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Author(s): James E. Campbell  
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# VOTER MOBILIZATION AND THE NEW DEAL REALIGNMENT:

## A Rejoinder to Erikson and Tedin

JAMES E. CAMPBELL

*University of Georgia*

**W**AS the New Deal Realignment a product of the mobilization of new voters or the conversion of established voters? Robert Erikson and Kent Tedin (1981 and 1986) conclude that conversion rather than mobilization was the "prime source of the New Deal Realignment." My reanalysis of their data indicates just the reverse was the case. Mobilization had a greater impact than conversion, though conversion's impact was considerable.

Why do we reach such different conclusions? The difference lies in who we count as a pre-realignment era or established voter and who we count as a realignment era or new voter. The differences are graphically illustrated in Figure 1 of my original article (Campbell 1985: 359). To summarize: by taking the survey data as given, Erikson and Tedin intermingle pre-realignment and realignment era voters in their analysis. In 1932 and 1936, many realignment era voters are counted as established voters. Since large numbers of realignment voters were erroneously labeled as pre-realignment voters and since these realignment voters were disproportionately Democratic, their intermingling with established voters inflated estimates of conversion. My analysis corrected the misclassification of realignment era voters.

The reader may still wonder who is rightly labeling voters and who is labeling them in an "idiosyncratic" or "unconventional" way? A hypothetical case may clarify the categorization rules of the two studies. Let us consider the hypothetical case of Patrick Murphy, an Irish immigrant who arrived in this country as a young man and settled in the northeast in 1910. After the appropriate waiting period, Patrick became an American citizen. Throughout most of the 1920s Patrick had little time for or interest in politics. But this changed when the Democrats in 1928 nominated the first Irish Catholic presidential candidate, Al Smith. That year Patrick registered and cast his first ballot for Smith. In the depression elections of 1932 and 1936, Patrick continued to vote Democratic.

How is Patrick counted by the two studies? In 1928, he is counted as a new or realignment era voter by both studies. The two studies treat him much differently, however, in the 1932 and 1936 elections. I continue to count Patrick as a realignment era voter, a contributor to the realignment by his mobilization. Erikson and Tedin count Patrick as an established voter. He is established because he is not new to the electorate of 1932 or 1936. He is new to the realignment era but not new to a particular election. This extremely narrow classification of new voters and very broad classification of established voters has a peculiar consequence: throughout the realign-

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ment period the number of Erikson and Tedin "established" voters increases. One would naturally expect that established voters would diminish in numbers through the years. As defined by Erikson and Tedin however, this is not the case. Using their definition, there were nearly 7 million more "established" voters in 1936 than in the last pre-realignment electorate of 1924. This despite the fact that about 6 million of the original 29 million in the 1924 electorate had died in the interim (Campbell 1985, Table 1). How is this possible? It is possible because the Erikson and Tedin definition of an established voter does not require that the voter be established in the electorate before the realignment. Simply by virtue of voting in the 1928 election our friend Patrick became an "established" voter for Erikson and Tedin's evaluation of the 1932 and 1936 electorate.

Is it important to the questions of mobilization and conversion whether Patrick entered the first, second, or third election in this realigning period? I think not. What is important is whether he was mobilized during the realignment or was part of the electorate prior to the realignment and was thus a potential convert. Given the facts of this case and the assumption common to both studies that the realignment began in 1928, the only reasonable classification of Patrick is as a mobilized voter. By failing to treat voters like Patrick as new voters, Erikson and Tedin made a costly mistake.

Why was this mistake so costly? There are two reasons. First, the number of misclassified realignment era voters is quite large. More than a quarter of Erikson and Tedin's established voters in 1932 are actually realignment era voters. Nearly 40 percent of their established voters in 1936 are actually realignment era voters, voters mobilized since 1928. Second, these misclassified voters were a good deal more Democratic than truly established voters (Campbell 1985: 370). Misclassified voters are 15 percentage points more Democratic in 1932 and nearly 12 percentage points more Democratic in 1936 than truly established or pre-realignment voters. When properly classified realignment era voters were anywhere from 9 to 15 percentage points more Democratic than the pre-realignment voters (Campbell 1985: Table 2).<sup>1</sup>

Finally, have I stacked the deck in favor of mobilization as Erikson and Tedin charge? Absolutely not. First, the substantial mobilization effects are a result of the unusually large influx of new voters into the electorate as well as their disposition of vote for Democrats. The fact that half of the 1936 electorate had not voted prior to 1928, a fact made little of by Erikson and Tedin, has nothing to do with definitions. Second, Erikson and Tedin find it difficult to imagine that the least "immunized," the new voters, could be less affected by the tide of realignment than the established voters. If true and if the surge in turnout was as great as stated above, the conver-

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<sup>1</sup>In pointing out that "pre-realignment voters were only about 4 percentage points less Democratic in 1936 than was the electorate as a whole," Erikson and Tedin make an inappropriate comparison. Half of the electorate, as a whole, was made up of pre-realignment voters. The appropriate comparison is between pre-realignment and realignment era voters. In 1936 the realignment era voters were 9 percentage points more Democratic than pre-realignment voters.

sion process "cannot possibly predominate as the realignment source." I wholeheartedly agree. What I find peculiar about these comments is the conclusion that they somehow indicate that the deck has been stacked for mobilization. What Erikson and Tedin have done is to outline the very rationale for the mobilization hypothesis. It is easy to imagine that new voters would be more affected by realignment politics than truly established voters. The argument that a realignment is produced by mobilization is a reasonable argument. To suggest that an argument is eminently reasonable is not to discredit it. It is not even to challenge it.

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