

Introduction

A Presidential Selection Process in Crisis

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There is no other event on the face of this earth that remotely resembles the American presidential selection process. Five months of grueling primary election and caucus contests, grandiose national nominating conventions, and a mysterious anachronistic electoral college are mechanisms unique to the selection of America's chief executive. Additionally, a host of forces integral to the outcome of a presidential election further serve to accentuate the uniqueness of the American experience. Intensive media coverage of presidential candidates, numerous debates, an astronomical amount of money spent on campaigns, and the omnipotent, if not notorious, spot-ads, are features of the American presidential selection system that defy any form of international comparison.

How well this astounding and at times incomprehensible system is functioning is a question that merits serious consideration. After all, it is the presidential selection process that affords a golden opportunity for the American people to showcase their democracy. At the same time, it is through the selection process that a leader should emerge capable of forging a broad consensus on domestic and foreign policy. Examining the process in place for choosing the American president, therefore, provides a rich opportunity to assess the vitality of our democracy and the extent to which leadership is enhanced.

As we approach the twenty-first century, a compelling body of evidence continues to mount that suggests a clear departure from what theoretically is expected of the presidential selection process

and the process in actual practice. To describe the process by which American presidents are selected as a process "in crisis" may not at all be an exaggeration, for the term *crisis* can confidently be applied to a system characterized by frequent and repeated failure.

The crisis state of the current selection system is most evident in two respects. First, the process with disturbing regularity is failing to mobilize political participation, inspire the American people, and generate enthusiasm for presidential candidates. Put differently, political linkage has not been engendered by the process we have adopted for choosing the president.

Second, the crisis state of the presidential selection process, which is as problematic as political linkage, can also be witnessed in the process of governance. Ample evidence strongly suggests that recent American presidents have had an extremely difficult time governing the nation. Although one cannot entirely blame the process of presidential selection for this dilemma, there does appear to be a correlation between the inability of presidents to forge broad coalitions in the governing process and the dynamics of the selection system through which they traveled en route to the oval office. What follows is a compelling body of evidence, gathered from a wide variety of sources, that clearly demonstrates the crisis state of the modern presidential selection process.

A CRISIS IN LINKAGE

Is the American electorate truly involved in the process of presidential selection? Does the current process generate positive perceptions toward candidates and parties? Regarding political involvement, the evidence is not at all encouraging. Voter turnout in primary elections, a device unique to American politics, is abysmally low. In 1988, primary turnout averaged only 24 percent of eligible voters voting.¹

Turnout in the 1992 primary season was also unimpressive. From the New Hampshire primary on February 18 to the Connecticut primary on March 24, eighteen presidential primaries were conducted. The average turnout among the registered voters was 30 percent. In some states, such as New Hampshire and Massachusetts, turnout was respectable at 67 percent and 59 percent, respectively. Frequently however, primary turnout was quite low: 26 percent of registered voters participated in the South Dakota pri-

mary, 25 percent in Colorado, 20 percent in South Carolina, 21 percent in Mississippi, 12 percent in Rhode Island, 18 percent in Michigan, and 16 percent in Connecticut.² Thirty-nine states in 1992 employed primary elections for the purpose of facilitating direct citizen involvement in the presidential nomination process, an extraordinary democratic opportunity, but, as the evidence reveals, one that failed to materialize. In states where the caucus is employed as a delegate selection mechanism, voter turnout is normally less than 2 percent of registered party members.³

Voter turnout on election day demonstrated a discernible rise compared to the 1988 election with 55 percent of the eligible electorate voting. This marked the reversal of a declining trend in voter turnout that followed the 1960 presidential election, an election year that recorded turnout at 63 percent. Nevertheless, despite the encouraging rise in voter turnout, the percentage of eligible Americans voting in 1992 was still considerably less than the turnout recorded for election years 1968 and 1964.⁴ One should also keep in mind that 45 percent of the eligible electorate still chose not to vote, despite the fact that three major candidates were running for president.

The electorate's detachment from the presidential selection process is further evident from attitudes expressed by voters toward political parties, the electoral process generally, and presidential candidates. Polls conducted during the 1992 campaign are instructive in this respect. To the question administered in April 1992 by the Gallup poll, "Does the way this year's presidential campaign is being conducted make you proud to be an American?," only 39 percent of voters responded yes. In October 1992, the peak month of the campaign, 51 percent replied yes, a gain of 12 points, but by no means a resounding endorsement of the campaign or the presidential selection process.⁵

Beyond the campaign, voters also expressed considerable disdain for political parties, a particularly unfortunate finding, given the fact that parties have historically served as the principal mechanism for facilitating political participation and electoral activity. In an ABC News/*Washington Post* poll conducted during the 1992 campaign, voters were asked the following question: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Both political parties are pretty much out of touch with the American people?" To this important question, 82 percent of respondents agreed, 15 percent disagreed, while 3 percent did not know.⁶ Analyzing voters' percep-

tions toward parties, the *Washington Post* concluded that "the idea of 'political party' has almost no content for a large swath of voters and the few images voters do have of both Republicans and Democrats are almost all negative."⁷

Voter disdain for the nation's two major parties is further evident from responses to this question: "Do you think it would be good or bad for the country if there were a new major political party to compete with the Democrats and Republicans?" Sixty-six percent of the voters responded that a new party "would be good," 24 percent responded that such a development "would be bad," while 10 percent replied "don't know."⁸ A poll conducted by the Gordon S. Black Corporation also discovered considerable support for a new political party. For example, 46 percent of persons polled viewed the Democrats and Republicans as incapable of reform, 57 percent expressed support for a new national party, and 56 percent were angry at the major parties and their candidates.⁹

Perceptions regarding the overall tone of the 1992 presidential campaign and the character of leading presidential candidates, continue to reinforce the crisis perspective. An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll discovered that 50 percent of voters viewed the campaign as "more negative" compared to previous elections, 38 percent replied "more positive," while 9 percent stated about the same.¹⁰ Moreover, a CBS News/*New York Times* poll discovered doubts about President Bush's trustworthiness among 45 percent of voters, 56 percent expressed doubts about Governor Clinton's trustworthiness, while 41 percent were doubtful about the trustworthiness of Ross Perot.¹¹

The character concerns expressed by voters raises an important question: Were candidates chosen under the old system of presidential selection actually better people in terms of personal character? While it might appear at first glance that candidates of the past were more trustworthy and moral compared to recent presidential candidates, the recent concerns over character seem to be more attributable to the process of presidential selection rather than the personalities involved. It is painfully evident that the long and torturous campaign for the presidency, from the New Hampshire primary in February to election day in November, inherently diminishes the character and credibility of those who pursue the oval office. Even Woodrow Wilson, a man of high moral and ethical principles, would most likely be deemed untrustworthy or of dubious character had he been required to compete within the modern sys-

tem of presidential selection. The increasing dominance of the media throughout the course of the selection process, combined with the public's insatiable demand for stories related to scandal and character, explain to a large extent the negative and skeptical attitudes of voters toward presidential candidates. A candidate's deficit reduction plan or economic stimulus package pale in comparison to the interest generated by reports regarding marital infidelity or inhaling marijuana. In addition to media reporting, a series of negative campaign commercials skillfully packaged by a candidate's media consultants relentlessly assault the essence of an opponent's character. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that voters have ill feelings toward the presidential campaign generally and presidential candidates specifically. This is indeed one of the unfortunate consequences associated with the modern system of presidential selection.

Voter trepidation toward presidential candidates is not confined to the 1992 campaign. Indeed, longitudinal data clearly demonstrate a fairly steady decline in the percentage of the electorate impressed with the two parties' presidential nominees. Consider the following findings from the Gallup poll. In 1952, 84 percent of the voters surveyed rated the two nominees as "highly favorable" candidates; in 1956, 92 percent of the voters rated the two presidential nominees in such terms. Clearly, from 1952 to 1960 the American electorate was very much impressed with those candidates who emerged as the nominees of the two major parties. Following 1960, however, one notices a marked decline in the ratings of presidential candidates, with 65 percent of the voters in 1964, 63 percent in 1968, 62 percent in 1972, 69 percent in 1976, and 53 percent in 1980 rating the Republican and Democratic nominees as "highly favorable" presidential candidates. From 1952 to 1980 the empirical evidence reveals a 31 percent drop in the highly favorable rating, a disturbing development to say the least. Such evidence is hardly suggestive of a presidential nominating process that is functioning well, particularly from the perspective of representation. Analyzing the Gallup data, Anthony King, an astute British scholar, stated the following: "The bizarre outcome in 1980 was that the most open, most 'democratic' leadership selection system ever devised resulted in the nomination of the two least respected and least admired presidential candidates in modern American history."¹²

Public attitudes toward presidential nominees in 1984 reveal a short-lived resurgence in positive perceptions among the electorate.

Following the nominating process, a Gallup poll discovered that 71 percent of the American electorate collectively rated the two nominees as "very favorable" candidates, the most favorable perception of candidates since the 1960 election. A word of caution should be noted, however. In 1984 President Reagan was an extraordinarily popular president. In fact, the impressive percentage of voters rating the nominees as very favorable was essentially attributable to the president. The data, when analyzed by party, reveal President Reagan receiving very favorable ratings from 43 percent of the voters, and Walter Mondale receiving very favorable ratings from only 28 percent of persons polled.¹³

In 1988 the American electorate appeared once again unimpressed with the nominees of the two major parties. Among those persons polled, only 39 percent rated the nominees as "very favorable" candidates. When examined by party, the data revealed George Bush receiving very favorable ratings from only 23 percent of the respondents, and Michael Dukakis very favorable ratings from a mere 16 percent of persons polled.¹⁴

In 1992 the Gallup poll examined only favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward the nominees of the two parties, rather than measure the intensity of attitudes. Although direct comparison with previous election years is difficult, the data are still instructive. Tracking polls for each of the two candidates from July 16, 1992, to November 1, 1992, found George Bush with an average "favorable" rating of 43 percent, while Bill Clinton's average favorable rating during this time was 54 percent. Such figures continue to raise questions about the extent to which the current nominating system is generating enthusiasm for our presidential candidates and yielding representative outcomes. With regularity, less than half of the electorate viewed the Republican nominee in favorable terms. In fact, from the twenty-seven tracking polls conducted from July to November never once did George Bush receive favorable ratings from over 50 percent of the voters. Bill Clinton's favorable ratings during the tracking period, although higher than Bush's, surpassed 60 percent only once.¹⁵

A CRISIS IN GOVERNANCE

Indication of a presidential selection process in crisis also surfaces in the performance of recent American presidents. In this respect, it is the failure in governance that casts a dark shadow over the

process by which American presidents are selected. Unlike the presidential selection system that existed prior to 1972, the "modern" presidential selection process, as it is often referred to, is a more open and democratic process, a clear reflection of the goals and objectives of the reform movement that prevailed following the tumultuous Democratic National Convention of 1968. Outcomes in primary elections and caucus contests now determine the nominees of both political parties, as opposed to independent and private decisions reached by party elites in national nominating conventions.

Although both parties continue to conduct national conventions, they are hardly the forums for determining the party nominee. The "modern" process of presidential selection is also a very porous process in that persons with minimal experience in party politics, what some refer to as "political amateurs," can emerge as meaningful and key actors within the context of nomination contests. Party organization officials or "political professionals" have to a significant extent been sidelined as the principal actors. It is the openness of the process and the decline of political party influence that characterize the modern process by which presidents are selected.

What is ironic, however is that it is precisely during such drastic reforms in the selection process that we notice serious problems developing with the process of governance. Indeed there now appears to be enough evidence to suggest an association between the reforms that have theoretically "democratized" the presidential selection process and the declining quality of presidential leadership.

Indeed, the relationship between ineffective presidential leadership and the process by which we currently select our president has not gone unnoticed by close observers of the American presidency. For example, Robert Shogan, a well-respected Washington correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, describes the dynamics of the modern selection process as resulting in "instability in politics and government, exaggerated expectations and excessive responses from the presidency and a deepening cynicism among the voters."¹⁶

Ted Sorensen, a former counsel to President John F. Kennedy, also views the current dynamics of presidential selection as being very incompatible with the requirements of modern presidential leadership. In Sorensen's view, critical differences between the modern presidential selection system and the selection system in use several decades ago include an excessive concern with generating the support of voters in primary contests as opposed to cultivating the support of party and elected officials, a heavy reliance on pollsters, media consultants, and professional fund-raisers rather than

policy advisors, simplification of complex policy issues for communicative purposes rather than through policy articulation, an over-emphasis on image and personal appearance as opposed to intellect and experience, and the replacement of campaign volunteers with computerized mailing lists, automated phone banks, and other technological devices designed to mobilize voter support. Such developments, according to Sorensen, have done little to bring to the forefront talented presidential leadership.¹⁷

The declining role of political parties within the presidential selection process seems to be particularly relevant for understanding the crisis in governance. The selection system facilitates little linkage between candidates for the presidency, party organizations at the state and local level, and fellow partisans campaigning for Congress. In the presidential campaign, a candidate will have in addition to his top team of national strategists a small corps of campaign coordinators and field supervisors located throughout the states, congressional districts, counties, and towns. Such individuals, many of whom are young and inexperienced in party politics, function completely independent of the state and local party machinery. With the presidential campaign only marginally connected to the formal party structure, the newly elected president assumes office without the institutional base of partisan support so necessary for effective policy-making and policy implementation.

To complicate matters even further, the presidential campaign has become dissociated from congressional campaigns with very little interaction between the parties' presidential and congressional nominees. Following the election, presidents owe little to members of their party in Congress, while congressmen feel little obligation to the president. The system of separated and shared powers becomes more separated than shared, with the end result being less legislative teamwork between the branches of government. The consequences of highly personalized presidential campaigns and the breakdown of a party-centered selection process is nicely captured by political scientists George Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne:

Candidates create their own organizations and mount their own campaign, but they pay a price for this independence. To put it simply, it makes governing more difficult. The electoral process provides the president fewer political allies in the state and in Congress. It makes his partisan appeals less effective. It fractionalizes the bases of his support.¹⁸

Lester G. Seligman and Cary R. Covington also identify the presidential selection process as the principal reason why recent presidents have faced serious governing problems. In their view, the dynamics of the selection process have forced presidents to rely more and more on the White House Staff for the purpose of policy-making, a condition that does little to enhance presidential leadership. "Unfortunately for the president, the White House is not an adequate substitute for strong partisan links to the public and Congress as a basis for creating a stable governing coalition."¹⁹

Indeed, the evidence continues to mount regarding the relationship between the current system of choosing presidents and the inability of presidents to effectively govern the country. Consider, for example, the trend toward one-term presidencies. Following full implementation of modern election reforms, only one American president, Ronald Reagan, has been elected for two terms. Presidents Jimmy Carter and George Bush both were defeated in their bid for reelection due to perceptions on the part of the public that they were not governing effectively. According to the Gallup poll, George Bush's public approval rating during the final months of his presidency was only 39 percent.

Although it is premature to evaluate the performance of the Clinton presidency, there does seem to be multiple indicators of a presidency faced with governing difficulties. This is particularly alarming given the fact that American presidents have historically enjoyed a legislative honeymoon with Congress during the early stages of their presidency. President Clinton, moreover, has the luxury of legislative majorities in both chambers of Congress. Yet problems already seem to be plaguing the president. Consider the fact that Clinton's nominee for attorney general, Zoe Baird, was forced to withdraw her name from nomination when it was discovered she had hired illegal aliens as domestic help. The public was outraged over the revelation and support in the Democratic-controlled Senate instantaneously evaporated, indicating no partisan base of support for the Baird nomination whatsoever. Clinton was left with no other choice but to distance himself from the nominee, who then voluntarily withdrew her name. The Baird fiasco was an embarrassing setback for the newly elected president.

Additionally, there is the problem between the Clinton administration and the powerful Democratic senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. It is well understood that President Clinton's economic recovery plan requires the support of Senator

Moynihan and that effective communication between the New York senator and the administration is imperative. Quoted in a February issue of *Time* magazine, four full months after the November election, Moynihan described the communication this way: "Not a single call, not from the President or any of his top people. I would have thought someone would have gotten in touch by now. I just don't get it."²⁰ The lack of association was clearly observed by Moynihan's public and vehement condemnation of Clinton's trial balloon regarding Social Security reform, hardly the sign of a healthy working relationship, let alone a legislative honeymoon. At the same time, President Clinton's proposal to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military has faced strong opposition by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and, more importantly Democratic senator from Georgia, Sam Nunn. The controversial proposal, one of Clinton's leading campaign promises, has been tabled with substantial compromise predicted.

A more rigorous assessment of President Clinton's performance can be conducted by comparing public approval ratings of American presidents during their first one hundred days of office. For the past forty years, pollsters have asked voters the same simple question, with the exception of the president's name: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president?" After ninety days in the oval office, a *Times Mirror* poll discovered Clinton's public approval rating to be only 49 percent, the lowest public approval of any modern president during the first three months in office.²¹ George Bush's public approval after three months as president was 58 percent, Ronald Reagan's 67 percent, Jimmy Carter's 63 percent, Gerald Ford's 52 percent (even with the controversial pardon of President Nixon), Richard Nixon's 61 percent, Lyndon Johnson's 76 percent, John F. Kennedy's 78 percent, Dwight Eisenhower's 73 percent, and Harry Truman's public approval was 82 percent.²² The extremely poor approval ratings for Clinton certainly appear closely connected to a presidential selection process that does little to facilitate impressive governance. Indeed, as this work heads for the publisher, President Clinton's economic stimulus package, a key component of his economic recovery plan, has been reduced from \$19 billion to only \$4 billion, the end result of a Republican filibuster. This is undoubtedly a serious legislative defeat for the President.

When the chairmen of the Senate Judiciary Committee (Biden), the Senate Finance Committee (Moynihan) and the Senate

Armed Services Committee (Nunn) all of whom are leading Democrats are not effectively interacting with the president, especially during his first one-hundred days in office, then one must ask if the dynamics of the presidential selection process, a process that is candidate as opposed to party-centered, is in fact contributing to good government and impressive presidential leadership. Would there have been a legendary first one-hundred days for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had he been elected within the context of the new system of presidential selection?

BUCHANAN, BROWN, AND PEROT: METAPHORS FOR CRISIS

Additional indicators of a selection system in a state of crisis include the recent presidential candidacies of Pat Buchanan, Jerry Brown, and Ross Perot. Although the three candidates admirably elevated the level of dialogue and debate during the campaign, the extent to which such candidates were able to penetrate the selection process clearly demonstrates how porous and undisciplined the system of choosing presidents has become.

The Buchanan and Brown candidacies were essentially insurgent campaigns that appealed primarily to voters who were angry at the status quo and who preferred candidates identified as "outsiders." Both candidates during the nominating contest provided symbolic alternatives to the Republican and Democratic frontrunners and, not surprisingly, did quite well in primary contests. Buchanan received slightly more than one-fifth of the total Republican primary vote, while Brown received slightly under one-fifth of the Democratic primary vote.²³

While the inclusion of policy alternatives and inclusion of diverse candidates during the nominating contests can be viewed as beneficial to the democratic process, the question that arises is whether or not political competition should emerge with such ease and with such little restraint. Pat Buchanan launched his bid for the American presidency, the most powerful political office in the world, not from a seat in the United States Senate or a state governorship, but instead from his position as the conservative commentator on the emotionally charged show "Crossfire." The controversial Buchanan had served as a senior communications advisor and speech writer for Presidents Nixon, Ford and Reagan prior to establishing

himself as a media personality, although at no time during his career did he ever occupy an elected post in government, nor was he ever appointed to a formal policy-making role. Yet Buchanan, equipped with excellent communicative skills and a dedicated core of volunteers known as the "Buchanan Brigade," moved laterally into the Republican nominating contest. In the New Hampshire primary Buchanan received 37 percent of the vote to President Bush's 53 percent, an impressive showing for a candidate with only a public communications résumé.²⁴ Although unsuccessful in his attempt to win the Republican Party's nomination, Buchanan's political leverage resulted in a prime time speaking slot at the Republican National Convention. His inflammatory speech, which encouraged cultural warfare in America, intensified hostility between political factions and did little to broaden the electoral base of the Republican Party. According to many observers, Buchanan's performance at the Republican Convention, and more generally the Buchanan campaign, seriously undermined the reelection efforts of President Bush.

Jerry Brown's political credentials were more established than Buchanan's in that Brown had been a two-term governor of California. He also had run for president in 1976 and 1980, and more recently served as chairman of the Democratic Party in California. But, like Buchanan, Brown's entry into the race was essentially a personal decision with little, or no, peer review. With the aid of a 1-800 telephone number, the "Brown for President" campaign was launched. The Brown campaign, devoid of working papers on policy issues, seemed to rely on newspapers for the purpose of generating debate and articulating policy positions. Indeed, during one Democratic debate, just prior to the New Hampshire primary, the camera showed Brown scanning the newspaper, an incredulous and unprecedented spectacle to say the least. Brown's caustic and provocative style, combined with his basically shallow platform, led one journalist to describe the Brown campaign as "a drive-by shooting."

The evolution of a presidential selection process from that of an organized system with structure to that of a structureless process was further evident in the historic campaign of another "outsider," Ross Perot. Fueled by public distrust of Washington insiders, anger at gridlock and deep concern over the monstrous and rising national deficit, the popular and plain-talking Texas billionaire pursued the presidency as a "servant" of the American people. Through highly educational infomercials replete with pie-charts and graphs, and fre-

quent appearances on television talk shows, Perot immediately surfaced as a rival to President Bush and Governor Clinton. Indeed, during the month of June, the month prior to his temporary withdrawal from the campaign, Perot often led Bush and Clinton in voter preference polls. For example, the Gallup poll found, 39 percent of voters expressing a preference for Perot, compared to 31 percent for Bush and 25 percent for Clinton.²⁵ On election day, despite lingering doubts about his credibility, Perot still gained an astonishing 19 percent of the popular vote, the highest percentage received by a third-party candidate since Teddy Roosevelt campaigned for the presidency under the banner of the Bull Moose Party in 1912.²⁶

While Perot, to his credit, has forced serious discussion of the deficit, as well as campaign finance reform, the Perot candidacy truly underscores the dire need to repair the presidential selection process. The current process is so distasteful to millions of Americans, and political parties in their present form command such little respect, that a folksy billionaire, independent of party, and known principally through the Larry King Show, Donahue, and his own controlled media, can with great ease permeate the presidential selection process and command the support of close to twenty million voters.

When a process becomes so porous that a fiery right-wing journalist, a candidate whose campaign is described as a drive-by shooting, and a mercurial Texas billionaire can successfully mobilize large segments of the American electorate and fragment traditional party coalitions, then it seems only reasonable to ask ourselves whether or not the system of presidential selection is in need of serious repair. When one considers the crisis in linkage and the crisis in governance, combined with the unusual candidacies of 1992, repair certainly seems warranted. More specifically, as we reflect upon the modern system of presidential selection, a system that has been in place for over twenty years, and as we look toward the 1996 race, there appear to be eleven fundamental issues that now require serious examination. The eleven issues are as follows.

IS IT TIME FOR A NEW PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING SYSTEM?

There is a sizable body of evidence that suggests Americans have become fundamentally displeased with the current method of nominating presidential candidates. For example, to the question

asked by the ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, "Do you think the present system of presidential primaries and caucuses usually produces the best nominees, or not?" 38 percent of voters responded yes, while 53 percent responded no.²⁷ Given the negative opinions expressed by voters toward political parties, candidates, and the general selection process as a whole, it is not too surprising to discover over one-half of the electorate expressing displeasure with the nominating system. The length of the nominating process and the fractious nature of primary election contests appear to have alienated millions of American voters. Not surprisingly, sentiment is also developing in favor of a more national nominating event. To the question put forward by the ABC News/*Washington Post*, poll "Which would you prefer more: one national primary for both major parties, or the present system of primaries and caucuses over a six-month period?" 51 percent of voters expressed support for one date, while 41 percent preferred the present system.²⁸ It is more than apparent that the American electorate feels unrepresented by the current nominating process and desires very fundamental change in the process both parties have adopted for choosing their presidential candidates.

There is precedent for grand reform in the presidential nominating process. For example, following the 1824 presidential election, an election that yielded unrepresentative and scandalous results, the political parties abandoned the congressional caucus in favor of the national party convention for nominating presidential candidates. Following the 1968 election and the controversy in Chicago, grand reform was engineered once again resulting in the nominating system we have today.²⁹ In both instances, sweeping reform was demanded due to a nominating system that was deemed unrepresentative; a crisis emerged and the process was reformed. Is it once again time for grand reform?

ARE BROKERED CONVENTIONS DESIRABLE?

The thought of a brokered convention immediately brings to mind cigar-smoking party chieftains, and private deals forged by party bosses with little input from the party's rank and file. Also, for those who remember scenes of baton-swinging police officers in the streets of Chicago during the summer of 1968, the brokered convention is not only undesirable, but most likely connotes an authoritarian model of politics antithetical to the principles of repre-

sentative democracy. Nevertheless, the restoration of the brokered convention, although somewhat improbable in an age of mass politics, party organization decline, and pledged convention delegates, still demands serious scholarly consideration.

Indeed, it can reasonably be argued that some of the finest nominees of both political parties, as well as several outstanding American presidents, emerged not from conventions that simply ratified decisions reached by voters in primaries and caucuses, but instead from conventions in which party leaders actually forged the party's ticket. Also, with the current state of the party system in such a weak condition, there is perhaps an urgent need, more than in recent decades, to revitalize the power of the nominating convention.

As historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., notes:

The crisis of the party system provides an additional reason why conventions deserve to be sustained—and to be given a fair break on television. Conventions are the culminating symbols of the system that has for two centuries brought a measure of stability to American politics. The crumbling away of the parties would transfer political power to personalist movements, founded not on historic organizations but on compelling personalities, private fortunes and popular frustrations. Political adventurers would roam the countryside like Chinese warlords, building personal armies equipped with electronic technologies. Without the stabilizing influence of parties, American politics would grow angrier, wilder and more irresponsible. Maybe that is already happening.³⁰

Brokered conventions obviously require the elevation of party authority in the nominating process, in conjunction with sweeping changes in current nominating rules and procedures. However, the restoration of the brokered convention, while a radical departure from the present presidential nominating process, could possibly be the first step toward correcting a flawed selection system. The issue is worthy of debate.

SHOULD VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES BE SELECTED FROM THE ALSO-RAN CATEGORY?

Fourteen vice-presidents have become president—nine by succession and five by election.³¹ Approximately one-third of American presidents have at one point in their political career served as

vice-president. Given the propensity of vice-presidents to become president, it seems prudent to evaluate the process by which vice-presidential candidates are selected.

With the decline of party authority and the concomitant rise in candidate-centered politics, the choice of vice-presidential running mates currently belongs exclusively to the party's presidential nominee. The national convention is quick to ratify the decision and with little intraparty screening or convention debate the ticket is rapidly assembled. In practically no time whatsoever, a potential American president is introduced to the American people.

The important question that surfaces is whether or not the current candidate-centered process is functioning well. The evidence is not very compelling. As we review two decades of candidate-centered politics, serious problems in the vice-presidential selection process are very apparent. In 1968, Maryland Governor Spiro T. Agnew was Richard Nixon's personal choice for vice-president. Agnew, during Nixon's short-lived second term of office, resigned amid charges of income tax evasion and kickbacks. Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton was George McGovern's personal choice for vice-president. Eagleton was dropped from the ticket shortly into the campaign following disclosure of shock therapy for depression. In 1984 Walter Mondale selected New York Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro to be his running mate. A cloud descended on the Democratic ticket with press disclosure of disreputable real-estate transactions on the part of Ferraro's husband. In 1988 George Bush personally selected junior senator from Indiana Dan Quayle as his running mate. Controversy regarding Quayle's fitness haunted the campaign as well as the Bush presidency for a full four years. Polls frequently demonstrated public uneasiness over the prospect of Quayle becoming president.³²

In addition to the fitness question, what is equally problematic is the relative obscurity of those individuals tapped as vice-presidential running mates. Agnew, Eagleton, Eagleton's replacement Sargent Shriver, Ferraro, and Quayle were by no means household names. They were, in other words, total strangers to the American people in terms of personal character and policy preferences. They never once entered a presidential primary and for the most part were known only to their immediate constituents and colleagues.

It seems wise therefore to examine an alternative method of choosing vice-presidential running mates. One interesting proposal

is to have running mates selected from among the "also-ran" category. Those candidates have already been subjected to intense media scrutiny and throughout the lengthy nominating season they have come into extensive contact with the American people. Although ultimately rejected by the voters in the various nominating contests, several candidates tend to establish a certain rapport with the American people, and in some instances become household names. There appears to be an element of legitimacy in selecting a running mate from among the ranks of the also-ran. The vice-presidential issue is therefore controversial, quite current, and worthy of scholarly debate.

DO THE MEDIA INFORM?

The role of the mass media within the context of presidential selection stirs a great deal of debate. The fact that so many Americans are dependent upon the media, particularly television,³³ to help form political opinions and opinions about presidential candidates that it seems more than appropriate to examine the informational capacity of the media. Do the media serve to inform the American electorate during the course of the presidential selection process? Do the media truly contribute to rational and sophisticated voting behavior during presidential elections? Is American democracy, which is deeply tied to the presidential selection process, currently being served by the mass media?

Reflecting upon recent presidential campaigns, one cannot help but notice the unusual amount of media attention focused on the private lives of presidential candidates. Consider the 1988 campaign. Was it that critical to become so deeply absorbed in Senator Gary Hart's private sex life? It certainly seemed as if the American people knew far more about Hart's encounter with model Donna Rice on the yacht *Monkey Business* than they knew about Hart's budgetary recommendations for resolving the massive budget deficit that currently threatens America's national security. At the same time, Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, referred to by his Republican colleague on the Senate Judiciary Committee Strom Thurmond as the Democratic Party's most articulate spokesman, will long be remembered as the presidential candidate who plagiarized a paper in law school and who verbally plagiarized a speech delivered by a member of the British Parliament. Senator Biden was a member

of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee, two committees deeply involved in national policy-making. Unfortunately, however, the American people remained uninformed with respect to Senator Biden's position on pressing and complex national issues. Like former Senator Hart, Senator Biden was forced to withdraw from the presidential nominating contest.

In 1992, despite vague promises on the part of networks to devote more attention to substantive issues, there appeared to be once again an obsession with stories unrelated to policy-making. Prior to the New Hampshire primary, the name of Gennifer Flowers was synonymous with that of Governor Bill Clinton. The media's fascination with the "blonde bombshell" practically derailed the Clinton campaign, and to this day it seems miraculous that the Arkansas governor was able to survive the negative publicity surrounding this alleged affair. In addition to Gennifer Flowers, the media also seemed particularly absorbed with Clinton's draft status during the Vietnam war, as well as his experimentation with marijuana. With a national debt of four trillion dollars, economic recovery moving at a snail's pace, and fifty-six million people in poverty,³⁴ the media at one point in the campaign seemed focused on one vital question: Did Bill Clinton inhale?

SHOULD CAMPAIGN COMMERCIALS BE REGULATED?

Should legal regulations be placed on campaign commercials? Legal regulation has been proposed by political scientists, political commentators and by current members of the United States Congress. While campaign commercials contribute to the national visibility of presidential candidates, which is a positive aspect of such commercials, the disturbing dimension of campaign commercials concerns their substance and the forces responsible for their production. An examination of a typical campaign commercial in the presidential campaign will discover a commercial very short in length, normally a 30- or 60-second spot ad.³⁵ The commercial will either promote the virtues of the presidential candidate, often with the skillful use of imagery, or depict the opposition in an extremely negative light. Campaign commercials are the clever products of paid media consultants, the "hired guns" of presidential candidates to strategically market their candidacies.³⁶ What is also unsettling is the raw fact that modern presidential campaigns expend over half of

all campaign funds on campaign commercials, such funds supplied by the American taxpayer.³⁷

While campaign commercials serve an important function in American politics, it is the repeated distortion of an opponent's record and character that has given rise to regulation proposals. In recent elections we have witnessed a rash of negative and very distorted campaign commercials that have successfully undermined the credibility of presidential candidates. In 1988 Senator Robert Dole, Congressman Richard Gephardt, and Governor Michael Dukakis were victimized by negative commercials. In 1992 the campaigns of Senator Paul Tsongas and Governor Bill Clinton were compromised through distorted campaign advertisements. One Republican ad attempted to assault the character of Bill Clinton by visually transforming a perfectly fine picture of his face on the cover of *Time* magazine into a ghoulish and alienlike image. Combined with eerie music, the ad suggested there was something deep, dark, and hideous in Clinton's personality that the American people had yet to discover.

Is this the way a presidential campaign should be conducted? The records of presidential candidates along with their personal integrity are relentlessly attacked and the American public frequently misled. It is also disturbing to find negative campaigning becoming institutionalized at the subnational level of American politics. Has the time come to impose legal regulations on campaign commercials?

IS PUBLIC FINANCING A DESIRABLE POLICY?

Another key and very debatable issue facing the American presidential selection process involves the policy of public funding for presidential candidates. Public funding, enacted under federal law in 1974 as a result of campaign finance reform efforts during the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, has been utilized with regularity by presidential candidates in the nominating contest and general election since 1976. Although not a legal requirement, all major presidential contenders of both political parties, with the one exception of former Texas governor John Connally in 1980, have chosen to use public campaign funds. In 1992 only independent candidate Ross Perot waged his presidential campaign independent of public funds.

The goal of public funding is to eliminate the influence of "fat cat" contributions and special interest money in presidential elec-

tions, thereby making the American president less beholden to wealthy forces behind the political scene. At the same time, presidential candidates should theoretically be tied to the will of the people who, through a federal income tax check off system, supply the federal funds.³⁸ Five presidential elections have now occurred under the provisions of public funding, clearly enough presidential contests to allow serious thought and reflection on the merits of this particular policy. Has the presidential selection process been improved as a result of this novel experiment? Have we witnessed the emergence of a more effective presidential selection system? This issue is controversial and debatable.

SHOULD PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES BE REQUIRED?

Are presidential debates a necessary forum for evaluating presidential leadership? In what way does a presidential debate assist the American voter in developing a more sophisticated opinion regarding the capabilities and leadership potential of presidential candidates?³⁹ Since the 1976 presidential election, presidential debates have become an institutionalized component of the presidential selection process. Americans now witness debates between the Democratic and Republican nominees, debates between vice-presidential candidates, and a series of debates between candidates contesting the nomination. In 1992 the American people watched three debates between President Bush, Governor Clinton, and Ross Perot.

In recent election years, debates among candidates for the presidency have come under criticism due to the control exercised by candidates over the debate format and the issues discussed during the debate. Candidates also appeared well rehearsed for arguments and rebuttals. In 1992, to the credit of networks and debate organizers, the debate format was modified significantly. Debates were less structured, and allowed for a substantial amount of spontaneous exchange between candidates. One presidential debate even allowed the audience to directly question the candidates, a significant departure from previous formats and one that will more than likely serve as a model in 1996.

Nevertheless, the utility of debates still needs to be questioned. Are presidential debates, despite recent modifications in format, truly useful for the purpose of choosing the American