

# **UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE**

**Managing Presidential Campaigns  
in the Television Era**

Edited by

**Mathew D. McCubbins**

University of California, San Diego

*C Q* PRESS

A Division of Congressional Quarterly Inc.

Washington, D.C.

# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	ix
<b>Introduction</b>	
<i>Mathew D. McCubbins</i>	1
<b>1 Party Decline and Presidential Campaigns in the Television Age</b>	
<i>Mathew D. McCubbins</i>	9
<b>2 Presidential Campaigns in Party- and Candidate-Centered Eras</b>	
<i>John H. Aldrich</i>	59
<b>3 The Persuasive Art in Politics: The Role of Paid Advertising in Presidential Campaigns</b>	
<i>F Christopher Arterton</i>	83
<b>4 Open Season: How the News Media Cover Presidential Campaigns in the Age of Attack Journalism</b>	
<i>Larry J. Sabato</i>	127
<b>5 Campaigns That Matter</b>	
<i>Samuel L. Popkin</i>	153
<b>Conclusion</b>	
<i>Mathew D. McCubbins</i>	171
<b>Contributors</b>	185
<b>Index</b>	187

# INTRODUCTION

*Mathew D. McCubbins*

Academics and journalists of all ideological stripes are wont to complain that American democracy is in a shambles. Budgets don't balance, policies aren't responsive to the needs of citizens, incumbent members of Congress never lose, voters don't vote, and parties don't seem to matter. This sort of hand-wringing has become a popular American pastime, filling page after page of newspapers, magazines, books, and academic journals and trumpeted night after night on television newscasts.

Of the myriad perceived failures of our governmental system in the past several decades, the way we choose our presidents regularly tops the list. Americans (at least reporters and academics) love to talk about presidents and presidential elections. The American presidency seems to be a position of extraordinary power and influence in the world. As such, it provides a powerful focal point for public opinion about the state of the nation. Not surprisingly, when things are not going well for the nation, much blame is laid at the feet of the president, and much energy is expended in reexamining the process by which we choose our presidents.

The period since 1968 has been, in many respects, a tough one in the national history of the United States. The American economy had assumed such a predominant position in the world economy during the postwar years that we had perhaps come to expect as a birthright continued rapid growth in our standard of living, but the late 1960s and 1970s brought a series of debacles: the turmoil of Vietnam, the outrage of Watergate, the Arab oil embargo of 1974, the malaise of

the stagnation of the mid-1970s, the Iran hostage crisis and second oil shock.<sup>1</sup> Each of these events shocked American sensibilities or pocketbooks. Add in the further economic and social upheavals rooted in the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the coming of age of the baby-boom generation, and one can quickly see why Americans might have developed a sense of malaise about our nation's future and the ability of our presidents to right the ship of state.

New stylized interpretations of the presidential selection process first gained prominence in the 1970s. Whereas presidential campaigns were once said to have defined the national issue agenda and helped sweep majority parties into and out of power in Congress, today they seem to many observers to have less and less to do with real policy concerns and the governance of the American state, and more and more to do with photo opportunities and frivolous or sensational events: the sleeping habits of American politicians, the business partners of their spouses or nephews, or the criminal records of their brothers.

Presidential elections were not always like this: in the days when American democracy worked according to the Founders' design, giants seem to have roamed the earth. Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt were the stock from which presidential timber was hewn. Even then, of course, not all presidents were destined to look down on the South Dakota badlands with stony visage for all eternity. But national crises

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the socioeconomic issues underlying the stylized interpretations of the state of the economy in the 1970s and 1980s, see Frank Levy, *Dollars and Dreams: The Changing American Income Distribution* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987).

such as the founding, the Civil War, and the rise of progressivism brought forward America's best.

The age of giants, many argue, passed with the demise of political party machines and the coming of the television age. These twin issues dominate the arguments about presidential campaigns in this volume. Each essay, at its heart, is about the dissemination of information and the coordination of voters' expectations and choices.

Before the development of television, according to the standard view, newspapers played a major role in presidential campaigns by disseminating information about primary candidates and coordinating voters by making endorsements. The print medium in the United States has always been intimately tied to political movements and political action, as is evidenced by the press's almost universal reverence for the First Amendment. In many cases, newspapers originated as arms of political organizations, run by and for members of political machines and their partisan identifiers.

However, the rise of television has, according to political consultant Doug Bailey, meant that "the whole [presidential] campaign is based upon what goes out on the nightly news on the television at night. That's what the campaign is." Americans today, it is claimed, get all or almost all of their political information from television. Unlike newspapers, however, television is not primarily an information service for consumers but rather an entertainment medium having more in common with cinema and works of fiction.

As a group, political reporters, broadcast or print, take very seriously their role as the "fourth estate" - sentinels for Americans' political freedoms. But, the story goes, the television medium and market make different demands on reporters than do print media and markets. This

structural difference has had important consequences for television news coverage, for, as former White House adviser Michael Deaver said,

One of the real problems [with television political reporting] that television simply will not come to terms with, is that they are an entertainment medium. They are not a news medium. Particularly, when [viewers] are sitting there with their clickers and they've got 69 channels to go around, you've got to stop that clicker, and you've got a second to do it.... The problem for us - when I say "us" I'm talking about this society - is that, unfortunately, that's where most of us are getting our information, with that clicker.

Television relies first and foremost on the images it presents to the viewer, not just the quality and quantity of the information in an encyclopedic sense of facts and figures, but stylistic qualities and emotive capacity that seem to be lacking in other media. It allows candidates to step into every American's living room, to look him or her in the eye and make an immediate, emotional gut impression. Critics argue that the instant emotional gratification that television can offer viewers conditions the kinds of competition that news reportage must face, and hence the kinds of reportage likely to be aired.

It is often argued that television has increasingly slighted campaign issues in favor of catchy imagery and soundbites. Recent research by Dan Hallin<sup>2</sup> shows that television coverage of candidate press conferences has moved away from the longer audiovisual clips often used on the

---

<sup>2</sup> Daniel C. Hallin, "Soundbite News: Television Coverage of Elections, 1968-88." Occasional paper, Woodrow Wilson International Center, Washington, D.C., 1991.

nightly news shows in the 1960s toward the very brief soundbite clips used today, annotated by the reporters interpretation or analysis. We are less able to read the lips of our candidates today because TV shows many fewer candidates-and many more reporters.

This change in coverage, it is argued, is emblematic of the increasing gap between the kinds of reporting done by television and newspapers. Critics of television reporting observe that there is less straight presentation of news events and more interpretation being done by TV reporters. These critics argue that TV newscasts now play a much more active role in shaping and defining what the news means for viewers. This changed mission, in turn, is reflected in the different approaches that newspaper and TV reporters take to researching stories. TV reporters, it is argued, have turned reporting upside down. They now look for the catchy image or soundbite around which to build a story instead of building a story and then writing a lead.

This preoccupation with imagery, it is argued, fails to provide voters with the kinds of information they need to make informed choices between presidential candidates. It provides pictures that TV thinks will grab viewers, not information relevant for evaluating the candidates' issue positions or competence. Even more disconcerting to critics of television is its indirect effect: the emphasis on images changes the types of people who think they can win elections, encouraging those best able to "sell" a good image while discouraging those whose attributes don't translate well to the small screen and facile "bites."

A further consequence of the new reliance on television as the primary medium through which the public comes to know presidential candidates is a phenomenon known as momentum: the tendency for campaign or primary successes to build on themselves, or, alternatively, for campaign gaffes or failures to snowball. John Aldrich argues in an essay in this volume that the

---

television medium has fundamentally changed the way presidential campaigns are organized and run in order to try to keep the candidate in command of his own momentum. Gary Hart's story is just one example of the momentum phenomenon. An unexpected groundswell of support for Hart in New Hampshire in 1984 transformed a relative unknown into a serious challenger overnight; likewise, sudden revelations about a cruise to Bimini transformed him from nominee-presumptive to ex-candidate in a matter of days in 1988. The challenge for campaign organizations today, Aldrich argues, is managing the interplay between mass opinion and events rather than stitching together organized groups into coalitions. Thus, where primaries and caucuses were once most notable for allocating convention delegates, today they are also used by candidates and their "spin doctors" to shape the media's expectations and voters' choices in subsequent states.

Momentum comes down to a coordination of voters' expectations that a particular candidate is most likely to win the nomination. Television, it is argued, radically compresses and accelerates the process of transferring information from candidate to audience, allowing a candidate to influence mass opinion directly rather than through the mediation of organized groups. This makes it increasingly difficult for relatively unknown, moderate candidates to build a coalition of support: well-known candidates have a tremendous initial advantage in gaining the attention of TV, since they are known commodities with known appeal to viewers. Ideologically extreme candidates, on the other hand, have an advantage over centrist candidates with similar name recognition: they have novel, perhaps inflammatory messages that often make for dramatic imagery. Thus in a competition for the attention of viewers, voters, and potential contributors at the start of campaigns, centrist candidates can get squeezed out, much

as reliable but dull products get squeezed off supermarket shelves by the competition from market leaders and new products.

The competition for air time is, in effect, a contest for which candidates will get on the agenda-which candidates voters will even consider when they finally cast their ballots. Critics of TV's effects on campaigns argue that this competitions and the subsequent process of momentum shifting with the wind currents of events, distances presidential campaigns from any real debate over issues. Hence, television, by putting vast quantities of imagery-based information in the hands of viewers, has actually promoted voter ignorance.

The consequence of increased voter ignorance, implicit in the standard view, is that electoral outcomes (both in presidential nominations and in general elections) are more volatile. The momentum story implies that the choice of the marginally attentive average voter is made for him or her by the media, while the attentive voter is unable to collect enough from candidate imagery to make an informed choice. As a result, these arguments imply, attentive voters are much less likely to coordinate on a "best" candidate to outweigh the effects of average voters who respond to images. Bad candidates are more likely to be chosen and therefore bad presidents are more likely to be the result.

In the olden, golden days before television, these critics imply, party bosses were able to select electable, competent candidates to run for office and could forge a unified party from the factional, regional splits, i.e., assemble a national coalition of voters. With the decline of party, Madison Avenue and Hollywood have supplanted party bosses in the presidential selection process. The successful candidate is defined more by the ability to attract marketing wizards and dollars at Hollywood parties than by competence or issue positions. The parties are no longer

parties; they are houses divided, standing only by the dint of ossified party identification in the herd of tube-tied voters.

In this book, John H. Aldrich, F. Christopher Arterton, Samuel L. Popkin, Larry J. Sabato, and I reexamine the claims that television and party decline have changed presidential campaigns, the evidence that presidential campaigns have in fact changed, and the effect of these changes on American democracy.

The plan of the book is simple. In the first chapter, I present a theoretical overview of the literature on presidential campaigns. Laying out the predominant view of how presidential campaigns have evolved, from this stylized view I construct an internally consistent, parsimonious explanation for both pre-TV and modern presidential campaigns. Then, I survey the evidence offered in support of the predominant view and attempt to reconcile this evidence with expectations derived from the explanation presented, rejecting those claims unsupported by the evidence or reasonable argument.

What's left is a much smaller set of stylizations of presidential campaigns. First, evidence and theory support the notion that certain changes in state electoral laws and party rules have affected presidential campaigning and elections. Changes in state ballot laws before the turn of the century and the move to primary elections for many important elective offices led to the demise of party machines in the United States. Second, these legal changes also partly explain the rise of candidate-centered campaigning in this century. Third, it is clear that television has changed some aspects of American life. However, I find no evidence nor any good theoretical reason to believe that TV has made any real difference in presidential elections. Television has

not reduced the ability of the print media to deliver the news, nor has it created a nation of illiterates and ignoramuses (despite the evidence of real problems with our education system). If anything, TV has increased the amount of political information available to the average person in America.

What I do draw from the literature on TV and politics is that most scholars have thought wrongly about what "information" is and what role it plays in decision making. Information is not merely facts and figures, i.e., encyclopedic data. Information is endorsements, images, "narratives"- any environmental signal received by a person that can help that person choose between alternative courses of action. What matters in decision making is not how many facts a person knows but rather how accurately he or she is able to make inferences about the consequences of his or her choices.

The chapters that follow my opening essay take up the issues of candidate-centered campaigns and momentum, the marketing of presidential candidates through TV advertising, the narrowness of modern political reporting, and the ability of voters to extract value from the political imagery they receive. Each essay wrestles with an interesting aspect of how modern presidential campaigns differ in style and structure from pre-TV contests. These essays are valuable, not because they contradict my findings, for they do not, but because they clearly illustrate the ways in which modern campaigns are different from their predecessors.

I have already mentioned the focus of John Aldrich's essay, which deals with the rise of candidate-centered campaign organizations. His account revolves around the issue of how the momentum phenomenon, bred from weak parties and the rise of television, has changed the competitive pressures candidates face. The decline of party machines, he argues, made

candidate-centered campaigns possible; television extended the range of such campaigns to presidential contests. The crux of Aldrich's argument is that modern campaign organizations are event-driven rather than issue-driven: candidates rush back and forth to take advantage of good press reports and squelch bad ones about their records and personal lives instead of concentrating on refining and advertising the substantive policy positions each is trying to sell. Thus, for candidates in the TV age, image is everything.

In the third essay, Christopher Arterton challenges the conventional view (and the implication of Aldrich's essay) that the message component of campaigns does not matter. He argues, however, that this component is biased by the television medium as campaigns try to tailor their message to attract undecided voters. Candidates start from a base of loyal supporters and attempt to add a sufficient number of ideologically more distant voters in order to win the nomination or election. But, Arterton argues, too much attention to attracting these marginal voters has tended to alienate voters in the base; the general consequence of television competition has thus been a shallowing of support for all candidates and a continuing process of dealignment in the electorate, as voters no longer see good reasons to adhere to any candidate or party.

In the fourth essay, Larry Sabato extends arguments about the alienating effects of modern media coverage on prospective voters. He argues that structural changes in media markets and a loosening of libel law following *The New York Times v. Sullivan*<sup>3</sup> in 1964 led to a new equilibrium in news coverage; political coverage has become more sensationalist, entertainment-

---

<sup>3</sup> *The New York Times v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254 (1964).

oriented, and frenzied, in the sense that *stories* develop momentum. Sabato thus provides one potential underpinning for the political momentum phenomenon identified by Aldrich.

The broad, antidemocratic implications of television's impact on presidential campaigns, offered by Aldrich, Arterton, and Sabato, are challenged by Sam Popkin in his essay. He maintains that voters are much more sophisticated image processors than is commonly thought. What matters is not the encyclopedic information in a particular advertisement, endorsement, or image consumed by a TV-viewing prospective voter but rather how the image or endorsement conforms to a network of prior observations and experiences the voter has already internalized. Popkin argues that what matters most are the cognitive models that voters employ to interpret the images and signals they consume; more powerful models allow more accurate inferences about the likely consequences of electing one candidate over another. Hence, the vital question for present-day presidential campaigns is not what information content is provided by TV advertisements or news in comparison with what advertising and media used to provide, but whether voters' cognitive models are sophisticated enough to keep up as TV ads and news have become more image-oriented. Popkin's answer is, in brief, that campaigns, not voters, have fallen short and that we now need bigger, louder, longer presidential campaigns that can provide the volume of information that voters are capable of processing.

The volume concludes with an essay in which I summarize the arguments and evidence presented by Aldrich, Arterton, Sabato, and Popkin in order to address the dreaded "so what?" question ubiquitous to social scientific research. Which of the hypothesized changes in presidential campaigns have actually changed since the 1960s, and what consequences have those changes had for the democratic responsiveness and efficiency of American political institutions,

particularly the presidency? Specifically, I examine the McGovern-Fraser and later reforms, since much blame has been laid at the feet of these changes in nomination rules and procedures.

# **1. PARTY DECLINE AND PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS IN THE TELEVISION AGE**

*Mathew D. McCubbins*

Scholars and popular observers alike are in nearly universal agreement that the decline of parties and the rise of television have had a great impact on American democracy. In this chapter I reassess the claims made about these two "revolutions" in American politics and their consequences for our democracy.

I begin by discussing the notion that a golden age of parties and party government preceded the modern period and the advent of TV. I then draw a set of stylized depictions of modern American politics from the scholarly literature on presidential campaigns and present the commonly cited consequences for American democracy of these changes wrought by TV and party decline.

It is insufficient merely to list the details of this revolution in presidential campaigning. If we truly believe that American democracy is on the road to ruin, we cannot hope to halt the process of decline without understanding the roots of that process. Thus, I offer stylized arguments to

explain the changes in presidential campaigns. The presentation of these stylizations raises numerous questions as to how factual the stylized facts really are. I next examine the evidence for and against these stylizations. I then conclude by focusing attention on those depictions of modern elections for which some basis in reality can be shown by means of plausible evidence or reasonable argument.

The gist of my argument is that although party competition and campaigning look a lot different today than they did fifty or a hundred years ago, neither the changes in parties and campaign organizations, nor the change in information transfer brought about by television, have fundamentally altered the outcomes produced by presidential campaigns. The presidents that we select today are not systematically less responsive to centrist ideological interests than presidents in the nineteenth century, nor are they systematically less competent, more corrupt, more "imperialistic" toward Congress, more adept at building legislative coalitions, or more photogenic. Indeed, if theory and evidence do indicate any change, it is that presidential candidates today are more candid about their records and more concerned about being responsive to voters' interests than ever before.

I do not argue against the idea that modern presidential campaigns are candidate-centered, in the sense that much of the news coverage and campaign action now seems to revolve around the personal characteristics of the candidates. This focus is the result of electoral laws and rules that destroyed party machines, beginning in the 1880s, and does not imply anything about the electoral value of a candidate's party label. Continuing evidence of the importance of those labels is the fact that no third-party candidate has outpolled either the Democratic or the Republican candidate in November since Theodore Roosevelt finished second in 1912. Indeed,

only a handful of presidential candidates in this century have won any electoral-college votes without running under a major party label (Roosevelt, Robert La Follette, Strom Thurmond, and George Wallace being the most prominent, each of whom led a splinter faction from one of the major parties).

Nor do I find any evidence or reason to believe that TV has made any real difference in presidential elections in terms of the kinds of individuals who are chosen or the kinds of policies they pursue in office. What I do find in the literature is that scholars have not only misunderstood how and why people gather information to make decisions but also what counts as information.

Finally, I have found no evidence or reason to believe that either TV or candidate-centered campaigning has been bad for American democracy. The hand-wringing about the state of American democracy, which is so evident in the popular press every four years, has more to do with divided government than with bad presidents. Scholars and the media have misinterpreted the role of the president in our constitutional system, aggrandizing what Wilson called our "chief clerk" into a latterday Caesar. Our president is clearly an important player in the legislative process-the veto power assures him of that role-but he is not, and was not meant to be, our Kwisatz Haderach. To attribute god-emperor status to the office is to ensure that its occupants will fall short of expectations.

## **When Giants Roamed the Earth: Presidential Elections before Television**

There is widespread agreement in the literature on five general characterizations of twentieth-century presidential electioneering before the popularization of television in the 1960s. First, *despite losing control over voters, a coalition of state and local party machines across the nation maintained control over presidential nominations.* Nelson Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky characterized national parties in this era as "coalitions of state parties which meet every four years for the purpose of finding a man and forging a coalition of interests sufficiently broad to win a majority of electoral votes."<sup>1</sup> In characterizing conventions of this era, Polsby and Wildavsky argued:

A relatively few party leaders control the decisions of a large proportion of the delegates to conventions. Delegates to national conventions are chosen, after all, as representatives of the several state party organizations.... While it is true that official decisions are made by a majority vote of delegates, American party organizations are centralized at state and local levels. This means that such hierarchical controls as actually exist on the state and local level will assert themselves in the national convention.<sup>2</sup>

Party bosses had to be able to deliver a bloc of votes at election time if they were to wield any influence over the nominating process, even though party rules may have concentrated the authority to name convention delegates in the hands of party bosses. Machine endorsements of candidates could have a powerful coordinating effect on voter choice: by committing the votes that it controlled to a particular candidate in a multicandidate setting, such as a primary, the machine could tag its favorite as the front-runner. Rival candidates effectively faced a barrier to

entry; how were they to coordinate enough voters to neutralize the bloc of voters committed to the machine candidate? Voters, who presumably had little information on which to base their choices, were forced to choose between a relatively clear choice (the machine-endorsed candidate) and a grab bag of lesser-known alternatives. Very often voters followed the cues provided by political machines.<sup>3</sup> But the grasp of political machines on the reins of political power loosened over a period of several decades after the turn of the century. It is thus difficult for the literature to pinpoint exactly when machines no longer controlled enough votes to dominate the nomination process.<sup>4</sup>

Second, *machine bosses chose electable candidates who could lead the ticket to victory.*

Theodore White noted:

Big-city bosses can usually be swayed only by a national candidate's demonstration of surplus disposable power at the polls, by a political glamor demonstrated as so appealing that voters will indiscriminately in November fatten the local ticket at the base and strengthen the machine's local candidates where it counts, at home.<sup>5</sup>

One way for the bosses to gauge a potential nominee's expected surplus, was to observe the success of candidates in those states that held primary elections, although, as Polsby observes, "winning even a large proportion of them was not a sufficient condition for winning the nomination."<sup>6</sup> Thus, in order for candidates such as John F. Kennedy to win the confidence and support of the party bosses, White noted, "there was no other than the primary way to the Convention. If they could not at the primaries prove their strength in the hearts of Americans, the Party bosses would cut their hearts out in the back rooms of Los Angeles."<sup>7</sup>

John Geer argues, however, that presidential primaries between 1912 and 1968 served largely an advisory role to party bosses and were not the sole determinants of who would bear the party banner in November. "[A] series of victories the primaries did not guarantee anything. For instance, in competitive races for the nomination, the top vote getter in the primaries became the nominee only about 40 percent of the time, showing that party leaders often ignored the advice offered by voters in primaries."<sup>8</sup>

Third, *machine bosses chose competent candidates who were qualified to be president*. Party leaders and bosses thus acted as a filter to weed out amateurs and incompetents in the presidential selection process. According to Polsby, "[T]he criterion of peer review seeks to increase the confidence of voters in the capacities of the nominee actually to execute the office of the Presidency effectively."<sup>9</sup>

Party bosses did not perform this function out of the goodness of their hearts or love of country, however. Basically, according to Polsby and Wildavsky, the party leaders were willing to do what was necessary "to gain power, to nominate a man who can win the election, to unify the party, to obtain some claim on the nominee, to protect their central core of policy preferences, and to strengthen their state party organizations."<sup>10</sup>

Fourth, *machine bosses chose their party's platform*. Party platforms were chosen that would appeal to voters, and often, as Martin Wattenberg notes, "parties forced presidential candidates to moderate their views and move toward the center."<sup>11</sup> In summation, the party bosses-the very same people who were decried by Progressives and municipal reformers for their nefarious effects on state and local politics-have been lauded for performing a host of salutary

functions vis-à-vis presidential selection. Responsible national party government, according to this standard view, depended to a great extent on the self-interest of local party bosses.

Fifth, *newspapers were local in scope and often overtly political and partisan*. As Lance Bennett explains, "Reporting involved the political interpretation of events. People bought a newspaper knowing what its political perspective was, and knowing that political events would be filtered through that perspective."<sup>12</sup> There was no pretense that information-what there was of it-provided by the media was unbiased or apolitical. Newspapers were either the tools of political machines or their rivals for political influence. As Robert Finch put it, there was a time "when the Copley papers and the Nolan papers and the *L.A. Times* and the Hearst papers would mark a ballot from top to bottom and usually decide primary elections, which they did, with a marked ballot."

The old world of presidential elections, then, was characterized in the literature by three factors: voters had access to only a small set of highly biased yet consistent information sources-presidential nominations were controlled by a handful of party bosses whose political interests were fundamentally local, not national- and these bosses, following their self-interest, limited nominations and party platforms to candidates and issues that were responsive broad national interests in order to maximize the positive coattails that a party presidential nominee would provide for the machines' local tickets.

## **Under the Watchful Eye: Presidential Campaigns in the Television Age**

The literature also shows widespread popular agreement on a number of characterizations of modern presidential campaigning. These also relate to the role and function of party organizations and the media in the political process, but in contrast to the preceding age, the modern era is said to be marked by trends toward the nationalization of information and the devolution of party power to the mass media. Much of the literature (exclusive of the authors in this volume) argues that although the machine-dominated era was not particularly democratic, its passing has led to a poorer class of candidates and presidents. Second, it is generally argued that many of the political and educative functions once fulfilled by political machines and partisan newspapers have now fallen to television, whose status as an entertainment medium critically damages its ability to serve those functions adequately. American democracy has suffered as a result.

The remainder of this section is a point-by-point explication of these two basic claims. As in the first section, here I sketch out the popular characterizations in order to present a robust picture of the current dominant view of the presidential selection process.

(1) It is universally argued that *the power of party machines to control votes, and therefore the nomination, has disappeared*. As White described it,

By 1968 [the] old political map of the Democratic party was as out of date as a Ptolemaic chart of the Mediterranean. No one any longer controlled New York, the state which had given Lyndon Johnson a 2,669,534 plurality in 1964. When one telephoned a switchboard of the New York State Democratic Committee early in 1968, one heard the languid voice of the telephone girl, "No. He's not here. There's nobody here. No

one comes in any more. You can leave a message if you want." . . . Here and there, of course, a few hereditary enclaves of the old machines, passed on from father to son, still existed.... But, over all, the machinery creaked and clanked, as if it had come ungeared.<sup>13</sup>

The political machines, after decades of decline, had finally become so feeble that their leaders could no longer dominate the conventions or primary elections. They were no longer able to forge a national coalition from the various interests and factions that make up the national parties.<sup>14</sup> This, of course, implies that the *guiding force of the party bosses in choosing electable and competent candidates was lost as well*. This point will be raised again in the context of our discussion of the rise of the modern media.

The state and local machines also had provided ready-made organizations with resources and manpower needed to fuel a national campaign. Without the political machines to act as coalition builders and providers of campaign labor and expertise, prospective presidential candidates were forced to turn elsewhere. Just as congressional candidates before them had done in the wake of state-sponsored congressional primaries decades earlier, presidential candidates increasingly turned to creating their own organizations.

(2) It follows that *successful candidates have their own large and expensive campaign organizations*. Winning candidates are likely to be those who succeeded in building organizations comparable in vote-getting capacity to the old networks of machine organizations. Barring changes in technology, those organizations would have to be comparable in size to the combined magnitude of the machine networks. And unless those organizations were completely dependent on volunteer labor and/or employees on contingency contracts (such as *quid pro quo*

expectations of job offers in the new president's administration), they were bound to be expensive as well. It is clear that the total cost of presidential nominations, for both parties, has climbed considerably in recent decades. In 1968 the Democrats and Republicans spent a total of \$129 million in 1982-1984 dollars, while in 1988 the two parties spent a total of \$174 million (in constant dollars).<sup>15</sup>

Presidential campaigns have become not only increasingly expensive but also considerably longer. Howard Reiter shows that major candidates in contested Democratic conventions have been formally announcing their candidacies much earlier than in the past; the number of days before the party convention has risen from an average of 148.5 days in 1932 to 427.3 days in 1984. Similarly, for the Republicans, it has risen from 303.3 days in 1940 to 337.5 in 1976.<sup>16</sup>

Polsby argues that the increased use of primaries, and the concomitant need for ample funds to compete in a long national campaign,

have given rise to the displacement of state party leaders and leaders of interest groups associated with them in the presidential nomination process. . . . It has ... meant that a new group of political decision-makers has gained significant authority. These are the fundraisers by mail and by rock concert, media buyers, advertising experts, public relations specialists,

poll analysts, television spot producers, accountants and lawyers who contract themselves out to become temporary ... members of the entourages of presidential aspirants. They work not for the party but directly for the candidates.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, *consultants have replaced party leaders in key campaign roles.*<sup>18</sup> For Doug Bailey, this problem goes beyond just campaign staff; modern presidential candidates are both proud and willing to accept the consulting mechanism that seems to come with the campaign. They're willing to subordinate themselves to the handlers. And if that's the type of person ... that we're attracting as candidates then we've got a serious problem, because ... the consultants are ahead of the candidates-it's not the candidate's campaign any more.

Thus the role of party and interest group leaders in presidential campaigns has changed from one of primacy to one of advocacy. Today, as Polsby points out, "selected state leaders may be invited to participate in a candidate's campaign rather than the candidate being a recruit and representative of the state party or faction."<sup>19</sup> Party leaders, it is argued, have gone from selecting candidates and running their campaigns to having almost no role in presidential elections. As Asher notes, "The presidential contest today is dominated by teams of specialists and loyalists whose first obligation is to the candidate and not to the political party of which that candidate is a leader."<sup>20</sup>

An unexpected-though perhaps predictable-consequence of this shift to *candidate-centered campaigns* has been that the issues and discussions now focus on the candidates and their personal qualifications and character rather than primarily on party platforms and party reputation. As Polsby and Wildavsky explain, "Since candidates self-select and campaign for themselves through the media, it would not be surprising if the electorate, observing what has

happened, pays more attention to the prime movers, the candidates, and less to their party labels.”<sup>21</sup>

(3) *Voter Participation and party identification have declined.* Following the institution of the Australian ballot, voter registration laws, and other ballot reforms around the turn of the century, the rate of participation of eligible voters in presidential elections declined from approximately 80 percent, for the period from Reconstruction through 1896, to 59 percent by 1912.

In support of the statement that party identification has declined, two arguments are usually employed. First, survey research has indicated that the percentage of voters who identify themselves with the Democrats or Republicans has declined, while those who identify with neither of the major parties has risen over time. Wattenberg presents National Election Study data for presidential years 1964 through 1980, breaking down the "nonidentifiers" into apoliticals (1 to 2 percent of eligible voters polled), no-preference (rising from 2 percent of those polled in 1964 to about 10 percent in 1980; about half of this group consistently admits to "leaning" toward one or the other party, however), and independents (averaging about 25 percent of those polled, two-thirds of whom reported "leaning" toward one or the other party).<sup>22</sup>

Second, it is argued that the degree of split-ticket voting has increased dramatically during this century, robbing survey measures of party identification of much of their value. Reiter asserts that the increase, even in recent years, has been significant:

From 1952 to 1964, some 11 percent to 17 percent of respondents split their tickets in races for the Presidency and the Senate (not counting votes cast for third-party and independent

candidates). In 1968 that figure rose to 19 percent and has exceeded 20 percent ever since. Similarly, in voting for President and Representative, the figure rose from 12 percent to 16 percent from 1952 to 1964, to 18 percent in 1968, and at least 25 percent ever since.<sup>23</sup>

(4) It is argued that *nominations are more contestable than they were in the era of strong Parties and bosses*. People have two developments in mind: first, that there are more candidates contesting nominations than in the past. Polsby tells us that the number of Democratic candidates running in more than one primary increased from a mean of 3.2 in 1952-1968 (before the nomination reforms) to 13 in both 1972 and 1976.<sup>24</sup> The Republican side also saw an increase, from the same 3.2 mean in 1952-1968 to 9 candidates seeking to oust Carter in 1980.

The second claim, as Stephen Wayne states, is that "opportunities for outsiders have increased."<sup>25</sup> Before the decline of party and rise of television, most politicians wanting to run for the presidency had no hope of winning, whereas now many more prospective candidates foresee a positive (if still small) chance of winning their party's nomination. It follows from the greater openness of a primary-focused nomination process that *amateurs, opinion outliers, and interest groups can under the right circumstances take over the nomination process as well as write the party's platform*.<sup>26</sup>

In 1979, for example, the National Education Association (NEA) officially supported Carter's renomination campaign, endorsing him when his poll standings were particularly low. Teachers worked hard to support Carter, and in the summer of 1980 the NEA supplied 302 delegates to the Democratic convention in New York. They received financial support from the NEA, caucused on every issue before the convention, and were monitored in floor voting by

NEA whips. This sort of machine-like activity helped defeat Edward Kennedy's convention challenge and gave the disciplined cadres of the NEA a strong voice in the writing of the Democratic platform."

Jeane Kirkpatrick presents evidence that delegates to the 1972 Democratic convention held opinions far different from Democratic identifiers in the electorate.<sup>27</sup> Everett Carll Ladd goes on to provide figures for the 1976 Democratic convention suggesting that although the delegates were again far different from Democratic identifiers in the electorate, they were far closer in their opinions to "New Class" Democrats-college-educated professionals under forty years old. (Ladd wrote this book before "yuppie" entered the popular idiom.) The "New Class" Democrats

support the busing of school children to achieve racial integration; ... reject "equality of opportunity," insisting instead upon "equality of result"; ... want to extend civil liberties, notably the rights of the accused in criminal trials; and [who] sharply question the value of economic growth, believing that it damages the "quality of life." The New Liberalism also differs from the New Deal ethos in the matter of personal morality; it takes a libertarian stance on such issues as abortion, legalization of marijuana, homosexuality, and racial intermarriage.<sup>28</sup>

When such unrepresentative convention delegates do gain control of their party's convention, *the result is likely to be the nomination of an outlier candidate.* According to Polsby and Wildavsky, "sometimes the policy positions advocated by party activists tend to be unpopular with most other people. Thus, it is possible for the nominating process to produce

candidates who appeal to the people who become delegates but not to voters.”<sup>29</sup> Richard Watson suggests:

The increased influence of amateurs dedicated to issue-oriented candidates means that both parties run the risk of nominating candidates whose views on public policy do not correlate with views of rank-and-file voters. When they do—as the Republicans did when they nominated Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Democrats did when they chose George McGovern in 1972—the result is the mass defection of traditional party supporters and the overwhelming defeat of the party's candidate in the general election.... Another serious possibility is that the amateurs *in both parties* could be successful in the same year and confront the electorate in the November election with having to make a decision between a Goldwater and a McGovern.<sup>30</sup>

The McGovern-Fraser reforms (and similar reforms undertaken in the Republican party) are thought to have enhanced these trends.<sup>31</sup> The McGovern-Fraser Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection produced a set of guidelines that it claimed constituted "the minimum action state Parties must take to meet the requirements of the Call of the 1972 Convention."<sup>32</sup> The guidelines ruled out the use of party caucuses and "delegate primaries" to select delegates in favor of more open conventions and "candidate primaries," in which prospective delegates would run as committed to a particular presidential candidate. They also called for greater demographic representation in state delegate slates and closer conformity between a candidate's relative support in a state and the number of delegates he or she received. As a partial response to the McGovern-Fraser Commission, the number of states with Democratic primaries rose from

seventeen in 1968 to twenty-three in 1972, while the proportion of convention delegates selected in primaries rose from about 50 percent to two-thirds. Again, the Republicans undertook similar changes in the number of primaries and proportion of delegates selected in primaries.

(5) It is argued that *voters get most of their information from television* and that television coverage of campaigns shapes how the rest of the media reports on candidates as well as how candidates and their consultants shape their campaign strategies.<sup>33</sup> According to *Los Angeles Times* reporter George Skelton, numerous polls conducted by the newspaper support this claim. "In fact, every poll we do, we ask the question, 'Where do you get most of your information?' And over a long period of time, many polls, ordinary people [say they] get most of their information from television." The central role of television in information dissemination in the United States is widely believed. Mike Deaver offered a very typical view: "80 or 90 percent of the people in this country get all their information and make all the decisions about the way we run this country from television."

(6) Critics charge that *the media in general-and television in particular-ignore questions of candidate competence and policy in their coverage of campaigns*. For Gary Hart, this tendency has been both clear and unfortunate. Referring to the 1984 campaign for the Democratic nomination, Hart tells of a "serious speech on foreign policy" that he gave in Chicago:

Mondale was charging me with something about an ad in the Chicago and Illinois primary, and I was responding, unfortunately, and it was back and forth. I'll never forget the front page of the *Chicago Sun-Times*: "Hart responds to Mondale charge," paragraph, paragraph, paragraph, paragraph, paragraph, paragraph. And the last sentence of the story is, "Hart was in Chicago to

give a major foreign policy speech." Now, from that newspaper, you would never have known what the speech was about. It's politics. It's politics, politics, politics, politics. And I don't think people want to hear that.

While this anecdote refers to newspaper coverage, it applies in spades to TV. Television, it is argued, is first and foremost an entertainment medium, not a news medium. As Doug Bailey notes, viewers can switch channels merely by pressing a button on the remote control. "The clicker means you can do it without getting up out of your chair, right? So it's very easy to change channels. The battle for getting your attention becomes greater and greater; therefore, more excitement." For George Skelton, this seems natural because "it's more fun. We are in this business to tell the reader about a competition. It's a struggle for power that's going on in the country. People want to know constantly who's ahead, who's doing what to who to get there, what strategy is being used. I mean, that's why we read the sports page."

The clicker and the nature of television as an entertainment medium, according to Doug Bailey, explain a major difference between television and print: where print reporters need to fill up space and get a story-not just a single quote-a television interview will continue only "until that reporter has heard the soundbite, and then the interview is over. I mean, that's what it's all about. It really doesn't have very much to do with analysis at all." Thomas Marshall states the case succinctly: the way that the media cover primaries means that "voters are provided little issue information-but much information on campaign trivia and on the candidates' win-loss records."<sup>34</sup> Robert DiClerico and Eric Uslaner show that news coverage of primary campaigns in

1976 dealt with issues only 24 to 28 percent of the time; the rest of the coverage was devoted to "horse race and hoopla."<sup>35</sup>

The success of TV has affected all reporters, prompting the growth of what Sabato has termed "junkyard dog," or attack journalism.<sup>36</sup> Attack journalism (or a journalistic "feeding frenzy") can be seen as the consequence of two tendencies in the journalistic community: first, a tacit coordination mechanism that induces homogeneity in how stories are framed-pack journalism. Second is the competitive pressure of the marketplace. Newspaper editors are driven to a great extent by the twin desires to scoop the competition and to avoid being scooped. This means simultaneously covering everything the other guy does, plus perhaps a little more. According to Jerry Warren, "The competitive urge in Washington [in the 1988 campaign] ... was so great that they would go after anything, and so there were a number of cases where rumors were put on the wire and then checked out."

Aldrich well summarizes points 5 and 6. He reports that "by 1974 only 12 percent of the population relied on media other than television or newspapers as a principal source of news"; that candidates design campaigns to garner the best coverage- and that lack of time and space in the national media means that "there is little time or space for complex issues. These constraints are especially true of television, where the need for relatively brief and visual stories means that question's of policy receive little attention." Instead, fully 72 percent of the time allotted by network news programs to presidential nominating campaigns is devoted to hoopla-rallies and motorcades. Moreover, "the media are interested in the 'horse race' aspect of the campaign. Many stories focus on who is ahead, who is behind, who is going to win, and who is going to

lose, rather than examining how and why the race is as it is."<sup>37</sup> It follows that in *presidential races voters are likely to be ill informed about candidate policy stances and competence.*

(7) It is commonly believed that momentum *has become important in primary campaigns.* In the view of Gary Hart, for example, success feeds on popularity, which feeds on success: "It is cyclical. If you're low in the polls, you can't raise money, and if you can't raise money, you can't sort of bootstrap yourself up in the polls. You have to win primaries.... But if you win a primary, you get charismatic very fast and you get money."

Success thus breeds success. As former Rep. Morris Udall has described the primary process,

It's like a football game, in which you say to the first team that makes a first down with ten yards, "Hereafter your team has a special rule. Your first downs are five yards. And if you make three of those you get a two-yard first down. And we're going to let your first touchdown count twenty-one points. Now the rest of you bastards play catch-up under the regular rules."<sup>38</sup>

It is widely held that voters have little information to go on in making their choices in the primaries other than the horse-race and hoopla coverage, the sensationalist, skeleton-in-the-closet investigative reporting, and the choices made by voters in preceding primaries. This paucity of information, combined with voters' weak ties to party organizations, is likely to result in weak attachments to candidates; hence a little new information could significantly sway the opinions of many voters. Since most people are seen as getting the bulk of their information from television,

the television industry can have a significant input into selecting nominees and ultimately the president.<sup>39</sup>

It has been argued that the media are biased ideologically.<sup>40</sup> If it is true that television does present a consistent, ideologically skewed view of the world, and if Iyengar and Kinder's experimental findings can be generalized to real-world settings, then the media itself may contribute to the selection of ideologically unrepresentative-outlier-candidates, with potentially perverse consequences for American democracy and the common interests of the American people.

(8 ) *The McGovern-Fraser and later campaign reforms accelerated the changes in presidential campaigns listed above and brought about further changes in the nomination process.* In my discussion of point 4, I noted that presidential nominations have become more contestable than they were during the machine period. The 1968 Democratic convention created the McGovern-Fraser Commission to address questions of procedural fairness and delegate selection. The commission recommended, among other things, that the party publish convention rules and establish uniform times and dates for delegate selection meetings; that state and local parties lower or abolish participation fees (paid by candidates for delegates to the national party convention in order to get on the primary ballot) that state delegations proportionally represent the vote totals won by the various presidential candidates in each state; and that women, young people, and minorities be well represented in these delegations.<sup>41</sup>

Of course the post-1968 reforms do not represent the first time that the parties tinkered with the way they choose candidates for high office. The Progressive reforms at the turn of the century clearly were an effort to change the nomination process, and, as Reiter notes, the

Democrats performed a major overhaul of their nominating process in 1936 (also the first year that widespread opinion polling was used in campaigns), when they abolished the two-thirds rule for choosing the party's nominee.<sup>42</sup>

The post-1968 reforms constitute a move by the liberal faction of the Democratic party to wrest control from the New Deal Democrats. They were instituted to help hammer in the last nails on the coffin of the party machine era. The growing predominance of primaries, for example, made presidential nominees, as Austin Ranney states, "less indebted than ever before to congressional and other national, state, and local party leaders and more indebted to their own organizations and contributors and to voters in the primaries."<sup>43</sup> Reiter notes:

The most dramatic example of this was the ejection of Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley from the 1972 convention because he had not followed the McGovern-Fraser guidelines in composing his delegation. The primaries also seemed to hurt party leaders by enabling candidates to win delegates by ignoring the leaders and appealing directly to the voters.<sup>44</sup>

In 1952, although Estes Kefauver won the most primaries, Adlai Stevenson, the favored candidate of the governors and the Democratic party organization, won the nomination. Likewise on the Republican side, nominee Dwight Eisenhower was outgunned in the primaries by Senator Robert Taft. Since that election, however, only Democrat Hubert Humphrey in 1968 failed to win either a plurality of his party's primaries or a plurality of votes cast in those primaries but still managed to take the party nomination.<sup>45</sup>

Quantitative evidence of the decline of machine influence at conventions is difficult to assemble. One proxy that has been offered is a measure of delegation loyalty to party leaders. Reiter reports that the proportion of state delegations providing a majority of support for the candidate endorsed by their state governor averaged around 80 percent for 1952-1960 and 1968 conventions on the Democratic side and for 1952, 1964, and 1968 on the Republican side. At subsequent contested conventions, the proportion drops to only half of state delegations.<sup>46</sup>

Eliminating the party bosses also meant abolishing the "unfair" rules that limited delegate participation and the unit rule (winner-take-all primaries and caucuses) in favor of more proportional representation. The latter reform had the desired effect: through 1960, state delegations to the convention frequently voted as unanimous blocs on the first ballot (ranging from a high of 85 percent of delegations in 1932 to a low of 46 percent in 1920), whereas since 1968, unanimity on the first ballot has never involved more than 14 percent of state delegations. Reiter also presents two other measures of state-delegation cohesion that roughly confirm this decline in state party unity.<sup>47</sup>

A number of nasty consequences have been ascribed to these reforms. First, they allegedly have made it more difficult for the parties to unify behind their nominees.<sup>48</sup> Since the success of candidate-centered nomination campaigns depends so much on the acquisition of public endorsements and support from various groups associated with the party, such campaigns necessarily lead to the public airing of policy disputes between rival factions in the party. This public process limits the ability of groups to bargain with one another without threatening the electoral value of the party label (by making them publicly commit to specific policy positions).<sup>49</sup> Second, and closely related to this factionalization of the parties, they promoted the participation

of issue-motivated activists.<sup>50</sup> As a consequence of increased factionalization and participation of single-issue activists, it is argued, the reforms have contributed to a greater likelihood of an ideologically extreme nominee.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, however, the reforms have been viewed as bringing about a nationalization of parties.<sup>52</sup>

The sum total of these common observations is said to be that parties and party organizations are increasingly meaningless to the American people; that the media -especially television- have assumed many of the salutary democratic functions once carried out by the parties; and that the media have dropped the ball on supplying the information cues and constraints needed for a well-functioning mass democratic polity. I return to these themes in the conclusion.

### **Stylized Arguments**

The mass of arguments made in support of the stylized facts cited above is truly prodigious. Sadly, however, few such studies have laid out the structure of the logical model necessary to account for these facts. In this section, in order to make sense of the stylized claims, I construct a parsimonious model of the stylized presidential literature -- a listing of assumptions necessary and sufficient to account for the main assertions-as a precursor to assessing the validity of the common inferences drawn in the literature for American democracy. This exercise necessarily does damage to some of the arguments made by various authors, but I think there is remarkable agreement on each of the basic assumptions. The point of this exercise is to clarify the degree to which the stylizations conflict with one another and to construct testable hypotheses to evaluate the stylizations that are consistent with the model.

There is no "objective" evidence in favor of a number of the above stylizations, only the "informed opinions" of various authors and professionals in the campaign business. Different people have different perceptions; it is difficult to derive hypotheses about presidential campaigns that can be tested solely on such impressionistic data. Instead, we may have to look for more indirect tests to evaluate some of the stylizations; if they follow deductively from other stylizations for which evidence is available, one may reasonably infer that the unobservable stylizations may be true as well. Thus it is vital that the premises of the model be plausible and that the first order implications be robust to technical tweaks to the basic assumptions.

My basic model has two parts: a set of assumptions about information and another set about political organizations in America, which I consider in turn. The goal of this section is to present a sufficient set of conditions to derive the major stylized observations presented in the section above. These assumptions ideally should be basic and simple enough to be virtually uncontroversial.

## **Television and Information**

The advent of TV, it is argued, has brought a new calculus to politics. The usual reasoning implicit in arguments about the effect of television on politics addresses two sides of the issue - demand and supply. I construct a model of the stylized view of each below, starting with the demand side, based on the following assumptions.

(1) *A picture is worth a thousand words.* This figure of speech is so old and well known that it seems almost heretical to question its merits as an assumption. Pictures can affect

viewers' perceptions about the world more efficiently than can words. Campaign managers from the

1970s and 1980s certainly think so. For example, Mike Deaver recalls when television reporter Leslie Stahl did a report "about the fact that the visuals that [the Reagan administration] portrayed simply did not add up to what our actions were, the policy. She may have had a point.... [But] Everybody sat there and watched this piece that she put together, three and a half minutes, and watched these beautiful visuals of Ronald Reagan. They [viewers] never got the point she was trying to make, because the pictures were so nice."

(2) *TV presents more pictures per minute than does print.* This is uncontested. It may be true that TV does not present all that many *discrete* pictures, but that is a semantic rather than a substantive objection.

(3) *TV is a public good for consumers.* Assuming that a consumer owns a TV and ignoring the cost of electricity, broadcast TV information is freely available to consumers, unlike newspapers, which generally must be purchased. Assumptions 1, 2, and 3 together imply that the cost to viewers (in terms of time and effort) of acquiring information from TV is less than the cost of acquiring the same amount of information through print, at least for some range of information acquisition.

(4) *The average person's demand for information is low enough to be below the threshold, if one exists, where information from print is less costly than information from TV.* The point of this assumption is that people, on average, demand little information in making a decision. The assumption is stated rather technically.

I assume that the viewer garners diminishing returns from additional TV viewing. The first half hour of TV news consumed, for example, allows the viewer to get a pretty good handle on the news of the day; each additional half hour yields less and less formation. In other words, I assume that the viewer has very little ability to consume selectively from subsequent TV news shows; viewers chose whether or not to watch a news show without knowing its specific content ahead of time. If, as I will argue below, TV shows are geared to the average viewer who demands little information, news shows broadcast during any given time period (a news day) will have a lot of overlap.

At low levels of consumption, TV viewing often substitutes for other mindless leisure activities, so the opportunity cost of watching TV is probably nil. This indicates that for very high levels of demand for information, TV news viewing would begin to intrude seriously on important activities, such as earning a living, sleeping, eating, procreating, or watching Dirty Harry movies.

Consumers can be very selective in their marginal consumption of printed information, however (if an article is repeated from a previous newspaper, the consumer can choose to ignore it). Hence, print-media consumption should not exhibit diminishing returns.

Note that nothing in this model precludes the possibility that some individuals will read newspapers. Those demanding a high level of information will read the newspaper and also watch television news. If television were not available, average information consumption would likely drop as everyone would have to purchase print media. High-level demanders would still

read newspapers, whereas many low-level demanders would be priced out of the market altogether.

These four assumptions (pictures are information-dense; TV is picture-dense; TV news is a public good; average demand for information is low) do bring up an important question about what information is. To many of the writers of presidential campaigning literature, possessing information means having encyclopedic knowledge -being able to regurgitate facts, figures, etc. This is not the only way to think about information and is perhaps the least appropriate way to consider how it is used in decision making, as I will discuss later. In this section I concentrate on what level of information consumption one can expect from the average person. In other words, I treat information as a commodity and assume that the level of knowledge possessed by one individual can be directly compared with that level possessed by another.

One last assumption completes the demand side of the information picture:

(5) *People are rational.* This means they are efficient; when given a choice, all else being constant (the amount of information obtained), they will acquire information through what appears to them beforehand as the least costly means.

It follows from the first four assumptions that TV is the least costly means of acquiring all the information that the average person wants prior to making choices, and assumption 5 then implies that *he or she will get all of this information from television.* These assumptions, however, tell us next to nothing about how well informed the average person will be on any particular subject, nor anything about which subjects he or she will be familiar with. I need, then, to make some assumptions about the supply side of the equation. Assume further that

(6) *TV networks seek to maximize profits.*

TV network profits are, of course, generated by advertising dollars. On the assumption that advertisers want to reach as many potential buyers of their products as possible, it follows that, if information can be treated as a commodity, the TV networks will seek to maximize their revenue by maximizing the audience for their news programs. Thus all the networks will target their primary newscasts to the same audience.

The networks presumably know a lot about consumers' viewing habits. They know that average demand is quite low-the below-average demander of information may watch only one half-hour newscast per day. Since it is costless for viewers to change channels, the networks know they are under competitive pressure to deliver as much news as compactly as possible. They will therefore tend to provide brief stories, each built around a single simple theme illustrated by a soundbite or image. As a result, the major networks' newscasts tend to have the same general coverage and format. Any behavioral norms that might arise among reporters to encourage pack journalism-such as are discussed in Sabato's essay-will simply support this tendency.

Supplying more information than the average person wants increases the networks' costs. If the demand for information equals or exceeds the point at which the marginal costs of consuming additional information from television and from print media converge, the increased costs borne by the network will not translate into increased market share, since the consumer can acquire the additional information from print media at a lower cost. Hence, it follows that the nightly news shows will tend to provide short, image-oriented, superficial coverage of many stories. The average person, in my model, wants a survey of the day's events in a quick and dirty format, not in-depth reporting that would require a longer show to cover the same number of stories. It also

follows that local newscasts will tend to expand their news coverage to include national stories, since they compete with the national broadcasts for the low-demand end of the market.

The stylization that TV coverage of presidential campaigns is superficial and soundbite-oriented fits quite naturally into this framework. The networks' style of coverage is based quite simply on the character of consumer demand for information and network responsiveness to market demand. I have shown that the first half hour of news programming will conform quite closely to the stylized views of TV news. Since average demand for information is low, there will be little encyclopedic informational content in the news. It follows that the average person won't know much, according to the commonly used definition of information as encyclopedic knowledge. Whether or not the information provided by this half hour of news is sufficient for most voters to make good political decisions is a separate question, which I address below.

Importantly, it also follows that candidates will want to manipulate the pictures people see on TV. Since the average person knows only a few things, any marginal increase in knowledge has the potential to change significantly his or her opinions about the world. Thus how the news is framed and primed is very important to candidates.<sup>53</sup> Witness, for example, Mike Deaver's preoccupation with visuals: "the picture is everything, in my opinion.... I happen to think that the picture, the visual, is just as important as the spoken word."

It follows from the assumptions about profit-seeking and demand that the networks will gear their primary newscasts toward the average viewer. We know that voters are not drawn randomly from the pool of viewers; voters tend to be wealthier, better educated, older, and are more likely to be white than a randomly drawn TV viewer. The interests of the average voter and the average viewer are therefore unlikely to coincide. It follows that the level of information

provided by primary TV newscasts will be lower than the average voter would prefer. The substantive content of those newscasts is also likely to be skewed away from the interests of the average voter, so that voters will be getting biased political information. Relatively more coverage will probably be devoted to candidates and issues of interest to the average viewer, relatively less to candidates and issues that would be of greatest interest to viewers with more extreme views and interests.<sup>54</sup>

Nomination campaigns are necessarily concerned with that portion of the electorate likely to vote in each party's respective primary elections. It is hardly controversial to assume that there is a difference between the average Democratic and Republican primary voter, and that both differ from the average person in the electorate as a whole. The average Democratic (or Republican) primary voter will know more about candidates whose positions are closer to the interests of the average television viewer rather than about candidates whose positions better satisfy the voter's own interests. It also follows trivially that, relative to the issues covered by the campaigns and the requirements of various partisans, TV coverage will be biased.<sup>55</sup>

Under certain circumstances, then, networks may influence the choice of the party's nominees and the president. If voters are risk averse, they will be more likely to vote for a candidate they know and dislike somewhat rather than a candidate they do not know at all. Voters make inferences from the information signals given to them by television-that some candidates' positions are relatively close to the interests of the average television viewer. Voters know only that the positions of other candidates are not close to the average viewer's interests. Such candidates could, in fact, be right- or left-wing extremists or somewhat more moderate, but

more precise information is unavailable, and the risk-averse voter will prefer the small evil who is known to the potentially large evil not known.

I have been able to derive most of the things attributable to the advent of TV from six basic assumptions (plus a few additional technical assumptions): (1) pictures are information-dense relative to printed and spoken words; (2) television is picture-dense relative to other media; (3) television provides cheap information; (4) people don't need full information in order to make choices in the world; (5) people are efficient in their information-consumption choices; and (6) competitors in the TV industry want to maximize the relative size of their audiences in order to make money. I now build upon this foundation, adding assumptions about party decline.

## **Primaries, Candidates, and the Decline of Parties**

The decline of parties in twentieth-century America is an article of faith for most political observers. In an earlier time, political machines ruled the roost; today they do not. The heart of our culture's definition of political party is the notion of machine politics, characterized by a tightly disciplined, hierarchical organization headed by one person or a small cabal of leaders, in the mold of Boss Tweed of Tammany Hall, Richard Daley (the elder) of Chicago, Don Corleone of Mario Puzo's New York, and the Galactic Emperor of George Lucas's imagination. Machines did three things: they restricted entry for candidates seeking office and regulated voter turnout and voter choice at the polls.

The decline of political machines is often traced to changes in electoral laws, which affected their ability to determine electoral results, and municipal reforms, which reduced their incentives to control local governments. Most machines had local roots, controlling a city or

county government and the jobs and contracts that such control could provide to its foot soldiers. The Progressive municipal reform movement of the early twentieth century transformed local governments, often increasing the accountability of elected officials to the voters. Career, professional bureaucracies were established in many larger cities, which allowed government workers in some cases to organize themselves on a separate basis from the political machines (e.g., to unionize).

Even more important, the secret Australian ballot made it almost impossible for the machine to ensure that the voters it brought to the polls would faithfully cast their ballots for machine-endorsed candidates. The use of government-printed ballots and formal procedures for getting one's name placed on the ballot also changed the locus of electoral competition, allowing competing interests to challenge the established party machines. The net result of these developments was the withering away of the hegemonic position of party machines in American elections.

Since political machines, for the most part, no longer exist in the United States, it follows that they no longer control the presidential nomination process. More significantly, political machines no longer impose great barriers to entry for competing candidates in the nomination process, nor do they determine turnout or voter choices at the polls. Rival organizations with well-known reputations such as unions and interest groups, now provide candidates with endorsements that imply electoral support from voters, enabling nonmachine candidates to run for (and have a chance to win) the presidency.

Further, since general election ballots present voters with a choice of candidates for many different offices, since no nonmachine central party authority can force candidates to help pay for

getting out the vote for the ticket, and since no organization can guarantee how any particular voter will cast his or her (secret) ballot, it follows that no organization will have an incentive to spend very much on get-out-the-vote efforts. As a result, turnout has declined from its peak during the machine era. Note that this effect has nothing at all to do with television.

Once a voter gets to the polls, how will he or she vote? Without a party machine to make voters support a whole ticket, other voters can't be depended on to ignore a candidate's individual characteristics and vote solely on the basis of party or party faction. Therefore, the voter's best bet is to do the same: cast a vote for each office independent of the choices made for other offices. More voters, on average, will thus split their tickets at the polls, especially if they want different things from different offices. And finally, from the perspective of individual voters, it follows that survey respondents, when asked to summarize their political views on different offices and institutions with a single indicator, will be less likely to identify themselves as strong partisans. A smaller share of voters will take this position than would have so identified themselves if they had no incentive to pursue different voting strategies for different offices.

The main observation that remains to be explained is the rise of candidate-centered campaigns. By candidate-centered, I mean that for each candidate for a particular office there exists an organization dedicated solely to getting him or her elected; and that the questions and issues of the election revolve around the competences of the candidates and their policy positions. One prominent explanation for the rise of candidate-centered elections is the introduction of primaries.<sup>56</sup> However, primaries by themselves do not produce candidate-centered general elections. They are clearly not necessary, given that many local elections -e.g., school board, county superintendent, municipal judge, and city council- for which primaries are

often not required are often candidate-centered and not party-centered. Moreover, numerous party machines during the twentieth century successfully directed votes and ran elections, including primaries. The most prominent example of a machine thriving despite primary elections is probably the Daley Chicago machine of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

There are three broad conditions sufficient to yield candidate-centered presidential nomination campaigns. The first is that candidates are able, at low cost, to gain widespread recognition in order to be considered by a majority of convention delegates. All states have more or less restrictive requirements for having one's name placed on primary ballots, so entry is not free, but once that fee is paid, the candidate is assured of being known to every primary voter.

Second, candidates must be able to create a coalition of voters who choose the candidate based on his or her personal reputation rather than solely on the reputation of any group to which the candidate might claim allegiance, such as a party. Third, this coalition must be potentially decisive. I discuss the latter two conditions in turn.

Aldrich, in an essay later in this volume, addresses the role of personal-vote coalitions. He points out that elections can become candidate-centered only if a technology exists that allows candidates to create a personal brand name. He observes that for presidential elections this technology did not exist until TV became a mature medium in the last two decades. But what does it take to create a brand name, or at least one large enough to encompass a potentially decisive coalition of voters? Perhaps we should first ask what a brand name is. It is a cue or signal that conveys information about the quality (and other relevant characteristics) of a product—in this case, a candidate. Perhaps the best examples of brand names are McDonald's and Coca-Cola. At the mere utterance of the name “McDonald's,” people recall its products and service

with remarkable accuracy and detail. The strength of this brand name, however, is not the result of TV advertising, as Aldrich's argument would imply, but rather of experience. Indeed, both the McDonald's and Coca-Cola brand names existed prior to the maturation of TV as an advertising medium.

Neither company's TV commercials today typically provide any information about products or service. Instead, their ads feature celebrity singers, catchy slogans about "Food, Folks and Fun," and teaching the world to sing. Likewise, for a well-known candidate (such as an incumbent), there is little need to provide such information, since we all know it already. Conversely, for little-known candidates (and new products), advertising alone is not sufficient to create a brand name.

In the world of politics and politicians, I would argue that personal brand names have been around for a long time. For example, nearly every voter at the time knew something about George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson. Indeed, their brand names were so strong that they still operate today. Most Americans probably could not begin to name specific policies advocated by Jefferson, but they could say something about what he stood for; moreover, they might know something about his personal life, in much the same way that Americans have some knowledge of politicians' personal lives today.

Many companies, with products ranging from automobiles to amusement parks, have established brand names for their products. These brand names-with a reputation among consumers for the quality and the characteristics of the products-are quite valuable and fiercely protected. The difference in price between brand-name drugs and their generic counterparts reflects largely the value of a brand name to the product's manufacturer. Knowing the reputation

of brand name products helps reduce the amount of encyclopedic information consumers need in order to choose between products. Indeed, most people use little more than a brand name to help them choose among big-ticket purchases such as cars and home appliances.

What makes brand names such as McDonald's so valuable is not the TV ads but rather the fact that nearly every one of us has been to a McDonald's and we have all shared the same experience. With cars, televisions, bedding, and toasters, brand-name reputations are created through our personal experiences with various products-or through testimonials from people who claim firsthand experience with a product. We might believe, for instance, that consumers can accurately infer the relative quality of competing products based on only two bits of information: prices and sales data.

There is, however, one critical difference between consumer-product brand names and candidate brand-name formation. Providers of consumer goods can compete on the basis of price, whereas candidates cannot. Voters presumably don't care who wins office, only what effect different officeholders will have on policy outcomes. Since price is assumed to be fixed, if retaining the incumbent is one of the choices, it follows that voters will not choose another candidate who promises identical policy outcomes, all else being equal. Challengers must advertise that they are different from the incumbent on one or more policy dimensions. Voters will be able to infer from a challengers level of expenditure that he or she offers outcomes that will differ from the status quo.<sup>57</sup>

Candidates develop reputations for championing certain policies or segments of society. Hence, John Petrocik tells us, not all advertising claims are credible.<sup>58</sup> David Duke can no more erase his past affiliation with white supremacist organizations than Jerry Brown can escape his

offbeat reputation, or Walter Mondale his image as an old-line, “special interest” Democrat. If a claim is contradicted by experience, people tend to discount the new claim-or, perhaps worse for the candidate, devalue the standing reputation. Once created, a reputation is both a valuable campaign resource and a constraint on a candidate's behavior. Television advertising can be used to reinforce the brand name once acquired, but it cannot be used to create one. At most, it can reduce differing perceptions of quality among consumers by exposing large numbers of them to an identical endorsement. The much vaunted incumbency advantage, of course, underscores this point: incumbents rely on their personal brand names to deflect competition and win reelection (although, interestingly, incumbents almost always outspend challengers in congressional races).<sup>59</sup> Given my assumptions about information transfer, the easiest way for endorsers to convey their endorsements to a large decentralized audience is through television<sup>60</sup> (but, again, TV advertising is neither necessary nor sufficient to create a brand name).

The chain of endorsements through which a reputation is established may be quite long. Typically, however, it extends from the candidate to some set of individuals with very large (well-known) reputations (such as interest groups, ex-presidents, Ralph Nader, or a political machine organization) to individual voters. A personal-vote coalition is simply a set of individual voters who independently choose to support a particular candidate based on their personal experience with that person. This coalition differs from other kinds of support coalitions in that it implies no strategic interaction among its members. In contrast, a machine-based coalition is a cartel of voters-a set of individuals who explicitly seek to coordinate their vote choices with one another. A party or issue voter, on the other hand, chooses a candidate

based on the endorsement of a person or group whose reputation the voter already knows, such as a political party or interest group.

Returning to the explanation of candidate-centered general elections (and proceeding from the six assumptions about information given in the previous section), in order to create a deductively valid explanation for this purported fact we need to assume that:

(7) *Candidates have personal brand names at the beginning of the general election.* My purpose here is not to write a book about brand names. Since they are a central part of most people's discussions of campaigns, of who wins and who loses, I will simply make the assumption and move on.

The third condition for candidate-centered campaigns basically states that there must be some gain to be made for a candidate to center the campaign on his or her own brand name as opposed to the party's brand name (or as opposed to the wind and the stars). The gain, of course, is in votes. Thus we assume:

(8) *There are voters whose choices are not predetermined; and this set of voters is decisive set.* By this I mean simply that if all members of the set vote the same, their choice determines the outcome of the election. Hence, for the set of all voters whose choices are not "hardwired" to be decisive, the predetermined votes cannot give a majority of votes to a single candidate, nor an insurmountably large plurality if there are more than two candidates.

Since party identification is said to be the principal source of vote predetermination, making partisan appeals is unlikely to sway the critical, nonpartisan swing voters. Thus, given the above model of electoral competition, it follows that general election campaigns will center on candidates rather than parties. It also follows that primary campaigns will focus on candidates'

attributes and interest-group endorsements; since all candidates in a primary are competing for the same party nomination, there are no predetermined votes.

Developing , maintaining, and reinforcing personal brand names (i.e., keeping to a minimum variations in people's experience candidate) are costly. This is clearly the case in the business world. McDonald's expends considerable effort and resources in conducting oversight of its franchises-training seminars, periodic inspections and in supplying the characteristic McDonald's containers. Another example of the cost of maintaining the value of a brand name can be seen in the U.S. automobile industry, where manufacturers periodically issue voluntary recalls for an entire model year to repair some systematic flaw. As American manufacturers have slowly learned in the past twenty years of competition with Japanese firms, consumers make inferences about product lines based on very little data, such as a bad experience with a single product. In the 1970s and 1980s thousands of American car buyers turned their backs on American producers in part because of their belief that Japanese cars had superior quality control.

It follows from the high costs of establishing and maintaining brand names that candidate-centered primary and general election campaigns will be long and costly. This is because candidates must establish themselves either with a set of endorsers whose reputations are very well known or with voters directly at the grass-roots level. Endorsers have their own reputations to protect, so they will not grant endorsements freely. A candidate has to find some way to make a precommitment to serving an endorser's interests. Reaching voters directly, on the other hand, is a logistical problem that requires both time and money.

During the primaries, if there is no candidate with a national brand name, then the candidate who can first acquire one will have a big advantage. Winning a state primary election

sends a signal to voters in other states that this candidate, for whatever reason, was attractive to a large number of voters. If we stipulate that media coverage of elections includes opinion polling and exit polling, it follows that the media will treat primary elections as horse races.

Note that this is true with or without television! Furthermore, for party voters (some 60 percent of the electorate, according to usual measures), candidates who can win their party's state primary elections should be attractive prospects to bear the party banner in the general election. Thus winning- or at least doing well enough to help establish a brand name- is important. Momentum is important, but not in the simplistic sense that it creates unbeatable juggernauts. Rather, people take cues from others whose reputations are well established: either individuals whose actions we have observed or representative samples of demographic groups, on whom we also have observations.

I agree with the assessment that momentum, observed as an apparent bandwagon effect, can be important, but only in limited ways. As Geer puts it,

The crucial component of this bandwagon scenario is that most voters have little information about the candidates. When voters have little or no information, any new information will create images about the candidates. Given the positive coverage that follows a winner, this initial impression of the candidate is likely to be favorable.... Of course ... if a relatively unknown candidate begins to receive bad press, voters may start to respond less positively to that contender.<sup>61</sup>

Bandwagons of this kind, therefore are unlikely to occur in races where the competing candidates are generally well known. When this is the case, voters will generally have more

stable preferences about the candidates, making large shifts in loyalties less likely, holding constant the field of candidates. Of course the news media's coverage will have some influence in races featuring well-known candidates, since some voters will have weak preferences or none at all. My point, however, is that there are not enough uncommitted or weakly committed voters for marginal bits of information to generate large shifts in candidate support.

Lastly, the rise of political consultants is no mystery, and an explanation of their ascendancy need not say anything about the decline of parties or the sinister nature of Madison Avenue. Rather, changes in technology lead rational candidates to hire experts in using the technology. Indeed, this was true with the advent of mass newspapers which led candidates to hire speech writers and press secretaries. Likewise, the advent of TV led candidates to hire ad men.

## **The Reforms**

Still to be discussed are what effects, if any, the post-1968 reforms in the nomination process have had on presidential selections, elections, and policy outcomes. The major reforms, as noted above, changed the procedure for selecting delegates to nominating conventions to provide better demographic representation of state populations and to represent more accurately the voting strength of presidential contenders in states holding primaries. A number of states also switched from caucus or convention formats to primary elections for committing national convention delegates to presidential candidates.

The standard interpretations generally argue that the reforms led to more ideologically extremist participation in state and national party conventions, more influence being given to

narrow, well-organized party factions or interest groups, and a general lessening of the cohesiveness of the major parties. Unfortunately there is very little evidence that (a) the reforms caused changes in the ideological composition of the party conventions, or (b) that changes in the composition of the convention caused or reflected a change in the kinds of candidates being nominated.

My approach to interpreting the effects of these reforms is to extend and modify the basic model presented above. In general, groups-demographic, ideological, or particularistic “interest” groups-are the focus of most studies of reforms of the nomination process. Therefore, I need to make some assumptions about how such groups are involved in American politics.

By a group I mean an organizations collection of individuals bonded together by some institutional structure to pursue a common goal, be it profit, mutual entertainment, or pressuring the government for the redress of grievances. My definition does not include such collectivities as social movements or any other collectivity united only by a common demographic, economic, or behavioral trait -i.e., blacks, whites, men, women, Jews, Christians, or small businesses. My definition does, however, include demographically homogeneous organizations such as the NAACP and the National Organization for Women, as well as gardening clubs, book clubs, churches, and so forth.

The organizations that provide structure for collective efforts and goals are often well placed to acquire information relevant to presidential candidate selection and to provide this information, in the form of cues, to their members. Indeed, if the group's reputation in the political arena is well known, its cues may affect the behavior of a much wider circle of individuals.<sup>62</sup> I have already assumed that information is costly to acquire and that as a result

people will be "ill informed" in an encyclopedic sense, all else being equal. The presence of groups may change this calculation. At a minimum, groups mean that some individuals will substitute cues for encyclopedic knowledge-what I described above as the general understanding of "information" -and thus will be better able to make "informed" decisions with respect to many choices, such as which candidate to vote for in a primary.<sup>63</sup>

Under certain circumstances, when the issues in an election affect the collective interests of a group, it will be motivated to provide not only an information cue to its members (and others with access to the group's cues) but also selective incentives to turn out and vote.<sup>64</sup> Such groups, in other words, will try to vote as a bloc or cartel, just as political machines did in the past. These selective incentives and information cues are especially important in primary elections. In a primary people often have very little information about the candidates, who tend to be not very well known (especially for the nonincumbent party); the party label provides no information since all of the candidates share the same one. If we assume that voters are risk averse and less likely to vote if they lack sufficient information to make good inferences about the effect on policy of a given candidate's victory, it follows that members of the set of policy-interested groups are more likely to vote in primaries than voters who are nonmembers.

Thus primary voters tend to be "interested" - people with affiliations to groups with particular policy axes to grind. There are two kinds of organized, politically active groups: those that favor the status quo policy, all else being constant, and those that reject it, who are therefore willing to bear some cost to get the policy changed. Assume that this is costly. Since I have assumed that voters are risk averse, groups whose interests are already being served by the government have no need to be active to maintain the status quo and groups whose preferred

policy differs only slightly from current policy probably can't justify the expense to change policy. Groups seeking sharp policy changes, on the other hand, are more likely to work actively to change the status quo.

Hence, there are two major categories of primary voters: either a supporter of the status quo or an advocate of radical change. It follows that, if voters' preferences on the relevant policy dimension are uniformly distributed voters in the nonincumbent party's primaries will tend to be extremists (relative to the status quo policy), and extremist candidates will tend to win primaries and, therefore, convention delegates. These delegates, I assume, will foresee that general election voters are risk averse and would not replace an incumbent with a challenger who promises more of the same. Hence, the Democrats in recent years have tended to nominate very liberal candidates for president.

Primary voters in the incumbent party, on the other hand, tend to be supporters of the status quo policy. Given a choice between an incumbent (who promises to maintain the status quo) and an intraparty challenger who proposes nothing more than better management of the status quo policies, voters would have to believe the incumbent's mismanagement was tremendous for them to throw that person out of office. Hence, incumbents almost always win renomination, except when they get caught in scandals.

If during the nonincumbent party's primary process enough delegates are committed to a single candidate to win nomination on the first ballot, it follows, as night follows day, that the convention will tend to nominate extremist candidates, in the sense that they will differ sharply from the incumbent on at least one policy dimension. If voters fail to coordinate in this way, there is no obvious solution to this process. Groups may logroll to nominate a candidate who is

extreme on multiple dimensions or they may compromise to nominate a candidate who differs relatively less from the status quo on those dimensions. Happily, since the installation of the reforms in 1972, no nominating convention has failed to select a candidate on the first ballot.

### **A Matter of Facts**

I have surveyed the most common observations about modern presidential elections, offering an explanation for them based on the most common premises in the scholarly literature. Having characterized people's beliefs and analyzed their origins, I now question the reasons why people believe these things: i.e., what evidence can we find that the things people seem to believe are, in fact, true?

This question, of course, brings up another: what constitutes evidence? My preference is for reproducible outcomes from repeated experiments. Failing to find many laboratory experiments regarding peoples' beliefs about presidential elections, I prefer quasi-experiments, that is, experiments in nature where only one (or very few) of the factors affecting the studied phenomena is changed, enabling us to observe directly the effect of such changes on the studied phenomena. Price changes for products and commodities provide quasi-experiments, for example, that allow us to test economic theory (does demand for a product rise or fall as its price increases?).

It is possible to conceive of some quasi-experiments on modern presidential election campaigns. I outlined three suitable hypotheses above: that the decline of party machines caused specific changes in presidential election campaigns; that the advent of television caused other changes; and that the McGovern-Fraser and subsequent reforms caused additional well-specified

changes. I might, of course, have trouble specifying when a change took place and when its consequences for presidential elections were manifest-when exactly was the advent of television, and when did we expect to see presidential elections change as a result?-and the authors of the literature surveyed above give me little (or no) guidance. Nonetheless, I could, in principle, construct some quasi-experiments.

Frequently, however, Political observers do not collect anything like experimental or quasi-experimental evidence. All too often, no objective evidence whatsoever is given for the purported phenomena: no evidence that I could easily reproduce on my own; no widely accepted, contemporaneous measures of the phenomena; and no databases from which I might draw evidence. Rather, the evidence given is subjective and personal constituting an opinion or judgment.

The problem with such evidence, however, is that on the one hand, I hate to throw it out, particularly when many smart people have come to the same opinion based on their personal observations. On the other hand, as we all know, opinions vary. There are often at least as many opinions concerning each observation as there are people who observed the phenomena. To cite a specific example, even if all observers agree that journalists have shown less restraint in the types of stories about politicians they pursue and file, there is no agreement (and indeed no discussion) on how much less restraint they now show (5 percent? 10 percent? A little? A lot?). For these and other reasons, I will not give much credence to measures based on observers' opinions.

For the most part, the stylized facts enumerated above are backed by no objective evidence. Rather, they are observations made by campaign insiders and analysts, agreed to by all

concerned and given credence in print or by repeated use on TV. I take these observations seriously. This does not mean, however, that I regard them as true facts but rather as things that need to be explained: why do these people believe things that, when held up to an objective standard, either cannot be confirmed or can be positively rejected?

### **Just the Facts, Ma'am**

My first demand is that the stylized facts surveyed above *be* facts. I will take them in the order presented earlier.

(1) *The power of party machines to control votes, and therefore to control the nomination, has disappeared.* Outside of certain variants of Marxist conspiratorial theory, everyone believes that the state and city machines of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries no longer exist and have not been replaced by new machines. What evidence could one present to show that something does not exist?

While I accept this "fact" as true, it is difficult to say when it happened; and since it is purported to be an intervening variable that generates further changes in presidential elections, it is important to be as precise as possible as to its genesis. The decline of party machines is most often associated with the Progressive reforms at the turn of the century.<sup>65</sup> I have argued that political machines were, in large part, cartels of voters. Cartels are, of course, difficult to maintain in the face of contrary individual incentives. The ballot reforms of the 1880s and 1890s and the later Progressive reforms made those cartels harder to maintain by reducing the observability of voting behavior and reducing the availability of patronage jobs in many cities.

We have some indirect evidence supporting the claim about the decline of state and local machines from voter turnout figures, which I discuss below.

We have no clear-cut answer, however, as to when machines declined in importance for presidential nominations. Most of the percentage decline in turnout for presidential elections occurred in the first two decades of this century. Paul David and his colleagues conclude, with regard to the Democratic and Republican nominating processes in 1952, that “ ‘very few of the state political conventions of 1952 were within the grip of a recognized state political boss’ and that the ‘old-time local .political bosses seem to be dying off without being replaced.’”<sup>66</sup> It is often argued that the bosses held their grip on presidential nominations by controlling the selection of delegates to the national party conventions. However, if we assume a world in which all bosses control blocs of delegates, but only some control blocs of voters as well, which bosses would we expect to wield the most clout in the smoke-filled rooms? Bosses without electoral clout quickly cease to be bosses.

(2) *Successful candidates have their own large and expensive campaign organizations.* The first question, of course, is what is meant by large and expensive? In comparative terms, presidential campaigns are not all that expensive. In 1984 Mondale and Reagan spent a combined \$80.8 million on the general election campaign, or about 870 per voter. Prenomination expenditures by all major party candidates in 1984 totaled another \$132.7 million, or \$1.43 per voter. In comparison, House candidates in 1984 spent \$177.6 million, or \$1.92 per voter.<sup>67</sup> Americans are pikers compared to the Japanese, however. Estimates of campaign spending by LDP candidates alone reach as high as \$50 to \$120 per voter.<sup>68</sup> In comparison to Japan, U.S. presidential campaigns are cheap.

Whatever we think about the size issue, candidates have at least had their own organizations since the advent of primaries. But so did Andrew Jackson, around whom Martin Van Buren built the Democratic party in the 1820s. Similarly in 1848 Van Buren built a Free Soil party organization around his own candidacy, winning 10 percent of the popular vote- former Whig president Millard Fillmore carried 21.5 percent of the vote as a Know-Nothing in 1856; Teddy Roosevelt finished second with 27.4 percent of the vote in 1912 under a Bull Moose party label created from thin air. More recently, goes the argument, presidential campaign organizations have become complements rather than alternatives to party organizations. John F. Kennedy, for example, was said to have run a highly structured (albeit small) campaign organization that was not linked to the Democratic party organization<sup>69</sup> -at the very beginning of the television era and before primary victories alone could assure a candidate the nomination.

Within this category it is also alleged that consultants have replaced party leaders in key campaign roles. People who have been involved in campaigns, such as Gary Hart, Susan Estrich, and others participating in the symposium on "Campaigning for the Presidency" held at the University of California at San Diego in 1991; and firms such as Joseph Napolitan Associates, Cambridge Survey Research, Market Opinion Research, Bailey/Deardourff and Associates, and Decision Making Information -to name just a few- are the best evidence for this.<sup>70</sup> Again the question is, When? Keech and Matthews described the 1940 campaign of Wendell Willkie, for example, as "a classic, highly professional public relations campaign," led by "talented and highly experienced experts in the communications industry and public relations"-long before the advent of the TV era.<sup>71</sup>

It is hard to measure meaningfully whether presidential elections have become candidate-centered. Wattenberg performed a content analysis of election coverage in a limited selection of newspapers and magazines (not television) and found that "throughout the whole 1952-980 period, mentions of candidates outnumbered those of parties, but ... the ratio increased from about two to one in the 1950s to roughly five to one by 1980."<sup>72</sup> This evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that presidential elections have become increasingly candidate-centered. I find substantial support for this hypothesis in the literature.

(3) *Voter participation and party identification have declined.* A decline in turnout is undeniable, but, contrary to much opinion in the press, the drop came *before* 1912: turnout peaked in the period 1856 to 1900 when voter participation in elections averaged 78.5 percent (standard deviation 3.1 percent); it declined to slightly more than 65 percent in the 1904 and 1908 presidential elections and to 59 percent in 1912. Since Woodrow Wilson's first election through 1988, however, turnout for presidential elections has averaged 58 percent of the estimated eligible electorate (standard deviation less than 5 percent), with the lows obtaining in the 1920s.<sup>73</sup> Turnout has clearly declined from the highs of the late nineteenth century, but the bulk of the decline actually occurred between 1896 and 1912.

As I mentioned above, the decline of party identification is a somewhat controversial issue. If we rearrange Wattenberg's subcategories to group "leaners" together and place "independents" with those who reported no preference, the data show that the National Election Studies' proportion of nonaligned voting-age respondents ranged from 10 to 15 percent for the 1968-1980 period. Leaners ranged from 18 to 21 percent of respondents. Making inferences from these data to the voting-age population as a whole, of course, requires that one compare

these ranges of variation with the margin of error implicit in the polls, typically between 1 and 2.5 percent.<sup>74</sup> Thus it is not at all clear that these data show any significant trend toward decrease partisanship. As Jacobson points out,

The degree to which partisanship has declined is a matter of some controversy. If partisanship is measured as the proportion of citizens who claim allegiance to one of the major parties, excluding apoliticals and those who call themselves independents even though they admit, on subsequent questioning, to lean toward a party, data from the American National Election Studies show a decline in party identifiers from 74.4 percent of citizens in 1952 to 62.7 percent in 1988. If leaners are included among the partisans ... the decline is considerably more modest, from 91.1 percent in 1952 to 87.8 percent in 1988.<sup>75</sup>

Thus if we are to take stock in survey data, it becomes a matter of taste and objectives whether one emphasizes the relatively large decline in strong identifiers or the minuscule drop in the more inclusive measure of identification.

Even if party identification has declined, it is highly questionable whether this means that parties no longer serve a purpose. As to the decline of party identification, the percentage of the electorate who are party-line voters (whose choice for president aligns with their party identification)<sup>76</sup> has, in fact, increased since 1952: 77 percent of the electorate were party-line voters in presidential elections in 1952; this increased to 79 percent in 1960 and 1964 and decreased to 69 and 67 percent in 1968 and 1972, 73 percent in 1976 and 68 percent in 1980. The percentage of party-line voters in the 1984 and 1988 presidential elections, however, increased dramatically to 79 and 81, respectively. And while there has been a slight decline in

the percentage of party-line voters in Senate and House races, from the low eighties in the 1950s to the low to mid-seventies in the 1980s, party identification is still the single best predictor of the vote in these races as well.

Moreover, even if we come up with some interpretation of the evidence, or new twists in the data, that purports to show a decline in party identification, does this necessarily imply that parties have declined? If we think of parties as machines, with voters following the marching orders of machine bosses, then a decline in disciplines drop in PID-would, in fact, correspond to a decline in machine (party) strength. Thus a drop in PID implies a corresponding decline in the ability of party machines to organize elections.

But thinking of parties as nineteenth-century machines is not a particularly useful way of understanding the role they play in modern politics. Though the analogy is not perfect, the most useful way of thinking about modern parties is as franchise organizations. Much like the McDonald's brand name, party labels convey information-cues about the policy positions of candidates to voters.

(4). *Nominations are more contestable than they were in the era strong parties and bosses;* outsiders and nonmachine candidates now have a chance to win the nomination. The fact that most candidates drop out of the nomination race well before the convention suggests that observations of increased contestability are illusory. Indeed, one might argue (although I will not do so), based on the modern trend toward conventions as coronation ceremonies rather than nominating contests, that nominations have become *less* competitive in recent years.<sup>77</sup> The proportion of first-ballot votes won by minor candidates (those receiving less than 10 percent) has fallen from the 1896-1932 mean of 28.9 to 15.1 percent in 1948-1960, to 7.4 in 1968-1984.<sup>78</sup>

This makes it sound as though the prereform nomination process was eminently fluid and contestable. And Reiter further notes:

There are problems in testing the hypothesis that there are more candidates entering the race today than before.... Many a candidate in the past waited in the wings, hoping to be regarded as a latter-day Cincinnatus and plucked from his plough. Conversely, there are literally hundreds of announced candidates, especially now that the Federal Election Commission requires a statement of candidacy before one can collect contributions.<sup>79</sup>

There is good reason to believe that party machines and voter turnout have declined since the Progressive reforms and that campaigns have become more candidate-centered. There is, however, little support one way or another for any contention about changes in party identification or the contestability of nominations. I now evaluate the evidence on the alleged effects of television.

(5) *Voters get most of their information from television.* Basically it has been true since 1963 that more people get most of their *news* from TV. The percentage of people citing this source in response to a survey question has been between 64 and 67 since 1972, while the percentage who cite newspapers as the main source of news has declined from 57 in 1959 to 42 in 1988. (Note that people could answer both TV and newspapers, so that the percentages can, and do, add up to more than 100).<sup>80</sup> At the same time, people have found TV news to be more credible; in 1988, 49 percent of the people surveyed were "most inclined to believe" TV reporting, while only 26 percent answered the same question with a preference for newspapers. These survey data, however, do not address the question of whether people get most of

information from television, where information refers to both encyclopedic knowledge and endorsements, impressions and opinions (cues and signals).

A 1984 survey found that 58 percent of the respondents read more than two newspaper articles about the presidential campaign, while 23 percent read none at all. On the other hand, only slightly more-62percent-watched more than two TV programs about the campaign. More than half of these same individuals admitted to paying very little or no attention to newspaper articles about the campaign, while only 31 percent admitted to paying no attention to TV programs.<sup>81</sup> These data indicate that most voters exert little effort to collect information from the media about presidential campaigns.

(6) *The media and especially TV ignore substance in favor of horse-race stories and muckraking.* Brady and Johnston, in an analysis of media coverage of presidential candidates, judged some 31 percent of the volume of candidate coverage to be "serious," i.e., having to do with "electability, experience, leadership, personal qualities, and policy positions." Approximately half of that serious coverage dealt with candidates' policy positions. On the other hand, some 22 percent of the volume was judged to be "less informative," such as stories about candidates' campaign appearances.<sup>82</sup>

Stanley and Niemi report the results of another analysis of TV news coverage in the 1988 presidential election: 50 percent of the coverage during the primaries was related to horse-race stories, while the other half of the 1,064 stories aired during this time were about campaign (focusing on the candidates) and policy issues. Coverage of the general election, however, was much more heavily skewed toward campaign issues (46 percent of the 1,237 stories aired) and policy issues (36 percent), with only 19 percent of the stories about the horse race.<sup>83</sup>

Does it follow that voters will be ill informed? The data suggest not only that television and print news provide far more nonfrivolous information than many observers would have us believe but also that information acquisition is a much broader process than reading newspapers and watching television. As Popkin notes, people obtain information about the economy and government policies through their everyday activities.<sup>84</sup>

People have simply thought the wrong way about information. It is not merely encyclopedic knowledge. It is also clues, signals, and shortcuts that enable people to make accurate inferences on which to base their decisions. For example, do people need to have encyclopedic knowledge about basketball shoes to choose between Nike and Keds? Or is it enough to know that professional (and perhaps collegiate) basketball players wear Nikes and not Keds?

We acquire encyclopedic knowledge about very few of the decisions we make. We learn very little about the cars, televisions, or stereos that we purchase, relying instead on brand names and endorsements from reputable sources, such as consumer magazines. Why should voting decisions be any different? Indeed, why should we exert as much effort in voting as we do in choosing basketball shoes, given that the probability is close to zero that any individual's vote will tip the election? What voters want is a cue or signal that allows them to make accurate inferences about expected performance. Party labels are one such cue. As Anthony Downs argued, if party labels are linked to policies in a consistent way,

some rational men [may] habitually vote for the same party in every election. In several preceding elections, they carefully informed themselves about all the competing parties, and all the issues of the moment; yet they always came to the same decision about how to

vote. Therefore they have resolved to repeat this decision automatically without becoming well-informed, unless some catastrophe makes them realize it no longer expresses their investing in information which would not alter their behavior.<sup>85</sup>

Personal brand names provide another cue, which function in the same way as the party label. For most people these two cues will be sufficient. A further segment of the electorate will be swayed by individual or interest-group endorsements, which the candidates themselves will happily advertise. The end result is that most people are probably able to make quite accurate inferences about candidates and their preferred policies on the basis of only a very few signals. This allows them to make reasonably good decisions (which under certain circumstances approximate full information decisions) without having encyclopedic knowledge.<sup>86</sup> Gary Jacobson, for example, argues forcefully that voters know, at least generally, the types of policies advocated by each party, and that they vote for Republican or Democratic candidates for different offices, depending on their perception of the best type of candidate for each.<sup>87</sup> Individuals, when asked which party cares more about (or is best able to deal with) given groups or issues, seem quite able to differentiate between the two parties on matters of substance.<sup>88</sup> That most people have little or no encyclopedic knowledge is no surprise. The surprise is that analysts ever expected them to have it.

While the presidential campaign literature generally contends that print media and TV news are different in content, there is no evidence at all to support such a claim. Trivially, of course, there is a content difference, since print does not offer moving pictures to supplement text, but how would one determine that the informational value is different? How people actually use the

informational content of TV as opposed to print has not been studied. However, if, as I have argued, Popkin's and Lupia's approaches are correct-that what matters in news are the inferences that signals make possible rather than some pedantic accounting of the number of facts a story contains-then the common criticism that the text of a TV newscast wouldn't fill the space above the fold of a newspaper's front page is irrelevant.

(7) *Momentum matters*. Evidence has been presented by Geer, for example, that purports to show the importance of momentum. For four "Unknown Candidates"-Bush in 1980, Carter in 1976, McGovern in 1972, and Hart in 1984-support from their party's voters increased rapidly upon becoming "known," with jumps ranging from 10 percentage points for McGovern to 27 percentage points for Hart (though only for Carter did the level of support increase above 50 percent); while for nine "Known Candidates"-Humphrey in 1972, Muskie in 1972, Ford in 1976, Reagan in 1976 and 1980, Carter in 1980, Kennedy in 1980, Jackson in 1984, and Mondale in 1984-support among their party's voters showed no upward trend, only slight month-to-month variations over the course of the campaign.<sup>89</sup>

But what does this tell us? First, some perspective is needed. For the most part, the support levels obtained by the "Unknown Candidates" were near zero before they became "Known." After they became known, their support levels (except for Carter) were still largely below those enjoyed by "Known" candidates. Second, the change in support from a candidate's party voters reflects the establishment of a brand name-what Geer (and others) mean by "known." A brand name may be a necessary condition for winning the nomination, but having one gives no indication whether it is a good or a bad brand name-one that will lead the candidate to win the nomination (as Carter and McGovern did) or one that can lead the candidate to win the

presidency (as only Carter was able to). Further, once a candidate becomes known, his support might actually decline (as it did for Bush and Hart). As Popkin puts it,

As voters learn more about a candidate, or as they discover that they know less than they thought, they sometimes learn that they prefer a different candidate. The rapid decline of early "surge" candidates occurs because of new information about their stands or competence, not because of changes in voter expectations about the candidates' chances of electoral success.<sup>90</sup>

On two related claims-that TV picks the winners and that the media is biased-I have not been able to locate any evidence at all. Even if these claims were true, it is still not clear what might have changed from the previous era.

It may be true that the average individual gets most of his information from television but it does not follow that voters have no other sources of information. A majority of voters read newspapers and, as Popkin argues, people gather information from everyday life and experience.<sup>91</sup> It may also be true that most TV reporting on campaigns covers horse-race and hoopla, especially late in the campaign, but this tells us nothing about the inferences that voters are able to make from such coverage. As for momentum, it tells us nothing about campaign dynamics. In his essay, Aldrich sketches the beginning of a more coherent theoretical approach to the concept, but there is no evidence for the common inferences drawn about the ability of TV to affect campaign outcomes.

(8) *The campaign reforms of 1972 and later mattered.* I have summarized evidence that the reforms (1) helped to bury bosses, and (2) made conventions more demographically representative of the population as a whole. Have these changes created persistent factions? In

the days when party bosses ruled with an iron grip, intramachine factions were unthinkable. Factions in the national party, on the other hand, composed of groups of state and local machines, undoubtedly existed but were not easily discerned in any quantitative data. Insofar as party bosses fade into irrelevance, then, we might expect to see signs of policy-based, factional infighting within the parties. And, in fact, Reiter shows that both parties do indeed suffer persistent factionalism (measured by looking at the degree of unity of state delegations on roll-call votes at the national party conventions).<sup>92</sup> However, this factionalism is something that arose in the early 1960s, prior to the McGovern-Fraser reforms.

Have the reforms helped amateurs, opinion outliers, and interest groups take over the nominating conventions? It is unclear whether this is a recent phenomenon. Jeane Kirkpatrick interviewed convention delegates at both major party conventions in 1972- this information was combined with larger surveys to compare Democratic rank-and-file attitudes with convention delegates' attitudes on a range of issues (including welfare, busing, crime, civil rights, and so forth). She found that ordinary Democrats (not convention delegates) were more in tune with delegates to the Republican convention than with delegates to the Democratic convention.<sup>93</sup> This was the case for most issues and candidates, as well as in the aggregate; moreover, the differences were greatest between ordinary Democrats and McGovern delegates!

There is widespread agreement that convention delegates are unrepresentative in one way or another of the whole electorate (for each party as well as for both). Polsby notes that as a group the 1972 Democratic convention delegates were better educated and wealthier than Americans in general.<sup>94</sup> John Kessel agrees, looking at citizens and activists in 1988, and also provides data showing that delegates are unrepresentative of the general electorate in terms of

religion, race, sex, and self-identification as conservative, liberal, or moderate.<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, his data show that while Republican delegates are wealthier than Republican identifiers (and also Democratic delegates), on most measures they appear to be closer to the Republican rank and file than are Democratic delegates to theirs. No significance tests are offered.

Geer argues that both Democratic and Republican voters in primaries are more moderate than their party's rank and file.<sup>96</sup> Assuming that Democratic convention delegates have become less representative of the average Democratic voter, have these delegates nominated outliers? Reiter claims, on the contrary, that for both parties "moderate candidates have often defeated more 'extreme' challengers for the nomination-Carter in 1976 and 1980, Ford in 1976, Mondale in 1984."<sup>97</sup> How should one judge how "extreme" a candidate is? The evidence cited both for and against such claims tends to be tautological: so-and-so lost, so he must have been an extremist.

In summary, I find little evidence one way or the other on the effects of the post-1968 party reforms. While convention delegations seem to have become more demographically representative, they apparently have had little or no impact on nominations, especially since most are now committed to a candidate, at least on the first ballot, via a state primary election.

## **When True Is False: Questioning Premises**

On the whole, I have two responses to the stylized facts. I agree that there is some evidence to support the claims that party machines have declined, presidential campaigns have become candidate-centered, voter participation has declined, convention delegates have become more

demographically representative of the whole population, and voters get most of their news from television. However, many of these facts were true long before the rise of television. The one change that seems most likely to have arisen from the reforms-the changed demographic composition of party delegations to the convention-poses no identifiable threat to democracy. As for the balance of the claims, I simply do not believe that they stand up to scrutiny.

I have tried to piece together arguments for the stylized facts found in the literature and expounded by political insiders, using premises that are plausible or at least not obviously false. However, the following assumptions-important pieces of the arguments for the stylized facts-have many strikes against them:

(1) The assumption that average demand for information is below the point at which print media become cheaper to consume than watching additional TV is patently silly. Millions of Americans buy daily newspapers; further, millions listen to the radio and millions more discuss politics with friends, neighbors, and acquaintances at the drop of a hat. Individuals have ready access to many sources of information in addition to the nightly news.

(2) TV networks also spend considerable effort trying to segment their markets in order to provide more targeted audiences for advertisers, contrary to the assumption that they always target the average viewer in general.

(3) The common definition of information as encyclopedic knowledge is clearly flawed. People are capable of making choices in the real world without being "fully informed" in the sense used by economists and game theorists in formal models. Further, we can actually observe individuals making choices between different levels of consumption of media sources of information. It follows that rational individuals are trying to use their resources efficiently,

making trade-offs between using resources to collect information about alternative courses of action and to really take action. To be informed means having the ability to make accurate inferences about the world based on a stock of knowledge; it is neither necessary nor sufficient to have encyclopedic knowledge of facts in order to make good inferences.

(4) The assumption that television and candidates manipulate voters implies that people make no effort to predict how their choices will interact with those made by other people to produce outcomes. This is clearly false with regard to predictions we make about what is likely to happen in our everyday lives; the choice of when to brave the commute home from work is a trivial example. Do we leave right at five o'clock and get snarled in rush-hour traffic, or do we stay at the office an extra forty-five minutes, waiting for traffic to clear? The optimal choice before the fact, of course, depends on the choices we expect other commuters to make, since if enough of us choose to wait, traffic will be clear at 5:00 but snarled at 5:45.

(5) The set of individuals' most preferred policy outcomes is uniformly distributed in some interval on a left-right continuum. It is well known that many issues, such as abortion, don't fit easily on a left-right continuum. But even more implausible than that claim is the assertion of a uniform distribution of preferences. Every schoolchild knows, with good reason, that when we don't know anything about a population, it can be useful to assume that it is distributed normally (a bell curve). We tend to believe that there is probably some average or central tendency in the population, be it height, weight, intelligence, or opinion. Why, then, without any evidence, should we expect voters to be different? But without a flat distribution of preferences, it is difficult to sustain arguments that extremist interests can take over political conventions.

The implausibility of these assumptions and relying on them for any internally consistent theory of presidential nominations that purports to explain the stylized facts should be sufficient to dispense with most of the stylizations I have discussed. So what can we conclude from the literature on presidential nominations and the role of television and of the post-1968 party reforms? We can still believe that the media have changed since the 1960s and Watergate. We can believe that the structure and organization of campaigns have also changed as candidates and their hired guns learn how best to present their message to the voters, given the resource constraints and the availability of free and paid media. And we can believe that voters' expectations and demands have changed as new information technologies and campaign strategies have made more and different information available to them. The following essays present detailed arguments and evidence in support of these circumstances that we believe to be true. I have not, however, found any evidence that these changes have affected the quality of American democracy in any significant way.

## **Notes**

---

<sup>1</sup> Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections:*

*Strategies of American Electoral Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 28; see also Polsby and Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Contemporary Strategies of American Electoral Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964); Austin Ranney, "The Democratic Party's Delegate Selection Reforms, 1968-76," in *America in the Seventies*, ed. Allan P. Sindler (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), 204; Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., *Where Have All the Voters Gone? The Fracturing of America's Political Parties* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Polsby and Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections*, 1969, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore White, *The Making of the President*, 1968 (New York: Pocket Books, 1970), 82; Gary R. Orren and William G. Mayer, "The Press, Political Parties, and the Public-Private Balance in Elections," in *The Parties Respond: Changes in the American Party System*, ed. L. Sandy Maisel (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), 210.

<sup>4</sup> White, *The Making of the President, 1968*, suggests that the threshold had been crossed by the election of 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Contemporary Strategies of American Electoral Politics*, 7th ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 260-261; William J. Crotty, *Decisions for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 267.

<sup>6</sup> Nelson W. Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 11, 13-14.

---

<sup>7</sup> Theodore White, *The Making of the Presidents 1960* (New York Atheneum, 1980), 79, 96-114; William Crotty and John S. Jackson III, *Presidential Primaries and Nominations* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1985), 15, 17; Polsby and Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections*, 1968, 83; William R. Keech and Donald R. Matthews, *The Party's Choice* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1976), 121-123; Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 15; Larry M. Bartels, *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Social Choice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988), 15.

<sup>8</sup> John G. Geer, *Nominating Presidents: An Evaluation of Voters and Primaries* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 170.

<sup>10</sup> Polsby and Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections*, 1964, 64; see also Howard L. Reiter "The Limitations of Reform: Changes in the Presidential Nominating Process," *Essex Papers in Politics and Government*, no. 20 (Department of Government, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, England, 1984), 4-5; Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter* (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1991), 221-222.

<sup>11</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952- 1988* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 143-144; see also Gerald M. Pomper and Susan S. Lederman, *Elections in America: Control and Influence in Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1980); Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952- 1988*, 149.

---

<sup>13</sup> White, *The Making of the President, 1960*, 82-83.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Howard L. Reiter, *Selecting the President: The Nominating Process in Transition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 10; Thomas R. Marshall, *Presidential Nominations in a Reform Age* (New York- Praeger, 1981), 57; Ladd, *Where Have All the Voters Gone?*, 52; Ranney, *America In the Seventies*, 204; Martin P Wattenberg, "Participants in the Nominating Process: The Role of the Parties," in *Before Nomination: Our Primary Problems*, ed. George Grassmuck (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1985), 50; and Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decline* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Stephen J. Wayne, *The Road to the White House*, 4th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 35, Table 2.5.

<sup>17</sup> Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 73; see also Wayne, *The Road to the White House*, 28; Stephen Hess, *The Presidential Campaign* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1988), 47.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Larry Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Melvyn H. Bloom, *Public Relations and Presidential Campaigns: A Crisis in Democracy* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973), 250-251.

<sup>19</sup> Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Herb Asher, "The Three Campaigns for President," in *Presidential Selection*, ed. Alexander Heard and Michael Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), 226.

<sup>21</sup> Polsby and Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections*, 40.

---

<sup>22</sup> Wattenberg, *Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1988*, Table 3.1.,

42.

<sup>23</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 62.

<sup>25</sup> Wayne, *The Road to the White House*, 133; see also Bartels, *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Social Choice*; and John Aldrich, "Methods and Actors," in *Presidential Selection*, ed. Alexander Heard and Michael Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), 177-180.

<sup>26</sup> David S. Broder, "The Parties: Democrats," in David Broder [et al., the staff of the *Washington Post*], *The Pursuit of the Presidency* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1980), 192-194.

<sup>27</sup> Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in National Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1976); Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties*.

<sup>28</sup> Everett Carl Ladd, *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* 37, 65; see also Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1986), 39-40; Broder, "The Parties: Democrats"; Polsby and Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections*, iix; Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> Polsby and Wild *Presidential Elections*, iix; see also Aldrich, *Presidential Selection*, 184; Keech and Matthews, *The Party's Choice*; Geer, *Nominating Presidents*, 7; Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Watson, *The Presidential Contest*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984), 98.

---

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 255-257; Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite*, 365; Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 34. For a detailed account of the history of the commission, and its predecessor, the Hughes Commission, see Byron Shafer, *The Party Reformed: Reform Politics in the Democratic Party 1968-1972* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey B. Abramson, F. Christopher Arterton, and Gary R. Orren, *The Electronic Commonwealth* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

<sup>34</sup> Marshall, *Presidential Nominations in a Reform Age*, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Robert E. DiClerico and Eric M. Uslaner, *Few Are Chosen: Problems in Presidential Selection* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 55, Table 2.2.

<sup>36</sup> Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants*; see also Chapter 4 in this volume.

<sup>37</sup> Aldrich, *Before the Convention*, 64, quoting Michael Robinson, 65; see also conference transcripts; Geer, *Nominating Presidents*, 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> Aldrich, *Before the Convention*, 118; see also, DiClerico and Uslaner, *Few Are Chosen*, 69; Benjamin I. Page and Mark P. Petracca, *The American Presidency* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 102; Bartels, *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Social Choice*; James Davis, *Presidential Primaries: The Road to the White House* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 82; James R. Beninger, "Polls and Primaries," in *Presidential Primaries: The Road to the White House*, ed. James W. Davis (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 115; Wayne, *The Road to the White House*, 118; John Kessel, *Presidential Campaign Politics*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988), 9; Marshall,

---

*Presidential Nominations in a Reform Age*, 57; Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1980 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1982), 28; Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1984 Elections*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1987), 22; Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1988 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1990), 18, 31, 37; William G. Mayer, "The New Hampshire Primary: A Historical Overview," in *Media and Momentum: The New Hampshire Primary and Nomination Politics*, ed. Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1987); Henry E. Brady and Richard Johnston, "What's the Primary Message: Horse Race or Issue Journalism?" in *Media and Momentum: The New Hampshire Primary and Nomination Politics*; Keech and Matthews, *The Party's Choice*, 95-96; Watson, *The Presidential Contest*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Iyengar and Kinder discuss the vulnerability of typical individuals' opinions to subtle forms of manipulation of the news, as might follow from a mildly ideologically biased newscast. Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, *News That Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Sabato's essay in this volume.

<sup>41</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 2. Subsequent reform efforts reinforced the general thrust of McGovern-Fraser. The Mikulski Commission, for example, "tightened the proportional representation rules for the 1976 convention, allegedly destroying the ability of party leaders to bring to conventions delegations that are united under their control.... Other significant Democratic efforts have included the ... Winograd Commission, which mandated that half

---

the delegates to the 1980 convention be women, and the ... Hunt Commission, which , increased the participation of party and public officials and relaxed some of the earlier reforms in anticipation of the 1984 convention." Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 4. Similarly, the 1974 Federal Election Campaign Act. Then came the FECA rules: matching funds "were expected to affect the nominating process ... by making it easier for candidates of modest means to pay for their campaigns and to avoid becoming captives of wealthy contributors and special interests." Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 4; for a full exposition of the post-1968 reforms, their formulation, and their adoption, see Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*; Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 40-52, see also Reiter, "The Limitations of Reform"; James W. Ceasar, *Reforming the Reforms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1982), 31-54.

<sup>42</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> Ranney, *America in the Seventies*, 204.

<sup>44</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, Table 1.1., 11; Reiter, *Selecting the President*, Table 3.2, 48. The story in 1968 is complicated by Johnson's withdrawal from the race after his near-defeat at the hands of Eugene McCarthy in New Hampshire and by Robert Kennedy's assassination following his victory in the California primary. Kennedy won five primaries and 30.6 percent of the votes cast; McCarthy won six and 38.7 percent respectively. Humphrey, the sitting vice president, did not contest any primaries. See Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 26, note 54.

<sup>46</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, Table 3.1, 44.

<sup>47</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, Table 4.8, 74.

---

<sup>48</sup> Ranney, *America in the Seventies*, 1977.

<sup>49</sup> Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*; Reiter, *Selecting the President*, Chapter 5; Anne Costain, "An Analysis of Voting in American National Nominating Conventions, 1940-1976," in *American Politics Quarterly* 6 (January 1978): 95-120.

<sup>50</sup> James Ceasar, *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 300.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion see Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 136-139.

<sup>52</sup> Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*; Xandra Kayden, "Regulating Campaign Finance: Consequences for Interests and Institutions," in *Presidential Selection*, ed. Alexander Heard and Michael Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987); John Kessel, *Presidential Campaign Politics: Coalition Strategies and Citizen Response* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1980); Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*.

<sup>53</sup> On framing and priming, see Iyengar and Kinder, *News That Matters*. I do not mean to imply, nor should the reader infer, that candidates' attempts to manipulate voters are necessarily successful. Though the claim that candidates manipulate voters is not a prominent one in the literature, it is occasionally made or implied in some arguments. If we want to believe that voters *are* manipulable, we must also assume, first, that people are unsophisticated (unable to do backward induction), and, second, that people have no prior information or beliefs. If these two assumptions are true (a controversial point, to be sure), then we can deduce that candidates can manipulate voters.

---

<sup>54</sup> Crouse offers support for the view that better-known, "establishment" candidates get the lion's share of press coverage. Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973).

<sup>55</sup> Actually this applies to *potential* primary voters. We might expect those who care enough to go out and vote in primaries to expend resources on obtaining information about candidates from sources other than TV.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur W. Lupia, "Busy Voters, Agenda Control and the Power of Information," *American Political Science Review* (June 1992).

<sup>58</sup> John R. Petrocik, "The Theory of Issue Ownership: Issues, Agendas, and Electoral Coalitions," 1991, under submission.

<sup>59</sup> See Gary Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 3rd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

<sup>60</sup> This, of course, depends crucially on the relative prices of different mass media advertising. I have assumed certain things about the market for information and consumer demand that imply that the average consumer will get all of his or her information from television. In the simple model, with only two competing TV stations, both targeting the average viewer, the equilibrium price for TV ads, denominated as dollars per viewer-second, will be determined trivially by the intersection of the aggregate supply curve with the aggregate advertiser demand curve.

<sup>61</sup> Geer, *Nominating Presidents*, 80-81.

---

<sup>62</sup> Indeed, if it serves the group's purpose, it will subsidize the provision of such information to nongroup members.

<sup>63</sup> People in groups are better informed than people not in groups, all else being equal. See Phillip

E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 236, Figure 3.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Schwartz, "Your Vote Counts on Account of the Way It Is Counted: An Institutional Solution to the Paradox of Not Voting," University of Texas, Austin, 1986, unpublished paper; see also Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965); Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-On Kim, *Participation and Political*

*Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* ed. George Grassmuck (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 301-302.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Crotty and Jackson, *Presidential Primaries and Nominations*, 23; Reiter, *Selecting the President*, Tables 3.1, 3.2.

<sup>66</sup> Paul T. David, Ralph M. Goldman, and Richard C. Bain, *The Politics of National Party Conventions (V President*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> See Harold W. Stanley and Richard A. Nienii, *Vital Statistics on American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1988).

<sup>68</sup> See Mathew D. McCubbins and Frances Rosenbluth, "Electoral Structure and the Organization of Policymaking in Japan," University of California, San Diego, 1991, unpublished; see also

---

McCubbins and Rosenbluth, "The Liberal Democrats Face Japan's New World," *The Economist* 314 (24 February 1990): 31.

<sup>69</sup> White, *The Making of the President*, 1960.

<sup>70</sup> Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants*, Appendix C.

<sup>71</sup> Keech and Matthews, *The Party's Choice*, 137.

<sup>72</sup> Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties*, 92-98, and figures 6.1-6.3.

<sup>73</sup> These statistics were calculated from data presented in Walter Dean' Burnham, "The Turnout Problem," in *Classic Readings in American Politics*, 2nd ed., ed. Pietro S. Nivola and David H. Rosenbloom (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), Table 18, 136-137; and Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1988 Elections*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> Under the assumption that data are drawn from random samples of the voting-age population. See Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties*, Table 3.1, 42.

<sup>75</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, *The Electoral Origins of Divided Government: Competition in U.S. Elections, 1946-1988* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), 9; see also Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1988*.

<sup>76</sup> See Stanley and Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 129.

<sup>77</sup> See Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 28, Table 2.2.

<sup>78</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, 27, Tables 2.3, 2.4.

<sup>79</sup> Reiter, "The Limitations of Reform," 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> Table 2-13, Stanley and Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 69.

<sup>81</sup> Table 2-12, Stanley and Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 67-68.

<sup>82</sup> Brady and Johnston, *Media and Momentum*, 163, referring to Table 5.9.

---

<sup>83</sup> Table 2-6, Stanley and Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 57.

<sup>84</sup> Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*, 23-23.

<sup>85</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 85.

<sup>86</sup> Lupia, "Busy Voters, Agenda Control and the Power of Information."

<sup>87</sup> Jacobson, *The Electoral Origins of Divided Government*.

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*, 57, Table 3.1; Jacobson, *The Electoral Origins of Divided Government*, 112-115; Martin Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952- 7984* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), Tables 9.8-9.11.

<sup>89</sup> Geer, *Nominating Presidents*, 81-82, figures 5.1, 5.2 show that momentum does play a role for relatively unknown candidates. In such cases, a large part of a candidate's support appears to depend on his or her perceived ability to win votes. But as candidates become more well known-and for candidates who are not ciphers from the outset-issue stances and character dominate people's perceptions of them. Also, if we examine Aldrich's tables 6-7 and 16 comparing delegates won from February to June of election years with the amount of money raised each of those months, we find no significant correlation (even with a lag structure) between winning delegates and raising money.

<sup>90</sup> Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*, 136.

<sup>91</sup> Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*.

<sup>92</sup> Reiter, *Selecting the President*, Chapter 5.

<sup>93</sup> Kirkpatrick, "Representation in American National Conventions," Table 9, 371; see also tables 10, 11.

---

<sup>94</sup> Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 161, Table 5.2.

<sup>95</sup> John Kessel, *Presidential Campaign Politics*, 4th ed. (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1992), Table 3-1, 80; see also Reiter, *Selecting the President*, tables 4.1-4.6.

<sup>96</sup> Geer, *Nominating Presidents*, Chapter 2, Tables 2.1-2.3.

<sup>97</sup> Geer, *Nominating Presidents*, 26.