CHAPTER 2

Presidential Politics in a Polarized Nation The Reelection of George W. Bush

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IN A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY there is and should be a continuity of politics between elections and governing.¹ Success in governing in a representative democracy, no less than success in winning elections, depends on assembling greater political support than the opposition. From a very practical political standpoint, those who supported the president and the reasons why they supported him in the campaign provide the basis for both the president's electoral victory and his governing constituency. Elections affect governing, in other words, not only by deciding who governs but by influencing how they govern. There is every reason for a president to expect to receive most of his support while serving in office from the same quarters as in his election. This chapter explores the electoral context for governing and how that context may have affected the way that President George W. Bush approached the second term of his presidency.

Who Evaluates What

Presidential candidates and sitting presidents receive political support from many sectors of the public and for many reasons. Presidential constituencies are routinely characterized by virtually every demographic, economic, and geographic characteristic and a great many of their combinations (e.g., soccer moms, NASCAR dads).² There is also a lengthy list of reasons for supporting or opposing presidential candidates and presidents. Perceived personal strengths or deficiencies, from intelligence to trustworthiness, and a long menu of issues understood in a variety of ways provide rationales for evaluating a president or a presidential candidate. Some of the reasons are

sensible, substantive, and grounded in reliable information; others are superficial, irrelevant, and based on distorted perceptions—but what is important is that voters find them of use in evaluating candidates and presidents.

Stepping back from the many constituent groups and boiling down the lengthy list of reasons undergirding their assessments, there are essentially two broad constituencies involved in assessing presidential candidates and presidents and two broad considerations on which they base their evaluations. The two general constituencies are the president's base and the center, and the two general considerations involve values and presidential performance.³

The Base and the Center

Presidents, whether as candidates or in office, assemble their election and governing coalitions from citizens who are either in the partisan base or in the moderate, swing vote.⁴ Presidents are pushed outward to their base and pulled inward to the political center for support.⁵ Just as political parties are composed of a more ideological wing and a more moderate wing, every successful candidacy must pull together a coalition of those predisposed toward the candidate and those who are "up for grabs." Democratic Party presidential hopeful Howard Dean sarcastically stated the distinction at the outset of the 2004 nomination season when he declared that his candidacy represented "the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party," implying that moderate Democrats were not really Democrats. Decades earlier, conservative Republicans similarly derided members of the more conciliatory or centrist wing of their party as "me too Republicans."

Presidents and presidential candidates may have different levels of strength among base and swing voters. Some appeal more strongly to their base. Others have a greater ability to reach out for support from centrists. Whether a president's strength lies more in ties to the base or appeals beyond the base, in the competitive world of presidential politics, success depends on doing well with both groups. Neither constituency can be neglected. Centrist voters have a real option to vote for the opposing party, and voters in the base may decide to sit out an election if they feel neglected. As a result, presidential appeals, whether directed to the base or to the center, are matters of emphasis. Roger H. Davidson succinctly states the essential campaign puzzle as devising a message to "motivate your 'base' without alienating undecided potential voters."

Values and Performance

The two broad constituencies each use two fundamental criteria to evaluate presidential candidates and presidents. Presidential candidates and presidents are evaluated by some combination of what the public thinks of their *values* and their

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performance—what candidates think should be done and what incumbents have done. Perhaps the most prominent reference to the values-performance dimensions of evaluation in American politics came in the 1988 nomination acceptance speech by Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis when he told his party's convention that "this election isn't about ideology. It's about competence." That was wishful thinking. All elections are about both.

In recent years, "values" in politics have often been construed quite narrowly as "moral values" or "traditional family values." This is only the tip of the values iceberg, however. More broadly, "values" refers to the general principles or gut instincts that guide people to take certain positions on issues—what the candidates and voters care about, their priorities. These are often summarized as political ideologies. Though there are some differences among conservatives about what values they prize, conservatives are generally more inclined than liberals to value individual liberties (including property rights) and take a stricter view of what is in the public sphere and appropriate for government intervention (e.g., national defense, preservation of social order, protection of innocent life). Similarly, although there are different views about their core principles, liberals tend to place a greater emphasis on equality and take a more expansive view of the scope of government action. The candidates' positions on everything from abortion and gay marriage to tax cuts and defense policy are influenced by their ideological values, and their decisions, as well as their personality traits, can be interpreted by voters as reflecting those values.8

In addition to values, presidents can be evaluated on the effectiveness of their performance in office—how well they handle the economy, defend the nation, provide for needed services, or maintain law and order ("domestic tranquility" in the Framers' language). Performance evaluations boil down to the simple matter of stability or change—whether the in-party has performed well enough to justify maintaining the status quo, or whether its performance fell far enough short of expectations that change is in order.

The values-performance distinction generalizes the more limited, prospective-retrospective distinction that has long been applied to economic policy. In essence, citizens rate presidents and presidential candidates more favorably to the extent that they share the same views about what government ought to be doing (pursuing the correct ends, that is, values) and regard the president or candidate as successfully administering the office (effectively executing the means, that is, performance).

Appeals by presidential candidates based on values or on performance have different characteristics. Values-based appeals tend to be based on long-term or stable considerations. Neither voters nor candidates change their values easily, and candidates who appear to change their stated values are regarded with a good deal of skepticism by the public. That being the case, values are also likely to be a greater consideration for a candidate's base—those with more durable commitments. The downside of values-based appeals is that they are often in conflict with other values.

For instance, an appeal favoring more limited government may be at odds with an appeal favoring more expansive and aggressive government policies to protect the environment or reduce poverty levels. In contrast to values, performance considerations tend to be short term (though the parties develop reputations for effectiveness in particular areas). They are also universal in their appeal. For example, everyone appreciates peace and prosperity. Although centrists may be won over by appeals to moderate and temperate values, the very moderation of their values in a partisan world means that they may be more prone to evaluate candidates and presidents on performance or likely performance grounds. The downside of performance appeals is that they are more difficult for the candidate or president to control. All presidents would like to preside over a peaceful, secure, prosperous, and crime-free nation with a just, efficient, and compassionate government, but no administration achieves all of these goals, and whether by their own doing or through confronting particularly difficult circumstances, some fall shorter than others.

Values considerations differ from performance considerations in one very important respect: a voter's values may also affect perceptions of presidential performance. There is usually (but not always) some ambiguity in a candidate's record. Given some room for varying interpretations of the record, a voter's values may substantially affect his or her perceptions of a president's performance. Values, which are embedded in ideology and partisanship, may be set aside for short periods apart from elections—as in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11—but they are likely to reemerge to affect performance perceptions when campaigns remind them of value differences.

Every president is engaged in steering between appeals to the base and to the center in assembling and maintaining a majority coalition. George W. Bush's 2000 campaign message of "compassionate conservatism" exemplifies the twin appeals—the compassion aspect of the message is meant to persuade centrists that the message is not too harsh, and the conservatism aspect is meant to reassure the base that the message does not depart from basic principles.

Though presidents seek support from both the center and their base, the amount of emphasis is not necessarily equal. Whether a president in an election depends more heavily on support from his ideological and values-sensitive base or from a performance-sensitive center may signal which constituency and which appeal he will emphasize in governing—whether he governs more to please his base or to satisfy moderates. The strategies pursued in elections, of course, may not be identical to those pursued in governing. Most presidents would like to expand support among both groups, and a strong performance in office (a booming economy and a secure, peaceful nation) allows a president to gain ground in both constituencies. However, issues, circumstances, and the limits of agendas often require presidents to choose between emphasizing the interests of their base or the interests of potential swing-vote centrists. It is only reasonable to assume that presidents

will be influenced by what happened in the election when they make such governing decisions.

Whether presidents govern for their base or for the center can be either praised or disparaged depending on one's political views. If a president steers policy toward pleasing his base, he may be portrayed positively, as exhibiting the courage of his convictions or displaying principled leadership. Alternatively, governing for the base may be derided as polarizing and divisive. By the same token, a president steering policy toward the center may be regarded positively as unifying, acting as a responsive and conciliatory leader, or negatively, as being unprincipled, governing by polls, and acting as a demagogue. The fact is that there is no one right way to govern. No one size fits all. There are benefits and costs to both approaches, and no president appeals exclusively to one side of the constituency spectrum. We need to understand better the electoral conditions that steer a president toward a more base-oriented approach or toward a more centrist-oriented approach to governing.

I therefore turn to the electoral influences that may have shaped the way President George W. Bush in his second term has steered a course between pleasing his base and appealing to centrists. President Bush's approach to governing undoubtedly reflected to a significant degree his own thoughts about presidential leadership and what he thought was the right policy, regardless of the politics. But presidents are political animals, and the political context in which they operate must also have some impact on how they choose to govern. What were the pressures and incentives evident in the 2004 election that would turn this presidency toward governing to please his conservative base, and what might have turned the president toward more centrist policy positions?

The analysis finds that President Bush was reelected substantially because of his appeal to the values of his conservative base rather than an appreciation by moderate voters of achievements during his first term. The political message of both his election in 2000 and his reelection in 2004 was that he would receive greater political support from his conservative base than from political moderates. Perhaps moderates could be won over, but the evidence from the election was that that would not be easy and might not be possible. President Bush's reelection depended more heavily on support from his base and less on support from centrist voters than the election of any other recent president. Whether he desired to govern as a principled leader of the right or a conciliatory leader of the center, the constellation of political factors presented to him in his 2004 election indicated greater potential support for a conservative Republican president than for a moderate Republican president. When his unusual political strengths in his base are combined with the removal of the electoral incentive for a second term administration, and with Republican majorities in both the House and the Senate, the alignment of political forces, opportunities, and incentives was clearly such that the greater prospects

for political success were in governing to please the base rather than a more bipartisan approach in an attempt to please those in the political center.

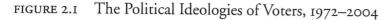
Electoral Forces

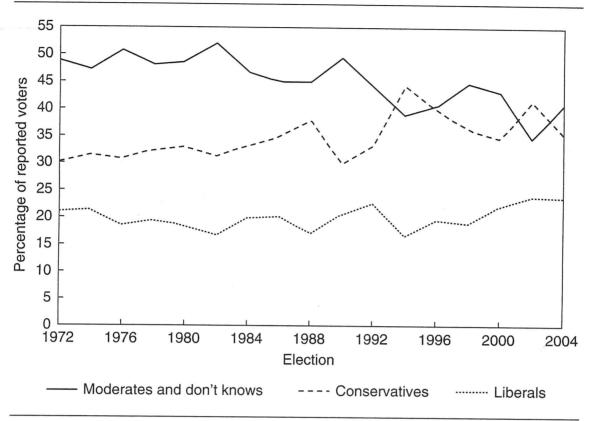
Leading into the 2004 election a number of important conditions were in place that affected the extent to which President Bush would seek votes from his base or the center and whether he would emphasize values or performance in his campaign's message. Compared with other recent presidencies, the electorate that would decide whether President Bush would receive a second term was substantially polarized in their political perspectives, highly partisan, very much aligned in their ideological and partisan allegiances, and evenly divided. These conditions would affect where and how the president could most safely secure the votes necessary for reelection and may have influenced how he would decide to govern once reelected.

A More Polarized Nation

Perhaps the most important characteristic of American electoral politics in 2004 was that the electorate was highly polarized. Although there has been some dispute about the extent to which the public has become more polarized in recent years (as evidenced in Morris Fiorina's contribution to this volume), the evidence of electoral polarization is compelling. Figure 2.1 presents the percentages of reported voters in the American National Election Study (NES) who were moderates, conservatives, and liberals. Both self-described moderates and respondents who said that they did not know how to classify themselves ideologically are counted as moderates. This is a generous count, since some of the "don't knows" may have ideological leanings that they simply do not know how to label, but the fact that they are unaware of an applicable ideological label may be interpreted as a sign of its being unimportant to them. Conservatives include those who declared themselves slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative. Liberals also include the equivalent three degrees of commitment to the liberal label. The data series begins in 1972, the first year that NES asked the ideological question.

The figure indicates that the American electorate is quite polarized and has become more so in recent elections. About half of all voters were moderates in the 1970s and 1980s. Their numbers declined in the late 1980s and 1990s. Since 1990, moderates have been a minority of voters in every election, regularly falling below 45 percent of the electorate. The minority status of moderates in recent years is also evident in General Social Survey data, as well as the Gallup data that Fiorina examines in his chapter in this volume. The number of conservatives among voters has rivaled and on occasion exceeded the number of moderates (including "don't knows") in these last six national elections. There is also some evidence that the





Source: Calculated from variable VCF0803 in the NES Cumulative Data File dataset. Weight variable VCF0009A was used.

Note: The percentages are of those reporting that they voted. Those who claimed that they did not know how to classify themselves are grouped with the moderates. Conservatives include those classifying themselves as slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative. Liberals include those classifying themselves as slightly liberal, liberal, or extremely liberal.

number of liberals has increased slightly in the last few elections. Since the size of a potential constituency should bear some relation to its influence, American politics in recent years should have diminished the political weight of moderates and increased the political heft of conservatives for a Republican president.

It is also clear from Figure 2.1 that the electorate's polarization predates President Bush's first term. Some analysts, most prominently Gary Jacobson and George Edwards, have asserted that Bush caused, or was the major contributor to, polarization—that he was a "divider, not a uniter." However, the increase in polarization that is evidenced in the decline in the percentage of moderates in the electorate began in the late 1980s and accelerated during the Clinton administration. An OLS trend regression with a counter variable (the year minus 1972) and

a dummy variable for the Bush 2002 and 2004 elections indicates that polarization in 2002 and 2004 was no more severe during George W. Bush's presidency than would have been expected given the long-term trend. In short, there was division during the Bush years, but there is no evidence that he was any more the divider than preceding presidents had been. The fact that the public is divided in their ideological perspectives and divided in their evaluations of President Bush does not mean that he is divisive—only that he is the focus of and the product of a divided public. The trend toward greater division simply continued to grow during Bush's term as it had for more than a decade before his election. He was undoubtedly the prime subject of political polarization in the nation, and there is always the possibility that a different president in different circumstances might have turned back the tide of polarization.

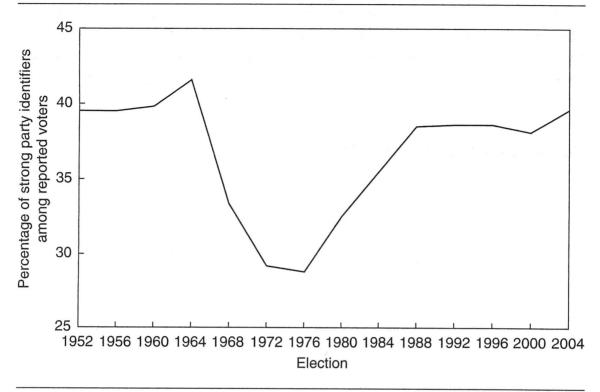
Was the nation more polarized as a result of the Bush presidency? It probably was. In appealing to his base on a number of issues, and in his handling of a number of issues (most notably Iraq), President Bush unquestionably triggered a good deal of animus from those inclined to oppose him. This may have contributed to the intensity of polarization. However, the nation had been growing more polarized for some time. President Bush as well as his predecessors may have contributed to increased polarization, but the general trend suggests that polarization has deeper roots. Whatever its cause, polarization was a fact of political life in 2004—a fact that would shape that election, President Bush's second term, and American politics for years to come.

A Highly Partisan Electorate

The electorate that George W. Bush faced in 2004 was also highly partisan.¹³ Nearly 40 percent of voters in the 2004 election indicated a strong identification with either the Democratic or the Republican Party. Though this was the highest percentage of strong party identifiers among voters in any election since 1964, and was nearly as high as has ever been measured, partisanship in the electorate has been growing stronger since the mid-1980s.

Figure 2.2 plots the percentage of strong party identifiers, either Democrat or Republican, among reported voters since 1952. The figure displays the decline and subsequent rise of partisanship in the electorate. As measured by the proportion of strong party identifiers among voters, strongly held partisan attachments were prevalent in the 1950s and early 1960s, ebbed during the dealignment period of the late 1960s and 1970s, and were restored in the 1980s. In elections since 1988, partisanship has been about as strong among voters as it was in its heyday of the 1950s and early 1960s. The 2004 electorate was not appreciably more partisan than electorates had been in the preceding four elections, but it was substantially more partisan than the ones that had elected Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan.

FIGURE 2.2 Strong Party Identifiers as a Percentage of Voters, 1952–2004



Source: Calculated from variables VCF0310 (party indentification) and VCF0705 (presidential vote) in the NES Cumulative Data File dataset. The data have been reweighted to the known actual vote division. See James E. Campbell, *The American Campaign: U.S. Presidential Campaigns and the National Vote* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), appendix A.

A More Aligned Electorate

Not only were voters in 2004 ideologically divided and highly partisan, but their ideological predispositions had become much more tightly aligned with their party identification than they had been historically. Voters in the 1950s and 1960s were often thought of as largely nonideological, in part because the parties were not so clearly ideological. There were significant numbers of liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats. That is no longer the case. The average correlation between ideological predisposition and party identification in the eleven national elections from 1972 to 1992 was .44. The mean ideology-party correlation in the six national elections since 1994 is .59. The increased correspondence of ideological disposition and party identification undoubtedly contributed to the increase in the number of voters claiming a strong identification with either the Democrats or the Republicans.

With fewer conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans (reflected in the stronger correlations), those with ideological leanings are less likely to be cross-pressured. Voters ideologically disposed to a candidate are more likely than before

to vote for that candidate and are thus more attractive targets for candidate appeals. In 1972, a highly ideological election for the time, about 80 percent of self-described liberals and conservatives voted for the ideologically compatible party's candidate. In 2004, not only were there more liberals and more conservatives, but they were more inclined to vote accordingly. About 89 percent of liberals and conservatives voted for the ideologically compatible party's candidate.

Highly Competitive National Politics

Despite the fact that conservatives outnumber liberals, and votes now quite closely correspond to ideological dispositions, American politics nationally is unusually competitive. Party identification is near parity. Among voters in 2004, once the NES data are corrected to the actual division of the national vote, 46.6 percent described themselves as Democrats, 48.0 percent were Republicans, and the remaining 5.4 percent were independents.

From 1952 to 1980, the Democrats enjoyed a double-digit lead in party identification. In some years Democrats held an advantage of more than twenty points over Republicans. Those days are over. Since 1984 Democrats have normally outnumbered Republicans by a few percentage points. In 2004 among reported voters, and correcting the data to mesh with the actual presidential vote division, Republicans for the first time slightly outnumbered Democrats.¹⁶

The nearly even division of partisans has been reflected at the polls. The controversial presidential election of 2000 between George W. Bush and Al Gore ranks among the closest elections in all of U.S. history. A shift of fewer than three hundred votes in Florida, out of more than one hundred million votes cast nationally, would have changed the election's outcome. As it stood, President Bush became the first president in over a century to be elected without a popular-vote plurality. Congressional politics has been almost as competitive. Republicans won a bare-bones majority in the House in 1994, and except for a brief time following the decision of Vermont's Senator Jim Jeffords to abandon his Republican Party affiliation in 2001 to become an independent, they held a slim majority in the Senate. Both majorities were dramatically reversed in the 2006 midterm elections. However, like the Republican majorities they replaced, the new Democratic majorities in both the House and the Senate are quite narrow. Democrats hold their majorities by just sixteen (of 435) seats in the House and one seat in the Senate.

Although President Bush was reelected in 2004 with a majority of the popular vote, the first presidential majority vote since his father's in 1988, it was still a very close election.¹⁷ It was the narrowest victory of an incumbent president since the Civil War (though Cleveland's losing reelection bid in 1888 was closer), and a shift of fewer than 60,000 votes out of more than 122 million cast could have reversed the outcome. In short, the 2004 election was fully in keeping with the highly competitive division of American national politics.

Conceivably this intense national political competition could have two different consequences for approaching electoral and governing constituencies. On the one hand, even though their numbers have declined in the polarized electorate, the importance of moderate swing voters might increase with the political parties near parity. If the nation is split, with 45 percent strongly disposed to the Democrats and 45 percent strongly disposed to the Republicans, the split of the remaining 10 percent determines the election outcome. Certainly President Bush was called upon by many to recognize the narrowness of his victory and the divisions in the nation and to govern in a bipartisan or centrist mode. On the other hand, highly competitive political parties may cause polarized positions on each side to become even more adamant and less accepting of compromise. Those on either side of the political divide may demonize the opposition when there is some real possibility of that opposition winning the election. Bipartisanship requires cooperation from both sides (even if they are just slightly to one side or the other). If neither side trusts the other, governing to the center may be desirable but unrealistic.

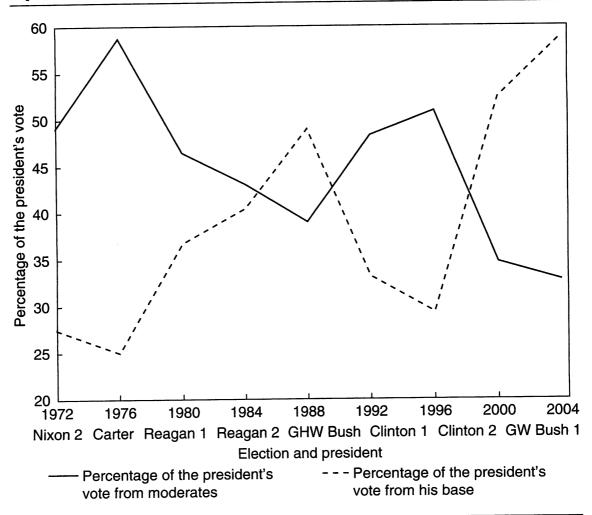
The Base and the Center in Perspective

What were the consequences of these electoral forces for President Bush's success in attracting support from the base and from moderate, swing voters? It is possible to gain some historical perspective on this question by examining the contributions to winning presidential candidates' popular votes from those firmly in the candidate's base and from moderate, swing voters. There are, of course, many voters in between the hard-core base and those squarely in the political center, but the relative contribution of each to the president's victory may reveal whom he was appealing to and who he might feel would provide the most support for his policy agenda once elected.¹⁸

The percentages of the vote for the winning presidential candidate provided by the president's base and by moderate, swing voters in the nine presidential elections since 1972 are plotted in Figure 2.3. The analysis begins with the 1972 election, since that is the first in which the NES asked respondents to declare their ideological disposition. Voters in the president's base are defined as those identifying with the president's party who also are ideologically disposed to that party (conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats) and voted for their party's winning presidential candidate. Moderate, swing voters are self-described moderates or voters who say they do not know how to describe their ideological disposition and voted for the winning presidential candidate.

Figure 2.3 shows just how fundamentally different the electoral circumstances were for President George W. Bush than for any of his recent predecessors. President Bush depended much more on votes from his base than from centrists. The president with the closest configuration of support from the base was George H. W. Bush, but even he depended far less on his base than did his son. Of the nine presidential

FIGURE 2.3 The President's Base and Moderate Vote as a Percentage of the President's Popular Vote, 1972–2004



Source: Calculated from variables VCF0310 (party identification), VCF0803 (ideology), and VCF0705 (presidential vote) in the NES Cumulative Data File dataset. Weight variable VCF0009A was used. The base vote consists of party identifiers claiming an ideological perspective consistent with the president's party (e.g., liberal Democrats for a Democratic president, conservative Republicans for a Republican president). Partisan leaners and slightly liberals or slightly conservatives are counted as partisans having an ideological preference. The moderate vote consists of self-declared ideological moderates and those who did not know how to classify their ideology. Both votes are percentages of all reported voters for the president.

constituencies examined in Figure 2.3, every president other than the Bushes received a larger share of their votes from moderate and nonideological voters than they received from their partisan-ideological base. Presidents Nixon, Carter, and Clinton received about half or more than half of their votes from the ranks of the moderates and nonideologicals. Even President Reagan, generally thought of as one of the most

conservative presidents of the twentieth century, depended more on moderates than on his base for his election in 1980. In his 1984 reelection President Reagan drew about evenly from both centrists and his conservative Republican base. Prior to George W. Bush's election in 2000, only George H. W. Bush had depended more on his base than on centrist votes for his election. The difference for George H. W. Bush was about ten percentage points (49 percent from the base and 39 percent from moderates).

Compared to every recent president, George W. Bush drew a much greater portion of his electoral support from his base than from the swing-vote center. He is the only president in recent history to have drawn a majority of his vote from his base, and he did so in both of his elections. In the 2000 election, Bush received 52 percent of his vote from conservative Republicans and 35 percent from moderates. His 2004 vote drew even more heavily on the base, with 59 percent of the Bush vote from his base and only a third from centrists. Of all votes cast for major-party candidates in 2004, more than 30 percent were those of conservative Republicans casting their votes for President Bush.

There are two sides to the unusual character of the Bush vote. While he did unusually well in his base, he performed unusually poorly among centrists. According to NES data, Bush lost the moderate vote to Gore in the 2000 election by 38 percent to 62 percent and to Kerry in 2004 by 40 percent to 60 percent. Every other president in the series except George H. W. Bush in 1988 (who narrowly lost the moderate vote to Dukakis 46 percent to 54 percent) won a plurality of the votes cast by moderates. In short, unlike any of the seven other presidential victories since 1972, George W. Bush's elections were strongly grounded in support from his base and drew only weakly on support from centrists.

Bush's base in the 2004 election had a number of defining sociodemographic characteristics, but it was large enough that there was more diversity within it than journalistic stereotypes suggested. The typical voter in Bush's base was an upper-income, college-educated, middle-aged, churchgoing, married, white male home owner. Although these were the characteristics of the typical voter in President Bush's base, according to NES data his base vote also included a large number of women (45 percent of his base vote), modest-to-middle-income voters (37 percent), and people who do not attend weekly religious services (52 percent). The idea that the conservative base is dominated by the religious right considerably overstates that aspect of the base. The defining characteristic of voters in President Bush's base was not common demographics or religious commitment but ideological perspective.

Values and Performance in the 2004 Campaign

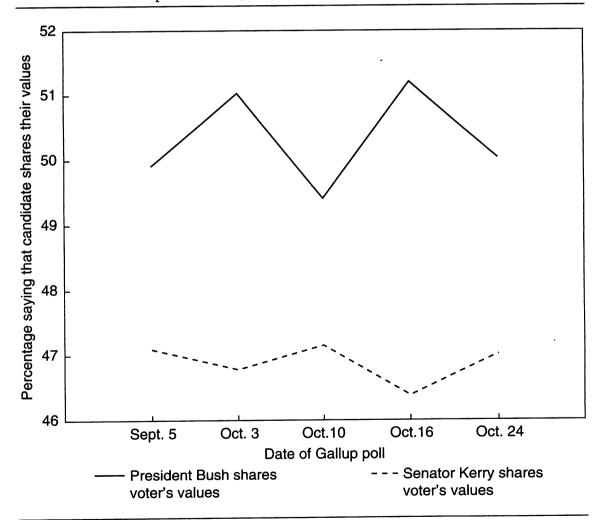
As one might expect, given the unusually strong support he received from his conservative Republican base, President Bush's election depended more heavily on evaluations based on values than on performance. With conservatives outnumbering

liberals in the very polarized electorate, more voters saw their perspectives on politics reflected in President Bush than saw them in his opponent, Senator Kerry. With mixed assessments on his administration's performance in its first term, the president's representation of conservative Republican values tilted the election in his favor.

The Comparative Advantage on Values

George W. Bush held a clear advantage with the voters over his Democratic rivals in both 2000 and 2004 when it came to values. Figure 2.4 displays the percentages

FIGURE 2.4 Percentages of Poll Respondents Saying That the Presidential Candidates Share Their Values, Sept.—Oct. 2004



Source: The data are from Gallup. The question to respondents was, "Next, thinking about the following characteristics and qualities, please say whether you think each one applies more to John Kerry or more to George W. Bush. How about—Shares your values?" "Both equally" volunteered responses were added to each candidate's totals.

of respondents in five Gallup polls, from early September through late October of the 2004 campaign, who said that Bush or Kerry shared their values. Those who said that they thought both candidates shared their values are counted for both. These data demonstrate consistently that more of the public regarded President Bush as sharing their values. The differences are not large, ranging from about two to about five points, but they consistently favor President Bush. A Gallup poll in late October 2000 indicated that Bush had a six-to-seven-point lead over Vice President Al Gore on the "shares your values" question.

Other evidence corroborates President Bush's greater appeal to voters in representing their values.²¹ In two surveys conducted in early September and mid-October, the Gallup Organization asked potential voters whether each candidate's political views were too conservative, too liberal, or about right. In both surveys, more respondents found Senator Kerry's positions too liberal than assessed President Bush's positions as too conservative. Whereas 40 percent said that Bush was too conservative, about 48 percent (47.9 in September and 47.4 in October) said that Kerry was too liberal.

Further corroboration can be found in the 2004 exit poll results. Although considerations of values infuse many different issues in the campaign, from tax policies to the war in Iraq, 22 percent of voters in the exit polls indicated directly that "moral values" were the most important issue for them in the campaign. More respondents mentioned "moral values" as the most important problem than mentioned the economy (20 percent), terrorism (19 percent), or Iraq (15 percent).²² Of those that explicitly mentioned "moral" values as the key issue—a subset of all values considerations in the election—80 percent said that they voted for President Bush. In short, combined with the "shares your values" responses and the "too liberal or too conservative" responses, there is solid evidence that considerations of the values that the candidates stood for were important to reelecting President Bush.

Mixed Grades on Performance

On performance grounds the 2004 electorate gave President Bush decidedly mixed reviews for his first term. When asked in mid-October by Gallup which candidate would better handle particular issues, respondents gave Bush higher marks than Kerry on terrorism, the situation in Iraq, and taxes and gave Bush lower marks than Kerry on the economy, health care, the budget deficit, and Social Security.²³ Though the economy was more robust than it had been when President Clinton sought reelection in 1996, many Americans were uneasy about it: The Democrats successfully claimed a lack of job creation, and NES data indicate that only 44 percent of voters approved of the president's handling of the economy. Opinions about the war in Iraq were fairly evenly divided. Though a Gallup poll in late August showed President Bush favored over Senator Kerry by 49 percent to 43 percent in handling the situation in

Iraq, only 44 percent of voters in the NES approved of the president's handling of the issue. Offsetting some of these lower marks were the high marks the public gave President Bush for his administration's handling of the war on terrorism. Bush held about a twenty-point advantage over Kerry on the terrorism issue, and Gallup polls in September and October found that between 57 percent and 62 percent of Americans approved of the president's handling of the terrorism problem.

The mixed reviews for the president's first term are best summarized in his overall approval ratings—the percentage of the public indicating that they approved of the way he was handling his job as president. In the months leading into the 2004 campaign, President Bush's approval ratings were between "electable" and "unelectable." Since 1948, seven presidents had approval ratings of over 50 percent in the Gallup poll in July of the election year. The president, or the candidate of the president's party, went on to win the election in all seven cases. In the same period, six presidents had approval ratings in July that stood at 45 percent or lower. Five of those six presidents, or the candidate of the president's party, lost their elections. Only Harry Truman managed to beat the odds and win his 1948 election with a sub—45 percent approval rating. In July 2004, President Bush's approval rating in the Gallup poll was 47 percent. His approval rating in the final preelection Gallup poll was 48 percent. These performance evaluations were not an obstacle to reelection, but they were not much of a help, either.

President George W. Bush's performance evaluations may have been mixed because that was how voters objectively judged his performance, but there is also evidence suggesting that Bush received middling performance ratings because the values of his raters in the public were spilling into their performance perceptions. As both Jeffrey Jones and Gary Jacobson have observed, there has been an unusually large partisan gap in President Bush's job evaluations. Republicans have tended to rate him unusually positively, and Democrats unusually negatively. This suggests that a significant portion of what ostensibly are performance evaluations are, in fact, indirect evaluations of the president's values.

Causes of the Values Appeals to the Base

Two explanations seem plausible for why George W. Bush stands apart from other recent presidents in his unusually large amount of support from his base and his unusually small amount of support from moderates. First, the long-term changes in American politics noted above may account for the unusual mix of base and center support. With the increased level of polarization, and particularly with the increase in the number of conservative voters in the electorate, the potential for support from the conservative Republican base grew at the same time that the potential for support from a smaller number of voters in the political center declined. The growth in Republican numbers and the greater alignment of ideological and partisan disposi-

tions also strengthened the potential of the base to supply votes, and the highly competitive nature of recent politics may also have heightened party loyalties.

Second, the political contexts and candidate strategies of both the 2000 and 2004 elections may have contributed to the unusual division of support between the base and center. In the 2000 election, the public generally gave high ratings to the performance of President Clinton and the in-party Democrats. Despite widespread distaste for his personal conduct, President Clinton's approval rating in the Gallup poll in late October 2000 stood at 57 percent, and better than 60 percent of respondents in an early October Gallup poll indicated that they were satisfied with the way things were going in the country. With clear majorities of the nation giving the Democratic administration high marks for performance, the only viable strategy for Republicans and the Bush campaign was to run on values that resonated with their base. Luckily for Republicans, Democratic candidate Al Gore also decided to run a values-based, prospective campaign, rather than a more bipartisan, retrospective campaign on past performance.²⁵ Whether this was an attempt by Vice President Gore to emerge from Clinton's shadow or to distance himself from the scandals surrounding President Clinton, the campaign was fought on territory favorable to the Republicans.

The context and candidate strategies of 2004 also may have steered Bush toward appeals to the base. Unlike 2000, performance evaluations seem to have been neutral between the two parties. The president could benefit by running on the record so long as debate focused on security and terrorism; beyond that, the record either cut both ways or was a drag on the ticket. On the other hand, when it came to questions of values, the president had a clear lead over his Democratic Party rival, and those values-based votes were generally from the conservative Republican base.

From Elections to Governing

When George W. Bush accepted the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 2000, he pledged to be a "uniter, not a divider." Six years and two presidential election victories later, critics turned his phrase inside-out to claim that he has been a "divider, not a uniter." They claim that he has governed to satisfy his base and not centrist Americans. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate that claim, but it should be noted that, as has every president, George W. Bush has pursued some policies to the liking of his base and some to the liking of centrists. One can easily assemble a reasonably long list of differences between the Bush record and his base. On the list would be his immigration/guest worker initiative, the failure to press for significant cuts in domestic spending programs, the prescription drug benefit plan for Medicare, the No Child Left Behind program that more deeply involved the federal government in education, the failure to press the faith-based initiative more strongly, and the proposal for progressive indexing of Social Security benefits. These are not policies and actions designed to appeal to his conservative base. Moreover, as the first Republican president

to preside over a unified party government since Dwight Eisenhower in the early 1950s, Bush may be regarded as a "divider" by those unaccustomed to and frustrated by this political configuration. Whether fully justified or not, analysts commonly concur with the late Wilson Carey McWilliams's conclusion that President George W. Bush "pursued an ideological and partisan agenda." ²⁶

To the extent that the critics are correct in claiming that President Bush has governed as a partisan—and there are good reasons to suspect that those conclusions have been overstated—were the conditions of his elections pulling him toward that course? Or did Bush pursue that mode of leadership despite the electoral message? Did the fact that he received an unusually large share of his vote from his conservative Republican base and an unusually small share of his vote from moderates, and won his reelection largely on an appeal to values, rather than approval of his administration's performance, affect how President Bush governed in his second term?

From the perspective advocated by many of his critics, President Bush's narrow reelection victory and the strong vote from his base argued that he should reach out to the political center to govern in a bipartisan way. According to this view, with his base secure, his victory narrow, and the nation polarized, Bush lacked a mandate for change and should have geared his appeals to bridge political differences. "Many expected him," as James P. Pfiffner wrote regarding Bush's first term, "to take a conciliatory approach to Democrats in Congress and seek out moderates of both parties to forge an agenda in the middle of the spectrum." According to this perspective, if President Bush had run for reelection more as a centrist and pursued a more moderate political agenda, he would have been reelected by a larger margin in 2004 and would have been a more popular president during his second term.

Contrary to that perspective is an argument for governing with particular sensitivity to the base. Although no successful candidate or president can neglect the political center, President George W. Bush has had less reason than any modern president to govern from the center. First, there are the institutional reasons: President Bush is a second term president and will not stand for election again—there is no personal moderating impulse to bend to swing voters in anticipation of another tight reelection campaign. Then there is the fact that Republicans controlled both houses of Congress until 2007—again dampening the moderating impulse to draw support across party lines. Beyond these institutional reasons is political reality. There is hard evidence from both the 2000 and the 2004 elections that President Bush could assemble considerable support from his base and has had much less success in dealing with moderates. In neither of his elections did he receive more than 40 percent of the moderate vote. In the polarized, partisan, and competitive world of American politics in 2004, the prospects of gaining cooperation across party lines were dim, and the center was shrinking. The conservative Republican base proved crucial to the electoral victories of both 2000 and 2004.

Critics could claim that President Bush's weak showing with moderates is a result of his being immoderate. A hard conservative agenda is not going to pull in moderate support. However, as noted above, President Bush has advocated some proposals that are more moderate than his base would support (the No Child Left Behind education initiative, the Medicare prescription drug benefit, no significant cuts in domestic programs, and sparing use of the veto), but these have won him precious little goodwill among moderates. Despite appeals to moderates through "compassionate conservatism," relatively few moderates were won over in either 2000 or 2004. As they say, "It takes two to tango," and many moderates were not inclined to support the president regardless of what overtures he made to them.

There is also a very personal reason for President George W. Bush to be wary of the centrist strategy. President Bush's father, the only other president in modern times to have received more votes from his base than from the center, made the politically fatal mistake of compromising with "centrist" Democrats on the budget and agreeing to a tax increase that violated his "Read my lips; no new taxes" campaign pledge to the nation (and his base). That won him high praise from some moderates and the media but also made him a one-term president. Despite his centrist compromise on his tax policy, President George H. W. Bush attracted only 37 percent of the two-party vote of moderates in 1992.

As appealing as the govern-to-the-center argument is, President George W. Bush has twice been elected by attracting substantial support from conservative Republicans. Nearly 60 percent of his votes in 2004 were from conservative Republicans, and only about a third were from moderates. His critics suggest that there is great room for growth in support from moderates. This is true, but a majority of moderates have exhibited an unwillingness to support President Bush in two elections, even when he reached out to them through both policy overtures and adoption of the "compassionate conservatism" theme. It seems eminently reasonable for the president and his advisers to conclude that they should build their governing constituency from those that provided the votes for the 2004 electoral plurality, and that is largely the base. As the old saying goes, "You should dance with the one that brought you."

Postscript: A Base-Based Presidency in a Divided Government

With the results of the midterm elections of 2006, the final two years of the Bush presidency will be conducted in a very different context than the prior six. As the 2006 midterm approached, the public had become increasingly impatient and dissatisfied with the conduct of the war in Iraq, and their frustration precipitated a slide of the president's approval ratings. President Bush had been reelected in November 2004 with approval ratings hovering around 50 percent. Two years later, on the eve of the midterm, his approval ratings had dropped into the high—30 percent range. His support dropped among Democrats (from the teens to single digits) and among

Republicans (from the low 90s to the low 80s), but especially among the performance-sensitive independents (from the mid-40s to the high 20s).

The dissatisfaction provided the foundation for Democratic Party victories in the 2006 midterm elections. Voters replaced Republican majorities with Democratic majorities in both the House and the Senate. Although midterm elections have often produced divided governments (in eight of the ten midterms since 1970), Democrats had not held a majority in both congressional chambers since 1994. President Bush, who governed through most of his two terms with Republican majorities in Congress, now faced a Congress held by the opposition.

How would a second term president who had depended on support from his base function when his base no longer controlled Congress? As we have discussed, there are many reasons why George W. Bush may tilt to his base more than to the center. Most of them are still intact. He is a second term president and is constitutionally prohibited from seeking reelection. He also has received and continues to receive much greater support from his base than from the center, and one would expect governing support to come from the same sources that provided electoral support. He no longer, however, is dealing with a hospitable Congress, and that may make a difference.

On the one hand, as David Mayhew has observed more generally, neither the president nor Congress desires a do-nothing or obstructionist legacy.²⁹ Though neither is prone to bipartisanship, President Bush and the Democrats in Congress might work together in the few areas where collaboration is most feasible. In the same way that the Republican Congress of the 1990s worked with Democratic President Clinton on the North American Free Trade Agreement, it is quite possible that the current Democratic Congress will come to terms with President Bush on the issue of immigration reform.

On the other hand, beyond the immigration issue, both short- and long-term politics portend intense partisan conflict. The president has made a firm commitment in the Iraq war, and Democrats, generally supportive of his position at the start of the war, have largely gravitated to more aggressive opposition as it has dragged on and as the 2008 presidential nomination race has begun to heat up. This short-term difference is reinforced by long-term party polarization. The parties have basic differences in values that are not going to go away anytime soon and cannot be readily compromised. The Republican minority in the Senate is large enough to block unacceptably liberal initiatives by the Democrats, and the veto pen is at the ready, to be used if necessary. The stage is set for policy gridlock.

Notes

1. The connection between election campaigns and governing has been termed "the permanent campaign." See Norman J. Ornstein and Thomas E. Mann, eds., *The Permanent Cam*-

paign and Its Future (Washington, D.C.: AEI and Brookings, 2001). Some have concluded that this is antideliberative and "antithetical to governing." See George C. Edwards, Governing by Campaigning: The Politics of the Bush Presidency (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 285. However, both political reality and democratic principles argue for the linkage of campaigns and governing. The political reality of involving the public in governing debates, at least defensively, was brought home to conservatives in the 1980s when liberal interest groups successfully campaigned to block the nomination of Judge Robert Bork to the U.S. Supreme Court. Liberals relearned the lesson a few years later when conservatives successfully campaigned against President Clinton's proposed health care program. Both cases are examples of what E. E. Schattschneider termed "expanding the scope of the conflict." See E. E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden, 1960).

- 2. See, for example, Richard J. Powell and Mark D. Brewer, "Constituencies and the Consequences of the Presidential Vote," in *A Defining Moment: The Presidential Election of 2004*, ed. William Crotty (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 20–45; Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 2004 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2006), chap. 5.
- 3. The base versus center or swing voter distinction applies to the potential source of votes for nonpresidential as well as presidential candidates and in all electoral systems. Essentially, candidates draw support from those who are predisposed to support them and some who are not. Though base and centrist voters are referred to as belonging in distinct constituency groups, in reality voters are spread across a spectrum from those firmly committed to the candidate to those with more ambivalent attachments. That is, the base-versus-center distinction is really one of degree and not dichotomous types. By the same token, many issues and assessments of the candidates' characteristics are not purely value driven or performance driven, but some blend of the two. For instance, a voter may evaluate a candidate's economic position partially on performance and partially on his or her preference for certain types of economic policies (for example, cutting taxes).
- 4. There are a variety of definitions and measurements of "swing voters." One variable in the definition is how far in advance of the election the voter is uncertain about how he or she will vote. In this chapter I consider ideological centrists or those unaware of their ideological bent to be swing voters in a very broad sense, though many such votes are probably quite committed as the general election campaign gets under way. For interesting alternative views of swing voters see William G. Mayer, "The Swing Voter in American Presidential Elections"; and Daron Shaw, "Swing Voting in U.S. Presidential Elections," both papers presented at the Swing Voting Conference, Northeastern University, Boston, June 10, 2006.
- 5. The classic study examining the convergence (centrist strategy) or divergence (base strategy) of presidential appeals is Benjamin I. Page, *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections:* Rational Man and Electoral Democracy (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
- 6. Roger H. Davidson, "Presidential Campaigning and Presidential Governance: The Case of 2004," in *Understanding the Presidency*, 4th ed., ed. James P. Pfiffner and Roger H. Davidson (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 140.
- 7. Michael Dukakis, "1988 Nomination Acceptance Speech," Democratic National Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, July 21, 1988.

- 8. Perceptions of a candidate's personality strengths and weaknesses also bear on what voters think about the candidate's values and performance (or likely performance). Certain values can be read into a candidate seen as being particularly compassionate or trustworthy. Performance or likely performance evaluations can be extracted from perceptions of a candidate's intelligence or steadfastness.
- 9. See, e.g., Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). The values-performance distinction might also be considered a generalization of the position issue versus valence issue distinction. Position issues involve conflict over the proper ends or goals of the policy (e.g., abortion), whereas valence issues involve conflict over who would better handle, resolve, or execute the means of achieving a generally accepted policy goal (e.g., economic growth, national defense).
- 10. Those concluding that polarization is minimal and has not changed much in recent years include Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004); and Paul DiMaggio, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson, "Have American Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 3 (1996): 690–755.
- 11. Counting both self-professed moderates and those who claim not to know their ideological leanings, only 41 percent of respondents in the General Social Survey since 1994 can be classified as moderates. Ironically, the Gallup opinion data that Morris Fiorina examines in his contribution to this volume (his Figure 5.2) corroborate the finding that moderates in the 1990s and 2000s were a minority, not a majority, of the public and an even smaller minority of those who bothered to vote.
- 12. See Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 13, as well as his contribution to this volume; and Edwards, *Governing by Campaigning*, 26, 282.
- 13. See Marc J. Hetherington, "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization," *American Political Science Review* 95 (September 2001): 619–631; Larry Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952–1996," *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (January 2000): 35–50; and James E. Campbell, *The American Campaign: U.S. Presidential Campaigns and the National Vote* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).
- 14. Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, "Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate," *Journal of Politics* 60 (August 1998): 634–652.
- 15. Of major-party voters in the 1972 election, 31 percent of self-described liberals voted for the Republican incumbent, Richard Nixon, rather than his Democratic Party opponent, George McGovern, and 13 percent of self-described conservatives voted for McGovern rather than Nixon.
- 16. Correcting the NES data to bring them into line with the actual presidential vote division, 48.0 percent of voters were Republicans, 46.6 percent were Democrats, and 5.4 percent were independents. Without the correction, 46.9 percent were Republicans, 47.7 percent were Democrats, and 5.4 percent were independents. Among all respondents (not just reported voters), regardless of whether the data are corrected, Democrats still slightly outnumbered Republicans, though the differences were much smaller than they had been.
- 17. In 1988, George H. W. Bush won 53.4 percent of the total national popular vote for president. Bill Clinton was elected with vote pluralities in 1992 and 1996 but fell short of receiving majorities. In 1992, Clinton received 43.0 percent of the vote to President

- George H. W. Bush's 37.4 percent and independent candidate H. Ross Perot's 18.9 percent. In 2000, George W. Bush won the electoral vote majority with 47.9 percent of the popular vote to Al Gore's 48.4 percent, with Ralph Nader and other minor candidates combining for 3.7 percent of the popular vote.
- 18. As "base" and "centrist" voters have been defined here, a large majority of the votes for the winning presidential candidate can be classified as from either the base or center, rather than from the gray area between them. The base and centrist groups have constituted between 77 percent and 91 percent of all voters for winning presidential candidates since 1972. In his contribution to this volume, Morris Fiorina indicates that he regards my definition of the base as "extremely generous." I do not believe that to be the case, since one must be both a partisan of the president's party and indicate ideological agreement with that party to be considered in the base. Moreover, what is important to the analysis is that the criteria are applied equally to all presidential constituencies since Nixon's, and in four of the nine presidential victories examined only a third or less of a president's election constituency can be characterized as coming from his base (see Figure 2.3).
- 19. Respondents who said that they "leaned" toward the Democratic or Republican Party are classified as partisans rather than independents. As Bruce Keith and his colleagues concluded, these "independent leaners" in nearly every important respect are like other partisans and unlike independents who do not indicate a leaning. See Bruce E. Keith, David B. Magleby, Candice J. Nelson, Elizabeth Orr, Mark C. Westlye, and Raymond E. Wolfinger, *The Myth of the Independent Voter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
- 20. This might appear to be a case contradicting the "median voter" thesis, that elections turn on the vote of the median-positioned voter. However, it does not necessarily contradict that thesis. President Bush's election and reelection required support from centrists, and there is variation among the political views of those who fall in the "moderate" voter category. The median voter in the 2004 election was probably a moderate with conservative leanings. See, Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).
- 21. James E. Campbell, "Why Bush Won the Presidential Election of 2004: Incumbency, Ideology, Terrorism, and Turnout," *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 2: 219–241.
- 22. The exit poll results were accessed at www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.o.html.
- 23. Patricia Conley, "The Presidential Race of 2004: Strategy, Outcome, and Mandate," in A Defining Moment: The Presidential Election of 2004, ed. William Crotty (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 108–135; also see, Helmut Norpoth and Andrew H. Sidman, "Mission Accomplished: The Wartime Election of 2004," Political Behavior 29, forthcoming.
- 24. Jeffrey M. Jones, "Views of Bush Reach New Heights of Polarization," accessed from the Web site of the Gallup Organization at http://www.gallup.com/, October 21, 2004; and Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter,* 4.
- 25. James E. Campbell, "The 2000 Presidential Election of George W. Bush: The Difficult Birth of a Presidency," in *Transformed by Crisis: The Presidency of George W. Bush and American Politics*, ed. Jon Kraus, Kevin J. McMahon, and David Rankin (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 9–28.

- 26. Wilson Carey McWilliams, "The Meaning of the Election: Ownership and Citizenship in American Life," in *The Elections of 2004*, ed. Michael Nelson (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2005), 187.
- 27. James P. Pfiffner, "Partisan Polarization, Politics, and the Presidency: Structural Sources of Conflict," in *Rivals for Power*, 3rd ed., ed. James A. Thurber (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 33.
- 28. Morris Fiorina chalks up President Bush's 2000 victory, despite forecasting models that predicted that Al Gore would win at least 52.8 percent of the two-party vote, to the moderation of Bush's appeal in that election. Efforts to claim some middle ground in policy territory often ceded to Democrats may have helped President Bush a bit in 2000. However, despite his centrist appeals, he received only 38 percent of the moderate vote. Whatever appeal his centrist message had apparently did not sway many moderates his way. A more important reason for Al Gore's receiving a smaller vote than predicted in 2000 was Gore's decision to emphasize the values divide over performance appraisals. See James E. Campbell, "The Curious and Close Presidential Campaign of 2000," in *America's Choice* 2000, ed. William Crotty (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 115–137.
- 29. David R. Mayhew, Divided We Govern, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).