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Introduction

It is election time in the US and Routledge has a wide range of offerings for every college course touching upon political parties, candidates, and campaigns. Here we have selected a representative set of chapters from just six of our most popular texts to give you an idea of the quality and variety of the course materials we have available. The chapters presented here cover topics of perennial interest and debate: The presidential nominating process, the primary season, the Electoral College, the role of the media, and getting out the vote. The examples provided are drawn from past election cycles (with an emphasis on 2008 and 2012), but many of the same issues and dilemmas are relevant to 2016. Also, it is important to know that new editions of most of the texts from which these chapters are drawn are underway and, in one case—Barbara Norrander’s The Imperfect Primary—already available.

So, please enjoy this reflection upon the US election process and look ahead to sharing these books and their new editions with your students in courses you may be teaching throughout the 2016 election year and beyond.

Chapter 1 Campaigns and Elections in American Democracy

This chapter is drawn from Stephen Medvic’s core text for courses on the subject. It outlines the distinctions between campaigns and elections, puts them in context with democratic theory, and offers a variety of pedagogical tools including role play scenarios, discussion questions, online resources, and suggested readings. A text box entitled “A Socialist for President” is particularly apt today.

Chapter 2 Presidential Nomination Politics at the Dawn of the 21st Century

Barbara Norrander’s chapter opens with Hillary Clinton in 2008 and invites comparison with 2016. Be sure to check out the second edition of this book (available now) in which interim elections and changes to the nominating process are detailed.

Chapter 3 The Republican Primary Season

Michael John Burton looks back to the last time a host of Republican contenders crowded the primary stage and his analysis of how the party arrived at Romney provokes speculation about this election’s progress to date.

Chapter 4 The Electoral College

Matthew Streb’s authoritative discussion of this controversial institution is as relevant today as when it was written—but see his new edition in press for new reform.
measures to consider.

Chapter 5  Voters and the Media

Jeffrey Stonecash lays out what has and has not changed in the interaction between voters and the media in the face of new technologies, new media outlets, and perennial challenges of money, message, and mobilization.

Chapter 6  Voter Mobilization

Robert A. Jackson brings theory, data, and practical reality together in a thoughtful examination of that most important election dynamic—GOTV.
Campaigns and Elections in American Democracy
Chapter 1. Campaigns and Elections in American Democracy

Elections can occur without democracy, but democracy cannot endure without elections.

—Dennis Thompson, *Just Elections*

Elections are among the most interesting and important political events in the life of a country. Even non-democratic governments reinforce the value of elections by routinely using them to justify a regime’s existence. The 1936 constitution of the Soviet Union guaranteed “all Soviets of Working People’s Deputies, from rural and city Soviets of Working People’s Deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., inclusive, are elected by the citizens by direct vote.” Furthermore, elections were to take place “on the basis of universal... and equal suffrage by secret ballot.” In practice, of course, the Communist Party controlled nominations, and candidates ran largely unopposed. More recently, Saddam Hussein “won” a reelection referendum in Iraq with 100 percent of the vote just months before he would be deposed by the U.S. military. Seven years prior to that, he had received 99.96 percent of the vote. In terms of raw numbers, nearly as many elections were held in dictatorships from 1946 to 2000 as in democracies. However, there were also significantly more dictatorships than democracies throughout the world between 1960 and 1990. When this disparity is controlled for, elections are found to have been held almost twice as often in democracies as in dictatorships. Nevertheless, that so many dictatorships have held elections will likely come as a surprise to many readers.

Though elections under totalitarian regimes and dictatorships may serve as propaganda, they are the sine qua non of democracy; without them, there can be no democracy. Indeed, one could argue that the degree to which a political system is democratic can be measured by the meaningfulness of its elections, although this point is debatable for a number of reasons. One such reason is that some scholars of democratization prefer to treat the concept of democracy as a dichotomous variable (that is, a country either is or is not a democracy) rather than a continuous one (whereby a country is more or less democratic). According to this view, there can be no degree to which a political system is democratic: Either it is, or it isn’t. Even so, a political system would never be considered democratic if it didn’t hold elections.

There are, of course, numerous requirements for democracy beyond elections. These include free expression, the right to association and the freedom to create political organizations, unfettered access to information, and an array of other citizenship rights. Determining which of these is most essential for democracy is, of course, futile. Nevertheless, elections certainly can claim historical primacy over other democratic practices. Robert Dahl—a preeminent democratic theorist—has noted that in the
common pattern of development in the world’s “older” democracies, elections to legislatures arrived early in the creation of political institutions. “The practice of electing higher lawmaking officials,” writes Dahl, “was followed by a gradual expansion of the rights of citizens to express themselves on political matters and to seek out and exchange information.”6 That is, elections came first and political rights—rights necessary to contest elections—came later.7

If a country is to have meaningful elections, it must also encourage competitive campaigns. When the laws of a country allow only one party to field candidates, for instance, we deem the country’s election outcomes illegitimate. If the media are not allowed to freely report on the records of the candidates or parties or if the voters are not allowed to openly discuss their preferences and the reasons for those preferences, we consider the level of democracy to be low or nonexistent.

However, even democracies face obstacles to hosting competitive campaigns. It is possible, for example, that two or more parties will be permitted to field candidates, but only one will do so. This effectively gives voters no choice at all. In other cases, voter turnout is quite low, which raises questions about the representativeness of election results. Campaign finance patterns, norms of media behavior, voter engagement, and various election laws may diminish the competitiveness of campaigns in otherwise democratic electoral systems.

Of course, no electoral system is perfectly democratic. Indeed, it is not entirely clear what it means to say that an electoral system is “democratic” because there are a number of competing models of democracy.8 Furthermore, democratic principles often come into conflict in designing the rules for campaigns and elections. Freedom and equality, for example, are in tension with respect to campaign finance regulations. According to some, candidates should be free to raise and spend as much as they would like to further their campaign efforts. Yet vast inequalities in campaign spending often give one candidate a distinct advantage over opponents. Thus, some have suggested that in the interest of fairness and equality, limits on campaign spending should be enacted, while others (including the United States Supreme Court) believe that such limits would violate candidates’ First Amendment rights to express themselves freely.

This chapter will explore the expectations we have for democratic campaigns and elections. It begins with conceptual clarifications of the terms campaigns and elections and identifies differences between particular types of campaigns and elections. The chapter then discusses the theoretical role of campaigns and elections in democracy and ends with a look at some ethical considerations.

What are Campaigns and Elections?
People often treat the terms campaign and election as synonymous. You might, for example, hear someone say, “That election was the nastiest in recent memory.” What the person means, of course, is that the campaign, not the election, was nasty. Unless voters fought with one another at the polling place, the election was probably quite civil. Now, this point may seem like hair-splitting but, as will be clear throughout this book, it is useful to distinguish between the campaign leading up to an election and the election itself.

An election is a mechanism for making collective decisions. It provides a means of expressing individual preferences through the “vote.” However, “taking a vote” is not the same as “holding an election.” In using the term election, we typically assume that a relatively extended campaign will be conducted to try to influence the outcome of the election. Thus, when a local parent teacher organization votes on which fundraiser to use this year, they are not really holding an election (even if arguments for each alternative were entertained).

Usually, elections choose individuals to perform certain duties. For instance, boards of directors for corporations and nonprofit organizations hold elections to determine their leadership. Viewers choose the American Idol by voting in what amounts to a nationwide election for a celebrity. Nevertheless, elections can also be held to determine a course of action for a group of people. For example, the National Labor Relations Board is empowered “to conduct secret-ballot elections so employees may exercise a free choice [as to] whether a union should represent them for bargaining purposes.”

As noted earlier, elections are typically preceded by campaigns. A campaign is simply a concerted effort to win votes in an election. William Safire explains that the term is taken from military jargon, “where it was first used to denote the amount of time an army was kept in the field, and later a particular military operation.” It began to be used in a political context in England as early as the seventeenth century, and “the idea that politics is a form of combat remains.”

The vast majority of campaign activity involves communication of one kind or another, and most of it is persuasive in nature. Candidates or groups need votes, so they make arguments that they hope will convince voters to support their cause. As we will see, they also contact voters to encourage them to participate in the election. Some organizations, however, may play the role of a disinterested third party that simply wants to inform voters so that they make a more educated decision at election time.

In this book, we will be concerned only with campaigns and elections that influence government in one manner or another. Most of our focus will be on candidate elections, or those that select representatives to governmental office. However, we will
occasionally address non-candidate (or "issue") elections such as initiatives, whereby citizens may propose laws to the legislature, and referenda, in which citizens are asked to approve or reject legislation. An additional set of elections—including both recall and judicial retention elections—allow voters to decide whether an elected official should remain in office. A recall asks voters whether they wish to remove the official before his or her term expires and may or may not simultaneously allow voters to choose a successor in the event that the official is recalled from office; judicial retention elections ask voters to decide whether to give a judge an additional term when his or her current term ends.

Further Distinctions between Campaigns and Elections

Beyond the distinction between campaigns and elections, we will identify differences between executive and legislative races. In a presidential system, like that of the United States and most Latin American countries including Mexico, the executive branch is independent of the legislature, and the chief executive (that is, the president) and legislators are elected separately. In parliamentary systems, which combine the executive and legislative functions as they do in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Canada, the majority party (or ruling coalition) selects the chief executive (that is, the prime minister) from among the members of parliament. There are, as you might guess, hybrid systems. France’s system is designed for a strong presidency but includes a prime minister nominated by the president. Germany’s system provides for a chancellor (which is not unlike a prime minister) selected by the parliament and a weak president who is elected indirectly by legislators and plays a largely ceremonial role.

One obvious difference between executive offices (for example, president or governor) and legislative offices (for example, member of Congress or state legislator) is that only one person is elected to executive branch offices, whereas many representatives are chosen to serve in legislatures. Furthermore, the executive and legislative branches have unique responsibilities. Among other things, this means that the criteria by which candidates are judged may differ depending on the office sought. For example, voters may seek leadership skills in executive branch candidates but want legislators to possess the ability to deliver tangible benefits, like a submarine contract that will provide jobs at a local shipyard.

In addition, executive branch races—whether for president, governor, or mayor—always garner more attention from the media and voters than do legislative contests—whether for Congress, state legislature, or city council; they also are always more expensive affairs. One indicator of the greater attention paid to executive branch campaigns is relative turnout in executive and legislative elections. More people vote in elections for
president or governor than vote in congressional or state legislative races in any given year. For example, in Indiana in 2012, more than 60,000 more voters cast a ballot for president than for U.S. Senator, even though the Senate race was one of the most hotly contested in the country, whereas the presidential race was not at all competitive in that state.\textsuperscript{11}

The typical pattern of greater attention to executive races than to legislative ones is complicated by another important distinction: that among the various levels of government—federal, state, and local. This book will focus most of its attention on the national level, in part because subnational campaigns and elections take so many forms that covering them adequately would become prohibitively complex. The emphasis on national campaigns and elections is not, however, meant to detract from the importance of state and local ones.

Generally, races for federal office have a higher profile than races for the same branch of government at the state level, which in turn attract more attention than races for the same branch at the local level. Thus, more people voted for president (3,125,516) in the state of Washington in 2012 than voted for governor (3,071,047), even though the state went comfortably for President Obama whereas the gubernatorial race was one of the closest in the country.\textsuperscript{12} Similarly, turnout (not to mention media coverage) will normally be greater for U.S. House races within a state legislative district than for that district’s state legislative race.

Examining the various offices and levels of elections simultaneously gives us a better understanding of the relative significance of elections. U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races, for example, are roughly similar in intensity. Both are statewide offices and, though Senate races attract the attention due federal elections, gubernatorial races have the high profile expected for the top executive post in a state. In November of 2010, twenty-seven states held both U.S. Senate and gubernatorial elections. In twenty of those twenty-seven states, the gubernatorial race had higher turnout.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, we can conclude that in most cases, the race for the state’s top executive post holds greater significance to voters than that for the highest federal legislative office. (Unlike at the federal level, many state executive branch offices, in addition to the post of chief executive, are elected. Depending on the state, examples might be lieutenant governor—which in many states is elected independent of the gubernatorial candidate—and attorney general, secretary of state, state treasurer, and a variety of commissioners such as insurance, agriculture, or railroad. Usually interest in these races falls behind that for governor and the U.S. Senate.)

Ultimately, then, presidential races sit alone atop the hierarchy of campaigns and elections in the United States, followed by gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races on the second rung (and mayoral contests in large cities of national stature such as New York
or Los Angeles). On the third rung are U.S. House races and statewide races for executive branch offices other than governor (and mayoral posts in medium to large cities having high stature at the state level). Next in line are elections to state legislative and countywide offices, followed finally by local elections.

It is a curiosity of modern elections that those farthest removed from the daily lives of the average voter are the ones that command the most attention. This is undoubtedly because high-level races are conducted mainly on television. Not only are the national and state media more interested in national and statewide races, but those campaigns find it more efficient to reach voters via the airwaves than face to face. Thus, large amounts of money and considerable media resources are devoted to bringing large-scale campaigns into the homes of the voters. Sadly, this is not the case for lower-level races, which have to scramble for even the slightest coverage. The result is a public that is more active in, and more informed about, elections for which the consequences are relatively less immediate and in which each voter’s odds of influencing the outcome are minimal.

Campaigns and Elections in Democratic Theory

This last consideration raises questions about the role of campaigns and elections in democracy. How can we ensure that elections are meaningful and serve democratic purposes? At its 154th session in Paris in 1994, the Governing Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union issued a Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections. In it, the Council maintained, “In any State the authority of the government can only derive from the will of the people as expressed in genuine, free and fair elections held at regular intervals on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage.”14 This statement nicely sums up the widely accepted claim of modern democrats, but it tells us little about a host of practical questions with respect to democratic elections. For instance, how often should elections be held and for what offices? Which candidates or parties should have access to the ballot? Who should be allowed to vote? How should voter choice be structured? What are acceptable regulations for campaigns? Many of these questions will be addressed in later chapters. Here, we begin with the basics: That is, what requirements are necessary for a free and fair election? And what is the relationship between elections and democracy? Considering these questions will make clear that electoral systems reflect competing conceptions of democracy.

Free and Fair Elections

Robert Dahl argues that free elections are those in which “citizens can go to the polls
without fear of reprisal”; elsewhere, he notes that in free elections “coercion is comparatively uncommon.” Fair elections, conversely, are those in which “all votes must be counted as equal.” To these criteria, Dahl adds that elections must be held frequently. “[W]ithout frequent elections,” he writes, “citizens would lose a substantial degree of control over their elected officials.”

While Dahl’s definitions help clarify the meaning of the phrase “free and fair elections,” it remains rather abstract. Election management and administration, however, are very practical endeavors. Indeed, a number of international organizations have been created to assist countries in holding elections. International election observers also monitor elections in countries throughout the world, including the United States. In 2004, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights was invited by the U.S. government to send a team of election observers to monitor the U.S. elections. Given the increased demand for these observers, it has become necessary to develop a set of international election standards. Box 1.1 highlights the most common criteria for free and fair elections.

**Box 1.1 What Constitutes a Free and Fair Election?**

A “FREE” electoral process is one where fundamental human rights and freedoms are respected, including:

- freedom of speech and expression by electors, parties, candidates, and the media;
- freedom of association; that is, freedom to form organizations such as political parties and NGOs (non-governmental organizations);
- freedom of assembly, to hold political rallies, and to campaign;
- freedom of access to and by electors to transmit and receive political and electoral information messages;
- freedom to register as an elector, a party, or a candidate;
- freedom from violence, intimidation, or coercion;
- freedom of access to the polls by electors, party agents, and accredited observers;
- freedom to exercise the franchise in secret; and
- freedom to question, challenge, and register complaints or objections without negative repercussions.

A “FAIR” electoral process is one where the “playing field” is reasonably level and accessible to all electors, parties, and candidates, and includes:

- an independent, nonpartisan electoral organization to administer the process;
• guaranteed rights and protection through the constitution and electoral legislation and regulations;
• equitable representation of electors provided through the legislation;
• clearly defined universal suffrage and secrecy of the vote;
• equitable and balanced reporting by the media;
• equitable access to financial and material resources for party and candidate campaigning;
• equitable opportunities for the electorate to receive political and voter information;
• accessible polling places;
• equitable treatment of electors, candidates, and parties by elections officials, the government, the police, the military, and the judiciary;
• an open and transparent ballot counting process, and
• election process not disrupted by violence, intimidations, or coercion.


Notice that the United States meets all of the criteria for free elections. Candidates, voters, party and interest group actors, and the media are able to speak, associate, and assemble without resistance. Information is abundant and access to it unrestricted. Anyone can register as a candidate or a voter (subject to minimal regulation). No violence accompanies elections, and polling places are open for observation. Virtually all adults can cast a ballot and do so in secret. Finally, everyone may criticize the electoral process or its outcomes without fear of reprisal. To be sure, elections in the United States are not perfectly free. Some argue, for example, that voter registration requirements are unduly burdensome. By and large, however, elections in the United States are among the freest in the world.

However, how fair are elections in the United States? Several aspects of the American system may be cause for concern. For instance, election administration is typically a partisan affair, handled by those with partisan interests rather than by neutral officials. The chief elections officer in Ohio in 2004, for example, was a Republican who himself was an elected official and who was also President Bush’s campaign chairman in that state. Furthermore, there is no constitutional guarantee of the right to vote. The Electoral College and the process of legislative redistricting (or redrawing district boundaries) raise questions about the equitable representation of voters. Suffrage is nearly universal but, in most states, convicted felons lose their right to vote. Many question the media’s balance in reporting on campaigns. Candidate and party resources
are anything but equitable, with a pronounced discrepancy between incumbent and challenger campaign funds. Finally, the ballot-counting process—how tallies on a machine translate into countable votes—is something of a mystery, and new technology may be increasing the mysteriousness.

Many critics of the American electoral system find these matters troubling and believe they reveal a lack of fairness that should not be tolerated. Others, while perhaps acknowledging some inequality in the system, argue that trade-offs are part of any political system and that these particular shortcomings are justified by other political values, such as freedom or order, which are particularly relevant to the debate over campaign finance and felon disenfranchisement, respectively. Nevertheless, most of the criticism of American elections today—and, indeed, most of the reform efforts—address threats to electoral equality and, thus, fairness.

**Elections and Popular Sovereignty**

Part of the difficulty in evaluating the democratic nature of elections is that the definition of democracy itself is problematic. At an elementary level, democracy means "rule by the people," but this does not get us far because we need to know who counts as "the people" and what it means for them to "rule." In the United States today, there is general consensus that all adult citizens constitute "the people." There is far less agreement, however, upon how much of a role the people should have in governing. The idealized model of a direct democracy is ancient Athens, where citizens met in the assembly to make the laws. As such an arrangement is impossible in modern, mass societies, the question becomes, how much of a voice should the people have? That is, within a representative form of democracy, how much direct democracy is desirable?

Some argue that the legitimacy of government derives from the will of the people and, therefore, that a measure of that will should be taken at every opportunity. Those holding this view believe that active involvement by the citizenry in the policy-making process is vital to the health of democracy. This theory of democracy is often referred to as participatory democracy. Elections, therefore, are opportunities not only to choose representatives but to influence the direction of government; thus, initiatives and referenda—ballot measures that give citizens some say in passing or rejecting legislation—and perhaps even judicial elections, are desirable. Those who hold this view would like to lower barriers to participation and lament low turnout and disparities in candidate resources. They also dislike the Electoral College and other institutions or processes, such as legislative redistricting, that may limit citizens' voices in governing. Needless to say, people on this side of the spectrum find the current electoral system in the United States to be deficient and the status quo unacceptable.
Others argue that there should be checks on the will of the people— that prevailing opinion should be filtered through representatives. From this perspective, the people should have minimal influence over the day-to-day operation of governing, and the lion’s share of the responsibility for policy making should be left to elected and appointed officials.\textsuperscript{21} Elections as instruments for holding those officials accountable are important, but their use can be limited to periodically choosing representatives. Those who tend toward this view, therefore, oppose measures that give voters a role in the policy-making process (that is, initiatives and referenda). Compared with those favoring participatory democracy, they are, generally speaking, less concerned about barriers to political participation (as long as a basic level of access is maintained). Consequently, they worry less about low levels of voter turnout or disparities in campaign funding. Finally, they tend not to be troubled by institutions such as the Electoral College, given that the electors are essentially representatives. For these individuals, the American electoral system is satisfactory and the status quo acceptable.

\textbf{Two Visions of Democracy}

Intuitively, one might conclude that the participatory view is the more democratic, but a sophisticated understanding of democracy requires us to recognize that there are advantages and disadvantages in the various models of democratic elections. As a result, evaluating electoral systems as more or less democratic fails to fully acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the systems and overlooks the trade-offs between them.

In his study of elections as instruments of democracy, G. Bingham Powell identifies two basic approaches to the relationship between elections and democracy: majoritarian and proportional. The majoritarian vision of democracy prefers “concentrated policy-making power,” which requires absolute governing majorities.\textsuperscript{22} As such, there are clear winners and losers in both elections and the policy-making process. The proportional approach favors a dispersion of power and the representation of as many viewpoints as possible. Bargaining and compromise are, therefore, necessary to accommodate multiple interests in the policy-making process. According to Powell,

The concentrated, majoritarian approach views elections as mechanisms for tight control, with election outcomes determining directly the makeup of the policymakers who will make all policies between elections. The dispersed [proportional] influence counterpart emphasizes the representation of all points of view brought into an arena of shifting policy coalitions.\textsuperscript{23}

These visions of democracy can be distinguished by a variety of institutional arrangements within a government. Arend Lijphart identified ten such arrangements,
according to which democracies can be classified. These include whether executive power rests with a single party or is shared by a coalition of parties; whether the executive branch is dominant or power is balanced between the executive and the legislature; whether a system has two parties or multiple parties; whether there is a unitary and centralized or federal and decentralized government; and whether legislative power resides in a unicameral legislature or in two equally (but differently) powerful legislative chambers. The most relevant institutional arrangement, for our purposes, is a country’s electoral system, which can produce a majority party or can award seats in a legislature in proportion to the votes parties receive. For each of these institutional arrangements, one characteristic reflects the majoritarian model of democracy, and the other reflects the proportional vision. So, for example, twoparty systems are majoritarian whereas systems that consist of multiple parties are proportional. Unitary governments are majoritarian, whereas federal systems encourage consensus and thus reflect the proportional ideal.

No country has a purely majoritarian or proportional system, but many tend toward one model or the other. The United Kingdom is the prototypical majoritarian system, deviating from that model only slightly on a few of Lijphart’s criteria. Majoritarian elements of the U.K. system include its two major parties (notwithstanding a third party, the Liberal Democrats, that entered into a coalition government with one of the major parties, the Conservatives, following the election of 2010); the fact that the majority party, by forming a cabinet that dominates Parliament, controls the government, which is unitary and (notwithstanding the recent devolution of power to Scotland and Wales) centralized; and the lack of judicial review of Parliament’s decisions. The best example of the proportional, or what Lijphart calls the consensus model, is Switzerland, which incorporates consensus principles in nine of ten categories (the exception being that it does not have judicial review). It has, for example, multiple parties, none of which has a majority of the seats in the parliament, which means that the cabinet is formed by a coalition of parties; the legislative branch is roughly as powerful as the executive; and the government is federal and decentralized. The United States is balanced between the majoritarian and consensus models. On six of Lijphart’s criteria (including a balance of power between the executive and legislative branches, a federal and decentralized government, and the use of judicial review), the United States follows the consensus approach; on four, including its electoral system, it is decidedly majoritarian.

The point of this discussion of competing visions of democracy is, first, to note that there are different ways to conceive of democracy. More important, it is to suggest that the institutional arrangements of a country’s government reflect a particular conception of democracy. This is particularly true of a country’s electoral system. Indeed, as one noted scholar claims, “The choice of an electoral system is, in effect, a
choice among competing definitions of democracy itself.26 Or, as Powell puts it,

Those political systems that have perfected most fully one of the major processes through which citizens seem to use elections for influence do so at the expense of one of the other processes. This trade-off is not only a matter of flaws in constitutional design or human imagination... It is built into the tension between concentrated and dispersed power for policy making and the desirable consequences of each. Students of elections and democracy will always have something to complain about because no set of election arrangements can satisfy conditions for all the desirable electoral roles.27

The Role of Campaigns and Elections

We have yet, however, to identify what, precisely, is the role of campaigns and elections in democracy. In other words, what functions do they play in a democratic political system?28 There may, of course, be overlap between the functions of elections and those of campaigns. Accountability, for example, is achieved not just through elections but by forcing public officials to justify their actions in public during a campaign. Overlap aside, distinct functions of campaigns and elections deserve attention. As campaigns presuppose an electoral event, we will begin with elections.

The Functions of Elections

Elections serve at least four functions in a democracy—choosing public officials, ensuring accountability, influencing the direction of policy, and granting legitimacy to the government.29 First and foremost, elections are a mechanism for determining who will hold public office. Most often, those who will represent the citizenry are chosen directly by voters. That is, votes are cast for candidates contending for an office, and the winner (or winners in multimember districts) are chosen based on a predetermined formula. In the U.S. electoral system, the formula is simple—the candidate with the most votes wins. In the case of the Electoral College, voters choose others to elect a leader on their behalf, although today these electors almost always behave as if the plurality of voters in their states directly chose a presidential candidate.

A related function of elections is to allow voters to choose the candidates who will run for various offices. Party nominees in general elections are often chosen in primary elections (or primaries), which vary significantly in terms of who may participate but offer some level of input into party business by rankand-file members. It should also be noted that elections can be used to remove an individual from public office before the end of his or her term. Eighteen states allow these recall elections for state
officials, and thirty-six allow recalls at the local level. Perhaps the best known example of a recall election was held in California in 2003 when sitting Governor Gray Davis was removed from office and replaced by movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger. More recently, the recall of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker in the summer of 2012 attracted considerable media attention, thousands of activists on both sides from around the country, and tens of millions of dollars in campaign spending.

Second, elections can be used to hold elected officials accountable for their actions in office. Whether one believes that representatives should act “on behalf of” their constituents (often called the trustee model of representation) or “in place of” them (the delegate model), everyone agrees that representatives must periodically answer to those they represent. Of course, representatives may not always act exactly as their constituents would like them to. Usually, voters give elected officials some leeway, but it is a foundational principle of democracy that voters have the opportunity to remove their representative from office when they are particularly put out by something the representative has done—including his or her personal behavior.

Of course, citizens may not all vote retrospectively; that is, they may not look back to an incumbent’s or a party’s record in previous terms in office as they make their choice. Instead, they may vote prospectively, by listening to candidate and party promises and choosing based on which one they believe offers the best plan for the future. Voters may be particularly apt to apply prospective evaluations to non-incumbents.

The third function of elections, therefore, is to give the people some say over the policy direction of the country (or state, city, and so on). This function takes two basic forms, one weak and one strong. In its weak form, the policy-directing role for elections is accomplished by encouraging elected officials to be responsive to the public. With an election looming (or having just occurred), representatives are keen to show how they are responding to citizens’ wishes. In this way, voters are able to influence the actions of elected officials. For example, in 2003, a Republican Congress passed, and President Bush signed, a bill that reformed Medicare to include prescription drug coverage for seniors. In part because such reform ran counter to Republican ideology, the passage of the Medicare bill appeared to be a response to general voter concern about the issue.

The strong version of this function gives voters some degree of control, rather than mere influence, over the policy-making process. When elections play this role, voters control government policy by electing leaders who will act on the agenda they proposed and that the voters, by choosing them, endorsed. This is what the victors mean when they claim a “mandate” from an election. Thus, in 1994, Republicans claimed that their “Contract with America,” a set of ten legislative proposals publicized during the campaign, should be enacted because the public elected Republicans to control Congress. Of course, the extent to which elections actually produce mandates,
or to which the public is able to control policy, is debatable.\textsuperscript{33}

There is one other way in which elections can foster public control over policy; we might call this the strongest version of the policy-directing function. Initiatives and referenda, as noted previously, give citizens a direct role in policy making. With initiatives, citizens propose legislation that either goes directly to the voters for their consideration (the direct initiative) or is sent to the legislature and on to the voters if the legislature fails to act or rejects the legislation (the indirect initiative). According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, twenty-four states provide for the initiative process.\textsuperscript{34} A referendum is a vote on a measure placed on the ballot either by the legislature (the legislative referendum) or by citizens in response to a law that passed the legislature but which those citizens oppose (the popular referendum). All fifty states provide for legislative referenda, while twenty-four states allow popular referenda.\textsuperscript{35}

A fourth function of elections is to grant legitimacy to the government. As long as an election is thought to be free from corruption, the winner is viewed as being the rightful occupant of the office at stake. In this way, elections help support the rule of

<table>
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<th>Box 1.2 Oregon Voters Allow Doctor-Assisted Suicide</th>
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<td>The initiative is a mechanism for citizens to propose (or initiate) legislation. Often, initiatives are used by a group of citizens when the legislature refuses to consider legislation they support. The first state to place a statewide initiative on the ballot was Oregon in 1904. Ninety years later, Oregonians considered one of the most controversial initiatives in American history.</td>
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<td>In November 1994, voters in Oregon faced 18 ballot measures. Among them was an initiative that would allow terminally ill adults to obtain a prescription for lethal drugs to end their own lives. After a contentious campaign, the initiative passed with 51.3 percent of the vote. Opponents immediately obtained a legal injunction, but the courts cleared the way for the law’s implementation in 1997. In November of that same year, however, the Oregon legislature referred a bill repealing the Death With Dignity Act to the voters. In this legislative referendum, Oregon voters, by a margin of 60 percent to 40 percent, retained the law and Oregon became the only state in the nation to allow doctor-assisted suicide.</td>
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<td>Beginning in 2001, the Bush administration tried to prohibit doctors in Oregon from prescribing lethal doses of medication, arguing that such prescriptions violated the federal Controlled Substances Act. In 2006, the Supreme Court upheld the state’s law in Gonzales v. Oregon. Through 2012, 673 patients had taken advantage of their right to end their own lives, a right obtained through the initiative process.</td>
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law, at least in developed countries; even those voters whose candidate has lost are expected to acknowledge the authority of the winner. That they do and that politicians themselves would concede power to their opponents without taking up arms is a testament to the moral force of elections in modern democracies. And it is an exceedingly rare political phenomenon in the history of humankind. In the United States and other developed countries, this function of elections is extremely robust. When the 2000 presidential election resulted in a protracted recount in the state of Florida, many Democrats seemed poised to reject the legitimacy of Republican George W. Bush. During the partisan dispute over how to recount the vote in Florida, a Pew Center for the People & the Press survey revealed that 51 percent of Democrats thought that Bush would not have won legitimately if, in fact, he was declared the winner.\textsuperscript{57} Even years later (in March of 2004), according to a National Annenberg Election Survey, 69 percent of Democrats believed that “Al Gore really won the 2000 presidential election but was somehow cheated out of the presidency.”\textsuperscript{58} Yet there were no violent protests caused by this sense of injustice, and Democrats accepted the presidential authority of George Bush. This demonstrates the powerful ability of elections to bestow legitimacy on governments, and this function serves to foster stability in democratic systems.

A variation of this function is the role elections play as a means for the peaceful expression of dissent. Ballots are extremely blunt instruments for communicating a message, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to glean any intention on behalf of the voter from his or her ballot. However, when voters cast blank ballots or opt for a third party candidate, they may be sending a message that they are dissatisfied with the status quo.\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, not participating in an election at all is often said to be a statement of dissatisfaction (although, in reality, it is more likely to indicate alienation, a lack of efficacy or, simply, apathy). To the extent that elections provide unhappy citizens with a way to express their displeasure, they may help to reduce the potential for political violence.

Campaigns, too, serve at least four distinct functions. Perhaps their most obvious role is to help citizens formulate their preferences and, ultimately, decide for whom to vote on Election Day. In the United States, though, those preferences may be set for many people even before the campaign begins. A long line of research into the voting behavior of Americans concluded that the party identification of most voters determines whom they will vote for regardless of what they hear from the candidates.\textsuperscript{40} In fact, some research has found that much of what a voter hears is filtered through a partisan lens that all but ensures the voter will look favorably on his or her party's nominee.\textsuperscript{41}

Recent research suggests, however, that scholars have overlooked the many ways
campaigns affect voter decision making.\textsuperscript{42} Of course, campaign effects vary by context and depend on circumstances. For instance, events such as party conventions and debates may influence voters’ choices, but the impact is most evident among those without strong party identification, who are undecided, or who are “cross-pressured,” that is, those pulled in different partisan directions based on conflicting characteristics such as having low income (pro-Democratic) but being an evangelical Christian (pro-Republican).\textsuperscript{43} Thus, campaigns help at least some voters make up their minds at election time.

Beyond influencing vote choice, campaigns serve a second function as a forum for debate, discussion, and deliberation.\textsuperscript{44} A campaign, after all, is a communication event wherein voters, candidates, parties and interest groups, and the media engage in “crosstalk” as the event unfolds.\textsuperscript{45} The discourse that takes place during a campaign produces its own set of effects. One of the most important is political learning within the electorate. Voters clearly learn something about the candidates as they follow a campaign.\textsuperscript{46}

A third function of campaigns is to promote citizen participation. At the individual level, campaigns have been shown to have a positive impact on a person’s intention to vote.\textsuperscript{47} Collectively, campaigns encourage voting by their self-interested pursuit of more voters for their particular sides. As evidence for this, scholars have found that the competitiveness of an election campaign tends to produce higher turnout than races that are not as close; when both sides are working hard to mobilize their voters, turnout increases measurably.\textsuperscript{48}

Campaigns foster other kinds of participation as well. They seek, for example, financial support and volunteer efforts. And campaigns foster democratic deliberation. When people discuss the campaign around the water-cooler with co-workers or over dinner with family members, they are participating in politics.

Some candidates’ campaigns inspire new activists to enter politics. Many politically active baby-boomers point to the presidential campaigns of Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964 or Democrat Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 as having pulled them into the process. More recently, the 1980 presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan and the U.S. Senate campaigns of the late Democrat Paul Wellstone attracted particularly committed activists. And Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign drew so many young people into politics that the campaign’s youth outreach program was dubbed “Generation Obama.” To the extent that campaigns are successful at getting individuals to participate, they are helping to cultivate the skills and, indeed, the habits of democratic citizenship.\textsuperscript{49}

Fourth, campaigns allow “outsiders” an opportunity to voice their opinions. In fact,
campaigns serve this function better than elections since, as noted earlier, a vote is ambiguous with respect to the voter’s intention. During a campaign, candidates and citizens explicitly express their views in a variety of forums, including debates, newspaper columns and letters, and the Internet. Occasionally, a third-party candidacy emerges to represent a viewpoint that is not entirely within the mainstream of opinion in the country but that, in a democracy, certainly deserves to be heard. This was true of the Socialist candidacies of Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas in the early part of the twentieth century, the states’ rights American Independent campaign of George Wallace

**Box 1.3 A Socialist for President**

Third party candidates often come from outside the mainstream of American politics. Nevertheless, they sometimes champion issues that later get adopted by one of the major parties. Such was the case for Eugene Debs, a five-time candidate for president in the early 20th Century.

Debs first gained national notoriety when, as leader of the American Railway Union, he was jailed for his part in the Pullman Strike of 1894. Though he refused the nomination of the People’s Party in 1896, Debs did run for president as the Social Democratic Party’s candidate in 1900. Having thrown his hat in the ring again in 1904, this time under the Socialist Party’s banner, he garnered over 400,000 votes. He did no better in 1908, but four years later he received over 900,000 votes. Debs campaigned unsuccessfully for a congressional seat from Indiana in 1916 but made one more run for the presidency in 1920. This time, however, he did so from a prison cell. Debs and the Socialists opposed U.S. entry into World War I When, in 1918, he gave an anti-war speech in Canton, Ohio, he was arrested for violating the Espionage Act and was sentenced to ten years in prison. As “Convict No. 9653” (as some of his campaign materials identified him), Debs once again received over 900,000 votes.

The Socialist Party would never again do as well at the polls as it had done under Debs’ leadership. But many ideas proposed by Socialists—including women’s suffrage, the prohibition of child labor, standards for workplace safety, and the right of workers to organize and strike—would eventually gain widespread support, and become law, in the United States. Third party candidates rarely win elections, but they can significantly influence the direction of public policy in the country. Eugene Debs certainly did.


Image source: The Granger Collection, New York.
in 1968, and the candidacies of Ralph Nader in 1996, 2000, and 2004. Ross Perot’s 1992 campaign, though not outside mainstream opinion, can be seen as speaking for disaffected voters. Third-party campaigns are not just vehicles to air unpopular views or vent voter anger. The agenda of a third-party candidate who garners significant support is often co-opted by one of the major parties. Many believe that Perot, for example, put the budget deficit on the table as a key issue in 1992. Cutting the deficit was something Bill Clinton would embrace and, eventually, accomplish as president. So campaigns can also act as a mechanism for influencing policy from outside the dominant political institutions.

The sum total of these campaign functions may be tantamount to the preservation of democracy. As the authors of an important study of campaign communication, Crosstalk, put it, “The interactions of the campaign, as well as who wins or loses, have important consequences for governance and for the robustness of the democratic process.” Roderick Hart agrees. He was once rather critical of the way campaigns take place in the United States, but his systematic study of “campaign talk” convinced him that the conversations that are our campaigns serve to bolster democracy.

**Normative Considerations**

Most of the material covered in this chapter is normative in nature. That is, it deals with questions of how campaigns and elections ought to operate and the standards by which we should judge that operation. Much of the rest of the book will consist of empirical descriptions; in other words, it will examine how campaigns and elections actually do operate, regardless of how they ought to. Nevertheless, every chapter will address normative considerations because all of the material in this book has implications for how we should organize our political system or how the major players in campaigns and elections ought to behave.

Indeed, when we ask whether campaigns and elections serve our nation’s democratic aims, we are asking, in part, whether the participants in those events are properly fulfilling their roles. The structure of campaigns and elections (including the rules and regulations that govern them, the focus of the next two chapters) dictate how they function to a large extent, but it is the players—candidates, political parties, interest groups, the media, voters—who in the end determine whether campaigns and elections are healthy or are not. The last chapter of this book will provide alternative frameworks for judging the players’ behavior.

In this chapter, the normative questions all deal with various visions of democracy. By now, it should be clear that there is no single checklist that can be applied to a country to determine whether its political system is or is not democratic. Instead, there are
competing visions of democracy. The result is that all countries face trade-offs in fashioning a system of campaigns and elections. Is the freedom of the major players paramount, or is it more important that they play on a level field? Should the system encourage participatory democracy, or should it rely more heavily on representative democracy? Is the proportional (or consensus) model of governing desirable, or is majoritarianism more attractive?

In determining what one values in a political system, it helps to think of these trade-offs as if they were mutually exclusive. That is, if forced to choose, which of the two options would you prefer? Two of the discussion questions at the end of this chapter force you to think in just those terms. The empirical world around us, however, is a bit messier than that. In reality, there are no pure examples of one vision or the other. All countries find themselves on a spectrum between extremes for each of the trade-offs. Thus, both the freedom and the equality of actors are important, and the question becomes where, precisely, to draw the line. Direct democracy, where full participation is required, is impossible in a modern mass society. Thus, within the framework of a representative democracy, the question becomes how much participation to encourage. And as the political system of the United States illustrates, consensus and majoritarian forms of governing are not entirely incompatible. The United States has adopted elements of both.

This chapter laid the theoretical groundwork for the role of campaigns and elections in a democracy. The next two chapters establish the framework, including the legal and regulatory structure, within which campaigns and elections take place. Chapters 4 through 8 will then examine the activity of the major players in campaigns and elections, and Chapters 9 and 10 explore the processes that result from that activity. Finally, Chapter 11 places the structure, players, and processes of campaigns and elections in a broader context and addresses the health of these vital events.

(Please note - references to chapters are of those from the featured book, not the chapters included in this Routledge FreeBook)

**Pedagogical Tools**

**Role-Play Scenario**

You are the head of a team of international election observers being sent to monitor the first election in a country that has recently transitioned to democracy. The country has had an acting president since the dictator who used to rule the country was overthrown eighteen months ago at the end of a prolonged civil war. Little or no violence has followed since the dictator was ousted, but tensions are running high
because of the election. The interim president is on the ballot and is opposed by a former advisor to the deposed dictator. Of the country’s three major regions, one shows overwhelming support for the interim president, another is a stronghold of the former dictator’s party, and the third is evenly split. Write a short report for your team identifying the factors you will look for to determine whether the election was legitimate. How will you know whether the criteria for a free and fair election were met?

Discussion Questions
1. For democracy to take hold in a country, do you think it is more important to first hold elections or first establish political rights and liberties? Why?
2. Discuss the pros and cons of the participatory and representative approaches to democracy. Which do you think is preferable?
3. Which vision of democratic governance do you find more compelling, the majoritarian or proportional vision? Explain your answer.

Online Resources
ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, aceproject.org
The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), www.idea.int
The International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), www.ifes.org

Suggested Readings
Notes


7 Not all observers hold this view. For instance, in his review of the history of democracy, Fareed Zakaria has argued that if liberal democracy is to take root in a country, constitutionally protected liberties such as freedom of speech must be in place before elections can be held. See Fareed Zakaria. 2004. The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


17 Dahl. On Democracy, 95 and 96.

18 These include the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, or IDEA (www.idea.int), the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (of the Department of Public Affairs, (http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/un/nda/main/issues/elections), and the International Foundation for Election Systems, or IFES (www.ifes.org).


23 Ibid., 6.


25 Ibid., 10-21 and 34-41.


28 It is possible that elections play a different set of functions for individuals and political systems, though the functions may be analogous. See Richard Rose and Harve Mossawir 1967. "Voting and Elections: A Functional Analysis." *Political Studies* 15: 173–201. In this chapter, I am primarily interested in the systemic functions of elections.

29 Among the many authors who explore the various functions of elections are Rose and Mossawir, "Voting and Elections;" and Katz, *Democracy and Elections*, Chap. 7.


Recall elections cannot be held for federal officeholders.


35 Ibid.

36 Interestingly, elections may undermine the rule of law in some countries. Chaturvedi and Mukherji have found that elections tend to incite violent crime in less developed countries (though there is no link between elections and violence in developed countries). See Ashish Chaturvedi and Arnab Mukherji. 2004. "Do Elections Incite Violent Crime?" Department of Economics, University of California, Irvine and RAND.
Graduate School. Unpublished manuscript.


CHAPTER 2

Presidential Nomination Politics at the Dawn of the 21st Century
Chapter 2. Presidential Nomination Politics at the Dawn of the 21st Century

At first glance, each presidential nomination contest appears to be unique. Folklore develops on how certain instances or decisions were crucial to the battle being waged. One such example is the frequent retelling of the events from a Manchester, New Hampshire coffee shop in 2008 when an audience member asked Senator Hillary Clinton how she could continue to campaign given the on-going adversity (and a loss in the Iowa caucuses). Clinton replied, “It’s not easy . . . I couldn’t do it if I just didn’t passionately believe it was the right thing to do . . . I just don’t want to see us fall backwards.” Did this wistful (or as depicted in some media accounts tearful) response turn the tide in the 2008 New Hampshire primary, leading to a Clinton come-back and setting up the long battle between Clinton and Senator Barack Obama? Did Howard Dean’s scream at the conclusion of his pep talk to supporters after losing the 2004 Iowa caucuses doom his campaign? At other times, “Monday morning quarterbacks” criticize candidates for flaws in their strategies. For example, did Senator Bill Bradley’s decision in 2000 to compete vigorously (and lose) in Iowa cause him to forfeit his early lead in New Hampshire? Still others ask whether media bias distorts the outcome, such as questioning whether undue favorable coverage of McCain in 2000 or Obama in 2008 garnered them additional support at the polls.

Presidential nomination battles have lots of intricacies because there are so many factors involved: numerous candidates, primaries and caucuses across the 50 states (and several territories), different rules for the two parties, an ever-changing calendar, and the impact of new technology. Each year a new group of candidates decides to seek their party’s presidential nomination. Some are well known, some are not. Some have a better chance of winning the nomination bid than others. Neither a uniform set of primary rules nor a standardized calendar of dates exist, because primary dates and rules are governed by the national parties, state parties, and state governments. These three groups often have competing rather than complementary interests. Presidential campaigns also are altered as candidates learn to exploit the latest technological advances. In 2000, McCain opened up the internet as a fundraising tool. In 2004, Howard Dean exploited social networking to bring his supporters to key campaign events. By 2008, internet fundraising and social networking were key components to all the candidates’ strategies.

Recent Nomination Contests

Despite the intricacies of each nomination contest, much commonality exists. In many races there is a frontrunner—someone who leads in the early public opinion polls and has raised a large amount of money. Sometimes this frontrunner has a commanding
lead and goes on to win the nomination. In a less common scenario, the frontrunner falters and is replaced by another candidate. A third category is a contest with no clear frontrunner but a number of more equal contenders vying for the nomination. In yet another variant, two strong competitors may battle it out over the entire course of the presidential primaries and caucuses. A final category includes sitting presidents seeking renomination. This is the most successful path to the nomination, because since the start of the 20th century, no sitting president seeking renomination has been defeated for the party’s presidential slot. A few presidents, however, have had significant challenges to their renominations.4 Let’s see how the last three nomination cycles played out.

2000 Republicans and Democrats: Frontrunner Victories

The 2000 Republican nomination is a clear case of a strong frontrunner winning the nomination. Texas governor George W. Bush established a commanding lead in fundraising totals and public opinion polls in 1999. In January 2000 Bush won the Iowa caucuses over his five competitors. New Hampshire proved to be a tougher fight. Arizona senator John McCain campaigned extensively in the state. Between April 1999 and January 2000, McCain held 114 town meetings in New Hampshire, often taking audience questions for up to 90 minutes.5 McCain’s grassroots campaigning paid off with a New Hampshire victory. Bush recovered with a critical victory in South Carolina, and on Super Tuesday Bush won victories in seven primary states while McCain won in four mostly smaller states. As a result of his victories, Bush had accumulated 681 of the 1,034 delegates needed for the nomination while McCain’s total stood at 225. Two days later, McCain conceded the race to Bush. On that date, March 9, George W. Bush became the presumptive nominee, though he would not become the legal nominee until confirmed as such on August 3 at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia.

On the Democratic side in 2000, a frontrunner won the nomination even more easily. Vice President Al Gore swept the primaries and caucuses over his sole competitor former New Jersey senator Bill Bradley. As a sitting vice president, Gore had many advantages including nearly universal name recognition and access to the party’s activists and campaign contributors. Not all former vice presidents are automatically successful in their quests for the presidential nomination, as the case of Dan Quayle shows. Gore, however, was judged a particularly successful vice president, who had worked well with President Clinton. Within the Democratic Party, President Clinton maintained high approval, and he heartily endorsed Gore’s candidacy. Overcoming Gore’s advantages would be an uphill battle, and many possible contenders simply decided not to run. Thus, Bradley became the sole opponent to Gore. Bradley had been a hardworking senator for 18 years, but he was a loner, did not connect well with other party officials, and was not an exciting speaker on the campaign trail.6 Gore won
decisively in the Iowa caucuses, and survived Bradley's strongest challenge in New Hampshire. Gore won all 11 primaries on Super Tuesday, March 7, and Bradley bowed out of the contest on March 9.

2004 Democrats: Switching Places

The Democratic presidential nomination contest in 2004 saw the frontrunner, Howard Dean, overtaken by John Kerry in the Iowa caucuses. Dean's frontrunner status was not insurmountable from the beginning. He led in funds raised in 2003 by $16 million over John Kerry (a relatively small lead compared to Bush's $34 million advantage at the same time in 1999). In addition, Dean had only taken the first-place slot in the national public opinion polls in October 2003. By late fall of 2003, Dean's fortunes began to wane while Kerry's began to rise. Dean had risen to early prominence among the Democratic contenders by criticizing the Iraq War, but on December 14, Saddam Hussein was captured, and public support for the war rose in response. Meanwhile, Senator John Kerry took out a $6.4 million mortgage on his home to help finance his campaign. This presented a mixed message. On the one hand, resorting to the use of personal funds may signal a crisis within a campaign unable to attract enough support from campaign contributors, but on the other hand, the size of Kerry's personal loan sent a cue as to his seriousness about the campaign and allowed him to hire more staff.

Dean had other weaknesses in his Iowa campaign, such as relying on out-of-state rather than local volunteers, and Kerry had hidden strengths, with support among Iowa's veterans and firefighters. Kerry also had the good fortune that Jim Rassmann, a Vietnam veteran, stepped forward to credit Kerry with saving his life during the war. Rassmann began to actively campaign with Kerry in Iowa. Dean's main competitor in Iowa had been Dick Gephardt, the Missouri congressman who needed to win in his own region. As caucus night neared, Gephardt and Dean began to question each other's electability. The tug of war between Dean and Gephardt took its toll. Meanwhile, John Edwards also was gaining in Iowa with upbeat speeches and the endorsement of the Des Moines Register.7

On caucus night, January 19, Kerry won the support of 38 percent of the caucus attendees, Edwards finished second at 32 percent, with Dean at 18 percent, and Gephardt at 11 percent. Dean's misfortunes in Iowa were augmented with a post-caucus speech before 3,500 supporters. In his rousing speech, Dean ticked off upcoming primary states he expected to win, pledged to take back the White House for the Democrats, and ended with a vociferous shout of "Yeeeeeaaah!" On the television news, late-night talk shows, and the internet, Dean's scream appeared to show the candidate as desperate and angry. Kerry's momentum took over. Dean's 30-point lead in New Hampshire disappeared, and on primary night, Kerry bested Dean 39 to 26 percent.8 Kerry went on to win 15 of the 18 primaries held between February 3 and
March 2, forcing the remaining candidates from the contest, and unofficially securing the Democratic nomination.

2004 Republicans: A Presidential Renomination

The 2004 Republican nomination battle was nonexistent. President George W. Bush was not challenged in his bid to be renominated. The last serious challenge to a sitting president by a credible candidate was in 1980, when Senator Edward Kennedy opposed Jimmy Carter’s renomination. Carter’s presidency was plagued by the stagnant economy of the 1970s and rising gas prices in 1979. Yet, Kennedy was unable to articulate why he would be a better contender, and the early rally-around-the-flag boost in Carter’s approval ratings from the taking of the U.S. embassy personnel in Iran in November 1979 helped Carter stave off Kennedy’s challenge. In 1976, the unelected presidency of Gerald Ford (he assumed the presidency when Richard Nixon stepped down due to the Watergate scandal) was challenged by the party’s conservative leader, former California governor Ronald Reagan. Ford and Reagan traded primary victories, and neither controlled a majority of the delegates at the close of the last primaries. Ford gained the final few delegates needed over the course of the summer, but was renominated by the slimmest of margins with 52.5 percent of the delegates.9

Other recent presidents have not faced such serious opposition to their renomination. In 1992, President George H. W. Bush faced an ideological challenge from political commentator Patrick Buchanan. A protest vote from conservatives upset that Bush had broken his no new taxes pledge helped Buchanan move within 16 points of Bush in the New Hampshire primary. Buchanan remained a critic of Bush throughout the rest of the campaign, though he would not win any of the primaries. President Bill Clinton was unchallenged for renomination in 1996 as was Ronald Reagan in 1984. Thus, in the past quarter century, only two presidents have faced serious challengers, one an ideological challenge, and three were unopposed for their renomination. Wayne Steger in studying challenges to sitting presidents in the 20th century concludes that presidents are most likely to face a serious challenger when the president is unpopular with a significant faction of the party but the party still has a reasonable chance of winning the fall election.10 Nonetheless, Ford, Carter, and George H. W. Bush all lost their reelection bids.

2008 Republicans: Who’s the Frontrunner?

The 2008 Republican contest presented mixed evidence on frontrunner status. Former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani led in the national polls throughout 2007. As mayor of New York City at the time of the 9/11 terrorists’ attacks, Giuliani campaigned on his record of being tough on terrorists, but his more colorful personal life and moderate stances on social issues did not sit well with party conservatives. Mitt Romney, the
former governor of Massachusetts, led in campaign finances, though onethird came from his own personal fortune. Despite the credentials of being a successful Republican governor in a Democratic state, Romney had recently adopted more conservative positions on social issues and faced lingering prejudices against his Mormon faith. John McCain’s campaign was financially broke by the summer of 2007. With a reduced staff, McCain began a fall “No Surrender” bus tour to regain his grassroots support. In addition, McCain’s early advocacy of a larger U.S. military force in the Iraq War began to resonate with Republican voters, and he performed well in the Republican candidate debates. McCain’s position in the national polls moved upwards by the end of 2008, as did that of Mike Huckabee, whose congenial ways and conservative positions on social issues captured the support of the party’s religious faction. Yet, no candidate seemed poised to unify the various types of conservatives within the Republican Party: religious conservatives, economic conservatives, and foreign policy conservatives.

The 2008 election season opened with Huckabee winning the Iowa caucuses. Romney who had campaigned heavily in the state finished second. McCain, who had skipped Iowa (a tactic more successful in the Republican than Democratic Party), won in New Hampshire. Once again, Romney finished second, but he won the Michigan primary and caucuses in Nevada and Maine. Fred Thompson, the former Tennessee senator and actor, claimed to be focusing on the South Carolina primary. When he finished third, he left the race. Giuliani proclaimed he was waiting for the Florida primary to demonstrate his strengths, but finishing third, exited the race and endorsed McCain. By Super Tuesday only Romney, Huckabee, McCain, and Ron Paul, an advocate for libertarian policies, remained in the Republican fray. McCain’s victory in 9 of the 15 Republican Super Tuesday primaries led Romney to quit the race, while Huckabee waited another month until McCain could claim the support of 50 percent of the Republican delegates, the number needed for victory, before dropping out. By the beginning of March, John McCain had secured enough delegates to claim the Republican nomination and forced all of the serious contenders from the field.

2008 Democrats: A Two-Candidate Battle

The 2008 Democratic nomination sure appeared to break the mold. The two leading candidates were a woman, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, and an African American, Senator Barack Obama of Illinois. Six other candidates also were in the race, did poorly in the early contests, and by the end of January most of these had quit the race. Clinton and Obama, however, would vie for the nomination throughout the entire presidential primary and caucus calendar. The last extended primary contest was more than 20 years previous, when Senator Gary Hart and former vice president Walter Mondale contested the 1984 Democratic nomination. In 2008, Obama would win in Iowa, Clinton in New Hampshire. The vote on Super Tuesday was split. Clinton was
unprepared for a longer battle (most pundits had predicted the race would be over on Super Tuesday) and did not intend to spend much time or effort contesting the caucuses (few candidates in the past had done so). Obama won a string of caucuses and primaries in February. Clinton came back with a win in the March 4 Ohio, Texas, and Rhode Island primaries, while Obama won in the Vermont primary and the caucus portion of the Texas selection. The two candidates evenly split the remaining 10 primaries, but with the help of superdelegates Obama's delegate total exceeded the 50 percent mark on the last primary day. Clinton conceded the contest the following Saturday.

Long battles for the presidential nomination had become rare over the past quarter century. The other two instances date back to the 1984 Democratic contest (between Vice President Walter Mondale and Colorado senator Gary Hart) and the 1976 Republican battle (between Ford and Reagan). All three occurrences involve a protracted battle between two candidates, rather than a multicandidate contest. John Aldrich theorizing about the course of presidential nomination politics argues that only the two-candidate scenario is likely to produce a long extended campaign. Each candidate will have his or her ups and downs. When one candidate gains, the other falls behind, but then the tide turns and the roles are switched. As long as each candidate has her or his strengths, and weaknesses, the relatively balanced contest continues to the end of the primary season.

Multicandidate contests often end more quickly. Candidates who do not do well in the early primaries and caucuses drop out of the race. Those who do better in the early contests or have sufficient campaign resources continue to the next round of primaries and caucuses. In rare instances, the battle will dwindle to two main competitors who compete over time, as was the case in the 1984 and 2008 Democratic contests. Yet, a quicker and more common scenario for the conclusion of a multicandidate race is for one competitor to dominate the early contests, as happened with Kerry and the Democrats in 2004 and Bush and the Republicans in 2000. Sometimes the initial round may have two or three candidates win in different primaries and caucuses, but then one of the candidates puts together a series of wins. The rest of the candidates fall behind in resources and delegate totals, and quit the race. Thus, the most common dynamic of multicandidate contests is that they dwindle down to a single, winning candidate, though it may be hard to predict in some years (Democrats in 2004, Republicans in 2008) which of the initial set of candidates will be the successful one.

So far we have seen the different scenarios for nomination contests and how they have been highlighted in the first three election years of the 21st century. Next we will look at the basic elements to all these campaigns:

1) the emergence of the candidate field,
2) the pre-election year or "invisible primary" battle for name recognition and campaign resources,
3) the election year dynamics of momentum and candidate attrition, and
4) the accumulation of delegates, the key to the legal definition of winning the nomination.

**The Candidates**

Through the mid-20th century an unwritten list of criteria described the desired qualifications for a presidential nominee. This “availability standard” required the potential candidate to be a senator or a governor, preferably from a large, competitive state. Of course, that the candidate would be a white male was a given, as was the requirement that he be a Protestant and have an ideal marriage. Gradually these standards were violated and went by the wayside as small-state (Eisenhower), Catholic (Kennedy), and divorced (Reagan) candidates won the presidency. Yet until 2008, all the winning candidates remained white males, and most serious contenders continued to be current or former senators and governors.

Senators, governors, and vice presidents have the name recognition, practical experience in campaigning, and a credible record of prior experience in governing to make good presidential candidates. Barry Burden, in investigating presidential candidates from 1960 to 2004, found the largest number (37 percent) were senators, followed by governors (22 percent). Yet, governors were more successful than senators at ultimately winning the nominations. In fact before 2008, the last sitting senator to win the White House was John Kennedy in 1960, though several senators were their party's nominees. Senators may be disadvantaged as presidential candidates because they often have a lengthy voting record that may be turned against them, and the greater number of senators running may mean that the list contains more mediocre candidates than the shorter list of gubernatorial contenders. Of course, presidents seeking renomination and vice presidents in quest of their own bids were particularly successful at winning the nomination.

Candidates vying in the first three nomination cycles of the 21st century did not deviate much from the career paths of the candidates in previous decades, as the listings in Table 2.1 show. Senators were the most typical candidates, but a good number of governors ran as well. Breaking a bit from past patterns, senators were equally as likely as governors to ultimately win their party's presidential bid. Thus the victors in these three election cycles were Texas governor George W. Bush, Vice President Al Gore (and former Tennessee senator), Massachusetts senator John Kerry,
Arizona senator John McCain, and Illinois senator Barack Obama.

Six candidates tried for the presidency from a current or former post in the House of Representatives, though most were considered second-tiered candidates due to lower visibility and fundraising totals. Some fit the mold of issue advocacy candidates, who use the presidential campaign to spread specific political messages or to advocate for core constituency groups. Thus, in 2008 Republican California representative Duncan Hunter ran on the issue of border security, and Republican Texas representative Ron Paul espoused a libertarian approach to conservatism. Only Richard Gephardt, the leader of the Democratic Party in the House, was considered a strong contender for the presidency, and his unsuccessful 2004 bid was his second try at the White House. Besides the lower visibility of House members to senators, all House members are up for reelection during presidential election years, while senators often run for the presidency in years they are not seeking reelection.

Among candidates from other positions in the 2000–2008 election cycles, the strongest contender was former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani. As mayor of New York City during the 9/11 attacks Giuliani had the level of name recognition often found for the more famous senators. A flawed campaign strategy of avoiding the initial contests for a decisive victory in the Florida primary imploded when Giuliani finished third in that contest. Wesley Clark was a retired four-star Army general when he ran for the 2004 Democratic nomination, and his inexperience in electoral politics led to amateurish mistakes. Meanwhile, Gary Bauer served in the Reagan administration and with various religiously conservative interest groups. Alan Keyes also served in the

### Table 2.1 Last office held by candidates, 2000–2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals who ran</th>
<th>% in each category</th>
<th>Success rate for each category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>1 (3%) 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>1 (3%) 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Bush, Dean, Romney, Huckabee, Richardson</td>
<td>5 (14%) 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>Bradley, McCain (2), Hatch, Smith, Edwards (2), Kerry, Lieberman, Thompson, Obama, Clinton, Biden, Dodd, Gravel</td>
<td>15 (43%) 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Kasich, Gephardt, Kucinich (2), Hunter, Paul</td>
<td>6 (17%) 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Forbes, Keyes (2), Clark, Sharpton, Giuliani, Bauer</td>
<td>7 (20%) 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: List includes candidates who remained in the race at least until the Iowa caucuses. N = 35; success rate = # nominees/# contenders. Numbers in parentheses indicate a candidate ran multiple times in these years.
Reagan administration and as a political commentator. His 2008 bid was his third try at the presidency, and he also failed three times to win a seat in the U.S. Senate. Finally, Al Sharpton is a civil rights activist and political commentator. These last three fit the mold of issue advocacy candidacies, using the campaign to spread a specific message, rather than having a realistic chance of winning the nomination.

Two women other than Hillary Clinton declared themselves as candidates for president in the past three election cycles, both leaving the race before the first ballots were cast. (A number of male candidates also announced plans to run for president but withdrew before the first primary.) Elizabeth Dole sought the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. She was the former head of the Red Cross and had served as both the Secretary of Labor and Secretary of Transportation in the Reagan administration. Yet, Dole had never run for public office before. While she scored high in the national public opinion polls, she was unable to translate this into a successful fundraising organization. Some analysts also report Dole did not receive as much media coverage as her poll standings would warrant and that the coverage she did receive paid more attention to her personality and appearance. Dole withdrew from the race on October 20, 1999. Carol Moseley Braun was the first female African American senator, but she served only one term representing the state of Illinois. She withdrew from the 2004 Democratic contest on January 15, citing a lack of funds and name recognition.

Three other women have been candidates for the two major parties' presidential nomination and two have been the vice presidential nominees. In 1972, Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman to serve in Congress, garnered 3 percent of the vote in the Democratic primaries. In 1976, Ellen McCormack ran as a pro-life candidate in the Democratic primaries, winning 2 percent of the vote. Maine senator Margaret Chase Smith was the first woman to have her name formally placed in the bid for a major party's presidential nomination, when she received nominal support at the 1964 Republican convention. In 1984, New York representative Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman nominated by a major party for the vice presidential slot. She joined former vice president Walter Mondale on the Democratic ticket. Thus, Alaska governor Sarah Palin was the second female vice presidential candidate.

Before 2007, no woman had been a frontrunner for a major party's presidential nomination. Hillary Clinton would be the first to do so. Still, as a woman she faced obstacles that her male colleagues did not. The words that we use to describe a president are those we often associate with men, such as being tough and assertive, while women are stereotyped as compassionate and passive. Female leaders in many fields beyond politics face the bias of either being perceived as competent but cold or less competent but kindly. Thus Clinton worked hard to build an image consonant with our expectations for a president. She was successful. The public perceived her as
qualifying to be the nation’s commander-in-chief, but at the same time, Clinton struggled against the image that she was cold and calculating.

Barack Obama also was not the first African American to run for a major party’s presidential nomination. Alan Keyes sought the support of religious conservatives in his bids for the Republican nomination. Other African American candidates have vied for the Democratic slot. As mentioned previously, two African American women sought the Democratic nomination: Shirley Chisholm and Carol Moseley Braun. In 2004, Al Sharpton, a minister and civil rights activist, ran in the Democratic primaries, but won only 2.4 percent of the vote. Prior to Obama, the most successful African American candidate was Jesse Jackson, also a minister and civil rights activist. In 1984, Jackson won 18 percent of the primary vote. In 1988, Jackson finished second among all candidates, winning seven primaries and four caucuses. Jackson’s strategy was to create a “Rainbow Coalition” of minority, poor, and liberal voters. Jackson won primaries in states where a large proportion of the Democratic electorate was African Americans and in caucuses where liberal whites were a larger proportion of the attendees. However, in the last round of primaries, when the race narrowed to Michael Dukakis versus Jackson, Dukakis won all but one primary by a two-to-one margin. The exception was the Washington, DC primary. Thus, before 2008, no African American candidate had been able to expand his or her base to win the support of a large number of white voters.

Sometimes the contest is decided not so much by what the candidates do as by who decides not to run. If former vice president Al Gore had decided to run for the Democratic nomination in 2008, he may have cut into Hillary Clinton’s base. A leading contender for the 1992 Democratic nomination was New York governor Mario Cuomo, until he formally announced he would not run late in December 1991. Similarly in 1995, former general Colin L. Powell, Jr. was a frontrunner in public opinion polls for the Republican nomination, but he declared on November 8 that he would not run.

We know that the typical presidential nominee will be a senator, governor, or vice president. We are less able to tell which of these types of politicians will actually run for the presidency. Even those candidates who declare their intentions to run do not know exactly who their competitors may be. Some politicians wait until fairly late to officially declare their quest for the nomination, though they may have been more quietly sizing up their chances of winning. Some people expected to run decide not to. Other politicians might declare they are running at an earlier point, but finding out they lacked support or resources quit the race before the first primary. The number of candidates running for the presidential nominations also varies widely. If a president is seeking renomination, he or she is likely to face few challengers. In the opposition party, the number of declared candidates may be six, seven, or even more. Who finally
runs and who becomes a strong candidate are two factors often established during the invisible primary season.

**The (Not So) Invisible Primary**

The year (or two) leading up to the presidential election is awash with campaign activities. Various candidates test the waters, making preliminary excursions to early primary and caucus states, forming exploratory committees to test their ability to raise campaign funds, and conducting their own public opinion polls to uncover what the public likes and dislikes about them. In 1976, journalist Arthur Hadley coined the phrase the “invisible primary” to describe this pre-election year activity. While some journalists and party activists pay attention to these initial candidate efforts, most Americans give little heed to this early stage of the competition. Only when the election year arrives and candidates run in the primaries and caucuses does the general public become interested. Yet, the invisible primary is no longer so hidden. In part because of the front-loading of the primary calendar and the greater need for early money and name recognition, candidate activities in the pre-election year have become more visible. Even the structure of this campaigning has changed. In 2007, more than a dozen candidate debates were held on each side of the partisan divide: 17 for the Democratic candidates and 15 among the Republican contenders. The goal of candidate activity in the pre-election year stage is to garner the resources, in terms of money, endorsements, and public recognition, that will facilitate victories in the election-year primaries and caucuses.

**Gathering the Money**

From the 1970s through the 1990s, the fundraising strategies of the candidates were molded by the campaign finance laws established by the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971 and modified in 1974 and 1976 with amendments. This legislation set up contribution limits (originally $1,000 per person but in 2008, $2,300) for all candidates seeking federal (e.g., president, Congress) offices. In reaction to the Watergate scandal, the 1974 legislation set up a system for public (i.e., government) funding of presidential elections. For the fall presidential election, the federal government would provide a set sum of money to the Democratic and Republican candidates, and these candidates would be limited to using these funds for their campaigns. In 1976 it was $20 million; in 2008 it was $84 million (only McCain accepted this).

For the primary phase of the presidential election, candidates may seek to qualify for federal matching funds by first raising $100,000. These funds must be raised in a way to demonstrate a wide appeal. Thus, to qualify for federal matching funds a candidate
must raise $5,000 in contributions of $250 or less in 20 states. Once a candidate qualifies for matching funds, the federal government matches one-for-one the first $250 of a contribution from an individual donor. The money for the federal matching funds system comes from a voluntary $3 check-off on the federal income tax form. Money from interest groups, in the form of political action committees (PACs), is not matched, and this established a pattern that PACs contribute less than 5 percent of the money raised for the presidential nominations. Once a candidate accepts the matching funds from the government, the candidate is limited in the amount of money that can be spent in each state, and the entire amount that can be spent nationwide. In 2008 this nationwide limit was $42 million.

With one exception (John Connally in 1980), all major candidates for the presidential nomination accepted federal matching funds through 1992 even though accepting federal funds limited campaign strategies. Individual state limits could be circumvented to some extent with accounting tricks, such as renting the cars used in the New Hampshire primary campaign in Boston rather than Manchester. The overall national limits were more of a hindrance to successful candidates. In 1996, Bob Dole spent most of his allowed money to win the nomination, leaving him no money for campaigning during the summer months before the Republican convention. 20

In 1996, self-financed candidate Steve Forbes used mostly his own money ($37 million) to run his campaign, and thus, was not subject to the spending limits for any particular primary. This allowed him to spend more heavily in individual states. In 2000, George W. Bush declined government matching funds. Steve Forbes ran a second time, again spending mostly his own money. George Bush’s $60 million raised in 1999 was seen as an astonishing feat and gave him enough money to vigorously campaign in every state and to come back from the setback of losing in New Hampshire. By 2004, both Howard Dean and John Kerry declined the government funding. In 2008, few serious candidates accepted matching funds and the spending restrictions that went along with them. 21

The largest amount of federal money went to John Edwards, $12.8 million, which was 22 percent of his $58.4 million total. Edwards’s acceptance of federal funds was seen as a sign of weakness in his campaign.

Most of the money, even for candidates accepting federal matching funds, comes from contributions from individual Americans. Candidates have several strategies for raising these funds. Fundraising events, such as dinners, cocktail parties, or other gatherings, are used to attract initial donors or contributions from more wealthy donors who can contribute the maximum amount (again, $2,300 in 2008). Campaigns also employ networking, eliciting wealthy individuals to make their own contributions but also to contact their friends and acquaintances to make contributions. In the 1980s and 1990s, candidates wanting to solicit small contributions resorted to direct mail tactics, which
are expensive and slow, or set up a 1-800 number. By 2000, the internet had supplanted these techniques, and candidates could now cheaply and quickly raise campaign funds in small sums from a large number of people.

Figure 2.1 shows how the 2000–2008 major candidates raised their campaign funds. The sums are divided into three time periods: the invisible primary (pre-election year), the competitive primary stage (usually through Super Tuesday), and the post-competitive primary phase (e.g., a quasi-general election period where one presumptive nominee begins to campaign against the opposite party’s presumptive nominee). In the graph for 2000, Bush's commanding lead in fundraising during the invisible primary stage is very apparent. He raised more in the year before the election than McCain did during the entire election cycle. Most of McCain’s fundraising came early in the election year, when he was doing well in New Hampshire, but even then he could not catch up to Bush’s totals. Steve Forbes’s numbers included mostly his own money. The Democratic “money primary” in 2000 was more evenly matched. Gore and Bradley raised similar amounts at similar time intervals. A significant proportion of the post-competitive primary money for these two candidates was the awarding of the government matching funds, which lags behind money coming in from individual contributors. Bush’s post-competitive primary fundraising enabled him to start the fall campaign against Gore during the spring and summer months. This was a definite advantage over Gore who had accepted federal matching funds and was subject to an overall limit in spending. Because of the edge Bush gained in the quasi-fall election campaign, fewer candidates in the next two election cycles would accept federal matching funds and their limits.

In 2004, the largest proportion of Kerry’s money was in the postcompetitive phase, after he secured the nomination and was beginning the quasi-fall election campaign in March. Early fundraising showed a lead for Dean, but not by much. Kerry once he started to win the early contests also garnered more money, making it even more difficult for other candidates to remain competitive. Even though President Bush had no competition in the 2004 primary phase, he could raise private funds. In Figure 2.1, his totals are simply divided into that raised in the pre-election year and that raised in the election year. His campaign was able to use this money for the quasi-general election campaign against Kerry in the spring and summer of 2004.

By 2008, most of the major candidates were no longer accepting the government matching funds, so they could raise as much money as possible in every phase of the competition. This money is overwhelmingly private contributions from individual Americans, and more of it is now coming over the internet. Some of the money raised by candidates is in large contributions, close to the $2,300 maximum and some of it is in small contributions of less than $200. About 50 percent of Clinton’s early money was
Figure 2.1 Candidate fundraising by period, 2000–2008. Source: Federal Election Commission.
in large contributions and another 25 percent in sums over $1,000. Only 33 percent of Obama’s early funds were at the maximum level, and 32 percent came in amounts of less than $200, as did 14 percent of Clinton’s. With a larger number of small donors, Obama could resolicit more of his contributors later in the primary season. Clinton’s campaign, despite the large sums raised, became strapped for cash at crucial stages in the campaign, and she gave her campaign two personal loans that totaled to $11.4 million. Overall, both Clinton and Obama were highly successful campaign fundraisers, and this helped to foster the long nomination battle between the two.

Money raised during the 2007 invisible primary stage on the Republican side was even less predictive of the ultimate outcome. Romney raised $90.1 million but $35.4 million was his own money. Giuliani raised $61 million, and McCain raised only $40 million. Further McCain overspent during the early months of 2007, and he had only $3 million in cash-on-hand at the end of December. Some scholars have found that it is the December cash-on-hand figures that best predict the winning candidate in the presidential primaries, but the Republicans in 2008 were certainly an exception to this pattern.

The quest for campaign funds during the invisible primary stage is certainly an important component of any presidential nomination. In many years, the frontrunner in campaign funds does win the nomination. The internet had democratized this quest for campaign funds. Most Americans can easily access candidates’ webpages, and by 2008, the first screen encountered was a request for campaign funds. The internet replaced earlier attempts to equalize access to campaign funds through the use of the federal matching fund system. Yet, the internet will not replace all traditional methods of campaign fundraising, because candidates need to make a name for themselves before Americans will want to search for the webpages and make contributions.

Endorsements: The Voice of the Party Elite

The party elite still plays a role in presidential nominations, despite the dominance of presidential primaries for selecting delegates attached to the presidential candidates. The party’s governors, senators, House members, and various other state and local government office holders may choose to endorse candidates during the invisible primary stage. Political scientists Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller demonstrated that these endorsements are meaningful indicators of whether the party elite is coalescing behind a single candidate and making this candidate the frontrunner going into the primary election year.

George W. Bush’s 2000 campaign is their classic example of the party elite coordinating on a single candidate during the invisible primary season. Half of the Republican governors supported Bush’s nomination in early 1999, and all but one would endorse
him by the end of the year. Bush was the successful governor of Texas, and the Republican governors were pushing for the nomination of one of their own. Along with their endorsements, the governors introduced their key fundraisers and supporters to Bush. Other major Republican contributors also began to back Bush and help solicit still others to make contributions as well. In fact, Bush was able to do much of his early organization from Texas, as the party’s elite flew to Austin to meet with him. All of this activity was a major reason that Bush was able to raise so much money during the invisible primary stage. But the process was about more than just money. Bush also was gaining the support of key leaders among the party’s economic and religious wings. By the close of the invisible primary, not only was Bush endorsed by the party’s governors, but he was the recipient of 65 percent of the endorsements from other party leaders. In contrast, John McCain had the second highest endorsement total, but at a mere 10 percent. Still, even if the party’s elite coordinates behind a single candidate, that candidate must win the support of the party’s voters in the caucuses and primaries.

The party elite does not always coordinate behind one candidate during the invisible primary season. In 2004, Cohen et al. found only 5 percent of the Democratic governors made an endorsement, and those that did split their support among several of the major candidates. With the party elite undecided, the early victories of John Kerry in Iowa and New Hampshire were significant in convincing both voters and the party elite to rally behind him. The Republican Party elite also were divided in 2008. None of the top three candidates, McCain, Giuliani, and Romney, was acceptable to leaders from all factions of the party. And none of these candidates was able to dominate among the early elite endorsements. Without an elite consensus in these two years, the public voting in the primaries and caucuses became even more decisive in selecting the presidential nominee.

On the Democratic side in 2008, Hillary Clinton garnered much of the early support from party leaders in 2007, even the support of some of the party’s African American leaders. Barack Obama had less of the early support among the party elite, because he was so new on the national scene with only two years of experience in the Senate. Yet, Obama did receive some significant early backing from important fundraisers, campaign professionals, and party activists. Still, many party elite, especially the elected officials, did not endorse Obama until after his initial caucus and primary victories. In 2008, the Democratic Party elite may have changed its mind midstream, but not until Obama proved his public popularity during the visible primary season.

*Early Public Preferences*

The American public also has a voice during the invisible primary through the numerous public opinion polls taken during the pre-election year. The public’s responses to the earliest polls, those taken a year or more before the election, refl
the preexisting national reputation of the candidates. Thus, the early stages of the preference polls reflect the name recognition of the candidates. Among those with high name recognition are national candidates from a previous election year, such as the party's previous presidential or vice presidential nominees. Sitting vice presidents and some senators also have high name recognition. Other candidates will need to build a base of support through speeches, rallies, or participation in candidate debates. Most of the public will not be paying close attention to these activities, but occasional news reports, especially if they consistently present positive information on a candidate, will filter through and begin to alter public preferences.

To see how these early public preferences played out in the 2000–2008 nomination battles, we will look at the responses to a Gallup poll question:

I'm going to read a list of people who may be running in the [Republican/Democratic] primary for president in the next election. After I read all the names, please tell me which of those candidates you would be most likely to support for the [Republican/Democratic] nomination for president in the year [2000, etc.].

The Gallup question continues with a listing of the major contenders. The relevant answers will be from those survey respondents who identify themselves as favoring one party over the other. Thus preferences for the Republican candidates will come from those respondents who say they are Republicans or independents that tend to favor the Republican Party. Likewise, preferences for the Democratic candidates will be shown from those respondents who identify themselves as Democrats or independents leaning toward the Democratic Party. These polling questions begin to be asked with some frequency about two years before the actual election.

The presidential nomination contests from 2000 to 2008 show three types of patterns in early public preferences and their relations to public opinion during the election year. Both the Democratic and Republican contests in 1999–2000 reveal a clear frontrunner during the invisible primary, as shown in Figure 2.2. Further, these early frontrunners kept their lead once the actual primary voting began. On the Republican side, Elizabeth Dole was in second place during the invisible primary, but she dropped out in October due to a lack of funds. John McCain's national support rose with his early primary victories, but he never came close to Bush's totals. On the Democratic side, Gore's advantage over Bradley in the invisible primary only grew larger in 2008 as Gore won in the primaries and Bradley did not. In these two election cycles, the public's preferences did not change much—the early leader maintained a commanding edge throughout the invisible and visible primary stages.

A different pattern is found for public preferences for the 2004 Democratic and 2008
Figure 2.2 Candidate standings in the Gallup polls, 2000–2008.

Source: Gallup polls accessed through the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Republican contests. The early phase is a jumble. The Democratic leader in 2003 was often Joe Lieberman, mostly because he was recognized as the party's vice presidential candidate from 2000. Kerry was close but faded in mid-2003. Wesley Clark took over first place when he entered the race but his support quickly fell off. The public was unsure of its preferences until Kerry won Iowa and New Hampshire, and then his support skyrocketed. The same thing happened for McCain in 2008. Once he started winning in the primaries, his support in the public opinion polls shot up. McCain, too, had a rough patch in the mid-section of the invisible primary stage before his support started to inch upward in late 2007. The Republican leader in 2007 was often Giuliani, buoyed by his reputation as a strong leader after the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York City. But Giuliani failed to win in the actual primary contests in 2008. Huckabee and
Romney did gain ground in late 2007 and during the early primaries, but failed to keep up with McCain. The mixed preferences during the invisible primary stages in these contests laid the stage for one candidate to take off during the primary phase by winning crucial early events.

The Democratic contest of 2008 presents a third pattern. Hillary Clinton clearly led in the invisible primary stage polls. For the most part, Clinton outpaced Obama by 10 percentage points or more. Clinton’s support did not decline in 2008, but it did not grow by much either. Her support fluctuated between a bit below to a bit above 40 percent. Not quite the majority support that would lead to a nomination victory. This left the door open for Obama to gain support. After a steady state of 20 percent throughout most of 2007, Obama’s support began to grow in the last twomonths of that year. His caucus and primary victories in early 2008 led to a quick upswing. Obama tied with Clinton in the national polls after Iowa, but Clinton retook the top spot after her win in New Hampshire. In early February Obama again led in the national polls, but Clinton briefly reclaimed the lead after her victory in the Pennsylvania primary. Finally, at the end of May and in the last stage of the visible primary season, Obama gained the support of 53 percent in the national public opinion polls. The 2008 Democratic race endured throughout the entire primary season because for the most part, Clinton held onto her base, which was quite substantial. Thus, Obama had to win over even more supporters to overtake Clinton’s lead.

The national polls show three different types of contest: 1) a distinct frontrunner from the invisible primary stage who remains the frontrunner during the election year, 2) an invisible primary stage with no clear frontrunner, and when one candidate begins to win a number of the early primaries and caucuses, support for this candidate rockets, and 3) a candidate catching up with the initial frontrunner and eventually surpassing her. While there are three distinct patterns, all have one aspect in common. In all of these nominations, national public opinion reacted to the results of the primaries and caucuses. Success in the primaries affects the preferences of the party’s supporters nationwide.

The Two-Tiered Nomination Process

Once the election year commences, two simultaneous processes determine the nomination outcomes. On one level is the national race: a competition between the candidates for a winning image. Candidates who do well in the primaries will gain in the national polls, or if they are a frontrunner, maintain their lead. Candidates who do well are often said to be gaining momentum, which gives them the assets to win subsequent events. Momentum candidates receive more coverage from the media, and
this coverage is often positive. Momentum candidates also receive more campaign funds, and the internet allows them to garner these new campaign funds more quickly. Momentum also causes voters in future primaries to change their minds about the candidate, perhaps switching preferences from another candidate or more likely moving from a “don’t know” stance to support for the advantaged candidate. On the other side of the coin, candidates who do poorly drop out of the race. Thus, some voters have to change their minds because their preferred candidate is no longer in the race. The second competition is the delegate race. Through the primary and caucus results candidates accumulate the support of the national convention delegates. This second competition is the one that legally determines the party's nomination. Both the national race and the delegate race are determined by the outcome of the primaries and caucuses.

As will be discussed more in Chapter 3, the election-year battle begins with the Iowa caucuses in early January or February. In Iowa, hearty souls tromp through the winter snow and ice to attend a weeknight neighborhood meeting. On the Democratic side, the candidate preferences of those who attend these neighborhood caucuses determine the selection of representatives to go on to higher level meetings, where delegates to the state and national conventions will be chosen. In the Republican caucuses, a straw poll is taken of candidate preferences, but these preferences are not directly tied to the selection of delegates. Turnout in these caucuses is small in terms of both absolute numbers and the percentage of the Iowa electorate. In 2008, the Iowa Democratic caucuses attracted 339,000 participants while 119,188 Republicans attended their caucuses. Iowa’s voting age population in 2008 was 2,294,375, so the combined turnout at the caucuses was only 16 percent of the eligible electorate. This turnout level is lower than most presidential primaries, though it is higher than any other caucus.

The real importance of the Iowa caucuses is for the national race, not the delegate race. The Iowa caucuses, and the New Hampshire primary, receive disproportionate amounts of media coverage. In fact, by some counts these initial events receive one-fourth or more of the total media coverage given to the primaries and caucuses. Thus, the outcomes are magnified. An early victory can provide a candidate with momentum for the upcoming primaries, as happened with John Kerry in 2004. As Table 2.2 shows, four of the last five candidates (excluding Bush’s renomination in 2004 from this count) claiming the ultimate nomination prize won the Iowa caucuses. The sole exception is John McCain in 2008, who averred he was not competing in them. On the Republican side, several leading candidates over the years have not competed in the Iowa caucuses. Thus, when McCain’s early ventures into Iowa in 2007 did not pay off in increased support, he removed Iowa from his strategy and concentrated on the New Hampshire primary instead. The media tend not to fault candidates for doing poorly in an event if the candidate claims not to be campaigning in the state. However, if a
Table 2.2 Primaries and caucuses won by nominees, 2000–2008

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<th></th>
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<th>New Hampshire</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>11/16</td>
<td>0/6</td>
<td>9/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>7/16</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>12/20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Includes only U.S. states. 2000 Republican excludes New York primary, which was delegate vote only. Super Tuesday was March 7, 2000. 2004 Democrats excludes early Washington, DC primary which did not award delegates. Super Tuesday date was March 2, 2004. 2008 Democrats excludes Michigan and Florida primaries which were originally stripped of all delegates. Other competitive primaries for Republicans included those primaries after Super Tuesday still contested by Huckabee until McCain accumulated 50 percent of delegate total. Super Tuesday was February 5, 2008.
candidate makes a state a key to his campaign, as Giuliani did with Florida in 2008, and then does not win this event, the media judgment will be harsh.

Winning the Iowa caucuses is hard work. Candidates need hundreds of volunteers to help them get their supporters to the caucuses. Campaign volunteers place phone calls, go door to door, and send e-mails to potential supporters urging them to participate in the caucuses. Candidates hold frequent campaign events in the weeks before Iowa. With not too much effort, an interested Iowan could attend a rally for Obama on one day and shake hands with Edwards on the next day. In the weeks before caucus night, Iowa’s television and radio stations are saturated with candidate commercials. Money and organization are key to winning Iowa, but precise predictions of the outcome are impossible to devise. Who will actually attend, the distribution of candidates’ supporters across 1,600 election precincts, and whether attendees will change their minds at the last minute all make caucus night tense for the candidates and their handlers.

The New Hampshire primary follows close on the heels of Iowa. In 2008, for the first time only five days separated the two events. New Hampshire is another state that receives the intense retail politics of numerous candidate visits. Media coverage is again intense. The electorate, however, is larger in a primary than a caucus. On the Democratic side, 287,557 voters participated in the 2008 New Hampshire primary and on the Republican side, another 239,328 voted, for a turnout rate of 51 percent. Still the number of New Hampshire voters is dwarfed by the four million voters participating in the Texas primary and the nearly eight million in California. Once again, it is not the size of the electorate or the number of delegates awarded that makes a victory in New Hampshire important. It is the media attention that such a victory garners.

Two of the last five presidential nominees failed to win the New Hampshire primary, so winning a party’s nomination is possible without winning in New Hampshire. Yet, each of the eventual nominees won at least one of the first two contests. The last candidate to secure the presidential nomination and lose in both Iowa and New Hampshire was Bill Clinton in 1992. The Iowa caucuses were not crucial in that year because Iowa’s Senator Tom Harkins was a candidate and dominated those contests.

With the Iowa and New Hampshire results, the attrition process begins in earnest. Those candidates who do poorly begin to drop out of the contest. Many of these candidates have simply run out of campaign resources. They often lagged behind in campaign funds to begin with and needed an early victory to refresh their campaign coffers. A prolonged campaign, without winning results, has other costs as well. Most of these candidates are career politicians who will need to work with the party in governance or in future campaigns. Prolonging an intraparty battle when it is unnecessary can hurt the reputations of these office-seeking politicians. Thus, they tend
### Table 2.3 The attrition game

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exit date</th>
<th>Candidate name</th>
<th>Candidate type</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Reason for exit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rep: 2000</td>
<td>Orrin Hatch</td>
<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Iowa/New Hampshire</td>
<td>Last in Iowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/26/2000</td>
<td>Gary Bauer</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Iowa/New Hampshire</td>
<td>Placed fourth in Iowa, fifth in New Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/9/2000</td>
<td>Steve Forbes</td>
<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Other Early</td>
<td>Selected Delaware as key primary and then lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/2000</td>
<td>John McCain</td>
<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Super Tuesday</td>
<td>After Super Tuesday too far behind in delegate totals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal exit</td>
<td>Alan Keyes</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Post-Competitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem: 2000</td>
<td>Bill Bradley</td>
<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Super Tuesday</td>
<td>After Super Tuesday had no primary victories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/2000</td>
<td>Dick Gephardt</td>
<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Iowa/New Hampshire</td>
<td>Iowa loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4/2004</td>
<td>Joe Lieberman</td>
<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Other Early</td>
<td>No victories in early primaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/11/2004</td>
<td>Wesley Clark</td>
<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Other Early</td>
<td>Won only one (Oklahoma) out of eight early primaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/18/2004</td>
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<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Other Early</td>
<td>No victories in first nine primaries, left after losing Wisconsin primary</td>
</tr>
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<td>3/15/2004</td>
<td>Al Sharpton</td>
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<td>Post-Competitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/22/2004</td>
<td>Dennis Kucinich</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<td>Gary Bauer</td>
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<td>Selected Delaware as key primary and then lost</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Super Tuesday</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alan Keyes</td>
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<td>Post-Competitive</td>
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<td>No formal exit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dem: 2000</td>
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<td>Dem: 2004</td>
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<td>Office seeking</td>
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<td>Office seeking</td>
<td>Other Early</td>
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<td>3/15/2004</td>
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</table>
to leave the presidential nomination race quite quickly once their campaigns falter. As shown in Table 2.3, in almost every recent election contest, some candidates drop out immediately after the Iowa caucuses or New Hampshire primary. Other candidates, however, do not drop out of the race as quickly. These candidates are better described as advocacy candidates. They have little realistic chance of winning the nomination but are campaigning to highlight a particular political philosophy or to represent a core constituency group within the party. These advocacy candidates often are able to run low cost campaigns, relying on debate participation, campaign stops, and media coverage, rather than expensive campaign commercials, to promote their causes. Also since these advocacy candidates tend to come from positions other than high elective offices, they are less concerned about their reputation among other party elites. Thus, advocacy candidates often remain in the race, sometimes even after another candidate has attained the delegate total needed to secure the nomination.32

Every presidential nomination victory depends upon winning more than the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary. A second phase of the primary and caucus calendar includes a few more early events. The number of these contests and the number of days covered by these contests varies by election year. Frequently, candidates who failed to win in Iowa or New Hampshire will channel their resources into one of these contests hoping for a victory somewhere. Sometimes they fail to win the victory, as was the case for Forbes in 2000. In which case, the candidate exits the nomination contest during the other early primary phase. Even if a candidate wins one of these events, she or he may have spent so much time and resources on this contest that they are ill prepared to contest the multi-state Super Tuesday which follows.

By the time the nomination contest reaches Super Tuesday, the weaker candidates have been culled from the field. With the increasing frontloading of the presidential primary calendar, Super Tuesdays have become more frequent and larger. In 2008, nearly half the states chose February 5 for their primary or caucuses. Some commentators turned to calling it Super Duper Tuesday or Tsunami Tuesday to reflect its size. Returning to Table 2.2 shows that in three of the last five competitive nomination contests, the race, for all practical purposes, came to a close on Super Tuesday. In 2000, the early frontrunners of Bush and Gore bested McCain and Bradley, with Bush winning two-thirds of these contests and Gore all of them. Similarly in 2004 Kerry won 90 percent of the Super Tuesday contests, closing out the contest for that year. In all three cases, these candidates swept the remaining primaries and caucuses that occurred after Super Tuesday during the "post-competitive" period.33 In 2008 McCain, while not winning in the caucuses, did win two-thirds of the Super Tuesday primaries. As Huckabee remained in the contest after Super Tuesday, a short "other competitive" primary period occurred. Yet, McCain won almost all of the events during this period, and Huckabee dropped out in early March, leaving McCain to sweep the
“post-competitive” primaries. Only the 2008 Democratic contest remained competitive throughout the full primary and caucus calendar, as Obama and Clinton split primary results on Super Tuesday and in the “other competitive” primary stage.

The multi-state victories by these candidates on Super Tuesday set into motion the delegate accumulation contest. The Super Tuesday contests are numerous and include some of the largest states with the most delegates at stake. A candidate who wins on Super Tuesday adds a large number of delegates to his or her column. After Super Tuesday, most of the other candidates lag behind the frontrunner. The gap in the delegate totals is now enough to convince most of the remaining serious presidential contenders to leave the contest. In fact, a delegate lead equal to 25–30 percent of the delegate total needed for nomination is often sufficient to convince the remaining office-seeking candidates to leave the field. Thus, in four of the five competitive nomination races we have examined, for all practical purposes, the race came to a close immediately after Super Tuesday. In 2000, McCain and Bradley drop out; in 2004, John Edwards bows out; and in 2008, Romney exits the race. Mike Huckabee did not concede the 2008 Republican race to McCain immediately after Super Tuesday. Yet, McCain soundly defeated Huckabee in the next round of primaries and by March 4 had won the needed 50 percent of the convention delegates. The top portion of Figure 2.3 shows how McCain continually added to his delegate totals, while Romney and then Huckabee fell far behind before dropping out of the nomination contest. In five of the six nomination contests since 2000, Super Tuesday results gave one candidate a sizable lead in convention delegates and most of the remaining contestants soon bowed out.

The sole exception in the last three election cycles was the 2008 Democratic contest, and the bottom portion of Figure 2.3 shows how Clinton’s and Obama’s delegate totals kept pace with one another throughout the campaign. Hillary Clinton had planned her campaign strategy around a dramatic Super Tuesday victory that would lead the remaining candidates to leave the contests. After all, this was the pattern of recent years. But she and Obama split the primaries on Super Tuesday and Obama won the caucuses. Coming out of Super Duper Tuesday, Clinton and Obama had almost identical totals among the pledged delegates allocated according to electoral contests results: 625 for Clinton, 624 for Obama. Clinton still had greater support among the unpledged superdelegates, composed of the party elite such as members of Congress and high party officials. Thus Clinton led in total delegates: 818 to 730. Yet, one or the other candidate would still need to win more than 1,200 additional delegates to garner the support of the 50 percent of the Democratic delegates needed to secure the nomination.34

Obama’s strategy of contesting the caucuses and being prepared for the post-Super Tuesday contests gave him momentum in the second half of February. He took the
delegate lead on February 12, but only by a margin of 42 delegates. Momentum shifted back to Clinton with important primary victories in early March in Ohio and Texas. With so many of the primaries scheduled for the front of the primary calendar, no state held a primary between March 12 and April 21. A three-week campaign led to another Clinton victory in Pennsylvania. The two candidates split the remaining primaries. At the close of the last primaries on June 3, Obama led Clinton in delegates by only 233 delegates: 2,156 for Obama and 1,923 for Clinton. Yet, Obama had surpassed the magic number of 2,118 delegates needed to win the nomination. The 2008 Democratic contest lasted to the last round of primaries because neither Obama nor Clinton was...
able to draw sufficiently ahead in the delegate count to convince the other to withdraw. Obama won only one more primary than Clinton in 2008, but he won all but one of the 14 caucus states. Other than the Iowa caucuses, most candidates ignore the caucus states. Turnout is low and hard to predict. Television advertising dollars are better spent in primary states where more actual voters will see them. Caucus states require a lot of grassroots mobilization. In 2008, however, two candidates did pay attention to these caucuses, with different results. The delegates Obama won in the caucus states helped him put together the narrow delegate margin that won him the nomination. Romney on the Republican side also spent time and money in the caucus states and he won most of these. Romney, however, failed to put together a convincing string of primary victories. He won only three, and all were “home states.” Romney won in Massachusetts, where he had been governor; in Michigan, where his father had been governor; and in Utah, with its many Mormon voters. Candidates are expected to win in such states, and so do not receive much credit from the media when they do so.

The presidential nominations for the Democratic and Republican parties are won through a two-tiered system. At one level, candidates compete for public support in a national race, where primary and caucus results serve to bolster the fortunes of some candidates and lead others to withdraw. At the second level, convention delegates are allocated to the presidential candidates based on the results of the primaries and caucuses. When one candidate can claim the support of 50 percent of these convention delegates, that candidate will be assured of being formally nominated for president at the party’s national convention. Yet in many cases, even before one candidate secures 50 percent of the delegates, most of the other candidates have withdrawn.

**Changing Technology, Changing Campaign Strategies**

The way that candidates campaign for the presidential nominations is affected as much by changes in technology as by the rules created by the parties and the dates chosen by the states for their primaries or caucuses. Each new technology is incorporated into candidates’ strategies. In the 1930s, Franklin Delano Roosevelt distributed phonographic records to potential supporters, as well as writing letters and placing telephone calls. Reliable and more available airline travel after World War II allowed Harold Stassen to crisscross the country in an early attempt to center a nomination bid on primary victories. In the 1970s, campaign consultants began to develop the lists of names that would be the basis for direct mail campaigns. These consultants would send out hundreds of thousands of letters in hope that a small percentage of recipients would return a campaign contribution averaging $25. Increasingly these consultants were able to hone the list of names to be able to send potential donors tailormade
appeals based on interest in specific issues or causes. Direct mail fundraising tended to work better for more ideological candidates and for contacting older Americans. In the 1980s, candidates sent out videotape cassettes to potential donors and likely voters in key contests. During his 1992 presidential bid, Jerry Brown frequently recited his 1-800 toll-free telephone number to solicit campaign contributions.\(^{37}\)

The internet is increasingly used to obtain small campaign donations. John McCain in 2000 was the first to successfully employ this technique. The internet has a number of advantages over previous methods for soliciting small campaign contributions. Foremost, candidates do not have to identify potential donors in advance, as they did with direct mail. Fundraising on the internet is inexpensive and results can be quick. Further, candidates' webpages do more than solicit contributions. These webpages provide a wealth of information about a candidate's background and issue positions. Vignettes of supporters can convince others with similar characteristics to make contributions. Sites include video clips of speeches, retransmissions of television commercials, and made-for-the-internet videos to get the candidate's message out to the American public.

The internet will not replace traditional forms of fundraising. Candidates will still seek out wealthy individuals who can solicit their networks of friends, business associates and acquaintances for campaign contributions. Individual donors can give only a bit more than $2,000 as their individual contribution to a candidate, but they can bundle together ten, twenty, or thirty $2,000 contributions from their friends and associates, as well. In addition, candidates will continue to raise funds by holding $2,000-a-plate dinners or $500 per person cocktail parties.

New technology is used for more than raising campaign funds. In 2004, Howard Dean used the internet to recruit volunteers and facilitate communications among supporters. Followers were encouraged to join chat rooms, to write blogs and create webpages in support of Dean, and to use facilities such as Meetup.com to organize their own campaign events. By 2008, social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace took center stage. Candidates had their own sites on these networks, with the public being granted automatic listings as supporters. Facebook would even report running tallies of the number of supporters for each candidate. At times, candidates may even lose control over their messages and images on the internet. Anyone can create webpages, blogs, or Facebook groups in support of or opposition to a candidate. Anyone can upload a video to YouTube. E-mail chains pass along fact and fiction about candidates and their positions.\(^{38}\) The internet is a two-edged sword for the candidates. It allows them direct access to the public for fundraising and conveying their campaign messages. The internet, however, allows anyone to present her or his own interpretation of the candidates, including images that the candidates may not like.
Today candidates use a combination of new, old, and improved technology to reach out to voters, activists, and contributors. Candidates hire consultants who specialize in conducting public opinion polls and holding focus group sessions. Other consultants shape a candidate's advertisements using the latest knowledge on effective communications whether it be for broadcasting on television, airing on radio, or streaming over the internet. Public speeches and rallies are staged. Store-front headquarters are established in states with upcoming primaries or caucuses to recruit and organize the activities of local volunteers. Candidates are well prepped for candidate debates and important media interviews. Modern political campaigns are multifaceted and ever-evolving organizations.

**Third-Party Nominations**

Every year the general election ballots listing the contenders for the U.S. presidency contain more names than those of the Democratic and Republican candidates. In recent years, the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, and the Reform Party, among a host of other minor parties, have their candidates' names listed on at least some of the 50 states' presidential ballots. Most of these candidates are nominated by a convention.

A basic tension within these minor parties is the pull between wanting to nominate a candidate with broader name recognition who can draw in new votes for the party versus wanting a candidate who is more strictly in line with the party's issues. One of the best examples of a minor party nominating a more recognized name is the Green Party's selection of consumer advocate Ralph Nader as its presidential nominee in 1996 and 2000. In the latter year, Nader won 2.7 percent of the popular vote, and some felt that Nader cost Al Gore votes in key states. In 2008, both the Libertarian Party and the Green Party selected candidates who had formerly served in Congress as a member of one of the two major parties. The Libertarian Party nominated former Republican Georgia congressman Bob Barr on the sixth ballot. Those who opposed Barr felt that he did not sufficiently represent the party's positions on all the issues. In a less contentious convention, the Green Party nominated another former Georgia representative, former Democrat Cynthia McKinney. The Reform Party, which spun off from Ross Perot's two self-financed runs for the presidency in 1992 and 1996, experienced a particularly divisive convention in 2000. The candidate who won the nomination would be entitled to $12.6 million in campaign funds from the federal government due to the number of votes Perot had accumulated in 1996. (The Democratic and Republican party candidates in 2000 each received $67.6 million for their fall campaigns.) The Reform Party held a mail-in primary in July followed by a convention in August. Political commentator Pat Buchanan, who formerly ran for the Republican nomination in 1992 and 1996, vied off against John Hagelin, who had been
the Natural Law Party candidate in 1992 and 1996. Buchanan supporters felt he would bring new energy to the party, while his detractors feared Buchanan would put too much emphasis on social conservatism. The Reform Party convention broke down into factions. When Buchanan won the nomination, Hagelin and his supporters broke with the party and eventually merged back in with the Natural Law Party. Buchanan and the Reform Party won .4 percent of the fall presidential election vote, and Hagelin .08 percent.40

Nomination Controversies
The three cycles of presidential nominations at the start of the 21st century produced candidates for the Democratic and Republican parties that were both typical and atypical. In electoral background, they all shared the experience of serving as a governor or senator. Their personal backgrounds were more rich and diverse. Yet each was nominated under the same system of contesting primaries and caucuses across the 50 states (and a few territories) to win the support of the party's national convention delegates. Each also was competing to win the support of the American public. While at least one of these pairs of candidates would have to lose in the fall general election, all six nominees received a substantial portion of the presidential vote. None lost in a landslide, and each won the support of approximately 90 percent of their own party's voters. The primary-dominated system produced candidates acceptable to a large majority of their party's voters.

Yet, the primary-dominated nomination system has its critics, and various controversies arise in each nomination cycle. The close race in 2008 between Obama and Clinton provoked disagreements over how to handle states that did not conform to national rules in scheduling their primaries. As the race lasted into April and June questions began to arise on whether the party's delegate allocation rules were needlessly prolonging the battle. On the other hand, Republican voters in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Oregon did not have much say in the 2008 nomination, as McCain had secured enough delegates to be the presumptive nominee before their states voted. Finally, what does it mean that the strongest candidates abandoned the federal campaign matching funds system that had shaped nomination politics since the 1970s?

Notes
1 "How He Did It," Newsweek, November 17, 2008, 49.


5 Mayer, "The Presidential Nominations;" 29.

6 Mayer, "The Presidential Nominations;" 18.


10 Steger, "Presidential Renomination Challenges in the 20th Century;" 18.


15 Other Republicans leaving the 2000 race early included former Tennessee senator Lamar Alexander, former vice president Dan Quayle, and political commentator Pat Buchanan who left to pursue the Reform Party’s presidential nomination. Early 2008 withdrawals on the Republican side included Kansas senator Sam Brownback, Jim Gilmore former Republican governor of Virginia, Tom Tancredo Republican member of the House of Representatives from Colorado, Tommy Thompson former Republican governor of Wisconsin, and on the Democratic side Thomas Vilsack former governor of Iowa.


21 Accepting federal matching funds in 2008 were John Edwards, Christopher Dodd, Joe Biden, Dennis Kucinich, Tom Tancredo, and Duncan Hunter. Declining federal matching funds were Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, Mitt Romney, Rudy Giuliani, Mike Huckabee, Ron Paul, and Fred Thompson.


26 Cohen et al., *The Party Decides*, 177, 338–44.


28 Gallup poll results were obtained from the Roper Center’s ePoll, using the key words “Republican and nomination” or “Democratic and nomination” for the two years preceding each election.


33 In 2004, Howard Dean won his home-state primary in Vermont after he had withdrawn from the race.

34 Norrander, "Democratic Marathon, Republican Sprint," 49.

35 The 2008 Democratic race also included caucuses in American Samoa, Democrats Abroad, Virgin Islands, and Guam. Clinton won in American Samoa while Obama claimed victory in the other three. Texas held both a primary and a caucus, with Clinton winning the primary portion and Obama winning the caucus delegates.

36 Cohen et al., *The Party Decides*, 100.


38 Matthew Hindman, "The Real Lessons of Howard Dean: Reflections on the First Digital Campaign;"


The Republican Primary Season: Strategic Positioning in the GOP Field
Chapter 3. The Republican Primary Season: Strategic Positioning in the GOP Field

Michael John Burton

In the congressional elections of 2010, centrist Democrats were soundly defeated and Republicans gained control of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Grand Old Party (GOP) was riding high with a new breed of Republican legislator. Many of the incoming members identified with the conservative Tea Party movement, vowing to carry their uncompromising principles to Washington. President Barack Obama called the defeat a “shellacking.” On the Sunday newsmaker program, Face the Nation, veteran CBS correspondent Bob Schieffer lamented, “The middle has fallen out of our politics. Democrats elected to next year’s new Congress are more liberal than those in the current Congress and the Republicans more conservative.”

President Obama looked vulnerable. A June 2011 survey showed that only 30 percent of Americans believed the economy was improving. At the beginning of 2012, traders placing bids through the political market exchange Intrade.com gave the president just even odds for re-election. If, as Republicans believed, the political climate was favorable, a conservative voter anticipating an Obama loss might think beyond a GOP candidate’s “electability” and toward the candidate’s commitment to conservative ideals. On the other hand, the GOP is a broad-based party. Many Republicans embrace center-right values. A more centrist candidate might offer the best combination of good public policy and prospects for success in the general election. For these voters, a line of second-tier conservative candidates attacking the center-right contender would merely threaten the ultimate goal: defeating Democrats. Those who held the two perspectives agreed that the president was vulnerable, but diverged as to the wisest path to victory—go right or run up the middle—and so the threat of a volatile primary season loomed.

The volatility played out in three distinct phases.

1 The pre-primary stage, when candidates announced their entry into the race and began pitching themselves to the electorate, especially voters in Iowa and New Hampshire.

2 The early-state battle, when those two states, along with South Carolina, effectively winnowed the field of candidates.

3 The months-long, three-way competition, in which candidates who survived the first two phases of the primary season fought to win more states and accumulate more delegates on their way to the Republican National Convention.
The Pre-Primary Stage

Several potential candidates stayed out of the presidential race. Political talkshow host and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee chose not to repeat his 2008 effort. Former Florida governor Jeb Bush, son of one president and brother of another, deflected speculation that he would make his own run. Haley Barbour of Mississippi, who had chaired the Republican National Committee in the 1990s before becoming a governor in the next decade, took a pass. Senators Marco Rubio of Florida and John Thune of South Dakota were not running. Indiana’s governor, Mitch Daniels, budget director under President George W. Bush, declined citing family reasons. An early poll showed arch executive and reality-show star Donald Trump tied for first place, but Trump decided to remain in the business and entertainment sectors. Despite public pleas for Chris Christie to join the fray, the governor declined, saying in a tweet: “New Jersey, whether you like it or not, you’re stuck with me.”

Two Republican candidates took a wholly different path. Charles (Buddy) Roemer of Louisiana went independent, but ended his campaign for president in May 2012; former governor Gary Johnson of New Mexico became the Libertarian Party’s nominee and earned 1 percent of the vote in the general election. Neither candidate had a realistic chance for the Republican nomination. Former Utah governor Jon Huntsman’s candidacy was more serious. President Obama had appointed Huntsman as ambassador to China, where Huntsman served until returning home to explore a White House run. Huntsman could reasonably be expected to capture centrist Republicans while his opponents fragmented the conservative vote. Unfortunately for Huntsman, his campaign never seemed to get organized. His announcement event at the Statue of Liberty might have been intended to look Reaganesque, but the camera angles were wrong, the crowd was sparse, and press credentials misspelled the candidate’s first name. Huntsman demonstrated he did not fully grasp the nature of the contemporary GOP when, at a January debate, he chose to make a point in Mandarin Chinese (which he speaks fluently).

Much early talk centered on Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota. Pawlenty had been a successful governor, reliably conservative, and well spoken. He seemed a good fit for Republicans in neighboring Iowa and indeed the former governor focused campaign efforts there. Perhaps to overcome concerns about his low-key style—Would the governor be tough enough to confront the president?—Pawlenty used an appearance on Fox News Sunday to conflate Romney’s health care plan with Obama’s program by characterizing the administration’s Affordable Care Act as “ObamneyCare.” However, face to face with Romney in a debate the next day, Pawlenty declined to repeat his attack. Faltering on the assault conveyed the very picture of weakness Pawlenty needed to overcome. Finishing third place in Iowa’s celebrated Ames Straw Poll...
motivated Pawlenty to withdraw from the race.

Among Pawlenty’s competitors in Iowa was fellow Minnesotan Michele Bachmann, who enjoyed the unique fortune of having been born in the Hawkeye State. Whereas Pawlenty seemed contemplative, Bachmann came to national awareness at the end of the 2008 campaign cycle when she called on journalists to investigate “the views of the people in Congress and find out are they pro-America, or anti-America.” In 2011, Bachmann gained praise from some leading Iowa conservatives. She won the Ames Straw Poll in August with more than 28 percent of the vote over nine other candidates. (Romney did not participate.) But after Ames, media attention fell away. Bachmann’s focus on Iowa precluded campaigning in other states and her verbal gaffes were frequent. Staffers would soon be quitting the campaign.

Governor Rick Perry of Texas—a solid candidate with a folksy style backed by high-powered data analysis—was next to gain traction. Perry stole Bachmann’s thunder by announcing his candidacy the day of her Ames win. (A pre-announcement write-in campaign gave Perry a smattering of the vote.) Perry’s strength in opinion surveys and on the stump faded, however, after he started campaigning. A handshake politician, Perry found himself in a battle fought with policy pronouncements and debating skills. Many Republicans thought Perry was too lenient on immigration, and in a November debate, he slipped badly. “It’s three agencies of government when I get there that are gone,” Perry declared; unfortunately, the Texas governor was unable to get past the second item on his list. After some back and forth, the moderator asked, “But you can’t name the third one?”; Perry responded, “The third agency of government I would do away with—the education, the uh, the Commerce and let’s see. I can’t the third one. I can’t. Sorry. Oops.” Combined with allegations that his family’s hunting camp greeted visitors with a racial slur painted on a rock, the “oops” moment ended realistic expectations of a Perry nomination.

Perry’s decline made room for business executive Herman Cain, who most famously had been chief executive of Godfather’s Pizza. With ready quips and a cheerful smile, Cain energized crowds by offering simple solutions like his “9-9-9” tax plan to radically change the structure of federal revenue. Cain’s supporters were looking forward to a general election battle between two African American leaders. But the businessman’s campaign disintegrated quickly. Allegations of sexual misconduct seemed to stun the candidate. Video of a newspaper interview showed Cain struggling with foreign policy: “Okay, Libya. President Obama supported the uprising, correct? President Obama called for the removal of Qaddafi. Just want to make sure we’re talking about the same thing before I say, ‘yes, I agree’ or ‘no, I didn’t agree.” Cain suspended operations at the beginning of December.

The pre-primary season, it seemed, was generating one fl awed candidate after another
without proceeding to the more politically tenable Governor Romney. Romney had support from members of the GOP establishment, a national network, and access to money. Still, with Herman Cain on his way out, public attention turned not to Mitt Romney but to 1990s-era Georgia Member of Congress and former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich.

The Early-State Battle

As the voting began in 2012, Gallup found that the volatility Republicans saw in 2011 was "truly historic." GOP candidates were moving up and down the polls like never before. In early 2011, there had been reason to believe Romney might eliminate the competition by the end of January 2012. If nothing else, he appeared to have the right background and experience. Romney’s father, George Romney, had been a respected industry executive and Republican governor of Michigan. The junior Romney had extraordinary success with his private equity firm Bain Capital. He had governed Massachusetts, a state that leaned heavily Democratic, and still managed legislative success. He had been called to rescue a troubled Salt Lake City Olympics, and by most accounts he did just that. In 2008, he ran a respectable presidential campaign. While Iowa might have been a disappointment that year—heavy spending on Iowa advertising brought Romney only 25 percent of the caucus vote—hard-won lessons in local politics and organization learned in the 2007–2008 cycle would be valuable in 2011–2012.

The main problem Romney faced was his mixed record on policy. Over the years Romney had seemed to be on both sides of environmental issues, gay rights, and abortion. His signal achievement as governor was the passage of comprehensive health care financing reform. In order to compete for votes among conservative and Tea Party voters he would need to emphasize the conservative aspects of his career. Sometimes, his positions sounded centrist and conservative at the same time, as with his statement that illegal immigrants should not be deported, but should “self-deport”; however, as noted in the New York Times, self-deportation as a policy objective “has been advocated for years by restrictionist and conservative groups and is central to tough laws passed in Arizona, Alabama and South Carolina, among other states.” When his conservative credentials were questioned in early 2012, he reassured attendees at the Conservative Political Action Committee that he “was a severely conservative Republican governor.”

The rightward shift seemed to work. In late November 2011, after the field had largely sorted itself, Politico reported on the expectations game playing out on the Intrade.com markets: “[A] 70.6 percent chance [for Mitt Romney] to win the nomination, followed by
Newt Gingrich (12.2 percent), [Ron] Paul, [and] Herman Cain (3 percent).” Yet, Romney could not seem to vanquish his opponents. The battle seemed like a never-ending fight between Romney and someone else, with the identity of "someone else" in constant flux. Gingrich was replacing Cain as Romney’s top competitor and a survey of Iowa voters showed Gingrich in the lead with 31 percent, Romney trailing with 17 percent, a point ahead of Ron Paul. A poor showing by the governor in Iowa might position one of Romney’s adversaries for victory in New Hampshire and then South Carolina, at which point the nomination might slip away.

**Iowa Caucuses**

In summer 2011, Gingrich seemed less than fully engaged—some said his travels looked more like a book tour than a presidential campaign—and the former speaker’s image as a partisan warrior was diminished by reports of lavish personal spending. Taking a European vacation in the midst of his campaign was odd behavior for a presidential candidate. Many staffers quit and most of the press corps wrote him off. But Gingrich had a second chance at the nomination with the departure of Bachmann, Perry, and Cain. Former Alaska governor and 2008 vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who had been coy about a possible bid as she visited key states, was out of the running as of October 2011. And so, toward the end of the year, attention returned to Gingrich.

It was opportune timing, close as it was to the start of early-state voting. If he did well in Iowa, the momentum might carry him through New Hampshire, before moving down to friendly territory in South Carolina. A Gingrich sweep to the nomination was at least thinkable. The problem for Gingrich was that this logic was visible to everyone. Opponents had to stop the “Newtmentum”; Gingrich became the main target of attack. Paul charged that Gingrich had lobbied for mortgage giant Freddie Mac, an institution many conservatives blamed for the collapse of the American housing market; Bachmann suggested that Gingrich was an “influence peddler”; Romney made fun of a Gingrich promise to build a permanent moon base.

Together with outside groups, Romney questioned Gingrich’s prospects in the general election. From one commercial: “You know what makes Barack Obama happy? Newt Gingrich’s baggage. Newt has more baggage than the airlines.” Many of the ads run against Gingrich were the product of post- *Citizens United* campaign finance laws which allowed for massive spending in Iowa. (The “baggage ad” was run by Romney-aligned Restore Our Future.) An analysis in the *New York Times* noted that “Mr. Romney has effectively outsourced his negative advertising to a group that has raised millions of dollars from his donors to inundate his opponents with attacks—all without...
breaking the rules that forbid super PAC to explicitly coordinate with candidates.” 17
Gingrich decried the negative ads, but he could not stop them. One estimate held that
anti-Gingrich attack ads comprised 45 percent of all campaign ads in Iowa during the
month of December. 18

Despite the high-profile ad war, on January 3, the day of the Iowa caucuses, retail
politics prevailed. Rick Santorum had been driving around Iowa's ninetynine counties
meeting social conservatives and building the commitments necessary to persuade
voters to spend an evening caucling with fellow partisans. When the votes were
tallied, Santorum and Romney both received just short of 25 percent (roughly the same
share Romney received in 2008). Voters heard that Romney had won by eight votes; but
because Santorum's strong second place was broadly unanticipated, it was Santorum,
not Romney, who ruled the newscasts. Gingrich and Perry trailed far behind. Bachmann,
winner of the Ames Straw Poll, barely registered support; she soon dropped out. By all
appearances, Santorum had won. In something like a victory speech—“Game on!”
Santorum said—the second-place candidate highlighted his conservative convictions:
”[W]hether it’s the sanctity of life in the womb or the dignity of every working person in
America to fulfill their potential, you will have a friend in Rick Santorum.” 19 A few
weeks later, a recount would show that Santorum had actually won the caucuses by a
handful of votes.

New Hampshire Primary
Rick Santorum's conservatism was a bad fit for New England's rock-ribbed electorate.
Many Republican New Hampshireites are pro-choice. License plates embossed with "Live
Free or Die" suggest an openness to the libertarianism of Ron Paul. Jon Huntsman had
bypassed Iowa in favor of the Granite State. Most importantly, southern New Hampshire
lies within the Boston media market and Mitt Romney had a vacation home in the state,
so the electorate had been acquainted with the former Massachusetts governor for
almost twenty years, just as it had known the then senator from Massachusetts, Paul
Tsongas, in 1992 and Massachusetts governor, Mike Dukakis, in 1988—two Democrats
who received strong support in New Hampshire. With only a week separating the Iowa
caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, there was little hope that Santorum could
exploit his Iowa success.

The politics of New Hampshire are driven by mass-media, old-fashioned politicking, and
endorsements, including the coveted endorsement of the Manchester Union Leader. In
November, near the zenith of the Gingrich campaign, the Union Leader had cast its lot
with the former speaker. Publisher Joseph W. McQuaid was seeking “conservatives of
courage and conviction who are independent-minded, grounded in their core
beliefs about this nation and its people, and best equipped for the job." McQuaid found that Gingrich had "the experience, the leadership qualities and the vision to lead this country in these trying times." 20 Asked about the endorsement, a Romney spokesperson had nothing to say. 21 A Washington insider publication reported that "[t]he failure to win the board’s endorsement may be a setback for former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney’s campaign which has struggled to win support from Tea Party-affiliated voters and the right-wing of the GOP base." 22 Adding insult to Romney’s injury, the editor of the Union Leader editorial page reportedly "said that the board’s ‘two favorites were probably Perry, Gingrich.’" 23

Nevertheless, Romney had been courting political leaders in New Hampshire for several years and public opinion surveys consistently showed a commanding lead. He would surely win the state, but in an expectations game, a win is a win only when it surpasses some political benchmark. In 1992, Bill Clinton’s rise from sure defeat to second place was counted as a virtual win against Paul Tsongas, who received more votes; Michael Dukakis’ 1988 win was deemed a non-event; and Romney’s performance in Iowa a week before the New Hampshire primary was discounted by Santorum’s unexpected strength.

On Election Day, Mitt Romney held his own. He won New Hampshire with 39 percent of the vote, ahead of Ron Paul, who had 23 percent, and Jon Huntsman’s 17 percent. Gingrich and Santorum each earned less than 10 percent.

**South Carolina Primary**

While Mitt Romney was fighting for New Hampshire, Rick Perry was in South Carolina starting the 2012 attack on Romney’s record at Bain Capital: “They’re vultures that are sitting out there on the tree limb, waiting for a company to get sick. And then they swoop in, they eat the carcass, they leave with that and they leave the skeleton.” 24 The Bain story was fueled by a 28-minute documentary released by Gingrich supporters that savaged Bain Capital and Mitt Romney through the words of former employees of Bain-related firms: “I think he’s a money man. And he’s gonna look out for the money people. ... So you put him in force up there over everything—then what? What’s gonna happen then?” 25 Thus, in an unlikely ideological twist, conservatives Gingrich and Perry were trying to take down the “Massachusetts moderate” by attacking his career in capitalism. Indeed, Gingrich pumped up his attack by marrying the populist shot on Bain with a pro-gun, anti-abortion message. Former New York mayor and 2008 presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani, concerned with the direction of Gingrich’s attacks on capital, felt compelled to ask, “What the hell are you doing, Newt?” 26

The South Carolina campaign would eventually see Gingrich back off on his Bain attacks, Huntsman bow out of the race and endorse Romney, comedian Stephen Colbert
join the fighting in support of Herman Cain, Sarah Palin nod toward Gingrich, Perry drop out and endorse Gingrich, an ex-wife of Gingrich claim that the candidate had requested an “open marriage,” and national-level Republicans become increasingly worried about the long-term effects of internecine warfare. The day before the South Carolina primary, the Iowa GOP announced that Santorum, not Romney, had won the largest number of votes in its caucuses, inching past Romney by a mere thirtyfour votes.

On January 21, Gingrich won 40 percent of South Carolina to Romney’s 28 percent. Santorum picked up 17 percent and Paul received 13 percent. In other words, Romney’s main competitors won a combined 70 percent of the vote. Santorum announced, “I took Iowa, Newt took South Carolina, and it’s ‘game on’ again.”

A Three-Way Competition

Mitt Romney’s network of donors had access to large sums of cash, a fact well known since the beginning of the cycle. The new math, however, included other wealthy supporters helping other candidates. Jon Huntsman, Sr., was using money he earned in manufacturing to assist his son. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson was shouldering much of the burden for Newt Gingrich. Investor Foster Friess was behind Rick Santorum. Politico reported that “[T]he three men are contributing millions of dollars to a trio of outside groups flooding the airwaves in early voting states with brutal ads attacking Romney and ads backing the candidates they would prefer to win the Republican nomination.” The inflow of cash from mega-donors was leveling the playing field, not just against Romney, but among Romney’s several opponents. “I guess if Newt’s got $5 million,” Friess said, “it makes sense that Rick [Santorum] should have a little bit.”

A lot of outside money went to Florida, mostly because Romney and Gingrich were there trying to muscle each other out of the race. Romney said Gingrich had “gone from pillar to post almost like a pinball machine, from item to item in a way which is highly erratic and does not suggest a stable, thoughtful course which is normally associated with leadership.” Ideas like the moon base that might once have been “visionary” were now examples of lunacy. Romney sharpened his message: “If I had a business executive come to me and say they wanted to spend a few hundred billion dollars to put a colony on the moon, I’d say, ‘You’re fired!’” Moral support from Palin did not staunch the bleeding. Gingrich lost Florida by 15 points, and after that election he failed to win any contest until the Georgia primary on Super Tuesday.

Santorum’s Middle American conservatism, however, was winning over voters, first in Iowa and then a month later in Missouri, Minnesota, and Colorado. While many Republicans wanted Santorum to exit the race, the former Senator represented values
that were widely held in the GOP. He was winning states and collecting delegates. The headline of a late February Gallup report told the story: "Santorum Expands Lead, but Romney Gets Electability Vote." Among Republicans, Santorum had a 10-point edge over Romney in terms of candidate preference, 36 percent to 26 percent, but Romney was beating Santorum 58 percent to 32 percent in terms of electability. A Romney supporter would surely have been distressed when Santorum won Alabama and Mississippi, with Gingrich falling slightly behind and Romney coming in third.

It became possible to imagine the race being decided by a floor fight. Santorum and Gingrich evidently considered forming a "Unity Ticket." But the Gingrich-Santorum alliance did not workout—the two candidates, it seems, could not agree who would run for president and who would take the VP slot—and a new entrant in the remaining states or a contested convention in Tampa was implausible, Romney had a problem: at a time when he should have been attacking President Obama and asserting a national vision, he was tethered to primary-style messaging, attacking Gingrich for his record at Freddie Mac and Santorum for courting the Democratic vote in the Michigan GOP primary. "[E]ven as he wins the delegate war," explained Política, "the former Massachusetts governor keeps getting reminders that conservatives are resistant to his candidacy and seemingly immune to the call of electability and inevitability." The race had become a slog.

Though Romney's campaign was unable to execute a quick, decisive victory, its capacity to organize and fund a national campaign effort allowed it to fight for convention delegates in a protracted conflict. In state after state, the three-way war was fought as a series of two-way skirmishes. Florida, for example, was essentially a contest between Romney and Gingrich; Missouri played out as Romney versus Santorum. The southern states of Alabama and Mississippi were unique in that all three major contenders boxed it out together. Even so, the Santorum and Gingrich campaigns were generally forced into selectivity by their relative lack of resources (at least compared to Romney's campaign). They were accumulating delegates haphazardly while Romney, pressing along a broad front, was picking up delegates even when he was not placing first.

Then Santorum, who was battling Romney and Gingrich by talking about his ardent conservatism and working-class roots, started tripping over his words, past and present. Old statements began cropping up, like one from a 2008 speech that would appear in the Drudge Report: "Satan is attacking the great institutions of America, using those great vices of pride, vanity, and sensuality as the root to attack all of the strong plants that has so deeply rooted in the American tradition.... This is a spiritual war." Santorum did not think the "spiritual war" quote was relevant in 2012, but some other Republicans did, and a growing collection of odd-sounding quotations was threatening to mark Santorum as an unacceptable ideologue. In late January, Santorum opined,
“President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob.”

Romney began to consolidate his victory on March 6, “Super Tuesday,” when ten states and the District of Columbia cast their ballots. Georgia was captured by Gingrich, as would be expected for a former Georgia Member of Congress, and Massachusetts supported Romney. But Ohio also went to Romney. If Santorum had won Ohio, Romney would have been in trouble. Such a victory would have shown that Santorum could win a big, complicated state on a day when several other jurisdictions were also in play. But Romney’s victory indicated that money and organization mattered. When all the delegates were allocated, Super Tuesday would grant Romney twice the states and close to four times the delegates as Santorum. Although Alabama and Mississippi gave Santorum a good boost on March 14, Romney started rolling up his opposition the following week in Illinois. Politico observed that “[e]arly exit polls pointed to a Romney-friendly electorate: 37 percent of voters said the top quality they wanted in a nominee was electability”; “Only 20 percent said their priority was finding a ‘true conservative.’” Santorum could no longer compete.

After Illinois, lingering doubts about the outcome of the primary season began to fall away. Jeb Bush endorsed Romney; South Carolina Senator Lindsay Graham said, “I think the primary is over” ; Gingrich downsized his campaign; Santorum left the race on April 10; Sheldon Adelson and Foster Friess announced their support of Romney; Gingrich dropped out; and Romney spent April winning all the contests held that month. The former Massachusetts governor finally pivoted to a national message and the news media started speculating as to whom Romney might choose for a running mate.

**Discussion**

Voting is an expression of deeply held values, to be sure, but it is also a game of chance. A conservative Republican assessing options in a partisan primary might ask, “Which candidate would have the best chance of victory in the general election?” and “Is that candidate sufficiently conservative?” If the most viable candidate is not conservative enough, then the next question might be, “Which of the other, more conservative candidates can win the nomination and then the general election?” The majority view in the 2012 cycle was that Romney had the best general election odds; but if Romney was a “Massachusetts moderate,” then perhaps he could not be trusted to carry the conservative banner. The added risk of supporting a less electable but more conservative substitute might be worthwhile. Time and again during the run-up to the Tampa convention, a seemingly viable alternative to Romney would surge in popularity
until the candidate's value or the campaign's staying power was called into question.

Over the course of the primary season, Romney seldom talked about his accomplishments as chief executive, emphasizing instead the pro-life convictions he developed relatively late in life. Some conservatives thought the claim of "severe" conservatism was hollow. Rush Limbaugh asked, "Severely? I have never heard anybody say, 'I'm severely conservative.'" 39 The arc of Romney's career was opening the candidate to charges that he was insufficiently conservative for the Republican base or too conservative for the political center. Or that his views were chosen out of political ambition. The latter notion was fanned in late March when a key adviser mused about the campaign's transition to the general election: "Everything changes. It's almost like an Etch A Sketch. You can kind of shake it up and we start all over again." 40 The gaffe would live on for months to come. Many of the campaign's gaffes came from Romney himself: Offering a $10,000 bet to show he was correct on a debate point; telling an Iowa voter, "Corporations are people, my friend" 41 ; seeming to imply that he liked firing people; saying his wife owned "a couple of Cadillacs" 42 ; feeling at home in Michigan, because, "You know, the trees are the right height" 43 ; and, when asked about his interest in NASCAR, replying, "I have some friends who are NASCAR team owners." 44

Gingrich helped prepare the foundation for future attacks by questioning Romney's honesty and Perry called on Romney to disclose more of his tax returns. Gingrich and Perry both pressed the attack on Bain Capital. The Obama campaign pounced. As reported in the Wall Street Journal, "The idea ... was to shape voters' impressions with a heavy expenditure before Mr. Romney had the money to do it for himself." "If it doesn't work," said Obama's campaign manager, "we're not going to have enough money to go have a second theory in the fall." The resulting barrage from the Obama operation was so heavy that some prominent Democrats expressed discomfort.

Romney, meanwhile, was gathering Republican rivals into the fold. Perry had offered his endorsement in April; Bachmann, Cain, and Santorum endorsed Romney in May. At the convention in Tampa, Santorum told the assembled delegates that voting for the Republican ticket "will put our country back in the hands of leaders who understand what America can and, for the sake of our children, must be to keep the dream alive." Gingrich used Tampa to host "Newt University:" Sarah Palin endorsed Romney right before the general election. (John McCain was an early Romney endorser.) Ron Paul, however, kept his distance, telling CNN on Election Day, "I don't think there's enough difference between the two candidates, and I assume the victor today will be the status quo." 45

Nevertheless, the Romney campaign emerged from the primary season stronger than it started. Romney's ability to ride through early disappointments, especially in Iowa and South Carolina, demanded more than just high expectations; it required a resilient field
organization, a powerful fundraising network, a core team, big-name support, and a national strategy. Romney polished his stump-speech style and parried ever more forceful thrusts from opponents and the news media. Eight months of formal debates required modes of preparation that would become useful in the general election. And as Governor Romney consolidated Republican support he was able, for the most part, to manage the thorny relationship between Tea Party activists and mainstream conservatives. In Tampa, Governor Romney accepted the Republican nomination, saying, “I do so with humility, deeply moved by the trust you have placed in me. It is a great honor. It is an even greater responsibility.”

Notes


6 Fox News Sunday for June 12, 2011.


8 Hardball, October 17, 2008 MSNBC.


23 Ibid.


29 Ibid.


33 Ibid.


CHAPTER 4

The Electoral College
Chapter 4. The Electoral College

Any book assessing the state of American electoral democracy would be incomplete without a discussion of one of the most controversial and unique aspects of American democracy: the Electoral College. Supporters of many of the other subjects covered in this book, including the frequency of elections, voting for numerous offices, and direct democracy, do so because they believe those aspects of the American electoral system promote more democracy. To its critics, however, the Electoral College is inherently undemocratic. First, there is no guarantee that the majority, or even the plurality, winner of the popular vote will become president. Second, according to the Constitution, there is not even a guarantee that the people will get to vote for president! Each state determines how it will choose its electors. They can do so through a popular vote, as all states currently do, but there is nothing that requires direct citizen input. If a state legislature decides it wants to appoint electors, as many state legislatures did immediately after the ratification of the Constitution, it is free to do so (although it would certainly face massive opposition from the public). As a result, perhaps no aspect of the Constitution receives more criticism than the Electoral College.

And, it should. In this chapter, I examine the arguments made in favor of the Electoral College and point out the flaws with those claims. I then outline the various reforms to the Electoral College that scholars and practitioners have suggested and look at their strengths and weaknesses. In particular, I argue in favor of a plurality election with an instant runoff. However, since the Electoral College seems to be here for the foreseeable future, two reforms are needed to improve the current system: the elimination of both “faithless electors” and the House contingency plan to select a president if no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote. Before laying out my argument, a brief history of how we ended up with such a unique system is in order.

What is the Electoral College? Why Do We Have It?

When you vote in a presidential election you are casting your vote not for a presidential candidate, but for an elector(s) pledged to support that candidate; this is similar to the delegate selection process discussed in the previous chapter. Each state gets a number of electoral votes, equal to their representation in the House of Representatives, plus two bonus electoral votes for Senate representation. So, for instance, California has 55 electoral votes today, while Wyoming has three. The ratification of the Twenty-third Amendment in 1961 gave the District of Columbia three electoral votes as well. With the exception of Maine and Nebraska, each state then normally pledges all of its electoral votes to the person who wins the most votes in the state (as I discuss shortly, Maine and Nebraska divide their electoral votes by
congressional district, and the winner of the state gets the two remaining electoral votes. The first person to get 270 electoral votes (a bare majority) wins.

If no candidate reaches 270 votes, then the election is sent to the House of Representatives. Once in the House, each state gets to vote for one of the three candidates who won the most electoral votes. A candidate must receive votes from a majority of states to be elected. This contingency plan gives the less populated states enormous power because Wyoming has the same influence as California. The Wyoming representative has massive sway because, since Wyoming only has one representative, her vote decides how the state votes; in California, a representative would be only one of 53 votes. The last time an election was decided by the House was in the controversial election of 1824 when Andrew Jackson won both the popular and electoral vote, but failed to win a majority of the electoral vote. Instead, the House elected John Quincy Adams. Given the closeness of the 2000 presidential election, some people worried that the House would decide the outcome of that election.

No other country in the world elects its executive in this manner. Once I had the opportunity to give a talk on the Electoral College to a group of Mexican politicians who were visiting the United States to study its democracy. As I was explaining how the Electoral College worked, I noticed that several of the politicians had quizzical expressions on their faces. I thought that perhaps the translator was not translating what I was saying correctly. After I finished the talk, one of the participants immediately raised his hand to ask a question—or perhaps, more accurately, make a statement. "I don’t understand how Americans can argue that their democracy is a model for others to follow," the politician said, "when they have a process such as this to elect their president." I quickly realized that there was not a problem with the translation after all.

The question is how did the United States end up with a system as distinct as the Electoral College? One might expect that the Electoral College was one of the great debates among the founders at the constitutional convention. In reality, the Electoral College was almost an afterthought. The founders were much more concerned with questions related to states' rights and representation in the legislative branch than they were with the selection of the president.

This is not to imply that the Electoral College was the only proposal put forth regarding the presidential selection process. In fact, other ideas were vigorously debated well before the idea of the Electoral College even emerged. Some of the participants at the convention believed that the Congress should choose the executive, a proposal that convention participants initially passed. After more thought, James Madison, Gouverneur Morris, and James Wilson, in particular, were concerned that Congress selecting the executive would violate the systems of checks and balances and separation of powers that they so strongly supported. "He [the executive] will be the
mex creature of the legislature if appointed and impeachable by that body," argued Morris. Eventually, the rest of the convention agreed and the Congress selection plan was overturned.

Wilson believed that the people should vote directly for the executive. This idea was met with skepticism because there was concern that the average American was not capable of making such an important decision. "The people 'will never be sufficiently informed of characters' to make a good choice," claimed Roger Sherman. Moreover, a direct election did not appeal to less populated states that were concerned that they would be irrelevant in electing the president. Only Pennsylvania (Wilson's home state) ultimately voted for the direct election of the president.

After much frustration and many proposals, the convention finally settled on the Electoral College, initially proposed by Wilson, just two weeks before adjourning. While ultimately adopted, the Electoral College was controversial from the start. Thomas Jefferson called it "the most dangerous blot in our Constitution." Historians Christopher Collier and James Lincoln Collier refer to it as "a Rube Goldberg machine." They write that the Electoral College was "jerry-rigged out of odds and ends of parliamentary junk pressed together by contending interests." Donald Lutz and his colleagues state that "the Convention delegates 'backed into' the final solution," and that "no coherent theory supported this solution." Although not a flawless system, the convention delegates assumed that George Washington would be elected to as many terms as he wanted. Again, they were more concerned with the long-term effects of other issues. And, the Electoral College was an acceptable compromise for both more populated and less populated states. The most populated states benefited from the proposal because they would have the greatest number of electoral votes, but the least populated states received more influence than they otherwise would have under other proposals because of the two "bonus" electors that each state received. Perhaps the even bigger advantage of the Electoral College from the point of view of the less populated states was that the House, again with each state getting one vote, would ultimately decide the election if no candidate received a majority of the electoral vote. Because parties did not exist at the time of the creation of the Electoral College, many delegates believed that the House would regularly decide presidential elections, whenever, of course, Washington decided not to run, because several candidates would likely throw their hats into the ring, making it difficult for any one candidate to receive a majority of the electoral vote.

Arguments in Favor of the Electoral College and Why They Are Flawed

Supporters of the Electoral College generally put forth four main arguments in favor of
the institution:

1. It is consistent with the federal nature of the Constitution.
2. It forces candidates to receive broad support, hence protecting less populated states.
3. It reduces fraud and produces a clear winner in a short period of time.
4. It protects the American two-party system.

I now address each of these claims:

**The Electoral College is Consistent with and Preserves Federalism**

Though the Electoral College may have found its way into the Constitution through the back door, proponents of the system argue that it is grounded in principles advocated at the convention: mainly federalism and separation of powers. I have already noted the founders’ concerns about giving Congress the power to choose the executive, but supporters believe that the Electoral College fits nicely with the founders’ emphasis on creating a federal, rather than national, system of government as well. It allows states to determine their own rules regarding the selection of electors. Paul Schumaker and Burdett Loomis write:

By distributing 436 electors to the states (and the District) on the basis of their populations, it gives great weight to the idea that we are a nation of individual citizens, who should all count equally in holding our presidents accountable through votes. By allocating 102 electors to the states (and the District) simply because they are states, it also recognizes that we are a nation of states, each of which should also count equally in the presidential election process. Arguments that the Electoral College is unfair in giving more value to the votes of citizens of small states are therefore problematic because they assume that we are simply a nation of individual citizens. As a nation of states, each state has a role to play in the process of electing the most powerful national authority.12

The problem with this argument is that the founders did not adopt the Electoral College because they believed it had a federal nature; they adopted it as a compromise between large and small states, slave and free states, and because neither the option of the people nor the Congress deciding the president was appealing to the majority of delegates.13 “The chief virtue of the Electoral College,” writes historian Jack Rakove, “was that it replicated other political compromises that the Constitutional Convention had already made,” not that it promoted federalism.14

Furthermore, it is unclear exactly what the presidency has to do with federalism since it is the only truly national office that is elected; it is congressional representation that is
more in line with the notion of federalism. Finally, were the Electoral College abolished, it is tough to see how federalism would be threatened. Electoral College scholar Neil Peirce sums up this view: "The vitality of federalism rests chiefly on the constitutionally mandated system of congressional representation and the will and capacity of state and local governments to address compelling problems," writes Peirce, "not on the hocuspocus of an eighteenth-century vote count system."\(^{15}\)

**The Electoral College Forces Candidates to Earn Broad Support**

Another argument in favor of the institution is that the Electoral College forces candidates to have broad support from a variety of states, not just the backing of people in the country's urban centers. "The Electoral College is an 'alloy' of popular will," writes political theorist Gary Glenn. "That means popular election of the president through the Electoral College makes popular election fairer to the interests of geographical minorities (small states), and hence elects presidents by broader and more diverse interests than would direct national election. It produces presidents more likely to govern for 'the general good' instead of the will of 'more' of the national popular vote."\(^{16}\)

Yet, there is scant empirical evidence that the Electoral College does what Glenn says it does. Candidates do not win presidential elections by racking up wins in a number of scarcely-populated states; they win by carrying a number of battleground states. A quick look at where a presidential candidate's campaign undermines the "broad support" argument. In 2008, presidential and vice-presidential candidates skipped ten states entirely (presidential candidates McCain and Obama did not make a single visit to 14 states and several others were only visited once).\(^{17}\) Even with the Democratic Party's fifty-state strategy, candidates Obama and Biden failed to make appearances in 17 states.

The number of states ignored by the presidential and vice-presidential candidates in 2008 was actually less than in previous contests. In 2004, presidential and vice-presidential candidates did not appear in 20 states, and eight others received three visits or fewer (mostly by the vice-presidential candidates).\(^{18}\) On the other hand, candidates made 84 trips to Florida, 63 to Ohio, 40 to Wisconsin, and 36 to Pennsylvania.\(^{19}\) In 2000, presidential and vice-presidential candidates visited Florida 61 times, Michigan 43 times, and Pennsylvania 42 times; they never visited Alaska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Rhode Island, Hawaii, Nebraska, Utah, Kansas, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Virginia. Three other states received only one visit and the candidates visited five other states three times or fewer.\(^{20}\) In 1996, Bill Clinton did not visit 19 of the 50 states, while Bob Dole skipped 29 states.\(^{21}\) It is hard to argue that
this is evidence of broad support.

In fact, abolishing the Electoral College in favor of a popular vote election might actually make candidates visit states that they otherwise ignore. Take Alabama, for instance, a medium-populated state that rarely receives visits from presidential contenders. The reason Alabama is not a frequent stop during a presidential campaign is clear; the state is not in play. The Republican candidate will win the state, so there is no reason for either party's candidate to visit. It does not matter if the Republican candidate wins the state with 55 percent of the vote or 75 percent of the vote; he is going to win all 9 of the state's electoral votes. In a popular vote election, it does matter if the Republican candidate wins 55 percent or 75 percent of the vote because all votes are counted in the same pool; every vote matters, so there is incentive to campaign for every vote. Even the Democratic candidate might visit Alabama in hopes of picking up extra votes.

Along with making candidates win broad support, proponents of the Electoral College argue that it protects the interest of less populated states. The argument goes that because each state gets two bonus electors, the less populated states have more influence than they would have under a popular vote election; therefore, less populated states cannot be ignored and their interests can be protected. I just showed that less populated states can be ignored under the Electoral College, but let's assume for a minute that they are not. It is unclear to me exactly what a "small" state interest is. As presidential scholar George Edwards notes, even the least populated states have significant diversity. Furthermore, it is difficult to think of a common interest between less populated states. It is not clear what a state like Wyoming or Rhode Island have in common besides their small populations. Indeed, these states regularly support opposing presidential candidates, indicating that they are more different than alike. If we were going to try to find a common interest between less populated states, I guess one might say that it is agriculture, because most of these states are predominantly rural. It is hard to argue that agriculture interests would suffer, though, if the Electoral College were abandoned. "The market value of the agricultural production of California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois exceeds that of all seventeen of the smallest states combined." Even if there is such a thing as a small state interest, it is not taking a part in presidential elections under the Electoral College. "[N]owhere in the vast literature on voting in presidential elections has anyone found that voters choose candidates on the basis of their stands on state and local issues," writes Edwards. "Indeed, candidates avoid such issues, because they do not want to be seen in the rest of the country as pandering to special interests."
And, why is it that we are only concerned about protecting local interests in presidential elections? If local interests need protection anywhere, it would be in gubernatorial elections. Do you think people in Centralia, IL have the same concerns as the people in Chicago? Yet, residents of Centralia are forced to accept the outcome of gubernatorial elections that are basically decided by a bloc of voters in Chicago. No doubt, just about every state in the Union has a similar example.

Finally, I am not sure why we are so concerned about protecting less populated states in the presidential selection process; they are more than represented in the U.S. Senate. Because of the filibuster and the fact that any bill that is signed into law has to be approved by the Senate, less populated states can hold legislation hostage. There is a reason why Delaware is “the first state;” Delaware’s legislature knew that they were getting a good deal under the Constitution. Interestingly, senators from less populated states rarely vote as a bloc, indicating that there probably are no issues that unite them. Founding Father James Wilson, one of the strongest advocates at the time of a direct vote, said it best: “Can we forget for whom we are forming a government? Is it for men, or for the imaginary beings called States?”

The founders chose to begin the Preamble to the Constitution with “We the People,” not “We the 13 states.”

The Electoral College Reduces Fraud

Another advantage of the Electoral College, according to advocates, is that it reduces fraud and ensures that a national recount crisis will not occur. Imagine if what happened in Florida in 2000 happened on a national stage. The Electoral College makes a national recount moot because it is not the popular vote that matters but the electoral vote. In addition, because so few states influence the outcome of the election, candidates do not ask for recounts, meaning that fraud is contained at the local level.

Writing about the possibility of a national recount, Norman Ornstein states “[T]hree (or four) crises out of more than 50 presidential elections is remarkably small. And the drive for reform, based on the actual crises or the threat of another precipitated by the Electoral College, tends to ignore the crises that could be generated by direct national popular vote for the president.”

If anything, fraud and concerns over recounts are heightened because of the Electoral College. “Direct election would create a disincentive for fraud,” claims Edwards, “because altering an election outcome through fraud would require an organized effort of proportions never witnessed in the United States. And because no one in any state could know that his or her efforts at fraud would make a difference in the election, there would be little reason to risk trying.” Law professor Jamin Raskin concurs. “The fact that we conduct not one national election for president but 51 different contests
for presidential electors creates a recurring incentive for strategic mischief by partisan actors in the states, who need only suppress a relatively small number of votes to swing all of a state's electors—and thereby potentially the entire election—into the desired column," writes Raskin. Furthermore, it is more likely that a state will require a recount than the nation as a whole. A recount was needed in Florida because 537 votes separated Bush and Gore. Recounts could have occurred in Iowa, New Mexico, and Wisconsin as well, because only a few hundred votes separated the candidates. Yet, there was no need for a recount nationwide since Gore had more than a 537,000-vote lead over Bush.

The Electoral College Protects the Two-Party System

If you are a supporter of a two-party system, proponents of the Electoral College assert, then you must back the Electoral College because its abolishment would lead to the rise of competitive third parties. There is no doubt that, because of the winner-takes-all allocation of electors, the Electoral College benefits the two major parties. Eliminating it, however, is not going to lead to the demise of the two-party system in the United States. In elections for other federal, state, and local offices the two-party system remains entrenched; an Electoral College elects none of those offices. There are too many institutional and cultural barriers to a third-party system in the United States, the Electoral College is but one. There is "no reliable, convincing evidence to suggest that changing the presidential election system, in and of itself, would alter significantly the party system in a predictable manner," writes Allan Cigler and his colleagues. "There are simply too many other factors that reinforce our system of two-party dominance beside Electoral College rules."

If anything, third parties may wreak more havoc under the Electoral College. If a strong regional candidate, such as George Wallace, can win enough electoral votes to throw the election into the House, then that candidate will have enormous negotiating power. Wallace won 46 electoral votes in 1968. Had he won a few other southern states and/or Hubert Humphrey defeated Nixon in one or two others, the House would have decided the election.

A Dated Argument

There is one argument in favor of the Electoral College that my students regularly make that definitely no longer holds water. They often reference the founders' concerns that the people would be incapable of making such an important decision as choosing the president. It is problematic to compare the capabilities of today's voters with those at the time of the founding. Information is far more readily available now than it was
back then and empirical evidence indicates that people are capable of casting informed
votes in presidential elections. But, let us assume that people are not casting
informed votes. The Electoral College no longer provides a buffer because all states
today choose their electors via popular vote; informed, engaged elites are not
responsible for selecting electors as some founders had initially envisioned.

**The Reasons for Change**

The most obvious defect of the Electoral College is the fact that, as we saw in 2000, a
national popular vote winner may not win a majority of the electoral vote. Al Gore
defeated George W. Bush by more than 537,000 popular votes, but lost the electoral
vote 271–266. Before 2000, the popular vote winner failed to win the electoral vote
three other times (1824, 1876, and 1888), but it has almost happened several other
times including 1960 and 1976.34 If a democracy is supposed to be “government by the
people,” then it is problematic when the choice of the plurality of voters is not elected
as is the case in every other election—federal, state, or local.

Critics of this argument, most notably public choice theorists, claim that it is impossible
to measure the national popular will. Ballot access requirements may screen out
attractive candidates or the rigors of running for the presidency may do so. In other
words, the choices the voters have may not represent who they really want.
Furthermore, not everyone votes in an election, meaning that the wishes of nonvoters
are not represented in the “popular will.” Both of these claims are true, but they are also
ture for every other office for which Americans are asked to vote. No one seems to
question whether senators, governors, or representatives reflect the popular will of the
people; therefore, I am not sure the argument should apply to the president. The
popular vote in presidential elections reflects the public will of voters based on the
choices with which they were presented, no different than any other elected office in
the country.

Moreover, the Electoral College is inconsistent with the cherished principle of “one
person, one vote.” Under the Electoral College, not everyone’s vote counts equally on a
national level. Because of the two bonus electors, electors in Rhode Island represent
fewer people than electors in New York. Politically engaged citizens in heavily
populated states, then, are disadvantaged simply on the basis of where they live.
Furthermore, some people’s votes count more than others because turnout is not
constant in the states. A vote will count less in a state like Wisconsin or Minnesota
where turnout is traditionally high than a vote in a similarly populated state like
Georgia where turnout is generally low. “States have no interest, as states, in the
election of a president,” writes Rakove, “only citizens do, and the vote of a citizen in
Coeur d'Alene should count equally with one in Detroit.”

The idea of "one person, one vote” has appeared several times in this book. Interestingly, the U.S. Senate violates this notion inherently since representation is equal. Why not argue then that the Senate is undemocratic? Some people do, but one does not have to abolish the Senate to defend the principle of "one person, one vote” for president. Again, George Edwards best sums up the response to the argument comparing “one person, one vote” in Senate and presidential elections. “The Senate is explicitly designed to represent states and the interests within them,” writes Edwards. “The presidency is designed to do something quite different. The president is to rise above parochial interests and represent the nation as a whole, not one part of it.”

Another problem with the Electoral College is that with the current winner-takes-all rules used in 48 states and the District of Columbia, the Electoral College discourages participation. The state of Kansas, for example, has voted for the Republican candidate in every election since 1964, when all but the Deep South and Arizona voted for Democrat Lyndon Johnson. As a result, Kansas is ignored in presidential elections. Voters are not encouraged to go to the polls there the same way that they would be in the neighboring state of Missouri, whose electoral votes are usually up for grabs. Recall that in the Calculus of Voting equation, potential voters consider the probability that their votes will matter when deciding whether to participate. In Kansas and many other states in the Union, the presidential election is not in play, so the incentive to vote is minimal. In a competitive popular vote election, the votes of people in uncompetitive presidential election states will matter, giving people a reason to participate. Indeed, research finds that voter turnout is greater in battleground states than in non-battleground states, either because of the perception that a vote matters more in a battleground state or because voters are exposed to more information about the candidates.

Finally, again because of the winner-takes-all rules, the Electoral College exaggerates the winning candidate’s victory. In 1980, Ronald Reagan barely won 50 percent of the vote, but carried more than 90 percent of the electoral votes. Clearly the electoral count is not a true reflection of public support. Advocates of the Electoral College argue that an exaggerated electoral vote victory is positive, because it gives the president a better opportunity to claim a mandate. The problem is that there is little evidence that presidents who win the electoral vote count in a landslide are any more successful than presidents who win by a closer margin; or, conversely, that presidents who win the electoral vote count by a slim margin are less successful than those with a significant electoral vote victory.

A brief word must be said about one argument made by people, mostly Democrats, who support abolishing the Electoral College, which does not pass muster. Many Democrats
have long believed that the Electoral College was biased in favor of Republicans; the fact that Al Gore won the popular vote but lost the electoral vote further solidified this feeling. It is true that Republican candidates generally win more states than Democratic candidates, but Bill Clinton and Barack Obama did quite well under the Electoral College. Moreover, had George W. Bush lost Ohio in 2004, we would have seen 2000 all over again, only with the results reversed. Bush would have won the popular vote, but lost the electoral vote. In fact, Kerry consultant Mark Mellman’s research indicated that the Electoral College favored Kerry over Bush. Even in the 2000 presidential election that renewed the controversy over the Electoral College, preelection polls made it appear that George Bush would win the popular vote, but lose the election (the opposite of what actually happened). In sum, there is no compelling evidence that the Electoral College favors one of the major parties over the other.

**Attempts to Reform the Electoral College**

Because of the issues just raised, no aspect of the Constitution has received more calls for amendment than the Electoral College. The controversy surrounding the Electoral College has led to more than 700 separate proposals for either amending or entirely abolishing the institution. It would obviously be impossible to discuss every plan, and many of them are redundant, but I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of some of the most prominent ideas.

**Amending the Electoral College**

There are many scholars and practitioners who believe that the basic framework of the Electoral College is sound, but that the institution needs some tweaking. Perhaps the most common reform for amending the Electoral College is the district plan. Indeed, two states—Maine and Nebraska—already use this system for allocating their electors. Under the district plan, supported by James Madison at the Constitutional Convention, the candidate who wins the plurality vote in each congressional district obtains that district’s electoral vote and the candidate who wins the statewide vote receives the two bonus electoral votes given to each state because of senatorial representation. The rest of the Electoral College remains intact. The argument in favor of the district plan is that it makes the Electoral College more reflective of the nationwide vote. There are heavily Republican areas in California, for instance, as are there strongly Democratic districts in Texas. Under the current winner-takes-all system, these areas do not matter. It makes little sense for a presidential candidate to campaign in a state that he knows he is going to lose. Under the district plan, a candidate might actually visit states that he otherwise would ignore because certain
Congressional districts are competitive or benefit the candidate's party.

One problem with the district plan, however, is that it does not eliminate the possibility that the plurality vote winner could lose the election. Indeed, if the district system had been in place nationwide in 1960, Richard Nixon would have defeated John Kennedy, the popular vote winner, by 33 electoral votes instead of losing to him by 84 electoral votes. Al Gore would have lost the electoral vote by an even larger margin in 2000 under a district system, while still winning the popular vote. Moreover, allocating electors by congressional district would make the redistricting process discussed in Chapter 7 (of the featured book) even more political as parties would push for drawing districts that would benefit their presidential candidates. Finally, it is likely that such a plan would simply create battleground districts instead of battleground states. California may have Republican districts and Texas Democratic districts, but there would still be little incentive to visit those districts because most are strongly in favor of one party or the other.

A similar reform to the district plan is the proportional plan, which was rejected by voters in Colorado in 2004. Under this proposal, again, the crux of the Electoral College remains in place, but electoral votes would be allocated proportionally, based on the popular vote in a state. In other words, if a state has 10 electoral votes and Candidate A receives 60 percent of the vote and Candidate B the remaining 40 percent, then Candidate A wins 6 electoral votes while candidate B wins 4; under the current system Candidate A wins all 10 votes. This is a clear example, but not all election results would be as clean. Pretend Candidate A won 65 percent of the vote and Candidate B won 35 percent. Would Candidate A then win 6.5 electoral votes? Would you round up or down? If so, then Candidate A would receive 7 electoral votes and Candidate B 4, but there are only 10 electoral votes. You can see how complex such a system could be. While it would be complicated to allocate the electors in a proportional system, certainly it can be done. As I stated in the previous chapter, delegates during presidential primaries are often allocated proportionally.

The most obvious advantage of the proportional plan is that the electoral vote would be more reflective of the popular vote, even more so than under a district plan. As under the district plan, a proportional plan might encourage candidates to visit states they otherwise would not. For example, now it would matter if a candidate won 40 percent of the vote in a state instead of 30 percent. And, candidates would no longer just visit competitive congressional districts as they would under the district plan.

Although these are positive aspects of the proportional plan, there is one major problem. Allocating electoral votes proportionally would make it extremely difficult for a candidate to receive a majority of the electoral votes because minor party candidates would no longer be shut out. A third-party candidate who receives 10 percent of the
vote in a state would receive 10 percent of the state’s electoral votes, which in a close race could be enough to throw the election into the House of Representatives. If electors were allocated proportionally, then half of the presidential elections between 1956 and 2000 would have ended up in the House. This percentage likely would have been even greater because, in reality, third-party candidates were hurt by the winner-takes-all rules. If a proportional system had been in place, then minor party candidates would have done better because people would be less likely to feel that they were wasting their votes. This would make it even more difficult for one candidate to receive a majority of the electoral vote.

Having a candidate fail to win a majority of the electoral vote leads to one of two undesirable results. First, a third party can essentially hijack an election unless one of the two major party candidates meets its needs. For example, in 1968, George Wallace could have received significant concessions from either Hubert Humphrey or Richard Nixon in return for support from Wallace’s electors. A fringe candidate then would have determined the outcome of an election and received who knows what kinds of promises from the incoming administration. If a third-party candidate did not instruct his electors to support one of the two major party candidates, then, as I noted earlier, the election would be decided in the House of Representatives where each state receives one vote, regardless of its population. It is hard to think of a less democratic solution than Wyoming and Delaware having as much influence as California and Texas in determining who the president will be. If a proportional plan were to be enacted, then states should require a threshold that candidates must pass to win electoral votes, as the Democrats do in their presidential primaries and caucuses. The problem is that once a threshold is implemented, then the vote is not a true reflection of the people thereby eliminating the main advantage of the proportional plan.

**Abolishing the Electoral College**

While the district and proportional plans each have some positives, ultimately they still keep the thrust of the Electoral College intact. Under each plan, the notion of “one person, one vote” would still be violated. Therefore, the only acceptable solution is to abolish the Electoral College. The question is: if the Electoral College is abolished, then what would replace it? The obvious answer is a popular vote election that is used in all other federal elections, but there is considerable debate among advocates of eliminating the Electoral College regarding the rules of a popular vote election.

One possibility would be for the candidate with the most votes to win the election. This election would look no different than most of the elections in the United States. An advantage of a plurality vote winner election is that it is most consistent with the
principle of “one person, one vote;” every person’s vote counts equally. From a democratic standpoint then, this suggestion might be fairest. The problem with the plurality vote winner proposal, however, is that a candidate could win the election with the support of a small fraction of the public. If several viable candidates decided to run, then a candidate who receives one-third or even one-quarter of the vote could win. This could result in the election of an extremely polarizing figure who has strong support among a minority of voters. The chance of a fringe candidate being elected is a concern, but I am not convinced that the possibilities of such a candidate being elected are as great as some have argued. With the exception of Louisiana, every gubernatorial election in the country uses this system and it works well. Parties keep the number of viable candidates to a minimum, and rarely do you see a gubernatorial candidate elected without significant support. Moreover, the Electoral College does not ensure a majority vote winner. Not only can a candidate win the electoral vote but lose the popular vote, candidates who win the electoral vote can be elected with far less than a majority of the popular vote. Bill Clinton carried only 43 percent of the popular vote when elected in 1992; Abraham Lincoln won less than 40 percent of the vote on his way to victory in 1860. In fact, in roughly 40 percent of the presidential elections since 1824 the winning candidate did not receive a majority of the vote.

One way to get around the problem of popular vote winners not receiving a majority is to hold a runoff election. I discussed this possibility as it relates to the reform of the presidential nomination process in the previous chapter. Under such a system—used in the state of Louisiana for example—the top two vote winners would face each other in another election several weeks later. The advantage of a runoff would be that, like under the plurality vote system, all votes would be counted equally, but the winner could also claim support from the majority of voters. However, the downside of this reform is that it would extend an already too long election season and infuse even more money into presidential elections. Two candidates would likely have to spend obscene amounts of money three times during the year (to win the primary, to get into a runoff, and to win the runoff). Often, the runoff would simply be a repeat election of the previous election held, because there are almost always only two candidates who have a legitimate chance of winning, although it is possible that more legitimate candidates would emerge since the Electoral College would be abolished. For example, in 2000 the runoff would have been a repeat of the race between Al Gore and George W. Bush. In other words, voters would have been exposed to another month of campaign commercials and stump speeches from the same candidates who they had probably already heard too much from. As noted in the preceding paragraph, winning presidential candidates often do not receive a majority of the vote, making the possibility of a runoff likely.

One solution to this problem is to hold an instant runoff vote (IRV). Again, under this
system a candidate would have to win a majority of the vote to be elected, just as she would under the previous proposal mentioned, but a separate runoff election would not take place. Instead, voters would have the opportunity to rank-order their preferences and vote totals would be recalculated until one candidate emerged with a majority of the vote. There are potential problems with an IRV as well. First, IRV might be more confusing to voters who are not used to casting a ballot for more than one candidate for an office. The information costs of voting might increase as well because an IRV would likely encourage more candidates to run for office, as would the two previous reforms, meaning that instead of studying the positions of two candidates, voters might have to consider the positions of three, four, five, or more candidates. Another concern with IRV is that some of the voting systems discussed in Chapter 6 might not be compatible with allowing people to rank-order their candidate preferences; and even if they are compatible, they still would be more likely to confuse voters. One final concern among some people with IRV, as opposed to a plurality election or a regular runoff, is that it would undermine the two-party system. The winner-takes-all rules of the Electoral College virtually guarantee that only a Democrat or Republican can win. IRV would encourage more third-party candidates or candidates of the two major parties who did not win the nomination, but choose to run as independents, because no longer would a person’s vote be wasted. For example, people could comfortably vote for Ralph Nader because Al Gore would not be hurt by their vote (assuming they voted Gore as their second choice).

Of these potential problems, the only one that concerns me is the compatibility of voting systems. IRV may initially confuse some voters, but it is not an overly difficult concept to understand. The number of candidates may increase, but I am not sure to an unmanageable amount. Again, party loyalty would keep some candidates from running and most elections, even ones such as the 2003 California gubernatorial recall that had 134 candidates listed on the ballot, would be quickly parsed down to only a few legitimate contenders. As I noted earlier, the two-party system would not be affected because of the other institutional and cultural barriers to competitive third parties. Ralph Nader might have won more votes in 2000 had IRV been in place, but not enough to undermine the two-party system. The compatibility of some voting machines is a concern, but it is not an obstacle that cannot be overcome. For example, Arkansas, Louisiana, and South Carolina currently use IRV for overseas voting. San Francisco, CA and Minneapolis, MN have also adopted IRV for most city elections.

IRV is advantageous because it will eliminate wasted votes, may bring more people to the polls, and, because a majority winner will occur, is a better reflection of the popular will. Furthermore, because a majority is needed to win, IRV will keep extremist candidates from ascending to the presidency. Some scholars even argue that the system will make fraud much more complicated to carry out.
The Future of the Electoral College

Although IRV has some definite benefits and is gaining traction in states and localities around the country, the chances of it being enacted to select the president are remote. In fact, the abolition of the Electoral College at all seems highly unlikely. As controversial as the Electoral College is, one must go all the way back to 1803 to find an amendment simply modifying the Electoral College. To enact any one of the abolishment reforms would require a constitutional amendment. In other words, two-thirds of both the House and the Senate would have to support such a proposal and then three-fourths of the state legislatures must do so. This is simply not going to happen; too many states benefit from the current system and opposition in only 13 of the 99 state legislatures would be enough to block an amendment. Because of the two bonus electors, less populated states believe—even if it is not true—that they are represented more than they otherwise would be under a popular vote or runoff. Furthermore, more heavily populated, politically competitive states—battleground states—would resist abolishing the Electoral College because they are so important under the current system. Look at the attention that states like Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania have received in previous presidential elections. Certainly these states would not be ignored in a popular vote election, but they would not garner as much attention as they currently do. Heavily populated, politically uncompetitive states, such as California, Texas, New York, and Illinois, which are ignored under the Electoral College would become just as important, if not more so, in a popular vote election than the current battleground states. Quickly doing the math makes it clear that three-fourths of the states would not be on board with abolishing the Electoral College because they benefit too much from it. After 2000, many people thought that it spelled the end for the Electoral College. Even with a popular vote winner losing the election, it was never close to being eliminated. If the Electoral College was not abolished after the issues surrounding the 2000 election, then it is difficult to see a scenario that would lead to its demise.

Recently, a new proposal to “amend” the Electoral College has received some support. I put the word “amend” in quotations because the proposal is essentially a backdoor way to abolish the Electoral College without having to change the Constitution. An organization named FairVote, which has former presidential candidates John Anderson and Birch Bayh among other known politicians on their advisory board, has pushed an interesting plan—if you are opposed to the Electoral College—to enact a national popular vote. Briefly, this is how the plan works. Remember that the Constitution mandates that state legislatures determine how electors will be selected. Every state but Maine and Nebraska relies on the popular vote within the state to determine which
candidate's electors are seated. Under FairVote's plan, the state legislature would ignore the state popular vote and choose electors based on the national popular vote. Let's use the 2000 presidential election as an example. Pretend that the state of Florida adopted FairVote's plans. The controversy surrounding the Florida election would be moot since Al Gore won the national popular vote. Instead of choosing Bush electors, because he won the popular vote in the state, Florida would have chosen Gore electors, because he won the popular vote nationally. This would have allowed Gore to win the electoral vote and, hence, the election.

The aspect of FairVote's plan that is so unique is that, as I said earlier, the Electoral College will not be abolished; therefore the proposal does not require a constitutional amendment. If FairVote can get enough states to pass the policy, then it will guarantee that a popular vote winner will not lose the electoral vote. In a sense, the Electoral College is abolished while still remaining on the books.

Not surprisingly, supporters of the Electoral College have criticized FairVote's proposal, but the organization has had some success pushing their plan. At the time of this writing, six states (Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Washington) and the District of Columbia have already signed the proposal into law. In four other states (California, Colorado, Rhode Island, and Vermont), the proposal has passed both bodies in the state legislature; in nine others the bill has passed one legislative body. The chances of FairVote's plan passing, however, are remote. As I noted, there are several states that benefit too much under the Electoral College to enact this plan; legislators will likely see it as what it is—a backdoor way to abolish the Electoral College. Also, even in the states where the plan has passed, it will only go into effect if enough other states comprising 270 electoral votes approve the legislation; again, this is unlikely to happen. Moreover, the constitutionality of the plan is debated. Finally, it is not clear that just because a state has adopted the legislation, it could be forced to follow through on its commitment. I have a hard time believing that had FairVote's plan been in place during the 2008 presidential election and had Barack Obama lost the popular vote, Illinois would have stood by its commitment and seated electors for John McCain. Moreover, it is not clear to me, even as an opponent of the Electoral College, why a state would want to go against the wishes of a plurality of its voters.

Since the Electoral College will not be abolished, there are two amendments that must be made to it. First, the Constitution gives electors the freedom to vote as they see fit; they do not have to pledge to vote for the popular vote winner in a state. These so-called "faithless electors" have voted against the wishes of a state (or the District of Columbia) only a handful of times in the course of the country's history and have never influenced the outcome of an election. The last time an elector did not follow the wishes of the popular vote was in 2004 when an elector from Minnesota voted for John
Edwards for both president and vice-president. In 2000, an elector from the District of Columbia submitted a blank ballot instead of voting for Al Gore to protest the area's lack of representation in Congress. Even though faithless electors have never turned an election, there is no reason to give one person such power. Moreover, if an election ever was decided by a faithless elector's vote, the legitimacy of the election would be completely undermined.

Not everyone is convinced that faithless electors are problematic. “[O]ur political system has always had a place of honor for the maverick—the freethinking human who refuses to succumb to the party line or popular pressure,” write Paul Schumaker and Burdett Loomis. “For example, the decision of Vermont Senator James Jeffords to change his party affiliation from Republican to Independent in May 2001, and thus change control of the Senate from Republican to Democratic, resembles the action of a rogue elector. For many of us, politics is a human endeavor and humans should exercise individual judgment.” However, the Jeffords example is a weak analogy. Residents of Vermont could vote Jeffords out of office when he came up for reelection if they were upset with his decision (Jeffords retired before voters had the chance), but there is no opportunity for voters to punish a faithless elector. Furthermore, the voters of Vermont likely recognized Jeffords’ maverick tendencies when they elected (and reelected) him; no one knows enough about the electors—indeed the overwhelming majority of people have no idea who they even are—to know if the elector might exercise her own judgment. Lastly, one person should not have the ability to determine the outcome of an election for an entire country, especially considering that electors are not necessarily the “cream of the crop” as the founders had envisioned, but the most loyally partisan and biggest donors instead. Simply because a person gives a substantial amount of money to a political party should not give him the right to vote however he wants as an elector. Because of concern over faithless electors, 29 states plus the District of Columbia “force” an elector to vote for the state’s popular vote winner. However, these faithless elector laws are not likely to hold up in court if challenged and, indeed, seem difficult to enforce given the faithless elector in the District of Columbia in 2000. Admittedly, the chances of a faithless elector determining the outcome of an election are extremely miniscule, but there is no reason to allow the possibility, however remote it may be.

The second reform that is needed if the Electoral College is to remain in place is that each state in the House of Representatives should not be given one vote to determine the winner of a presidential election if no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote. Prominent constitutional scholar Sanford Levinson refers to this provision as “the most dubious feature of the Constitution.” Again, it is rare that no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote; in fact, it has only occurred twice and not since 1824. Still, it has come close in some recent elections (1948, 1960, 2000) and if the
proportional allocation of delegates mentioned previously is enacted in some states, it would be more commonplace. It simply makes no sense to give Wyoming as much of a say as California, or Rhode Island as much of a voice as Texas. The seven states that have one representative can provide 27 percent of the votes needed to be president. Moreover, this contingency violates the principle of separation of powers by giving the House the power to determine the president. And, since the Senate gets to choose the vice-president if no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote, there is a possibility that the president could be a member of one party and the vice-president a member of the other; certainly not the best condition for governing.60

The easiest way to get around this problem would simply be to eliminate the requirement that a candidate receive a majority of the electoral vote. This might undermine a president elect's mandate, but no more so than if the candidate did not win the popular vote, but is elected president. If one insists on giving the House the final say, then each member should receive a vote instead of each delegation. However, the chances of eliminating the House contingency provision are admittedly small. A small number of states can thwart a constitutional amendment, and I cannot see a reason why Wyoming, the Dakotas, Delaware, Rhode Island, and other less populated states would want to give up the power they would have should an election be decided in the House.

In sum, however frustrating the Electoral College may be to it detractors, it seems extremely unlikely that substantial reform will be made to it anytime soon.

Notes

1. Initially it was the top five candidates, but the Twelfth Amendment changed the number of candidates to three.
2. It was not even clear that there should be only one executive, as many of the founders worried that a single executive would wield too much power.
4. Ibid., p. 298.
5. The congressional plan had actually been supported and overturned several times during deliberations.
8. Quoted in Raskin, “Neither the Red States nor the Blue States but the United States,” p. 188.
11. Indeed, the founders did not view the Electoral College as sacrosanct, as it was amended almost
immediately with the adoption of the Twelfth Amendment.


13. In Christopher Collier’s and James Lincoln Collier’s exceptional book on the Constitutional Convention, Decision in Philadelphia, I see no evidence that promoting federalism was a goal of the founders when discussing the Electoral College.


17. “Candidate Visit Map:” The number of states that candidates did not visit would likely have been marginally higher if Barack Obama and Sarah Palin were not candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency, respectively. Obama was raised in Hawaii and Palin was the governor of Alaska, two states that are visited infrequently during most presidential campaigns, but that received visits in 2008.

18. Travel to a few other states was inflated. For example, Dick Cheney was the only candidate to visit Wyoming (he did so five times), but Wyoming is Cheney’s home state.


20. Ibid.


22. Indeed, in 2008 none of the candidates made a single visit to Alabama.


24. Ibid., p. 96.

25. Ibid., p. 94.

26. Quoted in Ibid., p 95 (emphasis in original).

27. Ornstein, "No Need to Repeal the Electoral College.”

28. Edwards, Why the Electoral College Is Bad for America, p. 124 (emphasis is original).

29. Raskin, “Neither the Red States nor the Blue States but the United States,” p. 189.

30. To be fair, the likelihood of a recount would depend on the rules created by a popular vote election. For example, some states have provisions that trigger recounts automatically if the vote margin separating the candidates is within a certain percentage. If national legislation for a popular vote election included such a trigger provision of, say, 0.5%, then a national recount would be possible.


32. Lau and Redlawsk, "Voting Correctly.”

33. By 1836, all states but South Carolina chose their electors through the popular vote. South Carolina did not use the popular vote to choose its electors until after the Civil War.

34. In 1800, Thomas Jefferson tied Aaron Burr in electoral votes, but no accurate count of the popular vote exists. Presidential scholar George Edwards argues that Nixon actually won the popular vote in 1960. See Edwards, Why the Electoral College Is Bad for America, pp. 48–51. Edwards also notes 15 other presidential races where a change of roughly 75,000 votes or less in several states would have led to a popular vote
winner, electoral vote loser (p. 53).


36. Lind, “75 Stars.”


40. Mellman, Electoral College Bias Probe.” Mellman does indicate that which party benefits under the Electoral College may be time dependent. However, he argues that no consistent, systematic bias exists in favor of either party.


42. One proposal that I do not examine, but emerged as a possible reform in the 1970s is the bonus plan. Under the bonus plan, 436 of the electoral votes (the House allocation plus the District of Columbia) would be decided state by state, as is currently the case. The remaining 102 electoral votes would go to the popular vote winner. This reform is an attempt to get around the problem of a popular vote winner/electoral vote loser scenario. Because it is no longer advocated strongly today (and because of space consideration), I do not discuss this proposal further.

43. In 2008, it appeared that North Carolina would become the third state to allocate their electors by district. The bill passed one house of the state legislature and was poised to pass the second and be signed into law by the governor. At the last minute, however, the North Carolina Democratic Party pulled its support for the bill at the request of the national Democratic Party. Republicans in California began to push for the state to allocate their electors by district. Although the Democratic Party thought they would benefit from a district plan in North Carolina, they would be hurt severely by such a plan in California. Democrats did not want to be on the record as supporting a district plan in North Carolina but then opposing one in California. The North Carolina example illustrates how difficult it is to actually reform the selection of electors. Ironically, had the Democrats continued to push the plan in North Carolina, it would have been detrimental to Barack Obama because he ended up winning the state.

44. There is some evidence, however, that a district plan would benefit the Republican Party because Democrats are more highly concentrated in districts. See Jacobson, “Competition in U.S. Congressional Elections.”

45. Wayne, The Road to the White House, p. 323.


47. There are two different versions of how a proportional plan would be enacted. First, the states could decide to allocate their electors proportionally. This plan would be the easiest to enact because each state could decide on its own to do so (similar to Nebraska and Maine deciding to allocate their electors by congressional district). Second, the electors would be abolished, but the Electoral College would remain intact. There would no longer be a formal vote among electors; instead each state would simply allocate its electoral votes proportionally. This plan would be much more difficult to enact because it would require a constitutional amendment.

49. One possibility would be to enact the system used in Louisiana. In Louisiana, all candidates from any party run in an election. If no candidate receives a majority of the vote, then the top two candidates face each other in a runoff. To enact this system at the presidential level would require the elimination of parties’ primaries, something that they are unlikely to support. It could also lead to unmanageable numbers of candidates entering the race. A few dozen Democrats and Republicans might decide to run, not to mention a number of third-party and independent candidates, and all would be on the same ballot. The current presidential primary process weeds out almost all of these candidates making the decision in November much less onerous.

50. See the preceding chapter for how this process works.


52. The Twenty-third Amendment, which gave the District of Columbia three electoral votes, technically was an amendment to the Electoral College. However, the Twenty-third Amendment simply added to the total number of electoral votes; it did not modify the structure of the Electoral College. 53. Nebraska has a unicameral legislature.

54. See the debate between Muller, “More Thoughts on the Compact Clause and the National Popular Vote” and Hendrick, “Popular Election of the President.”

55. It is believed that the elector simply made a mistake when writing his or her vote. None of Minnesota’s electors in 2004 admitted to voting for Edwards for president. Since electors in Minnesota cast secret ballots, it is unknown who cast the “faithless” vote. 56. Schumaker and Loomis, “Reaching a Collective Judgment,” p. 201.

57. National Conference of State Legislators, "The Electoral College."

58. Levinson, "I Dissent!," p. 802.

59. Edwards notes seven elections that could have been decided by the House had roughly 53,000 votes or less changed in a few states. Edwards, *Why the Electoral College Is Bad for America*, p. 62.

60. The Twelfth Amendment stipulates that the Senate vote for the two vicepresidential candidates who received the most electoral votes instead of the top three candidates, as is the case in the House of Representatives.
Voters and the Media
Chapter 5. Voters and the Media

The situation facing parties is fraught with difficulties. They are not certain the long realignment of recent decades has reached stability. Will Republicans gain more of the conservative voters who are now in the Democratic Party? There are differing interpretations of what brought about realignment. Neither has a majority and they must consider who they can attract to achieve a majority and what issues they need to stress to achieve that. While they are positioning themselves, social change can undermine or enhance their strategy. It can thrust new issues on the agenda that most did not anticipate. Forming a party strategy is not simple.

Once a strategy is formed, it must be communicated to voters. That is also not simple. Much of the electorate is disengaged and not paying much attention to the specific positions of parties. The lack of attention creates a need to try to simplify issues and frame how voters see them. Only about one-half of the potential electorate actually votes in a presidential election and in non-presidential elections the rate is even lower. This creates a need to identify likely voters. Then a party must face the issue of how to get their message to likely voters. The process of presentation through “the media” has become more complicated because there are more outlets and fewer people using the traditional outlets. The certainty of getting a message across is less. Finally, with the proliferation of outlets and the growing party polarization, voters have more ability to select the sources they rely on. There is a greater probability that conservatives will choose “conservative” outlets and liberals will choose “liberal” outlets. The message may only get to those who already support the party and not to those the party wants to connect with.

Interest in Politics

Much of the electorate is not very interested in politics (Table 8.1). When asked during a presidential election year whether they are interested in public affairs, only 26.1 percent chose “most of the time” and another 37.5 percent chose “some of the time.” When asked about their interest in the upcoming elections, only 43.8 percent chose “very.”

The unsurprising result is that surveys regularly indicate that the electorate’s knowledge about politics is not high overall but increases with age, education, and interest in politics. Parties operate before an electorate that is not highly attuned to politics. Many people are just not interested and their jobs, families, and other interests consume their attention. Any presentation of party positions must be conducted with the realization that much of the public is not paying attention.
### Table 8.1 Interest in Politics (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest in public affairs?</th>
<th>Hardly at All</th>
<th>Only Now and Then</th>
<th>Some of the Time</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Interest in election       | 15.5          | 40.7              | 43.8            |


### Registering and Voting

The general lack of interest becomes very important when it comes to elections and party strategy. Parties and their candidates seek to win elections. That means paying attention to people who usually register and vote. While many politicians may express their concern for everyone, worrying about those who do not show up at the polls is a chancy and perhaps losing endeavor. There are enduring patterns of who registers and who votes and campaigns are organized with that in mind. Table 8.2 indicates registration and turnout rates in 2008. That is a year of a presidential election, which draws the highest turnout. Even in a year of relatively high interest, there are considerable variations in registration and voting by income and education levels. Those with less education and income are much less likely to register and vote. While party candidates might urge those individuals to vote, the probability is that those with higher incomes and education, and older, will vote more.

### Table 8.2 Registration and Voting by Education and Income, 2008 and 1998 (sum across)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Registered</td>
<td>Registered, No Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–16</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17–33</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34–67</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68–100</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>2008—Presidential Election</th>
<th>1998—Off-Year Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College plus</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table also indicates the patterns for 1998, known as an off-year election. When there is no presidential contest to stimulate voters their levels of registration and turnout decline. Any party candidate running for election in such a year knows that much of the possible electorate will not vote and the focus must be on those who are likely to vote. Finding out who is likely to vote has become easier in recent years because local boards of election maintain electronic files of registrants. The law now allows a person to stay on the rolls as long as they vote occasionally. To be able to know how frequently someone votes they have to record voting history. That makes it possible to total the number of times an individual has voted in the last six elections and then target those who have a record of voting regularly.

These records also provide an indication of how variations in turnout affect the composition of the voting electorate. Table 8.3 is from a local Board of elections file and indicates how turnout among those registered varies by age. Older people register and vote more than younger people, regardless of the type of election. This shows the distribution of registrants by age, how much each group votes, and the resulting composition of voters. In the presidential year (2008 in this case) 50.5 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 29 voted. While they were 15.7 percent of all registrants, they were only 10.7 percent of voters. Those 60 and over voted at a higher rate and were a larger percentage of voters than of registrants.

When a presidential election does not occur turnout among all groups declines. The right side of Table 8.3 indicates a typical pattern for an off-year election. Turnout is lower for all age groups. The drop, however, is greater for those younger. The result is that the composition of the electorate shifts, with those over 60 constituting a much bigger percent. Those over 60 are 31.0 percent of all registrants but 41.2 percent of voters in this off-year.

These changes in the composition of the electorate can have significant effects on which party wins an election. In 2008 Barack Obama won the presidency and Democrats acquired large majorities in the House and the Senate. Then in 2010 Republicans came close to taking the Senate and did win a majority in the House.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.3 Turnout and the Composition of the Electorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Registrants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 plus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “% of all” and composition sum down to 100. They indicate the percent of all registrants or actual voters coming from each age group. Turnout indicates the percentage within a group voting.
There are numerous reasons that might be offered for why Republicans did better. The economy was not generating new jobs and unemployment was relatively high. The enactment of the health care bill in 2010 angered many.²

There was also a significant change in who showed up to vote in 2010 versus 2008. In the 2008 elections there were 131,312,072 people who voted in the presidential race. In 2010 the number of people voting for House of Representatives candidates was 86,784,957. There were 44,527,115 fewer voters in 2010 than in 2008. While each party was trying to interpret what the election results meant, one important matter was how the relative composition of the electorate shifted between 2008 and 2010.³ The differences, drawn from CNN exit polls,⁴ can be significant. In 2008 whites were 74 percent of those voting and in 2010 they were 77 percent. Democrats were 40 percent in 2008 and 35 percent in 2010. Republicans were 33 percent in 2008 and 35 percent in 2010. Perhaps most important, conservatives were 34 percent in 2008 and 42 percent in 2010. The composition of the electorate became more favorable to Republicans.

These fluctuations are very important for parties. Republicans might assume that they did so well because of their stance on issues, but they also know that they may have done well because minorities and those with lower incomes are more likely to be Democrats and less likely to vote in an off-year election. The electorate that did not vote in 2010 might show up in 2012. They will change the composition of the electorate and that change could alter who wins the election. For party candidates for congressional seats it means that they must anticipate running in some years in which the electorate has more Democrats and in other years it will have fewer. Presidential candidates may face an electorate consistent in terms of composition, if not mood.

The Role of Partisanship

Parties are continually assessing where they can win votes. Compared to the 1980s, those identifying with either party are now more inclined to vote for the candidate of their party.⁵ Figure 8.1 indicates how this changed since 1980 for House candidates. Presidential elections indicate roughly the same pattern of an increase. As discussed in Chapter Four, the parties have been experiencing a long-term realignment. Each now has a base that more consistently votes for its candidates. There are still almost 40 percent of voters (depending on the survey) who say they are independent and move back and forth between the two parties. But among those who indicate they identify with a party, loyalty in supporting candidates is increasing. That means that focusing on partisans during a campaign is likely to result in a more certain payoff. Indeed, in the 2004 presidential campaign Karl Rove, political advisor to George Bush, indicated that
the strategy was to mobilize the base rather than try to convert anyone.\textsuperscript{6}

**Partisanship and Likely Voters**

These interest and voting patterns endure and become part of the givens of campaigns. Candidates want to devote their resources and attention on those who will respond and vote for them. As they consider the value of spending money to get a message to voters, there is little payoff in sending a message to those likely to vote for the other party. Table 8.4 indicates the partisan situation that parties face.

Those who identify with a party are more likely to say they are very interested in a current election. They pay more attention and follow the issues more than others. They are more likely to register and vote. Those who do not identify with a party have less interest and are less likely to register and vote. Even in a seemingly important presidential election such as 2008 over one-third of independents did not register and vote. The consequence is that campaigns face an electorate in which they know that mobilizing partisans will pay off in terms of actually voting and voting for party candidates. These patterns affect party calculations about their positions and who they seek to contact. The enduring challenge is how much to concentrate on mobilizing the base, which is most likely to respond and vote, or to persuading the independents that the other party’s policies are bad.

**The Changing Media**

Assuming a party can determine what their position is and how they are going to
Table 8.4 Partisan Identity, Interest and Voting, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest in the Elections</th>
<th>Registration and Voting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Registered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi</td>
<td>Did Not Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Present it to voters, the next challenge is to get their message to voters. It is becoming increasingly difficult to widely disseminate a message and assume that it will be received. In the 1950s and 1960s there were essentially three major news outlets—ABC, CBS, and NBC. A considerable percentage of the electorate read a local newspaper or a newsweekly such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *U.S. News and World Report*. If a party wanted to get a message across to voters they would try to get the major television networks and the major news services to report their position and criticism of the other party. If they were successful they had a reasonably good chance of getting their message to those who were somewhat attentive to news. Those uninterested would miss it, but much of the attentive public would get the message.

Since then the nature of mass media has changed considerably. The number of cable television channels has exploded with almost all of them devoted to entertainment. Consumers have much more choice and many of them are choosing not to watch the national evening news shows. Those uninterested in politics can specifically avoid having to watch any political shows. The percentage of the public watching presidential debates has declined. Newspaper readership has also declined, and as this has occurred newspapers have less revenue from advertising to hire reporters to cover politics. The result is newspapers with less news and fewer readers. Party members cannot assume that if they form and present a message that it will reach a substantial percentage of possible voters. It is now quite possible for a national issue to consume politicians in Washington for a week or two and encounter people who have no idea a controversy has emerged. They are simply accessing other media outlets and not interested or aware.

While traditional news sources are being utilized less, cable shows and the internet are becoming a growing source of information for many. Their rise presents an opportunity and a problem for political parties. These newer sources provide more opportunities for individuals to select their sources of information and many people are selecting them because they see them as sources compatible with their views. Conservatives trust some sources more than others and liberals trust other sources.
Voters can now select, particularly on the internet, the presentation and interpretation of news. The opportunity for the parties is to rely on these sources to present their case and seek to motivate their base to contribute, work for the party, and donate resources. They can regularly appear on particular channels and commentary shows to make their case as to how things should be seen. The opportunity is to effectively target the message to a specific audience that is interested.

The difficulty, however, is that getting a message to a wider audience becomes harder. No single outlet in America has such a wide audience that it can be presumed that a message will get through. This, combined with the disinterest of many, means that a party may have devoted considerable energy to presenting a position on a current issue, yet a poll can indicate that many Americans have paid no attention to the issue.

Implications

The varying interest levels of the public and the changing media have had several effects on parties. They have created behaviors that trouble much of the public, but that parties see as a necessary response to this situation.

First, parties realize that getting a message through to largely uninterested and uninformed voters is difficult. Their attention span is short and many will see a message only once. As a result, they devote considerable attention to simplification and framing. They will prepare background papers, hold lengthy hearings, and develop detailed critiques of the proposals of the other party, but few voters will ever be aware of that information. They also have to focus on a message that will be short and will get on the news. If possible, it has to constitute a good "sound-bite," or a statement short enough that it will make it on-air or will be prominent in a written story. The goal is to get the frame before the public.

President Ronald Reagan was successful in getting attention for his statement "Government is not the solution, government is the problem." His message that he did not believe another government program was the solution to social problems came through. President Bill Clinton sought to convey his position that there should be limits to benefits from programs with the message "a hand up, not a hand out." When Republicans submitted legislation to limit the availability of welfare they entitled the bill "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act." When Democrats were seeking to enact the Affordable Care Act in 2010 to expand access to health care they consistently told stories about individuals faced with serious health care problems. The goal was to convey the message that the legislation would help those in need. Republicans countered with references to big government choosing your doctor and the loss of individual freedom. In all such cases the emphasis is on simple messages
and endless repetition. The goal of a party official is to “stay on message.” This means adopting a message and repeating it in multiple settings.

The battle in 2012 over whether contraception should be a required benefit for women in health insurance programs is an important example of how complexity is displaced by competing frames as the parties seek to establish positions and connect with voters. The health care legislation passed in 2010 set standards for what health insurance benefits had to be provided. The issue of contraception presented a delicate problem. The Catholic Church opposes birth control and a requirement to provide it would conflict with their views. Yet to not provide it would mean women employees would have to pay for birth control separately. President Obama sought to finesse the issue by saying the church would not have to pay for and provide birth control but the regulations would require that insurance companies provide it as part of their packages. The issue quickly became the Republican criticism of a Democratic president infringing on religious freedom and government intrusion versus the Democratic concern about women’s health care needs rights. Each party was playing to its base and simplifying the issue into sound bites and each thought they would fare well with their framing.10

What was lost in the framing of the issue was the complexity of the role of Catholic hospitals. The Catholic Church owns and runs many hospitals and as the merger of hospitals in the nation occurs they are acquiring others.11 While the issue was discussed in 2012, the issue of how many religiously run hospitals there are and what policies should apply to what is not an exercise in religion but a medical and business activity and its employees were completely lost. The complex issue of how religion and business mesh was lost and voters were presented with two simple and competing ways to think about the issue.

This annoys many voters to no end. Many voters feel like they are being presented with simplistic responses to complicated situations. Politicians appear on news shows and repeat the same simple messages again and again. The United States’ debt is rising steadily and each party offers robotic messages of “maintaining programs that people need” (Democrats) versus “facing up to the limits of what we can do” (Republicans). One stresses the needs and the other stresses fiscal limits. While many are annoyed, each party is sending its essential message to an electorate that knows little detail of the situation. Few know what current tax rates are, how many people benefit from programs, and what alternative proposals exist for responding to the rising costs of government programs. To those who follow politics closely, these responses are inadequate and frustrating. To those who do not follow politics much and may vote, these messages convey basic stances. This simplification is a reasonable response to an electorate that is only somewhat engaged.
The situation of many voters with limited interest and media outlets that do not provide regular explanations of the policy disagreements between the parties prompts party candidates to find another way to get their message to voters. Their means is the commercial, with television increasingly the medium. If newspapers are not going to detail the policy positions of their opponents, the best way to get that information to voters is through television ads. If ads are going to be effective they have to get the attention of voters. The best way to do that is have ads that make some emotional connection, that present evidence that your opponent has betrayed some fundamental value of Americans. Your opponent does not care about life (is pro-abortion rights) or does not respect the rights of women (is antiabortion rights). Your opponent does not care about the security of America (voted against the PATRIOT Act passed following 9/11) or is in favor of trampling on the rights of Americans (voted for the PATRIOT Act). Your opponent does not care about the future of our children (voted for a budget with large deficits, requiring more government debt) or does not care about those vulnerable (voted to cut the budget and social programs). The simpler and the more tied to a fundamental and emotional value the better. Those ads present clear messages and if well done get the attentions of those sitting at home. Many voters do not like this barrage of ads and their negative tone, but if a party is going to get its message across to those less engaged, it needs ads with a clear simple message.

Then there comes the matter of acquiring the resources to pay for all these ads. Politicians need money to produce and air ads and they need to repeat these ads as many times on as many shows as they can. Given the fragmentation of the media, it is not enough to put ads on the major networks. They need to be on a variety of cable shows at all times of the day to get to specific audiences. This takes money. Television stations in America are not required to offer any free air time to campaigns and, to their delight, they are able to charge the highest rates for political ads. Campaigns want lots of repetition and that requires lots of money.

All this puts parties and their candidates in a difficult situation. They need money. They also know that there is considerable concern in America about the growing role of money. The affluent and interest groups have much more capability to contribute. Party candidates know that several Supreme Court decisions have made it easier for the affluent to raise money for campaigns. The reality for parties is that they have no alternative but to solicit and accept money from those who have it to offer. For Republicans this has been an easier situation because they argue that the successful should be respected and seen as the ones who generate jobs and tax revenue in America. They want to avoid appearing to be beholden to the most affluent, but accepting their money is not a fundamental conflict for the party. For Democrats, seeking contributions from the most affluent has been a greater source of unease, but they also need money to conduct campaigns. Democrats are in the situation of
bemoaning the role of money in politics in general, and particularly the role of money coming from Wall Street, but they still need money. At the same time many within the party are expressing their concern about inequality in America and the growth in CEO compensation. Yet, because they need money for campaigns the party and its candidates are just as aggressive as Republicans in seeking money from those who have it.

The result is that parties appear to be hypocritical. They speak of the people but they continually solicit money to run their campaigns from those with high incomes. It makes many voters cynical about who is dominating representation in Washington. Party candidates understand that and may wish it was otherwise, but, again, with many of the public only somewhat interested and a fragmented media, they need lots of money to present and repeat their message. They also need to have lots of money available in case a credible set of ads are run against them during a campaign and they need to run counter ads in a hurry. That possibility makes them even more inclined to raise money.

That does not mean that a party gives up on its principles. But it does make them realize that if they take money from interest groups they need to make sure they let them in turn make their case to a Member of Congress who is elected using the interest group’s money. They usually feel the obligation to listen. They may temper the tone of their criticism of the stance of a group that contributed to the party. They need money to present their case to voters, but they know they cannot look too cozy and responsive to contributors. Both parties may be more responsive to the affluent than would occur without our current campaign finance system. It is a challenge for parties to handle well.

Finally, the variations in who votes also affect the positions of parties. Anyone who campaigns knows that those older vote more than anyone else and younger people vote at lower rates, even in presidential elections. It should be no surprise that both parties recognize the problem of the growing cost of programs such as Medicare (which covers the health care costs of those 65 and older) but both are very careful how they talk about constraining the program. Democrats and Republicans realize some constraints are necessary but do not want seniors to see them as hurting the program. The result is the critics of the program’s costs always present their proposals as intended to “save” the program in the future. In 2010 Democrats enacted “reforms” in Medicare, which would save billions of dollars over time and said they only involved eliminating “waste.” They did not want to suggest they were curtailing the program. Republicans, who have been more inclined to want to restrain growth in the program, focus on saving the program and empowering individuals to make their own choices about who provides their coverage. Both want to avoid a clear impression that they are
curtailing Medicare, a position that would antagonize those over 65. Who votes affects the focus of public policy debates.

Notes


Voter Mobilization:
The Scientific Investigation of Getting Electorate to the Polls

Robert A. Jackson

I think we'll be analyzing this election [2008] for years as a seminal, transformative race. The year campaigns leveraged the Internet in ways never imagined. The year we went to warp speed. The year the paradigm got turned upside down and truly became bottom up instead of top down.

Mark McKinnon, Senior Adviser to George W. Bush's 2000 and 2004 campaigns

Voter mobilization received heightened attention in the midst of the 2008 presidential campaign. The media and campaign punditry were infatuated with Democratic nominee Barack Obama's efforts to reach out to new voters via new technologies. Mark McKinnon's view, quoted above, reflects a bit of hyperbole, but undoubtedly, future resource-rich campaigns will model many of the innovations of the Obama campaign. Obama won, voter turnout reached levels not seen for decades, and, generally speaking, Obama's mobilization efforts seemed "to work" (see Conway [2009] for an overview). Portending the future by using language suggestive of something akin to a political realignment, Adam Nagourney of the New York Times wrote,

The size and makeup of the electorate could be changed because of efforts by Democrats to register and turn out new black, Hispanic, and younger voters. This shift may have long-lasting ramifications for what the parties do to build enduring coalitions, especially if intensive and technologically-driven voter turnout programs succeed in getting more people to the polls.

(Nagourney 2008: A1)

Being familiar with the field experiments that have become pervasive in the academic literature on voter mobilization, Brian Stelter (2008: A17) suggested that the Obama campaign was effectively running a big "text messaging experiment" (see Dale and Strauss 2009b). Furthermore, the mobilization efforts of 2008 followed on the heels of the frenzied activity of the Bush campaign and of the Kerry campaign, as well as on the part of each candidate's party workers and group supporters, in getting out the Republican base and the Democratic base, respectively, in such battleground states as Ohio in 2004. Describing the situation on the ground heading into Election Day 2004, James Dao wrote,

So it goes here, throughout Ohio and, indeed, all across nearly a dozen swing states where the election is breathtakingly close. Never in the history of American presidential campaigns will so many people be called, visited, handed
literature and cajoled to vote than in the final hours of this race. And the side with the better turnout game is almost certain to win the race.

(Dao 2004: A17)

Clearly, voter mobilization matters to electoral campaigns, and it has also been a subject of longstanding focus in political science. Practitioners’ interest has been around as long as candidates have competed in elections, and academics’ interest in the topic blazed important trails in the behavioral revolution of the social sciences. Combined with the obvious importance of voter turnout in mass democracies, the readily available (and ever-expanding) supply of data (e.g., the collection of vote returns as dictated by law, the inclusion of turnout questions in most mass opinion surveys on political behavior, and the amenability of mobilization efforts to field experimentation) all but ensures that voter mobilization will continue to be a subject of intense inquiry.

This chapter covers several major domains in this area of research. First, it will review the several decades of “conventional” research on the role of campaigns, elections, and political parties in activating and mobilizing voters. Over the past 15 or so years, this stream has included an especially lively debate regarding the role of negative campaigning as (de-)mobilizer of potential voters. Second, the chapter will review the field experiment approach to studying voter mobilization, which has gained heightened prominence over the past decade. Finally, the chapter will amplify on some of the themes of the opening paragraph. Recent innovations in real-world campaigns, which rely on new electronic technologies, among other things, enable unprecedented micro-targeting and highly focused messaging and mobilization. Not only do many of the findings of the academic literature have direct relevance for real-world campaigns, but the innovations of campaigns in the field should inform the analytical approaches, data collection efforts, and theoretical frameworks of the academic literature.

Do Political Elites Influence Voter Turnout?

The premise that politics generally, and campaign conditions specifically, influence voter turnout has a longstanding history in empirical research on American elections. However, drawing on individual-level survey data, the most well-known turnout investigations, which laid the foundation for our understanding of electoral participation, focused primarily on the characteristics of citizens themselves (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Verba and Nie 1972, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). These investigations’ answers to the question of why people vote focused primarily on citizen socio-demographics and attitudes. Although providing a great deal of insight, these efforts do not emphasize some factors that are
of obvious importance to students of politics—namely differences in the campaign environment. Furthermore, studies that focus on individual-level characteristics are hard-pressed to explain why the level of turnout shifts dramatically from election to election, and why some citizens vote in one election, but sit out another. Thus, in the 1980s, a stream of research reintroduced the importance of politics to the study of turnout, considering citizens and electorates within the context of the campaign environment that surrounds them.

**Evaluating the Importance of Campaigns for Voter Turnout**

Powerful *prima facie* evidence that campaigns matter is the patterned difference in participation rates between presidential and mid-term elections. As detailed in Campbell's (1960) theory of surge-and-decline, a presidential campaign activates voters. Political elites structure this transient portion of the political environment (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Strategic elites determine if and when to run for office, how much money to contribute, how much money to spend, and so forth. As candidates, contributors, and political party leaders pursue electoral goals, they influence the election context of potential voters.

The complementary analytical frameworks of information flow and of costs and benefits provide the theoretical underpinning for these mobilization studies. According to Downs (1957), the making of any political decision presupposes a certain minimum of information. At the very least, potential voters must realize that a decision has to be made. To cast a vote, for example, citizens must become aware that a voting opportunity exists and gather, at least, a minimum of information on which to base the vote decision. Since the process of assimilating data consumes scarce resources, as Downs suggests, gathering this information is a costly endeavor. Purposive citizens (i.e., information processors) will attempt to reduce their information costs. When and where possible, they will transfer them.

The campaign environment in which citizens find themselves may attenuate the costs of procuring information and, subsequently, voting. That is, some electoral settings make it much easier to become informed. High-stimulus campaigns that provide easily available information transfer procurement costs, and enhance the likelihood that individuals will become aware of their voting opportunity and act upon it. Since the individual returns from voting are apparently low, the relatively free information provided by candidates and political parties and conveyed, in part, through the media become especially important. Rational citizens are unlikely to do much to inform themselves about whether and how they should vote in a mass election. Furthermore, a campaign that highlights and clarifies the differences between candidates and political
parties may give people a reason to vote. In other words, the benefits of voting for one candidate rather than another may become more apparent.

In supplementing individual-level survey data with contextual campaign measures, numerous efforts have examined the importance of campaigns for mobilizing voters at the individual level (e.g., Copeland 1983; Caldeira et al. 1985; Leighley and Nagler 1992; Jackson 1993, 1996a, 2002). Drawing on supplemented American National Election Studies (ANES) cumulative data, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, see esp. pp. 1778-8) provide the most wide-ranging support, both theoretical and empirical, for political activation in response to competitive electoral contests. The overarching conclusion that emerges from these studies is that a high-stimulus campaign environment, as indicated by greater levels of campaign spending, close contests, and party competitiveness, appears to be important for bringing out voters.

A parallel stream of investigation has assessed the implications of these same campaign indicators for voter turnout at the aggregate or macro level; these aggregate studies attempt to explain variations in the rate or level of turnout across various electoral districts (e.g., state legislative districts, congressional districts, and U.S. states). In the most widely cited of these studies, Patterson and Caldeira (1983: 686; see also Caldeira and Patterson 1982) reach the following conclusion regarding gubernatorial turnout at the state level: “the mobilizing influences of campaign activism and competitiveness have a strong impact on electoral participation.” The basic point is clear: “politics matters.”

Building on Patterson and Caldeira’s approach, Cox and Munger (1989; see also Gilliam 1985; Jackson 1996b) provide a rich treatment that examines congressional district turnout. Their study is important for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, Cox and Munger revisit the meaning of measures of closeness of outcome in models of turnout (see also Aldrich 1993). Is the apparent effect of such variables the rather direct product of citizens undertaking calculations about the likelihood of their votes making the difference on Election Day (i.e., acting in a Downsian, rational actor fashion)? Cox and Munger elucidate clearly an alternative explanation: the influence of closeness may be principally indirect, operating through the behaviors of strategic political elites. That is, candidates, their campaign staffs, political parties, and (potential) financial contributors respond to a close contest by raising and spending more money and putting additional efforts into getting out the vote. In turn, citizens respond to these elite-driven flows of information and stimuli. According to this conception, measures of closeness (including measures based on actual Election Day outcome) operate as surrogates that capture elite activity and effort. However, their final estimates suggest that measures of both closeness and campaign spending exert direct influence on turnout level, providing suggestive evidence for the importance of both elite efforts
and calculating citizens (see also Blais 2000: ch. 3).

**The Mobilizing Role of Political Parties**

In an era of so-called candidate-centered campaigns, it makes sense that a great deal of literature would have focused on such factors as candidate spending levels and the competitiveness of electoral contests. However, lines of research also revisited the role of political parties as agents of mobilization. As V.O. Key (1949: esp. ch. 14) suggested, there is perhaps no substitute for competitive, well-organized parties that offer distinct choices to an electorate. Vibrant party organizations have resources to help get out the vote. Furthermore, a political environment that, election-to-election, presents voters with hard-fought contests between candidates drawn from ideologically distinctive parties conveys to citizens that elections matter. Reciprocally, a history of close contests encourages party elites to activate voters and their party’s supporters in particular. Indeed, Burnham describes the mobilization of the mass electorate as “contingent on the existence, competition, and organizational vitality of political parties” (Burnham 1982: 121).

Several efforts focus on the ideological setting of the state party system as an important yet oft-neglected factor in studies of citizen mobilization. These studies view the ideological leanings of state party elites, and of Democratic elites in particular, as fundamental to the participation of voters.\(^2\) Consideration of the impact of elite ideology upon citizen participation rests on the expectation that party activity, as it is undertaken by elites and witnessed by potential voters, may influence the perceived benefits and costs of participation. In short, the values and efforts of political elites give shape and definition to state parties and politics. If, over time, political debate and discussion ignore concerns that are salient to them, citizens should become less likely to participate. Conversely, if they see their interests being represented or receiving attention in political debate and state policy, potential voters should become more likely to participate. The ideological environment sets a tone, and the messages found in elite discourse and conveyed through political activity may serve as a stimulus for participation.

Studies by Hill and Leighley (1996; see also Hill and Leighley 1993) and Brown, Jackson, and Wright (1999) examine the relationship between elite ideology and class-specific mobilization. According to Hill and Leighley (1996), liberal party control (i.e., liberal Democratic elites in control of the state legislature) mobilizes a state’s lower income classes, but, surprisingly, only in presidential election years. Brown, Jackson, and Wright (1999) find that liberal party control mobilizes a state’s poor in mid-term election years as well. Perhaps the major insight of Brown, Jackson, and Wright’s piece is its
recognition and incorporation of registration as the critical first hurdle of participation across the United States. They argue that a conception which views citizen decisions to participate as being determined by (short-term) candidate choices, issue positions, and campaign efforts in an election-at-hand tells only part of the story. Although the difficulty of the registration hurdle affects the level of Election Day turnout, citizens must overcome this hurdle several weeks prior in most states. The registration hurdle means that, at least once, citizens must make a decision relevant to participation and overcome obstacles before Election Day and before the campaign has reached its peak. Brown, Jackson, and Wright find that a state’s registration level is governed by relatively long-term factors (e.g., party elite liberalism, the difficulty of registration, and state socio-demographic characteristics) and that, reflecting enduring forces in the environment of participation, registration level combines with more proximate campaign and electoral conditions (e.g., the presence of gubernatorial and senatorial races) to structure turnout.4

In most other advanced democracies, political parties of the left pitch campaign appeals toward and mobilize the poor and the working class, and these democracies do not observe the marked differences in turnout across those of different socioeconomic status that are associated with the United States (Powell 1986; Jackman 1987; Franklin 2004). Burnham describes the uniqueness of the American setting:

> the institutional mechanisms for social learning among the lower classes—chiefly, of course, the political parties—are so defective that one is left with a kind of apolitical ‘state of nature’ in which formal schooling is the chief thing that matters.

(Burnham 1982: 168)

Exacerbating the socioeconomic stratification of its electoral participation, the United States is rather unique among democracies in placing the burden of registration upon citizens themselves.

Is the composition of the American voting electorate inherently biased against the poor, the less educated, racial and ethnic minorities, and the young—or can political parties and candidate campaigns effectively target and activate those segments of the electorate whom we have come to expect not to make it to the voting booth in large numbers? Drawing on the evidence from other democracies, it is likely the case that many among the less educated, the poor, young adults, and racial minorities would especially benefit from campaign messages and mobilization efforts targeted at them—giving them a reason or rationale to get to the polls. In fact, Obama’s targeting efforts in 2008 reflected a revised logic with a focus on those groups associated with the Left—with the strategy of the Republican Party in the battleground states of 2004 its right-leaning counterpart.
Relying on observational survey data and recall questions, other studies focus on the importance of partisan contacts at the micro level. For example, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993: 171–2) report that being contacted by a political party—either via a phone call or an in-person visit concerning the campaign—increases individual turnout likelihood by almost eight percentage points, other things being equal (see also Kramer 1970; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994). Although the results of these survey-based efforts are suggestive, several basic problems confront them (see Green and Gerber 2002). First, respondents may inaccurately recall whether they were contacted and whether they voted (problems not unique to the study of canvassing). In particular, those who self-report that they vote appear to exaggerate their level of campaign contact. In addition, political parties and candidate campaigns tend to target likely voters (see Gerstenson 2003). Thus, even if canvassing efforts have absolutely no effect, the survey data would reveal heightened participation among those who are contacted (i.e., endogeneity concerns plague these studies). Instrumental variables provide a possible statistical fix for endogeneity; however, in this case, creating the requisite instrument requires identifying variables that influence the likelihood of being contacted, but not the subsequent likelihood of voting—the set of plausible candidates is likely empty. These difficulties associated with using observational survey data to study voter mobilization via canvassing pose a major concern and provide an impetus for resurrecting the field experiment approach, as discussed below.

**Negative Campaigning as (De-)Mobilizer?**

Whereas this research from the 1980s and early 1990s correctly redirected attention to campaigns and the strategic behavior of candidates as factors that might mobilize voters, most of it conceptualized campaigns and measured the stimuli that they present to the electorate in a rather blunt fashion. The most common approach was to use dummy variables (i.e., 0/1 dichotomous variables) to account simply for whether specific electoral offices were on the ballot (e.g., was it a presidential election year, was a gubernatorial contest present, and so forth), often combined with measures of the level of spending and/or the closeness of election outcomes. In so doing, these studies attempt to capture the general magnitude or volume of the campaign stimuli aimed at an (undifferentiated) electorate. However, such measures are indirect indicators at best. These investigations do not look inside the “black box” of what campaigns are actually doing with their resources and whether they are expending them in ways that are likely to activate voters.

To illustrate: what are some of the limitations in gauging campaign stimuli via candidate expenditures (see Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Goldstein and Freedman
2002a; Goldstein and Ridout 2004)? First, we do not know what proportion of funds was spent on salaries, on polling, on commercials, and so forth. Second, expenditures figures do not take into account the fact that the purchasing power of a dollar varies geographically—one advertising dollar goes further in Nebraska than in New York. Third, there may be marked variation in campaign intensity within a state or an electoral district. For example, residents of Spokane and other parts of eastern Washington likely witness a somewhat different presidential (or U.S. Senate or gubernatorial) campaign than do the residents of Seattle. Expenditures figures do not accommodate this within-state (within-district) variation. Finally, in recent election cycles, spending by candidates’ own campaigns is not the only type of spending that takes place in many elections. An exclusive focus on candidate expenditures misses independent and political party expenditures.

Furthermore, these studies largely ignore the tone of campaign messages and implicitly assume away any variation in how different groups of people might respond differentially to campaign messages. One recent vein of turnout research that has considered a nuanced view of campaign information flows and, to a lesser extent, of differential responsiveness across the electorate is research into the relationship between negative campaigning and voter turnout. Given the concerns of academics and campaign reform advocates about both the increasing negativity of political campaigns and declining levels of electoral participation across the last decades of the twentieth century, the possible linkage between the two resonated with a wide audience.

Does attack advertising and so-called “mudslinging” depress turnout, especially among certain types of citizens? Suggesting that negative campaigns demobilize potential voters, the work of Ansolabehere et al. (1994) (see also Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995) laid the foundation and received a great deal of attention. Furthermore, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) argue that negative campaigns, characterized by so-called “mudslinging,” primarily demobilize certain segments of the electorate—most notably Independents (see also Kahn and Kenney 1999; Lau and Pomper 2001, 2004). Despite a great deal of counter-evidence, Ansolabehere et al. (1999) remain steadfast in their claims. They draw much of their evidence from a series of experiments in which participants were exposed to television news broadcasts that contained a variety of campaign ads, including negative ones. Subjects were then asked about their turnout intentions. Ansolabehere et al. (1994) (see also Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995) also present aggregate models of 1992 U.S. state turnout to support their claims (however, see Brooks 2006). They argue that, controlling for other factors, Senate campaigns which were negative in tone tended to depress turnout that year. Obviously, their results raise important concerns about the long-term health of democratic politics in an era when many campaigns resort to attacks on their opponents.
Several examinations of negativity and voter turnout also assess whether negative campaigns demonstrate greater influence on certain types of citizens. As indicated above, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) (see also Lau and Pomper 2001, 2004) suggest that the demobilization effect of negative ads is especially pronounced among Independents—citizens whom they argue are more likely to be open to persuasion by campaign messages. Similarly, Kahn and Kenney (1999) conclude that the demobilizing effect of “mudslinging” is more consequential for Independents, those less interested in politics, and those less knowledgeable about politics. Other efforts, however, do not uncover differential effects across different segments of the electorate (e.g., Finkel and Geer 1998; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Goldstein and Freedman 2002a), and raise doubts about those presented by Kahn and Kenney (Jackson and Sides 2006).

In contrast, most recent investigations find that, if anything, negative campaigns are associated with heightened voting probabilities and higher levels of turnout—what might be labeled a negativity-mobilization hypothesis (as contrasted with the negativity-demobilization hypothesis) (see Bartels 1996; Finkel and Geer 1998; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Lau et al. 1999; Wattenberg and Brians 1999; Lau and Pomper 2001; Goldstein and Freedman 2002a; Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004; Hillygus 2005; Geer 2006; Franz et al. 2008a; Jackson and Carsey 2007). These efforts generally conclude that, rather than turning away potential voters, negative campaigns motivate and subsequently activate citizens to go to the polls. Furthermore, several recent efforts suggest that exposure to campaign television advertising produces information gains and increases in political engagement that are especially pronounced among the politically unsophisticated (Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004; Franz et al. 2008a).

Advocates offer a number of compelling arguments supporting the mobilization hypothesis (for an overview, see Finkel and Geer 1998; Geer 2006). First, campaign advertising provides political information to a citizenry notorious for its low store. Beyond simply lowering the costs of acquiring information (Downs 1957), campaigns often highlight and clarify the differences between candidates, thereby giving many people a reason to vote. As Alvarez (1997) suggests, the flow of information in the political environment has implications for voter uncertainty. Advertising facilitates political learning (Freedman et al. 2004), and a truism of American politics is that more knowledgeable citizens are more likely to participate (see also Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Wattenberg and Brians 1999). Second, negative information could be especially pivotal to participation because citizens may weigh it more heavily than positive information when they evaluate candidates. Sigelman and Kugler (2003: 146) speculate that it may take “a loud barrage of brutal attacks to break through the public’s wall of inattention, for anything less than that is likely to pass through largely unnoticed.” Third, negative campaigns generally, and negative advertisements specifically, may
produce stronger emotional and affective responses than do positive ones. According to
Finkel and Geer (1998: 577), such reactions could elevate citizens' turnout by "arousing
their enthusiasm" for preferred candidates or by increasing the degree to which they
care about the outcome of an election.

In addition to normative concerns and theoretical motivations, in no small part, a new
and extremely rich data source on campaign television advertisements has facilitated
the most recent wave of research on campaign negativity and voter turnout. The
Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG), a commercial firm that specializes in
providing detailed satellite tracking information to campaigns in real time, has
provided to Professor Ken Goldstein, now at the University of Wisconsin and current
director of the University of Wisconsin Advertising Project (WAP), a wealth of data on
television campaign advertising in recent elections in the nation's largest media
markets (and, most recently, for the universe of markets). Under Goldstein's direction,
these data have been systematically coded, archived, and made available to the
research community. Each case in the datasets represents the airing of one ad, and the
data contain information about the date and the time of an ad's airing, the television
station and program on which it was broadcast, and a coding of its content.

Before these data became available, studies relied on the coding of secondary sources
(such as newspaper accounts), experimentally manipulated campaign themes and
television advertisements in a laboratory setting, interviewed campaign managers after
the election, and/or turned to samples of television advertisements deposited at
campaign media archives. Goldstein and Ridout (2004) critique these approaches
across-the-board for relying on what are, at best, indirect measures of campaign
stimuli; perhaps their major limitation is an inability to capture reliably campaign tone
and intensity. For example, Finkel and Geer (1998) criticize Ansolabehere et al's (1994)
analysis of the 1992 Senate campaigns because their measure of campaign negativity
(tone) is based on newspaper accounts. Such an approach necessarily conflates
variation in actual campaign tone with variation in the press coverage of campaigns.
Finkel and Geer argue that "tests of the effects of advertising on 'real world' turnout
rate must be conducted with content analysis of the advertisements themselves"
(Finkel and Geer 1998: 575; emphasis in original). Furthermore, measures based on the
proportion of news coverage that is negative also fail to capture how intensely the
campaign was fought. Finkel and Geer (1998) employ measures based on a content
analysis of the actual ads produced by candidates, as do Kahn and Kenney (1999).
Although this strategy accesses more directly the messages candidates send through
their advertising, these measures do not account for where or how frequently a
particular ad was aired (or for whether it was aired at all).

Many things about the WAP data are noteworthy. For the first time, they provide to
researchers reliable and valid information on the universe of ads that were actually aired, as well as the number of times that each ad was aired. The archive includes not only campaign ads paid for by candidates’ campaign organizations, but also independent expenditures ads and political party-sponsored ads. In addition, since the data contain the media market in which each spot aired, the researcher can effectively determine the number of ads (and which specific ones) aired in the viewing location of (most) respondents in a national survey. As Franz et al. (2008a) outline, if a survey contains information on respondents’ ZIP codes, counties of residence, or area codes, the researcher can locate them within their media market. Thus, the researcher can merge these detailed market-level ad data, including which ads aired on which TV shows and how many times, with the survey data. If the survey also provides information on the television viewing habits of respondents, the variables are in place to create the state-of-the-art advertising exposure measure that Franz et al. recommend.

To provide some flavor of the conclusions based on recent analyses that rely on these detailed advertising data, Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein (2004: 723) indicate that “exposure to campaign advertising can produce citizens who are more interested in a given election, have more to say about the candidates, are more familiar with who is running, and are ultimately more likely to vote.” Franz et al. (2008a: 23) refer to TV ads as the “informational multi-vitamins” of American democracy: “attractively (and expertly) packaged, simple to comprehend, easy to digest.”

Two recent studies, however, qualify the newly emergent wisdom regarding the significant mobilizing role of television advertising, as based on the observational findings. Each exploits a natural experiment and reaches the conclusion that television advertising does not mobilize (or, more specifically, did not mobilize in the 2000 presidential election). Huber and Arceneaux (2007) indicate that the apparent mobilizing effect of (presidential) campaign advertising may be a product of advertising exposure being correlated with unmeasured, on-the-ground GOTV efforts. In other words, previous studies may have incorrectly attributed the mobilizing influence of other campaign activities to television advertising. They take advantage of the fact that many individuals in the 2000 presidential election lived in a non-battleground state, yet resided in a media market that crossed over into a battleground state. Thus, these individuals were exposed to heightened television advertising but not to other GOTV efforts. Confining their analysis to respondents in non-battleground states, Huber and Arceneaux (2007: 963) report that they “do not find evidence that advertising increases interest in the campaign or plans to vote.” Krasno and Green (2008a) take advantage of the fact that residents of a given state may live in different media markets and thus likely be exposed to different levels of television advertising in a presidential election. Taking into account not only the level, but also
the tone of advertising in aggregate models that incorporate state-level fixed effects—where the unit of analysis is the media market by state—they again uncover no evidence of a mobilizing effect for presidential advertising in the 2000 election.3

The Field Experiment Approach

Gosnell’s (1927; see also Gosnell 1926) pioneering work on voter mobilization in the 1920s introduced many political scientists to the field experiment as a way of conducting social science research. Dividing citizens in each of 12 selected districts in Chicago into those who would be contacted and those who would not, Gosnell engaged in a non-partisan mail canvass to inform those targeted about registration and to encourage them to vote. His guiding assumption: if a larger proportion of the stimulated citizens registered and voted, then the stimuli had an effect. Furthermore, he explored the conditional nature of voter mobilization. For example, he determined that the GOTV notices had a lesser effect among the highly educated and where the local party organization was strong, and the greatest effect among new residents of the city.

Green and Gerber (2002) refer to Gosnell’s study, technically speaking, as a controlled field experiment—distinct from a randomized field experiment because Gosnell did not assign subjects to treatment and control conditions on a purely random basis.

Decades later, Gosnell (1948) continued to advocate for the field experiment as a way to study voter mobilization. He wrote:

[T]he experimental method might be employed to investigate the effect of the following upon the size of the poll: house-to-house canvass to get out the vote, a radio campaign to interest people in the election; local discussion groups; an intensive educational campaign in the schools on the rights and duties of citizenship, and other methods to inform and motivate the voter.

(Gosnell 1948: 101)

Building on Gosnell’s work, Eldersveld’s (1956) field experiments in Ann Arbor in 1953 and 1954 were the first to build pure randomization into a voter mobilization design. Randomly assigning subjects into treatment and control groups is central to any experimental design—doing so ensures that there is no expectation of differences, either observable or unobservable, between groups before the treatment, thus enabling the researcher to draw an unbiased inference about causal effect (see De Rooij, Green, and Gerber 2009). Eldersveld randomly assigned (potential) voters to receive telephone calls, mail, and/or personal contact prior to Election Day, assessing the effects of the appeals both separately and in combination. His central finding: the personalized approach is the most effective.
Gosnell and Eldersveld laid a foundation for the recent wave of field experiments on voter mobilization and, no doubt, would look approvingly upon their new-found prominence. Donald Green has been the principal figure advocating for, and facilitating, this wave. A basic design protocol underlies these studies (see Green and Gerber 2008). All incorporate a randomized experimental design in which lists of registered (potential) voters are divided into a treatment group that receives the intervention in question and a control group that does not. Following the election in focus, researchers then examine the public records to determine who voted and who did not. The key statistic is whether those who received the GOTV treatment voted at a higher rate than those assigned to the control group (who did not receive the treatment). Among the GOTV treatments that have been administered in these studies are the following: door-to-door canvassing, leaflets, mail, telephone calls, e-mail, campaign events, and communication through the mass media. Overall, these studies find that how a message is conveyed matters greatly in terms of effectiveness—with personal approaches (e.g., door-to-door canvassing and calls from volunteer phone banks) being much more effective than impersonal approaches (e.g., robotic telephone calls and e-mails) (see Gerber and Green 2000a, 2000b; Nickerson 2007; Green and Gerber 2008).

Summarizing this literature, Green and Gerber (2008: 10) indicate that the "gold standard mobilization tactic" is door-to-door canvassing by friends and neighbors.

Among the most interesting and innovative of the field experiments to appear in recent years are those that highlight the social dimension of mobilization. In a study of more than 180,000 households in Michigan, Gerber et al. (2008) report that social pressure transmitted via mailings is extremely effective at mobilizing voters. In the most provocative treatment, Gerber et al. mailed to potential voters a list of the voting record of every registered citizen in their household and of several neighbors, along with notification of the fact that an update would be sent after the election. Turnout increased by more than eight percentage points among those who received this treatment—an effect magnitude rivaling those found in studies that assess the influence of an in-person canvass. In addition, Nickerson (2008) finds that when one member of a two-person household receives an in-person GOTV message, approximately 60 percent of her increased voting likelihood (of nine percentage points or so) is passed on to the member who was not contacted. These results suggest that the turnout decision is socially contagious, perhaps due to social pressure and/or the sharing of voting costs. Thus, the social environment, social norms, and social pressure appear to play major roles in the decision to vote (see also Putnam 2000).

Both the "field" aspect and the "experimental" aspect of the field experiment contribute to its research appeal. The major advantage of the experimental approach is the leverage it provides regarding causal inference. Random assignment of a treatment guarantees an unbiased assessment of the average treatment effect. A complex,
multivariate analysis that attempts to encompass the process under investigation via an extensive specification—hopefully as informed by a theoretical model—becomes unnecessary. However, as Green and Gerber (2002) suggest, theory remains relevant (e.g., it may guide the researcher in terms of thinking about the conditions under which a treatment is likely to have a greater (and smaller) effect). Obviously, in the field, not all subjects designated for a (potential) mobilizing treatment will receive it; some may delete a phone message, may not watch or listen to a campaign ad, may not answer the door, and so on. However, Green and Gerber (2002) highlight that these failures to treat are not as problematic as they may first appear. The experimental data remain informative because the intent to treat is correlated with receipt of the actual treatment but uncorrelated with other determinants of registration and voter turnout. Thus, intent to treat provides an ideal instrumental variable for regression analysis. In fact, Green and Gerber (2002: 811) suggest that another interpretation of, or justification for, random assignment via a field experiment is of a “procedure for generating the instrumental variables necessary for the unbiased estimation of causal parameters.”

That these field experiments are being conducted in “real-world” naturalistic settings also has an appeal. Their external validity tends not to be in doubt. The treatments reflect activities that strategic campaign actors either do or could take part in, and they are being administered in the context of actual campaigns to actual potential voters. To provide a contrast frame, the inferential leaps are not as great as those from experiments being conducted in “sterile” behavioral labs on convenience samples of undergraduates.

The resurrection of the field experiment has facilitated marked scientific advance in the study of voter mobilization, and the study of voter mobilization has proven to be the most viable candidate for field experiment research in the study of voting and elections. Treatments that operate on vote choice are likely to be much more controversial and potentially more dubious ethically than are those that operate on voter turnout, especially when the anticipated effect of the latter is mobilization. Although its detractors may suggest that the field experiment is not a design panacea for all areas of study regarding voting and elections, this does not detract from the leverage this approach has provided to the investigation of voter mobilization.

Where Might We Go From Here?

The focus of much of the academic literature on voter turnout is largely removed from the concerns of candidates and their campaigns. Whereas most academic works attempt to explain variation in rates of participation or to provide summary insight into
what types of individuals get to the polls and why, strategic political elites are primarily concerned with targeting and mobilizing those citizens who are likely to support their candidate. Clearly, from the perspective of campaigns, effective GOTV is built around targeting and focus rather than mass appeals (see Malchow 1998, 2000; Rigamer 1998; Faucheux 1999; Lindauer 1999; Allen 2000). In the world of applied politics, mobilization for the sake of mobilization is an ill-advised strategy. According to Shea, “the campaign should steer clear of un-targeted activities.… Remember GOTV efforts are not about getting voters to the polls, but getting the ‘right’ voters to the polls” (Shea 1998: 48; see also Shea 1996). From a strategic perspective, the “problem” with generalized appeals is that they inevitably get some of one’s opponents’ supporters to the polls. Goldstein and Holleque (2010) provide a critique of Gerber and Green’s (2000b) first major contemporary field experiment along similar lines:

By using random assignment, Gerber and Green ignore the strategic nature of mobilization and distance themselves from the actual phenomenon under investigation. As the 2008 election vividly illustrates, candidates care not at all about high turnout, they care about differential turnout—high turnout among their partisans. . . . A more accurate estimate could be obtained if an experiment first identified which citizens were most likely to be mobilized, and then used random assignment among those people.

(Goldstein and Holleque 2010: 586)

Via telemarketing efforts, modern campaigns identify their likely supporters (a subset of the electorate) and, subsequently, focus on mobilizing them.6 Furthermore, the statistical techniques of social science research are migrating into the world of applied politics. Cutting-edge GOTV efforts collect socio-demographic and voting history data to predict citizens’ turnout probabilities via regression equations. According to the proponent practitioners, “knowing the probability that a voter will go to the polls is a huge advantage” (Malchow 1998: 46; see also Malchow 2000). Who is the best target for GOTV? The likely supporter who has a 50/50 chance of voting (Malchow 1998: 46). In terms of efficient use of campaign resources, ill-advised targets are those who are almost certain to vote, those who almost certainly will not vote, and, of course, anyone who likely will not vote for your candidate.

In terms of statistical techniques, campaign consultants are drawing upon political science for some insights. However, academic students of turnout could gain some valuable insights from the world of applied campaigning. My directive is not that research on turnout must become more practical or applied in nature. Rather, a greater understanding and recognition of how real-world campaigns operate should facilitate nuanced and richer theorizing about voter mobilization. Whereas a great deal of the foundational research on participation focused on explanatory factors that are fixed in
any given election (e.g., education, income, age, registration laws), candidates and consultants operate at the margins and take the baseline largely as given. They think quite seriously and in sophisticated ways about the flows of campaign information in this election cycle and what they will mean for the composition of the electorate on Election Day. From this perspective, students of turnout should pay closer attention to such things as the nature of campaign themes and messages and who campaigns target. Voter mobilization is likely a conditional process that depends on both campaign messages and the responsiveness or receptivity of the target audience(s).

As discussed above, the stream of research on negative campaigning and turnout has moved in the direction of providing a nuanced view of flows of campaign information and, to a lesser extent, of the electorate—scholars on both sides have thought quite seriously about the content of campaigns, at least along the dimension of negativity–positivity. Looking at campaigns in a differentiated fashion, this research recognizes a fundamental point about their turnout implications: what campaigns do is probably as important as how much they do. In addition, several of these efforts assess whether negative campaigns demonstrate greater influence on certain types of voters (e.g., on Independents or on the politically unsophisticated).

Thinking about the sources of campaign information raises additional questions. For example, are there differences in the ways in which incumbent, challenger, and open-seat campaigns activate? How do the mobilization efforts of Republicans differ from those of Democrats? In terms of the nature of mobilization, do on-years differ from off-years? Several studies indicate that a presidential contest provides an overriding stimulus that gets to the polls most of those (peripheral) voters who can be activated (e.g., Jackson 1997; M. Smith 2001). As a follow-up consideration, lower level contests may have greater potential to activate voters in mid-term election years, and research into the mobilizing influence of lower level contests may be well advised to examine these off-years.

Again, a lesson that academics should draw from the practitioners is that strategic campaigns target and attempt to get out their voters. Are they effective at doing so? Although a few articles examine the differential turnout influence of campaigns across segments of the electorate, existing research does not provide us with much insight into the answer to this question. Do the content of campaign messages and the emphases of campaigns structure the electorate that shows up at the polls on Election Day (Sides and Karch 2008)? The theories of priming, framing, and issue ownership are among the promising candidates in terms of guiding this style of inquiry. Each of these approaches prompts students of campaigns to think seriously about both the content of campaign appeals and their target audience(s).

Richer theory and data will inform the next generation of voter mobilization studies. In
addition to trying to gauge the level of the stream of campaign information, investigators are beginning to wade into the stream and assess its content—and, via field experiments, to even manipulate the flow. Furthermore, researchers should think more carefully about the differential responsiveness of various segments of the electorate. Again, what is the content of the messages that a campaign is presenting to an electorate? Who are the target audiences for these appeals? What types of voters are likely to be more and less responsive? Generally speaking, is it possible for campaigns to shape the composition of the voting electorate in predictable ways? Campaign operatives behave as if the answer to this last question is an unequivocal “yes,” but existing data and theories of mobilization do not provide us with sufficient insight.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Suzanne Kirayoglu for research assistance.


3. Their rationale is that Democratic elites are especially important to the mobilization of segments of the electorate, such as the poor, who are otherwise unlikely to participate.

4. Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009) outline the importance of taking into account the clustered nature of the data when pooling observations into a “group” based on their location within an electoral district or state. Ignoring the clustered nature of the data (i.e., the fact that the pooled observations are not likely statistically independent) tends to overstate the precision of the estimates for group-level effects. They illustrate this point in relation to the aggregate analysis of Brown, Jackson, and Wright (1999). Furthermore, the impact of statistical clustering should be assessed in any multi-level model that considers survey respondents in electoral context. To date, most of the research on voter mobilization has failed to do so.

5. Franz et al. (2008b) provide a critique of some of the modeling and measurement choices of Krasno and Green (2008a), with a follow-up response from Krasno and Green (2008b).

6. Hillygus and Shields (2008: ch. 6) provide an informative discussion of (micro) targeting in contemporary campaigns. They highlight campaigns’ use of wedge issues to prime potentially persuadable, cross-pressured citizens who identify with the other party.