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A Comparison of Winners and Losers
Approval of a Political Institution:

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This brief paper investigates the influence of winning and losing in politics. The research focuses upon the reaction of political participants to the political institutions in which their political victory or defeat occurred. In a seminal work John Kingdon considered the impact of winning and losing upon state legislative candidates. He hypothesized that winning legislative candidates developed more favorable perceptions regarding the electoral process while losing candidates developed less favorable perceptions. Subsequently additional research on legislative candidates has elaborated upon the Kingdon thesis. The evidence available suggests that winning and losing offers promise as an important factor in explaining political behavior; however, research evidence is available for only one political arena—state legislative elections. In this paper we seek to determine whether winning and losing influences another set of political participants, and thereby extend what is known about winning and losing to another political domain.

The subjects selected for investigation are presidential nominating convention delegates. Delegates are an important group of political activists. Party activists serve a crucial role in American politics. They “... function as a vast communication network to link groups, interests, and ideologues to the government. This intermediary role has long been recognized.” Thus, the delegates’ views are important because they may shape and reflect the level of approval for the institution of the

*The author thanks C. L. Kim of the University of Iowa for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.


3 Hugh Bone, American Politics and the Party System, 4th edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971), 12; the importance of convention delegates is discussed by John S. Saloma and Frederick Sontag, Parties (New York: Random House, 1972), 71. They write: “Collectively the delegates and alternates and visitors at a national convention are the largest pool of talent ever assembled at one place within the national party. . . .”
nominating convention. A change in the delegates' views regarding the convention could signal a period of greater or lesser political stability. One observer perceptively links approval of the nominating process to the smooth functioning of the office of the presidency.

... now the more politically conscious and politically active segments of the voting public are becoming increasingly critical. If this loss of confidence should continue, it would have profoundly negative effects on the legitimacy and effectiveness of the presidential office.

This paper examines the influence of winning and losing upon 1972 Democratic presidential nominating convention delegates. The remainder of the paper is divided into the following sections: (1) The Data, (2) Findings, and (3) Conclusions.

DATA

The problems and difficulties of collecting questionnaire information from convention delegates are evident to anyone familiar with past efforts. One difficulty is simply locating the delegates and getting them

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4 The views of the delegates are important for many additional reasons such as: (1) the delegates' role in state party elections, (2) the delegates' evaluation of the nominee, (3) the delegates' involvement in the presidential campaign, and (4) the delegates' involvement in organizational matters of the party. This paper will focus on only one important facet of the delegates' views—the delegates' evaluation of the democratic nature of the process. The convention process has been under increasing criticism since 1968, and a prime focus of the criticism has dealt with the need to make the convention process more democratic. The convention process must be perceived as democratic if it is to be considered legitimate. Political instability may result if the process is perceived to be undemocratic. See Judith Parris, The Convention Problem (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1972). For a general discussion of the role that approval of political institutions contributes to political stability see Seymour Martin Lipset, The Political Man (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1960), particularly page 64; also see Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1964).

5 Ibid.


7 Because the study investigates delegates from one party's convention during one presidential election year we cannot be certain that the results would be the same for other sets of convention delegates; the findings and procedures employed here may be replicated with delegates from future convention meetings. More to the point, however, is the fact that population parameters (in the sense of the total population of all conventions ever held or that ever will be held) are not the major concern of this paper. We are interested in determining if winning and losing has a substantial influence on the delegates' evaluation of the convention as a democratic process. In short we are interested in conditional universals which refer to general relationships and law-like statements. The difference between the data base required to research a population and that required to investigate conditional universals is carefully outlined by David Willer, Scientific Sociology (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), Chapter 6.
to respond. The response rate of the delegates that forms the data base upon which description and analysis of convention delegates has been undertaken in the past was recently critiqued as follows:

The single wave of questionnaires mailed by David Tuttle and relied upon by Paul David and his associates yielded a 37% response rate for Democrats and a response rate of 44% for Republicans. The response rate reported for McClosky and his colleagues was approximately 47% and was achieved by multiple mailings with cover letters from two ex-presidents.\(^8\)

The difficulties in collecting information based upon a random sample of 1972 Democratic convention delegates was pointed out in a book length study by Sullivan and his associates. They noted that “Some of the delegates could not be interviewed because they had not come to Miami or were inaccessible in Miami . . . our interviewers were not able to conduct a high percentage of the sample interviews. . . .”\(^9\)

The present investigation required information from the delegates first before they attended the convention and then after they returned from the convention. In order to make contact and to obtain information from the delegates in advance of the convention held July 10-14, the delegates’ mailing addresses had to be known by June 1. This meant states that chose delegates in June were excluded from the possibility of inclusion in the sample. Thirty-six states had selected delegates before June 1.

Because a major goal of this investigation was to determine the influence of winning and losing upon the delegates, it was necessary to be certain that the sample was stratified so that delegates who supported each of the major candidates were included in the sample. In this way the chances were improved of having both winning and losing delegates to analyze. To accomplish this goal any state delegation solidly in support of one candidate was dropped from potential inclusion in the sample. Next, the states remaining were stratified according to whether they were states with a primary or convention system of selecting delegates, resulting in eight convention states and four primary states.\(^10\) From the four primary states, Nebraska and Pennsylvania were


\(^10\) Subsequent analysis determined that there was no difference between the delegates selected by primary and by convention in terms of the hypotheses and questions investigated here.
randomly selected. From the eight convention states, Arizona, Iowa, and South Carolina were randomly selected. This procedure of sampling, then, increased the possibility of studying conditional universals; however, we can be less certain that the sample was representative of the entire population of delegates at the convention. To determine, in part, how closely this sample approximates the total population, a comparison of the sample to the population of convention delegates was made on basic demographic characteristics. On the basis of demographic characteristics there seemed to be no significant differences between the sample and the entire convention population.\footnote{There are no significant differences (p<.05) between the delegate sample and the total population of convention delegates according to such background characteristics as age, first time attendance at the convention, sex, and holding political office.}

In mid-June the 261 delegates in the sample were mailed a questionnaire that consisted of standard background items and also items dealing with the delegates' intended involvement in the presidential campaign and the delegates satisfaction with the convention process. Those delegates not responding to the first questionnaire received a second mailing followed by a reminder postcard. Great care was taken to make certain that if a delegate should inadvertently return both mailings of the preconvention questionnaire this could be discovered. Each delegate was given a number next to his name on the delegate list. This same number was written at the top of the questionnaire in a space labeled IBM number. For the second mailing of the preconvention questionnaire to those delegates not responding to the first mailing, a second number was assigned to each delegate, and this second number was written on the questionnaire in the space for the IBM number. Thus, when the questionnaires came back it was a simple matter to check the IBM number against the numbers assigned to each delegate.

One month after the convention, a postconvention questionnaire was mailed to all of the delegates responding to the preconvention questionnaire. The postconvention questionnaire collected information concerning the delegates' experience at the convention, and it also repeated the items dealing with their anticipation of involvement in the presidential campaign and their satisfaction with the convention process. As with the preconvention questionnaire, several mailings of the questionnaire and several reminders were employed. Also, the questionnaires were numbered similarly to those mailed in the preconvention questionnaires.

One hundred and fifty delegates returned the preconvention questionnaire for a response rate of 57%. One hundred and twenty-one dele-
gates, or 81% of those answering the preconvention questionnaire, responded to the postconvention questionnaire. Thus, 46% of the delegates sampled answered both questionnaires. Some of the attrition of delegates in the postconvention mailing was inevitable. For example, one high party official responded to the first questionnaire but then did not attend the convention. Nevertheless, this response rate compares favorably with the data base of previous studies using convention delegates.

The reliability of the delegates' responses to the questionnaires is considered acceptable for three reasons. First, the respondents can be considered a political elite and as such, they traditionally are known to provide stable responses. Second, party identification, a variable known to be very stable over time, remains unchanged for 75% of the sample. Finally, several delegates did inadvertently fill out both mailings of the preconvention or postconvention questionnaire, and consequently, a comparison of these delegates' responses to the same questions was made; the responses were virtually identical. Thus, it seems reasonable to believe the delegate responses are not capricious, but reliable.

FINDINGS

"Most of us, then, believe in democracy.... We can cast no greater slur upon an attitude or an institution we dislike than to brand it undemocratic." This statement appearing in a well-known text characterizes the close relationship between democratic practices and beliefs, on the one hand, and the criteria employed to judge American political institutions, on the other. The image of the convention was brought under closer scrutiny after the turmoil and discontent at the 1968 Democratic convention. After the 1968 convention there were many individuals who believed the institution of the nominating convention required revisions because

The convention remains one of the most closed and tightly run operations in politics. Time and again one is reminded how "inside" both party conventions are... senior leaders of the congressional parties familiar with the uses of power and accorded deference

13 See Philip Converse, "Of Time and Partisan Stability," Comparative Political Studies, 2 (July, 1969), 140-163; in addition no significant (p<.05) differences with respect to standard background characteristics and candidate preference occurred between the group of delegates responding to both the preconvention and the postconvention questionnaires and the group of delegates answering the preconvention questionnaire.
within the party dominate the convention proceedings, often gaveling down dissent and refusing to recognize delegation representatives on the floor.\textsuperscript{15}

The movement for reform was persistent, and before 1972 several changes were made in the nominating process. Clearly, the underlying motivation and concern of the reformers was "with the fairness and democracy . . . found in the presidential nominating process." \textsuperscript{16} Therefore changes in the delegates’ approval of the convention process are indicated by the extent they perceived the convention to be democratic.

Equality of opportunity to provide input into the process, majority rule, and the extent that the convention decisions reflect the will of the more general public that the convention represents are the three aspects of the democratic process employed in the construction of the variable reflecting the delegates’ approval of the convention process.\textsuperscript{17} Because the delegates provided information both before and after the convention, the change in their perception of the institution can be determined by subtracting their preconvention score from their postconvention score. A positive change score then indicated a shift to a more favorable perception of the convention. A negative score indicated a movement to a less favorable view of the process.

Examining the extent that the delegates changed their perception of the democratic nature of the convention process, we see in Table 1

\textsuperscript{15} John S. Saloma and Frederick Sontag, \textit{op. cit.}, 63.
\textsuperscript{16} Judith Parris, \textit{op. cit.}, 4.
\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion of the various aspects of democracy see Ranney and Kendall, \textit{op. cit.}; and Hugh Bone, \textit{op. cit.} The questionnaire item reflecting the first aspect of democracy, equality of opportunity to provide input into the process, was: "Conventions have allowed many viewpoints to help determine who the presidential nominee will be." The item reflecting majority rule was: "National convention platforms have adopted the goals which most members of the party feel are important." The item tapping the extent that the convention ultimately reflects the will of the general public was: "National conventions have selected candidates who are popular with large cross-sections of American voters." Delegates were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with this statement. The responses of these three items were coded as follows: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) slightly disagree, (4) don’t know, (5) slightly agree, (6) agree, and (7) strongly agree. The items were Guttman scaled and the scale had a coefficient of reproducibility of .93 which was above the generally accepted minimum of .90. Although Guttman scaling is ideally performed with more than three items, scaling with three items is not unprecedented. See for example, C. L. Kim, "Political Attitudes of Defeated Candidates in an American State Election," \textit{American Political Science Review}, 64 (September, 1970), 879-887. Moreover, R. J. Mokken in \textit{A Theory and Procedure of Scale Analysis} (The Hague: Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research: Mouton and Co., 1971), 312-323, suggests that three item scales are permissible. The most compelling reason to believe this scale is acceptable, however, because each individual item and a summated scale of the items yielded similar results when the analysis was performed.
that 15% of the delegates experienced a large increase in their evaluation of the convention process, 19% a small increase, 22% a small decrease, and 3% a large decrease. Therefore, 34% of the delegates experienced an increase in their evaluation of the convention as a democratic institution while 25% of the delegates lowered their estimation that the process is democratic. The pattern in this data suggests that a considerable proportion of the delegates did adjust their perception of the convention process and that more of the delegates adjusted upward their perception of the convention process as democratic.

**TABLE 1**

*Change in Perception of the Democratic Nature of the Nominating Convention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Decrease</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Decrease</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Increase</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Increase</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100% (N) (116)

Investigating the influence of winning and losing upon the delegates, we see in Table 2 that 45% of the winners, i.e., supporters of McGovern, increased their perception of the democratic nature of the convention process while only 10% of the winners decreased their estimation of the convention process. In marked contrast 42% of the delegates supporting a losing candidate lowered their belief that the convention was a democratic institution while 20% increased their perception of the convention process as democratic. The pattern in the data demonstrate that winners tend to develop more favorable views regarding the process while losers tend to develop less favorable views. The Tau C correlation of .40 reflects the substantial strength of the relationship

18 For ease of presentation an increase or decrease of one (1) is considered small and an increase or decrease greater than one (1) is considered large. Several of the delegates who responded to the pre and post convention questionnaires did not answer all of the relevant items so they were excluded from analysis; additional variables such as "the Eagleton affair" and the importance of the nomination to the delegates were employed as control variables, but they did not change the findings reported here.
between winning and losing and the change in perception regarding the democratic nature of the convention process.\textsuperscript{19}

Finally we seek to determine whether the politically experienced delegates reacted any differently than the delegates with less political experience with regard to their evaluation of the convention process. By separating the sample of delegates into two groups according to their political experience, we can examine the influence of winning and losing upon the delegates’ perception of the convention process in both groups.\textsuperscript{20} By attempting to specify the original bivariate relationship with a third variable, we are seeking greater clarity and understanding of the influence of winning and losing upon the delegates’ perception


\textsuperscript{20} One study examined in a limited sense the reactions of the delegates to winning and losing; however, changes in the delegates’ views were based upon aggregated scores calculated during different periods of the convention. The study does not separate the delegates with political experience from the delegates without political experience. See Denis Sullivan, \textit{et al.}, \textit{The Politics of Representation} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974). The hazards of making an inference regarding the behavior of individuals from aggregate data was articulated in the seminal study by W. S. Robinson, “Ecological Correlations and the Behavior of Individuals,” \textit{American Sociological Review}, 15 (June 1950), 351-357.
of the convention process. The extent of the delegates' political experience is indicated here by whether or not they hold political office. The pattern of the data in Table 3 reveal that winning and losing has a far greater influence upon the politically experienced delegates' perception regarding the democratic nature of the convention process than it does upon the less experienced delegates. Among political office holders the strength of the Tau C correlation is .71 while among non office holders the Tau C is .19. This sensitivity of the politically experienced delegates to winning and losing is understandable because these individuals have been working with the existing political institutions, and they are aware that particular rules governing political institutions are more amenable to their political success than are other political rules. Thus, if the politically experienced win, they find the institutional process acceptable, but if they lose, the process becomes less to their liking.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In this study we have shown that John Kingdon's ideas regarding winning and losing as they apply to legislative elections are applicable to another set of political participants, namely convention delegates. Winners do tend to develop a more favorable perception of the con-

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22 The relationship found when political experience was indicated by whether the delegate held a political office or not was very similar to what was found when the delegates were separated according to whether they had attended other nominating convention meetings or not.
vention process while losers tend to develop less favorable perception of the convention process. Additional analysis reveals that the delegates with political experience are particularly sensitive to winning and losing. The delegates with political experience are perhaps most likely to be influenced because they are acutely aware that the rules of the political process help to determine their success or failure.

Winning and losing, success and failure, represent a substantial part of what results from political activity.23 The research findings available regarding the importance of winning and losing as an explanatory variable suggest that more work in this area might produce additional important findings.