

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Posc 150**

CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

I. CONTENTS:

- A. Recent History
- B. Public opinion.
- C. Campaigns and elections

II. A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON:

- A. *Thirty year history of Democrat and Republican attempts to understand the public.
 - 1. Elections of Reagan and Bush (1988) convinced Democrats that something was wrong.
 - 2. Reaction to Ronald Reagan
 - i. ○Reagan's victories interpreted as
 - 1) evidence that the country was becoming or had become "conservative."
 - 2) Democrats were actually too "liberal" or "soft" on social issues.
 - ii. The need to raise money.
 - 3. ○Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)
 - i. Bill Clinton, chair
 - ii. Joseph Lieberman, recent chair.
 - iii. *Moved Democrats to the "Center."
 - iv. See, for example, "New Democrats Online" at <http://www.ndol.org/>
 - 4. 1992: Clinton wins the presidency.
 - i. Tax increase and health care fiasco put Democrats on the defensive.
 - 5. ○Newt Gingrich and the "Contract With America."
 - i. 1994 Republicans take control of both branches of Congress.
 - ii. Contract promises peaceful "revolution."
 - 1) See Readings below.
 - 6. Democratic rebound
 - i. Elections of 1996 and 1998 convinced Republican to tone down the rhetoric.
 - ii. Impeachment
 - 7. "Compassionate conservatism" and George W. Bush.

III. PUBLIC OPINION:

- A. Reprinted from Wednesday's notes. Refer to them for the figures.
- B. So what is the state of public opinion.

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- C. Difference between “door-step” opinions and considered views.
 - 1. Many have a small factual basis from which to work.
 - D. Pragmatism over ideology.
 - 1. Americans are not generally ideological in the usual sense of the word.
 - 2. They oppose “big” government in the abstract but favor many, many big-ticket and expensive specific programs.
 - i. They also support regulations aimed at preventing commonly perceived threats.
 - E. Pragmatically “internationalist.”
 - 1. They are reluctant to get involved militarily abroad and dislike foreign aid.
- IV. SOME BASICS OF ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY:
- A. *Elections are the mainspring of “democracy by accountability.”
 - 1. Instruments for holding representatives accountable
 - 2. Educational and motivational functions.
 - 3. Transmission of “demands.”
 - B. Elections American style:
 - 1. Eligibility and registration.
 - i. These laws generally discourage participation by raising the “costs” of involvement.
 - 2. Number of separate choices
 - i. Sheer number of offices to be filled can be overwhelming
 - ii. Choice may lead to confusion
 - 3. Selection of candidates: the nomination process
 - i. Generally speaking, to get on the ballot a person must have a party endorsement or nomination.
 - ii. Conventions and caucuses versus primaries
 - 4. *Primary elections.*
 - i. Contests to choose candidates for general elections.
 - ii. Discussed further under political parties.
 - 5. General elections
 - i. Presidential and "off year" elections
 - ii. State and local elections
 - iii. Referenda
 - 6. Timing: election day is NOT a holiday nor does it fall on a weekend.
 - C. *Recall a major effect of the constitution: the creation of independent power centers.
 - 1. Members of the White House, House, and Senate are elected separately.
 - 2. Geographical representation
- V. EXPLANATIONS OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR:
- A. General concerns:
 - 1. The turnout conundrum: participation in **presidential** and **off-year** elections has declined during the last 100 years *despite* improvements in

communications and transportation and rising level of education.

- i. ✓Turnout in historical perspective.
 - 1) Turnout has generally decline during the last 50 years.
 - 2) Less than half of the eligible electorate votes in congressional elections.
 - 3) Only little more than half vote in presidential contests.
 - 4) Primaries and local elections attract even fewer voters.
- ii. ✓Turnout in comparative perspective:
 - 1) Americans trail citizens in most other democracies.

B. Explanations revisited:

- 1. ○Personal factors (Hamilton school).
 - i. Social class “bias”
 - 1) Lower class individuals participate less regularly than upper status people.
 - 2) Benefits go to those who participate.
 - ii. Many other personal or individual characteristics have been connected to voting.
 - 1) Demographic factors: age and cohort; race.
 - iii. ○Partisanship:
 - 1) More partisan, more likely to vote.
 - a) *Don’t pass over this fact: the ethos in America is to be nonpartisan. Yet data suggest that partisanship encourages voting.*
 - b) ✓See the attached cross-tabulation.
 - iv. The bottom line: people don’t take advantage of the opportunities.
- 2. ○Structural factors (the “Jefferson school”): general proposition: political institutions and practices keep the “cost of participation” too high for many citizens.
 - i. What are these institutions and practices that discourage voting?
 - 1) Registration laws (see above)
 - 2) Structure of elections (see above)
 - 3) Campaign practices
 - 4) Mass media and “quality” information.
 - 5) Decline of political party grass roots organizations.
 - 6) Growing size and complexity of government.
 - ii. The bottom line: institutions discourage participation and so voters should not be judged harshly.

VI. MODERN CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND STRATEGIES:

- A. ✱Proposition: campaign strategies adversely affect participation.
 - 1. Candidates often or sometimes adopt policy positions in order to get elected; not run for office in order to get elected, not to advance public policies.
 - i. ✓Example: Clinton health care plan in 1992.

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- ii. “Valence” issues often play this role.
- 1) ○ **Valence issue:** an issue that has attracts virtually unanimous support to one side because of its emotional content and impact.
 - 2) These issues include the death penalty, prohibitions against flag burning, school prayers, getting tough against criminals and drug users, and so forth.
- B. ○ The impact of advanced technology
1. Television, polling, computers, direct mail
 - i. In fact, these like most campaigns in America are electronic campaigns.
 - ii. Images and repetitive slogans more than substance.
- C. ○ The strategy of ambiguity
1. Candidates are urged to obscure their positions by saying as little as possible, moving to the “middle of the road,” or wrapping themselves in valence issues.
- D. Avoidance of issue content.
1. *Look for “intelligent, substantive” discussion of issues in campaign commercials (i.e., “spot ads”).*
- E. ○ The new breed of political consultants
1. A new kind of advisor, a person who is “good at” campaign techniques (polling, public relations, media, computers, voter targeting, etc.) but who may not (usually does not) have much policy knowledge or experience and frequently no experience governing.
 - i. Image over substance
 - ii. A major point: some one who is good at getting elected is not necessarily good at governing.
 - iii. Political skills are not necessarily transferable.
- F. ○ Self-selected candidates:
1. Decline of party influence in candidate selection
 - i. Weakened party positions has enormous implications for governing, accountability, and democracy.
 2. ✓ Examples: John McCain, Steve Forbes, Joe Biden, Pat Buchanan, Jimmy Carter...
- G. ○ Candidate centered campaigns
1. Campaigns are more or less self-sufficient organizations that depend only indirectly on national parties.
 - i. They are contests between two men, not two parties or ideologies.
 - ii. Consequently, once elected a person’s “loyalty” is to his/her organization, not the party.
 - iii. This situation thwarts or hinders party leadership and, I will argue, ultimately undermines accountability.

VII. THE IMPACT ON DEMOCRACY:

- A. ✱What are the consequences?
 - 1. The bottom line: campaign practices depress participation and hence hurt accountability.
- B. Specific consequences:
 - 1. ○Soaring costs of running for office
 - 2. ○Trivialization of issues
 - 3. ○Personality over substance
 - 4. ○Negative advertisements
 - 5. ○The debasing of political discourse.
 - i. Important questions—crime and drug abuse, for example—simply can’t be discussed rationally, calmly, intelligently.
 - ii. I think “debates” about the death penalty demonstrate this point.

VIII. NEXT TIME:

- A. Film: “Taking On The Kennedys”
- B. Reading:
 - 1. Required: Drew, *The Corruption of American Politics*, Chapters 9 through 11.
 - 2. *Required:* “Turnout Decline in the U.S. and other Advanced Industrial Democracies,” Martin P. Wattenberg in the Cyber Reserve Room.
 - 3. *Suggested:* Effectiveness of Negative Political Advertising in the Cyber Reserve Room.
 - 4. *Suggested:* "Voters in the Crosshairs" by Marshall Ganz in the Cyber Reserve Room.

Frequency Distribution									
		v523							
Cells contain: -Column percent -N of cases		0 Strong Democrat (1,1, 0 in K1, K1a/b,	1 Weak Democrat (1,5/8/9,0 in K1, K1a/b	2 Independent- Democrat (3/4/5/8,0,5 in	3 Independent- Independent (3, 0,3/8/9 in	4 Independent- Republican (3/4/5/8,0,1 i	5 Weak Republican (2, 5/8/9,0 in K1, K1a	6 Strong Republican (2, 1,0 in K1, K1a/b	<i>ROW TOTAL</i>
v303	1 YES, VOTED	76.2 261	68.5 187	55.9 153	43.1 94	63.3 143	64.2 133	89.3 196	66.3 1,168
	5 NO, DIDN'T VOTE	23.8 82	31.5 86	44.1 121	56.9 125	36.7 83	35.8 74	10.7 24	33.7 594
	<i>COL TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i> 342	<i>100.0</i> 273	<i>100.0</i> 275	<i>100.0</i> 219	<i>100.0</i> 225	<i>100.0</i> 208	<i>100.0</i> 220	<i>100.0</i> 1,762
Means		1.95	2.26	2.77	3.28	2.47	2.43	1.43	2.35
Std Devs		1.71	1.86	1.99	1.99	1.93	1.92	1.24	1.89

Figure 1: Turnout In 1996 By Partisanship.