



## Ballots of Tumult: A Portrait of Volatility in American Voting

Review Author[s]:  
Kristi Andersen

*The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Sep., 1992), 794-795.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0554%28199209%2986%3A3%3C794%3ABOTAPO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N>

*The American Political Science Review* is currently published by American Political Science Association.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/apsa.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

the description of the event in news stories. When the significance of an event is more ambiguous, its meaning will be supplied by the reactions and interpretations of opinion leaders, which are carried as part of the news. If these interpretations are flattering toward a president, Brody argues that the public's evaluations will be similarly buoyant. If public opinion leaders are less enthralled, so, too, is the public at large. Thus, there are two parts to the theory: the news covers elite opinions and the news and elite opinions shape public opinion.

Brody's news model of presidential approval does not preclude consideration of such factors as the honeymoon and rally events, which have been pivotal in other explanations of the rise and fall of public evaluations. Brody maintains that opinion leaders tend to mute their criticisms of a president early in the term (the honeymoon) and during dramatic international crises that pit the United States against an unrelenting foe (rally events). Brody offers the first systematic comparison of the early period of presidents' first and second terms. The results suggest that while there is a honeymoon plateau of support in the first term, there is none in the second term. Presumably by the second term, opinion leaders are comfortable criticizing a known commodity. Brody also describes elite reactions to various international crises, from the U-2 incident during the Eisenhower administration to the Iran-Contra affair of the Reagan administration. He observes that during some of these crises, when the danger seems remote and presidential folly is apparent, elite criticism, rather than kudos, mounts. In this way, the international crisis (e.g., Iran-Contra) becomes a negative event, rather than a rally event, causing presidential approval to fall.

The core of the book is an intriguing analysis of the news model, offered in two parts: Kennedy through Ford and Carter and Reagan. Unhappily, because of some lost data sets, a combined analysis from Kennedy to Reagan is not presented. The news stories are distinguished between foreign and domestic news; policy proposals and policy results; and good, bad, and neutral stories. The results show that the net difference between good news and bad news affects public approval (relative to the effects of presidential broadcasts and the honeymoon in the first period and to the honeymoon, the economy, past approval, and the hostage taking in Iran in the second).

Even with this ambitious effort, work remains to be done in three areas. First, while Brody clearly outlines the relationship between media coverage and public opinion, he leaves for another book a test of the indirect relationship posited between opinion leaders and public opinion. As currently presented, opinion leadership is only vaguely defined, and opinion leaders constitute a somewhat amorphous group. They are primarily reporters' sources, including the president, vice president, presidential candidates, some members of the White House staff, the congressional leadership, some committee chairs, and columnists. No mention is made of governors, cabinet members, business leaders, or reporters and anchors themselves. In addition, the empirical treatment of elite opinion is largely anecdotal. Future efforts can develop a classification scheme that distinguishes news coverage of opinion leaders' comments about an event from news coverage of the event itself. This would provide a systematic test of the posited effect of elite opinion on news coverage and offer a way of judging whether opinion leadership takes place.

Second, the book does not fully distinguish between presidential opinion leadership and other elites' opinion leadership. In the Kennedy-Ford period, a variable measures presidential broadcasts, but this is not repeated for the Carter-Reagan period. The book acknowledges, but does not study, White House efforts to counter elite criticisms, create elite support, and generate its own favorable publicity. Other projects can build these activities into the news model more fully. Third, as part of presidential opinion leadership, presidents often offer symbolic presentations, as well as the policy proposals and outcomes Brody discusses. Many news events are mixtures of both. It would be important to know how these symbolic components of presidential news affect public approval.

In all, this valuable book offers scholars of the presidency, the media, and public opinion an approach that should be taken seriously and that offers an opportunity for future research.

*University of Arizona*

LYN RAGSDALE

**Ballots of Tumult: A Portrait of Volatility in American Voting.** By Courtney Brown. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991. 232p. \$34.50.

Courtney Brown's book is an ambitious one. He attempts to model electoral volatility in the United States in such a way as to resolve the debate about mobilization versus conversion during the New Deal realignments; develop a general picture of the impact of third parties on the American electoral universe; explain "where all those new female Republican voters came from in 1920"; and build a model of the congressional mobilization cycle incorporating variables derived from a wide range of theories about congressional voting. Brown argues that he addresses these questions from a new perspective, namely, "the possibility of fixed dynamic structures as characteristics of volatile mass electoral behavior differentially related to social context and evident across a wide range of events has not been extensively explored. . ." (p. 11).

*Ballots of Tumult* contains, in addition to its theoretical chapters, a case study of the dynamics of presidential voting during the New Deal realignment (1928-36); a chapter examining the sources of third-party support (and the subsequent movement of "demobilized" third-party supporters in the instances of the Populist party, Roosevelt in 1912, La Follette in 1924, Wallace in 1968, and Anderson in 1980); a chapter on the 1920 election that examines the differential mobilization of women into the Democratic and Republican parties; and a chapter that attempts to build a new and synthetic model of voting behavior in off-year congressional elections. Brown develops systems of differential equations to investigate each of these problems. For example, in the New Deal chapter, he illuminates (in my view quite successfully) the relative impact of conversion and mobilization by proposing three equations that together constitute an interdependent system describing the over-time fluctuations of three groups in the population: Democrats, Republicans, and nonvoters. Moreover, to communicate the results of his estimations, Brown offers the reader innovative and generally appealing graphic devices (though some are more successful than others).

Brown's is clearly a "bottom-up" perspective on po-

litical change. Leaders follow the masses; therefore, it makes sense to work on developing theories of mass behavior in the relative absence of theories of elite behavior. He makes fascinating and cogent points about how organizational dynamics might tie into his model. For example, he speculates that the differential mobilization of women into the parties in 1920 was a function of the local parties' electoral requisites. Nonetheless, he often seems more comfortable talking about mass behavior as a response not to intentional behavior on the part of elites but to "social forces" or "particular social chemistries indigenous to localized milieus" (p. 187).

This said, Brown does take into account critical contextual variables. Not only are his models "conditioned" so that we can see clearly, for example, the relationships between  $x$  and  $y$  for farm areas versus urban areas, but local levels of two-party competition are central to his view of how electoral dynamics work, and these kinds of variables are built into his models. This seems to me a clear strength of the book. Another is his lucid and useful discussion of the advantages and disadvantages (or pitfalls) of both aggregate voting data and cross-sectional survey data in the analysis of electoral change. He argues persuasively that neither is to be preferred consistently over the other. Finally, independent of the book's argument, Brown has clearly accomplished a monumental and valuable task by integrating diverse data from the ICPSR into a single data set containing county-level electoral and census data.

*Ballots of Tumult* will serve an important heuristic function, stimulating not only attempts to develop alternative models, but micro-level historical research, as well (which the author suggests is necessary to reach a better understanding of the mobilization of women in 1920). The chapter on the New Deal realignment is perhaps the most clear and convincing. The chapter on the congressional mobilization cycle and that on women in 1920 have a certain ad hoc quality about the explanations; but both, like the book as a whole, raise all sorts of interesting questions. Any reader interested in American voting behavior will find an idea or problem in this book that will encourage the rethinking of a question, the redoing of an analysis, or the revision of a conclusion.

Syracuse University

KRISTI ANDERSEN

**Catholic Bishops in American Politics.** By Timothy A. Byrnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 189p. \$29.95.

**The Bible and the Ballot Box: Religion and Politics in the 1988 Election.** Edited by James L. Guth and John C. Green. Boulder: Westview, 1991. 250p. \$34.95.

These two books, one a focused examination of a particular religious elite, the other a collection of essays and research reports about religion in a single election, illustrate well both the strength and weakness of contemporary research on religion in American politics.

In studying the political role of American Catholic bishops, Timothy Byrnes might have emphasized the *process* by which the church hierarchy formulates political policy and strategy. The fascinating story of how the bishops balance their own views with the conflicting imperatives of the Vatican, parish priests and nuns, professional staff members, Catholic interest groups, the

various religious orders, and the variegated and increasingly vocal American Catholic community has yet to be fully told. Alternatively, a book devoted to the bishops as political actors might have explored their *impact*, asking how their well-publicized messages on subjects as diverse as nuclear weapons, abortion, and the American economy influenced political elites, ordinary Catholics, and the American public. Eschewing both approaches in this slim book, Byrnes's principal aim is rather to chronicle and explain the emergence of the bishops as a provocative political force in recent American politics.

The recent change in the bishops' leadership style—their increased visibility on a range of controversial issues—was associated with the social transformation of American Catholicism. When they represented an immigrant church whose members suffered poverty, discrimination, and accusations of disloyalty, the bishops' principal political role was local in scope and defensive of Catholic interests and cultural values. When Catholics came out of the ghetto in the mid-twentieth century, the bishops similarly shifted their political role to encompass a broader range of political issues and values, pursue a more national political agenda, and assert a distinctly Catholic political ethic. The increased self-confidence of American Catholics and the enhanced organizational capacity of the bishops—the most common explanations for the new involvement—are only part of the story. According to Byrnes, the bishops simply adjusted to major shifts in American political life—the nationalization of American politics, the politicization of new issues, and efforts by other political elites to capture the Catholic vote. If the bishops became major actors on behalf of the prolife movement in the 1976 and 1980 presidential campaign, that is largely because the Supreme Court transformed abortion into a national issue, numerous candidates attempted to associate themselves with the bishops' agenda, and dealignment loosened the ties binding Catholics to the Democratic party, making them an attractive target for mobilization by conservatives. To those who regard the bishops as unwelcome interlopers trying to impose Catholic values on politics, one might say the bishops were more sinned against than they were sinners.

While the 1988 election may have seemed less overtly religious than its recent predecessors, the essays collected by James Guth and John Green in *The Bible and the Ballot Box* demonstrate a considerably more complex reality. While many observers discounted the role of religion once Jackson and Robertson departed the scene, the studies show a continuing if subterranean religious presence animating elites and ordinary citizens. The chapters following Allen Hertzke's essay—essentially a cultural argument that religion supplied the populist motif in the campaign—examine the political activities of denominational leaders and organizations, the impact of religion on political activists, and surveys of religious influences on the voting of major religious groups—white Protestants, black Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. The collection contains considerable original research, utilizing surveys of Protestant clergy, campaign contributors, and black Americans, as well as elite interviews and secondary analysis of more familiar exit polls and data sources.

In their conclusion, the editors extract an important theme from the diverse studies: "The United States is moving away from the ethnocultural foundations of