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Electoral Trends in Postwar Politics

The actors featured in previous chapters are the political elite in America—presidential candidates, convention delegates, the congressional, presidential and state wings of the major parties, professional campaign experts, among others. This emphasis on elites is justifiable. As Ranney notes in chapter 3, the most important phase of the process of choosing the President is the nomination battle, when the alternatives facing the electorate are reduced to only two candidates who have any chance of winning. Though the American electorate has a greater voice in the nomination process than citizens in any other country,[1] the nomination decision is still strongly influenced by these political leaders.

In contrast, the general election campaign brings in millions more actors. Independents and members of the opposition party become an important part of the campaign calculus. Perhaps more importantly the participating electorate takes on a very different character. The electorate in the primaries is usually small, partisan, and politically involved. In a general election the participants increase severalfold in number and represent a more accurate cross section of the public. The perspective of this chapter is to consider the motive impulses of this

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[1] James W. Davis, *Presidential Primaries: Road to the White House* (New York: Crowell, 1967), p. 15.

larger voting public and to place the analysis of voters in the context of more general postwar political trends.

Images of Voters

We owe our images of voters in postwar politics principally to a notable series of national sample surveys, which the University of Michigan Survey Research Center has conducted in the presidential and congressional elections since 1948. These studies are now so well known and authoritative that I will refer to them, as most scholars do, simply as SRC elections surveys.

Prior to the 1964 survey, the studies presented a consistent picture of the American voter.[2]

The most important factor in voting decisions was party identification. Most voters had acquired a deep-seated allegiance to one of the parties prior to voting age, many even prior to adolescence. Partisanship tended to strengthen as they grew older, and they rarely switched their allegiance to the opposition. With individual party loyalties so strong and stable, the proportion of self-identified Republicans, Independents, and Democrats scarcely changed from election to election. Democrats consistently outnumbered the Republicans by a ratio of 3:2 and monopolized electoral victories in Congress and in the states.

In the voting booths, party loyalties and evaluations of the candidates decided people's choices. Neither was greatly influenced by opinions people might have held on major public issues. Indeed, political information and interest in public issues were fairly low, and there were few discernible differences in the beliefs of ordinary Republicans and Democrats on government policy. Though information and interest were low, people's confidence in the political system remained fairly high. Voters believed that they significantly affected the course of politics, and they had moderate faith in the integrity of elected officials. This was, of course, the reason why issues seemed unimportant to people. Issues do not become salient when people's information is low and their confidence in the elected is high. Few candidates made issues a focus of their campaigns. Typically, candidates left issues in slogan form—for example, John Kennedy's appeal to "get the country moving again."

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[2] The bibliography is too voluminous to be cited. The two most influential interpretations of the electorate of this period are Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960), and, by the same authors, *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966).

Since the 1964 election, the electoral landscape has changed. Voters are more interested in public policies and less confident that political leaders have the capacity, or even the will, to cope with social problems. Most of these discussions of current political trends possess one of two underlying themes.

1. *One theme is that the electorate is increasingly dominated by disaffection, cynicism, and powerlessness.* Voters are disaffected because they question their own influence on elections and policy. They have also come to believe that candidates are self-interested and their methods corrupt. A notable example of this cynicism is the apparent willingness of the voters to dismiss the Watergate incidents during the '72 campaign as simply what one should expect in politics. One consequence of this disaffection is the erosion of the effectiveness of parties, both as psychological bonds for voters and as organizations efficiently pursuing election victories.

2. *The second theme* contrasts with the first. It *is that voters have become more interested and informed about issues and politics, and more willing to make personal sacrifices to campaign actively in support of preferred candidates.* Thus, their allegiances are less to parties as organizations, and more to candidates whose issue positions they share. If traditional party organizations are in disarray, this is an unlamented recognition that the strong party loyalties of the 1950s were rooted more in family ties or historical conflicts than in the knowledge of contemporary party differences.

The rub about presenting these themes as alternative perspectives on current politics is that underneath their obvious exaggerations both have a ring of truth. Certainly, there is enough evidence for each that we are faced with the puzzle of reconciling why a public that feels powerless and cynical should at the same time be interested in political issues and active on behalf of candidates they admire. First, I will discuss the evidence for each theme and then explore whether the two themes are consistent with one another.

The Theme of Voter Disaffection and Party Disarray

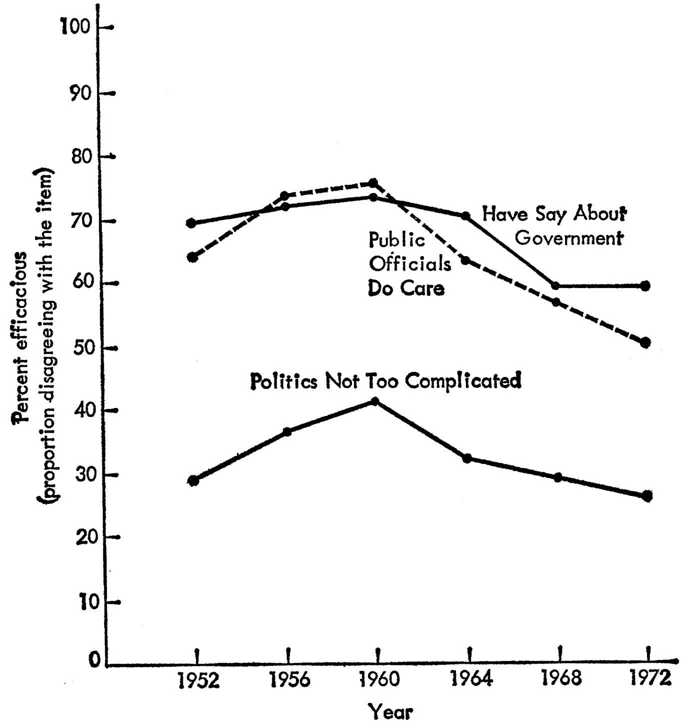
VOTER DISAFFECTION

1. *Feelings of Political Powerlessness*—A familiar and well-tested measure of people's sense of their influence on the federal government is the "index of political efficacy." First constructed by the Survey Research Center in 1952, the questions making up the index have been repeated in each of the SRC election surveys. Philip E. Converse has

traced popular responses to the questions and has found three of the original four to be reliable measures over time.[3] These are the items:

1. I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.
2. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
3. Sometimes politics and government are so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Fig. 1. Trends in Responses to Political Efficacy Items, 1952–1972



Sources: Based on a figure in Philip E. Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," in Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse, eds., *The Human Meaning of Social Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, © 1972), p. 328, and the 1972 Election Survey, Survey Research Center, The University of Michigan.

Figure 1 displays the public's responses in each election year since 1952. One need not ponder long why people have more confidence in the concern of public officials than they have in their own ability to understand politics. Subtle changes in the wordings of the items could easily reverse those results. The important point is the trend in each item itself. Throughout the '50s, self-confidence in political competence rose, reaching a peak in the election year of 1960. Since then this confidence has been systematically eroded, with 1972 representing a new low on two of the three items.

Converse points out that people's confidence in their political influence has declined in the face of an important counter trend, an increasingly educated electorate. Education is related to feelings of political influence for two reasons. First, education provides personal skills that are as useful in political life as in professional life. Second, confidence in understanding and influencing political events is one of the normative values emphasized in formal education. Looking only at increasing levels of education within the American electorate, one would predict that each of the efficacy measures would have *risen* five or six percentage points between 1952 and 1968.[4] Thus, the actual decline in feelings of political efficacy becomes more striking and significant.

2. *Mistrust of Government and Leaders*—A sense of political powerlessness has been accompanied by a growing cynicism about the responsiveness of government and the integrity of its leaders. With the following series of items, the Survey Research Center has documented the intensification of mistrust. (Mistrustful responses are italicized.)

1. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or *only some of the time?*
2. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a *few big interests* looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?[5]
3. Do you think that people in the government *waste a lot* of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it or don't waste very much of it?
4. Do you feel that almost all of the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing, or do you think that quite a few of them *don't seem to know what they are doing?*
5. Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government *are a little crooked,* not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked at all?

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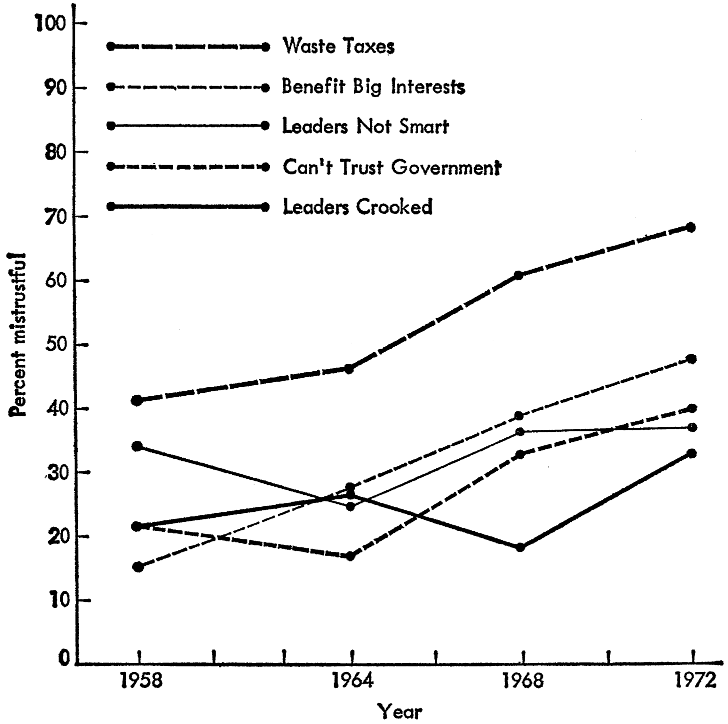
[3] Philip E. Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," in Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse, eds., *The Human Meaning of Social Change* (New York: Russell Sage, 1972), pp. 328–329.

[4] Ibid., p. 327.

[5] In 1958 the wording of this item is different: it then read, "Do you think that the high-up people in government give everyone a fair break whether they are big shots or just ordinary people, or do you think they pay more attention to what big interests want?"

Fig. 2. Trends in Responses to Political Cynicism Items 1958–1972



Source: Arthur H. Miller, Thad A. Brown, Alden S. Raine, "Social Conflict and Political Estrangement, 1958–1972" (paper presented at the 1973 Midwest Political Science Association Meetings, Chicago, May 3–5), p. 7.

As the work of Arthur H. Miller shows (figure 2), mistrust in our federal government and its leaders has increased significantly since 1960. That mistrust peaked in 1972 is all the more significant because these questions were asked before Watergate became an important issue in the public's mind. This did not occur until the spring of 1973, when the Ervin Committee began its hearings and President Nixon acknowledged the possible complicity of White House and campaign officials in the scandal.

The depth of the public's mistrust is evident in almost any question one asks about the integrity of officials, the quality of our institutions, or the influence of our citizens. Miller's analysis shows a similar growth

of cynicism in regard to feelings about the responsiveness of congressmen, the importance of elections, and the contributions of political parties.

3. *Faith in the Nation's Achievements*—A third example of public disaffection is the declining faith in the nation's achievements. Revealing evidence of this trend is the "self-anchoring striving scale," developed by Hadley Cantril and Lloyd A. Free in a series of studies in eighteen countries between 1958 and 1964.[6] The ingenuity of the technique is that each person evaluates the nation's achievements in relation to his own hopes and fears for it. Each person is first asked to describe "the best possible situation for our country," followed by "the worst." He is then shown a ladder, with the explanation that the tenth or top rung represents the worst. Having judged his own aspirations and fears for the nation, he then indicates where the nation stands on the ladder at present, where he believes it stood five years ago, and where he expects it to stand five years in the future. A person thus anchors his evaluations to his own expectations of the nation's achievements.

Typically, people are optimistic about a nation's future. They judge the present better than the past and expect the future to be better still. In the many countries in which the self-anchoring ladder technique has been used, only once (the Philippines in 1959) did a nation judge its present condition to be worse than it had been five years before. There is now a second exception, the United States in 1971.[7]

Figure 3 presents another perspective on these ladder ratings of national achievements. Americans evaluated the nation five times between 1959 and 1972. The trend is clear. The nation falls lower and lower in relation to people's expressed aspirations. The same is true with people's retrospective evaluation of the nation's past, and their expectations for the future are similarly pessimistic. This catalogue of national disappointment is not simply a reflection of the negative evaluations of disgruntled groups in the population such as the young and the blacks. Among nearly all occupational, racial, income, and age groups, the gap is widening between Americans' best hopes for the nation and their sense of its actual achievements.

4. *Declining Voter Turnout*—For harder evidence of voter disaffection, one only needs to look at the pattern of turnout in recent presi-

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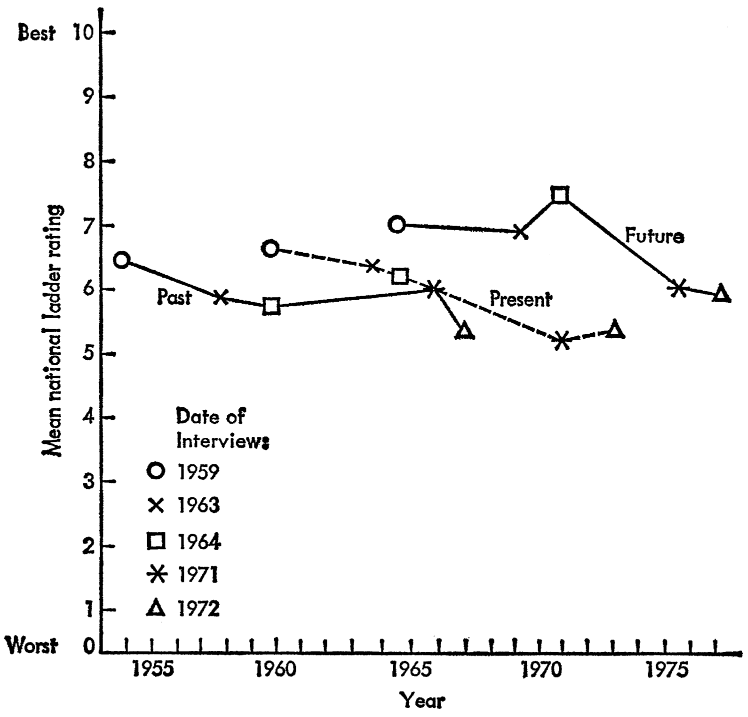
[6] Albert H. Cantril and Charles W. Roll, Jr., *Hopes and Fears of the American People* (New York: Universe Books, 1971), pp. 15ff.

[7] Ibid., pp. 25–26. In a 1972 survey, Americans again rated the present worse than the past, but in this case the difference was not large enough to be statistically significant. See William Watts and Lloyd A. Free, *State of the Nation* (New York: Universe Books, 1973), pp. 27–28.

Fig. 3. Trends in People's Judgments of the Nation's Past, Present, and Future, as Measured by Self-Anchoring Scales

1954–1977.



Judgments of the past and the future are recorded on the chart five years backward and forward from the actual date of the interview. E.g., the first set of interviews took place in 1959. Thus, the first judgment of the past is recorded for 1954, and the first projection of the future is for 1964.

Sources: Based on tables by William Watts and Lloyd A. Free, *State of the Nation* (New York: Universe Books, 1973), p. 304; Albert H. Cantril and Charles W. Roll, Jr., *Hopes and Fears of the American People* (New York: Universe Books, 1971), p. 26; Lloyd A. Free and Hadley Cantril, *The Political Beliefs of Americans* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 231; and Hadley Cantril, *The Pattern of Human Concerns* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p. 43.

dential elections. From 1920 to 1960, the proportion of the electorate going to the polls steadily increased, from 43.4 percent in 1920 to 63.1 percent in 1960.

After 1960, however, turnout begins an uninterrupted decline. In 1972 only 55.6 percent of the electorate voted, the second smallest turnout since 1932. Quite literally, the decline represents millions of potential votes lost to the candidates. If the 1972 electorate had simply gone to the polls at the 1968 rate of 60.7 percent, over seven million additional people would have voted.

It is tempting to explain away the 1972 decline by noting that eighteen-year-olds were eligible to vote for the first time in 1972. It must have been, one might argue, the typically low turnout of young voters rather than general voter disaffection that caused the five percentage point decline in 1972. This is simply not the case. The newly enfranchised eighteen-to-twenty age group represented only 8 percent of the eligible electorate in 1972, and the turnout rate of these new voters was only fifteen percentage points less than the national average.[8] At most, the eighteen-year-old vote accounted for less than two percentage points of the decline from 1968 to 1972.

One might suggest other legal explanations for the decline of turnout since 1960. The Twenty-fourth Amendment (ratified in 1964) abolished the poll tax for federal elections. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 suspended the use of literacy tests in states and counties where fewer than 50 percent of the voting age residents were registered to vote or actually voted in the 1964 election. The Voting Rights Amendments of 1970, in addition to lowering the voting age to eighteen, abolished residency requirements over 30 days (which enfranchised about ten million citizens in 1972) and suspended literacy tests in all states for five years (enfranchising one million new voters). Such changes have greatly expanded the eligible electorate, but they have enfranchised those who are least likely to vote—the very poor, the illiterate, the mobile, the young. By this argument a decline in the *percentage* of voters was to be expected simply because of these legal changes in registration laws.

On closer analysis, these amendments and statutes also fail to explain the decline in turnout since 1960. The reason lies in the crudeness of United States voting statistics. These statistics nearly always state the eligible electorate as the total number of residents of voting age, rather than the number who are legally eligible to vote. As we have just seen millions of residents were legally barred from voting until the above limitations were removed. Thus, prior to these acts, the real turnout rate was actually higher than official statistics show, and the decline in turnout since 1969 has even been greater than the official statistics imply.[9] We are thrown back to the original suggestion. Millions of people are staying away from the polls because they see little to be gained from participation.

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[8] Bureau of the Census, "Voter Participation in November 1972," *Current Population Reports,* Series P-20, No. 224 (December, 1972), p. 1.

[9] Official figures continue to count as nonvoters millions of residents who are legally barred from registering. The largest remaining categories are aliens and

The suggestion that disaffection is the cause of low turnout has an undeniable plausibility. The 1952 SRC election survey first established that people who feel politically powerless do not usually vote.[10] (The items are those in figure 1.) Numerous studies since then have given this finding a status about as close to a law as any generalization in social science. Thus, the explanation remains persuasive that feelings of political powerlessness have contributed to high ratios of vote abstention.

PARTY DISARRAY

1. *Weakening of Voters' Long-term Party Ties*—It is often argued that a major consequence of voter disaffection is the enfeebling of long-term party allegiances. Until recently most voters identified with the same party for most of their adult life and only infrequently cast votes for opposition candidates. Now, voters are increasingly detached from these loyalties. The proportion of the electorate who call themselves Independents is rapidly growing. In the 1972 SRC election survey, Independents outnumber Republicans. Among voters under 30, Independents outnumber both parties together. The old pattern of party loyalties may reestablish itself in time, but there is no such evidence at present.

Those who still identify themselves as party members now vote for opposition candidates with alacrity. The fate of McGovern in '72 is perhaps the most striking example; 44 percent of the Democrats voted against him. This trend is quite general. Converse has accumulated reported votes in the SRC samples for all congressional, senatorial,

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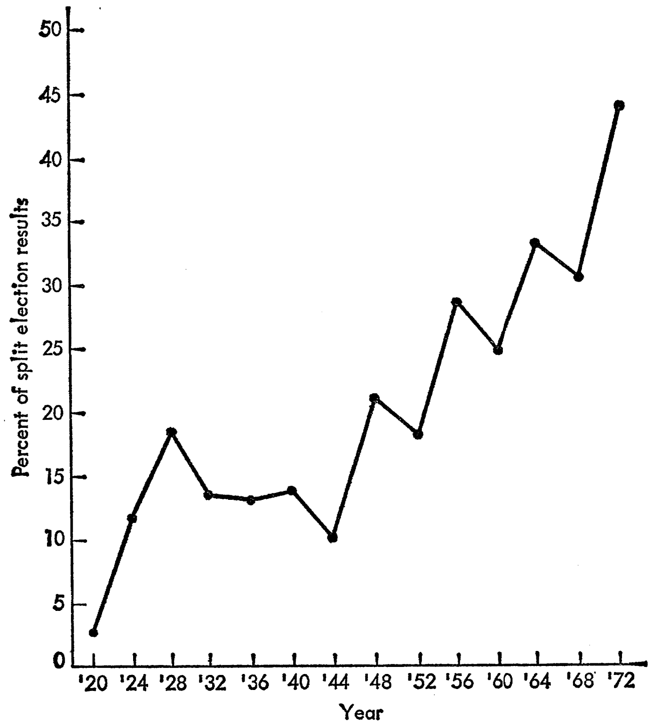
inmates of correctional and mental institutions. Excluding just these residents from the eligible list, plus those who then failed to meet residency requirements, the Bureau of the Census raised the extimated turnout in 1964 from 62.1 to 67.0 percent. (Bureau of the Census, "Estimates of the Population of Voting Age, for States: November 1, 1968," *Current Population Reports,* Series P-25, No. 406, October 4, 1968, p. 6.) If one also excludes from the eligible electorate persons who face other legal barriers to voting (e.g., many states bar persons who have ever been convicted of serious crimes) and those who face substantial obstacles to voting (e.g., members of the armed forces, the hospitalized, the institutionalized aged, and persons who must vote absentee), the turnout rate is actually higher still. At whatever level one estimates the *absolute* rate, however, the downward trend in turnout remains. (See Meyer Zitter and Donald E. Starsinic, "Estimates of 'Eligible' Voters in Small Areas: Some First Approximations," *American Statistical Association: Proceedings of the Social Statistics Section,* 1966, pp. 368–378.)

[10] Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1954), pp. 187–193.

gubernatorial, and presidential offices since 1952, and his analysis shows a significant decline of party fidelity in the late '60s.[11]

Fig. 4. Trends in Split Ticket Voting for President and Congressmen 1920–1972



The figure is the percentage of congressional districts carried by presidential and congressional candidates of different parties in each election year.

Sources: For 1920–1964, Milton C. Cummings, Jr., *Congressmen and the Electorate* (New York: Free Press, 1966), p. 32. For 1968, Walter DeVries and V. Lance Tarrance, Jr., *The Ticket-Splitter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 30. For 1972, the data are provided by Pierre M. Purves, director of statistical research, National Republican Congressional Committee, Washington, D.C., and by Michael Barone, Washington, D.C.

A result of this decline in party loyalty is a major increase in ticket-splitting. Figure 4 documents historical highs in recent years in the percentage of congressional districts carried by presidential and congressional candidates of opposite parties. Projecting the present increase into the future, straight-ticket voters may have to petition for public protection.

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[11] Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," p. 321.

2. *The Staying Power of Incumbents*—In general ticket-splitting has favored the incumbents. This is particularly true in postwar elections to the House of Representatives, where over 75 percent of the 435 House seats are generally regarded as safe seats.[12] Indeed, even if we combine the mortality rate in primaries and general elections, 90 percent of incumbent congressmen are regularly reelected.[13]

Incumbent senators are only slightly more vulnerable than congressmen. They won 80 percent of their reelection bids from 1946 to 1970. An analysis of Senate elections from 1966–1970 shows that incumbency was worth 12 percent of the two-party vote for the average senator seeking reelection.[14] As seats have become more safe for the incumbent, they have become less safe for the party. Oftentimes, a retiring incumbent is replaced by a candidate from the opposite party, who then enjoys a similarly long tenure.

Finally, one of the safest incumbents is the President himself. Since the Civil War only Cleveland, Taft, and Hoover have lost reelection bids. Each was defeated in the most exceptional of circumstances. Cleveland won the popular vote but lost in the Electoral College; Taft was victimized by the split of his party that yielded the Progressive candidacy of Theodore Roosevelt; and Hoover stands as a constant reminder to the elected that depressions are depressing. We can safely conclude that had McGovern run the most astute of campaigns, he would probably have succeeded only in losing less badly.

3. *Withering of the Surge-Decline Cycle*—An important consequence of the strength of incumbency is the withering of the surge-decline cycle connecting presidential and congressional elections.

The surge-decline cycle is a gain in seats in Congress by the party capturing the Presidency, followed by that party's loss of seats in the succeeding off-year, congressional election. The regularity of this sequence is impressive. Only four times in this century—1908, 1916,

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[12] H. Douglas Price, "The Electoral Arena," in The American Assembly (David B. Truman, ed.), *The Congress and America's Future* (second ed.; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 50.

[13] Charles O. Jones, *Every Second Year* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1967), p. 68. See also Barbara Hinckley, *Stability and Change in Congress* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), Ch. 2.

[14] Warren Lee Kostroski, "Form and Substance in Theory Construction: Electoral Behavior in Postwar Senate Elections" (paper presented at the 1972 American Political Science Association Meetings, Washington, D.C., Sept. 5–9), p. 3. This paper is forthcoming in the *American Political Science Review.*

1956, and 1960—has the party winning the Presidency failed to gain seats in the following off-year elections. Only once, in 1934, did the presidential party not lose seats in the following off-year.

Angus Campbell has explained this regularity by noting the different character of the electorate in presidential and congressional elections.[15] In a presidential year, the relative excitement of the election brings voters to the polls who do not ordinarily turn out in off-year elections. Campbell calls those who vote only in presidential elections "peripheral voters," in contrast to the "core voters" who turn out in congressional and presidential elections alike. Fewer of the peripheral voters have long-term party loyalties than do the more highly committed core voters. Lacking long-term party loyalties, most of these peripheral voters cast ballots for the presidential winner, who has been blessed by the short-term events in the campaign years. Enough of them cast straight tickets that a number of congressmen in competitive districts are elected who would not have won without the participation of these less partisan, peripheral voters. The result is a surge of congressional seats won by the party capturing the Presidency. In the following off-year election, the less interested peripheral voters stay home, and the congressmen elected in the presidential year surge must struggle for reelection without them. The presidential party thus suffers the off-year loss of the congressmen elected on the wave of the presidential year surge. This explains why a President nearly always enjoys a more sympathetic Congress after a presidential election than after an off-year election. His party is numerically larger, and it contains a number of congressmen who feel they owe their election to his drawing power.

Now, however, the surge-decline cycle is breaking down. Because incumbents are more secure in their seats, the congressional races have become increasingly insulated from the presidential contest.[16] Fewer seats are gained in the presidential year; fewer are lost in the following off-year. The evidence is in figure 5, which details the average gains or losses by the Democratic party in the House of Representatives by decade. In the five elections of the 1930s, for example, the average Democratic gain or loss was over 48 seats. In recent elections the surge-de-

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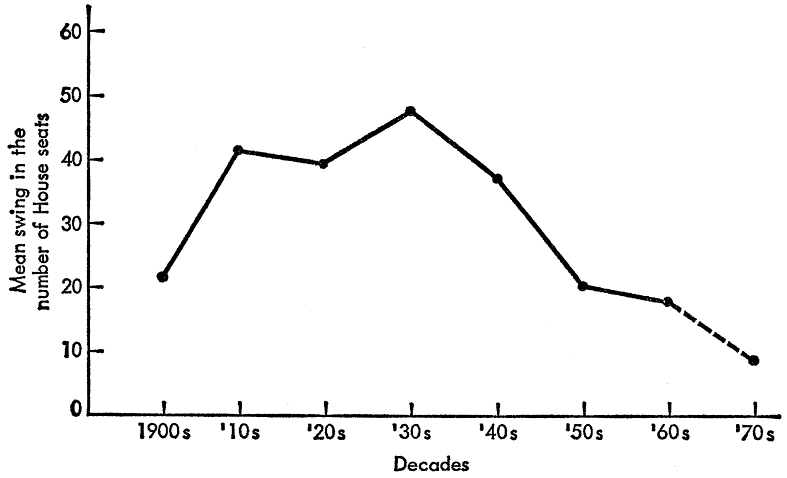
[15] Angus Campbell, "Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change," in Angus Campbell, *Elections and the Political Order,* Ch. 3.

[16] This insulation of congressional races from the presidential contest is closely related to the process Nelson W. Polsby has described as the "institutionalization of the House of Representatives." See in particular his evidence on the differentiation of the House from other organizations, the stabilization of its membership, and the growth of careers specialized to House leadership. (Nelson W. Polsby, "The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives," *American Political Science Review,* 62, March, 1968, pp. 114–168.)

Fig. 5. Trends in the Average Seat Swing in the House of Representatives by Decade

1900–1972



The figure is a plot of the mean number of Democratic seats gained or lost in the House of Representatives in the five elections each decade. The figure for the '70s is for 1970 and 1972.

Source: Based on a table by Robert A. Diamond, ed., *Politics in America* (Ed. IV; Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, n.d.)

cline pattern is much less important. In 1968 Nixon gained only 4 seats in the House. In 1970 he lost only 12. In 1972 he gained back only 11, leaving the composition of the House almost unchanged in partisan strength across three elections, including Nixon's landslide victory in '72.

INFERENCES

If we pause to consider the theme we have just discussed—the disaffection of voters, the increase in ticket-splitting, the security of incumbents, and the insulation of the presidential from the congressional races—we are led to three conclusions.

Landslide presidential victories will be commonplace.

Four of the six elections since 1952 have been of landslide proportions. Eisenhower polled 55 percent of the vote in '52 and 57 percent in '56. Johnson and Nixon both captured over 60 percent of the vote in '64 and '72. This trend toward landslide victories has two causes. One is the loosening of long-term party ties. Not bound by stable partisan loyalties, voters are responding to the short-term events and issues of the campaign year. When these short-term factors uniformly favor one of the candidates, he will likely swamp his opponent. A second cause is the nationalization of electoral politics.[17] Before World War II both parties had their bastions, which they could expect to hold even in the face of national tides against them. Now, electoral swings are increasingly uniform across the nation. To underline the historical contrast, with a popular vote share similar to Nixon's in '72, Harding in 1920 lost eleven states. In 1952, Ike lost nine; in '56, only six. Johnson lost only six in 1964, and Nixon, of course, failed only in Massachusetts and the District of Columbia in '72. Typically, the battle of the electoral college is now a massacre.

It is increasingly likely that the Presidency and the Congress will be controlled by different parties.

In the postwar period, the Republican party has controlled Congress only four years, from 1946–48 and from 1952–54. In view of the electoral security of congressional incumbents, this pattern is not likely to change. Yet, a Republican President has governed more than half of the postwar years. One can sometimes find solace in the divided control of the government, but what it has most often meant is that there is neither control of the President in foreign affairs or effective policy in domestic affairs.

Federal elective offices have become more insulated from public moods.

If we ponder the forces that lead governments to be responsive to public opinion, we would surely conclude that responsiveness is encouraged if people feel they can affect the system, if candidates believe their own electoral fortunes are linked to those of other elected leaders, and if incumbents feel electorally vulnerable. As we have seen, the political trends in the '60s and '70s have tended to undercut all of these conditions. First, an increasing number of people feel they have little impact on politics, and they resent their leaders as a consequence. Second, candidates for President and for Congress have good reason to doubt that their electoral fortunes are closely linked. The emphasis on personalistic rather than party campaigns is the new wave, encouraged by the growth of ticket-splitting. Divided control of the federal government has become accepted as a quite ordinary state of affairs. Third, the incumbent who feels electorally vulnerable today should, by any objective criteria, be the exception. If congressmen work their districts as much as they appear to, it is probably because most con-

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[17] Graham K. Wilson and Philip M. Williams, "Mr. Nixon's Triumph," *Parliamentary Affairs*, 26 (Spring, 1973), p. 197.

gressmen see their office as a life career. When one's career is at stake, even small dangers loom important. The fact remains that postwar electoral trends have created the pattern in which the potential for conflict and stalemate between the President and Congress is high and in which neither enjoys the confidence of the public. If this is the new politics, we might find new virtues in the old.

4. *Conclusion*—We have now followed this first theme to its pessimistic end. There is little doubt that the theme is accurate in its details. Turnout has declined. Elections to Congress have become more insulated from the presidential race. The increase of ticket-splitting, along with many other indicators, does show that the level of allegiance to political parties has fallen. To the degree that we adequately measure attitudes toward politics with public opinion polls, the evidence is clearly that people feel less politically potent than they did in the recent past and that they mistrust public officials as well.

Many will disagree, however, that the most appropriate evidence has been presented and will deny the explanation that connects voter disaffection with party disarray. For example, they will point to other evidence that voters are not disaffected from politics, such as the large numbers of volunteers that have sustained the ideological candidacies of Goldwater, Wallace, McCarthy, and McGovern. They will also deny that the disarray in the party system can be blamed on an electorate that avoids political activity and commitment. They would argue, rather, that the parties have failed the voters, failed to present clear choices of issues and attractive candidates, and failed to provide means for interested citizens to participate actively in party affairs. Such voters have not left politics. They have just left the establishment party candidates in favor of maverick challenges by issue candidates on the right and the left.

The Theme of a More Informed and Activist Electorate

There is an impressive body of evidence that the present electorate is more ideological and activist than its counterpart of the '50s. Issues, in contrast to party loyalties and candidate preferences, have a more central role in people's beliefs and behavior. In addition, citizens are increasingly active in political campaigns. The SRC election surveys provide extensive data on these points.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF ISSUES IN POLITICAL BELIEFS

1. *Consistency in People's Issue Beliefs*—One of the major myths deflated by the election surveys of the '50s was that people's attitudes on specific issues conform to more general patterns of liberal and conservative beliefs. Contrary to the commonplace use of such labels by academics and journalists alike, relatively few Americans were consistently liberal or conservative across a range of beliefs such as civil rights, civil liberties, social welfare, and anticommunism. People with liberal attitudes on one topic were as likely as not to hold conservative beliefs about others, and few people seemed to have sets of political beliefs organized around abstract ideologies regarding the proper role of the state in social and economic affairs.

As is the perverse tendency in scholarly matters, just as the revisionist position became the conventional wisdom, new studies began to support the old "myth." For example, using the SRC election surveys of 1952 through 1968, Norman N. Nie analyzed patterns of beliefs regarding the role of the federal government in five important areas: general social welfare, welfare measures specifically for blacks, the size of the federal government, racial integration in public schools, and the cold war. Nie's analysis of studies before 1964 confirmed that patterns of beliefs were not then consistent across the population, and that a person's attitudes on one issue could not be predicted from knowledge of his position on another. But the election of 1964 proved to be a major turning point. In both the 1964 and 1968 elections, Nie found that voters held consistent political beliefs, strikingly so.[18]

In all likelihood, people are now more consistent in their political attitudes as a response to the events of the 1960s. Protests over racial discrimination and the Vietnam war made many Americans rethink positions on race and military issues. Beginning with Goldwater a series of candidates staked campaigns on popular reactions to issue-based appeals. Whatever judgments one makes about the success of these campaigns (though Goldwater, Wallace, and McGovern failed to win the Presidency, clearly ideological appeals were necessary to their nominations), their programs served to crystallize beliefs across a range of issues among supporters and opponents alike.

2. *Issue Beliefs and Partisan Loyalties*—A second aspect of the new importance of issues in political behavior is the changing relationship of issues to party loyalties. Studies of elections of the '50s viewed party loyalties in a rather anomalous light. Most people developed partisan

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[18] Norman N. Nie, "Mass Belief Systems Revisited: Political Change and Attitude Structure," *The Journal of Politics*, 36 (May, 1974). Miller, et al., confirm the continued consistency of political beliefs in the 1972 election survey. (Arthur H. Miller, Warren E. Miller, Thad A. Brown, and Alden S. Raine, "A Majority Party in Disarray: Social and Political Conflict in the 1972 Election," paper presented at the 1973 American Political Science Association Meetings, New Orleans, Sept. 4–8.)

allegiances prior to voting age, and most maintained that allegiance all their lives. Moreover, on the best evidence party loyalties were the most important factor in voting choices, strongly influencing judgments of the merits of candidates.

Yet, in spite of the influence of partisan attachments on vote decisions, these same studies usually failed to find any consistent relationship between party loyalties and policy beliefs. Except for a few bread and butter issues such as labor-management conflict, the average Democrat of the '50s was not more liberal on any given issue than the average Republican. Only among political activists, such as congressmen or convention delegates, were Democrats consistently more liberal than Republicans.

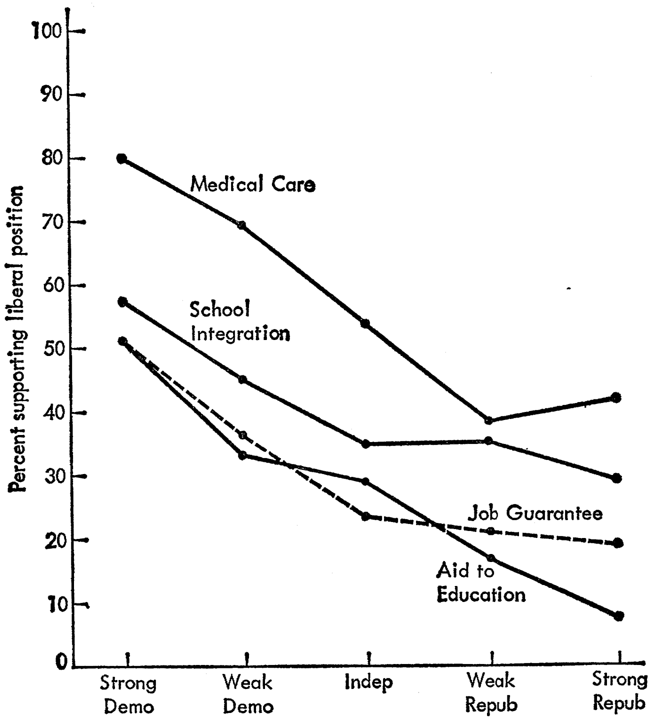
Since 1964, however, Republicans and Democrats in the electorate have become increasingly polarized on a series of important issues. Figure 6 presents the relationship of people's party identification and their policy beliefs on the proper role of the federal government on four representative issues: publicly financed medical care programs, forced school integration, federal job guarantees, and federal aid to public education. On all four issues the average Democrat in 1968 is substantially more liberal than the average Republican. Taking federal medical care programs as an example, the principle is supported by over 81 percent of Strong Democrats. In contrast, only 43 percent of Strong Republicans supported the principle, a difference of almost 2:1.

The most significant change in issue differences since the '50s is the newly partisan character of racial attitudes. Before 1964 there was little difference between Republicans and Democrats in their support of civil rights legislation. Goldwater's Southern strategy changed that, linking the Republican party to the conservative position on federal civil rights legislation. Despite stereotypes of the racially prejudiced, blue-collar Democrat, the average Democrat in both the North and the South is more liberal on race attitudes than his Republican counterpart. Figure 6 presents supporting evidence on the issue of school integration. The same is true for a range of other race and civil rights beliefs as well.[19]

3. *Issue Beliefs and Voting Decisions*—A third aspect of the changing importance of issues is that policy beliefs are now more highly related to people's voting choices than in the '50s. Then, people cast votes on the basis of their evaluations of the candidates and/or their long-term party attachments, but rarely on the basis of major controversies over public policy. Generalizing from the elections of the '50s, voting studies commonly assert that knowledge of a person's party identification is the most accurate predictor of his vote.

Fig. 6. Party Identification and Policy Beliefs

1968



Source: Based on a table by Gerald M. Pomper, "From Confusion to Clarity: Issues and American Voters, 1956–1968," *American Political Science Review*, 66 (June, 1972), p. 417.

Despite its currency, the generalization is no longer valid. Nie has systematically compared the relative ability of issues and party identification to predict votes from the elections of 1956 through 1968.[20] In '56 and '60 a person's party identification proved to be three to four times better in predicting his vote than his issue beliefs. In both '64 and '68, however, the relationship is reversed. *Issue stands are now a significantly more accurate predictor of votes than party identification.*

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[19] Richard W. Boyd, "Popular Control of Public Policy: A Normal Vote Analysis of the 1968 Election," *American Political Science Review*, 66 (June, 1972), p. 435.

[20] Nie, "Mass Belief Systems Revisited . . . ," pp. 40–41.

Goldwater's ideological challenge to the country set the tone for the issue-based campaigns of '64, '68, and '72. In 1964, the power of the federal government, medicare, racial segregation, the government's handling of foreign affairs, and the Vietnam policy—all were significantly related to voters' preferences between Goldwater and Johnson.[21] In 1968 these same issues continued to be important, each reinforcing Humphrey's major burden, the disposition of the electorate to vote against him if they thought poorly of Johnson's performance as President.[22] In 1972 the Vietnam war and the familiar social and economic controversies remained important voting issues, and a new category of cultural or lifestyle issues (equal rights for women, abortion, legalization of marijuana) cleaved the existing voting coalitions. That the public should have identified a man of such conventional background and values as McGovern's with strong support for these lifestyle issues is one of the many ironies of this election. Nonetheless, these and related issues clearly distinguished McGovern's supporters from his opponents in both the primaries and the general election.[23]

In sum we have noted three trends toward a greater importance of issues in the '60s and '70s. (1) There is more consistency, liberal or conservative, in people's attitudes. (2) For the declining number of people who identify with one of the parties, issue stands are more highly related to partisan allegiances. (3) Issues more strongly influence voting decisions.

These trends are not always complementary. As issues proliferate, it becomes increasingly likely that policy disagreements will emerge within party coalitions. Despite the tendency of voters to be consistent in their beliefs, persons attracted to the Democratic party on one issue will incline toward the Republican or a third-party candidate on another. The strains within the Democratic party are greatest between those who support the party on the basis of social welfare and labor issues and those who want the party to pursue new goals on foreign policy, race, and lifestyle issues.

This disagreement on policy goals within the Democratic party is at the crux of the debate on whether the party system is presently in the process of a major realignment. In terms of presidential elections, that realignment is a present fact. The deep South has left the Democratic party in presidential politics. Not a single deep South state has voted Democratic since 1960, and it is difficult to project a Democratic candidate who is both acceptable to the northern, reformist wing of the party and who could also carry the South against a moderate Republican or a third-party candidate such as Wallace. Without the South as a solid sectional base for the Democratic party, the party will continue to run a high risk of defeat in each presidential contest, maintaining the postwar pattern of Republican Presidents and Democratic congresses.

The pivotal role of the '64 election in this realignment of presidential politics suggests an interesting comparison between the elections of 1928 and 1968. In 1928 the majority Republican party continued its dominance with Hoover's landslide victory over Al Smith. Yet, the foundation of what was to become the Democratic majority of the '30s was already set in the defeat of '28. As Key has demonstrated, the working-class, industrial communities of the Northeast began their shift to the Democratic party in 1928.[24] Moreover, Smith's Catholic candidacy, as unsuccessful at that time as Goldwater's nomination appeared later, established the ethnic character for the coalition that was to become the Democratic majority.

Similarly, Goldwater's defeat in 1964 seemed at the time no more than an aberrant footnote to history, a reminder that ideological politics is losing politics. But certain issues Goldwater raised, most fundamentally his opposition to federal civil rights and social welfare programs for blacks and his attack on liberal assumptions about urban crime and disorder, struck a sympathetic cord with a great many voters. Recognizing this, Nixon made these themes the basis of his subsequent victories in '68 and '72. Goldwater's nomination was not essential to the Republican victories that followed, but he raised controversial issues and identified the Republican party with what is surely the present majority position in the country on race, crime, and welfare. It is in this sense that the 1928 and the 1964 are both critical elections. Each involved the initial defeat of election strategies that subsequently proved the foundation for realignments of historical voting patterns.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

As we have seen the '60s and '70s have witnessed a trend in which people's beliefs are more internally consistent and more related to their party attachments and voting choices. The consistency of people's beliefs and the accuracy with which they can identify candidates' positions on issues suggest a public that is both attentive and informed about politics. While people may be disaffected from the parties, they are not disinterested in politics generally. Hundreds of thousands have contributed both time and money to their favored candidates. In fact, the proportion of citizens actively involved in campaigns is probably higher than at any previous time in American history, though we lack the hard data to be certain. These volunteer efforts have changed the character of fund-raising and grass roots organization.

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[21] John H. Kessel, *The Goldwater Coalition: Republican Strategies in 1964* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), ch. 9.

[22] Boyd, "Popular Control of Public Policy . . . ," pp. 429–441.

[23] Miller, "The Majority Party in Disarray . . . ," and Peter B. Natchez, "The Unlikely Landslide: Issues and Voters in the 1972 Election" (paper presented at the 1973 New England Political Science Association Meetings, Boston, April 27–28).

[24] V. O. Key, Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics*, 17 (Feb., 1955), pp. 3–18.

1. *Campaign Contributions*—If modern campaigns are notable for integrating grass roots participation with computer-based fund-raising, market research, and mass communications techniques, Goldwater ran the first of the modern campaigns. As is usual in American politics, the party out of office had the incentive to adopt new strategies. Throughout the '60s, Democratic presidential candidates raised money in the old style, depending predominately on contributions from labor unions and a small number of large contributors. Kennedy, Johnson, and Humphrey all relied on versions of a President's club, the price of entry being a thousand dollars.[25] Such a scheme only works for winners. The Republican party and Goldwater exploited the potential of a systematic appeal to small givers instead, utilizing direct mail solicitation.

The Republican emphasis on soliciting contributions from a large number of small givers began in 1962, when the party inaugurated the first successful drive for small contributions in American politics.[26] Expanding the program in 1964, the party raised $5.7 million from 410,000 individual responses to its direct mail campaign.[27] To underline the contrast with Democratic fund raising in 1964, only 28 percent of the total individual contributions to the Republican campaign came from donations larger than $500, compared to 69 percent of Johnson's total.[28] In 1968 the Republican direct mail campaign was even more successful, raising $6.6 million from 450,000 contributors.[29] Even these figures, however, are dwarfed by the Republican small gifts campaign of 1972. The Republican National Committee and the Nixon reelection committee together persuaded at least 500,000 to contribute more than $13 million through direct mail appeals.[30]

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[25] Herbert E. Alexander, *Financing the 1968 Election* (Lexington: Heath, 1971), pp. 151–152.

[26] Kessel, *The Goldwater Coalition* . . . , p. 147.

[27] Herbert E. Alexander, *Financing the 1964 Election* (Princeton: Citizens Research Foundation, 1966), p. 70.

[28] Ibid., p. 84.

[29] Alexander, *Financing the 1968 Election*, p. 147.

[30] The Republican figures for 1972 and the 1972 Democratic totals below are preliminary estimates, kindly provided by Herbert E. Alexander of the Citzens Research Foundation in a personal communication, October 5, 1973.

Nixon's success among small givers proves that it is not just the ideological candidate of the left or right who can profit from small gifts campaigns. However, the success of McCarthy, Wallace, and McGovern in persuading hundreds of thousands to contribute money to their campaigns suggests the special advantage of candidates who stimulate loyal personal followings through issue-based appeals. In 1968 McCarthy spent about $11 million in his quest for the nomination, most of which came from a large number of small givers, aided, to be sure, by a small number of large givers.[31] Until superseded by the McGovern effort in '72, Wallace's '68 campaign was unprecedented in grass roots fund-raising. Conservatively, 750,000 people contributed over $6 million to the Wallace campaign with over 80 percent of the contributions being less than $100.[32]

In '72 the McGovern campaign eclipsed all previous successes among small givers. His direct mail campaign helped raise more than $15 million from small gifts. An estimated 530,000 contributed to the campaign. McGovern did not lose the '72 election for want of funds. His expenditures more than doubled those of Humphrey in '68.

In short, despite the recent attention paid to the sugar daddies of both the Nixon and the McGovern campaigns, the more important trend in fund-raising is the increasing courtship of small contributors. The success of grass roots responses to direct mail appeals does not evoke an image of an electorate so cynical that it does not believe it makes a difference who wins. Though the number of contributors to a presidential campaign is a small proportion of the electorate, the raw numbers of those willing to support political convictions with money is impressive. It is particularly so when we also take note of the number of volunteers who donate their time as well as their money to the modern campaign.

2. *Volunteer Work in Campaigns*—There are no hard data on trends in volunteer work in political campaigns. In the 1972 SRC election survey, 5 percent of the persons interviewed said that they "worked for one of the parties or candidates." However, the question does not specify either the political office or the type of work, so we are thrown back on impressionistic judgments about campaign activity in the 1960s and 1970s.

Each of the recent campaigns has relied significantly on volunteer work. In 1964 Goldwater coordinated a large voter canvass program around a vote quota system for each of 185,000 precincts across the country. At least 3.4 million voters were contacted by his workers, an effort which, when integrated with an election day get-out-the-vote drive, added substantially to the Goldwater vote.[33]

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[31] Alexander, *Financing the 1968 Election*, pp. 43–44.

[32] Ibid., p. 159.

More familiar are the grass roots canvassing efforts of the McCarthy and the McGovern campaigns. Because both were relatively unknown when they announced for office, their canvasses were designed to introduce their names and programs to the voters. A second purpose was to exploit the low turnout that typifies primary elections. When turnout is low, great dividends accrue to a candidate who can get his own supporters to the polls. Their canvasses, plus election day mobilization work, proved particularly effective in many primaries.

Finally we should not overlook the Wallace campaign of '68. The drive that successfully placed his name on the ballots of all 50 states required a nationwide organizational effort, relying primarily on volunteers. Some states had minimal requisites to appear on the ballot. At the other extreme California law demanded that 66,059 residents formally register as members of Wallace's American Independent Party. In all states more than 1.6 million signatures were legally filed, and many more than this were collected. One set of observers judged the Wallace ballot drive "perhaps the most remarkable triumph of participatory democracy at the grass roots in the campaign of 1968, not excluding the McCarthy campaign." [34]

If we reflect on the total number of volunteers who have contributed time and money to the campaigns of issue candidates—Goldwater, McCarthy, Wallace, and McGovern—we surely must question assertions that voters are so disaffected from politics that they refuse to make sacrifices for their political beliefs. Moreover, not only the maverick challengers attract volunteers. We do not know how many people worked in the Nixon campaigns of '68 and '72, but the number is probably as great as for any of the more issue-based candidates. In short, across the spectrum, left to right, there remains a large number of canvassers and contributors who are quite literally voting with their feet and their checkbooks for their preferred candidates. Their commitment to politics is sufficiently great that many candidates have the resources to compete for presidential nominations.

Conclusion

There remains a certain inconsistency between the two major themes about trends in postwar politics. The first emphasizes that the electorate is politically disaffected—distrustful of the integrity and ability of government officials and pessimistic about its influence on the course of government policy. These trends in beliefs are supported by the harder evidence of voting patterns: during the '60s, turnout declined, as did fidelity to the parties with which people identify.

In contrast, the second theme argues that the public has become more issue-oriented in its voting decisions and more willing to contribute time and money to campaigns.

The two themes do not directly contradict one another. Though politically active voters have usually been partisan voters, it is not surprising that people who are highly interested in political issues are now quite willing to vote against their parties' candidates. It is plausible as well that a public highly concerned with certain issues could become politically disaffected. Nonetheless, the two themes do evoke inconsistent images of the public. If turnout has declined, why has participation in campaigns appeared to have increased? If people are cynical about politicians, how can candidates as different as Nixon and McGovern both draw great numbers of volunteer workers to their campaigns? We will conclude with some observations, if not definitive answers, on reconciling the two themes.

I have spoken of general movements within an undifferentiated public: growing issue awareness and campaign activity, yet growing disaffection. But these two trends may occur among very different groups in the population. Studies of people who say they participate in campaigns nearly always conclude that activists have a high sense of political competence, are informed about politics, and feel a civic duty to participate.[35] Such characteristics are not ones we usually associate with people who are cynical about the political system or its leaders.

Yet, accepting this explanation that the activists of recent campaigns may not be politically disaffected requires at least three critical leaps of faith. One, it assumes that people who report in national surveys that they participate in campaigns accurately represent the true population of campaign activists, and we know, quite the contrary, that many people exaggerate their political activity in such interviews. Two, the explanation assumes that political knowledge and feelings of political efficacy and civic duty go hand in hand with trust in the political system, when in fact the correlation is fairly weak. Three, and most importantly, the explanation assumes that our research on campaign activists of the '50s and early '60s equally applies to activists of '68 and '72. This seems most implausible. The maverick candidacies of McGovern, McCarthy, and Wallace all emphasized the theme that

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[33] Kessel, *The Goldwater Coalition . . .*, pp. 162, 167–169, and 286–289.

[34] Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), p. 284.

[35] Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 91–93, and Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), pp. 56–62.

government leaders had violated their public trust by pursuing policies on Vietnam and on race that the average American opposed. Surely it is likely that the volunteers who peopled these campaigns shared their candidates' disaffection with public officials. The activists of '68 and '72 may have ranked high in political skills and felt political competence, but they likely also ranked among those who were highly cynical about the integrity of most office holders. In short, though we can reconcile the increase of cynicism and of volunteer campaign participation by asserting that the two trends are based in different groups in the population, the explanation rests on a series of tenuous assumptions.

How then may trends toward activism and disaffection be reconciled? William A. Gamson and Philip E. Converse argue that what is new about popular attitudes in the '60s and '70s is the number of people who feel politically competent and influential but who also mistrust the officials in office.[36] Such people provide, as Converse says, "prime setting for the effective mobilization of discontent."

Converse suggests that the politically cynical are composed of two very different groups. One consists of people who have less than average education and minimal confidence in their own political skills. These people have responded to what they have perceived as a lack of public integrity with acquiescence and resignation. The second group, better educated and more confident of their political skills and their potential to induce political change, have acted on their belief that one can do more to influence policy than simply vote. In all likelihood it is these people who have been active in the movements for civil rights, Vietnam disengagement, and maverick presidential candidates. When people trust their political effectiveness, then disaffection becomes the motive for action rather than apathy.

The success of candidates such as Wallace and McGovern suggests a final approach to reconciling the two themes. Many people have become disaffected from politics through opposition to federal policies on Vietnam, the economy, race, and social welfare issues. Candidates who have made these issues the focus of their campaigns have attracted these cynical voters to their camps. Arthur Miller's analysis of this issue basis of cynicism is illuminating.[37] He finds a significant growth of disaffection among people who are well to the left and to the right of the government on these issues. He labels the two groups "cynics of the right" and "cynics of the left." In his neat phrase, cynics of the left prefer more social change; cynics of the right, more social control. (By social control, Miller means that "cynics of the right" prefer the system as it is and support policies and police action against those who would disrupt it.) Thus, there is no necessary contradiction between a trend toward more concern for political issues and a growth of cynicism. Quite the contrary, the opposition of the left and the right to current government policies has been a cause of increased disaffection.

What then is the prospect for renewed trust in the political system? Suggesting a renewal of trust is the fact that political cynicism is not endemic to American politics. As late as the mid-'60s people were fairly confident of their own political influence and the integrity of public officials. For the short run many people may tap a reservoir of faith in the political system that will allow them to believe that though they distrust officials in office, the challengers to those incumbents may be more worthy of trust. The maverick candidates of recent elections—Goldwater, Wallace, McCarthy, and McGovern—have all been partially successful in appealing to the latent faith of the disaffected.

More likely, however, political disaffection will continue through the present decade. As Arthur Miller has shown, cynicism is centered among people who have opposed many of the major themes of government policy—on the Vietnam War to be sure, but also on race and social welfare. The problem is not simply that people believe that, on the war and Watergate, political leaders have mocked reasonable standards of official conduct. When disaffection is also tied to disagreements on policy, it is not clear that a government, however attentive to high standards of democratic procedures, can quickly regain the trust of dissidents. What policies will simultaneously satisfy the right and the left, when opinions are as intensely held as they presently are? For example, during the '72 primaries it was often remarked that McGovern was establishing a "coalition of the alienated." The disaffected on the right were said to be either insensitive to or willing to overlook their policy disagreements with McGovern because of their faith in his personal integrity. Reflecting on the '72 election, this all seems rather foolish. Honest candidates will not rapidly mute the disaffection of dissidents when policy disagreements between the right and the left remain intense. For perhaps a decade public officials can anticipate that many will react to government actions with reservations about the good faith and integrity of their proponents. This, in turn, suggests that policies that depend upon the cooperation of people who oppose their enactments will likely fail. This is not a sanguine prospect for the coming years in American politics.

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[36] Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," pp. 334–337, and William A. Gamson, *Power and Discontent* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1968), pp. 39–52.

[37] Arthur H. Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–1970," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (March, 1974). 951-72.