

Why Republicans Win

“Polarized Politics and the 2004 Congressional and Presidential Elections” by Gary C. Jacobson, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 2005), 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115–1274.

When the elections of 2004 were over, the Republicans stood triumphant, their lease on the White House extended and their holds on the House and Senate strengthened. Though denied a ringing national endorsement from the polarized electorate, they enjoyed something more useful for victory: a big “structural” advantage.

The Republicans’ continued control of the House was never in doubt, says Jacobson, a political scientist at the University of California, San Diego. “The reason is simple: Republican voters are distributed more efficiently across House districts than are Democratic voters.”

This structural edge can be seen by looking at how Democrat Al Gore’s roughly 540,000-vote advantage in the national popular vote in 2000 dissipates when the votes are tallied by congressional district: In only 195 districts (as currently configured) does Gore outpoll George W. Bush; in 240 districts Bush does better than Gore.

Gerrymandering by Republicans in Florida, Ohio, Texas, and other states after the 2000 census is partly responsible for their structural advantage in the House. They picked up 15 seats through redistricting, while losing only six elsewhere. (Democrats’ small gains through gerrymandering in states where they controlled the process were offset by pro-GOP changes in states where neither party was fully in control.) The other reason for the GOP edge, says Jacobson, is that minority and urban voters,

who disproportionately favor Democrats, “tend to be clustered in districts with lopsided Democratic majorities.”

The more efficient distribution of Republican voters was also the Democrats’ main problem in the 2004 Senate contests. Twenty-two of the 34 states with senatorial elections were states that Bush had carried four years earlier. “Democrats had to defend 10 seats in states Bush had won. . . [while] Republicans were defending only three seats in states won by Gore.” The structural outlook for the Democrats in 2006 is not much more favorable, says Jacobson.

In both Senate and House elections in 2004, the long-term trend against ticket splitting continued. In 27 of the Senate contests, voters picked senate and presidential candidates from the same party—the highest level of such partisan consistency since 1964. Bush’s strenuous efforts as president and as candidate to cater to and mobilize his party’s base, alienating moderates and Democrats in the process, undoubtedly encouraged that trend, says Jacobson.

But the intense partisanship has a price: Postelection polls gave Bush the lowest overall approval ratings of any newly reelected president since Dwight Eisenhower in 1956. That’s a price Republican leaders are evidently willing to pay. With an evenly divided electorate and the GOP’s structural edge, they now have little electoral incentive to follow through on the pledge Bush made in 2000 to be “a uniter, not a divider.”

The Evangelical President

“Jimmy Carter: The Re-emergence of Faith-Based Politics and the Abortion Rights Issue” by Andrew R. Flint and Joy Porter, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (March 2005), Dept. of Political Science, Texas A&M Univ., 4348 TAMU, College Station, Texas 77843–4348.

When he put his own pious faith on conspicuous display while running for president in 1976, Jimmy Carter awakened the political sleeping giant of evangelical Christianity. But the believers who helped put him in

office that year are the very ones who would help turn him out in 1980.

Though their numbers were growing fast during the 1970s at the expense of mainstream Protestant denominations, evangelical

Periodicals

Protestants, located mainly in the South and West, had been politically quiescent since the 1920s. Claiming that he would be a better president because of his deep religious convictions, Carter, a Southern Baptist and self-proclaimed born-again evangelical, introduced “an overt Biblical spirituality into the American political discourse,” write Flint and Porter, lecturers in American history and American studies, respectively, at the University of Wales in Great Britain. Striking that note of righteousness while the country was still reeling from Watergate, the Demo-



Evangelical Christians gave Jimmy Carter strong support during his run for the presidency in 1976, but turned their backs when he came out in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment and gay rights.

cratic candidate attracted massive support from evangelical Christians who previously had voted Republican or not at all.

Expecting Carter to fulfill his campaign promise to, in his words, “try to shape government so it does exemplify the teaching of God,” evangelical conservatives failed to notice or take seriously his stated commitment to

the Baptist belief in absolute separation of church and state. Critics pointedly reminded him of that commitment after he took part early in his presidency in a White House conference with leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, and he resolved not to make the mistake again. “Thereafter, Carter did not allow himself to be overtly politically linked to the evangelical Christian community.”

Before Carter, evangelical Protestants’ anti-Catholic bias and political apathy had kept them out of the pro-life movement. When Carter made his personal antiabortion views clear during the campaign, his candidacy drew evangelicals into the movement. But they failed to pay attention to Carter’s oft-repeated promise to uphold the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. His refusal in the White House to back a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion alienated evangelicals, even as his refusal to support federal funding for abortion alienated pro-choice feminists.

Evangelicals’ disillusion with Carter and his liberal political agenda set in as early as 1978. “His advocacy of the Equal Rights Amendment and gay rights and his failure to support mandatory prayer in public schools or to move to ban abortion were all anathema to their religious principles,” the authors write. By 1979, disenchanted evangelicals had begun to coalesce around a political agenda, forming organized pressure groups such as televangelist Jerry Falwell’s

Moral Majority. Carter long resisted meeting with evangelical leaders, but finally, in January 1980, he did have a short White House breakfast session with Falwell and others—which only reinforced their estrangement. Then, along came Ronald Reagan, a man not noted for his piety but ready to lend a sympathetic ear.