15	44	48	18	54	41	11	47	48	13	33	63	10	31	62	18	52	39	
> 50K	7	53	37	16	62	36	4	32	57	6	40	56	4	11	85	11	50	44	
Education																			
Less H.S.	NA	NA	NA	8	65	33	17	67	28	12	62	36	18	52	42	13	75	24	
H.S. grad	NA	NA	NA	27	63	32	43	51	43	40	47	49	46	48	47	34	65	32	
Some coll	NA	NA	NA	21	57	38	21	46	47	26	33	61	18	32	59	21	45	48	
Coll grad	22	33	53	42	52	40	17	34	54	19	34	54	14	28	62	29	45	47	
Religion																			
Catholic	—	—	—	45	56	39	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	54	58	36
Jewish	—	—	—	33	68	28	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	21	58	40
Issues mattered most																			
Poor/unemp/S.S.	62	49	43	44	61	32	72	55	39	69	47	48	71	47	48	48	64	31	
Deficit/defense	38	45	50	29	58	40	25	45	47	32	35	61	36	37	56	27	52	44	
Arms control	26	40	52	37	52	42	31	46	49	25	35	54	23	39	51	39	51	43	
Central America	5	27	65	6	15	70	6	29	61	6	37	53	6	31	59	7	45	46	
Russia	8	51	44	8	59	35	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	

Sources: All data are from CBS News and CBS News/New York Times Democratic primary exit polls.

Note: The total column represents the percentage each group comprised of the electorate. Each group's votes for Mondale and Hart are percentaged horizontally.

TABLE A-2
White Total and Candidate Vote Percentages, New England States

<i>Date and State:</i>	<i>2/28, N.H.</i>			<i>3/6, Vt.</i>			<i>3/13, Mass.</i>			<i>3/27, Conn.</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>
Total Whites		28	39		20	69		22	43		29	62
Sex												
Male	45	23	34	45	18	70	46	21	43	42	31	58
Female	47	26	42	48	18	69	54	22	44	57	26	65
Age												
18-29	19	21	45	18	11	76	18	11	52	15	22	60
30-44	37	17	39	41	16	68	35	20	40	30	19	68
45-59	21	26	42	22	24	69	23	21	49	22	31	62
60+	19	45	21	17	29	66	23	33	35	32	38	57
Party ID												
Dem	49	35	36	41	31	61	59	27	44	76	29	62
Ind	39	17	40	44	11	72	37	13	43	21	26	62
Rep + Ind	43	16	39	56	12	74	39	12	44	22	26	62
Pol Philosophy												
Liberal	27	23	43	27	15	66	33	16	45	34	25	61
Moderate	47	25	40	47	22	69	44	25	43	49	30	64
Conservative	17	24	25	20	16	77	20	22	42	12	33	54

Reagan approval												
Approve	26	11	28	24	16	75	28	16	48	21	25	62
Disapprove	69	32	41	72	21	66	67	23	42	73	28	62
Unions too powerful												
Yes	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	57	16	50	54	23	69
No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	38	29	34	42	35	53
Union household												
	—	—	—	15	22	63	28	26	42	27	35	57
Income												
< 12.5K	17	36	35	19	20	66	11	32	44	13	31	57
12.5–25K	29	23	36	33	20	68	26	22	46	25	28	63
25–35K	25	23	42	19	17	72	23	19	42	20	26	65
35–50K	15	24	36	15	16	72	21	17	43	19	28	63
> 50K	7	15	42	7	14	78	10	16	47	17	27	60
Education												
Less H.S.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	6	41	46	9	32	65
H.S. grad	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	25	28	47	23	31	64
Some coll	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	29	18	48	21	31	62
Coll grad	36	15	41	46	17	66	38	15	38	44	24	60
Issues mattered most												
Poor/unemp/S.S.	29	37	27	25	29	62	46	29	41	43	35	55
Deficit/defense	53	23	37	54	15	74	40	17	41	38	28	66
Arms control	41	22	48	44	17	71	42	15	46	41	20	73
Russia	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	9	20	52	8	27	69
Central America	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	8	9	82

Source: All data are from CBS News and CBS News/*New York Times* Democratic primary exit polls.

Note: The total column represents the percentage each group comprised of the electorate. Each group's votes for Mondale and Hart are percentaged horizontally.

TABLE A-3
White Total and Candidate Vote Percentages, South

<i>Date and State:</i>	<i>3/13, Ala.</i>			<i>3/13, Ga.</i>			<i>5/1, Tenn.</i>			<i>5/5, Tex.</i>			<i>5/8, Md.</i>			<i>5/8, N.C.</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mond</i>	<i>Hart</i>
Total Whites		29	37		31	38		51	43		50	37		53	35		45	41
Sex																		
Male	49	29	33	49	28	37	50	50	43	47	54	38	49	53	34	50	42	43
Female	50	28	40	51	35	39	49	51	44	52	47	37	50	54	36	49	48	40
Age																		
18-29	12	16	41	12	21	48	14	40	54	9	33	51	11	46	42	15	38	49
30-44	27	19	40	31	19	47	28	39	54	27	31	50	27	39	41	30	38	50
45-59	23	29	44	25	36	32	25	52	40	20	48	39	27	56	35	28	50	33
60+	36	40	28	31	44	30	32	63	32	40	65	27	34	64	28	27	51	35
Party ID																		
Dem	61	39	35	58	40	39	72	57	38	76	58	33	73	60	32	69	51	39
Ind	26	12	36	31	19	39	20	33	59	18	23	53	21	37	42	21	34	46
Rep + Ind	36	11	40	40	17	37	25	29	61	21	23	54	25	33	46	29	30	46
Pol Philosophy																		
Liberal	14	41	47	17	32	53	18	56	39	22	44	33	27	55	36	14	40	44
Moderate	40	33	37	45	34	39	53	50	46	49	54	39	48	57	33	47	54	36
Conservative	39	20	32	34	24	31	21	40	48	24	43	41	22	40	38	36	37	46

Reagan approval																		
Approve	47	13	38	42	19	37	25	27	58	NA	NA	NA	31	41	41	58	34	49
Disapprove	49	45	36	54	41	39	72	58	39	NA	NA	NA	62	58	33	40	61	30
Unions too powerful																		
Yes	64	20	43	71	26	41	59	38	55	56	38	49	55	42	46	73	40	47
No	31	46	27	25	44	35	35	68	27	39	65	24	38	68	22	22	63	27
Union household																		
	26	47	27	14	37	34	25	68	29	20	74	25	24	57	26	11	56	29
Income																		
< 12.5K	24	43	38	17	46	33	25	63	33	19	52	33	12	59	35	18	60	34
12.5–25K	25	31	33	25	29	45	28	51	44	27	53	32	21	52	36	27	47	39
25–35K	21	23	34	21	29	43	23	41	52	17	48	34	21	54	33	21	43	47
35–50K	14	15	46	19	24	37	12	38	52	20	46	43	23	48	36	16	37	49
> 50K	7	19	32	11	25	28	4	35	58	12	39	57	14	45	43	11	35	39
Education																		
Less H.S.	20	45	29	13	50	31	20	70	26	17	69	29	13	57	38	14	60	30
H.S. grad	36	32	39	32	35	41	34	50	46	21	63	24	30	57	32	30	46	44
Some coll	23	19	39	23	22	43	23	40	53	24	47	37	21	56	35	26	38	47
Coll grad	19	17	40	28	23	35	20	40	50	36	33	51	34	45	38	29	43	39
Issues mattered most																		
Poor/unemp/S.S.	56	39	33	46	42	38	65	59	35	57	60	28	55	59	31	48	52	36
Deficit/defense	42	18	41	45	20	42	33	40	52	47	43	46	42	49	40	53	38	48
Arms control	17	21	49	20	22	50	18	47	51	19	35	55	28	53	37	21	43	42
Russia	8	19	16	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	11	52	33	NA	NA	NA
Central America	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	5	25	69	11	33	49	7	41	44	7	30	58

Sources: All data are from CBS News and CBS News/New York Times Democratic primary exit polls.

Note: The total column represents the percentage each group comprised of the electorate. Each group's votes for Mondale and Hart are percentaged horizontally.

TABLE A-4
White Total and Candidate Vote Percentages, West

Date and State:	2/20, Iowa			5/15, Ore.			5/15, Neb.			6/5, Calif.		
	Total	Mond	Hart	Total	Mond	Hart	Total	Mond	Hart	Total	Mond	Hart
Total Whites		45	17		30	61		28	61		40	48
Sex												
Male	50	46	17	48	29	61	46	26	63	44	36	48
Female	50	43	17	52	30	61	52	29	59	55	42	48
Age												
18-29	21	19	19	14	20	68	11	20	64	14	26	58
30-44	30	41	17	31	19	68	29	19	67	28	29	53
45-59	35	54	16	23	31	61	25	29	61	20	41	47
60+	16	62	19	32	42	51	34	38	55	37	53	41
Party ID												
Dem	NA	NA	NA	71	32	60	75	31	60	77	44	47
Ind	NA	NA	NA	25	21	63	21	19	64	18	25	55
Rep + Ind	NA	NA	NA	27	21	63	23	19	63	21	25	53
Pol Philosophy												
Liberal	28	43	14	22	24	62	18	24	59	32	38	44
Moderate	64	44	18	51	30	63	52	28	64	49	41	50
Conservative	8	41	21	23	33	57	26	30	57	16	40	47

Reagan approval												
Approve	NA	NA	NA	25	25	62	36	20	63	29	32	53
Disapprove	NA	NA	NA	72	31	60	58	33	58	66	44	45
Unions too powerful												
Yes	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	59	34	55
No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	37	49	38
Union household	20 ^a	74 ^a	12 ^a	34	33	60	22	41	51	28	43	47
Income												
< 12.5K	NA	NA	NA	22	37	55	20	31	59	17	44	42
12.5-25K	NA	NA	NA	33	30	60	33	29	61	26	39	48
25-35K	NA	NA	NA	21	25	67	22	29	59	21	38	53
35-50K	NA	NA	NA	14	23	67	11	26	59	18	37	49
> 50K	NA	NA	NA	4	25	61	5	13	75	11	34	53
Education												
Less H.S.	NA	NA	NA	13	42	52	14	37	54	8	46	50
H.S. grad	NA	NA	NA	34	35	60	38	32	60	22	52	40
Some coll	NA	NA	NA	28	24	67	25	24	64	34	38	49
Coll grad	NA	NA	NA	22	19	63	20	21	62	33	31	52
Issues mattered most												
Poor/unemp/S.S.	NA	NA	NA	53	35	58	51	34	55	42	46	42
Deficit/defense	NA	NA	NA	36	29	62	38	25	64	34	32	57
Arms control	NA	NA	NA	29	21	68	24	24	66	43	39	47
Central America	NA	NA	NA	10	17	67	6	27	64	12	31	47

Source: All data are from CBS News and CBS News/New York Times Democratic primary exit polls.

Note: The total column represents the percentage each group comprised of the electorate. Each group's votes for Mondale and Hart are percentage horizontally.

^aUnion member.



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The Election of 1984 and the Future of American Politics

Warren E. Miller

The election of 1984, more than any election since the end of World War II, reflected changes in basic elements of American electoral politics that portend even larger changes in the politics of the future. After three decades of anticipating a fundamental realignment of American politics, the election of 1984 brought the first substantial indications that such a realignment may be occurring along ideological fault lines.

The aftermath of the successes of the civil rights movement two decades earlier produced a partial realignment with the solidification of black allegiances to the Democratic party and an offsetting movement of whites, disproportionately southern whites, into Republican ranks.¹ In many ways, however, the changes associated with the conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s seemed to do little more than reestablish many of the components of the traditional Democratic coalition in national politics. The social-structural distinctions that have long found the votes of the less than well-to-do, non-Protestant, urban, and ethnic groups allied

1. See Harold W. Stanley, William T. Bianco, and Richard G. Niemi, "A New Perspective on Partisanship and Group Support Over Time," paper prepared for delivery at the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, August 29–September 1, 1985, for a review of the recent literature and a confirming analysis for the entire period of 1952 to 1984.

against the traditional counterpart centers of Republican support remained sharp and clear through Jimmy Carter's loss to Ronald Reagan in 1980 and on to the Democratic resurgence in 1982. As of 1984, however, a new theme emphasizing the ideological distinctiveness of the two national parties appeared and carried with it at least the beginnings of a change in partisan loyalties.

The magnitude of the realignment that had taken place by the fall of 1984 is itself of some interest. Only the net changes in party fortunes following the election of 1964 were of greater magnitude than the changes that took place between 1980 (or 1982) and 1984. Even more notable, however, and with larger implications for the future, were the qualitative nature and the structural location of the rise in Republican loyalties and the decrease in the numbers of Democratic adherents. Moreover, the net Republican gains accrued despite some substantial gains for the Democrats in some limited sectors of the electorate. We return to the theme of an ideological party realignment after we have considered other changes that may have less significance for the long term but that were more important than party identification in determining the outcome of the 1984 election.

The Content of the 1984 Election

For the purpose of interpreting the 1984 election results, the most important changes that took place between the first and second Reagan elections were changes affecting the context within which the electorate returned to the polls for a second judgment on a Reagan candidacy. In the interim the nation's fortunes had taken a decided turn for the better. Double-digit figures for both unemployment and inflation, indicators responsible for the misery index that charted Carter's downfall, were replaced by economic stability and forecasts of new economic growth and prosperity. Despite high interest rates and a hurtful level of unemployment in 1982, by 1984 the outlook in most sectors of the nation's economy improved markedly from the perspectives that were shaped by the trough of despond from which Jimmy Carter bid for reelection 4 years earlier.

Although the nation did not experience any outstanding successes in world affairs during the same 4 years, the Reagan administration entered the campaign of 1984 free of any burden such as that which the Iranian hostage crisis had imposed on the Carter administration. Abroad as well as at home, the news continued to be good news. The crises that had plagued incumbent administrations since 1968 faded into the past

and permitted a reelection campaign that confidently asked the nation whether it was better off than it had been 4 years earlier.²

It is not clear whether the generally happy turn of events was a direct product of much-heralded administration policies or the consequence of more arcane decisions, such as those governing the affairs of the Federal Reserve Board. Nevertheless, it was abundantly clear to friend and foe alike that the Reagan administration had initiated a series of policies that were intended to change the role of the federal government as a participant in the nation's affairs. A new image of governmental goals provided a new orientation for the established and largely unchanging policy preferences of the electorate. This change, in reality as well as in perception, looms large in accounting for voters' decisions at the polls in 1984.

Moreover, as a result of the voters' appreciation of a reinvigorated economy and a nation at peace, their appraisal of the incumbent president's performance was strikingly different in 1984 from what it had been 4 years earlier. The voters, the nation, and the nation's president all basked in the warm glow of accomplishment and optimism.

At the same time, two prime sources of Reagan's strength in 1980 had been altered with the change of context. First, and most notable, the negative impetus provided by Carter's perceived failings as president had disappeared. Although the rhetorical question "Are you better off than four years ago?" was invoked in the campaign, Fritz Mondale was not Jimmy Carter, and his qualities of leadership were a new ingredient in the new contest.

Second, the popular call of 1980 for a turn away from the liberal policies of a Democratic administration was answered by the new Reagan administration with a sharp turn to the right, which, if effective, would eliminate support for further change. Moreover, insofar as the election outcome in 1980 had turned more on the rejection of an impotent president and less on opposition to his administration's policies, it was possible that the continuing rhetoric calling for massive reductions in governmental activity might have overshot the mark as it was defined by public demand. As we see shortly, this seems to have been the case.

The various changes in context were important because, at the same time, there was no increase in public sentiment supporting the administration's position on a variety of questions of public policy, support that would suggest a public resonating to the announced change in govern-

2. See Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, "Policy Directions and Presidential Leadership: Alternative Interpretations of the 1980 Presidential Election," *British Journal of Political Science*, 12 (1982): 299–356, for a review of the circumstances surrounding the 1980 election.

mental role. Indeed, what shift in policy preferences did occur between the two Reagan elections tended to run in a countering, liberal—not conservative—direction. Furthermore, despite the apparent success of a new conservative administration in the White House, there was no commensurate growth of popular support for the symbols of a conservative ideology.³

The very absence of changes in public opinion that would signal increased support for an apparently successful conservative administration provides a crucial insight into the nature of the 1984 election. It was an election preceded by a fundamental change in the philosophies of political leaders engaged in shaping governmental policy; the election was not preceded by any commensurate change in the public's opinions. As a result of the election of 1980 the government changed its ideological orientation, but the electorate did not follow suit.⁴ The ebullient Reagan candidacy of 1980 provided an apt alternative to a faltering incumbent, and the promise to change the course of governmental policies both in domestic and foreign affairs responded to sustained criticism of liberal Democratic administrations. But both remedies for popular dissatisfaction carried their own potential liabilities for the future. Removing Carter from the scene removed an impetus for Republican voting, and overdoing the remaking of America in a conservative image prompted a reaction that benefited the liberal cause.

Explaining Voters' Preferences

In order to sort out the various sources of support and opposition for Mondale and Reagan in 1984, it is necessary to review the evidence rather carefully and then proceed with an analysis that attempts to assess the various contributions to the election day outcome. In the larger work on which this paper is based, the accounting proceeds by first establishing the analytic importance of each of the various contributing or causal factors leading to the division of the electorate into Mondale and Reagan voters. This procedure can have many variations, but the parent work follows an established pattern of attempting to define a structure of

3. See the Appendix for detailed evidence of the absence of pro-Republican movement in public opinion.
4. In the June/July 1985 issue of *Public Opinion*, David R. Gergen argues persuasively that Reagan was not successful in changing American public opinion during his first term. See "Following the Leaders," *Public Opinion* 8, no. 3, pp. 16 and 55–57. The result of changed perceptions of actual government policies, 1980 to 1984, is sharply portrayed by Tables A-11 through A-15 in the Appendix.

relationships that accounts for differences between Republican and Democratic voters.⁵

When this stage of our analysis was completed, for the elections of 1980 and 1984, the similarity of results in the two election years was little short of astounding. Given all the appropriate caveats, the structure of relationships describing the components of individual voter decisions is virtually identical in both years. For example, the effect of one's ideological self-identification on the vote in 1980 is properly represented by a coefficient of .28; in 1984 the comparable value was .25. The comparable incremental predictive power to be derived from voters' party identifications in 1980 was reflected in a coefficient of .43; in 1984 the counterpart figure was .44. It is also true, and very relevant to our problem of interpretation, that the analytic importance of preferences for changes in government policy increased somewhat, from .22 in 1980 to .27 in 1984. At the same time, the importance of satisfaction with current policies also increased from .04 to .10 in 1984. In both years the personal attributes of the voters, such as age, gender, religion, or income, produced coefficients of .43, measuring their contribution to differences between Mondale and Reagan voters. In both years the ultimate assessments of the voters' various performance evaluations added up to coefficients of .41.

The differences between the electoral decisions in 1980 and 1984 were not differences in the analytic importance that could be assigned to the causal factors that discriminated Republican voters from Democratic voters. The crucial differences were those that pertained to the balance of sentiment on each factor and its subsequent contribution to enhancing or diminishing the Reagan margin of victory.

As the starting point in our review of these latter differences, Table 1 presents detailed information pertaining to eight categories of causal factors.⁶ The table reflects the origins of our descriptive generalizations

5. J. Merrill Shanks and Warren E. Miller, "Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation: Complementary Explanations of the Reagan Elections," paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, August 29-September 1, 1985.
6. It should be emphasized that the data in Table 1 tell us nothing about correlations or relationships. The entries simply reflect the average scores across the entire population of citizens who reported voting for one of the two major candidates. The table is by and large self-explanatory once it is recognized that the "signs" associated with each entry have consistent partisan meanings. A plus sign indicates that the net or average opinion was pro-Reagan, pro-Republican, or pro-conservative; a minus sign indicates a plurality of sentiments favoring Mondale, the Democrats, or a liberal position. It should also be noted that the range of possible scores that underlie the mean values that is presented in order to caution against misinterpretation. Where the ranges differ across categories of explanatory items, it is impossible to make intercategory comparisons. The only comparisons that are appropriate are those between the 2 years.

TABLE 1
National Opinion on Political Questions, 1980 and 1984

Political Question	Range of Scored Answers	Mean Value		
		1980	1984	Change
Self-designated ideology	-1 to +1	+ .11	+ .07	-.04
Party identifications	-1 to +1	-.14	-.09	+.05
Satisfaction with current policy	0 to 12 in 1980 0 to 14 in 1984	-2.74	+4.09	+6.83
Preference for policy change	-36 to +36 in 1980 -42 to +42 in 1984	+3.36	-3.54	-6.90
Satisfaction with family finances	-2 to +2	+1.23	+.25	-.98
Satisfaction with national economy	-2 to +2	+.06	+.28	+.22
Relative competence of candidates	-6 to +6 in 1980 -9 to +9 in 1984	+.84	-.02	-.86
Relative integrity of candidates	-6 to +6 in 1980 -9 to +9 in 1984	-.17	+.66	+.83
Presidential performance: overall	-1 to +1	+.21	+.29	+.08
Presidential performance: economy	-1 to +1	+.40	+.20	-.20

Note: Tables 1 and 2 are based on the sample of all NES respondents who said they voted for Reagan or Mondale and who did not refuse to answer questions on party identification and family income. Missing data on other variables were assigned the "neutral" score of zero. When the NES data on "vote validation" are released, all of these analyses will be redone after excluding all respondents who are known not to have voted.

comparing and contrasting 1980 and 1984. So, for example, the third category of causal factors summarizes several measures of satisfaction with the policy status quo in each year. The summaries move from a score of -2.74 in 1980 (out of a possible -12), indicating the extent of satisfaction with Democratic policy in 1980, to +4.09 in 1984 (out of a possible +14), reflecting the breadth of support for the new status quo as perceived in that year. The difference between the two scores indicates a substantial gain for the Reagan candidacy as modest satisfaction with the policies of the Reagan administration.

Countering the growth in the level of satisfaction with the policies of the incumbent administration, the fourth category, "preferences for policy change," reflects the fragility of the 1980 policy mandate. Where "satisfaction" measures the level of agreement between the voters' policy preferences and the perceived policies of the federal government, the scores on "preferences" indicate the *direction* of preferences in those quarters where dissatisfaction did exist. In 1980 the entry of +3.36 indicated a net preference for policy changes in the conservative direction. In 1984 the same measure suggests a comparable desire for policy

changes in the liberal direction (-3.54). These measures strongly suggest that the 1980 mandate for a change in the direction of governmental policies was not as unequivocal nor as extreme as administration leaders, especially the president, maintained. While the Reagan administration was subsequently successful in communicating the existence of new policies that more often met the preferences of the voters than had Carter's policies, the administration had overshot the mark for many people. Those who were not satisfied with the administration's programs in 1984 preferred, on average, that the policy pendulum swing back in a liberal direction. Credit was given and credit was taken away. The net consequence for the 1984 vote depends, of course, on the relative importance of each of these two contributions to the voters' decision, an importance measured by the structure of relationships between causal factor and vote choice that we just reviewed.

As another example of the tradeoffs produced by the change in context, one can turn to selected assessments of candidates' traits and note that in 1980 the score on the candidates' competencies ran strongly in Reagan's favor ($+0.84$), largely because of negative evaluations of Carter's performance. This bonus for Reagan was replaced in 1984 with a competence score not significantly different from zero. In the latter year Mondale and Reagan competed on very even terms in the voters' assessments of their competencies, and Reagan thereby lost the sizable advantage he had enjoyed when the same comparisons were made with Carter 4 years earlier. On the other hand, in 1980, Carter took the honors by a small margin as the relatively more trusted candidate; 4 years later, Reagan outdistanced Mondale in the voters' evaluations on the same dimension and gained as much ground in people's trust as he had lost on the question of competence.

Accounting for the Reagan Victories

Our final estimates of the ultimate contribution of each of these several factors to the Reagan-Carter and Reagan-Mondale vote totals are presented in Table 2. The estimates rest on weighting an analytic version of the scores presented in Table 1 by the estimates of importance discussed on page 297.

For example, the first row of entries in Table 2 reflects the consequence of the diminished Democratic margin on party identification in 1984. Party identification (favoring the Democrats) continued to make a larger, and more than offsetting, contribution to the vote division than did the voters' self-designated ideology (favoring conservatives and a

TABLE 2
Contributions to Reagan's Margin, 1980 and 1984^a

Political Factor	1980	1984
Party identification	-.11	-.07
Self-designated ideology	+.06	+.03
	} +.19	} -.09
Preference for policy change	+.13	-.12
Agreement with status quo	-.07	+.16
	} +.19	} +.10
Candidate traits	+.04	+.02
	} +.19	} +.10
Performance: national	+.14	+.03
Performance: presidential	+.01	+.05
	} +12	} +.25

^aFor a detailed discussion of the derivations of these estimates, see J. Merrill Shanks and Warren E. Miller, "Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation: Complementary Explanations of the Reagan Elections," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, August 29-September 1, 1985. Each estimate indicates the proportion of the two-party vote contributed by the variable or cluster of variables associated with it. The sign indicates the partisan direction of the contribution: a plus sign indicates a positive net contribution to the Reagan vote, a minus sign indicates a constraint on the Reagan vote or a positive net contribution to the Mondale vote.

Republican vote). The relative decline in Democratic strength in 1984, however, did limit the role of party identification as a restraining force against the Reagan tidal wave.

Perhaps the most striking conclusion from our analysis pertains to the dramatic shift in the electorates' preferences for changes in governmental policy. Ronald Reagan may have been reelected in part because he had moved the government to the ideological right; he was *not* reelected with a mandate to move further toward the goals of his conservative supporters. The 1980 election clearly turned in fair part on a desire for a shift to the right in the government's ideological center of gravity (contributing 19 percentage points to the ultimate Reagan margin). In that year Reagan benefited as much from the electorate's desire for more conservative governmental policies as he did from all the sources of dissatisfaction with Carter's leadership and with the dire economic conditions prevailing across the nation. Four years later, however, popular sentiment for ideologically oriented policy change had moved as decisively in favor of wanting *more liberal* governmental policies as it had been in support of a conservative turn 4 years earlier.

As we noted earlier, this change in direction of the thrust of criticisms of governmental policy is the more notable because the several

direct assessments of policy preferences in our 1984 NES study, as well as the overarching ideological concerns of the voters, changed scarcely at all during Reagan's first term. The thing that did change between 1980 and 1984 was the popular perception of what the federal government was doing. Even before 1980, the conservative bent of much public opinion and the margin by which self-declared conservatives outnumbered liberals constituted pressures for a governmental retreat from liberal Democratic policies that were regularly opposed by Republican challengers.⁷ It would now appear that the Reagan administration subsequently succeeded only too well in persuading the electorate that it was now pursuing a new policy course far to the right of that charted by the Carter administration years earlier.

Turning our attention from the *directional* thrust of criticism to the *level of support* for governmental policy, Table 2 reveals that Carter received more than a modicum of support in 1980 from the voters' overall sense of agreement between their policy preferences and the government's policy practices (reflected in the entry $-.07$). Four years later, there were clear rewards for the Reagan administration's new policy positions as an even larger proportion of the electorate perceived congruence between their policy preferences and the positions being taken by the new administration. While the reversal in preferred changes in governmental policy reveals a sharp limitation to the policy mandate claimed by Reagan in 1980, the other side of the coin shows an offsetting *gain* for the Reagan administration in terms of 1984 satisfaction with the new status quo.

Although it is somewhat orthogonal to our main line of argument, it should again be noted that even the drift to the left between 1980 and 1984 on many policy questions, noted on page 297, did not eliminate the plurality of conservative sentiments on issues such as those depicted in Tables A-3 to A-8 in the Appendix. Just as the division of ideological sentiment has revealed a comparative plurality of conservatives over liberals throughout the past decade, so many of the standard social welfare issues on which liberals and conservatives persistently disagree have also reflected a preponderance of conservative sentiments opposing an activist role for the federal government. The real and perceived shifts in governmental policy under Reagan clearly persuaded many individuals that the government was now pursuing policies more to their liking. The price of this newfound support was, of course, that

7. See Appendix Tables A-3–A-8.

which we have just noted: Pressures to reverse course were exerted by those who were not satisfied with the new status quo that had been established by 1984.

Our interpretation of public opinion centering on satisfaction or agreement with existing governmental policies—whatever they may be—lies close to the heart of any quantitative judgment we can offer as to the relative importance of factors influencing the Reagan vote margins in 1980 and 1984. It determines whether either election was primarily a mandate for altering governmental policies or was largely a stark rendering of a national score card on past failures or accomplishments. If the levels of satisfaction with current governmental policy ($-.07$ in 1980 and $+.16$ in 1984) are taken as one of several measures of performance evaluation, as is suggested in Table 2, it is then quite clear that the 1980 election was more a mandate for change than a rebuke to a failed president. By the same token, the same interpretation of the meaning of satisfaction with the status quo also means that the Reagan administration received smashing marks from the electorate for the performance of its first 4 years, even though the administration lost ground among its critics because of the dominant perception that the administration was too conservative.

Allocating the level of satisfaction to the domain of *policy* rather than the domain of *performance* alters somewhat the interpretation of each election taken alone. The election of 1980 becomes less clearly an election with a policy mandate and more clearly an occasion in which unsatisfactory performance was punished. In turn, 1984 is less clearly an occasion for rewarding performance. Even so, this *a fortiori* case for the importance of performance evaluation adds important evidence to the general conclusion that political evaluations in general, and during elections in particular, are often the creatures of retrospective judgments rather than rational expectations for the future.

The influence of the past is also apparent in the contribution of party identification to voters' choices and the aggregate division of the vote. Whether measured by defection rates in presidential voting, by the discernible influence on voters' perceptions and attitude formation, or by a combination of direct and indirect effects on the vote choice, party identification was powerfully important in shaping the 1984 presidential vote. As noted earlier, none of the other seven categories of explanatory factors in the causal scheme we have just reviewed had a stronger relationship with the vote. The fact that party identification provided somewhat less net support for the Democratic candidate, Mondale, in 1984 was not the consequence of any reduction in its centrality for individual voters' decisions. It was the result of a shift in the partisan

balance, the ratio of Democratic to Republican identifications. That shift, in turn, was the product of a larger realignment of party identifications that brought party loyalties into closer alignment with voters' ideological perspectives.

Party Realignment, 1980–1984

Party realignment is perhaps the most ubiquitous topic among the many that attract attention from academic analysts and political practitioners alike. The early work of V. O. Key, Jr., and others drew attention to the phenomenon of realignment as a basic shift in the political geography of the nation.⁸ Much of the rhetoric with which the topic is currently discussed continues to focus on the changes of political fortune that are captured by election-day returns every 2 or 4 years. The academic literature has not ignored the questions of partisan control of government, the emergence of third-party candidates, or questions of variations in ticket splitting and turnout at the mass level. Nevertheless, analytic interest has tended to focus on party identification and its correlates as the basic point of departure for talking about realignment.

Following a spate of sometimes hyperbolic writing in the 1960s, forecasting the demise of the Democratic party and a new period of Republican dominance, the continued nonappearance of realignment prompted a shift of interest to the topic of "dealignment."⁹ The latter phrase seemed to capture better the evidence that had accumulated between the mid 1960s and the mid 1970s, evidence that smaller and smaller proportions of the electorate were identifying themselves as strong partisans and more and more were willing to call themselves independents or indicate no enduring partisan preference. The period of apparent dealignment coincided with a period of declining turnout. At the same time, various measures of cynicism, the lack of trust in political and governmental institutions, indicated increasing disillusionment throughout the electorate. All these indicators were consonant with the general thesis that the stable system of two-party politics that had persisted for many decades was being replaced by a period of great

8. V. O. Key, Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics* 17 (1955) 3–18; and Key, "Secular Realignment and the Party System," *Journal of Politics* 21 (1959): 198–210.

9. Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg, *Controversies in American Voting Behavior* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1976), pp. 357–438.

instability and change, perhaps leading to the self-destruction of the two-party system of American politics and government.¹⁰

Against this backdrop, the many different sources indicating change in party identification at the time of the 1984 election have been interpreted as providing evidence that a long anticipated realignment is finally under way. Before examining relevant evidence of realignment in the data generated by the National Election Studies, it should be noted that there is an initial apparent anomaly concerning the relationship between declining strength of partisanship and realignment. The anomaly lies in the fact that for the past 8 years there has been a persistent upturn in the incidence of strong party identification coupled with a decline in the proportions who reject a partisan label, and a major part of that change took place before the 1980–1984 changes in party identification. It is likely the case that the increase in strength of partisanship has gone unremarked in the past because the full magnitude of the increase in strength of party identification has been obscured by the changing composition of the electorate. These compositional changes can be at least partially controlled by examining cohorts defined by their year of entry into the electorate. When this is done, it becomes clear that there has been a rather ubiquitous increase in strength of party identification across the entire population in the period following the election of 1976. The average increase by cohort, portrayed in Table A-2 of the Appendix, has been some 14 percentage points, instead of the 5 points that would be inferred from aggregate distributions such as presented in Table A-1 of the Appendix. The remaining surprise consists of the fact that changes in the partisan balance of party identification have come *after* the time that partisanship began increasing in strength rather than when the attractions of the parties were at low ebb.

At the same time that strength of party identification has been on the increase, the Democratic lead over Republican loyalties has declined. It dropped from an aggregate 17-point plurality in 1976 to a bare 10-point margin in 1984, the lowest margin in 30 years. Given what we know of the persistent relationship between stability of party identification and the age of the identifier, we first hypothesized that the two sets of changes were primarily the product of mobilization of nonpartisan, young voters into the ranks of the strong Republicans. This expectation

10. For a rather extreme prognostication of doom and gloom, see Walter Dean Burnham, "American Politics in the 1970s: Beyond Party?" in *The Future of Political Parties*, edited by Louis Maisel and Paul M. Sacks (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1975), pp. 238–277. For a different perspective with a much narrower focus, see Warren E. Miller, "Disinterest, Disaffection, and Participation in Presidential Politics," *Political Behavior*, 2 (1980): 7–32.

concerning those who entered the electorate during an era of Democratic defeats and Republican successes at the polls would have followed from the pattern of the last great realignment, which found Democratic growth stemming largely from mobilization under Roosevelt's leadership following the "Republican" depression of the 1930s.¹¹

Of course, mobilization alone would not have accounted for the full magnitude of change because Table A-1 of the Appendix makes clear there has not only been an increase in Republican strength but a decrease in Democratic strength. Again, drawing on conventional wisdom concerning the nature of party identification, the diminution of Democratic strength might have been a product of the young cohorts who have been added to the electorate coming to their majority at least more evenly divided between the parties, if not predominantly as Republicans. Yet another possibility might be that the somewhat more labile attachment to parties among the young permitted an actual conversion of Democratic loyalties into Republican loyalties between 1980 and 1984. In any event, we might have expected the young to be the primary source of change, either through their entry into the national politics with less enthusiasm for the Democratic party than that of their elders or through their susceptibility to conversion under the short term forces that have led to Democratic defeats and Republican victories at the polls. In point of fact, these theoretical expectations are not well supported by the evidence.

Quite contrary to our expectations, mobilization that has transformed political independents or nonpartisans into party identifiers was not visibly greater among the youngest cohorts in the 1980–1984 period. As the second column of Table 3 makes clear, the diminution in the ranks of the nonpartisans was quite unrelated to age.

A second confounding finding from the same table denies the youngest cohort credit for more than a minor portion of the Republican gains and the Democratic losses in party identification. The largest gains were in fact experienced within the two *oldest* cohorts, those who came of age during the New Deal period or the oldsters who had preceded them. Moreover, the roughly 20-point decrease in the Democratic margin among the older cohorts was quite apparently largely the result of the conversion of Democratic loyalties into Republican identifications. This is a striking finding because little in the literature would have prepared us

11. A review of the controversy over the sources of the New Deal realignment and a reanalysis of Gallup and *Literary Digest* data supporting this conclusion is presented in James E. Campbell, "Sources of the New Deal Realignment: The Contributions of Conversion and Mobilization to Partisan Change," *Western Political Quarterly*, 38 (1985): 357–376.

TABLE 3
 Percentage-Point Change in Party Identification,
 1980 to 1984, by Election Cohorts

Cohorts, by Year First Eligible to Vote	Party Identification			Net Republican Gain
	Democratic	Independent No Preference	Republican	
1976-1984	+1 ^a	-6	+ 5	+4(24) ^b
1964-1972	-6	-3	+ 9	+14(32)
1943-1960	+3	0	- 3	-6(26)
1932-1944	-7	-5	+12	+19(16)
1928-earlier	-9	-4	+13	+22(2)
Total ^c	-3	0	+ 4	+7(100)

^a Each entry indicates the change in the proportion of each cohort classified in accord with the column heading. The +5 in the first row indicates that the proportion of the youngest cohort expressing a Republican party identification increased by 5 percentage points between 1980 and 1984, the -6 indicates a decline of 6 percentage points in the nonpartisan category, the +1 indicates a 1 percentage point increase in the proportions calling themselves Democrats, etc.

^b Numbers in parentheses indicate proportions of total electorate in 1984.

^c The discrepancy between the "total" entries in the bottom row (derived from Appendix Table A-1) and the apparent average change in each column reflects differences in the signs of the cohorts and the fact that cohorts also differ in their partisan balance. Within-cohort changes are concealed in the process of aggregating to the total electorate.

for such magnitudes of change among the established partisans of the older generations.¹²

Having located the most prominent evidence of realignment among older citizens, we resorted to a new hypothesis that would explain realignment as the resolution of long-standing tensions between partisanship and ideology. One of the persistent facts of American politics has been the existence, both in the electoral mass and the elected elite, of a substantial group of conservative Democrats who continue to defy the more general pattern that finds liberal Democrats opposing conservative Republicans. The behavior of conservative Democrats has not only left its mark in the coalitions formed in the halls of Congress but in the voting behavior of the ordinary voters as well.¹³ It would be quite in keeping with a long-standing set of expectations were we to discover that realign-

12. See Paul A. Beck, "A Socialization Theory of Partisan Realignments," in *The Politics of Future Citizens*, edited by R. Niemi and M. K. Jennings (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

13. See T. Levitin and W. Miller, "Ideological Interpretations of Presidential Elections," *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979): 751-771.

ment was in fact taking place as long-time conservative Democrats shifted their allegiances to the Republican party. Once again, however, the evidence confounds our expectations.

Between 1980 and 1984 there was indeed a sharp realignment of party loyalties that often brought them into greater congruence with prior ideological commitments. This realignment was, however, confined to the two youngest cohorts, as portrayed in Table 4. The two cohorts taken together constitute well over 50% of the eligible electorate. Within these youngest cohorts we not only observe a massive shift of party loyalties away from the Democrats and to the Republicans among young conservatives, but we note an almost equally massive contrary shift of loyalties in the Democratic direction among young liberals. The pattern is not as dramatic in the next-to-youngest cohort where once again conservatives are marked by a massive increase in relative Republican strength, while liberals simply show no net change in party loyalties. Despite this latter fact, the counterpoised patterns of realignment resulted in a striking increase in the partisan polarization associated with ideological commitments. All told, among the younger half of the voting populace, 1984 did indeed see a rather massive realignment of party loyalties, which strengthened markedly the association between ideology and partisanship.

No such change occurred among the older cadres. The incidence of conservative Democrats—or liberal Republicans—among the older co-

TABLE 4
Net Percentage-Point Republican Gain/Democratic Loss
in Party Identification, 1980 to 1984,
by Ideological Self-Designation, within Election Cohorts

Cohorts, by Year First Eligible to Vote	Ideological Self-Designation			Net Republican Gain
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	
1976-1984	-25(8) ^a	- 8(7)	+35(8)	+ 4(24)
1964-1972	- 1(10)	+14(11)	+31(15)	+15(36)
1943-1960	+27(6)	-10(9)	- 4(11)	- 6(26)
1932-1944	+30(2)	+20(5)	+26(6)	+19(16)
1928-earlier	^b	^b	^b	+22(2)

^a Numbers in parentheses indicate proportion of total electorate in 1984.

^b Too few cases for reliable estimates.

horts was not affected by their overall movement into the Republican camp. It should be noted that the association between ideology and partisanship for these groups was, nevertheless, already every bit as sharp in 1980 as it was for the younger half following their realignment 4 years later. As noted earlier, the net change in the ratio of Democratic to Republican party identifiers within the oldest cohorts was substantially greater than among the younger cadres. Among the older, however, the change was totally unrelated to ideology. Within the next-to-oldest cohort the pattern of change somewhat perversely found liberals becoming more Republican, while moderates and conservatives moved toward the Democrats. This pattern simply produced a change that brought an extreme polarization from 1980 into line with the ideological polarization of the other cohorts in 1984.

At this stage in our analysis it would be foolhardy to pretend that we comprehend fully all the reasons for the frustration of virtually all the theoretical expectations that guided our inquiry. It is clear that our investigations of the nature, social location, causes, and consequences of the change in party identification that took place between 1980 and 1984 has only begun. One hint as to what future analyses may reveal, however, is contained in a final inspection of within-cohort changes in party identification. Table 5 reexamines the basic summaries of change in identification within broad categories, this time reflecting the formal education of citizens. Once again the pattern is not totally regular, with those who came of age during the post-World War II period of normalcy (1948-1960) countering the national trend by moving toward the Democratic rather than the Republican party. Even within that cohort, there is a mild pattern pertaining to education differences that persists throughout other cohorts as well. The greatest incidence of movement out of Democratic and into Republican ranks occurs among the less well educated. Indeed, among the college educated in the youngest cohort, as well as in the immediate postwar group, the net result of changes in party identification was to add to the Democratic ranks and weaken the Republican. Pursuing the question one step further, it does seem clear, although the evidence thus far is less stable than one might wish, that the ideological polarization of partisans brought about by the realignment of *both liberals and conservatives* is by all odds most pronounced among citizens with some college education.

It may well be that two qualitatively distinct changes in party identification are taking place. The first of these, among the older citizenry, may be largely a reaction to the performance of Democratic and Republican administrations over the past 20 years—an across-the-board reaction shared by liberals and conservatives alike. At the other end of the age continuum, one also finds a preponderance of college-educated electors,

TABLE 5
 Net Percentage-Point Republican Gain/Democratic Loss
 in Party Identification, 1980 to 1984, within Their Educational
 Categories, within Election Cohorts

Cohorts, by Year First Eligible to Vote	Years of Education			Net Republican Gain
	0-8	9-12	13 or More	
1976-1984	"	+10(12) ^b	- 5(11)	+ 4(24)
1964-1972	"(1)	+16(13)	+12(13)	+15(32)
1948-1960	- 3(3)	- 2(14)	-11(9)	- 6(26)
1932-1944	+26(5)	+25(7)	+18(4)	+19(16)
1928-earlier	+47(2)	"(1)	"	+22(2)
Net Republican gain	+19(11)	+ 9(47)	+ 4(42)	+ 7(100)

^a Indicates too few cases for reliable estimates.

^b Numbers in parentheses indicate proportion of total electorate in 1984. Entries in last column differ slightly from those in Table 4 because of missing data in the self-designation of ideology.

and within this set the evidence thus far suggests that changes in party identification are very much a function of an ideologically directed realignment. This may follow from the fact that retrospective evaluations of past performances are characteristic of the older cohorts in today's electorate, while the younger (and better educated) electors are more influenced by new controversies over policy direction and, therefore, by their own ideological commitments. To the extent these suggestions are true, it may also follow that the ideological polarization that has occurred over the past 8 years among the 55% of the electorate under 40 years of age is even more important than the thus far relatively limited change in partisan balance among party identifiers in the same age group.

More generally, the full pattern of changes in party identifications between 1980 and 1984 promises to be of both analytic and political significance. Of course, it may turn out that many of the changes are ephemeral, short-lived changes—an extension of the lesser fluctuations that have been observed in the past.¹⁴ If not, the sheer magnitude of the

14. Philip E. Converse, in his monograph, *The Dynamics of Party Support: Cohort-Analyzing Party Identification* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), provides a sparkling case study in the use of cohort analysis on our problem. In a brief chapter on our major concern, changes in the direction of one's party identification, he properly cautions against a premature conclusion that what may be no more than an election-period-induced, temporary, "oscillation" is a significant change that requires theoretical explanation.

changes that we have observed will pose a severe challenge for the reconceptualization of the essential qualities of party identification or for our understanding of the nature of the political era that produced such change. This is so because we have observed evidence that changes in party identification have occurred at a much higher rate than we could have guessed from aggregate figures, this both because the incidence of change was concentrated in select populations and because some patterns of changes included movement in countervailing directions, with some changes offsetting others in the overall net tally. Moreover, many of the patterns of change appear to defy our conventional wisdom concerning the nature, qualities, and developmental origins of party identification, and the overall configuration of the data does not seem to be the consequence of random processes, either in the real world or in our methods of inquiry. In fact, many of the patterns of observed change seem susceptible to explanation if a series of new appreciations can be established. These will certainly deal with the role of presidential leadership in promoting political perspectives if not ideologies, the impact of far-reaching events that are given meaning through repeated political interpretations by a popular leader, the constraints imposed by belief systems well anchored in formal education, and the imprint of political periods that may differ more than we realized as they leave their unique marks on the cohorts whose political values and beliefs were shaped by them.

Appendix

The tables in this appendix were originally presented in the paper "Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation: Complementary Explanations of the Reagan Elections," by J. Merrill Shanks, University of California, Berkeley, and Warren E. Miller, Arizona State University, prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, August 29–September 1, 1985.

TABLE A-1
Party Identification (percentages)

	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
Strong Democrat	15	18	15	15	17	20	17
Weak Democrat	26	21	25	24	23	24	20
Independent-Democrat	11	13	12	14	11	11	11
Independent-Independent	13	15	15	14	13	11	11
Independent-Republican	11	9	10	10	10	8	12
Weak Republican	13	14	14	13	14	14	15
Strong Republican	10	8	9	8	9	10	12
Other	1	3	1	3	3	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	-0.23	-0.31	-0.25	-0.29	-0.26	-0.33	-0.14

Question: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican? Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat? Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican party or to the Democratic party?

^a Scores are obtained by weighting strong Republicans as +2, weak and independent-Republicans as +1, Independent-Independent and other as 0, weak and Independent-Democrats as -1, and strong Democrats as -2.

TABLE A-2
Strength of Partisanship, by Four-Year Age Cohorts, 1952-1984

Age in 1952	Year of First Vote for President	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	Age in 1984
	1984									2	18-21
	1980								-6	6	22-25
	1976							-11	-8	11	26-29
	1972						-11	-3	0	13	30-32
	1972						-1	-10	2	8	33-36
	1968					-4	-5	-3	11	11	37-40
	1964				19	0	1	-6	4	10	41-44
	1960			11	25	16	1	-6	18	23	45-48
	1956		16	25	24	18	3	4	25	28	49-52
21-24	1952	25	14	20	32	15*	12	4	24	34	53-56
25-28	1948	27	24	27	34	13	20	27	18	24	57-60
29-32	1944	26	23	24*	25	15	20	16	19	31	61-64
33-36	1940	18	23	28	37	12	20	25	28	35	65-68
37-40	1936	32	25	29	27	27	29	25	24	33	69-72
41-44	1932	29	32	32*	40	30	23	23*	42	40	73-76
45-48	1928	27	34	32	36*	38	25	41	33	37	77-80
49-52	1924	38	36*	36	43	37	34	35*	41	41	81+
53-56	1920	41	36	40	40	38*	38	52	33		
57-60	1916	49	40	39	55	45	32	23			
61-64	1912	40	40*	46	53	48	37				
65-68	1908	39	40	52	41	33					
69-72	1904	51	55	58	36						
73-76	1900	40	52	56							
77-80	1896	41	60								
81+	1892	40									

Note: Entries are differences between the proportion of strong party identifiers and the proportion of Independent-Independents. The entries of 10 cells (out of 131), marked by *, have been "smoothed" by replacing those entries with the average of those in adjoining years and cohorts, when that single entry was markedly inconsistent with the entries for adjoining years and cohorts. The assigned values for these cells, reading by column are 36 was 24, 40 was 30, 40 was 35, 24 was 15, 32 was 21, 36 was 53, 15 was 28, 38 was 31, 23 was 3, and 35 was 18. This smoothing attempts to remove the most obvious instances of sampling error by substituting innocuous entries for those that are otherwise anomalous.

TABLE A-3
Self-Placement on Seven-Point Liberal–Conservative Scale (percentages)

	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
Liberal (1 + 2)	9	13	8	10	8	7	9
Liberal (3)	10	8	8	10	8	7	9
Center (4)	27	26	25	27	19	22	23
Conservative (5)	15	12	12	14	13	13	14
Conservative (6 + 7)	12	14	13	14	14	14	15
Not placed	28	27	33	27	38	37	30
Total ^a	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^b	+0.11	+0.06	+0.14	+0.12	+0.17	+0.20	+0.17

Question: We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

^a Some of the totals in this and subsequent tables may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

^b Scores are obtained by weighting (6 + 7) as +2, (5) as +1, (4) and "not placed" as 0, (3) as -1, and (1 + 2) as -2.

TABLE A-4
Perceived Power of the Federal Government (percentages)

	1964	1966	1968	1970	1972	1976	1978	1980	1984
Too powerful	30	39	41	31	41	49	43	48	32
Not too powerful	36	27	30	33	27	20	14	15	22
Don't know/no opinion	34	34	29	36	32	31	43	37	46
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	-06	+12	+11	-02	+14	+29	+29	+33	+10

Question: Some people are afraid of government in Washington getting too powerful for the good of the country and the individual person. Others feel that the government in Washington is not getting too strong. Do you have an opinion on this or not?
^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion saying "too powerful" from the proportion saying "not too powerful."

TABLE A-5
Position on Seven-Point Scale of Attitudes toward Government Support for Jobs and a High Standard of Living (percentages)

	1972	1974	1976	1980	1982	1984
Pro government support (1-3)	27	25	24	26	25	29
Center	20	20	17	17	20	19
Anti government support (5-7)	39	37	39	41	41	37
Not placed	13	18	21	16	14	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	+12	+12	+15	+15	+16	+ 9

Question: Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his own. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring governmental support (1-3) from the proportion opposing governmental support (5-7).

TABLE A-6
Position on Seven-Point Scale of Attitudes toward Government Aid to Minorities (percentages)

	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
Govt. should aid (1 + 2)	19	18	18	15	9	11	15
Pro aid (3)	12	10	11	9	10	10	13
Center (4)	21	21	18	22	25	25	27
Anti aid (5)	10	10	10	14	18	14	16
Minorities should help themselves (6 + 7)	28	27	27	28	24	25	17
Not placed	11	15	17	11	14	16	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	+07	+09	+08	+18	+23	+18	+05

Question: Some people feel the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minority groups, even if it means giving them preferential treatment (suppose these people are at one end of the scale, at point 1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should help themselves (suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6). Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring governmental aid (1-3) from the proportion opposing governmental aid (5-7).

TABLE A-7
Attitude toward School Busing to Achieve Integration (percentages)

	1972	1974	1976	1980	1984
Pro busing	5	4	5	3	4
	2	2	2	3	2
	2	2	2	3	3
	5	5	6	6	8
	3	4	4	5	10
	7	9	8	16	20
Anti busing	70	62	61	57	51
Don't know	7	12	11	7	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Question: There is much discussion about the best way to deal with racial problems. Some people think achieving racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools out of their own neighborhoods. Others think letting children go to their neighborhood schools is so important that they oppose busing. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

TABLE A-8
Evaluation of Civil Rights Movements (percentages)

	1964	1966	1968	1970	1972	1974	1976	1980	1984
Moving too slowly	5	5	7	9	8	9	8	13	12
About right	25	19	28	33	41	44	47	48	55
Moving too fast	63	65	63	53	46	41	39	33	30
Don't know	6	12	3	5	5	6	5	6	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	+58	+60	+56	+44	+38	+39	+31	+20	+18

Question: Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they haven't pushed fast enough. How about you: Do you think that civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving at about the right speed?

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion saying "too slowly" from the proportion saying "too fast."

TABLE A-9
Position on Four Alternative Attitudes toward Abortion (percentages)

	1972	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
Never permitted	11	11	11	10	10	13
Only for health	46	44	43	43	30	36
For personal reasons	17	16	16	17	19	19
Never forbidden	24	26	27	27	35	35
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	-13	-15	-16	-17	-22	-22

Question: There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can tell me the number of the opinion you choose.

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion saying "never forbidden" from the proportion saying "never permitted."

TABLE A-10
Position on an Egalitarian Role for Women in Society (percentages)

	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
Equal role	31	32	30	38	33	37	32
	16	17	20	18	26	21	22
	19	18	18	16	16	17	21
	10	12	13	12	13	11	10
Place is at home	19	15	11	10	6	7	5
Don't know	5	6	9	6	6	7	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	-18	-22	-26	-34	-40	-40	-39

Question: Recently there has been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. Others feel that women's place is in the home.

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportions favoring an equal role for women from the proportions believing the woman's place is in the home.

TABLE A-11
Position on Seven-Point Scale of Attitudes toward Government
Services and Spending, 1984 (percentages)

	1980	1984
Government should provide fewer services, reduce spending (1)	6	5
Reduce (2)	9	9
Reduce (3)	12	13
(4)	16	26
Maintain (5)	11	14
Maintain (6)	12	8
Government should continue to provide services; no reduction in spending (7)	15	7
Not placed	19	17
Total	100	100
Central tendency ^a	-11	- 2

Question: Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Other people feel it is important for the government to continue the services it now provides even if it means no reduction in spending. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring "maintaining" (5-7) from those favoring "reducing" (1-3).

TABLE A-12
Assessments of Spending Levels on Selected Government
Programs, June 1980 (percentages)

	<i>Environment</i>		<i>Crime</i>		<i>Education</i>	
	1980	1984	1980	1984	1980	1984
We are spending						
Too little	38	30	59	45	50	45
Right amount	38	45	25	34	32	33
Too much	13	7	5	4	10	5
Don't know	11	18	11	17	8	17
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Central tendency ^a	-25	-23	-54	-41	-40	-40

Question: We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount.

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring "too little" from the proportion favoring "too much" for domestic programs, and the reverse for defense spending.

TABLE A-13
Position on a Seven-Point Scale of Attitudes toward
Defense Spending, 1984 (percentages)

	1980	1984
Greatly decrease (1)	3	8
Decrease (2)	2	9
Decrease (3)	5	11
(4)	15	28
Increase (5)	20	16
Increase (6)	20	9
Greatly increase (7)	20	6
Not placed	15	14
Total	100	100
Central tendency ^a	+50	+ 3

Question: Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

^a Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring substantial decrease (1 + 2) from the proportion favoring a substantial increase (6 + 7).

TABLE A-14
Preferences for Change in Current Levels of Government
Services and Spending, 1980 (percentages)

	1980	1984
Large decrease ^a	29	11
Some decrease	20	21
No change	17	18
Some increase	23	31
Large increase	11	19
Total	100	100
Central tendency ^b	+15	-18

^a The desired magnitude and direction of change is computed by comparing respondents' preferred level of spending and respondents' perception of current federal policy. Data are derived from the seven-point scale displayed in Table 11 and are based on only those respondents who expressed a preference and could locate current government policy.

^b Scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring an increase from the proportion favoring a decrease.

TABLE A-15
 Preferences for Change in Current Government Policy
 on Defense Spending, 1984 (percentages)

	1980	1984
Large decrease ^a	6	27
Some decrease	10	32
No change	15	20
Some increase	38	18
Large increase	31	3
Total	100	100
Central tendency	+53	-38

^a The desired magnitude and direction of change is computed by comparing the respondents' preferred level of spending and respondents' perception of current federal policy. Data are derived from the seven-point scale displayed in Table 13 and are based on only those respondents who expressed a preference and could locate current government policy.

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About the Symposium

The papers contained in this volume were originally presented at the Third Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., Symposium on American Politics held at Boston College in October 1985. Organized by the Boston College Political Science Department with financial support from the university's Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., Chair in American Politics, the symposium is a biennial event bringing together participants from universities, the media, and public life to discuss a topic in American government and politics. The first two conferences were devoted to the U.S. Congress and the American presidency respectively.

Speaker O'Neill has represented the Eighth Massachusetts District since 1952 and is currently completing a decade of distinguished service as the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. He was graduated from Boston College in 1936 and was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws by the university in 1973. Long a generous supporter of the university, his commitment to education is illustrated by advice he once gave to a group of Boston College students:

In all your endeavors, use not only your minds, which have been educated for inquiry and thought, but also your hearts, which have been trained for compassion and understanding. These are the resources of intellect and sensitivity that your education has developed in you.

The O'Neill Chair is currently held by Prof. Herbert Kaufman. Professor Samuel H. Beer, Congressman Richard Bolling, and Joseph (Jody) Powell have previously held the O'Neill Chair.

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