

THE
1994 MIDTERM ELECTION
AND THE
REPUBLICAN REVOLUTION

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THE 1994 MIDTERM ELECTION AND THE REPUBLICAN REVOLUTION

The emergence and success of the Republican Party over the last 12 years continues to confound political scientists, as the political atmosphere seems to invalidate theories as fast as academics can turn them out. A whole host of literature seeks to explain the recent popularity of Conservatism, but rather than coming to a consensus, each new author identifies some other ideological, structural or geographical change that ultimately fails to withstand close scrutiny. This note aims to provide a survey of the literature explaining 1994, the election year that launched the Republicans in to Congressional majority power. It will begin with the history of the '94 midterms, discussing the success of the "Contract with America" and the Republican Revolution, and the leaders, marketing and mobilization that brought the unthinkable to pass. The second section will review literature that attempts to explain why the Revolution did not seem as imminent as it was. The review will conclude by surveying literature on the underlying political factors that made the Revolution possible.

THE STORY OF THE '94 MIDTERMS

The Democrats held the White House and a majority in both the House and the Senate in the wake of the 1992 elections. Though this was the first time both the executive and legislative branches came under single party rule in 40 years, the Democratic Party was anything but strong. Bill Clinton won the Presidency with just 43% of the popular vote, while the Democrats' hold on the House slipped by 9 seats. If

the Democratic Party did not clearly notice its own weaknesses and vulnerabilities, a few ambitious Republicans certainly did. The results in 1994 would not only significantly shift the balance of power, but would also challenge many widely accepted theories of American politics.

The 1992 Elections

Most literature on the outcome of the 1994 election begin first with a look at the election of 1992, and the seemingly monumental changes that occurred between those years. With a divided government no longer a problem, the Democrats, led by Bill Clinton, marched forward with a number of ambitious but highly contentious issues that would inevitably give the Republicans the window of opportunity they needed. Clinton campaigned as a centrist, DLC Democrat, but his proposal to allow gays to serve openly in the military, his tax hikes, and Hillary Clinton's failed plan for national health care all made Clinton vulnerable to numerous scathing attacks from the Right. A general but widespread disgust for Congress became a more focused disgust with the Democratic Party.

Before all of this was apparent to the general public, however, it was apparent to a small cadre of Republicans headed by Newt Gingrich, a Representative from Georgia. Gingrich was a zealous partisan who became the "embodiment of Republican frustration" after Republicans' 40 years of minority status in the House (Bader 1996, 177). After leading a congressional walkout in 1985, Gingrich led a successful campaign to topple Democratic speaker Jim Wright with a continuous succession of minor ethical violations. Preceding Clinton's ascension to the White House, Gingrich also derailed the tax increase

proposed by the Democratic House and backed by George H.W. Bush. Dan Balz and Ronald Brownstein, in defining Gingrich's volatile character, alluded to tension between a "brilliant visionary" and a "petulant four-year old" (1996, 34).

John Bader, in *Taking the Initiative*, identifies the 1992 election as the major turning point for Republican mobilization that made possible the Republican Revolution. George Bush's loss meant that Republicans lost any foothold of legislative power; it also allowed for an opportunity to develop a new and refreshed agenda without considering the consequences for a sitting President. The cohesiveness and organization that carried Republicans into the Congressional majority was anything but accidental or inevitable; John Bader, along with Dan Balz and Ronald Brownstein, in their book *Storming the Gates*, offer vivid accounts of the Revolution, from its conception through to its realization.

Newt Gingrich & The "Contract With America"

Both books begin at the same starting point: Newt Gingrich. In a Kentucky special election a few months prior to November, Democrat Joe Prather lost a "safe" seat to a Republican after his challenger successfully tied Prather to the overwhelming unpopularity of Bill Clinton (Balz & Brownstein, 19). After witnessing this defeat, it became clear to Gingrich that the Democrats' biggest liability in 1994 was going to be their President. Bader tells the story of Gingrich's Salisbury, Maryland retreat, where future GOP leaders including Dick Armey, Tom DeLay and Bill Paxton mapped out their course to victory. The first item on the agenda was to refresh and refine the Republicans' message, and the conference settled on five politically conservative values to emphasize:

individual liberty, limited government, economic opportunity, personal responsibility, and security both home and abroad (Bader, 181-3). These issues were meant to emphasize inclusiveness and accessibility, and deemphasize divisive issues within the party. Gingrich charged Dick Armev with devising 10 points for a “Contract” with Americans (Balz & Brownstein, 37-8).

Bader emphasizes the importance Republicans placed on both distancing themselves from Democrats, but also offering alternatives to Democratic agenda items. Dick Armev solicited ideas from House members, challengers, senate Republicans, and interest groups, and asked house members and candidates to rank their favorite items on a preliminary list. Bader notes that this is a departure from any previously employed campaign tactic, and resulted in a Contract comprised of Conservative agenda items (crime and welfare reform, tax cuts) and populist issues (balanced budget amendment, term limits). Douglas Lathrop (2003) supports this claim by noting the relative absence of pollsters and political consultants in the Contract’s construction. Balz and Brownstein offer a similar account, emphasizing Gingrich’s goal in nationalizing the elections, and marketing the Contract to as wide a constituency as possible, rousing both the grassroots and the disaffected.

Integrated seamlessly into the Contract’s construction was its marketing. Not one of the Contract’s 10 points polled at less than 60%. From the Contract’s unveiling¹ to the language of its \$265,000 TV Guide ad, the Contract aimed at mobilizing citizens and creating a clear and positive message for voters. Balz & Brownstein deliver the best

¹ Balz & Brownstein say that Gingrich consulted a long-range weather forecaster before settling on 27 September to ensure there would be clear skies for the event. It rained until midnight the evening before, and cleared up for the unveiling.

account of the concept's marketing to voters. What the Contract lacked in realistic substance, it made up for in ideology. The RNCC set up a command center that faxed hundreds of talking points and debate rebuttals, and allowed campaign managers to call for marketing tips. Candidates were able to use film from the Contract's unveiling in their campaign advertisements, and were funded heavily from the party and safe congressional members. Indeed Alan Abramowitz points out that the Contract did very little for incumbents, aside from strengthening the hold on their seats, and benefited Republican challengers the greatest (Abramowitz 1995, 882).

The Contract's Success

American politics had never seen an undertaking quite like the "Contract with America", and its success was in large part due to incredible organizational structure. Alan Abramowitz (1995) discusses one of the most crucial elements of the Republicans' success, namely an unprecedented control of resources to viable Republican challengers. The highly centralized NRCC command center could ensure that money would flow to where it was both most needed and most useful. Balz and Brownstein pick up where Abramowitz leaves off, explaining Gingrich's effectiveness in cajoling (eventually browbeating) sitting members in safe seats to donate large sums of money to the NRCC fund. Both the carrot and the stick in this instance was the promise of desirable committee chairs to loyal and generous party members if and when the Republicans were to regain the majority. The Republican National Committee, under the leadership of Haley Barbour, was able to direct an additional \$20 million to congressional challengers

at Gingrich's prompting, and PACs came under intense pressure to contribute greater sums as well (47).

Abramowitz's analysis mentions also that Bill Clinton's approval was not significantly lower prior to 1994 than other Presidents historically. Gary Jacobson (1996) would agree that Presidential disapproval in itself is not sufficient for significant change, but that disapproval, compounded by a deliberate derailment of Democratic initiative by Republicans, would be. Republicans, united behind Newt Gingrich, threw out all of their procedural stops to halt any meaningful legislation from passing through Congress. The inability of Democrats to pass any laws or make good on electoral promises further fuelled the public's discontent with its government.² The fact that both Congress and the White House were under Democratic control seemed to enhance this feeling, blurring the lines between the Democrat in the executive branch and those in the legislative. This is reflected in a statistic offered by Jacobson comparing the relationship between a survey respondent's House vote in 1994 and his or her approval of the President's performance: In 1994, 86 percent of House votes were consistent with Presidential ratings, up from 68 percent in 1990 and 72 percent in 1986 (1996, 208).

As November neared, the political momentum that was mounting became increasingly hard to ignore. Jacobson argues that although approximately the same number of Democrats and Republicans retired prior to the '94 elections, members' reasons for retirement differed greatly. Approximately 65 percent of retiring Republicans left congress to seek higher office, whereas 71 percent of retiring Democrats did not (1996, 214). This statistic leaves the reader to infer that most Democratic retirements

² Both Bader and Balz & Brownstein discuss Republicans' legislative derailment in great detail as well.

were not willing or planned, but done to avoid inevitable electoral defeat. A growing absence of formidable incumbents eased the job of the NRCC to elect fresh Republican faces into formerly Democratic districts.

GOP Cashes In

In the wake of the 1994 midterms, Republicans saw a gain of 52 seats in the House, 8 seats in the Senate, and a pick up of 11 governorships. The GOP now held a majority in both chambers of Congress and a plurality of governor's mansions. The House gain gave Republicans a 36-seat advantage, divided 230-204. The Republicans' margin in the Senate was a slim six seats, standing at 53-47 (Jacobson 1996, 203).

WHY WERE WE TAKEN BY SURPRISE?

Democrats were bracing for the worst, and academics were watching closely, but few predicted the magnitude of change experienced in 1994. Conventional models suggested that nothing was significantly out of the ordinary (204), predicting a typical loss of about 26 seats for Democrats (Campbell 1997, 833). So what went so terribly wrong?

Inadequate Models

Andrew Busch (1995) takes his first analytical cut into this question by criticizing the adequacy of empirical models. He argues that models were both not precise enough and too precise to produce a meaningful analysis before the 1994 election. The first

claim is based on the idea that models preceding 1994 were not able to capture everything that needed to be taken into account. Superficial analyses of economic conditions and approval ratings fail to reflect nuanced contextual concerns. GNP growth may have been good leading up to the midterms, but job growth paled in comparison to other post-war years. Clinton's approval rating may have been hovering around 45%, but a simple "yes or no" survey couldn't reveal that nearly one-third of the population could not stand him (708). This criticism also questions whether we can accept proxies (like that of GNP for economic health) as stable across time. With rapidly developing technologies and a changing job market, it would not be exceptionally farfetched to concede that economic indicators significant 30 years ago may not be as meaningful today. Likewise, one cannot assume that voters are uniform in their participation across approval ratings, and ignore the plethora of information linking the strength of one's political leanings and opinions to one's activity (Fiorina 2005; Abramowitz 2005).

Busch's second claim, that models are too precise, faults them for being too mechanistic, and incapable of measuring the impact of "largely intangible swings of public mood or sentiment" (708). Busch seeks not to incorporate public sentiment in to empirical analysis, but rather to acknowledge trends of opinion as a supplement to "bloodless" empirical studies. He then goes on to list a number of recurring concerns of contemporary politics that would prove difficult to empirically measure, including government direction, diminishing personal responsibility, and changing social norms (709). The deficiencies identified here obscured the inevitable movement towards realignment, and the 1994 election merely brought America back in to step with its real preferences.

James Campbell (1997) identifies yet another wrench responsible for jamming pre-1994 empirical machinery: Ross Perot. The two-party vote, he argues, did a poor job of measuring short-term forces at work in 1992 (833-4). Traditional two-party empiricism is not equipped to analyze the significance of, or to speculate as to the impact of a third-party candidate capturing one-fifth of the popular vote. This *ex post facto* explanation is supported by pre-1994 literature discussing the difficulty in assessing Perot's effect on the impending election (Connelly & Pitney 1994). Perot voters, concentrated in New England, the Midwest and the West, if complemented by the religious Conservatives in the South, were well positioned to "recreate the Reagan coalition" (578). Despite the superficial obfuscation Perot seemed to present in predicting 1994, Campbell finds Perot's effect to be rather insignificant, especially considering realignment (Campbell, 840). Regardless of retrospective analysis, empirical models would have had a great deal of difficulty unpacking Ross Perot's effect on the 1994 elections, and any model would carry with it a significant measure of uncertainty, helping to obscure the magnitude of the impending Republican revolution.

Are All Politics Local?

One of the Republicans' advantages discussed above was their relative unity in comparison to the Democrats' dispersed and district-focused law-making. Gary Jacobson (1996) notes the distinct focus of Democrats on their own individual constituencies, embodied by Tip O'Neill's contention that "all politics is local". This mode of thinking, which was well founded on historical precedent, ensured that notions of nationalized elections and top-down campaigning never even occurred to Democrats. The 1994

midterms represented the first real example of nationalized Congressional elections, which caught Democrats completely off guard. Dispersed interests also made for weak and ad-hoc coalitions that stood little chance against the well-organized Republican machinery directed by Newt Gingrich (205). Though this is compelling, and no doubt played a significant role in the election, it cannot claim full credit for the massive shift of power experienced in 1994.

Suppression of a Southern Realignment

James Campbell (1997) offers what seems to be the most compelling account for the Revolution's obfuscation: the suppression of Southern realignment. Prior to 1994's election, the relationship between Presidential and Congressional preference remained a mystery. Academics offered various explanations for split ticket voting, all of which required a great deal of empirical imagination and theoretical speculation that remained unresolved until '94. Campbell subjects various explanations for the Revolution to empirical analysis, and finds that Southern realignment achieves the greatest explanatory significance (849-51). Campbell explains his findings by suggesting that Republicans were not realizing gains they should have been making over the last several election cycles because of their failure to field qualified candidates in potentially competitive districts.

In his book, *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change* (2004), David Lublin argues that the incredibly slow pace of democratization and competitive party politics in the South was due to the virtual non-existence of a Southern Republican party until relatively recently. Institutional roadblocks like incumbency and a

general lack of experienced candidates created a disjunction between Presidential and Congressional preference until partisan effects trickled down to the lower rungs of government, or until local Democrat leaders became inextricably associated with their liberal Democratic non-Southern colleagues. Gains Republicans should have been recognizing in congressional races based on Presidential preference were, as a result, not materializing. Newt Gingrich provided the electoral shock necessary to realign and redefine each political party, and reclaim the South.

EXPLAINING THE REVOLUTION

It is clear now how the Republicans pulled off their incredible feat in 1994, and why its magnitude was so difficult to predict. This section discusses the literature dealing with arguably the most important angle of the Republican Revolution: why it was possible. As alluded to above, the two most common and compelling themes are an overall disaffection with government, especially single-party government, and a South waiting to be realigned. Each of these themes is comprised of numerous parts, parts occasionally enforcing one another, and parts occasionally conflicting. We'll begin with government disaffection, and explore various explanation of why disapproval with government was particularly salient and crucial in 1994, and then move on to different approaches to Southern realignment. These analyses should provide a context and an explanation to the pre-1994 history discussed in the first section.

Disaffection with Government

Balz & Brownstein (1996) discusses in great detail the environment in which Newt Gingrich formulated his scheme to reclaim the House of Representatives. Three broad trends facing both parties, the book contends, were economic stagnation, cultural fragmentation, and a collapse of faith in government. Economically, real incomes had not improved since the 1970s, and there was growing concern over the government's ability to stimulate the economy. Cultural fragmentation was leading to antagonistic social enclaves that resulted in diminishing capacity to formulate a set of commonly accepted values, like personal responsibility. And faith in government dropped from a high of 75% under Lyndon Johnson in 1964 to an astounding 20% in 1994. Clinton campaigned on remedying the country's ailments, but after two years of failed initiatives, Republicans were well positioned to redefine themselves as a better option. Gary Jacobson (1996) echoes a number of these sentiments, citing a government disapproval of 79% at one point in 1994 (205), and noting that the incomes of America's middle 50% remained nearly flat between 1973 and 1992 (206). Jacobson also notes that in the 1992 election, "angry and dissatisfied voters had voted Democratic in House elections 56 percent to 44 percent; in 1994, they voted Republican 64 percent to 36 percent" (207), demonstrating the significant shift in blame resulting from the failure of a unified Democratic government to make good on its promises.

Philip Klinkner (1996, in *Midterm*) fleshes out the idea of a steadily declining trust in government in his chapter "Court and Country in American Politics: The Democratic Party and the 1994 Election." Issues like Vietnam and Watergate fueled decaying trust in government, and an overall distrust of Washington hit hardest the party most associated with a strong central government, namely, the Democrats. The

suggestion of a conservative groundswell, according to Klinkner, is unsupportable, and the Democrats' declining support had more to do with the perception of over reaching government rules and regulation. Court ordered civil rights and strict environmental regulations were seen as out of touch with the mainstream, and were identified with the unpopular radical left movement of the '60s. Democrats' uphill battle was only exacerbated by the atrophy of their party's organization. The DNC, DCCC and DSCC focused their funding primarily on incumbents, and fundraising, primarily on large corporate contributions. Grassroots faded along with labor union membership, resulting in a group of elite politicians with a lack of desire or ability to mobilize voters.

Potent distrust of government further disaffected apathetic liberals, while simultaneously energizing mobilized Conservatives. Klinkner cites the convergence of the above concerns as the ingredients of political action, and Gingrich's campaign machine as the catalyst to bring them together. Third parties including the Christian Coalition and the National Rifle Association not only contributed money, but also organized large-scale direct mailings soliciting small donations and endorsing Republican candidates. Appeals from these organizations were especially salient with the "angry white male," often cited as the embodiment of disaffection and distrust that helped to bring about the Revolution.

Grant Reeher and Joseph Cammarano (1996, in *Midterm*) explore the notion of the angry white male in their chapter "In Search of the Angry White Male: Gender, Race, and Issues in the 1994 Elections." Reeher and Cammarano acknowledge the 18 percentage point gain of Republican votes among white men between 1990 and 1994, but their findings suggest that this change is not the result of a widespread shift in white

males' opinions so much as a change in the white males that actually vote. White men supportive of Democratic causes had less reason to turn out on election day in 1994 than did men stirred to action by the NRC, the NRA, Christian Coalition or talk radio. In support of these claims, Reeher and Cammarano point to the relatively stable trends in attitudes towards minorities and affirmative action, and the relative similarity between male and female attitudes towards the government's handling of healthcare and other important issues.

The apathy of liberal voters extended well beyond white males. Reeher & Cammarano note that liberal women were even less likely to vote in 1994. Whereas 20 percent of male 1992 voters abstained in 1994, the percentage was 28 for women. Furthermore, 19 percent of male 1992 non-voters voted in 1994, compared to 4 percent of female 1992 non-voters. Of those in the lowest (and generally most liberal) age bracket, voters aged 18 to 29, 48 percent of 1992 voters abstained in 1994. It is important to note that much of these drops have to do with the historically lower turnout for midterm elections, but it is the sex and age related differences that demand particular attention, and indicate significant differences in the potency of disapproval and ambivalence.

It is no doubt clear by this point that economic conditions are one of those issues widely cited as capable of stirring disaffected white males in to action. In their pre-1994 election speculation, Connelly & Pitney (1994) list economic conditions as one issue at the front of the electorate's mind. Klinkner (1996) provides a thorough analysis of just how salient the poor economic conditions were leading up to the election. Economic issues were not limited to the stagnant rates of income mentioned above. They extended to the rapid widening rift between the nation's richest and poorest, and to labor issues,

like Clinton's support of NAFTA, which alienated labor (Klinkner*).³ But Reeher & Cammarano (1996) contend economics in and of itself was not significant, but was important only in shaping the Democratic Party's image as inept and ineffective at governing.

An emerging force in 1994 responsible for stirring the fires of the Right was talk radio. Louis Bolce, Gerald DeMaio, and Douglas Muzzio (1996) provide an analysis of talk radio's role in the epic 1994 elections. Their investigation begins with the rapidly growing ubiquity of talk radio, expanding from 2 stations in 1960 to 1,130 in 1995 (459). Growth of talk stations was fueled by advances in cheap satellite technology, and by the eve of the '94 midterms, over 20 million people a week listened to Rush Limbaugh, approximately 20 percent of male radio listeners over 18 (459). Bolce, et al. seeks to settle the question over the nature of talk-radio listeners to better understand talk radio's effect on politics. Some previous research identified listeners as "politically alienated and inefficacious, inattentive to public affairs, socially isolated, and cynical" compared to non-listeners (459, cites Crittenden, 1971). Other research found listeners "paid more attention to politics and participated more in political activities than non-listeners" (460, cites Hoffstetter et al., 1994).

Bolce et al.'s analysis reveals a number of interesting results. As expected, talk listeners cast a majority of their votes for Republicans; 64 percent for Republican House candidates and 60 percent for Senate candidates (461). Also expected, talk's audience is disproportionately male, distributed amongst males and females 56 to 44 percent (464). Their analysis reveals a number of more interesting results, too. A typical talk listener's

³ An asterisk in a citation indicates that the page number was not available at the time of publication because the book was en route via Summit.

salient voting issues differed significantly from the mainstream (470), as did their opinions of Bill Clinton, Congress and perceived direction of the country (471). Further evidence suggested that “conservative talk radio listeners were the most pessimistic of all political groupings” (473) and tended to score twice as high on “grievance indicators” (474). Perhaps the most interesting finding, and one that would support Reeher & Cammarano’s findings, is that talk listeners, compared to non-listeners, were more active in nearly every measure of political participation, especially voting (475-6). The implications of talk radio’s popularity are unclear. Critics claim an aroused and increasingly vocal minority may disproportionately affect policy (478; Fiorina 2004), but supporters contend that it is a modern form of soapbox, a “forum for discussion and dissent” (478).

This is a brief survey of the literature surrounding different manifestations of government disaffection that seem to have had a large impact on the 1994 midterms. But as discussed earlier, disapproval with government is not, in and of itself sufficient for significant electoral change. For a sufficient explanation of 1994, it is necessary to explore literature on Southern democratization and realignment, and the actors that made it happen.

Dealignment vs. Realignment

Previous to the 1994 elections, political scientists struggled to explain why large numbers of individuals would consistently vote for a Republican president, but simultaneously support Democrats for Congress. A popular explanation was dealignment, which posited that national partisan identification was weakening, and

elections were becoming candidate-centered (Campbell cites Wattenberg 1990, 1991). Empirical evidence showing a rapid growth of “Independent” voters would seem to support this position, along with growing incumbency advantage and declining surge-and-decline coattail effects (Campbell 1993). These hypotheses were severely undercut by 1994’s election, which seemed to have corrected in large part the incongruence between Presidential and congressional vote preference (Campbell 1997).

Since realignment’s apparent vindication, a wide variety of academic literature has focused on various aspects of its evolution and origins. Approaches range from the South’s impact, discussed above, to the role of civil rights and the Christian right. Realignment in Southern districts alone accounts for 22 of the 52 House seats gained by Republicans. Campbell (1997) offers an astonishing statistic supporting Lublin’s (2004) account of slow southern democratization: In 1984, Reagan carried 33 Southern congressional districts with unopposed Democrats; in 1988, Bush carried 24 (1997, 853). As previously mentioned, this was due in large part to the power of incumbency and an absence of a viable competitive party structure. But focusing only on the South ignores more nationalized trends in politics and party government.

Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders (1998) contend that the national move towards conservatism is the result of a long-term ideological shift that’s been happening since the 1980s. Greater issue awareness has allowed for a greater expression of political preference, which inevitably polarizes the electorate. Unfortunately for Democrats, the majority of Americans favor Republicans’ platform (634). Abramowitz & Saunders also note a significant intergenerational shift between 1976 and 1994, finding 20+ point gains by Republicans among upper-income whites, white males and white Southerners (640).

By 1994, the number of Democratic offspring maintaining their parents' liberal identification dropped from a 1978 high of 73% down to 65%, and the number of Democratic children switching to the Republican Party jumped from 17% to 29% in that same period of time (642). Abramowitz & Saunders do concede that much of this shift is due to Southerners bringing their Congressional and party preference into line with their ideologies, but still maintain that the United States is moving rightward and that Democrats have little hope of regaining power on a national level (649).

Single party rule in the South is not the only explanation offered as to why realignment did not occur as rapidly as it should have. Clem Brooks (2000) argues that the only thing that prevented democrats from realizing even bigger losses had been their advocacy of civil rights. Public sentiments towards typically marginalized groups, like women, blacks, and gays, have liberalized significantly over the last 30 years, and Democrats have always been perceived favorably as the advocates of the underrepresented (486). Brooks constructs empirical models to track voting behavior over the last several decades, and demonstrates that Democrats' stand on social issues was responsible for a significant suppression of Republican realignment (502). Indeed, Brooks claims that without liberal changes in civil rights attitudes, Democrats would have lost *every* Presidential election between 1972 and 1996 (500). Despite this, Democrats can take heart in knowing that the political attractiveness of moderate stands on social issues has pulled Republicans back towards the mainstream, liberalizing their views on women's and homosexuals' rights, and moderating their stand on abortion (501). Though Democrats' position has altered the frame of debate towards their ideal

issue positions, their ability to take credit for further liberal advancements is severely hindered (502).

Approaching conservative moderation from a different angle is Matthew Moen's (1996) discussion of the Christian right. Moen notes the increasing influence of conservative Christianity in the realm of politics, but contends that its recent ubiquity has led Christian leaders to emphasize pragmatism over exclusionary rhetoric (461). The willingness for Christians to forgo divisive rhetoric in the short run in the interest of long-term gains is supported by their tempered message during the 1994 midterms (Balz & Brownstein). The ability of Evangelical Christianity to work its way in to politics has allowed Republicans to make exceptional use of its inherent organizational and mobilizational qualities. This organization has also allowed for small numbers of highly motivated individuals to infiltrate and take over local government, and to extend the ground-level grass roots (463). Moen also notes that conservative Christianity's survival as an influential force will remain largely dependent on its ability to remain innovative and accepting (464). Soper (1996, in *Midterm*) echoes many of these same opinions, and stresses the importance of walking the fine line between appeasing Christian activists, and not becoming a liability to the Republican Party.

Bringing all of these analyses together is Paul Frymer (1996, in *Midterm*), who details Republicans' success in nationalizing the elections and finally aligning the South's ideology with its votes. The primary difference in 1994 was that Southern Democratic incumbents could no longer distance themselves from their national party or Bill Clinton, and were successfully challenged by Republicans who better reflected their districts' political preferences. This was all made possible by the top-down

organization of Newt Gingrich mentioned in the first section, met half way by the organized and mobilized conservative grassroots just discussed. Frymer, echoing many of his colleagues, predicts that most seats lost to Republicans are gone for good, and that the future for Democrats is rather dim.

CONCLUSION

The Revolution of 1994 has indeed had a lasting impact on the political arena for the last 12 years. Even under their own single-party rule, Republicans have enjoyed a sizable majority, and have achieved unparalleled political success in scaling back tax revenues and government programs. This would seem to support the ominous theories of permanent Republican majorities widely offered in post-1994 analyses, but even as over a decade has lapsed, a lasting Republican majority seems far from certain. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 provided a temporary boost of Republican support, but one that has steadily faded over the last 5 years. Dick Armev was quoted in a May 7, 2006 Washington Post piece (Weisman 2006) as saying the three crucial pieces to Republicans' 1994 success were scandal, policy fiasco and a plan of action. With an unpopular war in Iraq, emerging ethics scandals involving lobbyists and high ranking Republican leaders, and growing confidence amongst demoralized Democrats, a window of opportunity for change may be at hand.

The 2006 midterms will provide an exceptional opportunity to study the permanence of the Republican majority, and to test the hypotheses of the authors in this paper. It will also provide an opportunity to study the effects of Republican institutional and representational changes on electoral competition in the United States (Hacker &

Pierson 2005). Much of the literature reviewed above emphasizes changes in party identification over real changes in ideological preference, whether short-term or long-term. Nor does it explore the impact that even short-term changes, like a particularly unpopular war, can make in the long run. There are a great deal of approaches to electoral competition left unexplored, that have the potential to shed light on the future of America's electoral landscape. It is one of these approaches I hope to take in my research design.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In the election of 1994, the Democrats lost an incredible 52 House seats, 8 Senate seats, and in 11 governorships. The academic literature in the years immediately following this Republican Revolution identified two major factors responsible for the shift: disaffection with government and an ongoing secular southern realignment. Most literature identifies interplay between the two, but the fact that only 22 of the changing House seats were in the south leaves open the question of both the role of disaffection from government and the possibility of a nation-wide trend towards conservatism.

Explanations for split ticket voting previous to the Revolution required a great deal of imagination and empirical dexterity. The "electoral shock" of '94 provided the force necessary to align House party preference with Presidential preference, and to put to rest the question behind "dealignment". In retrospective electoral analyses, many writers have attempted to explain the shift of the other 30 seats as some variation on a nationwide realignment towards conservatism. Most research done in this area was

conducted within the three years directly following the election, and very little has been done since to test those early hypotheses.

The original question of my proposed research was to analyze the permanence of the Republican majority. Understanding the difficulty and complexity of this question, I narrowed my focus to electoral change since the 1994 midterms. The particular nature of the American political system in general, and electoral districts specifically, has yielded a small, and ever shrinking, number of “competitive” electoral races. As a result, the study of most national-level electoral competition can be done through analyzing these “battle ground” states and districts. The Revolution challenged many widely accepted electoral theories, but many of the revised accounts were still subject to a limited perspective, and could only speculate as to the future of the Republican majority. More than ten years later, we are able to ask a number of questions that might shed light on the future of electoral competition in America. Illuminating answers around the (changing?) potential for change might shed light on more practical questions: Has the inability of Democrats to capitalize on voter disaffection point to further realignment, is it simply poor leadership, or is it structural? Are nation-wide empirical analyses capable of capturing the necessary explanatory variables in voter participation? My analyses would take a look at where the battlegrounds are, where they are emerging, what their common themes are (if any), and what their impact is on the potential for major change on a national level.

The best way to approach this question is to deemphasize national-level studies, and turn to a regionalized focus. The first cut we could make into current competition is

to identify what the battle ground states and districts are. Knowing how many Congressional districts are competitive is the most basic measure of the permanence of the current Republican majority. Once the definition of a “battleground” is defined, the criteria can be applied to data from the last 12 years. Tracking electoral battlegrounds, both numerically and geographically, over time will give a rough measurement of the trends in competition, and will provide a solid starting point from where we can continue and refine our analyses.

The next cut would be to define which areas are stable, competitively, across time, and which are changing. This sort of analysis would help separate perennially competitive areas from ones that might be realigning. If certain areas are experiencing rapid movement towards conservatism, while the rest of the country is remaining relatively stable, a national level analysis may prove inadequate to reflect such a distinction. This could especially be the case if changing districts are designed to exaggerate small ideological shifts and skew representation. Gerrymandering and district redrawing will inevitably disrupt a clean and tidy analysis of inner-district competition trends, but it will highlight a key factor of the changing electoral landscape. Redrawn district competition can be compared to state-wide, and arguably less fluid, data to shed light on gerrymandering’s impact on competitive change.

A coherent picture of electoral competition will allow for the second step in my analyses: a snap shot of the battlegrounds. It is difficult to speculate on what might be found in these districts and states, and if it will be terribly different than what is important in other less competitive states, but rough factors that would be considered might include the area’s geographical, ethnic characteristics, economic situation and composition,

religious population and industry. The idea would be to look for common or recurring themes within and between battleground areas, in an attempt to elucidate what factors are important to those voters who ostensibly matter the most.

As mentioned previously, the first step in my research would be to define and locate competitive areas. Battlegrounds could be divided into three basic categories: razor thin but stable margins (approximately 50/50 split between Democrat and Republican), competitive but stable margins (up to a 40/60 split between the two parties), and districts within the competitive margin, but that show a steady trend towards a new majority. Election data can be obtained from any number of sources, and is relatively easy to organize and analyze. This is true both for the most recent election, and for those preceding it. Information on gerrymandered districts is also relatively easy to find, though analyzing its significance will take some attention. Once data are collected, they can be mapped to illuminate geographical variations in electoral competition.

Developing a snapshot of electorally competitive areas will require more ingenuity. Basic information on demographics, geography and economics is easily obtainable, but cultivating an understanding of specific concerns will require a more hands-on approach. Most information of this type would be pieced together through newspaper and magazine searches. Articles pertaining to national and local elections, local leaders' platforms, regional polls, Op Ed pieces, and academic case studies all contribute to the understanding of a particular area, and are available through various academic resources.

A breakdown of this sort would first be helpful in answering the question of conservative realignment. Analyzing district level activity will elucidate whether there is, in fact, a conservative shift happening in America, and to see, spatially, where it is. When done across the previous 8 election cycles, it would become clear where change occurred, whether it is still occurring, and where it has leveled off. The information yielded would be extraordinarily more useful in constructing projections of future electoral outcomes, and in understanding just how permanent (or impermanent) the Republicans' majority is. The overall goal of this research is to identify trends in competition and voting behavior to examine the permanence of America's current single-party rule. Speculation on electoral upheaval, or on the political inertia necessary to bring it about, requires an intimate familiarity with those areas susceptible change. This level of familiarity and understanding is unattainable through national-level analysis, but can be advanced by focusing research on those areas most prone to electoral change.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. HISTORY

These works detail the history leading up to, and maneuvering to bring to reality, the 1994 Republican Revolution.

1. Bader, J. B. (1996). Taking the Initiative: Leadership Agendas in Congress and the "Contract with America". Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press. [Summit]

John Bader offers an account of Republican mobilization through the context of established campaign norms. He tracks the Contract from its inception through its success, discussing its formulation, execution, and historical significance.

2. Balz, D. J. and R. Brownstein (1996). Storming the gates: protest politics and the Republican revival. Boston, MA, Little, Brown. [Summit]

Balz & Brownstein discuss broad trends facing parties before 1994, how Republicans manipulated and capitalized on public discontent, and how they were able to execute the "Contract with America." Relevant chapters: Introduction and Chapter 1.

3. Lathrop, D. A. (2003). The campaign continues: how political consultants and campaign tactics affect public policy. Westport, CT, Praeger. [Summit]

Douglas Lathrop offers a unique perspective that focuses on the formulation and marketing of the "Contract with America." He pays particular to the ways that its authors chose the Contract's 10 points.

4. Jacobson, G. C. (1996). "The 1994 House Elections in Perspective." Political Science Quarterly **111**(2): 203-223. [JSTOR]

This article discusses the political climate leading up to 1994, and through that context, the mechanisms employed by Republicans that enabled the Contract's success.

5. Abramowitz, A. I. (1995). "The End of the Democratic Era? 1994 and the Future of Congressional Election Research." Political Research Quarterly **48**(4): 873-889. [JSTOR]

In this article, Abramowitz discusses the Contract's targeted audience, and the fundraising mechanisms that enabled the Contract's dissemination.

II. SURPRISE?

These articles offer explanations and speculations as to why the Republican Revolution's immanence was not apparent before the 1994 elections.

6. Campbell, J. E. (1997). "The Presidential Pulse and the 1994 Midterm Congressional Election." The Journal of Politics **59**(3): 830-857. [JSTOR]

James Campbell offers a review of pre-1994 circumstances, and walks through 4 theses offered to explain why the Revolution was not predicted. He then offers empirical evidence to support the theory of Southern realignment.

7. Busch, A. E. (1995). "Political Science and the 1994 Elections: An Exploratory Essay." PS: Political Science and Politics **28**(4): 708-710. [JSTOR]

Busch presents a concise but significant critique of empirical models' explanatory capabilities, with specific reference to their inadequacy leading up to the 1994 election.

8. Fiorina, M. P. and S. J. Abrams (2005). Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America. New York, NY, Pearson Longman. [Pol. 420 Syllabus]

Morris Fiorina explores the recently popular theory that America is becoming increasingly divided. He proposes that polarization is only occurring on the fringes and among elites, and that as a result, the majority of America (who are moderates) is becoming disinterested and disengaged.

9. Abramowitz, A. I. (2005). "Is Polarization a Myth?" The Forum: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics **3**(2). [Pol. 420 Syllabus]

This paper is Abramowitz's response to Culture War? He argues that polarization is occurring, and that American "moderates" tend to be disengaged because they are uninformed and have no interest in American politics. As a result, only informed (and opinionated) individuals vote.

10. Connelly, W. F., Jr. and J. J. Pitney, Jr. (1994). "The Future of the House Republicans." Political Science Quarterly **109**(4): 571-593. [JSTOR]

Connelly and Pitney wrote this article in the months preceding the 1994 election. They discuss the topics salient at the time of publication, and explore various possible scenarios of post-election Washington.

III. EXPLANATION

These articles offer explanations as to why the Republican Revolution happened, and how it was possible.

11. Lublin, D. (2004). The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press. [Pol. 420 Syllabus]

David Lublin's book is an in-depth account of the slow Southern democratization. He explores the reasons for realignment's slow advancement, and discusses their significance.

12. Klinkner, P. A. (1996). Court and Country in American Politics: The Democratic Party and the 1994 Election. Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context. P. A. Klinkner. Boulder, CO, Westview Press: 202. [Summit]

Klinkner's chapter in his own book addresses trends of declining government trust, and the saliency of government disaffection. He also discusses the effectiveness of Republican and Democratic machinery pre-1994 and their respective impacts on the outcome.

13. Reeher, G. and J. Cammarano (1996). In Search of the Angry White Male: Gender, Race, and Issues in the 1994 Elections. Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context. P. A. Klinkner. Boulder, Westview Press: 202. [JSTOR]

This chapter explores the validity of the "angry white male". It also explores varying political participation and salience of issues across gender and age brackets.

14. Bolce, L., G. D. Maio, et al. (1996). "Dial-In Democracy: Talk Radio and the 1994 Election." Political Science Quarterly **111**(3): 457-481. [JSTOR]

Bolce et al. discuss the role of talk radio in the 1994 election, and dispell myths pertaining to the character of talk listeners. They analyze empirically listeners' political participation, and briefly discuss potential political implications of the talk radio format.

15. Campbell, J. E. (1993). The Presidential Pulse of Congressional Elections. Lexington, KY. [Footnotes: Campbell 1997]

Campbell explores various explanations for "dealignment" in America, and speculates on why the South is voting for Republican Presidents, but not for Republican congressmen.

16. Abramowitz, A. I. and K. L. Saunders (1998). "Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate." The Journal of Politics **60**(3): 634-652. [JSTOR]

Abramowitz and Saunders present evidence supporting a movement towards both increased polarization and increased conservatism. They identify the South as the area of greatest change, but also note intergenerational rightward shifts.

17. Brooks, C. (2000). "Civil Rights Liberalism and the Suppression of a Republican Political Realignment in the United States, 1972 to 1996." American Sociological Review **65**(4): 483-505. [JSTOR]

In this article, Clem Brooks argues that Republican realignment has been suppressed by

the Democrats' popular progressive stand on social issues. He also argues that Democrats' success representing the interests of the underrepresented has shifted Republican stands back towards the middle.

18. Moen, M. C. (1996). "The Evolving Politics of the Christian Right." PS: Political Science and Politics 29(3): 461-464. [JSTOR]

Matthew Moen writes on the increasing influence of conservative Christians on national and local politics. He also discusses the concessions Christian leaders were forced to make in order to capture and increase that influence.

19. Soper, J. C. (1996). The Politics of Pragmatism: The Christian Right and the 1994 Elections. Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context. P. A. Klinkner. Boulder, CO, Westview Press: 202. [Summit]

J. Christopher Soper's chapter reviews the history of the Republican-Evangelical alliance, and discusses its significance within the context of 1994. His analysis also explores the implications of "selling out" for political influence, and the internal conflict that can result.

20. Frymer, P. (1996). The 1994 Electoral Aftershock: Dealignment or Realignment in the South? Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context. P. A. Klinkner. Boulder, Westview Press: 202. [Summit]

Frymer presents an analysis of realignment and Southern democratization, and discusses them through the context of nationalized elections.

CONCLUSION

21. Hacker, J. S. and P. Pierson (2005). Off Center: the Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press. [Pol. 420 Syllabus]

This book explores recent changes in governmental structure and procedures that are specifically designed to maintain Republicans' status as America's majority party.