Voter Decision Making in Election 2000: Campaign Effects, Partisan Activation, and the Clinton Legacy

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How do citizens respond to campaign events? We explore this question with a unique repeated measures survey design, fielded during the 2000 presidential campaign. We model transitions in support for the major party candidates following the party conventions and presidential debates. In the aggregate, Gore support increases following the conventions (but not the debates), while Bush support increases with the debates (but not the conventions). But there is considerable microlevel variation in the data: responsiveness to campaign events is greatest among Independents, undecided voters, and "mismatched partisans," but exactly how these groups respond differs for each event. Moreover, attitudes toward then President Clinton mediate the effect of the campaign events on voter preferences. Two primary conclusions follow: (1) rich data sets are required to observe the effects of campaign events; (2) the influence of campaign events on vote choice is conditional on previous preferences, partisan dispositions, and political context.

The question "do campaigns matter?" has long been debated in political science literature. We consider this a settled question: of course campaigns "matter," but the more interesting issues are *for whom* and under *what conditions* campaigns matter. The chief impediment to gaining a richer understanding of campaign effects has been a scarcity of appropriate data. Campaign research has largely been limited to cross-sectional surveys or two wave panels, making it difficult to examine individual-level movements in response to campaign activities. With these designs, the "campaign" is often treated as a singular event, or at most, varying by state (Shaw 1999a). This approach masks the possibility that different campaign events may have varying effects and on different portions of the population. Aggregate-level time-series analyses have recently provided valuable insights into the effect of presidential campaigns at the systemic level (Johnston, Hagan, and Jamieson 2001; Shaw 1999b), but these designs cannot speak to mechanisms of change at the individual level. Are all voters equally likely to change their vote preference in response to campaign events? Are some campaign activities more effective than others? Are voters more responsive to campaign events earlier or later in the campaign? In pursuing these questions, this field of research will move from debating whether campaigns should be studied at all, to the more politically relevant considerations of how and when campaigns influence electoral behavior.

We estimate a transition model to predict changes in individual vote preferences following major campaign events (party conventions and presidential debates) in the 2000 election. Not only do we find movement in vote preference following these campaign events, but we also find patterns of movement that provide interesting implications for theories of campaigns. The largest movements we identify are for mismatched partisans (partisans supporting the candidate of the opposing party), Independents, and the undecided. However, the movements of these groups were quite different for each event. Gore was generally able to increase his support among these groups with the conventions (but not the debates), while Bush solidified support following the debates (but not the conventions). Moreover, we find that attitudes toward then President Clinton also had an impact on changes in vote preference, mediating the effect of the campaign events. Our findings suggest several factors may determine how

a campaign event influences voter behavior: the previous vote preference of the voter, the partisan predispositions of the voter, and the way the campaign event is linked to the broader political context.

The Campaign Effects Debate

Our results build on a growing body of research in recent years that has challenged the conventional wisdom in political science that campaigns do *not* matter. But more than just providing evidence that campaigns influence voter preferences, our findings detail the complexity of campaign effects by identifying the individuals who responded to campaign appeals in the 2000 election.

Early voting behavior literature concluded that most voters select a candidate—based on sociological characteristics and/or partisan identification—before the campaign even begins, implying that the campaign has only "minimal effects" on voters' attitudes and behaviors (Bernard, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). The stability and influence of partisanship, in particular, suggests an upper bound on the possible impact of short-term campaign activities (Campbell et al. 1960). Decades of voting behavior research since have implicitly concurred with this minimal-effects hypothesis by ignoring campaigns in their models of presidential voting behavior. Rather, electoral behavior and election outcomes are typically modeled as a function of partisan identification, the state of the economy, and assessments of the incumbent party or administration (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992).[1] In addition, several studies explicitly focusing on campaign effects have offered empirical support to the minimal-effects hypothesis (Bartels 1993; Gelman and King 1993; Finkel 1993; Markus 1988). Some of this research suggests that campaigns might help to activate latent preferences, but the preferences are thought to be in place before the election period begins. So, again, individual votes and election outcomes can be predicted without accounting for the campaign.[2]

Declining levels of party identification in the electorate and simultaneous increasing levels of campaign efforts by the candidates and parties have led to renewed interest in campaign research (Shaw 1999a). A number of different studies have shown that voters can be influenced by campaign factors—media coverage, television advertising, and candidate evaluations (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Holbrook 1996; Shaw 1999a).[3] More directly relevant is the recent survey research on campaign effects (Holbrook 1996; Shaw 1999a, 1999b). This research has found evidence of marginal campaign effects on aggregate voting behavior. This research has offered important contributions to our understanding of the impact of campaigns at the aggregate and cumulative levels. There remains, however, much to be learned about the relationship between campaign activities and individual voting behavior that simply has not been adequately addressed in existing literature. As Holbrook (1996, 153) argues: "Campaign effects are unlikely to be found by analyzing only ultimate vote decisions or election outcomes. A political campaign must be understood to be a process that generates a product, the election outcome, and like any other process, one cannot expect to understand the process by analyzing only the product."

Limitations of Data

Previous research on campaigns has often been limited by the available data. Moreover, the way the data have been collected and analyzed has had a profound impact on the way that campaign effects are conceived. Much of this research relies on data that measures presidential campaigns as monolithic, time-invariant events that have the same average effect for all people during all points of the campaign (Wlezien and Erikson 2001). Clearly, the campaign is not so simplistic. Presidential campaigns consist of a series of events, activities, and efforts, and the candidates may do better or worse on each of these efforts. Intuitively, we might expect, for instance, that the effect of a Bush ad in Virginia might be different from the effect of a Gore rally in California. More fundamentally, we expect that an individual's reactions to campaign events may be influenced by that individual's prior beliefs and preferences.

If different individuals are more responsive than others, we need to consider this fact in studying campaign effects. Existing research tends to estimate campaign effects as a single parameter, which can tell us only about

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[1]In contrast, studies looking at lower-level contests have found substantial evidence of campaign effects. For instance, campaign spending and television advertising has been found to directly influence Congressional vote choice (Franklin 1991; Jacobson 1989).

[2]Forecasting models and campaign effects are not necessarily at odds with one another. Some have suggested that the fundamental variables simply determine how the campaign will play out, thus rendering the outcomes predictable (Campbell 2000; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2003). Presidential candidates will run optimal campaigns, but subject to the constraints of existing social and economic conditions. For instance, running a successful campaign is much easier when presidential approval and prosperity are on your side.

[3]There is also a growing body of literature on the agenda setting, priming, and framing effects associated with presidential campaigns (Mutz, Sniderman, and Brody 1996).

the average effect. To fully understand the political implications of campaigns, we need to determine if campaign efforts have different effects on different people.

The most direct way to study such dynamics is with individual-level panel data. Cross-sectional analyses are simply incapable of determining the extent of individual-level changes in vote preference in response to campaign events. Instead, change in vote preference must be inferred from comparisons of different survey respondents at different times. Panel data provide direct evidence of change by comparing the same respondents at different times (see Finkel 1993, for more thorough description of the benefits of panel data relative to cross-sectional data). There have been a few important election panel studies, but existing analyses using these data have not explicitly examined the variable effects of campaign events on different voters (Bartels 1993; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Finkel 1993).

Data

Throughout the 2000 election, Knowledge Networks (KN)[4] repeatedly asked 29,000 respondents about their vote intentions, yielding more than 100,000 individual responses to the vote-intention question, along with a rich set of relevant demographic, political, and attitudinal variables.[5] Thus, we can identify individual transitions in vote preference around specific campaign activities. This unique data from Election 2000, coupled with an empirical model that incorporates dynamics, offers insights about which campaign activities matter, when they matter, and for whom they matter.

While KN panelists are recruited by phone, the actual mode of interviewing is self-completion, via the Internet and a WebTV unit. Panelists are provided with a WebTV unit and an Internet connection in exchange for their survey participation. Thus, although surveys are conducted over the Internet, respondents are a random probability sample of the United States population.[6]

Election 2000 Data

The KN panel is particularly well-equipped to study campaign effects. At different points throughout the campaign, KN panelists were asked a series of political questions, including vote preference, turnout intention, and, at times, a variety of other questions about political attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors. Figure 1 shows the number of interviews per day over the course of the campaign. Between August 1 and Election Day, the number of interviews per week never drops below 2,600.

The modal number of interviews per respondent is three, and the average number is about five interviews.[7] Given that some respondents were interviewed a large number of times, the possibility of "panel effects" warrants attention. Panel effects are changes in respondent attitudes or behavior under study in response to repeated interviewing about those attitudes and behaviors. If respondents systematically change behaviors or attitudes because of participation in a survey (or anticipation of subsequent surveys), the survey responses will be biased, since they are no longer representative of the general population not subject to interviewing. We expect that the KN election panel is not affected by such political activation effects to the degree that most political panels are affected. First, many of the core political variables—party identification, attitudes toward Clinton, ideology, etc.—were collected long before the campaign season even started. These political profile questions were often answered without the heightened political awareness engendered by an electoral campaign. Second, the political questions were often asked as just one small part of a short survey (10–15 minutes) on a completely different topic. For instance, four to five political questions might be asked at the end of a marketing survey about consumer products. We would expect that such a design does not have the same activation effect as typical political surveys. Finally, existing research on the KN panel has found minimal panel effects (Clinton 2000; Dennis 2001). In a comparison of responses between tenured panelists and a fresh cross-section, there was no statistically significant difference on four political opinion attitudes (Clinton 2000). Similarly, Dennis (2001) finds no evidence of selection bias—panel attrition is evenly distributed across demographic groups.

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[4] Knowledge Networks is a private survey research firm cofounded by Douglas Rivers and Norman Nie. Respondents in the Knowledge Networks panel are randomly selected through Random Digit Dial (RDD) sampling methods on a quarterly updated sample frame consisting of the entire U.S. telephone population. All telephone numbers have an equal probability of selection, and sampling is done without replacement. Household cooperation rate during this time averaged 56%. Detailed information on the Knowledge Networks methodology can be found on their website, http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/.

[5] The data were collected as part or all of approximately 75 randomly assigned surveys (with widely varying sample sizes).

[6] The viability of this methodology was recently demonstrated in an objective comparison test. Krosnick and Chiat Chang (2001)

commissioned a set of side-by-side surveys using a single questionnaire to gauge public opinion and voting preferences regarding the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election from national samples of American adults. The researchers find that the Knowledge Networks survey is comparable to the RDD telephone survey and is representative of the U.S. population with respect to respondent demographics, attitudes, and behaviors.

[7] About 450 (1.4%) respondents were interviewed 10 times or more over the course of the campaign.

FIGURE 1   Interviews per Day
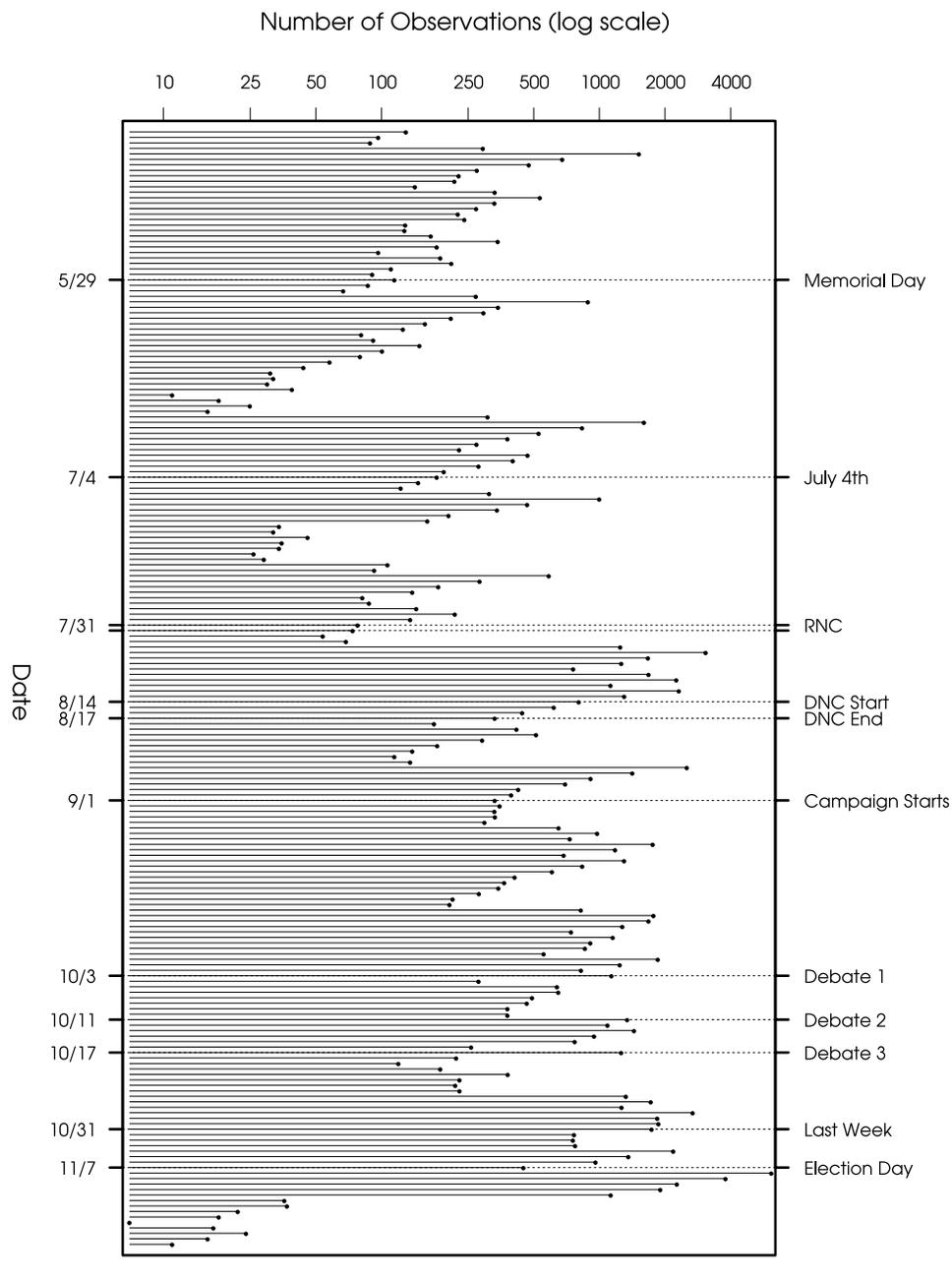
These data provide the necessary structure to assess the stability of individual voter preferences. In order for a campaign activity to influence vote preferences, a necessary (though not sufficient) condition is that vote preferences actually change. Of the 29,000 individuals in the Knowledge Networks election panel, nearly 45% changed their minds as to their vote preference (including the change from being undecided) at some point during the campaign. This contrasts sharply with the less than 15% instability found between pre- and post-election

NES interviews (Zaller n.d.). Comparing the vote preferences of individuals between their first and last interviews, we still find 32% inconsistency. Twenty-eight percent of likely voters indicated that they were undecided at least one time during the campaign, 53% reported supporting Gore at least once, and 53% reported supporting Bush at some time. All of these descriptives suggest that the 2000 presidential campaign had the opportunity to influence changes in vote preference. We estimate a transition model to identify the factors related to changes in vote preference

following the conventions and debates, but we first look at the patterns of those movements at the aggregate level.

Aggregate Campaign Dynamics

To understand voter decision making, we must explore not only *if* voters are changing their candidate preferences, but also *when* and in *what direction*. We thus compare every individual's current vote preference with their previous vote preference to examine aggregate movements in individual candidate preferences for each week of the campaign.[8] Figure 2 reports, for every week of the campaign, the net movement in vote preference (percent of likely voters changing vote preference *to* each of the candidates; percent changing *from* each of the candidates). Of respondents interviewed the week of August 15, for instance, Gore realized a net increase of 3.5% (7.7% moved to Gore; 4.2% moved from Gore) while Bush realized a net change of 0.1% (4.5% moved to Bush; 4.4% moved from Bush).

Evidence of change is obviously muted in the aggregate because some people move to the candidate while others simultaneously move away from the candidate. Nonetheless, we find that net change is particularly pronounced following the party conventions, following the presidential debates, and in the last week before Election Day. Gore sees increased net movement in his direction following the Democratic convention (3.5%) and decreased movement following the presidential debates (−0.2%). In a daily analysis, we find that a higher-than-average percentage of respondents change their vote preference in the five days following the conventions and debates, again suggesting that these campaign events might have played a role in the decision. The graph also illustrates the expected movement during the last week of the campaign, as Bush and Gore receive increased gains while more people move from the undecided category. The total amount of weekly movement ranged from 20% in August, down to a low of 13% in late October (and on Election Day), indicating that individuals were less likely to change their minds closer to Election Day. This preliminary analysis suggests that voters do respond to campaign events, especially the conventions and debates.

However, these aggregate analyses are limited in how well they can explain the determinants of these movements. We offer an empirical model that more closely examines changes in individual vote preferences following the 2000 conventions and debates.

Campaign Events: Previous Research

We are certainly not the first to study the impact of party conventions and presidential debates (Campbell, Cherry, and Wink 1992; Geer 1988; Shaw 1999b). Presidential debates have been a subject of interest since the first televised debate between Kennedy and Nixon in 1960. Debates draw a larger audience than any other campaign event, and they allow the audience to assess and compare the issue positions and personal qualities of the candidates without the media gatekeepers (Schrott 1990). Some researchers contend, however, that debates may actually do little to shape vote preference because the format cancels any effect (candidates are able to counter directly the other's message) and because the audience tends to be composed of politically interested partisans who have probably already selected their candidate. In effect, the debates are "preaching to the converted" (Holbrook 1996; Lanoue and Schrott 1991). Others have found that the victorious debater experiences a small surge of support following the debate (Geer 1988; Holbrook 1996), but they do not identify which voters change their votes.[9]

Party conventions have been studied noticeably less, but definite theories about convention effects have been ascertained. Though party conventions are no longer important for nominating the party candidates, they do provide an opportunity for each candidate to dominate the flow of information and, as such, they tend to produce a "bump" in public support for the candidate (Campbell, Cherry, and Wink 1992; Holbrook 1996; Shaw 1999b). It is easy to imagine, however, that some might dismiss the effect of conventions—if both candidates receive a bump, they might end up right where they started. Conventions could be the textbook example of the neutralizing effect of presidential campaigns (Campbell 2000).

Clearly, debates and conventions are not the only campaign events that have the potential to influence voters. Campaign speeches, major endorsements, television advertising, major gaffes or scandals, and the like, may provide influential information to the electorate, but identifying and quantifying the impact of these activities

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[8]In other words, for all individuals in a given week we compared their current vote preference to their previous vote preference to determine if they were consistent or whether they were moving to or from each of the candidates. The weeks are defined starting with 8/1 (e.g., values for week 8/1 are computed from all interviews collected between 8/1–8/7), with estimates plotted at the midpoint of the week.

[9]Holbrook (1996) uses individual-level panel data in his analysis, but his empirical model imposes the assumption that the debate will have the same average (expected) effect for all voters.

FIGURE 2   Weekly Net Movements in Vote Preference
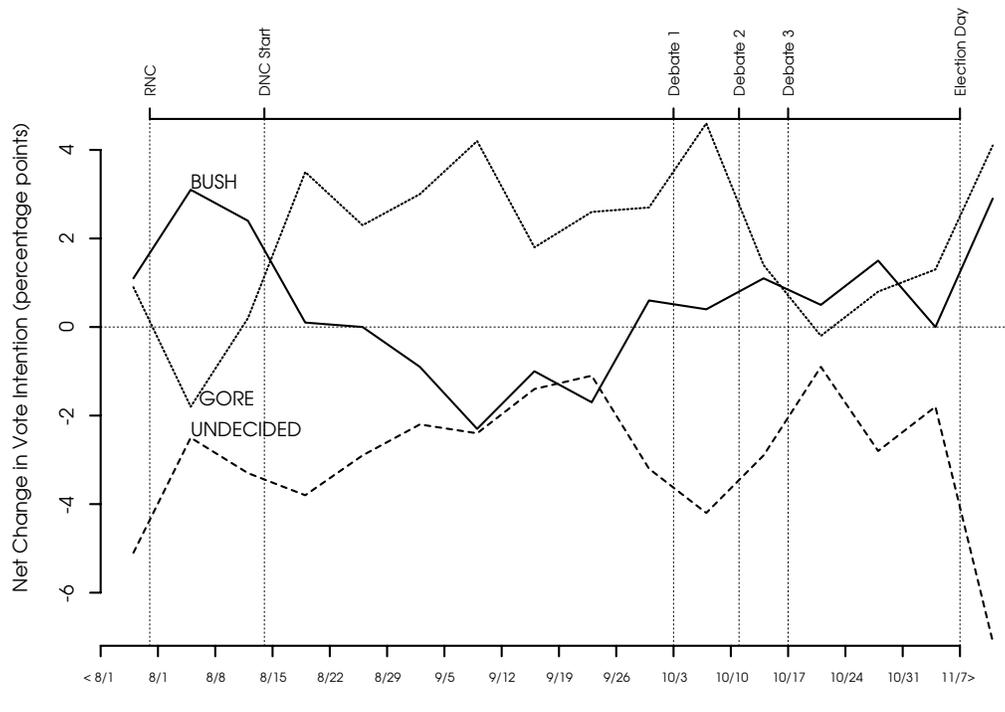
is much more difficult. Party conventions and debates provide convenient focal points for analyzing campaign effects.

Individual-level Analysis
Convention and Debate Transitions

In the aggregate, we identify the party conventions and presidential debates as campaign events that appear to stimulate changes in voter preferences in Election 2000. Before moving to the transition model results, we briefly look at the individual voters behind the net movements associated with the conventions and debates.

Our analysis of the effects of the conventions and debates is limited to those individuals who were interviewed just before and after either of the campaign events.[10] Thus, we treat the conventions and debates as intervening events, allowing us to study individual-level movements

in vote preferences in response to these events. Because we do not have a controlled experiment, we cannot rule out the possibility that the observed movements in vote preferences are caused by something other than the conventions and debates. For instance, the respondents may have been exposed to other stimuli—TV advertising, political discussion, news coverage—that might have caused them to change their vote choice during this same time period. At the same time, however, such stimuli are undoubtedly shaped by the events themselves (media assessments of the events, for instance). Moreover, we feel justified in treating the conventions and debates as intervening events given the heightened movement in preferences and observed patterns of movement following each of these events. The statistically significant relationships we find in our multivariate model also indicate that the movement is not attributable to random error alone.[11] Finally, individual survey questions gauging reactions to the conventions and debates indicate that individuals did indeed respond to the campaign events. Following the Republican Convention, only 54% of interviewed respondents said the convention had "no effect on my vote." And in

[10]For each event, we analyze transitions between the last vote-preference interview prior to the event and the first vote-preference interview following the event (no more than ten days after). This cutoff date is consistent with the campaign-effects research, which has found in the aggregate that campaign effects may be strongest three to ten days after an event (Shaw 1999b). This ten-day cutoff also seems sensible given the data—earlier cutoffs decrease the sample sizes significantly (e.g., a four-day cutoff would reduce convention-model sample size by nearly 80% and the debate-model sample size by 77%).

[11]In an attempt to account for random movement on the part of respondents, we also included a variable measuring the number of times respondents changed preferences prior to their pre-event interview. This variable was never significant and did not change the other coefficients, so we have not included it in the final models.

TABLE 1   Change in Vote Preference between
Pre- and Post-Convention Interviews

Pre-Convention Vote	Post-Convention Vote		
	Bush	Gore	Undecided
Bush	85.6%	7.4%	7.0%
	(998)	(86)	(82)
Gore	4.3%	87.7%	8.0%
	(48)	(983)	(90)
Undecided	24.1%	37.8%	38.2%
	(184)	(289)	(292)
Total	1230	1358	465
	(40.3%)	(44.5%)	(15.2%)

TABLE 2   Change in Vote Preference between
Pre- and Post-Debates Interviews

Pre-Debates Vote	Post-Debates Vote		
	Bush	Gore	Undecided
Bush	91.2%	2.5%	6.3%
	(1354)	(37)	(93)
Gore	4.5%	87.0%	8.5%
	(72)	(1397)	(137)
Undecided	21.4%	21.1%	57.5%
	(122)	(120)	(327)
Total	1548	1554	557
	(42.3%)	(42.5%)	(15.2%)

response to the individual debates, 13–15% gave an affirmative response to the question, "Has anything you have learned from, or about, the debates made you change your mind about whom to vote for?"[12]

Table 1 displays the transitions from pre-convention vote preference to post-convention vote preference.[13] Overall, 26% of respondents change their vote preference between the pre- and post-convention periods. This is considerable movement between current and lagged vote preferences. By comparison, we find less than 20% were inconsistent with their lagged vote preference in the early campaign season (before August 1). Since we might have expected there to be even more movement early in the campaign when vote preferences are typically less congealed, this further suggests that this heightened movement following the conventions may be related to the event. For the debate period, Table 2 displays the observed transitions between pre- and post-presidential debate vote preference. Stability is greater two months later in the electoral campaign, with only 16% of respondents changing their vote preference between the pre- and post-debate periods.

Some notable points are apparent from even this casual inspection of the data. First, the fact that instability decreases from the convention period to the debate period suggests that the electorate may solidify their vote preference as Election Day nears.[14] Second, comparing transitions during these periods, we find that transitions after the conventions favored Gore and transitions after the debates favored Bush.[15] Undecided voters were more likely to support Gore following the conventions, but more likely to support Bush following the debates. Similarly, Gore's aggregate vote share increased after the conventions (36.7% to 44.4%), but declined after the debates (43.9% to 42.5%). In the next section, we estimate a transition model to examine the characteristics of the individuals who changed their vote preference following the conventions and debates.

Modeling Vote Preference

To identify the factors related to changes in vote preference following the conventions and debates, we estimate a transition model (Diggle, Liang, and Zeger 2000; Jackman 2000). A transition model allows us to estimate the effect of covariates (x_i) on the probability of transitioning to

[12]These statistics are from individual surveys after the conventions and debates, with survey sample sizes of 2738 and 622, respectively. We also replicated our model on the period prior to the party conventions—when campaigning was less intense—to identify a sort of "null model." The absence of statistically significant patterns to the changes in vote choice (only undecided partisans increase their probability of supporting their respective candidates) further suggests that many of the vote-preference changes during the convention and debate periods can be attributed to those events.

[13]Supporters of third-party candidates are included in the undecided category. This pooling is justified both by the small number of cases (about 3.5% of sample) and the fact that a majority of these individuals ultimately select a major-party candidate anyway (so their behavior mirrors that of undecided voters).

[14]In comparing post-event vote preference with reported vote on Election Day (for the subset of respondents for whom we have post-election vote preference), we find that approximately 63% of the individuals who changed their preferences ultimately voted for the candidate they moved *to* after the campaign event. Roughly 25% of these individuals report not voting at all.

[15]This analysis omits those individuals who preferred Nader, Buchanan, or were undecided following the conventions and debates as they represent a very small proportion of vote intentions (less than 10% moved to the Nader, Buchanan, or undecided categories combined).

TABLE 3   Transition Scheme

Previous Vote	Current Vote	
	Bush $(y_i = 0)$	Gore $(y_i = 1)$
Bush ($j = 1$)	Stability	Transition
Gore ($j = 2$)	Transition	Stability
Undecided ($j = 3$)	Transition	Transition

either Gore or Bush by conditioning on previous vote preference (Gore, Bush, undecided).[16] The transitions we model are shown in Table 3.

In other words, we hypothesize that the choice to support a particular candidate prior to a campaign event not only influences support after the event, but also influences individual reactions to the event (i.e., conditions the effects of the covariates). This approach is consistent with the view that political predispositions shape how information is received and processed (Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt 1998; Zaller 1992). For example, it is not just that we expect that Democrats will react differently to an event than will a Republican or Independent: we hypothesize that undecided Democrats will react differently than will Bush Democrats, Gore Democrats, and so on. So, each of these groups may be more or less likely to support Gore (or Bush) following the campaign event.

More formally, if respondent i supported candidate j in their previous interview, then we set $D_{ij} = 1$, where j indexes the set {"Bush," "Gore," "undecided"}, and $D_{ij} = 0$ otherwise. With this notation, our model can then be expressed as

$$h(p_i) = \sum_{j=1}^{J} \mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta}_j \cdot D_{ij} \qquad (1)$$

where $h(p)$ is the familiar logit transformation $\ln[p/(1 - p)]$, mapping probabilities $0 < p < 1$ onto the real line, and p_i is the probability that the ith respondent intends to vote for Gore (i.e., $y_i = 1$) while respondents intending to vote for Bush are coded $y_i = 0$. This model speci-

fies a different set of coefficients for each of the previous vote preferences (Gore, Bush, undecided). Comparing the specific elements of the three parameter vectors $\boldsymbol{\beta}_j$ lets us assess how specific covariates govern the probability of change in vote preferences.

There are a number of factors that we might expect to influence the likelihood of changing candidate preference. Age, for instance, is included in the model with the expectation that older voters will be more stable in their preferences. Gender (female indicator) is included to test whether women were more likely to switch to Gore than were men. Previous research has argued that the volatile voters—those most likely to change their vote preference—are characterized by low levels of information, party affiliation, and political interest (Campbell 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Zaller n.d.). Party identification, in particular, is expected to play an important role in shaping both the extent and direction of movement. We also interact party identification with political interest to test whether political interest conditions the probability of transitioning for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Building on the ideas of Zaller (1992), we hypothesize that the most interested partisans will be the most stable in their preferences, and thus the least open to influence by the campaign events. In contrast, the most interested Independents may be the most susceptible to campaign effects since they have the motivation to be informed about politics, but are not necessarily wedded to a particular candidate or party.

We also include a measure of Clinton unfavorability and Clinton job approval (both normalized to range from 0 to 1)[17] to assess the impact of the respondents' views of Clinton on their voting decisions. It is well documented that assessments of the incumbent administration have an impact on vote choice (Fiorina 1981); we are able to test whether opinions toward the incumbent also impact changes in vote preferences. In the wake of Gore's loss, it was also debated whether disapproval of Clinton's personal behavior hurt Gore in the election (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2003; Pomper 2001). Although not ideal measures, including both Clinton unfavorability and Clinton job approval in the model will help to parcel out the effect of personal versus policy judgments in the vote-choice decision.

[16]With a binary outcome, we estimate as many parameter vectors β_j as there are rows in Table 3. Thus, conditioning on additional previous states (e.g., Nader, Buchanan, nonvoters) adds more parameters to the analysis. More critically, expanding the number of current vote states proliferates the number of parameters (increasing from 2 to 3 doubles the number of parameters to be estimated; moving from 3 to 4 triples the number of parameters, and so on). Given that Gore and Bush account for more than three-quarters of responses and for ease of presentation, we present the binary model.

[17]The Clinton unfavorability question is worded as follows: "Please rate your feelings toward Bill Clinton. Is your overall impression of him favorable, somewhat favorable, neutral, somewhat unfavorable, unfavorable?" The Clinton job-approval question, asked in the same survey as Clinton unfavorability, is worded as follows: "Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the way Bill Clinton has handled his job as President?"

TABLE 4 **Estimates of Transition Model of Gore Vote for Convention and Debate Periods**

	Convention Model			Debate Model		
	Undecided	**Gore**	**Bush**	**Undecided**	**Gore**	**Bush**
Previous Vote	β_1	β_2	β_3	β_1	β_2	β_3
Intercept	−0.74	−1.51	−1.56	1.86	2.43**	−1.89
	(0.95)	(1.39)	(1.27)	(1.60)	(1.12)	(1.71)
Age	0.08**	0.09**	0.02	−0.01	0.08**	−0.05
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Age^2	−6.0E-4	−8.0E-4*	−2.0E-4	1.0E-5	−6.0E-4	6.0E-4
	(4.0E-4)	(4.5E-4)	(5.0E-4)	(6.0E-4)	(4.0E-4)	(6.0E-4)
Female	−0.27	0.78**	0.22	−0.36	−0.10	0.37
	(0.23)	(0.33)	(0.28)	(0.32)	(0.25)	(0.37)
Interest	−0.70	1.26	0.65	−1.42*	−1.30	−1.03
	(0.66)	(1.32)	(0.98)	(0.79)	(0.93)	(1.10)
Democrat	−0.63	1.41	2.52***	−0.31	−0.54	0.60
	(0.61)	(0.91)	(0.86)	(0.94)	(0.76)	(0.94)
Republican	−1.98***	−0.62	−0.33	−2.65***	−1.40	−0.79
	(0.62)	(1.25)	(0.81)	(1.05)	(0.91)	(1.11)
Interest * Democrat	1.59	−0.68	−2.13	1.42	1.60	0.50
	(1.03)	(1.48)	(1.33)	(1.38)	(1.11)	(1.53)
Interest * Republican	0.87	−1.00	−0.87	2.05	0.57	−1.51
	(0.98)	(1.91)	(1.26)	(1.53)	(1.32)	(1.93)
Unfavorability	−1.55***	−0.54	−2.88***	−1.47***	−2.66***	−1.24*
	(0.45)	(0.71)	(0.55)	(0.62)	(0.48)	(0.72)
Approval	0.90***	0.78	0.60	0.70	−0.09	1.85***
	(0.33)	(0.57)	(0.44)	(0.47)	(0.38)	(0.62)
n	2588			3102		
Deviance (−2LogL)	1221.45			1011.49		
Area Under ROC curve	.801	.763	.867	.793	.803	.885

Notes: *p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01, two-tail. Dependent variable is Gore ($y_i = 1$) and Bush ($y_i = 0$) with all other vote preferences excluded from the analysis.

Results

Estimates of the transition models for the convention and debate periods are reported in Table 4. Our results indicate that the effects of the campaign events and the covariates are indeed conditional on the previous vote preference of the respondent. Even a casual inspection of Table 4 shows that different variables are important for each of the previous vote preferences. Clearly, it would not have been appropriate to have assumed—as most models of vote preference do—that the effects of the covariates are the same for all individuals. In other words, to understand the dynamics of voter decision making, we must take into account an individual's previous vote preference.

Given the large number of coefficients and the fact that logit coefficients are not easy to interpret directly, in Table 5 we report the effects of the key variables on the predicted probability of transitioning.[18] Comparing these transition probabilities helps to illustrate our most important findings.

These predictions demonstrate the critical role that partisanship plays in shaping *changes* in vote preference—offering evidence of strong partisan activation effects associated with the campaign events. These effects are apparent among both the undecided partisans, who have a very large probability of switching to their respective party candidate, and the mismatched partisans (partisans supporting the candidate of the opposing party). More interestingly, we find that these effects are different for each of the campaign events. Bush Democrats were

[18] All other variables are set to their means, indicator variables set to their mode. Though not reported in the table, the probability of transitioning from undecided to Bush is simply $1 - PR$(Undecided → Gore).

TABLE 5   **Predicted Probability of Transitioning by Party Identification and Political Interest**

	Convention Model						Debate Model					
	Democrat		Republican		Independent		Democrat		Republican		Independent	
Interest	lo	hi	lo	hi	lo	hi	lo	hi	lo	hi	lo	hi
Bush → Gore	0.55	0.22	0.07	0.05	0.09	0.16	0.11	0.07	0.03	0.01	0.06	0.02
Gore → Bush	0.08	0.05	0.39	0.33	0.26	0.09	0.06	0.04	0.13	0.23	0.03	0.12
Undecided → Gore	0.69	0.84	0.36	0.41	0.67	0.80	0.70	0.70	0.19	0.30	0.76	0.44

more likely to "come home" after the conventions than were Gore Republicans. In contrast, Gore Republicans were more likely than Bush Democrats to come home following the debates. In certain cases, these transitions vary significantly by level of political interest. Following the conventions, 55% of politically uninterested Bush Democrats (and 22% of interested ones) came home to Gore and 39% of uninterested Gore Republicans (30% of interested ones) switched to Bush. In contrast, following the debates, only 11% of politically uninterested Bush Democrats (and 7% of interested) switched to Gore, and 13% of uninterested (and 23% of interested) Gore Republicans switched to Bush.

We also find evidence of campaign effects among Independents. Following the conventions, politically interested, undecided Independents were more likely to support Gore (with predicted probability of .70 of supporting Gore); while they were more likely to support Bush (with predicted probability of .56 of supporting Bush) following the debates. Politically interested Independents were also more likely to switch from Bush to Gore following the conventions, but to switch from Gore to Bush following the debates.

So, comparing the patterns of transitions from the conventions and debates—while keeping in mind this is a heuristic comparison and not a statistical comparison— suggests that Gore "won" the conventions and Bush "won" the debates. This comparison also indicates that voters may be generally less likely to change their vote preference following the debates, suggesting that voters are more likely to solidify their vote as Election Day nears. Just scanning the predicted probabilities in the tables, it is obvious that Gore and Bush supporters were much less likely to transition following the debates than following the conventions.

Our results also indicate that the decision to change candidate preferences was shaped by attitudes toward then President Clinton. The more a respondent disliked Clinton, the less likely he was to support Gore, regardless of previous candidate preference. This finding is par-

ticularly interesting given the amount of discussion in the media and academic commentary about the Gore campaign's decision to distance Gore from President Clinton. The concern about a negative "Clinton effect" may well have been warranted—individuals who disliked Clinton were more likely to change their vote choice away from Gore following a campaign event, even if they had supported Gore previously. The Clinton unfavorability effect was large enough to make the difference between a Gore vote and Bush vote for many voters, especially Republicans supporting Gore before the debates, Democrats supporting Bush before the conventions, and undecided voters in both models.[19] Figure 3 illustrates the changes in predicted probability for each previous vote. For the convention model, for instance, the probability that a Bush Democrat switches to Gore decreases from more than .55 to less than .10 across the range of Clinton unfavorability (all other values set to means, indicator variables set to mode). Similarly, for the debate model, the probability that a Gore Republican switches to Bush increases from less than .10 to nearly .60 across the range of Clinton unfavorability. This finding is all the more impressive because we have controlled for party identification, previous vote preference, *and* presidential approval. Forecasters have shown that presidential approval has an important influence on electoral outcomes; we find that presidential favorability also shapes an individual's decision to change his vote preferences.

In gross terms, the estimated transition models fit the data very well, as does any model with a lagged dependent variable in the equation. The convention model correctly

[19]Roughly 16% of debate respondents (15% convention respondents) fell into one of these three categories. Of these individuals, 42.6% reported being somewhat or very unfavorable toward Clinton versus only 29.1% being somewhat or very favorable toward Clinton (the convention numbers were 41.8% and 32.8%, respectively). Thus, the potential marginal impact of Clinton unfavorability was considerable in the 2000 election.

FIGURE 3   **Changes in Predicted Probability of Transitioning by Clinton Unfavorability**
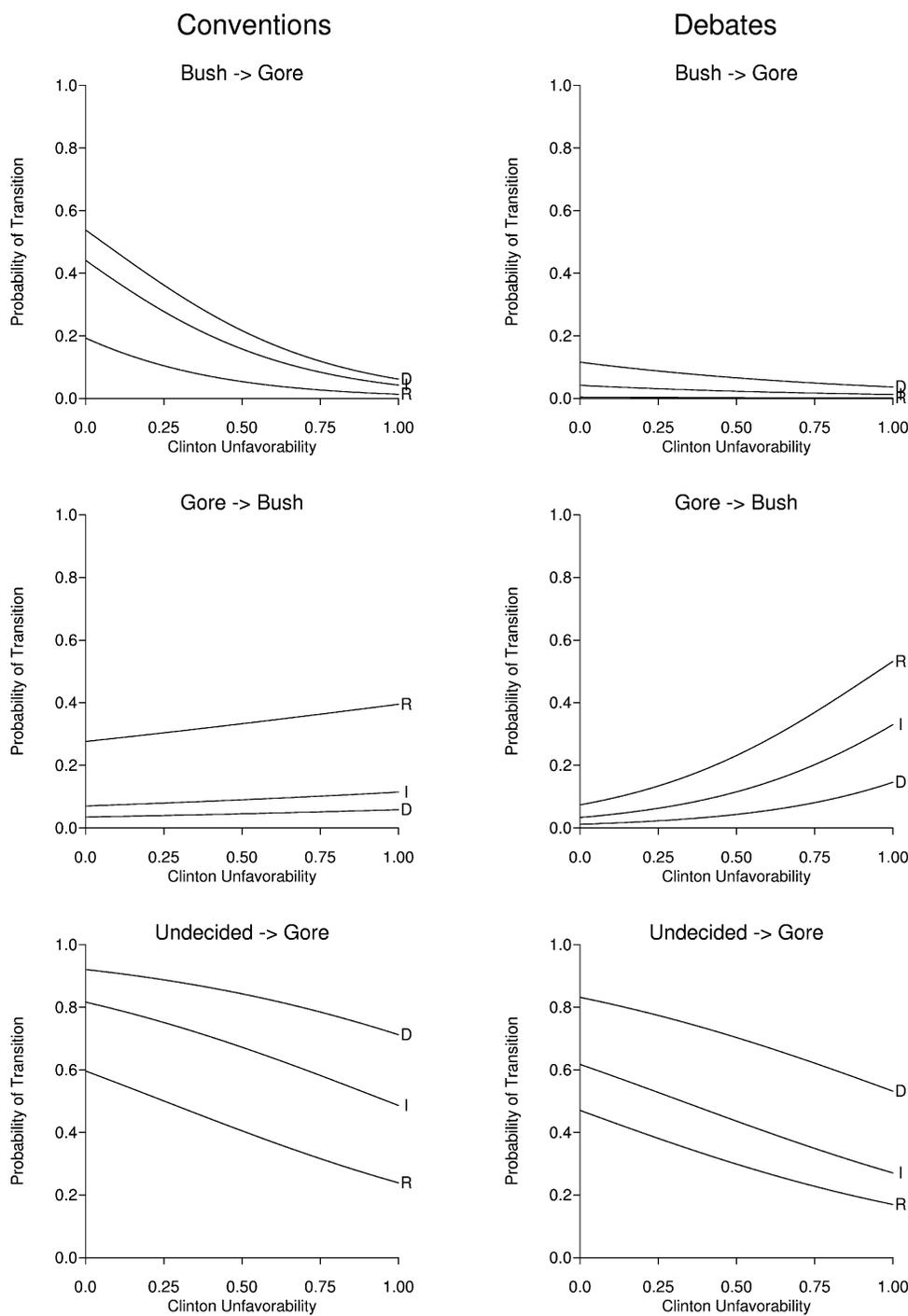
predicts 91% of vote preferences, and the debate model correctly predicts 94% of vote preferences, using p = .5 as the classification threshold. Moreover, each of the models has an area under the ROC curves anywhere from .79 to .89. These numbers indicate that each of our models does an acceptable to excellent job of discriminating those who transitioned from those who were stable.[20]

[20]To provide an imperfect analogy, the ROC curve is like a hit-miss table over the entire range of possible cut points. The area under the

Given the high percentage of those not changing their vote preference following the campaign events, the null model predicting all stayers has a great goodness of fit. However, such a model offers nothing to our understanding of voter decision making and campaign effects. Our analysis in some sense parallels the empirical models of war in the International Relations literature—given the rarity of war, a null model predicting no war does an excellent job of fitting the data, but it is worthless for explaining when or why wars occur. Likewise, it wouldn't be a bad guess to predict that no voters change their minds following the campaign events, but we are interested in identifying the people who *do* change their vote preference in response to campaign events. Thus, we are interested in evaluating the ability of our model to account for those who change their vote preference following the campaign events. Generally, our models do a good job of predicting transitions from undecided to Gore and undecided to Bush at nearly all reasonable classification cutoffs. At the standard .5 cutoff (a reasonable threshold given the absence of an informative prior about candidate preference), we correctly predict 57% of transitions from undecided to Bush and 84% of transitions from undecided to Gore with the convention model. With the debate model, we correctly predict 69% of transitions from undecided to Bush and 69% of transitions from undecided to Gore. It is much more difficult to correctly predict those who transition from Gore to Bush and vice versa, given the rarity of such changes.[21] Nonetheless, our model offers important insights into voter decision making that a null model simply could not provide.

ROC curve measures discrimination; that is, the ability of the test to correctly classify those who move their vote preferences and those who stay with their vote preference. To understand what the area actually measures, consider the situation in which respondents are already correctly classified into two groups (movers and stayers). You randomly pick one mover and one stayer and do the test on both. The area under the curve is the percentage of randomly drawn pairs for which the probability of moving is actually higher for the mover than for the stayer (that is, the test correctly classifies the two individuals in the random pair).

[21] Relying on the standard .5 cutoff, we correctly predict 29% of Gore to Bush and 2% of Bush to Gore transitions during the convention period; 4% of Bush to Gore and 1% of Gore to Bush transitions in the debate period. Given that the .5 cutoff is a rather arbitrary cutoff, and one that makes little sense as *the* standard by which to judge all transitions we also mapped the correct predictions over the entire range of cutoffs. Changing the cutoff involves a tradeoff: as it becomes easier to predict a mover, it becomes more difficult to predict a stayer. We are able to correctly predicted as much as 80% of movers before there is a significant decline in the correctly predicted percent of stayers.

Discussion and Conclusion

While these campaign effects are quite notable, it is conceivable that the level of voter instability and campaign effects are attributable to unique qualities associated with the particular presidential election studied. The impact of presidential unfavorability relative to presidential approval, in particular, may be unique to the 2000 election given the personal scandals of the Clinton presidency. It could also be the case that campaign events are especially effective in elections where marginal changes have the potential to switch the outcome. The 2000 campaign may have been more influential because the election had no incumbent; the economy may have been less of a factor given the decade of rapid expansion; and the public was not overly enthused about either candidate. Unfortunately, we do not yet have access to cross-election data that would place our campaign model in a broader historical context.

This research also cannot distinguish what specifically about each of the campaign events was influential. Was Gore's convention performance successful because of his populist message, because he distanced himself from Clinton ("I am my own man"), or because he humanized his image with the affectionate kiss with his wife? Did Bush sway voters during the debates with his compassionate conservative message or because he exceeded expectations regarding his communication skills? And were these performances evaluated directly by the public or filtered through late-night talk shows and Saturday Night Live? This may be a case in which the media coverage of these events played as much or more of a role than the events themselves. Our findings are consistent with previous research on the 2000 debates that has found that debate watchers believed Gore won the first and third debate, but the individuals *not* watching the debates increasingly believed that Bush won those debates—perhaps in response to media interpretations of Gore's smirks and sighs (Johnston, Hagan, and Jamieson 2001). There is little doubt that the media provides the filter through which campaign events influence voter behavior, but the extent of that effect is still unknown. Future research should take advantage of media content data from the 2000 election to attempt to parcel out these different effects.

Nonetheless, our research offers an important contribution to the campaign effects literature. Previous research has been conceptually constrained by insufficient data that have, in turn, limited our understanding of the relationship between campaign activities and voter preferences. Rather than dwell on whether presidential campaigns matter or not, we have examined how specific campaign activities influenced changes in vote preference in

Election 2000. Applying a transition model to individual-level campaign data, we find that the party conventions and presidential debates affected vote preference in complex ways. Our findings suggest that the effect of a campaign event depends on previous preferences, partisan dispositions, and political context. In short, our findings suggest that different voters respond differently to different campaign events—and we identify which individuals were susceptible to changing their votes following each of the events.

Mismatched partisans, undecided voters, and Independents were particularly likely to change their vote preference following the campaign events, offering evidence of both partisan activation and persuasion effects in Election 2000. The campaign appeared to do little to change the minds of politically interested partisans, no doubt because most had loyally selected their preferred candidate long before these campaign events. More notably, these campaign effects varied with each event. Specifically, Gore was able to increase support among Democrats, Independents, and the undecided with the conventions (but not debates), whereas Bush was able to activate Republicans and solidify support among politically interested Independents following the presidential debates (but not the conventions). It appears that a strong performance (as perceived by the public and media) brings home the stray partisans and wins over the Independents, but there are no such benefits with a lackluster performance.

We also find that the "fundamental variable" of presidential approval was overshadowed by presidential unfavorability in the 2000 election. Even controlling for previous preferences, there was a strong and consistent negative relationship between Clinton unfavorability and the probability of supporting Gore following a campaign event. Individuals unfavorable toward Clinton were more likely to change their vote preference from Gore to Bush following the campaign events. For many voters, this effect was large enough to make the difference between a Gore vote and a Bush vote. This suggests that the campaign events—despite Gore's attempts otherwise—may have reinforced his connection with Clinton, with quite negative consequences for Gore.

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