

PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT 11	RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY 28
FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE 14	SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY 31
ECONOMICS, LABOR, & BUSINESS 19	RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT 34
SOCIETY 23	ARTS & LETTERS 36
PRESS & TELEVISION 26	OTHER NATIONS 38

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

A Close Election In 1984

"The Divided Electorate" by William Schneider, in *National Journal* (Oct. 29, 1983), 1730 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The presidential election season is upon us again, and given the fates of recent incumbents—Gerald Ford lost to Jimmy Carter, who lost to Ronald Reagan—it would be premature to bet on a Reagan victory.

Indeed, reports Schneider, an American Enterprise Institute political scientist, the race now looks like a toss-up. The much-heralded "new Republican majority" that was supposed to supplant the Democrats' New Deal coalition after Reagan's 1980 victory never materialized. Voters' party affiliations—45 percent Democratic, 25 percent Republican, 30 percent independent—have barely changed since 1980. In the 1982 elections, the GOP lost 26 seats in the House of Representatives.

While Reagan is personally liked (he is the only President since Eisenhower to enjoy increased popularity during his third year in office), public opinion on a variety of issues that helped him win in 1980 has changed. Support for bigger defense outlays dropped from 72 percent in 1981 to only 33 percent in August 1983. During the same period, popular sentiment on some key issues reversed itself. Two-thirds or more of the public now favors more federal spending for health, education, and welfare programs. To win re-election, Schneider speculates, the President must run on a new set of issues.

Other changes in the electorate bode ill for Reagan, especially considering his 1980 victory margin: He carried 44 states, but with only 50.7 percent of the total popular vote. The "gender gap" that emerged in 1980 has since widened. While 54 percent of American men have consistently given the President a "favorable" job performance rating, women's approval has dropped from 48 percent early in 1981 to 42 percent in September 1983. (Interestingly, the gap was widest between men and working women but nonexistent between men and full-time housewives, suggesting that high female unemployment, not just femi-

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

nist sentiment, helps to account for the split.)

Blacks, who vote overwhelmingly Democratic, could also upset the Reagan applecart. In 11 states, including New York, Massachusetts, and nine Southern states, the number of unregistered blacks exceeds Reagan's local 1980 margin of victory over Carter. And black voter turnout is on the upswing. About 43 percent of all blacks said they went to the polls in the 1982 congressional election, up 5.8 percentage points from 1978 levels.

All is not gloomy for the President. The South, where he is strong, gained electoral votes after the 1980 census. A continuing economic recovery or a foreign policy success (the Grenada invasion boosted his approval rating, at least temporarily) would be a shot in the arm. And if the 1984 election is as close as Schneider predicts, a John Anderson-style, third-party candidacy might well doom the Democrats.

Against Bipartisan Commissions

"The New Bipartisan Commissions" by Mark Greenberg and Rachel Flick, in *Journal of Contemporary Studies* (Fall 1983), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Dept. 541, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

A new type of presidentially appointed commission is taking over jobs that America's top elected officials should be doing, and the change is symptomatic of a malfunction in the U.S. political system. So argue Greenberg and Flick, Senate and White House aides, respectively.

The first presidential commission was dispatched by George Washington in 1794 to investigate the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania. But such panels were rarely used before the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, who appointed 29 commissions between 1901 and 1909. Richard Nixon convoked 27 commissions in his first term, and by late last summer, Ronald Reagan had turned to special panels 23 times.

Traditionally, such blue-ribbon commissions simply gather facts on behalf of the president. Usually, they confront technical or administrative problems; sometimes, social issues; occasionally (as in the case of the Warren Commission charged to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy), a crisis. Though theoretically apolitical in nature, few have been entirely so. Jimmy Carter's Commission on Coal, for example, was designed to enhance the appeal of his energy program.

But last year, Reagan appointed three bipartisan commissions with explicitly political mandates. The Commission on Social Security and the Scowcroft Commission on the MX Missile broke legislative logjams not only by formulating policies, but also by devising schemes for easing compromise bills through Congress. The Kissinger Commission on Central America, still at work, has the same marching orders.

Why this resort to commissions? Twenty years ago, the president could haggle with a few key congressional party leaders and committee chairmen in forging a consensus. Currently, power on Capitol Hill is