AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON TIME OF VOTING DECISION IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, 1952-1976

DISSEMINATION

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By

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Early voting studies before television predominance determined that mass media had a "limited effect" on American voting behavior. This work reassesses the limited-effects notion. The thesis is that the mass media do have significant impact on voting decisions.

A trend study, the work utilizes the Center for Political Studies national presidential election surveys 1952-1976, and multiple regression analysis to examine the impact of media, social, and political variables on the dependent variable, time of voting decision. Time of decision ranges from early (before the national conventions) to late (during the campaign). The early deciders have been characterized as older, male, educated, affluent, urbanite, involved, participatory, knowledgeable, opinion giving, partisan, and heavy media consumers.

The hypotheses postulated that each of the independent variables encouraged an early vote decision. It was hypothesized that over the period 1952-1976, strength of partisanship declined in importance as an explanation of time of
voting decision whereas the influence of mass media and television exposure had increased.

All of the independent variables explained little of the total variance in time of decision. The R-squares never exceeded .15. No individual variable's Beta exceeded .26. The most influential independent variable over the period was strength of partisanship followed by age and political involvement. In every year except 1972 strength of partisanship explained the greatest amount of variation in time of voting decision. Strength of partisanship has not declined as an explanation of time of voting decision.

None of the mass media, television, or television news measures influenced time of voting decision. Media or television exposure has not increased as important explanations of time of voting decision throughout 1952-1976. Television news viewing in 1976 had no impact on time of decision. The social, political, and communication factors had negligible impact. The limited-effects notion remains a potent explanation of media impact on voting behavior even in the age of pervasive television.
The data utilized in this study were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data for the CPS 1952-1976 American National Election Studies were originally collected by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan under a grant from the National Science Foundation. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.
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CHAPTER I

THE RISE OF THE MASS MEDIA AND THE STUDY OF VOTING

Introduction

Since television's advent on the American political scene in the late 1940s, the medium has grown vastly in importance to the American people as a source of credible information and news (1, p. 12) as well as entertainment. Much has been written in the popular press about the influential effects of the mass media, especially television, in American life.

As television was increasingly employed by the national broadcast networks to provide news coverage of national nominating conventions, political campaigns, and, more recently, presidential debates, it began to be considered as an apparently potent weapon in the candidates' arsenal of campaign techniques. Journalists and other observers of the political scene assumed that television wielded tremendous power over the electorate and American political life.

However, such an assumption concerning the mass media and television's influence regarding political behavior, especially voting, has not been shared by most social scientists. Early voting studies, completed before the television age, determined that the mass media had little
impact on political behavior and the voting behavior of the American people (2, pp. 124-125; 3). So prevalent was this idea that in 1959 Berelson predicted the end of communications research (4). This "minimal effects" notion that "mass communication does not ordinarily serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors" (5) has not been readily dispelled despite the growth in research on the media, findings that run counter to these early studies (6, pp. 13-20), the increasing importance of television, and the growing use of the medium by the public.

It is the purpose of this study: (1) to examine the prevailing "theories" of media impact on political behavior, with special regard to the impact of television; (2) to survey the scholarly literature concerning the mass media and politics, especially in relation to voting behavior; and (3) to focus on the relationship between the voting behavior of the American electorate, its traditional correlates such as socioeconomic variables and partisan identification, and utilization of the mass media by the voters.

Thesis

The study involves a re-examination of the utility of the concept of "time of decision" in the understanding of voting choice. The expectation is that the notion may be very helpful in determining the importance of mass
communication, especially television, in shaping the voting behavior of the American electorate. The thesis of this study is that the mass media have a significant impact on voter decision-making. By using the time of voting decision variable, the impact of the mass media, television, and television news is assessed and compared to relevant competing determinants of the voting decision. Such competing variables include the social variables—income, education, age, sex, and residence; another communication variable—interpersonal discussion (opinion giving); and the political variables—strength of partisanship, interest, knowledge, and participation.

Voters can be divided into three categories with regard to their time of decision: early deciders, those who arrive at a vote decision for President before the national nominating conventions; convention deciders, those who make their voting decision at the time of the national conventions; and late deciders, sometimes referred to as the "undecided," those who delay their decision until the campaign period after the conventions and who finally decide by election day.

This trichotomization of the voting decision was introduced by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet in The People's Choice in the 1940s to assess mass media impact (2, pp. 124-125). In 1968 Prisuta examined mass media exposure and political behavior by utilizing the time of decision
variable (7, pp. 167-173). Subsequently, Mendelsohn and O'Keefe in *The People Choose a President* (1972) trichotomized voters into early deciders, late deciders, and switchers (8, pp. 52-53). In 1976 Lucas and Adams categorized voters as decided, leaning, and undecided in examining political communication (9, pp. 120-131). And Chaffee and Choe (1980) used Pre-Campaign Deciders, Campaign Deciders, and Last-Minute Deciders categories to assess the impact of media use during the Ford-Carter campaign (10, pp. 53-69).

The time of decision notion has been used especially in these studies to assess the impact of the mass media on voting behavior. The variable has been found "to affect the roles that exposure to campaign-related media will play in ultimately influencing or not influencing their (the voters') vote decisions" (11, pp. 136-137).

These studies, each employing time of decision in a local setting, except the Prisuta study which used a national sample, examined the relationship of time of decision as a dependent variable to such independent variables as demographic, political, and information characteristics, as well as media use characteristics. For example, Lazarsfeld found early deciders to be heavier consumers of the mass media than late deciders (2, pp. 124-125). Lucas and Adams hypothesized that the late deciders, impoverished informationally, might utilize the
mass media, especially television, more heavily (9, p. 122). Time of decision has been helpful in illuminating the relationship of media use to voting behavior and is used in this research.

A Trend Study

This study is an examination of the relationship of the relevant variables in seven presidential election years since 1952. It is also a trend study, examining changes in voting behavior over the period 1952-1976. The study attempts to test the findings of these local studies at the national level, by utilizing the 1952-1976 American National Election Studies of the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies (CPS), formerly the Survey Research Center (SRC).

The Hypotheses

Previous research has characterized early deciders as being quite different from late deciders. The early decision-makers were, according to these studies, more interested in the campaign, more politically knowledgeable, more politically participatory, and more highly partisan. They were more highly exposed to political communication and more likely to engage in interpersonal communication and to be opinion leaders. And they were better educated, more
Individual voting behavior was determined largely by social characteristics. Place of residence, socioeconomic status, and religion, for example, played a large role in differentiating Democratic from Republican voters (2, pp. 25-26). Later works argued that partisan identification was the major explanatory variable in voting choice (12). Time of decision was determined by political interest and the extent of cross-pressures on the voter. The more interested and the less cross-pressured decided early; the less interested and the more cross-pressured decided late (2, pp. 53-64).

However, a 1976 study found dissimilarity between early and late deciders on only two variables—television news viewing and talking about the candidates Ford and Carter. No significant differences in income, education, participation, knowledge, and other mass media variables appeared among the decided, leaning, and undecided (9, p. 130).

These contradictory findings—some thirty years apart—raise the question of whether the early studies' generalizations, formulated in the 1940s, hold true in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. And do these results hold at the national level? What are the characteristics of the decided and undecided today? Perhaps the early deciders are
no longer so distinguishable from those who delay their
decision until late in the campaign. Among these competing
characteristics, which ones are the most influential in
shaping time of decision? Perhaps media exposure has become
influential at the expense of social and partisan
characteristics.

In the present study the impact of several variables on
the dependent variable, time of voting decision, is
assessed for each presidential election from 1952 through
1976 by means of multiple regression analysis. The
variables include the social measures: education, income,
place of residence, age, and sex; the communication
measures: interpersonal discussion (opinion giving),
television exposure, and mass media exposure; and the
political measures: degree of partisanship, political
involvement, political knowledge and political
participation. For the 1976 election measures of national
television news exposure and total television news exposure
are employed in the analysis.

The basic hypothesis is that of the early studies. The
early deciders should be significantly different from the
late deciders on the measures under consideration. The
early deciders should be disproportionately represented
among the educated, affluent, involved (interest and
concern), knowledgeable, participatory, and the partisan.
They should constitute a greater proportion of those who
indulge in interpersonal discussion (opinion giving) and mass media surveillance of the campaign than do the late deciders. They should be disproportionately represented among the older, the urban residents, and the males.

By multiple regression analysis techniques the impact of each independent variable on time of decision can be ascertained as well as the amount of variation in time of decision which can be explained by all of the independent variables acting together. It is postulated that two of the independent variables—strength of partisanship and media exposure—have the greatest impact on the dependent variable. Partisanship is a most influential factor in voter behavior (12). It is expected to reveal its significance here. However, the impact of partisanship in explaining time of decision is hypothesized to have declined in recent years. The decline of partisan identification and its impact, documented by many recent studies (13), should be reflected in the data.

It is further hypothesized that exposure to the mass media, especially television, has become a very important variable in explaining time of voting decision in the last thirty years and has replaced partisanship as the most influential factor. Television and mass media exposure is assessed over the twenty-five year period. The impact of television news exposure is determined for 1976, the one
year when such measures were available in order to test the Lucas and Adams findings.

The specific hypotheses tested are as follows:

H1: The more involved (interested and concerned) in the election people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H2: The more knowledgeable people are about politics, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H3: The more people participate in politics, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H4: The more highly partisan people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H5: The more people are highly exposed to the mass media about the campaign, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H6: The more people are highly exposed to television about the campaign, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H7: The more people engage in attempts to influence another person's vote (opinion giving), the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H8: The more educated people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H9: The greater the income of people, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H10: The older people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H11: The more urban people's places of residence are, the sooner they reach a vote decision.

H12: Males are more likely than females to reach an early vote decision.

H13: In 1976, the more people watched the national television nightly news, the sooner they reached a vote decision.
H14: In 1976, the more people watched local and national television nightly news, the sooner they reached a vote decision.

H15: Over the period 1952-1976, strength of partisanship has declined in importance as an explanation of time of voting decision.

H16: Over the period 1952-1976, mass media exposure has increased in importance as an explanation of time of voting decision.

H17: Over the period 1952-1976, television exposure has increased in importance as an explanation of time of voting decision.

The specific regression equations are:

1. Time of voting decision, the dependent variable, is regressed on the independent variables income, education, age, sex, place of residence, interpersonal discussion (opinion giving), mass media exposure, strength of partisanship, political knowledge, political involvement, and political participation for each presidential election year from 1952 through 1976.

2. Time of voting decision, the dependent variable, is regressed on the independent variables income, education, age, sex, place of residence, interpersonal discussion (opinion giving), television exposure, strength of partisanship, political knowledge, political involvement, and political participation for each presidential election year from 1952 through 1976.

3. Time of voting decision, the dependent variable, is regressed on the independent variables income, education, age, sex, place of residence, interpersonal discussion (opinion giving), national television news exposure, strength of partisanship, political knowledge, political involvement, and political participation for the presidential election year 1976.

4. Time of voting decision, the dependent variable, is regressed on the independent variables income, education, age, sex, place of residence, interpersonal discussion (opinion giving), local and national television news exposure, strength
of partisanship, political knowledge, political involvement, and political participation for the presidential election year 1976.

The Methodological Limits of the Study

There are certain limitations to the study. Most, if not all of the constraints stem from the use of survey data.

First, in relation to multiple regression is the problem of multicollinearity. Blalock speaks to this point:

"... if the intercorrelations among independent variables are quite high in magnitude, the multiple R will ordinarily not be much larger than the largest total correlation with the dependent variable. In other words, if we wish to explain as much variation in the dependent variable as possible, we should look for independent variables which are relatively unrelated to each other but which have at least moderately high correlations with the dependent variable. Put another way, if we have two highly interrelated independent variables, the second will be explaining essentially the same variation as the first since there will be considerable overlap. If they are uncorrelated they will each explain a different portion of the total variation (14, p. 456).

An additional problem with choosing independent variables that are highly intercorrelated is both partial correlations and slope estimates ... will be increasingly sensitive to sampling and measurement errors. ... The implication is that whenever independent variables are highly intercorrelated, it will be necessary to have both [italics his] large samples and accurate measurement (14, p. 457).

Some of the study's independent variables correlate as high as .30. Large samples are not a particular problem with sample sizes ranging from 1,195 respondents in 1952 to 1,720 in 1976. (See Table VII, p. 137.) However, accurate
measurement may be a problem, for the question rests with the vagaries of survey research questionnaire problems.

The problem of accurate measurement results from the requirement of regression analysis that all variables for the regression be interval level. Not all of the variables can be measured at the interval level in survey research. The quality of the regression may be reduced to the extent that the extra precision and allowable variation is reduced by using variables that are not measurable at the interval level.

However, the lack of interval data may not be a devastating problem. Berk (15) and Labovitz (16) argue:

... though correlational analysis techniques are designed for equal interval data, the algebra on which they are based is actually very insensitive to the metric employed. Ordinal data with more than about five levels will usually produce about the same result as equal interval data (15, p. 763).

Labovitz points out three distinct advantages in considering ordinal variables as if they are interval:

(1) the use of more powerful, sensitive, better developed and interpretable statistics with known sampling error, (2) the retention of more knowledge about the characteristics of the data, and (3) greater versatility in statistical manipulation, e.g., partial and multiple correlation and regression, ... (16, p. 523).

Babbie appropriately summarizes the concerns about the shortcomings of regression analysis as related to survey research. He notes:
The use of regression analysis for statistical inferences makes certain assumptions of which the researcher should be aware. These are the same ones assumed by correlational analysis: concerning simple random sampling, the absence of nonsampling errors, and continuous interval data. Since survey research never completely satisfies these assumptions, the reader should use caution in assigning ultimate meaning to the results of regression analyses (17, p. 324).

A problem not yet alluded to in operationalizing the variables is that survey questions do not always have identical or comparable wording. Where slippage in question wording arises and comparability is lacking, the measure's validity is questionable. In a trend study the problem is enhanced in attempting to match questions and measures at several different time points.

The problem appears in trying to match the CPS questions with the previous studies' measures and, sometimes, in matching CPS questions over the years. For example, in endeavors to match Lucas and Adams' survey items the data do not offer a conversation measure equivalent to their "talking about Ford and Carter" measure. The best the CPS studies provide is the "influence attempt" measure. Also, the data do not contain an ordinal or interval measure of conversation nor can one be constructed. The situation makes it difficult to operationalize the opinion leader notion. Altered question wording has been shown, in some instances, to affect a study's findings (18).
Another problem in matching the Lucas and Adams study is that queries about television news viewing were not asked by the CPS except in 1976. For the trend analysis it is necessary to change from the "television news viewing" measure of 1976 to the more general question "How many television programs about the campaign would you say you watched?" which was asked in all the years. Consequently, the study is handicapped by potential inexactness of measurement due to question format and wording problems.

Question validity is another problem in survey-based research of this ilk. Validity means "the extent to which there is a correspondence between the verbal response to a question and the actual attitude or behavior of the respondent that the question is designed to measure" (19, p. 203). The respondent may be influenced by societal pressures or his own perceptions of how a good citizen behaves to report that, for example, he watches more television news than he actually does (20, p. 165). Many of the media attentiveness questions may particularly trigger such over- or under-reporting. In addition, "recall of past voting behavior falls victim to failing memories and intervening events" (19, p. 204). Such may be the case with some of the study's participation measures.

An additional problem is the restrictive nature of the data regarding media impact. A major reason for this problem is the paucity of certain mass media questions for
the years prior to 1968. For example, the CPS surveys, as noted previously, do not include questions about television news before 1976. Similar problems are encountered concerning questions of interpersonal communication.

Because the empirical study of media effects in the 1940s and 1950s was mainly by sample survey techniques and resulted in the minimal-effects notion such techniques for studying the media have been criticized. Janowitz asserts: "... Hovland has demonstrated that investigators who use experiments—laboratory or real life—are more likely to be impressed with the influence of the mass media . . ." (3, p. 304).

Others assert that "... many survey specialists have collected data which tend to emphasize the limited effectiveness of the mass media for producing specific changes in attitudes and behaviors" (3, p. 304). It is also argued:

[T]he survey approach deals with a person's response to specific messages or campaigns rather than the cumulative effect and fails to deal with the role of the mass media in "defining the situation" and posing alternatives . . . (3, p. 304).

Thus, some argue that survey research, especially as it has been designed in the past, is inadequate for the study of the mass media. However, survey research techniques continue to be employed. Proponents argue that the increased "sophistication of survey research, especially by
the use of more refined statistical procedures" (3, p. 30) enables the technique to adequately analyze media effect.

One last limitation has to do with the study's designation of the mass media as an independent variable. There is considerable argument concerning whether the mass media is an independent or a dependent variable. Recently, it is argued that the mass media is both an independent and a dependent variable:

... the systemic investigation of the mass media is a very complex task because of the inescapable reality that the contents of the mass media both influence the processes of sociopolitical change in society and at the same time reflect the organization and values of society. In the language of social research, the mass media are both independent and dependent variables. Contradictory conclusions—analytic and empirical—about the influence of the mass media in part reflect relative emphasis on either assumption (3, pp. 304-305).

Despite these constraints, this effort can fill a significant lacuna in the voting-mass media literature. The study contributes to the literature in several ways.

The Benefits of the Study

This research has several benefits. First, the effort is a study of the relationship of the variables using a national data base. Previous studies have been based on samples drawn from a particular city or county. The time of decision-media literature tends to generalize these local findings or relationships to the American electorate as a whole (21, pp. 327-328). Using a national data base, the
accuracy of such generalizations is tested. Thus, a major benefit of the study is the opportunity to test previous local findings at the national level.

Second, the generalizability of the findings is further tested by the examination of seven presidential elections. Earlier studies, having probed only one election, may have produced findings that are consistent only with the dynamics of that specific election. By examining seven elections covering twenty-five years of American electoral history, patterned relationships or trends can be deciphered from anomalous results specific to only one election.

Third, the research indicates whether the mass media and especially television are now more important than in earlier years in influencing time of decision. Thus, the limited-effects notion and bias are tested over an extended time frame. The work also assesses whether social and other variables still significantly differentiate the decided from the undecided voter.

Fourth, the ability of survey research to reveal media effect is tested by using the CPS data base. It has been argued that survey research is an inferior instrument for the study of mass media effect (3, p. 304). That notion is evaluated with this work.

A fifth benefit is also related to the trend analysis. There has been no national over-time trend analysis of the
data. The study, therefore, represents a major contribution to the time of voting decision literature.

A sixth benefit of the study is the resolution of the contradictory findings produced by other studies. One study found no difference between early and late deciders in income, education, knowledge, and participation (9, p. 120). Another effort discovered considerable difference (2). This study will help decipher the conflicting results.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is a means of calculating the relationship between two variables. The formula \( Y = f(X) \) (Read "Y is a function of X") means that values of Y are explainable in terms of the varying values of X. In effect, X causes Y, or the value of X determines the value of Y. "Regression analysis provides a method for determining the specific function relating Y to X" (17, p. 317).

It is possible to extend this basic regression model to accommodate more than two variables. In attempting to avoid the clumsiness of manipulating many variables in a simple multivariate analysis, multiple regression is employed. It allows the assessment of the impact of one independent variable on the dependent variable while controlling for the effect of numerous other independent variables (22, pp. 294-295). The analysis also determines the impact on the dependent variable of all the independent variables working
together. That is, the total amount of variance in the dependent variable which can be explained by all the independent variables working together is calculated.

In preparing the data for multiple regression the independent and dependent variables are correlated in a matrix of correlation coefficients produced by the OSIRIS III software package "Missing Data Correlation" (MDC). MDC produces matrices of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for all pairs of the input variables. The correlation coefficient indicates whether two variables are related, what the strength of the relationship is, if any, and the direction of the relationship (22, pp. 306-310). The coefficient, r, varies from -1.00 for perfect negative association, through 0.00 for no association, to +1.00 for perfect positive association.

The matrix produced by the MDC program is then input to REGRESSN, the OSIRIS program for standard linear regression. REGRESSN computes several useful statistics. Among these are B, Beta, Partial R squared, and R squared. B is the partial nonstandardized regression coefficient. It is partial because it designates the variable's effect holding constant all the other variables. B is nonstandardized because it is measured in the same units as the original values (years of education, dollars, etc.). It cannot be compared with the nonstandardized coefficients of the
competing variables to determine which of the independent variables has the most effect (22, pp. 297-298).

However, the nonstandardized coefficient is employed in examining the trend aspect of the data. For example, to determine the pattern of importance of income in the equation over the seven election years, the nonstandardized coefficient is used. In this case the coefficient is related to the original value of dollars.

Because the nonstandardized coefficient cannot be used to assess the relative impact of the competing variables within an individual election year, a standardized measure is required. That measure is Beta, the partial standardized regression coefficient or Beta weight. Beta is partial because it designates the variable's effect holding constant the effect of the other variables. It is standardized allowing comparison of the impact of dollars of income, years of education, years of age, gender categories, population figures, degrees of partisanship, and amounts of interpersonal discussion, mass media exposure, political involvement, political knowledge, and political participation. Beta is, in effect, a "unitless" measure (22, p. 298).

A third statistic of interest is R squared, the fraction of explained variance. It indicates the fraction of variance of the dependent variable explained by all the independent variables working together. Also of note is
Partial R squared. This statistic designates the proportionate contribution of each independent variable to the total variation explained (as expressed by R squared).

The Tests of Significance

Two significance tests are computed by the REGRESSN program, the T-Ratio and the F-Ratio. In assessing the significance of an individual independent variable to the dependent variable the T statistic is appropriate. The F Ratio is the statistic for significance of the regression equation, that is, for all the variables in the equation. Tables for these two statistics are used to find the probabilities associated with these values. "A rough rule of thumb is that if you have 10 or more cases . . . , a minimum t value of 2 or an F Value of 5 indicate significance at .05 or better" (22, p. 298).

The Construction of Indexes

Several indexes are constructed for this study. They include indexes of television news exposure, mass media exposure, political involvement, political knowledge, and political participation. The process of index construction is outlined below.

A first step for inclusion in the index is that the items be related logically (22, p. 191). In addition to the surface validity of the items, several similar indexes using similar items have been constructed by others in measuring
mass media exposure, political involvement, political participation, and political knowledge. Thus, there is considerable evidence that the items included here are logically related.

A second step is to cross-tabulate or correlate the potential components of the indexes. The measure of association, Gamma, is appropriate to assess the degree of association "between two ordinal variables where the number of cases is rather large and the data are, or may be, grouped into classes" such as in survey research questions (22, p. 206).

Gamma is appropriate to discover a positive or negative relationship between two variables (22, p. 213). The statistic ranges between -1.00 and +1.00. "Survey researchers are generally quite satisfied with gammas above .30 as indicating a meaningful relationship" (22, p. 215). If the gammas are over .70, the variables may be different operational definitions of the same concept (22, p. 215).

After the items of the index are correlated, the variables are combined in the index. A frequency distribution program is run to note the distribution of respondents on the index. The distributions are satisfactory. For example, the political participation and mass media exposure frequency distributions, as expected, increase to a peak of moderate participation or exposure and
decline for the highest categories of participation or exposure.

The Dependent Variable: Time of Voting Decision

Time of voting decision, the dependent variable, is based on the following query (3, p. 1380) of voters: "How long before the election did you decide that you were going to vote the way you did?" The question is not an open-ended one. The respondent is not at liberty to answer freely. He must choose from a list of decision times ranging from before the conventions, to at the time of the conventions, to on election day. In some election years, there are considerably more choices reflecting, for example, the proliferation of the presidential primaries and such historical events as the shooting of candidate George Wallace in 1972. The number of answer categories (excluding the "Don't Know," "No Answer," and "Other" categories) ranges from six choices in 1952 to eleven choices in 1976. The literature, as previously noted, tends to divide voters into two categories—early and late deciders. A third category, varying in designation, is sometimes employed. For instance, one study (8, pp. 52-53) labels a third category as "switchers."

For purposes of multiple regression, the variable should be a continuous interval level measure. At the very least, as much variation as possible should be allowed.
Initially, various alternative codings of time of voting decision were created. The alternative constructions of the time of decision variable's categories were: (1) the early deciders, the convention deciders, and the late deciders; (2) the early and convention deciders combined and the late deciders; (3) the early deciders versus the convention and late deciders combined; (4) the early deciders and the late deciders excluding the convention deciders; (5) the "TIME6" categorization; and the "TIME11" construction that allowed for as much variation as possible for the existing categories. All these various categorizations were tried in the regression equations.

"TIME6" proved to be the most illuminating. Its coding included the following response choices: "Knew all along"; "Pre-convention because of who's running"; "Decided at the time of the convention"; "Decided after the convention, during the campaign"; "Decided within two weeks of the election"; and "Decided on election day." The election samples with more elaborate codings were collapsed to these six categories. With this coding of time of decision considerable variation can be allowed. Comparable times of decision were also created for all seven election years.

The Independent Variables

The independent variables include social variables, communication variables, and political variables. The
social measures are sex, age, education, income, and place of residence. The communication measures are interpersonal communication (opinion giving), television news viewing, campaign television exposure, and exposure to the mass media about the campaign. The political measures are strength of partisanship, political involvement, political knowledge, and political participation.

Sex, Age, Education, Income, and Urbanization

Sex is a dichotomous variable, male and female, with female coded higher (3, p. 1295). To measure age, the actual number of years indicated by the respondent is coded (3, p. 1211). Education is measured by response to the question (23, p. 1218): "What is the highest grade of school or year of college that you have completed?" Some response categories are collapsed so that fifteen comparable responses exist for each election year sample. The categories include: "no schooling through grade 1"; a separate category for each grade through eleven grades (eleven categories); "12 grades or a high school diploma"; "some college" (one, two, or three years of college); "four years of college or a college diploma"; and "more than four years of college" (23, p. 1218).

Income is a more difficult measure to operationalize. It is measured by the respondent's family's income before taxes or his own estimated income before taxes if the
respondent is the only family member fourteen years or older. The measure is troublesome to categorize because of the question of what is a comparable income in, for example, 1952, 1962, and 1972.

Income is generally categorized in $1,000 increments, but the upper and lower ends of the income range have varied over the time period. For example, the upper limit is categorized in the CPS samples as $10,000 and over in the 1950s, $15,000 and over in 1960 and 1964, $25,000 and over in 1968, and $35,000 and over in the 1970s. No logical re-categorization is apparent and so the income measure remains as it originally appears in the data. Thus, there are nine income categories in the 1950s samples (24, pp. 91-92; 25, pp. 110-111) ten categories in the 1960 (26, p. 103) and 1964 (27, pp. 144-145) samples, fifteen in the 1968 sample (28, p. 137), eighteen in 1972 (29, pp. 244-245), and twenty categories in 1976 (23, p. 1290).

Place of residence, a measure of urbanization, is difficult to operationalize. The hypothesis requires a measure of urbanization. Several population size variables are considered. In the interest of comparability across time the various population variables are collapsed to match the five-category "Size of Interview Place-Master" of 1972. That categorization, in order of declining population and thus declining urbanization, is as follows: "Central cities of the 12 largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical
Areas (SMSA); "Central cities of the other SMSA's"; "Suburbs of the 12 largest SMSA's"; "Suburbs of the other SMSA's"; and "Non-SMSA's" (29, pp. 9-10). For the years 1964 (23, p. 2), 1968 (28, p. 3), and 1976 (27, p. 1045) comparable categorization exists thus requiring only the collapsing of the categories "Adjacent area" and "Outlying area" as an equivalent of the "Non-SMSA" category mentioned above.

The matching of the 1952, 1956, and 1960 population variables with the 1972 coding is more difficult. For 1956 (25, pp. 1-2) and 1960 (26, p. 2) the recoding is as follows: the "Central city" category of 1956 and 1960 is considered equivalent to the "Central cities of the 12 largest SMSA's" of 1972. "Census Name Places of 100,000 population or more" is recoded as "Central city of the other SMSA's"; "Suburbs from rural to 100,000 population or more" is recoded as "Suburbs of the 12 largest SMSA's"; "Census Name Places of 2,500 to 99,999 is recoded as "Suburbs of the other SMSA's"; and "Rural" and "Census Name Places of less than 2,500" are recoded as "Non-SMSA's."

For 1952 the existing categorization (24, p. 3) is recoded as follows: "Urban metro area" to "Central cities of the 12 largest SMSA's"; "Suburban metro area" to "Suburbs of the 12 largest SMSA's"; "Rural metro area" to "Suburbs of the other SMSA's"; "City of 50,000 population and over" to "Central cities of the other SMSA's"; and "Cities of 50,000
or less, north or south" and "Open country, north or south" to "Non-SMSA."

With this recoding the study has a comparable population measure of five categories that is used as a measure of urbanization.

**Interpersonal Communication: The Opinion Giver**

In a 1976 study "talking often about candidates Ford and Carter" significantly differentiated the early from the late deciders (9, p.120). No comparable questions exist in the CPS surveys. Two measures of interpersonal communication do appear in the national survey data. They ask the respondent whether he talked to another person in an attempt to influence that person's vote intention. There is a question for such an attempt in the presidential primary election and for the general election. The question for 1976 (30, pp. 20, 261) which is similar to those throughout the years is "During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for one of the parties and candidates?"

An ordinal measure of interpersonal discussion is required to match the Lucas and Adams hypothesis (9, p. 120). No such measure exists in the data and a composite variable indicating amount of interpersonal discussion cannot be constructed. The presidential primary discussion variable cannot be used to build such a composite variable
because presidential primaries are not held in every state; therefore, many respondents do not have the opportunity for such interpersonal discussion.

This measure presents another problem. The "opinion leader" notion of the Columbia studies cannot be operationalized because the proper survey questions are lacking. To operationalize the opinion leader concept optimally, the two questions used by Kingdon from the 1966 CPS election study are required: "Did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for one of the parties or candidates?" and "during the election campaign did anyone ask you for your suggestions about which party or candidate was best." Kingdon defines opinion leaders as respondents who engage in influence attempts and who are solicited for advice by others (31, pp. 257). The second question does not appear in the data.

Given the restrictive nature of the data, which provides only the influence attempt measure, Robinson's "opinion giver" notion must suffice. The opinion giver is a person who engages in attempts to influence another person and who may or may not receive influence attempts (32, pp. 311-312). In this study respondents who answer "yes" to the interpersonal communication question are classified as "opinion givers"; interpersonal communication are classified
as "opinion givers"; those who answer "no" are defined as "non-discussants."

**Television News Viewing, Television Exposure, and the Media Exposure Index**

The mass communication variables are a measure of television news viewing in 1976, a news viewing index for 1976, and a television use and a media use index for each year of the study.

Lucas and Adams found in their 1976 study that one of the two variables that differentiated the early from the late deciders was national television early evening news viewing (9, p. 130). That finding can be tested with the 1976 national survey data.

Unlike the other CPS election surveys, the 1976 survey does contain two questions about television news viewing. One inquires about national news viewing habits; the other local news viewing. The national news viewing question is: "How often does R (the respondent) watch news broadcasts in the early evening (like Cronkite, Chancellor and Brinkley, or Reasoner and Walters)?" The local news viewing question is: "How often does R (the respondent) watch local news broadcasts in the late evening?" The response categories for both questions are frequently, sometimes, rarely, and never. The "don't know" and "no answer" categories are excluded from the analysis (23, pp. 1366-1367).
A television news viewing index for 1976 is created by combining these two variables in an additive manner. If a respondent watches both television newscasts frequently, his score is 6. If he watches both newscasts sometimes, his score is 4. If he watches national news frequently and local news rarely his score is 4. If he never watches either newscast his score is 0. With these measures of television news viewing in 1976, the study can test the Lucas and Adams news viewing finding and go beyond it with the television news viewing index.

In addition to the television news measures, a media exposure index is constructed for each election year. The index is created by combining answers about the use of the four media: radio, television, magazines, and newspapers. The same or quite similar questions and responses exist in each of the study's election samples. For example, the respondent is asked how many radio programs, magazine articles, and television programs about the campaign did he partake of: a good many, several, just one or two ("don't know" and "no answer" responses were collapsed into this category) or none (23, pp. 1346-1348). The newspaper surveillance question is only slightly different: regularly (recoded to include often), from time to time, just once in a great while (recoded to include "don't know" and "no answer"), and none. (See Table VIII, p. 141.)
From these responses an additive index of media exposure is built with a maximum score of 12 if the respondent indulges in frequent use of all four media to observe the campaign. If the respondent does not attend to any of the four, a score of 0 is recorded. If the respondent watches "a good many" television programs (3 points), reads "just one or two" magazine articles (1 point), hears "several" radio programs (2 points), and reads newspaper articles "regularly or often" (3 points), his media index score is 9 points total.

Because of the lack of television news viewing questions in the 1952-1972 data, a different question is used to assess the impact of television in those years. The question is the campaign exposure via television question mentioned above.

It is important to note that these campaign surveillance questions refer to radio and television "programs." It is not possible to decipher what "programs" means to the respondent. It could include news programs, paid political advertisement programs, or even short political commercials for candidates.

**Strength of Partisanship**

It is hypothesized that the highly partisan individual is an early decider. To test this notion, the major explanatory variable of the CPS studies, party
identification, serves as a measure of strength of partisanship. Partisan identification and strength of partisan identification are based on self identification by the respondent. The question (25, pp. 45-46) is

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? (If Republican Democrat) Would you call yourself a strong (Republican) (Democrat) or a not very strong (Republican) (Democrat). (If Independent or other) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?

The respondent identifies himself on a seven-point scale as a

Strong Democrat, Not very strong Democrat, Independent closer to Democrat, Independent, Independent closer to Republican, Not very strong Republican, Strong Republican, Other, minor party and refused to say, Apolitical, and No answer (25, pp. 45-46).

To create the degree of partisanship measure, the variable is recoded as follows: strong Democrats and strong Republicans, weak Democrats and weak Republicans, Independents leaning to the Democrats and leaning to the Republicans, the Independents, and the apoliticals. This coding creates a strength of partisanship measure ranging from strongest partisanship to mild partisanship to apolitical, the absence of partisanship.

The Political Involvement Index

To construct an index of political involvement, two political interest questions appearing continually in the CPS studies are combined in an additive index. Similar
involvement indexes have been constructed in other works including some of the CPS election studies (26, p. 172; 33, p. 564). One question (23, pp. 1050-1051) queries interest in politics:

Some people don't pay much attention to the political campaigns. How about you, would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the political campaigns so far this year?

Unfortunately, the "care much which party wins" variable was reduced to a dichotomy in the later surveys. Therefore, for comparability's sake, all of the "care" variables are reduced to dichotomies as are the "interest" variables, in preparation for the additive index. In order to be combined with a dichotomous second variable, the trichotomous interest responses are recoded as a dichotomy: (1) very much and somewhat interested and (2) not much interested (includes the don't know and no answer responses). Reasoning that respondents who were classified as don't know and no answer reveal little or no interest, they are combined with the not much interested category.

The second political interest question (28, pp. 10-11) is: "Generally speaking, would you say that you personally care a good deal which party wins the presidential election this fall, or that you don't care very much which party wins?" The response categories are "care" (includes care a good deal or very much; care; pro-con, depends) and "don't
care" (includes don't care very much or at all; don't care about party, only about the man; don't know; and no answer).

Thus, two dichotomous variables are created which can be easily combined in a political involvement index. The two variables correlate moderately highly averaging a Gamma of .42 over the seven elections. A respondent who is both concerned and interested receives a score of 2. One who is interested but not concerned receives a 1. And a respondent who neither cares nor is interested is scored 0. (See Table IX, pp. 142.)

Table IX indicates the proportions of highly involved, lowly involved, and the uninvolved for each year. Over the years 60 percent of the population indicates high involvement; 30 percent indicates low involvement; and 10 percent is uninvolved.

The Political Knowledge Index

Lucas and Adams (1978) found no significant difference in political knowledge between early and late deciders (9, p. 130). The Columbia studies found the early deciders to be much more politically knowledgeable (2, p. 70). Perhaps this analysis of the CPS studies can shed light on the subject.

Two questions concerning majority party control of Congress appear in the CPS surveys of 1960-1976. An index of political knowledge is constructed from them. The first
question (23, p. 1389) is: "Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington before the elections this last month?"

The second question poses the same query after the election (23, p. 1389). The response "Democrats" is coded as the correct response. A response of "Republicans" and "No; Don't Know" is coded as incorrect. The two variables are combined to form an index of political knowledge for each year from 1960 through 1976. As expected the two variables correlate highly averaging a Gamma of .84 over the five elections. High political knowledge (correct responses to both questions) scores 2; one correct and one incorrect response scores 1; and two incorrect responses scores 0. (See Table X, p. 143.)

Table X indicates that over one-half of the samples are politically knowledgeable with the exception of the 1968 sample. One-fourth appear to be somewhat knowledgeable and one-fifth have no political knowledge.

The index cannot be constructed for 1952 and 1956. No majority party control questions exist in those surveys. For 1956 knowledge of one's Congressman is used as the measure of political knowledge (25, p. 126). In 1952 a two-item index is created combining knowledge of the Congressman and awareness of the Taft-Hartley Act, a prominent controversial issue of the time (24, p. 108, 29).
The Political Participation Index

Early deciders were found to be more politically participatory than the late deciders by the early voting studies (2, p. 70). Recently, the finding has been brought into question by a contradictory conclusion (9, p. 130).

A participation index is constructed from five individual questions about participation. Two are voting behavior questions. The respondent is asked if he voted for a Congressional candidate and if he voted in the previous presidential election (23, pp. 1118, 1383). The three other questions concern campaign activity. The respondent is asked if he attended any political meetings such as rallies or dinners; did he work for a political party or a political candidate; and did he give any money to a political party or make another contribution during the year (23, pp. 1303-1305). Similar participation indexes have been utilized in various studies (33, pp. 564-565). The items used here correlate and scale satisfactorily. (See Table XI, p. 144.)

A respondent who participates in all five participation activities scores a 5. A respondent who is nonparticipatory scores 0. (See Table XI, p. 141.)

Summary

The impact of the mass media and television on American political life is a much-discussed issue in academic as well
as journalistic circles. Years ago social scientists concluded that the media have little impact on voting decisions. Several research efforts have examined the question periodically since that time. The present study examines the time of voting decision—mass media impact relationship with particular concern for television and television news impact. Other relevant competing variables—social, communication, and political in nature—are also studied. The impact of these variables in each presidential election from 1952 through 1976 is reported. In addition, trends in the impact of these independent variables over the twenty-five year period are examined and presented.

This effort stands at the end of a long line of voting behavior—mass media research. An examination of the literature reveals that the endeavor began with The People's Choice in the early 1940s.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

VOTING STUDIES AND MASS COMMUNICATION:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical Orientations:
The Stimulus v. Perceiver Theories

Studies which attempt to determine whether the mass media's effect is minimal or substantial may be significantly affected by their basic theoretical orientation. At present there appear to be two dominant theoretical orientations regarding the political effects of the mass media. These two theses are at fundamental odds.

The stimulus and perceiver theories suggest different processes by which a media user obtains media-related images. The stimulus theory argues that the images are the direct product of the stimulus, the media source. The perceiver theory rejects this notion and asserts that images are processed by the perceiver. This theory stresses that the subjective orientations of the media consumer are the most important factors in how that person responds to media stimuli.

Thus there is a conflict between the "image thesis," which asserts that "images are determined primarily by the object-of-perception confronting a perceiver," and the
"perceptual balance principle," which contends that images are primarily determined by "the subjective predilections of a person attending and responding to stimuli" (l, p. 81).

Fundamentally, these two competing views differ in how an image is conceptualized. The image, or stimulus, theory defines an image as "all traits projected by a candidate to influence an audience" (l, p. 82). The perceptual balance theory contends that images are "held by audience members and simply attributed to political figures" (l, p.82). From this viewpoint a candidate's "image" is "little more than our personal values, hopes, frustrations, fears, and envies as we think they are reflected in the person of a politician" (l, p. 82). Neither viewpoint "ignores the coupling of a stimulus with a response disposition of the perceiver, but each view does assert the primacy of one over the other" (l, p. 82).

The question raised by these two competing theories is important. It represents a conflict over the question of what factors affect how voters perceive political figures. The stimulus theory attributes a very significant role to the mass media in molding vote perceptions arguing that the media stimulus determines perceptions. "Popular perceptions of a candidate are a function of the traits projected by that candidate" (l, p. 82). Thus the stimulus theory sensitizes the researcher to the potential of election campaigns in influencing citizens' voting decisions.
The perceptual balance theory, on the other hand, emphasizes that the perceiver determines perceptions. "Images are introjected into a candidate by voters in accordance with their own political values" (1, p. 82). This theory complements the classic voting studies' findings of limited media influence on voters. Those findings emphasize strong and lasting partisan or group affiliations as the dominant factors that shape and color the voters' perceptions of political figures (1, p. 82). Similarly, the psychological processes of selective exposure, perception, and retention noted in the early voting studies are part of the perceptual balance theory.

Both the perceptual balance and the stimulus theories support major concepts of the CPS voting studies. The perceptual balance theory emphasizes the CPS's long-term factor of party identification in explaining how voters develop images of candidates. The stimulus theory stresses the CPS notion of short-term forces confined to a particular election contest. Forces such as the opposing candidates' traits as projected by the media are emphasized as the molders of voter perceptions (1, p. 84).

These two media theories, either explicitly or implicitly, appear in the most basic and heretofore most influential sources of information regarding the effects of the mass media on voting behavior. These seminal voting studies are *The People's Choice* and *Voting*, produced by
scholars associated with Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research. Later, the University of Michigan Survey Research Center presented the voting studies *The Voter Decides* and *The American Voter*. A review of the literature follows.

The Seminal Voter Studies: The Columbia School

The People's Choice

Central to any discussion of the role of the mass media and voting behavior is Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's book *The People's Choice*. The work is a panel study focusing upon 600 Erie County, Ohio residents' political opinions and voting behavior in the presidential campaign of 1940 (2, pp.3-5).

The major conclusion of *The People's Choice* was that a person's political preferences were in large part determined by his social characteristics. For example, socioeconomic status, religion, and place of residence were the major factors in differentiating between Democrats and Republicans (2, pp. 25-26).

The people who were most interested in the campaign were most likely to show its effects. Thus interest was used as an organizing concept. The person most interested in the election was likely to be an older urban male of higher education and socioeconomic status. He voted and was an opinion leader who offered advice to others on political
issues or whose advice was solicited by others (2, pp. 45-51).

The study divided the sample into three groups according to the time the respondent decided for whom to vote: the early or pre-campaign deciders, voters who decided at the time of the presidential nominating conventions, and voters who decided during the last months of the campaign.

Two factors were dominant in influencing time of decision—interest and cross-pressures. Those who delayed their decision were less interested and subject to more cross-pressures, that is, conflicts among the factors which influence voters' decisions. Two-thirds of those who had high interest in the election decided early and less than one-half of the less interested made an early decision. Of the late deciders only one-eighth were greatly interested; twice as many of the less interested waited until late to make a decision. If a person was subject to cross-pressures he tended to delay his vote decision or to abstain from voting (2, pp. 53-64).

The campaign had three basic effects. First, it appeared to activate the latent political predispositions of those who had made a decision by first raising their interest; increased interest stimulated increased exposure and attentiveness to the campaign. As the interest and attentiveness of the eventual voter heightened, his
political predispositions came into play and his attention to campaign stimuli became selective; that is, he paid attention to stimuli that reinforced his predispositions and ignored information that was counter to his predispositions. Finally, the person having gathered enough stimuli, crystallized his vote (2, pp. 73-76).

Second, for those who made an early decision the campaign had the effect of reinforcing their vote determination. In the authors' view,

... [P]olitical communications served the important purpose of preserving prior decisions instead of initiating new decisions. It kept the partisans "in line" by reassuring them in their vote decision; it reduced defections from the ranks. It had the effect of reinforcing the original vote decision (2, p. 87).

It is the highly partisan persons who are likely to decide early and these highly partisan people "protect themselves from the disturbing experience presented by opposition arguments by paying little attention to them" (2, p. 90).

A third effect of the campaign was to convert those who were in doubt as for whom to vote. Those who were most open to conversion by the campaign were those who were least attentive to the campaign stimuli. The highly partisan person with strong predispositions was most attentive to campaign stimuli, and was the least susceptible to conversion (2, pp. 94-100).

In summary, "the campaign activated the indifferent, reinforced the partisan, and converted the doubtful" (2, p.
Fifty-three percent of the sample were reinforced; 14 percent were activated; 3 percent were reconverted; 6 percent experienced partial conversion; 8 percent were converted; and 16 percent experienced no effect (2, p. 103). Clearly, the processes of selective exposure, perception, and retention discussed in The People's Choice fit nicely with the perceptual balance theory.

Turning specifically to the role of the mass media, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues found that those who were interested and those who were decided had been highly exposed to the campaign through radio and newspapers. They conclude: "At any one time, the people who already knew how they were going to vote read and listened to more campaign material than the people who still did not know how they would vote" (2, p. 124). The undecided were least likely to read or listen to campaign information.

Concerning the social group nature of voting, interpersonal relationships were influential in the political realm. This form of communication rather than the formal media of communication had more potential influence. Those who decided late and those who were less interested in the campaign often mentioned personal influences and conversation as a major factor leading them to a vote decision. So the less interested and the undecided were highly exposed to interpersonal communication but were not
attentive to the formal modes of communication (2, pp. 150-151).

Those who influenced the late deciders through interpersonal communication were labelled "opinion leaders." Opinion leaders engaged in interpersonal discussions that influenced the late deciders. The leaders themselves, however, were more influenced by the mass media. Armed with this information, The People's Choice authors postulated the "two-step flow" theory of communication. The theory contends that the formal mass media provide information to which the opinion leaders attend. In turn, these opinion leaders, through informal personal discussions, pass on relevant information garnered from the formal media to the rest of the populace, who are much less attentive to the formal media (2, pp. 151-152).

In summary, The People's Choice is important for the study of mass media effects on political behavior because of several findings. First, and probably foremost, the work is responsible for the widespread prevalence of the judgment among social scientists that the mass media effects on voting and political behavior are minimal, which stems from the notion of selective perception. Primacy in voting behavior is given not to the media, but to social group membership and partisanship—powerful forces that the media cannot overcome. Second, of the two types of communication, interpersonal communication and the two-step flow theory are
emphasized rather than the formal media of mass communication.

As a result, the charge has been made, quite accurately, that "... by and large, when the political science fraternity investigates what makes the electorate behave in given ways, mass media variables either have not been included or have not been taken seriously" (3, p. 5). This is the legacy of The People's Choice findings of minimal effects of the mass media. It continues with Voting and the Michigan studies.

Voting

A second voting study from Columbia University was Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee's Voting, a panel study of 1,000 citizens in Elmira, New York during the presidential campaign of 1948 (4, pp. vii-viii). Like its predecessor, Voting tended to concentrate on the social forces, especially interpersonal associations and group contacts, that shape the voting decision.

The authors confirmed the "selective perception" concept found initially in The People's Choice. The voter's partisanship was related to the voter's perception of the candidates. The partisan individual held the perception that his issue position and the candidate's position coincided. He perceived his candidate's issue position as similar to his own view, and he saw the opposing candidate's
stance as dissimilar to his own view. Also, the partisan voter did not perceive any issue differences with his candidate nor any issue similarities with the opposition candidate. Finally, if the voter felt strongly about a candidate he misperceived the candidate's issue stance as compatible with his own issue position (4, p. 233).

Concerning media exposure, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee found that voters with greater exposure had greater interest and stronger feelings about the candidate. In addition, greater media exposure was related to less change of position and the greater likelihood of the voter carrying through with his decision on election day. Finally, with greater media exposure the voter gained more correct campaign information and a more accurate perception of the candidate's issue stance (4, pp. 251-252). Thus, the second Columbia study bolstered the limited-effects view of its predecessor The People's Choice.

One of the most significant concepts resulting from the two Columbia studies was the two-step flow theory relating the impact of the mass media to the mass public through the medium of opinion leaders. Yet this theory probably had the least empirical data to support it. Further empirical testing of the notion was needed.
An Update of the Two-Step Flow of Communication

The full findings, assumptions, and arguments for the two-step flow theory have been succinctly stated by Katz:

If word-of-mouth is so important, and if word-of-mouth specialists are widely dispersed, and if these specialists are more exposed to the media than the people whom they influence, then perhaps "ideas often flow from radio and print to opinion leaders and from these to the less active sections of the population" (5, p. 64).

In a review article Katz cited further studies which had attempted to test the two-step flow hypothesis in political and nonpolitical situations. As of 1957 these studies had revealed the following:

Opinion leaders and the people whom they influence are very much alike and typically belong to the same primary groups of family, friends and co-workers. While [sic] the opinion leader may be more interested in the particular sphere in which he is influential, it is highly unlikely that the persons influenced will be very far behind the leader in their level of interest. Influentials and influencees may exchange roles in different spheres of influence. Most spheres focus the group's attention on some related part of the world outside the group, and it is the opinion leader's function to bring the group into touch with this relevant part of its environment through whatever media are appropriate. In every case, influentials have been found to be more exposed to these points of contact with the outside world. Nevertheless, it is also true that, despite their greater exposure to the media, most opinion leaders are primarily affected not by the communication media but by still other people (5, p. 77).

The later studies have discovered that the two-step flow is not only an aspect of interpersonal relations as channels of communication, it is also a source of social
pressures to conform and a source of social support that serves to integrate people into the group (5, p. 77).

In a further elaboration of the two-step flow concept, Kingdon (6, p. 257), utilizing a 1966 CPS national election sample, developed a typology of opinion leaders according to how they answered these questions: "Did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for one of the parties or candidates?" and "During the election campaign did anyone ask you for your suggestions about which party or candidate was best?" "Activists" (10 percent of the sample) answered positively to both questions; "talkers" (12 percent) attempted influence but were not solicited by others; "passive leaders" did not attempt influence but their opinions were solicited by others (7 percent); and "nonleaders" (71 percent) answered both questions negatively (6, p. 257).

Comparing the three leader categories to the nonleaders, Kindgon found that the leaders were more likely to be highly educated, white, male, and from high status occupations. The latter finding contradicted *The People's Choice* assertion that opinion leaders were distributed evenly throughout every societal strata, but it did coincide with the characteristics of the "most interested" person of the 1940 study. Finally, the leaders were more politically efficacious, more interested in the campaign, and more concerned about the election outcome (6, p. 257).
In summary, the three types of leaders and nonleaders tended to rank order from high to low, with the highest being "activists," then "talkers," "passive leaders," and the lowest, the "nonleaders." This rank ordering prevailed for education, occupation, income, interest, concern, efficacy, information level, turnout, and political contributions. The opinion leaders were more informed than nonleaders, and, in terms of media use, the leaders relied more on print media and on a combination of sources, and nonleaders relied heavily on television as their source of news (6, pp. 259-260).

Thirty-seven percent of the sample were opinion leaders. They tended to be ticket-splitters and changed their voting loyalties from election to election. These traits conflict with their other characteristics—the same traits as the strong partisans.

Kingdon was unable to determine if the opinion leaders were actually passing on to the nonleaders information gleaned from the mass media as the two-step flow hypothesis suggests. However, the relationship between opinion leadership and information level was sustained even with controls for occupation and education. "Substantively, this means that opinion leaders within [italics his] occupational and educational strata are better informed than nonleaders in the same strata" (6, p. 259). Kingdon did not discount that information may flow from the leaders to the followers.
It is clear . . . , that there is much yet to be learned about this important process of information flow in the electorate. The question of how much communication is among the leaders and how much passes to followers is only one of the subjects on the agenda (6, p.261).

More recent writing on the two-step flow hypothesis suggests that the original formulation was over-simplified and that a better model would emphasize two step-flow hypotheses (7, pp. 304-319). Utilizing data from the 1968 CPS election study, Robinson asserted that there were two patterns of mass media and interpersonal influence. He constructed a trichotomous typology of interpersonal influence: "opinion givers" (32 percent), who offer opinions and may or may not receive opinions; "opinion receivers" (17 percent), who receive but do not give opinions; and the "inactive or nondiscussants" (51 percent), who neither give nor receive opinions. Opinion givers and receivers tended to be high status, strong partisans and independents, and male (7, pp. 311-312).

Robinson's first pattern or step-flow hypothesis related three components: the mass media, opinion givers, and opinion receivers. There was evidence to support the hypothesis of a flow of information from the mass media to the opinion givers. However, the opinion givers said that they were not influenced by the information from media endorsements. They were more attentive to print media. The opinion givers were not significantly more attentive to
broadcast media than were the opinion receivers or the nondiscussants (7, pp. 312-313).

The media may have provided information directly to the opinion receivers without its being filtered through the opinion givers. However, there was no evidence that the receivers were influenced by such information as mass media endorsements compared to the nondiscussants (7, p. 313).

An influence relationship existed between the opinion givers and the opinion receivers. If two influence attempts were experienced, the receivers' voting behavior shift was even greater. An exchange also occurred among opinion givers although they appeared much less susceptible to being influenced (7, pp. 313-314).

The second step-flow was the relationship between the mass media and the nondiscussants excluding the opinion givers or receivers. This relationship may simply provide information or it may also be influential. Unlike the opinion receivers, nondiscussants were more likely to have their vote influenced by newspaper endorsements (7, p. 314).

In summary, Robinson believes the original two-step flow hypothesis was too simple an explanation. The original and the Katz formulations were correct. "When interpersonal sources and mass media sources are compared or are in conflict, interpersonal sources wield greater influence" (7, p. 315). However, voters in recent years reported being exposed more often to such mass media influences as
newspaper endorsements than to interpersonal influence attempts (7, p. 315). The revised step-flow sequences more adequately explain the relationship among the mass media, interpersonal discussion, and the voter.

The Seminal Voter Studies: The Michigan School

The American Voter

In the late 1940's the Survey Research Center (SRC) of the University of Michigan began research based on samples drawn to represent the national rather than a local electorate. "The entire nation could now be represented by fewer than 2,000 carefully drawn respondents. Findings could not [sic] longer be dismissed as representative only of Sandusky, Ohio or Elmira, New York" (8, p. 619). The Voter Decides covered the 1952 election (9) and The American Voter covered the 1952 and 1956 elections (10).

These SRC studies departed from the Columbia studies' emphasis on sociological explanations of voting and moved to a more explicitly social psychological explanation of the voting act. Although the studies looked at attitudes and evaluations of candidates, the primary focus for explaining the vote was the concept of party identification.

In The American Voter, Campbell and his colleagues posited a "funnel of causality" notion of forces impinging on the voting act and concentrated on the psychological forces at work on the voter during the campaign (10).
They examined both short-term and long-term forces that helped explain the vote decision. The major long-term force on the voter was political party identification. Short-term factors included candidate orientation and issue orientation. The authors found little voting on the basis of issues or ideology among Americans. Partisan identification, they noted, was the major explanatory variable of American voting behavior. As noted previously, these findings lent support to the perceptual balance theory of media effects (10).

The orientation of the Michigan school toward social psychological explanations of the vote minimized the influence of social factors and the role of the mass media. Although mass media and interpersonal communication were treated, they did not receive major examination. The media were considered as only one of a variety of forms of an individual’s political activity. Later Michigan election studies (since 1968) introduced a significant number of media measures in the surveys (11, pp. 32-33). Finally, the Michigan studies did not fully pursue the role of interpersonal communication in influencing the vote decision, an important component of the Columbia studies.

The Changing American Voter

The American Voter was updated by Nie, Verba, and Petrocik in The Changing American Voter in 1976 using CPS
data from the presidential years 1952 to 1972 (12). Nie and his colleagues traced the slight decline in the importance of party identification over the twenty years and examined the rise of issue voting in 1968 and 1972 (12).

Under the general rubric of political interest, the rising proportion of those who claimed to follow the political campaign on television and the proportionate decline in radio surveillance of the campaign was traced. The decline in newspaper and magazine surveillance was also noted. Nie and his colleagues conclude:

The growth of television as a source of campaign news comes at the same time as the growth in political interest. . . . But though it is likely that television has introduced a new dimension to campaign attentiveness, the growth of interest does not seem to be only the result of the availability of this new medium (12, pp. 272–273).

Nie, Verba, and Petrocik wrote about the "individuation" of American political life, asserting that group membership and party affiliation no longer predict political behavior very well. They speculate: "The individual voter evaluates candidates on the basis of information and impressions conveyed by the mass media, and then votes on that basis" (12, p. 347). In this update of the Michigan findings, the decline of group membership and party affiliation as reliable predictors of political behavior was documented. It is speculated that the media now fill the void and have become influential in shaping the behavior of the American electorate.
Summary of Findings: The Conventional Wisdom

In summary, the "conventional wisdom" concerning the role of sociological, psychological, and interpersonal and mass communication variables on American voting behavior as gleaned from the Columbia and Michigan studies has been the following:

1. At least 80 percent of voters have made up their minds before the campaign begins; 70 to 85 percent will vote for the party they chose in the previous election; about 10 percent switch from one party to another (but some are returning to the party of their earlier choice); 10 percent are undecided voters who may become activated by exposure to the campaign.

2. Among major influences on voter-decision are the voter's predisposition to favor a party, candidate, or make an issue-related decision; the role of interpersonal communication, including the influence of persons perceived as opinion leaders; and group associations and other social pressures.

3. The more voters are exposed to a campaign in the mass media, the more strongly they come to feel about their candidate, the more correct information they obtain, and the more likely they are to go to the polls.

4. The influence of the mass media on voters in making or changing decisions during a campaign is small, but it can be important in a close election.

5. Television had exposed, and perhaps 'activated,' large numbers of persons with low degrees of party loyalty and interest in politics. Viewed by the politicians as the medium of major importance since 1960, television has been perceived as an impartial and widely-reaching agency. But evidence indicates that reliance on television as a source of information about campaigns declines with increase in educational level. The press is the preferred medium of the opinion leader, the better educated, and the highly partisan voter.

6. If the mass media are seldom able to convert voters, they are extremely important in reinforcing voting intentions and basic party loyalties. In this area they are dealing with up to 85 percent of the voters. Voter turnout is a crucial concern of any
candidate, and many have lost due to lack of voter interest (13, pp. 89-90).

There are studies that deal more explicitly with media impact, especially television, in the political realm. Some bolster the "conventional wisdom" of the seminal studies; others pointedly reject the notion of "minimal effects" of the mass media. All of them question the idea that the mass media have limited impact on voting behavior.

Studies Questioning The Limited-Effects Notion

The Simon and Stein Study

One of the first studies explicitly attempting to measure television's effect on voting behavior was carried out during the 1954 presidential campaign in Iowa (14, pp. 470-477). The situation was unique because it was during the nascent days of television. Simon and Stein were able to compare counties that were similar in every respect except one: one-half of the sample counties received television signals; one-half did not. Under these circumstances the causal effect of television could be isolated; unlike other studies that would only correlate individual voting behavior with television exposure. The results revealed no "reliable difference either in the voting turnout or in the percentage of the vote cast for the Republican candidate between HTD (counties of high television density) and other areas" (14, p. 471).
Simon and Stein concluded that the areas had already been saturated with information from the other media. Thus the hypothesized "intensification" impact of television coverage of the campaign did not occur (14, p. 477). This initial study of television's impact did nothing to dispel the minimal-effects notion.

**Politics and Television**

Other researchers rejected the conventional wisdom that the effects of the mass media on political behavior are minimal. Typical of this questioning orientation is Lang and Lang's work *Politics and Television* (15). From their studies of television coverage of such news events as MacArthur Day in Chicago in 1951, the national conventions of 1952, and the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960, they argue that the minimal-effects notion was not the whole story (15, pp. 19-35). They assert:

The media also structure a very real political environment which people can know about only through the media. Information about this environment is hard to escape. It filters through and affects even persons who are not directly exposed to the news or who deny that they are paying a great deal of attention to what the media say. There is something pervasive about the content of the mass media, something that can make its influence cumulative (15, p. 305).

Lang and Lang emphasized the cumulative impact of the mass media and especially television. Rejecting the minimal-effects notion, they argue: "[T]he preconceptions and impressions that enter into a vote decision are
gradually built up throughout the years between elections, and television plays a large part in shaping that political imagery" (15, p. 305). Their studies show how television coverage of political events, whether during campaigns or not, shape the viewers' perceptions of those events and the personalities involved. They assert, without citing the specific concept, that television, like radio and the print media, sets peoples' issue agendas, thus shaping opinion and ultimately affecting voting behavior (15, p. 306).

In their study of televised coverage of the 1952 national conventions Lang and Lang found that the networks presented, probably unwittingly, a biased, distorted view of reality. This "inferential structuring" phenomenon is not calculated but is inherent in television coverage resulting in bias that influences the definition of a televised event. This occurred, they say,

... through network decisions concerning what information is salient at any given moment and through the choice of themes to depict the mood of the convention. The selection of what to show ... , the dissemination of background information and interpretation, its timing, the linking of different events to one another are governed by a judgment of what will appeal to audiences. Yet they may at the same time leave an imprint on how the event is transmitted (15, pp. 134-135).

Later studies have appropriated the Lang and Lang implication of an agenda-setting function. Studies have also examined more intensively the alleged bias of the media, especially television, and the specific political
effects on viewers of television news and political advertising.

**Studies of the Agenda-Setting Function**

Lang and Lang's implied agenda-setting function of the mass media has instituted a prolific production of research. The evidence that the mass media changes attitudes in a campaign is not very conclusive; the evidence is stronger that voters do learn from the great quantities of information inundating them in a campaign. The better educated and the politically interested may seek out information; others may exert little effort. But Berelson and his colleagues found that those who are most likely to know the issue positions of the candidates are those who are most likely to have the highest exposure to the media (4, pp. 228, 244).

In addition, the audience learns in direct proportion to the mass media's emphasis on the campaign issues. Cohen succinctly states the agenda-setting notion when he observed that the press "... may not be successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (16, p. 13). Thus the agenda-setting hypothesis posits a strong, positive relationship between the emphases of the mass media coverage and the saliency of these emphases in the minds of individuals in the audience.
Examination of agenda-setting has most often occurred in a campaign milieu, especially presidential campaigns. The initial empirical test of agenda-setting by McCombs and Shaw focused on undecided voters in the 1968 presidential campaign (17). The undecided were considered most likely to be open to campaign information. The respondents were asked what issues they believed were important, and the various media serving the community were content analyzed. The data revealed a very positive relationship between the media issue emphasis and the voters' issue saliency (17, pp. 176-187).

In 1968 the three presidential contenders differed on the issues they chose to emphasize; however, the voters' judgments mirrored the composite of the mass media coverage rather than differential judgments. This phenomenon suggested that the voters were attentive to all political news regardless of its source, rather than being especially attentive to news from or about their own party or candidate preference—the selective perception hypothesis. Further examination of the respondents who indicated a preference but not a commitment for a candidate revealed that voters were more in agreement with all the news rather than with news about only their own party or candidate preference (17, p. 181).

The selective perception hypothesis argued that the voters paid more attention to the issues oriented toward
their own party. The agenda-setting hypothesis, on the other hand, argued that voters were more attentive to all the news, regardless of source or emphasis. The stronger correlations between voter judgments and all the news lent further support to the agenda-setting notion (17, pp. 181-182).

Although a number of studies have documented the ability of newspapers to set the public agenda, there is scant evidence that television news has an equal ability. Patterson and McClure compared the agenda-setting ability of national television news and newspapers in the 1972 presidential election (18). A vast majority of newspaper readers (nearly 70 percent) were much more likely to recall newspaper stories about important political matters such as the Vietnam peace attempts or the political corruption of a budding Watergate than were television news viewers. Over half (54 percent) of the television viewers were likely to recall the "hoopla," the trivial aspects of the presidential campaign, that dominated the nightly network news programs rather than the substantive issues of the day—Vietnam, political corruption, or specific campaign issues. Only 31 percent of the readers, remembered a news story about "hoopla" (18, pp. 79-82).

Patterson and McClure conclude,

If the mass media's most far-reaching power is its capacity to determine what people will know about and think about—in other words, to set the public
agenda—then television network newscasts, during a presidential election, work to the detriment of a rational electorate (18, p. 82).

The public receives the trivial rather than the significant from television network news.

Patterson and McClure examined why television news presented the kinds of stories and emphases that it did and why television news had so little impact. They conclude,

Because television's coverage of certain events has a dramatic impact, it has been assumed all [emphasis the author's] types of television news reporting have tremendous impact. Not true. Since the nightly news is too brief to treat fully the complexity of modern politics, too visual to present effectively most events, and too entertainment-minded to tell viewers much worth knowing, most network newscasts are neither very educational nor very powerful communicators (18, p. 90).

An area of agenda-setting research that has yet to be clearly delineated is the function of contingent conditions on the correlation between the media's issue presentation and the electorate's agenda of important issues. Such variables as interpersonal discussion, the political use of television, interest in the news, and interest in the election may explain much of the agenda-setting effect consistent with the perceptual balance theory.

The agenda-setting perspective assumes direct effects from exposure to the mass media. However, not everyone is assumed to be equally susceptible to influence. Only individuals in certain contingent social conditions are viewed as open to media influence. A rephrasing of the hypothesis may eventually read as follows: The mass media influence the salience of events in the public mind when certain contingent conditions are present. . . Much remains to be accomplished, . . . , before research will be able
to answer our . . . query about the validity of agenda-setting measures (3, p. 221).

In addition to the agenda-setting notion, recent studies have probed the alleged bias of the mass media, especially television news, and the specific political effects of television news and political advertising on viewers.

**Bias in the News**

A recent study confronted the question of television bias in news presentations by examining the network television coverage of the 1972 election campaign. Hofstetter content analyzed all of the campaign news stories appearing on the ABC, CBS, and NBC weekday evening television network news programs between July 10, 1972 and November 6, 1972 for partisan bias in the networks' treatment of candidates, issues, and political parties (19). He concluded that political bias was not detectable in the network news presentations of the McGovern-Nixon contest (19, p. 24). Nightly network news coverage of the candidates hurt neither McGovern nor Nixon. In fact, "neutrality was the hallmark of TV news coverage of Nixon and McGovern" (19, p. 74). Each candidate was helped in different ways by the network news presentations of the campaign. Although no partisan bias was detected in the news, Hofstetter did find "situational" and "structural" bias.
Situational bias refers to "the precise ways in which constraints on the networks affect news coverage . . . sharply according to the situation" (19, p. 34). For example, the networks' greater coverage of McGovern's campaign was related to his situation as a candidate. McGovern was the lesser-known challenger facing an incumbent President whose tactic was not to campaign. McGovern's strategy was to provide the networks with an explicitly media-conscious campaign. On the other hand, Nixon, the incumbent, deliberately chose to restrict his campaigning, a fact reflected in less television news coverage. However, Nixon benefited in that the stories about him were more supportive or favorable. Those about McGovern were less supportive or favorable and tended to emphasize the problems in his campaign effort (19, p. 74).

Structural bias was discovered in the networks' presentations of campaign issues. All three networks treated the issues similarly. The issue presentations accentuated the negative rather than the positive and treated the candidates' stances either unfavorably or neutrally (19, p. 10).

Each network devoted about the same proportion of stories and of time to the same subjects. Each network presented political material in a similar way. About the same attention was given to stories about candidates, political issues, and parties on each network (19, p. 34).
Structural bias was related to the nature of television news itself. Two major factors were time constraints and the necessity of dramatizing stories in order to boost audience ratings (19, p. 33).

Hofstetter wrote,

Structural biases in television news reporting occur when some things are selected to be reported rather than other things because [italics his] of the character of the medium or because of the incentives that apply to commercial news programming instead of partisan prejudices held by newsmen. This study indicated that network news tended to be no less subject to the structural biases during the 1972 presidential election than at other times (19, p. 34).

The Unseeing Eye

Another recent work studied the impact of political commercials as well as network television news during the 1972 presidential campaign. Patterson and McClure's The Unseeing Eye was the result of a panel study of 2,000 respondents in Syracuse, New York and a content analysis of the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening television news shows and the candidates' televised political commercials (18, p. 21-34). They found that the networks covered the "hoopla," the trivial aspects of the campaign. The substance of the campaign—candidate qualifications and campaign issues—was given short shrift. Television indulged in a parade of faces and candidate antics rather than seriously examining the candidates' qualifications. It downplayed issues because they were dull, boring and not photogenic—
situation television wished to avoid. Consequently, television network news tended to "trivialize" politics by emphasizing the inconsequential rather than the substantive. "The contest theme was carried to the campaign's very end, at the expense of the election's issues and the candidates' qualifications for office" (18, p. 46). (The findings' import for agenda-setting are reported in "Studies of Agenda-Setting" above.)

The impact of network nightly news on the information levels of the electorate was examined. Although many Americans watched the evening news, they apparently learned very little from viewing. In fact, those who depended solely upon television for their information learned only a little more than those who did not rely solely upon television. In contrast, newspaper readers were much better informed on the issues.

Neither men nor women, the uneducated nor well educated, the poor nor the wealthy, the young nor the old greatly improved their issue information by tuning in television news. Newspaper reading, by comparison, informed each of these groups of voters . . . (18, pp. 53-54).

Thus, television does not help the voter decide on the issues. "Network news may be fascinating. It may be highly entertaining. But it is simply not informative" (18, p. 54).

Television news is not informative because it involves "an impossible learning situation"--too many pictures, not
enough words, and a passive audience. Only information
which is repeated often appears to "stick" with the viewer.
The authors conclude,

When the typical election issue is mentioned once
a month, for less than twenty seconds, in a mix of
extraneous news material, the certain consequence is
viewer ignorance. ABC, CBS, and NBC may have allowed
Americans to "see" the campaign, but in so doing they
have added nothing of substance to the voters' civic
education (18, pp. 55-58).

The selective perception notion of earlier studies
explained the relationship between candidate images and the
network news. Voters, especially the committed, saw what
they wanted to see. They absorbed imagery favorable to
their candidate and blocked out the unfavorable. The
uncommitted voters, having no predilection for a candidate,
saw nothing in the candidate images on the television news.
However, once they made a presidential choice, the undecided
then absorbed information and imagery that bolstered their
decision (18, pp. 59-73).

Patterson and McClure conclude that the much-vaunted
image-making power of television is a myth. They argue, as
did Key, that "voters are not fools" (23, p. 7). Voters
could not be manipulated by television images of the
candidates. They evaluated presidential contenders by
attending to the candidates' political successes and
failures, rather than to contrived television images of the
candidates (18, p. 73).
Patterson and McClure's findings regarding the impact of paid political commercials challenge the conventional wisdom that commercials are "mere fluff." Political commercials often provided serious information to the viewers and spot commercials educated the electorate much more than they manipulated the voter. They found that voters ignored advertising imagery but did respond to issues through exposure to issue-oriented political commercials. Contrary to conventional thinking, spot commercials were more effective at conveying issue information than were thirty-minute commercials (18, pp. 111-120).

The spot commercials were presented in a manner that allowed television to be very effective: brief, simple, repetitive messages (18, pp. 116-122). These messages apparently had greater impact on the uninformed and uninterested voter—boosting his issue knowledge—because they were readily available and entertaining and did not require much effort on the voter's part. "As inconceivable as it may seem to some, political advertising provides many less knowledgeable voters with the most systematic, general information they will possess about the candidates" (18, pp.125-138).

The Unseeing Eye provided three major conclusions. First, network television news presentations of the presidential campaign did not influence voters' views of the candidates' qualifications nor the voters' comprehension of
election issues. Second, paid political commercials were unable to dislodge the voters' pre-existing perceptions of the political parties and candidates. And, third, political commercials, contrary to the conventional wisdom, did provide voters with serious information about candidates and issues.

The Mass Media Election

Patterson continued his pursuit of media impact on American politics with his book *The Mass Media Election*, purportedly "the most comprehensive analysis yet undertaken of presidential election news coverage and its impact on voters" (19, p. viii).

The work involved a seven-wave panel study of 1,250 respondents covering the extended campaign period from before the first primary to after the general election. Also, Patterson content analyzed television, newspaper, and newsmagazine coverage of the 1976 presidential campaign (19, p. viii). Generally, Patterson's findings underscore and extend somewhat his findings of 1972 reported in *The Unseeing Eye*.

He found that

the nature of election news . . . combines with the length and structure of today's campaign to divert the public's attention from the performance of the in-party . . . . The press . . . de-emphasizes the incumbent's performance by finding significance primarily in the campaign's contests, activities, and episodes. The public's response to this type of election news is predictable. As the 1976 campaign
progressed, the electorate's concern with the policies and leadership of the Ford administration declined, replaced by a heightened interest in Ford's campaign style, electoral success, and tactical mistakes (19, pp. 175-176).

The overall impact of election news' nature was to diminish the public's concern with the candidate's programs and leadership. Although changes in the campaign have increased the voters' need for information about the candidates' politics, election news now contains proportionately less information of this kind (19, p. 176).

In summary, these recent studies have questioned the minimal effects of the mass media notion and have sensitized researchers to the need for further studies. Several contemporary studies have resurrected the time of voting decision notion in order to examine the impact of the mass media.

Time of Decision and the Mass Media: Recent Studies

The Prisuta Study

Utilizing a 1968 CPS sample of 1,400, Prisuta examined the relationship of the media to time of voting decision. In addition, he analyzed the media's impact on voter turnout and interest and information levels (20). He found that surveillance of newspapers for political information correlated significantly with voter turnout, but the correlation did not occur for television, radio, and magazines (20, pp. 168-169).

No relationship between media exposure and time of voting decision was discovered
which seemed to discount theories that voters would seek out information via the media, thus making up their minds late in the campaign; or that voters would be manipulated by media advertising, thus also deciding on a candidate late in the campaign (20, p. 169).

Two small but statistically significant relationships between time of decision and the broadcast media were noted. The more highly exposed to radio or television the more likely the voter was to have reached a decision before the conventions, thus before the campaign (20, p. 170).

This finding countered the notion that voters would seek information from the media, and thus delay their vote decision until late in the campaign. The finding supports those . . . who claim that the indecisive, low-involved, or "cross-pressured" voters will avoid information via the media, because it forces them to think about making a decision which may involve dissonance (20, p. 170).

Prisuta concluded:

. . . it seems that causal factors are apparent from both a media and a political standpoint. Higher exposure is often a factor in affecting behavior, and, also, political behavior is a factor which increases media use. While lack of involvement in the political system is often a result of low media exposure, it is also at times a cause which involves the deliberate avoidance of media information due to apathy, socialization, or cross-pressures (20, p. 172).

The People Choose a President

Another study of the 1972 presidential election is Mendelsohn and O'Keefe's The People Choose a President. They studied the electorate from three perspectives. First, following The American Voter tradition, they examined
sociopsychological processes impinging on the vote decision. Second, appropriating *The People's Choice* perspective, they investigated interpersonal communication. And, third, questioning the minimal-effects idea, they analyzed the role of mass communication. A panel survey of 618 Summit County, Ohio respondents interviewed in five waves during the 1972 presidential campaign was the work's focal point (21, p. 10).

The study's design, reflecting the influence of *The People's Choice* examined three categories of time of voting decision: the early deciders, who decided for whom to vote for president before the conventions and maintained that choice; the late deciders, who decided for Nixon or McGovern after the national nominating conventions; and the switchers, who changed from a decision to vote for one candidate to a decision to vote for the opposition candidate. These three categories were compared and contrasted in terms of social demographics, interpersonal discussion, media use, and psychological factors found to impinge on the voting decision (21, pp. 52-53).

The early deciders were the most interested in the campaign and the most attentive to the campaign. They had the greatest exposure to campaign media content and utilized television the most for information about the campaign. These early decision-makers were the most likely to discuss the campaign, had the least difficulty in coming to a voting
decision, and were the least likely to be influenced despite their involvement (21, p. 158).

The switchers, on the other hand, anticipated being influenced more than did the early or late deciders. They appeared moderate, falling between the early and late deciders in terms of campaign interest, attention, media exposure, interpersonal discussion, and reliance on television. These switchers relied most on newspapers for political information, sought interpersonal guidance more than the early or late deciders, had the most problem in reaching a voting decision, and scored highest on being influenced (21, p. 161). The late deciders anticipated being influenced the least, were the least interested and the least exposed to the media, relied least on newspapers and television for campaign surveillance, and discussed the campaign the least (21, pp. 162-163).

In regard to influence on the voting decision, Mendelsohn and O'Keefe conclude,

Influence . . . seems rather weakly predicted by voters' communication behavior over the campaign . . . Influence seems more clearly explained as a consequence both of such factors as decision condition, anticipation, difficulty, interest, and of campaign attention, media exposure, news media dependence, and so forth (21, p. 169).

Regarding political commercials' influence on the voting decision, Mendelsohn and O'Keefe found that the early deciders said they were least likely to be influenced by commercials.
Early deciders appeared to reflect a rather passive orientation to the campaign per se, and their encounters with televised political advertisements appear to have been both casual and haphazard, occurring more as by-products of using television for entertainment than for political knowledge (21, pp. 190-191).

The late deciders were quite different from the early deciders. The late deciders who were influenced by commercials sought more interpersonal guidance, had greater difficulty making a decision, had greater campaign interest, and did not rely so much on television news for information. Guidance-seeking, reliance on television, and difficulty of decision were the factors that most explained the influence of advertising.

An interesting subset of voters emerged in relation to media use. These were the undecided voters who were having difficulty coming to a decision.

They did not, however, turn to the serious aspects of the media for help; instead, in their routine use of television for entertainment, they encountered political advertising that served as an aid to crystallizing a final choice. These late deciders appear not to have been skilled information-seekers as such, but welcomed guidance-giving information from whatever "noneffort" source it might come, including televised political commercials (21, p. 193).

The data of The People Choose a President provided an update of the characteristics of the early and late deciders in campaigns and further elaborated their media use.
The Chaffee and Choe Study

In a 1976 panel study Chaffee and Choe classified Wisconsin voters as Pre-Campaign Deciders, Campaign Deciders, and Last-Minute Deciders in order to challenge the prevailing notion that the campaign has limited effects on voting (22). The Campaign Deciders, 40 percent of the sample, were low in partisanship and high in media surveillance of the campaign and the Ford-Carter debates and voted in agreement with perceptions garnered during the campaign. The Pre-Campaign and Last-Minute Deciders voted predominantly on the basis of party identification (22, p. 53).

The Pre-Campaign Deciders were well-educated partisans who actively discussed the campaign even before the period of heaviest information flow from the media, and "saw large differences between the candidates" (22, p. 63).

The status of a person's vote decision at the beginning of the campaign was determined by the combined effect of, in order of importance, image discrimination—a media effect; discussion of the campaign; education; and partisanship (22, p. 63). Image discrimination during the campaign and attention to the campaign via television were the factors that differentiated the Campaign and Last-Minute Deciders.

This provides empirical support for our [Chaffee and Choe's] assumption that TV has become a key factor in reducing the correlation between partisanship and exposure so that a group like the Campaign Deciders would emerge in significant numbers (22, pp. 63-64).
Chaffee and Choe were surprised to note the influence of party identification on the Last-Minute Deciders even though this group was not strongly partisan. They conclude:

[A]pparently when these voters finally do decide, with campaign-specific cues absent because of lack of attention to the campaign, their latent partisan predispositions are activated. This finding is contrary to the picture usually painted of Last-Minute Deciders as nonpartisan (22, p. 66).

The Lucas and Adams Study

Another recent examination of time of decision and political communication linking *The People's Choice* and *The People Choose a President* is Lucas and Adams' "Talking, Television, and Voter Indecision" (25). Intrigued by the large proportion of undecided voters in the 1976 presidential campaign, the authors examined and rejected *The People's Choice* contention that the undecided, those who delayed their decision until late in the campaign, were less attentive and apathetic. Utilizing a sample drawn from Pennsylvania cities, the study revealed no significant differences among early, leaning, and undecided voters in terms of education, income, information, and participation. Two characteristics did differentiate early from late deciders: interpersonal discussion about the candidates and watching national television network news programs. Lucas and Adams offered the explanation that these communication activities helped the voters decide early in the campaign by "authenticating" information (23, pp. 120-130).
The time of decision and mass media impact relationship used in studies beginning with *The People's Choice* and culminating with the Lucas and Adams work is central to the present effort. This study is an attempt to examine time of decision and its differentiating characteristics, especially political communication, over time. National survey data gathered by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies for the presidential elections 1952 through 1976 is employed to test the relationships with national samples.


CHAPTER III

THE ANALYSIS

Introduction

In analyzing the data produced by the regression programs several concerns are paramount. First, the explanatory power of all the independent variables working together is noted for each election and over time. Second, the significant variables in each election year are examined. After detecting these significant variables for each year, emergent patterns or trends are discussed.

The most explanatory variables over the twenty-five-year period are examined; each hypothesis is accepted or rejected; and conclusions are reached concerning mass media impact on time of decision.

The dependent variable in all of the regressions is time of voting decision. This decision variable, as noted, consists of six categories. The coding allows considerable variation in the dependent variable which is necessary for adequate regression analysis. Each election year's time of decision question is coded similarly, permitting comparability across the time span 1952-1976. The literature refers to early deciders, those who decide
for whom to vote for President before the national
nominating conventions; the convention deciders, who decide
during the convention period; and the late deciders, those
who delay their voting decision until late in the campaign
(after the conventions). In terms of analyzing the
regressions it is feasible to refer to the two polar
categories--early deciders and late deciders.

Total Explained Variance

Looking at Table I, it is apparent that the explanatory
power of the independent variables is limited. The adjusted
R squares range from a low of 6 percent of the variance in
time of decision explained in 1972 to a high of 15 percent
in 1960. Seven percent of the variance is explained in 1956
and 1964, 9 percent in 1952, and 11 percent in 1960 and
1976. All of the R squares are statistically significant at
the .05 level.

A higher proportion of the variance in time of decision
is explained in the years 1952, 1960, 1968, and
1976--elections when incumbents were not candidates. (Ford
in 1976 was not a true incumbent, having been elevated to
the presidency upon the resignation of Richard Nixon, who
had chosen Ford as Vice-President to replace the resigned
elected Vice-President Agnew.) Less of the variance in time
of decision is explained in the election years featuring
incumbent candidates--1956, 1964, and 1972. These are also
### TABLE I

REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TIME OF DECISION, 1952-1976, USING MEDIA EXPOSURE INDEX—BETA COEFFICIENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.17</td>
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<td>.04</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Source:** The Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1952-1976 American National Election Studies

b: A weighted sample
c: 1956 dichotomous question
d: Significance level
e: Knowledge of Congressman
the years when greater proportions of American voters made an early choice for President. (See Table XII, p. 145.)

Why is so little of the variance in time of decision explained? Perhaps decision is much more dependent on peculiar characteristics of each election such as incumbency rather than on long-term regularities such as education and income. Apparently the presence of an incumbent President as a candidate is related to greater numbers of early decisions. Thus, the incumbency factor explains more of the variance in time of decision. Consequently, the amount of variance that the independent variables under consideration can explain is depressed.

There are other reasons for low R squares. Measurement error with this type of data can be considerable thus depressing the R squares. Also important is the amount of variance in the dependent variable. The absence of greater variance in time of decision could explain the low R squares.

Not only are the R squares rather low; so are the Betas. The highest Beta is .25. What variables and what elections produce such results?

The 1952 Findings

In 1952, 9 percent of the variance in time of decision is explained. Age at .18, closely followed by strength of partisanship at .16, have the greatest relative influence on time of decision. The older and the more partisan voters
were more likely to reach closure early in the contest. The relationship is significant at .001.

Political involvement and interpersonal discussion, both at .08, are the next most significant explanatory variables. They are significant at .01. The more involved in the election a person was, as evidenced by interest and concern for the outcome, the more likely he decided early. In 1952, opinion givers tended to decide earlier in the contest.

Knowledge of politics, at -.07, is slightly but significantly associated with a late voting decision. The greater the knowledge of politics, the later the decision, an incongruous result given the fact that the literature has always associated interest, knowledge, and strength of partisanship (1, pp. 51-93). In 1952, the more involved and partisan decided early, but the more knowledgeable decided late, controlling for other relevant variables.

It should be noted that the 1950s knowledge indexes are not composed of the same questions as the 1960-1976 indexes. The 1952 knowledge questions are correct identification of one's congressman and awareness of the Taft-Hartley Act. Perhaps concern over the issue stance of the candidates toward the Act caused the knowledgeable to delay their voting decision until late in the campaign.

Participation, sex, education, income, and urbanization appear unrelated to time of decision. Media exposure has
literally no impact in 1952. When television exposure is substituted for media exposure the new regression produces exactly the same negligible results as did the media index. (See Table II.) The result is surprising considering that television made its debut in the election process in 1948 and that televised conventions and the first television political commercials also debuted in the 1952 campaign (2, p. 50). In addition, "television, while available only to a minority, led the other media (in 1952) in number of persons who rated it most informative" (3, pp. 46-48). Yet, neither television nor media exposure has any impact in 1952. This finding coincides with Simon and Stein's (4) discovery of little television impact in 1952. Perhaps it is to be expected that strength of partisanship rather than media influence would have been influential in 1952 for two reasons. First, partisanship and its strength as an explanation of voting behavior has been documented as the dominant factor, especially in the 1950s (5). Second, it is not until 1960 that television assumed a greater role in presidential election campaigns (2, p. 58).

Thus, in 1952, the older, involved, opinion giving partisans were driven to make an early decision. The late deciders were younger, less partisan, less involved non-opinion givers but, curiously, more knowledgeable. Media or television use is not associated with early or late
### TABLE II

**REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TIME OF DECISION, 1952-1976, USING TELEVISION EXPOSURE—BETA COEFFICIENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
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<th>1956</th>
<th>1960&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1964&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1968&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1972</th>
<th>1976&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>-.02&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.04&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Involvement Index</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge Index</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.03&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
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<td>Strength of Partisanship</td>
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<td>.09</td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-Sqd.</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Source: The Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1952-1976 American National Election Studies

<sup>b</sup>A weighted sample

<sup>c</sup>1956 dichotomous question

<sup>d</sup>() Significance level

<sup>e</sup>Knowledge of Congressman
decision in 1952. Neither is participation, urban residence, education, income, and sex.

The 1956 Findings

In 1956, 7 percent of the variance in time of decision is explained. The result is significant at the .05 level. Again, involvement, strength of partisanship, and age significantly (.001) affect time of decision. Education is significantly (.05) related to early decision. Participation, urbanization, interpersonal discussion, income, and sex are not associated with early or late decision. Neither is media nor television exposure. (See Tables I and II.)

In summary, in 1956 the older, the involved, the educated, and the partisan were early deciders. The late deciders were less involved, less educated, younger, and less partisan. Participation, urbanization, interpersonal discussion, media or television exposure, knowledge, income, and sex have no impact on time of voting decision.

The 1960 Findings

In 1960, 15 percent of the variance in time of decision is explained by the eleven independent variables—the highest percentage of explained variance of the seven years examined. The result is significant at .05 or better. Six independent variables are significant at .01 or .001. They are in order of explanatory power—strength of partisanship,
education, urbanization, involvement and age, and participation. Knowledge, income, sex, and interpersonal discussion have little or no effect.

The 1960 election is often perceived as the first "television" election. That is, it was the first election in which television played an important role in the contest and was considered influential in voter decision. Indicative of this perception is Kennedy's accounting for his narrow victory: "It was TV more than anything else that turned the tide" (6, p. 333).

The 1960 election was the first to feature televised presidential debates. Given the presence of the Kennedy-Nixon debates in the campaign (7, p. 154), television or mass media impact should surely appear in 1960. Yet neither exposure to the mass media nor television surveillance of the campaign has a significant impact on time of decision in this study. (See Tables I and II.) Such long-term forces as strength of partisanship and education remained the predominant factors shaping the voting decision in this first television election.

Thus, in 1960 the highly partisan, highly educated, involved, participatory, older urbanite was an early decider. The late decider was, therefore, less partisan, less educated, less involved and participatory, younger and more likely to come from a rural area. Exposure to all the
media, television exposure, knowledge, income, sex, and interpersonal discussion are unrelated to time of decision.

The 1964 Findings

In 1964, 7 percent of the variance in time of decision is explained by all the independent variables. The result is significant at .05 or better. Five independent variables produce significant (.05 or better) results. Again, strength of partisanship is the strongest explanatory variable but in this year its impact is negative at -.19. The highly partisan were more likely to delay their decision until late in the 1964 campaign. The result is not surprising, given the known reluctance of many stalwart Republicans to support the conservative GOP nominee Goldwater (8). Education is the second-best explanatory variable at .16. Age at .07 and involvement at .05 follow. The educated, the involved, and the older were more likely to make an early decision.

Media exposure, for the first time, produces a significant (.05) negative, if small, impact at -.04. The late deciders were somewhat more exposed to the mass media. However, if television is substituted for media use, no relationship with time of decision results. (See Table II.) The first instance of media impact on decision is the election of 1964. The greater the exposure to all the media, the greater the likelihood of a delayed decision.
However, surprisingly, the relationship is not accounted for solely by television exposure.

Much has been written and spoken about the impact of press coverage of the Republican nominee Goldwater as very conservative, if not, reactionary (7, pp. 161-165). Perhaps the 1964 media exposure index is tapping such an emphasis, which gave voters pause and caused them to delay their voting decision until late in the campaign.

The remaining variables—income, knowledge, participation, urbanization, sex, and discussion—have no effect on time of voting decision in 1964.

Thus, in 1964 the early decider was educated, older, and involved. In a notable deviation from the pattern, the 1964 late decider was more partisan and more inclined toward media use but not television surveillance. There is no difference in time of decision by income, knowledge, participation, urbanization, sex, or discussion.

The 1968 Findings

In 1968, 11 percent of the variance in time of decision is explained by the independent variables. Seven independent variables produce statistically significant (.05 or better) relationships. Age has the most impact at .17, closely followed by strength of partisanship at .16, and involvement at .13. As appears to be the normal pattern in the years examined, the older one is the more likely one is to make an early presidential voting decision. Similarly,
the more partisan a person is, the more likely he is to reach closure quickly. And, the more involved in the election a person is, the sooner he comes to a decision.

Interpersonal discussion produces a Beta of .09 and income and sex each scores .04. In 1968 opinion givers were early deciders. Sex is significant for the first and only time: Men were more likely than women to make an early choice.

A significant but small negative relationship appears for knowledge (−.05). The more political knowledge a person had, the greater the likelihood of his delaying the voting decision until late in the 1968 campaign. This relationship appeared previously in 1952. The 1968 result can be explained by knowledge of the Vietnam War, a salient campaign issue (9). The knowledgeable might have postponed a decision until the last moment, choosing the candidate who appeared most likely to end the war. For example, Humphrey, the Democratic contender and the incumbent Vice-President, did not officially separate himself from the Johnson administration war policy until late in the campaign, when he promised to stop the bombing of North Vietnam (7, p. 172). In addition, the turbulent Democratic convention in 1968 might have negatively influenced the knowledgeable so that they delayed their decision until late in the campaign. The more politically knowledgeable, having to contend with
volatile political issues such as the war and the disrupted convention delayed their decision as long as possible.

Education, participation, and urbanization have negligible impact in explaining time of decision. Neither mass media use nor television surveillance provides an explanation of time of decision in 1968. (See Table II.)

Thus, in 1968, the older, more partisan, involved, affluent, male opinion giver decided early. The late decider was more knowledgeable but younger, less partisan, less involved, less affluent, female, and non-opinion giving. Media or television use, participation, urbanization, and education have no impact on time of decision.

The 1972 Findings

For 1972, 6 percent of the variance in time of decision is explained. Four variables produce significant results—involvement, age, strength of partisanship, and interpersonal discussion—all related positively to time of decision. Political involvement is the most important measure explaining early decision in 1972. The politically involved person was moved to a decision before the conventions. A similar result occurred in 1952. Age follows in impact. Again, the older a person was, the greater the likelihood of early closure.

Notably, although still exerting its influence, strength of partisanship was somewhat less important in the
1972 Nixon-McGovern contest. The more partisan tended to reach an early decision. The diminished impact of strength of partisanship is consistent with other studies that found that issues and personalities, rather than strength of party identification, were the dominant factors influencing the vote in 1972 (10).

Interpersonal discussion, or opinion giving, also influences the 1972 time of decision. Opinion givers were more likely to reach early closure.

Income, participation, sex, urbanization, knowledge and mass media usage are unrelated to decision. When television exposure replaced media exposure, a similar negligible finding results. (See Table II.)

Thus, in 1972, the older, involved, more talkative partisan decided early. The late decider was younger, less involved, less partisan, and less opinion-giving.

The 1976 Findings

In 1976, 11 percent of the variation in time of voting decision is explained. Three significant positive relationships exist—strength of partisanship, age, and involvement. Strength of partisanship, once again, asserts itself as the most influential factor on time of decision. The stronger the individual's partisan bias, the earlier closure was attained. Age follows not far behind. The older person reached an early decision. Similar, but not as
influential, is political involvement. The more involved in
the election one was, the sooner a decision was reached.

Knowledge, participation, urbanization, education, income, sex, and discussion are unrelated to decision as are
media and television use.

In 1976, the early decider was again more partisan, older, and involved. The late decider had the opposite
characteristics. Knowledge, participation, education, urbanization, income, and opinion giving produces no
significant results.

Television News in 1976

The 1976 data provided an opportunity to assess more
extensively the impact of television news on voter decision.
A measure of national television news viewing and an index
of television news viewing (combining both local and
national television news viewing) are substituted in the
regression equation as media measures.

Television news has become very important to
presidential politics in recent years. Robinson argues that
the networks' switch from a fifteen- to a thirty-minute
evening news format in 1963 was as important a political
development as the assassination of Kennedy and that
thirty-minute television news "altered the basic process of
political communication in the United States" (11, p. 104).

The television news audience has several
characteristics that are important in understanding the
medium's effect. First, as Robinson notes, the audience is "inadvertent." The audience

in large proportion does not come purposely to television for news, but arrives almost accidentally, watching the news because it is "on" or because it leads into or out of something else. . . . Hofstetter found that 87 percent of the television news audience watches for 'nonpolitical' reasons (11, p. 104).

Second, the audience is huge. Forty million watch each evening. Third, and more important, the audience is disproportionately from lower socioeconomic status. "The people who watch the most television news, . . . are among the least well-educated and least 'connected' individuals in our mass society" (11, p. 105).

Robinson concludes, "Because of its size, composition, and constancy, the evening news audience is singularly vulnerable to the message it receives" (11, p. 105).

Following Robinson's reasoning, late deciders, considered by the literature as the "least connected" individuals of society, are prime candidates to be strongly influenced by television news.

Patterson and McClure, however, argue that the undecided are not influenced by television news. They found in 1972 that television news "trivializes" politics and the presidential campaign. Television news does not inform voters. Newspaper readers are much better informed on the issues. As to decision time, the committed, because of selective perception, are not influenced by television news. The undecided are not influenced by the television news, but
once they decided on a presidential choice, the undecided absorbed information and candidate imagery which reinforced their decision (12, pp. 59-73).

Lucas and Adams (13, p. 121), however, found 1976 national television news viewing to differentiate the early from the late decision-makers. Thus, it is hypothesized in H13: In 1976, the more people watched the national television nightly news, the sooner they reached a vote decision. H13 is rejected. The national television news viewing variable produces a negligible .01 Beta. (See Table III.)

It is hypothesized in H14: In 1976, the more people watched local and national television nightly news, the sooner they reached a vote decision. The television news viewing index which accounts for local and national news viewing produces a -.03. (See Table IV.) H14 is rejected. Thus, the media and television exposure measures, and the television news viewing index all produce similar negligible negative results; the national television news viewing measure produces a negligible positive result. Therefore, television news viewing does not have substantial impact on time of voting decision.

The Impact of Strength of Partisanship

From this examination of the seven individual elections it is apparent that strength of partisanship, involvement, and age are the three most explanatory independent variables.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Beta Coefficient</th>
<th>Significance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Television News Exposure</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>(.0188)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Involvement Index</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>(.1473)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge Index</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>(.0504)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Participation Index</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>(.0131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>(.0217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship</td>
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<td>(.3295)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>(.0269)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>(.0087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>(.0750)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>(.0140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Discussion</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>(.0244)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-Sqd.</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1976

American National Election Studies

b A weighted sample

c Coefficients in parentheses are unstandardized

d Significance level
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Beta Coefficient</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficient</th>
<th>Significance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Television News Index</td>
<td>-.03 (-.0347)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Involvement Index</td>
<td>.06 (.1592)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge Index</td>
<td>.03 (.0605)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Participation Index</td>
<td>.00 (.0155)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>.02 (.0231)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship</td>
<td>.20 (.3282)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.04 (.0285)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.03 (.0085)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.02 (.0684)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.16 (.0149)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Discussion</td>
<td>.03 (.0265)</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-Sqd.</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

bA weighted sample
cCoefficients in parentheses are unstandardized
dSignificance level
for time of voting decision. Strength of partisanship predominates as the single most important explanatory variable. It is the most influential of the competing variables in 1960, 1964, and 1976; second to involvement or age in the 1950s and 1968; third to involvement and age in 1972.

The Erie County study found that in relation to time of decision the highly partisan voter, because of his greater interest in politics, made his voting decision early. The weak partisan, having less political interest, delayed his decision until late in the campaign (15, p. 53). H4 hypothesizes: The more highly partisan people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision. H4 is confirmed in six of the seven elections. Only in 1964 were partisans late deciders. Usually, weak partisans and Independents postpone their vote decision.

H15 hypothesizes: Over the period 1952-1976, strength of partisanship has declined in importance as an explanation of time of voting decision. Tables V and VI present the unstandardized regression coefficients. The tables indicate that there is no clear, monotonic decline in the importance of strength of partisanship in explaining time of decision as H15 predicted. Strength of partisanship has not declined in importance over the years as an explanation of time of decision. H15 is rejected.
### TABLE V
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TIME OF DECISION, 1952-1976, USING MEDIA EXPOSURE INDEX—UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<td>-.0343c</td>
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<td>-.0266</td>
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<td>.0191</td>
<td>-.0258</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.3241</td>
<td>.1766</td>
<td>.1341</td>
<td>.3062</td>
<td>.3790</td>
<td>.1713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge Index</td>
<td>-.1613</td>
<td>-.1090^a</td>
<td>.0267</td>
<td>.0502</td>
<td>-.1004</td>
<td>-.0915</td>
<td>.0714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Participation Index</td>
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<td>-.0168</td>
<td>.0688</td>
<td>.0230</td>
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<td>Urbanization</td>
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<td>.0417</td>
<td>.0865</td>
<td>.0016</td>
<td>-.0041</td>
<td>-.0308</td>
<td>.0247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship</td>
<td>.2713</td>
<td>.2022</td>
<td>.3821</td>
<td>-.3776</td>
<td>.2481</td>
<td>.1207</td>
<td>.3258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.0283</td>
<td>.0760</td>
<td>.0609</td>
<td>.0957</td>
<td>.0140</td>
<td>.0195</td>
<td>.0223</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>-.0012</td>
<td>.0031</td>
<td>.0089</td>
<td>.0091</td>
<td>.0162</td>
<td>.0078</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<td>.0029</td>
<td>-.1199</td>
<td>-.0157</td>
<td>.1399</td>
<td>.0486</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.0178</td>
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<td>.0077</td>
<td>.0081</td>
<td>.0166</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Discussion</td>
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<td>.0234</td>
<td>-.0112</td>
<td>-.0154</td>
<td>.0793</td>
<td>.0417</td>
<td>.0316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


^bA weighted sample

^c1956 dichotomous question

^d( ) Significance level

^eKnowledge of Congressman
## TABLE VI

REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TIME OF DECISION, 1952-1976, USING TELEVISION EXPOSURE—UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1956</th>
<th>1960&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1964&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1968&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1972</th>
<th>1976&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television Exposure</td>
<td>.0059</td>
<td>-.0363&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.0459</td>
<td>-.0030</td>
<td>-.0085</td>
<td>.0389</td>
<td>-.0821&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Involvement Index</td>
<td>.1690</td>
<td>.3097</td>
<td>.1824</td>
<td>.1125</td>
<td>.2974</td>
<td>.3860</td>
<td>.3732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge Index</td>
<td>-.1569</td>
<td>-.1190&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.0319</td>
<td>.0328</td>
<td>-.1045</td>
<td>-.0871</td>
<td>.0709</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Participation Index</td>
<td>.0887</td>
<td>.0887</td>
<td>.1237</td>
<td>.0124</td>
<td>-.0209</td>
<td>.0721</td>
<td>.0146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>-.0129</td>
<td>.0437</td>
<td>.0851&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0027</td>
<td>-.0056</td>
<td>-.0278</td>
<td>.0233&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship</td>
<td>.2714</td>
<td>.2022</td>
<td>.3829</td>
<td>-.3759</td>
<td>-.2485</td>
<td>.1197</td>
<td>.3279&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.0277</td>
<td>.0877</td>
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<td>.1008</td>
<td>.0167</td>
<td>.0156</td>
<td>.0277&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>-.0012</td>
<td>.0029&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0093&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.0093&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.0159</td>
<td>.0087&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.1432</td>
<td>-.0083</td>
<td>-.1241</td>
<td>-.0111&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.1368&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0523&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0700&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.0179&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0096&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0077&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0072&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0162&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0103&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0151&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Discussion</td>
<td>.0664&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0211&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.0143</td>
<td>.0066</td>
<td>.0764&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0418&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.0294&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Source: The Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1952-1976 American National Election Studies

<sup>b</sup>A weighted sample

<sup>c</sup>1956 dichotomous question

<sup>d</sup>( ) Significance level

<sup>e</sup>Knowledge of Congressman
The B's produced by strength of partisanship are significant at .01 or .001. Strength of partisanship begins at .27 in 1952, declines to .20 in 1956, surges to an all-time high of .38 in 1960, turns negative but remains strong at -.37 in 1964, declines to .24 in 1968, drops to an all-time low of .12 in 1972, and regains much of its strength at .32 in 1976. Overall, strength of partisanship remains a reliable predictor time of voting decision.

The Impact of the Media and Television

H16 hypothesizes: Over the period 1952-1976, mass media exposure has increased in importance as an explanation of time of voting decision. H17 hypothesizes: Over the period 1952-1976, television exposure has increased in importance as an explanation of time of voting decision. Both hypotheses are rejected. (See Tables V and VI.) The notion that strength of partisanship is displaced by the mass media or television in explaining time of decision is not borne out by the data. The three elections of the 1960s and the 1976 election can certainly be characterized as "media" elections. Yet strength of partisanship is dominant and media or television impact is small or nil in these years.

The media's importance in 1960 has been alluded to. Televised presidential debates occurred in both 1960 and 1976. In fact, the 1976 election is the subject of a book entitled The Mass Media Election (14). But media or
television impact on decision in 1976 is miniscule whereas strength of partisanship reasserts itself after a slight decline in 1972.

The election of 1964 can be noted as a media election too. It was the first election after the three television networks expanded their nightly news format to thirty minutes in 1963 (14 p. 5). "Since 1964, . . . the networks' evening news programs have been the major target of the candidates' campaign activities" (14, p. 5). Yet, strength of partisanship dominated in explaining time of decision when media impact was expected to be influential.

The People's Choice found that, in addition to having low participation and information levels, the undecided voter was less attentive to the media. "At any one time, the people who already knew how they were going to vote read and listened to more campaign material than the people who still did not know how they would vote" (15, p. 124). Mendelsohn and O'Keefe's 1972 study found similar results: the early deciders discussed the campaign more and were more attentive to the media than were those who delay their decision (16, p. 159).

In the Lucas and Adams 1976 Pennsylvania sample, undecided voters were not found to eschew the mass media. In most instances, the late deciders were just as attentive to national news sources as were the early deciders. In one instance of media exposure a difference did occur: the
decided were more likely to say that they tuned in early evening television network news programs every broadcast day than were the undecided. "With the exception of television, media attentiveness was not associated with voter decisiveness" (13, pp. 125).

In this study, media, whether measured by mass media exposure, television exposure, or television news exposure produces negligible impact on time of decision. H5 hypothesizes: The more people are highly exposed to the mass media about the campaign, the sooner they reach a vote decision. H5 is rejected. In only one year, 1964, is media exposure statistically significant. However, its Beta is small in 1964, and in no year does its Beta surpass an insubstantial .05.

H6 hypothesizes: The more people are highly exposed to television about the campaign, the sooner they reach a vote decision. H6 is rejected. Television exposure has no impact on time of decision. In no year does television exposure produce a statistically significant relationship with time of decision. The coefficients are all very small.

The uncommitted voter, or late decider, has been portrayed as distinctly less informed, less exposed to the media and less likely to participate than those who have decided early. This late decider was initially described by Lazarsfeld as follows: "The campaign itself is progressively waged in order to win the less interested and
less involved, the 'withdrawn' individuals living within narrower horizons" (15, p. 70).

The late decider has been a focus for some researchers attempting to investigate media impact on voting. Their argument is that the late decider has a greater propensity to utilize the influence sources available to him during the campaign, including, and especially—the media—to aid him in arriving at a voting decision (18, p. 137).

The present evidence supports the notion that the late decider is distinctly less involved than those who have decided early. However, media attentiveness and participation in politics have little impact on time of voting decision.

The Impact of Age

Second to strength of partisanship in explanatory power concerning time of decision over the years is age. It is the most influential factor in 1952 and 1968; second-most in the 1970s; and third-most in 1956, 1960, and 1964.

Age, a strong predictor within each year, maintains its steady impact over time. (See Table V.) It begins with an unstandardized coefficient of .01 in 1952 and ends at .01 in 1976. Thus, for every one year change in age, tendency for earlier decision time increases by .0178.

Both the 1940 Erie County study (15, p. 124) and the 1972 Summit County study (16, p. 54) found that older people decided early and young people postponed their decision.
H10 hypothesizes: The older people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision. H10 is retained.

Old people decide early; young people decide late. The voting behavior literature indicates that the young are less likely to vote (17, pp. 134-135). Those who do vote are likely to be operating with less information, less interest, and less partisanship and thus to delay their decision. Older people are more likely to vote (17, pp. 134-135) and to have more information, more interest, and greater partisanship—all of which propels them to an early decision.

The Impact of Political Involvement

A close third in explaining time of decision is political involvement. It is most influential in 1956 and 1972; second in no year; and third to strength of partisanship and age in 1952, 1960, 1968, and 1976.

Political involvement begins with an unstandardized coefficient of .16 in 1952, doubles to .32 in 1956, drops to .17 in 1960, declines to .13 in 1964, increases to .30 in 1968, reaches an all-time high of .37 in 1972, and plunges to .17 in 1976. (See Tables V and VI.) Political involvement has its greatest impact on early decision in 1956 and 1972. Both elections are characterized by incumbent presidents winning by landslide margins.

Lazarsfeld (15, p. 53) found that the early deciders had the most interest in politics. Thirty-two years later,
Mendelsohn and O'Keefe (17, p. 56) found that the early deciders were more interested than the late deciders as did Lucas and Adams in 1976 (13, p. 121). H1 hypothesizes: The more involved (interested and concerned) in the election people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision. H1 is retained. Early deciders are the more interested and concerned in all the years examined.

Flanigan and Zingale (1, p. 175) argue that data from recent elections do not support the notion that the most interested voters reach early vote decisions and that the least interested remain undecided during the campaign. They contend that this description fits only the Eisenhower elections and 1976 "when once again the most interested voters were more likely to decide early and the less interested decided [sic] later in the campaign" (1, p. 175).

They found that the least interested decided early rather than late in 1960; and that there was no difference in time of decision of the most and least interested in 1964, 1968, and 1972. They conclude,

... under many circumstances interested voters are as likely as uninterested voters to enter the campaign still undecided on their vote choice. This is not to say that these interested voters are completely without preferences or that they are extremely well informed. They are neither. But it is not true that in all political campaigns the only voters still undecided at the start of the campaign are uninterested in politics (1, p. 175).

The present data support the Flanigan and Zingale findings only for the 1950s and 1976. That is, the more
involved do decide early, the least involved stay undecided during the campaign. However, the data do not confirm their 1960-1972 findings. The least involved did not decide early in 1960; they decided late. In 1964, 1968, and 1972 the involved made an early decision. The least involved decided late in the campaign.

The Impact of Interpersonal Discussion (Opinion Giving)

Interpersonal discussion's importance as an influence on the vote decision surprised Lazarsfeld in 1940 (15, pp. 150-158). Thirty-two years later the Summit County survey found that interpersonal communication about the campaign retained its importance. Discussion distinguished the decided voter more than any other single variable (16, p. 159).

Lucas and Adams found no major differences among the 1976 time of decision voters and discussion of the weather, sports, and city and state politics. They did discover differences in frequency of discussion of national affairs and politics and even more pronounced differences when the discussion referred to candidates Carter and Ford (11, p. 125).

Interpersonal communications about the candidates did make a significant difference. Frequency of discussing the campaign was tied to voter decision-making more strongly than any other variable considered. . . . Almost half of the decided voters (48.2 percent) talked often about the candidates compared to a third (33.6 percent) of the leaners and a fourth (24.7 percent) of the undecided (13, pp. 126).
H7 hypothesizes: The more people engage in attempts to influence another person's vote (opinion giving), the sooner they reach a vote decision. As Table V indicates, interpersonal discussion, or opinion-giving, produces small but significant relationships with early decision in 1952, 1968, and 1972. The variable produces slightly negative results with time of decision in 1960 and 1964. Significant only in three years, there is not enough evidence to conclude that opinion-giving leads to early decision. H7 is rejected. Interpersonal discussion or opinion giving does not have significant impact on time of voting decision. Perhaps the measure does not produce stronger results because of the inability to construct an ordinal measure of interpersonal discussion.

The Impact of Education

In 1972 Mendelsohn and O'Keefe found that higher socioeconomic status encouraged an early vote decision. However, the late deciders rather than less educated and poor, were more likely to be from middle status (15, p. 54). In 1976 Lucas and Adams observed that no distinct differences in education occurred among the decided, leaning, and undecided. "Indecision characterized many 1976 voters in all walks of life" (11, p. 125).

H8 hypothesizes: The more educated people are, the sooner they reach a vote decision. In 1940 the early
deciders were more likely to be the better educated (15, p. 124).

Education has a significant positive relationship with early decision in three years—1956, 1960, and 1964. However, the Betas are low. The evidence is not persuasive. H8 is rejected. Education does not have significant impact on time of voting decision.

The Impact of Income

The early deciders are supposed to be from the more affluent sector of society (15, p. 124). The Summit County study found a less clear pattern, but generally the early deciders were from a higher socioeconomic status. The late deciders tended to be from middle status rather than from the poor (16, p. 55). In 1976 Lucas and Adams found little difference in income by time of decision (13, p. 126).

H9 hypothesizes: The greater the income of people, the sooner they reach a vote decision. Empirically, income produces only one significant relationship with early decision, in 1968. H9 is rejected. Income has no impact on time of decision with the exception of 1968.

The Impact of Urbanization

The 1940 Erie County study found the decided to be from urban areas (13, p. 124). H11 hypothesizes: The more urban people's places of residence are, the sooner they reach a vote decision. In the data, only once, in 1960, is urban
residence associated significantly with early decision. H11 is rejected. Place of residence has no impact on time of decision.

The Impact of Political Knowledge

The notion has prevailed since The People's Choice that the decided voter has and utilizes more information in order to reach his decision earlier, whereas the late decider, operating with less information, delays his decision (13). A recent test of this presumption by Mendelsohn and O'Keefe did not confirm such a notion (16, p. 85).

Lucas and Adams measured the knowledge levels of their Pennsylvania respondents and found no differences among the decided, leaning, and undecided in general political knowledge (13, p. 218).

H2 hypothesizes: The more knowledgeable people are about politics, the sooner they reach a vote decision. The data reveal two statistically significant but weak relationships between knowledge and a delayed voting decision in 1952 and 1968. Overall, the data are not persuasive. Knowledge of politics has no impact on time of decision. H2 is rejected.

The Impact of Political Participation

In a 1976 study the undecided voter was just as likely to be participatory and politically knowledgeable as those who had made a decision (11, p. 125).
H3 hypothesizes: The more people participate in politics, the sooner they reach a vote decision. H3 is rejected. The data reveal one statistically significant association between participation and early decision. Participation in politics has no impact on time of decision.

The Impact of Sex

In 1940 Lazarsfeld found men tended to be early deciders (15, p. 124). In the Summit County study in 1972 Mendelsohn and O'Keefe found a similar result (16, p. 54).

H12 hypothesizes: Males are more likely than females to reach an early vote decision. In fact, only in 1968 were men more likely than women to decide early. H12 is rejected. Sex has no impact on time of decision.

Summation

It is surprising to discover that the independent variables explain so little of time of decision. It is equally startling that media or television exposure has no impact on time of decision, especially in the later years examined. Similarly, television news exposure has little power as an explanatory factor.

The data reveal that strength of partisanship was and remains a strong influence on voting behavior. Nor is the power of political involvement as an explanation particularly puzzling. Age, often neglected by the
literature, is the third independent variable of explanatory import.

The rest of the measures—urbanization, income, education, sex, political knowledge, political participation, opinion-giving, media and television or television news exposure—explain little or nothing of time of decision.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER IV

THE CONCLUSION

Introduction

Impressed by the emergence of mass propaganda during World War I, social scientists set out to examine the phenomenon. Lasswell (1) studied the effectiveness of these propaganda techniques and developed the perspective that, indeed, the mass media were a powerful force (2). Thus when researchers in the 1940s studied presidential election contests, they expected to find media influence. Yet the 1940 and 1948 election studies found little media impact. Political party loyalty and social forces shaped voting behavior. This result coupled with the discovery that most voters decided for whom to vote before the campaign even began minimized the influence of all campaign activities including media impact. The notion of the limited effects of the mass media that arose from these works provided an alternative to Lasswell's perspective. Bolstered by subsequent studies, the limited-effects characterization quickly displaced the Laswellian viewpoint (3). As a result, studying mass media's impact has not been a major concern of voting studies since the 1940s.
In the 1950s the impact of partisan identification and issue concerns became the focus of voting studies and remains the dominant perspective in the study of voting behavior today. As television became widespread, however, renewed concern over the media's impact on voting and the significance of campaign-related activity has appeared.

The increased number of primaries, the decline in party loyalty, and the emergence of media-based campaigns have rendered what happens in the campaign more important to its outcome, prompting questions that go beyond the way in which people's attitudes relate to their vote (4, p. vii-viii).

Attention has focused once again on the influence of the mass media, especially television and television news. With the pervasiveness of television has arisen a new perspective on media impact that represents a synthesis of a resurrected Laswellian perspective and the limited-effects notion.

Reflecting the new perspective, this study's expressed concern is with the impact of the mass media in toto, television, and television news. Following the voting behavior-media literature from the 1940s to the present, the study focuses on the time of voting decision. This key dependent variable is utilized to study the combined impact of all four media—television, radio, newspapers, and magazines—and the impact of television alone. Earlier studies examined a single election in a localized area. This study, however, employs an extended time frame and a national rather than a local data base. The intention was
to test the hypotheses over three decades, the 1950s, the 1960s, and the 1970s, to see if these notions still hold true. The expectation was that the effort would disprove the early studies' findings of minimal media effects. The mass media and television would be found to have an important impact on the time of voter decision-making.

Negligible Mass Media and Television Impact

It is evident from this investigation that exposure to the campaign via the mass media and exposure to television, the predominant medium in terms of audience exposure, apparently exerts little influence on the voter's time of voting decision. These findings hold not just for one election, but are true for the entire period 1952 through 1976.

In addition, exposure to television news about the campaign has little effect on closure of voting decision. Exposure to the early evening national television news in 1976 exerted little influence on time of voting decision. Similarly, exposure to both national television news and late evening nightly local television news had little impact on voter closure in 1976.

For all that has been written about the power of the mass media, particularly television and television news, the medium's impact on voter closure is very weak if existent at all. These findings are consistent with the earliest
voting-media impact studies' notion of the limited effects of the mass media. The limited-effects idea was based on the negligible impact of newspapers, magazines, and radio on time of voting decision. Evidence underscoring the minimal influence of all of the media in combination and for television and television news in particular is presented here.

Recent studies have pointed to the minimal impact of television, especially television news, in providing voters with information and images which enable them to reach a vote decision. This study's evidence attests to the limited impact of television and television news on time of voting decision. Patterson and McClure (5) are correct when they conclude that television news provides little help for the voter in reaching a decision.

Thus, even with the rise and pervasiveness of the allegedly powerful medium of television, the limited effects of the mass media on time of voting decision remains a viable finding.

The seminal voting-mass media impact studies found another mode of communication, interpersonal discussion, to be an influential factor on the voting decision. Although not measured in precisely the same manner, opinion giving or interpersonal discussion in this study exerts little influence on time of voting decision. The studies argue that the impact of the mass media was channeled through
opinion leaders. These leaders, who greatly used the mass media, passed on relevant information by word-of-mouth to the populace. This study finds no evidence to support the influence of the mass media or interpersonal discussion. Neither communication mode, mass nor interpersonal, has significant impact on time of voting decision.

The key independent variable exercising impact on the voting decision time in this study is strength of partisanship. Its influence is demonstrated not only in the earlier years but throughout the entire period under investigation.

Partisan identification has been considered the major explanatory variable of American voting behavior since the SRC first discovered its importance in the late 1940s and early 1950s (6, pp. 53-54). In recent years several studies have argued that the measure's influence has been displaced by the impact of issues and candidate images. These issue concerns and candidate images have been brought to the public primarily through the mass media, particularly television. Thus it was predicted that the media's influence on time of decision would be substantial. This notion would be especially true in the later years under examination when television had attained a mass audience and dominance over newspapers, radio, and magazines. Yet, this predicted influence has not materialized. The influence of
strength of partisanship has remained powerful and very stable over the time period 1952-1976.

Media presentations about politics are pervasive but apparently the voter's perceptual screen, colored by his strong partisanship, acts as a filter to mediate the influence of the media's messages. The evidence here strongly supports the perceiver theory of media impact. That theory emphasizes the importance of the subjective orientations of the media consumer as the most influential factors in determining how a person responds to media stimuli. Strength of partisanship is the dominant subjective orientation for the voter, colors his perceptions, and moderates the impact of the mass media.

It is important to note that early studies emphasized the importance of social factors on the voting decision. Sex, income, education, place of residence, and age were important. Of these social categories this study found that only age exerts significant impact on time of voting decision. The importance of age as an independent variable in voting studies has often been overlooked. Its explanatory power here suggests that further study of the effect of age should be pursued. Thus this effort finds two factors that affect the media consumer's perception of candidates and issues. First is the psychological component, strength of partisan identification. Second is the social factor, age. These two are also interrelated. Voting
studies have revealed that the older person is likely to be more partisan (6, p. 55).

The third key independent variable for time of voting decision is political involvement. The more involved person decides earlier. Previous studies have noted a linkage among these three influential independent variables—age, strength of partisanship, and political involvement (6, pp. 53-56). That linkage appears in this study.

Future Media Research

Several problems in assessing media impact have been encountered in this writing. Enumeration of these concerns is instructive for future media research.

Some researchers argue that these results supportive of the limited-effects notion reveal only that the CPS surveys are limited instruments for determining media effects. They contend that because the CPS data, like most surveys since 1950, consist of at best two interviews with the respondent the assessment of media effects is constrained.

Entirely adequate for researching the effects of party loyalty and issue attitudes, since these do not change greatly during the campaign, such surveys are inadequate for the study of change that occurs during the campaign (4, p. viii).

Panel studies, it is argued, involving repeated interviews with the same individuals, are more likely to detect the subtle changes within a campaign. However, even with panel studies, detection of media impact has not been
assured. The People's Choice and Voting were both panel studies, yet they produced the limited-effects notion. In addition, such panel studies are expensive and laden with difficulties (7, pp. 64-69). The idea of following a national sample of the same voters over a series of presidential elections would be even more difficult and expensive. It should be noted that this critical view of the CPS studies defines the campaign period very narrowly.

A difficulty discovered in the present study that future media studies will have to resolve is the problem of defining the boundaries of the campaign period. A drawback of the narrowly defined campaign in the CPS studies and the 1972 panel study that resulted in The Unseeing Eye, is that only the general election campaign is examined (4, p. viii).

With the proliferation of the presidential primaries and the consequent media attention given to them, researchers have difficulty in determining just when the presidential campaign really begins. Patterson's effort, reported in The Mass Media Election, was the first panel study to extend from before the primaries until after election day (4, p. viii). Unfortunately, the work does not employ time of decision as a dependent variable. However, Patterson finds little impact of television news on the voter. At any rate, it is obvious that the campaign season has extended far beyond the traditional Labor Day-Election Day time frame. Future research designs, whether
media-oriented or not, will have to contend with this political reality.

Defining the duration of the campaign has a great effect on the time of decision notion as presented in this study. Current surveys tend to ignore the growing campaign season prior to the national conventions. Sensitive to this concern, Chaffee and Choe (8) define time of decision as Pre-Campaign, Campaign, and Last-Minute Deciders. Future studies of time of decision must take into account the extended campaign period.

In a related vein, Asher (9) points to the importance of focusing on the two-thirds of the voters who decide by the conclusion of the nominating conventions. He argues that the media may play an influential role in shaping these voters' predilections long before the conventions occur.

The many Democrats who decided early in 1972 that they would not support the McGovern candidacy certainly received information from the media that helped shape their decision. Thus, while the media change relatively few preferences during the actual campaign, they still are influential in providing citizens with information and images upon which to base pre-campaign vote decisions and in structuring alternatives and depicting potential candidates throughout the interelection period (9, pp. 241-242).

The early voting studies found that the media helped reinforce rather than modify existing predispositions. A powerful predisposition noted in the present study is strength of partisanship. Yet the present age is one of declining party loyalty and growing numbers of Independents.
If this phenomenon continues, the reinforcement effect will decline, thus raising the possibility of greater media effects in future campaigns (9, p. 24).

In support of the notion that the media will be more important where voters have weaker predispositions, less information, and more uncertainty, Jacobson found that broadcast campaigning was more consequential in nonpresidential elections, especially, primary elections where voter information was low and party identification was not available as a basis of vote decision (10, pp. 243).

Jacobson's findings are particularly relevant to the present study (10). First, this study's political knowledge measures indicated that one-half of the sample had a great deal of political knowledge and one-third had some knowledge. Second, strength of partisanship had the greatest impact of all the independent variables. Jacobson provides a possible explanation for the negligible impact of the media in this study. The research considered only presidential elections—elections where partisan predilection is stronger, more information is available, and uncertainty is less. Political knowledge was widespread and partisanship was a very influential factor. Thus, according to Jacobson's view, media impact would not appear in presidential elections. However, in nonpresidential primary elections, media impact would be significant.

Political involvement is a relevant independent variable in this study. Low involvement is a good predictor of late decision-making. Nimmo (11, pp. 242-243) adduces a
media theory of perceptual effects that is particularly applicable to those without political involvement. The theory emphasizes the media's importance for long-term rather than short-term effects limited to one campaign:

Political television raises the possibility of para-social participation by viewers in election campaigns. The remarkable capacity of television to convey the images of conflicts, candidates, and political moods yet allow the viewer to perceive in those images what he expects to see, to "see for himself," results in citizens who are electronic participants in political events rather than mere targets for campaign messages. . . .

This capacity of television to structure what viewers assume to be truth . . . has far-reaching consequences for politics. The various media structure a political environment which people perceive only through the media. Moreover, the preconceptions, illusions, and impressions that affect voters' perceptions and ultimately their vote decisions have been influenced over the years by the mass media. Hence people perceive in the televised political campaign precisely what the media have led them to believe should be there. For highly motivated and involved voters whose attitudes are resistant to change in a single campaign, the media's reactivating and reinforcing of past loyalties has a cumulative impact which is not easily measured in studies of campaign effects. For the lesser involved the media, by para-social means, shape predispositions about what politics is about . . . and the preferred qualities of political leaders. . . . Thus in the long term the mass media themselves create the conditions in which the image campaign can have its greatest impact (11, pp. 242-243).

Nimmo's theory is not only relevant to this study's findings about those with low political involvement who are late deciders, but it is also reflective of the notion among some media researchers that the real impact of the media and television is long-term. The media's impact, according to this view, is to be found not in one short-term presidential
campaign but in exploring media and television's long-term and cumulative influence on American voting behavior and political life. The present study attempted to tap long-term media influence through trend analysis. However, the work is still based on a series of short-term presidential campaigns. New research designs utilizing panels would help analyze the cumulative impact of the mass media.

Lang and Lang, in summing up the case for studying the long-term cumulative consequences of the mass media, provide an appropriate conclusion for this writing:

Such influences as age differences, regional locations, and traditional political affiliations which may affect voting habits can with relative ease be isolated for examination. When we come to deal with mass-media influences, however, these are much more difficult to single out. They operate among a multitude of other factors and their effects do not always take tangible shape. Consequently, the measures of mass-media exposure are usually crude and the effects looked for are relatively specific, and short run.

Quite naturally, campaign studies . . . , have focused on the short-range influences operating during the period of active electioneering and on how these culminate in a final voting decision. . . . [T]his approach to the problem, with its emphasis on individual conversion during the "official" campaign, minimizes the important cumulative influences of the mass media and emphasizes instead how political communications are transmitted through personal networks and how latent tendencies are activated. In this way, attention has been focused on the limits to mass-media influence.

Where the question for study is "What makes the electorate tick?" research is naturally shaped to fit the problem; the mass media become just one among many concerns. On the other hand, experts in mass communications have not in recent years distinguished themselves by probing the long-range influence of mass media on political life--and more particularly on
voting behavior. The cumulative and society-wide
effects about which we often talk vaguely as shifts in
public moods or drifts in political opinion are hard to
demonstrate; yet, if we would further our knowledge of
political behavior, such effects are much in need of
clarification. And they can only be clarified through
research specifically designed to get at them (12, pp.
338-339).

Summary

The present effort has contributed to the voting
behavior-mass media literature by examining old hypotheses
with old and new data. The research has discovered that
strength of partisanship, age, and political involvement are
influential on time of voting decision. The stronger the
partisanship, the earlier the voter decides. With
increasing age, decision-making occurs earlier. And with
greater political involvement, the voter reaches closure
sooner. These results confirm previous findings.

However, contrary to previous studies, sex, education,
income, place of residence, political knowledge, and
political participation play little role in influencing the
time of a voter's decision. Communication, whether via the
mass media or interpersonal discussion, is not influential
on time of voting decision. This work confirms the notion
that the mass media have minimal impact on time of voting
decision. A new finding is that television exposure to the
campaign and television news exert a limited effect on time
of voting decision. Interpersonal discussion or opinion
giving, considered influential in other studies, does not appear important for time of voting decision in this study.

These conclusions are based, not on localized data, but on national samples. Generalizations based on a single election have been examined over seven presidential elections covering a time-span of twenty-five years. Thus, existing generalizations have been bolstered or rejected by the findings. Last, the limits of the CPS data for media research have been explored. All of these tasks have filled a lacuna in the existing literature. However, future research must employ innovative panel studies focusing on the extended campaign and the long-term, cumulative impact of the mass media and television.

The mass media, especially television, are pervasive. It is the responsibility of political science to ascertain the impact of such new forces on the politics of American democracy in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. It is hoped that the effort here has produced knowledge which will aid in the fulfillment of that responsibility.
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APPENDIX
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TABLE IX

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT INDEX FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION* IN PERCENT

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### TABLE XI

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