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Change in the components of the electoral decision: The nature of short-term forces in elections

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ABSTRACT

The procedure developed by *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960) to understand determinants of the electoral decision first demonstrated the importance of short-term forces as vote components. Using a similar categorization scheme of these components from the National Election Studies, this paper examines the importance of these short-term forces in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, augmenting the basic components model by developing summary measures of the combined impact of these forces as well as analyzing the vote components for political independents. The authors conclude that, in comparison with the 1952 and 1956 elections, these short-term forces were relatively mild in these two recent elections and that, despite the conventional wisdom, the way in which short-term forces affected Independents did not impact the outcome of the elections generally.

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The elections of 2000 and 2004 resembled the 1952 and 1956 elections by putting a Republican into the White House for two successive terms. But how similar were the electoral forces? How did electoral forces change over this half-century? And what does this tell us about the nature of short-term forces in elections?

The American Voter (Campbell et al., 1960) developed an important procedure to understand presidential election outcomes by decomposing the electoral decision into a set of 'components' measuring short-term forces in the election. They used the answers of survey respondents to a series of open-ended questions, which they classified into attitudes toward the Republican and Democratic candidates, domestic and foreign issues, social groups, and parties as managers of government. They then analyzed how these six components affected the vote decision in the 1952 and 1956 elections (see also Stokes et al., 1958). This paper examines how each of these components separately

and their combined impact of short-term forces have changed in importance during the past half-century.

Previous studies have not focused on the combined impact of short-term forces. *The American Voter* model is based on a distinction between long-term political predispositions like party identification and short-term forces that are specific to the election as embodied in the vote components. This paper augments the basic components model by developing summary measures of the combined impact of short-term forces affecting election results. Additionally, this paper amplifies the components model by analyzing the vote components for Independents separately, since they are the voters most affected by short-term forces.

This analysis of short-term forces in the polarized 2000 and 2004 elections provides some important results as to the nature and effects of short-term forces. First, the determinants of the election results for these two years are clarified, demonstrating how events can move candidate and issue factors in opposite directions. Second, short-term forces in these elections are shown to be much weaker than those in the elections of the 1950s, providing a new understanding of the nature of polarized elections. Third, short-term electoral forces are found to operate in an

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opposite direction for political independents in 2004 than for the electorate as a whole, showing that election results do not necessarily rest on how Independents vote when there are shifts in the distribution of party identification.

1. The basic components model

The basic components model is fairly simple. The pre-election National Election Studies surveys ask a series of eight open-ended questions as to what the respondents like and dislike about each party and its presidential candidate. Human coders subsequently categorize each respondent's answers into an elaborate set of 'master codes', coding up to five responses on each of the eight questions. Each code is then classified into one of six 'partisan attitudes': referring to the Republican and Democratic candidates, domestic and foreign issues, social groups, and parties as managers of government. In preparing *The American Voter Revisited* (Lewis-Beck et al., 2008), we attempted to classify the responses into categories using classification decisions that matched as closely as possible to those employed for *The American Voter*, though there were inevitably several difficult decisions as to how to classify particular codes.

The next step is to construct the six separate components. In each case, we counted up the number of pro-Republican and anti-Democratic comments made by the respondent in a category (such as the number of comments made about what the person likes about the Republican party or candidate on domestic issues and what the person dislikes about the Democratic party or candidate on domestic issues) across the eight questions, then counted up the number of pro-Democratic and anti-Republican comments made by the respondent in the same category across the eight questions, and finally took the difference to see how much the person favors the Republicans net. Since these measures are constructed on the basis of up to 5 answers to each of 8 questions, the components could each conceivably have a range of -40 to +40, with higher scores being more pro-Republican.

The final step is to regress the individual's vote decision on these components along with computing the mean on each component. The impact of the component on the aggregate vote decision is then the product of a component's unstandardized regression coefficient and its mean. This value shows how many percentage points each component moved the vote decision, controlling for the other components.

The American Voter (Campbell et al., 1960) employed this model for analyzing the 1952 and 1956 elections (see also Stokes et al., 1958), and Stokes (1966) extended this analysis to the 1960 and 1964 elections. Later analysts extended it through 1972 (Kagay and Caldeira, 1980; Pomper, 1975; Miller and Miller, 1976; Popkin et al., 1976) and 1980 (Miller and Wattenberg, 1981). More recently, *The American Voter Revisited* (Lewis-Beck et al., 2008, chap. 14) employed this model for analyzing the 2000 and 2004 elections.¹

¹ In a related series of analyses, Kessel (Smith and Kessel, 1995; Smith et al., 1999; Kessel, 2004; Kessel, 2005) employed both a simpler decomposition into only 3 components (candidates, issues, and parties) and a more elaborate decomposition into 16 components (e.g., candidate experience, international involvement, and comments about other people in the party).

Methodologically, there are two obvious issues with this components model. First, the reliance on open-ended comments can be questioned. For example, the scores are affected by how verbal the respondents are, so some respondents will have more extreme scores than others simply because they give more elaborate answers as to why they like and dislike the parties and candidates. There is also considerable concern that open-ended responses will be rationalizations of how one has already decided to vote. This problem would be more serious if respondents were being asked *why* they were voting as they are rather than simply what they like and dislike about the candidates and parties, since social psychologists find that people cannot reliably give the reasons behind their behavior (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). On the plus side, the open-ended questions have the advantage of capturing public reactions to campaign events that arise after the closed-ended questions in the survey have been finalized. Kessel and Weisberg (1999) provide a detailed discussion of the stakes involved in using these open-ended questions to analyze vote determinants rather than closed-ended questions.

The second methodological issue is the use of ordinary least-squares regression analysis on a dichotomous dependent variable rather than using logit or probit analysis. As is well understood, the linear assumption underlying OLS regression, when applied to dichotomous variables, leads to predictions that some people will have probabilities above one and others will have probabilities below zero of displaying the dependent behavior, both of which violate the rules of probability theory. By contrast, logit and probit analysis are well behaved in this sense because they are non-linear. *The American Voter* might have used logit or probit if they had been easy to compute in the 1950s, though Stokes (1966, 28) later argued against using such analyses since 'the distribution of the electorate along an attitude dimension is much more easily summarized under the linear model'. Furthermore, the impact of each component on the aggregate vote decision cannot be so readily calculated with non-linear models, since it would not be appropriate to multiply the regression coefficients by their respective means,² as can be done with OLS coefficients.

2. Extending the components model

In addition to comparing the components model results for the 2000 and 2004 elections to those for earlier elections, the basic *American Voter* components model will be extended in two ways in this paper. First, the vote components will be used to develop summary measures regarding the short-term forces in a particular election. One measure will monitor the extent to which the short-term forces act together to move the aggregate vote in a particular direction. A second summary measure will estimate the overall magnitude of the short-term forces in the election. The third measure will summarize the consistency

² The Kessel papers referenced above use various alternative approaches to obtain an impact analysis from probit, but there is no simple definitive procedure for doing so.

of the different short-term measures. The social-group component will be discarded in this part of the analysis, in that it generally taps more long-term associations of groups with the parties rather than short-term election-specific factors.

Second, the component analysis will be broken down to focus on political independents. After all, partisans rarely defect to the other major party (only 6%–8% did in the 2000 and 2004 elections), so there would not be enough variation in their voting direction for regression analysis of Republican or Democratic identifiers. However, Independents swing from one party to the other, and their choices are usually considered essential to determining the outcome of an election. Therefore the component analysis will be performed separately for self-declared Independents, as determined by the first party identification question.

Neither *The American Voter* nor *The American Voter Revisited* deals sufficiently with the implications of party identification for how the six components affect the electoral decision. After analyzing the impact of the six components on the vote, they do an additional analysis of the impact of those components controlling for party identification, but that approach does not reflect how the effect of the components vary by party. Consider a polarized component on which Democratic identifiers tend to be pro-Democratic (such as giving more pro-Democratic than anti-Democratic comments about the Democratic presidential candidate) and on which Republican identifiers tend to be pro-Republican (giving more comments against the Democratic candidate than for her). Regardless of whether the net effect of that component helps the Democrats or hurts them, the logic of the model is that it helps them among their own partisans, hurts them among the other party's partisans, and the real effect of that component is determined by how it plays among Independents. If one assumes the partisans are extremely likely to stay with their party regardless of short-term factors, then the effect among Independents might matter most. Therefore, this paper also extends the basic components model by adding a special focus on political independents.

Leaners are included with Independents in this analysis rather than with the party to which they admit being closer. Keith et al. (1992) argue that leaners should be combined with partisans, but that would leave too few Independents for separate analysis. Instead, this paper follows Johnston et al. (2004) in recognizing that treating leaners as Independents leads to more stable categories. The Independents who say they are closer to one party or another may simply be reporting how they are currently planning to vote in the upcoming election, which can swing back and forth several times before the actual election takes place (Shively, 1977, 16–20). That may make leaners look like they are voting about the same as weak partisans, but, according to this interpretation, they are coming to that decision because of short-term factors more than long-term factors. Miller (1991) and Miller and Shanks (1996) also adopt this view that leaners should be combined with Independents since leaners explicitly assert that they are Independents.

One further adjustment to the usual components model is made in this paper, involving the social-group

component. The components are generally interpreted as short-term factors affecting the vote. However, the social-group component measures long-term group identification matters that are very close to party identification itself, much more than it measures short-term election-related factors. Most of the social-group comments coded into this category speak about the coalitional bases of the parties: that the Democrats are good for working people, or not good for business people, or good for blacks, or not good for Christian fundamentalists (or the converse statements as regards Republicans), or similar statements that are typically related to why the respondents are or are not Democrat in their partisanship. There are occasionally more short-term matters incorporated into this component when a specific social cleavage becomes salient for a particular presidential election, but that is the exception rather than the rule.³ Because of the long-term perspective of the social-group component, it will be disregarded when this paper treats the components as short-term.

3. Vote components over time

Table 1 shows the effects of the six components on the electoral decision from 1952 to 1980 (Miller and Wattenberg, 1981) and for 2000 and 2004 (Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). As analysts have typically found over the years, the social-group component has always helped the Democratic vote, while managing government has nearly always worked in favor of the Republicans (with the sole exception during this time frame of 1964), and these patterns continued in 2000 and 2004.

What is more interesting is the issue side, where the results for 2000 and 2004 do not comfortably fit usual patterns. Domestic issues have generally favored the Democrats over the years (with significant exceptions for the Reagan election of 1980 and the Nixon victories in 1968 and 1972). They still favored the Democrats in Bush's victory in 2004, but they were exactly neutral in the close 2000 contest. Foreign issues have generally favored the Republicans over the years (with the exception of when the Republicans nominated Barry Goldwater in 1964). They still favored the Republicans in 2000, but they swung decidedly in the Democratic direction in 2004 because of negative reactions to the Iraq War.

The candidate side is also interesting. One would expect that a party's candidate would help garner votes for his or her party, but there are important exceptions when the party nominates a candidate who turns out to be as weak as Goldwater was for the Republicans in 1964 and McGovern was for the Democrats in 1972. Table 1 shows that Reagan cost the Republicans votes in 1980, while Humphrey cost the Democrats votes in 1968 and Stevenson in 1956 and Carter in 1976 did not attract votes for the Democrats. In 2000, the Bush candidacy did little to move the election

³ Each component inevitably has some long-term and some short-term aspects, but the social-group factor tends to reflect those that are more long-term. Although the social groups that are connected with the parties change as new groups become politicized, the set of groups that have been most closely associated with the parties have remained largely unchanged over time (Miller et al., 1991).

Table 1
Components of the Vote Decision, 1952–1980, 2000–2004.^a

	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	2000	2004
D candidate	-1.18	.17	-1.99	-3.93	.90	4.29	-.05	-.93	.68	1.62
R candidate	4.37	7.60	5.70	-2.60	1.60	3.98	.24	-.70	.35	1.45
Domestic issues	-1.34	-.88	-.54	-2.36	1.10	1.35	-.69	2.70	.00	-.72
Foreign issues	3.30	2.46	1.80	-.25	1.00	3.23	.40	3.06	.56	-1.30
Gov't management	5.40	1.18	1.20	-.30	1.50	.04	.17	2.87	.59	.60
Social groups	-4.29	-5.50	-4.01	-2.59	-3.60	-4.55	-4.53	-5.08	-4.08	-3.16
Sum without social groups	10.55	10.53	6.17	-9.44	6.10	12.89	.07	7.00	2.18	1.65
Sum abs w/o social groups	15.59	12.29	11.23	9.44	6.10	12.89	1.55	10.26	2.18	5.69
Stdev without social groups	3.17	3.31	2.91	1.59	0.31	1.82	0.43	2.03	0.27	1.30

Sources: Miller and Wattenberg (1981) and Lewis-Beck et al. (2008).

^a Each component, including attitudes toward the Democratic candidate, is coded in a pro-Republican direction, so positive values show that the component helped the Republicans and negative values show it helped the Democrats.

toward the Republicans, and the Gore candidacy actually moved the vote more in a Republican direction than did the Bush candidacy. Bush moved the vote more in a Republican direction in 2004, but the Democratic candidate again moved the vote in the Republican direction more than Bush did. In short, the Democratic candidates in 2000 and 2004 did not end up helping their own causes.

Note that the change from 2000 to 2004 was not all in one direction. While the candidate components helped the Republicans more in 2004 than 2000, the issue factors helped the Democrats more in 2004. Other analysis shows that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent War on Terrorism, War in Afghanistan, and War in Iraq had mixed effects, with the Iraq War leading to negative views of the administration on foreign policy while giving George W. Bush the image of a strong leader (Weisberg and Christenson, 2007).

Several sets of summary statistics are provided in the bottom rows of Table 1, chosen to tap what the components reflect about short-term forces.⁴ The sum row shows how much the components together moved the vote. What is most noticeable is how much smaller the entries for 2000 and 2004 are than for most of the earlier elections. For example, the first five components moved the vote decidedly in the Republican direction in the 1950s, allowing the Republicans to overcome a real Democratic advantage in party identification. They were pro-Republican enough in 1960 to keep Kennedy's victory very narrow, even though the Democrats still had the advantage in party identification. The sums of the first five components were only slightly pro-Republican in 2000 and 2004, but the party identification distribution was much more balanced, allowing the 2000 election to be close enough that the popular vote winner did not win the Electoral College and allowing the Republicans to win the 2004 popular vote.

The next row in Table 1 shows the sums of the absolute values of the effects of the components, showing how

strong the short-term forces were. Again, the values for 2000 and 2004 are much smaller than most of the earlier entries. The short-term forces were major aspects of the 1950s elections, but they were much milder in 2000 and were still relatively weak in 2004.

The bottom row in Table 1 gives the standard deviations of the components in each election year, so one can more readily judge how uniform they were in magnitude. Yet again the entries for 2000 and 2004 are distinctive, especially in comparison with the 1950s. The components in the 1950s varied more in their impact, as when government management and the Eisenhower candidacy gave the Republicans several percentage points in the vote in 1952 while domestic issues and the Stevenson candidacy each gave the Democrats at least one percentage point that year. By contrast, none of the first five components moved the vote even one percentage point in 2000, and none of those five aided the Democrats. The components varied a little more in 2004, but the standard deviation was still on the low side.

To summarize, the five short-term components of the vote had relatively little effect in 2000 and 2004. Collectively they moved the vote little, they were weak as short-term forces, and they were relatively uniform. Most analysts view contemporary partisan politics as highly polarized (cf. Fiorina et al., 2005). At first blush, polarization

Table 2
Vote by Partisanship, 2000 and 2004.

	Strong Dem.	Weak Dem.	Independent	Weak Rep.	Strong Rep.
2000					
Republican	3%	15%	54%	84%	98%
Democratic	97%	85%	46%	16%	2%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of cases	233	164	346	128	179
Percentage of cases	22%	16%	33%	12%	17%
2004					
Republican	3%	15%	42%	90%	97%
Democratic	97%	85%	58%	10%	3%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of cases	140	112	244	116	169
Percentage of cases	18%	14%	31%	15%	22%

Source: Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, Table 6.4, p. 123).

⁴ As explained above, the social-group component is not included in the summary statistics. The comparisons of the summary values across the years are similar when the social-group component is included, except that the sum row is always less positive since the social-group component has always favored the Democrats.

Table 3Means of Components for Vote, 2000 and 2004.^a

Means	2000			2004		
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Dem	Ind	Rep
D candidate	-.75	.16	1.08	-.87	.09	1.45
R candidate	-.86	.19	1.08	-.76	-.15	1.26
Domestic issues	-2.19	.00	2.80	-1.98	-.66	1.63
Foreign issues	.01	.16	.24	-1.01	-.33	.74
Gov't management	-.43	.18	.83	-.60	.08	1.08
Social groups	-1.62	-.55	-.03	-1.51	-.92	-.06

^a Each component, including attitudes toward the Democratic candidate, is coded in a pro-Republican direction, so positive values show that there were more pro-Republican (and anti-Democratic) comments on the component than pro-Democratic (and anti-Republican) comments.

would seem to imply that the short-term components would be very important. Instead, this analysis shows that polarization means that there is less room for the short-term forces to matter. If people are voting their partisanship more (Bartels, 2000), as was the case in these two elections, then short-term factors are weaker – though there still can be some effect of short-term forces in slightly changing the distribution of party identification (Johnston et al., 2004, 43; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008, 420).

4. The components within partisan categories

The first step in looking at the vote components within partisan categories is to see how the different partisan categories voted in 2000 and 2004. As Table 2 shows, strong partisans nearly uniformly voted with their party both years, with defection rates of only 2%–3%. Weak partisans also were highly loyal to their party, but with somewhat greater defection: as low as 10% of weak Republicans in 2004 and as high as 16% of weak Republicans in 2000. Interestingly, Independents voted 54%–46% for Bush in 2000, but voted 58%–42% for Kerry in 2004.⁵ Yet Bush lost the popular vote in 2000 and Kerry lost it in 2004 because of the distribution of partisans. Combining strong and weak partisans, the Democrats had a 38%–29% advantage over Republicans among voters in 2000, so the fact that Independents favored Bush was not enough to give him the popular vote. By 2004, the Republicans had a 37%–32% advantage over Democrats among voters, so the fact that Independents favored Kerry was not enough to give him the popular vote. Thus, a shift in the distribution of partisan identifiers among actual voters of about 7% between 2000 and 2004 was responsible for Bush's higher vote in 2004 rather than a shift in his direction by Independents.

Turning to the open-ended comments, Table 3 shows the means for each component by party identification in 2000 and 2004. As to be expected, the means on each component are most pro-Republican for Republican

identifiers and least pro-Republican for Democratic identifiers (Campbell et al., 1960; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008).

Most of the components break in the Republican direction among Republican identifiers and in the Democratic direction among Democratic identifiers, with the interesting exceptions of foreign issues, which did not favor the Democrats even among Democratic identifiers in 2000, and social groups, which did not favor the Republicans even among Republican identifiers in either election year.

Another pattern to examine in Table 3 involves change between 2000 and 2004 within party identification categories. Republicans' views of Bush became somewhat more positive and their views of the Democratic candidate became more negative. Comments on domestic issues became less extreme for partisans, while comments on foreign issues became much more polarized among partisans. Comments about parties as managers of government became somewhat more extreme among partisans.

The changes from 2000 to 2004 are more striking for Independents. Independents became less favorable to the Republicans on all six components. Their mean evaluation of Bush changed from positive to negative, while their mean for the Democratic candidate became slightly less pro-Republican. Independents' comments on domestic issues, which were neutral in 2000, became decidedly anti-Republican by 2004, while their comments on foreign issues switched from pro-Republican on average to pro-Democrat. Comments on parties as managers of government became less pro-Republican and more neutral among Independents, while their social-group comments moved decidedly in the Democratic direction between these two elections.

As explained above, given that only 6%–8% of partisans defected from their party in these two elections, it is not reasonable to analyze their vote determinants further and instead the remainder of this paper focuses on Independents. The regression coefficients for Independents are shown in Table 4, with significant values bolded. Views of the two candidates, domestic issues, and social-group comments affected the vote of Independents in both elections, with foreign issues being significant only in 2004.

Note also the difference in explanatory power of these equations, with the R^2 values showing much greater explanatory power in 2004 than 2000. The explanatory power of the components model for Independents in 2004 rivals that for the electorate as a whole, while that is not the case for 2000. These short-term measures were very able to

⁵ Exit polls show that the vote of Independents against the popular vote winner in these two elections is unusual but not unprecedented. Their division in recent elections was 54%–43% for Ford over Carter in 1976, 55%–30% for Reagan in 1980, 63%–35% for Reagan in 1984, 55%–43% for Bush in 1988, 38%–32% for Clinton in 1992, 43%–35% for Clinton in 1996, 47%–45% for Bush in 2000, and 49%–48% for Kerry in 2004 (CQ Weekly, 2008).

Table 4
Vote Components for Independents, 2000 and 2004.^a

	2000			2004		
	Mean	Coeff	Effect	Mean	Coeff	Effect
(constant)		.537			.516	
D candidate	.16	.083	1.4	.09	.060	0.5
R candidate	.19	.053	1.0	-.15	.102	-1.5
Domestic issues	.00	.051	0.0	-.66	.023	-1.5
Foreign issues	.16	.045	0.7	-.33	.102	-3.4
Gov't management	.18	.031	0.5	.08	-.006	0.0
Social groups	-.55	.058	-3.2	-.92	.042	-3.9
Adjusted R-square		.397			.510	
Sum w/o groups			3.6			-5.9
Sum abs w/o groups			3.6			6.9
Stdev w/o groups			.53			1.53

^a Bolded values are significant ($p < .05$). Each component, including attitudes toward the Democratic candidate, is coded in a pro-Republican direction, so positive values show that Republican voting is greater as the net comments on the component are more pro-Republican. The Effect column is the product of the Mean and Coefficient columns.

capture the vote determinants of Independents in 2004, but they are much less successful in 2000. A likely explanation is that the campaign events may have intervened between the pre-election survey and the vote decision on Election Day in 2000 more than was the case in 2004.

Table 4 also shows the effects of the components on the Independent vote. The Independent vote in 2000 was pushed in a Republican direction by attitudes toward Bush and Gore, and, to a lesser extent, foreign issues and government management, with only social groups moving their vote in a Democratic direction. Both candidate factors moved the Independent vote more in a Republican direction than for the electorate as a whole in 2000. In 2004, the Independent vote was moved in a Democratic direction by social groups and foreign issues, and, to a lesser extent, attitudes toward Bush and domestic issues, with attitudes toward Kerry moving their vote slightly in the Republican direction.

What is most interesting in Table 4 is how all the components among Independents advantaged the Republicans less in 2004 than in 2000. Social groups, foreign issues, and even attitudes toward George W. Bush cost the Republicans significant numbers of votes among Independents in 2004. We generally expect that candidates win because short-term factors lead Independents to break in favor of them, but that was not the case in 2004. This confirms the discussion of Table 2: Bush's 2004 victory was due to the electorate being slightly more Republican in partisanship, rather than to how Independents evaluated short-term forces.

Partisans are likely to follow their long-term predispositions and be relatively immune to short-term forces, but Independents should be expected to be more affected by short-term considerations. The summary statistics at the bottom of the effect columns in Table 4 confirm these expectations. Compared with the results for 2000 and 2004 in Table 1, short-term forces were somewhat stronger, though also more varied, for Independents than for the electorate as a whole. The sum of the first five short-term components moved the Independent vote 3.6% in the Republican direction in 2000, compared to 2.2% for the whole electorate, and they moved the vote 5.9% in the

Democratic direction in 2004 contrasted with 1.6% in the Republican direction for the full electorate. As to their magnitude, the sum of their absolute values was about 1.2%–1.4% higher for Independents than the electorate as a whole both years. And the standard deviations show greater variability among these components among Independents than among the entire electorate. Still, a comparison of these summary statistics with those in Table 1 shows that short-term forces were much more muted and consistent even for Independents in 2000 and 2004 than short-term forces were for the electorate as a whole from 1952 through 1980. The short-term forces were relatively bland even for Independents in 2000 and 2004, with the important exception of foreign issues in 2004.

5. Conclusions

The vote components model of *The American Voter* was used periodically through 1980, but had not been used again until *The American Voter Revisited* employed it for 2000 and 2004. Only the social-group factor helped the Democrats in 2000, while Bush's victory in 2004 was based on positive views of his candidacy and negative views of John Kerry's candidacy, with foreign issues hurting the Republicans that year.

While this summary of the 2000 and 2004 elections in terms of vote components is interesting, it is more important to see that the short-term components were relatively mild in these two elections. They were relatively uniform, and they moved the vote little. These were polarized elections in which long-term partisanship had a large effect and short-term factors were weaker.

The conventional wisdom is that elections turn on how Independents are affected by short-term forces. Breaking the electorate down by partisan categories shows this was not the case in 2004. Instead, we are seeing small shifts in party identification between elections in the early 2000s, shifts that are large enough to affect election results without the popular vote winner carrying the Independent vote. George W. Bush won the election due to a small increase in Republican partisanship that offset how short-

term forces moved Independents in the Democratic direction. Running the components model for Independents thus tells a richer story about the 2004 election than when the model is applied only to the electorate as a whole.

Thus, the vote components model remains interesting in what it shows about elections, and it is even more useful when the conventional analysis is augmented with summary statistics about the short-term forces and when the basic model is extended by focusing on the voting of Independents.

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