

CURRENT RESEARCH

This section of the *Quarterly* is reserved for brief reports of research in progress, discussions of unsolved problems, methodological studies, and public opinion data not extensively analyzed or interpreted. Succinct case histories are welcomed, as well as hypotheses and insights that may be useful to other students of public opinion. Usually, material in this section will be shorter, more informal, and more tentative than in the preceding pages of the *Quarterly*.

CHOOSING AMONG 133 CANDIDATES*

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To handle the ever increasing growth of junior colleges in the Los Angeles area, it was decided by some Power in 1968 that things would be much better if the junior colleges were able to operate independently of the city's unified school system. Accordingly meetings were held, resolutions were passed, organization charts were shuffled, and a new order was proclaimed.

To head this order, a new Junior College Board of Trustees was to be elected, and prospective candidates were invited to file for the seven positions, a rite which required the submission of a \$50 fee and a petition with 500 valid signatures. Since almost everyone in this affluent age has \$50 and since almost any supermarket has 500 valid and willing petition signers, 133 candidates qualified by the filing deadline.

So, in the April 1969 primary, each Los Angeles voter was invited to distribute seven votes among this interminable list of candidates. The top 14 vote-getters were to be retained for the run-off election in May.

In its way, this election was as magnificent as the famous 1964 election for state House of Representatives in Illinois, in which each voter was given 177 votes to distribute among 236 candidates. For in Illinois much of the sport was eliminated by the division of the ballot

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into two 118-candidate party slates and by the provision of party circles.¹ The Los Angeles election was sternly nonpartisan.

The candidates were listed in strict alphabetical order on the ballot and most of the names were accompanied by a brief indication of occupation (parent-homemaker, engineering configuration manager). The county uses the Votomatic punch card ballot and the 133 candidates filled seven pages in the ballot book used with this device.

What campaigning there was for the election was largely engulfed by an intensely fought mayoralty campaign in which a mere 13 candidates were attempting to unseat the incumbent, Sam Yorty. Also on the ballot were hotly contested races for the Board of Education and several school bond and tax issues.

The result of all this was that Los Angeles voters were required to make their decisions on this incredible array of candidates without reference to two convenient voting guides, party identification and incumbency, and with little help from campaign activity which could serve to disclose what, if anything, the individual candidates stood for. Voters had to look elsewhere for cues.

METHOD

This study seeks to investigate sources of influence on this Junior College Board vote. Multiple regression analysis is used so that the independent impact of a number of potential factors can be estimated.

The *dependent variable* is the number of votes attained by each candidate. The top candidate received 187,000 votes and the man in last place garnered around 4,000. It took about 60,000 votes to win a place in the May run-off.

With party, incumbency, and campaign references largely or entirely irrelevant in this election, one must consider other influences on the vote. Specifically, it was expected that a candidate's vote would be larger if (1) his name came at the beginning of the ballot; (2) he was recommended by a newspaper or active campaign group; (3) the occupation listed with his name was education-related; (4) his name was attractive to certain large ethnic groups; and (5) his name had a special identification.

These notions were fashioned into a set of *independent variables*, predictor variables of the vote result.

Order. It is fairly well established that candidates listed first in low-visibility races have a special advantage.² Although the phe-

¹ For a discussion of this contest, see James L. McDowell, "The Role of Newspapers in Illinois' At-Large Election," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 42, 1965, pp. 281-284, and James H. Andrews, "Illinois' At-Large Vote," *National Civic Review*, Vol. 55, 1966, pp. 253-257.

² See Henry M. Bain and Donald S. Hecock, *Ballot Position and Voters Choice*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1957; Howard White, "Voters Plump for

nomenon apparently has never been investigated for a contest with so many candidates, it is to be expected that the finding would hold true for the Junior College Board election as well. As noted, the candidates were listed in alphabetical order on all ballots, and thus a candidate with the name Aardvark stood to do especially well. No Aardvarks chose to run, but it is undoubtedly worth noting that, while only about one-half of one per cent of the population of Los Angeles has a name beginning with the letter A, almost eleven per cent of the candidates were so named.

The variable initially used in the analysis was the rank order of each candidate on the ballot. As it turned out, certain modifications from a simple linear representation of the order effect gave a more satisfactory fit. These will be discussed later.

Endorsement by a newspaper or active campaign group. Order scarcely tells the whole story, however. Two candidates whose names began with W emerged in the top group, and most of the A's finished out of the running. Some voters presumably based their decision on other, possibly somewhat more rational, cues.

The city's two major newspapers, the *Times* and the *Herald-Examiner*, cheerfully volunteered such cues. Each paper endorsed some 17 or 18 of the candidates and urged its readers to vote for 7 of them. Only five candidates were recommended by both newspapers.

In addition, there were two active campaign groups working in support of slates of candidates. One of these was a teacher-oriented group with generally liberal leanings. Its recommended slate of 8 candidates³ was publicized to the 30,000 teachers in the area by the Los Angeles College Teachers Association. A conservative group was also active. It supported both a slate of 7 candidates for the Junior College Board and a number of conservative candidates in other school races on the ballot. Its efforts seem to have been made substantially on an individual and door-to-door basis.

All of the liberal candidates were also endorsed by the *Times* and most of the conservatives were also endorsed by the *Herald-Examiner*. The two campaign groups agreed on only one recommendation.

One variable is included in the regression analysis for each of these recommendations. Each of these is a "dummy" variable and takes on a value of one if the candidate was recommended by the source in question and is zero otherwise.

Occupational identification. It was not originally intended to have

First on List," *National Municipal Review*, Vol. 39, 1950, pp. 110-111; John E. Mueller, "Voting on the Propositions: Ballot Patterns and Historical Trends in California," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 58, 1969, pp. 1207-09.

³ That's right, eight. If a voter carelessly voted for more than seven candidates his ballot was declared invalid for the race.

occupational designations accompany the names on the ballot, but strenuous efforts, including court action, were made by several candidates to have the occupational listings included. The assumption presumably was that such information in this low-visibility race would redound to the benefit of candidates with certain sorts of occupations—perhaps those with jobs that seemed related to education. Accordingly considerable creativity was shown by several candidates in specifying their occupation. There were, for example, the “Optometrist and Educator” and the “Railroad Worker, Scholar.”

To assess this phenomenon, a dummy variable was included in the analysis to indicate whether a candidate had an education-related occupation. Two other occupational dummy variables were also incorporated: one for the second most common occupation, attorney or lawyer, and one, as a sort of control, for those candidates who had no occupation listed at all.

Ethnic identification. Some voters, unwilling to expend the energy to get precise information about each of the candidates and not trusting newspaper or group endorsements, might conclude that the best method for electing candidates congenial to their point of view would be to vote for those with names from their own ethnic group.

Two groups of names were fairly easily identified for purposes of the analysis, and each is represented by a dummy variable. One was the Spanish surname, to test the reaction of the area’s largest minority group, the Mexican-Americans. The second was Jewish names. It was not clear, however, in which direction this factor would work. While some Jews might have been inclined to select congenially named candidates, other voters might have tended systematically to exclude Jews in their vote choices either on grounds of anti-semitism or in the belief that Jews were likely to be “too liberal” in school policy.

Name identification. Many voters in this election were unquestionably influenced by the appeal of a familiar name among the candidates. Only this can explain the phenomenal success of one candidate, a young lawyer named Edmund G. Brown, Jr., the son of a former California governor. Brown received by far the highest vote: over 186,000 votes to 135,000 for the man in second place.

Clearly, while Brown was favored by his alphabetic placement and by his endorsements by the *Times* and the liberal campaign group, his exceptionally high vote must be attributed in large measure to his familiar name and also to the identification with the Democratic party the name implied. A similar situation holds in lesser degree for two other candidates who were well known in some districts because of their earlier unsuccessful campaigns for Congress and who did quite well in the Junior College Board race.

It is difficult in the regression analysis adequately to account for such idiosyncratic phenomena. Nevertheless, something had to be done about the Brown situation, at least, since his extraordinary vote margin could seriously distort the relevance of the other variables: the *Times* variable, for example, would be made to look much stronger than it probably really should.

Accordingly, a variable was included which is unity for Brown and zero for all other candidates. This procedure is somewhat equivalent to removing Brown from the analysis altogether, while providing an estimate of the extent of his deviance from more typical patterns.

RESULTS

When these variables are cranked into the analysis, they generate reasonably clear results, as displayed in Table 1.⁴ The fit of the equation is quite good: It explains 87 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable.

Order was unquestionably influential in the vote result. As suggested above, however, the effect was not linear. Rather, a logarithmic transformation of a candidate's rank order proved to give a better fit. The results of such an exercise suggest, all other things equal, that a candidate in fiftieth place stood to lose because of his ballot position some 70,000 votes over the man at the top of the ballot, while a candidate in hundredth place lost some 81,000 votes. It mattered quite a bit in this election, therefore, whether one's name began with A or F, but relatively little whether one's name began with F or Z.

There is an additional minor wrinkle in the order phenomenon. Some of the literature indicates that the order effect on a long list of candidates follows a "J"-curve pattern: that is, while those at the top of the list gain considerable advantage from their ballot position, those at the very end also gain a bit.⁵ Thus the worst position on the ballot is not at the end of the list, but shortly before it.

Traces of this were found in the Junior College Board race, but with peculiar application because of the ballot format. As noted above, the candidate listing covered seven pages of the ballot. The candidates listed last on each page received some 5,000 votes more than one would expect on the basis of other considerations. Although this finding is noticeable and worthy of mention, it should be stressed that the

⁴ The equation is displayed vertically in the table. The number in parentheses next to each partial regression coefficient is its standard error. Conventionally, a regression coefficient should be at least twice its standard error to be regarded statistically significant. The equation is significant (*F*-test) at well beyond the 0.1 level. When the equation is calculated with Brown and the "Brown" variable excluded from consideration (thereby reducing the variance to be explained as well as an important explanatory variable), the R^2 generated is .82.

⁵ See Bain and Hecock, *op. cit.*

TABLE 1
REGRESSION RESULTS^a

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Intercept</i> | 47.4 |
| <i>Independent Variables</i> | |
| Order | |
| Log _e of ballot position | -18.5 (2.2) |
| Last on page | 5.0 (4.0) |
| Endorsements | |
| Los Angeles Times | 24.0 (3.5) |
| Los Angeles Herald-Examiner | 9.2 (2.9) |
| Liberal group | 8.4 (5.1) |
| Conservative group | 56.2 (4.3) |
| Occupation | |
| Education-related | 5.3 (2.0) |
| Lawyer | -1.8 (2.3) |
| No occupation listed | -2.8 (4.8) |
| Ethnic identification | |
| Spanish surname | 15.6 (3.6) |
| Jewish surname | 3.1 (2.8) |
| Name identification | |
| E. G. Brown, Jr. | 134.7 (10.9) |
| <i>R</i> ² | .87 |
| Standard error of estimate | 10.03 |

^a Dependent variable: Number of votes received by each candidate (in thousands). Mean = 27.86, standard deviation = 26.63, *N* = 133. See also note 4.

effect is small and, as the relative size of the standard error suggests, statistically not very reliable.

The impact of the *endorsements* on the vote varied quite widely. The newspaper recommendations appear to have been beneficial, with the *Times* candidates garnering an extra 24,000 votes and the *Herald-Examiner* candidates gaining some 9,000. The difference is more than one would expect on the basis of circulation figures, the *Herald-Examiner* having about three-quarters the circulation of its rival.

The campaign groups differed greatly in their effectiveness. Candidates backed by the liberal group gained only about 8,000 votes, a quantity which does not even satisfy usual standards of statistical significance,⁶ while the conservative group's candidates garnered fully 56,000 votes beyond what was to be expected on other grounds. As a

⁶ It is possible that this figure is somewhat underestimated. Brown was one of the liberal-endorsed candidates but, because of the inclusion of the "Brown" variable, his vote does not contribute to the strength of the coefficient for the liberal variable. Accordingly, when the Brown variable is excluded from the analysis the coefficient of the liberal variable increases greatly. Since this latter formulation ignores any magic in the Brown name, it is rejected on grounds of patent absurdity. But it must be acknowledged that, in denying any of Brown's vote to his support from the liberal group, the equation in Table 1 is probably not entirely realistic.

matter of fact *all* the conservative candidates emerged in the top fourteen.

It certainly appears that the conservatives were vastly more effective than the liberals in getting their message across. In part this may be due to the fact that the electorate in Los Angeles was in a generally conservative mood on school issues at the time of the election and thus found the conservative argument rather congenial—all the school tax and bond issues on the ballot failed badly. The election came during tax time and there had been a series of public school disruptions in Negro areas a few weeks earlier.

Occupation effects on the vote were rather small. However, candidates with education-related occupations did seem to gain some 5,000 votes. This also means that the conservative mood of the election was not reflected in any sort of effective anti-teacher feeling.⁷

Ethnic identification, at least for Mexican-Americans, seems to have been very important. All other things equal, candidates with Spanish surnames gained some 15,600 extra votes. There was some campaigning in relevant areas by Mexican-American groups, both liberal and conservative, so the strength of the variable may partly reflect this factor. On the other hand, it seems neither to have paid appreciably nor hurt to be Jewish in this election.

There is, additionally, some indication that Negro candidates may have benefited from an element of racial identification. The two candidates whose vote the equation underestimates most—each by some 32,000 votes—are both Negroes.⁸ The racial aspect could not readily be fashioned into a satisfactory variable, however, because it proved next to impossible to find out which other candidates were Negroes.

Finally the *name identification* for Edmund G. Brown, Jr., is estimated to have been worth a sensational 135,000 votes. Incidentally, the Brown name seems to have generated no noticeable “coat-tail” effect. Candidates listed near him on the ballot apparently enjoyed no special advantage from this fact.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Important cues for the voters in this rather bizarre election seem to have been endorsement by the area's largest newspaper, the persuasions of a conservative campaign group, the appeal of a familiar name, and, at least for Mexican-Americans, ethnic identification. In

⁷ At one point a variable was also included in the analysis to check whether there was any notable bias for or against candidates with female names. There was none.

⁸ Turnout in Negro areas was unusually high at this election. This seems to be due to the fact that a Negro with a very effective campaign organization was running—with considerable success—for mayor.

addition, there was a clear order effect that followed a logarithmic pattern but with a small, impertinent upturn at the end.

It must be stressed that one important cue, incumbency, was entirely missing in this election and that another, party identification, could play only a very minor and indirect role, if any. In elections in which these factors are involved and also in those in which campaigning by the candidates becomes more visible, it is to be expected that the effects of order, name and ethnic identification, and newspaper endorsement would diminish greatly.⁹

Nevertheless, elections with minimal information, such as the one in Los Angeles, are by no means unusual, although rarely do they involve such a preposterously large number of candidates. Many elections carry low visibility races with lengthy lists of aspirants. This occurs not only in races for public office as seats are filled on various school, hospital, zoning, and judicial boards, but also in contests for ruling boards in large private and semi-private organizations such as alumni associations, fraternal organizations, and labor unions. Of particular interest in this connection are the recent efforts to have private corporations become more "democratic" by more frequently opening up elections for boards of directors to competing candidates. Should these efforts be successful, we may soon find corporation leadership selected in very much the same way as the Los Angeles Junior College Board of Trustees.

In such contests, the results of this study suggest, the outcome is likely to be determined by authoritative endorsement, the activities of small organized groups, various semi-relevant cues associated with the names of candidates, and the order in which their names appear on the ballot.

⁹ For findings suggesting that the Los Angeles newspapers have been rather ineffective in influencing the vote on even the most obscure of the propositions, see Mueller, *op. cit.*, pp. 1204-06.