Riding Obama’s Coattails: The Democrats Finally Take the Ohio 1st

Gregory Petrow, University of Nebraska Omaha

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/gregory-petrow/1/
THE AMERICAN REVIEW OF POLITICS

Volume 30 Spring 2009

CONTENTS

Partisan “New Media” and Opinion Change, 2002-2004
  David A. Jones ................................................................. 1

The Texas Republican Gerrymander of 2003:
Was There an Effect on Congressional “Cheap Seats”?  
  Kenneth A. Wink ............................................................. 17

Presidential Campaigning during Midterm Elections
  Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha and Sean Nicholson-Crotty .............. 35

Expanding the Measure of Congruency: Presidential Anticipation of Public Preferences, 1953-2001
  Brandon Rottinghaus ....................................................... 51

Book Reviews ........................................................................ 71

Table of Contents for Summer 2009 ........................................... 105
The American Review of Politics (ISSN 1051-5054) is published quarterly in issues currently combined in Spring & Summer and Fall & Winter volumes, by University of Arkansas Printing Services, Fayetteville, AR 72701; http://policy.uark.edu/arp/index.htm. Postage paid at Fayetteville, AR. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The American Review of Politics, 428 Old Main, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

The journal is supported by the University of Arkansas through its Public Policy Ph.D. Program, Graduate School, and J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences; and The Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron.

INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS: Send manuscripts for publication consideration to Andrew Dowdle, Editor, The American Review of Politics, Department of Political Science, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701, adowdle@uark.edu; http://policy.uark.edu/arp/index.html. Four copies of any manuscript, three of which will have all identifying references removed, and an abstract of approximately 100 words are required for publication consideration. Manuscripts will not be returned. The journal prefers manuscripts that are double spaced and 25 to 30 pages in length, including text, notes, references, and tables and/or graphs and conforming to the Style Manual for Political Science published by the American Political Science Association. Moreover, manuscripts should not be submitted simultaneously to another journal.

SUBSCRIPTION AND BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE: Managing Editor, The American Review of Politics, Department of Political Science, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701, adowdle@uark.edu. All subscriptions should be sent to the managing editor, as well as correspondence concerning advertising or journal exchanges. Subscription rates: U.S., $25.00 per year for individuals; $60.00 for libraries and institutions. Foreign postage is an additional $40.00 for airmail.

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR: Richard L. Engstrom, The Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Social Sciences, Social Science Research Institute, Duke University, Erwin Mill, Duke Box 90420, Durham, NC 27708, richard.engstrom@duke.edu. Please send books for review to Dr. Engstrom.


TYPESET: The American Review of Politics is typeset by Mary Brohammer, The Wordsmith, 725 W 25th St Apt 4, Lawrence, KS 66046-4484, mbro@kgs.ku.edu.

© The American Review of Politics
Partisan “New Media” and Opinion Change, 2002-2004

David A. Jones

When gathering news about public affairs, citizens may now choose from a broader selection of political “new media” outlets that provide programming closely aligned with their opinions and worldviews. This study explores whether partisan opinion-based communication such as that broadcast on talk radio influence the views of their audiences. It finds that between 2002 and 2004 Democrats who regularly listened to political talk radio developed distinctly cooler feelings toward President Bush and other high-profile GOP leaders. Although these findings provide no decisive proof of media effects, they do raise questions about partisan new media’s contributions to polarization in the electorate at large. As more partisan outlets become available, existing political cleavages may widen.

Until recently, scholars found little evidence of what most political actors have long assumed: that the media may have a powerful impact on public opinion. Instead of shaping political attitudes and behavior in meaningful ways, the media seemed to have only “minimal effects” on the way Americans thought and acted. But the research consensus shifted when scholars began disentangling a number of methodological and theoretical problems (e.g., Bartels 1993). John Zaller (1996, 18), for one, found empirical evidence to decisively rebut the minimal effects paradigm:

Exactly as common intuition would suggest, mass communication is a powerful instrument for shaping the attitudes of the citizens who are exposed to it, and it exercises this power on an essentially continuous basis.

Apparently, one reason for such scant evidence was that citizens are exposed to a variety of competing messages, which often cancel each other out. That meant, for example, that during the 2004 election campaign, a week of mostly negative coverage of President Bush would have been offset by a week of positive stories. Significant media effects are difficult to tease out partly because the overall tone of standard news media coverage rarely favored one side over the other.

Recent media trends make this “canceling out” phenomenon less prevalent. Although mainstream media news outlets continue to strive for objectivity and balance, they often fall short (Groseclose and Milyo 2005)—perhaps more so today than during the “objective media” era of the 20th century (West 2001). Journalists have become more aggressive in their...
reporting and more likely to interpret the news rather than merely report the facts of a particular story; in other words—to paraphrase the “Five W’s” of basic news writing—they focus more on the “why” and “how” of the story than the “who,” “what,” and “when.” Sometimes the prevailing interpretations sway decidedly in one particular direction. This was the case in the early stages of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Bennett 2003), which was slanted in a pro-White House direction, and during the 1992 presidential election, which saw significantly more negative stories about President George H.W. Bush than Governor Bill Clinton (Shah et al. 1999).

Another relevant change in the media environment—the focus of this paper—is the emergence of partisan “new media” sources. Citizens on the right and left may now choose from a more diverse set of media sources that provide news and political talk closely aligned with their political views. On cable television, the Fox News Channel broadcasts news and talk shows that lean to the right and attract conservative audiences (Morris 2005). On the internet, partisan “bloggers” post links to news stories accompanied by personal commentary by the individual hosting the site; anecdotal evidence suggests that left-leaning web sites such as the Daily Kos prevail on the “blogosphere.” Political talk radio programs provide their mostly right-leaning audiences with outlets for hearing fellow conservatives talk politics on the air with a charismatic host. Other talk shows, such as the radio programs broadcast on Air America, feature decidedly liberal messages (delivered to much smaller audiences). The emergence of these partisan outlets is important because the more audiences seek out these sources at the expense of traditional news media outlets, the less they potentially expose themselves to messages that are incompatible with their beliefs (Mutz and Martin 2001).

What is the potential impact of partisan new media messages? In this study, I examined whether partisans who reported regular exposure to opinion-based media outlets experienced significant opinion change over time. Specifically, I attempted to assess the effect of regular listening to political talk radio on partisan subjects’ feelings toward President Bush and other high-profile Republican leaders.

**New Media**

The growing availability of new political media sources is a positive development in many respects. Americans are no longer as dependent on the mainstream media for information about public affairs. Although they still rely on daily newspapers, local television news programs, and the nightly network news, more and more citizens are supplementing—but not replacing—their traditional media diet with news, talk and commentary from such
sources as talk radio, cable TV talk shows, late-night comedy, and internet blogs. Many of these sources provide an entertaining and sometimes informative take on the day’s news. Citizens—as long as they have cable TV service and internet access—may choose from a wider array of political information sources than anyone imagined during the dominance of a more homogenous “mass media,” when many scholars were concerned about the media’s propensity to encourage mainstream thinking and conformity (for example, see Gerbner et al. 1982). Indeed, it would be a mistake to lament the fact that Americans are less reliant on the Big Three networks for political information. After all, traditional broadcast news media so often fail to provide the information voters need to make informed decisions (Patterson 1993).

Unfortunately, this new “fragmented media” environment is fraught with problems (West 2001). For one, it is easier for some citizens to tune out politics. On broadcast outlets, large chunks of the programme day—particularly the early evening—are dedicated to news. This meant that in the 1960s and 1970s, before cable was king, most Americans who wanted to watch television between the hours of 6 and 7pm had almost no choice but to watch the news. News was the only show on the majors networks during that time; “choice” constituted either selecting between one of the three network news programs, syndicated programming on a local independent channel, or turning off the television. Even unmotivated viewers gained substantive political information via television—even if it was inadvertent. Today, however, citizens who are less engaged in public affairs are more likely to opt for entertainment programming (Prior 2007). Whereas less engaged citizens were once compelled to experience “politics by default” (Neuman 1996), they now may completely avoid news about public affairs. As a result, there are wider gaps in knowledge and participation between motivated and non-motivated citizens (Prior 2007).

Yet choice has been a boon for news junkies. Engaged citizens can—and do—take advantage of a vast array of political programming on cable television and on the internet (Prior 2007). They are better informed as a result (Prior 2007). But some of these new media outlets have their own shortcomings. Talk show hosts and late-night comedians are not journalists. The programs they host are not conventional news organizations. They are thus less constrained by journalistic norms such as objectivity, fairness, and balance (Barker and Knight 2000). Indeed, according to Lee and Cappella “the norm is one-sidedness” (2001). These sources also lack the checks and balances needed to ensure accuracy in the information they present (Davis and Owen 1998). Granted, journalists and the mainstream news organizations they work for are not always objective, fair and balanced either (Groseclose and Milyo 2005; Schiffer 2006). Their mistakes are sometimes
egregious and can carry serious implications, as was the case when the *New York Times* published dozens of inaccurate stories written by reporter Jayson Blair. On the whole, however, conventional news organizations succeed in their efforts to be fair and accurate (Niven 1999). That is not the case with political talk shows, which are more concerned about entertaining their audiences, heightening conflict between the left and right, communicating particular points of view, spreading gossip, or all of the above (Davis and Owen 1998).

The effects of these differences are unclear, but potentially serious. For one, new media consumption has been associated with misinformation and distorted perceptions of political realities. Morris (2005), for example, found that viewers of the Fox News Channel were likely to underestimate the number of US casualties suffered in Iraq despite paying close attention to the news about the war. In a different study of Fox News, viewers of the network were far more likely than audiences for other news outlets to believe that the U.S. had found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and evidence of a link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda (Kull et al. 2003). Others have associated misinformation with exposure to talk radio (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Hofstetter and Barker 1999), the new media outlet that is analyzed in this paper. Although it is unclear whether the new media content is extraordinarily misinformed or distorted, these findings serve as a reminder that people often “fill in” knowledge gaps selectively with information that is consistent with existing beliefs (Kuklinski et al. 1997). Partisan talk shows and other new media may foster such reasoning (Hofstetter and Barker 1999).

The focus of this paper is the new media’s potential effect on individual attitudes. The findings of other related studies suggest that partisan media outlets may contribute to opinion polarization in the electorate (Jones 2001; Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1996). In Canada, a fragmented media environment in Quebec seems to magnify differences between French Canadians and other citizens (Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1996). In the US, conservative Americans who listened to right-wing talk radio shifted further to the right in the mid-1990s (Jones 2001). Studies such as these underline the assumptions of group polarization theory, which holds that people’s views on particular issues tend to be enhanced or become more extreme after discussing those issues with like-minded people (e.g., Myers and Lamm 1975; Isenberg 1986).

The current paper’s research questions are designed to build on this line of work. Between 2002 and 2004, did Republicans who regularly listen to talk radio develop warmer feelings toward the President, the Vice President, and other high-profile Republicans? Did the opposite occur for Democratic listeners of talk radio? By exploring these questions, I seek to develop a
more nuanced understanding of the potential impact of new political media that communicate partisan messages.

Talk Radio

In some ways, talk radio is not “new media” at all. Radio is old technology. Local radio programs that invite listeners to call in and express their political views have been in existence for decades, and were quite popular in the 1970s. Yet a number of technological and legal factors—including the ubiquity of toll-free phone calling and the dismantling of the Fairness Doctrine—have facilitated the emergence of call-in talk shows that are national in scope (Cappella et al. 1996, 6).

By the mid-1990s, political talk radio was a leading source of alternative media (Davis and Owen 1998). Like other forms of new media, talk radio programs are free to provide listeners with an entertaining, often inflammatory form of political commentary. With opinion playing such a prominent role, talk radio programs tend to attract audiences of people who agree with what the hosts say (Owen 1997). United by shared political perspectives, listeners to any given program may experience a form of group identification with a mediated, virtual community made up of similarly minded people. This community consists of people who share not only an interest in public affairs, but also a general agreement with the political views expressed on the air. By listening to other members of such a community, people learn values, norms, ways of thinking and speaking (Herbst 1995, 23). Listeners who identify with, or somehow belong to, a talk radio audience can turn to their program for political cues—sometimes called information shortcuts or heuristics (Chaiken 1980; Mondak 1993). By listening to the discussion on the air, members of this community can find out, on a very specific level, “what people like me think.” Perhaps partisan talk shows help audience members make sense of an otherwise confusing political world overflowing with policy details, ideological distinctions, and strategic political maneuvering.

Does opinion change follow? What effects do talk radio messages have on their audiences? On the whole, the most popular talk radio shows attract decidedly conservative listeners (Bennett 2002; Bolce et al. 1996; Cappella et al. 1996; Owen 1997), although liberal or moderate shows and audiences do exist in smaller numbers (Lee and Cappella 2001). With Rush Limbaugh and other like-minded hosts dominating the airwaves, the medium provides a safe haven of sorts for conservatives disgruntled with the so-called “liberal media” (Jones 2004). Listening to talk radio has been associated with negative feelings toward President Clinton (Owen 2000) and Al Gore (Holbert 2004), positive feelings toward George Bush (Holbert 2004), and
Republican vote choice (Barker 1999). Talk radio messages thus may have a greater potential to reinforce existing predispositions rather than persuade listeners to change their minds (Lee and Cappella 2001; Owen 1997; Yanovitsky and Cappella 2001). Furthermore, the anti-government messages that prevail on talk radio may deepen listeners’ negative attitudes toward government institutions (Pfau et al. 1998). Even though attitude reinforcement is sometimes portrayed as a “minimal effect” (Zaller 1996), it can be consequential, especially if members of the audience are becoming more conservative over time (Barker 2002; Barker 2000; Jones 2004). This is especially important in light of evidence that talk radio can also have a mobilizing effect, spurring listeners to contact elected officials (Pan and Kosicki 1997) and stimulating other types of political participation (Hofstetter 1996; Hollander 1996).

In sum, existing research suggests that talk radio and other forms of new media communicate messages that can shape opinions and spur behavior. Although their tendency to attract like-minded audiences makes dramatic persuasion effects “tricky” to demonstrate (Barker 2000), subtle shifts in opinion can have important consequences.

**Methods**

One approach to exploring media effects is to analyze individual opinion change over time, analyzing patterns among different types of media users. For this study, I did just that by looking at the 840 American National Election Study panelists who participated in the 2000, 2002 and 2004 surveys. The key dependent variables were feelings toward key Republican figures prominent in the news (and therefore presumably on political talk shows): President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, First Lady Laura Bush, John Ashcroft and Colin Powell, as measured by feeling thermometers. The key independent variable was talk radio exposure. Since I eventually analyzed changes in these thermometer scores and the extent to which talk radio listening explains these shifts, I controlled for other factors that may help explain this sort of opinion change.

The two key variable sets warrant elaboration:

*Feeling thermometers.* After examining the data, I realized that changes in these particular thermometer scores between 2000 and 2002 would be distorted by the effects of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Accordingly, I limited my analysis to opinion change between 2002 and 2004, setting aside the feeling thermometer scores for 2000. In 2002, the feeling thermometer questions were asked during the pre-election survey; in 2004, during the post-election survey.
Talk Radio. Only in the 2000 post-election survey were respondents asked whether they listened to talk radio—or, radio programs “in which people call in to voice their opinions about politics.” Subjects who said “yes” were then asked two follow-up questions: whether they (1) listen every day, most days, once or twice a week, or only occasionally and (2) pay very close attention, fairly close attention, occasional attention, or very little attention. For my analysis, regular talk radio listeners were the 165 panelists who said they listen to call-in political radio at least “once or twice a week” and pay at least “fairly close attention.” My first assumption then was that these respondents—because they indicated regular, close attention in 2000—were still listening in 2002 and 2004. Although this is admittedly a stretch, I hope that the elimination of inattentive occasional listeners made drop-offs less likely.  

Results

Univariate analysis revealed no surprises: overall, feelings cooled toward the President, Vice President and Attorney General between 2002 and 2004, but remained warm for the less polarizing First Lady and Secretary of State. Still benefiting from his perceived leadership during 9/11 and the war on terrorism, President Bush’s mean thermometer score was 65.5 in 2002—nine points higher than two years earlier. Between 2002 and 2004, however, it dropped about seven points to 58.5. Vice President Cheney’s mean thermometer score started lower in 2002 (59.9), but also declined by about seven points by 2004. John Ashcroft dropped from 55.8 to 49.3 on average. Laura Bush, by contrast, was regarded warmly both years, finishing 2004 with a mean thermometer rating of 68.3—a two point increase from 2002. Similarly, Colin Powell maintained his popularity, dropping insignificantly from 72.0 in 2002 to 69.9 in 2004.

Did new media exposure help explain the shifts that occurred and the differences in ratings? Turning to the panelists who participated in both years, I computed change scores by subtracting the 2002 thermometer rating from its 2004 counterpart. I then compared mean change scores across various groups distinguished in terms of their talk radio habits.

The first comparison was between regular talk radio listeners and non-listeners. Here, no patterns emerged. Regular talk radio listeners felt cooler toward President Bush, Cheney, and Ashcroft in 2004 than in 2002, but no more so than non-listeners. As with non-listeners, Laura Bush and Colin Powell maintained their high ratings among talk radio listeners.

Yet this first-order analysis overlooks the partisan elements of political talk radio and other new media outlets (see discussion at the beginning of this paper). Although talk radio is most popular among conservative
Republicans, left-leaning talk is broadcast on National Public Radio, local political call-in shows hosted by Randi Rhodes and Michael Jackson, and stations with a predominately African-American audience (Squires 2000); presumably, they also attract like-minded audiences. In any case, it would be mistake to lump together all talk radio programs and their listeners. Unfortunately, only in 1996 did the NES include a question measuring exposure to a particular radio program, the one hosted by Rush Limbaugh. To help compensate, I separated talk radio listeners and non-listeners into six groups along partisan lines:\(^5\)

1. Republicans who regularly listen to talk radio (N = 80)
2. Democrats who listen regularly to talk radio (N = 36)
3. Independents who listen regularly to talk radio (N = 49)
4. Republicans who do not listen to talk radio (N = 180)
5. Democrats who do not listen to talk radio (N = 236) and
6. Independents who do not listen to talk radio (N = 250)

I thus operated under another key measurement assumption: that self-identified Republicans who listened to talk radio primarily tuned in to conservative programs such as Limbaugh’s, and that self-identified Democratic and independent listeners mostly tuned in to radio programs that were similarly compatible with their beliefs. No doubt many of these subjects listened to a variety of political talk shows, not all of them consistent with their personal partisan orientations. Indeed, the Limbaugh audience includes quite a few liberal Democrats (Barker 2002). But I will assume that most of the programming favored by the typical talk radio regular leans in the direction of their existing leanings.

These results also followed likely patterns. Democrats on the whole were bound to develop cooler feeling toward the three most polarizing Republicans studied here: President Bush, Cheney and Ashcroft—and that proved to be the case here (Figure 1). But the decline was precipitous among regular talk radio listeners who identified themselves as Democrats. On average, Democrats who regularly listened to talk radio rated President Bush 21.8 points cooler on the thermometer scale in 2004 than they did in 2002. That is nine points steeper than the decline among Democrats who did not listen to talk radio (down 12.6 points; p<.01). Independents who listened regularly to talk radio also rated Bush significantly lower (down 8.1 points), slightly more so than independents who did not listen to talk radio (Figure 3). Among Republican regular listeners, by contrast, feelings toward Bush cooled only slightly—down 2.2 points (Figure 2).
Figure 1. Democrats
Feeling Thermometer Changes 2002 vs. 2004

Figure 2. Republicans
Feeling Thermometer Changes 2002-2004

Figure 3. Independents
Feeling Thermometer Changes 2002-2004

Total = All Respondents (N = 831)
Rep non-TR = Republicans who did not regularly listen to talk radio (N = 180)
Ind non-TR = Independents did not regularly listen to talk radio (N = 250)
Dem non-TR = Democrats did not regularly listen to talk radio (N = 236)
Rep TR = Republicans who regularly listened to talk radio (N = 80)
Ind TR = Independents who regularly listened to talk radio (N = 49)
Dem TR = Democrats who regularly listened to talk radio (N = 36)
For Vice President Cheney and John Ashcroft, the declines followed similar patterns. Cheney was down 22 points among Democrats who regularly listened to talk radio, ten points sharper than among non-listening Democrats (down 12.3 points; p<.01). Ashcroft’s rating also dropped ten points sharper among Democratic talk radio regulars (p<.01) Among independents, the differences between talk radio regulars and non-regulars were negligible. But among Republicans, regular talk radio listeners exhibited more support for Cheney and Ashcroft than their non-listening fellow partisans. Although Cheney was down only slightly among Republicans who listen regularly (down 2.8 points) and those who do not (down 3.4 points), Ashcroft’s decline was sharper among non-listening Republicans (down 5.4 points compared with a decline of only 3.3 points for talk radio regulars).

The differences were perhaps most striking with First Lady Laura Bush. Recall that overall her thermometer scores rose slightly between 2002 and 2004. Comparing groups, however, this steady pattern held for only independents and Republicans—regular talk radio listeners and non-regulars alike, with Republicans increasing by a slightly higher amount. Democrats who reported regular listening to talk radio rated her significantly lower in 2004 than in 2002, cooling by 11.4 points compared with a relatively minor 4.4-point decline among non-listening Democrats (p<.01).

For Colin Powell, it was Republican and independent talk radio regulars who bucked the trend. Whereas the other groups developed slightly cooler feelings toward Bush’s Secretary of State, warmer feelings emerged among independents and Republicans who listened to talk radio regularly. Still, the differences between the groups were relatively slight.

In sum, one group in particular underwent significant opinion shifts between 2002 and 2004: Democrats who regularly listened to talk radio. Toward the President, Vice President, First Lady, and Attorney General, they cooled more than not only Republicans and independents, but also fellow Democrats who were not regular talk radio listeners. Also noteworthy is that Republicans who listened to talk radio—more so than their non-listening GOP counterparts—held steady in their feelings toward these three Republican figures, cooling relatively slightly between 2002 and 2004.

If partisan talk listeners underwent significant opinion change between 2002 and 2004, how much of these shifts can be explained by their exposure to talk radio? Was there a causal relationship between talk radio listening and increasingly cool feelings toward high-profile Republicans? It would difficult to answer this question without controlled media-effects experiments (e.g., Iyengar 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1983; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1996). But OLS regression analysis using panel data moves us a step closer. For a more rigorous test of the prospect that new media exposure is a key factor explaining these shifts, I regressed each of the thermometers
scores for 2004 on (1) their 2002 counterparts (2) a measure of talk radio listening and (3) two other variables that plausibly could have influenced changes in feelings toward these political figures. By incorporating the lagged value of the dependent variable, I have created a model of attitude change. This allowed me to focus on factors that may have contributed to opinion shifts between 2002 and 2004 (presumably, the effects of more stable factors are reflected in the lagged dependent variable). One potential source of influence—and the one that is of greatest interest here—was exposure to talk radio, for which I created a dummy variable (1 = respondent regularly and closely listened to talk radio). Other possible influences on attitude change between 2002 and 2004 included whether the respondent (1) perceived the war in Iraq—which started in 2003—was worth the cost and (2) is financially better or worse off compared with a year before. Other relatively stable control measures (e.g., ideology) should be captured in the lagged versions of the dependent variables.

Table 1. Talk Radio and Feelings toward Key Republican Figures: Democrats vs. Republicans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrats</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular talk radio</td>
<td>-.09**</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Iraq War</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic pessimism</td>
<td>-05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 FT</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. $R^2$</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republicans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular talk radio</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Iraq War</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic pessimism</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 FT</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. $R^2$</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .05

**p ≤ .01

FT = Feeling Thermometer Rating (1-100)

Is partisan talk radio associated with opinion change even when controlling for all of these other potential sources of influence between 2002 and 2004? For the most part, that appears to be the case. Table 1 shows separate results for Democrats and Republicans on the relationship between regular talk radio listening and feelings toward all five subjects, controlling for the lagged dependent variable and the two other controls. For Democrats, regular talk radio listening was associated with significantly cooler feelings toward four of the five subjects. For Republicans, three of the five subjects significantly benefited from regular talk radio listening. These relationships held even when several other plausible sources were held constant.

**Discussion**

It would be a mistake to overstate the strength of the evidence presented here. The models are inherently incomplete. The measurement assumptions entailed several compromises. As is always the case when attempting to analyze attitudinal change, other explanatory factors were either overlooked in theory or unmeasured or both. Indeed, other studies of talk radio and other forms of new media (e.g., Barker 1999)—including research by the current author—have benefited from more precise measures of key concepts.

Yet, it also would be a mistake to use measurement limitations as a reason to set aside NES data for analyzing the new media phenomenon during this time frame. And the essence of these results is worth underlining: that exposure to a partisan new media outlet is associated with significant movement in opinion over time. Although there is nothing extraordinary about attitudinal shifts among like-minded people, it is noteworthy that particular forms of media use seem to help explain these changes—even when available measures are limited. To be sure, the shifts suggest a reinforcement effect—perhaps more evidence of minimal consequences—rather than full-fledged persuasion. It is possible that talk radio listeners are the type of people who polarize during the course of a presidency. Few of the respondents changed their minds about the President, Vice President and First Lady. Democrats were inclined to feel coolly about them and Republicans were inclined to feel warmly. But those who tuned in to a particular form of media shifted further than their fellow partisans—in opposite directions. Such shifts did not occur among people who did not listen regularly to talk radio.

The widespread availability of nationally distributed partisan new media is a fairly recent phenomenon (Davis and Owen 1998). But their appeal is hardly mysterious. When given the opportunity, “people invoke
their own political preferences when they search out sources of information—they attempt to locate a bias that reflects their own predispositions and self-perceived interests” (Huckfeldt et al. 1995, 1049). Survey evidence suggests that “conservatives and liberals are increasingly choosing sides” in terms of where they get their news about public affairs (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2004, 13). The findings of this study hint at what may happen when people tune in to partisan new media on a regular basis. From partisan political outlets, like-minded members of the audience experience political communication primarily among people who think like themselves. They hear and see charismatic talk show hosts elucidate and articulate why they feel the way they do. The views they already support are less likely to be “cancelled out” by other perspectives (at least until they change the channel or read the newspaper). Armed with the knowledge that their views are shared by millions of others, their feelings sometimes shift every so slightly. In this case, Democrats shifted a bit further to the left, Republicans to the right.

Perhaps partisan media outlets already contribute to “the magnification of social cleavages” and other forms of opinion polarization (Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1996). Although it is easy to exaggerate the depth and breadth of polarization in the US electorate (Fiorina 2005), there are deep divisions between a broad swath of Democratic and Republican voters (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006). The public’s news consumption habits seem to reflect these cleavages (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2004). As partisan new media outlets become more widely available, existing divisions may become further accentuated.

NOTES

1 For providing the data, I am grateful to the National Election Studies / Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan. I am solely responsible for errors and interpretations of these data.

2 Admittedly, the choice of these particular individuals was partly determined by the availability of indicators in more than one wave. Indeed, this explains why no Democrats were used in the analysis. Whereas in 2000 Al Gore and Bill Clinton dominated political discussion, John Kerry was the party’s standard bearer in 2004. By contrast, all five Republicans maintained high profiles across all three waves.

3 Analysis of related measures suggests that media use can be fairly stable for regular viewers and readers. Among respondents who said they read a newspaper at least four days a week in 2000, about 80 percent reported the same level of newspaper reading two years later. Among regular TV viewers of the national news in 2000, about 76 percent reported watching the national news in 2002.

4 Because it was not created until 2004, Air America Radio—a national network for progressive talk shows—falls outside of the time frame for this analysis.
As a measure of party identification, I used the NES’s summary party identification variable that combines the question, “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” with the follow-up measure of party strength, “Would you call yourself a strong Democrat/Republican or a not very strong Democrat/Republican?” and the probe for independents, “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic party?” For my analysis, Republicans and Democrats included both strong and weak identifiers along with independent leaners, leaving only a handful of “pure” independents.

Respondents were asked, “Taking everything into account, do you think the war in Iraq has been worth the cost or not?” I treated this as a dummy variable with 1 = worth it.

Because so few panelists identified themselves as pure independents, I did not include a separate regression for this category of respondents.

For raising this point, I give full credit to one of the anonymous reviewers who evaluated this manuscript.

REFERENCES


The Texas Republican Gerrymander of 2003: Was There an Effect on Congressional “Cheap Seats”?

Kenneth A. Wink

I examine the 2002, 2004, and 2006 Texas congressional elections to determine whether Republican redistricting in 2003 affected partisan turnout bias in subsequent elections. I use election results published in relevant issues of the Almanac of American Politics and from the website of the Texas Secretary of State’s Office and apply James E. Campbell’s (1996) calculation of partisan turnout bias. I find the Republican gerrymander did not reduce the Democratic advantage in turnout bias, suggesting that Republicans were somewhat restricted from affecting turnout bias by legal requirements to draw majority-minority districts and—more importantly—they probably had as their first priority the gaining of a favorable allocation or distributional bias rather than a favorable turn-out bias in translating votes into seats.

In a recent study of the second U.S. House redistricting in Texas in the first decade of the new millennium, McKee et al. (2006) found that all five plans proposed by the Texas state legislature—including the plan eventually passed—were biased toward the Republicans. The pro-Republican bias of the redistricting plans came as no surprise, given the fact that Republicans had expressed dismay at the outcome of the 2002 House elections, in which Republican candidates received a majority of the statewide congressional vote but won only 15 of the 32 House seats. Republicans were further spurred to action by the perception that Texas Democrats had succeeded in avoiding the fates of their brethren in Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina in the 1992 election and the mid-term election in 1994. Whereas Democrats in the southeast lost many U.S. House seats due to the creation of majority-minority districts in their states, Texas Democrats had cleverly drawn districts with bare majorities of Latinos and/or African-Americans and had combined urban and rural pro-Democratic constituencies to maintain their congressional majority (Hill 1995; Lublin 1997; Petrocik and Despasato 1998). When, after the smoke cleared from the 2002 state elections the Republicans had control of both houses of the legislature and the governorship in Texas for the first time since Reconstruction, GOP lawmakers found a legal loophole in the fact that the first redistricting plan was passed by

The data used in this analysis have been collected by the author and will be gladly shared with any interested readers.

KENNETH A. WINK is an associate professor of public administration and chair of the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Texas at Tyler.

©2009 The American Review of Politics
federal judges and never passed by the legislature. They seized their opportunity and pushed through a decidedly pro-Republican plan.

Using the methodology associated with Gelman and King’s (1994) JudgeIt software program, McKee et al. (2006) identified levels of bias for the various Republican proposals and noted that Plan 1374C, the adopted plan, seemed likely to produce the highest level of pro-GOP bias in the short-term, when incumbency was taken into account. In the 2004 election, Republicans picked up a net gain of 6 seats, making the total Texas congressional delegation consist of 21 Republicans and 11 Democrats. The magnitude of the Republican swing in 2004 seems to confirm the existence of a pro-Republican “allocation” bias—the type of bias found by McKee et al.—in the translation of seats to votes. But the size of the Republican tsunami in 2004 also begs another question: Did the Republican gerrymander succeed in making Democratic seats more costly to win or Republican seats less costly to win? In the words of James Campbell (1996), what happened to the Democratic “cheap seats” in the 2004 Texas House races? This article is an attempt to answer the question of how cheap seats were affected by the redistricting and what effect the change in cheap seats had on the final partisan makeup of the Texas congressional delegation, a question that looms large for other states in the southwestern U.S. (and, increasingly, nationwide) as the growth in the Latino population poses challenges to the achieving of fair representation for all ethnic groups.

The Republican Gerrymander of 2003

What did the Republicans do to alter the balance of power so greatly in the Texas congressional delegation? The Republicans targeted several Democrats for defeat and acted also to shore up the district of the lone Hispanic Republican Representative, Henry Bonilla. Max Sandlin (District 1) and Jim Turner (District 2) in East Texas, Nick Lampson (District 9) in Southeast Texas, Chet Edwards (District 11) in Central Texas, Charles Stenholm (District 17) in West Texas, and Martin Frost (District 24) in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex were the Democrats targeted for defeat. Before describing the Republican strategy in detail, it should be noted that Republicans had benefited even before the 2003 redistricting when Texas received two additional seats after the decennial census. Those two seats were created in high growth suburban areas and both were won by Republicans in 2002: the 31st district stretched from suburban Houston to north of Austin and the 32nd was created in affluent, mostly Anglo areas of Dallas.

In East Texas, Districts 1 and 2, made up disproportionately of conservative Democrats living in rural counties, were sliced down and joined with a number of other districts having more concentrated areas of population. Max
Sandlin was defeated by Republican Louie Gohmert in the newly drawn Tyler-based District 1. Jim Turner, the incumbent from District 2, decided to retire after his district was carved into Districts 1, 2, and 8, all of which were won by Republicans.

In the Houston area, Districts 7, 8, 9, 14, and 25 were dramatically gerrymandered. District 7, already a safe Republican district, was drawn with a more heavily Anglo population than before, thus leaving surrounding districts more heavily populated with minority voters. District 9, Democratic incumbent Lampson’s district, had consisted of the Galveston Bay area east and southeast of Houston (Galveston and Jefferson counties) and a small part of Houston proper. Heavily Anglo portions of Lampson’s district were moved to the 2nd and 14th districts; indeed, Lampson ran for reelection in the 2nd district and was defeated by Republican Ted Poe and the 14th district became an even safer seat for Republican incumbent Ron Paul. Poe’s effort was helped by the fact that the 8th District occupied by Republican incumbent Kevin Brady shed its north Harris county white suburban areas to Poe’s district, pushing the safe Republican 8th further north and east to incorporate more rural (but still conservative) areas. Democratic incumbent Chris Bell had occupied a comfortable south Houston district (the 25th) made up of an eclectic mix of working-class Anglo, Hispanic, and black voters. After the GOP gerrymander, most of the African-American neighborhoods in the old 25th wound up in the newly drawn 9th district and Bell (an Anglo) was defeated by Republican Al Green (an African-American) in the Democratic primary in 2004. Many of Bell’s former Anglo and Hispanic constituents, meanwhile, found themselves in a district already safe for Democratic incumbent Gene Green (the 29th). When the cutting was done in the larger Houston area, the partisan tally went from five Democrats and four Republicans to three Democrats and six Republicans.

In central Texas, Chet Edwards’ District 11, consisting of population based largely in Bell and McLennan counties, was literally split in two. Edwards ran for reelection in 2004 in the northern half of the old district, the newly drawn 17th, with his base in Waco (McLennan County). Despite having fewer African-Americans in District 17, Edwards eked out a 51 percent to 47 percent victory over Republican Arlene Wohlgemuth in the 2004 election, thus becoming the lone targeted Democrat to survive the Republican gerrymander.

Charlie Stenholm also experienced a division of his district into multiple new districts. The old 17th had included population centers immediately west and northwest of Fort Worth, extending westward to include the cities of Abilene and San Angelo. After the 2003 redistricting, the only thing left was Abilene; the bulk of the population of the new district (the 19th) extended northwest to Lubbock and continued on to the New Mexico border.
The problem for Stenholm is that Lubbock was the home base of Randy Neugebauer, a Republican first elected to the House in a special election in 2003. The result was that Stenholm, who had served in Congress since 1978, was crushed by Neugebauer 58 percent to 40 percent in the 2004 election; meanwhile, Republicans continued to control the three other districts into which parts of Stenholm’s old district were merged.

Similar to Stenholm, Martin Frost found his district located in the mid-cities area between Dallas and Fort Worth perfectly situated to be carved into four different districts. It was, and Frost found himself living in the Dallas stronghold of Republican incumbent Pete Sessions’ 32nd district. Although this move by the GOP was a bit risky in that significant Hispanic populations were merged into Sessions’ once safe district, the result was another win for the GOP, with Sessions beating Frost 54 percent to 44 percent.

At the same time as the Democrats were targeted for defeat, Republican Henry Bonilla’s district was made safer by the redistricting. His old district, the 23rd, had included suburbs of San Antonio but it also stretched westward nearly to El Paso, including the bulk of southwest Texas. The new 23rd brought in heavily Anglo Kendall and Kerr counties from the German Hill country and lopped off heavily Hispanic and Democratic leaning Laredo in the south. The result was that Bonilla defeated his Democratic opponent by 40 percent of the vote, a vast improvement over his 5 percent victory in 2002. However, a Democratic Party federal court challenge to the redistricting plan succeeded in having Bonilla’s district redrawn again to resemble the old 23rd since Hispanic voting-age population (VAP) was reduced from approximately 63 percent of the total VAP to just under 50 percent. In the ensuing special election resulting from the federal court’s decision, Bonilla lost 54 percent to 46 percent to former Democratic member of Congress Ciro Rodriguez. Special elections in Districts 15, 21, 22, 25, and 28 as a result of the litigation failed to change the balance of power since these districts were only changed slightly, although Democrat Nick Lampson won the contest in District 22 after Republican incumbent Tom DeLay resigned his seat after his much-publicized legal problems (Barone and Cohen 2003, 2005; Texas Legislative Council 2003a, 2003b).

In summary, the Republicans won a net gain of five seats by exercising different strategies in different parts of the state. In the Houston area, the packing of African-Americans and Hispanics into more homogeneous districts worked to the advantage of the GOP. In central Texas, slicing the African-American population was attempted but without much success. In East and West Texas, there was less a case of pairing Democratic incumbents as redrawing the districts of Democratic incumbents to include much of the population base of the districts of Republican incumbents. In Dallas, slicing minorities and the pairing of a Republican and Democratic incum-
bent did the trick. In actuality, however, since changes in one or two districts affected a number of contiguous districts, one almost has to look at a state map to appreciate fully what the Republicans accomplished. Essentially, the Republicans used urban population centers spreading into rural areas to shift district lines with nearly surgical precision to advantage Republican incumbents and challengers and to weaken Democratic incumbents.

The Nature of Partisan Bias

Did the Republican redistricting have an impact on partisan bias, after all? That depends on the sort of partisan bias being measured. Partisan bias is generally understood to consist of inequity or asymmetry in the translation of partisan votes into party seats in the legislature. In legislative elections having single-member districts with plurality winner rules, the fact that the winning party typically wins a higher percentage of seats than popular votes is not sufficient to prove the existence of partisan bias. An electoral system is deemed biased when one party wins a higher or lower percentage of seats than would the other party, at some given percentage of the popular vote. Grofman et al. (1997) asserted that partisan bias can emerge under three conditions: (1) When the distribution of partisan voters differs by geographical area in such a way that one party wins an inflated seat share [distributional bias]; (2) When seats are allocated based on differences in population across constituencies [malapportionment bias]; (3) When one party’s supporters turn out to vote at higher rates than their partisan opponents [turnout bias].

Most studies of partisan bias have used the JudgeIt methodology or King and Browning’s (1987) logit model approach, which involves regressing a party’s seat percentages on its vote percentages and identifying bias by the coefficient associated with the constant. In fact, there is a voluminous literature that spans many types of American elections in which researchers have followed one or the other of these approaches: Congressional elections (Brunell 1999; Gelman and King 1994b); U.S. state legislative elections (Browning and King 1987; Campagna 1991; Gelman and King 1994a; Gryski et al. 1990; Niemi and Jackman 1991); the electoral college (Garand and Parent 1991); and presidential primaries and caucuses (Ansolabehere and King 1990; Geer 1986) have all been analyzed. However, the direction and magnitude of bias in these studies has focused only on distributional (sometimes known as ‘allocation’) bias. Malapportionment bias is relevant in contexts such as the electoral college, since electoral votes are not allocated in direct proportion to population, but malapportionment bias in legislatures has been severely restricted by the ‘one man, one vote’ rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court. But turnout bias—that bias that may favor one
party or the other due to systematic differences in voter turnout between the faithful from the respective parties—has not been greatly scrutinized.

James Campbell (1996) has been a leading proponent for the study of turnout bias. His study of U.S. House elections from 1952 to 1992 led him to conclude that the Democratic Party disproportionately won low turnout districts that Campbell identified as the ‘cheap seats,’ a finding confirmed by Wink and Weber (2005) in their study of U.S. state lower houses. Rather than focusing on partisan seat and vote percentages, Campbell analyzed actual votes and seats and found that Democratic congressional candidates frequently and systematically won their seats with fewer votes than their Republican counterparts. For Campbell, the fact the Democratic Party had fewer unwasted votes—those votes that went to winning candidates—than did the Republicans, was the key to understanding turnout bias.

Rather than using a historical approach to produce seats-votes curves over an extended time period (King and Browning 1987; Niemi and Jackman 1991; Rae 1967; Tufte 1973), the Campbell method can be used to examine partisan bias in individual election years. This advantage allows the immediate effects of redistricting on partisan bias to be examined, as well as the fairness of election results for each election year. The researcher simply uses election results district-by-district, in a given state in an election year. There is no need to determine the extent to which old district lines are different from new district lines; one simply notes the numerical results of each race at the conclusion of the election. To identify which party wins the ‘cheap seats,’ the researcher compares the average winning candidate votes for one of the two major parties in an election year, and calculates the total seats in the legislature that party would have won if they had won seats at the same vote totals as had all winners in that year. Then the percentage of seats the party would have won if they had won seats at the same vote totals for all winners is subtracted from the percentage of seats actually won by that party. This final figure is then subtracted from .50 to produce the “cheap seats” measure of partisan turnout bias. For this study, I calculate bias figures by analyzing the district results in 2002, 2004, and 2006, thus producing three measures of Democratic turnout bias, one for each year. It is therefore possible to study the Republican gerrymander of the Texas House to determine if partisan turnout bias was altered as Republicans benefited from a pro-GOP allocation bias by comparing the partisan direction and level of turnout bias in 2002 with the partisan direction and level of turnout bias in 2004 and 2006.

Data and Methods

In their study using JudgeIt, McKee et al. regressed the 2002 Democratic share of the two-party congressional vote on a number of explanatory
variables (measured at the district level) and produced parameter estimates that were applied to the districts that would have been created by the five proposed plans. In essence, their effort was a simulation that attempted to forecast what would happen in the 2004 election. The present study, however, is a post-hoc analysis using 2002, 2004, and 2006 data which illustrates how partisan turnout bias was changed from pre-redistricting to post-redistricting. Since the forecast of McKee et al. was highly accurate in predicting the partisan winners in each of the 32 House districts, one can be confident that their finding of a measurable Republican *distributional or allocation* bias did play out in the election of 2004. But how did the changing of the district lines in a pro-Republican manner affect *turnout bias*?

To answer this question, district-level election results from 2002, 2004, and 2006 were obtained from the *Almanac of American Politics* (Barone and Cohen, 2003; 2005; 2007) and from the website of the Office of the Secretary of State of Texas (http://elections.sos.state.tx.us) in cases in which uncontested election totals were not published in the former. Partisan bias measures were calculated for each election year in the manner prescribed by Campbell (1996). For example, in 2002 the mean vote of Texas Democratic winners was 79,821. But all winning candidates earned a total of 3,040,616 votes. Dividing the total number of votes cast for winning candidates by two, it can be determined that each major party in an unbiased system should have expended a total of 1,520,308 votes. Dividing this measure of “unwasted” votes in an unbiased system by the average number of votes for Democratic winners produces 19.05. Dividing 19.05 by the number of seats won by major party candidates (32) produces 0.595, which represents the percentage of seats that would have been won by the Democrats if they had won 50 percent of the votes won by all winners. The final figure, referred to as partisan turnout bias, is calculated by subtracting 0.50 from 0.595. Thus, in 2002, the Democrats benefited from a turnout bias of 9.5 percent. The question is did Republicans succeed in decreasing this turnout bias in favor of the Democrats by manipulating the district lines before the 2004 election?

**Were Democratic “Cheap Seats” Replaced by “Box Seats” in 2004?**

Before directly answering this question, it may help to step back and view the big picture. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the most important variable in the study, the votes earned by winners from the respective parties. Table 1 illustrates that in all three years in the study, it took a Republican candidate, on average, more votes to win a seat than it did for the typical Democratic candidate. In 2002, Republican winners expended over 32,000 more votes (a ratio of 1.41 to 1.0) than did Democratic winners, while in 2004 the gap between Republican winners and Democratic winners
Table 1. Mean Votes of Winning Candidates, by Party, U.S. House Races in Texas, 2002-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dem.</td>
<td>79,821</td>
<td>14,953</td>
<td>112,947</td>
<td>18,047</td>
<td>65,343</td>
<td>21,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repub.</td>
<td>112,245</td>
<td>21,230</td>
<td>166,702</td>
<td>21,726</td>
<td>96,772</td>
<td>11,038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2002, the difference was 31,429 votes on average, a figure closer to the 2002 measure but a ratio (1.48 to 1.0) that still seemingly advantaged the Democratic candidates. Of course, both party winners spent more votes to win in the presidential election year of 2004, but winning Republican vote expenditures increased 48.5 percent from 2002 to 2004, while Democratic winners’ vote expenditures increased only by 41.5 percent. Then in 2006 both parties spent fewer votes in winning causes because of lower voter turnout in 2006. But the ratios presented above are instructive. According to the figures in Table 1, therefore, one can expect to find a Democratic turnout bias in 2002, 2004, and 2006, and the size of that pro-Democratic Party bias in 2004 and 2006 should be larger than the pre-redistricting turnout bias. In fact, even when one observes districts in which Republican vote expenditures were relatively low, those figures are still high relative to the comparable numbers for the Democrats. For example, one standard deviation below the mean, one finds Republican vote expenditures of 91,015 in 2002, 144,976 in 2004, and 85,734 in 2006, all of which exceed the Democratic winners’ mean votes in the respective years.

In order to provide a measure of Campbell’s partisan turnout bias in 2004 and 2006, one need only replicate the calculations described earlier using election data from those years. One other factor, however, should be accounted for as well. If there are a large number of uncontested or relatively uncompetitive races, or if there are a small number of such races that disproportionately affect one party, then the lack of competitiveness could have a profound impact on measures of party turnout bias. A perusal of the election results appears to support the proposition that uncontested or uncompetitive races should not have a large effect on the bias measures in 2002 or 2004. In 2002, there were 18 races in which the losing major party candidate received at least 25 percent of the two-party vote. In the fourteen uncompetitive races, each major party won seven contests, a fact that suggests bias measures will accurately reflect the aggregate differences in party...
vote spending for winning candidates. Similarly, in 2004 there were only eight uncompetitive races, with the Democrats winning three and the Republicans winning five. In 2006, there were nine uncompetitive elections; but in this year, the Democrats won seven of the nine less contested seats. For the sake of ensuring the robustness of the results despite this anomaly in 2006, the partisan bias is calculated with all races included and then with uncompetitive races excluded for the three election years. Following Gelman and King (1994) and McKee et al. (2006), who impute uncontested seats as earning 75 percent to 25 percent splits in their use of vote percentages with JudgeIt, we exclude seats in which the winning party earns greater than 75 percent of the two-party vote in our analysis of only contested elections. The results are reported in Table 2.

As illustrated in Table 2, pro-Democratic turnout biases are present in all years, whether or not uncompetitive races are excluded from the analysis. With all seats included, the bias grew from 9.5 percent in favor of the Democrats to 15.6 percent in favor of the Democrats, and then declined slightly in 2006 to a Democratic turnout bias of 14.3 percent. When only competitive seats are included in the analysis, the pro-Democratic bias rose from 7.7 percent to 15.7 percent, and again declined slightly to 13.1 percent in 2006. In both cases—with and without uncompetitive seats—the Republicans failed to decrease the pro-Democratic bias in either post-redistricting election. One can also express confidence in the results reported in Table 2 since in the respective years the measures of bias calculated with and without uncompetitive seats are nearly identical.

Finally, in Table 2, following Campbell (1996), I calculate the level of Democratic Party “seat inflation” due to turnout bias by multiplying the Democratic bias percentage by the number of seats contested. The seat inflation measure reflects the number of seats that supposedly were won by the

Table 2. Partisan Turnout Bias for the Democratic Party, by All Districts and Competitive Districts, Texas U.S. House Races, 2002-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pro-Democratic Party Turnout Bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All +9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N =</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat Inflation = (bias * no. of seats)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Democrats, above what would have been won by them in an election system lacking turnout bias. Results are reported for all races and for only competitive races, in both election years. The Democratic seat inflation margin ranged from 1.4 seats (only competitive races) to 3.0 seats (all races) in 2002, from 3.8 seats in competitive races to 5.0 seats in the contests for all the seats in 2004, and from 3.0 seats (only competitive races) to 4.6 seats (all races) in 2006. Interestingly, although Republican candidates picked up a net gain of 6 seats in 2004, increasing their total of 15 seats to 21, the analysis suggests that Democrats still won three or four seats more than they should have won in 2004 due to the cheap seats phenomenon. Then, the court-mandated redistricting after the 2004 elections reduced the Democratic seat inflation by approximately one seat in the 2006 election. Of course, there is a practical limit to the number of seats Republicans “should” have won under the current arrangement since there are 11 majority-minority districts (of 32 total districts) in the state, which exacerbates the tendency of Democrats to win in very low turnout districts (Texas Legislative Council 2003b). But the findings do beg the question of whether the drawing of these majority-minority districts produces a “fair” system in the sense that Democrats can win several seats with little effort and exhaustion of resources.

One objection to the findings in Tables 1 and 2 might be that the 2004 findings are an artifact of the presidential election of 2004. If voters knew George W. Bush would win the state of Texas easily, so the logic goes, Democrats might not turn out to vote. Then, in heavily Democratic districts, Democratic incumbents might win with fewer votes than normal and “artificially” inflate the Democratic turnout advantage. Texas voters do not express a party affiliation when they register to vote, so it is not possible to gauge the level of party turnout differences based on registration and voting data. However, one can examine the top of the respective tickets to infer whether one year was a stronger year for one party than the other and that turnout differences might result from those party trends. Upon examination, turnout in general was of course much higher in Texas in 2004 than in either 2002 or 2006. Turnout as a percentage of voting-age population was 46.1 percent in 2004 and only 29.4 percent and 26.4 percent in 2002 and 2006, respectively. But there is little evidence of a partisan differential to this increased turnout in 2004. Looking at the “top of the tickets,” George W. Bush won an impressive 61.5 percent of the two-party vote in Texas in the 2004 presidential election. But, in 2002, Republican Rick Perry won an almost equally impressive 59.1 percent of the two-party vote in the gubernatorial race that year, and in 2006 Republican U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison won 63.1 percent of the two-party vote in her reelection bid. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the increased Democratic turnout bias in 2004 could have been greatly influenced by the fact that 2004 was a presidential election.
year with a popular native son running for the presidency atop the Republican ticket.

**Is the Republican Gerrymander of 2003 a Myth?**

How can it be that a redistricting plan that other scholars, pundits, and the media portrayed as a Republican gerrymander—and a plan that objectively increased the number of Republican seats in dramatic fashion—fails to cause Democrats to spend more votes to win their seats? Are McKee et al. (2006) simply wrong in their assessment that the congressional redistricting undertaken in Texas in 2003 was biased toward the Republicans? How can one account for this apparent anomaly?

The difference in findings can be attributed to the fact that there were different kinds of bias operating simultaneously in these elections. McKee et al. (2005) operationalize and measure distributional or allocation bias in their study. The fact is that the new district lines drawn for the 2004 election (which largely existed unchanged in 2006) were created primarily to insure that Republican vote percentages would exceed Democratic vote percentages in the majority of districts. In other words, the number of *unwasted votes cast by Republicans* was less relevant to GOP strategists than the number of *votes wasted by the Democrats* in losing causes. In fact, according to Campbell (1996), measures of distributional bias like those analyzed by McKee et al. (2006) are based on party differentials in wasted votes: “We should expect that the party winning the larger share of the popular vote would waste a small portion of that vote in losing causes (1996, 234).” If the Republican redistricting effort in 2003 was a successful gerrymander that failed to produce more expensive victories for Democratic candidates, then it must be the case that the new district lines caused the Democratic votes that were cast in 2004 and 2006 to be spent on more losing causes relative to the Democratic votes that were cast in 2002.

Table 3 confirms that Democrats cast a much larger number of votes for losing candidates in 2004 and 2006 than in 2002. Conversely, Republicans actually cast fewer wasted votes in 2004 and 2006 than in 2002, even though 2004 was a presidential election year in which many more total votes were cast! Whereas the number of Democratic wasted votes nearly tripled from 2002 to 2004 and remained higher in 2006 than in 2002, the number of Republican votes cast in losing efforts actually declined by 19 percent from 2002 to 2004 and dropped again in 2006. As Table 3 indicates, 46.5 percent of the votes cast for losing candidates in 2002 were Democratic votes; in 2004 and 2006, Democrats cast over 74 percent and over 75 percent, respectively, of the total votes spent in losing causes. On average, across the 32 districts, Democrats cast—on average—almost twice as many votes as
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Votes Cast for Losing Candidates</td>
<td>528,222</td>
<td>607,053</td>
<td>1,471,551</td>
<td>511,791</td>
<td>965,325</td>
<td>317,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Major Party Votes Cast for Losing Candidates</td>
<td>.465</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.742</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>.753</td>
<td>.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Party Votes Cast for Losing Candidates</td>
<td>35,215</td>
<td>35,709</td>
<td>70,074</td>
<td>46,526</td>
<td>50,807</td>
<td>24,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats Won</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Seats Won</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>.469</td>
<td>.344</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>.406</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Republicans for losing candidates in 2004 and over twice as many in 2006. The Republicans were extremely efficient in producing distributional or allocation bias toward the GOP across the 32 districts, a fact that more than made up for the lack of additional costs borne by Democratic winners.

Two more points should be made about turnout bias. First, there are limits on what state legislatures can do. All states are required to use census data—rather than voter turnout or voter registration figures—as the basis for drawing congressional district lines. Furthermore, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 required preclearance by the U.S. Department of Justice of the congressional redistricting plans in the Deep South. As the number of states under preclearance was later expanded and as Congress extended protected status to language minorities in 1975, more state legislatures—including the one in Texas, of course—were required to create the maximum number of African-American and Latino majority districts as possible (Lublin 2004, 99-101). Thus, the Texas GOP did not have a free hand to minimize their turnout bias disadvantage.²

Second, there is the question of whether turnout bias is—or should be—a major concern for the party in control of the redistricting process. While distributional or allocation bias should result in a change in seats in favor of the party experiencing the favorable bias, what is the evidence regarding the relationship between seats won and turnout bias? As noted earlier, Democratic turnout bias actually increased in Texas U.S. House
races after 2003, despite the fact that Democrats actually lost seats in the two races after 2002. Perhaps surprisingly, the bivariate correlations between Democratic bias and Democratic seats won in the elections from 2002 to 2006 are -.992 (p = .083) when all races are included and -.844 (p = .361) when uncompetitive races are included. Obviously, with only three years of cases, we do not find the levels of statistical significance we would wish to see, but the strong, negative correlations between turnout bias and seats won by the party experiencing the favorable bias are suggestive.

To test further the possibility that turnout bias and success in winning seats might be negatively correlated, I borrowed from the extensive array of data presented by Campbell in the appendices of his study (1996, Table B.1 and Table B.4, pp. 235, 239). Campbell presents the Democratic seats percentages won and the unwasted votes measure of Democratic turnout bias for contested races in each election for the U.S. House from 1954-1992. I found the bivariate correlation of those two variables to be -.656 (p = .002). The findings from the test using the Campbell data indicate strongly that the higher the pro-Democratic levels of turnout bias, the lower the percentage of seats won by the Democrats!

**Conclusion**

What are we to conclude from this analysis? First, it is possible to measure partisan turnout bias and apply it to a particular election or set of elections. While partisan turnout bias has been applied to U.S. House races and state lower-house races to describe the relationship between partisan votes and partisan seat allocation over lengthy periods of time, in this paper, I have used the cheap seats measure in a unique way, to analyze a specific attempt by the dominant party in a state to redraw congressional district lines to the advantage of that party’s congressional candidates. Although this exercise is a straightforward effort to measure the success of a particular redistricting, it also has implications for the larger issue of fair representation, both in terms of translating partisan votes into partisan seats and in terms of achieving fair representation for large ethnic and racial groups in the increasingly diversely populated United States.

Second, partisan turnout bias might not work in quite the manner Campbell and other scholars have imagined. Since cheap seats are legislative seats won rather inexpensively with low voter turnout, one might expect that the majority party could redraw district lines in such a way as to make winning efforts more costly for the minority party in the state. In the present study, I found the Republicans did not succeed in making Democratic victories more costly by requiring more votes to win those seats. Instead, I found the Republicans’ new districts caused Democrats to “waste” many more
votes in losing efforts. Rather than forcing Democrats to turn out to vote at higher rates in order to win more seats, the Republicans simply ensured GOP candidates would likely win a majority of newly redrawn districts, assuming normal voter turnout for each party. Thus, Democratic votes that in the past would have been spent in winning efforts were cast for losing candidates in 2004 and 2006. In fact, the number of votes cast for losing Democratic candidates tripled from 2002 to 2004, despite the fact that Republican votes for losers actually fell in 2004.

Third, despite the findings that suggest that partisan turnout bias does not work in an intuitive manner, findings presented here do not support the proposition that the cheap seats phenomenon is mythical or unimportant. As Grofman et al. (1997) have noted both turnout bias and distributional bias are legitimate concepts in attempting to determine the fairness of plans that turn partisan votes into seat allocations. Indeed, since Democratic winners still paid a smaller cost for their elections victories than did Republican winners in 2004, I noted that Democrats probably won more seats than they would have if their winning seats had been more costly, everything else being equal. But in 2004, everything else was not equal. Distributional or allocation bias was so powerful in support of the GOP that there was a six-seat swing in the total partisan division of seats from 2002 to 2004. This was certainly the primary intention of the Republican state legislators all along.

Scholars may, therefore, wish to examine particular elections to determine, in fact, if there may be an inverse relationship between distributional bias and turnout bias in cases of very effective redistricting efforts. In other words, while turnout bias may have negative connotations for the party that controls redistricting and is on the losing end of turnout bias, it may be that clever gerrymandering to enhance distributional bias can win seats for the dominant party because packing schemes increase turnout bias toward the party that lost seats. Thus, while it may be true that there will always be some Democratic turnout bias because Democratic voters turn out at lower rates than Republican voters, scholars in the future might wish to examine the relationships between distributional bias, turnout bias, and seats won in elections to determine if the results suggested in the present study can generally be observed in other contexts.

In some respects, turnout bias may be even more relevant to the discussion of fair elections today than in the years Campbell studied. For example, Texas Republicans may have been able to use the Voting Rights Act to create a distributional bias, if not a turnout bias, in their favor, in the 2003 redistricting. In almost all districts in which there are Hispanic Democratic members of Congress in Texas, the Hispanic population exceeds two-thirds of the population, partly due to the prevalence of large Hispanic populations in border counties but perhaps in some cases because of “pack-
ing” (see Lublin 2004). Furthermore, the state legislature cannot resort to “cracking” minority populations into small ineffectual percentages—a tool to preserve the power of white Democrats in the South for decades—because of the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to prohibit the practice (Black and Black 2002; Butler and Cain 1992; Canon 1999; Lublin 1997). Thus, the three districts in which there are African-American Democratic members of Congress in Texas are not likely to have their African-American populations diluted through clever redistricting strategies, although in all three of these districts there are substantial Hispanic populations (Barone and Cohen 2005; Texas Legislative Council 2006). Regardless of whether these seats are won in the future by African-Americans or Latinos, however, turnout is likely to be low, the winners are likely to be Democrats, and there will continue to be a Democratic Party turnout bias.

The implications of redistricting to provide ethnic and partisan representation will continue to be felt in Texas, California, Illinois, and New York, states with urban centers having diverse populations. Cheap seats are likely to be present for a long time due to legally mandated majority-minority districts and housing patterns that reflect distinct socioeconomic (and partisan) cleavages (Abramowitz et al. 2006). It will be interesting to see, therefore, if turnout bias remains largely academic, placed on the backburner as practitioners focus on enhancing a party’s distributional bias, or if variation in turnout bias becomes a more central focus of legislative activity or legal challenge in the future. While the advantages and disadvantages of creating majority-minority districts has been debated and will continue to be debated (e.g., Cameron et al. 1996; Canon 1999; Lublin 1997; Petrocik and Desposato 1998; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997), partisan turnout bias may be a measurable variable that can be a part of the larger debate over fair legislative elections (e.g., Brunell 2006).

NOTES

1 It should be noted that Ralph Hall, a Representative from East Texas, ran as a Democrat in 2002 and a Republican in 2004. Although one could argue that the actual seat swing due to redistricting produced only five new Republican seats since Hall was not defeated as a Democrat, Hall became a Republican convert when it became apparent the new redistricting would place him in a district with more suburban portions of the eastern Dallas region as compared to his more rural East Texas district of 2002. The fact that the new redistricting plan had just been upheld by the federal courts almost certainly led to Hall’s decision to change party affiliation.

2 As an example, a federal appellate court threw out the 2004 district of Henry Bonilla, the only Hispanic Republican in the Texas congressional delegation, in League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) v. Perry (2006). The Republicans had protected Bonilla from dwindling victory margins by adding Anglos from counties northwest
of San Antonio to his district. But the formerly majority Hispanic voting-age population declined to less than 50% as a result of the GOP plan, and the redrawing of the district by the court led to Bonilla’s defeat in a special election in 2006 (Office of the Texas Secretary of State, 2006).

REFERENCES


Presidential Campaigning during Midterm Elections

Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha and Sean Nicholson-Crotty

Previous studies have approached presidential campaigning at midterm from very different theoretical vantages. One component of the literature suggests that presidents campaign at midterm primarily to aid individual candidates and improve congressional makeup, while another argues that all presidential travel is part of the “permanent campaign” that presidents undertake in order to further personal reelection goals. Interestingly, these approaches, and the factors that each suggests influence presidential decisions, have remained effectively insulated from one another in empirical studies of presidential travel and campaigning. This study combines these complimentary theoretical stories to provide a more comprehensive model of presidential campaigning in midterm elections. We test this model in an analysis of midterm campaign stops between 1994 and 2006 and show a mix of factors from both literatures best explain presidential campaigning at midterm.

In the fall of 2002, President George W. Bush made over 40 official campaign speeches for dozens of congressional candidates across the American states. What encouraged President Bush to campaign so frequently in 2002? Pundits suggested that the close partisan division of Congress, the high number of vulnerable seats, and his own historic popularity gave the president tremendous incentive to campaign. Bush, they argued, could use the 2002 elections as a referendum on his presidency, encouraging voters to support Republicans as the nation had supported him (Milbank 2002; National Journal 2002). In contrast, Bush purportedly avoided campaigning for numerous candidates in 2006 due to his lagging approval numbers (Balz 2006).

Two complimentary, but largely isolated bodies of scholarship have also offered answers to the question of presidential campaigning in midterm elections. One area of research focuses on the use of campaign stops to aid those seeking congressional election (see for example Cohen et al. 1991). Another body of work, concerned with presidential travel more generally, suggests that midterm campaign stops might be used to further the president’s own reelection and policy goals (see Doherty 2007b). This study...
begins with the assumption that both theoretical stories are plausible and combine them to offer a more comprehensive model of presidential campaigning in midterm elections between 1994 and 2006.

**Midterms and the Permanent Campaign**

The literature explicitly concerned with the subject suggests that, despite their historical losing record, presidents campaign at midterm primarily to aid individual candidates and influence congressional makeup, thus improving their chances for policy success in Congress (but see Herrnson and Morris 2007). Scholars suggest that the president’s decision to appear on the stump is driven by the marginality of the individual candidate, presidential popularity within a state, and the percentage of legislative losses in the last legislative session (Cohen et al. 1991) or a combination of presidential popularity and the number of competitive House and Senate races (Hoddie and Routh 2004). Most notably, Cohen et al. (1991) argue that presidents are unlikely to campaign in states where they are unpopular because the costs to individual candidates, and ultimately to the president’s future policy success in the Congress, are too great.

Presidential campaigning at midterm also fits nicely into the growing literature on the “permanent campaign” (Blumenthal 1980). The concept of the permanent campaign assumes that presidents use travel opportunities throughout their administrations strategically in order to maximize reelection chances. Doherty (2007b) suggests that these motivations compel presidents to travel more frequently to states with a large number of electoral votes and to states that are electorally competitive. The author argues that, because “electoral goals permeate the president’s term one would expect to see targeting of key electoral states throughout a president’s term in office” (Doherty 2007b, 753). Charnock et al. (2006) also adopt a “permanent campaign” approach and attempt to understand first term travel by presidents from Eisenhower to George W. Bush as a strategic allocation of electoral resources. Their findings, in data drawn covering a significantly longer time period (Eisenhower through George W. Bush Administrations) than Doherty’s (2007b) study, confirm the importance of electoral votes as an important factor in presidential decisions about which states to visit. Their findings regarding electoral competitiveness are more mixed, though margin of victory/defeat does appear as a significant predictor of travel for 3 individual presidents.

Though the literature on the “permanent campaign” does not focus explicitly on midterm campaigning, there are numerous reasons to treat these stops as strategic travel by presidents attempting to maximize electoral resources. First, journalists and White House staff consistently suggest that
Presidential Campaigning during Midterm Elections | 37

Presidents campaign during midterm elections with their own reelection campaign in mind (see Allen 2002; Milbank 2002). Top Bush administration officials have directly linked Bush’s 2002 campaign stops to his reelection bid. A top Bush adviser maintained in September 2002 that the states in which he campaigned heavily at midterm are also critical states for Bush in 2004 (Allen 2002). As early as June 2002, Karl Rove, Bush’s senior advisor, and Ken Mehlman, his political director, identified states that Bush had nearly won in 2000, “listed them according to the final margins, then totaled the electoral votes at stake in each category” (Allen 2002, A04). Others also link Bush’s strategy in 2002 to his reelection bid in 2004, even citing the outcomes in twenty-five gubernatorial contests as vital to Bush’s chances in 2004 (Milbank 2002).

Second, presidential speeches provide evidence that the president has his own personal reelection in mind when he campaigns during midterm. Without question, a president will stump for a candidate, discussing that candidate’s record and why voters in a district or state should vote for that candidate. Yet, much of the president’s own midterm campaign speeches concern his policy record. Perhaps presidents are citing their policy record so that voters associate a congressional candidate with those policy victories and a popular president, as the conventional wisdom would hold. But presidents are also taking an opportunity to claim credit for their own policies in these speeches in an implicit effort to remind voters to vote for them or their political party in two years.

Combining the Theoretical Models

Obviously these two theoretical approaches to understanding presidential travel are highly complimentary, though the insights from both have yet to be combined in a single study. Both assume that presidents act strategically when allocating scarce travel resources during the midterm campaign season. One simply emphasizes the policy gains that presidents hope to achieve by influencing the makeup of Congress, while the other focuses on the direct electoral benefit that they might garner by choosing to visit some states rather than other. Because the broader literature on presidential motivations suggests that presidents typically have both electoral and policy goals (see Light 1999), we argue that both models of presidential travel can and should be combined to produce a single set of expectations about the factors that influence presidential campaign stops during midterm elections.

Doing so produces a relatively rich set of empirical expectations about the factors that influence the likelihood that a president will campaign in a state during midterm elections. Previous work on campaign stops suggests that the presence of highly competitive congressional races within the state
should increase the likelihood of a visit. Because unpopular presidents are unlikely to provide congressional candidates much benefit (and are unlikely to be asked to appear), that literature also suggests that low approval ratings within a state are likely to reduce the likelihood of a campaign stop. Turning to the work on the permanent campaign, we expect that presidents attempting to strategically maximize electoral resources will be more likely to campaign in states with a high number of electoral votes. Additionally, presidents are unlikely to waste scarce time in states where they have no chance of victory, and so a lower margin of victory or defeat in the previous election should, therefore, be associated with a higher probability of making a campaign stop.

Before moving on, it is important to deal with the question of a president’s second term in office and the potential effects on midterm campaign activity. If we assume that presidents campaign to benefit candidates, influence the makeup of Congress, and achieve policy success, then there should be little difference between the first and second term. Presidents will campaign in states with marginal candidates and those in which they are popular regardless. However, if we assume that they are strategically maximizing their own chances for reelection, then there would be little incentive to favor large states, or those that are electorally competitive, when there is no possibility for reelection. Interestingly, however, the findings from previous studies of the permanent campaign do not conclusively demonstrate this. Doherty (2007b) finds that presidents travel less overall in their second terms, but does not offer a direct test of the expectation that presidents travel to large or competitive states less frequently in the second term relative to the first. Given the research of Light (1999) and Jacobson et al. (2004), it is possible that presidents campaign during their second terms for even longer-term, legacy goals. Lacking a stronger theoretical foundation, however, we hold only that presidential campaigning should be less in the second than first term, consistent with Doherty (2007b).

Data

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable in this study is a dichotomous measure of whether or not a president campaigns in a state during a midterm election. Presidential campaign stops were recorded from the Public Papers of the Presidents and then aggregated by state and year. For coding purposes, a presidential speech was coded as a campaign stop any time that the president appeared with and endorsed a senatorial or gubernatorial candidate between June and November in a midterm election year. We restrict the dependent
variable to statewide races and exclude presidential stops on behalf of House candidates because we have state-level, rather than district-level, predictor variables. We display these data in an Appendix.

**Independent Variables**

**The Permanent Campaign Literature.** The next two measures represent hypotheses regarding the goals of presidents’ campaign strategy at midterm drawn from the literature on the permanent campaign. First, we hypothesize that the number of electoral votes should increase the likelihood of midterm campaigning in a state because presidents campaign during midterm not only to benefit other candidates, but also to help their own goal achievement. To account for this, we include a count of each state’s electoral votes, which are available in the *Book of the States.*

Second, we include a measure that accounts for whether or not a state is in play, based on the popular vote margin in the previous presidential election. Accordingly, the president’s previous electoral performance in a state may influence the president’s decision to campaign in a state. If a state is not “in play” a president would not want to waste his time and resources campaigning in that state, whereas a larger margin of victory (or defeat) in the president’s initial campaign for the presidency should decrease the president’s chances of campaigning in that state. Hypothetically, if a state was competitive in the previous presidential election, presidents are more likely to campaign there during midterm. These data are available on numerous websites. For the purposes of this paper, the model in Table 1 includes a measure coded 1 if the popular vote was ±5 percent in the previous presidential election and 0, otherwise.

**The Midterm Campaigns Literature.** The remaining variables included in subsequent analyses represent the key explanations for midterm campaigning in previous studies—presidential approval and candidate marginality. The conventional wisdom and supporting research contends that presidents are more likely to campaign in a state where they are relatively popular. To assess the president’s popularity in a state, we include a measure of state-level approval drawn from a relatively new dataset of presidential approval ratings at the state level (Beyle et al. 2002). The data consist of aggregate responses from presidential job approval questions asked in one or more poll conducted within a state between January and October of a midterm election year. Though the number of polls conducted in each state correlates closely with state size, the compilers of the data selected only scientifically conducted polls for inclusion in the data. To deal with the problems posed by differing response sets across polls, the dataset reports only dichotomized “percent negative” and “percent positive” ratings. For the
purposes of this study, we collapse all state polls in any given year into one aggregate approval figure.\(^8\)

Though the data set represents the best available information on state-level approval ratings of American presidents, it is not comprehensive in its coverage of states and years. The set contains state-level polling data beginning in 1963, but the early years contain results from very few states. Because of this limitation, we restrict the analysis in this article to four recent mid-term elections, 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006, where a campaigning president was in his first or second term.\(^9\) Although we were forced to exclude a few states from each analysis fortunately, for the purpose of this analysis, when taken together across all elections, included states do not differ from excluded states on a number of dimensions.\(^10\) Difference of means tests suggest that the two groups of states are not statistically different in terms the number of marginal races \((t=0.76)\), the percent of House seats held by the president’s party \((t=0.57)\), or the likelihood of being a presidential campaign stop \((t=0.89)\).

Even taking into account these challenges, the state-level measure of presidential approval employed in subsequent analyses represents an improvement over indicators used in previous studies. Cohen et al. (1991, 168) use “the difference between the vote for the president and the number two candidate in the previous presidential election at the state level” as an indicator of public support (see Hoddie and Routh 2004). Although a clever measure of presidential popularity given limitations in data availability fifteen years ago, it may not accurately reflect the president’s current popularity in a state at midterm. Any state vote for Ronald Reagan in 1980, for example, was likely much higher than his approval ratings in that state two years later when his national approval ratings were below 40 percent.\(^11\)

To assess the degree to which presidents campaign to help individual candidates we measure the level of candidate marginality in two ways. The first captures whether or not a senate or gubernatorial race within a state was labeled as “vulnerable” prior to the election. “Vulnerable” includes open seats, but not all open seats are “vulnerable.” For the 1994 election we depend on CQ Weekly for the assessments. We utilize the list published in the National Journal for the 1998, 2002, and 2006 midterm elections. We use these \textit{a priori} assessments rather than a post hoc measure of races in which the incumbent wins with less than 55 percent of the vote (Fiorina 1977; Mayhew 1974) in order to avoid potential problems of endogeneity.\(^12\) The second measure of marginality focuses on the number of competitive House elections, which could increase the likelihood of a presidential campaign stop. This count variable ranges between 0 and 5. Again, we use CQ Weekly and the National Journal to identify competitive races.\(^13\) Presidents
should be more likely to campaign in marginal races, rather than for safe incumbents.

**Controls.** The model also includes two variables that control for other potential influences on the likelihood of a midterm campaign stop. First, previous work suggests that presidents travel less frequently in their second terms (Doherty 2007b). Thus, we include a dummy variable for the president’s term in office, coded 1 if a second term (1998 and 2006) and 0 if a first term contest (1994 and 2002).

As a final control we include a measure of the strength of the president’s party within a state, based on the logic that presidents are expected by partisans to act as party leaders by campaigning for members of the House of Representatives, the Senate, and state-elected officials, including governors. The specific indicator included in subsequent models is the percentage of presidential party incumbents in the House of Representatives, with presidents being more likely to campaign in states that have a higher percentage of co-partisans in Congress. We have also estimated models substituting a general measure of state political ideology (see Berry et al. 1998). The results do not change in any meaningful way and we think that this measure is more theoretically appropriate. What is more, this measure—if statistically significant and positive—lends support to our argument that presidents campaign in state for party leadership reasons, perhaps to benefit their own political party in the presidential election during the waning days of the president’s second term in office.

**Findings**

Because our dependent variable is dichotomous, we employ a logistic regression in this analysis on data consisting of all states that reported presidential approval percentages in 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006. Table 1 displays the unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, and because coefficients are difficult to interpret in logit, predicted probabilities for several key variables. Both the additive and interactive models, which predict the likelihood of whether or not a president campaigned in a state during midterm, are highly significant and correctly predict about 76 percent of the cases.

Turning first to variables suggested in previous studies of midterm campaigning, the findings provide only mixed support for these expectations. On the one hand, state-level approval has a positive but statistically insignificant impact on the probability of the president making a midterm campaign stop in a state. Although weakly positive, this finding is striking in light of the overwhelming conventional wisdom which dictates that
Table 1. Determinants of President’s Decisions to Campaign in Midterm Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Additive Model</th>
<th>Interactive Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Approval</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable State-wide Offices</td>
<td>1.80*</td>
<td>1.85*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td>(0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[+0.38]</td>
<td>[+0.39]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive House Races</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.54*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[+0.14]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Party Make-up</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
<td>0.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[+0.15]</td>
<td>[+0.15]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Votes</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[+0.24]</td>
<td>[+0.30]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Races</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.44)</td>
<td>(0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Term</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.44)</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[-0.13]</td>
<td>[-0.13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Votes*Competitive House Races</td>
<td>-0.02*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>[0.17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-5.43*</td>
<td>-5.69*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.16)</td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$ (p &gt; .001)</td>
<td>68.47</td>
<td>48.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctly Predicted (%)</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE (%)</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p<.05$ (one-tailed test)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors for the additive model and robust standard errors for the interactive model. Predicted probabilities, which are in brackets, hold all other variables at their mean.
Presidential approval ratings are a primary reason for presidential campaign stops. Using a state-wide measure of approval ratings, we show this is not strongly the case.

On the other hand, Table 1 corroborates the importance of vulnerable candidates to a president’s decision calculus, although only for state-wide races. The indicator of whether a senate or gubernatorial race was competitive is positive and significant, such that the vulnerability of one of these offices increases the president’s probability of campaigning in a state by .38. Yet, the impact of the number of competitive House seats on the likelihood of a presidential campaign stop in a state fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance in the additive model.

The findings from Table 1 also provide mixed support for hypotheses drawn from the literature on the permanent campaign. They do indicate that the president’s reelection goals have an important impact on the likelihood of making a campaign stop. Even when controlling for vulnerable races, state-level approval, and other factors, the measure of electoral votes within a state is positive and significant. Holding all other variables at their mean, a one standard deviation increase in electoral votes increases the probability of a midterm campaign stop by .24. Although closeness of the previous presidential election is positive and in the expected direction, the coefficient is not statistically significant.

Turning finally to the controls, the party makeup of a state matters to presidential campaigning. The higher percentage of legislative seats that belong to the president’s party increases the likelihood that a president will campaign at midterm. A one standard deviation increase in state party control increases the probability of a midterm campaign stop by .15, holding all other variables at their mean. Although a modest impact when compared with the effect of other variables, this result provides some evidence that presidents are more likely to campaign in states that lean in favor of the president’s political party. Two possible reasons for this effect even in the second term are for presidents to appeal to existent support in a state to build an historical legacy (see Jacobson et al. 2004) and to benefit their party in the subsequent presidential election. The second term is also important to presidential campaigning at midterm. The negative coefficient on the second term dummy variable indicates that presidential campaign behavior is different in the second term, with presidents campaigning less overall in comparison, at least at a lower level of statistical significance.17

Given the primacy of electoral votes in the president’s decision as to where to travel (Charnock et al. 2006) and our expectation that it, too, affects midterm campaign stops specifically, it is possible that a state’s electoral benefit to a president may condition the impact of other political
variables. Although most possible interactions with electoral votes are statistically insignificant\textsuperscript{18} and thus not included in the interactive model presented in Table 1, the number of competitive House seats, when interacted with a state’s electoral votes, is statistically significant and negative. This interaction suggests that as a state becomes more important to a president’s electoral goals, the importance of helping House candidates’ election chances decreases. Consistent with the presidential travel literature, this finding affirms the importance of electoral votes to the president’s decision calculus during midterm campaigning, even as the midterm elections literature holds that presidents campaign at midterm primarily for the benefit of congressional candidates and their policy goals in the next Congress.

**Discussion**

We now place these findings in the context of the 2002 midterm election and the view that presidents campaign in those states where they are popular and, thus, can be most helpful to candidates. In 2002, Bush chose not to campaign in several states, including Kansas, which had vulnerable seats and where he enjoyed a high approval rating. Presumably a campaign appearance would have benefited the vulnerable candidate. Our findings suggest that he chose not to campaign in those locations, however, because Kansas has only 6 electoral votes and was not, therefore, crucial to his personal reelection goals. Alternatively, despite few competitive or vulnerable races, the president chose to speak in Pennsylvania twice, which controlled over 20 electoral votes in the 2004 presidential race and was a clear battleground state.\textsuperscript{19}

An alternative explanation to ours, nevertheless, is that presidents campaign in large states because this is where big-money donors are, not for the reelection goals that we identify. Although plausible, this alternative hypothesis is difficult to test directly, lacking a clear calculus for what might predict the propensity of candidates to raise more money in one state versus another.\textsuperscript{20} As such, we cannot definitively reject this alternative rival hypothesis, but provide some evidence that it is incomplete and possibly inaccurate. Arguably, presidents have the most to gain from raising money for legislators—and themselves—during a first term midterm election contest for two reasons. First, if fundraising sways congressional races or gives presidents more leverage over individual legislators (Jacobson et al. 2004) presidents would benefit more from fundraisers in their first-term midterm campaign, when they are more likely to have more legislative influence than in their lame-duck, second term. Second, reelection, another first term goal, requires substantial amounts of money. Although presidents have the intangible and perhaps strategic goal of campaigning to improve a historical
legacy in the second term, this requires less money than running for re-election. Thus, we would expect to find that presidents campaign more in large states during their first than second terms, if the fundraising hypothesis is to be supported.

Additional analyses do not, however, demonstrate support for the fundraising hypothesis. A multiplicative interaction of the number of electoral votes and an indicator of second term was statistically insignificant, indicating that presidents are not less likely to campaign in large states during the second midterm election of their administration. We also do not find support after an examination of the location of designated fundraising events for state-wide candidates found in the *Public Papers of the Presidents*. A comparison of 1994 and 1998 reveals that President Clinton attended more fundraising events for large state-wide races in 1998 than in 1994, by a margin of 11 to 8. President Bush attended exactly the same number of fundraisers in large states, 3, in 2002 and 2006. We believe this provides evidence against the alternative fundraising hypothesis and challenge future research to demonstrate otherwise.21

**Conclusion**

We have argued that presidents have multiple goals when they campaign in midterm elections, seeking not only to influence individual races and affect the composition of the Congress, but also to increase their own chances for reelection. These expectations are drawn from two complementary, but largely disconnected literatures on presidential decision-making—one emphasizing the president’s desire to help individual candidates and influence the make up of Congress and one focusing on the president’s strategic use of travel to further his own reelection goals.

Combining the insights from these theoretical stories in a single empirical model produces some support for and some challenges to both. Candidate marginality in a midterm election is important, as the presence of vulnerable state-wide races in a campaign season significantly increases the likelihood that presidents will campaign in a state at midterm. This has long been an accepted predictor of presidential stops in the literature on midterm campaigns, but has not been investigated in previous studies of presidential travel more generally.

Conversely, the findings suggest that approval ratings within a state do not influence the likelihood of a presidential campaign stop at midterm. This calls into question the long accepted wisdom, among both pundits and scholars, that presidents’ midterm campaign decisions are based on their popular standing in a state. We show, instead, that the likelihood of visiting a state is a function of other factors. Future research should explore the impact, never-
theless, of individual legislators’ requests for campaign appearances by presidents, which is obviously related in important ways to approval and is something that neither we nor other scholars have yet examined.

The expectations from work on the “permanent campaign” also received mixed support. Electoral votes are a strong and significant predictor of the decision to campaign in a state, which indicates that presidents do attempt to strategically maximize electoral resources through campaign stops. As noted above, this has been a consistent finding in the literature on presidential travel but has been absent from research focused more specifically on campaign stops during midterm elections. The persistence of this finding in the presence of the control for term in office also suggests that presidents see an advantage to their political party’s chances to maintain the White House, and perhaps their historical legacy, by touting their record in large, electorally-important states during the second term. Interestingly, the measure of electoral competitiveness in the previous presidential election, which typically emerges as a strong predictor of presidential travel in the literature on the permanent campaign, fails to reach statistical significance in our models. Yet, when candidate marginality is dropped from the model, a state’s competitiveness becomes statistically significant. This indicates to us that although campaigning in midterm elections is a form of presidential travel and part of the permanent campaign, presidents have more flexibility to target battleground states outside of the congressional campaign season when they are not expected to assist congressional candidates at midterm.

The mixed findings regarding consistent predictors from both theoretical approaches confirm the importance of combining them in a single analysis. Doing so offers evidence that presidents pursue multiple goals during the midterm campaign—improving the electoral fortunes of individual candidates, strengthening their political party within certain states, and furthering their own chances for reelection or a positive historical legacy. It also suggests, however, that previous conclusions about the importance of presidential approval within a state and the impact of a state’s electoral competitiveness may have been a product of underspecified models of presidential travel. Obviously, this analysis is far too preliminary to justify any certainty about that assertion, but it does suggest the need for further research that incorporates the insights from multiple theoretical approaches.
APPENDIX

Campaign Stop Count Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Number of Stops</th>
<th>Number of States</th>
<th>Stops in Oct/Nov</th>
<th>Number of Multiple Stops</th>
<th>States With Competitive Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES

1 We do not model Cohen et al.’s (1991) measure of legislative failure for several reasons. First, it is an aggregate measure of presidential defeats in a model of presidential campaigning for individual senators. So conceptually we are concerned with this institutional measure used to assess decisions to campaign on behalf of individual legislators. Second, the measure is methodologically problematical. A blunt measure that is the same across fifty observations could cause estimation problems.

2 We also ran a count model assessing the impact of popularity, candidate vulnerability, electoral votes, and state partisanship on the number of campaign stops within a state. The results from this model match closely with our findings in Table 1. Because the findings from the count model were confirmatory and did not produce any different conclusions, we have chosen not to include it in this research note.

3 Nonetheless, we control for the number of competitive House seats in case House races motivate the president’s decision to campaign in a state. Hoddie and Routh (2004) model competitive House races, as well, despite also having only statewide data.

4 Some have suggested that the number of electoral votes is not a “clean” measure of a state’s importance to the president because state size closely correlates with competitiveness. To control for potential spuriousness, we created an index of party competition in the state legislatures and included that measure in initial estimations. The index is calculated as proportion of the largest party minus one minus the proportion of the largest party (p-(1-p)) and takes on values of 0 (perfect competitiveness) to 1 perfect single party control. The measure was not significantly associated with the likelihood of a campaign stop, and the variance inflation factor with electoral votes and other measures were well within acceptable bounds. Because the inclusion of the measure did not change the findings in any meaningful way, we exclude it from the final model.

5 We use a close race measure that is based on the absolute value of margin of victory in the previous presidential election. We use this dummy variable instead of a margin of victory measure in part because previous research use a margin of victory variable to approximate presidential popularity in a state (Cohen et al. 1991; Hoddie and Routh 2004). Conceptually electoral margin can be multifaceted (popularity, a state’s likely electoral competitiveness), limiting its construct validity.

6 Coding a state as competitive with a margin of ±10 percent (as Doherty [2007b] does) makes no substantive difference in the findings.

7 Information on pollster, sample size, and methodology are available at www.unc.edu/~beyle/jars.html.
In their original article, Beyle et al. (2002) demonstrate empirically that the state-level approval ratings aggregated from their data set correlate closely with the presidential vote within a state, and thus have high construct validity. Similarly, they demonstrate that ratings are consistent within states over time. Furthermore, the validity, reliability, and predictive accuracy of the approval ratings in the U.S. Officials Job Approval Rating Collection (JAR) have been externally validated in a number of studies (Alt et al. 2002; Dometrius 2002; Bath and Ferguson 2002; Anderson and Newmark 2002).

The findings presented below hold when we include the 1990 election in the analysis. We have chosen not to include that election in the final models, however, because of the large number of states for which approval data is unavailable. Across all election years, included and excluded states do differ significantly from one another if we include 1990. Within that particular year, however, there are meaningful differences between in-sample and out-of-sample states. Thus, we chose to drop that year from the analysis.

Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Dakota are missing from the data in 1994, while there is insufficient information to include Alabama, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, and North Dakota in 2002. 1998 is limited to all states except Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, North and South Dakota, Oregon, and Tennessee.

We initially ran the models presented here using a measure of the president’s margin of victory (or defeat) in his initial run for the White House instead of the state approval measure. Interestingly, it failed to predict midterm campaigning. This further emphasizes the need for a measure of approval with greater construct validity.

In other words, the president’s activities (i.e., campaigning) may have affected the vote percentages secured by each candidate.


The Wright et al. (1993) measure of state partisanship would also be an acceptable substitute. Unfortunately, it has only been updated through 1999 and is, therefore, not the best measure to be included in a model of the 2002 election. Berry et al. report a correlation between the two measures of .8 (.9 in larger states where both measures are more reliable) and thus the substitution of the Wright et al. measure should not alter our current results. Another possible measure of state party is state-level CBS/New York Times party identification measures. These, of course, are correlated with our measure of presidential party incumbents in the House: a higher percentage of Democratic Party identifiers in a state will approximate a higher percentage of Democratic representatives in that state. Some have suggested using voter registration to assess party membership by state. But some states do not require its citizens to register to vote (e.g., North Dakota), while other states do not require voters to register with one or another political party. Voter registration also introduces problems associated with Independent voters and Independent “leaners” (see, among others, Wattenberg 1996).

We also estimated a pooled logit, random effects model, using the xtlogit command in Stata. Stata automatically produces a $\chi^2$ statistic with 1 degree of freedom estimating the probability that an autocorrelation parameter $\rho$ is distinguishable from zero. For our model the probability that $\rho$ was statistically different from zero was .499,
which confirms the absence of autocorrelation. What is more, and unsurprisingly, the coefficients and standard errors were virtually identical across the logit and pooled logit models. Reporting the logit model allows for us to also report probabilities.

16 During each election year there was a set of states that did not hold a state-wide election (1994/2006-KY, LA, NC; 1998-DE, MS, MT, NJ, WV, VA; 2002-IN, ND, UT, WA). All models discussed below originally included a dummy variable for these states in order to control for the fact that a president was less likely to campaign in a state that had no state-wide election. In all models, however, the measure was insignificant, did not change the findings in any way, and has been dropped from the final model.

17 The second term variable varies in significance depending on the model’s specification, even though it is always in the negative direction.

18 These conditional effects, such that presidents are even more likely to campaign in large states that were close in the previous election, proves statistically insignificant. Another possibility is that presidents are likely to campaign in large state in which they are also popular. This interaction is also statistically insignificant.

19 Of course, Kansas was not close in 2000, but Pennsylvania was. Taken together, this may suggest a conditional impact of close races and electoral votes, but they do not work in this fashion. Again, an interaction between close states and electoral votes is statistically insignificant.

20 Several measures that might assess fundraising power include income and income per capita. Neither of these variables significantly predicts the president’s propensity to campaign in a state at midterm.

21 Aside from these counts, there appear to be no other tally of fundraisers in congressional election years. Doherty (2007a, 27) provides a compilation of fundraisers by a state’s electoral votes, but only for presidential election years. Not surprisingly, he finds that presidents attend more fundraisers in large than small states in presidential election years, presumably for the obvious electoral benefit of campaigning in large, instead of small states.

REFERENCES


Expanding the Measure of Congruency: Presidential Anticipation of Public Preferences, 1953-2001

Brandon Rottinghaus

Several important studies have examined congruency between presidential policy position taking and public opinion. Much of this policy-public opinion scholarship, however, explores reflexive responsive pathways between representative and represented, where presidents read public opinion and respond to the opinions of the known public. A less explored aspect of presidential responsiveness to public opinion is the idea of presidential anticipation of future public opinion similar to Key’s (1964) concept of “latent opinion.” In this article, we offer a simple measure of anticipatory public opinion. Confirming what Key speculated about latent opinion, we find that presidents are more likely to successfully anticipate public preferences when the issue is salient and when elections are approaching, whereas popularity matters very little. Based upon these findings, presidents tend to look outward at the future political environment they face rather than inward (at current popularity) in anticipating reactions to new policy agendas.

Decades of research have demonstrated that public opinion has a consistent effect on the design of public policy. Specifically, these scholars find connections between public opinion and public policy outputs between half to three-quarters of the time (Page and Shapiro 1983; Stimson et al. 1995; Monroe 1998; Burstein 1998; Erikson et al. 2002). At the federal level, public opinion has been demonstrated to have a positive effect on spending, for instance, across a range of issues (Wlezien 1995), health care policy (Jacobs 1993), defense policy (Hartley and Russett 1992; Wlezien 1996) and welfare (Fording 1997). Much of this policy-public opinion scholarship, however, explores reflexive responsive pathways between representative and represented, where presidents read public opinion (through polls and otherwise) and respond to the opinions of the public.

A less explored aspect of presidential responsiveness to public opinion is the idea of presidential anticipation of public opinion. Anticipation of public opinion occurs when politicians anticipate public opinion in the future and adopt policy positions (often new policies) without perfect information on whether or not the public will approve, or “where politicians try to please future voters” (Mansbridge 2003, 517). Anticipation of public opinion arises from politicians’ desire to get reelected and implies politicians are continually reflective of public preferences (Arnold 1993). The presumption is that voters punish (or may punish) politicians for policy positions taken outside the boundary of public opinion and these voters use retrospective frames to
evaluate success (Page 1978). Anticipation of opinion is also theoretically akin to presidents anticipating what effect their actions will have on the electorate, a concept Key (1964) refers to as “latent” opinion. Key defines latent opinion as opinion that is “hibernating” but “given relevant or appropriate stimulus, the opinion will be triggered into expression or action” (1964, 264). This conceptualization of public opinion is a realistic approach to studying public opinion because, if we assume politicians are concerned about public standing and reelection, latent opinion is the “type of reaction that governments must be concerned about as they weigh the possible effect of events on public opinion” (Key 1964, 274).

Scholarly work exploring the degree to which presidents read and react to public opinion (after that opinion has been formalized in a poll or otherwise, most often called opinion congruency) gives us only one dimension of how presidents take policy positions. To remedy this, the goal of this article is to provide an initial simple and direct test of the concept of anticipatory opinion by utilizing data that directly measure presidential congruent position taking on future favorable public opinion. We measure latent opinion by creating a large data set of matched presidential statement and public opinion polls—if there was no valid public opinion on the president’s statement within one year before the date the president made the statement but a majority of the public (51% or greater) agreed with the statement after the statement was made, the president successfully “anticipated” latent public opinion. We link the literatures of congruent position taking and latent opinion by testing several theoretical assertions concerning the practice of anticipation of latent public opinion, including temporal aspects, electoral connections and issue dynamics. Doing so will extend analysis of presidential responsiveness to public opinion and aid our explanation of the behavioral parameters of the public presidency.

Indeed, presidential anticipation of public opinion and Key’s compelling concept of “latent opinion” can help us understand the degree to which presidents anticipate public opinion and take policy positions accordingly. Studies about activation and anticipation of latent opinion also have potential to influence our understanding of congruent position taking, yet few works have undertaken this task. Zaller hints at a “revival” for latent opinion and suggests that this topic “ought to be more central to the study of public opinion than it is” (2003, 312). Indeed, Key argues, “the concept of latency of opinion enables us to elaborate this model of the relation between government and opinion” (1964, 282). As noted, however, we do not fully know the extent to which presidential actors are successfully able to guess, reason or infer future public opinion. This approach allows for us to understand how and when politicians attempt to be responsive (or not) to public opinion and expands our scholarly understanding of presidential responsiveness to public opinion.
Anticipating Latent Opinion

The concepts of anticipatory and latent opinion have practical and scholarly value in the discussion of the implications of public opinion on policy making. As noted, Key describes the concept of latent opinion as opinion that exists but has yet to be manifest into active opinion, yet “given relevant or appropriate stimulus, the opinion will be triggered into expression or action” (1964, 264). Key’s clever explanatory analogy relates a story of a burglary in a neighborhood where a certain level of hostility may exist towards the burglary, but “the opinion remains latent until, say, a wave of burglaries sets off a movement to oust the chief of police” (1964, 264). Key suggests that “anticipation” of future public preferences is important to politicians because “attentive” citizens are “equipped with ingrained sets of values, criteria for judgment, attitudes, preferences, dislikes—pictures in his head—that come into play when a relevant action, event or proposal arises” (1964,264). As a result, politicians must carefully weigh the presumed future expectations of public support in taking new policy or political positions.

Latent opinion is estimated by politicians based upon response propensities and past routines that the public has followed in reaction to particular past events. Key notes that these responses from the “attentive public” engage “patterns of reaction that serve as bases for predictable responses” that are “more or less Pavlovian” and are linked to “the broad kinds of values and expectations held by people” and by their willingness to absorb elite cues (1964, 265, 271, 274). Zaller similarly agrees that these propensities to event stimuli are predictable and that seasoned politicians “learned or could at least sense many of these propensities” in order to reason their way to reelection (2003, 314). Zaller (2003) specifically lists economic events and “rally around the flag” events as periodic, routine events that activate latent opinion. Therefore, presidents must understand these opinion “stimuli” and make anticipatory determinations when designing and unveiling policy positions that are congruent with future public opinion. Fundamentally, then, latent opinion represents the prospect for “future congruence” (or the degree to which presidents anticipate what the public will want and take positions accordingly) and can therefore be linked to other concepts involving presidential congruence with public opinion.

Testing Anticipation of Opinion

The parameters of presidential anticipation of opinion (and latent opinion) produce two prominent, simple and testable conditions under which we might expect presidents to anticipate public opinion: elections and important issues. Both political phenomena constrain presidential action by forcing the
president to acknowledge and predict future public preferences because the public is more likely to notice if presidents are not responsive during these times or on these issues. Presidents are uncertain about future votes and are therefore constrained by these political and temporal forces, both of which have the effect of drawing closer attention and scrutiny on presidential actions, to coordinate their action with public opinion. Thus, in order to test Key’s assertions about latent opinion and determine under what conditions presidents find success at anticipating opinion, we offer five hypotheses to more fully flesh out these two broad themes.

**Elections**

Given the critical linkage of contemporary judgments about public opinion and the next election in successfully anticipating opinion, election years serve as critical political considerations (see Mansbridge 2003). Given the partially prospective nature of elections, we should expect presidents to be more successful in anticipating public opinion in election years because presidents are worried about appearing non-responsive to the public during a time where there is a possibility of not getting reelected. Scholars have found similar patterns in other responsive environments. For instance, presidents are found to be responsive to previous public preferences when an election is imminent or when a policy position is seen to be favorable in terms of leadership image (Canes-Wrone et al. 2001, Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004; Rottinghaus 2006). Scholars have also found these patterns when exploring legislative behavior (generally in the U.S. Senate since the unit of analysis is greater), specifically that Members of Congress more closely adhere to known median voter preferences when elections are coming soon (Kuklinski 1978; Elling 1982; Thomas 1985).

Further, latent opinion is intimately linked with what Key terms “electoral reprisal.” Consistent with our theorizing above, he notes “anxieties about electoral reprisal doubtless condition the operations of democratic governments” (1964, 268). The president, he argues, should be especially interested in the consequences of his actions on public opinion since latent opinion may become activated and thereby significantly affect his chances for reelection. The end result of “activated” latent opinion is the conversion of amorphous latent opinion into votes. Key notes, “latent opinion may not be truly activated until it is converted into a vote in appraisal of those who make public decisions. Estimation of latent opinion in this sense becomes the tricky job of forecasting the relation of particular actions and events to future popular votes” (1964, 267). Presidents are therefore more likely to anticipate public preferences with congruent position taking or unveiling popular policies especially when elections are closer. And, in theory, second
term presidents, who vacate this pressure, are less likely to anticipate public preferences in their second terms.

Alternatively, because of the futuristic nature of latent opinion, we should also expect that presidents are less responsive to previous election outcomes in generally engaging in anticipatory responses to opinion than a prospective judgment about public preferences in the future. Electoral data can give meaningful signals to presidents about the policy preferences of the public (Kelley 1983; Conley 2001). However, the structural determinants of successful anticipation of public opinion are not based on “promissory” representation (where presidents promise policy or political action during an election and work during their term to accomplish that goal, see Mansbridge 2003), but rather a forecast of what the voters will want in the subsequent election. Therefore, measures of the percentage of the popular vote garnered in the previous election should result in a negative association with successful anticipation of public opinion.

_Election Year Hypothesis:_ Presidents will be more successful at anticipating public opinion in election years.

_Prior Vote Hypothesis:_ Results from previous elections (percentage of the popular vote received) should be a negative indicator of anticipatory behavior.

_Second Term Hypothesis:_ Given the election-based behavior of first term presidents, presidents in their second terms should not be as reflective of future public opinion.

**Issue Salience**

The second broad condition thought to enhance presidential anticipation of opinion is the importance (or prominence) of an issue. The parameters of the public presidency generally foster in presidents an incentive to talk about issues that are most salient in the public’s mind, particularly if administrations are concerned with at least appearing responsive to public concerns (Cohen 1999). Presidents may also adapt this strategy depending on the nature of the issue. Scholars have found that presidents are more responsive on “pocketbook” issues (those issues that directly affect the public) (Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004). Similarly, Key argues that elements of public policy that intimately affect the public are more likely to activate latent opinion—specifically, Key notes “economic deprivation, external threat, grave injustice” and “the triggering effect of circumstance may certainly be reinforced by the oratory of those politicians who come forward with diagnoses and prescriptions” (1964, 270). If the president reasons that
the public believes the issue important, the president is more likely to take a position they believe to be congruent with the public or introduce a policy they believe will find favor with the public because the public is paying attention on that issue and can more readily hold the president accountable.

Given the relatively short duration of a president’s term and the concurrent need to maximize support at the next election, presidents should be theorized to have “strong incentives” to anticipate the reactions of the public when the public is paying attention (Page 1978). For instance, Stimson et al. find that government officials sense movements in public opinion and “like antelope in an open field, they cock their ears and focus their full attention on the slightest sign of danger” (1995, 559). Without perfect information (even with internal White House polling) about exactly what the public will favor (or be aroused to favor) and how future opponents will craft opposing messages, rational presidents are wise to anticipate public opinion under conditions where the public is paying attention, such as when the issue is of a greater perceived importance (see Arnold 1993 and Geer 1996).

Furthermore, presidents desiring to maximize their future popularity with the public will want to talk about issues they speculate might be most salient in the public’s mind in the future by taking policy positions on those issues that they predict will resonate positively with the public (Edwards et al. 1995). Similarly, Geer argues that rational politicians are judicious in choosing which non-salient issues to make salient (by discussing them publicly). He finds that choosing policies which are already salient in the public mind is a case of “easy Wilsonian” leadership (1996, 113). Presidents may also seek to anticipate future opinion to transform a popular issue into “their” signature issue (captured by our anticipation measure) by unveiling a new policy proposal or taking a new political position that connects to a public event or crisis. Specifically, Key argues that the kinds of events that stimulate latent opinion are “usually objective conditions that affect or capture the attention of the masses of people” (1964, 270). Accordingly, we should see presidents anticipating public opinion on more salient policy or political issues.

Avoiding issues that will impose additional costs on voters is also part of successfully anticipating future public preferences. Arnold argues that “legislators are more fearful of electoral retribution when they consider proposals that would impose large and direct costs on their constituents” whereas those imposing only small costs (or hidden costs) are too narrow to be understood (1993, 411). In particular, he argues that most legislators are unwilling to entertain raising the gas tax, cutting Social Security or closing military bases because of perceived retribution at the polls. Further, in-depth legislative studies of tax, energy and economic policy, illustrate that legislators were reluctant to enact policies that imposed direct costs (in the form
of higher energy prices or tax burdens) on the public (Arnold 1990). Therefore, we should expect presidents to not anticipate congruent public opinion more frequently when the issue in question will impose (or is perceived to impose) a direct cost on the electorate.

**Issue Importance Hypothesis:** Presidents should anticipate public opinion more when the current salience of the issue is greater, especially if those issues involve matters of interest to voters’ pocketbooks.

**Issue Cost Hypothesis:** Presidents should not anticipate public opinion more when the issues in question potentially impose greater costs on the public.

**Measuring Matched Rhetoric and Anticipatory Opinion**

Woodrow Wilson argued in his famous “Leaders of Men” speech that “interpretation” of public preferences is critical to leadership in the presidency. Wilson writes, “Leadership, for the statesman, is interpretation. He must read the common thought: he must calculate very circumspectly the preparation of the nation for the next move in the progress of politics” (Wilson 1890 [1952], 42). Wilson continued, “it need not pierce the particular secrets of individual men: it need only know what it is that lies waiting to be stirred in the minds and purposes of groups and masses of men” (Wilson 1890 [1952], 23, emphasis added). At the core of Wilson’s “interpretation” is judgment about public reactions to the president’s latest policy agenda and the question of whether or not that policy agenda will meet with mass approval. Wilson’s analysis presciently summarizes the concept of how presidents anticipate opinion.

To approximate Wilson’s framework for leadership and explain “latent opinion,” the specific approach used here was to match presidential policy statements to public opinion with a random sample of total pages from the *Public Papers of the President* from Presidents Eisenhower to Clinton. For each page, the first statement of policy expressed on that page was taken as the dependent variable for that case and recorded. These statements reflect a number of characteristics (or absence of certain characteristics), but the goal of this search was to record a specific policy statement. Because the *Public Papers* included a large number of statements, several criteria were created for what constituted a valid policy statement on each page. An item was considered valid if it came from the President (not subordinates or other actors) and advocated action on a specific policy. A vast majority of the president’s statements were straight-forward enough to easily code the policy and
presidential preference. For example, President Clinton saying “I stand by my decision to send troops to Haiti” or “I applaud the efforts of the Republicans in Congress in passing minimum wage increases” both present a clear indication of policy and preference. However, it is likely that pollsters poll on the most salient issues of the day and subsequent to a president speaking on an issue, pollsters may decide to poll on that very issue reasoning that it has entered the public discourse (explaining the “post” only poll). This possible bias excludes our ability to claim presidents “created” this opinion, instead this simply limits our conclusion to claim that presidents correctly reasoned that the policy would be popular by some form (poll, personal interactions, guessing).

The online polling archive at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut was used to search for public polling data that could be matched to randomly selected presidential policy statements. The Roper Center has a comprehensive archive of publicly available polls dating back to 1930 and is the most complete record of all public opinion polling available to researchers. This search strategy limits our findings to the issues on which public pollsters poll, narrowing the kind of opinion we can measure and, concurrently, the types of statements we can match. Ultimately, the issues most frequently registered were large-scale policy issues, allowing us to satisfactorily claim to have covered most of the policy landscape. An examination of the data offers face validity in that Presidents tend to discuss the significant policies one would historically expect them to discuss (e.g., Eisenhower on the farm program and the Korean War, Kennedy on the missile gap and civil rights, Johnson on Vietnam and civil rights, Nixon on Vietnam, busing and federalism, Ford and Carter on energy policy and the crisis in the middle east, Reagan on the Strategic Defense Initiative and tax cuts, Bush on the Gulf War and Clinton on balancing the budget and education reform). This approach also satisfies Zaller’s notion that systematic evidence in testing the emergence of latent opinion requires that the issues examined span multiple cases (2003, 333). Polling data was searched for one year after the statement on the assumption that public opinion may not rapidly respond to external events, including a president’s speech. In each instance, the closest poll to the statement found was coded. Presidents anticipate future favorable majority opinion (or “activated” latent opinion) when they make an educated guess, rely on internal opinion data or simply use their intuition to take a position on an issue that they expect the public to favor (see Stimson et al. 1995; Mansbridge 2003; Cohen and Hamman 2003). New policy agenda initiatives are often anticipatory, born out of a political need for support on a particular issue or spawned from new presidential policy initiatives (Light 1999). Likewise, Geer notes that in
“Wilsonian” leadership, the task of the president is to “give life to such [non-salient] issues” (1996, 47). Therefore, as illustrated in Figure 1, presidents sense the contours of opinion (on which they have little certain information) and make a statement they believe will find favor with majorities of the public at the time of the next election. Post-statement polling serves as our measure of the degree to which future publics approve of the president’s message. However, we cannot measure the degree to which the White House is “crafting talk,” thereby shaping this opinion (Geer 1996; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000), since there is no way to quantify this in the aggregate. We assume this is happening but are limited in this measure to determining the congruence presidents find with public opinion.

In order for a statement to be coded as successfully “anticipatory” of activated latent public opinion, there had to be no valid public opinion on the president’s statement within one year before the date the president made the statement but a majority of the public (51% or greater) had to agree with the statement after the statement was made. Although Key never strictly defines how latent opinion should be measured, this is a reasonable measure of latent opinion and comports on face with Key’s (1964) analysis of latent opinion as opinion that exists below the surface but is waiting for an external event (in this case, the president’s speech or related action) to excite it. In our article, measuring public opinion only after a president’s statement allows for a valid test of anticipatory opinion because it offers a prospective evaluation of what the public will support and demonstrates the president introducing a new policy to an uncertain political environment (even with the benefit of internal polling). The average number of days from the president’s statement to a measured poll is 122 days. As a specific example of successful anticipation of a policy proposal, on October 10, 1963, President Kennedy introduced a policy where the United States would sell excess grain to the Soviet Union. On October 16, a poll was taken in which 59 percent of the polled public agreed with the president on this issue (with no poll one year on the issue prior to the October 16 poll). A sample of emerging policy issues captured include: the Peace Corps (Kennedy), the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Johnson), block grants to

Figure 1. Simple Model of Anticipation of Public Opinion

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Opinion (unpolled)</th>
<th>Presidential Statement (presidential inference)</th>
<th>Voters (next election)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t1</td>
<td>t2</td>
<td>t3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Opinion poll

Note: Voters represent voters at the time of the next election, where the president’s statement simultaneously anticipates voters’ reactions and is shaped by inferred reactions (see Mansbridge 2003).
the states (Nixon), negotiations over the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt (Carter), the Strategic Defense Initiative and the space shuttle program (Reagan) and AmeriCorps, the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy and the Family Medical Leave Act (Clinton). In addition, several instances captured “new” policies related to unexpected foreign interventions, including sending troops to the Dominican Republic (Johnson), the Middle East (Carter) and Iraq (Bush).

This measurement provides us with assurance that if we find a statement-poll match after the president’s statement, that there was no such poll-registered opinion on the issue before the president spoke. This measure implies that the opinion registered in the “post-speech only” poll has been “excited” by the president’s speech (and related events), consistent with our understanding of latent opinion and “Wilsonian” leadership. A poll was considered pertinent if the specific policy statement expressed in the Public Papers was the same policy expressed in the public poll. Great care was taken to search all of the germane polling data to ensure that the policy expressed in the president’s statement matched the policy in the poll. Occasionally, the president would not express a specific solution or viewpoint on a policy but would offer a vague statement about the importance or urgency of the problem. If this was the case, and no policy poll could adequately be matched to the statement, only the salience of the measure was coded. Overall, this matching process left 230 cases where an opinion poll was found only after the president’s statement, allowing us to measure anticipatory congruency in these cases.

This measurement also assuages several concerns about imprecise measures of public opinion and advantageously provides a continuous and analytically distinct measure of anticipatory opinion. Several studies discuss “anticipation” of public opinion (see Canes-Wrone 2006, 6), but this definition can be used to encompass several kinds of behavior. In addition, presenting an “after only” design “becomes useful information in assessing the degree of the aggregate shift in the public mood” and allows for analysis of the degree to which a president’s new policy agenda is received by the public (Cohen and Hamman 2003, 147). In fact, Key (1964) initially tests his theory about latent opinion with a similar quasi-experiment (event and opinion measure test). Finally, this allows us to examine a random and continuous (throughout the president’s term) selection of policy issues on which presidents take positions, not simply those in State of the Union messages (Cohen 1999) or on budget proposals (Canes-Wrone 2006), position taking which might bias the results in favor of finding significant anticipatory success.
Model and Findings

The bivariate data demonstrate that presidents from Eisenhower to Clinton are generally adept at anticipating future majority favorable opinion with their policy statements, and most presidents are able to do so 75 percent of the time. Put more simply, presidential rhetoric successfully takes positions on issues that are likely to be favored in the future by the public in most situations. Thus, contradicting Key’s (1964) assertion, presidents are relatively good at anticipating unformed, future public opinion. Yet, to model a causal multivariate relationship, Table 1 identifies two OLS models with the percent approving of the president’s policy after the president spoke on it (measured continuously). Other probabilistic models, including a Heckman model, were analyzed and rejected because (1) dichotomous measures of the dependent variable (successful anticipation of popular opinion or not) over fit the data by squeezing the total percentage approval into a dichotomous variable and (2) the inverse Mills ratio (lambda) for several specifications of the Heckman model were not significant, indicating no need to use a censored model. To control for any endogenous influence, we also include a variable representing a president’s policy promise in the most recent past State of the Union message, which effectively models a “control variable” to control against presidents taking positions on a range of issues (see Canes-Wrone 2001; 2006).

In both OLS models in Table 1, the three election-related variables were statistically significant predictors (holding all other factors constant) of presidential statements anticipatory of “activated” latent opinion, largely confirming our overarching expectations about the role of elections in harnessing latent opinion: the percentage a president won in the popular vote (Popular Vote), which was negative, and the closer in time until the next election (Election Year Distance), which was positive, and presidential election year (Presidential Election Year), which was positive. As expected, anticipation of latent opinion is inherently a forward-looking enterprise; thus it makes sense that an impending presidential reelection (or possible election of a party standard bearer), as the primary motive for the White House, drives behavior rather than backward-looking behavior.

Specifically, our predictions in the Election Year Hypothesis and Prior Vote Hypothesis were proven accurate. We argued that presidents would be more anticipatory in election years where the president was at the top of the ticket. Table 1 indicates that the coefficient for presidential election year is strong and statistically significant for both models (.274, .237). Further, the variable “countdown” code for election year approaching (“Election Close”) captures a measure of presidential behavior leading up to the election year. Again we find this election forecasting variable strong and significant in
Table 1. Factors Predicting Successful Presidential Anticipation of Latent Opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Election and Temporal Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Close</td>
<td>.131 (.045)**</td>
<td>.199 (.048)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Election Year</td>
<td>.274 (.114)**</td>
<td>.237 (.131)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Election Year</td>
<td>-.001 (.082)</td>
<td>.001 (.086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Vote (previous election)</td>
<td>-.013 (.006)*</td>
<td>-.014 (.065)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Term</td>
<td>.175 (.096)*</td>
<td>.178 (.098)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue-Based Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Doorstep” Issues</td>
<td>.118 (.094)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue “Costs”</td>
<td>.024 (.063)</td>
<td>.079 (.172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Salience</td>
<td>.004 (.003)</td>
<td>.005 (.003)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.105 (.094)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.107 (.167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.040 (.188)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.060 (.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.061 (.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of the Union Promise</td>
<td>.269 (.075)**</td>
<td>.280 (.081)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Approval</td>
<td>.000 (.002)</td>
<td>.000 (.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Carter Presidents</td>
<td>-.121 (.084)</td>
<td>-.155 (.098)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Government</td>
<td>-.104 (.083)</td>
<td>-.109 (.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; Chi²</td>
<td>.0012(***</td>
<td>.0077(***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.12 (.376)**</td>
<td>1.13 (.396)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dependent Variable: Successful presidential anticipation of public opinion (as defined by opinion poll registering majority support for presidential policy after the president speaks, measured continuously). See details in text.

*** statistical significance at p<.01. ** statistical significance at p<.05. * statistical significance at p<.10.

both models (.131, .199). These findings largely comport with studies demonstrating that elections have a strong effect on responsive presidential behavior (Stimson et al. 1995; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Moreover, the Prior Vote Hypothesis (past election results should be negative) is also proven accurate as both models in Table 1 reveal that the percentage of the
popular vote from the president’s previous election is negative and not statistically significant.21

However, contradicting our expectations in Second Term Hypothesis, even though they cannot be reelected, second term presidents (Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton) are significantly more likely to anticipate public opinion than first term presidents.22 Given that the electoral incentive dissipates after presidents are reelected, this finding runs against the findings from Canes-Wrone (2006) and Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004). These works may have overlooked the important legacy and party attachment elements to second term presidencies, where presidents have been shown to be congruent with public opinion in their second terms as a result of wanting to cement a popular legacy and desiring to assist in the election of their party in the subsequent election (Rottinghaus 2006).

We also suggested in the Issue Importance Hypothesis that more salient issues should produce more presidential success in anticipating latent opinion. This expectation is demonstrated accurate in Model 2 in Table 1 (which takes into account several specific issues), where the coefficient for salience is positive and significant (.005). Consistent with Key’s (1964) observations, presidents surmise the future salience of a particular policy issue to determine whether or not to make congruent statements with public opinion. This also confirms Geer’s (1996) theoretical argument that presidents governing in an environment replete with polls would practice “Wilsonian” leadership by taking popular positions on more salient issues. This also implies, as expected, that presidents are interested in appeasing the public in terms of the valence of issues as well as on the substance of issues. Yet, the effect is somewhat small, implying that salience is only weakly related to future congruent position taking.

Additionally, turning to the Issue Cost Hypothesis, on particular issues judged to invoke “costs” from the American public (such as tax policy, welfare spending and budget spending), we find that this condensed variable is not a substantive or significant predictor of presidential anticipatory behavior. The “Issue Costs” variable in both models of Table 1 suggests that on those issues that may register a larger cost to the American public, presidents are not more likely to anticipate public opinion in a direction favoring higher costs judged by the lack of significance of the variable (.024, .079 in Models 1 and 2). In both instances, the president is insuring that the public’s well being is catered to by not enacting burdensome public policy, consistent with our broad expectations about presidents anticipating opinion on more important issues. Yet, “doorstep” issues (those issues suggested to be closer to the people, especially involving personal finances, welfare and health care) were not consistently significant in producing presidential anticipation
of latent opinion. In neither model did these issues become statistically significant.

Conclusion

Consistent with Woodrow Wilson’s arguments discussed above, our findings reveal several dimensions on how presidents relate to the future, predicted political environment and has extended the literature on presidential congruency with public opinion. In particular, the data indicate that all of our predicted election-based variables adhere to expectations. Presidents are more successful at anticipating opinion when elections are closer, during a presidential election year but not reflective of the popular vote from the previous election. These findings are not surprising because anticipation of public opinion is inherently a forward looking objective, reflecting Key’s (1964) “electoral reprisal” argument and a wealth of presidential scholarship that anchors presidential decision making to upcoming elections. These findings also reveal that the “electoral connection” appears to be robust in relating to a “permanent campaign” strategy of campaign-style governing (Blumenthal 1980; Tenpas 2003; Heith 2003; Doherty 2007). Building on these findings of strategic resource allocations, our study extends empirical investigations of the “permanent campaign” to include rhetorical policy actions. These conclusions demonstrate a reoccurring (and often successful) strategy by presidents (in their first and second terms) to engage in permanent campaigning by continuously responding to public preferences in a manner prescribed during the campaign season.

In addition to demonstrating the power of elections in shaping presidential behavior, in the present data we also expand our understanding of how and when presidents interpret the prospect of future public support. The evidence suggests that, in anticipating public preferences by introducing new policies into the agenda, current popularity does not seem to have an effect. Interestingly, Key (1964) does not mention popularity as a resource in anticipation of latent opinion, rather his focus is on presidents understanding and anticipating opinion at times of reelection. These findings also help to explain presidential agenda setting behavior and provide insight into when we might expect new presidential policy proposals. Based upon these findings, presidents tend to look outward at the political environment they face rather than inward (at popularity) in anticipating reactions to new policy agendas. Specifically, we discover that presidents are more likely to follow public preferences (or what they presume are public preferences) on higher salience issues, a finding which reinforces scholarly thinking about leadership on “easy” issues (Bailey et al. 2003) and similar to Geer’s fear that
frequent access to public opinion polls establish “more demagogues and fewer leaders” (1996, 115).

In circumstances where presidents have a choice of whether or not to follow to public opinion, White Houses go for the “easy” sell—they take positions favored by public opinion in instances where the mass public cares about the issue. For instance, we find presidents unlikely to anticipate majority public preferences on issues where taking a position may impose a “cost” on voters’ pocketbooks. This confirms findings from the congressional literature that argues that legislators work to reduce the costs for their constituents (Arnold 1990). Similarly, we find presidents strongly seek to follow public preferences when the issues are important issues to the public. The realization that choosing issues on the wrong side of an attentive public, as implied by Key’s interpretation of latent opinion, compels presidents to make sure that the public’s core needs are satisfied and policy choices do not impose additional costs on the voters.

NOTES

1See Cook and Manza (2002) and Burstein (2003) for excellent summaries of this body of work.

2Our simple argument here is that presidents anticipate public opinion out of a desire to be congruent with public opinion. It could also be the case that presidents are pandering to the public or are attempting to shape public opinion before opinion is registered (see Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Our data do not allow for a test of these theories and examining presidential motivations of pandering or shaping public opinion is difficult. Therefore, in this article, we adhere to factual findings and only speculate about the degree that presidents are pandering or shaping opinion.

3In this article, we test one proposition of opinion latency (the “estimation of the direction of majority sentiment”) and leave the supplemental questions Key poses (such as predicting “the estimation of what sectors of society, influential and noninfluential, will have opinions” or “whether an issue will command the attention of a large public”) aside (see Key 1964, 266). I do this because these questions speak to the makeup of latent opinion rather than the impact of latent opinion, as is the question in this paper.

4To measure salience, we use Gallup’s measure of “issue importance.” The exact wording of the Gallup organization’s question is: “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” When appropriate, other answers to similar questions were recorded, as long as the questions allowed for (1) open ended to the respondent and (2) requested only one (rather than two or three) “top issues” were coded. This preserved the spontaneous and singular “problem” nature of the issue in question.

5Concurrent with Arnold (1993), we isolated those issue mentions where the president endorsed, supported or introduced a potential new “cost” to the voters in three issue areas: taxes, budget and health care and Social Security. On issues of taxes, tax credits or tax cuts were coded as reducing tax burdens while increasing taxes on BTU’s, estate taxes or capital gains were counted as a tax increase. On issues of the budget, references to “balanced” budgets or reducing debt or expenditures were coded as reducing the “cost”
of the issue while any reference to a budget expenditure was coded as increasing the “cost.” On health care and Social Security, any references to increasing taxes on Social Security, raising the retirement age, funding a particular diseases (such as cancer or AIDS) or nationalizing health care were all considered an increase in the “cost” of the issue. The variable is a dummy variable, with “cost” issues is coded as “0” and “1” if a cost was not incurred.

A 4% random sample was decided upon since it would yield a manageable number of statements to match with opinion polling.

This process was thought to be the most systematic, consistent and relatively simple manner in which to select a case on the page. The Public Papers themselves are organized chronologically, but there seems to be no logical way that there would be a consistent bias in selecting the first such statement on the page in question. Although the placement of the page break from page to page in the president’s speech is not technically or purely random, it is various enough to not present any consistent selection bias.

This process also required excluding several types of statements that violated this general principle. Generally, statements that were not coded include those that were too vague, procedural statements, ceremonial statements, political speculation, economic predictions, observations on the general state of the economy, conditional statements (“might” or “maybe” or “considering”) or personnel decisions.

While this “matching” approach to measuring opinion-statement congruency is not perfect, it has been utilized by several scholars in important works in examining opinion-policy congruence (see Page and Shapiro 1983; Page and Shapiro 1992; Jacobs and Shapiro 1995; Jacobs and Shapiro 1997).

Essentially, the policy issue had to be specific to the poll (e.g., “we need to reduce the deficit” or “I support a raise in the minimum wage”) rather than vague (e.g., “we need to work for peace in the world” or “we need to help the neediest people with our programs” or “we need to make government smarter”) and/or make clear (or reasonably clear) the president’s advocacy of a particular policy approach. However, if the intended effect or assisted group was vague but was attached to a policy, the president was coded as supporting the policy (e.g., “we need to pass my health care bill to protect our kids”). At the sentence level, if a sentence referred to several advantages or several reasons for presidential support in a statement, the first such advantage listed was coded as the dependent variable and the additional advantages within the sentence were counted as individual statements (on the assumption that the president would desire to individually enumerate them). For instance, if the president said, “Our tax bill will reduce the deficit, give tax cuts to the middle class and remove the capital gains restrictions,” the tax bill “reducing the deficit” was the coded statement and the remaining two were counted as statements on page. Similarly, at the paragraph level, if the president listed ten separate advantages (or features) of the same bill, the first sentence was coded and the remaining nine were counted as assertions. The line drawn here is between specific issue and vague solution in order to capture the most specific issue possible.

The percentage of those that responded “don’t know” or “not sure” to each poll question was also recorded. In separate models run (but not shown here), the findings of presidential anticipation with those responding “don’t know” or “not sure” reaveraged into the overall percentages revealed no significant changes in the outcomes.

Page and Shapiro (1983) argue that a one-year lag in opinion and policy congruence is a reasonable time interval and base their results on this thinking (see page 177). Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1987) also discover that changes to presidential approval take an average of five to ten months to take effect, providing support for our modeled time lag. Further, in offer an “after only” design that does not attempt to argue for persua-
sion (i.e., causality) effects (merely suggesting congruent or non-congruent position taking) we are safe in assuming that our measure of opinion after the president’s statement is the first polled opinion on that matter (see Sigelman and Rosenblatt 1996).

13Cohen and Hamman (2003) describe this phenomenon of searching for data on public preferences after the president spoke on an issue (in their case, State of the Union addresses) “issue installation” (see pages 145-148). They rely on public mood data, not direct measures of public opinion.

14Key does argue that speeches are not necessarily sufficient to arouse public attention but speeches combined with policy or reflective of objective concerns is sufficient. He argues, “talk, even from the most conspicuous sources, is not enough to arouse widespread attention or demand. Propaganda seems to be most effective when reinforced by objective conditions” (1964, 285). Since most of the speeches made by the president in our measure of “anticipation” are either new policies or the president taking a new position on a real event, this condition is satisfied.

15The key here is that we are measuring polled opinion only after the president speaks. This accounts for the relatively low number of yielded cases from our original sample of 1,976 statements. Our design adds to the uniqueness of this relationship because we have a valid measure of how popular the issues was after the president discussed it publicly but with no prior baseline of opinion. There were 944 instances of “congruence” before the president spoke.

16In 75% of the cases where public opinion data was found only after the president’s statement was made, presidential statements matched the position favored by a majority of the public. This 75% figure is derived from the total number of statements of which there are valid opinion above 51% approving of the president’s position after the president’s statement (173) out of the total cases where there was any poll-matched statement after the president’s statement (230). This measure excludes the cases for which there was only matched opinion either only before the statement. The Chi Square (19.042) and Gamma statistic (.283) are both statistically significant at p>.01. Richard Nixon (84.3%) and Bill Clinton (85%) were the highest, while Gerald Ford (33.3%) and Jimmy Carter (52.9%) were the lowest.

17Table 1 presents the full model including all control variables. We also include two specifications: one including several specific issues and one including the “doorstep” measure more broadly defined. These are reported in Model 1 and Model 2. In alternative models run with a non-monotonic specification for popularity (comporting with Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004), the effect of popularity in instances of first or second half of terms were still negative and not significant.

18A Heckman specification could be appropriate here because, although we randomly select and directly observe the president’s speeches and the public opinion polling associated with each statement, we do not observe the public opinion polls for all presidential statements (or all issues). Specifically, we only observe public opinion polls for those statements that we randomly sample, not the universe of public opinion polls. That is, there is a degree of “self selection” in that pollsters only poll on particular issues (rather than all or a random sample of issues), making sample selection bias a possible problem with traditional OLS (Heckman 1979). Yet, the insignificance of the lambda statistic across several specifications of the selection equation leads us to reject this model.

19This coefficient is strong and significant in both models in Table 1. The assumption is that we need a counter measure to control presidential position taking on all issues versus only select issues the White House cares about greatly. If the issue was mentioned in the president’s annual message, we presume it is part of his core agenda (Cohen 1999).
“Election upcoming” is a countdown variable, coded as the number of years until the next election.

President Ford’s ascendancy to office did not provide a popular vote score, so as a proxy for his two years in office we used President Nixon’s 1972 election results.

Alternate models run with each of the presidents as a dummy variable demonstrated that none of the presidents as individuals presented a statistically significant success at anticipating public opinion, therefore these variables were excluded from the final model.

REFERENCES


**Book Reviews**

*Richard L. Engstrom, Editor*


The question of “energy independence” has been somewhere on national policy agendas at least since the Arab Oil Embargo and the price shocks of the early to mid 1970s. Indeed, Jay Hakes, in his book *A Declaration of Energy Independence,* acknowledges this problem on page six, where he reproduces a moderately famous Jimmy Marguiles cartoon in which each president, from Nixon to G.W. Bush, utters one word to form a sentence “It’s time we end foreign oil dependence.”

With this dismal history behind oil policy, and energy policy broadly, what new can be said? Complicating Hakes’ task—if one desires short-term fixes—is the rapid pace of change in the economy and in energy markets; in 2008 a gallon of gasoline in the United States cost over four dollars at its peak in some areas, and at a low of $1.40 in other locations and months. And when Hakes started writing this book, the economy was in much better shape than it is now.

But Hakes’s book is valuable, because he takes the longer view, both historically and into the near feature. Hakes melds energy market concerns, environmental problems, and technological advancements into a cogent analysis. Hakes, whose expertise as director of the U.S. Energy Information Administration from 1993 to 2000 serves him well, seeks to connect these threads into a call for action that would reduce American dependence on foreign oil. Such an action would, in turn, give the United States a stronger hand in foreign policy, reduce air pollution and slow global climate change, and would yield greater economic security.

The book is divided into three broad parts. Part One usefully lays out the history of our oil problem. Those who remember the gas lines and price spikes of the 1970s, and those who do not, will learn a great deal about the nature and mechanics of the oil market and how the United States became vulnerable to price increases or oil embargoes. Hakes traces the history of our oil policies since before World War II, and shows how the interplay of British and U.S. energy hegemony, followed by Middle Eastern nationalism, has shaped foreign policy in oil-rich regions, and shaped decision making in other nations, such as Venezuela and Norway. This period also saw import quotas and price controls that kept American production high, and prices low.
In Part Two, Hakes outlines “the problem of America’s energy dependence,” including chapters on our increased dependence on foreign oil despite actual successes in reducing oil imports and consumption in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These successes were a result of actual market forces and regulatory change not, as our former Vice President might say, as a result of personal virtue. This section also discusses the foreign policy, military, and climate implications of increasing oil dependence in the 1990s, and then discusses the need to critically assess market based solutions to declining oil stocks without being saddled by “ideological blinders.”

Part Two outlines “seven economically and politically viable paths to energy independence.” These include increasing the size of emergency oil reserves, building efficient vehicles, developing alternative fuels, electric cars, and energy taxes “liberals and conservatives can like,” making energy conservation “a patriotic duty,” and taking chances on some “Hail Mary’s” through advanced research and development. Part Three is a one chapter exhortation on “what we need from national leaders and voters.”

Overall this volume, particularly Part Two, contains several interesting ideas, but some of the ideas have been made less feasible, at least in the near term, by unforeseen events. The market for ethanol and biodiesel, for example, has been badly hurt by (as of January 2009) $40 a barrel oil. And American automobile companies’ capacity for major technological improvements that would yield fuel economy improvements is deeply constrained by the Big Three’s serious financial plight.

For political scientists, Hakes’ book provides excellent nuggets of insight and information. It is curious, for example, why the U.S. Department of Transportation figures on a given car model’s fuel efficiency are unrealistically low, and how much oil could be saved if the measurements were simply more realistic and if the letter and spirit of the law were applied. The politics of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and of fuel economy standards are fascinating and are important case studies for any student of American politics and public policy. Hakes is not an ideologue or a partisan, and writes respectfully of the ideas advanced by Democrats and Republicans, and those on the left and right, while pointing out their ideological biases. Hakes, a former political science professor, understands how to assess and write about politics and policy.

However, a significant shortcoming of this book is its overly optimistic tone and its assertion that partisan politics and ideology are major impediments to policy change. These themes are taken up most clearly in chapters 6, 7 and 15. Hakes attributes the failure to make better energy policy to the ideological blinders of both the left and the right, but he does not adequately explain how particular interests are major drivers of policy positions, as students of Theodore Lowi or Paul Sabatier have described in explaining “interest group liberalism” and “advocacy coalitions” for policy change.
Hakes’ call for action in Chapter 15 may be inspirational, but is also rather simplistic. While starting with an excellent observation that there is a long lag between a policy and its (hopefully positive) effects, Hakes argues that we should “change the politics” by “paying more attention to Congress,” “increasing the political involvement of young people,” and “finding elected officials who dare to lose.” He rightly points to champions of energy independence from significantly different regions or ideological predispositions, but does not focus on what institutional advantages or disadvantages Congress may have compared with the executive branch in shaping energy policy.

Inducing greater youth involvement in politics is laudable, and young people may have participated somewhat more in the 2008 election, but Hakes claims without evidence that young people have a keener sense of long-term effects than do older people. This would be more convincing if we had any evidence of different discounting among different age groups. And “finding politicians who dare to lose” is a tall order if we assume, following David Mayhew and Morris Fiorina, that politicians are at least as concerned with their reelection as they are with making “good” policy. While finding politicians who care about intergenerational equity is a worthy goal, it is hard to imagine, under current institutional arrangements, a large cadre of new politicians joining the Congress to pursue long-term goals over short-term reelectability.

Despite these criticisms, this book is worthwhile reading for students of American politics and public policy. Those searching for a deeply theoretical work on the amazing complexities of energy politics and public policy should look elsewhere. But those looking for a readable and sober analysis about how “Freedom from foreign oil” can improve “national security, our economy, and the environment” would do well to give this book a look. And the style and tone of the book might be just the thing to stir up debates in advanced courses in energy history, politics, and public policy.

Thomas A. Birkland
North Carolina State University


For eight years, the spreading of American-style democracy and the building of democratic institutions in the Arab world was a pillar of President George W. Bush’s foreign policy. The Freedom Agenda, as the Bush
administration formally called it, was sold as the sociopolitical face of the United State’s counterterrorism agenda. The Freedom Agenda managed to make U.S. foreign policy and democracy promotion synonymous with each other. Arguably, in the Arab world the results have been disastrous. The utter failure of the Freedom Agenda has resulted in the ideas associated with spreading democracy and the building of democratic institutions highly unpopular. In Freedom’s Unsteady March: America’s Role in Building Arab Democracy, Tamara Cofman Wittes’s main argument is that Arab democracy and American involvement in the Arab world is a necessity and fundamental to both Arab and American security. She argues that it is imperative that the U.S. facilitate democratic reform within the region. She shows why the Bush administration was correct to help facilitate democratic movements; however, she argues that they went about it in the wrong way. Wittes dissects the Bush Administration’s failures and uses them as building-blocks to develop a rational, long-term democracy promotion policy to assist the next presidential administration.

While talking about the Bush Administration and the spreading of democracy Tamara Cofman Wittes writes that “Even where the administration succeeded by its own terms, it failed spectacularly” (p. 1). Wittes argues the Bush administration’s failures were threefold. First, it pushed for democratic progress in areas least equipped to build democracy. It pushed for elections in the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq and each time the results ran counter to what the administration had anticipated. Secondly, it emphasized elections rather than building democratic norms and establishing basic sociopolitical freedoms. Third, she demonstrates that President Bush faltered because of a lack of planning and preconceived notions that did not represent Islamic culture or acknowledge Middle Eastern history. On the other hand, Wittes argues that it is fundamental for the United States to facilitate democracy by supporting grassroots movements and building democratic norms within Arab states. She agrees with President Bush that the development of liberal democracies in the Arab world will help secure the advancement of American interests, if done in the correct way. It also would help stabilize the region and help with its long-term economic growth. Wittes assumes that Arab populations are eager for American-style democratization.

Witte’s rational long-term democracy policy consists of two parts. First, a basic typology categorizing Islamist movements, and secondly, advice directed to American foreign policy decision makers when dealing with Islamic movements and Arab democracy promotion. The first category consists of ideologically driven jihadist movements such as al-Qaeda. Groups like these hold a worldview of total opposition to the United States role in the Middle East. Also, they are committed to working outside demo-
cratic institutions and using violence. The second category includes local and/or nationalist militant movements that have a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and their political environments. They use violence as a means to realize their political goals. Groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas are included in this category. The third category of Islamist movements includes movements that aspire to politically participate in the state's political institutions and do not use violence. The most prominent group in this category is the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. Wittes emphasizes that movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood are significantly different from the first and second category. Unlike the first two categories, there is a total rejection of violence and they seek to formally participate in democratic institutions and follow the norms and rules of their respected societies.

The second half of Wittes’s rational long-term democracy policy consists of advice directed to American foreign policy decision makers when dealing with Islamic movements and democracy promotion. Foreign policy decision makers must be willing to deal with Islamist movements that fall into her third category. She uses the mistakes that the Bush administration has made as her starting point. Specifically, she argues that its greatest mistake was its one-size-fits-all approach to building and dealing with Arab democracy. It is imperative that the next administration understand that each Arab state and Islamic movement is different and that they must be more attuned to regional differences. Furthermore, she advises that an Islamist movement’s attitude toward violence is a necessary but insufficient indicator of its likely ability to play a constructivist role in building and working within a democratic political system. Other factors that play a critical role are their attitudes toward women and religious and ethnic minorities, their attitude toward political pluralism, and the ideas associated with the separation of church and state and Islamic law. According to Wittes, if the Islamist movement meets the basic criteria of nonviolence, a democratic process, and pluralist ideals, then the United States government must be willing to work with it, even if ideological differences persist.

In the last 8 years we have seen American approval in the Arab world plummet as a result of the Bush Administration’s regional policy. As a result of this unpopularity, it is logical to question Wittes’s main hypothesis and ask how much of an impact the next administration really have on spreading Arab democracy. I would think that it is the wrong time to argue that the United States should engage in democracy promotion. Furthermore, the results of past eight years demonstrate the difficulty of meeting this goal. And the result of Arab elections could result in significant negative repercussions for the United States, as demonstrated in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. Wittes’s assumptions associated with the stability and security of the Arab world being facilitated by the establishment of democratic norms
and values are highly idealistic. It is not the ideas associated with democracy that frighten the Arab world. It is the inherent hypocrisy associated with U.S. foreign policy and the norms associated with capitalism that run counter to the foundations of Islam that frighten the Arab world. Witte barley touches on the fact that U.S. foreign policy makers must understand the underlying factors that are facilitating Islamic extremism, much of which is the indirect effect of U.S. hypocrisy and the socioeconomic inequality inherent in much of the Arab world.

D. Dustin Berna
Northern Illinois University


*Punishing the Prince* fits in well with the growing trend in emphasizing political leaders as the key actors in international relations. By relaxing the assumption of states as unitary actors, the book crosses levels of analysis and shows how leaders and their domestic institutional environment shape the relations between states. Adopting a multi-method approach, the book combines formal modeling, experimental design, and quantitative data analysis covering a variety of cooperative and conflictual interactions between states.

In developing their theory of *leader-specific punishments*, the authors argue that “the targets of foreign policies are often political leaders rather than the nations they represent” (p. 1). Targeting punishment against individual leaders has two important implications for relations between states. First, leader-specific punishments allow states to “identify an end to sour relations” when targeted leaders are subsequently deposed from office (p. 2). Second, the effectiveness of leader-specific punishments is dependent on the cost of removing the targeted leader, which is a function of the domestic institutional context.

The authors adopt a principal-agent framework in which office-seeking political leaders can be replaced by their principals for failing to cooperate with other states. However, the ability of citizens to replace leaders who cheated their nations depends on the cost of leader removal. Building on earlier work on *selectorate politics*, the authors expect that leaders in regimes with large winning coalitions can be replaced with low cost. When coalition size is large (as in democracies), leaders provide public goods to their supporters, in turn benefiting all members of society and reducing the
incumbency advantage. Yet leaders in small coalition systems (as in authoritarian regimes) retain power by distributing private goods to a small circle of supporters, thus making defection from the winning coalition and challenges to the leadership costly and therefore less likely. The costliness of leader removal also impacts the variability in policies following leader removal. In large coalition systems, leadership change should not result in significant policy changes since new leaders will want to continue providing public goods. Leadership turnover in small coalition systems, on the other hand, will likely result in dramatic policy shifts since coalition membership will differ fundamentally under a new leader.

This theoretical model allows for the development of several empirical predictions. Anticipating citizens’ desire to replace cheaters, leaders in large coalition systems are unlikely to cheat and will cooperate with international actors to avoid removal. When the cost of removal is high as in small coalition systems, leaders lack incentives to cooperate since “a leader’s survival is relatively detached from her ability to produce successful foreign policy outcomes” (p. 21). In consequence, leader-specific punishment theory expects that leaders in large coalition systems are more likely to cooperate with other states than leaders in small-coalition systems. Moreover, because of the greater policy variability induced by leadership change in small-coalition systems, leadership turnover in such systems is more likely to alter interstate relations than leader change in large coalition systems. As a corollary, when relations have been tarnished by noncooperative behavior in the past, leadership change can result in the reemergence of cooperation. Since leaders in large coalition systems are unlikely to cheat in the first place, this effect is observed for small coalition leaders only.

Expectations derived from the model are assessed in a number of empirical tests. The authors first conduct human subject experiments and compare behavior in groups with mechanisms for leader removal to groups where removal is impossible. Results indicate that mutual cooperation is most likely in a representative democracy environment and that high costs makes leader removal less likely. Two subsequent chapters provide quantitative empirical tests and analyze dyadic trade levels and sovereign debt, respectively. In both tests, small coalition leaders are less likely to cooperate, experiencing lower trade levels and higher default rates. Moreover, leadership change in small coalition systems succeeds in restoring cooperative relations in both tests. Following periods of noncooperation, leadership change increases trade levels and the probability of lending in small coalition systems, but has no such effect in large coalition systems.

The most significant contribution of this book is its emphasis on leadership change, but some questions remain unanswered. While the cost of removal means that leaders in small coalition systems are less likely to be
replaced, one of the most interesting empirical predictions arises from the replacement of precisely these leaders. If leader replacement in small coalition systems has the expected benefit of producing renewed cooperation, would we not want to know why and under what circumstances leaders in such systems are removed? Related to this point, the outcome of leadership change seems important. For example, if a leader in a small coalition system is replaced by another dictator, it is unlikely that future relations would be more cooperative since the new leader would cheat again, if only by using a different winning coalition to support her stay in power. Moreover, one could argue that while leader removal is costly in small coalition systems, the consequences of losing office are much more severe for authoritarian leaders, who often experience imprisonment, exile, or death after being removed. Why are these leaders not more cautious in avoiding replacement? Finally, there may also be reason to amend the office-seeking assumption. Term limits in presidential systems or the dependence of prime ministers on their political party in parliamentary systems, for example, suggests that leaders’ reasoning for cooperation may be influenced by a commitment to the governing party in addition to fear of replacement.

With regard to the empirical tests, the authors claim that the concept of winning coalition size ($W$) is distinct from measures of democracy. Yet even though it is known that $W$ strongly correlates with democracy for values at the extremes, substantive predictions are focused primarily on instances where $W$ is at such values. In addition, one may question whether citizens are sufficiently informed on international economic issues such as trade levels or the size of a nation’s debt. Empirical tests focusing on more salient foreign policy issues could increase confidence in the authors’ results.

To conclude, the book makes a strong contribution to the growing literature on the incentives of international leaders. The focus on leadership change and its potential to restore cooperative relations between states results in novel predictions and empirical findings.

Ursula E. Daxecker
Colorado State University


The study of identity politics can become quickly complicated by the intersectionality of identities. Those who study America’s Latino population are all too keenly aware of this. In observing the behavior of Latinos or
Latino organizations in the United States, social scientists must not only pay attention to the heterogeneity of Latinos but also understand how ethnicity may intersect with identities related to class, nation-state, or gender. Catherine Wilson’s work problematizes the intersectionality of Latino identity politics even further by introducing us to Latino religious identity. While some could claim that her analysis falls short of perfection, it is no small task that Wilson has taken on in this book. In the end, she provides a necessary contribution to an understudied aspect of ethnic-urban politics. In doing so, she also provides valuable insights for scholars of Latino politics who implicitly acknowledge (conceptualize) the important role of religion to Latino political behavior but have fallen short in operationalizing and conceptualizing beyond.

Wilson provides a rich, ethnographic account of three Latino faith-based organizations (FBOs): Latino Pastoral Action Center (LPAC) based in the Bronx, Neuva Esperanza based in North Philadelphia, and The Resurrection Project (TRP) headquartered in Chicago. Wilson’s method of inquiry is heavily informed by the likes of Clifford Geertz and Paulo Freire by which she strives to relate her analysis from the perspective of the agents and organizations she studies. The method of inquiry is not accidental as evidenced by frequent reminders to the reader that while some social scientists may critique her approach, it is essential to view the role of Latino religious identity “from the viewpoint of the believer.” (p. 8). It is only by doing so, Wilson argues, that we can come to see the “truth” motivating the actions of religious leaders and their organizations—actions that many social scientists would be quick to dismiss as irrational.

While this approach serves as an admirable strength of the book, it is also, at the same time, one of the weaknesses of the book. At times, it seems as if Wilson is unwittingly uncritical of the organizations and actors she examines. In letting subjects speak for themselves, one does provide a level of “authenticity” to the subject matter, yet this poses the risk of failing to critically assess these organizations. This perhaps might be understandable within a traditional ethnographic perspective. How many of us, after all, enjoy critiquing our own actions and perspectives objectively? However, if the author is grounding her work in Geertz and Freire, who are clearly concerned with the politics of representation and power relations in society, it is curious that Wilson did not spend more time unpacking her own positionality and as well as seeking to understand more fully the power and politics of those organizations.

For example, the origins of the three organizations under study are traced back to periods of government devolution during the 1970s and 1980s when there was a failure by governments to provide adequate services to inner city residents. These religious organizations arose in response to fulfill
needs in the community. Yet, one cannot help but wonder why these Latino FBOs continue to exist today. Have they failed in their mission to provide adequate services and, hence, continue to exist because of continued needs from inner-city residents? Or has government devolved even further, which continues to explain these organizations’ existence? A more critical ethnographic approach, or a basic comparative approach—either historically or organizationally to secular community service organizations (e.g., Chicanos por la Causa) could help answer some of these questions. In justifying her methodological approach, Wilson and her subjects argue against the use of performance outcomes in assessing organizations. If we are only to understand Latino religious identity for “its own sake and on its own terms” (p. 37), we then lose any ability to analyze whether such organizations are making barrio residents feel warm in their stomachs and not just in their souls.

This potential weakness of the book should not be confused with another common pitfall in ethnographic research that Wilson cautions against—“going native.” To her credit, Wilson is able to reference relevant scripture without proselytizing about letting Christ into your heart and allowing Him to show you the way. However, there are moments in the book where Wilson risks alienating those who are not all too familiar with religious doctrine and scripture. This, for example, is evidenced in the chapter on “new liberation theology”—perhaps the book’s strongest chapter. This chapter is critical to understanding the motivations of the leaders of the three organizations under review. Brief references are made to “old” (i.e., Latin America) liberation theology, Thomistic philosophy, and Vatican II that can drive the reader to want to have a catechism nearby because the relevance of these references are sometimes too brief. This, however, paints itself as a necessary avenue of future research for Wilson or others to pursue. Expanding on the distinction between old (i.e., Latin America) and new (i.e., U.S. Latino) liberation theology would be interesting. Doing so would also help shed light on how transnational state identities of immigrants intersect with religious identities.

In assuming the viewpoint of the religious leaders as the primary viewpoint, the salience of other non-religious identities becomes lost. To be sure, Wilson’s own subjects place a greater emphasis on religious identities rather than racial, ethnic, or political identities. However, the primacy of religious identities throughout the book makes it seem as if there are not as many meaningful intersections of religious identities with those other identities—something opposite of Wilson’s argument at the outset. Furthermore, the viewpoints of lower level agents and constituents become lost. The most prominently written about are the viewpoints of the leaders of these organizations. As a reader, I was left wondering about the viewpoints of individ-
uals at lower-levels in the organization or, more importantly, the viewpoints of the constituents that these organizations claim to serve.

The primacy of religious identities relative to others may simply be an outcome of the methodological approach used in the book. Perhaps, cognizant of the division between church and state in American politics and also cognizant of the sensitive subject of race in America, the religious leaders discussed in the book strive to make themselves appear as apolitical or color blind as possible and emphasize only their religious identities. But this makes scholars of racial politics ask, “Where is politics? Where is race?” The case study of Nueva Esperanza is, perhaps, the exception to seeing the political connections; but this may simply be due to the fact that its leader, Cortes—a widely recognized religious leader in the country, has made deliberate efforts to make his ministry political. Yet, for the rest of the book, the intersectionality of religious identities with Latino racial and ethnic identities is less than obvious.

An example of where more attention could have been given to the political is on the contrasts of the political contexts in which these Latino FBOs exist. Using Census data, Wilson spends some time describing the social and demographic context of South Bronx, North Philadelphia, and the Pilsen district in Chicago because she says this is essential for understanding these organizations. However, political scientists more accustomed to a counterfactual approach to guide their inquiry might question the selection of these three particular contexts versus other urban areas. In conducting case studies, one can always be susceptible to the criticism of case selection. However, in the present case, one unifying political characteristic of all three of these urban environments justifies such a critique—these are urban environments with a strong history of powerful urban machines playing influential roles in electoral outcomes and the distribution of goods, services, and patronage. Did the three Latino FBOs under examination rise to such prominence because of such an environment? Could they have done so in other settings? Would looking to urban environments in the West and Southwest where party machines are non-existent due to Progressive Era reforms (i.e., San Antonio, Dallas, Phoenix, San Diego, Los Angeles) lead to different conclusions about the role of Latino FBOs? Or even at a minimum, providing a direct comparison of the variation of the political environment between New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia might have borne out some ways in which the religious organizations were different. In short, while there are some descriptions of the political environments of each of the urban settings, the readers are left to make more of the direct comparisons themselves.

In the spirit of this book, it is imperative that I, too, relate the lens through which I read Wilson’s study. Due to my own interest in Latino politics, I may not be a conventional political scientist to some. However,
relative to Catherine Wilson, or, at least, what I am able to infer from her work, I most certainly recognize that I am a conventional political scientist. To state my own perspective is inspiration drawn from the spirit of Wilson’s work, for any comments or critiques I present owe more to the failings of my own conventional understanding of political science and ethnic identity politics rather than Wilson’s work itself. Again, Wilson provides a worthwhile and necessary contribution to the field of identity politics—most especially religious identity politics.

Rodolfo Espino
Arizona State University


The research question that drives this book is: What role does religion play in fostering broad civic responsibility? By “religion” the authors mean more than simple church attendance or affiliation, they mean individual religious expression. And by “civic responsibility,” they mean a type of civic engagement that includes active behaviors, capacity building, and civic virtues which are based on caring and respecting others (p. 3). Within the context of civil society, that is the space between the public and private spheres, they maintain that the state provides the space for religious associations to function and develop an ethic of civic responsibility.

This study is significant because it uses a unique research design. While other researchers have traditionally looked at religious expression primarily through the lens of church attendance and affiliation, this study focuses on the fact that religion today is more personalized, eclectic, individualistic and fluid. Indeed, the authors argue that religion is not necessarily disappearing, but changing, and therefore, the relevance of this research design comes from looking at the way one is religious today. It leads to the hypothesis that the type of one’s religious expression is a factor in fostering broad civic responsibility.

By statistically analyzing “diminished,” “private,” “public” and “integrated” religious expressions as a benchmark, the authors were able to make a statistical breakthrough. Using a different research design than those used by mainstream sociologists and political scientists in the past, the authors showed that the design for their study is more valid than earlier approaches.
because it can apply to all religions because the way of expression is not a function of one’s religious affiliation (p. 62).

Given their new statistical approach, what did the authors find out about the role of religion in fostering broad civic responsibility? While some of the information seems almost intuitive, their survey research finally gives empirical proof to what many academics have only surmised in the past.

With regard to joining civic associations they showed that Church members are more likely than non-church members to join secular voluntary associations; that they play key roles in associations and that their religious tradition and pattern of association are connected. Beyond that, though, they were able to show that the way people express their religion plays a role in their civic involvement. In short, they conclude that “there may be something in religion itself that encourages associational involvement” (p. 94).

In terms of volunteering and philanthropy the authors were able to demonstrate that people who are religious volunteer more than do those who are nonreligious, and that they volunteer more for religious rather than civic or political organizations. These individuals are also more likely to do charitable giving. Of all the religious inspired individuals, however, those who have been described as “integrated,” i.e., those whose private religious activities and active participation in worship life are intertwined, are those most likely to have volunteered and reported charitable contributions (p. 120). Statistically, then, Smidt et al. were able to prove that religious expression is either the most important or among the most important variables in making charitable contributions (p. 127).

As far as civic capacity building, the authors looked at the practice of developing and using civil skills such as giving speeches and running meetings as well as becoming involved in public affairs and gaining political knowledge. They were able to show empirically that Evangelical Protestants, mainstream white Protestants, black Protestants and Catholics, participate in church activities in that order. This is due to tradition and the structure of their denominations. While the authors’ findings in this area are important, they must be viewed in the context of their final results which show that education and age are more important indicators of civic involvement than religion. Specifically with regard to attention to public affairs—these variables also trump religion although religion does contribute to the development of civic skills.

What is the connection between religion and civic virtues then? While there is ample room to argue that religion brings a moral dimension to the exercise of civil responsibility, the authors report mixed results and can only show that “... religion matters ... in subtle ways” (p. 205). But, the civic virtues that they affect are interesting: trust and acceptance of institutions and their political efficacy, tolerance, and support for the work ethic.
Thus, the authors are able to make several empirical claims about the role of religion in fostering broad civic responsibility. First, they are able to prove that the most civically and politically engaged among those surveyed were those whose religious life is “integrated.” Their fused private and public religious expressions play a role in generating and maintaining the behaviors, capacities, and dispositions that the authors identify as component parts of civic responsibility. Second, they show that variables such as education, age and income rank are significant in developing civil responsibilities. Third, they demonstrate that religiously “integrated” individuals are more involved in civic rather than political activities. And fourth, they show that religion helps to aid in an individual’s involvement in political life through encouraging participation in it, and by providing another voice in the public arena.

What the authors do not do, however, is discuss in detail the political and policy implications of their findings. What is the significance of their study? Specifically, what do these statistics mean with regard to the role of religious groups in the political arena and the policy process? What are their national and state ramifications? Although such a discussion would have made the study more valuable from a campaign and strategic legislative perspective, their new research design is enough to expect from a limited study. This book is worthwhile for what it finally proves statistically about one’s religious expression and its role in fostering civic responsibility.

Jo Renee Formicola  
Seton Hall University


State governments in the U.S. have wide discretion over the rules that govern elections within their borders and this has resulted in large interstate differences in election laws. The authors of this book utilize this natural laboratory setting to determine the effects of various election reforms that have been instituted in recent years. The analysis begins with an overview by the editors who contend that several forces drive contemporary election reform: cynicism about election competitiveness, concern over the role of money in politics, and low confidence in the integrity of election administration. The chapters that follow are divided into three main sections dealing with issues of election integrity, efforts aimed at increasing political partici-
pation, and changes intended to increase responsiveness. Each chapter considers a specific element of what the editors refer to as an “intended” or “unintended” reform to determine its impact relative to competing explanatory conditions. While some chapters are primarily reviews of existing literature, others provide new empirical findings that often challenge convention wisdom concerning a particular aspect of election reform.

The collective finding to emerge from these chapters is that the effects of election reforms vary. Some reforms bring about changes in a manner consistent with their proponents intentions. For example, liberalization of felony voting rights and same day registration have increased voter turnout (Tolbert, Donovan, King, and Bowler). More liberal ballot access laws lead to more minor party candidacies, although this does little to harm the major parties’ voting strength (Burden). Competitive voter initiative campaigns do increase voter interest in elections and engage less sophisticated voters (Tolbert and Bowen). However, the adoption of other reforms such as early voting has only increased turnout by a modest amount and had little, if any, effect on energizing less political active members of the electorate (Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller). Still, other reforms have had few intended effects and have actually resulted in negative consequences. A chapter by Kousser indicates that term limits have done little to increase competition in state legislative elections or to change the types of people who run for and win these offices. However, in states where term limits have been imposed partisanship has increased, power has shifted more to the executive branch, legislators have lower levels of knowledge, and policies adopted are less innovative (Kousser).

A major strength of the book is the varied types of laws and regulations that are analyzed. For example, the chapter by Cooper points to the different styles of representation exhibited by legislators in multi-member and single-member districts regarding their constituency service activities and policy voting. A chapter by McDonald examines factors that impinge upon the redistricting process that occurs within the states every decade. While many of these reforms deal with fundamental issues of the electoral terrain, others involve features of election administration that have not been the focus of widespread attention by political scientists. A chapter by Atkeson and Saunders shows that voting mechanisms can affect the degree of confidence that citizens have in the election system. Interestingly, they find that the presence of early voting and absentee voting appears to make voters have less confidence. Another chapter, by Hall, Monson, and Patterson, points to the importance of poll worker training as a factor contributing to greater voter confidence in the election process. These findings demonstrate that while issues of election administration have been off the beaten path to a
large segment of the political science community, they can have significant consequences that deserve greater scrutiny.

The book ends with a chapter summarizing the major points that can be taken away and suggest what “lessons” can be learned and applied to the next generation of reforms. Overall, the book will make an excellent addition to an undergraduate or graduate course on state politics or elections. It does an exceptional job of stressing the great variability across the states in reform efforts and how these differences can be utilized in empirical analyses to further our understanding of elections.

Robert E. Hogan  
*Louisiana State University*


Like everyone else, political scientists are coming to terms with the demise of secularization theory. While scholars now accept the fact that religion continues to command attention in American social and political life, there are plenty of understudied research areas in the growing subfield of religion and politics. The influence of clergy on their congregants’ political views remains dramatically understudied—Corwin Smidt’s 2004 *Pulpit and Politics* is a rare exception—and Gregory Allen Smith’s book is a welcome addition to the literature.

Smith concerns himself with Catholic priests, in part due to their prominence in American politics; 25% of Americans self-identify as Catholic, and over half of these are regular churchgoers. Drawing from the literature on political communication and voting behavior, Smith hopes to show that priests in the pulpit have a similar effect on parishioners’ political views as does the media. While this claim might seem obvious at face value, Smith reminds readers that in the past, “the potential for a high degree of clergy influence has been assumed rather than demonstrated” (p. 25). To move from assumption to demonstration, Smith uses a variety of methods and data sources. One chapter analyzes the (admittedly old) Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life; in addition, the author conducted his own study in the Washington, DC, area, utilizing pastor interviews, separate surveys of priests and parishioners, and a quantitative content analysis of church bulletins.

Smith discovers a variety of political messages emanating from different parishes. While the Catholic hierarchy constrains the positions priests may take on any number of issues, from abortion to the war on terror,
particular clergymen emphasize certain issues over others. Smith helpfully suggests three categories for the priests he surveys: “personal morality” priests who emphasize conservative positions on abortion and homosexuality; “social justice” priests who focus more on traditional Church positions on poverty and war; and “mixed-emphasis” priests who, unsurprisingly, fall in the middle of the other two categories. Based on a convincing portrait of these different types, Smith rightly concludes that scholars who want to understand the role of the Church in American politics need to pay particular attention to local context.

But the study is less clear on the actual influence of Catholic priests on individuals’ political attitudes. Smith finds no evidence that priests influence the party affiliation, voting choices, or even ideology of their parishioners. There is some evidence that the more liberal, “social justice” priests may steer their parishioners towards more liberal positions on public policy issues overall, but even this is not definitive. Instead, Smith suggests that priests have more of an indirect influence, possibly inculcating a stronger sense of religious particularism (the view that Church policy positions are core tenets of Catholicism), which itself affects political attitudes. Priests also seem to influence how strongly congregants are willing to accept church guidance on public policy issues, which similarly affects a person’s politics. But Smith offers no clear account of how this priestly influence might actually work on congregants. Could the quality of homilies as perceived by parishioners (one of Smith’s admittedly imperfect gauges of influence) really affect the willingness of Catholics to accept the Church’s teachings? Certainly these chief measures—religious particularism and willingness to follow the Church—conclusively show that religious attitudes affect political attitudes. But Smith does not do enough to show how clergy affect these religious attitudes in the first place.

The elusiveness of this influence points to another, more significant problem with Smith’s study. Since Catholic parishioners do not have a role in selecting their pastor and priests, Smith hopes to establish causality; for example, similarities in political views are not the result of parishioners selecting priests who are politically compatible. But it is entirely possible, as Smith only occasionally admits, that priests are assigned to parishes based on their ideological compatibility with parishioners. Moreover, priests could, as he suggests in an endnote, “tailor their public messages based on their perceptions of the attitudes and beliefs of their congregants” (p. 113). So while Smith certainly shows that there is some correlation between the political views of priests and their parishioners, this is only an important first step towards causation.

The study is limited for an additional three reasons. First, most of the data are either old (the Notre Dame study is from the 1980s) or limited to the
2004 election. Smith wonders if mitigating factors for that particular election may have limited the effect of priestly influence on political views. If the 2004 election was centered on 9/11 and fighting terror, for example, than clergy may have had little effect in budging voters beyond their hopeful calls for world peace. Second, the choice of political communication/voting behavior as a theoretical basis for the study might be too reductive. Clergy are more than just communicators; they interact with parishioners in a variety of ways. A more sociological approach might tell us more than a focus on just their communicative function. Finally, there is a drawback to studying only Catholics; as Smith admits, Catholic teachings do not map well onto American politics. The Catholic Church is conservative on abortion and gays, but liberal on poverty and peace issues. The political influence of priests thus may be constrained by their inability to choose sides. A study of evangelical pastors or megachurch leaders, many of whom adopt more entrepreneurial and free-market views of poverty and economics, might show more clerical influence in a clearly conservative direction.

This book appears to be adapted from Smith’s award-winning dissertation, and sometimes hews too close to the earlier project; for example, there is a rather long literature review chapter that does not seem to contribute as much to this study as Smith thinks. Similarly, the prose style is sometimes redundant, although exceedingly clear and cogent. Despite some significant flaws, however, this is an important study, and a good starting point for future research into the role of clergy in American politics. It is recommended for all students of religion and politics, particularly those interested in American Catholics.

Richard J. Meagher
Marymount Manhattan College


In Cable News Network’s 2008 exit poll, of those respondents who said that in the past year their family’s financial situation had been the same or improved, 56 percent voted for Sen. John McCain of the party that holds the White House, but of those who said it had gotten worse, 71 percent voted for Sen. Barack Obama. Yet of those who saw a future worse economy, 54 percent voted for the candidate of the party in power while of those who saw it better 61 percent voted for his opponent. Is this just another textbook
example of the power of retrospective economic voting, and lack of prospective evaluations making a difference, in determining elections?

Not according to political scientist Brad Lockerbie’s exploration of the influence of prospective economic issues on voting behavior, which provides a thought-provoking argument that comprehensively surveys the theory and literature regarding the degree to which voters look to the past and future in making their decisions. Making the case that prospective voting is far more important than generally is conceded, his conclusions are tempered only by the limitations that his data and models force upon him.

Lockerbie makes an intuitively appealing argument that voters, even if a large portion of them have the barest surface knowledge about issues, are not fools to the point that they cannot form expectations about what candidates will do on the economic front if elected and thereby vote accordingly. The role of economics as an issue in the discipline’s literature mostly has favored the notion that voters choose simplistically here, punishing candidates of parties seen as non-performers and rewarding them if they have come through. Not only does this seem to equate past with future, but it discounts any impact that candidates of the challenging party (because evaluations of them matter only prospectively) might have in shaping votes.

The approach taken by Lockerbie is more nuanced and theoretically compelling. He observes that both retrospective and prospective evaluations should matter, where the former informs the latter as voters draw upon past experiences to make reckoning of the future, but “[w]hile there is some relationship” between the two, he demonstrates that “they are by no means synonymous” (p. 33). Nor does partisanship definitively influence these evaluations. Further, they have distinct effects nonrecursively on party identification and (obviously) recursively on vote choice with the prospective components actually being more powerful.

Based on a model of presidential vote choice using American National Election Studies 1956-2000 data, with partisanship affecting issues and the vote, retrospective issues affecting the prospective and both affecting the vote, and with ideological identification affecting the vote, he shows prospective evaluations typically are second only to party identification in influence. Using a similar approach with both U.S. House and Senate contests, he comes to the same conclusion. For good measure, he also weighs on the definitional argument of egocentric vs. sociotropic retrospective evaluations (they are conceptually distinct and, in a model with prospective evaluation, partisanship, and ideology weakly predict the vote) and on forecasting elections using economic evaluations (which works fairly well for presidential contests, somewhat less well for seat change predictions in the House, and not really at all for Senate seat distributions).
However, the effort is not without shortcomings. The most glaring weakness comes in the actual modeling and testing in assessing effects of components. Arguing simultaneous relationships between issues and partisanship, and positing direct and indirect effects of partisanship and retrospective evaluations on voting, Lockerbie’s analysis demands more sophisticated techniques than he employs to minimize the possibility of biased estimators. He does seem aware of this in at least one situation where he constructs an instrumental variable to minimize autocorrelation concerns while testing for the impact of previous partisanship on present partisanship, yet in trying to determine effects of a much more complex causal model he eschews techniques such as computing linear structurally related equation sets that could reduce bias in estimation.

One issue here is that, given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, the author sensibly prefers logistic kinds of regression techniques. However, ordinary least squares as a method is fairly robust and the distribution that characterizes voting for a national office violates insignificantly the normal curve assumption. But, inescapably, for more complex modeling the author would find for his interests too few issue variables in the data, leaving too many paths to be estimated. Dumping more variables into the equation set would bring potential multicollinearity difficulties and/or mis-specification problems, so one must sympathize with the author and realize he did what he could with what he had. Still, reliance solely on path modeling with assumed additive effects does make his conclusions more cautionary.

Minor things also hamper the effort. For example, the work appears to cover economic evaluations, yet in some analyses proceeds to pull in non-economic evaluations, making a little unclear the conceptual thrust of the effort. His analysis of the sociotropic distinctiveness question relies for confirmation on several dependent variables that are of questionable comparability (behavior vs. attitude). The text sometimes does not comport to the tables and typographical errors in them appear. The tome also demands familiarity with statistical techniques not often encountered by many who are the likely readers, so some further explanation of the reported results and their substantive meanings would have been helpful.

Regardless, Lockerbie’s work takes up a neglected subject and shows why it deserves more attention. If making a compelling case is held back for methodological reasons, it certainly makes a good case for more research concerning voters’ utilizing prospective economic evaluations.

Jeffrey D. Sadow

*Louisiana State University Shreveport*

Those who study racial and ethnic politics in the United States are often frustrated by research that, by focusing on the black-white divide, fails to recognize and assess the increasing diversity in the country as a result of immigration. In this book, Jane Junn and Kerry Haynie have put together an excellent collection of essays that richly explore the consequences and significance of this diversity for electoral politics. Cautiously arguing that “the imposition of racial identities by the state has the political effect of instituting a racial hierarchy” (Junn and Matto, p. 6), the book chapters focus on three minority racial group categories: Asians, Latinos, and African Americans. This volume has a clear normative perspective that recent demographic change throughout the United States will in some way alter our understanding and practice of race and ethnic politics. In their effort to fully investigate the implications of significant growth in Latino and Asian populations, the book provides new and much needed insights about the complex and uncharted relationship between race and ethnicity and electoral politics.

The book is structured into nine chapters, including introductory and summary chapters by the editors. Given the diversity of scholarship within the field of racial and ethnic politics and the reality that race and ethnicity affect political life in multiple ways, it is no surprise that the chapters in the book are distinct in purpose. At first glance, it might be difficult to perceive how this collection of essays fits together to form a coherent volume. The opening chapter successfully solves this dilemma by pointing out that there are several themes in the book, all stimulated in some way by the changing diversity of the country. While one chapter focuses on the role that political and civic organizations play in mobilizing immigrants (Chapter 2), several chapters examine the significance of racial and ethnic consciousness for political mobilization and participation (Chapters 3 and 4). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 reexamine traditional models of voting behavior to assess the role that race and ethnicity play in Latino and African American participation. The remaining chapter raises interesting questions about the prospects for multi-racial political coalitions by analyzing African American elite response to changing Latino immigration.

Of these chapters, I found of particular interest Chong’s and Kim’s research which finds that differences between African Americans and other minority groups in their economic status affects their willingness to embrace racial and ethnic group interests. In particular, they find that affluent African Americans tend to be more race-conscious whereas affluent Latinos and Asian Americans tend to “place less emphasis on racial or ethnic considera-
tions in their political attitudes and policy preferences” (Chong and Kim, p. 63). The authors suggest that one reason why group interest may be more robust among African Americans is because of African Americans’ sustained belief in the power of collective mobilization due in large part to the success of the Civil Rights Movement. The authors fail, however, to recognize that persistent patterns of residential segregation may also help explain this outcome. Despite the increasing diversity of the country and the migration of Latinos and Asian Americans to nontraditional cities and towns, it remains clear that the daily events and experiences that define most Americans’ lives occur in homogeneous settings. Interestingly, even economic class does not change this reality, as studies show that middle-class African Americans live in neighborhoods, on average, with considerably more poverty than those inhabited by middle-class whites. Thus, for the most part, racial and ethnic groups remain residentially separated in U.S. metropolitan areas (see R.M. Adelman. 2004. “Neighborhood Opportunities, Race, and Class: The Black Middle Class and Residential Segregation” City and Community 3:43-63).

Also of interest was the chapter by McClain and colleagues which gave a rare look at African American elite attitudes about Latino immigration. While the chapter is primarily a case study set in Durham, North Carolina, the use of both elite interviews and mass survey data is an appealing approach to examine the potential for creating and sustaining multiracial coalitions in American cities. I was surprised however at the small number of African American elites in the sample pool given the broad manner in which the authors defined who in the city was an “elite.” Interestingly, the African American elites interviewed expressed great concern about the growing tension between the African American and Latino populations due to scarce resources, yet these elites describe themselves as making efforts to improve the relationship. It is unfortunate that the authors provide no description of these efforts. This information could prove useful to future scholars who wish to assess whether political relations among racial and ethnic minorities in other cities and towns across American can be enhanced.

In summary, New Race Politics in America provides a timely and provocative overview of current research on racial and ethnic issues in American politics. The chapters are theoretically grounded and most are empirically informed, making this path-breaking volume invaluable for understanding racial and ethnic politics in this new millennium. My only concern, or wish, is that the next edition of this volume will include more essays so that it can be more clearly organized into three sections on institutions, political psychology, and political behavior to reflect three major areas of empirical study in American politics. Doing so would make the volume parallel (to differing degrees) the organization of most U.S. politics courses.
New Race Politics in America is an excellent resource to help all American politics students explore the future of the racial dimension in American politics. Increasing the size of and reorganizing the volume can only enhance the perceived utility of the book, opening the door for the book to be used not only for race courses but for general American politics courses as well.

Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown
Bucknell University


In this important book, Lina Newton uses discourse analysis to probe the rhetoric of policy debates that surrounded the passage of two key immigration bills: the 1986 Immigration and Reform Act (IRCA) and the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). Focusing on the years 1981-1986 and 1994-1996, Newton examines policy narratives and social constructions that dominated legislators’ communications during the debates. She concludes that legislators strategically use stories, images, and symbols to divide immigrant populations into more manageable groups. These groups are then targeted and labeled as “deserving” or “undeserving,” as in the case of the Mexican population which has become the stigmatized “other.”

Well written and well organized, the book provides readers with contextual information about the political and economic milieu surrounding the debates. She notes how IRCA deviated from previous immigration policies and imposed strict penalties on employers found guilty of encouraging illegal immigration and how for the first time the United States offered amnesty to illegal aliens. By 1996, however, control of the Congress had changed and so had the mood of the country. Congress passed IIRIRA which was a far more restrictive policy towards immigrants and it eased the compliance regulations governing employers. Newton’s book provides typologies which make it easy for the reader to follow the narratives, target groups, and policy proposals.

Chapter One provides a literature review and introduces many of the tropes she explores later in the book. In Chapter Two, she examines the conditions that spurred congressional action, the problems that legislators sought to address, and the interest groups that would gain or lose from the various proposals. This chapter offers a discussion of the 1978 Select Com-
mission on Immigration and Refugee Policy and the Reagan Administration’s reactions to the report. Newton notes how the Commission headed by Notre Dame’s Father Theodore Hesburgh held 12 hearings and listened to over 700 witnesses before issuing its 1981 report. The report, she notes, added an ethical dimension to the discussion of immigration reform because of the attention given to the potential for human rights violations given the vulnerability of the undocumented population. Chapter Two also provides an in depth look at California politics and the impact of Speaker Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America on immigration reform.

Newton devotes Chapter Three to a detailed discussion of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). It is in this chapter that she identifies narratives and social constructions of targeted groups. The four major groups are (1) the “government-off-our backs narrative,” (2) the “family farmer narrative,” (3) “the corrupt agriculturalist counter-narrative,” and (4) the “anti-discrimination narrative.” Minor narratives include (1) the “undeserving illegal narrative,” and (2) the “deserving illegal counter-narrative.” Chapter Four covers the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). After addressing public opinion data, Newton provides a brief discussion of Proposition 187 and the Contract with America. In this chapter, she identifies five additional policy narratives: (1) the “zero-sum narrative,” (2) the “pathologies of federalism narrative,” (3) the “criminal alien narrative,” (4) the “lawless border narrative,” and (5) the “government-off-our-backs narrative.”

Chapter Five is titled “Problem Mexicans: Race, Nationalism, and Their Limits in Immigration Policymaking.” Here Newton links some of the narratives and social constructions developed in previous chapters to negative characterizations of Mexican immigrants. Much of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of race and the stigmatization of Mexican nationals. Newton argues that both race and national origin have dominated immigration policy and American citizenship debates. Her evidence includes questions raised about birthright citizenship, criminal aliens, and Mexicans depicted as freeloaders. In the concluding Chapter Six, Newton argues that American citizenship is an identity that lies “at the nexus of different axes of in-group and out-group construction . . . .” She argues that legislators use their power relationships to stigmatize and label vulnerable groups. She notes that during the 1996 debates, legislators abandoned the negative social construction of employers and demonized immigrants instead.

Newton’s book offers an original contribution to an increasingly contentious policy area. Instructors and students will find her application of discourse analysis to the study of immigration both creative and useful for stimulating debate. Like most studies, the book has shortcomings. In particular, Newton fails to critically assess a possible relationship between
demographic changes caused by the sheer volume of illegal immigration, increased social and economic costs imposed on cities and communities, and the changed narratives and social constructions of legislators who were most certainly hearing from their constituents. A changed situation on the ground and the 1994 partisan switch from Democrat to Republican majorities presumably led legislators to reevaluate the immigration situation and IRCA’s failure to address the problems. Less support for amnesty may exist today because conservative interests groups who cut deals in 1986 with pro-immigration groups felt they had been betrayed when Congress gutted the employer sanctions provision given in exchange for their support of amnesty. Newton also fails to take adequate account of other circumstances that led to heightened negative perceptions of illegal immigrants, for example increased gang activity and other high profile violent crimes. A more nuanced analysis would acknowledge that politicians use narratives all the time. In the case of members of Congress, they are elected to represent particular constituencies and protect the American interests. For more than two decades, a majority of Americans have desired enforcement of current immigration laws and more restrictive immigration policies. It seems perfectly reasonable that legislators’ narratives would reflect their own experiences and what they hear from their constituents. Attaching value judgments to negative characterizations of undocumented immigrants or to a legislator’s use of personal immigration stories as prefaces to their position-taking take away from Newton’s primary contribution, discourse analysis of legislative debates surrounding immigration policy. Readers should be able to use Newton’s scholarship and come to their own conclusions regarding the motivations behind political rhetoric and judge the actors for themselves.

Carol M. Swain
Vanderbilt University


The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been perverted, according to Anthony Peacock. It has been subordinated to multicultural purposes. If that process of warping the Act can be said to have a beginning it is in 1969, with Allen v. Virginia. But the subordination of voting rights law to multiculturalism has deeper roots in “judicial rationalism”—“a judicial form of Friedrich Hayek’s ‘constructivist rationalism’” (p. 2). Judicial rationalism is like
judicial activism, but it is also a belief in the comprehensive capacities of
courts to regulate the democratic political process. Thus Allen sharply
expanded the range and kinds of governmental decisions subject to “pre-
clearance” under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. In doing that Allen
changed the Voting Rights Act from an emergency statute meant to secure
African-Americans’ right to vote for a temporary period, until the turmoil in
the ex-Confederacy cooled, into a far more ambitious and permanent regulatory
framework that would demand yet more “judicial rationalism.”

The federal government consequently got into the business of telling
state legislatures and local representative bodies to carve out majority minority
districts—which was nothing more than an “ersatz multiculturalism”
based on “racial bean-counting” (p. 153). The statute was used to guarantee
the political careers of black (and since 1975) Latino politicians. One result
was a quota system, in effect, both for the United States House of Represen-
tatives and for state and local representative bodies in jurisdictions which are
covered by the Voting Rights Act.

A more serious impact was—to use Peacock’s term—“racial class-
warfare” (pp. 63-69). The administration of the Voting Rights Act effective-
ly taught people that there are victims and oppressors—and that the victims
must be compensated. This is a “racial class-warfare vision . . . in which
racial groups were being deconstructed into the simple binary categories of
victimizer and victimized, oppressor and oppressed, Hegemon and Other”
(p. 68). It is no accident, for example, that Section 203 of the Act now pro-
tects some linguistically identified minorities—Native Americans for in-
stance—but not others, such as speakers of Polish.

Such “racial class-warfare” fundamentally subverts the Founders’ in-
tentions for America. They established a limited government and they en-
sioned the protection of individual rights. But the Founders did not want
government to guarantee representation for any group.

One implication of Peacock’s argument is the failure of Madisonian
safeguards. The Founders constructed our national institutions to prevent the
capture of the national government by a “faction.” The Voting Rights Act’s
perversion, however, permits just that, the capture of voting rights policy by
a faction—in this case, multiculturalists (here Peacock mentions, among
others, Justice Thurgood Marshall, Justice William Brennan, and the “voting
rights bar”). The multiculturalists seek nothing less than to entrench their
regulatory power and to foment deep distrust between blacks and whites.
They have swept from one success to another—most recently with the 2006
renewal of the Voting Rights Act, which threatens “more intensified racial
antagonism” (p. 153). Their success creates a crisis of the regime. Ameri-
cans now have a fateful choice “between maintaining their longstanding
Madisonian regime of equality and representation or continuing to under-
mine that regime” by following the precepts of a “brazen multiculturalism . . . calculated to fragment the nation into racial constituencies, inviting the very race factionalism that the original Constitution and the Civil War amendments were designed to avoid” (pp. 153, 110).

Peacock is not, of course, the first political scientist to dislike how the law of the Voting Rights Act has evolved. But this book certainly offers one of the most rhetorically vivid attacks to date. When Abigail Thernstrom mounted the first serious critique of the Voting Rights Act she argued far more cautiously. Recall, for example, her treatment of Section 2 of the Act, as amended in 1982. She suggested that it would deprive black politicians of the salutary discipline of learning how to appeal broadly to white as well as black voters. (This was a subtle criticism, it is worth noting, but now seems mooted by the election of Barack Obama to the presidency.) By contrast, Peacock ends his book with the proposal that the courts completely withdraw from the judicial rationalism through which multiculturalists have generated “racial antagonism.” Indeed, Peacock tells us that his clear thinking about the matter of what is to be done is akin to that of John Yoo with respect to executive power (p. 162). Yoo says that executive power cannot be regulated; likewise, voting rights cannot be regulated. They are appropriately left to “state legislatures . . . because resolving questions at this level would facilitate greater local control, accountability, and freedom” (p. 163). Going back to letting the state legislatures do their work without federal involvement would be consistent with the Founders’ intentions.

All of this raises the obvious question: who besides Peacock himself fully grasps the crisis of the republic? Supreme Court Associate Justice Clarence Thomas does—more, in fact, than several of his colleagues who might be expected to see the danger, such as Justices Alito, Roberts, and Scalia. In *Holder v. Hall* Justice Thomas incisively captured the tendency of the Voting Rights Act’s administration to “exacerbate racial tensions, ‘segregating the races into political homelands’” (p. 12). Peacock points as well toward the apprehensions that many others have shown toward judicial rationalism and multiculturalism, ranging from Justices Felix Frankfurter and Potter Stewart to Senator Orrin Hatch (R–UT), and a variety of academic commentators.

But Peacock is perhaps in a class by himself. He raises the stakes of Voting Rights Act criticism far more than anyone else has. This probably has to do with his evident training in Straussian political thought. Straussians—which is the name for those political scientists who (properly) take seriously the work and teaching of the great émigré philosopher Leo Strauss—are, for better or worse, unabashedly normative about policy analysis. Policies are not just for solving problems. They also can reinforce—or undermine—the basic values of the American regime.
Very large questions about the regime come into Peacock’s picture right away. In the first chapter of the book, Peacock portrays (if this reviewer reads him correctly) a United States challenged, from abroad, by the corrosive thought of Marx and Weber, and from within by Progressive political thought—Charles Beard and Woodrow Wilson, for example, who were hostile to the natural rights teaching of the Declaration of Independence. In short, unlike those critics of the Voting Rights Act who rest their case against it on the putative color-blindness of the 14th Amendment, Peacock is far more ambitious, bringing in 1776, a reading of the Founding, the historicist relativism of European social thought, Friedrich Hayek, the falsely rationalist, anti-Hayekian development of American political science—and, just for good measure, John Yoo.

Is there any actual election law in the book? There is—quite a bit of election law, in fact. Before becoming a political scientist Peacock practiced law in Toronto and he is quite at ease with judicial decisions. He knows the relevant case law extremely well. This book tours—often instructively—over large parts of what elections lawyers now call “the law of democracy.”

Peacock’s readings come across, however, as selective—at least to this reviewer. Peacock arrays the case law to reveal the widening gyre of judicial rationalism, and thus the deepening crisis of the regime. He also highlights what he considers warnings and misgivings—dissents, for example, or partial retreats from multiculturalist judicial rationalism, such as Shaw v. Reno, Holder v. Hall, and Miller v. Johnson, among others.

Also the factual details of the Article III “cases and controversies” treated by Peacock are slighted. Because Peacock invites his readers to consider the intentions of the Founders, this reviewer found himself noticing a contradiction between the paucity of detail concerning the actual facts of the cases, on the one hand, and (on the other) the Founders’ intentions for the federal courts. By restricting the Court’s remit to “cases and controversies,” the Founders signaled that they wanted a Supreme Court which was empirical, casuistic, and focused on the facts. But because Peacock prefers to offer a short, very forceful jeremiad concerning an emerging crisis of the American regime he disregards the histories of the jurisdictions that have come before the Court. At best he offers two or three sentences on who the plaintiffs and defendants were and on the significant details that prompted judicial review in the first place.

In summary, Peacock offers a very lively and daring polemic against the Voting Rights Act. It is well worth reading for the intellectual stimulus it provides. The introduction to election law is brisk and useful. Whether one comes away persuaded is another matter altogether.

Richard M. Valelly
Swarthmore College

One of the great challenges of teaching is communicating to students the relevance of course material to their lives beyond the classroom door. This is particularly difficult when the concepts presented are more abstract in nature. To be sure, even students who have no experience voting can understand the connection between tangible political participation and an electoral outcome. Furthermore, many students either have had personal experience with the judicial system or know someone who has interacted with some level of the judiciary. Elections and court cases are concrete, discrete political events and can be discussed and digested as such. However, American federalism is a fluid concept, with the balance of power between the states and the national government often in flux. Explaining federalism typically requires a discussion of American political history, replete with court cases, legislation, and institutional decisions that have altered the power relationship between national and subnational units. The resulting deluge of constitutional interpretation and political events that have changed the nature of American federalism can often overwhelm students who may have difficulty understanding how the decision in *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824) impacts the United States in 2009. Joseph F. Zimmerman’s *Contemporary American Federalism: The Growth of National Power* (2009) successfully demonstrates the relevance of historical events in the development of American federalism by illustrating how they collectively contributed to the expansion of the size and scope of the national government.

*Contemporary American Federalism* is the second edition of a book first published in 1992. Although there are significant changes in some of the text passages of the second edition and many contemporary court cases have been added, the books are virtually identical. The premise of both books is stated most succintly in the preface of 1992 edition: “The central theme of this book is the accretion of political power in the United States at the national level” (Zimmerman 1992, p. xi). Like most federalism books, Zimmerman begins with a discussion of the constitutional foundation and historical development of the federal system. Zimmerman’s first three chapters are exceptionally good at breathing life into material that can often be dull. Chapter 1 contains a brisk overview of the principal issues of American federalism with tidy definitions of major terms. In Chapters 2 and 3, Zimmerman provides an excellent summary of the constitutional foundations and resulting development of federalism, emphasizing historical import without getting mired in minutia. In fact, one of the great strengths of the book lies in Zimmerman’s clarification of the core terms and concepts of
federalism. The first chapter further develops Zimmerman’s argument regarding the growth of national government power, introducing the notion of increased national preemption of subnational authority, which the author suggests is not fully explained by either dual or cooperative federalism.

With the exception of Chapter 7, which explores conflict and cooperation between states, the balance of the book dissects the issue of control of a higher level of government over a lower level of government. Chapters 4 through 6 examine national control of states: congressional preemption, preemption initiated by the judiciary, and control based on fiscal aid programs. State preemption of local authority is the subject of Chapter 8. The most profound contribution of the book lies in its treatment of national government preemption of state authority. Zimmerman reports that congressional preemption statutes increased from a mere 14 passed between 1900 and 1909 to 106 passed since 2000. The author’s argument is blunt:

The sharp increase in the number of and variety of preemption statutes, particularly in the period 1964-1980, reduced substantially the discretionary authority of states and their political subdivisions; promoted additional interest group lobbying in Congress and national regulatory agencies; and affected the power relationships between the governor and the state legislature in each state (p. 56).

Zimmerman balances this claim against a statement by Alexander Hamilton in Federalist #17, who suggests states are more likely to intrude in the national sphere than the reverse (p. 57). The increased use of preemption has created a “confused responsibility problem,” in which the lines of accountability are so blurred as to make it nearly impossible to assign blame or praise to the responsible level of government (p. 72). Illustrating the impact of preemption on state institutions, Zimmerman outlines thirteen acts of Congress and one executive order that empower governors, albeit in limited degree, in ways not enumerated by state constitutions (p. 75). For example, as a result of the Highway Safety Act of 1966, the U.S. Department of Transportation, as opposed to a state’s legislature, designates the governor to be responsible for directing safety programs. This insight is often overlooked in comparable federalism books. Furthermore, Zimmerman’s discussion of preemption, partial preemption, cross-over sanctions, and cross-cutting requirements is outstanding, providing readers with clear distinctions between terms that can be confusing (p. 133).

In a book so well organized and carefully written, it is surprising to discover vague or redundant language. For example, in his discussion of fiscal federalism, Zimmerman maintains that “the federal mandate is the principal irritant in national-subnational relations today” (p. 131). Later, the author states: “Today, federal mandates, restraints, cross-cutting sanctions,
cross-over sanctions, and tax sanctions are the principal irritants in national-subnational governmental relations” (p. 135). Editing oversights such as this are rare in this book, but nevertheless detract from the impact of the boldness of such statements. As the title of the book is Contemporary American Federalism, one might question the extent to which the book treats contemporary policy issues in the federal system. There is no mention of states’ responses to the No Child Left Behind (2001) law or the expected increased role of states in addressing the homeland security threat. The decision in Lawrence v. Texas (2003) reexamined the privacy issue and, in the process, invalidated fourteen states’ anti-sodomy laws. Furthermore, the consequences of Hurricane Katrina raised questions about the appropriate roles of the different levels of government in dealing with a natural disaster. Each of these cases illustrates the relevance of federalism in a contemporary context and none are included in the book. However, this is perhaps an unfair criticism, as this is not a policy book. Standard federalism books tend to focus on the constitutional basis and historical development of the federal system. In the process of accomplishing this objective, Zimmerman directs his historical narrative toward the increased national power in the federal system. As an expose on the vast increase of national authority at the expense of state power and autonomy, the book is quite successful.

Reference

Jeremy D. Walling
Southeast Missouri State University


Paradoxically, there has been a decline of a “Catholic vote,” but there has also been a persistent pursuit of Catholic voters by elected representatives, including presidential candidates. Why? Perhaps because Catholics are the largest single denomination in the United States, representing nearly a quarter of the U.S. electorate, and 80 percent of Catholic voters live in fewer than a dozen important industrial states which also double as states with large Electoral College votes. Perhaps, Catholics are seen as swing voters. On one hand, Catholics are closer to Republicans on issues of abortion and
the like. On the other hand, Catholics are closer to Democrats on issues of justice and social welfare. As Mark M. Gray and Mary E. Bendyna note, “If a Catholic wishes to cast a ballot that is entirely consistent with Church teachings, there is nearly always no valid choice” (p. 76). This edited volume provides interdisciplinary analyses of the dynamic tension between religion and politics in the Catholic community.

The book is divided into four sections. The first four chapters analyze the role of Catholic leaders in U.S. politics. Margaret Sammon, in Chapter 1, provides a brief history describing how Catholic leaders shifted from being sporadically involved in local politics to becoming prominent players in national politics as well as how abortion became “the” issue on which many Catholic voters began to base their electoral decisions. Sammon argues that Roe v. Wade triggered the intense and strategic involvement of bishops in national politics, explaining that bishops chose abortion “not only because of its moral implications but also because it epitomized all Catholic concerns.” The author provides a thorough analysis of a shift toward one-issue salience among Catholic leaders, but I wanted Sammon to also discuss the implications of single-issue voting for Catholic voters here.

Chapter 2 provides an analysis comparing the opinions of conservative Catholic and evangelical Protestant Republican convention delegates in efforts to gauge the potential of an alliance between the two groups. Many evangelical Protestants are found in the GOP, which has a tendency toward anti-abortion policies while at the same time supporting the death penalty and weak social welfare policies. There has been cooperation between the two groups, providing evidence that “politics makes for strange bedfellows.” Mark J. Rozell ultimately posits, however, that there can only exist fragile and temporary alliances between the two because while they agree on moral policies, they very much disagree on most other salient issues.

Gregory A. Smith, in the next chapter, provides evidence that Catholic parishioners are likely to hear considerably different political messages from parish to parish. Smith interviewed 9 pastors, developing three politico-religious categories. On one end of the spectrum, there are “Social Justice” pastors who steer away from topics like abortion but emphasize the responsibility of the government as well as individual Catholics to help the needy. Second, he classifies “Mixed Emphasis” pastors. Finally, he describes “Personal Morality” pastors; this group of pastors tend emphasize anti-abortion messages but argue that individual citizens, rather than the government, should help the needy. I would have liked the author to discuss the extent to which parishioners might be affected by these messages as well as whether parishioners are likely to attend churches were the pastors’ homilies are in-line with their own beliefs.
Perhaps, Kristin Heyer’s own essay is the gem of the entire collection. Heyer not only discusses the implications of either taking a “Cuomo doctrine” stance (“I’m personally opposed but”) or basing one’s vote on a single-issue, but also provides a normative argument as to what Catholics should do in the current polarized political context (p. 61). She tasks Catholics to broaden their perspective of “issues of life” (p. 64). Further, she argues that while it is not legitimate for Catholics to disagree with the teachings of the Church, they can disagree on how to solve problems that challenge the sanctity of life.

The next section of the book includes three essays on the Catholic public. Gray and Bendyna use a unique data set to gauge Catholics’ opinions in 2002 and 2006. They find that many Catholics are either walking contradictions (i.e., among Republican Catholics who stated that Church teachings were more important than their conscious, 58 percent believed that the death penalty is an appropriate punishment) or Catholic voters are driven more by partisanship rather than religion. Gray and Bendyna ultimately find that Catholics’ policy opinions “show much greater consistency with their party affiliation than with their religious affiliation” (p. 88). Matthew J. Streb and Brian Frederick provide a broader perspective of a decline in the Catholic vote by analyzing ANES data between 1952 and 2004, and similarly show that while Catholics were solidly Democrats in the 1950s and 1960s, there has been a decline of a Catholic vote bloc since then. Instead of making a purely sociodemographic argument to explain the increased diversity among Catholic voters, Streb and Frederick also seriously consider the role of cultural conservatism and cultural issue salience in shifting some Catholics from the Democratic Party to the GOP. Despite the general decline of a Catholic vote, Adrian Pantoja, Matthew Barreto, and Richard Anderson conclude that the Christian Right may be able to garner Latino voters, noting 70 percent of Latinos are practicing Catholics and showing that many Latino survey respondents believe that the Church should provide guidance in the political realm.

Part Three of Catholics and Politics focuses on the how the American legislative, judicial and executive branches of government interact with Catholics. William V. D’Antonio’s, Stephen A. Tuch’s and John Kenneth White’s chapter would serve as an excellent stand alone in a course on Congress, as party polarization is their main topic of discussion. The authors center abortion as “the” source of persistent polarization in Congress; while I would argue that abortion cannot stand alone in the explanation for party polarization, the authors’ argument serves as an alternative to theories of conflict extension and issue evolution. Barbara A. Perry (Chapter 9) and Thomas J. Carty (Chapter 10) provide exceptional historical analysis of how pandering to Catholics has affected the make up of the Supreme Court and
the politics of the White House, respectively. Both authors show that in the past Catholicism was a factor in gaining support through symbolic and descriptive representation while today Catholicism is employed to signal to conservative Christians notions of traditional and conservative cultural values. That is to say, there has been a shift from electoral considerations to ideological ones (Perry, p. 70).

The book closes with two very short essays. The first, by Paul Christopher Manuel, briefly describes the notion that while both the U.S. and the Vatican are global powers (of different sorts) that maintain “parallel endeavors for peace,” they are also in dynamic conflict because they have “competing visions of justice” (i.e., rugged individualism and capitalism versus compassionate communitarianism). Thomas J. Reese closes the book by making suggestion for reforms to the Vatican in efforts to make it more collegial.

The essays in the book present social scientific and historical evidence as well as ethical and philosophical arguments, all driving home several themes: Catholic voters are at odds with both parties because each party presents different perspectives on how to preserve life. What is more, Catholic leaders find themselves making fragile alliances and marriages of convenience by concentrating on one issue, abortion. Further, it remains to be seen whether sociodemographic diversity among Catholics will continue to erode a once solid voting bloc. Each of the essays provides nuance to a very complex topic, such that after reading the text, any reader can begin to make their own insightful contributions to this conversation.

Candis S. Watts
Duke University
THE AMERICAN REVIEW OF POLITICS

Volume 30 Summer 2009

Special Edition – The 2008 Congressional Elections

CONTENTS

Fighting “Change” in Congressional Campaigns
   Randall E. Adkins and David A. Dulio .............................................. 107

Riding Obama’s Coattails:
The Democrats Finally Take the Ohio 1st
   Randall E. Adkins and Gregory A. Petrow ................................. 115

Playing Defense in the Illinois 10th:
Surviving “Obama-mania” in the Shadow of Chicago
   Wayne P. Steger ................................................................................. 137

All Politics is Still Local: McConnell vs. Lunsford
in the 2008 Kentucky Senate Race
   Jasmine Farrier .................................................................................. 155

All Politics is Local . . . Except When It Isn’t: The Campaign for
the 3rd Congressional District in Pennsylvania
   Daniel M. Shea and Stephen K. Medvic ............................................. 173

Incumbency is No Advantage: Michigan’s 7th Congressional District
   David A. Dulio and John S. Klemanski .............................................. 189

Back to Blue? Shifting Tides of Red and Blue and
the Dole-Hagan Senate Race in North Carolina
   Jody C Baumgartner, Peter L. Francia, Brad Lockerbie,
   and Jonathan S. Morris ................................................................. 213
Fighting “Change” in Congressional Campaigns

Randall E. Adkins and David A. Dulio

The results of the 2008 election cycle were historic. After all of the votes were tallied, Senator Barack Obama garnered more votes than his principal opponent, Senator John McCain. Although the election brought the first African-American president to Washington, there is a lot more to the story. Congressional campaigns are often overshadowed by the presidential campaign and thereby left out of the post-election discussion. This is a mistake. Campaigns for House and Senate seats are just as important to how the nation will move ahead on serious issues in the coming years. Congress, after all, is responsible for delivering to President Obama the legislation that makes up his agenda. In 2008 congressional Democrats increased their margins in both the House and the Senate and returned the Democratic Party to unified control of government. The articles in this special issue of the American Review of Politics examine six important congressional campaigns and help tell the story of the 2008 election, beyond Barack Obama’s historic victory.

The National Political Setting

Primary among the factors that made up the political landscape in 2008 was President George W. Bush. Indeed, his public approval rating of 25 percent in October of 2008 was near historic lows. In fact, President Nixon’s approval ratings were at 24 percent at the time he resigned from office due to the Watergate scandal. The public’s perception of President Bush created a highly advantageous context for most Democrats running for office and Republicans were effectively “on their heels” throughout the election cycle battling their challengers as best they could by dismissing President Bush and his unpopular policy choices. In fact, President Bush played a key role in many of the races tracked by the articles that follow; he was a common target of Democratic candidates, party committees, and outside groups trying to move voters to their side.
The political landscape was also full of difficult issues including an unpopular war, a declining economy, growing budget deficits, and others. These were serious problems and understandably the public was in the mood for a change. Pollsters often ask the public in opinion surveys, “Do you feel things in this country are generally going in the right direction or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?” Clearly, this question taps into how respondents view the economic and political climate. In 2008, the public mood was bad. An unbelievable 89 percent of the public said the country was off on the wrong track in late October, with fewer than one-in-ten agreeing that the U.S. was headed in the right direction.

While George W. Bush had low approval numbers, those of Congress, which was controlled by the Democrats, were even worse. It seemed, however, as if Republican incumbents were faring worse than their Democratic counterparts for two reasons. First, while each incumbent was certainly partially responsible for those low ratings, congressional approval ratings appear to be tied to the performance of the leadership in the House and Senate. In other words, while the public may not approve of the Congress as a whole, they tend to like their own member of Congress (see Fenno 1978). Second, empirical evidence also suggests that when poor public approval ratings of a sitting president are coupled with a poor economy, incumbents of the president’s party are more likely to face higher quality challengers who are well funded (see Jacobson and Kernell 1983). This is exactly the scenario Republicans were up against in 2008—high quality and well funded Democratic challengers.

Combined, these factors gave Democrats an initial advantage and created a context in which it would be very difficult for Republicans to be successful. Led by Barack Obama, the Democrats took advantage of a built-in theme—*change*. The Obama campaign did an absolutely masterful job of utilizing the theme of change to connect with voters. Thus, the 2008 presidential election in many ways was less about John McCain and more about George W. Bush and his policies. Democratic congressional candidates did this as well, linking incumbent Republicans to President Bush in stump speeches and campaign advertisements.

**Election Aftermath**

Pundits have described the 2008 election results as a “realignment,” a “tectonic shift,” and a “revolution.” However, in spite of the great strength at the top of the Democratic ticket, the Democratic congressional majorities were really no larger than they were in other election cycles where the presidency changed hands from a Republican to a Democrat. Many analysts
predicted even larger majorities in both chambers than the election results produced, but congressional Democrats fell short of their goals.

Barack Obama defeated John McCain in the popular vote 53 percent to 46 percent, or just over 9.7 million votes. Of presidents selected in election years since 1932 where the party in leadership changed hands, only Franklin Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower were elected by larger popular vote margins (to be fair, in 1992 Bill Clinton won 53.0% of the two-party vote, but only 43% of the three-party vote).

In the Electoral College vote Obama defeated McCain 365-173. Of presidents selected in election years where the party in leadership changed hands, only Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan won by larger Electoral College vote margins (to be fair in 1992 Bill Clinton won 370-168). In fact, they won rather handily with 472, 442, and 489 Electoral College votes, respectively.

If only John McCain could have carried the states that George W. Bush carried in 2004, he would have won the presidency. Of the 286 electoral votes that Bush won in 2004, McCain only carried 173 and Barack Obama won the others, in addition to all of the states carried by John Kerry in 2004 (representing 252 electoral votes). From the Republicans Barack Obama stole 113 electoral votes, which were not concentrated in any one region of the country. First, Obama won the state of Iowa, where he also campaigned heavily in 2007 in order to win the Democratic caucuses. Second, he secured the “swing” states of Florida and Ohio. Third, Obama won three western states with growing numbers of Latino voters, including Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico. Further, he won two traditionally Republican states that have growing urban centers, North Carolina and Virginia. Fifth, he picked off Indiana, which neighbors his home state of Illinois. Finally, Barack Obama even won one Electoral College vote in Nebraska, which allocates its electors using the “district” plan rather than the “unit” rule. 6

Since 1932, the voters have given the Democrats control over Congress far more often than the Republicans. The Democrats controlled both chambers of Congress from 1933 to 1981 except for the 80th and 83rd Congresses. The Republicans won the Senate in the 97th to 99th Congresses and won control of both chambers starting with the 104th Congress. The Democrats were able to win control of the Senate back in the 107th Congress, but lost it the following election year in 2002. The Democrats wrestled control of both chambers of Congress away from the Republicans in 2006 and were hoping to expand their majorities from the 110th Congress in 2008.

In the Senate the goal of the Democrats was to reach the magic “filibuster-proof” number of 60, whereby the Republicans would no longer be able to debate a bill indefinitely. Since 1932, the magic number has changed twice. First, the inclusion of the states of Alaska and Hawaii increased the
number needed to reach cloture. Second, in 1975 the number, originally set at two-thirds of senators present and voting, was reduced to three-fifths. Since 1932, the Democrats achieved the magic number in the 74th to 77th Congresses, the 88th and 89th Congresses, and the 94th and 95th Congresses. During times when the Republicans held the Senate they never reached the magic number.

In 2008, the Democrats picked off seats held by Republicans in Alaska, Colorado, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, and Virginia. The Republicans won no seats that were previously held by Democrats. This gave the Democrats a total of 58 seats, two short of their goal. Then, on April 28, 2009, Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter switched parties putting the Democrats just one short of the magic number of 60. Further, at the time of this writing it appears as if Democrat Al Franken is going win the court challenge and pick up the Minnesota seat previously held by Republican Norm Coleman. If Franken wins this challenge, the Democrats will have met their goal, but just barely. If Coleman wins this challenge, the Republicans will continue to be in the minority, but the filibuster will still be available to them as a bargaining chip.

In the House the goal of the Democratic leadership was to simply expand the majority. Many analysts thought they would pick up as many as 35 additional seats. Prior to the election the Democrats controlled 236 seats and the Republicans 199. The Democrats held onto 231 of those seats and picked up 26. Of the seats picked up by the Democrats, all but three were in states won by Barack Obama (Alabama, Arizona, and Idaho). Meanwhile, the Republicans held onto 173 of their seats and picked up only five.

Rationale for the Special Issue

Congressional Democrats did not meet the goals set for them before Election Day when many analysts predicted that they would add more than 35 seats in the House and attain 60 votes in the Senate. In fact, many political analysts were underwhelmed by what the Democrats accomplished. A report in The Hill, a Capitol Hill newspaper, described the gain in the House as a “blip on the screen instead of a big splash.” Political analyst Charlie Cook reported in the Cook Political Report, “. . . given the strength of the top of the ticket nationally, one might have thought that the victory would have been more vertically integrated.” Clearly, Democrats hoped to ride the “coattails” of an Obama victory and increase their margins in the House and Senate. While Democrats in the Senate may end up with a filibuster-proof majority, it will only come because of Arlen Specter’s party switch.

While the Democrats grew their majorities in both houses of Congress, many endangered incumbent Republicans managed to get reelected in an
election cycle where the dynamics clearly worked against them. In fact, given how strongly the political landscape favored the Democrats and how poorly the Republican brand was perceived, it is surprising that the Democratic congressional victories in 2008 were not of a greater magnitude.

The following articles investigate the 2008 congressional elections from a unique perspective: each examines a congressional seat that was held by one of the most vulnerable Republicans. The collective goal of these articles is to ascertain how these incumbents defended their turf in a year when the political tide is blowing against them.

These cases represent a diverse group. They include both House and Senate campaigns from across the country, along with instances where the incumbent won and successfully defended his or her turf as well as occasions when the seat changed hands. More importantly, all of the races selected were among the most competitive and most expensive of the year. In order to better compare the campaigns, however, the sample does not vary in terms of which party the incumbent represents. In each case a Democratic challenger was running against a G.O.P. incumbent. The races this issue examines are:

- The Kentucky Senate race where incumbent Republican (and Senate Majority Leader) Mitch McConnell defeated Democratic challenger Bruce Lunsford. In this race, McConnell relied on a tried and true defensive campaign strategy for congressional incumbents focusing on what he has done for his home state in terms of influence and benefits.
- The North Carolina Senate race where Democratic challenger Kay Hagan defeated incumbent Republican Elizabeth Dole. Here, a myriad of factors—from the national-level to the changes in the make-up of the electorate—made it very difficult for Dole to defend her seat.
- The Illinois 10th congressional district race where incumbent Republican Mark Kirk defeated Democratic challenger Dan Seals. In this race, a Republican incumbent actually performed better than he did two years prior; it is the classic example of a campaign where the incumbent was “running scared.”
- The Michigan 7th congressional district race where Democratic challenger Mark Schauer defeated incumbent Republican Tim Walberg. Here, the importance of an incumbent’s “fit” with the district he represented was key to his defeat.
- The Ohio 1st congressional district race where Democratic challenger Steve Driehaus defeated incumbent Republican Steve Chabot. In this race, the Democrat ran a strong campaign and knocked off a long-time incumbent with the help of outside groups and the candidacy of Barack Obama.
• The Pennsylvania 3rd congressional district race where Democratic challenger Kathy Dahlkemper defeated incumbent Republican Phil English. In this contest, a political neophyte who ran a strong campaign knocked off another long-time incumbent; the story of this challenger is uncommon in congressional campaigns today.

Each article examines the important national- and district-level factors at work in the campaign. There are several district-level elements that are common in each article; these include: a description of the district or state and the electoral and political context of the campaign; the candidates; the strategies and tactics waged by the campaign and outside groups; and an analysis of the factors that helped determine why the winner came out on top.

It is our hope that these articles will help scholars better understand the dynamics of the 2008 congressional races. We believe these case studies convey valuable lessons about how local issues and trends, as well as national forces, impacted each contest. These are important lessons for understanding 2008 beyond the historic presidential election results, but also in looking forward to 2010 and what those elections may bring.

NOTES


Fighting “Change” in Congressional Campaigns | 113


REFERENCES


Riding Obama’s Coattails:  
The Democrats Finally Take the Ohio 1st

Randall E. Adkins and Gregory A. Petrow

In 2006 the Democratic Party swept both houses of Congress. It was a tidal wave. For the first time since 1994, both branches of the legislature were under Democratic Party control. While many of his Republican colleagues lost in 2006, Steve Chabot survived by narrowly defeating Cincinnati City Council member John Cranley by roughly 9,000 votes. The political environment favored the Democrats again in 2008, and this year the Democrats believed that Steve Driehaus, the Minority Whip in the Ohio state legislature, was the person to unseat Chabot.

The First District

The 1st congressional district of Ohio includes most of Hamilton County and the southwest corner of Butler County (Figure 1). These counties are in the corner of Ohio and border Indiana on the west, with Hamilton County bordering Kentucky to the south. More than three-fourths of the residents of the city of Cincinnati (primarily those who traditionally vote Democratic) live in the 1st District; it also includes with the majority of the middle-class suburbs such as Forest Park, White Oak, and Norwood. The more affluent suburbs in the eastern part of the city are part of the neighboring 2nd District.

A highly diversified economy bolsters the Cincinnati metropolitan area against downturns in the economy. A majority of those employed in the 1st District, 60.5 percent, work in white collar jobs. Cincinnati is a national leader in consumer market research, consumer product development, and manufacturing. A number of different corporate entities are headquartered in the city, including Proctor and Gamble, the retail giant Federated Department Stores, and the Kroger supermarket chain. Manufacturing is also important to the district. Blue collar jobs make up 23.2 percent of employment,
including General Electric’s aircraft engine factory. The remaining 16.3 percent of the district work in the service industry.¹

After the redistricting in the 1990s, the African-American population in the district almost doubled. In 2008, the 1st District had the second largest African-American population of any congressional district in Ohio and the largest African-American population of all congressional districts in the country that were held by a Republican incumbent.² Overall, the 1st District is 69 percent white, 27 percent black, and about 1 percent each Asian and Latino. Racial tensions were strong even before the riots in 2001 (in response to the fatal shooting of an unarmed black male by a white police officer). In spite of the drop in crime since then, Cincinnati was still ranked by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the City Crime Rankings as one of the 25 most dangerous cities.³ Higher crime rates in the city have led to a boom in new suburban housing construction to the north of the city and to the south across the Ohio River in northern Kentucky.

In the decades preceding the 2008 election the population of Cincinnati was declining. For more than a century the city was identified by the careful, conservative character of the German Catholic immigrants, who in recent years moved outside of Cincinnati to the suburbs. As Hamilton County’s Republican base moved toward the beltway that encompasses Cincinnati and northern Kentucky, the city became noticeably more Democratic. In fact, in 2008 the city of Cincinnati itself was 43 percent black, and the more heavily black neighborhoods tend to vote very consistently for Democrats. In contrast, the Republicans in the 1st District knew how to flex their political muscle too. The portion of Butler County that sits in the 1st District was strongly Republican, and the heavily Republican suburbs in Hamilton County cast more votes than the city.

Because of the tension between the urban downtown and the suburbs, the 1st District has proven to be one of the most competitive electoral districts in the country at the presidential level. George W. Bush carried the district with 53 percent and 50 percent of the vote in 2000 and 2004, respectively. In 2004, Bush lost Hamilton County by a very narrow margin, but his larger margin in southwestern Butler County allowed him to carry the district by less than one percentage point. In 2008, the district swung over to the Democratic column as Barack Obama won handily with 55 percent of the vote.⁴

On the other hand, the 1st District has a rather rich tradition at the congressional level. Former president William Henry Harrison was one of the first representatives from this district. He was elected in October of 1816 to succeed John McLean who was elected to the Ohio Supreme Court (McLean would later be appointed by President Andrew Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court and serve there for over 30 years). His time in the House was short,
serving until the election of 1818 when he left Congress to run for a seat in the Ohio state senate.

Later in the 19th century the district was represented by Republican George Pendleton, the author of the famous Pendleton Act of 1883, establishing the United States Civil Service Commission. Written in response to the assassination of President James A. Garfield by Charles Guiteau (who was upset with the president for not offering him a political appointment), the Pendleton Act ended the patronage system of employment in the federal government as the Democratic and Republican presidents who alternated in office used the civil service system to protect those they appointed.

Probably the most notable representative from the Ohio 1st District was Nicholas Longworth IV, the husband of Alice Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt's oldest daughter. Longworth was elected to the House as a Republican in 1902. In the 1912 election, however, the Republican Party split into two factions, the Conservatives and the Progressives. Longworth’s father-in-law, the former President, led the Progressives who bolted from the Republican convention in Chicago in June of 1912 and held their own convention a month later. Most of the former president’s closest allies, including Longworth, continued to support President William Howard Taft. For those that expected to remain in politics, leaving the Republican Party was just too radical. Of course, this caused stress between Longworth and his wife. The Progressive Party ran a candidate in 1st District, which allowed Democrat Stanley E. Bowdle to defeat Longworth by only 105 votes. Longworth returned to office, however, defeating Bowdle in both 1914 and 1916. He became the Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1925, where he remained until the Democrats took control of the House after the 1930 midterm elections. Longworth is best known for strengthening the power of the Speaker while remaining very popular among members of both parties. Today, the Longworth House Office Building is named after him.

Until the 1970s, the district remained almost exclusively in the hands of the Republicans. Democrats temporarily wrestled control away from the Republican Party in the 63rd, 75th, 89th, and 93rd Congresses, but Thomas Luken was the only Democrat to hold this district for more than one term in the 20th century. After the district lines were redrawn following the 1980 census, Luken defeated incumbent William Gradison in the 1982 mid-term elections and held the seat until his retirement in 1990 when he was replaced in office by his son Charlie.

In the 1994 mid-term election, Republican Steve Chabot defeated freshman David Mann. Steve Chabot had previously run for the office, losing to Luken, in 1988. Since 1994 Chabot has won reelection, but sometimes by very narrow margins. Given the competitive partisan nature of the district, Chabot’s political fortunes appeared to be tied closely to the perception
of the Republican Party nationally, winning less than 55 percent of the vote every year, except in 2002 and 2004 when Republicans did very well.

The Incumbent: Republican Steve Chabot

Born in Cincinnati, Chabot was educated at the College of William and Mary. After graduating in 1975, this cultural and fiscal conservative returned to Cincinnati and worked as a school teacher while he attended Northern Kentucky University law school at night. Early in his law career Chabot decided to get involved in politics, running for Cincinnati City Council in 1979 and again in 1983. He eventually won in 1985 and was reelected in 1987 and 1989.

After serving a short time on the Hamilton County Commission, Chabot was poised to run for Congress again in 1994. This was the same year of the Republican “revolution” when the G.O.P. picked up 54 seats in the House and wrestled control from the Democrats for the first time in 40 years. Chabot embraced the House Republican’s “Contract with America” and defeated Democratic incumbent David Mann fairly handily with 56 percent of the vote. During his two years in the House, Democrats were angered by Mann’s votes in support of President Bill Clinton’s fiscal policies. In particular, organized labor was frustrated by his vote in support of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Mann was challenged in the Democratic primary in 1994, which left him susceptible to Chabot in the general election. Chabot’s campaign focused on attracting voters in Cincinnati’s white, working class neighborhoods and the western suburbs by emphasizing his humble, blue-collar beginnings. With Chabot cutting into his base of support, Mann ran television ads effectively running against President Clinton, with Mann bragging that he voted against the president’s “government take-over of healthcare.” Chabot’s campaign answered back with an ad morphing Mann’s face into Clinton’s while the announcer asserted that a vote for Mann was a vote for Clinton. In the end, the national trends that favored the G.O.P. allowed Chabot to emerge the victor, winning the support of suburban voters and many labor Democrats in the district.

In 1996, 1998, and 2000, Chabot defended his seat successfully, but never really won convincingly. By 2002 and 2004, however, his seat began to look safer as he won with 65 percent and 60 percent of the vote, respectively, against Democrat Greg Harris. Harris was a community activist and director of the Hamilton County Democratic Party. In the 2004 race, however, Harris received more than 116,000 votes, including 63 percent of the vote in Cincinnati. This number represents a higher raw vote total than any Democrat had ever received in this district. Of course, numbers like this triggered Chabot’s opponent from the 2000 election, Cincinnati City Council
member John Cranley, to take another shot at picking off the seat. Even though it was a mid-term election, voter turnout was only slightly lower than it was in 2000 and Cranley yielded almost as many votes in 2006 as he did in 2000. In this tough year for Republicans Chabot held on to win narrowly with 52 percent of the vote.

The 1st District is a textbook example of a marginal district, but the close elections that Chabot faced did not seem to have a mitigating influence on his policy positions. As the data in Table 1 suggest, Chabot was far from a moderate. According to both the American Conservative Union (ACU) and Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), he was among the most conservative members of Congress. Further, he was a strong supporter of the Republican Party in the House, and was among the strongest supporters of President Bush (until 2008 when he took positions opposing the president much more frequently). Throughout his tenure in office, Chabot consistently maintained a hard-line conservative voting record and acted as an advocate for conservative causes.

First, Chabot was a true fiscal conservative. His consistent voting record in opposition to tax increases led to very high ratings among anti-tax political advocacy groups. In addition, Chabot’s criticism of government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ACU</th>
<th>ADA</th>
<th>Party Unity</th>
<th>Presidential Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1995-2007 scores from various editions of CQ’s Politics in America; 2007-08 American Conservative Union (ACU) and Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scores from the organization websites; 2007-08 party unity and presidential support scores from CQ Weekly Report.
spending for both social welfare programs and “corporate welfare” were controversial even among the more moderate factions of the Republican Party. He regularly voted against programs like the State Children’s Health Insurance Plan (S-CHIP), highway funding bills he claimed were full of wasteful “pork,” and subsidies or tax breaks to support business.

Second, given his strong Catholicism, it is no surprise that Chabot was very conservative on social issues. During his 14 years in the House, he consistently voted against legislation that would expand abortion, receiving a 0 percent rating from National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League and an 85 percent rating from the National Right to Life Committee. In fact, Chabot sponsored the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003, which was signed into law by President Bush. It is no surprise that Chabot’s record is similarly conservative on other social issues like the teaching of intelligent design along with evolution in schools. He is also a staunch opponent of both gambling and gun control.

Finally, Chabot was a critic of both the Democratic and Republican leadership. In 1999 he stepped into the spotlight to serve as one of the floor managers of the Senate’s impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. Likewise, he was one of the first and loudest to call for Speaker Newt Gingrich to step aside after the disastrous 1998 mid-term elections, when the Republicans actually lost five seats.

The Challenger: Democrat Steve Driehaus

Steve Driehaus is another local product. He graduated from nearby Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, served in the Peace Corps in West Africa, and returned to the U.S. to earn an M.P.A. from Indiana University. He eventually settled in Cincinnati, working in community development. While holding similar policy positions to Chabot on the budget and abortion, Driehaus was able to position himself as a more moderate alternative on issues where Chabot tended to take a less compromising policy stance, such as sustainable environmental policies and the expansion of government health benefits for children. Overall, political analysts such as Stuart Rothenberg of the Rothenberg Political Report recognized Driehaus as a candidate to watch in 2008. Specifically, Rothenberg took note of Driehaus’ proclamation that he was a ‘raging moderate.’ His positions suggested that he rode the fence on many issues. For example, Driehaus is pro-life, but supports embryonic stem-cell research. He opposes a federal constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, but he voted in support of Ohio’s Defense of Marriage Act. Driehaus also believes that forces in Iraq should be withdrawn, but opposes setting timelines for withdrawal.
In 2000, Driehaus got into electoral politics by winning an open seat in the Ohio House of Representatives. He represented the 31st state legislative district, which is incidentally completely contained within the boundaries of the 1st congressional district. In campaigns that followed, Driehaus was never opposed in a primary and won reelection each time with at least 57 percent of the vote. He developed a reputation as a pro-life, fiscal conservative, and his strong work ethic in Columbus left him highly regarded. The Cincinnati Enquirer named Driehaus legislative “Rookie of the Year” and the Ohio Association of Election Officials named him Democratic Legislator of the Year in 2008.11

After Chabot’s narrow victory margin in 2006, Driehaus smelled blood in the water and decided to take the plunge and jump into the race. In 2006, he was recruited by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) to challenge Chabot, but sat on the sidelines. That year Chabot ended up winning narrowly and the Republicans held onto two of the other three Republican seats in Ohio that were targeted by Democrats. Given that he had been elected as the Minority Whip in the Ohio House of Representatives in 2005, Driehaus chose instead to run for reelection. In 2008, however, term limits barred him from running for a fifth term. So, after the 2006 election cycle was over, Driehaus started planning his campaign against Chabot.

Driehaus officially announced his intent to run on May 3, 2007. In response to the question of whether he could defeat Chabot, Driehaus argued that although John Cranley (the 2006 challenger to Chabot) had wider name recognition, he was actually better positioned to defeat Chabot. Like Chabot, Driehaus resided in Cincinnati’s West Side neighborhood. This part of the city makes up almost one-third of the district. It is very middle-class and heavily Catholic. Of the West Side Driehaus claimed, “I think that will be critical to us succeeding in the fall. We don’t need to win in those areas, but we need to do well.”12 After winning the Democratic primary (he was unopposed), Driehaus was ready to challenge Chabot.

The Race

Early polls showed Chabot clearly leading the contest. The Chabot campaign commissioned a poll of 400 likely voters conducted June 30-July 2 and the results showed Chabot leading Driehaus 50 percent to 37 percent.13 The results of the poll, conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, were leaked to The Politico, along with Chabot’s favorable/unfavorable ratings. In the 1st District, 63 percent of voters viewed Chabot favorably compared to 23 percent unfavorably.14 Even though Chabot had a target on his back, he still had some room to breathe.
By the end of September the race closed to a statistical dead heat. Chabot led Driehaus 46 percent to 44 percent.\(^5\) In a poll conducted by SurveyUSA for Roll Call,\(^6\) the candidacy of Barack Obama appeared to be having a very positive influence on Driehaus’ prospects. SurveyUSA projected that if black voters made up 28 percent of the voters on Election Day (as they do in the district overall), then Obama would get 52 percent of the vote (remember Bush received 53 percent and 50 percent in 2000 and 2004, respectively). Black voters, therefore, might also determine the winner of the congressional race. According to SurveyUSA, if black voters made up only 26 percent of the voters on election day, Chabot’s lead would grow from two to four percent, but if black voters made up 30 percent of the electorate, Chabot and Driehaus would be dead even. Not surprisingly, the job approval rating of President Bush was only 29 percent in the district and the job approval of Congress was only 12 percent.\(^7\) Obviously, his association with both was not helping Chabot. Within two weeks Driehaus led in the polls, although the results were still within the statistical margin of error.\(^8\)

Clearly, Driehaus needed the vote of African-Americans in order to defeat Chabot. As noted above, the 1st District has the second largest black population of any congressional district in Ohio and it had the highest black population of any congressional district in the country that was held by a Republican. Still, this district is historically conservative, and in order to win Driehaus hoped that a higher than average black voter turnout fueled by the candidacy of Barack Obama might be the push that he needed. In 2006, City Councilman John Cranley lost to Chabot in Hamilton County by a mere 6,000 votes. Democrats that year were hesitant, however, to encourage the black vote in Cincinnati. Ken Blackwell, the Republican gubernatorial nominee who also happens to be African-American, won Hamilton County while losing the state by 25 percent. The Executive Director of the Hamilton County Democratic Party said of 2006, “I think that, while I could never quantify it for certain, but I think for African-Americans particularly here in Hamilton County, they found themselves quite conflicted.” Thus, voter turnout in some black neighborhoods was expected to almost double in 2008, which is important because that would not happen in the predominantly white precincts in the district.\(^9\)

The Driehaus campaign developed a plan for courting black voters. First, many months prior to the election Driehaus started spending Sunday mornings attending services at prominent black churches in Cincinnati. After each service his staff passed out campaign materials, which included photographs of Driehaus with Senator Obama.\(^10\) Second, during the campaign many prominent members of the Congressional Black Caucus visited Cincinnati to campaign with Driehaus. House Majority Whip, James Clyburn (D-SC), visited the 1st congressional district in June to stump for Driehaus.
and attended a prayer breakfast for community leaders and ministers.\textsuperscript{21} During the campaign Driehaus brought other African-American members of Congress including Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas and Gwen Moore of Wisconsin to campaign with him.\textsuperscript{22}

Republicans in the 1st District were worried. Regarding the possibility of elevated turnout among African-Americans, the Executive Director of the Hamilton County Republican Party, Alex Triantafilou, stated, “Scared wouldn’t be the right word, but we are aware of the potential for a higher than normal African-American turnout and have told our candidate to prepare for that. We are aware that it’s a phenomenon that exists, and I think Steve Chabot is aware as well and will run the kind of campaign that he needs to be successful.”\textsuperscript{23}

As Barack Obama’s presidential campaign increased their presence in the 1st District, the images in Chabot’s advertisements grew more diverse. In one television ad entitled, “Independent Voice,” the campaign used a photo of Chabot taken during his earlier career as a teacher in front of a class of primarily black students and another, more recent photo of him speaking with a black constituent.\textsuperscript{24}

In addition to turning out the African-American vote, Driehaus needed to make inroads with other voting blocs in the district, particularly social conservatives. In recent election cycles social issues dominated the campaign discussion in the 1st District. The Democrats recognized that the Republicans were better-positioned to win the battle. In fact, Republicans in southwestern Ohio led the fight against abortion and gay marriage. In 2004 the Cincinnati offices of the Citizens for Community Values, a conservative Christian group, led the effort to get the ban on gay marriage on Ohio’s ballot. This move increased voter turnout among social conservatives and helped George Bush win a narrow victory in Ohio. In response, Democrats chose to nominate Driehaus, a pro-life Catholic, in 2008. Democrats employed this strategy in socially conservative districts across the country. While most of the country was focusing on the economy, Driehaus saw his Catholicism and pro-life position as a form of “baseline” necessary for any candidate to have a chance of winning Cincinnati’s West Side.\textsuperscript{25} In support of this, Driehaus spokesman Joe Wessels argued that, “It’s not like [voters] are making a radical departure from the type of politician that they’ve elected from the West Side of Cincinnati before. They just see somebody [in Mr. Driehaus] who is maybe a little safer in these difficult times.”\textsuperscript{26}

Chabot introduced an additional aspect of uncertainty late in the campaign when he voted against the $700 billion financial bailout package known as the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). Chabot, along with seven other highly endangered Republican members of Congress voted against the bailout not only the first time on September 29, but again on
October 3 as well. Chabot claimed the legislation would place a burden on taxpayers. Further, Chabot defended his votes, arguing that the legislation did not include sufficient reforms to prevent similar financial emergencies in the future. He said, “While I believe we must work to stabilize our financial markets as quickly as possible, this legislation would have placed an enormous burden on taxpayers. In my view, this bill would set a dangerous precedent by forcing hardworking families to pay for the mistakes of businesses that acted irresponsibly.”

Even though Driehaus initially refused to take a position on the bailout, he quickly questioned Chabot’s opposition stating, “The congressman has a history of inaction on the issue. People are beginning to connect the dots. Yesterday’s vote was just the latest example of the cost of his inaction.”

Driehaus called the financial bailout the most important issue facing greater Cincinnati. His spokesperson, Joe Wessels eventually admitted that if he were the incumbent Driehaus would have voted for the bailout “very reluctantly.” Given the anxiety he found among his constituents, Chabot decided to hold three telephone town hall meetings. According to campaign spokeswoman Katie Fox, the meetings attracted more than 15,000 callers. Apparently, this issue was a double-edged sword and many constituents were paying attention to how Chabot handled it.

While Chabot was swimming against the tide, Driehaus turned out to be a formidable challenger who could raise money from individuals, PACs, and the DCCC. Due to the expected competitiveness of the race, Driehaus found assistance in fundraising from congressional leaders like Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and other Democrats like Rep. John Murtha of Pennsylvania. Murtha traveled to the Cincinnati area three times to campaign for Driehaus, but he was in Cincinnati primarily to campaign against Rep. Jean Schmidt of the 2nd District who insinuated in a floor speech that Mr. Murtha, a Marine Corps veteran, was a coward. Although the $1.45 million that Driehaus raised was not as much as the $2 million raised by John Cranley in 2006, it was far more than Chabot’s challengers earlier in the decade (see Table 2). In addition, Driehaus raised 43 percent of his funds from PACs, which represents an unusually high amount for a challenger. Finally, the DCCC spent just under $2 million to level the playing field with approximately one-half of that spent to support Driehaus and the other one-half spent to oppose Chabot. Of that money, 89 percent was spent on the production and distribution of advertisements. By early October the DCCC had spent over $650,000 attacking Chabot and reserved almost $1 million in airtime in the Cincinnati area.

To keep pace, Chabot raised $2.35 million and spent slightly more, with 48 percent of funds raised coming from PACs. In an analysis of where the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) chose to
spend money in the final days of the campaign, *Roll Call* determined that spending in the Ohio 1st District was certainly warranted given the competitive nature of the district. *Roll Call* noted that while the district went narrowly for Bush in 2004 and the black population was among the largest in the country, Driehaus simply looked formidable. \(^{38}\) NRCC ended up coming to Chabot’s assistance by spending just over $1 million, mostly in opposition to Driehaus. \(^{39}\) Approximately 80 percent of those funds were spent on advertising production and distribution. \(^{40}\) By early October the NRCC had reserved $500,000 in airtime to spend on either the 1st or 2nd District seats, both of which were considered competitive. \(^{41}\)

While Driehaus and the DCCC ran a number of positive, biographical advertisements introducing the challenger to the voters outside of his state legislative district, both were quick to attack Chabot. The attacks on Chabot tended to emphasize three themes. First, they were critical of Chabot for his support of the policies of President Bush, such as the privatization of Social Security. For example, in one ad the DCCC argued that Chabot was too closely aligned with President Bush and “Didn’t Get the Memo,” emphasizing the theme of change popularized by Senator Obama’s campaign. \(^{42}\) Second, early in the summer energy was an important issue as gas prices were very near or even above $4 per gallon. As a result, Driehaus ran advertisements contrasting his views on energy policy with those of Chabot (i.e., alternative fuels versus drilling). Third, both Driehaus and the DCCC repeatedly linked Chabot to the economic crisis. In one ad run in October by the DCCC entitled, “What a Comedian,” Chabot was criticized for his support of policies that led to tax breaks for Wall Street, record trade deficits, and the loss of jobs overseas. \(^{43}\)

For his part, Chabot’s campaign also ran many positive, biographical advertisements that emphasized his early childhood, growing up in a trailer park, cutting lawns, and pumping gas to make ends meet. \(^{44}\) Later in the

---

**Table 2. Campaign Finance Data for First District, 2000-2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chabot Disbursements</th>
<th>Challenger Disbursements</th>
<th>Chabot Receipts</th>
<th>Challenger Receipts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$2,410,292</td>
<td>$1,447,544</td>
<td>$2,349,745</td>
<td>$1,489,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2,991,572</td>
<td>2,021,495</td>
<td>2,669,976</td>
<td>2,024,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>610,087</td>
<td>81,663</td>
<td>479,225</td>
<td>85,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>490,317</td>
<td>23,388</td>
<td>702,171</td>
<td>25,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,099,555</td>
<td>465,745</td>
<td>1,083,178</td>
<td>469,185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

campaign, however, his advertisements and those of the NRCC were clearly designed to portray Steve Driehaus in a highly negative light, thereby increasing his unfavorable ratings. As a result, Driehaus was forced to respond often to advertisements he claimed were false or misleading. In August, Chabot’s campaign released an ad criticizing Driehaus’ stance on energy, which the *Cincinnati Enquirer* claimed distorted Driehaus’ position.46 Another ad claimed Driehaus did not approve of making English the official language of the state of Ohio, but Driehaus was forced to respond that he did.46 The NRCC also aired an ad attacking Driehaus for “opposing tax cuts for the middle class” and missing a vote in the state legislature concerning home foreclosures in Ohio.47 In many cases, Driehaus seemed to get the better of the exchange. For example, in early September prior to the economic emergency, Chabot ran an ad critical of Driehaus entitled, “All over the Place,” for allegedly changing his position on a number of issues.48 In response, Driehaus ran an advertisement critical of Chabot for paying for his ad with campaign contributions from “big oil” companies.49

Finally, while Driehaus benefitted from Obama’s frequent campaign stops in southwestern Ohio, visits by John McCain simply were not as electric. Chabot needed the draw of celebrity, but there was no rock star in 2008 like Barack Obama. Former Speaker Newt Gingrich campaigned with Chabot in September, but Gingrich was not exactly the type of celebrity who could reach out to many people beyond the solid Republican base.50 A few days before the election Chabot stopped by a restaurant in the Price Hill neighborhood with Joe Wurzelbacher, who is better known as “Joe the Plumber.” Senator McCain made him a household name in the third presidential debate after Wurzelbacher stepped up and questioned Senator Obama about his tax plan on a campaign stop outside of Toledo, Ohio. Price Hill is another heavily Catholic Cincinnati neighborhood that also tends to be very white and very Republican. Outside the restaurant a protester yielding a plunger screamed at Wurzelbacher to get his plumber’s license, which incited a confrontation with a Chabot supporter.51 It was a tough race for Chabot.

### The Results

The race was as close as everyone predicted. Overall, Driehaus defeated Chabot, winning the 1st District by a margin of 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent. That, however, was not true throughout the district (see Table 3). As expected, Chabot ran well-ahead of Driehaus in Butler County, winning with almost 73 percent of the vote. The bad news for Chabot was that Butler County represented only 4.4 percent of the overall vote cast in the 1st District. Also as expected, Driehaus ran well-ahead of Chabot in the city of
Table 3. Election Results for 1st District, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Chabot (%)</th>
<th>Driehaus (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st District overall</td>
<td>296,138</td>
<td>140,683 (47.5)</td>
<td>155,455 (52.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler County only</td>
<td>12,999</td>
<td>9,457 (72.8)</td>
<td>3,542 (27.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton County only</td>
<td>283,139</td>
<td>131,226 (46.3)</td>
<td>151,913 (53.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Cincinnati only</td>
<td>99,306</td>
<td>23,362 (23.5)</td>
<td>75,944 (76.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st District minus City of Cincinnati</td>
<td>196,832</td>
<td>117,321 (59.6)</td>
<td>79,511 (40.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton County minus City of Cincinnati</td>
<td>183,833</td>
<td>107,864 (58.7)</td>
<td>75,969 (41.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Cincinnati, winning with 76.5 percent of the vote. The good news for Driehaus was that the city of Cincinnati represented just over one-third of the overall vote cast in the 1st District. The real question was whether Chabot could remain close enough in the suburbs that were outside of the city of Cincinnati, but still within Hamilton County. Chabot won 58.7 percent of the vote in the suburbs compared to Driehaus’ 41.3, but in 2008 it was not enough.

In 2006, Democrat John Cranley garnered 47.8 percent of the vote and in 2008 Steve Driehaus won 52.5 percent of the vote, representing a gain for the Democrats of 4.7 percent. The swing within Hamilton County of 5.1 percent was slightly greater than the overall swing in the district and exactly matched the 5.1 percent pro-Democratic swing in the district’s Cincinnati precincts. Interestingly, however, the Republican stronghold in Butler County reacted against the pro-Democratic swing. There the Democrats lost 13.9 percent of the vote compared to 2006. Of course, Butler County is a very small part of the district, which did little to help Chabot compensate for the gains made by the Democrats in Hamilton County. In examining the underlying dynamics of how Driehaus defeated Chabot, it is more important to examine both how the political landscape of the district changed from 2006 to 2008 and the force of the tide introduced by the presidential election.

The first step in understanding the changing political landscape in the district is to examine changes in voter registration. There were 36,649 new registrants in Hamilton County, compared to only 210 in Butler County. Of course, within the 1st District there were also approximately 24 voters in Hamilton County for every one voter in Butler County. Of the new registrants in Hamilton County, 14,535 were from the precincts in Cincinnati,
which are of course part of the district’s Democratic base. Given that Ohio has an open primary system in which voters register without identifying a partisan preference, it is impossible to measure either party’s growth by counting the number of new Democratic or Republican registrants. Still, we can determine whether new registrants were added to already strong Democratic or strong Republican precincts. If we define a strong partisan precinct as one in which the party nominee for Congress carried 65 percent of the vote or more in the previous Congressional election, we find that the differences between the parties in terms of registration are not terribly stark. Of the 36,859 new registrants, 13,165 were in strong Democratic precincts and 10,911 were in strong Republican precincts. This differential benefits the Democrats by about 2,000 new voters, which is only about a bit more than a tenth of Driehaus’ roughly 15,000 vote margin of victory. Of course, all of the voters making up the differential were not loyal Democrats, nor do we really know the partisan breakdown of new registrants in the “swing” districts. What is noteworthy is that there was no registration surge that occurred solely in the solidly Democratic or Republican precincts. Table 4 shows the correlations between the pro-Driehaus vote swing for each precinct, and the increase in voter registrants for each precinct from 2006 to 2008. The correlation of .06 indicates that a weak relationship between the number of new voters registered in the precincts, and the size of the pro-Democratic congressional vote swing from 2006 to 2008. Barack Obama earned approximately 2.5 percent more of the vote in the district than Steve Driehaus, which suggests the presence of presidential coattails. Unfortunately, we find that the percent of a precinct’s new voters in the 1st District is virtually uncorrelated with Barack Obama’s share of the two-party vote. Thus, while precincts with more new voters were slightly more likely to support the Democratic congressional candidate in 2008 compared to 2006, precincts with new registrants were no more likely to support Obama than other precincts. In examining precincts within the city limits of Cincinnati, however, the correlation is better, but still a very weak .05. Again, it appears that new registrants had little to do with Barack Obama or Steve Driehaus winning the 1st District.

The second step in understanding the changing political landscape of the district is to examine the relationship of changes in voter turnout with the congressional and presidential vote. This is particularly important when considering how election outcomes shift from one election year to another. The question is whether (and to what degree) were Democrats mobilized and Republican turnout suppressed by the electoral environment in 2008. Between 2004 and 2008 the number of voters grew marginally. In the 2004
Table 4. Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlate vote swing and new voter registration</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlate new voter registrants and Obama vote</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlate new voter registrants and Obama vote in Cincinnati</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlate turnout change with % of vote for Obama</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlate turnout change with % of vote for Obama in Cincinnati</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlate Driehaus vote and Obama vote</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

election cycle 289,665 votes were cast in the 1st District, but that number increased only slightly to 296,138 in 2008. Given the very small growth in turnout, this result suggests that the outcome was not likely due to the mobilization of some new group of the electorate that had newly registered and become energized. Of course, making this interpretation is problematic because the simple difference is possibly masking changes in the electoral dynamics, which may or may not include the mobilization or suppression of sub-groups.

It is a long-established fact that voters are more likely to turn out to vote in presidential elections than in mid-term elections. In 2008, Senator Obama was a charismatic candidate at a time when the electoral environment cut strongly against the G.O.P. Steve Chabot had weathered many difficult electoral challenges in the past, but Barack Obama was not running at the top of the ticket in any of those contests. Table 4 also shows the correlation between the percent of the change in voter turnout for each precinct with Barack Obama’s share of the precinct-level, two-party vote. We find that the correlation is a strong 0.49. In other words, larger increases in turnout in the district’s precincts relative to turnout in 2006 were associated with Obama claiming a greater share of the vote in the district’s precincts. In addition, the relationship is quite strong. In contrast, the correlation within the subset of precincts located in the city of Cincinnati was only slightly stronger (0.54).

It appears that a surge in turnout fueled by Obama’s candidacy played a major role in Driehaus’ victory. This is only true, however, if Driehaus’ share of the precinct-level vote is closely related to Obama’s. Not surprisingly, we found that they are almost perfectly correlated (0.99). Although Obama ran about 2.5 percent ahead of Driehaus in the district overall, the fall-off from the Obama vote to Driehaus was very, very small across the hundreds of precincts in the 1st District. Driehaus was clearly considered to be a palatable alternative to Chabot, and it appears he hung onto virtually all of the Obama voters.
Conclusions

Following the 2004 election cycle the electoral environment turned against the Republican Party throughout the nation. The Democrats won control of both chambers of Congress in 2006 and were looking to build larger majorities in 2008. In order to do so, they targeted a number of congressional districts that were competitive and, given Steve Chabot’s narrow escape in 2006, his seat was one that they targeted. As a result, Steve Driehaus enjoyed early attention from the Democratic leaders in the House: Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Majority Whip James Clyburn, and Chris Van Hollen, the Chair of the DCCC. Three weeks before Election Day the Rothenberg Political Report wrote that the 1st District was a tossup. According to Nathan Gonzales, Chabot knew he had a target on his back, and so he ran a tough race. He wrote, “If he loses, it says more about Republican problems nationally than it does about something specific that the congressman has done wrong.”

In the November 4 election, Steve Driehaus defeated incumbent Steve Chabot with 52.5 percent of the vote. Driehaus ran very well in the heavily Democratic city of Cincinnati getting 76.5 percent of the vote and he ran well enough in Cincinnati’s more Republican suburbs to win a close victory. In addition to the national current flowing in favor of Driehaus, Chabot faced tough challenges unique to his district. A poll by SurveyUSA indicated that African-American turnout would probably determine who won the race. Although the district is considered a leaning-Republican district, 27 percent of the district’s voters are African-Americans. Former Ohio Democratic Party Chairman, Jim Ruvulo, said, “That Chabot seat we dreamed about for years, but we never could get enough black voters and young voters to come out and care enough about it.”

Steve Chabot said of his defeat, “The Democrats were saying about my district in particular that it would see a significant Obama factor. Apparently, they were right.”

Many of the seats targeted by Democrats in 2008 were similar to the seat held by Steve Chabot. They were Republican-leaning districts or Republican-leaning states where crossover appeal brought by the candidacy of Barack Obama at the top of the ticket could provide the additional votes necessary for a Democratic challenger to take the seat. Without this appeal, Democrats across the country would be forced to rely on voters to split their tickets without a strong impetus to do so. The analysis clearly indicates that this is, in fact, what happened. While at the margins voter registration patterns benefitted Driehaus, the most important factor, by far, was that the turnout surge benefitted him. The greater the swing in turnout over 2006, the higher the vote total for Driehaus in those precincts. The data indicate that the principal reason for the surge is the candidacy of Barack Obama.
Driehaus then held onto almost all of the Obama voters. In the end, a few of the Obama supporters certainly defected to Chabot, but he simply did not give voters enough reason to split their ticket. Perhaps he will in 2010. Chabot has already declared his intent to challenge Driehaus to win back his old seat and he has raised over $232,000 in the first quarter of 2009. This time, however, Barack Obama will not be running at the top of the ticket.

NOTES

14http://www.politico.com/blogs/thecrypt/0708/Poll_shows_Chabot_leading_by_13.html (accessed May 19, 2009). The poll of 400 likely voters was taken June 30-July 2 and had a 4.9 percent margin of error.
16OH: Democrats Have Pickup Opportunities In State. The Frontrunner. Tuesday, September 23, 2008.
17http://www.surveyusa.com/client/PollReport.aspx?g=1b9d8d99-bbbd-4d78-b8f7-70964e21002 (accessed May 19, 2009). The poll of 645 likely voters was taken Sept. 19-21 and had a 3.9 percent margin of error.
19http://www.pollster.com/polls/oh/08-oh-01-ge-cvd.php (accessed on March 19, 2009). The poll of 400 likely voters was taken September 30-October 1 and had a 5 percent margin of error.
Riding Obama’s Coattails: The Ohio 1st

41. Toeplitz, Shira. No Heavy Spending Yet in Schmidt Seat Contest. _Roll Call_. Thursday, October 9, 2008.


REFERENCES


Playing Defense in the Illinois 10th:
Surviving “Obama-mania” in the Shadow of Chicago

Wayne P. Steger

Mark Kirk, Republican Representative for the 10th congressional district of Illinois, faced a daunting reelection challenge in 2008. As noted earlier, national conditions favored the Democrats in 2008 with an unpopular Republican president, increasingly unpopular wars, high energy prices, a looming recession, increasing problems with the health care system, and growing budget deficits that limit solutions. National polls indicated widespread public dissatisfaction with the status quo on a wide range of issues and increasing support for “change.” Further, the Democrats won control of the House and Senate in 2006 and more recent polls indicated a growing Democratic advantage in national partisan identification. Finally, Democrats nominated a charismatic presidential candidate who excited Democratic voters while Republicans nominated one who drew temperate support from segments of the Republican base. Still, Mark Kirk was able to defend his seat and score a reelection win in this difficult environment.

Local level circumstances also favored the Democrats. Illinois has been trending Democratic, with Democrats gaining control of both chambers of the state legislature and all state-wide elected offices. Democrats also were gaining congressional seats in traditional Republican areas in the Chicago suburban and exurban areas. Charlie Cook’s Partisan Voting Index (PVI), a measure of how strongly a congressional district leans toward one political party compared to the nation as a whole, rated the 10th district as D+4. Further, the district lies due north of Chicago, the epicenter of Barack Obama’s political base (Figure 1). That location translated into a substantial advantage in media coverage for the Democratic congressional nominee. “Obama-mania” also translated into relatively healthy fundraising, volunteerism, and voter turnout for Democrats.

Finally, the incumbent, Mark Kirk, was perceived as vulnerable after the 2006 election when he won with only 53 percent of the vote against a relatively unknown challenger. Though not a quality challenger in the usual sense, Dan Seals, went into the 2008 campaign with substantial name
Figure 1. The Illinois 10th Congressional District
recognition, campaign experience, and organization after having almost upset Kirk in the 2006 election. Seals also had the financial backing of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), something he lacked in his 2006 campaign. That the DCCC targeted the race is itself a strong indication that Washington handicappers saw this as a seat that could be won. One week before the election, *CQ Politics* declared there was “no clear favorite” and described the district as “a slightly Democratic-leaning swing district.”

Given all the circumstances suggesting a tough race, why did Mark Kirk fare better in 2008 than he had in 2006? Several factors contributed to Kirk’s reelection in the 10th district. Mark Kirk typified an incumbent who was “running scared” in a district that does not fall neatly into the stereotypes of a “Republican” or “Democratic” district. The decentralized, pragmatic nature of American political parties help incumbents like Kirk by enabling them to deviate from national party positions on issues for which local constituency preferences are not aligned with the national party line. Incumbents like Kirk also win because they use their offices effectively to promote constituency interests and preferences.

### The 10th Congressional District and the 2008 Elections

Most congressional elections in Illinois did reflect the expected boost for the Democratic Party consistent with national trends. Across all 19 congressional districts in Illinois, Barak Obama averaged more than 6.6 percent more of the presidential vote in 2008 than had Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry in 2004. Obama won a majority of the presidential vote in 16 of the 19 Illinois congressional districts, including the 10th district where he received more than 61 percent of the vote. The Democratic surge behind Obama seems to have had some coattails in most congressional districts in Illinois. Across the state, Republican congressional candidates in Republican districts won an average of 87.75 percent of the vote that they had received in 2004. Democrats picked up two open seats on the fringes of the Chicago area that were vacated by retiring Republican incumbents.

Table 1 shows the district-level vote shares of the Republican and Democratic candidates for congressional and presidential elections in the 10th district since 2000. The district has split for the Republican candidate in the congressional elections while voting Democratic at the presidential level. In his first election in 2000, Kirk ran ahead of his party’s presidential candidate by four percentage points in the 10th. In 2004, Kirk ran ahead of George W. Bush by 17 percentage points. In 2008, Kirk ran 17 percentage points ahead of John McCain in the district. Kirk took 55 percent of the congressional vote while Barak Obama took 61 percent of the presidential vote.
Table 1. Congressional and Presidential Vote Sares of Republican Incumbent Mark Kirk, the Democratic Opponent, and the Major Party Presidential Candidates, 2000-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Illinois 11th Congressional Vote</th>
<th>Illinois 10th Presidential Vote</th>
<th>Republican Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep. Mark Kirk</td>
<td>Democratic Opponent</td>
<td>Presidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vote in the 10th congressional district. Given the surge in the Democratic vote and the decline in the Republican vote across the state, how did Mark Kirk manage to increase his vote share over 2006 when he nearly lost to Democratic challenger Dan Seals?

The answer begins with understanding that the 10th congressional district does not fall neatly into the dominant stereotypes of a “Republican” or “Democratic” district. The outcome owes in part to the characteristics of the district’s population and the mix of issue positions taken by the incumbent. While split-ticket voting has been declining nationally for more than a decade, the decline owes mainly to increasingly homogenous congressional districts that are more solidly Democratic or Republican. Split-ticket voting remains common in moderate or swing districts like the Illinois 10th.

The 10th district is often characterized as a swing district with “moderate” preferences—right of center on economics but left of center on social or cultural issues. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the district is the 21st ranked congressional district in terms of wealth, with a median household income of $78,269 (as of 2006). A number of Fortune 500 Companies are headquartered in the district including pharmaceutical, computer, corporate consulting, manufacturing, and food companies. Almost 48 percent of the district’s adult population has a college or graduate degree, and a majority of adults work in management, professional, or office occupations. It is home to a major training facility at the Great Lakes Naval Station. The district also has substantial immigrant populations, which tend to have weaker ties to either political party. The 10th district is also home to one of the larger Jewish populations in the United States. Taxes, education, the environment, civil liberties, defense, and foreign policy toward Israel and the Middle East are perennially salient issues in 10th congressional elections.
The socio-economic and demographic composition of the district means that neither party has a lock on the loyalties of voters so frequent split-ticket voting is not surprising. Both parties have ownership of issues that appeal to voters in the district and both parties could assemble winning coalitions in the 10th. The incumbent, Mark Kirk, tailored his issue positions to an economically conservative and socially moderate constituency.

Candidate Strategies:
Framing the Vote Choice through a National versus Local Lens

Dan Seals adopted a strategy common to many Democratic challengers across the country in 2008. Seals sought to tie his fortune to Obama and a message that emphasized change. Seals also sought to tie Mark Kirk to the Republican Administration of George W. Bush. Seal’s advertisements, mailings, and press releases sought to tie Kirk to Bush, so that a vote for Kirk would be a vote for “more of the same.” That strategy, however, did not appear to resonate with a majority of voters in the 10th district. The incumbent had already established a solid reputation as a moderate Republican, and he created even more separation between himself and his party in Washington, DC, between the 2006 and 2008 elections. Further, Kirk sought to tie Seals to widely-perceived corruption of the Illinois Democratic Party, which was headed by a governor rumored to be on the verge of impeachment and who was under investigation by the U.S. Justice Department before the election. Kirk ran ads criticizing Seals’ ethics thereby associating him by common label with other, impugned Democrats in Illinois.

For his part, Mark Kirk had long cultivated an image of a “moderate” Republican with a mixture of economic conservatism and more moderate social positions. Kirk’s record, webpage, direct mail, and advertisements emphasized issue positions and priorities that match those of most voters in the 10th district. Kirk supports tax cuts and opposes tax increases, which plays well in one of the most affluent districts in the country. The 10th is home to a naval reserve base and a veterans’ hospital, and Kirk consistently supports more spending on defense and veterans’ health care. The district has a large number of well-educated, environmentally conscious voters and Kirk has been very active proposing legislation regarding the environmental condition of Lake Michigan. He has backed a mixture of liberal and conservative policies on energy supplies—supporting both alternative energy and expanded drilling, for example. This plays well with an environmentally conscious population that logs a lot of miles in automobiles. He secured federal funding for education and highways, which are both important given the district’s population and traffic. Kirk has been an avid supporter of Israel and has taken a hard line on terrorism, Iran, and Iraq in the Middle East,
which plays well with the large Jewish population in the district. While being tough on defense abroad, Kirk supported gun control at home. Kirk had developed a centrist position on abortion by supporting rules bringing restrictive bills or amendments to the floor but voting against those measures on roll call votes (see below). Kirk hewed a complex position on the economy, urging FBI investigation of unethical behavior by corporate leaders while supporting a bailout of the financial sector.

Kirk’s biggest potential problem in 2008 may have been his support for the Iraq War, which had become unpopular in the district. After supporting the war for several years, Kirk modified his position following his close call in the 2006 election. Kirk was among a group of congressional Republicans who warned President Bush of crumbling public support for the war. Kirk also broke with his party and president by endorsing a withdrawal of troops, beginning in 2007. This position put him at odds with both President Bush and GOP presidential candidate John McCain who were calling for a troop surge in Iraq. The switch enabled Kirk to mute criticism of his support for the war and visibly reduced his association with an increasingly unpopular president.

More generally, Kirk’s voting record in Congress supported the image of a moderate Republican. Kirk repeatedly pointed to his record on a variety of issues to demonstrate his independence from the increasingly unpopular Bush and his own political party. The moderate voting record also made less credible Seal’s claims that a vote for Kirk is a vote for “more of the same” or a vote “for Bush.” While Seals sought to nationalize the electoral focus, Kirk kept the focus local and emphasized his contributions to his district.

Since gaining office in 2000, Kirk has had one of lowest party support scores among Illinois Republicans in Congress. Figure 2 shows party unity scores of Mark Kirk, the average of the other Republican Representatives from Illinois, and George W. Bush’s presidential approval ratings (averaged by Congress) from 2001 to 2008. Kirk was generally less supportive of his Party’s positions than other Republican Representatives from Illinois, which is consistent with his image as independent and reflects the mixture of values held by his constituencies. Kirk’s voting record also indicates that he has voted with an eye on voters back home—he became less supportive of Republican Party positions in Congress as his party’s president became less popular. This is consistent with Kingdon’s (1989) observation that incumbents typically become less supportive of their party’s president as the president’s approval ratings drop. All of the Illinois Republican Representatives decreased their party support after 2006, but Kirk’s support for the Republican position declined further than the others. Kirk began voting less frequently with his party after 2004, when George W. Bush ran poorly in the 10th district. Kirk’s loyalty to his party dropped even further after his close
call in 2006 and the continued decline of public support for George W. Bush. Kirk voted with his party less than 71 percent of the time in the 110th Congress, but that figure belies a shift during the Congress. Kirk voted with his party 79 percent of the time in 2007 but only 66 percent of the time prior to the election in 2008. His support for President Bush dropped even more, going from 80 percent in 2007 to 39 percent in 2008.

Endorsements of Kirk reflected his economically conservative and socially moderate issue positions. Reflecting his positions on economic policy, taxes and balanced budgets, Kirk received endorsements by economically conservative groups like the US Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Business. For his positions on defense and veterans’ issues, Kirk received the endorsement of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He also received numerous endorsements by environmental groups including the Sierra Club, the Humane Society, League of Conservation Voters, National Wildlife Federation. He was endorsed by a variety of other groups typically associated with liberal causes including Planned Parenthood, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, the Illinois Education Association, the National Education Association, and the Human Rights Campaign. Finally, Kirk was endorsed by Jewish groups for his
positions on Israel and the Middle East. In contrast, his opponent, Dan Seals, received endorsements mainly from liberal groups including numerous unions, the National Organization for Women, and a few others advocating various social welfare programs.

The campaign itself largely reinforced the moderate image that Kirk had cultivated and deflected Dan Seal’s charges that Kirk represented more of the same (see below). Incumbents like Kirk begin the campaign already having established name recognition, an image, a campaign organization, networks of supporters, and a winning coalition from the prior election. Challengers face the tougher task. They need to establish name-recognition, cultivate a favorable image usually from scratch, and they have to give voters a reason to reject the incumbent. In 2008, Dan Seals sought to give voters several reasons to reject Kirk in two main ways. First and foremost, Seals sought to nationalize the election by associating Kirk with George W. Bush and the Republican Party. Second, Seals sought to attack Kirk on the Iraq War, for which Kirk had been a strong supporter. Kirk, however, successfully distanced himself from both George W. Bush and the Republican Party in Washington by defecting from the party line repeatedly on issues that were salient in the district.

This kind of nuanced candidate-determined position-taking is made possible by the collective nature of Congress and the decentralized, pragmatic character of American political parties. The collective but fragmented structure and processes of Congress make it difficult to attribute credit and blame for national conditions. As Kingdon (1989) and others have demonstrated, the congressional parties prefer their members in Congress to follow the party line but allow partisan members to deviate from the party line when it is electorally advantageous to do so. The Illinois 10th is a district in which the demographic and socio-economic characteristics make it a swing district in which either political party could assemble a winning electoral coalition. While national trends worked against the Republicans and John McCain at the national level, decentralized political parties and the collective authority of Congress enable individual incumbents plenty of opportunities to escape blame for unpopular policies and to take credit selectively for those that are popular with their voters in their districts. The autonomy of individual legislators enables them to tailor their issue positions to local constituencies rather than those of the political party he or she affiliates with. To that end, Kirk’s behavior typified a candidate-centered campaign in Washington and in the district. The result was an incumbent largely insulated from national trends adversely affecting the Republican Party. By separating himself from the Republican Party and distancing himself from his party’s unpopular president, Kirk avoided becoming collateral damage.

Mark Kirk solidified his support in the 10th district by taking positions on issues that reflected majority sentiments in his district, even if those
positions put him at odds with his own party and president in Washington. His record, press releases and news coverage reinforced an image of a Member of Congress who was opposed to taxes/supportive of tax cuts, pro-defense, pro-Israel, pro-environment, pro-immigrant, pro-education, pro-stem-cell research and pro-choice. While rhetorically advocating free markets, he called for tougher regulations and investigations of crimes by the financial sector. While maintaining a record of strong support for the military and a hard line in foreign policy toward the Middle East, he also supported gradually withdrawing troops from Iraq. By shifting positions on the Iraq War and engaging in populist outrage at high energy costs and malfeasance and greed in the financial sector, Kirk denied his opponent several critical issues. His positioning on issues enabled him to distance himself from the less (locally) popular positions of his political party and president while embracing those that were popular with his constituents (e.g., tax cuts, environmental initiatives, cheap gas, etc.).

Benefits and Services That Only an Incumbent Can Provide

The incumbent in the Illinois 10th congressional district, Mark Kirk, is a classic career politician, having spent most of his adult life in congressional politics—first as a staffer and then chief of staff for former 10th district Representative John Porter. Though other goals matter to career politicians, reelection is an instrumental, intermediary step for the attainment of other goals (e.g., Mayhew 1974). Further, while members seek reelection, they are uncertain about their reelection prospects (Fenno 1978, 36; Mann 1978). Even large electoral margins in a previous election do not imply safety in a volatile electorate loosely anchored by partisan loyalties, such as those in swing districts (e.g., Jacobson 1992). Mark Kirk seems to typify an incumbent whose reelection in 2008 owed in part to his behavior in office. Simply put, he ran scared (e.g., King 1997). Like other incumbents, he won reelection in part by taking care of his constituents—securing benefits and services for constituents, communicating with constituents, and raising money in preparation for a serious electoral challenge (e.g., Jacobson 1992; Herrnson 1997).

Incumbents have a substantial advantage in gathering information on constituent preferences through their congressional staffs, which operate as efficient and effective intelligence operations generating dual-use information for both legislative and campaign activities (e.g., Steger 1999). Legislators use such information for deciding how to vote on issues, what bills to sponsor, and what services to provide constituents. Knowledge of constituent concerns also informs campaign strategy, messages and images, and identifying and targeting audiences for stylized communications.
Kirk took issue positions that reflect a complex balancing of various, sometimes conflicting preferences of his various constituencies. His voting record on abortion illustrates the point. Kirk supported rules to bring restrictive amendments to the floor, which is important for social conservatives in the Republican Party—a significant minority of Republicans in the district. He also voted against passage, which is apparently preferred by the majority of voters in the district. Similarly, Kirk took a complex mix of positions on energy, balancing competing groups in the district. He supported increasing oil supplies including off-shore drilling but opposed opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to drilling. He also supported increasing fuel efficiency standards and alternative energy sources. On the economy, Kirk supports lower income and capital gains taxes, less spending on social welfare (the 10th district ranked 432 in direct federal payments to individuals), and advocates less government regulation of business. Yet he also voted for the federal bailout of the banking industry while calling for FBI investigations of corporate management. These kinds of mixed positions reflect a nuanced understanding of what will be politically popular in this district.

Incumbents also have advantages in meeting with constituents nearly full time, whereas most challengers do not have this luxury. Congress as an institution accommodates members’ desire to visit their constituencies by providing them with ample travel budgets and by scheduling most legislative business between Tuesday and Thursday (Fenno 1978; King 1997). This kind of personal outreach on official business is another dual-function of the office. Legislators like Kirk solicit requests for assistance, listen to complaints, and get constituent input on policy. They also use the opportunity to explain or justify their activities in Washington in order to shore up support among loyalists, consult with their friends and allies, advertise and claim credit for programs for the district or state, cultivate an image of “competence, empathy, and an identification as being ‘one of us’” (Fenno 1978, 153). Kirk was clearly active campaigning from the soapbox of the office during 2008. He made numerous public appearances and announcements through the summer and fall of 2008 proclaiming his success in delivering benefits for specific projects (funds for cleaning up a local harbor, Lake Michigan, education, transportation, and the VA hospital in the district). His staff is also recognized for being effective in responding to constituency concerns and requests for help.

Bringing home money to the district is also an advantage that incumbents use (e.g., Ferejohn 1974). Levitt and Snyder (1997) found strong evidence that federal spending benefits incumbents in House elections. By all indications, Mark Kirk was a successful procurer of federal funds for his district. While advocating less government and balanced budgets in his
speeches, direct mail and website, he used his position on the House Appropriations Committee to fight for and secure funding for small to massive local projects for education, immigrant programs, environmental clean-up, mass-transit, highway transportation, local monies for Homeland Security at O’Hare airport, and most notably, a massive Department of Defense-Veterans Administration hospital in the district (an expansion worth $130 million). Each project yielded favorable coverage in local news media (see below). In terms of Federal contracts, the 10th district ranked 126th among congressional districts receiving federal funds in 2008.\footnote{18}

Finally, Kirk’s office is known for effective constituency service and outreach efforts. Members have provided themselves with enough staff support, both in their Washington office and in their district or state offices, to provide services to constituents—services that provide significant electoral benefit for legislators, even though the number of people serviced varies considerably across districts and states (Johannes 1984; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987). Though most congressional staffers take care to separate governing and campaign work, congressional offices have an inseparable dual functionality. Efforts to serve constituents have inevitable implications for the campaign and election. Incumbents and their staffs research their constituencies, they create and distribute programs and services tailored to the demands of their constituents, and they advertise themselves to their various constituencies. Kirk’s staff is well known for being responsive to constituents and Kirk has been an active presence in the district.\footnote{19}

**Information in the Campaign**

While congressional campaign studies often focus on the dissemination of information, that aspect of the campaign was fairly standard for the Kirk campaign. Kirk used the resources of office, such as the franking privilege, his office website, and numerous press releases to explain his activities in Washington, take credit for programs in the district, and offer services to his constituents—stories picked up by the local press. Compared to other Illinois Representatives, Kirk had more appearances on “Chicago Tonight”—a well watched Chicago public television program, local TV and radio news programs, and repeated coverage in the Chicago metro- and suburban newspapers. Kirk’s exposure on TV, radio, and print news exceeded that of his opponent, whose coverage was limited to stories on the closeness of the race and for a single campaign event.\footnote{20}

Kirk’s campaign used a mixture of heavy direct mail, radio and television advertising—matching the paid advertising of the Democratic challenger and external groups.\footnote{21} Kirk spent $1.4 million on media expenditures
for the 2008 campaign, or more than five times the amount that was spent by the average House Republican incumbent for their entire campaign. Once independent expenditures are taken into account, the Seals campaign roughly matched the media spending by Kirk even though Kirk also spent heavily on campaign communications. With this level of spending, both campaigns had ample opportunity to present their case to voters. However, as noted earlier, the messages in the local news media largely reinforced the image that Kirk sought to portray and generally ran contrary to the message portrayed by the Seals campaign.

Both campaigns emphasized issues that were salient to the constituency. Both candidates’ campaign communications sought to portray themselves as supporting policies that would grow the economy while attacking the other for misguided economic policies. Both sides for example, condemned terrorist attacks on Israel, pledged strong support for Israel, and advocated a tough foreign policy toward Iran. Both sides used direct mail and TV ads that related to health care, veterans’ health care, energy, education, and the environment. While presidential campaigns tend to emphasize issues owned by their political party (e.g., Petrocik 1996), the congressional campaign in the district featured both campaigns focusing on issues that were important to constituents as well as those owned by their respective political parties. This reflects the mixed issue preferences of voters in the 10th district.

Like other close congressional races, both sides engaged in a mixture of positive and negative advertising during the campaign. All incumbents face potential opponents who will seek to undermine their image with negative advertising. The Seals campaign for example, was highly critical of Kirk’s support for the Bush Administration, particularly in regard to the War in Iraq as a misguided, mismanaged and costly mistake. The Seals campaign also criticized Kirk on a range of issues that are “owned” by the Democratic Party. For example, the campaign attacked Kirk for opposing equal pay for women and the extension of unemployment benefits in 2008; and for supporting privatization of social security. The campaign also sought to undermine Kirk’s image as environmentally friendly with ads and mailings associating Kirk with Bush and oil companies. The Seals campaign also hit Kirk on issues typically perceived as owned by the Republicans. For example, the Seals campaign ads repeatedly refer to wasteful spending and economic policies that have “hurt the economy.” For his part, Kirk essentially tried to link Seals to fears that a Democratic president and Congress would increase taxes. In a move also consistent with the issue ownership theory, the Kirk campaign accused the Democrat of supporting higher taxes, especially capital gains taxes—an important concern given the affluence of the district. Similarly, the Kirk campaign accused Seals of supporting greater regulation
of small businesses, weakening veterans’ health benefits, and of gimmickry on energy.

With two campaigns otherwise closely matched in paid media, earned media was a critical factor in this race. The flow of information during the campaign through the news media tended to contradict the Seals’ information strategy and reinforced Kirk’s message. As an incumbent, Kirk was able to gain repeated favorable exposure in the media for securing federal funds to clean up PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in Lake Michigan, opposing mercury pollution by a British Petroleum refinery in Indiana, and for extending tax credits for alternative energy development and energy conservation.24 His support for legislation on the environment received repeated coverage in suburban newspapers. He received favorable coverage for securing funds for literacy programs for immigrants (who constitute 18 percent of the district’s population) and for sponsoring amendments to weaken the No Child Left Behind Act.25 Kirk received favorable news coverage on gun-control for sponsoring legislation to restore the ban on assault weapons.26 He also received local news coverage for his efforts to gain funding for the North Chicago VA Hospital, a joint Department of Defense–VA hospital in the district.27 He also gained coverage for his activities on the House Appropriations Committee where he pushed for more funding for FBI agents to investigate financial crimes, for mass- and highway transit in the district, public education, and homeland security.28 Finally, Kirk received favorable coverage in ethnic and mainstream newspapers for his support for sharing data with Israel from early warning satellites in Europe.29 In short, Kirk consistently received favorable news coverage in the local press, radio, and TV news programs, often for appearances and announcements of programs or projects secured for the district. The incumbent used his position in Congress to secure the exposure and favorable coverage that typically advantages incumbents in congressional elections.

All of the major newspapers for the area endorsed the incumbent, including both major city newspapers and four suburban papers. The Republican-leaning Chicago Tribune endorsed Kirk noting that he is, “one of the most thoughtful, independent and effective members of the House. Kirk is a leader on environmental issues, . . . He is a strong advocate for embryonic stem-cell research. He’s a workhorse on local concerns, known for having a diligent staff. Voters should look beyond partisanship and embrace their pragmatic, get-it-done congressman.”30

The Chicago Sun Times called Kirk, “hard working, very knowledgeable, fiercely independent, dedicated to bipartisan action, and an effective contributor to resolving the nation’s and his district’s problems.”31 These kinds of newspaper endorsements matched almost perfectly with the image that the incumbent sought to cultivate and the messaging that he used
through the campaign. The challenger, by contrast, received less news coverage and a solitary endorsement by a local paper despite being recognized as a capable candidate in all of the newspapers.  

A Note on Money: The Mother’s Milk of a Campaign?

Conducting a continuous campaign is expensive. While the monetary advantage of incumbents is often identified as a critical factor in explaining the success rates and electoral margins of incumbents (e.g., Jacobson 1992; Herrnson 1997), money is a necessary but not sufficient condition for winning congressional elections. No candidate, however meritorious can win without money, but having a large war chest does not ensure victory. The asymmetry is that money enables candidates to compete for votes by enabling them to make their case before voters, but it cannot ensure that voters will like what they see, hear, or read. Further, the imbalances that we see between incumbent and challenger spending are in large part a consequence of the relative chances of victory for the candidates. Candidates that have the characteristics that make them appealing to voters and likely to win as a result are the candidates who have relatively little difficulty raising money. Candidates who lack either the characteristics that appeal to voters or are perceived as unlikely to win are generally unable to raise much money. The interesting cases are those in which both candidates are well funded, as occurred in the 2008 congressional election in the 10th district.  

While Kirk had an advantage in candidate spending, Dan Seals benefited from greater national party support. Overall, there was little difference in the spending and both sides had sufficient financial resources to make their case to voters in the Illinois 10th. Table 2 shows fundraising and spending patterns in the last six elections in the 10th district.  

Though based on only six elections, there is a moderate correlation between candidates’ campaign spending in the 10th district and candidates’ vote shares. What seems to matter is the financial advantage of the incumbent relative to the challenger. The correlation between the ratio of incumbent to challenger spending on one hand and the ratio of incumbent to challenger vote share is $r = .415$. Kirk had a financial advantage in each of his elections, with the advantage being greatest in 2004 when Kirk faced only nominal opposition. Correlations, however, mask important variations. Kirk’s spending advantage over his Democratic rival actually decreased from 2006 to 2008. Kirk outspent Dan Seals by a ratio of 1.87 to 1.0 in 2006, but only by a ratio of 1.53 to 1.0 in 2008. Kirk spent 87 percent more than Seals while gaining about 13 percent more of the vote in 2006; while spending 53 percent more than Seals in 2008 while gaining 22 percent more of the vote. Just taking into account candidate spending, Kirk’s vote
Table 2. Fundraising and Spending by Incumbent Mark Kirk and the Democratic Opponent in Illinois 10th District Congressional Campaigns, 2000-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fundraising</th>
<th>Spending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kirk (D)</td>
<td>Challenger (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$5,451,604</td>
<td>$3,532,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3,168,367</td>
<td>1,918,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,747,924</td>
<td>95,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,705,510</td>
<td>477,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,068,719</td>
<td>1,975,304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Responsive Politics.

share increased even as his financial advantage decreased relative to his challenger. It seems unlikely that we can attribute Kirk’s improved margin to his greater fundraising prowess even though he raised and spent more than two million dollars more in 2008 than he had in 2006.

Further, the difference in spending is even less in 2008 once we take into account independent spending in support or in opposition to the candidates. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, the DCCC and other groups spent $1,030,368 in support of Dan Seal’s candidacy and $1,033,180 in opposition to Mark Kirk. The National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) and other groups spent only $198,346 in support of Mark Kirk and nothing in opposition to Dan Seals. If these figures are added to the spending amounts of the candidates, then spending by or in support of Kirk totaled $5,644,005; while spending by or in support of Seals (or in opposition to Kirk) totaled $5,629,671. In effect, the amounts of money spent in this campaign were almost identical for the two candidates. While there are no comparable figures available for 2006, neither national committee targeted the race in 2006 which suggests that independent expenditures were negligible in that year.

Thus while campaign spending is important, it does not fully or even marginally explain the rise in vote shares by the incumbent Mark Kirk. That is a remarkable inference when we recall that most of the exogenous factors of the state and national tides favored the Democratic challenger. Certainly money matters, otherwise candidates would not spend so much time and energy raising it. But variations in fundraising and spending do not account for much if any of the change in the vote from 2006 to 2008. Rather, the amounts of money raised do indicate a change in candidate behavior that likely does matter. Kirk raised substantially more funds when he faced a tougher election and reelection campaign (see Table 2).
If we take the 2000 race as a baseline—when the seat was open and most vulnerable to a change in party control, then we can gain insights into the behavior of the incumbent. Kirk raised about two million dollars during his first congressional campaign—much of which was spent in the Republican primary against a well-funded field of politicians eager to replace the retiring John Porter. Kirk raised about $1.7 million in each of the two next cycles while facing moderately- and poorly funded challengers in the two races, respectively. Kirk raised substantially larger sums in 2006 when he faced a strong challenge by Dan Seals, consistent with the hypotheses that challenger spending drives incumbent spending. Kirk was highly aggressive in raising funds following his close call in 2006, raising $5,451,604 for his 2008 campaign. Further, Kirk expanded his fundraising extensively going into 2008—raising more funds earlier, raising more funds out-of-state, and raising more funds from political action committees. These patterns indicate an incumbent who anticipated a tough reelection fight in 2008 and who adapted his behavior by engaging in substantial fund-raising efforts. Mark Kirk’s fundraising and spending patterns fit the profile of an incumbent who believed he was safe (from 2000 to 2004) and suddenly faced a tougher race in 2006 and 2008. It seems likely that the increased effort to defend the seat—represented in the financial figures, matters at least as much or more than the actual funds themselves. Mark Kirk became and continued to be an incumbent who runs scared. His actions in office and in the district were critical to his reelection in 2008.

Conclusions

In sum, the 10th district incumbent won the race largely because he did what incumbents do well. He and his staff paid close attention to their constituents and used that information to propose (and take credit for proposing) legislation on issues salient to constituents. He deviated from his political party and president on a few issues salient to his constituents. While always maintaining a more moderate voting record in Congress, he increasingly deviated from his party’s positions in Congress after 2004 and especially after his close call in the 2006 election. He even registered a presidential support score of under 40 percent for the election year itself. He was highly active using his position on House Appropriations to steer money into his district for a range of projects, but especially for the Department of Defense-VA hospital. All of these activities reinforced an image of a hard-working incumbent, in touch with his constituents, and willing to act as an “independent voice” in Washington. These activities also undermined the central claim of the challenger’s campaign—that a vote for Mark Kirk would be a vote for continuation of Republican policies in Washington. The campaign
itself was hard fought over the airwaves, in the media, and on the ground. Both sides spent over $5 million on the campaign (including independent expenditures in support or opposition to one of the candidates). As a close race, the campaign drew a larger than normal amount of local and national media coverage, the content of which generally reinforced the imaging and messages of the incumbent while tending to undermine that of the challenger.

NOTES

1. The Republican nominee, John McCain was not enthusiastically supported by evangelical Christians in the Republican Party (Steger 2009).
2. Democrats won the IL 8th in 2004, which had been represented by a Republican since 1962. Democrats won the IL 14th in a special election in March of 2008 to replace retiring former Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert. Democrats also were poised to win the IL 11th where Republican incumbent, Jerry Weller, was retiring.
3. The index for each congressional district is the average of the district vote for the president in the prior two elections compared to the national presidential vote. “Cook Political Report, PVI for the 110th Congress,” http://www.cookpolitical.com/sites/default/files/pvichart.pdf.
4. Quality or strong challengers are typically thought to be elected officials with a constituency that overlaps that of the incumbent (e.g., Squire 1992). Seals had never held elected office.
5. CQ News Online, October 27, 2008.
17. Lake County News Sun, October 4, 2008.
20. Dan Seals received coverage on local broadcast and print news for an event in which his campaign provided cheap gas to voters. These stories, however, were not all favorable as the event caused a substantial traffic jam (e.g., Cook Political Report, September 25, 2008).
21. The Kirk campaign outspent the Seals campaign on TV advertising, but probably not the combined TV advertising of Seals and ads run by the DCCC and other groups.
The following examples were drawn from the Kirk and Seals’ campaign press releases and video streams of the ads run by the two campaigns. [http://dansealsforcongress.com](http://dansealsforcongress.com) and [http://www.kirkforcongress.com](http://www.kirkforcongress.com).


**Pioneer Press**, October 9, 2008;


**Chicago Tribune**, October 21, 2008.

**Chicago Sun Times**, October 13, 2008.

The *Journal and Topics* Newspaper endorsed Seals on October 29th, being critical of Kirk for voting against a bill for equal pay for women and for negative advertising.

**REFERENCES**


All Politics is Still Local: McConnell vs. Lunsford in the 2008 Kentucky Senate Race

Jasmine Farrier

The guy running against me, if he was successful, would be a rookie. Do you want to send Kentucky to the back bench with little or no influence?

—Sen. Mitch McConnell

I’m running to restore the American dream and the opportunities I had as the son of a union laborer who grew up to become a Fortune 500 CEO. Mitch McConnell and George Bush have stood in the way of working families, and it is time for a change.

—Challenger Bruce Lunsford

Introduction

The political drama of the 2008 re-election of Mitch McConnell was not his eventual fifth victory, which was predictable, but the fact that he won by only six percent of the vote. Senator McConnell spent over $20 million (including $2 million in final-stretch loans) to defend his seat against a self-financed businessman who spent $11 million and had never held an elected post. The fact that this race was the second most expensive in the country in 2008 suggests that the seat was in real danger for the first time in decades and McConnell knew it (see Jacobson 1980, 1985). His first two elections in 1984 and 1990 were very close, but as he ascended in statewide and national prominence his next two elections in 1996 and 2002 were landslides. While 2008 had special twists, this type of sudden vulnerability was not unique to Senator McConnell. In fact, this “bumpy-smooth-bumpy” electoral trajectory happens in many congressional careers. Paul Herrnson writes, “[a]lthough incumbents generally derive tremendous advantages from the strategic environment, the political setting in a given year can pose obstacles for some, resulting in significant numbers losing their seats” (2004, 29).

JASMINE FARRIER is an associate professor of political science at the University of Louisville.

©2009 The American Review of Politics
Using public data, media reports, and interviews with six people knowledgeable about the race (two closely involved with Kentucky Republicans and Senator McConnell, two with Democrats and Lunsford, and two veteran statewide political reporters), I argue that McConnell versus Lunsford was a meaningful contest for many reasons that spring from Kentucky’s complex political environment but also transcend it. On the one hand, the election appears to be a straightforward story about the power of incumbency, political demographics, and maintaining large war chests. Looking deeper, McConnell’s re-election highlights how Senators balance their responsibilities—statewide representative of diverse interests, national policy maker, and partisan—and communicate their choices to voters when these duties come into conflict. This article shows how and why McConnell emphasized the first as well as how the opposition failed to exploit his vulnerabilities in the latter two. The full story has several interconnected components, two of which centered on McConnell and two on the state’s political environment.

The first and most important aspect of the election was Senator McConnell’s strategic use and communication of his political position. Senator McConnell’s defense during the “year of change” turned the recession and accompanying anti-Republican tide on its head. His main argument was that the Commonwealth would benefit from his power and prestige—regardless of who won the White House and which party held the majority in Congress. In this way, McConnell turned his main liability—being a key member of the Republican Washington establishment—into an asset by distancing himself from President Bush, Republicans in Congress, and his own party’s presidential candidate, all while maintaining and promoting his stature as the most important Republican in Congress in 2008 (and probably the most important Republican in all of Washington in 2009). While John McCain campaigned against federal spending earmarks during his presidential run, McConnell touted his efforts to deliver benefits to his constituents in detail, with the underlying message that the Senator put Kentucky first.

Second, Senator McConnell is a prodigious fundraiser and fierce campaigner known for attacking challengers on personal and political vulnerabilities. McConnell has a reputation in Kentucky for defining his opponents negatively early and 2008 was no different. McConnell asked, “Who is Bruce Lunsford?” and made Lunsford’s business success, personal wealth, and homes in multiple states all look to be mysterious and non-representative of Kentucky’s interests. Bruce Lunsford was not able to overcome this negativity despite the fact that Senator McConnell’s own approval fell throughout the fall as the economy worsened and Republicans nationally (including John McCain) suffered one political blow after another. Using television ads tailored to each part of the state, direct mail, and a two week
final bus tour making over 60 campaign appearances in small towns, McConnell defended his unique position in Washington, while keeping the heat on Lunsford and repeatedly saying that only he knows how to deliver.

Third, Senator McConnell did not have to worry about an Obama coattail effect and probably benefited in reverse. With a relatively low African-American population (about 7%) and widespread assumption of racism among Kentucky’s white rural voters, it was a commonplace observation that Bruce Lunsford suffered by being one spot below Barack Obama on the ballot instead of Hillary Clinton (who won the Kentucky primary easily in May of 2008). Still, according to the interviews and election data, Kentucky is more maroon than red and has complex split-ticket tendencies that put more emphasis on the person and office than the party. While McConnell would have had a tougher re-election with a more popular Democrat on top of the ballot in 2008, Kentucky’s political culture allowed him to be judged on his own merits, outside the state and national party environment that was increasingly hostile to Republicans. McConnell has become, in the words of several political insiders, “his own institution.”

Fourth, Bruce Lunsford did not provide the strongest possible threat to Senator McConnell. He had personal wealth to fund television ads and name recognition after his previous unsuccessful runs for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 2003 and 2007, but Lunsford was not known for any specific policy stances and had an uncomfortable relationship with statewide Democrats after he endorsed the Republican nominee in the general election in 2003. Lunsford nevertheless won the 2008 Democratic primary and the support of state and national Democrats mostly due to his ability to pay for his own campaign. Apparently, more established Kentucky Democrats were waiting until the more vulnerable Senator Bunning ran for re-election in 2010. As a political outsider, Lunsford was more comfortable discussing President Bush’s tenure and his own business history than specific policy stances. For example, Lunsford failed to exploit McConnell’s unwavering support for the October 2008 Wall Street bailout, which was not popular in Kentucky. Even Lunsford’s own strategists said he did not know how he would have voted on the legislation. Lunsford tried to paint Senator McConnell as being tied to Bush’s hip, but such efforts were undermined by McConnell’s party separation strategy. Research on congressional elections shows that high levels of partisan voting in Congress often results in a potent strategy for challengers in certain circumstances (Carson 2005). According to strategists on both sides, 2008 was the most favorable political environment for Democrats to win McConnell’s seat but Lunsford was not the person to do it.
In many ways, Kentucky is square in the demographic mainstream of the current Republican Party. However, Kentucky is split internally, like other Midwestern and Southern states, between urban and rural voters, with the latter favoring Republicans by increasing margins and the reverse being true in the cities. In 2008, Senator McConnell lost the counties that contained the biggest cities in Kentucky, Louisville and Lexington, the latter for the first time. Barack Obama won both of those counties. Yet as a state, Kentucky is closer to the contemporary averages of the Republican Party on a variety of “culture war” issues in recent decades. Almost 37 percent of Kentucky’s population describes itself as “evangelical Protestant,” which places the Commonwealth sixth highest in the nation (Arkansas leads with 43% and Rhode Island is last with 1.5%). In a separate aggregate 2004-2006 Gallup poll report, Kentucky ranked 12th in the nation for church attendance, with 48 percent responding that they attend once a week or almost every week. Kentucky public opinion is very close to the Republican National Committee’s (RNC) “Values” platform on abortion, gay marriage, and guns.

At the same time, while Kentucky is not a high profile “swing state” and was not courted heavily by presidential candidates in 2004 and 2008, it has shown complex electoral patterns since the 1970s. On the presidential level, Kentuckians preferred fellow southerners Carter and Clinton but have otherwise leaned Republican beginning with Nixon. Yet Kentucky is still considered a Democratic state for its statewide registration figures: 57 percent to the Republicans’ 36 percent. Kentucky also only elected a single, one-term Republican governor from 2003-2007 after decades of Democrats. For the past 10 years, the state legislature has been split with the state Senate dominated by Republicans, and the state House of Representatives dominated by Democrats. Democrats have been on the rebound since 2007 with the election of Democrat Governor Steve Beshear and a party sweep of independently elected cabinet offices.

While the causes and evidence of split ticket voting decisions are complex (see for example Karp and Garland 2007) these different national and statewide electoral results in Kentucky show a “maroon,” not “red” state, which the political strategists and analysts agreed force statewide candidates to work harder and more personally for votes. For example, in 2004, George W. Bush won Kentucky by 20 percent over John Kerry and voters went 3:1 in favor of a gay marriage ban in the state Constitution, but Kentucky’s junior Senator, Jim Bunning, also a conservative Republican, won re-election by just 2 percent against a little-known Democratic state senator. While a less dramatic difference in 2008, John McCain won almost 300,000 more
votes than Barack Obama (57% to 41%). Senator McConnell’s victory, however, was just a third of that margin, with almost 107,000 votes more than Lunsford (53% to 47%).

 Electoral and Political Context of the 2008 Election Cycle

McConnell’s sudden vulnerability had little to do with statewide issues. He would not have been challenged as effectively as he was in 2008 if the Republican Party and President Bush were not held so low in popular opinion. There was no particular scandal at home involving Kentucky’s senior Senator and there was no widespread sense that other than being a Republican in a bad moment for Republicans that he was a bad “fit” for Kentucky. In Kentucky, President Bush’s approval rating declined steadily from 2005-2008. His monthly approval rating hovered in the high to low 40s in 2005, the low 40s to high 30s in 2006, and then stayed in the 30s for both 2007 and 2008, with the exception of two months that reached 41 percent approval.

In 2008, it seems Kentucky voters punished Senator McConnell more than Senator McCain for being a Republican loyal to the signature policies of President Bush. In 116 out of 120 counties in Kentucky, McConnell won by a smaller margin than McCain. At the same time, according to the state party political strategists and news analysts interviewed, McCain’s high margin of victory did not imply high levels of support for him personally or the party but rather fear and distrust of Barack Obama. Both McCain and McConnell struggled to distance themselves from President Bush and their burdens had different origins and consequences for the election. All six insiders agreed that McConnell’s position as party leader made his floor votes and public rhetorical support crucial to the President’s legislative goals for both terms. The trick for McConnell was temporarily divorcing himself from this policy loyalty that enabled him to climb the party ladder and convince voters that the Commonwealth was always his first priority.

The Incumbent: Mitch McConnell

Senator McConnell was not dragged into politics. He said the night of his 2008 election that “[c]ampaigns like this force you to work harder, and they remind you what a privilege it is to serve. But public service has always been a special privilege for me. Growing up, most kids want to be baseball players. I wanted to be a U.S. Senator.” Addison Mitch McConnell, Jr. was born in Alabama but was raised and educated in Kentucky. McConnell showed early political ambition by winning three positions as some form of student body president: in high school in Louisville, in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville, and then president of the
Student Bar Association at the University of Kentucky Law School. After he completed law school, McConnell worked for two liberal/moderate Republican Senators from Kentucky: John Sherman Cooper and Marlow Cook. McConnell then became a deputy assistant attorney general under President Gerald Ford. His first elected position in Kentucky was serving as County Judge-Executive in Jefferson County, which includes Louisville—the state’s most populous and liberal county—from 1978 to 1984. McConnell’s two Senate mentors also held this once-powerful post (now defunct due to county government reorganization). The real start of McConnell’s career was of course in 1984, when he squeaked ahead of two-time Democratic Senate incumbent Walter “Dee” Huddleston by less than one-half of one percentage point and became the first Republican to win a Senate seat from Kentucky in almost twenty years.

Over two and a half decades in the Senate, McConnell went up the ranks on the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and Appropriations Committees as well as the party leadership ladder. In 2002, he was elected Majority Whip (also called Assistant Majority Leader) and after the 2006 election he was promoted to Minority Leader, which he retained after the 2008 election. Among other national policy stances, he supported agricultural policy, especially federal payouts for tobacco farmers’ transition into other crops, and appropriations for Kentucky’s universities, infrastructure, and community centers across the state. In Washington, McConnell has long been considered a conservative Republican motivated by an ambitious pragmatism rather than ideological fervor on any one issue. During the Bush years, McConnell voted with his party on most culture war issues, taxation, and the War on Terror, but never wavered from bringing home federal dollars (even while repositioning himself as a deficit hawk in 2009).

The Challenger: Bruce Lunsford

Bruce Lunsford is a Kentucky native who lived in-state most of his life and, like McConnell, earned degrees from its public institutions: the University of Kentucky for undergraduate and Northern Kentucky University for his law degree. In the late 1970s, Lunsford was active in the state Democratic Party as Treasurer and had high-profile roles in the campaign and administration of Democratic Governor John Y. Brown Jr., who remained close to the candidate in 2008. Lunsford was appointed by Brown as the state’s first Commerce Secretary and had a large hand in developing the Northern Kentucky airport near Cincinnati as a Delta hub revitalizing that region of the state. Lunsford is also a CPA, who in the 1980s founded a large nursing home and health care company, currently known as Kindred Healthcare.
While no longer owned by him, this company’s history in its earlier forms proved a consistent burden when Lunsford decided to enter politics. In the late 1990s, Lunsford’s company, then known as Vencor, did not admit wrongdoing but engaged in a complex federal civil settlement of over $100 million dollars for allegations involving overbilling of Medicare and other issues related to its Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Meanwhile, throughout this time, Lunsford gave millions to both Democratic and Republican Party candidates and committees, which probably did not help him win over the Democratic establishment. At the time he ran for Senate in 2008, Lunsford’s current business interests were less controversial, including a private investing firm, horse racing, and independent film production.

While Lunsford had no discernible record as a policy advocate, in 2003 Lunsford ran in the Democratic gubernatorial primary and spent about $8 million of his own money. This action raised eyebrows, but not as much as his other activities. First, after Democratic rival Ben Chandler, then-state Attorney General and son of a former governor, raised the Vencor settlement issues in an ad campaign, Lunsford dropped out at the last minute and endorsed Democrat Jody Richards, speaker of the State House. Chandler won the primary and Lunsford then endorsed the Republican nominee, Congressman Ernie Fletcher, who won in November. Lunsford then served on Fletcher’s transition committee. In interviews and media accounts, this “betrayal” of Democrats in 2003 is considered Lunsford’s main “baggage”—even more so than his complex health care businesses.

In 2007, three Democratic tickets of Governor/Lieutenant Governor contested the primary and Lunsford’s ticket came in second. Lunsford’s partisan loyalties were considered thin and malleable by some Democrats and Republicans that year, based on his behavior four years earlier and the fact that the same Republican Governor Fletcher was running for re-election. The winner of the 2007 primary, Steve Beshear went on to beat Fletcher in November. In 2008, the primary choice was mainly between Lunsford and a lower-profile Democratic businessman who had more establishment support; Lunsford won with 51 percent.

As the epigraph implies, Lunsford’s campaign tried to paint his personal and business history as a Horatio Alger-esque story of rags to riches—a blue collar and agricultural family produced an entrepreneurial success that benefited Kentucky. McConnell, however, painted Lunsford’s complex business interests as being built on greed and ethical lapses. McConnell’s campaign also tried to portray Bruce Lunsford as a wealthy outsider, highlighting his homes and business ventures outside of Kentucky. Despite his rocky relations with other prominent Democrats, Lunsford tried to minimize these liabilities by being endorsed by the state’s four previous Democratic governors in a television ad touting his job creation in Kentucky.
Strategies and Tactics in the Campaign

Senator McConnell’s first line of attack was part of a long-held strategy to define his opponent. Lunsford tried from the beginning of the race to define himself as a successful person who rose on his own pluck from cutting tobacco on the family farm in Kentucky as a child and putting himself through college laying blacktop.\textsuperscript{25} Lunsford’s portrayal of himself as a populist was in constant competition with McConnell’s repeated description of him as a wealthy and shady mystery man.\textsuperscript{26} In a surprising attack ad that focused on the lesser-known spin-off of Lunsford’s health care company, Vencor, McConnell accused Lunsford of neglecting veterans’ medical care. This dramatic and negative image stuck.\textsuperscript{27} Strategists on both sides said McConnell did not need to, or care to, exploit other business vulnerabilities of Lunsford’s related to the late 1990s bankruptcy and federal civil suit, in part because McConnell’s wife Elaine Chao sat on one of those company’s boards.

In late 2007, national antiwar groups began airing ads against Senator McConnell’s support for President Bush and the Iraq war.\textsuperscript{28} Bruce Lunsford attacked Senator McConnell most consistently on his close connection to the national Republican Party and the policies of outgoing President George Bush—both obvious targets in 2008. These lines of argument were the most important and successful of Lunsford’s race, according to all the sources interviewed. He was less successful in challenging McConnell’s assertions about his appropriations prowess; Lunsford tried to that argue he could deliver more federal money and services to Kentucky than McConnell and that McConnell overstated the amount of federal dollars he brought to Kentucky. Those interviewed all agreed this strategy did not work.

Those interviewed also added that they were surprised that Lunsford did not successfully exploit McConnell’s clear help for President Bush in securing the first finance industry bailout in October 2008, which was not popular in Kentucky. According to a Rasmussen poll, Lunsford was supported by 61 percent of voters who rated the economy as the top issue in the fall election.\textsuperscript{29} As said earlier, part of the reason for Lunsford’s tepid response was, according to sources on both sides of the race, that he did not articulate his own position on the bailout and seemed privately and publicly unsure how he would have voted had he been in the Senate. In a television ad, for example, Lunsford alluded to this issue as well as the conviction of McConnell’s close colleague Sen. Ted Stevens, but did not hit them very hard.\textsuperscript{30} In the end, Lunsford’s arguments and strategies failed to undermine McConnell’s main argument of being deeply useful to Kentucky. McConnell was not just President Bush’s “water boy” in the words of one political reporter, he was “his own political institution.” Under some political condi-
tions, this description would be a liability, but that argument did not stick in 2008. At the same time, exit polls in Kentucky show that on several questions related to the economy, the worse people saw the situation the greater the support they had for Bruce Lunsford. Those who were most worried about terrorism and the war in Iraq had greater support for Mitch McConnell.  

**Campaign Themes and Communication Strategies**

McConnell’s campaign was primarily about his own strengths and secondarily about Lunsford’s weaknesses. As said earlier, McConnell tailored several similar television ads to each part of the state to explain how much and where the money went to benefit Louisville, Central Kentucky, and Northern Kentucky. Lunsford’s campaign was also primarily focused on McConnell—specifically the latter’s relationship to the national Republican Party and President Bush’s signature policies. Despite the prickly relationship Lunsford had with some prominent Democrats in Kentucky based on his previous races, he gained endorsements from four former Democratic governors and made several appearances with important Democrats, such as Louisville-area congressman John Yarmuth and Mayor Jerry Abramson, as well as state attorney general Jack Conway, all of which are not particularly well-known or liked by rural voters.

Lunsford was not the central point of 2008 even within his own campaign—the battle cry of the Democrats was “Ditch Mitch.” Jennifer Duffy, of the nonpartisan Cook Political Report, reported that Lunsford was the fourth or fifth choice of statewide Democrats for 2008, but only Lunsford had the personal funds to make the race interesting. One Kentucky Democratic insider who was a field organizer for Lunsford said that there was not much love lost between Lunsford and his soldiers in the field. This person personally expressed his/her own dislike for Lunsford as a candidate and described the campaign manager Bradley Katz’s strategy of “A.A.”—Lunsford was an “acceptable alternative” to McConnell and should be presented as such to voters. A Republican strategist involved in the McConnell campaign said he/she noticed at opposition rallies there were seas of “Ditch Mitch” t-shirts and signs—not “Lunsford for Senate.”

**The Horserace**

Clearly, the most important issue in the race was jobs and related to it were issues of funding for Kentucky’s universities, infrastructure, farmers, and cities. Although the Iraq war was an important issue of the presidential campaign, Lunsford could not have exploited it because Kentuckians backed
the Republican war line more than most other states. Clearly, the economy mattered most to Kentuckians in the fall of 2008 and McConnell’s voting record in support of President Bush’s fiscal policies made him vulnerable. Lunsford’s support peaked twice—once in May after he won the primary and, more tellingly, toward the end of October when the first Wall Street bailout dominated the news (Table 1). At that point, Senator McConnell still held a 51 percent to 44 percent lead on Lunsford, with 5 percent undecided, according to an October 28 Rasmussen Reports telephone survey of voters in the state. Just the previous week, McConnell was ahead by several points, however. As the fall continued, the race went up and down.

Yet, as said earlier, Kentucky has split ticket tendencies. So, it is revealing that at a bad time for Republicans across the country other surveys showed 25 percent of Kentucky Democrats still backed McConnell, while 13 percent of Republicans backed Lunsford. McConnell also had a nine-point edge among unaffiliated voters. He led among men by five points and among women by eight. And, tellingly, while Barack Obama garnered almost all of the African-American vote in Kentucky, McConnell still managed to get the backing of 18 percent of those polled. National political

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poll</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>McConnell</th>
<th>Lunsford</th>
<th>Spread</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SurveyUSA</td>
<td>10/29–11/01</td>
<td>616 LV</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>McConnell +8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasmussen</td>
<td>10/29–10/29</td>
<td>500 LV</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>McConnell +7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 2000</td>
<td>10/27–10/29</td>
<td>600 LV</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>McConnell +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasmussen</td>
<td>10/21–10/21</td>
<td>500 LV</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>McConnell +7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 2000</td>
<td>10/19–10/21</td>
<td>600 LV</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>McConnell +4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SurveyUSA</td>
<td>10/18–10/20</td>
<td>535 LV</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Tie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 2000</td>
<td>10/14–10/16</td>
<td>600 LV</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>McConnell +4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasmussen</td>
<td>09/30–09/30</td>
<td>500 LV</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>McConnell +9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SurveyUSA</td>
<td>09/21–09/22</td>
<td>672 LV</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>McConnell +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 2000</td>
<td>09/15–09/17</td>
<td>600 LV</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>McConnell +13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SurveyUSA</td>
<td>08/09–08/11</td>
<td>636 LV</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>McConnell +12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 2000</td>
<td>07/28–07/30</td>
<td>600 LV</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>McConnell +11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasmussen</td>
<td>07/29–07/29</td>
<td>500 LV</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>McConnell +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasmussen</td>
<td>06/25–06/25</td>
<td>500 LV</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>McConnell +7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SurveyUSA</td>
<td>06/13–06/16</td>
<td>626 LV</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>McConnell +4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasmussen</td>
<td>05/22–05/22</td>
<td>500 LV</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Lunsford +5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 2000</td>
<td>05/07–05/09</td>
<td>600 LV</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>McConnell +12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LV = Likely voters
analysts who followed public opinion closely showed McConnell ahead in the early part of the race with Lunsford closing the gap toward the end. For example, Larry Sabato’s Crystal Ball Website entries over the course of the 2008 election showed weaker support for McConnell as the year went on. Rothenberg Political Reports put McConnell ahead narrowly while Rasmussen was more favorable to him throughout the election cycle.\textsuperscript{36} There was never prediction of an easy upset.

**Money: Record-Breaking Warchests**

Mitch McConnell built a substantial war chest well in advance, as he had done in previous races, and had $7.7 million on hand at the time Lunsford won the primary in May (Table 2). According to the Center for Responsive Politics, McConnell’s contributions from political action committees (PACs) were around a quarter of his total financing while Lunsford’s were much less—around 4 percent. McConnell’s campaign war chest was dominated by individual contributions at 60 percent with about 16 percent coming from self-financed contributions and $2 million in bank loans. When polls showed the race tightening beginning in late September, these loans got a lot of local press attention as McConnell financed a blizzard of new television ads in the final weeks of the campaign in response to the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee’s infusion of ads and money in support of Lunsford.\textsuperscript{37}

Mr. Lunsford’s campaign raised over $7 million on its own and benefited from almost $3.5 million from the DSCC, which ranked him eighth out of eighteen races supported this way by the Democrats, ranging from $1.5 to 12.5 million (independent expenditures from the National Republican Senatorial Committee were negligible).\textsuperscript{38} Lunsford’s individual contributions were only 16 percent with the bulk (80 percent) of his campaign finance funded by the category “other,” which in this case meant loans from Lunsford to the campaign. The Kentucky Senate race was the most expensive in

| Table 2. Campaign Finance Summaries for KY Senate Race 2008 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Receipts**   | McConnell       | Lunsford        | Total            |
|                 | $20,991,678     | $10,883,172     | $31,874,850      |
| **Disbursements** | $21,334,523     | $10,801,203     | $32,135,726      |
| **Cash on Hand**   | $87,972         | $81,967         | $169,939         |

state history and, at more than $31 million for both sides, was the nation’s second most expensive Senate race, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, with the Minnesota Senate contest at the top.

The totals on both sides imply that McConnell knew he was in trouble. One Louisville columnist in his year-end summary of political life in the state in 2008 explained that all of McConnell’s funds, especially the extra $2 million were necessary and well-used. “Polls showed McConnell and Lunsford about neck-and-neck a month before the election, but McConnell used the millions he raised and borrowed wisely and was able to pull out a 6-point win.”

Impact of the 2008 Presidential Contest

In the presidential election Kentucky was never in play. So it is not surprising the state barely got a dozen total visits from all top Democratic and Republican candidates combined. Barack and Michelle Obama each visited only once (just before the May 20 primary). However, Hillary, Bill, and Chelsea Clinton visited several parts of the state before the primary, which Clinton won by a large margin as predicted. In the early part of the campaign, Sen. McCain visited Kentucky twice—in April as part of his “poverty tour” and in May to address the National Rifle Association convention in Louisville. In the general election, McCain visited once more and Vice President Biden also visited Kentucky just once, in September, for a fundraising dinner. Sarah Palin never visited Kentucky at all; however, both vice presidential candidates visited nearby Indiana in the fall and received news coverage and visitors from across the Ohio River in Louisville. The Obama campaign had some presence in the largest metropolitan areas in the weeks before the primary, but no dominant force before the general election. Obama’s campaign had a Kentucky page on his general election website, but it was not personalized to the state in any dramatic manner.

The most obvious fact about Kentucky’s presence in the 2008 presidential election drama was that that Kentucky was pegged as a solid GOP state the entire cycle, especially after Barack Obama won the nomination. Kentucky was one of only seven states that did not hand Obama either a primary or general election victory. Significant shifts occurred in Kentucky at the end of the race that favored McCain, even as McCain’s fortunes suffered elsewhere. Over the month of October, McCain increased his support from an 8 to 10 to 12 percentage lead over Barack Obama, ending the month up 55-43, which was his highest showing against Obama for five months, according to Rasmussen Reports. Part of this jump was attributed to unaffiliated voters leaning heavily toward McCain. In late October, Rasmussen polling in Kentucky showed McCain leading by just 4 points among
men in Kentucky. Just 5 days before election day this jumped to 58 percent to 39 percent among men (compared to 52% to 47% among women). A lopsided racial disparity continued, with white voters choosing McCain over Obama by a 59 percent to 40 percent margin and black voters overwhelmingly backing Obama, 90 percent to 10 percent. Bucking the national trends at the end of the presidential race, Kentucky voters trusted McCain over Obama by 11 points on the economy. Unaffiliated voters in the state trusted the Republican even more, 55 percent to 37 percent. Voters in Kentucky also gave McCain the edge on national security by 22 points.45

As said above, these numbers did not reflect a great affection for McCain as much as a deep dislike and/or distrust of Obama that negatively impacted Bruce Lunsford’s chances. One senior field organizer for Lunsford said in an interview that campaign phone and door-to-door workers were explicitly instructed to downplay Lunsford’s affiliation with Obama as much as possible if asked. The prevailing mode in the Lunsford campaign was to avoid mentioning or discussing the presidential nominee completely. Lunsford’s extensive TV ad campaign did not mention Barack Obama or feature his image, words, or other evidence of a coattails strategy. In television news interviews, Lunsford argued repeatedly that voters could separate the offices on the ballot as they had done in the past. Each of the campaign professionals interviewed for this article suggested (unsolicited) that race played a large factor in most rural counties’ voting behavior and if Hillary Rodham Clinton had been the Democratic nominee, she might have won Kentucky or at least gotten closer to winning than Obama. Likewise, if Lunsford were listed below Clinton on the ballot, he would have fared better and could have won.

Why McConnell Wins by a Length

McConnell’s victory speech the night of his re-election began with a quotation. “Winston Churchill once said that the most exhilarating feeling in life is to be shot at—and missed. After the last few months, I think what he really meant to say is that there’s nothing more exhausting. This election has been both.”46 The race was intense and expensive because McConnell had to prove himself worthy of the seat for the first time in decades and Republicans nationally had to “play defense” in the wake of the unpopular outgoing president. Although this race, like all others, is best understood in the state’s multi-layered political and cultural contexts, there are aspects of the race that lend insights into voting and political behavior more generally.

In Kentucky, McConnell swam successfully against the national tide because he spoke the language of representation: Kentucky is a poor state and relies openly on federal assistance in both urban and rural areas, from
the state universities’ elite researchers to unemployed blue-collar families to
insecure farmers. McConnell’s Washington career and campaign themes
have long centered on political clout for Kentucky. Separating himself from
the woes of his party, McConnell’s personal brand is defined by an eco-

While we realize that Sen. McConnell has a number of duties to attend to in
Washington while being the leader of his party in the Senate, there are a
myriad of responsibilities right here in his own state that need attending to as
well. . . . The senator from Louisville campaigned on the power he wields in
Washington, and he has again gained the majority of votes from his home
state. Now is not the time to rest with the knowledge that another six years
have been gained, but to put into action the words heard on the campaign
trail. The people deserve no less.48

In this story of power and representation, there is also a lesson for
political challengers. Lunsford did better than any other challenger to
McConnell since 1990, but left some wondering if he had turned over every
stone. Lunsford did not exploit McConnell’s vulnerabilities and he had to
play defense himself because his prior business practices were a distracting
issue. In an election post-mortem, a columnist for the Lexington Herald-
Leader said Lunsford failed to hammer McConnell on three specific issues:
McConnell’s close relationship with the deeply unpopular (even in presi-
dential “red” Kentucky) President Bush, McConnell’s non-hesitant support
for the $700 billion October financial industry bailout, and McConnell’s
personal and political closeness to Senator Ted Stevens, who was at that
time recently convicted of three federal felony counts just before the elec-
tion. The columnist wondered if Lunsford’s not being the top choice for
Democrats meant that perhaps the others would have done it better.49 Top
strategists on both sides said in interviews that Lunsford’s main reason for
running was his “ego” and need to erase the previous losses. Personal wealth
and good timing appeared to not be a match against a dyed-in-wool polit-
ician.

McConnell fought off Lunsford by emphasizing his representative
credentials and downplaying his national connections. He admitted as much
after the election was over, seeming thankful that he survived the tough elec-
tion year. Senator McConnell said in January, 2009, on the Today Show:
“Well, I was a strong supporter of the President [Bush], but presidential un-
popularity is bad for the president’s party. We suffered losses in ‘06 and ‘08.
We wish President Bush well. But frankly, [in 2010] we will not have to be
carrying that sort of political burden that we carried the last two elections.”

Luck and timing played into it too: if Bunning and McConnell’s election schedule had been reversed, Bunning would likely be out.

Above all else, the campaign professionals interviewed agreed that McConnell is deeply tuned into his strengths and weaknesses. Rural and small town voters know he is not one of them—not a farmer, son of a coal miner, nor does he have extensive military experience. He does not have a symbolic/descriptive representative mindset (see Pitkin 1967)—nor do they. These voters are old fashioned enough to want the candidate to justify their record and solicit support face-to-face. In 2008, McConnell went county by county on the stump. It’s about substance: what did you do for me lately?

Nationally, Democrats were hoping to unseat the party leader, as happened to Tom Daschle (D–SD) in 2004 and Rep. Tom Foley (D–WA) in 1994. McConnell was tuned into that vulnerability when he said on the campaign trail “unlike six years ago, it’s not going to be a coronation. It was fun getting 65 percent of the vote and carrying 113 out of 120 counties [in 2002]. That was then, and this is now. And what is different is that your senator is a lot bigger target than he used to be.”

NOTES


3. For a comprehensive review of key concepts and literature in the study of representation see http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-representation/.

4. This kind of delicate dance between national partisanship and district focus in Congress is a key to long-term electoral and political success (see Mayhew 1974 among others).

5. See for example different spots that showcased federal appropriations for Louisville (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFgRK9-MIM&feature=channel), Northern Kentucky (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rbi265Q8omE&feature=channel), and Central Kentucky (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mi- aZrs0Gw&feature=channel).


12 SurveyUSA, Survey News Poll 11478, December, 2006, “Do you approve or disapprove the job Ernie Fletcher is doing as Governor?” http://www.surveyusa.com/client/PollReport.aspx?g=a3755e2c-daa4-4239-a0f0-748f3d0ae28c.


17 While it was a good year for some Republicans due to President Reagan’s landslide re-election, McConnell was personally credited with winning due, in part, to his campaign’s two versions of an original television ad that showed a pack of sniffing bloodhounds questioning the Washington whereabouts and voting record of Sen. Huddleston. The “hounds” ad campaign went immediately and deeply into Kentucky political lore—so much so that Bruce Lunsford’s campaign in 2008 used the exact concept against Sen. McConnell, down to the running dogs, a bearded man in a flannel shirt holding the leashes, and a suited man representing the incumbent going up a tree. See two different “bloodhound” ads from the 1984 campaign, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4KOh1Z9s&feature=related and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4-4EPc2xvU&feature=related and Lunsford’s reversal of the bloodhound trail in 2008 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC8QSGvRDLE.

18 For a variety of vote and issue positions, see http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Mitch_McConnell.


24 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPqL0Yd_ij-s.
All Politics is Still Local: McConnell vs. Lunsford | 171

25http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMCoTR2Y8RU.
27http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJVJvSfxIq.
28http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkG4JpXGXoA.
30http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jidL3Q_JbeA.
31http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JVJIvSfxIQ.
32http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkG4JpXGXoA.
41For news summaries of both visits, see http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSN23431921200808052 and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwXH30NX8.
42http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/kvhome.
REFERENCES


All Politics is Local . . . Except When It Isn’t:
The Campaign for the 3rd Congressional District in Pennsylvania

Daniel M. Shea and Stephen K. Medvic

In an era when the vast majority of officeholders who seek reelection win (and typically do so by large margins), the rare defeat of an incumbent is a critically important phenomena. In the Third Congressional District of Pennsylvania, a political neophyte—Kathy Dahlrymple (D)—knocked off Phil English (R), a smart, aggressive, 14-year incumbent. Part of the story is the national tide of change, sparked by the presidential campaign of Barack Obama. As a result, the Republican incumbent had no choice but to play defense. But another piece of the tale is the experience of the challenger, which provided her with a non-traditional, but crucially important source of support. Still another layer is the strategies and tactics of both candidates. No two campaigns are ever the same, and the story of the 2008 contest in Pennsylvania’s Third Congressional District was certainly unique.

The Context

The District

Pennsylvania’s Third Congressional District sits in the northwest corner of the state. The district extends from Lake Erie south to Butler and Armstrong Counties and at its southernmost point is roughly 20 miles north of Pittsburgh (see Figure 1). Though 42 percent of the district is rural, there is also a significant industrial influence, particularly in the district’s major city, Erie, which is Pennsylvania’s fourth most populous city. The result is a district that is more blue-collar (30.7 percent) than the rest of the state (25.2 percent) and one with a median income ($35,884) of roughly $4,200 less than the state as a whole (Barone and Cohen 2007, 1393; 1374).

Politically, the district leans Republican. In 2000, 51 percent of the voters in the Third District supported George W. Bush as did 53 percent in 2004. In both cases, Mr. Bush’s vote totals were five percentage points higher in the Third District than were his statewide totals. Though Erie and
Figure 1. The Pennsylvania 3rd Congressional District
Mercer Counties are predominantly Democratic, the Democrats in this district are relatively conservative. The combination of conservative, blue-collar voters with rural voters explains the Republican tilt to the district, but also suggests an opportunity for Democratic candidates in the mold of Senator Robert Casey, Jr.; that is, those who are economically progressive and socially conservative.

The Candidates

The Incumbent: Phil English

Republican incumbent Phil English was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1994 by a narrow victory in which he garnered just under 50 percent of the vote (the Democrat netted 47 percent and an Independent candidate pulled in three percent). It was widely reported that during the 1994 campaign English had pledged to serve only six terms in Congress, though he denied making such a pledge.

In his first reelection contest, English survived another close race, edging out Democrat Ron DiNicola 51 percent to 49 percent. Beginning in 1998, however, he won four consecutive races with at least 60 percent of the vote. In the midterm election of 2006—a difficult year for the GOP in which fellow western Pennsylvania Republicans Melissa Hart (Fourth Congressional District) and Rick Santorum (Senate) lost reelection bids—English’s vote share dropped to 54 percent against a challenger who was vastly outspent. After several years of comfortable victories, English appeared to be on relatively thin electoral ice.

Through 2006, it could reasonably be said that Phil English’s voting record was reliably conservative. His ratings from the American Conservative Union (ACU) for 2005 and 2006 were 88 (100 being most conservative) and 80, respectively; the liberal Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) gave him scores of 5 (100 being most liberal) and 15 in those same years. His party unity scores (calculated by CQ Weekly) were 93 percent and 90 percent in 2005 and 2006. Finally, he supported President Bush’s position on legislation 85 percent and 95 percent of the time in those two years.

Perhaps in response to a reelection contest in 2006 that was closer than it should have been, English’s voting record became noticeably more moderate in the 110th Congress. His ACU scores dropped (that is, became less conservative) to 64 and 52 in 2007 and 2008 and his ADA scores rose (or became more liberal) to 40 and 65. His party unity scores also fell to 78 percent and 82 percent in 2007 and 2008 and he supported President Bush only 50 percent and 44 percent of the time in those years respectively (see Table 1 for a summary of these trends).
### Table 1. Representative English’s Vote Scores, 2005-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACU Score</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADA Score</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Unity Score</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Support Score</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The 2005 and 2006 ACU and ADA scores are from Barone and Cohen (2007, 1392); 2007 and 2008 scores are from the ACU and ADA websites. Party unity and presidential support scores are found in the various “vote studies” conducted by *CQ Weekly* and published in late December or early January each year.

With a seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee, English could claim a significant amount of clout in the House for his constituents. He certainly worked hard to protect their interests, even if that meant occasionally disagreeing with his party. For instance, he supported an increase in the minimum wage and home heating subsidies for low-income families.

Though he voted for the Central America Free Trade Agreement, he did so only after certain concessions were in place and he generally considered himself a supporter of “fair trade.” As such, he was willing to support tariffs on imports from China and Vietnam, a popular position in Northwest Pennsylvania. As chair of the Steel Caucus in the House, he was also a staunch defender of the steel industry. This was manifested by his support for import quotas for steel and his efforts to stop Korea from “dumping” (or using predatory pricing for) steel pipe and tubing (Barone and Cohen 2007, 1394).

Following the 2006 midterm elections, English hoped to enter the ranks of Republican leadership in the House. To do so, he made a bid to become chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC). Though that bid was unsuccessful, English was tapped to chair an NRCC task force devoted to erasing the campaign committee’s $14.4 million debt.¹

Outsider observers, such as a few local political scientists and several of the beltway handicappers such as Charlie Cook, seemed reluctant to tag English as vulnerable at the outset of the 2008 campaign. He was smart, aggressive, well-positioned on key committees, well-financed, and a moderate in a moderate district. The Cook Political Report, for example, suggested the Third District was “solidly Republican” even after Dahlkemper swamped her primary election opponents. This was likely because traditional wisdom says that incumbents lose due to overt deficiencies and glaring missteps (to be fair, Cook’s assessment slowly changed as the campaign progressed.) As noted by a prominent campaign strategist some time
ago, “Deadly sins of incumbents include excessive absences, numerous junkets, and bloated office budgets, misuse of public funds, cronyism, and voting for taxes” (Brookover, as quoted in Shea and Brooks 1995, 21). This was not Phil English; his problems did not seem obvious or significant.

The Challenger: Kathy Dahlkemper

Kathy Dahlkemper was the first woman from Northwestern Pennsylvania ever elected to Congress in her own right (i.e., not filling a spot held by a deceased husband). She was able to beat three good candidates in a heated primary—all by double digits—and to knock-off an attentive 14-year incumbent in the general election. One would assume that her background was a key factor in her victory, and it was, but not in the conventional sense. Indeed, it is difficult to pin Kathy Dahlkemper’s background into categories common among successful challengers. For one, she had never held public office prior to running for Congress. She never expressed any interest in public life prior to 2007. In fact, she had never spoken up in any public forum (letter to the editor, open city council meetings, etc.) about a public policy question, nor had she been a robust supporter of any other candidate or public figure. No one in her immediate or extended family could be called “political” and she was not the sponsored candidate of any prominent public official.

Along similar lines, Dahlkemper was not an active member in local party politics. The Erie County Democratic Committee is a viable organization, boasting several dozen active members and undertaking numerous functions throughout the year. Dahlkemper never attended party meetings and rarely took part in these events.

There was no issue or set of ideological concerns that propelled her candidacy, as is often the case with challengers. In the fall of 2007, before she had entered the race, one of the authors of this chapter (Shea) was invited to have lunch with her. Dahlkemper was interested in finding out more about the rigors of a competitive congressional campaign, as well as the broad parameters of being a member of Congress. During their 90 minute conversation Dahlkemper noted concerns about the war in Iraq, our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, the loss of jobs in the region, and what she believed to be a less-than adequate health care system. But no particular issue or a deep ideological agenda seemed at the heart of her potential candidacy. Instead, there seemed to be a general belief that it was time for new leadership and that she might have something to give. She was also concerned with the general direction of the community and about the “future for our children.” As she explained it, several friends had made passing comments that she would make a good member of Congress, and this caught her
attention. She had completed her work raising her five children, and the idea of running for Congress kept surfacing.

Nor was she wealthy, ready to conduct a robust self-financed race, as is generally the case with successful challengers. She and her husband Dan own a landscaping business, with about ten employees during peak seasons. There was no significant pool of resources from which Dahlkemper expected to draw. Nor was she a principal figure in business circles. The Dahlkempers were known and respected in the Erie business community, but there is little evidence that Kathy or Dan were leaders in that realm.

In short, Kathy Dahlkemper did not have a political base, a pool of resources to draw upon, a sponsor, or a deep connection to the local party organization. And her candidacy was not driven by a pressing issue or an ideological agenda.

So how did her background help defeat an entrenched incumbent? What resources was she able to draw upon? For one, she had a much larger base than most outside observers understood. Her deep community roots sprang from an intimate tie to the Erie Roman Catholic Dioceses. She and her family faithfully attended church and through the decades Dahlkemper had taken on numerous leadership roles in the church. The most important of these activities was her position as marriage encounter coordinator.

The Erie Dioceses, as with most Catholic dioceses across the country, regularly holds marriage encounter weekends for parishioners. As coordinators, Dan and Kathy Dahlkemper steadily broadened their network of intimate friends—not mere acquaintances, but dear friends. They were known and well-liked throughout Northwest Pennsylvania. This created a steadfast base of supporters that any local elected official would covet. And, unlike the followers of most politicians, Dahlkemper’s base was bipartisan; many of her Catholic friends were conservative Republicans. Thus, by the time she was gearing-up for her campaign, Dahlkemper was better known than each of her primary election opponents even though they were elected officials and/or leaders in the Erie legal community. We might say that her strength sprang from a veiled base, rather than an overt group of partisan supporters.

Worth brief mention, Dahlkemper’s name identification was buffeted from the recurrent television advertisements for Dahlkemper Jewelry Connection, a vibrant small business in Erie. The two families are related, though only distantly (as third cousins). Nevertheless, for most residents in Northwest Pennsylvania the name “Dahlkemper” was rather familiar.

A less tangible, but nonetheless critical resource for Dahlkemper was her understanding of the mood of the community. Having lived nearly all of her adult life in Erie, and having raised five children and owned a small business in the area, she had an intuitive sense of how things were going.
This was quite obvious in several pre-primary conversations with Shea when she articulated a growing unease with Phil English. Dahlkemper insisted that the district needed a change in leadership.

There is one other resource that may have proved quite helpful. Jim Murphy, a veteran of New York State electoral politics, once commented that the number one characteristic in successful challengers is the steadfast commitment to winning. “When you are looking for challengers to back,” noted Murphy, “the depth of their conviction says as much as anything. Successful challengers have a big heart, and are not afraid to show it” (as quoted in Shea and Brooks, 1995, 23). By all accounts, Dahlkemper was of this sort of candidate. She considered her run for months, carefully charting what it would take and her own level of commitment. Once she made the decision, she worked tirelessly. She took very few days off from long before the primary until November, and on most days put in long hours. Given the nature of her employment, Dahlkemper was able to campaign full time. She made the most of it; she certainly had heart.

The Campaign

English: Trying to Find the Right Message

Phil English’s reelection strategy had remained essentially the same through the years. First, he would take care of the district. As member of the majority for most of his time in the House, and as a member of important committees, including Ways and Means, English was afforded hefty earmarks. He also kept busy on legislation, sponsoring some 357 bills between 1995 and 2008, of which 5 were successfully enacted into law. He was skilled at advertising, which included robust use of the franking privilege and copious press releases. In 2006, for example, English sent out mailings from his congressional office totaling some $73,360.2 He would also tout his moderate voting record. English was a skillful fundraiser, too. His ability to amass a huge war chest scared off many potential opponents, often leaving the field to weaker challengers.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, English skillfully used his massive resources to create a narrative about his opponents. This followed a major axiom of campaigning: define the opponent before she can define herself. A good example of English’s adherence to this rule was his campaign against Stephen Porter, who ran against English in 2004 and 2006. Few expected Porter to mount a serious campaign, having few roots in the community and very modest resources. Nevertheless, English leveled a barrage of negative campaign ads against the retired art professor early in both campaigns. Again and again, over the airways and through direct mail,
English portrayed Porter as a radical, with irrational, if not dangerous, ideas about public policy. Regardless of whether the attacks were founded, the volume of attacks was devastating; Porter stood little chance. It was like watching a professional football team play against a high school squad.

In short, English’s reelection strategy had always been the traditional route for most incumbents: take care of the district; be visible to voters; amass a huge war chest; and define the opposition early in the campaign so that they could never recover. Money from outside groups, a critical party of most challengers’ campaigns, would sit on the sidelines. On the night that Dahlkemper won the Democratic primary, English was candid about the route to victory he would take in 2008: follow the path of prior campaigns.3

Things, however, took a different turn. For one, English’s vote total in 2006 against Stephen Porter was surprisingly small—just 54 percent. Porter was a weak candidate with very modest resources (netting about $81,000 for his 2006 race). This, combined with a growing sense that Republicans were out of favor nationally, lead to a hotly contested primary election on the Democratic side. That is to say, many Democrats smelled blood in the water and were itching for a chance to challenge English. Still, the primary was cordial and when it was over all the candidates rallied around the winner. Dahlkemper also proved somewhat adept at raising early money. While her fundraising never matched English’s (in the end she raised about one-half English’s total), by mid-spring she had raised more than Porter’s total in 2006.

Most significantly, English’s efforts to define Dahlkemper did not seem to work. His strategy to label her as a “radical liberal,” the approach used against Porter, did not seem to resonate because Dahlkemper was a pro-life, pro-gun, small business owner. Having few policy-centered lines of attack, several early negative ads in support of English, which were sponsored by the NRCC, suggested Dahlkemper had “wacky” environmental ideas.4 One ad even featured a dogsled, suggesting that if his Democratic opponent had her way few would have gasoline to drive cars. There is little evidence that this worked. As noted by one of Dahlkemper’s campaign operatives, “the polling hardly moved, and our positives remained much higher than English’s throughout the course of the campaign.”5

Thus, English’s strategy of offering himself as the moderate, common sense alternative—even if voters were not crazy about his party—stalled. By early fall it was clear that the English team understood this and a new approach was floated. During the first debate, held at Allegheny College in early October, English outlined the new strategy in his opening statement. “This district,” he said, “needs a change, and I intend to be the agent of change.”6 He went on to suggest that only those who understand the complexity of the legislative process, the ins-and-outs of Congress, could bring
meaningful change to the district. In other words, English was trying to become the change candidate; given the resonance of the “change” theme in Barack Obama’s campaign, and given only about 20 percent of Americans thought the country was headed in the right direction, one can understanding the attractiveness of this new message. Only an experienced legislator can really know how to change the system, but it seemed rather odd coming from a 14-year incumbent who originally ran for Congress supporting term limits.

At the end of the campaign the strategy continued to shift. It could be seen in his television advertisements, press releases, and in the final debate at the local public radio station. The message from English now was that he had delivered for the district, time and again, and the community would suffer if they lost their leader in Washington. For example, in the spring of 2008, he claimed credit for helping provide nearly $1 million in federal funds for sand restoration at Presque Isle State Park, the largest tourist attraction in the district. As it became clear that Obama would likely win the presidency, English also made the pitch that Republicans should be sent back to the House in order to check radical policy changes. A final line of attacks was leveled against Dahlkemper, this time attempting to paint her as wealthy and out of touch. The focus of the English campaign seemed muddled. Phil English and his supporters seemed to be throwing everything at the wall with the hope that something would stick. Likely, the inconsistency in message was due to never being able to mount a line of attack against his opponent. As his polling numbers stalled and as the attacks continued, English scrambled for any theme that would take.

Dahlkemper: “You Know Me!”

Early polling showed the race close—with Dahlkemper perhaps a few points ahead of English. Unlike most challengers, there was no hill to climb for the Democrat, but instead a lead to maintain. However, even when the results of this poll were released to the media and reported on in June showing that Dahlkemper had the support of 41 percent of likely voters, English at 40 percent, and 19 percent undecided, groups that might have been willing to spend outside money, surprisingly continued to hedge their bets and wait on the sidelines.

Early on, the Dahlkemper campaign focused on building the candidate’s credentials and local ties. A series of “bio” mailings and television spots focused on her community roots and her experience as a mother and small business owner. The message was simple: You know Kathy Dahlkemper; she’s one of us. Dahlkemper noted, “I had connections with people from all over the district—through my life.”
Perhaps concerned that their opponent would slowly rise in the polls as the election drew near, or maybe as a means to offset the attacks being leveled against their candidate, near the end of the summer the Dahlkemper campaign shifted to attack ads against English. Generally, this was a two pronged approach. First, in keeping with the theme many Democrats employed across the nation, the idea of “change” was pushed by the candidate. It was time for Phil English to step aside. Dahlkemper pounded this theme at events, press conferences and debates. Second, a series of attack ads sponsored by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) suggested English was more concerned with protecting “special interests” and “Wall Street speculators” than with protecting the residents of Northwest Pennsylvania. The message here was simple: English was out of touch, failing to protect average citizens. Democratic committee ads “were able to take on the opposition while allowing us to stay focused on the positive message of change and vision for the district,” said Tina Mengine, Dahlkemper’s campaign manager. Moreover, she noted, “because we have no input into these ads nor do we know about them in advance, each ad that ran was a surprise and usually very welcome” (Perna 2009). As Mengine notes, this type of activity is often viewed positively by candidates’ campaigns because while the party or outside group hammers away at the opponent, the candidate can remain untainted by the charge of “negative” campaigning.

When pressed to explain the overall strategy of the Dahlkemper campaign, another staffer suggested it was “all about fight[ing] off attacks and keeping our lead.” Also, “Kathy was much more popular than most of us understood. The attack ads didn’t stick because they [the voters] knew her.”

Dahlkemper’s strategy also focused on geography. As noted above voters in the Third District lean Republican, but it varies greatly from one county to the next. Dahlkemper’s campaign understood that if they could carry Erie County, roughly 50 percent of the district, by a large margin and hold their own in the other Democratic county, Mercer, they could pull it off. This proved to be a wise route, as she won Erie with nearly 57 percent of the vote and Mercer County with nearly 52 percent, but lost every other county.

Finally, it is likely that Dahlkemper benefited from support among women voters. The nuances of identity politics are complex and hard to fully discern when exit polling is unavailable, but it is clear that Hillary Clinton was quite popular in the Third District, especially among Democratic women. In the congressional primary, held the same day as the presidential primary, the margins of victory for Clinton and Dahlkemper were highly
correlated throughout the district. That is, both candidates had massive wins in the rural counties—Crawford, Venango, Butler, and Mercer. In Erie County the race between Clinton and Obama was closer, as was the margin of victory for Dahlkemper. Did this carry over to the general election? It is hard to say, but in a year when “change” dominated the political landscape (an issue discussed in greater detail below) Dahlkemper, the first women candidate for Congress from this area in decades, seemed to fit the bill.

Party Committees and Interest Groups

Faced with a serious challenge, English raised nearly $2.7 million, which was twice as much as his Democratic opponent. Though Dahlkemper’s $1.3 million was an impressive fundraising haul for a challenger, her Democratic allies appear to have been concerned about the spending disparity between the candidates. Late in the summer of 2008, the DCCC added Dahlkemper to their “Red to Blue” program of targeted House races. In the end, their financial commitment to Dahlkemper amounted to nearly $1.6 million in independent expenditures, a total that dwarfed spending by all other outside groups. Half that amount was spent in support of Dahlkemper while the other half was used for attacks against English.

AFSCME also spent independently in this race. In fact, AFSCME spent almost half a million dollars—all of which was spent opposing English—which was more than any other group, save the party committees. Of course, a number of Democratic leaning interest groups endorsed Dahlkemper. Those endorsements meant not only financial contributions to her campaign, but the commitment of volunteers for canvassing and get-out-the-vote efforts. The support of organized labor is particularly valuable in this regard and Dahlkemper lined up endorsements from nearly all of the major unions including the ALF-CIO and the United Steelworkers.

As an incumbent, English was able to raise plenty of money, but his vulnerability and the DCCC’s commitment to Dahlkemper worried the NRCC. As early as September 10, the NRCC paid for polling in the Third District, one of only two incumbent-held seats in which they were polling at that time. The NRCC ad criticizing the Democratic challenger for her “wacky” ideas about energy—its first ad of the cycle—was yet another sign that English was high on the party’s list of incumbents to protect. The DCCC responded to this ad immediately, with one accusing English of supporting the privatization of Social Security.

English also received more money from Republican leadership PACs than all but two other Republican incumbents, an indication that his colleagues recognized the trouble he faced. For its part, the NRCC spent $776,828 to help English and virtually all of that money was spent attacking
Dahlkemper. Other groups that spent independently on the Republican side, including the National Rifle Association ($91,694) and the American Medical Association ($200,338), did so entirely in support of English (rather than against Dahlkemper). Despite the assistance from the party and other outside groups, English was in serious trouble by the end of October. With just about two weeks left in the campaign, *Politico* reported that the GOP was “all but writing off” English’s seat.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, the last independent expenditure by the NRCC against Dahlkemper was made on October 24.\textsuperscript{17}

When all was said and done, Dahlkemper’s allies nearly eliminated the financial gap between her and the Republican incumbent. Democratic spending, including Dahlkemper’s, amounted to $3,496,614; Republican spending totaled $3,929,721 (see Table 2). Clearly, the independent spending efforts in support of Dahlkemper were critical to her ability to mount a serious challenge. The DCCC, in particular, was invaluable. As Dahlkemper acknowledged, “Having support from the party was very helpful, just in letting me compete on a level playing field” (Perna 2009). Without their assistance, it is quite possible that the outcome of this race would have been different.

### Table 2. Spending by Both Sides in Pennsylvania’s Third Congressional District Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Committees\textsuperscript{a}</th>
<th>Interest Groups</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dahlkemper</td>
<td>$1,592,099</td>
<td>$591,276</td>
<td>$1,313,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>$ 858,300</td>
<td>$411,450</td>
<td>$2,659,971</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a}Includes coordinated expenditures by the Pennsylvania Democratic Party (for Dahlkemper) and the Republican National Committee (for English).


### Lessons Learned

Incumbents lose, but not often. The conventional wisdom is that English got caught up in the national anti-Republican tide. All politics is local, except when it is not (we might say). He was an attentive, active representative, but he could not weather the storm against his party and the backlash against George W. Bush. Phil English had no choice but to play defense.
There is some truth to the conventional wisdom, of course. It is likely that Dahlkemper would not have entered the race if she and others in the district did not perceive a powerful national tide. She calculated that there would be a boost for any Democratic candidate. The strategic politician model played out across the nation in the fall of 2007 (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Indeed, “strategically sophisticated challengers carefully judge the vulnerability of their opponents . . .” (Goldenberg and Traugott 1986, 15). Moreover, strong potential candidates are vastly more likely to run when they see a good chance of winning seems to be have played out in this race (Maisel, Stone, and Maestas 2001).

In addition, outside groups might not have been able to bolster Dahlkemper’s efforts if the Democratic advantage had not been as big as it was in 2008. Because there was more energy and excitement among Democrats than among Republicans, the Democratic Party and its allies were flush with money. With more money to spend than their opponents, the Democrats could compete in more races than could the GOP. So the national tide had very practical implications for the resources available on the challenger’s side of this race.

But did voters kick their 14-year incumbent out of office simply out of a desire for change? Did Barack Obama’s message trickle down to Northwest Pennsylvania and did his coattails pull Dahlkemper along? Perhaps, but one should bear in mind that Barack Obama lost the Third Congressional District of Pennsylvania. He carried Erie County, but was badly beaten in all of the other counties (though he performed better than John Kerry had done in nearly every part of the district). Indeed, Dahlkemper ran ahead of Obama in some counties. In Butler County, for instance, Obama received 35.7 percent of the vote, compared to Dahlkemper’s 48.1 percent. Many scholars have found only modest evidence to suggest a direct connection between national tides and local voting trends (see Jacobson 1987 and 1992, for example). Additionally, if the tide was so strong, how did some Republicans stay afloat? Again, English was a competent, moderate legislator.

Another explanation might be that English ran a poor campaign. Ed Brookover, the former Political Director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee and Regional Political Director of the Republican National Committee once noted, “There is nothing more pleasing, from the point of view of a strategist, than to work against an incumbent who runs the same campaign again and again” (Shea and Brooks, 1995, 24). English surely began his campaign against Dahlkemper the same way that he had confronted other opponents. When that did not work, his campaign appeared to panic and flailed from strategy to strategy until it ended up with a terribly inconsistent message.
The most likely explanation contains elements of each. There was a tsunami against all GOP candidates and English was in trouble even before the Democratic primary. His team, however, probably surmised that they could survive by relying on their ability to use hefty resources to define the opponent. This would keep outside Democratic money on the sidelines and push voters to see Dahlkemper as too risky. The problem was that attacks on Dahlkemper did not stick. She was too well-known and respected in the district. Over nearly two decades she had broadened her community roots into a solid foundation. She was a political neophyte, but a known neophyte. As months passed and Dahlkemper maintained her strength, her campaign caught the attention of the DCCC, AFSCME, and other contributors. This outside money was critical in helping to neutralize English’s last-minute media blitz.

The core lesson of the race, then, is that national trends can shape local contests, but alone they cannot determine the outcome of these races. Other factors such as the quality of the candidates and the effectiveness of their campaigns also matter. For an incumbent free of scandal or controversy to lose, all of these elements must be present. In the Third Congressional District of Pennsylvania in 2008, they were.

NOTES

5 Michael Burton, personal interview March 17, 2009.
6 Response to a question in the first debate at Allegheny College, October 12, 2008.
10 Michael Burton, personal interview March 17, 2009.
REFERENCES


Incumbency is No Advantage: Michigan’s 7th Congressional District

David A. Dulio and John S. Klemanski

Introduction

In the four elections from 2002 through 2008, four different candidates were elected to the United States House of Representatives seat representing the Michigan’s 7th congressional district. Such turnover is rare in U.S. House races, where a large majority of incumbents easily win reelection and many districts are not considered to be competitive. In fact, the 7th district is the only one in the nation that has seen this type of turnover in this four-election span. The turnover in representation has occurred even though the district has been considered a leaning Republican district after both the 1992 and 2002 re-districting plans went into effect. The district’s turnover in representatives is due in part to the nature of the district and its voters, but also because of the candidates in each election, and a combination of events that began after the 2002 election.

First, Republican Nick Smith was elected from this district in each election from 1992 through 2002. After the 2002 election, Smith announced that he would retire as part of a promise he made during his first campaign to serve only six terms. Republican John J.H. (Joe) Schwarz, a moderate Republican former state senator from Battle Creek, beat five other candidates in the 2004 primary, and then won the general election with 58 percent of the vote. The one-term incumbent, however, faced a serious challenge from within the Republican Party ranks in 2006. One of Schwarz’s primary challengers in 2004 was former state representative Timothy Walberg, a staunch social and fiscal conservative who was able to oust Schwarz in the 2006 primary and then win a close general election with just 50 percent of the vote.

In the 2008 election, voters in Michigan’s 7th district contributed to the Democratic Party’s expansion of their majorities in both houses of Congress by electing Democrat Mark Schauer over the one-term Republican incumbent Walberg. There were macro-political and economic factors, along
with micro-political campaign factors specific to the candidates and the
district that helped influence the specific interplay of strategic decision-
making made by each candidate, all of which contributed to Rep. Walberg’s
loss in 2008. In order to better understand how a Democratic challenger beat
an incumbent Republican in the 2008 election, we will examine each in turn.

The Michigan 7th U.S. House District

Michigan’s 7th congressional district is located in the south-central part
of the state. It is largely small-town and rural, so it is not surprising that the
district has been considered a Republican district since the 1990s (Figure 1).
The district is comprised of all or fairly large parts of seven counties. The
district includes three conservative “southern tier” counties—Branch,
Hillsdale, and Lenawee—along with the more moderate, but still Republican
leaning, Jackson County. Calhoun County, where the city of Battle Creek is
located, is a relatively high-population area that is the most Democratic part
of the district. Battle Creek is the district’s largest city, mostly blue-collar,
and home of 2008 Democratic candidate Mark Schauer. The district also
includes Eaton County, mostly rural in the past, but moving towards the
Democrats as the nearby Lansing-area population has moved further away
from the city into the surrounding suburbs and rural areas. Moreover, a large
General Motors factory employing about 3,000 workers is located in Eaton
County’s Delta Township, which further shifted the county towards the
Democrats. Finally, a portion of Washtenaw County that includes the near-
northern and western areas surrounding the highly Democratic city of Ann
Arbor is at the eastern end of the district.

District Characteristics

The latest round of redistricting did not have a major impact on the
make-up of the 7th, but it did pick up some voters from western Washtenaw
County. This change likely moved the district towards the Democrats a bit,
but the character of the district has remained small-town and rural, with
enough conservative voters for it to remain a Republican-leaning district.
The district has been described by Congressional Quarterly as “. . . small
towns, farming communities, and a few midsize cities. . . . Auto parts manu-
facturing drives small-town economies, especially in Jackson. Outside the
cities and towns, expansive fields of soybeans and corn dominate the rest of
the 7th, which is the state’s leading producer of both crops” (Koszczuk and
Angle 2003, 521).
Census data indicate that almost half (46.3 percent) of the district’s
population lives in rural areas—over twice that of the U.S. as a whole.
Figure 1. The Michigan 7th Congressional District
Almost 90 percent of the district’s population is white, with an estimated 6.6 percent black population in 2007. The district’s unemployment rate in 2007 was 7.9 percent, with 12.2 percent of the population living under the poverty level.

Despite its distance from the metropolitan Detroit area, many communities in the district have continued to rely on the automobile industry for its economic livelihood. Most of the automotive-related work has featured small-scale auto suppliers and job shops related to auto manufacturing. These small shops include stamping operations, sheet metal fabrication, automobile parts manufacturing, and producing automotive sealants and adhesives. These businesses have been substantially hurt over the past 5-10 years because of the downturn in the automobile industry in the U.S. and specifically in the state of Michigan. Not surprisingly, the area also has been hurt economically in part because of free trade policies such as the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and trade policy’s impact on the U.S. domestic auto industry became a major campaign issue in 2008.1 The most recent economic crisis that became so evident in late 2008 will only create further hardships in the 7th district in the future.

District Politics

The Michigan 7th district has largely been conservative and Republican leaning, given its rural and small town nature. But the district also has a split personality of sorts. It does not appear to have a social, economic, or political cohesiveness that is found in many congressional districts in the U.S. One identifiable component of the district includes the three southernmost counties in the district. Branch, Hillsdale, and Lenawee counties all border Indiana or Ohio, are small-town/rural, and are considered to be the centers of social conservatism in the district. Another component of the district includes the city of Jackson and Jackson County, both of which contain a large Catholic voting bloc and represent a Catholic-based version of conservatism among the district’s Republican voters.

In the more moderate and Democratic part of the district, Calhoun County is located in the northwest part of the district, Eaton County is located in the northeast, and the Washtenaw County portion of the district is in the eastern part of the district. However, these are not geographically contiguous areas, nor are they cohesive on economic and political dimensions. This lack of a unified district identity was not necessarily created on purpose through gerrymandering, at least according to some. Former 7th district Representative Joe Schwarz bemoaned the lack of unity in the district, but does not believe the district was drawn that way on purpose. Schwarz noted:
The district has lots of differences both north and south and east and west. . . . This district is not cohesive historically or ideologically. The west part of the district doesn’t think about the east part and vice-versa. The district is so bad, I don’t even consider it to be gerrymandered. It was put together with scraps from here and there. It’s a bunch of leftovers.²

Understanding the 2008 election results cannot be accomplished without examining the earlier district elections—especially the 2004 election. Republican Nick Smith’s tenure as Representative would end once he completed his term of office after the 2002 election. In many ways, this decision set in motion a series of events that led to a Tim Walberg versus Mark Schauer contest in 2008. For the 2004 election, Nick Smith tapped his son Brad as his successor. However, six Republicans entered the 2004 primary election. The candidates were considered to be quite conservative (including Brad Smith), except for former State Senator Joe Schwarz—a Republican with moderate bona fides including pro-choice, pro-gay rights, and pro-stem cell research positions. When asked to compare ideology to his five 2004 Republican primary opponents, former Rep. Schwarz said, “People used to ask me how I won that primary. I used to say that there weren’t six people in that primary, there were seven. There was me, and there was Attila the Hun, and then there were five guys to the right of Attila the Hun.”³ The other candidates split the conservative vote in the 2004 primary, allowing Schwarz to win with 28 percent of the vote. Brad Smith finished with 22 percent. Schwarz then beat organic farmer Sharon Renier (D) in the general election, winning 58 percent to 36 percent. For a Republican, Schwarz did well in counties that were Democratic or trending that way—Calhoun, Eaton, and Washtenaw.

The 2006 Election: An Incumbent Loses in the Primary

Among the conservative candidates in the 2004 primary was Tim Walberg, a nondenominational pastor⁴ and former Michigan state representative from the small town of Tipton, Michigan. Walberg had placed third in the crowded 2004 primary, and ran an aggressive campaign in a head-to-head contest against Schwarz in the 2006 Republican primary as a social and fiscal conservative. He did not hide his opposition to gay marriage and abortion, against amnesty for illegal immigrants, and in support of tax cuts and reduced pork barrel spending. This created a marked contrast to Schwarz’s views. Schwarz was supported in the election by robo-calls (automated telephone calls) to voters from First Lady Laura Bush and a district appearance by U.S. Senator John McCain (Schwarz had chaired McCain’s presidential primary campaign organization in Michigan in 2000). Walberg beat Schwarz 40 to 35 percent in the 2006 primary, in large part by attacking
Schwarz’s positions on social issues and by mobilizing the conservative voters in the district. Schwarz refused to endorse Walberg in the 2006 general election, in part because of the negative advertising against him during the primary campaign.

The Washington, DC-based Club for Growth was a factor throughout the 2006 campaign, providing financial support to Walberg, and sponsoring negative ads against Schwarz in the primary and then again against Democrat Sharon Renier in the general election. Walberg narrowly defeated Renier 50 percent to 46 percent, but spent far more ($1,260,111) than Renier ($55,682). Some later observed that the fact that an underfunded, relatively unknown candidate could come so close to winning suggested that Walberg was vulnerable. Indeed, Ken Brock, an advisor to the 2008 Schauer campaign, put it this way: “Because of his conservative politics, Walberg is a great fit for a Republican primary in the 7th District, but he’s a lousy fit for a general election.”

The results of the 2006 election made the Democrats look more closely at their prospects for the 2008 election, and by the end of 2007 the 7th district was seen as a prime target for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC). By this time, the DCCC had 40 GOP-held seats on its list of most vulnerable targets and Tim Walberg was at or near the top. The district fit many of the criteria the DCCC set out for being on the list of target districts, but most important here was the candidate. An important reason for the targeting of the 7th was the 2008 challenger Mark Schauer. While the DCCC did contact Mark Schauer about running in 2008, he argued that his motivation came primarily from the district’s constituents. Schauer noted:

The DCCC had periodically recruited me—but I was clear that I didn’t want to run for Congress. They had put out feelers in 2006, and then they contacted me again in the 2008 cycle. . . . As I watched Tim Walberg in action establishing a record that was so out of sync with the district and missing opportunities to help people in the district, plus the intensity of requests from constituents in my district, I finally started to listen. I think ultimately, it was more a decision that came because of my constituents more than from Washington.

The Strategic and Issue Environments

The strategic environment at the start of the campaign in the 7th district favored Mark Schauer dramatically, as it did for most Democratic challengers in 2008. In addition to a strong challenger from the opposing party, Tim Walberg would have other considerations to battle than simply a well-funded challenge from a quality candidate. Much like other Republicans
Incumbency is No Advantage: Michigan’s 7th

around the nation, Tim Walberg was saddled with a Republican brand that was slumping. George W. Bush had low approval ratings from district voters—he had only 37 percent approval as of February 2008—and would likely be a drag on the rest of the GOP ticket. Nearly 80 percent of district residents said that the nation was off on the wrong track, which is typically bad news for incumbents. More importantly, Walberg’s own approval ratings were low. In the same February poll, he was given a positive approval rating by only 39 percent of district residents and 38 percent gave him a negative job approval rating. An incumbent with ratings like these is in for a tough reelection battle.  

Early ballot tests did not give Walberg much more to be optimistic about. When respondents were asked who they would vote for in the congressional race had it been held that day, Walberg had an advantage of 51 percent to 40 percent over Schauer. While an incumbent always likes to hear that he or she has support of a majority of voters, at this point, Schauer was relatively unknown in many parts of the district, except his home county of Calhoun. An analyst from the polling firm that conducted the early poll noted the concern the Walberg campaign should have had: “If I were in Tim Walberg’s camp, I would have grave concerns at this point that a relatively unknown Democrat in a traditionally Republican district can match up so competitively.”

As the fall campaign began after the August primary, the sentiment of the district had not improved much, if at all. Bush was still unpopular with only 24 percent approval and Walberg’s job approval numbers actually went down to only 32 percent saying he was doing an “excellent” or “pretty good” job; 43 percent said he was doing “just fair” or “poor.” Moreover, the ballot test was down to a two point margin. In August, poll results for the ballot test after respondents’ heard the candidate biographies, Walberg was doing well (leading 68 to 24) in Branch and Hillsdale counties—his core support in the strong conservative areas—but was leading only 46 to 35 in Lenawee and in the heavily Catholic Jackson County was up by only one point. These poll results certainly validated the ratings by prognosticators such as Charlie Cook and Stuart Rothenberg that the race was a toss up. At the time of this poll, EPIC-MRA pollster Bernie Porn argued that for Walberg to be successful, he would have to go on the offensive and make Schauer the issue.

The voters of the 7th congressional district cared about one issue during this campaign—the economy and jobs. As we have noted, Michigan was feeling the effects of a weak economy months or even years before the national economic crisis hit in September of 2008. Citizens of the 7th district were watching jobs disappear for years while the national economy was still creating them, and Michigan was the only state with a shrinking GDP in
2006. One report in the *Detroit News* on June 13, 2007 noted that, “Michigan’s one-state recession is now three years old and counting.”

Poll results from February 2008 illustrate this clearly. While the economy became a central issue nationally late in the campaign’s season, it was clear this would be *the* issue in this election a full nine months before Election Day. The next most-often mentioned issues (protecting the country from terrorism and making quality health care available to everyone) were nearly 30 points behind the economy and jobs. All other issues—war in Iraq, family values, education, taxes, and the environment—were considered to be most important by less than ten percent of survey respondents. The importance of jobs and the economy was not constant through the district, however; it was more important in some areas of this split-personality district. In Branch, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties, a majority of poll respondents said the economy was the most important issue, while in Calhoun County less than 25 percent said the same. In Calhoun County, Mark Schauer’s home, protecting America from terrorism was a close second with 21 percent, while in Lenawee County, health care was a second with 23 percent.

**Candidate Issues**

These data should have been a signal to both candidates as to which issue they should focus their message. Only one candidate was able to really address the worries of the voters during this campaign, however. There was both good and bad news in the poll numbers cited above for Tim Walberg. John Petrocik’s (1996) theory of issue ownership tells us that the different parties “own” certain issues because the public trusts that party to handle the issue better than the other party. The good news was that one of those most-mentioned issues favored Tim Walberg in Petrocik’s categorization of owned issues. According to Petrocik, Republicans have an advantage on foreign and defense policy, of which protecting the public from terrorism is an important piece. Terrorism is also an issue Republicans had used to their advantage in the 2002 and 2004 elections. This might have been an opportunity for Walberg—a portion of the electorate, and a sizable one on his opponent’s home turf, was worried about a solidly GOP issue.

The bad news for Walberg was that the most-cited important issue—the economy—was not a Republican-owned issue. The economy, according to Petrocik, is not a Democrat-owned issue either. Rather, it is what Petrocik calls a “performance issue,” where neither party owns the issue but one party can take out a short term “lease” on the issue based on how the party in power had performed. Clearly, the national electorate had placed blame with Republicans for the declining state of the economy; this was less clear in Michigan, however, because the state’s governor, Democrat Jennifer
Incumbency is No Advantage: Michigan’s 7th

Granholm, did not have high approval ratings either. The candidate who could address voter concerns about the economy would be in a better position to win the seat.

Tim Walberg discussed a number of issues during the course of the campaign including energy, social security, and taxes. Some of his television ads also made reference to the economy, but his message varied throughout the campaign. For instance, his early television ads mentioned issues such as energy—including his No More Excuses Energy Act, which he introduced in the House—as well as a vote Schauer made in the state Senate that Walberg said would have allowed adults to send pornography to minors over the Internet. Walberg also tried to use the issue of energy during the summer when gas prices reached a record-high $4 per gallon. He touted his energy plan in the aforementioned ad, and also made a point of riding his Harley Davidson motorcycle during a week-long campaign tour of the district.

Walberg’s ad focusing on energy was the first one the campaign aired and the one focusing on values was the third. Some early ads also mentioned taxes quite a bit. The problem with these ads is that they were not issues the public was concerned about. In the February poll noted above, only seven percent of respondents said promoting morality and family values was their biggest worry and only three percent said the same about keeping federal taxes low. These were Walberg’s two biggest bread-and-butter issues. While the February poll was conducted months before Walberg had likely outlined his message and before these ads began to run, the importance of the economy and the secondary nature of the issues he featured only became more entrenched in the voters’ minds.  

The ads focusing on taxes did reference the economy but the focus of the ad was certainly taxes more than the economy. Walberg’s ads on the economy went after Schauer for voting to raise taxes during his time in the state Senate. One ad featured the following audio:

Tim Walberg understands the key to a strong economy is keeping taxes down and encouraging business to create jobs. Mark Schauer. He was the deciding vote. The deciding vote for the largest tax increase in Michigan history. Raising income and small business taxes. It’s been devastating for the Michigan economy. Schauer wants to raise taxes again. This plant, these jobs, our survival is in jeopardy if we let him.

Other ads also featured a link to the economy through a lens of taxes. According to pollster Bernie Porn, the tax issue “was not an issue that resonated. As a matter of fact, most polling showed that Obama was preferred over McCain among those who were concerned about taxes. And when you asked questions testing messages. . . . Democrats were at least even if not running ahead on the tax issue. . . .”
Moreover, the Walberg campaign did not focus their attention to taxes until late in the campaign. Schauer advisor Ken Brock argued that the decision by the Walberg campaign to turn to taxes is what made the race competitive in the last two weeks.

The race actually ended up tighter than our polling indicated. And the Republicans saw something in this race that we weren’t picking up. . . . Now, I would have never would have predicted a 10-point victory, but I thought we’d be more in the 5, 6, 7, not 2, 3 [point] range. And I think what did it for ‘em is that they finally got their message act together in the last two, three weeks . . . on the single message of taxes. 17

Even so, the tax issue was not the best way to connect with voters on the issue of the economy. Pollster Bernie Porn notes that, “People did not think about taxes . . . in the election in terms of their economic fears. Their economic fears were based on their personal fear out of potentially losing their jobs and the uncertainty of what was happening with the financial markets.” 18

At the start of the fall campaign, the Schauer campaign tied into the theme Barack Obama was having such success with, noting immediately after his primary victory, “This campaign is about change, and this district is represented by a stubborn ideologue who is a part of the problem, part of why Washington is broken.” 19 Schauer worked the Democratic mantra of change into the 7th district by focusing on economic policy, specifically trade policy and vowed to try and alter it if elected to Congress. The Schauer campaign was focused on one issue in most of their communications—the economy and jobs. More importantly, they focused on the issue by framing it in terms of trade, which was an important issue to the district. As we have noted, portions of the 7th district relied heavily on manufacturing jobs as a source of employment. As in many manufacturing areas, the loss of jobs was blamed on trade policy, including the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The NAFTA issue was a common theme in all aspects of the Schauer campaign. It appeared in TV ads as well as other communications, and brought up in debates and other appearances. An exchange in the first debate between the two candidates summarizes each one’s issue priorities.

Walberg criticized the business climate in the state, while Schauer said many of the problems were caused by outside factors. “Trade is a major issue that needs to be addressed, NAFTA and China” . . . "It’s partly bad choices (by business) and part bad trade policies that must be changed." . . . Walberg said Inc. magazine listed Michigan as having the third worst business climate in the country—ahead of only California and New York. He blamed that on high business taxes and an unfriendly regulatory climate. 20
Schauer advisor Ken Brock said focusing on the economy and trade was their strategy from the beginning: “... from a positive messaging standpoint, [the best strategy we had] was to essentially own the trade and economic issues in the beginning and ... to not let it go, not to get distracted by other peripheral issues”; in short, “if this is a race about jobs and trade, we win.” The Schauer campaign adhered to this strategy throughout the campaign and continually hit Walberg (and Republicans generally) on the issue of jobs by talking about trade and outsourcing. In all, Schauer aired eight television commercials, and each one of them mentioned the most important issue to the people of the 7th district—jobs and the economy.

One of Schauer’s first ads was a positive ad that introduced him to the parts of the district that were unfamiliar to him and included the following audio:

While Michigan’s economy gets ignored in Washington, here in Michigan Mark Schauer is working to turn things around by creating tax incentives and cutting red tape. Mark Schauer is keeping jobs here: 60 new jobs in Brooklyn, 107 manufacturing jobs kept in Homer, 379 aviation jobs in Battle Creek. Our economy has a long way to go, that’s why in Congress Mark Schauer will keep fighting to turn Michigan around one job at a time.

Schauer also aired attack ads against Walberg by arguing he supported unfair trade deals and outsourcing:

Unfair trade policies are costing us jobs. A recent study reported 319,000 jobs were lost last year alone. Everyone gets that except for Tim Walberg. Tim Walberg and his free-trading buddies think outsourcing has been good for our economy. Maybe we should outsource Tim Walberg. Mark Schauer knows that outsourcing is killing our economy and devastating Michigan families. In Congress, Mark Schauer will fight against unfair trade policies and focus on creating good jobs here.

**The Impact of George W. Bush**

Interestingly, President Bush and his policies were not mentioned specifically by the Schauer campaign. Schauer advisor Ken Brock, noted that the campaign did not do too much to tie Walberg to President Bush:

We did a little bit of that. As I look back there was maybe one ad with that Bush-linkage stuff. But ... we tended to take it to him on the issues specific [to the district]. We had him on some pretty good quotes on trade, for example. Because he was linked to Club for Growth, we had some pretty juicy economic and trade [quotes] directly from him. So our attack lines on him were not exactly Bush-specific or Bush-generic.
In a reversal of how campaigns played out across the country, incumbent Tim Walberg proudly touted his allegiance to President Bush throughout most of the campaign. Even as late as October, when it was clear just how big a liability Bush would be to Republicans, Walberg maintained his support of the president. In the debate noted above, Walberg kept up rhetorical support for the Bush administration, especially on Iraq. Walberg argued that the troop surge had worked, resulting in a much more stable country, and that the war needed to be won. Schauer countered that argument with a call for a timetable for withdraw.

Walberg’s strong rhetorical support for Bush came with one exception. During the first debate between the two candidates, each was asked how they had disagreed with their party leader in the past. Walberg was quick to give four examples of when he did not follow the president: The Water Resources Development Act, the Farm Bill, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the Wall Street Bailout bill. These positions, however, fit with Walberg’s ideology—the votes against NCLB and the Wall Street bailout were votes against an increasing role of the federal government—and the votes for the Water Resources Development Act and the Farm Bill were both driven by constituency interests. Walberg did support Bush, but not as much as one might think when it came to casting votes on the floor of the House; he had a presidential support score of only 68 during 2008, down from 84 in 2007 (even in 2007, there were only 68 House Republicans with higher support scores). Rhetorically, however, as we noted earlier, he was quick to stand with the president.

Money in the 7th Congressional District

Both candidates were very well funded for this campaign. In total, Tim Walberg raised $2,021,793, while Mark Schauer brought in $2,198,909 in contributions. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, this marked one of only 14 races where the challenger candidate outraised the incumbent. Walberg ended the 2006 cycle with $37,961 in cash on hand; he raised another $266,772 by the time Mark Schauer decided to enter the race in August of 2007. At that point, Walberg had a fundraising lead of $240,784 on Schauer. In this case, Walberg did not do the first thing that incumbents need to do to protect their seats—raise early money. Normally, incumbents’ war chests scare off potential challengers because they can be almost insurmountable. This was not the case with Schauer, however. First, the lead that Walberg had was not as daunting as that faced by other challengers. And second, Schauer quickly made up ground. In fact, in every fundraising period after he entered the race, Schauer outraised Walberg (see Table 1).
### Table 1. Schauer and Walberg Fundraising Totals by Quarter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark Schauer</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising this period</td>
<td>$323,349</td>
<td>$419,504</td>
<td>$428,054</td>
<td>$301,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising to date</td>
<td>$561,376</td>
<td>884,850</td>
<td>1,303,345</td>
<td>1,731,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash on hand</td>
<td>501,563</td>
<td>751,359</td>
<td>928,686</td>
<td>856,148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tim Walberg</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising this period</td>
<td>264,895</td>
<td>363,441</td>
<td>309,541</td>
<td>365,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising to date</td>
<td>557,756</td>
<td>822,651</td>
<td>1,186,093</td>
<td>1,495,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash on hand</td>
<td>438,005</td>
<td>604,466</td>
<td>855,137</td>
<td>691,635</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Federal Election Commission
By April of the election year, Schauer had shown himself to be a serious candidate and threat to Walberg simply by raising the amount of money he did. The early returns on Walberg’s fundraising were not so optimistic. By the end of 2007, Schauer was ahead of Walberg in dollars raised and cash on hand. David Wasserman of the nonpartisan Cook Political Report warned that for Walberg, “that’s not a good omen at the beginning of the year” and that “Walberg should be doing better than he is right now. At this point, most freshmen have raised considerably more money, even those in noncompetitive districts.” Walberg did step up his fundraising pace making the total dollars raised by the candidates nearly equal.

Both candidates raised money from political action committees (PACs) and individuals in roughly equal ratios. Walberg’s single biggest donor was Club for Growth, with contributions totaling over $153,000. This should be no surprise since Club for Growth had such an important role in electing Walberg to Congress two years earlier. Former Michigan gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos’ company, Alticor, and its employees gave Walberg another $13,300; a litany of other PACs provided the maximum $10,000 in contributions. A long list of labor groups and traditionally Democratic groups (e.g., NARAL) were top contributors to Mark Schauer’s campaign. However, the single biggest source of Schauer’s money was ActBlue, a Web site which funneled nearly $400,000 to his coffers by allowing donors to bundle their contributions together.

Candidate Spending in the 7th District

These fundraising successes allowed both candidates to do nearly everything they would have liked from a tactical standpoint. The Walberg campaign spent nearly $1.3 million on paid electronic media (TV and radio). Walberg also spent over $270,000 on direct mail—this sum combines funds spent for fundraising solicitations as well as persuasion mail. These figures are much higher than the average candidate in congressional elections who spends only about 56 percent on communication (Herrnson 2008). Another large chunk of money ($154,000) in the Walberg campaign budget was spent on outside consultants, while only a relatively small amount was spent on staff inside the campaign (FEC records show only two paid staffers throughout the campaign with total payments of $31,000). Over $50,000 was spent on voter lists and data, presumably to help the campaign target voters with mail pieces.

The Schauer campaign was also able to spend large sums to develop and communicate its message. Nearly $125,000 was spent on research to help develop the candidate’s message in the form of polling and opposition research. Another $12,000 was spent on voter lists and data that could help
identify important target groups within the district. Communication, however, took up the largest share of the budget. Over two-thirds of the Schauer campaign’s total budget was spent on paid electronic media (TV and radio). Moreover, almost $67,000 was spent on direct mail and other printed materials that would also spread the candidate’s message. The Schauer campaign also paid over $250,000 to staff in the district (including health care benefits) as well as over $35,000 in consulting fees.

An important strategic point about this district that helps explain the large sums spent on electronic media is the nature of the media market coverage of the district. To advertise to all potential voters, the campaigns had to buy time on broadcast networks in four separate media markets, three of which contained only small portions of the district. Roughly 40 percent of the district is covered by the Lansing / Jackson media market, the other 60 percent of the district is covered by the Grand Rapids / Kalamazoo / Battle Creek (25 percent), Detroit (15 percent), and Toledo, Ohio (10 percent) markets. This creates quite a fractured district in terms of media markets and poses a problem for the campaigns. In order to cover the district with broadcast television, campaigns would have to buy time on network affiliates in all four markets, at least two (Detroit and Toledo) of which are very inefficient in that huge numbers of viewers in those markets are not even eligible to vote for their candidate.

The nature of the media markets in this district made it so that campaigns had to make very difficult decisions on where and how to spend their money. Even with over $2 million for a congressional race, every penny mattered. For instance, the Schauer campaign decided not to buy time in the Detroit media market, which would have covered western Washtenaw County, the part of the district that included the suburbs of Ann Arbor. According to Schauer advisor Ken Brock, the nature of the media market matrix created some difficult choices that had to be made:

> You really have to run four different campaigns. The mix of your media and how long you can be on the air and in the mailboxes . . . in the Lansing / Jackson media market is different than in the Grand Rapids media market. We never went on broadcast TV in Detroit, we did for a very short time in the Toledo market and so that impacts your direct mail budget in each of those media markets. . . . Obviously, if you are doing a lot of broadcast TV you don’t have to do quite as much direct mail, and in places where you can’t do broadcast TV you are doing more direct mail.30

The decision not to go on the air in the expensive and inefficient Detroit media market was likely driven by the nature of the voters in that part of the district—recall Ann Arbor is a heavily Democratic area—and the fact that the campaign felt it had enough coverage in their mail.
Outside Money Pours into the District

The 7th district has a history of outside money playing a part in congressional elections; recall that the Club for Growth spent over $1 million in 2006 to help Tim Walberg defeat Joe Schwarz in the GOP primary. The 2008 campaign was no different, as many different outside groups dropped money into the district. In fact, the Michigan 7th saw the fifth largest amount of outside money spent during this cycle. The Club for Growth again was involved in the 7th, as in the first part of October, the group went on the air with an ad buy of roughly $175,000 in the Lansing market and on cable TV that attacked Schauer’s record on taxes. The Club’s entrance into the race may have actually hurt Walberg, as this was the one thing that former Rep. Schwarz said would make him cross party lines and endorse Schauer, which he did. In addition, National Right to Life spent about $20,000 on a mail piece for Walberg, and the National Rifle Association spent about $10,000 to support Walberg.

On the Democratic side, there was a good deal more outside money. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) spent roughly half a million dollars on ads opposing Walberg. Interestingly, the ads went after Walberg on his main issue of taxes by claiming that Walberg voted to keep a tax loophole for “Wall Street Fat Cats” rather than tax cuts for 22 million families, and creating a tie between Walberg and donations from individuals from Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch. Patriot Majority Midwest, a left leaning 527 committee, spent nearly $300,000 opposing Walberg for his vote on a bill in the House on the Head Start educational program. Health Care for America Now! (HCAN) also spent $475,000 on ads critical of Walberg.

The presence of outside groups is not always a benefit for the candidates they are trying to help. Sometimes, the message of the outside group does not mesh with that of the candidate and it is a distraction from what the campaigns want to discuss (Gill 1998). This was particularly true from the perspective of the Walberg campaign. According to advisor Ken Brock:

> On our side there were times where I had frustration, quite frankly. . . . We were driving one message and they were off doing other stuff. . . . HCAN . . . had a beautiful health care message attacking Walberg, but it wasn’t quite dead on message because were trying to drive jobs and trade and they were talking about health care. . . . It helped . . . but it wasn’t spot on.

This frustration stems from the rules that allow these groups to spend unlimited funds advocating for or against a candidate. Namely, if a group is going to make independent expenditures, they cannot coordinate or have any
contact with the campaign. As Brock notes, his frustration came from his team not being “on the same page.”

Large sums were spent by both Hill Committees—the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC). The DCCC spent $1.7 million in support of Schauer while the NRCC spent $1.4 million. The NRCC invested a great deal in trying to keep Walberg in his seat only to pull their funding in the last weeks of the campaign. Even after pulling their funds, Walberg was one of only four GOP House candidates who received more than $1 million in help from the NRCC and ended up second in total support from the party. While the DCCC spent a lot in the 7th, they spent large sums elsewhere as well—Schauer was only one of 35 Democrats that received more than $1 million in party aid—which illustrates the large advantage in fundraising Democrats had nationally. A full accounting of the total funds spent shows that when all was said and done, between the candidates’ funds, outside groups’ independent expenditures, and party committee spending the campaigns were on roughly equal in terms of spending with roughly $5.5 million being spent on both sides for a total of $11 million.

**Impact of the Presidential Race**

For the last several presidential election cycles, Michigan has been one of the “battleground” states that the presidential campaigns targeted with resources including money, volunteers and staff, and candidate visits. These important resources can bring paid media campaigns that spread a party message, workers for get-out-the-vote efforts and other mobilization activities close to election day, and enthusiasm for the party’s base. Voters in Michigan were set for the more of the same—wall-to-wall television ads from the presidential campaigns and frequent visits by the candidates—in 2008. The candidates in congressional races around the state, including the 7th congressional district, were hoping to benefit from the presence of their party’s standard bearer.

For much of the summer and into the fall this was the case. Both campaigns were on the air in many of the media markets in the state including ones that covered the 7th district and candidates made visits in the state expecting it to once again be a tough battle for the state’s 17 electoral votes. This all changed in the first week of October when the McCain campaign announced it was pulling its resources from the state of Michigan to increase spending in other states deemed more competitive.

Tim Walberg was clear about his hopes for working with the McCain campaign. He told the *Ann Arbor News* in early September before McCain’s withdrawal: “We’ll help him and he’ll help us, there’s no doubt about it. . . .
I think his message will truly resonate with people who want to have reform in Washington. He’s not afraid to take anyone on.”

According to the story, Walberg hoped he could take advantage of McCain’s success in Michigan, and Washtenaw County specifically, during the 2000 presidential primary. Clearly, he was looking to pick up the votes of some moderate partisans and independents that he had struggled to connect with to that point. Mark Schauer attempted to capitalize on and take advantage of the excitement and enthusiasm associated with Barack Obama’s candidacy. This was especially true among young voters as there are several colleges and universities in the district. Pollster Bernie Porn noted the potential impact:

There’s a real intensity in terms of the intent to turn out voters, especially African-Americans and younger voters . . . and you can see that in the numbers of new registrants. They’re voting for Obama. We can’t assume they’ll vote Democratic down the ticket but I would be surprised if they didn’t.

The McCain campaign’s decision to pull out of the state had a dramatic effect on the race in the 7th district. Now, instead of both candidates rallying support and trying to energize the base, only the Obama campaign was left in Michigan. This had a two-fold impact. First, the resources that could have helped Tim Walberg while John McCain battled to win statewide were gone. Second, and more importantly, any excitement and motivation that was present among Republicans in the state also was gone. As long-time Michigan political analyst Bill Ballenger noted: “Any time your standard bearer . . . throws up the white flag and says ‘I quit,’ and leaves the field of battle, it has to be a body blow to the whole party, on down to the candidates.”

Interestingly, the Obama campaign, buoyed by their tremendous advantage in campaign resources, stayed active in Michigan. They stayed on the air and kept much of their staff in the state, thus keeping up the excitement in the Democratic base. Schauer beat Walberg by less than 7,500 votes, or about 2 percent. He certainly benefited from the Obama campaign’s continued presence in the district. Would the outcome of the race have been different had McCain stayed in Michigan? That is a more difficult question to answer. Obama’s strength and appeal were difficult to combat, especially given Walberg’s strong conservative record. Schauer may have won anyway since Walberg was in electoral trouble even without the presidential contest as a factor in the race. But when Schauer had the added advantage of the Obama campaign’s resources and excitement Walberg’s fate was likely sealed.

Conclusion

Tim Walberg was defeated on November 4, 2008 by a margin of 48.8 percent to 46.5 percent of the vote, marking the fourth time in four elections
that the citizens of the 7th congressional district had elected a new member of Congress. A number of factors contributed to Walberg’s loss in 2008 that were tied to trends in the district and voters, national-level political factors, and factors related to the candidates and their campaigns. On a fundamental level, the 7th district was trending Democratic, especially in Eaton and Washtenaw counties with a migration of Democrats and Democratic-leaning individuals to those areas from the cities of Lansing and Ann Arbor. This gave the Democrats at least a shot at making the 7th, once a solid district for the GOP, a possible Democratic seat.

Of course, the larger economic and political trends in 2008 also hurt Walberg’s re-election chances. President Bush had very low approval ratings by the time the 2008 election cycle began, due to looming economic difficulties and the war in Iraq continued to be unpopular with voters. Voters in the 7th district were worried about the economy as they kept seeing their jobs disappear, and many felt this was the result of both bad trade policies and general economic decline. In addition, Rep. Walberg was swimming against the tide that was moving nationally and had begun two years prior. Walberg beat an underfunded and inexperienced challenger two years before by less than 4 percentage points and with 49.9 percent, failed to get a majority of votes; he probably should have been prepared for a fight, or at least known that the Democrats would come after him with a strong challenge.

Mark Schauer certainly benefited from Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama’s strength nationally and statewide. Obama won by a large margin after John McCain decided to no longer contest the state after early October. Schauer benefited from increased turnout and enthusiasm in his base. He was able to take advantage of the popularity of the top of the ticket first hand when Obama visited Battle Creek as part of his campaign travels and Democratic candidate Schauer spoke at that same rally, which drew over 18,000 people. Schauer was the last person to speak before vice presidential candidate Joe Biden introduced Obama and presented the two with a box of Corn Flakes cereal made at the local Kellogg’s factory complete with the pictures of the two on the front of the box. As Schauer advisor Ken Brock said about the event, “That’s gold. . . . Did that persuade anyone to vote for him? Probably not. But does it build energy and enthusiasm for our team? Oh yeah.”

Trends in the district and the national political environment set the stage for a Democratic pickup in the 7th district, but the factors that closed the door on Rep. Walberg’s reelection were ultimately driven by the candidates and their campaigns. Despite the indications that the Republican “brand” was in decline, Rep. Walberg stayed true to his social and fiscal conservative principles. He supported federal tax cuts and argued that the troop surge in Iraq was effective. He supported a hybrid privatized version
of Social Security and opposed the $700 billion financial institutions bailout. He did not always support President Bush on the floor of the House, but many times it was difficult to know that by his actions and rhetoric on the campaign trail. Walberg defended the president’s policies and the Republican approach for most of the 2008 campaign. He did not try to put much distance between himself and the president—as many Republican candidates around the country tried to do in 2008, given the president’s unpopularity. Rob South, a reporter covering the race for WKAR Radio in Lansing, found that Walberg’s strategy regarding the problems of the economy and President Bush’s approval ratings did play a role in this campaign:

It sure did put Walberg on the defensive, but he defended his president! Walberg was a stalwart George W. Bush supporter to the bitter end—except when Bush started to talk about bank bailouts and the bailouts for the Big 3 automakers. Walberg maintained his conservative, small government, “defend our flag,” composure throughout the campaign. While that message continued to play well in the conservative rural areas of the district, he lost favor as the Republicans imploded.

Even though Walberg was not the staunchest supporter of President Bush, he was seen as a very conservative member of Congress and candidate. This, in the end, is what failed him—he did not fit well with the district, especially as it continued to see shifts that made it more Democratic. In essence, Walberg was a candidate who was a terrific fit for the GOP primary electorate—his social conservative and anti-tax positions served him well—but a bad fit for a general election in a district that overall is more moderate. To his credit, Tim Walberg never tried to run from his core beliefs. He was very much a “what-you-see-is-what-you-get” candidate. Unfortunately for him, he could not attract enough votes from the middle of the political spectrum to secure a victory in the general election.

Stephen Medvic’s (2001) theory of deliberate priming argues that when deciding what issues to focus on, candidates and their campaign teams look to those issues that, one, the public cares about, and two, on which they have a strategic advantage over their opponent. Walberg failed by focusing on issues that were not at the top of the public’s mind, which, by an overwhelming majority, was the economy. He also failed to use the issue of terrorism to a great degree. Recall that this issue was the second most cited issue in the district, albeit with only 13 percent; but concerns over terrorism was a close second in Schauer’s home county of Calhoun. Had Walberg used this more effectively, he may have been able to take some additional votes away from Schauer in his backyard, which is where Schauer effectively won the election. Schauer won by 7,500 votes; he carried Calhoun
Incumbency is No Advantage: Michigan’s 7th

County by 10,000. Had Walberg used the issues to his advantage more, he may have been able to pull the race out.

Moreover, while Walberg broke from the president to support proposals that were beneficial to the district, he did not have that much to brag about to his constituents in terms of district service, which can help incumbents at election time (Ferejohn 1974; Levitt and Snyder 1997). One of the local papers in the district noted this when making their endorsement before election day. The *Jackson Citizen Patriot* (the same Jackson, Michigan town where the Republican Party was born in 1845) said the following while endorsing Mark Schauer:

> . . . this congressional district—and every district—deserves an advocate. It needs someone who can identify priorities and fight to see they are met. The Jackson area needs money to modernize I-94. Michigan’s automakers (and, by extension, their local suppliers) need federal assistance. Economic development projects involving government contracts or regulations need attention from a local lawmaker. Walberg’s record in this regard has been spotty. Schauer’s has been exceptional.48

Mark Schauer certainly had a lot to do with the victory. Just by getting into the race, he made the seat competitive. In Schauer, a popular state senator and Senate Minority Leader, the Democrats had a candidate that had name recognition and a much higher profile than his predecessor Sharon Renier. Mark Schauer was particularly strong in Calhoun County (his home county) and won Jackson County (a rarity for a Democrat). Schauer also did well in Lenawee County, trailing Walberg by only 900 votes out of 45,000 cast in one of the southern tier counties that had been solidly conservative and Republican in the past. Mark Schauer’s own analysis of his victory touched on several factors:

> It’s very difficult to unseat an incumbent. But the 2006 election demonstrated that Tim Walberg was vulnerable and much too extreme for the district. We ultimately were able to draw contrasts and make the case that he was just out of step with the district. He had failed to represent the district in a way that would help people and businesses who were suffering in a tough economy. He had failed on the trade issue; he had marched in lockstep with the Club for Growth. . . . He didn’t have any accomplishments to campaign on. . . . Plus, he was totally tone-deaf—he didn’t listen to the district. . . . We were able to successfully make the case that Walberg should be fired.49

Interestingly, in the several interviews we did for this article every person believed that the 7th congressional district would still likely be a safe district for a Republican had that Republican been Joe Schwarz. This is partly seen in the candidate the Democrats put forward in 2006—organic farmer Sharon Renier. Had Schwarz won the race in 2006 there was no
guarantee that Schauer would have even run. According to journalist Rob South, Schwarz “really fit [the district] and . . . a lot of people were comfortable with him.” Speaking about fit with the district, not long after he lost the 2006 primary, Joe Schwarz predicted that his party would lose the seat. In recounting a lunch meeting he had with then Minority Whip Roy Blunt (R–Mo.), Schwarz says Blunt asked him what was going to happen in the 7th. Schwarz responded:

I said, “Here’s what’s going to happen. There’s a 50 percent chance Walberg will lose this year . . . and the only reason he’ll win is because his opponent is Sharon Renier.” And . . . he damn near did. . . . And I said, “the chance he will lose in 2008 is 100 percent. . . . I’ll beat him if I run as a Democrat and . . . Mark Schauer will beat him.”

Now, the 7th congressional district is far from a safe Democratic seat. Recall, Mark Schauer, like Walberg two years before, also failed to get a majority of votes on Election Day. In 2010, this district may just as easily elect its fifth member of the House in as many election cycles.

NOTES

1Ken Brock, telephone interview, March 12, 2009.
6Ken Brock, telephone interview, March 12, 2009.
8Poll data were provided by Bernie Porn of EPIC-MRA.
10Poll data were provided by Bernie Porn of EPIC-MRA.
13Poll data were provided by Bernie Porn of EPIC-MRA.
15http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwS_fEitGUM.
17Ken Brock, telephone interview, March 12, 2009.


23. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iY9kpm0mYk.


27. Center for Responsive Politics, “Top Contributors.” http://www.opensecrets.org/races/contrib.php?cycle=2008&id=M107 [accessed March 22, 2009]. CRP makes an important point about these figures: “The organizations themselves did not donate, rather the money came from the organization’s PAC, its individual members or employees or owners, and those individuals’ immediate families.”

28. An important point here is that there are also some consulting fees contained in the dollars listed under paid media. Media consultants may be on retainer, but they also take a percentage of the media buy (the cost of getting the ad they make on the air) as a commission. This can be as high as 15 percent of the total media buy. However, this is not disclosed or separated out in filings with the FEC so it is impossible to know exactly how much went to the consultants who produced and bought time for TV ads.

29. The source of the data in this section is reports from the Federal Election Commission.


Ken Brock, telephone interview, March 12, 2009.
Ken Brock, telephone interview, March 12, 2009.
Rob South, telephone interview, March 12, 2009.
Rob South, telephone interview, March 12, 2009.

REFERENCES

At the start of the 2008 election cycle, not many observers or analysts would have predicted that Senator Elizabeth Dole would lose her seat. Indeed, in their January 2008 analysis of U.S. Senate races, the non-partisan Cook Political Report rated Dole’s seat “solid Republican.” However, the dynamics in North Carolina began to change and Dole was on the long list of Republicans who had the potential to lose; by May the race had shifted to the “likely Republican” category, by the end of summer Dole’s seat was classified as “lean Republican,” and in the middle of the fall campaign it was judged as a “toss up.” This article explores the contest between Elizabeth Dole and Kay Hagan by tracing the factors that allowed this apparently “safe” Republican seat to be captured by Democrats in 2008. While we discuss a number of factors that help to explain Hagan’s victory, we suggest that a changing partisan electoral environment resulting from the immigration of non-Southerners to the state not only favored this outcome, but may auger well for the Democratic Party in the future. In other words, a state that had shifted red during the past several decades may be reverting back to blue.

Next, we outline the shifting electoral and demographic landscape in North Carolina and contrast the candidates. Then, we discuss the environmental factors arrayed against Dole in 2008, including the mood of the state, an economic crisis, the popularity of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in North Carolina, and a competitive Democratic primary that drew out a large number of newly registered Democrats. Finally, we examine the campaign in some detail, including the important issues,

We would like to thank Hunter Bacot and the Elon University Polling Center for their assistance with providing data.

JODY C BAUMGARTNER is an assistant professor of political science at East Carolina University. PETER L. FRANCIA is an associate professor of political science East Carolina University. BRAD LOCKERBIE is a professor political science and chair of the Department of Political Science at East Carolina University. JONATHAN S. MORRIS is an assistant professor of political science at East Carolina University.

©2009 The American Review of Politics
strategies and tactics of the candidates, and the effect the national campaigns of the parties and presidential candidates had on the race.

The Setting

Conventional wisdom suggests that North Carolina, like most southern states in the past 40 years, is a state that consistently votes for Republican candidates. Accounts reflect this in the popular press as well as scholarly research.¹ The tide in North Carolina presidential politics began shifting toward the GOP as early as 1952, when Dwight Eisenhower captured a respectable 46 percent of the vote. In 1956, he increased his vote share in the state to 49.3 percent, and in 1960, Nixon garnered 47.9 percent of the vote.² Since 1968, the only Democratic presidential candidate to win in North Carolina was Georgia native Jimmy Carter in 1976. Based upon this recent history, the idea that North Carolina was ‘in play’ for Barack Obama in 2008 attracted a good deal of media attention. Below the surface of presidential politics, however, the Tar Heel state is not as reliably Republican. Unlike some other southern states, North Carolina has a fairly competitive two-party system (Prysby 2008).

Like much of the South, North Carolina was a solid Democratic state before about 1950. Starting at the presidential level it started to change. As noted above, Republican candidates for president (with the exception of Barry Goldwater) were competitive in North Carolina in the 1950s and 1960s. Since 1976, Republican presidential candidates consistently garnered greater than 50 percent of the vote, and from 1984 through 2004, a greater percentage of the popular vote in North Carolina than their national average. Although there were a few election cycles in which their support declined, Republicans have steadily grown in the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1960. However, their support peaked in 1994 and declined somewhat since then. Elections to the 120 member state House and the 50 member state Senate followed a similar pattern. Democrats have remained firmly in control of the state Senate, and as the Republicans’ numbers in the House waned throughout the last decade, they lost a controlling majority in 2006. Republican success at the gubernatorial level was limited as well. They won only three of the 12 elections for governor since 1960 (James Holshouser, Jr., in 1972, and James Martin in 1984 and 1988). At no point during this period, however, did the Republican vote share fall below 43 percent (Prysby 2008). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that North Carolina cannot be simply characterized as a “red” state. Two-party competition is alive and well in the Tar Heel state. Partisan trends in elections to the U.S. Senate in North Carolina are harder to identify.
Figure 1. Republican Strength in NC Federal Elections (1960-2006)

Source: Prysby 2008; Leip 2009.

Figure 2. Republican Strength in NC State Elections (1960-2006)

Source: Prysby 2008.
Elizabeth Dole’s Senate seat was the subject of much attention in the past few decades. Starting with Jesse Helms’ first bid for the Senate in 1972, in which he won with 54 percent of the vote, the seat was always very competitive. Helms never won more than 55 percent of the vote at any point in his career. If there is any merit to the concept of presidential coattails, Helms certainly was indebted to Richard Nixon and then Ronald Reagan. In 1990 and 1996, Helms was opposed by Harvey Gantt, garnering close to 53 percent of the vote in each of these contests. The 1990 race was particular rancorous due to a television ad run very close to Election Day by the Helms campaign that was criticized for the indirect use of racist themes. Meanwhile, the other Senate seat in North Carolina was even more competitive and margins of victory even narrower. Moreover, there was a good bit of partisan turnover in this seat. In fact, since 1974, the seat has changed parties in every election cycle.

There were other factors at work to suggest Dole’s defense of the seat may have been problematic. First, President Bush’s approval ratings dropped steadily in North Carolina throughout his second term. As much as a year before the 2008 election, only 10 percent of North Carolinians strongly approved of President Bush while 40 percent strongly disapproved. Second, the economy seemed to be in a freefall in the fall of 2008, which bodes ill for the party in power. Finally, the national economic crisis hit North Carolina particularly hard. The manufacturing base located in Eastern and Northern North Carolina had bled jobs for decades, and this job loss was further accelerated by the economic crisis that hit during the fall of 2008. In the year preceding the election, unemployment in North Carolina rose from 4.7 percent to 7.7 percent. The crisis within the financial industry also affected the state. Charlotte is the financial hub of the Southeast: both Wachovia and Bank of America have their headquarters there. And, while blame associated with the cause of the financial crisis was thrown in all directions, President Bush and the Republican Party absorbed the majority of it.

Although there were several factors that hampered the Republican Party’s efforts to successfully defend their control of Dole’s Senate seat, the defeat may also be indicative of larger trends within the state. North Carolina may be in the midst of a demographic realignment. The population of the state has consistently increased in recent years. Figure 3 shows this growth, illustrating that it exceeded national averages, never falling below 100,000 in the past 15 years. The dramatic increase since the turn of the century is especially noteworthy. Of course, by itself population growth does not signify a partisan shift. But recent survey data do suggest a distinct trend among those migrating to North Carolina. Relying on data from 2005, Vercellotti (2008) found that native born North Carolinians were more conservative than those NC residents who were born outside the state. He
also concluded that this trend was more pronounced in North Carolina than in the rest of the south.

More recent data further demonstrate a strengthening progressive base in the state. An Elon University Poll taken in March of 2009 found that 23 percent of those who have lived in the state ten years or less classify themselves as “liberal” or “very liberal.” This is in clear contrast to those who have lived in the state 30 years or more: only seven percent of this group identify themselves as liberal or very liberal. Furthermore, those moving into North Carolina who do not classify themselves as liberal are more likely to register to vote as Democratic or unaffiliated rather than Republican. In fact, the percentage of unaffiliated voters in the state increased by 18 percent between 2000 and 2008 (Prysby 2009).

Migration to North Carolina appears to be most pronounced in major metropolitan areas of the state, which have traditionally leaned further to the left than the rest of the state. Thus, the size of the Democratic electorate has increased. As Vercellotti noted, “The sizable migration of non-southerners into the state beginning in the 1980s has at least partially offset the growing conservatism of native North Carolinians. Less conservative newcomers have relocated to the metropolitan areas in the Piedmont section of the state, along with counties popular with retirees” (2008, 42). More recent data
indicate this trend may have accelerated in recent years. For example, Mecklenburg County, which contains the city of Charlotte, has grown by 25 percent since the turn of the century, and Wake County, which contains the Raleigh-Durham area, grew by 33 percent over the same time period (Prysby 2009).

The Candidates

A native of North Carolina, Elizabeth Dole spent much of her career in Washington holding executive branch positions under five presidents. Some of these were fairly high profile, including Deputy Assistant in the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs under President Nixon (1969-1973), membership on the Federal Trade Commission under Presidents Nixon and Ford (1973-1979), Secretary of Transportation under President Reagan (1983-1987), and Secretary of Labor under President George H.W. Bush (1989-1990). Later, she left government to become president of the American Red Cross (1991-2000). In 1999, she began an unsuccessful bid for the Republican presidential nomination. In spite of a fairly strong showing in the Iowa straw poll in August, she withdrew from the race in October, citing a lack of funding.

Upon Senator Jesse Helms’ retirement in 2001, and at the urging of national and state party leaders, Dole re-established residence in North Carolina in order to make a run for his seat. With the endorsement of Helms, Dole won the nomination with 80 percent of the vote and faced off against former President Bill Clinton’s chief of staff, Erskine Bowles, in the fall. Her campaign was fairly aggressive in a race that saw close to $30 million spent. While Dole had to contend with charges that she was not a true North Carolinian (a.k.a. a “carpetbagger”), her national reputation as influential within the national political scene appeared to benefit her campaign. Furthermore, her marriage to 1996 GOP presidential nominee, Bob Dole, also helped her name recognition against the lesser-known Bowles. Dole won the race with 54 percent of the vote (Bowles received 45%).

Dole established a solidly conservative voting record as a member of the U.S. Senate, siding with the position of the American Conservative Union more than 90 percent of the time. Dole supported making President Bush’s 2001 tax cuts permanent, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and a “do-it-all” approach to energy (including offshore drilling), while opposing same-sex marriage and abortion rights. Dole also helped secure federal money to fund several North Carolina projects that included programs to assist local law enforcement in identifying and processing illegal immigrants with criminal records, anti-gang initiatives, and road construction.
Despite Dole’s work as an incumbent Senator, she faced some potential problems heading into her re-election campaign. Her conservative voting record, for instance, put her on the same side as many of the positions supported by President Bush. While this was a benefit in the years immediately following her 2002 election when President Bush was exceedingly popular in North Carolina, it became a major drawback in 2008 when Bush’s approval ratings reached historical lows. In addition, Dole presided over the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) in 2006 when Republicans lost six Senate seats and control of the U.S. Senate. Not only did the Republicans’ disappointing performance earn Dole criticism for the defeats, but her high-profile role as a national leader and fundraiser in the Republican Party also contributed to a growing perception among North Carolina residents that she was out of touch with their concerns. As one voter explained to a reporter during the campaign, “Dole hasn’t lived among us that much. She doesn’t know what’s going on in North Carolina.”

Kay Hagan ultimately took advantage of these electoral circumstances as the Democratic Party’s nominee in the 2008 general election. In the year leading up to the election, however, Hagan was not viewed as a likely challenger to Dole. As potential Democratic challengers, including Governor Mike Easley and former Governor Jim Hunt decided not to run, Hagan emerged as the favorite. Hagan secured the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate in May of 2008 when she defeated her main opponent, Jim Neal, by a 32 percentage-point margin (60% to 18%).

Hagan is also a native of the Tar Heel State, although her family moved to Lakeland, Florida when she was young. Like Dole, Hagan became active in politics at a young age. As a youth she worked on the campaigns of her uncle, former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Lawton Chiles Jr., and interned at the Capitol as well. After marrying her husband Chip, she moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, where she practiced law and was later vice president for NationsBank (now Bank of America). Hagan remained active in community and state Democratic politics throughout this period, eventually serving as local chair for Democratic Governor Jim Hunt’s 1992 and 1996 re-election bids.

In 1998, Governor Jim Hunt persuaded Hagan to run for the state senate in the 32nd district, which includes most of the city of Greensboro. With the help of her uncle Lawton, who walked the district with her, she won the seat and was re-elected to four more terms. During her time in Raleigh, she served as chair of the Appropriations Committee and the Pensions, Retirement & Aging Committee. While known as a “pro-business Democrat,” she was far from conservative, supporting pay increases for teachers, a moratorium on executions, and opposing a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.
The Campaign

Despite the early polls showing Elizabeth Dole in the lead, there was some indication of trouble to come. Although Dole led early by as much as twenty percentage points, she was only garnering 55 percent in the polls. Moreover, no subsequent polls showed her with such a large lead.

Following her win over Neal, Hagan wasted little time in attacking Dole, accusing her of spending too much time in Washington and not enough time in North Carolina. At one campaign stop, Hagan joked that Dole had been absent from North Carolina for so long that, “I don’t think she’d qualify for in-state tuition.” Hagan positioned herself as a moderate Democrat on major issues such as taxes. For example, Hagan supported tax cuts for the middle-class, but criticized Dole for supporting “tax cuts for the wealthy.” She carefully developed a “responsible withdrawal” position on the Iraq War to avoid upsetting either pro-military or anti-war voters. With the price of gasoline topping $4 a gallon as the election approached, Hagan also connected her support for renewable “green” energy technologies with jobs, telling an audience: “Energy cost is the first thing that people mention to me every day. . . . We need to become the state that says ‘Alternative energy sources (are) important to us.’ We need to be helping people with manufacturing solar panels and windmill parts, creating those jobs in North Carolina. Once we do that, those jobs aren’t going to be outsourced.”

Hagan was also the beneficiary of a far more significant factor—the unprecedented size and energy of Barack Obama’s campaign organization in North Carolina. Obama won the North Carolina primary against Hillary Clinton in May of 2008 by building a sizable grassroots operation throughout the state. For example, Obama had field organizers in all 100 North Carolina counties, as well as more than 400 paid staff members in North Carolina compared to just 35 for the McCain organization (Francia et al. 2009). Grassroots efforts by the Obama organization and other allied groups helped significantly expand voter registration of African Americans and young voters (18-29) and they were effective in getting these voters to the polls, especially to participate in early voting (Francia et al. 2009). As Figure 4 demonstrates, the association between Barak Obama’s public approval and Kay Hagan’s tightened significantly following the primary season. In the last month of the general election campaign, this association became even closer ($r=.45$ in October, $p<.05$ [N=22]).

In addition to Obama’s popularity and organization in North Carolina, Hagan also benefitted from the competitiveness of the Democratic presidential primary in North Carolina six months earlier. While some Democrats were concerned that the close contest between Obama and Hillary Clinton would drive a wedge through the party and discourage some Clinton
supporters from turning out in the general election, in hindsight it is clear that North Carolina Democrats were energized by the state’s unexpectedly important role in the primary. Newly registered Democrats outnumbered newly registered Republicans by a margin of six-to-one (MacGillis and Crites 2008). This clearly served as an advantage to all Democrats on the ticket in the general election.

Despite the major factors working against Dole, polls showed the election to be close throughout the summer and closing months of the campaign. As Election Day drew near, television advertisements became the dominant weapon for allies of the Dole and Hagan campaigns, with estimates indicating that some $34 million was spent for and against each candidate. One of Dole’s primary backers was the outside group, Freedom’s Watch, which bought ads in October that were highly critical of Hagan. In one ad ("Runaway") the group accused Hagan of supporting increases in state taxes and fees. The announcer in the ad stated: “Kay Hagan voted for over 50 higher taxes and fees on income, birth, medical care, cars, food, even death.”

Allies of Hagan were active as well. In August, Moveon.org, spent nearly $500,000 on commercials that attacked Dole for “being in the pocket
A month later in September, the League of Conservation Voters (LCV), added Dole to its “Dirty Dozen” list for her poor legislative record on environmental issues. Labor groups, such as Citizens for Strength and Security (CSS), also targeted Dole. The LCV and CSS combined spent more than $1 million on ads against Dole. Organized labor’s active involvement in the election led to charges from the Dole camp that Hagan was “in the tank for big labor” and that Hagan’s efforts to “sneak into office as a Trojan horse for her big labor backers” were a “slap in the face to voters.” Much of Dole’s opposition to organized labor centered around the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which would make it easier for workers to unionize. Hagan claimed to be looking “favorably” at the bill.

Still, the most memorable and controversial advertisements did not come from the interest group community, but rather from the candidates and the party committees. Initially, though, the earliest ads were relatively benign. In June, Dole put out a series of ads touting her legislative work and constituent service for the people of North Carolina. The ads discussed Dole’s “clout” and effectiveness in handling the tobacco buyouts and in mitigating the effects of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Act. Another set of ads extolled Dole’s role in assisting local law enforcement with illegal immigration.

Later that summer, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) countered Dole’s message with one of the more memorable commercials of the election. The ad relied on a double entendre, seeming at first to be about Dole’s age (she was 72 at the time of the election), but was in actuality about disappointment in her lack of effectiveness as a senator and her close association with President Bush. The ad begins with two elderly men sitting in rocking chairs on the front porch of a country store where they engaged in the following exchange:

[Senior 1]: “I’m telling you, Liddy Dole is 93.”
[Senior 2]: “Ninety-three?”
[Senior 1]: “Yup, she ranks 93rd in effectiveness.”
[Senior 2]: “After 40 years in Washington?”
[Senior 1]: “After 40 years in Washington, Dole is 93rd in effectiveness, right near the bottom.”
[Senior 2]: “I’ve read she’s 92.”
[Senior 1]: “Didn’t I just tell you she’s 93?”
[Senior 2]: “No, 92 percent of the time she votes with Bush.”
[Senior 1]: “What happened to the Liddy Dole I knew?”

As both men rock in their chairs, “Senior 2” ends the ad with the line: “She’s just not a go-getter like you and me.”
The Dole-Hagan Senate Race in North Carolina

The ad drew attention in the *Washington Post* when polls began to show Hagan leading Dole after the commercials had blanketed the state. The DSCC continued with its “rocking chair” theme. In another ad, the two seniors criticize Dole for outsourcing jobs to China. The commercial ends with same tag line, “What’s happened to the Liddy Dole I knew?” The DSCC also followed a line of attack raised earlier by Moveon.org that criticized Dole for her associations with oil companies. The ad tells viewers, “She [Dole] voted for billions in tax breaks for Big Oil, against funding for alternative energy like wind and solar . . . [and] even tried to eliminate mileage standards. On gas prices, she’s part of the problem.”

The Dole campaign returned fire with a series of its own ads attacking Hagan. In one notable commercial, a yelping dog exclaims, “Fibber Kay Hagan.” The “fib,” according to the ad, involved Hagan falsely minimizing her husband’s financial interests in oil stocks. These ads were supplemented with additional ones from the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). A popular line of attack against Hagan was on the issue of taxes. In one ad, a narrator tells viewers: “Taking a closer look at Kay Hagan? She’s been in the state legislature for a decade. Hagan helped double the state debt, gave us the highest tax burden in the Southeast, higher income taxes, sales taxes, too. Now Kay Hagan wants to go to Washington?” Another NRSC ad implored viewers to consider the prospects of liberal politicians controlling Washington. The announcer in the commercial asks: “Who’s the Senate race really about? Hagan or Dole? Neither one. It’s about liberals in Washington. They want complete control of government... the left wants 60 votes in the Senate.”

Interestingly, critics of the ad pointed out that the NRSC—by suggesting that the Democrats would have complete control of government with 60 votes in the Senate—was tacitly conceding the presidential election to Barack Obama. John McCain, the Republican presidential nominee, followed with his own ads, pleading for support from North Carolina voters to block the possibility of 60 Democratic votes in the Senate—a similar example of what some saw as a concession of a Dole defeat. DSCC spokesman, Matthew Miller, compared the situation to a “circular firing squad.”

Still, without question, the most controversial advertisement came in the election’s final week when the Dole campaign ran its now infamous “Godless” spot. In the ad, the Dole campaign questioned Hagan’s ties to the group, Godless Americans Political Action Committee. Most controversially, the ad ends with what critics saw as an effort by the Dole campaign to falsely paint Hagan as an atheist. The commercial closes with an image of Hagan and a voice that sounded similar to Hagan’s—but was not—that says, “There is no God.” The full text went as follows:
[Announcer]: “A leader of the Godless Americans PAC recently held a secret fundraiser in Kay Hagan’s honor.”

The ad transitions to a clip of Godless Americans’ PAC Executive Director, Ellen Johnson.

[Johnson]: “There is no God to rely on.”

A second clip of Johnson appears.

[Johnson]: “There was no Jesus.”

The ad moves to a clip of Bill O’Reilly of Fox News who questions Godless Americans’ PAC director, David Silverman.

[O’Reilly]: “But taking ‘under God’ out of the Pledge of Allegiance—you’re down with that?”
[Silverman]: “We’re down with that.”
[O’Reilly]: “‘In God We Trust’—are you going to whip that off the money?”
[Silverman]: “Yeah, we would.”
[Announcer]: “Godless Americans and Kay Hagan. She hid from cameras. Took godless money. What did Hagan promise in return?”

The ad then shows an image of Hagan as an unidentified female voice exclaims, “There is no God!”

The media, both local and national, were quick to report on the truthfulness of the ad and Hagan’s incidental association with the group. The association appears to have been tied to a fundraiser hosted by Wendy Kaminer and Woody Kaplan, members of the Secular Coalition of America and organized by Democratic Senator John Kerry and a group of some 35 people who were campaigning to support a Democratic majority in the U.S. Senate. When questioned about the event by the press, Kaplan claimed that the fundraiser for Hagan had nothing to do with Godless Americans PAC or its cause.25 According to Kaplan, “This event happened to be at my house. I don’t know if any of those people are religious or not, whether they’re Muslims, Christians, Jews, or whoever. I have no idea, I never asked them when I went to their houses, and I bet you no candidate did either.”26

Hagan, a Sunday school teacher and elder at First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, responded that “Elizabeth Dole is attacking my strong Christian faith” and that Dole should be “ashamed.”27 The Hagan campaign filed a defamation lawsuit, alleging “personal slander.”28 However, the Dole campaign defended the ad. Dan McLagan, a Dole spokesperson, replied to the Hagan campaign’s counter-charges that, “The facts remain: Kay Hagan attended a fundraiser in her honor hosted by the founder of the Godless Americans. Kay Hagan accepted their money.”29
The controversy that ensued may have ultimately backfired on Dole. In press accounts, several voters expressed their displeasure with the advertisement. At a Greensboro shopping center, one voter was quoted as telling Hagan: “Dole did you a favor. I was a Dole fan before this. I just think this a below-the-belt, dirty, nasty way to try to campaign.” Another voter from Charlotte called the commercial “reprehensible” and added that “it’s the lowest common denominator; it’s hate speech.” The Hagan campaign further claimed to have received a flood of telephone calls from undecided voters who voiced their support for Hagan because of the ad.

The godless ad remained a controversial subject right through the end of the campaign. In and of itself, the advertisement was not responsible for Dole’s eventual defeat. It did, however, fit into a larger theme that Hagan was able to craft—that Elizabeth Dole was out of touch with North Carolinians and outside the ideological mainstream of America. The backlash against the godless advertisement illustrated the popular perception that Dole was attempting to use political maneuvering in order to cover-up for her shortcomings as a Senator. Of course, Hagan was equally responsible for the negative tone of the campaign over the airwaves, but Hagan was effective in keeping Dole on the defensive throughout the campaign. In total, Dole spent more than twice the amount of Hagan to fund her campaign ($19.5 million versus $8.5 million), including $2.5 million of her own money. This was not, however, enough to stave off defeat. Hagan’s victory was a relatively decisive one—53 percent to 44 percent.

In Dole’s concession speech, she acknowledged the ugly tone that both campaigns had taken. However, even in defeat, Dole defended her campaign one last time, “I will never regret fighting as hard as I could for the privilege of continuing to serve you.”

Conclusion

Of course, hindsight is 20-20, but, looking back it should have been much less of a surprise that Hagan was able to steal the Senate seat from the incumbent Dole in 2008. This is in spite of the fact that re-election rates for incumbent senators have well exceeded 80 percent in the past few decades (Jacobson 2004). North Carolina has a vibrant two-party system which should have suggested that no Republican candidate could easily count on being returned to office. This was particularly the case in 2008, when national tides clearly favored Democratic candidates. Beyond this, the Democratic Party machine and a superbly organized and energized Obama campaign created a favorable environment for, and lent support to, Hagan’s effort in the state.
This said, it might be the case that the most decisive factor in Hagan’s victory was a shifting partisan environment in North Carolina resulting from the influx of more progressively oriented individuals to the state in the past decade, particularly into the more populous areas of the state. For example, in the 2008 Senate race, the Hagan far outperformed Dole in these counties. In Mecklenburg County, Hagan won 62 percent to 35 percent, and Hagan won Wake County 56 percent to 41 percent (State Board of Elections 2009).

This trend shows little sign of waning. If the ideological orientation of North Carolinians continues to move to the left, the national voting trends of the state will begin to reflect the past tendency to vote more Democratic in state and local elections. Of course, this will be a much different Democratic constituency than that of yesteryear—leaning more to the left than the right. Certainly, recent population growth benefited Hagan and Barack Obama in 2008, and there is little reason to expect that it will do anything except hurt Republican senatorial candidates in the future. Indeed, polling from early 2009 indicates that first-term incumbent Republican senator Richard Burr will likely face a tough uphill battle in defense of his seat in the 2010 midterm election. If the electorate does indeed continue to slide leftward, North Carolina’s national image as a “red state” will fade.

NOTES


The Dole-Hagan Senate Race in North Carolina


2Ibid.
5http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1hmrYb46O8.
17Ibid.
19Ibid.
20Ibid.
21Ibid.
23Ibid.
REFERENCES


