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The Segmented Electorate: Presidential Campaigns and Their Consequences in an Information Age

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The Segemented Electorate: Presidential Campaigns and Their Consequences in an Information Age

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Abstract

It is common to think of presidential elections as long campaigns waged by two warring powers, each competing for the hearts-and-minds of American voters. Yet this metaphor masks considerable variation in how voters experience the campaign in the run-up-to Election Day. We focus on how the rise of candidate-centered campaigns in has created a situation in which some voters experience an avalanche of information from the campaigns and others hear next to nothing. We argue that when we carefully consider which voters should be most responsive to campaign information, that the pattern of segmentation that exists does not advance a nation-wide campaign about the health of American politics.

1 Introduction

Presidential campaigns are arguably the most important political events in a citizen's life. According to the American National Election Study, a biennial random sample survey conducted among citizens aged 18 or higher, interest in and attentiveness to presidential elections is considerable. On average, roughly one-quarter

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of all Americans are "very interested" in presidential campaigns, with large majorities reporting that they monitor the campaign through print and broadcast media.[1] Moreover, among Americans eligible to vote, turnout in presidential elections from 1948 to 2008 averaged just under 60%.[2] Contests for control of the Executive Branch are among the few moments in time when Americans are collectively focused on government and politics.

As a consequence, political stakeholders—candidates, campaign managers, interest groups, pundits, to name a few—are acutely interested in communicating their priorities and positions to the public, creating opportunities for citizens to educate themselves on the health and direction of American society. Yet because stakeholders are self-interested actors; they are not as committed to providing citizens with unbiased information that might facilitate "good" decisions as they are to advancing their agenda. It is this back-and-forth among different actors that creates the unique patterns of information, emotion, and imagery that constitutes the core of a presidential campaign and, ultimately, affects the outcome on Election Day.

An unavoidable product of this situation is the presence of stark differences in the amount and quality of information available to different groups of voters. Though presidential elections are ostensibly national debates about our collective concerns, in actuality, they directly involve only a small part of the nation's states, media markets, communities, and voters. As political scientists have come to better understand how campaigns influence election outcomes and voting behavior, they have noted that the electorate is sliced into ever smaller pieces, that campaigns provide certain messages and information to some voters and not others. This is what we call *the segmented electorate*. This segmentation holds important consequences for how individuals choose candidates, and ultimately, the kinds of outcomes we get from elections.

In this chapter, we offer this simple hypothesis about presidential campaigns in a media age: campaigns increasingly focus on narrower, more limited appeals to specific voters and eschew broader policy debates about the direction of government. The implication is that today's campaigns contribute to fragmentation in American government and fail to add coherence at the one moment in time when such a debate is possible. To demonstrate support for our point of view, we first describe significant transformations in presidential campaigns that are rooted in a combination of electoral reforms and technological innovation. We then identify how campaign strategies are developed in this environment, and we explain the implications this has for future presidential elections. From there we proceed to demonstrate how campaigns influence voters and provide some evidence that campaigns reach and mobilize a particular group that we call "peripheral partisans." The chapter concludes by addressing the question of how trends in information technology are leading us "back

to the future," with campaigns focusing on ever narrower groups of voters rather than more nationalized elections in which all voters are engaged.

2 The Operation of Presidential Campaigns

2.1 Background

To understand the modern campaign, we must look at the political history and institutional context under which presidential elections have taken place. The institution established by the Founders to select the president, the Electoral College, was devised as a means of insulating the choice of our chief executive from the whims and passions of the masses. The Electoral College represented a compromise among the states—awarding disproportionately more representation for states of lesser populations, while also maintaining numeric strength for states with greater populations—with the total number of electors equal to the number of Representatives and Senators for each state (Edwards 2004, Wayne 2011). Given this formula, and the fact that the Constitution created a winner take all system, presidential candidates and party elites soon recognized the importance of creating a winning coalition comprised of electors from certain states, states that were to become the target of their efforts. Even at the onset of U.S. democracy, and still true today, securing a plurality of voters nationally was only important inasmuch as it led to victory in the Electoral College (Davis 1997).

Party elites dominated early presidential elections. Congressional and state legislative caucuses controlled candidate nominations and exercised subsequent influence in the general election. Candidates themselves engaged in little active campaigning, leaving such matters to newspapers and party elites. Newspapers praised their preferred candidate and ridiculed the opposition, at times using accusations and slurs that would raise eyebrows today.[3] Though the election of 1828 witnessed the end of "King Caucus," party elites continued to exercise considerable influence over the nomination process through their control of both local party organizations and, ultimately, the convention delegates who chose the party nominees.

The dominance of party elites and the importance of local party organizations in campaigns outlasted a number of subsequent reforms, including efforts to reduce and later eliminate the poll tax; efforts to limit corruption, such as reforms to the civil service in the late 1800s; mandates on hiring bureaucrats based on merit rather than campaign service; and limits on the campaign activities of unions and corporations. Party organizations engaged in most of the actual campaign activity, based in part on their local organizational strength, while the candidates played a much less central

role in the day-to-day affairs of the campaign. To offer some sense of how this era contrasts with today, consider the McKinely "front porch" campaign of 1896, where delegations of voters were *invited to travel* from across the country to Canton, Ohio, for an opportunity to meet with McKinley, with an estimated 750,000 citizens availing themselves of the opportunity (Boller 2004).

Several additional reforms and technological advances eventually shifted power away from party elites in the 20th century. The rise of the direct primary forced party elites to cede more control to the public during the nomination stage. The subsequent appearance of mass media—first in the form of radio, and later, television—permitted candidates to reach the electorate directly with their messages and mobilize voters. Given the government's creation of "media markets" dictating what geographic areas were to be covered (and excluded) by a given station's broadcast, campaigns could take advantage of unique media markets to target voters in high stakes, battleground states. Indeed television ushered in the advent of segmentation, where certain messages could be readily disseminated across the country, while other communications could be used to target audiences located in particular areas (Kendall 2000, Boller 2004). As early as 1960s, candidates were cognizant of the ways in which television advertisements could be used strategically, and they shifted their efforts towards these techniques.

The transition in power away from parties culminated with the McGovern Fraser Commission's nomination reforms that were implemented in the aftermath of the 1968 election. Under these rules, the delegate vote at the convention was to be a close approximation of the results of the primary elections. The change brought about the beginnings of campaigns where candidate's fortunes were no longer governed by party elites (Polsby 1983). The reduced grip of parties on nominations offered opportunities for little known candidates to gain momentum and rise to prominence, particularly with early primary/caucus wins in states such as New Hampshire and Iowa. It also widened the opening for other political stakeholders—including the media, interest groups, and other activists—to become more involved. Thus the campaign took on new importance, and candidates began to recognize the value of a well coordinated and calculated effort to win.

The McGovern Fraser reforms had far-reaching effects, but the most important was the rise of candidate-centered elections. In contrast to party-based campaigns run by insiders, in this system, candidates cultivated their own message, image, and base—often in ways independent of the parties (Campbell 2008*b*, Jamieson 1996). Although candidates today still rely on the party for financial resources and expertise, particularly following the primaries, they enjoy greater liberty in dictating their fortunes than the candidates of an earlier era. Today, messages, targets, and

strategies are at the discretion of the campaign rather than the party.

2.2   The Strategic Environment of Modern Campaigns

With the rise of candidate-centered campaign organizations and the rise of direct voter contact through the media, a new style of electoral campaigning has evolved. The party insiders who once controlled primaries and wielded extensive field organizations have been replaced by the likes of political consultants, media strategists, data miners, and interest group liaisons who use money and technical expertise as their campaign weapons. The impact of their expertise and tools have shaped campaigns, such that today we have highly segregated campaign environments, where certain peoples' votes are pursued by campaigns armed with important information, while other voters are taken for granted and ignored.

Campaign strategy ultimately revolves around decisions about how to distribute resources between states in order to build an Electoral College majority. The challenge facing candidates and their organizations is how to use their resources (time and money) to produce information environments (messages) that allow them to gain enough support (votes) in the right places in order to achieve that goal. In the contemporary campaign era, presidential campaign managers conceive of this decision in terms of *efficiency* and *expediency*. Efficiency captures the marginal cost associated with campaign activities, while expediency refers to the marginal gain in support given the cost of an activity. Daron Shaw's (2006) extensive research on campaign strategies based on internal campaign memos from the 2000 and 2004 elections illustrates what these concepts mean and what they imply.

Campaigns are concerned about efficiency because they do not want to waste scarce resources. A principle manifestation of this, according to Shaw (2006), is a focus on cost; all things being equal a campaign would rather spend money in a market or state that is less expensive. As Shaw's data show, the cost of television advertising—and undoubtedly true for other forms of campaign, such as canvassing—varies substantially by both state and media market. For example, there are marked differences in the cost of 100 gross rating points in the 20 most efficient media markets.[4] As an example, even within the state of Missouri, the purchase of 100 GRPs ranged from $2,000 in the Jefferson City-Columbia media market to $13,700 in St. Louis (Shaw 2006, p. 61). For a campaign short on the funds necessary to buy a blitz, the attractiveness of the Jefferson City market is clear.

But campaigns are not merely about efficiency, and decisions about how to spend resources are not based solely on cost. In order to win, decisions on where to spend must also be balanced by the potential gain in votes. The example we introduced

from Missouri underscores this point. Though a campaign can purchase more ad time in Jefferson City-Columbia than in St. Louis due to the cost, the ad will reach fewer potential voters in Jefferson City—approximately 280,000 voters versus over 1,000,000 in St. Louis. And depending upon which voters in Missouri support the campaign, and to what degree, it may be sensible to organize a smaller, more effective ad buy in St. Louis than a cheaper and more extensive (but less effective) campaign in Jefferson City-Columbia.

This is where expediency—the marginal gain in potential voters given the cost of campaign activities—factors in to campaign strategy. As the popular Red-state/Blue-state metaphor suggests, there are significant differences in the politics of each state, and certain states are unlikely to be winnable for a presidential campaign(Gelman, Park, Shor, Bafumi & Cortina 2008, Fiorina, Abrams & Pope 2006). This is illustrated in Table 12.1, which shows the last time each of the states switched from one major party candidate to another in successive elections. As can be seen in this table, voters in states like Washington and Utah have consistently favored the same party for around forty years, while those in states such as Missouri and Colorado have been carried by candidates from different parties in recent elections.

[Insert Table 12.1 about here]

How do these criteria—Electoral College votes, efficiency, and expediency—shape the different information environments to which voters are exposed? Shaw (1999b, 2006) and Huang and Shaw (2009) show that campaigns by the two major party candidates classify states into three categories that form the basis of their campaign strategy. And by implication, campaign intensity varies by category. The first of these categories are what Shaw calls *base states* (such as Utah and Oklahoma), where the campaigns have very little incentive to compete, because one party is heavily favored to win. Not surprisingly, there is almost no campaigning in many of these states, particularly regarding campaign advertising and visits from the candidates. The second category includes *marginal states* where one party has a natural advantage because of the state's history, but where (typically) both campaigns expend resources in their efforts to build an Electoral College majority. The degree to which they put resources into these states is especially sensitive to the campaign's financial resources and the cost of media markets; if campaigns have sufficient funds and are doing well generally, they may compete harder here to broaden their base of support. Finally, there are the *battleground states* (such as Missouri and Colorado) where both campaigns input substantial time, effort, and money because they anticipate a close outcome. These states tend to be more costly *because* they are competitive, but their "winability" means that a campaign must spend considerable time and money

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winning over voters in those states. It is in these areas that the campaign is most intent and the voters are faced with a constant barage of information.

In addition to differences driven by these strategic considerations, the level of electoral segmentation is also dependent on the national political context. Consider, as an illustration, the highly competitive 2000 presidential election juxtaposed with the far less competitive 2008 election. The 2000 election pitted former Senator and then-current Vice President Albert Gore against George W. Bush, the then-popular governor of Texas and the son former president George H.W. Bush. Despite a strong economy that should have benefited Gore, many voters suffered from "Clinton fatigue" due to the outgoing president's infidelities and scandals while in office. Thus it was difficult for Gore to claim credit for the previous administration's successes without being attached to its embarrassments. Bush's credentials, his image as a "compassionate conservative," and the national political context, facilitated his ability to fundraise, and therefore, compete. By contrast, the 2008 election was marked by an increasingly severe economic crisis and with discontent over eight years of the Bush administration, which significantly advantaged the Democratic candidate. The Democratic nominee, Barack Obama, raised substantial funds, while the Republican candidate, John McCain, accepted public funds for his campaign and the stringent fundraising limits that came with them. In the end, Obama was able to outspend McCain significantly.

As shown in Table 12.2, such disparate contexts produce different levels of electoral segmentation across the states and over time. In 2000, the campaign was competitive in a smaller range of states—as judged by the ad expenditure data—and especially intense in the battleground states, with both campaigns working fervently for the same votes. In contrast, the 2008 electoral terrain was dominated by the Democrat, Barack Obama, as witnessed in the spending data especially. Given the political context and his vast stores of funds, Obama was able to spend heavily in both battleground and marginal states, apparently with some success. By contrast, John McCain was left to focus on holding a base that was not overly enthusiastic about his candidacy.

[Insert Table 12.2 about here.]

2.3 The Future of Campaign Strategy

What then do the imperatives of efficiency and expediency imply about the future of presidential campaigns, particularly with regards to strategic and tactical decision making? Ultimately, campaigns would like to spend their money on persuadable

voters and, conversely, not spend on those who cannot be swayed. Accordingly, campaigns must both identify these persuadable voters and develop contacting strategies that allow them to focus singularly on them.

Two trends have become apparent in recent campaigns as they try to distinguish between votes for which they will compete and those for which they will not: *narrowcasting* and *microtargeting*. Concerning narrowcasting, in today's multi-channel, multi-audience world, campaigns can locate a great deal of information about the viewing habits of voters and the audiences for different television programs. As a consequence, campaign managers can decide what people are more likely to see advertisements and (for the campaigns with time and resources) potentially cast different versions of their message depending on the audience. Similar, for microtargeting, campaigns can shape their message and contacts to voters based on information that they can compile about those individuals.

The distinction of today's campaign from earlier elections relates to the amount and variety of information collected on voters. Such information is typically based on a combination of both data mining (a process which statisticians use material they access from data companies, such as magazine subscriptions), and opinion surveys, used to identify groups of voters with particular interests. Campaigns then compile these data to decide on what information voters receive, be it a certain campaign mailer or a knock on the door from a canvasser with a particular message. Although, ultimately, changes in privacy laws and the increasing reluctance of voters to participate in surveys may reduce the feasibility of certain tactics, the strategic imperatives of campaigns will accelerate the drive toward increased electoral segmentation. In an age where data on individual voters abounds, the group of voters that are contacted will be, presumably, increasingly smaller and divided into ever narrower swaths.

3   Campaigns That Matter

The trend in the previous section toward narrower, more focused, campaigns that do not engage in a "national conversation" has been documented by numerous studies, (Hillygus & Shields 2008, Shaw 2006, Wolak 2006, Shaw 1999*a*, McClurg & Holbrook 2009, Holbrook & McClurg 2005, Johnston, Hagen & Jamieson 2004, Simon 2002). Less clear from that discussion is whether voters exposed to the campaign behave differently than others. If true, such differences in behavior has consequences for both the outcome of a race and the behavior of presidents once they enter office. In this section, we first explain why it is that campaigns might have very limited consequences for voters, in order to demonstrate the limits and importance of segmentation. We then follow with an explanation for why this skepticism about important

consequences for campaigns has abated in recent years. We show how the literature has evolved to a more sophisticated understanding of voting and elections where campaigns play an important role.

3.1   Do Campaigns Matter? Sources of Skepticism

Early political communication research advanced what became known as "minimal effects" understanding of campaigns (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee 1954) According to this perspective, exposure to campaign advertisements did not change minds, but rather, it served to reinforce underlying predispositions, motivating partisans to act on their biases. A campaign did little more than activate latent preferences, it "crystallizes and reinforces more than it converts" (p. 248 Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee 1954).

With this as a foundation, scholars naturally focused on the causes and consequences of voters' political predispositions. One avenue of research examined socio-psychological factors that drove voting decisions. At the heart of this explanation, dubbed the "Michigan model" because of its origins among a group of scholars at the University of Michigan, was a focus on longstanding partisan decisions that were, at times, superceded by temporary evaluations of parties, candidates, and issues (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes 1960, Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth & Weisberg 2008). According to this model, partisan identities were strongly rooted in voters' social classes, religious affiliations, and group identities. These factors then shaped how voters interpreted short term factors. Through this lens, campaigns were considered less important, largely because voters were seen as unwilling to move away from these core beliefs.

Dissatisfied in part by what was perceived to be the Michigan model's downplaying of short term factors in elections, a subsequent contribution developed a "restrospective voting" model. Seminal research in this vein noted that incumbent performance was a useful shortcut in making electoral choices (Downs 1957) and could shape the preferences of those voters not strongly allied with a political party (Key 1966). In Fiorina's (1981) classic formulation, the author articulated how voters make decisions in the face of changing circumstances, particularly, downturns in the economy. Yet despite a strong emphasis on issues and performance in this model, voters were still not considered to be heavily dependent on the campaign to inform their decision because "...citizens need only calculate the changes in their own welfare. If jobs have been lost in a recession, something is wrong (p.6)." Here again, there was no reason to believe that campaigns played an important role in the decisions that voters made.

From a different vantage point, other research called into question the importance of both campaigns and the media by questioning their capacity to inform voters. In this vein of research, the implication was that, even if voters were not driven by deeply rooted predilections and economic performance, there was not much to be learned about elections from the campaigns and media. As an example of this logic, consider that modern campaigns are dominated by negative advertisements. Conventional wisdom from campaign strategists and early empirical evidence dictates that negative ads will shape voter attitudes about the candidates, essentially generating ill-will toward the derided candidate. And indeed, some scholars suggest that such advertisements had deleterious consequences for democracy, fostering cynicism among the electorate and ultimately depressing turnout by as much as 5% (Ansolabehere, Iyengar & Valentino 1994, Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995). However, as more work has been done on these issues, there has been meager support support for such strong claims, particularly regarding the consequences for turnout or vote choice (see Lau, Sigelman, Heldman & Paul Babbitt (1999) and Lau, Sigelman & Rovner (2007) for reviews).

With respect to the mass media in elections, scholars and pundits alike have been wary of the power of the news media to offer voters the kind of information needed to make normatively good decisions. Such decisions, based on the rationality perspective of voting behavior (see Hinich & Munger 1997 for a review), suggests voters are "voting correctly" when they efficaciously translate their preferences to their vote choice (Lau & Redlawsk 2006). Faced with competing pressures to be financially viable—and in the case of the 24 hour news networks, to provide a constant stream of information—many have noted the dominance of news intended to appeal to audiences (and, therefore, advertisers)(Hamilton 2004). Many media critics have argued that such news compromises the quality of information voters receive. In this market driven model, the "news" is the information that captures the audience's attention—which can translate to entertainment-orientated soft news; information that is sensational, emphasizing conflict, scandal, or disaster; and information that covers familiar themes and personalities excessively (see Graber 2010 for a review). In the context of elections, Thomas Patterson (1994, 2003) finds that undue attention is granted to the *game*, the strategy decisions made among competing candidates, and, related, to the *horse race*, changes in the polls among viable candidates leading up to Election Day. Such news coverage fails to elucidate the policy differences among the candidates, thereby obfuscating the information voters need to make a "correct" choice. The absence of quality news also creates an opportunity for candidates to cast their own message to voters, to frame issues and ideas according to their own perspective.

Finally, political scientists have shown that election outcomes are quite predictable, and well in advance of an election, which again calls into question the effect of campaigns.[5] Using a handful of variables such as the state of the economy and presidential approval ratings, researchers have been able to approximate the percentage vote for the presidential candidates weeks, and even months, before Election Day. Thus it can be argued that the campaign itself must be less consequential, with the outcome driven by other factors. In other words, the campaign is more of a *consequence* of the political and economic environment than a *cause* of the outcome.

3.2   How Do We Know Campaigns Matter?

Recent developments in political science scholarship, however, give pause to such skepticism about the limited ability of campaigns to influence voters. Much of this has been driven by innovations in survey research and data collection that provide a better picture of electoral *dynamics*. When we examine trends in voter preferences and "political markets" over the course of presidential campaigns, key events such as televised debates (Holbrook 1996), degrees of advertising (Shaw 1999*a*), and other campaign related phenomena (Campbell 2000, Hillygus & Jackman 2003) are undeniably linked to changes in how the public evaluates and responds to the candidates. How is it that the public as a whole can show significant change over time when we know from earlier research that people come to elections with partisan biases and broad concerns about government performance? The key to answering this question lies in thinking about how evidence for these two points has been gathered and used.

Academic surveys have typically approached voters in the weeks preceding Election Day and asked them a variety of questions about their upcoming decision. Although such surveys capture the strength of voters' leanings at a given moment in time, they fail to uncover important changes in how voters assess the candidates' credibility, personality, and ideology over the course of a campaign. Importantly, changes in voters' evaluations are conceivable even if the partisan lens through which they evaluate information does not itself change. To see how, consider the following in the context of 2008 election: Many Democratic voters who supported Hillary Clinton's bid for the nomination likely leaned toward Barack Obama over John McCain at the beginning of the campaign. But, the length and bitterness of the nomination battle could have left these voters with reservations about Obama's candidacy. Had the Obama campaign not explicitly tried to strengthen those voters' initial predispositions through various issue appeals, the entire dynamic of the 2008 race could have changed.

More generally, this means that that we have to be careful interpreting what even

two snapshots of the electorate may mean about the consequences of a campaign. To illustrate, consider a case in which the percentage of voters favoring a particular candidate does not greatly change over time. Despite the temptation to do so, you cannot infer that the *same voters* preferred the *same candidate* at each point in time. And in campaigns, *those* changes may be even more consequential. To illustrate, conservative Democrats may initially lean toward a Democratic presidential candidate in an election but eventually defect toward a moderate Republican on the basis of ideology. If that defection is offset by an equal number of undecided voters moving toward the Democratic candidate, then the total support for the two candidates may not have necessarily changed significantly. Given that candidates are not seeking a plurality of votes but rather a majority of *Electoral College votes*, such changes in support for a candidate can be highly consequential depending on what they signify about *where* and with *whom* a candidate is losing or gaining ground.

The 2000 presidential election serves as a suitable illustration of what we are arguing about campaign effects revealing themselves over the course of an election. The American National Election Study (ANES) interviewed a sample of registered voter at two time points in 2000, once shortly before Election Day and once again in the weeks following. In the pre-election survey, Gore was preferred by 49.7% of the respondents and Bush by 43.1%; in the post-election survey, these numbers were 51.0% and 45.3%, respectively. These percentages tentatively suggest that voters' preferences did not waver significantly.[6] Yet, in contrast, the data displayed in Figure 12.1—drawn from a survey that sought to interview nearly 100 respondents on a weekly basis over the last three months of the campaign—show significant change in how voters reacted to the ebb and flow of the campaign (Johnston, Hagen & Jamieson 2004).

[Insert Figure 12.1 here.]

As we can see, there were important shifts in how potential voters viewed the candidates in 2000 that become clear when the data are collected at an interval (here, the week) that is much closer to the meaningful unit for campaigns (days), rather than at one or two moments in time. Although Gore started the campaign with a clear advantage, he eventually lost that lead around the time of the Republican Convention, only to spend the rest of the campaign playing catch-up. Were the campaigns "responsible" for this movement? Extensive analyses of the data that serve as the basis for this graphic and of other similar data suggest that the answer is a clear "yes." As the original analyses of these data show, Gore's comeback was driven by a message that focused on protecting Social Security (Johnston, Hagen

& Jamieson 2004). Given the closeness of that election, the implication is that had Gore's campaign focused on Social Security earlier, he might have won in November.[7]

3.3   How Do Campaigns Influence Voters?

Such evidence of campaign effects helps assuage lingering doubts from earlier research about the importance of campaigns; however, the more central and perplexing question of *how and why campaigns matter* for voters remains. To address this, we need a model of voting that not only leaves room for decisions to be shaped by the campaign, but also accounts for what we know from the earlier literature about the important roles of partisanship and retrospective evaluations. The <u>mobilization model</u> of campaign effects meets these criteria (Gelman & King 1993, Finkel 1993, Freedman, Franz & Goldstein 2004). This explanation of how voters change in response to information from campaigns is based on two assumptions consistent with prior evidence about voter decision making. The first is that people with partisan predilections are more likely to pay attention to politics and are therefore more likely to respond to campaign information. The second assumption is that these same people—those who harbor partisan leanings—are also more likely to vote in the election, in part because they are more politically engaged, and in part because they are already more invested in politics. The implied contrast here is with those individuals who are apolitical or truly independent, meaning they are less attached to the naturally oppositional elements of politics. What is not assumed is that all voters with partisan views are as equally committed or passionate about them, nor that they will inevitably cast a vote consistent with those views.

Campaign effects, then, are less about persuading independents and opponents and more about rekindling dormant loyalties and gathering support on Election Day. This mobilization perspective, to state it somewhat differently, suggests that campaigns tend to preach to a chorus of partisans who are more likely to say "Hallelujah" then they are to consider the merits of the sermon. Importantly, this fits with what we know about how campaigns make strategic decisions, focusing on persuasible voters and eschewing the strategy of engaging in a broad national debate.

Evidence from recent studies supports this perspective. Holbrook and McClurg (2005) find that as the amount of campaigning in a state increases, the composition of the voting day electorate becomes more partisan. In another study, they also found that the importance of ideology and partisanship for predicting votes in 1988 and 1992 increased for people who lived in battleground states (McClurg & Holbrook 2009). Other research uses continuous survey data (of the type displayed in Figure 12.1) to show that the so-called "fundamentals of voting"—factors, such as

voter partisanship, interest, political evaluations that are presumably distinct from the campaign itself—become better predictors of election results as the campaign proceeds (Johnston, Hagen & Jamieson 2004, Shaw 2006). The fundamental attributes that underlie voting behavior (such as partisanship) become activated and therefore more relevant over the course of the election, presumably because of information made available by the campaigns.

4 The Consequences of a Segmented Electorate

Campaigns "matter" in the sense that they mobilize the base voters of each party, a depiction that we believe fits well with the picture of the segmented electorate. In line with that expectation, the model suggests that the segregation of the electorate by campaigns does more to influence the beliefs of what we call "peripheral partisans." In contrast it offers less help to those voters whose beliefs are poorly anchored in the political system. Here we focus on using these understandings of campaign strategy and campaign effects to understand the consequences of segmentation for voting. We do this by focusing on the rise of more peripheral partisans who are likely to be persuaded by campaigns and the effect of living in areas saturated by campaign messages.

4.1 The Rise of the Peripheral Partisans

Although it is common for pundits and journalists to conceive of independent and undecided voter as blank slates, the truth is that most people harbor political prejudices that affect what information they acquire and that shape their behavior. In Figure 12.1, we provide two graphs that capture the percentage of strong partisans (*Strong Identifiers*), weak partisans (both *Weak Identifiers* and *Leaners*) and "true" independents and apolitical voters (*Non-Identifiers*) since the early 1950s. As shown in graph on the left-hand side of Figure 12.2 below, the percentage of voters who have relatively weak partisan beliefs have comprised over 50% of the electorate over the last sixty years.[8] This group is roughly twice the size of the most committed voters, the Strong Identifiers, and they outnumber Non-Identifiers by nearly 6-to-1. In our view, it is the weak partisans who are the targets for campaigns because, while they have an affinity for one party or another, they also harbor more ambivalence toward the parties than strong partisans. That is, they are more likely to be responsive to party messages (Petrocik 1996, Abbe, Goodliffe, Herrnson & Patterson 2003) than Non-Identifiers and yet, importantly, they are less committed than strong partisans.

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In short, it is among these "peripheral partisans" where the campaign can get the most "bang for their buck."

[Insert Figure 12.2 here.]

Trends observed from the data in Figure 12.2 suggest that targeting weak partisans is becoming *more* important for the campaigns. Looking at the graph on the right-hand side of the Figure, we observe a precipitous increase in the percentage of Leaners since the early 1960s. Importantly, the percentage of Non-Identifers, the "true" independents, has generally decreased since the mid1970s. Although much is made about the role of "independent" voters in dictating election outcomes, the growth in partisan leaners is of much greater consequence. Our conjecture is the significant increase in "peripheral partisans" signifies that presidential candidates must attempt to bring these voters into the fold on Election Day.

If our interpretation holds, what some have suggested is merely partisans naturally returning to the fold as Election Day approaches is, rather, the result of a more complex set of factors driven by campaigns. Although a full test of this argument has yet to materialize, McClurg (2006) found that in the 2000 election, peripheral partisans were more responsive to the advertising strategies of the two parties than the other groups. In particular, he found that as the parties talked more about their traditional issues, peripheral partisans were more likely to favor the candidate of the party to which they had some allegiance.

4.2   Living in (or Near) a Battleground

If segmentation matters, then we should observe differential effects among those who are and are not targeted for campaign communications. Though this subject has only recently been broached by scholars, some evidence finds such differences. The first body of evidence stems from studies using so-called "field experiments" to study voter mobilization, which take place in a natural, real-world setting. Field experiments have distributed campaign messages to a randomly selected set of voters via phone, mail, or door-to-door canvassing. By randomly assigning the contacts to sufficient number of voters, one can effectively rule out other potential causes of voter behavior and isolate the effect of the contact. In *Getting Out the Vote*, Donald Green and Alan Gerber use this cutting edge technique to show that personal contacts, such as a neighborhood canvass, can increase voter turnout by as much as 7%.

Additional evidence comes from studies comparing the behavior of voters in battleground states to those who reside elsewhere. McClurg and Holbrook's (2009) analysis of the 1988 election shows that the controversial issue of race—clearly a

centerpiece of that campaign—played out differently in battleground states than in other areas. Likewise, they show that economic attitudes were more strongly related to battleground state voting in 1992 than in the other states. Other studies of both individuals (Wolak 2006) and groups of voters (Shaw 1999*a*, Shaw 2006, Johnston, Hagen & Jamieson 2004) arrive at similar conclusions.

One reason, however, to give pause to our claim that campaign segmentation matters relates to a classic problem of inference known as *selection bias*. As noted, campaigns chose their targets carefully, which is another way of saying that voters in such locations have certain characteristics that set them apart from those in other areas. Thus if the people targeted by campaign change their behavior, how can we know with confidence that this was *because* of the campaign instead of the characteristics that drew the campaign's attention in the first place? It is very difficult to distinguish between the effect of the campaign's message and the characteristics of the voters. Ideally, one would randomly contact some voters who are "good" targets, but not others, and study the behavior of the two groups.

One suitable approach to address selection bias, pioneered by Huber and Arceneaux (2007), has taken advantage of what one would call "accidental targets." Quite simply, these are voters who reside in media markets targeted by campaigns in competitive states, but who happen to live in a *different state* than the one focused on in the target. An example helps to illustrate the design of this research. Voters in the battleground state of Missouri have been heavily targeted in the past three presidential elections, while voters residing in neighboring Illinois and Kansas have not, given Illinois and Kansas' status as base states. (See Table 12.1) When the campaigns buy advertising time in Kansas City and St. Louis (not to mention in other media markets), a number of voters in Kansas and Illinois, respectively, are exposed to these ads because the cities' media markets cross state lines. These non-Missouri voters do not share the characteristics' of the voters who were targeted with the ad, but they are exposed to the ad, nonetheless. Thus one can study the effect of campaigns by examining such voters.

Using this method, Huber and Arceneaux (2007) consider three questions: does advertising engage?; does advertising inform?; and, does advertising persuade? Regarding the first, the authors find that, after taking into account other forms of campaign activity, advertising has little effect on turnout. Concerning the second, the authors find mixed evidence of learning, with citizens in these areas better able to gauge the presidential candidates' positions on only of six issues. Finally, related to persuasion, the authors' find evidence of campaign effects, with campaigns having their greatest influence among moderately aware voters. Voters with lower levels of awareness face less opportunities for persuasion, and those with higher levels of

awareness and stronger prior beliefs are more resistant to the appeals in the advertisements. This latter finding is consistent with the the mobilization model in that we have argued that campaigns have less influence among strong partisans (those with strong beliefs) and among Non-Identifiers (those with low awareness), and more influence among peripheral partisans who are more likely to have moderate levels of awareness. Although some of what Huber and Arceneaux find is not on its face consistent with the mobilization model—e.g., the lack of an effect of campaign message on turnout—their evidence is important for the argument we offer here for two reasons: 1) they provided the clearest evidence that it is campaign messages, as a part of the campaign, that have meaningful effects for voters, and 2) they raise the possibility that what we have called mobilization is not only a rekindling of blind loyalties, but a process of connecting those loyalties to policy positions.

5   Back to the Future

We have argued that campaign effects take place in the context of the mobilization model, and that increased segmentation is to be expected given the importance of targeting leaners; what we have yet to consider is what this means for future elections given the rise of new media, and what avenues of research students and scholars of political science might pursue. For this, we provide several examples of the use of new media for electoral segmentation in the past several elections. New media and the Internet represent represent the fourth information revolution, offering new opportunities for citizens, pundits and journalists, policymakers, and other political stakeholders to readily transmit and share information (Bimber 2003). Unlike print or broadcast media, where campaigns had little control over whom, in a given media market, would be exposed to the content of advertisements, campaigns today can better isolate an audience, particularly in conjunction with the new data about voters that we described earlier. Moreover, the cost of communication through new media is far less than the cost of television ad buys. Using several examples below, we consider the prospects for increased segmentation in the new media era.

Looking at the 2004 campaign, two 527 groups from the highlight the use of new media to convey their respective messages: *America Coming Together* and *Swift Boat Veterans for the Truth*. 527 groups, so-called because of their tax designation by the IRS, are organizations that must operate independently of the parties and candidates without explicitly endorsing a candidate. The first 527, America Coming Together (ACT) and its sister organization, Media Fund, was orchestrated by former AFL-CIO director Steve Rosenthal and heavily financed by billionaire George Soros. The organizations were intended to forward the campaign of John Kerry, and moreover, to

eventually become a more permanent fixture in the advancement of liberal policies. With close to $200 million in seed money, these organizations targeted voters in battleground states with campaign ads and with door to door canvassers, focusing particular attention on a message criticizing the Republicans' handling of the war in Iraq. At the same time, they adopted an Internet strategy where voters could locate resources and information related to their efforts. Many pundits and journalists credited their push with mobilizing voters, although academic research confirming this conjecture has been in want.[9]

Another 527 group taking advantage of new media in the 2004 election was the Swift Boat Veterans for the Truth. Prior to the election, one of the purported strengths of Kerry as a candidate was his service record in Vietnam. Many believed that Kerry's criticisms of the war in Iraq would be perceived as credible, given his commendations for duty in Vietnam and his foreign policy experience in the Senate. The Swift Boat Veterans for the Truth cut at the very core of Kerry's campaign using ads that questioned the validity of Kerry's service, actions that were subsequently given the eponymous moniker of "swiftboating." A series of veterans appeared in Internet and in television ads targeted at certain markets in battleground states. These servicemen, who all noted "I served with John Kerry," admonished Kerry for acting distrustfully, for dishonorable behavior, and for betraying his country. Although the ads were initially run in only a handful of battleground states, they received considerable exposure due to the news media commenting on their controversial nature, with the 24 hour news networks devoting particular attention to them. Thus the organization received considerably more free air time than paid-for air time. And for citizens who were intrigued, the Internet provided a means of locating and watching all of the ads on the Swift Boat Veteran's website. Kerry response to the Swift Boat attacks came late, and by that time, many pundits argued that damage had been done.

As further evidence of segmentation, consider the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaigns of recent elections. In the 2002 midterm elections, Republicans mounted a "72-hour Task Force" effort, the branding referring to a concerted effort to contact voters in areas with contested elections in the 72 hours prior to the election. Armed with evidence suggesting personal contacts could be an important means of mobilizing voters, Republican operatives directed by Karl Rove targeted areas in the states of New Jersey, Colorado, Florida, and Georgia, with mass mailings, phone calls, and door-to-door canvassing (Robinson 2004). These efforts were bolstered by visits from President Bush on behalf of the candidates. After some success in picking up Congressional seats, Republicans reiterated this effort in the 2004 election, soliciting Evangelical voters, Latinos, and Catholics especially with targeted appeals.

The Obama campaign of 2008 allows for the opportunity to focus on the use of new media and electoral segmentation. The campaign can be considered on multiple fronts that tie into the goals of efficiency and expediency: the execution of the general message of "Hope" and "Change" from the initial announcement to the evening of the victory speech, and even continuing into the presidency; the ability to raise funds throughout the course of the election; the strategy of creating a winning coalition in the primary season by focusing both on important early elections and on communicating with voters in often-ignored primary states; and the subsequent targeting of voters in battleground states with visits and campaign ads during the general election. Several studies to date suggest that these and related strategies were effective in mobilizing leaners (Osborn, McClurg & Knoll 2010, Lupia 2010).

The streamlined management of the Obama campaign was heralded by both pundits and scholars alike. First, the general themes of hope and change resonated with voters after eight years of Republican rule and the downward spiral of the economy late in the election season. While the McCain campaign struggled to find a unifying message, offering "Country First" and later highlighting "experience," the Obama campaign was able to cultivate their message of change by tieing McCain directly to Bush, and to offer hope in the way of new policy solutions that appealed to specific groups of voters, such as tax cuts for the middle class (Thurber 2010). The campaign, perhaps cognizant of the poor timing of Kerry's reaction to the Swift Boats ads, responded quickly to scandals and accusations using both information disseminated online and via transmissions to the press (Thurber 2010). The campaign encouraged interactions through social media particularly among young audiences, allowing voters to organize events, upload YouTube videos, and even doctor the official symbol of the campaign, the branded "O," to their liking. And Obama's campaign was the first to include advertisements in video games (Steinhorn 2010).

Second, Obama's fundraising operation was remarkably successful, particularly when seen in contrast to that of both Hillary Clinton and John McCain. Thanks to an innovative online presence attributed to such staff hires as one of the founders of Facebook, Obama was able to attract large number of donors who gave incrementally and, importantly, repeatedly, particularly through the use of Internet messages and email contacts (Steinhorn 2010). In contrast, while Clinton was successful in establishing what was initially a large warchest, most donors provided the maximum contribution, and thus when the campaign found itself in need of funds following the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries, Clinton herself was forced to keep her campaign financially afloat. Obama continued to amass large amounts of money in the general election, outspending McCain by a significant amount (Corrado 2010, Nelson 2010, Thurber 2010).

Finally, concerning the general election, the campaign targeted leaners in battleground states in new and creative ways. Through online recruitment and social networking, the campaign was able to place more volunteers and staffers in battleground and even marginal states well before the McCain camp was able to establish a presence. Marginal states where Republicans were historically advantaged—places such as North Carolina, Virginia, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, New Mexico—were targeted extensively by Obama campaign. With the exception of Georgia, all were carried by Obama.

Our illustrations from the last several elections shed light on the mobilization model and point to increased electoral segmentation. What remains to be seen, however, is the extent to which new media enhance or detract from opportunities to microtarget and narrowcast in future elections. Consider the Swift Boat Veterans as an example of an initial intent to target voters in media markets in battleground states with their message, only to see the information go "viral" when picked up by the news media and accessed by thousands of Americans online. Indeed campaigns must be increasingly aware that information can be widely disseminated. Whether this portends a return to more nationalized elections or whether we should expect greater segmentation remains to be seen. Both students and scholars should find this latter question of particular interest in coming years.

Notes

[1]National Election Studies. 2010. "Political Involvement and Participation in Politics" *The NES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior* http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/gd-index.htm#6 [Accessed 17 May 2010]

[2]McDonald, Michael. 2010. "Voter Turnout" *United States Election Project* http://elections.gmu.edu/ [Accessed 17 May 2010]

[3]Consider Rachel Jackson, wife of Andrew Jackson, who was much maligned over her "adultery." According to her husband, such criticism contributed to her untimely death (Boller 2004). See Boller (2004) for a brief historical review of each presidential election.

[4]*Gross rating points* represent an estimate of media penetration. Each 100 GRPs in a particular market suggest that an advertisement will be on average seen by every person in the market. For example, if an advertisement aired 3 times and reached 25, 30, and 35 percent of the audience, respectively, then the GRP would be $25 + 30 + 35$, or 90. Shaw's state-based estimates are calculated by the weight of each media market's contribution to a particular state's electorate. See Shaw (2006, p. 76) for more details.

[5]For a review, see a special edition of *PS: Political Science & Politics* edited by James E. Campbell, October 2008.

[6]While these numbers show that Gore was preferred to Bush by nearly 5% among survey respondents, the actual election outcome was much closer with Gore receiving slightly more than 1% to Bush. The serves as a reminder that national sample surveys are *estimates* of actual behavior, and that in some scenarios, sampling errors can be meaningful. However, this is not problematic for the point we illustrate here.

[7]The 2000 presidential election was the closest of the last century, with Gore winning a greater percentage of the national vote, but losing in the Electoral College.

[8]These data were compiled from the American National Election Study.

[9] Edsall, Thomas B. "Soros-Backed Activist Group Disbands as Interest Fades" *Washington Post* http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/02/AR2005080201849.html [Accessed 16 March 2010]

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Table 1: Last Election in Which State Shifted Party Support From Previous Presidential Election

State	Year	State	Year	State	Year	Year	State	Year	State
Colorado	2008	Arizona	2000	Connecticut	2000	1988	Massachusetts	1976	Minnesota
Florida	2008	Arkansas	2000	Delaware	2000	1988	New York	1968	Alaska
Indiana	2008	Kentucky	2000	Illinois	2000	1988	Oregon	1968	Idaho
Iowa	2008	Louisiana	2000	Maine	2000	1988	Rhode Island	1968	Kansas
Nevada	2008	Missouri	2000	Maryland	2000	1988	Washington	1968	Nebraska
New Mexico	2008	Tennessee	2000	Michigan	2000	1988	Wisconsin	1968	North Dakota
North Carolina	2008	West Virginia	2000	New Jersey	2000	1992	Alabama	1968	Oklahoma
Ohio	2008	Georgia	1996	Pennsylvania	1996	1992	Mississippi	1968	South Dakota
Virginia	2008	Montana	1996	Vermont	1996	1992	South Carolina	1968	Utah
New Hampshire	2004	California	1992	Hawaii	1992	1988	Texas	1968	Wyoming

Table 2: Campaigning in the 2008, 2004, and 2000 Presidential Elections

	2008	2000
Republican Spending[a]	$358	$185
Democratic Spending	$760	$120
Number of Battleground States[b]	10	15
States with Republican Ad Expenditures[c]	31	19
States with Democratic Ad Expenditures	36	15

[a] Spending data are for entire two-year reporting cycle. Obtained from http://www.fec.gov [Accessed 17 May 2010]

[b] These are states categorized as a battleground by at least one of the major party campaigns. Data obtained from Shaw (2006) and Huang and Shaw (2008).

[c] These are states shown as having an ad buy of 1 or more GRPs by Shaw (2006) and Huang and Shaw (2008).
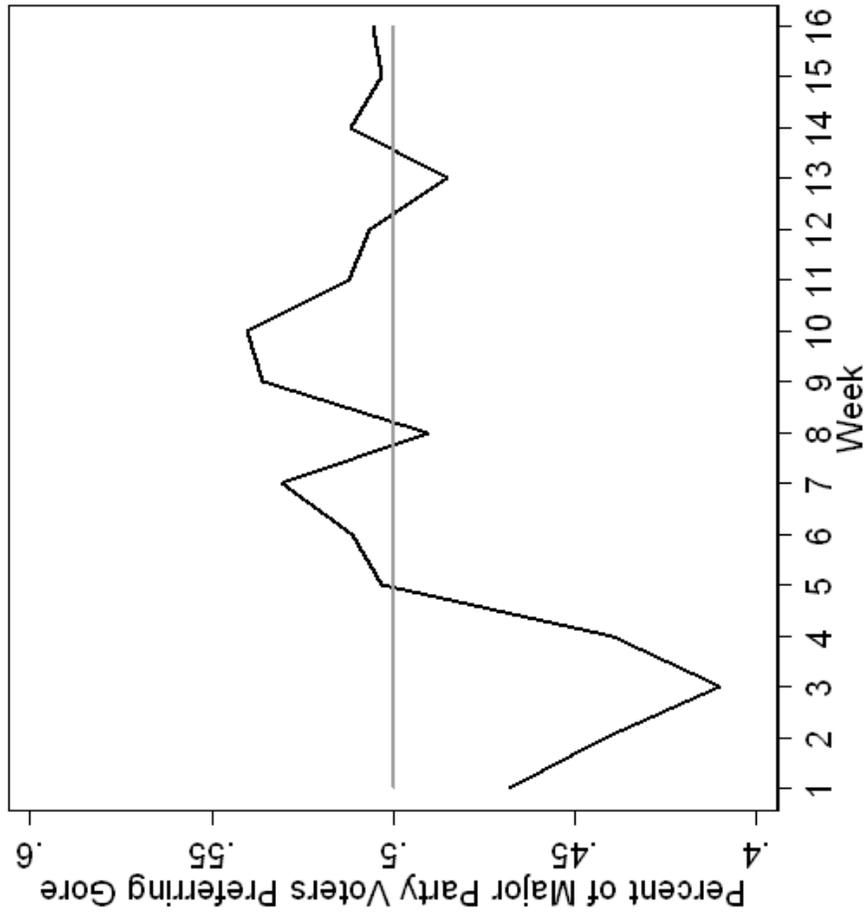
Source: 2000 National Annenberg Election Study

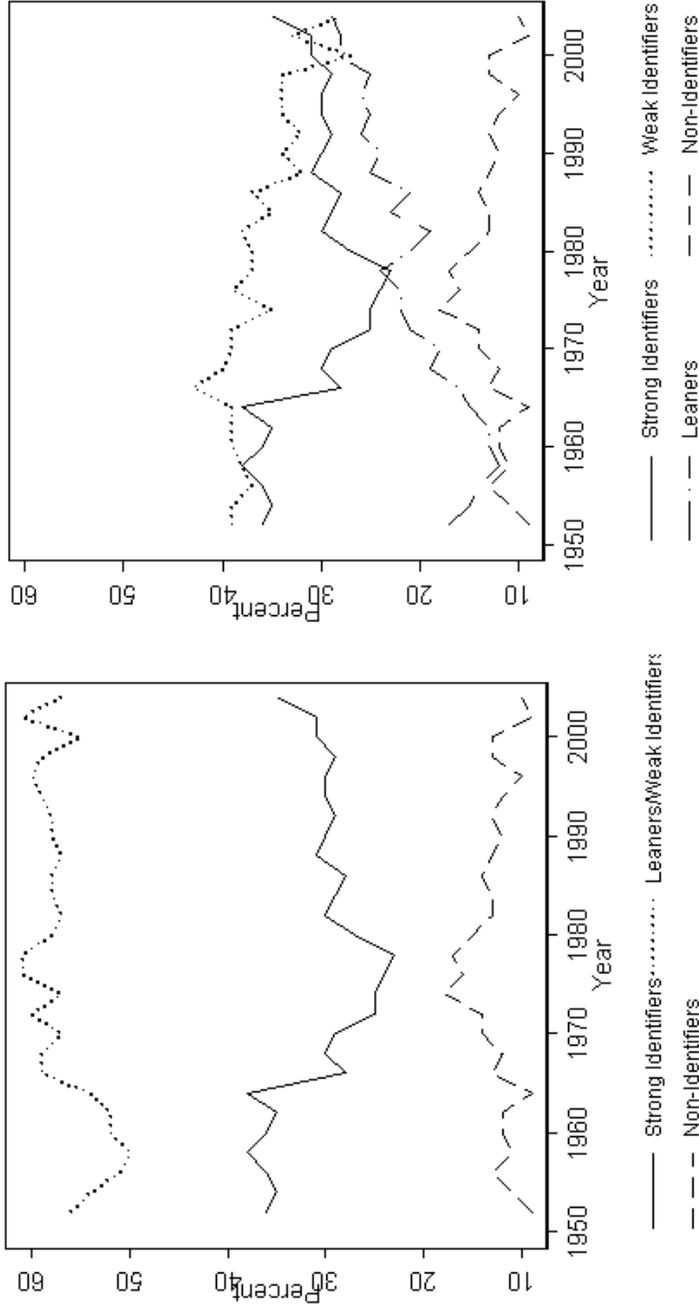Figure 1: Percent Preferring Gore over Bush, 2000, National Annenberg Election Study

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Figure 2: Trends in Partisan Identification, 1952-2004, ANES Data