

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Overseers
National Election Studies
Center for Political Studies

FROM: Warren L. Kostroski

RE: Conference on Issue Voting, Rational Choice, and Information Processing

I have just completed a study of the effect of campaign stops on the electoral support given to presidential candidates. The main finding is that, contrary to expectations, campaign stops have no effect on a candidate's vote in the locality visited. Trying to come to grips with this result has led me to think about how the 1980 CPS survey might help address a number of interrelated questions about campaign activity and its effect on voting behavior. Let me first summarize the study and then describe two main ways the 1980 survey might deal with the influence of campaigns on citizens.

"THE EFFECT OF CAMPAIGN STOPS ON A PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATE'S ELECTORAL SUPPORT": A SUMMARY

Presidential candidates expend vast amounts of time, money, and energy on campaign stops. In the process they expose themselves to great personal danger: Recall the tragedies which befell Robert Kennedy in 1968 and George Wallace in 1972, and the two attempts on President Ford's life in 1975. Yet we have no evidence bearing directly on the obvious question: Do campaign stops "work"? Like most other campaign techniques, we know very little about its effect on voters. This study aims to determine whether the 1972 general election campaign visits to cities and SMAs by Nixon and McGovern increased their electoral support in the targeted constituency. Lacking appropriate survey data with which to address the question, aggregate election data from 1960, 1968, and 1972 were used. In brief, the design involved the following steps: (1) Identify the places visited in September and October 1972 by McGovern only (54 cities), by Nixon only (10 cities), and by both candidates (7 cities).

(2) Calculate the city/state and city/nation ratio of the Democratic percentage recorded in each constituency in 1960, 1968, and 1972, all years when Nixon was the Republican nominee for president. Do the same with the corresponding SMAs. This controls for most of the social, economic, and political characteristics of the visited localities which might otherwise confound the relationship of central concern. (3) Now subtract the 1960 ratio from the corresponding 1972 ratio; do the same for the 1968-1972 pairs. These figures will show a relative increase or decrease in the Democratic percentage between the two years involved. If campaign stops have the expected effect, the cities (and SMAs) visited by McGovern should show an increase, those visited by Nixon a decrease, and those visited by both candidates, no change.

These expectations are tested with the following statistical model:

$$V = aN + bM + c,$$

where, using the 1968-1972 comparisons of the city/state ratios² for illustrative purposes:

V = the change in the relative electoral support between the 1968 city/state Democratic ratios and the 1972 ratios. A positive value denotes an increase for the Democrat (McGovern), where a negative value denotes an increase for the Republican (Nixon);

N = whether Nixon visited the city, coded 1 = yes, 0 = no;

M = whether McGovern visited the city, coded 1 = yes, 0 = no;

c = the change in electoral support in the absence of any visit or in the event of visits by both candidates. (Hypothesized to be $c \approx 0$)

a, b = the respective effects of campaign stops by Nixon and McGovern.

(Hypothesized to be equal in magnitude but opposite in sign, with $a < 0$ and $b > 0$)

Eight separate regressions were run: for each of the two election year pairs (1960-1972) the subtractions for the city/state ratios, the city/nation ratios, the SMA/state ratios, and the SMA/nation ratios. The results point clearly and emphatically toward the conclusion that (in 1972 at least) campaign stops had no effect on a presidential candidate's electoral support in the locality visited. Possible statistical and methodological problems are discussed and found to be insufficiently serious to undermine this substantive conclusion. The lack of an effect is related to such phenomena as national news coverage of the campaign (see, e.g., McClure and Patterson, 1976), the norm of "balanced coverage" adhered to by reporters covering the campaign (see, e.g., Crouse, 1973), and the relatively small proportion of the electorate (about one-third decide on their vote choice during the campaign: see, e.g., Flanigan and Zingale, 1975) which remains available to be persuaded by campaign activity.

THE 1980 CPS SURVEY: A CAMPAIGN FOCUS

Whatever the reason(s) that campaign stops fail to influence voters in the expected manner, conducting the study led me to realize, in a forceful and direct fashion, how very little we know about the effects of presidential campaigns. Plenty of insights emerge from the ample journalistic writings on the subject, (White, 1961, 1965, 1969, 1973; Chester, Hodgson, and Page, 1969; Witcover, 1969; to name a few), but very little systematic analysis has been forthcoming. This despite the fact that the campaign period matters for electoral outcomes: While it is true that about two-thirds of the voters say they decided how to vote before the general election campaign even began, a full third claim to make their decision during the two months or so leading up to the election. Yet we have modest glimpses at best into that decisional process, and how it is shaped by the massive efforts of the candidates to influence it. Given the real

and unavoidable limitations of a national election survey, we can't entirely fill that gap in our knowledge in a single year, but we can begin.

How to begin? Two specific approaches come to mind, the first dealing with the creation of appropriate "contextual data" to attach to the PSUs comprising the sampling frame, and the second focusing on the nature of the opinion and behavior changes that might be detected in a multi-wave sampling design which asks respondents explicitly about campaign activities.

Contextual Data

Included among the hundred or so PSUs that will be used to draw the 1980 sample will likely be a number of cities and SMAs that will be visited by one or both of the presidential candidates on the campaign tour. (This assumes, of course, that both candidates will not cancel their tours because of the finding in the study I've just described. Fortunately, the danger of that happening seems remote.) Why not organize/coordinate teams of a half dozen or more political scientists who live in or near the targeted city to collect the following types of information before, during, and after the campaign stop: media coverage; organizational activity--parties, interest groups, college students, etc.; the plans made and how they are carried out by the candidate's advance teams and their local contacts. In short, let's assemble a whole host of descriptive data about how presidential campaigns function, but do it in such a way as to enable us to make some connections to the opinions and behaviors of the people presumably affected. Does the activity surrounding a presidential campaign stop result in more knowledge, more changed opinions, different views of the candidates? Do the individual level measures we commonly use shift more in visited PSUs than in those not visited? To the extent the campaign techniques we generally associate

with a campaign year affect voters, their effects should be most boldly etched in the midst of the heightened pace of a presidential candidate's personal appearance.

Multi-Wave Sampling

To get at the phenomenon of change, we will need at least two waves of interviews. One of them can occur at the usual time, immediately following the election. The other, however, should come in late August or early September, before the fall campaign swings into high gear. Collecting a baseline set of measurements at that time, and being able to see the amount of change that has occurred in visited versus non-visited PSUs, will help illuminate the decisional process of paramount interest.

Let me try to say all this one other way and then stop. A typical way to conceptualize the main influences on the presidential vote is with party, issues, and candidates. If we attempt in 1980 to treat certain key aspects of the campaign and their effects on the vote decision process, we can address several interrelated questions: How do the views that voters--especially the "campaign period deciders"--develop of party/issues/candidates get communicated (contextual data) and received (multi-wave sampling)? What is the relative importance of face-to-face contact during a campaign stop compared to the delayed effect of two (or three) step flows of communication? What is the impact of local versus national news coverage on citizen knowledge and opinions? (Significant in this regard may be the fact that the McClure and Patterson finding that national television news coverage had "no effect" may be related to the type of coverage that occurs: 72% deals with campaign stop activity, with the remainder split between issues and personal qualifications of the candidates).