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Although much recent work suggests that contemporary presidential campaigns have more powerful electoral effects than were seen in previous decades, there has been little research that examines the actual effect of recent campaigns on individual vote choice. Using the 1980 NES panel study, I show that the overwhelming majority of individual votes can be accounted for from attitudes such as party identification and presidential approval that are measured *before* the political conventions, and that changes in orientations during the campaign had limited effects on individual vote choice and negligible consequences for the electoral outcome. Moreover, models derived from the 1980 panel data can predict with a great deal of accuracy the aggregate outcomes of the 1984 and 1988 presidential contests. I argue that the results support an "activation" model of campaign effects in recent elections: rather than simply reinforcing individuals' preexisting vote intentions, the campaigns served mainly to activate existing political predispositions and make them electorally relevant. At the same time, the results show that campaigns have the *potential* to exert larger electoral effects, but in recent elections they have not done so.

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, political scientists viewed presidential campaigns as having relatively minor effects on voters and electoral outcomes. Early studies of voting behavior showed a high degree of stability of individual vote preferences during election years (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954), as well as a similarly high degree of stability of individual partisan preferences from one election to the next (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1962). Given this impressive lack of change both within and across elections, it was not uncommon for political scientists to assume that "campaigns only minimally influenced the outcome of elections" (Salmore and Salmore 1989, 4). For a variety of reasons, however, the view of presidential campaigns as electorally inconsequential has fallen, if not into disrepute, then into serious disrepair.

The most significant cause of the uncertainty surrounding the "minimal effects" model of presidential campaigns has been the well-documented decline of partisan loyalties in the American electorate since the mid-1960s (Abramson 1982;

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Wattenberg 1986). As individuals shifted away from strong partisanship, and as new cohorts entered the electorate with weaker partisan attachments, the number of voters thought to be potentially influenced in a given campaign increased dramatically (Salmore and Salmore 1989). Survey data bore out this potential for campaign effects, as the proportion of individuals who reported making their final voting decision during the general election campaign rose from 25% in 1948 to highs of 45% in 1976 and 40% during the 1980 and 1988 contests (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1990, 52; Flanigan and Zingale 1987, 167). Other empirical studies showed possible increases in the electoral effects of campaign-related factors such as candidate personality judgments, media coverage, debates, and television advertising (Hershey 1989; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Markus and Converse 1979; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Patterson 1980). Finally, numerous surveys showed significant volatility in the electorate's aggregate candidate preferences during recent campaigns (Allsop and Weisberg 1988; Crespi 1988), apparently large shifts in reported vote intention during the 1988 contest, and several instances of last-minute surges in support for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and Michael Dukakis in 1988 (Frankovic 1981; Farah and Klein 1989). Campaigns, it appears, may be much more influential than was originally thought, and of course a multimillion dollar political consulting and campaign industry has arisen to exploit that possibility (Agranoff 1976; Sabato 1981).

Curiously, during this period of increased interest in presidential campaigns, there has been little research on their "bottom line," that is, their effect on individual vote choice. Empirical research has focused largely on analyses of voters interviewed at the end of the campaign, or on analyses of trends in the aggregate distribution of vote intentions over time, leaving the evidence of the effect of campaigns on the vote necessarily indirect and inconclusive. Further, previous longitudinal research has focused only on short-term changes in vote intention as evidence of the campaign's impact (Mendelsohn and O'Keefe 1976; Patterson 1980); few studies report the overall net effect of the campaign on the individual's vote choice, nor whether choices were determined by precampaign political orientations or by changes in attitudes and cognitions that took place during the contest.

In this paper, I address these issues by first analyzing panel data collected from interviews with the same individuals at various points during the 1980 campaign. I show that the overwhelming majority of individual votes could be predicted from attitudes such as party identification and presidential approval that were measured *before* the political party conventions. Changes in orientations during the general election period had little impact on vote choices at both the individual and aggregate level. Moreover, models derived from the 1980 panel data predict with a great deal of accuracy the aggregate outcomes of the 1984 and 1988 presidential contests. I argue that the results support an "activation" model of campaign effects: rather than necessarily reinforcing individuals' preexisting vote intentions, recent

campaigns have served mainly to activate existing political predispositions and make them electorally relevant. The results, however, do suggest that campaigns have the potential to exert larger effects, but that in elections they have done so to only a limited extent.

Campaign Effects on Individual Vote Choice

Reinforcement and Conversion

In their classic studies of the 1940 and 1948 campaigns, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) and Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) showed that the dominant effect of both campaigns was to reinforce individuals' initial vote intentions. More than one-half of individuals expressed an intention to vote for the same candidate at the end of the campaign as they did at the outset, leading to the conclusion that, for most voters, the events and stimuli of the campaign period served to "preserve prior decisions instead of initiating new [ones]" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 87). On the other hand, only 5% to 8% of all voters converted during the campaign from an intention to vote for one candidate in May or June to an October preference for the other. The findings suggested that there were serious limits on the potential of campaigns to *change* voter decisions, and the results quickly became part of the core of the emerging "minimal effects" model in campaign, media, and mass communication research (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Klapper 1960).

More recent presidential election research has cast doubt on whether reinforcement continues to be the typical effect of presidential election campaigns. As mentioned above, scholars have documented the increased number of independents and initially "uncommitted" voters, the increased volatility in candidate preferences during the campaign, and some short-term impact of the mass media and other campaign stimuli on vote intentions, all of which seem to indicate that campaign effects are more widespread now than they were during the 1940 and 1948 contests (Allsop and Weisberg 1988; Mendelsohn and O'Keefe 1976; Patterson 1980).

While there has been a steady growth of empirical research that claims larger campaign effects than were seen in the 1940s, it is premature to dismiss the "minimal effects" model in accounting for the impact of the campaign in contemporary elections. First, much of the evidence against the reinforcement model may be criticized on methodological grounds. Studies based on cross-sectional analyses are incapable of determining the extent of individual-level changes in vote intention, and rely instead on indirect indicators of campaign change, such as the individual's self-reported "time of final decision" or precampaign preference. Second, the election year panel analyses that have been conducted since the 1940s (Mendelsohn and O'Keefe 1976; Patterson and McClure 1976; Patterson 1980)

have not reported the relationship between individuals' initial preferences and either their vote choice or late-October vote intention, leaving the ultimate extent of reinforcement unknown.

Third, and most important, is the fact that testing the "minimal effects" model involves more than assessing the extent of stability and change in self-reported vote intentions. Along with the presentation of reinforcement and conversion effects in the early studies was a detailed discussion of how campaigns may "activate" prior political orientations, and bring the electorate's votes in line with their underlying predispositions (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 73–104; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954, 280–96). The early studies' conceptual framework emphasized the roles that prior *preferences* and *predispositions* play in limiting the abilities of campaigns and mass communication to influence voters; thus to understand the nature and extent of campaign-period changes in the contemporary electorate, both reinforcement and activation effects need to be estimated in empirical research.

Activation

In both the 1940 and 1948 elections, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and their colleagues found that a large proportion of initially uncommitted individuals ultimately cast votes that were consistent with their underlying political predispositions based on social class, religion, and place of residence. For these voters, "what the campaign did . . . was not to form new opinions but to raise old opinions over the threshold of awareness and decision. . . . Political campaigns are important primarily because they *activate* latent predispositions" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 74, emphasis in the original). According to this process, individual votes depend less on the changes in attitudes and gains in information that occur during campaigns than on long-term dispositions that are present at the outset of the contest. These dispositions "set the goal; all that is read and heard (during the campaign) becomes helpful and effective insofar as it guides the voter toward his already 'chosen' destination" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1954, 83). In the activation model, then, the mass media, campaign stimuli, and interpersonal communication processes function largely to give individuals reasons to vote in accord with their underlying predispositions; only rarely do these processes result in votes for the candidate who the individual initially opposes, or the candidate who is "opposed" to the individual's political predispositions.

The "predispositions" activated by the campaign were based solely on group memberships or demographic characteristics in the early Columbia studies. Social group categorizations aside from race, however, represent relatively weak predictors of individual behavior in the present-day American electorate (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1990; Niemi and Weisberg 1983, 11). Yet this does not necessarily indicate that the activation process currently is inapplicable, and Lazarsfeld et al. recognized that "a finer index of predispositions, containing basic political

attitudes" may even have had greater predictive power in the early studies (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 103). In fact, several likely alternative bases of political activation are suggested in more contemporary theories of voting behavior. One obvious choice is the individual's precampaign party identification, as many studies report a widespread tendency of voters to return to their partisan camp as campaigns progress (Flanigan and Zingale 1987; Farah and Klein 1989). The notion of party identification as a summary indicator of the individual's political predispositions, based on social group, regional and family influences, fits neatly into this categorization as well.

More recent research points to the powerful electoral effects of economic factors and incumbent performance evaluations, or what may be termed the "referendum model" of presidential elections (Erikson 1989; Fiorina 1981; Lewis-Beck 1989; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1982; Markus 1982, 1988; Sigelman 1979). Scholars working with aggregate data show that presidential electoral outcomes can be predicted with a great deal of accuracy with such variables as changes in real disposable income per capita and precampaign indicators of presidential popularity. At the individual level, Markus (1988) shows that both national economic conditions and individual "pocketbook" considerations are significant independent predictors of vote choice, and Lewis-Beck (1989), Markus (1982), and many others show the importance of economic and political performance evaluations of the incumbent president in determining votes as well. The referendum model suggests that presidential elections are ultimately decided on the state of the national economy and the perceived ability of the incumbent administration to manage it successfully; the effect of the campaign in such a model is to "heighten voter awareness of prevailing economic conditions and the electoral relevance thereof" and otherwise activate and "reinforce preexisting dispositions" (Markus 1988, 152).

These orientations, along with party identification and race, represent variables whose effects may be activated during political campaigns. Often, these factors are pitted against short-term, campaign-related judgments concerning candidate image, personality, and the like as competing influences on individual vote choice (Erikson 1989; Salmore and Salmore 1989). Yet it is possible that most individuals' judgments of candidate competence, integrity, and other personality characteristics are formed by the end of the primary campaign, with little new information or change taking place during the general election period. This may be especially true when politicians long visible on the national political scene become the major party candidates, as occurred in both 1980 and 1984. Consequently, "personality" effects need not be equated with "campaign" effects, and it may be the case that prior personality judgments represent initial dispositions that individuals bring to the general election campaign, and which are activated by the events and stimuli that unfold during the contest. Such evaluations, however, are conceptually distinct from party identification and the referendum variables, and therefore I report results from models with and without the personality factors included in the analyses.

Conversion Effects Revisited

The activation model suggests that the main function of the general election period is to make electorally relevant certain attitudes that individuals bring to the campaign, that is, that individual votes are determined from the predispositions that are in place before the general election period begins. Given this process, the notion of campaign "conversion" takes on a somewhat different meaning. Instead of simply representing changes in individuals' stated preferences, campaign conversion in this view refers to changes away from the candidate toward whom individuals are disposed to support, given increases in knowledge or changes in political attitudes that take place during campaigns.

Certainly much new information regarding candidate personality traits may emerge during campaigns, and indeed it is this type of political learning that scholars associate most closely with "campaign effects" (Farah and Klein 1989; Frankovic 1981). Recent research suggests that even more long-term orientations such as party identification and presidential performance and approval judgments change during campaigns as well, and these changes may have important influences on converting individual votes away from their precampaign dispositions (Alsop and Weisberg 1988; Markus 1982). It remains to be seen the extent to which precampaign values on these variables are activated and made electorally relevant, or whether campaign-period changes in these orientations are more powerful determinants of the individual vote.

Data, Methods, and Statistical Models

I test the extent of campaign influence on the vote in several different ways, at both the individual and aggregate levels of analysis.[1] Using panel data from the 1980 National Election Study, I specify alternative activation models of the individual vote in November with variables measured in the June wave of the panel study, before the political conventions and just after the last primary elections. In addition, I include the *changes* in all relevant variables that took place during the campaign as predictors of the vote as well, in order to determine whether initial values or campaign-period changes could account more adequately for individual votes.[2]

Two activation and conversion models are specified and tested with the 1980 panel data. In the first, individual votes are modeled as a function of two long-term orientations, party identification and race, two referendum-model variables,

[1]For an excellent discussion of the goals and procedures involved in individual and aggregate level comparisons, see Jennings and Niemi (1981). My specific goals here are to build individual level models, and then to link the individual-level processes to aggregate level changes through calculation of each variable's net impact on the overall vote distribution.

[2]Unfortunately, the latest preelection wave of the 1980 survey took place in September, making analyses of late-campaign changes difficult. I test late-campaign changes indirectly by applying the models derived from the June–September panel period to the October portion of the traditional NES pre-post election study. These results are reported in footnote 9.

presidential approval and perceptions of the state of the national economy, as well as *changes* in each of these variables that take place during the general election campaign. In the second, I include ratings of candidate personality on the two dimensions, competence and integrity, that have been shown in previous research to be most relevant for individual vote choice (Markus 1982; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986). In equation form, they may be expressed as:

$$V = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PID + \beta_2 \Delta PID + \beta_3 RACE + \beta_4 PRES + \beta_5 \Delta PRES + \beta_6 ECON + \beta_7 \Delta ECON + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

and

$$V = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PID + \beta_2 \Delta PID + \beta_3 RACE + \beta_4 PRES + \beta_5 \Delta PRES + \beta_6 ECON + \beta_7 \Delta ECON + \beta_8 COMP + \beta_9 \Delta COMP + \beta_{10} INT + \beta_{11} \Delta INT + \epsilon \quad (2)$$

where

V = the individual's major party vote for president in 1980
PID = party identification in June 1980
ΔPID = change in party identification, June–September 1980
$RACE$ = self-described race of respondent
$PRES$ = presidential approval in June 1980
$\Delta PRES$ = change in presidential approval, June–September 1980
$ECON$ = perception of state of national economy, June 1980
$\Delta ECON$ = change in perception of state of national economy, June–September 1980
$COMP$ = evaluation of net candidate competence, June 1980
$\Delta COMP$ = change in evaluation of net candidate competence, June–September 1980
INT = evaluation of net candidate integrity, June 1980
ΔINT = change in evaluation of net candidate integrity, June–September 1980
β_0 = constant
ϵ = error term
β_1 to β_{11} = regression weights linking variables to the vote

All variables are contained in the 1980 National Election Major Panel Study and represent widely used indicators of these concepts. The analysis of the panel data is limited in general to the 734 respondents who were interviewed in June, September, and November of 1980, and specifically in the vote models to the 496 respondents who voted for one of the two major party candidates.[3]

The independent variables were measured as in previous research, and all were scaled so that positive values are pro-Republican and negative values pro-Democratic. Missing values were recorded to "0," the theoretical neutral point on each variable's scale. *PID* is the standard seven-point party identification scale

[3]I follow previous analyses and ignore the handful of voters who cast ballots for John Anderson or other minor-party candidates (cf. Markus 1982; Kenney and Rice 1988).

(coded as −3 for "strong Democratic" to +3 for "strong Republican"), *PRES* is a five-point item constructed from responses to the initial question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the job Jimmy Carter has been doing as President?" and its follow-up to measure strong or not-so-strong approval or disapproval (coded as −2 for "strongly approve" to +2 for "strongly disapprove"). *ECON* is a five-point item constructed from responses to a question and the follow-up intensity question: "What about the economy? Would you say that over the past year the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?," (coded as −2 for "much better" to +2 for "much worse"). *RACE* is a dichotomous variable with all white respondents in one category (1) and all nonwhite respondents in another (−1).

The personality ratings followed the procedures outlined in Markus (1982). Based on the factor analyses presented there for all candidate trait evaluations, I constructed a nine-point scale for candidate competence from "how well" respondents thought the adjectives "knowledgeable," "inspiring," and "strong leader," described Carter and Reagan, and scales for integrity from how well respondents thought "moral," "dishonest," and "power hungry" described each candidate. A net competence scale and a net integrity scale were created by subtracting the Carter scale value from the Reagan score.

The dependent variable was coded as 0 for individuals who voted for Jimmy Carter and 1 for those who voted for Ronald Reagan. Given the dichotomous nature of the variable, OLS estimation of the model is no longer appropriate, and I use instead the generalized least-squares procedure developed by Goldberger (Aldrich and Nelson 1984; Hanushek and Jackson 1977). This technique was chosen over the probit or logit specifications for several reasons. First, the resultant coefficients can be interpreted directly as changes in the probability of voting for Reagan, given a one-unit change in each independent variable. Second, the GLS coefficients, unlike logit or probit estimates, can be multiplied by the mean of each independent variable to assess the impact of each factor on the *level* of the dependent variable, and hence on the aggregate outcome of the election (Achen 1982, 71–73; Markus 1988, 144). In this way the "importance" of each independent variable on the overall vote distribution may be assessed, and the coefficients from these models can be applied directly to other elections where only cross-sectional data (i.e., only aggregate or "mean" values of change in the electorate) are available for analysis.

After developing the 1980 individual-level models of activation and conversion effects, I then apply the models to other election periods, where only cross-sectional data are available for analysis. I use the NES Continuous Monitoring Survey from the 1984 election, and data from the ABC News-Washington Post election surveys in July and October 1988 to generate predicted outcomes of these elections, with and without campaign-period change. In these aggregate-level analyses, the mean values of the independent variables for all registered voters are multiplied by the coefficients from equation (1) to generate the predicted scores. Equation (1) is used due to the lack of comparable personality variables in the 1988 data, and because it

will be seen that the personality variables add little to the aggregate predictive accuracy in the 1980 panel models.

Finally, the role of initial preferences and their relationship to vote choice and campaign effects will be examined using the 1980 NES data and the 1988 ABC-Washington Post surveys. There is no direct vote intention question in the 1980 NES survey, as the June wave was conducted before the parties nominated Carter and Reagan as their candidates. There is, however, a somewhat complex series of preference questions that respondents are led through, asking them who their "first choice" is for the Democratic and Republican nominations, and then asking them to choose which they would vote for in a mock election. Not surprisingly, this results in many respondents who did not intend at that time to vote for Carter or Reagan, but 223 respondents out of the 496 major party voters, or 45%, did express a vote preference for one of these two candidates. In the 1988 ABC-Post surveys, I used the standard "If the election were held today. . ." vote intention question, along with the follow-up for initially undecided voters.

FINDINGS

Individual-Level Models: 1980

The initial estimation of equation 1 showed that all variables were statistically significant, except for perceptions of the state of the national economy and changes in economic perceptions. The unstandardized coefficients for each variable were both less than .01, and were smaller than their respective standard errors as well. This indicates that such "simple" retrospective economic evaluations exert impact on the vote through other variables, in particular party identification and presidential approval (Lewis-Beck 1989), and hence need not be included in the vote prediction model. Table 1 reports the results of the estimation of equations 1 and 2 after omitting the insignificant effects of national economic perceptions.

For each variable, I report its mean value, unstandardized and standardized GLS estimate, as well as its "impact" on the level of dependent variable, calculated as b multiplied by the mean of X (Achen 1982).[4] These statistics, along with the summary measures of model fit and changes in predictive accuracy with and without the inclusion of the change scores, reveal several interesting findings regarding the impact of the general election campaign period on the individual and aggregate vote. Equation 1.1 shows that in terms of unstandardized effects, i.e., changes in the estimated probability of a Reagan vote holding all other variables

[4]As Achen (1982) notes, assessing the effect of an independent variable on the "level" of a dependent variable makes sense only by comparing the distribution of the independent variable in a particular sample with a real or hypothetical alternative distribution. In this case, since the independent variables are all coded so that zero is the theoretical neutral point (cf. also Markus 1982), the "impact" of a given variable represents the extent to which it contributed to the level of the dependent variable (the aggregate vote outcome), compared to a hypothetical "neutral" electorate whose average value on the independent variable would have been zero.

TABLE 1

REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING 1980 VOTE CHOICE FROM JUNE ATTITUDES AND JUNE–SEPTEMBER ATTITUDE CHANGE

		1.1			1.2		
Variable	Mean	b^a	Beta	Impact ($b^* \bar{X}$)	b^a	Beta	Impact ($b^* \bar{X}$)
June *PID*	−.175	.100*	.44	−.018	.086*	.40	−.015
		(.006)			(.006)		
Δ *PID*	−.042	.056*	.12	−.002	.047*	.11	−.002
		(.011)			(.010)		
June Approval	.619	.105*	.31	.065	.054*	.15	.033
		(.009)			(.009)		
Δ Approval	−.067	.094*	.23	−.006	.054*	.12	−.004
		(.010)			(.010)		
Race	.794	.065*	.08	.052	.065*	.07	.052
		(.012)			(.011)		
June Competence	1.075				.023*	.12	.025
					(.004)		
Δ Competence	−.422				.016*	.10	−.007
					(.004)		
June Integrity	−.619				.016*	.04	−.010
					(.004)		
Δ Integrity	.207				.020*	.09	.004
					(.004)		
Constant		.487		.487	.494		.494
Adjusted *R*-Squared			.53			.59	
Predicted Reagan Vote with No Campaign Change			58.6			57.9	
Actual Reagan Vote			58.9			58.9	
Percent Correctly Predicted with No Campaign Change			81			84	
Percent Correctly Predicted, Full Model			84			88	

Source: 1980 NES Major Panel File, major party voters ($N = 496$).

[a]Coefficients are generalized least-squared estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is coded 1 for Reagan voters, 0 for Carter voters.

*significant at .05 level.

constant, the precampaign values of party identification and presidential approval have the strongest effects, followed by changes in presidential approval, race, and changes in party identification. The standardized effects show almost the same pattern, with June party identification and presidential approval carrying the most weight.

While these variables are the most influential, both change score variables are statistically significant, and for presidential approval, almost as large in magnitude

as the initial June value. This indicates that the *potential* for widespread conversion exists as this variable changes during the course of the campaign, and to a lesser extent, the same process is true for party identification (cf. also Allsop and Weisberg 1988). But the *actual* effect of these campaign-period changes in converting individual votes was limited, and their effect in altering the electoral outcome was negligible. This may be shown by using the coefficients in equation 1.1 to generate a predicted vote for each individual with and without including the campaign-period change scores.[5] These calculations show that 81% of the votes in 1980 could be predicted correctly based solely on race and the June values of party identification and presidential approval, i.e., without taking into account any attitude changes during the campaign whatsoever. The figure rises only three percentage points when the change score variables are included. This 81% predictive accuracy is roughly 10–15 percentage points higher than the "predisposition" vote models reported in the early Lazarsfeld-Berelson studies (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 95), and shows that campaign period "activation" is at least as prevalent in contemporary elections as it was in the 1940s.

In addition, the stability of the individual-level predicted votes was extremely high, as 91% of the sample was predicted to cast votes for the same candidate after taking into account campaign changes as before.[6] This indicates that although changes in these variables did occur during the campaign, their effects served largely to maintain the vote predictions based on the individuals' precampaign dispositions. In fact, among individuals who were initially predicted to support Carter, 81% either expressed the same party identification or changed in a pro-Democratic direction, and 79% either expressed the same level of presidential approval or changed in a pro-Carter direction as well. Conversely, among predicted Reagan supporters, 79% either retained the same party identification or changed their attitudes in a pro-Republican direction, and the same percentage was either constant or more strongly pro-Reagan by September on the presidential approval variable. These patterns show that changes in individual orientations for the most part went in accordance with their precampaign dispositions, and that the changes that went in the opposite direction were of sufficient magnitude to alter the vote predictions of only 9% of the sample.

The net effect of the campaign-period changes on the aggregate vote distribution was even more limited, as the individual changes toward Reagan and Carter tended to cancel one another out in the entire sample. The effect of each independent variable on the overall vote distribution is shown in the fourth column of table 1 as its "impact" on the dependent variable. As can be seen, the net effect on

[5]To generate the latter prediction, the change-score variables were set to zero. Thus, the predicted probability of voting for Reagan without campaign-period change was estimated as $V = .487 + .10PID + .105PRES + .065RACE$, and with campaign period as $V = .487 + .10PID + .105PRES + .065RACE + .056\Delta PID + .094\Delta PRES$. Those with predicted probabilities less than .5 were predicted to be Carter voters, and those greater than .5 as Reagan voters.

[6]The correlation between the two predicted probability estimates was .92.

the vote of changes in party identification during the campaign was approximately .2% in favor of Carter, with approximately a .6% pro-Carter change attributable to shifts in approval ratings. So although the change-score variables potentially could have resulted in more altered votes, as evidenced by the size of their unstandardized regression coefficients, their actual effect on the outcome was negligible, since the *average* change among voters during the campaign in both independent variables was extremely small.

Far larger contributions to the aggregate vote were made by the low levels of June presidential approval, which netted Reagan almost seven percentage points (compared to an electorate which would have been neutral on this factor), and the preponderance of white voters in the electorate, who were estimated to have a .13 (.065 $\times$ 2) greater probability of voting for Reagan than nonwhites, ceteris paribus. These variables, along with the June levels of party identification, resulted in an extremely accurate aggregate level prediction of the Reagan vote, very close to its actual value among this sample of voters (58.9%). Thus, the activation model receives support at the aggregate level as well.

Equation 1.2 adds individual evaluations of candidate personality traits to the analysis. The model as a whole shows some improvement, as the R-squared value reaches .59 and the proportion of the sample whose vote choices are predicted correctly is 88%, quite close to the values reported in other analyses of the 1980 election (Kenney and Rice 1988; Markus 1982). All personality variables are statistically significant, and interestingly, the change score values for both competence and integrity are fairly large, and in the case of integrity, larger than its corresponding value for the initial level in June. However, as in equation 1.1, while the change score coefficients indicate a potential for campaign-period changes in estimated vote probabilities, the *net* effect of change in personality evaluations was slight, due to relatively small changes in these ratings at the aggregate level. Thus, the predicted Reagan vote based solely on June attitudes and race was quite close to the actual distribution in the sample, and the net effect of the campaign on votes was also less than one point in the Democrats' favor. At the individual level again, the campaign period changes were not large enough to change many vote predictions: 91% of individuals had identical predictions over time, with only 4% more of the sample's votes being correctly predicted by taking into account the changes in personality ratings and other variables during the course of the campaign.[7]

Aggregate Predictions of Electoral Outcomes: 1980, 1984, 1988

The main difference in the results of equations 1 and 2 is the greater explanatory power of the model at the individual level, i.e., in accounting for and predicting individual votes. At the aggregate level, the two models are essentially identical, indicating that for purposes of predicting electoral outcomes and accounting

[7]The correlation between the predicted probability of voting for Reagan with and without including campaign period change from this model was .94.

TABLE 2

PREDICTED AGGREGATE ELECTORAL OUTCOMES, 1980, 1984, AND 1988

	1980		1984		1988	
Variable	Mean	Impact	Mean	Impact	Mean	Impact
Summer *PID*	–.175	–.018	–.249	–.025	–.094	–.009
Δ *PID*, Summer-Fall	–.042	–.002	.342	.019	–.033	–.022
Summer Approval	.619	.065	.383	.040	.142	.014
Δ Approval	–.067	–.006	.138	.013	.152	.014
Race	.794	.052	.80	.052	.681	.044
Constant	.487		.487		.487	
Predicted Republican Vote from Summer Attitudes	58.6		55.4		53.6	
Predicted Republican Vote, Full Model	57.8		58.6		54.8	

Sources: 1980: Table 1, Model 1.1.
1984: NES Continuous Monitoring Survey File, Version Nos. 4–5, April 13 to July 11, N = 1,264, and Version Nos. 9–11, October 8 to November 5, N = 355 (registered voters only)
1988: ABC News/Washington Post National Adult Surveys July 6–11, 1988, N = 1,539, and September 1–October 10, N = 16, 898 (registered voters only)

Model: $Vote = .487 + .100PID_{Summer} + .056(\Delta\ PID) + .105Approval_{Summer} + .094(\Delta\ Approval) + .065Race$

for net aggregate change in the outcome that can be attributed to the campaign period, equation 1.1 is equally appropriate. This is important because many campaign period data sets, including those analyzed here for 1988, do not contain explicit measures of candidate competence and integrity, though practically all surveys ask basic questions concerning party identification and presidential approval. Thus, model 1.1 can serve as a general equation to determine net campaign effects in other election periods. Table 2 displays a summary of the earlier findings for 1980, and then reports the results of applying the model to the 1984 and 1988 elections.

Surprisingly, the 1984 results show the largest net campaign-period effects of any of the three elections. The approval rating of President Reagan was quite high going into the campaign (although not as high as the *dis*approval rating for Carter in 1980), resulting in a prediction of 55.4% of the vote for Reagan, taking into account the partisan and racial distribution of the electorate in the spring as well. The large changes in party identification during that contest in favor of the Republicans (Allsop and Weisberg 1988), as well as a strong surge in presidential approval during the summer and fall resulted in a net impact of the campaign of just more than three percentage points. Thus, while the activation model initially predicted a large Republican victory, the campaign succeeded in converting enough voters to turn the contest into a landslide.

The results from the ABC-Washington Post survey taken in July 1988, just before the Democratic convention, show very similar campaign effects as in 1980. Taking into account the aggregate distributions on party, race, and presidential approval, the activation model predicted a 53.6% Republican vote, with campaign-period changes in presidential popularity and party identification accounting for just over a 1% net increase in the Republican totals. The actual vote outcome was 53.9% for the Republicans, indicating that the activation model could account quite well for the overall vote, along with a small increase in Republican fortunes that could be attributed to the campaign.

The findings in table 2 confirm that for all the presidential elections in the 1980s, the outcomes were essentially predictable from the electorate's spring or early summer dispositions.[8] The effect of the general election campaign in shifting the aggregate vote distribution was small, and the maximum overall net impact of the campaign was about 3% (cf. also Markus 1988). Thus, the results of table 1 and table 2 confirm the activation hypotheses at both the individual and aggregate levels.[9]

The Role of Initial Preferences

I have shown thus far the role that precampaign political dispositions play in determining individual votes and aggregate electoral outcomes. Yet campaign effects traditionally have been viewed as changes in voters' *stated* preferences, and the original studies did show that, for a majority of the electorate, voter preferences at the outset of the campaign remained stable over time. The original analyses cannot be replicated completely with the data from the 1980 panel study because, as noted above, June vote intentions were asked only in an indirect manner.

[8]I also applied the 1980 panel model to cross-sectional data collected in 1976, although differences in measures make the comparison somewhat difficult. Nevertheless, using the CBS-New York Times national surveys collected in June and October of 1976, I calculated a June vote prediction for then-President Ford among registered voters of 48.7%, and an October prediction of 49.9%. The campaign-period increase in Republican fortunes was due to a three-point increase in Ford's job approval during that time, which offset a very slight pro-Democratic drift in party identification during the campaign. Since the surveys did not contain a single measure of job approval, I averaged responses to the domestic policy and foreign policy approval questions. The results should therefore be interpreted with caution; nevertheless, they suggest that the model is roughly applicable to other campaigns where the GOP fared more poorly in comparison to their landslide or near-landslide victories in the 1980s.

[9]I also tested the model on the individuals who were interviewed in October 1980, as part of the traditional NES pre-post election study. This was done in order to test for the possibility of late-campaign conversion effects, as hypothesized in some empirical work from the 1980 election (Frankovic 1981; cf. the discussions in Rosenstone 1983, 24–32, and Kelley 1983, 207–10). While the different samples in the two studies make comparisons somewhat tentative, it was found that including October in the campaign period resulted in about a one percentage point more net effect than in the September model. Thus, while activation of precampaign dispositions remains the dominant effect, there did appear to be some late-campaign change as well. Yet, the analysis shows that the changes actually benefitted Carter, not Reagan, unlike most previous commentaries concerning the 1980 election assumed (but see Robinson 1981).

TABLE 3

REINFORCEMENT, ACTIVATION, AND CONVERSION EFFECTS IN 1980

Count Row Percent Total Percent	Actual November Vote:	
	Consistent with June Dispositions	Inconsistent with June Dispositions
June Vote Intention:		
Consistent with Dispositions	185	14
	93.5%	6.6%
	37.2%	2.6%
	(Reinforcement)	(Conversion)
Inconsistent with Dispositions	11	13
	44.0%	56.0%
	2.2%	2.6%
	(Conversion)	(Reinforcement)
Undecided	213	60
	80.6%	19.4%
	44.4%	10.7%
	(Activation)	(Conversion)

Source: 1980 NES Major Panel File, major party voters (N = 496). Initial dispositions based on Model 1.2 in table 1 with no June–September attitude change.

Nevertheless, I present in table 3 the available evidence, which sheds some light on the interrelationships of initial preferences, initial dispositions, and the individual's eventual vote.

For each respondent, I have estimated a predicted vote in June based on the results from equation 2 (shown in table 1), omitting any campaign-period change, and cross-tabulated the predicted vote with their eventual vote in November and their stated vote intention in June. Each cell contains the number of respondents and two percentages: the row percentage indicating the proportion of individuals in that row whose vote was either congruent or not congruent with their June dispositions, and the total percentage indicating the proportion of the entire sample of 496 individuals who are in that cell. The table is a rough replication of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's Table V (1944, 102), "The Effect of the Campaign Upon Vote Intentions," although I include the *actual* reported vote as the final measure of campaign effects.

The results show that, just as in the 1940 study, reinforcement and activation are by far the dominant effects of the campaign, accounting for 82% of all voters. Activation is somewhat more prevalent, and reinforcement somewhat less, than in the earlier studies, but this is due to the indirect measure of vote intention in the June survey which resulted in an unusually high number of initially undecided voters. Among voters who did express a June preference, however, the extent of reinforcement was extremely high: 88.1% (199 out of 223) voted in accord with their earlier

preference. The number of "switchers," those individuals who expressed a preference in June but voted for the other candidate in November, totaled just 4.8% of the entire sample. And, as was noted above, the net impact of the campaign in terms of the electoral outcome was negligible, as campaign-period switching and conversions for one candidate were offset by similar gains for the other.

While the table shows that conversion effects, either in the sense of voting against predispositions or in the sense of changes from the individual's stated preferences, were the least likely outcome of the 1980 campaign, it displays one type of conversion effect of particular interest. Among individuals whose earlier stated preference is *inconsistent* with their initial dispositions, 44% ultimately convert to the opposing candidate in November, in a process that Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and their colleagues call "reactivation" (cf. also Bartels 1988, 91–94). These individuals represent only 2.2% of the entire sample; nevertheless their rate of reinforcement is extremely low (56%) in comparison with the 93.4% reinforcement rate shown for individuals whose stated preference is in accord with their June predispositions. This suggests that the overall amount of conversion effects in a campaign may depend on the extent to which the electorate's initial dispositions and initial preferences are in accordance with one another. In 1980, these data show that there were few such "cross-pressured" individuals, and thus very little conversion took place. By contrast, table 4 shows the relationship between preferences and predispositions in the July 1988 ABC/Washington Post data, and the differences are striking.

In this table, I show the cross-tabulation of stated vote intention in July with predispositions based on party identification, presidential approval, and race for all registered voters. There are many fewer "undecideds" in this survey than in the 1980 panel data, undoubtedly due to the differences in question wording for the vote intention measure. But the table shows clearly that initial dispositions and stated preferences were much more incongruent at the outset of the 1988 campaign than in 1980.

As can be seen, the overall preferences of the electorate were 51.1% for Dukakis and 45% for Bush, in contrast to the predisposition predictions of a 53.9% to 46.1% edge to the vice president. Further, among the individuals who stated a vote intention for Dukakis, almost one-quarter of them (23.1%) had initial dispositions which would lead to a predicted vote for Bush. This figure is about twice as high as the corresponding 12.8% of voters who claimed to support Bush but whose predispositions favored the Dukakis candidacy. Overall, 17% of the sample expressed initial preferences that were incongruent with their initial dispositions, again in contrast to the 5% total for 1980. Given such imbalance between preferences and predispositions, it was to be expected that larger campaign-period conversions away from earlier preferences would take place during the 1988 contest than in 1980, and that the net effect of such conversion would favor Bush, as the electorate's eventual preferences were brought into accord with their underlying dispositions. While the absence of panel data for 1988 precludes any definitive judgment, I hypothesize that those individuals whose preferences and predisposi-

TABLE 4

DISPOSITIONS AND SELF-REPORTED VOTE INTENTIONS, JULY 1988

	Dispositions for:		
Count Row Percent Column Percent Total Percent	Dukakis	Bush	Total
Vote Intention for:			
Dukakis	605	182	787
	76.9%	23.1%	
	85.2%	22.0%	51.1%
	39.3%	11.8%	
Undecided	23	36	59
	39.0%	61.0%	
	3.2%	4.3%	3.8%
	1.5%	2.3%	
Bush	82	611	693
	12.8%	88.2%	
	12.0%	73.7%	45.0%
	5.3%	39.7%	
Total	710	829	1,539
	46.1%	53.9%	

Source: ABC News/Washington Post National Adult Survey, July 6–11, 1988, $N = 1,539$

tions were initially incongruent were those who were "reactivated," i.e., switched allegiances by the end of the campaign. In this sense, changes in vote intentions in 1988 may have been larger than in 1980, but were ultimately as predictable as in 1980 and 1984, based on the activation process that occurred during these presidential campaigns.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to determine the nature and extent of the campaign's impact on individual votes and electoral outcomes in recent presidential elections, and to assess the continued applicability of the "minimal" effects model in the process. I arrived at three main conclusions. First, a simple activation model, which predicted individual votes on the basis of race and precampaign party identification and evaluations of incumbent performance, accounted for over 80% of all votes in the 1980 election. This figure rose to 84% if precampaign estimates of candidate competence and personal integrity were included in the analysis, and approaches the level of predictive accuracy reported in prior models constructed from October and November data.

Second, changes in political attitudes did take place during the campaign, but the magnitude of the changes were not large enough to alter many individuals'

vote predictions. Further, attitude change in the overall sample did not occur preponderantly toward one candidate, and thus the net aggregate impact of 1980 campaign-period changes was only a very small overall movement toward Jimmy Carter. Applying these individual-level findings to the 1984 and 1988 elections showed very similar processes: in all elections the aggregate outcome could be predicted with great accuracy on the basis of the electorate's precampaign attitudes, as changes during the campaign had a net impact of about 3% toward Reagan in 1984, and about a 1% impact in both 1980 and 1988.

Third, I examined the extent to which individuals' stated preconvention preferences were reinforced during the 1980 contest and found extremely high rates of stability, as in earlier panel studies. However, I also found much larger rates of conversion among individuals whose initial preferences were incongruent with their predispositions, and hypothesized that this incongruity is the key to understanding cross-election differences in the overall amount of campaign-period changes in preferences.

By replicating in many ways the conclusions of earlier panel studies, the results at first glance may seem to indicate the constancy of the "minimal effects" school of campaigns and political communication. However, several qualifications to this conclusion must be made. First, the "minimal effects" model is confirmed *only* if by minimal effects we mean campaign period conversions away from both preferences and political predispositions. While this was clearly the original conclusion of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, et al., much scholarly work on the minimal effects model has centered on the stability of stated vote intentions only, and neglected the critical role of predispositions and political activation that was outlined in the original work. It may be the case that reinforcement is somewhat less prevalent in contemporary campaigns than before, but the eventual votes of the overwhelming majority of the electorate, and by extension the overall outcome of recent elections, nevertheless were due "largely to conditions that were in place well before the campaign[s] even began" (Rosenstone 1985; Markus 1988). What occurred during these campaigns was not minimal in the sense of simple reinforcement of preferences, but predictable movement by the electorate toward casting votes in accordance with these underlying conditions and their accompanying political predispositions.

Second, the results from the individual-level panel models indicate that the *potential* does exist for campaigns to move individuals away from their vote dispositions, but this potential was not realized in recent presidential elections. In other words, if there were larger changes in the overall distributions of presidential approval or in the perceptions of the two candidates' competence and integrity, the effects of the campaign on the vote would have been more considerable. If these changes, moreover, were in the direction against individuals' precampaign dispositions, then conversion effects would have been even more widespread. One could imagine scenarios in presidential campaigns whereby these types of effects may be observed: an "October surprise" in 1980 of an agreement to free the American hostages in Iran, which would have increased presidential approval dramatically; a major gaffe or blunder in a televised debate that would lead to

sharp and sudden declines in the perceived competence of a particular candidate; or other stimuli that would lead voters in large numbers to change their attitudes toward the major party candidates. It must be noted, however, that to have much effect on the aggregate outcome, the changes would need to be very large and disproportionately in favor of one candidate or the other, and such patterns of attitude change were not observed in any of the three general elections in the 1980s.[10]

Third, the results here do not contradict the notion that the mass media may influence voter attitudes during election campaigns. As Markus (1988, 152) notes, the media probably play a critical role in reinforcing preexisting dispositions, and West (1991) and Bartels (1992) also find that media use can bring about changes in presidential approval and other attitudes during the campaign.[11] The findings here, however, indicate that the changes produced by the media or through other processes served mainly to strengthen the probability that the individual will vote in accordance with his or her initial political dispositions. Further, the media may play a crucial role in influencing those voters whose dispositions and stated preferences are incongruent at the outset of the campaign, and thus in drawing individuals back to their predisposed candidate. Future research could address these hypotheses more adequately with panel data containing more refined measures of preferences and predispositions throughout political campaigns.

Finally, aside from their effects in activating and reinforcing the electorate's preexisting dispositions, general election campaigns may be important in several additional ways. First, as Markus (1988) suggests, the three-percent net campaign effect seen in 1984, if replicated in other elections, could certainly swing the overall outcome of the contest. Further, there may be significant effects of the campaign on voter *turnout* that could also alter electoral outcomes under certain conditions. Additionally, campaigns serve other functions in a representative democracy aside from influencing vote choices; they are one of the principal means through which the policy positions of the parties and candidates are articulated and placed on the public agenda, governing coalitions are formed, and the period of time during which the most political learning may take place, regardless of its immediate electoral impact (Quirk 1989; Joslyn 1984; West 1984; Finkel 1989).

The conclusion that general election campaigns have limited electoral consequences also does not imply that other types of elections have similar effects. In particular, congressional campaigns (Jacobson 1987; Goldenberg and Traugott 1983) and primary election campaigns (Bartels 1988; Orren and Polsby 1987) take place under conditions where candidates are often not well known, where strategic aspects of voting come into play far more often, and, in the case of primary

[10]I am particularly grateful to two anonymous *JOP* reviewers for their assistance in clarifying this point.

[11]Bartels (1992) estimates the effect of media use on political attitudes after correcting for measurement error in the variables. If measurement error models were estimated here, it is likely that party identification and presidential approval would show higher levels of stability, with a corresponding decline in the extent to which campaign-period changes influenced the individual vote and aggregate electoral outcomes as well.

elections, where party identification is a less meaningful guide for candidate evaluation and the vote. But as Bartels (1988) has shown, political predispositions in the primary election context still shape and constrain the effects that campaign stimuli and new information presented to the electorate during the contest may have; the research here suggests that these constraints in general elections are more powerful, and limited in more significant ways the impact that recent presidential campaigns have had on individual votes and electoral outcomes.

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