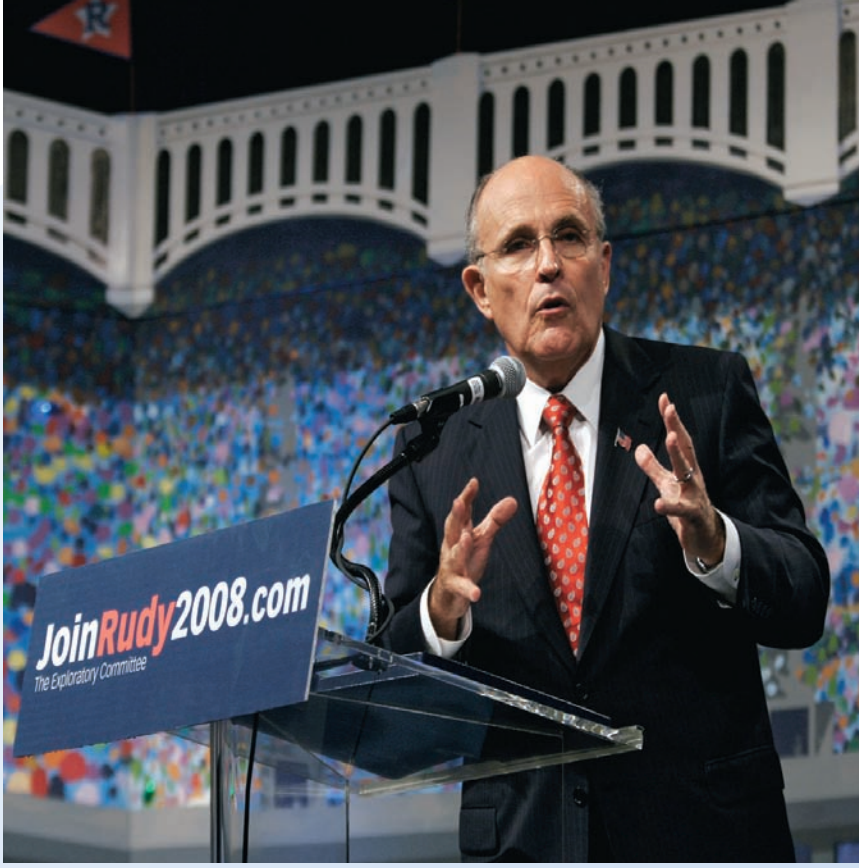
CHAPTER

10

Elections and Campaigns



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WHO GOVERNS?

1. **How do American elections determine the kind of people who govern us?**
2. **What matters most in deciding who wins presidential and congressional elections?**

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TO WHAT ENDS?

1. **Do elections make a real difference in what laws get passed?**

The 2008 presidential sweepstakes started in 2006. By early 2007, over a dozen candidates had come forward, and at least one had declared then dropped out. For the first time in four-score years, neither a sitting president nor a sitting vice-president was in the race. With hundreds of days left to go before election day in November 2008, several front-runners were each on their way to raising around $100 million.

It is difficult to imagine how different things were not all that long ago. In 1968, Vice President Hubert Humphrey won the Democratic presidential nomination without competing in a single state primary. His party's bosses pretty much delivered the nomination to him. He competed in a three-way race for president without having to raise nearly as much money as many also-ran candidates routinely do today. (He lost in a close race to Republican Richard M. Nixon.)

Just twenty years ago, in 1988, Vice President George H.W. Bush won the Republican presidential nomination. He had to win primaries and raise tens of millions of dollars, too. His party's leaders played a big role in his campaign, but so did consultants, pollsters, and others with no traditional ties to the party organization. (He won in a landslide over Democrat Michael Dukakis.) Still, even his 1988 campaign would not be close to presidential politics in 2008.

★ Campaigns, Then and Now

Many things have changed, but the key changes are related to one another: parties are less important; media (or "media buys") are more important; polling is ubiquitous; and money—or the nonstop fund-raising that keeps it coming—matters more than ever.

As we saw in Chapter 9, political parties once determined, or powerfully influenced, who got nominated. In the nineteenth century, the members of Congress from a given caucus would meet to pick their presidential candidate. After the caucuses were replaced by the national nominating conventions, the real power was wielded by local party leaders, who came together (sometimes in the legendary "smoke-filled rooms") to choose the candidate, whom the rest of the delegates would then endorse. Congressional candidates were also often hand-picked by local party bosses. Most people voted a straight party ticket.

That was then, but by 2006 that system's last remaining remnants had faded to the point where only older party workers or political history buffs paid any real attention to them. With the parties' ability to control nominations weakened, candidates are now

Hillary Clinton running for president in 2008.

pretty much on their own. Most, however, do not go it alone. Rather, they hire people to perform several separate but related campaign tasks:[1]

- *Media consultants* who create advertisements, and buy airtime from stations and networks.
- *Direct mail firms* that design and produce mailings to promote the candidate or solicit money.
- *Polling firms* to survey voters on their attitudes toward issues and candidates, and run focus groups.
- *Political technology firms* to supply services such as web site design, online advertising, online fundraising, and voter-targeting.

Today's candidates depend—and spend—the most on media. For instance, in 2004, presidential and congressional candidates spent a combined $1.2 billion on media, and over a half a billion more dollars on other campaign supports (see Figure 10.1). With well over a billion dollars being spent for this purpose, you might suppose that there is clear and convincing evidence to show that, other things equal, media exposure makes a critical difference in who wins elections, or that some types of televised appeals work better than others, or both.

But you would be wrong. About the only safe generalizations one can presently make on the subject concern not that "media buys" matter, but how common it is for today's candidates to purchase political ads embodying emotional appeals.

A comprehensive 2006 study carefully analyzed thousands of political ads broadcast from 1999 through 2004.[2] A plurality, it found, were purposely designed (everything from the images used to the music playing in the background) to appeal mainly to voters' fears (impending war, losing a job, and so on). A smaller but significant fraction were more focused on stirring positive emotions (patriotism and community pride). You might suppose that candidates favor such ads because they are particularly effective in reaching voters who know little and care less about politics.

Once again you would be wrong. The political ads, televised and other, that appealed to emotion (fear or enthusiasm, mainly) wielded the greatest influence over voters with the greatest interest in politics and the most information about government.[3] Still, experts don't know how or whether televised political ads influence election outcomes.

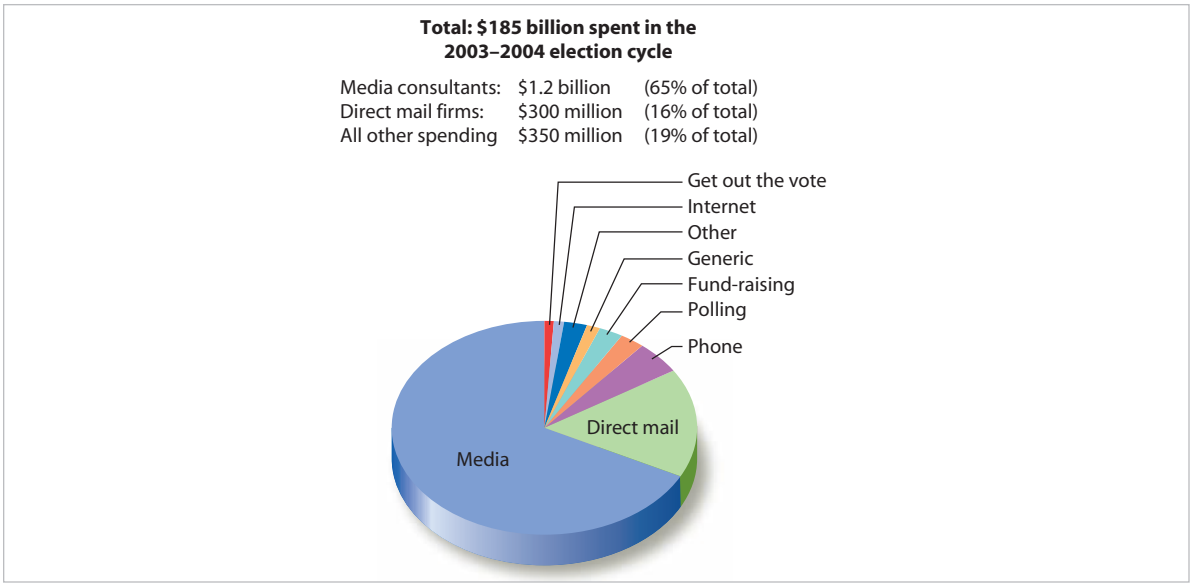
Better or Worse?

There is less mystery in political polling. Today, even many candidates running in relatively low-budget local races do extensive pre- and post-election voter polling, and often use the results to shape television ads, other campaign communications, positions on the issues, and even what words candidates repeat (or eschew) and how they dress when in public.

It is, however, still only in the national political big leagues that many candidates do extensive polling designed not merely to test voters' existing attitudes, but to discover how to change them. And it is still only in presidential races and especially well-funded contests for Congress (mostly for the Senate) that sophisticated surveys, much like those traditionally done by big corporations to identify markets where their goods or services are especially likely to sell, are used to mobilize voters.

In 2004 and again in 2006, these survey techniques "micro-targeted" people by using data about their consumer and recreational habits (small car or SUV, drink

Figure 10.1 Federal Campaign Spending: Where the Money Goes



Source: Sandy Bergo, *Campaign Consultants: A Wealth of Advice,* Center for Public Integrity, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., September 26, 2006, reporting data from the Federal Election Commission and Internal Revenue Service on spending by federal candidates during the 2003–2004 election cycle.

high-cost coffees or cheap brews, like watching professional sports or loathe it, and more). In early 2007, most declared presidential candidates were planning to order at least some such surveys.

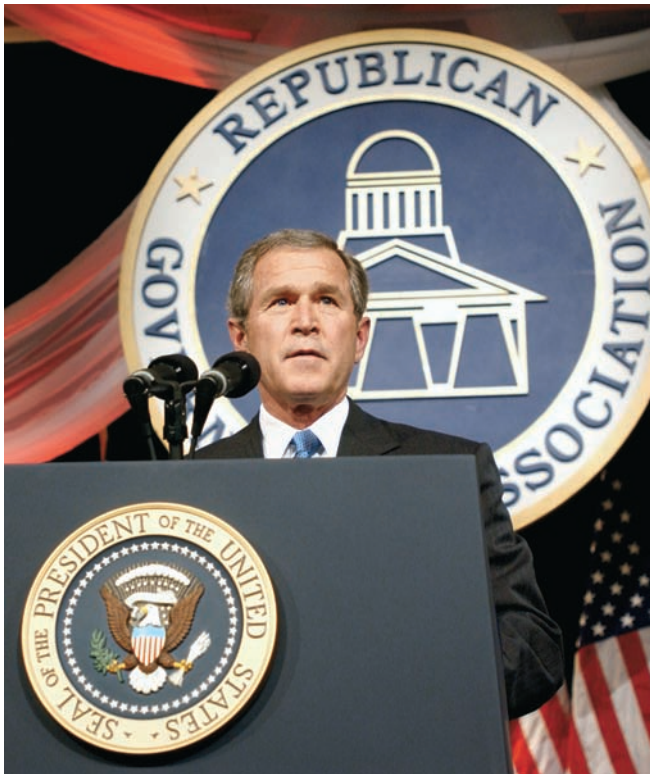
Of course, it is one thing to know where "your voters" are, but quite another thing to reach them through door-to-door drives like the ones that once were the political parties' chief stock in trade. In 2004 and again in 2006, both parties' national leaders stressed building or expanding grassroots get-out-the-vote organizations not dissimilar from those that, precinct by precinct, once dominated election days in most American cities. It is too early to say, but such "high-tech canvassing," if it continues, may yet re-create something somewhat like the party organizations of old.

Patrick Caddell pioneered present-day political polling techniques when he served as Jimmy Carter's consultant in the mid-1970s. By the time Ronald Reagan followed Carter as president in 1980, pollsters like Caddell were the new political bosses, at least in presidential campaigns. As veteran political reporter Joe Klein has reflected, when they "endorsed" a candidate, "fund-raising, media buzz, and support from the party's special interests suddenly became easier."[4]

In 2006, republican presidential hopeful, Senator John McCain, hired into his campaign political consultants who had previously worked against him and developed harshly negative ads that he had in years past objected to as dishonest (and worse). But nobody who knows how the game is played today was really surprised. Today, candidates in both parties, whether ideologically liberal, conservative, or in between, routinely practice what the political professionals preach and purchase what they produce.

This is the main reason for the unceasing spiral in campaign spending, and hence for the fact that "campaigning" has become largely synonymous with "fund-raising." Candidates for major offices have two top needs: money for television ads, followed by time for fund-raising to generate the cash needed to pay for the ads.[5] Once elected, the permanent fund-raising campaign continues for House members, and almost as much for senators and even for the president (who, especially when popular, also makes many trips to raise money for his party's candidates).

The American Association for Political Consultants (AAPC) is a trade association. In 1980 it had about fifty members. By 1990 it had around seven hundred members. Today it has over eleven hundred members representing a campaign industry with over 2,500



President George W. Bush addresses the Republican Governors Association.

firms.[6] The industry's expansion coincided with decreased political participation, and—the only development that can definitely be laid at its door—a dramatic rise in negative, slick, and super-costly political ads. If that leads you to wonder whether, all told, campaigns were better for democracy when party bosses in smoke-filled rooms were more common than political consultants in high-tech firms, you are not alone.

Here and Abroad

Even the best American political consultants probably would have trouble exporting their wares. A campaign plan that will work here would be useless in almost any other democratic nation; one that would work abroad would be useless here.

incumbent *The person already holding an elective office.*

Unlike in many other democratic nations, in America, elections have not one but two crucial phases—getting nominated and getting elected. Getting nominated means getting your name on the ballot. In the great majority of states, winning your party's nomination for either the presidency or Congress requires an *individual* effort—*you* decide to run, *you* raise money, *you* and your friends collect signatures to get your name on the ballot, and *you* appeal to voters in primary elections on the basis of your personality and your definition of the issues. In most European nations winning your party's nomination for parliament involves an *organizational* decision—*the party* looks you over, *the party* decides whether to allow you to run, and *the party* puts your name on its list of candidates.

American political parties do play a role in determining the outcome of the final election, but even that role involves parties more as labels in the voters' minds than as organizations that get out the vote. By contrast, many other democratic nations conduct campaigns that are almost entirely a contest between parties as organizations. In Israel and the Netherlands the names of the candidates for the legislature do not even appear on the ballot; only the party names are listed there. And even where candidate names are listed, as in Great Britain, the voters tend to vote "Conservative" or "Labour" more than they vote for Smith or Jones. European nations (except France) do not have a directly elected president; instead the head of the government—the prime minister—is selected by the party that has won the most seats in parliament.

★ Presidential Versus Congressional Campaigns

Presidential and congressional races differ in important ways. The most obvious, of course, is size: more voters participate in the former than the latter contests, and so presidential candidates must work harder and spend more. But there are some less obvious differences that are equally important.

First, presidential races are more competitive than those for the House of Representatives. In the thirty-eight elections from 1932 to 2006 the Republicans won control of the House only eight times (21 percent of the time); in the nineteen presidential elections during the same period the Republicans won the White House on nine occasions (47.3 percent of the time). In the typical presidential race the winner gets less than 55 percent of the two-party vote; in the typical House race, the **incumbent** wins with over 60 percent of the vote.

Second, a much smaller proportion of people vote in congressional races during off years (that is, when there is no presidential contest) than vote for president. This lower turnout (around 36 percent of the voting-age population) means that candidates in congressional races must be appealing to the more motivated and partisan voter.

Third, members of Congress can do things for their constituents that a president cannot. They take credit—sometimes deserved, sometimes not—for every grant, contract, bridge, canal, and highway that the federal government provides the district or state. They send letters (at the government's expense) to large fractions of their constituents and visit their districts every weekend. Presidents get little credit for district improvements and must rely on the mass media to communicate with voters.

Fourth, a candidate for Congress can deny that he or she is responsible for "the mess in Washington," even when the candidate is an incumbent. Incumbents tend to run as individuals, even to the point of denouncing the very Congress of which they are a part. An incumbent president can't get away with this; rightly or wrongly, he is often held responsible for whatever has gone wrong, not only in the government but in the nation as a whole.

These last three factors—low voter turnout, services to constituents, and the ability to duck responsibility—probably help explain why so high a percentage of congressional incumbents get reelected.

But they do not enjoy a completely free ride. Members of Congress who belong to the same party as the president often feel voters' anger about national affairs, particularly economic conditions. When the economy turns sour and a Republican is in the White House, Republican congressional candidates lose votes; if a Democrat is in the White House, Democratic congressional candidates lose votes.

At one time the **coattails** of a popular presidential candidate could help congressional candidates in his own party. But there has been a sharp decline in the value of presidential coattails; indeed, some scholars doubt that they still exist.

The net effect of all these factors is that, to a substantial degree, congressional elections have become independent of presidential ones. Though economic factors may still link the fate of a president and some members of his party, by and large the incumbent members of Congress enjoy enough of a cushion to protect them against whatever political storms engulf an unpopular president. This fact further reduces the meaning of party—members of Congress can get reelected even though their party's "leader" in the White House has lost popular support, and nonincumbent candidates for Congress may lose despite the fact that a very popular president from their party is in the White House.

Running for President

The first task facing anyone who wishes to be president is to get "mentioned" as someone who is of "presidential caliber." No one is quite sure why some people are mentioned and others are not. The journalist David Broder has suggested that somewhere there is "The Great Mentioner" who announces from time to time who is of presidential caliber (and only The Great Mentioner knows how big that caliber is).

But if The Great Mentioner turns out to be as unreal as the Easter Bunny, you have to figure out for yourself how to get mentioned. One way is to let it be known to reporters, "off the record," that you are thinking about running for president. Another is to travel around the country making speeches (Ronald Reagan, while working for General Electric, made a dozen or more speeches *a day* to audiences all over the country). Another way is to already have a famous name (John Glenn, the former astronaut, was in the public eye long before he declared for the presidency in 1984). Another way to get mentioned is to be identified with a major piece of legislation. Former Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey was known as an architect of the Tax Reform Act of 1986; Representative Richard Gephardt of Missouri was known as an author of a bill designed to reduce foreign imports. Still another way is to be the governor of a big state. Former New York governors, such as Mario Cuomo, are often viewed as presidential prospects, partly because New York City is the headquarters of the television and publishing industries.

Once you are mentioned, it is wise to set aside a lot of time to run, especially if you are only "mentioned" as opposed to being really well known. Ronald Reagan devoted the better part of six years to running; Walter Mondale spent four years campaigning; Howard Baker resigned from the Senate in 1984 to prepare to run

coattails *The alleged tendency of candidates to win more votes in an election because of the presence at the top of the ticket of a better-known candidate, such as the president.*

Political campaigns are hard work, even when you get to fly on the vice president's airplane.

in 1988 (he finally dropped out of the race). However, most post-1988 candidates—senators Bob Dole, Tom Harkin, Bob Kerrey, Paul Simon, and John Kerry; governors Michael Dukakis, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush; vice presidents George Bush and Al Gore; and House members Richard Gephardt and Jack Kemp—made the run while holding elective office.

Though presidential candidates come from various backgrounds, in general the voters tend to prefer those with experience as governors or military leaders rather than those who come immediately from Congress. Some candidates, such as John F. Kennedy, have been elected president directly after being a senator, but most are either war heroes (Dwight Eisenhower), former governors (George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, and Franklin D. Roosevelt) or former members of Congress who have already had experience as vice presidents (Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, and Harry Truman).

political action committee (PAC) *A committee set up by a corporation, labor union, or interest group that raises and spends campaign money from voluntary donations.*

Money One reason why running takes so much time is that it takes so long to raise the necessary money and build up an organization of personal followers. As we shall see later in this chapter, federal law restricts the amount that any single individual can give a candidate to $2,000 in each election. (A **political action committee,** or PAC, which is a committee set up by and representing a corporation, labor union, or other special-interest group, can give up to $5,000.) Moreover, to be eligible for federal matching grants to pay for your primary campaign, you must first raise at least $5,000, in individual contributions of $250 or less, in each of twenty states.

Organization Raising and accounting for this money requires a staff of fund-raisers, lawyers, and accountants. You also need a press secretary, a travel scheduler, an advertising specialist, a direct-mail company, and a pollster, all of whom must be paid, plus a large number of volunteers in at least those states that hold early primary elections or party caucuses. These volunteers will brief you on the facts of each state, try to line up endorsements from local politicians and celebrities, and put together a group of people who will knock on doors, make telephone calls, organize receptions and meetings, and try to keep you from mispronouncing the name of the town in which you are speaking. Finally, you have to assemble advisers on the issues. These advisers will write "position papers" for you on all sorts of things that you are supposed to know about (but probably don't). Because a campaign is usually waged around a few broad themes, these position papers rarely get used or even read. The papers exist so that you can show important interest groups that you have taken "sound" positions, so that you can be prepared to answer tough questions, and so that journalists can look up your views on matters that may become topical.

Strategy and Themes Every candidate picks a strategy for the campaign. In choosing one, much depends on whether you are the incumbent. Incumbents must defend their records, like it or not. (An incumbent ran for president in 1964, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1992, 1996, and 2004.) The challenger attacks the incumbent. When there is no incumbent (as in 1960, 1968, 1988, and 2000), both candidates can announce their own programs; however, the candidate from the party that holds the White House must take, whether he thinks he deserves it or not, some of the blame for whatever has gone wrong in the preceding four years. Within these limits a strategy consists of the answers to questions about tone, theme, timing, and targets:

- What *tone* should the campaign have? Should it be a positive (build-me-up) or negative (attack-the-opponent) campaign? In 1988 George H.W. Bush began with a negative campaign; Michael Dukakis followed suit.

- What *theme* can I develop? A theme is a simple, appealing idea that can be repeated over and over again. For Jimmy Carter in 1976 it was "trust"; for Ronald Reagan in 1980 it was "competence" and in 1984 it was "it's morning again in America"; for Bush in 1988 it was "stay the course"; for Clinton in 1992 it was "we need to change"; for George W. Bush in 2000 it was "compassionate conservatism."
- What should be the *timing* of the campaign? If you are relatively unknown, you will have to put everything into the early primaries and caucuses, try to emerge a front-runner, and then hope for the best. If you are already the front-runner, you may either go for broke early (and try to drive out all your opponents) or hold back some reserves for a long fight.
- Whom should you *target?* Only a small percentage of voters change their vote from one election to the next. Who is likely to change this time—unemployed steelworkers? Unhappy farmers? People upset by inflation?

Getting Elected to Congress

A president cannot serve more than two terms, so at least once every eight years you have a chance of running against a nonincumbent; members of Congress can serve for an unlimited number of terms, and so chances are you will run against an incumbent. If you decide to run for the House, the odds are very much against you. Since 1962, over 90 percent of the House incumbents who sought reelection won it. In 2000, 394 reelection-seeking incumbents won, and only 9 lost.

But the incredible incumbency advantage enjoyed by modern-day House members is hardly the whole story of getting elected to Congress. Who serves in Congress, and what interests are represented there, is affected by how its members are elected. Each state is entitled to two senators, who serve six-year terms, and at least one representative, who serves a two-year term. How many more representatives a state has depends on its population; what local groups these representatives speak for depends in part on how the district lines are drawn.

The Constitution says very little about how representatives will be selected except to require that they be inhabitants of the states from which they are chosen. It says nothing about districts and originally left it up to the states to decide who would be eligible to vote for representatives. The size of the first House was set by the Constitution at sixty-five members, and the apportionment of the seats among the states was spelled out in Article I, section 2. From that point on, it has been up to Congress to decide how many representatives each state would have (provided that each had at least one).

Initially some states did not create congressional districts; all their representatives were elected at large. In other states representatives were elected from multimember as well as single-member districts. In time all states with more than one representative elected each from a single-member district. How those district boundaries were drawn, however, could profoundly affect the outcomes of elections. There were two problems. One was **malapportionment,** which results from having districts of very unequal size. If one district is twice as populous as another, twice as many votes are needed in the larger district to elect a representative. Thus a citizen's vote in the smaller district is worth twice as much as a vote in the larger.

The other problem was **gerrymandering,** which means drawing a district boundary in some bizarre or unusual shape to make it easy for the candidate of one party to win election in that district. In a state entitled to ten representatives, where half the voters are Democrats and half are Republicans, district lines could be drawn so that eight districts would have a slight majority of citizens from one party and two districts would have lopsided majorities from the other. Thus it can be made easy for one party to win eight of the ten seats.

malapportionment *Drawing the boundaries of legislative districts so that they are unequal in population.*

gerrymandering *Drawing the boundaries of legislative districts in bizarre or unusual shapes to favor one party.*

Malapportionment and gerrymandering have been conspicuous features of American congressional politics. In 1962, for example, one district in Texas had nearly a million residents, while another had less than a quarter million. In California Democrats in control of the state legislature drew district lines in the early 1960s so that two pockets of Republican strength in Los Angeles separated by many miles were connected by a thin strip of coastline. In this way most Republican voters were thrown into one district, while Democratic voters were spread more evenly over several.

Hence there are four problems to solve in deciding who gets represented in the House:

1. Establishing the total size of the House
2. Allocating seats in the House among the states

3. Determining the size of congressional districts within states
4. Determining the shape of those districts

By and large Congress has decided the first two questions, and the states have decided the last two—but under some rather strict Supreme Court rules.

In 1911 Congress decided that the House had become large enough and voted to fix its size at 435 members. There it has remained ever since (except for a brief period when it had 437 members owing to the admission of Alaska and Hawaii to the Union in 1959). Once the size was decided upon, it was necessary to find a formula for performing the painful task of apportioning seats among the states as they gained and lost population. The Constitution requires such reapportionment every ten years. A more or less automatic method was selected in 1929 based on a complex statistical system that has withstood decades of political and scientific testing. Under this system, since 1990 eighteen states have lost representation in the House and eleven have gained it. Florida and California posted the biggest gains, while New York and Pennsylvania suffered the largest losses (see Table 10.1).

sophomore surge
An increase in the votes congressional candidates usually get when they first run for reelection.

The states did little about malapportionment and gerrymandering until ordered to do so by the Supreme Court. In 1964 the Court ruled that the Constitution requires that districts be drawn so that, as nearly as possible, one person's vote would be worth as much as another's.[7] The Court rule, "one person, one vote," seems clear but in fact leaves a host of questions unanswered. How much deviation from equal size is allowable? Should other factors be considered besides population? (For example, a state legislature might want to draw district lines to make it easier for African Americans, Italian Americans, farmers, or some other group with a distinct interest to elect a representative; the requirement of exactly equal districts might make this impossible.) And the gerrymandering problem remains: districts of the same size can be drawn to favor one party or another. The courts have struggled to find answers to these questions, but they remain far from settled.

Table 10.1 Changes in State Representation in the House of Representatives

States	Number of Seats Before 1990 Census	After 1990 Census	After 2000 Census	Change
Gained Seats After Both 1990 and 2000 Census				
Arizona	6	8	10	+4
California	45	52	53	+8
Florida	15	23	25	+10
Georgia	10	11	13	+3
North Carolina	11	12	13	+2
Texas	27	30	32	+5
Lost Seats After Both 1990 and 2000 Census				
Illinois	22	20	19	–3
Michigan	18	16	15	–3
New York	34	31	29	–5
Ohio	21	19	18	–3
Pennsylvania	23	21	19	–4

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Winning the Primary However the district lines are drawn, getting elected to Congress first requires getting one's name on the ballot. At one time the political parties nominated candidates and even printed ballots with the party slates listed on them. All the voter had to do was take the ballot of the preferred party and put it in the ballot box. Today, with rare exceptions, a candidate wins a party's nomination by gathering enough voter signatures to get on the ballot in a primary election, the outcome of which is often beyond the ability of political parties to influence. Candidates tend to form organizations of personal followings and win "their party's" nomination simply by getting more primary votes than the next candidate. It is quite unusual for an incumbent to lose a primary: from 1990 through 2006 only about 10 percent of incumbent senators and 5 percent of incumbent representatives seeking reelection failed to win renomination in primaries. These statistics suggest how little opportunity parties have to control or punish their congressional members.

Most newly elected members become strong in their districts very quickly; this is called the **sophomore surge.** It is the difference between the votes candidates get the first time they are elected (and thus become freshman members) and the votes they get when they run for reelection (in hopes of becoming sophomore members). Before the 1960s House candidates did not

do much better the second time they ran than the first. Beginning then, however, the sophomore surge kicked in, so that today freshman candidates running for reelection will get 8 to 10 percent more votes than when they were first elected. Senate candidates also benefit now from a sophomore surge, though to a lesser degree.

The reason for this surge is that members of Congress have figured out how to use their offices to run *personal* rather than party campaigns. They make use of free ("franked") mail, frequent trips home, radio and television broadcasts, and the distribution of services to their districts to develop among their constituents a good opinion of themselves, not their party. They also cater to their constituents' distrust of the federal government by promising to "clean things up" if reelected. They run *for* Congress by running *against* it.[8]

To the extent that they succeed, they enjoy great freedom in voting on particular issues and have less need to explain away votes that their constituents might not like. If, however, any single-issue groups are actively working in their districts for or against abortion, gun control, nuclear energy, or tax cuts, muting the candidates' voting record may not be possible.

Staying in Office The way people get elected to Congress has two important effects. First, it produces legislators who are closely tied to local concerns (their districts, their states), and second, it ensures that party leaders will have relatively weak influence over them (because those leaders cannot determine who gets nominated for office).

The local orientation of legislators has some important effects on how policy is made. For example:

- Every member of Congress organizes his or her office to do as much as possible for people back home.
- If your representative serves on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, your state has a much better chance of getting a new bridge or canal than if you do not have a representative on this committee.[9]
- If your representative serves on the House Appropriations Committee, your district is more likely to get approval for a federal grant to improve your water and sewage-treatment programs than if your representative does not serve on that committee.[10]

Former House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill had this in mind when he said, "All politics is local." Some people think that this localism is wrong; in their view members of Congress should do what is best for "the nation as a whole." This argument is about the role of legislators: are they supposed to be *delegates* who do what their district wants or *trustees* who use their best judgment on issues without regard to the preferences of their district?

Naturally most members are some combination of delegate and trustee, with the exact mix depending on the nature of the issue. But some, as we shall see, definitely lean one way or the other. All members want to be reelected, but "delegates" tend to value this over every other consideration and so seek out committee assignments and projects that will produce benefits for their districts. On the other hand, "trustees" will seek out committee assignments that give them a chance to address large questions, such as foreign affairs, that may have no implications at all for their districts.

★ Primary Versus General Campaigns

When you run for federal office, you must run in two elections, not just one. The first consists of primary elections designed to choose each party's nominee, the second is the general election that picks the winner who will hold office. If you are running for president, some states, such as Iowa, hold caucuses instead of primary elections. A caucus is a meeting of people, often in an auditorium or church basement, where they vote on who they would like their party's nominee to be.

Each election or caucus attracts a different mix of voters. What may help you win a primary or a caucus may be very different from what will help you win the general election. To win a primary or a caucus you must mobilize political activists who will give money, do volunteer work, and attend local caucuses. As we saw in Chapters 7 and 8, activists are more ideologically stringent than the voters at large. To motivate these activists you must be more liberal (if you are a Democrat) in your tone and theme than are rank-and-file Democrats, or more conservative (if you are a Republican) than are rank-and-file Republicans.

Consider the caucuses held in Iowa in the winter preceding a presidential election year. This is the first real test of the candidates vying for the nomination. Anyone who does poorly here is at a disadvantage, in terms of media attention and contributor interest, for the rest of the campaign.

How Things Work

Qualifications for Entering Congress and Privileges of Being in Congress

Qualifications

Representative

- Must be twenty-five years of age (when seated, not when elected)
- Must have been a citizen of the United States for seven years
- Must be an inhabitant of the state from which elected (*Note:* Custom, but *not* the Constitution, requires that a representative live in the district that he or she represents.)

Senator

- Must be thirty years of age (when seated, not when elected)
- Must have been a citizen of the United States for nine years
- Must be an inhabitant of the state from which elected

Judging Qualifications

Each house is the judge of the "elections, returns, and qualifications" of its members. Thus Congress alone can decide disputed congressional elections. On occasion it has excluded a person from taking a seat on the grounds that the election was improper.

Either house can punish a member—by reprimand, for example—or, by a two-thirds vote, expel a member.

Privileges

Members of Congress have certain privileges, the most important of which, conferred by the Constitution, is that "for any speech or debate in either house they shall not be questioned in any other place." This doctrine of "privileged speech" has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to mean that members of Congress cannot be sued or prosecuted for anything that they say or write in connection with their legislative duties.

When Senator Mike Gravel read the Pentagon Papers—some then-secret government documents about the Vietnam War—into the *Congressional Record* in defiance of a court order restraining their publication, the Court held that this was "privileged speech" and beyond challenge [*Gravel v. United States*, 408 U.S. 606 (1972)]. But when Senator William Proxmire issued a press release critical of a scientist doing research on monkeys, the Court decided that the scientist could sue him for libel because a press release was not part of the legislative process [*Hutchinson v. Proxmire*, 443, U.S. 111 (1979)].

The several thousand Iowans who participate in their parties' caucuses are not representative of the followers of their party in the state, much less nationally. In 1988 Senator Robert Dole came in first and evangelist Pat Robertson came in second in the Iowa Republican caucus, with Vice President George Bush finishing third. As it turned out, there was little support for Dole or Robertson in the rest of the country.

Democrats who participate in the Iowa caucus tend to be more liberal than Democrats generally.[11] Moreover, the way the caucuses are run is a far cry from how most elections are held. To vote in the Republican caucus, you need not prove you are a Republican or even a voter. The Democratic caucus is not an election at all; instead a person supporting a certain candidate stands in one corner of the room with people who also support him, while those supporting other candidates stand in other corners with other groups. There is a lot of calling back and forth, intended to persuade people to leave one group and join another. No group with fewer than 15 percent of the people in attendance gets to choose any delegates, so people in these small groups then go to other, larger ones. It is a cross between musical chairs and fraternity pledge week.

Suppose you are a Democrat running for president and you do well in the Iowa caucus. Suppose you go on to win your party's nomination. Now you have to go back to Iowa to campaign for votes in the general election. Between 1940 and 2004 Iowa has voted Republican in every presidential election but six (1948,

1964, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000). Your Republican opponent is not going to let you forget all of the liberal slogans you uttered nine months before. The Republican candidate faces the mirror image of this problem—sounding very conservative to get support from Republican activists in states such as Massachusetts and New York and then having to defend those speeches when running against his Democratic opponent in those states.

The problem is not limited to Iowa but exists in every state where activists are more ideologically polarized than the average voter. To get activist support for the nomination, candidates move to the ideological extremes; to win the general election, they try to move back to the ideological center. The typical voter looks at the results and often decides that neither candidate appeals to him or her very much, and so casts a "clothespin vote" (see the box on this page).

Early in the 2004 presidential caucuses and primaries, John Kerry claimed that he was an opponent of the American invasion of Iraq in order to defeat Howard Dean, the Vermont governor who seemed to be capturing the antiwar vote among Democrats. But after he won his party's nomination, Kerry backed away from an antiwar stance in order to be more attractive to centrist voters. He had learned a lesson that George McGovern did not understand in 1972. McGovern maintained his liberal views on the war in Vietnam, decriminalizing marijuana, and providing amnesty for draft dodgers.[12] His opponent, Richard Nixon, defeated him easily by taking more centrist positions.

One last thing: if you decide to run for president as a Democrat, do not trust too much in the early polls indicating who is the front-runner for the nomination. Edmund Muskie (1972), George Wallace (1976), Ted Kennedy (1980), Gary Hart (1988), Mario Cuomo (1992), and Joseph Lieberman (2004) were all early front-runners among Democrats, but none got the party's nomination. Only front-runners Walter Mondale (1984) and Al Gore (2000) prevailed (though neither went on to win the office). By contrast, since 1972, every early Republican front-runner has won the nomination. (In early 2007, New York State Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton led among Democratic hopefuls, while former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani led among Republican hopefuls.)

Two Kinds of Campaign Issues

In election campaigns there are two different kinds of issues.[13] A **position issue** is one in which the rival candidates have opposing views on a question that also divides the voters. For example, in the 2004 election George W. Bush wanted to let people put some of their Social Security money into private savings accounts; John Kerry opposed this.

Since 1860 many of the great party realignments have been based on differing position issues. After the Civil War the question was whether African Americans should be slaves or free. In the 1890s it was whether tariffs should be high or low and whether the dollar should be made cheaper. In the 1960s it was whether broad new civil rights legislation was needed.

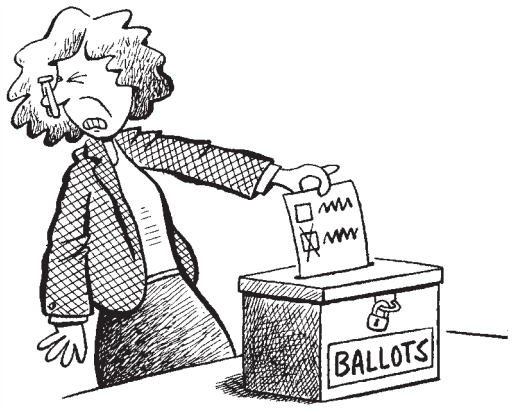
But sometimes voters are not divided on important issues. Instead the question is whether a candidate fully supports the public's view on a matter about which nearly everyone agrees. These are called **valence issues.** For example,

position issues *An issue about which the public is divided and rival candidates or political parties adopt different policy positions.*

valence issue *An issue about which the public is united and rival candidates or political parties adopt similar positions in hopes that each will be thought to best represent those widely shared beliefs.*

POLITICALLY SPEAKING

Clothespin Vote



The vote cast by a person who does not like either candidate and so votes for the less objectionable of the two, putting a clothespin over his or her nose to keep out the unpleasant stench.

Trivia

Elections

Only two men to have been elected president by the House of Representatives after failing to win a majority in the electoral college	**Thomas Jefferson (1800) and John Quincy Adams (1824)**
Only Democratic senator to be the running mate of a Republican presidential candidate	**Andrew Johnson (1864)**
Candidates for president who received more popular votes than their opponents but were not elected	**Grover Cleveland and Al Gore got more popular votes but fewer electoral votes than their opponents**
President who won the largest percentage of the popular vote	**Lyndon B. Johnson, 61.7 percent (1964)**
Only person to serve as vice president and president without having been elected to either post	**Gerald Ford (1973–1976)**
President who won the most electoral votes	**Ronald Reagan (525 in 1984)**
First woman to run for national office on a major-party ticket	**Geraldine Ferraro (Democratic candidate for vice president, 1984)**

everybody wants a strong economy and low crime rates, and so no candidate favors high unemployment or more crime. What voters look for on valence issues is which candidate seems most closely linked to a universally shared view.

Valence issues are quite common. In 1968 Richard Nixon seemed to be more supportive of anticrime measures than his rival; in 1976 Jimmy Carter seemed more likely to favor honesty in government than his opponent; in 1984 Ronald Reagan seemed more closely identified with a strong economy than his opponent; in 1988 George H.W. Bush seemed more closely linked to patriotism than his opponent. Notice that we have said "seemed." This is how voters perceived the winners; it does not mean that the opponents favored crime, corruption, unemployment, or anti-Americanism.

In 1992 Bill Clinton was beset with charges that he was guilty of dodging the draft, marital infidelity, and smoking pot. But his strategists decided to focus the campaign on the valence issue of the economy, and they went about rescuing Clinton from the other criticisms. One observer later reported, "Retooling the image of a couple who had already been in the public eye for five battering months required a campaign of behavior modification and media manipulation so elaborate that its outline ran to fourteen single-spaced pages."[14] Bill and Hillary Clinton made joint appearances on television during which they demonstrated their affection for each other. The plan even called for staging an event where Bill Clinton and his daughter would surprise Hillary Clinton on Mother's Day.[15]

The 2004 campaign relied on both valence issues (Bush and Kerry supported "strengthening" the military while differing on many details, including how to recruit allies) and position issues (Bush supported his tax cuts while Kerry favored repealing them for people earning over $200,000 a year).

Campaigns have usually combined both position and valence questions, but the latter have increased in importance in recent years. This has happened in part because presidential campaigns are now conducted largely on television, where it is important to project popular symbols and manipulate widely admired images. Candidates try to show that they are likable, and they rely on televised portraits of their similarity to ordinary people.

Television, Debates, and Direct Mail

Once campaigns mostly involved parades, big rallies, "whistle-stop" train tours, and shaking hands outside factory gates and near shopping centers. All of this still goes on, but increasingly presidential and senatorial candidates (and those House candidates with television stations in their districts) use broadcasting.

There are two ways to use television—by running paid advertisements and by getting on the nightly news

How Things Work

Kinds of Elections

There are two kinds of elections in the United States: general and primary. A **general election** is used to fill an elective office. A **primary election** is used to select a party's candidates for an elective office, though in fact those who vote in a primary election may not consider themselves party members. Some primaries are closed. In a **closed primary** you must declare in advance (sometimes several weeks in advance) that you are a registered member of the political party in whose primary you wish to vote. About forty states have closed primaries.

Other primaries are open. In an **open primary** you can decide when you enter the voting booth which party's primary you wish to participate in. You are given every party's ballot; you may vote on one. Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin have open primaries. A variant on the open primary is the **blanket** (or "free love") **primary**—in the voting booth you mark a ballot that lists the candidates of all the parties, and thus you can help select the Democratic candidate for one office and the Republican candidate for another. Alaska and Washington have blanket primaries.

The differences among these kinds of primaries should not be exaggerated, for even the closed primary does not create any great barrier for a voter who wishes to vote in the Democratic primary in one election and the Republican in another. Some states also have a **runoff primary:** if no candidate gets a majority of the votes, there is a runoff between the two with the most votes. Runoff primaries are common in the South.

A special kind of primary, a presidential primary, is that used to pick delegates to the presidential nominating conventions of the major parties. Presidential primaries come in a bewildering variety. A simplified list looks like this:

- **Delegate selection only** Only the names of prospective delegates to the convention appear on the ballot. They may or may not indicate their presidential preferences.
- **Delegate selection with advisory presidential preference** Voters pick delegates and indicate their preferences among presidential candidates. The delegates are not legally bound to observe these preferences.
- **Binding presidential preference** Voters indicate their preferred presidential candidates. Delegates must observe these preferences, at least for a certain number of convention ballots. The delegates may be chosen in the primary or by a party convention.

In 1981 the Supreme Court ruled that political parties, not state legislatures, have the right to decide how delegates to national conventions are selected. Thus Wisconsin could not retain an open primary if the national Democratic party objected (*Democratic Party v. La Follette,* 101 Sup. Ct. 1010, 1981). Now the parties can insist that only voters who declare themselves Democrats or Republicans can vote in presidential primaries. The Supreme Court's ruling may have relatively little practical effect, however, since the "declaration" might occur only an hour or a day before the election.

general election *An election held to choose which candidate will hold office.*

primary election *An election held to choose candidates for office.*

closed primary *A primary election in which voting is limited to already registered party members.*

open primary *A primary election in which voters may choose in which party to vote as they enter the polling place.*

blanket primary *A primary election in which each voter may vote for candidates from both parties.*

runoff primary *A second primary election held when no candidate wins a majority of the votes in the first primary.*

broadcasts. In the language of campaigners, short television ads are called *spots,* and a campaign activity that appears on a news broadcast is called a *visual.* Much has been written about the preparation of spots, usually under titles such as "the selling of the president" or "packaging the candidate" (and mostly by advertising executives, who are not especially known for underestimating their own influence). No doubt spots can have an important effect in some cases. A little-known candidate can increase his or her visibility by frequent use of spots (this is what Jimmy Carter did in the 1976 presidential primaries).

The effect of television advertising on general elections is probably a good deal less than its effect on primaries; indeed, as we shall see in Chapter 12, most scientific studies of television's influence on voting decisions have shown that either it has no effect or the effect is subtle and hard to detect. Nor is it surprising that this should be the case. In a general election, especially one for a high-visibility office (such as president or governor), the average voter has many sources of information—his or her own party or ideological preference, various kinds of advertising, the opinions of friends and family, and newspaper and magazine stories. Furthermore, both sides will use TV spots; if well done, they are likely to cancel each other out. In short, it is not yet clear that a gullible public is being sold a bill of goods by slick Madison Avenue advertisers, whether the goods are automobiles or politicians.

Visuals are a vital part of any major campaign effort because, unlike spots, they cost the campaign little and, as "news," they may have greater credibility with the viewer. A visual is a brief, filmed episode showing the candidate doing something that a reporter thinks is newsworthy. Simply making a speech, unless the speech contains important new facts or charges, is often thought by TV editors to be uninteresting: television viewers are not attracted by pictures of "talking heads," and in the highly competitive world of TV, audience reactions are all-important determinants of what gets on the air. Knowing this, campaign managers will strive to have their candidates do something visually interesting every day, no later than 3:00 P.M. (if the visual is to be on the 6:00 P.M. news)—talk to elderly folks in a nursing home, shake hands with people waiting in an unemployment line, or sniff the waters of a polluted lake. Obviously all these efforts are for naught if a TV camera crew is not around; great pains are therefore taken to schedule these visuals at times and in places that make it easy for the photographers to be present.

Ironically, visuals—and television newscasts generally—may give the viewer less information than commercial spots. This, of course, is the exact opposite of what many people believe. It is commonplace to deplore political advertising, especially the short spot, on the grounds that it is either devoid of information or manipulative, and to praise television news programs, especially longer debates and interviews, because they are informative and balanced. In fact the best research we have so far suggests that the reverse is true: news programs covering elections tend to convey very little information (they often show scenes of crowds cheering or candidates shouting slogans) and make little or no impression on viewers, if indeed they are watched at all. Paid commercials, on the other hand, especially the shorter spots, often contain a good deal of information that is seen, remembered, and evaluated by a public that is quite capable of distinguishing between fact and humbug.[16]

A special kind of television campaigning is the campaign debate. Incumbents or well-known candidates have little incentive to debate their opponents; by so doing, they only give more publicity to lesser-known rivals. Despite the general rule among politicians never to help an opponent, Vice President Nixon debated the less-well-known John Kennedy in 1960, and President Gerald Ford debated the less-well-known Jimmy Carter in 1976. Nixon and Ford lost. Lyndon Johnson would not debate Barry Goldwater in 1964, nor would Nixon debate Humphrey in 1968 or McGovern in 1972. Johnson and Nixon won. Carter debated the equally well-known Reagan in 1980 (but refused to join in a three-way debate with Reagan and John Anderson). Carter lost. It is hard to know what effect TV debates have on election outcomes, but poll data suggest that in 1980 voters who watched the debates were reassured by Reagan's performance; after the second debate with Carter, he took a lead in the polls that he never relinquished.[17] In 1984 most people thought that Mondale did better than Reagan in the first debate, but there is little evidence that the debate affected the outcome of the election. In 1992 and 1996 Clinton was probably the better debater, but he most likely would have won even if he had stumbled.

In 2004 George W. Bush and John F. Kerry held three televised debates. Opinions differ as to who did better, but there is little evidence that these encounters affected the election results.

Though TV visuals and debates are free, they are also risky. The risk is the slip of the tongue. You may have spent thirty years of your life in unblemished public service, you may have thought through your position on the issues with great care, you may have rehearsed your speeches until your dog starts to howl, but just make one verbal blunder and suddenly the whole campaign focuses on your misstep. In 1976 President Ford erroneously implied that Poland was not part of the Soviet bloc. For days the press dwelt on this slip. His opponent, Jimmy Carter, admitted in a *Playboy* interview that he had sometimes had lust in his heart. It is hard to imagine anyone who has not, but apparently presidents are supposed to be above that sort of thing. In 1980 Ronald Reagan said that trees cause pollution—oops, here we go again.

Because of the fear of a slip, because the voters do not want to hear long, fact-filled speeches about complex issues, and because general-election campaigns are fights to attract the centrist voter, the candidates will rely on a stock speech that sets out the campaign theme as well as on their ability to string together several proven applause-getting lines. For reporters covering the candidate every day, it can be a mind-numbing experience. Nelson Rockefeller spoke so often of the "brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God" that the reporters started referring to it as his BOMFOG speech. Occasionally this pattern is interrupted by a "major" address—that is, a carefully composed talk on some critical issue, usually delivered before a live audience and designed to provide issue-related stories for the reporters to write.

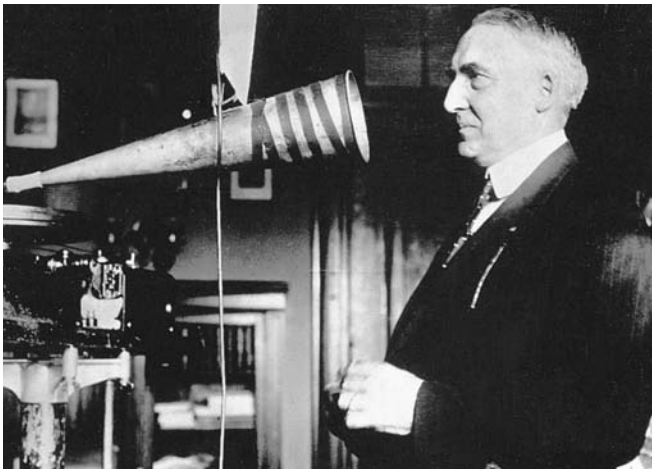
If you dislike campaign oratory, put yourself in the candidate's shoes for a moment. Every word you say will be scrutinized, especially for slips of the tongue. Interest group leaders and party activists will react sharply to any phrase that departs from their preferred policies. Your opponent stands ready to pounce on any error of fact or judgment. You must give countless speeches every day. The rational reaction to this state of affairs is to avoid controversy, stick to prepared texts and tested phrases, and shun anything that sounds original (and hence untested). You therefore wind up trying to sell yourself as much as or more than your ideas. Voters may *say* that they admire a blunt, outspoken person, but in a tough political campaign they would probably find such bluntness a little unnerving.

Television is the most visible example of modern technology's effect on campaigns. Since 1960 presidential elections have been contested largely through television. Without television the campaign waged in 1992 by independent candidate Ross Perot might not have happened at all. Perot launched his candidacy with successive appearances on Cable News Network's call-in program "Larry King Live," and he bought several half-hour chunks of television time to air his views on the federal budget deficit. In early October, before the first of three televised debates featuring Perot, Republican incumbent George H.W. Bush, and Democratic challenger Bill Clinton, most national polls showed Perot with only 10 percent of the vote. But after the debates Perot's support in the polls doubled, and he ended up with about 19 percent of the votes cast on election day.

In 1996 the big television networks agreed to make some free television time available to the major presidential candidates. The Federal Communications Commission approved the plan to limit the free TV to "major" candidates, thus denying it to minor third-party nominees.

Less visible than television but perhaps just as important is the Internet. The computer makes possible sophisticated direct-mail campaigning, and this in turn

In the 1888 presidential campaign, supporters of Benjamin Harrison rolled a huge ball covered with campaign slogans across the country. The gimmick, first used in 1840, gave rise to the phrase "keep the ball rolling."



Candidates first made phonographic recordings of their speeches in 1908. Warren G. Harding is shown here recording a speech during the 1920 campaign.

makes it possible for a candidate to address specific appeals to particular voters easily and rapidly solicit campaign contributions. In the 2004 presidential campaign Vermont Governor Howard Dean, at first a largely unknown person, raised a huge amount of money from Internet appeals in which he emphasized his opposition to our war in Iraq. Other candidates will no doubt do the same. However, the Internet lends itself to ideological appeals that motivate small contributions, and not every candidate will want to make such arguments.

Whereas television is heard by everybody—and thus leads the candidate using it to speak in generalities to avoid offending anyone—direct mail is aimed at particular groups (college students, Native Americans, bankers, autoworkers), to whom specific views can be expressed with much less risk of offending someone. So important are the lists of names of potential contributors to whom a computer may send appeals that a prized resource of any candidate, guarded as if it were a military secret, is "The List." Novices in politics must slowly develop their own lists or beg sympathetic incumbents for a peek at theirs.

The chief consequence of the new style of campaigning is not, as some think, that it is more manipulative than old-style campaigning (picnics with free beer and $5 bills handed to voters can be just as manipulative as TV ads); rather it is that running campaigns has become divorced from the process of governing. Previously the party leaders who ran the campaigns would take part in the government once it was elected, and since they were *party* leaders, they had to worry about getting their candidate *re*elected.

John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon debate during the 1960 presidential campaign.

Modern political consultants take no responsibility for governing, and by the time the next election rolls around, they may be working for someone else.

★ Money

As we outlined earlier in this chapter, all these consultants, TV ads, and computerized mailings cost money—lots of it. A powerful California politician once observed that "money is the mother's milk of politics," and many people think that our democracy is drowning in it. In Chapter 11 we will consider what, if anything, interest groups get for the money they give to politicians, and in Chapter 12 we shall summarize what we know about the effects of television advertising on elections. Here let us try to answer four questions: Where does campaign money come from? What rules govern how it is raised and spent? What has been the effect of campaign finance reform? What does campaign spending buy?

The Sources of Campaign Money

Presidential candidates get part of their money from private donors and part from the federal government; congressional candidates get all of their money from private sources. In the presidential primaries, candidates raise money from private citizens and interest groups. The federal government will provide matching funds, dollar for dollar, for all monies raised from individual donors who contribute no more than $250. (To prove they are serious candidates, they must first

How Things Work

Major Federal Campaign Finance Rules

General

- All federal election contributions and expenditures are reported to a Federal Election Commission.
- All contributions over $100 must be disclosed, with name, address, and occupation of contributor.
- No *cash* contributions over $100 or foreign contributions.
- No ceiling on how much candidates may spend out of their own money (unless they accept federal funding for a presidential race).

Individual Contributions

- An individual may not give more than $2,000 to any candidate in any election.
- An individual may not make federal political gifts exceeding $95,000 every two years, of which only $37,500 may go to candidates.

Political Action Committees (PACs)

- Each corporation, union, or association may establish one.
- A PAC must register six months in advance, have at least fifty contributors, and give to at least five candidates.
- PAC contributions may not exceed $5,000 per candidate per election, or $15,000 to a national political party.

Ban on Soft Money

- No corporation or union may give money from its own treasury to any national political party.

Independent Expenditures

- Corporations, unions, and associations may not use their own money to fund "electioneering communications" that refer to clearly identified candidates sixty days before a general election or thirty days before a primary contest.
- PACs may fund electioneering communications up to their expenditure limits.

Presidential Primaries

- Federal matching funds can be given to match individual contributions of $250 or less.
- To be eligible, a candidate must raise $5,000 in each of twenty states in contributions of $250 or less.

Presidential Election

- The federal government will pay all campaign costs (up to a legal limit) of major-party candidates and part of the cost of minor-party candidates (those winning between 5 and 25 percent of the vote).

raise $5,000 in each of twenty states from such small contributors.) The government also gives a lump-sum grant to each political party to help pay the costs of its nominating convention. In the general election the government pays all the costs of each candidate, up to a limit set by law (in 2004 that limit was $74.4 million for each major candidate).

Congressional candidates get no government funds; all their money must come out of their own pockets or be raised from individuals, interest groups (PACs), or the political parties. Contrary to what many people think, most of that money comes—and has always come—from individual donors. Because the rules sharply limit how much any individual can give, these donors tend not to be fat cats but people of modest means who contribute $100 or $200 per person.

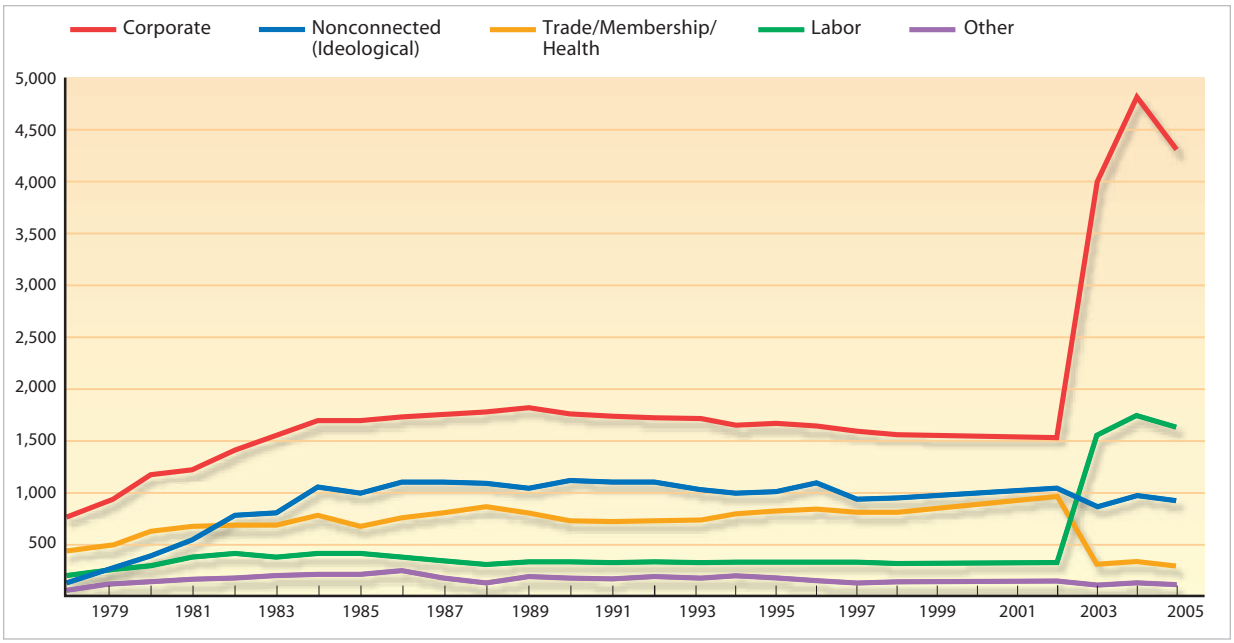
Campaign Finance Rules

During the 1972 presidential election, men hired by President Nixon's campaign staff broke into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate office building. They were caught by an alert security guard. The subsequent investigation disclosed that the Nixon people had engaged in dubious or illegal money-raising schemes, including taking large sums from wealthy contributors in exchange for appointing them to ambassadorships. Many individuals and corporations were indicted for making illegal donations (since 1925 it had been against the law for corporations or labor unions to contribute money to candidates, but the law had been unenforceable). Some of the accused had given money to Democratic candidates as well as to Nixon.

When the break-in was discovered, the Watergate scandal unfolded. It had two political results: President Nixon was forced to resign, and a new campaign finance law was passed.

Under the new law, individuals could not contribute more than $1,000 to a candidate during any single election. Corporations and labor unions had for many decades been prohibited from spending money on campaigns, but the new law created a substitute: political action committees (PACs). A PAC must have at least fifty members (all of whom enroll voluntarily), give to at least five federal candidates,

Figure 10.2 Growth of PACs



Source: Federal Election Commission.

and must not give more than $5,000 to any candidate in any election or more than $15,000 per year to any political party.

In addition, the law made federal tax money available to help pay for presidential primary campaigns and for paying all of the campaign costs of a major-party candidate and a fraction of the costs of a minor-party candidate in a presidential general election.

The new law helped increase the amount of money spent on elections and, in time, changed the way money was spent. There are now more than four thousand PACs (see Figure 10.2). In each election since 2002, they have given over $250 million to congressional candidates. But PACs are not a dominant influence on candidates because they in fact give rather little (often no more than $500). A small contribution is enough to ensure that a phone call to a member of Congress from a PAC sponsor will be returned but not enough, in most cases, to guarantee that the member will act as the PAC wishes.

Moreover, most money for congressional candidates still comes from individuals. But since the limit until 2002 was $1,000 per election (a limit set in the early 1970s), candidates had to devise clever ways of reaching a lot of individuals in order to raise the amount of money they needed. This usually meant direct mail and telephone solicitations. If you are bothered by constant appeals for campaign funds, remember—that's what the law requires.

By contrast, when George McGovern ran against Richard Nixon in 1972, he was chiefly supported by the large contributions of one wealthy donor, and when Eugene McCarthy ran against Lyndon Johnson in 1968, he benefited from a few big donations and did not have to rely on massive fund-raising appeals.

A candidate gets federal money to match, dollar for dollar, what he or she has raised in contributions of $250 or less. But a presidential candidate can decide to forgo federal primary funding and raise his or her own money. In 2000 George W. Bush relied entirely on his own fund-raising, while his chief rival, John McCain, used federal matching funds. In 2004 Bush, Kerry, and Dean all declined federal matching funds in the primary elections. In 2007, several presidential candidates decided to rely on private rather than federal contributions.

If you are a minor-party candidate, you can get some support from the federal government provided you have won at least 5 percent of the vote in the last election. In 2000, both Pat Buchanan (Reform party) and Ralph Nader (Green party) got partial support from Washington because their parties had won more than 5 percent of the vote in 1996. But this time out, neither party won that much, and so Nader did not get federal support in 2004.

The 1973 campaign finance law produced two problems. The first was **independent expenditures.** A PAC, a corporation, or a labor union could spend whatever it wanted supporting or opposing a candidate, so long as this spending was "independent," that is, not coordinated with or made at the direction of the candidate's wishes. Simply put, independent expenditures are ordinary advertising that is directed at or against candidates.

independent expenditures *Spending by political action committees, corporations, or labor unions that is done to help a party or candidate but is done independently of them.*

soft money *Funds obtained by political parties that are spent on party activities, such as get-out-the-vote drives, but not on behalf of a specific candidate.*

The second was **soft money.** Under the law, individuals, corporations, labor unions, and other groups could give unlimited amounts of money to political parties provided the money was not used to back candidates by name. But the money could be used in ways that helped candidates by financing voter-registration and get-out-the-vote drives. Over half a billion dollars in soft money was spent during the 2000 presidential campaign and again in the 2004 presidential campaign.

A Second Campaign Finance Law

Reform is a tricky word. We like to think it means fixing something that has gone wrong. But some reforms can make matters worse. For example, the campaign finance reforms enacted in the early 1970s helped matters in some ways by ensuring that all campaign contributors would be identified by name. But they made things worse in other ways by, for example, requiring candidates to raise small sums from many donors. This made it harder for challengers to run (incumbents are much better known and raise more money) and easier for wealthy candidates to run because, under the law as interpreted by the Supreme Court, candidates can spend as much of their own money as they want.

After the 2000 campaign, a strong movement developed in Congress to reform the reforms of the

The 2004 Election

The 2004 election revealed an electorate as deeply divided as it was in 2000. But unlike 2000, when Bush won fewer popular votes than Al Gore and the contest did not end until after a long recount in Florida and a major Supreme Court decision, Bush in 2004 won many more popular votes than did John Kerry, carried Florida without any chance of a recount, and obtained 286 electoral votes.

With only a few exceptions, Bush and Kerry in 2004 won the same states that Bush and Gore had won in 2000. There were three differences: Kerry won New Hampshire and Bush carried Iowa and New Mexico. The similarity between the two elections has led people to refer to "Red states" that Republicans carry and "Blue states" that the Democrats win. In the map on page 243, we show the split between Red and Blue *counties* rather than states because in many Red and Blue states the opponent won several counties. The Democrats dominate New England, the bigger cities in the Midwest, and the coastal areas on California, Oregon, and Washington; the Republicans carried almost everything else.

Bush was helped by the assignment of electoral votes to the states following the 2000 Census. In 2004 he gained seven more electoral votes by carrying the same states he had won in 2000.

In 2004 we were at war in Iraq. Though we had easily conquered the country from the Saddam Hussein dictatorship, dissident elements in Iraq kept relentlessly attacking American troops as well as other foreigners and members of the new Iraq government. American experience over many decades has shown that though the public will support a war, that backing weakens when we seem stalemated. Moreover, many Kerry supporters never wanted us to fight in Iraq at all and deeply distrusted Bush because they thought him to be "too religious."

John Kerry had his own troubles. Not only was he trying to unseat a president during wartime, his own experiences as a naval officer in Vietnam became controversial. A group of naval veterans (the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth") with experience in Vietnam attacked him for not having won his medals fairly and for his having bitterly criticized the American military in testimony he gave to the Congress after his return. For many weeks, the only campaign issue seemed to be whether Kerry had behaved honorably.

The campaign was especially intense, leading to a very high turnout. Almost 60 percent of the voting-age population cast ballots, the highest since 1968. The big increase in the number of registered voters and the massive get-out-the-vote drives probably helped Bush more than Kerry. In every state but two (South Dakota and Vermont), Bush increased his share of the vote over what he had received four years earlier.

Bush won the votes of men, whites, conservatives, Protestants, married couples, the especially religious, military veterans, gun owners, strong critics of abortion, voters deeply concerned about the war against terrorism, opponents of same-sex marriages, and people worried about taxes and moral values and who approved of Bush's tax cuts. Kerry won a majority of the votes of women, blacks, liberals, union members, Jews, unmarried voters, secularists, gays, people favoring same-sex marriages, strong supporters of abortion, opponents of our war in Iraq, and people who worried about education and the economy and were critics of the tax cuts.

If there was any one decisive issue, it was voters' concerns about terrorism and national security. Opponents of the war in Iraq supported Kerry, but for people who worried about terrorism, the overwhelming majority supported Bush.

In the struggle to control Congress, the Republicans did better than the Democrats, increasing their majority in the House by at least three seats and in the Senate by four seats. In the Senate campaigns, the Republicans increased their hold on the South by winning seats in Louisiana, Georgia, and North and South Carolina. Perhaps the Republicans' most dramatic win was the defeat of Senate minority leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota. He had served in Congress for over a quarter of a century, but lost to John Thune.

People paid a great deal of attention to the 2004 election. When pollsters asked the voters if they were "very interested" in the election, a higher percentage said "yes" than in any election since at least 1996. In 1996 and 2000, 17 percent of the voters made up their minds just a few days before the election; in 2004, only 6 percent waited that long.[18]

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The Florida Vote-Count Controversy

The presidential election of 2000 was decided in favor of George W. Bush on December 12, 2000, when the U.S. Supreme Court suspended the counting of disputed ballots in Florida as ordered by the Florida Supreme Court. When the recounting was halted, Bush was ahead by 537 votes. But would Bush have won Florida and the election anyway?

According to an exhaustive nine-month analysis of 175,010 Florida ballots conducted by eight media organizations in 2001 with the help of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, the answer is yes. The analysis suggested that if the U.S. Supreme Court had allowed the vote counting ordered by the Florida Supreme Court to continue, Bush still would have won Florida by 493 votes, rather than by 537 votes. Likewise, the analysis suggested that if Al Gore had won his original request for hand counts in just four heavily Democratic Florida counties, Bush would have won by 225 votes.

But the controversy was hardly settled by these results. For one thing, the NORC study also suggested that a majority of Florida voters who went to the polls on November 7, 2000, went intending to vote for Gore, but thousands more Gore than Bush voters failed to cast their ballots for their favorite candidate because of mistakes engendered by confusing ballots. For another, the NORC study's findings further indicated that, had the ballots been recounted using the exacting "equal protection" standard that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled was constitutionally necessary but that was impossible to complete given legal time limits, Gore probably would have won.

The U.S. Supreme Court's five-to-four decision in *Bush v. Gore* was hotly debated at the time it was announced, and it has only grown more controversial since. Even some conservative Republicans who wanted Bush to win have criticized not only the Florida Supreme Court for extending the recounts, but the U.S. Supreme Court's majority for deciding the issue as it did. They would have preferred the Florida Supreme Court to do nothing except uphold the state's vote recount law and, failing that, the U.S. Supreme Court to allow Congress to decide the matter as the Constitution seems to require.

Sources: Jackie Calmes and Edward P. Foldessy, "Florida Revisited: Bush Wins Without Supreme Court Help," *Wall Street Journal* (November 2001); E.J. Dionne and William J. Kristol, eds., *Bush v. Gore* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2001).

1970s. The result was the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002, which passed easily in the House and Senate and was signed by President Bush. After the 1970s laws were passed, the Supreme Court, in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), upheld federal limits on campaign contributions even as it ruled that spending money to influence elections is a form of constitutionally protected free speech (hence candidates were free to give unlimited amounts of money to their own campaigns). That precedent had pretty much held, but the new law made three important changes.

First, it banned "soft money" contributions to national political parties from corporations and unions. After the federal elections in 2002, no national party or party committee can accept soft money. Any money the national parties get must come from "hard money"—that is, individual donations or PAC contributions as limited by federal law.

Second, the limit on individual contributions was raised from $1,000 per candidate per election to $2,000.

Third, "independent expenditures" by corporations, labor unions, trade associations, and (under certain circumstances) nonprofit organizations are sharply restricted. Now none of these organizations can use their own money to refer to a clearly identified federal candidate in any advertisement during the sixty days preceding a general election or the thirty days preceding a primary contest. (PACs can still refer to candidates in their ads, but of course PACs are restricted to "hard money"—that is, the amount they can spend under federal law.)

Immediately after the law was signed, critics filed suit in federal court claiming that it was unconstitutional. The suit brought together a number of organizations that rarely work together, such as the

American Civil Liberties Union and the National Right to Life Committee.

The suit claimed that the ban on independent spending that "refers to" clearly identified candidates sixty days before an election is unconstitutional because it is an abridgement of the right of free speech. Under the law, an organization need not even endorse or oppose a candidate; it is enough that it mention a politician. This means that an organization, sixty days before an election, cannot say that it "supports (or opposes) a bill proposed by Congresswoman Pelosi."

Newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations are not affected by the law, so that they can say whatever they want for or against a candidate. One way of evaluating the law is to observe that it shifts influence away from businesses and unions and toward the media.

In *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (2002), the Supreme Court decided to uphold almost all of the law. As we saw in Chapter 5, it rejected the argument of those who claimed that speech requires money and decided it was no violation of the free speech provisions of the First Amendment to eliminate the ability of corporations and labor unions (and the organizations that use their money) to even *mention* a candidate for federal office for sixty days before the national election. In 2007, however, the Court backed away from this view. An ad by a right-to-life group urged people to write to Senator Russell Feingold to convince him to vote for certain judicial nominees, but it did not tell people how to vote. The Court decided that this was "issue advocacy" protected by the First Amendment and so could not be banned by the McCain-Feingold law.

If the past is any guide, however, neither recent changes nor the existing legal maze will do much to keep individuals, PACs, party leaders, and others from funding the candidates they favor. Nor should we be surprised if groups continue to steer contributions much as one might expect.

For instance, since 1980 the national Republican party platform has endorsed the pro-life position on abortion while the national Democratic party platform has endorsed the pro-choice position on abortion. During the 2005–2006 federal election cycle, pro-life groups such as National Right to Life gave 98 percent of their $410,000 in contributions to Republican candidates, while pro-choice groups such as Planned Parenthood gave 86 percent of their $887,000 in contributions to Democrats. Eleven of the top twenty PAC contributors gave more money to Democrats, eight gave more to Republicans, and the single largest split

Table 10.2 Top Twenty PAC Contributors to Federal Candidates, Democratic and Republican (2005–2006)

PAC Name	Total Amount	Dem Pct	Repub Pct
National Assn of Realtors	$3,756,005	49%	51%
National Beer Wholesalers Assn	2,913,000	30	70
National Assn of Home Builders	2,897,000	26	73
National Auto Dealers Assn	2,814,100	30	70
Operating Engineers Union	2,711,485	78	21
American Bankers Assn	2,687,174	35	65
Laborers Union	2,643,650	85	14
Intl Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	2,573,125	97	3
American Assn for Justice	2,526,500	96	4
Credit Union National Assn	2,377,353	45	54
AT&T Inc	2,279,183	33	66
Carpenters & Joiners Union	2,261,423	74	25
United Parcel Service	2,231,628	32	68
United Auto Workers	2,212,350	99	1
American Federation of Teachers	2,095,948	99	1
Teamsters Union	2,089,100	91	8
American Medical Assn	2,018,634	31	69
American Fedn of St/Cnty/Munic Employees	2,006,683	98	1
Plumbers/Pipefitters Union	1,948,100	91	9
International Assn of Fire Fighters	1,875,105	72	27

Source: Federal Election Commission.

Senators John McCain and Russell Feingold wrote the campaign finance reform act that passed in 2002.

its money almost exactly between the parties' candidates (see Table 10.2).

New Sources of Money

If money is, indeed, the mother's milk of politics, efforts to make the money go away are not likely to work. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, once enforced, immediately stimulated people to find other ways to spend political money.

527 organizations *Organizations that, under section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code, raise and spend money to advance political causes.*

The most common were **527 organizations.** These groups, named after a provision of the Internal Revenue Code, are designed to permit the kind of soft money expenditures once made by political parties. In 2004 the Democrats created the Media Fund, America Coming Together, America Votes, and many other groups. George Soros, the wealthy businessman, gave over $23 million to organizations pledged to defeat George Bush. The Republicans responded by creating Progress for America, The Leadership Forum, America for Job Security, and other groups. Under the law, as it is now interpreted, 527 organizations can spend their money on politics so long as they do not coordinate with a candidate or lobby directly for that person. In 2004, 527 organizations raised and spent over one-third of a billion dollars. So far the lesson seems to be this: campaign finance laws are not likely to take money out of politics.

Money and Winning

In the general election for president, money does not make much difference, because both major-party candidates have the same amount, contributed by the federal government. During peacetime, presidential elections are usually decided by three things: political party affiliation, the state of the economy, and the character of the candidates.

For all the talk about voting for "the person, not the party," history teaches that at least 80 percent of the presidential vote will go to the candidates of the two main parties. This means that a presidential election will normally be decided by the 20 percent of voters who cannot be counted on to vote either Democratic or Republican.

In good economic times the party holding the White House normally does well; in poor times it does badly. This is sometimes called the "pocketbook vote." But it is not clear whose pocketbook determines how a person will vote. Many people who are doing well financially will vote against the party in power if the country as a whole is not doing well. A person who is doing well may have friends or family members who are doing poorly. Or the well-off voter may think that if the country is doing poorly, he or she will soon feel the pinch by losing a job or losing customers.

Voters also care about character, and so some money from presidential campaign coffers goes to fund "character ads." *Character* here means several things: Is the candidate honest and reliable? Does the candidate think as the voter thinks about social issues such as crime, abortion, and school prayer? Does the candidate act presidential? Acting presidential seems to mean

being an effective speaker, displaying dignity and compassion, sounding like someone who can take charge and get things done, and coming across consistently as a reasonable, likable person. Rash, disagreeable extremists need not apply.

Since both major candidates usually get the same amount of federal money for the general-election campaign, money does not make much of a difference in determining the winner. Other factors that also do not make a difference include the following:

- *Vice-presidential nominee:* There has rarely been an election in which his or her identity has made a difference.
- *Political reporting:* It may make a difference in some elections, but not in presidential ones.
- *Religion:* Being a Catholic was once a barrier, but since John F. Kennedy was elected president in 1960, this is no longer true.
- *Abortion:* This probably affects who gets a party's nomination, but in the general election ardent supporters and ardent opponents are about evenly balanced.

In congressional races, however, in general it seems that money does make a decisive difference. Scholars are not entirely agreed on the facts, but there is strong evidence that how much the challenger spends is most important, because the challenger usually must become known to the public. Buying name recognition is expensive. Gary Jacobson has shown that, other things being equal, in every congressional election from 1972 to the mid-1980s, challengers who spent more money did better than those who spent less.[19] Jacobson also suggested that how much the incumbents spent was not very important, presumably because they already had all the name recognition they needed (as well as the other benefits of holding office, such as free mail and travel). Other scholars, applying different statistical methods to the same facts, have come to different conclusions. It now seems that, other things being equal, high-spending incumbents do better than low-spending ones.[20] As noted earlier in this chapter, "million-dollar challenges" are becoming more common in House races; but it remains to be seen if that will continue, and if so, whether it narrows the gap with incumbents.

Incumbents find it easier to raise money than do challengers; incumbents provide services to their districts that challengers cannot; incumbents regularly send free ("franked") mail to their constituents, while challengers must pay for their mailings; incumbents can get free publicity by sponsoring legislation or conducting an investigation. Thus it is hardly surprising that incumbents who run for reelection win in the overwhelming majority of races.

Landmark Cases

Financing Elections

- ***Buckley v. Valeo* (1976):** Held that a law limiting contributions to political campaigns was constitutional but that one restricting a candidate's expenditures of his or her own money was not.
- ***McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (2002):** Upheld a law prohibiting corporations and labor unions from running ads that mention candidates and their positions for sixty days before a federal general election.

To explore these landmark cases further, visit the *American Government* web site at college.hmco.com/pic/wilsonAGIle.

★ What Decides the Election?

To the voter it all seems quite simple—he or she votes for "the best person" or maybe "the least-bad person." To scholars it is all a bit mysterious. How do voters decide who the best person is? What does "best" mean, anyway?

Party

One answer to these questions is party identification. People may say that they are voting for the "best person," but for many people the best person is always a Democrat or a Republican. Moreover, we have seen in Chapter 7 that many people know rather little about the details of political issues. They may not even know what position their favored candidate has taken on issues that the voters care about. Given these facts,

many scholars have argued that party identification is the principal determinant of how people vote.[21]

If it were only a matter of party identification, though, the Democrats would always win the presidency, since usually more people identify with the Democratic than the Republican party. But we know that the Democrats lost six of the nine presidential elections between 1968 and 2000. Here are three reasons for this.

First, those people who consider themselves Democrats are less firmly wedded to their party than are Republicans. Table 10.3 shows how people identifying themselves as Democrats, Republicans, or independents voted in presidential elections from 1960 to 2004. In every election except 1992, at least 80 percent of Republican voters supported the Republican candidate in each election. By contrast, there have been more defections among Democratic voters—in 1972 a third of Democrats supported Nixon, and in 1984 some 26 percent supported Reagan.

The second reason, also clear from Table 10.3, is that the Republicans do much better than the Democrats among the self-described "independent" voters. In every election since 1960 (except 1964, 1992, 1996, and 2004), the Republican candidate has won a larger percentage of the independent vote than the Demo-

Table 10.3 Percentage of Popular Vote by Groups in Presidential Elections, 1960–2004

		National	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
1960	Kennedy	50%	5%	84%	43%
	Nixon	50	95	16	57
1964	Johnson	61	20	87	56
	Goldwater	39	80	13	44
1968	Humphrey	43	9	74	31
	Nixon	43	86	12	44
	Wallace	14	5	14	25
1972	McGovern	38	5	67	31
	Nixon	62	95	33	69
1976	Carter	51	11	80	48
	Ford	49	89	20	52
1980[a]	Carter	41	11	66	30
	Reagan	51	84	26	54
	Anderson	7	4	6	12
1984	Mondale	41	7	73	35
	Reagan	59	92	26	63
1988	Dukakis	46	8	82	43
	Bush	54	91	17	55
1992	Clinton	43	10	77	38
	Bush	38	73	10	32
	Perot	19	17	13	30
1996	Clinton	49	13	84	43
	Dole	41	80	10	35
	Perot	8	6	5	17
2000	Gore	49	8	86	45
	Bush	48	91	11	47
2004	Kerry	49	6	89	49
	Bush	51	93	11	48

[a]The figures for 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1996 fail to add up to 100 percent because of missing data.

Sources: Updated from Gallup poll data, compiled by Robert D. Cantor, *Voting Behavior and Presidential Elections* (Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock, 1975), 35; Gerald M. Pomper, *The Election of 1976* (New York: David McKay, 1977), 61; Gerald M. Pomper et al., *The Election of 1980* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1981), 71; *New York Times*/CBS Poll, November 5, 1992.

cratic nominee; in fact the Republicans usually got a majority of the independents, who tend to be younger whites.

Finally, a higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats vote in elections. In every presidential contest in the past thirty years, those describing themselves as "strongly Republican" have been much more likely to vote than those describing themselves as "strongly Democratic."

Issues, Especially the Economy

Even though voters may not know a lot about the issues, that does not mean that issues play no role in elections or that voters respond irrationally to them. For example, V. O. Key, Jr., looked at those voters who switched from one party to another between elections and found that most of them switched in a direction consistent with their own interests. As Key put it, the voters are not fools.[22]

Moreover, voters may know a lot more than we suppose about issues that really matter to them. They may have hazy, even erroneous, views about monetary policy, business regulation, and the trade deficit, but they are likely to have a very good idea about whether unemployment is up or down, prices at the supermarket are stable or rising, or crime is a problem in their neighborhoods. And on some issues—such as abortion, school prayer, and race relations—they are likely to have some strong principles that they want to see politicians obey.

Contrary to what we learn in our civics classes, representative government does not require voters to be well informed on the issues. If it were our duty as citizens to have accurate facts and sensible ideas about how best to negotiate with foreign adversaries, stabilize the value of the dollar, revitalize failing industries, and keep farmers prosperous, we might as well forget about citizenship and head for the beach. It would be a full-time job, and then some, to be a citizen. Politics would take on far more importance in our lives than most of us would want, given our need to earn a living and our belief in the virtues of limited government.

To see why our system can function without well-informed citizens, we must understand the differences between two ways in which issues can affect elections.

Prospective Voting *Prospective* means "forward-looking"; we vote prospectively when we examine the views that the rival candidates have on the issues of the day and then cast our ballots for the person we think has the best ideas for handling these matters. **Prospective voting** requires a lot of information about issues and candidates. Some of us do vote prospectively. Those who do tend to be political junkies. They are either willing to spend a lot of time learning about issues or are so concerned about some big issue (abortion, school busing, nuclear energy) that all they care about is how a candidate stands on that question.

Prospective voting is more common among people who are political activists, have a political ideology that governs their voting decision, or are involved in interest groups with a big stake in the election. They are a minority of all voters, but (as we saw in Chapters 7 and 8) they are more influential than their numbers would suggest. Some prospective voters (by no means all) are organized into single-issue groups, to be discussed in the next section.

Retrospective Voting *Retrospective* means "backward-looking"; **retrospective voting** involves looking at how things have gone in the recent past and then voting for the party that controls the White House if we like what has happened and voting against that party if we don't like what has happened. Retrospective voting does not require us to have a lot of information—all we need to know is whether things have, in our view, gotten better or worse.

Elections are decided by retrospective voters.[23] In 1980 they decided to vote against Jimmy Carter because inflation was rampant, interest rates were high, and we seemed to be getting the worst of things overseas. The evidence suggests rather clearly that they did not vote *for* Ronald Reagan; they voted for *an alternative to* Jimmy Carter. (Some people did vote for Reagan and his philosophy; they were voting prospectively, but they were in the minority.) In 1984 people voted for Ronald Reagan because unemployment, inflation, and interest rates were down and because we no longer seemed to be getting pushed around overseas. In 1980 retrospective voters wanted change; in 1984 they wanted continuity. In 1988 there was no incumbent running, but George H.W. Bush portrayed himself as

prospective voting *Voting for a candidate because you favor his or her ideas for handling issues.*

retrospective voting *Voting for a candidate because you like his or her past actions in office.*

the candidate who would continue the policies that had led to prosperity and depicted Michael Dukakis as a "closet liberal" who would change those policies. In 1992 the economy had once again turned sour, and so voters turned away from Bush and toward his rivals, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot.

Though most incumbent members of Congress get reelected, those who lose do so, it appears, largely because they are the victims of retrospective voting. After Reagan was first elected, the economy went into a recession in 1981–1982. As a result Republican members of Congress were penalized by the voters, and Democratic challengers were helped. But it is not just the economy that can hurt congressional candidates. In most midterm elections the party holding the White House has lost seats in Congress. Just why this should be is not entirely clear, but it probably has something to do with the tendency of some voters to change their opinions of the presidential party once that party has had a chance to govern—which is to say, a chance to make some mistakes, disappoint some supporters, and irritate some interests.

Some scholars believe that retrospective voting is based largely on economic conditions. Figure 10.3 certainly provides support for this view. Each dot represents a presidential election (fifteen of them, from 1948 to 2004). The horizontal axis is the percentage increase or decrease in per capita disposable income (adjusted for inflation) during the election year. The vertical axis is the percentage of the two-party vote won by the party already occupying the White House. You can see that, as per capita income goes up (as you move to the right on the horizontal axis), the incumbent political party tends to win a bigger share of the vote.

Other scholars feel that matters are more complicated than this. As a result a small industry has grown up consisting of people who use different techniques to forecast the outcome of elections. If you know how the president stands in the opinion polls several months before the election and how well the economy is performing, you can make a pretty good guess as to who is going to win the presidency. For congressional races predicting the result is a lot tougher, because so many local factors affect these contests. Election forecasting remains an inexact science. As one study of the performance of presidential election forecasting models concluded: "Models may be no improvement over pundits."[24]

The Campaign

If party loyalty and national economic conditions play so large a role in elections, is the campaign just sound and fury, signifying nothing?

No. Campaigns can make a difference in three ways. First, they reawaken the partisan loyalties of voters. Right after a party's nominating convention selects a presidential candidate, that person's standing with voters of both parties goes way up in the polls. The reason is that the just-nominated candidate has received a lot of media attention during the summer months, when not much else is happening. When the campaign gets under way, however, both candidates get publicity, and voters return to their normal Democratic or Republican affiliations.

Second, campaigns give voters a chance to watch how the candidates handle pressure, and they give candidates a chance to apply that pressure. The two rivals, after promising to conduct a campaign "on the

Figure 10.3 The Economy and Vote for President, 1948–2004

issues" without mudslinging, immediately start searching each other's personal histories and records to find acts, statements, or congressional votes that can be shown in the worst possible light in newspaper or television ads. Many voters don't like these "negative ads"—but they work. Careful statistical studies based on actual campaigns (as opposed to voter surveys or laboratory-like focus group studies) suggest that negative ads work by stimulating voter turnout.[25] As a result every politician constantly worries about how an opponent might portray his or her record, a fact that helps explain why so many politicians never do or say anything that can't be explained in a thirty second television spot.

Third, campaigns allow voters an opportunity to judge the character and core values of the candidates. Most voters don't study in detail a candidate's positions on issues; even if they had the time, they know that you can't predict how politicians will behave just from knowing what a campaign manager has written in a position paper. The voters want some guidance as to how a candidate will behave once elected. They get that guidance by listening not to the details of what a candidate says but to the themes and tone of those statements. Is the candidate tough on crime and drugs? Are his or her statements about the environment sincere or perfunctory? Does the candidate favor having a strong military? Does the candidate care more about not raising taxes or more about helping the homeless?

The desire of voters to discern character, combined with the mechanics of modern campaigning—short radio and television ads and computer-targeted direct mail—lend themselves to an emphasis on themes at the expense of details. This tendency is reinforced by the expectations of ideological party activists and single-issue groups.

Thematic campaigning, negative ads, and the demands of single-issue groups are not new; they are as old as the republic. In the nineteenth century the theme was slavery and the single-issue groups were abolitionists and their opponents; their negative ads make the ones we have today sound like Sunday school sermons. At the turn of the century the themes were temperance and the vote for women; both issues led to no-holds-barred, rough-and-tumble campaigning. In the 1970s and 1980s new themes were advanced by fundamentalist Christians and by pro- and antiabortion groups.

Union members were once heavily Democratic, but since Ronald Reagan began winning white union votes in 1980, these votes have been up for grabs.

What has changed is not the tone of campaigning but the advent of primary elections. Once, political parties picked candidates out of a desire to win elections. Today activists and single-issue groups influence the selection of candidates, sometimes out of a belief that it is better to lose with the "right" candidate than to win with the wrong one. In a five-candidate primary, a minority of the voters can pick the winner. Single-issue groups can make a big difference under these conditions, even though they may not have much influence in the general election.

Finding a Winning Coalition

Putting together a winning electoral coalition means holding on to your base among committed partisans and attracting the swing voters who cast their ballots in response to issues (retrospectively or prospectively) and personalities.

There are two ways to examine the nature of the parties' voting coalitions. One is to ask what percentage of various identifiable groups in the population supported the Democratic or Republican candidate for president. The other is to ask what proportion of a party's total vote came from each of these groups. The answer to the first question tells us how *loyal* African Americans, farmers, union members, and others are to the Democratic or Republican party or

candidate; the answer to the second question tells us how *important* each group is to a candidate or party.

For the Democratic coalition African Americans are the most loyal voters. In every election but one since 1952, two-thirds or more of all African Americans voted Democratic; since 1964 four-fifths have gone Democratic. Usually, Jewish voters are almost as solidly Democratic. Most Hispanics have been Democrats, though the label "Hispanic" conceals differences among Cuban Americans (who often vote Republican) and Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans (who are strongly Democratic). The turnout among most Hispanic groups has been quite low (many are not yet citizens), so their political power is not equivalent to their numbers.

The Democrats have lost their once strong hold on Catholics, southerners, and union members. In 1960 Catholics supported John F. Kennedy (a Democrat and fellow Catholic), but they also voted for Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan, all Republicans. Union members deserted the Democrats in 1968 and 1972, came back in 1980 and 1988, and divided about evenly between the two parties in 1952, 1956, and 1980. White southerners have voted Republican in national elections but Democratic in many local ones (see Table 10.4).

The Republican party is often described as the party of business and professional people. The loyalty of these groups to Republicans is in fact strong: only in 1964 did they desert the Republican candidate to support Lyndon Johnson. Farmers have usually been Republican, but they are a volatile group, highly sensitive to the level of farm prices—and thus quick to change parties. Contrary to popular wisdom, the Republican party usually wins a majority of the votes of poor people (defined as those earning less than roughly $5,000 a year). Only in 1964 did most poor people support the Democratic candidate. This can be explained by the fact that the poor include quite

Table 10.4 Who Likes the Democrats?

Percentage of various groups saying that they voted for the Democratic presidential candidate, 1964–2004.

	1968[a]	1972	1976	1980[c]	1984	1988	1992[d]	1996	2000	2004
Sex										
Men	41%	37%	53%	37%	37%	41%	41%	43%	42%	45%
Women	45	38	48	45	42	49	46	54	54	52
Race										
White	38	32	46	36	34	40	39	43	42	42
Nonwhite	85	87	85	82	90	86	82	84	90	89
Education										
College	37	37	42	35	40	43	44	47	45	47
Grad school	52	49	58	43	49	56	55	52	52	55
Age										
Under 30	47	48	53	43	41	47	44	53	48	54
50 and over	41	36	52	41[e]	39	49	50	48[g]	48	49
Religion										
Protestant	35	30	46	NA	NA	33[f]	33	36	42	41
Catholic	59	48	57	40	44	47	44	53	50	48
Jewish[b]	85	66	68	45	66	64	78	78	79	76
Southerners	31	29	54	47	36	41	42	46	NA	41

[a]1968 election had three major candidates (Humphrey, Nixon, and Wallace). [b]Jewish vote estimated from various sources; since the number of Jewish persons interviewed is often less than 100, the error in this figure, as well as that for nonwhites, may be large. [c]1980 election had three major candidates (Carter, Reagan, and Anderson). [d]1992 election had three major candidates (Clinton, Bush, and Perot). [e]For 1980–1992, refers to age 60 and over. [f]For 1988, white Protestants only. [g]For 1996, refers to age 45 and over.

Sources: For 1964–1976: Gallup poll data, as tabulated in Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, "Changing Patterns of Electoral Competition," in *The New American Political System*, ed. Anthony King (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 254–256. For 1980–1992: Data from *New York Times*/CBS News exit polls. For 1996: *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report,* 1997, p. 188; For 2000: Exit polls supplied by ABC News. For 2004, CNN exit polls.

different elements—low-income blacks (who are Democrats) and many elderly, retired persons (who usually vote Republican).

In sum, the loyalty of most identifiable groups of voters to either party is not overwhelming. Only African Americans, business people, and Jews usually give two-thirds or more of their votes to one party or the other; other groups display tendencies, but none that cannot be overcome.

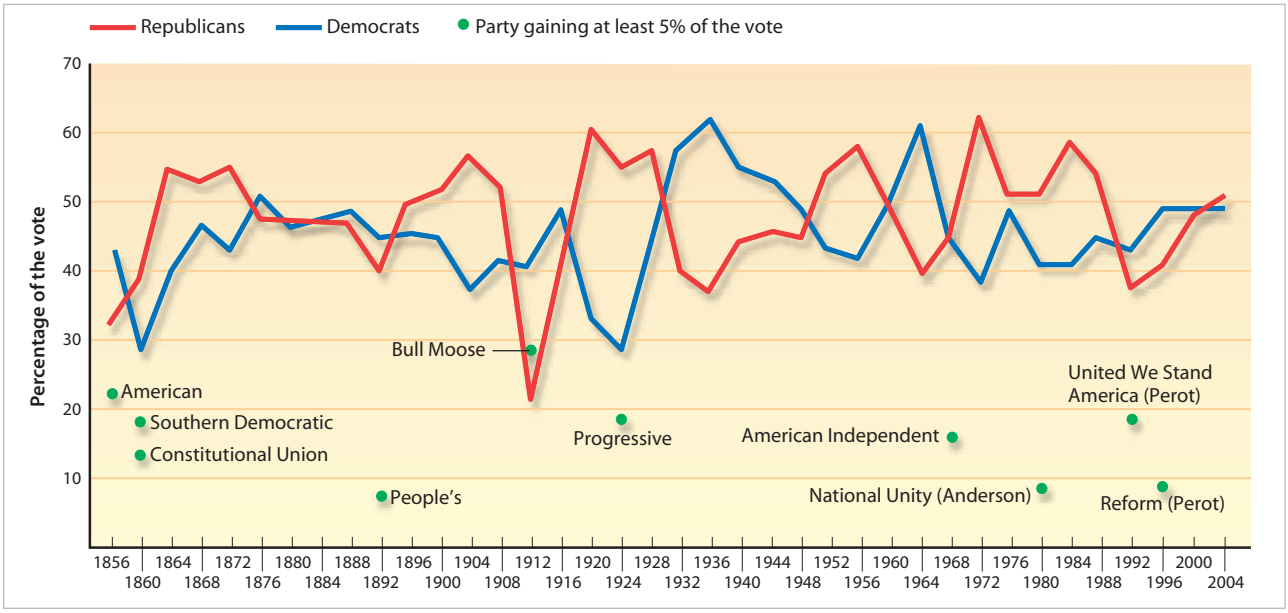
The contribution that each of these groups makes to the party coalitions is a different matter. Though African Americans are overwhelmingly and persistently Democratic, they make up so small a portion of the total electorate that they have never accounted for more than a quarter of the total Democratic vote. The groups that make up the largest part of the Democratic vote—Catholics, union members, southerners—are also the least dependable parts of that coalition.[26]

When representatives of various segments of society make demands on party leaders and presidential candidates, they usually stress their numbers or their loyalty, but rarely both. African American leaders, for example, sometimes describe the black vote as being of decisive importance to Democrats and thus deserving of special consideration from a Democratic president. But African Americans are so loyal that a Democratic candidate can almost take their votes for granted, and in any event they are not as numerous as other groups. Union leaders emphasize how many union voters there are, but a president will know that union leaders cannot "deliver" the union vote and that this vote may go to the president's opponent, whatever the leaders say. For any presidential candidate a winning coalition must be put together anew for each election. Only a few voters can be taken for granted or written off as a lost cause.

★ The Effects of Elections on Policy

To the candidates, and perhaps to the voters, the only interesting outcome of an election is who won. To a political scientist the interesting outcomes are the broad trends in winning and losing and what they imply about the attitudes of voters, the operation of the electoral system, the fate of political parties, and the direction of public policy.

Figure 10.4 Partisan Division of the Presidential Vote in the Nation, 1856–2004



Sources: Information for 1856–1988, updated from Historical Data Archive, Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, as reported in William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 3rd ed., 32. For 1992: *World Almanac and Book of Facts 1994*, 73.

Figure 10.4 shows the trend in the popular vote for president since before the Civil War. From 1876 to 1896 the Democrats and Republicans were hotly competitive. The Republicans won three times, the Democrats twice in close contests. Beginning in 1896 the Republicans became the dominant party, and except for 1912 and 1916, when Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, was able to win owing to a split in the Republican party, the Republicans carried every presidential election until 1932. Then Franklin Roosevelt put together what has since become known as the "New Deal coalition," and the Democrats became the dominant party. They won every election until 1952, when Eisenhower, a Republican and a popular military hero, was elected for the first of his two terms. In the presidential elections since 1952, power has switched hands between the parties frequently.

Still, cynics complain that elections are meaningless: no matter who wins, crooks, incompetents, or self-serving politicians still hold office. The more charitable argue that elected officials are usually decent enough, but that public policy remains more or less the same no matter which official or party is in office.

There is no brief and simple response to this latter view. Much depends on which office or policy you examine. One reason it is so hard to generalize about the policy effects of elections is that the offices to be filled by the voters are so numerous and the ability of the political parties to unite these officeholders behind a common policy is so weak that any policy proposal must run a gauntlet of potential opponents. Though we have but two major parties, and though only one party can win the presidency, each party is a weak coalition of diverse elements that reflect the many divisions in public opinion. The proponents of a new law must put together a majority coalition almost from scratch, and a winning coalition on one issue tends to be somewhat different—quite often dramatically different—from a winning coalition on another issue.

In a parliamentary system with strong parties, such as that in Great Britain, an election can often have a major effect on public policy. When the Labour party won office in 1945, it put several major industries under public ownership and launched a comprehensive set of social services, including a nationalized health care plan. Its ambitious and controversial campaign platform was converted, almost item by item, into law. When the Conservative party returned to power in 1951, it accepted some of these changes but rejected others (for example, it denationalized the steel industry).

American elections, unless accompanied by a national crisis such as a war or a depression, rarely produce changes of the magnitude of those that occurred in Britain in 1945. The constitutional system within which our elections take place was designed to moderate the pace of change—to make it neither easy nor impossible to adopt radical proposals. But the fact that the system is intended to moderate the rate of change does not mean that it will always work that way.

The election of 1860 brought to national power a party committed to opposing the extension of slavery and southern secession; it took a bloody war to vindicate that policy. The election of 1896 led to the dominance of a party committed to high tariffs, a strong currency, urban growth, and business prosperity—a commitment that was not significantly altered until 1932. The election of that year led to the New Deal, which produced the greatest single enlargement of federal authority since 1860. The election of 1964 gave the Democrats such a large majority in Congress (as well as control of the presidency) that there began to issue forth an extraordinary number of new policies of sweeping significance—Medicare and Medicaid, federal aid to education and to local law enforcement, two dozen environmental and consumer protection laws, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a revision of the immigration laws, and a new cabinet-level Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The election of 1980 brought into office an administration determined to reverse the direction of policy over the preceding half century. Reagan's administration succeeded in obtaining large tax cuts, significant reductions in spending (or in the rate of increase of spending) on some domestic programs, and changes in the policies of some regulatory agencies. The election of 1982, in which the Democrats made gains in the House of Representatives, stiffened congressional resistance to further spending cuts and stimulated renewed interest in tax increases as a way of reducing the deficit. Following the election of 1984 a major tax reform plan was passed. After the 1996 election Clinton and Republican congressional leaders agreed on a plan to balance the budget.

In view of all these developments it is hard to argue that the pace of change in our government is always slow or that elections never make a difference. Studies by scholars confirm that elections are often

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

MEMORANDUM

To: *Arjun Bruno, National Party Chairman*
From: *Arlene Marcus, State Party Chairwoman*
Subject: *Supporting a National Primary*

In the past few election cycles, our state's role in the party nomination for president has virtually disappeared with a May primary date. Several states have leapfrogged ahead of us, and party leaders have indicated that they do not want any more states to move up their primary date. The national party needs to find a way to ensure that all states, large and small, have a real voice in nominating a presidential candidate.

State Party Organizations Support a National Presidential Primary

January 8 LITTLE ROCK, AK

Party leaders in several states are urging their elected officials to support a one-day national primary for presidential candidates. As more states move toward early primary dates in February, states with later nominating processes argue that their elections are little more than symbolic. They argue that to give all states an equal say in nominating presidential candidates, a single election is both fair and cost-efficient. Critics question, however, whether one nationwide primary would favor the best-known candidate with the most funds in each party, severely limiting the prospects for "dark-horse" candidates to prevail . . .

Arguments for:

1. A single national primary permits equal participation by all states, and presents a fair compromise with the increased number of delegates that larger states send to the national conventions, much like the compromises during the original constitutional debates.
2. The nominating process needs to be less costly, particularly when presidential candidates realistically need to raise $100 million a year before the general election to be competitive for the nomination. Holding all primaries and caucuses on a single day will reduce overall election expenses significantly.
3. If the American electorate knows that presidential nominations will be decided by each party on one day, then they will be more likely to vote, a significant factor for elections in which historically, fewer than 20 percent of eligible voters typically participate.

Arguments against:

1. Each state decides in conjunction with the national party when its primary or caucus will take place, and the federal system of government designed by the Framers did not guarantee that all states would be treated equally at all times.
2. A national primary would favor candidates with high name recognition and funding to further that recognition, and would severely disadvantage lesser-known candidates within the party.
3. Even though the general election takes place on one day, voter turnout in the United States is still lower than in other advanced industrialized democracies, which suggests that other factors influence who participates.

Your decision:

Support National Primary _____ Oppose National Primary _____

significant, despite the difficulty of getting laws passed. One analysis of about fourteen hundred promises made between 1944 and 1964 in the platforms of the two major parties revealed that 72 percent were put into effect.[27]

Another study examined the party platforms of the Democrats and Republicans from 1844 to 1968 and all the laws passed by Congress between 1789 and 1968. By a complex statistical method, the author of the study was able to show that during certain periods the differences between the platforms of the two parties were especially large (1856, 1880, 1896, 1932) and that there was at about the same time a high rate of change in the kinds of laws being passed.[28] This study supports the general impression conveyed by history that elections can often be central to important policy changes.

Why then do we so often think that elections make little difference? It is because public opinion and the political parties enter a phase of consolidation and continuity between periods of rapid change. During this phase the changes are, so to speak, digested, and party leaders adjust to the new popular consensus, which may (or may not) evolve around the merits of these changes. During the 1870s and 1880s Democratic politicians had to come to terms with the failure of the southern secessionist movement and the abolition of slavery; during the 1900s the Democrats had to adjust again, this time to the fact that national economic policy was going to support industrialization and urbanization, not farming; during the 1940s and 1950s the Republicans had to learn to accept the popularity of the New Deal.

Elections in ordinary times are not "critical"—they do not produce any major party realignment, they are not fought out over a dominant issue, and they provide the winners with no clear mandate. In most cases an election is little more than a retrospective judgment on the record of the incumbent president and the existing congressional majority. If times are good, incumbents win easily; if times are bad, incumbents may lose even though their opponents may have no clear plans for change. But even a "normal" election can produce dramatic results if the winner is a person such as Ronald Reagan, who helped give his party a distinctive political philosophy.

★ SUMMARY ★

Political campaigns have changed dramatically since the mid-twentieth century, with many important changes occurring in just the last two decades. Today's candidates must create a temporary organization that can raise money from large numbers of small donors, pay for political consultants and pollsters, mobilize enthusiastic supporters, and win a nomination in a way that will not harm their ability to appeal to a broader, more diverse constituency in the general election. There are important differences between presidential and congressional campaigns, but both involve position-taking on different types of issues. Federal election laws have changed several times since the early 1970s, and restrictions on fundraising by individuals and organizations are now many and complicated, but each new election cycle breaks previous total spending records. Money alone, however, does not decide elections. Campaigning itself has an uncertain effect on election outcomes, but election outcomes can have important effects on public policy, especially at those times—during critical or "realigning" elections—when new voters are coming into the electorate in large numbers, old party loyalties are weakening, or a major issue is splitting the majority party. Most people vote retrospectively rather than prospectively.

RECONSIDERING WHO GOVERNS?

1. ***How do American elections determine the kind of people who govern us?***

   American democracy rewards candidates who have personal appeal rather than party endorsements. Politics here produces individualists who usually have a strong ideological orientation toward liberal or conservative causes, but only a weak sense of loyalty to the political parties who endorse those ideologies.

2. ***What matters most in deciding who wins presidential and congressional elections?***

   The party identification of the voters matters the most. Only 10 to 20 percent of the voters are available to have their votes changed. For them, the state of the economy, and in wartime the success or failures we have while fighting abroad, make the most difference. Closely allied with those issues, at least for presidential candidates, is the voters' assessment of their character.

RECONSIDERING TO WHAT ENDS?

1. ***Do elections make a real difference in what laws get passed?***

   Yes. During campaigns parties may try to sound alike, in order to attract centrist voters, but when in office they differ greatly in the policies they put into law.

WORLD WIDE WEB RESOURCES

Federal Election Commission: **www.fec.gov**
Project Vote Smart: **www.vote-smart.org**
Election history: **clerkweb.house.gov**
Electoral college: **www.fec.gov/pages/ecmenu2**
Campaign finance: **www.opensecrets.org**

SUGGESTED READINGS

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