

*“His to Lose”: The Failure of George Herbert Walker Bush, 1992\**

Michael A. Maggiotto, *Bowling Green State University*  
Gary D. Wekkin, *University of Central Arkansas*

Using a two-wave panel, this paper locates the proximate causes of the defeat of George Bush in 1992 not among the variables traditionally applied by election forecasters—economic performance measures, presidential popularity, or retrospective partisanship—but in the tactics and choices of the electoral season itself. The Bush campaign failed to secure a firm base of support, failed to generate momentum even among those predisposed to support the incumbent, and failed to recognize, then capture, the issue space most important to the electorate. As a result, Bush failed to secure a second term.

This paper is an exploratory look at the 1992 electoral season, from its beginnings shortly before the New Hampshire primary to its culmination on November 3, 1992. In particular, it will focus on the connection between primary election choice (and intended choice) and general election behavior.

Our thesis is simple and straightforward. American political parties are *cadre* parties (Duverger 1959) that expand during the electoral season to embrace larger numbers of occasional activists and mobilize latent supporters. For a campaign to succeed, it must secure its core of support, then reach out to galvanize the sympathies of more and more peripherally supportive groups, while not alienating the core. These notions are easily recognized as paralleling activation, reinforcement, and conversion (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968). The tactics by which these activities are accomplished accumulate into each candidate’s “homestyle” (Fenno 1978), a presentation of self that defines not only the themes and issue positions of the candidate but refines the image of the candidate him- or herself (Hershey 1984). Thus, candidates are not infinitely malleable: what is said early to attract those who may be more ideologically extreme constrains what is stated later in the campaign. The degree to which packaging one’s appeal for allegedly different audiences during the course of the campaign poses a problem is open to

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MICHAEL A. MAGGIOTTO is Professor of Political Science and Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences at Bowling Green State University, and Executive Director of the Southern Political Science Association.

GARY D. WEKKIN is Professor of Political Science at the University of Central Arkansas.

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question, since purists and pragmatists, amateurs and professionals alike generally value winning as an overarching goal (see Maggiotto and Weber, 1986, and the literature cited therein). Moreover, the innate caution of candidates yields the well-documented politics of ambiguity (Page 1978) that persists even under the media's klieg lights. Nevertheless, in the candidate-centered context of the modern presidential campaign, for good or ill, the image of the party in a presidential election year is defined by the campaign of its nominee (Wattenberg 1984, 1991).

Political party primaries provide candidates their first opportunities to secure a base and extend their support. The importance of early primary success in order to build momentum, secure financing and demoralize the opposition is legendary (Wayne 1988), especially the importance of victory in New Hampshire (Orren and Polsby 1987). However, to assume that early victory is tantamount to nomination is plainly wrong. There is more than one road to the nomination, each of which is both smooth and pot-holed, which helps explain the uneven progress of most campaigns, even as momentum for the eventual winner ultimately builds (Bartels 1988).

Indisputable is the need to secure a base of support. The early campaign can be seen as an effort to craft a message that will accomplish that goal. For those successful early, or those who can sustain their candidacies through early defeats and other travails, the initial message will be refined and elaborated as the electoral season continues. The goal of winning maximally (Downs 1957; Schlesinger 1975) frames the message as a means, not an end, for the campaigner that in turn becomes the end, not the means, for the elector. This symbiotic connection is what lies at the heart of our notion of self-presentation becoming self-definition, not just for the nominee, but for the party as a whole. Thus, the candidate's message—as vision, theme and issue positions—must have wide appeal to the electorate, if it is to serve effectively as the political currency of the presidential and associated (if derivative) party campaigns.

In the pages below, we will assess the degree to which presidential candidacies in 1992 were successful in securing a base, then reaching out to claim popular territory. We will evaluate the ability of campaigns to maintain the beachheads they secured, while they drove forward to establish new salients. Finally, although we will not strive to assess the impact of retrospective voting (Fiorina 1981) on the fortunes of the incumbent president, nor account for the predictions of his defeat (Abramowitz 1992; Campbell 1992) or of his victory (Fair 1992; Lewis-Beck 1992), we cannot help but note the size of his early base and the manner in which his momentum built, compared to that of his challengers.

### **Data and Methods**

The data for this paper come from two national surveys conducted for the authors by the Population and Society Research Center of Bowling Green State University. Together they form an *intraelection-year* panel.

The first survey, conducted between February 3 and March 14, 1992, straddled the early primaries. Households in the lower 48 states were contacted using well-established random digit telephone number sampling techniques. Each sampling frame was divided into replicates, with each replicate comprising a microsample. Additionally, respondents were randomly selected from within households to provide representativeness. Sampled households were phoned a maximum of five times at different times of the day and week. Specially supervised attempts to convert refusals were made. These procedures generated a sample of 1,537 respondents for analysis.

The second survey, wave two of the panel, was conducted between November 4 and December 23, 1992. All respondents in wave one of the panel were contacted, regardless of their stated desire to participate in the second phase of the project. To enhance the prospects of locating subjects, no fixed limit was placed on the number of calls to a residence, and calls were made at different times of the day and week. Specially supervised attempts to convert refusals were made. In the end, only a very few subjects actually refused ( $N = 9$ ). A total of 26,650 calls were made. Of the original 1,537 individuals surveyed in wave one, 1,107 (72 percent) were successfully contacted and reinterviewed in wave two.

The omnibus panel surveys touched on a number of theoretical questions pertaining to partisanship, representation and electoral behavior, in addition to securing attitudinal and socio-demographic information on each respondent. Only a subset of the questions is employed in the analysis reported in this paper.

### **Securing Core Support**

In the order of battle of any political campaign, the candidate and his or her organization first must identify and secure the support of a solid core of voters. We measure the success of presidential candidates in accomplishing that task in the tables immediately below.

Table 1 crosstabulates general election vote, from wave two, with intended vote for selected candidates from wave one. The data reported will help us gauge how much vote slippage presidential candidates experienced among respondents stating an early vote intention.

**Table 1. General Election Vote as a Function of Wave One Vote Intention**

General Election Vote	<i>Intended Vote</i>						Don't Know Not Reg.
	Clinton	Democratic Challengers	Bush	Buchanan	Democrat	Republican	
Bush	7.7%	9.6%	78.3%	21.1%	8.0%	66.7%	28.0%
Clinton	73.1	71.2	9.6	10.5	82.1	14.0	48.0
Perot	19.2	15.4	11.0	63.2	10.0	19.4	23.3
Other	—	3.4	1.1	5.3	—	—	.7
N =	52	52	272	19	201	93	275

Several things are clear from this table. First, both Clinton and Bush were nearly equally successful in keeping within their electoral coalitions those whose early intention was to vote for them. Seventy-three percent of early Clinton supporters voted for him in November. The corresponding figure for Bush is 78 percent. This fact is especially significant for Bush, for his high percentage is based on five and one-half times as many would-be voters. However, Clinton was far more successful than Bush among those who were undecided in the early Spring. Second, comparatively few likely Republican voters had not committed themselves already to a candidate by the end of wave one interviewing. Of the respondents not yet committed to candidates, twice as many claimed that they would support whomever the Democrats nominated, as opposed to whomever the Republicans nominated. In addition, Clinton was able to convert 82 percent of intended Democratic voters, while Bush was able to keep only two-thirds of intended Republican voters. Third, and equally telling, Clinton was able to capture the overwhelming majority of the supporters of his Democratic party challengers, 71 percent; whereas Bush yielded over 60 percent of Republican challenger Patrick Buchanan's support to Ross Perot while garnering a meager 21 percent for himself. These data begin to suggest a Republican party divided early into camps for or against Bush, facing a more open-minded and ultimately united Democratic party.

We must hasten to add, however, that the breadth of the fissures in the Republican party were not completely apparent during the primary season. In wave two, respondents were asked to recall their primary votes, and these were compared to the votes and intended votes reported in wave one (data not shown). Looking back to our wave one responses regarding vote intentions, Bush received the votes of 91 percent of those who said they already had or would vote for him, as well as 61 percent of Buchanan's declared supporters. Clinton, in turn, received 89 percent of his declared support in the primaries and 48 percent of the support of his more numerous rivals.

Another measure of core support is the ability to retain the loyalty of fellow partisans. In Table 2, we crosstabulate the general election vote decision of our respondents with their national partisanship.<sup>1</sup> It is immediately apparent from that table that Clinton was much more successful in retaining the support of Democrats of all strengths than Bush fared in maintaining the support of Republicans. Bush claimed a small edge over Clinton among strong identifiers, 90 percent to 87 percent, but was outpolled by Clinton among weak identifiers, 61 percent to 72 percent, as well as among leaners, 66 percent compared to 76 percent. It also is clear that, in addition to claiming the modal share of the pure Independents (43 percent), Perot made his most significant inroads into the bases of his rivals

**Table 2. General Election Vote as a Function of National Partisanship**

General Election Vote	<i>National Party Identification</i>						
	Strong Democrat	Weak Democrat	Independent Leaver-Democrat	Pure Republican	Independent Leaver-Republican	Weak Republican	Strong Republican
Bush	8.5%	11.5%	4.8%	24.3%	66.2%	60.7%	90.3%
Clinton	87.0	71.9	75.9	31.8	10.4	15.9	1.6
Perot	4.0	15.8	19.3	43.0	23.4	20.7	7.5
Other	.5	.7	—	.9	—	2.8	.5
N =	200	139	83	107	77	145	186

among Republican identifiers and leaners. His independent candidacy more frequently was selected as a viable electoral alternative by those in the Republican camp than by those in the Democratic.

A third measure of core support spotlights the role of ideology. Bush portrayed himself as the only viable choice for conservative voters. Although Bush steadfastly campaigned as the political scion of the Reagan dynasty, using Quayle as his point-man, it was Buchanan who isolated the social dimension of conservatism early and set the tone of the Republican National Convention with his moralistic populism. Clinton, on the other hand, eschewed the “L” word. As an Arkansan, he laid claim to a renewal of the “New South” Democrat label and thereby seemed less credible a liberal than Massachusetts Democrat Dukakis in 1988 or Minnesota Democrat Mondale in 1984. In fact, he did nothing to quash the stories of his disdain for the intraparty caucuses that have been the bane of liberal candidates since Ronald Reagan followed Gary Hart’s example in labelling these groups as “special interests” in 1984. Nor did he move faster in announcing his positions on liberal causes than his own schedule dictated, regardless of the shrill cries of too little, too late from such groups. And although Clinton at numerous points during the campaign maintained close ties with other African-American political figures, most notably party chairman Ron Brown, he deliberately distanced himself from Jesse Jackson.

**Table 3. General Election Vote as a Function of Self-Described Ideological Position**

General Election Vote	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Bush	65.0%	27.7%	7.6%
Clinton	17.1	55.9	73.5
Perot	17.1	15.5	18.9
Other	.8	1.0	—
N =	391	401	132

Yet, as Table 3 clearly indicates, Clinton was more successful at coyly coaxing support from liberals than Bush was in his strident courtship of conservatives. Moreover, Clinton bested Bush by a two-to-one margin among moderates. Despite having foresworn the title “moderate” when he pledged allegiance to what he earlier had derided as “voodoo economics,” neither that, nor Panama, nor Desert Storm, nor the demise of the Evil

Empire and its colonies was enough to convince conservatives of Bush's conservatism.

Together, these data suggest that Bush failed to implement successfully the first phase of any political campaign: seek out and secure a base of support.

### Building Momentum

Ideally, momentum should build for a candidate as he or she progresses through the primary season, until, at some point, the party simply coalesces around the candidate as its nominee. In building momentum, the pivotal role of early primaries has been emphasized repeatedly. Wave one of our panel was designed particularly to assess the impact of the New Hampshire primary. Moreover, because of the use of sampling replicates as the building blocks of the total sample, we can gain valid insight into the impact of later primaries, including those on Super Tuesday. Table 4 partitions our sample into those respondents interviewed prior to the New Hampshire primary, those contacted between New Hampshire and Super Tuesday, and those reached after Super Tuesday.

**Table 4. The Impact of Early Primaries on the Decision to Support Selected Candidates in General and Primary Elections**

Candidate	Pre-New Hampshire	Post-New Hampshire	Post-Super Tuesday
<b>Panel I: Intended General Election Vote</b>			
Clinton	5.7%	4.4%	12.2%
Dem. Challengers	.6	3.5	4.7
Bush	25.3	25.1	26.4
Buchanan	2.2	1.9	.7
Republicans	9.1	10.4	8.1
Democrats	22.6	20.1	15.5
Don't Know	26.9	28.4	25.0
N =	495	864	148
<b>Panel II: Actual/Intended Primary Vote</b>			
Clinton	6.9%	7.9%	12.8%
Dem. Challengers	1.6	5.4	3.4
Bush	23.2	24.5	29.1
Buchanan	2.8	3.6	2.7
Don't Know	56.4	50.9	45.9
N =	495	864	148



Both panels of Table 4 come to the same conclusion. Whereas Bush received no measurable boost from the early primaries, the Clinton candidacy doubled its support after Super Tuesday. Still well behind Bush both in intended November vote (Panel I) and intended or actual primary vote (Panel II), Clinton's trend was sharply upward, while Bush's trend essentially was flat. The sparkless Bush effort should have worried his handlers and galvanized them into action, since he was acknowledged by 75 percent of our respondents to be the likely Republican nominee even before the New Hampshire primary and affirmed in that position by fully 86 percent after Super Tuesday (data not shown). Despite the certainty of his nomination, he remained the favorite of only slightly more than a quarter of the electorate even after Super Tuesday. To be sure, a sitting president may fall victim to a coalition of minorities (Mueller 1973) because of sins of omission and commission during his term (Kernell 1978). But equally regular is the resurgence of the popularity of presidents seeking a second term, as the reelection drive heats up. As late as the period immediately following Super Tuesday, that was not happening to the Bush candidacy. The "Big Mo," as Bush himself referred to it, had stalled.

Further evidence of the absence of momentum in the Bush campaign is provided in Table 5. Here, our wave two respondents were asked to recall when they made up their minds for whom to vote. These data then were crosstabulated with general election vote choice.

Among the relatively small number of voters reporting essentially standing decisions, Bush held a commanding lead—over three-to-one. However, he ran only neck-and-neck with Clinton among the considerable number who made up their minds during the primary season. Then, during the summer and early fall, when a number two-thirds as large as the previous group made up their minds for whom to vote, Clinton was the dominant force. Part of this was to be expected, especially the surge coterminous with the Democratic National Convention in July, which further was boosted by the well-timed withdrawal of Ross Perot. But the surge toward Clinton also reflected his success in refining, perhaps even redefining, his image as "the man from (and of) Hope," and his success in portraying more evocatively his positions on jobs, the economy, health care and other pressing domestic issues.

The pro-Clinton surge in August, even as the Republican National Convention was dominating the news, certainly could not have been anticipated. Indeed, quite the opposite should have been predicted. Only the utter failure of the Bush campaign to orchestrate a harmonious convention within the broader framework of a competent understanding of the temper of the electorate could have produced such a catastrophic result (see Edwards' essay

**Table 5. The Timing of Voter Decision-Making During the Election Season**

General Election Vote	<i>When Vote Decision Was Made</i>							Day before Election	Day Election Day
	Standing Decision	Primary Season	July	August	September	October	Debates to within last week		
Bush	75.9%	48.8%	27.9%	26.5%	19.7%	32.2%	34.6%	18.4%	31.2%
Clinton	23.0	45.8	59.3	55.1	49.2	37.4	43.4	36.8	33.8
Perot	1.1	5.1	12.8	18.4	31.1	28.7	22.0	39.5	32.5
Other	—	.3	—	—	—	1.7	—	5.3	2.6
N =	87	297	86	49	61	115	136	38	77

below; also see Dowd 1992 and Weinraub 1992).<sup>2</sup> Those respondents who came to a decision in August opted for Clinton in nearly the same proportions as during July! And Bush’s inability to gain support persisted through September, as decisions to vote for the president even lagged behind decisions to vote for Perot.

Our data reveal that the Bush campaign did not get on track until October. Even then, the train sputtered behind Clinton and could not derail Perot’s resurgence. The debates did not provide a sufficient catalyst for Bush. If anything, the final debate was a definite boon for Clinton. And the final week-end Perot media blitz (along with the Iran-Contra prosecutor’s indictment of Caspar Weinberger) nailed shut the coffin of the Bush campaign (Dowd 1992). For those whose indecision continued right up to election day, the incumbent could do no better than an even split with his competitors.

A final measure of momentum is the ability of a campaign to mobilize non-voters and first-time voters. These voters proved to be an especially important constituency in the 1992 electorate, which ballooned to 55.9 percent of the voting age population—almost four percent more than turned out to vote when George Bush was elected in 1988. Our wave two respondents were asked when they last had voted in a presidential election. We especially were interested in how new voters and voters with spotty records of participation reacted to Bush, Clinton and Perot. The data in Table 6 are particularly instructive.

Of those who voted in 1988, Bush and Clinton garnered nearly equal support, 43.4 percent and 41.4 percent respectively. Given the marginals in

**Table 6. Campaign Mobilization of Regular, Occasional and First-Time Voters**

	Last Voted in		First-time	Never
	1988	1956-1988	Voter	Voted
Bush	42.2%	22.0%	15.4%	37.5%
Clinton	41.4	42.0	61.5	50.0
Perot	15.5	34.0	23.1	12.5
Other	.8	2.0	—	—
N =	850	50	52	8

Table 6, Perot, as expected, trailed far behind with 15.5 percent. The story is very different when we look at those who last voted some time between 1956 and 1984. Forty-two percent of these voters supported Clinton; 34 percent voted for Perot, and only 22 percent cast ballots for Bush. Even more telling is the distribution of votes among those newly eligible to vote, labelled herein as “first-time voters.” More than 61 percent of these young voters took up the Clinton banner, outstripping substantially the 23.1 percent who turned to Perot and the 15.4 percent who followed Bush.

Virtually all of Bush’s support came from voters who had voted in 1988. His inability to mobilize either those left out of the electorate or first-time voters stands in marked contrast to the success of Clinton and of Perot. Turning the table on its side (data not shown), nearly three percent of Clinton’s voters and five percent of Perot’s voters had sat out 1988. Another one percent of Clinton’s voters and 2.5 percent of Perot’s voters had not cast a ballot since 1980. A further 1.2 percent of Clinton’s voters and over three percent of Perot’s voters had not voted since 1976 or earlier! Moreover, young, first-time voters provided a rich harvest for both Clinton and Perot. They comprised 7.8 percent of Clinton’s support and 7.4 percent of Perot’s support.

In sum, these data suggest that the era of the young Reaganauts—heralded as the future of the Republican party—may have come to an end.

Together, these measures of momentum suggest quite strongly that the Bush campaign frittered away the golden advantage of incumbency. Whether that reflected a misjudgment about the quality and persistence of the opposition, or a miscalculation of the disenchantment of the electorate, must await the spate of biographies and autobiographies that will appear within the next several years. Having failed to secure a beachhead among a core of supporters and unable to mobilize new support, the Bush-Quayle campaign could not create momentum. Opportunities such as the Republican National Convention were squandered through poor planning, poor scheduling, and poor selection of themes and targets (Dowd 1992; Weinraub 1992). Important months, such as September, were wasted. Too much depended upon the “end-game,” which ultimately collapsed, felled by the slick debating style of Clinton and Perot’s quip and media blitz.

### **Coopting the Issue Space**

For democratic theory, issues are the most important element in a campaign. A rough-and-ready definition of democratic government that owes much to the “process” school of democratic thought (Ricci 1970) states that

a polity is democratic if the people exert meaningful control over the outputs of government. Among the requirements for democratic governance, Sullivan and O'Connor (1972) emphasize the need for policy choice between candidates, and follow-through once elected. These concerns are echoed in Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida's (1989) study of the impact of foreign policy issues. In both cases, choice among candidates was evident and policy implementation could be documented. Pomper and Lederman (1980) provide additional evidence of follow-through in documenting the high number of party platform promises that have been enacted, or on which passage was attempted during presidents' terms. Thus, it is rational for voters to accept campaign promises as a pledge redeemable in future actions, even if candidates follow Downs and conceive of policy as merely a means to the end of officeholding.

The data in Table 7 present 24 separate issues of concern to voters in 1992. In 17 of 24, at least a 60 percent majority voiced opinions in one direction, a cue that should have been discovered easily by vote-seeking candidates. In four of the seven issues failing the 60 percent threshold, a majority opinion existed; in the remaining three, a bimodal distribution was found. With these raw data, the question the table addresses is: which candidate appealed to the voters holding the dominant views on the issues?

If votes are investments by the electorate in their future, then the Clinton candidacy was the stock that was bought. Of the 17 issues on which the national constituency gave clear advice, Clinton received the most support on 11, Bush on only six. Moreover, on those 11 issues, the margin that Clinton enjoyed over Bush averaged 13.2 percent, whereas Bush's average lead over Clinton on the six issues that advantaged his candidacy was only 8.2 percent. On issues where the nation spoke clearly, then, Clinton's policy proposals were favored more often and by larger majorities than those commanded by Bush. On those four issues that failed to reach the 60 percent threshold but on which a majority opinion existed, Bush was preferred on each by an average margin of 11.2 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, even here, with a record of foreign policy achievement and a strategy for economic recovery that in retrospect was working, Bush could not use the power of his incumbency and the bully-pulpit that went with it to convince the American people that his positions should prevail in number and in intensity. His candidacy foundered on the shoals of the Neustadt principle of presidential power (1964): Bush failed to persuade.

**Table 7. Issue Cues and Candidate Electoral Coalitions**

Issue (in order asked)	Direction of Dominant Response	Percent of Dominant Responders	Bush	Clinton	Perot
The government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic situation for women.	Agree	87.7%	36.3%	47.0%	15.9%
By law a woman should be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.	Agree	67.9	29.1	52.0	18.2
Defense spending should be increased.	Disagree	77.2	34.8	45.8	18.5
The government in Washington should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce government spending.	Disagree	65.9	30.2	52.1	16.9
Prayer should be allowed in the public schools.	Agree	75.0	46.3	36.7	16.6
Government spending on improving and protecting the environment should be increased.	Agree	73.2	32.5	50.1	16.6
A constitutional amendment to balance the national budget should be passed.	Agree	72.3	41.8	38.3	19.5
If your state faces a financial crisis, the state legislature should raise taxes rather than reduce spending.	Disagree	75.4	45.8	34.7	18.8

The government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minority groups.	Agree	73.5	33.9	49.7	15.7
The government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living.	*	*	*	*	*
Women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government.	Agree	92.5	37.6	44.0	17.4
This country should pay more attention to problems at home and less attention to problems in other parts of the world.	Agree	74.4	34.0	46.9	18.5
The United States should continue to cooperate with Russia.	Agree	87.9	39.3	42.1	17.8
Because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion.	Disagree	83.3	44.6	36.7	17.8
The government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at low costs.	Agree	81.0	33.3	49.0	17.3
The federal government should increase taxes to decrease the deficit.	Disagree	58.2	47.8	33.7	17.3
The character of a candidate is as important as the policies that the candidate proposes.	Agree	76.1	47.5	35.5	16.5
A cleaner environment means losing jobs.	Disagree	82.5	37.2	45.2	16.9
As the last remaining super-power, the U.S. must always be prepared to intervene militarily to keep peace in the world.	Agree	52.6	49.5	36.5	13.0

**Table 7 (continued)**

Issue (in order asked)	Direction of Dominant Response	Percent of Dominant Responders	Percentage of Dominant Responders Voting for		
			Bush	Clinton	Perot
The boundaries of election districts should be drawn to give minority voters a political advantage.	Disagree	76.8	43.2	38.0	18.1
American families would be better and stronger if the national government spent more on domestic social programs.	*	*	*	*	*
Positive family values are endangered because there are not enough good paying jobs to go around.	*	*	*	*	*
If government provides parents the money and the opportunity to choose the schools their children attend, that choice should not be limited to public schools alone.	Agree	59.1	44.9	36.5	17.9
The federal government should spend to create jobs, even if that increases the deficit.	Disagree	59.1	41.4	32.3	18.6

\* No majority viewpoint.



## Discussion

George Bush lost an election that he should have won. His defeat in 1992 underlines how far a president can fall in a short time. In the afterglow of Desert Storm, when his popularity reached heights about which other presidents have but dreamt, Bush seemed invincible. The supposedly premium Democratic hopefuls, like the “strategic candidates” of the literature on congressional elections (Jacobson and Kernell 1983), one-by-one took themselves out of the running, leaving only the second team for the sacrificial slaughter. That is not the way things worked out.

What is clear from this analysis is that Bush—or the handlers to whom he delegated responsibility—failed to execute sound principles of campaigning. First, he did not secure a firm foundation of core supporters from among his fellow partisans or his ideological compatriots. He did not capitalize fully on the initial support that was intended for him, even among those committed to supporting the Republican candidate, whomever that might be, much less attract any undecided voters.

Second, his campaign stalled in first gear. There was no evidence of momentum generated during the primary season. That inaction allowed Clinton to close the gap, then pull ahead during the Republican debacles of the summer of 1992. Too much emphasis on the “end-game” strategy, whether by design or default, allowed the competition to draw the lines of the battle and to define the opponent—as Bush and Atwater had done to Dukakis in 1988. Put on the defensive, Bush could not and did not recover, as was reflected in, among other things, his inability to mobilize new support from non-participants and first-time participants.

Finally, our data suggest that Bush could not manipulate the issue space of the campaign, even in arenas of traditional Republican strength such as foreign policy and management of the domestic economy. If, with Theodore J. Lowi (1993), one regards Bush’s critical re-election problem as ‘running out of foreign policy crises’ too soon, then Bush could have chanted a litany of global changes consistent with, if not actually produced by, the foreign policy goals of the Reagan and Bush administrations. Unprompted by steady rhetoric to this effect, neither pundits nor voters paused to take stock of the New World Order.

If, with the Democrats, one regards Bush’s Achilles Heel to have been the economy (“It’s the economy, stupid!”), then Bush could have claimed a program in place that was beginning to produce a slow but steady turn-around, and extant conditions preferable to the double-digit inflation, unemployment, and interest rates of the Carter years against which the Reagan-Bush ticket had inveighed successfully in 1980. Indeed, to the extent that the

election did turn on the macroeconomic issues of taxes and government expenditures, the data in Table 7 show that Bush enjoyed a sizable lead among voters who held the dominant view on such questions. However, Bush's economic leadership never earned full credit in the discourse of the 1992 elections, because his political judgment failed to focus (and thus to capitalize) upon the direction and comparative condition of the economy and upon his electoral advantage on the macro-questions of taxing and spending. Instead, the time, attention, and resources of the Bush-Quayle campaign were diverted too often from the political-economy core of conservatism (and from the foreign policy posture informed by and reflective of that core) to the comparatively peripheral, social dimension of conservatism with which Patrick Buchanan had stung the President during the nomination race.

If presidential power is the power to persuade, then George Bush effectively abandoned his bully-pulpit to the debater from Little Rock and the quipster from Dallas. To be sure, elections do not rest entirely upon tactics and strategies. They are human dramas of great moment, frequently turning upon living conditions, social forces, interactions across political boundaries, and other substantive matters that form the tides of history. For George Bush, however, the electoral drama of 1992 was a tragedy, in which he and his campaign principals starred.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Because one of the theoretical foci of the panel surveys was partisanship defined by level of government, or segmented partisanship in our nomenclature (Maggiotto and Wekkin 1992a, 1992b), it is important to identify which partisanship questions were employed. The Presidency is obviously a national contest, and, therefore, the national partisanship questions were used. These questions were modeled after the standard ANES battery. The only difference is the inclusion of a level referent asking respondents to think particularly of the national, state or local levels.

<sup>2</sup>George Bush has said that he made an agreement with Patrick Buchanan in the interest of solidifying the rightwing portion of his party base, under the terms of which Buchanan was allowed to speak without time limit and without submitting the text of his convention speech to Bush for prior approval (we are indebted to George C. Edwards III for sharing this insight). Dowd (1992) and Weinraub (1992) report that the national convention debacle also stemmed in degree from poor decision-making on the part of Craig Fuller, and from the noninvolvement of ex-Secretary of State James Baker, who sulked in Wyoming during the convention and limited himself to editing Bush's acceptance speech.

<sup>3</sup>To be sure, rational voters cast ballots based upon the summation of utilities, and neither number of issues nor number of voters preferring an alternative should be confused with the intensity calculations that underly the measurement of utilities.

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