CHAPTER 12

The Long Campaign: Senate Elections in 1992

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All members of Congress serve a fixed term of office, after which they must stand for reelection, retire, or run for another office. The vast majority seek reelection.[1] In going before the voters, incumbents often say they "run on the record." They point to things they have done in Congress as reasons for voters to reelect them. Challengers often point to other things they have done (or not done) as reasons not to reelect them. In either event, it is clear that the time of governing, the period between elections, is crucial to the reelection bid. We call this time the *long campaign.* Members of Congress are clearly aware of the consequences of their actions in office for their future reelection chances. They worry about how their votes will play back home (Kingdon 1989), they anticipate likely challengers and what might be done to avert or prepare for those challengers (Fenno 1992), they raise money for the next campaign (Box-Steffensmeier 1993), and they constantly seek to explain their actions to their constituents (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978). This is all part of the long campaign, which culminates in the short campaign between Labor Day and election day.

Studies of voters and elections have focused almost exclusively on the short fall campaign. If our primary interest is in the psychology of the vote choice, then this is a good period to study. During the fall campaign voters learn about the candidates, especially the challenger

(Alvarez and Franklin 1994b). The fall campaigns may also affect citizens' beliefs about the candidates, through speeches, news coverage, and advertising. Exactly how voters "boil down" their beliefs and perceptions of candidates to make a voting choice is the subject of a vast literature on elections that focuses on the short campaign.[2]

The long campaign has been much less studied. This is unfortunate, for it is the period of governing that sets the stage for the final fall contest. What is more, the consequential actions of elected representatives during their terms of office provide the substance of republican government. How these actions make themselves felt in reelection choices is the essence of the politics (as opposed to the psychology) of voting.

In this chapter we dip into the long campaign by considering how U.S. senators position themselves for reelection during their term of office. Our interest is in how a senator's standing during the time of governing influences the outcome of the reelection contest. We want to trace a senator's standing with the voters to his or her actions in office over the time from election to reelection (or defeat). We also want to examine the extent to which voters appear to respond myopically to only the short campaign or alternatively incorporate the senator's performance over an entire term.

To do this we look at three pieces of evidence. First, we demonstrate that how a senator stands with the voters throughout a term of office plays a significant role in the outcome of the reelection bid. Second, we look at how a senator's voting in Congress during the six-year term affects voters' evaluations of performance and voters' perceptions of the senator's positions. Finally, we turn to the ultimate vote choice, asking if the voters appear to incorporate past performance in their vote decisions, rather than attend only to the moment of the short fall campaign.

Data and Design

Studies of voting behavior in presidential and congressional elections have relied heavily on surveys of voters taken during the short campaign. The earliest major academic study of campaigns was conducted by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet in 1940. They studied how citizens made their vote choices from May to November during the 1940 presidential campaign. While their study was intended to show how voters were affected by the campaign, they actually found surprisingly little change. It seemed that most voters entered the election campaign with

their minds pretty well made up.[3] Lazarsfeld and colleagues explained this as being the result of stable partisan predispositions, which largely determine political preferences.

Our interpretation is somewhat different. In 1940 Franklin D. Roosevelt sought his third term as president, having presided over the most devastating depression of the century and the beginnings of a gradual recovery. Roosevelt had truly reinvented government, giving it a role in social and economic affairs unimagined previously in American history. All of these changes were controversial, arousing passions among both supporters and opponents. If we view his eight years in office as the long campaign leading to the 1940 election, it is far less surprising that preferences were well set before the fall contest. It is difficult to imagine how even an inattentive voter could fail to have reached a judgment of Roosevelt as president after eight years in office.[4] If we wish to understand the 1940 election, therefore, we would be better rewarded by asking how, over eight years, judgments of Roosevelt were formed, rather than focus only on the events of the last few months before the election.[5]

In the half century since the Lazarsfeld study, academic surveys have, for the most part, focused on an even shorter campaign period, from about Labor Day through election day. The National Election Study (NES), which is the leading academic survey of voters, has kept to the same basic design since 1952.[6] In presidential election years, the NES conducts interviews through the roughly eight weeks leading up to election day. After the election, these same respondents are reinterviewed. This allows an analysis of any changes in preferences that may have taken place during the campaign between the preelection and the postelection interview. There are no interviews taken before the beginning of the fall campaign, however, and hence there is no possibility of studying the development of the long campaign between elections using NES data.[7] In nonpresidential election years, the NES interviews citizens only once, after the election is over. This design can capture the outcome of the election, but is obviously unable to illuminate the dynamics of the campaign, either long or short.

While the NES surveys have not been designed to study the long campaign, a recent NES effort is much better able to address the Senate case. The NES sponsored a project known as the Senate Election Study (SES), which focused on the Senate elections of 1988, 1990, and 1992. The SES interviewed voters in all fifty states after each of the three elections, focusing primarily on perceptions of the senators from each state, and the Senate election when there was one. A new sample of respondents was drawn each year, so we cannot follow the same individuals

across the three elections, but we can track aggregate opinion in each state over time. This provides the opportunity to explore the long campaign that culminated in the Senate elections of 1992.

There were thirty-four incumbent senators eligible for reelection in 1992. Of these, twenty-six sought reelection and eight chose to retire.[8] We can use the SES to follow the perceptions of these senators in the years leading up to and including 1992. Our aim is to show how perceptions of these senators were formed during the long campaign, how these perceptions changed over time, and how they shaped the fall election campaign in 1992. We can do this because the SES allows us to estimate the aggregate perception of each senator in each year. In 1992 we can relate these past aggregate perceptions to individual perceptions and voting choices in the fall campaign. Thus we can combine the study of the short and long campaigns of 1992.

A Model of Public Opinion

Before moving to the analysis, it is important to be clear about what our assumptions are concerning the dynamics of public opinion. The model we adopt plays an important role in our interpretation of the results.

The key element of our model of public opinion is the concept of memory. At one extreme, the public could have no memory at all. In this case, perceptions of and opinions about senators would be formed anew every election. Under this model, voters in 1992 would not give any weight to what they thought of a senator in 1990 or 1988. Their opinions would be based entirely on perceptions formed in the 1992 campaign.[9] If this were the case, our concept of the long campaign would be entirely irrelevant because only events of the reelection year would have any effect on voters. Such a model would place great emphasis on the strategy and tactics of the candidates over the short campaign only.

At the opposite extreme, the public could have long memories indeed. Under this model, previous evaluation of a candidate would continue to affect preferences even after taking account of current evaluations. Rather than let bygones be bygones, these voters hold a grudge. The empirical evidence for this would be seen in the continued effect of 1988 or 1990 opinion on vote, for example, even after controlling for 1992 opinion.

A model of public opinion that falls between these extremes is the Bayesian learning model. Bayesian theory is a means of formally taking prior information into account. According to this model, current opin-

ions are updated based on a combination of prior beliefs and new information.[10] Bartels (1993) points out that Bayesian analysis provides a systematic way to characterize both the relative weight of the old and new information in voters' current opinions (1993, 268). Once updated, current opinion should include all relevant past information. There is memory in this model because the past affects current opinion. Once incorporated in current opinion, however, the past no longer has any direct impact on current behavior.

Empirically, under this model we should see approval in 1990 affect approval in 1992. Once we control for 1992 approval, however, there should be no remaining direct influence of prior approval on vote in 1992.[11]

Our expectation is that the Bayesian model is a reasonable approximation of the dynamics of opinion over the long campaign. Thus we expect that there will be an influence of past opinions on current ones, but that the past will exert little direct influence on election choices once current opinion is included in the model. Such a result does not reduce the importance of the long campaign at all. Instead, it shows how the long campaign is incorporated into the short contest. If our expectation is wrong, then the data can tell us this by showing either that the past has no effect on current opinion or choice or, alternatively, that the past continues to exert an influence after accounting for current opinion. The important point is that the data can distinguish between these alternatives. Thus our expectations are testable hypotheses, rather than preconceptions that will determine our conclusions.

Analysis

In this section we look at three aspects of the long campaign: the development of fundamental perceptions of senators; how the long campaign sets the stage for the election year; and how the election year choice is affected by the past.

DEVELOPING PERCEPTIONS OF SENATORS

How a politician presents himself or herself to the voters is a fundamental piece of the long campaign. Indeed, Fenno (1978) argues that the presentation of self is virtually the defining activity of members of Congress when they make contact with constituents. Incumbents must tell voters who they are. Voters, by the same token, need to know who the incumbent is. Without an established image of the incumbent, the voter will be unable to evaluate his or her performance.

Political folk wisdom paints a picture of politicians as veritable chameleons, able to change their hue to suit the surroundings. For the most part, this is a misleading picture. While politicians may find equivocation a useful skill in some circumstances, in general the politician who tries to be all things to all people is soon out of office. Obvious inconsistency is rapidly discovered and punished. Rather than constantly changing positions, incumbents attempt to define an image that will serve their need to appeal to a majority of voters. In order to appeal to voters successfully, the incumbent must also succeed in making that position known. This presentation of self is fundamental to the long campaign. There are many possible avenues along which senators can travel in presenting themselves to the voters. This section focuses on one crucial aspect of this presentation: political ideology.

One of the key elements of a senator's presentation of self is position taking (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978). In some cases, position taking is a rhetorical device, mere words, cheap talk. But once in office, position taking includes the far more consequential action of voting on legislation. Incumbents inevitably create a record of positions taken on the policy choices of government through their roll-call voting. Because this record is public, it is necessarily subject to debate in the next election campaign. Thus senators must take positions that they are prepared to defend and, indeed, to use as electoral weapons. This record is built up almost entirely during the long campaign. How it is established, and how it is linked to voters, is our primary concern in this section.

For our measure of roll-call voting, we use scores computed by the American Conservative Union (ACU). The ACU selects a number of votes that it considers important for conservative interests and scores each senator for the percentage of the time the senator took the conservative position. A score of 100 represents support for the conservative position on all votes, while a score of 0 represents opposition to the conservative position on all votes.[12] Similar scores are constructed by liberal groups, such as Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). The ADA and ACU scores are very highly correlated with each other, so there is little reason to prefer one over the other. Our results are the same with either measure.

Past research has found that the voting behavior of members of Congress is highly consistent over their time in office (Clausen 1973; Asher and Weisberg 1978; Kingdon 1989; Jackson and Kingdon 1992). In figure 12.1 we find that this is confirmed for the senators eligible for reelection in 1992. The figure shows that there is a strong relationship between ACU score in 1988 and in 1991. The correlation is a very high .96. (A correlation of +1.0 indicates a perfect relationship, while 0 indi-
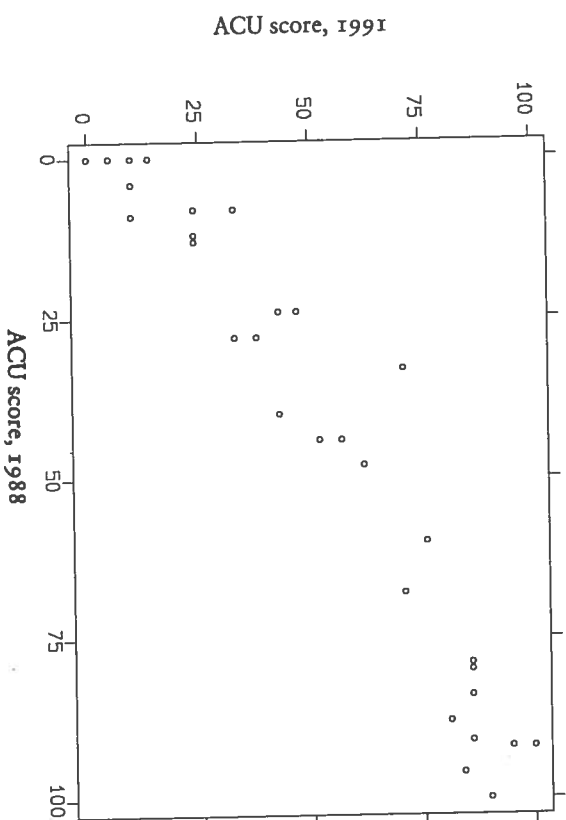
FIGURE 12.1. STABILITY OF ROLL-CALL RECORD.

cates no relationship at all and −1.0 indicates a perfect negative relationship.) Regardless of how they present themselves rhetorically, the consequential behavior of these senators is remarkably consistent over time.

Such consistent policy positions form a core of the presentation of self. Over the course of the long campaign, senators transmit their policy positions to voters. Figure 12.2 shows the relationship between ACU score in 1991 and mean liberal-conservative placement of the senator in 1992, as measured by the SES survey.[13] The correlation is a robust .83. This is all the more remarkable when we realize that virtually no one knows what a senator's ACU score actually is. This relationship demonstrates that through all the behaviors that communicate positions to voters, the senator is successful in conveying an image that is congruent with his or her behavior.

While citizens form perceptions of the incumbent that are strongly related to roll-call voting behavior, it is important for us to examine what learning takes place over the course of the long campaign. If citizens respond to the initial position taking of the incumbent (either during or immediately after the first election) but then ignore later developments, then our model of Bayesian learning is incorrect. Likewise, if perceptions are developed anew each year, then there is no memory and no learning. We address each of these possibilities.
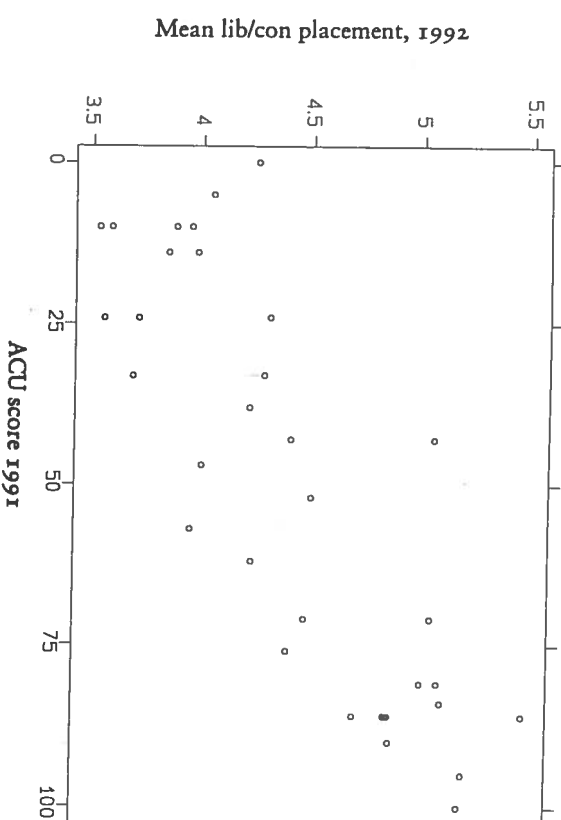
FIGURE 12.2. MEAN LIB/CON PLACEMENT BY ROLL-CALL VOTING RECORD.

The images voters have of the incumbent are not static, though given the consistency of senators' behavior it is not surprising that the images among voters are quite stable. Figure 12.3 shows the relationship between mean liberal-conservative placement in 1990 and in 1992. The correlation is .83, indicating that average perceptions are highly stable over the two years. This stability, however, does not answer our primary question.[14]

It is critical to our argument that this stability is not stasis with a bit of noise. Instead, we want to show that perceptions are responsive to the behavior of the senator even as they incorporate past information. We show this by regressing mean liberal-conservative placement in 1992 on mean placement in 1990 and ACU score in 1991. In keeping with the Bayesian model of public opinion, 1992 perception should respond to both prior perception and the intervening roll-call behavior. It does, as table 12.1 shows.

The coefficients in the table show how much change in the average rating on a liberal-conservative scale we should expect given a change of one point on the independent variables, past perception and 1991 ACU score. Both are statistically significant, meaning we can reject the hypothesis that there is no effect of the independent variables on mean perception in 1992.[15] It is not surprising that the coefficient on 1990
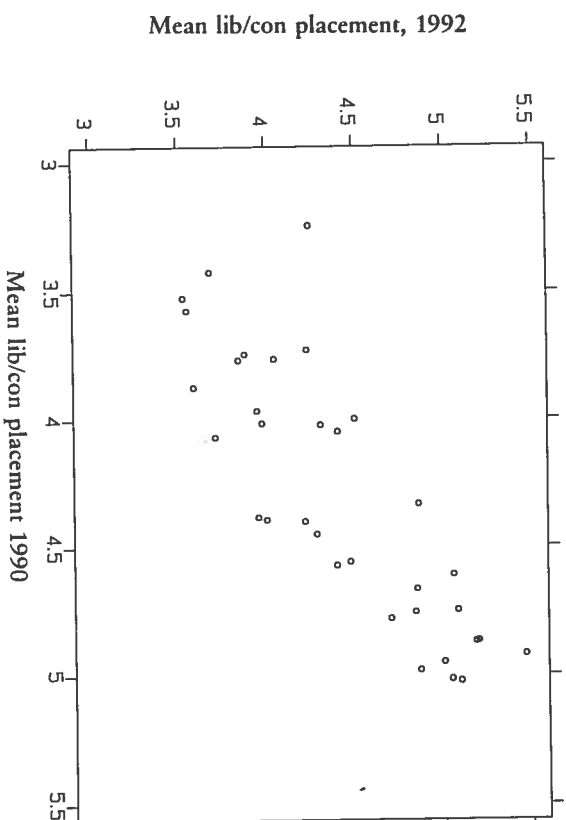
FIGURE 12.3. STABILITY OF MEAN LIB/CON PLACEMENT.

perception is larger than that for ACU score. In part, this is simply a reflection of the scales of each variable. The mean perception ranges from about 3 to about 5, or just two points. The ACU scale, in contrast, ranges over 100 points. A way of comparing these effects, then, is to think what would happen to perceptions if the most liberal senator were miraculously transformed into the most conservative. For past perception, this means changing perception from a 3 to a 5. The predicted change in 1992 perception is $.49 \times (5 - 3) = .98$, or about one unit. For a similar reversal of ACU score, we would have $.008 \times (100 - 0) = .80$. So it looks, from this, as if the effect of past perception is a little stronger than that for ACU score, though not by a whole lot.

In fact, we should expect the effect of ACU score to be less than that for past perceptions. According to our model, past perceptions incorporate all previous ACU scores plus everything else that affects the perception of a senator's ideological position. The 1991 ACU score is just one more observation of behavior. There should therefore be more information represented by past perception than by the new ACU score. According to the Bayesian model, more weight should be given to the more reliable information, which in this case should be past perceptions because they incorporate more information. By this light, the fact that the ACU score is as powerful as it is suggests that the behavior which it reflects is perceived by voters as quite reliable.

TABLE 12.1
DEVELOPMENT OF IDEOLOGICAL PERCEPTIONS
OF THE INCUMBENT, 1992

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Significance
Constant	1.91	.66	.007
Mean Lib/Con, 1990	.49	.18	.011
ACU Score, 1991	.008	.003	.015

$N = 34$
Adjusted R^2 = .729
Standard error = .288

SOURCE: Senate Election Study, 1988–92.

A second major element of the Bayesian model is the assumption that prior information is completely incorporated when updating is done. In this case, we would expect that 1988 mean liberal-conservative placement will add nothing to our prediction of 1992 mean placement, once 1990 placement and 1991 ACU score are taken into account. Figure 12.4 shows just this. The figure shows the scatter plot of residuals from the regression in table 12.1 against 1988 mean liberal-conservative placement.[16] The correlation is .0796, comfortably close to zero; if 1988 placement had a lingering effect on 1992 perceptions, there would be a positive correlation.

It is important to understand that this finding does not mean that perceptions in 1988 are irrelevant. Quite the contrary. What this shows is that 1988 perceptions are incorporated in 1990 perceptions, which in turn affect 1992 perceptions. It also shows that all the information from 1988 is absorbed in the 1990 perceptions, so there are no bits of information left over to have an independent effect on perceptions in 1992. Shifting slightly to negative campaigning, this also shows why old charges are unlikely to matter in a later campaign. If they were already incorporated in prior opinions, bringing them back up will have no effect on current opinion. In contrast, if a new scandal could be uncovered, there would likely be substantial impact.

The conclusions of this subsection are that senators behave consistently and that the public perceives their behavior rather accurately. Citizens behave consistently with the Bayesian model, and it appears that past information has no value once updated beliefs are incorporated. From the perspective of the long campaign, these results show just how
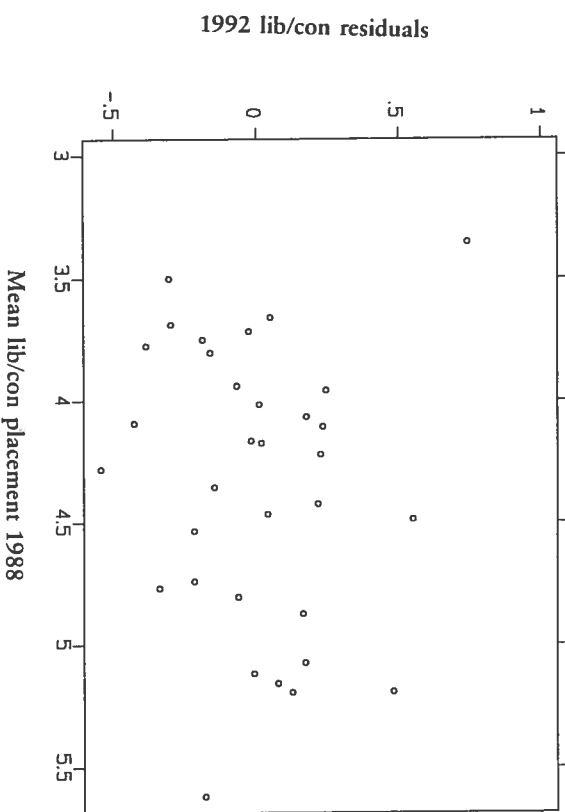
1992 lib/con residuals

FIGURE 12.4. PRIOR PERCEPTION AND CURRENT RESIDUALS.

effective senators can be in communicating to voters, and how acute voters can be in receiving and processing those signals.

SETTING THE STAGE

The long campaign is not only a time for voters to learn about incumbents. It is also a time in which potential challengers make decisions about whether to run or not. Jacobson and Kernell (1983) have made a strong argument that conditions a year or more before an election play a powerful role in encouraging or discouraging strong challengers. Wilcox (1987) provides empirical evidence supporting Jacobson and Kernell's argument and finds that many serious challengers decide even earlier than spring of the election year. Ambitious politicians, those seeking to make politics their lifelong profession, must be especially selective in choosing the races they attempt.[17] A losing race can end a promising career. By the same token, an opportunity missed can forever foreclose advancement.

The events of the long campaign are summarized in the job approval of the incumbent at any point in time.[18] We can, in turn, use job approval as a measure of the incumbent's standing with voters. The abundance of public polls and the use of private polls by parties and those considering a race make it likely that the incumbent's standing with the public is known to potential challengers.

It is reasonable to assume that incumbents calculate the likely impact of their actions on voter approval. Fenno (1992) describes the considerable calculation behind an incumbent's actions. Studies of roll-call voting have often found that incumbents consider the impact of votes on their standing with the constituency (Kingdon 1989). It is reasonable, therefore, to think of the incumbent as choosing actions with some attention to the effects of these actions on voter approval. In some circumstances, an incumbent may choose actions that will lower his or her standing with voters in order to achieve some other goals, such as supporting the party's president or enhancing power within Congress. There is an obvious limit to such strategic behavior, however: low approval can lead to a strong challenge and the risk of electoral defeat. This means that few if any incumbents ignore the effects of their actions on their standing with voters. This calculus of action and approval then is an essential element of the long campaign.

We would expect high approval for the incumbent to deter the entry of strong challengers, while low approval would invite challengers into the race. Several measures of challenger quality have been proposed in the literature, including past officeholding and electoral experience. All such measures are aimed at the extent to which the challenger can run an effective campaign. We use total spending by the challenger as a measure of quality. The amount a candidate can raise is a good indication of whether potential contributors see the candidate as viable. Challengers almost always spend everything they are able to raise. Thus the total spending is a reasonable measure of how convincing the challenger is.[19]

Figure 12.5 shows the relationship between challenger spending in 1992 and mean incumbent job approval in 1990. The correlation is −.52. Thus an incumbent who can maintain popular support among voters through the middle years of his or her term can make substantial progress in assuring a relatively easy reelection bid.

Voters are not the only participants acting consistently with the Bayesian model. Candidates seem to also update their beliefs based on recent information. Table 12.2 shows the regression of challenger spending on incumbent job approval in 1990 and 1988. If potential challengers are Bayesians, we would expect the incumbent's standing in 1990 to matter, but not in 1988. That is what we find.

In addition to polishing their images with voters, incumbent senators spend an extraordinary amount of time planning for their next reelection bid by raising campaign funds. Table 12.3 shows the incumbents' activity in terms of the amount of money raised and the size of war chests between the 1986 and 1992 elections. Incumbents clearly do not wait
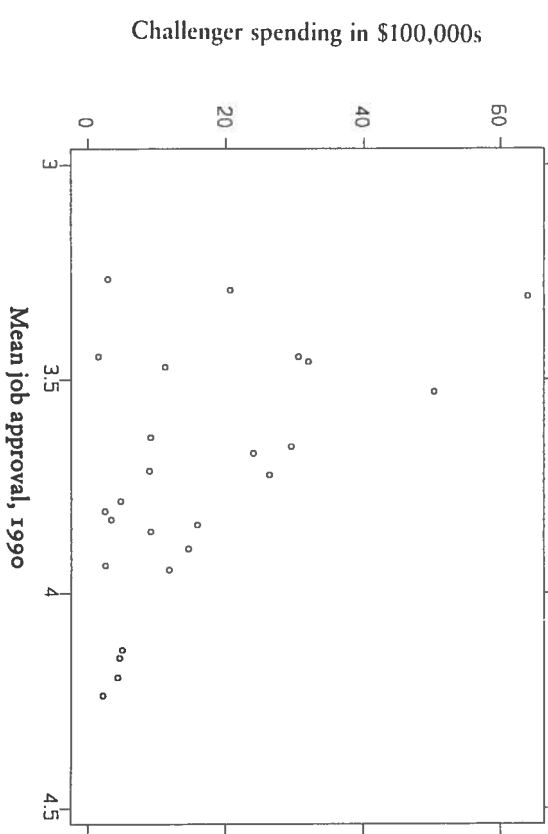
until the fall of the election year to start raising money. Instead, it is an ongoing process and an integral part of the long campaign.

Incumbents who anticipated a tough race in 1992 began preparing for the challenge very early in the election cycle by raising large amounts of money. Safe incumbents helped ensure their success by building large war chests. Potential challengers are deterred from entering a race when the incumbent has a large war chest because potential challengers and contributors know that a challenger can never raise as much money as the incumbent and because contributors will be hesitant to contribute money to a strong incumbent's opponent. Without substantial financial backing, the challenger is doomed to fail because of the central role of money in successful modern campaigns. The distinction between unsafe incumbents who seek contributions because they are reacting to a threat and safe incumbents who build their war chests to deter quality challengers is important. Comparing the 1988 contributions and 1988 war chests exemplifies this point. The median unsafe incumbent, who received less than 55 percent of the 1992 vote, raised a whopping $544,646 but the war chest contained only $52,857. In contrast, the median safe incumbent, who received over 65 percent of the vote, raised less than one-third of the contributions that the unsafe incumbent raised and yet has a war chest that is six times larger.

FIGURE 12.5. CHALLENGER SPENDING BY INCUMBENT JOB APPROVAL.

Box-Steffensmeier (1993) separates incumbents' reaction and deterrence strategies and finds empirical evidence that incumbents who build large war chests effectively deter quality challengers.[20]

By their actions during the long campaign, incumbents both affect the decisions of their potential challengers and prepare themselves for the reelection bid. Their actions affect their job approval, which in turn has a significant impact on the strength of the eventual challenger. The large amount of time and effort devoted to fund raising has effects both on the strength of the challenger and on how well prepared the incumbent is to meet whatever challenge arises.

TABLE 12.2
CHALLENGER STRENGTH IN 1992 AS A FUNCTION OF PAST INCUMBENT APPROVAL

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Significance
Constant	114.50	51.74	.038
Approval, 1990	-31.61	11.93	.015
Approval, 1988	4.96	14.46	.735

N = 24
Adjusted R^2 = .210
Standard error = 14.53

SOURCE: Senate Election Study, 1988–92.

TABLE 12.3
MEDIAN INCUMBENT CONTRIBUTIONS AND WAR CHESTS OVER THE COURSE OF THE ELECTION CYCLE

	1988	1990	1992
Contributions			
Less than 55% of the vote	$544,646	$816,090	$4,322,671
55% to 65% of the vote	$85,375	$185,190	$2,317,149
More than 65% of the vote	$155,454	$515,242	$2,816,778
All incumbents	$155,454	$515,242	$2,889,357
War chests			
Less than 55% of the vote	$52,857	$751,373	$106,621
55% to 65% of the vote	$127,775	$286,901	$172,582
More than 65% of the vote	$349,721	$490,202	$354,763
All incumbents	$163,616	$423,862	$176,003

SOURCE: Federal Election Commission, 1990.

RUNNING THE RACE

By the time the short campaign begins on Labor Day, the stage has largely been set by the events of the long campaign. This does not mean that the short campaign is meaningless. There are clearly visible effects of the last eight weeks, as we shall see. In this section we trace the path that the short campaign plays to the final vote tally.

One way to approach the long campaign is to trace the paths of incumbents to these outcomes. We distinguish among four outcomes: retirement, winning less than 55 percent of the vote, winning between 55 and 65 percent, and winning over 65 percent in the 1992 election. These categories also happen to divide the set of incumbents into roughly equal numbers (eight or nine in each group). We want to know if these groups have distinctive histories over the long campaign. We summarize these histories by the mean job approval for the incumbent and the mean feeling thermometer score.[21]

Table 12.4 presents the histories of job approval and feeling thermometer for the four groups of incumbents. The results are striking in two ways. First, the paths diverge rather sharply, but only after initial similarity. Second, the retirees are unmistakably similar to the incumbents who run the closest races, suggesting that anticipation of the competitive election plays a significant role in retirement decisions. In 1988 there is no reliable difference in the job approval of retirees and those

TABLE 12.4
INCUMBENT JOB APPROVAL AND THERMOMETER HISTORY
BY 1992 VOTE OUTCOME

Outcome	1988	1990	1992
Job approval			
Retiree	3.73	3.60	n.a.
Less than 55%	3.70	3.51	3.29
55% to 65%	3.71	3.78	3.76
More than 65%	3.99	3.95	4.03
Thermometer			
Retiree	56.7	56.0	51.7
Less than 55%	58.5	57.0	51.5
55% to 65%	60.2	61.0	61.0
More than 65%	65.1	65.2	65.6

source: Senate Election Study, 1988–92.

with less than 65 percent of the vote. Only the strongest vote getters appear distinctive in 1988. By 1990, however, a clear separation has begun to appear, with the eventual retirees and close-race incumbents showing a decline in job rating, while the other two groups hold steady or improve slightly. By the end of the reelection campaign in 1992, those in close races have fallen still further in the voters' eyes, while the two stronger finishers retain their levels of approval. The mean thermometer scores present the same picture, but confirm that by 1992 the retirees are as unpopular as those in the tightest races, even though retirees, by definition, had avoided the negative effects of a highly competitive short campaign. Had they chosen to seek reelection, it appears likely that the retirees would have been in for a tough fight.[22]

A second factor that distinguishes among the groups of outcomes is the relationship between incumbent and voter ideologies. We saw earlier that incumbents do a rather good job of transmitting their ideological positions to voters. This naturally raises the question of how the fit between incumbents and the voters plays into the eventual outcomes of races.

Table 12.5 shows the correlation between mean perceived incumbent liberal-conservative ideological placement and the mean voter's ideology in the state on the same scale, for each group of incumbents by the 1992 vote outcome. These measures are from 1990, so there are no effects of the short campaign. Once more, the groups are distinctive. The retirees show only a modest correlation with state opinion. Those in the closest races, by contrast, show a very strong negative relationship with state opinion. Senators earning at least 55 percent of the vote, in contrast, show a rather strong positive relationship to the average voter's ideological position. It seems that those who end up in electoral trouble are first out of step with their constituents. Those who match the voters do so much better.[23]

TABLE 12.5
CORRELATIONS OF SENATORS' PERCEIVED IDEOLOGY
WITH MEAN VOTER IDEOLOGY IN 1990,
BY 1992 VOTE OUTCOME

Outcome	Correlation
Retiree	.159
Less than 55%	-.715
55% to 65%	.487
More than 65%	.535

source: Senate Election Study, 1988–92.

These results make it plain that the course of events over the long campaign is related to distinctive outcomes. But we are also interested in the short campaign. The model of public opinion we have adopted predicts that learning occurs throughout the election cycle, so while we expect the long campaign to set the stage, the short campaign should also play an important role in the final results. We now turn to this issue.

Comparing the Long and Short Campaigns

Our model of public opinion allows us conceptually to decompose public opinion into two components, prior opinion and new information. This corresponds rather closely to our ideas of the long and short campaign. If we were able to measure opinion before the short campaign begins, this would provide an observation of the end product of the long campaign. The short campaign would be captured by deviations from this initial position. Unfortunately, the design of the SES does not provide us with this. The SES measures for 1992 are all collected after the election is over and thus incorporate the events of the fall contest. Despite this difficulty, we can make some progress by adopting a simple statistical model of the campaign components.

As we argued earlier, it is possible to think of the incumbent job-approval measure as a summary of the net effects of the many elements that make up a campaign. In 1992 we have a measure of this approval taken after the completion of the fall campaign. This measure therefore incorporates both the long campaign effects and those of the short campaign. Given only the 1992 measure, we could not possibly separate these components. Thanks to the design of the SES, however, we have additional information in the form of the 1990 survey data, which includes job approval in 1990. Job approval in 1990 is clearly the result of the long campaign alone, since the short campaign does not begin for another two years. This gives us the leverage we need to examine the long and short campaigns.

The estimation of long and short campaign effects requires the decomposition of 1992 job approval into long and short components. This is a somewhat technical maneuver that is fully discussed in Box-Steffensmeier and Franklin (1994). Here we try to give a feel for the logic of what we are doing without resorting to the algebra necessary for the full proof.

Think about the 1992 approval measure. According to our Bayesian model of learning, this measure incorporates both the long and the

short campaigns. If we had a way to separate these components, we could estimate the effects of each. The problem is how to do this. There are two ways, one that underestimates the effect of the long campaign and one that overestimates it. By doing both we can get a pretty good, but not perfect, estimate of the relative importance of the long and short campaigns.

The first way to decompose the campaign is to subtract the 1990 job approval from the 1992 approval. The 1990 measure, obviously, depends only on the long campaign. The 1992 measure depends on three parts: the long campaign up through 1990, the long campaign between 1991 and 1992, and the short campaign of 1992. After we subtract the 1990 approval, we are left with a combination of the 1991–92 long campaign and the 1992 short campaign. If we predict the vote using this difference as a measure of the short campaign, and 1990 approval as a measure of the long campaign, we will underestimate the long campaign effect (since some of it will be included in our short campaign measure) and overestimate the impact of the short campaign. This gives us our first estimate of the two effects.

The second way to decompose the effects is to subtract everything in the 1992 approval measure that is related to the 1990 long campaign measure.[24] This is clearly going too far, since we would expect that the 1992 short campaign is surely related to the long campaign (strong long campaigns are likely to be followed by strong short campaigns and likewise for weak campaigns). What this means is that we will overestimate the long campaign effect using this approach, since our measure will include some elements of the short campaign.

The virtue of these two approaches is that they set bounds on what the true effects are, since one is an overestimate and the other an underestimate. This means we can be confident that the actual effects of long and short campaigns are somewhere between our two estimates, though we cannot say exactly where. As it turns out, these bounds are close enough together to give us a reasonably good estimate of the two effects.

To estimate the effect of long and short campaigns on vote, we regress the incumbent's share of the two-party vote on our two alternative measures of the long and short campaign. We also include challenger spending to account for any short campaign effects not accounted for by our other measure. The results for both the over- and underestimates are presented in table 12.6.

Since both long and short campaign variables are measured on the same scale, job approval, we can compare their coefficients. The estimated coefficients for the long campaign effects are 20.6 and 17.1, a

TABLE 12.6
ESTIMATES OF LONG- AND SHORT-CAMPAIGN INFLUENCES
ON THE 1992 VOTE

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Significance
Overestimating long-campaign effects and under-estimating short-campaign effects			
Constant	−15.95	21.47	0.466
Long	20.64	5.68	0.002
Short	11.74	2.43	0.000
Challenger spending	−.07	.07	0.325
N = 25			
Adjusted R^2 = .71			
Standard error = 3.96.			
Underestimating long-campaign effects and over-estimating short-campaign effects			
Constant	−3.37	14.73	0.821
Long	17.13	3.78	0.000
Short	11.74	2.43	0.000
Challenger spending	−.07	.07	0.325
N = 25			
Adjusted R^2 = .71			
Standard error = 3.96.			

SOURCE: Senate Election Study, 1988–92.

relatively small range. The short campaign estimate is the same in both cases, 11.7. Both make a statistically significant contribution to the vote. In comparing the relative influence of long and short campaigns, we can conclude that the long campaign has from 46 to 76 percent greater impact on vote than does the short campaign. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the fact that the short campaign has a clear influence on the ultimate outcome as well. While the long campaign sets the stage, the short campaign clearly has a role to play.

We can get a visual picture of how the various senators fared by plotting the vote against long and short campaign effects. To this point, we have treated senators as a group. Here, however, we include the name of each senator, so we can see if our statistical evidence makes political sense in the light of the fortunes of each incumbent.

Figures 12.6 and 12.7 plot vote share against our estimated long and short campaign effects. Based on the long campaign, it appears that three incumbents should have been in precarious electoral circum-
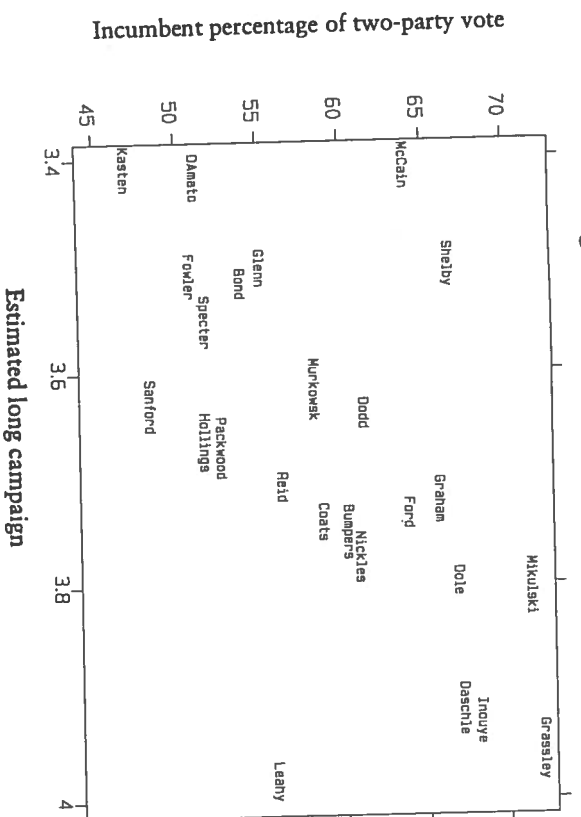
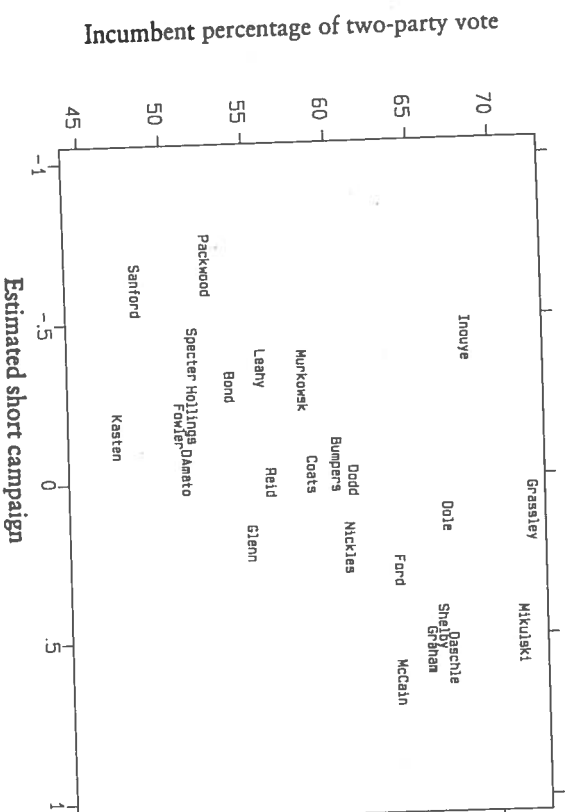FIGURE 12.6. INCUMBENT VOTE BY LONG CAMPAIGN.

FIGURE 12.7. INCUMBENT VOTE BY SHORT CAMPAIGN.

stances: Kasten, D'Amato, and McCain. A second group of five should have expected close races: Fowler, Specter, Bond, Glenn, and Shelby. In fact, all but McCain and Shelby were held to under 55 percent of the vote.

The short campaign rescued some of them, while hurting others. Both McCain and Shelby had unusually strong short campaigns. In McCain's case, this represented a rebound from his entanglement in the savings-and-loan scandal. Glenn, like McCain, was implicated as a member of the "Keating five" and was thus the subject of an Ethics Committee investigation looking into involvement with a failed savings-and-loan institution controlled by Keating. Like McCain, Glenn bounced back with a strong short campaign, even against a quality challenger. Both McCain and Glenn may have benefited from the seemingly widespread perception that they were the least involved in the Keating affair and arguably should not have been made part of the Ethics Committee investigation (Barone and Ujifusa 1991, 953). Shelby benefited from drawing a rather weak opponent, a political consultant not in the U.S. Senate." (Barone and Ujifusa 1993, 7).

At the other end, Sanford, Packwood, Inouye, and Specter had the most negative short campaigns. In Sanford's case, heart surgery and a strong opponent snatched defeat from the jaws of what should have been victory, based on his long campaign. Packwood faced a bruising campaign against a strong opponent (Congressman Les AuCoin), though subsequent charges of sexual harassment did not emerge until after the election. Inouye faced charges of sexual misconduct, resulting in a negative short campaign performance, and a finish some 6 to 10 percent off his recent results. (Subsequent investigation by the Senate Ethics Committee ended when none of the alleged victims would come forward.)

Specter was the target of a challenge based on his role in the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and what some perceived as his hostile questioning of Anita Hill, who accused Thomas of sexual harassment. The Specter case is a good example of how a senator's actions in office, part of the long campaign, can affect the short campaign. His opponent, Lynn Yeakel, made the Thomas hearings a central issue in the campaign. Were it not for Specter's previously strong performance in the long campaign, the short campaign might well have cost him his seat in the Senate. In each of these cases, then, there is ample reason to expect the negative short campaign result which we observe.

Our results in this section have shown that there are distinctive

paths to the reelection bid. While most incumbents are in similar circumstances four years before the election, clear differences emerge over the next two years. Those destined for a close race and those who eventually retire, are quite distinctive two years out. While not all retirees do so for electoral reasons, our results suggest that this is a common motivation, if not the only one.

We have also been able to partition the election campaign into long and short components. From this effort, we conclude that the effects of the long campaign are about one and a half times as large as the effects of the short. But the short campaign also has substantial effects on the outcome. Thus we would be unwise to ignore either of these elements of electoral competition.

Conclusions

We have seen that both the long and short campaigns are important elements of electoral politics. During the long campaign, a senator's actions play a substantial role in the development of citizens' perceptions. Perceptions of ideological position are closely tied to the senator's roll-call voting behavior. The evolution of these perceptions are consistent with the Bayesian model of public opinion that we use. The events of the long campaign also set the stage for the coming election. We found substantial differences in the ultimate outcome of reelection bids that were related to elements of the long campaign. In particular, we found that retirees seem very likely to have faced tough reelection battles. Finally, we were able to estimate the relative impacts of the long and short campaigns on the outcomes of the 1992 Senate races. The larger effect of the long campaign demonstrates the importance of what happens between elections. The significant effect of the short campaign shows that what happens after Labor Day can tip the balance in a close race. Incumbents cannot afford to neglect either campaign.

This chapter contains optimistic findings about the behavior of both incumbents and voters in a republican system. In contrast to numerous articles about the deplorable state of voter information in American politics, we find that constituents' aggregate perceptions are quite responsive to incumbent behavior in office. This finding is not necessarily inconsistent with studies that show that many individual voters are not well informed. As long as at least some citizens are informed, aggregate opinion will reflect incumbent behavior.[25] At the same time, our results imply that incumbents' presentation of self to voters is generally in line with their behavior in Congress. Instead of

systematically misleading or confusing voters, senators adopt positions that they believe will attract majority support and convey these positions to voters.

The long campaign is the time in which these perceptions of performance are developed, though our results also show that the short campaign can be an important factor in the ultimate election outcome. As Franklin points out, however, if elections are to reflect the public's collective judgment of a representative's record, it is crucial that the record not be entirely a creation of the short campaign (1993, 228.) Our results show that the time of governing strongly affects public perceptions and evaluations, and so provides a key linkage between representatives and their constituents.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank Laura Arnold and Christopher Zorn for research assistance on this chapter.

Notes

1. This was not always so. In the nineteenth century most members of Congress served only a term or two and then retired. See Polsby (1968), Fiorina, Rohde, and Wissel (1975), Price (1975), and Kernell (1977) for details on how this has changed.

2. For a glimpse at this literature, see Niemi and Weisberg (1993a, 1993b).

3. To be sure, some people did change their vote intention during the campaign, but Lazarsfeld and his colleagues found that most of this change reflected people returning to their partisan "home" after flirting with the opposition. To explain both the stability of most voters and this homing tendency, the authors developed the notion of a "partisan predisposition," defined by social class and other demographic factors. In their words: "A person thinks, politically, as he is, socially. Social characteristics determine political preference" (1944, 27). In the half century since they wrote, this verdict has been modified by a much greater emphasis on psychological factors, which are more malleable than are social characteristics, and by theories of rational choice, which assume voters make calculations of the expected benefits and costs of political alternatives and choose the option with the highest net benefit. Even modern theories, however, continue to acknowledge that social characteristics play a major role in the structuring of political preferences, though perhaps not as deterministic a role as Lazarsfeld and colleagues envisioned.

4. Niemi and Weisberg concur: "The problem with this model [the 1940 Columbia research team's model] is that the people knew how they would

vote even before the national conventions were held, particularly since President Franklin D. Roosevelt was running for a third term in office in 1940. People knew whether or not they were going to vote for him without listening attentively to the campaign" (1993a, 8).

5. This argument is somewhat at odds with another of the classic works on voting behavior, *The American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). Campbell et al. argue for viewing elections as the results of "proximal forces," which are captured by the attitudes, perceptions, and preferences voters hold at the moment of the election. These proximal forces may themselves be the result of past political events, but the past is assumed to affect vote choice only through them and not directly. Our model is compatible with theirs on this point, but we differ in arguing that understanding how the proximal attitudes were formed, and relating them to the past political events of the long campaign, is more important for understanding the political origins of the vote choice.

6. The NES has also conducted several innovative studies that focus on a longer campaign period. In 1980 the NES conducted a study that repeatedly interviewed respondents in February, June, September-October, and November. This study is invaluable for studying the workings of the nomination process that leads to the fall campaign. The NES also conducted a continuous monitoring of public opinion throughout the 1984 election year, interviewing a new, small sample of the public each week throughout the year. (See Bartels 1988 for an excellent example of the use of these data.) These two studies provide many opportunities for analysis of public opinion through the eleven months leading to an election, but fall somewhat short of what is needed for studies of the longer campaign, which is our focus. Other scholars have also conducted studies over the course of the election year (e.g., Patterson 1981), but none have covered the interval from first election to first reelection that would be the key to a study of the long campaign.

7. Twice the NES has interviewed the same respondents over a period of four years. These panel studies of respondents between 1956 and 1960, and between 1972 and 1976, provide a glimpse of developments in the long campaign. But they are unfortunately placed insofar as they bracket the second terms of incumbent presidents as they sought reelection and after they became ineligible for another term. It would be far better to study the first terms of presidents as they initially establish their records with the public and to see the consequences this has for their reelection bids. The NES has begun a study that may provide this coverage for Bill Clinton's first term. Survey respondents interviewed in 1992 were reinterviewed in 1993. Current plans call for another reinterview in 1994. Whether this study will be continued into the 1996 election is as yet undecided.

8. Not all the retirements where voluntary: Alan Dixon of Illinois was defeated in a three-way primary race by Carol Moseley-Braun.

9. This model is also consistent with the scenario of uninformed constituents that have not formed past opinions.

10. The basic Bayesian model specifies how opinion at time t, Y_t, is related to prior opinion, Y_{t-1}, and new information, X_t. The formal model is $Y_t = aY_{t-1} + bX_t$, where a and b are weights that depend on the precision (or

proval and saving predicted values and residuals (our second measures of long and short campaigns respectively).

25. In fact, Franklin (1991) shows that even individual voters' perceptions of senators' ideology is responsive to roll-call voting, though there is considerably more noise in the relationship than we find in the aggregate data here. Our interpretation of this is that individuals are imperfectly informed (some very imperfectly!) but that there is enough "signal" in the noise to produce perceptions that are, when aggregated, quite responsive to actual incumbent behavior.

Chronology of the 1992 Presidential Campaign

BARRY C. BURDEN

1991

March   Bush's popularity reaches an all-time high of nearly 90 percent following U.S. success in the Persian Gulf. For the first time since at least 1972, no significant presidential aspirants have declared their candidacies at this point. Bush has scared away potential opponents in both parties.

30 April   Former Senator Paul E. Tsongas (D-Mass.) declares his candidacy for the presidency. He begins campaigning with around 2 percent name recognition in New Hampshire.

17 July   House Majority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) publicly decides not to run in 1992.

7 August   Senator John D. "Jay" Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) announces that he will not seek the presidency.

21 August   Senator Al Gore (D-Tenn.) declares that he also will not run for president, largely due to a recent car accident involving one of his children. Gore was thought to be a front-runner given his success in the 1988 primaries.

13 September Governor L. Douglas Wilder (D-Va.) declares his candidacy. He is the first significant black contender for the office since Jesse Jackson.