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Presidential Election Campaigns and Partisanship

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How do presidential general election campaigns affect the partisan behavior of the electorate? Do campaigns undercut partisanship in the electorate or activate it? From one standpoint, by centering attention on the candidates running in a particular election, campaigns would seem to undermine partisanship. Ever since *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960) drew the distinction between long-term and short-term influences on the vote and found party identification to be the preeminent long-term political influence, some election analysts have supposed that short-term campaign influences on the vote are at the expense of partisanship. Presidential general election campaigns emphasize the particular policy issues and candidate qualifications for office that concern voters at the time of the election; they are not directly about partisanship. To the extent that voters' attentions are drawn to the political issues of the day and to the merits and personalities of the specific presidential candidates, the impact of partisanship would seem to be overshadowed by candidate-centered campaigns. Campaigns may encourage many people to vote independently-minded for the "person and not the party."

There are additional reasons to suppose that presidential campaigns in recent decades may have drawn voters away from their partisan moorings and contributed to what some analysts have seen as a decline in partisanship (Wattenberg 1991, 1996). Presidential campaigns are far more expensive than they once were, and the technology available to candidates is far more sophisticated than in the days of front-porch speeches, whistle-stop campaigning, and static-

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distorted radio addresses. From cable news to entertainment-interview programs to their own web sites, presidential candidates now have virtually instantaneous and production-rich access to millions of voters any time they want. With these greater resources for candidates to communicate their messages to the electorate, we might well expect that candidate-specific considerations would receive ever-greater attention from the public at the expense of considerations of party affiliations. Moreover, with the public's strong disdain for parties in recent times and the political necessity of appealing to the middle-ground of independent voters in a competitive political environment, candidates have been loath to make much of their partisan backgrounds (West 1993, 38). In short, the messages of modern presidential general election campaigns draw voters' attentions to the here and now—that is, to the candidates, their records, and their stands on the issues. Partisanship gets short shrift.

Although there are reasons why campaigns may pull voters away from their parties, there are also good reasons why they may promote partisanship. Campaigns may revitalize partisanship for voters rather than diminish its importance to them. The candidates' campaign messages that provide reasons to vote for one candidate over the other emphasize differences and polarize voters, commonly along party lines. Moreover, a crucial component of any campaign strategy is the shoring up of the candidate's base. Any hope of winning the election depends on candidates securing the loyalty of their own partisans. In doing so, campaigns remind Democrats why they are Democrats rather than Republicans and remind Republicans why they are Republicans rather than Democrats. This reminder is especially important after months of divisive internal party nomination contests emphasizing differences within the parties. By emphasizing differences between the parties, even candidate-centered campaigns, with all of their attention on the short-term aspects of particular elections, may restore the potency of long-term partisanship.[1]

Which view of the campaign's effect on partisanship is correct? Have campaigns pulled voters away from their parties and contributed to party decline or have they drawn straying partisans back to their parties and contributed to party resurgence? Campaigns probably have both sorts of effects. The information conveyed by campaigns about the election's particular candidates and

1. A third possibility is that campaigns have no effect on party loyalties in the electorate. Because of the competitive balance of the candidates' campaigns and the tendency of those voters most attentive to the campaigns to have well-established preferences not easily dislodged by the campaigns' attempts at persuasion, campaigns may have minimal effects on voters, including their loyalty to their parties (Campbell 2000a, 10–12; Holbrook 1996).

issues may pull some voters away from supporting their parties. At the same time, the candidates and issues are thoroughly imbued with partisanship. Candidates have partisan backgrounds and associations, and policy issues have partisan histories. To the extent that campaigns provide voters with the candidates' messages and qualifications, they may also provide voters with information that indirectly, but importantly, revitalizes partisanship. As such, although campaigns draw some voters away from their parties' candidates, they may draw other voters closer to support for their parties' candidates. The real question is which effect is most prevalent in most presidential campaigns? In general, do campaigns weaken or reinvigorate the partisanship of the typical voter?

Approaching the Question

This analysis attempts to answer the question of whether presidential election campaigns are more likely to (1) take party-identifying voters away from their "standing decision," or predisposition, to vote for their parties' presidential candidates or (2) guide them back to their long-standing partisan commitments. Using the National Election Study (NES) surveys, conducted in the twelve presidential elections from 1952 to 1996, I compare the choices of voters who decided how they would vote sometime during the campaign (late deciders) with the choices of those who decided before the campaign began (early deciders). Voters are classified as late deciders if they said in the postelection survey that they decided how they would vote after the national party conventions or if they changed their reported vote from the vote intention they indicated in the preelection wave of interviews. The preelection interviews generally take place in September and the first weeks of October of the election year. Do these late-deciding voters, as a group, tend to decide in favor of their parties' candidates; or, with their attentions focused on particular issues and candidates, do they set aside their partisanship in arriving at their votes? Do these voters exit campaigns and enter voting booths with their partisanship reinvigorated or with it in doubt? With ever-increasing resources being devoted to presidential campaigns, the partisan implications of campaigns may play a large role in affecting the future strength of political parties.

One thing to keep in mind in examining the behavior of the campaign-deciding, or late-deciding, voters is that they selected themselves into this group. Late deciders are late deciders by choice or, more accurately, by their failure to make a choice. By virtue of their inability or unwillingness to reach an early decision, as most other voters do, they stand apart from the electorate as a

whole. For the most part, late deciders are not simply procrastinators but rather voters who for one reason or another have some difficulty deciding how they will vote. Given that most late deciders are to some degree partisan, their reluctance to endorse their parties' standard-bearers suggests that they have at least mixed feelings about their parties' candidates. Additionally, late-deciding partisans tend to be less strongly identified with their parties than are early deciders.[2] Typically about half of early-deciding partisans and only about a quarter of late-deciding partisans indicate a strong identification with their parties. This observation accounts in part for the greater difficulty that late deciders have in reaching an easy (and therefore earlier) vote decision and also suggests that they will probably be less loyal to their parties, even if the campaign is as reaffirming of partisanship as possible. In short, even if the campaign consists of two full-fledged partisan rallies, we would expect less than a solidly loyal vote from late-deciding partisans because they have serious doubts about their parties' candidates from the outset. Put differently, the behavior of late deciders can say as much about them as it does about the impact that the campaign has on them. With this reason for caution in mind, an examination of the voting behavior of late deciders may still provide some insight into the impact of campaigns on partisanship.

What should we expect to see if campaigns activate or deactivate partisanship? If campaigns successfully compete with long-standing partisan commitments, we should expect loyal party voting among late deciders to be low. In landslide election years, when the political winds of the campaign are blowing strongly in one direction, we might expect defection rates among late-deciding partisans in the losing party to rise dramatically. If campaigns successfully pull voters away from their parties, on these occasions we might not even be surprised if the loyalty rates of late deciders dipped below 50 percent. Four elections in the period of study can be categorized as near landslides (1956) or clear landslides (1964, 1972, and 1984). If candidate-centered cam-

2. The strength of partisanship is consistently and positively related to early decision making by voters. The relationship was statistically significant in each of the twelve NES surveys ($p<.01$). The strength of partisanship was coded as 1 for strong Democrats and strong Republicans and as 0 for weak and leaning Democrats and Republicans. Pure independents were excluded. The time of decision was coded as 1 for major-party candidate voters who said they reached their decisions at or before the conventions and did not change their votes from their preelection vote intentions. The time of decision was coded as 0 for major-party-candidate voters who said they reached their vote choices after the conventions or who changed their votes from their preelection vote intentions. The consistent positive relationship between the strength of partisanship and early decision making is indicated by the Kendall tau-b nonparametric correlations ranging from .14 to .31, with a mean value of .24.

paigns are at the expense of partisanship, we would also expect that voters who change their minds during the campaign (that is, changing their votes from their previously stated vote intentions) change them in a way that costs their parties' candidates votes. If campaigns undermine partisanship, voters changing from indecision or a loyal vote inclination to defection should outnumber voters changing from indecision or a disloyal vote inclination to party loyalty.

In contrast, if campaigns draw voters back to their parties, we should expect substantial party loyalty from late-deciding partisans. Given that they are self-selected doubters about their parties' candidates (otherwise they would have decided early), the party loyalty of late deciders is likely to fall short of that of early deciders. Nevertheless, if the campaign reasserts the importance of partisanship, even if only indirectly by raising the issues and leadership qualities that the party values, late-deciding partisans ought to be quite loyal in voting for their parties' presidential candidates. Moreover, we should expect a majority of those who change their minds during the campaign to change them in favor of their parties' candidates.

The analysis proceeds in three steps. The first step examines the party voting of early- and late-deciding Democrats and Republicans from 1952 to 1996. Following Bruce E. Keith et al. (1992), independents who lean toward a party are counted as partisans throughout the analysis. The focus in examining voters by their time of decision is on the behavior of the late deciders, voters who reached a decision during the campaign. As noted earlier in this chapter, even with a strongly partisan campaign, we would not expect late deciders to be as partisan in their voting as those who reached an early decision, but the loyalty of early deciders provides a benchmark of sorts in evaluating the partisanship of late deciders. Because we are interested in the overall impact of campaigns on partisan voting, rather than what aspects of campaigns detract from or add to partisan voting, the analysis is of simple partisan loyalty rates instead of a multivariate analysis of how the various components of the campaign affect partisan voting.

The second and third steps in the analysis examine the vote decisions of two groups of late-deciding voters: those who reported voting for the same candidate they said they favored in the preelection interview and those who changed their preferences between the preelection interview and election day. Campaign effects ought to be less evident among late-deciding partisans who have apparently stable preferences. The pro-party or anti-party tilt of campaign effects should be most evident among late-deciding partisans who changed their votes.

Throughout the analysis the party loyalty and defection rates of late deciders are computed exclusively for major-party voters. A parallel analysis that also includes as defectors all partisans voting for third-party candidates confirms the basic findings of the major-party vote analysis.[3] Because of differences between the actual vote distribution and the distribution of the reported vote in the NES surveys, the NES data have been reweighted to bring them into line with the actual national division of the popular vote.[4]

The Findings

Do Late Deciders Vote with Their Parties?

Table 1-1 presents the percentages of early-deciding and late-deciding Democratic and Republican Party identifiers who voted for their respective party's presidential candidate (rather than the other major party's candidate) in each election from 1952 to 1996. As the data demonstrate, late-deciding Democrats and Republicans are less loyal in their vote choice than their early-deciding compatriots. On average, late deciders are almost fifteen percentage points less loyal than early deciders. This loyalty difference, however, is significantly reduced when the tendency of early deciders to have stronger party identifica-

3. Loyalty rates computed for all votes rather than two-party votes are approximately the same for early deciders but are somewhat lower for late deciders. The basis for this difference is that few third-party voters commit to an early vote decision, perhaps because third-party candidacies have less of a history for voters to evaluate early in the election year and the viability of these candidacies must be established in the campaign. As such, voters who defect from their parties to vote for third-party candidates are nearly absent from the ranks of early deciders but boost the number of late deciders and thus increase their defection rates (by about seven percentage points among late-deciding Democrats and Republicans).

4. The mean absolute error in the NES reported vote percentage (1952–1996) is about 2.3 percentage points (Campbell 2000a, 62). Considering that the average winning vote over this period was a 5.4 percentage point margin over an even vote split, the NES errors are nontrivial. Votes for Republican presidential candidates appear to have been overreported by NES early in the series and underreported late in the series. With the exception of 1964, Republican presidential votes were overreported in elections from 1952 to 1980. Democratic presidential votes were overreported by NES from 1984 to 1996. Because the extent and direction of the unrepresentativeness of the NES data is known (we know the actual vote percentages), we can correct for it by reweighting the data. For example, Bill Clinton in 1996 actually received 49.24 percent of the total popular presidential vote, and Bob Dole received 40.72 percent, with the remainder being cast for minor-party candidates. However, in reported votes in the NES surveys (in a cross-tabulation with party identification), the Clinton vote is overreported at 52.89 percent and the Dole vote is underreported at 38.31 percent. To correct for this inaccuracy, the data are weighted by the ratio of the actual vote percentage to the NES reported vote percentage. In 1996, reported Clinton votes are weighted by a factor of 0.931 and reported Dole votes are weighted by a factor of 1.063. The weight values (rounded to hundredths) for 1952 through 1992 are reported in the notes to the tables in Appendix B of Campbell (2000a).

Table 1-1. Partisan Loyalty in Presidential Voting by Time of Vote Decision, 1952–1996

	Percentage of Early- and Late-Deciding Partisan Voters Who Voted for Their Parties' Presidential Candidates			
	Democrats		*Republicans*	
Election Year	*Early*	*Late*	*Early*	*Late*
1952	80	64	99	84
1956	83	58	98	82
1960	82	78	97	76
1964	95	69	80	75
1968	89	71	98	82
1972	59	63	99	74
1976	85	78	94	76
1980	85	64	94	90
1984	84	68	98	86
1988	91	75	98	79
1992	93	84	97	80
1996	98	85	92	74
Mean	85	71	95	80
Elections in Which Partisan Loyalty Was > 50%	12	12	12	12

Note: The percentages are calculated from NES data reweighted to the actual national vote division. The party loyalty rates are the percentages of partisans in categories who voted for their parties' candidates rather than the other major party presidential candidate. Third-party voters and pure independents are excluded. The mean loyalty rates computed for all votes rather than major-party votes are 85 percent and 65 percent for early- and late-deciding Democrats, respectively, and 95 percent and 73 percent for early- and late-deciding Republicans, respectively.

tions is taken into account.[5] Moreover, comparisons to early deciders aside, the most important point is that late-deciding partisans are strongly and consistently supportive of their parties' standard-bearers. In the typical election year,

5. An individual-level pooled analysis among the twelve election studies indicates that the impact of the time of decision on loyalty rates is partly attributable to differences in the strength of party identification. When the strength of party identification is taken into account, the estimated effects of the time of decision variable on party loyalty drop by about 20 percent. The conclusion from this observation and from an aggregate analysis of the loyalty rates in Table 1-1 is that a portion of the observed lower loyalty rate of late deciders simply reflects the stronger party identifications of early deciders and the increased party loyalty among those with stronger party identifications whether or not subjected to the campaign.

more than seven out of ten Democrats who reached their vote decisions during the general election campaign ended up voting for their party's presidential candidate. Republican late deciders were even more loyal.[6] Nearly eight out of ten late-deciding Republicans cast their ballots for their party's candidate. The loyalty of partisans of either party who decided during the campaign never dropped below 50 percent, and only once (in twenty-four opportunities) did it dip below 60 percent (for Democrats in 1956).[7]

If campaigns were at the expense of partisanship, we would expect that their impact would be most evident in landslide election years when the information conveyed by the campaign would most clearly favor one candidate. If presidential landslides are defined as elections in which the winning candidate received about 58 percent or more of the two-party popular vote, the twelve elections under examination have included three Republican landslides (1956, 1972, and 1984) and one Democratic landslide (1964). In all four landslides the loyalty rates among partisans of the losing party were below average. However, before we make too much of this, aside from the Democrats in 1956, between nearly two-thirds and three-quarters of late-deciding partisans remained loyal to their parties despite the campaigns ostensibly pulling them toward the opposition. Moreover, loyalty rates of losing partisans who decided before each of these campaigns were also lower than normal. In the 1964 Johnson landslide over Goldwater, late-deciding Republicans were about five percentage points short of their usual loyalty rate (75 percent versus an average of nearly 80 percent), whereas early-deciding Republicans that year were about fifteen percentage points less loyal than usual (80 percent versus an average of about 95 percent). In fact, in the face of the Nixon landslide over McGovern in 1972, Democrats who decided how they would vote during the campaign were actually more likely to vote with their party for McGovern than were Democrats who had decided how they would vote before the campaign (63 percent versus 59 percent).

6. Loyalty rates differed by party and over time. In elections since 1952, loyalty rates have been on average about ten percentage points lower among Democrats than among Republicans. However, these rates have changed in recent years as Republicans have gained numbers and become more diverse while Democrats have lost numbers and become more cohesive. As a result of the realignment toward Republicans (or toward a more competitively balanced party system), Democratic loyalties increased and Republican loyalties declined. In the most recent elections there appears to be no consistent and significant loyalty difference between the parties.

7. Paired samples *t*-tests were performed on the differences between the loyalty rates of early deciders and late deciders in each party and between late deciders in each party and the null standard of 50-percent loyalty (the expected loyalty rate if partisanship were not a consideration). All four differences were statistically significant at $p<.01$.

This review of the voting history of late-deciding party identifiers offers little support to claims that candidate-centered campaigns significantly weaken partisanship. Under even the most adverse conditions (landslides against their parties), large majorities of late-deciding identifiers in both parties voted loyally for their parties' standard-bearers. Two conclusions from these findings seem plausible: Either campaigns in fact support rather than undermine partisanship in the electorate or the party identifications of late deciders are more than a match for whatever distracting impact that campaigns have. Either way, whether despite the impact of campaigns or because of that impact, partisan loyalty does not appear to be appreciably weakened as a result of the general election campaign. Even when buried in a landslide for the opposition, large majorities of late-deciding partisans "keep the faith."

Despite the seemingly strong showing of partisan voting among late-deciding partisans, some of these late-deciding partisans may have been quite close to reaching a decision before the campaign. These late-deciding partisans may be only nominally late deciders. They may have been fairly well prepared to support their parties' candidates before the campaign and simply confirmed their near-decision during the campaign. They may have been 95 percent set in a party vote, and the campaign added the final slight measure to this certainty. If many late deciders are on the brink of a decision before the campaign, it may still be the case that the campaign may have anti-party consequences for the decisions of other late deciders who enter the campaign truly in a quandary about their choices. To assess this possibility, and to shed more light on the degree to which partisanship survives or is encouraged by the campaign, I next examine the decisions of both late deciders whose vote intentions were stable and those whose stated vote intentions changed over the course of the campaign (the voters most open to campaign influence).

Stable Preferences and Party Voting

Table 1-2 presents the party loyalty and defection rates for late-deciding party identifiers who voted for the same candidates they declared they would vote for in the preelection interview. These late deciders stayed with their initial inclinations. As one would expect, late deciders who were stable in their vote preferences voted in overwhelming numbers for their parties' presidential candidates. Typically, more than four out of five late-deciding partisans who stayed with their precampaign intentions voted loyally for their parties' candidates. The party loyalty of these stable-preference, late-deciding partisans rivals that of partisans who said they had decided their votes at or before the conventions.

Table 1-2. Partisan Loyalty Among Late-Deciding Partisans Who Had Stable Preferences During the Campaign, 1952–1996

Election Year	*Vote Choice Was Unchanged from Preelection Vote Intentions (Late-Deciding Partisans Voting for Major-Party Candidates)* Percent Who Voted Loyally for Their Party's Candidate	Percent Who Defected to Vote for the Other Party's Candidate	Percentage of Late-Deciding, Major-Party Voting Partisans Whose Votes Were Unchanged from Their Preelection Vote Intentions
1952	81	19	57
1956	84	16	42
1960	89	11	56
1964	79	21	59
1968	83	17	52
1972	74	26	55
1976	84	16	57
1980	82	18	45
1984	81	19	63
1988	85	15	63
1992	87	13	68
1996	84	16	70
Mean	83	17	57

Note: The percentages are calculated from NES data reweighted to the actual national vote division. All respondents examined in this table reported voting for a major-party candidate, indicated an identification with one of the major political parties, and indicated that they decided their vote choices after the nominating conventions. Reported voters who indicated a preelection intention vote for their parties' candidates and then reported actually voting for those candidates were counted as stable loyal party votes. Reported voters who indicated in the preelection wave that they would vote for the opposition party's candidate and then reported doing so in the postelection interview are counted as stable defectors. When third-party votes are included, the mean loyalty rate is 75 percent, the mean rate of defection to the other major party's candidate is 16 percent, and the mean rate of defection to the third-party candidate is 9 percent.

These stable-preference late deciders were probably fairly sure of how they would vote before the campaign began, were most probably not very open to influence by the campaign, but were reassured enough by the campaign to vote as they originally intended (for the overwhelming majority this meant a vote with their parties). The campaign made a difference to these voters, and the difference in most cases favored a party vote, but the difference may not have been of great magnitude.

If all late deciders were so stable in voting their early party intentions, we

might conclude that the impact of campaigns, while apparently reinforcing partisanship, does not amount to much. The last column of Table 1-2, however, indicates that although a substantial proportion of late-deciding partisans held vote intentions that were unchanged by the campaign (on average, 57 percent), many did not. Many late-deciding partisans (typically about 43 percent) voted differently than they indicated in the preelection interview. These partisans are the late deciders who would seem to be most susceptible to campaign influence. If the anti-party effect of campaigns were to be found anywhere, it would be in the vote decisions of these late deciders who changed their minds during the campaign. The question is whether these changers were pulled back to vote for their parties' presidential candidates or induced to stray from their parties by the campaign.

Changers During the Campaign and Party Voting

Table 1-3 presents the party loyalty and defection rates for late-deciding party identifiers who voted for a presidential candidate of one of the two major parties but had indicated that they intended to do otherwise in the preelection interview. These changers may have initially indicated that they intended to vote for a major-party candidate other than the one they eventually voted for, that they intended to vote for a third-party presidential candidate, or that they did not intend to vote at all.

As Table 1-3 demonstrates, party identifiers who changed their minds during the campaign tended to move toward supporting their parties' presidential candidates rather than to defection. To be sure, in every election a significant number of partisans drift away from a party vote during the campaign. However, with the exception of 1956, when pro-party and anti-party changes during the campaign were equal, partisan voters who changed their minds during the campaign were more likely to back their parties' candidates than oppose them. Campaign movements by voters in support of partisanship have typically been almost twice as likely as movements away from partisanship support. In 1996, for example, 68 percent of late-deciding partisans who changed their minds during the campaign changed in a pro-party direction, whereas only 32 percent of changers voted for the opposition party's candidate.

Another way of looking at the impact of campaigns on the party voting of these changers is to compare what their rates of party voting would have been based on their stated preelection intentions with how loyal these voters actually were to their parties at the end of the campaign. The party loyalty rates based on preelection intentions and the loyalty based on the postelection reported

Table 1-3. Partisan Loyalty Among Late-Deciding Partisans Who Changed Preferences During the Campaign, 1952–1996

	Vote Choice Changed from Preelection Vote Intention (Late-Deciding Partisans Voting for Major Party Candidates)		
Election Year	*Percent Who Voted Loyally for Their Party's Candidate*	*Percent Who Defected to Vote for the Other Party's Candidate*	*Percentage of Late-Deciding Major-Party Voting Partisans Whose Vote Choices Changed from Their Preelection Vote Intentions*
1952	54	46	43
1956	50	50	58
1960	63	37	44
1964	61	39	41
1968	66	34	48
1972	57	43	45
1976	67	33	43
1980	66	34	55
1984	64	36	37
1988	63	37	37
1992	72	28	32
1996	68	32	30
Mean	63	37	43

Note: The percentages are calculated from NES data reweighted to the actual national vote division. All respondents examined in this table reported voting for a major-party candidate, indicated an identification with one of the major political parties, and either indicated that they decided their vote choices after the nominating conventions or changed their vote choices from their precampaign vote intentions. Those reported voters who indicated a preelection intention other than a loyal vote (favored another candidate, undecided, or indicated that they would not vote) and then reported voting for their party's presidential candidate were counted as changers toward a loyal party vote. Those who indicated a preelection intention other than a vote for the opposition's candidate and then reported voting for the opposition's candidate were counted as changers who defected to vote for the other major party's presidential candidate. When third-party votes are included, the mean loyalty rate is 56 percent, the mean rate of defection to the other major party's candidate is 35 percent, and the mean rate of defection to the third-party candidate is 9 percent.

vote were compared for the same voters: party identifiers who reported voting for a major-party presidential candidate and voted differently from their preelection intention. In the typical election year, about 170 respondents in the NES surveys meet these criteria.

In calculating, from the stated vote intentions, what the extent of party loyalty might have been without the effects of the campaign, party identifiers who indicated they intended to vote for the opposition party's candidate were

Table 1-4. Partisan Loyalty Rates Based on the Vote Intentions and Reported Votes of Party Identifiers Who Changed Their Votes from Their Preelection Vote Intentions, 1952–1996

	Percentage of Partisans Changing Their Votes from Their Vote Intentions and Voting for Their Parties' Presidential Candidates		
Election Year	*Party Loyalty of Vote Intentions*	*Party Loyalty of Reported Votes*	*Difference Between Party Loyalty of Intentions and Votes*
1952	54	54	0
1956	58	50	–8
1960	50	63	+13
1964	50	61	+11
1968	52	66	+14
1972	53	57	+ 4
1976	48	67	+19
1980	53	66	+13
1984	50	64	+14
1988	52	63	+11
1992	49	72	+23
1996	56	68	+12
Mean	52	63	+11

Note: The percentages are calculated from NES data reweighted to the actual national vote division. The unweighted number of changers ranged from 91 (1996) to 254 (1972) with a mean *N* of 172. See the text for a description of how party loyalty based on preelection vote intentions was calculated.

counted as would-be defectors and those who said they intended to vote for their own party's presidential candidate were counted as would-be loyal party voters. Those who said they would vote for a third-party candidate or would not vote at all were counted as half a defection and half a loyal vote for the purposes of determining aggregate two-party loyalty and defection rates. Because these intentions did not indicate whether the voter would contribute to the ranks of the loyalists or the defectors, they were assigned equal probabilities of falling either way.

Table 1-4 presents the rates of party voting by preference changers as they might have been without campaigns and as they actually were with campaigns. Although changers appeared to be less loyal to their parties after the 1956 campaign than they were at its start, and although the 1952 campaign had no discernible impact on the party voting of changers in that election, party voting in-

creased as a result of the campaign in each of the other ten election years examined. In nine of the twelve elections, party voting increased by more than ten percentage points after the campaign. Based on the typical stated intentions of changers over these years, they entered the campaign season about as likely to oppose their parties as support them. After the campaign, however, almost two-thirds of these changers ended up voting for their parties' standard-bearers.[8] The conclusion is clear: Presidential general election campaigns reduce party defections and increase loyal party voting over what would otherwise be the case.

The Partisan Campaign

Partisanship in the electorate is robust, despite repeated claims that it has been in decline. Although some voters do not like to admit it, about nine out of ten voters identify (more or less) with either the Democratic or the Republican Party and most of these party identifiers usually vote for their parties' presidential candidates (Campbell 2000a; Keith et al. 1992). Contrary to the expectations of those who see parties in decline, presidential campaigns have played a positive role in sustaining and renewing this pervasive partisanship of the electorate.

Despite all of their attention to the candidates and the issues du jour and for all of their neglect of the political parties, presidential general election campaigns are, in the end, party-friendly events. They bring straying partisans back to their parties.[9] On their surface, presidential campaigns steer clear of the par-

8. Paired samples *t*-tests were performed on the difference between the precampaign and postcampaign loyalty rates of changers. The test indicated that the difference was statistically significant at $p<.01$.

9. Gelman and King (1993) mistakenly dismissed the "coming home of partisans" thesis based on a low and near constant percentage of undecideds in the preference polls, which suggested no gradual movement of partisans in the electorate. The percentage of undecideds in preference polls, however, greatly understates the extent of electoral indecision (Campbell 2000a). The percentage of late deciders is regularly several times the percentage of those who refuse to indicate a preference when pressed under the hypothetical conditions of the trial-heat polls ("If the election were held today. . ."). Nevertheless, the coming home of partisans thesis is consistent with Gelman and King's more general claim that presidential campaigns enlighten voter preferences, bringing their vote choices more in line with their underlying predispositions. The coming home of partisans to their parties finding is also consistent with Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee's (1954) notion that campaigns rally partisans by refocusing their attentions on partisan fundamentals; with Erikson and Wlezien's (1998) notion that campaigns polarize the distribution of voter preferences; and with Gopoian and Hadjiharalambous's (1994) findings that late-deciding voters (defined as those deciding their vote in the last two weeks of the campaign) were more likely to have supported a rival candidate for their parties' nomination and were ultimately influenced by partisan-

ties and emphasize the qualities and shortcomings of the candidates and their positions and records on matters of public policy. However, at their roots these campaigns are partisan affairs. The positive effect of campaigns on partisanship explains how so much emphasis can be placed on campaigns while the electorate can remain so overwhelmingly partisan.

The presidential candidates and the issues they address certainly have clear partisan pedigrees. In winning their parties' presidential nominations, the candidates have proven themselves to represent at least a large segment of their parties' faithful. In many cases the candidate is regarded as the leader of the party and virtually defines what it means to be a Democrat or a Republican. It is not too far off to say that, in their day, the terms "Roosevelt Democrat" or "Reagan Republican" were redundancies. Although candidates come and go and they lack the longevity of the parties, one should not underestimate how intertwined the candidates and the parties have become. In this regard, it is interesting to note that in the twelve elections from 1952 to 1996, in only one election (1964) did the Republican Party not have one of three candidates—Nixon, Bush, or Dole—on its presidential ticket.

The issues raised in campaigns usually also have a partisan history. Most issues that arise in a campaign, though taking twists that reflect the times, have been around for a while in one form or another—the economy, taxes, defense policy, crime, education, the environment, health care, an assortment of social issues, and so on. The positions that candidates take on these issues are usually the accepted positions of the party, or not far from them. The records that voters are reminded of during the campaign are also associated with the parties. The party of the incumbent president, for instance, is given the credit or the blame for the performance of the economy regardless of whether the incumbent is personally seeking reelection. Moreover, the evaluation of the candidates' supposed strengths and weaknesses and of their issue positions and records are colored by partisanship, as is the importance attached to any of these evaluations. In essence, the short-term forces of candidates and issues are

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ship in their vote choices. Gopoian and Hadjiharalambous (1994, table 8, 64) found statistically significant "carryover effects" of the nomination (correlations between time of the vote decision and support for rival candidates for the party's nomination) in four of seven cases, and in each case the effect had the correct sign (indicating that supporters of rivals to the nominee were more likely to reach their general election vote decisions late). Although they found defection rates to be higher among late deciders (Gopoian and Hadjiharalambous 1994, table 11, 72), late deciders were consistently more likely to vote for their own parties' candidates than for the opposition's. Additionally, party identification significantly affected the vote choice of late deciders in four of the five elections they examined (1972 through 1988).

not so purely short term and not so easily separated from the long-term force of partisanship.[10]

The effect of campaigns in pulling partisans back to their parties is at least partly in keeping with the long-established finding that campaigns tend to reinforce preexisting dispositions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Finkel 1993; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944). For a variety of reasons, both psychological and rational, voters are unlikely to change their preferences dramatically during a campaign. Acknowledging this, the candidates' campaign messages and strategies work at the margins. The major candidates, for the most part, run cautious campaigns. They work with voters the way they are instead of trying to remake them politically. To a large extent, this means that campaigns generally work to reinforce or to increase the confidence that voters have in their preelection intentions (in most cases favoring their parties' candidates). However, as we have seen, the reinforcement effect of campaigns extends beyond reinforcing voters' initial vote intentions. Campaigns also reinforce voters' long-standing commitments to political parties and their candidates.[11]

From some perspectives, reinforcement would seem to be a campaign effect that is not much of an effect at all. Voters who are reinforced in their vote intentions do not vote any differently than those who are not. They may feel better about their votes, more certain that they are doing the right thing; but in the end they vote for the same candidates they would have voted for without

10. There are good reasons to suspect that the impact of partisanship on the vote is mostly, if not entirely, indirect in nature. In the examination of short-term influences on congressional elections, I found evidence that the long-term effects of partisanship are mediated nearly entirely by short-term political considerations (Campbell 1997). This view is also supported by theories of voting and empirical research (Campbell et al. 1960; see also Kelley and Mirer 1974). This claim also explains why partisanship can be so important to the vote and yet absent from virtually every forecasting model of presidential elections (Campbell 2000b).

11. A breakdown of the vote by the time of the decision and the consistency of the vote choice with the voter's original vote intention and the voter's party identification (for those identified with a major party who voted for a major-party candidate) indicates that more late-deciding votes are typically cast consistent with partisanship than with the voter's initial vote intention. On average, approximately 39 percent of party identifiers who voted for major-party candidates are late deciders (or changed their votes from their preelection intentions). Typically this 39 percent can be broken down further as follows: 18 percent voted as they said they were inclined to before the campaign and this was their party's candidate, 4 percent voted as they had intended to before the campaign but this was not their party's candidate, 11 percent voted for their party's candidate but did not originally intend to do so, and 6 percent voted for the other party's candidate but had not originally intended to defect. In summary, of the 39 percent of major-party-voting partisans who reached their vote decisions during the campaign, 74 percent (29 of the 39 percent) apparently were reinforced in their partisanship, and 56 percent (22 of the 39 percent) apparently were reinforced in their initial vote intentions.

reinforcement. The reinforcement effect of partisanship (as opposed to the reinforcement of the vote intentions), however, does change votes. As a result of reinforcing partisanship, party identifiers who intended to defect, who were flirting with not voting or with voting for a third-party candidate, or who were truly undecided about their vote choices are brought back into their party's column.

Why do general presidential election campaigns reinforce partisanship? Four reasons seem plausible. These are the four R's of campaign reinforcement. First, campaigns *remind* partisans why they are partisans. Second, they *refresh* partisanship by demonstrating that the parties differ in ways that are important to current politics. The campaigns update the substantive reasons for partisanship. Third, campaigns *reinvigorate* partisanship by building enthusiasm for the parties' candidates and issues. Finally, and perhaps most important, campaigns *restore* partisan unity after often fractious infighting for the parties' nominations.

The parties need not be explicitly mentioned by the candidates for voters to be reminded why they are Democrats or why they are Republicans.[12] The two major parties are virtually different subcultures, with different values, different views of history, and different heroes (and villains). These traditional differences carry over from one election to the next, and each election sets these differences in stark contrast to one another.[13] When the campaign is said

12. Wattenberg (1996, 172–173) and others have observed that presidential candidates seldom campaign using explicit appeals to party. West's (1993) examination of televised presidential advertising from 1952 to 1992 supports this observation. Party ranked seventh out of the seven content areas coded in West's study of 324 prominent ads (1993, 38). It may well be true, as Joel Silbey asserts, that "increasingly, presidential candidates [have] preferred to run as individuals, emphasizing their personal qualities rather than their adherence to party norms" (1998, 16), but this means that campaigns are less overtly partisan, not that they are any less partisan in their effect.

13. Party differences are so numerous and are on so many dimensions that one hesitates even to give examples. However, among the examples one might cite are the following: In manner, Democrats are more raucous and Republicans are more reserved and respectful. The greatest sin according to Democrats is hypocrisy; to Republicans it is relativism. When Democrats see a problem, they tend to look to the national government to solve it (even if it involves government providing benefits indirectly by placing mandates on private businesses). When Republicans see a problem, they tend to look first to the individual, then to the private sector, then to local and state governments, and only last and least to the national government. An example of the differences in the parties' views of history is in how they view the healthy economy of the 1990s. Democrats credit President Clinton and the tax increase early in his administration that supposedly set the government on track for a balanced budget and ultimately surpluses. Republicans credit the large tax cuts of the Reagan administration and the restraint placed on Democratic Party spending initiatives by Republicans in Congress (as well as the pressures not to add to already high budget deficits). They would view the slowdown in the early 1990s as the result of President Bush's ill-advised tax increase compromise with the congressional Democrats.

to polarize voters, it is seldom creating new divisions; it is reminding everyone of the long-standing old divisions.

The candidates and the issues they raise during the campaign represent what the political parties mean in the politics of the current election. In this way, the campaign refreshes or updates the parties' traditions and demonstrates their continued relevance. Although President Clinton had some differences with other leaders within the Democratic Party (most notably over free trade and welfare reform), his positions and approaches to issues during the 1992 and 1996 campaigns went a long way toward defining what the Democratic Party's positions were in the minds of most observers and what it meant to be a Democrat in the 1990s. Put more generally, parties are known by the candidates they nominate, and the success of the candidates and their parties are inextricably linked to one another (Campbell 1997; Farlie 1978).

The campaign also reinforces partisanship by reinvigorating partisans, giving them reasons to feel enthusiastic about voting for their parties' tickets. One of the functions of campaigns is to energize the party's base of support. If members of the party's base think that their candidate is far superior to the opponent, they will be sure to turn out to proudly cast their ballots for their party's ticket come election day. For most partisans, campaigns succeed in this function. When they do not, when a significant number of partisans in a party are unenthusiastic about their party's candidate or have doubts about which candidate is best, turnout declines, defection rates inch up, and elections are lost (Campbell 1997).

Perhaps the most important reason why campaigns reinforce partisanship is that they provide an opportunity to restore party unity. Following lengthy and often hotly contested nomination campaigns, parties are able to nominate their candidates—but not without a price. The nomination battle often exacts its toll on party unity and leaves embittered factions. The disappointed supporters of candidates defeated for the nomination may enter the general election campaign feeling they cannot possibly support the party's nominee, a candidate they had spent the previous months campaigning against. Besides the natural resentment and disappointment that may be felt toward the nominee, many disappointed partisans may also question how closely the nominee represents their views. The intraparty focus of nomination contests tends to exaggerate internal party differences (and ignore interparty differences). Small differences on the general political landscape are portrayed as vast chasms within the party.[14]

14. The 1996 Republican nomination contest provides a good example of how small differences among candidates of the same party are blown out of proportion in the heat of battle for a

After months of dwelling on differences within each party, the general election campaign turns voters' attentions to differences between the parties. When the general election campaign sets these differences in their proper general perspective, voters disgruntled about relatively minor disagreements with their parties' nominees seem to sober up. They realize that electing the opposition party's candidate is a far worse fate than electing their second or third choice within their own parties. In effect, even with all of their hoopla and histrionics, campaigns may encourage voters to vote with their heads or with their hearts rather than with their spleens.

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party's nomination. Among the many 1996 Republican hopefuls, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole was portrayed as the moderate. Conservative Republicans looked upon his candidacy with considerable skepticism. Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, in contrast, was widely viewed as a candidate seeking the mantel of the party's conservative wing. Prior to their 1996 nomination bids, both Dole and Gramm had established records in the Senate. Their tenure in the Senate overlapped from 1985 to 1996. During this period their voting records differed only at the margins. From 1985 to 1994, Dole's average ADA scores (an index of liberalism) were a very conservative 4.4 percent. Over the same period, Gramm's average ADA scores were only a smidgen more conservative (1.7 percent). Likewise, there was barely daylight between the two on their ACU scores (measuring conservatism). Dole voted for the conservative position in Senate roll calls about 89 percent of the time, and Gramm voted conservatively about 96 percent of the time. Was Gramm's record more conservative than Dole's? Yes, but the difference was slight. Contrary to the widespread perceptions created during the nomination campaign, both Dole and Gramm had exemplary conservative credentials.