

## Campaign Strategy

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*Baseball fans with enough gray hair* to remember what the game was like fifty years ago will know that the complete game, today nearly an extinct species, was once the hallmark of a successful pitcher. Those who lament its passing may blame Casey Stengel, the legendary manager of the New York Yankees, who saw more clearly than others before him that extra games could be won by removing starters and bringing in power pitchers in late innings. Thus, while he did not invent the professional relief pitcher, he did more than anyone else to establish specialized relief pitching as a way to reframe baseball competition. In the process, he succeeded in defeating more opponents than any other manager of his day.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Benny Friedman, elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2005, redefined how teams gained yards by making the forward pass a routine, rather than an extraordinary, weapon. Friedman recognized that his team's blockers could create a pocket to shield the passer. As he observed, "Charging tackles, bearing down on the passer, come at the original position of the passer, which is the apex of the angle. . . . The passer, [by stepping into the pocket] if he delivers the ball properly, will escape the tacklers. They will converge behind him."<sup>2</sup> There is no football team today that does not exploit the pocket for exactly the benefits that Benny Friedman first saw.

Finding better ways to defeat opponents is the mark of a genius in sports, and it is the mark of a genius in politics as well. Genius is, of course, uncommon. Most competitors aim at incremental improvements within the prevailing understanding of strategy, rather than by

redefining competition itself. This book is about political analogs of Casey Stengel and Benny Friedman: two extraordinary politicians, Ronald Reagan and Boris Yeltsin, whose strategies reframed the possibilities of political campaigns. Whether one likes or dislikes their policies, it is hard not to recognize that each reconfigured the political landscape of his day. Their success did not depend exclusively on skillful pursuit of office under the usual terms of competition. Instead, they redefined the rules of the game.

Although we examine campaigns by two politicians, this book is not primarily a biographical undertaking, another application of the “Great Man” view of history. Rather, it is a comparative study of campaign strategy. We use theory, archival evidence, and secondary sources to gain insight into how politicians thought to be extremists within their own political setting were able to redefine issues and change institutions so as to relocate the political center to their advantage. We believe that Reagan’s and Yeltsin’s campaigns illustrate general characteristics of political competition.

As in sports, so too in politics: defeat is the greatest enemy, to win the greatest goal. Those who lose often fade rapidly from public view. How many of us remember the American presidential candidates defeated during our own time, let alone before? George Romney, once a leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination, disappeared from national prominence following his failed 1968 primary campaign. Edwin Muskie likewise faded from electoral politics in 1972, as did the Democrat’s 1988 nominee, Michael Dukakis. The 1964 Republican vice presidential nominee, William E. Miller, became so obscure that American Express used him in an advertising campaign that emphasized the once famous but now forgotten.

Defeat in politics usually ends public life. Yet some succeed in reviving their political career. Abraham Lincoln proceeded from defeat to defeat before achieving the presidency. After serving in the Illinois Assembly, Lincoln won one term in Congress, followed by a long electoral dry spell, including two failed attempts at election to the United States Senate, before he gained the presidency in 1861 and again in 1865. He relied in part on institutional innovation to win his second term, providing absentee ballots to soldiers so that they could vote from the front. Winston Churchill lost his first campaign for Parliament, only later to become a fabulously successful prime minister. He then lost to Clement Atlee in 1945, but overcame defeat and reemerged as prime minister in 1951. Richard Nixon, defeated for both the presidency and

the governorship of California, resurrected himself in 1968, only to self-destruct in the Watergate scandal and then resurface as a prolific and influential writer and thinker on foreign policy.

The puzzle of how individuals return from the wilderness of political defeat deserves close attention. It may be that most failed politicians are just unlucky, while a few find an opportunity to win, hitting on the right argument at the right moment by dumb luck. If serendipity is the dominant factor separating winners from losers, those of us who are trying to understand historical outcomes should not portray victors as clever strategists when good luck is a better explanation. Indeed, we do not doubt the importance of serendipity in any politician's rise to high office. Quite the contrary. We are mindful of Napoleon's response when asked what qualities he most desired in his generals: "I want them to be lucky." It is a candidate's bad luck, in a sense, to adhere to uncommon opinions. Holding views judged by the majority to be wrong—however right those views may later prove—may create an impediment too difficult for a candidate to overcome. (On the other hand, holding popular but wrong views—the wrongness of which is only established in the fullness of time—may lead to a successful run for office, and failure once there.) However important luck is in politics, we believe it is never the whole or even the main story. Anyone who strives long enough in any arena is bound to have runs of bad luck and good luck. But some people are better at exploiting the opportunities that come their way, seizing chances that others miss. Here we examine how Ronald Reagan and Boris Yeltsin each rose, phoenixlike, from defeat, and we do so with the supposition that more than luck was at play.

Reagan's rise to the presidency in 1981 followed on his failed 1968 campaign for the Republican nomination and his close defeat by Gerald Ford at the Republican convention. In the 1980 election, Republican candidates benefited from Carter's bad luck in being saddled with a hostage crisis and a weak economy (if those were matters of luck). But, as we will show, Reagan's successful strategy was taking clear shape well before these fortunate breaks came his way. He capitalized on the opportunity when his Republican rivals failed to do so. Success depended on his creativity in redefining issues, rather than on his convincing voters that he had the right position on issues as they had previously been understood.

Boris Yeltsin's creation of and ascent to the Russian presidency followed his 1988 expulsion from the Politburo by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Like Reagan, Yeltsin benefited from the difficult economic conditions faced by his country. He also benefited from the attempted coup d'état against Gorbachev, an event that both provided Yeltsin with a bully pulpit and opened the door for dramatic institutional change. Yeltsin, after being expelled from the Politburo, could not have realized his great political success without redefining the very institutional framework within which political competition took place. How he did so while other contenders in the Soviet Union failed is an important part of our story.

We present historical evidence suggesting that Yeltsin was unlikely to be victorious solely within the confines of Communist Party competition, the arena in which political success had previously been determined. Instead, he suggested ways to improve the welfare of the average Russian, often at the expense of party officials. In the context of the USSR's rigged electoral structure, such an approach was likely to fail. Campaigning to limit private benefits for party members—the very people whose support was required for victory—made him a loser in 1987; similar appeals made him a winner in a newly shaped electoral environment that had, by November 1991, outlawed the Communist Party. The times were right for him, that is clear. Yet others could not see how to exploit the opportunities of the moment. Yeltsin seized the day, turning luck into political opportunity and employing his genius for campaigning to spark a remarkable political resurrection. Even though they benefited from propitious circumstances, both Reagan and Yeltsin were ingenious at creating opportunities for themselves.

Our purpose lies, therefore, not in illuminating the luck of the moment or the unique personal qualities of this or that candidate, but in specifying generalizations about the strategies of campaigning. Indeed, our primary goal is to understand how candidates who appear to be out of the mainstream of political life—as many thought Reagan and Yeltsin were before their rise to the highest offices in their respective lands—can maneuver themselves into position to win office through democratic processes.

A secondary goal is tied to the dramatic international consequences of Reagan's and Yeltsin's quests for high office. In our view, the end of the Cold War is as much a story of leadership as of anything else. Most scholars who have investigated the role of political leaders in ending the Cold War have typically done so in biographical terms, emphasizing idiosyncratic factors over general principles.<sup>3</sup> While these studies stimu-

late thinking about common patterns, they do not contribute directly to knowledge about how individual campaign strategies affect international outcomes. For more than a decade, however, certain political scientists have been working to understand definable characteristics of political leaders as key variables in international relations and politics more generally.<sup>4</sup> One of our objectives is to appreciate the transformation of the international system in the late 1980s and 1990s from the perspective of the domestic political maneuvers of Ronald Reagan and Boris Yeltsin. Our study is thus rooted in the growing body of research on strategic politicians. As such, this book contributes to a more focused investigation of the intertwining of domestic politics and foreign policy.

We have two additional, narrower interests. These are to stimulate further research into a cross-national theory of campaigning, and to illustrate through the Reagan analysis how archives can be used to assist in testing equilibrium-based theories of political action through the method of analytic narrative.<sup>5</sup>

All of our goals can be summarized as efforts to move beyond anecdotal accounts of political campaigning. While anecdotes are entertaining, they usually make a particular point rather than establish what is generally true. As such, anecdotal studies may be misleading guides to general principles of campaign strategy. Here we build on systematic theorizing about campaigns, coupled with an institutional theory of incentives that identifies when it makes sense for politicians to offer special rewards to elite backers, and when to offer general rewards to all in the polity through public-goods-oriented initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

This study is not a rigorous, scientific demonstration of the veracity of the theoretical principles we examine. Such an undertaking would require an investigation of many more campaigns within the same theoretical framework, as well as the juxtaposition of the generalizations set out here with those that follow from other perspectives on political campaigns. We hope that our investigation will stimulate more studies of campaigning that rely on an explicit theoretical perspective and the hypotheses that follow from it, and that those studies will motivate further archival research into whether campaigners approach their challenges according to the general principles we articulate.

Our work is a step along the way. But it is a step we believe helps answer the question that motivated us at the outset: How can politicians whose ideas are seemingly at odds with mainstream political thought nevertheless rise to hold the highest office in the land?

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## Overview of the Book

Most studies of campaigning are chronicles of particular political competitions, not analytical investigations of the campaign. Yet campaigns are one of the most important features of the contract between the governed and the politician in a democracy. During campaigns, politicians present their ideas and are judged; intense debates about policy occur; political coalitions form; and political parties set new directions. Campaigns, failed and successful, are our units of analysis. In this introductory chapter we delineate the puzzles that motivate the study and set out our theoretical perspective on how to resolve them.

Chapter 2 focuses on Reagan's failed effort to win the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 1968. Here we see how important the structure of party competition was and how skillfully Richard Nixon exploited it. In 1968 Reagan failed to grasp how difficult it was to gain the nomination based on a grassroots campaign in a political environment dominated by party bosses.

By 1976, the structure of competition for the Republican nomination had changed in ways that were advantageous for Reagan. As chapter 3 demonstrates, he manifested considerable skill in competing for the nomination against the incumbent president, Gerald R. Ford. Although Reagan failed to secure the nomination, he positioned himself as the leading contender in 1980. Chapter 4 draws our attention to Reagan's maneuvers within the Republican Party in preparation for his campaign in 1980 against an impressive list of competitors. We will see how Reagan progressed in his politicking, from a candidate in 1976 who made rhetorical arguments about well-defined issues, to a more sophisticated strategist who recast political debate in order to construct a coalition that could win him the nomination without weakening his prospects in the race against Jimmy Carter. Chapter 5 continues this theme, turning attention to Reagan's successful bid during the 1980 presidential election. Here we see that luck played a part—he could not have anticipated that Jimmy Carter would face a disastrous Iranian hostage crisis or a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—but also that Reagan laid out his winning strategy well before Carter's woes set in.

Reagan's strategic insights into reshaping political competition not only helped him win the presidency, but also launched what has come to be known as the Reagan Revolution. His revolutionary reframing of the issues was an example of what William Riker calls *heresthetic*. We discuss the meaning of this term subsequently in this introduction.

Chapters 6 and 7 parallel the Reagan chapters, examining the campaigns of Boris Yeltsin between 1986 and 1991. In chapter 6 we examine his efforts between 1986 and 1988 to gain national prominence by arguing against the special privileges afforded members of the Communist Party. This strategy was doomed to failure so long as political control resided in the hands of the very Communist Party officials Yeltsin criticized.

Following his seeming political demise, Yeltsin resurrected himself by redirecting his campaign against privileges as a vehicle to restructure political competition. As we show in chapter 7, Yeltsin shifted strategies between 1989 and 1991. Early on he relied primarily on rhetoric to improve his political position within the Soviet system, but later he realized that he could not rise to great heights within the existing political framework. Whereas a less skillful politician might have satisfied himself with a middling career, Yeltsin was able to restructure political institutions and reframe debate, calling into question the unequal economic and political treatment of the Russian Republic as compared to the other Soviet republics. In the course of doing so, he redefined political competition in such a way that the existence of the Soviet Union itself became a central issue. His main political rival, Mikhail Gorbachev, could not move toward Yeltsin's positions without losing important elements of his core coalition, nor could he forgo doing so without losing still other elements. Thus, Yeltsin's redefinition of the debate over economic policy prevented anyone from competing with him for the loyalty of his newfound supporters. He deflected the rhetoric of his rivals by reducing their policy positions to obsolescence.

Finally, our concluding chapter pulls together the key generalizations that follow from this study. Now, however, we turn to the theoretical approach that defines our investigation.

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### The Theoretical Argument

Every political contest occurs within a unique context defined by its time and place. The context always includes a particular configuration of issues thought to be important by competitors for office and those who choose among them. We believe that a small set of general principles governs all campaigning, but that the particulars of their implementation depend on a separate set of principles unique to individual institutional contexts. We will first set out these context-specific prin-

ciples, and then turn to the more general principles of campaign strategy that help resolve the puzzles at the core of our study.

### *Institutional Context and Policy Choices*

In *The Logic of Political Survival*, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and his coauthors set out a theory in which a politician's motivation to gain and retain power and the institutional context in which he or she operates powerfully influence the content of political debate and the allocation of resources among contending policies.<sup>7</sup> As the authors of that study see it, the governmental structure of every polity is defined by its location in a two-dimensional institutional space. One dimension is the size of the *winning coalition*, the group whose support is essential if a leader is to remain in office. The other dimension is the size of the *selectorate*, the people in a polity who have a say in choosing leaders. The winning coalition is a subset of the selectorate.

Democratic national governments are characterized by large selectorates and large winning coalitions. Still, there are systematic differences in the sizes of those coalitions in different types of democracies. For example, systems with directly elected presidents foster larger winning coalitions than do British-style parliamentary democracies. These, in turn, rely on larger coalitions than many proportional representation systems.

Autocracies and other nondemocratic systems sometimes have smaller selectorates, and always have smaller winning coalitions than democracies. Military juntas and monarchies normally rely on both small selectorates and small winning coalitions, while rigged-election autocracies are typified by small winning coalitions drawn from relatively large selectorates.

Leaders provide both public and private goods. The latter—the special privileges that all leaders and regimes dole out to supporters—are given only to members of the winning coalition. For our purposes, the key feature of the selectorate theory is its logical and empirical demonstration that leaders who rely on small coalitions retain power primarily by providing private, personal rewards to their winning coalitions, while leaders in large-winning-coalition systems maintain their hold on power by providing broad public goods, such as personal freedoms, effective economic policies, and national security. When the coalition is small, as was true in competitions for national office in the Soviet Union, membership involves valuable personal benefits. If the small



coalition is drawn from a large pool of selectors, then a would-be defector to a rival politician incurs a high risk of losing those valued rewards. Naturally, the combination of personal benefits and the risk of their loss induces fierce loyalty to the leader who provides the rewards and who, in turn, demands support for his or her continued hold on office.

In contrast to the special-privileges focus of small-coalition, rigged-election systems, personal rewards to members of large coalitions, such as those typical of the American system, are swamped by the greater value of public goods that everyone enjoys through the policy choices of the leadership. Because the coalition is inherently a large proportion of the selectorate, the risk of losing private benefits by being excluded from future winning coalitions is relatively small. As a consequence, leaders who rely on large coalitions tend to provide successful public policies and have relatively short tenure in office. Because the loyalty of coalition members to the incumbent leader is greatest when the coalition is small and the selectorate is large and weakest when both are large, it is easier for autocrats to survive in office despite failed national policies than it is for democratically elected officials.

The selectorate theory implies what sort of campaign is most likely to be successful in different political contexts. In this regard it is important to recognize that even the most democratic political system may, at the local or the party level, operate along institutional principles quite different from arrangements at the national level. Party politics in the United States, for instance, especially before the explosion in importance of primary elections starting in the 1970s, were (and sometimes still are) the politics of the “smoked-filled room.” The 1968 Republican campaign was the last in which a majority of convention delegates were chosen by party barons rather than through primary elections.<sup>8</sup> That is, party politics before 1970 were governed by small coalitions that determined which candidates would receive backing and funding from the party. In such a small-coalition setting, successful candidates needed to offer personal benefits for members of the coalition, rather than focus on broad-based national priorities.

As we will see in chapter 2, Richard Nixon understood the importance of emphasizing rewards to party insiders in his 1968 campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. An analysis of the campaigns of his competitors, Ronald Reagan, Nelson Rockefeller, and George Romney, indicates that they did not understand this principle, or at least failed to act on it. Chapter 2 reveals a nomination process largely

controlled by a few barons who could deliver the vote in exchange for the right commitments from the successful candidate. Reagan, Rockefeller, and Romney all eschewed the support of the party barons in favor of appealing to a broad swath of voters. They tried to persuade voters of the soundness of their policy proposals, while Nixon was busy persuading party elites, especially in the South, that he could and would protect their interests.

By the time Ronald Reagan secured his party's nomination in 1980, the process had been changed by institutional reforms, especially the surge in the significance of primaries. The coalition needed to secure the nomination and win the presidency had become much larger than that required in 1968. Even in primaries that attracted only party activists to the polls, the size of the coalition—and therefore the variety of policy orientations—required to win was much greater than that needed in the smoke-filled room. In the institutional context of internal party competition in 1980, having the right agenda of solutions to national problems had become more important than it was in 1968, when party politics was dominated by an elite group of party leaders.

The principles of the selectorate theory will prove even more important for our analysis of Boris Yeltsin's campaigning. After all, in the Soviet Union he operated in the context of a rigged election autocracy at the national level and a small-coalition, small-selectorate "junta" at the party level. President Mikhail Gorbachev understood the fundamental selectorate principle: when you rely on a small coalition—and the leadership of the Communist Party was inherently a small coalition—you succeed by protecting and enhancing private rewards. Yeltsin's initial campaign sought to eliminate the economic, educational, housing, and social privileges that came with top party positions. Such an appeal might have worked well in a large-coalition environment, but it was anathema in the institutional context within which he competed in 1986 and 1987. By 1991, however, that context had been radically transformed by internal and external pressures, including Yeltsin's own political maneuvers.

In the new, larger-coalition environment, Yeltsin's call for radical economic reform, even at the price of the Soviet Union's dissolution, could have great appeal. An expanded coalition required more emphasis on public policy than private rewards. One of the striking aspects of Yeltsin's political ascent was his effectiveness in redefining the institutional landscape, shifting it from a small-coalition system of privilege to an inclusive system of competition over policy ideas, especially in the

economic arena. This change was essential if Yeltsin was to realize his comparative advantage as a campaigner, and he did everything in his power to make it happen.

*Principles of Campaigning: Heresthetic and Rhetoric*

Institutional context may shape the extent to which a successful campaigner emphasizes private rewards or public benefits, but whatever the institutional context, one must also have the requisite skills as a campaigner to exploit one's opportunities. William Riker's investigation of the Federalists' campaign to overturn the Articles of Confederation, replacing them with the Constitution, is the exemplar around which our study is constructed. Riker observes that campaigners persuade people to support them even though voters know that campaign promises often prove meaningless. He suggests a theory designed to resolve this conundrum. His theory not only provides our analytic focus, but also suggests a resolution of the puzzle of campaign persuasion that stands in contrast to the received wisdom as articulated by James A. Farley, Franklin Roosevelt's campaign manager, who is reputed to have said, "[M]ost elections were decided before the campaign began."<sup>9</sup>

Riker's initial point of departure is to examine the ways in which campaigners use language to argue and persuade. He enumerates three traditional liberal arts of language: Logic concerns the truth-value of sentences; grammar concerns their communications-value; and rhetoric concerns their persuasion-value. He then identifies a fourth art, which he calls *heresthetic*. Derived from the Greek root for choosing and electing, heresthetic concerns the strategy-value of sentences. "In each case," Riker writes, "the art involves the use of language to accomplish some purpose: to arrive at truth, to communicate, to persuade, and [in the case of heresthetic] to manipulate."<sup>10</sup> Heresthetic is about framing the situation so that others want to join you. Put simply, heresthetic is "structuring the world so you can win," or at least improving the odds of winning.<sup>11</sup> Although closely linked to rhetoric, the art of persuasion, heresthetic is distinctly concerned with manipulation.<sup>12</sup>

Generally, the competition of ideas and issues takes place during the rhetorical phase of a campaign. Rhetorical interaction produces a sifting of issues that "set[s] the scene for heresthetical manipulation."<sup>13</sup> Heresthetic becomes relevant when the landscape of issues in dispute is relatively clear and is susceptible to redefinition. A successful heres-

thetician is a politician who has found a way to uniquely combine issues in order to create a coalition that would not otherwise be possible.

Rhetoric and heresthetic are two elements in agenda setting. Rhetoric can play a role in agenda setting if the campaign is about sifting through issues. But agenda setting does not always occur in a rhetorical campaign, for persuasion can occur without an agenda being set. This is what occurred in the 1968 Republican primaries and in the general election. In both stages, Richard M. Nixon, the victor, ran a campaign based on rhetoric.

Heresthetic, in contrast, is a strategy of (1) uniquely combining issues that have become salient in the rhetorical phase of a campaign; and (2) showing how these issues work together. It is not enough for a candidate to merely combine issues; he or she must present a convincing “story” of why this particular combination is the best alternative. The manipulation of issues that is central to heresthetic goes to the heart of agenda formation. The very linking of issues is a form of agenda setting; it entails laying out policy alternatives.

Richard Nixon’s 1968 campaign illustrates the key features of a rhetorician. Nixon seized control over the agenda without taking many transparent positions on policy. Instead, he neatly summarized his claim to exceptional competence with his campaign theme, “Nixon’s the One.” Ronald Reagan’s 1980 campaign, in contrast, illustrates the master heresthetician at work. Reagan emphasized an unprecedented view that linked growth-oriented economic policies with greatly increased military spending intended to provoke a peaceful end to the Cold War. Reagan argued vigorously that these policies could be linked to forge a stronger America, and by doing so he built a coalition of voters that included socially conservative, hawkish, blue-collar workers and fiscally conservative conventional Republicans. That coalition persists to this day as central to the Republican Party.

The effective heresthetician redefines the debate—as both Reagan and Yeltsin did—so that policies previously viewed as distinct are combined to create a new context for political debate. A central component of heresthetical maneuvering, then, is linking issues to create new and durable coalitions. Successful herestheticians do not merely break up an opponent’s coalition; they realign issues so that the opponent cannot repair the damage.<sup>14</sup> While purely rhetorical campaigners try to persuade voters that their solutions to previously defined problems are superior to those of their rivals, the heresthetician tries to persuade voters that the rivals have not recognized the true nature of the issues.

Rhetoric, Riker wrote, is the “principal feature” of campaigns, and “campaigns are rhetorical exercises: attempts to persuade voters to view issues in the way the candidate wishes them to.”<sup>15</sup> Heresthetic is not a principal feature of most campaigns because few politicians develop the skills needed to reframe issues or reconfigure coalitions to isolate opponents. Riker equates a successful heresthetician with a great painter or mathematician: “[T]he level of genius and creativity is roughly the same for the heresthetician as for these other innovators.”<sup>16</sup>

Heresthetical campaigners argue that their opponents do not understand the real issues and that their policies, therefore, are aimed at the wrong problems. While Jimmy Carter discussed the right trade-off between guns (that is, national defense) and butter (quality of life), Ronald Reagan argued that the choice itself was wrongheaded. Reagan maintained that the American voter could have guns *and* butter, rejecting the standard view that one had to choose one or the other. While his view prompted derision from rivals, with George H. W. Bush describing it as “voodoo economics,” none of Reagan’s rivals could find a rhetorical means to undo the coalitional gains he derived by reframing the debate over national security and individual consumption. As Reagan aptly demonstrated, the heresthetical cross-fertilization of manipulation and persuasion can transform a campaign.

Reagan reframed the discussion about the Cold War by arguing that the existing policy of peaceful coexistence failed to address the real issue. He argued that the morally compelling question was not how to survive within the Cold War, but how to win it. All of his predecessors and contemporaries, in contrast, had debated how to manage U.S.-Soviet relations, presuming the inevitability of a persistent Cold War. As we will see, Reagan’s linkage of guns and butter, victory in the Cold War and economic prosperity at home, allowed him to disassemble existing coalitions and reassemble them in a way that promoted his electoral success and propelled him to the center of American politics.

Although heresthetic and rhetoric are distinct, we should not overstate the clarity of that distinction, or the ease with which it is observed. At times the line between them “is wavy and uncertain,” as Riker warned.<sup>17</sup> One useful marker that distinguishes the two is the audience to which each is targeted. Rhetoric is directed at the voter. Candidates use it to persuade voters to support them. Heresthetic is directed at both the voter *and* the opponent. Candidates use it to structure the contest so that voters feel compelled to support them and opponents are unable to adjust to the new landscape of issues.

*Heresthetic, Credible Commitments,  
and Policy Equilibrium*

Heresthetic is performative radical. By definition, it combines issues in new ways, and the unique recombination it creates is the basis upon which a diverse coalition is held together. Once in office, politicians may find that they cannot easily abandon the implications of this reconfiguration. At the very least, they must look to the next election, where a major departure from prior campaign themes could hurt them. In this way, a successful campaign strategy exerts a binding effect on any campaigners.

This binding commitment, however, may be less chafing to herestheticians than other politicians. By reframing issues, heresthetic campaigners move voters to their viewpoint. Rhetorical campaigners, in contrast, present themselves as advocating what they believe are the dominant preferences among voters; they move themselves to the voters' preferred position, not the other way around. Thus, a successful heresthetician is more likely to show her hand during a campaign than a rhetorician.

*The Dependent Variable*

Following Riker, we seek to explain how candidates who are political or ideological outliers can exceed expectations about their "performance," while others who either are in the political center or have had a broad-based following fail to perform at or above expectations.

For us, "performance" does not mean that the candidate must win the election. We mean that the candidate must receive a greater number of votes than was predicted: she wins more supporters than she started with; or, in the case of a novice politician, comes through a contest without having damaged her future in politics. She may even have improved her future chances. Harking back to Jim Farley's observation that elections are decided before campaigning even begins (or its more recent incarnation in models that predict electoral outcomes based on economic indicators and other noncampaign variables), we can think of the successful candidate as one whose vote performance exceeds expectations based on these precampaign models.

In essence, we investigate the phenomenon of candidates who outperform expectations. Our primary focus is on political outliers who become acceptable contenders. All campaigns include more than one contender; they are classic examples of strategic interaction. Thus, we

also investigate those politicians whom the outlier challenges. Sometimes the political outlier is competing against another, more or less like-minded outlier, as may have been true with Yeltsin and Gorbachev in the late 1980s; sometimes the outlier runs against someone from the opposite end of the political spectrum, as in the case of Reagan and Nelson Rockefeller in 1968. We are looking to see how an outlier performs in comparison to expectations. We also investigate how the outlier candidates interact with each other.

The political outlier's main challenge, however, is the candidate who commands the political center. Hence, we also investigate the performance of the centrist candidate, as well as the interaction of the centrist with the outlier, a vivid example of which is found in chapter 2. Our objectives in studying the American campaigns are not only to track the evolution of Reagan's strategies, but to give considerable attention to the campaign strategies of Reagan's competitors (Nixon, Rockefeller, and Romney) and the strategic interaction among all four (see chapter 2, which examines the Republican contest of 1968).

There is a copious body of scholarly literature on elections, and there are standard theories, such as retrospective economic voting, that are seen as reliable explanations for and predictors of electoral outcomes. These explanations tend to be high-altitude, macro explanations of elections, but they are not about politicking, which is the mainstay of campaigns. We do not seek to supplant these theories; indeed we do not answer the questions they do, though, as stated earlier, our performance variable is sometimes associated with a successful electoral outcome for the candidate under investigation.

We are interested in the practice—really the art—of politics, the politicking that takes place during a campaign. We offer a probabilistic contribution to the electoral outcome, not a causal, deterministic explanation of election outcomes.

This takes us, then, to the specifics of how candidates maneuver within campaigns. Our analysis begins by evaluating two general principles outlined by Riker, and which we believe will help readers understand the strategy of campaigning.

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### The Dominance and Dispersion Principles

The “two principles for the choice of rhetorical effort” are the principle of dominance and the principle of dispersion.<sup>18</sup> The dominance prin-

ciple maintains that when an issue attracts a net increase in support for one side in a campaign, then that side reiterates the importance of the issue and the solution it advocates, while the other side, to the extent permitted, abandons the issue. The dispersion principle indicates that if neither side gains from a particular issue, then that issue is abandoned by both sides and so ceases to be a feature of the ongoing campaign.<sup>19</sup> Taken together, these principles dictate that actors do not talk about the same issues in campaigns. They suggest that the winner will be the actor who dominates on issues that matter most to voters. These principles are about the rhetorical aspect of a campaign.

Riker built a theory of campaigning around these two and related ideas, but he also recognized that, because they were derived from his study of the Federalist campaign, it could not provide an independent test of them. In his final, posthumously published book, *The Strategy of Rhetoric*, he urged others to subject his propositions to investigation, using other campaigns. As others before us, we do so here.<sup>20</sup>

The dominance and dispersion principles hardly seem surprising. One might be tempted to think that they say no more than “do what works and give up whatever doesn’t.” Yet they carry important normative implications about politics, politicians, and citizens. These implications speak to the factors contributing to political success, and those creating the essential political tension between the desires of citizens and the actions of their leaders.

### *Normative Implications*

The dominance and dispersion principles strongly imply that successful politicians do not and cannot act solely on the basis of high ideals and deeply held philosophical commitments to a particular approach to government. Rather they must be committed to winning, tailoring their campaign to that goal and that goal alone. This suggests a corruption of the language arts of logic and grammar.

The former, recall, concerns the truth-value of sentences. When the truth is not advantageous for a politician, she must choose how far to deviate from it: when to tell the truth but not the whole truth. As we will see in our case studies, effective campaign rhetoric often compels persuasive candidates to tell partial truths, making clear the inherent tension between the exercise of logic and of rhetoric. One of the most effective ways to bridge the gap between the incentive to persuade and the urge to tell the truth is to strategically alter the communication-



value of campaign utterances. The widespread, discernible corruption of logic and campaign grammar is, of course, the reason that voters are skeptical of campaign promises, and is thus at the core of the fundamental puzzle of campaigning: why are voters persuaded by what politicians say, when they know that politicians have incentives to mislead and obfuscate? After all, voters understand that campaigns are at least in part about personal advancement for the candidates, who may place expedience and pragmatism ahead of civic virtue. Therefore, voters need ways to ensure that candidates are committed to fulfilling their campaign promises—that is, committed to the truth-value of their utterances.

Ensuring that the successful candidate is bound to deliver the goods is more easily done in a small-coalition institutional setting than a large-coalition environment. When the winning coalition is small, victors must deliver private benefits. These are easily seen and evaluated by their recipients. If the rewards fall short of what coalition members think they can get from someone else, they switch sides. The risk that they will defect binds the incumbent, ensuring that she or he delivers. And the possibility that coalition members can be replaced with other selectors constrains their demands so that rewards doled out to the coalition's members fall within feasible levels. Thus, Communist Party officials in the Soviet Union could demand special privileges, confident that their party general secretary would deliver the goods. Perversely, the promises of Soviet leaders to their party's elite (but not to citizens in general) were likely to hold considerable truth-value as a result.

In a large-coalition setting, competition is essentially an arms race over policy ideas. Because the coalition is large and rewards are enjoyed more or less equally by those inside and outside the coalition, it is difficult for supporters to discern when a promised policy fails to materialize because of factors beyond the leader's control, and when it fails because the incumbent has reneged. Consequently, incumbents in such situations live on the brink of being deposed. They are never as secure in their jobs as their autocratic counterparts. And, perhaps surprisingly, the grammar of democratic policy campaigning is thus likely to be fraught with a looser vocabulary, weak in truth-value.

Of course, successful politicians can hold high ideals or strong beliefs, but, especially in large-coalition political settings, they must be prepared to massage their message to satisfy a massive number of voters. Those seemingly principled, issue-driven candidates—like John Calhoun, Ralph Nader, or Gary Bauer—who act as if they would

rather be right than win may be profiles in courage, but they have virtually no prospect of election. Such candidates, therefore, are not the subject of this study. That is not to say that Ronald Reagan, Boris Yeltsin, or any other successful politician must be unprincipled. A lucky few enjoy a convergence between their circumstances and their principles. We mean to say that successful politicians know how to bend; they present their principles in a manner that first and foremost wins over supporters, even if that requires some intellectual gymnastics.

One critical normative observation is that politicians who frankly say what they mean and believe, uncensored by concern for the impact of their words on voters, rarely hold office. Citizens say they want principled people to hold high office, but when voters think the candidate's principles are not the same as their own, they vote for someone else.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, successful campaigners must know what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. They must also know which among their beliefs are best left unsaid. We will see in chapter 5 that Ronald Reagan quite consciously chose not to raise the idea of missile defense in his 1980 presidential campaign, even though he passionately believed in it long before he became president. During the campaign he did not deny his principles, he simply chose to emphasize some issues and not others. We are confident that, had missile defense become a major topic, he would have made a forthright statement of his position,<sup>22</sup> but—and this is an important part of his political success—it did not come up because hardly anyone else in mainstream politics was thinking about missile defense as a strategic option.

Conversely, both Boris Yeltsin and his hard-line rival, Yegor Ligachev, made early efforts to gain political advantage over Mikhail Gorbachev, as detailed in chapter 6, by advocating principled positions that inevitably diminished their political fortunes, at least in the short term. Yeltsin argued against the economic and educational privileges bestowed on party leaders and their families, thereby alienating a constituency whose support was vital to political success. At the same time, Ligachev attacked excessive political liberalization, making himself a spokesman for the party conservatives. In doing so he angered Gorbachev, who viewed Ligachev's platform as a challenge to his policy of perestroika. Both Yeltsin and Ligachev were subsequently demoted and lost influence within the party. However, as detailed in chapter 7, Yeltsin ultimately shifted ground and found a way to satisfy his politi-

cal ambitions. By combining issues that appealed to the wider public, he transformed the political setting from a small-coalition, private-goods orientation to a large-coalition, public-policy outlook. Ligachev was unable to do the same.

### *The Negative Campaign: A Dominance Imperative*

Because voters hold different views of how government should function, campaigners are driven to use negative messages rather than positive arguments. Positive statements of policy intent must be crafted so as not to alienate people who might otherwise have voted for the candidate. But any clear policy statement is likely to alienate at least some voters. Therefore, at the first sign that such messages are costing support from more voters than are being attracted, the message must be abandoned. This is the dominance principle at work. Negative messages are less risky, as we explain later. They are aimed at convincing voters not to vote for the campaigner's rival. With luck, negative campaign messages shift voters from the rival to the message-sender, but even if negative campaigning merely persuades some of the opponent's supporters to stay home, the effort has paid off. If some of the rival's backers do not vote, fewer votes are needed to overcome any electoral advantage that the rival may have held.

This gloomy view of *homo politicus* forces us to ask questions about the effectiveness of campaign rhetoric. Why do voters care what politicians say, if politicians routinely subsume principles to expediency? Why do campaign promises have any impact in persuading voters, when such promises may be easily broken after the election? Why do voters look at anything more than a candidate's previous record?<sup>23</sup> What can they learn from words that will mean more to them than the candidate's actions? Voters know that campaign rhetoric is often "cheap talk" offered by candidates eager to get elected. Yet politicians since time immemorial have tried to persuade voters with promises that the voters have surely looked upon with skepticism.

The great orator Cicero successfully pursued the office of consul of Rome, relying on campaign advice given to him by his brother, Quintus Tullius, in an essay, *Commentariolum Petitioni*, to "change his air and his statements in accordance with the opinions of the people he meets" and—anticipating Riker's strategy of rhetoric by two millennia,

to “[s]lander your opponents as often as possible, reckon their crimes, their sexual depravity, or their attempts to bribe other candidates—all according to the character of the individual opponent.”<sup>24</sup>

Quintus Tullius provided the essential rationale behind the use of slander and deception in campaigns. Disproving the negative—denying allegations of personal depravity—is always difficult. Telling people what they want to hear always gratifies listeners, as long as they are not inalterably opposed to the speaker from the outset. Telling the whole truth does not provoke the same gratification in listeners and so is less likely to persuade. Politeness toward one’s rivals does not stimulate the kind of doubt necessary to erode an opponent’s support. Therefore, slander is a better means to gain support than generosity toward one’s foes. We say this not as a normative endorsement of such behavior, but in recognition of its effectiveness as a strategy of campaigning. Indeed, the heresthetician, by recasting political debate, may be able to escape the pressure to use negative campaigning. But for the rhetorical campaigner, such escape is exceedingly difficult.

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### One Winning Position or Many Winning Positions?

Perhaps the best-known insight in political science is the median voter theorem: when an issue is one-dimensional (that is, the set of alternatives can be positioned along a single line) and preferences are single peaked (that is, any policy closer to the chooser’s ideal policy than the status quo will be more desirable to the chooser than the status quo), and a majority is needed to win, then the position of the median voter will be the predicted political outcome.<sup>25</sup> Building on the insights of Harold Hotelling, Anthony Downs has shown that in such a one-dimensional, winner-take-all political landscape, politicians will gravitate toward the political center.<sup>26</sup> In converging on the median voter’s position, they ensure that no rival can gain political advantage by staking out a different policy position. Indeed, quite the contrary: if one candidate moves closer to the median voter’s policy preference and another candidate moves farther away, then the latter, more “extreme” candidate will lose support. Downs’s account helps explain why most American presidential elections are close, with candidates who appear to be, like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, virtually indistinguishable.

The median voter theorem highlights how the more centrist candidate in a two-person race gains the advantage by keeping issues sepa-

rate in the minds of the voters. To illustrate this we briefly consider the contest between Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin in 1990, foreshadowing our more extended discussion in chapter 7. Figure 1 illustrates the advantage Gorbachev would have gained if he had succeeded in keeping separate the political debates over economic reform and the degree of autonomy—if any—to be granted to the Russian Republic. The top half of the figure shows the policy preferences regarding reform of the Soviet economy among three critical factions: Gorbachev and his backers, Yeltsin and his supporters, and the nomenklatura. In 1990, Gorbachev still held the center on this issue. His position enjoyed the support of the median “voter” (or, in this case, the median official in the Communist Party and the Soviet Congress) and so was the “winning position.” The top party nomenklatura, though more conservative than Gorbachev, certainly preferred his economic stance to Yeltsin’s radical reformist position. Therefore, Gorbachev could count on their backing in a head-to-head contest.

When debate turned to the prospect of Russian sovereignty, Yeltsin again took a radical stance, far from the political center. On this issue, however, the nomenklatura (and general public opinion), rather than Gorbachev, were the relative centrists, although they were shifted closer to the right than to the left. They saw some value in expanding Russia’s rights, thereby improving their own welfare or power position; but they were not yet ready to embrace full-fledged Russian sovereignty, at least not in the economic sphere. Thus, the nomenklatura included the median voter, probably forcing Gorbachev to be more receptive to modest improvements in the Russian Republic’s well-being than he otherwise would have been. In a contest over Russian autonomy, we can infer from the assumption of single-peaked preferences that the nomenklatura would have sought modest concessions from Gorbachev while continuing to back him rather than throwing their support behind Yeltsin, whose position was farther from theirs.

Figure 1 looks at preferences on two important issues facing decision makers in Russia and, more broadly, the Soviet Union, in 1990–91. It shows us that as long as the economy and Russian sovereignty were treated separately, Yeltsin could expect to lose, as was confirmed by the results of the 1991 referendum, when the majority of Russians voted in favor of Gorbachev’s plan to preserve the Soviet Union. Yeltsin needed to alter the terms of debate if he was to rise to power through direct elections.

The median voter theorem, of course, holds only under the condi-

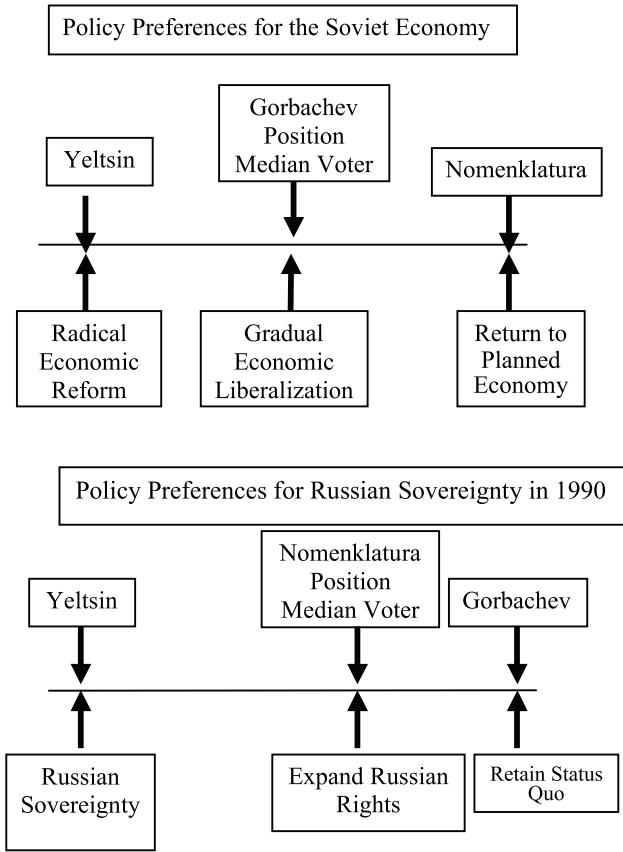


Fig. 1. Two separate, unidimensional issues, preferences in 1990 for the Soviet economy and for Russian autonomy

tions from which it is derived. If preferences are not single-peaked, or majority rule does not hold, or issues are not unidimensional and treated separately, then the median voter's preferred policy need not be the winning position. For instance, the chaos theorems of Richard McKelvey and Norman Schofield show that when issues are multidimensional or policy choices across issues are linked together, then there is a rational path to any policy stance so that neither the median voter's position, nor any other position, is privileged as the likely outcome unless some additional constraint is added to the decision-making environment.<sup>27</sup> Examples of such constraints include tie-breaking authority (such as is often granted to a committee chair), a fallback policy posi-

tion (such as the existing policy), or agenda control (such as might be seized by a skillful campaigner).

Yeltsin could not alter the underlying, fundamental preferences of the decision makers. Nor was he yet in a position to change the decision-making procedure. So as long as the issues of economic well-being and Russian autonomy were framed as distinct political questions, there was little prospect that Yeltsin, as a rhetorician, could be persuasive enough to win. But as a heresthetician he could reframe the debate, tying the issues together inextricably. By linking issues he could find a path through the debate that would defy the median voter theorem, defeat Gorbachev, and win the election. To see how this could be done, we return to the two issues from figure 1, but now inquire about what would happen if Yeltsin bound these two questions to one another. We already know that Gorbachev had no interest in doing so. He profited from their being kept separate. Therefore, Riker's dominance principle tells us that Gorbachev, if left to his own strategic devices, would try to maintain that separation. Equally, we know that Yeltsin had to alter the terms of debate if he were to have a chance at political success.

Figure 2 shows what happens if Yeltsin succeeds in tying the issues together. While examining the figure, keep in mind that we continue to assume single-peaked preferences and majority rule among the few with a say, given the then-existing institutional arrangements. We continue to infer that a coalition of any two factions is sufficient to defeat the third. The solid dots show the ideal policies for each faction. They are located as in figure 1 on each issue. The solid oval shows the location of the existing policies on the two now-linked issues. It, too, is at the same location on each issue as was true in figure 1.

If we draw a circle (or ellipse if salience for the two issues is different) centered on a faction's ideal point so that the circumference of the circle is tangent to or just crosses through the position representing existing policies, then all policy combinations inside the circle are preferred by members of that faction to the existing policies. Figure 2 shows such circles for Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and the nomenklatura. If the circles for two factions intersect, as shown by the shaded area in figure 2, then the policy combinations that fall within the overlapping segment are preferred by both factions to the existing policies. Therefore, policy combinations in such overlapping areas reflect campaign positions around which a winning coalition could form to defeat the existing policies. In this case, the existing policies are the position of the median voter on each of the two dimensions: the degree of Russian

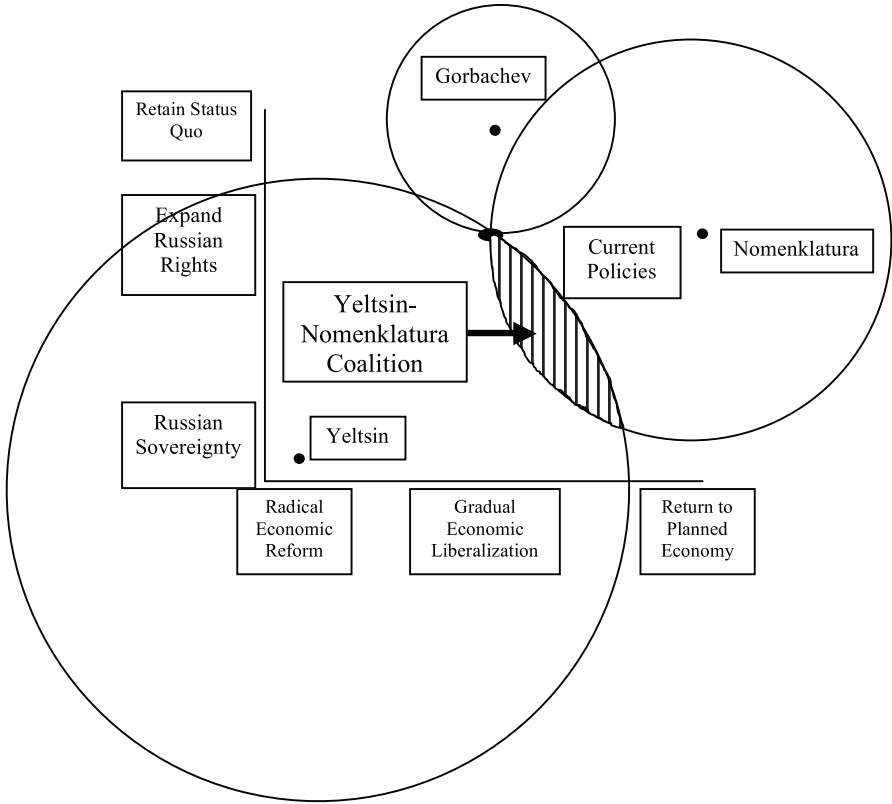


Fig. 2. Issue linkage and policy choice, an illustrative example

autonomy and economic reform. As separate issues, those policies favored Gorbachev over Yeltsin.

By arguing that the Russian economy could only be reformed through greater Russian independence, Yeltsin linked these two questions, opening the possibility that he could construct a coalition that could beat Gorbachev (and then restructure the institutional setting of coalition size and selectorate size in a more autonomous Russia). The shaded area in figure 2 shows the range of policy options regarding the economy and Russian independence that favored a political victory by Yeltsin.<sup>28</sup> We see that he could align himself with some in the party nomenklatura, as indeed he did. If Yeltsin behaved in accordance with Riker's dominance principle, then he not only would tie economic reform to greater Russian autonomy, but also would repeat his issue-



linkage message—as indeed he did—because it won him more supporters than it cost him. We document this in chapter 7.

Taking figures 1 and 2 together, we see several important, well-established principles of politics. If issues are subject to the conditions of the median voter theorem, then centrist politicians are advantaged. In such cases, whoever occupies the policy stance desired by the middle voter is sure to win. If, however, issues are multidimensional, then positions far from the political status quo are advantaged. In such a setting, embracing the median voter policy on each dimension does *not* confer a political advantage. Rather, extreme policy stances offer an advantage, in that many variations from the status quo policy will be viewed by extremists as improvements, thereby fostering many opportunities for compromise. Strategic centrist politicians are therefore expected to keep issues separate, while extremists will link them together. Thus, whether issues are linked is probably not determined by inherent attributes of the policies in question, but is rather a consequence of heretical maneuvering; it is, in the vocabulary of game theorists, endogenous. Linkage is a critical path to political success for politicians whose policies lie outside the mainstream on important individual issues.

Centrists want to keep debate focused on separable, one-dimensional concerns because this form of campaign debate favors them. Those with policy preferences that are far from the center—Boris Yeltsin and Ronald Reagan both fit this description during the times they sought office—have an interest in introducing new policy combinations to political debate. By doing so, they improve their chances of breaking any existing coalition that favors their rivals, and replacing it with a coalition that improves their own chance of victory. Success in recasting political debate so that previously separate issues are seen as part of a single, larger problem, and in convincing voters that the candidate who links them has the right approach to solving the newly identified larger problem, depends on the campaigner both as a heresthetician and as a rhetorician.

The heresthetical component is essential. It is the creative means by which an otherwise losing candidate maneuvers into a position from which voters can be persuaded to deliver the support needed to win. Rhetoric is equally essential. It is the means by which those voters are persuaded. The candidate skilled at rhetoric is likely to improve her electoral prospects regardless of whether she is a centrist who successfully keeps issues apart or an extremist who links issues in a single, larger debate.

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### The Best Heresthetical Maneuvers

A politician vying for office attempts to satisfy a few simply stated—but difficult to implement—principles. Strategic politicians try to pick (and possibly link) positions so that if their opponents disagree with the selected position, the voters whom the opponents are counting on to elect them will most likely abandon them. Conversely, if opponents endorse the strategically successful politician's proposals, they will appear to compromise their core philosophy and thus lose constituents who subscribe to it. Furthermore, the incumbent will have conceded innovation on policy and control of the political agenda to the person he seeks to defeat. We will see in chapter 5 that Jimmy Carter faced these problems as a consequence of policy positions carved out by Ronald Reagan.

Successful heresthetical politicians advance their prospects by taking positions that bring new people into their camp and isolate their opponents by preventing them from embracing the positions the heresthetician has adopted. This is done by some combination of reshaping debate over issues and reshaping the institutions that determine who has a say in determining campaign outcomes. A skillful politician creates and capitalizes on such opportunities by acting on the dominance and dispersion principles. This is true even if—or perhaps especially because—the candidate is perceived as being well outside the political mainstream on individual issues.

Success through heresthetical maneuvers requires that a politician identify one or more issues that attract broad-based support among essential backers (voters in a democracy, military officers in a junta, etc.). If one or more issues exist that can attract broad support and cannot be endorsed or co-opted by other candidates, the politician has greatly improved his or her chances for success.

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### Rhetoric Redux

Finding issues that restructure political coalitions is difficult. With hindsight, students of American electoral politics are able to identify successful efforts to do so. The politician's challenge is much tougher than the scholar's: scholars need only recognize these realignments after they have occurred, whereas politicians must figure out how to bring them about. Recall that Riker asked how campaign speeches and

promises could influence outcomes. In his study of the debates leading to the writing and ratification of the Constitution, he observed that politicians floated many new issues or new solutions to old issues.

Political history is strewn with examples of insightful politicians who nonetheless failed to advance their political prospects, even though their ideas eventually prevailed over those held by candidates who defeated them at the polls. We have only to think of a figure like Norman Thomas, who succeeded Eugene Debs as the Socialist Party candidate for president. Thomas, strongly anti-Soviet, was a founder of the American Civil Liberties Union and an early advocate of social security, racial equality, and efforts to combat poverty. Might he have risen to high office by employing the rhetoric of a mainstream politician? Thomas chose instead the rhetoric of an outlier, but apparently lacked sufficient heresthetical creativity or rhetorical panache to forge a strong base of support. Nevertheless, his ideas eventually became part of mainstream America. Franklin Roosevelt's Social Security program owed more than a little to Thomas's ideas, as did Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Yet Norman Thomas is little more than a footnote in American political history.

Changing a losing coalition into a winning one is no small task. Consider the problem of entrenched policy positions. A candidate's core constituents typically hold well-formed preferences, and have concluded that their candidate's positions are close to their own. That is what makes them core constituents. It is rarely the case that the core constituency is so large that it alone ensures political victory. Therefore, rivals for office are likely to campaign for the support of swing voters. In addition, an aspiring candidate will seek to mobilize people who traditionally do not vote. The latter group typically does not hold well-formed political opinions, nor do they generally know much or care much about the candidates. If they did, they would already be in the fray.

How do candidates attract voters who are not members of their core constituency, or who would normally stay home? One significant answer, as Quintus Tullius so well understood, is negative arguments. Rhetoric about the virtues of one's own ideas is fine, but is unlikely to motivate new support. Those already committed to a candidate typically have weighed the costs and benefits of each candidate's positions and chosen the person they believe most likely to maximize the voter's welfare. But some people do not choose on this basis. Voters who have not committed to a candidate presumably believe they are as well off with

one as with the other. One way to sway such voters or those planning not to vote is to make a persuasive case that their indifference exposes them to grave dangers. Negative campaigning does exactly that. It is a means by which candidates attempt to gain support by creating the belief that a victory for the other candidate will lead to disaster.

We know from the experimental research by Nobelist Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky that a considerable number of people choose on the basis of how issues are framed. Emphasizing the positive or negative aspects of a choice influences how these people respond to an otherwise comparable situation. Kahneman and Tversky found that people are more tenacious about preserving what they have—about avoiding losses—than they are about seeking new benefits. The risk of loss looms large in calculations. In such circumstances, many more prospective voters can be mobilized by raising their fear of losses than by promising future gains. When Ronald Reagan asked voters on the eve of the 1980 election to judge whether they were better off after four years under Jimmy Carter, he was invoking this principle. He was, in essence, encouraging voters to avoid the dangers that he claimed Carter embodied. The easiest way to do that, Reagan implied, was to vote for him.

Choosing on the basis of avoiding losses is one expression of a principle known as minimax regret. Simply put, those who act on the principle of minimax regret choose to do things that, if failure follows, will minimize their losses. Riker makes a persuasive case that it was negative campaigning, causing people to be in line with minimax regret, that drew out the extra, marginal support needed to pass the Constitution. Likewise, as just suggested, Reagan skillfully argued that the economic policies of his rival would lead to disaster in the form of persistently high inflation and high unemployment. Reagan's economic policies, untested before his election to the presidency, were surrounded with greater uncertainty than were Carter's. But through clever negative rhetoric Reagan made the case that the devil people knew—Carter's economic policies—was a bigger danger than the devil they did not—that is, Reagan's supply-side economics.

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### The Domestic Story of International Affairs

The twenty-first century in international affairs began around 1989, when democracy and market-based economies finally prevailed over

the third of their three most prominent twentieth-century rivals: mercantilist monarchy (defeated in World War I), fascist dictatorship (defeated in World War II), and authoritarian Communism (defeated in the Cold War). As we look ahead to the challenges of the future, prospective rivalries are brewing between, for example, religious fundamentalism and secular—increasingly democratic—governance.

The events that brought us to this emerging world order are not exclusively nor even primarily the product of grand strategies in foreign affairs that were sustained from one governing administration to another. Nor are they solely the product of contests between super-power rivals. The end of the Cold War and the emerging new international order require a close focus on the role of leaders in their domestic context. Even political contests that ignore foreign affairs have the potential to change fundamental international relationships. Without attending to partisan domestic political competition, it is unlikely that we can understand or illuminate what is possible in foreign affairs.

Our thesis is straightforward. Domestic political issues and competition over ideas shape choices about foreign policy. Whatever brings a politician to national leadership, he or she must inevitably address foreign affairs. The intersection of ideas about foreign policy held by leaders in different countries determines the future course of international relations. No one country can determine the course of events by molding a grand strategy that is independent of the domestic political context. Leaders select the issues that must be addressed and the direction that policy takes. Their decisions reflect the choices they believe best enhance their prospects of gaining or staying in high office. Therefore, they must be attentive to the preferences of the citizens whose support they require. Considerations of national power, national security, or even the national interest play a more limited role in the choices leaders make in foreign policy. Indeed, in political settings where leaders need only the loyalty of the military and perhaps key civil servants, it will be almost impossible to continue in power by enhancing the national interest, if doing so comes at the expense of the few essential backers. How else are we to explain the success of leaders like Cuba's Fidel Castro or North Korea's Kim Jong-il, who cling to power while begging their people? They surely are not ruling on behalf of the well-being of their citizenry.

Whether the focus of foreign affairs is on arms control, missile defense, human rights, free trade, or counterterrorism, the solutions chosen must be consistent with the incentives leaders and politicians

have to gain and maintain office. We investigate the end of the Cold War in the context of domestic political maneuvers in the United States and Russia. These maneuvers changed the structure of the international system, but they were designed and adopted with an eye toward control of domestic leadership, achieved through the give-and-take of local political competition.

Our focus on leadership probes general principles grounded in the individual motivations of prospective leaders. We show how those motivations translate into actions that can reshape the structural landscape of the international system. Although we illustrate our main propositions with the tactical and strategic maneuvers of Boris Yeltsin and Ronald Reagan, this is not a study of characteristics unique to these individuals. Rather, it is a study of how individual motives shape foreign policy, and how political choices, especially when made by someone at the helm of a major state, reshape international politics.

It is rare for world leaders to be selected on the basis of their foreign policy acumen or experience. Perhaps only when leaders are chosen against the backdrop of an international crisis do such skills predominate over everyday political ability. The German invasion of Poland in 1939 may have marked such an occasion, ensuring the downfall of Neville Chamberlain and the rise of Winston Churchill. But Adolf Hitler's rise to power through the ballot box did not depend primarily on his plans for foreign policy, even though, after the fact, it is evident that those plans were central to his policies as chancellor.

Most leaders are chosen over rivals because of skills in domestic politics. This is true whether the selection process is democratic or autocratic. Whether politicians are motivated by high-minded civic ideals or crass opportunism, they cannot fulfill their objectives without first coming to and then holding onto office. Consequently, those who shape international affairs are best understood first as politicians and only later perhaps as statesmen.

Whatever the domestic maneuvers that brought Ronald Reagan and Boris Yeltsin to their respective presidencies, their approaches to foreign affairs fundamentally changed the world. Their successes illustrate our central claim that individual leaders, rather than system structure, are fundamental to change or constancy in international politics. Understanding how leaders come to and stay in office is far more important to our grasp of major events in international politics than traditional ideas about the balance of power or bipolarity. Leaders make decisions constrained, but not determined, by the international

environment in which they live. Those decisions include choices that can and do fundamentally change the international system.

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Summary

We build on earlier work by William Riker and many others with the hope that we can offer additional insights into how campaign strategy, together with institutional context and rhetoric, influences electoral outcomes, policy formation, and the reshaping of international affairs. Our investigation focuses on five campaigns. These are Ronald Reagan's failed efforts to gain the Republic presidential nomination in 1968 and 1976, his successful effort to win the presidency in 1980, Boris Yeltsin's failed campaign against party conservatives in the period from about 1986 to 1988, and his successful effort to create an independent Russian state with himself at its head. In each case, we draw on ideas about heresthetic and rhetoric within the relevant institutional framework to explain the campaign strategies of Reagan, Yeltsin, and their rivals.